Copan Altar Q: Network of Narratives Depiction of Kings

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Abstract
Located in Honduras, Copan is one of the most studied Maya cities. Copan Altar Q in particular helped Mayanists to understand the lineage of the city's sixteen kings from the lineage's Founder K'ínich Yax K'uk' Mo' to Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat. This thesis project delves into an assortment of the monuments and depictions of the Classic Period - roughly 426 - 822 - kings to pursue the narrative trends and motifs through their reign. Through the website format, this project allows the user to follow the links between monuments, structures, biographies of kings, and glossaries to put these narratives into conversation with each other. The introductory essay provides an explanation into the process and reasoning behind the website development process before providing a brief overview of content. The Appendix contains a copy of the content pages from the website.

Keywords
cultural anthropology, archaeology, maya, copan, honduras

Disciplines
Anthropology

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COPAN ALTAR Q: NETWORK OF NARRATIVES DEPICTIONS OF KINGS

By

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In

Anthropology

Submitted to the

Department of Anthropology

University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Simon Martin

2020
Abstract:
Located in Honduras, Copan is one of the most studied Maya cities. Copan Altar Q in particular helped Mayanists to understand the lineage of the city's sixteen kings from the lineage’s Founder K'inich Yax K'uk’ Mo' to Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat. This thesis project delves into an assortment of the monuments and depictions of the Classic Period – roughly 426 – 822 - kings to pursue the narrative trends and motifs through their reign. Through the website format, this project allows the user to follow the links between monuments, structures, biographies of kings, and glossaries to put these narratives into conversation with each other. The introductory essay provides an explanation into the process and reasoning behind the website development process before providing a brief overview of content. The Appendix contains a copy of the content pages from the website.
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Introductory Paper

Introduction

For completion of the Undergraduate Senior Thesis in Anthropology, the author sought to expand on an earlier term paper on Copan Altar Q’s rhetoric by creating a website through which the viewer may explore Copan’s dynastic and monumental history through the famous altar. The altar, constructed by Copan’s last king Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat, comprises one of the most complete king lists in the Maya region and also provides a vital account of the lineage Founder Yax K’uk’ Mo’s accession. Through the king’s portraits on the Altar, the viewer explores the kings’ biographies and their monuments. In so doing, the viewer explores the motifs present in the monuments, the kings’ rhetorical strategies, and how these monuments affect our understanding of the kings and Copan.

This introductory essay will explain the process and reasoning behind the website’s construction and provide a brief overview of its contents. A copy of the website pages will be published in the Appendix.

Format of Website

The thesis website has been programmed by the author using Jekyll, an open source language, and is currently hosted on GitHub Pages under ahutnick.github.io/copanaltarqkings. Given that the files for the site are on GitHub and can easily be shared and edited under the owner’s permission, it is her intention that these files may be accessed by future students and administrators for the purpose of updating the site. In this manner, the site can both remain current with new discoveries and include information on more monuments and structures.

The first half of the website’s core content contains brief biographies for each of the sixteen kings depicted on Altar Q, each of which may be accessed by clicking on their Altar Q
portrait on the Home Page. The biographies link to both the monuments that the king had created and the monuments on which he was otherwise depicted. At the top of each king’s biography is listed his name and place in the lineage, alternate names to which he was referred, the dates of his reign, and the monuments he created or in which he was depicted. The preceding and succeeding kings are also linked on the page to allow for continued chronological reading for the viewer. Each page varies in length depending on the amount of information known about the king.

The second half of the website’s core content contains twenty-one monument articles, two of which specifically discuss the various iterations of an archaeological structure and three of which are from cities outside of Copan in which the kings are mentioned. These monuments may be accessed through links in the king biographies or by visiting the Monuments List page. Each page contains information on the monument's location, dates, rulers involved, and measurements at the top where available. At the bottom are linked monuments with similar features or by the same king on the web page with some monuments mentioned that are not covered. Motifs found in the Motif Glossary are also listed with a link to the glossary for further consideration and to find other monuments that have this feature. Finally, the page lists the sources referenced in the work as well as provides the Creative Commons licenses for the photographs used when appropriate. Each monument page describes the overall appearance, understanding of text where applicable, description of motifs, historical context, connections to other monuments, and general interpretation of the content.

Furthermore, these twenty-one articles do not cover the entirety of the monuments and structures at Copan. The selection process included importance to the historical narrative, corpus of information available, and balance among the king's reigns. If a monument has historical
significance yet does not meet the latter criteria, it may be mentioned in the king's biography page, as is the case with Ruler 12's Stelae 10, 12, 13, and 19. The author created these limitations in order to discuss these monuments with a reasonable amount of depth.

As aids for the reader, the top menu contains an About page, a Glossary of terms, a Monuments List for simplified access, a Motif Glossary, and a compiled list of Sources used in the site. The Glossary defines Maya terms and Maya related terms that are used in the website or are thematically relevant to the site - i.e. describing a theme. The page lists the terms in alphabetical order and provides the accompanying source. The Monuments List provides links to each of the pages for readers who are looking for a specific monument and updates with the addition of a new Monument or Structure page. The Motif Glossary defines each of the motifs found in the site. It is organized in alphabetical order and provides monuments in which it may be found as well as the source responsible for the entry. The sources are listed in parenthetical reference format with reference to the Sources tab. The Sources tab compiles every source cited in the website organized according to the American Anthropological Association's guidelines including with alphabetization of sources by the same author in the same year, to which is adhered in the glossaries.

The images for this site have been acquired from Creative Commons licensed materials from Flickr and Wikimedia Commons as well as received from the personal collection of Dr. Clark Erickson and have been cited accordingly. Indications have been made if the author has edited the photograph to remove issues such as obstructions or people. The author has used PhotoShop for the purposes of cropping, trimming, resizing, and enhancing images when necessary. If the photograph has been licensed, the license has been provided at the bottom of the
Why a Website

The website format allows for the content to be made more readily available to a public audience and allows for greater audience exploration. Much like how a museum curator cannot control what information a visitor pulls from an exhibit and allows the visitor to define their own process of discovery, the website allows the viewer to choose what information they receive and in what order. With the website, the viewers enter the site through Altar Q, starting with the king’s biographies accessed through their portrait on the Altar. The use of links then allows for the viewer to move from king to monument, monument to motif, etcetera according to the order with which they are comfortable. Furthermore, with the website format, the viewer is better able to view and visualize the comparisons between monuments with the same motifs without traversing a single monolithic text.

Comparisons to Harvard Digital Exhibit

The Peabody Museum at Harvard’s digital exhibition Altar Q and Copan would perhaps be the most similar website to the thesis website. With text from a 1996 article by David Stuart, this site also covers Copan Altar Q and briefly describes the lives of the first and tenth through sixteenth rulers. However, structurally, the site is divided between Copan’s dynastic history and the process of decipherment, in which approximately half of the exhibition focuses specifically on text, leading to a different emphasis. Also, in discussing Copan’s dynastic history, the thesis website provides biographies for all sixteen kings. Most notably, the thesis website provides pages for a select number of monuments outside of Altar Q in telling the dynastic history whereas the Peabody exhibit focuses mainly on the Altar.
Content Overview

Yax K'uk' Mo', the Founder of this lineage, assumed the throne in 426 CE, taking over from the previous king Smoke Codex God K (Stuart 2004, 233; Schele 1986, 4). His accession, detailed on Altar Q, was comprised of cham K'awiil or "receiving K'awiil", depicted as the reception of a scepter in effigy of the patron god of kings K'awiil, in the Wiin Te'naah or "Origin House", likely in Teotihuacan (Stuart 2004, 233, 236-237). Three days later he left this place, and seventeen k'atuns later, he arrived in Copan (Stuart 2004, 238). There, he married a local royal woman and began the redesign of the city (Martin and Grube 2008, 195). According to oxygen and strontium testing, the king previously was born and lived in the Central Peten region (Price et al 2010). Future kings would emphasize his connections to Teotihuacan, particularly in the Late Classic period (Fash 2004, 264).

His son, Popol Hol, was responsible for an expansive architectural and monumental program including the construction of at least six structures and five monuments (Martin and Grube 2008, 194-196). Popol Hol and his father had overseen the auspicious 9.0.0.0.0 bak'tun ending in 435, which would continue to be monumentally represented throughout the lineage, including on his own Stela 63 and Motmot Marker (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 78). Among others, he is credited with building the First Ballcourt and the Hunal and Margarita structures for his father and mother's tombs respectively (Martin and Grube 2008, 194-195). He has even built over his own existing structures to serve a new purpose, such as the construction of Yehnal over Hunal to seal his father's tomb (Martin and Grube 2008, 195. His reign cemented the ancestor worship of his father, depicting him as synthesized with the Sun God in Yehnal (Taube 2004, 177). This reverence for the Founder specifically would continue throughout the lineage.
Little is known about Rulers Three through Six. The fourth ruler, K'altuun Hix, is the only king out of the four whose name has been identified, and also the only ruler who is credited with monumental and structural expansion (Martin and Grube 2008, 196). He had likely renovated Popol Hol's Papagayo Structure in Structure 10L-26, which included the leveling of the floor and the addition of a hieroglyphic stair in front of Stela 63. Particularly noteworthy, this stair contains a rare instance of the second person in Maya text, referring to "your gods" (Fash 2011, 105). This message may insinuate some idea of separation between K'altuun Hix and the first two rulers. Ruler Three and K'altuun Hix may have been mentioned on Quirigua's tf, as the text referred to tf. None of the four rulers have conclusive dates of reign.

The seventh king, Bahlam Nehn, erected Stela 15 to celebrate the half k'atun ending, being the first king in an almost one hundred year period to have a surviving stela (). Bahlam Nehn was also honored on three stelae, two of which - Stela E and Stela 9 - were built by future Copan kings, and one of which was constructed in Caracol (Martin and Grube 2008, 197). Caracol Stela 16 marks the only instance of a Copan king being mentioned by name in this city, and alludes to the extent of Copan's power and importance at this time (Martin and Grube 2008, 87). Given one theory that Yax K'uk' Mo' was originally from Caracol, this stela may discuss Bahlam Nehn due to a familial relation (Stuart 2007). Bahlam Nehn is also believed to be the father of the tenth king, Moon Jaguar (Schele 1986, 59).

The eighth king, Wi' Yohl K'inich, famously built the Rosalila Temple, a grand and colorful iteration of Structure 10L-16. This vibrantly painted structure is at the center of the Acropolis and is a location for ancestor worship of Yax K'uk' Mo' (Fash 2011, 43). Besides its impressive architecture, this Temple is known for being the last large scale instance of stucco in the region. Deforestation and population expansion limited the amount of wood available for use
in rendering the limestone for stucco work (Martin and Grube 2008, 213). After Rosalila, monuments would largely be created from volcanic tuff mined near the city (Fash 2011, 43). Deforestation and overpopulation would eventually play a large role in the lineage's downfall.

While little is known about the ninth king, with the tenth king Moon Jaguar comes the return of figural stelae, last during Popol Hol’s reign (Schele 1987, 235; Fash 2004, 255). His Stela 9 both serves this purpose and provides evidence that Bahlam Nehn was his father (Schele 1986, 59). Interestingly, both of Moon Jaguar's stelae were constructed in Copan Ruinas, a residential area to the west of the urban area El Bosque outside of the Acropolis and Main Group. Most of the previous kings had erected monuments in the Acropolis or Main Group rather than in the residential areas (Martin and Grube 2008, 199).

The eleventh ruler, Butz' Chan erected Stelae 7 and P, both of which featured the Paddler Gods, or psychopomp deities representing among other things the life and death cycle (Fash 2011, 55; Stone and Zender 2011, 51). While similar, each stela emphasizes a different aspect of this duality with Stela 7 emphasizing warfare, sacrifice, and night while Stela P emphasizes fertility and day. Of note, Stela P was erected in the Acropolis while Stela 7 was erected in Copan Ruinas, perhaps befitting their respective focuses on physicality and spirituality (Fasquelle 2004, 102; Schele 1987, 200).

The twelfth ruler, K'ahk' Uti' Witz' K'awiil, reigned for sixty-seven years, famously extending over a five k'atun period. The five k'atun lord erected seven stelae, four out of which were placed close to the borders of Copan's control, marking their recent expansion (Martin and Grube 2008, 201). The king had also been mentioned on Quirigua Altar L, although the exact political context of its construction is unclear (Looper 2003, 52). His successor, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, would bury K'ahk' Uti' Witz' K'awiil in the Chorcha Tomb, constructed over
K'altuun Hix's renovated Papagayo Structure in Structure 10L-26 (Martin and Grube 2008, 202). Of note, the tomb would include twelve incense burners, each bearing a full figure sculpture of the twelfth king and each of his predecessors (Fash 2004, 268).

The thirteenth ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil represented the height of Copan's influence and the turning point toward their downfall. The thirteenth king oversaw an impressive monument program including the construction of eight stelae, four structures, and the first half of the famous Hieroglyphic Stairway. In addition to the Chorcha Tomb for K'ahk' Uti' Witz' K'awiil, the thirteenth king built the Esmeralda Structure to seal off Chorcha and built the first iteration of the Hieroglyphic Stairway into Esmeralda's stairway to honor his predecessor (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). Each block of the stairway consisted of text, starting a comprehensive king list and history of the city (Fash, Fash, and Stuart 2014).

However, his reign tragically ended when he was captured by Quirigua king K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Yopaat and beheaded. Quirigua, once vassal to Copan, flourished as a result, rhetorically claiming power from Copan. K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Yopaat had even referred to himself as the "Fourteenth Successor", perhaps claiming to be the successor to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's power (Schele 1986, 9). Copan's fourteenth king, K'ahk' Yoplaj Chan K'awiil, did not construct any stelae or monuments, though he is credited with renovating Temple 22. He created a space for local statesmen to meet, emphasizing closer ties with the elites under Copan's control (Fash 1991, 134).

Fifteenth king K'ahk' Yipyaj Chan K'awiil attempted to rally the city by returning to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's style of ornate monument production. His Stelae M and N continued the ornate high relief, with Stela N as a particularly impressive double figured stela. He also renovated the Hieroglyphic Stairway, adding Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's history and
building statues of previous kings. He also built Structure 10L-26-1 at the top of the Stairway (Martin and Grube 2008, 208).

Notable in both structures, the fifteenth king emphasizes the city's Teotihuacan connections through Yax K'uk' Mo', depicting the king statues in Teotihuacan warrior garb and creating a text with a Teotihuacan pseudoscript translation in Structure 10L-26-1 (Martin and Grube 2008, 208). After Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's death, the kings would often invoke both their Teotihuacan connections and warrior imagery in order to relate Copan to the once great city and regain Copan's pride by asserting that their kings were successful warriors. Given that their version of the thirteenth king's death was that he died a warrior's death by "flint and shield", this approach would suit this narrative (Martin and Grube 2008, 219). With this focus also came much more exaggerated depictions of sacrifice, at times portraying the kings with trophy heads, which had not previously been done (Fash 1991, 170). Yet, the strain on the city was already somewhat apparent, as the differences in carving quality between the first and second iterations of the Hieroglyphic Stairway were clear, and the materials used to cement the second iteration were of poorer quality (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014; Fash 1991, 150).

The sixteenth king Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat would produce an impressive monumental program by sheer numbers. He produced two stelae, fifteen altars, Temple 16, and added inscribed benches and other furnishings to five structures (Martin and Grube 2008, 209). Though he likely did not have the capability to produce a number of stelae or structures, he worked with what he had to continue to rally the city.

His most famous creation would be Altar Q, which depicts every king with his name since Yax K'uk' Mo'. The text at the top describes Yax K'uk' Mo's accession process, providing Mayanists with a much more comprehensive understanding of the players and origins of Classic
Copan's history. On the west side, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ hands Yas Pasaj Chan Yopaat the K’awiil, confirming his right to the throne (Martin and Grube 2008, 209). When paired with the stair blocks on the Temple, the Altar depicts the sixteenth king as a Rainmaker, spiritually able to start the process of resurrecting the Founder through ancestor worship (Taube 2004, 295).

Unfortunately, the city was already in decline, and the monarchy effectively ended with the sixteenth king. Overpopulation and lack of resources had resulted in large scale disease and starvation (Martin and Grube 2008, 213). The elites as well had seen a rise in power at the end of the monarchy to the point where they were able to commission elaborately carved benches and in a few cases stelae of their own (Fash 2011, 133; Martin and Grube 2008, 210). This rise in elites and their power and the issues of a lack of resources caused political turmoil that would not survive Yax Pasaj. Particularly telling, the sixteenth king’s tomb was plundered within a century of his death with few of his bones remaining and his funerary “stela” - in actuality a door support - broken in half (Fash 1991, 177; Martin and Grube 2008, 212).

Yet, another man claimed to be king after Yax Pasaj. Only one monument - Altar L - exists referring to Ukit Took’, the supposed seventeenth king. The monument was never finished with only one side completed and another sketched. It depicts the now ancestor Yax Pasaj handing K’awiil to Ukit Took’, mirroring Altar Q and perhaps attempting to legitimate Ukit Took’s claim to the throne (Fash 1991, 177). People would continue to live in the surrounding area after the fall of the monarchy, but the lineage had come to a close, leaving behind a legacy of working with what was available to produce legendary results.

**Difficulties in the Field**

Maya Studies is a fast paced field in which translations, conventions, and general historical understanding may change in an instant. This truth makes itself particularly known in
the website through the at times long and varied lists of alternate names by which we know the kings. Similarly, finding one consistent system of spellings for month names also proves challenging. In such a field, navigating sources and remaining current becomes particularly delicate. An otherwise source from ten years ago may contain a now antiquated spelling or interpretation whereas a source from thirty years ago may provide the best readily available explanation of a monument. The field is still very much in the process of more fully understanding the information left and their context, leading to an abundance of nuance and differing definitions. Of course, in discussing this process, one must also mention the corpus of eroded or destroyed information unable to provide further clarification.

**Conclusion**

In completing the website, the author has provided the audience with a method of exploring the dynastic history of Copan through Altar Q by first seeing the king behind the portrait and then through the monuments with which he was involved. Furthermore, in creating a thesis project in an easily accessible and collaborative medium, the project has the capability of staying current in a dynamic and complex field.
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Copan Altar Q constitutes one of the most complete king lists remaining from the ancient Maya world. With each of the 16 kings in the Classic era dynasty, the altar tracks roughly four hundred years of the city's history. Seated at the foot of the stairway to 10L-16, the Temple of the Founder, this altar connects his last successor Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat to Yax K’uk’ Mo’ himself. Explore each of the kings and their own monumental creations below, searching for the answers to the following questions:

- How did the historical situation in Copan affect their monuments?
- What were the kings’ rhetorical strategies?
- Where did these motifs come from?

To start your exploration, click on the king's portrait on the Altar.

If you'd like to search for a specific monument, check the Monuments List tab above.
First Row - Popol Hol (2), Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (1), Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat (16), K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil (15)

Second Row - Ruler 6, Ruler 5, K’altuun Hix (4), Ruler 3

Third Row - Moon Jaguar (10), Ruler 9, Wi’ Yohl K’inich (8), Bahlam Nehn (7)

Fourth Row - K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil (14), Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil (13), K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz K’awiil (12), Butz’ Chan (11)

Image Sources

- First row - "Copan Museum, Altar Q, dynastic rulers" (Edited), by Arian Zwegers, is licensed under CC BY 2.0
- All other photos Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson (Edited)
Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this site is to provide basic information on a series of monuments and structures throughout Copan under Yax K’uk’ Mo’s lineage, to identify connections in time and among Copan and its neighbors, and to explore the narrative implications behind these creations intended or otherwise. True, this intended narrative and the history recorded upon these structures is biased by the creator. In certain circumstances we cannot corroborate their stories, which may only be an effort of royal rhetoric rather than objective fact. Yet, the ideas that the kings attempt to invoke and how they compound upon previous monuments weaves a unique story about the city. It reveals through time and space what relationships are particularly important to them or the people at this time. And we do have evidence for when the message and the public sentiment align or fail to align - a monument kept for generations reveals its importance to its audience while a monument constructed haphazardly reveals a potential lack of investment in the project.

Please also remember when reading this site that new discoveries and interpretations are made frequently, that there is still plenty to learn. Also, due to the time and scope of the Senior Thesis, only a fraction of the monuments at Copan were able to be given their own pages here. It is my hope that, given the nature of this site, it may be handed down and updated by future members of the University to keep up with the field.

Authorship and Acknowledgements

This website was originally created by Anastasia Hutnick for completion of her Honors Thesis in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. She would like to thank the following people for their guidance in its construction:

- Dr. Simon Martin, Thesis Advisor
- Dr. Katherine Moore, Undergraduate Chair and Major Advisor
- Dr. Clark Erickson, photographs
Glossary

aj holpop - "he who is at the head of the mat" or government

- Fash 1991, 131

ajaw - lord

- Stone and Zender 2011, 37

ak’ab - darkness / night, may relate to the Underworld

- Stone and Zender 2011, 145

ak’bal-k’in - day and night / darkness and light or other paired opposites

- Schele 1987, 200; Stone and Zender 2011, 145

altar - Mayanist term for table-like monument - purposes may include serving as a throne or a space for offerings, god effigies, or ritual actions

- Herring 2005, 208-209

bak’tun - roughly 400 years or 144,000 days, first number in Maya Long Count, goes to 19
• Martin and Grube 2008, 12-13

butz’ - smoke

• Stuart 1986, 113

cauac (kawk) - divination related day name - lightning, rainstorm, thunderstorm. May also refer to a now out of date term for a Witz zoomorph

• Stross 1989, 2; Cauac Monster

chan - sky

• Stone and Zender 2011, 25

ch’am-K’awiil - literally K’awiil taking

• refers to a ritual in which a king either accedes the throne or is otherwise granted greater authority

Ch’orti’ - Modern Maya people living in / descended from the Copan region

• Fasquelle 2004, 102

Haab - 365 day vague year comprised of 18 months of 20 numbered days with five extra days - often used together with Tzolk’in calendar

• Martin and Grube 2008

hotun - 5 year

• Fash 2004, 251

kaloomte’ - war title, Chaak holding sacrificial axe

• Looper 2003, 84
k'atun - roughly 20 years or 7200 days, second number in the Maya Long Count, goes to 19

- Martin and Grube 2008, 12-13

k'exol - children were considered to be the replacements or regenerations of their ancestors, as reflected in this term

- Fash 2011, 43

k'in - day, fifth number in the Maya Long Count, goes to 19

- Martin and Grube 2008, 13

k'inich - "great sun", referring to the Sun God

- Stone and Zender 2011, 153

k'uk' - Quetzal

- Stone and Zender 2011, 25

lahuntun - 10 year period

- Fash 2011, 55-56

Long Count - calendar system for long expanses of time, written #.#.#.#.# (i.e. 9.0.0.0.0), composed of bak'tuns (400 years), k'atuns (20 years), tuns (360 day years), winals (20 days), and k'ins (days). Often followed by Tzolk'in, Haab, and/or Lord of the Night

- Martin and Grube 2008, 12

Lord of the Night - 9 day cycle of patron gods, often found in text after Long Count and Tzolk'in date

- Martin and Grube 2008, 13
mo’ - macaw

- Stone and Zender 2011, 25

ochk’in kaloomte’ - title for highest Maya kings - used by early Quirigua to refer to the Copan Kings

- Martin and Grube 2008, 217

tun - year or 360 days, third number in the Maya Long Count, goes to 19

- Martin and Grube 2008, 12-13

tutook’ tupakal - with his flint, with his shield (used in death account for Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil)

- Looper 2003, 77

tuun - stone

- Stone and Zender 2011, 169

tz’ak - succession glyph

- Friedel, Schele, and Parker 1993, 416

tz’ap - erection of stelae

- Fash 2011, 50-51

Tzolk’in - 260 day calendar with 20 day names and 13 numbers

- Martin and Grube 2008, 12

Uxwitik - Three Witik / ancient name for Copan
- Stuart 2004, 238

Uxwitza’ - Three Hill Water, or name for Caracol

- Martin and Grube 2008, 87

waxaklajuun ubaah kaan - Teotihuacan war serpent

- Martin and Grube 2008, 213

way(ob) - spirit-companion. The jaguar was the typical spirit-companion for the kings

- Fash, Fash, and Davis Salazar 2004, 70

winal / uinal - period of 20 days, fourth number in the Maya Long Count, goes to 18

- Martin and Grube 2008, 12-13

witz - mountain, Sacred Mountain and entrance to Underworld

- Grube and Schele 1987 157; Fasquelle 2004, 109

yax - blue-green

- Stone and Zender 2011, 25

yitah - siblinghood

- Grube 1990
Motifs

bakab (bacab) - one of four sky bearers who hold up the two-headed serpent where the gods can be found dancing, may also be a variation of the God N. Also may represent vassals and their duty to their lords

Monuments: Altar of Stela M, Stela N

Source: Fash 1991, 122-123; Martin 2015, 189-190

bat - Refers to the Underworld and decapitation, is a part of the Copan emblem glyph embodied by its head rather than full figure representation

Monuments: Stela N Altar

Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 177

beard - advanced age and potential ancestor status

Monuments: Stela C, Altar L

Source: Grube and Schele 1986, 157

bicephalic serpent - entrance to the Underworld, often referring to one figure entering into death, the other exiting into life

Monuments: Stela M, Stela N

Source: Baudez 1994, 87

black glyph in skeletal jaws - representative of the entrance to the Underworld

Monuments: Quirigua Stela J

Source: Looper 2003, 101
**black lake / hole** - refers to both the Underworld and Chaak's place as executioner

Monuments: *Quirigua Stela J*

Source: *Looper 2003, 83*

**bow over mouth** - autosacrifice

Monuments: *Rosalila*

Source: *Fasquelle 2004, 109*

**braid and tassel** - variant on the mat motif, sign of royalty, particularly in Copan

Monuments: *Stela 2, Stela E, Stela M, Stela N, Stela P*

Source: *Baudez 1994, 139*

**bulrush (puh glyph)** - reference to "Tollan" or political homeland. In the case of many Maya, including Copan, this would be Teotihuacan

Monuments: *Stela 63, Temple 26*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 221*

**bunch of grapes** - image resembling this that may invoke tuun or Witz

Monuments: *Stela J, Rosalila*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 169*

**kakaw (cacao)** - sacred food embodying the resurrected Maize God

Monuments: *Stela P*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 219*

**centipede** - when skeletal and paired with solar imagery, represents the sun in or dawning from the Underworld. When paired with the sun and flint on a shield, refers to warfare

Monuments: *Hieroglyphic Stairway, Quirigua Stela J, Stela C, Stela F, Stela 4, Stela H, Stela A, Stela B, Stela D, Temple 16 Block II*

Source: *Taube 2004, 286; Stone and Zender 2011, 153*

**Chaak** - Maya Rain God, also associated with clouds and lightning. Depictions may include snakeskin, fish tail, ponytail, and shell crown. Famously split open the Sacred
Mountain releasing the Maize God, earning him the title of executioner and setting the Underworld as his domain. Is associated with agriculture, fertility, and aggression

Monuments: Quirigua Stela J, Altar Q
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 41

Cipactli - Refers to a crocodilian central Mexican entity that forms the earth

Monuments: Altar Q
Source: Martin 2015, 195

Creation stones - Comprised of the jaguar platform, the snake platform, and the water or Chaak platform, each of which correspond to the Jaguar shield, the k’awiil scepter, and the Chaak pectoral. The three also correspond to warfare, ancestor worship, and death and rebirth respectively, the three main ritual responsibilities of the king

Monuments: Quirigua Stela J
Source: Looper 2003, 106

Crocodile - when horizontal, refers to the earth as it emerged from the primordial sea. When vertical, refers to the World Axis and may be used to align a figure with it

Monuments: Altar Q
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 183

East - rising sun, resurrection

Monuments: Rosalila
Source: Fash 2011, 43

Entwined serpents - sacrifice

Monuments: Stela 7, Stela P, Stela E
Source: Baudez 1994, 139

Feathered serpent - another term for the Teotihuacan god Quetzalcoat or Kulkulan. Counterpart to the Teotihuacan war serpent, represents the ruler’s responsibilities pertaining to fertility and domestic affairs

Monuments: Motmot Marker, Stela 63, Stela P, Structure 16, Structure 26
Source: Taube 2018, 202
**feathered shield** - indicative of Teotihuacan style as well as Quetzalcoatl

Monuments: *Hieroglyphic Stairway, Altar Q, Structure 26*

Source: *Martin and Grube 2008, 208*

**fish** - aquatic nature, sometimes refers to Chaak making rain

Monuments: *Stela E, Stela N*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 191*

**four** - May refer to the sun, the cardinal directions, or the creation date of the world - 4 Ajaw

Monuments: *Altar Q, Temple 16, Motmot*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 153*

**Giant Ajaw** - style of altar, day "Ajaw" (also "Ahau") indicated by large image of king sitting in the center, more common in Caracol than Copan

Monuments: *Quirigua Altar L*

Source: *Looper 2003, 51*

**intertwined glyphs** - see mat

Monuments: *Stela J*

Source: *Fash 1991, 150*

**jaguar** - warrior, night / nocturnal sun, sorcery, water, fire

Monuments: *Quirigua Stela J, Stela 2, Stela 7, Stela E, Stela J, Stela M, Stela P*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 195*

**jaguar pelt** - war / wealth

Monuments: *Stela 2, Stela 7, Stela P, Chorcha*

Source: *Stone and Zender 2011, 195*

**Jaguar Tlaloc** - aspect of Tlaloc focusing on warfare and sacrifice as opposed to the fertility aspect embodied in the crocodilian counterpart. This is the only version of the two to be found in Classic Maya imagery

Monuments: *Hieroglyphic Stairway, 10L-26*
K'awiil (scepter) - Effigy of K'awiil - associated with lightning, agriculture, ancestor worship, and royalty. The bar of the scepter is fashioned from his serpent leg with his head forming the head of the scepter. This scepter represented royal authority. See Yax K’uk’ Mo’s accession

Monuments: Altar Q, Altar L, Quirigua Stela J,
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 49; Baudez 1994,

k'in cartouche - warfare

Monuments: Quirigua Altar L, Stela 7, Stela M
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 153

k'an cross - center of the world and sky

Monuments: Temple 16
Source: Taube 2004, 266

lancet - autosacrifice

Monuments: Stela A, Stela E, Stela M, Stela 11
Source: Baudez 1994, 20

maize - deity, rebirth, fertility

Monuments: Rosalila
Source: Fash 2011, 43

mat - symbol of royal power

Monuments: Stela A, Stela J, Stela M
Source: Fash 1991, 150

Paddler Gods - Comprised of the Stingray Spine Paddler God and the Jaguar Paddler God, these two aged solar associated gods are classified by day and night glyphs respectively. Their dualism represents the transformation of life and death, and as such they are responsible for transport to and from the Underworld. Period ending stelae often depict the Paddler Gods in the clouds of sacrificial offerings, being summoned by the kings. Paddler bathing rituals would serve the purpose of rainmaking.
Monuments: Stela 2, Stela 7, Stela E, Stela P, Quirigua Stela J
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 51

**Pax Jaguar** - protection of the ancestors and cycle of fertility

Monuments: Stela E, Stela 15
Source: Baudez 1994, 48

**quatrefoil** - reference to the entrance to the Underworld

Monuments: Motmot Marker
Source: Fash 2011, 78

**red** - rising sun, heat and vitality

Monuments: Stela 7, Stela J
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 153

**rope** - may refer to conquest or sacred ritual - in writing almost always the latter. May refer to sacrifice, binding captives or offerings. Twisted, refers to supporting the heavens

Monuments: Stela E, Temple 16
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 77

**sak pectoral** - associated with the color white, refers to a floral sense and the cosmic tree - refers to cycle of resurrection

Monuments: Quirigua Stela J
Source: Looper 2003, 165

**serpent** - may represent sky phenomena such as the celestial sphere, lightning, and a constellation, the Underworld when paired with a centipede, a pathway for the supernatural, or women

Monuments: Stela N
Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 201

**serpent bar** - king’s connection to the spirit world and ability to make spirits manifest

Monuments: Altar Q, Caracol Stela 16, Motmot Marker, Stela 7, Stela 9, Stela A, Stela E, Stela M, Stela N, Stela P
serpent's mouth - Door to the Underworld

Monuments: Rosalila

Source: Fasquelle 2004, 109

Skeletal Tlaloc - war, sacrifice, trophies

Monuments: Temple 16 Stair Block I, Rosalila

Source: Taube 2004, 285

skull and vegetation - Cycle of death and rebirth

Monuments: Stela 2, Stela 7, Stela A, Stela E, Stela P

Source: Fash 2011, 59

Spondylus Shell - wealth, was considered a luxury item

Monuments: Hieroglyphic Stairway, Stela M, Stela N

Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 167

spotted jaguar headdress - ritual for resurrecting the jaguar deity

Monuments: Stela P, Stela 2

Source: Fash 2011, 57

Star - May indicate the life head of the bicephalic monster; following its path was a particular focus in Copan texts

Monuments: Altar of Stela M, Altar L

Source: Looper 2003, 52

stingray spines - autosacrifice

Monuments: Rosalila, Stela 7, Hieroglyphic Stairway

Source: Fasquelle 2004, 103

Sun God - "celestial counterpart" to the king, evoking masculinity and power, existing as a paternal figure. Kings would often depict themselves as this god

Monuments: Stela P, Structure 16
Teotihuacan war serpent - differentiated from its counterpart Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent) by the high upturned nose or nostril on the tip of the nose and lack of feathers covering the body, identified with rulership and fire, warfare, and empire.

Monuments: Hieroglyphic Stairway, Stela 11

Source: Taube 2018, 202

three blackened circles - jaguar, particularly nocturnal element

Monuments: Azul, Stela M

Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 195; Fasquelle 2004, 106

Tlaloc - Teotihuacan god of rain and lightning. May at times be considered a counterpart to the Maya god K’awiil. Large rings may represent his eyes or the goggles worn by Teotihuacan warriors

Monuments: Altar Q, Structure 16, Structure 26, Quirigua Stela J

Source: Taube 2018, 186, 181

torch through forehead - apotheosis of a previous king to the status of K’awiil, associated with posthumous portraits; also referred to as cigar or k’awiil through the forehead or smoking axe

Monuments: Altar L, Stela 11, Stela M, Stela N, Palenque sarcophagus

Source: Schele 1987, 170; Fash 1991, 177

turban - royalty

Monuments: Rosalila, Stela N, Altar Q, Altar L

Source: Fasquelle 2004, 109

turtle shell - Usually refers to the resurrection of the Maize God, who is depicted as having emerged from the Underworld through a broken turtle shell - a representation of the earth or the constellation Orion. When yellow, may refer to a turtle shell drum

Monuments: Stela 2

Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 207

Tuun in hand - glyph, represents erection of stela

Monuments: Caracol Stela 16
Chac-Xib-Chaac - Rain and lightning god. Also known as G1 in the Palenque Triad. G1 in the Triad was the reborn version of the god who was promoted to the rank of Lord or ajaw under the patronage of another god. In the triad he is joined by a young k'awiil and a version of the Sun God

Monuments: Stela 9

Source: Schele 1987, 236; Coe 1989, 182; Martin and Grube 2008, 159

Vision Serpent - conduit through which the summoned deity or ancestor appears to the king; AKA the Bearded Dragon

Monuments: Quirigua Stela J


waterlily - earth, fertility, related to God N and his affinity for water and fertility

Monuments: Stela 2, Stela A, Stela N, Hieroglyphic Stairway

Source: Baudez 1994, 86; Martin 2015, 191

west - associated with death and the Underworld; black is the typical color associated with this direction for the sun's nightly journey

Monuments: Rosalila, Yehnal, Stela J

Source: Fasquelle 2004, 102; Stone and Zender 2011, 145

white - color used in Ch'orti' funerals, associated with burial

Monuments: Rosalila

Source: Fasquelle 2004, 102

wiin te' naah / crossed bundles glyph - Refers to the Foundation House (assumedly in Teotihuacan) where Yax K'uk' Mo' had taken K'awiil. Though used to refer to this house at a number of Maya cities including Tikal and Quirigua. At Copan it also often refers to the Founder

Monuments: Altar Q, Hieroglyphic Stairway, Quirigua Stela J, Stela 11, Stela E, Stela J, Stela M, Stela N,

Source: Stuart 2004, 236-237
witz - represents the sacred mountain - living entrance to the Underworld, site of the Maize God's rebirth, and throne


Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 139

Xokfish / bull shark - Semi-divine, the bull shark is credited in the origin story for maize, wind, and rain

Monuments: Stela 7

Source: Stone and Zender 2011, 203

Yaxk’in - Eastern sun emerging out of the Underworld

Monuments: Rosalila, Temple 16, Altar Q

Source: Taube 2004, 287

year sign - Mexican symbol often referring to burnt vegetal offerings

Monuments: Yehnal Structure (Structure 10L-16)

Source: Taube 2004, 277
Ruler 1: K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'

**AKA:** Ajaw K'inich K'uk' Mo', Ajaw K'uk' Mo', Solar Green Quetzal Macaw, The Founder

**Reign:** 426 - 437

**Preceded by:** Smoke Codex God K (previous lineage)

**Succeeded by:** Popol Hol

**Structures:**
- Structure 10L-16
- Structure 10L-26
- Motmot Marker
- Stela 63
- Altar Q
- Hieroglyphic Stairway
- Stela 15
- Stela J
- Stela P
- Stela 11

Despite his Teotihuacan garb on Altar Q, oxygen and strontium testing have confirmed that Yax K’uk’ Mo’ was originally from neither Copan nor Teotihuacan. His larger levels of strontium suggest that he spent much of his time in Central Peten, though a shift in ratios also suggests that he spent time perhaps in childhood in a different central or southern region (Price et al. 2011). David Stuart had previously suggested that the Founder was from Caracol due to the use of the term uxwitz’ ajaw or Three Hills Place Lord on Stela 63 (Fash 2011, 105). One theory claims that Yax K'uk' Mo' spent part of his childhood in Caracol before advancing his political career in Tikal. According to Copan's Stela 15, Yax K'uk' Mo' was present in Copan in 8.19.0.0.0, over ten years
before his accession, insinuating that he was sent to the city before he was confirmed as its next new king (Stuart 2004, 223).

While the theory is not conclusive, Tikal had notably been taken over in a similar manner to Copan by Sihyaj K’ahk’, a general with strong ties to Teotihuacan, in 378 CE (Martin and Grube 2008, 30). Sihyaj K’ahk’ would preside over the accession of Yax Nuun Ahin I, the son of Teotihuacan king Spearthrower Owl and a Tikal noblewoman, cementing a “New Order” in the Maya city (Martin and Grube 2008, 30-32). Given Tikal’s strong ties to Teotihuacan, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ - then Ajaw K’uk’ Mo’ - could have gained status in Tikal and been chosen to be confirmed at Teotihuacan as the next king of Copan. As a center of trade routes between the Maya region and the rest of Central America, and with its proximity to Quirigua and its relation to the obsidian and jade routes to and from the Caribbean, Copan would have been an advantageous city to have under its influence (Price et al 2010).

Altar Q states that for his accession, Yax K’uk’ Mo’, then Ajaw K’uk’ Mo’ received K’awiil in Wiin te’naah or Origin House likely in Teotihuacan on September 6, 426 (Stuart 2004, 233, 237). Three days later, he departed from this place (Stuart 2004, 235). One hundred fifty-three days later, he - the “West Kaloomte” - arrived at Copan (Stuart 2004, 238).

Similar to the events at Tikal, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ upon his arrival seized control of the throne from the city’s previous king Smoke Codex God K, beginning his own lineage (Schele 1986, 4). Copan also underwent a significant redesign around this time though Yax K’uk’ Mo’ did largely work with the existing architectural layout (Traxler 2004, 55).

Shortly after his arrival in Copan, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ would witness another king’s accession at the Foundation House: Quirigua’s first king, Tok Casper (Martin and Grube 2008, 216). Copan would continue to have control over Quirigua and the Motagua Valley for roughly three hundred years.

Like Yax Nuun Ahin I’s father, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ also married into local Copan nobility, assumedly to further legitimize his seizure of the throne (Martin and Grube 2008, 196). Their son, Popol Hol, may have ruled with his father as co-regent for some time. According to Stela 63 and the Motomot Marker, both men bore witness to the auspicious 9.0.0.0.0 bak’tun ending (Martin and Grube 2008, 194). Popol Hol would spend much of his reign building his father’s legacy, constructing his tomb as well as creating structures for his worship. Like Yax Nuun Ahin I, Popol Hol’s task was to invoke his father as a local king with Lowland Maya garb and deities while paying homage to his Teotihuacan patronage. Accordingly, mention of his connections to Teotihuacan would decrease until the Late Classic Period. The first king’s tomb would incorporate both aspects of this narrative.

Yax K’uk’ Mo’ was buried in the Hunal Tomb in Structure 10L-16 (Martin and Grube 2008, 195). The tomb itself was constructed in the talud tablero style, and the king wore a composite shell headdress - both of which hailed from Teotihuacan (Traxler
2004, 58; Price et al. 2011). The talud tablero style however had been adapted in both the Maya Highland and Lowland regions at the time and showed influence from both locations (Traxler 2004, 58). Likewise, the burial itself followed Lowland Maya tradition. Yax K'uk' Mo' was laid out in a supine position on a stone bier. He was buried with a variety of pottery from Copan, Central Mexico, the Highlands, and Lowlands. Interestingly, the king's body had survived several fractures and blunt force trauma, indicating a history as a warrior (Price et al. 2011). His right arm was among these fractures as was depicted on Altar Q (Martin and Grube 2008, 193).

His son's efforts would take root, and Yax K'uk' Mo' would continue to be worshipped and invoked by his successors as a sign of legitimacy, strength, and prosperity. In Structure 10L-1, he would be apotheosized and worshipped as the Sun God, and he would appear on countless stelae and other monuments. Yax K'uk' Mo' the foreign king would become the figurehead for Classic Copan and a god to each of his successors.

Sources:

Ruler 2: K'ìnich Popol Hol

**AKA:** Mat Head, Tok’

**Reign:** circa 437

**Preceded by:** Yax K’uk’ Mo’

**Succeeded by:** Ruler 3

**Structures:**
- Stela 18
- Stela 28
- Stela 63
- Motmot Marker
- Xukpi Stone
- **Structure 16:**
  - Hunal
  - Yehnal
  - Margarita
- **Structure 26:**
  - Motmot
  - Papagayo
- Ballcourt I

Popol Hol, second king and son of the foreign Founder Yax K’uk’ Mo and a Copan noblewoman, both had a truly ambitious building program and worked to build his father’s legacy. Each of his monuments and structures evoked his father, with whom
he may have ruled as co-regent before his death around 437 CE (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 72).

Interestingly, Popol Hol’s Stela 18 with one figural side and three sides of text was the last figural stela found before the tenth king Moon Jaguar’s rule (Fash 2004, 255, 259). Though fragmentated today, this stela contains a lashed ladder glyph that was only found elsewhere in reference to the Tikal founder Yax Ehb Xook (Martin and Grube 2008, 195). Further reference to Tikal may be found in Popol Hol’s Xukpi Stone found in the Margarita Structure, which may mention Sihyaj K’ahk’, the invading general (Martin and Grube 2008, 196). In each of his stelae, Popol Hol carved with the low relief and rectangular glyphs popular at the time (Fash 2011, 78).

Popol Hol’s main task in his construction was to build his father’s legacy and mediate between his different regional influences to legitimize him in the eyes of the people. Notably, his tomb in the Hunal Structure contains references to Teotihuacan, the Maya Lowlands, and the Maya Highlands (Traxler 2004, 58). In his figural depictions of his father on the Motmot Marker, he wears local Maya Lowland garb instead of the Late Classic Teotihuacan goggles and cape, asserting his Maya identity (Martin and Grube 2008, ). In structures such as Yehnal, Popol Hol would apotheosize his father by combining him with the Sun God, a motif that would continue with depictions of Yax K’uk’ Mo’ in the future (Taube 2004, 277).

Perhaps most famously, both Popol Hol and his father oversaw the 9.0.0.0.0 bak’tun ending in 435, which would be the focal point in Popol Hol’s Motmot Marker and later Stela 63 after the renovation of the Motmot Structure. Even after the destruction of the Papagayo Structure and consequently Stela 63 during the reign of the thirteenth king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, the thirteenth king would replace the monument with his own memorial to the bak’tun ending, Stela J (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 78). The seventh king Bahlam Nehn had also erected his own Stela 15 mentioning the bak’tun ending by this point (Fash 1991, 83).

Popol Hol succeeded in making his father a patron deity for the city who would be remembered on most of Copan’s monuments. He also built up some of the essential monuments in the Acropolis that survive to this day in a truly legendary feat of engineering.

Sources:

Ruler 3

**Reign:** Uncertain

**Preceded by:** Popol Hol

**Succeeded by:** K’altuun Hix

**Structures:**
- Unknown

Not much is known about Ruler 3 - information between 437 and 524 - Popol Hol’s reign and the start of Bahlam Nehn’s - is limited at best.

This king may have been mentioned on Quirigua Monument 26 along with K’altuun Hix. The text refers to a “third” and “fourth king”, although the evidence is not conclusive (Martin and Grube 2008, 196).

**Sources:**
Ruler 4: K’altuun Hix

AKA: Cu Ix

Reign: Uncertain

Preceded by: Ruler 3

Succeeded by: Ruler 5

Structures:

- Papagayo Structure
- Stela 34
- Step at Stela 63 (Papagayo Step)

*Altar Q Portrait*

*Photograph (Edited) Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson*

Not much is known about the fourth king of Copan, although more is known about him than Rulers 3, 5, 6, and 9. He renovated the Papagayo Structure, adding in a stair in front of Stela 63 in dedication. Fascinatingly, this stair is one of the few instances of invoking the second person, indicating a direct quote from the ruler. The text, including “your gods” and “your land” appears to refer to Yax K’uk Mo’ and his identity as a foreigner with ties to Teotihuacan (Martin and Grube 2008, 196). The stair even uses the “pu” or bulrush glyph associated with Teotihuacan (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 78). This text may perform a sort of separation between customs of Teotihuacan
and local origins, or it may seek to celebrate the power derived from the founder’s origins.

K’altuun Hix’s name, meaning “Bound Stone Jaguar”, had also been found on fragments of Stela 34, although not much else has been derived (Martin and Grube 2008, 196).

K’altuun Hix may be mentioned on Quirigua's Monument 26. The text refers to a “third” and “fourth king”, which William Fash suggested may refer to Ruler 3 and K’altuun Hix, although the evidence is not conclusive (1991, 79). Regardless, the mention of the ochk’in kaloomte in Quirigua around the time of K’altuun Hix’s reign confirms that Copan still held a position of authority over the city continuing from the days of Yax K’uk Mo’.

Sources

Ruler 5

Reign: Uncertain

Preceded by: K’altuun Hix

Succeeded by: Ruler 6

Structures:
- Unknown

Not much is known about Ruler 5 - information between 437 and 524 - Popol Hol’s reign and the start of Bahlam Nehn’s - is limited at best.

This king may have been mentioned on Quirigua Monument 26. The 480 CE monument mentions an event supervised an ochk’in kaloomte, which at Quirigua in this time referred to a Copan king (Martin and Grube 2008, 217). If Ruler 5 ruled during this time, he may very well be that king.

Sources:
Ruler 6

Reign: Uncertain

Preceded by: Ruler 5

Succeeded by: Bahlam Nehn

Structures:
- Unknown

Not much is known about Ruler 6 - information between 437 and 524 - Popol Hol's reign and the start of Bahlam Nehn's - is limited at best.

Sources:
Ruler 7: Bahlam Nehn

**AKA:** Waterlily Jaguar, Jaguar Sun God, Mirror Jaguar

**Reign:** 524 - 532

**Preceded by:** Ruler 6

**Succeeded by:** Wi' Yohl K'ínich

**Structures:**
- Stela 15
- Caracol Stela 16
- Stela E
- Stela 9

On Altar Q, Bahlam Nehn the depiction of a Waterlily Jaguar head is a primary feature of his name glyph (Schele and Schele 1986 66). His name was however written in a variety of different ways, including with a k’atun title (Schele 1987, 236).

Bahlam Nehn is the first king since K’altuun Hix to have a confirmed surviving stela of his own - **Stela 15.** This stela was categorized as a Type III with all four sides bearing glyphs (Fash 2004, 259). No figural stelae have been found between the reigns of the
second king Popol Hol and the tenth king Moon Jaguar (Fash 2004, 255). This stela was erected to celebrate the 9.4.10.0.0 half k’atun ending and, Given the use of phrases such as “to burn” and “he binds stone”, described the associated rituals (Martin and Grube 2008, 197; Boot 2009 63, 105). He is also the first to refer to himself with his succession number as the seventh king in Yax K’uk’ Mo’s line.

The seventh king would however be remembered on no less than three future stelae. One of these stelae was erected in Caracol, making Bahlam Nehn the only Copan king to be recognized both outside of Copan’s region of control and by one of the three most prominent cities (Martin and Grube 2008, 197; Fash 2011, 59). During his reign, the tenth king, Moon Jaguar would honor his father - Bahlam Nehn - in his Stela 9 (Schele 1986, 56). It has been speculated that Wi’ Yohl K’inich and Ruler 9 were also the seventh kings’ sons. The thirteenth ruler, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil would also honor him in the enigmatic Stela E (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat, the final king in the Yax K’uk’ Mo’ lineage, would depict Bahlam Nehn among other well known kings as witnesses to his accession on a Temple 11 stair (Martin and Grube 2008, 209).

Though relatively little remains from Bahlam Nehn’s time, his continued remembrance by later kings and his mention on a Caracol stela speak volumes about his impact on the city. He would later be buried in a tomb beneath Structure 22A (Fash 2011, 147).

Sources:

Ruler 8: Wi' Yohl K'inich

**AKA:** The Heart of the Sun God, Wi' Ohl K'inich

**Reign:** 532 - 551

**Preceded by:** Bahlam Nehn

**Succeeded by:** Ruler 9

**Structures:**
- Rosalila Temple
- Ante Step
- Hieroglyphic Stairway

On Altar Q, Wi' Yohl K'inich's name was written in a cursive form, which may have simply been due to allotted space (Martin and Grube 2008, 197).

Wi' Yohl K'inich was known for his creation of the Rosalila Temple. This three level structure was the sixth incarnation of Structure 16 at the center of the Acropolis (Martin and Grube 2008, 198). The Temple itself served as a house of ancestor worship complete with underworld motifs and stations for kings to communicate with their predecessors through autosacrifice (Fasquelle 2004, 109). The structure contained
numerous references to Yax K’uk’ Mo’ apotheosized as the Sun God, appearing as an avian sun in various phases (Fash 2011, 43). The temple would last until the reign of the thirteenth king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, who would ritually bury it intact under ritual white paint (Martin and Grube 2008, 204; Fasquelle 2004, 102).

The Temple spared no expense with its impressive stucco work and vibrant colors. Yet, it would be the last structure of its kind at Copan, as overpopulation had led to deforestation, limiting available resources to produce the stucco (Martin and Grube 2008, 198). During this century, the city had surpassed its capacity (Martin and Grube 2008, 213).

Wi’ Yohl K’inich was also known for his construction of the Ante Structure to replace previous palaces (Martin and Grube 2008, 197). In front of this structure was a stair detailing his accession and the dedication of the structure in circa 541. This structure in part helped deduce that Wi’ Yohl K’inich was the long contested occupant of the Sub Jaguar tomb.

Previously, Bahlam Nehn, Ruler 9, and Moon Jaguar were considered potential candidates due to their time of death (Martin and Grube 2008, 199). Yet, the tomb was to the west on the same axis as the Ante Structure, adding symbolic significance. Furthermore, the offerings when tested were found to have originated in about 550, in time for Wi’ Yohl K’inich’s burial in 551 (Price et al. 2011). While not definitive, evidence does exist that this is Wi’ Yohl K’inich’s tomb.

While no stelae remain from Wi’ Yohl K’inich’s reign, he completed impressive structural renovations, including for a lavish location for kings to commune with their ancestors. The Rosalila Temple also proves that worship of Yax K’uk’ Mo’ continued from Popol Hol’s influence. This occurrence had previously been suggested by the eighth king’s predecessor, Bahlam Nehn being the first king to refer to himself in relation to his succession from Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Martin and Grube 2008, 197). This trend would certainly flourish into the Late Classic period.

Sources:

Ruler 9

Reign: 551 - 553

Preceded by: Wi' Yohl K'inich

Succeeded by: Moon Jaguar

Structures:

- Mentioned: Hieroglyphic Stairway

Not much is known about Ruler 9. Their accession date in 551 can be found on the Hieroglyphic Stairway, and the following ruler Moon Jaguar acceded the throne in 553, providing an end date.

Ruler 9 might be buried in the Sub-Jaguar tomb, but no names were recorded. Bahlam Nehn, Wi' Yohl K'inich, and Moon Jaguar are also candidates for burial in this tomb (Martin and Grube 2008, 199).

Sources:
Ruler 10: Moon Jaguar

Reign: 553 - 578

Preceded by: Ruler 9

Succeeded by: Butz’ Chan

Structures:

- Stela 9
- Stela 17
- Hieroglyphic Stairway

On Altar Q, Moon Jaguar is found sitting on a Waterlily Jaguar glyph, which is probably in reference to his father, Bahlam Nehn (Schele 1986, 57).

The tenth king’s Stela 9 is notable for two particular reasons. First, it reveals Bahlam Nehn, the seventh king, to be Moon Jaguar’s father. Moon Jaguar even goes so far as to refer to his father with Ma Kina, a title usually reserved for Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Schele 1986, 59). Second, Stela 9 is the first stela to include figural depictions since the second king Popol Hol’s reign (Schele 1987, 235; Fash 2004, 255). This return to form would give way to impressive works of high relief from future kings. Unfortunately, due
to the monument's previous destruction, little information is available about Moon Jaguar's figural style. Moon Jaguar's other confirmed monument, Stela 17, is classified as a Type II stela with two sides carved only with glyphs, denying further information (Fash 2004, 259).

Interestingly, Moon Jaguar erected both Stela 9 and Stela 17 in the village of Copan Ruinas rather than the Acropolis like most of his predecessors (Martin and Grube 2008, 199). With this decision, the tenth king focused on speaking directly to the people rather than creating more ritualistically significant stelae. Both his successor Butz' Chan and the twelfth king K'ahk' Ut'i Witz' K'awiil would continue this tradition of creating stelae in the village. K'ahk' Ut'i Witz' K'awiil would even go so far as to create stelae on the edge of Copan's control to celebrate and cement the city's expansion (Martin and Grube 2008, 201).

Sources:

Ruler 11: Butz’ Chan

**AKA:** K’ahk Uti Chan, Fiery Sky, Fiery Snake, Smoking Heavens, Smoke Serpent, Smoke Sky

**Ruler:** 11

**Reign:** 578 - 628

**Preceded by:** Moon Jaguar

**Succeeded by:** K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil

**Structures:**
- Stela 7
- Stela P

Butz’ Chan’s nearly fifty year reign oversaw a large population growth in the 7th century (Martin and Grube 2008, 200; Fash 1991, 98). Only two of his stelae - Stela 7 and Stela P have survived, both of which commemorate period endings (Martin and Grube 2008, 200; Schele 1987, 200; Fash 2011, 55). Both of his stelae feature the Paddler Gods - the Stingray Spine God and Jaguar God - who represented day and night respectively as well as death and rebirth and other dualities (Stone and Zender 2011, 201). Notably, these gods also appeared in Tikal Burial 116, Dos Pilas Stela 8,
and other locations in the Maya region (Schele 1986 199). Following the theme of duality, these stelae emphasize each half of these dualities respectively, with Stela 7 emphasizing the physical strength, sacrifice, and prowess in warfare through the jaguar or night while Stela P emphasizes fertility and abundance through the day and rebirth aspect. Notably, these stelae were erected in the village and in the Acropolis respectively, and Butz’ Chan alters the carving style used to suit each location, with the village stela focusing on the physical and the Acropolis stela focusing moreso on the divine.

Butz’ Chan was a fairly famous king. A Pusilha king in Belize had taken the eleventh ruler's name shortly after his death (Martin and Grube 2008, 201). Furthermore, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil honored him on Stela A (Schele and Grube 1986, 153). Butz’ Chan would continue to be honored on at least four more stelae in Copan (Martin and Grube 2008, 200).

Sources:

Ruler 12: K'ahk Uti' Witz' K'awiil

**AKA:** Smoke Imix, Smoke Imix God K, Smoke Jaguar, Butz' Hunab Smoking One and Only K'awiil, Fire is the Mouth of the Water Serpent

**Reign:** 628 - 695

**Preceded by:** Butz' chan

**Succeeded by:** Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil

**Structures:**

- Chorcha Tomb, Structure 10L-26
- Stela 2
- Stela 3
- Stelae 10, 12, 13, 19
- Stela 23
- Quirigua Altar L
- Hieroglyphic Stairway
Reigning at the same time of other famous Maya rulers such as K’inich Janaab’ Pakal of Palenque and Itzamnaaj B’ahlam III of Yaxchilan, K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil was honored in his long rule and expansionist policies (Fash 2011, 104). On Altar Q, he does not need to sit on his name glyph, but is rather referenced using a 5 k’atun glyph, because his reign lasted during 5 k’atun periods (Martin and Grube 2008, 201).

Believed to have been born in 604, K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil would have been twenty-four at the time of his accession. It would be another twenty-four years before his first stelae in 652 (Martin and Grube 2008, 201). Four of his seven stelae - 10, 12, 13, and 19 would be placed at the edges of the Copan Valley, not just the city (Grube and Schele 1988, 301). While this policy of expansion began during his predecessor Butz’ Chan’s time, K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil undertook the ambitious program to memorialize these findings (Looper 2003, 52).

Evidence of K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil’s power in the valley is especially evident in Quirigua’s Altar L which mentions the twelfth ruler at a Quirigua period ending. However, the exact political situation concerning Quirigua and Copan at this moment is uncertain at best given some of the design choices on the altar and the fate of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil (Martin and Grube 2008, 201; Looper 2003, 51). Though the thirteenth king would be present at the next king of Quirigua’s accession, tensions may have already been high between the two cities. Yet, the possibility also exists that K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ Kawiil simply had the altar made to spread his name throughout Copan’s territory.

After his death, K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil was buried in the Chorcha Tomb in Structure 10L-26, which the thirteenth ruler would cover with the Esmeralda section and the first Hieroglyphic Stairway (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). The tomb’s stairway would be named for its royal inhabitant (Martin and Grube 2008, 202). The twelfth ruler had succeeded in making his name known throughout the region - after his death, a Pusilha king in Belize took the Copan king’s name (Martin and Grube 2008, 201).

Sources:


Ruler 13: Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil

AKA: 18 Rabbit

Reign: 695 - 738

Preceded by: K'ahk' Uti' Witz' K'awiil

Succeeded by: K'ahk' Joplaj Chan K'awiil

Structures:

- Stela J
- Stela C
- Stela F
- Stela 4
- Stela H
- Stela A
- Stela B
- Stela D
- Esmeralda Structure, Structure 10L-26
With the reign of the thirteenth king came the pinnacle of Classic Copan and subsequently one may argue the beginning of its end. His impact would be evident in future works.

From what we know of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil in life, he achieved an ambitious amount of building projects with eight stelae and renovations on five different structures. Paying homage to his immediate ancestors was also a particular strategy for the thirteenth ruler. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil honored the eleventh king Butz’ Chan on Stela A and his predecessor K’ahk’ Ut’ Witz’ K’awiil in the Hieroglyphic Stairway, in which he had celebrated the history of the city.

His first stela, Stela J is a bit of an anomaly as it is the only one of his stelae to appear in low relief, outside of the Main Group, and without an apparent self portrait (Fash 1991, 113). However, the stela does serve to remind those entering the city of Copan’s illustrious history by invoking Yax K’uk’ Mo’s presence at the bak’tun ending. He then uses this illustrious history to honor himself by connecting his accession date to that of the Founder’s, assuring visitors of their success both past and present.

His later stelae in contrast all were constructed in the Main Group and had exceptional detail in high relief. The king depicted himself performing ritual actions in the regalia of the local gods holding the centipede bar (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). The thirteenth ruler therefore asserted his divinity from the gods of the people and like many of his predecessors did not choose to present himself as a warrior, instead focusing on his duality as both mortal and divine (Martin and Grube 2008, 203).

In 724, he supervised K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat’s accession in Quirigua, confirming that Copan’s previous position of power over the city still held. This would change fourteen years later when the same king would capture the Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil at Kok Witz or Turtle Hill and, six days later on 9.15.6.14.6 6 Kimi 4 Sek (May 3, 738), behead him (Martin and Grube 2008, 205; Fash 2011, 98; Looper 2003, 76). The only somewhat substantial record of the capture and beheading exists in Quirigua - Copan simply said that he died by “flint and shield”, implying warfare. Quirigua however never mentions a battle between the two kings, which raises the question of how covert Quirigua’s methods were (Martin and Grube 2008, 219).

For Quirigua, the Copan king’s death marked the beginning of a renaissance of sorts for the city - they had broken Copan’s hold on the Motagua Valley and its valuable
resources. At first, they mimicked Copan's existing stelae to assert their newfound power. Likewise, K’ahk Tiliw Chan Yopaat took Copan titles and god names, even referring to himself as the “Fourteenth Ruler”, possibly claiming Copan’s royal status. With time, Quirigua honed their own style of monument production - including towering stelae and full figural glyphs (Martin and Grube 2008, 220). In 762, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat would be the one overseeing another king’s succession (Martin and Grube 2008, 221).

For Copan, the death of the king brought the city to a near standstill. His successor, K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil would not assume the throne for nearly forty days, and no stelae, altars, or new structures would be created during his reign (Martin and Grube 2008, 204-206). In losing Quirigua, Copan lost its hold on the Valley and its reputation. Copan started to decentralize.

In an attempt to rally an overpopulated people with too few resources, later kings would continue the monumental style of the thirteenth king while evoking a fairly different style of content. For example, in the extension of his Hieroglyphic Stairway Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil would be depicted as a warrior wearing Teotihuacan regalia in order to rewrite history and return to a glorified past (Martin and Grube 2008, 207). Whereas the thirteenth king would invoke history to celebrate Copan’s present, his successors would invoke history to rally the people beyond the present. While impressive monuments would be created in K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil and Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat’s time, Copan ultimately would not recover.

Sources:

Ruler 14: K'ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil

AKA: Smoke Monkey, Three Death

Reign: 738 - 749

Preceded by: Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil

Succeeded by: K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil

Structures

- Mentioned on Hieroglyphic Stairway
- Possibly 10L-22A facade

Unlike his predecessor and successor, K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil did not produce any grand monuments in his own name. Taking the throne after the decapitation of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, morale in Copan was low to say the least. The city had humiliatingly lost its ruler, its vassal, and its control in the Motagua Valley. According to the Hieroglyphic Stairway, K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil erected “no altars, no pyramids”, nor would any be erected until seventeen years after Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s death (Martin and Grube 2008, 206).
What was devastating for Copan was a massive boon to Quirigua. K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat or Cauac Sky, the Quirigua king who captured the thirteenth ruler, may have even laid claim to Copan’s legacy given his reference to himself as the “Fourteenth Ruler” (Martin and Grube 2008, 219).

However, while K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil may not have erected any stelae, altars, or large scale structures, this king may have developed Structure 10L-22, adding on a banquet hall and meeting space for the eight local statesmen and other representatives in 746 (Fash 1991, 134). This development signals both a shift in government away from a consolidated royal authority and also a political strategy to strengthen ties with neighboring towns under Copan’s control. A glimpse of this shift could be spotted during K’ahk Uti’ Witz' K’awiil’s reign based on one interpretation of the dates for the Rio Amarillo altars (Schele 1987, 264). This shift would ultimately come to a head in Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat’s reign with the end of Yax K’uk’ Mo’s lineage.

Sources

Ruler 15: K'ahk' Yipyaj Chan K'awiil

**AKA:** Smoke Shell, Smoking Squirrel, Smoke Squirrel

**Reign:** 749 - 761

**Preceded by:** K'ahk' Joplaj Chan K'awiil

**Succeeded by:** Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat

**Structures:**

- Hieroglyphic Stairway Phase 2
- Temple 26
- Stela M
- Stela N

The fifteenth king in Yax K'uk' Mo's lineage had a very different approach to monument building than his father K’ahk' Yipyaj Chan K’awiil. Whereas his father performed his only renovation for the statesmen below him, granting them power through recognition, K’ahk Yipyaj Chan K’awiil would resurrect Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil's more ostentatious and ambitious monumental stylings to attempt to reinvigorate the city and reassert the king’s authority.
His first project was to add an extension onto Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's Hieroglyphic Stairway. Completed 9.16.4.1.0 / May 5, 755, the fifteenth king doubled the length of the previous stairway only six years after his accession (Fash 2011, 104; Martin and Grube 2008, 207). This version of the stairway attempts to reclaim the city's lost honor and assert its strength through its invocation of the ancestors (Fash 1991, 149). Five life sized figures of previous kings - one believed to have been Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil - stand guard in the garb of Teotihuacan warriors (Fash 1991, 145). K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil even went so far as to erect a new temple atop Structure 10L-26 that contained pseudo-glyphs evoking Teotihuacan’s style (Martin and Grube 2008, 208). In this way, the fifteenth king harkens back to their connection to the now legendary city and also rewrites the incident of the thirteenth king’s death by celebrating him as a warrior who fell honorably.

At the base of the stairway, K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil placed his first stela and the first since before Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s death, Stela M. Interestingly, this stela was conducted in the wraparound style and had little to no text, yet evoked the intricacy of his predecessor. His next stela, Stela N, would be even more intricate, reviving the double figured approach last seen in the thirteenth king’s Stela C. Some have speculated that this stela served as a legitimization for the fifteenth king’s successor, Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat (Baudez 1994, 86-87).

At the beginning of his reign, no monuments had been erected for the 9.16.0.0.0 k’atun ending (Martin and Grube 2008, 207). While the second Hieroglyphic Stairway was under construction at this point, the fact that such an important period ending was missed was pretty informative of the state of the city at that point. Though the stairway itself was completed and earned Copan the title of having the longest hieroglyphic stairway of any Maya city, the production quality is also telling. The stairway had been constructed with cheap dirt that was considered the weakest out of any Principal Group architecture, and the glyphs themselves were more uniform but less nuanced, considered to have been the work of a journeyman rather than master carver (Fash 1991, 146-149). The city may not have been in a state to produce the same quality of work as in previous years, yet the still fifteenth king created impressive and creative structures and monuments. This philosophy would continue with the next and last ruler of Yax K’uk’ Mo’s lineage, Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat. He is believed to be buried somewhere in 10L-11, in front of which he had erected his final stela, Stela N (Martin and Grube 2008, 208).

Sources:

Ruler 16: Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat

**AKA** Yax Pac, Yax Pasaj, Yax Pasaj Chan Yoaat, Madrugada, New Sun at Horizon, Yax Sun at Horizon, New Dawn, Rising Sun, First Dawned Lightning God, First Dawn Sky Penis

**Reign:** 763 - around 810

**Preceded by:** K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil

**Succeeded (?) by:** Ukit Took’

**Structures:**

- Stela 8
- **Stela 11**
- Stela 29
- Altars G1, G2, and G3
- **Altar Q**
- Altar R
- Altar T
- Altar U
- Altar V
- Altar Z
Altar B'  
Altar C'  
Altar D'  
Altar F'  
Altar G'  
Altar W'  
Temple 22A - stone  
Temple 11 - wall panels, step, and reviewing stand  
Temple 18 - doorjamb, incensarios, and wall texts  
Temple 18 - tomb  
Temple 21A - bench  
Temple 16  
9N-82 bench  
Altar L

Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat, creator of Altar Q, was the last of the official kings in Yax K’uk’ Mo’ lineage. The final king may have been as young as nine years old when he acceded the throne two years after his predecessor K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil (Martin and Grube 2008, 209).

While he would have many monuments attributed to him, the bulk of these would be embellishments to existing structures such as doorjambs, incensarios, benches, and altars rather than stelae or complete structural renovations (Martin and Grube 2008, 209). Three stelae are credited to the sixteenth king, although one of these - Stela 11 - is credited posthumously and another - Stela 8 - is largely destroyed or obscured, limiting discussion of his style in stelae (Baudez 1994, 139). He would also build Temple 16 final superstructure on at 10L-16 (Fash 2011, 67).

Yax Pasaj’s familial structure was also of particular note. References to his mother appear on not one but two monuments - Stela 8 and Altar U (Schele and Grube 1987, 153). References to a king’s mother are far from common at Copan, and what is particularly interesting is that this woman - Lady Chak Ni Ye’ Xook - was a member of Palenque nobility (Martin and Grube 2008, 209). There has been some debate as to whether Yax Pasaj’s father was K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil. The fifteenth king may have married into Palenque - one of the core Maya lowland cities - nobility to strengthen Copan’s royal line (Fash 1991, 153). Yet, Yax Pasaj only definitively refers to his father once, and the text is inconclusive as to his identity (Martin and Grube 2008, 209).

According to Stela N, K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil recognized his heir regardless of whether Yax Pasaj was his child (Baudez 1994, 86-87). Regardless of his parentage,
the fact that Yax Pasaj needed to legitimize his right to rule through his mother’s foreign status is telling of the political situation in Copan at his accession.

Like his predecessor before him, Yax Pasaj would create a grand tribute to his ancestors, albeit on a smaller scale. For his most famous example, in 776 he dedicated Altar Q, one of the most complete king lists found in the Maya region. This monument includes all sixteen kings in Yax K’uk’ Mo’s lineage along with their names, though some have eroded or have yet to be understood. The altar was placed at the base of Structure 10L-16, a Temple to and tomb of the Founder. The text itself both honors the Founder and legitimates Yax Pasaj’s right to rule by portraying himself taking K’awiil from Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Martin and Grube 2008, 209). Similarly, Yax Pasaj would depict himself associating and performing rituals with kingly characters who were likely deities (Martin and Grube 2008, 210).

Yet, Altar Q and its offering had structural flaws that hint at Copan’s decline. While Yax Pasaj impressively sacrificed fifteen jaguars to invoke his ancestors as protectors of the city, two of these jaguars had not yet reached adulthood (Fash 1991, 170). Copan did not have the resources to offer a perfect sacrifice. On the altar itself, text had been forced to fit on the space provided with a few grammatical quirks, and one date in particular is impossible for the time period, indicating a carving mistake (Sdouz 2015, 83-85). The apparent flaws on this altar highlights the lack of care able to be afforded to previous kings’ monuments.

During Yax Pasaj’s reign, a number of residential areas and outlying vassals began erecting their own monuments, sometimes but not always with reference to the king. Nobles began commissioning elaborately carved, full figured benches instead of the usual smooth, plain benches. One in Las Sepulturas comemorates a ritual performed by the sixteenth king and mentions the residential leader’s service to Yax Pasaj’s father, K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil (Fash 2011, 133). Los Higos - a city previously under Copan’s control - in 781 was erecting its own stelae and featuring its local ruler (Martin and Grube 2008, 210; Fash 1991, 166). This trend may have been the result of both a political move by Yax Pasaj to attempt to pacify the over twenty elite substructures as well as evidence that the sixteenth king was rapidly losing political control (Fash 1991, 172; Martin and Grube 2008, 210).

Yax Pasaj is mentioned briefly on Quirigua’s Structure 1-B-1 as participating in a “scattering event” for the k’atun ending in 810 (Fash 1991, 171; Martin and Grube 2008, 212). While the details are unclear, the fact that the then king of Quirigua Jade Sky mentioned the Copan king on this structure suggests that the two cities had reached a sort of truce during these difficult times. Quirigua itself would not survive beyond a few
more years, though a new settlement would establish itself there soon after (Martin and Grube 2008, 225).

Yax Pasaj’s tomb was fairly out of character for the city both in content and in quality. Temple 18 was both small and militaristic (Martin and Grube 2008, 212). Whereas kings had been invoked as warriors in the Late Classic period, Yax Pasaj’s tomb was another matter. Depictions of sacrifice of war captives is highly overt including a presentation of the king as holding trophy heads (Fash 1991, 170). Though more intense, this depiction of the king as warrior continues the attempt to reestablish authority by claiming military prowess. His burial stela - Stela 11 - reflects this loss of authority. The stela could not even stand on its own but instead was carved into a pillar (Martin and Grube 2008, 212). The text mentions the “fall of the Foundation House” and both Yax Pasaj and Yax K’uk’ Mo’ s names, indicating that the sixteenth king would be the last in the lineage. Sometime circa the century following his death, his tomb would be looted (Fash 1991, 178). Like Quirigua, Copan would not last long after Yax Pasaj’s reign, succumbing to poor health due to overpopulation, deforestation and lack of resources, and unrest among the growing nobility (Martin and Grube 2008, 213).

Yet, Yax Pasaj was not the last man who would claim to be king. In 822, Altar L would appear unfinished, depicting Yax Pasaj sitting across from the next supposed king Ukit Took’. Though his legitimacy is far from secure, the city’s story would not officially end with Yax Pasaj’s death.

Though Yax Pasaj’s reign was shortly followed by the collapse of Classic Copan, his monuments reflect the city’s admirable ability to work with what they had, from Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and the pre-existing structure of a city to the Late Classic kings developing the ability to craft volcanic tuff like stucco to invoking the city’s ancestors rather than succumbing to a crushing defeat.

Sources:

After the strong poetic conclusion to the dynasty that could be found in Altar Q and Stela 18 came Altar L, evidence of a new ruler. Ukit Took', whose name means “Patron of Flint”, is rarely considered to be a part of the Classic Copan dynasty (Martin and Grube 2008, 213). Though he depicts himself with Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat in traditional Copan garb, his unusual name and his lack of mention in the record cast doubt on his reputation.

His only monument tells us a single crucial piece about his reign - it was cut dramatically short. Only one face of the altar was ever completed.

This fascinating altar sat on the North Ballcourt, never to be completed. Only the South side was finished, with the North side merely sketched in. Two rulers sit in mirrored profile - similar to the Motmot Marker and to Altar Q - facing the date glyphs - 3 Chicchan 3 Uo. The final glyph refers to a seating expression (Grube and Schele 1986, 157).
As on Altar Q, both men sit on their name glyphs - on the left newcomer Ukit Took', on the right Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat (Martin and Grube 2008, 213). Each king is dressed almost identically to the kings on Altar Q, complete with the turbans unique to Copan (Martin and Grube 2008, 201). Yax Pasaj also holds k’awiil, indicating a transfer of office (Schele and Grube 1986, 158).

Both of the men wear evidence of underworld or ancestor imagery. Yax Pasaj is more prominent in this regard with K’awiil in his forehead. This motif is commonly used in the posthumous portrait to evoke the king’s elevation, taking his place as K’awiil the patron of kings (Schele 1987, 170; Fash 1991, 177). Yax K’uk’ Mo’ has a similar motif in Yax Pasaj’s funerary stela, Stela 11. To complete their similar dress with underworld meanings, both men wear Witz pectorals with zoomorphic heads with its T-shaped mouth as well as Witz markings (Fash 1991, 177).

Furthermore, as with Stela C, Yax Pasaj has a beard, which is indicative of his age and possible ancestor status (Grube and Schele 1986, 157). The previously confirmed king has switched roles and is now being invoked to confirm Ukit Took’s place as royalty. Fascinatingly, the supposed seventeenth king defers to his predecessor rather than to Yax K’uk’ Mo’, indicating some deeper connection or a general respect for the last confirmed king of the Classic Copan dynasty.

Yax Pasaj’s last confirmed appearance was in 810, a full twelve years before any mention of Ukit Took’, although it has been proposed that the sixteenth king survived until 820 due to a date on Stela 11. Regardless, one may question why so much time passed before any monuments or mention of the supposed last king. Yet, with the decline of the city due to lack of resources and political tensions, even completing an altar was an impossible feat. Even Altar Q fifty years prior had issues in its construction (Sdouz 2015, 83-85). Ukit Took’ attempted to rally the city, but the dynasty was already in the process of falling. Life would continue in Las Sepulturas, but the Acropolis would not (Schele and Grube 1986, 158-159). Stone monuments would be pilfered to build houses, and this version of the monarchy at Copan would end without much fanfare, like the construction of Altar L (Martin and Grube 2008, 213).

See Also:

- Altar Q
- Stela C
- Stela 11
Motifs:

- Beard
- K’awiil
- K’awiil in forehead
- Turban
- Witz

Sources:

- Sdouz, Gert. 2015. Altar Q Copan Honduras: A tour through the illustrations of one of the Maya’s most interesting monuments. Vienna: Wien.
# Altar Q

**Location:** At the base of Structure 10L-16

**Dates:**

- 5 Kaban 15 Yaxk’in 8.19.10.17.17 / September 6, 426 CE
- 8 Ajaw 18 Yaxk’in 8.19.10.11.0 / September 9, 426 CE
- 5 Ben 11 Muwan 8.19.11.0.13 / February 9, 427 CE
- 6 Kaban 10 Mol 9.16.12.5.17 / June 28, 763 CE
- 6 Ajaw 13 K’ayab 9.17.5.0.0 / December 29, 775 CE
- 5 K’an 12(13) Uo 9.17.5.3.4 / March 2, 776 CE

**King:** 16 - 1

**Measurements:** 2.5 feet x 4 feet x 4 feet

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**Altar Q in Front of Temple 16**

*Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson*

Before Altar Q, Copan's king lists included the censers in the Chorcha tomb, which were complete for the time but revealed little textual information, or the Hieroglyphic...
Stairway, which provided great textual information that required a great effort to reorder, translate, and contextualize. Altar Q is the most complete in that it includes all sixteen recognized kings in Yax K’uk’ Mo’ s lineage.

The altar was carved out of volcanic tuff, mined from north of the Acropolis. Altar Q rests upon four cylindrical feet which also bore the names of kings, though their writing has since been worn away by the elements (Herring 2005, 210). On the top of the altar, thirty-six glyphs are carved, with the text comprised of three sets of two columns of glyphs. Sixteen figures in total are found on its sides, with four figures to a side, each sitting on a glyph. On three sides, each of the figures sits facing in one direction. Eight face left while four face right (Baudéz 1994, 95). They sit in a circle, facing the two figures who meet in the west side of the altar. All but these two figures hold a fan-like object in their hand. In the center of the west side, the figure to the right hands the figure to the left a scepter-like object, and two glyphs are suspended between them. Notably, the figures on the sides appear as they would from the opposite side of the circle from where they are positioned (Herring 2005, 211). Thus, the figures, who face out toward the viewer, project the center of the circle out to the altar’s audience, drawing them into the action of the circle.

The text on the top of the monument says that on September 6, 426, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ as Ajaw K’uk’ Mo’ underwent ch’am-K’awiil, or took K’awiil at Wiin te’nah, or the Origin House (Stuart 2004, 233, 236-237). Through this ritual, Ajaw K’uk’ Mo’ became Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Stuart 2004, 233). Three days later, he left the Origin House believed to be in Teotihuacan (Stuart 2004, 235, 237). One hundred fifty-three days later, the journey ended and the West Kaloomte’, or Lord of the West, arrived in Copan (Stuart 2004, 238). Seventeen k’atuns later under Yax Pasaj’s rule, either the altar itself or Temple 16 was dedicated, and sixty-four days later the rites were concluded. Sixty-four as the cube of four may have served a symbolic purpose adding to the altar’s reference to the four sided cosmos (Stuart 2004, 239). The altar itself is dedicated to the Founder as his memorial (Stuart 2004, 227). On the front of the Altar, in between Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and Yax Pasaj, is the sixteenth king’s accession date 6 Kaban 10 Mol, or June 28, 763 (Baudéz 1994, 97; Martin and Grube 2008, 209). Surrounding this glyph, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ hands the k’awiil scepter to Yax Pasaj, justifying his rule (Martin and Grube 2008, 209).
Along the sides, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil do not sit on their name glyphs, unlike the other kings. Yax K’uk’ Mo’ sits on an Ajaw glyph with his name given in his headdress. One can find glyphs for K’inich and Yax in the front feather, a quetzal feather in the back for K’uk’, and a macaw eye for Mo’ (Sdouz 2015, 102). The twelfth ruler sits on the glyphs for “5 k’atuns”, referring to his being over eighty at his death (Sdouz 2015, 106). For Yax Pasaj, his name is split between his seat and his headdress, with Chan or sky and Yoaat found in his headdress (Sdouz 2015, 107, 109). Another interpretation is that he wears a headdress invoking Chaak - the rain god - asserting his status as a rain maker, or the fertile rain that falls from the rising smoke of the ancestors (Taube 2004, 295).

The rest of the kings sit on their name glyphs. Furthermore, all of the kings except for Yax K’uk’ Mo’, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, and Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat wear turbans. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil also potentially wears his name - Eighteen Rabbit - in his headdress (Sdouz 2015, 109). The turbans are rare in the region and relatively rare at Copan, only appearing on seven stelae, two altars, and one bench. Notably, none of these monuments precede K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil (Sdouz 2015, 108).

Each of the kings except for Yax K’uk’ Mo’ wear one of five combinations of designs for their pectoral. Out of respect for the Founder, he only wears one tubular bead. Ruler 2,
K’altuun Hix, and Ruler 6 all wore the serpent bar with the day glyph Ik surrounded by forked tongues above an assortment of beads below. Similarly, Ruler 3, Ruler 5, Ruler 10, Ruler 7, and Ruler 14 wear a Witz head surrounded by forked tongues with an assortment of beads hanging below. Ruler 8, Ruler 9, and Ruler 12 wear a tubular bead with three beads on each end and two sets of two beads hanging below. Ruler 13 and Ruler 15 wears a combination of the tubular bead with the bead sets and the Ik glyph assortment. Yax Pasaj sets himself apart by wearing both the tubular bead with bead sets with a plain tubular bead below (Sdouz 2015, 111).

When Altar Q was created in 775, Copan was roughly celebrating the new k’atun, the seventeenth since the change of the bak’tun which Yax K’uk’ Mo’ had overseen (Herring 2005, 217). Yet, Yax Pasaj did not have the resources or labor needed to create a large scale monument or temple. He remodeled existing sites and created several altars, which compared to stelae were small in stature (Martin 2008, 209). Altar Q was an addition to Structure 10L-16, a temple to Yax K’uk’ Mo’. The sixteenth king placed the altar at the bottom of the stairway to the temple and named it the Yax K’uk’ Mo’ Altar (Herring 2005, 218). Beneath the altar he buried fifteen jaguars, one for each of his predecessors (Fash 1991, 170). Jaguars were recognized as the way or the spirit guides of the kings, providing an impressive gift to his predecessors (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 70).

Yet, Altar Q and its offering had structural flaws that hint at Copan’s decline. While the sixteenth king impressively sacrificed fifteen jaguars to invoke his ancestors as protectors of the city, two of these jaguars had not yet reached adulthood (Fash 1991, 170). Copan did not have the resources to offer a perfect sacrifice. On the altar itself, text had been forced to fit on the space provided with dates spilling over into the next column, and one date in particular is impossible for the time period, indicating a carving mistake (Sdouz 2015, 83-85). The apparent flaws on this altar highlights the lack of care able to be afforded to monument production at this time.

In depicting the founding event as well as the entire king list up until the sixteenth king, the sixteenth king was able to celebrate the glory of Copan, recalling the bounty of its prime. Yax Pasaj chooses to have Yax K’uk’ Mo’ dressed in his Teotihuacan garb with his feathered shield and Tlaloc goggles, recalling the moment when he seized power in the great city. References to Teotihuacan rose in the Late Classic period, in particular after the crushing loss of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil (Fash 2004, 264).

Having asserted the glory of Copan’s founding and its history, Yax Pasaj inserts himself into the narrative and thus justifies his rule. The inscription at the top of the altar ends with Yax Pasaj creating the altar and later seizing the k’awiil himself, which
is depicted on the west side of the altar. This west to east motion can even be seen as Yax K’uk’ Mo’ being resurrected through Yax Pasaj’s efforts if not through Yax Pasaj himself (Taube 2004, 295). In this altar that is created at the foot of the temple for the founder and is dedicated in his name, the focus of the narrative ultimately shifts to the accession of the sixteenth king. The glyph between Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and Yax Pasaj even records the date of Yax Pasaj’s accession. As a king with a potentially questionable claim to the throne in a difficult political climate, this monument would have asserted his right to rule while providing a comprehensive reminder of the city’s glorious past.

**Motifs:**
- Cipactli / Crocodile
- Crossed bundles
- Feathered Shield
- Four
- Jaguar
- K’awiil
- Serpent Bar
- Tlaloc
- Turban
- Witz

**See Also:**
- Altar L
- Hieroglyphic Stairway
- Chorcha Tomb Censers
- Motmot Marker
- Stela N
- Temple 16

**Sources:**


• Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2008. Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Dynasties of the Ancient Maya. London: Thames and Hudson


• Sdouz, Gert. 2015. Altar Q Copan Honduras: A tour through the illustrations of one of the Maya’s most interesting monuments. Vienna: Wien.


Caracol Stela 16

**Location:** Caracol

**Dates:** 9.5.0.0.0 11 Ajaw 18 Zec / July 13, 534 CE

**Kings:** 7

Though we know little about the context, Caracol Stela 16 marks the first confirmed mention of a Copan king outside of the Southeastern region (Martin and Grube 2008, 197).

While one side depicts the Caracol king K’an I, commissioner of this monument, the textual side describes the erection of the stelae as well as familial and political relations (Grube 1990; Martin and Grube 2008, 87). After a now illegible portion of the text, K’an I discusses *yitah* and *tz’akab* - siblinghood and succession respectively - which may indicate a network of related royalty throughout the region. The text continues with a “royal woman from Xultun”, a city in the Peten region in Guatemala.

With the focus on family in the text, Bahlam Nehn may have been a relative of K’an I. The Founder himself, Yax K’uk’ Mo’, is presumed to have been from the Central Peten Region, perhaps more specifically from Caracol (Price et al. 2010). On Stela 63, Popol Hol refers to the Founder as Uxwitz’a ch’ajoom, or “Three Hills Water Lord”, with Three Hills Water being understood as a place name for Caracol. A similar title “Three Hills Lord” would later appear on Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s Stela J (Stuart 2007).

Unfortunately, we do not currently know why the seventh king’s name appears here, whether he was an ally or relative (Martin and Grube 2008, 87). Regardless, the fact that his name appears at all speaks to Copan’s power at this time (Grube 1990). The thirteenth ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil would later associate Copan with Maya Lowland Capital Tikal, Palenque, and Calakmul with cardinal directions on his Stela A, asserting the city’s prestige (Fash 2011, 59). With Copan’s influence reaching to Caracol, the thirteenth ruler’s claims may have been justified.

Motifs

- Serpent Bar
- Tuun in hand

See Also:

- Stela A
- Stela E
- Stela 15
- Stela 63

Sources:

• Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2008. Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Dynasties of the Ancient Maya. London: Thames and Hudson

Hieroglyphic Stairway

Location: 10L-26-1

Dates: 26 Nov 710 CE (First Phase), 5 May 755 CE (Second Phase)

Kings: 13, 15, 1-12, 14
This impressive stairway stands sixty-four to sixty-five risers high with at least six hundred twenty volcanic tuff blocks containing two thousand two hundred glyphs (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014; Martin and Grube 2008, 208). Each riser is eight meters wide and thirty centimeters high, yet each forms a complete statement from top to bottom (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). With these glyphs forming sixty-nine continuous feet, Copan officially has the longest Maya hieroglyphic stairway (Martin and Grube 2008, 208). Six figures - five seated and one standing - watch those who climb the stairway (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). At the base, Stela M faces in the same direction (Martin and Grube 2008, 207).

While hieroglyphic steps would also be found in the Ante structure, the Rosalila Temple, Structure 10-11, Xukpi, and in front of Stela 63, the Hieroglyphic Stairway is the only one of its kind to be found outside of a structure rather than inside (Fash 2004, 261).
Reconstruction and translation of the text had earlier proved difficult due to deterioration and the sheer volume of text. At least part of the stairway had been filled with weaker dirt, resulting in its partial collapse over time (Fash 1991, 150). While debris tended to keep the lower portion preserved, the upper portion would be disrupted by earthquakes, storms, vegetation, and other natural phenomena (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014; Fash et al 1992, 106). Due to these factors, the Stairway would not be able to be restored entirely.

In 1986, the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project began to excavate the exterior of Structure 10L-26 as well as its substructures as well as to more thoroughly document the Stairway (Fash 1991, 143). As of 2011, 71 percent of the glyphs have been translated (Fash 2011, 103). Starting in 2007, the Peabody Museum's Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions program began their efforts to create three dimensional models of various Maya monuments and structures. By 2013, they had completed the digitization of Copan's Hieroglyphic Stairway (Fash and Tokovinine).

First Phase:

The first phase of the Hieroglyphic Stairway was erected by thirteenth king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awii and dedicated in 26 November 710 CE (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). The first stairway was built into the outer stairway of the Esmeralda Structure. The thirteenth king had built this structure on top of Chorcha, the tomb of K’ahk’ Uti Witz’ K’awiil (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). The stairway commemorates his dead predecessor with the text “patawa[ni] yehbil u muhkil”, or “it is formed, the stairway of the [Lord of Copan]'s burial” (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). While Yax K’uk’ Mo’ is mentioned, particularly in succession statements, the twelfth ruler is far more prominent in this construction effort, in a sense giving a new focus to the structure (Fash 2011, 104). This portion of the stairway also forms a king list by introducing relevant dates - including accession and death dates - that would be continued in the second half (Fash 2011, 103).

In comparison to the second half, the glyphs in the first half are more consistent and nuanced with more detail and sharper borders, which suggests a stronger Copan, more time and energy able to be devoted to detail, and greater effort into controlling production. Fittingly, this portion is believed to have taken at most fifteen years to allow for such care and detail (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). This half of the stairway is a true triumph combining the celebration of a king who reigned for over sixty years with the justification of his successor through this ambitious structure (Fash 2011, 104).
Second Phase:

The Second Phase of the Stairway was erected by fifteenth king K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil and dedicated in 5 May 755 CE. Given that the fifteenth ruler had acceded the throne in 749, this project would likely have taken only six years to complete (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). He had built 10L-26 over the Esmeralda Structure, moving and expanding the stairway in the process (Martin and Grube 2008, 207). In doing so, he had doubled the length and added in life-sized statues of kings, including thirteenth ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil and potentially K’ahk’ Uti Witz’ K’awiil (Martin and Grube 2008. 207; Fash 1991, 145-146). Statues of kings also appear lying down, some with beards or torches in their forehead, symbolizing wisdom and apotheosis (Baudez 1994, 230-231).

The fifteenth ruler continues where Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil left off, detailing the lives of the thirteenth and fourteenth kings. This of course would include the thirteenth ruler’s demise at the hands of Quirigua’s king K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat on the “birth of new rains” at “Kok Witz”, or Turtle Hill (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). Little detail of the death is given at Copan however, refering to a warrior’s death by “flint and shield” rather than by capture and decapitation (Martin and Grube 2008, 205). Notably, K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil also erected his Stela M at the base of the stairway, this time evoking ostentation reminiscent of his predecessor to justify his own reign (Martin and Grube 2008, 207).

While both phases were ambitious, K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil had to reinvigorate the city in addition to glorifying his predecessors and justifying his own reign. The inscription for the second half of the staircase is “patwani yehbil utuunil”, or “it is formed, the stairway of stone” before glyphs associated with sacrifice believed to be the name of this half of the stairway (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). “Stone” usually referred to a monument or may refer to something or someone having the qualities of stone, so this inscription may refer to another monument or the intention for the stairway to have the same permanence and strength (Stone and Zender 2011, 169). In either case, this inscription and subsequent invocation of sacrifice does not celebrate an individual king as the former half did. This style also invokes the warlike nature found typically found in monumental imagery post Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil.

Notably, each of the king statues on the stairway are dressed in Teotihuacan warrior garb, holding feathered shields in their left arm and either a scepter or weapon in their right (Martin and Grube 2008, 208; Baudez 1994, 197). Skulls also hang from their belts, perhaps suggesting a trophies similar to instances in sixteenth king Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat’s tomb (Baudez 1994, 197; Fash 1991, 170). Before the thirteenth king’s
death Copan kings rarely portrayed themselves as warriors, typically focusing more on their spiritual connections. Faced with a crushing defeat, later kings would emphasize their military prowess in order to redeem their reputation and perhaps confirm their narrative about the thirteenth king’s honorable death in battle.

Likewise, references to Teotihuacan, which at this point had been defunct for some time, only became prevalent again toward the end of Copan’s Classic lineage (Fash 2004, 261). In addition to the Stairway’s statues, the associated temple features full-figured text in both Lowland Mayan glyphs and a pseudo-script appearing to be from Teotihuacan (Martin and Grube 2008, 208). This appeal would draw justification from the glory of the city, to which Yax K’uk’ Mo’ had connections.

The cache at the base continues these themes of war, sacrifice, and glory. The cache contained spondylus shell and two jade pieces from the third or fourth century speculated to be royal heirlooms (Fash 1991, 148). While the jade was a sign of royalty, spondylus shell was considered a luxury item and mark of wealth, marking the city’s ability to still procure such items (Stone and Zender 2015, 167). Likewise, three eccentric flints with “seven Classic Maya Heads in profile” each were also included in the cache (Fash 1991, 148). These flints display incredible skill, again highlighting the city’s ability.

In terms of sacrifice, stingray spines - tools for autosacrifice - were also discovered. These items were often used in rituals for ancestor worship and worship of Jaguar Tlaloc, a deity associated with warfare and sacrifice (Fash 1991, 148-149).

Interestingly, the base of the cache’s stairway is shaped like a Jaguar Tlaloc head, adding to the connection. Continuing the theme of sacrifice, a spiny oyster shell - associated with inauguration - was also found in this cache (Fash 1991, 149). Though perhaps not as lavish as previous caches, the Hieroglyphic Stairway does contain items to continue its theme and reaffirms Copan’s wealth and ability to complete the dedication.

Yet, the construction of the stairway itself shows the cracks forming in Copan’s continued existence. Whereas the first portion was created in perhaps fifteen years, the second portion was likely created in six, less than half the time to create at least the same amount of material. Perhaps as a result, the quality is inconsistent. The top and bottom show stylized full-figured glyphs, but most of the other glyphs are rounder with lower relief and less nuance. Whereas the first portion shows greater control, the second portion appears rushed and like the “work of a journeyman” (Houston, Fash, and Stuart 2014). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the blocks themselves were cemented with some of the weakest material found in the Principal Group, suggesting
a lack of resources, time, or even morale from the workers constructing the stairway (Fash 1991, 150).

The Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copan is indeed one of the world's most impressive monuments. Its existence is listed as one of the criteria justifying Copan’s status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (“Maya Site”). Furthermore, in one structure it summarizes perfectly Copan before and after the death of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil. While the second half shows the event’s strain on the city, it also displays the tenacity of its kings and its craftspeople.

**Motifs**

- Centipede
- Crossed bundles
- Feathered Shield
- Jaguar Tlaloc
- Macaw
- Rope
- Spondylus Shell
- Stingray
- Waterlily
- Witz
- Year Sign

**See Also:**

- Stela M
- Stela N
- Stela C
- Structure 10L-26
- Stela 11
- Altar Q

**Sources:**


Photographs:

- Hieroglyphic Stairway of Copán, by Hans Birger Nilsen, is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0
- Other Photos Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson
**Location:** In Front of Motmot Structure, **10L-26**

**Dates:** 9.0.0.0.0 8 Ajaw 14 K’ej / December 9, 435 CE

**Rulers:** 1 and 2

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*Facsimile of the Motmot Marker*

*Photograph (Edited) Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson.*

The Motmot Marker is a particularly unique Copan monument. It serves as a gravestone sealing the circular crypt in front of the Motmot Structure, a renovation of Structure 10L-26 built by Popol Hol. The marker is both the only Copan monument found to be carved from limestone instead of volcanic tuff and the oldest monument found in place and intact (Fash 2011 79). The carving also has some of the lowest-relief carving found in Copan, which along with its rectangular glyphs fits the Early Classic style (Fash 2004, 257). Uncommon for the Early Classic style however was the figural element of the carving. Figure carvings would not reappear on stelae for roughly a century (Fash 2004, 255).

The marker depicts Yax K’uk Mo’ and Popol Hol facing each other with each holding serpent bars. The kings are separated by two columns of glyphs meant to be read left column then right column (Fash, Fash, Davis-Salazer 2004, 73). The kings’ names can be found in their headdress, which Altar Q would later incorporate along with the mirrored profile layout (Fash 2011, 81). The two kings sit on glyphs referencing mythical locations 7 K’an and 9 Imix, which, along with the quatrefoil border, invokes
the supernatural and their connection to it as royalty (Fash 2011, 78; Martin and Grube 2008, 194). The text itself celebrates the ending of the bak’tun (9.0.0.0.0) on December 9, 435, a truly auspicious occasion witnessed by both kings. David Stuart suggested that the two men were ruling as co-regents at the time (2004, 72). This reference to their supernatural connection would certainly celebrate their authority.

Fascinatingly, this carving is one of the few depictions of **Yax K’uk Mo’** in Lowland Maya garb without the Tlaloc goggles evocative of Teotihuacan (Fash 2011, 81). The crypt itself would be found in the Yax portion of **10L-26**, with the marker being added seven years after the bak’tun ending (Fash, Fash, Davis-Salazar 2004, 68 - 69). The circular crypt was a common tradition in Teotihuacan (Fash 2011, 81). See the early ballcourts for more examples of the circular marker. The two kings facing each other in profile was a popular Preclassic style in both the Maya Highlands and Lowlands (Fash 2004 259). The Motmot Structure itself evoked the Peten apron-molding style of stonework (Fash, Fash, Davis-Salazar 2004, 74). The Marker and the Motmot structure itself seems to signal a balance between Teotihuacan to Lowland Maya tradition befitting **Yax K’uk’ Mo’**s origins.

The chamber itself contains the remains of a woman in her mid twenties who is believed to have been a day keeper, or shaman. She was buried with a puma serving as her way or spirit companion. As long as seven years after her death, her remains were ritually burned. Funerary offerings then laid in the tomb include a sacrificed deer, three human heads, ceramics, jade, shell, seeds, deer antlers, mercury, feathers, and a representation of a crocodile pelt (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 68-70; Fash 2011, 80). The jade pieces were placed in the cardinal directions, and three stones in the center for the hearthstones (Fash 2011, 80). The crypt was then sealed off with the Marker, which would detail the deer offering and the “smoke entering” from the ritual burning (Fash, Fash, Davis-Salazar 2004, 74). The text also mentions “4 Macaw” and “4 Chan [Sky]”, which may refer to the Ballcourt with its four stone macaws and the Motmot Structure with its four sky bands respectively (Fash 2011, 78). With this information, the marker was assumedly created to consecrate the Motmot Structure, the Ballcourt, and neighboring Structures 10L-7 and 10L-11 on the bak’tun ending (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 74).

The bak’tun ending would be a defining moment for this lineage in Copan and Structure 10L-26 in particular. After **Popol Hol** built the Papagayo Structure over the Motmot Structure, he erected **Stela 63** to commemorate his and his father’s presence during this occasion. The seventh king **Bahlam Nehn** would later reference the bak’tun ending in **Stela 15’s** text. This stela would remain visible until the thirteenth ruler **Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil**’s reign, when he would build over the Motmot Structure.
Even then, he erected Stela J at the base of the new structure to commemorate the bak'tun ending. At the end of the dynasty, Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat the sixteenth king would reference the event on top of Altar Q (Fash 1991, 83). Only Yax K’uk’ Mo’ would be referenced in the later depictions of the bak’tun ending, solidifying Popol Hol’s efforts to begin his father’s ancestor cult.

**Motifs:**

- Cardinal Directions
- Feathered Serpent
- Jaguar
- Mirrored profile
- Quatrefoil
- Serpent bar
- Wayob

**See Also:**

- Stela 63
- Stela 15
- Stela J
- Altar Q

**Sources:**

Quirigua Altar L
**Location:** Quirigua, Exact Location Unsure

**Dates:**

- 9.11.0.0.0 12 Ajaw / 653 CE
- Dedicated 9.11.0.11.11 9 Chuwen 14 Zec / June 2, 653 CE

**Ruler:** 12

**Measurements:** 3.28 feet diameter, .82 feet thick

During **K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil**’s reign, Quirigua erected this fascinating altar to celebrate the k’atun ending (Martin and Grube 2008, 217). While the altar would be found in the Acropolis, its original location has yet to be conclusively determined. This rhyolite circular altar features the then current king of Quirigua K’awiil Yopaat facing right and sitting cross-legged on two glyphs (Looper 2003, 51). Interestingly, this altar is the only record we have of this king. His succession number is not even known, and he is the only king recorded between the third ruler in 480 and K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat.
in 724 (Martin and Grube 2008, 216-218). The altar is carved in the Great Ajaw style, in which a large depiction of the ruler indicates the Ajaw day name (Looper 2003, 50-51).

The king is adorned with a large collar, belt, wristlets, and anklets. He wears a winged serpent headdress with a Venus glyph to commemorate Venus's rise coinciding with the k'atun (Looper 2003, 52). The figure is surrounded by a day sign cartouche (Looper 2003, 51). A double bar is present on top of this cartouche, and the text is both carved along the rim and surrounding the king within the cartouche (Looper 2003, 51).

The glyphs themselves are carved in a crude, unique style with high relief on the glyphs (Looper 2003, 52). Given that Copan was carving elaborate high relief monuments at the time, this altar must have been carved locally (Martin and Grube 2008, 217). Furthermore, the Great Ajaw altar style was never used at Copan, but was particularly popular in Caracol, where Quirigua was known to have political ties (Looper 2003, 53). The T168 Ajaw glyph carved into the altar had been popular in Copan during Butz' Chan's reign, but had fallen out of fashion by the time of the twelfth ruler (Looper 2003, 52). The glyph's presence here either indicates Quirigua's failure to follow trends closely or a deliberate decision to institute their own style.

The text describes a “house censing event”, and the king sits on glyphs describing dancing (“Ak’taj ti nep nah”) at a yet to be determined location (Looper 2003, 51). The text also mentions K'ahk Uti' Witz' K'awiil, the “divine Copan ajaw”, present for a tz'ak huli event (Looper 2003, 51; Martin and Grube 2008, 201). This event, roughly translated as “Conjured arrival here” is uncertain in its exact connotations.

The exact connotations present in this altar are likewise debatable. The fact that K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil is directly mentioned during a k’atun ending inscription would suggest that Copan still held political dominion in Quirigua. Yet, Quirigua’s exact attitude toward the Copan king at this point is still unsure. The only other inscription mentioning tzak huli described two cities who had recently been at war, so tensions may have already been high (Martin and Grube 2008, 201). The k’in cartouche motif also typically referred to warfare, although the exact reference is unsure (Stone and Zender 2011, 153). At the same time, the twelfth ruler’s reign was the height of Copan expansion in the valley, and the altar may have been commissioned by the twelfth ruler to display his power (Looper 2003, 52). The use of an altar motif not commonly found in Copan might be Quirigua establishing their own sculptural identity, cultural diffusion from Caracol, or an act of defiance by creating a monument outside of Copan fashion.

Like the king who erected this monument, Altar L offers a fascinating if not inconclusive look into a period in which Quirigua was largely silent. The mention of
Copan’s twelfth ruler certainly reveals the reach of his power regardless of political motive. With the reign of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, the power dynamic between the two cities was about to drastically change, as would be evident on the next known Quirigua king K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat’s Stela J.

**Motifs:**
- k’in cartouche
- Venus

**See Also:**
- Caracol Stela 16
- Quirigua Stela J
- Stela 2
- Stela 3
- Stela 10
- Stela 12
- Stela 13
- Stela 19

**Sources:**

**Photograph**
- Altar L de Quirigua, by José Luis Filpo Cabana is licensed under CC-BY-SA-4.0.

**Quirigua Stela J**

**Location:** Quirigua, Northern Platform - Great Plaza
**Dates:** 9.16.5.0.0 / April 12, 756 CE

**Ruler:** 13

**Measurements:** 16.4 feet high, base 21.3 feet x 21.3 feet

Quirigua Stela J front and side


Quirigua’s Stela J was one of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat’s several monuments discussing the fall of *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil*. It was erected at the completion of the Northern Platform - evoking the entrance to the Underworld in the Great Plaza - the location where the thirteenth ruler was killed (Martin and Grube 2008, 221; Looper 2003, 82-83, 85). This particular stela’s dedication date would occur eighteen years after *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil*’s execution, allowing the city time to reap the benefits of their victory and develop their monumental program accordingly (Martin and Grube 2008, 205).

This stela is tall at 16.4 feet and is constructed in the wraparound style, defined as Type VI (Fash 2004, 259). Unlike previous wraparound stelae at Quirigua, Stela J
contains side panels of text which are narratively more complex (Looper 2003, 101). On the wraparound, the king stands in shallow relief, wearing a headdress made of three masks topped with a bird god evocative of Tlaloc-Venus (Looper 2003, 107). In keeping with the ritual he wears heavy tinklers, knee bands, and a collar made from jade and shell. He wears a Sak - or Chaak - pectoral and a God C apron while surrounded by serpent heads (Looper 2003, 106). He has a Jaguar shield that may or may not depict the Jaguar Paddler God, complete with cruller (Looper 2003, 103). Interestingly, the possible god appears on the shield rather than out of the serpent bar like in Copan Stelae 7, P, and 2. Instead, staffs emerge from the serpent bar, similar to the more recent Copan Stela A (Looper 2003, 109).

In constructing the Northern Platform, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat presents himself as an incarnation of Chaak, a lightning and storm deity associated with fertility, aggression, and more specifically execution (Stone and Zender 2011, 41). Chaak derived this association from his role in splitting the Maize mountain with his axe as well as a common depiction of him executing a jaguar. In doing so, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat cements his status as a warrior in a widely understood way (Looper 2003, 84). As a god of rainfall - necessary for all people, both king and commoner - Chaak was fairly universally worshipped (Stone and Zender 2011, 41).

This Chaak imagery continues on Quirigua Stela J, in which K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat seizes k’awiil and wears a Chaak pectoral (Looper 2003, 103, 105). The text on the stela’s base also mentions the “Black Lake”, which both refers to the entrance to the Underworld as well as Chaak’s domain as executioner (Looper 2003, 83). The stela describes K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat as kaloomte’, a title in times of war represented by Chaak with his axe (Looper 2003, 84). The Tlaloc-Venus headdress is also described as befitting a warrior (Looper 2003, 109).

Meanwhile, the pectoral represents the rebirth aspect of the deity and also functions as one of the three stones of creation along with k’awiil scepter and the jaguar shield (Looper 2003, 106). Chaak’s role of executioner when tied to splitting the mountain is also representative of rebirth as maize sprung from the cleft in the mountain (Stone and Zender 2011, 41). Likewise, the Paddler God’s represent the life death cycle in their duality and role as psychopomps, including for the Maize God (Stone and Zender 2011, 51).

Interestingly, in this stela, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat refers to himself with the succession glyph and the crossed bands glyph as the “Fourteenth Successor” (Schele 1986, 9). While the exact number of kings at Quirigua is unclear, this phenomenon is generally interpreted as the Quirigua king referring to himself as Waxaklajuun Ubaah
K’awiil’s successor, putting himself in competition with actual Copan king K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil and adding further insult (Looper 2003, 101). In using the crossed bands glyph, the Quirigua king even refers to the Foundation House at which Yax K’uk’ Mo’ both assumed the throne and oversaw Tok Casper’s - Quirigua’s first king - accession (Looper 2003 101; Martin and Grube 2008, 216). Similarly in this stela the Quirigua king refers to himself as having undergone ch’am-K’awiil, or taking K’awiil, on the day of the thirteenth Copan king’s death. While taking K’awiil usually refers to accession, here the term likely refers in part to the authority that Quirigua won from Copan (Stuart 2004, 233).

Yet, this stela also asserts Quirigua’s identity both as an emerging regional power and producer of its own monumental style. This stela at sixteen feet tall was a relatively early installment in a monumental program with stelae as tall as twenty-five feet, the highest in the region (Martin and Grube 2008, 221). With these impressive heights, Quirigua chose to abandon its former pattern of mimicking Copan stelae and return to its own Early Classic style (Martin and Grube 2008, 220-221). The wraparound design, shallow relief, squared shaft, blockiness, curved lines, and double outlines all work to revivise and develop this style (Martin and Grube 2008, 221; Looper 2003, 110-112).

This stela understandably represents the rebirth of the city as a major power through physical prowess both in its content and the fact of its construction. The stela’s existence provides Quirigua with the physical authority to confirm its newfound power in trade and politics (Martin and Grube 2008, 221). Yet, its creation also petitions the divine in its ritual garb and the labor taken to create it, seeking the gods’ blessing in the city’s new role (Looper 2003, 114).

**Motifs:**

- Black Glyph in Skeletal Jaws
- Black Lake / Hole
- Centipede
- Chaak
- Creation Stones
- Crossed bands
- K’awiil
- Paddler Gods?
- Sak Pectoral
- Serpent Heads
• Skull with Vegetation
• Tlaloc-Venus
• Vision Serpent

See Also:

• Quirigua Altar L
• Hieroglyphic Stairway
• Stela A
• Quirigua Stela H
• Quirigua Stela D
• Quirigua Stela F
• Quirigua Stela E
• Quirigua Zoomorph G

Sources:

• Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2008. Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Dynasties of the Ancient Maya. London: Thames and Hudson

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• Guatemala-0612, by Dennis Jarvis, is licensed by CC-by-SA 2.0.

Stela 2

Location: Great Plaza, Currently Overlooking Ballcourt
**Dates:** 9.11.0.0.0 12 Ajaw 8 Ceh / 652 CE

**King:** 12

**Measurements:** 9.65 feet x 2.55 at base, x 3 feet at top. relief roughly .4 feet deep

![Stela Photo](image)

*Photo Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson*

This stela was erected by **K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil** for the 9.11.0.0.0 k’atun ending. Notably, this stela bears a considerable resemblance to **Bahlam Nehn’s Stela P** with its low relief and Paddler God heads emerging from the flexible serpent bar (Fash 2011, 57). This stela also is a Type IV with three sides carved with glyphs and one side carved figurally (Fash 2004, 259).

Though the figure on the stela is seriously eroded, particularly at the base, he stands dressed for the period ending ritual. Fittingly, he wears the spotted jaguar headdress suitable for resurrecting the jaguar deity as well as the loincloth, belt, celts, and tinklers.
suitable for ritual dress (Fash 2011, 57). The jaguar helmet differs from Stela P’s bird headdress, perhaps to emphasize this particular ritual. Both stelae feature similar ritual garb however, also including youth masks, circular shields, serpent head wristlets and anklets, and circular shields (Baudez 1994, 94, 111). In addition, both stelae position their kings in front of a jaguar pelt background, symbolizing warfare or wealth (Stone and Zender 2011, 195). Stela 2 is also surrounded by braid and tassel and serpent motifs (Baudez 1994, 111).

Above the headdress, a waterlily emerges, mirroring the waterlily emerging from the jaguar skull in the serpent bar (Baudez 1994, 111). This evokes the skull and vegetation motif representing the life and death cycle (Fash 2011, 59). This motif complements the Paddler Gods, who represent day and night as well as the psychopomps conveying souls through the cycle of death and rebirth. Only the Jaguar Paddler God is visible with the Stingray Spine God having eroded (Stone and Zender 2011, 51). The figure also has a witz sign on his forehead referring to the Underworld, the source of death and rebirth. This motif is also typically paired with vegetation (Taylor 1978, 3).

Like in Butz’ Chan’s Stela P and Stela 7, the Paddler Gods emerge from the serpent bar rather than floating by the ruler’s head as was common for a period ending (Stone and Zender 2011, 51).

In Stela 2, K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil pays homage to his predecessor by creating a variant of Stela P. These monuments would have stood simultaneously as Stela P was reported as standing in place when Stephens found it in 1839 (Baudez 1994, 92). These stelae both invoke the king’s divine abilities and role during period endings.

**Motifs:**
- Braid and Tassel
- Jaguar
- Paddler Gods
- Serpent Bar (flexible)
- Skull and Vegetation
- Turtle Shell
- Witz

**See Also:**
- Stela P
- Stela 7
- Stela 3
- Stela 10
- Stela 12
- Stela 13
- Stela 19
- Quirigua Altar L

Sources:

Stela 7

**Location:** Mound 7, in the Village / Modern Day Copan Ruinas

**Dates:** 9.9.0.0.0 3 Ajaw 3 Zodz / 613 CE

**Rulers:** 11

**Measurements:** 10.8 feet x 2.46 feet x 1.64 feet at base, 10.8 feet x 2.69 feet x 1.57 feet at top (Baudez 1994, 137)

Thirty-five years into his reign, Butz’ Chan erected his first stela in the village to commemorate the 9.9.0.0.0 k’atun ending (Schele 1987, 200). Interestingly, no such stela has survived from his first k’atun ending twenty years prior. Stela 7 had been found and broken into two pieces in 1874. (Baudez 1994, 137). Besides the fractures, the content of the stela has also eroded and in some places broken off. The monument still contains traces of red paint and is believed to have originally been painted entirely red.

The stela had previously been attached to a cruciform chamber with a cribbed border. The cache within the chamber contained shell, perforated stone, obsidian points and knife, a jade stone with a carved portrait of an Early Classic ruler, and the remains of Stela 24 (Baudez 1994, 137; Schele and Stuart 1986, 48). Particularly of interest, this stela mentions a king who assumedly reigned before Yax K’uk’ Mo’. Butz’ Chan also evokes a ruler previous to the Founder’s lineage in the text of the stela, using 12 before the succession glyph.

The stela is carved in the Type IV style with three sides containing glyphs and one side containing a figural depiction (Fash 2004, 259). In this case, its west side depicts Butz’ Chan in high relief wearing a “Stingray-Xokfish headdress”, a k’in cartouche, and jaguar masks (Schele 1987, 200; Baudez 1994, 137-139). He is surrounded by entwined serpents, particularly at his feet. At the top of the stela sits a skull in the shape of a water lily blossom, and a jaguar pelt forms the background. Though his hands are eroded, Butz’ Chan carries the bicephalic serpent spear, with the Paddler Gods’s heads emerging out of the serpents’ mouths (Baudez 1994, 139; Schele 1987, 201).

This stela has strong associations with rebirth, sacrifice, warfare, and the day and night duality. Baudez argues that through the stela Butz’ Chan claims the jaguar as his patron, given the abundance of jaguar motifs (1994, 139). The jaguar has numerous associations, including warfare, wealth, the night, sorcery, fire, and water. The jaguar
pelt, as seen in the background of this stela, would be linked to either warfare or wealth. The Jaguar Paddler God bears the cruller, the jaguar motif, and the beard evocative of the Underworld Jaguar God associated with warfare and fire (Stone and Zender 2011, 195; Baudez 1994, 139). Interestingly, Butz’ Chan’s name is spelled in part with a knot made of netting followed by a -na, perhaps a nod to na meaning night and associating himself further with the jaguar imagery (Schele and Stuart 1986, 48-49). Finally, the k’in cartouche or eclipsing sun that Butz’ Chan wears is also a symbol of warfare. The color red in relation to the sun would both evoke masculinity, ferocity, and vitality as well as the fiery aspect of the jaguar (Stone and Zender 2011, 153). Unlike in Stela P, in which Baudez claims that the eleventh ruler claims the Earth Monster as his patron and thereby evokes fertility and rebirth, here he focuses more on the warfare aspect of this duality.

The idea of ak’bal-k’in or duality particularly comes into focus when we consider the Paddler Gods. The Paddler Gods consist of the Stingray Spine God and the Jaguar God, representing day and night respectively as well as the psychopomps conveying souls through the cycle of death and rebirth (Stone and Zender 2011, 51). The skull and vegetation motif found at the top of the stela suggests the cycle of death and rebirth (Baudez 1994, 139). The stingray aspect of the headdress may also evoke the Stingray Spine God, providing the day or ti aspect to the night or na aspect invoked by the jaguar helmet (Schele 1987, 201).

Interestingly, the Paddler Gods were commonly depicted during period endings, but would usually be floating by the ruler’s head rather than emerging out of the serpent bar as seen here and on Stela P. However, despite Butz’ Chan’s divergence from the norm, both depictions would assert the ruler’s ability to summon these gods. In the usual case, the gods would be floating above the ruler’s heads following the incense that the ruler had burned for them (Stone and Zender 2011, 51). In Stela 7 and Stela P.’s cases, the gods emerging from the serpent bar would evoke Butz’ Chan’s natural connection to the divine (Stone and Zender 2011, 201).

This stela unlike its counterpart was erected in the village rather than the Acropolis. It was found to the west of the El Bosque portion of the urban core surrounding the Acropolis and Main Group of temples and royal structures (Fash 2011; Webster 1999, 20-21). This particular stela had been found in a mound in the modern town of Copan Ruinas (Schele 1987, 199). Mounds of this sort were not uncommon in the region (Webster 1999, 21).

This stela while satisfying the bloodletting rituals necessary for the period ending took the opportunity to broadcast Butz’ Chan’s might to the people. His replacement of an
early stela with his own acknowledgement of the previous ruler may have been a compromise of some sort, appealing to the local history. Given the rise in population occurring during the 7th century, Butz’ Chan may have had to rally morale and assert his authority to the rising citizenry, particularly since Copan had already reached capacity during the previous century (Martin and Grube 2008, 200, 213).

**Motifs:**

- Entwined Serpents
- Jaguar
- Jaguar Pelt
- K’in Cartouche
- Paddler Gods
- Red
- Skull and Vegetation
- Stingray Spine
- Xokfish / Bull Shark

**See Also:**

- Stela P
- Stela E
- Stela I
- Stela 1
- Stela 2
- Stelae 10, 12, 13, 19
- Stela 18

**Sources:**

• Schele, Linda. “Copan Note 8: The Founders of Lineages at Copan and Other Maya Sites” In The Copan Notes. Austin, TX: Copan Mosaic Project, 1986. pp 1 - 21

• Schele, Linda and David Stuart. “Copan Note 14: Butz-Chan, the 11th Successor of the Yax-K’uk-Mo’ Lineage” In The Copan Notes. Austin, TX: Copan Mosaic Project, 1986. pp 47 - 56


Stela 9

**Location:** Uncertain

**Dates:** 9.6.10.0.0 8 Ajaw 13 Pax / circa 564

**Rulers:** 10, 7

**Measurements:** Unknown

This stela was created by Moon Jaguar roughly midway through his reign. Unfortunately, it had previously been destroyed and was used as part of the base for Yax Pasaj’s Stela 8 (Schele 1987, 235). From the fragments, this stela is classified as Type IV, with three sides carved with glyphs and one figural side (Fash 2004, 259).

Interestingly, Moon Jaguar refers to himself as the “ninth child in the lineage of Copan” yet does not mention Yax K’uk’ Mo’ or use the typical succession title (MacLeod 1988, 339; Schele 1986a, 2).

However, while the tenth ruler does not name the Founder, he does name his father, which was not particularly common on Copan stelae (see Stela 63, Stela 10, and Stela N). Here, Moon Jaguar mentions the seventh ruler Bahlam Nehn, or Waterlily Jaguar, with the u ajaw or “child of the father” glyph (Schele 1986b, 59). Of particular note is that Moon Jaguar refers to his father with the “Ma K’inah” title usually reserved for Yax K’uk’ Mo’. Given that Bahlam Nehn is the only other king with “Jaguar” in his title, no other kings in the lineage present themselves as potential candidates. The text also describes the father as being a “one k’atun lord”, and given that Bahlam Nehn reigned from 524 - 532, he would have been within one k’atun (Schele 1986b, 59). Schele speculates that Wi Yohl K’inich and Ruler 9 were also sons of Bahlam Nehn (1987, 236). In the bloodletting glyphs associated with parentage - with the blood referring to the child - the glyphs are believed to have used the -tal suffix then popular in Copan and Palenque (MacLeod 1988, 340).

Of note, Stela E, a successor by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil also commemorates Bahlam Nehn, although the context is somewhat vague (Martin and Grube 2008, 197).

The hero of the stela’s text is not Moon Jaguar specifically, but U-Chac-Xib-Chac, a rain and lightning god in the Palenque Triad also known as G1 (Schele 1987, 236; Coe
The god’s name is written with a shell-fist glyph as is seen on Stela I. Interestingly, Bahlam Nehn also has a title using a shell-fist glyph (Schele 1987, 236). Through this stela, Moon Jaguar presents himself in the character of a god. The serpent bar is also present on this stela, showing his connection to and power over the divine (Schele 1987, 235).

While this stela does mention the Founder briefly, Moon Jaguar instead gives his father the greater honor and glorifies himself as a god in an impressive display of authority and inheritance.

**Motifs**

- Serpent bar
- Chac-Xib-Chaac

**See Also:**

- Stela 8
- Stela 63
- Stela 10
- Stela N
- Stela E
- Stela I
- Stela P
- Stela 1
- Stela 2
- Stela 7
- Stela 18

**Sources:**

• Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2008. Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Dynasties of the Ancient Maya. London: Thames and Hudson
Stela 11

Location: Temple 18

Date: 9.19.10.0.0 8 Ajaw 8 Xul? / 820 CE

Kings: 16, 1

Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat's funerary “stela” marked a stark contrast to both Copan's previous style and the king's efforts. Stela 11 is not a true freestanding stela, but rather a carved column supporting the doorway (Martin and Grube 2008, 212). The monument is completed in low relief and depicts the final king in warrior garb (Martin and Grube 2008, 212). Of note, warrior garb as a motif had been established as a technique particularly used to assert authority after thirteenth king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's execution.

Similarly, Temple 18, which houses this monument, provides more specific sacrifice messages - i.e. depicting heads of captives as trophies - than any previous structure (Fash 1991, 170). Yet, no evidence exists of Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat being a war-monger while evidence does exist of him being a diplomat. In the decade before his death, he appeared in a Quirigua text participating in a ritual with their king, insinuating that the two cities had made amends (Martin and Grube 2008, 225). This move may have been intended to convince the elites of the sixteenth king's might and authority in the time of a city in decline.

Stela 11 is a Type VI with a wraparound figural pattern and two brief columns of text (Fash 2004, 259; Martin and Grube 2008, 212). On it, the king faces left in low relief profile. A torch emerges from his forehead, symbolizing his apotheosis as the God K, patron of kings. He stands on a shell signaling the entrance to the Underworld and is guided into it by the Maize God (Fash 1991, 177; Martin and Grube 2008, 212). Crossed band glyphs appear on his belt, referring perhaps to the Founder and the Foundation or Origin House. Stela 11 only contains part of the text with the rest on the other columns and furniture (Martin and Grube 2008, 212).
One possible reading of the text refers to the “toppling of the Foundation House”, which is believed to mean the ending of the lineage (Martin and Grube 2008, 212). The Foundation House or Origin House was also found in Altar Q to refer to the location assumedly in Teotihuacan where Yax K’uk’ Mo’ acceded the throne (Stuart 2007). Fittingly, the text also mentions the waxaklajuun ubaaah kaan, or Teotihuacan war serpent, continuing the appeal to Teotihuacan’s former glory as well as the frequent war motif (Martin and Grube 2008, 213). The text concludes with Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and Yax Pasaj Chan Yopoat’s names, cementing the bond between the first and last rulers.

The temple itself had already been looted supposedly in the century after his burial, speaking to the people’s need for resources and attitude towards the kings. Few pieces of Yax Pasaj’s body remained, and Stela 11 was found broken in half (Fash 1991, 177). Far from Hunal, the Founder’s impressive tomb, the state of Temple 18 truly reflected the toppling of the lineage.

**Motifs:**

- Crossed bands
- Shell
- Teotihuacan war serpent
- Torch in forehead

**See Also:**

- Altar L
- Altar Q
- Stela M
- Hieroglyphic Stairway
- Hunal and Yehnal
- Chorcha

**Sources**

Stela 63

Location: Papagayo Structure, 10L-26

Dates: 9.0.0.0.0 8 Ajaw 14 Kej / December 9, 435 CE

Rulers: 1, 2, 4

Photo Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson

Stela 63 was erected by Popol Hol to celebrate his father Yax K’uk’ Mo’ s witness of the bak’tun ending on 9.0.0.0.0 8 Ajaw 14 Kej, or December 9, 435 (Fash 2011, 105; Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar, 76). The stela was found in the Papagayo structure in 10L-26. This structure had replaced the previous Motmot level which had housed the aptly named Motmot marker. This marker had also commemorated the bak’tun ending and had placed the father and son together, so this stela may have been considered a replacement monument for the marker. The stela in fact would remain visible until the thirteenth ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil built over the structure (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 78; Martin and Grube 2008, 202) Even after this portion of the building was destroyed, Stela J would take Stela 63’s place as the 9.0.0.0.0 b’aktun marker, emphasizing both the importance of the date and of Yax K’uk’ Mo’.

The stela itself is classified as a Type VII Copan stela with three carved sides composed entirely of glyphs. Interestingly, no other Copan stela is listed in this category (Fash 2004, 259). No more figural stelae would be erected until Moon Jaguar’ s reign in 554 (Fash 2004, 255). The fourth side of the stela was blank, as the monument stood against the back wall, where a large crocodilian monster was depicted to represent the surface of the earth (Fash 2011, 105). The base of the sculpture would later be found in place against this wall, with the stela ritually destroyed. The macaw heads from the ballcourt would be found among the fragments likely as a tribute to the Founder (Stuart et al. 1989, 1).
The last glyph of the text names *Yax K'uk' Mo'* followed by what is believed to be *Uxwitz'a' ch'ajoom*, or “Three Hills Water Lord.” The title “Three Hills Water” is associated with the Maya Lowland city of Caracol, leading David Stuart to believe that this is where the Founder originated. Thirteenth king *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil* similarly referred to the Founder as “Three Hills Lord” in *Stela J* over 250 years later, and before him, seventh king *Bahlam Nehn* was mentioned by name on a *Caracol Stela* (Stuart 2007). By invoking this title, *Popol Hol* may have been appealing to the Founder’s Lowland Maya origins.

When fourth ruler *K'altuun Hix* later renovated the structure, he would add a step and a bench to the stela, blocking some of the text (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 76-77). Interestingly, the text on the stair would invoke the second person, which was rare in Maya monuments (Martin and Grube 2008, 196). *K’altuun Hix* would refer to “your gods” and “your land”, speaking to both the stela’s text and perhaps also the Founder himself. The structure did have some references to Teotihuacan in its inclusion of the feathered serpent and green obsidian, and the stair itself did have the glyph *puh* or *bulrush* which would later be found in the final version of 10L-26 specifically to invoke the ancient city (Fash 2011, 105; Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar, 78). The fourth king’s use of the second person may indicate a sense of separation, perhaps in following more local styles and deities. While Teotihuacan would continue to influence monumental sculpture, this style would reach its peak prominence after the city had fallen towards the latter half of the Classic Copan lineage (Fash 2004, 261). Little is known about *K’altuun Hix*’s rule to explain his motivations.

**Motifs:**

- Bulrush

**See Also:**

- 10L-16
- 10L-26
- First Ballcourt
- Motmot Marker
- Caracol Stela 16
- Stela J

**Sources:**
• Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2008. Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Dynasties of the Ancient Maya. London: Thames and Hudson
• Stuart, David, Nikolai Grube, Linda Schele, and Floyd Lounsbury. 1989. “Copan Note 56: Stela 63, A New Monument from Copan”. In The Copan Notes, 1-8. Austin, TX: Copan Mosaic Project
Stela A

Location: North of Structure 4, Main Plaza

Dates: 9.14.19.8.0 12 Ajaw 8 Kumk’u / 731 CE

Rulers: 13, 11

Measurements: 11.65 feet x 2.85 feet x 2.56 feet, relief 1.7 feet deep, frame 5.87 feet x 5.64 feet x 1.28 feet (Baudez 1994, 19)
Erected by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil, Stela A faces eastward across the Main Plaza directly across from Stela H, erected by the thirteenth ruler three winals beforehand (Fash 2011, 58). The stela, overlooking its altar on the central axis of Structure 4, is believed to have been erected in dedication of this structure, with the ruler’s stone eyes watching the ceremony. The stela stands on a cruciform chamber filled with pottery and is surrounded by a circular platform (Baudez 1994, 19).

Stela A is a Type IV stela with three sides of text and one figural side (Fash 2004, 259). The monument was carved at over eleven and a half feet tall in Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s signature high relief style (Baudez 1994, 19). Notably, this stela is one of the few today with a surviving face (Fash 2011, 58).

On the eastern side of the stela, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil stands facing front in a tall cylindrical headdress comprised of three braids woven into a mat adorned with ribbons (Baudez 1994, 19). Feathers may be attached to the headdress, and a serpent head surrounds the braids. A skeletal serpent appears on either side of the headdress with a k’in sign on its forehead, filed incisors, and wrinkles. The king wears large simple earflares, and his hair falls behind his ears. A skull with vegetation sits above the king, surrounded by snakes. His wristlets and anklets depict lancets in the form of serpent heads with three braids. Bird masks adorn his knees. Staffs surround his legs which end in serpent heads. From the head on the left emerges a being with a k’in sign on its forehead. From the head on the right emerges a being evoking the skull with vegetation motif (Baudez 1994, 23). In his hands he carries the double headed centipede bar (Martin and Grube 2008, 204).

This stela evokes rulership motifs through its use of the mat headdress, serpent bars emerging from braided serpents surrounding the king, and potentially the skull with vegetation motif appearing twice in this stela. In certain circumstances, the skull with vegetation motif has been used to celebrate accessions (Baudez 1994, 23). The imagery also emphasizes the association between the sun and sacrifice and the ensuing death and rebirth bearing fertility. The skeletal serpents bear solar imagery, and an emerging elongated skull next to the king also forms a part of the witz glyph (Baudez 1994, 22). The lancets and ribbons also evoke the bloodletting rituals needed for the sun to rise. The subsequent fertility imagery emerges from the skull and vegetation motifs, both over the king and in the skeletal serpent bearing waterlily imagery. This combination of skeletal serpent and waterlilies would also feature heavily in Structure 18 (Baudez 1994, 23).
Interestingly, this stela, like Stela H, honors Butz' Chan the eleventh ruler by describing rituals in which bones or relics would be sliced from the dead king's tomb (Fash 2011, 58). This *susaj baak* ritual had been completed the year prior, and its mention on this stela speaks to the regard for the eleventh ruler (Martin and Grube 2008, 200). One of the verbs used in this description had previously only been found in Palenque's Tablet 14. The term celebrated their king Chan-Bahlum's departure from Xibalba three haabs and one tzolk'in after death and was also used to celebrate ancestors and their spiritual rebirth (Schele and Stuart 1986, 51).

The text of Stela A also mentions the Lowland capitals Tikal, Palenque, and Calakmul, assigning each of them a cardinal direction along with Copan (Fash 2011, 59). While the association of Copan with the capitals may seem ambitious, Tikal king Jasaw Chan K'awiil I did inscribe information concerning Copan and Palenque on bones circa 730 (Martin and Grube 2008, 47). Whether or not Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil was noting their arrival in Copan, the thirteenth ruler certainly used their appearance to his advantage. Stela A has an impressively rhetorical aim in celebrating a previous king, evoking sacrifice, rulership, and the resulting fertility, and invoking the three most powerful Maya Lowland cities on a monument erected only sixty days after his previous stela. True to form, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil delivers in grandeur and abundance.

**Motifs**
- Centipede
- Lancet wristband
- Mat
- Serpent Bar
- Skeletal snake
- Skull and vegetation
- Solar Deities
- Waterlily
- Witz

See Also:
- Stela J
- Quirigua Stela J
- Stela P
- Stela 7
- Stela E
- Stela 1
- Stela 1
- Stela 2
- Stela 18

Sources:
Photograph

- Honduras-0265 - Waxaklajuun Ub’aah K’awiil, by Dennis Jarvis, is licensed by CC-by-SA 2.0.
- All other photographs (Edited) Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson
Stela E

**Location:** West Side of the Main Plaza

**Dates:** Uncertain

**Kings:** 13?, 12?, 7

**Measurements:** 11.26 feet x 2.03 feet x 1.44 feet, maximum relief depth 0.82 feet
The commissioner of this stela has been in doubt for much of its study. Due to the numerous mentions of Bahlam Nehn and the 9.5.10.0.0 period ending, the seventh king seemed a likely candidate (Schele and Schele 1986, 69). However, later dates were found on both the altar - believed to have been the 9.9.5.0.0 hotun ending between Stela 7 and Stela P - and the stela itself with one possible date during the reign of twelfth ruler K'ahk Ut'i' Witz' K'awiil (Schele 1987, 177; Baudez 1991, 46). The absence of a Lord of Night as well as the current state of preservation of the date glyphs do obscure exact textual dating of the object (Schele 1987, 178).

More recently, thirteenth king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil has also been proposed as the commissioner (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). Given the stela's ostentation, high relief, and height, the stela very well could have been his. Yet, the stela is also attributed to his predecessor who also worked with similar styles (Fash 2011, 55).

The monument itself is a Type IV stela with three sides of text and a figural king depiction on the eastern side (Fash 2004, 259; Schele and Schele 1986, 69). An altar was found broken nearby and assumed to have been the pair to this stela. Similarly, the top and base of the stela have since eroded with the face being completely broken off (Baudez 1991, 46). The figure is symmetrical and holds a serpent bar in his hands. The king's headdress is composed of two masks, and rope and entwined serpent imagery surround the figure (Baudez 1991, 47-48). Two ancestors brandish an axe on either side of the king's head, offering protection. Jaguar imagery and crossed bands are particularly prominent in this stela. A mask with waterlilies or a skull and vegetation variant also appears, as do lancets on the knee ornaments. Interestingly, the figure wears a loincloth with both jaguar and fishtail elements (Baudez 1994, 47). Fish elements typically referred to the water, perhaps literally evoking the aquatic Waterlily Jaguar, or Bahlam Nehn (Stone and Zender 2011, 191, 195). Baudez proposes that the elements in this stela depict a king allied with the jaguar, specifically the Pax Jaguar, who invokes the protection of the ancestors as well as the cycle of fertility (Baudez 1994, 48).

Interestingly, a jaguar head emerges from the one head of the serpent bar, reminiscent of Butz' Chan's depiction of the Paddler Gods emerging from the serpent bar's heads in both Stela 7 and Stela P. The jaguar head here is reported as having a witz element as well as a torch in its head, differing from previous depictions (Baudez 1991, 47). Perhaps this head is another reference to the gods or a continued evocation of the jaguar imagery befitting the mention of Bahlam Nehn/a>. Also of note however is that both of Butz' Chan's stelae potentially invoke the jaguar god as patron and focus on a king's divine abilities.
The text makes the stela particularly unique by describing Yax K'uk' Mo', the Founder himself, as a successor to a king named Smoke Codex God K (Schele 1986, 4). Of note, Yax K'uk' Mo' had also been called a successor on Stela 24, whose fragments had been discovered beneath Stela 7 (Schele and Stuart 1986, 48). Given the connections to the eleventh ruler and his work, perhaps Stela E was created by Butz' Chan, or perhaps this is another stela paying homage to him. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil himself had honored the eleventh king on his Stela A (Fash 2011, 58).

Yax K'uk' Mo' depicted as successor may be ironic given the abundance of crossed band glyphs that appear in the imagery of this stela, which typically refer to the Founder (Taube 2004, 273). Or, perhaps this stela discusses the Founder's rise to power overthrow of the previous king. In this way, the stela could describe Yax K'uk' Mo', and therefore the commissioner, as rightful king.

Unfortunately, lack of definite time and placement prevents us from discussing a specific political situation, but this stela does confirm the existence of a king before Yax K'uk' Mo', the importance of Bahlam Nehn, and the king's divine authority.

Motifs:

- Ancestor Figures
- Crossed Bands
- Fishtail
- Knotted Serpent
- Paddler Gods?
- Pax Jaguar
- Rope
- Braid and Tassel
- Serpent Bar
- Skull and vegetation
- Witz

See Also:

- Stela J
- Stela A
- Stela 7
- Stela P
- Stela 2
- Stela 24
Sources:

- Schele, Linda and David Stuart. 1986. “Copan Note 14: Butz-Chan, the 11th Successor of the Yax-K’uk-Mo’ Lineage” In The Copan Notes, 47-56. Austin, TX: Copan Mosaic Project.

Photograph:

- Copan Stela E, by Gus MacLeod, is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
At the eastern entrance to the village stands Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil's first monument, erected seven years after his accession (Martin and Grube 2008, 203). The stela was created to celebrate his first period ending as king (Fash 1991, 150). So early into his reign, he had yet to develop his signature elaborate, high relief style. Stela J was created in low relief and is the only surviving stela created by the thirteenth ruler in the village (Fash 1991, 113). Yet, the stela was still elaborate and unique with exceptional detail on its two figured sides, neither of which depict a human subject. With text on the sides and two sides containing figural imagery, one may classify this stela as a Type V, although text is largely present on all four sides (Fash 2004, 259).
The stela was sealed to a cruciform chamber sealed with cribbing containing a large shell, pottery, and a white stone stained red (Baudez 1994, 69). A stone roof is erected over the monument, a rare evocation of a house (Martin and Grube 2008, 203). The eastern side has an elaborate mat design while the eastern sign has Witz imagery, including filed incisors and a T shaped image resembling a bunch of grapes, although the latter more often represents tuun or stone (Baudez 1994, 69-70). Also evoking the mat motif, a portion of the historical text on its eastern side is braided with itself, rendering the meaning nearly indecipherable (Martin and Grube 2008, 203; Looper 2003, 235). The mat motif represents royalty, and in the east represents the rise of the thirteenth ruler in the first period ending after his accession. The Earth Monster imagery is also reminiscent of jaguar iconography on loincloths (Baudez 1994, 69).

Stela J has an altar with a jaguar head on a pyramidal base situated three meters west of it (Baudez 1994, 70). The base of the pyramid has crossed bands like the founding glyph, perhaps evoking Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Baudez 1994, 71). Baudez describes the altar’s jaguar head against the eastern side of Stela J as the rising of the nocturnal sun (1994, 71). The Earth Monster on the west may also invoke the Underworld and the king’s connection with the ancestors and the supernatural.

The text itself mentions both K’ahk Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil’s accession date as well as Yax K’uk’ Mo’ during the 9.0.0.0.0 period ending. Notably, this monument mentioning the bak’tun ending was erected after the twelfth ruler’s tomb was finished in 695, burying the Papagayo Structure and Stela 63 along with it (Martin and Grube 2008, 203). Popol Hol’s monument to his and his father’s witness of the bak’tun ending had been accessible for roughly 120 years beforehand. Stela 63 had replaced the Motmot Marker before it, and Bahlam Nehn had later erected Stela 15 also commemorating this event (Fash 1991, 83). Given its creation after the twelfth ruler’s tomb, Stela J may have served as a replacement.

Standing in front of the entrance to the village, and therefore the city, Stela J announces the glory of the Founder by commemorating the bak’tun ending, pays respect to his predecessor by acknowledging his accession date, and celebrates his own accession with the stela’s imagery and previous two purposes. Anyone entering the city would witness the rise of the king and lineage’s glory.

In 751, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat, the Quirigua king who killed Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil would imitate this stela as a method of claiming Copan’s power. Quirigua’s Stela H would also include the mat pattern, diagonal text, location at the entrance, and be erected in the first major period ending after K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaat’s accession (Martin and Grube 2008, 221; Fash 1991, 150). As Quirigua had yet to reach the
pinnacle of its carving skill, these imitations would pale in comparison to the original. Later monuments, such as Quirigua's own Stela J, would eventually rival even Copan (Martin and Grube 2008, 221).

**Motifs**

- Crossed Bands Glyph
- Bunch of Grapes
- East/West
- House
- Intertwined Glyphs
- Jaguar
- Mat Pattern
- Witz

**See Also:**

- Motmot Marker
- Stela 63
- Stela 15
- Stela P
- Stela A
- Quirigua Stela J

**Sources:**

Photograph

- Honduras-0294, by Dennis Jarvis, is licensed by CC-BY-SA-2.0.
Stela M

Location: Base of the Hieroglyphic Stairway

Dates: 9.16.5.0.0 8 Ajaw 8 Zodz / 756

Rulers: 15

Measurements: 11 feet x 3.6 feet x 2.66 feet, cribbing 6.89 feet x 6.3 feet x 1.5 feet

Stela M is the first stela in Copan since Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s death at the hands of Quirigua nearly twenty years prior (Fash 1991, 139). The thirteenth ruler’s successor, K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil was known for not having built any stelae, although he may have commissioned a structural renovation for his more local government. Considering the level of high relief and the fact that this stela and its associated altar marked the dedication of the second phase Hieroglyphic Stairway, K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil certainly departed from this strategy in favor of ostentation and large-scale efforts to rekindle national pride (Baudez 1994, 74).

Both Stela M and its accompanying altar were impressive pieces of sculpture even by Copan’s standards. Though both monuments are fairly eroded, and the stela was
found in the nineteenth century in pieces, an exceptional amount of detail can be seen on both (Baudez 1994, 74-75). Stela M was a Type VI stela with its wraparound design and no side specifically devoted to glyphs (Fash 2004, 259). Of note, the bulk of the previous stelae that used this style were created by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). His choice to use this style of stela probably aimed to pick up where the thirteenth king left off and, along with the ambitious new installment of the Hieroglyphic Stairway, remind the people of Copan’s glory.

Further supporting this idea, in the cruciform cache under the stela’s platform was housed various ceramics, jadeite, stalactites, and a spondylus shell treated with mercury (Baudez 1994, 74). The spondylus shell was a high end luxury item in Copan, which only a king could afford to give in offering (Stone and Zender 2011, 167). Though Copan had lost its foothold in the Motagua Valley and had an injured reputation, the king still put forward lavish offerings to insist that they were not defeated.

The figure - K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan Yopaat stands facing forward, carrying the serpent bar, from which K’awiil heads emerge bearing the stone glyph and the torch or “axe and smoke” as Baudez calls it in their forehead, evoking the “k’awiil” - the symbol of royal authority (Baudez 1994, 74). K’awiil in the forehead specifically may symbolize a king’s apotheosis as the God K, patron of kings (Fash 1991, 177). Yax K’uk’ Mo’ had seized this bar to begin his dynasty roughly three hundred years prior.

The figure bears a crocodile helmet on his head, lancets on his wristlet, and the solar jaguar snakes and eyes on his loincloth (Baudez 1994, 74) Interestingly, the crocodile head has shells instead of ears, which feature blackened U’s. This may have been a reference to the thirteenth ruler’s name, which has been translated as “Smoke Shell”. For another instance of a literal reference to K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan Yopaat, see the temple for the Hieroglyphic Stairway (Fash 1991, 149). On his belt are panels of the crossed bands glyph associated with the Founder. The figure is surrounded by a number of grotesques. The stela also features serpents against a feathered background with rosettes and braid and tassel embellishments (Baudez 1994, 74-76).

The Altar
The associated altar also fits in with the elaborate carving strategy as a Witz zoomorph, or the cave entrance to the underworld (Baudez 1994, 76; Fasquelle 2004, 109). The altar is comprised of three pieces, with the base forming the crocodilian body and two heads that fit into the north and south alcoves. The body has three Witz masks on the top, east, and west and three sided deer feet made of shells (Martin 2015, 217; Baudez 1994, 77).

The life head was identified in the south with two instances of the Star of Venus, and had a bakab head, or the head of the “Old Man” God N, emerging from its mouth, holding up the sky (Baudez 1994, 77 – 80; Martin 2015, 217, 189). This head also has a serpent jaw, three circles on the earrings, and motifs around the eyes and cord on its forehead. The life head also wears a hatched bonnet, which may be a variant on the mat motif, signaling royalty. The death head in the north also wears a bonnet as well as a braid, the underworld tripartite emblem, and, fittingly, skeletal jaws. The head also has a rectangular k’in cartouche, which could be interpreted as a symbol of warfare (Stone and Zender 2011, 153). The star markings and witz masks on the crocodile insinuate a creature who either represents both the heavens and earth in one or a
primordial being who existed before the two were split (Martin 2015, 217-218). This union may be a further reference to the spirit world and cosmic order.

*K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan Yopaat*’s stela combined with the altar suggests him emerging from the Underworld and rising in accession (Baudez 1994, 80). Furthermore, the crocodilian helmet could be used to associate the fifteenth ruler with the world axis, asserting his necessity to the cosmic order (Stone and Zender 2011, 183). The first stela since the thirteenth king’s demise revives his flair for ostentation particularly when combined with the Hieroglyphic Stairway, *K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan Yopaat* emphasizes both his strength as a ruler and the strength of his city.

**Motifs:**

- Bicephalic serpent
- Braid and Tassel
- Crocodile
- Crossed bands
- God K
- Lancet
- Serpent bar
- Solar Jaguar
- Spondylus Shell
- Torch in forehead
- Venus
- Witz

**See Also:**

- Hieroglyphic Stairway
- Stela N
- Stela 11
- Altar Q

**Sources:**

● Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. 2008. Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Dynasties of the Ancient Maya. London: Thames and Hudson
Stela N

**Location:** Base of Hieroglyphic Stairway Courtyard, Base of Temple 11

**Dates:**

- 9.15.6.16.5 6 Chicchan 3 Yaxk'in (R14 Accession)
- 9.15.17.13.10 11 Oc 13 Pop (R15 Accession)
- 9.16.10.0.0 1 Ajaw 3 Zip (Dedication)

**Kings:** 15, 14, 16?

**Measurements:** 11.68 feet x 4.03 feet x 3.08 feet, relief 1.31 feet deep (North) and 1.48 feet (South)

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Stela N North and South

*Stela N South - Adalberto H V. Copán Stela N (Edited), 2009, photograph. Wikimedia Commons.*

*Stela N North Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson*
Stela N is fifteenth ruler K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil’s second stela after Stela M. He continues his style of high relief with depth at almost one and a half feet and figural detail wrapping around the sides. This stela is classified as a Type V with two figural sides and 2 textual sides, though the text on the east and west sides comprise of only one column (Fash 2004, 259; Baudez 1994, 83). Underneath the stela is cached five bowls, ten flower pots, and stalactites, noticeably less extravagant than even Stela M’s offerings, which contained a spondylus shell and jadeite (Baudez 1994, 83, 74). The stela is paired with a zoomorphic altar.

Both the north side and south side depict a young king seemingly emerging from the mouth of the Witz creature and by connection the Underworld. Both figures wear a waterlily headdress being eaten by a fish surrounded by braid and tassel as well as a beaded cape, pectoral mask, serpent bar, and square earrings (Baudez 1994, 83). K’awiil heads emerge out of the serpent bar on both sides. Both men also have ancestor figures above their heads and a witz entity by their feet, sinking back into the Underworld (Baudez 1994, 84). However, whereas the north face wears an assumedly serpentine helmet, the south figure’s helmet is crocodilian (Baudez 1994, 85). On both sides, the kings are surrounded by fertility spirits adorned with waterlily blossoms and Witz elements (Baudez 1994, 86).

From Left to Right, Stela N East and West

Photos (Edited) Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson

The text mentions both K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil and K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil’s accession dates, yet also seems to mention Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat by name as “New Sky at Horizon” or “Rising Sun” (Schele and Grube 1988, 289; Baudez 1994, 87). This
title is also believed to be the name of the stela (Baudez 1994, 87). It has been suggested that the figures represented on this stela are K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil and Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat for this reason. In this case, the invocation of K’ahk’ Joplaj Chan K’awiil would serve to anchor the lineage and further add authority to the fifteenth king declaring his successor. Of note, the stela is placed at the base of Temple 11, previously known as the “lineage house of Yax K’uk’ Mo’, potentially providing a further anchor (Fash 1991, 168).

This action would explain why both kings appear young and why they both appear to emerge from the Underworld rather than one going into the Underworld (Baudez 1994, 87). It would also explain why the figures appear on the north and south sides of the stela rather than the more traditional west and east for death and rebirth respectively. The fertility imagery in the abundance of water lily motifs and bacabs may further provide authority to the lineage as being responsible for the continuation of this cycle.

The Altar

![Altar Sides West - Death Mask crowned with Plant Life and North - Jaguar Head](Edited) Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson

The associated altar continues this theme of death and its role in perpetuating fertility. Though the west and east sides are broken, four heads comprise the sides of the altar. The east side contains a bat mask while the west side contains a death mask crowned with plant life. The north and south sides contain jaguar faces, each with a corresponding leg. Three circles, possibly representing the Witz sign, can be found on the east and south sides. A trilobed shell with ajaw glyphs form the top of the altar. The bat and jaguar masks, particularly when coupled with Witz symbols, can represent
death and the Underworld. When coupled with fertility stemming from death in the west mask, this altar emphasizes this cycle (Baudez 1994, 87, 90).

**Motifs**

- Ancestor Figures
- Bacabs
- Bat
- Bicephalic zoomorph
- Braid and Tassel
- Crocodile
- Crossed Bands
- Double Figure Stela
- Intertwined Serpents
- Jaguar
- K'awiil
- Red Paint
- Serpent
- Serpent Bar
- Shell
- Torch in Forehead
- Turban
- Water Lily
- Witz

**See Also:**

- Stela C
- Stela 3
- Stela 5
- Stela M

**Sources:**

- Fash, Barbara W. 2004. “Early Classic Sculptural Development at Copan.” In Understanding Early Copan, edited by Ellen E. Bell, Marcello A. Canuto, &


Photographs:

- [Copán Stela N (Edited) by Adalberto Hernandez Vega, is licensed under CC-by-2.0](#)
- Other Photographs (Edited) Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson
Stela P

**Location:** In front of Structure 10L-16

**Dates:** 9.9.10.0.0 2 Ajaw 13 Pop / March 21, 623 CE

**Rulers:** 11, 1

**Measurements:** 10.5 feet x 2.13 x 1.73 feet at base, 10.5 feet x 2.85 feet x 1.73 feet at top, cribbing 0.98 feet tall

Butz’ Chan erected his second stela ten years after Stela 7 to celebrate the lahuntun or ten year period (Fash 2011, 55). Like its predecessor, Stela P is a Type IV stela with text on three sides and a figure on the fourth and featured the Paddler Gods emerging from the serpent bar (Fash 2004, 259; Fash 2011, 55). Unlike its predecessor, which was constructed in high relief and in the village, Stela P was constructed in low relief and was found in front of Structure 10L-16 (Fash 2011, 55; Baudez 1994, 92). While some debate exists as to whether the stela was originally erected here, it would have been positioned in front of the Rosalila Temple and even featured a similar style (Fasquelle 2004, 102).
The stela itself was erected on a prismatic chamber containing various works of dishes and pottery including incensarios with cacao (kakaw) pod embellishments said to be in better condition than the caches beneath Stelae M and N during the fifteenth king K’ahk’ Yipyaj Chan K’awiil’s reign (Baudez 1994, 94). The cacao embellishments particularly evoke sacrality given cacao’s involvement in the Maize God’s resurrection as well as the defeat of Underworld God L by the Hero Twins (Stone and Zender 2011, 219).

Butz’ Chan appears once again on the west side of the stela and against a jaguar pelt background. He wears a helmet with serpent and/or crocodilian elements as well as a bird headdress (Baudez 1994, 94; Fash 2011, 56). He also wears a jaguar skirt and loincloth, jade pendants, a skeletal chin mask, youth masks, wristlets with snake heads and quincunxes, and circular shields. Serpents - possibly feathered serpents - surround his legs, and a water-lily shaped skull appears at the top of the stela (Baudez 1994, 94). Serpents and braids and tassels are fairly common on this stela, and the braided or entwined serpent does also appear.

This stela deliberately evokes the archaic Early Classic style (Fash 2004, 256). Its low relief certainly harkens back to the earlier style as well as the serpent meeting the quincunx on the wristlet (Baudez 1994, 247).

Furthermore, the stela, being placed in front of the Rosalila Temple dedicated to Yax K’uk’ Mo’ would naturally provide associations with the Founder. The feathered serpents, though common in Maya depictions, was derived from Teotihuacan imagery and may have been a reference to Yax K’uk’ Mo’s association with the city (Stone and Zender 2011, 201). The serpents also represent Cosmic Monsters and therefore Butz’ Chan’s connection with the supernatural (Baudez 1994, 95).

The bird headdress is also stylistically similar to the Sun God imagery in the Rosalila Temple (Fash 2011, 56). Given that much of the Sun God imagery in the Temple evoked Yax K’uk’ Mo’ as well, Butz’ Chan is literally putting on the image of the Founder with both the headdress and the Early Classic imagery. As was common in Copan monuments, the eleventh ruler does list himself as a successor to Yax K’uk’ Mo’ in the text (Schele and Stuart 1986, 49).

Baudez interprets this stela as Butz’ Chan claiming the Earth Monster as his patron (1994, 95). Whereas the jaguar in Stela 7 focused on the sacrifice and warfare aspect of the Paddler God duality, this stela focuses more on the fertility and abundance aspects, although the jaguar elements are still present in this stela. The crocodile aspects of the helmet would confirm the Earth Monster theory, as the Maya like the
Aztecs believed that the earth was a crocodile. The incorporation of the crocodile in association with the ruler, particularly on the vertical axis as the helmet implies, would assert the ruler’s importance and control in the cosmic order. In the vertical alignment, the crocodile becomes an axis of the world (Stone and Zender 2011, 183).

The Paddler Gods like in Stela 7 evoke the dualities of day and night and life and death as well as Butz’ Chan’s connection to the divine. The connection to the divine is particularly heightened with his wearing the Sun God headdress evocative of the apotheosized Founder and his association with the axis of the world through the crocodilian imagery. By placing Stela P in the Acropolis and in front of the Rosalila Temple, the eleventh ruler celebrates the Founder as well as his own divinity and justification to rule. Whereas in the village he displayed his physical strength, in the Acropolis he demonstrates his place in his lineage as well as his divine duties.

**Motifs:**

- Cacao / Kakaw
- Crocodile / Earth Monster
- Entwined serpents
- Jaguar Pelt
- Paddler Gods
- Serpent bar
- Skull and vegetation
- Spotted Jaguar Headdress
- Sun God / Yax K’uk’ Mo’

**See Also:**

- Stela 7
- Stela E
- Stela I
- Stela 1
- Stela 2
- Stela 18
- Stela M
- Stela N
- Rosalila Temple

**Sources:**
• Schele, Linda. 1986. “Copan Note 8: The Founders of Lineages at Copan and Other Maya Sites” In Copan Notes, The, 1-21. Austin, TX: Copan Mosaic Project
• Schele, Linda and David Stuart. 1986. “Copan Note 14: Butz-Chan, the 11th Successor of the Yax-K’uk-Mo’ Lineage” In Copan Notes, The, 47-56. Austin, TX: Copan Mosaic Project
Structure 16

Temple 16, Altar Q in Front

Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson

This Temple is one of the three structures, along with Structure 26 and Structure 11, known to have existed since the beginning of the Yax K’uk’ Mo lineage if not beforehand (Fash 2011, 36). In two of its earliest incarnations it contains the tombs of and potentially his widow. Throughout its lifetime it has remained dedicated to the Founder. Fittingly, Structure 10L-16 is Copan’s tallest building, standing at twenty meters above the West Court (Taube 2004, 266). The structure had several editions over the dynasty, below is a general overview of the more discussed iterations.

Yune

Dates: circa 400 CE

This earthen structure predated the arrival of Yax K’uk’ Mo as king. The previous Copan polity built terraces, patios, and small cobblestone and earthen structures on top of this platform. Shortly after his royal arrival, Yax K’uk’ Mo would begin the legacy of Structure 10L-16 here as well (Traxler 2004, 58).

Hunal

Dates: 437

Rulers: 1, 2
The Hunal structure, built sometime after Yax K’uk’ Mo’s arrival in Copan in 426, would serve as the place of his tomb. The building was constructed in the *talud tablero* style indicative of Teotihuacan. While this architectural style was likely chosen to evoke the Founder’s ties to the Central Mexican city, it is of note that both Maya Highland and Lowland cities had already been using this technique during this time, though they differed in their execution. Copan followed the Lowlands tradition by using the plaster method rather than clay-talpetate, but it also followed the Highlands tradition by creating undecorated tablero. (Traxler 2004 59; Price et al. 2010).

The tomb itself was built according to the Lowland style with a vaulted crypt cut into the floor and a stone bier upon which the Founder’s bones lay in a supine position (Sharer et al. 1999; Price et al. 2010). While the tomb did contain some references to Teotihuacan, such as pottery vessels from the Central Mexican region and a composite shell headdress befitting a warrior from that region, these references were fairly minor. Compared to the *Motmot Structure* whose tomb was created in the Teotihuacan style, the Hunal tomb appears to refer to Teotihuacan mostly as a city politically tied to Copan, similarly to other cities in the region. However, while the tomb was more locally evocative, the references to Teotihuacan would have reminded the people of Copan of the authority vested in Yax K’uk’ Mo’ by the city (Price et al 2010).

The royal treatment of the body with cinnabar and jades as well as its physical state highly suggests that this is the Founder’s tomb (Martin and Grube 2008, 193). His body had underwent and healed from several instances of blunt force trauma or other injuries - including his wrist, arm, spine, and head, which highly suggested his status as a warrior (Price et al. 2010). His injury on his right arm would have caused stunting similar to that seen depicted on Altar Q, potentially providing further confirmation (Martin and Grube 2008, 193). Isotopic analysis also suggests that the person in question spent most of his time in the Central Peten region and Tikal in particular, which would concur with David Stuart’s theory about Yax K’uk’ Mo’ being from Caracol (Price et al. 2010).

In addition to the materials from Central Mexico, ten pottery vessels were found from the Copan area, three from the Central Peten region, one from the highlands, and two from Quirigua (Price et al. 2010). Through the architecture, burial, and offerings, Yax K’uk’ Mo’s tomb embodied Copan’s network between the Lowlands, Highlands, and Central Mexico. Furthermore, the Maya ritual and abundance of local goods would also assert the foreign Founder’s place in the city.

Yehnahal
Dates: circa 437

Rulers: 2, 1

Shortly after his father’s burial, Popol Hol covered the Hunal structure with a temple to the founder. Built in the Peten style with apron moldings and vaulted rooms, this structure continued to evoke Lowland Maya architecture (Martin and Grube 2008, 195; Price et al. 2010). The building now faced west instead of its original north, facing the direction of the Underworld (Fasquelle 2004, 102). This orientation is fitting considering that the structure was dedicated to the deceased Founder.

Yax K’uk’ Mo’ appears imposed in the mask of the Maya Sun God K’inich Tajal Wayib, with diagonal torches coming out of his head (Martin and Grube 2008, 195; Taube 2004, 277). This deity was also found on Palenque’s Tablet of the Sun, where it referred to the solar god GIII of the Palenque Triad (Stuart 2004, 223). This particular headdress depicts a Mexican year sign from Teotihuacan and Xochicalco imagery, combining Maya and Central Mexican imagery to establish the Founder’s divinity (Taube 2004, 277). Though the structure was short-lived, worship of the Founder would continue to expand.

Margarita

Rulers: 2, 1
Shortly after Yehnal was completed, Popol Hol constructed the Margarita Structure, which is believed to be his mother's burial place (Martin and Grube 2008, 195). This structure is also built in the Lowlands style with triple doorways and stucco exterior as well as the body laying in a supine position on a stone bier (Price et al. 2010).

The woman was covered in cinnabar, was buried with enough jade pieces, and had similar cranial deformations to Yax K’uk’ Mo’ to be recognized as royalty or as someone of high status (Martin and Grube 196; Price et al. 2010). According to testing, her age was somewhere upwards of fifty at entombment, and she was from Copan or the surrounding area.

The exterior stair of the structure was surrounded by stucco panels with the intertwined quetzal and macaw iconography - as shown in the picture above - representing Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Martin and Grube 2008, 196). Given Yax K’uk’ Mo’s status as a foreigner, marrying into the local nobility would have been a wise political decision (Martin and Grube 196).

Unlike in the Hunal tomb, the “Lady in Red” - no name for the queen has yet been found - was buried with mostly local pottery vessels as well as four vessels from Central Mexico, one from the Highlands, and one from the Lowlands (Price et al. 2010).
abundance of local vessels in her tomb speaks to her origins in the city, although she is in a place of status to receive representation from the other regions in her collection of grave goods.

Rosalila

**Dates:** circa 550, 9.6.17.3.2 3 Ik’ 0 Kumuk’u - February 2, 571, 623

**Rulers:** 8, 10, 11, 1

According to one of its hieroglyphic stairs, this grand Temple was constructed by **Wi Yohl K’inch** towards the end of his reign (Martin and Grube 2008, 198). The sixth version of 10L-16, this temple was vibrantly painted red, green, yellow, and white. The temple was built in three levels, each of which face westward in the direction of the Underworld (Fasquelle 2004, 102). The stairway had been added by **Moon Jaguar** according to the date 9.6.17.3.2 3 Ik’ 0 Kumuk’u, or February 2, 571. Eleventh ruler **Butz’ Chan** would later add **Stela P** at the base of these stairs in 623 (Fasquelle 2004, 103).
In keeping with previous structures, Rosalila has a particular emphasis on interweaving the Sun God with *Yax K’uk’ Mo’*. The god masks depict the solar deity as a bird, typically with a headdress involving a quetzal with macaw eyes, forming *Yax K’uk’ Mo’*’s name as it would be later seen on Altar Q (Fasquelle 2004, 107). The wings would often be formed by feathered serpents, or in one case, serpents with feathers in their mouths (Fasquelle 2004, 107, 109).

The masks themselves denote the rising sun. On the lowest level, the western panels depict the Sun God with the mirror or brightness sign on the face. Meanwhile, the northern mask has the *ak’bal* or darkness glyph on the face, relating to the sun’s nocturnal journey (Fasquelle 2004, 109). The mask on the second floor finally has the *Yaxk’in* glyphs representing the rising sun. This progression is a physical representation of the resurrection of the Founder (Fash 2011, 43). Particularly interesting is that the Sun God was at the literal center of the city (Fasquelle 2004, 110).

Continuing with the theme of resurrection, this temple was a manifestation of the Underworld where rituals would be conducted to communicate with the ancestors. On the second level is a Witz mask with a maize cob in the forehead, both *ak’bal* and mirror glyphs side by side, stone glyphs on the teeth, and grape clusters on the forehead. The Witz mask represents the mountain containing the entrance to the Underworld with the stone glyphs and grape clusters as common traits. The maize cob represents resurrection while the juxtaposition of the darkness and brightness glyphs probably represents duality, particularly that of life and death (Fasquelle 2004, 109-110). As the highest building in the Acropolis and the site of the Founder’s burial, 10L-16 would have been an ideal place to build a manifestation of the door to the Underworld.

Evidence of ancestor worship is abundant in this structure. In one case, seven censers were found, two of which had jaguar pedestals (Fasquelle 2004, 104). These seven censers may correspond to each of the seven kings who preceded *Wi’ Yohl K’inich*, similar to the censers buried in the Chorcha tomb where *K’ahk’ Uti’ Witz’ K’awiil* would be buried. By lighting the censers, the practitioner would provide breath to the ancestor, calling them back (Taube 2004, 268). The third floor mask captures the importance of this aspect of the ritual. The mask with its defleshed jaws represented death and rebirth, and one interpretation is that the bodies of its feathered serpent wings represent the smoke from the censers or *chijchan*, the smoke from the mountains (Fasquelle 2004, 110; Fash 2011, 43).
For this ritual, one space in the first floor is recognized as a place for calling the ancestors. Between the wings on the north Sun God mask in which faces would appear out of niches wearing turbans, three dots symbolizing the nocturnal aspect of the jaguar, and a bow tie shaped image on the mouth representing autosacrifice. By these faces slits opened into a soot covered interior room where incense would be burned and autosacrificial rituals would be conducted to communicate with past kings, Yax K'uk' Mo' in particular (Fasquelle 2004, 109).

Rosalila was the last building project in Copan to feature large-scale stucco work. After this project, buildings and monuments were constructed out of stone, primarily volcanic tuff from the nearby quarries. Two reasons exist for this phenomenon: first, stucco is less durable than stone carving and would require more upkeep. Once Copan had developed their stone carving abilities, they would still be able to achieve the same effect as stucco by whitewashing and painting the stone after completion (Fash 2011, 43). The second reason is that creating stucco was very resource intensive, involving a great amount of lumber to render down the limestone. This practice led to the deforestation of the Valley, which would later play a great role in Copan's downfall (Martin and Grube 2008, 198). The shift was mainly out of necessity to spare the remaining resources. Stucco would still be used in roofing and flooring, but the change would result in greater sustainability (Fash 2011, 44).

**Purpura**

**Ruler:** 13

Thirteenth king Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil built this structure to ritually bury the Rosalila Temple, taking great pains to inter its predecessor intact (Martin and Grube 2008, 204). The Temple was covered with a ritual coat of white paint before its burial (Fasquelle 2004, 102). Rosalila is the only structure at Copan known to have been entombed so carefully, with even the roof crest remaining untouched (Fash 2011, 38).

**Temple 16**

**Dates:** 776

**Rulers:** 16, 1

The final addition to Structure 10L-16 was built by sixteenth king Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat to honor the Founder (Fash 2011, 67). This structure, the tallest in Copan, was likely originally taller, as four foundations have been found in the Temple (Taube 2004, 266).
The building is square in construction, forming a cross oriented with the four directions, similar to many stela crypts. The building itself is based on the Kan cross and also was built with blocks containing the Kan cross, noting its location as the center (Taube 2004, 266).

Temple 16 Block 1

Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson

Particularly notable about this Temple are the stair blocks or altar / bench structures placed on the stairway along its axis (Taube 2004, 283). The first is a T-shaped rendering of Tlaloc as a skull with a defleshed jaw and Kan cross earrings surrounded by eighteen skulls (Taube 2004, 284-285). This image again invokes the Teotihuacan god as a representation of death, the Underworld, sacrifice, and warfare. Incense would likely have been built upon the altar in ancestor worship, placing the symbol of resurrection atop the Underworld (Taube 2004, 286).

Temple 16 Block 2

Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson
The second block contains another mask portraying Yax K’uk’ Mo’ as the Sun God, complete with quetzal-macaw headdress. In this case, the mask is surrounded by skeletal centipedes and, similar to the second-level Rosalila mask, contains the Yaxk’in glyph, in this case by fashioning the Sun God’s face into the spokes evocative of the yax glyph (Taube 2004, 286-287). In so doing, the mask represents the sun emerging from the Underworld, or the resurrection of the Founder (Taube 2004, 287). The Founder himself appears in the center of a rectangular shield or solar mirror, his left leg raised and foot turned out in the midst of a victory kach dance. The carving is done in a frontal position in low relief. He wears a pectoral comprised of rope and torches resembling Altar Q’s k’awiil (Taube 2004, 288).

The third block appears as a giant open likely serpentine zoomorphic mouth filled with cloud and smoke elements. This zoomorph is believed to be a localized form of the Teotihuacan cloud serpent Mixcoatl (Taube 2004, 290). The block contains both Teotihuacan and Classic Maya representations of rain with stylized raindrops and columns of raindrop beads respectively side by side (Taube 2004, 293). This image completes the blocks’ arc, from the Underworld the spirit of the Founder and other ancestors rises victoriously in fire and falling as life-giving rain (Taube 2004, 294).

In a sense completing the Temple’s message, Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat also erected Altar Q at the base of the stairway to honor the Founder and justify his own claim to the throne (Martin and Grube 2008, 210). In it, the sixteenth ruler wears a Chaak headdress, emphasizing his role as “Rain Maker” to call back the ancestors and perpetuate the cycle (Taube 2004, 294). He inserts himself into the ancestor worship narrative of resurrection by emphasizing his place in the ritual. In emphasizing warfare, victory, and perpetuation of life the block sequence fits the Late Classic style of asserting Copan’s glorious past and identity of successful warriors, reclaiming their glory after the death of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil and the decline of the city.

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Structure 26

This Temple is one of the three structures, along with Structure 16 and Structure 11, known to have existed since the beginning of the Yax K’uk’ Mo lineage if not beforehand (Fash 2011, 36).

Yax

Dates: Before 435 CE

Rulers: 1

Yax is Structure 26’s earliest iteration. A small terrace, it differentiates itself from the rest of Pre-Classic architecture by being built of stone rather than earth (Traxler 2004, 59). Only a U-shaped stucco panel remains (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 68).

Though little more can be said about its architectural style, its location is perhaps more telling. The structure sits on top of a fill containing pottery and Pachua or green obsidian, which would have been imported from Teotihuacan (Fash, Fash and Davis-Salazar 2004, 74, 67). As this structure was assumedly built by Yax K’uk’ Mo’, the fill reflects his political origins and connections to the city (Price et al. 2010).

Also of note is the cylindrical chamber on the central axis containing the remains of a woman. The chamber is sealed with the floor marker in the structure succeeding Yax (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 68).

Motmot

Dates: 435 CE

Rulers: 2, 1

Constructed by second king Popol Hol, the Motmot structure covered the preceding Yax structure, destroying its upper section in the process (Fash, Fash, and Salazar 2004, 67). The structure also was built on the same plane as the contemporary first Ballcourt, Structure 10L-7, and Structure 10L-11 (Traxler 2004, 59). These four structures would be consecrated by the burial and offerings found in the funerary cist in Yax which were sealed off by the Motmot Marker (Fash, Fash, and Salazar 68-69). According to this marker, Motmot is believed to have been called the “four sky place” due to sky bands on its east and west walls (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 74).
The Marker in addition to detailing the consecration also celebrates the 9.0.0.0.0 bak’tun ending on 8 Ajaw 14 Kej, or December 9, 435 (Fash 2011, 105; Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar, 76). This auspicious event would continue to be represented in Copan monuments through the end of the dynasty.

**Popol Hol** built Motmot with a rather Maya Lowland style. The stonework incorporated apron moulding, and the building faced west in accordance with the style in the Peten region. This style over the clay and stone method found in the Highlands suggests Copan had closer ties with this region, which aligns with *Yax K’uk’ Mo’*’s assumed origins (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 74). Of note, the cylindrical cist burial hailed from Teotihuacan (Fash 2011, 81).

Of particular interest is the G1 mask on a central panel at the back of Motmot. Facing the rising sun, the mask was topped with a bird emerging from a Yax sign and surrounded by sky bands (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 74–75). The god G1 became an *ajaw* or king under the patronage of another god Yax Naah Itzamnaaj, setting a precedent for the accession of mortal kings and strengthening their spiritual association. The bird emerging from the Yax head is believed to represent *Yax K’uk’ Mo’*, as this motif appears in the Margarita Structure for the same purpose (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 75).

The G1 mask succinctly summarizes the goal of the Structure. Like the deity depicted, Copan’s first king acceded the throne under the patronage of another ruler. While a theory claiming that the Founder had achieved his position through political connections at Tikal is uncertain, his political alliance with Teotihuacan is much clearer (Price et al. 2010). His accession first occurred at the “Origin House”, believed to have been in Teotihuacan (Stuart 2004, 237). In this sense, the Founder would have been in the place of G1, assuming the throne under the patronage of another king. Likewise, the Structure combines architectural elements from both Teotihuacan and the Maya Lowland region. Also of note, the Founder himself would later oversee the accession of Quirigua’s king, putting him in the role of both G1 and his patron (Martin and Grube 2008, 216).

This representation of his father speaks to **Popol Hol**’s efforts to solidify his father’s legacy and begin his cult. Given that his father started a new dynasty at Copan, **Popol Hol**’s promotion of his father would have justified the continuation of the lineage.

**Papagayo**

**Dates:** circa 435
**Rulers:** 2, 4, 1

**Popol Hol** built the Papagayo Structure over his previous Motmot Structure. Before destroying Motmot, he provided a burial offering consisting of jade earflares positioned at the cardinal directions, pigments, and spondylus shell, jade, and feathers burnt on a three stone hearth. Two men had also been buried in stone cists, one by the G1 mask, and another with a jade vulture bead in his mouth. After the offerings, the Structure had been filled and destroyed (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 76).

Along the back of the Structure, a stucco crocodile was fashioned, symbolizing either the world axis or the surface of the earth (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 76; Stone and Zender 2011, 163). Also against the wall stood **Stela 63**, a monument that both celebrated the bak’tun ending - replacing the buried **Motmot Marker** - and identifying **Popol Hol** as **Yax K’uk’ Mo’**’s son (Fash 2011, 105). Some years later, fourth ruler **K’altuun Hix** would renovate Papagayo, adding in a step in front of **Stela 63**, a bench, and a new stucco floor (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 76-77). This building would serve as a temple, with the later Mascarones pyramid behind it serving as a space for open gatherings (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 80). The Papagayo Structure and **Stela 63** would be accessible until the construction of Chorcha in 695 (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 81).

**Chorcha**

**Dates:** 695

**Ruler:** 13, 12, 1 - 11
Both Mascarones and Papagayo were later destroyed to form Chorcha, the site of K’ahk’ Ut’i’ Witz’ K’awiil’s burial (Martin and Grube 2008, 202). An offering of jades processed in varying degrees, cinnabar, and a spondylus shell was placed between Mascarones and Papagayo before the construction (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 80). Stela 63 was also ritually broken and burned, and macaw heads from the Ballcourt were also buried here. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil would soon replace Stela 63 by commissioning his own monument commemorating the bak’tun ending, Stela J (Fash, Fash, and Davis-Salazar 2004, 81).

Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil buried his predecessor with forty-four pottery vessels, jades, spondylus shells, spiny oyster shells, jaguar pelts, painted wood, and gourds (Martin and Grube 2008, 202; Fash 2002, 12). The bodies of a man and child were found in the tomb along with the king’s body (Martin and Grube 2008, 202). K’ahk’ Ut’i’ Witz’ K’awiil’s body was ceremoniously wrapped in matting and jades as well as unfired clay, which resulted in the body’s quick degradation (Martin and Grube 2008, 202; Fash 2002, 12). Though the available evidence is scant, the bones do belong to a man over fifty-five years of age, corresponding with the twelfth ruler who was eighty-two at death. The tomb was covered with eleven stone slabs (Martin and Grube 2008, 202). The fifth stair on the Hieroglyphic Stairway discusses these burial practices (Fash 2002, 12).

Most intriguing are the twelve censers buried in Chorcha, each with a top shaped like a human head. These censers are considered to be the king list predecessor to Altar Q (Fash 2004, 268). One of these censers has the same Tlaloc goggles over the eyes as Yax K’uk’ Mo’ wears on the altar, identifying one of the censers as the Founder (Martin and Grube 2008, 202). The censer associated with K’ahk’ Ut’i’ Witz’ K’awiil was only fired just before completion of the tomb in order to unite the twelfth ruler with his ancestors (Fash 2002, 13).

The nature of the censers comments on the relation of fire to the royal line in two ways. Succession could be visualized as passing down k’awiil, or the torch in the god K’awiil’s head, from king to king. Altar Q not only depicts this handing off of the scepter, but also explains how Yax K’uk’ Mo’ first received the scepter. The censers as receptacles of fire reflects this passing of k’awiil. These censers would have also served the purpose of providing breath to the ancestors, calling them back (Taube 2004, 268).
In building the Chorcha tomb over the Papagayo Structure, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil not only built a new temple for ancestor worship, but also shifted the narrative of the structure, asserting K’ahk’ Uti' Witz’ K’awiil’s influence in the city’s history.

Esmeralda

**Dates:** 710

**Ruler:** 13

Thirteenth Ruler Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil built this structure to seal off Chorcha, his predecessor’s tomb. He fitted the temple with the first phase of the Hieroglyphic Stairway, further commemorating the previous king (Martin and Grube 2008, 204).

10L-26

**Dates:** 755

**Ruler:** 15

Only one column of the structure succeeding Esmeralda survived, dubbed 10L-26 2nd (Fash 2002, 13). Its successor, 10L-26-1 was constructed by fifteenth K’ahk’ Yipyaj

*Stela M and Hieroglyphic Stairway outside 10L-26*

*Photograph Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson*
Chan K’awiil along with his extension of the Hieroglyphic Stairway. The upper sanctuary contains detailed full figured glyphs side by side with translations into a pseudoscript designed to appear from Teotihuacan (Martin and Grube 2008, 208). Depictions of Teotihuacan flourished in the Late Classic period in order to emphasize Copan’s connections to the previously powerful city after the fall of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil. Tikal had employed the same strategy in 682 to rally their people to revitalize after a devastating defeat from Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2008, 44-45).

Example of Skull and Bones

Photo Courtesy of Dr. Clark Erickson

To continue this theme, six Jaguar Tlaloc masks are positioned across the four corners and doorways of the temple. Jaguar Tlaloc, originally hailing from Central Mexico, was associated with warfare and sacrifice, which also relates to Late Classic imagery at Copan. The rectangular feathered shields and shells reminiscent of the Underworld echo the effect (Fash 1991, 146). The theme continues in the Annex (10L-230) on the south side. The “house of bones and skulls”, the interior is decorated with stone skulls and over 100 long bones, emphasizing sacrifice (Fash 1991, 149).

Temple 26 began with the solidification of Yax K’uk’ Mo’s status and his lineage. It became the embodiment of the city's bright days before Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil’s defeat and the revitalization effort.

Sources


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