Of Snakes and Bats:
Shifting Identities at Calakmul

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Figure 1. The emblem glyph of the "Snake" polity: left, on Dzibanche Monument 13 (B3); right, from a codex-style vessel (K6751, L2). All drawings by the author unless otherwise stated.

My first sight of the Dzibanche steps, in storage at the regional INAH headquarters in Chetumal, Quintana Roo, was deeply impressive.[1] It was just as they had been described: numerous limestone blocks finely carved in an early style, most bearing miserable captives struggling with their bonds, each of them near-naked with wild, tousled hair (Nalda 2004). Their most compelling feature, for an epigrapher, was the accompanying texts with the array of emblem glyphs they contained—each of them the famed "Snake" title (Velásquez 2004:80) (Figure 1). The question was: did they reflect Dzibanche's success in capturing lords subject to the Snake kingdom—known as Kan/Kaan in ancient times—or was Dzibanche itself a one-time seat of the Snake polity?[2] While there were serious challenges to reading the relevant passages, it was clear that they had implications for my own work at the faraway ruins of Calakmul, Campeche.

I had joined the Proyecto Arqueológico de la Biosfera de Calakmul, directed by Ramón Carrasco, in 1994 and had started to wrestle with the scoured and shattered remains of the site's monuments—a vestigial epigraphic record that had long proved jealous of its secrets (Morley 1933; Denison 1943; Marcus 1987). But our large-scale investigation of the site promised much in the way of new data. Combining information from fresh discoveries with those from the preceding Proyecto Calakmul, directed by William Folan, as well as relevant sources from across the Maya world, the opportunity was ripe to fully situate Calakmul among its peers and, in effect, to wake a sleeping colossus.

By that time, Calakmul had been a prime candidate for the capital of the Snake polity for over two decades (Marcus 1973).[3] David Stuart and Stephen Houston published their work on Classic Maya toponyms the same year and had provisionally linked two placenames, "Nab Tunich" and "Oxte'tun," to Calakmul as well as to the activities of Snake rulers (Stuart and Houston 1994:28-29). Most importantly, a text at Dos Pilas gives "Nab Tunich"—better read Chiik Nahb—as the site of Yich'aak K'ahk's accession (Martin 1997:851-852). A further five examples of Chiik Nahb have turned up at Calakmul, and it unquestionably names the site and/or the area under its direct administration. Similar evidence connects Uxte'tuun (the preferred form for Oxte'tun today) with the polity and city.

Together with some key archaeological finds, this confirmed Calakmul as the seat of the well known Snake king Yich'aak K'ahk' "Claw of Fire" (previously Jaguar Paw Smoke), who reigned from AD 686 to at least 695.[4] Moreover, new kings emerged, such as Yuknoom Ch'een II (636-686) and Yuknoom Took' K'awiil (>706-731>), Snake rulers who also used Calakmul as their capital (Martin 1998, 2000a).[5] It was these three,

[1] This visit was in 1995 and made together with Nikolai Grube, who had earlier inspected the steps with Linda Schele.

[2] A feature of the Snake emblem long noted by epigraphers is the prefixed **ka** sign that cues the reading **KAN** in place of the normal **CHAN**. The spellings **ka-KAN** and **KAN-nu** in substitution for one another in the name of a particular deity suggests that the k- form is long-vowel *kaan*. Two rationales present themselves: either it is a very ancient form from Proto-Mayan (Martin in Grube 2004:119) or simply that it reflects a Yukatekan form.

[3] Heinrich Berlin isolated a snake's head in his original 1958 publication on emblem glyphs, although, unlike Tikal, Copan, and half a dozen more, he could not link it to a specific Maya site. Joyce Marcus first suggested Calakmul, based on its sheer size, in 1973, but for more than twenty years no surviving emblems could be found at the site. This allowed competing claims to emerge, which were only silenced with the work of David Stuart and Stephen Houston (1994), who identified two toponyms with Calakmul and linked them to the doings of Snake kings. The first local Snake emblem emerged on a fragment of hieroglyphic stairway uncovered by Ramón Carrasco in 1994, and there are some eight examples known today (Martin 1996, 2000a).

[4] This ruler was first identified by Jeffrey Miller (1974:155, Fig. 5) and his birth date in 649 recognized on Calakmul Stela 9 by Peter Mathews (1979). The site of his accession was subsequently tied to the Calakmul toponym Nab Tunich/Chiik Nahb (Stuart and Houston 1994:28; Martin 1997:851-852), while excavations have produced his name on Stela 115 (Marcus and Folan 1994) and on a plate from Tomb 4 in Structure 2 (Carrasco et al. 1999; Martin 2000a).

[5] The full name of the king I've called Yuknoom Took' K'awiil includes at least one, more probably two, additional elements, but their readings and sequence are in doubt. After Yuknoom comes a human head with three cloth-like elements over its eye, seemingly complemented by syllabic **li**. The head is infixed by a probable **CH'EEN** sign. This ruler employs a daunting variety of name spellings on his monuments, with frequent omissions.

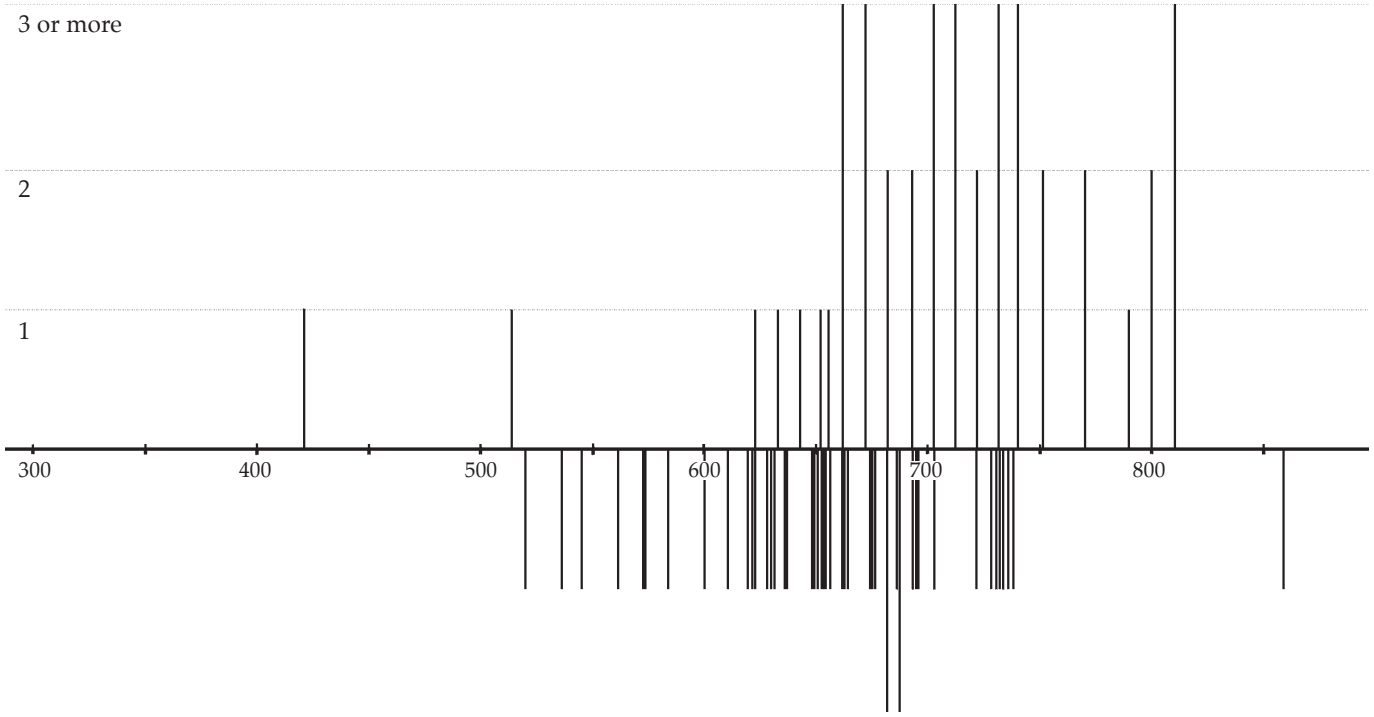

Figure 2. Monument dedications at Calakmul (top) charted against references to the Snake dynasty at other sites in the Maya region (bottom).

but especially the last two, who commissioned a startling proportion of its monuments—as many as forty-three stelae between them.

But as I've learned more about the site and its inscriptions, problems with the easy equation of the Snake kingdom with Calakmul persisted. The invitation accepted here, to contribute a Calakmul perspective on the Dzibanche finds and the accompanying article by Erik Velásquez García, allows me to discuss a range of these issues. Fortunately, some of them may finally be coming into focus.

A Missing History

Sylvanus Morley visited Calakmul in 1932—following up on Cyrus Lundell's discovery of its extensive ruins just a year earlier—and recorded a total of 103 stelae (Morley 1933). He noted the dearth of early monuments, with Stela 43 from AD 514 the only representative (Morley 1933:199) (Figure 2).[6] Similar vacuums for the Early Classic appear at a number of other sites, and it was reasonable to imagine (and still is) that early monuments lay buried in construction fill, or even in special group deposits, like one found at Caracol (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:48).

Stela 43 had been erected in a secondary context, within a roofed structure on the face of the massive temple platform Structure 2, the largest at the city. Its text was fairly well preserved except, that is, for a key section where we would expect to find the ruler's full name and titles. The protagonist is mentioned in several later passages, but the form **AJ-K'UH-BIH?-a** is not known from other texts (Marcus 1987:68-69). The only visible title he carries is *k'uhul chatahn winik* "Holy Man of Chatahn" (Martin 1996). Given the prevalence of this epithet on ceramics from the Mirador Basin, the heartland of the Preclassic Maya, it has been suggested that Chatahn names this region (Boot 1999; Grube 2004:122).

The Early Classic inventory was doubled by the Proyecto Calakmul's discovery of Stela 114, also in 1994. Like Stela 43, it was found in a secondary context, this time within a purpose-made niche low on the front of Structure 2 (Marcus and Folan 1994; Pincemin et al. 1998). It had suffered from some burning and spalling to its frontal portrait, but most of the text on its sides and back remained legible. An initial analysis established its Long Count date, 8.19.15.12.13 from 431, as well as a later count linking to the Period Ending 9.0.0.0.0 in 435. Despite its reasonably complete state, the inscription supplies no sign of a Snake emblem glyph.

We know a fair amount about the activities of the Snake polity in the sixth and early seventh centuries and have names for many kings we might hope to find on Calakmul monuments: K'altuun Hix (formerly Tuun K'ab Hix) (>520-546>), Sky Witness (>561-572), Yax ?-Yopaat (>573>), Scroll Serpent (579-611>), Yuk-

[6] Morley, and Dennison after him, doubted the date on Stela 43 was contemporary (Morley 1933:199; Denison 1943:100). However, this view was rightly contested by Marcus (1987:70), since the style of the carving is entirely consistent with the early sixth century.

noom Ti' Chan (>619>), and Tajoom Uk'ab K'ahk' (622-630).[7] The last of these, known from texts at Naranjo and Caracol, held office during the same years covered by Calakmul Stela 28 and 29. Dedicated together in 623, these male-female portraits mark the very beginning of the city's surge in monument production. Unfortunately, close examination of their badly preserved texts shows no emblem glyphs or recognizable names. The chronology of Stela 29, depicting the lord, can be deciphered and covers the years 620-623. Troublingly, however, it does not include a date found at Caracol that seems certain to mark Tajoom Uk'ab K'ahk's inauguration in 622 (Martin 1998).

The next monoliths at the city, Stela 76 and 78, date to 633—a revision to Morley's assessment (Martin 1998).[8] No further information can be gleaned from them today, but their creation coincides with the first records of a Snake ruler, Yuknoom Head, that mention Chiik Nahb and Uxte'tuun.[9]

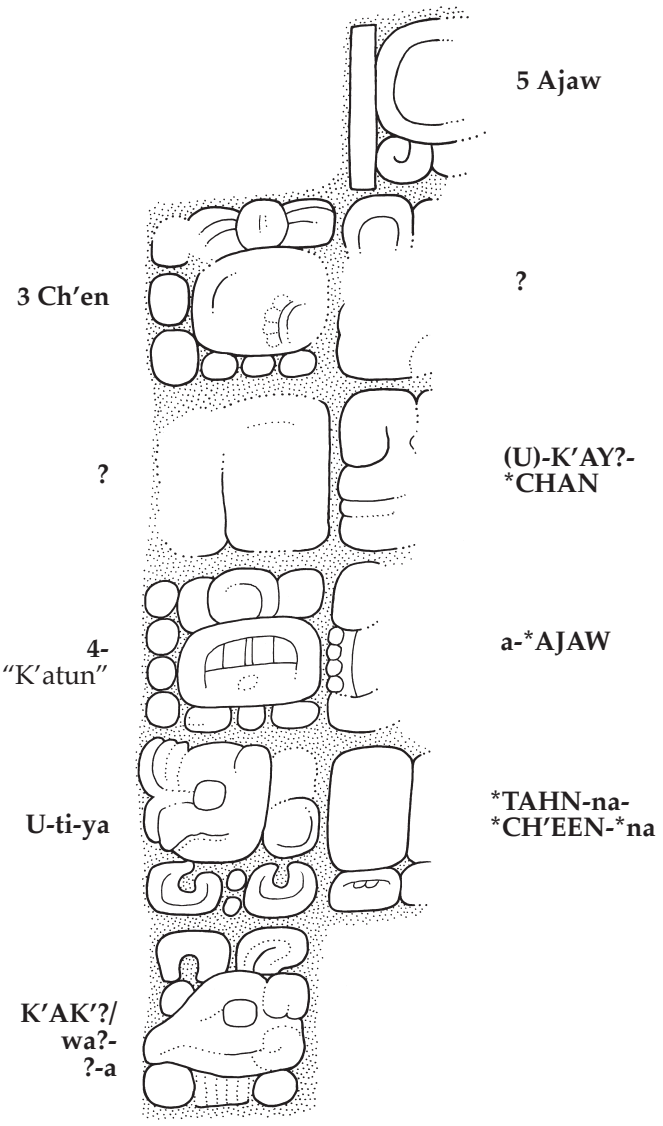

Figure 3. A location given for the 9.8.0.0.0 Period Ending of AD 593. CLK Stela 8 (D3-C8): *ho ajaw ux ik' sihoom ? ? uk'ay? chan chan ? ajaw uhtiiy *tahn *ch'een ?* "5 Ajaw 3 Ch'en 'Period Ending' ? ? 'Scroll Serpent,' Four K'atun Lord, it happened at the center of the cave(town?) ?"

The very first monument I worked on in 1994 was Calakmul Stela 33, erected in 657 as one of eight on and around the south side of Structure 5. All were dedicated between 652 and 662 and were commissions of Yuknoom Ch'een II. A gratifying surprise was an account dated to 579 giving the accession of Scroll Serpent, a Snake king who raided Palenque in 611 (Martin 1996). This event is anchored to the Period Endings 9.7.10.0.0 in 583 and 9.8.0.0.0 in 593, celebrated by Scroll Serpent and his presumed spouse. This retrospective history is interesting for its sheer length—covering the whole back of Stela 33—as well as its attention to calendrical junctures not represented on extant monuments at the city. Yuknoom Took' K'awiil repeats the exercise on Stela 8 in 721, counting back 128 years to recall 9.8.0.0.0 once again (Figure 3). Although barely recognizable today, Scroll Serpent is again named as the celebrant. But this time the text goes on to place the celebration at a specific location, although not one we can fully read or recognize from any other inscription. Since the narrative of Stela 8 then returns to the time of Yuknoom Took' K'awiil and explicitly locates his actions at Uxte'tuun, there seems to be a conscious attempt to contrast local and foreign locales.

The Short Dynastic Count

Unlike a number other major polities—Tikal, Naranjo, Copan, Yaxchilan, and Palenque, for example—the Snake kingdom avoids lengthy "dynastic counts" or "successor titles" in any currently known text. It was not that Snake kings lacked interest in the antiquity of their line: as many as eleven codex-style pots record a

[7] The Scroll Serpent name features a snake with a sound-scroll emerging from its open mouth, suggesting a hissing serpent. In some contexts the scroll could read **K'AY** "song" (see Houston 2002). With the possessive pronoun **U-**, we might have Uk'ay Chan "Song of the Snake" or something similar.

[8] Stela 76 features a fairly clear 1 Ajaw 8 K'ayab date on its front face, equivalent to 9.10.0.0.0 AD 633. It is probable that Stela 77, with which it is aligned, joined it as part of a male-female pair. The rest of the group, Stelae 75, 77, and 79 are later and probably all date to the 9.12.0.0.0 AD 672 mark seen on Stela 75.

[9] This reference comes in 631 on the Naranjo Hieroglyphic Stairway—a partial monument probably removed from Caracol as a trophy of war (Martin 2000b:57-59). There is a slight possibility that Yuknoom Head is variant, or pre-accession, name for Yuknoom Ch'een II, who took power in 636 (date supplied by David Stuart [personal communication 1997] from an altar at La Corona). While the same text makes Tajoom Uk'ab K'ahk' a *k'uhul ajaw* "Holy Lord," Yuknoom Head is given only as an *ajaw*.

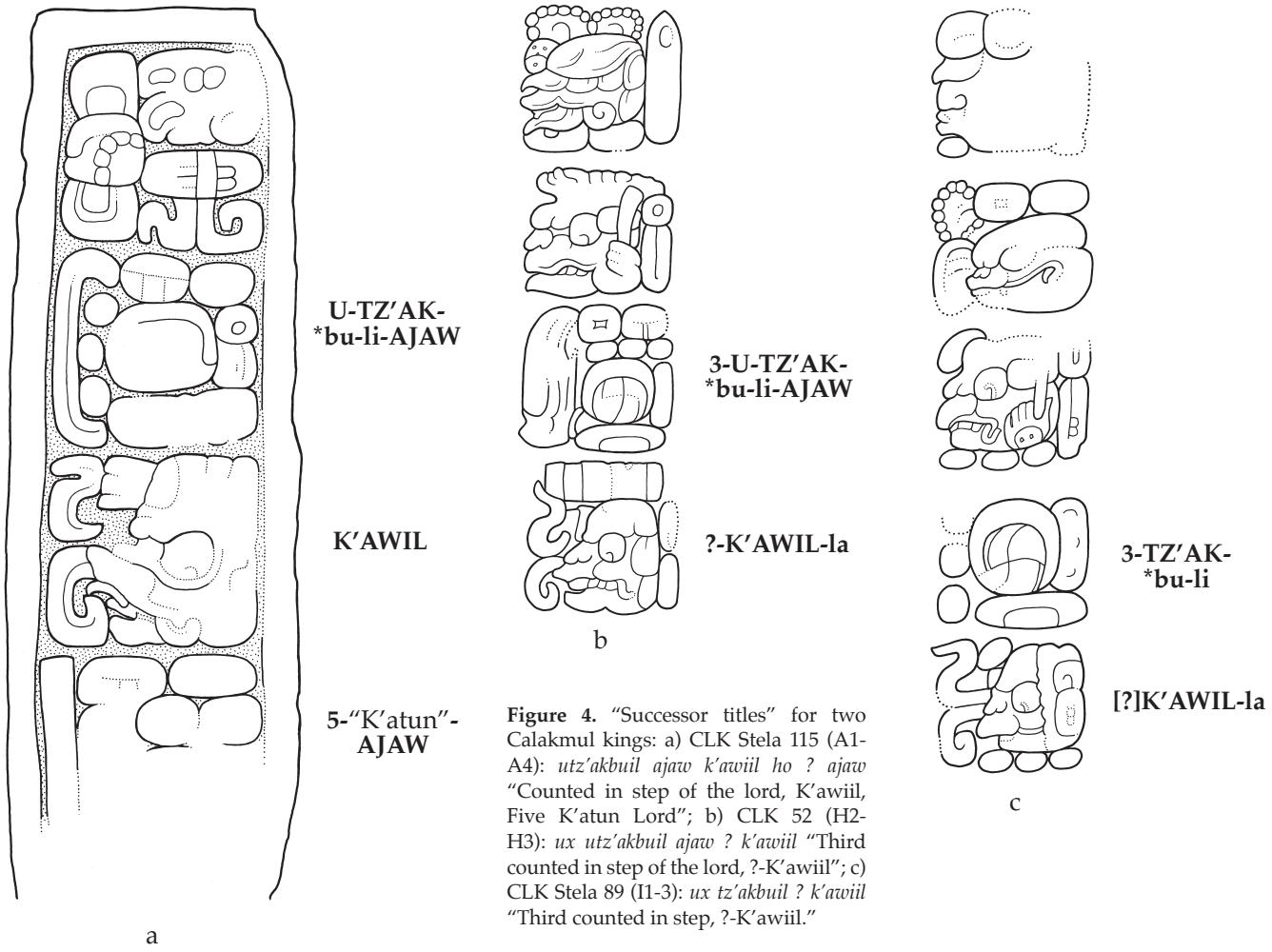

Figure 4. "Successor titles" for two Calakmul kings: a) CLK Stela 115 (A1-A4): *utz'akbuil ajaw k'awiil ho ? ajaw* "Counted in step of the lord, K'awiil, Five K'atun Lord"; b) CLK 52 (H2-H3): *ux utz'akbuil ajaw ? k'awiil* "Third counted in step of the lord, ?-K'awiil"; c) CLK Stela 89 (I1-3): *ux tz'akbuil ? k'awiil* "Third counted in step, ?-K'awiil."

sequence of nineteen Snake rulers, spanning some 400 years or more (Martin 1997). For whatever reason, historical Snake kings chose not to (or could not) set themselves within this great series, and instead preferred counts of very truncated length.

Calakmul Stela 115—actually a doorjamb or other architectural element—provides the name of Yich'aak K'ahk' (Marcus and Folan 1994) (Figure 4a). Further investigation of the text shows that he is said to be the direct successor of a Five-K'atun Lord (that is, an individual aged between seventy-eight and ninety-eight), here described simply as K'awiil. A foreign source, El Peru Stela 33, indicates that Yich'aak K'ahk' succeeded Yuknoom Ch'een II—who was indeed a Five-K'atun Lord, being eighty-six years of age at his death in 686. This would argue that K'awiil is used as a post-mortem term for this long-lived king. Two similar statements can be found for Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, where he is named as the "third counted in step."[10] On these occasions the K'awiil name for Yuknoom Ch'een is elaborated a little, with some additional term prefixed (Figure 4b) and infixed (Figure 4c).

The precise rules governing these "dynastic counts" are unclear, but they are not restricted to direct father-to-son succession and may at times constitute simple sequences of office-holders (Martin 2003:29). Significantly, K'awiil/Yuknoom Ch'een is here given a status equivalent to a dynastic "founder." He certainly seems to have been the most powerful Maya ruler of his time, the "overking" to a number of other polities and a one-time conqueror of Tikal. Even so, this resetting of the "dynastic clock" to zero is without ready precedent, and a little surprising in light of the great line celebrated on the codex-style vases.

[10] Another case is probably to be found on Stela 8 (C10-D10), where this king is the "third counted in step of (the) *kaloomte*'." If we follow the normal formulae at other sites, then "third" would be the third in line including the "founder" (for example, the "thirteenth successor" at Copan makes the founder the first). This raises further questions about the Split Earth character named with a Snake emblem glyph on the bones from Tikal Burial 116 (Martin and Grube 2000:111).

Enter the Bat

Thus far we have established certain anomalies and inconsistencies in the epigraphic record. We will now move to more concrete reasons for questioning an Early Classic Snake-Calakmul link. The aforementioned Stela 114 was re-examined in 2001 at the newly opened Museo Fuerte de San Miguel, Campeche City, were better access was possible than previously at either the site or in storage. The ruler's name appears on the back as the protagonist of rituals celebrating his first K'atun anniversary, presumably of office, implying an unstated accession date in 411. His identity is confirmed by the presence of key name components in the headdress of the elaborate portrait on the front face. Moreover, close inspection of the abraded sign directly in front of this name reveals an emblem glyph (in early texts they can precede rather than follow personal names, a position which becomes fixed only after AD 500) (Figure 5). Its main sign—the name of the socio-political unit under this lord's control—is not a snake head, as we might expect, but the head of a bat (Figure 6a).[11]

This provoked thoughts of two other monuments at Calakmul. In the 1970s, Eric Von Euw made a drawing of Stela 62, dated to 651, that showed an apparent bat emblem. For a long time I took this to be no more than an eroded snake head, but re-examination of the stone, now in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, changed my mind. The ruler's name turns out to be a version of a deity we call the "Waterlily Bird Serpent," whose final component, the head of a snake**,** allows us to make a direct comparison to the following emblem (Figure 7). The differences in physiognomy are considerable, while the emblem's head closely follows bat representations in Maya art and writing (Figure 6b). Meanwhile, in 2001, I had studied the sides of the newly re-erected Stela 59 from 741. Despite its poor condition, in good light a bat emblem glyph could be discerned high on its left side (Figure 6c).[12] In this position it would continue the near-illegible title phrase of the king, seen low on the opposing right side. Recent re-checking of photos taken when this monument was still on the ground provided additional support for this assessment.

A significant piece of the puzzle comes from the site of Oxpemul, a large "satellite" city 22 km to the north

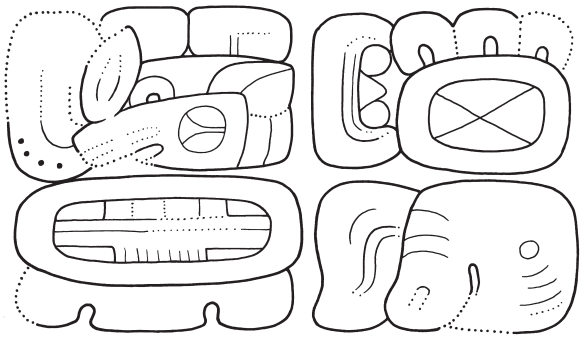

Figure 5. Early Classic ruler using the Bat emblem glyph. CLK Stela 114 (C5-D6).

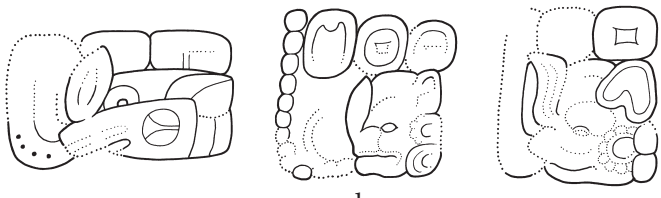

Figure 6. The Bat emblem glyph at Calakmul: a) CLK Stela 114 (C5); b) CLK Stela 62 (B4); c) CLK Stela 59 (C1)

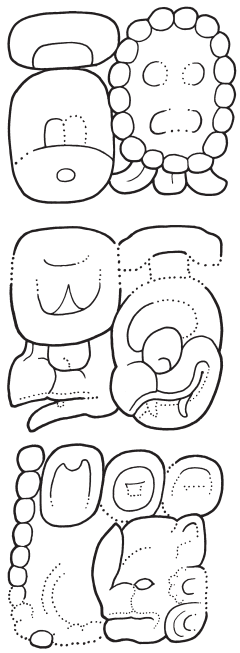

Figure 7. Late Classic ruler using the Bat emblem glyph. CLK 62 (B1-B4)

[11] Coincidently, Pincemin et al. (1998:316) identify the previous glyph, D4, as the head of a leaf-nosed bat. Although in some angles this appears to be the case, I believe the sign is something different.

[12] The apparent "stone" markings on the cheek of the bat initially brought the emblem of Copan to mind—especially given the proximity of the Quirigua-Copan war to which Calakmul may have had some connection, however notional, in 738. There may still be a connection between these two bat head emblems, but it is important to note that the Calakmul versions lack the **pi** and/or **pu** suffixes seen at Copan.

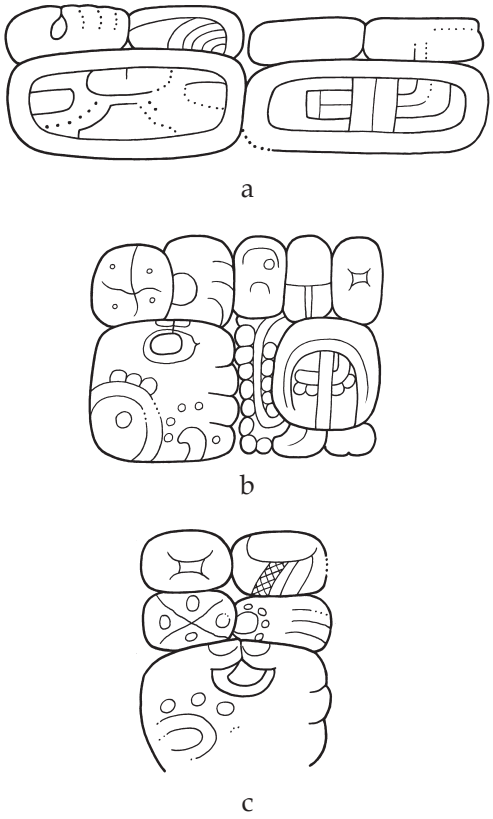

Figure 8. Chiik Nahb Ajaw "Lord of Chiik Nahb": a) CLK Stela 114 (C16-D16); b) QRG Stela I (C5-D5); c) CLK MT.6 (A2).

of Calakmul. Recently relocated by Ivan Sprajc, it has been opened to its first epigraphic investigations since the 1930s. Its monuments show two royal titles. The first incorporates an undeciphered throne/altar glyph not unlike a variant of the *witz* "mountain" sign (Robichaux and Pruett 2004). At the most recent Texas Meetings, Nikolai Grube (2005) identified a second, based on the head of a bat. It carries the prestigious *k'uhul* "holy" prefix, and Grube views it as the true Oxpemul emblem—interpreting the throne/altar compound as a local toponym in titular form.

The three Calakmul examples indicate a wider significance for the Bat emblem. Spanning at least 320 years at Calakmul, we have an entity of some longevity that had regional or multi-center relevance.[13] It appears at the site at the very time Dzibanche is suspected of being the (or at least a) Snake capital (Martin and Grube 2000:103; Grube 2004:117-118).[14] Consequently, the Bat's return in 741 and 751 must make us wonder if the Snake emblem was still in use at that time. Had its seat had shifted once more? One thinks here of the cherished resetting of Stela 114 in the Terminal Classic (Pincemin et al. 1999:319), which makes better sense if the establishment of the time shared the identity of the ancestral Bat king they honored. The last known example of the Snake emblem glyph at Calakmul comes in 731, on Yuknoom Took' K'awiil's final stelae. Given the ruinous state of the city's monuments, caution is obviously required here. It has been assumed until now that later Snake emblems are simply eroded beyond recognition—and we must be open to what new excavations could bring. All we can say at this point is that we have two visible emblems after 731, and that both feature the head of a bat rather than a snake.

Lords of Chiik Nahb

Returning to Stela 114, after a parentage statement for the Bat king, we advance to a new date and event, seemingly an accession in 431 or shortly before. It features a character using, or acquiring, the title **chi-ku-NAHB AJAW** "Lord of Chiik Nahb" (Figure 8a).[15] This epithet is not a common one, with just two other examples. One is at distant Quirigua, recorded in 800 but referring back to the 9.15.5.0.0 Period Ending of 736 (Looper 1999:270-271; 2003:79) (Figure 8b). This time spelled **chi[ku]-NAHB K'UH-AJAW** "Holy Lord of Chiik Nahb," it seems to place a Calakmul lord at Quirigua less than two years before the latter's victory over its erstwhile overlord Copan. Given that this text goes on to describe details of the conflict, a Calakmul connection would seem to be implied. The other example of this title, **chi[ku]-NAHB-AJAW**, appears on a hieroglyphic block recovered from the fill of Calakmul Structure 13 (Figure 8c). Dated to 751, it is carried by a character called Bolon K'awiil, known to be a ruler of the site by 771 (Martin 2000a). It is worth noting that the well preserved passage describing Bolon K'awiil's "scattering" ceremony on Stela 58 contains no emblem glyph at all.

[13] It could be argued that Stela 114 is mobile enough to have been brought to Calakmul from Oxpemul, but this does not account for the Bat emblems on Stela 59 (a massive stone typical of Calakmul) or 62 (on which the ruler calls himself the "many" in line of K'awiil, plainly in continuation of the Snake dynasty's "short dynastic count" despite the switch in emblem). The latter stone shows ample signs of fresh political disturbance, since the side texts were never completed. It is also interesting that the bat emblem has also been noted at Naachtun (Grube 2005).

[14] Grube makes a more explicit statement to this effect (2004:121-122). He sees Calakmul as subject to the Chatahn entity in the Early Classic, drawing on Stela 43's use of this title as evidence. Yet the same epithet appears within scribal signatures on Stela 51 and 89, commissioned by Yuknoom Took' K'awiil in 731 (Martin 1996), and it is used more widely by a range of polities on painted and carved ceramics (Boot 1999). The import of the *k'uhul chatahn winik* title seems broad indeed and plausibly refers to the people and territory of the Mirador basin and adjacent regions, a claim to a largely defunct but once powerful region and polity.

[15] Grube (2004:121) refers to a *yajaw* "his lord" subordination statement on Stela 114. However, close examination reveals no such term or relationship in this text.

The appearance of the Chiik Nahb title on Stela 114 is most interesting. The implication is that one lord, an *ajaw*, controlled Calakmul under the aegis of another, a higher status *k'uhul ajaw* of the Bat entity. We should note too that all known instances of Chiik Nahb Ajaw fall outside the "three kings" era—just like those of the Bat emblem glyph, with which it has a close temporal correlation. It remains to be seen if further finds will conform to this pattern, but at the moment we have a distinctly local title used when the Bat emblem is also evident at the site, but not when the Snake title is apparent.

Discussion

So, what are we to make of these disparate lines of evidence? How might internal data from Calakmul complement, expand, or explicate that from Dzibanche?

The evidence that Calakmul served as the seat of the Snake polity in the seventh and early eighth centuries—the era of the "three kings"—is clear. But as we have seen, locating the Snake kingdom at Calakmul both before *and* after this century-long era presents difficulties. While the rarity of Early Classic monuments at the city is not in itself reason to question the association, the lack of recognizable royal names or visible Snake emblems does leaves a vacuum into which the Dzibanche proposition neatly sits. The retrospective recording of past Period Endings smacks of introducing an absent past—of recalling events not only from another time, but another place. In this regard, it is noteworthy that a Snake king (Yax ? Yopaat) is associated with the 9.7.0.0.0 Period Ending from 573 on a block from Dzibanche (Velásquez 2004:97)—just a decade before the 9.7.10.0.0 described on Calakmul Stela 33. It is tempting to think that the location given on Stela 8 refers to Dzibanche or some other Snake capital.

The "short dynastic count" indicates that Yuknoom Ch'een exercised a pivotal place in the self-definition of the dynasty and its time at Calakmul, consistent with the idea that he was involved in a special "reconstitution" of the polity—apparently involving relocation of the royal seat to Calakmul by him or his predecessor. The conspicuous success of the Snake kings in extending a network of patronage and military power in the sixth century may have made a more southerly location advantageous—which is not to ignore the potential symbolic value of occupying an ancient site that was once part of the Preclassic "heartland." We certainly should not exclude the possibility that other sites were involved in the Early Classic make-up of the polity, and that there might be more going on than a straightforward Dzibanche-Calakmul transfer.[16]

If the Bat emblem defines the governing authority of Early Classic Calakmul, then it was itself a complex

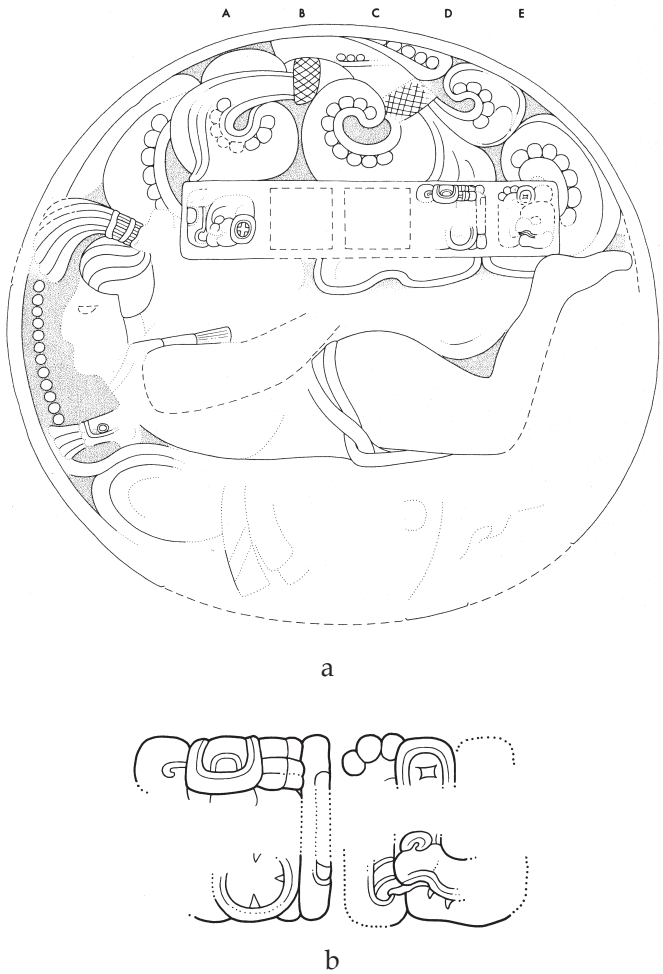

Figure 9. A Tikal-Calakmul conflict circa AD 736: a) TIK Altar 9 (drawing by William R. Coe); b) Caption giving the name of the Snake king, apparently Yuknoom Took' K'awiil. TIK Altar 9 (D-E).

arrangement that appears to see an "overking" preside over a lord with a more direct role in governing the site. It remains unclear if the Bat king was also based at Calakmul, but the implication is that he had importance beyond the city and some kind of regional domain. The bigger question for us is: What historical processes underlie the return of the Bat emblem in 741 and 751?

It is sobering to realize that, save for one example, the last contemporary Snake emblem in the Maya region can be placed no later than 736. It appears on Tikal Altar 9 in the caption to a bound captive, where it identifies either the victim himself or his overlord (Jones

[16] The wooden lintel at Dzibanche (Harrison 1972) refers to the 9.6.0.0.0 mark of 554, as well as an accession event a few months earlier in 553. It is significant that this event is *chumlajiiy ti kaloomte'*, an elevation into the very highest office and so rare it is otherwise only known for Tikal. The Snake ruler Sky Witness could have been in office at this time.

and Satterthwaite 1982:48) (Figure 9a). This stone is partnered by Tikal Stela 21, the first monument put up by Ruler B (Yik'iniiy Chan K'awiil). Commemorating the 9.15.5.0.0 Period Ending of 736, it also recalls his accession in 734, thus providing a probable time range for the conflict. The name of the Snake ruler is damaged, but bears so many similarities to one or another of Yuknoom Took' K'awiil's (very) varied nominals that there can be little doubt that it refers to him (Figure 9b).

This inscription marks the end of a 194-year period in which mentions of the Snake dynasty abound on Maya monuments (Figure 2). With the exception of their only other recorded defeat—also at the hands of Tikal in 695—it makes for a narrative of unblemished success. No state even approached the number of foreign rulers the Snake dynasty confirmed in office, while at various points it conquered or sacked major centers such as Tikal, Palenque, and Naranjo (Martin and Grube 1995, 2000). The defeat of Yich'aak K'ahk' in 695 was plainly a serious setback, judging by the decline in foreign references that follows (Martin 1996). However, Yuknoom Took' K'awiil maintained notable influence over El Peru, Dos Pilas, and La Corona, so Snake power was not entirely eclipsed.

After 736, however, the Snake polity disappears from foreign mentions (see Figure 2), turning up again only in a single reference at Seibal in 849. (This instance is, in my view, from a mid- or post-political collapse era, in which Seibal held sway in the dying days of the Classic era. The lords who gathered to witness the Seibal king's Period Ending—that of Tikal among them—cannot be equated to those who presided over the wealthy, populous states of half-a-century earlier.[17]) In the past, I had assumed that the Snake polity retrenched to Calakmul and continued a stable, if greatly diminished, life until the general unraveling of Classic Maya civilization in the early ninth century. However, the Bat emblem's re-appearance now raises the possibility that the decline was not restricted to the polity's foreign reach, but went to its very heart. Conceivably, the defeat by Tikal was so decisive that it extinguished the Snake dynasty, with the victors reviving a Bat entity at Calakmul ousted or long-sublimated under the "three kings." But perhaps the relatively low-key record at Tikal hints at more complex processes in which Tikal benefited, but may not have been fully responsible.

The limited number of legible texts at Calakmul after 736 makes analysis of this later period and its regional relationships very difficult. Preservation is better at Oxpemul, where extant monuments begin only at the key juncture of 731—when, significantly, only the throne/altar toponym title is used. Interestingly enough, the high profile of this local *ajaw* title is rather reminiscent of how Chiik Nahb Ajaw is used at Calakmul—implying that the Bat was an over-arching, essentially non-local entity at Oxpemul as well. In the limited sample at our disposal, we lack simultaneous use of the Bat emblem at both centers, holding out the possibility that only one lord could use this title at any one time. The only Bat emblems at Oxpemul that can be clearly dated come in 771 when, as we've seen, the contemporary Calakmul ruler called himself Chiik Nahb Ajaw or used no title at all.

In conclusion, this scenario paints a dynamic, somewhat radical, view of Calakmul's turbulent political history, yet one that finds parallels elsewhere in the Classic era. The shifting political identities hinted at in past studies (Mathews 1985:32; Houston 1986:3) has matured in our current understanding of the intrusive history of the "Tikal" emblem at Dos Pilas (Houston 1993:100; Martin and Grube 2000:56-57). Through such events we glimpse revealing political processes, demonstrating that Maya ideas of statehood and territoriality could be more fluid than often supposed. Researchers have long accepted geographical definitions of Maya polities, which implicitly draw on the heritage of Old World urban states, be they Greek polis or medieval city-state. The main signs of the emblem glyphs have been taken to be the names of such territorial entities—a reasonable assumption given the strong correlation between emblems and large population centers. But glyphic toponyms actually serve to undermine the strict "city-state" view, since the majority of polity names are not derived from those of their core settlements (see Stuart and Houston 1993:Fig. 107).

It may be our notion of the Maya "polity" that is at fault. We need a definition that sits comfortably with dramatic—if rare—shifts in location, and the transfer of identity and affiliation that affects not only places but whole populations. In essence, these emblem names seem to label royal houses whose connections to specific territories are less intrinsic than habitual. Plausibly composed of a single extended family or lineage, they may yet be closer to "house" communities, with idealized structures of kinship and descent (see Gillespie 2000:476).[18] Across a range of other world regions and time periods, aristocracies have acted as independent agents capable of uprooting themselves both from the lands they control and the populations that support them in search of more favorable conditions elsewhere, and it should not surprise us that the Classic Maya could do much the same.

Finally, I need to reiterate earlier cautions about the

[17] For the "witnessing" here see Stuart (in Houston 1992:66). If we take this gathering of lords as factual—and there is no particular reason not to—a Snake polity existed at this time, but it is not specified where its capital lay.

[18] I am indebted to Robert Sharer for raising this issue in an informal presentation of this paper at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, October 2005.

limited data currently available on this, as on so many other questions at Calakmul. This immense site is sure to produce exciting discoveries for many years to come, and we should expect further surprises and shifts in our perspective. That said, the hypothesis presented here seems tenable and fits the evidence we have to hand.

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