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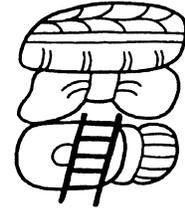
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# Glyph Dwellers



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## *A “Macaw Face Headband” Dance on Site R Lintel 5*

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More than a decade ago, when I was doing research for my M.A. thesis on ancient Maya dance, Linda Schele shared with me photographs of the Site R lintels. Many of these photographs were also reproduced in the 1991 Workbook for the Maya Meetings at Texas (Schele 1991:196-200). Being particularly interested in Lintels 4 and 5, which preserved T516 “dance” expressions, I proceeded to make a preliminary drawing of Lintel 5, which depicts two dancers (Figure 1). (A drawing of Lintel 4 was soon published by Nikolai Grube [1992].) In my original drawing, I was able to discern the elements of the dance expression correctly, but did not realize their significance. In this paper, I suggest that they identify the performance of the figure on the left as a “macaw-face headband” dance.

The figures on Site R Lintel 5 are expertly drawn, expressing the swaying motion of a coordinated dance through bodily posture and costume elements. The postures of the figures mirror each other, with the weight borne on one leg, the other knee bent and heel raised. Each figure holds rattles or small feathered batons in both hands; these are held with one arm extended outward and slightly upward and the other in front of the chest. The costumes are broadly similar, consisting of a beaded necklace and a bar pectoral worn over a long scarf. The scarf appears to be made of quilted cotton with cloth strips attached to its end. A feathered band crosses the torso and passes under one arm. The precise structure of the clothing covering the hips is uncertain, but it does include four tasseled panels and possibly medallions. It is similar to the “Type III” skirt featured on carvings from Yaxchilan (Tate 1992:79–81). The apron is rendered in a crosshatched pattern and with two bands of long fringe. Where it is visible on the figure on the right, the apron has a small quatrefoil design on the lower section. Short trapezoidal extensions project stiffly from the top of the apron. Both figures also wear high-backed sandals, wristlets, tasseled knee-bands, ear spools, and feathered nose ornaments.

The headdresses of the two dancers are broadly similar, consisting of a curved, feathered headband, with bunches of cut feathers projecting from the top. Additional long feathers, some decorated with rings and tassels, extend out of the cut-feather bunches. However, each headdress has a different frontal adornment: the figure on the right wears a vulture head, while his companion has a macaw

head. The personified wings are attached directly to the birds' heads. On the figure on the right, the leg and claw of the vulture is visible dangling behind the headband.

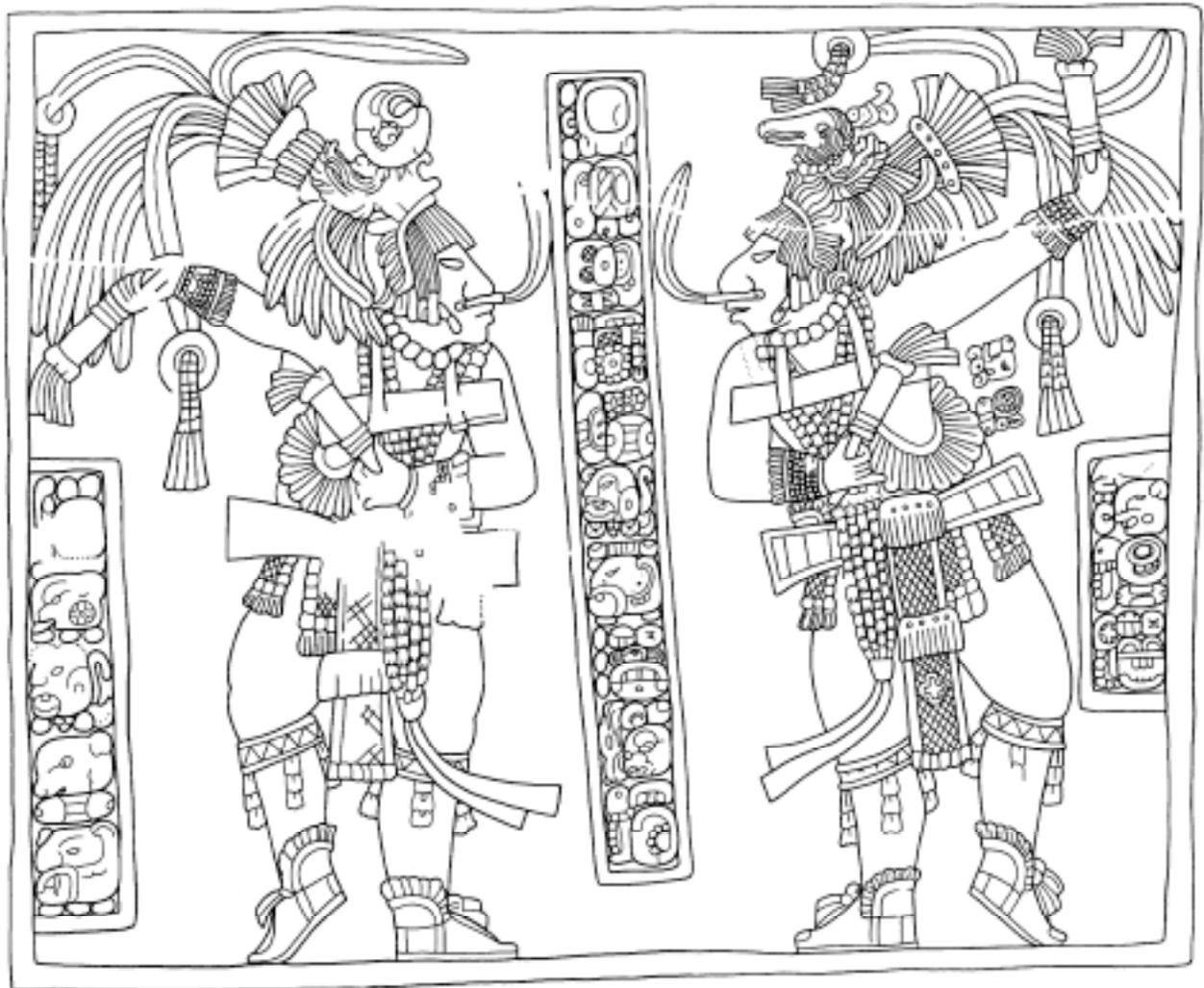


Figure 1. Site R Lintel 5.

The text of the lintel begins at the center glyphic column with a CR date of 2 Kab'an or Ik', O Pop (A1-A2). Schele (1991:199) gave the two most likely LC correlations for this date as 9.16.1.13.17 (February 4, 753) or 9.16.14.17.2 (February 1, 766). The *ak'taj* "dance" verb is next, at A3, followed by the complement clause describing the name of the dance: *ti' u-tu-mo'-hun* (A4). Next is the name of the actor: **yax to-ko we'?-la?-ne** "Yax Tok We'lan?" (A5-A6). Next, at A7, is a relationship glyph (**u-sa-ja-la**), which identifies him as a *sajal* subordinate to the person named in the following glyphs. The remainder of the signs in column A and all of column B (to the far right) refer to the overlord, Bird Jaguar IV, ruler of Yaxchilan (*ux k'atun ajaw ucha'nun aj uk yaxun? b'alam aj k'al b'ak ch'uhul siyaj? chan ajaw* "three k'atun ajaw, guardian of Aj Uk, Bird Jaguar IV, he of twenty captives, holy Yaxchilan ajaw"). In conformity with pictorial conventions at Yaxchilan (and other Classic Maya sites), the politically dominant figure (Bird Jaguar IV) must be the figure on the right, while the *sajal* Yax Tok We'lan is the figure on the left. This is also suggested by the nose feather of the figure on the left??, which brushes against the central glyph column. The T516 expression therefore refers to the dance performed by the figure on the left, the *sajal*.

The caption on the far left begins with a partly effaced glyph (C1) and a sign including T757 **b'a**, but the following signs seem to restate the name of the *sajal*, including the name **we'?-la-ne?** at C3,

*ch'ok* 'prince' (C4), and *sajal* (C5). A small incised scribal signature adjacent to the figure on the right (D1-D2) attributes the panel to an artist named *Chak Jal Te'*.



As Houston (1984) and Grube (1992) discussed, the terms contained in the complement clauses of T516 'dance' expressions generally refer to some attribute of costume or to the objects held by the dancers. In turn, this provides the name for the dance. However, in a recent note, I made the suggestion that the names of some dances could be based on the headdress worn in the performance (Looper 2003). Lintel 5 provides confirmation of this hypothesis. The name of the dance recorded here (transcribed above), can be read as *ut mo' hun*, literally "face macaw headband," an obvious reference to the macaw-headed headdress worn by the dancer on the left. More properly, the name of the dance should be rendered "macaw-face headband" (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Site R Lintel 5, detail of dance phrase.

The use of the T582 sign alone represent *mo'* "macaw" is known from Copan (Macri and Loper 2003:93), and *hun* for "headband" is well attested in the epigraphic literature. However, *ut* as "face" is less well documented. However, this term has close cognates in the Cholan languages:

proto-Cholan (Kaufman and Norman 1984:120)  
*\*(h)ut* 'eye, face, fruit'

Ch'ol (Aulie and Aulie 1978:132)  
*wut* 'cara'

Ch'ol (Attinasi 1973:334)  
*wut* 'eye, fruit, grain, small solid'

Chontal (Knowles 1984:425)  
*hut* 'eye, fruit on tree, face'

Ch'olti' (Moran 1935:17)  
*ut* 'cara'

Ch'orti' (Wisdom 1950:474)  
*uut* 'one's face, its front side, one's front'  
*uut nibah* 'front side of my body'  
*uut e witzir* 'side or face of a hill, precipice, bluff'  
*uut e ch'en* 'precipice, steep wall of a canyon'  
*uut e winik* 'man's face'

The grammar of the lintel text is similar to that documented in Ch'orti', in which the term for face is inherently possessed. (The *e* in the Ch'orti' examples functions as an article.) No additional pronoun is needed to clarify that the 'face' belongs to a macaw.

Although this is not the place for an extended commentary on the meaning of this performance, a few points should be made. First, this dance may be a variant of other ancient Maya performances involving macaw symbols, such as that described on Piedras Negras Lintel 3. This performance, which has been interpreted as a "descending macaw" dance, happened 17 years earlier on 9.15.18.3.15 (August 2, 749; Martin and Grube 2000:149). The Site R Lintel 5 dance may also be

somehow related to rites performed by rulers attired as supernatural birds on Izapan style monuments and elsewhere in ancient Maya art (see Kappelman 1997).

It is also interesting that this dance was performed on 0 Pop, the day before the Maya New Year. The precise significance of the dance in relation to this date is not clear; however, we do know that dances played an important part in New Year ceremonies in sixteenth-century Yucatan, as reported by Landa. For instance, in the rites performed for K'an years, a standard was carried "with much rejoicing and dancing, to the house of the *principal* where the other statue of Bolon Dzacab was standing" (Tozzer 1941:141). These years also warranted sacrificial dances performed by old women (Tozzer 1941:143). Muluc years were celebrated by war dances, termed *Holcan okot* and *Batel okot* (Tozzer 1941:144). For Ix years, Landa states that, "They executed many dances, and the old women danced as they were wont to do" (Tozzer 1941:147). Finally, for Cauac years, officials performed the "muddy dance", also termed *Xibalba okot*, which Landa translates as "the dance of the devil" (Tozzer 1941:147). Although separated significantly from these events in time and space, the image on Site R Lintel 5 may suggest that Classic Maya rulers of the southern lowlands similarly performed specific dances to mark the transition to the New Year.

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