

A PARENTAGE STATEMENT FOR BUTZ' CHAN¹

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One of the less known monuments of Copan is Altar Y which had been found cached under Stela 4 erected by Waxaklahun-U-B'aah-K'awil on the Great Plaza (Figs. 1-2). Altar Y is a roughly quadrangular block, 122 cm wide, 9 cm deep and 38 cm high and carved in low-relief on all visible sides.

On the lateral sides it bears a hieroglyphic inscription of eight blocks each which are each divided by a vertical band in groups of four glyph blocks to be read in pairs from top to bottom. The front and back sides of the monument show each two anthropomorphic figures behind a water-band. The mentioned vertical band is part of the monument's design which represents a strap of cloth wrapped

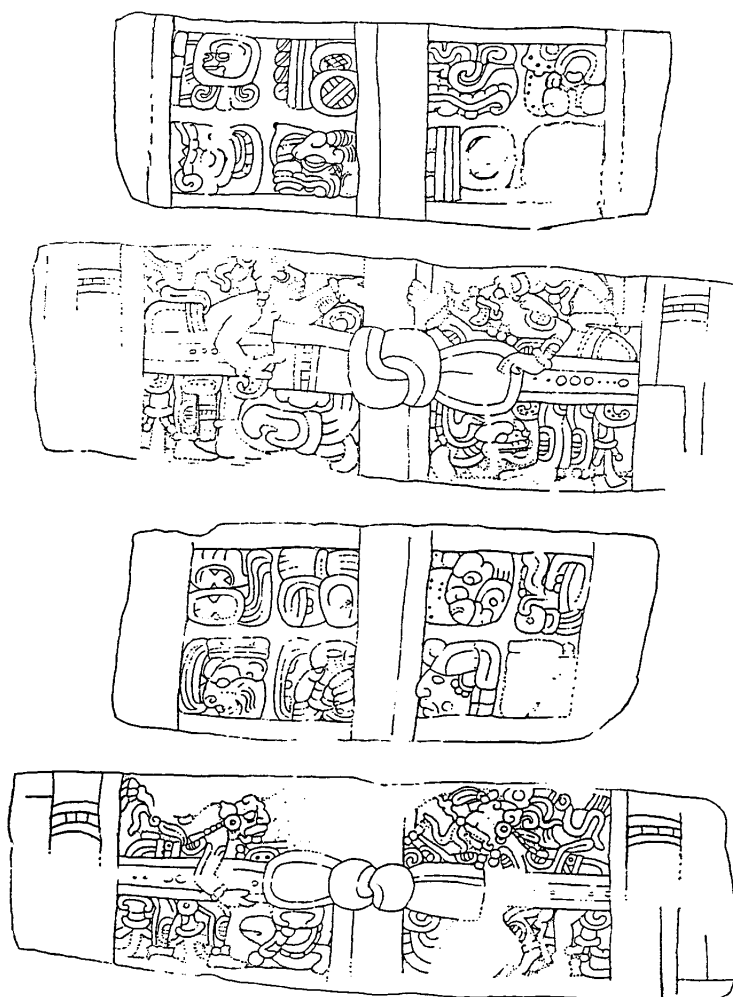


Figure 1: Copan, Altar Y (drawing by Linda Schele)

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around the square stone to make it look like a tied parcel. This indeed turns the stone-altar in a bundled object – a kind of sacred bundle (Wagner 2003). Although found in a secondary context, the style and format of the monument lead to assume that it once was part of the same sculptural programme as Altar X (Morley 1920:66, Plate 8c).

Figure 2: Copan, Altar Y, inscribed sides (after Morley 1920, Plate 8b)

Linda Schele and Nikolai Grube (Schele and Grube 1987) first discovered that this monument records the birth of Copan's 11th ruler known as Butz' Chan, but perhaps read as K'ak' Uk'uuw'? Chan Yoaat, on 9.6.9.4.6 7 Kimi 19 Wo. Butz' Chan's name occurs in B2 to C1 and is followed by *k'uhul* in D1 and two eroded glyphs in C2 to D2. The still preserved prefixed number 18 in C2 excludes the possibility of a new sentence starting with a Calendar Round



date. It seems to be still part of Butz' Chan's nominal phrase, perhaps *18 b'aah chan*, the name of the war serpent. This assumption is supported by the next glyphs on the opposite side of the monument in E1 to F1 recording the epithet *ochk'in kaloomte* that was also carried other rulers of Copán. In sum, the nominal phrase of Butz' Chan includes glyph blocks B2 to F1.

The text continues in E2-F2 with *u b'aah* that is followed by *u tzahk*. This expression is followed by the nominal phrase of another obviously male person in the remaining text from G1 to H2. No personal name is clearly readable, only the title *k'uhul witik ajaw* in G1 to G2. Perhaps the completely eroded last glyph H2 recorded his personal name.

As will be discussed in the following, the semantic context of *u b'aah u tzahk* leads me to the assumption that we deal with a relational term connecting Butz' Chan with the other man mentioned on Altar Y, recording not only Butz' Chan's birth but also his father.

U b'aah is a possessed noun with the general meaning "his/her/its image". *Tzahk*, as the fish-in-hand glyph was deciphered by Nikolai Grube (Grube n.d.) means "to grasp, catch" (Laughlin 1988, 1: 171) but also "to conjure" (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 850) and was used by the ancient Maya scribes both as transitive verb as well as possessed verbal noun to record bloodletting-rites where ancestors or gods were conjured up and "caught" or "materialized" in visions. Another semantically related verb or verbal noun used to record this kind of events is *ch'ab*, "to create" in the phrase *u b'aah u ch'ab* (Schele et al. 1991). In that context *u b'aah u ch'ab* and *u b'aah u tzahk* can be translated, "he/she/it is the image of his/her creation" or "he/she/it is the image of his/her conjuring" respectively.

On the other hand *u b'aah u ch'ab* is also used in parentage statements (Schele and Matthews n.d., Schele et al. 1991) where the child is *u b'aah u ch'ab* of his/her parent. By the close semantic relation of *tzahk* with *ch'ab* in the inscriptions both *ch'ab* and *tzahk* substitute each other and thus *tzahk* can also be used to record a parentage statement.

But who was Butz' Chan's father? From his nominal phrase only the title *k'uhul witik ajaw* is readable. It seems that he was a king of Copán as the title *k'uhul ajaw* indicates. Here it is not written together with the *?-pi* toponym as it usually occurs in the royal emblem title of Copan rulers. Instead occurs the toponym *witik* that elsewhere occurs as *witik*, *ox witik* and later as *kan witik* probably naming the area of the acropolis, the residence and ancestral shrines of the Copan kings. Perhaps *witik* without the number is a more general reference to the latter. The last glyph may have been the personal name or another title. If Butz' Chan's father was ruler of Copán it was then his predecessor "Moon Jaguar", the tenth ruler of Copán (9.5.19.3.0 - 9.7.4.17.4) (Schele 1986, Martin and Grube 2000: 198-199) who had been in reign when Butz' Chan was born.

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