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Identifying Individual Hands in the Monuments of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Naab of Palenque



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Introduction and Acknowledgements

A few researchers have attempted to identify the hands of individual Maya artists. For instance, Spinden in 1913 and Proskouriakoff in 1950, while classifying types and trends in Maya art, mention in passing the likelihood that, for example, some monuments of strikingly similar sculptural style standing in the Copán Plaza were likely sculpted by the same hand (Spinden, Herbert, *A Study of Maya Art, Its Subject Matter and Historical Development*. From the series *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol. VI. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1913; and Proskouriakoff, Tatiana, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture*. Carnegie Institute Publication No. 558, Washington, DC, 1950). Günter Zimmermann in 1953 identified eight scribes at work in the *Dresden Codex* ([Figure 1](#)).

Cohodas identified hands of individual Yaxchilán artists in 1972 and, with his students in 1984 attributed the paintings on several score 'Codex Style' vases to perhaps a single workshop containing only six master artists (Cohodas, Marvin, "Transformations: Relationships Between Image and Text in the Ceramic Paintings of the Metropolitan Master," in William Hanks, ed., *Text and Image in Ancient Mesoamerican Art*, Oxford, 1984).

In 1988 Barbara and Justin Kerr pioneered a Morellian analysis of various hands in Codex-style vases ("Some Observations on Maya Vase Painters," pp. 236-259 in *Maya Iconography*. Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillett G. Griffin, eds., Princeton University Press).

In 1992, Carolyn Tate, using Morellian connoisseurship methodology, not only identified a dozen or so individual sculptors working at Yaxchilán, but distinguished on these reliefs between the work of carvers and of the scribes who laid them out. Beginning with Yaxchilán Stela 12, she showed that in ambitious productions such as stelae and lintel-sets, that it was the rule, rather than the exception, for several expert artists to work together (Tate, Carolyn E., Yaxchilán, *The Design of a Maya Ceremonial City*, Austin, 1992, pp. 38ff.). More recently, David Stuart and John Montgomery have looked at artist's signatures, especially in Usumacinta region sites such as Piedras Negras. A surprising number of these monuments bear multiple signatures, sometimes as many as eight or ten ([Figure 2](#)).

It has been the aim of this research project to follow a similar course of inquiry in Palenque, focusing on the monuments of Palenque's K'an Hok' Chitam and Ahkal Mo' Naab (ca. A.D. 715-745). In a forthcoming paper, I submit the Early Classic monuments of Tikal to a like analysis.

Variationen häufiger Hauptzeichen und Affixe
(Die Schreiber der Dresdener Handschrift)


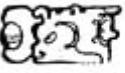


































Dresden Seite:	2	3-23	24, 45-63 29-44	65-69	69-74	25-28	32-35a	42-45c
126 (Gott E)								
169 (Gott B)								
128								
1								
60								
79								

Figure 1. Part of Zimmermann's table of idiosyncratic glyphs distinguishing eight Hands.

I am grateful for generous sponsorship and financial support from the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI) and others. I am especially indebted to the crucial and enthusiastic personal sponsorship of Alfonso Morales in Palenque and of Sofia Paredes, former Acting *Directora* of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia in Guatemala City. At more fundamental levels, Norberto Tesucun at the Museo Sylvanus Morley and Don Florentino in the *bodega* of the Museo Nacional in Guatemala City cheerfully accompanied me for the duration of my study, and tirelessly fetched scores of priceless objects in their charge. This assistance allowed me to take some 5,000 detail photographs of inscriptions, comprising nearly every surviving glyph and relief fragment within my purview. These photographs, most for the first time, reveal subtle details of carving technique and personal idiosyncrasies of style which define the personality of an artist's handwriting.

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Figure 2. Piedras Negras Stela, signatures.



Figure 3. Close-up detail of Woman's profile from Palenque Tablet of the Slaves.

The Idea

The beautiful stucco glyphs from Temple XVIII provided the initial inspiration for this project. They are not displayed in text order, but rather by type: Calendric and Distance Number glyphs in the first rows, collocations with 'moon' signs together, etc. This typological arrangement fortuitously allows the observer to compare various examples of the same glyph, side by side. It was there that I first noticed the variety of styles juxtaposed in a single inscription. For instance, the so-called Distance Number Introductory Glyph or DNIG (which we now read as *u-ts'akaj*), exists in several adjacent examples ([Figure 4](#)). It should be obvious to anyone immediately upon comparing these four, that at least two and perhaps all four were fashioned by different individual artists.

Standard Morellian practice suggests we examine simple, repetitive forms such as the shape of the *-aj* and the *ts'ak* glyphs to begin to recognize individual artistic habits. The second example of *ts'ak* 'swastika' is rigidly straight, while the other three are curved. The other three differ less dramatically, but the fourth's 'swastika' has curved corners, and the treatments of the 'hairs' and 'pellets' in the final *-aj* syllable also strikingly differ from each other. The two 'shark' profiles disagree in the shape and texture of every detail—eyes, whiskers, teeth, forehead-fins.



Figure 4. Stucco glyphs from Temple XVIII: Distance Number Introductory Glyph.

In spite of their differences, these glyphs do have enough similarity of style to appear to belong together; the sculptors have rendered their volumes to a similar depth and roundedness, and apparently employed similar tools. This indicates the existence of a master plan, a "house style" or "manual of style", as it were. Obviously, one high-ranking artist defined a format, and made certain that the work of every member of the team followed this format. Even so, he tolerated a rather wide range of interpretations. The graceful hand of the third example stands out: this artist preferred to sculpt tiny, 'laughing' eyes and subtly modeled features.

A quick comparison of calendric glyphs, of the repetitions of names, revealed a similarly diverse team of artists ([Figure 5](#) and [Figure 6](#)).



Figure 5. Stucco glyphs from Temple XVIII: 'Long Lips', father of Ahkal Mo' Naab.



Figure 6. Stucco glyphs from Temple XVIII: Name glyph of (Ahkal) Mo' Naab.

Comparing the four examples of 'Long-Lips'-Chan-Mat, one's eyes are drawn to the 'laughing eyes' of the fourth head; this appears to be by the same artist as noted in the third example above. Contrasting with the subtle 'Master of the Laughing Eyes' are the boldly-drawn eyes and mouths of the first and second examples. Here we see gorgeous clarity, strong simplicity of line and form. These qualities suggest another nickname –the 'Clarity Master'– and both *appear* to have been done by this single master, though minor interior details of the *ma* and *ta* glyphs invite caution.

The third example, stripped of fine details of eyebrow and wrinkles, presents us with a more minimalist example of the same aesthetic. Comparing the subtle concave 'bulges' on their respective *ta* glyphs, I vacillate on whether to assign this minimalist glyph to yet another hand. My criterion is influenced mainly by Occam's Razor: I assume that two very similar glyphs from the same inscription are by the same hand, unless compelled to conclude otherwise. What compels such a distinction is a combination of identifiable differences –a syndrome, if you like,– such as we see in the masters whom I have just nicknamed.

A study like this must proceed with extreme caution, especially because Maya artists clearly valued a certain level of creative improvisation. They deliberately used variant allographs –different spellings if you like– of many glyph collocations. Even when drawing the same exact glyph, an artist often seemed to revel in deliberately varying minor details.

Temple XIX Stuccos

The discovery and reassembly¹ of Temple XIX's well-preserved stucco relief ([Figure 8](#), [Figure 9](#), and [Figure 10](#)) offers an opportunity to compare styles. Temple XIX is next door to Temple XVIII, it was built under the same ruler at roughly the same era, and its artisans were presumably drawn from the same pool of talent.

Partly because of its brevity (only 12 glyphs), it offers few points of comparison with the 100-glyph Temple XVIII text. The content and discourse of the texts have little in common. The numerals in Temple XVIII are usually head-variants, while no head-variant numerals appear on the Temple XIX relief. The Temple XIX text never mentions

¹ In spite of the fine state of preservation of its parts, this huge relief (some eleven feet high and three wide) had largely fallen from its stone support and lay in a thousand pieces on the floor. Thanks to an emergency grant from FAMSI, a team of six trained Mexican conservators labored eight months to reconstruct it. With rare foresight, setting a standard for this type of archaeological excavation, Project Director Alfonso Morales insisted on the laborious collection and preservation of every scrap and chip of stucco. Many of these were the consistency of toothpaste, requiring extreme care and skill to preserve and dry out without further damaging them. Preserving the undecorated and interstitial fragments of the stucco bed allowed the team eventually to reconstruct the entire text in order, unlike the Temple XVIII texts.

Akal Mo' Nab, nor his family, focusing on a different set of characters than that of Temple XVIII. Finally, the Temple XIX text repeats thrice a striking glyph heretofore completely unknown: a heron or osprey holding a fish in its mouth, apparently a kind of title.



Figure 7. Four adjacent glyphs in Palenque Temple XIX Platform/Throne, with three different forms of the "u" syllable.



Figure 8. Palenque Temple XIX stucco Panel: whole.



Figure 9. Palenque Temple XIX stucco Panel: top panel, glyphs.



Figure 10. Palenque Temple XIX stucco Panel: middle with two glyphs.

David Stuart (private communication, October 2000) pointed out that these three examples each seem to be by a different hand. The second example, at D1, exhibits the same strength of line and form that we see in the glyphs of the 'Clarity Master' in Temple XVIII. The other two differ from each other in their treatment of eyes, fins, *u*-syllables, and *le*-syllables. The 'Clarity Master's' bird head and fish tail are strikingly simple and smooth in outline, his sculptural quality of eye of both bird and fish are crisp and effective. The other two examples are more realistic, but more diffuse. The finely-detailed head of the third fish reminds me of the 'Laughing Eyes Master,' though I hesitate to commit fully to such a claim.



Figure 11. Temple XIX Stucco Relief: A2, D1, D3. Three examples of 'Bird-with-Fish' glyph.

There are, however, many strongly-flavored glyph elements in this inscription which are difficult to parallel in Temple XVIII. For instance, the beautiful *chum-tun-ni* at C1 ([Figure 12](#)), displays an anthropomorphic "stone" and elegant *ni*-suffix without peer on Temple XVIII. The two *ch'ok* collocations at D4 and D5 (by two distinct hands, of which D4 might be our 'Clarity Master,' [Figure 13](#)) are clearly by different artists than the *ch'ok* examples surviving from Temple XVIII (Schele, Linda, and Mathews, Peter, *The Bodega of Palenque, Chiapas, México*, Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 1979, #541, 542, 543, & 545, [Figure 13](#)). The three daysigns (all *ahaw*, [Figure 14](#)) spring from two different hands, one of whom may be our 'Clarity Master'.

The second and third examples (B2, C2) are similar enough that they may spring from the same hand, though the differing details of the cartouche give me pause. This artist (or artist and slavish follower) favors crescent-shaped eyes and mouths, and the inline border of the cartouche is a distinct organic crease, while the artist of A1 prefers round eyes and a shallow-groove inline. The well-formed, single stroke mouth of A1 and the crisp grooves in the adjacent *ni*-suffix suggests that we have here another glyph by the 'Clarity Master.' Contrasting these with a pair of calendric glyphs from Temple XVIII, we see a third hand at work in the *ajaw* daysign, and a well-formed 5-*K'ayab* whose strength and simplicity recall the 'Clarity Master.'



Figure 12. Chum-tun-ni at C1.



Figure 13. Temple XIX Stucco Relief: D4 and D5, two ch'ok collocations.



T. XIX: A1

B2

C2



T. XVIII: CR glyphs

Figure 14. Temple XIX Stucco Relief: three ajaw daysigns; and ajaw daysign from Temple XVIII.

Stone Inscription Sculptors

These examples should suffice to show that even in a short 12-glyph text, the foreman working for Akal Mo' Nab saw fit to employ at least three expert stucco sculptors. One of these appears also to have worked on the inscription in Temple XVIII. But stucco text production was done piecemeal: Glyphs were formed individually, like cookies, dried, and then inserted into a bed of wet stucco on the wall. The drawback to this procedure is that the bond between glyph and substrate is rather weak, and the glyphs later fall off onto the floor. The advantage from a production standpoint is that it is not necessary for any glyph to be made in proximity to any other; one can distribute the work among several artists, and get the job done much more rapidly.

But what about stone inscriptions? Every carver needs a minimum of elbow room. Most stone inscriptions are monolithic, and one would expect any of these that are smaller than, say, the size of a grown man, to have been the work of a single artist.



Figure 15. Panel of the 96 Glyphs, detail of Columns GH.



Figure 16. Lapida de la Creación text detail (found with the Panel of the 96 Glyphs).

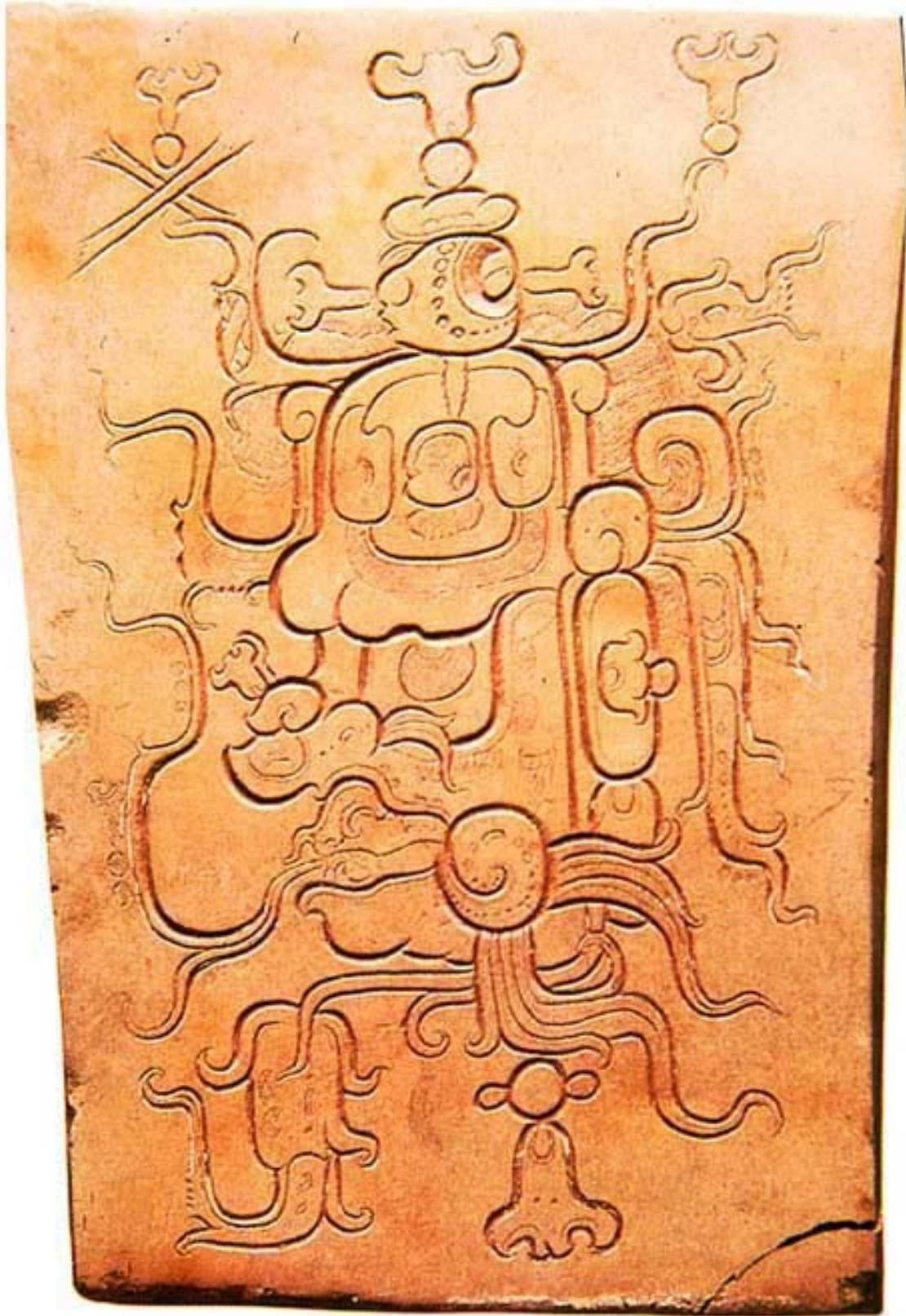


Figure 17. Trapezoidal slabs bearing images of Chaak, now housed in San Diego Museum of Man and Palenque Bodega.

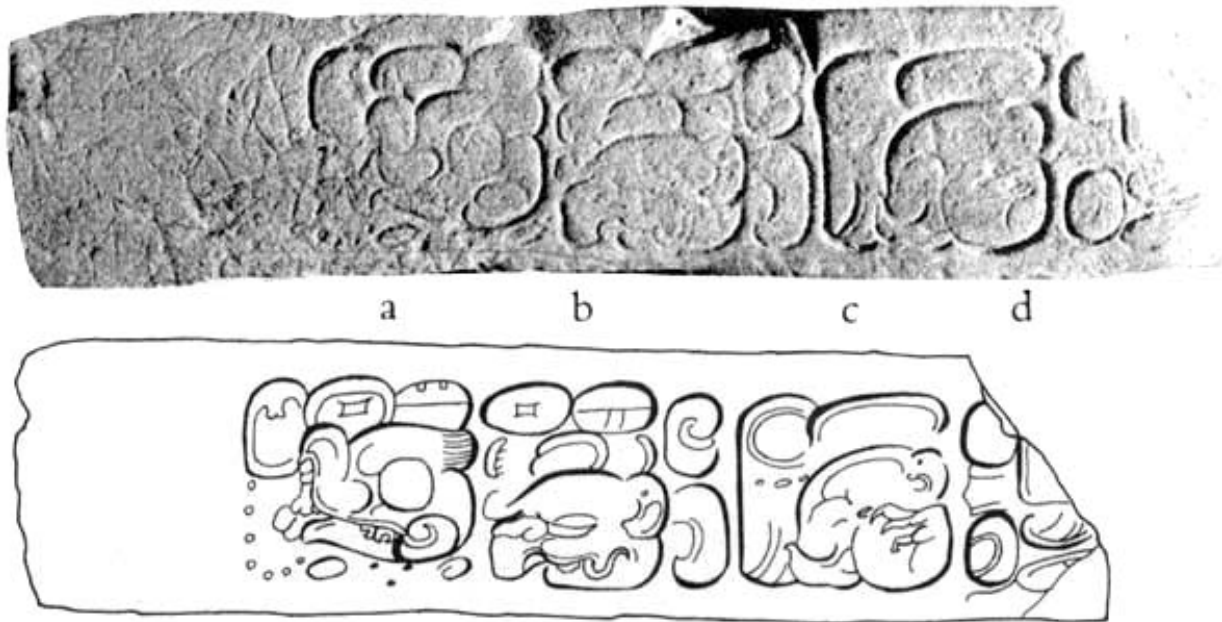


Figure 18. Fragment(s) found near Façade of the Palace (Schele & Mathews, 1979, item #37), now housed respectively in the Villahermosa Museum and Palenque Bodega.

Indeed, this is clearly the case with the celebrated *Panel of the 96 Glyphs* (124-cm-long, made A.D. 783 for K'inich K'uk'-Balam and found in the *Court of the Tower*, [Figure 15](#)). The unique work of its brilliant and flamboyant artist is instantly recognizable. Other pieces by the '96 Glyphs Master' are the *Lapida de la Creación* ([Figure 16](#), found with the *Panel of the 96 Glyphs*), two matching trapezoidal slabs bearing images of Chaak ([Figure 17](#)), and two fragments from the North Façade of the Palace (Schele & Mathews, 1979, item #37, my [Figure 18](#)). All of these seem to have once been part of a single throne or platform ensemble.



Figure 19. Incised and Relief glyphs comparison.



Figure 20. Early Classic calligraphic glyphs painted on stucco-clad vase from Waxaktun Burial A-31.

The work of this master is recognizable partly because he (or she) esteems incised glyphs and images. Most Maya carvers sculpted glyphs in (relatively) naturalistic relief, relying on volumetric modeling to enhance the forms. The '96 Glyphs Master,' in contrast, engraves his forms, precisely copying the bold and modulated calligraphic strokes of the painted layout. This carved calligraphy is rare among the Maya (though it is the rule in China and Japan, and was also in Ancient Rome).

Maya incised texts appear most commonly on non-monumental contexts, such as inscribed shells, sceptres, and the like, and on monuments, in artists' signatures and minor texts, such as one sees on stones from Piedras Negras, Yaxchilán, Bonampak, El Perú, and Kalak'mul ([Figure 2](#) and [Figure 21](#)). One also sees incised texts at Palenque on stone incensario stands, such as those found in the Temple of the Cross and Temple XVIII (Schele & Mathews, 1979, #281 and #391, my [Figure 22](#)). Incised texts of a more *prominent* purpose are much rarer, and include some Early Classic stelae from Caracol ([Figure 23](#)), Bonampak Sculptured Stone 1 and the Platform or Throne of Palenque Temple XIX, the last of which occupies our attention next.



Figure 21. Piedras Negras signatures.



Figure 22. Reverse of Palenque stone incensarios.



Figure 23. Caracol incised texts.

Temple XIX Platform

The justly-famed Platform/Throne of Temple XIX bears the longest Late Classic incised text yet found (some 200 glyph blocks). It dates to A.D. 734, during the reign of K'inich Akal Mo' Nab, predating K'uk' Balam's Panel of the 96 Glyphs by some fifty years. Except for some vandalism² and perhaps the effect of the roof of the Temple falling in, it is in extraordinarily fine condition. (Apparently the Platform was exposed for a relatively short time, perhaps less than a decade,³ before it was buried in the collapse of the Temple.) It also was a first-rate production, employing the finest artisans and a considerable budget. Although close inspection suggests that the carvers were working against a deadline –some portions appear slightly hurried, and some glyphs near the floor seem awkward, as if carved *in situ*– in general, the work is superb and brought to completion. With five decades separating the two, it is unlikely that there was a direct relationship between the artists of the Temple XIX Platform and the '96 *Glyphs* Master,' though certainly the latter was inspired by the work of the former.

The Platform consists of two carved and two uncarved limestone slabs, built against a north inside wall. As the entire text is incised calligraphy, we have here a splendid opportunity to compare long passages of actual handwriting, as well as carving idiosyncrasies. As one might expect, a preliminary comparison shows that different hands carved glyphs on the two slabs.

² The vandals broke into the stone box whose front and side contain the inscription, scattering its contents and throwing inside a text fragment or two from the front. The only substantial damage they did to the inscribed portions seems to have been directed at the image of Akal Mo' Nab, seated in the center of the south side: a frontal blow stove in the image of his head and torso.

³ This time span reflects the opinion of the archaeologists who excavated it, communicated to me personally.



Figure 24a. Temple XIX Platform South Side.



Figure 24b. Temple XIX Platform South Side.



Figure 25. Temple XIX Platform West Side.

The prominent part played by G1 in this text provides eight examples of his name for comparison, and a close examination of these names surprisingly reveals some six or seven individual hands at work.

Caution: One is rarely certain of every attribution on a complex work such as this. When a group of artists work as a team, they influence each other and the boundaries blur. It is entirely possible that Artist A carved his own layouts, and also painted the texts for Artist B and Artist C, or that Artist C carved the faces for Artist B and Artist E, and so on. However, unless compelled otherwise, I shall assume that each artist wrote his own layouts, and that they all worked from a master text layout. Although I am certain that one artist oversaw the whole project and drew the initial layouts, I am equally sure that his master layout existed mainly on paper.

This is because the handwriting and spelling habits change at the same boundaries across which the carving style changes (see [Figure 27](#)). Each artist was given an assignment, and handed a page with his text laid out on it. The master may have drawn out the text grids and sketched the figures approximately onto the stone slabs, but he trusted his expert team to interpret and paint their own assignments on the stone. To have accomplished this, the carvers must have been literate—important, high-ranking scribes, exalted in position at court, well-respected and well-fed.

Palenque Temple XIX Platform: Eight examples of the G1 glyph



Each of these four above were carved by a different individual; the other four by two more artists

The upper pair is apparently by one hand; the lower pair by another.

Figure 26. Palenque Temple XIX Platform - Eight examples of the God G1 —C6, H1, Label 4 Gl. 2, J1, P5, T3 [sans title], V1 [sans title], W7.

Palenque Temple XIX Platform

Four examples of *Sajal* glyph



Label 7, Gl. 1



S4



Label 10, Gl. 1



U4

Figure 27. Temple XIX Platform - Four examples of the *Sajal* collocation.

Figure 28 is a chart showing my initial interpretations of how the carving assignments were distributed about the throne.⁴ The changes in style tend to follow natural divisions of the layout: Hand 1 took the first four columns of text, Hand 2 the second four, Hand 4 the labels of the figure panel and Hand 3 a double load: all eight columns of the right section of text. However, he may have suffered some sort of interruption, for a few glyphs in the middle of this passage seem to have been carved by different hands.

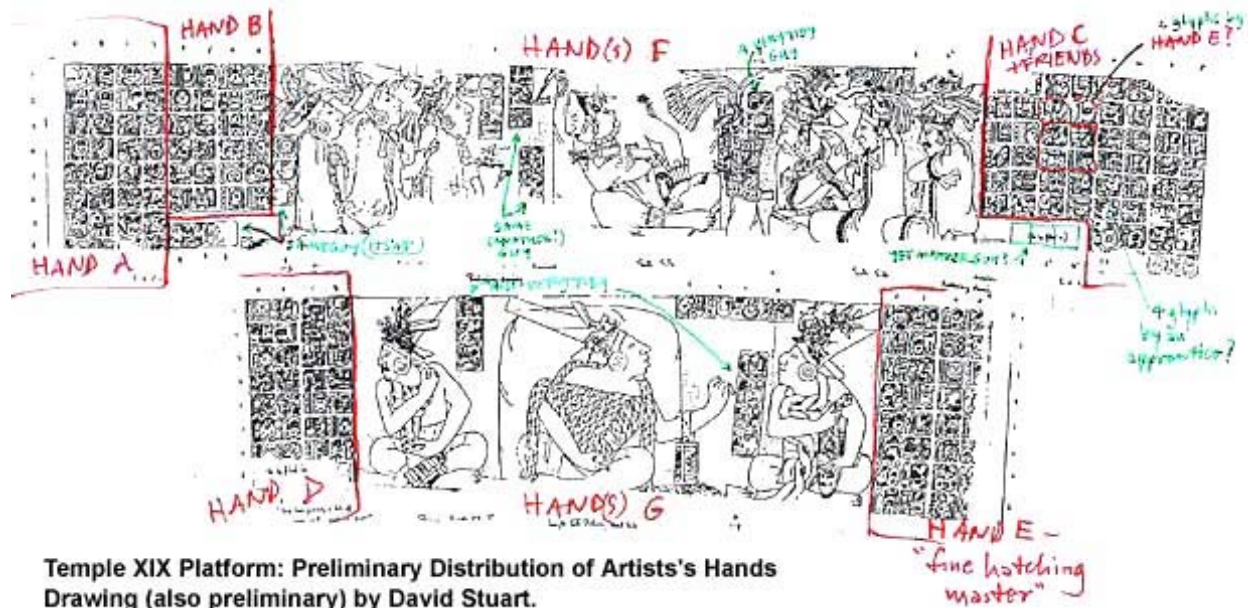


Figure 28. Temple XIX Platform/Throne with delineation of work areas. Drawing by David Stuart.

Perhaps he had apprentices he was training. The interruptions occur unexpectedly, in mid-phrase, for instance, between the *Tuun* and the *K'atuun* parts of a distance number. I can imagine him demonstrating, carving the first glyph in a phrase, then handing the tools to his student and saying, "Now, you have a go."

The seven short texts labeling figures on the South Side (my Hand[s] 4) are distinct from those of the main texts. As short as they are, it is difficult to be certain whether they represent one hand or several. It seems to me that the first two texts (both end with an *Its'aat*) are by one hand, as are the two vertical labels to the left of K'inich Ajkal Mo' Naab. Beyond that, closer analysis in the future may achieve a finer distinction.

⁴ By the way, one other work by one of these artists can be found in Schele and Mathews' 1979 Bodega Book, a fragment of a slab, perhaps the seat of a throne, found in Temple XXI, another of Akal Mo' Nab's constructions round the Plaza del Templo de la Cruz. Its edge is engraved with several glyphs by one of our artists.

Finally, three other artists (at least) divided up the work on the West side. Hand 6, who wrote and carved the last four columns of text, is to me the most recognizable of the team: his drawing and carving both wallow in fine, delicate details. Especially salient is his prolific crosshatching. My nickname for him is the "Fine Hatching Master" ([Figure 29](#)).

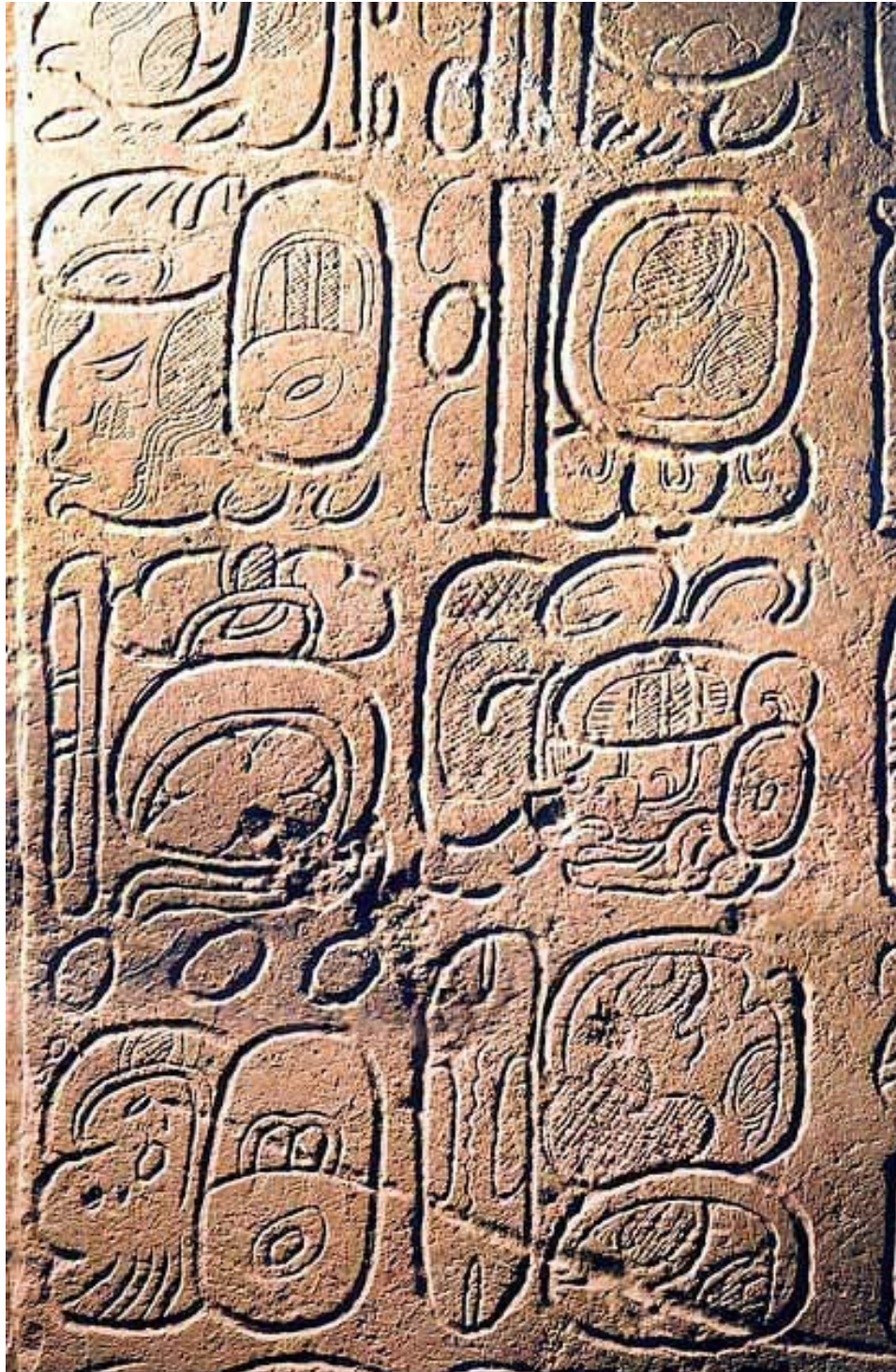


Figure 29. Temple XIX Platform/Throne: 'work of the Fine Hatching Master,' Columns UVWX.

Temple XIX Platform Scribe/Artists: Characteristic Glyphs

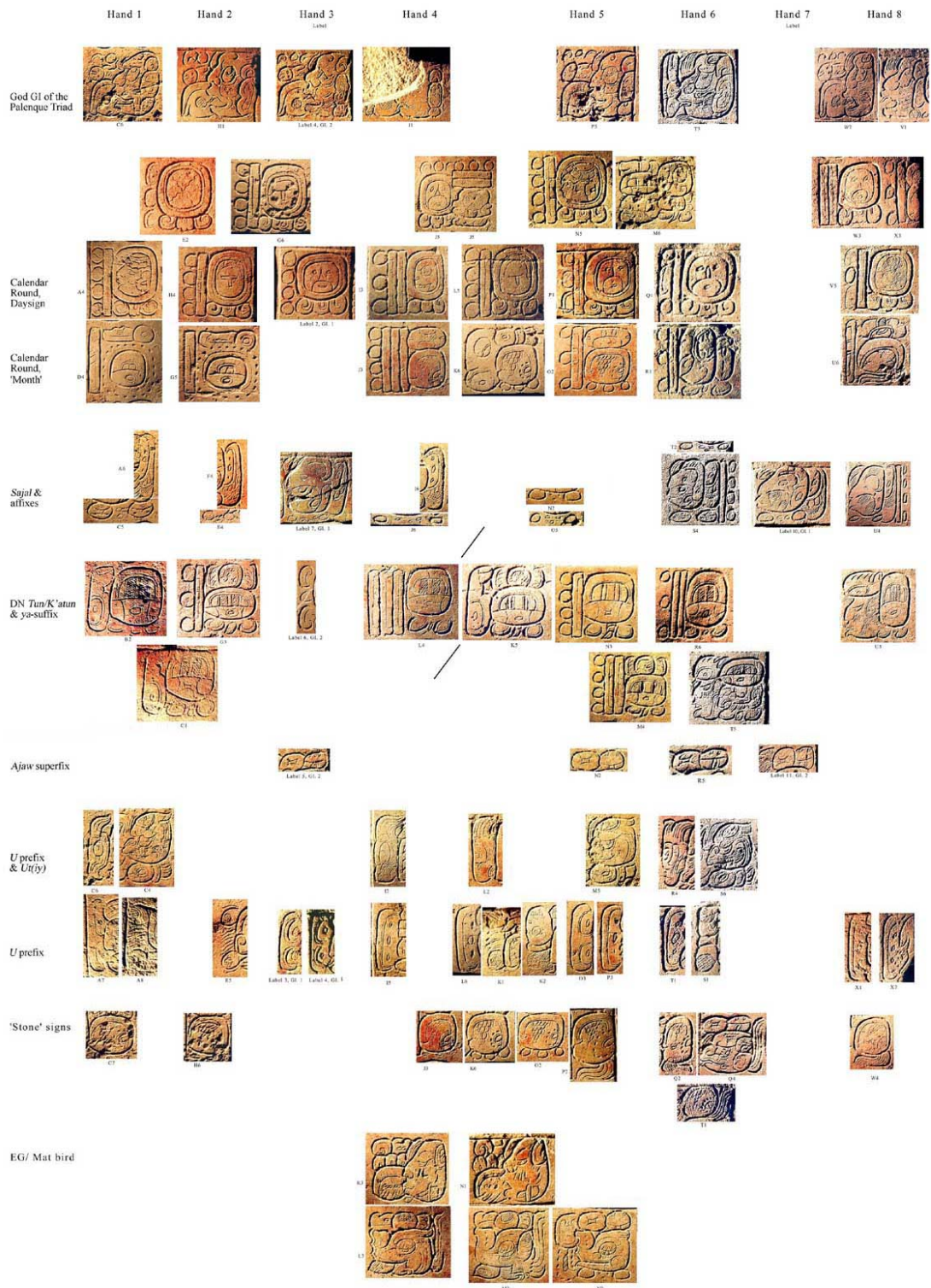


Figure 30. Temple XIX Platform/Throne: Table of idiosyncratic glyphs distinguishing seven Hands.

For some reason, whether by design or miscalculation, the final text-block overlaps the seam between the slabs of stone at the corner of the Platform, and only part of each glyph –less than half– survives. The "Fine Hatching Master" had the unfortunate task of providing the carving across this joint. The carved stucco filling then completely eroded away, perhaps quite soon after completion of the Platform.

His patch of glyphs, with both a highly individualistic drawing style and delicate carving style, suggests that carvers did their own calligraphy. Now, it *is* possible that each calligrapher worked closely with a particular carver, as a defined team. Ancient Roman sign shops usually consisted of such a team: a calligrapher, called *ordinator* or "layout man," and a sculptor or *marmorius*, "marble man."



Figure 31. Roman inscription, carved calligraphic lettering.

Alternate methods of working are to be seen in Ancient Egypt, in China, and among modern Western lettercarvers. In China, the calligrapher has traditionally been exalted high above the carver. The latter is totally anonymous, and his job is subsumed completely in doing justice to the calligrapher's bravura brushstrokes. In modern Britain and America, lettercutters are revered both as carvers and as calligraphers; each artisan is expected to master both skills. Egyptian reliefs occasionally remain partially unfinished, and reveal how closely the carvers hewed to the original drawing.



Figure 32. Egyptian drawing for carving.

Usually, Egyptian layout drawing is neat and skilled, but hardly more than a sketch, usually with a few corrections drawn directly over the first attempt, as here ([Figure 32](#)). The outline of a figure, and his eye might be drawn, but the carver was expected to furnish all other details. The Egyptian carver, though not usually as exalted as the scribe, was clearly a highly skilled and knowledgeable professional.

Maya monument artists could have used any of these procedures, but, as I said, I tend to favor the British/American model.



Figure 33. Piedras Negras Stela-Yuxul(?) signatures.

There is another bit of evidence that I am still working out. The artists' signatures on ceramics and monuments almost invariably distinguish the medium of writing. That is, if the writing is painted, the signature says *U-ts'ib*, "his writing" or "his painting," followed by the name of the artist. (See [Kerr Maya Vase Collection of Rollout Photographs](#), then Search by clicking on "Utzib, his writing" in the "Iconography Multiple Selections" menu.) If it happens to be engraved or carved, the sentence begins with a collocation that perhaps reads, *Yuxul*, and certainly means "his carving." (Search the *Kerr Maya Vase Collection*, clicking "Individually Carved" on the "Type" of vessel list.) We never see a signature that says, "Written by so-and-so, carved by such-and-such," nor, "Written and carved by so-and-so." That is, although the calligrapher was a highly esteemed member of court, apparently what mattered in the making of a monumental text was *only* the carved, final rendering. Obviously this means that the carver, too, was esteemed, perhaps as highly as the calligrapher. Alternately, one could claim that it suggests that a text-carver was, like a modern lettercutter, also expected to be a master calligrapher. In other words, to mention that the carver was also the scribe must have always been superfluous. Perhaps the glyph collocation that we take to mean "his carving" could be more accurately translated, "his painting-and-carving."

Unlike their counterparts just to the east, Palenque artists apparently never signed their work, so we have to rely on handwriting analysis to distinguish individual talents.

Temple XIX Limestone Panel

The limestone panel which greeted those entering Temple XIX was even more ambitious than the Throne or Platform. Ten feet high and three wide, it had been deliberately torn off its supporting pier and its pieces scattered about the Temple just before the roof collapsed. The vandals dragged a large fragment carrying the torso of the central image of Ahkal Mo' Nab over in front of the Platform, face up, and piled organic offerings upon it, apparently at the same time as they sacked the interior of the Platform. Presumably they burned these offerings, but the fire luckily did not damage the carved surface.

As you see, the carving is brilliant and almost perfectly preserved. The sensitive modeling of portraits and glyphs truly communicates the power and vitality of the characters, and the artists carried every square centimeter to utter completion. There are no unfinished or rushed areas of this panel, like we usually find, (for instance, as on the Palenque Panel in Dumbarton Oaks, carved in the reign of K'an Hoy Chitam, the immediate predecessor of Ahkal Mo' Naab).

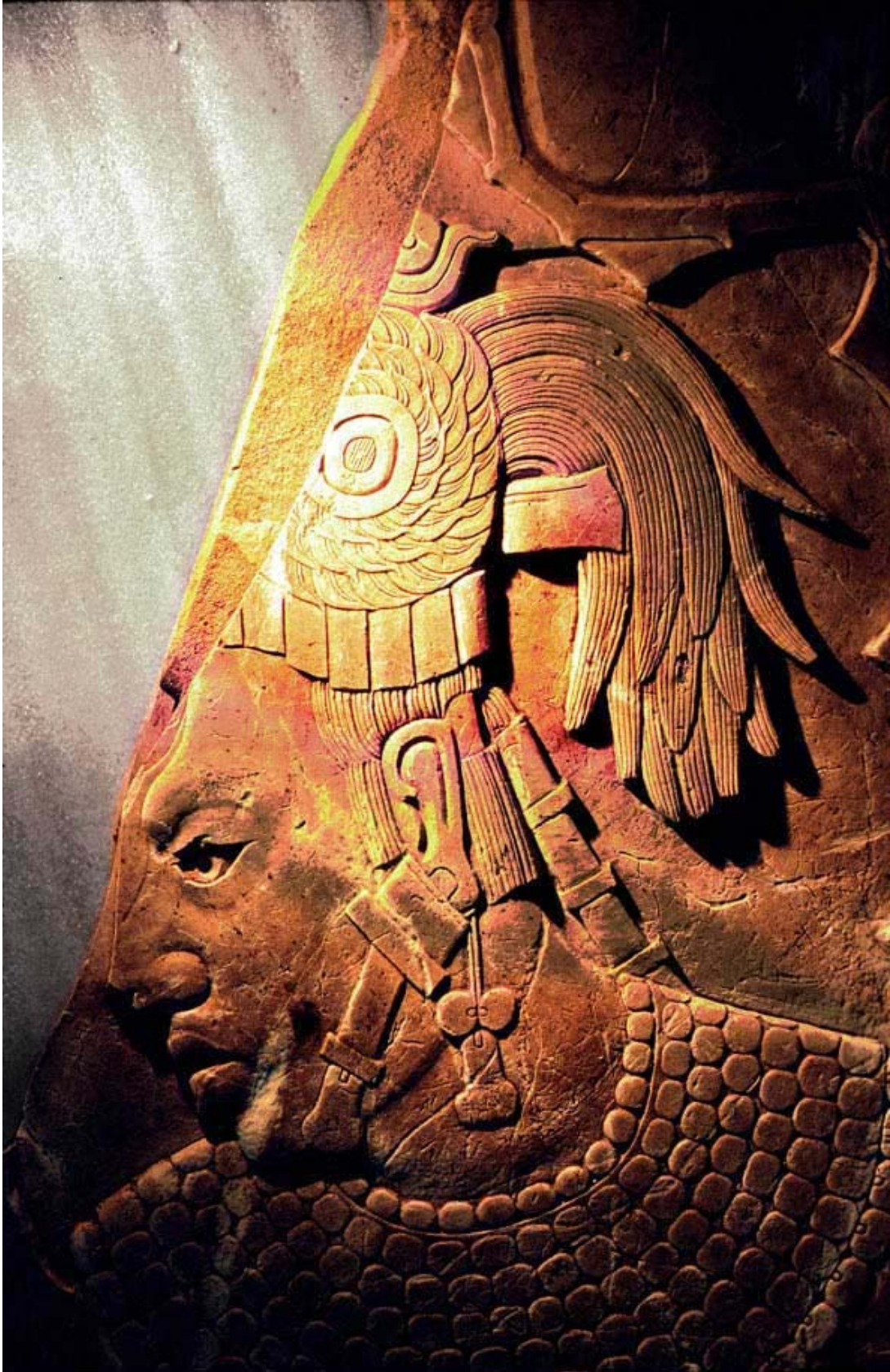


Figure 34. Temple XIX Limestone Panel, central panel showing Akal Mo' Nab.



Figure 35. Unfinished hem of Dumbarton Oaks Panel.



Figure 36. Ahkal Mo' Naab's HV name from Throne & Panel.

Unfortunately, although the *Proyecto* archaeologists found most of the fragments of this Panel, the greatest part of the text, (which arched over the king's backrack), is still missing. The spelling of Ahkal Mo' Naab's name on the main text is striking: a turtleshell (*Ahk*), a whole Parrot's head (*Mo'*) instead of just a beak, draped with a lily pad (*Naab*).

This spelling would be unique, except that it appears with precisely the same elements on the Platform. Comparing the two, notwithstanding the difference in carving technique, one sees that they appear to represent two different handwritings: look particularly at the form of the beak. I do think that in this case we are looking at two artists' renderings of Ahkal's name as copied from some venerable model; perhaps the codex from which they derived the historical information recorded on these two monuments, or perhaps a favorite spelling of the Temple architect.

Palace Tablet

Some fifteen years earlier than Temple XIX, a team of artists completed the huge, ambitious Palace Tablet. Like the Temple XIX Panel, it faced north, from a wall just inside the center of a main entrance of the Palace. In this case, it greeted the pilgrim as he or she arrived at the North entrance. It too stands ten feet/three meters tall, but it is much larger; as wide as it is high. It consists of three slabs of stone; a large central one and two side panels four columns wide, carefully fitted together into a unified monument.

Its 240 glyphs were carved by perhaps nine or more distinct artists. One was responsible for the Full Figure Initial Series and the adjacent parts of Column CD, while on the same slab another fine artist carved the lower part of these four columns. At least three more artists executed the text on the central slab, and yet another two or three shared responsibility for the narrow slab comprising the last four columns of text.

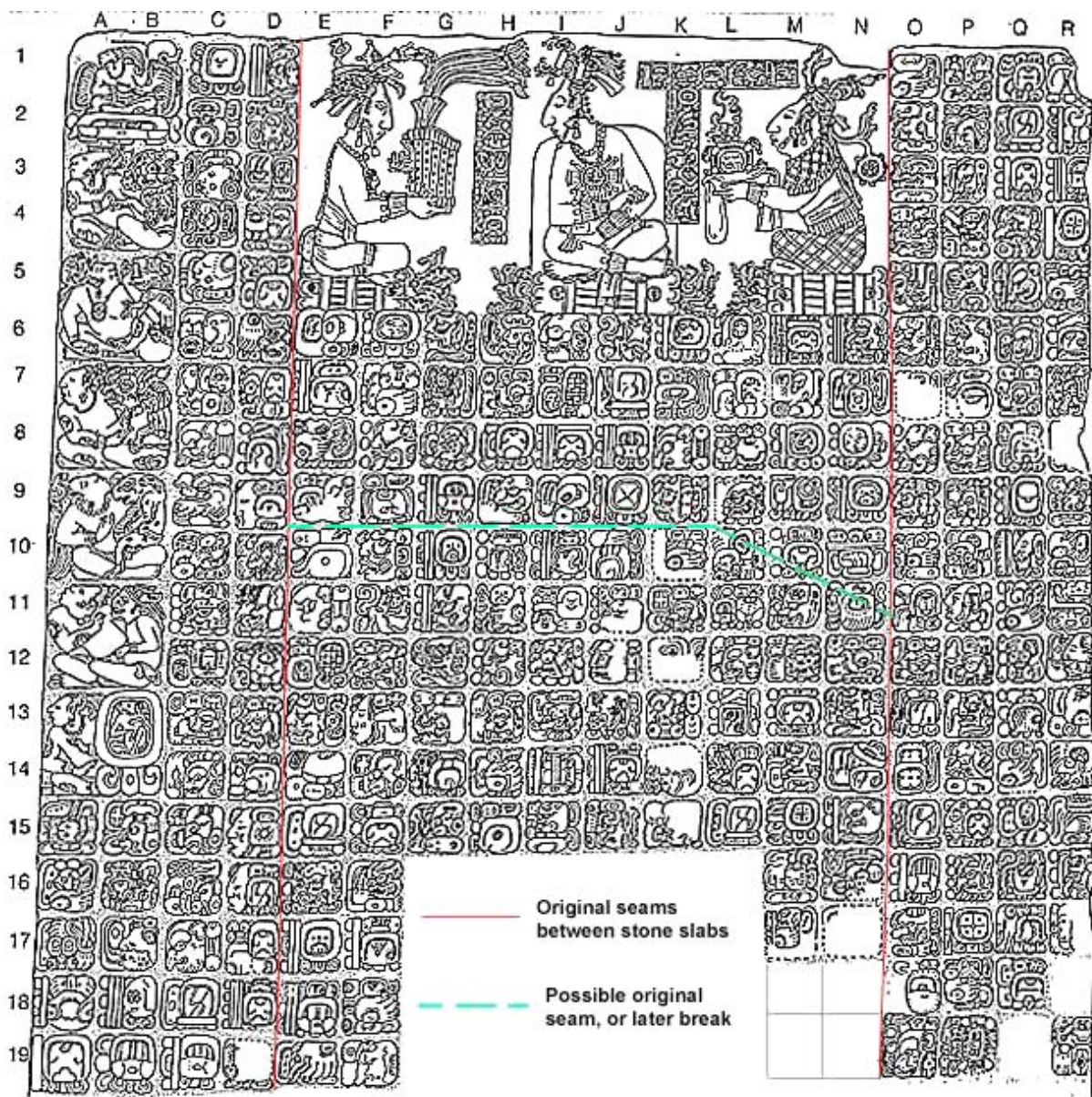


Figure 37. Palace Tablet, whole. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson

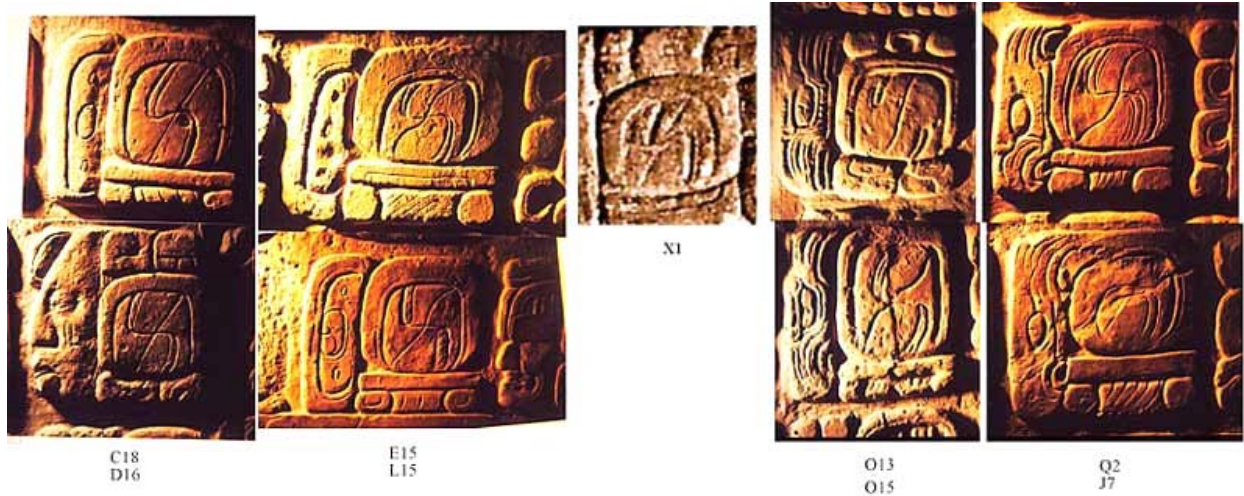


Figure 38. Palace Tablet, Ts'ak glyphs differentiating hands.

There are a number of irregular breaks in the work-distribution. The Palace Tablet is nearly unique in Palenque for its use of double Emblem Glyphs, an unusual practice (most well-known at Yaxchilán) which may reflect an Ancient Mayan antecedent to titles such as "Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland". Examining the use of the ajaw superfix which appears most commonly on emblem glyphs, we find at least nine and perhaps as many as eleven hands at work. It appears that, with the exception of the double EG's, possibly each of the eleven examples of this affix was carved by a different hand. These examples are distributed fairly evenly about the tablet, so this may be sheer coincidence, but one is tempted to speculate why each appearance of the ajaw title, or a royal name, might have required a different carver.



Figure 39. Palenque Palace Tablet: Six examples of Ajaw affixes by six artists.



Figure 40. Palace Tablet, Hanab Pakal's name; both examples from middle panel.

The middle panel is interesting. Only there do we find K'inich Janab Pakal's name spelled phonetically. Elsewhere in Palenque, and on the side panels of this Tablet, artists write it with the standard logograms. The two phonetic examples were carved by different carvers, both excellent artists. They are remarkably similar in their details, but the two have differently flavored finish. I think we have here a likely example of two sculptors carving from the painted layout of one calligrapher.



Figure 41. Palace Tablet, Jaguar-Headed Bone Throne.

Still another artist carved the scene at the top of the large central slab, and presumably also its texts. I am quite fond of his modeling of faces, particularly those of the animal heads on the Bone-Thrones of Creation.



Figure 42. Palace Tablet Lower Right flat-finish face glyphs.



Figure 43. Palace Tablet, top.



Figure 44. Flat-finish faces: glyphs and some figures.

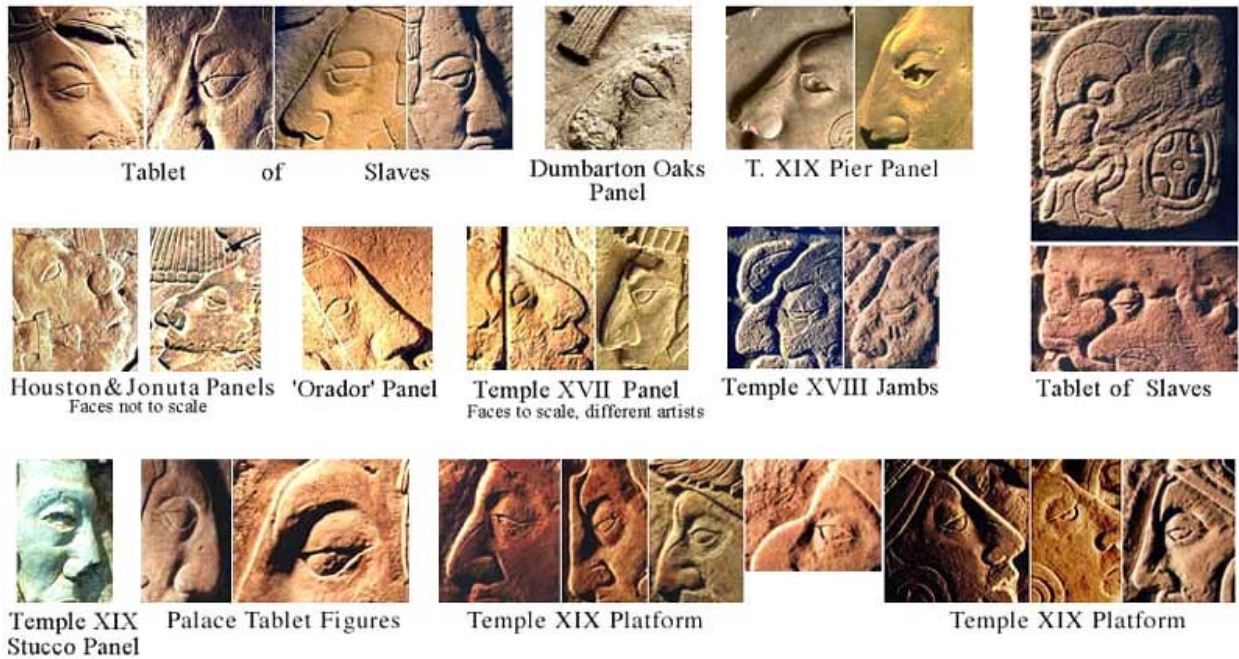


Figure 45. Compare eye-sockets of various Palenque figures.

I am also enchanted by the work of the artist who did the lower half of Columns QRST. He is partial to flat relief, decorated with delicate calligraphic 'whiplash' strokes which delineate eyebrow hairs and such. His influence (and sometimes his hand) is widespread at Palenque; I find it on the Temple XVIII Jamb, on the Tablet of the Slaves, perhaps also on the so-called 'Warrior Panel' from Temple XVII, although most of that Panel is crudely carved. All these monuments appeared under Ahkal Mo' Naab,

so some crossover, the survival of more than one object from the hand of one artist, should not surprise us.



Figure 46. Compare ears of various figures.

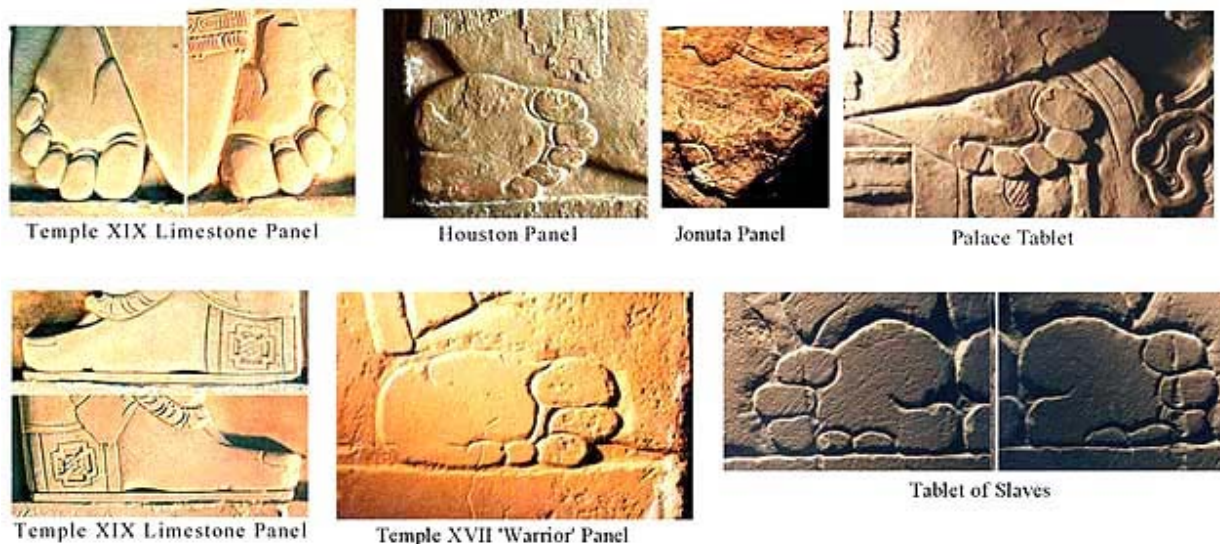


Figure 47. Compare feet of various figures.

The style of face and figure we see carved on Palenque monuments is remarkably consistent. Notice, for instance, that the artists of these monuments used in common a peculiar technique for rendering the all-important eyes and mouth. The faces all share a slightly bulging spherical eyeball inside a gently modeled concave eye-socket. The artists paid particular attention to the full, parted lips, with subtly-modeled cheek muscles. And they also rendered the soles of feet with striking care, often carefully sculpting a charmingly natural double wrinkle behind each toe.

I initially ascribed this uniformity to the omnipresence of a single prolific master, who trained with the team who carved the Cross Group under K'inich Kan-Balam, then worked as a master under his successors K'an Hoy Chitam and Ahkal Mo' Naab. Now, after seeing the incredible array of superb talent carving the glyphs, I am not so sure. I think this is a good example of a 'House Style' created and taught by a single master, which proliferated among his students and colleagues. This kind of practice was common in Ancient Egypt and Rome. Under the Caesars, for instance, the standard procedure was to create a standard, idealized, politically correct portrait of the emperor in several official copies, then send it to licensed sculpture studios throughout the empire, where it would be available for reference by anyone wishing to portray the Emperor for any work of art.

When one looks at the ears of the figures from Palenque during this period ([Figure 46](#)), they all share a simplified linear style, defined by specific lines incised in a certain way. This is true not only of the stone figures, but those sculpted in stucco as well. One is tempted to see a specialist in faces or figures, or even in ears, going about finishing the figures being carved in various temples. However, before committing ourselves to dividing up the community of figure artists, we need to do a lot more looking.

A Parting Question

The question remains: Why did the monuments of Palenque (and Piedras Negras and San José de Motul) employ such a jostling crowd of artists? Were they just interested in cranking these stones out fast? With seven artists at work, the Temple XIX Platform could have been conceived and completed in a week or two. Perhaps there were so many celebrations to commemorate, they had to produce monuments on a tight schedule.

Allen Christenson and David Stuart suggested to me another reason. Large monuments were costly, and certain types were erected only once every five or ten years. It seems likely to have been the custom for each lineage head to endow a portion of such a monument, not only to enable large communal works to be erected, but to allow each of several lineages to share the honor of having produced them.

In the Primary Standard Sequence on ceramic vessels, one notes that a critical part of the text states that the process of *painting* or of *carving* the vessel sanctifies it. Often the painter or carver is honored by the mention of his or her name. Now the action of patronage, of causing someone to do something, is often recorded on monuments: "Sajal So and So conquers the city of Whatzit, *u-kab-hi* / "By order of" his lord Such and Such." Nowhere do we find on a pot or monument that it was painted or carved *u-kab-hi* Such and Such. What is recorded is the *actual act* of painting or carving, *u-ts'ib* So and So. It apparently would not do merely to provide the money to erect a monument, you had to provide the *carving itself*.

My guess is that each carver-calligrapher working on the Palace Tablet and on the Temple XIX Platform could have been the actual scion of a participating lineage. Michael Coe (1995) has shown that Maya calligraphers and at least some associated craftspeople were highly esteemed members of court, on par with Japanese and Chinese calligraphers. Some were apparently members of the royal family itself, and clearly the arts of calligraphy and carving were considered honourable callings for nobles. I have no doubt that any lineage of high rank was well-supplied with skilled scribes and artisans in its own members, which their *ajaw* could assign to contribute to a given monument. This situation prevails today, according to Christenson, among the lineages of a *cofradía* which each contribute to decorating a specific portion of the building on feast days.

Although this practice of distributing work among several artists seems less widespread in the Early Classic, there is some evidence that it goes back to the Middle Preclassic. Susan Gillespie analyzed unfinished Olmec monuments at Ana del Jacaro. Her analysis suggests that one group of artisans did the initial roughing out of the sculptures, another brought the figures nearly to their final state, then fine details were added by a third group. This *could* be an entirely practical kind of craft specialization, or it might have had a basis in religious or political considerations like those I am positing.

The large number of signatures on monuments from El Perú and Piedras Negras suggests similar divisions of sponsorship there. I am anxious to apply this

connoisseurship analysis to Early Tikal and other sites and eras, to determine whether this multiple-artist procedure was the rule. Whether it turns out to have been more or less universal, or whether one finds spatial or temporal distinctions in Maya monument-creation practice, I believe it can shed a little more light on the political microeconomy of Ancient Maya cities.

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