

Some Observations on Naachtun Stela 26

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I would tend to agree with Jorge that if the Naachtun St. 26 image represents GI, it would be a rather idiosyncratic version of this deity, but sometimes the *k'in* sign in the offering bowl is replaced by other elements in at least one instance that I am still looking for. Personally, I think the dots around the face suggest that the figure is either a maize related deity or, if an actual human, a ruler in the guise of this deity, or even an ancestor in the guise of this deity. In the attachment to this posting, I have included a drawing of an Early Classic censer (see below) that presents a similar composition. The glyphic collocation in the headdress I think could be analyzed, as pointed out by the other Michael and Jorge, as *jun-tzutz-T124*. The reading of the glyph formally known as *nik* (flower) is currently very much debated, with a possible reading of *mook* recently proposed by Luis Lopez and Barbara Macleod. A word which at the time when we were discussing the topic, I believed to be traceable back to the pMZ word *mo:k* for 'ear of maize' and 'maize plant.' I think more can be done with the glyphs here but I will have to put this off until later, after my grading is finished.

The fact the image depicts only the head I think is the best argument for the idea that the figure is non-human—perhaps a deity or an ancestor. Ancestors are often depicted in such a way in Mesoamerican art. I would recommend looking in particular at PN St. 40, where an entombed ancestor is depicted only from the torso up. Isolating whether this sculpture presents us with a historical person or the deity whose guise he wears, I think, it is not, at least for the moment, as important as seeing that, if a ruler, he has most likely road-entered and is now a divine ancestor, where the distinction between deities and spirits of ancestors is perhaps rather fuzzy.

The placement of the head on a skeletalized bird head with three elements projecting from the face provides a context for the ancestor head (if this is what it is). Similar basal iconography is found on other Early Classic stelae, such as Uaxactun Stela 3 where the three lobes projecting from the face (eroded in the case of St. 3) are more clearly depicted. These elements are part of another glyph for the word *ch'en*, cave (see text of Tikal St. 39). On either side of this central element, or possible *ch'en* glyph, are the upper jaws of two serpents. In other scenes, these serpents are depicted as emerging from mountains. It is possible that the offering hands are emerging from the mouth of these serpents. Thus, we might interpret the basal iconography of Naachtun St. 26 as a toponym, as Jorge suggests, which refers to either a cave or more likely in my view a pyramid shrine where this image, that is, the icon of the depicted deity or ancestor was kept.

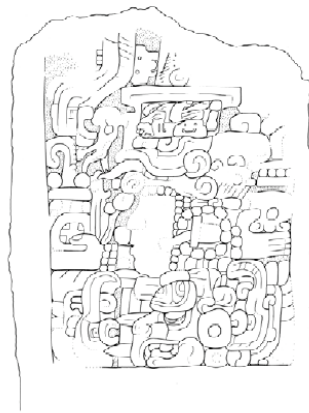
Turning to the hands, I think we find a very close parallel in the iconography of the Deletaille tripod vessel, wherein a nearly disembodied hand associated with a head emerging from the mouth of a serpent holds a version of T124 surrounded by dots (see Maya Iconography pp. 154-155). More to the point, in the imagery of the Naachtun stela the hands each hold known offerings as has been observed. The one on the left holds the rather common 7 *k'an* offering, while the right holds a 9 followed by a glyph that possibly

reads *k'ik'*, "blood." As we all know, blood was an important component in Maya ritual. I think though more can be said about the 9 blood and I recently recorded a narrative in the Yucatan about the use of nine drops of blood to enliven small wax figures, *b'ox kib'*, that were believed to protect the milpa. While this contemporary practice proves nothing in itself about ancient practice the fact that 9 *ipnaj* and *iplaj* in the inscriptions talk about the empowering of things, and blood was part of important rites performed in front of the icons of Palenque's patron deities is suggestive and merits further research.

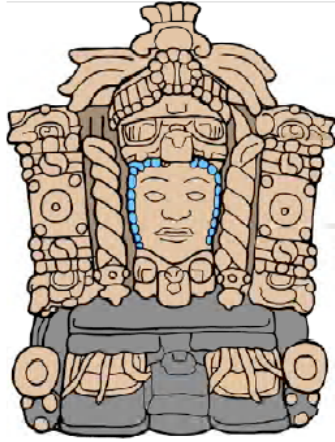
Finally, I find the following observations from the article on this stela very interesting. The article states:

It was buried by the Maya inside an ancient building after their city was attacked and the inscriptions on the stela were hacked off by the invading forces. The burial was a reverential act meant to honour the individual whose image was carved on the monument. An infant's burial accompanied the stela.

Perhaps from this piece of contextual information, we might build a story something like this: After the attack, the city of Naachtun was left very much crippled. Its religious images, like those of Palenque later in history, were most likely desecrated or taken captive, and their shrines destroyed. St. 26 itself suffered damage but the St. 26 image nevertheless survived and when a new structure was built the image itself somehow became a surrogate for the icon that St. 26 depicts and was ritually deposited along with offerings in the new shrine. Of course this is just a story.



Naachtun St. 26



Early Classic Incensario



Palenque Incensario depicting GI