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Relief with Scene of the Palenque Ruler
K'inich K'an Joy Chitam
Maya, Late Classic Period, 700-721 A.D.

Limestone

149 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 47 cm.; 59 x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

148 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 46 $\frac{1}{4}$ cm.; 58 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.

147 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 87 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm.; 58 x 34 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Provenance

Private Collection, Europe

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This rare relief panel encapsulates the life of Palenque's 13th ruler K'inich K'an Joy Chitam (reigned 702-721 A.D.), second son of K'inich Janaab' Pakal, one of the most famous Maya sovereigns.¹ The panel's hieroglyphic text affirms K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's royal legitimacy as ruler, and the scene highlights his prowess as a warrior. The panel's artistic and narrative styles connect it to a group of finely carved tableaux considered the pinnacle of Palenque's sculptural tradition, commissioned by Rulers 13-16 during the seventh and eighth centuries (9.11.0.0.0-9.17.0.0.0 in Classic Maya long count notation). It is remarkably similar to the recently discovered Temple XVII wall tablet which features K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's older brother K'inich Kan Bahlam II (reigned 684-702 A.D.) (Figure 1).

The panel's scene portrays K'inich K'an Joy Chitam guarding a war captive and attended by a smaller figure standing behind him. K'inich K'an Chitam's war shield is emblazoned with the Jaguar Sun god, one of three Palenque patron gods also featured on his brother's Tablet of the Sun enshrined in the Temple of the Sun (Figure 2). The hapless captive wears royal finery but his identity remains unclear due to the erosion of the small nominal text above him.²

The hieroglyphic inscription begins on the panel's left side with the birth on December 23, 452 A.D. (9.0.17.5.4 5 Kan 12 Mak) of an ancestral personage 192 years prior to that of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam. The eroded text eludes a thorough reading although this enigmatic person is likely a dynastic member given the presence of the "princely lord" title *ch'ok ajaw* in his name phrase and the mention a war captive. The second phrase records the birth of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam on November 2, 644 A.D. (9.10.11.17.0 11 Ajaw 8 Mak). The parallelism of these

¹ Joel Skidmore, *The Rulers of Palenque: A Beginner's Guide*. Third edition, 2008. Mesoweb: www.mesoweb.com/palenque/resources/rulers/PalenqueRulers-03.pdf.

² Linda Schele suggested this text includes the name of Lady Sak K'uk', the mother of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam. However the final glyph in the name phrase does not appear to be a *k'uk'* logogram.

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opening phrases intimates a direct connection between the two dynastic members, yet the significance is not understood. K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's birth phrase ends with *Ux Yop Huun, matawil*. *Ux Yop Huun* is the name and physical embodiment of the royal headband of ritual bark paper tied onto the king's forehead at accession. This vital symbol of royal authority is highlighted throughout the text on K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's principal monument The Palace Tablet (Figure 3).³ The final glyph *matawil* names the mythical place where Palenque's patron gods were born.⁴

The text moves to the right side and chronicles K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's accession to kingship on May 30, 702 (9.13.10.6.8 5 Lamat 6 Xul). His name phrase includes a rare use of Palenque's two emblem glyphs—the *muwaan mat* and *baak'el* signs. *Muwaan mat* is the name of the progenitor of Palenque's patron gods, and it parallels the naming of the patron gods' mythic birth place in the panel's earlier natal statement. The long but eroded accession phrase concludes by connecting K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's office-taking to the passing of his father K'inich Janaab' Pakal on August 28, 683 A.D. (9.12.11.5.18 6 Etz'nab 11 Yax). The text's parallelisms and interconnections validate K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's dynastic legitimacy and political authority.

As noted, the panel closely resembles a wall tablet from Palenque's Temple XVII in a recently excavated elite compound near Palenque's royal palace. It was commissioned by K'inich Kan Bahlam, the previous ruler and older brother of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam. Both were sons of ruler K'inich Janaab' Pakal and Lady Tz'akb'u Ajaw. The Temple XVII tablet employs the same narrative format of a

³ David Stuart, "The Name of Paper: The Mythology of Crowning and Royal Nomenclature on Palenque's Palace Tablet." In *Maya Archaeology 2*, edited by C. Golden, S. Houston, and J. Skidmore, 2012, pp.116-142. San Francisco: Precolumbia Mesoweb Press.

⁴ Simon Martin, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering the Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*, 2000, p. 159. London and New York: Thames and Hudson.

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central pictorial image framed by two-columned hieroglyphic texts on the left and right sides (the Temple XVII tablet is missing its right panel). K'inich Kan Bahlam is pictured as a successful warrior, implying political savvy and power. He wears a comparable, symbol-laden war outfit as his brother, and he too grasps a combat shield and long-handled spear. A bound figure peers up at his captor, the defeated opponent bedecked in the jadeite jewelry and elaborate headdress of noble attire.

The panels' hieroglyphic texts are comparable, anchoring the brothers' 7th-century affairs in the 5th-century formative years of Palenque's dynastic line. The Temple XVII text begins with the founding of the Classic Period center of Palenque in 490 A.D by king B'utz'-aj Sak Chiik. It then records the 501 A.D. accession of ruler Ahkal Mo' Nahb' who is prominently mentioned in the dynastic narratives of K'inich Janaab' Pakal, the father of K'inich Kan Bahlam and K'inich K'an Joy Chitam. The narrative ends because the tablet's right half is missing, but it likely contained a dynastic record like that on the London panel's right side which registers his brother's accession to the throne and relation to their father K'inich Janaab' Pakal.

The small texts on the Temple XVII tablet provide historical details of the ruler's military campaign and name the captured lord. Given the equivalencies of the two panels, it is plausible that the eroded text above the captive on the London panel detailed the war event and captive's name.

Artistically, both panels display the same fine carving and attention to details of costuming and hieroglyphic elements, and they are carved from a similar fine-grained limestone. Yet minor differences suggest the work of two sculptors and the role of time producing changes in artistic production during the 5-15 years between the two panels' creation. Note the London panel's slightly less fine-grained limestone and lower relief carving with less contouring of figural and glyptic

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surfaces, especially notable in the lords' faces and the head-variant hieroglyphs. Although these variances point to the work of two master carvers, the similar pictorial and hieroglyphic narratives intimate the artistry of scribes and sculptors working in the same or closely affiliated workshops.

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Fig. 1. Temple XVII panel. It depicts K'inich Kan Bahlam II, Palenque's 12th king (reigned 684-702 A.D.) and older brother of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam portrayed on the London Panel. Drawing by Linda Schele.

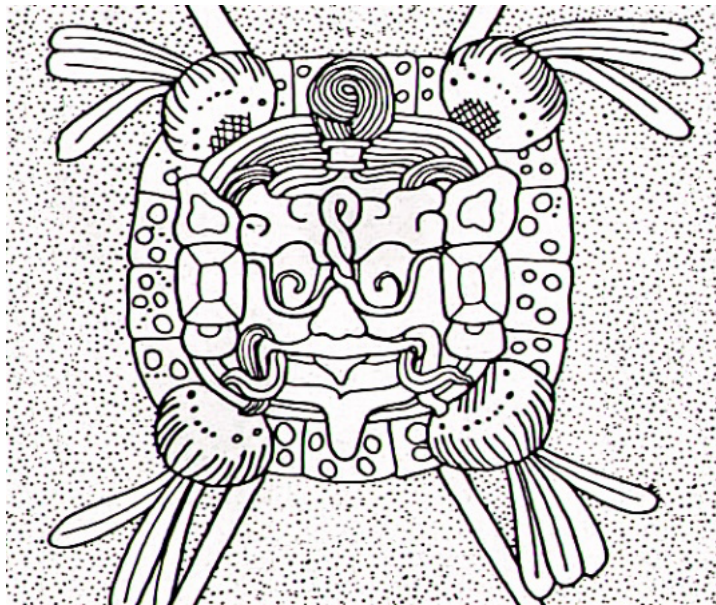


Fig. 2. Temple XVII panel. It depicts K'inich Kan Bahlam II, Palenque's 12th king (reigned 684-702 A.D.) and older brother of K'inich K'an Joy Chitam portrayed on the London Panel. Drawing by Linda Schele.

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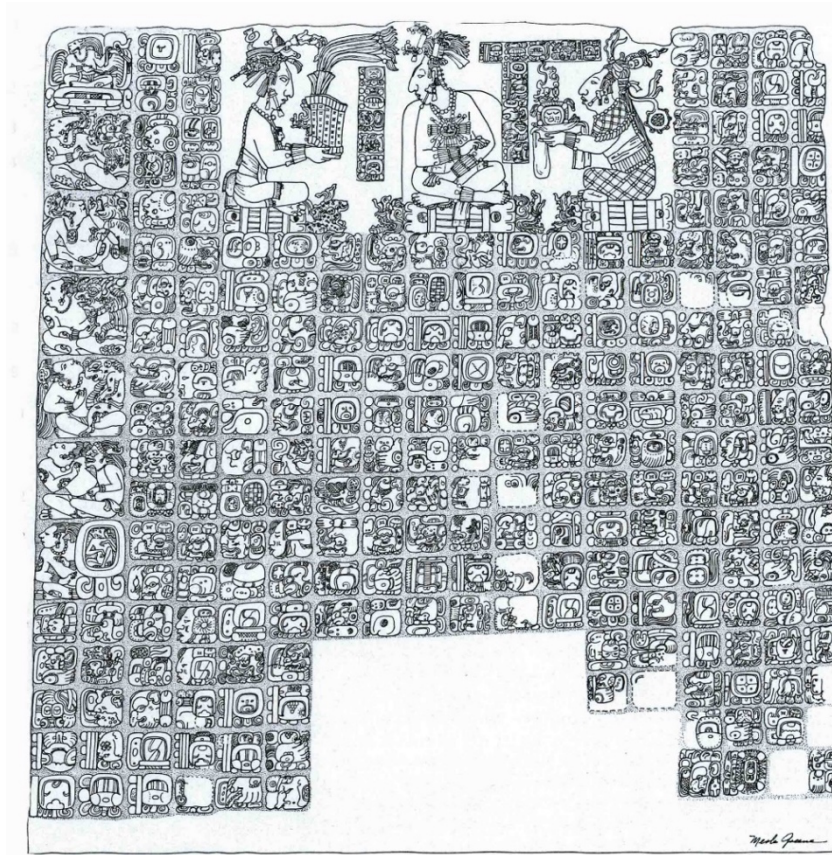


Fig. 3. The Palace Tablet, K'inich K'an Joy Chitam's crowning masterpiece. It was commissioned to adorn the wall of House A-D in the royal palace, the house of royal accession. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson.

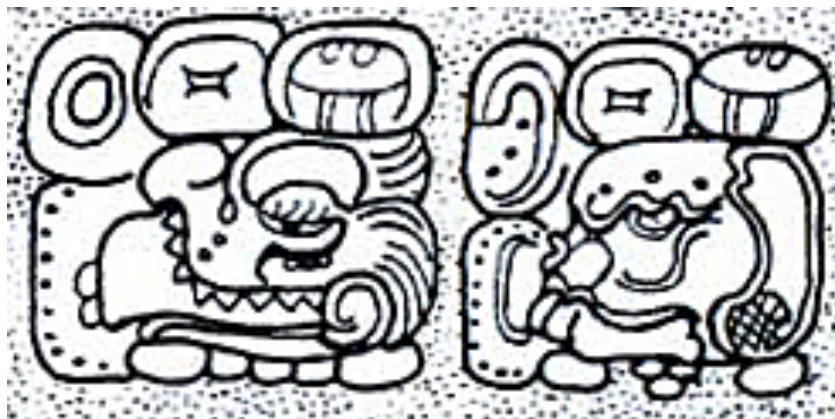


Fig. 4. Palenque's paired emblem glyphs, from the Palace Tablet (at C13-D13). Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson.