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A War at Palenque During the Reign of Ah-K'an

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In 1975, Floyd Lounsbury (in course at Yale) presented the first stage of his analysis of the panels of the Temple of Inscriptions. In this analysis, he demonstrated the discourse formula for the k'atun histories that occupy first two and one third panels. Over the years since his original insight, he along with the team from the Dumbarton Oaks mini-conferences and participants in the Texas workshops have advanced our understanding of the contents of these k'atun histories to a level none of us anticipated would be possible. The passage appearing at M6-M11 (Fig. 1) on the east panel had eluded this process until very recently, but new decipherments have revealed that this passage describes a war that happened at Palenque during the k'atun that ended on 9.9.0.0.0.

The sentence begins at M6-N6 with a distance number of 6 k'ins, 14 winal, which is to be counted from the backgrounded date 13 Ahaw 18

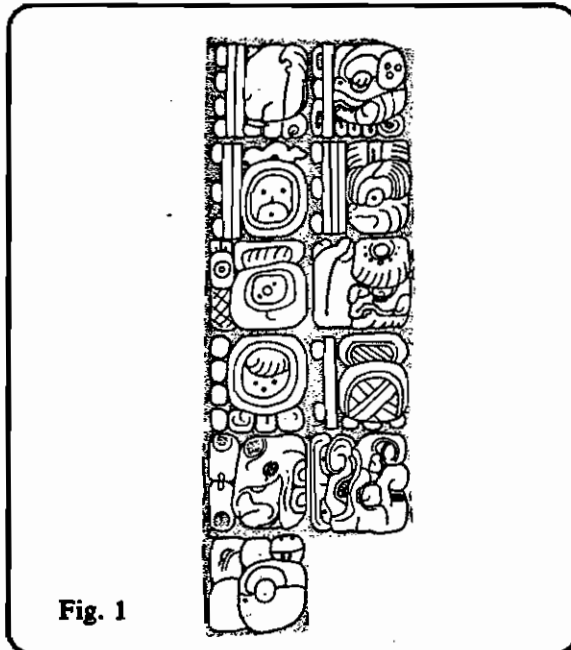


Fig. 1

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Mak or 9.8.17.9.0 (M7-N7). The verb occurs at M8-N8 in the phonetic spelling *ch'a-ka-h(a)*, followed by the subject *te'-nab* and the date of this event 4 Ix 1 Wo, or 9.8.17.15.14. The verb is simply the phonetic rendering of the "axe verb," first deciphered by Jorge Orejel (1990) and Grube (personal communication, 1989). In Yukatek, *ch'ak* is glossed as "to cut with a blow, with an ax, or with another instrument" while *ch'akah pol* is "to decapitate" (Barrera Vásquez 1980:122). In the Classic inscriptions, when its patient is a person, as in the Quirigua references to 18-Rabbit of Copan or the self-decapitating God A images on pot, *ch'ak* is "to decapitate."

There are several example where "decapitate" or "cut with a blow" does not fit the context so well. On Tortuguero Monument 6 (C1-D1), for example, the patient of axe-verb is a location (Fig. 2). Perhaps the intended meaning was "cut with a blow," it seems for likely to us that this example refers to Cholan entries meaning "to damage."

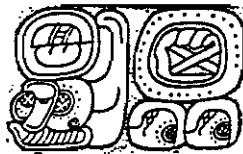


Fig. 2

Aulie and Aulie (1978:56) gloss *ch'ak* as "mal-decir," while Kaufman and Norman (1984:119) reconstruct proto-Cholan **ch'aak* as "lastimar/injure." In the *ch'akah* phrase in the Temple of Inscriptions text, the patient is clearly a place, the *te'nab*, identified by Stuart and Houston (1991) as a place name. Schele and Grube (1990) identified the *nab* part of the place name as "plaza" and the place as the large flat area running from the Group of the Cross to the plaza in front of the Temple of Inscriptions. We take the second meaning of *ch'ak* as the appropriate one and suggest that the passage records that the *te-nab* area of Palenque "was damaged."

The phrase naming the person responsible for this damage to the sacred precinct of Palenque is named after the date. *U kahi*, a verb now generally agreed to record agency with some like "his doing," precedes the name. The name itself has eluded a reading until several new texts appeared to give us a clue to the phonetic values of the signs. The first sign is of course *u*, which can be entirely phonetic or the third person pronoun. The second sign is a scroll that appears on a newly found stair at Dos Pilas in Glyph F as a substitute for *na*. Schele, Grube, Houston, Stuart, and others have all independently noticed the substitution and found it in other contexts as well. The *na* value for this sign is quite productive.

The last sign is an open-mouthed monster who appears to have the *na* sign emerging from its mouth. This same open-mouthed monster is prominent in one of the form of Glyph X in the lunar series, but an example in a primary standard sequence (Fig. 3) which has this same head as the



Fig. 3

wa in *kakaw*. The assignment of this last value is still very tentative, but if it proves to be productive, then the name is U-na-wa.

The last glyph in the name phrase is very badly eroded, but a careful examination of Maudslay's photograph and two by two photographs of the TI panels made by Merle Robertson in 1974. We are sure that the first sign is *pi* and we think the second sign is very likely to be a turtle head although the identification is not as secure. If it is, then we have a glyph reading *Pia ahaw*. Schele first became aware of *Pia ahaw* is drawings done of a new stucco panel found at Tonina and thereafter at noticed that *Pia* also showed up repeatedly

in the inscriptions of Pomona as a place name. David Stuart and Stephen Houston (1991) and Nikolai Grube (personal communication, 1991) noticed the same usage at Pomona, but in addition Nikolai noticed that one of the captives on the east substructure of House C was also an ahaw of Pia.¹

What then is going on in this TI passage. We think that it records an attack on Palenque by a lord of Pia, which was associated in some way with the kingdom of Pomona. In this attack, the central plaza area of Palenque was damaged. We thought about why would Pakal have featured what appears to have been a defeat in the historical recall of his dynasty when he could have easily excised it from the public records. The answer seems to be on the west panel of the TI and on the Hieroglyphic Stairs of House C. Both of these texts record a battle and a visit by Shield-Skull (Nun Bak Chak) of Tikal. The occasion for the visit was the dedication of House C for which the later lord of Pia was sacrificed. The reason for his visit was not recorded in the inscriptions of either Tikal or Palenque, but it seems significant that he was captured and killed at Dos Pilas exactly one k'atun after this visit (9.11.6.16.17 for the visit and 9.12.6.16.17 for his downfall).

Nikolai Grube² has shown that Altar 21 of Caracol's records first an attack by Tikal lords on Caracol as well as their own later victories. Flint-Sky-God K at Dos Pilas used the same device, recording first an aggression by an enemy and then their later defeat almost as if the victor is rationalizing his own aggression by blaming it on a previous act of his enemy. This is a familiar pattern even in our own world, but we suspect, as

does Nikolai Grube, that the pattern was a normal one in the ancient Maya world. Tit for tat mentality may have contributed to the prevalence of war in the Classic period.

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1. In a recent conversation with Stephen Houston, he commented that he and David were now reading this location Pipia, because the *pi* sign often has two dots attached to it. Khris Villela had made the same observation and had me a note on it in mid-September, 1991. The place then may have been Pipia instead of Pia.

2. Nikolai first presented this interpretation at the 1990 Symposium on Tikal at the Workshop on Hieroglyphic Writing at Texas.