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Cover illustration:

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Drawing by Linda Schele

Maya Dynastic Territorial Expansion: Glyphic Evidence from Classic Centers of the Pasion River, Guatemala

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The study of Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions, in effect a study of Maya written history, has advanced considerably in recent years, and important decipherments have facilitated the reconstruction of modes of Classic Period cultural behavior of which we might otherwise remain grievously uninformed. At present the glyphic system is sufficiently understood to permit epigraphic examinations of hieroglyphic texts for embedded information regarding political structure and social organization. The aim of such research might be the generation of testable models of intrasite and intersite sociopolitical organization among Classic Lowland Maya. It is anticipated that the development of epigraphically-based models will articulate advantageously with similarly oriented predictive modeling based on archaeological data.

In response to this research potential, and as a preliminary demonstration of its utility, the present study examines a body of Classic Period hieroglyphic inscriptions in which may be discerned information of a sociopolitical nature. The phenomenon of dynastic territorial expansion documented in the texts is identified, modes of regional political integration implied in several texts are examined, and particular consideration is given to one ruler during whose reign the process of territorial expansion culminated.

All inscriptions examined originate from sites located in the Pasion River geopolitical region of Guatemala. The Pasion River is a lengthy and voluminous drainage servicing archaeologically important zones of the southern Peten lowlands, including the Lake Petexbatun district situated south of contemporary Sayaxche. Certain unusual epigraphic features seem to distinguish sites of the Pasion River region. For instance, in apparent contrast to Classic Period lowland centers situated elsewhere in the Peten, many of which employed a unique "emblem glyph," distinguishing each according to criteria of either place or dynasty (Berlin 1958:111), in the Pasion River region, and in the Lake Petexbatun district in particular, eight different sites used, over several successive katuns, one emblem glyph. Several of these sites are quite geo-

graphically dispersed. They include Dos Pilas, Aguateca, Tamarandito, and Arroyo de Piedra in the Petexbatun region, La Amelia and Aguas Calientes in the lower Pasion, and Seibal and a looted site near Cancuen in the middle and upper Pasion areas, respectively (see Graham 1982: Supplementary Map of Maya Area).

The regional distribution of the emblem glyph was initially remarked upon by Berlin (1960:26), who designated it the "Laguna Petexbatun" emblem glyph after noting its appearance in the inscriptions of Dos Pilas, Tamarandito, and Aguateca. The glyph possesses as its main sign either T569 or T716, two variants of the so-called "Tikal" emblem glyph (Figure 1). The present discussion follows the lead assumed by Berlin, and refers hereafter to the glyph as the "Petexbatun" emblem glyph.

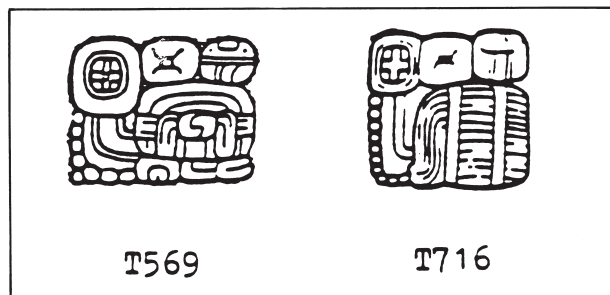


Fig. 1 Variants of the Petexbatun emblem glyph. Drawings by Peter Mathews and Ian Graham.

Epigraphic evidence of a sociopolitical integration of adjacent settlements situated in the Petexbatun district of the Pasion drainage basin may be deduced from Arroyo de Piedra Stela 3. Arroyo de Piedra is a small site with an occupation history predating 9.9.0.0.0, as evidenced by the Initial Series of Arroyo de Piedra Stela 1, situated 4 kilometers east of Dos Pilas near Lake Petexbatun. The text of Stela 3 (Fig. 2) opens with an Initial Series date that presents curiously conflicting information: the Long Count 9.14.0.0.0 (B1-B3) appears with the Calendar Round, 4 Ahau 13 Yax (A4-B4), which corresponds to

the succeeding katun-ending 9.15.0.0.0. The notation would be ambiguous were it not for the verbal clarification at C1-D1 which relates the “completion of 15 katuns,” signifying that the intended Initial Series is 9.15.0.0.0 4 Ahau 13 Yax. Recorded at C2-C3 is the performance of a period-ending observation by Chac Be-Ah Cauac (Schele 1982:214-215), named at D3-E1.

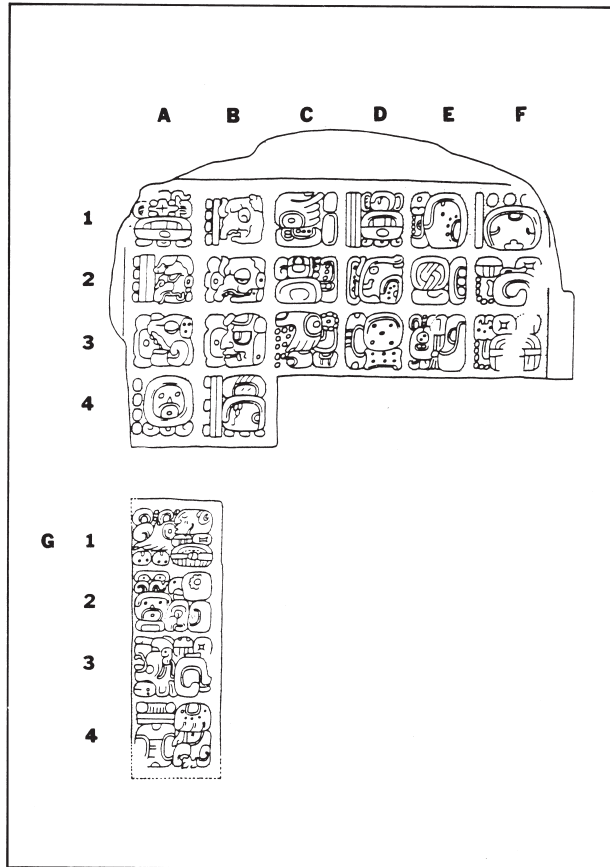


Fig. 2 Arroyo de Piedra Stela 3. Redrawn from Ian Graham, Peabody Museum, Harvard University; with additions at B1, B2, A3, and B3 by Kevin Johnston.

In the second clause of the text, a Distance Number at F1 of 3 tinals and 5 kins counts from the Initial Series, although whether forward or backward in time cannot be ascertained since the text lacks a Directional “Count” Indicator. On the occasion of the implied date an event transpired, recorded at E2, whose meaning has not yet been established. Similarly problematic is the identity of the agent of the verb, for following it are two different emblem glyphs, “Ahpo T578” at F2 and “Ahpo Petexbatun” at F3, only one of which is likely to name the agent.

These two emblem glyphs appear again in a short text, which includes hieroglyphs known to function as statements of parentage (Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1977), inscribed on the lower left flank of Stela 3 (G1-G4). This secondary text records the agent of the previous verb as “child of mother Lady Ahpo Petexbatun” (G1)

and “child of father Macaw-Beastie-Jaguar, Ahpo T578, he of ten captives” (G2-G4a). The T578 compound at G3b may constitute the original emblem glyph of Arroyo de Piedra.

In the parentage statements of Classic-era inscriptions royal male heirs, with few exceptions, inherit the emblem glyph designation of the father rather than that of the mother or another person. Consequently, it is to be expected on Stela 3 that the agent of the verb at E2 should, like his father, bear the emblem glyph “Ahpo T578,” and, in fact, this denomination follows the verb at F2. The protagonist of the first two clauses, then, is “Chac Be-Ah Cauac Ahpo T578.” Reported in the first clause are his personal names (D3-E1) and in the second is his emblem glyph (F2).

Following at E3b and F3 is the name “Shield God K Ahpo Petexbatun,” the second known ruler of Dos Pilas, whose death several years earlier, on 9.14.15.1.19 11 Cauac 17 Mac, is recorded on the back of Dos Pilas Stela 8 (Mathews 1977). The personal name of this lord is preceded at E3a by the compound T126:683:130. While the precise meaning of the glyph is unknown, its situation between the names of the Dos Pilas lord and the Arroyo de Piedra lord suggests that it expresses a “relationship” between the two persons. It is possible that their relationship resulted from a pre-existing social affiliation, perhaps consanguineous, between Shield God K and Chac Be-Ah Cauac’s mother, signalled by their common possession of the Petexbatun emblem glyph.

Returning to the parentage statement of Stela 3 at G1-G4, this information is significant because it implies the occurrence of a royal marital alliance. If one accepts Berlin’s (1958:111) thesis that emblem glyphs function as insignia of dynasty or place, then it follows that the use by each parent of a discrete emblem glyph, different from that employed by the other, signals their origination from two separate places or dynasties. Their marriage, it may be inferred, was a deliberately plotted point of articulation in the social field, wherein two royal domains, the “Petexbatun” domain and the T578 “shell” domain, were conjoined.

Spores (1974) has observed that in several pre-Columbian cultures of Mesoamerica royal marriages performed complex integrative functions, linking participant communities and independent organizational domains into larger social, economic, and political alliances that were at once cooperative and reciprocal, yet fissionable. A similar role for royal marriages may be envisioned for Classic Maya culture. This possibility has previously been considered by Proskouriakoff (1961b), Molloy and Rathje (1974), and Marcus (1976a). Great care and advance planning undoubtedly went into royal marriages so as to ensure mutually beneficial associations between dynasties. And such arrangements may have been exploited as a means of polity growth. An auspicious affiliation of Arroyo de Piedra with the Petexbatun polity as a consequence of this marriage is suggested, while Chac Be-Ah Cauac’s use of the Arroyo de Piedra emblem

glyph and his occupation of a political office at the site indicates that Arroyo de Piedra did not entirely relinquish its political autonomy upon conjoining through marriage with the larger and perhaps more powerful Petexbatun polity. Instead, Arroyo de Piedra appears to have assumed a stance of partially independent but collaborative alliance.

Complementary epigraphic evidence concerning the infrastructure of the Petexbatun polity may be gleaned from Aguateca Stela 5. The site of Aguateca is intermediate in size between Arroyo de Piedra and Dos Pilas, and is situated 12 kilometers southeast of the latter center on a high escarpment overlooking the upper reaches of Lake Petexbatun (Vinson 1960:3). The highly fragmented text of Stela 5 (Figure 3) opens with a damaged Calendar Round, including in the haab position at B1 the glyph “Zotz.” A missing phrase at A2-B2, probably verbal, is followed by partly intact glyphs naming the protagonist as “...Sky Makina...Ahpo Turtleshell, he of three captives, Ahpo Petexbatun” (A3-B4), with space available at A3 and B3 for additional appellatives.

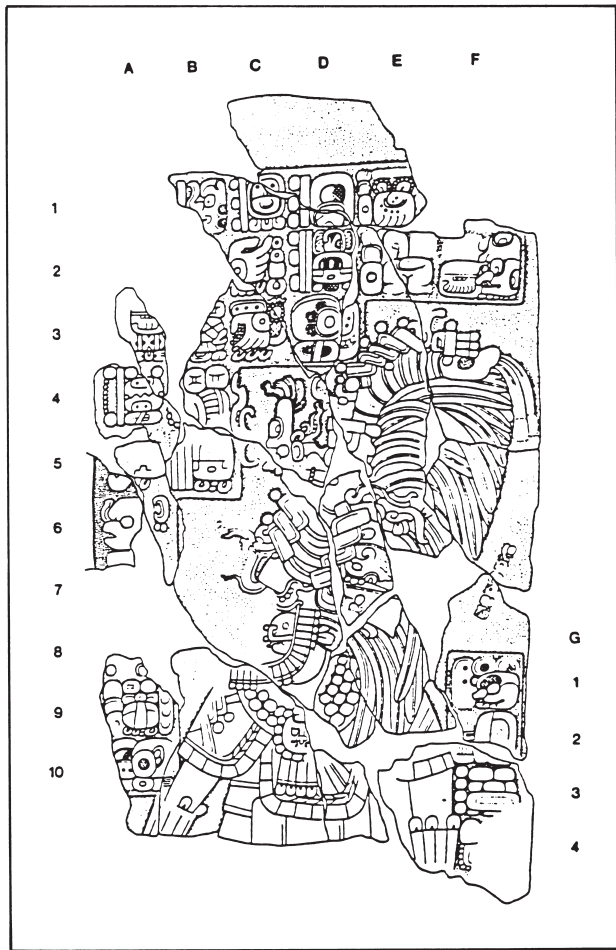


Fig. 3 Aguateca Stela 5. Drawing courtesy of Ian Graham; with addition at A6 by Kevin Johnston. Preliminary drawing.

The second clause is prefaced by a Distance Number of 15 tuns, 1, and no more than 3, uinals, and an unknown number of kins (A5-B5), followed at A6-A8 by several glyph blocks, missing in the available illustration. The text resumes with the glyph for “accession” at A9 and the Posterior Date Indicator at A10. Martin Diedrich has shown me photographs of fragments from this monument, including one on which is inscribed a *xoc*-fish variant of the Anterior Date Indicator. This fragment fits neatly into the available space at A6, thereby resolving the ambiguity of the accession statement in terms of its temporal relationship to the subsequent “scattering” recoded at C3-E1. The second clause (A5-A10) must state that it was “?? kins, 1(?) uinal, and 15 tuns since the accession until” transcription of the 8 Ahau 8 Uo date, corresponding to 9.13.0.0.0 (Graham 1967), recorded at C1-D1. Although the name of the acceding protagonist is deleted, he is understood to be Sky Makina Ahpo Turtleshell of the previous phrase. The final, and dedicatory, clause celebrates “scattering” (C3-E1) by “Flint Sky God K, captor of Tah Mo’, 4-katun lord, Ahpo Petexbatun” (F2-G4) on 8 Ahau 8 Uo, 9.13.0.0.0 (C1-D1).

Stela 5 is prominently situated in the central plaza of Aguateca, and commemorates, in part, important events in the political history of the site, including the accession of a ruler to the Aguateca throne. Yet the featured, and dedicatory, event of the stela is a period-ending observation by Flint Sky God K, the first known ruler of Dos Pilas, whose royal deeds are documented in the Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway. And it is probably his sumptuously attired portrait, the right arm appropriately outstretched in a gesture of “scattering,” which adorns the face of Stela 5. That an Aguateca monument deliberately and publicly so emphasizes the importance of actions conducted by a Dos Pilas ruler suggests that those actions somehow directly influenced political life at Aguateca.

The text of Stela 5 appears to be structured so as to correspond to certain organizational properties of a socio-political relationship between Aguateca and Dos Pilas. Events on Stela 5 are ranked, in the sense that those performed by Flint Sky God K are accorded particular importance. This may correspond, in turn, to a ranking of rulership between sites. This suggestion is perhaps corroborated by another epigraphic phenomenon, the fact that while the hieroglyphic texts of Aguateca which predate 9.15.10.0.0 consistently and invariably refer to actions carried out by Dos Pilas rulers, Dos Pilas texts never mention Aguateca lords in return. This suggests an intersite political relationship within which the distribution of power was asymmetrical and non-reciprocal. Evidently Aguateca occupied a subordinate position in the hierarchy, obliged to describe local events in terms of their relationship to events performed at the primary center. Aguateca’s possession of its own throne indicates a franchising of power at the local level, while its use of the T716 main sign in the Petexbatun emblem glyph, rather than the T569 employed at Dos Pilas, denotes a tangibly independent dynastic identity.

Sometime subsequent to 9.13.0.0.0 and the erection of Stela 5, Aguateca experienced a pronounced reduction or cessation of inscriptional activity. Dos Pilas, concomitantly, maintained its posture as the dominant center of the Petexbatun polity, continuing to construct stelae so as to document local dynastic history. When periodic monument erection resumed at Aguateca, two katuns later, the site appears to have become the political adjunct of Dos Pilas, judging from the inscriptional record. Aguateca Stela 3 (Graham 1967: fig. 9), for instance, records a katun-ending observation on 9.15.0.0.0 4 Ahau 13 Yax by Scroll-head God K, the third known ruler of Dos Pilas. The spatially adjacent Stela 2 (Graham 1967: fig. 5) reports three sequential military events, again by the same Dos Pilas lord, followed 11 uinals and 16 kins later by his "scattering" on 10 Ahau 8 Ch'en, 9.15.5.0.0. Neither of these inscriptions contain any references to Aguateca rulers despite their situation at the site, and it is assumed that, whatever its status within the polity, Aguateca no longer possessed its own throne.

A significant change in the political status of Aguateca, and in the configuration of the Petexbatun polity as a whole, is documented on Aguateca Stela 1 (Fig. 4), the next monument erected at the site. The text of Stela 4 begins with a damaged Calendar Round at B1. Graham (1967:6) tentatively identifies the notation as "5 Ahau 8

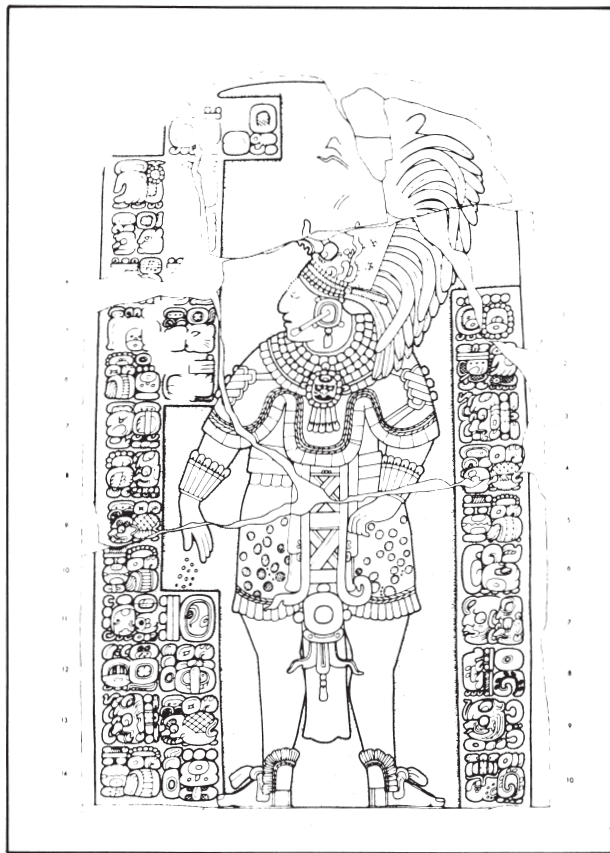


Fig. 4 Aguateca Stela 1. Drawing by Ian Graham.

Kayab," corresponding to 9.15.9.9.0. It is followed by a verbal phrase (C1-A2) which includes the period-ending compound T586:59:131 at C1b and, at A2, the "scattering" hand which denotes ritual bloodletting (Stuart 1982). The protagonist is named at A3 as "captor of Kin Balam," a title assigned to Scroll-head God K of Dos Pilas on the adjacent Stela 2.

A Distance Number and Posterior Date Indicator at A4 lead forward to the next date, reconstructed as 13 Chuen 14 Xul, 9.15.9.16.11 (Graham 1967:6). The protagonist of the damaged verbal compound at A5 is the same Dos Pilas ruler, "captor of Kin Balam, Ahpo Petexbatun," named at B5-A6a. The third clause (B6-A10) is prefaced by a Distance Number of four days (A6b) leading to the date 4 Men 18 Xul, 9.15.9.16.16 (ibid.) at B6, when an event of unknown meaning at A8 was conducted by "God K Makina, captor of Ahpo Turtleshell, he of two captive, Ahpo Petexbatun," named at A8b-A10. God K Makina is a lord heretofore unknown in the Aguateca inscriptions. One uinal and 2 kins later (A11), on 13 Caban 0 Yaxkin, 9.15.9.17.17 (B11-B12) (Graham 1967:6), there transpired the accession (B12) of God K Makina (A 13), whose additional titles are listed at B13 and A14.

Returning to the unidentified verb at A5, let us consider what occurrence is likely to befall one ruler so as to necessitate shortly thereafter the accession of another. Death is an obvious possibility, and, in fact, the verbal compound in question displays several graphemes diagnostic of the "death" phrase, including the capped ahau of the verbal noun.

Identification of the verb at A7 is more problematic, since it is apparently unique in Maya inscriptions. Whatever the event, it was performed four days after the death of Scroll-head God K, and by his successor, God K Sky Makina, shortly before his accession. One event known from the inscriptions to occur four days after death is burial. Dos Pilas Stela 8, for instance, reports that the death of Shield God K of Dos Pilas, on 9.14.15.1.19 11 Cauac 17 Mac, was followed four days later by his burial, perhaps at night (Mathews 1977). While it is unlikely that the verb at A7 of Aguateca Stela 1 denotes burial itself, since the protagonist of the verb is the living God K Makina rather than his deceased predecessor, it is quite possible that it represents an event performed by the ruler on the occasion of his predecessor's burial, perhaps as a pre-accession demonstration of dynastic legitimacy and political authority.

That God K Sky Makina, rather than a Dos Pilas lord, replaced Scroll-head God K as ruler of the Petexbatun polity is suggested by the fact that, following the Aguateca inscription, there is in the extant corpus of Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions an abrupt cessation of references to Dos Pilas rulers. While it should not necessarily be understood that monument erection was discontinued at Dos Pilas, it diminished significantly at the very least, and the last monument known to be erected at Dos Pilas, Stela 8, has as its final intact date 9.15.4.6.11.

This reduction or dissolution of inscriptional activity coincides with the apparent demise of Dos Pilas as a regional power and a relatively sudden transposition of political authority to Aguateca.

The process of dynastic territorial expansion, evidently begun by Flint Sky God K of Dos Pilas, culminated during the reign of God K Sky Makina of Aguateca, whose accession on Aguateca Stela 1 has just been discussed. So considerable was his influence that an intermittent history of his rulership may be traced in the inscriptions of sites situated throughout the Pasion River geopolitical region. Several of the inscriptional references to deeds by God K Sky Makina are explicitly militaristic in character, and reflect a general concern during the reign of this ruler with the augmentation of political territory by means including military conquest.

While episodes of military conquest are known from Classic Period inscriptions (Reents and Sosa 1980), they are rare, and warfare among the Maya is thought to have consisted primarily of raids conducted for the purpose of seizing captives (Schele 1984). Through their leadership of small raiding parties, and the subsequent torture and execution of captives taken, rulers aggrandized their prestige (*ibid.*). Although military excursions may have functioned secondarily to eliminate opponents and weaken rival centers, the outcome of such engagements rarely seems to have been actual military subjugation or occupation, and the political superstructures of attacked sites, while perhaps decapitated, appear to have been left otherwise intact.

Military encounters with a significantly different outcome are indicated in the hieroglyphic inscriptions of several sites situated in the lower and middle Pasion regions. Stela 16 of Dos Pilas (Graham 1967: fig. 7) and Stela 2 at Aguateca (Graham 1967: fig. 5) both record three sequential military events involving Seibal, a large site situated 27 kilometers northeast of Dos Pilas, which were evidently of considerable importance to the Petexbatun polity. These events consisted of: a "star-over-Seibal" event on 9.14.4.6.4 8 Kan 17 Muan, now known to correspond to the first appearance of Venus as Evening Star (Lounsbury 1982:152); followed one day later by an "axe" and "shield" event, indicating warfare (Schele 1984), during which Paw Jaguar Ahpo Seibal was captured; followed six days later by the submission of Paw Jaguar to a *nauah* event, a category of activities known to include the ritual torture and execution of captives (*ibid.*). That this engagement resulted in the eventual occupation of Seibal by forces representing the Petexbatun polity is suggested by the Seibal Hieroglyphic Stairway which serves as a monument commemorating actions of God K Sky Makina Ahpo Petexbatun and his captive Paw Jaguar.

The text of the Seibal Hieroglyphic Stairway opens with the only true Initial Series date at Seibal, 9.15.13.13.0 at A1-G1, and is followed by descriptions of "scattering" by God K Sky Makina on 7 Etz'nab 16 Xul, 9.15.14.17.18, at P2-R2, and two days sub-

sequently, on 9 Ahau 18 Xul, 9.15.15.0.0, at X1-Z1 (Fig. 5). (The stairs are lettered and numbered in accordance with the scheme devised by Stephen Houston and Mary Miller, personal communication, 1983). Paw Jaguar, the captive seized by the predecessor of God K Sky Makina, is referred to in fragmented clauses at L1b-L2, at T1-V1, and finally at B'2-D'2. The latter is his last known appearance in the inscriptions, and occurs on the date 6 Caban 10 Kankin, 9.15.16.7.17 (Fig. 5).

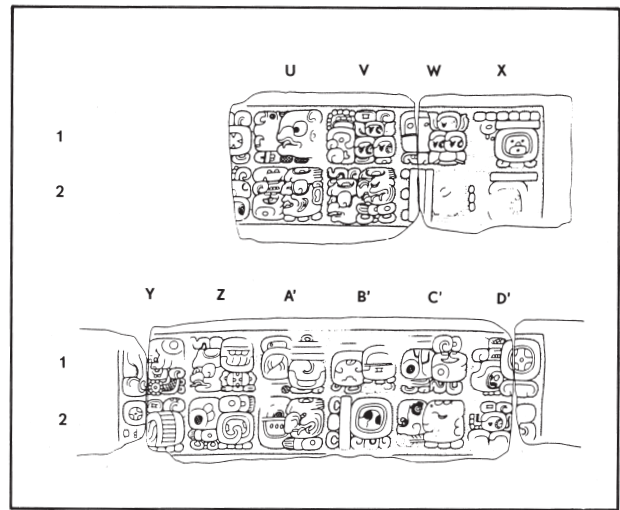


Fig. 5 Fragments of the Seibal Hieroglyphic Stairway. Drawing by John Graham, courtesy of the University of California, Berkeley.

The installation into major architecture at Seibal of a hieroglyphic stairway commemorating events directly associated with the reign of a Petexbatun ruler suggests a protracted occupation of the place by representatives of the Petexbatun polity and inheritance of the site as a dynastic property by God K Sky Makina from his predecessor, Scroll-head God K of Dos Pilas, the conqueror of Seibal. This occupation was one component in a broad and aggressive policy of territorial expansion, also evidenced in a fragment of hieroglyphic stairway reportedly removed from a looted site, perhaps situated near Cancuen (Ian Graham, personal communication, 1983), in the upper reaches of the Pasion drainage basin. The inscription (Fig. 6), which lacks calendrical notations and so cannot be dated, is inscribed with the name "God K Sky Makina West" at A1-B1. He is noted as "captor of Ahpo Turtleshell" at A2-B2 and "Ahpo Petexbatun" at C1. The final legible hieroglyphs on the fragment, an Anterior Date Indicator at D1 and a compound composed of a shell-winged serpent prefixed with a T501 main sign at C2, are both dynastic appellatives specifically associated with rulers of the Petexbatun polity. They are also known from Dos Pilas Stela 25 and 26 where they are so used by Shield God K.

The epigraphic evidence from Seibal and the site near Cancuen denotes expansive thrusts into the middle and

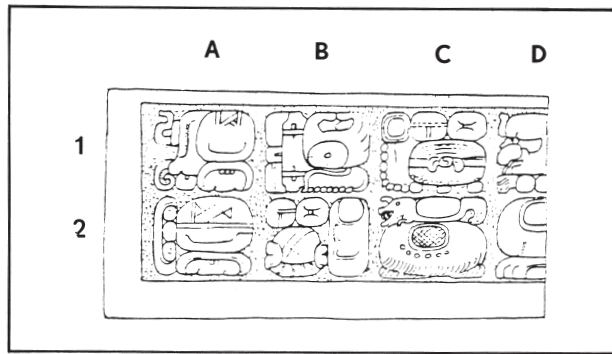


Fig. 6 Section of a hieroglyphic stairway from a site near Cancuén. Drawing courtesy of Ian Graham, Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

upper reaches of the Pasión River by the Petexbatun polity resulting in its achievement of increased political influence over these territories. That the process particularly affected settlements situated within the narrow river basin suggests polity interest in the Pasión River per se and the possibility of an attempt to wrest control of its length. Expansion into the river basin topographic zone might best be understood in terms of the utility of the waterway as a route of regional and interregional communication and commerce, the importance of which was surely recognized by Petexbatun polity leaders.

The story of God K Sky Makina resumes at Tamarandito, a small site situated atop a high escarpment overlooking Lake Petexbatun, 7 kilometers east of Dos Pilas and 7 kilometers northwest of Aguateca (Vinson 1960). There, events nineteen years subsequent to his accession are inscribed on the risers of a hieroglyphic stairway which adorns the east face of Structure 12, so named by Brehm, Grieder, Talbert, and Vinson who mapped the site in August 1960 (Grieder 1960; Vinson 1960). The steps read in chronological order from top to bottom, and have been numbered and lettered accordingly.

The Tamarandito Hieroglyphic Stairway inscription (Fig. 7) commences on Stair 1 at AB1-AB2 with a partly damaged Calendar Round, identified by Peter Mathews (personal communication, 1983), who has examined detailed photographs of the inscription, as "7 Chuen 19 Zac." Of the Long Count positions possible for the Calendar Round, 9.16.9.8.11 has been selected as most appropriate (ibid.). On this date there occurred the accession, at AB3, of a personage whose nominals include the glyphs for "sky," T561, at AB5a; "jaguar," T571, at AB5b; and a pair of stacked anthropomorphic heads at AB6. I have called this ruler "Sky Jaguar." The bulk of the next step, Stair 2, is unfortunately missing, but the final phrase of the step continues through F1 of Stair 3. The protagonist of this clause is not identifiable.

The second clause of Stair 3 opens at F2b with the tzolkin glyph "9 Akbal" and an obliterated haab at E3a. The haab may be reconstructed by establishing its temporal relationship to the subsequent Calendar Round of the text. The succeeding clause of the stair commences

at E5b with the tzolkin "Muluc," the eroded coefficient of the glyph reconstructable as "2," because in the cycle of named Maya days Muluc occurs 6 days after Akbal (Peter Mathews, personal communication, 1983). The haab inscribed at E6a, although badly damaged, may be identified as "17 Cumku" since it is followed "1 day later" (F5) by the haab "18 Cumku" at F6b. Having identified the Calendar Round at E5b-E6a as "2 Muluc 17 Cumku," it is now possible to reconstruct the preceding Calendar Round at F2b-E3a, which transpired 6 days earlier, as "9 Akbal 11 Cumku" (ibid.). The Long Count positions selected as most appropriate to these Calendar Rounds are 9.16.9.15.3 and 9.16.9.15.9, respectively. The final date of Stair 3, at F6, is reconstructed as "3 Oc 18 Cumku," 9.16.9.15.10 (ibid.).

The protagonist of the initial date of Stair 3, 9.16.9.15.3 9 Akbal 11 Cumku, is "Sky God K Makina, captor of Ah Ahpo Turtleshell, he of three captives, Ahpo Petexbatun," named at E3-F4, whose accession is recorded on Aguateca Stela 1. The event transpiring on this occasion is designated at E3b by the T575 "shell" glyph from the crown of which emerges a curvilinear emanation, possibly the body of a snake or the neck and head of a waterfowl. Several examples of the "shell" glyph in verbal contexts are found in the hieroglyphic inscriptions of Dos Pilas and Naranjo, including its usage in the Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway. There, at A4a of West Step 4 (Fig. 8), it occurs as the last glyph in a verbal phrase which begins with a "star-over-shell" compound, understood in a number of cases to designate raids or battles (Lounsbury 1982:148). On Naranjo Stela 1 at A3 the "shell" verb refers to the actions of a ruler portrayed carrying a shield and spear, as if attired for battle. A reading of the "shell" verb as some attendant circumstance of raiding, then, seems admissible, and is consistent with its usage on Tamarandito Stair 3. Note that the subsequent event of the Tamarandito text, which transpired seven days later on 3 Oc 18 Cumku, 9.16.9.15.10 as specified at F5-F6, has as its main sign the "axe" and "shield" graphemes, at E7 and E8, respectively, and is of a type known to be associated with war and conquest (Schele 1984).

Involvement of the protagonist, God K Sky Makina, in a military engagement subsequent to his accession is reflected in a conspicuous augmentation of his "count of captives" title, an epithet recognized by David Stuart (this volume). His designation as "he of 3 captives" at F4a contrasts in quantity of reference with the title "he of 2 captives" assumed nineteen years earlier on the occasion of his scattering, recorded on Aguateca Stela 1 at D5a, and suggests successful leadership of a raiding party during the interim period.

Terminating Stair 3, at F7b-F8, is the phrase "*u cab GI, GII*," indicating that the military event was conducted "under the auspices of" (Schele 1982:73) these two important deities. The fourth and final stair, which will not be discussed in detail, is inscribed with three separate clauses, the second of which reports the lahuntun-ending

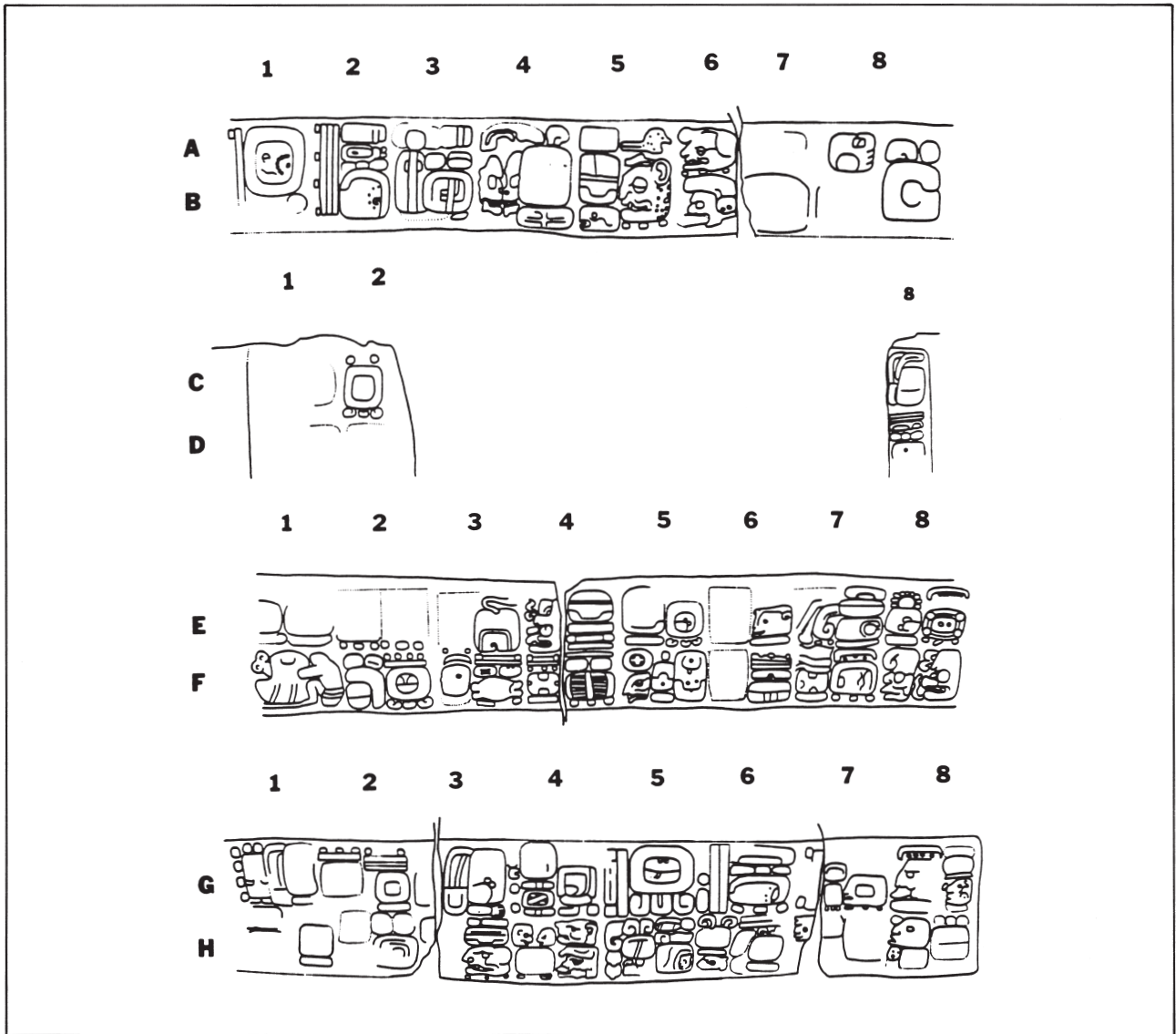


Fig. 7 Tamarandito Hieroglyphic Stairway. Drawing by Kevin Johnston. Preliminary drawing.

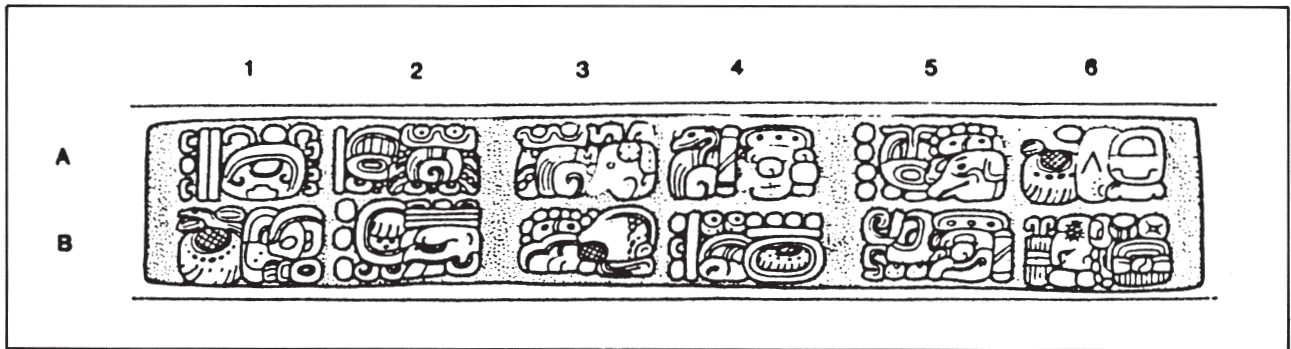


Fig. 8 Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway, West Step 4. Preliminary field drawing courtesy of Ian Graham, Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

9.16.10.0.0 1 Ahau 3 Zip (G4) as observed by Sky Jaguar (H3-H4), whose accession is recorded on Stair 1.

The personage Sky Jaguar is the protagonist of several clauses of the Tamarandito Hieroglyphic Stairway and is presumed to have been the ruler of Tamarandito and possessor of local authority since his name and record of accession are known only from the inscriptions of this site. That some twenty-five percent of the Tamarandito Stairs (1 out of 4 stairs) was allocated for the documentation of deeds accomplished by a ruler other than Sky Jaguar is most striking, and may have occurred as a consequence of certain political or social obligations experienced by Sky Jaguar that were, at the local level, most appropriately satisfied by such epigraphic means.

Conclusions

Hieroglyphic texts indicate that sites situated in the Pasion River geopolitical region of the southern Peten lowlands came to be dominated during the Late Classic Period by a single powerful political body. By approximately 9.15.10.0.0, this organization had gained hegemony over many sites situated along the Pasion drainage, including Seibal, a site near Cancuen, and most if not all of the Petexbatun centers. The organization seems to have been structured by certain elaborated social and political affiliations that were largely dynastic in character. Polity membership was signalled in inscriptions by use of an emblem glyph which featured as its main sign either the T569 or T716 variant of the "Tikal" bundle glyph. This emblem glyph, which may have functioned as a dynastic insignia, is found in the inscriptions of eight separate sites located in the Pasion drainage basin.

Centralization was achieved to the extent that the polity was dominated by a single center to which numerous secondary centers were subordinate. Characteristic of the dynasty's administrative infrastructure was an intersite hierarchy with Dos Pilas, and later Aguateca, evidently at its apex. Rulership between sites was ranked, with lords of secondary sites apparently exercising authority primarily at the local level, in contrast to the more pervasive and prestigious authority of the primary center. This asymmetrical and non-reciprocal distribution of power is reflected in a readily discernible epigraphic phenomenon: the fact that secondary centers consistently refer in their inscriptions to events performed at the primary center, while texts of the primary center never mention subordinate lords.

The repeated references in the hieroglyphic inscriptions of secondary centers to the primary center are, in effect, a register of the greater prestige accorded the primary center, and may have served as an official and necessarily public acknowledgement of that prestige in accordance with certain obligations required of secondary centers. This is in evidence on Aguateca Stela 5 where local events are described in terms of their relationship to events performed by Scroll-head God K of Dos Pilas. The documentation of certain military events by God K

Sky Makina on the Tamarandito Hieroglyphic Stairway seems to have fulfilled a similar requirement. Such articulations were undoubtedly but one segment of a greater network of social, economic, and political obligations that were the cohesive fabric of the Petexbatun polity.

Growth of the polity was achieved by means both voluntaristic and coercive. Royal marriages, such as that recorded on Arroyo de Piedra Stela 3, were undoubtedly frequently employed as a means of polity expansion, since they ideally resulted in a conjoining of political territories. They functioned also as an integrative mechanism, linking secondary centers to the primary center. Expansion was concomitantly accomplished by militaristic means, including the conquest and subsequent occupation of sites by personnel representing the Petexbatun polity. This is clearly indicated in the Seibal Hieroglyphic Stairway, which served primarily as a monument to God K Sky Makina, whose predecessor, Scroll-head God K of Dos Pilas, had captured the ruler of Seibal.

The Petexbatun polity was evidently expandable only to the point where territories incorporated into the system could be controlled by existing political structures. That capacity was evidently exceeded sometime subsequent to the reign of God K Sky Makina, when the polity fragmented into several smaller, more localized and independent political units situated at Aguateca, Seibal, La Amelia, and perhaps elsewhere. These continued to employ the Petexbatun emblem glyph, but were no longer under the hegemony of a single primary center.

The establishment of a centrally-organized regional political body with pronounced territorial ambitions was perhaps unusual in lowland Maya culture, and may have produced unprecedented and debilitating stresses within a political system inadequately structured to withstand them. These stresses may have been sufficiently severe to cause a serious political destabilization of the Pasion region, thereby permitting the Terminal Classic intrusion into the area of non-indigenous peoples. The process of political centralization and territorial expansion may be regarded as paradigmatic of a cultural system in transition, and its eventual failure as a factor possibly contributing to the collapse of Maya culture in the Peten lowlands.

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