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El Zapote and the Dynasty of Tikal

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In November, 1992, the three authors¹ were attending a conference held in association with the *World of the Maya* exhibition at the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim, Germany. Among the objects exhibited was El Zapote Stela 5. The three of us found ourselves returning to the stela again and again and, in working with it, we were able to tease new information out of the partially eroded text.

The stela depicts a figure on the opposite sides, with both of them facing in the same direction (Fig. 1). One of them is clearly male, but the other has traditionally been identified as a female because of the net-skirted costume (Easby and Scott 1970). We disagree with this gender identification for two reasons. First, no female person is named in the text, and we doubt that a person would be depicted visually and not be named in the text. Since only males are named, we assume both figures are male. Sec-

ond, although the costume can be worn by females, it is the characteristic costume of the Holmul Dancer and, we believe, the moon goddess. Taube (1985) identified the Holmul Dancer as the Maize God. Since the Moon Goddess and the Maize God are the First Mother and First Father of the Maya Creation story, we take the costume to mark them or those who are in their ritual. It can, thus, be worn by both males and females. Here the skirt fall between the knees and ankles, just as on Copan Stela H, which is clearly identified as the ruler Waxaklahun-Ubah-K'awil. We think the El Zapote image also portrays a historical person in the guise of the Maize God.

This personage, whoever he is, holds a square object filled with the image of the reclining jaguar god so important in the inscriptions and imagery of Tikal Stela 31. Here, the box has a bar and trapeze sign and the number 12 attached to its top, and a

1. Simon Martin also joined us in our examination and contributed to the discussion.

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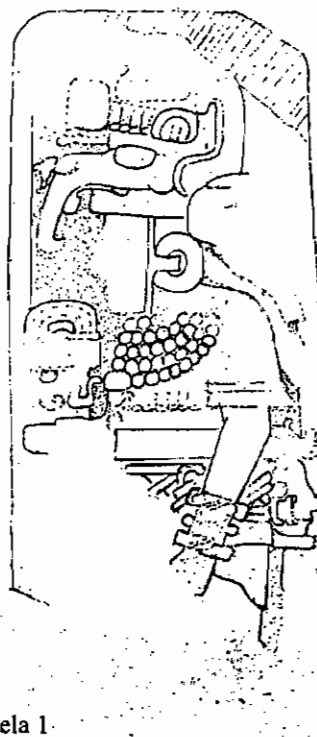


Fig. 1 El Zapote Stela 1

mat with sak signs decorates the bottom of the square. A snake head with a *sak* sign on the tip of its nose hangs from the bottom decoration. This snake is remarkably close to those on Late Preclassic serpent-sky bands at sites like Cerros and Izapa. Here it dangles from the jaguar box. This object seems to combine elements from Late Preclassic imagery, Early Classic Tikal deity imagery, and the Tlaloc war complex. The dominant context here, however, is Maya.

The other figure represents a male wearing the headdress of the magical bird called Itzam-Ye. He also wears a beaded necklace, an ornate belt, and, most important, he holds an object in his hand that appears to be the top of a staff. If so, this is the earliest known staff stela of the kind that become prevalent at Tikal during and after the reign of Kan-Boar. We have long suspected that this staff rite and its associated costume are particularly associated with period-ending rites at Tikal. The staff stelae, in this view, signal a public emphasis away

from individual historical events to the celebration of k'atun endings.

The Text

The text opens on the side of the stela faced by both figures (Fig. 2). It begins with an ISIG and a long count of 9.0.0.0.0 8 Ahaw, followed by G9, F, 3D, 4C with the skull infix, the appropriate Glyph X, 29A, and 13 Keh. The verb and next two glyphs no longer survives, below there is the fragment of a *k'u* sign that we suspect came from a "sky-god/earth-god" phrase like that on Tikal Stela 31. The only other readable signs is T740 upended-frog and the number 16, but we don't know their context.

We suspect that a distance number was located somewhere in the destroyed area for when we went to the top of the opposite side, we found another lunar series. This one has an destroyed number with D, 4C with the Young Lord, a destroyed X, and 29A. We could not find a calendar round date to go

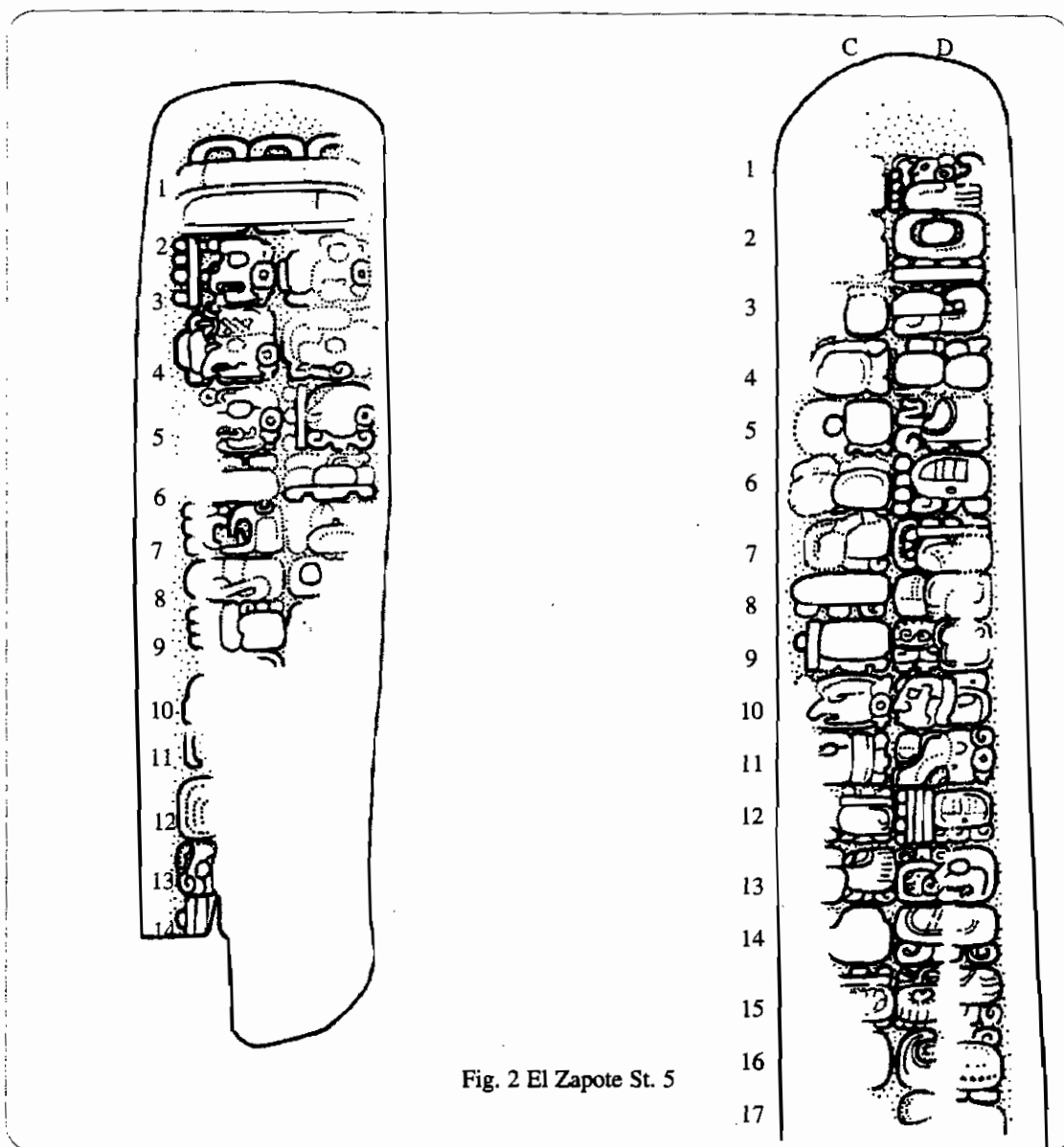


Fig. 2 El Zapote St. 5

with this lunar series, but we noticed that a distance number of 4.0.0 follows the end of this opening clause. Since the two glyphs that follow this distance number are "ended 9 pi^2 ," we take them to designate the base of the count, thus giving 9.0.4.0.0 as the implied date. We checked both 9.0.0.0.0 and 9.0.4.0.0.0 for their expected lunar series. 9.0.0.0.0 calls for 4.8D and 4C with the skull while 3C and 4 skull C is written. 9.0.4.0.0 wants

.3D and 4C with the Young Lord. Since the text records ?D and 4 Young Lord C, we believe this lunar series went with the 9.0.4.0.0 date.

The event is *tz'apah u te'-tun*, "was erected, the tree-stone of." The next three glyphs should be the name of the actor and owner of the stela, but the only part of it that we recognize is *k'awil* (D5), preceded perhaps by *chan*, "sky." We believe it is pos-

2. Stuart (1987) demonstrated the *pi* value for the double kawak sign, although we do not know how it works as a word for the 400-year cycle.

sible that the glyphs sitting in the headdress of the net-skirted figure includes a sky sign. It is possible that the name in the text corresponds to this figure.

The text continues with a reiteration of the 9.0.4.0.0 event as the second part of a couplet. It consists of the distance number, the earlier event of "ended 9 *pi*," what appears to be the T617 introductory glyph, and a verb perhaps preceded by *iwat* to mark it as the later event. The next two glyphs are Wak-Chan-Muyal-Witz, a supernatural location associated with the tree motif on the Tablet of the Cross at Palenque (Schele and Freidel 1990) and with the Milky Way (Schele 1991). In a presentation at the 1992 Philadelphia meetings, Stuart (n.d.) pointed out the presence of the *witz* "mountain" glyph and suggestion an association of this place name with Copan Temple 22. That is not to say that this El Zapote text refers to the Copan structure. Instead this is a cosmic location shared by these two sites and many others. We suggest that the 9.0.4.0.0 had something to do with this supernatural location.

We checked all three days mentioned on this stela—December 10, 435, November 19, 439, and September 19, 420—for appropriate astronomy. On all three of these days, the configuration of the Milky Way associated with the Wakah-Chan Tree simply was not visible—or if it was up, it was only in the hour after sunset when the Milky Way cannot be seen. We were disappointed, until it occurred to us that this may be a "Six-Sky-Cloudy-Mountain (*Wak-Chan-Muyal-Witz*), precisely because the Milky Way tree was inside the earth on these days. Perhaps, more importantly, 9.0.4.0.0 (November 19, 439) saw Orion and the three stones of Creation transiting the heavens exactly at midnight. That means they were directly overhead. Since First Father's birth turtle was the belt of Orion, this may account for why one side of the stela shows the ruler in the guise of First Father, the Maize God. Furthermore, when the three stones are at their highest point, the *wak-chan* is at nadir. We think this may place it inside the mountain.

The name of the person involved in this event is named in the following four glyphs. The first one seems to include the cage glyph from the Tikal founder's name. It is followed by an zoomorphic head with a jaguar ear, a human face and now miss-

ing signs, the personified form of the *k'inich* title, and a kawak throne sign followed by another head. These last two glyphs appear to be titles.

The next phrase begins with a distance number of 19.8.?. We presume that it counts backward from the 9.0.4.0.0 to reach a day that fell in between 8.19.4.10.0 and 8.19.4.10.19. The first half of the next glyph (C13) is too eroded to reconstruct, but the second half read *ch'ay*, "to die." The next glyph has two parts. The curl-snouted crocodilian head from Curl-Snout's name occupies the second half of the block. We suspect the next glyph (D13) holds the knot and yax signs that are part of the king's name.

The sign in front of the "curl-snout" glyph puzzled us until we took a trip to Berlin to visit the museum there. Among the objects on display is the fragment of an stone incensario stand from Salinas de las Nuevas Cerros. We determined in our examination that the side panels one had a double column of glyph, but one has been cut away. The surviving text records the seating of a man named Smoke-Jaguar. The final glyph in the surviving text reads *u hun sak nik*, "the headband of the white flower."³ The portrait of the ruler on the front of the incensario stand has the king's name, "Fire-Jaguar," in his headdress. Above it sits a maize symbol to which is attached at cartouche with a *sak nik* glyph inside. Two volutes ride the upper edge of the cartouche. This voluted cartouche is identical to the cartouche following the *chay* glyph on El Zapote Stela 5. We think this along with the head inside the cartouche records the *sak-niknal* sign that normally goes with the death expression. We suggest that this entire passage records the death of Curl-Snout of Tikal sometime between 8.19.4.10.0 and 8.19.4.10.19.

D14 seems to begin another reiteration with the T617 introductory glyph preceding a badly damaged glyph that included a number of either eight or nine. This could be the 9.0.0.0.0 reference again, but we suspect that the dates intended are the 9.0.4.0.0 and the 8.19.4.10.? already mentioned in the text. In any case, the event is the hand from the "west" glyph of a *ba* sign followed by the *ch'ay* glyph.

3. Schele (1991) showed that the T60 knot in Glyph F reads *hun* and means headband. It sometimes occurs with a *sak* prefix and refers specifically to the Jester God headband. It can be specified as a different kind of headband by the addition of other glyphs to the name.

David Stuart has suggested that the glyph for "west" read *och k'in*, which this hand carrying the logographic value *och*, "to enter" in Chol. According to his proposal, the Classic term for west was the place where the sun entered (the earth), an attested form in Chol. He has also shown that the rattlesnake tail which can freely substitute for this sign in rare contexts also reads *och* in the dedication phrases. He proposed *och butz'*, "entered smoke" for one of the most important dedication verb.



Fig. 3 Tikal St 31

The *ochba* of the El Zapote text shows up twice on Stela 31, as well as on a pair of belt plaques which may have been looted from Rio Azul. The first example on Stela 31 is spelled *och-ba-ha*, and occurs with the 8.17.1.4.12 conquest date (Fig. 3). The protagonist is Great-Jaguar-Paw. The second occurrence is spelled *och-bi* and occurs with the date 9.0.3.9.18 (Fig. 4). Its actor is recorded as the Spearthrower-Shield person, whom

Schele and Freidel (1990) have proposed refers to the then-current king, K'awil-Chan or Stormy-Sky. The El Zapote example is spelled *och-ba* and occurs only 162 days later on 9.0.4.0.0. Finally, the example on the looted celt (Fig. 5) occurs on 9.0.16.5.9,⁴ 154 days after the date implied by the final date on Stela 31,



Fig. 4 Tikal St 31

9.0.15.15.15. Thus, we have a cluster of dates connected with this *ochba* event.



Fig. 5 Tikal St. 31

Stuart's identification of the *och* (fist sign) was based as its substitution into an *och bih*, "entered the road," expression for death on a Site Q panel. This identification has led many researchers to assume that the *och-bi* example on Stela 31 is the same and records a death. We think that the various spellings of this verb at Tikal, El Zapote, and the looted celt, two *och-ba-ah*, one *och-bi*, and one *och-ba*, points toward the spelling of a root that ends in *-b*. We even entertain the possibility that this pattern is evidence that the "fist" sign is a syllabic sign with a different value. The *och-ba* verb is followed by *ch'ay* and then a set of hard to read glyphs that should name the protagonist.

If we are correct in our analysis, El Zapote Stela 5 records the period ending 9.0.0.0.0, a stela setting 4.0.0 later, and a commemoration (or else recall) of Curl-Snout's death, which had occurred around 8.19.4.10.0. The question remains of why this Tikal lord would be remembered posthumously at El Zapote. The answer seems to appear on several other monuments at El Zapote. Stela 3, for example, has an incensario with the main sign of the Tikal emblem glyph sitting beside the figure's feet

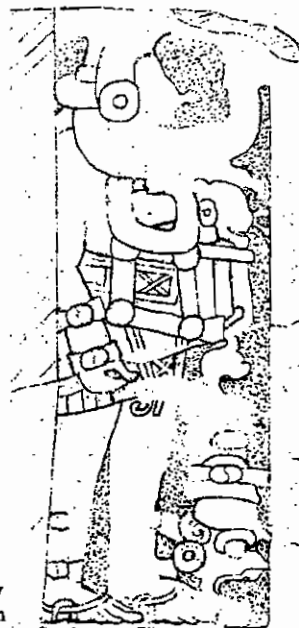


Fig. 6
El Zapote
Stela 3
drawing by
Ian Graham

4. The text on this celt begins with the date 5 Ahaw 13 Mak with G8 of the lords of the night. This or occurs with G8 on 9.6.1.13.9, but the name of the protagonist also occurs on the other celt of this pair. There the date is clear 8 Ahaw 13 Keh with the "end of 9

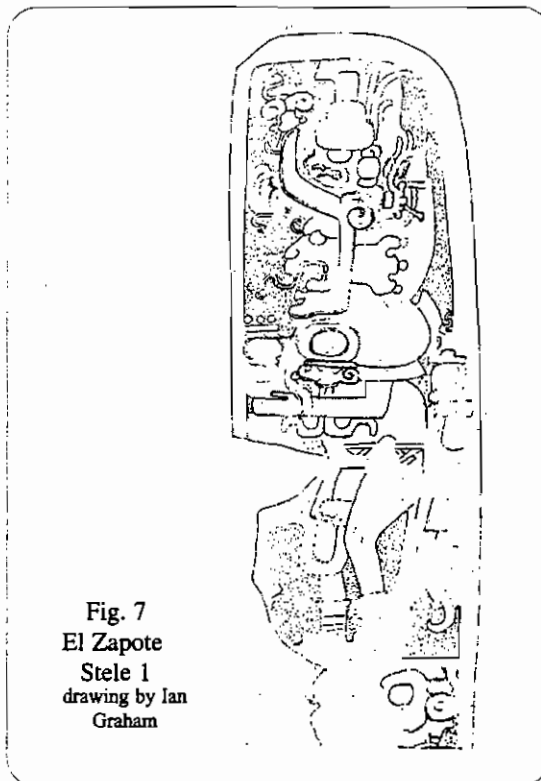
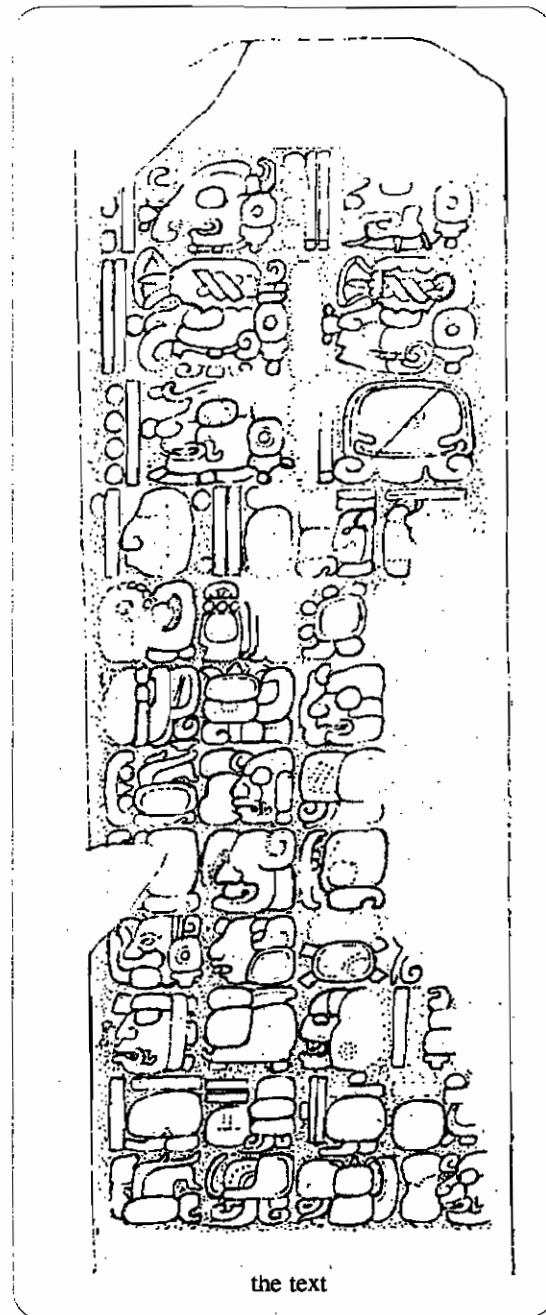


Fig. 7
El Zapote
Stele 1
drawing by Ian
Graham

(Fig. 6). Stela 1 (Fig. 7) is, however, the most important. It shows a portrait of a person wearing a *chak* costume on one side and a long text on the other.

The chronology of the text is difficult, and while we are not sure we have it exactly right, we believe we have it within a few days of what was intended. The initial series date (Fig. 8) is damaged by it has the following readable components: 8.19.10.5-9 5+ Muluk G4 12 ?????. These components yield only one possible placement--8.19.10.2.5 6 Muluk 12 K'ayab. The following clause appears to be a lunar series. The first may be Glyph D with an unreadable number, while the second is Glyph 3C with a form also used on Waxaktun Stela 22. And the next glyph seems to be Glyph A and the T617 introductory glyph. Since the lunar series for the proposed date wants a lunar age of 27 or 28D and 3C with the female head, we take it as support for our reconstruction. The event phrase is *tz'apah u te-tun*, "was erected, the tree-stone." A set of names follows until the head of an aged person appears and then there are an addition two glyphs which may be



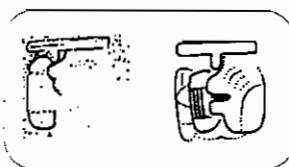
named. In fact all of the glyphs after the event phrase may be a name, or there may be two names joined by a relationship, or more likely, a subordination glyph.

The last two glyphs are the important ones. The first is a personified *k'inich* title preceded what we think is the same throne glyph we saw at D11 on Stela 5. Here the throne glyph has an ahaw title with it, naming the person in the text as a lord of the *k'inich* throne. We suspect the two stela refer to the same person, but even if they do not, they same to refer to the same toponym.

The next clause starts with a distance number of 10.5.5 that is related to the dedication of the stela as the base of the count. We tried adding the distance number, but the history makes far more sense if we subtract it. We would thus have:

8.19.10. 2. 9	6 Muluk	12 K'ayab
<u>10. 5. 5</u>	dn subtract	
8.18.19.15. 4	6 K'an	17 K'ank'in

The event for this earlier date is not clear, but we suspect it is either *chuk*, "capture," or *u chakteya*, which we believe may refer to war. There is a very similar glyph in final position on Yaxchilan Lintel 18. For us the most interesting glyph is found at the top of the next reading columns at D7. It has a T4 *na* sign prefixed to a *ko* sign and a now damaged head. This very unusual glyph appears to be the same as one at C6 on Waxaktun Stela 4. There the



context is clear. The glyph follows Smoking-Frog's name and a series of titles that includes Ma Chak-te.

The date on this monument is 8.18.0.0.0 and the protagonist is the conqueror of Waxaktun.

The other date that can be reconstructed with some possibility of success is the last one. Unfortunately Ian Graham's drawings shows uncertainty here. It is either 8.6.11 or 10.6.11. The text seems to show that it counts to a half-period on which a stela was set. That gives us two possibilities.

8.18.19.11. 9	9 Muluk	2 Sak
<u>10. 6. 11</u>		
8.19.10. 0. 0	9 Ahaw	3 Muwan

or

8.19. 1.11. 9	1 Muluk	12 Yax
<u>8. 6. 11</u>		
8.19.10. 0. 0	9 Ahaw	3 Muwan

Although we cannot determine which of these alternatives was meant, the final event is clearly the same as the first--the erection of the stela for the la-

huntun. We suspect we have a stela dedication rite that took place over a period of forty-nine days.

This leaves one fugitive distance number at C8. It appears to read 2.3 but there may have been a tun notation in the now-missing D9. The distance number required to stand between 8.18.19.15.4 6 K'an 17 K'ank'in and 8.18.19.11.9 9 Muluk 2 Sak is 3.15, while that between 9.18.19.15.4 and 8.19.1.11.9 is 1.14.5. Unfortunately neither of these fit the written text. So assuming that it is 2.3 and that it counted from the earlier date, we would have:

8.18.19.15. 4	6 K'an	17 K'ank'in
<u>3. 2</u>		
8.18.19.12. 2	9 Ik'	15 Sak

We are not satisfied that this chronology was intended, but until we can examine the original monument, we can't solve the problem.

This problem DN is followed by a destroyed area, then what appears to be a name, so that the verb had to be in the second half of D8. D9-D10 are not recoverable, but C11 looks like the *u kahiy* subordination or agency expression. D11 is lost, but C12 appears to be the spear-thrower shield title so prevalent at Tikal. We suggest, in fact, that this title refers to the war leader of Tikal and that the passages here record the conquest of El Zapote and its incorporation into the larger Tikal polity.

Thus, we surmise the following events from the Stela 1 text. It records the erection of a stela to celebrate 8.19.10.0.0, the day on which K'awil-Chan acceded to the Chak-te-ship at Tikal (Fahsen and Schele 1992 and Schele and Villeda 1992). The dedication event began on the period ending and appears to have culminated forty-nine days later on day of the initial series date. Two other events are recorded with one of the associated with a title included in Smoking-Frog's name at Waxaktun, and the other followed by an expression with what may be the spearthrower shield. These events are followed those on Stela 5, including another stela erection on 9.0.4.0.0 and the commemoration of what seems to be the death of Curl-Snout of Tikal.

Fahsen and Schele (1991) have proposed a series of event in the record of Stela 31 that relates to the history of these two El Zapote stela. The events we reconstructed interlock with the El Zapote history we have discussed here.

Chart of Tikal-Waxaktun-el Zapote Events

8.17.1.4.12	Tikal conquered Waxaktun (Tikal 31, BCM, Wax 5) the <i>ochbah</i> event of Jaguar-Paw (Tikal 31)
8.17.2.3.16	Curl-Snout entered the <i>ch'ok-te-na</i> as the heir (MT 35)
8.17.2.13.15	Curl-Snout dedicated a house called Wi-te-na under the authority of the Chak-te (Tik 31)
8.17.2.16.17	Curl-Snout acceded to the ahawship of Tikal under the authority of the Chak-te, Smoking-Frog (Tik 4)
8.17.18.17.2	a monument was dedicated at Tikal (Tik 31)
8.18.0.0.0	the one-k'atun ahaw Curl-Snout ended the tun at Tikal under the authority of Smoking-Frog (Tik 31, 18)
8.18.6.6.17	Smoking-Frog ended the k'atun at Waxaktun (Wax 4) someone (Smoking-Frog) died and was succeeded by the Huh-Chan- Mah K'inah (Curl-Snout).
8.18.10.0.0	the half-period ended by Curl-Snout
8.18.15.11.0	K'awil-Chan became the ahaw of Tikal
8.18.19.15.4	a war? event at El Zapote (Zap 1)
8.19.1.11.9	an event conducted under the authority of a spearthrower-shield person
8.19.4.10.0	(plus up to 9 days) Curl-Snout dies (Zap 5)
8.19.10.0.0	K'awil-Chan put on the war headdress of the Chak-te'. local lord dedicated El Zapote Stela 5
8.19.10.2.9	end of stela dedication ritual
9.0.0.0.0	the 9th bak'tun was ended at Tikal by K'awil-Chan (Tik 31)
9.0.4.0.0	the 9th bak'tun was ended at El Zapote (Zap 5) El Zapote 5 dedicated by the local lord

Some Implications

The identifications of some of the events at El Zapote stelae and all of the actors must remain tentative because of the eroded state of the texts, but some implications and data can be drawn from the pattern of the data. The earlier event on Stela 1 cannot be identified with certainty, but the title in the name of the actor is shared by only one other monument--Waxaktun Stela 4. This is a monument of Smoking-Frog, the Tikal lord who ruled Waxaktun and who carried the *chak-te* title. We think the presence of this title at El Zapote points to a similar kind of person there. However, if we are right in our interpretation of Tikal Stela 31, then Smoking-Frog would have been dead by the El Zapote event, and his successor, Curl-Snout would have been the Chak-te.

The next event occurred over a year later (if we have the chronology approximately correct. In this phrase, the verb is destroyed, but we learn that the

action took place under the authority of a person holding the spearthrower-shield title. Schele and Freidel (1990) have suggested that the spearthrower-shield title is an early version of the *tok'-pakal* symbol that was the Maya metaphor for war. If this identification is correct, and we believe it is, then we have the evidence of a war of conquest at El Zapote. The presence of Curl-Snout's name and possible death record on Stela 5 suggests it was the conquest of El Zapote by someone of Tikal under Curl-Snout's authority.

What evidence is there at Tikal that Curl-Snout held the spearthrower-owl-shield title? First of all, he is depicted on both sides of Stela 31 in the costume associated with this war emblem. Schele (1990) has suggested that the text with one of these portraits names Curl-Snout as the actor of a dedication event. His name is recorded as *u yahawte Ma Chakte Tikal ahaw*, "the treelord of the Great Chakte, lord of Tikal." On the other side, Curl-

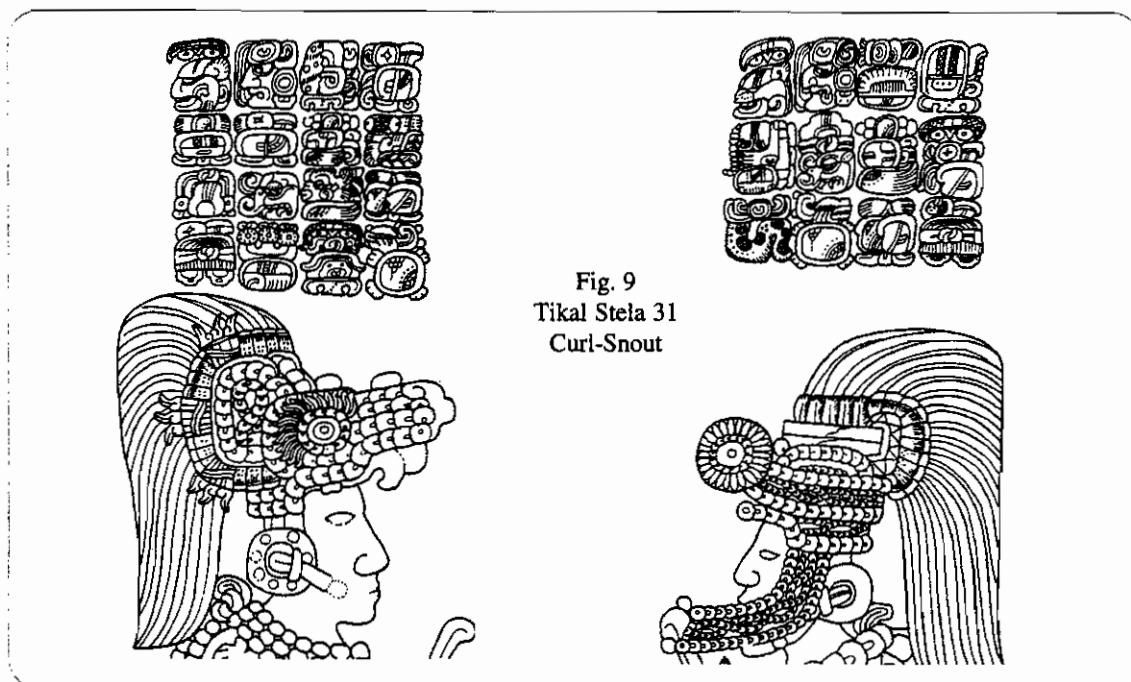


Fig. 9
Tikal Stela 31
Curl-Snout

Snout is call the yahaw of the object he dedicated on the other side, and his name includes the Chakte title. Apparently, the two portraits show him at different times in his life, when he was the ahaw ruling local Tikal and when he was the high king of greater Tikal.

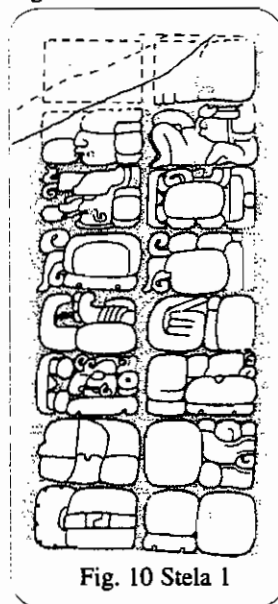


Fig. 10 Stela 1

This staggering of titles can also be associated in K'awil-Chan's monuments at Tikal. Stela 1, for example, has a text that refers to someone who was a *yahaw*, "the vassal of," someone named with a moon sign, the spearthrower, and the shield. The *ha* sign may be a phonetic complement,⁵ but the title is clearly the same as that on Stela 31. The next phrase identifies who the actor is. The verb is

"ended two tuns or k'atuns"⁶ and the actor is clearly K'awil-Chan. Most people have calculated the anniversary from the 8.19.10.0 accession date, but this causes a problem because it fall later than the 9.1.1.10.10 date in Burial 148, identified by Coggins (1976) as K'awil-Chan's death date. Schele (1992) offered a different solution by suggesting that the anniversary should be counted from the 8.19.15.11.0 date on which someone (we believe K'awil-Chan) was ahawed. That gives a date of 9.0.15.11.0 12 Ahaw 13 Pop for the anniversary. This is a full six years before the death date in the tomb. Thus, we have an event in which the protagonist is called "the vassal of the spearthrower-shield," where the protagonist is named in the next phrase as K'awil-Chan. We deduce that he was a subordinate lord before he became the high king.

Stela 28 also has a subordination phrase, but we cannot tell for who because of its damaged condition. However, we can deduce that Az2 is part of a name. The first half of Az3 is *yahaw*, "the vassal lord of." The second half has the *och* "fist", but the glyph is too badly eroded to tell whether it is the "west" glyph preceding Mah Chakte or if it is one

6. The glyph is a bit strange here, but the *na* suffix is used with the number 10, *lahun*, and here as the phonetic complement for *run*. We take the cycle to be k'atun because the bird head does not have the skeletal features of a tun bird or the hand over the lower jaw that characterizes the bak'tun bird.

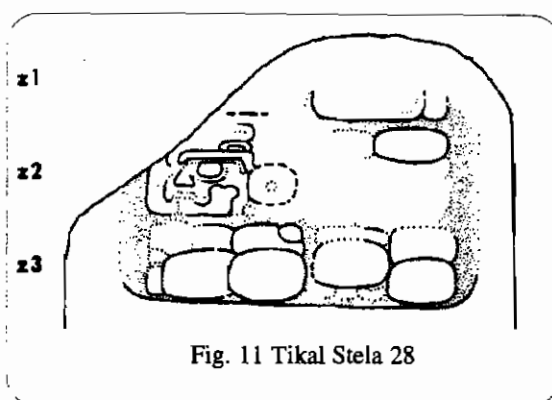


Fig. 11 Tikal Stela 28

of the *och-ba* glyph. In either case we again have an expression of subordination for a stela that seems to represent someone in the royal family. David Stuart pointed out to us the presence of Jaguar-Paw's name and that of the Skull fellow on Stela 39 in the feather fringe on the side of Stela 28. It may not have represented K'awil-Chan, but it surely represented another subordinate, probably from the royal family.

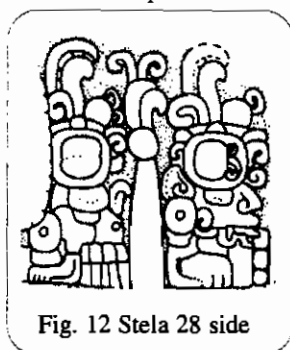


Fig. 12 Stela 28 side

Thus, we find that there is growing evidence from the Early Classic inscriptions of Tikal of subordination relationship between the lords of different lineages and the king, and between the king and other males in his own family. We believe there is good evidence that the heir occupied a lesser office while waiting to the highest office. Furthermore, at Tikal there is evidence the ruling king held the office of *chaktelel* that incorporated all of the conqueror areas, while the heir or other high ranked family member was appointed to the *ahawship* of the local area of the greater kingdom. These subdivisions may well have constituted the *tzuk* or partitions of the kingdom.

Peter Mathews (1985) first suggested that Waxaktun and Tikal had a significant encounter on 8.17.1.4.12. Schele and Freidel (1990) followed up on his ideas and evidence and based on the iconography and verbs used to describe the event suggested that there was a war that Tikal won. Inscriptions thereafter at Waxaktun repeatedly acknow-

ledge the importance of the date, and acknowledge that its administrators and its rulers come from Tikal. Even as late as 9.13.10.0.0 on Stela 14, a lord of Waxaktun acknowledges his descent from a man of Tikal.

Between thirty-eight and forty years later, it seems Tikal attacked another neighbor, this one to the south. Apparently, it won the contest and absorbed El Zapote into its control. We cannot tell how long or how effectively this marriage by force held, but Ixlu, a site fairly near El Zapote, used the Tikal emblem glyph during the Terminal Classic period, although we suspect that Ixlu, like Jimbal, had set itself up as an alternative Tikal. If El Zapote was part of the greater Tikal kingdom, then Curl-Snout extended it to the south as a conqueror who perhaps rivaled Jaguar-Paw. It also suggests that Tikal extended from Waxaktun in the north to the tip of Lake Peten Itza in the south during by the end of the ninth bak'tun. We do not yet have evidence concerning its east to west extension.

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