The Entering of the Day:
An Unusual Date from Northern Campeche

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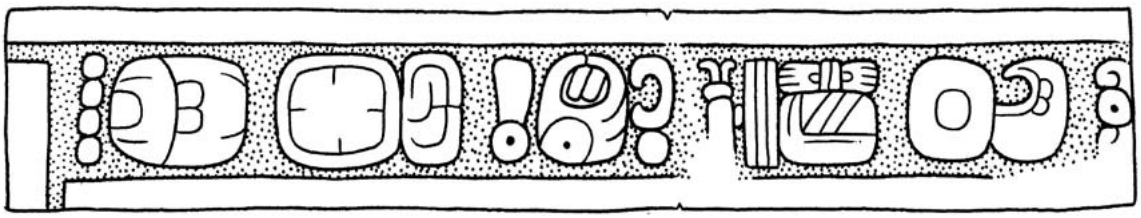

Figure 1. Inscribed front of door lintel, presently in the Museo Arqueológico de Hecelchakan, Campeche. Inked by the author from a field drawing by Eric Von Euw, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

An inscribed door lintel without provenience, now in the regional museum of Hecelchakan, Campeche (Figure 1), bears an unusual date written:

4-MULUK K'IN o-chi-ya tu-16-MAK

Presumably this is 4 Muluk 16 Mak corresponding to 9.15.1.3.9, 9.17.13.16.9, or 10.0.6.11.9. I have little preference among these stations, although I lean a bit more toward the second of these three possibilities. The remarkable feature of the date record is the sign grouping **o-chi-ya** located between the day and the month glyphs. This can only be the verb *ochiiy*, "it entered." The fuller text therefore reads:

Chan Muluk k'in
Ochiiy tu Waklajun Mak

Four Muluk (is) the day
It entered on the 16th of Mak

2004 The Entering of the Day: An Unusual Date from Northern Campeche. *Mesoweb:* www.mesoweb.com/stuart/notes/EnteringDay.pdf.

4 Muluk 16 Mak is of course an example of what Proskouriakoff and Thompson (1947) called a "Puuc style" date, where the coefficient of the month, or *haab*, is one less than we usually find in the lowland Maya calendar statements (4 Muluk 17 Mak would be the conventional way of expressing the date). Puuc dates are commonplace among the inscriptions of northern Campeche and southwestern Yucatan, but noticeably absent from the texts of Chichen Itza. The Puuc system had a long life once it was adopted during the Late Classic, surviving into sixteenth century Yucatan, where it appears in various historical documents including Landa's *Relación*.

Such dates first appear in the Puuc zone during the Late Classic period, and the system is presumably related to a certain structural feature of the lowland calendar. Dates with a "minus one" coefficient on the *haab* appear from time to time in southern lowland inscriptions together with standard dates, as Proskouriakoff and Thompson noted. This led Mathews (1977), in his classic study of Dos Pilas Stela 8, to posit that the 260-day (*tzolkin*) and 365-day (*haab*) stations began at different hours of the 24-hour day. As Mathews put it: "If, for example, the *tzolkin* day began at 6:00 pm., and the *haab*

day at 6:00 am., and some event took place at midnight, then the *tzolkin* date would be one position advanced over the *haab* date." In other words, Mathews discovered that so-called "Puuc" dates in the southern sites reveal a key structural feature of the Calendar Round, and not a different system of time reckoning altogether.

Puuc-style dates are far more common, of course, in the northern lowlands, but there they never co-occur alongside day records using the standard system. Even after Mathews' study, Puuc-style dates from Yucatan and Campeche were consistently viewed as direct evidence of a localized, non-conformist calendar system that was "one off" for some obscure historical reason. Yet this begs an interesting question: if we are dealing with a simple shift of one number, should a Puuc system not have its own "nighttime calendar" reflecting different starting points for the *tzolkin* and *haab*, as Mathews described? There is no evidence of this overly complicated scenario, and I believe the Hecelchakan block holds the answer to the dilemma.

The mention of the day "entering" within the *haab* suggests that we have been misled in thinking that northen Puuc-style dates simply reflect a localized structural change in the reckoning of time. Could it be that many of the ritual events commemorated in Puuc inscriptions—the vast majority of them are dedication rites—actually took place in the window of time between the turn of the *haab* and the arrival of the *tzolkin*—perhaps between midnight and dawn? Needless to say, nocturnal rituals of dedication and renewal are widespread throughout the ethnographies of Mesoamerica. If these were nighttime rituals, scribes of the Puuc region may have been especially diligent in utilizing the subtle mechanisms of the Calendar Round to specify just when certain events took place within our own conception of a 24-hour day. At least the scribe of the Hecelchakan block took pains to explain the mechanics of time, revealing that its structure is identical to what Mathews described for Dos Pilas Stela 8. It may be, therefore, that the "Puuc system" is no separate system at all, but rather a concentrated application of the "nighttime" indicators found only occasionally in the southern texts.

As mentioned, in the early Colonial period the Maya of northwest Yucatan expressed time using the same one-off numeration for the *haab*. It is natural to see this as a survival of the older way of recording Calendar Round dates, examples of which would have been quite visible to Postclassic Maya *ahk'inoob* who saw and probably read the monuments of Oxkintok, Uxmal, Dzibilchaltun, and other nearby ruins. I can only speculate, then, and wonder if the calendar of Postclassic Yucatan was a fossil of an earlier practice that had once highlighted the rituals of darkness and nighttime.

Be that as it may, it does seem that the Hecelchakan stone offers a valuable and explicit description of the time structure Mathews described—that the day "entered" during the station of the month.

References

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