

#### IV. NON-CLASSIC INSCRIPTIONS AND SCULPTURES AT SEIBAL<sup>1</sup>

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##### Background.

The Maya ruin of Seibal is found in the southwestern corner of the Guatemalan Department of El Peten. The site rests upon several steep limestone hills high above the left bank of the Pasion River some 100 kilometers upstream from the Pasion and Salinas (or Chixoy) confluence which originates the Usumacinta. In common with much of the Southern Lowlands of the Maya region, this is an area of high rain forest and dense tropical jungle.

The existence of the Seibal ruin has been known since the 1890's when the site received its first important explorations. In 1892 a Guatemalan commission made casts of some of the Seibal sculptures for exhibition at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In 1895 and again in 1905 Teobert Maler visited Seibal on behalf of Peabody Museum who published his report. Maler made a rough map of a small portion of the ruin and photographed the sculptures then known. In 1914 and 1915 Sylvanus Morley visited the site briefly to study its epigraphy; this he subsequently analysed in his great study, The Inscriptions of Peten. In brief, then, this is the extent of archaeological explorations at Seibal prior to 1961.

In 1959 Peabody Museum at Harvard University began an excavation program at the site of Altar de Sacrificios, downstream from Seibal and at the mouth of the Pasion; it was from this project that the present studies at Seibal derive. During the course of excavations and study in the Altar project it proved possible to establish a good chronological record for the sculptural and textual materials. This begins at 9.1.0.0.0 which may mark the arrival of the so-called Classic stela cult. Excepting the usual hiatus of the 6th century, this inscriptional record carries forth through Cycle 9 to 9.17.0.0.0 when it appears to terminate abruptly.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared for delivery at the session on Maya archaeology at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology held on May 5, 1966, at the University of Nevada, Reno. The text is unrevised but is updated by the references, footnotes, and appendix.

The Peabody projects at Altar de Sacrificios (1959-1963) and subsequently at Seibal (1964-1968) were conceived and directed by Gordon R. Willey and A. Ledyard Smith, to both of whom I am deeply indebted for the privilege of participating in these explorations. I wish also to acknowledge the financial support of my Seibal studies since 1964 by the Committee on Research, the Archaeological Research Facility, and the Humanities Institute, all of the University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>2</sup> Of the surviving Altar stelae only Stela 2 appears to postdate 9.17.0.0.0. Almost surely dedicated at 10.1.0.0.0, this small monument may have been raised under the influence of the powerful regime upstream at Seibal which celebrated this critical date in such lavish manner.

My study of Altar texts and sculptures, The Hieroglyphic Inscriptions and Monumental Art of Altar de Sacrificios, is in press as Vol. 64, No. 2, of the Peabody Museum Papers, Cambridge.

Curious as to the reasons why this long record should so end at the height of the Late Classic development, I noted that the epigraphic record at Seibal appeared to commence at just about this time and I wondered if this might be more than just coincidence. I wondered, for instance, if there might have been some shift in hierarchial organization from Altar de Sacrificios upstream to Seibal at this time and, if so, what the reasons for it might have been. As a result of such speculation, I visited Seibal twice in 1961 on behalf of Peabody Museum.<sup>3</sup> A number of surprises resulted from these explorations, and it was found that the late history of Seibal tied in with that of Altar de Sacrificios even more closely than first suspected.

The explorations of 1961 demonstrated that the ruin of Seibal was of far greater importance than previously suspected. The ruins themselves were found to be far more extensive than the explorations of Maler and Morley had revealed. Half again as many sculptured monuments as were previously known at the site were found. Furthermore, many of these monuments are stylistically related and compose a complex of highly exotic non-Classic sculptures relating to an alien intrusion at Altar de Sacrificios in terminal Classic times which was uncovered in the ceramic investigations. A shift in importance and political power from Altar de Sacrificios to Seibal was thus possibly verified, with the natural defensive advantages enjoyed by Seibal providing one suggestive reason for the shift (Smith and Willey 1966:387-388).

#### Discussion.

The only thorough and formal definition of the great Maya art style, characteristic of Maya civilization in the Southern Lowlands during the Initial Series Period, has been undertaken by Proskouriakoff who terms the tradition the Classic style (Proskouriakoff 1950). It is important to follow Proskouriakoff's restriction of the term Classic to that coherent and unified artistic development of the greater Peten area, and thus to term the exotic and stylistically alien elements described in this paper as non-Classic (Cf. Proskouriakoff 1951). In order to avoid any misunderstanding it should be emphasized explicitly that non-Classic refers not necessarily to non-Maya but simply to features not characteristic of the integrated Classic tradition of the Southern Lowlands.

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I wish to thank Timothy Fiske who joined in the very soggy explorations of Seibal in that very rainy January of 1961; Stelae 14-16, the jaguar atlantean altar, architectural Groups C and D, and Structure A-9, the largest building of Group A, were first seen and the blazing of a new, much shorter and direct route to the site was accomplished during these hectic explorations. In March of 1961 somewhat drier explorations of the site were shared with R. E. W. Adams who undertook ceramic testing and correction of the grossly inaccurate Maler map of Group A (Adams 1963); Stelae 17-18 were discovered at this time and further exploration of Groups C and D was carried out.

The non-Classic elements discussed here are from the corpus of nearly two dozen Late Classic sculptured stelae from Seibal. Some of the stelae are characterized by a predominance of these non-Classic elements, may not have been raised at Classic katun endings or subdivisions, and hence might properly be termed non-Classic monuments. In other instances, however, the non-Classic features figure as intrusions into predominately Classic compositions. Obviously, this is an important aspect of the non-Classic presence at Seibal, and it holds chronological as well as other significant implications.

In terms of the epigraphy one signature of the non-Classic presence is the squared cartouche. Four of these inscriptions are now known at Seibal, none, unfortunately, in an outstanding state of preservation. These texts are found upon Stelae 3, 13, 16, and 18; only one of these monuments has been known previously--namely, Stela 3 published by Maler. Each of the texts opens with a variable glyphic element framed in a rectangular border which I term the squared cartouche. In each instance there is a numerical prefix. Twice this is a coefficient of one; twice this is a coefficient of seven. In one only of these texts (Stela 3) immediately sequent to the initial glyph with coefficient of seven, is a second squared cartouche glyph; it presents the same interior glyphic element seen in the initial glyph, but in this instance the coefficient is five.

In two of the inscriptions the remaining text following the squared cartouche introduction is very brief and virtually illegible. Only in the inscriptions of Stelae 3 and 13 are there preserved additional glyphs suitable for study. In the case of Stela 3 there are four glyphs additional to the double squared cartouche construction which stands at the top of the monument. As these glyphs are located in a lower panel, presenting a different scene, they might not relate directly to the squared cartouches of the upper panel. It is interesting to note, however, that these four glyphs are fully within the canons of Classic Maya epigraphy and would pass unnoticed in a more conventional context. Two of the glyphs form a CR statement read as 1 Chicchan 8 Kankin and placed at 9.18.9.5.5 by both Morley and E. W. Andrews (Morley 1937-8; Andrews 1936).<sup>4</sup> The associated art of this monument is, however, entirely non-Classic in character.

In Stela 13, our final text, we have our most lengthy inscription, consisting of about a dozen glyphs arranged in a single hieroglyphic caption over a sculptured human figure. With the exception of the initial squared cartouche, none of the text's remaining characters possess numerical coefficients. While these remaining glyphs of the text are derived, possibly in all instances, from Classic Maya epigraphy, the use of some of the signs is irregular. Unfortunately I am unable to present an interpretation of the text other than pointing out the color/direction/year count notation.

Since the epigraphy affords little direct chronological controls, dating of these texts must be derived indirectly from the art, the positioning of the monuments, and similar considerations. On this basis the four texts are

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<sup>4</sup> Repeated study of this Calendar Round date leads me to read it as 1 Oc 8 Kankin, which I would place at 10.2.5.3.10.

assigned to the first quarter of Cycle 10.<sup>5</sup>

The immediate interpretation of these four squared cartouche texts is difficult because, aside from their small number, of their very poor state of preservation. While there are other possibilities, I think the squared cartouche glyphs are best regarded as calendrical and, in fact, are probably chronological statements. In addition to the bar and dot affixation, their initial position with the absence, with one exception, of other chronological statements in their texts contribute to this interpretation. If this view is accepted, then the variability of the framed interior elements and the lack of coefficients of greater than thirteen (in, admittedly, an inadequate sample) strongly suggest that we are dealing with day formulae. Just possibly these might be year bearer statements; we recall that in Central Mexico year bearer formulae were sometimes enclosed in rectangular frames, although these frames encompassed the coefficient as well as the day sign.<sup>6</sup>

I am aware of only a few parallels for the squared cartouche texts of Seibal. At Ucanal on the Mopan, about fifty airline miles northeast of Seibal, there is the very important Stela 4 of early Cycle 10 date. The text, which is otherwise of Classic appearance, presents three probable instances of squared cartouche glyphs. Here, the coefficients are 7, 10, and 13. The associated sculpture, while basically in the Classic tradition, has non-Classic aspects. Most important is the "capture motif" shown: the principal figure is a lord bearing the Manikin Scepter and standing upon a captive. A related scene occurs on a monument of the same date at Seibal. The critical importance of the events of this date at Seibal are attested dramatically by the erection of no less than five sculptured stelae (Stelae 8-11, 21). The date is 10.1.0.0.0.

A more distant, but equally important, parallel for the squared cartouche glyphs is at Chichen Itza. These glyphs occur on two, possibly three, of the gold disks from the Cenote of Sacrifice. Disk I from the Cenote presents eleven squared cartouche glyphs which have human and animal head as the interior elements. There are no Maya glyphs on this disk, and the only personages depicted are Toltecs. Disk J also bears two squared cartouche glyphs together with others of Yucatecan Maya style. The eleven squared cartouche glyphs of Disk I lack numerals, and perhaps are mainly decorative in function. The two glyphs of Disk J may have coefficients, but it is difficult to separate them from other elements and these glyphs also may be merely decorative.

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<sup>5</sup> As a result of subsequent studies I now venture to suggest more precise datings of these and other Seibal monuments; see the appendix of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> It is now clear that this interpretation will not fit the several squared cartouche texts now known at other sites such as Jimbal and Ucanal. The recent discovery of El Zapote Stela 5 (Easby and Scott 1970: 214-215) provides the most fascinating new light upon the squared glyphs. On this monument a year sign is interpolated between the coefficient of 12 and the squared frame. The very early date of this stela, 9.0.0.0.0, confirms Proskouriakoff's perceptive observations with respect to another element of the non-Classic group, the I-A5 pose (Proskouriakoff 1950: 19, 152-153).

I have previously noted the possibility of a connection between the squared cartouche glyphs and the rectangular year bearer frames in Central Mexico. Otherwise, outside of the Maya area, these squared cartouche glyphs do not appear to point to any particular region.

Turning now from the epigraphy to the sculpture, we see that there is a larger array of elements complexly distributed. It is possible here, therefore, only to note some of the general features of non-Classicism found in the sculptural art of Seibal.

The non-Classic presence is to be seen in specific elements of costume and accoutrement, in the physiognomy of depicted personages, in symbolism, and in certain artistic conventions such as in modes of portrayal or representation. As a fascinating example of the latter, we now have three instances of human figures being portrayed in virtually the precisely same pose (type I-A5) typical of Cycle 8 art. As Proskouriakoff (1950:19, 152-163) has noted, the reappearance of this pose in Cycle 10 at Seibal does not reflect its survival here through the centuries of Cycle 9, but rather its re-introduction from a foreign source uninfluenced by the evolution of the Classic style during Cycle 9. That we are not contending with the phenomenon of archaism is demonstrated by the exotic context.

Many of these non-Classic features in the sculpture of Seibal have as their closest parallels examples in the art of Chichen Itza, western Yucatan, and Campeche. Long nose beads, certain types of slippers and sandals, the use of the so-called fending club or curved stick, certain serpentine symbolism, these are instances of specific ties to Chichen Itza. Now it is of the greatest interest to note that these ties with Chichen Itza are to be seen both in the Toltec and in the Chichen Maya who were themselves of non-Classic tradition.

A more immediate and most significant tie of Seibal's non-Classicism is to be seen downstream at Altar de Sacrificios. At Altar a recently discovered intrusive ceramic complex has defined the Jimba Phase.<sup>7</sup> Dated as terminal Classic or very early PostClassic, the Jimba Phase represents a short term occupation of the old Classic ceremonial precincts by an intrusive group. There is the impression, almost, of a bivouacking in the old ceremonial buildings and courts (Smith, Willey, and Adams 1962:35-36; Adams 1964:376-377). Characteristic above all of the Jimba intrusion is the enormous quantity of fine paste pottery. In this pottery's carved decoration there may be seen squared cartouche glyphs associated with long haired warriors dressed in peculiar skirts. Now these very same figures are to be seen in some of the monumental art of Seibal.

The most remarkable example of this is found on Stela 17. The monument presents a scene with two figures. One figure is attired in typical Late Classic Maya dress of the Southern Lowlands. In terms of Proskouriakoff's chronological study of the Classic style, the figure derives from the terminal Decadent Phase of Southern Lowland Maya art. In his left hand, this lord holds the Manikin Scepter, not raised, but lowered. The right hand is raised toward the left chest in what may be the traditional "gesture of submission." The remarkable figure who confronts the Maya lord is long haired and skirted, and the features of his face are far from the Classic ideals.

<sup>7</sup> Fully defined in Adams 1971; cf. Sabloff 1970 for the related complex at Seibal.

In one hand he holds the curved stick weapon. The obvious question is: Does the sculpture depict the surrender of a Maya lord to the skirted warrior?

The data reported here are still in the process of being researched and evaluated. There are several critical factors yet to be brought under control, while simple and immediate interpretation is confounded by the possibility of more than one facies to the non-Classicism of Seibal. There is the suggestion of initial military success, recorded at 10.1.0.0.0, but only to be followed shortly by ultimate extinction. Some of these points are beginning to be clarified as research progresses, so that it is premature to push the interpretations at this moment. Rather, in conclusion, I prefer simply to underscore that these sculptures and texts of Seibal reflect very crucial events during the final moments of Classic Maya civilization in the southwestern lowlands. While the collapse of Classic Maya civilization long has been subjected to a great variety of abstract theorizing, here we have tangible documentation for some of the important events of the times. I am not suggesting that military conflict and conquest was the primary factor behind the Classic debacle as it may well have been only symptomatic of other failures and problems. I do cite it, however, as a highly significant feature of the final collapse.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Sabloff and Willey 1967 for a recent hypothesis on the Classic collapse derived from the Altar and Seibal materials.



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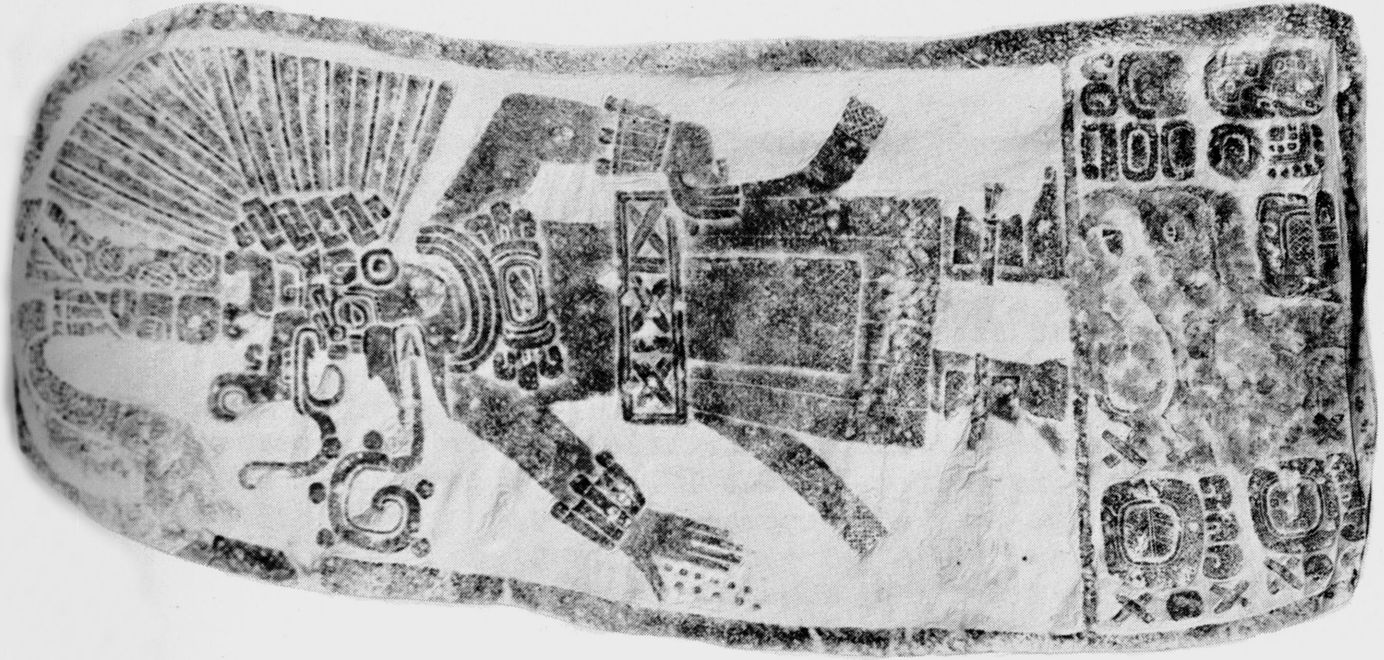
a

Plate 1. a) Seibal Stela 14. b) Seibal Stela 18.

Plate 2. a) Seibal Stela 17. b) Stela 19: see Plate 3b for rubbing with upper left fragment of stela replaced







b



a

Plate 3. a), Seibal Stela 18. b), Seibal Stela 19. Rubbings by Merle Greene Robertson.

## Appendix

The following tabulation presents my current (1970) conclusions with respect to the dating of Seibal monuments; some dates are somewhat tentative and further studies may lead to minor revisions. Christian equivalents to Maya dates are calculated with a constant of 584,283.0 days. Absent from the tabulation are Maler's Stela 4, which is apparently non-existent, and Morley's Stela 12, which is not located at the main Seibal ruin but at "Group B" several kilometers distant.

- Stela 1. 10.2.0.0.0 3 Ahau 3 Ceh, August 15, 869.
- Stela 2. No inscribed date. Stylistic considerations place carving within Katun 1 Ahau, ending at 10.3.0.0.0, i.e. between 869 and 889.
- Stela 3. Best reading of the Calendar Round date is 1 Oc 8 Kankin, and this is to be placed at 10.2.5.3.10, September 28, 874. Erection was probably at about this date or shortly thereafter, perhaps about 879.
- Stela 5. Incomplete Period Ending date places this monument almost surely at 9.17.10.0.0 12 Ahau 8 Pax, November 30, 780, or 9.18.10.0.0 10 Ahau 8 Zac, August 17, 800.
- Stela 6. A Calendar Round date of 13 Ahau 18 Cumku almost surely places this monument at 9.17.0.0.0, January 22, 771.
- Stela 7. 9.18.10.0.0 10 Ahau 8 Zac, August 17, 800.
- Stela 8. 10.1.0.0.0 5 Ahau 3 Kayab, November 28, 849.
- Stela 9. 10.1.0.0.0 5 Ahau 3 Kayab, November 28, 849.
- Stela 10. 10.1.0.0.0 5 Ahau 3 Kayab, November 28, 849.
- Stela 11. 10.1.0.0.0 5 Ahau 3 Kayab, November 28, 849.
- Stela 13. Stylistic considerations place carving within Katun 1 Ahau, ending at 10.3.0.0.0 i.e. between 869 and 889.
- Stela 14. Stylistic considerations place carving within Katun 1 Ahau, ending at 10.3.0.0.0, i.e. between 869 and 889.
- Stela 15. Stylistic considerations place carving within Katun 1 Ahau, ending at 10.3.0.0.0, i.e. between 869 and 889.
- Stela 16. The small surviving fragment of this miniature stela is too incomplete to suggest a precise dating of the carving; however, its positioning upon the platform with Stelae 14 and 15 was surely no earlier than Katun 1 Ahau, ending at 10.3.0.0.0.
- Stela 17. Stylistic considerations place the carving after 10.3.0.0.0 (889), perhaps at about 894 or 899.
- Stela 18. Stylistic considerations place the carving after 10.3.0.0.0 (889), perhaps at about 894 or 899.
- Stela 19. The text opens with a most unusual double date, unfortunately badly damaged. The first date of the pair is probably the Calendar Round 1 Ben 1 Pop which would surely be at 9.19.5.11.13, January 19, 816, or 10.1.18.6.13, January 6, 868. Even if the Calendar Round reconstruction suggested here is incorrect, stylistic considerations place the date of carving surely very close to these dates, and there are good arguments in favor of either date.
- Stela 20. 10.3.0.0.0 1 Ahau 3 Yaxkin, May 2, 889.
- Stela 21. 10.1.0.0.0 5 Ahau 3 Kayab, November 28, 849.
- Stela 22. This is the re-erected upper fragment of Stela 6. Presumably, this event follows the latest carved monument "normal" raisings, considered to be Stelae 17 and 18 at about 894 or 899.
- Structure A-I Panels. The text opens with the only surviving Initial Series date at Seibal: 9.15.13.13.0 4 Ahau 3 Uo, February 27, 745. Dedication was probably at 9.16.0.0.0 2 Ahau 13 Tzec, May 7, 751, a date recorded in the text as a Period Ending.

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