

## Copán Note 18

### The Step Inscription of Temple 22 at Copán

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Thirty-two hieroglyphs are carved on the riser of the single step of the inner room of Temple 22, placed directly below the famous serpent doorway of this structure. This inscription has weathered severely since it was first photographed by Maudslay in the last century. The commentary below was therefore done through a detailed examination of the published photographs and the invaluable drawing by Annie Hunter.

The first comment should concern the reading order of the glyphs. For various reasons to be explained below, I prefer to read the inscription in single vertical columns. The physical spacing of the blocks lends some support to this. A vertical space appears between each column, whereas there is no horizontal gap between the two individual glyphs that make up each column.

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1. The Copán Notes are a running series of commentaries and small reports deriving from the multidisciplinary research project designed to record and analyze the monolithic and architectural sculpture of Copán. The Copán Mosaics Project has received support from the Center for Field Research (Earthwatch; 1985 and 1986), Northern Illinois University (1985 and 1986), The National Science Foundation (1986 and 1987), The National Endowment for the Humanities (1986 and 1987), the National Geographic Society (1986), The H. John Heinz III Charitable Foundation (1986), and the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (I.H.A.H.; 1985 and 1986), and is conducted under the authority and jurisdiction of the I.H.A.H. through a five-year agreement between the I.H.A.H. and Northern Illinois University. According to the terms of that agreement, any publication using materials (either written or in the form of line drawings or photos) derived from the Copán Mosaics Project must receive prior written consent from the Project director (William Fash) and the Director of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (Ricardo Agurcia).

The inscription begins with a date notation "*ti* 5 Lamat," or "on (the day) 5 Lamat." There is no month glyph recorded, which makes a precise placement of this date in the Long Count impossible. The glyph which follows below, Glyph 2, is I believe the verb for this sentence, and it may carry the T181 verbal suffix. Its main component, unfortunately, is unreadable. This is followed at Glyph 3 by a Katun glyph, probably a continuation of the verbal phrase. The Katun has some unusual prefixes, however, but their significance is unknown. The presence of the Katun glyph might suggest that this sentence celebrates some anniversary event.

The next two glyphs, 4 and 5, are completely unknown to me. I will suggest one possible interpretation of their general significance by jumping forward to a consideration of Glyph 6. This is composed of two signs: a skeletal (?), jawless head sign with a long, almost beak-like, snout, followed by T178, the phonetic syllable *l(a)*. The first sign strongly reminds me of the head variant of T126, syllabic *ya*. The combination *ya-l(a)* is known in a few other inscriptions as rendering *yal*, "child of (mother)." I suggest, tentatively, that this glyph expresses the relationship between a named individual (Glyphs 4 and 5) and his mother, named afterwards. It is interesting to note that, if my identification is correct, this glyph would be identical to the child-of-mother glyph found on the hieroglyphic bench of Structure 9-N-82 (the Scribe's Palace) at Copán.

The name of the mother may extend to Glyph 10. At 11 and 12 we find two familiar glyphs that also can express a child-parent relationship, and the next few glyphs, I believe, may name the father of the individual noted at 4 and 5. This name phrase, if that is its true significance, may close at Glyph 16, or it may continue much further with names and titles. My uncertainty in the matter rests with the fact that very little is known about the glyphs from 17 through 26. Certain individual glyphs are recognizable,

even though their meaning is unclear. At 17 and 18 are two glyphs that appear identical except for one sign. Glyph 17 contains *cab*, "earth," whereas 18 has *chan*, "sky," rendered by a snake head. The pairing of earth and sky in such a way is very common in the Copán inscriptions. Next at 19, 20, and 21 are parts of a familiar sequence of glyphs that include the expressions "4 *te' ahaw*" (19), "9 God K" (20), and the "*k'u-'ahaw*" combination (21). Glyph 22 may be grouped with these as well, for, although eroded, it seems to be another *ahaw* glyph. *Ahaw* is often known to follow the glyph shown here at 21. Little can be said of the glyphs remaining up to 26, although this last one resembles, in one sign only, the possible name glyph at position 5.

The last six glyphs of the inscription probably refer, at least in part, to the dedication of the building itself. We begin with a Distance Number at 27 expressing simple "14 Tuns." This is followed at 28 by a very interesting variant of a verb glyph that I have long thought concerns the dedication of structures. It is very common at yaxchilan, where this possible function is clearest. The glyph contains a head sign that is known to be one of the personifications of the "Manik," or *chi*, hand. This is preceded by "snake rattles" and followed by T126. As a dedication verb this glyph is always followed by *butz'*, "smoke," and this is to be seen as the first sign in Glyph 29. The rest of 29 is clearly *yotot*, "his house," another vital component of these possible dedication phrases. The possessor of the house is named only with a "Shell-Fist" title, and it may be a simple reference to the ruler of Copán. Because, from a glyphic standpoint at least, we cannot precisely date this building, I am not sure if this would be naming "Smoke-Shell" or his successor "Yax Pac." In any case, things begin to get complicated with the last two glyphs of the inscription. At 31 there is a clear mention of "seating," but the prefix(es) this glyph takes are unknown to me. The final glyph is a day sign with a number five, very

reminiscent of the 5 lamat we saw open this text. I suspect that these last two glyphs express a second event, but the question remains: what is the temporal relationship, giving the "14 Tuns," between the possible house dedication and the seating? There are two options open to us as I see it:

(1) The two events occur roughly 14 years apart. The possible house dedication event is associated with the first 5 Lamat date of the inscription. The D.N. counts from this to a seating event that occurred on the day 5 ?? (5 Lamat as well?). Support for this option can be found in the fact that the *chi* sign in the dedication verb is suffixed by T126, the Anterior Event Indicator.

(2) The other option is that the last glyph is a restatement of the first date, namely 5 Lamat, and that the seating event is to be associated with it rather than a later date. The house dedication (or whatever it signifies -- dedication may be too narrow a suggestion), took place some 14 years before 5 Lamat on a day that is not mentioned in this inscription.