

The Founder of the Tikal Dynasty

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In memory of Linda Schele

One of Linda Schele's many lasting contributions to Maya glyph research was her seminal discussion of dynastic "founders" at Copan, Yaxchilan, Tikal and Naranjo (Schele 1992). My own research in 1986 on the historicity of the initial Copan ruler, K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo', led Linda and I that summer to search for similar founders at other sites. Our method involved looking at "numbered successor titles," which at Copan routinely accompanied ruler's names to indicate their placement in the numerical order of dynasts (Reise 1984). The Copan ruler Waxaklahun Ubah K'awil, for example, would sometimes be called the '**U-13-TS'AK-BU-IL**, for 'u-oxlahun-ts'ak-bu-il, probably translatable as "(he is) the thirteenth maker-whole." The sense here is that the ruler, as the thirteenth in the dynastic sequence, completes or "makes whole" (ts'ak-bu) the register of rulers up to that time. Other rulers of course have different numbers, appropriate to their placement in the king list. Such successor titles appear at Tikal and other sites, where they have been of some help in reconstructing gaps in dynastic sequences even where no records exist.

In our 1986 collaboration at Copan, we encountered at Yaxchilan a reference to the ruler "Moon Skull" (a nickname) as the "seventh maker-whole." This appears on Lintel 21, a Late Classic inscription composed by the much later king Bird Jaguar IV, probably the sixteenth or seventeenth ruler. The king list of Structure 12 at Yaxchilan confirms that "Moon Skull" was indeed the seventh ruler (Mathews 1992). What struck Linda and I most, however, was the reference on Lintel 21 to another name directly after numbered title of Moon Skull. This name was written as a combination of the "spangled Chaak" deity and a jaguar, **BALAM**. As we knew from other sign substitutions at Copan, the "spangled

Chaak" was sometimes written as a leaf sign before a penis. As it happens, in the Yaxchilan king list the very first king was "Leaf-Penis-Jaguar," making it all too clear that the mysterious Lintel 21 name was none other than that of the Yaxchilan dynastic founder, whose name was perhaps Yop At Balam "Leaf Penis Jaguar" (a tentative name for the figure Mathews called "Progenitor Jaguar"). The full titular reference on Lintel 21 named "Moon Skull" as "the seventh maker-whole of Yop At Balam," in precisely the same way Copan rulers were often called the "nth maker whole of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'" (Schele 1992:138). In this way, Linda and I immediately saw the possibility of finding other "founders" simply by investigating other successor titles.

Linda's recognition of the Tikal dynastic founder was a direct result of this process. She saw that several inscriptions made reference to a name Moch Xok or Yax Moch Xok in direct association with numbered successor titles (Schele 1992:138-140). On Stela 5, for example, "Ruler B" (Yik'in Chan Chaak ?) is dubbed the "twenty-seventh maker whole" of one Yax Moch Xok, presumably Tikal's counterpart to K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' and Yop At Balam. Armed with the numerical sequence, we can posit that Yax Moch Xok probably reigned as the first king well into the Late Preclassic period, perhaps in the second century or so after Christ.

In this brief study, I would like to revisit the Tikal evidence and investigate its founder figure in somewhat more detail. As I will argue below, there are probably alternate forms of his name that have thus far gone unrecognized, allowing for a broader investigation of Yax Moch Xok and his role in the murky beginnings of Maya rulership in the central Peten.

The Founder's Name Glyph

Schele's discussion of the Tikal founder's name glyph need not be repeated here, but a few essential points are necessary as background. In the late

inscriptions at Tikal such as Stela 5, cited above, we find that the name of the founder opens with **YAX** (yax, "green, blue, unripe, first") followed by a squared element resembling the bound sticks of a wooden frame-work, read **MOCH**, "cage," by Schele, following an earlier reading from the Dresden Codex by Lounsbury and Coe (1968). This **YAX**-cage sequence in turn precedes a familiar piscine head sign read as **XOK** by Thompson (***). This is often simply read 'u in other contexts (Stuart 1990), and the **XOK** value remain problematic. The optional presence of a -ki ending on the fish element suggests that it is here logographic, with **XOK** as a possibility. For now I would simply say that it renders a word ending in -/k/, with the understanding that **XOK** is little more than a convenient label for the sign.

We have several early examples of this name, but lacking the **YAX** element altogether. The Tzakol cache vessel bearing Tikal MT140 carries one example, where we can see the framework element before an early variant of the xok fish. The large round eye, pointed front tooth, and fin at the forehead are distinctive markers for this early xok variant. On MT140 the name precedes that of the celebrated early Tikal ruler **CHAK-TOK-ICHAK**, Chak Tok Ich'ak ("Red Burning Claw"), who ruled at 8.17.0.0.0. Schele noticed that the fifth glyph on this vessel, **9-TS'AK-BU-IL -AJAW**, was very similar to the successor titles, and reasoned that this named Chak Tok Ich'ak was the ninth ruler. However, we have since come to realize that the use of "nine" and **AJAW** on this otherwise familiar glyph makes for a different sort of title, probably bolon-ts'ak-bu-ajaw, "the many maker-whole lords," that is "many successors" (bolon, the number "nine" often carries the connotation of "many" in certain ritual terms). I suggest that the reference here is to "the many successors of 'Moch Xok'," or perhaps more generically to Chak Tok Ich'ak's high number on the successor list. Another very well preserved example of the founder's name, essentially identical in form, appears on Stela 39, where it follows directly after the name of the same Chak Tok Ich'ak.

We find the name used outside of a textual environment as a headdress element on Stela 31. The portrait is of Siyaj Chan K'awil ("Stormy Sky" in previous literature), a somewhat later ruler still of the Early Classic period, yet his distinctive headgear includes a rearing xok head topped by the frame sign and, interestingly, a renewed appearance of the **YAX** element on the nose of the fish. This is not a typical hieroglyph, but rather an example of an "iconic" hieroglyph often found in Early Classic iconography. The scene intimates that Siyaj Chan K'awil is here assuming a role as an impersonator of Yax Moch Xok, but in this I over speculate.

A Variant of the Founder's Name

A number of early Peten inscriptions include another important name glyph based upon a xok fish. This appears on several looted vases and artifacts, as well as on some Tikal monuments. In all respects the xok element of this name is identical to what we find with the Tikal founder. However, the framework sign or cage in the Tikal name seems to be replaced by a sign representing steps in profile, very similar to what is used in Late Classic inscriptions as the logograph 'EHB, "staircase." In many cases the step is integrated into the forehead of the xok, but sometimes they are kept separate. Significantly, one example of this "Step Xok" name includes a **YAX** prefix, suggesting a pattern very similar to the Tikal founder's name, where **YAX** is only sometimes written with the name.

Could these similar glyphs be in fact alternate forms of a single name? There is compelling circumstantial evidence to believe so, not the least suggestive of which is that both names are strongly associated with Tikal. On an Early Classic Tzakol style vessel from the Tikal region, we find the name of Siyaj Chan K'awil (G and H) written as the owner of the vessel. Directly after his name is an all-important numbered successor title, here with 16, followed in turn

by Step Xok. That is, the Tikal ruler is named as the "sixteenth maker-whole of 'Step Xok'." Logic would dictate that this Tikal ruler would be included within same numerical sequence as others in his office named as successors of Yax Moch Xok, leading us to conclude that the Step Xok glyph is an alternate way of writing the founders name.

Following the name of Step Xok on this vessel we find the glyph **NA:B-K'INICH**, for na:b-al k'inich, "Watery Great Sun" (na:b, "pool"). This appears as a title at Tikal and Dos Pilas in both Early and Late Classic inscriptions, possibly in reference to the Underworld domain of the night sun. It's placement here with Step Xok is perhaps telling, since on Stela 5 at Tikal we have the later ruler Yik'in Chan Chaak named as the 27th successor of Yax Moch Xok, whose name is followed directly by **NA:B-AL-K'INICH**. The parallel between the passages on the Tzakol vessel and Stela 5 are striking, lending further support to the equivalence of the two Xok names.

What, then, of the one difference in these two supposed variants, namely the alternation of the "frame" and the "step" preceding the xok? It is difficult to analyze the frame sign independently, since it is all but unique to the founder's name under discussion. One possible example comes from nearby Uaxactun, on Stela 14 (at Dp5), where it looks to be a part of a personal name, but this is too battered to be of much aid. What can be said, however, is that the reading MOCH, "cage," has no direct support from internal substitution evidence. It derives only from the signs resemblance to a "cage" depicted in the Dresden Codex, named perhaps by an accompanying glyph as mochte', "cage" (Coe and Lounsbury 1968). This is hardly enough basis for reading the sign MOCH, however. In her study of the sounder Schele (1992:**) cites another possible reading for the frame, **CH'AKTE'** suggested to her by Nikolai Grube in personal communication. I take it that this derives from an interesting depiction of a similar cage-like structure on a polychrome vessel, shown behind a spotted hix feline reclining upon it. The caption above this figure states that it is the **CH'AK-**

TE'-EL HIX. Ch'ak or ch'ak-te' are widely attested words for "bed," referring specifically to a wooden bedframe, in perfect agreement with the depiction on the vase of the "Bed-ridden Jaguar" (hix may in fact refer to a different species of cat, such as the ocelot). Thus, as I understand it, Grube posits that **CH'AK** or **CH'AK-TE'** is the value of the frame in the Tikal name under discussion. There is much sense to this reading, but I would point out that the accompanying **CH'AK-TE'-EL HIX** name on the vessel makes use of the axe sign established now for several years as a **CH'AK** logograph. The existence of another **CH'AK** sign which never substitutes for the axe would strike me as unusual and troubling.

I suggest that the posited equivalence between the Frame-Xok (or Moch Xok) and the Step Xok name glyphs provides an answer to this issue, and perhaps a closer approximation to the true name of the Tikal founder. The step sign, as noted, has an established value as '**EHB**, "staircase." This is often replaced by the syllabic elements '**e-bu**, thus confirming the value. If the frame element is a direct replacement of the step, it too should be read '**EHB**. In fact, this makes considerable sense, for '**ehb** in addition to meaning "staircase" or "steps" also means "ladder." This is the exact meaning given for *ehb' in proto-Cholan (Kaufman and Norman 1984). I can certainly see the lashed poles of the hieroglyphic sign as a representation of a section of a ladder. The scaffold ladders depicted on the niche stelae of Piedras Negras show precisely the same sort of bindings, and we can be certain that this was called ehb' in Classic times, in addition to masonry steps. If the step and the ladder signs are free substitutes, as I believe they are, then arguably one might question why the "ladder" variant is not used as '**EHB** in the Late Classic texts, where dedications of steps are frequently mentioned (Friedel, Schele, and Parker 1993:***; Stuart, in press). A simple answer would be that the scribes are not recording the dedication of ladders, but of monumental staircases. There could well have been

an aversion by scribes to use a ladder for the intended meaning of a staricase, since there was no lexical differentiation in Mayan between the two.

The common 'EHB value for both the framework ladder sign and the step make for a compelling and simple explanation for the substitution I have proposed. If correct, the name would be YAX-'EHB-XOK or simply 'EHB-XOK. This assumes, of course, the veracity of the XOK reading which, as mentioned earlier, may need to be modified in favor of a better alternative, but that is another issue as yet unresolved.

Mentions of the Founder

While Step Xok is not uncommon in texts at Tikal and elsewhere, it is not always simply a part of numbered successor titles. Assuming the equivalence between the two names is valid, we can approach these novel contexts in order to shed more light, albeit dim, on this enigmatic Tikal founder.

On Tikal Stela 3, dating to 9.2.13.0.0, the name closes the inscription, directly following a reference to the Tikal king K'an Chitam (or "Kan Boar"), father of the ruler who celebrated the period ending with this stela. A "child of man" parantage glyph precedes the K'an Chitam name. The structure of this Stela 8 inscription is seemingly problematic, giving us the names of two rulers effectively back-to-back, without any relationship expressed between them. We earlier encountered this pattern on ceramic texts which have the names of both Nun Yax Ayin and Ehb' Xok, one after the other. One might be tempted from these texts to place the Ehb' Xok glyph within the vague category of a "title" glyph, and not an actual personal name, given that it appears with multiple individuals. It is equally likely in my view, however, that such sequential references are meant to convey "lists" of different persons, grouped together within some category, either as actors in a narrative or as associates in some

other respect. In this instance, we may be being told that the Tikal ruler is the descendant of K'an Chitam and (more distantly) Ehb' Xok.

The founder's name again appears on Tikal Stela 8, at the bottom of the left side, where it closes the inscription. The step element is visible just before the Xok, and may be prefixed by YAX-, although this is now largely effaced. Preceding this is a name appearing on several other Tikal stelae of this time (Martin 1998), possibly of a woman. The nature of the reference is obscure, but again we might have some sort of "associative" reference to the founder with another individual, as on Stela 3.

On Stela 1, we find the founder's name glyph used as a "belt head" on the standing ruler, presumably as an ancestral display. Similar belt heads at Tikal are specified as names of dieties or deified ancestors, good examples being the pseudo-glyphic heads on the belt of Siyaj Chan K'awil on Stela 31. At Yaxchilan, as well, many of the belt heads are named as specific ancestors of the wearer. The appearance of the Ehb' Xok name here thus strengthens the case that it is the founder's name, and lays to rest any lingering suggestions that the glyph is a title and not an individual's name.

A Tzakol vessel known as the Dellitaille Tripod (Hellmuth 1988) bears an important iconographic scene with a short text naming our founder, whom I will now call 'Ehb Xok. As with the other vessel just discussed, he is not the owner of the vessel, but rather named in relation to the owner, whose name glyph is composed of a bird's head (possibly K'UK', "quetzal") and an inverted water jug decorated with lines of dots. Accompanying his name (though placed beforehand) is the Emblem Glyph title associated with the site of Ucanal: K'AN-WITS-NAL-AJAW-wa, K'an Wits Nal Ajaw, "the Lord of K'an Wits Nal." After the personal name of "Bird Jug," we find a possessed noun, though the main component is unfamiliar to me. Closing the text, in turn, we find 16 TS'AK 'EHB-XOK NA:B, which, despite the difficulties of truncated spellings, I would translate as "the sixteenth (maker-)whole of 'Ehb Xok, the Watery (Great Sun)."

It is highly unlikely that the "Bird Jug" name is some obscure reference to Siyaj Chan K'awil of Tikal, since the Ucanal association of the protagonist seems secure. One could interpret this vessel text as showing that "Bird Jug" himself was a successor tracing his line back to an origin with 'Ehb Xok. While this remains possible, it is also quite likely that the unknown possessed term immediately after the "Bird Jug" name expresses a relationship between this figure and Siyaj Chan K'awil, who is named only by his association with 'Ehb Xok. Until this intervening glyph is better understood, it is difficult to answer this question in full.

We find another Ucanal association with 'Ehb Xok on an inscribed celt dating to the Early Classic. Here the name appears twice within an inscription that also makes reference to a lord of Ucanal, once more raising the interesting question of the early relationship between Tikal and this much smaller center. The inscription on the celt is difficult to decipher in full, but the beginning of the text (beside the standing figure) seems to refer to the "caring of the three child-gods" (blocks 1-4) perhaps an oblique mention of a triad of deities like those known from Palenque and Caracol. On the obverse, the two columns continue with a reference to the "three mountains (and) caves" (11 and 12) and, a few blocks later, the name of our founder figure (15). This in turn is followed by what appears to be another name, K'inich Tah Ahk (17, 18) who is an Ucanal Lord (19, 20). The inscription continues on to refer to another individual, perhaps a woman (23), who is portrayed on the celt, and a child of woman relationship glyph (24). Finally a second reference to Ehb' Xok closes the entire inscription. Neither reference to the founder makes clear what his association is with regard to the other names. Further study of the inscription may help to clarify the issue.

Finally, I should point out an example of the Tikal founder's name in a Maya text from Kaminaljuyu. This short text of six glyphs is from an earspool from Tomb B-1, dating to the Esperanza phase of that site. Once more, the text is

difficult to decipher, but closes with a reference to Ehb' Xok, here written in two distinct blocks. The style of the glyphs may be earlier than the date of Tomb B-1, but this is uncertain. The importance of this reference lies in its presence at the distant site of Kaminaljuyu, with its obvious important connections to Tikal during the Early Classic, especially during the reign of the Tikal king Nun Yax Ayin, otherwise known as "Curl Nose."

Having covered the several known mentions of the Tikal founder we are still left with many questions, but perhaps we now come away with a somewhat better understanding of his place in the historical consciousness of the central lowlands during the Early Classic. As I have argued, the inscriptions of Tikal contain more references to this figure than previously known from Schele's groundbreaking recognition of his name. I have also posited a decipherment of the name as 'Ehb' Xok or Yax 'Ehb Xok, concentrating attention on a probable equivalence of a "step" sign and another element representing a ladder, both 'ehb. As mentioned, the **XOK** reading of the fish logograph goes back to Thompson's old decipherment, and remains to be fully demonstrated, so I would hesitate to say that the founder's name can be fully read at this stage. I am intrigued also by the **YAX** sign and its apparent optionality in the founder's name. Of course yax is a prominent part of the founder's name at Copan, and it is probable that its meaning as "first" is significant in this context.