



Copan's Last *Saklaktuun*

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In 1996 excavations overseen by Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle in the East Courtyard of Copan's main acropolis uncovered the inscribed lid of a large stone *incensario* vessel, called *saklaktuun* in ancient times (illustrated above). The text on the stone is short, but it is important for having the latest date firmly identified at Copan, as well as one or two epigraphic quirks worthy of discussion.

Numerous other *incensario* texts have been found in the East Court, most in direct association with the terrace platform of Structure 10L-19, now overlooking the famous river cut of the acropolis. This wide ceremonial platform was used for the display of these unusual stone vessels, and it is possible that this newer fragment, designated CPN 27948, was moved a short distance from Structure 10L-19 to the place of its discovery at the base of Structure 10L-16. The short texts on these *incensarios* appear mostly on the lids and are remarkably formulaic in their presentation (Stuart 1986).

The inscription begins with a Calendar Round date written 3 Ajaw 3 Yax, which surely corresponds to the period ending 9.18.15.0.0. Importantly, this is the latest known period ending from Copan and one of the latest of all dates from the site. 9.18.15.0.0 comes only five Tuns before 9.19.0.0.0, the last known date for the 16th ruler Yax Pasaj Chan Yopat, mentioned on the inscribed bench of Structure 1 at Quirigua. At Copan, only the inscription

on Altar L may be later, although its CR is not firmly anchored in the Long Count.

In an interesting text arrangement, the opening “3 Ajaw” takes up a full glyph block, but all of the other glyphs are paired. A full transcription reads:

A1: **3-AJAW**
A2a: **3-YAX-SIHOM**
A2b: **WA'-ni**
A3a: **U-SAK-LAK-ka**
A3b: **TUUN-ni**
A4a: **3-WINIKHAAB'?**
A4b: **xu?[ku]-AJAW**

As is customary on Copan's *incensarios*, the dedication verb is based upon the root **WA'**, “to stand, erect.” Here the suffix **-ni** seems to be an example of under-spelling, probably standing for the fuller form **-wa-ni**. Abbreviations of verbal suffixes and outright sign omissions are common on other *incensario* texts (Stuart and Houston 1994:Fig.17). The verb's subject is **U-SAK-LAK-ka TUUN-ni**, spelling the standard term for the stone vessels, *u-saklaktuun*, literally meaning “his white dish stone.” The **LAK** logogram represents a ceramic spiked censer, and it is important to distinguish this from the “*k'in* bowl” sign read **EL**, found in the “east” glyph (**EL-K'IN**), among other contexts.

The final glyph block specifies the censer's “owner,” but only by title. This “3 K'atun lord” surely refers to the ruler Yax Pasaj Chan Yopát, who carries a similar title in nearly contemporary texts on other censers. But whereas numbered K'atun titles are routine in Maya texts at Copan and elsewhere, here we have an interesting and rare addition to the basic term **AJAW**. The bat's head with the infixed **ku** element is of course the main sign of the Copan emblem glyph, and reveals that the title at A4 strangely combines a numbered K'atun title and an emblem glyph: “the Three-score-year ‘Copan’ Lord.”

The late stone lid is hardly an impressive monument, but this is typical of Copan's last inscriptions. By the time of Yax Pasaj Chan Yopát's reign, the age of large monuments had long passed, and texts appear only on architecture or on small portable media. It is interesting to consider what this says about the state of royal institutions during the final years of one of the greatest of Maya kingdoms.

References

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