

THE MONUMENTS AT NAACHTUN, PETÉN

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This year, the first season of the Naachtun project was completed. This paper will present the Naachtun monuments, the results of the epigraphical investigation conducted during the 2004 season, and the goals for next season.

Naachtun is located in the northern end of Petén, and occupies a central position among the Classic “superpowers” of Tikal and Calakmul. The readable dates in the monuments of Naachtun, between 504 AD and 761 AD, cover almost the entire Classic period. One of the goals of the Naachtun Project is to investigate how the site managed to survive among those two powerful neighbours and their constant political presence. An additional goal of the project consists in exploring the transition between the Preclassic and the Classic in Naachtun. The site is located in the northwest end of the El Mirador basin, and contrary to the fate of many –if not all– other neighbours in the basin, it survived the social upheavals that unfolded around the end of the Preclassic period.

A STUDY OF THE NAACHTUN MONUMENTS

Since its discovery by several gum gatherers less than 100 years ago, Naachtun remained unknown to archaeologists and was not investigated because of its remote localization, but most of all because the carved monuments there were quite deteriorated and presented the epigraphists with very little information. During the expeditions conducted by Morley (1922, 1937-1938), Lundell (1932, 1933), and Ruppert and Denison (1943), a total of 24 carved stelae were recorded, together with 21 plain stelae and nine plain altars.

However, Morley, Ruppert and Denison made some mistakes in the identification of the plain stelae and in the numbering of several carved ones. It is now known that there are 25 carved stelae among the monuments found up to 1933. Given such anomalies, the re-numbering of the monuments published by Morley was an important work to do. Besides, a new stela was discovered during the 2004 season, as well as a plain altar (Altar 8), which in fact had carvings.

Based on these monuments and on additional archaeological information, it may be inferred that Naachtun was a large site with an occupation that extended from the

Preclassic to the Terminal Classic period. However, there is only fragmentary information about the inscriptions at the site, as indicated in two characteristic monuments.

Stelae 18 and 19 are located at each side of the base of the west stairway of Structure 38, a radial pyramid in Group B. Stela 18 is presently located on the left side of the stairway; this was one of the stelae mistakenly documented in the numeric sequence of Ruppert and Denison. At front there is a female standing on a captive. When comparing it with the other stelae at Naachtun, this one shows a good state of preservation, despite the fact that the glyphs carved on both sides are too deteriorated and therefore hinder any accurate deciphering.

In the opposite side of the stairway lies Stela 19, about which Ruppert and Denison (1934:134) wrote, "*there are traces of sculpting and glyphs, but nothing that can be identified*". This stela was considered to be in such a poor state of preservation that not even pictures were taken. When Alexander Parmington and Peter Mathews undertook the investigation of Stela 19 during the 2004 season, they discovered that it was a remarkably fragmented monument. When they turned it upside down and cleaned the fragments, they found something more than mere "traces of sculpting", though unfortunately, there is not much to be observed. Nonetheless, the fragments recovered made it possible to establish that just like Stela 18, Stela 19 also was depicting a person standing on a captive, with carved glyphs at both sides.

Actually, Stelae 18 and 19 form a "pair of stelae". Stela 19 represents a ruler standing on a captive, while Stela 18 is depicting the queen. The dating of these stelae is not known for sure, but most probably they both date to around 700 AD to 750 AD, according to their style and history.

THE 2004 SEASON

The most important work in the epigraphic program of the 2004 season consists in the compilation of the basic documentation of the monuments located in Naachtun. The program includes the elaboration of drawings in the field, measurements and notes about the monuments, to be published in a format useful to epigraphists and other scholars devoted to the Maya culture. This process has attempted to apply the high standards of the project *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions* conducted by Ian Graham. During the 2004 season, detailed notes and measurements were taken of all the carved monuments at the site, and documentation is being prepared with field drawings and photos. It was also decided that monuments were not to be turned over, a much time-consuming process. Therefore, other monuments must be examined to find out whether they do or do not have other sculptures or glyphs besides the ones previously recorded.

One of the major purposes of the 2004 season consisted in finding the Emblem Glyph of Naachtun, as well as investigating any existing interrelationship with Tikal or Calakmul. The Emblem Glyphs are present among the titles of rulers, and indicate that the ruler is "*the sacred lord of the kingdom so and so*". Nikolai Grube thinks he succeeded in identifying one local Emblem Glyph in Naachtun's Stela 23, and

suggested that the name of the kingdom was that of *Masul*. This Emblem Glyph occurs in several monuments from other sites around Naachtun, as well as in Calakmul, Tikal, and Río Azul. Unfortunately, it was not possible to confirm this identification, neither with Stela 23 nor with the other Naachtun monuments.

Even though several Emblem Glyphs are in fact present in the Naachtun monuments, none has survived intact, and consequently, the name of Naachtun has not yet been identified. However, the name of *Masul* is a sound candidate, for a number of reasons. Clearly, Naachtun is a major site with a large palace and with the largest *corpus* of carved monuments in the northern end of Petén. This suggests that it was the capital city of a Classic kingdom, and therefore it must have had an Emblem Glyph. The only Emblem Glyph present in the inscriptions within the region, and one that has not been identified with any archaeological site in the area is the *Masul* glyph.

A TENTATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE EPIGRAPHIC HISTORY OF NAACHTUN

Then, worked continued with the Naachtun inscriptions (in most cases that means deciphered dates), and the presumption that the emblem glyph *Masul* refers to Naachtun. The earliest references to the Emblem Glyph of *Masul* occur in a pair of looted ear flares (probably from Río Azul), and in Tikal's Stela 10. The ear flares do not include a date. In the case of Stela 10, the dating ranges between 465 and 527 AD. Martin and Grube (2000: 37, 39), and Guenter (2002), favour the interpretation of a dating to the 486 AD.

The clause connected with *Masul* reads *ch'akaj u ch'en Masul Ajaw*, which means "the lord of Masul's cave has been hit". In other words, if Naachtun could be identified as the capital of the kingdom of *Masul*, this "was hit with the axe" of Tikal, implying that the two kingdoms were enemies before the attack took place. That is one of the earliest mentions made referring to a conquest in the historic inscriptions of the Classic period. Although it is not known for sure, it is probable that Naachtun was a member of the Calakmul sphere prior to the battle.

The text in the ear flares mentions a ruler from Río Azul who lived shortly before 500 AD. In addition, it mentions a *Masul* ruler who bears the title of "*Ochk'in Kalomte*", a high ranking title associated with Tikal and Teotihuacan. In the following 150 years, Calakmul would be at its peak, and it would be hard to believe that Naachtun was not forced to shift once more towards the Calakmul sphere at that time.

Nonetheless, by the end of the VII century, Tikal initiated its recovery and by 695 AD, *Jasaw Chan K'awil I*, the king of Tikal, defeated his counterpart of Calakmul in battle. Although it would seem that Calakmul survived its defeat, no doubt many of its allies resulted more seriously affected. In fact, Naachtun would be mentioned in Tikal's Altar 5, implying it was loyally affiliated to Tikal. The text in Altar 5 tells about the king of *Masul* who assists the king of Tikal in an unearthing ritual in 711 AD.

Mathews suggests that Stelae 18 and 19 of Naachtun correspond to a time when Naachtun and Tikal were allies during the period of dominance over Calakmul. Like we said, both stelae show persons from Naachtun standing on top of captives. In Stela 18, the queen of Naachtun is represented standing on a captive, who has been identified through one glyph only, which reads *Ox Te' Tun*. This is a well-known toponym which refers to Calakmul. Considering the localization of Naachtun, so close to its powerful neighbour, this declaration shows almost an arrogant confidence on the side of Naachtun, probably quite safe as a Tikal ally.

Another glyph found in the region, around Naachtun, is mentioned as well. It is the *K'uhul Chatan Winik* glyph, particularly associated with the Codex-style pottery from northern Petén (Boot 2002). The *K'uhul Chatan Winik* glyph has been documented in Tikal, Calakmul, and Nakbe. Erik Boot persuasively argues that this glyph was a title which was incorporated to the toponym *Chatan*. In general, he identified that toponym with the region at north of Lake Petén Itzá, associated with people and places from northern Petén, known from Itza' colonial sources like "*Ah Chata*".

Recently, the *K'uhul Chatan Winik* glyph was found in a monument at a site that Ivan Sprajc discovered in 1998. The site, initially called Zapote Bobal, is located some 45 km north of Naachtun at the border between Campeche and Quintana Roo. In 2002, the name was changed to Altar de los Reyes, following the discovery of a wonderful Late Classic altar that lists different Emblem Glyphs, including those of Calakmul, Tikal, and Palenque. That list also includes the *K'uhul Chatan Winik* glyph. In other words, it would seem that the title might well work as an Emblem Glyph.

What is important here is that the *K'uhul Chatan Winik* glyph is directly associated with the *Masul* Emblem Glyph in Early Classic texts. This suggests that at least during the Early Classic, both titles overlap. Hopefully, new investigations and new findings in Naachtun may be of help so that the issue of identifications is finally solved.

EPIGRAPHIC WORK IN THE FUTURE

In future seasons, the documentation of the monuments at Naachtun will continue, including the revision of a number of stelae in order to verify their carved surfaces, make the drawings and take pictures. In addition, the program for the protection of monuments must be continued, with the construction of thatch-roofed shelters to protect them from the rain.

As to the epigraphy, the most important goal resides in identifying one Emblem Glyph of Naachtun in a legible condition so as to place the site in the context of the political geography of the Classic period. It is still believed that *Masul* is the best candidate for the Emblem Glyph, though this must be confirmed with the discovery of a legible and clear emblem glyph.

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