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Revisiting Cancuen Panel 1: Truncated History and the Progress of Maya Epigraphy

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Although some argue that there is no progression in the humanities but only parallel paradigms side by side, we believe that there is progress in knowledge and understanding in some disciplines, in which case our empirical knowledge is greater in quantity and quality than the knowledge accumulated by the previous generation. In Mayan epigraphy, since there was a system of writing to be deciphered, and hence a language to convey that system, the very notion of "deciphering" carries with it the implication of progression of knowledge. The fact of deciphering the signs, i.e., identifying the correct transliteration equivalent to a given Mayan glyph, increases our knowledge by one step with each decipherment, and the cumulative body of graphemes already deciphered increases the quality of understanding of the texts and the information they convey. The empirical proof of this is apparent when we look at a given text and assess how many signs we can read, and also how greatly improved is the quality of our understanding of the text, of related texts, and of their historical context (see Zender 2017). For this purpose it is best to look at a longer text, because it gives us a better idea of the advancements in our knowledge. Some long texts are known to specialists in Maya epigraphy, but they usually study only a part of them, setting aside what they already know and concentrating only on what they do not yet understand. But during an earlier era in epigraphy, epigraphers often transliterated the parts which were transparent or being proposed, with the rest summarized as paraphrases.

One of the longer inscriptions, the incomplete but imposing Cancuen Panel 1 (Figure 1), has only been fully dealt with once as an independent text over two decades ago (Guenter 2002).[1] Having this earlier, thorough study available makes it possible to observe the changes in our understanding of the passages that were questionable or not deciphered in 2002. That said, we note the gaps that still exist. Qualitative development should not only be understood as the abundance of new lexical information in the language, but also in the fact that our knowledge of grammar also increases. Other qualitative progress is observed when the knowledge obtained from the text is combined with other data: our historical, religious, or anthropological knowledge also grows. When we analyze a given text again, we are actually performing a philological operation, a theoretical and a practical act (Gumbrecht 2003).

[1] According to Ashley Kistler (2004) the panel was part of a lost throne smuggled out from the site in the 1980s. There are rumors about the first part of the throne panel: some think that it was buried at the site itself, or it is in a private collection in Guatemala. Additional rumors assert that a substantial fragment of the text fell out of a canoe and could not be recovered.

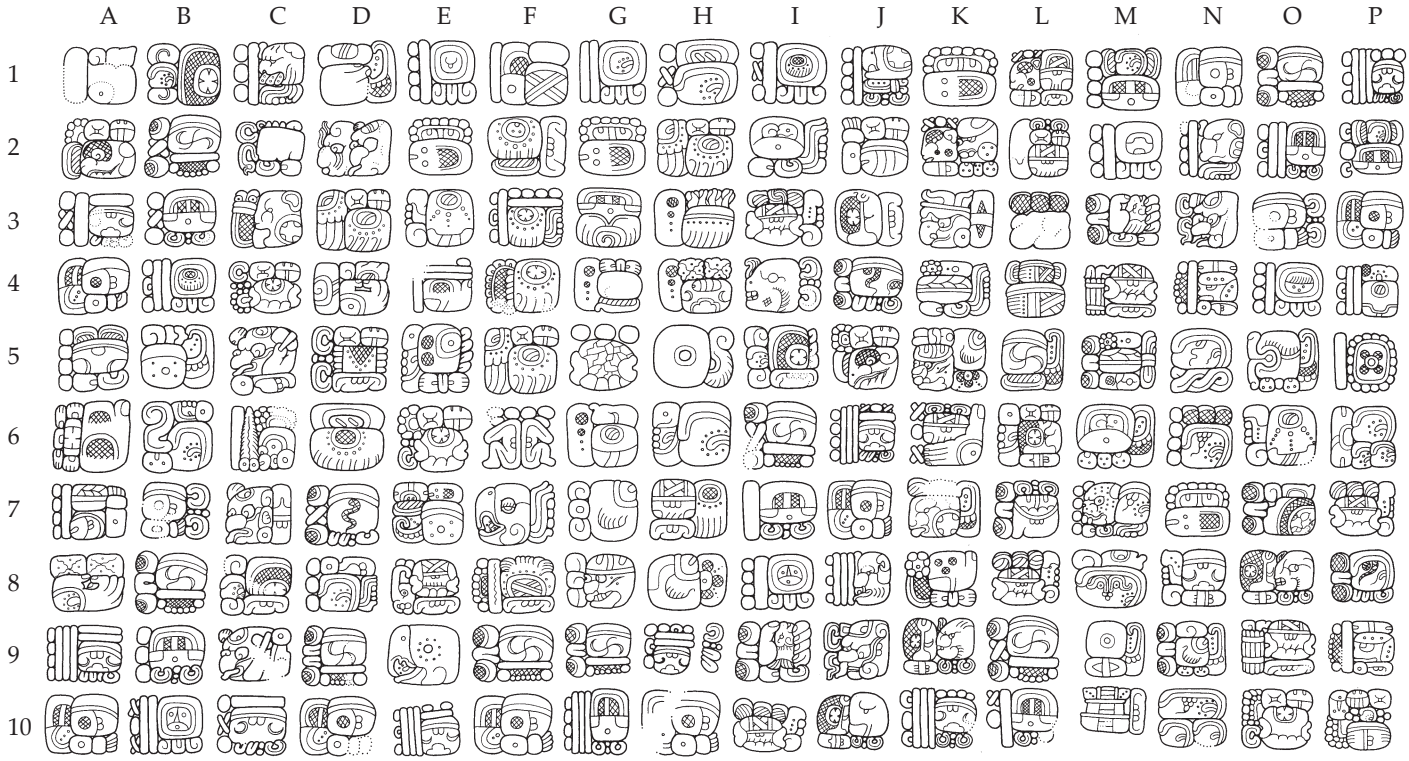


Figure 1. Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter)

Cancuen Panel 1

Cancuen was founded at the beginning of the seventh century in the region bordered by the southern Pasión and Chixoy rivers to the east and west, and flanked by the high mountains to the south (Figure 2). It was strategically located at the upstream limits to navigation on the Pasión River (Demarest et al. 2016:162), which fact may have played a part in its final abandonment. In the major political realignment of the seventh century, the Kanul dynasty of Calakmul established this southernmost Classic Maya city as a vassal kingdom.

The Cancuen royal family claimed to have originated at Tres Islas (K'inich Mo' Witz 'Shining Macaw Mountain'), which is actually a small island in the middle of the Río Pasión.[2] The site may have been used as an astronomical observatory, having a southern version of the E-Group building complex that was widespread in the Preclassic period, but the real center of the dynasty of Cancuen-Machaquila would probably have been El Raudal, 5 km east of Tres Islas (Tomasic et al. 2005:29-10).[3]

From the texts of the three stelae found at Tres Islas, it is clear that the founder of the dynasty reigned in about 100 BC and that the three monuments were erected in 475 by the nineteenth king of the royal family. The inscriptions bear two emblem glyphs, a particularly rare phenomenon in the Early Classic period: the first—Yahk K'in—is that of the Cancuen dynasty proper, while the

[2] The site is located on the left margin of the Río Pasión, approximately 20 km north of Cancuen and 20 km west of Machaquila (Barrios and Quintanilla 2008). Here three stelae created a solar 'observatory,' and they mention several kings who had the titles of later Cancuen and Machaquila. Stela 1 (see Beliaev and de León 2017:128-130) was dedicated in 9.2.0.0.0 4 Ahau 13 Uo (May 15, 475) by Mam Yax … Chahk who was the son of Tayal Chan K'inich, lord of Yahk K'inich who died in 415. Stela 2 was also dedicated in 9.2.0.0.0 4 Ahau 13 Uo by Mam Yax … Chahk who now titled himself as the 19th order-of-kings of Machaquila (19 *utz'akbul k'uhul* 'Machaquila' *'ajaw*).

[3] Cancuen has been the subject of numerous articles and books by Arthur Demarest, who is currently the head of archaeological excavations there. Two of his best-known summary books were published in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Guenter (2002) was the first to deal with the inscriptions at Cancuen in a substantial way; Federico Fahsen, the official epigrapher for the excavations, also contributed to a better understanding of the city (Fahsen and Jackson 2001; Fahsen et al. 2003; Fahsen and Barrientos 2006). Other epigraphers have also analyzed some of the monuments of Cancuen (Kistler 2004; Zender and Skidmore 2004; Tokovinine 2020). At present, apart from Cancuen Panel 1, the site has three ballcourt markers, a fragmented Hieroglyphic Stairway, Cancuen Panel 2, two eroded and fragmented stelae, and a burial shell inscription—a necklace which mentions the Cancuen emblem glyph. Almost all were produced in the reign of Tajal Chan Ahk, though the shell necklace and an unprovenanced inscribed conch shell also bearing the emblem glyph were owned by K'an Max, the last king of Cancuen.

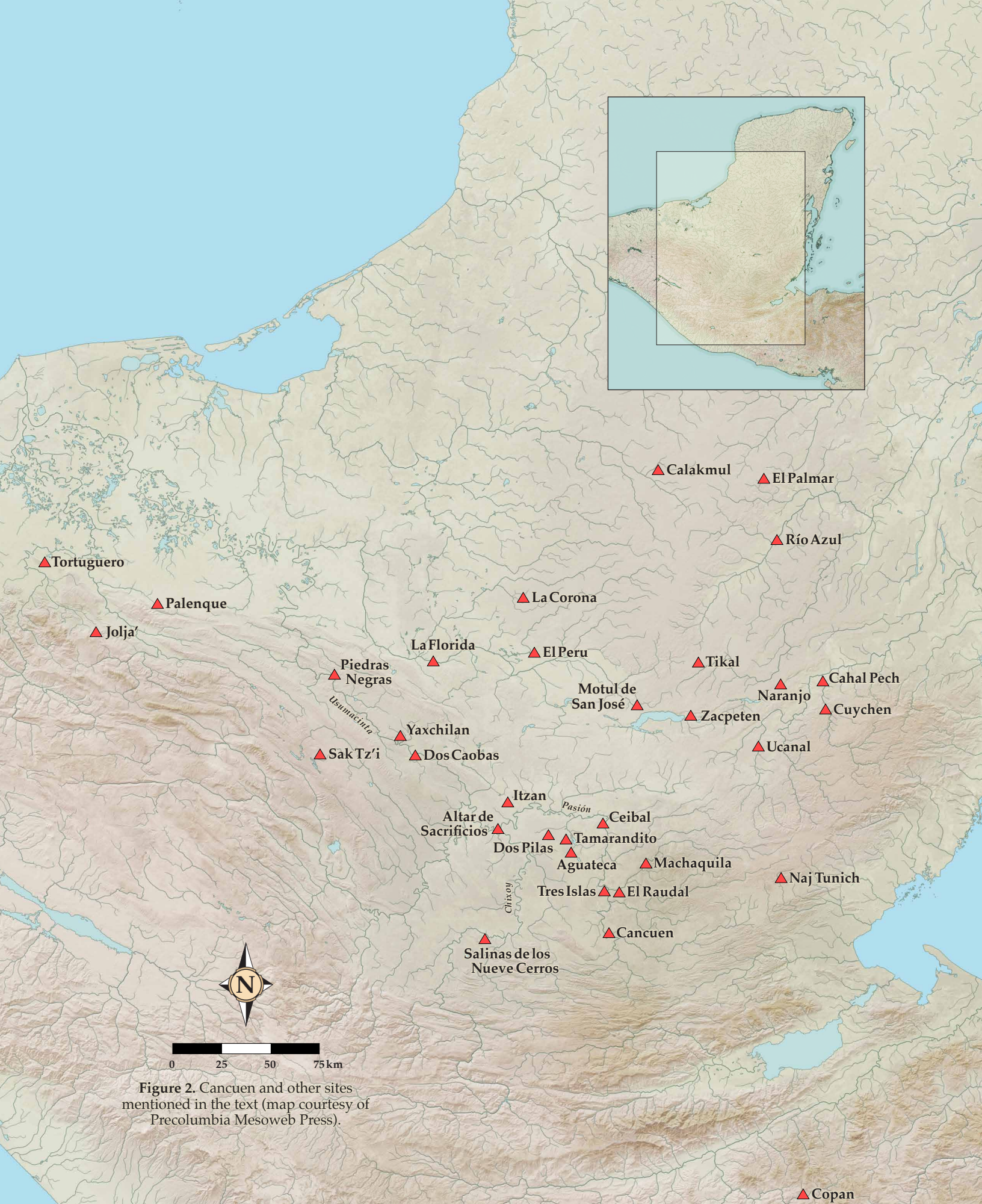


Figure 2. Cancuen and other sites mentioned in the text (map courtesy of Precolumbia Mesoweb Press).

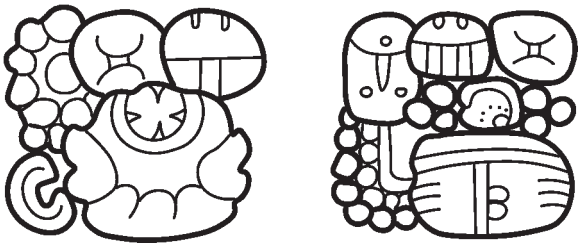


Figure 3. Emblem glyphs of Cancuen and Machaquila (drawings by Péter Bíró).

other was used by the Machaquila kings in the Late Classic period (Figure 3).[4]

The reasons for the use of two emblem glyphs are not known, but as in other cases, it is likely that two royal families shared power, or that the two emblems represented a single area in a given city.

Later, the two families appear to have separated, either peacefully or due to hostility. The Cancuen kings usually preferred the Yahk K'in emblem, while the second emblem glyph was used by the Machaquila rulers in the Late Classic Period. But there were occasions when the king of Cancuen used both emblem glyphs together while at the same time the king of Machaquila also used one of them.[5] This suggests that relations between the two cities were strained, but apart from one captive caption no war events have been documented which would prove a hostile relationship.

In the Early Classic Period in the region where Cancuen was later located, there were originally villages in the valley of the Pasión River; in the same period a Copan-style stela was erected 50 kilometres to the west in the town of Salinas de los Nueve Cerros, an important inland salt source. The iconography of the stelae of Tres Islas has a strong Teotihuacan element. This is evidence that the Teotiwa and Maya alliance dominated the river valley and controlled the trade in jade and obsidian from the highlands. In the Early Classic Period, the area was directly under the rule of Tikal and taxes were collected by the families of that city. In addition, the kings of Tikal oversaw the towns of Salinas de los Nueve Cerros and Altar de Sacrificios, located on the upper reaches of the Chixoy and lower Pasión rivers respectively.

This status quo persisted until the beginning of the Late Classic Period, when members of the Kanul family moved to Calakmul. The move made the towns of Petén accessible and initiated a political realignment. The states formerly controlled by Tikal—Itzan, Dos Pilas, and finally Cancuen—were referred to as vassals of the Kanul family in the inscriptions. Cancuen was founded amid the powerful initiatives of the Calakmul dynasty in the mid-seventh century, and the bond of vassalage survived until the mid-8th century.

The Cancuen inscription under study not only reveals how the power of the Calakmul kings accrued in the seventh century, but also how the founding of a vital vassal city took place and how the event was described in discourse at considerable retrospective distance.

While the panel itself is undamaged with almost all its glyphs identifiable, the narrative on Cancuen Panel 1 is fragmentary, the first part of it not even appearing on lists of stolen monuments. The inscription, which has 160 graphemes, appears to have emerged during illicit excavations in the 1990s, but the panel was soon confiscated by the police.

Consequently, the archaeological context of the panel is not known, but the surviving inscription is in good condition, which suggests that the quality of the other (earlier) part, which has not been found, is likely to be similar if it is found in some form in the future.

There is no figural representation on the panel, as is true of the long inscription on the tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, and at the end of both inscriptions it is mentioned that the object may have been housed in a tomb. The text starts in the middle of a sentence, but the rest of the text is well preserved and the calligraphy clearly indicates that it is a masterly monument by a group of highly skilled scribes or sculptors.

Table 1 presents our transliteration, transcription, and translation of the inscription in segments. In some cases these are new, and our translation has elements which alter the interpretation in comparison with those of previous authors. We suggest solutions for several eroded or missing glyphs in the text.[6] In the following section, we discuss the events commemorated in the

[4] Proposed readings for the two emblem glyphs still lack consensus. The main title of the Cancuen emblem is composed of three elements: **ya**, the **AK** turtle shell, and **K'IN**, which at first sight appear transparent as **ya**-**AK**-**K'IN** *yahk k'inich,* meaning 'Turtle of the Sun God.' But since the **K'INICH** logogram is never present, another transcription is also possible: *yahk k'in* 'The Turtle of the Sun.' It is also possible (but less likely) that **AK** and **K'IN** together denote another sign, i.e. a digraph, whose initial sound was /a/. Machaquila's emblem glyph is usually written as T174-**su**, but rarely the spellings T174-**ti**-**su** or T174-**su**-**ji** appear. Based on a substitution pattern in the Dresden Codex, the details of which are beyond the scope of this essay, Barbara MacLeod suggests that the emblem written as T174:**SUT** (not **su**)-**AJAW** and sometimes including -**ti**-(**ji**) might be *sut*/*sutij 'ajaw* 'lord of the return.'

[5] Tajal Chan Ahk used both the Cancuen and Machaquila emblem glyphs together on Cancuen Panels 1 and 2 and on one of the stelae; K'an Max used them on Ballcourt Marker 3.

[6] In this paper we use the following conventions: when a given text is presented there will be a full broad transliteration and a broad transcription using the alphabet designed by the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages. In transliteration, a single <?> directly following a grapheme indicates an uncertain value, and when it stands alone it indicates an unknown reading. Three periods <…> indicate erosion. Transliteration will be given in **boldface** letters, with syllabograms in **lower case** and logographs in **UPPER CASE**, separated by hyphens. In the transliteration we do not employ the glottal stop with the initial vowel but we do put it in the transcription (i.e. **AJAW** ~ *'ajaw*). The pronominal clitics *u* and *a* are not in relevant Mayan languages preceded by a glottal stop, so we will not transcribe them.

inscription in separate episodes, first repeating our transcription and then explaining the new meanings, while placing them in a broader historical context.[7]

1. Refugees or Local Noble House in Calakmul

Transcription of Episode 1 (Figure 4): *…yichnal Yuk[nom] Ch'en K'uh[ul] Kan[ul] 'Ajaw utz'akaj huk [hew] ho' winikjiy cha' habiy 'i 'u[h]ti 12 Imix 4 Kasew 'ochbih[a]j K'i[h]nich Pak' Ne[h]el 'A[h]k balun 'otot u[h]tiy Chi[h]k Na[h]b utz'akaj balunlajun [hew] lajun winikjiy hux hab[i]y i u[h]ti 11 'Ajaw 8 Muwan k'a[h]laj k'ahk' ?-aw tzin hun tu bah K'ib 'Ajaw K'uhul y-ahk k'in 'ajaw yichnal kal[om]te' Yajaw Man Ho' Kokan K'uh Yax Ha' Cha[h]k ukabjiy Yuk[nom] Ch'en Huxte' Tun kal[om]te'*

The first episode is also the shortest, as unfortunately only the last part of it survived while the rest was lost. Other than our substitution of *pak'* for *k'ap in the old king's name, there is practically no change between the old and the new transliteration, transcription, and translation; in ours we do not mark the hypothetical long vowels, and we do not follow the original order of the written graphemes, but rather the grammatical one, i.e., **K'UH-ka-KAN-AJAW** instead of **K'UH-ka-AJAW-ka-KAN**. Guenter (2002:2) transliterated the toponym as Kan(al), while we follow Mora-Marín's (2010) 'affixation conventionalization/most common suffix' theory, whereby the typical spelling **KAN-nu** alludes to the *-ul* toponymic suffix: Kan[u]l 'place where snakes abound' (see Lacadena and Wichmann 2019:197).

The name of the famous king Yuhknom Ch'en is composed of the transitive root *yuk*, antipassive *-n-* and agentive *-om* plus the word *ch'en* 'cave, settlement, sanctuary,' with the whole as 'Earthquake Causer.'[8] Before the ruler's name and the emblem glyph stands a term of interpersonal relationship, *y-ich-n-al* (Houston and Taube 2000:287-289; Bíró 2011:14-18; Stone and Zender 2011:59, 233 n. 15). The root is the Greater Lowland Mayan **iky-* '(to be) facing someone(/something?)'; Kaufman and Justeson 2003:304); in Classic Ch'olan it means 'in front of, in the presence of.'

The term *y-ichnal* specifies where the higher-ranking individual resided. The ritual took place in Calakmul, where an unknown person, likely an elite who bore the Yahk K'inich emblem glyph,

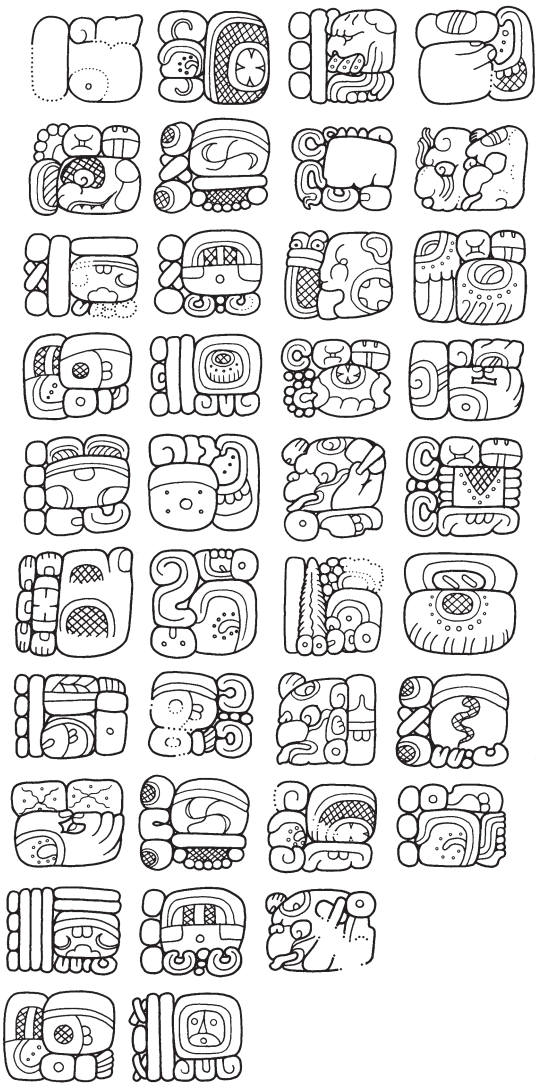


Figure 4. Episode 1, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter)

Occasionally, transcriptions indicate morpheme division via hyphens (e.g., *y-ajaw te'*, *u-we'-ij-iy*). We follow none of the proposed disharmonic rules, and we do not accept the existence of morphosyllabic signs.

Transcription is in *italics*, and every independent lexeme will be written in lower case letters. Any reconstruction (historical, internal, and palaeographical) is in square brackets [ ].The three periods … in transcription indicates unknown reading. Literal translations will be given between single quotation marks '…'.

[7] The dates appearing in the inscription are as follows:

9.10.19.5.14 13 Ix 7 Cumku	February 11, 652	Lost earlier event
9.11.0.11.1 12 Imix 4 Zec	May 23, 653	Death of K'ihnich Pak' Ne[h]el Ahk
9.11.4.4.0 11 Ahau 8 Muan	December 12, 656	K'ib Ajaw's Coronation
9.11.4.9.2 9 Ik 5 Uo	March 24, 657	K'ib Ajaw arrives at Makan Witz
9.11.4.16.19 10 Cauac 2 Yax	August 28, 657	K'ib Ajaw settles amidst reeds and lake in Cancuen
9.12.4.11.1 7 Imix 9 Kayab	January 17, 677	Coronation of Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay
9.12.10.0.0 9 Ahau 18 Zodz	May 10, 682	Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay conjures K'awil
9.16.16.4.16 8 Cib 9 Xul	May 21, 767	Taj Chan Ahk 'Aj Chak Jut Te' conjures K'awil
9.18.8.6.14 9 Ix 12 Cumku	January 11, 799	Taj Chan Ahk 'Aj Chak Jut Te' visits the tomb

[8] See Stuart (2001) and Zender (2010:10-13) for additional contexts and discussion of the 'earthquake' term.

A1–A2…**yi-chi-NAL yu-ku-CH'EN K'UH-ka-KAN-AJAW**

…yichnal Yuk[nom] Ch'en k'uh[ul] kan[ul] 'ajaw

'... in the presence of Yuhknom Ch'en (Earthquake Causer), the Divine King of Kanul.'

B2–A8 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 7-5-**WINIK-ji-ya** 2-**HAB-ya i-u-ti** 12-'Imix' 4-**ka-se-wa OCH-BIH-ja K'INICH-k'a-pa ne-la-a-ku** 9-**OTOT-ti u-ti-ya chi-ku-NAB**

utz'akaj huk [hew] ho' winikjiy jun habiy 'i 'u[h]ti lajchan ha' chan kasew 'ochbih[a]j K'i[h]nich Pak' Ne[h]el 'A[h]k balun 'otot u[h]tiy chik na[h]b

'1 year, five months, and seven days later, [on] 12 Imix 4 Zec, K'ihnich Pak' Ne[h]el Ahk (Shining Founder of the Tail of the Turtle) of the Nine Houses road-entered (died) at Chik Nahb (Coati Lake district).'

B8–C9 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 19-10-**WINIK-ji-ya** 3-**HAB-ya i-u-ti** 11-**AJAW** 8-**MUWAN-ni K'AL-ja K'AHK'**-?-**wa TZIN**? **HUN tu-BAH k'i-ba-AJAW K'UH-ya-AK-K'IN-AJAW yi-chi-NAL KAL-TE' ya-MAN-na-AJAW** 5-**KOKAN-K'UH YAX-HA' CHAK-ki u-KAB-ji-ya yu-ku-CH'EN-na** 3-**TE'-TUN-ni KAL-TE'**

utz'akaj balunlajun [hew] lajun winikjiy hux hab[i]y i 'u[h]ti buluch 'ajaw waxak muwan k'a[h]laj k'ahk' ?-aw tzin hun tu bah K'ib 'Ajaw k'uhul y-ahk k'in 'ajaw yichnal kal[om]te' Yajaw Man Ho' Kokan K'uh Yax Ha' Cha[h]k ukabjiy Yuk[nom] Ch'en Huxte' Tun kal[om]te'

'3 years, ten months and 19 days later, it happened 11 Ahau 8 Muan, was held/tied the Fiery ? Shark/Sustenance Paper (crown) to the head of K'ib Ajaw,[9] Divine Lord of Yahk K'in (Cancuen) in the presence of the kalomte' Yajaw Man, the god Five Stingray, and Yax Ha' Chahk. He tended it, Yuhknom Ch'en (Earthquake Causer), the kalomte' (High King) of Huxte' Tun (Three Stones).'

D9–E9 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 2-5-**WINIK-ji-ya i-u-ti** 9-**IK' 5-IK'-a**?-**AT HUL-li ma-ka-na wi-tzi** 7-[**t'i**?-**ni**] 9 **t'i**?-**ni** 6-[**pa-k'a**] 12-**pa-k'a ju-t'i**? **a-AK'-no-ma k'i-ba-AJAW K'UH-ya-AK-K'IN-AJAW** 4-**K'UP**? **CHAK-ka-ja-li-bi a-ni** [square-nosed beast]-**CHAN-na-AK AJ-XAN-na mo-MO'**

utz'akaj cha' [hew] ho' winikjiy i 'u[h]ti balun ik' ho' 'ik'at huli Makan Witz huk [t'in] balun t'in wak [pak'] lajchan pak' jut' 'ak'nom K'ib 'Ajaw k'uhul y-ahk-k'in 'ajaw

chan k'up chakajlib 'ani "Square-nosed Beast"[10] *Chan 'Ahk 'Aj Xan Mo'*

'Five months and 2 days later, then it happened 9 Ik 5 Uo; he arrived at Makan Mountain, he of seven and nine hills, 6 and 12 foundations, the narrow-place-offerer K'ib Ajaw, Divine Lord of Yahk K'in (Cancuen).

(The) four cutting-reddening places (sacrificial altars) were "Square-nosed Beast," Sky Turtle, He of Palm/He of Foot Travel, and Macaw.'

---

[9] In Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980:392), *k'eb* is 'abrir como trincheras o camino.' We propose this as a cognate and provisional explanation for the name *k'ib 'ajaw* as 'lord who opens the road.'

[10] The "Square-nosed Beast (SNB)," "Zip Monster (patron of the third month of the *hab*)" or "Mars Beast" is a fundamental supernatural entity associated with deep-time reckonings as a primordial ruler/ancestor on the Palenque West Tablet of the Inscriptions, Naranjo Altar 1, and Copan Stela J (Grofe 2015), and which is connected to the cycle of Mars in the Postclassic codices (Milbrath 1999:219-223; Bricker and Bricker 2011:382, 485-488). Several examples of the "Square-nosed Beast" have a **mi**- or **MIH** 'zero' prefix, and the **MIN** suggestion of Dmitri Beliaev et al. (2016:121), following Tokovinine and Fialko (2007:7-8), remains unproven. In the Dresden Codex, the creature has deer hooves, which suggest a pedigree reaching back to the Classic Period "Starry Deer Caiman" with its K'in-bowl rear head; the whole beast represents the Maya firmament. The entity's image terminates the five branches of the central "cross" motif on Palenque's Tablet of the Cross (named nearby as '5 SNB-**TE'**') whose long text is dedicated to the mythological foundations of the dynasty.

Table 1. Transliteration, Transcription, and Translation of Cancuen Panel 1.

F9–H8 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 17-7-**WINIK i-u-ti** 10-'Cauac' 2-**YAX-SIJOM HUL-li k'i-ba-AJAW KAJ-yi WAL-JAL**? **WAL-tz'e-ka WAL-NAB** 3-**AK PET-ne WAL-yo-OL a-ku yu-lu CHAN-na-HA' ha lu-mi**

utz'akaj huklajun [hew] lajchan winikjiy 'i 'u[h]ti lajun kawak cha' yax sihom huli K'ib 'Ajaw kajay wal jal wal tz'e[h] k wal na[h]b hux 'a[h]k pet[e]n wal yo[h]l 'a[h]k yul chan ha' ha' lum

'12 months and 17 days later then happened 10 Cauac 2 Yax, arrived K'ib Ajaw; he settled now at the reeds, he [settled] now at the [stone] threshold foundation, he [settled] now at the Lake of Three-Turtle Island, [and] he [settled] now at the Heart of the Turtle, at the Rippling Sky Waters [of] this land.'

G9–J5 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 2-12-**WINIK-ji-ya** 19-**HAB-ya i-u-ti** 7-'Imix' 9-**K'AN-a-si-ya CHUM-mu-wa-ni ti-AJAW-le ITZAM-CHAN-AK-wi TAK-ki CHAY-ya u-KAB-ji-ya yu-ku-no-CH'EN-na K'UH-ka-KAN-AJAW**

utz'akaj cha' [hew] lajchan winikjiy balunlajun hab[i]y 'i 'u[h]ti huk ha' balun k'anasiy chumwan ti 'ajawle[l] 'Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay ukab[i]jiy Yukno[m] Ch'en k'uh[ul] kan[ul] 'ajaw

'19 years, 14 months, and 2 days later, then happened 7 Imix 9 Kayab; he sat in rulership Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay ('Sorcerer who is the Sky Turtle [with] Little Roots of Fish') in the presence of Yuhknom Ch'en, the Divine King of Kanul.'

I6–K9 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 19-6-**WINIK-ji-ya** 5-**HAB-ya i-u-ti** 9-**AJAW** 18-**SUTZ' u-TZAK-ka-wa K'AWIL ITZAM-CHAN-AK-wi TAK-ki-cha-ya HUL-li** 1-**OK-ki-CHAN-na** 1-**OK-ki-UH-la NUN**?-**ya-AJAW-CHAN MUK**?-**ta ITZAM-AT**? **PAT-wa-ni K'AL**? **ha-lu-mi TZ'AK-ka-ja** 1-**ya-YAL-CHAN a-AJAW-TAK-ki BAH-hi-ja u-CH'AB-ya-AK'AB ch'a-ho-ma ITZAM-CHAN-AK-wi TAK-ki-CHAY-ya**

utz'akaj balun [hew] wak winikjiy ho' hab[i]y 'i 'u[h]ti balun 'ajaw waxaklajun sutz' utzakaw K'awil 'Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay huli Jun 'Ok Chan, Jun 'Ok Uhal, Nun? Yajaw Chan mukta[w], 'Itzam 'At? patwani k'al ha' lum tz'ahkaj Yal Jun Chan Ajawtak bahij uch'a[h]b[il] [y]ak'ab[il] ch'ahom 'Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay

'Five years, six months, and 19 days later, then happened 9 Ahau 18 Zotz'; Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay conjured K'awil. And then [the gods] One Foot Sky, One Foot Jewel?, Nun? Yajaw Chan, the guardian [of the sacred objects], and Itzam arrived. The shrines were built in this land. They were set in order, the 'Lords who throw [the spear] from One Sky.' Came into being/materialized the creation-darkness of the incense-bearer Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay.'

L9–N10 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 16-4-**WINIK-ji-ya** 6-**HAB-ya** 4-**WINIKHAB i-u-ti** 8-'Cib' 9-**TZ'IK**?-**ni u-TZAK-ka-wa K'AWIL TAJ-CHAN-na-AK AJ-CHAK-JUT-TE' u-PAT-bu-ji KAB-SUM**? **CHUM-mu-la-ja** 4-**ITZAM-TUN** 4-**xi-wa-TUN-ni HUL-li EK'-TUN-NAL wi-WINIK-ki PET-ta-ja u-mu-lu-la-ja KUN**?-**na** [pedestal altar?]

utz'akaj waklajun [hew] chan winikjiy wak hab[i]y chan winikhab 'i 'u[h]ti waxak kib balun tz'ikin utzak[a]w K'awil Taj Chan 'A[h]k 'Aj Chak Jut Te' upatbuj kab sum? chumlaj Chan 'Itzam Tun Chan Xiw Tun huli 'Ek' Tun Nal Winik petaj u-mulul-aj ?kun ?

'86 years, 9 months, and 16 days later, then happened 8 Kib 9 Xul; Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te' (Heavenly Torch Turtle, Great Feller of Trees [=soldiers]), conjured K'awil, then formed the earth-rope; were seated [statues of the Gods] Four Itzam Tun and Four Xiw Tun; Arrived 'Ek' Tun Nal ('Star Stone Place') person; became round/was completed the piling-up/the base of the sanctuary? (and) the altar.'

O1–P10 **u-TZ'AK-AJ** 18-3-**WINIK-ji-ya** 12-**HAB-ya** 1-**WINIKHAB u-ti-ya i-u-ti** 9-**HIX** 12-**BIX-OL IL-la-ja** 5-**JAN wi-tzi CHAK**-? **u-MUK-NAL ITZAM-CHAN-AK-wi TAK-ki CHAY-ya u-KAB-ji-ya TAJ-CHAN-na-AK AJ-CHAK-JUT-TE' K'UH-ya-AK-K'IN-AJAW K'UH-SUT**?-**AJAW**

utz'akaj waxaklajun [hew] hux winikjiy lajchan hab[i]y jun winikhabijiy 'u[h]tiy 'i 'u[h]ti balun hix lajchan bix o[h]l 'ilaj ho' janab witz chak ? umuknal Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay ukab[i]y Taj Chan 'A[h]k 'Aj Chak Jut Te' k'uh[ul] yahk-k'in 'ajaw k'uh[ul] ? 'ajaw

'32 years, 1 month, and 18 days later [since the foregoing events], then happened 9 Ix 12 Cumku, was attended/witnessed the Five-Devourer-Mountain Red Altar, [which was] the tomb of Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay; he tended it, Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te', Divine King of Yahk K'in and the Divine King of Sutij.'

appeared in the presence of Yuhknom Ch'en. This was probably the noble K'inich Pak' Ne[h]el Ahk mentioned in the next episode. The date of the lost event is 9.10.19.5.14 13 Ix 7 Cumku or February 11, 652, in the midst of the Mutul factional war and the expansion of Calakmul to the south (see the Discussion).

The second episode recounts the death of K'inich Pak' Ne[h]el Ahk in Chihk Nahb, the center of Calakmul, where the majestic palace is located. We have altered the old transliteration in substituting *pak'* 'to found/populate a town' (Barrera Vásquez 1980:624) for *k'ap, which had rendered the noble's name incomprehensible. With *k'inich* as 'shining' and *'ahk* as 'turtle,' **ne**-**la** makes sense as *ne[h]-el,* the innately-possessed form of *neh* 'tail' which is reconstructed to Proto-Ch'olan *neh 'tail.'[11] K'ihnich Pak' Ne[h]el Ahk's title is 'Nine Houses' (*balun 'otot)*, which is unique in the Classic Maya corpus. The only other similar examples are Aj? Sak? Nikte' Nah and Aj Ajan Nah which appear in the parents' titles of the king of Tamarindito (HS 3, Step V: A-B, and Step VI: C-D). One could speculate that the term 'house' is actually the antecedent to the later Guatemalan Highland *nimja*, 'big house,' referring to a kinship-corporative group.

In the text of the third episode we offer a new interpretation with respect to the previous translation. The first is one of the names of the three-leaf crowns, which in the iconography were once termed "Jester God" heads. This one, the Piscine Jester God, Barbara MacLeod (2021) proposes be read as **TZIN**? 'sustenance' which further qualifies the **HUN** or Avian headband (see Steinbach 2015). The only glyph in this section which is still not understood is the partially-eroded grapheme after the **K'AK'** sign. One option would be **TIL**-**wa** (*til* 'to burn': Kaufman and Norman 1984:132), but this antipassive form is usually spelled with -**wi** instead of -**wa**.

It is unusual that the title *kalomte'* appears twice: first in the name of the god (*kalomte'* Yajaw Man) and then as the title of the king (Yuhknom Ch'en *kalomte'*). *Ukabijiy* designates the high king as the one who 'tends to' the coronation rite as the "organizer" or the "chief guardian" of the ceremony.

Apart from the additional *kalomte'*, the three supernatural entities are well-known patron gods of Calakmul (Schele and Grube 1994; Martin 2000a, 2000b, 2008; Guenter 2002). Yajaw Man is exclusively connected to Calakmul and mentioned on Cancuen Panel 1, Tikal Temple I Lintel 3, Calakmul Stelae 54, 58, and 89, and a carved rock (see Baron 2016:173), while the two other gods, Ho' Kokan K'uh and Yax Ha'al Chahk, appear in other cities' inscriptions (Tortuguero Mon. 8 and the Brussels Stela; Piedras Negras Panel 2). *Man (*T566) is also part of the spelling of the place name (**na**-**MAN**-**ni**) of La Florida (Lopes 2003), but as an independent lexeme its meaning is elusive; Lopes suggested that it is in some way connected to the Yucatec *manab* 'fantasma, visión' and Chontal *manap* 'devil' (Arzápalo 1995:1907; Dienhart 1997:1927).

The most important piece of information in these three episodes is that a relative (perhaps the father) of the newly-appointed king of Cancuen died in Calakmul, again unique in the corpus of Maya inscriptions, and his successor acceded to rulership in the same city under the eyes of the high king and his gods. Because the first part of the inscription is not available, we can only surmise that the person who died was a Calakmul nobleman whose son K'ib Ajaw became the Cancuen ruler, taking the emblem glyph of the city. There are examples in the inscriptions wherein the king went to a new city and took the local emblem glyph while seemingly not being connected to the previous dynasty. In 829 Wat'ul K'atel moved to Ceibal as ordered by the ruler of Ucanal (Schele and Mathews 1999:175-196; Houston and Inomata 2009:306-307; Bíró 2011:42-43; Carter 2014:196-197; Martin 2020:128). On Ceibal Stela 11, the arrival was sanctioned by 'Four Palanquins, 8 Palanquins, Divine Lords of Ceibal,' whom previous scholars had interpreted as the ancestral king or nobles from the city; however, it could be the case that these were the gods of Ceibal.

After the breaking of a dynastic line, the re-foundation of a new kingly house must have the permission of the given settlement's gods. In the case of Cancuen Panel 1, K'ib Ajaw had the authorization of the high king of Calakmul as well as his gods. During his journey to Cancuen he apparently spent some time at Makan Witz, whose court may have overseen the cave of Naj Tunich, a famous long-distance pilgrimage shrine (Guenter 2002a; Carter and MacLeod 2021; MacLeod n.d.). In comparison with the analogous event linked to Ceibal, K'ib Ajaw moved his warriors and his courtiers into a new area, possibly bringing the gods of Calakmul together with the gods of the previous Cancuen dynasty, who resided in another, unknown location. His arrival in Makan Witz as the 'narrow-place offerer,' in the context of the newly-deciphered shrines of the following sentence, suggests a high-level convocation of multiple earth gods and ancestors amid an extended series of rituals.

The inauguration of K'ib Ajaw on December 13, 656 had been in the dry season, an ideal time for a grand ceremony and also a time when the high king was in Calakmul. Yuhknom Ch'en often undertook war campaigns in that period, usually to the Petexbatun and the lakes area in Peten (see the most up-to-date summary in Martin 2020:233-236). If we place the accession of K'ib

[11] Prior attempts to explain *k'ap in both Guenter's and our own original interpretation yielded no useful term, but upon considering the *pak'* 'to found' component in K'ib Ajaw's nominal phrase, we have settled on this alternative.

Ajaw in the wider and tumultuous historical context, the major invasion of Tikal[12] by Yuhknom Ch'en took place roughly one month after K'ib Ajaw received his crown in Calakmul. An earlier event had been the death by sacrifice of Sak Mas of La Corona.[13] Less than two years after this, El Peru Waka' erected its first stela after a hiatus of 103 years.[14] The road from Calakmul to Cancuen had now become safe after the 657 'Yaxha' agreement (Guenter 2002:180-181) between Yuhknom Ch'en, Nun Ujol Chahk, and Bajlaj Chan K'awil.[15]

Thus when K'ib Ajaw began his journey to Cancuen, probably after January 15, 657, he marched in relative safety along the Great Road. We speculate that he may have participated in the defeat of Tikal.

Episode translation: '... in the presence of Yuhknom Ch'en the Divine King of Kanul. 1 year, five months, and seven days later, [on] 12 Imix 4 Zec, K'ihnich Pak' Ne[h]el Ahk of the Nine Houses road-entered (died) at Chik Nahb. 3 years, ten months and 19 days later, it happened 11 Ahau 8 Muan, was held/tied the Fiery ? Shark/Sustenance Paper (crown) to the head of K'ib Ajaw, Divine Lord of Yahk K'inich (Cancuen) in the presence of the *kalomte'* Yajaw Man, the god Five Stingray, and Yax Ha' Chahk. He tended it, Yuhknom Ch'en (Earthquake Causer), the *kalomte'* (High King) of Huxte' Tun (Three Stones).'[16]

2. Journey to Makan Witz

Transcription of Episode 2 (Figure 5): *(1) utz'akaj cha' [hew] ho' winikjiy i 'u[h]ti balun ik' ho' 'ik'at huli Makan Witz huk [t'in] balun t'in wak [pak'] lajchan pak' jut' 'ak'nom K'ib 'Ajaw K'uhul Y-ahk-k'in 'Ajaw*

(2) chan k'up' chakajlib 'ani "Square-nosed Beast" Chan 'Ahk 'Aj Xan Mo'

This episode is uniquely complex and laden with previously undeciphered signs. We are obliged to take our own long pause on the road of our exposition to share new data regarding their decipherment in tandem with the ramifications of these new proposals.

The full text of Cancuen Panel 1 appears at a glance to represent one journey with a major stop at Makan Witz; a second sentence follows the Makan Witz arrival and is tied to the same Distance Number. Although earlier epigraphers (Guenter 2002a; Tokovinine 2020) have understood the king's travel to Cancuen as one journey, we suggest it to have been two journeys with an extended stay in Makan Witz. Tokovinine (2020:263) has proposed that K'ib Ajaw set out immediately after ascending the throne, thus arriving in Makan Witz after 102 days, but it is not clear that he set out immediately, and we think it more likely that he did so after Tikal had been subdued—i.e., on or soon after January 15, 657. If so, the actual travel to Makan



Figure 5. Episode 2, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter)

[12] This attack took place on 9.11.4.5.14 or January 15, 657.

[13] The sacrifice of Sak Mas took place on 9.11.3.6.18 or February 14, 656; he was possibly the loser of a civil war among the ruling houses. This event was perhaps connected to the Calakmul-Tikal war.

[14] Stela 1 commemorated the date of 9.11.5.0.0. or September 18, 657, with El Peru now the vassal of Calakmul (Guenter 2005).

[15] Dos Pilas HS2, East Stair, Step 3 mentions an event at Yaxha in which Yuhknom Yich'ak K'ahk', the would-be heir to the throne of Calakmul, participated in a rite together with Nun Ujol Chahk of Tikal and Bajlaj Chan K'awil of Dos Pilas. Sadly the step is partially destroyed; therefore we do not know the date and the precise nature of the event but it took place between January 12, 657 and July 10, 662 (Guenter 2002b:18-19).

[16] Guenter's translation:

> ...in the presence of Yuknoom Ch'een, Divine Snake Lord. It changed: 7 (k'ins) and 5 winals and 1 tuun later, and then it occurred on 12 Imix 4 Sek: he entered the road, K'inich K'ap Nel? Ahk, 9 House; it happened at Chiik Naab. It changed: 19 (k'ins) and 10 winals and 3 tuuns later, and then it occurred on 11 Ajaw 8 Muwan; it was wrapped (the) K'ak' al...w K'awiil .... (headband) on his head, K'ib Ajaw, Divine Cancuén Lord, in the presence of the Kalo'mte', Yajaw Man, 5 Bloodletter God, Yax Ha' Chaak; he oversaw it, Yuknoom Ch'een, the Ux Te' Tuun Kaloomte'.

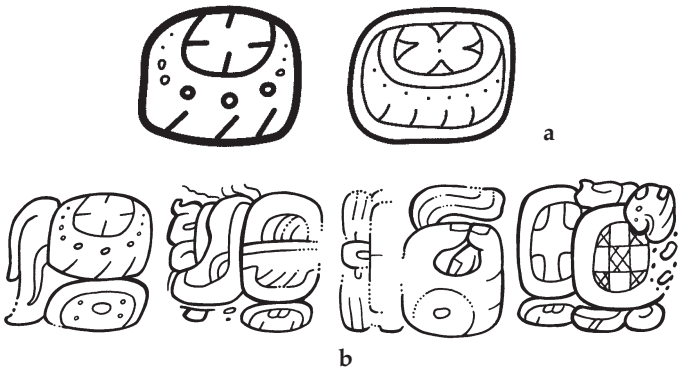


Figure 6. (a) T501[544] (drawing by Péter Bíró); (b) Cahal Pech ring (drawing by Marc Zender).

Witz took about 68 days. We again transcribe the first sentence, following the Distance Number, as: *huli Makan Witz huk [t'in] balun t'in wak [pak'] lajchan pak' jut' 'ak'nom K'ib 'Ajaw K'uhul Y-ahk-k'in 'Ajaw.*

It is a simple 'arrival,' taking into account that 'arrivals' in the script are not casual but place their subjects in historically significant settings on a text's timeline. While the significance of Makan Witz becomes more apparent with the second sentence, the first challenge is found in the two sets of paired titles carried by the new king, one of which is rare and the other unique. The first, containing the sign T501[544] nicknamed "K'in Imix" (Figure 6), has been the subject of controversy and discussion for a decade or more (cf. Tokovinine 2013:110-112; Valencia Rivera and Sheseña 2016; MacLeod and Bíró 2018). This sign occurs in an assortment of unrelated contexts, one of which is that of the elite title T501[544]-**ni** seen as a pair in K'ib Ajaw's nominal phrase with coefficients of 7 and 9. The coefficient varies, providing a somewhat predictable geographic distribution. The title appears on both stone monuments and polychrome ceramics. Due to the diverse inventory of its contexts, epigraphers have thought it to be an as-yet-unidentified syllabogram. Its full history in epigraphic circles is beyond the scope of even our present aims, although it includes a published paper of our own (MacLeod and Bíró 2018) which proposed a **tz'u** reading for the sign—a reading we have since disaffirmed. We now support a syllabic **t'i** proposal by Yuriy Polyukhovych (personal communication 2021), who has given us permission to develop and present it here for the first time.[17] The elite title 7/9 T501[544]-**ni** seen in K'ib Ajaw's nominal phrase on Cancuen Panel 1 is known from two other contexts, both associated with Calakmul (Tokovinine 2013:111). Following Polyukhovych's proposal we read this title as **t'i**-**ni** *t'in* 'hill(s).' In the same nominal phrase of the king we have a different context for T501[544] in **ju**-**ti'** *jut'* 'narrow place, crevice' (*hut'* 'estrecho, angosto, cosa así angosta' Barrera Vásquez 1980:259); the phrase

[17] Since 2012 MacLeod had discussed this sign in email conversations with Yuriy Polyukhovych, who had provisionally advocated for a **t'i** syllabic reading for the sign in contrast with MacLeod's **tz'u** reading. One benefit of these discussions for both Barb and Yuriy was our acquisition of a full inventory of contexts in which to evaluate candidates. But neither of us could explain the elite title with -**ni** suffix as either a geographic feature or a solution for the provocative context of Copan Structure 10L-18, wherein the scenes of four jamb panels depict the king Yax Pasaj dancing on different mountain/quatrefoil motifs. The northeast jamb (Baudez 1994:191) has a text reading *u-bah ti waxak* (eight) T501[544]-**ni**, offering a compelling juxtaposition to possible iconographic solutions for the sign: was it something he was holding, or the mountain on which he danced? Inclining us toward the latter was a bench in the building with eight alternating Sun God relief masks with "*witz* monster (mountain)" masks depicting in frontal view the animate basal registers of the jambs (Baudez 1994:197). In September 2021, Yuriy sent Barb the critical Tzotzil dictionary entry <t'inav> 'hills, uplands' (Laughlin 1975:356) which helped explain the Copan Structure 10L-18 context. We propose that the eight *t'in* were part of a major cosmogonic myth at that city, but even read as 'eight supernatural mountains' the title remains mysterious. Bíró recently found *t'in pokche* 'montecillo de matorrales y yerbazales' in Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980:837) which appears cognate, referring to scrub-covered high ground unsuitable for planting.

While continuing discussions with Yuriy and/or our own investigations have confirmed all of the remaining **t'i** contexts, only one other (with agreement from Yuriy in October 2021) is mentioned briefly here due to its familiarity to many readers: the incised bone rings excavated at Cahal Pech in 2011 by Catharina Santisilia (Zender 2014). The other contexts will not be discussed in this paper, with the expectation that Yuriy Polyukhovych will in the future publish the full argument for T501[544] as the syllabogram **t'i**.

Marc Zender (2014:57-58) transliterates the identical name-tags on two incised bone rings as **yo**-?-**bi K'AWIIL-la CHAN-na K'IN-ni-chi K'AN-na BAHLAM**…**w** (Figure 6b). Zender tentatively proposed a value of either **si** or **so** for the syllabogram, suggesting that the initial name tag on the rings might read *y-osib* 'his ring (literally 'thing for inserting (a finger into)', identifying the root as potentially related to Ch'orti' *'os* 'to enter' (< *'och-es). In contrast with Zender's proposal, MacLeod has long assumed that these name-tag rings encircled the wooden handles, lost to time, of an artist's tool which would complement the beautiful cut shell ink-pot found in the same tomb. With Yuriy's **t'i**, the spelling **yo**-T501[544]-**bi** (or **yo-t'i-bi**) signals a verb root of the form /'ot'/ or /hot'/ at Cahal Pech which is explained by the Colonial Yucatec verb <hoth> (*hot'*) 'arañar como rayando o rayar arañando, entallar, esculpir [to scratch, notch, sculpt]' (Arzápalo 1995:1765 under *H simple*). But as a /j/-initial root, *jot'* appears on the Cancuen Ballcourt Marker 2 as **su-tu-jo-t'o** or *sut jot'* '[a]round carving,' a name-tag apparently referring to disk-shaped carved objects (see Zender 2004:260 n. 95 for the **t'o** reading for this variant of T174). In other modern Mayan (Tzotzil, Chontal, Ch'ol) sources *jot'* is 'to scratch,' but the Colonial Yucatec source demonstrates its /h/-initial phonology in that subfamily, from which we might suggest Yucatecan influence at Cahal Pech.

While the argument cannot be fully offered here, many lowland Mayan languages treat /h/-initial roots as vowel-initial if they are innately possessed, as seen with *ha'* 'water' in *y-a'al* 'the water of (a river)' in Yucatecan river names. We assume these Cahal Pech tools to have been innately-possessed incising instruments. This may be a unique script example of the spelling rule for /h/-initial roots.

is *jut' ak'nom* 'narrow-place offerer,' and in association with Makan Witz—first identified by Guenter (2002) as a site called Mak Witz represented in a Naj Tunich text (Figure 7a)—it strengthens Guenter's proposal that K'ib Ajaw included a pilgrimage to Naj Tunich Cave during his travel to Cancuen (Figure 7b).[18]

There is a second paired-and-numbered title in K'ib Ajaw's long nominal phrase: 6 [*pak'*] 12 *pak',* which we have recently analyzed as counts of 'foundations' (*pak'* 'hacer y fundar pueblo,' 'edificar pueblo o casa': Barrera Vásquez 1980:624). It is unique in the known corpus. The spelling is [**pa**]**k'a** *pak'* which we had previously misinterpreted as *k'a'* 'bridge' (MacLeod and Bíró 2018). Like *t'in*, this title must belong generally to the domain of geographically related and numbered collective titles, of which there are many.[19] In our case, we assume *pak'* complements *t'in* 'hills' and by extension 'animate quatrefoil mountains' in relation to the act of foundation and to rites of dynastic territorial legitimacy that are further suggested by the second sentence in this episode.

One assumes that K'ib Ajaw's retinue had multiple short layovers during the 68 days of travel to Makan Witz.

2.1 The Supplementary Sentence of This Episode

We transliterate and transcribe the second statement following K'ib Ajaw's arrival in Makan Witz as:

CHAN K'UP? **CHAK**-**ka**-**ja**-**li**-**bi a**-**ni** [square-nosed beast] **CHAN-na AK AJ XAN-na mo**-**MO'** (see Figure 5)
chan k'up? chakajlib 'ani [square-nosed beast] Chan Ak 'Aj Xan Mo'

The "back-to-back" sign (HT4 in the Looper and Macri [1991-2024] database; no T-number), here with a superfix **CHAN** 'four,' has long eluded decipherment. A decade or more ago, a tentative proposal **LUB** 'resting place' was suggested by Yuriy Polyukhovych but never published, and while it was initially attractive in a 'travel' context, it has not been supported by Polyukhovych for years (see Looper and Macri [1991-2024] for HT4; Polyukhovych, personal communication 2024). This example of HT4 is unique in the inscriptions, but several contexts in the Dresden and Madrid Codices, including a syllabic spelling **k'u**-**po** on Madrid 27c associated with the "back-to-back" image in the frame, have led us to a reading **K'UP**? 'cut[ting]' (Figure 8). The reading is further supported by our interpretation of the following glyph block as *chak-aj-l-ib* 'place of reddening'/'sacrificial altar.' The full decipherment of HT4 will be treated in a separate essay in progress (MacLeod and Bíró n.d.), but see Footnote 20 for key contexts. For linguistic sources see Barrera Vásquez (1980:424); Robertson et al. (2010:306).[20]



Figure 7. (a) Mak Witz (Naj Tunich, Drawing 24, drawing by Andrea Stone); (b) Makan Witz (Cancuen Panel 1, drawing by Péter Bíró)

MacLeod had originally analyzed the

[18] The term *jut'* also appears in Naj Tunich Drawing 88 in the phrase *i kojoy jut'* 'and then they went down into the narrow place,' which confirms that *jut'* was used in reference to Naj Tunich itself. Guenter (2002:7-8) was the first to identify the term <ak'no'm> as 'giver,' whereas we and Yuriy Polyukhovych have together proposed *jut'*.

[19] *T'in*, as with *tzuk*, is presumably a ritual-mythological and geographic term that is still not fully understood. According to our research, it was similar to the later 'katun circle,' which consisted, among other things, of "these thirteen ages [which] are distributed among thirteen provinces which divide up this kingdom of Yucatán, and each age – with its idol, priest, and prophecy – reigns in one of these thirteen parts of this land according to how they have it distributed" (Fray Andrés de Avendaño y Loyola in Jones 1998:102).

At present, of the 13 hypothetical *t'in* provinces, we have the coefficients 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12, although their placement on the map is uneven: 4 *t'in* may be in the area around Motul de San José, 5 covers the Río Azul area (although the *sajal* of a settlement near Sak Tz'i' also came from this region). The 7 is found singly in Aguateca and Cuychen; it is disputed whether the 7 *t'in* in Naj Tunich Drawing 82 refers to Calakmul or to Bax Tun, but the 7/9 pair might be associated with Calakmul and Naranjo (as an ally of the former). One plausible solution is that 7 *t'in* references the area from south of Naranjo to Naj Tunich, while 9 *t'in* may refer to Calakmul and its surroundings. It follows that 7/9 *t'in* denotes an alliance that can be linked to Calakmul. It is curious that in K'ib Ajaw's case, this sequence of *t'in* and *pak'* titles precedes his name and emblem glyph, whereas in other cases of numbered *t'in* the title is in final position in a much simpler text. We follow Marc Zender in interpreting #-#-noun spellings as non-contiguous haplographic abbreviations for '# [noun], # noun' (Zender et al 2016:43 n. 14).

[20] *K'up* 'to cut' is productive in Yucatecan and is also found in Ch'olti', as noted. The reading was first proposed by MacLeod in a Zoom conference and following correspondence with Gabrielle Vail during March/April 2024. Vail (mayacodices.org) had previously identified a **k'u**-**po** spelling in the augural-birds text of Madrid 27c associated with HT4 as back-to-back Maize Gods in the scene, but did not interpret it. Further investigations of all codical text examples by the present authors have strengthened the **K'UP**? 'cut' proposal. We now transcribe the Madrid 27c case as *k'upo[l] ka' lem k'uh* 'the cutting [of] two "shiner" gods.' Especially pertinent are two additional texts: the first is the well-known Dresden 68a (Figure 8b), where in the scene back-to-back Chahks beneath clouds in dry weather vs. rain

CHAK-**ka**-**ja**-**li**-**bi** *chak-aj-l-ib* spelling as *chak jalib* "the great road"[21] before we agreed on our current 'sacrificial altar' analysis.[22] This follows the "four-back-to-back" sign, and in turn is followed by **'a**-**ni** *'ani* 'was/were [back then]' (Pérez Martínez et al. 1996; Robin Quizar, personal communication 2024), yielding thus far:

chan k'up chakajlib 'ani…
'four cutting/reddening places there were…'

The spelling **'a**-**ni** has prompted much debate and speculation relative to its diminutive size in the narrative. In the absence of other lexical anchors in this elusive sentence, Guenter (2002:7) and Tokovinine (2020:272)[23] both proposed it to be the verb 'to run' (*'ahn in proto-Ch'olan and proto-Mayan [Kaufman and Norman 1984:116]). For his part, Helmke (2018:454) appears to have extended 'run[ning]' to "a dance ritual."

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function metaphorically as a "cut" or seasonal boundary (the start of the rainy season) thought to be equinoctial by Bricker and Bricker (1988):

HT4 **HA'**-**MUYAL**-**AJAW**
k'uhp/k'u'up Ha' Muyal Ajaw
'Cut is Rain-Cloud Lord' (another term for Chahk)
?**NAK**-**CHAN**-**na CHAK**-**ki**
na'ak chan Chahk
'Chahk sat in the sky'
?-**AJAN ta**-**HA'**-**la**
? 'Ajan ta ha'al
'The Maize God is in rain'

The second case is in the "marriage" almanac (Dresden 21-23c) analyzed by Bíró, wherein in the fourth frame of Dresden 22c (with no image, Figure 8c), HT4 as 'cut[ting]' is followed by 'death' and a woeful augury:

(Third Frame)
chamal Xib umuk Sak Ixik
'mortal fear, it is the omen of Sak Ixik'
(Fourth Frame)
k'up (HT4) *chamal ulobahxul*
'cutting death, evil, the end.'

An essay by Beliaev and Houston (2020) identifies a sign without a discrete code in either the Thompson (1962) catalogue or the Looper and Macri (1991-2024) database which they describe as a "hooked obsidian blade." It appears uncommonly in the inscriptions and somewhat more often on ceramics. In the Looper and Macri (ibid.) database it is lumped with the sign PEI, the "head with flint wound" to which it is often prefixed, persuasively read by Beliaev et al. (2020) as **YAJ**. The authors (ibid.:Fig. 8) convincingly propose a **KUP** 'to cut' reading for the obsidian blade sign based on a **ku**-**po**-**ma** syllabic substitution in the name of Kupom Yohl Ahin at Tikal. The sign is productive, which HT4 is not. As the authors argue, *kup* 'to cut' is also found in Tzeltalan languages with specific application to blood sacrifice in Colonial Tzotzil. Our view is that Tzeltalan *kup* (the hooked-blade sign) and Yucatecan *k'up* (HT4) are likely cognates, and that in the Classic script they were in complementary distribution, with *kup* contexts dominating.

[21] The transitive stem <halabtah> in Colonial Yucatec (Arzápalo 1995:1713) 'to follow a road' can be analyzed as a noun *jal-ab 'edge of road with instrumental suffix' with the transitivizing sequence *-t-aj*. It was tempting to suggest that Yucatec *jalab could be cognate with a word *jalib in this spelling. The route of the Great Road taken by K'ib Ajaw is almost identical to the Camino Real, so named in the colonial era, which passed through Campeche, then continued on to the Pacific coast (Jones 1998:129-147). In the Classic Period it must have had destinations at Calakmul, La Corona, and El Peru on the upper San Pedro River, so it consisted not only of a north-south route, but also had branches to the west and east. The colonial road went sharply east from the southern part of Lago Petén Itza', passing very close to Naj Tunich and transiting the upper reaches of the Machaquila River, a reasonable route to the Pasión River and to Cancuen. K'ib Ajaw certainly did not go to the cave by chance.

[22] Among previous authors who have struggled to analyze not only this spelling but a similar **CHAK**-**li**-**bi** (Figure 9) spelling on the leg of a famous captive on Tonina Mon. 27 (Wichmann 2002:7-8), both Sven Gronemeyer (2014 n. 434) and Christophe Helmke (2018:456) considered that they might be related. A distillation of suggestions for the Cancuen example made by Sim Lee (2021, personal communication 2024) led us to Gronemeyer and Wichmann:

> A completely different derivation is provided by Gronemeyer-OCoMHW.p194.pdfp216.fn434: 'Compare to **CHAK**-**ka**=**ja**=**li**=**bi** on CNC P. 1, E7, which can be transcribed as *chak-aj-l-ib*. As mentioned earlier, Wichmann (2002a: 7-8) had discussed the positional instrumental *chak-l-ib* as "prisoner" on TNA Mon. 27, B2 from the otherwise transitive root *chak*, "to tie" in CHT.'
>
> EB [Erik Boot] has three entries with *-lib*: *chaklib*, *eklib*, and *aj jamalib*. EB p124.#4 speculates that it might be a locative suffix. He points out however that *aj jamalib* is the only one with an explicit *aj*.

[23] As testimony to how opaque this pair of sentences has been to epigraphers, here is Guenter (2002):

> Translation "It changed; 2 (k'ins) and 5 winals later, and then it occurred on 9 Ik' 5 Wo: he arrived (at) Makan Witz, the 7-9 ...n; the 6-12 k'a, to Ju..., the giver K'ib Ajaw, Divine Cancuén Lord; 4 ? Chak ....lib ?, ... Sky Turtle; ?, Macaw."
>
> Free Translation: "5 months and 2 days later, on 9 Ik' 5 Wo, K'ib Ajaw, King of Cancuén, arrived at Makan Witz." (And a lot of other information that hasn't yielded itself to decipherment or interpretation yet.)

We view all 'run' interpretations as incorrect, noting in fairness that this sentence has been one of the most intractable in the corpus and that many off-the-mark interpretations (including our own) were put forth prior to the aforementioned decipherments.

Following consultation with Robin Quizar (personal communication 2024; see Footnote 23), we suspect that *'ani* on this panel is the same adverbial particle *'ani*' [was, were] in the past' found in Ch'orti' (Hull 2016:52-53), with a cognate <oni> in Morán's 1625 Ch'olti' manuscript (Morán 1935:Vocabulario p. 5). It is rare in the script, with one related occurrence in a painted text in the cave of Jolja', Joloniel, Chiapas (Sheseña 2007) spelled **'a-ne-ya** *'ani* '[there] was…' followed by the logogram **WE'** 'feasting': '(On) 9 Ak'bal, as the moon went to her well (*hul[i] tu ch'en*: the first day of the New Moon), 11 K'ank'in, there was feasting' (Sheseña 2007:13-14; see also Martin et al. 2002:6). Another **a-ni** spelling at R8 on K1398—in a somewhat opaque passage concerning the crafting and planting of wood and stone effigies—seems quite likely to represent the same word.

The rest of the sentence on the Cancuen Panel consists of a sequence of four nouns—a complex issue to be considered at length below. Three are logograms with or without expected complements; one is a logographic compound with a complement. These are in order: (1) the undeciphered "Square-nosed Beast" (SNB), (2) the compound *Chan 'Ahk* 'Sky Turtle,' (3) *'Aj Xan* 'He of Guano/Fan Palm' or 'He of Foot Travel,' and (4) *Mo'* 'Macaw.' Three have known values and all have known functions elsewhere, but their configurations and purposes have been challenging here. That said, we now have a formal understanding of the sentence, which constrains how and whether these nouns may combine as nominal phrases. Our sentence thus far reads:

chan k'up chakajlib 'ani…
'four cutting/reddening places there were…'
"SNB" Chan Ahk 'Aj Xan Mo'
'"Square-nosed Beast," Sky Turtle, He of Thatch/He of Foot Travel, Macaw.'

Amid our collaborative effort to shed light on this recalcitrant text, the authors came to a crossroads of irreconcilable views for several weeks. Our disagreement positioned syntactic constraints—considered bedrock by MacLeod (see Note 22)—against script and historical antecedents for the components of royal names.[24] The "royal name" argument advanced by Bíró obliged that these nouns represent no more than two nominal phrases and perhaps only one, naming a hitherto unknown ancestor or pair of ancestors of the Machaquila-Cancuen dynasty. This argument, while historically sound, was finally set aside upon our consensus that such an ancestral name or pair could not be grammatically equivalent to the 'four cutting-reddening places' in a predicate-nominative construction: two (or one) ancestor(s) cannot be equated with four locations, and the relationship is not one of possession. Furthermore, there are no signifiers of kingship (*k'inich, k'uhul ajaw, y-ahk k'in*) present among the four nouns.

We conclude that the most likely interpretation is that these four altars were these four nouns/names. But to what category/-ies do the names belong? We see that they are *not all of one class* (i.e., lineage titles, ancestors, patron deities, ancient homeland), but rather of several.

The "Square-nosed Beast," a Primordial Ancestor and the Animate Sky

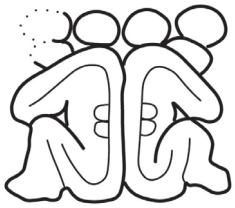
The "Square-nosed Beast" (T1021, Looper and Macri [1991-2024] AB8) was a polysemic, primordial crocodilian ancestor of paramount importance to the dynasties of Palenque, Naranjo, and Copan (see also Footnote 10). In his deep-time manifestation he has a **MIH** 'zero' prefix or/and an **IK'** 'black' prefix which

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In contrast, regarding the second sentence Robin Quizar (personal communication 2024) offers this analysis:

> This would be a stative construction with a nominative predicate. Because of VOS word order, I would translate it as:
>
> *Chan k'up-chakajlib ani* "SNB" *Chan Ahk Aj Xan Mo'*
>
> "SNB," Sky Turtle, He of Palm, and Macaw were four cut-redden INST. NOUN
>
> The particle ***ani*** makes the 'be' a past tense 'were' in the English translation… To me, it makes more sense to think of this sentence as naming these places or associating these names with these places (in some kind of relationship that doesn't exist in our culture).

[24] Bíró argued that Chan Ahk, a recognized lineage title at Cancuen, at Naj Tunich, and at El Peru Waka', always appears in royal names paired with another element: Maman Chan Ahk, K'ilismal Chan Ahk (the foregoing are at Naj Tunich), 'Leaf' Chan Ahk, 'Tapir' Chan Ahk, K'inich Bahlam Chan Ahk, or Chan Ahk "Dragon Jaguar" (see MacLeod n.d.; Navarro-Farr et al. 2024:37, Fig. 2.6). At Cancuen specifically, long king names such as Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay and Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te' fused Chan Ahk with multiple elements including supernatural entities. These motivated the interpretation of "SNB" Chan Ahk as one unit, and in this case there is another example on Yaxchilan L. 35, B8, with both elements in a single block as they are here. Following Christian Prager et al. (2016:13-14) in their article on the **XAN** 'palm' decipherment, Peter opted for Aj Xan Mo' as the other unit, referencing Prager and Wagner's identification of several royal names containing the **XAN** logogram. Noteworthy and close to home were Aj Chak Xan Bahlam (on Cancuen Ballcourt Marker 2) and Xan Tatbu Sutz', one of the Tres Islas kings of the Early Classic Period, who once used the emblem glyphs of both Machaquila and Cancuen.



a



b



c

Figure 8. (a) HT4 grapheme (drawing by Péter Bíró); (b) Dresden 22c; (c) Dresden 68a.

appear to be semantic cues to his "before-creation" status (Figure 10).[25] The courts of Copan and Naranjo were allies of Calakmul at the time of the events of Cancuen Panel 1.

As mentioned earlier, there is evidence at Salinas de Los Nueve Cerros of the reach of Copan into the region of the upper Pasión River, and there is abundant evidence of a *teotiwa* influence (as an indirect signifier of a Copan connection) in the iconography of Tres Islas.

As the central icon of the Palenque Cross Tablet, the "5-SNB Tree," whose branches terminate in heads of the entity, is an icon representing the vitality of the dynasty. A text on a lesser-known effigy bench found beneath the Palace (now in the Museum) features this entity as the "Starry Deer Crocodile," the animate Milky Way, who traverses the night sky bearing on his tail the sacrificial *k'in* bowl as the rising sun. He dives into the earth in the daytime, carrying the sun across the sky (Stuart 2003). Here is Stuart's transliteration, transcription, and translation of the text with our minor amendments underlined:

[?-?]-**ba**? **a-je-ne** **BAK**-**SAK-IK' nu-mu-li-TA-CHAN-na nu-mu-li-TA-ka-ba**
?-? 'ajen bak sak-ik' numil ta chan numil ta kab
'(verb) the awakened vitality-and-breath passing in the sky passing in the earth'

?-**NAL yo-to-ti** 2-**WINIKHAAB**? **pi-tzi-la K'INICH-JANAB pa-ka-la**
"SNB"-nal y-otot 2 winikhab pitzil K'inich Janab Pakal
'The "SNB" place is the house of the 2 k'atun ballplayer'

This bench would have been a material shrine to the "SNB" in the form of the Starry Deer Crocodile, here with 'awakened vitality and breath.' We propose that K'ib Ajaw made offerings upon or before such an effigy, either at Makan Witz or in the cave of Naj Tunich.

Chan Ahk, a Lineage Title of Cancuen and Bax Tun

We note in Bíró's summary (Footnote 24) that *Chan Ahk*, the one compound in the list, is a lineage title at Cancuen and elsewhere. It likely originated as an

[25] The monuments registering his deep-time accessions/awakenings are: the Palenque West Tablet of the Inscriptions (F12 *'ajaw-yan* 'became lord'; G1 **mi**/**MIH** "SNB"); Naranjo Altar 1 (B8 *'ajaw-yan*; A9 **mi**/**MIH** "SNB"), and Copan Stela J (p19 *y-ak'ab y-ajal*; p20 **IK' mi**/**MIH** "SNB"; p21-p22 *'uhtiy wak mihnal*). In the Copan example, the 'hand-across-mouth' allograph of **MIH** 'zero' co-occurs with the **'IK'** 'black' prefix. The **ya-AK'AB**-[**ya**-]**YAJ-la** *y-ak'ab y-ajal* 'his night, his awakening' compound on Copan Stela J is a proposal by MacLeod (December, 2023) amid email correspondence with Carl Callaway and José Daniel Martínez. The "darkness," "black," and "nothing" associations all imply a primordial status apart from the role of the "Starry Deer Crocodile" as the celestial arch.

In a Primary Standard Sequence on the vase K2358 from Naranjo, the "SNB" has an obscure epithet, related to one on K7750, where the spelling **IK' mi-na** 'black -?' preceding the crocodilian head has been suggested as evidence for a **MIN** (untranslated) reading for the head itself. The Maya Hieroglyphic Database (Looper and Macri 1991-2024) credits Albert Davletshin (personal communication 2001 to Yuriy Polyukhovych) for the AB8 **MIN** *miin* proposal. Whatever (**IK'**) **mi-na**' (black) *min' is, it may be an attributive and not the name of the beast itself. The other 'black' and 'zero' signs may be attributives as well, qualifying but not naming him. The text on K2358 and the lexical value of the "SNB" are otherwise beyond the scope of this essay.



a



b

Figure 9. (a) **CHAK-li-bi** (Tonina Monument 27); **CHAK-ka-ja-li-bi** (Cancuen Panel 1). Drawings by Péter Bíró



Figure 10. "Square-nosed Beast" (Palenque West Panel, Temple of the Inscriptions, G1, drawing by Linda Schele); (b) Naranjo Altar 1, A9, drawing by Ian Graham; (c) Copan Stela J, p20, drawing by Linda Schele)

astronomical entity, a zodiacal constellation as suggested in the Bonampak murals. Prior investigations of the painted texts in Naj Tunich Cave (MacLeod and Stone 1995:155-184; Tokovinine 2023; MacLeod n.d.) all recognize Chan Ahk as the lineage of cave ritualists from nearby Bax Tun (Figure 11). We follow Guenter (2002), who placed Makan Witz near Naj Tunich because of an agricultural ritual commemorated in the cave by Mak Witz lords a century later. With our decipherment of *jut' 'ak'nom* 'narrow-place/cave offerer' (see Footnote 18) as the final title carried by K'ib Ajaw as he reached Makan Witz, we propose that this altar was located in the cave itself.

Naj Tunich has been the focus of extensive investigations since it first came to light in 1980 (Brady 1989, 2012; MacLeod and Stone 1995:155-184; Stone 1995; Brady and Prufer 2005; MacLeod and Sheseña 2013:201-114; MacLeod n.d.). It had unfortunately been known to local residents for some time before and had been looted, such that whole vessels were not found archaeologically until several remote sections were later discovered (Veni 1995). Any effigies would have been removed in Classic times when the cave fell into disuse or taken away when it was rediscovered by modern Maya hunters or farmers.

The locations of several altars are known, however, due to constructed platforms and high concentrations of sherds and burnt small objects. Two other remote altars are designated hieroglyphically: one features an offering text venerating a jaguar deity adjacent to the painted visage of the Jaguar God of the Underworld:

'aj chak k'awil lay tan bahlam 18 pat
'he of great sustenance, here before the jaguar, 18 tribute-offerings'

The other is reached via a vertical shaft giving access to a narrow opening labeled *chihil k'uh* 'pulque god' (a name of the death god Akan): this was a limited-use platform with seven erected, broken-off stalactites. An intact jar with a "kill hole" and a child's skeleton were found nearby.

The above archaeological data suggest that the four "cutting/reddening places" of the Cancuen panel—assuming one or more to be within the cave—were each dedicated to one supernatural entity of importance to either the Cancuen dynasty, the Calakmul dynasty, to the foundational mission which sent K'ib Ajaw southward, or to all of these.[26] Thus the title *Chan Ahk* might stand alone, designating an ancestral bloodline which is collectively venerated at a specific shrine.

Aj Xan: Patron of Thatch Palm, or of Foot-Travelers?

We accept the provisional **XAN** 'guano palm' reading for the sign A27 (with no corresponding T-number on the monuments) proposed by Prager and Wagner (2016), and concur with the authors (ibid.:8-9) that there are sufficient reasons, both historical and phonological, to set aside homophonic *xan* 'adobe' as having a different origin. *Xan* 'guano palm' and cognates are widespread in Mayan; the word appears in both branches of Ch'olan and in Tzeltal as *xan;* the proto-Mayan reconstruction is *xa'nh and for proto-Ch'olan it is *xan (Kaufman and Norman 1984:136; Kaufman and Justeson 2003:1119). Guano-palm leaves are preferred today as an easily-accessed, renewable forest resource for the construction of water-tight thatch roofs.

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[26] In his years-long study of contemporary cave use among indigenous Tzotzil and Tzeltal of Chiapas, Alejandro Sheseña (personal communication 2024) has found evidence of ancestral lineage titles being assigned to a single ritual cave: "Según la mitología de los tseltales de Cancuc, se cree que los antepasados de los 4 linajes de Cancuc viven en cuevas de la siguiente manera: linaje Chejeb —cueva llamada Yalan ch'en; linaje Chijk' —cerro llamado Bojom; según otra versión, en Atsam. Linajes Ijka y Boj —en las montañas llamadas Ox Witz (según los mitos, los antepasados de estos dos linajes decidieron vivir juntos en una sola cueva)."

According to Sheseña, other cave- and mountain-dwelling divinities have simple names: Don Juan, Ik'al Ajaw, Yax Winik.



Figure 11. Maman Chan Ahk (Naj Tunich, Drawings 25, 28, and 66; drawings by Andrea Stone).

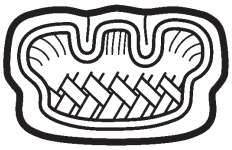


Figure 12. XAN (drawing by Christian Prager).

Prager and Wagner state that there is as yet no phonetic substitution for—nor a preposed complement to—A27, but the sign frequently takes a **-na** or **-ni** suffix supportive of *CVn*. The authors offer graphic evidence for the sign as a plant or leaf with crossbands or a weaving pattern at the base (Figure 12).

One of its prominent contexts offers excellent support for the reading: at Palenque it is an architectural term often followed by **NAH-li** (also **NAH-hi**) 'house' in the collocation **CHAK-XAN-NAH-li** > *chak xan naahil* which "refers to or designates a specific type of building or construction. In this compound, the color prefix *chak* most likely alludes to the orange-red color of dried palm leaves" (Prager and Wagner 2016:9). Stuart (2005:19, 101-102) had previously proposed this phrase to refer to an interior building within Temples XIX and XXI (Prager and Wagner 2016:10); this makes us wonder whether the interior structures were painted red, because *xan* leaves naturally weather to light brown. Prager and Wagner then consider how A27 functions in names of objects likely made of palm as well as in a variety of personal names.

Among its earliest examples is one on Tres Islas Stela 2 in the personal name Xan Tatbu Sutz', which brings it into the historical record of Cancuen, whose earliest forebears resided at Tres Islas. A much later example in the Cancuen sphere refers to a captive Chak Xan Bahlam K'uh from Machaquila; thus these names might indicate that we seek *Xan* as an early Cancuen/Machaquila title rather than a rebus, and we will keep this possibility in mind. The difficulty lies in making sense of Aj Xan as either an ancestor or a tutelary god, one who would be venerated by a royal descendant at a Late Classic altar distant from Cancuen. 'Thatch Palm,' no matter how useful the plant, doesn't seem motivated. We note that Prager and Wagner elected to consider the sequence Aj Xan Mo' on Cancuen Panel 1 as another example of a personal name containing *xan*, but this argument is not supported by the syntax and new interpretations presented above.

We are therefore considering that *'Aj Xan* was a patron god of foot travelers. In Ch'orti' and Ch'olti' the intransitive verb *xana* is 'caminar, andar,' and in Tzotzil 'caminar' is *xan-aw* (Kaufman and Justeson 2003:1293; see also Hull 2016:493 for *xana* 'to walk, travel'). *Xan* in all Ch'olan and Tzeltalan languages is the root of the instrumental noun *xanab* 'caite' (sandal); *xanh.ab' 'caite, footgear' is reconstructed to proto-Mayan (Kaufman and Justeson 2003:1293).

Given the well-documented eighth-century evidence for Naj Tunich Cave as a major pilgrimage site receiving high-status ritualists from polities as distant as El Palmar, Campeche, and Altun Ha in northern Belize (Stone 1995; Carter and MacLeod 2021; Tokovinine 2023: MacLeod n.d.), one would expect a deified protector of travelers to have a shrine at the cave, and that K'ib Ajaw would honor Aj Xan 'He of Foot-Travelers/Foot Travel' in this function is self-explanatory.[27]

Mo' and the Ancient Homeland

Mo' (macaw) is a common bird name in the inscriptions, though it rarely appears in kings' names. That said, the dynastic founder of Copan was Yax K'uk' Mo', and that city has a toponym *Mo' Witz* depicted prominently on Stela B. Several Ahkul Mo' Nahb kings ruled in Palenque. While no Cancuen rulers used the macaw element in their nominal phrases, on the three early stelae of Tres Islas the kings stood on the formidable image of K'inich Mo' Witz or 'Radiant Macaw Mountain,' an apt toponym (Figure 13). But there is no mountain close to the low-lying site, so the basal registers of these monuments are either mythical or archaically retrospective. It is more curious that these three stelae are earlier than any monuments among the major Petexbatun cities to the north, and although they were erected in 475, they

[27] Karl Taube observes that God M, a Postclassic god of merchants termed Ek Chuah by Schellhas (1904:35-36), was also appealed to for protection on any type of journey: "In view of the value of cacao, it is not surprising that the god of merchants was associated with this esteemed commodity. In fact, cacao beans were an important form of currency not only in Yucatan but over much of Post-Classic Mesoamerica. But rather than being simply a cacao god, Ek Chuah was a deity presiding over all traveling ventures. Landa (in Tozzer 1941: 107) notes that during a journey, one would offer incense at night to Ek Chuah to ensure a safe return" (Taube 1992:89-90).

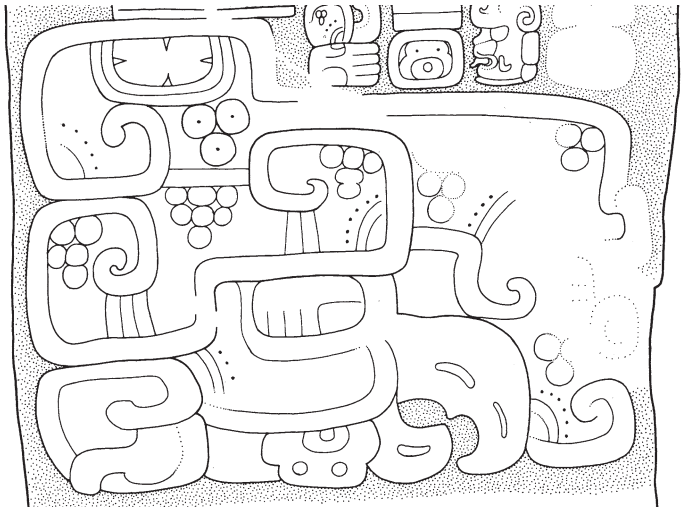


Figure 13. K'INICH-MO'-WITZ (Tres Islas Stela 1, drawing by Christian Prager)

mention events dated in 396, 400, 415, and 416 (see Tomasic and Fahsen 2004; Beliaev and de León 2016). Although in 475 the king on the Machaquila side boasts an unusually long pedigree via the 19 *tz'akbu ajaw* title, the site is just a sanctuary which could not have supported such a long occupation (Tomasic et al. 2005).[28] As we have previously suggested, it was therefore not the location of the early joint Cancuen-Machaquila dynasty.

The Tres Islas kings wear the Early Classic Period *teotiwa* attire which is best portrayed on Tikal St. 31: the *ko'haw* headdress and the ubiquitous atlatls with darts in the hands (Tres Islas Stelae 1 and 3) and the trapezoidal "year-sign" headdress (Tres Islas Stela 2). Indeed, on Stela 2 the caption of the ruler mentions not only the K'uhul Yahk K'in title but also the Winte' Nah, the quintessential title of those who claimed origin in or traveled to Teotihuacan in the Early Classic Period.

We posit that Tres Islas may have been the connection between the Mo' name or toponym and the Cancuen dynasty, and that K'ib Ajaw may have passed through the erstwhile homeland of the ancestors of Tres Islas who were founders of the bloodline, honoring them at a shrine. Although in the Introduction we have mentioned El Raudal 5 km. to the east as the more likely archaic capital of the Cancuen dynasty, it could be the case that it was located closer to Naj Tunich. Cities such as Copan and Yaxchilan were founded by kings from the Peten in the fourth century or the fifth ; therefore it is not impossible that the Cancuen dynasty's original homeland was in the mountainous region of southwestern Belize. Indeed Yax K'uk' Mo', the founder of Copan, came from Caracol (Hux Witz Ha') in southwestern Belize some 40 miles to the north of Naj Tunich.

Tres Islas, while on an unassuming low island, might have been established as a small port on the Río Pasión which controlled the river and lands to the northeast. Complementing the "Square Nosed Beast" and Chan Ahk, which commemorated first the primordial god and second the lineage, an altar named Mo' on the island might have memorialized the ancient village of Cancuen's forebears; thus it could have held K'ib Ajaw's fourth shrine and been his final stop before reaching Cancuen.

Episode translation: 'Five months and 2 days later, then it happened 9 Ik 5 Uo; he arrived at Makan Mountain, he of seven and nine hills, 6 and 12 foundations, the narrow-place-offerer K'ib Ajaw, Divine Lord of Yahk K'in (Cancuen).

'(The) four cutting-reddening places (sacrificial altars) were "Square Nosed Beast," Sky Turtle, He of Palm/He of Foot Travel, and Macaw.'

3. Foundation of Cancuen

Transcription of Episode 3 (Figure 14): *utz'akaj huklajun [hew] huk winikjiy 'i 'u[h] ti lajun kawak cha' yax sijom huli K'ib 'Ajaw kajay wal jal? wal tz'e[h]k wal na[h]b hux 'a[h]k pet[e]n wal yo[h]l 'a[h]k yul chan ha' ha['] lum*

This episode is the peak event of the grand narrative of this panel. Previous scholars have succeeded in deciphering the *kajay* verb 'he settled' which here is paired with *huli* 'he arrived.' Four examples of the *wal* expression appear



Figure 14. Episode 3, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter).

[28] Mam Yax ? Chahk, who erected the three stelae at Tres Islas, may have had the emblem glyph of Cancuen on Stelae 1 and 3, but it is certain that on Stela 2 (E3-F3) he claimed to be the 19th king of Machaquila. It is possible that his father Tayal Chan K'inich had the Cancuen emblem glyph on Stela 1 (B8). We don't know whether the Cancuen line was ancient, because we have no *tz'akbu* title sequence in the Cancuen inscriptions. If the case were similar to that of Yaxchilan, wherein Kok Mut Bahlam III was the 15th successor of Pa' Chan while he was also the 20+ successor of Kaj in Dos Caobas, perhaps Mam Yax ? Chahk was the king of a pre-Machaquila site and his connection with Cancuen was through his father.

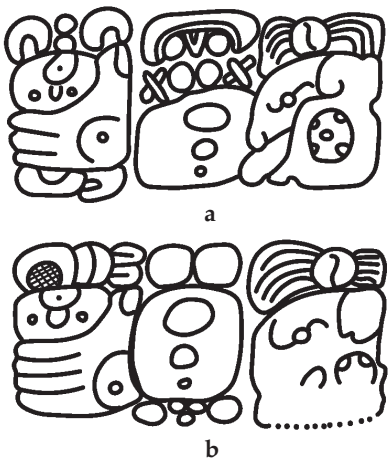


Figure 15. (a) **ya**-**YAL**-**la**-**ja u**-2-**WAL**? **BAH**-**hi**; (b) **tu**-**YAL**-**la**-2-**WAL**?-**la BAH**-**hi** (Yaxchilan Lintel 10, A2b-B2 and C1-D1a, drawings by Péter Bíró).

in the long sentence, each followed by a different location at Cancuen. We will offer not just a clarification of *wal* 'now, presently' but also a different analysis of the *ha' lum* toponym.

Elsewhere in the Maya inscriptions *huli* may sometimes refer to conquest, but here it is certain that the site of Cancuen was a "virgin" field for the king to settle with his courtiers and his army. The archaeological data indicates that the area had been sparsely inhabited before these Late Classic Period newcomers arrived to found the palace and its surrounding buildings. The original translation of *kajay* was 'to found,' based on the Early Classic Coba Panel 9 inscription (Tokovinine 2013:80-81, 134 n. 45), but these events are not necessarily foundations; rather they are *settlings* in an existing location. The root is *kaj* 'to reside'; it derives from proto-Western Mayan 'to put on top of' and from Yucatec <*kaꞌ*> (*kaj) 'reside' (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:280; Bricker et al. 1998:120).[29] Here *kajay* is initially followed by T280 **WAL** *waꞌal* 'now,' 'present[ly]' (literally, 'standing'): *kajay waꞌal* 'he settled now [at]' and a location in the city; thereafter, **WAL** occurs alone, followed by three more locations with 'settling' understood.

First suggested by Alfonso Lacadena (in Grube et al. 2003:40) as **WAL** (T280), the sign occurs often at Chichen Itza, once on the Zacpeten Altar (Stuart 2009:317-326), and twice on Yaxchilan Lintel 10 (Figure 15). On Yaxchilan Lintel 10 (Figure 15b) the grapheme has the phonetic complement -**la**, which cues not only the final consonant but indicates a likely root vowel /a/; this led to the **WAL** proposal, buttressed by the productivity of *waꞌal* in temporal contexts. On Yula Lintel 1, for example, the expression appears in *ti wal 5 pis tun ta 1 ajaw* or 'within the current (i.e., 'standing') 5th *tun* of 1 Ahau.' While this is its predictable function in Northern Yucatan, and although we can now propose *waꞌal wahy* as 'the current earthly cavity' on the Zacpeten Altar, on Yaxchilan Lintel 10 the context has been opaque, holding back the confirmation of the reading.[30]

In the Cancuen inscription we apply the meaning 'presently' (or simply 'now') and with *kajay* we have an expression 'he settled now at (toponym or location).'

The first grapheme's reading has been debated. Tokovinine (2020:272) proposed **AKAN** 'grass,' but here we feel that **JAL** 'bamboo, wild reed' (recently

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[29] Tokovinine (2013:134 n. 45) states:

> The decipherment proposed by Beliaev and Davletshin is based on the aforementioned occasional -**ja** final phonetic complement of the logogram and on a new example of the "foundation" glyph in the inscription of the Early Classic Coba ballcourt panel. It includes an initial phonetic complement **ka**- in the context **ka**-"foundation.glyph"-**yi ko**-**ba**-**a**, where the second word likely spells Koba', the ancient name of the Coba archaeological site. David Stuart (personal communication 2011) reads that initial **ka** glyph as **u**, however.

And on page 80-81 he states:

> Davletshin (personal communication 2011) suggests that the cognate transitive verb in proto-Western Mayan is *kaj* "to put on top of," whereas the proto-Chʼolan intransitive **kaj* "to begin" could be a different gloss."

In our view, the example on Coba Panel 9:A11 (followed by **ko**-**ba**-**a** at B11) is without question a **ka** and not an **u**. In consideration of all known contexts for *the* T550 **KAJ**[**yi**] sign, it is an intransitive root with a -**yi** suffix which should never occur with an ergative prefix, and which in every case makes sense as 'he settled.' The newly-found Coba Rock Inscription (INAH Boletin #486, August 2024) also has an explicit spelling of **ka**-**KAJ**-**ji**-**ya** *kajay Kej Witznal Kʼawil Chʼak Chʼen* 'Kʼawil Chʼak Chʼen settled at Deer Mountain place.' Additionally, the El Resbalón Hieroglyphic Stairway inscription twice contains the full phonetic spellings of **ka**-**ji**-**ya** as 'to settle down' (Alexandre Tokovinine and Sandra Balanzario, conference presentation at the 37th Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala 2024).

[30] The *wal* 'enemy' interpretation for the sign T55/1GE on Yaxchilan Lintel 10 was first proposed by MacLeod in an unpublished note circulated digitally a decade ago. It proceeded from a recognition of Yucatec *wal* 'enemigo capital y contrario que mata y destruye' (Barrera Vásquez 1980:910) within two revealing war statements: *yahlaj u-chaꞌ-wal-bah* '[they] fell, his two enemy-persons' and *tuyal chaꞌ-wal-bah* 'amid the fall of two enemy-persons.' Within the original transliteration and transcription of this lintel by Marc Zender on the website of the CMHI/Peabody Museum, these sentences had not been translated. Years later, as Bíró and MacLeod (2024) were writing a new account of Piedras Negras Throne 1, we collaborated on a fleshed-out analysis of Lintel 10 in consideration of then-known vassals of Piedras Negras, the late history of Yaxchilan, and the final war against Piedras Negras that ended its dynasty. Lintel 10 is the only memorial to Kʼinich Tatbu Jol IV of Yaxchilan; its text first documents a campaign in March and April of 808 in which two enemy *kalomteʼ* nobles fell (the *chaʼwal* or 'two enemies' mentioned above). These individuals and their affiliations are then named. The narrative continues with details of the war, naming the Yaxchilan kings obliquely by their war titles and famous captives. A third episode recounts the consecration of a temple—the dwelling place of a litany of important patron gods—and then finally (April 14, 808), the text proclaims the capture of the king of Piedras Negras, Kʼinich Yat Ahk II (as first recognized by David Stuart), referring to him as *u-bak-tzil maʼ-chʼahb [maʼ-]ʼakʼab*, 'honorable captive of no creation, no darkness' (i.e., no power). The proof of Lacadena's **WAL** proposal arises in a different context where it is used as a rebus and yields a new productive reading 'capital enemy.' Here are the sentences in which T55/1GE **WAL** occurs (Figure 15a and b):

deciphered by Stephen Houston et al. [2017]), is a better fit, because the 'plant' sign at the top differs from that of the **AKAN** sign (see Stuart 2005:180, n. 59). We provisionally read the first clause as 'he settled now at the reeds.'

The second spelling **tz'e-ka** has been suggested by Albert Davletshin (in Tokovinine 2023:134-135, n. 46) as *tz'ek*: 'a paved area in front of one's home' in Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:881) or in Itzaj 'edge of a cliff or canyon' (Hofling and Tesucún 1997:636). Tokovinine (2020:272) translated this as '(he settled) on the shore,' but we prefer 'he [settled] now at the [stone] threshold foundation.' Here 'threshold foundation of the palace' makes more sense than 'shore' or 'cliff' or 'canyon.'

We follow previous scholars' interpretations of the rest of the episode save for more precise identifications of (1) *Chan Yul Ha'* 'Rippling Sky Water' as the Pasión River itself (because its glassy surface when disturbed reflects the sky in small undulations) and (2) *Ha' Lum* as simply 'this land,' a straightforward etymology for a city being newly populated from an old and distant one.

Ha' Lum occurs three times in the inscriptions: twice on Cancuen Panel 1 (G1-H1 and K5) and once on the Cancuen Hieroglyphic Stairway 1 (at pL1-pK2). The spelling is always **ha lu-mi** and only once does the expression appear in one glyph block. On Cancuen HS 1 the sentence is **hu-li TAN-CH'EN-na ha lu-mi;** while this seemingly functions as an actual city name, we understand it as 'he arrived at the (city) center of this land.' Here *ch'en* signifies 'settlement, city.'

(Episode translation):

'12 months and 17 days later then happened 10 Cauac 2 Yax, arrived K'ib Ajaw; he settled now at the reeds, he [settled] now at the [stone] threshold foundation, he [settled] now at the Lake of Three-Turtle Island, [and] he [settled] now at the Heart of the Turtle, at the Rippling Sky Waters [of] this land.'[31]

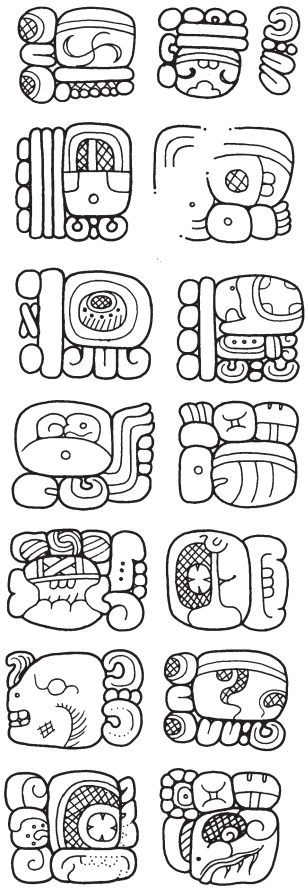


Figure 16. Episode 4, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter).

4. Inauguration of Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay

Transcription of Episode 4 (Figure 16): *utz'akaj cha' [hew] lajchan winikjiy balunlajun hab[i]y 'i 'u[h]ti huk ha' balun k'anasiy chumwan ti 'ajawle[l] 'Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay ukab[i] jiy Yukno[m] Ch'en k'uh[ul] kan[ul] 'ajaw*

Within the Classic Maya historical genre, the foundation narrative is typically superseded by that of the dynasty's rise to power. This episode describes the accession of the next king whose name is Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay, 'Sorcerer who is the Sky Turtle [with] Little Roots of Fish.' This rather long name corresponds to an aspect of the Old Man deity best portrayed in the marvelous two piers of the Lower Temple of the Jaguar at Chichen Itza (see Schele and Mathews 1999:214, Fig. 6.10). Itzam here wears a giant turtle around his middle (as Chan Ahk) and on both sides of his headdress a small fish suckles the waterlilies (Little Roots of Fish).

7-CHAM? [JUL]JAN?-na-TI'-HUN-na 14-**CHAK-*AT ya-YAL-la-ja u**-2-**WAL? BAH-hi KAL?-ma-TE' u**-2-**CHAN a-AK-MO' K'UH**-?-**AJAW-wa**
huk chami, jul-jan[ab]?-ti' hun chanlajun chakat yahlaj u-cha'-wal-bah kalomte'? u-chan 'Ahkul Mo', K'uhul-Kaj?-'Ajaw.
'It (was) 7 Cimi (G3) 14 Zip. Were thrown down the two *kalomte'* enemy-persons of the Captor of Ahkul Mo' (who was) the Divine Lord of Kaj (Yaxchilan).'

chu-ka-ja AJ-YAX-MO'-SUTZ'?-?-TE'? tu-YAL-la-2-WAL?-la BAH-hi-si-ji-AJ K'IN[chi]-ni-ta-bu-JOL AJ-K'AN-na-ba-na-ka u-cha-CHAN AK-[ku]lu MO'-o
chu[h]kaj 'Aj Yax Mo' Sutz' ? kalomte'? t-u-yal cha'-wal-bah-sijaj K'inich Tatbu Jol 'aj k'an-banak, u-chan 'Ahkul Mo'
'was captured Aj Yax Mo' Sutz' the ?-te' amid his throwing-down of the two enemy-person gifts, K'inich Tatbu Jol III, Yellow *Banak*, the Captor of Ahkul Mo'.'

[31] Guenter (2002:10) summarizes this passage as follows:

Free Translation: 12 months and 17 days later, on 10 Kawak 2 Yax, K'ib Ajaw dedicated a series of buildings(?) at Halub.

Discussion: Almost half a year later, on August 25, 657, K'ib Ajaw finally arrived at Cancuén. We can infer this, even though the location is not immediately specified, as the king is simply said to "have arrived here" without any mention of the site of his arrival, a sure sign that this was a local event. Immediately following K'ib Ajaw's name glyph is a dedicatory verb, indicating that attendant to his arrival was the beginning of the (re)construction of his city. Many of the following glyphs may be the names of towns in the vicinity of Cancuén or, more probably, buildings in the city itself. These include a mention of a "Turtle Island," or Ahk Peten, possibly an island in the Pasión river. The text concludes with the name Halub, which reappears in this text at glyph-block K5. This is perhaps the ancient toponym for the site of Cancuén itself."



Figure 17. Episode 5, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter).

Presumably after the death of K'ib Ajaw, Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay went to Calakmul and received the crown in the presence of Yuhknom Ch'en, now 77 years old but still mighty. This demonstrates that the ties between the two cities remained intact, and that the Cancuen king controlled the river commerce with his overlord's help.

Episode translation: '19 years, 12 months, and 2 days later, then happened 7 Imix 9 Kayab, he sat in rulership Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay ('Sorcerer who is the Sky Turtle [with] Little Roots of Fish') in the presence of Yuhknom Ch'en, the Divine King of Kanul.'[32]

5. Arrival of the Gods and the Celebration of 9.12.10.0.0

It is a curious fact that the only period-ending celebration in the inscription is that of 9.12.10.0.0 or May 10, 682. This may be understood given the varying circumstances; one assumes that benchmark dates such as 9.11.10.0.0 and 9.12.0.0.0 were celebrated, but only this one was privileged to be recorded. The 9.13.0.0.0 period-ending occurred at the beginning of a political disruption which lasted more than 80 years.

Transcription of Episode 5 (Figure 17): *utz'akaj balun [hew] wak winikjiy ho' hab[i]y 'i 'u[h]ti balunlajun 'ajaw waxaklajun sutz' utzakaw K'awil 'Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay huli Jun 'Ok Chan, Jun 'Ok 'Uhal, Nun? Yajaw Chan mukta[w], 'Itzam 'At? patwani k'al ha' lum tz'ahkaj Yal Jun Chan Ajawtak bahij uch'a[h]b[il] [y]ak'ab[il] ch'ahom 'Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay*

Here five events are commemorated in the text, some of which are regularly recorded in other inscriptions. These include several expressions which are very rare and/or have been misunderstood by previous researchers.

The first event is one of the most common period-ending ceremonies in the inscriptions: *tzak K'awil* or 'conjure K'awil'; here it is written as the active transitive *u-tzakaw k'awil* 'he conjured K'awil.'[33]

This act is portrayed on many monuments and vases, wherein the conjurer, usually the king, calls forth from his ceremonial bar the god K'awil, the metaphysical embodiment of kingship and agricultural fertility. This event initiates the discourse, and is followed by an arrival of four gods, of whom two are otherwise unknown in the corpus.

The first two—the unique ones—were probably a pair, because both have the common components of *jun* 'one' and *'ok* (**OK-ki**) or 'foot': *Jun 'Ok Chan* 'One Foot Sky' and *Jun 'Ok 'Uhal* 'One Foot Jewel.' *'Ok* occurs as *k'uhul 'ok* 'divine foot' or simply 'the foot' of other gods, usually with K'awil in the 819-day count, when on these occasions the deity's foot rests at one of the cardinal directions.

The third god Nun Yajaw Chan, who appears at Palenque and Copan, is more familiar, though the Nun ('great'?) component is elusive. Although his behavior is ambiguous, while David Stuart has accepted him as a person, we argue here that he is indeed a deity, even though he has the courtier's "Banded Bird" title *muktaw* (Bíró et al. 2020:133-140). Because this title is usually claimed by humans, and because Nun Yajaw Chan has the title, scholars assume that he was a noble. But it is suspicious that this proposed person appears in different times and locations (at Cancuen and on the Palenque Temples of the Cross and Foliated Cross) with the same expression Nun Yajaw Chan *muktaw.* As noted in the aforementioned paper, the Paddler Gods may carry the

[32] Guenter (2002:11) translates:

> it changed; 2 (k'ins), 14 winals, 19 tuuns later, and then it occurred 7 Imix 9 K'ayab; he was seated in lordship, Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi'; Taak Kay; it was overseen by Yuknoom Ch'een; Divine Snake Lord.
>
> Free Translation: 19 years, 14 months and 2 days later, on 7 Imix 9 K'ayab, Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi' Taak Kay was seated as lord by Yuknoom Ch'een, king of Calakmul.

[33] Guenter transliterated this as **u**-**TZAK**-**ja K'AWIIL** (*u tzakaj K'awiil*) **PAWAHTUUN**?-**AHK**[**CHAN**]-**wi** (*Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi'*) **TAAK**?-**ki**-**ka**?-**ya** (*Taak Kay*). Given the proximity of several Distance Numbers whose introductory glyph is spelled **u**-**TZ'AK**-**'AJ** 'its count is,' we think the author modeled this grammatical error from these spellings.

muktaw title, as on Ixkun St. 2:D12 and Sacul St. 1:B6-C6; therefore gods may occasionally have the Banded Bird title.

On the Palenque Tablet of the Foliated Cross (L6–L14), David Stuart (2006:147) suggests that Nun Yajaw Chan may have been a person rather than a god:

> **u**-3-**TAL-la u-TZAK-K'UH NUN-ya-AJAW-CHAN MUK-ta tu-u-CH'AB-AK'AB u-K'AL-HUN-AJ u-K'UH-li K'INICH-KAN-BALAM-ma K'UH-MAT-AJAW**
>
> "The third god-conjuring of Great-is-the-Lord-of-the-Sky (a priestly title) by the creation and darkness of the headband-fastening person of the gods of Radiant Snake Jaguar, the Holy Matawil Lord."

This is certainly possible, for the owner of **tu-u-CH'AB-AK'AB u-K'AL-HUN-AJ u-K'UH-li** is definitely **K'INICH-KAN-BALAM-ma K'UH-MAT-AJAW**. However, the preceding sequence **u**-3-**TAL-la u-TZAK-K'UH NUN-ya-AJAW-CHAN MUK-ta** does not have to be part of the same noun phrase. The first **u**- gives the ordinal. The second **u**- states that **NUN-ya-AJAW-CHAN MUK-ta** owns the god-conjuring, grammatically. So this suggests that **NUN-ya-AJAW-CHAN MUK-ta** may be a god, in which case the translation could be:

'The third god-conjuring of Nun Yajaw Chan *muktaw* in his creation and darkness; it was the headband-fastening of the gods of K'inich Kan Ba[h]lam, Divine Lord of Matawil.'

We know almost nothing of this god, and from this specific context we cannot give more data on his function. Suffice it to say that gods arrive into the shrine, though we do not know whether they came from abroad or just moved from one temple to another one.

The fourth god, 'Itzam 'At or the Old God (Martin 2015), was usually represented in colonial texts as four directional gods often connected with the creation of the world, like the Bacabs (*bah kab* 'head/first one of the earth'), the four pillars holding up the sky.

In both Classic and Postclassic iconography he was depicted with an old face, and on his body a symbol of rock or stone can be seen. As on Tikal Altar 4, he represents a crocodilian mountain with turtle attributes, which explains the name Itzam Tun, a set of earth gods who are conjured in the following episode.

He is also associated with magic. In Yucatec *'aj 'its* is 'hechicero' and *'its* is 'leche, resina o goma…de árboles,' while Itzam is 'lagarto' and 'brujo del agua' (Barrera Vásquez 1980:271-272). He is often fused with other gods such as the Principal Bird Deity (Itzam Yax Kok), the Caiman monster (Itzam Ahin, in the colonial period Itzam Cab Ain), or the Precious Turtle (Itzam K'an Ahk). His presence here implies that as an earthly creator god he represents the newly-negotiated legitimacy of the city; indeed, it is possible that this is a second coronation ceremony, featuring not the Dos Pilas ruler but only the gods of Cancuen and testifying to its emerging independence—at least from a far-future vantage point.

Following the summoning of these four gods, the narrative states simply:

patwani k'al[34] *ha' lum*
'The shrines were built in this land.'

These would not only house the gods, but represent the contract between the gods and the king which authorized this construction.

The next episode, another conjuring, is curious because it mentions a deity designation Yal Jun Chan Ajawtak 'Lords who throw [the spear] at One Sky' which usually appears in the codices, referring to an astronomical feature (see for example Dresden page 24:A15-16).

In a previous essay (Bíró et al. 2020:129, n. 7) we have argued that the collocation *Taj Yal Jun Chan Ajawtak*, the 'Lords who throw the dart at One Sky,' describes five constellations in which Venus rises heliacally—-i.e., it is for the first time after conjunction seen at dawn before sunrise, as illustrated in the five pages of the Dresden Venus Table. Dennis Tedlock (2010:208-212) has proposed that the forward vs. retrograde motion of Venus represents a dart thrown from one constellation to another. In the Cancuen case, on the date 9.12.10.0.0 Venus is approximately two weeks after heliacal rise near the Pleiades, but it has reached its precise stationary point after retrograde motion, perhaps suggesting the holding and throwing of Venus as a dart (Michael Grofe, personal communication 2024).

Following Tedlock (2010:211), Grofe proposes that the fifth and final constellation in which Venus rises heliacally in the Dresden Venus Table is associated with the Pleiades, and this reference at Cancuen suggests a

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[34] In an earlier essay (Bíró and MacLeod 2024) we proposed the pre-accession name of Piedras Negras Ruler 7 to be **AJ-JUN-K'AL-na-ku** 'He of Twenty Battles.' The sign we read as **K'AL** consists of T29 and T563b. This grapheme substitutes for **JUN-**T683 **WINIK-ki** at Yaxchilan in the frequent 'count-of-captives' title, where it is '[one unit of] twenty.' This substitution greatly constrains the value of the sign.

We propose a **K'AL** reading for T29:563b, not only because it means 'twenty' across Mayan languages, but because *k'al* 'enclosure, temple sanctuary' is the best syntactic and semantic fit in the Cancuen and Dresden cases. The logogram is a pedestal on Dresden Codex page 68b, Frame 12 (Gabrielle Vail, personal communication 2023). We also apply the **K'AL** reading to the **IX**-T29:563b-9-**TUN-ni** nominal phrases in the murals of Chik Nahb Structure Sub 1-4 at Calakmul (Martin 2012) as 'she of the 9-*tun* temple sanctuary.' On Cancuen Panel 1, T29:563b refers to a *structure* or *structures* which were 'built' or 'formed' (**PAT-wa-ni**); we translate it as 'sanctuary' because their construction anticipated the conjuring of gods to reside in them.



Figure 18. Episode 6, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter)

Classic Period antecedent to this progression.

Amid the setting in order of the 'Lords who throw the dart at One Sky' Itzam Chan A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay built and dedicated a sanctuary, and in his 'creation-darkness' rites materialized the arrival of these gods. The construction of the shrine would have taken months, during which one assumes all other period-ending preparations and astronomical observations took place. As with other Classic Maya inscriptions, the gods and the king together conducted the rituals while the king held the upper position, for without his intervention the deities could not participate in the human sphere, nor would earthly life be possible: the cosmos would be in disorder.

It is also true that although the commemoration of the inscription was in 799, the period-ending ceremony and its description was in 682, or more than five katuns in the past. This means that this episode was recreated from one or more codices—a dynastic history and an astronomical almanac like the Venus table in the Dresden. It is intriguing that an astronomical event appears in this text, because the period ending ritual in the Classic Period inscriptions is usually described as a simple 'retaining of the stone' or 'planting of the stone' while the kings impersonated gods. It could be the case that at the beginning of the Terminal Classic Period the monumental discourse was slowly changing: amid the transformation was the backgrounding or omission of the lives of kings and nobles while the gods and celestial protagonists, especially Venus, had a more salient role. The Venus cult now emerged from Veracruz and the Guatemalan Highlands, with a new elite, the Itza. Cancuen Panel 1, carved in this time, may be hinting in this episode at this shift.

Episode translation: '5 years, six months, and 19 days later, then happened 9 Ahau 18 Zotz'; Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay conjured K'awil. And then [the gods] One-Foot Sky, One-Foot Jewel?, Nun? Yajaw Chan, the guardian [of the sacred objects], and 'Itzam 'At arrived. The shrines were built in this land. They were set in order, the 'Lords who throw [the spear] at One Sky.' Came into being/materialized the creation-darkness of the incense-bearer Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay.'[35]

6. Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te' and the Calakmul God

Transcription of Episode 6 (Figure 18): *utz'akaj waklajun [hew] chan winikjiy wak hab[i]y chan winikhab 'i 'u[h]ti waxak 'cib' balun tz'ikin utzak[a]w K'awil Taj Chan 'A[h]k 'Aj Chak*

[35] Here it is worthwhile to share most of Guenter's (2002:13-14) extensive commentary for this episode:

> Date: 9.12.10.0.0 9 Ajaw 18 Sotz' (May 7, 682)
>
> Translation: it changed: 19 (k'ins) 6 winals, 5 tuuns later, and then it occurred 9 Ajaw 18 Sotz'; he conjured K'awiil, Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi' Taak Kay; he/they arrived; 1 ...Chan; 1 ??; ?; the messenger? of ?; it was built, the stair?; (at) Halub. It changed; 1 ?; ? Lord; it is the image; the fasting? and darkness? of the Ch'ahoom Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi'; Taak Kay.
>
> Free Translation: 5 years, 6 months and 19 days later, on 9 Ajaw 18 Sotz', Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi' conjured K'awiil. There were arrivals of deities or individuals and a stair? was built at Halub. Venus? changed. It is Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi"s image in ritual?
>
> Discussion: This lajuuntuun is the only Period Ending (PE) on the entire monument, and thanks to the generous use of DNs by the scribes on this monument, it has allowed us to reconstruct the Looted Panel's chronology. On this date Pawahtuun? Chan Ahk Wi' is said to have "conjured K'awiil," a major ritual often associated with ancestor veneration. At K1 we find an arrival glyph, indicating that included in these festivities was the arrival of someone or something (possibly deities given known Classic Maya monumental rhetoric). The following glyphs, naming the individual and/or the place of his arrival, are hard to make out and provide few clues to interpretation.
>
> Glyph K4 suggests that a monument of some sort was constructed at Halub. The rest of the text is ritualistic in nature but poorly understood. While many of the glyphs have known readings their interpretation is at best only partial. It is interesting that the events described here are almost a refoundation of the dynasty. The regal ancestor and fecundity deity K'awiil is conjured while we have arrivals and new construction being carried out."

Jut Te' upatbuj kab sum? chumlaj Chan 'Itzam Tun Chan Xiw Tun huli 'Ek' Tun Nal Winik petaj u-mulul-aj kun ?
'86 years, 4 months, and 16 days later, then happened 8 Kib 9 Xul; Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te' (Heavenly Torch Turtle, Great Feller of Trees)[36] conjured K'awil, then formed the earth-rope; were seated [statues of the Gods] Four Itzam Tun and Four Xiw Tun; Arrived Ek' Tun Nal ('Star Stone Place') person; became round the piling-up of the sanctuary? (and) the altar.'

The prominent player is now Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te', the new king of Cancuen, and the one who commemorated this monument. From other inscriptions we know his birthday (Cancuen HS, 9.15.10.14.6 3 Cimi 4 Zodz or April 12, 742), then his accession (Cancuen HS, 9.16.6.9.18 7 Edznab 1 Kankin or October 22, 757) and then his conquest of Machaquila (Cancuen Ballcourt 2, before 9.18.5.5.19 6 Cauac 12 Cumku or January 12, 796). Attested thereafter are the dedication of his palace (Cancuen Panel 2, 9.16.7.5.0 9 Ahau 18 Mol or July 11, 758) and the celebration of 9.18.5.0.0 4 Ahau 13 Ceh, a first *hotun*-ending (September 15, 795). It is likely that his son K'an Max also participated in these ritual events because his portraits appear on Ballcourt Markers 1 and 3. On an inscribed conch shell in a private collection, the text names him as a *4-winikhab ajaw*, while other evidence suggests he had died by 800, by which time K'an Max was the king. It thus appears that his *4-k'atun ajaw* claim derived from his having lived during k'atuns 15, 16, 17, and 18 of bak'tun nine.

When Taj Chan Ahk was born, the geopolitics of the Pasión were dominated by Dos Pilas, now more autonomous in relation to its overlord Calakmul after the latter was defeated in 695 by the resurrected Tikal. Significantly, Tikal would in a few decades defeat the Calakmul allies El Peru (743) and Naranjo (744). In this geopolitical vacuum Dos Pilas created a minor hegemonic state which Ruler 3 had already initiated with his conquest of Ceibal in 735. Ruler 3 had an undeciphered personal name (inspiring the nickname "Spangle Head") and is best known by the war title *Uchan K'in Bahlam* 'the captor of K'in Bahlam.'

Cancuen had a strong relationship with Dos Pilas during this time. Ix Xok K'awil, who via two Dos Pilas texts was titled *Ix Yahk K'in Ajaw* 'Royal Lady from Cancuen,' was the wife of Dos Pilas Ruler 3. As a prominent person in the Dos Pilas court, she appears on Dos Pilas Panel 19 as a participant in the coming-of-age ceremony of the fourth king K'awil Chan K'inich. We don't know whether Ix Xok K'awil was the mother of K'awil Chan K'inich, but her death on 9.15.10.17.15 (June 20, 742) is mentioned on the Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Bench.

The coronation of Taj Chan Ahk occurred at Dos Pilas; this was mentioned on the Cancuen HS, whose text also states that he arrived back in Cancuen 4 days later. Although there is no confirming evidence, it is possible that like other princes, Taj Chan Ahk was raised in the capital as a young man and later returned to his hometown. By 799 he had completed slightly more than two *katuns* of rulership.

Episode 6 of Cancuen Panel 1 begins with the date 9.16.16.4.16 8 Cib 9 Xul or May 21, 767, a curious one because it not connected to either a period-ending nor to any other anniversary dates. It is a rather long episode with five events in which gods played prominent ritual roles. The only human actor was the king Taj Chan Ahk, and his actions—the first and second events—were (1) the well-understood *utzakaw K'awil* or 'he conjured K'awil,' and (2) an unknown ceremony expressed as *upatbuj kab ?sum* or 'he made [the] earth-rope.'[37]

Although we have transliterated the "rope" sign

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[36] A recent **JUT** decipherment of the rare sign SG5 by MacLeod was aided by a search for all examples in the Looper and Macri (1991-2024) Maya Hieroglyphic Database, where it is assigned a phonetic value <ju'> without explanation. Nearly all contexts are identical spellings of this title as **AJ CHAK**-##-**TE'** with **TE'** occasionally absent, but one entry cites the vase K1398 with a very different context (Figure 19a). Among occurrences of the title (at Cancuen, Itzan, Zacpeten, Yaxchilan, and significantly the famous "Hummingbird" vase from Tikal Bu. 196) is a carved shell previously unknown to us from Aguateca (Inomata 1997:347, Fig. 14) with a unique phonetic spelling replacing SG5: **'a**-**CHAK**-**hu ju**-**TE' ch'o**-**ko** (Figure 19b). It includes an odd **hu** > **ju** ligature and employs the T513:87 allograph of **TE'**. Here we suspect T513 to have been interpreted as **'u,** leading to the <ju'> interpretation.

A proposal for SG5 as **HUT** 'blowgun' (derived via rebus from *hut* 'face') is offered by Beliaev and Houston (2020:Note 1), citing an earlier suggestion by Marc Zender. We had considered **HUJ** 'iguana' due to the sequence on the Aguateca shell. But the K1398 context demonstrates that none of these (<hu'>, **HUT**, **HUJ**) can be correct. K1398, the "Regal Rabbit Vase," previously analyzed in detail by Beliaev and Daveletshin (2006:21-44) presents dialogue between the nude God L and an imperious rabbit, consort of the Moon Goddess. Beliaev and Davletshin (2006:25) had hitherto identified many signs in the interchange with an ample and entertaining account of the ancient folktale. MacLeod now recognized two cases of a rare **ni** sign deciphered by Stuart (cited by Bíró et al. [2014:Note 10]) plus semantic clues in a difficult passage featuring SG5 leading to a reading **JUT** *jut* 'cause to fall' for the sign (cf. Yucatec *jut* 'demoler, desmoronar, derribar, causar caer' [Barrera Vásquez 1980:258]; Lacandon *jut* 'causar caer' [Hofling et al. 2014:166]). Here God L declares: *bay ni b'uhk juht-aj xani ni-b'ah* '… (it is) where my clothing is which was caused to fall (and) go (from) my body.' In the Cancuen title, the English agentive noun 'Feller' is derived from the transitive verb *to fell* (='to cause to fall').

[37] Prior interpretations of the *pat* verb, including existing drawings, do not represent it as a second transitive verb in a couplet with *utzakaw.* The photograph by Jorge Pérez de Lara shows the suffix to not be a **-na** as appears in several drawings, but we rely on the assurance of Yuriy Polyukhovych (personal communication 2021) who determined it to be **-bu** when he last stood before the monument. As with the prior episode, the summoning of gods and the construction of a shrine to house them must have taken weeks or months, and these physical and metaphysical actions were surely intertwined during this phase of the narrative.

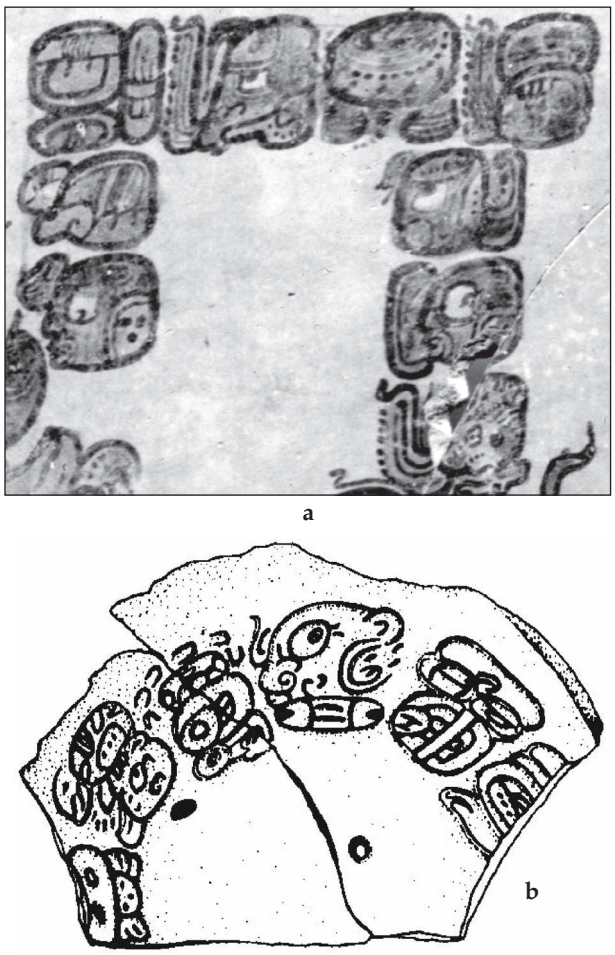


Figure 19. (a) **JUT-ja** (K1398, Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.); (b) **a-CHAK-hu ju-TE' ch'o-ko** (Aguateca conch shell, after Inomata 1997:Fig. 14).

T98/ZS2 as **SUM** we don't have solid evidence for it.[38] It is also possible that 'earth' and 'rope' together functioned as a *difrasismo* referring metaphorically to an unknown expression in the manner of *kab-ch'en* 'settlement' or the sets of paired signs representing **TZ'AK** 'add,' 'count.'

On the vase K1485 from Ik'a, the 'earth-rope' collocation again appears in a secondary text with the verb *pat* 'form'; the text reads *patax kab ?sum uk'aba' utz'ib* 'name' '"[being] formed [is] the earth-rope" is the name of the painting of (titles of the scribe from Ik'a').' Here *u-tz'ib* must refer to the entire multi-leveled scene peopled by a plethora of supernaturals. A simpler attribution of the scribe closes the dedicatory formula of the rim text.

The astonishing scene consists of two levels, divided by a sky-band. In the upper one, precisely below the PSS initial sign *'alay* 'here,' the solar God D with a water-lily headdress and jaguar-pelt skirt holds before four aged God Ns a traditionally-dressed woman with breasts exposed as he lowers her through a portal to the bottom level.[39] Behind these aged gods, or in the next episode of the narrative, two Wind Gods (a nod to the Ik'a' polity?) with jaguar-pelt skirts sit before a senior female with a water-lily headdress. In the lower level on the right, the same Sun God sits on a jaguar-pelt throne, and the same senior woman sits at his feet; she faces a row of five sitting women while two others, having just been lowered, float in the air. Above the seated women are three Old Gods with Itzam headdresses holding in their hands multicolored long textiles with twisted-cord knots attached. These textiles with knots are skirts: their black and orange patterns are identical to the patterns and colors of the skirts worn by the seated women. While this adornment with skirts by the avatars of the Old God might signify a marriage ceremony, it may more directly signify lineage fertility and supernatural impregnation, and birth—an undisputed theme on a set of Codex-style vases considered in Note 40. While at Cancuen the "earth-rope" rite might refer to the 'dressing up' of Chan Itzam Tun and Chan Xiw Tun —the eight deities who are seated (perhaps at two levels) at the cardinal points of a shrine, the eponymous event on K1485 involves the dressing (or fertilization) of *females* by these aged gods. The connection to a paramount Earth God of the Kan polity depicted on Codex-style vases becomes more apparent with the arrival of the Ek'-Tun-Nal Winik in the next sentence (Figure 20):

huli 'Ek' Tun Nal Winik

The god Ek' Tun Nal Winik 'Person (deity) from Star-Stone-Place' who "arrives" at Cancuen is likely the same 'Star Lord' named on K4113, an unprovenanced Codex-style vase manufactured in the vicinity of Calakmul. As a patron god of the Kan polity, his role on this vase and at Cancuen may be further understood in relation to the collective "Snake Lady" scenes on Codex-style vases wherein this aged deity with a knotted-net Itzam headdress is conjured by a beautiful young sorcerer-goddess. He emerges from the snake who is the foot of K'awil, offering cups and enema clysters to his conjuror. More often, he touches her breasts with the obvious intention of mating with her.[40]

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[38] At E3 in Passage W-4 on the Platform of Temple XIX at Palenque (Stuart 2005:102-104) a possessed noun which visually resembles a twisted loop of cloth has a **-mu** suffix, which led Stuart to suggest that the 'rope' word otherwise featured in this passage (**k'a**-**ma**-ZS2) might be *sum*, the term for 'thick/braided rope' in Yucatecan (Barrera Vásquez 1980:743). This section of the text refers to the central theme of rope-taking in the scene. The "rope" sign T98/ZS2 is otherwise undeciphered and its various contexts are largely opaque.

[39] A short text adjacent to the woman suspended in the portal reads **tz'a**-**CHAN IXIK** *tz'a[j]-chan 'ixik* 'put-down/dipped-[from]-sky woman.' *Tz'aj* in Ch'ol (Aulie and Aulie 1978:99) is 'remojar' whereas *tz'a[j]* in Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980:870) is 'to put down'. Either suggests that the lower level is the (watery) underworld presided over by the Night Sun with his coterie of aged male gods and the senior female with water-lily headdress.

[40] On K4113, the Old God Itzam (whose name means 'sorcerer') appears without the snake before a lord of the Kan polity while a dwarf looks on. Between them is an animate-female jar of presumed psychoactive brew.

We transcribe the final event of this episode as:

pet-aj u-mulul-aj ?kun ?

This is a challenging sentence for several reasons. It employs an uncommon attributive root *pet* which in relevant languages means 'round,' here verbalized. With the inchoative suffix *-aj* it means 'became round.' Elsewhere in the script, as on the Oxkintok Ballcourt Ring, inchoatives based on *pet* refer to the completion of the hieroglyphic text, in that case circular, but not always; *petaj* appears to be one of several nuanced ways to say 'was completed.'[41] Here **PET-ta-ja** *petaj* (it is not a passive) could refer to the completion of a possessed, perhaps round structure termed *mulaj* (**u-mu-lu-la-ja**), which is its subject. Following Wald, Ashley Kistler (2004) reads this as *u-mul-aj*, a derived noun based on the Ch'olan noun root *muhl* 'pile (of things),' and offers the pragmatic translation 'its mound' or 'its base.'[42] Her translation and summary are as follows:

> The entire phrase (M9-N10) should be read "it was encircled, the base of the pyramid at the three-stone place (or altar)." This statement is curious, since there are no pyramids or large mounds at the site of Cancuen itself and for this reason may indicate that the original location of the monument itself was in fact some location other than Cancuen. (Kistler 2004:8)

For various reasons we doubt that this panel originated somewhere other than at Cancuen. We don't know exactly what this construction was, nor how enduring, and if it had been a central shrine, it could have been destroyed with the final sacking of the city. Because of its other contexts we prefer for *petaj* the interpretation 'was completed.'

The possessors of the mound or base are two undeciphered signs, both having other contexts which help to circumscribe their function as (1) a shrine and (2)

The text reads:

> *huli Kan-Nah y-Ajaw Ek' yax ba-? Winik 'Itzam Tun 'Uk' Sahb'in*
> 'arrives at the Calakmul House, the star lord, first ? person, sorcerer of the stone, drink-weasel.'
>
> (effaced) *u-b'ah u-ch'ab y-ak'ab'il*
> His (Itzam's) person is his (the lord's) creation and his darkness.' (MacLeod 2021:205-209)

His designation as *Y-ajaw Ek'* and *'Itzam Tun* on this vase make it all but certain that he is the deity who 'arrived' at Cancuen to complete the construction and animation of a shrine and an altar.

Karl Taube (1994:664) in a treatise on the "Birth Vase" K5113 considers it to belong thematically with the codex-style "Snake Lady" scenes as a birth rite:

> Rather than constituting the primary individual being born, the old figure emerging on the Birth Vase and in the codex-style scene probably represents a god ritually conjured in association with the actual birth…Tarn and Prechtel (1986:179) describe a Tzutuhil birth ceremony during which the Mam and protective female goddesses are conjured: At a birth, the midwife receives the Mam in the center of the house with incense and candles, and the quality of the reception and duration of offerings will determine the ease of birth. (Taube 1994:664)

It is noteworthy that the "Birth Vase" depicts the tradition of the "birth rope" which the mother as the young Goddess O grasps from the roofbeams while standing to deliver the newborn, with the old Goddess O in attendance.

[41] The transliteration, transcription, and translation of Lacadena (2011:356, 372, Fig. XV-6) for the Oxkintok Ballcourt Ring are as follows:

> **PET-ta-ja-la yu-xu-ja u-chi**-T540-**TUN-li KALOMTE'-te JUN**-? **YOPAT**
>
> *pet-aj-al yuxja[l] uchi… tuun kalo'mte' Jun…Yopat*
>
> 'it becomes round the inscription of the stone ring of kalo'mte' Jun Yopaat'

With the recognition of T540 as **K'IL** (MacLeod 2023) the sentence may be transcribed and translated as:

> *pet-aj-al yuxja[l] uchik'il tuun kalo'mte' Jun…Yopat*
> 'becomes round the inscription (carving) of the *constricting*-stone (ring) of kalo'mte' Jun Yopaat.'

The *petajal* verb was interpreted by Lacadena as the Yucatecan inchoative incompletive, yet it lacks an ergative pronoun. Further grammatical discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.

[42] A detailed discussion by Kistler (2004:6-8), with input from Robert Wald, offers a useful analysis of this whole sentence with particular attention to the term represented by the **u-mu-lu-la-ja** spelling. She notes that Guenter (2002) reads it as a passive, but notes that the ergative prefix prohibits that interpretation (we agree). Following Wald, she analyzes *mul-aj* as a derived noun in Ch'olan, citing Wisdom (1950:529) and other sources, proposing the *-aj* suffix to be a nominalizer. *Muhl 'mound, pile' is reconstructed to proto-Ch'olan (Kaufman and Norman 1984:126) but in Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980:538) *mul* is both a noun 'montón' and an intransitive verb 'amontonarse.' Kistler's interpretation of the whole episode follows:

> After Tajal Chan Ahk conjures K'awiil, the text mentions the building of a place identified as an "earth place." One can speculate that this "earth place" is a building, temple, mound, or some other structure. At M6-M7, the text refers to the *chumlaj*, or seating, of two gods, Chan Pawahtuun and Chan Xiiw Tuun. These gods are often portrayed holding up the earth. In this inscription, the seating of these gods appears to relate to the construction of the earth place itself and may correspond to the building or dedication of new structures. Following the seating of these two gods, the text states that a man arrives at a stone-star place, indicating that he may be making a ritual journey or pilgrimage to some location. One can assume that the man making this journey is Tajal Chan Ahk, and that he may be arriving either at the site of the newly constructed building or at another sacred site, in order to offer sacrifices in conjunction with the dedication of the new construction. The text moves forward to the passage

an altar. The co-occurrence of these as *mih* 'not existing' on the Copan Hieroglyphic Stairway with the death of the thirteenth king (Stuart 2005:386; Boot 2011) may be a key to understanding their pairing here amid a series of conjurings and construction marking the re-founding of Cancuen and a reclaiming of the land by its dynasty after 80-plus years under the shadow of Dos Pilas. We will consider the relevance of the Copan HS passage in the Discussion.[43] It may not be too great a stretch to posit that these conjuring rites and shrine-building were an invitation to the Old Gods resident in Cancuen to re-invigorate the fecundity of the dynasty via its women.[44]

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which I have already discussed in great detail, *petaj umulaj* [pyramid] [three stones or altar], or the encircling of the mound or pyramid at the three stone place or altar.

[43] For the "temple" sign (T685/ZHB) we tentatively propose a **KUN** value, to be explained shortly. For the "altar" sign (ZC9) we offer no reading, but distinguish it from ZC6, a similar sign associated with the 4 Ahau 8 Cumku "Era Day" expression as the place where the *k'ob* (an effigy, a pedestal, or a calendric/astronomical datum) was 'changed' (Callaway 2011:276-277). ZC6 has flamelike flanking elements (ZC9 does not), and the large upper stone of ZC9 suggests an altar with smaller supports beneath. In the Looper and Macri (1991-2024) database, there are two other co-occurrences (on Tikal St. 26 and the Copan HS) of the "temple" ZHB with the "altar" ZC9 showing these to be paired, likely as a diphrastic kenning symbolic of the metaphysical integrity of the city center. In the final episode on the Cancuen Panel, ZC9 has a **CHAK** 'red, great' prefix and is part of the name of a royal tomb.

Entries in the Looper and Macri (ibid.) database demonstrate that the "temple" sign ZHB often has a phonetic complement -**na** (indicating a *CVn* value) as well as the common following sign T4 **NAH** 'house,' indicating that it is a building (Figure 21a). It can be counted and possessed (with *u-*) by kings or used as an agentive title, as in 'he of five ZHB-**NAH**,' wherein the five houses of the Palenque Palace may be identified. In secondary texts on the Cross and Sun Tablets of Palenque, ZHB-**NAH** is the locus of an extended rite-of-passage for the young heir to the throne, Kan Bahlam. The word *kun* in Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980:352) is the noun 'encanto, hechizo, conjuro' (enchantment, spell, a conjuring) and a transitive root with these meanings.

In the Looper and Macri (ibid.) database we found that a stylized ZHB "temple" sign is the Emblem Glyph of Nakum (Figure 22b), which we tentatively analyze as *nah-kun 'house of conjuring.' The site name lacks the earmarks of an archaeologist's fabrication, but Tozzer (1913:151) admits to having changed Périgny's original <Nacun> spelling to <na kum> to accommodate *kum* 'olla' (unglottalized /k/). The site had been named <Nacun> without further explanation by its first explorer Périgny (1906-1908) as cited by Tozzer (1913:151), with *kum* 'olla/clay vessel' being the latter's modification based on the speculation that local people had found votive vessels and incense burners in the ruins and named it <na kum> 'house of the vessels.' This spelling adjustment was Tozzer's invention, and <Nacun> seems to have been the original name.

[44] Guenter's (2002:15-16) transcription and translation with commentary for this episode:

u tz'aka' waklajuun (k'in) baluun winikiiy wak haabiiy chan winik haab i uut waxak kib baluun tz'ikin
u tzakaw K'awiil Taj(al) Chan Ahk Aj Chak Tzukte'? ? Pik ... chumlaj Chan Pawahtuun? Chan Xiiw Tuun?
huli ? winik petaj u mulwaj ? ?

Date: 9.16.16.4.16 8 Kib 9 Xul (May 17, 767)

Translation: it changed: 16 (k'ins), 9 winals, 6 tuuns, and 4 k'atuuns later, and then it occurred on 8 Kib 9 Xul: he conjured K'awiil, Tajal Chan Ahk, Aj Chak Tzukte'?; ?; ?; was seated Chan Pawahtuun?; Chan ...; he arrived; ?; person; was circled; was piled up?; pyramid; altar.

Free Translation: 86 years, 9 months and 16 days later, on 8 Kib 9 Xul, Tajal Chan Ahk Aj Chak Tzukte'? conjured K'awiil. Chan Pawahtuun? and Chan .... were seated. A person arrived and a pyramid was encircled and built, along with (or at) an altar.

Discussion: ... [T]he early eighth century at Cancuén remains something of a "Dark Age" to scholars. Due to the length of time involved it is certain that at least one and probably more rulers governed the city during this time. The hieroglyphic stairway at the site, also dating to the reign of Tajal Chan Ahk, contains a number of dates pertaining to this period but as most of the blocks comprising this inscription were stolen and badly eroded, little information can be gleaned at the moment, although study of this important text is ongoing.

However, one block of this stairway mentions an event carried out at Dos Pilas by its fourth king, K'awiil Chan K'inich, indicating Cancuén's inclusion within the political sphere of this powerhouse in the mid-eighth century. This link between the two sites is further strengthened when we note that the previous ruler of Dos Pilas, Ruler 3, was married to a Cancuén princess. These connections have led scholars to conclude that Dos Pilas was deeply involved politically with Cancuén at this time, with the latter likely finding itself in vassal status, along with most of the other kingdoms of the region. This could help explain why Cancuén's scribes, when later drawing up their history of the kingdom for Tajal Chan Ahk, chose to ignore this period.

One other stair block from the hieroglyphic stairway informs us that Tajal Chan Ahk was born in 742, making him 25 years old at the time of the event described in this passage. Interestingly, the events on this date are remarkably similar to those in the previous passage: conjuring, arrivals and construction. We are not given Tajal Chan Ahk's accession date on this panel, but it must have occurred earlier, making this lord little more than a youth at the time of his coronation. Given the mention of K'awiil Chan K'inich on another block from this stairway, it is quite likely that Tajal Chan Ahk's accession was supervised by the king of Dos Pilas.

Dos Pilas' control of the region fell apart in the early 760s as a number of former vassals rose up in rebellion. It is not known if Cancuén was among these but the date of this "ritual refounding" of the city by Tajal Chan Ahk may be significant in this regard. While Dos Pilas's dynasty was not destroyed, it was forced to relocate to the secondary capital of Aguateca, and though it appears to have recovered much of its homeland along the Petexbatun river, its control of the greater Pasión region waned. This newfound freedom would allow Tajal Chan Ahk to embark upon a new construction boom in his city, to which the numerous new monuments attest.

Episode translation: '86 years, 4 months, and 16 days later, then happened 8 Cib 9 Xul; Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te' (Heavenly Torch Turtle, Great Feller of Trees [=soldiers]), conjured K'awil, then formed the earth-rope; were seated [statues of the Gods] Four Itzam Tun and Four Xiw Tun; Arrived Ek' Tun Nal ('Star Stone Place') person; became round/was completed the piling-up/the base of the sanctuary? (and) the altar.'

7. Taj Chan Ahk Attends a Ceremony at "Five Devourer Mountain"

Transcription of Episode 7 (Figure 22): *utz'akaj waxaklajun [hew] hux winikjiy lajchan hab[i]y jun winikhabijiy 'u[h]tiy 'i 'u[h]ti balun hix lajchan bix o[h]l 'ilaj ho' jan[ab] witz chak ? umuknal Itzam Chan 'A[h]k Wi' Tak Chay ukab[i]y Taj Chan 'A[h]k 'Aj Chak Jut Te' k'uh[ul] yahk-k'in 'ajaw k'uh[ul] ? 'ajaw*

The main event of the final episode has long been understood (cf. Guenter 2002:17-18), though uncertainty has persisted concerning the meaning of *janab*, and the "three-stones" logogram of the 'red altar' is undeciphered. The greater puzzle concerns the dual emblem glyph which Taj Chan Ahk proudly uses, but whose historical veracity has been doubted.

Thirty-two years after the "second coronation" Taj Chan Ahk opened the tomb of the previous king and participated as a witness (*ilaj*) in the ceremony. Its name *Ho' Janab Witz* has been translated as '5 "Flower" Mountain.' This same rare phrase '5 "Flower" Mountain' names another tomb: the burial place of Itzam K'an Ahk

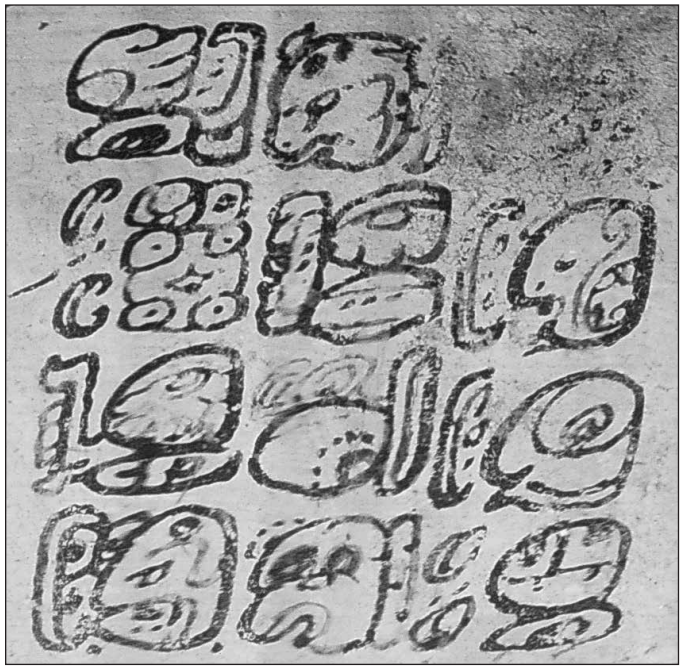


Figure 20. K4113 (Justin Kerr photograph collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.).

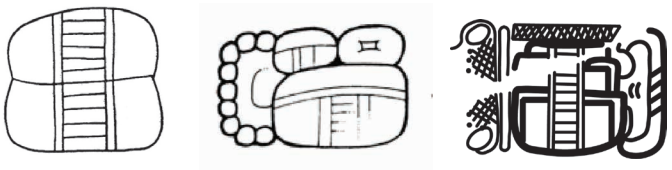


Figure 21. (a) ZHB grapheme (drawing by Matthew Looper); (b) Nakum emblem glyph (Nakum Stela C, drawing by Nikolai Grube); (c) 'he of five ZHB-**NAH**' (Palenque Tablet of the 96 Glyphs, A4, drawing by Péter Bíró).

II on Piedras Negras Panel 4. A related expression *Ho' Janab* appears on an unprovenanced plate possibly from El Zotz', and on Yaxchilan Stela 3 an ancestor in a solar cartouche is named Aj Ho' Janab Witz (Taube 2004:80-81). In agreement with Guenter (2002:18) and Kistler (2004:Note 5) we consider Ho' Janab Witz to refer to a mythical afterlife/underworld location, but we argue below that *janab* is not 'flower.'[45]

The logogram ZG5 appears as a four-petaled flower with a border of beads or dots. Several sources term it 'an unidentified type of flower' (Kettunen and Helmke 2014; Taube 2004, citing Stuart). While often read **JANAB**, Marc Zender (personal communication 2010) suggests a **JAN** reading given that it takes -**na** complements, as on Yaxchilan L.10 (see footnote 30). *Jan* is 'corn flower' in the now extinct Ch'olti' (Morán: <han> '*flor de la milpa*') and 'spike or tassel of maize' in Ch'ol (Hopkins et al. 2011:74).

ZG5 is substituted for by the spelling **ja**-**na**-**bi** at Palenque (Miraflores fragment, TI sarcophagus sides, Palace Tablet, Olvidado Temple) in the name of the famous king K'inich Janab Pakal and his eponymous predecessor. This has led to broad agreement that the intended word is *janab*, but without comparable assurance that it means 'flower(y).' One might prefer that the shield in this king's name be more menacing, and it is strange that a term for 'flower' would appear with an instrumental suffix. We therefore suspect *jan* 'corn flower, spike, tassel of maize' to be a rebus for a homophonous verb root. We propose this to be the Yucatecan root *jan* 'to eat' (Bricker et al. 1998:96) with the corresponding *-ab* suffix which forms instrumental

[45] Kistler (2004:Note 5) states: "one must look at the panel's last passage, which refers to a ritual that occurred on 9.18.8.6.14 (AD 799). On this date, Tajal Chan Ahk performed rituals of an unknown nature at a place named in the text as Ho' Janaab Witz, or "Five-Flowered Mountain," the burial place of his predecessor, Chan Ahk Wi' (Guenter 2002:18). This name also appears on Piedras Negras Panel 3 in reference to the memorial temple of Piedras Negras Ruler 4, who was buried in AD 757 (Martin and Grube 2000:150). … Nevertheless, since Martin and Grube (2000:150) state that this name normally refers to some mythological locale, one should not assume that there is a connection between the tomb of Cancuen's Chan Ahk Wi' and Piedras Negras Ruler 4."

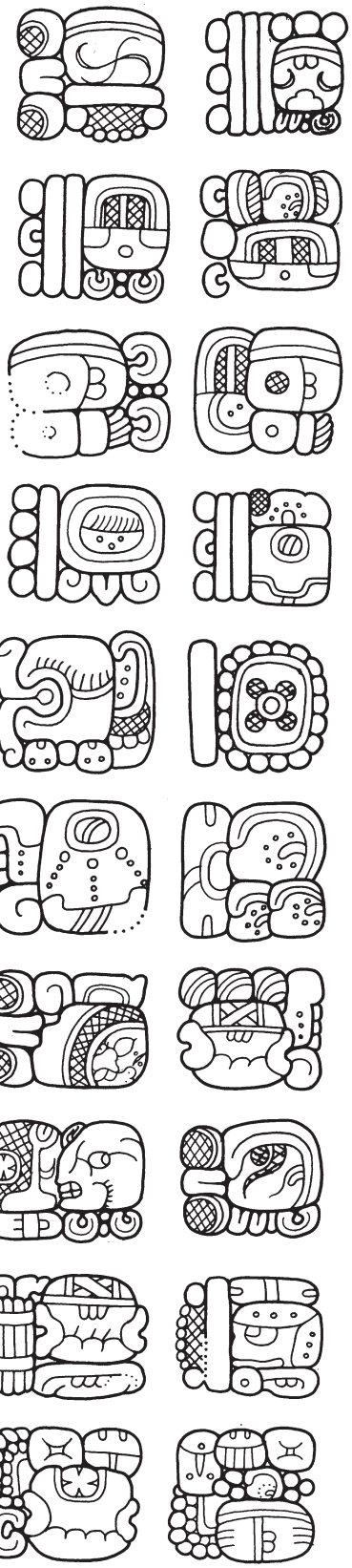


Figure 22, Episode 7, Cancuen Panel 1 (drawing by Nicholas Carter)

nouns. This finds support in the name Janab Ti' O', a lord of Hix Witz, on several unprovenanced objects wherein the **JAN** ZG5 sign is in the mouth of a raptorial bird with the **TI'** 'mouth' sign superfixed or otherwise present (Martin and Reents-Budet 2010). With our final piece of evidence in the name of K'inich Janab Pakal on the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs (Figure 23), we offer the translation 'devourer' for *janab*.[46]



Figure 23. K'INICH-JAN-PAKAL-la (Palenque Tablet of the 96 Glyphs, B3, drawing by Péter Bíró).

The reference to the tomb includes the ZC9 "altar" logogram with a **CHAK** 'red, great' prefix perhaps symbolizing sacrifice and blood. In an earlier passage we proposed the logogram HT4 to be an altar associated with "reddening." Although it is not explicitly mentioned in this or any other Cancuen inscription, it is highly probable due to his visiting the tomb that Taj Chan Ahk was the son of the late Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay.

As king, Taj Chan Ahk claimed not only the Cancuen emblem but also that of Machaquila. The claim also appears on Panel 3 (Zender and Skidmore 2004), and it has been persuasively argued that Cancuen conquered Machaquila (Fahsen et al. 2003:708-710). The capture of Aj Chan Xan Bahlam, Divine Lord of Machaquila, was mentioned on Cancuen Ballcourt Marker 2; it occurred sometime before 795. Cuidad Ruiz et al. (2013:80) advanced the hypothesis that Taj Chan Ahk celebrated the 9.18.5.0.0 ceremony not only at Cancuen but also at Machaquila, and actually portrayed it on Cancuen Panel 3. The panel depicts Taj Chan Ahk flanked by two kneeling courtiers. The scene is framed in a quadrilobed space similar to the ritual enclosure built in Machaquila Plaza A. The text, which commemorates the celebration of the first *hotun*, refers expressly to that quadrilobed space as 'the house of Tajal Chan Ahk'. Brian Just (2006:69-76) following Graham's observation suggested that Machaquila Stela 17, which is unfinished, would have marked the 9.18.5.0.0 period-ending, but because of the attack by Cancuen it was never completed. This occupation of Machaquila lasted only five years, however, because Machaquila Stela 2 documents that on August 19, 800 (9.18.10.0.0) a new king sat on the throne. Other events and details of his history appear on the inscribed but largely eroded sides and back. Significantly, the title '*ochk'in kalomte*' is associated with his image.[47]

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[46] The following proposal was first shared with colleagues by MacLeod in 2012. The ZG5 **JAN** sign appears in the name of a lord known as Janab Ti' O' in several texts on looted vases (K1387, K5646, K8665, and K8722) and on a small exquisitely carved looted panel, likely a riser from a hieroglyphic stair from the polity of Hix Witz, now known to be in the region of La Joyanca/El Pajaral/Zapote Bobal southwest of El Peru Waka' (Martin and Reents-Budet 2010). Here we consider the implications for interpretation of ZG5, which appears in the mouth of a raptorial bird sign BT1s read **O'** of uncertain zoological identification (perhaps an owl?). The logogram PXA/T128 read **TI'** 'mouth' is superfixed. Martin and Reents-Budet (2010:Note 3) observe that there is uncertainty in reading the formula of "X in the mouth," as the components may not be part of the reading (we offer, for example, that **KAB** in the mouth of **TI'** is the syllabogram **sa**). The authors do not consider an example of **K'INICH JANAB PAKAL** at B3 on the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs which gives control of this uncertainty: the **O'** bird with ZG5 in the eye and a -**la** suffix substitutes for the standard "beaded flower" motif which in turn substitutes for the spelling **ja**-**na**-**bi** in other texts. Therefore the Hix Witz bird with ZG5 in the mouth must read **JAN**, and the image of a raptor further strengthens our Yucatecan *jan-ab* 'devourer' proposal.

[47] The Looper and Macri (1991-2024) database indicates that Machaquila Stela 2 records not only the half-period event but both earlier (including birth on May 4, 786) and later events which are mostly effaced. The *'ochk'in kalomte'* title appears with his image on the front of the monument. He also uses the title *'Aj Ho' Bak* 'he of five captives,' but no personal name has been identified. The title *'ochk'in* (west) *kalomte'* originally came into the Maya area in the Early Classic Period, carried by the teotiwa emperors or their representatives. After Teotihuacan fell

Episode translation: '32 years, 3 months, and 18 days later [since the foregoing events], then happened 9 Ix 12 Cumku, was attended/witnessed the Five-Devourer Mountain Red Altar, [which was] the tomb of Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Tak Chay; he tended it, Taj Chan Ahk Aj Chak Jut-Te' , Divine King of Yahk K'in and the Divine King of Sutij.'[48]

Discussion

Apart from the Early Classic stelae at Tres Islas, we have no earlier mention of the Cancuen dynasty. The term "truncated" in the title of our article refers not only to the likelihood that an opening narrative had been written on the missing stone block, but also to the fact that we do not know the archaeological context of the panel we have. There are other inscriptions which, although not in Cancuen, can be used as a clue to the likely original location. The best evidence is from Piedras Negras Panel 3, not only because it mentions Five Devourer Mountain as a tomb, but also because it was made almost contemporaneously with Cancuen Panel 1 (782 and 799, respectively).

The Piedras Negras inscription commemorates the burial in the Ho' Janab Witz tomb of the deceased Itzam K'an Ahk II. It also depicts a throne-room audience of paramount significance including visitors from Yaxchilan, and the main text confirms the Early Classic friendly relationship between that upstream polity and Piedras Negras. Panel 3 was discovered at the top of the O-13 pyramid, and although there is no pyramidal structure known at Cancuen, the association suggests that Panel 1 stood in front of Cancuen's massive palace and was near the tomb of Itzam Chan Ahk.

Let us consider what the text says about Classic Maya political discourse and its historical structure in the Late Classic Period. The Panel 1 inscription features episodes about foundation and re-foundation through the titles, travels, and achievements of kings and the invocation of gods—initially foreign ones from the overlord's city. Drawing upon other inscriptions as well, we note that Cancuen's resettlement reflects a trend from the early phases of the Late Classic Period. In the Usumacinta region, La Mar was supported by Piedras Negras, Bonampak was bolstered by Yaxchilan, and Sak Tz'i' was likely buttressed by Palenque. These sites were all founded on the threshold of the Late Classic Period, circa 550-600. Dos Pilas was founded by the brother of the contemporary king of Tikal; the relationship between the parent city and its protectorate by all evidence was amicable at first. During the Mutul brothers' war of 650 to 679, Cancuen, Machaquila, and Zapote Bobal were settled by dynasties whose forebears resided at other sites.

Cancuen, Hix Witz, and Dos Pilas were vassals or allies of the hegemonic empire of the House of Kanul, whose latter members settled at Calakmul after the civil war of the 620s. Thus in the early phase of the Late Classic Period, there were many movements and resettlings of dynasties who either originated on the periphery (as with the Kanul relocation to Calakmul), or others whose parent cities presumably wanted to control the periphery (Tikal and Dos Pilas; Calakmul and Cancuen).

The Yahk K'in house in the Late Classic was firmly loyal to Calakmul, even unto the death of the last Cancuen king. Within the canon of Maya political discourse, the text is remarkable in its detailed description of rituals and events concerning the foundation and expansion of the city. Travel and arrival punctuated by dates and intervals is enacted by both gods and kings. Early in the narrative K'ib Ajaw and his retinue spent some 65 days on foot to reach Makan Witz / Naj Tunich Cave; including an unspecified interval involving offerings at named shrines, they reached Cancuen 137 days later. Amid less detailed chronology Itzam Chan Ahk Wi' Chay went to Calakmul to be crowned; then gods arrived in Cancuen (possibly from Calakmul), and thereafter Taj Chan Ahk's inauguration took place at Dos Pilas. The gods' roles are paramount in the stages of the foundation of the city, even before K'ib Ajaw arrives. All construction mentioned on the panel was to accommodate the gods.

The founding of the city undoubtedly required the consent of the ancestors, as K'ib Ajaw went first to Naj Tunich Cave near Makan Witz as a "descent offerer" before traveling on to Cancuen. Even the rare *t'in* and *pak'* titles he carried reflected his foundational mission. We observe that the founding of the city was on "virgin" (sparsely settled) land, just as in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel the Itza settled in an "empty" area.

The archaeological record informs us that during the time of Taj Chan Ahk, the town functioned as a port receiving the surrounding population, and a massive palace was built for merchants and nobles from the distant Guatemalan highlands. A rarely-used "pyramid and altar" expression appears when Taj Chan Ahk re-consecrates the center and the city in a new geopolitical configuration, whereupon he now effectively controls the upper Pasión River. While these logograms operate independently in the script and are functionally understood, the "pyramid and altar" *difrasismo* forms a political and metaphysical unit equivalent to the sacred precinct of the city, the office of kingship, and the king

ca. 550, many Late Classic Maya kings began to use the title, the most prominent of whom were those of Tíkal, Yaxchilan, and Palenque. But at the beginning of the Terminal Classic, kings with Chontal names such as Olom and Papamilil now used *'ochk'in kalomte'*, as did the ruler of Machaquila depicted on Stela 2. Together with other epigraphic and archaeological evidence, the spread of this title during the first half of the ninth century heralds the end of the old elite in the Maya Lowlands.

[48] Guenter 2002:17-18.

himself. A model for this interpretation is found in Copan: on the day the king Waxaklajun Ubah K'awil is beheaded at Quirigua and an interregnum is forced upon the city, the Hieroglyphic Stairway text registers:

> *mih* pyramid *mih* altar *mih kab ch'en ulok' chitaj yan Jun Pik K'uh*
> '[there was a] vacant temple, vacant altar, vacant earth-cave (sacred center); it was the departure of the companions and of the existence of (the god[s] called) Jun Pik K'uh.' (Stuart 2005b:373-394; Boot 2011).

Mih is used as *'zero'* in the Long Count and can be translated as 'no,' but this phrase expresses the concept of 'vacant.' This king had been captured several years before, and the gods of Copan awaited his return. As the long history is told on the stairway, at the moment the king was killed, the gods departed their shrines because only the king could engage with them. At Palenque, when many members of the royal family were killed in the war (*satay ixik satay ajaw*), the living tree of the dynasty withered.

It is generally the case that in the political discourse of the Classic period, the actions of kings and nobles are highlighted, with the gods to some degree positioned in the background. On the Cancuen Panel, the gods rule and the kings serve them.

We do not know the date of Taj Chan Ahk's death, but it most likely occurred between January 22, 799 and May 16, 800. This last date—as [9.18.9.13.5] 6 Chicchan 13 Xul—appears in a text on an unprovenanced conch shell which registers a deer hunt by his son K'an Max, who as king now has the K'uhul Yahk K'in emblem glyph. Taj Chan Ahk was the greatest of Cancuen's kings, and the monuments of the city, all his, testify to a long and successful reign. While he conquered Machaquila circa 795, his son could no longer hold it; as noted above, on August 19, 800 a new ruler with the title *'ochk'in kalomte'* ascended the throne and asserted independence from Cancuen.

Not long after, with the exact date uncertain, K'an Max was the victim of a massacre wherein not only he but the whole royal family was exterminated and the city abandoned. Thus the dynasty that K'ib Ajaw had brought to the city was destroyed in its entirety (see Demarest et al. 2016), leaving investigators with another sort of truncated history. The archaeological record does not inform us about who the attackers were: Demarest et al. (2016:186) proposed that they were warriors from the Guatemalan highlands and/or the piedmont, while Ciudad Ruiz et al. (2013:81) inculpated Machaquila, a view echoed by Guenter (2014:181-183), who even suggested that the warriors included Chontal soldiers. Here we are inclined to agree with Guenter and Ciudad Ruiz; many sources mention that at the very beginning of the Terminal Classic, alien elements appear in both the archaeological and iconographic records with confirmation from the epigraphic evidence (Ciudad Ruiz and Lacadena 2006, 2008; Bazy and Inomata 2017; Halperin and Martin 2020; Martin 2020:277-299; Halperin et al. 2021, 2024; Le Moine and Halperin 2021). The kingdom of Taj Chan Ahk and K'an Max was silenced forever, but on Cancuen Panel 1, thanks to the efforts of epigraphers over decades, the text has once again been given a voice, and it undoubtedly still holds surprises for future researchers.

Summary and Conclusion

We have stated in the introduction that the expansion of knowledge in epigraphy consists of generating new decipherments, new grammatical explanations, new translations, and new understandings, and we believe that this has been achieved with our work on Cancuen Panel 1. More than two decades after Guenter's brilliant and prescient article, thanks to many avenues of progress in the field we have been able to insert new decipherments (**K'AL** as 'sanctuary,' **K'UP** as 'cut,' **KUN** as 'temple'; **JUT** as 'cause to fall'); to clarify royal names and titles (Pak' Nehel Ahk, 7/9 *t'in*, 6/12 *pak';* Aj Chak Jut-Te' 'Great Feller of Trees'); to apply decipherments recently proposed by colleagues (**t'i** and **XAN**); to further elucidate elusive phrases (*jut' ak'nom* 'narrow-place offerer'; *chakajlib* 'sacrificial altar' (literally 'place of reddening'); *janab* 'devourer,' and *Yul Chan Ha'* 'rippling sky water' as the Classic-period name of the Pasión River); to strengthen proposals of others (**WAL** *wa[']al* 'presently') and to better represent the absolute syntactic integrity of this example of Classic Ch'olan literature, filling in gaps and question marks left by Guenter and others. This has produced a new translation which we believe is better and closer to the message of the original text, although there remain some gaps which we hope future epigraphers may yet be able to fill.

To the foregoing summary we add new historical and religious interpretations, among them (1) the elucidation of a hitherto intractable phrase featuring four shrines and a cult associated with mythological and historical ancestors; (2) the hypothesis that the "earth and rope" expression is part of an ancient foundational animacy myth, here linked to a rite of re-establishment of the city; (3) the identification of the Old God of Episode 6 as the same 'star-stone lord' on K4113, a patron deity of the Kanul dynasty; and (4) in referencing the Copan dynasty's first great political disruption, an observation that the common *kab-ch'en difrasismo* for 'city' in the script discourse is joined by a rarely-used pyramid-and-altar metaphor employed in both cities which identifies the center of the settlement as the abode of gods bound to the living king. This calque for 'sacred center' is also found in the Postclassic Period Nahuatl language.

We address and resolve that K'ib Ajaw made not one but two journeys, first to Naj Tunich and afterward

to the area of present-day Cancuen. We reinterpret the previously-deciphered toponym Halum, the original name of Cancuen, as *ha' lum* 'this land,' a unique term which may reflect the constellating of a new identity on the colonial frontier. Finally, we admit that with regard to these new ideas about religious practice and geopolitical ontology, we are only in the early stages of the work. This relatively raw interpretive territory has been infused with both immediate consensus and heated debate between two authors who have collaborated on many projects over the past decade. In the end, the path which has been at times unimpeded and at others, rocky, has led us to satisfactory solutions. We trust that over the next 22 years—the past interval on which we have chosen to reflect—the questions that we have set aside will be answered, and that the ideas we have shared will be either substantiated, improved, or superseded.

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