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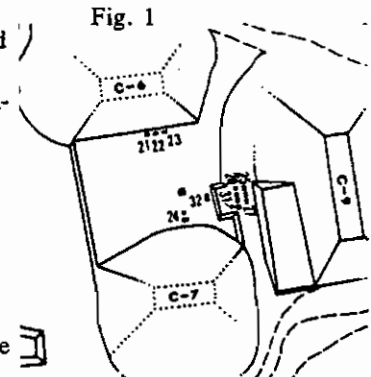
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Creation Mythology at Naranjo

by Matthew G. Looper

In the workbook for the 1992 Maya Meetings at Texas, Linda Schele (1992) has coordinated Maya iconography placed far apart in space and time through a single metaphor--the Milky Way and the stories of creation of the world which the Maya believed they witnessed in its movement each night. She has demonstrated the power of creation narratives primarily from Palenque and Quirigua in the elucidation of the symbolism of a large number of works of art from all over the Maya realm. In this note I will suggest how yet another program, this time at Naranjo, manifests the Maya creation myths, primarily as they are described on Quirigua Stela C (see Schele 1992:122-126). This program of six stelae, erected by 'Smoking Squirrel' and his mother 'Lady 6' coordinates time, space, and myth into a powerful statement of the divine and ancient rights of ahaw kings.

The monuments I am discussing were erected around the plaza formed by Structures C-6, C-7 and C-9 at Naranjo (Fig.1). They were dedicated on four period endings--the first three at five-tun intervals. The first two were Stelae 22 and 24, dedicated on 9.13.10.0.0. These monuments were placed in front of Structures C-6 and C-7, across the plaza from one another. Stela 22 shows 'Smoking Squirrel's' accession, while Stela 24 depicts 'Lady 6' 'passing over' the captive K'inichil Kab. The



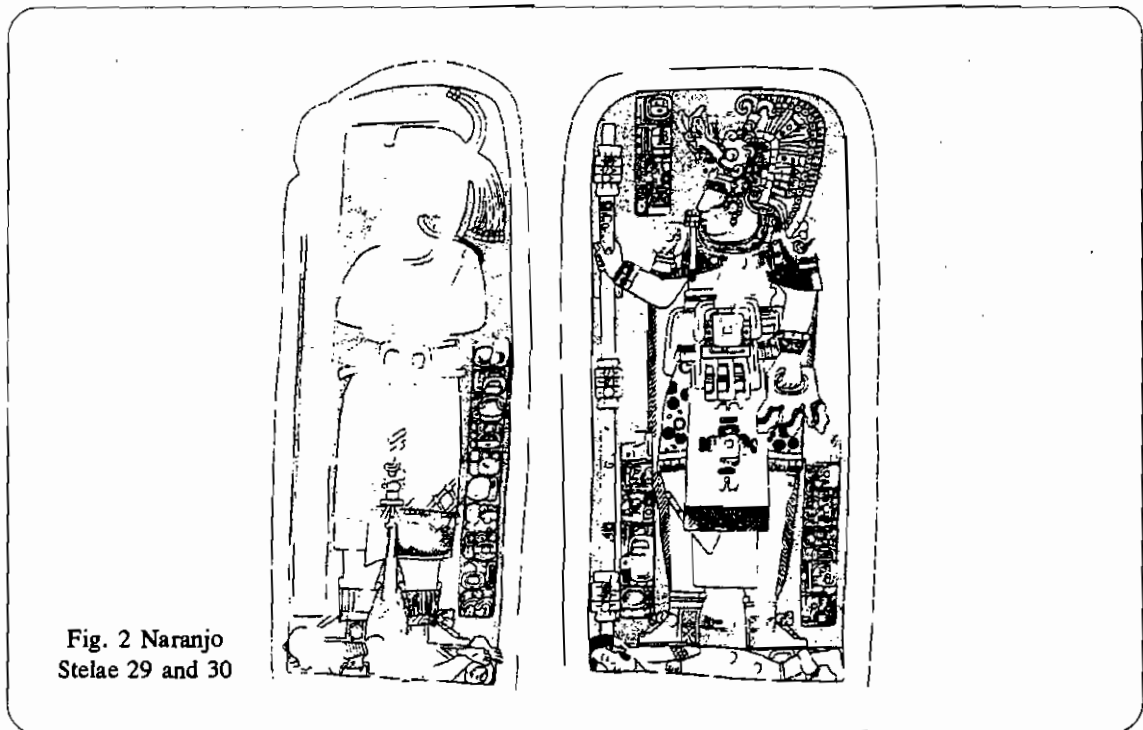
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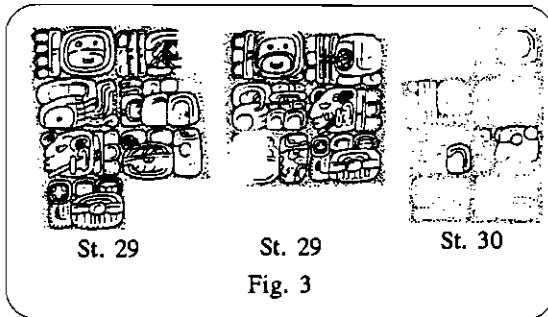
next two monuments, Stelae 21 and 23, dedicated on 9.13.15.0.0. and 9.14.0.0.0. were set up in front of Structure C-6. Like Stela 22, with which they were grouped, they show images of 'Smoking Squirrel,' dressed for war on Stela 21 and dancing with the K'awil manikin scepter on Stela 23. Thus, the side of the plaza bounded by Structure C-6 seems to have been associated with 'Smoking Squirrel' monuments, while the opposite side was linked to 'Lady 6'.

The final two monuments, however, change both the pattern of dedication at hotun intervals as well as the segregation of stelae of the two rulers on opposite sides of the plaza. The two stelae, 29 and 30, were dedicated on 9.14.3.0.0. and were erected in front of Structure C-9, creating a triangular arrangement of stela clusters in the plaza. Although the front of Stela 29 is highly eroded, the image of 'Lady 6' dressed as 'First Mother' and standing on a captive is visible. The front of Stela 30 (Fig. 2) is in much better condition and shows 'Smoking Squirrel' in the jaguar god costume and carrying a staff and trilobed flint associated with rituals shown on Tikal Temple III Lintel 2 and Altar 5. The two monuments, therefore, bring to-

gether the iconography of the previous monuments by displaying mother and son together.

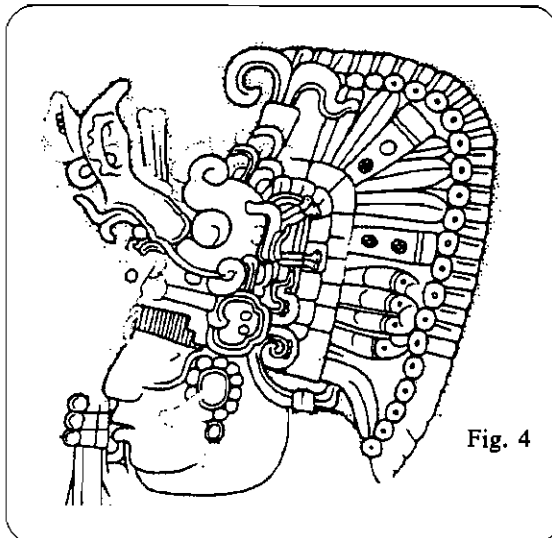
I believe that with the creation of a triadic arrangement of stelae and their dedication on the third year after the katun ending, 'Smoking Squirrel' and his mother were establishing an analogy between their actions and those of the gods at the beginning of the world, 4 Ahaw 8 Kumk'u. According to the text of Quirigua Stela C, several gods placed a jaguar throne, a serpent throne, and a sea throne under the authority of 'First Father' (see Schele 1992:122ff). This placement of stones was the initial act which organized the space of the universe and prepared it for humanity. The triadic arrangement of stela groups at Naranjo replicates the spatial arrangement of three stones of creation. But in addition, the dedication date of Stelae 29 and 30, 9.14.3.0.0., compares this spatial arrangement to the three years that had elapsed since the katun ending because *tun* can signify either 'stone' or the 360-day period. Passages from the texts of both stelae suggest that the Maya considered these groups of three years to be special. On Stela 29, the text from H11-H14 (Figure 3a) describes the 9.13.3.0.0 period ending of 'Lady 6' as the *tun* be-



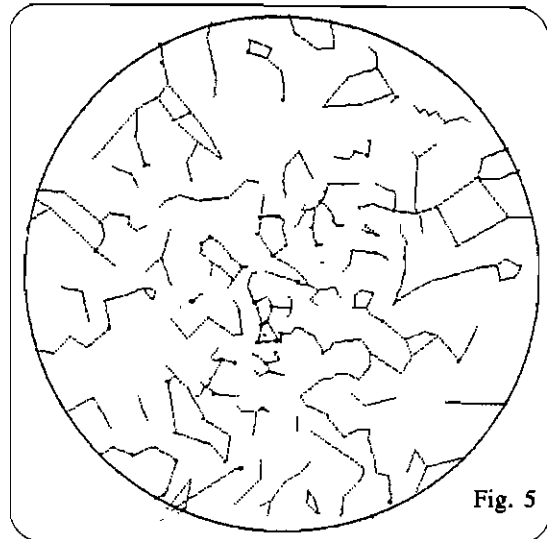


ing set *ti in?* *yax tzop* (I12). If *tzop* is a rendering of the Maya word *tz'op*, meaning 'bundle' according to Barbara MacLeod (1992:p.c.), then the *tun* was set 'on my? first bundle'. This suggests that the Maya grouped years in 'bundles' of three. Parallel expressions with the *yax tzop* collocation also seem to occur in the context of the 9.14.3.0.0. period ending on Stelae 29 and 30 (Figure 3b and c).

The references to creation extend to iconography, as well. On Stela 30, 'Smoking Squirrel' is shown wearing a fancy zoomorphic headdress at the top of which is located a cluster of three *kawaks* with a torch coming out of the top (Fig.



4). I think that these three *kawaks* symbolize the three stones of creation to which this entire program refers. As they are replicated in the sky, the three stones are Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel of Orion, which to the modern Quiche are three hearthstones (see Schele 1992:125 and Tedlock 1985:261). If the Quiche understanding of Orion may be applied to Classic Maya iconography, it



might be that the torch on Stela 30 symbolizes the Orion Nebula, which, in modern lore, is the smoke from the hearth. It is interesting that at midnight on 9.14.3.0.0., when Stela 30 was dedicated, the three stones of creation of Orion were at very close to zenith (Figure 5).

In conclusion, 'Smoking Squirrel' and 'Lady 6' of Naranjo seem to have drawn on the central mythological cycle of the Maya in the creation of this stela program. The chronological and spatial arrangements of the monuments recalled creation myths, celestial reenactments of which the populace of Naranjo would have witnessed on the very night of their dedication. Their program seems to have been an attempt to justify, through symmetries with supernatural events, their right to rule Naranjo. It casts mother and son as equivalents of the gods.

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