



The Ahau Chronicles



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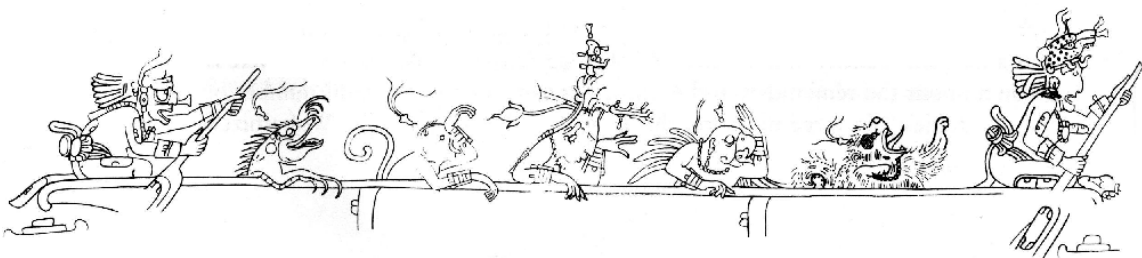
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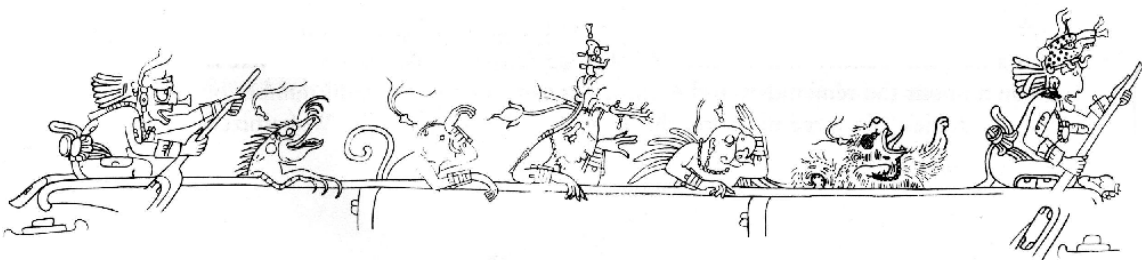
Maya in Toronto

On January 6 I drove for 8 hours to Toronto where the Royal Ontario Museum is hosting a stunning new exhibit entitled: **“Maya, Secrets of their Ancient World.”** The museum is on the campus of my *alma mater*, the University of Toronto, and it felt great to be back home. In collaboration with Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the exhibit highlights many of the greatest artistic and cultural achievements of the Maya culture. Not surprisingly, a large number of these artifacts were from the ancient site of Palenque and, more specifically, from the reign of Chan Bahlum.

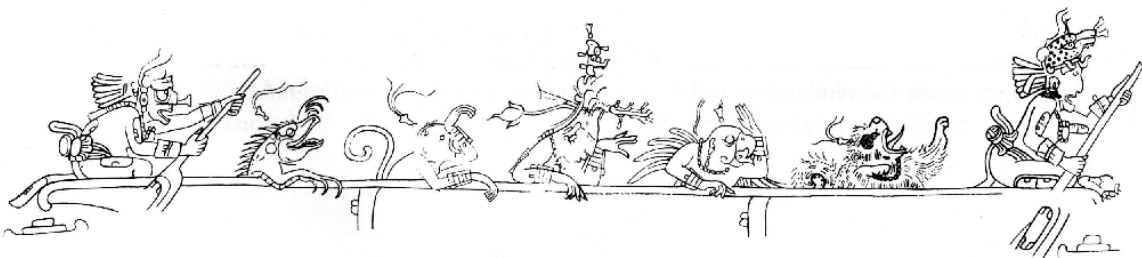




Upon entering the exhibit and passing an impressive stela of a Maya noble, the next artifact on display was the stucco head shown at left. Representing the face of Chan Bahlum, the royal visage stared out at me with a look of silent concentration. To be met at the front door by the master was just the first of many thrills. While I spend much time trying to imagine the intent of this great king and the purpose of his impressive program of monuments and enigmatic inscriptions, I am typically forced to think in the abstract or to gaze at photos or line drawings of his artistic works. But to be able to stand next to the original pieces, to feel his presence and know that he had a hand in their design and manufacture, I felt awash in the power that these objects must have held during the height of their use.

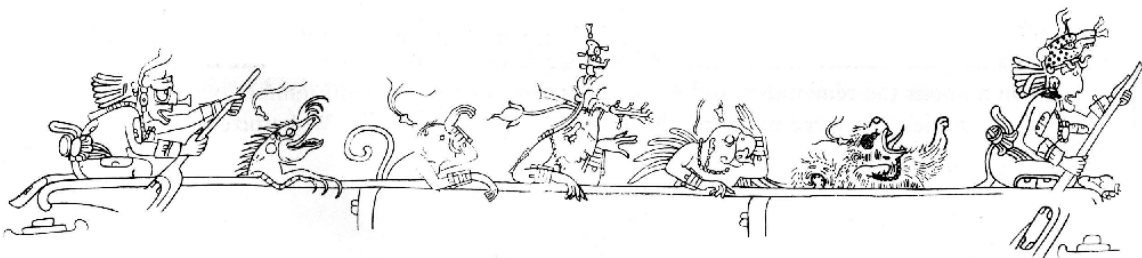
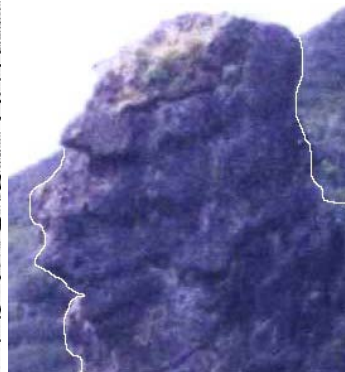


Throughout the exhibit were several examples of the ceramic censers that have been recovered from within the Cross Group of Temples, the heart of Chan Bahlum's sacred precinct at Palenque. Originally interred within the temples themselves, the censers have been recovered in an incredible state of preservation. Very little damage has occurred to the delicate ceramics and much of the original paint still adheres. I have discussed in previous newsletters the profound effect these censers had on me when I first encountered them in the Palenque museum and how, through extended meditations in their presence, their imagery became indelibly imprinted on my mind such that I carried them with me wherever I wandered, including to the magical Robinson Crusoe Island where the great 2012 eclipse monument awaited me. The censer at right again shows the face of Chan Bahlum surrounded by representations of the mythological beings that populated his supernatural world.





Readers of this newsletter will recall **Volume 21: The Tomb of Chan Bahlum**. In it I described the Emiliano Zapata Panel from the Mexican state of Tabasco showing an image of Chan Bahlum carving a large stone head alongside a description describing the date of his death and a series of glyphs interpreted as saying that upon his death, the “sculptor” of the “precious stone” was interred “on the back of” the great monument. This was the most explicit proof yet for me that Chan Bahlum is buried beneath the towering megalith on Robinson Crusoe Island. You can imagine my surprise when I turned around in the Toronto exhibit and came face-to-face with the tablet itself.

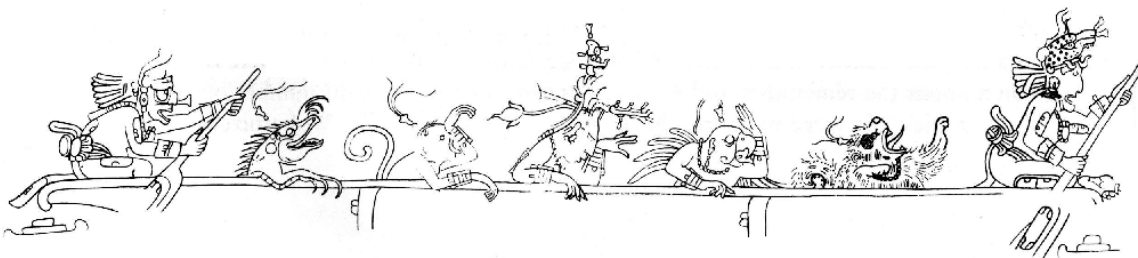




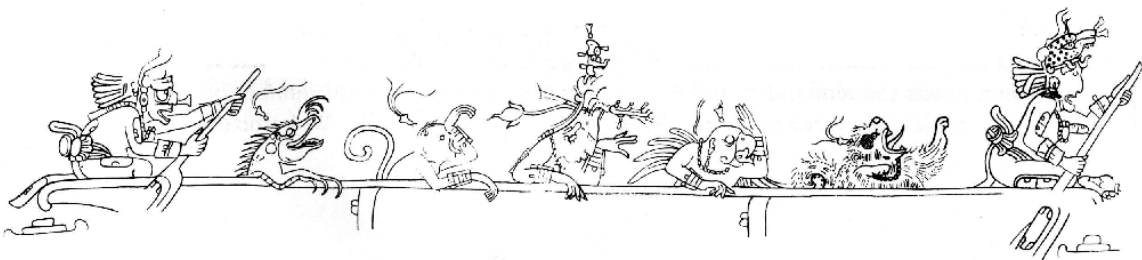
Shortly before Chan Bahlum assumed the throne of Palenque after the death of his father Pakal, the period-ending altar above was carved at Tonina to commemorate the completion of the half *katun* in 682 AD (9.12.10.0.0). Like an original version of The Ahau Chronicles, this carving features the Ahau glyph prominently in its center. The altar was commissioned by Ruler 2 of Tonina, Jaguar Casper, who had ascended the throne in 668 AD. Two years after the altar was dedicated, Chan Bahlum ascended the throne of Palenque in 684 AD and went on to vanquish Jaguar Casper in 688 AD.



Students of Palenque will recognize the inscription above from Tonina which depicts Chan Bahlum's younger brother and successor, K'an Joy Chitam II, as a bound captive. The glyphs on his leg include his name and the Palenque emblem glyph while the ones at right give a date of 711 AD as well as the Venus glyph for warfare.



The capture of K'an Joy Chitam II began a dark period in the history of Palenque. After almost a century of stability and prosperity under Pakal and Chan Bahlum, the city was plunged into chaos while Tonina held their king captive. Typically the captive would have been sacrificed as the climax of this ritual warfare but it appears that K'an Joy Chitam II was held alive for several years and that he eventually made his way back to Palenque. There are no glyphs from Palenque after the capture of the king until Ahkal Mo' Nahb III ascended the throne in 721 AD. The stunning panel below, recently recovered from Temple XXI, shows Pakal at the center on a jaguar skin throne while Ahkal Mo' Nahb III and his brother make offerings to jaguar-cloaked supernatural beasts.



The explanatory texts accompanying the artifacts were supportive of my interpretation of the island monument with its representations of the Sun God, K'inich Ahau, and the crouching jaguar. As the text in the exhibit catalog explains the significance of the ceramic that graces the ROM's promotional poster that began this newsletter: "The Sun God, K'inich Ajaw, on his nightly journey through the underworld, transforms into the Jaguar God of the Underworld." The dual nature of the Sun God with his jaguar aspect is depicted in the Mayan masterpiece of the 2012 Eclipse Monument.

On another note, besides the wealth of artifacts in the exhibit from Palenque, the ancient site of Altun Ha in Belize was also prominently represented. This is a result of the half-century of research and excavation that the ROM has conducted there under the guidance of David Pendergast. After discovering the monument in 1996 and returning to photograph it in 1997, I had arranged a meeting with Dr. Pendergast at his office in the museum to reveal to him my great discovery and take my place in the history books. I delivered a packet of photos to him before the meeting to pique his curiosity and then hauled a trove of books and other supporting evidence with me for the meeting. We met at the beginning of the work day and I could tell that, soon after our introductions, his attention began to wane as I recounted my story. He dismissed me soon after, undoubtedly writing me off as a quack who had no idea what he was talking about, and we have never spoken again. This is unfortunate, for Dr. Pendergast's greatest discovery at Altun Ha is the famed jade head of the Sun God, K'inich Ahau, a cultural icon in Belize which appears on their stamps and currency and which, at 4.42 kilograms, is the largest jade sculpture ever recovered from the Maya world.

