CONTEXTUALIZING THE GLYPHIC TEXTS OF TIPAN CHEN UITZ, CAYO DISTRICT, BELIZE

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The 2011 investigations of the Caves Branch Archaeological Survey at the large and recently documented Maya site of Tipan Chen Uitz resulted in the discovery of the site's first monument with a glyphic inscription. Prior to this discovery, the site's glyphic corpus was limited to a small collection of texts rendered on fragmentary ceramics. In this paper, we describe these sherds as well as the monument (Monument 1), report on their archaeological contexts, provide an epigraphic analysis of the texts, and consider these written sources relative to our growing understanding of Tipan and its place in the ancient political landscape. The discovery of Monument 1 is important, for it stands to contribute to sociopolitical reconstructions in this part of the central Maya Lowlands and has significant implications for the possible presence of other, as yet undiscovered, Late Classic period (A.D. 550–830) monuments at Tipan.

Las investigaciones de la temporada de 2011 del proyecto Prospección Arqueológica del Caves Branch en el sitio grande — y recientemente documentado—de Tipan Chen Uitz resultaron en el descubrimiento del primer monumento del sitio con una inscripción glífica. Previamente, el corpus glífico del sitio estaba restringido a una pequeña colección de textos fragmentarios realizados sobre cerámica. En este artículo describimos estos tiestos, el monumento (Monumento 1), y sus contextos arqueológicos. Proporcionamos un análisis epigráfico de los textos y consideramos estas fuentes escritas relativas a nuestro entendimiento creciente de Tipan y su lugar en el panorama político prehispánico. El descubrimiento del Monumento 1 es un hallazgo importante, pues contribuye de manera reveladora a las reconstrucciones sociopolíticas en esta parte de las tierras bajas mayas centrales y tiene implicaciones significativas para la posible presencia de otros monumentos del período Clásico Tardío (550–830 d.C.) en Tipan.

The large site of Tipan Chen Uitz was first documented in 2009 by the Caves Branch Archaeological Survey in the Cayo District of Belize (Andres et al. 2010; Wrobel et al. 2010). The site lies in a rugged and little-studied upland zone—the Roaring Creek Works—defined to the east and west by the Caves Branch and Roaring Creek Valleys (Figure 1). While the Caves Branch and Roaring Creek Valleys are renowned for cave sites of archaeological importance (e.g., Awe 1998, 1999; Awe et al. 2005; Glassman and Bonor 2005; Graham et al. 1980; Helmke 2009; Reents 1980, 1982; Reents-Budet and MacLeod 1997), only a handful of surface sites (Awe and Helmke 1998; Conlon and Ehret 1999; Davis 1980; Graham et al. 1980; Jordan 2008), were known before the discovery of Tipan.

Tipan has the distinction of integrating two other sites, Yaxbe and Cahal Uitz Na (located 1.5 and 3.0 km to the west), via a system of causeways (*sacbeob*). These raised causeways transect

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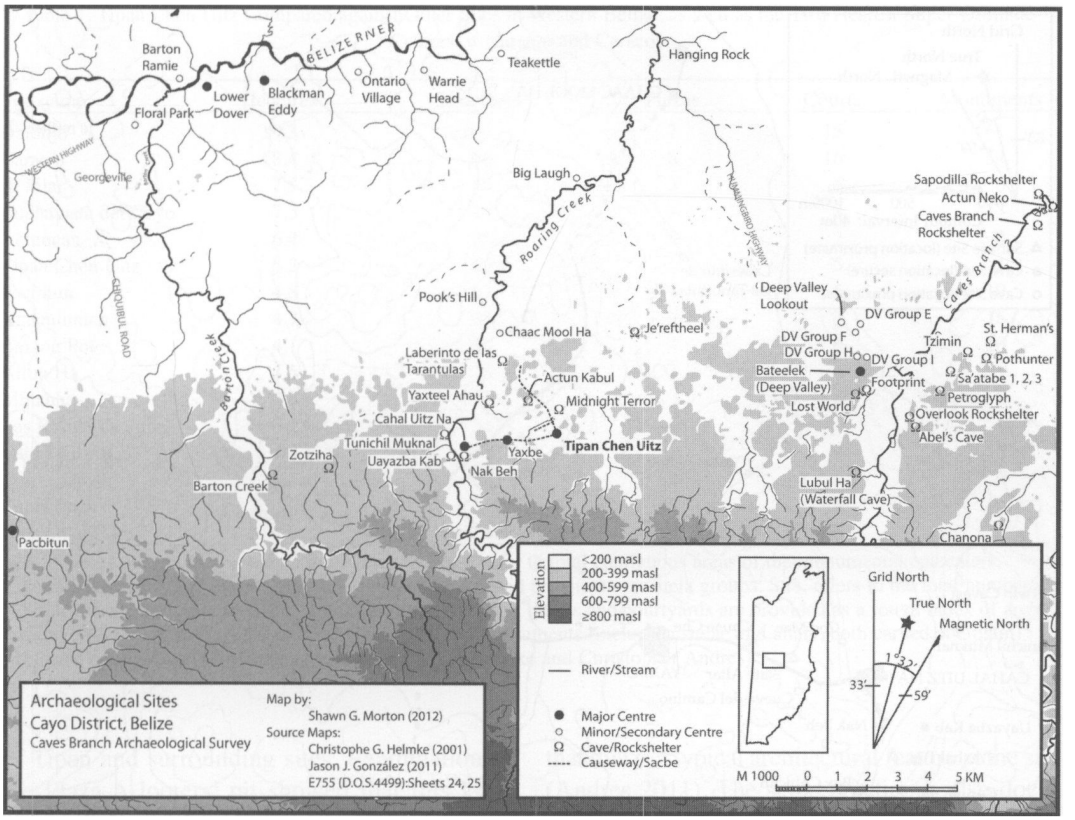


Figure 1. Map of central Belize showing locations discussed in the text (map by Shawn Morton, adapted from maps by Christophe Helmke).

uneven terrain, are built of dry-laid boulder core, measure 3 to 8 m wide, and represent a major construction effort (Andres et al. 2011b). Tipan, the largest of the three sites, likely represents a polity capital wherein the satellite sites were integrated into its orbit by means of the causeways (Figure 2).

Prior to discovery of Monument 1, the site's glyphic corpus was restricted to texts rendered on fragmentary ceramic vessels. These texts, coupled with that of Monument 1, inform our understanding of Tipan's fluctuating sociopolitical position during the Classic period. Moreover, the monument's presence at a site strategically situated between two primary drainages suggests that Tipan's sociopolitical importance was derived, at least in part, from its location in the physical landscape.

Site Description and Summary of Investigations

Following Tipan's discovery, a preliminary map was completed of the monumental epicenter. Initial observations, relating to building sizes, courtyard counts, energetics of construction, and the variety of architectural features present, all pointed to the community's importance in antiquity (Andres et al. 2010, 2011a). While no single statistic satisfactorily characterizes the scale and complexity of ancient Maya sites (see Adams and Jones 1981; Hammond 1975; Helmke and Awe 2008:67–70; Turner et al. 1981), Tipan is clearly very large, suggesting that the site is best classified as a major center (e.g., Bullard 1960:275; Hammond 1975:40–42; Helmke and Awe 2008:68–69, 76–78) (Table 1). We propose that

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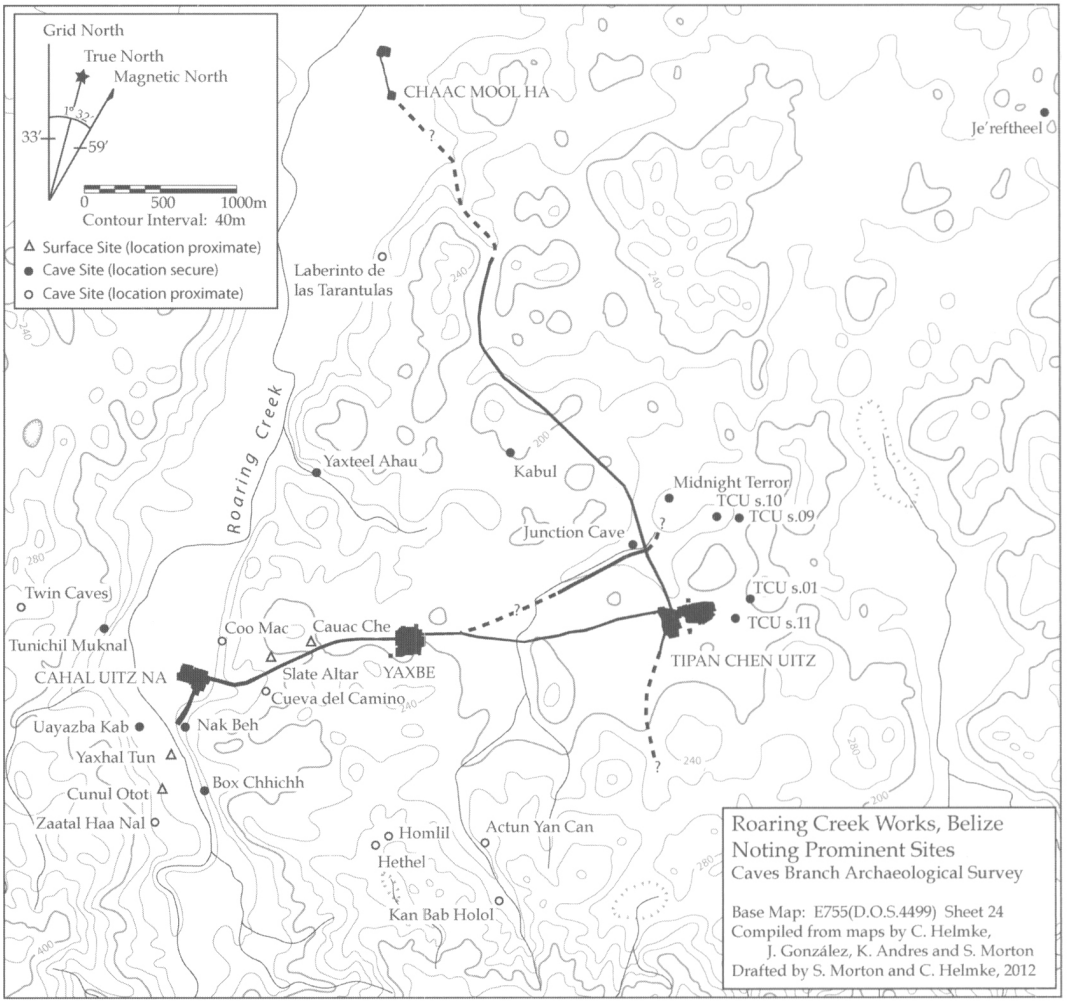


Figure 2. Map of the Tipan Chen Uitz polity, showing the location of neighboring archaeological sites and the system of causeways that integrates the sites of Cahal Uitz Na and Yaxbe to Tipan (map by Shawn Morton, adapted from maps by Christophe Helmke).

Tipan once occupied the top of a sub-regional political hierarchy and is most appropriately viewed as a "primary" civic-ceremonial center (Andres et al. 2010) for the surrounding 155-km^2 area (Helmke and Awe 2012:61–65).[1]

The first season of investigations, in 2010, included excavations in the site's monumental epicenter and detailed topographic mapping. This work sought to clarify the occupational chronology and to illuminate key architectural features. The map shows that the epicenter extends over 5.2 ha and comprises 63 major structures (González and Howell 2011:153) (Table 1 and Figure 3). The site center also includes seven plazas and five courtyards; at least five temple structures; a sunken, T-shaped ballcourt; several long range structures; three causeways; and an acropoline palatial complex measuring more than 20 m in height (Andres 2011; González and Howell 2011; Wrobel et al. 2012).

Excavations completed in 2010 and 2011 focused primarily on structures affected by looting. Two of the locations examined included the west face of Str. A-1 (the formal approach to the palatial complex) and a looters' crater in Plaza A (Andres 2011). These investigations provided insight into the site's construction history and helped define the style of architecture that is characteristic

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Table 1. Tipan Chen Uitz Compared against Other Sites in Western Belize, as well as the Two Nearest Super-Ordinate Centers of Naranjo and Caracol.

Site name	Hectares	Structures	Plazas	Courts	Monuments
Naranjo	19.3	105	7	15	61
Caracol	18.4	96	6	16	54
El Pilar	7.5	40	3	6	0
Buenavista del Cayo	7.3	44	4	8	13
Actuncan	6.4	36	5	2	2
Tipan Chen Uitz	5.2	63	7	5	1
Pacbitun	4.8	41	5	5	19
Xunantunich	4.7	32	2	5	16
Baking Pot	4.1	42	3	6	10
Altun Ha	3.5	28	2	4	1
Minanha	3.3	47	2	6	9
Las Ruinas de Arenal	3.2	34	4	3	4
Cahal Uitz Na	2.6	31	3	3	5
Lower Dover	2.5	32	3	4	0
Cahal Pech	2.4	31	3	4	6
Blackman Eddy	1.2	24	3	1	4

Note: Surface areas are represented in hectares (ha) and refer to total contiguous areas of the monumental epicenters, including structures and plazas, but excluding causeways and proximate plazuela groups. Strs. refers to the total number of buildings that constitute the monumental epicenter. Tallies of plazas and courtyards are provided as a rough index of architectural complexity, as is the total number of megalithic monuments (including stelae and altars, both carved and plain) (table and computation of surface areas by Christophe Helmke and Christopher Andres).

of Tipan and surrounding sites. Examination of the Plaza A looters' pit showed that this large plaza was raised in a single construction event by more than 3 m. While no diagnostic ceramics were recovered, the plaza's dry-laid boulder core construction is typical of sites in the area (including Pook's Hill, Cahal Uitz Na, and Deep Valley; see Ehret and Conlon 1999:57–62; Helmke 2009:285; Jordan 2008:65). Investigations of Str. A-1 have shown that the formal approach to this first level of the palace incorporated an outset axial stairway with stair-side outsets that was modified during the Late-to-Terminal Classic period (A.D. 750–850), when a low platform was constructed over the stair's base (Andres 2011) (Figure 4).

Both this platform and the earlier outsets were faced with slabs of dense crystalline limestone (fossiliferous limestone or micrite; see Villaseñor and Helmke 2007:138–139), measuring ca. 1.0 m high and 2.5 m wide and shaped via direct percussion (Figure 5). Although initially identified as stelae (Andres et al. 2010), excavations have revealed that these slabs form part of the axial stair and associated stair-side outsets.

Similar slabs embellish the lateral stair-side outsets of Strs. F-5 and F-7 at Tipan, indicating that this is a typical architectural feature at the site (Andres 2011). The same practice is also documented at Yaxbe and Cahal Uitz Na, the satellite sites to the west (Awe and Helmke 1998:210–215, 2007:31–32; Helmke 2009:269–270, 273). Excavations at both Cahal Uitz Na and Tipan have made it clear that these monoliths rest directly atop the terminal plaza floor (Andres 2011; Ehret and Conlon 1999), and, as such, these slabs are better designated as "panels" that were set as battered facings to the stair-side outsets. The repeated occurrence of these panels at Tipan and its satellites suggests that this is a characteristic architectural feature of this polity, integrated into regally commissioned construction. The use and placement of monolithic panels along stair-side outsets is otherwise most commonly seen at sites in the Pasión area of Guatemala, including Dos Pilas (Strs. L5-49 and L4-35), Aguateca (Strs. 1 and 133), Tamarindito (Strs. 2 and 64), La Paciencia (Strs. 2 and 7), and El Excavado (Str. 1) (Houston 1993).[2]

The presence of what could be termed a Pasión architectural feature at a series of west-central Belizean sites is intriguing. Recent excavations conducted by the Triángulo project (under the direction of Vilma Fialko) at Naranjo, revealed that

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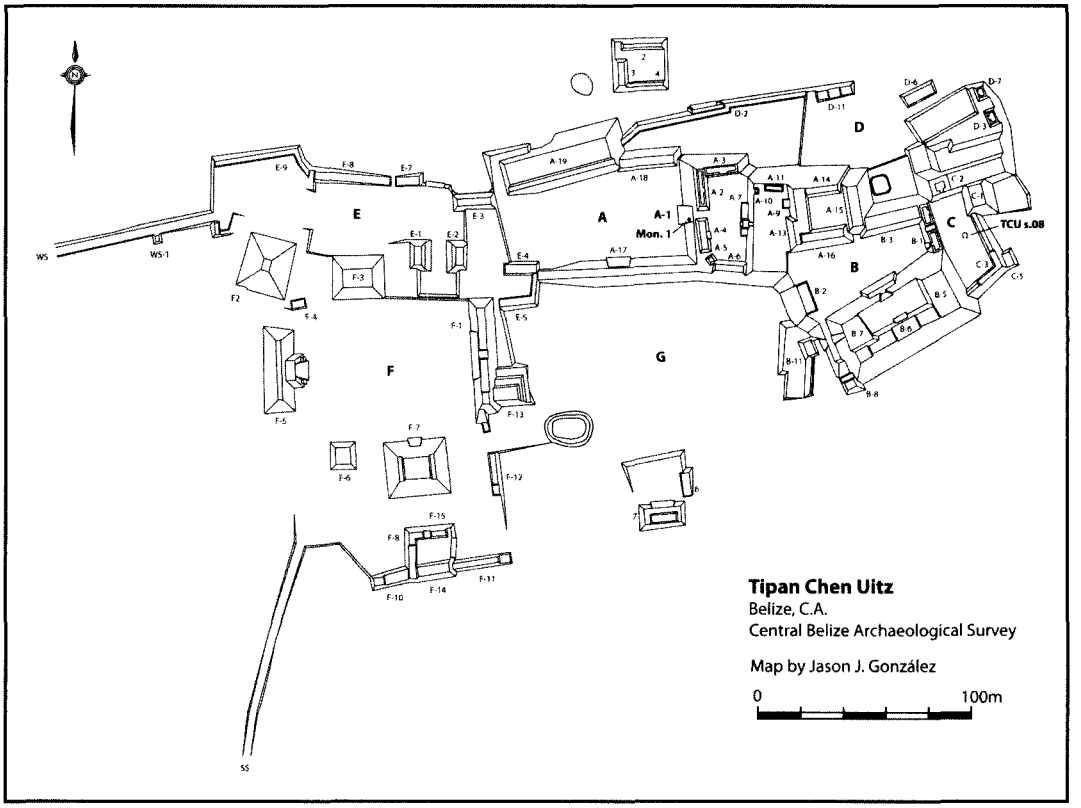


Figure 3. Plan of the monumental epicenter of Tipan Chen Uitz, showing locations of structures discussed in the text (map by Jason González).

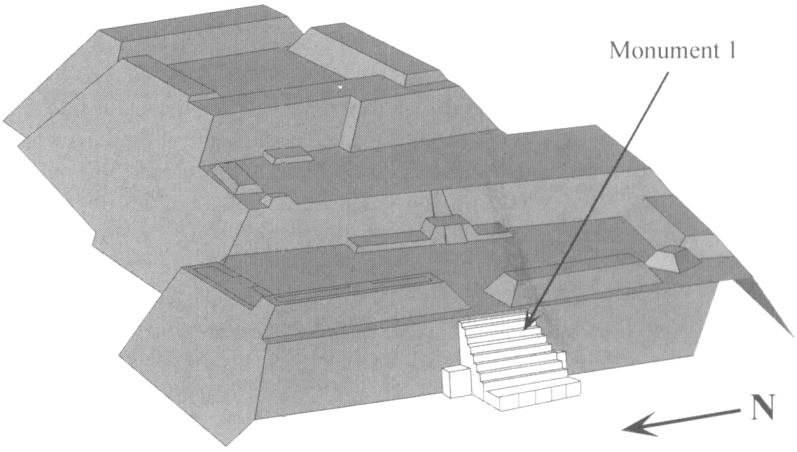


Figure 4. The acropoline palace of Tipan, showing the Late Classic period stair with overlying Late-to-Terminal Classic platform and re-faced stair-side outsets (isometric reconstruction by Jason González and Christopher Andres). Note the context of discovery of Monument 1 near the top of Str. A-1's stair.

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Figure 5. Photograph of 2011 excavations at western base of Str. A-1 at Tipan showing massive facing stones incorporated into Late-to-Terminal Classic period modification. Note the central facing stone—visible at left—that was displaced by looters (photograph by Christopher Andres).

the stair-sides of Str. B-14, a temple within the central acropolis, were likewise embellished with monolithic slabs. The Naranjo panels are made of local, friable limestone (i.e., porous micrite; see Villaseñor and Helmke 2007:140) and in their measurements more closely resemble their Pasión counterparts than the heavier and thicker examples from the Roaring Creek Works. The Naranjo connection provides a pivotal link between the Pasión and the Tipan polity. For one, the historical connection between Dos Pilas and Naranjo is well-known, since the glyphic texts of Naranjo laud the arrival of Lady Six Sky in A.D. 682, daughter of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil, king of Dos Pilas (Grube 2004:201–202; Grube and Martin 2004: 42–43; Helmke and Kettunen 2011:20–30; Martin and Grube 2000:74; Schele and Freidel 1990:183–186). With her "arrival" event, we see the temples of Naranjo rededicated and the local dynastic line revitalized, resulting in the birth of the heir and successor, in A.D. 688. The incumbent, K'ahk' Tiliiw Chan Chaahk (A.D. 693–728), was to have a strong impact on eastern Peten and parts of adjoining Belize, and his monuments record an initial series of warfare campaigns on neighboring sites between A.D. 693 and 714, followed by diplomatic alliances with client states, including Ucanal, *Yootz*, and Buenavista del Cayo (see Boot 1999; Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet 1994:290–311; Tascheck and Ball 1992). Against this historical backdrop, Lady Six Sky may have brought with her to Naranjo, from her native Pasión, the tradition of monolithic stair-side panels, which could have disseminated from there to client states in west-central Belize, especially given that there is evidence that several Belizean sites were under the sway of Naranjo during much of the Late Classic (Helmke and Awe 2008:79–84). We hope that additional excavations at Tipan, Naranjo, and other sites will

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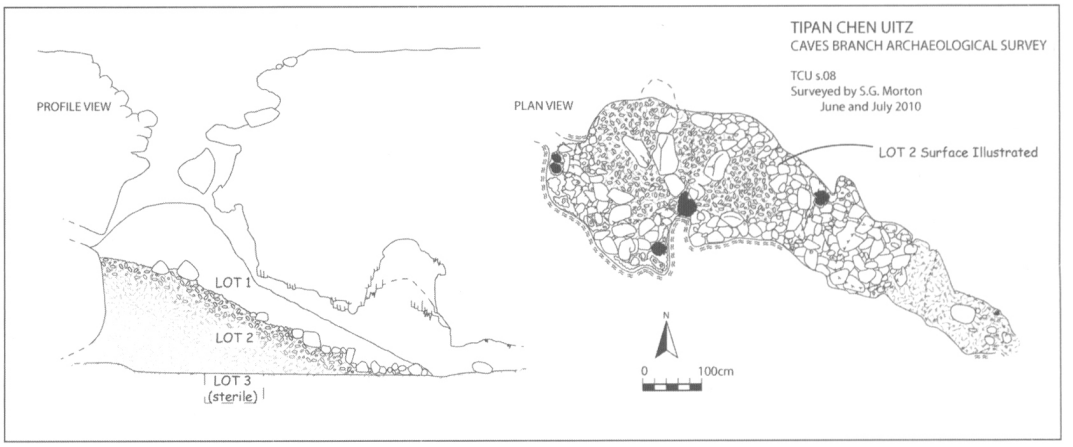


Figure 6. Plan and section of TCU s.08 (plan and section by Shawn Morton).

help to clarify whether the dates of these panels align with the historical events outlined above, or whether another explanation must be sought. If this model can be substantiated, the presence of these panels at Tipan may provide tacit evidence for relations with Naranjo during the Late Classic period.

Context of Discovery of the Ceramic Texts

Tipan's ceramic texts were discovered within a small cave, designated TCU s.08. The karstic hills surrounding Tipan are dotted with caves, many of which are of archaeological importance, including Actun Kabul, Je'reftheel, Midnight Terror, and at least ten other cave sites (Brady 2009; Helmke and Wrobel 2012; Morton 2010). TCU s.08 lies in Plaza C, within the acropolis complex, and is one of nine sinkholes discovered within Tipan's epicenter (Figure 3). As elsewhere at Tipan, the sinkhole's entrance was covered during construction of the plaza, but was later exposed by a tree-fall. The irregular entrance measures approximately 3.0 m in diameter and continued to a depth of ca. 2.5 m at the time of its discovery. This cave exhibited a massive ceramic deposit that partly choked the chamber, a feature that warranted investigation to recover temporally diagnostic materials and assist in dating Tipan's occupation.

Excavations in TCU s.08 in 2010 revealed three stratigraphic units. The first (Lot 3) was composed of the sinkhole's clayey and sterile alluvial floor (Figure 6). The second level (Lot 2) represents a stratum of dry-laid rubble interspersed with artifacts. Several larger limestone blocks present in Lot 2 may have been introduced during infilling of the cave in tandem with construction of Plaza C. Clearing Lot 2 revealed that most of the cave's stalactites had been deliberately broken and removed from the site in antiquity (see Brady et al. 1997, 2005).[3] The uppermost stratum (Lot 1) consists of the ceramic deposit, which, given its profile, reflects materials cast through the entrance. Minor smoke clouding of formations beneath the entrance and the paucity of sherds with carbonized surfaces suggest that fire was introduced sparingly, probably reflecting use of torches.

Although analyses of this deposit are on-going, salient horizon markers for the respective strata have been identified, and a ^{14}C sample recovered from Lot 2 produced a calibrated date of 1810–1560 years B.P. (cal A.D. 140–390) [2 σ - Beta Analytic 284075 – wood charcoal]. As a whole, the artifacts from Lots 1 and 2 consist almost entirely of ceramics, dominated by unslipped jars, with a few bowls, dishes, vases, and other specialized forms such as censers, shoe pots, and drums. Interestingly, the ceramics appear to have been introduced, not as whole vessels, but as partial vessels and sherds. Only a small number of non-ceramic artifacts were present in the deposit (particularly in Lot 2), including two prismatic obsidian blades, slate fragments, flakes of chert and quartzite, several

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fragmentary groundstone manos and metates, freshwater *jute* (*Pachychilus* sp.), apple snail (*Pomacea* sp.), olive shells (*Olivella* sp.), and isolated human long bone fragments.

Due to the prevalence of Late-to-Terminal Classic ceramics visible on the deposit's surface, it was initially surmised that the entire assemblage dated to this period. However, excavations and ceramic analyses indicate that the ceramics were deposited over a more extended period of time. Protracted use of the feature is suggested, for example, by an intact, miniature Cocay Appliquéd: Cocay Variety (brown ware) *ollita* found at the stratigraphic interface between the sterile floor and the overlying rubble (at the juncture between Lots 2 and 3) that can be assigned to the Proto-Classic to Early Classic transition (see Reents 1980:168, 1982:61, 62). That caves tend to contain some of the earliest materials attesting to human presence in a given area has been repeatedly noted across Mesoamerica (Brady 1997). The earliest materials discovered within TCU s.08 are therefore particularly significant because they potentially index the earliest settlement at Tipan, especially given that deposits of equal or greater time depth have yet to be recovered from deeply buried strata beneath the monumental core. Whereas the majority of materials from TCU s.08 can be dated to the Late-to-Terminal Classic (A.D. 650–950) (Spanish Lookout: Roaring Creek Red, Xunantunich Black-on-orange, Benque Viejo Polychrome, Belize Red, and Cayo Unslipped), limited numbers of sherds date to the Proto-Classic (A.D. 0–250) (Floral Park: possible examples of Monkey Falls Striated and Negroman Punctated-incised), spanning the Early Classic (A.D. 250–550) (Hermitage: Minanha Red), and Middle Classic (A.D. 550–650) (Tiger Run: Macal Orange-red, Molino Black, Uacho Black-on-orange, and a number of buff and cream polychromes) (Gifford 1976). With some exceptions, the general pattern is that the older materials are from Lot 2, whereas the later ceramics constitute Lot 1. This suggests that the deposit accumulated over an extended period of time, rather than in a few temporally restricted acts. What is significant here is that all glyphic sherds were recovered from the later Lot 1. As a result, the deposit recovered from TCU s.08 distinguishes this cave from other subterranean sites in the area, as does its association with Tipan's palatial acropolis. In this regard, TCU s.08 is comparable to other caves in the Maya area that are associated with palatial structures. Key examples include the cave of the Murciélago palace at Dos Pilas (Brady 1997:605–608; Demarest et al. 2003) and the Cueva de los Quetzales (Brady and Rodas 1995), two sites of the Pasión area. Context and associated architecture aside, the most comparable assemblages are those discovered within two caves in the nearby Roaring Creek Valley, namely the Laberinto de las Tarántulas and the entrance chambers of Actun Tunichil Mucnal (Awe et al. 2005; Helmke 2009:246–260, 424–434). The similarity of these assemblages to the one at Tipan suggests that we are looking at the material remains of similar ritual practices. They also seem to reflect the social status and origin of the users of these caves.

Epigraphic Analyses of the Ceramic Texts

The ceramics recovered from TCU s.08 that are decorated with glyphs and glyphic elements set this context apart from others at the site in terms of quantity and quality of materials. These decorated ceramics can be subdivided into two broad groupings: those dating to the Middle Classic (Figure 7a–b) and those of the Late-to-Terminal Classic (Figure 7c–d) (Gifford 1976; Helmke and Reents-Budet 2008). This division between relatively early and late assemblages is typical of western Belize, with few texts dating to the intervening Late Classic, a time during which sites in the area fell under the sway of either Naranjo or Caracol (Helmke and Awe 2008:78–86). This patterning has interesting implications in terms of the ability of royal dynasties to produce and consume written texts, and in terms of the sumptuary laws that undoubtedly conditioned the execution of glyphic materials. At Tipan, most of the late materials are represented by pseudoglyphs, in which glyphic elements only approximate the appearance of writing. Thus, one set of sherds presents an abbreviated and repeated dedicatory verb (Figure 7c), another the highly abstracted and repetitive title *keleem* ("youth") (Figure 7d), or the mostly illegible caption naming a kneeling captive on a Terminal Classic Molded-carved sherd (see Helmke et al. 1998:116–117, Figure 8s).

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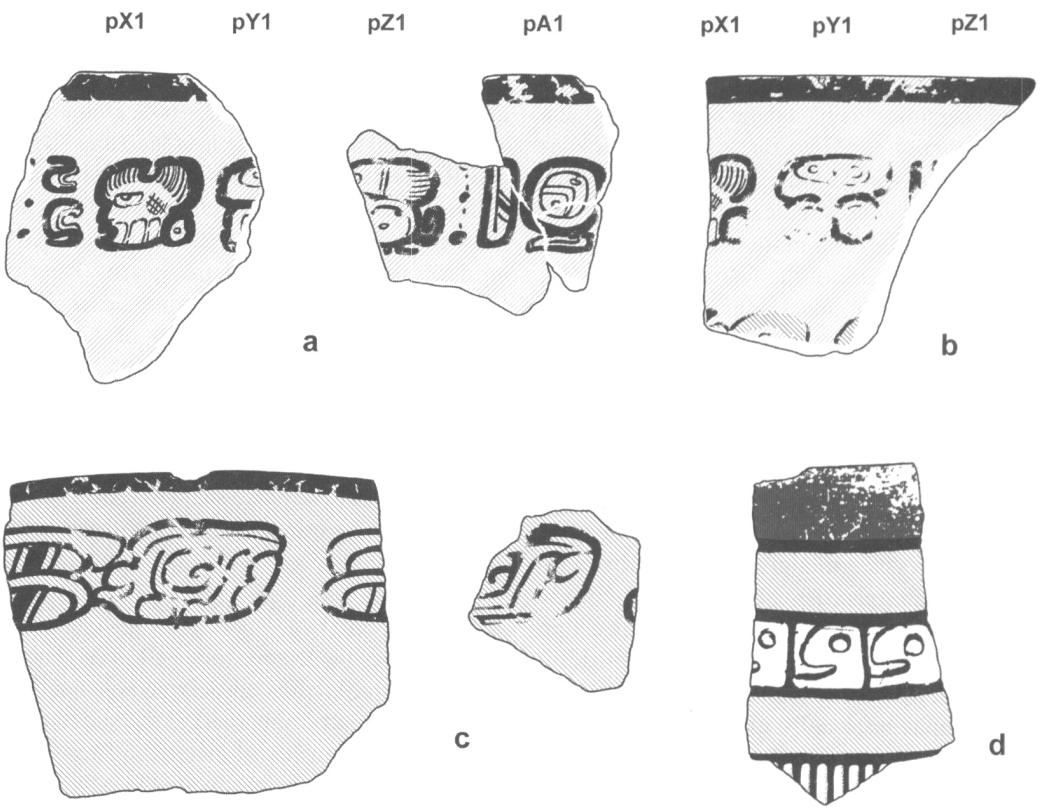


Figure 7. A sample of the decorated sherds recovered as part of the ceramic assemblage of TCU s.08: (a) Sherds 1-4, Uacho Black-on-orange; (b) Sherd 5, Saxche Orange-polychrome; (c) Sherds 6-7, Belize Red (Maroon ware); and (d) Sherd 9, Puhui-Zibal Composite (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

In contrast, the fragmentary texts represented on the earlier sherds are more in keeping with the style and execution of Middle Classic painted glyphs. The first of these texts was painted in black along the rim of a Uacho Black-on-orange bowl and is represented by a group of four sherds, which clearly conjoin (Figure 7a). Unusually, the text appears to begin with a Calendar Round date, wherein only the initial Tzolkin notation is preserved (pA1; written as **5-chi/KEJ?**, for "5 Manik").[4] Despite an extensive inspection of the glyphic texts from neighboring sites in the central Maya Lowlands, we are unaware of any historic event that is said to have transpired on the date 5 Manik', between A.D. 550 and 650, based on the type-variety of the ceramic. We are therefore left to assume that this date records an otherwise unknown historic event or, more prosaically, the vessel's dedication.

The only other remaining sections of the text are parts of three glyphs at the end of the clause (pX1-pZ1). Considering the syntax of Classic Maya texts, these glyphs should record parts of the names and/or titles of the original owner of the vase. While little sense can be made of the extant segments, another fragmentary text rendered on a Saxche Orange-polychrome vase with slightly everted sides (Figure 7b) appears to have been part of the same set as the bowl. Indeed, the calligraphy is nearly identical, and of the three partial remaining glyph blocks (pX1-pZ1), the first two match those found in the previous text, suggesting that both vessels originally bore the same text.

What marks these painted texts as exceptional is not so much their content, but the presence of glyphic texts rendered in black on orange-slipped

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Figure 8. Partial Uacho Black-on-orange bowl, discovered in El Duende Cave at Dos Pilas, bearing a nomino-titular phrase including the Tikal/Dos Pilas Emblem Glyph (drawing by Stephen Houston, courtesy of the Petexbatun Cave Project).

vessels. The ceramic style and calligraphy of the Tipan examples closely matches the Uacho Black-on-orange and Saxche Orange polychromes that were so commonplace in the central Lowlands and at Tikal, in particular, during the Middle Classic (see Chase 1994:Figure 13.2e; Culbert 1993:Figures 42c, 46c3, 49a2). What is intriguing about these two ceramic types is that their presence appears to correlate with the influence that Tikal exerted over sites in the central Lowlands. Indeed, a text on a Uacho bowl discovered in one of the caves of Dos Pilas bears the Emblem Glyph of Tikal, thereby signaling the influence, if not presence, of Tikal in the area well before Bajlaj Chan K'awiil (ca. A.D. 648–692), the first well-attested ruler of the site (Brady 1997:608; Houston 1993:102, Figure 4–6; Martin and Grube 2000:56–58) (Figure 8). Importantly, this bowl constitutes the earliest dynastic text of Dos Pilas, preceding the carved monuments by several decades. Equally, the Saxche ceramics produced during the Middle Classic at Caracol may be the mark of a client state, subservient to Tikal. In fact, Tikal may have extended its influence into this part of western Belize as early as A.D. 485 by endorsing the accession of the Pacbitun king on that date (Helmke et al. 2006). With the now well-known military embroilments that pitted Caracol and its allies against Tikal between A.D. 556 and 562 (Houston 1991; Martin and Grube 2000:39–40, 89–90), and which eventually saw the emergence of an independent Caracol, we see a proportionate shift away from the consumption of Uacho and Saxche ceramics, although evidence suggests that these ceramic types remained in use at Caracol as late as A.D. 582 (Chase 1994:163).[5] In much the same way that the megalithic panels hint at the influence exerted by Naranjo on Tipan after the arrival of Lady Six Sky in A.D. 682, the ceramics found at Tipan suggest participation in a Tikal-centered network (at least until Tikal's defeat in A.D. 562). Remarkably, the Saxche and Uacho ceramics also reflect early dynastic activity at Tipan, thereby duplicating the situation known for Dos Pilas by predating the construction of monumental architecture and carved monuments by several centuries.

Context of Monument 1

The 2011 investigations at Tipan focused on the acropoline Group A palace in the site's eastern sector, and this is where Monument 1 was discovered (Figure 4). Based upon its formal resemblance to architectural complexes at other centers, it is likely that Tipan's 20-m-high acropolis served as the community's primary palatial complex. This functional interpretation is based on observations related to the group's form, scale, and location. As discussed elsewhere (Andres et al. 2010; Andres et al. 2011a), the complex consists of terraced spaces that decrease in size as they increase in elevation and apparent privacy (Figures 3 and 4). Similar architectural configurations have generally been interpreted as the residential compounds of the paramount elite (e.g., Awe 2008; Awe et al. 1991; Chase and Chase 2001).

Issues of access figure prominently in discussions of palatial complexes (e.g., Evans and Pillsbury 2004; Inomata and Houston 2001), and recent investigations have explored traffic flow patterns relative to the Group A palace (Andres 2011). Based on our understanding of the complex, formal approach to its uppermost level was highly restricted and would have involved movement through multiple intermediate spaces from Plaza A, via the axial stair of Str. A-1, upon which our excavations concentrated. Following this ascent, one proceeded through a passage between range structures (conforming to the configura-

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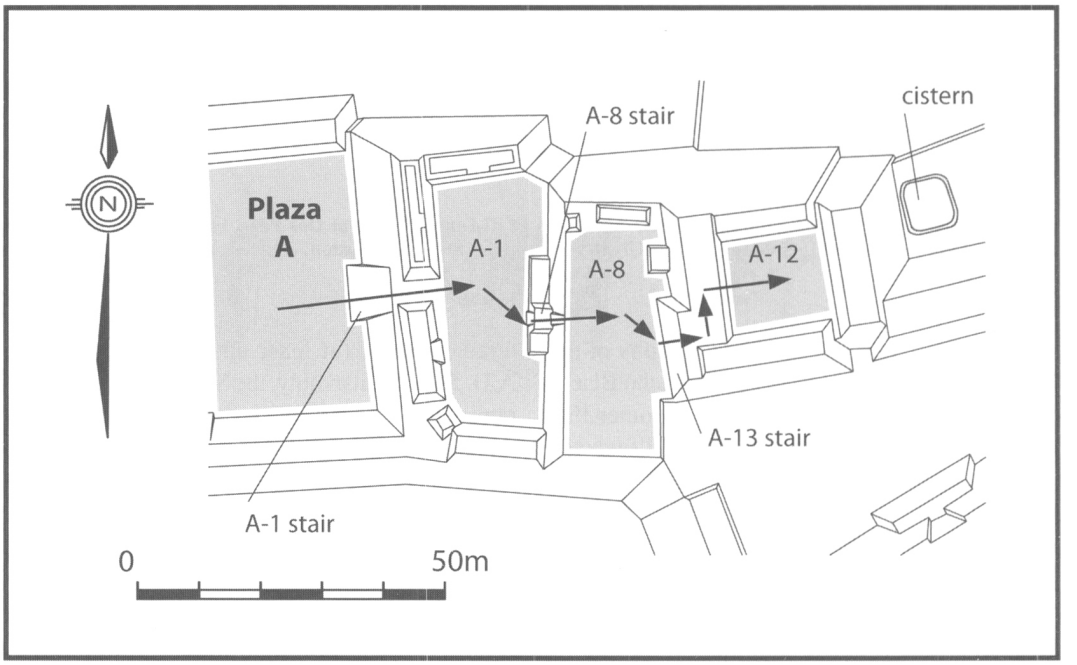


Figure 9. Map of the Group A palace showing the arrangement of its constituent spaces and the formal approach to the uppermost A-12 courtyard (map by Jason González with amendments by Christopher Andres).

tion of an *audiencia*), crossed Court A-1, climbed a second flight of stairs, crossed Court A-8, and negotiated Str. A-13 before emerging into the apical and most restricted private space of the A-12 courtyard (Andres et al. 2010; Andres et al. 2011a) (Figure 9).

Of note is the degree to which this extended approach resulted in a distinct privacy gradient, as discussed for Cahal Pech (Awe et al. 1991), Chau Hiix (Andres 2005), Minanha (Seibert 2004), and Xunantunich (Awe 2008). Also evident is a tendency for the spaces in Tipan's palace to decrease in size as they increase in elevation and degree of relative enclosure. Thus, Tipan's apical A-12 courtyard is the most highly elevated space in the site's eastern sector, as well as the "deepest" space (following Hillier and Hanson 1984) in the acropolis relative to the site's plazas, which presumably served as public congregational spaces (see Inomata 2006). Significantly, our investigations also revealed that the Group A palace was rendered increasingly inaccessible over time, with the A-12 courtyard, which was originally open on its north and south sides, being fully enclosed by the end of the Late Classic (Andres 2011).

Finally, the compound's residential nature and the high status of its occupants are further suggested by the presence of a nearby 4-m-deep, plaster-lined cistern, capable of holding at least 227 m^3 (60,000 gallons) of water (Andres 2011; Andres et al. 2010). This feature most likely functioned as a private water supply (see Figure 9). In addition, the cave that yielded the glyphic sherds is located within Plaza C, immediately southeast of this cistern, thereby forming an integral part of the greater acropoline complex.

Together, these elements suggest that architecturally structured distinctions between royals and non-royals were most pronounced in this part of the community. These data, together with the glyphic texts from the cave and the discovery of Monument 1 in Acropolis A, suggest that the complex served as the community's paramount elite residential and administrative focus and as Tipan's royal court.

Circumstances of Discovery of Monument 1

Tipan Monument 1 was discovered near the top of Str. A-1's outset axial stair (Figure 4) on the next

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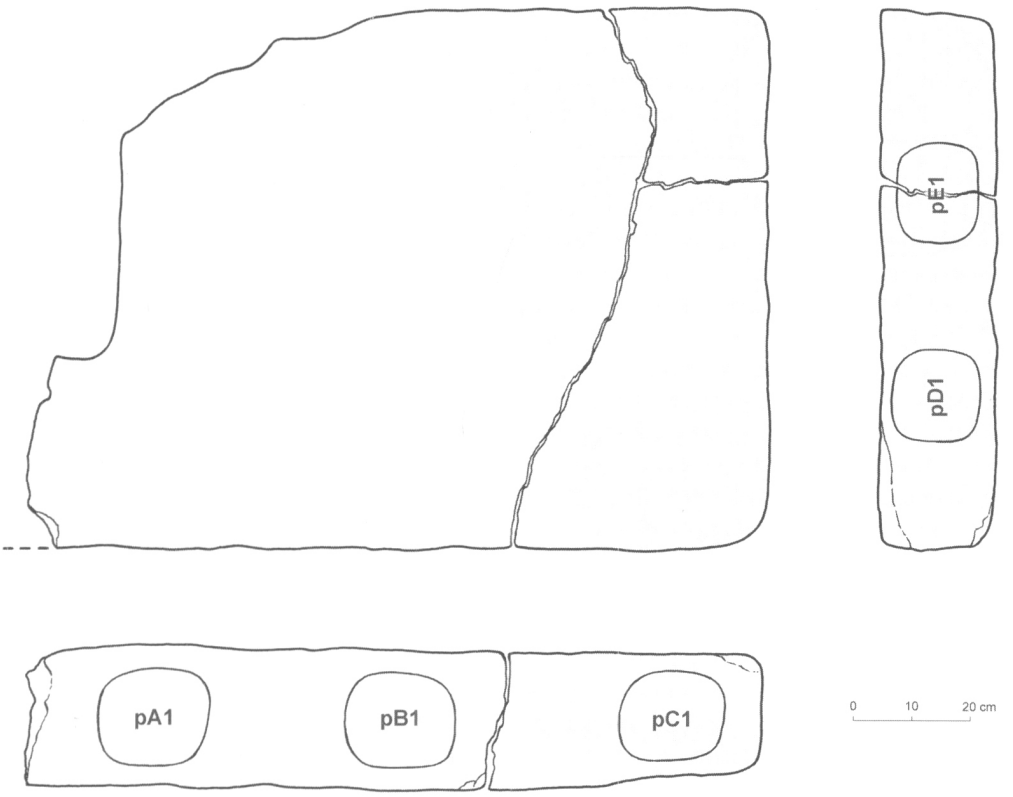


Figure 10. Plan and elevation drawings of Monument 1, Tipan (drawing by Christophe Helmke and Christopher Andres). The front face of the monument is represented below the plan and the north face to the right.

to the last day of the 2011 field season, when the senior author investigated a limestone block protruding from the humus. Clearing soil from the block's face revealed part of a glyphic text. A shallow excavation was thus established, and soil was removed from the monument's surface and perimeter. While the monument was partly covered by humus, it rested primarily within a layer of collapse debris. Although all excavated material was sieved through 1/4-inch mesh, only five non-diagnostic body sherds and a few pieces of painted plaster were recovered. These items do not appear to have any meaningful relationship to the monument and do not assist in its dating. Considering the stratigraphic context, the monument appears to have slid to its resting spot from between Strs. A-2 and A-4 (the *audiencia*), where we suspect that it originally stood. The slab on which the text is carved lay adjacent to a large tree, and the monument extended beneath it and was enveloped by its roots. Although the monument could not be completely extricated, its edges were exposed, it was mapped and photographed in situ, and fragments were turned to check for carving on their reverse faces, revealing none.

Description and Analysis of Monument 1

Monument 1 was fashioned from a large slab of crystalline limestone measuring 1.25 m long by 0.90 m wide, and 26 cm high. The segment of the monument exposed in the excavation was fractured into three articulating sections (Figure 10). The monument is embellished by five glyphic medallions along two of its lateral sides, three medallions on what can be described as the front, and two on what may have been the right side. The sides that exhibit the medallions were worked

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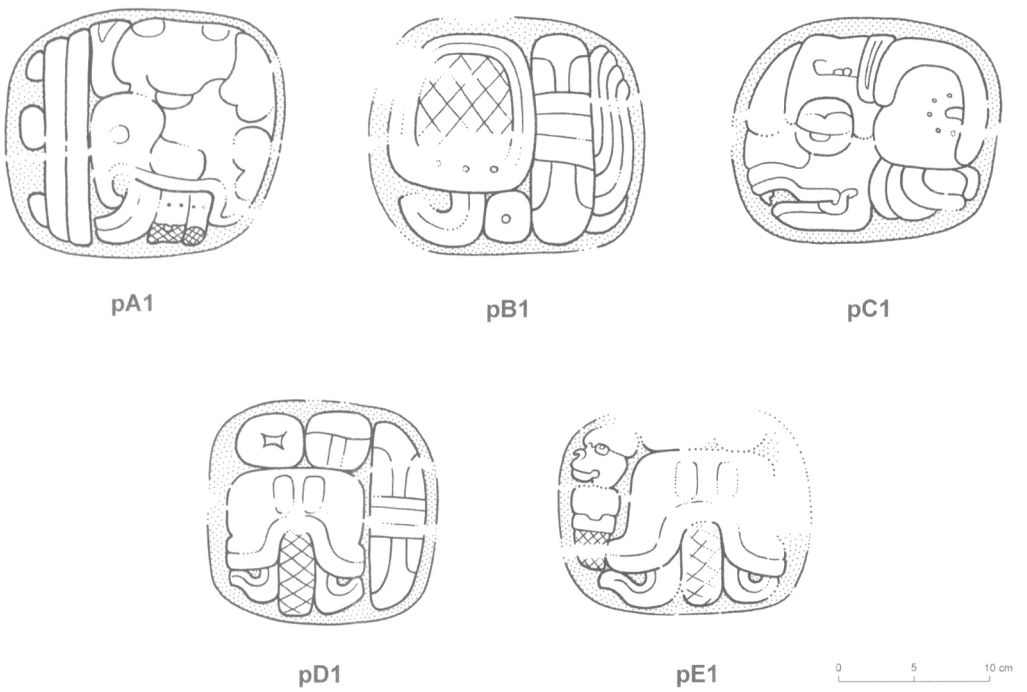


Figure 11. The glyphic medallions of Tipan, Monument 1 (drawings by Christophe Helmke based on photographs by Christopher Andres and Shawn Morton).

and formed by direct percussion, whereas the broad backside was left unaltered, featuring the natural surface of the stone. It was initially surmised that the monument was essentially square and symmetrical in form. However, excavation revealed that Monument 1 is in fact roughly rectangular, with an irregular notch along its unworked backside (Figure 10). Investigation also showed that the text was not only positioned right-side up, but that its extremity was broken off in antiquity on a still-missing fourth fragment. The extant text confirms that the initial left portion of the inscription is currently missing. Also of note is an absence of carving on the monument's superior face, such as that typical of giant *Ajaw* altars, which are otherwise common at Caracol (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981; Satterthwaite 1951:26–37). These features suggest that the monument may have formed part of an architectural feature, with its irregular backside originally embedded in masonry, leaving the other three sides exposed. As such, the monument may have served as the uppermost course of an axial outset stair block embellishing Str. A-1. Indeed, the use of large and heavy facing stones as the crowning course is a construction practice found elsewhere in the palace at Tipan, as well as at other sites in the area, including Cahal Uitz Na and Pook's Hill. Excavations in 2013 revealed the two lowest courses of the interior corner of an axial outset. Whether these are remains of a stair block associated with Monument 1 is unclear, however, due to an extensive looters' trench that affected the feature.

The five remaining glyphic medallions together constitute a syntactically coherent clause that serves as a self-referential dedicatory statement to the monument (see Stuart 1998:374–376) (Figure 11). The clause is initiated by a calendrical notation (pA1) that provides the name of the "month" in the Haab calendar and its associated coefficient. The remaining partial date is written **13-MUWAN**, read *uxlajuun muwaan*, "13 Muwan." Given that the style of the glyphs indicates that the monument dates to the Late Classic, and assuming that this date refers to an even pe-

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riod-ending date, the best match is 9.14.0.0.0—6 Ajaw 13 Muwan, corresponding to the first of December A.D. 711 in the Julian Calendar (using the standard GMT correlation). This indicates that at least a first medallion, bearing **6-AJAW** in the Tzolkin calendar, is missing. Assuming that the glyphs were applied symmetrically to the monument, the left side of the monument would originally have borne two medallions, thereby mirroring the disposition of the matching right side. If this is the case, the complete calendrical notation may have included a reference to the so-called Lord of the Night (Glyph G) between the Tzolkin and Haab that together form the Calendar Round. Were this the case, the permutations of the calendar dictate that the Lord of the Night should be G9.

The calendrical record is followed, in keeping with syntax, with the verb of the clause. The verb provides a record of the monument's dedication. Although somewhat odd, the verb *patwaan* is written **pa-wa-ta-ni** (pB1), with the second and third signs in reverse sequence. As such, this collocation records the positional verb *pat*, or "to mould, shape, form, build" (see Stuart 1998:381–384).[6] The verb *pat* was used in dedicatory statements for a variety of elements in the built environment, wherein the subject (marked for possession) follows the verb, including *y-otooht*, "house (home)," *y-ehbul*, "stair(s)," and **u**-T174-**tuun**, "altar." On the Tipan monument, the subject is recorded in the third medallion (pC1), wherein the latter clearly recordS **TUN-ni**. The first sign represents a zoomorphic glyph that serves as the head-variant of the vocalic sign **u**, functioning as the possessive marker in *u-tuun*, "his stone." As such, the text records the "forming" of the monument that is described, rather insipidly, as a "stone," which does not assist us in determining whether the monument formed part of a stair or stood on its own as an altar.

The fourth medallion (pD1) is of particular importance and poses some interesting challenges. At first sight, the glyph block appears to be written T733-**ta-AJAW** (using the numerical glyph designations of Thompson 1962). The reading of the T733 logogram remains in debate, but based on phonetic complements **ta** and **ti** in final position, it is clear that the term in question ends in the consonant *-t*. Stephen Houston and Dmitri Beliaev have proposed reading T733 as **PIT**, and although a tentative proposal, it is clear that the logogram refers to palanquins —the elaborate deity effigy litters on which kings were borne into battle (see Houston 2008; Martin 1996:227–232; Stuart 2005:88–89) (Figure 14d). Were the glyph block to record **PIT?-ta-AJAW** one would obtain the title *pi't ajaw* or "palanquin lord," here presumably referring to the monument's possessor. Nevertheless, the value of T168 (usually recording **AJAW**) in this context has been called into question since it remains unclear whether T733:168 forms two separate signs, or fused elements of a larger logogram (Stuart 2005:88). Assuming that T733:168-**ta** together serve to write **PIT?-ta**, then the dedicatory clause can be expanded and read in full as *patwaan u-tuun pi't*, or "it was built/shaped, the stone palanquin." This segment would provide us with the designation for a heretofore unknown type of monument, a stone simulacrum of a palanquin. Relevant to our interpretations is Naranjo Stela 32, which depicts an elaborate palanquin resting on an elevated platform (Graham 1978:86). Following from this, if Monument 1 indeed formed part of an axial stair block, this particular type of architectural feature, both at Tipan and at sites throughout the Maya area, could have specifically functioned as a pedestal for the display of palanquins.

The same spelling as that recorded on Tipan Monument 1 is found in the text of Caracol, Altar 12 (dated to A.D. 820); here it is found in the titular phrase of a Tikal individual who was defeated at the hands of one of Caracol's rulers (Grube 1994:97) (Figure 12b). Intriguingly, the text also makes reference to a verb that elsewhere is seen in connection with the carrying of palanquins (Grube 1994:95). The same palanquin logogram is also recorded in the text of Dos Pilas, Stela 8, in the phrase relating the accession of Itzam K'awiil (A.D. 698–727) (Figure 12c). Elsewhere, we see a titular form preceded by a numeral, ranging from six to nine, as in the case of Naj Tunich, Drawings 25 and 29, El Palmar, Hieroglyphic Stair 1, or Sacul, Stela 1 (Figure 12e-g), titles that are also found in the texts of Naranjo, Seibal, Tikal, and Calakmul. Whatever the case, it is probable that the Tipan text refers to a particular type of monument and its dedication,

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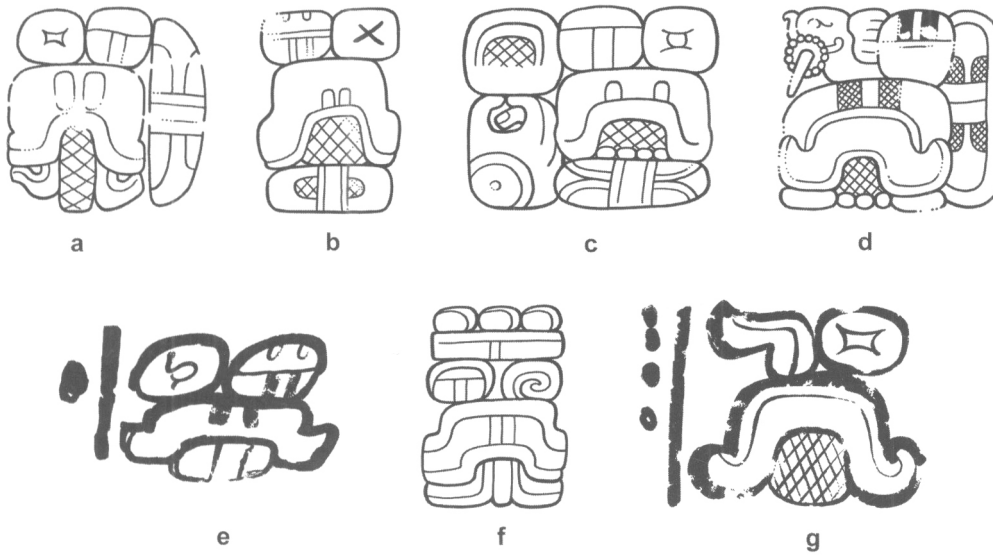


Figure 12. Palanquin glyphs in Maya writing: (a) Tipan, Monument 1; (b) Caracol, Altar 12; (c) Dos Pilas, Stela 8; (d) Tikal, Temple IV, Lintel 2; (e) Naj Tunich, Drawing 29; (f) Sacul, Stela 1; (g) Naj Tunich, Drawing 25 (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

rather than providing a title referring to the historical figure who commissioned the monument.[7]

The final glyphic collocation (pE1) is the most problematic, since it is partly eroded. However, detailed inspection reveals that this records **u-PIT?-#**, and the final eroded segment may well record the T168 portion of the palanquin logogram, closely duplicating the preceding medallion. Alternatively, one could posit that a numeral **2** was rendered above as a superfix, thereby forming one of these numbered titles, here providing *ucha'pi't*, "second palanquin." Assuming that the medallion originally recorded **u-**T733-168, then this would form a typical possessive construction, *u-pi't*, "his/its palanquin," with the remainder of the now-missing text going on to cite the names and titles of the historical figure who owned the palanquin and commissioned the monument. This possessive construction thereby makes it clear that the glyphs preserved on Monument 1 are just a small part of the original text, additional parts of which, it is hoped, will be discovered in future field seasons.

What can be said with certainty is that the style and quality of the glyphs of Tipan Monument 1 demonstrate that it is the product of an accomplished sculptor and/or scribe. The text is completely unprecedented for the area and sheds light on a heretofore unknown but important literate court. Whereas the inscription raises many questions for future research, the discovery of additional segments of the original text would greatly aid in resolving the uncertainties presented by the extant monument.

Summary and Conclusions

The discovery of the ceramic texts and of Monument 1 at Tipan is significant on multiple fronts. As the first example of a glyphic monument documented in this part of west-central Belize, Monument 1 allows us to start considering Tipan's place in the ancient political landscape. The monument's date is also significant since it falls squarely within a specific sculptural tradition seen at both Caracol and Xunantunich. At these locations, relatively small and wholly glyphic monuments were dedicated within the confines of the royal court at the close of the Late Classic period—the stucco texts of the Caana at Caracol (dated to ca. A.D. 680 [Grube and Martin 2004; Martin and Grube 2000:94–95]), as well as Panels 1 and 2 at Xunantunich (dated to between A.D. 670 and 820 [Helmke et al. 2010:98, 99–107]). Considered together, these texts speak of a de-emphasis on public royal pageantry and point to

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mounting seclusion, with the target audience becoming increasingly limited to the highest social echelons in the confines of the royal court. Significantly, this shifting audience and recontextualization of glyphic texts mirror our growing understanding of Maya palatial architecture, which exhibits similar signs of mounting seclusion and restricted access during the Late Classic period.

In view of Tipan's size, the presence of Late Classic period Monument 1 is significant, for it suggests that the site may yet yield additional glyphic monuments. In the event that these come to light, they would further support our suggestion that Tipan was a place of great importance in Late Classic period central Belize (Andres et al. 2010). Fortunately, we are now in a position to draft a tentative outline of Tipan's historical trajectory, to be supplemented and amended as necessary as more data become available. As we have seen, the early ceramic texts may mark the incipience of dynastic activity at the site. If these ceramics indeed serve as viable proxies for estimating the extent of Tikal's influence, it would seem that Tipan was an active part of this network by the mid-sixth century. Changing fortunes and Tikal's defeat in A.D. 562 undoubtedly released Tipan from this sphere of influence in the Middle Classic. However, rather than falling under the sway of Caracol, the monolithic stair-side panels may hint at a connection with Naranjo during the regency of Lady Six Sky and the reign of her son (A.D. 682–728+). At the same time, the waning of Naranjo's power may also be evident, since even before the reign of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk had come to a close, Tipan's elites asserted their prerogatives by raising Monument 1 in A.D. 711. This monument marks the advent of a strong local dynasty, and the presence of the "palanquin king" title may link Tipan with sites in southeastern Peten, where this title predominates. Equally important, the fact that the Tipan monument exhibits the innovative suffix *-waan* but does not bear a giant *Ajaw* date on its upper surface implies that the site did not maintain close relations with Caracol during this part of the Classic period. Although archaeological evidence makes it clear that Tipan continued to flourish well into the Terminal Classic, Monument 1 is also the latest clear historical data presently known.

Clearly, these assessments of Tipan's affiliations and our understanding of the web of social, political, and economic relationships within which the community was embedded are preliminary and will require refinement relative to future finds. However, when considered in combination with the well-developed site hierarchy we are documenting in the area, and the substantial degree of integration indicated by the extensive inter-site causeway system within the Tipan polity (Andres et al. 2011b), Monument 1 further highlights the sociopolitical importance of this still poorly understand part of the ancient Maya world (Wrobel et al. 2012).

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Notes

1. In a recent study (Helmke and Awe 2012), the extent of the Tipan polity was reconstructed using nearest-neighbor Thiessen polygons. The nearest neighbors are Bateelek, Deep Valley, Hanging Rock (a.k.a. Irish Creek), Camalote, Blackman Eddy, Lower Dover, and an unnamed site in the Barton Creek Valley. As such, the polity would encompass an arc with a radius ranging between 5.4 and 7.7 km (Helmke and Awe 2012:74).

2. In addition to the Pasión, where monolithic panels predominate, this architectural feature is also found at other sites in Belize. At Lamanai, an Early Classic carved panel adorns a stair block of Str. N10–36, depicting two seated figures framing a hieroglyphic text. Noteworthy examples in southern Belize include the Mayflower sites, where granite panels adorn the sides of stairs (Graham 1994:105, Figure 4.25). Similar panels are known for Lubaantun and Uxbenka, and granite slabs were also reported in 1899 at Kendal (Phil Wanyerka, personal communication 2012). At present, the dating of the southern Belize examples remains unknown and it is therefore difficult to ascertain whether these are contemporary with, or postdate, the Pasión examples.

3. Although the exact motivations for speleothem breakage are unknown, in this instance it seems that the speleothems were broken to facilitate access to the most remote reaches of the cave and for ritual use outside of the cave, given that none were discovered during the excavations within.

4. The three larger dots preceding the coefficient of the date, and the stippled line connecting these dots, serve not as a numeral, but as "fillers" to mark off the beginning from the end of a text (contemporary examples are known from Altun Ha and Tikal).

5. This is not to say that Uacho and Saxche ceramics continued to be produced at Caracol, but that existing vessels dating from before the military engagements persisted in use for at least two additional decades (based on dates recorded in tombs, see Chase 1994).

6. The *-waan* suffix is a western Ch'olan innovation, replacing the more archaic eastern Ch'olan suffix *-laj* from A.D. 633 onwards (see Hruby and Child 2004; Lacadena and Wichmann 2002). The innovative suffix eventually came to predominate and supplant the former, even within the eastern part of the central Lowlands, where traditional eastern Ch'olan was preferred. The presence and dating of the *-waan* suffix on the Tipan monument indicates that the elite of the site followed these same innovative trends, in contrast to Caracol, which in most respects can be treated as a relict area preserving archaic forms of the language.

7. In several cases, the palanquin glyph occurs in segments that make reference to deities, and in particular those that adorned particular litters. This may have been the case here also, with the now missing portion of the text going on to name a tutelary deity of Tipan, to whom the monument was dedicated.

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