



Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture

No. 13

September, 1991

Curl-Snout Under Scrutiny, Again

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The passages in Tikal's Stela 31 referring to Curl Snout (Fig. 1) have been problematic to epigraphers for years, mostly because the chronology associated with his events is at best confusing, and at worst unintelligible. The chronological problems at the heart of the interpretative difficulties are as follows:

a) A distance number at D24-D29 leads to a date some seventeen years after the Tikal-Waxaktun war. This date falls later than all of the events recorded in the subsequent record of Curl-Snout's history.

b) A date has probably been lost in glyph blocks D29-D30.

c) An 8 Men glyph at E7 is not tied to any other calendrical information.

d) A 10 Kaban 10 Yaxk'in, G4, date at F8-F9 is likely in error no matter what its reconstruction. Some solutions have taken the coefficient of the

day sign to be in error and the date to be 5 Kaban 10 Yaxk'in. Others have assumed the G4 is in error, but that the calendar round date is correct. The second solution places the date at the long count position of 8.19.7.9.17, some twenty-five years later than 8.17.2.16.17, Curl Snout's reconstructed accession date.

e) A distance number of 1.5.2.5 (F20-E21) has been traditionally counted from the end of the 18th k'atun, giving 8.19.5.2.5. This placement breaks the chronological sequence in an unlikely way by juxtaposing the dates 8.18.0.0.0, 8.19.5.2.5, 8.18.10.0.0, and 8.18.15.11.0 in sequential clauses.

In addition, critical actors and distance numbers were either suppressed, eliminated, or destroyed. A large number of glyphs are missing at the bottom of columns C and D, leaving a situation which is complicated beyond normal expectations

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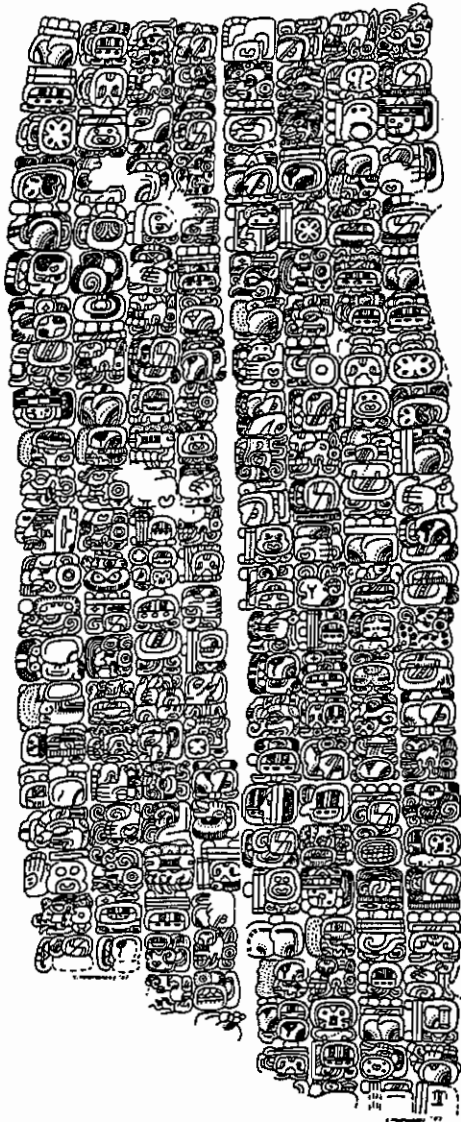


Fig. 1 The rear of Stela 31
(drawing by John Montgomery)

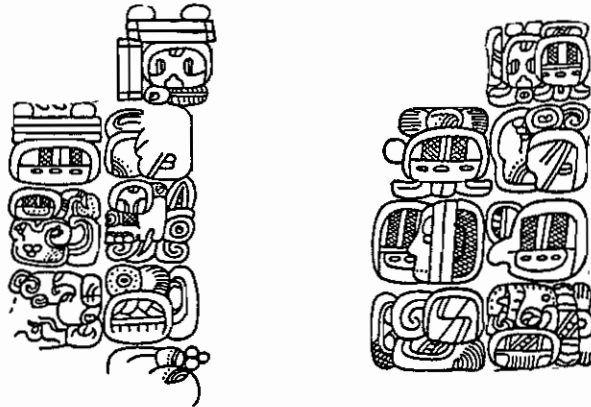
of difficult texts. For example, the actor associated with the last events in C-D has been destroyed and the gap leaves ample room for a now missing date to accompany the house dedication event at the E5-F5. An *u kabhi* glyph at F7 seems to subordinate Curl-Snout to someone who is named only by a title at E8, while he is subordinated to Smoking-Frog, the conqueror of Waxaktun, at F13. And who is the person named at F23? These as well as difficulties in the interpretation of some of the nouns and verbal expressions have made decipherment tentative at best, although recently some headway was made at the 1990 Texas Workshop on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing (Schele 1990).

A important breakthrough was made at the second annual Xequistel meetings, held at Fahsen's ranch, when the authors were looking over these inscriptions once again in the hope of resolving disputes over interpretations and chronology. The first insight came when they recognized a substitution pattern in Curl-Snout's name (Schele and Fahsen 1991). Following an earlier decipherment by Nikolai Grube of the upended frog as phonetic *hu*, they read this grapheme combined with phonetic *ha* as *Huh*, a word for "iguana" in Yukatek and Chol. They saw that the T670 holding a "feathered shell" sign substituted directly for the *huh* spelling in examples of his name on Stela 31. Since the *chaan-mah k'ina* components remained constant in both forms, they used the principle of substitution to identify the T670 compound and the *huh* spelling as exact equivalents. This newly recognized substitution pattern allowed us to take a new look at the Stela 31 inscription and chronology.

The Tikal-Waxaktun War and the *Yukut* Events

The verbal expressions at D25 and F21 are composed of syllabic signs spelling the word *yu-ku-te* (Fig. 2). In both passages, the *yukut* glyph comes immediately after a distance number and is followed by a verbal phrase marked by an *iwal* "and then," sign. This pattern is well known in Maya inscriptions: a distance number is counted from an earlier, previously stated event, to a later one highlighted by the "and then" marker—in the discourse

Fig. 2 a, b
the *yukut*
passages



structure, "so much time after something happened and then something else happened."

In the first passage (Fig. 2a), the distance number is counted from this *yukut* event to an event written *awal te'-witz-ha*. The event recorded immediately before this second verb is the Tikal-Waxaktun war, thus placing the date of the earlier event at 8.17.1.4.12. We interpret the *yukut* as a restatement of the Tikal-Waxaktun war event. The "te'-witz-ha" event has no expressed actor,¹ but we believe it to have been a ritual consecration. The next two glyphs, *uhti* ????, "it happened at a place," (Stuart and Houston 1991) give the location, and the event is repeated with a T79 "house" variant used for monument dedication events at Copán, Palenque, and elsewhere. Unfortunately the rest of the passage is now missing, although the glyph at D28 may be a glyph for altar. Fahrensen, however, has argued that another distance number and date must have been recorded in the now-missing area.

The second passage (Fig. 2b) with the *yukut* collocation follows a clause recording the end of 8.18.0.0.0 under the authority of a one-k'atun ahaw.² The text continues with a distance number

of 1.5.2.5, which is counted from the same *yukut* event to an *awal* marked event that we can now identify as the Early Classic equivalent to a skull death used on the Naranjo Hieroglyphic Stair and the Emiliano Zapata Panel (Grube and Nahm 1990, Stuart 1990). The passage ends with *utz'akhi*, the verbal form of the glyph meaning "to replace," and a name written with an upended frog, phonetic *ha*, a sky glyph, and the mah k'ina title. We take this passage to record the death of a person 1.5.2.5 after the Tikal-Waxaktun war, and his replacement by a person named Huh-Chaan-Mah K'ina. Based on the substitution pattern we described above, we believe the replacement person at F23 (Fig. 2b) to be Curl-Snout. The Huh-Chaan-Mah K'ina person in this passage is the same as the T670-chaan-Mah-K'ina recorded at B22-A23 and on the side of Stela 31.³ We, thus, identified Curl-Snout as the person who replaced the deceased.

These data give us the following pattern of events and actors:

17.10.12 after the conquest of Waxaktun, a monument was dedicated on 8.17.18.17.2.

1. It is possible that the actors were Smoking Frog and Curl Snout, since both erected monuments at the end of the 18th K'atun.
2. Curl Snout is designated one-k'atun ahaw in this period-ending phrase. If the title refers to k'atuns of life, he would have been barely a child at his accession. If it designations k'atuns of reign, as it does in Pakal's records at Palenque and Yax-Pak's at Copn, it confirms that Curl-Snout had not yet finished his first k'atun in office.
3. This name is also on Stelae 4, 18, 31, the "Man of Tikal," and on a looted lidded tripod vessel.

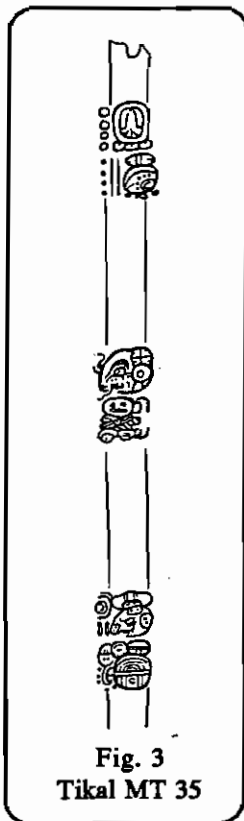


Fig. 3
Tikal MT 35

1.5.2.5 after the Waxaktun war, a man died on 8.18.6.6.17 and was replaced by Curl-Snout.

Curl-Snout ended the 18th K'atun as a one-k'atun lord under the authority of Smoking-Frog (according to Stela 18).

The Accession Date and Other Events

The 10 Kaban 10 Yaxk'in date on Stela 31 has been problematic since the stela was first discovered. Although Schele (1990 and Schele and Freidel 1990) argued for a later placement, we now accept Jones and Satterthwaite's (1982) placement of this date at 8.17.2.16.17. Several new pieces of evidence support that reading.

In 1986, David Stuart (personal communication) recognized Curl-Snout's name on MT 35, a bone from Burial 116. Schele (1990) placed the date of the event recorded at 8.17.2.3.16 and identified the event as *och ch'ok te na*, "he entered into the sprout-tree-house" (Fig. 3).⁴ We think this was the day he entered the lineage as heir. We believe that this date may have been recorded in the missing section at the bottom of columns C and D on Stela 31.

The 8 Men date at E7 (Fig. 1) falls into the span between this "entering" event and Curl-Snout's accession. The only 8 Men in that gap falls at 8.17.2.13.15. The event seems to be the dedication of a house called *Wi-te'-na*. Curl-Snout

is named as acting under the authority of the Chakte',⁵ a title we think was reserved for the high king who ruled the enlarged kingdom. Unfortunately, we do not know the death date of Great-Jaguar-Paw, so we cannot discern whether it was him or his brother, Smoking-Frog.

In the next passage, Curl Snout accedes as ahaw under the authority of Smoking-Frog, who is clearly designated as a higher authority here, on Stela 4, and on Stela 18.⁶ At this moment, Curl Snout ruled not only as the ahaw of his lineage, and perhaps of Tikal, but he ruled under the authority of Smoking-Frog, who apparently ruled over the combined polities of Waxaktun and Tikal.

We can now reconstruct a series of events that are implied by this record. The conquest of Waxaktun was followed by Curl-Snout's entry into the founder's house as an heir, the death of Great-Jaguar-Paw (implied), the accession of Smoking-Frog to the overall rule of the kingdom (implied), the dedication of a house, and the accession of Curl-Snout to the ahawship of Tikal under Smoking-Frog's authority.

We think the succeeding section, between F15-F29, repeats the same information for Curl-Snout and his heir. The passage begins with the end of 18 k'atuns under the authority of Curl-Snout. It continues through the death passage discussed above and the replacement of the deceased person by Curl-Snout, whose name is written as *Huh-Chaan-Mah K'ina*. Although we cannot provide direct glyphic evidence, we feel the most likely person to have died on 8.18.6.6.17 was Smoking-Frog, and that he was replaced by Curl-Snout in the *Chak-te'* office ruling the unified kingdom.

The next passage follows in chronological order, recording the end of the half-period 8.18.10.0.0 as the base of a count of 5.11.0, and leading to 8.18.15.11.0. Schele (Schele 1990) has identified this date as an important astronomical event in-

4. In 1991, an example of the founder's glyph was found in which the crossed torches were replaced by the double-eyes now known to read *ch'o* as a syllable and *ch'ok* as a logograph. *Ch'ok* is the Chol word for "sprout," giving the name for a lineage or dynasty as "sprout-tree-house." Today the Maya of Santiago Atitlan have exactly this symbol at the heart of their religion (Carlsen and Prechtel 1990). Their mother-father tree gave off sprouts that became all the living things of the universe.

5. This title is the phonetic spelling of the traditional "batab" title. Schele previously used the nickname of "makuch" based on an erroneous evaluation of the components signs of the syllabic version. Stuart, Grube, and Sebe (1989) identified another version at Copn written as *kolom te*, "corner tree." In 1990, Schele began using *chak-te* because the head variant of the title depicts the god Chak holding an axe combined with a *te* sign. Since the Copn example suggests this title is associated with the directional trees, she took the New-Year's pages of the Dresden Codex to demonstrate the existence of directional Chak trees—in other words, a *chak-te'*. As Peter Mathews suggested (personal communication, 1990), the accession phrases of Late Classic Tikal record that rulers acceded to *chakte-lel* ("chakte-ship"), just as other rulers acceded to *ahawlel*—"ahaw-ship."

6. Peter Mathews (1985) was the first to identify Smoking-Frog and to demonstrate that Curl-Snout was subordinate to him. Many of our interpretations stem from Mathews's early work.