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The Dedication of Tikal Temple VI: A Revised Chronology

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The long hieroglyphic text that adorns the back and sides of Tikal Temple VI—a building known more descriptively as the Temple of Inscriptions and more prosaically as Structure 6F-27—has some

distinctive features (Figure 1). It offers an unusually detailed statement of relations between an ancestral ruler-deity and both contemporary and deep-time local monarchs. It also has a distinctive physical



Figure 1. The rear façade of Tikal Temple VI (Structure 6F-27). Photograph by Jorge Pérez de Lara.

character since, with constituent blocks measuring as much as 85 cm across, it boasts the largest hieroglyphs in the Maya world. Due to its current state of timeworn decay it has received only limited attention, although four studies have made significant contributions (Berlin 1951; Satterthwaite and Jones 1965; Jones 1977; Stuart 2007a). To make further progress requires a re-examination of the documentary record, in terms of historical photography and field drawings, together with an effort to integrate epigraphic and archaeological evidence. The Tikal Project Archive held in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology is a repository that makes such a reassessment possible.¹

The present article uses this trove of data to address the particular question of the dedication date of Temple VI and the identity of the ruler most responsible for bringing this structure into the form we see today. It proposes an alternative temporal scheme for a key section of the text dealing with the construction and outfitting of the building.

Studying the Temple VI Inscription

Heinrich Berlin published a remarkably comprehensive description of the architecture, façade inscriptions, and associated monuments of Temple VI in the year of their discovery (Berlin 1951). This included an initial sketch of the text by Antonio Tejeda and Guillermo Grajeda, which was made partly from ground-level observation and partly from close inspection while suspended from ropes. Berlin proposed that the reading order began with an Initial Series on the rear face and identified the last inscribed date on the north side as 9.16.15.0.0 (766 CE), surmising correctly that this approximates the date of the text's completion (Berlin 1951:47-53, Figs. 17-20, 1953).

A more detailed understanding would emerge only after a more thorough examination by a team from the University of Pennsylvania, who erected an access scaffold in 1965. A sequence of close-up photographs in both natural and artificial light was taken by Gordon Echols. Tracings of these by Christopher Jones were checked in situ by Jones together with Linton Satterthwaite, and the amended versions formed the basis of a line rendering by William Coe (see Jones 1977:Figs. 9, 18; Miller 1986:Fig. 46b) (Figure 2). The six panels were each accorded letter designations, with Panels U and V on the south side, Panels W and X facing east on the rear, and Panels Y and Z on the north.

Satterthwaite and Jones (1965) established the core chronology of the text, which shifts from mythical—or at least legendary—time to a historical narrative spanning the Early to Late Classic. It begins in 5.0.0.0.0 (1143 BCE), advancing to 6.14.16.9.16 (456 BCE), 7.10.0.0.0 (157

BCE), and 9.4.0.0.0 (514 CE), before damage robs us of reliable or legible dates until firm ground returns in the closing passages with 9.16.14.14.17 and 9.16.15.0.0 (766 CE). Jones (1977:53) recognized that Stela 21, which was set up in front of Temple VI on 9.15.5.0.0 (736 CE), was commissioned by a king he designated Ruler B, known today as Yihk'in Chan K'awiil.² As a result this character became the leading contender for the builder of Temple VI. But the issue was complicated by the discovery of "successor titles," which pointed to an unknown monarch who held office between Ruler B/Yihk'in Chan K'awiil who was 27th in line and his son Ruler C/Yax Nuun Ahiin II who was 29th (see Riese 1984:274). Since Ruler C came to power in 768, this 28th Ruler was likely responsible for the last events recorded on Temple VI just two years earlier (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:129). Although his name is damaged and hard to reconstruct in both places it appears, the final passage on Temple VI names Yihk'in Chan K'awiil as his father, confirming that the inscription was completed by this elusive character.³

The earlier of the two 766 dates, 9.16.14.14.17, is associated with an *ochk'ahk'* or "fire-entering" ceremony that dedicated a *wayibil* "sleeping house"—a temple conceived of as the dormitory of a god that must be Temple VI itself (Houston and Stuart 1989:11-13; Stuart 1998:399-401). The god in question was called Sak Hix Muut, one of a select band of supernaturals that were in some sense viewed as ancestral rulers and carried local emblem glyphs (Martin and Grube 2000:50; Stuart 2007a; Baron 2013:173-174). David Stuart (2007a) has explored the longevity and importance of this character at Tikal in detail, describing the recurring structure of the rear text in which events are *yichonal* "overseen" by Sak Hix Muut but *uchabjiy* "supervised" by a Tikal ruler. In essence, the purpose of the Temple VI inscription was to record important interactions between kings and their divine royal patron.

Epigraphy and Chronology of Columns E-F

There are many interesting observations to be made about the Temple VI inscription, but I will concentrate here on the construction history described in Columns

¹ My colleague Dmitri Beliaev has been collaborating with Oswaldo Gómez of IDAEH to conduct a comprehensive re-documentation of the Temple VI inscription as part of the project Atlas Epigráfico de Petén, Fase II. This important new effort has already made valuable contributions, as we will shortly see.

² The name features the word *ihk'in*, meaning "darkness" or "night," formed from the fusion of *ihk'* "black" and *k'in* "sun/day." For "black" as *ihk'* see Zender in Stone and Zender 2011:121.

³ See the summary in Harrison 1999:158-161.

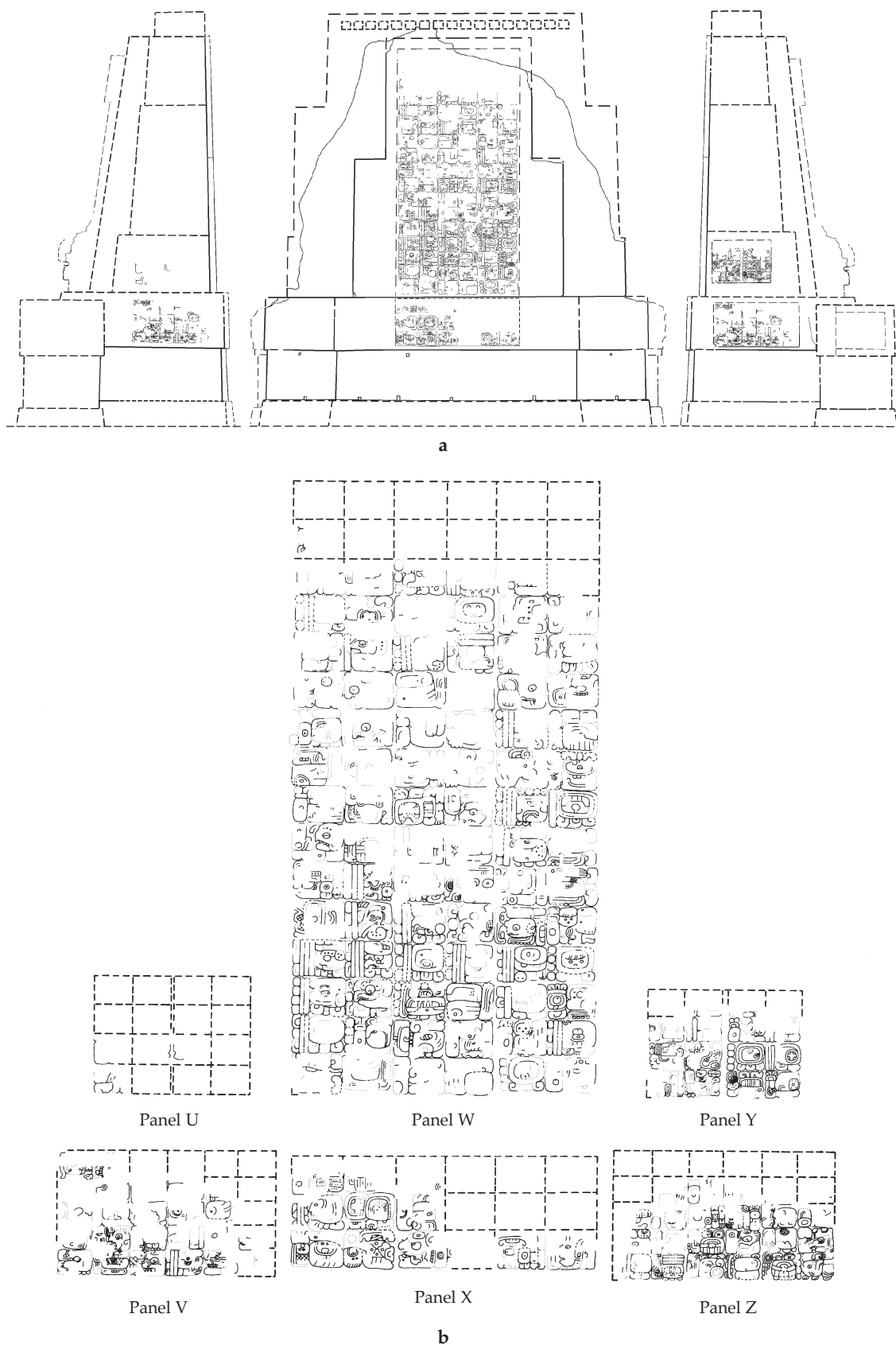
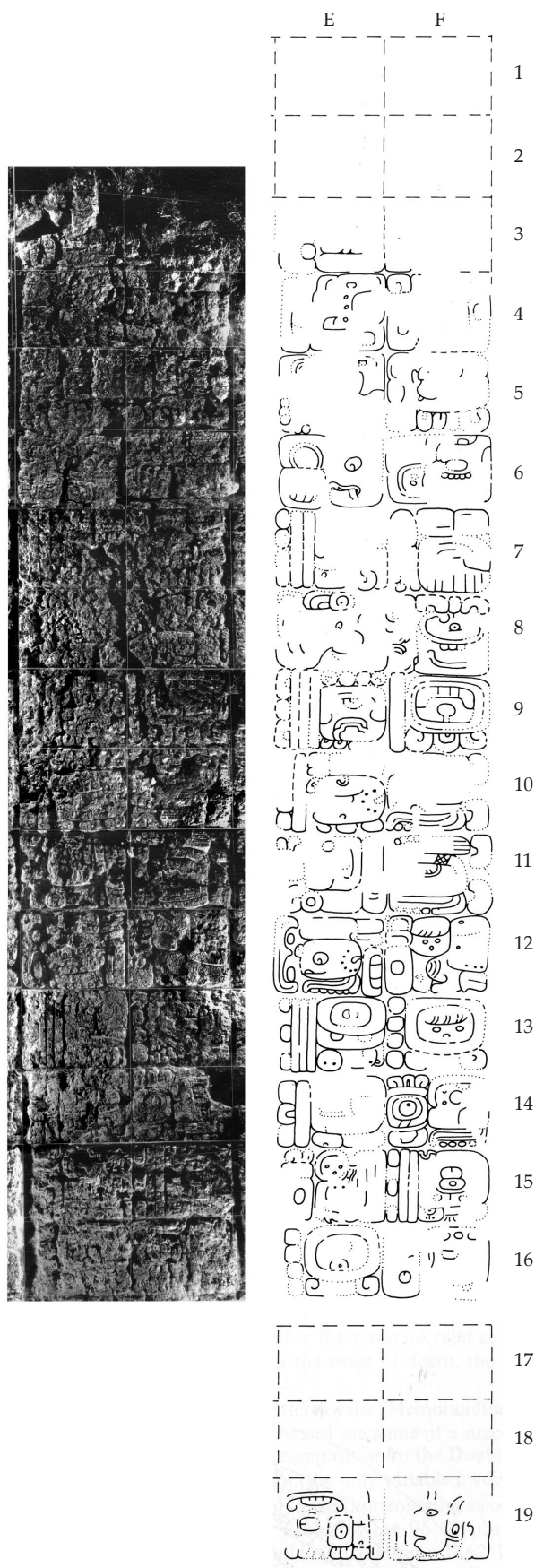


Figure 2. The Tikal Temple VI inscription: (a) distribution of hieroglyphic panels on the south, east, and north sides of the structure (drawings by Anita Zale after Stanley Loten); (b) text and panel designations (drawings by William R. Coe).



E-F of Panels W and X (Figure 3). The most important insights on this section have come from Stuart (2007a), who pointed to the remnants of **u-WAY[bi]-li** *uwayibil* “the sleeping place of” at E4 and speculated that this formed the subject of an earlier dedication phrase for Temple VI. Additionally, he noted twin examples of the verb **PAT-wa-ni** *patwaan* “is fashioned” at F10 and F11, as references to the making of items, one of them in stone, for Sak Hix Muut’s temple. Stuart also recognized the next event at F14 as **ja-tz’a-[BIH]TUUN-ni** *jatz’ bihtuun* “to strike a stone road” and suggested that it relates to the construction or dedication of the Mendez Causeway leading to Temple VI (see also Grube 2004:209). He subsequently found an entry in the Yukatek Motul Dictionary of *hadz be* “abrir camino por matorrales (to open a road through bushes)” —clear evidence that this term could describe the making of roadways (Stuart 2007b).

An examination of the photographs and field drawings supports these assessments in large measure and allows us to elaborate upon them. The highly eroded E4 is certainly consistent with *uwayibil*, with the implication that the missing F3, alone or more probably together with E3, once supplied an appropriate verb—possibly, but not necessarily, the *ochk’ahk’* term. As expected, F4 names Sak Hix Muut as the owner of the temple. Further on, one of the fashioned objects, at E12, was certainly made of stone, but the one at E11 seems to be composed of **TE’** “wood.” It is possible that they refer to parts of a cult statue. But the most consequential point from the re-analysis concerns exactly when these events took place and who ordered that they be performed.

The existing chronology of columns E and F was derived from Date E at F9-E10, which consists of 5 Cib 9 Ceh, in partnership with a connecting Distance Number of either 2.16 or 4.16 at E9. This *winal-k’in* combination counts back from Date E to an entirely destroyed Date X, which would likely have filled the blocks E2-F2. With 4.16 preferred for the calculation we reach the Calendar Round 13 Ahau 13 Yaxkin, a position appropriate to the Period Ending 9.4.13.0.0. Since the preceding Date D in the C and D columns is firmly fixed to 9.4.0.0.0—just thirteen years earlier—this reconstruction seemed highly probable. As a result, 9.4.13.0.0 became the provisional anchor from which to place all the Long Count dates in the E-F column in the following scheme (Jones 1977:53-55):⁴

⁴ The table in Jones 1977:Fig.18 contains some typographical errors in regard to these dates.

Figure 3. Tikal Temple VI, Panels W-X E1-F19: (a) photographs by Gordon Echols; (b) drawing by William R. Coe based on a field sketch by Christopher Jones.

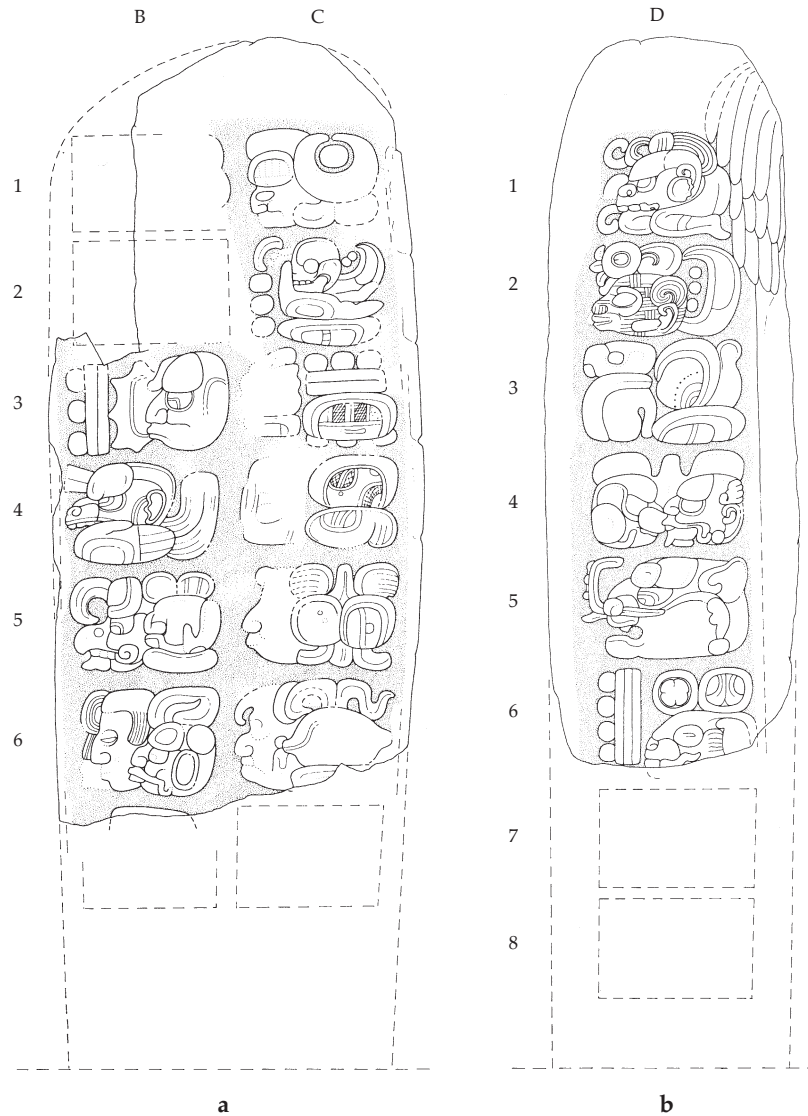


Figure 4. Tikal Stela 12: (a) rear side; (b) left side
(drawings by William R. Coe).

Date X (E2?-F2?)	9.04.13.00.00	*13 *Ahau *13 *Yaxkin
	<u>*04.16 +</u>	
Date E (F9-E10)	9.04.13.04.16	5 Cib 9 Ceh
	<u>01.18 +</u>	
Date F (F13-E14)	9.04.13.06.14	4 Ix 7 Kankin
	<u>13 +</u>	
Date G (E16-F16)	9.04.13.07.07	4 Manik 0 Muan

The 9.4.13.0.0 date already has one record at Tikal, where it is commemorated by Stela 12 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:31-33, Figs. 17, 18). The celebrant there is the young queen known as the Lady of Tikal, who carries the female version of the high title *kaloomte'* and enacts the appropriate rites of *tzutz'uuy uuxlajuunhaab* "thirteen-haab ends" and *k'altuun* "(it is) a stone-raising/presenting" (Martin 1999:5, 2003:18-21) (Figure 4a).⁵ However, the monument itself was owned by a separate male

character, another holder of the *kaloomte'* title, whose appellative is a fusion of the undeciphered name of the Stingray Paddler deity with *bahlam* "jaguar." This 19th king in the Tikal sequence is one I have previously nicknamed *Kaloomte' Bahlam* (Figure 4b). A further monument, Stela 23, tells us that that the Lady of Tikal acceded in 511, while Stela 6 adds that she presided over the 9.4.0.0.0 mark of 514. It comes as little surprise therefore that the matching Date D on Temple VI is followed by an eroded but visible reference to this young woman and, in all probability, that of her consort/co-ruler as well (Martin 2014).

If Date X corresponds to 9.4.13.0.0 then we would

⁵ Marc Zender (personal communication 2014) suggests the nominalization of *k'altuun* employed here.

expect to see the Lady of Tikal as its supervising agent once more. However, the name of the relevant ruler at E6-F6 is spelled very differently as ***yi**[IHK'IN]-**CHAN-?** **K'AWIIL** (Figure 5). This is an expanded but nonetheless recognizable name for Yihk'in Chan K'awiil (Figure 6).⁶ His nominal phrase continues at E7 with *chanlajuun te'* “fourteen tree/lineage?”—a poorly understood designation borne by the same king on Stela 5 (B7)—while F7 supplies the expected Tikal emblem glyph of *k'uhul mutul ajaw*. Beyond this, at E8-F8, we find the battered remains of ***u**-**BAAH-hi** **u**-**CH'AHB-ya**-[**AK'AB**] *ubaah uch'ahb yak'ab(il)*, a reference to mystical essences that, when possessed, express relations between rulers and gods (Stuart 2005:278; Baron 2013:172, 204). In this stand-alone context the reference likely reiterates the link between Yihk'in Chan K'awiil and the deity Sak Hix Muut he honored in building this temple.

This discrepancy between date and presiding monarch presents a significant problem for the accepted chronology.⁷ If the Calendar Rounds of this section are realigned to Long Counts within the reign of Yihk'in Chan K'awiil the following scheme emerges, all positions falling in 735:

Date X (E2?-F2?)	9.15.04.00.00	*1 *Ahau *13 *Chen
	*02.16 +	
Date E (F9-E10)	9.15.04.02.16	5 Cib 9 Ceh
	01.18 +	
Date F (F13-E14)	9.15.04.04.14	4 Ix 7 Kankin
	13 +	
Date G (E16-F16)	9.15.04.05.07	4 Manik 0 Muan

Notably, a temple dedication in this timeframe would be wholly consistent with the presence of Stela 21, the aforementioned Yihk'in Chan K'awiil monument dated to 9.15.5.0.0 in 736 that stands at the base of the Temple VI stairway (Figure 7a). This stone would appear to signal the termination of his work at this location. Appropriately enough a loose text fragment gives the name of Sak Hix Muut (Figure 7b), clear evidence that this deity was linked to the calendrical rituals recorded here.

The E-F columns move on through the “fashioning” and “road-striking” events to a passage dated 13 days after the latter that begins on Panel W and continues on Panel X. Nothing survives beyond the date until we reach two titles of rulership at E19-F19, which presumably refer to Yihk'in Chan K'awiil once again. The lost event, at E17, could mark the final completion of the complex, a fitting conclusion to the huge rear text and perhaps a more appropriate occasion for the *ochk'ahk'* event that turns buildings into sanctified and ritually active spaces.

What is perhaps most striking about this revised chronology is the speed with which the new king set about his construction project, dedicating the temple

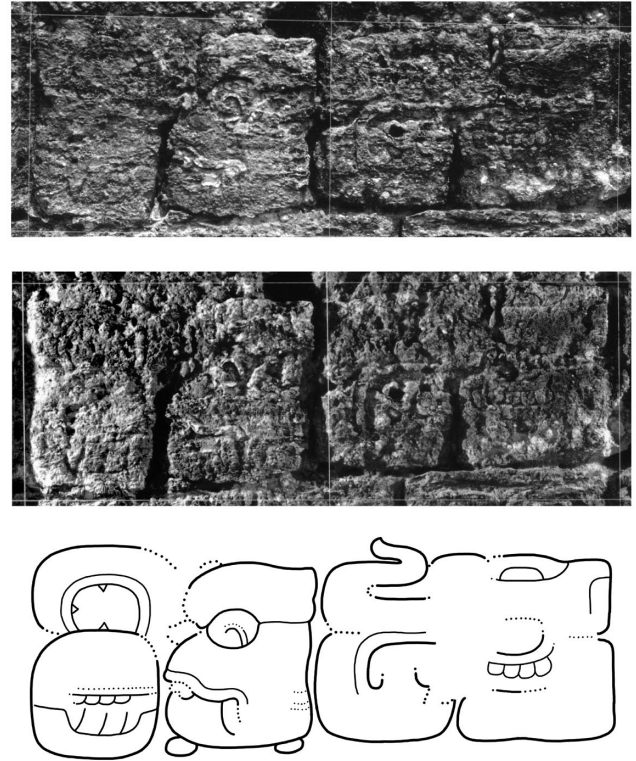


Figure 5. Yihk'in Chan K'awiil on Tikal Temple VI, Panel W E6-F6: (top) daylight photograph by Gordon Echols; (middle) nighttime photograph by Gordon Echols; (bottom) drawing by the author.

just ten or twelve *winal* after his accession on 9.15.3.6.8 (734). We do not know when his father and predecessor Jasaw Chan K'awiil died, but the lack of a carved stela to celebrate the 9.15.0.0.0 mark of 731—despite the construction of Twin-Pyramid Group O which was surely meant to host it—might well imply that the old king did not live to see this juncture and no commemorative text was commissioned as a result (Jones 1977:44-45). If there were a significant interregnum of three or more years it is not inconceivable that Yihk'in Chan K'awiil commenced

⁶ The remaining question concerns the role of the fish-like sign between *chan* and *k'awiil*. Common values for this would be **XOOK**, **CHAY**, or **ka**, although in this position only a phonetic **na** would normally be called for. That this name has greater complexity than most spellings of it is already demonstrated by a version on a polychrome vessel from Burial 196 that shows a **ya** suffix after *yihk'in*, suggesting a verbal role for this unit (Martin 2003:Note 49) (see Figure 6c).

⁷ As Dmitri Beliaev (personal communication 2014) points out, Stuart's recognition that the topic of the Date X passage is a *wayibil* already undermines the idea that it focuses on commemorating a significant Period Ending. Another frailty for the current reconstruction is the reliance on 4.16 for the Distance Number, even though the original field sketch more resembles 2.16. The latter will be preferred here, although this is not to suggest that 4.16 can be excluded as a possibility.

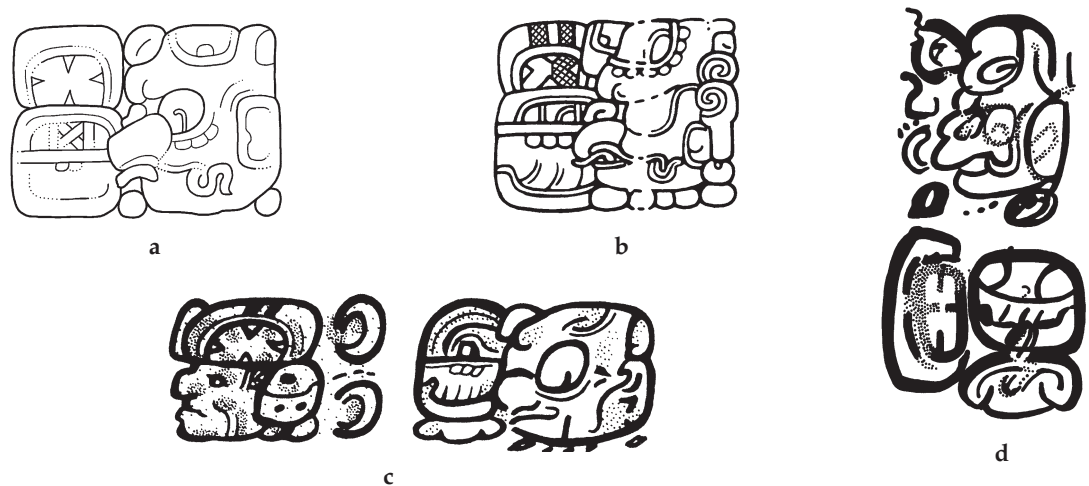


Figure 6. The name of Yihk'in Chan K'awiil: (a) Tikal Temple VI, Panel Z, F4 (drawing by the author); (b) Tikal Temple IV, Lintel 2, B5 (drawing by William R. Coe); (c) Tikal Miscellaneous Text 176 from a vessel in Burial 196 (drawing by Virginia Greene); (d) Tikal Group 5E-11, to be read in reverse order (drawing by the author after a photograph by David Stuart).

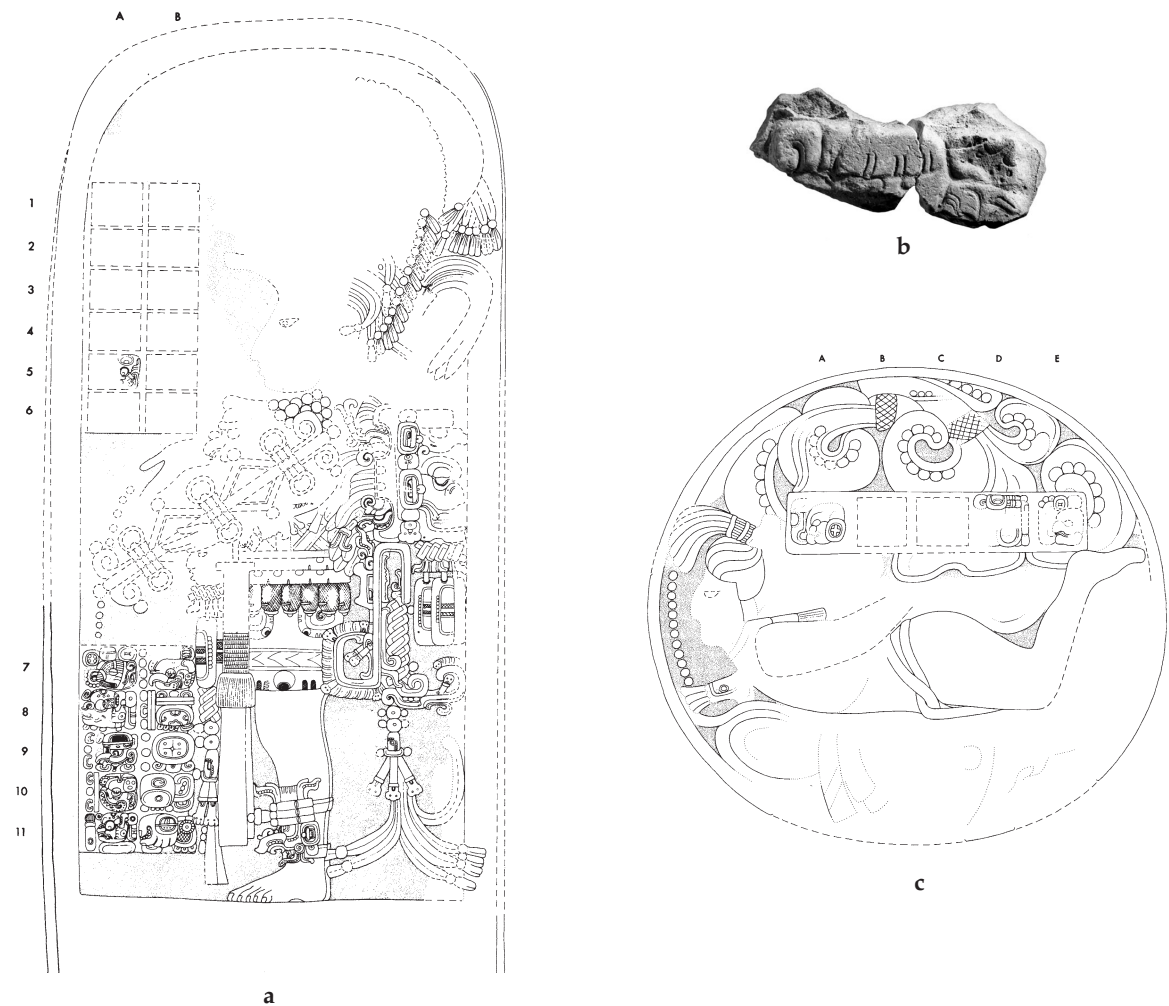


Figure 7. Monuments associated with Tikal Temple VI: (a) Tikal Stela 21; (b) Tikal Stela 21, Fragment 7; (c) Tikal Altar 9 (drawings and photograph by William R. Coe).

work on Temple VI before his official elevation to office. We tend to think of interregna as moribund periods or, if at all enduring, spells in which rival claimants struggled over the succession. However, in most monarchies a pre-designated heir assumes control immediately upon the death of his or her predecessor, thus avoiding a power vacuum, while the formal ceremonies of installation might follow months or even years afterwards.

In addition to quickly stamping his authority on the city by honoring its most important ancestral deity, a contributing motivation for building the temple could have been a military celebration. Altar 9 was set in front of Stela 21 and carries the image of a bound prisoner whose name caption features the snake-head emblem glyph of Calakmul (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:46-48) (Figure 7c). Sadly, damage to the caption's central section prevents us from knowing if this was an actual king or simply one of his nobles (Martin 2005:11-12, Fig. 9b). What little remains of the Calakmul king's name seems to be a conflation of forms used by Yuknoom Took' K'awiil (reigned 698-731+) and the general timeframe would coincide with the last years of his tenure. If we assume, as we must, that this was a victory achieved by Yihk'in Chan K'awiil it should be placed within the relatively narrow window between the death of his father and the completion of the Temple VI complex in 735-736.

Archaeology of Temple VI and the Mendez Causeway

However we ultimately understand the epigraphic evidence it needs to be correlated, as far as is now possible, with the physical remains of the temple. The forthcoming Tikal Report 23B, authored by Stanley Loten (in press), describes crucial architectural and stratigraphic data that we need to take into account. For example, excavations have shown that the basal platform on which Temple VI stands was penetrated by a cache (Problematic Deposit 170) filled with vessels from the Manik ceramic complex dating from 250 to 550 CE. This makes it all but certain that the platform was originally built to support an Early Classic structure, notionally designated 6F-27-2nd, that is encased by the pyramid we see today. Plaster floors found a meter or so beneath those of the upper building of 6F-27-1st presumably belong to this earlier edifice.

As for the main substructure and surmounting vaulted temple of 6F-27-1st, Loten notes the absence of sealing layers in any part of the project bar the division between roof and roof-comb:

Details recorded by three different investigators failed to detect any major pauses from the base level to the roof of the building. Evidence does not clearly indicate that any part below the roof-comb was completely finished and plastered prior to initiation of the next. (Loten, in press)

This would be consistent with a rapid building program since protective plaster seals, designed to prevent rain-water penetrating and destabilizing the rubble fill, normally signal distinct construction phases. The evidence is not incontrovertible; sealing layers may have been missed or removed, but what we currently know of the architectural fabric supports a single building episode.⁸

The plaster finish to the roof of 6F-27-1st necessarily poses the question of whether the roof-comb was raised after only a short pause or whether it was a substantially later addition. Interestingly, at some point the long rear room of the vaulted temple at the summit was largely closed off and packed with rubble to help support the enormous roof-comb. To Jones (in Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:48) this suggests that the great crest was added later, whereas Loten sees no such necessity, arguing that the room filling could amount to a modification made during the construction process or as a subsequent remedial measure.

Data from the stone monuments set atop the basal platform at the foot of the temple stairway help to illuminate the construction sequence. Loten notes that Altar 9 rests on the same plaster floor that abuts the main substructure, indicating that Stela 21 was cut through the same surface. If so, Yihk'in Chan K'awiil must be credited with 6F-27-1st and the question shifts to what degree he was involved with the roof-comb. In one scenario Yihk'in Chan K'awiil was responsible for 6F-27-1st with the exception of the roof-comb and its texts, which were added by his son and successor the 28th Ruler. In a second scenario Yihk'in Chan K'awiil built 6F-27-1st with its roof-comb and its rear text facing east (Panels W and X), while the 28th Ruler conducted limited renovations and added the flanking texts on the north and south sides (Panels U, V, Y, and Z).

Here it is necessary to take account of the physical characteristics of the inscription. Examination shows that both the rear and side texts were originally carved in stone but that this version was later obscured by another modeled in a thick layer of stucco. Earlier scholars believed that the former consisted only of "general outlines" (Berlin 1951:48; Satterthwaite and Jones 1965:2).⁹ But where lumps of plaster have fallen away they reveal fully formed stone glyphs beneath, a particular finding of the Atlas Epigráfico project (Dmitri Beliaev, personal communication 2014). Where both iterations can be

⁸ For a similar single project see Baron 2013:352-353.

⁹ "As noted by Berlin, the glyphs were first blocked out by incising on the stone blocks of masonry, and then in effect re-executed in stucco. Sometimes a line was seen partly in stucco and partly on stone, where stucco had peeled away. No attempt was made to record these distinctions in specific cases, even where the 2 parts of a line did not register precisely. We were on the lookout for incising on the stone through a previously applied coat of plain plaster, with negative results, concluding that the glyph-carving was part of the original plan..." (Satterthwaite and Jones 1965:2).

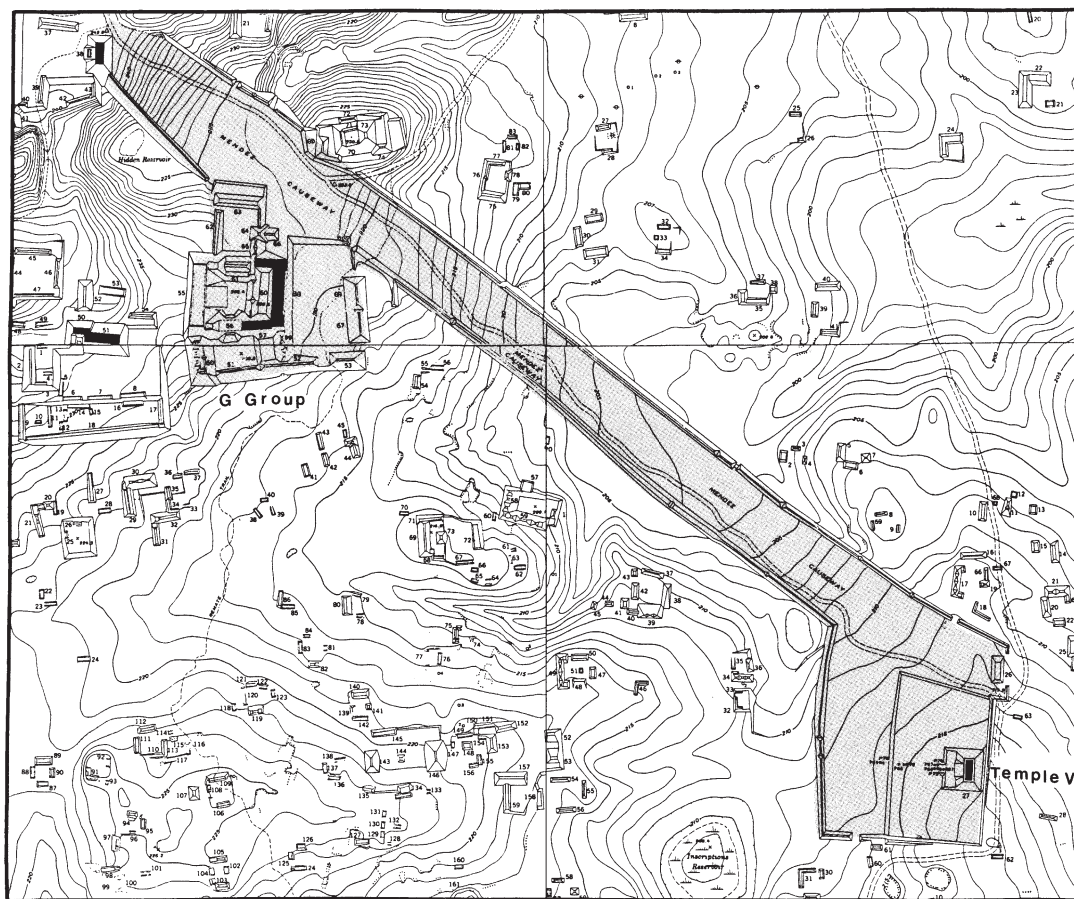


Figure 8. Tikal Temple VI and the Mendez Causeway (from Harrison 1999:Fig. 97).

clearly discerned they are all but identical, as if the purpose of the coating was renovation rather than revision.¹⁰ However, the very small number of such “mixed” cases makes it impossible to be sure if this was true of the whole inscription. Delineating lines in the stucco were drawn while the material was still wet, leaving distinctively raised ridges. This uncommon technique is apparent on both the rear and side texts, and is, if not definitive, then highly suggestive evidence that all the stucco was added in a single effort.

Finally, we must consider the Mendez causeway that extends from the ceremonial core of the site past Group G and out to Temple VI (Figure 8). Investigations here, including one deep section cut close to Group G by Luis Luján in 1960, reveal that the length of causeway that heads from there to the temple complex consists of a single phase above bedrock, while its style of masonry construction provides strong evidence for a Late Classic date (Christopher Jones, personal communication 2014).¹¹ Here we appear to have another synergy between the revised chronology and the material evidence, especially if we link this to Stuart’s interpretation of the *jatz’ bihtuun* “to strike the road” phrase, which would now fall in 735 rather than 527.

Conclusion

This re-analysis of the chronology of the Tikal Temple VI inscription suggests that some of the most important passages, concerning the construction and outfitting of the temple, as well as the building of its associated causeway, should be moved from their current placements in the Early Classic to others in the Late Classic. More precisely, it argues that there is a textual account of Yihk’in Chan K’awiił’s dedication of 6F-27-1st and that it was built rather rapidly at the beginning of his reign. This expedited schedule seems to have been facilitated by building directly over a pre-existing Early Classic 6F-27-2nd. Although there is no reference to the construction of this earlier version in the text, the focus put

¹⁰ One can imagine various motivations for the stucco version, whether it was to restore a quickly eroding original or to harmonize an earlier text with a later one. It is likely that a better-preserved stone text lies beneath the often-ruinous stucco surface at least in some portions.

¹¹ William Coe (1967:87) describes two phases to the causeway close to the East Plaza, one Late Classic in date, the other perhaps built in the Early Classic (Stuart 2012). There appear, therefore, to be two distinct projects, with a shorter initial version later rebuilt and extended to reach Temple VI.

on the co-rulers of the sixth century may indicate that it was one of their projects. We know that 6F-27-1st honored an important ancestral ruler-deity and provided its cult image with a renovated home, but it also served to celebrate a military victory against Calakmul that was recorded on the carved altar at its base. The temple was later re-dedicated in the reign of Yihk'in Chan K'awiil's son and successor the 28th king of Tikal. He must have added the side panel texts that record that ceremony and advance the timeline to 9.16.15.0.0. However, the extent to which this king remodeled other parts of the building, and the degree to which he was responsible for the initial text in stone as opposed to its remodeling in stucco, remain unclear.

Acknowledgments

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