

MYTHOLOGICAL EMBLEM GLYPHS OF ANCIENT MAYA KINGS

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Abstract

Heinrich Berlin's identification of Emblem Glyphs in 1958 has rightly been hailed as one of the major breakthroughs in the decipherment of ancient Maya writing. Although their exact function and meaning was unclear at the time, these are now recognized to serve as exalted regal titles that incorporate toponyms, or place names. However, what interests me here is not so much the geo-political importance of Emblem Glyphs, but the toponyms that are used to form these. Many of the toponyms that are the basis of Emblem Glyphs can now be read and can be matched up with corresponding places. In pairing off the Emblem Glyphs with their earthly referents, one is left with a peculiar group of toponyms that are clearly otherworldly. It is these supernatural Emblem Glyphs that I would like to discuss here and the role they played in legitimizing the monarchs that bore these, as titles that hark back to great antiquity in deep mythic time. The importance of these place names stems from the pivotal mythological events that are said to have transpired there, which sheds light not only on the origin of these titles, but also on the permanence and legacy of emic conceptions of deep-time.

Resumen

La identificación de los glifos emblema efectuada por Heinrich Berlin en 1958 ha sido justamente aclamada como uno de los mayores progresos en el desciframiento de la escritura maya. A pesar de que en aquel entonces su función y significado exacto no eran del todo claros, se ha reconocido que estos funcionaron como títulos reales exaltados que incorporaron topónimos o nombres de lugares. Sin embargo, lo que me interesa aquí no es tanto la importancia geopolítica de los glifos emblema, sino los topónimos que se emplearon para formarlos. Muchos de los topónimos que son la base de los glifos emblema, ahora pueden ser leídos y ser asignados a sus lugares correspondientes. Al asociar los glifos emblema con sus referentes terrenales, queda un grupo peculiar de topónimos que claramente refieren un mundo no terrenal. Estos glifos emblema sobrenaturales son los que deseo discutir aquí, así como el papel que desempeñaron en la legitimación de los monarcas que los portaban, ya que estos títulos se remontaban a una gran antigüedad en el profundo tiempo mítico. La importancia de estos nombres de lugares proviene de los eventos mitológicos fundamentales que se dice han transcurrido ahí, lo que arroja luz no sólo sobre el origen de estos títulos, sino también sobre la permanencia y el legado de concepciones émicas del tiempo profundo.

INTRODUCTION

In light of the growing attention that is increasingly given the year 2012 in the media, the time seems ripe to tackle the ancient Maya conception of time, or at least to attempt to address some aspects of this fascinating topic. Here, I have decided to focus not so much on calendrical statements and records of important chronological turning points as has been given precedence by other scholars, but

instead on mythic “deep-time”. In the study of myths an essential concept is that of “deep-time” as formulated among others by folklorist John Bierhorst (1985, 1988, 1990), the time during which the great cosmogonic events are set. Crucially important origin myths, that serve to explain the advent of features of the natural world as well as the customs, traditions and ritual practices of human societies, are typically said to take place within this deep-time, the time before the separation of night and day, earth and sky, animals and humans. The explanatory power of such origin myths rests in the claims that customs were established by supernatural or divine beings and mythic heroes (e.g. Helmke 2010; Beliaev 2011). Traditions that dictate the actions and inherent social norms of the everyday are thereby immutably rooted directly into mythic deep-time. What is significant is the way in which historical monarchs drew on elements from the supernatural realm to substantiate their prerogatives by presenting themselves as direct descendants, or replicating the deeds of deities and mythic heroes (e.g. Kowalski and Fash 1991; Stuart 2005: 118; Zender 2004a: 4-5). It is precisely these processes, wherein themes, actors and events are dredged from the mythic past and are ferried to the shores of the historical present that reveal the intent and purpose behind such parallelism and restructuration. In addition to causality and agency, by likening themselves to mythic predecessors, the actions of kings reveal much as to the way in which deep-time was perceived and conceived.

These processes constitute an “eternal return”, to use the words of Mircea Eliade (1971), which describe the ability to return to mythic time and for mythic events to become contemporary to their narration. As astutely remarked by Bierhorst (1988: 13): “One of the mysteries associated with mythology is the belief that powerful forces operative during the ancient time may be felt again in the present, especially at annual feasts or during important ceremonies”. As such, myths and their content are as real and tangible in the distant past as they are in the narrative present, due to their ability to materialize and manifest themselves in the storyteller’s words, allowing practitioners to actively engage in the events narrated. Another feature emphasized by various scholars is the relationship between knowledge and power, so that knowledge of the “origin of an object, an animal, a plant, and so on is equivalent to acquiring a magical power over them” (Eliade 1963: 15). The same principles are at play in Mesoamerican religion and ritual practices, where to know the name of a personified disease provides magical curative powers to the medical practitioner (see Roys 1965; Arzápalo Marín 1987; Helmke and Nielsen 2009). In much the same way, knowledge of the etiology of a myth, and the ability to recount it, empowers those who possess the wisdom.

The shreds of myths the ancient Maya preserved in the imagery and texts of the Classic period provide us with vitally important insights into such miraculous tales. Nevertheless, due to pictorial conventions and narrative style, much is equally suppressed, omitted, or simply lacking, since the sources were designed for persons enculturated into Classic Maya culture and world-view (Martin 2006: 57-59). The emic viewer or reader would have provided the remainder of myth that is only synoptically encapsulated in graphic form, or crystallized into a single figurative vignette. In some cases just citing the name of a locality serves to call forth a whole series of events that culminated at this place – just think of the Garden of Eden, Troy, Golgotha, or Camelot not to mention Agincourt, Waterloo, and Hiroshima. Having thus set the stage, I go on to discuss key supernatural toponyms, and again I argue that the place names suffice to evoke the mythic events that transpired there in the deep-past. What is all the more remarkable is that these place names were incorporated into the titles of Classic Maya kings, known as Emblem Glyphs, who evidently strove to style themselves as divine lords of these supernatural localities. I go on to propose that the titular use of the toponyms exemplifies the echoing of mythic time in the historical present, and attempt to reconstruct in broad strokes the mythic events tied to these supernatural toponyms.

EMBLEM GLYPHS

Before going on to present and discuss the mythological toponyms under scrutiny, a review of Emblem Glyphs is in order. The identification of Emblem Glyphs by Heinrich Berlin in 1958, has rightly been hailed as one of the major breakthroughs in the decipherment of ancient Maya writing. At the time Berlin designated these as “Emblem Glyphs”, precisely “because they seemed to be emblematic, in some ways, of the site in which they predominantly occurred. Berlin left open, however, the question of their precise significance, i.e., whether Emblem Glyphs represent the name of the city itself, or of the patron deity or ruling dynasty of the city” (Mathews 1991a: 22). Later, without toponyms forthcoming, Peter Mathews (1991a: 25) in his seminal review of Emblem Glyphs was left to conclude that “If Emblem Glyphs do not include references to the individual sites or polities, then there seems to be no such reference in the Maya inscriptions”. It was this rationale that justified using Emblem Glyphs (EGs) as the basis for reconstructing the geographic distribution and extent of peer-polity city-states (Mathews 1991a; see also Marcus 1976; Freidel 1986). The discovery of toponyms proper had to wait three more years until the publication of *Classic Maya Place Names* by David Stuart and Stephen Houston (1994). Stuart and Houston also conclusively demonstrated that many if not most EGs used as their main sign the principal toponym of a site and were also the first to decisively identify supernatural place names in the corpus. The simple addition of the logogram read *ajaw*, or ‘king’ to a toponym thus formed what have been termed partial or “problematic Emblem Glyphs” (Houston 1986; see also Mathews 1991a: 24; Grube 2005: 87, 97, 98). In contrast a complete EG could always be expected to carry the qualifier *k’uhul*, lit. ‘godly’ ~ ‘divine’, although we now know that the Maya first developed this feature in the latter half of the Early Classic.

Although it has been clear from the onset, EGs serve primarily as exalted titles for the most prominent members of the royal court, and despite this function tend to be equated with place precisely because in most cases the holders of such titles remained at the site where it was used (Grube and Martin 1998; Grube 2000: 549-550; Martin and Grube 2000: 17-19; Martin 2004a). Even though the variable component of EGs is usually toponymic, in all cases, these served as titular referents to monarchs of particular royal courts, not sites or toponyms *per se*. Supporting this view is the *Mutu’l* EG that was divided between Tikal and Dos Pilas (Houston 1993: 97-101; Houston and Mathews 1985: 3-9; Martin and Grube 2000: 42, 55, 56-57), as well as the *Baake’l* emblem shared between Palenque, Tortuguero and Comalcalco (Gronemeyer 2009; Martin 2004a; Martin and Grube 2000: 165, 2008: 232; Zender 2001). These illustrative cases demonstrate that EGs were liable to geographic dispersal when dynasties fissioned as in the case of Tikal and Dos Pilas, or as ruling dynasties expanded their influences and/or territories as in the case of Tortuguero’s domination of Comalcalco. This conclusion has recently been furthered by the identification that the *Kaanu’l* or “Snake Head” emblem, which was originally used at Dzibanche during the Early Classic, but came to be used at Calakmul in the Late Classic, superseded a “Stone Bat” emblem that was used locally at the site during the Early Classic (Martin 2005: Figs. 1 and 6; Martin and Grube 2008: 231; Velásquez García 2008a, 2008b). Similarly, the “Split Sky” emblem found at Yaxchilan, El Zotz and possibly Uaxactun are now seen as the product

¹ Although the reading of the Tikal-Dos Pilas emblem glyph has been offered by David Stuart more than a decade ago (Stuart 2000a) and has been widely accepted by the epigraphic community, the logographic value of T569 as **MUT** has recently been called into question. For one, Marc Zender (pers. comm. 2010) has remarked that the reference in the Cordemex dictionary of Yukatek that was used to bolster the reading is erroneous. For another, Dmitri Beliaev (pers. comm. 2011) has proposed that a fully phonetic rendition is in fact represented on Tikal Stela 31. That example records **K’UH-[²ku-la]AJAW** to be read *k’uhul kuku’l ajaw*, incorporating the toponym *kuku’l*.

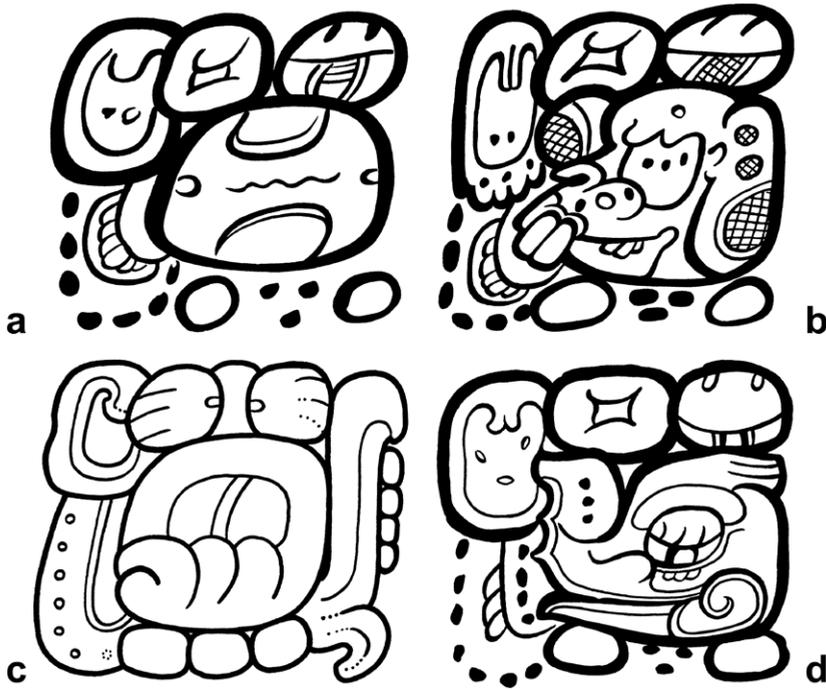


Fig. 1. Emblem Glyphs of Palenque. The *Baake'l* emblem: a) geometric form, Temple 21, bench, F7, and b) head-variant form, Temple 21, bench, X1. The *Matwiil* emblem: c) geometric form, Temple of the Foliated Cross, central panel, C11 and d) head-variant form, Temple 19, bench, south side, N2 (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

of historical connections between closely related dynasties, each claiming the prerogatives to the title (Houston 2008: 1-4). The sharing of EGs between distant sites clearly negates whatever connotations of “place” that these may have accrued over the course of their use at a particular site and conclusively demonstrates that these titles did not serve as toponymic references *per se*.

Consequently, it is clear that although toponyms are incorporated into EGs, these functioned primarily as exalted royal titles. In theory each EG represents the same exact title and thus ancient Maya kings who bore these titles could claim to be at least nominally equal in rank and status. It is precisely on this emic basis that it makes sense to produce maps of the Maya area in which sites associated with distinct EGs can be seen as capitals of city-state territories under the administration of equally-distinct royal courts, as this is the view of political realms that was recorded glyphically by the ancient Maya themselves (see Mathews 1991). However, what interests me here is not so much the political geography of EGs, but the toponyms that are used to form these. Many of the toponyms that are the basis of EGs can now be read and have been matched up with corresponding places. It should be cautioned, however, that toponyms are scalar, referring to anything from prominent physiographic features in the landscape to larger territorial expanses, down to singular buildings (see Helmke and Nielsen in press; Tokovinine 2008; Zender 2005a). In pairing off the toponyms of EGs with their earthly referents, one is left with a peculiar group of toponyms that are seemingly otherworldly. It is these supernatural EGs that I would like to discuss here and the role they played in legitimizing the monarchs that bore these, since these titles hark back to great antiquity in deep mythic time. In no

way does this study aim to be exhaustive or otherwise comprehensive, instead I will focus on a highly illustrative set of paired EGs found in the texts of Palenque and Yaxchilan, which account for four of the ten EGs originally identified by Berlin. As noted by Alexandre Tokovinine (2008: 199-200, 212), one of the features shared by these four EGs is that the presumed toponyms that appear at their heart are never actually used to refer to earthly locales where historical events are said to have transpired. However, in the few rare cases wherein these are present in historic passages – in the context of toponyms – these appear to provide the names of the kingdoms as a whole, not the toponym of a particular place (see Gronemeyer 2004: 78-79; Martin 2003: 45, 46, 2004b: 2-3; Martin and Grube 2008: 170; Tokovinine 2008: 136, 195, 197, 199-200).

PALENQUE: *BAAKE’L* AND *MATWIIL*

As initially identified by Berlin the most common EG of Palenque (P1b) is formed on the basis of the geometric logogram **BAK**, usually functioning literally as the term *baak* ‘bone’ and by extension ‘captive’ (Fox and Justeson 1984: 42; Schele 1980: 156-158; Schele and Miller 1986: 210; Stuart 1985: 98) (Figure 1a). Alternatively, the EG can also be rendered in its head-variant form (P1a) wherein the main sign represents a zoomorphic skull with pronounced canines and an elongated appendage or “ear” marked with darkened circles (Figure 1b).² The majority of examples of the geometric form of the EG are subfixed by the syllabogram **la**, whereas the head-variant examples are split nearly evenly between those that are accompanied by **la** and those that are not (Table 1). The final syllabogram **la** appears to provide a *-VI* suffix, in which the identity of the vowel remains the subject of debate, although *-e’l* seems likely, based on available evidence.³ In full, the *k’uhul baake’l ajaw*, or ‘godly *Baake’l* king’ title was borne by historic rulers of Palenque and Tortuguero, but from approximately AD 709 onwards was also used by Comalcalco rulers, after the conquest of the site at the hands of Tortuguero’s *Bahlam Ajaw* (some sixty years before), thereby eclipsing the use of the local emblem, *Joy-kan* (see Gronemeyer 2009; Martin and Grube 2000: 165; Zender 2001).

As is now well known, the kings of Palenque, at times, do not carry the *Baake’l* title, but another EG altogether, which Berlin designated as P2 (Berlin 1958: 117). This EG, which accounts for a fourth of all examples (Table 1), is also found in what can be called geometric and head-variant forms, wherein the logographic main sign represents the head of a bird with a beak delineated by serrated teeth (Figure 1d). In the few rare instances wherein the head-variant is rendered geometrically, which is to say syllabically, it is written **ma-ta-wi-la**, or more simply as **ma-ta**, targeting the reading *matwiil* (Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.: 19; Stuart 2000b: 7, n. 3; 2005: 21-22) (Figure 1c). Although the identity of this avian figure has been the source of conjecture for some time, David Stuart has shown through

² However, as suggested by Alfonso Lacadena and Søren Wichmann (n.d.: 28) the **BAK** logogram, in geometric or head-variant form may well function according to the rebus principle to cue the word *bahk* ‘cormorant’.

³ Some have suggested that the suffix involves the vowel [a], cuing an abstractive *-al* suffix. Others prefer to reconstruct the missing vowel with [i], forming the suffix *-iil* that qualifies a toponym as a place where there is an abundance of something, along much the same lines as the toponymic suffix *-tlān* in Nawatl (see Launey 1992: 281-282; Lacadena & Wichmann n.d.: 27-28). Nevertheless, the example of this toponym rendered on K1256 provides the syllabogram **le** instead of the otherwise typical **la**. Considering the orthographic reforms spurred by the phonological shift from glottalized to long vowel and from long to short vowels (see Lacadena & Wichmann 2004: 115-116, Table 6.4), it stands to reason that [e] is the vowel of the suffix with *-e’l* > *-eel* > *-el* during the course of the Late Classic (Zender 2006; Helmke & Nielsen 2009: 67, n. 16). Finally, the rare spelling **BAK-ke-la** found on Pendant 15B from Comalcalco (Zender 2004b: 259-260, Fig. 75) conclusively provides the otherwise omitted [e] making the reconstruction of the *-e’l* ~ *-eel* suffix in other contexts highly plausible.

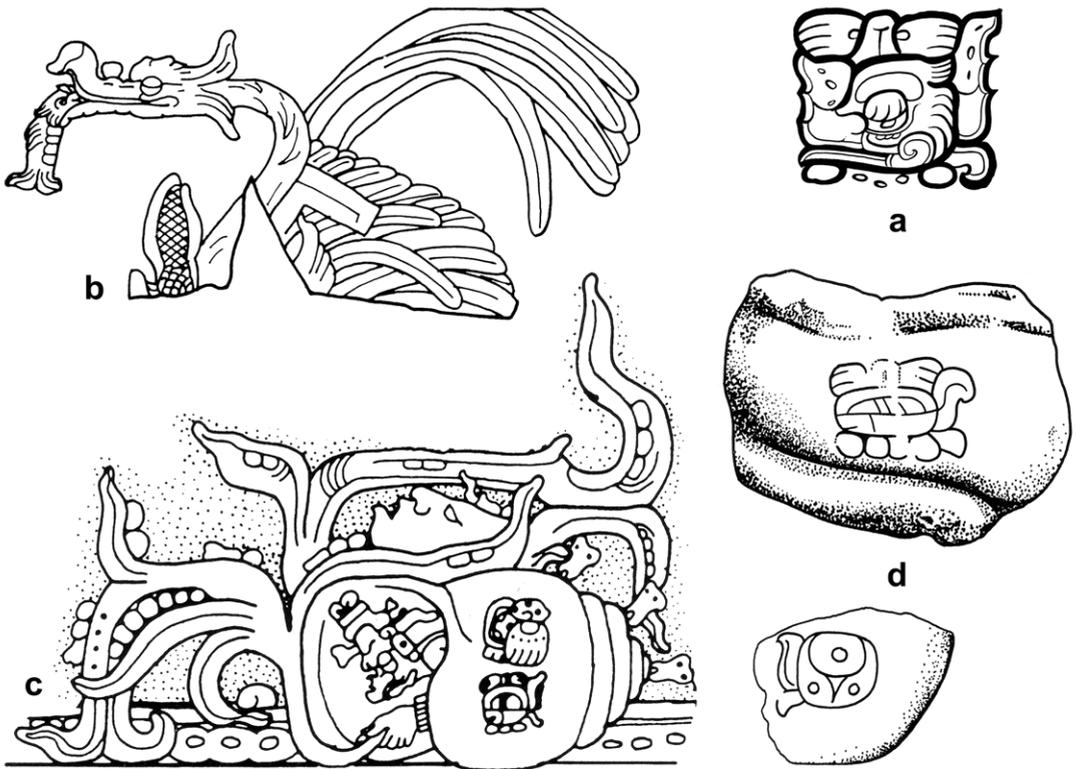


Fig. 2. The *Matwiil* of mythology in imagery and text, as place as an aquatic place where cormorants abound; a) the *Matwiil* toponym, Temple 19, bench, south side, J2 (drawing by Christophe Helmke); b) comparison to a waterfowl headdress, Temple of the Foliated Cross, south panel (drawing by Linda Schele); c) detail of the central panel, Temple of the Foliated Cross (drawing by Linda Schele); d) fragmentary stucco shells bearing the label *Matwiil* (drawings by David Stuart).

substitution sets in nominal contexts that it functions logographically as **MAT**, and has convincingly argued that this refers to a type of waterfowl such as cormorant, based on Chontal *mat* and cognate Yukatek *mach* (Stuart 2000b: 7, n. 3; 2005: 21-22; see Mathews 1991b: 65, Fig. 57.1c-d) (see Figure 2b). Again the head-variants of **MAT** are split nearly equally between those that are paired off with a *la* suffix, versus those written without it (Table 1). Outside of EGs exceptional examples spell the whole compound as **ma-MAT-wi-la** (Stuart 2000b: 7, n. 3; 2005: 22, 79, 193) (Figure 2a), and as such it seems clear that the final *la* suffix in these instances helps to spell a toponymic *-iil* suffix (see Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.: 15-19).

Many questions surround the use of this alternate *Matwiil* title that appears to substitute for the otherwise common *Baake'l* title. When and under what particular circumstances did the kings of Palenque carry the *Matwiil* title? Are there significant patterns governing the use of this title? While the patterning is not entirely evident, there are some interesting trends in terms of when this title appears in Palenque's texts and to which ruler it is associated with. Throughout we have to be attentive to the distinction between retrospective and contemporary accounts since both inherently provide differing perspectives and records of history (see Velázquez García 2011; Boot 2011).

Starting at the beginning by delving into the remote past, we find that *Matwiil* names the place where each of the Triad gods were born, or said ‘to touch the earth’ (*pas kab*), to use the emic expression, and where the Triad Progenitor was invested into the office of kingship (Stuart and Houston 1994: 75-77). As has been recognized by Stuart, the Temple of the Foliated Cross is an architectural emulation of *Matwiil* and the large stucco sea shells that once adorned this structure are prominently inscribed with the toponym *Matwiil* (see Schele and Mathews 1979: nos. 305-306; Stuart 2005: 79, 169; 2006: 94-95) (Figure 2c-d). These shells mark the surface of the watery underworld and the maize that blossoms from these reveal that *Matwiil* was a place associated with the divine emergence of this indispensable crop (Schele and Miller 1986: 47; Stuart 2005: 169, 2006: 94). As an aquatic realm, where waterfowl are said to abound, *Matwiil* resonates deeply with the Nawaatl toponym *Aztlān*⁴, the mythic place of origin of the Aztec. As cogently summarized by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube (2008: 159) the Triad Progenitor was born in 3132 BC just seven years before to the advent of the current creation, and at the extraordinary age of 761, gave birth to each of the Triad gods over the course of 18 days in 2360 BC. The next significant episode is the Progenitor’s accession in 2325 BC, an event that is described to be the ‘first seating into kingship’ (*unahtal chumwaaniiy ajaw*). This passage essentially serves as the local origin myth, setting the stage for all ensuing royal accessions and explaining the advent of this pivotal and regal rite of passage. Upon his investiture the Triad Progenitor was styled with a complete EG attributing him the title of *k’uhul matwiil ajaw* or ‘godly *Matwiil* king’ (Figure 3a). The Triad Progenitor has the distinction of being the only ruler to carry the *Matwiil* EG in exclusivity and evidently later kings attempted to liken themselves to this mythological founder when they bore the *Matwiil* EG, the title of their primordial homologue. The ruler that serves to bridge the mythic past with the historical dynasty of the Classic period is a figure named *Ukokan Kan ~ Chan*, whom we are told was born in 993 BC and acceded to the throne some twenty-six years later (Mathews 1991b: 120; Schele and Mathews 1993: 32-33; Stuart 2006: 113, 124-125). Remarkably this ruler is attributed the *Matwiil* EG at his birth, but gained the *Baake’l* EG on his accession⁵ (Figure 3b). This shift is far from coincidental and marks the transition between the mythic deep-past associated with the gods, and the subsequent dynasties of mortal kings. The pattern is maintained since the semi-mythic king known as Casper I retrospectively carries the *Baake’l* EG in the text of Temple 21 on the occasion of a house dedication ritual in 252 BC. The earliest contemporary mention to his Early Classic namesake Casper II, a name-tag on a fine travertine bowl, equally marks him as the bearer of the *Baake’l* title.

Although sampling may be at fault here, during the two and a half centuries separating the accession of Casper II from that of *K’inich Kan Bahlam* II in AD 684, all of Palenque’s kings carried the *Baake’l* title in exclusivity. It is only during the reign of *Kan Bahlam* (AD 684-702) that we first see the *Matwiil* title attributed to mortal kings. His father, the prodigious *K’inich Janaab Pakal* I (AD 615-683) does carry the *Matwiil* title as many as ten times, but upon closer scrutiny it becomes clear that he did not bear the title during his own lifetime. Instead this title was retrospectively applied in

⁴ Although some controversy surrounds the correct etymology of the toponym <*Aztlān*>, it can be analysed as *astā-tlān* ‘(where) heron-abound’, and it is according to this interpretation that *Matwiil* dovetails coherently with the Aztec toponym.

⁵ In the text of the Temple of the Cross that relates the accession of *Ukokan Kan ~ Chan*, the *Baake’l* EG is written **K’UH-BAK-a-AJAW**, where the vocalic sign **a** (T12) appears to substitute for the otherwise common **-la**. There is no coherent explanation for this otherwise unique spelling, but I wonder if the vocalic sign does not serve to spell the toponymic suffix *-a?*, an allomorph of *-ha?* (see Zender 2005). Other instances are known wherein the toponymic suffixes are substituted, such as *ik’-iil* and *ik’-a?* both referring to Motul de San José, and *uxwitz-a?* vs. *uxwitz-nal* the toponym of Caracol. These shifts tend to reflect temporal differences and if this is the correct interpretation, would imply that the original toponym was *baak-a?* only to be replaced by *baak-e’l* at a subsequent point in time.

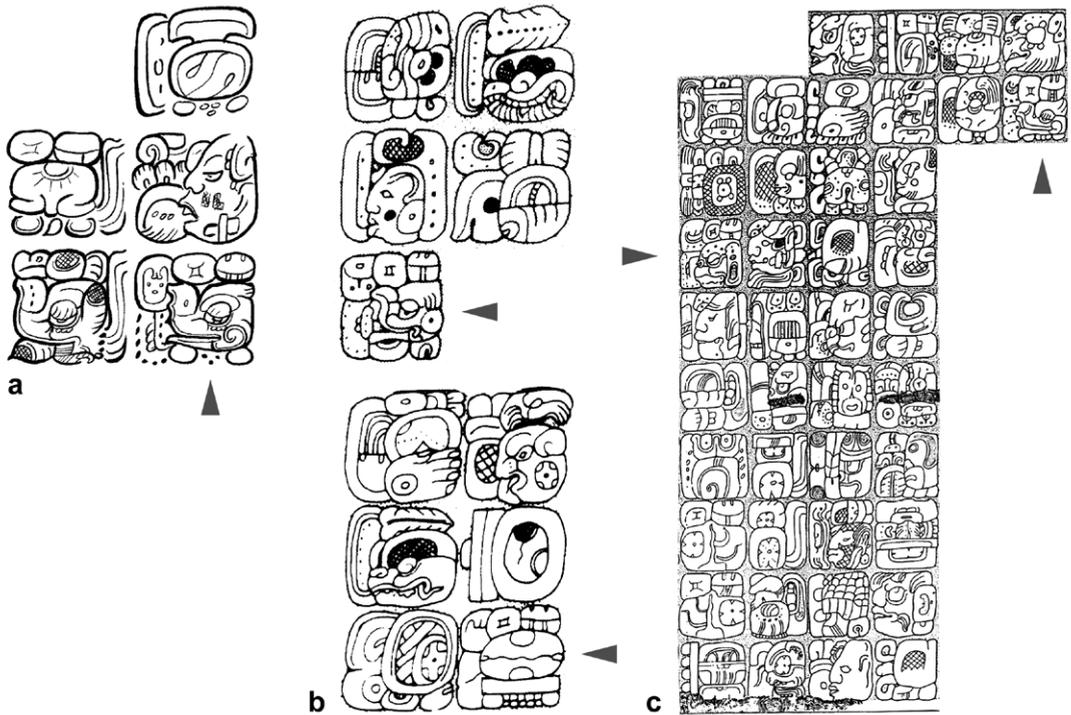


Fig. 3. Three glyptic passages that illustrate the use of the *Matwiil* and *Baake'l* emblems (marked with arrows); a) Temple 19, bench, L6-N2 (drawing by David Stuart); b) Temple of the Cross, central panel, E13-H3 (drawing by Linda Schele); c) Temple of the Inscriptions, central panel, G2-L2 (drawing by Linda Schele).

posthumous monuments erected by his eldest son and successor. The earliest contemporary records of *Pakal's* reign demonstrate this pattern, since the texts of the Olvidado, the Simojovel shell, as well as the subterranean Tableritos and Throne of the Palace, which cumulatively date to between AD 647 and 652, all ascribe him the title of *Baake'l* in exclusivity. Even the *alfardas* of House A in the Palace, dated to AD 662 provide evidence for contemporary usage of the *Baake'l* title. In contrast the panels of the Temple of the Inscriptions completed by his son, *Kan Bahlam* between AD 688 and 689 (Schele and Mathews 1998: 102-109; Guenter 2007: 3-4; Stuart and Stuart 2008: 170-171) attribute *Pakal* the title of *Matwiil* four times. One fascinating passage from the Central Tablet is particularly revealing (G1-L2), since it starts off by stating that *Pakal* witnessed the period-ending of AD 672 (9.12.0.0.0) at which point he is styled with the *Baake'l* EG (Figure 3c). After a long litany recording a drought and the downfall of kings near and far, the passage brightens to a second commemoration event followed by a long list of regalia that was offered to the Triad gods (see Lacadena 2006: 209-211; Guenter 2007: 31-35). The whole clause culminates in stating that these are the gifts of *Pakal*, who at this juncture carries the *Matwiil* EG. The contrast, between the start and the end of the clause could not be more pronounced and it seems to affirm that *Pakal* in essence became akin to the mythological Triad Progenitor by nurturing and providing for the Triad Gods as a parent would for his offspring, thereby entitling *Pakal* to carry the *Matwiil* EG.

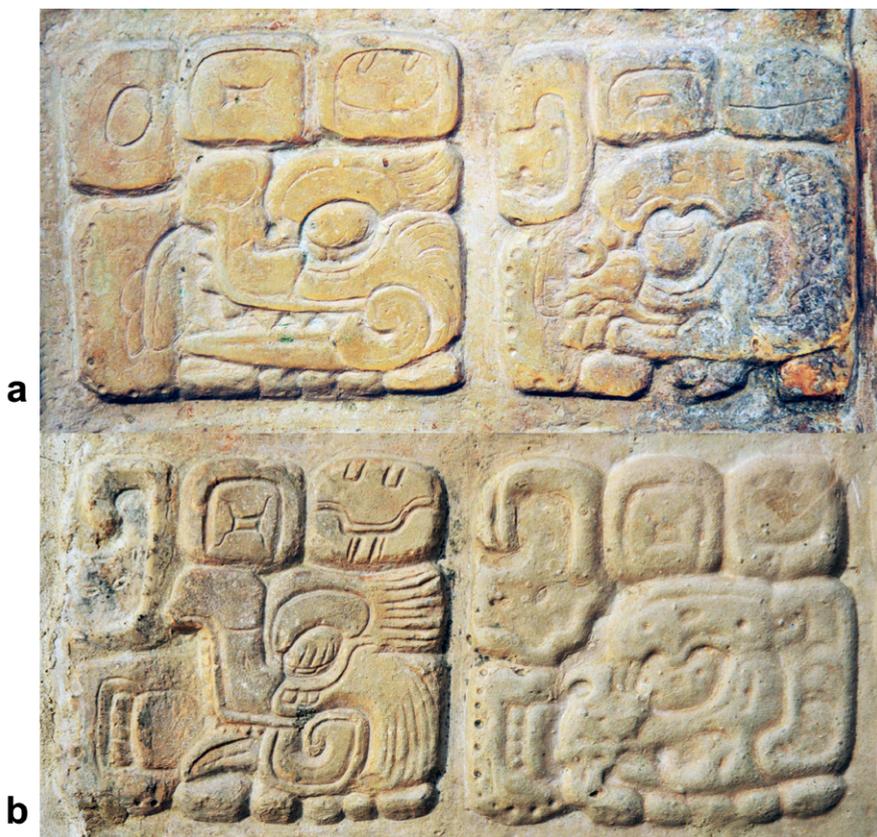


Fig. 4. The paired EGs recorded on the Palace tablet, a) C13-D13 and b) O12-P12 (photographs by Christophe Helmke).

His son, *Kan Bahlam* II, evidently had a special relation to the triad deities and the text tells us that he considered them to be ‘his cherished ones’ (*u-juun-tahn*), a metaphorical kinship term that is otherwise seen in reference to the devotion that a mother shows her child. Although evidently a champion of the *Matwiil* title, *Kan Bahlam* did not use the title until he had completed the Cross Group, dedicated to the Triad gods in AD 692. Once built, he used the title more freely and again we can entertain the idea that *Kan Bahlam* did not acquire the title’s privilege until a significant contribution or show of devotion had been made to the Triad deities, in much the same way as his father’s many offerings to the patron deities nearly two decades before. We have more limited information for his successor, *K’an Joy Chitam* II (c. AD 702-721), but in the account offered by the Palace Tablet he is granted the *Matwiil* title immediately upon his accession, although it bears remembering that the text provides a wholly respective account of his reign. Remarkably the Palace Tablet provides *K’an Joy Chitam* with paired EGs, first the *Matwiil* title, then that of *Baake’l* (Figure 4) a feature also granted *Pakal* at the start of the same text, and obliquely in a passage of the East Tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions (C1-D6). These exceptional pairings of the two EGs and the coherence of their sequence conclusively reveal that the *Matwiil* title does not substitute for the *Baake’l* title, but instead is another separate honorific title harking back to great antiquity. With the accession of *Ahku’l Mo’ Naahb* III (c. AD 721-736) we

see a return to orthodoxy since he, much like his more illustrious uncle, is only granted the *Matwiil* title after his dedication of Temple 19 in AD 731 and again upon dedicating Temple 21 in AD 735. The texts of Temple 18, completed in AD 724, some three years after the accession of *Ahku' l Mo? Naahb* III, were designed to legitimate his right to rule after the awkward agnatic succession from older to younger brothers, following in the wake of Pakal's lengthy reign. *Ahku' l Mo? Naahb* III, the son of the youngest of Pakal's brothers, who never appears to have occupied the throne, thereby had to justify his claim and the texts of Temple 18 despite their intricacies all purposefully serve this design (see Stuart and Stuart 2008: 162-163). There, Pakal and his successors are referred to as *matwiil ajaw*, 'Matwiil kings', in the placating words of the priest who addresses the enthroned ruler (Zender 2004b: 310-312; Stuart and Stuart 2008: 162-163). Thereafter, as far as can be ascertained, none of the successors of *Ahku' l Mo? Naahb* III used the 'godly *Matwiil*' title, bringing this glorious period of "eternal return" to a close. For about five decades the Late Classic kings of Palenque sought to recall the figures of the mythic deep-past by fostering the memory of the gods of *Matwiil*, and enthusiastically donned the title of their mythic forebears. It is not coincidental that it was those who obtained their right to rule – not from their immediate predecessors – but by their relations to *Pakal*, who bore the *Matwiil* title. In the ebbing tide following *Pakal's* long reign, it is a sequence of rulers who were conscious of their dynastic history that sought to validate and redefine their identity by embracing the mythic title, repeatedly asserting their place within the everlasting deep-past, materialised in the historic present.

YAXCHILAN: PA?CHAN

When Berlin (1958: Fig. 28.2, 115-116) first identified the paired EGs of Yaxchilan, he designated them as Y1 and Y2, respectively. Let us focus on the first of these, Y1, leaving a detailed treatment of the second to later. This primary Emblem of Yaxchilan has as its main sign the logogram **CHAN** 'sky', at times accompanied by its final phonetic complement **na**, but characteristic of Late Classic examples the upper portion is shown cloven, as two arcs (Figure 5a). In Early Classic examples the same sign is depicted as cleaved in two, or alternatively is torn and tattered as suggested by a sharp and pointed zigzag edge (Figure 5b) (Schele 1993: 46; Martin 2004b: 3). As has been conclusively demonstrated by several epigraphers, the cleft or torn edge cues the logogram **PA?**, which as a verbal root can be translated as 'quebrar, rajar, dividir', or in nominalised form as 'cosa quebrada, rajada, partida', based on Yukatekan and greater K'iche?an lexemes (see Boot 2004; Martin 2004b: 4). As such the full reading of the EG is *k'uhul pa?chan ajaw*, or 'godly *Pa?chan* king'. The toponym *Pa?chan* is of great interest since it clearly refers to a 'torn or broken sky', and thereby immediately suggests that it refers to a celestial feature rather than functioning as a typical terrestrial toponym. Yaxchilan is not alone in this since Comalcalco's local EG is *Joy-kan* 'bound-sky' and another similar title is associated to Chinkultic in the Highlands (Wölfel and Wagner 2010) as well as to Xcalumkin and Jaina in north-western Yucatan (Mathews 1991a: 21; Graña-Behrens 2006: 110) all present a more simple 'sky' emblem.

Although the vast majority of examples of this *Pa?chan* emblem are found at the site of Yaxchilan, additional examples are found on unprovenanced ceramics. Initially many of these ceramics were attributed to Uaxactun, since other ceramics bearing the so-called "Split Sky" emblem were found archaeologically during the Carnegie excavations at the site (see Smith 1955: Fig. 72b; Reents-Budet 1994: 155, 197-198; Zender 2000; Boot 2003) (Figure 5d). Furthermore, an eroded example of the *Pa?chan* emblem is found on Stela 2 at Uaxactun as was first identified by Peter Mathews (pers. comm. 2011) (Figure 9). Nevertheless, since then Stephen Houston has suggested that the *Pa?chan* emblems previously attributed to Uaxactun, should instead be seen as stemming from the archaeological site of

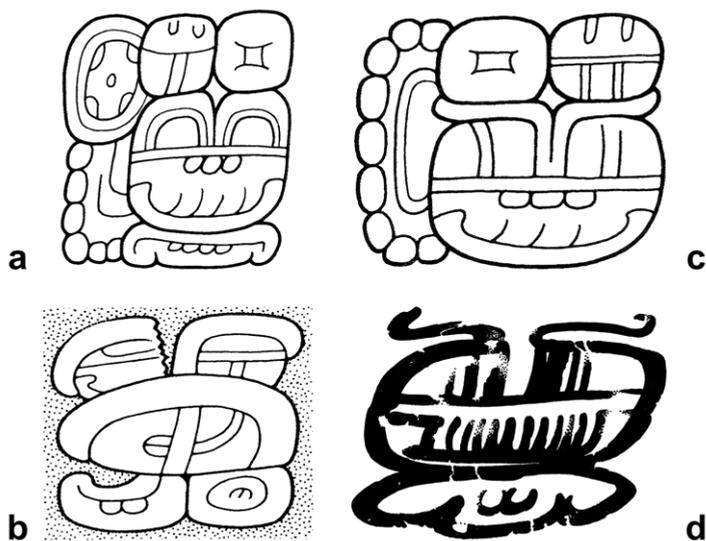


Fig. 5. The *Pa?chan* emblem of Yaxchilan: a) late form with cloven sky glyph, Yaxchilan, Stela 10, H2; b) early form with torn sky glyph, Yaxchilan, Lintel 35, B2; c) the *Pa?chan* emblem with tendrils, Piedras Negras, Panel 3, K1 (drawings by Simon Martin); d) painted example, unprovenanced, K8418, H1 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

El Zotz, located 27 km to the southwest, based on the name inscribed on the wooden lintel from the site that shares features with the nominal segments recorded on the ceramics (Houston 2008: 1-4; see Schuster 1999). However, it is the recent discovery of Stela 4 at El Zotz, which bears the *Pa?chan* EG (Figure 9), that makes it clear that the kings of this site also bore this title (Houston *et al.* 2011). At Yaxchilan, the earliest surviving monument is Stela 27, which depicts Knot-eye Jaguar I (c. AD 508-518) performing a scattering ceremony on the important period-ending of AD 514 (9.4.0.0). Already here the king is styled with a complete *Pa?chan* EG, but as has been remarked this example has to be tended with care, since the lowest portion of the textual panel was re-carved at some later time (Proskouriakoff 1993: 21, 24, 25; Martin and Grube 2000: 129). Nevertheless, under his successor, *K'inich Tatbu Skull II* (AD 526-537) the lengthy king lists that he commissioned in the first half of the sixth century attribute to all his predecessors the *pa?chan ajaw*, or 'Pa?chan king' title (see Martin and Grube 2000: 118-121). Without exception all subsequent kings of Yaxchilan's dynasty bore the *Pa?chan* title, until the last known king *K'inich Tatbu Skull III*, who reigned sometime at the start of the ninth century (Martin and Grube 2000: 137).

Occasionally, the cleft of the *Pa?chan* toponym emits two sinuous and tendril-like lines, a feature also found on various forms of the month sign *Pax* that represents a stylized log drum (Justeson 1984: 342). The addition of these tendrils is found especially in non-local texts that refer back to Yaxchilan, such as the mentions made at Palenque, Dos Pilas and Piedras Negras (Marcus 1976: 84) (Figure 5c). Simon Martin (2004b: 5) aptly remarked that these tendrils "do not constitute an independent sign, but are instead features of the open clefts" and goes on to observe that "The similarity between these lines and those that emerge from the human eye glyph is more than coincidental, since both refer to types of sensory experience, with sight and sound as related projective emanations. Our tendrils would seem to represent radiating sound: whether the vibrations of a split-log drum or, in the case of the

more elaborated Yaxchilan emblems, the din of a sky rent asunder”. This insightful interpretation of the *Paʔchan* main sign paints a vivid picture of a celestial event and evokes a particular Mesoamerican metaphor also found among the Late Postclassic Aztec.

The sixth book of the encyclopaedic *Florentine Codex*, completed in AD 1577 by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, provides an unparalleled record of poetic expressions. The final 43rd chapter of Book 6 provides a lengthy listing of such lyrical language, which Sahagún describes as “algunas methaphoras delicadas con sus declaraciones” (Dibble and Anderson 1969: 241). In the coherent structure used throughout this chapter, each expression is given first, followed by short explanations of its use, which although wanting are meant to clarify to western readers the meaning of the enculturated Nawatl idioms. In several cases the expressions are reminiscent of the *difrasismos* so beloved by Aztec orators (see León-Portilla 1969: 77, 1992: 54-55; Montes de Oca Vega 1997, 2004), but here rather than employing two contrasting lexical items we have short sub-clauses set in parallel. To give a sense of the metaphors let us consider some of the examples given. One is *It is my drink, it is my food* to which Sahagún provides the declaration “That is, it is my property, my goods, my sustenance” (p. 241). Another is *In the clouds, in the mist*, which is described as an idiom that “was said of the highly esteemed, the very great; of those never before seen, of those never before known, nor anywhere seen in times of yore” (p. 244). A third example is *The very broad, the deep green precious feather*, which is explained as “that with which the ruler, the nobleman, or magistrate admonished well” (p. 252). But, the metaphorical expression that directly echoes the Classic Maya *Paʔchan* is *The heavens are open, the earth is rent*, to which Sahagún provides the following clarification:

This saying was said of the very wonderful which happened, of that which happened not very often, as when the body of Our Lord is received. So it is said: “Now a great marvel has come to pass. The heavens are open, the earth is rent. Let no one cause laughter; let no one cause rejoicing. Let all be afraid, stand afraid, be trembling, stand trembling, before the deity, the ruler.”⁶ (Dibble and Anderson 1969: 259-260)

In the original Nawatl entry the metaphor is given as <*Matzaianj in jlvicatl, tentlapanj in tlalli*> (Figure 6), wherein the verb affecting the heavens involves the root *tzayān* found in items such as *itzayāna* ‘abrir los ojos’, but also seen in nominalized form as *tzayānki*, ‘roto, resquebrajado’ (Molina 2001: 21v, 56r; Siméon 1992: 64, 145, 208; Karttunen 1992: 311), but more to the case at hand are the optative forms, with *mātzayāna* glossed as ‘cortarse, partirse, separarse’ and *mātzayāni*, which is specifically translated as ‘partirse, abrirse, hablando del cielo, etc.’ (Molina 2001: 49v, 53v; Siméon 1992: 241, 262; Karttunen 1992: 126). Thus, whereas Dibble and Anderson provided ‘the heavens are open’ as the translation of <*Matzaianj in jlvicatl*>, this segment may be more aptly understood as ‘let/may the heavens be broken, separated, or torn apart’ since that is the semantic weight of the original. The parallel with *Paʔchan* could not be clearer and if the expression itself were not enough, the compilers of the *Florentine Codex* also provided a figurative vignette for this important expression, which although rendered by a Nawatl hand is strongly influenced by western artistic canons (Dibble and Anderson 1969: Fig. 52) (Figure 6). In a landscape dotted with European church spires, an observer sits in rapt attention, witnessing the earth below, cleaved in two, and a celestial globe above, emblazoned with stars as it tears apart at the base, its division emitting a deafening din. The hand appended to the side of the celestial sphere marks the heavens as personified, but as a post-conquest document may have been intended to refer to the Christian creator. The combination of text and image

⁶ The English translation provided by Dibble and Anderson is based on the original Nawatl entry, whereas the abridged Spanish translation provided in the original reads: “Qujere dezir esta letra. Abrese el cielo y rompese la tierra. Por methaphora qujre dezir: hace vna maraujilla y un mjllagro nunca visto nj oydo eta. Vi supra” (Dibble & Anderson 1969: 259).

*q Matsaiami inibicatl, tentla
 panl inthalli.*
*q Qujere dezire esta letra. Abre
 se el cielo y rompese la tierra.
 Por metaphora qujere dezire:
 hazese vna marauilla y vn
 millagro nunca visto ny oydo
 etc. vñ papa — .*



Fig. 6. The metaphorical expression <Matzaianj in jlvicatl, tentlapanj in tlalli>, excerpt of the Spanish text and accompanying figurative vignette, Florentine codex, folio 215r.

in the *Florentine Codex* allows us to grasp that the rupture of the sky is compared to a cataclysmic earthquake, an event that is explicitly said to be solemn and miraculous and the analogy drawn to the mystery of the Christian Eucharist makes it clear that the Mesoamerican conception of a “broken sky” refers to an exceedingly rare or even singular supernatural event. Considering the concept of “eternal return” stated at the outset one may surmise that this applies here also wherein the reiteration of the mythological event causes it to manifest itself and this may be precisely what Sahagún was attempting to convey by drawing on the Christian notion of the transubstantiation.

Having attempted to clarify the supernatural event known as the “broken sky” in Mesoamerican thinking one is left to wonder what *Paʔchan* specifically referred to among the ancient Maya. Were this represented in the iconography of the ancient Maya one would expect to find a depiction of the sky that is open or broken in two and this is indeed what is found in the famous murals of the site of San Bartolo. These truly astonishing polychrome murals adorn the building designated as Pinturas Sub-1A, a relatively small structure at the back of the Ixim pyramid (Saturno *et al.* 2005; Saturno 2009: 116-117; Taube *et al.* 2010). Painted on the primary axis of the back wall is a majestic Principal Bird Deity descending out of a cloven and snake-headed sky band, with a diminutive figure below, possibly the wind god, seemingly beckoning the bird with song (Taube 2006, 2009: 43; Taube *et al.* 2010: 45, 48) (Figure 7a). The accompanying glyphic caption remains illegible for the most part, but provides the abridged calendar round date that helps to fix the building’s dedication to around 100 BC (Stuart 2004: 6). The manner in which the sky band is shown split in the San Bartolo murals, forming a trapezoidal opening through which the Principal Bird Deity descends, is truly remarkable. For one

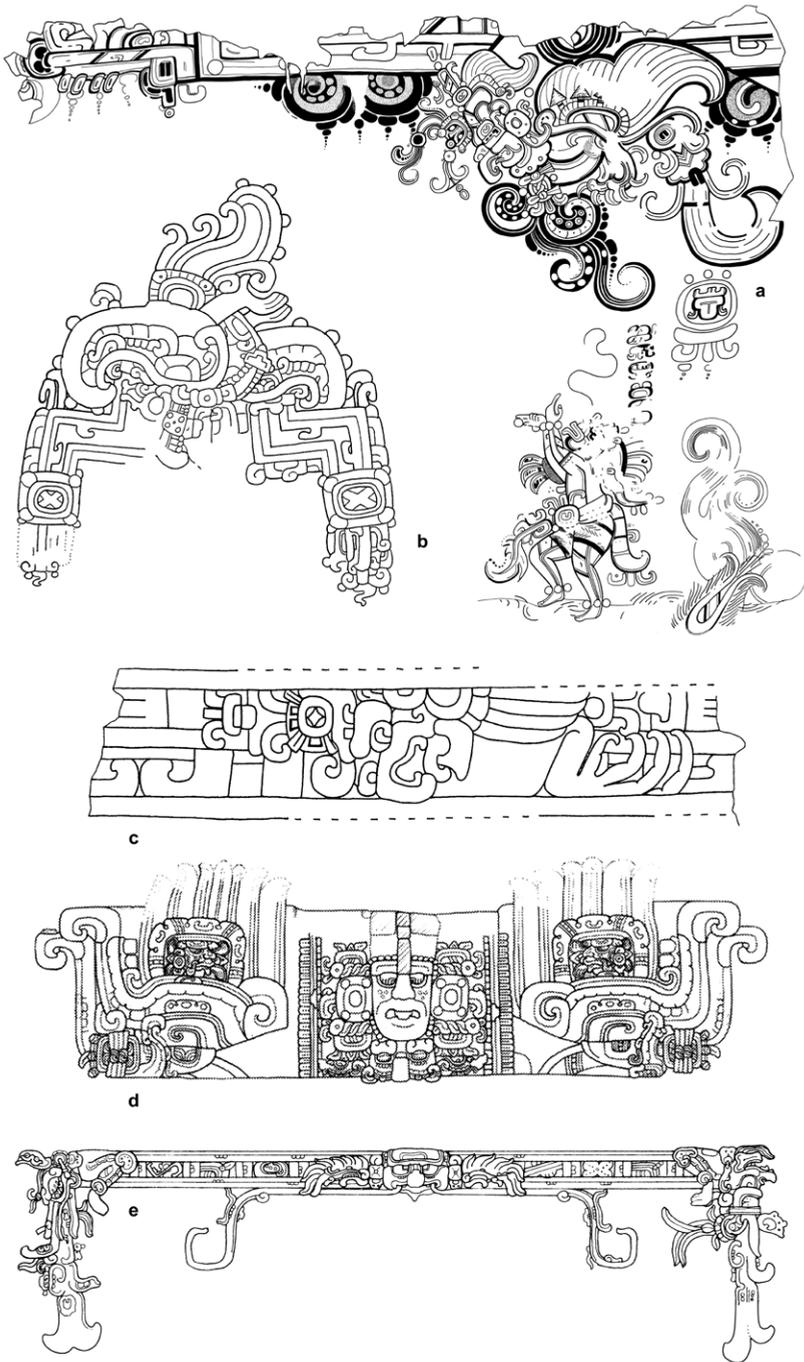


Fig. 7. Descent of the great bird through a cloven sky: a) San Bartolo, West Wall (drawing by Heather Hurst); b) Takalik Abaj, Altar 13 (drawing by Karl Taube); c) San Bartolo, Str. Pinturas, Sub-1, stucco facade (drawing by Karl Taube); d) Copan, Rosalila Str., west facade (drawing by Barbara Fash); e) Palenque, House E, stucco (drawing by Linda Schele).

this opening recalls the celestial portal that is often mentioned as part of both North and South American creation mythology, affording sky creatures a means of access to the surface of the earth (see Bierhorst 1985, 1988; Bingham and Roberts 2010: 25, 48, 54, 94; Lynch and Roberts 2010: 28, 103). For another, in the San Bartolo example, the descent of the great bird from the heavens is the first of a series of scenes that relate the trials of *Juun Ajaw* (the elder of the mythical Hero Twins), which ultimately resulted in the defeat of the great celestial bird. According to the much later *Popol Wuj*, the epic story of the K'iche' Maya, that provides the most extensive account of this myth, the defeat of the great bird serves as a prerequisite to the creation of humanity, by ridding the world of monsters (Coe 1989; Christenson 2003; Nielsen and Helmke in press). The theme of a split sky that provides a portal for the great bird is also found on Altar 13 at Takalik Abaj (Figure 7b). On this monument the stepped sky band again terminates in solar serpentine heads, whereas the great bird plunges head first through the prominent opening, wings beating and talons raised. As if labelling the whole building, the exterior stucco facade of the Sub-1A structure at San Bartolo, also depicts the descent of the Principal Bird Deity, although the details of the sky band and its square opening are partly concealed behind the bird's headdress and ominous talons (Figure 7c). In fact, all depictions of a downward-facing Principal Bird Deity, with serpent wings characteristically flapped back, illustrate its descent from the sky, the crucial starting point in the narrative that eventually leads up to its final defeat, as seen at Izapa, Copan, and Palenque, and even as far afield as Teotihuacan (see Agurcia Fasquelle 2004; Fash 2011: 36-44; Nielsen and Helmke in press; Robertson 1985: Figs. 79-81, 1991: Figs. 45-46; Stuart 2006: 109-110) (Figure 7d-e). Admittedly, the earlier depictions are the ones that most strongly emphasize the bird's descent through the breached sky, and the toponym *Pa?chan*, in addition to providing the name for the celestial portal through which the great bird descended into the realm of mythic heroes, may even serve to name the place of its defeat. If this interpretation holds true, the mere toponym *Pa?chan* may have fundamentally conjured up the whole mythological narrative that was said to have unfolded at this locality, the location of this mythic battle between ancient titans.

The iconography of San Bartolo is not, however, the only piece of evidence supporting the connection between the "broken sky" and the theme of the great bird's descent. When an earlier version of the Ixim pyramid was dismantled, its architectural mass was recycled as core for the subsequent phase of construction, thereby fortuitously preserving one of the earliest examples of Maya writing. The wall fragment bearing the text was found in the core of Str. Sub-4, dated by carbon assays to c. 250 ± 100 BC, and preserves a partial column of 10 glyphs (Saturno *et al.* 2006) (Figure 8). The text, considering its early date and the archaic form of its individual signs, poses many problems to its reading, but one



Fig. 8. The early text from San Bartolo, Str. Sub-4 (drawing by David Stuart).

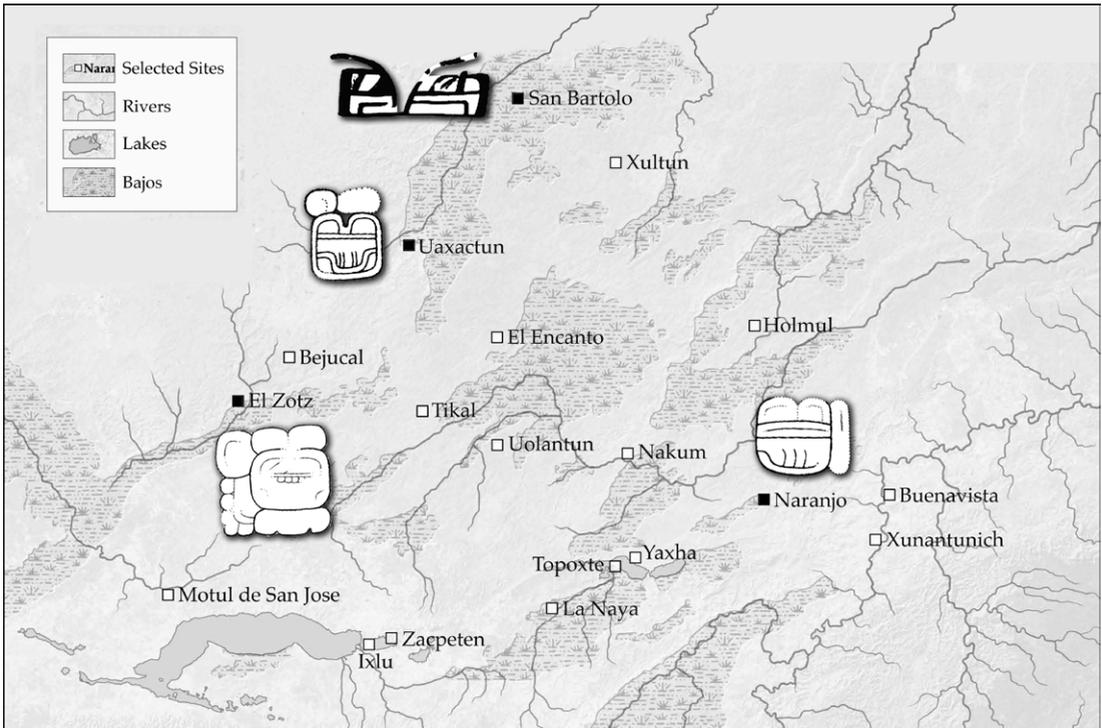


Fig. 9. Map of the central Lowlands showing the distribution of *Pa?chan* (map by Joel Skidmore; drawings of the glyphs by Ian Graham, David Stuart and Stephen Houston).

glyph that can be clearly made out is the logogram **AJAW**, ‘king’ (Ap7) (Saturno *et al.* 2006: 1282). Remarkably, the preceding sign (Ap6) represents the logogram ‘sky’, possibly read *ka?an* at this time, with the same tendrils emitting from a cleft running down the middle of the sign. There can be little doubt that this serves to record an early form of the *Pa?chan* toponym and here it functions, much as later examples, as part of an early emblematic title. The relationship between the “broken sky” toponym and the mythology depicted in the iconography of the later San Bartolo murals is made evident by the last glyph in the clause that depicts the head of the Principal Bird Deity (Ap10). As such the glyphs from Str. Sub-4 provide us with coherent evidence for the close relationship between “broken sky” and the myth relating the descent of the great bird, and furthermore offer some tantalizing clues as to the title borne by early kings of this site. What is truly significant is that *Pa?chan* as a titular label at San Bartolo may finally hold the key to explaining the prominence given to the myths surrounding the Principal Bird Deity and its defeat at the hands of *Juun Ajaw*, ultimately serving as local origin myths explaining the advent of kingship and associated rites (see also Saturno 2009). Since this is the earliest example of the titular use of *Pa?chan* one might be tempted to assume that San Bartolo was the original seat of this emblem, which later diffused out by means of historical interactions and consanguineal relationships to other sites, ultimately making an appearance at Yaxchilan.

That *Pa?chan* had some greater importance in the eastern Peten is suggested not only by the glyphic text of San Bartolo, but also by the EG that appears on Stela 2 at Uaxactun in AD 751 (located 30 km southwest of San Bartolo) (Reents-Budet 1994: 138, 155, 197-198), and the name of a dance

recorded on Stela 28 at Naranjo (located 50 km south-south-east of San Bartolo), performed by *K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk* in AD 716, that involves the term *Pa?chan* (see Helmke and Kettunen 2011: 61). However, in light of the mythological origin of the toponym *Pa?chan* I cannot help but wonder if we should not entertain an alternate model, wherein multiple, unrelated and competing dynasties all strove to lay claim to the title derived from the mythical place, to liken themselves to the primordial ancestor of kings, *Juun Ajaw*, the one who defeated the great bird below a broken sky. If this is indeed the case, the *Pa?chan* toponym, scoured from the depths of the deep-past, not only conjured up the whole mythological narrative that unfolded there, but was adopted by several historical dynasties and assimilated into titular forms that empowered kings with divine authority.

YAXCHILAN: Y2

The second of Yaxchilan's paired EGs has as its main sign an undeciphered logogram. Although the logogram was inventoried by Thompson (1962: 110-111) as T511, I have opted to follow Berlin (1958: 115-116) in designating the sign as Y2.⁷ The main sign has a darkened circle with a small whisk at its base and in this it superficially resembles the syllabogram *ye* or a simplified logogram *KAB ~ CHAB* 'earth, land', but Y2 differs graphically and in its usage from the latter two (Figure 10).

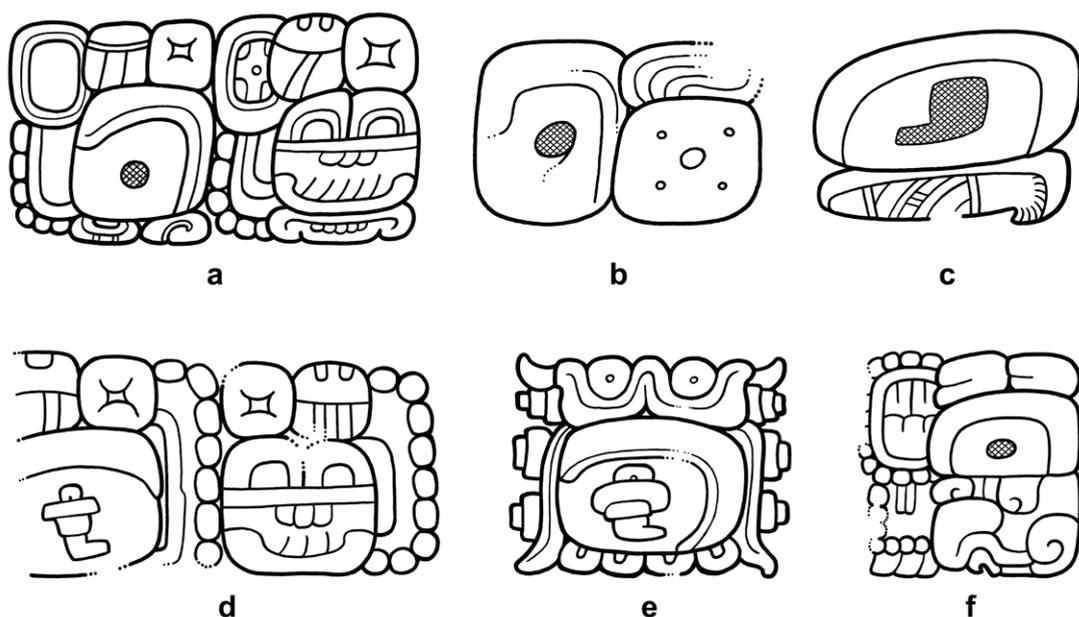


Fig. 10. The Y2 sign: a) typical form as part of paired EGs at Yaxchilan, Stela 11, verso, D3-E3; b) as a toponym involving the suffix *-nib*, Yaxchilan, HS 3, Step 4, C7; c) early form with phonetic complement *ji*, Calakmul, Str. 3, Tomb 1, celts; d) earspool variant in paired EGs at Laxtunich, Panel 1, H1-I1; e) earspool variant with matching phonetic complement *ji* involved in a Star War verb, Tikal, Str. 5C-4-1st, Lin. 2, B8; f) the avian form of God D, note the cranial bone, Tonina, Mon. 159, A4 (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

⁷ Thompson subsumed under the T511 designation the day sign *Muluk*, the main sign of the later of Yaxchilan's EGs, and even the logogram *PET* (see Thompson 1962: 110-111). Designating the main sign of Yaxchilan's EG as T511v is therefore not only confusing, but erroneous.

When accompanied by a phonetic complement one finds the syllabogram **ji** in final position, cueing its final consonant and possibly a long medial vowel (Figure 10c & e). In one example, rendered on a sherd discovered at Buenavista del Cayo in Belize, the Y2 sign was thought to be preceded by the syllabogram **ka**, suggesting the transliteration **ka-KAJ-ji** and prompting logographic value **KAJ** and the reading *kaaj* for the logogram (Figure 14c) (Alexandre Tokovinine pers. comm. 2007). Nevertheless, the *kaaj* reading remains problematic and it is likely that the logogram carries another value. Early variants of Y2 provide a darkened L-shaped form as its diagnostic element, which may represent a simple earplug that compares favourably with the form of artefactual counterparts (e.g. Coe 1959: 58, Fig. 55q-t; Helmke 2009: 400-402; Helmke and Wrobel 2012: 75, Fig. 10; Reents and MacLeod 1997: 43, 66, 67, 93, 106, Fig. 49d) (Figure 10c). In fact several Late Classic substitution sets demonstrate that an earspool, shown in profile, serves as an alternate form of Y2 (Figure 10d). In a different vein, Marc Zender (2005b: 9, n. 8) has suggested that the main sign is “a *pars pro toto* representation of the cranial plate of the avian form of God D” (Figure 10f). Unfortunately, none of these clues have helped to narrow down the semantic domain carried by the term that the sign encodes.⁸

As an EG Y2 first makes a contemporary appearance in the textual record at Yaxchilan during the reign of *Itzam Bahlam* II (AD 681-742), and once firmly established as a set with the *Paʔchan* EG, these two titles were retrospectively attributed to the founder of the local dynasty, *Yopaat Bahlam* I under the reign of *Yaxuʼn Bahlam* IV (AD 752-768) (Martin and Grube 2008: 119). Although Tokovinine (2008: 211) has suggested that Y2 is never involved in toponymic constructions at Yaxchilan, this is not in fact the case. Nevertheless, it should be conceded that the majority of examples make it clear that Y2 is a mythological place, and considering the importance of the Y2 emblem at Yaxchilan, toponymic usage of the main sign in historical contexts is astonishingly rare, being limited to a singular example found in the text adorning Step 4 of Hieroglyphic Stair 3 (Figure 10b).⁹ However, despite this isolated example in the texts of Yaxchilan, we are nowhere nearer to matching the toponym with an earthly locale. Promisingly, the same EG is found on the wooden lintel of Structure 1 from the site of El Zotz (Houston 2008: 1, Fig. 1-2), but unfortunately that example is found in a parentage statement naming not the local ruler, but his father.¹⁰ It may well be that the Y2 emblem originally had its seat at El Zotz and was later integrated into the privileges of Yaxchilan kings (Stephen Houston pers. comm. 2008; Gronemeyer 2009), but alternatively it remains possible that El Zotz and Yaxchilan both contemporaneously shared use of the emblem. However, as we have seen in the discussion of the *Paʔchan* emblem presented earlier, there is no inherent reason to assume that various sites could not share the same titular emblem, especially if these were independent claims based on a mythological toponym.

⁸ Intriguingly, the sign appears twice outside of the context of Emblem Glyphs on K1196, where wizened scribes tutor novices in the intricacies of mathematics and calligraphy. Based on the disposition of these signs in the scene it would seem that these somehow qualify the novices, not the least since one follows the term *chʼok*, ‘youth’.

⁹ The text of the tread of Step 4 of HS 3, records the dedication of Structure 44 in AD 671, involving a deity impersonation ritual wherein *Itzam Bahlam* III took on the guise of an aspect of the Maize god. At the very end of the text is the name of an individual who is said to have been a *yitaaʔ* or ‘companion’, named Lahchan Pat(an), and he is described as *a[j]ta[h]n chʼeʼn ?-nib*, or ‘he of the middle of the settlement of the Y2-place’ (Helmke *et al.* 2010: Fig. 5.3). That Y2 here functions toponymically is made clear by the *-nib* suffix that accompanies several other place names in the eastern central Maya Lowlands (Helmke *et al.* 2010: 104-106; Boot 2008: 6-7).

¹⁰ In addition, two vases (K0679) provide the same name, but it remains unclear if these refer to the same paternal individual, or to namesakes (Houston 2008: 1-4). One of these (K8458) now in the National Gallery of Australia attributes an early form of the *Paʔchan* title to the owner, whereas the other (K0679) duplicates the father’s name without title, but as part of his pedigree attributes the *Paʔchan* title to his mother. It is on the basis of this evidence Stephen Houston has suggested that many of the ceramic vessels bearing the *Paʔchan* emblem do not in fact stem from Uaxactun as has long been assumed, but instead find their origin at El Zotz.

The texts from the subsidiary site of Dos Caobas provides some interesting details as to Yaxchilan's paired EGs, as has been pointed out by Stuart (2007: 31) and Tokovinine (2008: 51). The passage in question closes the text carved into the front of Stela 1, and provides the lengthy pedigree for Yaxchilan's king *Itzam Bahlam* III (AD 681-742). Evidently pleased to relate his many titles, the monuments of *Itzam Bahlam* provide lengthy lists of captor statements and Stela 19 at Yaxchilan also cites him as the first to bear high titles, including the exalted *kalo'mte?* and a more enigmatic one, possibly read *yootz'soon*. The pedigree recorded on Dos Caobas Stela 1 states that *Itzam Bahlam* is the son of Lady *Pakal* and of *Yaxu'n Bahlam* III (AD 629-681). The father, said to be the 15th successor of the dynastic founder *Yopaat Bahlam* I, is here given the title of 'godly *Pa?chan* king', but startlingly he is also said to be the twenty-odd successor of an unidentified figure bearing the Y2 emblem (Cougnaud *et al.* 2003: 3-4; Martin and Grube 2000: 122; Stuart 2007: 31; Tokovinine 2008: 51). This discrepancy in the dynastic counts confirms that the two emblems have different sources, and before being paired off in the titular strings of Yaxchilan's kings had enjoyed autonomous existences.

While it is clear that historical dynasts bore the Y2 emblem during the Classic period, other texts make it equally clear that the toponym involved is a mythic one. Demonstrating the extraordinary longevity of the Y2 emblem is the text of Tonina's Monument 150, a stela that records a version of the events surrounding the last creation (Figure 11a). Here we are told that the passing of time at the juncture between the past and the present creations has been completed. The place where this is said to have transpired is given as *Uxpikte?-sinaan?-witz* ('24 000-scorpion-mountain'; David Stuart pers. comm. 2010), and the agent that is credited for this event bears a complete form of the Y2 emblem. What is truly remarkable here is that this ruler is said to be the 12th king in the dynastic succession, an impressive claim considering that the events are said to take place in 3114 BC. Also reaching back to the deep-past is the text of Quirigua Stela C that likewise recounts key passages from the last creation (Figure 11b), wherein the three primordial hearthstones were planted in the heavens (see Freidel *et al.* 1993: 64-67; Schele andLooper 1996: 92;Looper 2003: 32, 127, 158-164, Fig. 16-5). Each of these hearthstones is named and different supernatural entities are said to have been responsible for planting them at three different supernatural localities. The first is the Ocelot stone, that was planted by the Paddler deities at the place named *Nah-ho?-chan* ('first-five-sky'); and the third, the Water stone, is said to have been set by the supreme celestial lord, God D, at *Ti?-chan* ('edge of the sky'); but it is the second that is of greatest interest here, since this Snake stone was planted at *kab ~ chab-Y2* ('in the land-Y2') by an entity named in part *Ik' Naah*. As attentively noted by Tokovinine (2008: 212), the name *Ik' Naah* re-appears on the inscribed jadeite celts found in Tomb 1 of Str. 3 at Calakmul (Fields and Reents-Budet 2005: 181) (Figure 11c). The text is incomplete and divided up between the celts, but appears to describe a 'powerful' *Ik' Naah* before going on to relate his arrival at the Y2 place. Due to the brevity and partiality of the text, we are none the wiser as to what took place after this arrival event, nor what precisely the thrust of these texts is. However, the way in which the Y2 toponym was cited in the text of Quirigua Stela C is closely duplicated in the text of Lintel 15 at Yaxchilan. That lintel records a ritual event conducted in AD 755 on the occasion of the dedication of Str. 21, which houses the monument (Schele and Miller 1986: 190). The lintel depicts one of the wives of *Yaxu'n Bahlam* IV holding a large basket filled with bloodletting implements, including a stingray spine, blotted paper, and a rope. The glyphic caption relates two conjuring events (Schele 1991: 206-209), wherein the first called forth a great serpentine divinity, which is said to be the spirit companion of the deity *K'awiil* (Houston and Stuart 1989: 7-9), and the second conjuring beckoned another deity whose name eludes us, but meaningfully the epithet is closed with the same toponymic construction as found in the text of Stela C at Quirigua.¹¹ Possibly read *u-kab ~ chab-Y2*

¹¹ The name of the serpentine deity appears to be written **YAX-CHIT?** / **NAH-KAN**, to be read *yax chiiit nah kaan* ('first boss great snake'), and although the name of the second deity is not entirely clear we one can make

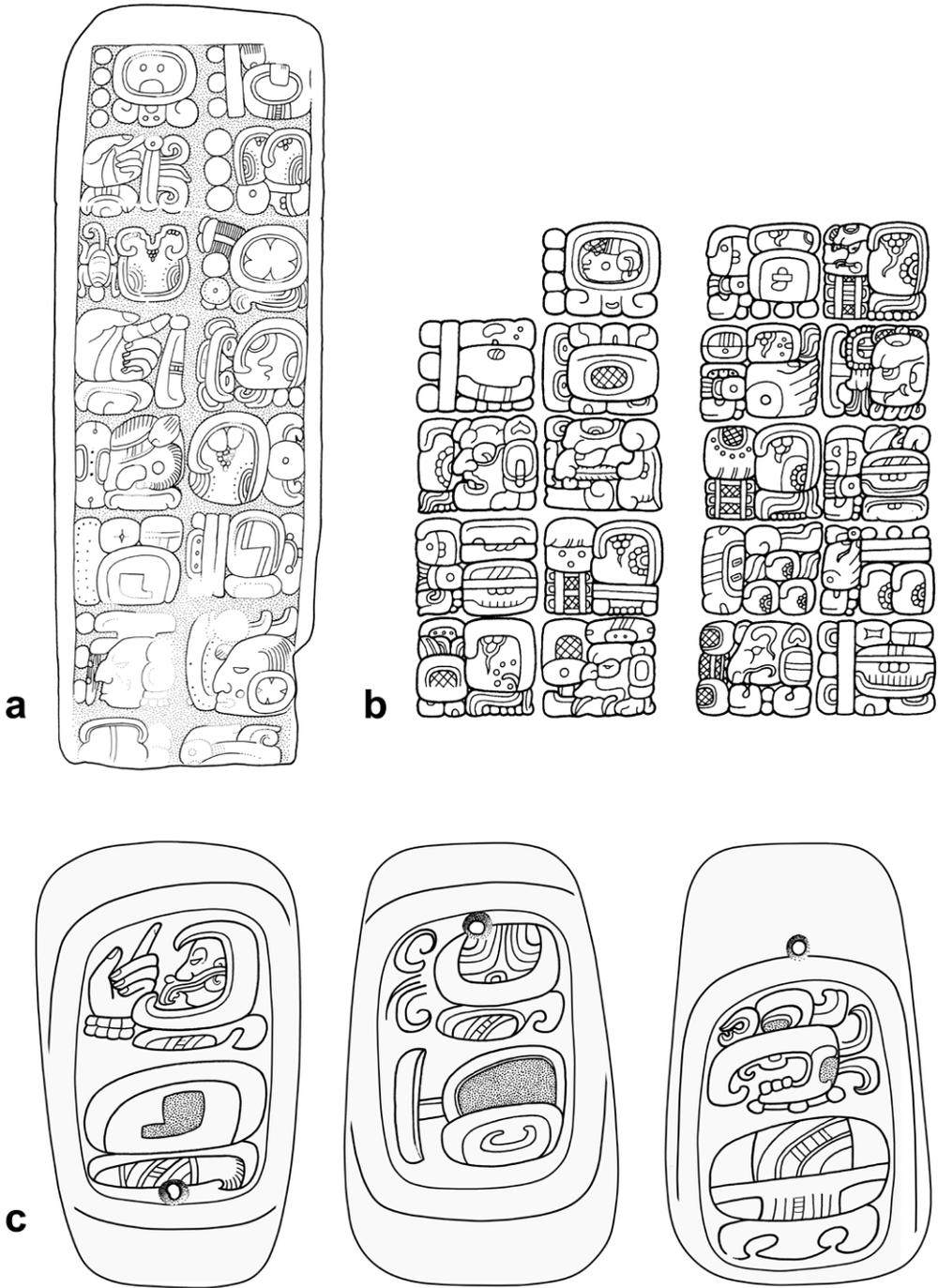


Fig. 11. Mythological texts referring to the Y2 place: a) Tonina, Mon. 150 (drawing by Ian Graham); b) Quirigua, Stela C (drawing by John Montgomery); c) Calakmul, Str. 3, Tomb 1, incised celts (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

‘the lands of Y2’ the Yaxchilan text can be used to suggest that this second deity was summoned from this supernatural locale. Furthermore, considering the importance of the Y2 emblem at Yaxchilan the conjuring event may have been used to reiterate the close affiliation between the supernatural and the mortal kings who bore this title. The texts from Tonina, Quirigua, Calakmul and Yaxchilan thus make it clear that this Y2 place figures prominently in creation accounts and leave little doubt that it served to name an important mythological locale.

Aside from these captivating creation accounts how are we to fix Y2 within greater mythological narratives? Truly remarkable in this regard are the mythological scenes represented on vase K1004, now in the collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Figure 12). The vase, elegantly painted in fine black lines on a variegated cream background with subtle diluted brown wash, can be attributed to a workshop in the Motul de San José area of the central Peten, and dated to the latter half of the eighth century (see Robicsek and Hales 1981: 201). One scene depicts the Hero Twins, with *Yax Bahlam* holding a wide dish over his head, brimming with regalia (Figure 12a) and *Juun Ajaw* shouldering a large bundle, whilst precariously riding a serpentine figure (Figure 12b). According to Michael Coe’s interpretation of this scene, the Hero Twins are gathering up the head and the regalia of their father, the Maize god, for “reassembly and resurrection”, following his defeat at the hands of the nefarious underworld lords (Coe 1989: 178; see Taube 1985: 175).

The other side of the vase depicts another scene in which the adult Maize god is shown standing, but slightly stooped, in a gesture of grief, with his right arm partly folded over his face (Figure 12c). The Maize god wears little jewellery and is otherwise stripped down to his loincloth. The context is clearly the watery underworld as visibly marked by the diving waterfowl and the large skull that represents the twisted rhizomatic root mass of water-lilies. Before the Maize god is a woman, with prominent black face paint framing her eyes, who is seated cross-legged within the maw of a giant skeletal centipede, forming the portal to the underworld (see Taube 2003: 413-416). Held in the palm of her left hand is a *Spondylus* shell and a stylized shark’s head, that together form the centrepiece of a belt assemblage and the posture suggests that she is offering this item of regalia to the Maize god (Freidel *et al.* 1993: 92, 279; Quenon and Le Fort 1997: 892). The accompanying glyphic caption confirms the context and explains the Maize god’s grief. It is headed by the calendar round 13 Ok 8 Sip and the main clause goes on to record: *ochha?a¹² juun ixim wak ajaw uhtiy¹³*, ‘he water-entered One maize the *Wak Ajaw*, it has happened’.¹⁴ As is well-known the expression *ochha?* is a metaphor for ‘death’, in which the subject is said to enter the waters of the underworld, precisely duplicating the scene at hand (see Lounsbury 1974; Schele 1980: 116-117, 350; Stuart 1998: 388). Thus, the Maize god’s sorrowful posture appears to be caused by his demise, as conveyed in the glyphic text. What is significant to remark at this juncture is that the death of the Maize god is commonly represented in ancient Maya iconography and forms a central theme that can be traced back to the Protoclassic murals of San Bartolo where this deity literally plunges

out **YAX-tz’a[?]-wa / je?-na**, possibly read *yax tz’a...w je’n* (‘first ... valley?’).

¹² The verb can be segmented morphologically as follows: *och-ha?-a-Ø* and analyses as ‘enter-water-a-3SB’. The *-a* suffix may be an allomorph of *-aj ~ -ij*, a denominalizing suffix (Lacadena 2003) serving turn the substantive *ochha?* ‘water-entry’ into an intransitive, which conforms to the syntax of the main clause. Elsewhere the *-a* suffix typically marks the inflection as the active voice of non-CVC transitive verbs.

¹³ The final element of the main clause, involves the intransitive root *uht* ‘to happen’ followed by *-iy* the past temporal deictic marker, which here accentuate that the action is completed and has transpired, serving essentially as an emphatic device (see Helmke *et al.* 2006: 8-9).

¹⁴ In the caption the Maize god is named *Juun Ixim*, ‘One maize’, and carries the title *Wak Ajaw* (literally ‘six king’) that forms the template for another series of other more localized titles after his rebirth in splendour (see Reents 1991; Houston *et al.* 1992: 503-504; Helmke in press).



Fig. 12. The death of the Maize god and the acquisition of the *Spondylus* regalia. The sides of the vase depicting a) *Yax Bahlam* and b) *Juun Ajaw* (photographs © of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts); c) The reverse of the vase depicting the Maize god in the watery underworld (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

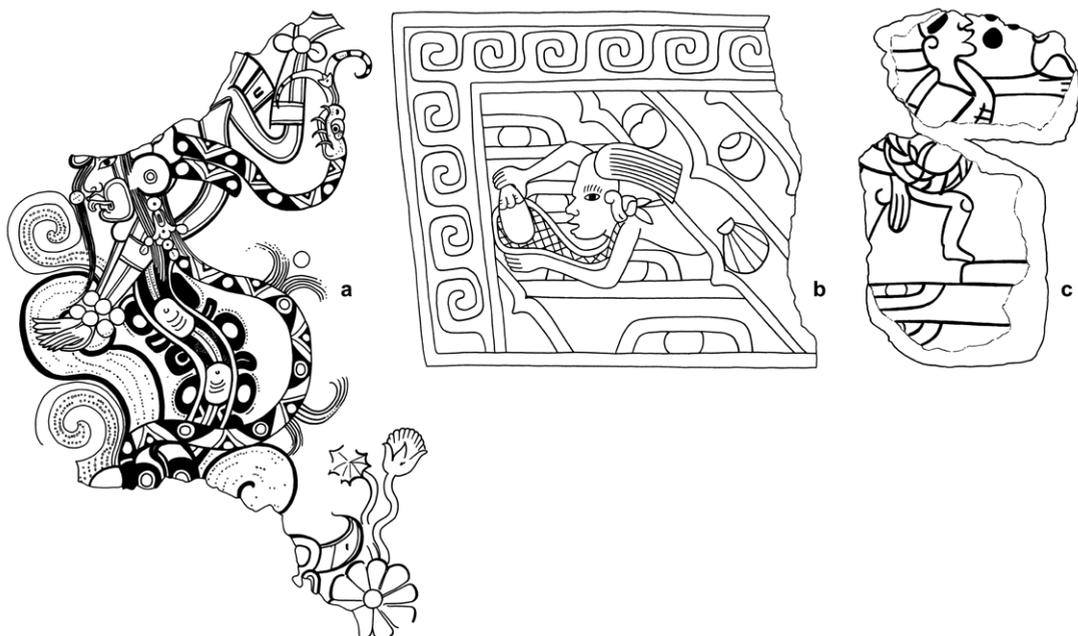


Fig. 13. The Maize god's death and immersion in Maya and Teotihuacan iconography: a) the Maize god being drawn into the watery underworld by a snake, San Bartolo, West Wall (drawing by Heather Hurst); b) the Maize god as a shell diver, Teotihuacan, Tetitla, Portico 26, Mural 3 (drawing by Christophe Helmke); c) the Maize god coming ashore holding out a shell, Teotihuacan, Tetitla, Corridor 12a, Murals 3-4 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

into the watery underworld (Taube 2006; Taube *et al.* 2010: 81-83) (Figure 13a). In his most recent study of the Maya-influenced murals, known as the *Pinturas Realistas*, at Teotihuacan, Karl Taube (in prep.) has compellingly identified a series of shell-diving scenes involving the Maize god (Figure 13b-c). In this connection Taube fittingly notes that “the mythic death and submergence of the maize god was also related to the procurement of marine shell, including *Spondylus*” (Taube in prep.: 17), a feature that is closely duplicated in the scene rendered on the vase. Thus, whereas the particulars of the two narratives differ in certain details, the iconography of K1004 depicts not only the passing of the Maize god, but also the particular circumstance under which he obtains the *Spondylus* shell that would ultimately become a distinctive insignia upon his resurrection.

What is truly fascinating is the information provided in the final segment of the glyphic caption, which strangely has not been commented upon in the published literature. The two glyph blocks that make up the sub-clause – wedged between the Maize god and the seated woman – promptly record: *uchabij k'uh[ul] ? ajaw*, ‘it is the doing of the godly Y2 king’. Therefore, here we are told that the death of the Maize god was deliberately caused by another agent, to whom credit is given for the action. Although no name is provided, the agent is referred to by title, in this case the Y2 EG, the same title borne by the mythic figures cited in the creation texts. Based on our understanding of the *Popol Wuj* the scenes depicted on the vase ought to represent the death of the Maize god at the hands of the underworld lords. As a result, Yaxchilan's second EG can be traced all the way back to deep-time to the mythic events surrounding the death of the Maize god. With this interpretation in mind, it thus stands to reason that the main sign of this EG somehow refers to the underworld and may even provide the toponym by which it was known in the Classic period.

Nevertheless, it bears remembering that the text of Quirigua Stela C clearly states that the hearthstones are planted in the heavens and the toponyms *Nah-hoʔ-chan* ‘first-five-sky’ and *Tiʔ-chan* ‘edge of the sky’ substantiate this. The supernatural entities that plant the stones are also well known entities tied to the sky, including the Paddler deities and God D, the supreme celestial ruler (Schele and Miller 1986: 54; Miller and Martin 2004: 51-65; Martin in press; Stone and Zender 2011: 47). As a result it would seem likely if the Y2 place were also to be found in the heavens and the figures bearing the EG that incorporates that toponym would thus equally be entities inhabiting the sky. While this interpretation may seem premature, there are in fact four key pieces of iconography that support this conclusion. The first is the sherd from Buenavista del Cayo, already mentioned above, that depicts God D seated on a jaguar cushion in his palatial court, as he conjures a godly essence from an offering bowl placed on a throne of bound human long bones (Figure 14c). Significant is the first, shorter glyphic caption that may record an appeasing quotation addressed to God D in the second person, uttered by a now-missing individual (see Zender 2004b: 310-312; Stuart and Stuart 2008: 162-163). The second, lengthier caption remains unclear in its reading, but includes the honorific *mam* ‘grandfather, elder’, the verbal form *jom* ¹⁵ ‘he/it ended’, the whole closed by a clear example of the Y2 toponym. Although the Buenavista sherd provides a key mythological passage, its incompleteness raises more questions than it answers, but nevertheless suggests that God D was somehow involved in the affairs of the Y2 place. The second important piece of iconography is the superb, but unprovenanced, throne back in the Museo Amparo. The throne back represents God D within his cavernous court, attended by a concubine who caringly embraces a diminutive figure with serpent wings (Figure 14a). The associated glyphic captions help to clarify the iconography and relate that the winged figure is the Patron of Pax, known as *Sibikteʔ* (Zender 2005b: 13; Helmke 2008: 164-169), who is explicitly said to be the ‘messenger of God D’ (Miller and Martin 2004: 28-29). As such the scene appears to represent the return of his winged messenger bringing tidings of *Wak-chanal* ‘six-sky-place’ from whence he is said to have descended (Zender 2005b: 13-14). The end of the text is partly weathered and difficult to make out, but recounts an ascent to the settlement of an unidentified figure that appears to carry the full Y2 emblem (Figure 14b). Also relevant is the celebrated Codex style vase K1226, which depicts the elder Hero Twin shooting his blowgun at the great celestial bird. This vase is remarkable for its glyphic caption that appears to relate the great bird’s descent from the heavens (Zender 2005b: 9-11), and significantly the name of God D is directly paired off with the Y2 sign, and its matching phonetic complement (Figure 14d). The mythological scenes, on the Buenavista sherd, the Amparo throne, and K1226 provide important parallels and reveal that God D had significant ties to the Y2 place and the corresponding EG. As such one is left to wonder whether the death of the Maize god was not brought about by the intervention of God D, the ‘godly Y2 king’ himself, as credited on K1004. This may also explain in part why the Hero Twins are so frequently shown at audience with God D in his heavenly palace, as though his blessings had to be secured before they could embark on the perilous journey to the underworld to salvage and resurrect their father, the Maize god. This conclusion may in fact be substantiated further by the glyphic caption (designated MT50) that was engraved on one of the human bones recovered from Bu. 116 at Tikal (see Moholy-Nagy 2008: Fig. 190). This bone depicts the Maize god being ferried to the underworld by the so-called Paddler deities, and the text is remarkable in recording the ‘sinking’ of this deity by use of the Star Wars glyph, and seems to go on to record an *uchabiiy* statement (pC1) followed by the name of God D (pD1) (Figure 14e). As such the death of the Maize god again appears to be brought about by God D, revealing a whole mythological narrative relating these two deities that had heretofore gone unnoticed.

¹⁵ This intriguing example provides a rare example of an absolutive antipassive inflection (see Lacadena 2000), which can be segmented as *jom-o* ‘w-Ø, and analysed as end-AP-3SB.

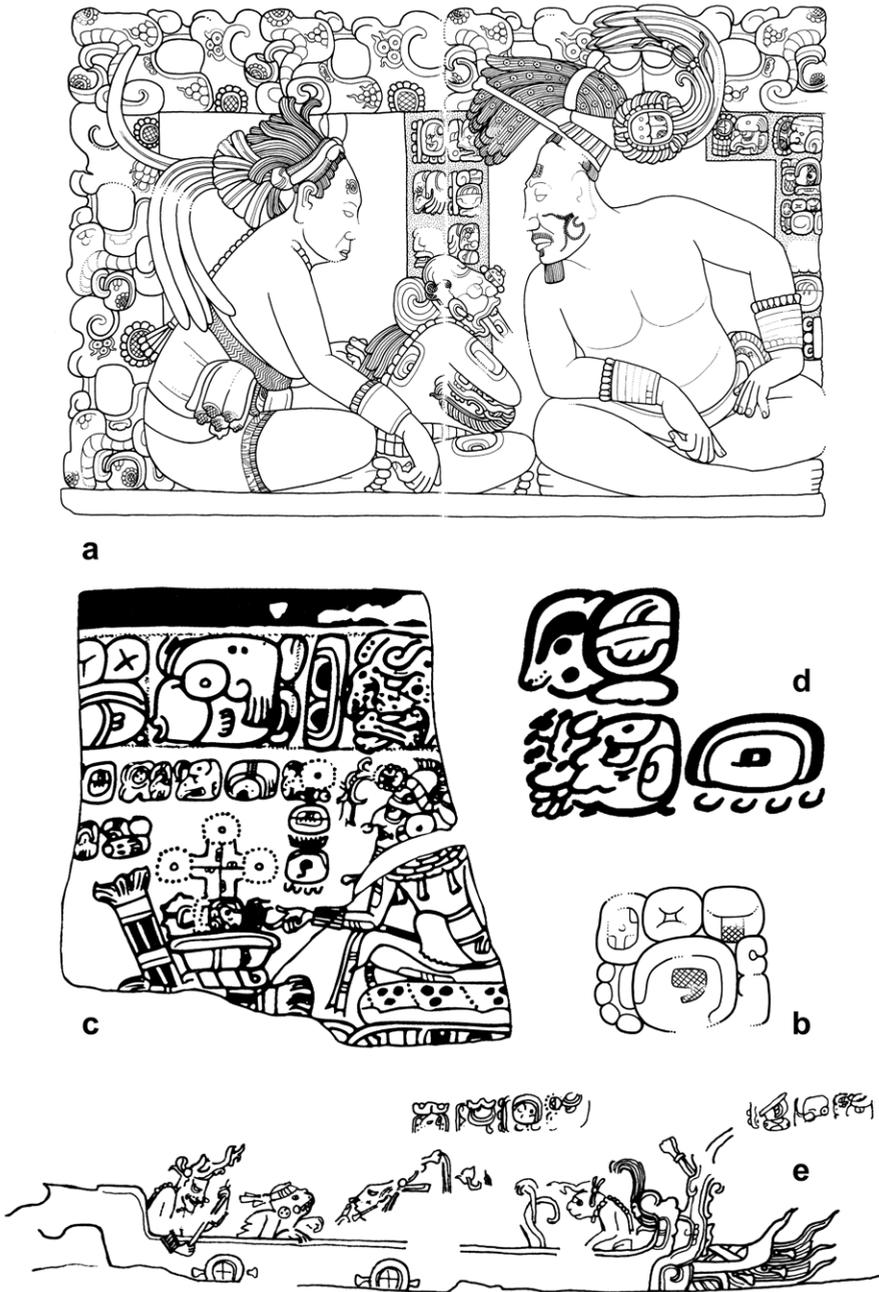


Fig. 14. The Y2 place and its association with God D: a) God D in his cavernous court, Amparo throne back (drawing by Marc Zender); b) detail of the glyphic caption of the Amparo throne (D3) showing a Y2 EG (drawing by Christophe Helmke); c) God D in his palace before a conjuring dish, Buenavista del Cayo, Sherd 2 (drawing by Karl Taube); d) detail of the glyphic caption on K1226, A3-B4 (drawing by Marc Zender); e) the Maize god being ferried to the underworld, Tikal, Bu. 116, MT.50 (drawing by Linda Schele, courtesy of FAMSI).

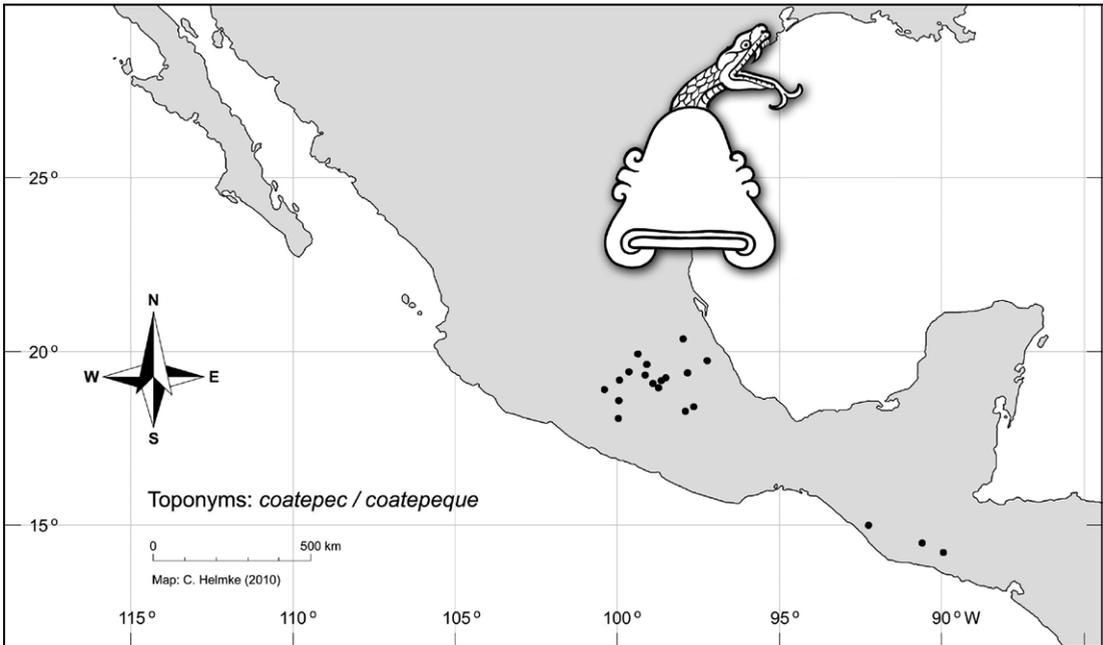


Fig. 15. Map of Mesoamerica showing the distribution of toponyms named *Kōwātepek* <Coatepec ~ Coatepeque>. Note the concentration of place names in central Mexico and the outliers on the Pacific coast of Guatemala (map by Christophe Helmke).

CONCLUSIONS

In the review presented here, I have attempted to make a case for the mythic origin of the toponyms incorporated into the paired EGs of Palenque and Yaxchilan, tracing these through glyphic narratives stretching back into the distant past. The events that are said to have taken place at these various localities leave little doubt that we are dealing with supernatural toponyms. The incorporation of mythical toponyms into prominent royal titles, undoubtedly served to enhance the prestige of the dynasties that bore them and to underline a conceived link to the earliest figures of the deep-past. The myths presented here are all intimately related to royalty and clearly served a prominent role in ancient Maya world-view. Their influence rests in the explanatory framework that these provide and betray the devout efforts of ancient historians concerned with the etiology of the institution of kingship. As for *Matwiil* and *Paʔchan*, these toponyms, and the myths they conjure, lie at the heart of royal power and the legitimization of the institution.

Whereas I have attempted to make clear the mythological origin of the toponyms involved in certain EGs, in no way am I attempting to reduce or diminish the pivotal role that EGs have played and will continue to play in the reconstruction of the ancient Maya geo-political order. The recurrent use of these supernatural titles firmly bonded these mythic toponyms to the dynasties that bore them, and on rare occasion were used as place names referring to the kingdom as a whole. This transposition has been noted elsewhere in Mesoamerica where many settlements are variously derived from the mythic toponyms *Tōllān* ('place of reeds') and *Kōwātepek* ('snake-mountain-place') of Aztec mythology (see Helmke and Nielsen in press) (Figure 15). This is a pattern also found among other cultures, such as the place of emergence *Sipaapu* of the Pueblo Indians (e.g. Bierhorst 1985: 82-83; Geertz 2010),

or the Icelandic settlements named *Ásgarður*, after the land of the gods in Nordic mythology (e.g. Lindow 2001), or even *Hawai'i* whose etymology can be traced back to Proto-Polynesian *Sawariki, the ancestral homeland or paradisiacal underworld (Biggs and Clark 2006; Taumoeofalau 1996). Unexpectedly, and wholly anachronistically, it would seem as though certain historical kingdoms in the Maya area did carry toponyms that find their origin in myths. Whether it was thought that the mythic events actually transpired at these locations remains an open question, but is certainly plausible.

As to the temporality of these myths and their place within the larger chronologies, certain interesting patterns are to be noted. The first among these is that the *Matwiil* and the Y2 place were both anchored to events that took place at the transition between the present and the past creation in 3114 BC. For the mythical Triad Progenitor, who was the first to carry the full *Matwiil* emblem, we are told that he was born at the cusp of the present creation, whereas the Y2 texts relate a well-established sequence of kings by this important turning point. As for *Paʔchan*, although I suggest that events tied to this toponym took place in the time of *Juun Ajaw*, unfortunately we do not have any secure chronological anchors. The narratives though firmly rooted to the previous creation and to the interstice with the present one, also set aside a lengthy chapter that straddles the true advent of Classical dynasties. At Palenque we see the mythical figure *Ukokan Kan ~ Chan* as the hinge between conceivable history and the bafflingly distant past, and the alternation of EGs that he bore, starting with that of *Matwiil* and going on to that of *Baakeʼl*, illustrates the means by which Classic Maya historians strove to account for the disparity between the mythical era, recorded history and the time in-between. The case of Palenque is particularly evocative since in the time of *Matwiil*, ageless divinities and supernatural agents figured as the prominent actors, whereas from the time of *Baakeʼl* onwards – although initially preceding the advent of written history – the rulers appear as mortal and occupied reigns conforming to human life-spans. As such the separation between the history of mortal kings and the deep-past of undying gods is evenly made. The time before the present creation was thereby the deep-past, the preserve of the gods, leaving thirteen centuries to span the protracted transition that culminated in recorded history. In contrast, for *Paʔchan* and the Y2 place, the Classic Maya kings who bore these titles appear to have envisaged an uninterrupted sequence of kings spanning all the way into the deep-past. This case is openly made by the dynastic counts found on the Tonina and Dos Caobas stelae, whereas *Paʔchan* kings may have claimed to be descendents of *Juun Ajaw*, who was in essence the first monarch to ascend to the throne and take as his crown the head of the great bird he had slain (Nielsen and Helmke in press). As a result, the distinction between deep-time and the sanctioned history of kings is blurred by the continuities that are imposed by the chronology. These cases epitomize the application of “eternal return” with deep-time and its recurrent manifestation being essentially inseparable, in much the same way that mythical figures and divine kings formed links in an uninterrupted chain.

While the examples from Palenque and Yaxchilan constitute only a small, but highly illustrative sample, other EGs in turn may equally find their origins in mythic deep-time, although this remains within the purview of future studies. The EG of Seibal is a case in point since the toponym that it uses as its main sign is the same three-stone hearth that is cited in the creation texts (see Taube 1998: 434, 441-443, Fig. 3b; Taube *et al.* 2010: 23) (Figure 16a). Furthermore, the *Kaanuʼl* or “Snake Head” emblem of the Late Classic rulers of Calakmul is also noteworthy in this regard (Figure 16c), since there is now evidence to suggest that even this place name is a supernatural one (Martin 1997, 2005; García Barrios and Carrasco Vargas 2006: Fig. 10; Guenter 2000; Tokovinine 2008: 211; Velásquez García 2008a, 2008b) (Figure 16b). In addition, key examples of EGs that integrate the earspool glyph as their main sign at Uxmal and Ek Balam (Figure 16e), if related to the Y2 place discussed here, may be relatively late examples of the same processes already seen in the central Maya Lowlands during the larger course of the Classic period. The example from Ek Balam is rendered on the capstone that closed the tomb of the local ruler *Ukit Kan Leek Tookʼ* (AD 770-806+) (see Lacadena 2004) (Figure

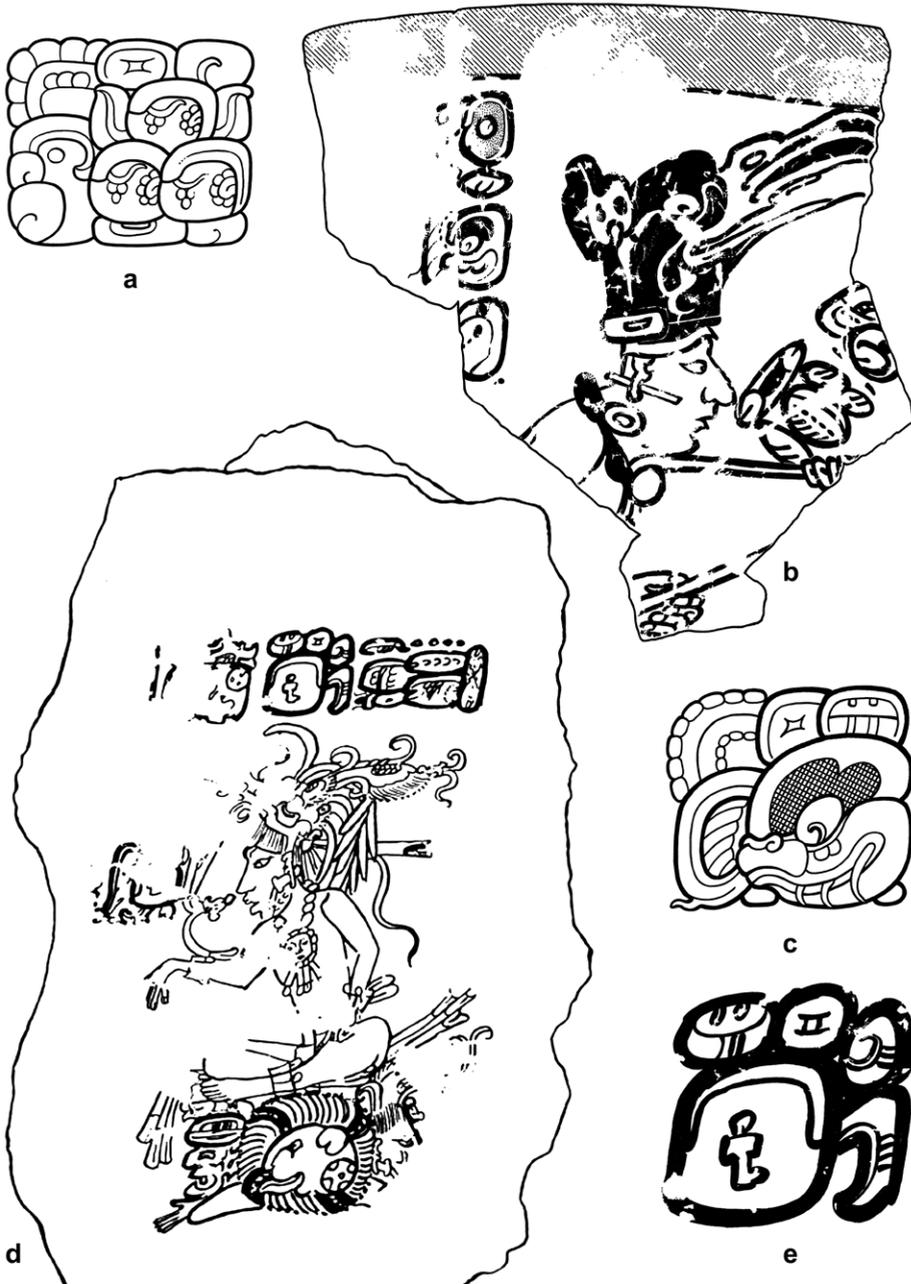


Fig. 16. Examples of other mythological EGs: a) Seibal emblem, Seibal, HS, Tablet 9, E2; b) mythological scene depicting a cave-entry event in a cave named *Kaanu'l*, Calakmul, Str. 20, sherd; c) “Snake Head” emblem, La Corona, Hieroglyphic Stair 2, Block X, A2; d) posthumous depiction of the ruler *Ukit Kan Leek Took'* as the Maize god, Ek Balam, Capstone 15; e) earspool variant of Y2, Ek Balam, Capstone 15, B1 (drawings by Christophe Helmke, except d), by Carlos Arriega).

16d). What makes this example particularly noteworthy is that this example captions an iconographic scene wherein *Ukit Kan Leek* is posthumously depicted as the Maize God, thereby motivating the use of a supernatural EG and duplicating the mythological episode relating the death of this divinity.

In spite of the five decades since Berlin's groundbreaking identification of EGs, these titles continue to be fertile ground in which to explore the ways in which Maya kings perceived themselves and the role they assumed in the geo-politics of the Classic period. The proposals made here also raise the question as to whether shared EGs in every case are the product of historical interactions, including dynastic fissioning and the right of conquest, or whether at times some unrelated and competing dynasties independently claimed the prerogative of titles based on supernatural toponyms. The new insights gained from the mythological origins ascribed to certain EGs are highly revealing as to how rulers aspired to embody the divine status of their stations and sheds light onto the varied conceptualisation of deep-time among the ancient Maya.

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