

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF YUCATÁN

Edited by

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**Archaeopress Pre-Columbian Archaeology 1**

# Archaeopress

Gordon House  
276 Banbury Road  
Oxford OX2 7ED

[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978 1 78491 008 2  
ISBN 978 1 78491 009 9 (e-Pdf)

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Printed in England by CMP (UK) Ltd  
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## Chapter 22

### The Queen of Cobá: A Reanalysis of the Macanxoc Stelae

Stanley Paul Guenter

Cobá is one of the largest sites of northern Yucatán and boasts the greatest number of stelae of any site north of Calakmul, some of the tallest pyramids in the region, as well as the most extensive causeway network (figures 22.1-22.2) known for any ancient Maya site (Benavides 1981; Folan et al. 1981; Navarrete et al. 1979; Thompson et al. 1932). The obvious importance of this site to understanding the political history of Classic period Yucatán is unfortunately offset by the truly terrible state of preservation in which most of its inscriptions were found (Graham and Von Euw 1997; Thompson et al. 1932). This situation is exemplified by Stela 3, which originally bore at least 150 hieroglyphs, not a single one of which is fully legible today (Figure 22.6). The reason for the extensive amount of erosion seen on these monuments is that the limestone of the northern Yucatán peninsula is of generally poor quality and often composed of fossilized shell that leads to pitting and uneven erosion patterns. The result is that while more than fifty carved stone monuments are known from Cobá, little historical information has yet been produced for the site.

While the prospects remain bleak for revealing a detailed dynastic history of the site, of the sort produced for so many of the major centers in the southern Maya lowlands (see Martin and Grube 2008), there are tantalizing details left in these long, eroded texts at Cobá and a few epigraphers have struggled with them to wrest what few fragments of information yet remain. Sylvanus G. Morley (1927) and J. Eric S. Thompson (1932) were the first to publish on these monuments and they concentrated their analyses on the eroded but relatively intact monuments found in the Macanxoc Group, southeast of the site center (figures 22.3-22.4). Apart from Stela 20, located in the Nohoch Mul area of the site, these Macanxoc monuments (stelae 1-8) were the only ones to preserve Long Count dates, the primary interest of these early epigraphers. While later epigraphers and iconographers would make occasional references to Cobá's monuments and inscriptions, it was not until 70 years later that the first attempt to provide a dynastic list for the site was published. This work, by Sven Gronemeyer (2004), identified three rulers of the Late Classic period, and suggested accession and death dates for one of these kings.

Gronemeyer's first king, whom he identified simply as "Ruler A", appeared on Stela 6 (Figure 22.5), which bore a dedicatory date of 9.9.10.0.0, 2 Ahau 13 Pop (March 16, 623),<sup>1</sup> as well as on Stela 4 (Figure 22.8), which, according

to Morley (1927), also bore this same date. Gronemeyer's "Ruler B" was to be found on Stela 1 (Figure 22.10), one of the most remarkable of ancient Maya monuments due to its extremely lengthy text consisting of no fewer than 313 glyph blocks, including four Initial Series dates (Thompson 1932:137). The two non-Period Ending Initial Series dates on this monument are 9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluc 17 Kayab (January 26, 653) and 9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb 10 Yax (August 25, 682). While erosion precluded any firm reading of the texts associated with these dates, Gronemeyer speculated that these may have been the accession and death dates of his Ruler B. The last ruler that Gronemeyer identified, Ruler C, appeared on Stela 20, which has a dedicatory date of 9.17.10.0.0, 12 Ahau 8 Pax (November 26, 780), the last securely dated monument at Cobá.

Recently, David Stuart (Stuart 2010) has expanded and modified Gronemeyer's king list, adding a fourth ruler and producing accession dates for three of these (Table 22.1). Stuart's first major contribution was the redating of Stela 4 and the realization that the last column of text on this monument included an accession statement and a Distance Number. In a similar composition on Cobá Stela 20, Stuart noted that the Distance Number connected the accession with the Initial Series date recorded at the beginning of the text. On Stela 4 this pattern indicated that the accession date was (9.10.7.5.9) 4 Muluc 17 Uo (April 4, 640) and the dedicatory date of the stela thus had to be 9.11.0.0.0, 12 Ahau 8 Ceh (October 9, 652). Thus, stelae 4 and 6 did not bear the same dates and must have portrayed different rulers.

Stuart's second major contribution was to recognize that the first Initial Series date on Stela 1, 9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluc 17 Kayab, was the 13<sup>th</sup> *tun* anniversary of the accession date on Stela 4. This implied that the text on Stela 1 pertained to the reign of the same ruler as had commissioned Stela 4, Ruler B. Stuart's examination of the text on the front (east) face of Stela 1 also revealed a third insight – that the last part of this text actually recorded the accession of a new ruler, Ruler C, on 9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb 10 Yax. Stuart suggested that the portrait on the front of Stela 1 was Ruler C, while the king portrayed on the rear (west) face was his Ruler B, as this face bore the Initial Series 9.12.0.0.0, 10 Ahau 8 Yaxkin (June 26, 672), a Period Ending that fell within the reign of Ruler B.

Stuart's new readings and interpretations provide a valuable opportunity to revisit the Macanxoc monuments as a whole and re-examine their role in understanding the larger picture of Cobá's ancient history. These monuments

<sup>1</sup> All western dates presented in this paper are in the Julian calendar, according to the G.M.T. (584283) correlation. Unless otherwise indicated, all dates are A.D.

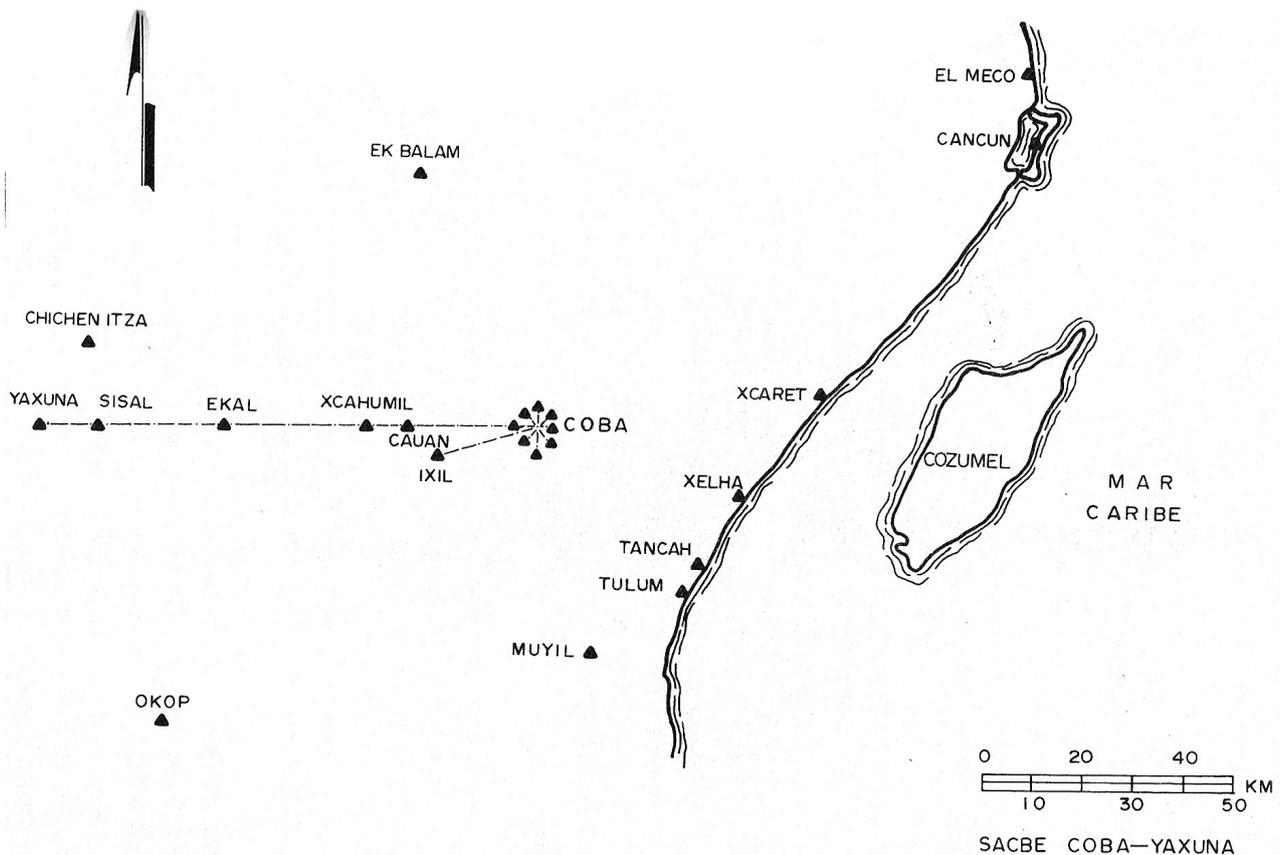


FIGURE 22.1: COBÁ AND EAST-CENTRAL QUINTANA ROO (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 53).

reveal the history of a hitherto unknown queen of the ancient Maya who was arguably one of the most powerful women in Precolumbian America. Despite the awful state of the monuments that originally told her story, much fascinating information remains, although recovering these data is a most difficult endeavor for epigraphers.<sup>2</sup>

### The Queen of Cobá

While Gronemeyer and Stuart have provided invaluable contributions to our knowledge of the ancient dynastic history of Cobá, there is one further basic fact about the Macanxoc stelae that can be stated up front – most of these monuments portray women. As first noted by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1961:97), five of the nine portraits of rulers shown on these monuments are of women;<sup>3</sup> these being the front and back of Stela 1, Stela 2, Stela 4, and the back of

Stela 5 (figures 22.7, 22.8, 22.9b, and 22.10). Their female identity can be seen in the fact that all of these figures wear ankle-length *huipils*, and this female costume is easily contrasted with the thigh-length skirts and accompanying loincloths worn by the male figures on Stela 3, the front of Stela 5, and stelae 6 and 8 (figures 22.5, 22.6, 22.9a, and 22.11). In fact, while there are more than a dozen other portraits found on the remaining stelae of Cobá, only one other is that of a female, this being Stela 30 from Group D (Figure 22.12). Most significantly, with Stuart's redating of Stela 4, all five of these Macanxoc female portraits fall within the reign of his Ruler B, strongly suggesting that we are dealing with a single historical individual, a previously unrecognized queen of Cobá.

It should be noted here that not all archaeologists are in agreement on this issue, and it has been argued that on occasion Maya kings would dress up in what is otherwise female costume. For example, Stela H of Copán was long thought to be a unique monumental portrait of a woman at that site (Maudslay 1889-1902, Vol. 5:50; Stuart and Stuart 1977:37). When this stela's hieroglyphic inscription was read, however, it was determined that the image was actually that of the site's 13th king, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil (Schele and Mathews 1998:154-158). However, the text actually does not state explicitly that the stela *portrays* this king. Rather, it merely states that the stela was the property/commission of this king: *u lakamtuun*

<sup>2</sup> Much of the following analysis, especially the chronological re-examination of Cobá Stela 1, is largely derived from a term paper I wrote for an undergraduate class in epigraphy I took from Peter Mathews in 1996 at the University of Calgary, with revisions predicated upon Stuart's 2010 paper. I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Peter for the extensive training he gave me in the intricacies of the Maya calendar, and for teaching me that with a little luck and a lot of hard work (especially considering that Peter insisted we learn how to carry out calendric calculations by hand), a date or two could be coaxed out of even badly eroded texts such as those of Cobá.

<sup>3</sup> That these images at Cobá portray women has also been recognized and commented upon by Emma Sánchez Montañis (1987), Marlene Fritztler (2005), Reese-Taylor and colleagues (2009), and Daniel Stewart (2009).

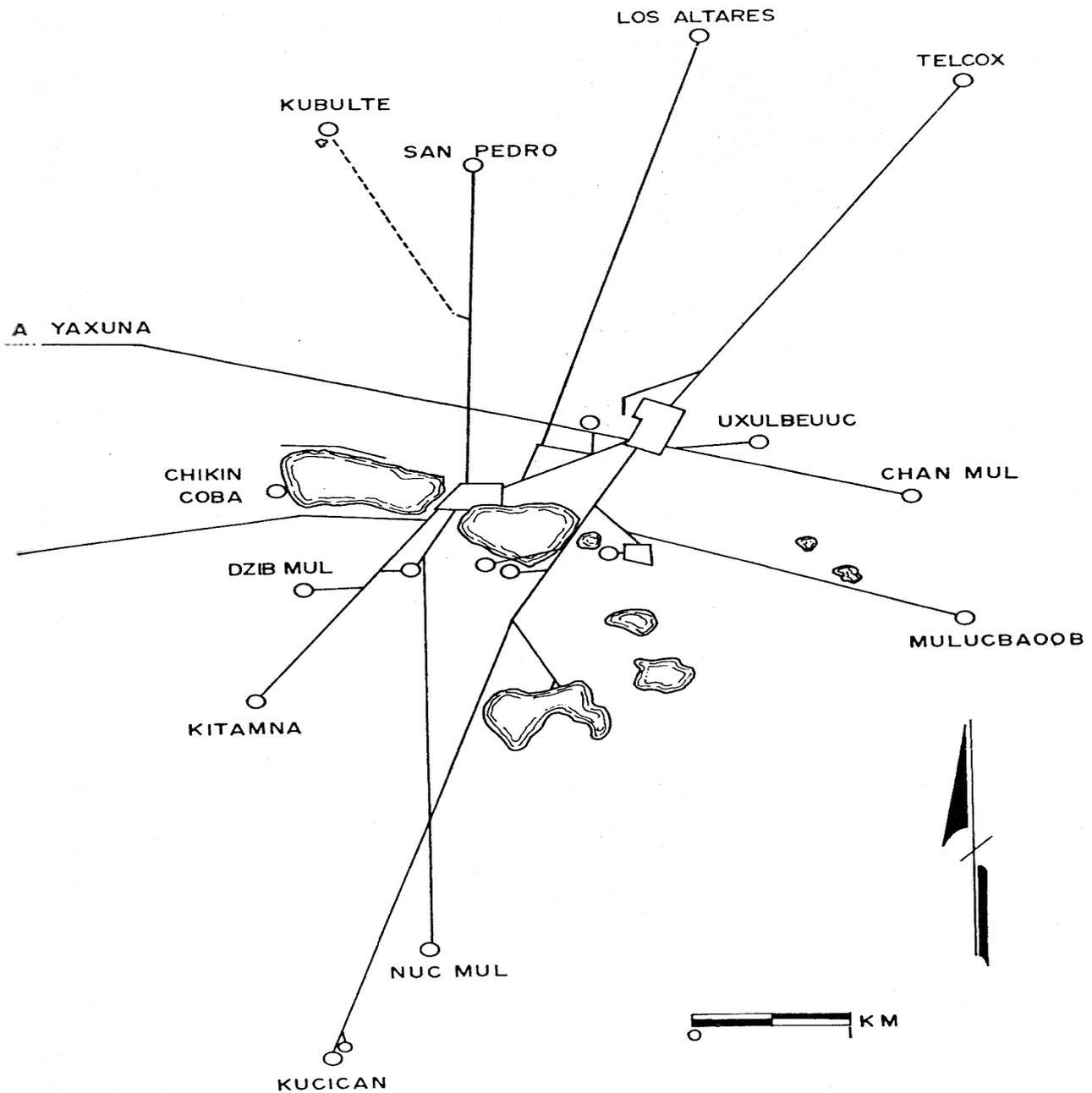


FIGURE 22.2: THE SACBÉ NETWORK OF COBÁ (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 54).

*waxaklajuun ubaah k'awiil*. The monument thus cannot be said to clearly portray this king, and, furthermore, it is but a single example, and one must always be wary of unique cases in science and logical argument. Apart from this one questionable case, then, Classic Maya portraits that depict a skirt falling below the knee depict women, while skirts that do not cover the knee exclusively identify male individuals.

It can also be noted that the specific costume seen on this Copán stela is that of the Maize Deity, consisting of a long

skirt formed of jaguar skin, overlain with a lattice-work “net” design, probably constructed of interlocking jade tubes and beads (Quenon and Le Fort 1997; Taube 1985). This costume is usually completed with an open-mouthed *xoc*-monster and/or a shell in place over the groin, symbols of fertility and (re)birth associated with the myth of the death and rebirth of the Maize Deity (Miller and Martin 2004:95-97). Male rulers would wear this costume of the Maize Deity<sup>4</sup>, but usually in a “mini-skirt” form, while the

<sup>4</sup> I use the term “Maize Deity” rather than “Maize God” as the Maize

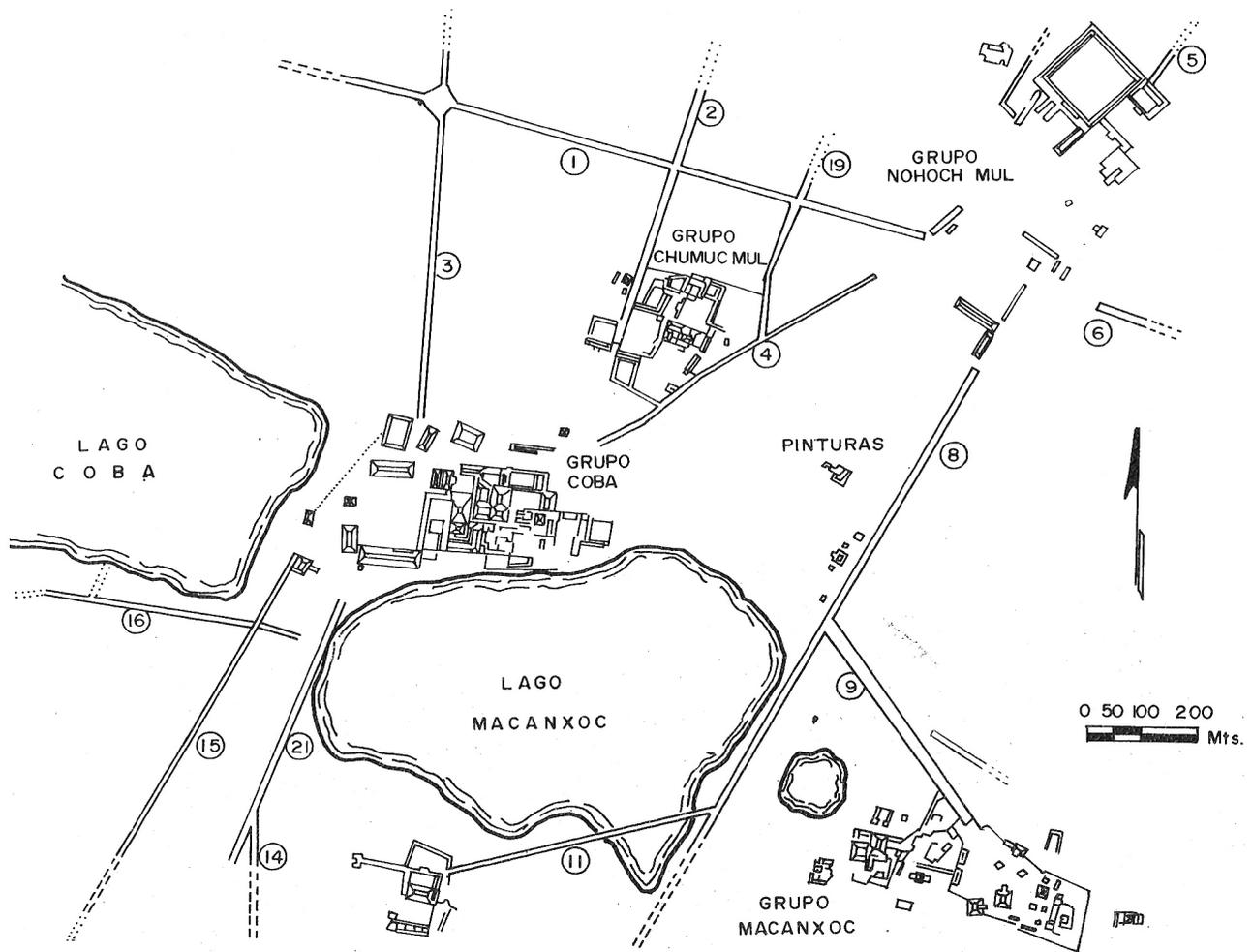


FIGURE 22.3: CENTRAL COBÁ AND ITS MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL GROUPS (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 4).

longer skirt as seen on Copán Stela H was worn by women impersonating this deity. Male rulers probably adopted this costume to symbolically appropriate the powers of reproduction and fertility inherent in both this god, as well as in female humans (Stone 1988; cf. Loper 2002), but there is no evidence that males ever wore the long dresses that were the prerogative of human females. Just as in most modern Maya cultures, the division between the genders during the Classic period appears to have been extremely rigid and this is reflected in both pre- and post-Columbian gender-specific clothing.

There are further reasons why the figures on the Macanxoc stelae cannot be male rulers dressed in the costume of the Maize Deity. First and foremost is the fact that on none of these stelae does the *huipil* appear to be the Maize Deity's latticework skirt. Only on the east face of Stela 1 (Figure

Deity appears to embody both genders. This reading, I believe, better captures the androgynous character of this deity better than "god" or "goddess."

22.10b) do we see any diamond patterns on the skirt that might suggest this latticework. However, on Cobá Stela 1 it appears only on the lower, underskirt, and the lattice may not even be formed of separate jade beads.<sup>5</sup> Given that female *huipil* decoration, as seen on the monuments of Yaxchilán,<sup>6</sup> often incorporates latticework decoration completely unrelated to the Maize Deity's bead-and-tube composition, it is probable that the skirt depicted on the Cobá stela was also designed with a diamond pattern unrelated to the Maize Deity's skirt. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that one of the most common pieces of the Maize Deity's costume, the shell or *xoc-monster* over the groin, is entirely missing from all of the Cobá figures on the Cobá stelae.

<sup>5</sup> As the crossing point of the lattice on these skirts is normally depicted with a single, circular bead, these elements are usually still clear in the carving, even given a fair amount of erosion across the entire monument. See Naranjo stelae 3, 29, and 31 for good examples of this phenomenon.

<sup>6</sup> Examples include lintels 17, 24, 26, 32, 41, and 43 at Yaxchilán.

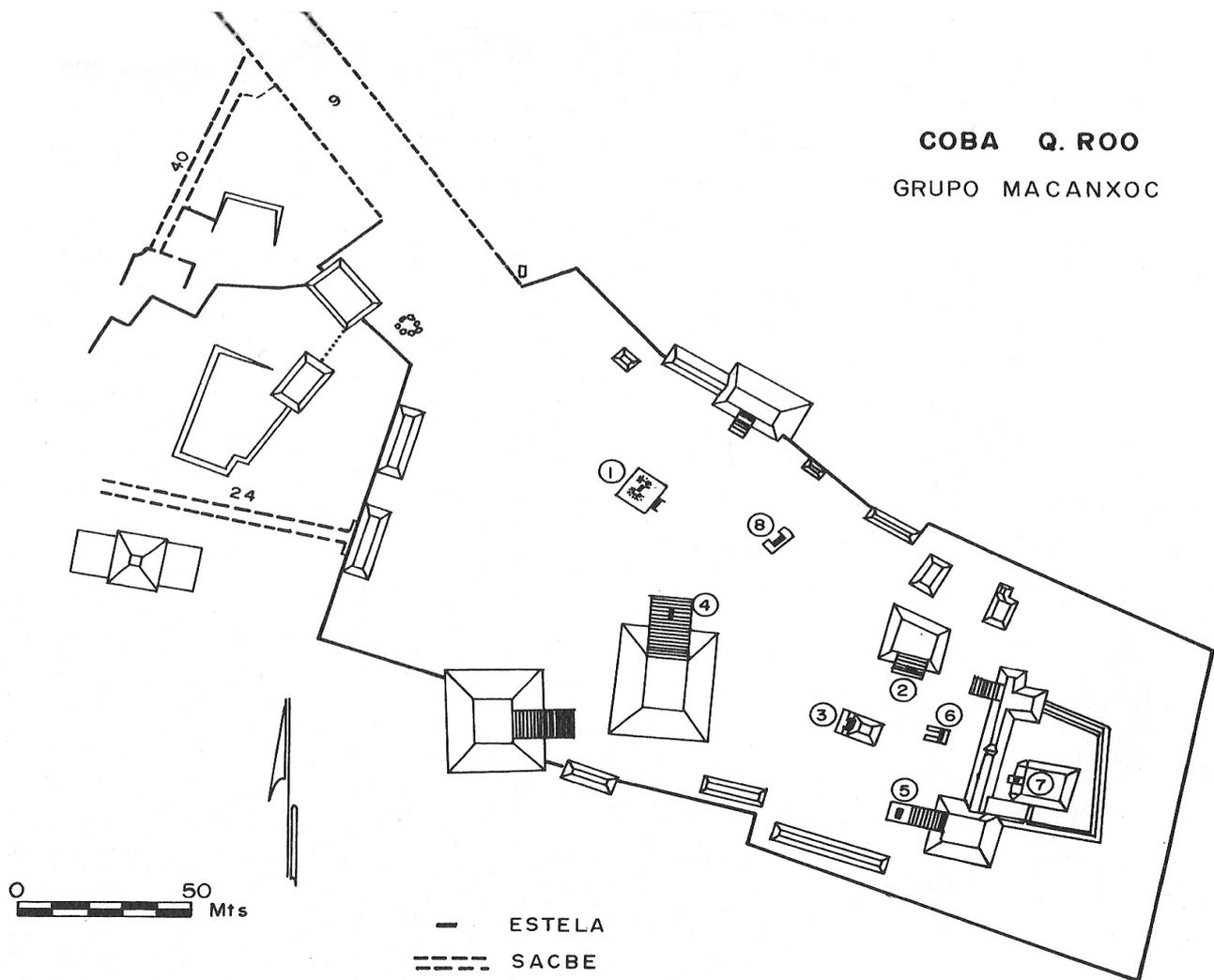


FIGURE 22.4: THE MACANXOC GROUP, SHOWING THE POSITIONS OF COBÁ STELAE 1-8 (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 38)

Further support for this interpretation comes from Stela 5 at Macanxoc. This monument is carved with a portrait of a male ruler in a short skirt on its western, or front, side (Figure 22.9a), while a female in a long *huipil* is found on the eastern face of this same monument (Figure 22.9b). This is a pattern seen on a number of Maya monuments, including stelae 9 and 88 of Calakmul, Tulum Stela 1, as well as stelae 1 and 3 of Piedras Negras. Single stelae with dual portraits – a male on one side and a female on the other – compare with an even more common pattern, that of two separate stelae, bearing the same date but with one portraying a woman and the other a man. Examples of this latter situation include Calakmul stelae 23 and 24, 28 and 29, 52 and 54, 57 and 58, and 62 and 88, as well as stelae 11 and 12, and 33 and 34 of El Perú. Joyce Marcus (1987) and Daniel Stewart (2009) have analyzed these paired stelae and noted that in most cases they seem to portray a royal couple, presumably the king and his primary wife. Given this pattern attested at other sites, it is most likely

that Cobá Stela 5 is a monument depicting a royal couple of this site.

#### The Dates of Cobá Stela 1

An investigation of the reign of this queen of Cobá necessitates a reexamination of the front side of Stela 1 (Figure 22.10b). Given the extent of erosion on this monument it is first necessary to establish the separate clauses that make up this long text. To date, attention has been paid only to the two Long Count dates that begin and end the inscription on this side of the monument. In fact, there are four other dates in this text that fall between these two Long Count dates, and as eroded as this inscription is, just enough details remain to recover at least two of these. As worked out by Thompson and Morley<sup>7</sup> three quarters

<sup>7</sup> Thompson indicates in his publication on the monuments of Cobá that “[t]he decipherments were made in about equal number by Doctor S.G. Morley and the writer” (Thompson 1932:134). I therefore credit them

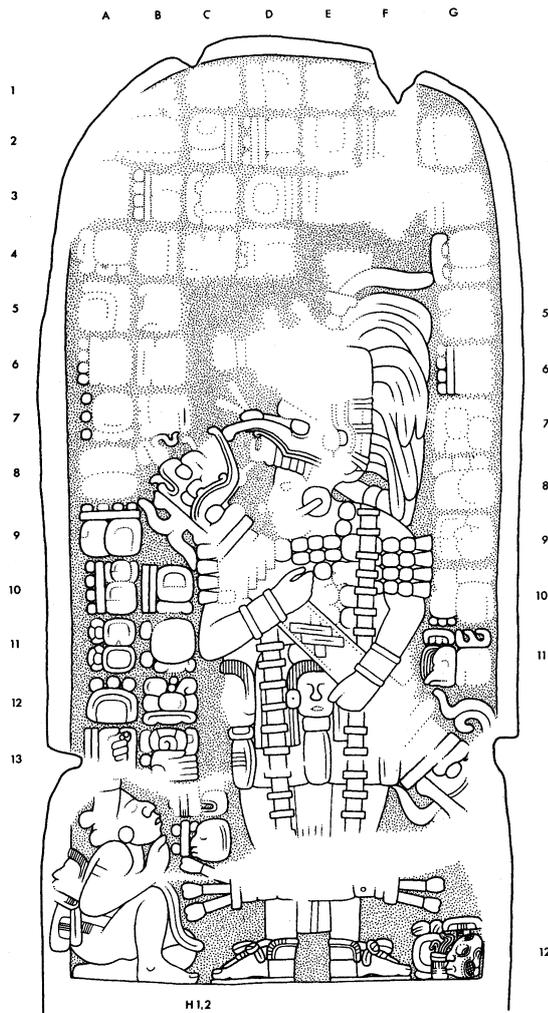


FIGURE 22.5: COBÁ STELA 6 (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:37).

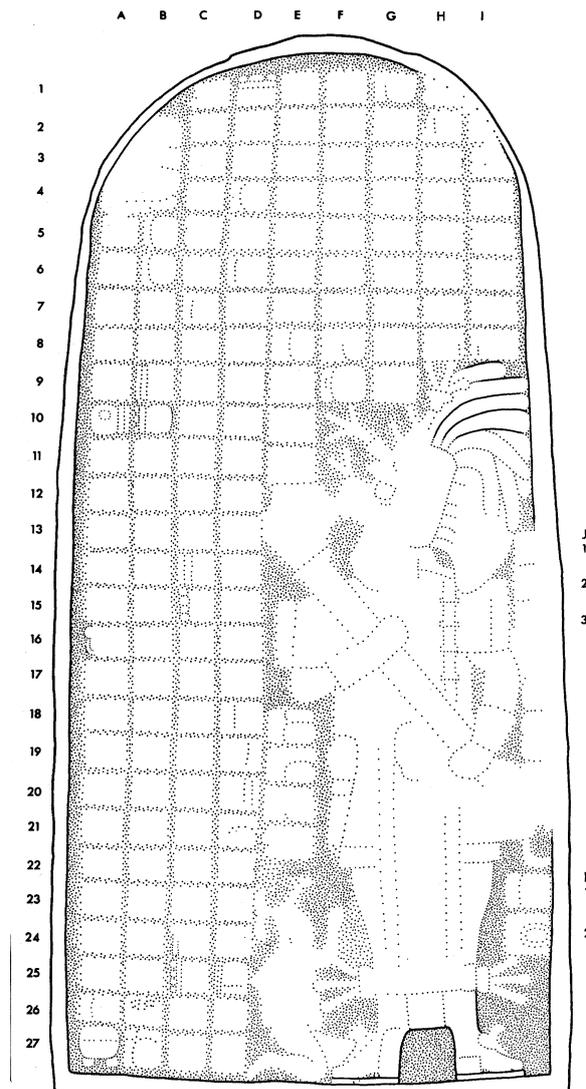


FIGURE 22.6: COBÁ STELA 3 (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:27).

of a century ago, the two Long Count dates on the front of Stela 1 are 9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluc 17 Kayab (January 26, 653) and 9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb 10 Yax (August 25, 682). Gronemeyer interpreted these dates as possibly being the accession and death dates of his Ruler B (Gronemeyer 2004:3-4). Stuart presented compelling evidence that the second Long Count date is recorded as the accession of his Ruler C and noted that the first date is the 13 *tun* anniversary of the accession date of his Ruler B, as carved upon Stela 4 (Stuart 2010).<sup>8</sup>

Most helpfully for the epigrapher, the scribes who laid out the text of Stela 1 appear to have been obsessed with the calendar and not only does the monument

bear a remarkable four Long Count dates, the Calendar Round dates in the rest of the text are all provided with G-numbers, and these provide the key to recovering two further dates. The initial Long Count date on the east side of the monument extends from glyphs A1-B9. The next date, Date #2 of this text, is in Calendar Round form and can be recognized in glyphs B16-A18 as glyphs A17-B17 are clearly Glyph G5 and Glyph F. Unfortunately, both the *tzolkin* and the *haab* glyphs of Date 2 have been completely effaced. However, they can be recovered by consideration of the next date. This appears in glyphs D4-C6.<sup>9</sup> Glyph D4 is a *tzolkin* with a coefficient of 4

equally for the readings presented in this publication.

<sup>8</sup> In my own earlier analysis of the inscription of Stela 1 I had considered the possibility that the first Long Count date was the birth date of the woman portrayed on this stela, while the latter Long Count recorded the date of her accession. Given the information presented by Stuart regarding the accession date on Stela 4 and its anniversary coinciding with the earlier Long Count date on Stela 1, my original interpretation cannot be sustained and the accession date on Stela 1 must belong to a later ruler, as first suggested by Stuart.

<sup>9</sup> As Thompson and Morley did not recognize the G-numbers in these “secondary series” dates, they noted that glyph D4 was a *tzolkin* date and thus interpreted C5 as a *haab* date, which they read as 7 Cumku (Thompson et al. 1932:138). This reading was derived not so much from surviving details but through calculation, given the preceding Distance Number (D3-C4) that they saw as leading to this date from the initial Long Count date of 9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluc 17 Kayab. They thus read this “second” date as (9.11.3.6.14) 4 Ix 7 Cumku. This reading cannot be

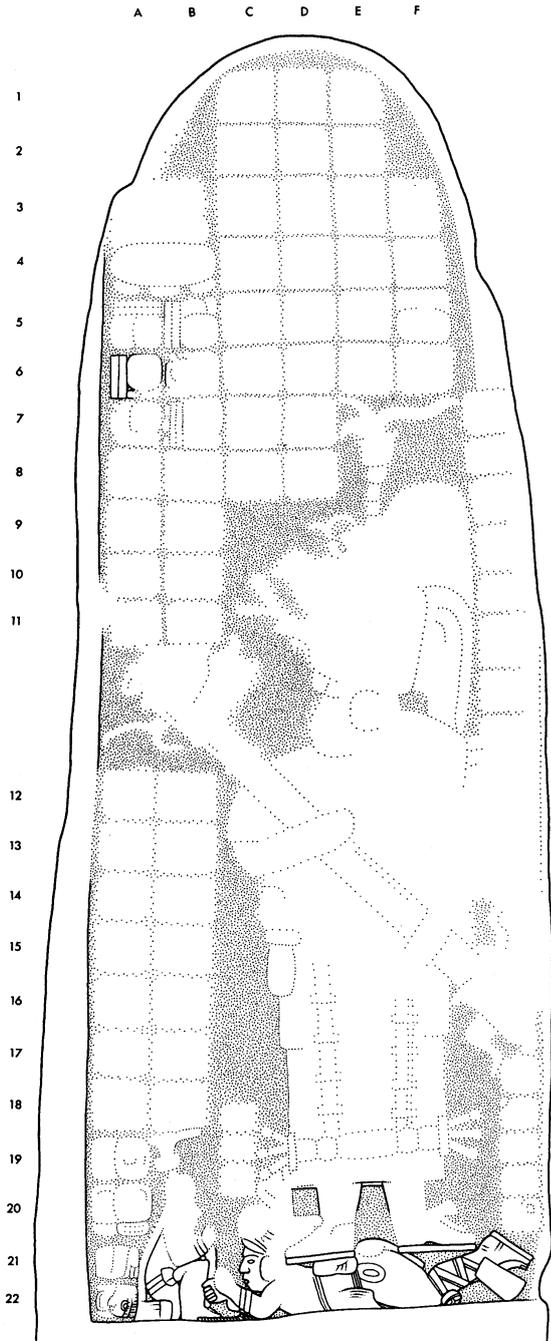


FIGURE 22.7: COBÁ STELA 2 (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:26).

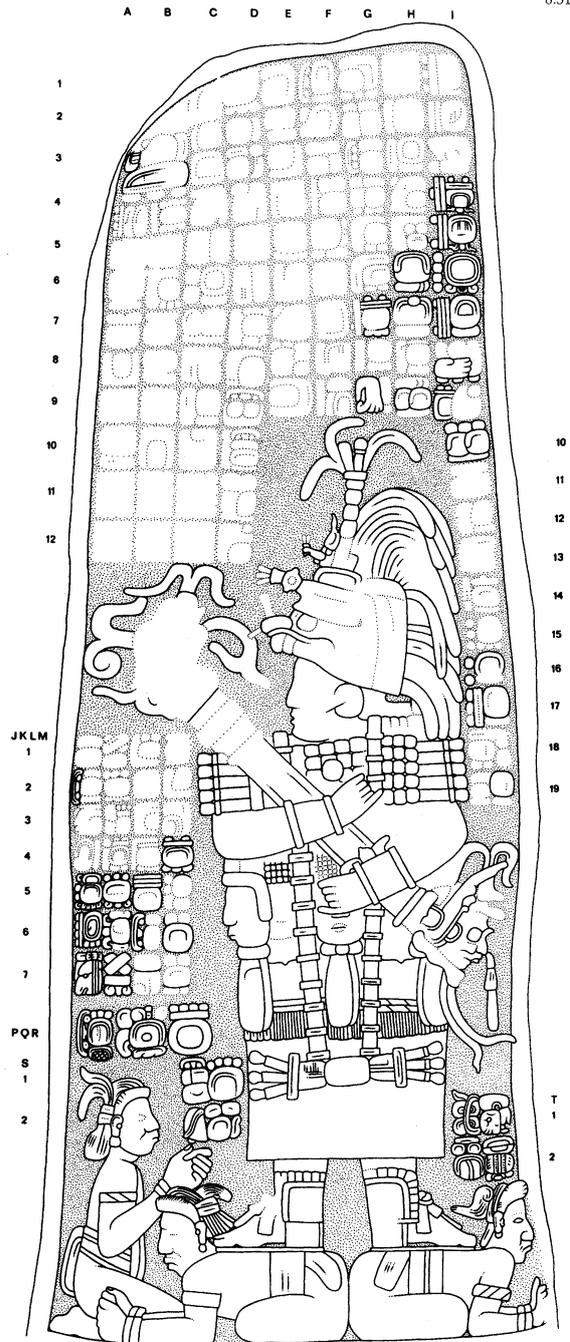


FIGURE 22.8: COBÁ STELA 4 (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:32).

but the internal details within the day sign cartouche are entirely eroded. Glyphs C5-D5 are glyphs G and F and the surviving outlines of Glyph G suggest G5. That this is indeed G5 can be confirmed by the fact that immediately before Date 3 is a Distance Number in glyphs D3-C4 that appears to be 3.2.5 and this Distance Number does connect one G5 date with another. A final observation can be made; that the *haab* date in C6 appears to have a coefficient of 3 (or, less likely, 1 or 2).

sustained, however, for obvious reasons.

These details are not enough to recover Date 3, but one final clue is available. Glyph A16, just in front of Date 2, appears to be a *tzolkin* with a coefficient of 11 (or, less likely, 12 or 13), but given G5 appearing in Glyph A17, the *tzolkin* of Date 2 must fall in the now thoroughly erased B16. A16, then, must be part of a Distance Number. Glyph A15 appears to be the Distance Number Introductory Glyph (DNIG) **u-TZ'AK-AJ**, *u tz'akaj*, and this means that the Distance Number falls in the following two glyphs. Glyph A16, then, must be either 11, 12, or 13 *tuns* in the Distance Number, with a preference for 11. Date 2 thus

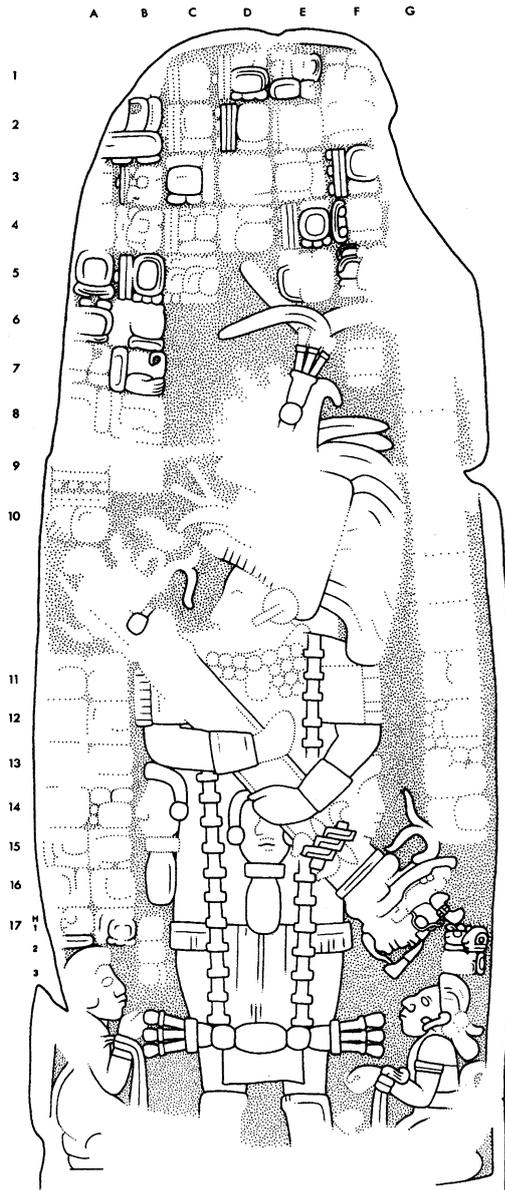


FIGURE 22.9A: COBÁ STELA 5 (FRONT) (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW AND IAN GRAHAM, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:33).

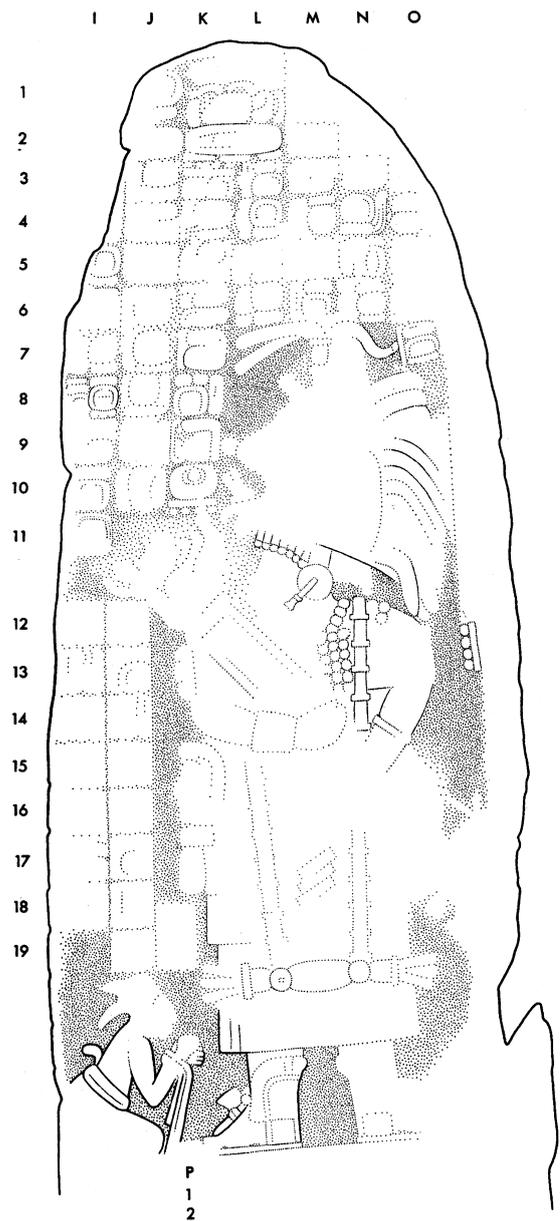


FIGURE 9B: COBÁ STELA 5 (REAR) (DRAWING BY IAN GRAHAM, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:34).

falls between 11 and 13 years after the initial Long Count date of 9.11.0.5.9 and Date 3 a mere three years after that. These surviving clues leave only one possible solution to dates 2 and 3, given the outlines of the *haab* in Date 3, and these are given in Table 22.2.

Not much can be said about these passages, for while calendric considerations have allowed the recovery of some of these dates, no such rigid formulae exist to allow us to recover the non-calendric portions of the text. These would have been historical events involving individuals who bore many names and titles, with countless different possible ways of writing each of these. Given their position immediately following *haab* positions in Calendar Round dates, glyphs D6 and F4 can be identified as verbs and, indeed, both seem to be suffixed with the T181 “moon” sign,

syllabic *-ja*, a common verbal suffix. Most importantly, in the glyphs that follow are various nominal elements, including what may be the T1002 female head that serves to introduce the names of royal women, at A13-B13 and F6, with a probable *kaloomte'* title preceding the latter in E6. In the first passage, that associated with the 9.11.0.5.9 Long Count date, we see in glyphs A13-A14, at the end of the passage and thus in the correct position for the name and/or titles of the actor, a name phrase that includes two human heads (A13-B13). Repeated human heads such as this are most common in the title strings of females and these probable female titles precede the glyph at A14, which is the head of a god prefixed by the fire sign, quite likely that of the deity K'awiil.

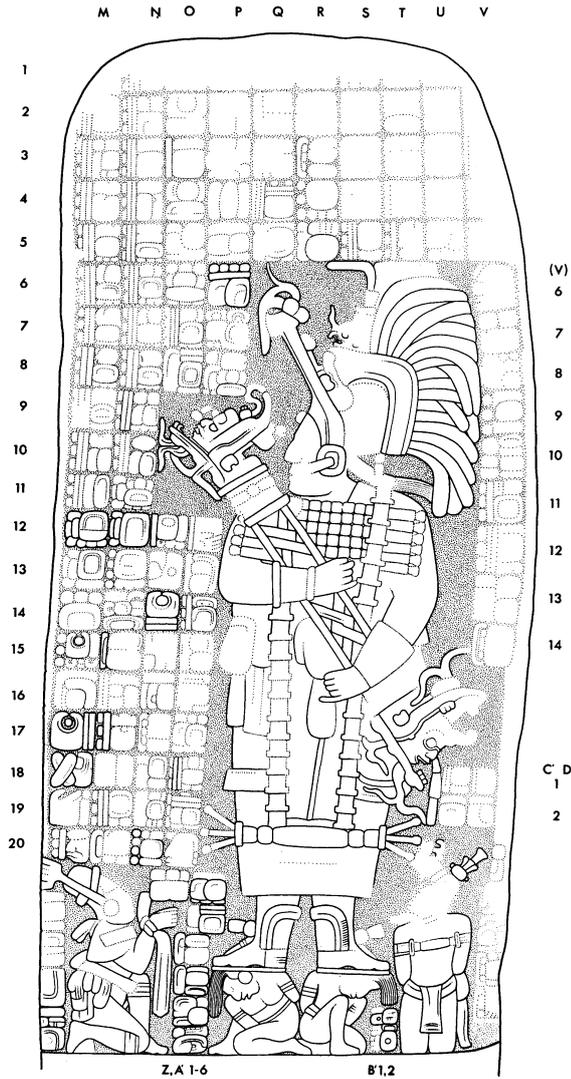


FIGURE 22.10A: COBÁ STELA 1 (WEST SIDE) (DRAWING BY IAN GRAHAM, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:22).

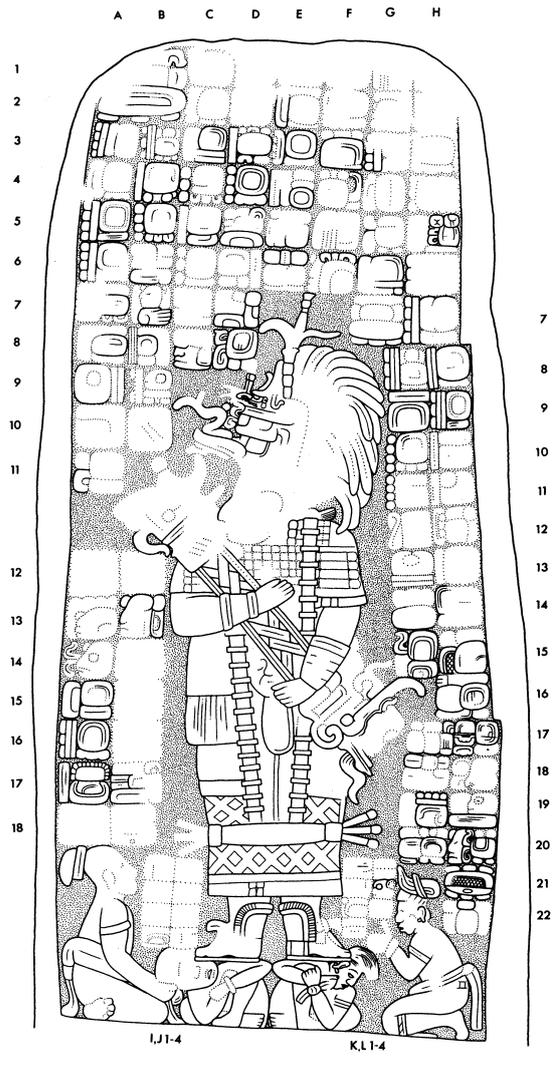


FIGURE 22.10B: COBÁ STELA 1 (EAST SIDE) (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW AND IAN GRAHAM, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:18).

Glyph H5 can also be brought into this discussion. It is all but certainly nominal since it is the last glyph in the passage associated with Date 5. While its prefix is completely eroded, the latter half of the glyph appears to be readable as K'awiil Ajaw, with a T168 **AJAW** superfix above the smoking mirror sign. Gronemeyer saw this as a probable Emblem Glyph title, possibly of an otherwise unknown site located between Cobá and Ek' Balam (Gronemeyer 2004:6), although it is just as likely to be a personal name. Possible support for this latter interpretation may be found in the fact that within the headdress of the female figure on this monument can be seen a possible smoking mirror sign, just below the *huunal* jewel. While this could be just a reference to the deity *k'awiil*, it could also be an iconographic clue to this individual's name, a pattern seen on many other Classic period monuments, such as the famous Stela 31 of Tikal. The completely eroded prefix to glyph H5 could be the "divine" prefix, *k'uhul*, but it just as easily could be the female prefix *Ix*. That the latter is

much more likely to be the case can be seen by considering what the likely event for Date 5 was. While the verb for this event, along with the date, has been destroyed in the erosion that has obliterated the details of the text in the upper section of columns G and H on this stela, the next event below is clear and has strong implications for the previous one in this text.

Stuart noted that Date 6, the 9.12.10.5.12 Long Count date listed above, corresponds to the accession date of a new ruler, whose name is partially readable as ... Chan Yopaat<sup>10</sup> (Stuart 2010:2). While the preceding Date 5 cannot be read, it must have fallen less than a year before the accession of Chan Yopaat, given that the Distance Number that follows it and leads to the final Long Count

<sup>10</sup> This is the character Stuart identifies as "Ruler C". As Stuart's "Ruler C" is not the same individual as Gronemeyer's "Ruler C", I do not wish to add to any potential confusion on this matter and so will hereafter refer to this ruler by the part of his name that we can read; Chan Yopaat.

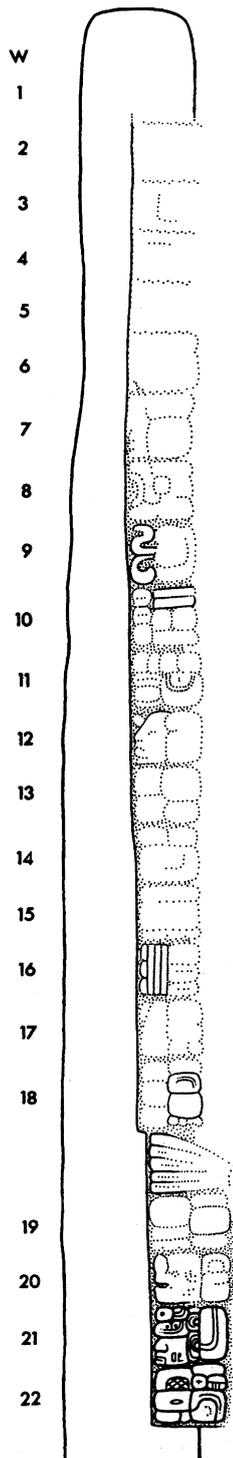


FIGURE 22.10C: COBÁ STELA 1 (NORTH SIDE) (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW AND IAN GRAHAM, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:20).

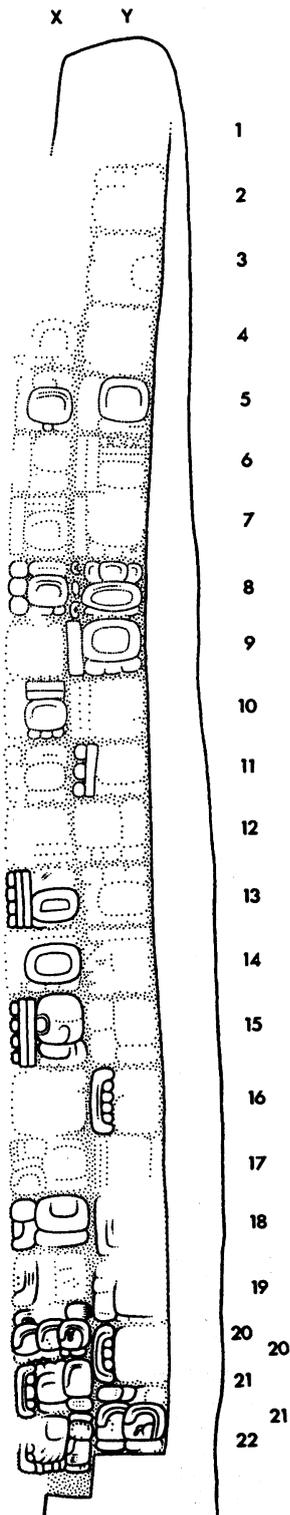


FIGURE 22.10D: COBÁ STELA 1 (SOUTH SIDE) (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW AND IAN GRAHAM, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:24).

date is only one glyph long, and thus likely consists of only *kins* and *uinals*. Glyph G6 can be recognized as a DNIG and that leaves only Glyph H6 for the Distance Number itself. Given rhetorical patterns seen on other monuments that discuss a long history of an earlier ruler's life before concluding with the accession date of a new ruler, such as Stela 8 of Dos Pilas (Mathews 2001), the event associated

with Date 5 of Cobá Stela 1 is most likely the death or burial of Chan Yopaat's predecessor. With this in mind we can return to David Stuart's interpretation of the imagery on Stela 1. Stuart suggested that the two portraits on Stela 1 belonged to his ruler's B and C, with the east side corresponding to the new king, Ruler C, while the west side, associated with a historical date of 9.12.0.0.0, 10

Ruler A:	9.9.10.0.0	Stela 6	Period ending
Ruler B:	9.10.7.5.9	Stela 4	Accession
	9.11.0.5.9	Stela 1	13 Tun anniversary
	9.12.0.0.0	Stela 1	Period ending
Ruler C:	9.12.10.5.12	Stela 1	Accession
Ruler D:	9.17.2.0.5	Stela 20	Accession
	9.17.10.0.0	Stela 20	Period ending

TABLE 22.1: HISTORICAL DATES AND DYNASTIC HISTORY AT COBÁ (AFTER STUART 2010:6).

Date 1:	A1-B9	9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluc G1 17 Kayab
	A15-A16	D.N. 11.*3.*16
Date 2:	B16-A18	(9.11.11.9.5) *10 *Chicchan G5 *18 *Cumku
	C3-C4	D.N. 3.2.5
Date 3	D4-C6	(9.11.14.11.10) 4 *Oc G5 3 *Uo
	F1-F2???	D.N. of ??? (at least a year)
Date 4	E3-F3	?????, ??? G9 10 ???
		Completely eroded D.N. at the top of columns G-H
Date 5		top of columns G-H
	G6-H6	D.N. less than a year
Date 6	G7-H13	9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb G4 10 Yax

TABLE 22.2: THE DATES FROM THE EAST SIDE OF COBÁ STELA 1.

Ahau 8 Yaxkin (June 26, 672), portrayed the earlier Ruler B (Stuart 2010:4). Given that both of these portraits depict women, and as there is no indication that Chan Yopaat was female, I would suggest that both of the images on Stela 1 are of a ruling queen of Cobá, and that Chan Yopaat is not portrayed on this monument. In fact, if Date 5 is her death, the earlier dates pertain to events that fell during her reign. Stela 1 thus appears to be a memorial stone to this queen, perhaps named Lady K'awiil Ajaw, raised posthumously by Chan Yopaat, who may well have been her son. Given the need of a moniker by which we can refer to this queen, I will refer to her hereafter as "Lady K'awiil Ajaw", with the note that this is a nickname and not necessarily the name by which she was originally known.

### Reinterpreting the Macanxoc Stelae

Given the preceding analysis of Cobá Stela 1, it is apparent that a re-examination of the remaining stelae of the Macanxoc Group is in order. Stuart's own reinterpretation of Stela 4 (Figure 22.8) provided an accession date for his Ruler B, this being 9.10.7.5.9, 4 Muluc 17 Uo (April 4, 640), as well as a revised dedication date for the monument, 9.11.0.0.0, 12 Ahau 8 Ceh (October 9, 652) (Stuart 2010:2). A reconsideration of the final Calendar Round date on the stela, at I16-I17, appears to support Stuart's reading. This eroded date preserves a coefficient of 2 for the *tzolkin* while the *haab* is a relatively clear 13. Thompson and Morley saw this as a recapitulation of the dedicatory date found in

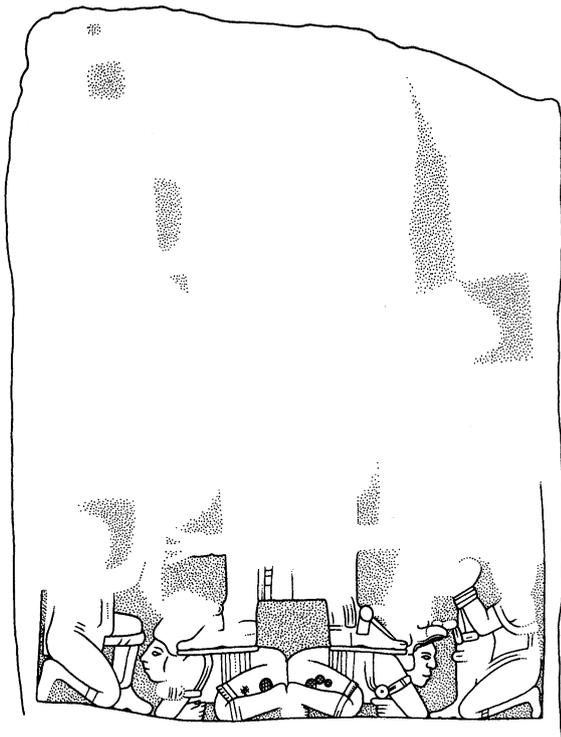


FIGURE 22.11: COBÁ STELA 8 (DRAWING BY ERIC VON EUW, FROM GRAHAM AND VON EUW 1997: 8:39).

the monument's lone Long Count date, which they read as 9.9.10.0.0, 2 Ahau 13 Pop, and this is not an unreasonable proposition (Thompson 1932:148). It is, however, totally at odds with Stuart's reading of the other dates on this monument, which is far more secure and preferable to the tentative suggestions of Thompson and Morley. In fact, an alternative reading for this final Calendar Round date on Stela 4 is possible. It is apparent that a badly eroded Distance Number appears immediately preceding these glyphs, at I14-I15, and this consists of what is probably 3 *tuns*, with 6 or 11 *uinals* likely in I14, and a *kins* coefficient of what looks like 5 or 10. Assuming that this Distance Number connects the following Calendar Round with the dedicatory date of the stela, and taking Stuart's revised dedicatory date of 9.11.0.0.0, 12 Ahau 8 Ceh as a given, what is almost certainly the correct solution is a Distance Number of 3.11.10 that leads back from the dedicatory date to (9.10.16.6.10) 2 Oc 13 Pop (March 9, 649). This solution provides yet further support for Stuart's redating of Stela 4.

What should now be apparent is that the ruler portrayed on Stela 4 is female, as she is wearing an ankle-length skirt as discussed previously. Unfortunately, the name of the ruler whose accession is recorded in Column I has been lost to erosion and all that remains is a *kaloomte'* title at I10. While the rest of the text is also terribly eroded, the outline of glyphs G4-H4 appear to again be a *kaloomte'* title followed by a glyph with the female T1002 prefix (other

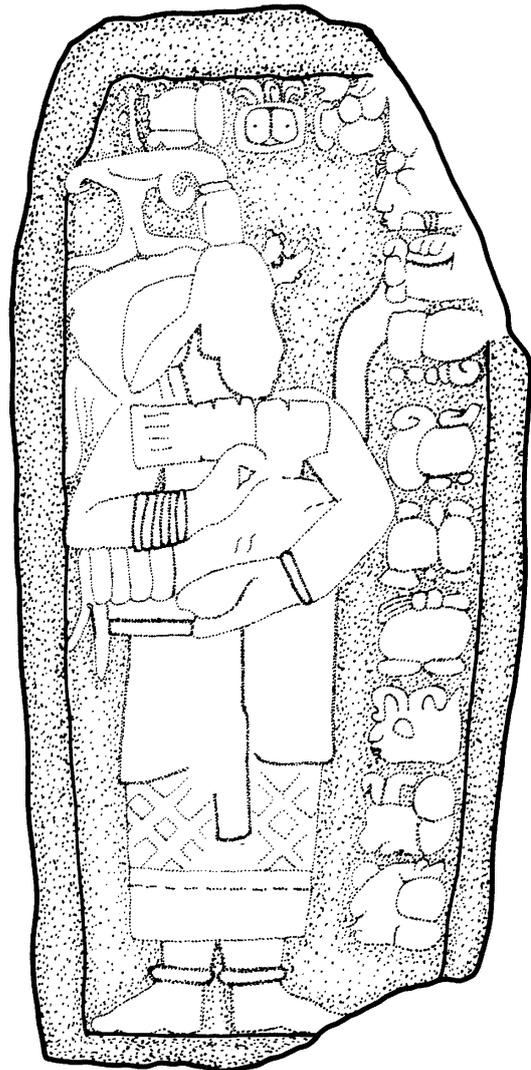


FIGURE 22.12: COBÁ STELA 30 (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 35).

possible female names appear at J3 and E7). Given that the ruler portrayed on Stela 1 is also female and also titled as a *kaloomte'*, and the fact that Stela 1's opening Long Count date is the 13 *tun* anniversary of the accession on Stela 4, it is hard to escape the conclusion that this accession in 640 is of the queen herself, Lady K'awiil Ajaw, and that she *is* Stuart's "Ruler B."

What should be the first stela of her reign is Stela 2 (Figure 22.7), bearing a partially preserved dedicatory Long Count date of 9.10.10.0.0, 13 Ahau 18 Kankin (December 1, 642), as first deciphered by Thompson and Morley (Thompson 1932:144). This stela is one of the worst eroded at the site, and while complete, essentially all but one of the non-Long Count glyphs on this stela are wholly and completely illegible. Thankfully, enough detail remains in the iconography to see that the figure of the ruler, standing atop a captive, is wearing an ankle-length skirt. As the dedicatory date of Stela 2 falls only two and a

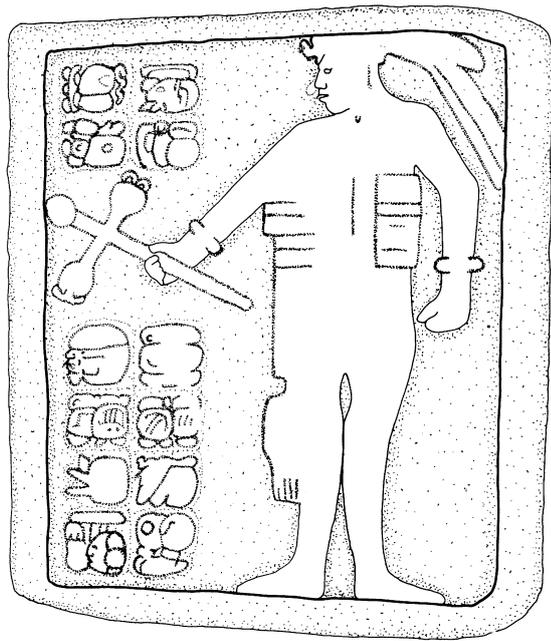


FIGURE 22.13: COBÁ PANEL 4 (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 33).

half years after the accession date recorded on Stela 4, this monument can thus be identified as the first monument of that Lady K'awiil Ajaw's reign.

Stela 2's dedicatory date provides us with the opportunity to address yet another part of the inscription on Stela 1. This monument was originally carved not only on both its front and back faces, but also on both sides (figures 22.10c-22.10d). While the north, or right, side of this stela is carved with a single row of glyphs the south, or left, side is carved with two columns. Unusually, these are read individually and not as a single double-column, as can clearly be determined by examining the bottom of the inscription, where the glyphs in the left hand column (Column X) become progressively smaller than those in the right column (Column Y) and the two texts ultimately lose symmetry in the bottom couple of rows. A number of calendric glyphs appear in Column X, but these are too eroded to read. Column X concludes with three glyphs (X20-X22) that would appear to describe a Period Ending, as they describe an event as apparently having occurred *ukabjiy kaloomte*, "under the authority of the *kaloomte*" (X20), as well as a scattering event, *u chokow ch'aj* (X22). Glyph X21 may describe the "planting" of a stela - *u tz'apaw[lakam] tuun* - but the glyphs are too damaged to be entirely certain of this reading. In any event, the scattering event is one normally associated with Period Ending events.

The name of the actor should follow and the name glyph of this person should be found in the first three badly eroded glyphs atop Column Y. Glyphs Y6-Y8 are a Distance Number that appears to be 1.5.14.10, with Y5 being the

DNIG, while Y9-Y11 should be the Calendar Round date reached by this Distance Number. The Distance Number almost certainly leads backwards from the Period Ending recorded at the bottom of Column X since the suffixation of the verb that follows the new Calendar Round date (Glyph Y12) appears to be T126/136, syllabic *ji-ya*, *-jiy*, that marks events that occurred in the past (Robertson et al. 2004; Wald 2004). In fact, the outlines of the eroded signs of this glyph look remarkably like the way the "birth" verb, **SIH-ji-ya** *sihjiy*, is spelled on the Tablet of the Cross at Palenque.

The Calendar Round date itself, Y9-Y11, is so eroded that all internal details of the signs have been lost. However, enough remains to identify a probable *tzolkin* coefficient of 5, or perhaps 10, and a *haab* coefficient of 8, or perhaps 13. Given that the Distance Number has what appears to be a 10 in the *kins* position (Y6), this would mean that the *tzolkin* day must be Oc, and the fact that the *haab* coefficient at Y11 is an apparent 8 or 13 would be entirely consistent with this proposal. The Distance Number of 1.5.14.10 would lead forward from a *tzolkin* of 5 Oc to a Period Ending date of 13 Ahau, and, perhaps not coincidentally, the first Period Ending of Lady K'awiil Ajaw's reign would have been 9.10.10.0.0, 13 Ahau 18 Kankin. Proceeding back 1.5.14.10 from this Period Ending leaves us with a date of 9.9.4.3.10, 5 Oc 13 Xul (June 25, 617), and it can be noted that the remaining details of the Calendar Round in Y9-Y11 are consistent with this interpretation. Furthermore, if this is the birth date of Lady K'awiil Ajaw (and note the apparent T1002 female-head prefix at Y14 in the correct position for being the subject of this verb), she would have been 23 years old upon her accession, 25 years old when she celebrated her first Period Ending as depicted on Stela 2, 35 years old on Stela 4, and would have died within a year of her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, if the interpretation of the penultimate date of Stela 1 as given above proves correct. This would have made her a four-*katun ajaw* and is a perfectly normal and respectable lifespan for an ancient Maya ruler. While there is thus much to recommend this interpretation, it must be admitted that the heavy erosion in this area of the text means that these readings must remain tentative and are suggestive rather than certain.

The other side text of this stela (Figure 22.10c) may also contain references to women, as the human-head prefix may be seen in glyphs W12, probably W17, and W21 as well. The latter example is followed by the smoking-mirror of K'awiil but the possible female prefix is surmounted by an unusual sign or two. If this is Lady K'awiil Ajaw, her name is followed by a clear Emblem Glyph. The Emblem Glyph consists of 3 or 4 signs, only the first of which is fully legible. This is T95, the color "black", read *ik'* in Ch'olan and *ek'* in Yukatek. Significantly, the name of a female ruler at H20 on the east side of the stela (to be discussed below) is followed by two glyphs that should provide her titles. The first of these is again the T95 black color sign, but here modified with triple ovals both above and below, almost as if conflated with the T548 **HAAB**

Monument	Ded. Date	# of Captives	Is Ruler Standing Atop Captives?
Stela 6	9.9.10.0.0	1	No
Stela 3	9.10.0.0.0 ?	1	No
Stela 2	9.10.10.0.0	2	Yes
Stela 4	9.11.0.0.0	3	Yes
Stela 5 front	9.11.10.0.0	2	No
Stela 5 back	9.11.10.0.0?	1 or 2	No
Stela 1 west	9.12.0.0.0	4	Yes
Stela 1 east	9.12.10.5.12	4	Yes
Stela 20	9.17.10.0.0	4	Yes

TABLE 22.3: THE DATED STELAE OF COBÁ IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER.

Date	Monument	Event	Person
(9.7.0.0.0) 7 Ahau (3 Kankin)	Stela 29	Period Ending?	
(9.7.5.0.0, 13 Ahau) 18 Ceh	Stela 29	Stela erected	
-----			
9.9.0.0.0, 3 Ahau 3 Zodz	Stela 6	Period Ending	Ruler A
(9.9.4.3.10) 5 Oc 13 Xul	Stela 1	birth?	Lady K'awiil Ajaw?
9.9.10.0.0, 2 Ahau 13 Pop	Stela 6	Period Ending	Ruler A
9.10.0.0.0, 1 Ahau 8 Kayab?	Stela 3	Period Ending	Ruler A?
(9.10.7.5.9) 4 Muluc 17 Uo	Stela 4	Accession	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
9.10.10.0.0, 13 Ahau 18 Kankin	Stela 2	Period Ending	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
(9.10.16.6.10) 2 Oc 13 Pop	Stela 4	???	Lady K'awiil Ajaw?
(9.10.16.17.18) 9 Edznab 1 Mac	Stela 4	???	Lady K'awiil Ajaw?
9.11.0.0.0, 12 Ahau 8 Ceh	Stela 4	Period Ending	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluc 17 Kayab	Stela 1	(13 anniv. of accession)	
9.11.10.0.0, 11 Ahau 18 Ch'en	Stela 5	Period Ending	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
(9.11.11.9.5) 10 Chicchan 18 Cumku	Stela 1	???	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
(9.11.14.11.10) 4 Oc 3 Uo	Stela 1	???	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
9.12.0.0.0, 10 Ahau 8 Yaxkin	Stela 1	Period Ending	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
(9.12.9.5.13-9.12.10.5.11)	Stela 1	Death?	Lady K'awiil Ajaw
9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb 10 Yax	Stela 1	Accession	Chan Yopaat
-----			
(9.17.2.0.5) 10 Chicchan 13 Cumku	Stela 20	Accession	Ruler D
9.17.10.0.0, 12 Ahau 8 Pax	Stela 20	Period Ending	Ruler D

TABLE 22.4: THE DATES OF COBÁ.

sign. The glyph at H22 is badly eroded, but may once have included a T168 **AJAW** superfix. Unfortunately, the erosion is too advanced to now say one way or another.

The interesting thing about this possible Emblem Glyph preceded by the color black is that the Postclassic province in which the ruin of Cobá was located was known as Ecab or Ekab to the Spanish (Roys 1957:150-151). This may well have been originally a word such as *Ek' Kab*, "Black Land", that would not be inappropriate for the region surrounding the lakes of Cobá, otherwise known for its very poor soils. However, it should be noted that the Spanish usually recorded the name of this polity as Ecab, and that the capital of this province was a town of the same name located at Cabo Catoche, in the far northeastern corner of the Yucatán peninsula (Andrews et al. 2006; Roys 1957). These factors indicate that the name of this Postclassic province likely had nothing to do with the ancient polity

of Cobá. The inscriptions of Cobá, in any situation, record the term **ko-ba-'a**, *koba'*, at least four times<sup>11</sup>, and it seems quite certain that, whatever the name of the kingdom, the city and ruins have been known as Cobá for more than fifteen centuries.

### Contextualizing Lady K'awiil Ajaw in the Cobá Dynasty

There remains but a single other stela from the reign of Lady K'awiil Ajaw to consider, and this brings us once again to the issue of "Ruler B". Stela 5 (Figure 22.9), like Stela 1, is carved on both sides and bears a partially preserved dedicatory date that can be reconstructed as 9.11.10.0.0, 11 Ahau 18 Ch'en (August 18, 662) carved upon its western,

<sup>11</sup> These four examples include three on the new hieroglyphic panel found in the ballcourt of Group D (Con Uribe et al. 2004) as well as one on a panel found in this same area of the site decades ago (Grube and Stuart 1987:10).

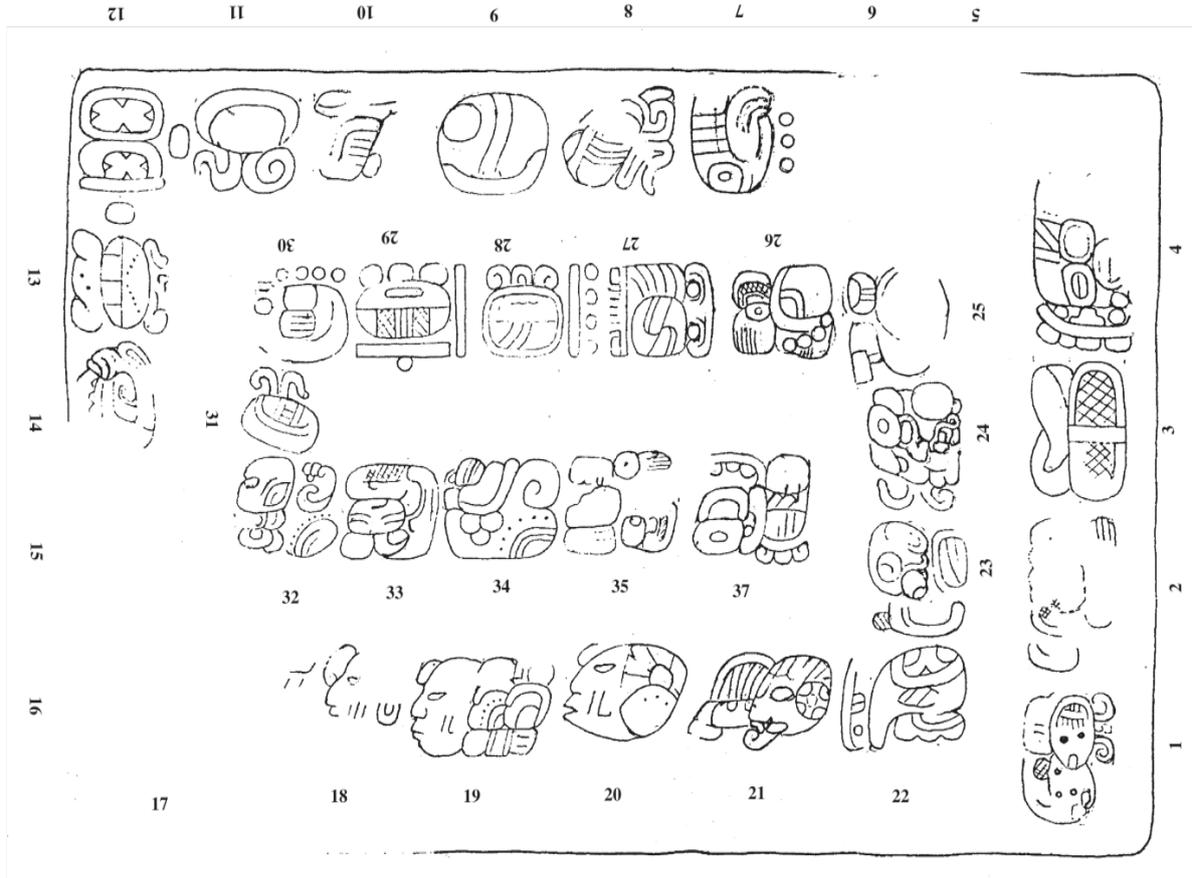


FIGURE 22.14: COBÁ PANEL 1 (DRAWING BY IAN GRAHAM, COURTESY CORPUS OF MAYA HIEROGLYPHIC INSCRIPTIONS, PEABODY MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY).

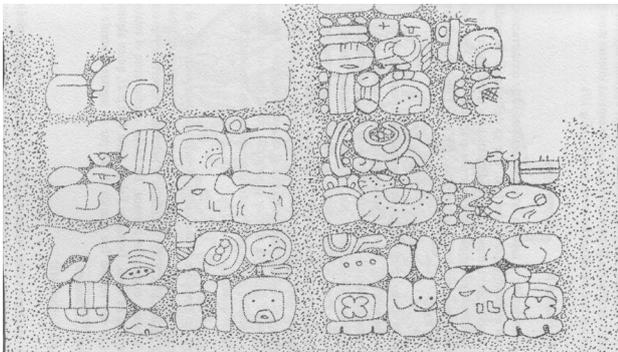


FIGURE 22.15: COBÁ STELA 29 (FROM BENAVIDES C. 1981: FIGURE 20).

or “front” side. This side of the monument bears a portrait of a male figure, while the rear bears an image of a queen.<sup>12</sup> The woman on the rear face of the stela (Figure 22.9b) is all but certainly the same ruling queen depicted on stelae 1, 3, and 4, given that the dedicatory date of the monument

<sup>12</sup> It must be pointed out that while I use front and rear here to distinguish between the two separate faces of this stela, and follow the order as given in Thompson and colleagues (1932), as well as Graham and Von Euw (1997), there is no clear reason to declare one side over the other as the “front.” As the Macanxoc monuments were clearly moved around in the Postclassic period, their original orientations are completely unknown today.

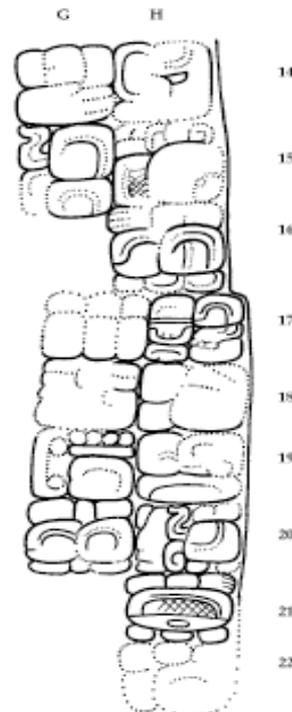


FIGURE 22.16: ACCESSION STATEMENT FROM THE EAST SIDE OF COBÁ STELA 1, INCLUDING THE REFERENCE TO CHAN YOPAAT BEING THE NINTH SUCCESSOR OF A KALOOMTE’ WHOSE NAME APPEARS IN GLYPH H20 (DRAWING BY DAVID STUART, AFTER STUART 2010: FIGURE 4).



FIGURE 22.17: A CAPTIVE ON A CARVED BONE FROM TIKAL BURIAL 116, WITH A REFERENCE TO A DEFEAT OF “HE OF COBÁ” (DRAWING BY LINDA SCHELE, AFTER SCHELE AND FREIDEL 1990: FIGURE 5:27).

falls during her reign, although it must be admitted that erosion prevents the recovery of any epigraphic clues to this identity. Two Long Count dates are found on this face of the monument, but both are unfortunately too eroded to decipher, although the second is clearly a historical date and may well be a recapitulation of the 9.11.10.0.0, 11 Ahau 18 Ch'en date seen on the other side.

The front of Stela 5 (Figure 22.9a) most likely portrays the husband of Lady K'awiil Ajaw. While he has been identified in earlier studies as “Ruler B”, it must be noted that this is the only known image of a male ruler from the reign of Lady K'awiil Ajaw. Unless we wish to consider the unlikely scenario that, while so many monuments of this queen have survived, nearly all of her husband's monuments have been destroyed, it must be admitted that the evidence is far greater that the real power during the reign of this queen was Lady K'awiil Ajaw herself, and not her husband. Not only do we have five portraits of this

queen compared to only one of this man, but the accession recorded on Stela 4 and whose 13<sup>th</sup> *tun* anniversary is commemorated on Stela 1 is quite clearly hers.

This situation is reminiscent of that seen during the joint rule of Kaloomte' Bahlam and the Lady of Tikal, where these two sixth-century monarchs appear to have reigned jointly but it was the woman who provided the genetic relationship with the earlier dynasts of the site (Martin 1999; Martin and Grube 2008:38-39). Lady K'awiil Ajaw, however, appears to have been a far more prominent ruler in her own right than the Lady of Tikal. In fact, while Martin and Grube (2008:74) have stated that portraits of female rulers standing atop captives are restricted to Calakmul and Naranjo, this queen of Cobá is easily the champion amongst all known ancient Maya queens for the number of captives she is shown presiding over, or treading upon; no fewer than 14 are shown on Cobá monuments groveling either at, or under, her feet, more captives than are known for almost any ancient Maya king, in fact. Her exalted status is also indicated by the fact that, extraordinarily for a woman, her portraits regularly show her wearing a belt with triplicate jade masks and associated dangling celts, costume elements that otherwise are found only on male portraits.

How did Lady K'awiil Ajaw come to be such a powerful figure? Unfortunately, this is not clear and whatever record there once was that connected her to her predecessors is now too eroded to read. Nevertheless, some observations can be made. The earliest securely dated stela at Cobá (apart from the recently discovered D Group ballcourt monuments) is Stela 6 (Figure 22.5), which bears two Long Count dates of 9.9.0.0.0, 3 Ahau 3 Zodz (May 7, 613), and 9.9.10.0.0, 2 Ahau 13 Pop (March 16, 623) and portrays a male ruler. Sadly, this king's name has been lost in the now eroded upper section of the monument, but what is likely his *kaloonte'* title can be seen in Glyph G8. As Gronemeyer (2004:2) first pointed out, Glyph G11a is the collocation *u mam*, “the grandson/grandfather of” and would appear to indicate that the figure on Stela 6, Gronemeyer's Ruler A, was the grandson of the person whose name falls in Glyph G12. This name consists of three signs. The prefix is a flaming torch, the second glyph (the superfix) is T48 NAAH, “house”, and the main sign is an anthropomorphic head with apparent *cauac* markings. As this name cannot be read phonetically, he is hereafter referred to by the nickname of “Torch House”. This same name appears on Panel 4<sup>13</sup> from the Group D ballcourt (Figure 22.13) and likely identifies an earlier ruler of Cobá, although no Emblem Glyph follows his name. However, the first part of Glyph G12 on Stela 6 may be a partially hidden *kaloonte'* title, which would identify him as a supreme ruler. On Panel 4 this name is certainly preceded by the *kaloonte'* title (at B4), and so his identification as an earlier ruler of Cobá seems to be corroborated. If he was

<sup>13</sup> This monument is designated Stela 29 in Navarette and colleagues 1979.

the literal grandfather of Ruler A, Torch House likely ruled in the mid- to late-sixth.

If the proposed birth date for Lady K'awiil Ajaw as given above is at all correct, she would have been just over five years of age when Stela 6 was dedicated. It would seem, then, that the male figure portrayed on this stela, Ruler A, could quite possibly have been her father. It must be admitted, though, that there are no legible inscriptions that elucidate their relationship and it is also possible that Ruler A may have merely been an unrelated predecessor. However, if this later queen were not the daughter of a previous ruler her ascent to the throne as the *kaloomte'* of Cobá at such a young age seems rather inexplicable.<sup>14</sup> Thus, if Ruler A was not the father of Lady K'awiil Ajaw, he was almost certainly related to this future queen, either as a grandfather or an uncle.

Stela 3 may be another monument from the reign of Ruler A (Figure 22.6). This monument is appallingly eroded, and as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the text is essentially completely illegible. What few traces of carving that survive suggest a *haab* coefficient of 8 for the initial Long Count date (Glyph B10) and Thompson and Morley used this, along with the apparent early style of the carving, to suggest a dedicatory date of 9.10.0.0, 1 Ahau 8 Kayab (January 22, 633) (Thompson 1932:145). It is worth examining here the main “style” element that Thompson and Morley considered in this dating issue, that of the “subsidiary figures”, what today we would call “captives.”<sup>15</sup> Arranging the dated stelae of Cobá from earliest to the latest (Table 22.3, and note that figures 22.5-22.11 present the Macanxoc stelae in chronological order, see also Table 22.4) and considering how many captives are shown on each image, and whether these captives are shown kneeling in front of the ruler, or are underfoot, we can see that apart from the slightly aberrant Stela 5 there is a very clear progression in terms of the depiction of captives. The earliest stelae show only a single captive kneeling in front of the king. The number of captives then increases, and, starting with Stela 2 – incidentally the first from the reign of the queen – we see rulers standing atop the captives.

It can thus be noted that Stela 3 fits perfectly with the dedicatory date suggested by Thompson and Morley. Not only is there but a single captive shown on this stela, but this captive is kneeling in front of the king and not being stepped upon as on later monuments. Furthermore, it can be observed that with Stela 3 in place at 9.10.0.0 the stelae of Macanxoc account for every *katun* and half-*katun*-ending between 9.9.0.0 and 9.12.0.0, with the “missing” half-*katun* ending of 9.12.10.0 being accounted for by the

9.12.10.5.12 accession and dedicatory date of Stela 1.<sup>16</sup> While the date of Stela 3 must remain tentative due to the extreme amount of erosion on this monument, there is thus still much to recommend the original date suggested by Thompson and Morley.

This leaves only two other stelae in the Macanxoc group. Of these, the surface of Stela 7 has so badly crumbled that no trace of carving on it can now be discerned, and it may have originally been a plain monument (Graham and Von Euw 1997; Thompson 1932:152-153), although it should be noted that there are no other plain stelae in the Macanxoc group and little evidence for certainly plain stelae in the site as a whole. Stela 8 consists of only the heavily eroded lower half of the original monument, and the erosion is so extreme on this remaining section of the stela that not even a single glyph can be recognized in the carving that survives (Figure 22.11). Nevertheless, as the ruler is shown standing atop two captives, with two others kneeling on either side of them, it is likely that this monument is among the later stelae of the Macanxoc group (Thompson 1932:153-154), and may well pertain to the reign of Chan Yopaat or a later ruler.

Apart from the undatable stelae 7 and 8, then, all of the carved stone monuments of the Macanxoc group appear to cluster within a sixty-year period of the seventh century and represent the work of only three or four rulers. All of these stelae appear to have been reset in the Postclassic period (Pollock 1932:88-96; Thompson 1932:133-134), but it seems doubtful that the Postclassic Maya would have hauled so many monuments such a great distance (1½ km) from the main Cobá group (Group B) and still have the assemblage form such a cohesive whole, in terms of their dates and depicted rulers. The most probable situation is that these monuments had originally been erected in the Classic period in the vicinity of or within the Macanxoc group and that the Postclassic Maya only moved them a short distance to their final resting places. This, in turn, would suggest that the Macanxoc group was a major ritual center at Cobá during the reigns of Ruler A, Lady K'awiil Ajaw, and Chan Yopaat. To date, however, little archaeological work other than consolidation has been carried out on the structures and platforms of the Macanxoc group (Folan 1983:80) so this hypothesis has yet to be tested.

### An Earlier Queen of Cobá

Lady K'awiil Ajaw, it has been argued, was one of the most important rulers of ancient Cobá. She does not, however, appear to have been the first female ruler at the site. Panel 1 of Cobá (Figure 22.14) was discovered in 1974, apparently reset in the south side of Structure X

<sup>14</sup> Even if the proposed birth date of Lady K'awiil Ajaw presented above is not accepted, she must still have come to the throne at a relatively young age given that her reign lasted for 41 years.

<sup>15</sup> While Thompson normally refers to these figures with the noncommittal term “subsidiary figures” he did recognize the ropes binding their arms and on occasion referred to them as “captives”, demonstrating that he and his coauthors recognized the status of these figures already in the 1930s.

<sup>16</sup> If this queen had died just before the Period Ending, it may well have been that no monument was commissioned on this date due to the impending funeral rites for the deceased sovereign, as well as the forthcoming accession rituals for the incoming king. The carving of the east side of Stela 1, being apparently commissioned right after the accession of the new king, Chan Yopaat, would function as the monument commemorating this half-*katun* Period Ending.

of the Nohoch Mul group (Mayer 1987:101). It has been described as a “sarcophagus lid, a cornice stone, or a wall tablet” (Mayer 1987:101). That it was originally a lintel seems improbable as the hieroglyphic text is found incised around the very edges of the face of the stone, and these glyphs would have necessarily been covered by the wall if it had been set above a doorway. That it was ever used as a sarcophagus lid also seems unlikely, as that interpretation was based upon an early attempt at reading the text, which erroneously saw the text as referring to someone’s death. In fact, the panel’s dimensions (142 x 97 x 15 cms) would have been too small for a sarcophagus of anyone other than a child. An updated reading of the text suggests it may have been used either as an altar or a stand for an idol, as discussed below.

Most curiously, the incised text on this panel consists of a single row of glyphs read in a counter-clockwise spiral around the edge of the panel before the inscription turns in on itself and terminates in the center of the monument. George and Gene Stuart (1977:195) provided a preliminary translation of the text: “Death ... Smoking Mirror ... [who was the child of] Lady MaCuc [and] the child of Lord ... of Cobá ...” In the thirty years since this initial attempt many additional decipherments allow us to update the translation and interpretation of the text. The inscription begins (with the glyph in the lower right of Figure 22.14) with a lunar series, indicating that the full Long Count begins elsewhere (perhaps on the side of the panel), and sadly not enough of this is preserved to recover the date. The verb appears to occur in Glyph 7, which is not well preserved but may have a prefix of 3 or 4 in front of a scattering hand. Glyph 8 is the “smoking mirror” glyph referred to by the Stuarts but I see this as not a reference to a lord named K’awiil, but more likely to an idol, as *k’awiil* seems to have designated such sacred objects (Freidel et al. 1993:193-207). Glyphs 9-12 then appear to state that this *k’awiil* was *u k’awiil aj elk’in*, “the *k’awiil* of He of the East.” This man from the east is named in Glyph 13 and his name appears remarkably similar to that of Til Man K’inic of Altun Ha, whose accession is recorded on a jade pendant found in Tomb B-4/6 at Altun Ha with a Calendar Round date that best correlates with A.D. 584 (Pendergast 1982:85). The name on Cobá Panel 1 does not include *k’inich*, unless this was inserted into the center of the upper **TIL** glyph. In any event, there is no evidence that this *Til* Man refers to the same historical individual as the king of Altun Ha, although they would have been (near) contemporaries and we cannot dismiss the possibility that this is a reference to the Altun Ha lord.

Glyphs 14 and 15 then record the phrase *u tuun*, probably declaring that this panel, referred to simply as a “stone”, was possessed by someone whose name follows. Glyphs 16 and 17 are lost, but quite possibly stated what the stone was used for. The owner of the stone is named in glyphs 18 through 21. The T1002 female prefix **IX/IXIK** can be seen in three of these glyphs, and as already recognized by the Stuarts, this is a woman’s name. The name they provided is probably just a misspelling of an old reading

for the *kaloonte*’ title, “*macuch*”, as Glyph 19 is clearly *Ix Kaloonte*’, the same title carried by Lady K’awiil Ajaw, but here explicitly in its female version. However, this female ruler on Panel 1 is not named K’awiil Ajaw. Glyph 20 is again the T1002 female head, possibly modified by the infixing of other signs at the back of the head, but this area of the glyph is too eroded to fully read. Glyph 21 is composed of three signs, the T679 syllable ‘**i**, and T757 syllabic **ba** or logographic **BAAH**, plus a nearly illegible sign beneath these previous two. If this is indeed part of this woman’s name<sup>17</sup> it must have originally read something like *Iba...*, and it can be noted that *ibaach* is a known term for armadillo. That said, it must be admitted, that whatever sign is found as a subfix in Glyph 21 does not resemble any known **-cha** allographs.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever her name, this was certainly not Lady K’awiil Ajaw. Antonio Benavides (1981:55) has suggested a date of ca. A.D. 600 for this text, which would be at least half a century before the reign of Lady K’awiil Ajaw. Benavides’ stylistic dating of this text is supported by the fact that there are a couple of other incised inscriptions at Cobá, and all appear to date to the late sixth or early seventh centuries. These monuments include stelae 10 and 13, whose texts are far too eroded now to read. However, the individuals on these monuments are shown in profile, in relatively stiff positions with the legs being placed in line so that the back leg is almost entirely hidden behind the one in the front. Comparable monuments can be found in southern lowland sites, such as Naranjo stelae 16, 17, 25, 27 and 38, Arroyo de Piedra stelae 1 and 6, Aguateca Stela 16, and Stela 6 of Uaxactún. These monuments all date to the late sixth or very early seventh centuries, suggesting that Cobá stelae 10 and 13 also date to this general time period.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Glyph 22 reads *u ch’abyak’ab* and this collocation, referring to creation, is often preceded by the term *u baah*. There remains the possibility, then, that Glyph 21 is not part of this woman’s name but rather a poorly spelled part of the subsequent passage. In this case, Glyph 21 would constitute the entirety of this woman’s personal name and it can be noted that this name, while too eroded to read, is definitely not Lady K’awiil Ajaw.

<sup>18</sup> The rest of this inscription on Panel 1 becomes much less intelligible. Glyphs 22-23 can be read as *u ch’ab y’ak’ab u k’uhuul*, or “the creation, the darkness of the gods” and the two patron gods of Cobá are named in Glyph 24. These are two fire gods, and their faces can be seen on most of the Macanxoc stelae peaking out of the open maws of the vision serpent bars being held by the rulers. Glyph 25 appears to be an Emblem Glyph but the main sign is completely effaced. Glyph 27 is the DNIG, which reads *u tz’akaj*, but the next two glyphs, numbers 28 and 29, are not arranged in normal fashion for a Distance Number. Glyph 28 appears to be a *tzolk’in*, possibly Eb, with a coefficient of 9, while Glyph 29 is a curious DN formed of the *haab* main sign prefixed by the numeral 5 and superfixed by the number 6. Given the incomplete nature of the Long Count at the beginning of this text, as well as the non-standard form of this DN, this new date cannot yet be deciphered. K’awiil appears again at Glyph 31, while Glyph 33 appears to be the dedicatory flat-hand verb. Glyph 34 seems to read K’awiil Witz, “K’awiil Mountain”, but the following glyphs are badly weathered and the text as a whole cannot be read.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that Stela 30 of Tikal, dating to 692, also depicts the ruler in profile, with one leg hidden behind the other. However, this monument does not bear an inscription and the associated altar, Altar 14, bears a text that is not incised. Cobá stelae 10 and 13 are much closer to the monuments dating to the reign of Aj Wosaaj Chan K’inic of Naranjo than they are to Stela 30 of Tikal.

Another Cobá monument in this general style is Stela 25. E. Wyllys Andrews IV (1938:38) first published this monument and suggested that its weathered inscription was the Calendar Round date 5 Ahau 3 Mac, which corresponds to the Long Count 9.14.10.0.0. However, the style of this monument, with the ruler shown in profile with overlapping legs and but a single captive, suggests an earlier date. In fact, the type of *k'awiil* scepter that the ruler holds in front of him reminds one of images on a couple of looted plates that name K'inich Waaw (a.k.a. "Animal Skull") of Tikal<sup>20</sup> as well as in the murals painted inside the tomb of Temple XX at Palenque (Robertson 2000). Unfortunately, the published photographs of the inscription of Stela 25 are rather grainy and the details of the eroded glyphs are not easily discerned. The three glyphs are all but certainly a Calendar Round date with the second glyph being the G-number. The coefficient of the *haab* appears to be 3 and this would be consistent with the interpretation that this date was a Period Ending. Interestingly, all four *katun* endings between 554 and 613 had *haab* coefficients of 3 and any of these dates would fit the style of Stela 25. Access to the original monument, or better photographs, may well solve the date of this monument.

A queen from this general period of Cobá's history appears on Stela 30 (Figure 22.12). Associated with the panels from the Group D ballcourt, this monument corresponds stylistically to Panel D, with which it may have been originally associated. Panel D, it will be remembered, bears the name of Torch House, apparently an early *kaloonte'* of Cobá who probably ruled in the mid- to late-sixth century. Two of the glyphs on this monument, D2 and D10 appear to include the T1002 female prefix, confirming that this individual in a long skirt is indeed a female. Glyph D6 is the *kaloonte'* title but it is not certain whether this is part of her titles or whether a relationship glyph is meant to refer to her as having been associated with some other person bearing that title.

A final monument from this period that can be examined in relation to earlier queens of Cobá is Stela 29 (Figure 22.15). Its base was found reset within a shrine at the foot of Structure D-33, the Late Postclassic Las Pinturas temple (Benavides 1981:58, Figure 20). As Benavides has already noted, the glyphs carved on the back side of the stela include a number of references to women, including Glyphs pA4, pB6, and pD8. The first example is too eroded to confirm its identity as T1002, but the second definitely is (note the **IL** mark on the cheek), and is preceded by the *kaloonte'* title. The last example includes an unclear superfix and the T545 **CH'EEN** glyph. The text provides elements of two dates, including at pB8 the term *ti wuk ajaw*, "on 7 Ahau", which suggests a Period Ending. At pC3-pD4 is a statement that 13 *tuns* after an accession to *ajaw*, on a date that includes a *haab* of 18 Ceh, a monument was erected (*u tz'ap[aw]*), possibly a reference to Stela 29 itself. These two elements suggest the dates 9.7.0.0.0, 7 Ahau 3

Kankin (December 3, 573) and 9.7.5.0.0, 13 Ahau 18 Ceh (November 7, 578) and suggest that a Cobá ruler acceded within a year of 566. This may well have been the female *kaloonte'* mentioned earlier on this monument, although without a certain reference to her accession it may be that she was only accorded this title by virtue of her husband, the actual ruler of Cobá. Unfortunately, the name of this female *kaloonte'* at pB6 is not clear and neither can we be certain of who the Lady Ch'een mentioned at the end of the text was. There is every reason to believe more of this text will be able to be deciphered, when better photographs and drawings of the monument are produced.

There thus exist a number of monuments at Cobá that date to the late sixth century,<sup>21</sup> indicating that this was a period of considerable prosperity and cultural vitality at the site, and one in which at least one female *kaloonte'* ruled, either in her own right or as a powerful and prominent wife of a male *kaloonte'*. This is also the probable time period of Torch House, the "grandfather" of Ruler A named on Stela 6 and Panel D, but there is no information on how any of these individuals might have been related to one another. Nevertheless, enough evidence exists to state that Lady K'awiil Ajaw was not the first female *kaloonte'* of Cobá, even though she is the only one whose accession date has been recovered. Women appear to have had a prominence within the royal society of Cobá rarely seen in the better-known Maya kingdoms to the south.

<sup>21</sup> A final monument that can be mentioned with this earlier time period is the new hieroglyphic panel found in the Group D ballcourt (Con Uribe et al. 2004). This important monument was set into the sloping surface of the northern structure of this ballcourt and bears 74 glyphs, generally in a better state of preservation than most other Cobá inscriptions. Of great interest are the two Long Count dates on the monument but there are problems with both of them, as carved the Long Count dates do not correspond with the *tzolkin* or *haab* coefficients, and there are problems even with the associated G-numbers and *haab* patrons inserted into the ISIGs. Almost certainly there are mistakes in these dates as carved. Con Uribe and her colleagues report two dates set 108 days apart; 9.1.10.0.0, 5 Ahau 3 Tzec (July 3, 465) and 9.1.10.5.8, 9 Lamat 6 Yax (October 19, 465) and connect the first date to a Period Ending by a *kaloonte'* named Smoking Tapir and the second date to the dedication of a ballcourt by a *kaloonte' ajaw* nicknamed Smoking Jaguar (Con Uribe et al. 2004). My own cursory inspection of the stone, hampered by poor light and a bad angle, suggests the following two dates for the Long Counts:

9.3.10.5.\*1, 11 Imix G2 \*9 \*Cumku (March 16, 505)

9.7.0.\*14.8, 9 Lamat G9 6 Yax (September 17, 574)

While these dates fit most of the Long Count and Calendar Round positions as carved, it must be noted that the ISIG *haab* patron for the second Long Count appears to be that for the month Zip and these dates remain uncertain. If the second Long Count does date to 574, then it falls within the dates found on Stela 29 and suggests we are dealing with the same historical individuals. As reported by Con Uribe and her colleagues (2004), the second passage includes the glyph for ballcourt and likely refers to the dedication, or re-dedication, of the Group D ballcourt. I wonder whether the earlier date may refer to an earlier dedication of the ballcourt. Certainly the smaller panels that were inserted into the sloping playing surface of this ballcourt, depicting captives, appear to date from the period of the fifth or early sixth centuries and are earlier than this hieroglyphic panel. Archaeologists María José Con Uribe and Alejandro Martínez Muriel (2002:40-41) excavated this ballcourt and found evidence, including dedicatory caches, which indicated that it had been built in the Early Classic period and saw use and renovation through the Late Classic period.

<sup>20</sup> An excellent example is K1261, photographed by Justin Kerr and available on famsi.org.

### The Queens of Cobá and the Snake Kings of Calakmul

Lady K'awiil Ajaw ruled as the *kaloomite'* of Cobá between 642 and 681/682. The entire period of her reign thus falls during that of Yuhknoom Ch'een the Great of Calakmul. He ruled as Snake King for a full half-century between 636 and 686 and dominated the southern lowlands like no other Maya sovereign (Martin and Grube 2008:108-109). If ever there was a king who warranted the title "emperor", it was this Yuhknoom Ch'een and he is well known for augmenting his military strategies with marital alliances between his daughters and his vassals. One of his daughters or granddaughters married K'inich ... Yook of La Corona, arriving at that site in 679 according to a wall panel<sup>22</sup> in the Dallas Museum of Art (Martin 2008). Another probable daughter, Lady K'abel of El Perú-Waká, was married to that site's ruler, K'inich Bahlam II, who ruled in the late seventh and early eighth centuries (Guenter 2005).

Lady K'abel bore the title *Ix Kaloomite'* and this "Lady *Kaloomite'*" title is also known from Stela 12 of Tikal, Stela 24 of Naranjo, Altar 1 of Edzná, and a number of texts at the site of Yaxchilán. However, apart from these examples, this title is exceedingly rare. The *kaloomite'* title itself appears to have been the highest title known to the Classic Maya and, until the title became debased in the later eighth century, was held by only the most powerful kings,<sup>23</sup> especially those of Calakmul and Tikal (Martin and Grube 2008:17; Stuart et al. 1989). The head variant of the title depicts the rain/storm god Chahk holding an axe in his hand and a few vases (K2068 and 2772) depict the mythological basis for this title, showing Chahk with his axe and thunderstones violently attacking a house, marked with stone or earth signs, in which is found a number of human figures. Almost certainly, this is a reference to the violent storms that are part of the tropical environment in which the Maya live, storms that destroyed but also gave

life by breaking through the dry, parched surface of the earth to bring life to the maize seeds/humans buried inside. The *kaloomite'* title alludes to this power, but emphasizes the martial aspect of Chahk and the first person in Maya history to be contemporaneously credited with the *kaloomite'* title was Sihyaj K'ahk', the apparently foreign warlord who appears to have conquered or made subject much of Petén in the late fourth century (Martin and Grube 2008:29-31; Stuart 2000). Essentially all known *kaloomite'*s dominated large territories and the fact that the *kaloomite'* title is so regularly preceded by directional titles (e.g., *ochk'in kaloomite'* for "western *kaloomite'*", *xaman kaloomite'* for "northern *kaloomite'*", etc.) suggests that the title can be loosely translated as "regional warlord", or even "emperor".

Female *kaloomite'*s must have held similarly elevated positions in the kingdoms in which they resided. Lady K'abel of El Perú, it can be noted, bore the *Ix Kaloomite'* title while her husband, the local king of El Perú, contented himself with the local Emblem Glyph, *Wak Ajaw*. The fact that Lady K'abel's status seems to have been higher than that of her husband is likely due to the fact that she was a royal princess from Calakmul, the powerful Snake Kingdom whose ruler held the *kaloomite'* title, and this seems to have been the same situation that existed in La Corona as well.<sup>24</sup> One of the Yaxchilán *Ix Kaloomite'*s was also from Calakmul, and given how prominent portraits of women are in Calakmul and Calakmul-related sites,<sup>25</sup> one could argue that Lady K'awiil Ajaw of Cobá may have been another Snake Princess sent from Calakmul to extend the Snake Kingdom's influence into the northern lowlands. The fact that her reign coincides with that of Yuhknoom Ch'een the Great of Calakmul, the man most noted for a strategy of marriage alliances between his daughters and his vassals, definitely gives one pause for thought. We know that the Snake Kingdom was already insinuating itself into the politics of the northern lowlands prior to the reign of Lady K'awiil Ajaw as Sky Witness, the Snake King who ruled from before 561 to 572, is referenced in the inscriptions of Yo'okop, located less than 100 km southwest of Cobá (Martin 1997:861; Martin and Grube 2008:104).

<sup>22</sup> This monument was mislabeled as an "altar" by earlier epigraphers. Examination of the monument by the author and David Freidel in 2002 revealed by erosion patterns on the monument that it must have originally been set in a vertical position and remained so for a very long time. Almost certainly it was originally a panel set into a wall. It has been designated La Corona Panel 6 by the La Corona Archaeological Project.

<sup>23</sup> I know of no examples of a *kaloomite'* being possessed by another lord, implying that lords of this status were not vassals. Only two very late texts suggest that at the end of the Classic period the title had become so debased that certain *kaloomite'*s could be in subordinate relationships to other lords. These are the murals from Bonampak Structure I, Room 1 and Ixlu Altar 1. The Bonampak mural describes the accession in 791 of a new lord, Man-Eating Jaguar, who is given the *kaloomite'* title in the accompanying inscription. The accession is said to have taken place *yichnal*, "in the sight of" the king of Yaxchilán, implying a hierarchical relationship between the new lord of Bonampak (the vassal) and the Yaxchilán king (the lord). Ixlu Altar 1 dates to 879 and records a Period Ending by a local lord of the Tikal dynasty who appears to be credited with the *kaloomite'* title at glyph E2. The *yichnal* glyph follows, and at the end of a long title string is found the collocation *xaman kaloomite'*, suggesting that at this late date the Ixlu king, probably a pretender to the throne of Tikal, was in a subordinate relationship to a foreign overlord. This foreign overlord was likely from Yucatán, which would make sense considering the direction associated with this *kaloomite'* title in the Ixlu text, as well as the fact that Alfonso Lacadena (2003) has identified the only other currently known example of the *xaman kaloomite'* title in Mural A of Ek' Balam. It should be noted, however, that the *xaman kaloomite'* named in the Ek' Balam inscriptions is not a local lord and we are not certain of the home politics of either of the known *xaman kaloomite'*s.

<sup>24</sup> At Naranjo and Yaxchilán the *Ix Kaloomite'* title appears to be rather more honorific than real. Except for the powerful Lady K'abal Xook, all of the examples of the *Ix Kaloomite'* title at Yaxchilán are posthumous references to the mothers of the kings commissioning the monument on which these examples appear, and the same situation exists with the Naranjo example.

<sup>25</sup> While there are many portraits of women from Maya sites, the vast majority are posthumous portraits of the mother of the ruling king. Images of contemporaneous royal women, specifically the wife of the king, are much more rare and almost entirely restricted to sites allied to Calakmul. Sites with known antagonistic and bellicose histories with Calakmul, such as Tikal and Palenque, and probably Copan as well, have almost no portraits of women except those commissioned by their sons. A similar distribution exists for scribal signatures, which are almost entirely absent from Tikal, Palenque and Copan, but are relatively common at sites such as Piedras Negras, El Peru and other vassals of Calakmul. This suggests that the rivalry between Calakmul and its enemies was not merely political, but extended more deeply into other aspects of identity, and that royal women and scribes had greater visibility, if not higher status, in the Calakmul sphere than in the kingdoms of its enemies.

It should be noted, however, that there are no recognized Snake Emblem Glyphs in the texts of Cobá. Given how terribly eroded most of Cobá's inscriptions are, though, if there were originally any, or even many, such references to foreign relations and overlords there is little reason to believe that today this would be evident. Given the stretch of Calakmul's influence in the seventh century, extending all the way to Cancuen at the southern end of the lowlands, and the confirmed presence of the Snake Emblem Glyph at Yo'okop, there can be no doubt that these two great kingdoms were in close contact. The open question that remains is: was their relationship confrontational or conciliatory? Or perhaps both? Given that these polities were interacting over centuries it is inconceivable that their relationship did not change over time.

David Stuart has recently suggested that the fact the date of Chan Yopaat's accession, 9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb 10 Yax, is shared with Naranjo, where it is celebrated on a number of monuments as the date of the arrival of Lady Six Sky from Dos Pilas to restart the local dynasty, suggests a Calakmul connection. "The co-occurrence of two major dynastic events on the same day in separate kingdoms is probably not coincidence; it may point to some important historical connection between Cobá and the "Snake kingdom" to the south" (Stuart 2010:4). Similar arguments have been advanced for another shared date in Maya history. On 9.12.6.16.17, 11 Caban 10 Zodz (April 28, 679) Nuun Ujol Chahk of Tikal was defeated by Bajlaj Chan K'awiil of Dos Pilas in an epic battle, recorded on hieroglyphic stairways 2 and 4 of Dos Pilas. On the exact same date a Calakmul princess arrived at La Corona, according to the same wall panel (La Corona Miscellaneous Mt. 2) referred to above. "The [La Corona] text is of greatest significance because it talks about the arrival (*huli*) of a female from Calakmul. That the arrival occurred at the same date as the climax of the Tikal wars cannot be coincidence. Simon and Nikolai suggest it was an intentional act by Calakmul to consolidate its power at the same time Dos Pilas reestablished its power in the south." (Schele and Grube 1994:133)

I must admit that I am quite skeptical that these events falling on the same day imply a political connection, especially to Calakmul, which is mentioned in only one of the four texts referring to the events falling on these two dates. We have now recovered so many historical texts from Maya monuments that statistics alone would suggest that some unrelated events falling on the same date will be mentioned at different sites. Furthermore, one must take into account the Maya obsession with numerology, chronomancy, and astrology. We know from colonial accounts and modern ethnologies that certain days are better than others for carrying out certain events. We can note that Siyaj K'ahk's arrival at Tikal in 378 fell on the day 10 Eb, while the arrival event that served as the foundation of the kingdom of Ek' Balam in 770 fell on 11 Eb 10 Zodz (Lacadena 2003) and Lady Six Sky's arrival at Naranjo fell on the day 4 Eb and the Calakmul princess who arrived at La Corona in 679 did so on 10

Zodz. Rather than indicating a political connection, then, these coincidental historical dates for events at different sites may imply deep-seated cultural connections, and that these people were following the same underlying cultural motives for choosing to carry out unrelated major actions on these specific days.<sup>26</sup>

If the date of the accession of Chan Yopaat does not provide evidence for a Calakmul connection, does the presence of so many images of female rulers at Cobá do so? This, it must be admitted, is most unclear. Stela 2 is the earliest dated image of a female at Cobá, dating to 642, while Stela 28 at Calakmul, dated to 623, bears the earliest known portrait of a royal woman from that kingdom. However, we have already seen above that there is very good evidence to indicate that Lady K'awiil Ajaw was not the first female *kaloomte'* at Cobá, and that at least one earlier queen is portrayed and referenced on monuments from the sixth century. Furthermore, Stela 1 of Tulúm portrays an apparent royal couple, with the king on one side and a queen on the other, and this monument dates to 564.

One could perhaps still make the argument that these earlier royal women from Tulúm and Cobá were still foreigners from Calakmul, or Dzibanché as would have been the case in this earlier epoch. Certainly we know from La Corona Panel 6 that princesses of the Snake Kingdom were being sent to foreign cities by the early sixth century at the latest. However, by this point the argument that female portraits indicate Calakmul or Snake Kingdom influence has probably run out of steam, for an equally plausible, and far simpler hypothesis is available, and this is simply that women had equally high status and visibility within the realm of Cobá as they did in Calakmul and the Snake Kingdom. Perhaps one can make the broader generalization, that this elevated status and visibility of women is a trait of the northern Maya lowlands in general, given the presence of female *kaloomte'*s at both Cobá and Edzná (see Pallan 2009), as well as the frequent reference to women as ancestors in the texts of Chichén Itzá (Grube 1994:324-325; Grube and Krochok 2007:223-224).

In fact, Cobá seems to have had a special focus on royal women that may have extended from the very foundations of the kingdom. David Stuart's re-examination of the last clause on Stela 1 (Stuart 2010:3) revealed not only that this recorded the accession of Chan Yopaat in 682, but that he was the ninth ruler of a dynasty whose founder is named in glyph H20 (Figure 22.16). This name appears to be prefixed by T1002, indicating that this individual too was likely female. Most interestingly, this personal name

<sup>26</sup> One can compare this to the phenomenon of events in China that took place on August 8, 2008. This date was chosen to open the Olympic games in Beijing, but the date also saw a major increase in the number of weddings and other events. These were designed not so much to coincide with the Olympics, but were scheduled due to the fact that the number eight is extremely lucky in traditional Chinese numerology. In this case it is indisputable that the connection between these events is not direct, but based upon an underlying cultural appreciation for the auspiciousness of events carried out on that date.

includes the name of the deity K'awiil, and both above and below the smoking-mirror glyph in this name are a pair of small circles. The bottom two circles are almost certainly the common T178 **-la** suffix that the name of K'awiil regularly takes in Classic period inscriptions. The two small circles above the **K'AWIIL** logogram could well be the same T168 **AJAW** glyph, thus making the founder of Cobá a namesake of Lady K'awiil Ajaw herself, if the interpretation of the ... K'awiil Ajaw name/title in the clause of Date 5 presented above holds true.<sup>27</sup> While a female as dynastic founder would be most unusual in the southern lowlands,<sup>28</sup> the phenomenon of women as renowned and foundational ancestors is already attested at Chichén Itzá (Schele and Freidel 1990:358-362) and women seem to have had much higher statuses in the northern lowlands in general. The founder of Cobá's dynasty, whose name is more certainly Lady K'awiil Ajaw than the queen whose reign in the seventh century we have been examining, should have ruled in the late-fifth or early-sixth century, if we grant an average reign length of twenty years to each of this dynasty's rulers. A date of ca. A.D. 450-525 for the founding of the Classic period dynasty of Cobá would correspond with the earliest monuments known from the site and region, at least as dated stylistically<sup>29</sup>, and corresponds to a period of intense contact and interaction with Teotihuacan, seen throughout the Maya area (see the papers in Braswell 2003). What is most remarkable about this earlier Lady K'awiil Ajaw, the founder, is that she is given the *kaloomte'* title. I know of no other Maya kingdom whose founder was given this title, which suggests that from its foundation as a royal kingdom, Cobá was an imperial power. That this imperial founder should have been a female ruler is quite extraordinary. If the hypothesis presented above is correct, that the queen who ruled Cobá from 640 to 681/682 was indeed also named Lady K'awiil Ajaw, it would not be surprising for her to have taken the name of such an illustrious ancestress as her own.

<sup>27</sup> Later rulers taking the same royal names as those of the founders of their dynasties is a well attested pattern in Maya history, and include Yopaat Bahlam II of Yaxchilán, K'uk' Bahlam II of Palenque, and Wak Chan K'awiil (Yax Ehb Xook K'inich) of Tikal (Martin and Grube 2008).

<sup>28</sup> One may be tempted here to posit that the prefix of Glyph H20 may not be T1002 **IX** and may be one of the young male heads (such as the T1000 series), or another glyph unrelated to the female prefix. However, it can be noted that the prefix in Glyph H20 is extremely narrow, and there does not appear to have been space for any internal details to have been carved within this face. This makes it far more likely that the glyph in question is indeed the T1002 head, which is often found reduced in just this manner.

<sup>29</sup> These early monuments at Cobá include the panels found in both the Group B (Cobá) ballcourt, as well as in the ballcourt in Group D. Their images show similar treatment of the tied wrists and name glyphs attached to the belts of captives as is seen on the figures of captives shown on the hieroglyphic staircase of Dzibanché (Nalda 2004; Velásquez 2004). Along with the style of hieroglyphs carved on these monuments, this suggests a date for the Cobá ballcourt panels in the fifth or early sixth centuries A.D. A tenoned sculptured stone found in front of Stela 31, at the Xaibe structure (Benavides 1981: Figure 28), is clearly modeled after the serpent heads that adorn the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan, which dates to the late third century A.D. (see the discussion of the various dates for the construction of this structure in Guenter 2002: Appendix 1). In addition, a Teotihuacan-style mural in Xelhá Structure 86 (formerly 26) (Lombardo de Ruiz 1987) provides further evidence that monumental architecture was already being constructed in this region of northeastern Yucatán during the period of intense Teotihuacan contact, which in the southern lowlands can be dated to ca. A.D. 375-525.

With this information regarding Cobá's founder being an earlier female *kaloomte'* named Lady K'awiil Ajaw the argument that the later, seventh-century, queen was related to Calakmul falls apart entirely. What clinches this is the fact that the later Lady K'awiil Ajaw appears to be the ruler whose accession is recorded on Stela 4. While we know of many lady *kaloomte'*s who were members of the Calakmul royal family, none of these others are known to have acceded as rulers in their own right. The reason for this is obvious; these women were the consorts of the real rulers of the kingdoms into which they married. There is no evidence that Lady K'awiil Ajaw was a consort of the local lord. Her accession date, and the fact she appears on most of her monuments alone, indicates that she acceded as the ruler *suo jure* of Cobá. There are very few known ancient Maya women who ruled in their own right, as the legitimate sovereigns of their kingdoms, and not merely as regents holding the throne for their infant sons. Examples extend not much further than the Lady of Tikal and Lady Yohl Ik'nal of Palenque. The Lady of Tikal appears to have been a political pawn of Kaloomte' Bahlam (Martin 1999, Martin and Grube 2008:38-39) while Lady Yohl Ik'nal is known to us only from retrospective accounts by her probable grandson, K'inich Janaab Pakal I. The only major event recorded for her reign was an ignominious defeat at the hands of the forces of the Snake Kingdom, which "axed" Palenque in 599 and despoiled its patron gods (Martin and Grube 2008:159-160).

In contrast, Lady K'awiil Ajaw's reign at Cobá appears to have been one of the more impressive and successful reigns of ancient Maya sovereigns, not only in terms of other women rulers but even compared to her male colleagues. While the extreme erosion suffered by Cobá's texts precludes the recovery of many details about her reign, the large number of monuments she commissioned, on regular half-*katun* intervals, suggests, on the one hand, a certain political continuity and economic prosperity that is not attested for Lady Yohl Ik'nal of Palenque, and, on the other hand, more independence of action and sovereignty than seen in the case of the Lady of Tikal.

### The Kingdom of Cobá during the Reign of Lady K'awiil Ajaw

On the stelae that she commissioned Lady K'awiil Ajaw had herself portrayed standing over more than a dozen captives, more than for any other ancient Maya queen and more even than most Maya kings. This indicates that while she herself may have not taken the field of battle, she must have had in her service a number of successful warlords and many warriors. Cobá's famous causeway to Yaxuná (Villa Rojas 1934) has been dated to the initial phase of the Late Classic, ca. A.D. 600-700 (Shaw 1998, Stanton and Gallaretta 2001:234; Suhler et al. 1998:177), and the excavators of Yaxuná suggest that the incorporation of this site into the Cobá polity took place during the transition from the Early to the Late Classic, at some time between A.D. 550 and 600 (Ambrosino et al. 2003). This indicates that during the late sixth century, when numerous



founded in the late fifth or early sixth centuries, with some indications of contact with Teotihuacan. Shortly thereafter, with the withdrawal of this cultural and political influence from Central Mexico, the polity of Cobá began to expand and experience a period of major florescence, so that by the late sixth century numerous stone monuments decorated the city and attested to the power not only of the city's kings, but also to the presence of extremely influential and prestigious female *kaloomte*'s.

Lady K'awiil Ajaw was born into this dynasty, perhaps in 617, just as its power was cresting. She took the throne in 640 and would rule for just over four decades. In that time she commissioned at least four stelae and held court over some of the most ambitious and innovative scribes of ancient Maya culture. She was also sovereign of a group of very successful warriors and statesmen who either conquered Yaxuná or consolidated this prize of their fathers by constructing, or extending, the network of causeways for which the site is justly famous. When she died, apparently in late 681 or early 682, her kingdom was one of the most powerful the Maya world had ever known. However, archaeological evidence and some difficult inscriptions from Tikal and Edzná suggest that, shortly after her death, Cobá's power waned. The monuments of Macanxoc suggest a relatively short "golden age" and that while later kings and queens ruled at Cobá in the eighth century, this area so intimately associated with Lady K'awiil Ajaw was no longer the center of royal patronage. In the Late Postclassic, however, it was evidently a focus of renewed ritual, and while the site of Cobá was largely a ruin whose pyramids were overgrown and hidden in the forest, the Macanxoc area greatly interested these latter-day priests and scribes. What must they have thought of these monuments that they so carefully and respectfully enshrined in new, if crudely constructed, shelters? What did these Maya think of these images of an ancient queen? The information we have recovered to date must be only a fraction available to these Postclassic scribes, but I believe the picture of Lady K'awiil Ajaw's reign we are now beginning to reconstruct, no matter how murky and fuzzy the details may still be, is enough to provide some indication of why they held her monuments in such reverence and awe.

#### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Joel Skidmore, Marc Zender, Traci Ardren, and Travis Stanton for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge and thank George and Gene Stuart, as the description of Cobá in their 1977 volume, "The Mysterious Maya" proved to be my first inspiration to look at the inscriptions of Cobá. Finally, I thank Antonio Benavides for permission to reproduce several of the figures in this chapter. As always, I reserve the right to credit to myself all mistakes or errors in this paper.

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