

Capture and Sacrifice at Palenque

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The theme of the captive at Palenque has been alluded to only in passing, and mainly in connection with the Tablet of the Slaves. But representations of captives at Palenque are not uncommon, and indicate that the power of the Palenque dynasty was based at least in part on the conquest of surrounding areas.

The captive theme is a common one in the Maya area, and is present among the earliest Maya monuments. For example, a captive is portrayed on the Leyden Plaque, behind (but probably to be understood as *under*) the feet of a standing ruler. The area of greatest occurrence of captive representations in Classic Maya sculpture is the Usumacinta zone (Yaxchilan, Bonampak, Piedras Negras, La Mar, Morales, etc.) and the site of Tonina. Tonina Monument 83 (Fig. 1) is a representative example of a captive in Maya art: a warrior holds the undone hair of an individual falling on his back, one of whose arms is folded behind him as if bound, and who wears only a loin-cloth. From the captive's ears hang end-cut ribbons mutilated by cut-out holes indicated by two superimposed ovals, one hollowed out, the other in relief. A rope passing around his neck is tied high on the chest; from the knot hang down a large loop and two free ends, one of which falls to the ground. A similar scene is present on each of the Bonampak Structure 1 lintels, where the captured individual is falling on his back; he has no headdress, his hair is falling, he wears an elementary dress, ear ribbons and — in one case — a rope encircles his neck.

At first sight, we are facing a battle scene, where a disarmed or wounded warrior has fallen to the ground while the victor holds him, grasping his hair. But the meaning of the sculpture goes far beyond this: as much as the recently vanquished, it is the future captive and next victim that concern the artist. The captive is depicted in a captive posture (the arm bound on the back on Tonina M.83), and with the rope ostensibly knotted on his chest; his headdress has been taken off and his hair falls down; his earplugs are replaced by perforated ribbons, and the attitude is one of a dead man. This falling-on-the-back posture, which was at first no more than a realistic depiction of a fallen warrior, became — through association with the captive's fate — a conventional attitude to represent the dead, even out of any context of war and sacrifice; as an example, Lord Pacal on the Palenque sarcophagus lid is seen in this same posture.



Fig. 1 Tonina Monument 83. Photo by the French Archaeology Mission.

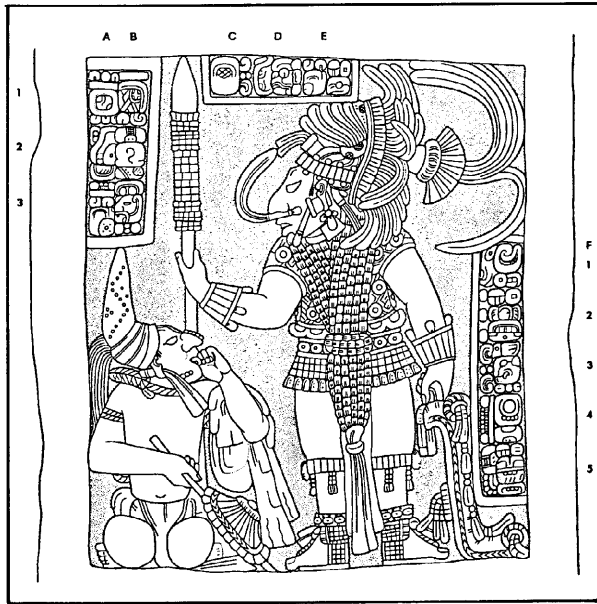


Fig. 2 Yaxchilan Lintel 16 (Graham 1977: 41).

bound and stepped upon; there are others, dressed as nobles, their limbs unbound, but who — through a gesture, a posture or some symbolic attribute — are shown to be free no longer. One passes through a series of intermediate steps, from the “poor”, brutally captured prisoners to the “rich” ones, who come to make their submission.

The captive’s condition may be rendered through posture, attitude or gesture, the presence of bonds, the absence of elements of dress and adornments and through insignia of captivity, degradation or sacrifice. In Classic Maya sculpture, the captives sometimes stand alone, but most often appear beside or beneath a ruler, who is often of relatively larger size. The captives have diverse postures: seated, kneeling, lying on their front, fallen on their back and sometimes even standing. Most of them are bound by ropes around the wrists or arms, and their arms are usually folded on the back or against the chest.

The submission by captives to the victor is expressed by several gestures, the most common being the placing of one hand on the opposite shoulder. This attitude has been described by Landa with the same meaning. Among other submissive gestures is the one which consists of holding a fan, inverted so as to touch the ground (Yaxchilan Lintels 12, 16 (Fig. 2), Stela 22, and the Upper Step of the Central Doorway of Structure 44; Bonampak Stela 3). A subdued figure may also kiss the flexible shield of the victor, or put his hand into or close to his mouth, illustrating the description of Cervantes de Salazar:



Fig. 3 Tonina Monument 70. Photo by the French Archaeology Mission.

"All of them placed their bows and arrows on the ground on their right side, placing their right hands in their mouth, and having covered them with saliva, they placed them on the ground and brought them to the side of the heart, rubbing their hands. This was the manner of greatest reverence and respect with which those Indians venerated their princes, giving them to understand, according to my belief that they prostrated and humiliated themselves before them like the earth they trod." (Tozzer 1941:235)

The arms crossed on the chest is another gesture that seems to have had the same or similar meaning. Almost unknown in the southern Maya area (Tonina, with six examples, being the major exception — cf. Fig. 3), it is illustrated by several examples in the Northern Lowlands in Pure Florescent context, at Chichen Itza and Uxmal (Ruppert 1952, Fig. 146a; Seler 1917:60). But this gesture is widely distributed elsewhere in southern Mesoamerica: in Chiapas (near Comitán — Navarrete 1967, and north of San Cristobal — Lee 1972, Fig. 3) and in the Guatemala highlands (Quen Santo — Seler 1901, Fig. 167; Los Encuentros — Ricketson 1936, Fig. 4). It is also common in the Guatemala Pacific piedmont, in the Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa region, at El Baúl (Thompson 1948; Parsons 1969 vol. 2) and Bilbao. Other scattered examples have been found at Tula (Seler 1902-03, Fig. 68), Oaxaca (Parsons 1969 vol. 2; Caso and Bernal 1952) and Veracruz (see Tozzer 1957).

Although this theme seems to have been carved in stone from Preclassic times (Bilbao Monuments 66, 67), the great majority of known examples date from the Middle and Late Classic and the Early Postclassic periods. Most of these are simply vertically tenoned sculptures, but in the Santa Lucia region, where much greater variety of forms and techniques can be observed, the motif is even used in glyphic form (El Baúl, Monuments 7 and 27; Bilbao Monument 11). The figures depicted are very simply dressed: loin-cloth, simple hairdress and, often, earplugs. The figures on Bilbao Monument 7 and on the Rio Grande, Oaxaca, stela differ from the usual representations: they are diving deities wearing elaborate costume and headdress. The characteristic attitude of all these sculptures indicates passiveness. It can be interpreted as a gesture of respect, veneration, or prayer, as a submissive pose, or as a position of death. Borhegyi has suggested that the figures are mummies and that the glyphs on the El Baúl and Bilbao monuments had the meaning of death or sacrifice. Parsons does not argue this interpretation, but criticizes Thompson, who saw the glyphs associated with the *ozomatli* sign.

The analysis of the representations and sometimes of their context shows that the crossed-arms-on-the-chest gesture is associated with the concepts of submissiveness, captivity and death — in a word, sacrifice. Four figures from the Santa Lucia region (Bilbao Monuments 67, 69 and 70; El Castillo Sculpture 5) have a cadaverous expression, with closed eyes and either open or tightly closed mouth. The seated figure from Uxmal has the wrists bound. A peg-statue from San Mateo (Comitán valley: Navarrete 1967, Figs. 2, 3), whose figure does a comparable gesture (the arms are not crossed, but the hands are resting high on the chest), wears arm-bands like the Maya captives. The diving deities doing this same gesture may be interpreted as presiding over a sacrifice, in the same way as when the sacrificer sometimes wears death symbols generally reserved for the victims. On Bilbao Mon. 7, one of the Ball Court sculptures, such a deity presides over sacrifice by beheading.

Most of the captives wear elementary clothing and appear without jewels. This simplicity and poverty indicates not their lower-class origin, but their condition as captive. On the Bonampak paintings, the battle introduces richly dressed victorious warriors fighting very poorly dressed or naked foes. The scene has been interpreted as a Maya raid on a small community of rather miserable barbarians. We think that if the enemy is depicted in such a way, it is because they are presented, in anticipation, as captives. This would confirm our previous observation that in the Bonampak and Tonina capture scenes, the captured people already show captivity symbols.

The most common of these symbols are the knotted long hair, the arm bands (generally of rope) and the flexible ear pendants. The three characteristics may occur independently, but more

often than not they are found together on the same individual. It will be seen that they frequently occur at Palenque, but also at Tonina, Yaxchilan (Lintels 8 and 16, Stelae 11 and 19, and the steps of Structure 44), and Bonampak (Lintels of Structure 1). Further examples are to be found at Tamarindito (steps), Piedras Negras (Stelas 8 and 35), Ixkun (Stela 1), Naranjo (Stela 22), Aguateca (Stela 7) and Tikal (Altar 8).

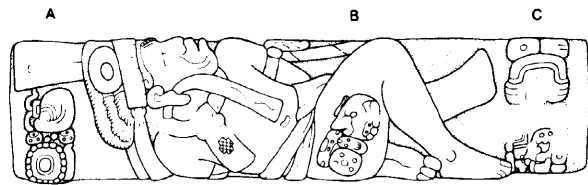


Fig. 4 Tonina Monument 27. Drawing by Ian Graham.

If the wrist or arm bands of rope have an obvious symbolism which does not require further comment, the ribbons hanging from the ears deserve special attention. Let us first notice that almost always the circular or rectangular earplugs are missing on captives, and that sometimes they have not been replaced by anything: for example, on the captives of the lower register of Piedras Negras Stela 12. Nevertheless, in most cases one or more ribbons hang from the perforated lobe of the ear. They are generally plain, but may have a wavy line drawn on them (Tonina M. 27 — Fig. 4), black markings (Yaxchilan Lintel 12), or holes cut out of them (Tonina M. 108; Yaxchilan Stela 11) or serrated on one side (Palenque, Tablet of the Slaves). Proskouriakoff noticed that the flexible ear pendant —

“...occurs frequently on minor figures but is rarely worn by the main personage. It is probably a poor man’s earplug, though it may also have particular association with some ethnic group other than the Maya, and hence is represented as worn by captives or slaves

(Proskouriakoff 1950:58-59)

We do not share this interpretation: the individuals who wear these ribbons are not poor people, they are people left bare of jewels as of their dresses. Furthermore, these ribbons are sometimes



Fig. 5 Tonina Monument 99. Photo by the French Archaeology Mission.

worn by well-dressed people making a submissive gesture. It would be strange that this attribute would be associated with a definite ethnic group, when one considers its distribution throughout the Maya area and that it is worn by individuals who more often than not have clear Maya physical features. The ear ribbon is a degrading symbol: the ornament of jade — the precious material par excellence — worn by any people of importance in Mesoamerica, has been replaced by a miserable ribbon in cotton or bark cloth. Furthermore, some cut-outs are sometimes added, which symbolically “kill” the bearer.

The association of the ear ribbons with death is evidenced on many examples of Mesoamerican art both in and outside the Maya area. On Lintel 3 of Bonampak Structure 1, the victor wears as pectoral a skull with ribbons attached to the “ears”. God A of the Maya codices and on Classic Maya vessels (Coe 1973, No. 46) has the same ribbons, with the death eye at the end. The same association is found on Bilbao Mon. 13, where a figure with ribbons through his ears falls in front of the Death God.

El Baúl Mon. 3 (Thompson 1948:22, Fig. 10d) has the same attributes as do the long-snouted heads from Pantaleón (Thompson 1948, Fig. 13a-e). In the manuscripts of the Borgia group, Bodo Spranz has isolated this element, which appears exclusively with Death deities: it consists of one or more plain ribbons (Spranz 1973, Fig. 881), or one ribbon with a death eye at the end (Spranz 1973, Fig. 882), or with one or two wavy lines (Spranz 1973, Fig. 883). It seems that in all these examples we have a Death and/or Sacrifice deity, with the ear ribbons as one of his main attributes. Consequently, the captives who wear ear ribbons are to be sacrificed. On occasion, it happens that the ruler on a stela wears these insignia: on Seibal Stela 1, for example, the main figure has circular earplugs from which hang two ribbons. We think that these are still a sacrifice symbol, but this time worn by the sacrificer and not the victim. In the same function appears the main figure on Yaxchilan Lintel 12, who wears a robe adorned with crossed bones and a trophy-head on his chest.

At Tonina, the cut-out holes mutilating the ribbons may occur on the skirt (M. 122), on the robe (M. 99 — see Fig. 5), or on the cravat (F. 36) of the captive. These intentional mutilations are perhaps more than simple marks of the bearer's degradation. These holes may be compared to the ones which in some funerary vessels symbolically "kill" the pots; as such, they would express the captive's fate: promised to a certain death as a victim of sacrifice.

Some captives, at Tonina and elsewhere, wear a rope knotted on the chest, or a kind of cravat.

The glyphs which refer to the captive are generally located on his thigh or other parts of his body; in contrast, the short texts referring to the lords and their followers are always placed on the side. Therefore, the captive appears not only named but "branded", like a slave or a convict.

CAPTURE AND SACRIFICE AT PALENQUE

At Palenque, most of the captive or submissive figures are to be found in the northern half of the Palace, the access to which is through House A. On the piers of the outer façade of House A are modelled in stucco figures of a ruler standing in a majestic pose, holding a lance with the head of God K at the upper end. At the ruler's feet are seated two figures, generally simply dressed: on Pier e, these individuals are making the gesture of submission, with a hand resting on the opposite shoulder.

After having passed through House A, one goes down the stairway leading to the Eastern Court. On each side of the steps, large sculptured slabs are leaning against the building's basal platform (Fig. 6). One cannot help being struck with the feeling that something is wrong with this composition: there are four slabs on one side of the stairway, five on the other; the slabs are of the same height, but of variable width and general form. The figures are not facing the stairway, as one would perhaps expect in this situation, but rather all face south, except for the slab on the north end of each set. Robertson (1974:121) noted that most of the figures have the upper part of their hairdress cut off in order to have the slabs' tops aligned. Each figure fills the maximum space of the slab and its form is adapted closely to the slab's natural form. The third figure from the north follows exactly the original contour of its support: on both sides of the head, stones adorned with a molding have been added to fill the blanks. None of these sculptures conforms to the Palenque art canons: the usual proportions of the human body are not respected: the heads are enormous and the attitudes clumsy. Furthermore, the sculptures not only differ as a whole from the Palenque works; they also differ from one another.

From the uneven number of the slabs on each side of the stairway, from their orientation, their variation in size and proportions, their differences in style, the slight modifications (cut offs, filled blanks) brought to their original form, it may be concluded that the slabs come from outside Palenque, from different sites, and possibly at different times.



Fig. 6 Palenque: House A - Figures on the Basal Platform. Photo by Merle Green Robertson.

As far as the representations are concerned, let us begin with the southernmost figure. It is a kneeling captive, with the arms bound behind the back; his only piece of clothing is a loincloth which, as usual, passes around the waist before falling between the legs. The front part of the loincloth has been recently interpreted as a huge phallus (Robertson 1974: 107, 121).

All the other figures, either kneeling or standing, have an arm crossing the chest, or the hand on the shoulder or close to it. In all cases, this is a gesture of submission, and the slight differences one can observe in the exact location of the hand probably do not mean anything. The figures have kept with them their ornaments and jewels: necklace, pectoral, bracelets, cape and earplugs. The only signs of degradation are the

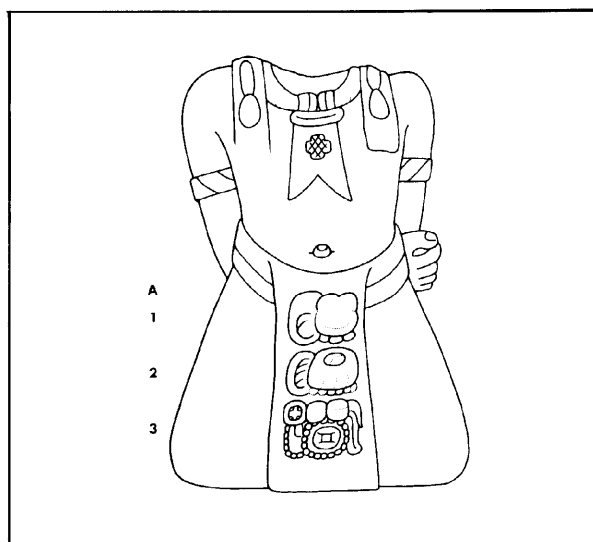


Fig. 7 Tonina Monument 108. Drawing by Ian Graham.

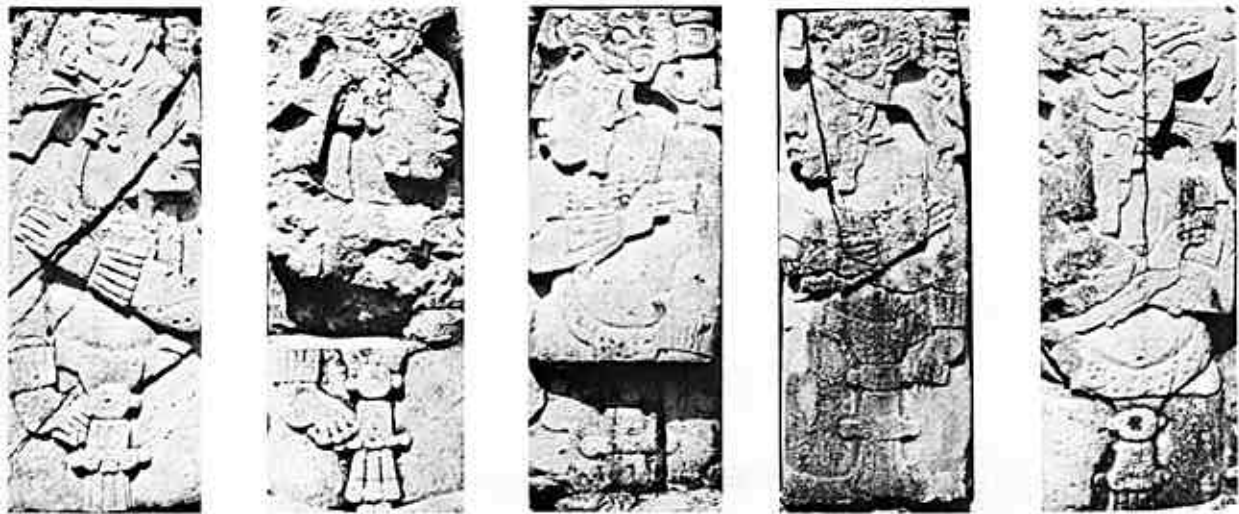


Fig. 8 Palenque: House C - Figures on the Basal Platform

Photo by Merle Greene Robertson.

absence of belts and headdresses: the hair is undone and apparently knotted.

The two submissive individuals flanking the stairway have a column of glyphs on their loincloth. On the northern side, the date 7 Ben 11 Uo is followed by a glyph T23:130:181 in the Thompson (1962) system of transcribing the Maya glyphs, and a skull compound. The text ends with the Palenque Emblem Glyph. (Tonina M.108 — Fig. 7 — is a small captive in the round which has three glyphs carved on his loincloth, the last one being the Tonina Emblem Glyph, in the same fashion.) The captive south of the stairway has four glyphs, the first two recording the date 6 Eb 10 Uo; then follows the same glyph that we saw in the third position on the other captive, and a title. The structure of the clause suggests that the first half of the third block is a verb; this is confirmed by the presence of the T181 verbal suffix. The second half of the block could be a complement to the verb, or it could be the subject of the clause. It is hardly the name of the captive, because it figures on two different people associated with two different dates (even if they are only one day apart). Nor is it the Palenque ruler's name, because these are known. We would suggest here that the T23:130:181 verb has reference to "sacrifice" or "conquest", and that the skull glyph is either a further explanation of the verb or the name of a victorious Palenque war captain.

We have suggested above that the slabs were made by different artists, and not Palencanos. One may wonder why Palenque, which used the services of extremely skilled artists, ordered sculptures from abroad. We would suggest that the several captive figures were each made by a conquered people, who had to pay as tribute to the victor an image of their humiliated ruler.

On the other side of the Northeast Court at Palenque is the stairway leading to House C.



Fig. 9 Palenque: House C - Hieroglyphic Stairway (after Maudslay, IV, Pl. 23).

The stairway, which bears a hieroglyphic text, has for balustrades two huge sculptured slabs depicting a kneeling figure. Both look similar in style to the slabs on the base of Structure A and may have been added independently and later than the other six figures which adorn the Structure C platform. The six figures are carved on rectangular slabs which project slightly from the wall and are separated from one another by short texts.

The sculptures (Fig. 8) seem to form a homogenous group, very distinct from the collection on Structure A. There is the same number (three) of slabs on both sides of the stairway. They are all of the same size and seem well integrated with the substructure's architecture, which includes a cornice, a tablero and a basal molding. Besides, all the figures drawn in profile are facing the stairway; they are kneeling, and make a gesture of submission: one of them has the arms crossed on the chest, the other five have one hand resting on the opposite shoulder. All wear a helmet in head form, a pectoral and an elaborate breech-clout. The only anomaly in their costume are the ribbons which hang from their ears. Here again we have clear examples of submissive people, whose fate is to be sacrificed.

The inscription in the middle of the stairway (Fig. 9) can be partly interpreted as follows:

A1-B4	9.8.9.13.0 8 Ahau 13 Pop
A5	"birth / <i>Mah k'ina Pacal / pa-ca-l(a) / (of) Palenque.</i> "
B5	(it was) 12.9.8 (to) (9.9.2.4.8) 5 Lamat 1 Mol
A6	"the accession (of) / <i>K'ina Pacal / pa-ca-l(a).</i> "
B6	(it was) 2.12.3.3 (from the Initial Series date) (to) (9.11. 1. 16.3) 6 Akbal
C1	1 Yax / verb / ?? / ??
D1	?? / title / name, sky title / (of) ?Calakmul
C2	relationship? / GI / GII / GIII
D2	?? / ?? / name? / title?
C3	relationship / Shield-Jaguar / (of) Yaxchilan / ??
D3	?? / name / title / Emblem Glyph?
C4	<i>chucah</i> ("captured") (9.11.6.16.11) 7 Chuen 4 Ch'en / verb?
D4-C5	??
D5	?? / ?? / ?? / <i>Bolonyocte</i> (god)
C6	<i>Mah k'ina Pacal / pa-ca-l(a) / (of) Palenque / T78:514.4</i>
D6	<i>titles?</i>

In summary, the main figure in the inscription is Pacal, who is cited at the beginning (with the dates of his birth and accession) and at the end. Names and titles of foreign rulers (of ?Calakmul and Yaxchilan) are mentioned. The capture glyph appears at the end of the third clause. T78:514 follows the Palenque Emblem Glyph and precedes possible titles. In this context, this glyph could be a title, but with what meaning? Among its other occurrences in and outside Palenque, some are in texts associated with captive representations, and it is possible that it is a title having to do with conquest and/or capture and/or sacrifice.

Before presenting our arguments for this, let us consider the iconography of the two famous tablets found at the foot of the Tower of the Palace. Christened the "Scribe" and the "Orator", later interpreted as portraits of *Chac-Zutz'* practicing blood-letting rites, it can be argued that they are representations of captives, for they have the following characteristics: kneeling position, costume reduced to loincloth, holding banner with cutout holes, flexible ear pendants, arm bands, knotted long hair. The Orator (Fig. 10) is making the hand-against-the-mouth gesture, which is a submissive attitude, as we have seen. The Scribe (Fig. 11) is holding what has been interpreted both as a stylus for writing and as a blood-letter. The panel is broken at this point, and so the object is not complete: it might be, for example, the handle of a fan. The comparable tablet from Temple XXI (Fig. 12) shows a captive displaying most of the same attributes as the other

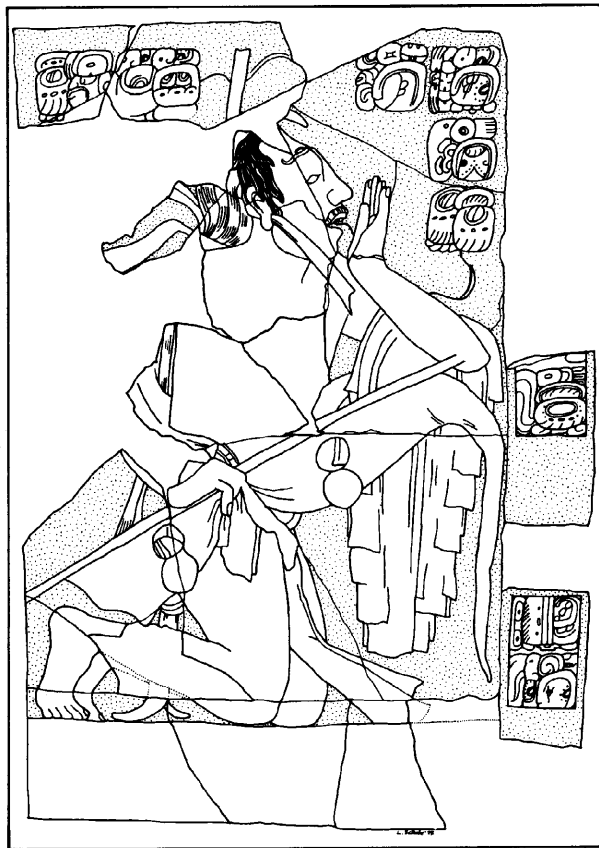


Fig. 10 Palenque: Tablet of the Orator. Drawing by Linda Schele.

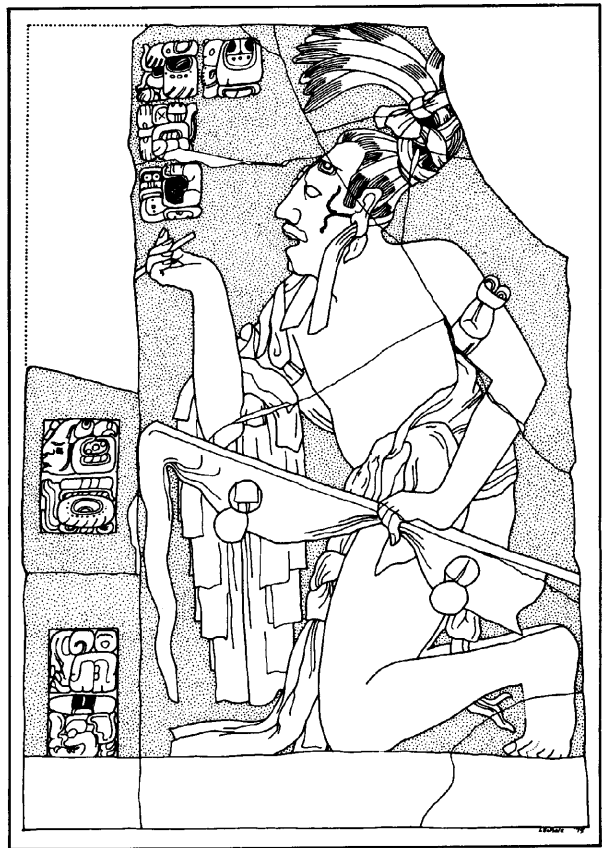


Fig. 11 Palenque: Tablet of the Scribe. Drawing by Linda Schele.

two. The differences lie in the costume: he wears a skirt, a distinctive belt and very small ear pendants, besides the ribbons. He is holding well above his head, and as though presenting it to someone above him, what can be described as a bunch of sticks, bound together (again, these have been interpreted as blood-letting instruments). Perhaps a similar object (as insignia of power) is held by some of the rulers and nobles at Copan (Altar Q:12 and 14; Altar L; Carved Step of Str. 11). The accompanying glyphs of the Temple XXI tablet are not very explicit:

A-B	??
C1	<i>Chaacal</i> (Palenque ruler)
C2, D1-D3	titles
D4	Palenque Emblem Glyph.

Far more interesting is the text on the Scribe tablet:

A1-A2	??
A3	T1000i(=T23).130:181
A4	??
A5	T220.78:514
A6	<i>Chac-Zutz'</i> (Palenque ruler)
B1	??
C1	Blood sacrifice
B2-B3	??

Being associated with the Palenque ruler's name, T78:514 probably functions as an adjective or a title.

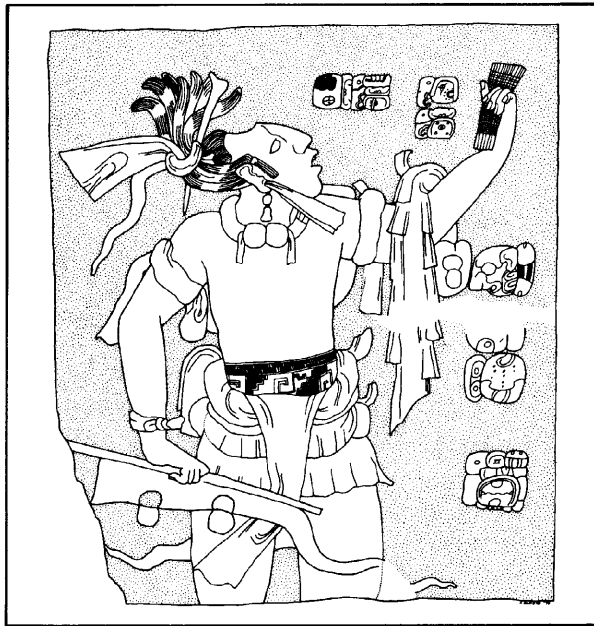


Fig. 12 Palenque: Tablet of Temple XXI. Drawing by Linda Schele.

On the Orator panel, the inscription reads as follows:

A1	??
B1	Blood sacrifice
C1	Title
D1	<i>Mah k'ina Chaacal</i> (Palenque ruler)
D2-D3	titles
E1-E3	missing. E3 perhaps was T23:130:181?
E4	same as A4 of the Scribe tablet
E5	title
E6	<i>Chaacal?</i>

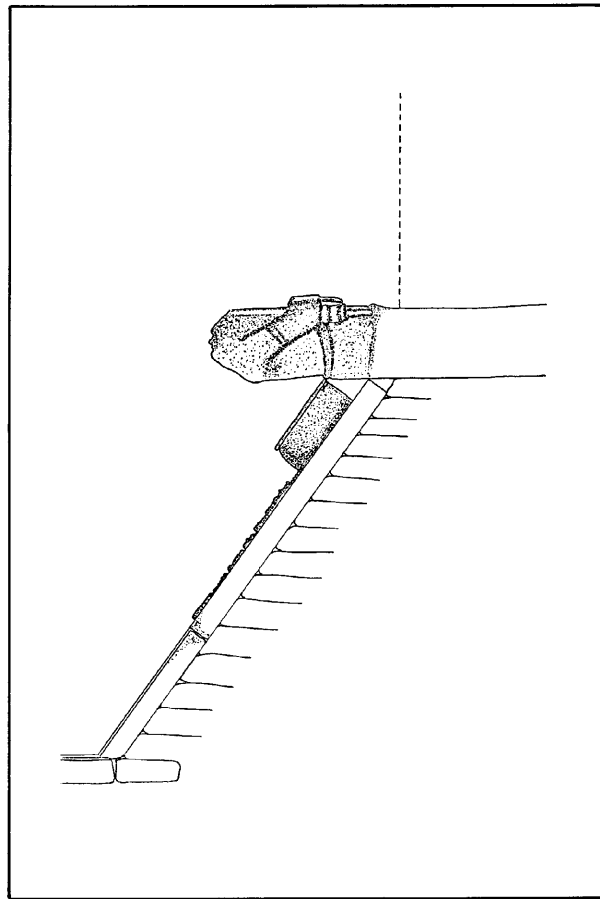


Fig. 13 Tonina Monument 31. Drawing by Ian Graham.

More evidence of the association of T78:514 with captive iconography is to be found at Tonina. Ball Court 1 was adorned with six identical sculptures located at the middle and at the ends of the lateral structures. They are made up of two parts: the first one is a statue showing the upper body of a captive, with arms bound behind the back, horizontally tenoned in the top of the sloping wall. Just under the statue, and leaning against the slope, is a panel whose top is the lower part of the captive's body in high relief. The remaining part of the panel bears an inscription on a background made of ropes and snakes' tails (Fig. 13).

Four fragmented inscriptions (out of a total of six) were recovered in the Ball Court excavations by the French Archaeological Mission; in every case, the text begins with the same two glyphs: IX.78:514/674?:?.

Tonina Monument 27, exhibited in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, is a step showing a dead captive (Fig. 4). Apart from a short text on the thigh of the captive, the inscription consists of a pair of glyphs on each end of the step:

A1-A2	God K / Mo'o (macaw)
B1-B2	T78:514 / <i>Mah k'ina</i> "skull"

B2 is a personal name, different from the one on the prisoner's thigh. Presumably, it is that of the victor.

The other occurrences of T78:514 do not clearly carry any sense of captivity-death-sacrifice, but they are in plausible title context.

At Yaxchilan, T78:514 appears 10 times alone, and 3 times preceded by T220, on Lintels 49, 37 and 35. The transcription and analysis of this long text would take us too far, but we can observe that the compound is preceded 7 times by T169:518 (a title?), 4 times by a name, twice by a date. These contexts would favor the interpretation of the compound as a title.

In summary, T78:514 is associated with capture-sacrifice figurations in all its occurrences at Tonina, and at Palenque on the Hieroglyphic Stairway, the Scribe Tablet and probably also on the Orator Tablet.

On the Scribe Tablet, the glyph forms a pair with a ruler's name. On Tonina M.27, it also constitutes a pair with a name, which cannot be that of the captive. These two examples show that the glyph cannot be a personal name (already present) or a verb (no complement), but rather that it is a title or an adjective. The other examples of T78:514 neither confirm nor contradict this hypothesis: in all cases the compound is close to titles, names or Emblem Glyphs. The occasional addition of the numeral IX or of the prefix T220 does not seem to radically alter the compound's meaning.

After having read the first draft of this manuscript, Berthold Riese made the following comment:

"On the jade earplug from Tortuguero there is at All another example of T78:514. It precedes the name of the Tortuguero ruler 'Lord Jaguar' (T168:751) and is part of a phrase stating that a war was undertaken on the day (9.11.2.17.4) 10 Kan 17 Yax by 'Lord Jaguar'.

"In block C6 on Monument 6 of the same site there might be still another example of the glyph in question, although the drawing by Ian Graham gives it as T324:628a.181. Affix 324 can probably be interpreted as a graphic variant for T78; the main sign T628a might possibly be a slightly mis-drawn T514, for the outlines of both are similar. The only true deviation of this example from the standard form is postfix 181, which probably does not change the meaning but rather transforms the whole compound into a past tense verb. This glyph is part of a phrase recounting another war undertaken by the same Tortuguero ruler on the day (9.10.17.2.14) 13 Ix 17 Muan.

"Thus both examples seem to reinforce the interpretation proposed for glyph T78:514."

[For more details regarding the Tortuguero texts, see Berthold Riese MS 1977, "The Inscriptions of Tortuguero, Tabasco", to be published by Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.]

Other evidence of the capture-sacrifice complex in the Palace at Palenque is in the piers of the western corridor of Structure D. Pier b shows the ruler threatening a captive(?) with an axe. On Pier c, the ruler faces a kneeling, submissive figure. On Pier d, he dances with an axe in his hand, and Pier f shows a true capture or sacrifice scene: the victim is held by the hair and an axe is threatening his neck.

Thus the whole northern half of the Palace appears as a political monument, which not only presents the rulers in majestic attitudes, performing rites or receiving regalia from acolytes, but also presents them threatening and capturing their enemies. The princes they have conquered are proudly displayed in humiliating attitudes, and short texts are present to complete the pictures' message. How much the ruler's power rested on his military glory is largely demonstrated.

No more can Palenque be considered solely as the City of the Arts, where benevolent rulers were leading a pious and peaceful existence amidst a court of priests and artists. Its closest neighbors, the cities of the Usumacinta valley as much as Tonina, were not only warlike but fond of displaying it. Palenque could not possibly stay out of the game, and we would guess that the more we decipher the inscriptions the more they will confirm this point.

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