

Cycles of Time: Caracol in the Maya Realm with an Appendix on Caracol Altar 21

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The Maya were firm believers in cyclical time. Time repeated itself every so often, in the Maya case particularly after the passage of 13 katuns or, in westernized terms, every 256 years. Events could reoccur and good or evil things could be presaged. These events are to some degree recorded in the katun prophecies and rounds that survived into the Historic era (Roys 1933:144–163; A. Chase 1986:124–137). The passage of time and the concomitant events were inevitable. Rather than fight such cyclical time, the Maya worked around it. If something was inevitable, then why not succumb to it on your own terms?

The impact of cyclical time upon the Postclassic Maya is clearly seen in the final moments of the independent Itzá Maya of Tayasal (A. Chase 1976:159). The Itzá resisted all attempts by the Spanish at conquest and conversion, assiduously waiting until the upcoming "Katun of Change," Katun 8 Ahau. As this all-important shift began to approach, the Itzá sent an emissary, Martin Can, to Mérida circa A.D. 1695 to offer their submission (on their own terms) to the Spanish crown (A. Chase 1985c:202). Although the Itzá had successfully resisted Spanish conquest for over 180 years, their time counts dictated that, to put it colloquially, "their time was up." The successful assault on the Itzá by Ursua in fact occurred only some 136 days before the seating of Katun 8 Ahau (Tozzer 1957:64). This final conquest of the Itzá by the Spaniards in A.D. 1697 was therefore foretold in the passage of time; they believed that they were helpless to prevent this event, which essentially forever changed their way of life, their society, and their culture.

Edmonson (1984:99) commented on this fatalistic view of time in Maya society, noting that the "katuns not only chronicled the wars of Yucatan but actually caused them" (see also Farriss 1987). The cyclical nature of time was not restricted to the Postclassic Maya, but was also in evidence during the Classic Period. "The Books imply with some clarity that the thirteen katun cycle—the *may*—controlled the fate of dynasties in the major cities of Classic times and continued to do so in the Postclassic down to the fall of Mayapan" (Edmonson 1984:99).

Dennis Puleston (1979) ascribed this fatalistic view of the cyclical passage of time as perhaps the main cause behind the Classic Maya "collapse." Just as the Postclassic Maya knew that change was inevitable and attempted to deal with such change before its time, Puleston argued that the Maya collapse could also be viewed in a similar frame. A Katun 8 Ahau, or Katun of Change, was due to occur in 10.6.0.0.0 (A.D. 948 in an 11.16.0.0.0 correlation). The Classic Period ceremonial complex from the Southern Lowlands, at least as recognized in archaeological terms, ends by this date. The latest monumental Long Count dates, those from Toniná in Chiapas (Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer 1983:135) and from Tzi-banche in southern Quintana Roo (Harrison 1974; Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer 1983:596), are 10.4.0.0.0, some forty years before this date. Most sites of the Southern Lowlands, however, never saw 10.4.0.0.0, but instead began to fade from the Classic Period after 9.19.0.0.0 (A.D. 810), at least in terms of their inscriptional records. No matter what internal or external reasons can be mustered to explain the collapse (Culbert 1973; Sharer 1977), it is clear that this almost mythical event also coincides, at least archaeologically, with the 10.6.0.0.0 Katun of Change. Thus, Puleston's (1979) basic argument appears valid.

I would like to expand this ontological notion of time in Classic Period Maya thought by looking at earlier Katun 8 Ahaus, particularly those of 8.7.0.0.0 (A.D. 179), 9.0.0.0.0 (A.D. 435), and 9.13.0.0.0 (A.D. 692). In short, following Coggins (1979:48) and Puleston (1979:66–68), I would argue that much of Classic Period Maya prehistory can be explained by reference to the cyclical passage of time as seen in the "Short Count" or passage of 13 katun periods. In particular, recent excavations at Caracol have yielded significant data to augment this position.

Caracol

The site of Caracol, located approximately 1,600 feet above sea level in the Maya Mountains of the southern Cayo District of Belize, offers much insight into Maya prehistory—especially the transition between the Early

and Late Classic periods. The site has been known since 1938 when it was reported to the Belizean archaeological commissioner by a chiclero working in the region. Because of its monumental record, Linton Satterthwaite (1951, 1954; Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981) of the University of Pennsylvania worked at the site in 1950, 1951, and 1953. Satterthwaite succeeded in recording the majority of the carved monuments and in making an accurate transit map that hinted at the extent of the site. Later excavations at Caracol in 1956 and 1958 by A. H. Anderson (1958, 1959), the first Belizean archaeological commissioner, confirmed the existence of preserved architecture and a large number of burial chambers at the site.

In an attempt to link site development, specific structures, and individual interments to the epigraphic record, a major project sponsored by the University of Central Florida and under the direction of Diane Z. Chase and myself began work at Caracol in 1985. The recovered remains are allowing the anticipated juxtaposition of data. Most significantly, painted tomb texts continued at Caracol at least through 9.13.3.15.16 (A.D. 695), some 200 years after their last appearance at most other sites. Like Palenque, stucco hieroglyphic texts also adorned buildings during this same era. The epigraphic texts also attest to Caracol's warlike nature during the transition between the Early and Late Classic periods. While Caracol's conquest of Naranjo by Lord Kan II in 9.9.18.16.3 (A.D. 631) is well known to epigraphers, a new text on Altar 21 of Caracol (fig. 2) notes the apparent defeat of Tikal by his father Lord Water in 9.6.8.4.2 (A.D. 562).

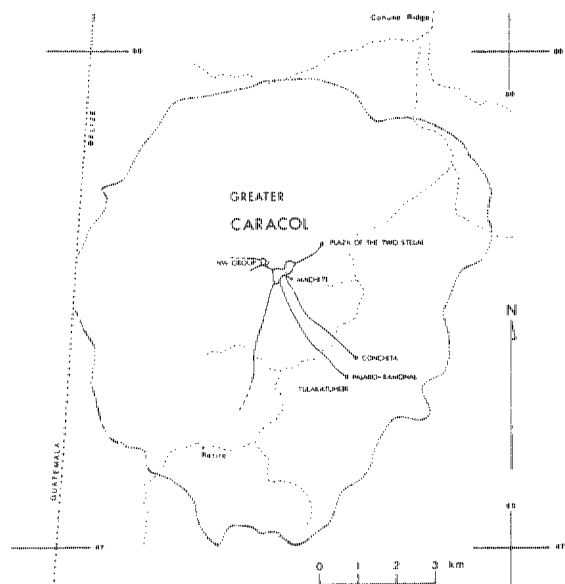


Fig. 1 Greater Caracol, showing the approximate range and location of the various known causeways relative to the central precinct of the site (map by Arlen F. Chase, courtesy Caracol Archaeological Project, University of Central Florida).

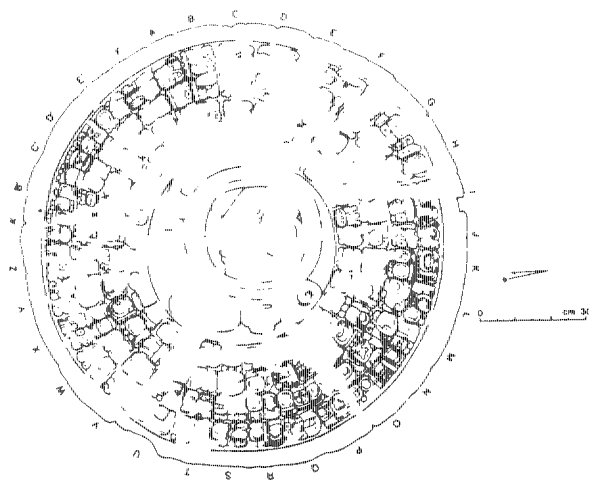


Fig. 2 Caracol Altar 21, a monument dating to 9.10.0.0.0, located in the center of the A Group Ball Court during the 1986 field season (field drawing by Stephen O. Houston, courtesy Caracol Archaeological Project, University of Central Florida).

Apart from the new epigraphic material, recent work at Caracol has revealed a vastly different site from that presented by Beetz and Satterthwaite (1981). Thus far, seven causeways are known to radiate out from what, for lack of a better term, is now referred to colloquially as "downtown Caracol" and formally as the "central precinct" or "epicenter" (see fig. 1). Four of these causeways are known to be over 3 km in length and a fifth is suspected to run at least this distance. With one exception, these causeways do not connect different sites to Caracol, but rather connect parts of Caracol to its epicenter; the areas along and between the causeways exhibit continuous settlement and areas of terracing. These intra-site causeways were used for communication, transportation, and, perhaps, ceremonial purposes.¹

Caracol is presently estimated to cover between 28 and 50 km², while its overall dominion probably approximated some 314 km² during the Late Classic Period (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987a, 1987b:53). The epigraphic, ceramic, and settlement data all point to the prosperity of the site between 9.5.0.0.0 and 9.12.0.0.0. These data also allow for a fresh understanding of the transition between the Early and Late Classic periods and the role that the Maya concept of cyclical time may have played in this transition. Minimally, these data underscore the prime importance of Caracol in any understanding of the Classic Maya hiatus.

Models

Two models predominate in archaeological and art historical literature to account for the development and expansion of the Maya core area. One may be termed the "Teotihuacán" model, in which major growth in

the Southern Maya Lowlands is linked via Tikal either directly or indirectly to the site of Teotihuacán (Sanders 1973:352–354, 1977:408; Coggins 1979, 1983a; Adams 1986:434–440; but see Haviland 1978:180). A second model for the Maya rise to prominence is Rathje's (1971, 1972) core/buffer zone model for the development of Maya civilization. Following Rathje, the Maya traded esoteric goods out of the Southern Lowlands in return for three needed items: salt, hard volcanic stone, and obsidian. Since trade and communication are viewed as being all-important for the rise of Maya society, the second model is not all that divorced from the first model and, in fact, the two have been conjoined (Rathje 1977:379–381). Both of these models for the evolution and expansion of Maya society, however, are clearly out-of-sync with the growing body of archaeological data. Recent archaeology in the Southern Lowlands has demonstrated that large-scale growth, represented by the development of huge Preclassic centers at El Mirador (Dahlin 1984; Matheny 1986) and smaller ones at Cerros (Freidel 1979), Lamanai (Pendergast 1981), and Tikal (Culbert 1977), preceded the advent of "Teotihuacán" related forces in the Maya area. The fact that these large sites prospered without the stela/altar cult also presents problems for Rathje's core/buffer model of Maya development, for the esoteric knowledge the Maya were supposedly trading out was only in the process of being developed by the Maya themselves. It is perhaps more appropriate to view Maya development with a less materialistic approach.

Although trade is important in any society, it is surely the simple *contact* between societies and the resulting political exigencies that lead to the development of new cultural patterns. These patterns, however, are formulated within the preexisting ideological framework. Thus, if the Maya were in fact concerned with cyclical time throughout their history, the impact of such a fatalistic belief in the repetition of events should be visible in their prehistory. Archaeologically, this does in fact seem to be the case; much of the Maya "rise and fall" appears in a cyclical fashion that is apparently tied to the passage of the Short Count, particularly as seen in Katun 8 Ahau, the Katun of Change.

8.7.0.0.0 (A.D. 179)

The earliest Katun 8 Ahau to be reviewed here is 8.7.0.0.0. Although technically before recorded Southern Lowland Maya hieroglyphic prehistory—the earliest known monument date from the Lowlands is from Tikal Stela 29 at 8.12.14.8.15 (A.D. 292)—the 8.7.0.0.0 date is significant in an ideational framework, for it does indeed effectively denote the shift in power from the primary Late Preclassic site of El Mirador to the primary Early Classic site of Tikal. Why El Mirador disappears before the Classic Period and why Tikal fully emerges can at least partially be suggested by the passage of the fateful Katun 8 Ahau.

It is clear, however, that within 100 years after 8.7.0.0.0 (i.e., by 8.12.0.0.0) Tikal had come into contact with Teotihuacán or its allies, as had Uaxactún (see Laporte and Fialko 1987). It is in fact unclear whether the development of a Maya "state" at Tikal was primary or secondary in its nature. Surely, however, the early contact between the Maya Lowland area and Teotihuacán was *not* due to the core's lack of obsidian, salt, and hard stone. Rather, politics were at play. These political forces seemed to have transformed Maya society by the end of the Early Classic Period by placing an expanded societal emphasis on lineage ancestor worship (A. Chase 1985a:38). Yet the ideological underpinnings of cyclical time continued.

9.0.0.0.0 (A.D. 435)

The next passage of a Katun 8 Ahau in 9.0.0.0.0 ushered in a major "revolution" in the Maya region: rather than having only one primary site, Tikal, several others came into existence following this Katun of Change. It is also apparent that Tikal often had a direct interest in the sites that were adopting the full core ceremonial complex following the cycle change. Sharer (Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer 1983:111–113) has pointed out that Tikal was involved in the dynastic affairs of Yaxchilán by A.D. 475 (9.2.0.0.0), some forty years before the site first exhibited an emblem glyph (on Stela 27 at 9.4.0.0.0), and was also involved in the affairs of Copán by A.D. 500, some sixty years before the appearance of an emblem glyph at this site. This therefore raises the possibility that some, if not all, of these first expansion sites had formed alliances, or minimally relationships, with Tikal to aid them in exploring and using their newly acquired status. It is indeed possible that certain of these sites' dynasties were set into motion by either colonists or direct intervention from Tikal.

While Tikal reached new heights prior to 9.0.0.0.0, perhaps through its direct or indirect connection with Teotihuacán, its initial Maya heritage caught up with the site after this date. Rather than reverting to Rathje's economic model to explain the development of the Maya area following 9.0.0.0.0, I would rather employ an ideological model. The Katun 8 Ahau that occurred in 9.0.0.0.0 was one of great significance. Even if outlying "buffer-zone" sites had previously been cowed by almighty Tikal, several took heart and followed the fortunes of the Katun of Change. Thus, what may be termed the "first expansion" of Classic Maya sites took place (see fig. 3). These sites included Copán and Quiriguá far to the southeast, which erected their initial monuments in 9.1.10.0.0 (Copán Stela 20) and 9.2.3.8.0 (Quiriguá Stela 21), respectively; Piedras Negras, Altar de Sacrificios, and Yaxchilán to the west and southwest at 9.0.0.0.0, 9.1.0.0.0, and 9.4.0.0.0, respectively; Oxkintok and Calakmul to the north at 9.2.0.0.0 and 9.4.0.0.0, respectively; and Naranjo and Caracol to the east at 9.2.0.0.0 and 9.4.0.0.0, respectively. Note,

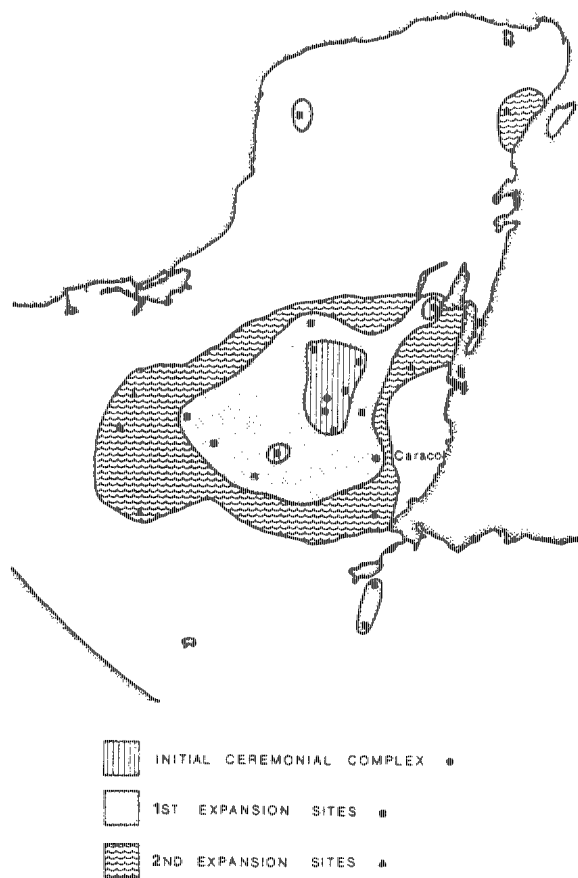


Fig. 3 The Maya area illustrating the spread of the core ceremonial complex, first to primary expansion sites after 9.0.0.0.0 and then to secondary expansion sites after 9.7.0.0.0 (map by Arlen F. Chase, courtesy Caracol Archaeological Project, University of Central Florida).

however, that all of these sites previously existed, but did not exhibit the full core ceremonial complex until after 9.0.0.0.0.

This first expansion of sites represents the initial spread of the full Maya ceremonial complex out of the heartland sites of Tikal, Uaxactún, Yaxhá, Xultun, and perhaps Balakbal. This expansion was partially due to the success of the Lowland Maya area and its buffer zone during the Early Classic and to the ideological climate allowed by the Katun 8 Ahau. First expansion sites emphasized their access to the trappings of cyclical time. At Caracol, this is clearly seen in the giant Ahau altars that are erected to commemorate katun endings. According to Satterthwaite (1954), the earliest of these altars was erected to commemorate Katun 9.2.0.0.0, some forty years earlier than the first secure hieroglyphic date at Caracol.

As if buoyed by their success in establishing themselves at the end of the Early Classic Period, many of the first expansion sites bridge the time between the

Early and Late Classic periods and are apparently responsible for the "Maya hiatus." The Maya hiatus, as traditionally defined, is a period dating minimally from 9.5.0.0.0 (A.D. 534) to 9.7.10.0.0 (Mathews 1985a:31) or 9.8.0.0.0 (A.D. 593; Proskouriakoff 1950:111; Willey 1974, 1977:397) when few stelae are known from the Lowland Maya core. The exact dating for the end of the hiatus is open to debate. Most authorities agree on beginning the hiatus at about 9.5.0.0.0; the end of the hiatus, however, varies as to site and may extend at least until 9.11.0.0.0 (A.D. 652) in the core area (Coggins 1979:48). For Tikal, Coggins (1979:38) would start the Middle Classic at about 9.2.10.0.0, corresponding with a time of "political unrest" and, more importantly, the loss of "elite goods imported from the Mexican Highlands" at the site; she would end the Middle Classic at Tikal at 9.12.10.0.0 (see also Haviland, in press). Because of the lack of monument erection, the lack of construction activities, and the lack of rich burials in the core during this era, the general tenet has been to view the hiatus as a period of general decline for the Maya as a whole. In fact, it would now appear that the reverse may be true, for during the Maya hiatus the greatest areal expansion of the Maya realm, at least in terms of epigraphic texts, took place. This is witnessed by the emergence of what may be termed "secondary expansion" sites (see fig. 3) such as Toniná, Pusilha, Palenque, and Cobá (i.e., ca. 9.8.0.0.0 to 9.9.0.0.0) at the precise moment that what is traditionally recognized as the Late Classic Period was coming into being.

The Maya hiatus in the core area was undoubtedly caused by the emergence of first expansion sites after 9.0.0.0.0. At Caracol, the mechanisms for this so-called hiatus are visible in Altar 21 (fig. 1; appendix) which makes it abundantly clear that Caracol was either directly responsible for Tikal's "hiatus" or, minimally, played a large part in it. Although Tikal may have a "hiatus," the rest of the Maya area does not. Altar 21 at Caracol notes a series of relationships and events with Tikal going back to the 9.5.19.1.2 accession of Lord Water; an early undated relationship with Tikal is also recorded on Caracol Stela 15 (Glyph Block C13). Stephen Houston made preliminary readings of this new monument and noted an "axe" event by Tikal against Caracol on 9.6.2.1.11 followed by a "war" event by Caracol against Tikal at 9.6.8.4.2 (see appendix). This dating corresponds with the existence (or demise) of Double-Bird at Tikal, the last known Tikal ruler prior to the so-called hiatus. It is therefore evident, at least from Caracol's standpoint, why Tikal suffers a "setback in the 6th century" leading to tomb furnishings described as "impoverished" (Coggins 1975; Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer 1983:115). Once Lord Water of Caracol stripped the Tikal core of its mystic abilities, it was possible for the stela and altar cult to gain its greatest areal extent.

The disturbed nature of Tikal's archaeological record during the Maya hiatus may be even more directly related to Caracol than has been previously thought.

Caracol may, in fact, have been responsible either completely or partially for the ancient breakage of Tikal's Early Classic monuments, for what better way is there to demonstrate your disdain for a conquered city than to destroy its symbols of dominance and religion, the monuments of revered rulers? Satterthwaite (1958:75) noted that his "minimum date for the breakage" of monuments at Tikal was between 9.4.13.0.0 and 9.7.0.0.0. This correlates rather nicely with the 9.6.8.4.2 date for Caracol's war at Tikal. Shook (1957:45), in fact, had previously suggested that some of the breakage of Tikal stelae might have been due to violent action and that this action "may have been responsible for the end of the Early Classic period and perhaps for the hiatus in the known sequence of inscriptions at Tikal."

While Caracol may have been directly responsible for the core's demise and indirectly responsible for the spread of the core ceremonial cult, significant differences existed between the primary and secondary expansion sites that arose following 9.0.0.0.0. While the primary expansion sites all seem to have been at least initially influenced by Tikal, the secondary expansion sites were freed by the sudden lack of core constriction through Tikal's conquest to follow new patterns that would usher them into the Late Classic Period. The initial expansion sites, however, for the most part relied on the established formulas that had been regularized during the Early Classic Period in their attempt to persevere in dealing with their world. This is clearly seen at Caracol in the persistence of Early Classic patterns into the Late Classic Period, particularly in the retention of Early Classic traditions of painting in tombs—black-on-red and red-on-white. This would be expected in a conservative religious environment dealing with death rituals. Thus, at Caracol, it is not surprising to find Long Count tomb dates in three instances dating between 9.7.0.0.0 and 9.10.5.0.0 and a Calendar Round date of 9.13.3.15.16. However, Caracol's fortunes reversed dramatically with the next cycle of time.

9.13.0.0.0 (A.D. 692)

The 9.13.0.0.0 8 Ahau Katun of Change saw the rise again of core area sites such as Tikal. Even though Tikal explodes onto the scene immediately after the initiation of the new cycle (Coggins 1979:48; Puleston 1979:67), it operated within a drastically reduced political arena. No longer was a single site to control or, perhaps more correctly, dominate Maya politics; instead, many different sites vied for that power. Indeed, with the advent of the new Katun of Change, many different sites and rulers filled the political arena. Schele and Miller (1986:209) noted that "after the completion of katun 8 Ahau (9.13.0.0.0, A.D. 692), both the pace of warfare and the status of the captives increased. Everywhere, kings faced kings in battle, and so, inevitably, many fell in combat and were taken captive."

Changes also occurred in other areas as well. Iconographic innovations made at such first expansion sites as Caracol were adopted by other core sites following the advent of the new cycle. Stone, Reents, and Coffman (1985:267) noted: "Artistically, many innovations introduced by the Middle Classic Caracol sculpture appear to influence other sites, notably Tikal and Naranjo, as early as 9.8.0.0.0. By 9.13.0.0.0 these influences on monumental sculpture such as the dwarf, the trifigure group, the Oliva shell girdle, and Giant Ahau Altars are in widespread use across the Maya region. But by this time during the Late Classic period, the pictorial and hieroglyphic record at Caracol appears to have sunk into relative obscurity." Proskouriakoff (1950:111), as if foreseeing the impact of Caracol on Maya prehistory, noted that "the break in the sequence and the changed artistic mode seem to be a reflection of some momentous historical event that disturbed the normal artistic development and was followed by a restoration of order and a new pulse of creative activity." It would appear that the cyclical change in 9.13.0.0.0 again had major repercussions in Maya prehistory, especially for Caracol.

Coggins (1979:46) noted that the post-9.12.0.0.0 revival of Tikal may have been through rulers who "may have come to power at Tikal through dynastic connections with a southeastern Peten site near Pusilha" after 9.9.0.0.0. I have argued elsewhere (A. Chase and D. Chase 1987b:61) that the father of Tikal Ruler A, or "Ah Cacao" (cf. Jones 1977), may have in fact come from the Caracol polity. This could be interpreted as an attempt by Caracol to manipulate Tikal's ruling dynasty prior to the onset of the next Katun 8 Ahau; this may also be linked with Caracol's conquest of Naranjo in 9.9.18.16.3, for Naranjo is one of the first sites courted by the Tikal/Dos Pilas lineage at the onset of the Late Classic Period. A woman (or women), probably from Dos Pilas, is celebrated on four stelae at Naranjo between 9.13.10.0.0 and 9.14.0.0.0 (Houston and Mathews 1985:14; Marcus 1976:165). This emphasis on, and presumably by, Dos Pilas and, indirectly, Tikal at Naranjo may be interpreted as directly reflecting Tikal's reemergence to power with the new Katun 8 Ahau as well as the eclipsing of Caracol's former sway with the advent of the new cycle. New ties with the site of Cobá far to the north (Marcus 1976:166) also may have strengthened Tikal's political base, at the same time eliminating any alliance or connection previously held by Caracol.

It may be posited that Tikal physically destroyed the symbols of power at the site of Caracol either directly or indirectly with the onset of the new cycle. If a relationship may be established between conquest and stelae destruction, as has been suggested above, then the "abnormal stelae placement" of Caracol's Stelae 3, 15, and 16 and possibly Stelae 13, 14, 21, and Altar 7—as well as other monuments—may be indicative of retaliation by Tikal against Caracol after 9.13.10.0.0, if Stela

Z1 can be used to judge the dating of such an event. This would indeed have been a capping event for Tikal's spectacular rise at the onset of the Late Classic Period and would have reaffirmed the inevitable cycle of time.

Even though time may have dictated the repetition of events and actions, the stage for these actions and events had spiraled onto a new plane between 9.0.0.0.0 and 9.13.0.0.0. Whereas Tikal had been the dominant center in the Maya area prior to 9.0.0.0.0, it could not enjoy such absolute power after 9.13.0.0.0. The Late Classic Maya were not unified politically or economically, but were rather a series of independent states. Perhaps for this reason, there are problems with attempting to apply a single cosmological model to attempt to explain the organization of the Late Classic Maya, as Marcus (1973, 1976) did. While larger "alliances" or geographically diverse gatherings may have existed, such as the one recorded on Copán Stela A for 9.15.0.0.0 involving individuals from Tikal, Copán, Palenque, and perhaps Calakmul or El Perú, no four sites represent the totality of the Maya area. Yaxchilán was clearly a military power at this time and Caracol was also very much alive again by 9.17.10.0.0. In fact, the lack of a unified Southern Lowland Maya area may account for the skewing found in the 9.15.0.0.0 text at Copán in the directions associated with each of the four emblem glyphs. The problems inherent in attempting to apply pan-Maya directionality to the spatial world of the Late Classic Maya are also evident in A. Miller's (1974) directional model, in which he associated east with rebirth and the site of Tulum while associating west with death and the site of Palenque. The purposeful and controlled organization of the Maya area, which must be assumed for such cosmological models, clearly did not exist during the Late Classic Period.

10.6.0.0.0 (A.D. 948)

The final Katun of Change in 10.6.0.0.0 saw a Lowland Maya area that had already largely turned away from many of its traditional patterns. As already noted, Puleston (1979) adequately dealt with the ideological aspects of the collapse.² The real question that must be raised for this katun is the relationship, if one exists, between the hiatus and the collapse. Willey (1974) once called the "Classic Maya hiatus" a "rehearsal for the Maya collapse," thus indicating that the events that caused these two recognized periods of Maya prehistory were founded in similar conditions. Willey (1974:427) felt that "the hiatus and the collapse were phenomena with a similar cause. This cause was the severance of the symbiotic relationships between Maya civilization and the other Mesoamerican civilizations that were contemporaneous with it."

Although Willey's logic followed a host of models that have all since been severely reviewed and revised, including Thompson's (1927, 1954) peasant revolt hypothesis

(Willey 1974:421, 427), Rathje's core-buffer zone model (Willey 1974:424-427), and his own models for invasion and foreign impact on Maya society (Willey 1974:423, 427), the linkage Willey established between the hiatus and the collapse remains in the current literature. Willey (1977:397) refined his initial statement somewhat by noting that "the Classic Hiatus" was "a southern phenomenon and, especially, a Peten phenomenon." Although still tied to a model that inexorably linked the Maya to Teotihuacán, Willey (1977:406) did foresee, to some degree, the Caracol data by wondering if "Teotihuacan influence" stopped "because of a locally generated crisis within the Maya Lowlands." With the reduction of the Maya "hiatus" to core sites dealing with newly founded buffer-zone strongmen, many of the previously held models that attempt to explain this era are in need of revision, especially those that view this era as representative of a "breakdown" in the Southern Lowlands. Yet the linkage between both the hiatus and the collapse remains just as strong as when first posited by Willey (1974), but for different reasons. Relationships between these two eras can especially be seen in a consideration of politics, warfare, and cyclical time, for in essence the collapse reflects the inability of the Southern Lowlands to deal with stresses from the Northern Lowlands (D. Chase and A. Chase 1982; A. Chase 1985a; A. Chase and D. Chase, in press)—stresses that took advantage of the approaching Katun of Change. Caracol clearly recognized some of these forces and attempted either to counter them or to take control of them as the new Katun 8 Ahau began to approach (A. Chase 1985d). The events of the time, however, proved to be too much for the majority of the larger sites in the Southern Lowlands and led to their eventual abandonment, quite likely in accord with an ideological system that had already predicted such an event.

Conclusions

Cyclical time was recognized by the Classic Period Maya and in fact ordained certain aspects of their prehistory. Caracol, a first expansion site, especially illuminates the crucial era that occurred between the Katuns 8 Ahau of 9.0.0.0.0 and 9.13.0.0.0. Rather than illustrating a decline or "Maya hiatus," Caracol aptly shows that the fringe of the Maya heartland gained control of the Maya area and dedicated the beginning of the transition between the Early and Late Classic periods sometime shortly after 9.0.0.0.0. By 9.13.0.0.0, the initial core area had again begun ascendancy, probably by emphasizing this particular Katun 8 Ahau for political expediency. Perhaps because the previous Katun 8 Ahau had been so emphasized, the next led to a requisite decline of the Maya area and a major shift in patterns that ushered in the Postclassic Period. As expected, according to the tenets of cyclical time and in anticipation of the upcoming Katun 8 Ahau, Caracol began an upswing in its

monumental record circa 9.18.0.0.0, but for naught: its stela record ends in 10.1.10.0.0. In closing, it is noted that the Maya preoccupation with cyclical time, when applied to the extant archaeology, can show that, in

seeking matters of cause and effect in overall Maya prehistory, ideological factors must be consulted because they often contrapose materialistic interpretations.

Appendix: Caracol Altar 21

STEPHEN D. HOUSTON

On 22 February 1986, a circular stone monument was found by Arlen Chase in the central corridor of the Group A ball court (fig. 2). Subsequent excavations revealed that this monument, designated Altar 21, contained well over 160 glyphic compounds, making it the longest hieroglyphic text yet discovered in Belize. In the report that follows, this find is described and its glyphic content discussed.

Altar 21 is located on the floor of the ball court at the juncture of two axes: the transverse axis of Structures A11 and A12 and the perpendicular axis along the center line of the court. On present evidence the monument appears to be the only sculpture in the court, although another ball court carving, an evident transplant from the ball court in Group B, was found on the surface just southeast of Structure A12. It is remotely possible that further stripping of the court will uncover additional monuments.

Although carved from dense limestone, Altar 21 is now in only fair to poor condition. Natural weathering and the passage of logging trucks to the Group A aguada have conspired to break the stone into six major pieces and innumerable smaller fragments, as well as to abrade into illegibility as much as half of the hieroglyphic text. Nonetheless, it is still possible to establish the shape and dimensions of the monument. The sides of Altar 21 are convex, as is the top, which slopes gently from the center to a circumferential groove that encircles the inscription. The diameter of the altar is 127.5 cm; the maximum depth of carved relief is close to 1 cm. The absolute orientation of Altar 21 can be seen in the rendering of the monument (fig. 2).

The Inscription: General Observations

The glyphs on Altar 21 are disposed in a circular arrangement (in double columns, four rows deep) around a giant day sign with numerical coefficient. The top of this day sign points to the beginning of the text, an Initial Series, which in turn lies in the direction of the transverse axis of Structure A12.

It can be appreciated that a circular text, especially

one the length of the inscription on Altar 21, presents an enormous compositional challenge to the ancient scribe: glyphic phrasing must be thought out very carefully if the text is to end where it begins. The challenge is compounded by the wedged columns, which do not permit the uniform placement of compounds of equal size. It is fair to say that the scribe(s) responsible for Altar 21 more than met these challenges. The text does not display the cramped spacing that characterizes the final clauses of a poorly planned inscription, such as Lintel 10 from Yaxchilán. The scribe also seems to have handled the problem of attenuated columns by the simple expedient of reducing to one the number of compounds in the innermost rows. This measure ensures that such compounds retain the same proportions as glyphs in the outermost rows.

The Inscription: Chronology

Table 1 summarizes the chronology of Altar 21. It can be seen from the table that many details of dating are far from understood. In general, this ambiguity stems from the eroded condition of the inscription, which at points permits little more than speculative ligatures between dates.

The first Secondary series (SS1) on Altar 21 is a useful example of both speculative reconstruction and the interpretive problems that attend an eroded text. To begin with, the Secondary Series does not appear legibly in the inscription, so its existence must be taken on faith. (The *tun* sign at G1 may form part of SS1; its suffixes, T585a:126, are appropriate for a distance number, although its prefixation and placement in the text are not.) As an alternative possibility, it may be that two Secondary Series exist in place of SS1, in which case a third date must also occur between Dates A and B. This notation has much to recommend it. For one, the great length of the Initial Series clause (fully a quarter of the inscription) suggests that the clause was once divided into at least two parts. For another, the parentage statement at J1-L1, which names Lord Kan I and his consort, signals that Lord Water figures importantly in the

Table 1. Summary of Chronology for Caracol Altar 21

Position	Date	Long Count	Calendar Round	Event	Transcription	Individuals	Other References
A1-?	Date A SS1	9. 7.14.10. 8 (1.15. 9. 6)	(3 Lamat 16 Uo)	Birth	?	*Lord Kan II * < Lord Water (Lady) (Lord Kan I) Lord Water < Tikal Lord	Stela 3: A17a-A17b; NAR Panel 1: A1-B1 Stela 6: A1-A3
K2b-L2a	Date B SS2	(9. 5.19. 1. 2) 16.18	9 Ik 5 Uo	Accession	T644a.181.126- T53.229.747a:24	*Lord Water < Tikal Lord	Stela 6: A7-E7a; Altar 5: A1
N1b	Date C SS3	(9. 6. 0. 0. 0) 2. 1.11	9 Ahau 3 Uayeb	Period Ending	T679a.528.116:713a	*Lord Water	
N3-M4	Date D SS4	(9. 6. 2. 1.11) 6. 2.11	6 Chuen 19 Pop	Axe Event	T333:?	*Lord Water < Tikal Lord	
R1b-Q2a	Date E SS5	(9. 6. 8. 4. 2) *9.12.18	7 Ik 0 Zip	War	T137v.510baf.137v:?	*Tikal Lord < *Lord Water * < Tikal Lord	
Q2b-R2a	Date F SS6	(9. 6.17.17. 0) 3.19	8 Ahau 13 Mac	?	?	*Lord Water	
V3-U4	Date G SS7	(9. 6.18. 2.19) 1.15. 1	9 Cauac 12 Kayab	?	?	*Lord Water	
W2b-X2a	Date H SS8	(9. 7. 0. 0. 0) ? 2. 3. 8.13	7 Ahau 3 Kankin	Period Ending	T1:528.116:713a	*Lord Water	Stela 6: C7; Altar 6: A1
X3-W4	Date I	?	?	?	?	*Lord Water	
Y3-Z4	Date J	(9. 7.19.10. 0)	*1 Ahau 3 Pop	Ball Game	IX?:ms.23	*Lord Water	Stela 1: A1-D1; Stela 6: C8; Altar 1: A1
A' 1b-B' 1b	Date K	(9.)8. 0. 0. 0	5 Ahau 3 Ch'en	Period Ending, 8 Katun	T218.VIII.28:548:142	*Lord Water	Stela 3: E7a-E7b; Altar 19: A1; NAR Panel 1: G2-H2; NAR H5
A' 2-B' 2	Date L	?(9.10. 0. 0. 0)	*1 Ahau (8 Kayab)	Period Ending	0	*Lord Kan II	

Note: The numeration of glyph blocks follows standard practice in that the alphabetic and numeric series begin with the opening date and proceed from left to right (or clockwise, as in this instance). The giant day sign at the center of the altar design is placed for chronological reasons at the end of the series, a placement that contravenes conventional reading order in Classic altar texts. Asterisks * mark unattested but reconstructible forms. Thompson numbers record the glyphic composition of the verbs. < indicates a nonparental relationship; parentheses enclose parental names.

Initial Series clause. Yet we have already seen in table 1 that the initial Series is the birth date of Lord Kan II. Since Lord Water would probably not list his immediate ancestry were he not the principal figure in the clause, it seems likely that two clauses rather than one interpose between Dates J, K, and L. In the case of the first two dates, this is only a minor problem: other clues allow the dates to be fixed in the Long Count. But with the third date the issue becomes crucial. To judge from the giant Ahau day sign and its final position in the inscription, Date L is likely to be a component of Altar 21's Dedicatory Date, which presumably refers to the altar's positioning in the Group A ball court, or perhaps to its date of consecration.

There are other problems with the chronology of Altar 21. For example, no legible distance numbers connect Dates J, K, and L. In the case of the first two dates, this is only a minor problem: other clues allow the dates to be fixed in the Long Count. But with the third date the issue becomes crucial. To judge from the giant Ahau day sign and its final position in the inscription, Date L is likely to be a component of Altar 21's Dedicatory Date, which presumably refers to the altar's positioning in the Group A ball court, or perhaps to its date of consecration.

In the absence of a distance number, Date L must be reconstructed by other means. The coefficient of the giant Ahau day sign (here in headbanded form) is as good a place to start as any. The number of the day sign is most likely 1, as can be deduced from the space-filler. Given that all giant Ahau altars at Caracol apparently bear katun-ending dates (specified explicitly on Altars 14 and 17), it would seem that the Dedicatory Date of Altar 21 must be 9.10.0.0.0 1 Ahau 8 Kayab. This date falls squarely in the reign of Lord Kan II, whose birth date is recorded in the Initial Series of Altar 21. The references to Lord Kan II in both the beginning and end of the altar inscription suggest that the placement of 1 Ahau is correct: all other dates on the altar refer instead to his predecessors.

The Inscription: Content

Many of the events recorded on Altar 21 are attested elsewhere at Caracol (table 1). Nonetheless, several important ones are not. The first of these is an "axe" event (O2), which is associated with war and possibly with decapitation (cf. Altar 13:A21 and its image of a decapitated head; also, Adams 1971: fig. 94b; Robicsek and Hales 1981: fig. 22c; and the Madrid Codex, pp. 97-98). This event took place under the auspices of, or perhaps in the territory of, a lord from Tikal. Unfortunately, the name of the Tikal lord is almost completely obliterated.

A second event (R2b) involves war, but in the sense of major conflict rather than skirmish or ambush. It is the so-called shell-star event (Riese 1984b), which is now known to coincide in large part with momentous junctures in the synodic cycle of Venus (Lounsbury 1982). The form of the event at Caracol is aberrant: a full Venus sign (T510b) replaces the more usual version (T2v). Another example of a shell-star verb with full Venus glyph appears at D1a on Piedras Negras Stela 12 (Schele 1982:103) in reference to war waged by the dynasty of Piedras Negras against Pomoná, a site in

Tabasco, Mexico. Regardless of its form, the shell-star on Altar 21 is the earliest yet documented in Classic inscriptions.

The shell-star event at Caracol apparently records war against Tikal, albeit in an unconventional reference. In common practice the main sign of the victimized site occurs singly, that is, without "water group" and *ahaw* titles. By contrast, the verb on Altar 21 adjoins a full Tikal emblem, indicating, perhaps, that the war affected not so much the site of Tikal as its dynasty or possibly a key member of the royal family. Presumably the effect was still profound: not a single stela at Tikal can be conclusively assigned to the period between the shell-star event and the Late Classic (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: table 5; but note Tikal Stela 17). In addition, many Early Classic monuments at Tikal witnessed systematic violence during this period (Satterthwaite 1958:75; Christopher Jones, personal communication, 1986), a fact perhaps consistent with a successful campaign by Caracol against the Tikal dynasty (see discussion in text above).

It is worth noting in this connection that a similar gap of datable monuments characterizes the site of Naranjo after its apparent defeat by Caracol (fig. 4; Sosa and Reents 1980:10). Nonetheless, both this event and the incident recorded on Altar 21 took place (if in fact we can rely on the historical veracity of the altar text) during or just after the "hiatus," an epoch of general debilitation in monument erection. Caracol may simply have displayed opportunism rather than great strategic ability in vanquishing two prominent yet perhaps ailing centers. Possibly the martial success of Caracol contributed to its sustained activity during the hiatus.

As might be expected, the shell-star event against Tikal possesses astronomical significance. In the Julian Calendar, and according to the compelling 584285 correlation advocated by Floyd Lounsbury, this event falls on 29 April 562, or the first stationary point of Venus. Relatively few Classic dates coincide with this point (Lounsbury 1982:163), although Lounsbury suggested that 29 April 562 would have been a useful occasion to detect slight movements in Venus: from the perspective

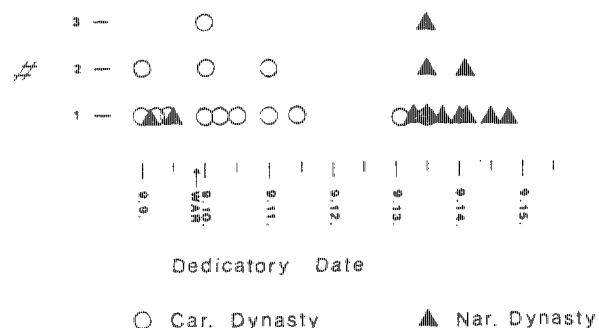


Fig. 4 Pattern of dates at Caracol and Naranjo (graphic by Stephen D. Houston, courtesy Caracol Archaeological Project, University of Central Florida).

of naked-eye astronomy the planet was in Taurus, midway between the Pleiades, and close to Aldebaran and Beta, all bright stars that would afford a visual framework for minute observation. The high location of epical Caracol may have also assisted precise astronomical measurement.

The clause that follows the shell-star event is a long one, but only a few items can be recognized: a relationship glyph (R3), probably followed by the name of Lord Water; a possible bloodletting sign (S1a, Peter Mathews, personal communication, 1985; cf. Caracol Stela 6:B12, Tikal Stela 31:C23, and perhaps Tikal Stela 12:D1); a second Tikal emblem (S2b), and a "Q-Site" emblem (U2a), erroneously identified by some as the emblem of E1 Perú (Schele 1984a:24).

A final event on Altar 21 bears on the nature of the monument and the question of its primary context. This verb appears at C'1b and is unquestionably a variant of the ball court glyph (cf. Schele 1982:13). As stated above, Altar 21 has been appended to the altar series at Caracol, although this may be misleading: the presence of the ball court glyph and the location of Altar 21 in the center of the Group A ball court suggest that the altar is a ball court marker, most likely in primary context. Unfortunately, a comparison of altar and marker diameters does not speak strongly for this conclusion (tables 2 and 3; quantitative information from Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981): Altar 21 is small for its class, yet considerably larger than the range of marker diameters (cf. .74 diameter for the center marker of Ball Court II-B at Copán).

Table 2. Caracol Altar Diameters through Time

Long Count Date	Number	Diameter
9. 3. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 4	1.77 (with Stela 9)
9. 5. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 14	1.82
9. 6. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 5	1.93
9. 7. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 6	2.25
9. 8. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 1	2.07 (with Stela 1)
9. 9. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 11	1.68
9. 9. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 15	2.06
9.10. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 19	1.81 (with Stela 11)
9.10. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 21	1.275
9.11. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 17	1.36
9.11. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 7	1.38 (with Stela 14)
9.17. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 2	1.17
9.18. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 3	1.78
9.19. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 12	1.58
10. 0. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 13	1.60
10. 0. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 16	1.07
10. 0.19. 6.14	Alt. 10	1.15 (with Stela 17)
10. 1. 0. 0. 0	Alt. 18	1.60
	Alt. 8	(not an altar, plain stone)
	Alt. 9	(not an altar, plain stone)
	Alt. 20	(reused stela fragment?)
early Late Classic	BSc. 1	.69 (style date)
early Late Classic	BSc. 2	.69 (style date)

Table 3. Caracol Altar Diameters Ranked Independent of Time

Diameter	Number	Long Count Date
1.07	Alt. 16	10. 0. 0. 0. 0
1.15	Alt. 10	10. 0.19. 6.14 (with Stela 17)
1.17	Alt. 2	9.17. 0. 0. 0
1.275	Alt. 21	9.10. 0. 0. 0
1.36	Alt. 17	9.11. 0. 0. 0
1.39	Alt. 7	9.11. 0. 0. 0 (with Stela 14)
1.58	Alt. 12	9.19. 0. 0. 0
1.60	Alt. 13	10. 0. 0. 0. 0
1.60	Alt. 18	10. 1. 0. 0. 0
1.68	Alt. 11	9. 9. 0. 0. 0
1.77	Alt. 4	9. 3. 0. 0. 0 (with Stela 9)
1.79	Alt. 3	9.18. 0. 0. 0
1.81	Alt. 19	9.10. 0. 0. 0 (with Stela 11)
1.82	Alt. 14	9. 5. 0. 0. 0
1.93	Alt. 5	9. 6. 0. 0. 0
2.06	Alt. 15	9. 9. 0. 0. 0
2.07	Alt. 1	9. 8. 0. 0. 0 (with Stela 1)
2.25	Alt. 6	9. 7. 0. 0. 0
	Alt. 8	(not an altar, plain stone)
	Alt. 9	(not an altar, plain stone)
	Alt. 20	(reused stela fragment?)
.61	BSc. 1	early Late Classic (style date)
.69	BSc. 2	early Late Classic (style date)

Concluding Comments

In both its content and its dates, Altar 21 is emblematic of Caracol's vitality during the hiatus. However, from the perspective of domestic affairs, the altar is intriguing rather for the apparent absence of any references to Lord Kan II's immediate predecessor, Lord Knot Ahau. The omission is systematic: in referring to the past on both this and other monuments Lord Kan II mentions only his connections with Lord Kan I and Lord Water. Indeed, Altar 21 represents little more than the glorification of Lord Water by a successor equally lucky in warfare. Further research is needed to explain why Lord Knot Ahau merited so little attention.

Notes

1. One of these causeways and its associated settlement patterns is being excavated and analyzed by Susan Jaeger of Southern Methodist University to determine the differences in interpretations garnered through a culturally defined, as opposed to an arbitrary, settlement transect. Her research has been partially supported by National Science Foundation Grant BNS-861996.

2. Other subsidiary katun cycles may have also held sway during the Classic era. Puleston (1979:68) viewed Katun 11 Ahau, occurring in 9.5.0.0.0 (A.D. 534) and 9.18.0.0.0 (A.D. 790) as being particularly significant in Tikal's history in that each ushered in a period of "impending decline" at that site. The opposite case would have been true at Caracol, where increased monument erection occurred after each Katun 11 Ahau. The fact that the Caracol monumental record reemerges in association with Katun 11 Ahau after an apparent hiatus in the middle of the Late Classic Period perhaps again exhibits the intertwined political histories that existed between Tikal and Caracol throughout the course of Classic Period Lowland Maya development.

Haviland (personal communication, 1986) sees another potential cycle at Tikal involving Katun 1 Ahau in 8.17.0.0.0 (A.D. 376), 9.10.0.0.0 (A.D. 633), and 10.3.0.0.0 (A.D. 889): "If Katun 8 Ahau was a time of establishment/re-establishment at Tikal, Katun 1 seems to have been the one of change, in the sense of 'undoing.'" No Katun 1 Ahau cycle is thus far evident in the Caracol data.

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Cycles of Time: Caracol in the Maya Realm
with an Appendix on Caracol Altar 21
by Stephen D. Houston, Vanderbilt University

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