

Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture

No. 45

March 1993

A Painted Capstone at Becan, Campeche

by Peter Mathews

In February 1979, while making a brief visit to the ruins of Becan, Campeche, I saw a stone with inscription, so far as I know the only hieroglyphic text which survives from Becan.¹ The stone was found late in 1978 in a garbage chultun some distance to the northwest of the main group of ruins at Becan. It is now at the house of Juan Briceño, the caretaker of the ruins.

The stone measures 48.2 cm. by 48.9 cm. and is approximately 15 cm. thick. One of the large surfaces is coated with stucco, and it is on this stucco coating that the hieroglyphic inscription is painted (Figure 1). In view of the fact that the text is painted in a single column of glyphs (parts of three glyph blocks, A1-A3, survive), and in view of the fact that the column is in the center of the stone, it is most likely that this stone originally served as a capstone of a vault.

The inscription is somewhat worn, but most of the elements of the first two glyphs can still be seen. The first glyph, A1, is clearly "6 Men," and A2a is "3 Kayab." Glyphs A2b and A3 are not sufficiently preserved to enable complete identification, although A2b begins with T74, *ma*, as superfix.

There are several Long Count possibilities for the day 6 Men 3 Kayab:

- a) 9.11.16.8.15
- b) 9.14.3.3.15
- c) 9.17.1.16.15
- d) 9.19.14.11.15
- e) 10.2.7.6.15

For reasons of style, possibility (a) is almost certainly too early to have been the contemporaneous

* The Texas Notes are an running series of commentaries and small reports on Precolumbian art, writing, and culture published for the purpose of quick, limited distribution among interested scholars and students working in the field. The series is published by CHAAAC, the Center of the History and Art of Ancient American Culture of the Art Department of the University of Texas at Austin. Funds for reproduction and distribution of complementary copies are provided by the John D. Murchison Professorship in Art, currently held by Linda Schele. Copyright is held by the authors and the CHAAAC and may be copied for scholarly purposes without further permission. Submissions will be accepted from contributors working in all disciplines and concerning any Precolumbian cultural tradition or its descendant traditions. Contributions may be submitted by anyone working in the field, but they may not exceed ten pages, including references. Any of the major word processors may be used, but final text must be submitted in the IBM format, although any IBM disk size is acceptable. All illustrations must be provided at the finished scale in either line or stippled drawings suitable for scanning. The publisher takes no responsibility for copy editing and the authors must clear all copyright permissions before submission of a manuscript. The editor reserves the right to reject submissions if they are deemed inappropriate or incorrectly prepared. Style conventions should follow Chicago Style B and text should be single column and formatted to conform with the paragraph, sub-titling, and other features of this note. Ventura Desktop Publisher will be used to format the text into this layout, which will then be printed on a Hewlett-Packard Laserjet III. A master copy of the recent notes will be put on file at Kinko's at the beginning of each semester and can be ordered from Kinko's Copies, 2901-C Medical Arts St., Austin, Texas 78705 (512-476-3242; FAX 512-476-2371).

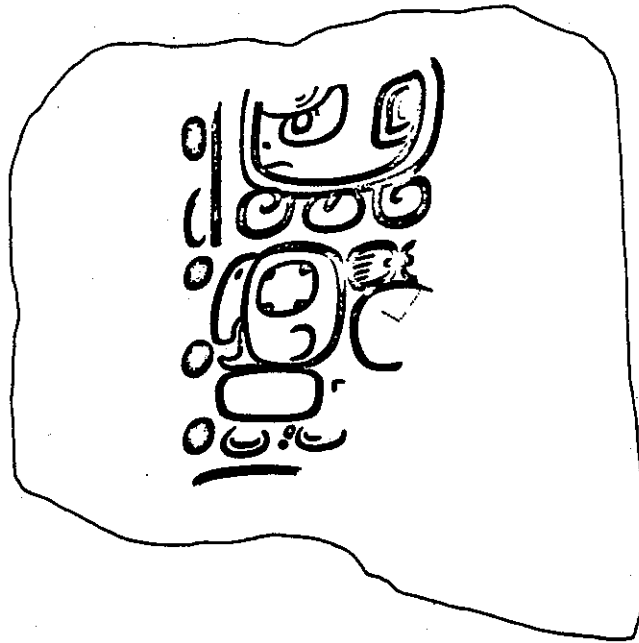


Figure 1. The Painted Capstone at Becan.
Drawing by Peter Mathews.

date of this inscription. Possibilities (d) and (e) are too late, again for reasons of style. We are left with (b) and (c) as the best possibilities for this date, with little to choose between them.

Notes

1. This essay was originally distributed in manuscript form as *Maya Glyph Notes*, No. 3 in March 1979. We here make it more widely available — Khristaan D. Villela, editor.