

GLYPH

Notes

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Palenque's Tablet of the Cross Should the Auditorium Replica Be Accessible?

by Sherrie Kline Smith

Palenque, the “eternal city of the Maya,” captures the hearts and imaginations of its visitors. Many of our readers have been to Palenque, Mexico, and felt drawn to its beauty. Many have climbed the steep stairs to view the Tablet of the Cross on the back wall of the inner room of the Temple of the Cross.

Most, however, don't realize it's not the original, but a cast replica. The original is displayed in the National Museum of Anthropology at Mexico City. Part of this magnificent example of Maya art was among the first, if not the first, to make its way to the United States as early as 1842. Since that time the tablet has become one of the best known examples of Maya sculpture and hieroglyphics.

The purpose of this article is two-fold: first, to give a short history of the original Tablet of the Cross including insights about its iconography and hieroglyphic text; and second, to advocate for accessibility of the replica of the tablet once displayed in the Auditorium.* The value of having it available for the public should not be underestimated.

The museum in Chetumal, Mexico, displays this replica of the tablet. It's not known if it was made from a cast of the original or hand-carved.

A recent blog post by David Stuart, one of the world's foremost Maya epigraphers, triggered this article. His post was to make blog followers aware of the high resolution image of the original tablet on the INAH (Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia) website. Stuart wrote,

It's important to stress that the right third of the tablet shows extensive restoration, and

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*Independence, Missouri

The value of having the replica of the Tablet of the Cross available for the public should not be underestimated.



Tablet of the Cross *(Cont. from Page 1)*

a number of details of the glyphs are not what they should be. This restoration work took place in several phases, it seems, and goes back to the late nineteenth century, after that section of the tablet was first broken at the ruins, sometime before 1839. The fragments were sent to the U.S. National Museum in Washington D.C. in 1842, and remained there for many decades attracting “considerable attention on the part of numerous visitors” before their eventual return to Mexico. An early photograph of the glyphs published by Charles Rau, in 1879, shows somewhat different restoration work, so clearly the panel had a complex and troubled history.



Right third of the tablet as shown in Rau's 1879 book.

Potentially, depending on when this photo of the tablet had been taken, Vincent's replica may be closer to the original than the one now in Mexico City.



Don Beebe

Right third of the tablet now displayed in the museum in Mexico City

“The Graphic Arts Bureau [of the church] paid for the three slabs of Minnesota stone which resemble the original in texture and color” (Miller 1954:18). A former handout for Auditorium guides indicates it took Vincent about two years to produce the replica, aided by enlarging each section of the photograph. Upon its completion the tablet was “mounted on the northwest wall of the foyer of the Auditorium” sometime around 1947—it may have been later as Miller does not give any dates—and subsequently moved to a wall on a fourth-level corridor. Sometime after 1991, it was moved to storage.

Stuart's post reminded me of the replica of the tablet formerly exhibited in the Auditorium. I wondered how faithfully it had been reproduced. If it is close to accurate, access to this replica could provide researchers and scholars in the Midwest an opportunity to study its content, which could prove valuable to Maya scholarship.

Background of the Stone Replica in the Auditorium

C. Ed Miller provides details about the creation of the replica in an article “The Palenque Tablet of the Cross—in the Auditorium.” Gomer Rufus Vincent, a skilled stonemason employed by the Johnson and Sons Monument Company of Independence, “wanted to make a contribution to the church [Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints †].” Sometime in the 1940s, Vincent went to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City where he “took exact measurements of the Tablet” and obtained an official photograph which he used to create the church's replica. According to Miller, Vincent purchased one of only two remaining photographs; the negative had been lost (Miller 1954:18).

† Now known as the Community of Christ.

History of the Original Tablet of the Cross

Miller then gives a history of the original tablet, but some details of his account appear to be incorrect. By combining several sources, like Stuart's blog (quoted above) with two others, we get a clearer picture. The first source is a two-volume account written by John Lloyd Stephens with artwork by Frederick Catherwood, a skilled architect and draftsman. Their ever-popular publication about their travels to locate and document the ruins in Central America was published in 1841, only a year after they had been to Palenque. I think it worthwhile to use Stephens' own words as he describes the tablet in the Temple of the Cross. The italicized portion below refers to the right third of the tablet mentioned in Stuart's blog.

Within, the chamber is thirteen feet wide and seven feet deep. There was no admission of light except from the door; the sides were without ornament of any kind, and in the back wall, covering the whole width, was the tablet given in the engraving opposite [referring to Catherwood's drawing in the book]. It was ten feet eight inches wide, six feet four inches in height, and consisted of three separate stones. That on the left, facing

the spectator, is still in its place. The middle one has been removed and carried down the side of the structure, and now lies near the bank of the stream.... We found it lying on its back near the banks of the stream, washed by many floods of the rainy season, and covered with a thick coat of dirt and moss. We had it scrubbed and propped up.... In the engraving [Catherwood's] it is given in its original position on the wall. *The stone on the right is broken, and, unfortunately, altogether destroyed; most of the fragments have disappeared; but, from the few we found among the ruins in the front of the building, there is no doubt that it contained ranges of hieroglyphics corresponding in general appearance with those of the stone on the left...* (Stephens 1842: 345-346, emphasis added).

The second source is a book written by Charles Rau about the tablet with the photograph noted by Stuart in his blog. Rau writes that the pieces of the third panel were sent to the U.S. by Charles Russell, consul of the United States at Laguna, Campeche, Mexico, in 1842. These fragments "fitted exactly together" and comprised the complete missing third panel of the tablet, contrary to Stephens' observation that most had disappeared. At the time, however, the only thing known about this panel was that it was from Palenque; sometime later it was identified as the missing third of the Tablet of the Cross (Rau 1879:1-3).

If Miller was correct, the panel remained in the Smithsonian until sometime around 1905 to 1909 when Elihu Root was Secretary of State. When Secretary Root learned that the other two sections of the tablet were being sent to Mexico City, he had the panel in the U.S. returned to Mexico "as a matter of international courtesy" (Miller 1954:19). The three panels finally were "fitly framed together."

Insights about the Iconography and Hieroglyphic Text

Stephens continued his description of the tablet with specific details about the engravings.

The principal subject of this tablet is the cross. It is surmounted by a strange bird, and loaded with indescribable ornaments. The two figures are evidently those of important personages. They are well drawn, and in symmetry of proportion are perhaps equal to many that are carved on the



Don Beebe

This photograph of the cast replica in situ on the back inside wall of the Temple of the Cross was taken in 1995. More recent photos show much deterioration.

walls of the ruined temples in Egypt.... Both are looking toward the cross, and one seems in the act of making an offering, perhaps of a child; all speculations on the subject are of course entitled to little regard, but perhaps it would not be wrong to ascribe to these personages a sacerdotal character. The hieroglyphics doubtless explain all. Near them are other hieroglyphics, which reminded us of the Egyptian mode for recording the name, history, office, or character of the persons represented. [Almost 150 years later this observation proved correct!] This tablet of the cross has given rise to more learned speculations than perhaps any others found at Palenque (Stephens 1841:345-347).

It is that cross on the tablet that baffled the Spaniards and early explorers and still today challenges Maya scholars. The ability to now read the glyphs, though, helps open the door to comprehending the cross and the complete tablet, as explained below.

The larger of the two standing figures is K'inich Kan Bahlam as he looked on the day of his inauguration as king in 684 [AD]. This day is recorded in the caption next to his portrait.... The opposite figure is a childhood portrait of K'inich Kan Bahlam on the day of his initiation rites on 17 June 641, when the future king was only six years old (Stuart and Stuart 2008:197).

The left hieroglyphic portion of the tablet is "mythological," describing events like the creation of the world, the Palenque Triad (three gods noted in various inscriptions at Palenque and called God

Cont. on Page 4

Tablet of the Cross

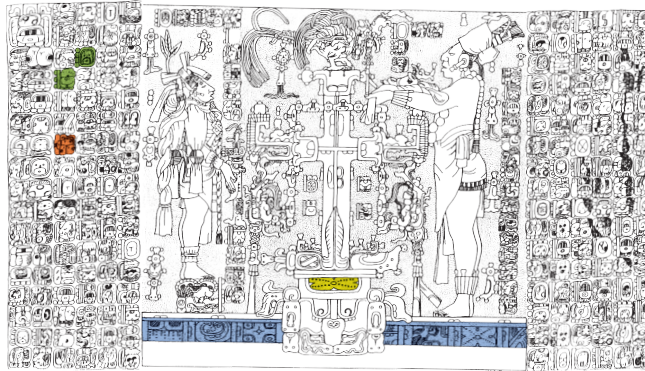
(Cont. from Page 3)

GI, GII, and GIII because their names cannot yet be read), as well as the birth and puzzling rebirth of God GI who descends to dedicate a temple. The right panel provides birth and accession dates of seven of the king's immediate forbearers. As for the cross, Stuart describes it this way:

The central image of the Tablet of the Cross . . . is the jeweled cruciform tree or plant which emerges from the “k'in bowl” . . . associated with offerings and *blood sacrifice*. It is an important iconographic element also made famous by its appearance on the lid of Pakal's sarcophagus, but its interpretation has long been difficult.... The solar bowl [the “k'in bowl” mentioned above] and its emerging *tree-cross* is, we know from elsewhere, an *important symbol of GI*. Here the motif serves to reference that deity by highlighting his associations with the sun, the sky, and an overarching theme of *ancestral resurrection* (Stuart 2006: 116; emphasis added).

The current insights regarding attributes of God GI—a major deity in the heavens directing the creation; a major participant in a sacrificial event; his existence before he was born; his descent from the sky; the cruciform tree, an important symbol for GI; and more—certainly seem to suggest Jesus Christ. Some scholars even see those similarities. Karen Bassie-Sweet with the University of Calgary compares One Ixim in the Popol Vuh (who is basically God GI of the inscriptions) with Jesus Christ and enumerates their shared characteristics (Bassie-Sweet 2008:12-13; 122). Stuart commented in a 2006 Maya Meetings workshop that trying to describe the relationship of God GI with the other two in the triad “was as hard to describe as the Christian belief in the Trinity.” The scholars, however, do not believe that God GI and Jesus are the same deity; they are simply similar.

The bottom line: The Tablet of the Cross not only provides historical information about some of the Palenque kings, but also preserves religious beliefs of the people of Palenque. Even though it was created around AD 692—some 300 years after the defeat of the Nephites—I think it intriguing that vestiges of Christianity are present.



This drawing by Linda Schele of the Tablet of the Cross has been used in several glyph workshops. The colors were added by the author during one of the workshops. The blue celestial band indicates God GI lives in the heavens and the k'in sign is highlighted in yellow.

Why Remove the Auditorium Stone Replica from Storage?

I have in my possession a copy of a 1991 memorandum from Alan D. Tyree to Roger Yarrington about the Auditorium tablet replica which includes the handout given by guides to interested visitors. Tyree notes that some of “its contents are quite speculative.” He is right. So many times in our enthusiasm to try to “prove” The Book of

Mormon, we *assume* correlations and interpretations without knowing the true facts. Under the authority of this memo, the tablet was removed from guided Auditorium tours and, I suppose, subsequently also removed from public view. In light of the brilliant work recently done by Maya epigraphers in cracking the Maya code, however, to keep this replica of the tablet unavailable for public inspection is certainly a tragedy. It's like keeping a copy of a Renoir or the Rosetta stone in storage. All that's needed is a simple label with the date, the medium, the creator, and identification as a replica of the original.

Because of the progress in decipherment in the last 20 to 30 years—although refining and tweaking continues—it is now possible to not only read most of the glyphs on the Tablet of the Cross but also to grasp an understanding of its iconography. As a result, the tremendous value of having the tablet's replica available for public viewing should not be underestimated. Although not a cast replica—being hand-carved by Vincent—the church's replica is one of only a handful of examples of probably the most famous piece of Maya art and hieroglyphics. Keeping it in storage where no one can see it hinders Maya scholarship. At least scholars and the public in this area would have access to the tablet, and, who knows, might contribute more insights about our understanding of the Tablet of the Cross.

The author wishes to thank Cindy Green, whose excellent research at the Community of Christ archives provided much of the material concerning the tablet made by Vincent.

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GLYPH *Quotes* *Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works....* —Mosiah 3:21

By Eric English


Do you remember Ammon in The Book of Mormon? No, not the Ammon who is a son of King Mosiah and a great missionary among the Lamanites; the other Ammon. The Ammon that I'm referring to is a descendant of Zarahemla and an eyewitness of King Benjamin's famous sermon. Three years after that message, he and 16 men are personally selected by King Mosiah to go on a grand adventure to uncover the mystery of what happened to the Zeniff party that had returned to the land of Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 5:4). He and his traveling companions are identified as being strong and mighty men, terminology used many times in The Book of Mormon as descriptive language of soldiers.

After wandering in the wilderness for 40 days, they come upon the descendants of Zeniff's group. At first, they are captured because they are mistaken for some of the wicked priests of King Noah, but upon further discussion with Limhi, the current king, the truth is revealed, and Limhi rejoices because of the knowledge of the continued existence of the Nephites. Limhi calls his people together to address them and then, in spite of Ammon presumably being a soldier, asks Ammon to rehearse to the people what has been going on with the Nephite people back in the land of Zarahemla.

While given the stage, Ammon also takes the opportunity to teach them what King Benjamin shared in his speech. We find that, during this time,

King Limhi and his people choose to enter into a covenant with the Lord (Mosiah 9:175). Ammon the soldier also becomes Ammon the unlikely missionary. And yet, when Limhi and his people request baptism, Ammon declines, stating that he is "an unworthy servant" (Mosiah 9:177).

We, the readers, can only deduce one of two things from Ammon's statement. Either he hasn't been ordained nor given authority to baptize, or he has broken a moral code and invalidates his personal authority and thus judges himself unworthy. Either way, he has the strength to do what is right in God's sight by turning down their request. Ammon knows who he is and who he is not.

What a clear example for all of us. No matter the circumstances, we can still share the gospel with others. Just like Ammon who conveys what he was taught by King Benjamin, even though that isn't what he was asked to speak about, we too can pass along what God reveals to us when an opportunity arises. Even though we may not be ordained, we can still share the good news. Even if we sin and fail, we can still share the good news. Even if we are given a different opportunity altogether, we can still find a way to share the good news. No matter what we are busily engaged in, if God presents an opportunity as he did for Ammon, we need to have the courage to respond and share. 

The Wheel and Maya Innovation

By Eric Scott

This is a synopsis of part of the chapter "Maya on the Move" from The Lost Secrets of Maya Technology by James A. O'Kon, Career Press, 2012, pp. 271-292.

Many have wondered if the Maya were aware of the wheel, and if they were aware of it, why there isn't more evidence of its use. Maya museums display toys with wheels and axles, but there doesn't seem to be any indication that wheeled transportation was used in daily life. In the book, *The Lost Secrets of Maya Technology*, the author O'Kon, an engineer, offers a rather simple explanation. Without the availability of domesticated animals of burden, the wheel was too inefficient a device for transportation.

Generally archaeologists want to claim that there were no horses in the Americas at the same time as man. While The Book of Mormon lists a number of large animals, including horses, between the time the Nephites arrived in the Land of Promise and Christ's appearance here, there doesn't seem to be any mention of horses thereafter. Without the availability of dray animals for hauling, the wheel was not the most efficient means of transportation.

Why wasn't the wheel efficient? In order to make use of the wheel it would be necessary to construct a wheeled wagon or cart. The wagon or cart would require a trace to be connected to the front of the wagon to accommodate the beasts of burden. Since there apparently were no dray animals available after the appearance of Christ (perhaps due to the devastation at the time of the crucifixion), man power would have to be utilized instead of animal power to transport trade goods and other commodities. There were also advantages to using man power rather than animal power. Man power allowed for the elimination of the need to care for and grow food to feed a beast of burden. The porter could care for himself and required only two pounds of corn a day for subsistence while a horse or mule required 15 to 20 pounds of grain per day as well as caretakers. This was very important in the natural environment of the Yucatan which was a difficult place for producing high crop yields.

Whether by animal power or man power, however, the use of the wheel proved unproductive. O'Kon proves this by providing the following illustration of applying the same energy to weight formula that was used on large freight wagons pulled by horses or mules in the nineteenth century. In order to gauge the number of animals required to pull a heavily loaded freight wagon, the number of animals was

calculated using the loaded weight of the wagon divided by the weight of the animals. Each dray animal was considered capable of pulling a load equal to its own weight.

O'Kon's weight-formula philosophy can be transferred to the use of man power by using the example of a wagon weighing 1,000 pounds and transporting a payload

equal to 1,000 pounds. The sum of the load and the wagon would be equal to a total weight of 2,000 pounds. If a Maya man weighed 125 pounds, the number of 125-pound men that it would take to haul 2,000 pounds would be equal to 2,000 divided by 125. That calculation identifies

a Maya work force of 16 men to haul the load. It would be an average of 62.5 pounds of net payload carried by each of the 16-man team. "Not a very good efficiency rating when Maya technology had developed manpowered transport devices [known as the tumpline or *mecapal* in Maya] that enabled a porter to transport a load of 125 pounds each" (274). That device allowed for twice the payload.

The tumpline consisted of a leather head strap that was positioned on the top of the head to direct loads from the skull and directly into the spinal column. The ends of the head strap were attached to a 3-foot long tail strap.... The strap was connected to the frame or load container supporting the load. The tumpline was a simplistic tension-based mechanism that



Figure 1: Murals found at Calakmul, Mexico, depict everyday scenes in the life of the Maya. The reconstituted drawing shows a man using a tumpline to carry a large pot with a net bag holding unknown small round objects tied to the pot. The net bag is topped by a hat in the form of a long-snouted animal, possibly an opossum. People in Guatemala, Nepal, and India still use the tumpline.

Glenn Scott

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Glyph Dwellers

Dwellers – to live and have a home in a particular place



I reminded you last time to hold on to your faith in Jesus—even when things are not going well around you.

The Adventures of Beezrom

By Mindy Mulheron
Illustrations by Aaron Presler

Boy, have I needed that advice! You know what I've realized though? When things seem really bad, like they'll never get better, Jesus never leaves you. He's always right there with you—no matter what. And when Jesus is with you, suddenly things seem a bit easier. There's nothing that you can't handle with him at your side. Pretty neat, huh? It means a lot to me anyway—knowing that he's there, always. That's what gets me through bad days. And we've had a lot lately.

Life has been pretty rough. Lots of people are getting hurt. Lots of bad things are happening to good people. Sometimes I don't really understand why things are the way they are. I mean, God can do anything, right? He should be able to fix bad things. It's hard sometimes to remember that he is big and I'm very small. He sees everything and I don't. He knows the best way. He's the light, and without him I'm stumbling around in the dark. God is going to send his son to die for me. My best friend, Jesus, is going to come here and live and die—just so I can be with him again someday. Isn't that amazing? Doesn't it make your head spin?

An amazing thing just happened! When the sun went down, it didn't get dark! It stayed bright as day all night long—just as Samuel prophesied would happen when Jesus was born. I went off by myself for a little bit, just to think. It's a lot to wrap your head around.

Jesus and I have been friends for a long time. I know he really likes me, but I can't believe he would give up his life! He knows that he will eventually die, but he came anyway. Jesus knows

that I'll never measure up because I am a sinner. I do bad things sometimes—even when I don't mean to. He knows that I try really hard, but that I've made mistakes. He knows that I'll never be able to stand in the presence of my Almighty Father and be good enough to pass. So this

Jesus, my friend, decided to save me. He knew that I couldn't do it myself, so he decided to do it for me. He knew that it would hurt, but he thought I was worth it. Jesus, my best friend, saved my life when he decided to come to earth. And now—he's here! His birth is my salvation—my hope.

And that's when I remember, GOD IS good and HE IS in control and HE DOES have a plan—even if things seem crazy. I'll never understand what he understands, but I do understand this one thing: He loves me. He told us that in this life we'd have trouble sometimes, but make sure you remember the rest—and most important part—of the verse: He has already overcome. That means he has already won. We just need to sit back and watch—knowing that it will all turn out in the end. ☺

See you guys next time!

Scriptural reference: 3 Nephi, chapters 1-3 [1-7 LDS]

Who's in the Dots?

By Beezrom





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Maya Wheel *(Cont. from Page 6)*

distributed loading the mass of the burden directly onto the load paths that frame the human body.... To position the tumpline, after placing the tumpline on top of the head, the bearer then leaned forward to balance and align the load and started his march (275).

The tumpline—also developed in Nepal, India, and Africa—enabled the bearer with a load of approximately his weight to travel along level roadways at a pace that could cover 15.5 miles per day. The ability to carry loads equal to the porter's body weight was dependent on taking rest stops to regulate his energy expenditure. He would rest by sitting his tumpline loads on load-resting platforms called *lab*. The pace in rough, rugged and mountainous terrain would be slower, but a sure-footed porter would travel faster than a beast of burden. In addition, the poor load-carrying capacity of wheeled transport, whether by man or animal, made wagon travel over the rough terrain and muddy jungle tracks an overall poor alternative. So, in the evolution of Maya transportation technology, the use of the wheel was dead-ended.

O'Kon lists a wide range of items transported by the tumpline method like construction materials

(cement, timber, etc.), agricultural products (vegetables like sweet potato, tomato, squash, etc.), animal products (turkey, deer, turtle, possum, etc.), and trade goods (chicle, rubber, and copal) (279).

The tumpline was also used as a vertical lifter in construction projects, and the Maya engineers coordinated the weight of the construction materials with the weight capacity of the tumpline. For example, the standard size of worked stone in Maya structures was based on a weight of approximately 125 pounds. The coordination between stone size and weight/carrying capacity simplified the type of transport used for the construction process.

A mural at Calakmul lends credence to O'Kon's hypothesis. It depicts a Maya bearer supporting a large pot filled with goods supported by a tumpline (see Figure 1). The Maya were aware of the wheel but logically recognized the disadvantage of a wheeled vehicle when compared to the efficiency of man power and the tumpline.

O'Kon's reasoning seems logical and perhaps provides the answer to the mystery of why the Maya didn't use the wheel to transport objects. They knew about the wheel (evidence from small wheeled figures in museums) but innovatively adapted to their environment by using the tumpline—a more productive method for transporting goods. 