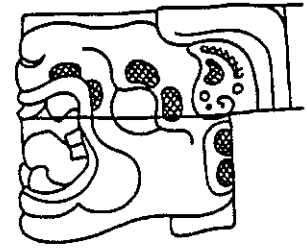


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Another Look at Stela 11

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edited by Kristaan Villela

Stela 11, the last erected in Copán's history, carries a unique text in Maya literature—it records the end of a dynasty (Schele and Freidel 1990:342-343). Originally erected near the southwest corner of Temple 18 (Fig. 1), it is dated at 9.19.10.0.0 8 Ahaw 8 Xul, or May 6, 820 (Gregorian). In summer 1991, I spent a portion of my research time at Copán contemplating various monuments to see what would occur to me. During my time with Stela 11, I realized that all previous drawings had missed details vital to the identification of two glyphs in the text. The particular glyphs are central to the stela's written message.

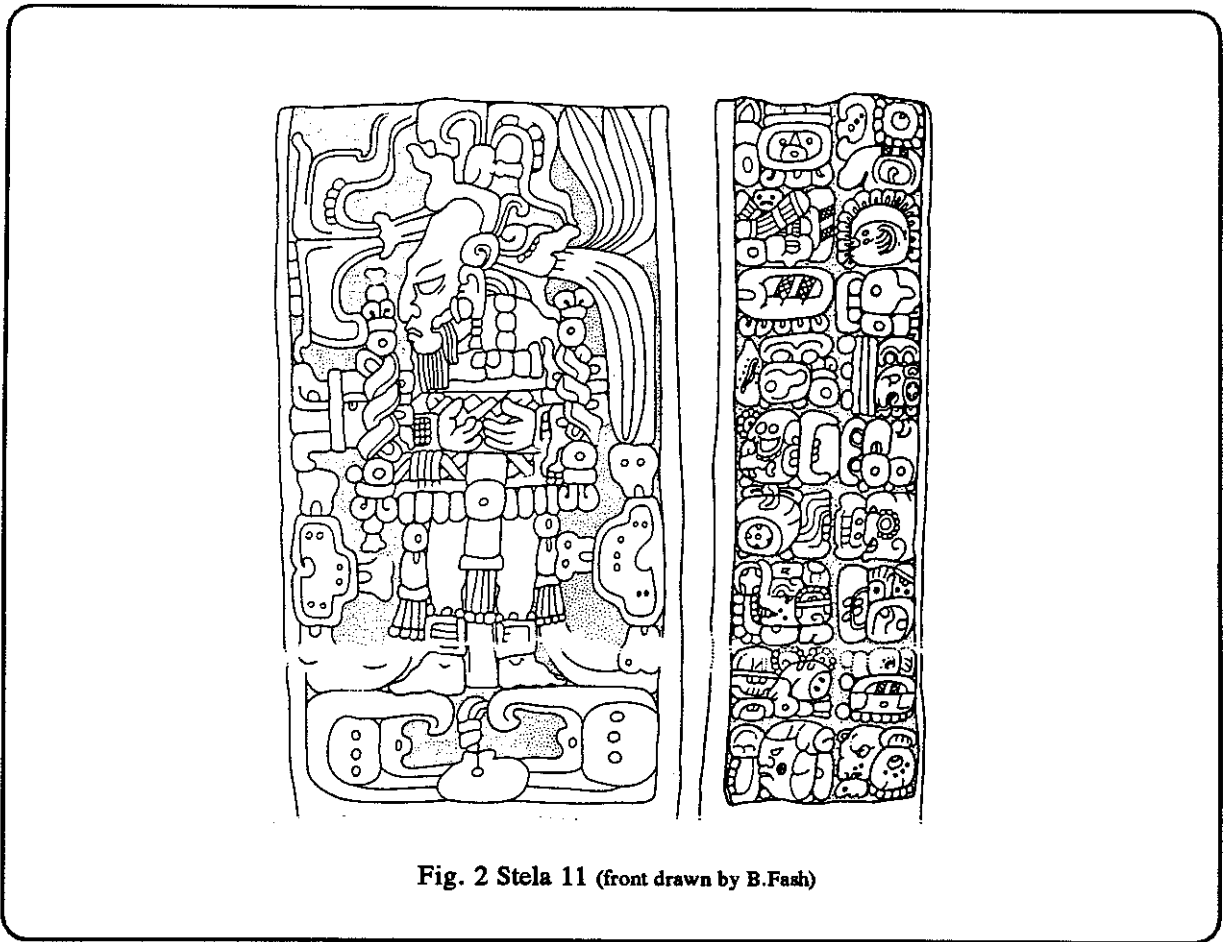
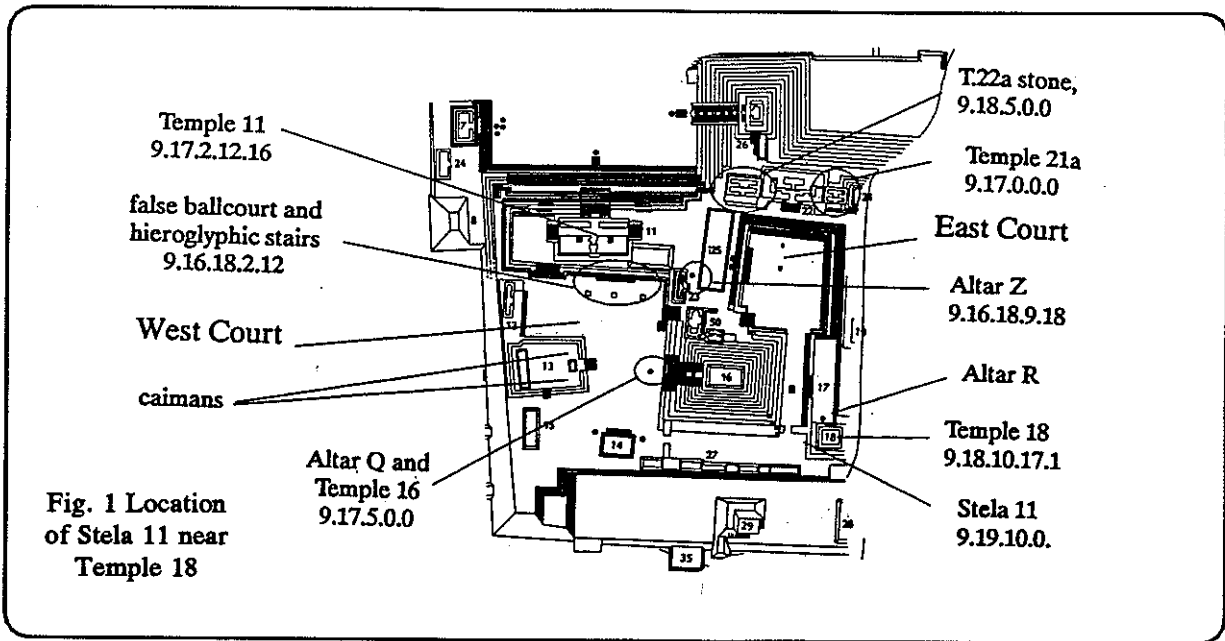
The text (Fig. 2) begins with *ti Waxak Ahaw*, "on 8 Ahaw," *homi*, "it terminated," the founder's

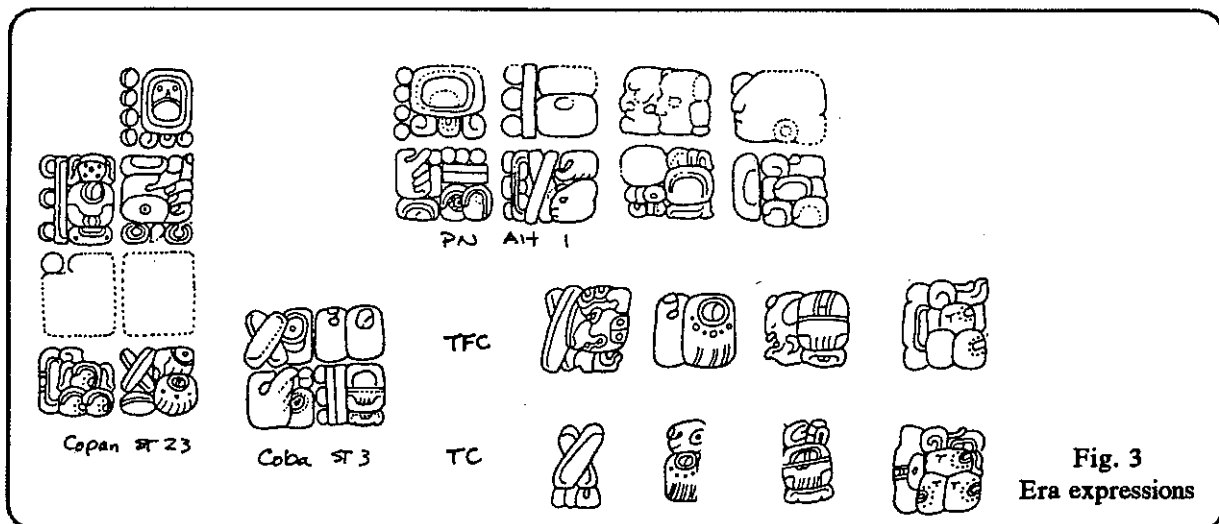
house.¹ These three glyphs record explicitly that on the lahuntun the "house of the sprout-tree," the Maya metaphor for lineage and dynasty, was terminated. Since the next accession was less than a year later on 9.19.11.14.5, when the ruler U-Kit-Tok' tried unsuccessfully to establish a new dynasty (Grube and Schele 1987), I previously took this half-period ritual also to mark the apotheosis of Yax-Pak. In this interpretation, the figure on the front of the stela is Yax-Pak himself standing in the water above the entry portal to the Otherworld (Fig. 2).

Identification of the glyph at B2 had eluded us until I realized this summer that it had been completely misdrawn. It is actually a conflation of the

1. This glyph for "founder" was deciphered in 1991. However, I am not allowed to use the new reading in the *Copán Notes* by request of the excavator.

*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 in 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.





sign Nikolai Grube identified as *hu* and T82 *li*. The following glyph combines *ta* and *hi* to spell *tah*. Together the phrase is *hul tah*. *Hul* has several meanings that may be appropriate. They include, "to arrive," "to shoot with an arrow or blowgun," and "to pierce." *Tah* is the word for "obsidian" and "torch." The combined meaning would be: "arrived the obsidian," or more likely, "pierced the obsidian."

The text passage contains a couplet that involves two war-related symbols which permeate Classic Maya imagery. The first is the laurel-leaf flint blade combined with the round *pakal* shield to form the *tok'-pakal* war metaphor (Schele 1990a). The second is *Waxaklahun-Ubah-Chan*, the name of the Maya war serpent (Schele 1990b). The *tok'-pakal* and the *Waxaklahun-Ubah-Chan* are the central symbols of warfare and the capacity to make war for the ancient Maya (Freidel, Schele, and Parker n.d.). Furthermore, they are particularly associated with founders of dynasties on Yaxchilan Lintel 25, Copán Altar Q, and Structure 16 (Schele 1990b).

Here the two glyphs referring to them—*tok'* and *Waxaklahun-Ubah-Chan*—appear in a couplet with each following a glyph reading *ut*. This verb usually means "to happen" or "to occur" in the Classic inscriptions, but Kaufman and Norman (1984:135) also list *uht* as "to terminate, finish." Interestingly, these collocations seem to have two *u* signs. I think this might be a reduplication of the phonetic

u, but it is also possible that the first *u* is a third person pronoun inflecting the verb as imperfective or transitive.² This may be the intended meaning here—"ended the flint, ended the Waxaklahun-Ubah snake." If this is the correct interpretation, then the end of the sprout-tree-house also resulted in the end of the flint and the war serpent of the dynasty. I am not yet sure how these emblems and their associated complexes were tied to founders, but it seems clear that the Maya considered the capacity to make war and control the supernatural forces that participated in it as the prerogative of lineage founders and their descendants.

The next phrase continues with a verb consisting of *u*. The presence of the *u* in front of this verb identifies it either as an intransitive in the continuative or as a transitive root. I believe it is the latter because of the remainder of the text. The next three glyphs record *K'inich Yax-K'uk'-Mo'*, *Ch'ul Xukpi Ahaw*, "Sun-faced Yax-K'uk'-Mo', Holy Copán Lord." These five glyphs record Yax-Pak's name with a full array of titles. Since no other verb intervenes between these two name phrases, I take them to be the object and the subject of the verb above. In other words, Yax-Pak did something to Yax-K'uk'-Mo', and that "something" should be appropriate to the ending of the dynasty which began when Yax-K'uk'-Mo' grasped the *k'awil* of the founder's house 393 years earlier.

2. This second alternative is problematic because *yu* should be the prevocalic form of the third person pronoun (preceding a root beginning with *u*).

Considering this new interpretation of Stela 11, the verb preceding Yax-K'uk'-Mo's name was critical. Since all but one of its component signs now have accepted phonetic values, I decided to search Yukatekan and Ch'olan sources for roots with a *lo-* CV shape that fit the context. As a further limitation for the fist glyph, I also used era expressions as they appear at Palenque, Quiriguá, and other Classic Maya sites (Fig. 3). Barbara MacLeod (1991) has shown that the first glyph in this expression (which consists of crossed planks) substitutes for *hal* in a dedication phrase on Lintel 4 of the Temple of Four Lintels at Chich'én Itzá. Based on this evidence, she proposed a reading of *hal* with two related meanings in Yukatek: "manifest," "cause to appear," and from both Yukatek and Ch'olti, *hal* "to say" and "to be said." From these she deduced that *hal* means "to make manifest" by the act of "saying." As MacLeod and others have noted, this is exactly the instrument of creation in the Popol Vuh.

The last two glyphs of the era expression, *Ch'a Chan Yax-Ox-Tun-nal*, are given on Quiriguá Stela C as the location where creation occurred. Schele (1991) read this phrase as: "Lying-down Sky First Three-Stone-Place."

The glyph between the *hal* verb and the location of the event is composed of the same fist glyph as in the Copán example followed by phonetic *ba*. This is the only context in the inscriptions that can be used presently to test a value for the fist glyph. I used it to check the possibilities generated by the Copán text. I searched the dictionaries for *lo* with every consonant possible in Mayan languages.

The possibilities I found included, from Ch'olan languages: *lok'* "to leave," *lo'ch'* "to hold in the hand," *lo'* "to wound," *lom* "spear, to spear," and *lob* "to make ugly, to deform, to deface." Most of these meanings also occur in Yukatek, but in addition I found *loh* "redeem, rescue," *lol* "rose, flower with leaves," and *lon* "to kneel." Of the set of meanings, *lok'*, *lom*, *loch'*, and *lob* seemed most appropriate. I then checked the context of the era expressions to see if one of the generated values of the fist sign—*k'o*, *mo*, *ch'o*, or *bo* would yield something meaningful. Only one did.

The glyph recording what was spoken or manifested at creation is *Cv-b(a)*. One example at Copán has a *ho* in the compound, and in another

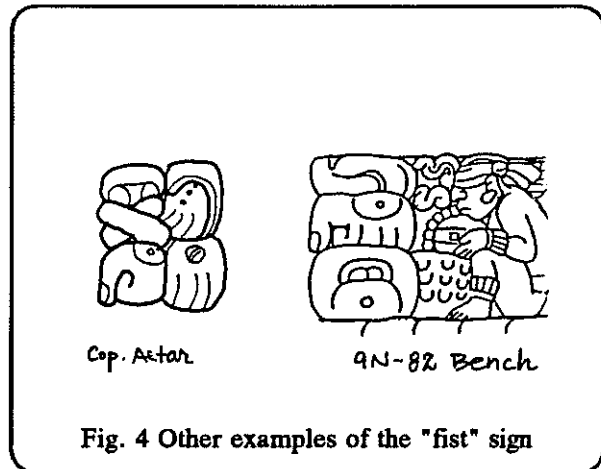


Fig. 4 Other examples of the "fist" sign

context, the fist is combined with a *yo* and *lo* sign (Fig. 4). These examples point toward the identification of *o* as the vowel in the syllable recorded by the fist glyph. None of the forms resulting from combining the possibilities above with a final *b* made sense except for *bob*.

Yukatek (Barrera Vásquez 1980:59) has (*ah*) *bobat* as "profeta, adivino;" *bobatil t'an* as "profecía, pronóstico, profetizar or pronosticar; predicción;" *bobatah* as "profetizar, pronosticar, predecir." The root in this Yukatek term seems to be *bobat*. Although the spelling in the era expression is *boba*, I think that "prophesy" is an entirely appropriate thing to be uttered and manifested at creation.

The *bo* value seems to be productive in other contexts also. The *yobol* compound from the bench in Copán Structure 9N-82 precedes a phrase reading *ch'ah pom*, "censed with copal." Ch'olti has *obel* as "hoja de Santa Maria," so it may refer to a particular kind of incense used in dedication rites. I consider the *bo* proposal to be a tentative one that may be superseded by another using one of the other values for the fist, but I was not able to get any of them to work. If, however, the *bo* value holds, then the Copán verb records *u lob*, "he defaced him," or "he ruined him."

In the context of the entire text, this reading makes a strange kind of sense. The text would read:

On 8 Ahaw ended the Founder's house.
Arrived or pierced the obsidian.
Ended the flint.
Ended the Waxaklahun Ubah Snake.

Defaced Sun-faced Yax-K'uk'-Mo'

Holy Copán Lord

Yax-Pak Sky Penis 3-k'atun Ahaw Bakab.

In free translation, this is: "On 8 Ahaw, the Founder's house ended. The obsidian pierced. The flint blade (war banner and portal) ended. The Waxaklahun Ubah Snake (war serpent) ended. Yax-Pak defaced Yax-K'uk'-Mo'."

At first thought, defacing the founder seems an unlikely ending, but in the context of Maya archaeology it is not. Throughout Maya history, masks, stelae, and other objects were defaced as a part of killing rites when they were no longer to be used. When David Freidel first told me that the eyes and muzzles of the Cerros masks were defaced, I realized that this is also a kill pattern throughout the Maya zone. All of the portraits on the Copán stelae have their noses knocked off and often one or both eyes pecked out. Destruction of the faces of images by pecking is so prevalent that it has been the basis of suggesting there was a peasant uprising. David Grove (1981) suggested that the mutilation of Olmec heads was a similar act of ritual killing to release the power in objects before they were buried. I believe exactly the same is true of the Maya mutilation patterns.

The face of Yax-K'uk'-Mo' on Altar Q is badly eroded around the mouth and nose. It is impossible to discern whether the destruction was deliberate, or the result of a thousand years of exposure. However, I do not think that the *lob* verb need refer to a specific act of defacing—although I do not rule out the possibility that it does. Instead, I suggest that the act of defacing as a part of ending the life of things like buildings and objects was so pervasive and fundamental to Maya thought, that it functioned as a metaphor for the ending of the Copán dynasty. Yax-K'uk'-Mo' was literally de-faced and apparently, the Copanecs considered the agent of this to have been Yax-Pak, who produced no heir to continue the dynasty.

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