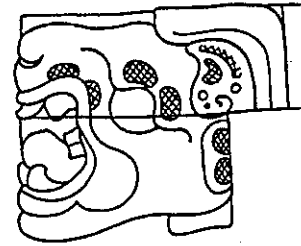


Copán Mosaics Project

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Venus and the Reign of Smoke-Monkey

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During June 1991, discussions between Linda Schele and Barbara Fash on the iconography and use of Structure 10L-22A led Schele to investigate the connection of the dates associated with this structure and its builder, Smoke-Monkey, with Venus phenomena. In investigating this pattern further, Schele found evidence of intense use of Venus hierophanies in Copán's history and Fash found iconographic imagery confirming the associations of the dates.

The earliest known Venus associations at Copán occur with the two founding events recorded for Yax-K'uk'-Mo' on Altar Q (Schele 1989 and Schele and Larios 1991). 8.19.10.10.17 and 8.19.10.11.0 were the maximum altitude (-.1) and

maximum elongation (exact) respectively, of the Morningstar. Smoke-Imix-God K repeated this Morningstar association by placing his accession date on the elongation of the Morningstar.¹ This accession was recorded on Stela 2, which stands on the platform at the north end of the ballcourt. When 18-Rabbit constructed and dedicated the final phase of the ballcourt (Grube, Schele, and Stuart 1989), he included two Venus dates in the inscription. Both are Eveningstar events.

9.12.0.0.0 fell on the maximum elongation of the Eveningstar (Closs 1979), and the dedication of the ballcourt itself, 9.15.6.3.13 10 Ben 16 K'ayab (January 6, 738),² occurred when the Eveningstar

1. The accession fell on February 5, 628 (Julian), when Venus was at 46.2205 of elongation and 39.2428 of altitude. Maximum elongation was on Feb. 15 at 46.5625, and maximum altitude was on Jan. 29 at 39.4050.

2. All dates in this note will be given in the Julian calendar, unless otherwise noted.

*The Copán Notes are a running series of commentaries and small reports deriving from the multidisciplinary research project designed to conserve, document, and analyze the architectural and sculpture monuments of the Classic Maya ruins of Copán. Originally undertaken by William L. Fash and known as the Copán Mosaics Project, this endeavor has since June 1988 formed part of the larger Copán Acropolis Project, funded and carried out by the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia through financing from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Funding for the Copán Mosaics Project, the Copán Hieroglyphic Stairway Project, and supplementary funding for the Copán Acropolis Project has been provided by the National Science Foundation (1986-1988), the National Geographic Society (1986-1989), the National Endowment for the Humanities (1986-1987), the Center for Field Research (EARTHWATCH; 1985-1988), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (1987; 1989), the H.J. Heinz Charitable Fund (1986), Council for International Exchange of Scholars (1987), and Northern Illinois University (1985-1989). The Copán Acropolis Project, as a dependency of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, is subject to the rules of that body. Regarding any re-use or subsequent distribution of these materials presented in the Copán Notes or an project publications, those rules stipulate that any publication using materials (either written or in the form of line drawings or photographs) derived from the Copán Acropolis Project must receive prior written consent from the Project Director (William Fash) and the Director of the Instituto (José María Casco). These notes are published by the Copán Acropolis Archaeological Project and the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia.

was elongated 46.4564 from the sun. Exact elongation occurred ten days later at 46.7593.

The proximity of the ballcourt dedication on January 6, 738 to 18-Rabbit's unfortunate death by sacrifice on April 29 of the same year led Grube, Schele, and Stuart (1989) to speculate that he was taken captive when he sought sacrificial victims to use in this dedication ritual. Although that speculation will probably never be provable, we can say that his successor was equally aware of Venus as 18-Rabbit had been during his own lifetime. Smoke-Monkey's accession date was set 152 days after the dedication of the ballcourt, on the opposite elongation of Venus. On 9.15.6.16.5 6 Chikchan 3 Yaxk'in (June 7, 738), the Morningstar was at 45.6738, the exact elongation point for that cycle. In other words, 18-Rabbit dedicated the ballcourt when Venus was hovering near its highest point in the west after the sun set. He was killed 113 days later. Venus continued sinking until it crossed the sun at inferior conjunction. When it had risen in the morning sky to its maximum separation from the sun, Smoke-Monkey took office as the successor of the fallen king.

The one building associated with Smoke-Monkey's reign with some security is Structure 22A (Fig. 1). Barbara Fash and David Stuart working together reassembled a 9 Ahaw glyph once mounted on the outer facade and proposed that it corresponded to 9.15.15.0.0, a date that falls within Smoke-Monkey's reign and that fits well with the stratigraphic history of the building. Since Barbara Fash had found parts of a Venus headdress from a large central figure that she believes was once mounted on the south super-frieze, Schele decided to check this date for a Venus association. 9.15.15.0.0 (May 31, 746) was also an elongation of the Morningstar with the planet separated from the sun by 45.6063. Exact elongation occurred four days later at 45.6819.

Out of curiosity, Schele also calculated the separation between this date and Smoke-Monkey's accession to see if they related to the Dresden Codex Venus cycle. The Dresden Venus tables are divided into five pages, each representing one cycle of Venus, from heliacal rising of the Morningstar through superior conjunction to heliacal rising of Eveningstar and inferior conjunction. The five-repetition unit recorded on these pages

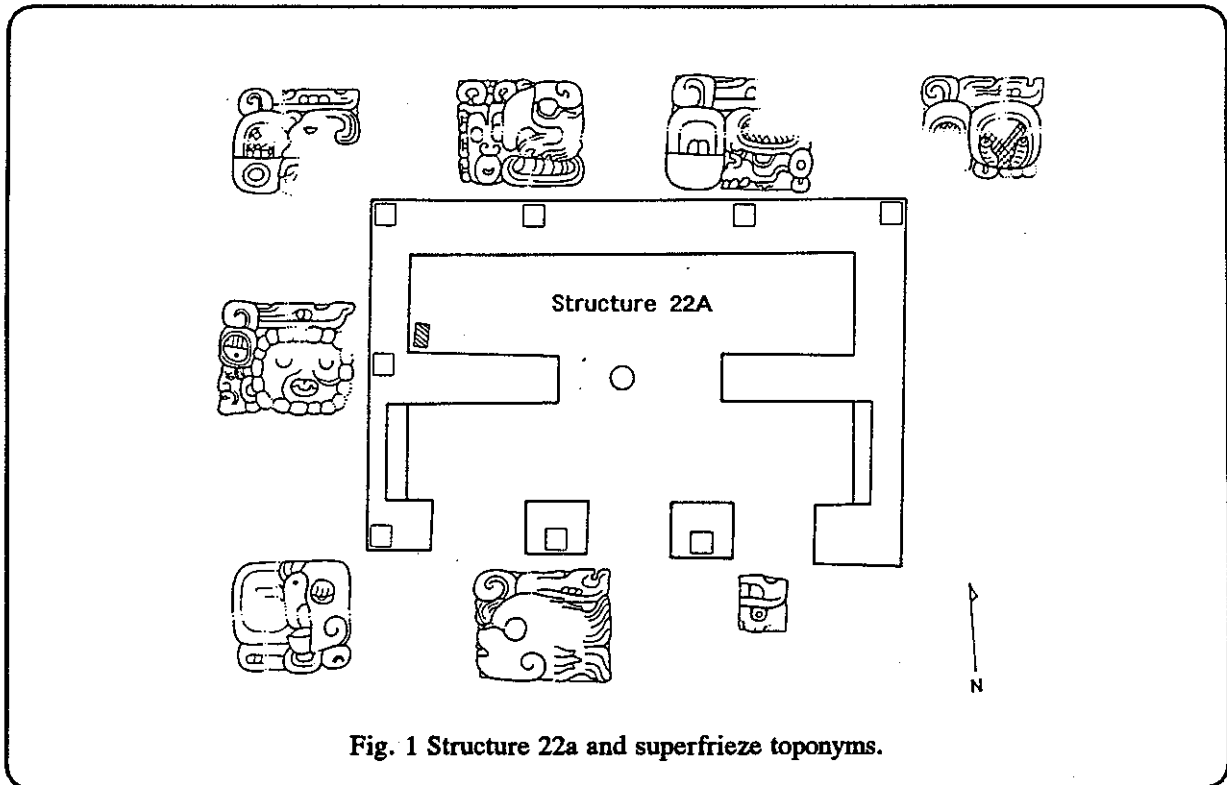


Fig. 1 Structure 22a and superfrieze toponyms.

correlated Venus with the 365-day year (8×365 and $5 \times 584 = 2,920$) so that any particular station in the Venus cycle returns to the same day in the haab. This same five-repetition cycle brings the same Venus gods back into power so that Venus events timed eight haabs apart will be influenced by the same gods.

The separation between Smoke-Monkey's accession and the 9.15.15.0.0 date on Structure 22A is 2,915 days, just five short of an exact Venus-haab cycle. We suspect the interval is five days short of the exact distance because the period-ending was as important as the Venus interval, and since elongation stretches over a period of several days, the planet would still be close enough for his purposes—.08 would not be a visible difference to the human eye. In addition to linking his accession to Structure 22A by this Venus-haab interval, his choice of elongation points of the Morningstar also connected him to Smoke-Imix-God K, his illustrious predecessor. Smoke-Monkey's accession was sixty-nine Venus repetitions plus four days, and the Structure 10L-22A date was seventy-five repetitions less one day after Smoke-Imix-God K's accession. Copán's kings appear to have been taking advantage of the natural periodicities of planetary motions and the Maya calendar to link themselves together in magical ways—especially in relation to Venus.

Smoke-Monkey also played off of 18-Rabbit's architecture in special ways. Anthony Aveni (1991) and Closs, Aveni, and Crowley (1984) demonstrated that the west window of Temple 22, built by 18-Rabbit in celebration of the end of his first k'atun of reign, was aligned to the Eveningstar in the April/May planting season. 18-Rabbit connected himself repeatedly to the Eveningstar with Stelae C, and B, Altar S, the dedication of his revision of Structure 10L-26 and the old ballcourt, his dedication of the new ballcourt, and the alignment of Temple 22. Smoke-Monkey closed the observation windows in Temple 22 when he built Structure 10L-22A and he replaced 18-Rabbit's preoccupation with the Eveningstar with his own interest in the Morningstar—an association that connected him directly to Smoke-Imix-God K and the founder, Yax-K'uk'-Mo'.

Yax-Pak continued the same practice of deliberately connecting himself to Venus dates in earlier reigns, just as Smoke-Monkey had done in his time. The east door, north panel of Temple 11 contains the one passage that virtually all epigraphers agree refers to Venus. The text includes the same verb as the Dresden Venus tables and names the actor of this event as Chak-Ek', a acknowledged name for Venus and the one used in the Dresden. Schele and Miller (1986:123-125) identified the event, which took place on 9.15.15.12.15 5 Kib 9 Pop (Feb. 11, 747), as the heliacal rising of the Eveningstar and showed that it related to another heliacal rising of Eveningstar Yax-Pak recorded on the west door, south panel. The later event occurred on 9.17.0.0.16 (Feb. 5, 771), when Venus rose to 7.4598 of separation from the sun. However, they also noted that this date was exactly three repetitions of the Venus-Haab cycle after the east door event. Like Smoke-Monkey before him, Yax-Pak wanted the same Venus god back in power. The 9.17.0.0.16 heliacal rising was, furthermore, the next three-k'atun (+ 16 days) repetition of the cycle that correlates the k'atun with Venus. In other words, that heliacal rising of the Eveningstar was tied to the one 18-Rabbit featured sixty years earlier on Stela C, the pivot of his program in the Great Plaza.

Despite knowing the connections of the two Temple 11 Venus dates to other phenomena in the city, no one knew until now the reason Yax-Pak decided to connect the crucial heliacal rising in his own reign to the one in Smoke-Monkey's reign. Now we recognize that he pivoted off Structure 10L-22A in the same way that Smoke-Monkey pivoted off the ballcourt dedication date. The earlier heliacal rising on 9.15.15.12.16 5 Kib 9 Pop (February 14, 749) saw Venus at 7.0831 separation from the sun and it was the first sighting of the Eveningstar after the elongation of the Morningstar associated with Structure 10L-22A. In other words, 18-Rabbit dedicated his ballcourt on the elongation of the Eveningstar. After 18-Rabbit's death, Smoke-Monkey waited until the next elongation of the Morningstar to accede as the fourteenth successor. He then chose a Morningstar elongation five Venus cycles later to dedicate his Popol Nah. Yax-Pak, who wanted an Eveningstar instead of a Morningstar association,

took the Popol Nah date, which was a Morningstar elongation, calculated the next heliacal rising of the Eveningstar, and connected that by three Venus-haab cycles to his own heliacal rising of the Eveningstar. Today we might consider these a fortuitous series of occurrences, but we are sure the Maya saw it as the working of the gods.

There is a curious reversal of Venus associations for the last kings of the dynasty. Smoke-Imix-God K was associated with the Morningstar. 18-Rabbit reversed that association to connect himself with the Eveningstar. Smoke-Monkey reversed the association again to Morningstar and Yax-Pak again to the Eveningstar. Partially, of course, these associations resulted from the luck of the draw. Smoke-Shell apparently did not luck out, for the dates of his two period-ending monuments—9.16.5.0.0 and 9.16.10.0.0—did not fall near Venus days and neither did his dedication of the Hieroglyphic Stair. Events march onward without direct connection to the movements of the planets, but there is also enough repetition in the periodicities of the planetary movements that the Maya could often afford to wait for an auspicious day. By using their complicated and detailed tables of planetary movements, they could anticipate how long they would have to wait. The relationship was then a reciprocal one between history and astrology. Good days likely to allow successful action were calculated by the complexities of the calendar and the movements of the stars and planets. Events of major import, like war, accession, house dedications, marriage, and sacrificial ritual took place on days that favored a successful outcome. It is what one might call "a chicken and the egg problem"; yet nevertheless the correlation between the stars and history was a real one—especially at Copán.

As we were discovering the pattern of these Venus associations, Rex Koontz noted passages in a publication by Carmack, Fox, and Stewart (1975) on the K'iche' Maya of the Guatemalan Highlands and the founding actions they performed on their arrival in the Highlands. Carmack and his co-authors call the various groups in the highlands "parcialidades," or segmentary lineages. Here is a passage particularly relevant to the pattern we see at Copán.

Otro símbolo de identificación era el fundador primordial de cada parcialidad. Los Parcialidades Quichés casi siempre se asociaban con los "toltecas," diciendo que habían venido de Tulán. Eran héroes, hombres prodigiosos, o, como les decían, *nawales* . . . Por ser *Nawales* podrían transformarse en fuerzas poderosas. Así, e.g., los fundadores de tres parcialidades Quichés (Balam Quitzé, Balam Ak'ab, Mujucatuj) se transformaban en tigre, águila, y avispas, además de ser "alter-ego" de sus dioses. K'ak'awitz, el fundador del las parcialidades Cakchiqueles, se transformó en una serpiente de nubes. . . Los *nawales* más poderosos poseían envoltorios (*pizom*) que escondían sus poderes secretos. No sabemos lo que contenían, pero fueron heredados y guardados por la parcialidad.

El poder mágico de los fundadores de las parcialidades se combina con derechos sacerdotales. Servían ritualmente a los dioses patronales con sacrificios, oraciones, y ofrendas. En su capacidad de sacerdotes se llamaban *ah q'uixb, aj cajb*, "los que de pinchan," "los que sacrifican (con cuchillo)" . . . Llevaban a cabo ritos especiales que habían traído de México. Entre ellos sobresalía la ceremonia del "alba" (*sakiribal*), que era para recibir la estrella de la mañana. Bajo las órdenes de sacerdote, los miembros de la parcialidad subieron a las cumbres de los montes sagrados para esperar ansiosamente la aparición del planeta. Cuando al fin se dejaba ver era el momento de quemar incienso sagrado (*pom*), cantar, y bailar, porque era señal de vida y protección divina hasta la próxima alba."

(Carmack, Fox, and Stewart
1975:17-18)

Carmack and his associates interpreted the *sakiribal* rites as Mexica in character. However, for the Mexica, the appearance of the Morningstar was a time of fear and great danger. The *Sakiribal* of the K'iche' and Kaqchikel was a rite celebrating life with dance and song. It was a source of political power and sanction exactly like the Maya attitude toward the Morningstar and Venus in general. The founding events at Copán

took place when the Morningstar was at its highest point. Fash and Fash (1991), following an observation by Claude Baudez, recognized a statue from Temple 16 of Yax-K'uk'-Mo' with bird-wings on his arms and feathers on his body. We suggest this is an image of the founder transformed into his *nawal* just like the founders of the K'iche' segmentary lineages.

During the 1989 Texas Symposium on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, Dennis Tedlock proposed that Copán was the Tolan of the East named in the Popol Vuh. Fash and Fash (1991) suggested a relationship between Yax-K'uk'-Mo', the founder of Copán's dynasty, and Kaminaljuyu and the surrounding highland region. The very particular relationship between Copán and the highlands may well have continued far longer and with an extraordinary contribution of Copán to the highland peoples. If Tedlock is right, the Maya of the Terminal and Postclassic periods went to Copán to secure the regalia of office. And if we are right, the same highland Maya founded their segmentary lineages in a manner that is particularly flavored by the historical and long-lasting preoccupation of Copán's kings with Venus.

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