



The Lords of Baakal

How an emblem glyph was shared in the Western Maya Lowlands

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Abstract

The Baakal emblem glyph was one of the few emblems that were shared by different cities during the Classic Period. Originally appearing at Palenque, this emblem glyph would later be used by rulers at Tortuguero and Comalcalco. The close study of the emblem glyph's development reveals that it was brought to Tortuguero through royal marriage while its later use by Comalcalco rulers is indicative of Palenque's growing influence in the western Maya Lowlands.

Keywords

Baakal, emblem glyph, Palenque, Tortuguero, Comalcalco

Resumen

El glifo emblema de Baakal fue uno de los pocos que compartieron diferentes ciudades durante el período Clásico Maya. Aunque originalmente apareció en Palenque, este glifo emblema sería usado más tarde por los gobernantes de Tortuguero y Comalcalco. El estudio detallado del desarrollo del glifo emblema revela que fue traído a Tortuguero a través de un matrimonio real, mientras que su uso posterior por los gobernantes de Comalcalco es indicativo de la creciente influencia de Palenque en las Tierras Bajas Mayas Occidentales.

Palabras clave:

Baakal, glifo emblema, Palenque, Tortuguero, Comalcalco

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Introduction

Out of the plethora of emblem glyphs that existed during the Classic Maya period (250–900 CE), several of them were used by more than one city. While some of those cases are the result of direct struggle for power between antagonistic cities, the case of Baakal presents a different challenge. With its use in three different cities, Palenque, Tortuguero, and later Comalcalco (Figure 1), the Baakal emblem confronts us with a unique case of emblem glyph sharing. In this essay, I will examine the history of the Baakal emblem, starting from its origins, all the way to its last occurrences. First, a brief discussion of the term “emblem glyph” will be given, in order to establish the term’s meaning, use, and purpose. This will be followed by a brief overview of the origin of Baakal and its coexistence with other emblems at Palenque. A historical examination of the Tortuguero dynasty and its uses of Baakal is then necessary, followed by an investigation to determine why this emblem glyph is found outside Palenque. Finally, this discussion will continue with the emergence of the Baakal emblem at Comalcalco and conclude with the historical implications of its appearances there. The wider scope of this investigation is twofold: first to study the reasons that motivated the use of this emblem glyph outside of Palenque, and second, to examine what can be inferred from the widespread use of Baakal regarding the question of political identity among Classic Maya polities.

Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs

Emblem glyphs were first identified by Heinrich Berlin who proposed that they may have functioned either as city names, patron deity names, or the names of a city’s ruling dynasty (Berlin 1958: 111). Later scholars such as Proskouriakoff (1960: 471) leaned towards emblem glyphs referring to dynasties instead of places, others supported the idea of them being place names (Kelley 1976: 215), while there were even claims of emblems being used as ethnic indicators (c.f. Barthel 1968: 120). Later opinions favoured the idea of emblem glyphs being references to the wider political dominion of a site, or alternatively references to specific sites as well as territories under their control (Marcus 1976: 913; Mathews 1996: 26). A notable study by Stuart and Houston (1994: 2–7) identified ancient place names and highlighted the differences between emblem glyphs and simple toponyms. In addition, more thorough examinations revealed differences between full emblem glyphs and toponymic titles (Grube 2005: 98), the latter lacking the *k’uhul* adjective, which is usually a typical element of the former (Houston 1986).

Later studies on the topic favoured the idea of most emblem glyph main signs originally being place names (Tokovinine 2007) which may signify the origin of a dynasty or ruling family. This is indicated by the common use of locative expressions such as the suffixes *-il*, *-ul*, and *-al* “abundance of”, the reference to natural phenomena like *ha’* “water” or *witz* “mountain”, *tun* “stone”, *chan* “sky”, or elements of cultural signif-

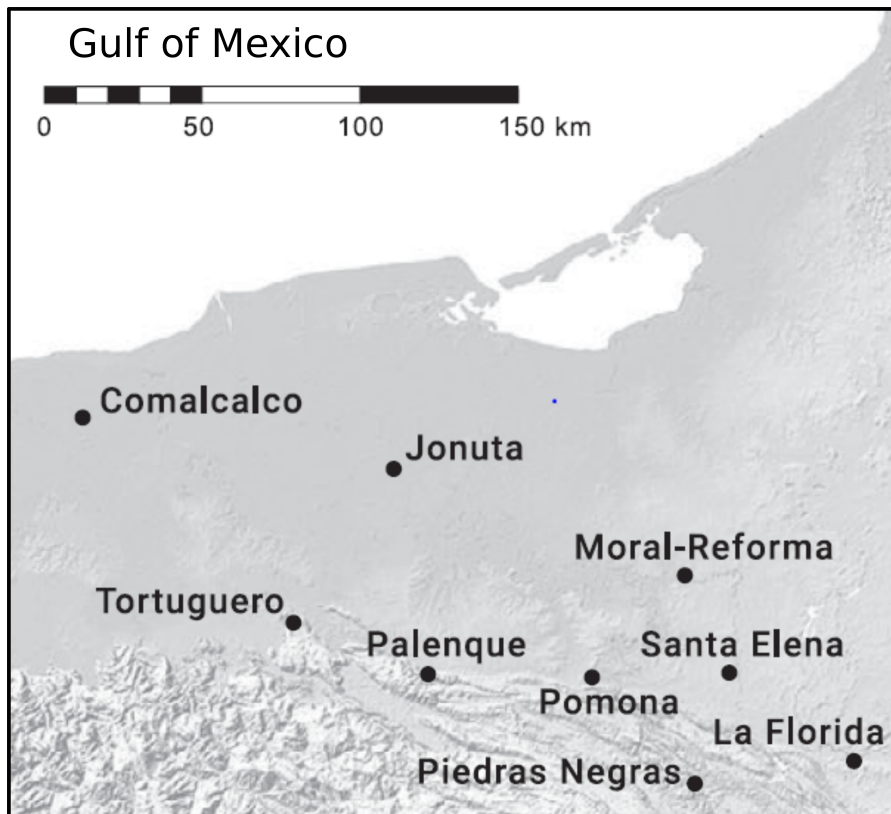


Figure 1. Map showing part of the Western Maya Area (Detail from map by Simon Martin (2020: 2), modified by the author).

icance e.g. *nal* “maize” and *nah* “house”. (Biró 2012: 58; Tokovinine 2013). The discussion of identity is also relevant to this debate, where emblems could have acted as an instrument for royals in creating a group identity that could contribute to the cohesion of the local population that either willingly united under that identity or accepted it as a dictated label (Gronemeyer 2006: 51).

Therefore, a typical emblem glyph example includes a varying main sign, the title *ajaw* “lord”, and from the early 9th *bak'tun* (435 CE) onward, the adjective *k'uhul* “holy” was included (Figure 2) (Biró 2016: 127; Houston 1986). This last modification may have been an attempt to differentiate and emphasise the hierarchy that existed among nobles and ruling families (Houston & Stuart 1996: 295). Today most epigraphers agree that as royal titles, emblem glyphs likely referred to the polity over which a site had dominion (Gronemeyer 2012). The creation, distribution, and combination of emblem glyphs was often an individual decision and not an automatic process (Gronemeyer 2006: 52). Thus through a system that was collectively accepted, emblem glyphs could be combined, changed, or shared; the latter being the focus of this essay.

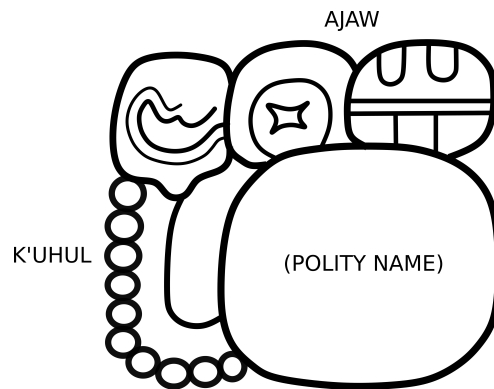


Figure 2. The structure of an emblem glyph (Drawing by the author).

The Emergence of Emblem Glyphs at Palenque

Matwiil

One of Palenque's emblems is usually spelled **MAT-la** (Figure 3A) which can be related to the mythological toponym Matwiil (Stuart 2005: 83), which is spelled **MAT-la**, **ma-MAT-wi-la**, **ma-ta-wi**, and **ma-ta-wi-la** (Figure 3B). There is also a similar **ma-ta** sequence in pre-accession names of a few rulers. The logographic variant **MAT** was spelled using the T793a and T793b signs and represents a cormorant, possibly derived from the Chontal *mat* and cognate Yukatek *mach* (ibid: 21–22). It is highly likely that all these references are related to Matwiil, a mythological location where the supernatural beginnings of Palenque and its deities are said to have taken place. This can be inferred from textual references where Matwiil is preceded by the verb *uhti* "it happened at Matwiil" as seen in several inscriptions (Biró 2012: 40).

This emblem glyph makes its appearance in narratives that recount the emergence of Palenque's early kingship, where the mythic origins of the dynasty are laid out, in events going back millennia. A deity called *Muwaan Mat* born 3121 BCE, that gave birth to the famous Palenque Triad in 2360 BCE was crowned an *ajaw* in 2305 BCE, while carrying the emblem glyph *k'uhul matwiil ajaw* "Holy Lord of Matwiil" (Martin & Grube 2000: 159). Interestingly, the later use of this emblem by historical rulers may display a meaningful pattern. It would seem that mortal rulers did not carry the Matwiil emblem unless they contributed to the nurturing and maintenance of Palenque's gods and their temples, particularly the Triad (Helmke 2012: 100), making the Matwiil emblem a special honorific title.

Toktahn

Toktahn "Cloud Centre" is an emblem that was used by early historical rulers of Palenque, spelled phonetically as **to-ko-TAN** (Figure 4A). It is paired with the *k'uhul*

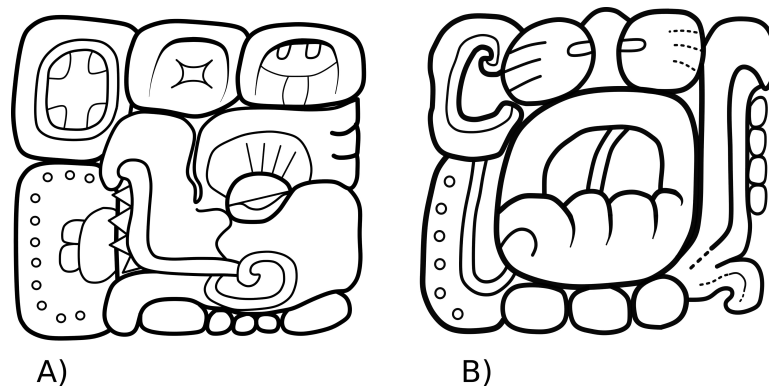


Figure 3. The emblem glyph Matwiil with A) Logographic spelling: **K'UH-MAT-la-AJAW** (Palace Tablet), and B) Phonetic: **K'UH-ma-ta-wi-la** (Temple of the Foliated Cross) (Drawings by the author).

adjective and can also be combined with the *ajaw*, *winik* and *ch'ok* titles. Additional evidence that points to Toktahn referring to an actual place, is found in the term's pairing with the verb *uhti* "it happened at Toktahn" (Biró 2012: 41). Therefore, Toktahn functions both as an emblem glyph, and as an independent toponym.

The first historical Palenque ruler, *K'uk' Bahlam I*, who ascended to the throne in 431 CE, and ruled for four years is referred to as *k'uhul toktahn ajaw*. No contemporaneous records exist of him, however from Late Classic references one can argue that he was the "founder" of the Palenque dynasty (Martin & Grube 2000: 156). The second Palenque ruler, Lord Casper II (435–487 CE) who also carries the Toktahn emblem (Biró 2012: 40), chose Toktahn as the location for celebrating the 9th *bak'tun* (9.0.0.0) on December 11th 435 CE.¹ A much later, yet contemporary reference to Toktahn can be found on the Palace Tablet, where *Ix Tz'akbu Ajaw*, *K'inich Janaab Pakal's* wife is referred to as a *toktahn winik* "person of Toktahn" (Skidmore 2010: 9). Some have proposed that Toktahn refers to the valley from which the Otulum River flows (Schele & Mathews 1998: 95) while others favour the Picota area (Barnhart 1999). In any case, it is very likely that Toktahn was a part of the archaeological zone where the Early Classic court was established, and in fact the appearance of *K'uk' Bahlam I*, the first historical Toktahn lord at Palenque, corresponds with a notable change in the site's ceramic tradition (Stuart & Stuart 2008: 113; Rands 1967: 117, 119).

Lakamha'

Under the reigns of *Butz'aj Sak Chihk* (487–501 CE) and *Ahkul Mo' Nahb I* (501–524 CE) who may have been brothers (Martin & Grube 2000: 157), a new toponym makes its appearance in the inscriptions. At Temple XVII, commissioned by *K'inich Kan Bahlam II*

¹ Maya dates in this article are converted to the Gregorian Calendar using the Thompson 584,285 correlation.

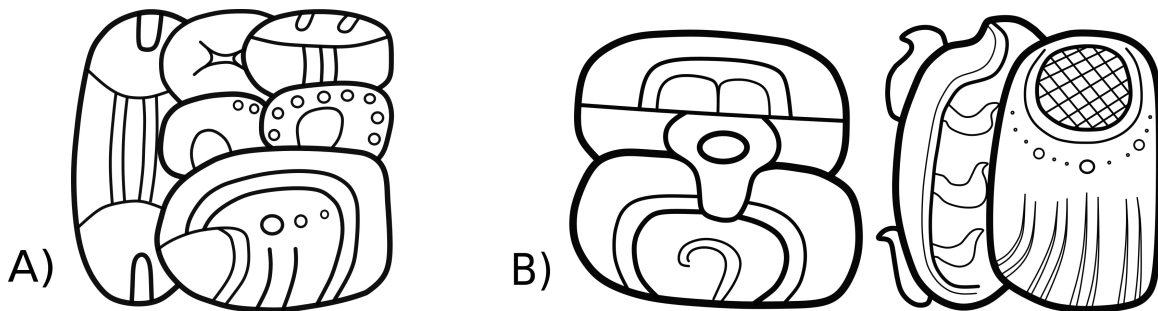


Figure 4. A) The Toktahn emblem glyph spelled **to-ko-TAN-AJAW** as seen on the Temple of the Foliated Cross, B) the establishment of Lakamha' as recorded on Temple XVII (Drawings by the author).

(684–702 CE), one finds a militaristic scene with an accompanying inscription recording the phrase *kaaajaay lakamha'* “establishment/foundation of Lakamha'” (Figure 4B) which was done by *Butz'aj Sak Chihk*, in the company of a young *Ahkul Mo' Nahb I* in 490 CE (9.2.15.9.2). This reference probably recounts the establishment of a new ritual and political centre of the current dynasty, moving it from the previous centre which was Toktahn (Stuart & Stuart 2008: 115). After this transition, Toktahn was still used but only appears sporadically and slowly falls out of use.

This newly established centre is referred to as **LAKAM-HA'** “Big Water” (Stuart & Houston 1994: 30–31) and is mostly restricted to the Cross Group inscriptions, Temples XVIII and XXI, and the Palace Group. It is likely a reference to the Otulum River that flows through the site, and designated a restricted area where the Palenque dynasty resided from the 6th century onwards. Contrary to Toktahn, Lakamha' is never paired with *ajaw*, *winik*, *sajal*, the agentive *aj* or other titles, let alone appear as a full emblem glyph, but the fact that it functioned as a toponym is confirmed by its continuous pairing with *huli'* “arrived at”, *uhti* “happened at” as well as it preceding the *chan ch'een* “land/country” parallelism (Biró 2012: 40).

Baakal

Even though Palenque rulers carried several emblem glyphs throughout their dynasty's history, only one was used consistently. Spelled as **BAK-la** or simply **BAK**, translated as “bone” (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 26; De Ara 1986: 247; Stuart 1985) or “heron” (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 27; Stross n.d.: 42) this emblem glyph presents a difficult challenge for complete transliteration, which remains unresolved (Lacadena & Wichmann 2019). As it stands, there are several proposals, such as *Bakiil* or *Bake'l* while among other circles *Baakal* is preferred (Stuart & Stuart 2008; Martin & Grube 2000: 155). Since the precise phonetics of the term are not the primary focus of this essay, the latter will be used here, but only as a preliminary spelling. In his original emblem glyph study, Berlin (1958: 117–118) noted that this main sign is mostly affiliated with the site of

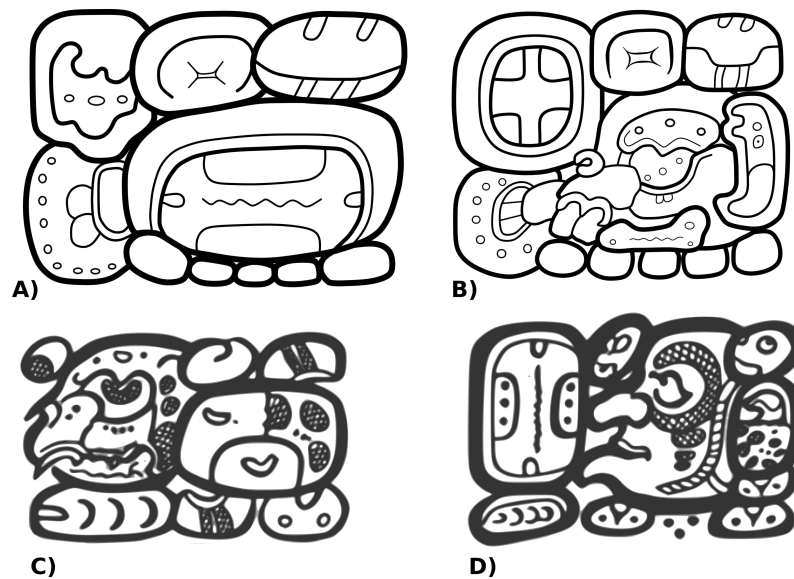


Figure 5. The Baikal emblem glyph spelled **K'UH-BAK-la-AJAW** with: A) its T570 variant (Temple XVIII) and B) its T1045 variant (Palace Tablet), drawings by the author; the *baikal waywal* title C) **BAK-le wa-WAY-wa[la]** and D) **BAK-le WAYWAL?-la** (both from the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs) (Drawings by Linda Schele (Freidel, Schele & Parker 1993, fig. 4:7), modified by the author).

Palenque, while others later discussed the variants of the emblem and their distribution (c.f. Barthel 1968; Marcus 1976). Since then, further investigation (Stuart 1985: 98) verified the reading of the logogram. Despite the ongoing debate, what is certain is that the *-VI* toponymic suffix is part of the emblem glyph main sign, with its rough meaning being “the place of”, therefore it has been translated as place of the “Bone” (Martin & Grube 2000: 155) or place where “the heron abounds” (cf. Lacadena & Wichmann 2019: 198). The most frequently encountered variants of this glyph seem to freely substitute (Gronemeyer 2006: 37), namely T570 (Figure 5A) depicting a bone pattern while T1045 (Figure 5B) represents the head-variant of the same sign with a deer skull being depicted (Stuart 2007).

There is also evidence that the Baikal emblem glyph main sign is actually a place name on its own, as seen on several examples from both inside and outside Palenque. Within Palenque some of the most illustrative cases include glyphic collocations found in royal names as parts of supernatural titles. These spell out *waywal* “sorcerer?” (Schele & Freidel 1990: 441; Zender 2004: 77), although the translation is not secure and remains debated. Common spellings of the term include **BAK-le WAY-la** (G3) (Figure 5D) or **BAK-le wa-WAY-wa[la]** (I2) (Figure 5C) as seen on the Tablet of the 96 Glyphs and also on other monuments (Stuart 2007).

The details and significance of this term are not well established (Zender 2004: 76; Prager 2013: 482–483), but what is clear is that it ascribes some kind of supernatural role or refers to one's position in a site's ritual landscape (Tokovinine 2013: 61), in this case that of Palenque. By itself, the term Baakal may have referred to the plateau or first settlement on the plateau upon which the site of Palenque is situated (Biró 2012: 44), however that too remains unclear.

The first rulers to carry this title are individuals who were probably mythological, such as *Ukokan Chan* (acceded in 967 BCE) or Casper I (was ruling in 252 BCE) who act as a bridge between Palenque's remote antiquity and the first historical Early Classic rulers. Archaeologically, the first use of the Baakal emblem comes with the second Palenque ruler, Casper II (435–487 CE), who carried both the Toktahn and Baakal emblem glyphs. His Baakal affiliation can be seen on an unprovenanced travertine vessel (Figure 6) (also known as the Dumbarton Oaks Bowl) thought to date to the Early Classic Period (250–550 CE) (Martin & Grube 2000: 157). However, there are subtle indications on the vessel that raise doubts regarding its chronology, potentially dating it to a time slightly after the 5th century and the Early Classic style it exhibits may have been of deliberate making (Stuart & Stuart 2008: 253). In this scenario, the two first Palenque rulers used the Toktahn emblem glyph exclusively, with their authority being based at that location. The later switch to the Baakal emblem may be a consequence of the establishment of Lakamha' as a new seat of royal power. In fact, virtually all Palenque rulers after the Lakamha' founding carry a full Baakal emblem glyph, with the exception being a possible last ruler named *Wak Kimi Janaab Pakal* (Skidmore 2010: 91). However, the alternative possibility would be that Casper II did indeed carry both Toktahn and Baakal emblems, which would signify a more gradual transition from one place to the other.

Following Casper II, even though *Butz'aj Sak Chihk* along with his brother may be responsible for the Lakamha' establishment, he himself does not carry a Baakal emblem glyph, or any emblem for that matter. Admittedly, his appearances in the hieroglyphic corpus are limited, which may provide an explanation for the lack of emblem glyphs accompanying his name. But as of now it is from *Ahkul Mo' Nahb I* onwards that one sees an uninterrupted use of the Baakal emblem, with the aforementioned exception of the last ruler signalling the end of the pattern.

It must be noted that even though the majority of Palenque rulers appear in inscriptions with the Baakal emblem glyph, not all of them appear in contemporary records, and the title may have been deliberately added by the person who commissioned the monument. All of these points suggest that the Baakal emblem glyph did, at least partially, stand for an identity which may have been linked to a location, possibly the dynasty's origin, and was maintained for the majority of Palenque's history.

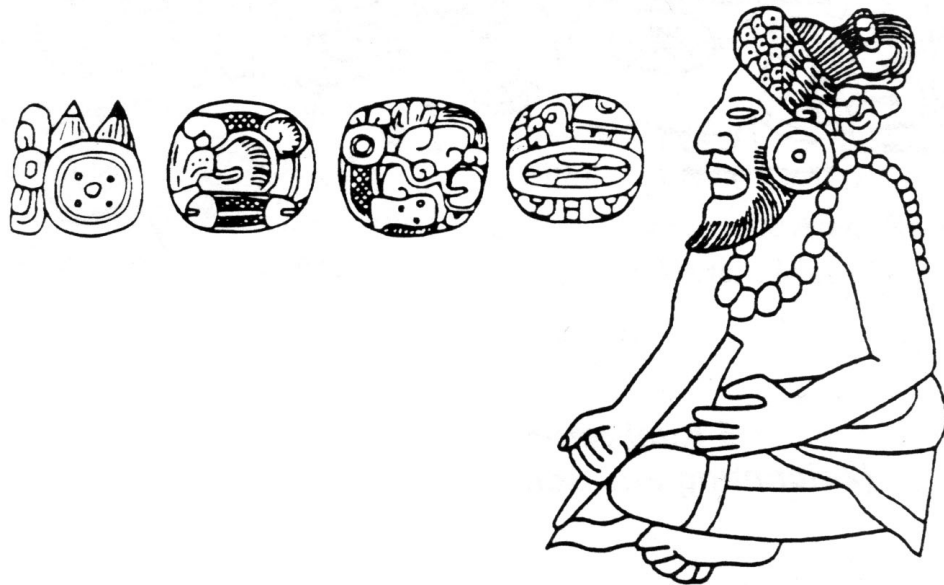


Figure 6. The Dumbarton Oaks Bowl mentioning Casper II: *yuk'ib ch'ok ch'a-? k'uhul baakal ajaw* "the drinking cup of the youth 'Casper II' Holy Lord of Baakal" (Drawing by David Stuart (Kerr 1992: 471)).

The Tortuguero Dynasty

The Rulers of Tortuguero

The earliest historical figure that appears in Tortuguero's past is a chronologically isolated individual named *Ahkul K'uk'* who is said to have conducted a ritual involving the placement of something in his sweatbath (*pibnaah*) on December 9th 510 CE (9.3.16.1.11) (Gronemeyer 2006: 48; Martin & Grube 2000: 165). This is the only known reference to this figure, and he is given no titles nor is he related to any other person through genealogical reference. This sole mention of him comes from Tortuguero Monument 6 (N2) and is a posthumous reference which goes back 160 years, indicating that he was an important figure for Tortuguero's history. It may also be noteworthy that other such *pibnaah* rituals can be found elsewhere e.g. the wall tablets of the Cross Group at Palenque, where inner shrines are labelled as symbolic *pibnaah* (Houston 1996: 133). Interestingly, he seems to occupy the same position on the historical timeline as the fourth Palenque ruler of a similar name, *Ahkul Mo' Nahb I*. This has led many epigraphers to consider a possible connection between the two, with *Ahkul K'uk'* being a candidate for the Tortuguero "dynasty founder" (Martin & Grube 2000: 165).

The next individual also barely appears in the inscriptions, and has been designated as *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I*. He was the father of the prolific *Bahlam Ajaw*, and also carried the Baakal emblem glyph as the ruler of Tortuguero. He appears in a couple of references, in 667 CE (9.11.15.0.0) on Monument 6 and in 649 CE (9.10.17.2.14) on Monument 8 (Gronemeyer 2006: 49), which are both posthumous references as no contemporary inscribed monuments have been found (Zender & Guenter 2000: 7).

As mentioned above, *Bahlam Ajaw* (644–679 CE), the son of *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I*, follows as the next Tortuguero ruler. He acceded to power on February 9th 644 CE (9.10.11.3.10), as recorded on Monument 6 (F7–E8). Several months later, he started attacking numerous sites in the area, notably two “Star War” attacks, one against *Utxe' K'uh* (9.10.11.9.6), and the other against *Comalcalco* (9.10.17.2.14) as well as carrying out “axing” military attacks on sites such as *Yomoop* (9.10.16.13.6); all events recorded on Monument 6 (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010). He married *Ix Witz Chan* on December 11th 647 CE at *K'ahk' Witz* (ibid: 44), which may be a toponym for Tortuguero itself (Biró 2012: 43). The inscription on Tortuguero Box 1 records *Bahlam Ajaw's* death on May 24th 679 CE (9.12.6.17.18). For now, it should be noted that during his reign *Bahlam Ajaw* consistently carried the *k'uhul baakal ajaw* title, indicating he was a Tortuguero sovereign.

Two more rulers appear in the Tortuguero hieroglyphic corpus, albeit with fewer references. Despite having no birth or death dates, *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan II* is named as the grandson of *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I* (*yeht k'aba'-il u-mam* “is the namesake of his grandfather”, Tortuguero Box 1, J2–L1), and was therefore *Bahlam Ajaw's* son (Gronemeyer 2006: 45; Zender & Guenter 2000: 7). His mother is not mentioned, however through context, *Ix Witz Chan* is the most probable candidate. *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan II's* accession can be securely dated to July 4th 679 CE (9.12.7.1.19). Not much else is known about him, however it is important to note that he does not carry any emblem glyph in the inscriptions (Gronemeyer 2006: 46). On the contrary however, the next ruler, dubbed as Ruler D, follows straight after and does in fact carry the Baakal emblem glyph. This figure's name has been eroded beyond recognition, and is only known from one record, that is, Tortuguero Stela 2 which this individual erected. Ruler D also celebrated the *k'atun* ending 9.14.0.0.0 making it clear that the Tortuguero emblem glyph was still used around 711 CE.

The Royal Women at Tortuguero

As mentioned earlier, *Bahlam Ajaw* and *Ix Witz Chan* were married on December 11th 647 CE (9.10.15.1.11), as seen on Tortuguero Monument 8 (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 51). Unfortunately, this is the only mention of *Ix Witz Chan* and in that one example she does not carry any titles.

However, a different individual is more relevant to this debate and is directly tied to *Bahlam Ajaw*. On Tortuguero Monument 6 a powerful female figure appears with the

name of *Ix Yan K'oj* (J17) who also carries a full Baakal emblem glyph. Her name also appears spelled differently on Monument 8, which in the past has yielded a separate reading entirely, while treating the spelling on Monument 6 as a another female figure associated with the Tortuguero elite (Gronemeyer 2006: 20; Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 54). However, recent work done by Stuart (2020) has demonstrated that in both instances the name is to be read *Ix Yan K'oj* and thus characterised one person. On Monument 8, *Ix Yan K'oj* is related to *Bahlam Ajaw* through the relationship phrase *u-baah u-juntan*. The translation of this expression is still debated with some understanding it as “he (the son) is the person of her caregiving” (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 53) while others associate it more with “maternal devotion” (Stuart 1997: 12), most likely indicating that *Ix Yan K'oj* was *Bahlam Ajaw*'s mother and therefore the consort of *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I*. On Monument 6 she is associated with *Bahlam Ajaw* through the poorly understood phrase *u-baah u-chiit²-ch'ab*, which is usually used for a reference between a child and a parent, and some have translated as “co-creation” (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 53). It should also be noted, that throughout Classic Maya history, local female rulers or figures do not usually carry emblem glyphs, which may mean *Ix Yan K'oj* was not from Tortuguero but rather from Palenque (Gronemeyer 2006: 43). This would have numerous implications and would suggest *Ix Yan K'oj* may be associated with the use of the Baakal emblem glyph at Tortuguero.

The Origins of Baakal Outside Palenque

Previous scholars initially believed that the appearance of Baakal at Tortuguero signified political subordination by the Palenque state (Marcus 1976: 106–109; Riese 1980) since *Bahlam Ajaw* is never mentioned in Palenque inscriptions. Once further research revealed that *Bahlam Ajaw* was in fact an independent ruler (Looper 1991: 1), he was seen as a ruler who was given the privilege of carrying the original Palenque emblem glyph, while carrying out military campaigns that benefited his contemporary *K'inich Janaab Pakal* (615–683 CE) (Grube 1996: 6).

In later works (Martin & Grube 2000: 165), it was proposed that the usage of the Baakal emblem at Tortuguero signalled an interruption in the patrilineal sequence. It is indeed interesting that *Ahkul Mo' Nahb I* is the first ruler listed in *K'inich Janaab Pakal*'s dynastic sequences (Martin 2020: 96; Martin & Grube 2000: 165). In this scenario, a breakaway in the dynasty may have happened where new dynastic lines were established at Palenque and Tortuguero respectively. This could explain why *K'inich Janaab Pakal* starts his dynastic listings during this period, and it may also be connected to the fact that *Ahkul Mo' Nahb I*, save perhaps for Casper II's mention on the Dumbarton Oaks bowl, was the first historical Palenque ruler to carry a Baakal emblem (and not Toktahn). Meanwhile at Tortuguero, if *Ahkul K'uk'* did indeed mark the beginning of a new dynastic era, his appearance in *Bahlam Ajaw*'s posthumous references on Mon-

² The exact reading of this sign (T580) is still debated with CHIT being one of several proposals (Stuart et al 1999: 56; Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 53).

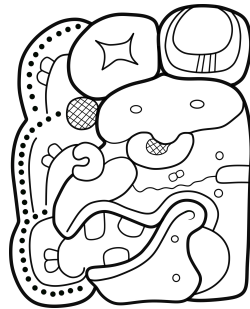


Figure 7. The Tortuguero emblem glyph as seen on Monument 6 carried by *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I: k'uhul baak[al] ajaw* "Holy Lord of Baakal" (Drawing by the author).

ument 6 was warranted. The archaeological record may contribute to that, with some ceramic wares at Tortuguero displaying similarities to Early Classic forms at Palenque e.g. the Picota complex (c.f. Rands 1973: 196, 199; Gronemeyer 2006: 50). In a similar light, some have linked *Ahkul K'uk'* and his *pibnaah* ritual to the change in emphasis from Toktahn to Lakamha' at Palenque (Grube et al 2002: II 9).

These ideas can explain a lot about a possible schism of the dynasty, however Tortuguero's local texts may present a different point of view (Gronemeyer 2006: 50).

With regards to emblem glyphs at Tortuguero, the Baakal emblem appears a total of 14 times in the site's inscriptions while using two distinct graphemes. Out of those 14 instances, the two variants are T570 (Figure 5A) and T1040 (Figure 7), which freely substitute, although the former seems to be preferred with a total of eight appearances (ibid: 37). The first Tortuguero ruler to carry a Baakal emblem is *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I* appearing in a posthumous reference by *Bahlam Ajaw* and coincides with the reign of *Muwaan Mat* (612–615 CE) at Palenque. If the rulers preceding him did not carry the Baakal emblem, this would mean that *Ix Yan K'oj* is closely linked to the introduction of the emblem to Tortuguero. Since she was probably *Bahlam Ajaw's* mother, and likely hailed from Palenque this would suggest that the Baakal emblem was introduced to Tortuguero through royal marriage. This may constitute the most likely explanation for the appearance of Baakal at Tortuguero, and would reveal an example of emblem glyph sharing between two cities, facilitated through matrimony. However even if *Bahlam Ajaw* himself was responsible for the initial use of the Baakal emblem glyph in Tortuguero, the evidence still overwhelmingly points to its peaceful introduction into the city. Thus, the adoption of an emblem glyph originally only found at Palenque may indicate a type of strategic alliance. It seems that the Tortuguero rulers joined the nobility of Palenque either under *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I* and *Ix Yan K'oj* or *Bahlam Ajaw*. Such a transition probably happened under peaceful and voluntary terms, as links between the two dynasties through *Ix Yan K'oj* can be demonstrated. It reflects a strategic adoption of an identity for prestigious motivations, but one that still allowed Tortuguero to exercise its own autonomy.

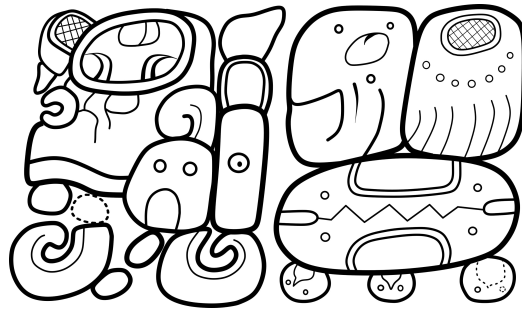


Figure 8. *uhtiiy tahn ha' baakal* "it happened in the middle of the waters of Baakal", statement recorded on Tortuguero Monument 6, probably mentioning an event taking place at Palenque in 353 CE (Drawing by the author).

Baakal Toponymic References Outside Palenque

In *Bahlam Ajaw's* retrospective references on Tortuguero Monument 6, one also finds the appearance of the Baakal main sign as a toponym and not an emblem title, one of two such references that exist outside Palenque. On Monument 6 it appears in block J2, and is probably an alliance event (*k'axiiy t'aan* "tied the word"?), one of two such events recorded in the text (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 49–50). In fact these two are linked through a rather long Distance Number that extends some 294 years into the past, stopping on March 1st 353 CE (8.15.16.0.5). Using the phrase *uhtiiy tahn ha' baakal* (I2–J2) (Figure 8), the inscription specifically states that this event happened at Baakal. Biró (2012: 42) translates it as "in the water" or "in front of the water". This reference to Baakal could mean either Palenque or Tortuguero itself (Gronemeyer 2006: 53), although there are more arguments in favour of the former. Since Baakal most likely originates at Palenque (Stuart & Stuart 2008: 109; Skidmore 2010: 3), and is found in toponymic phrases at Palenque, it is likely a place heavily associated with the site's dynasty. Tortuguero Monument 6 (J2) may be making a reference to one of the rivers at Palenque such as the Otulum or the Picota. In addition to that, Tortuguero appears to have had its own distinct toponym: *K'ahk' Witz* "Fiery Mountain" or "volcano", as seen on Monument 8 where the wedding between *Bahlam Ajaw* and *Ix Witz Chan* took place (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 51). This might be a reference to the Macuspana volcano near the site (Biró 2012: 43). The implication here being that we have a reference of a possible alliance event taking place at Palenque, during an early time even before the reign of *K'uk' Bahlam I* and the establishment of the historical Palenque dynasty. Archaeological evidence does point to early occupation periods in Palenque before that time (López Bravo et al 2004: 12), but such remote references should be examined with caution.

Further confirmation for Baakal being a reference to a place at Palenque, can be found in the second such mention on Moral-Reforma Stela 4. There, the third accession of *Muwaan Jol* in 690 CE is recorded, followed by the phrase "... *yichnal k'inich kan bahlam*

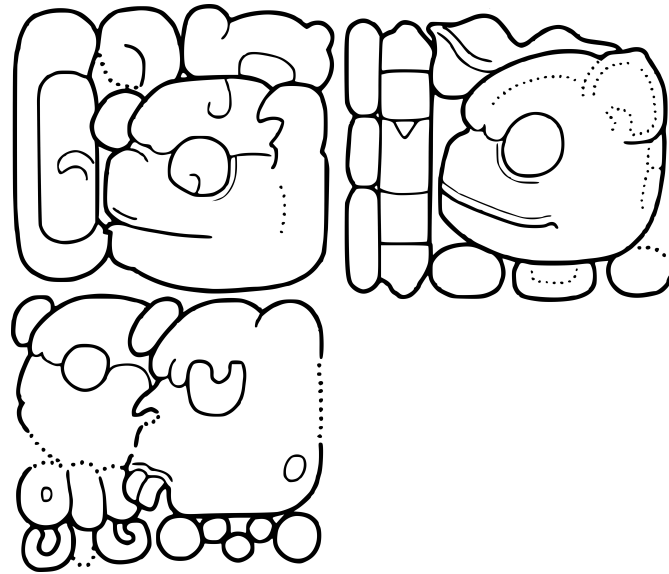


Figure 9. Moral-Reforma Stela 4, statement recording the third accession of *Muwaan Jol* in 690 CE at Palenque, witnessed by the Palenque ruler *K'inich Kan Bahlam II* (Drawing by Simon Martin (Martin 2020: 252)).

uhtiiy baakal' "...in front of *K'inich Kan Bahlam II*, it happened at Baakal", stating the exact place of his coronation ritual (Figure 9) (Martin 2003: 45; 2020: 252–253). In this instance the phrasing of the event explains that it was carried out in the presence of a Palenque ruler. Therefore, both Baakal toponymic references here were in fact made in the 7th century, indicating that during that time, several rulers still referred to Palenque, or at least part of it, as Baakal.

Comalcalco

Baakal at Comalcalco

Lying on the western edge of the Maya world, Comalcalco developed during the Classic Period, while reaching its peak in the Late Classic (Armijo & Jiménez 2006). Until the first half of the 7th century, Comalcalco's dynasty used their own emblem glyph, spelled as **JOY[KAAN]**, which appears in the site's inscriptions (c.f. Wanyerka 2002: 58) but is also mentioned at Tortuguero (Figure 10A). It should be noted, that as an emblem title, Joy Kaan never occurs in a full emblem glyph spelling that included the *k'uhul* element. Its appearances only make use of the spellings *joy kaan ajaw* "Joy Kaan Lord" (Martin 2020: 405) or alternatively, paired with an agentive prefix such as *aj joy kaan* "he of Joy Kaan" (Biró 2012: 36). On December 23rd 649 CE (9.10.17.2.14) the army of the Comalcalco ruler *Ux Bahlam* suffered a major "Star War" attack as recorded on Tortuguero Monument 6 (G4–H5). The gruesomeness of the battle is emphasised by the

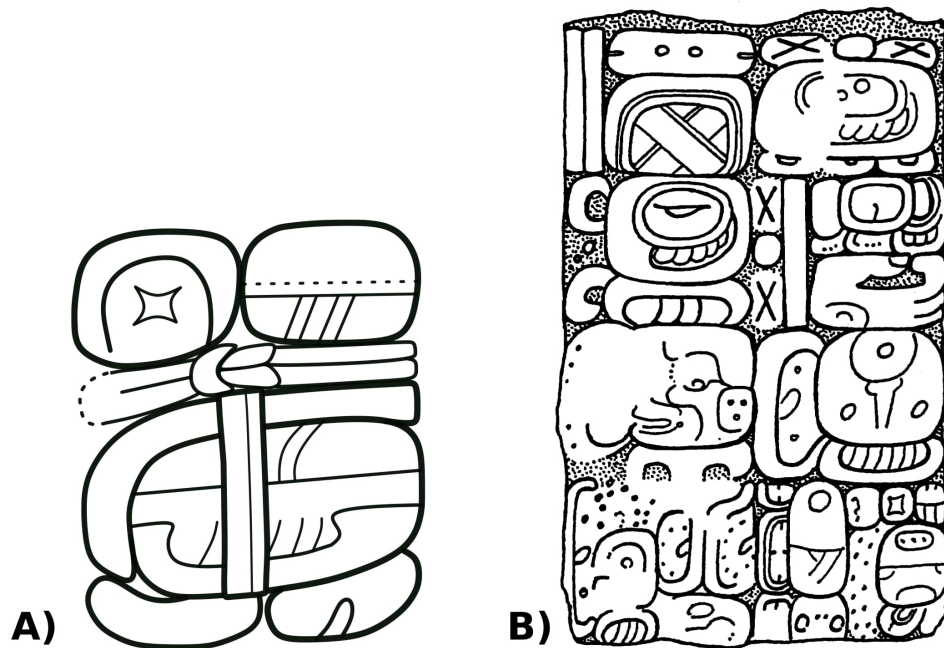


Figure 10. A) The original Comalcalco emblem glyph spelled JOY[KAAN]-AJAW-wa (Tortuguero Monument 6), drawing by the author; B) Comalcalco Modelled Brick No. 2 mentioning *K'inich Ohl* who carries the Baakal emblem glyph (Drawing by Jean Michel Hoppan (Grube et al 2002: II 41)).

phrase *nahbaj ch'ich', witzaj jol* "the blood pooled, the skulls piled", which is followed by the "strengthening" of the victorious *Bahlam Ajaw's sak(?) ik'il* "force and breath?" (Gronemeyer & MacLeod 2010: 48). The outcome of this encounter was devastating. Not only did the Comalcalco ruler meet his dire end, but the entire dynasty seems to have been shaken up; so much that we do not find any future uses of the Joy Kaan emblem at Comalcalco or elsewhere.

After this event, Comalcalco remains silent for a long time with no local monuments being erected until 56 years later with Comalcalco Stela 1 breaking the silence on February 16th 705 CE (9.13.13.17). This monument records the accession of a ruler provisionally named *K'inich-?* since his name and possible titles are broken off (Grube et al 2002: II 36). This demonstrates that a dynasty did indeed exist at Comalcalco at that time, but does not help in answering what kind of emblem glyph it used. Other monuments following this erection do not look promising either since they concern themselves with dedications and calendar rites (Hoppan 1996). The first Comalcalco ruler to carry the full Baakal emblem glyph is an individual named *K'inich Ohl* mentioned on Comalcalco Modelled Brick No. 2 (Grube et al 2002: II 42) (Figure 10B) with a reconstructed date of April 2nd 726 CE (9.14.14.9.12), making him a contemporary of *K'inich Ahkul Mo' Nahb III* (721–736 CE) at Palenque.

Turning to Tortuguero, the termination of its writing tradition is dated to December of 711 CE (9.14.0.0.0). This is documented on the heavily eroded Monument 2, making it the last monument erected at Tortuguero (Morley 1938, IV: 326–328). Tortuguero Box 1 provides us with the only references to *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan II* (Gronemeyer 2006: 46; Bassie & Zender 2002). From then until Monument 2, no inscription can be attributed to *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan II* himself, while the last ruler, Ruler D, seems to be responsible for Monument 2's erection. This means, that there is a 30 year gap between Box 1 and Monument 2, indicating that the writing tradition of Tortuguero was still alive during Ruler D's reign, raising the possibility that future monuments might be found with texts surpassing those dates. However this lack of later inscriptions has led researchers to consider whether it indicates an abandonment of Tortuguero, possibly after receiving less political support from Palenque (González Jiménez 2014: 3; Arellano Hernández 2006). There is a temporal gap of roughly 14 years between the last monument at Tortuguero and Comalcalco Modelled Brick No. 2. Assuming that Tortuguero's Ruler D ruled for some time after the dedication of Monument 2, the end of his reign may be connected to the appearance of Baakal at Comalcalco. Gronemeyer (2006: 62) proposed that such a scenario is indeed very likely and maintained that Ruler D must have passed away between December 5th 711 CE (9.14.0.0.0) and April 2nd 726 CE (9.14.14.9.12) and was succeeded by *K'inich Ohl* who moved from Tortuguero to Comalcalco. Indeed, the previously mentioned studies on ceramics (Rands, 1967, 1973), point to different regional affiliations of Tortuguero at that time, in favour of the lowlands of the Mexican Gulf area. (Gronemeyer 2006: 62). So further occupation at Tortuguero continued, but later pieces of pottery such as Fine Gray ware slightly deviate from those at Palenque, and are more similar to Comalcalco (c.f. Rands 1973: 199–200).

During that period, Comalcalco saw a considerable increase in activity and building construction, with many projects using fired clay bricks, something typical for this site. However, many structures of the site such as the palace acropolis, are reminiscent of the palace at Palenque. Other strong architectural parallels can be found between Comalcalco temples and the Cross Group structures at Palenque (Figure 11) (Andrews 1989: 81, 141–150; Armijo & Jiménez 2006: 451). It is because of observations like these that the Tortuguero migration hypothesis seems more unstable (Gronemeyer 2006: 62).

Tortuguero may have been an important force in the western lowland political sphere, but from a settlement perspective it probably remained a site of relatively modest size (c.f. Hernández Pons 1984: 68–69; Gronemeyer 2006: 3). Therefore if we hypothesise that the Tortuguero dynasty relocated to Comalcalco, further explanation is required to clarify why they commissioned such large building projects, something currently not seen in Tortuguero building traditions (Arellano Hernández 2006: 60–64). As for Comalcalco's hieroglyphic inscriptions, most of them are limited to clay bricks and stingray spines (c.f. Armijo & Gallegos 2001; Zender 2004: 67), while others display a rather crude style, not comparable with the scribal traditions of Tortuguero (Gronemeyer 2006: 62). It should be noted that there are at least four known refer-

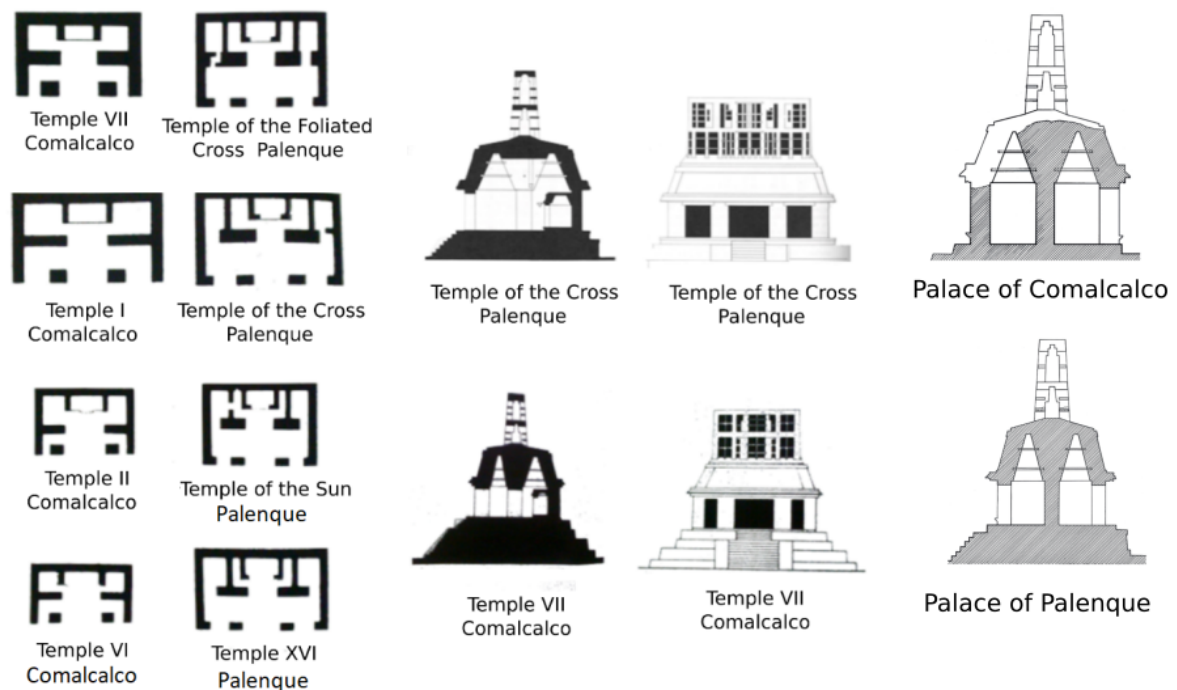


Figure 11. A comparative graph of Palenque and late Comalcalco architecture (Graph by Andrews (1989), modified by the author).

ences to Baakal rulers from Comalcalco and all of them use the T570 variant which is more common at Palenque, while the T1040 variant found at Tortuguero does not make any appearances.

The situation is further complicated by the existence of an anthropomorphic jade head (Figure 12) alleged to come from Copan or its near vicinity (Grube et al 2002: II 61; Mayer 1997: 26; Gronemeyer 2006: 62). It bears the name of the Comalcalco ruler *Upakal El K'inich* who is specifically named the *k'uhul baakal ajaw*. The name of this ruler is also found on Modelled Brick no. 5 that was unearthed at one of Comalcalco's temples. The jade head has been connected to the mother of Copan ruler *Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat*, called Lady *Chak Nik' Ye' Xook*, who bore the Matwiil emblem (seen on Copan Stela 8). For this reason, she was thought to have come from Palenque (Martin & Grube 2000: 209), but whether this find connects her to Comalcalco remains speculative, and can only be proven with additional finds.

Therefore, the conflicting evidence could point to varying scenarios for why Baakal appears at Comalcalco. One possibility is that Comalcalco was the home of the Tortuguero dynasty or at least parts of it, which presumably after the death of Ruler D, moved to Comalcalco for reasons unknown. This seems plausible since no inscriptions appear at

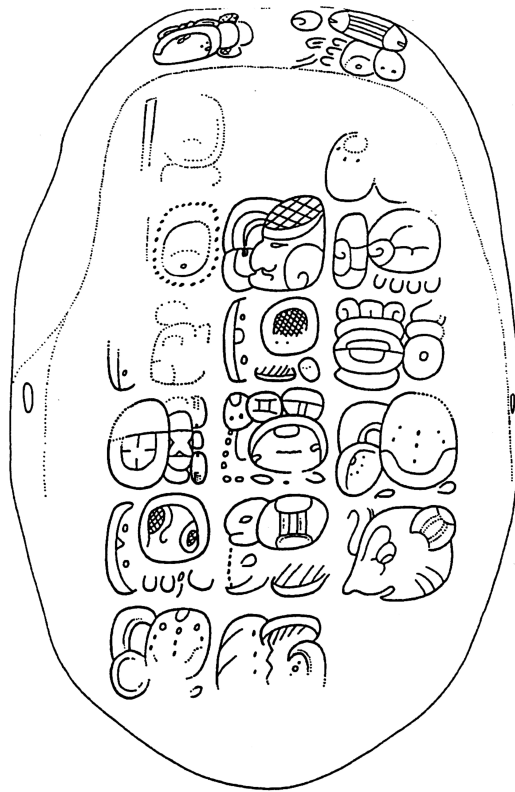


Figure 12. The jade head found in Comayagua mentioning the Comalcalco ruler *Upakal El K'inich* who carries the Baakal emblem glyph (Drawing by Christian Prager (Mayer 1997, fig. 19)).

Tortuguero after 711 CE and the first Baakal ruler at Comalcalco appears 14 years later. Ceramic evidence does point to changes at Tortuguero during those times, with some similarities to Comalcalco ceramics (cf. Rands 1973: 200; Gronemeyer 2006: 61).

A second scenario may involve a complete takeover or conquering of Comalcalco by Tortuguero, as a result of the “Star War” *Bahlam Ajaw* carried out, an idea already considered by some epigraphers (Martin 2020: 97; Martin & Velásquez 2016: 27; Helmke 2012: 93). This would imply that Tortuguero may not have been abandoned, at least not entirely. A point to consider here, is that by looking at the quality of workmanship of Tortuguero’s last two monuments, despite their long temporal separation, one can hardly recognise a decline in the quality of the scribal work (Gronemeyer 2006: 61). This may point to limitations in sampling as the reason for the sparse temporal distribution of the inscriptions and the complete absence of new ones. As mentioned previously, the archaeology of Tortuguero despite small changes in its ceramic record, suggests the site was still occupied after the reign of Ruler D, that is, at least after 711 CE (c.f. Rands 1973: 200; Gronemeyer 2006: 61). In addition to that, a stone vessel found at Comalcalco dat-

ing to 652 CE, mentions *Bahlam Ajaw*, which may suggest the lineage from Tortuguero had a longer presence at the site (Martin 2020: 97). If such a scenario proves correct, it may mean that rulers still occupied a seat at Tortuguero, while exercising authority on Comalcalco through the installation of puppet rulers or loyal vassals, something seen in other parts of the Maya area (Martin 2020: 210; Helmke 2017: 107; Martin & Grube 2000: 32).

Looking beyond the exact treatment of Comalcalco by Tortuguero, the battle of 649 CE seems to have achieved the presumably intended goal of this war, that is, to take control over a large centre in the western lowlands. This is important as it could hint at the wider and ambitious intentions of Palenque. Since it has been established that friendly relations existed between Palenque and Tortuguero, it can be hypothesised that Palenque may have used this alliance as a way of securing influence over lands to the west. Many of the wars that *Bahlam Ajaw* carried out may be related back to Palenque, something already pointed out in past studies (Grube 1996; Arellano Hernández 2006; González Jiménez 2014). As with the case of Comalcalco, these wars were certainly sanctioned by the Palenque court, if not directly planned although more textual evidence is needed to strengthen such ideas.

Such an association would account for the large construction projects seen at Comalcalco, whose size seems uncommon for Tortuguero standards (Arellano Hernández 2006: 60–64), and could also explain the strong similarities between the newer Comalcalco temples and the ones of Palenque (Rice 2018: 99). Interestingly, such architectural influences may also be seen in other sites such as Xupa, where some buildings are laid out in ways that are almost identical to the ones seen in buildings of Palenque (Mayer 1981: 5). Further evidence suggests Xupa functioned as a subsidiary administrative centre, facilitating control over communities in the southern part of the Palenque polity and the agricultural value of the surrounding area (Sharer & Golden 2012: 38; Stuart & Stuart 2008: 164). This indicates that Palenque's sphere of influence in the western lowlands was much wider and possibly included several sites in the area, Comalcalco and Xupa being at least two of them.

Furthermore, the preferences in the use of a certain Baakal variant seen at Comalcalco align with those at Palenque, and may not be significant but at least remain suggestive. The existence of the same religious-military institutions at both Palenque and Comalcalco, such as *yajaw k'ahk'* or *baahajaw* (Zender 2004: 195), may suggest further contact during the late 8th century (Martin & Grube 2000: 175). Therefore, the aforementioned evidence may suggest a link between Comalcalco's Late Classic upswing and Palenque, and it indicates there is room for such interaction, one that should be tested with the appearance of new evidence in the future. As a result of Comalcalco's defeat at the hands of Tortuguero, the site's allegiance and identity definitely changed. This is a change that is attested for both in the epigraphy and archaeology of the site. Tortuguero may have continued to develop after the death of Ruler D, and may have

kept its presence at Comalcalco or even moved there. Either way, after its defeat in 649 CE, Comalcalco probably fell under the sway of Tortuguero and Palenque.

Conclusion

It can be concluded, that through its use, the Baakal emblem glyph originates at Palenque, and slowly through inter-polity contact, spread to Tortuguero and Comalcalco. Its history of use at Palenque confirms that the emblem glyph's main sign is indeed a toponym, something that was recognised at least until the Late Classic. Through the emblem's careful treatment by Palenque rulers, one can see that a certain identity is constructed around it. The dynasty of Palenque initially carried the Toktahn emblem while later favouring Baakal. At Tortuguero, the early history of the site is unclear, but what is known for certain is that through friendly and familial ties, its rulers adopt a new identity and become a separate part of the Baakal court. Through *Ix Yan K'oj* the Baakal emblem is brought to Tortuguero, first used either by *Ihk' Muuy Muwaan I* or his son *Bahlam Ajaw*, according to present evidence. This new state of affairs probably favoured both Palenque and Tortuguero, although after *Bahlam Ajaw's* reign the history and relationship between the two sites becomes unclear.

It can be safely assumed that *Bahlam Ajaw's* "Star War" against *Ux Bahlam* led to the eclipse of the Joy Kaan emblem, and later political subjugation of Comalcalco. Later Comalcalco rulers carry the Baakal emblem glyph, until the city's final decline. The exact circumstances of this are also unclear but two logical scenarios may offer possible answers. Either Tortuguero's dynasty relocated to Comalcalco, or Tortuguero rulers continued to rule, and exerted control over Comalcalco by forcibly introducing the new emblem and bringing a new identity for the city. The latter option seems more probable, even though both still remain speculative. Either way, the archaeological record suggests that this expansion was done under Palenque's wing. Palenque may have found it lucrative to get involved in Comalcalco's affairs, and further expand its influence in the area.

The wider implications of this emblem glyph sharing add to our current knowledge of how Classic Maya politics work. Several cases of polities using the same emblem glyph reflect antagonistic relations where royals compete for the same position and ultimately, only one prevails. The use of the Baakal emblem glyph however, reveals a different story. Its appearance at both Palenque and Tortuguero through familial relations shows that at least from the early 7th century, two rulers carried the same prestigious royal title that recognised their authority in the surrounding region. This may suggest that both cities cooperated, and their simultaneous use of the same emblem glyph reflected their political affiliations. If Tortuguero conquered Comalcalco, a scenario that is very likely, the use of Baakal by later Comalcalco lords would signify some form of dependency and political subjugation. Hints of further Tortuguero presence at Comalcalco and an

archaeological transformation of the site that mirrors Palenque architecture, indicate a political takeover by Tortuguero which was likely overseen by Palenque. This would add to our understanding of Classic Maya emblem glyphs which aside from dynastic identities, may also indicate political affiliations where some sites answered to more politically dominant cities whose rulers carried the same emblem glyph.

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