

How to Assess and Understand a Maya Hieroglyphic Inscription?

John Major Jenkins. July 8, 2012

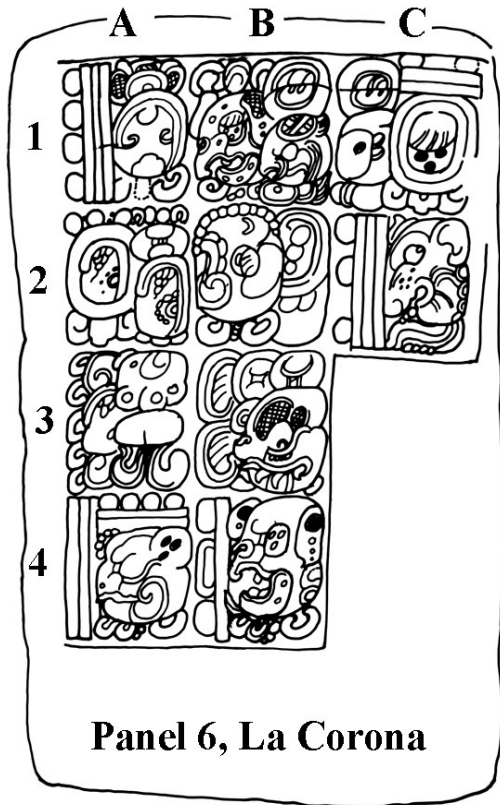
When we look at a brief hieroglyphic inscription such as this, what are the assumptions that underlie our approach? Which are justified, which are too limiting and unwarranted? In my experience of studying Maya texts and Maya cosmology, it's quite clear that astronomy — an ongoing and constant awareness of the sky — is an ubiquitous feature. It therefore should be a default assumption that astronomy was a motivation for the selection of dates recorded in Maya texts, whether they be accessions, dedications, or investiture rites. Since a king and his ruling elite were interested in crafting rhetorically potent narratives about the king's personal relationship with divine forces, ancestor deities, and sacred mythologies, a high premium was on demonstrating inborn connections with other dated events in the narratives. This carries with it a providential, congenital quality of the king. It's possible that, to effect this goal, a king's birthday may have been manipulated. Likewise, a king may have performed his own self-sacrifice in timing with a perceived celestial event that would seal his legacy in a way that honored the astro-theological themes he strove during his reign to concretize in his narratives.

A king's self-association with key dates in the Long Count calendar, namely the big period endings (with the 10th, 13th, and 20th being repeatedly used more than others) is now known from several sites. We can examine the specific texts for dates, rites, ceremonies, statements, and astronomy. But we can also investigate other contextually relevant texts in a king's corpus of monuments. For example, examining Lord Jaguar's other monumental texts from Tortuguero illuminates how and why he referenced the 2012 date on Monument 6. Likewise, we can examine other texts from Calakmul or La Corona that mention Yuknoom Yich'aak K'ahk' to understand how he was crafting his "brand" and portraying his associations with potent rhetorical memes of various types — numerological, astro-numerological, ritual, astronomical, mythological, or calendrical.

One such text, which augments our understanding of Yuknoom, is Panel 6 (or "HS2 Block VI") from La Corona. It is a very short text, consisting of only of 10 glyph-blocks. But it contains two Distance Numbers and three dates, including Yuknoom's birthday. The text appears to intend to show his personal relationship with two other dates that have rhetorical meaning in his ongoing self-portrayal, his life-story that is elaborated on other monuments. Remembering that Yuknoom Yich'aak is the king that asserted a connection with TWO future period-endings in the Long Count — the 10th Baktun in 830 AD and the 13th Baktun in 2012 — we should be alert to how he represents his birthday via associations with whatever the two other dates may allude to. As mentioned above, a defensible default assumption is that astronomy is relevant to understand text and sub-text in Maya hieroglyphic narratives. Being glyphic, they are often curt, brief statements. However, any hieroglyphic script packs a lot of allusions, metaphors, analogies, and information into compact spaces. The Maya scribes very likely treated the astronomy associated with a date as a given, understanding that readers initiated into that level of meaning would give it due consideration, and additional explicit statements in the text were probably considered to be redundant and unnecessary, unless rhetorical emphasis or embellishment was desired. The astronomical level of the text may have been considered to be esoteric, and explicit treatment was avoided.

Site Q Glyphic Panel 6 = “La Corona HS2 Block VI”

This text [was drawn by Linda Schele](#) and the inscription’s dates, DN’s, and content, were recorded [by Lloyd Anderson on his website](#).



Date 1:

9.10.15.16.0 (**1 Ajaw 8 Sak**). Sept. 20, 648
(1 day from equinox, 6 days after Venus
inferior conjunction; first appearance of
Venus as morning star)

DN = 1.0.19 (379 days)

Date 2:

9.10.16.16.19 i-uhti, (**3 Cauac 2 Keh**) *Sih-*
yaj Yuknoom Yich’ak K’ahk’ **KAAN**
Ajaw. October 4, 649, Saturn-Moon
conjunction (1 day off from 4 Ajaw). First
appearance of Venus as eveningstar.

DN = 7.14.15 (2815 days)

Date 3:

9.11.4.13.14 i-uhti (**10 Ix 17 Xul**). It can’t
be 18 Xul with an Ix day.
June 19, 657 (exact solstice, last appearance
of Venus as morning star). Age 7, some
kind of early investiture rite? Exactly
1355.5 Tropical Years before 13.0.0.0.0

These are the three dates. The central “fulcrum” date is Yuknoom Yich’ak’s birthday, October 4, 649 (Date 2). It is noteworthy for being 1 day away from 4 Ajaw, linking calendrically to the 2012 period-ending date (also falling on 4 Ajaw). Also, this date is just slightly after **Venus’s first appearance as eveningstar**. “KAAN Ajaw” in text?

This birthday is linked to a near-equinox day, 379 days prior to his birth (Date1). The Tzolkin day is 1 Ajaw, the traditional Sacred Day of Venus. AND, Venus is 6 days after inferior conjunction. The standard measure for the heliacal rise of Venus is 4 days after inferior conjunction, but in practical terms there is a range of observational possibilities, so **this is in effect the first appearance of Venus as morningstar**. The 1 Ajaw affirms the very likely intention behind the noting of this date. The sun is conjunct Mars, suggesting an additional confluence of calibration. On the next day, the new moon was near Mercury and Venus. The mythological and symbolic meaning of the Venus emergence as morningstar is associated with the rebirth of Quetzalcoatl, the Maize God’s birth, and the solar First Father complex (One Hunahpu’s resurrection in the *Popol Vuh*). As I’ve pointed out elsewhere, it is symbolically analogous to the alignment of the solstice sun with the Milky Way’s dark-rift in era-2012.

The third date (Date 3) is linked from Yuknoom Yich'aak's birthday to a precise summer solstice date some 7.7 years later (DN = 2815). **It is very close to the last appearance of Venus as morningstar.** Being a solstice date, it suggests the turnabout of the sun, the beginning of its dying. It is 1355.5 Tropical Years from 13.0.0.0.0 in 2012. The contrived or embedded interval between this solstice date and the 2012 period-ending date is 495085 days. Dividing by the Venus synodical period, the remainder is 437 days or within one day of three-quarters of a Venus cycle. This brief, three-date text highlights some very potent associations between Yuknoom's birthday, the Venus cycle, calendrical parallels, and Tropical Year stations (one equinox and two solstices).

What was Yuknoom Saying?

Yuknoom explicitly uses the 2012 date on Block V from the HS2 (Hieroglyphic Stairway, 2). See my previous two essays on this at [The Center for 2012 Studies](#). Here on Panel 6 he may be setting the stage, so to speak, for a demonstrated connection to 2012. I suggest that he was advancing several rhetorical notions about himself — a connection to the “rebirth of Venus/Quetzalcoatl” mythos and a connection to Tropical Year positions, including solstices. These both carry a connotation of solar rebirth and period endings. In the Block V text, an association of a Saturn-Moon conjunction with 9.13.0.0.0 and the Crossroads position (solstice sun in 2012) is rhetorically consistent with the Saturn-Moon conjunction in his birth chart. This all seems to echo the “literary device” used decades earlier by Lord Jaguar at Tortuguero. It is also similar to what Pakal did with the 20th Baktun period ending in the West Panel of the Temple of the Inscriptions from Palenque.

Further Research Needed ...

Additional texts from Calakmul, La Corona, and elsewhere can be examined for additional information about how Yuknoom Yich'aak K'ahk portrayed himself. There are several references to the 9.13.0.0.0 date, for example, which Yuknoom claimed as a special date for himself, providing a numerological link to 2012 (via the “13” in the Baktun and the Katun positions). From Stela 9, Calakmul, we find his birthday, honors of his youth, and a dated rite when he was 12 years old.

Any text cannot be understood in isolation. The larger corpus of texts commissioned by a given king help us understand the overall picture regarding what he considered his “image” or “brand” or “claim to kingship” to be based on. This brief essay shows how even short inscriptions can contribute information, if all of the possible information it encodes is accessed. An important and underused resource is astronomy.

A final thought. As more 2012 inscriptions are bound to be identified in the coming years, we should expect, less and less as time goes on, that every single one is going to provide astronomical parallels. Maya civilization was a large and complex phenomenon. Some Maya kings may have referenced 2012 for superficial effect with no attention to embedding astronomical information. This is what we would expect. We may eventually find “smoking gun” evidence for my thesis (as if these two inscriptions aren't enough) and we may also find texts that are totally absent of relevant astronomy. Let's see where we are at in 2020 AD.

See additional essays at *The Center for 2012 Studies*: <http://thecenterfor2012studies.com/>