

Dating Stela 26 of Tikal

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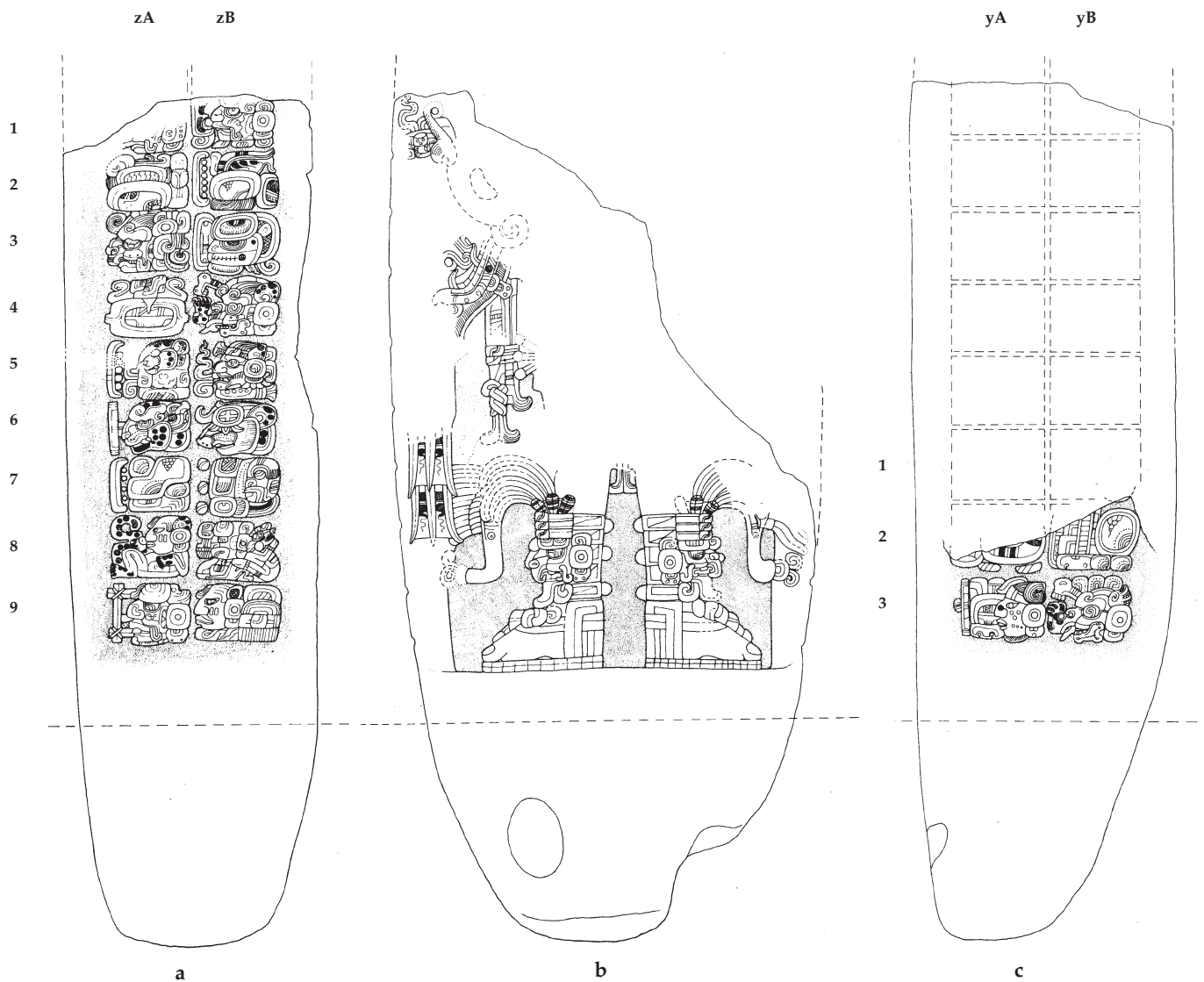


Figure 1. Tikal Stela 26: (a) left side; (b) front of monument; (c) right side. Drawing by William R. Coe © The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 44b). Courtesy of the Penn Museum.

Stela 26 of Tikal (Figure 1) was discovered in 1958 by members of the University of Pennsylvania Museum archaeological team while excavating Structure 5D-34-1st, in the North Acropolis of the site (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:58; Shook 1958). Known as the “Red Stela” due to the considerable amount of red pigment still adhering to the monument when first found, the

fragments of this stela had been deposited and buried within a masonry bench in the back room of this temple that had been dug into and despoiled apparently during the Terminal Classic period (Coe 1990:475-476; Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:58; Shook 1958). Only approximately half of the original surface of the monument was found intact, with its uppermost part entirely missing, as is the

vast majority of the right side of the stela as well. Due to this damage no recognizable date was found on the monument and the question of the date of this stela has long bedeviled scholars.

Tatiana Proskouriakoff provided a provisional style-date of 9.7.10.0.0 \pm 2 ½ katuns (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:58).

The fragmentary inscription on Stela 26 has no date, and only the legs of the figure below the knees and a small fragment of a serpent head of a bar now remain. The feet of the figure point outward, in the Late Classic manner, but the heels of the sandals are of a transitional type, high and square, with a rectangular opening for the strap that ties them on the ankle, a type that occurs at Yaxha after 9.9.0.0.0, but here may appear earlier. On the other hand, the high ankle guards with feather ornaments flowing from them are shared with Stela 1, which also has no date, but which appears to be Early Classic. ... I may be placing it here too late, but its remarkable inscription, with its handsome glyphs, carefully organized and squared, does not fit with other Early Classic inscriptions at Tikal. (Proskouriakoff 1993:37)

Joyce Bailey (1972:72-83) thought this estimate too late and considered that Stela 26 compared most favorably with Caracol Stela 16, which bears a Long Count dedicatory date of 9.5.0.0.0 (AD 534). Christopher Jones and Linton Satterthwaite noted that Stela 26, with its figure carved on the front and hieroglyphic texts on the sides, but not on the back, “follows the tradition of the Tikal segmented-staff stelae” (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:58). These segmented-staff stelae, it should be noted, include Stelae 3, 6–9, 13, 15, and 27, which bear dedicatory dates from 9.2.0.0.0 (AD 475) to 9.4.0.0.0 (AD 514) (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:23).

In addition to the style of costume and design elements on the monument, the dating of Stela 26 to the early sixth century was based on the presence of a number of royal names in the surviving text of the stela. The name of “Jaguar Paw Skull” (now read phonetically as Chak Tok Ich’aak) is found twice on the monument, at yB3 and zB4, while that of “Stormy Sky” (now read phonetically as Sihyaj Chan K’awiil) is found at zA4. The name of “Kan Boar” (read as K’an Chitam in Martin and Grube 2000:37, although evidence for the phonetic reading of this name has not yet been discovered) shows up in glyph zB6. Jaguar Paw Skull’s name appears on Stela 3, which was dedicated in 488, as well as on Stelae 7, 15, and 27, which were dedicated collectively in 495. Stormy Sky dedicated the famous Stela 31 in 445, while Kan Boar’s name is found on Stelae 9 and 13, with the former bearing a dedicatory date of 475. Given the state of decipherment and epigraphic knowledge of the dynastic history of Tikal that was current at the time, the

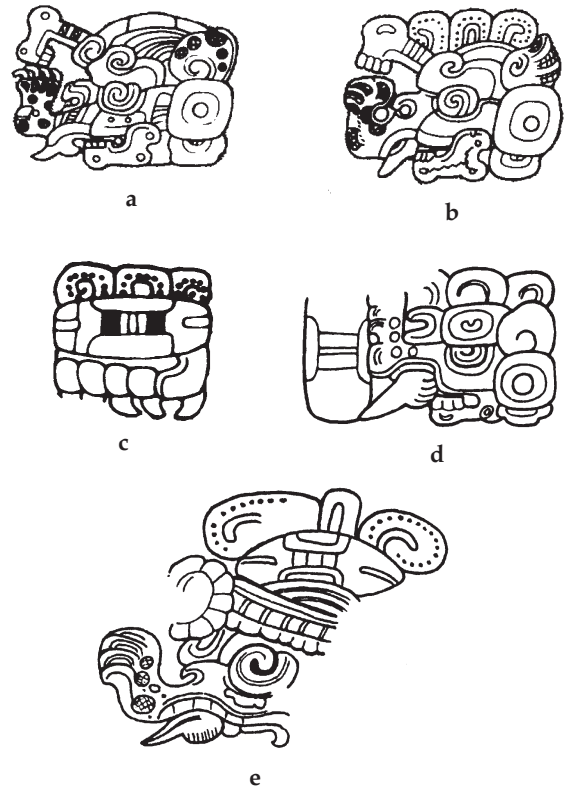


Figure 2. David Stuart’s (1987:Fig. 1) compilation of the different forms of the names “Jaguar Paw Skull” and “Great Jaguar Paw”: (a) Tikal Stela 26, left side, zB4 (after drawing by William R. Coe in Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 44); (b) Tikal Stela 26, right side, yB3 (after drawing by William R. Coe in Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 45); (c) Tikal Stela 31, C14 (after drawing by William R. Coe in Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 31b); (d) Tikal Stela 39, Ap2 (drawing by David Stuart from photograph provided by the Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala); (e) detail of carved cache vessel (after drawing by Ian Crocker-Deletaille in Berjonneau et al. 1985:231).

presence of these names on Stela 26 indicated to scholars of the 1980s and 1990s that this monument, while not able to be specifically dated, could be generally dated to the period around or just after AD 500.

A radical reinterpretation of the date of Stela 26 became possible with the observation by David Stuart that the names of Jaguar Paw Skull, who ruled around AD 500, and Great Jaguar Paw, who ruled prior to AD 378, were one and the same (Stuart 1987). These names (Figure 2) can now both be read phonetically as Chak Tok Ich’aak, and Stuart’s observation was itself only possible due to the discovery of Tikal Stela 39 by Juan Pedro Laporte and the Proyecto Nacional Tikal (Laporte and Fialco 1995:64). This stela (Figure 3), or at least its bottom half (as the upper half of the monument has never been found), had been cached within Structure 5D-86 and bore upon its front an intricate and detailed

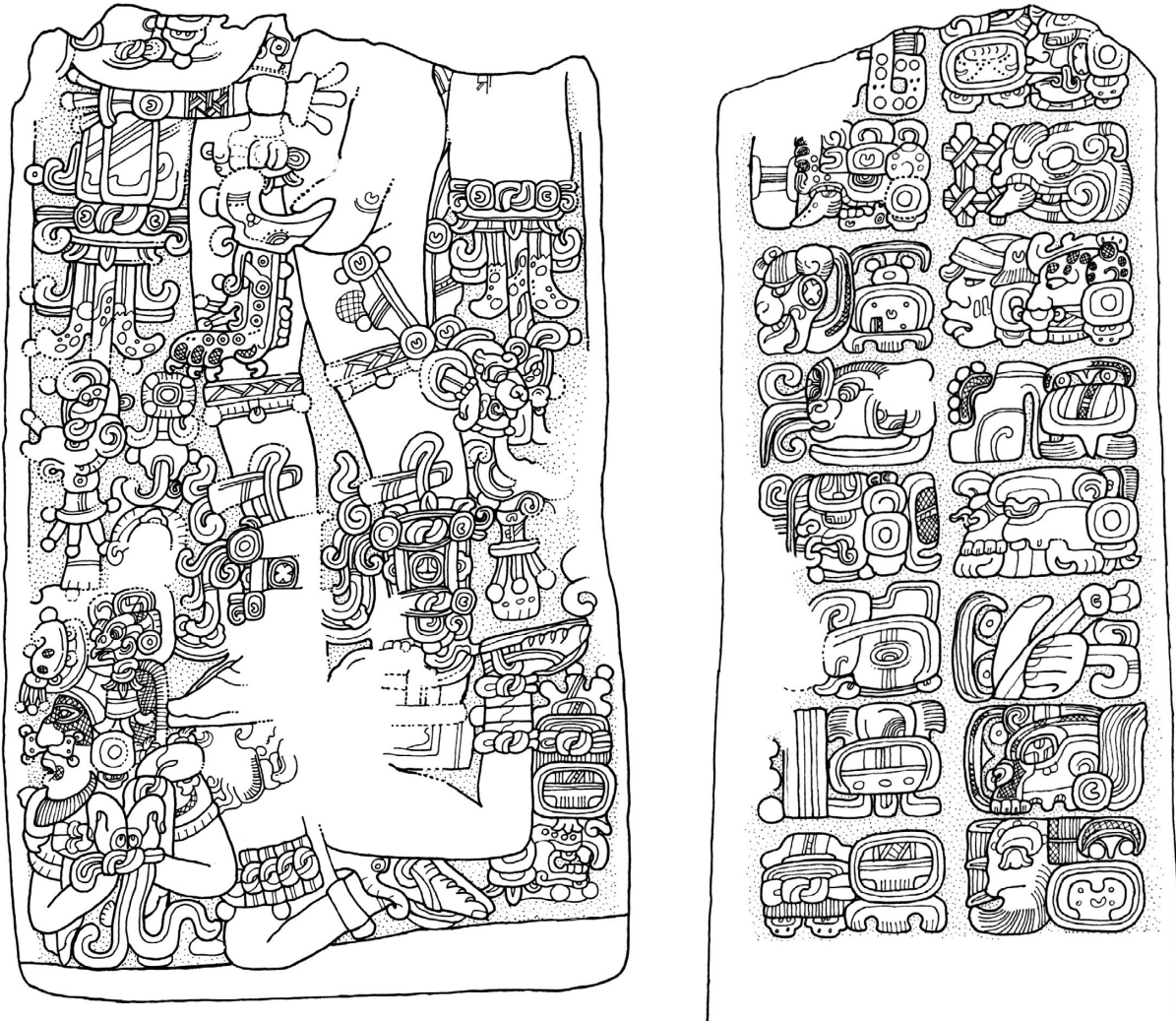


Figure 3. Tikal Stela 39 of Tikal: (left) front; (b) back. Drawing by Linda Schele, courtesy of David Schele.

carving of a king standing atop a captive, with a well preserved glyphic text carved upon its back. In having hieroglyphic texts restricted to only the rear of the monument, Stela 39 matches the earliest stelae of Tikal, including Stelae 29 (AD 292), 4 and 18 (AD 396), and 1 and 2 (early fifth century).

Stela 39 bears a Period Ending reference but damage has meant that what is recorded, the end of either 17 or 19 katuns (glyphs Bz6-Az7), can be read as indicating a date of either 8.17.0.0 (Ayala Falcón 1987) or 8.19.0.0.0 (Schele and Freidel 1990). Today the date is accepted as 8.17.0.0.0, which corresponds to AD 376 (Martin 2003:10; Martin and Grube 2008:28; Montgomery 2001:44-46). The name of Chak Tok Ich'aak I is found in glyph Az2 and is a unique spelling as it includes the T109 **CHAK** logograph in front of the "Jaguar Paw Skull" deity head that is otherwise only found in spellings of the name of the later Tikal king of the late fifth and early sixth centuries. While the name of Great Jaguar Paw, without

exception, always includes the T109 form of *chak*, the name of Jaguar Paw Skull never does. Instead, the later king always has the *chak* part of his name spelled with an inverted jawbone that David Stuart (1987) noted had to be simply another *chak* allograph.

The carving on Stela 39 is very fine, with large and very finely detailed hieroglyphs, which stylistically bear a certain affinity with those on Stela 26. As Grube and Martin (2000:II-18) observe of Stela 26, "Although this monument does not bear a date, stylistically it resembles other fine carvings from the reign of Chak Tok Ich'aak I." This observation led Martin and Grube to include Stela 26 in their discussion of the reign of Chak Tok Ich'aak I in their *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* (Martin and Grube 2000). With reference to Chak Tok Ich'aak I they observe, "His name appears on a second fragment, Stela 26, found in the North Acropolis' Temple 34." However, in the second edition of this volume, the authors retreat from such a firm identification of Stela 26 with Chak

Tok Ich'aak I: "His name appears on a fragment of Stela 26—found in the North Acropolis' Temple 34—but since it has no surviving date it could yet prove to be the work of a successor" (Martin and Grube 2008:28).

In fact, I believe that the sum total of all of this evidence clearly connects Stela 26 with Chak Tok Ich'aak II, and not his earlier namesake. Chak Tok Ich'aak I's name, as noted above, always includes the T109 **CHAK** logogram, while Chak Tok Ich'aak II's name never does. The Chak Tok Ich'aak glyphs on Stela 26 both include the inverted jawbone, and thus clearly match the glyphs of the second king of this name. Stela 26 is carved with hieroglyphs on its sides, which is a feature of Tikal monuments starting only in the mid-fifth century. Earlier monuments, including Stela 39 of Chak Tok Ich'aak I, never have carved sides, but only carry texts on the stela's rear surface, a feature absent on Stela 26. As noted by Tatiana Proskouriakoff, the feet on Stela 26 are splayed out, in Late Classic form, a feature not found on Tikal monuments until Stela 10, which while not bearing a clear dedicatory date, is roughly contemporaneous with stylistically similar Stela 12, which does bear a dedicatory date of 9.4.13.0.0, or AD 527 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:25-29, 31-33).

There are also other, paleographic, indications that Stela 26 is a later monument than Stela 39. The **u** allograph seen in glyphs zB2, zA5, and zA7 on Stela 26 have more than the standard three circles, and qualify as examples of Thompson's T11, in place of the T1 variant seen on Stela 39 at Az3b, Bz4b, Bz6, Bz7, and Bz8b. The T23 **na** suffix seen on Stela 39, at Az3b and Az8b, is an early form, featuring small vertical slashes on the lower protuberances, with no small double loop hanging from the internal framing line within the sign. This contrasts with the later version of T23 **na** seen on Stela 26, at yB2a. It is also notable that the T24 **li** sign on Stela 39, seen at glyph Az5b, is carved in an Early Classic style, with a hook at one end, while the same sign on Stela 26, seen at zB3, is in later style, with no hook.

There is thus considerable evidence, in terms of style, paleography, as well as format, which indicates quite clearly that Stela 26 is a late fifth or early sixth century monument, and almost certainly dates to the reign of Chak Tok Ich'aak II. However, I believe there is just enough evidence surviving to achieve a more precise date for this stela. In 2004, David Stuart published a brief note on glyphs zB1-zB2 of Tikal Stela 26, in which he suggested that glyph zA2 was actually a unique logograph for **TZ'AP**, a verb deciphered by Nikolai Grube (1990) and meaning "to plant" or "to erect." The thing planted on Stela 26 is the stela itself, referenced as *ulakamtuunil*, "his stela," in glyph zB2. According to Stuart (2004:1):

In this case it might be better understood as "their stela," since the string of glyphs that follows seems to

name different gods and historical ancestors, including Chak Bay Kan, Siyaj Chan K'awiil, and Chak Tok Ich'aak.¹

It is likely that the front of the stela portrayed Chak Tok Ich'aak II carrying a double-headed serpent bar, from whose mouths emerged ancestral portraits. It is also highly likely that Stela 26 was erected on a Period Ending, as almost all Tikal monuments were dedicated on Period Endings (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982).

As noted by Stuart, glyph zB1 is the variant of the PSSIG that features the head of GI, and reads *alay*, a demonstrative focus marker deciphered independently by Barbara MacLeod and Yuriy Polyukhovych (2005). The *alay* glyph is found on a number of Early Classic monuments at Tikal, including Stelae 3 (glyph B7), 31 (glyphs A12, C19, and G15), and 40 (glyphs B9 and D11). In all cases a Calendar Round date either immediately precedes or follows the *alay* glyph. As the glyphs after the *alay* on Stela 26 refer to the planting of the stela, the glyph immediately preceding it, glyph zA1, must have been the *haab* part of a Calendar Round date. Only a small amount of this glyph survives on the monument, but there is enough to see that it is the head of the Rain God Chahk, with his shell earflare and fanged mouth. Chahk's earflare is a rare but not unknown addition to the *cauac* sign in the color months, Ch'en, Yax, Zac, and Ceh. If we look at the list of Period Endings during the reign of Chak Tok Ich'aak II, which spanned the period between 486 and 508, we find that no *tun* endings fell on color months during this period except 9.3.12.0.0 6 Ahau 18 Ceh, and 9.3.13.0.0 2 Ahau 13 Ceh. Twelve *tuns* is not a known Period Ending that was commemorated at Tikal, but 13 *tuns* was, and Stelae 3, 5, 12, and 40 were all dedicated on 13-*tun* Period Endings.

While it is impossible to prove due to the extensive damage to the monument, a good case can thus be made that Tikal Stela 26 was dedicated on the 9.3.13.0.0 2 Ahau 13 Ceh Period Ending of November 20, 507.² This would make this stela almost certainly the last monument from the reign of Chak Tok Ich'aak II, who died on 9.3.13.12.5

¹ With regard to Chak Bay Kan, Nikolai Grube and Simon Martin (2000:II-11) compare this deity name on Stela 26, actually a reference to a Vision Serpent, to one on Yaxchilan Lintel 14. In the latter text the name is actually Chanal Chak Bay Kaan, which can be translated as "Celestial Great/Red Net/Basket Snake." I believe the avian head in glyph zA3 on Stela 26, immediately preceding the Chak Bay Kaan portion of this text, is merely the avian bird version of the sky sign, thus also providing a full Chanal Chak Bay Kaan name on this monument too.

² To forestall a potential objection to this proposed date for Stela 26, it should be noted that while there is clearly not enough space in front of Chahk's head in glyph zA1 for the two bars and three dots of the coefficient of 13, it was common in this era to place the numeral on top of the glyph, rather than on the left side. See Stelae 3, 12, 17, and 27 for examples.

13 Chicchan 13 Xul (Martin and Grube 2008:37), a mere 245 days later. Stela 26 must have been an impressive memorial for this king, as it included both archaic and innovative features, all carried out by some of Tikal's most accomplished sculptors of the Early Classic period. The reverence shown the fragments of the monument that were cached in Temple 34 a century and a half later is quite understandable in this light.

Acknowledgments

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