

A Reassessment of Date Ambiguities on Tortuguero Monument 2

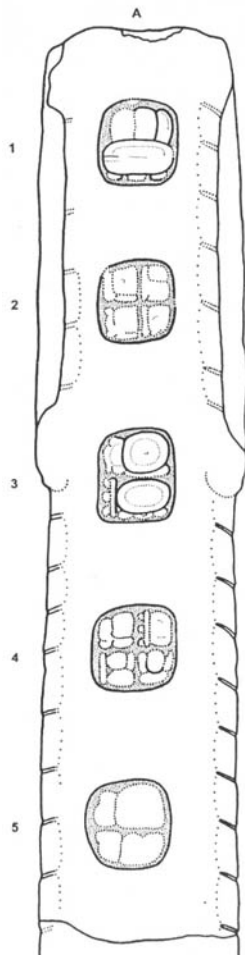
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Monument 2 from Tortuguero is a highly eroded serpent-shaped carving. Glyphs on the ventral side were drawn and interpreted by Gronemeyer (2004) with references to earlier work by Berlin (1953), Riese (1980), Hernández Pons (1984), Blom & LaFarge (1986), and others. Of importance for checking some of the glyphs questioned here, reference to photographs in Hernández Pons (1984: Fig. 25) would help, augmented by a direct examination of the monument in the Carlos Pellicer Museum in Villahermosa.

Ambiguities and Questions

The current view is that the date on Monument 2 can be reconstructed as 9.14.0.0.0, 6 Ajaw 13 Muwaan, November 29, 711 AD (J). Plate 6 in Gronemeyer (2004) provides



drawings of the ventral side, which is the best preserved part of the monument and contains the date reference (see Fig. 1, left). An eroded ISIG is identifiable at the top. This is followed, below, by four cartouches. The first cartouche (A2) contains the Baktun, Katun, Tun, and Winal place values of the Long Count date. These glyphs are extremely eroded and their reconstructed values rely heavily on the better preserved Tzolkin and Haab glyphs in A3 and A4. The Kin value (which is zero) and the Tzolkin glyph are both situated in the A3 cartouche. The Tzolkin glyph (A3y) is faceless but is in the typical oval form of an Ajaw glyph. The associated bar(s) and dot(s) are reconstructed by Gronemeyer and the other epigraphers as being a bar (“5”) and a dot flanked by two curled place-holders. Gronemeyer states that the curved “crueller” shapes of typical place holders are identifiable, and thus a lone dot in the center results in a “6” rather than an “8”. It is not absolutely clear whether the middle dot survives in any sense, and whether perhaps two dots might be present. This ambiguity is a minor first problem for the 9.14.0.0.0 date and has repercussions on my alternative possible reading of the date.

In the next cartouche (at A4) we see, like the A2 cartouche, four internal glyph blocks. Gronemeyer reconstructs the eroded A4ax block (which comes between the Tzolkin and the Haab positions in the sequence) as being a G9 in the 9-day cycle. The interval between the proposed 9.14.0.0.0 date and my alternative proposal (discussed below) is divisible by 9, so Gronemeyer’s reconstruction of G9 is not affected.

Figure 1. Monument 2

The glyph at A4bx presents a second, and more serious, problem for the 9.14.0.0.0 date reconstruction. The numerical value is clearly a bar and three dots, thus “8” (see the upper-right section of Fig. 2 below). The 9.14.0.0.0 reconstruction requires a “13” here and it also must be combined with the Haab month Muwaan, but this part of the glyph-block is very eroded and Muwaan is merely assumed. The very next glyph (at A4ay) provides some indication of “the flat hand MR2 holding the /TUN-ni/ collocation” (Gronemeyer 2004:118), and thus this glyph indicates a period-ending “stone-binding.” Although it isn’t mentioned, there is also what appears to clearly be a vertical bar on the left side of the main glyph (see the lower-left glyph-block section in the close-up of the A4 cartouche, Fig. 2 below). We are thus faced with the possibility that a 5-Tun (Hotun) period-ending is indicated, one which must end on an 8-*something* Haab position combined with a possible “6” Ajaw position in the Tzolkin. If this is indeed a 5-Tun indicator, then the Tun value at A2ay in the opening Long Count date should also contain a “5” bar. It is too eroded to tell with certainty, but outlines below the main-sign or to the left suggest a possible bar (refer back to the A2 cartouche in Fig. 1, above).

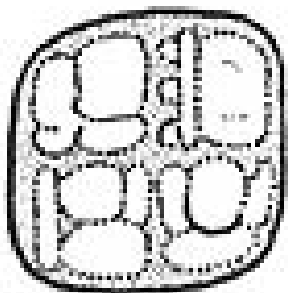


Figure 2. A4 cartouche

Because of the semantic structure of these kinds of period-ending “stone-bindings,” the very eroded closing glyph at A5y is suspected to state “Holy Lord of Tortuguero.” Assuming that Monument 2 was carved at the time of the reconstructed date (in 711 AD), Gronemeyer posits that this is a “Ruler D” in the Tortuguero royal line. He could therefore possibly be the son or grandson of Lord Jaguar.

The glyphs on the dorsal side of the serpent-shaped monument were not verifiable by Gronemeyer because of the positioning of the monument against a wall in the museum. As such, the rough drawings from Blom & LaFarge (1986) are provided. A Distance Number seems indicated, suggesting a second date, but nothing else can be determined.

An Alternative Date Proposal

Based on these identifications of fairly secure elements in the surviving glyphs (at A4bx and A4ay), two clear problems arise for the 9.14.0.0.0 date proposal. To review, an “8” numerical value is clearly present in the Haab position (A4bx), but the 9.14.0.0.0 proposal requires a “13.” It must be assumed that this is a scribal error. Secondly, a 5-Tun (Hotun) period-ending “stone-binding” seems possible at A4ay. This derives from the clearly visible vertical bar. Since the month-glyph in the Haab position is largely eroded, we cannot determine with certainty that it is Muwaan, as required by the 9.14.0.0.0

proposal. There is also some ambiguity regarding the numerical value associated with the Ajaw glyph in the Tzolkin position, although the “6” interpretation seems probable (until closer scrutiny of photos or an in-person examination can take place).

Based on the possible 5-Tun binding and the clear “8” numerical value of the Haab month position, my investigation of other possible dates proceeds. Here is a list of 5-Tun endings during the 7th and 8th centuries:

9.09.5.0.0	9 Ajaw 18 Uo	April 11, 618 AD
9.10.5.0.0	7 Ajaw 3 Pax	Dec. 27, 637
9.11.5.0.0	5 Ajaw 3 Zac	Sept. 13, 657
9.12.5.0.0	3 Ajaw 3 Xul	May 31, 677
9.13.5.0.0	1 Ajaw 3 Pop	Feb 15, 697
9.14.5.0.0	12 Ajaw 8 Kankin	Nov. 2, 716*
9.15.5.0.0	10 Ajaw 8 Chen	July 20, 736*
9.16.5.0.0	8 Ajaw 8 Zodz	April 6, 756*
9.17.5.0.0	6 Ajaw 13 Kayab	Dec, 23, 775

The first date requires scribal errors. Entertaining the Haab dates with “3” (between 637 AD and 697 AD) requires accepting scribal errors in both the Tzolkin and Haab positions. The last date, although having a 6 Ajaw Tzolkin position, replicates the same Haab error as the 9.14.0.0.0 date, and it occurs much too late to be likely. The three remaining dates do fulfill the secure “8” numerical criterion for the Haab position (asterisked above). These mostly fall late in Tortuguero history. There is some indication, because of a “Bakaal” place-name glyph at Comalcalco, that Tortuguero declined and passed authority to Comalcalco in the early 8th century (Gronemeyer 2006:61). From this viewpoint, the final two asterisked options (736 AD and 756 AD) in the list above are unlikely. Given that almost all of the surviving monuments from Tortuguero are related to Lord Jaguar, who ruled from 644 to 679, we have this range for Tortuguero’s heyday. But the remaining “8” Haab date falls in 716 AD, some 37 years beyond Lord Jaguar’s reign. A succession no doubt happened after Lord Jaguar, as indicated by an event recorded on the Wooden Box (Zender 2000), but nothing more is known beyond the 680s at Tortuguero, except for this one monument.¹ If we entertain the remaining and most likely 12 Ajaw 8 Kankin, 9.14.5.0.0, November 2, 736 date,² the “12” in the Tzolkin position does not fit with Gronemeyer’s interpretation of the “cruller form” of the apparent space holders—unless there were in fact two dots in the middle and another bar was accidentally omitted (a scribal error) or something else is evident upon a closer eyeball-to-glyph examination.

Is requiring a “12” in the Tzolkin’s numerical position a problem? Well, if we do accept 9.14.5.0.0, 12 Ajaw 8 Kankin, as a viable alternative proposal for Monument 2, *it is at least on even ground with the 9.14.0.0.0 proposal because each proposal requires a scribal error.* The 9.14.0.0.0 date requires that the secure “8” in the Haab is really a “13.” My new 9.14.5.0.0 proposal requires that the apparent “6” in the Tzolkin position (*less secure* in my opinion, but certainly associated with an Ajaw day-glyph) is really a “12.” If this is considered an even trade-off, making both proposals equally feasible, we should then note that my 9.14.5.0.0 proposal has added support from the previously unacknowledged though very possible “5” in the tun-binding statement at A4ay (also vaguely suggested in the Long Count Tun-block at A2ay).³

Lord Jaguar's Relationship With Future Period Endings

What remains to be explained is why my newly proposed date in 716 AD falls outside the historical purview of the reign of Lord Jaguar, Tortuguero's apparent heyday (it is some 37 years after Lord Jaguar's death). It is nevertheless only five years later than the previously accepted 9.14.0.0.0 date (711 AD) and thus should not be dismissed on those grounds; it may simply be a late survival. On the other hand, the date in 716 AD does in fact relate to the life of Lord Jaguar: *It falls exactly two Calendar Rounds after his birth.*

In March of 2011, I examined in person Tortuguero Monument 6 with special attention to the eroded Distance Number that generates Lord Jaguar's birthday. My study and published report (Jenkins 2011a) verified the 5-day range for his birthday and also argued for the greater likelihood of two of those five dates, November 28th and November 30th of 612 AD (J). Later that year I published a composite transcription of six Tortuguero monuments with a line-by-line commentary (Jenkins 2011b). I offered additional arguments and gave my preferential support for the November 28th date, based on the overall evidence. Of striking importance to my current reassessment of Monument 2, this birthday for Lord Jaguar (November 28th 612 AD) falls on 12 Ajaw 8 Kankin (9.8.19.10.0). It is extremely curious that a careful re-assessment of the inscription on Monument 2 points to this same Calendar Round position, 104 Haab (1 Venus Round) after Lord Jaguar's birth. If we entertain that this is indeed the correct date for Monument 2, several questions arise. If Monument 2 was carved in 716 AD, could it have been intended as a recognition and celebration of the earlier king, essentially providing support for my reconstruction of the November 28th birthday? Perhaps his possible grandson, Ruler D, was paying homage to his ancestor and royal predecessor?

Or might the monument have been carved during Lord Jaguar's reign, projecting forward to a coordination of his birthday Calendar Round with a stone-binding period-ending in the future? If this were the case, it would be similar to what has been proposed for Lord Jaguar's relationship with the far-future 13th-Baktun period-ending in 2012 (Grofe 2010; Jenkins 2009, 2010, 2011b;). In this view, Lord Jaguar seems to have consistently liked to claim, as other Maya kings did, sovereignty over future period-endings in the calendars. And further, he displayed his rationale for doing so by crafting or highlighting calendrical and astronomical analogies with his own birthday.

If we disagree with my newly proposed date and maintain acceptance for the previous 9.14.0.0.0 reconstruction, that date also provides a striking parallel to both Lord Jaguar's birthday astronomy and the 2012 period-ending astronomy. Here are the dates: 9.8.19.10.0, 9.14.0.0.0, and 13.0.0.0.0. On all three dates, the sun is positioned at the Crossroads of the Milky Way and the ecliptic, at the southern terminus of the Milky Way's dark rift. Iconography on Copan Stela C, which contains the 9.14.0.0.0 date, supports the notion that the Maya were consciously aware of this type of sidereal alignment of the sun, portrayed on Stela C as the kingly Solar Lord within *the jaws of the cosmic caiman*, which symbolize the dark rift in the Milky Way (see Jenkins 2000).

The sequence of glyphs on the dorsal side of the serpent-shaped Monument 2 were, as mentioned, roughly sketched by Blom & LaFarge (1986). It is possible that a closer examination of that side of the monument will shed some light on the alleged second date implied by an apparent Distance Number, and clarify the likelihood of my re-interpretation if that second date is anchored to the date on the ventral side.

A Third Date Proposal: 9.12.7.0.0

Another date proposal may be feasible, which would also be aided (indirectly) by a clearer reading of the apparent DN and other glyphs on the dorsal side. The numerical portion of the Haab glyph at A4bx clearly reads “8” in the drawing. However, the previously proposed 9.14.0.0.0 date requires that this is a scribal error, and the number should be “13”. Gronemeyer reads the number portion of the “Ajaw” Tzolkin glyph (at A3y) as a “6”, but if the edge place-holders are actually dots, then it would be 8 Ajaw. So, if we maintain that the Haab number is indeed a scribal error, and it should read “13”, then we have a Tzolkin-Haab position of 8 Ajaw 13-*something*.

If Gronemeyer’s interpretation of a “stone-binding” event at A4ay is maintained, then we are looking at a date which must have a “0” in the Winal position of the Long Count. We do have a handy date that fits these criteria in the Tortuguero record. The Wooden Box references the period ending of 9.12.7.0.0 as a “stone binding” (at B2 on the Wooden Box; see Gronemeyer 2006:81 and Fig. 3 below):



Figure 3. The stone-binding on 9.12.7.0.0, 8 Ajaw 13 Sek, May 19, 679 (J). B2 on the Tortuguero Wooden Box.

This demonstrates that a 7-Tun period ending could be designated with a stone-binding marker. This period ending was referenced on the Wooden Box as an anchor for Lord Jaguar’s death, two days earlier. It is stated that “he was no longer seen” on the period ending of 9.12.7.0.0, 8 Ajaw 13 Sek. This proposal for Tortuguero Monument 2 requires a scribal error in the Haab position, which puts it on the same level of feasibility as the other two proposals (9.14.0.0.0 and 9.14.5.0.0), but it also requires that the reading of 6 Ajaw (at A3y) is incorrect and the place-holders are in fact dots, resulting in an 8 Ajaw reading.

Again, it is quite possible that a closer look at the glyphs on the difficult dorsal side of Monument 2 (we only have the rough sketches of Frans Blom) will clarify these date proposals. It does seem that a DN is possibly indicated, leading to a second date. If enough information is preserved and readable on the dorsal side, and assuming that a DN there is linked to the date on the ventral side, then progress may be made. If the date is the period-ending anchor for Lord Jaguar’s death, one wonders what secondary date the Tortuguero scribes would have desired to link it to.

In summary, I have proposed two additional dates for Tortuguero Monument 2, based upon ambiguities and my scrutiny of the surviving inscription. These are: 9.14.5.0.0 and 9.12.7.0.0. The former relates to Lord Jaguar’s birth while the latter relates to his death.

Notes:

1. Actually, Monument 9 possibly has the date 9.13.0.0.0, 8 Ajaw 8 Wo (in 692 AD). Notwithstanding a scribal error at “8” Ajaw, this suggests yet another option for Monument 2.
2. My date (9.14.5.0.0) also occurs on two monuments (Ms. 136 and p31) from Tonina, and probably elsewhere, although I have not yet pursued this line of investigation.
3. The idea that Hotuns (5-Tun, 10-Tun, or 15-Tun periods) are sometimes secondarily reiterated with Tun or “stone binding” statements, equivalent to the number of Tuns involved in the period-ending, is attested at position G4 on the west side of Palenque’s Temple XIX platform inscription. A 5-Tun marker also occurs at J10 on Tortuguero Monument 6, where it is associated with the Hotun date 9.11.15.0.0. There, the “5” bar occurs above the tun/stone glyph.

Sources:

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The Figures in this essay are adapted from Gronemeyer (2004). The 584283 correlation is used throughout this essay. (J) indicates the Julian calendar. DN = Distance Number.

Addendum. An astronomical component of the 9.14.5.0.0 date provides a nice parallel with Lord Jaguar's birthday astronomy, suggesting another reason for Lord Jaguar (or his rhetoricians) to reference that date in his corpus of monuments. Obviously, since a Venus Round interval is involved, a certain connection with the "return of Venus and the rebirth of the Maize God" ideology can be expected. In 612 AD, Venus made its first appearance as evening star in mid-October. The 9.14.0.0.0 Katun ending is well known for the first evening star appearance of Venus that occurred on that date. Since 3 Katuns equal 37 synodical cycles of Venus, the 9.11.0.0.0 Katun-ending closely embodies the same first evening star appearance of Venus. The 9.11.0.0.0 date falls on 12 Ajaw, Lord Jaguar's suspected birthday, and this Tzolkin date is referenced in the Tortuguero inscriptions several times. On 9.14.5.0.0 in 716 AD, we can suspect that Venus will be in the same position as it was on his birthday, in its movement toward maximum elongation some six weeks after its first appearance as evening star. This is indeed the case, with the added factor that it is exactly in conjunction with Mars, both on the western edge of the Milky Way. Seven days later, Venus as evening star is right at the Milky Way-ecliptic Crossroads, visible at sundown. On November 29th the sun occupies the same sidereal position as it did on Lord Jaguar's birthday. This is one day further on in the tropical year, suggesting the forward-moving shift that leads to the solstice sun and galactic equator alignment on 13.0.0.0.0 (December 21, 2012 AD).



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