

**The Caracol Disk of Chichén Itzá (929-932 CE).
Some Thoughts on Epigraphy and Iconography**
**El disco de El Caracol de Chichén Itzá (929-932 d.n.e.).
Algunas consideraciones de epigrafía e iconografía**

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RESUMEN: La escultura conocida como el “Disco con espiga” de El Caracol de Chichén Itzá es un monumento de forma peculiar decorado con un bajorrelieve de figuras históricas que se acompaña por un texto jeroglífico en el borde lateral. Este texto incluye varios nombres de personas y una fecha 8 Ajaw utilizando el fechamiento y el lenguaje maya yucateco. Por extrañas razones este monumento ha sido relegado en la construcción de la cronología del sitio. En nuestra opinión, representa un momento crucial en la historia de Chichén Itzá y de Yucatán en general: la llegada de gente “mexicana-tolteca” y la refundación de la ciudad bajo un nuevo contrato social que incluyó tanto a los extranjeros como a parte de la nobleza local.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Posclásico Temprano maya, Chichén Itzá, epigrafía, iconografía, arqueología.

ABSTRACT: The sculpture referred to as the ‘Tenoned Disk’, which was recovered from the Caracol building at Chichén Itzá, is a monument decorated with a bass-relief carving displaying historical figures and an accompanying hieroglyphic text located on the rim of the monument. This text makes reference to several persons named using a Maya Yucatec language. The date 8 Ajaw is also recorded on the sculpture. For some unknown reason this monument has been overlooked by scholars who have sought to reconstruct the chronology of the site. Crucially, this monument records an important moment in the history of Chichén Itzá and of Yucatán in general: the arrival of the “Mexican-Toltec” people, and the re-foundation of the city under a new social construct that included foreigners and local nobility

KEYWORDS: Early Postclassic Maya, Chichén Itzá, epigraphy, iconography, archaeology.

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Introduction

According to the traditional view, most of the major buildings of Chichén Itzá pertain to two distinct construction periods, named generally “Maya” and “Toltec”.¹ This understanding of Chichén Itzá as a sequence of two distinct periods was challenged by the Overlap Model, which posited that there was a total or partial overlap between “Maya” and “Toltec” buildings and ceramics, leading to the chronological movement of the “Toltec” phenomena into the Terminal Classic period (Ball, 1979; Lincoln, 1986; Ball, 1986; Sabloff and Andrews, 1986; Ringle, Bey and Peraza, 1991, among others). In this study, we base our chronology of occupation at Chichén Itzá on recent ceramic studies which support the sequential model and agrees partially with the traditional viewpoint (Tozzer, 1957; Brainerd, 1958; Pérez de Heredia, 2002, Pérez de Heredia and Bíró, 2007, in press; Pérez de Heredia, 2010; Bíró, 2011).

Two different arrivals are mentioned in the colonial documents; one by the Itzá, and another other led by K’uk’ulkan. However, as early as the middle of the 16th century, there was confusion over which migration occurred first (Diego de Landa, ca. 1546; in Tozzer, 1941: 20-23).

Since the Colonial period, many theories have been proposed regarding these migration events. The search for the Itzá² and the arrival of the Quetzalcoatl accounts for a great part of the scholarly research during the twentieth and early twenty first century. There are those who maintain a skeptical attitude toward the published accounts suggesting that migrations or ‘military invasions’ occurred in Northern Yucatán in the Postclassic Period (but see Hassig, 1992).³ While we concur that in isolation the *k’atun* history outlined in the *Chilam Balam* Books is not a reliable source to reconstruct the history of Chichén Itzá, the dates and events recorded in colonial accounts remain a valuable source of information that can shed some light on the history of Yucatán.

With regard to the migration events at Chichén Itzá, it is likely that the first (being the “Itzá” migration) occurred during the early ninth century and was led by an elite who spoke a mix of Classic Yucatek, Classic Ch’olan, and proto-Nahuatl

¹ We use these terms to refer to the two different architectural periods, only with a chronological meaning, and with no ethnic affiliation intended, except when we explicitly do so.

² The Itzá is still a controversial term. Its etymology is also speculative, with possibilities either from Mayan languages (*itz*, “resin, sap”, and *ha*’, “water”; *itz*’, “wisdom, knowledge”) or from Nahuatl languages (*itztli*, “obsidian blade, mirror” [see Jones, 1998: 428; Ringle, Gallareta and Bey, 1998: 226; Voss, 2001: 154-155]) From epigraphy, the [ij]-tza-a spelling is found in the emblem glyph of Itzimte Sacluk (Jun Pik Tok’ 771 CE), and in stone and ceramic inscriptions from Lake Petén Itzá area such as Motul de San José (ca. 771 CE) (Boot, 2005, 2010). The main element of an emblem glyph, as a title for the ruler and its family, was usually a toponym such as *itza*’ or *itz ha*’ (Bíró, 2012; Mathews, 1991; Stuart and Houston, 1994; Tokovinine, 2013). What was read as *hi-tza-a* from the texts of Chichén Itzá has turned out to be a local variant of the *tza* syllabic sign and therefore the intended collocation is simply *tza-a* (Grube, 2003: 361-362). Therefore, at the moment the Itzá are *only* mentioned in the colonial sources in Northern Yucatán, aside of the Classic Southern Lowlands.

³ For a critical review of the different theories of the history of Chichén Itzá see Smith, 2007.

languages (Wichmann, 2006; Pérez de Heredia and Bíró, in press). This linguistic combination is evident in the phonetic components of ninth century epigraphic texts at Chichén Itzá. It has been posited that this arrival led to the construction of the city of K'ahk' Upakal in a variation of the Puuc architectural style, and the introduction of Cehpech ceramics in the region. While the exact date for the arrival of the Itzá remains uncertain, epigraphic evidence supports a date on or slightly before 830 CE (Pérez de Heredia and Bíró, in press).

On the other hand, we are of the opinion that the second arrival can be identified with people associated with Sotuta ceramics, non-Maya architecture, an abundance of non-local graphemes, and the specific S-shaped serpent which later became an icon in the Great Terrace buildings (see Baudez and Latsanopoulos, 2010). Here we refer to this configuration as “Toltec”. What is interesting is the fact that the Classic Yukatek and Classic Ch'olan elite of the previous period still remained in the city with an important place in government, according to the preserved inscriptions.

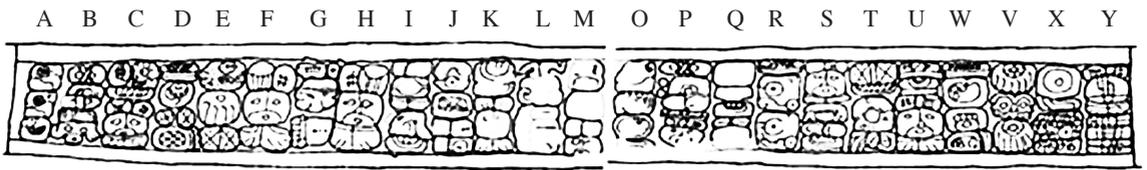
The date for the second arrival and the beginning of the “Toltec” configuration of Chichén Itzá has also been intensely debated, especially in relation with ceramics and architecture. Usually “Toltec” buildings exclude Classic Maya inscriptions, but for few exceptions. A most significant “Toltec” monumental building with Maya hieroglyphs is the Osario pyramid, which also contains an epigraphic date 998 CE (Graña-Behrens, Prager and Wagner, 1999). The Osario pyramid, as well as its underlying platform can be dated to the early phase of the Sotuta ceramic complex, and this association provide a provisional dating for the beginning of production of this pottery ca. 930-950 CE (Pérez de Heredia, 2010).⁴

In this paper we will present evidence that the later iconography in the Great Terrace buildings appeared for the first time at the Tenoned Disk of the Caracol building⁵ (Figure 1), and that this monument bears testimony of the arrival of a non-Maya group and the re-foundation of the city around 929 and 932 CE. We think that this date also marks the end of the Terminal Classic Period system with the instauration of a new political order which transcended the figure of kingship that characterized the Classic Maya period (see Ringle, 2004, 2009). This date is, in other words, the date of the beginning of the Early Postclassic Period at Chichén Itzá.

In a general sense the Caracol Disk relates to a ritual known as *toma de posesión* (taking possession) or *hedz luum* (*asentar la tierra*, setting the land), which is men-

⁴ A note about the dates used in this article for the relevant periods: different chronologies have been proposed for Chichén Itzá, usually grouped as the Sequential, Partial Overlap, and Total Overlap theories (Sabloff and Andrews, 1986). We align with a modified sequential model in which the Terminal Classic at “Maya” Chichén Itzá is dated 800/830-932 CE, while the Early Postclassic “Toltec” city is dated ca. 932-1150 CE (Pérez de Heredia, 2010; Bíró, 2011; Pérez de Heredia and Bíró, 2016).

⁵ In this paper we will refer to the Tenoned Disk simply as the Disk. The monument was named in this manner because its shape: a tenon is a projecting member in a piece of wood or other material for insertion into a mortise to make a joint. It refers to the shape of the monument.



A B C D E F
G H I J K

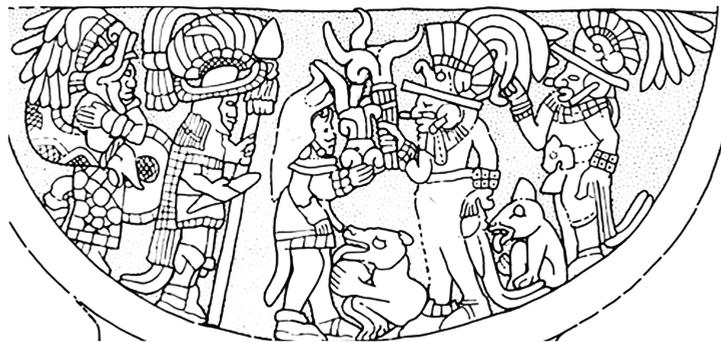


FIGURE 1. Text and Image of the Disk at the Caracol Tower
 (text drawing by Alexander Voss, 2001; figures by Mark Van Stone, April 13, 1997
 in FAMSI Schele Drawing Collection no. 5085).

tioned in the *Chilam Balam* and was an archetypical ceremony all over Mesoamerica (Oudijk, 2002; Boot, 2005: 110-123; Nielsen, 2006). This ritual involved the ‘coming of the torch’, the same event that took place at Tikal in the 4th century. This new foundation of Chichén Itzá was marked by the K’atun 8 Ajaw which will be a particularly significant date in the *Chilam Balam*.

The Caracol Building

The Caracol Tower (Figure 2) was excavated and restored by Karl Ruppert, and its peculiar architectural characteristics and astronomical associations have been thoroughly described in a number of publications (Ruppert, 1935; Marquina, 1950; Aveni, Gibbs and Hartung, 1975). The building consists on a circular tower constructed atop three earlier versions of a circular construction (Figure 3). The latest stage dates by 890 CE, while the first one possibly as early as 830-840 CE (Pérez de Heredia, 2010) and was possibly constructed by the predecessors of K’ahk’ Upakal. As such, this edifice accounts for 60 years of continuous building, which was in all probability dedicated to the Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl cult from its first stage of development.

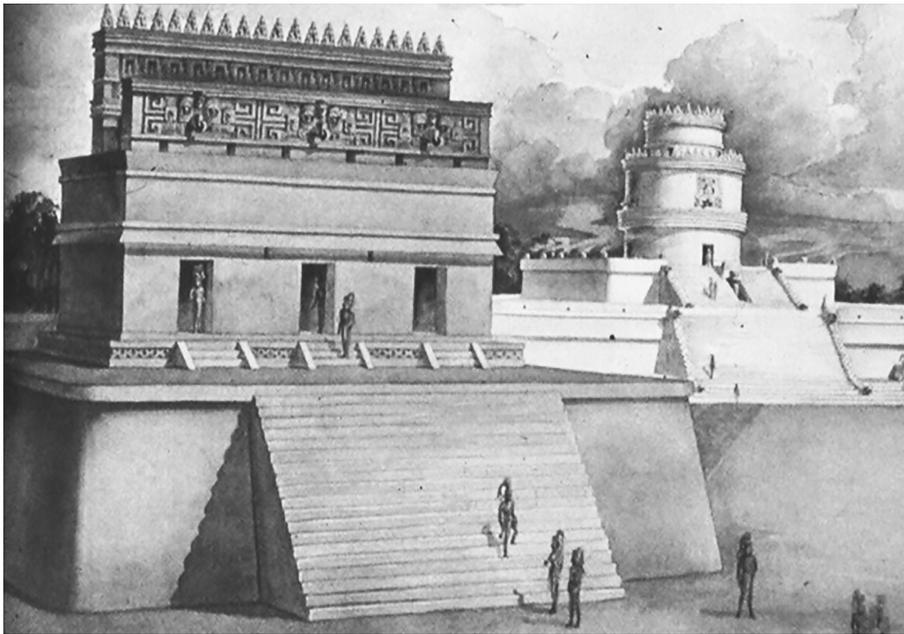


FIGURE 2. The Caracol Tower seen from the Casa Colorada.
(Tatiana Proskouriakoff, 1946).



FIGURE 3. The Caracol stages by Ruppert (1935).

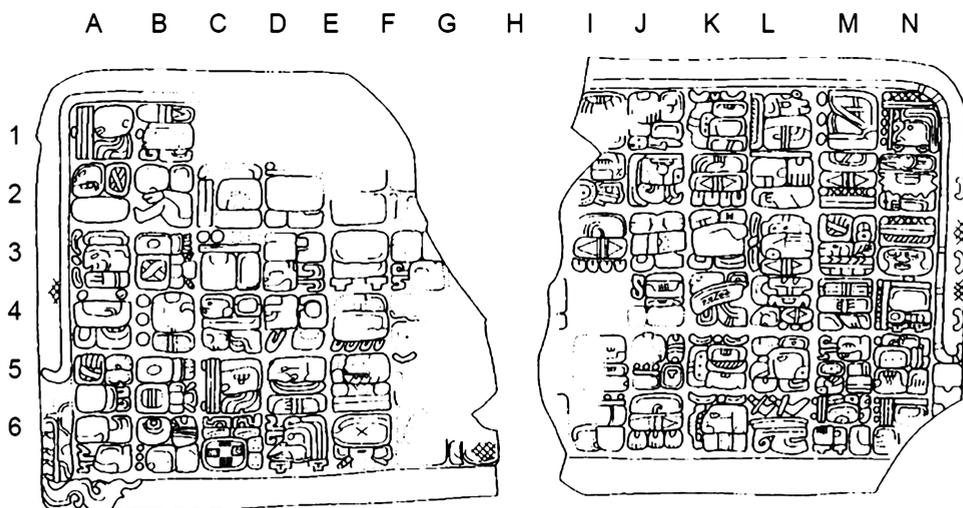


FIGURE 4. The Caracol Panel (drawing by Voss, 2001: 170, fig. 6).

The construction and subsequent dedication of the Caracol Tower in its latest configuration (see Figure 2) can be dated with some precision because of associated carved inscriptions providing an inauguration date of 890 CE. Collectively, there are three hieroglyphic inscriptions associated with the building, which are in various states of preservation, either eroded or broken. There are at least 10 dates associated with the building, they are carved on the Caracol Panel, the Hieroglyphic Serpent and on the Disk all inscribed using the Short Count notation in the Yucatecan writing system (Thompson, 1937). The first two monuments are contemporaneous with the construction/dedication of the building with the last being carved almost 40 years later (Voss, 2001).

The inscription on the Caracol Panel (Figure 4) displays 16th and 17th *tun* dates in K'atun 1 Ajaw, and also the 1st *tun* in K'atun 12 Ajaw or 884-885, 885-886

and 889-890 CE, respectively (García Campillo, 2000; Voss, 2001; Boot, 2005). Within the text there is also an unknown verb followed by a list naming both gods and humans. One of the names listed is that of K'ahk' Upakal. The verb *pek* is also contained within the inscriptions, which means “to invite”; a verb not only used to assemble nobility but also to gather the gods.

The last human named on the Caracol Panel is Aj B'olon K'awil Lem? Taj Tza', meaning “He of the Many Kawiil, the Jeweled Obsidian from Tzaj”. This descriptive title lists the toponyms as he was from Tz'iknal (the Caracol Building) from the neighbourhood of Tzaj in Wak[hab'?]nal, which was the name of Chichén Itzá itself (Voss, 2001; Boot, 2005: 345). His title was *aj k'ahk'* (“he of fire”) and *k'uhul aj kan* (“divine speaker”; Voss, *ibid.*, 160).⁶

Although the Hieroglyphic Serpent is broken in several fragments, there are at least four legible dates that correspond to the periods 876-877, 884-885, and 885 CE, respectively (Voss, *op. cit.*). Importantly, it appears that the text refers to the same individuals mentioned in the Caracol Panel; specifically, K'ahk' Upakal (the ruler of Chichén Itzá), Uchok Wata'ab' (believed to be K'ahk' Upakal's father) and Aj B'olon K'awil (speaker and possibly the leader of Caracol) from Tz'iknal Wak[hab'?]nal. The last two ashlar (10-7) are important because they mention not only the local nobility but also a non-royal noble (*anab'*) who maybe came from a site that was later mentioned in the Caracol Disk in block W. Indeed, the other lords referred in the text could be coming from non-local sites and were maybe connected to individuals mentioned in the Disk of Caracol, dedicated almost 40 years later.

The events surrounding the death of K'ahk' Upakal, as well as his succession to power, remain a mystery. Presently, we do not know exactly when he died but we estimate it must have occurred before 910 CE or slightly later (see Pérez de Heredia and Bíró, in press).

The Caracol Disk

The next date to occur at Chichén Itzá is 929-930 CE⁷ and appears on the Caracol Disk (Figure 1). This monument records two ritual scenes on its front and a hieroglyphic text around its rim, which describes an event maybe accounting for

⁶ At the end of the sentence comes the date 1st *tun* of K'atun 12 Ajaw (889-890 CE). The side texts of the panel mention Uchok Wata'ab' (possibly the father of K'ahk' Upakal K'awil) and some other women of the dynasty. Later it refers to the ‘creation’ of the date 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u, and finally the 1st *tun* of K'atun 12 Ajaw (889-890 CE).

⁷ According to Boot (2005: 135-136) the Disk is a retrospective monument made in the 9th century (because of the iconography) but the event recorded occurred in 673-674 CE (the previous K'atun 8 Ajaw). Also, he used the *Chilam B'alam* chronicles and he believed that the Disk narrated the arrival of the Itzá, as he had identified the *Itza* lexeme in the text. He worked with the chronology of the overlap ceramics (Sotuta 700-1000 CE etc.). According to our position the Sotuta complex began ca. 930/950 CE and in the 7th century the city was a small village (associated with Yabnal ceramic complex). Regarding the *Itza* lexeme, it is nowadays read as *tza'/tzaj*, a toponym of the Caracol area.

the arrival of a central-Mexican people and the re-foundation of the city as Tollan through the installation of a new variety of the cult of Quetzalcoatl.

While the Disk is the best preserved of the monuments from the Caracol building, the text is more complicated, because being of a later date it is not connected paleographically to the previous texts of Chichén Itzá. Also the original position that the monument held in the Caracol remains unknown, which some view as problematic (Ruppert, 1935). The date on the Disk reads 2nd *tun* of K'atun 8 Ajaw, or 10.5.1.0.1-10.5.2.0.0 (929-930 CE; Voss, *ibid.*, 157).

Epigraphy⁸

The text analysis is the following (see the glyphs in Figure 5):

(A) u/k'a?-u/k'a?-lu (B) u-?-tu-?-EK' (C) TZ'AK-ka-AJAW-wa (D) AJ-ja-?-? (E) MAK?-b'a-? (F) AJAW-wa (G) TE'-?-si (H) AJAW-wa (I) ?-CHAN?-? pe-ka (J) ?-ta-?-? (K) ?-AJAW-wa (L) K'AK' #-#-# (M) #-#-AJAW-wa (N) ?-?-TUN-ni (O) u-2-pi-si-8 AJAW (P) #-#-?-?-# (Q) AJ-k'a-k'a (R) AJAW-wa tz'u-nu-li (S) ?-ka a-hi (T) tza-AJAW-wa (U) AJ-jo-lo-TUN-ni (V) b'a?-la?-ma? (W) PET?-ni ITZAM?-ma-la (X) TZ'AK-AJAW-wa ha-i

(A) ... (B) u-t? ek'? (C) tz'ak ajaw (D) aj ja... (E) ma[h]k b'a[h] ... (F) ajaw (G) te' ...is (H) ajaw (I)...chan?... pek'[j] (J)... (K)... ajaw (L) k'a[h]k' (M) ... ajaw (N)... ... tun (O) uka' pi[s] waxak ajaw (P) (Q) aj k'a[h]k' (R) ajaw tz'unil (S) ...k ah (T) tza' ajaw (U) aj jol tun (V) b'alam? (W) pet[e]n itzamal?⁹ (X) tz'ak ajaw ha'i

“(A) ... (B) the ... Star? of (C) Tz'ak Lord (D) Aj Ja... (E) Turtle Head ... (F) Lord (G) Tree ...is (H) Lord (I) ...Sky... Dog (J) ... (K) ... Lord (L) Fire (M) ... Lord (N) 10-19? ... Stone (O) [in] second Stone of 8 Ajaw (P) (Q) He of the Fire (R) Lord Young (S) ...k He of (T) Tza' Lord (U) Aj Joltun (V) B'alam? (W) Pet[e]n Itzamal? (X) Tz'ak Lord here”

⁸ A note about written conventions used in this text for Maya words: when a given hieroglyphic text is presented there will be either a full broad transliteration and/or a broad transcription, using the alphabet designed by the Guatemalan Academy of Maya Languages. Single question marks <?>, directly following a grapheme indicate uncertain decipherment or unknown reading (using Thompson's 1962 catalogue); the sign <#> indicates erosion and </> means an alternative reading of a sign. Transliteration will be written in **bold face** letters, with syllabographs in **lower case** and logographs in **UPPER CASE**, separated by hyphens. As we do not accept the existence of morphosyllables, this category of signs will not be represented in our transliterations nor the long-vowels signs. Transcription appears in *italics*, and every independent lexeme will be written in lower case letters. Any reconstruction (historical, internal, and palaeographical) is written in square brackets [...]. Literal translations will be given between quotation marks “...” and the non-deciphered signs will be expressed as three dots.

⁹ Other suggestion is **WAY?-wa-la/waywal**, “dreamer, magician” (pers. comm. by Carlos Pallán, June 2014).

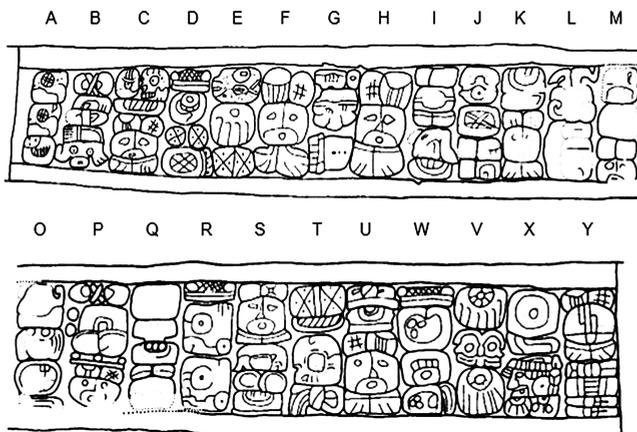


Figure 5. Detail of the text of the Disk (drawing by Voss, 2001: 170, figure 7).

The first verb, unfortunately, has not been deciphered yet and the object also is unique in the corpus of the Maya inscriptions. Recently, Boot (2005: 121-122), suggested that the verb can be read as *u'ul* or “to arrive”, however at the moment there is no definitely proof of the reading. Although the drawing is excellent, the photos lend some doubt to the *u* grapheme. However, if the spelling is **u-u-lu** then by the rule of the Maya writing it is obligatory to reconstruct it as *u'ul*, or in the linguistic *ʔuʔul* with the glottal stop. The form is the imperfective stem in the Modern and Colonial Yucatec (Bricker, Po'ot Yah and Dzul, 1998: 344). Indeed, in Yulá Lintel 1:B1 appears as **u-li-ya** with the imperfective stem and the *-iy* suffix.

Other epigraphers read it as *k'a-k'a-lu/k'ak'ul*¹⁰ (García Campillo, 2000; Voss, *op. cit.*, 2001). We have checked the same *k'a* in the other line (Q) and the former one is slightly different. However sometimes the grapheme appears without the thumb, for example in Temple of the Three Lintels, Lintel 1: F1; but one of the photos maybe shows a part of the thumb. If it is *k'ak'ul* then we have the “lantern” in Colonial Yucatec (Bolles, 2001) and since the sentence begins with a noun, it will read as “there was the lantern/torch of...”. Apparently then, the second option coincides better with the iconography of the disk.

The object possessed by the lords has not been deciphered before, but the ergative pronoun is certain (*u* “he, his, she, her”) and the head grapheme comes next before **tu**.¹¹ Barbara MacLeod (email May 30, 2014) has suggested that the

¹⁰ *K'ak'ul* is composed of the *k'ak'-0* “to roast” in the incomplete plus the abstract *-ul* suffix; the literal meaning would be “roasting the... (something, presumably a branch of a tree or torch)” (Smailus, 1989:116).

¹¹ Here we are speculating from the statistics pattern of the Classic Maya writing. First, the head is usually a logogram and has either a CVC or CVCVC pattern (because of the ergative pronoun). The phonetic complement **tu** leads to the suggestion that the morpheme would be either *Cut* or *Cat* because the *Cu* syllabogram is usually composed of a synharmonic word (*CuC-Cu*) or dysharmonic word (*Cac-Cu*). However the phonetic complement **tu** is rare after a logogram.

grapheme can be HUT “face, fruit, seed”. Notice has to be made of the fact that the HUT term is connected to the arrival of the ‘face’ of the gods in other texts, such as in Copan Stela 11, even though the logogram is different from the sign in the disk. However it is possible that **tu** is not linked with the previous grapheme but reads as *t-u-* or “with his...”. Therefore the reading of the clause would list two objects owned by the lords.

The last part of the block B is the STAR sign¹² with a possible feather K’UK’ attached on its right side (Figure 6a). It is worth mentioning that usually there is no feather in the grapheme for EK’. This same design of a feathered star will appear in other later buildings as the House of the Dancing Jaguars in the Initial Series Group (Figure 6b; Osorio, 2004; Schmidt, 2007). Although the glyph EK’ is not Venus *per se*, we suggest that, in the context of the Caracol Disk, K’uk’[ul] Ek’ (Feathered Star) would be referred to the Feathered Venus, and therefore to Quetzalcoatl.

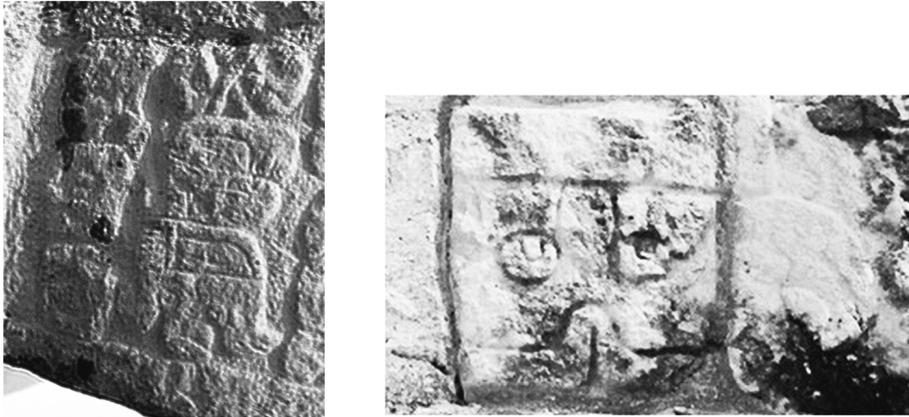


FIGURE 6. a) Photo of Caracol Disk, blocks A-B (by Carl Callaway);
b) Venus with feather on the House of the Dancing Jaguars of the Initial Series Group (by Guido Krempel).

In sum, there are at least three different possibilities: “arriving the ... t STAR of...”, “arriving the ... with the STAR of...”, and “there was the torch of the ... STAR/with the STAR of...”.

The text states later that the owners of the object/s are eight lords or *8 ajaw*, exactly as the date 8 Ajaw in the inscription, which divides them into two groups (Figure 7). Unfortunately, the five names positioned before the date are badly eroded and only partially legible. As such, we have not been able to transcribe their names completely. We will refer to them here as Lord Tz’ak, Lord Turtle

¹² The first epigrapher to identify the logogram as a “star” was Beyer (1937: II-16; “Venus”).

Head (*ma[h]k b'a[h]*), Lord Tree (*te' ... is*), Lord Heavenly ... Dog (... *chan ... pek'...*) and Lord Fiery ... (*k'ahk' ...*).

Lord Tz'ak is undoubtedly the most important person mentioned in the inscription, since he appears first and last in the text and also carries more titles than the other four persons named. In Classic Maya texts the root *ts'ak* functions as a positional verb meaning “to add”, “to accumulate”, or “to put in order” (as in the distance number *utz'akaj*), *-tz'ahk* may have functioned as a numeral classifier (“things added”, “put in order”) and its derivation *tz'ahkb'ul* “he is Number X in the order of the list of kings” (*tz'ak* also means knot or juncture). It is possible that the Tz'ak title had a meaning then as “the first added, successor, first ruler, knot”, possibly used by the first ruler or the founder, who are never mentioned with the number one (Boot, 2005: 123).¹³

An alternative meaning is suggested for this collocation by the toponym and status title, similar to Mutul (Tikal) Ajaw, Kanul (Calakmul) Ajaw, B'akal (Palenque) Ajaw, etc. Interestingly, sources record the name *tzactam* (*tz'aktam* in contemporary autography see Robles, 2010) for the region during the Colonial period for Laguna de Términos and Xicalango. The etymology of the toponym comes from the Chontal *tz'äktan*, “completarse”, meaning “to be completed” (Keller and Luciano, 1997: 261).

Among the titles held by Lord Tz'ak is that of Aj Joltun B'alam. *Balam* means “jaguar”, and *holtun* means “port”, or “harbour”, so the title reads “Jaguar Harbour”. Attention must be given to the chronicles of the *Chilam Balam* where Holtun Balam is named as a leader associated with Sakal Puk (one of the first conquerors and head of lineage of the Kupul). Intriguingly, another title held by Lord Tz'ak is Peten Itzamal (*pet[e]n itzamal?*). As noted previously, whatever the reading of the site may be, the same place is mentioned in association with a non-local noble (*anab'*)¹⁴ on the Caracol Tower (Ashlar 10), which was recorded four decades earlier during the reign of K'ahk Upakal.

An alternative to the above interpretation is that transcribed by Boot (2005: 122-123), where the **ITZAM?-ma?-la?** may be read as *itzam-al* or “Itzam-like person”. In this interpretation Itzam could be a name of the cultural hero or god who came from the west. Indeed, the full toponymal title Aj Holtun B'alam Peten Itzamal Tz'ak Ahaw could be translated as “He from the Port of the Jaguar from the island/province/lagoon where there is an abundance of Itzam, from Tz'ak(tam)”, where the town, the island and the region are mentioned. This line of reasoning raises the possibility that the lord who arrived to Chichén Itzá came, in last instance, from the Laguna de Términos in Tabasco.

¹³ The title *tz'ak ajaw* is mentioned associated with the mother of K'ahk' Upakal in Lintel 3 of Monjas and maybe it is also mentioned in Lintel 2 of the same building associated with the name of a god.

¹⁴ The reading of the *anab'* title was suggested by Beliaev (2004) as “runner” from the proto-Cholan **ahn* “run” and the suffix *-ab'*. In the iconography is represented as a helper in the dressing of kings and also several stelae were made by the *anab'* titled persons. The title is restricted to the Western Region and to Copán (one example).

1. Tz'ak Lord
2. Aj Ja... Mahk? B'ah ... Lord
3. Te' ... is Lord
4. ... Chan... Pek' Lord
5. K'ahk' ... Lord
DATE
6. ... Aj K'ahk' Lord
7. Tz'unil? ...k Ah Tza' Lord
8. Aj Jol Tun B'alam? Pet[e]n Itzamal? Tz'ak Lord

FIGURE 7. Persons mentioned in the text of the Disk.

The date 8 Ajaw is followed by the names of two other nobles who attended the ceremony: Lord He of the Fire (*aj k'a[h]k' ...*) and Lord Young from Tz'a (*tz'unil ...k ah tza' ajaw*). The title *aj k'ahk'* (lord of fire) is connected with the Chichén Itzá elite during the 9th century, while the toponym Tza' has been identified with the Caracol building (Voss, 2001; Pérez de Heredia and Bíró, in press).¹⁵

In reference to the Chan Pek' Lord, we have reconstructed the spelling **pe-ka** as *pek'* or 'dog' (noticing the absence of the glottal stop of Colonial Yukatek).¹⁶ According to Dakin (2010: 230-231) this word was borrowed from Proto-Nahuatl languages and utilised in Yucatecan and Huastec (*piko* meaning 'calendar sign').¹⁷ In the Maya texts of the Classic Period the 'dog' is named *ook* or *tz'i'*, not with the Yucatec word *pek'*. Our reconstruction finds support in the iconography of the disk where two (i.e. twin) dogs are represented.

It is important to point again that there was an explicit connection between the Caracol Panel and the Disk, since in both texts the same place names are mentioned: Aj Tza'/Aj Tzaj and Itzamal?, and the context suggests that the first one is a local toponym while the latter one is foreign. In 890 CE the "runner" of the Itzamal ruler appeared in the fire ritual and in 929-930 CE the succeeding ruler of Itzamal came to be present in the ceremony of the Disk. We can conclude that the rulers of Chichén Itzá and Aj Holtun already knew each other, and significantly the meeting was placed in the Quetzalcoatl Temple.

An obstacle in understanding the Disk is that there are eight names referenced in the text, a number that does not correspond with the frequency of individuals represented in ceremonial imagery; in the iconography 11 persons are portrayed. Also, the date in the text holds an unusual position. Usually Classic Maya texts

¹⁵ One of the titles of Aj B'olon K'awil is Aj Tza' "He from Tza". The toponym is also mentioned in the Dzilam Stela 1 as Tzaj Ajaw (Grube, Lacadena and Martin, 2003: II-32-33).

¹⁶ In the Yulá text the usually written **to-TOK'** is substituted with **TOK'-ko** without of the glottal stop (Lintel 2).

¹⁷ In the Mexica calendar it was substituted for *xolotl* which ultimately came from a Proto-Uto-Aztecan *ci-ra'awi, 'twin, dog, coyote, evening star' (Dakin, 2004).

start with the date, but here the date is placed in the middle of the passage, dividing the text and imagery into two parts as they are articulated in two panels. We will present an explanation for this discrepancy in the next sections.

Iconography

The front of the Disk, which is carved with human figures, is divided in two semicircles in order to present two different ritual scenes (Figure 1). In terms of its authority, the upper scene is more important and dominates over the lower one. The upper scene is also more complex, involving more persons and ritual paraphernalia (censer, idol, and bundle), as well as supernatural manifestations (serpent, ancestor). The upper register shows six men standing in profile (A-F) congregating around an incense burner. The most important persons in the scene are C, who can be seen carrying an idol, and D, from whom emanates the Feathered Serpent. In turn, from the mouth of the serpent emerges an ancestor brandishing an *atlatl* or spear-thrower.

On the lower register there are only five persons depicted (G-K). There are arranged symmetrically in the same manner as above, although the ceremony is of a different kind. The ritual paraphernalia includes a flaming torch and brazier as well as two dogs (coyotes), animals that have been identified with Xolotl (see Boot, 2005: 115-125). In terms of content, both rituals can be viewed as complementary, since Xolotl is the counterpart of Quetzalcoatl Venus the evening star. Due to the presence of the flaming torch in the scene, it is likely that the ritual portrayed in the lower scene occurred at night.

It is important to point out that that the themes, characters and arrangements of the scenes in the Disk are direct antecedents of full developed “Toltec” scenes like those that appear in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars. As such, comparisons between them can help us to understand the meaning of the monument. In the following descriptions of both scenes, we pay special attention to the foreign (Mexican) traits.

Upper Scene

This image is divided in two even groups of three persons performing a collaborative ritual activity involving the burning of substances in a censer or brazier. The ritual includes the presentation of sacred objects and the conjuring of supernatural entities (Figure 1). Immediately adjacent to the censer, stand the most important performers in the ritual. Character C, to the left, presents an Idol, while Person D scatters substances or objects from a bag into the censer. Meanwhile, a serpent is conjured from the body of Person D (Figure 8a). This helps to identify him with the Quetzalcoatl impersonator of later “Toltec” monuments, like those

seen in the Lower Temple of Jaguars (Figure 8b) where this character can be seen in vivid detail, wearing a gold Tlaloc mask (see Taube, 1992 for similar images).

The Disk is possibly the first representation of the ritual of conjuring the Feathered Serpent at Chichén Itzá or the S-formed serpent which some art historians identified as a military group connected with the Central Mexican iconography in the city (Baudez and Latsanopoulos, 2010). As the persons in the left side he also has a bird (*xiuhtototl*) above his headdress (Tozzer, 1957). The position of the right hand is called “scattering”, an activity where the performers scatter drops (of a range of materials like *copal* [*tok poom*], blood, precious stone beads, flint lances, arrowheads, and sticks, that come out from a ceremonial bag) into a burning brazier (see Boot, 2005: 116). The same type of bag with a criss-cross pattern will later appear in the South Temple of the Great Ballcourt (Figure 8c).



FIGURE 8. a) Quetzalcoatl Impersonator at the Lower Temple of Jaguars (Adela Breton unpublished images of the City Museum of Bristol; in Ringle, 2009: 30; fig. 13d); b) Person D with the bag (drawing by Mark Van Stone); c) South Temple Wall Panel (drawing by Linda Schele in Schele and Mathews, 1998: 245, fig. 6.42).

The ritual culminates with the conjuring of a vision serpent at the centre of the scene, where an ancestor emerges from the mouth of the Feathered Serpent carrying a spear thrower.¹⁸ The ancestor presides over, and legitimize the developing scene below him: the presentation of the idol to the fire by Person C, and the scattering on the censer by Person D.

¹⁸ The concept of the “serpent-from-the-mouth” ancestors is ancient in Maya area (Boot, 2005: 118-119), however the structure of the image (behind the person) and the two heron feathers that identify him as Mixcoatl (the father of Quetzalcoatl in some sources of the Central Highland) are innovations and they are explicitly connected to the Tula’s area in central México.

The headdress of Person C, surrounded by birds *xiuhtototl*, adopts the form of a canine ‘coyote’ head and he may be wearing a duck-beaked mask (Figure 9a). More interestingly, this character shows a tail hanging from his back that almost reaches the floor, and which can be identified as a “Coyote Tail” when compared to representations of this animals at Tula (Figures 9b and 9c). In the case of the Disk we think that Coyote Tail is the first of the individuals mentioned in the text as Tz’ak *ajaw* (we will show later more proof of this identification). The Coyote headdress character was one of the most prominent corporate group of soldiers in Teotihuacan, Tula and also in Tenochtitlan, with other animals such as the jaguar and the eagle (Olko, 2005; Latsanopoulos, 2008).



FIGURE 9. a) Character C at the Disk (drawing by Mark Van Stone); b) Stucco relief of Tula, Hidalgo; c) Toltec Coyote Headdress (Tula, Hidalgo; both photos by José Daniel Martínez Gastélum).

The remaining persons in the upper scene are surely secondary attendants, but nevertheless of great importance. Each of them is characterized by different costumes and objects suggesting specialized participation in the ritual. Notably, Person B carries the Puj or Tollan headdress, which is similar to those represented on Copan Temple 26 and Acanecah Stucco Frieze, each instance denoting the foreign origin of the character.

The headdress of the first individual on the left, Person A, presents a prominent knot element. He also displays an unusually long nose-bar (*xiuhyacamitl*) and holds a knife with his right hand. This individual shows similarities with a character represented on the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, who displays comparable costume elements and also brandishes a knife in his right hand (see Figure 10).

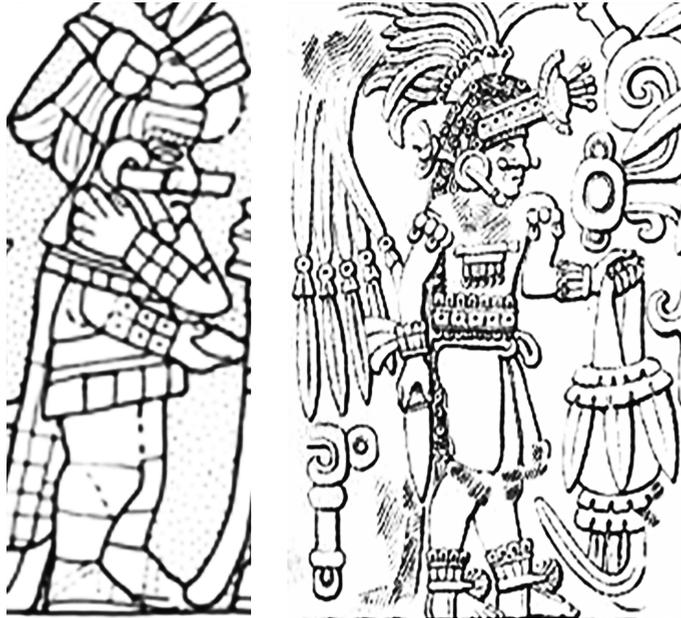


FIGURE 10. Comparison of Character A with figure at Lower Temple of Jaguars (drawings by Mark Van Stone (a) and Annie Hunter (b) in Maudslay, 1974, Ill: plate 49).

On the right side of the scene on the Disk, Character E (positioned just behind the Quetzalcoatl impersonator) is identical to the individual portrayed on the Lower Temple of Jaguars (Figure 11), as evidenced by the same high multi-layered feathered headdress, and similar skirt and sandals. Both are shown carrying a bowl containing offerings (probably *tamales*). This identification is of some value in suggesting that the identity of the people depicted on the Disk may be Xiw, since both figures display the bird *xiuhtototl*, which on the Disk is more difficult to discern.

Lastly, on the right of the Disk stands Person F, who is portrayed dressed in a cape and carrying some sort of bundle (Figure 12). Beyond this description, this part of the carving is not detailed enough to make a more precise identification; however, some further comments would be appropriate here: Firstly, ancestor bundles were involved in foundation rituals across Mesoamerica; this may be a representation of just such a ceremony. Secondly, the bundle is covered with

a triangular element - a cap with one dot positioned at the top (*ocelocopilli*). This constituent probably “alluded to the identification of the dead ruler as Quetzalcoatl” (Olko, *ibid.*, 159, see Figure 13). Indeed, according to Tezozomoc this cap was placed on the mortuary bundle of Tizoc during his funeral ceremony (Tezozomoc in Olko, 2005: 159).



FIGURE 11. Comparison of Character E with figure of the Lower Temple of Jaguars (Annie Hunter in Maudslay, 1974, III: 49 and photo by Carl Callaway).

Finally, some attention must be cast on the figure coming out of the mouth of the Serpent. This kind of figures have been often identified with ancestors in Chichén Itzá and also to some corporate groups represented in the Upper Jaguar Temple (see Ringle, 2009). The figure in the Disk shows long hair and has no headdress, except for the two feathers or *aztaxelli* shared by similar figures in the gold plates of the Sacred Well, or the lintels of the Upper Temple of Jaguars (Figure 13). The two heron feathers are not just the symbol of the ruler and noble status but are also part of the dress of Mixcoatl in the Postclassic Period (Ringle, *op. cit.*).

Lower Scene

On the lower register of the Disk, only five men are depicted (see G-K; Figure 1). The imbalance in the symmetry, between the upper and lower and portions of the composition, was corrected by the sculptor’s positioning of Character I cen-

quesalcoatl.



FIGURE 12. a) *Ocelocopilli* (in *Primeros Memoriales* fol.261v in Sahagún, 1993);
b) Character F (photo by Carl Callaway).



FIGURE 13. a) Disk; b) Lintel of the Upper Temple of Jaguars
(drawings by Mark Van Stone (a), and Annie Hunter (b) in Maudslay, 1974, III: plate 35).

trally in the lower register. The torches and dogs (coyotes) displayed in the image relate this scene to the Underworld.

The central position of the censer as shown in the upper scene is occupied by a dog in the lower scene. Holding a round-shaped object in his paw, the animal is portrayed interacting with Person I. This scene is suggestive of the ‘dog-feeding’ scene, as has been depicted on the North Temple of the Great Ballcourt at Chichén Itzá (Figure 14).



FIGURE 14. North Temple of the Great Ballcourt: ‘dogs’ scene (drawing by Linda Schele, in Schele and Mathews, 1998: 254-255, figure 6.51).

The two more important figures in the scene, I and J, stand around this dog holding smoking ritual objects. Person I is easily identified as Person C in the Upper register by the presence of the coyote tail hanging from his waist. As such, he is represented twice on the monument, as is his name (Tz’ak) in the hieroglyphic text. In this scene he is depicted changing the idol for a brazier. In front of him Person J carries a flaming torch. The attire of character J is badly eroded; however, his headdress is reminiscent of the Chahk headdresses of the terminal Classic Period, like K’ahk’ Upakal, as depicted in the Halakal lintel, and Person J may have been a local ruler.

Behind the coyote-tail-character stands Character H, who is portrayed wearing Puj headdress, as Person B does in the upper register, suggesting that he is one

and the same character. In this instance, however, he appears with a lance, a large knife, and a cape. Firstly from the left, Person G appears intertwined with a Serpent and wears a type of skirt associated with the Cihuacoatl (and also with Coatlicue-Toci, and therefore *temazcalli*). Similar skirted figures are common in posterior “Toltec” art, as seen on the Temple of Chacmol and Temple of Warriors (Ringle, 2009). Lastly, Person K, depicted on the right of the scene, wears a canine head-dress; therefore, this individual can be identified with Chan... Pek’ ... Ajaw in the text. Interestingly, there are also grounds to identify Character J (the individual brandishing the Torch) with K’ahk’ ... Ajaw (Lord Fire). See below for a correlation of the glyphic names with the figures of the Disk (Figure 15).

If our reasoning is correct, the last three names after the date correspond to three of the persons in the upper register. We have already noticed that C corresponds with Lord Aj Joltun B’alam? Pet[e]n Itzamal? Tz’ak.

<i>Lower Scene</i>	
1. Tz’ak Lord	Coyote Tail (I)
2. Aj Ja... Mahk? B’ah ... Lord)	Puj Headdress (H) maybe also (B)
3. Te’ ... is Lord	Cihuacoatl (G) maybe also (A)
4. ... Chan... Pek’ Lord	Dog Headdress (K)
5. K’ahk’ ... Lord	Torch (J)
<i>Upper Scene</i>	
6. ... Aj K’ahk’ Lord	maybe (D)
7. Tz’unil? ...k Ah Tza’ Lord	maybe (E)
8. Aj Jol Tun B’alam? Pet[e]n Itzamal? Tz’ak Lord	Coyote Tail (C). Same as (I)

FIGURE 15. Correspondence of Name Glyphs and Images.

Discussion

Even if the upper part of the Disk is more important in terms of hierarchy, in terms of reading order we agree with Boot (2005: 115-123) that the narrative

starts in the lower part, and the upper scene must be read later. This is also apparent in the Lower Temple of Jaguars, and also helps to inter-link text and image in the Caracol Disk. In the text there are five names before the date, as there are five persons in the lower scene. According to the rule in Maya texts that the last name is the more important, the last three names of the Disk are likely the most important of the text.

In terms of interpretation, it can be argued that the Feathered Serpent (Quetzalcoatl impersonator) conjuring ceremony depicted here represents the main ritual activity in the re-foundation of Chichén Itzá by both Mexican “Toltec” foreigners and local rulers descendant of a previous migration by “Mexicaned” Maya. The upper scene is dedicated to the Feathered Serpent, while the lower one is devoted to Xolotl and the descent into the Underworld, being both supernatural entities the counterparts of Quetzalcoatl.

Selecting a circular shape for the Disk was surely a conscious decision, possibly taken in order to imitate a similar shape, like that of the round Sun god banners seen in the murals of the Upper Temple of Jaguars (Ringle, 2009). Nevertheless, the horizontal division into two semicircles allows the artist to emphasize the different content of the two ceremonies. The figures in lower register are descending, as well as advancing towards the center, which relates to the descent into the underworld of the Xolotl myth, while the curving of the upper part allows for the ascent of both the Feathered Serpent and the Mixcoatl-Ancestor into a heavenly dominant position.

We consider that these two ‘snapshots’ of the re-foundation of Chichén Itzá displayed in the Disk also mark a new social contract between locals and foreigners, leading to a complex government system in which power was negotiated through areas of economic, political, religious and military control represented by Aj Tza’ (the Caracol area) and the Tz’ak lord, respectively. And then the newcomers and the local elite decided to create a new ceremonial complex, distinctly associated with the Sacred Well: the “Toltec” city.

The text marks only one event, either the arrival of the object or the torch ritual, while the iconography of the Disk can be interpreted as two different rituals, the conjuring of the Feathered Serpent above, and the torch-dogs ceremony below. Though clearly both were a significant part of a bigger set of activities and ceremonies to mark the re-foundation of the city, the upper scene corresponds possibly with the act of the arriving of the S-shaped Serpent impersonator. Some questions arise: Does the expression of the text refers to the Conjuring of the Serpent by the Quetzalcoatl impersonator, or to the presentation of the idol? Or, even more likely, to the conjuring of the ancestor?

Another character may have been duplicated in both scenes: Person H, who carries the same Puj headdress as his counterpart B in the upper register, and even may be the same person. If so, maybe Person A in the upper register could also be the same as Person G in the lower one. This reasoning is of some value, because it follows then that Persons A and B are equal to G and H, and there-

fore they can be identified as Aj Ja ... Mahk B'ah Lord and Te' ... is Lord in both registers.

In this context of repetitions, the Quetzalcoatl impersonator, which in the upper register is named Kahk ... Lord, could be the same High Priest represented in the Lower register as (J) Lord Aj K'ahk'. This could mean that the remaining Glyph Name left, Lord Tz'unil ...k Ah Tza', would then correspond to Character E (the *tamal*-carrier).

At least five figures show clear "Mexican" traits: the Quetzalcoatl impersonator D, the Coyote Tail C, the Puj headdress B, the "Xiw" E and the Cihuacoatl G. The Quetzalcoatl impersonator, as evidenced in other later representations, never has a name, and it may so represent the High Priest of the Quetzalcoatl cult (maybe Ah Mex K'uk' Kan of the Colonial documents, see Knowlton, 2010).

In the Lower Temple of Jaguars, the named persons are the ones confronting the Quetzalcoatl impersonator. On the Disk the impersonator is not the main ruler, but rather person C or Lord Tz'ak. According to Oudijk (2002), the *toma de posesión* was a ceremonial ritual performed when a king or dynasty founded a new city. One of the ritual events was to create the new-fire and invite the surrounding nobles to legitimate the new ruler. The flaming torch is the archetype of the new fire coming from the Underworld, which is also represented in association with dogs.

Another novelty appears in this monument. For the first time the Feather Serpent is represented behind the human figure. This will be unique for Chichén Itzá (Great Ballcourt Stone, Temple of the Lower Jaguar, Murals of the Temple of the Upper Jaguar) and for Tula (Cerro de la Malinche), and appears later in Tenochtitlan.

In summary, we think that the Caracol Disk imagery implies the arrival of a foreign Quetzalcoatl-corporate group at Chichén Itzá ca 930 CE. We ignore the exact origin of this people, but they carried with them several religious items that can be connected to Mexican Central Highlands. The more prominent "Mexican" elements present in the Disk are: the Quetzalcoatl impersonator with a Tlaloc mask, the supernatural Feathered Serpent, the *atlatl*, the 'Coyote Tail', the 'Coyote headdress', the Puj headdress, the 'dog-coyote' animal pair, the *xiuhtototl* birds, the *aztaxelli* feathers, the *ciuhcoatl* serpent-skirt, the *ocelocopilli* cap, and the *xiuhyacamitl* nose plug. There are twelve traits in total. In comparison, few Maya traits are visible in the Disk, if not but for the possible Chahk headdress and the Pek headdress characters.

There is more than one possible scenario to interpret the event recorded in the text and the iconography of the Disk. The first possibility is that the Quetzalcoatl group indeed invaded Chichén Itzá on their own accord. The second scenario is based on certain parallelisms that can be traced to the 4th century capital of Tikal, when, according to the inscriptions, *teotihua* Sihyaj K'ahk' *kalomte'* marched from the metropolis into the jungle to install in the throne a new leader: the son of the Teotihuacan emperor, named Yax Nu'un Ahin I.

We also know that he was son of a Maya queen and possibly he was the winner of a factional war amongst families. Sihyaj K'ahk' went to several cities and installed more kings, building a 'New Order' in the Southern Lowlands (Stuart, 2000).¹⁹ In a similar scenario, the Tz'ak Lord could have invited the Torch Lord, the Quetzalcoatl impersonator and their warrior-merchants group to legitimize his rulership (see Stuart, *op.cit.*; Boot, 2005: 194-283). A third possibility is that Lord Tz'ak himself may have visited Tollan (the Quetzalcoatl's place; such as recorded in the *Popol Vuh* and in Tikal), and brought back with him the gods, idols and ceremonial objects necessary for the accession/foundation ritual. We want to remark that the event of 930 CE had a previous event mentioned in the Caracol Panel in 890 where the same places were mentioned in the text although the names of the protagonists were different.

Also we have to consider that the "Toltecs" may have been in Yucatán (and specifically at the Puuc) for a time before arriving to Chichén Itzá, as was first suggested by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1950). Finally, we have to ponder if this corporate group may have had previous contact with the 9th century elite of Chichén Itzá by commerce and even maybe by matrimonial connection. At the moment there is no decisive evidence to choose amongst the hypothetical events, and more scenarios are also possible and in need of further research.

In all scenarios there are hints from a population movement that traversed from the Highlands of México into Yucatán, maybe for as much as 1300 km. This population movement may have been related to the abandonment of Tula Chico a few decades before, or to one of the new other capitals of the Early Tollan phase. It is possible that the famous Landa's Relación line about the Quetzalcoatl arrival indeed was a quintessentially emic tradition from an event occurred ca. 930 CE in K'atun 8 Ajaw.

In imagining how the scenes of the Disk were in reality, some help is needed to calibrate the magnitude of the ceremonies involved. We have demonstrated a direct link between this monument and the main scene at the Lower Temple of Jaguars (and the Temple of the Chacmol), where rituals are depicted involving dozens of elite attendants in the form of warriors, priests, god impersonators, and foreign visitors. The ceremony of the Disk was carefully planned to show the might of the new city, and people in the thousands possibly attended the celebrations. The placement of the Disk in the Caracol Tower was not by happenstance, because since its first versions it was the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. The building was used to amalgamate foreigners and locals into a new form of a cult with some elements already shared by both groups.

¹⁹ See Boot (2005: 283) where he listed the historical figure as Quetzalcoatl from the 4th century Sihyaj K'ahk' through Lord 4 Jaguar 8 (in Mixtec codices), Ah Nacxit K'uk'ulkan Hunak Keel in 15th century (our period) and Acamapichtli in Central México. Acamapichtli was put on the throne by the leaders of corporate groups in Tenochtitlan. The leaders went to Culhuacan (heir of Tollan by its dynasty) and they asked a man whom "was born the grandson of Culhuaque lords and rulers of us Mexica Chichimeca" (Anderson and Schroeder, 1997: 113).

Aftermath

The arrivals of foreign visitors to Chichén Itzá led to the development of the “Toltec” city. Subsequent to the carving of the Disk, two phenomena became apparent at Chichén Itzá. The first was that no more buildings were constructed in the “Maya-Puuc” style. At this time, no destruction of the older symbols of power occurred; the old city remained occupied and was enlarged. The second was that a new architectural style was adopted and a new centre for the city was selected in what is now known as the Great Terrace. At the time of the arrival, the Great Terrace was enlarged to a considerable size; the result of a series of vertical and horizontal extensions that have been dated to the Late and Terminal Classic periods (Figure 16; Schmidt and Pérez de Heredia, 2006).



FIGURE 16. Development stages of the Great Terrace dated by ceramic contents: Yabnal ceramic complex in yellow, Huuntun in black and Sotuta in red (Schmidt and Pérez de Heredia, 2006).

The first constructions of the newcomers lay in the area of the Castillo pyramid. The Sub-Castillo style was named Transitional by Ignacio Marquina (1950), but an even earlier construction was detected by Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia in 1942 by Erosa Peniche. According to Braswell²⁰ Castillo-Sub2 of Erosa Peniche probably is built on AC3 with its expansion AC10. The first is a pure

²⁰ Personal communication, July 2015.

Yabnal-phase platform. The latter expansion is still somewhat problematic but probably dates no earlier than 870 CE, therefore it suggests a date for Castillo-Sub2 sometime between 870 CE and 900 CE.

As shown in Figure 17, the preference for this location dates from Late Classic times, possibly associated with the higher point of the topographic formation (*poop chaltun*, “*laja en la superficie de la tierra*” (Barrera *et al.*, 1980: 82). A testpit by the Chichén Itzá Project shows the complex stratigraphy of the terrace below the Castillo.

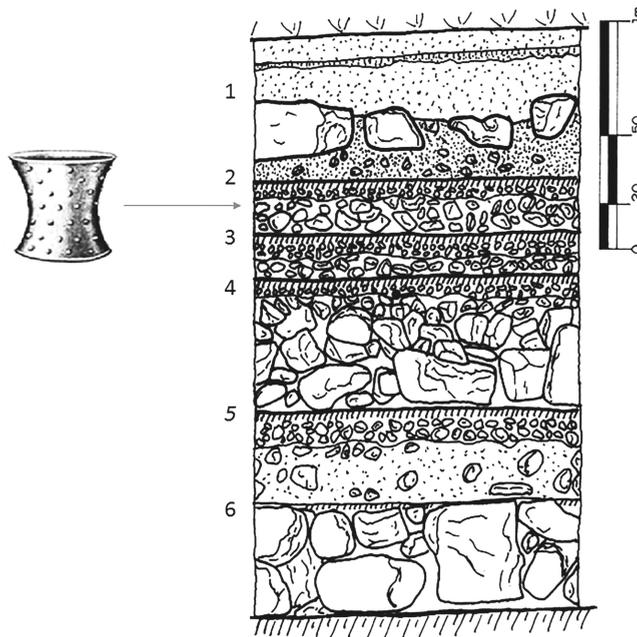


FIGURE 17. Test pit at the Gran Nivelacion (Schmidt and Pérez de Heredia, 2006).
 Floor 2 corresponds with Braswell's Stage V.
 The Sotuta incense burner marks the position of AC8.

Recent excavations between the Castillo and the Temple of the Warriors have been published recently, revealing the construction sequence of the area between the Castillo and Temple of Warriors (Braswell and Peniche, 2012, Volta and Braswell, 2014). During Phase IV of construction (dated by these authors ca. CE 900), the original platform was extended to the east (AC7), and a building of great importance was erected: the first Patio Gallery structure firmly dated into the “Toltec” configuration (Structure AC8). This is possibly the first Toltec construction erected on the Great Terrace and may be a contemporary, or directly post-dates, the events narrated on the Disk. Although the building was later demolished, there is enough remaining evidence to reconstruct its floor plan

(Figure 18), revealing the presence of three benches and four circular columns associated with a westward facing gallery (Braswell and Peniche, 2012). While Volta and Braswell (2014: 387) proposes the date 900 for the construction of structure AC8, based on a range of C14 CE 860-980, we consider that this Patio-Gallery is possibly not older than the Disk events, and therefore we propose a slightly later date ca. 930-950 CE.

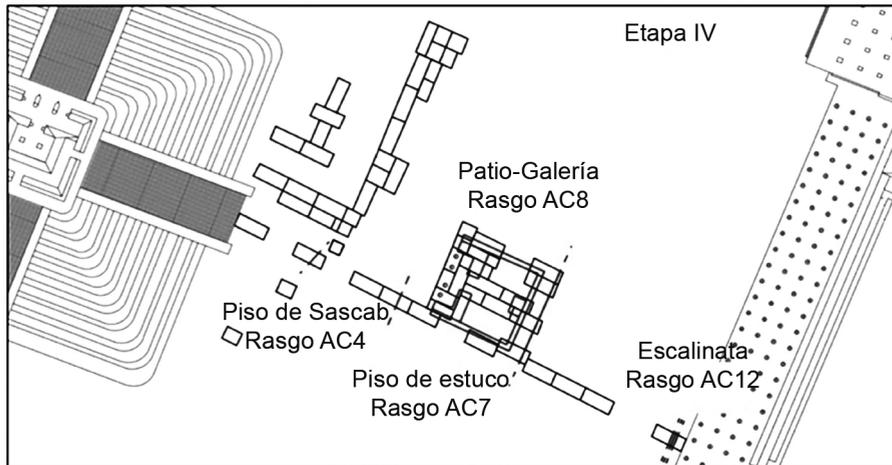


FIGURE 18. Great Terrace East side: Constructive Stage IV showing AC8 (after Volta and Braswell, 2014).

No evidence of decoration has survived on the substructure, but an important archaeological find was made in the center of the patio: the remains of a “*caja de fuego*” (firebox, *tlaculli*) filled with ashes and burnt lime (Braswell and Peniche, 2012; Volta and Braswell, 2014); remains of a censer were also found associated with the firebox. The censer can be identified as an hourglass shape of the Sisal Unslipped Group (possibly Espita Aplicado Type), and therefore represents the first datable item of the new Sotuta Ceramic Complex. Interestingly, the form of the excavated censer is the same as the censer represented on the Disk (Figure 19).

Other constructions are associated with the Patio-Gallery structure AC8. Stairway AC12 is dated to this same period, because both were later covered by the extension of the platform during Phase V (Braswell and Peniche, 2012). The Patio-Gallery AC8 was oriented towards Substructure 2 of the Castillo pyramid and possibly contemporary with the Patio Gallery and the stairway.²¹

²¹ Nevertheless we have no certainty: it is necessary to consider here the possibility that this second substructure of El Castillo may be an earlier Terminal Classic construction, as suggested by Braswell and Peniche (2012).

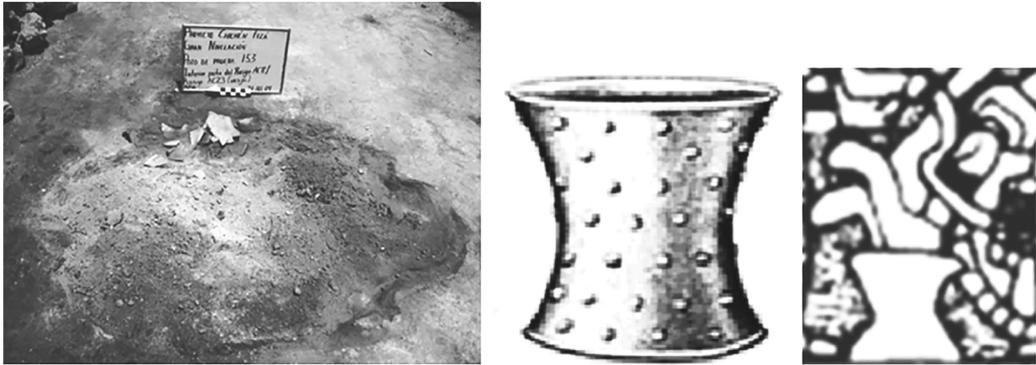


FIGURE 19. *a)* Unslipped censer in the firebox of AC8 (Volta and Braswell, 2014);
b) a complete form of a similar censer from Balankanche Cave (Andrews IV, 1971);
c) the censer in the Disk (Mark Van Stone).

Sacbe 1, the road that connects the Great Terrace with the Sacred Cenote, was very possibly constructed during this period of first “Toltec” buildings as well. Materials obtained from the fill of the Sacbe in two different operations along the causeway by Patricia Fernández del Valle (1993) seem to pertain to an Initial/Early Facet of the Sotuta Complex (Pérez de Heredia, 2010). This would suggest a planned association of the new city to the Sacred Well from its inception. Construction in the Great Terrace was possibly constant during these times. Interestingly, newer constructions, such as the Temple of the Chacmol (Sub Warriors), the substructure of Las Mesas (Big Tables), and the Lower Temple of the Jaguars seem to have followed the planning of the first “Toltec” constructions in the decades following 950 CE.

Then, the arrival depicted in the Disk can be tied up with the first “Toltec” constructions, signaling for a shift in the location of power from the Xtolok Cenote to the Sacred Well. The patio-gallery type of construction of AC8 is associated with new ceramic forms (Sotuta complex), inaugurating a new period, the Early Postclassic, characterized by the concentration of the regional power and population in a single metropolis: Chichén Itzá.

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown that the Disk of the Caracol relates the arrival of a population group in the early 10th century into Chichén Itzá (929-932 CE), bearing strong “Mexican” traits, which has been referred to as “Toltec”. Some “Mexican” traits were certainly present in the previous migration of the Terminal Classic period, but they were not as overpowering as in this occasion. We are certain that the Disk monument depicts two scenes of the ceremonies carried out during

the foundation of the new city; the principal ceremony being the conjuring of the supernatural Quetzalcoatl Serpent and the emergence of an ancestor (Mixcoatl). In this scene an effigy was presented to the smoke emerging from the censer.

“Mexican” elements are prominent on the Disk imagery. When compared to Classic Maya traits, the iconography of the Tenoned Disk contains indeed the germs of the future “Toltec” bass-relief sculptural program with more elaborated scenes of similar ceremonies, such as the Lower Temple of Jaguars. Currently we know the name/title of the leader of the newcomers: Lord Tz’ak. It is regrettable that the state of the text does not allow for a better understanding of the names and/or titles of the historical characters involved in the foundational rituals.

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