Discovery and Description of Monument 2 at Tipan Chen Uitz, Belize

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Discovery and Description of Monument 2 at Tipan Chen Uitz, Belize

Christophe Helmke and Christopher R. Andres

Background and Context

In 2009, members of the Central Belize Archaeological Survey (CBAS) were led to the site of Tipan Chen Uitz, in the Roaring Creek Works area of the Cayo District, Belize (some 17 km south of the capital Belmopan). Realizing the importance of the site, it was the subject of preliminary mapping and was promptly reported to the archaeological authorities in Belize as well as the international scientific community (Andres et al. 2010). Since then Tipan Chen Uitz has been a focal point of the CBAS project, which has been conducting investigations at a series of archaeological sites and caves in the area (Andres and Wrobel 2010, 2011; Wrobel et al. 2013). Continued archaeological surveys of the area have revealed that Tipan Chen Uitz was a super-ordinate centre that controlled a series of satellite sites (including the sites of Yaxbe and Cahal Uitz Na, and possibly Chaac Mool Ha) that were physically integrated via a series of raised causeways (Andres et al. 2014: 46-48; Awe and Helmke 1998; Helmke 2009: 210-216, 266-278). If size is a measure of importance, then surface area as well as the number of structures, plazas and courts that together comprise the monumental epicentre make it clear that Tipan Chen Uitz was among the most influential sites in central Belize (Andres et al. 2014: 48-49) (Figure 1). As a result, from the onset it was expected that Tipan Chen Uitz would yield monolithic monuments, a hypothetical premise, which has been borne out by recent discoveries.

As part of the investigations conducted in the summer of 2011, the access to Group A—an acropoline palace complex—was excavated. Excavations focused in particular on the axial stair of Structure A-1, which appears to have functioned as an *audiencia* structure, a building type that here, as elsewhere, provided a series of multi-functional rooms (primarily for administrative purposes), with a single axial entryway, thereby controlling and restricting access to the palatial group (Awe 2008; Awe et al. 1991; Chase and Chase 2001). As fortune would have it, on the very last day of the 2011 field season a carved monument was discovered downslope from the *audiencia* structure, evidently displaced from its original context, apparently due to an episode of structural collapse, although its secondary context may also have been affected by deliberate human action. The monument could not be adequately classified as either a stela, a panel, or an altar, and as such received the more neutral and noncommittal designation of Monument 1. That particular monument can be described as a broad limestone slab that is generally rectangular in form (measuring 1,25 m long by 0,90 m wide), and whose height is in keeping with that of a standard step (c. 26 cm). The front edge and right side of Monument 1 were embellished by a series of five glyphic medallions. As such Monument 1 resembles an architectural element that was incorporated into the stair, quite possibly as an outset, and may have served as the crowning course of an axial outset stair block (Andres et
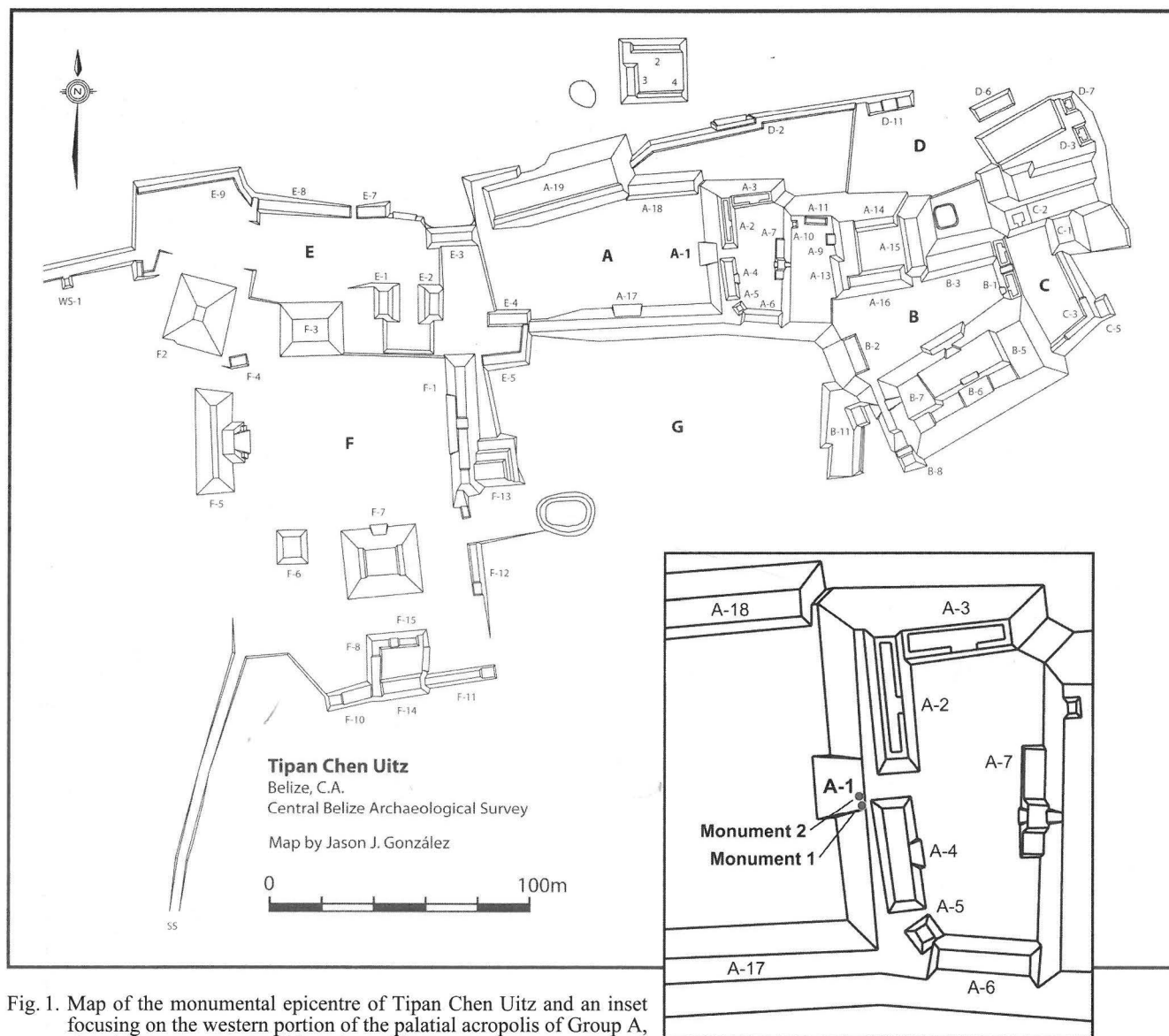
Fig. 1. Map of the monumental epicentre of Tipan Chen Uitz and an inset focusing on the western portion of the palatial acropolis of Group A, showing Structure A-1 and the points of discovery of Monuments 1 and 2 (map by J. González; inset by C. Helmke and C. Andres).

al. 2014: 58; see also Loten and Pendergast 1984: 11, 13). The glyphs reveal that the monument was known as a *tuun-piit?*, or 'stone-palanquin', and as such could have been conceived as a stone skeuomorph or simulacra of a palanquin and may have functioned as the pedestal for a portable throne (Andres and Helmke 2013; Andres et al. 2014: 58-60; see also Stuart 2005b: 88-89). Based on the extant text of Monument 1, it is evident that only part of the text is preserved since it starts off in mid-sentence and lacks the initial calendrical notations that typically initiate glyphic clauses. In addition, the name of the monument's patron is missing from the sub-clause at the end of the monument, which was initiated by a so-called name-tag statement (e.g. Mathews 1979; Grube 2006: 70-72; Stuart 2005a: 116-117).

When excavations resumed at Tipan in 2013, work continued to focus on Str. A-1 in an effort to clarify the architectural context of Monument 1, and also in the hopes of finding the missing portions of the monument. The axial stair has suffered considerable damage from looters who illicitly excavated a large axial trench. Despite this destruction, the fragile juncture between an architectural unit (Lot 87) – which may represent the southern stairside outset or an axial stair block – and the lateral terraces (Lots 79, 86 & 88) was nevertheless uncovered during the excavations (Andres and Pierce 2015). These investigations also revealed that Monument 1 was resting on the nose of what may be the next to highest terrace (Lot 88). Exposing the flooring, by clearing the collapse between Monument 1 and the architectural unit (c. 1,5 m apart), revealed, much to everyone's surprise, fragments of yet another monument, now designated as Monument 2 (Figure 2). The fragmentary state of Monument 2 and its context, with the fragments lying directly atop the terminal flooring surface, indicate that the destruction this monument has suffered, and its secondary redeposition, are the product of deliberate actions in antiquity. We will return to this feature after discussing the monument and the text that it once bore.

Description of Monument 2

Monument 2 was made of dense crystalline limestone, which—much like the previously discovered Monument 1—can be classified as fossiliferous limestone or micrite based on analyses of limestones of the Roaring Creek Valley (see Villaseñor and Helmke 2007: 138-139). As recovered, Monument 2 subsists as a series of 22 fragments that conjoin as 16 larger

113

Fig. 2. The fragments of Monument 2 as discovered *in situ*, between Monument 1 (to the left) and the partially preserved architectural unit (to the right). The nose of the upper terrace is visible in the foreground along the base of the photograph (photograph by C. Andres).

fragments. These fragments measure between 9,1 and 11,3 cm in thickness, indicating that these are the remains of a panel, which was possibly once mounted into a wall. Nevertheless, it remains possible that the panel functioned as a riser framing a stair, such as the panels adorning the faces of stairside outsets at Palenque, known as *alfardas* (see Stuart 2005b: 17-20). Due to these uncertainties it was deemed prudent to assign the designation as Monument 2. The plain frame of the panel is preserved on most fragments and two sets of conjoining fragments also exhibit a linear groove, indicating that part of the frame was accentuated by an additional line. Fortunately, the largest fragments also exhibit parts of glyphic collocations.

The width of the plain frame varies between 12,9 and 14,0 cm. Based on the remaining glyphs, we can reconstruct the average height of the glyphs as 15,2 cm since the maximal height of both glyph blocks is preserved. Projecting the symmetry of the remaining signs, we can reconstruct the average width of the glyph blocks as 15,3 cm, meaning that the glyph blocks were almost perfectly squared. The width of the plain bands demarcating the glyphs blocks varies greatly, measuring between 0,4 and 1,4 cm. Nevertheless, we can reconstruct the original width of the panel to at least 58 cm (supposing a double column of glyphs). Assuming that this original panel consisted of at least six glyph blocks, we can conclude that only 16 % of the original text has been recovered to date – considering only the surface area of the glyphs in the computation.

The one fragment bearing parts of a glyph block clearly represents a left edge and a corner piece, since the plain band runs along the left and bottom edge of the glyph and forms a neat rounded corner (Figure 4). As such, it is clear that this particular glyph block occurred in the lower left hand corner of the panel. In contrast, the other fragment bearing glyphs preserves part of the right edge of the panel, since the plain band runs along the right of the two partially preserved and superimposed glyph blocks. Based on these features, it is clear that what remains on this second fragment was higher up in the text. It is on the basis of these observations that a reconstruction drawing was attempted (Figure 4). Here, one of the assumptions is that the text of this panel was initially written in a set of paired columns, since this duplicates the configu-
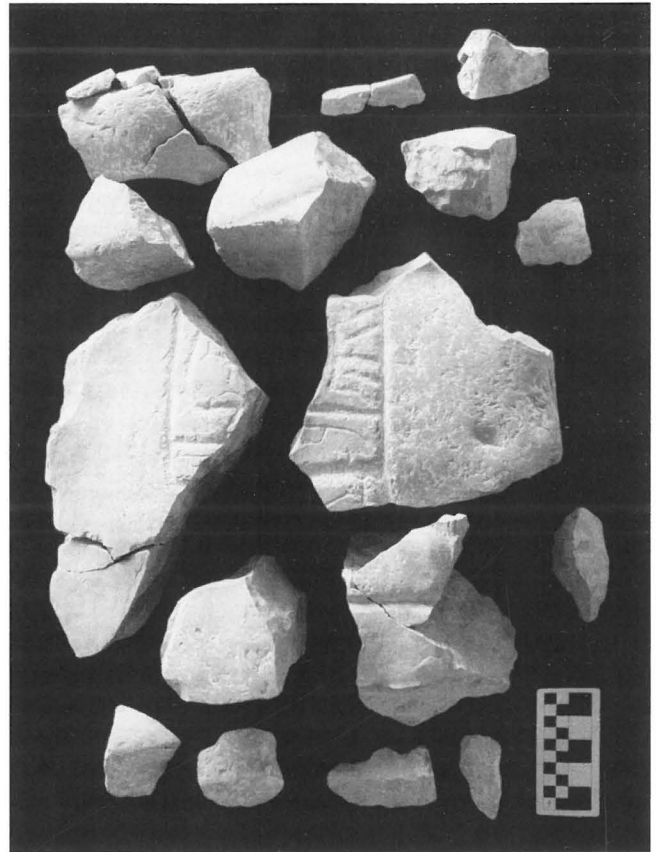

Fig. 3. The fragments of Monument 2 after cleaning and conjoining (photograph by C. Andres).

ration of the similarly-sized panels, known as *tableritos*, from the subterranean chambers of the palace at Palenque (see Schele and Mathews 1979: n. 36). These *tableritos* each bear six glyphs, arranged in a double-column over three rows. We suspect that Monument 2 once exhibited a very similar composition, and have therefore assigned the remaining glyphs to putative double columns designated as pA and pB, but at present the monument is in such a fragmentary condition that this is difficult to corroborate.

Due to the highly fragmentary state of Monument 2 there is very little that can be said with certainty about its original text. The few remaining elements, however, suggest that at least tentative readings are possible, with the caveat that additional fragments and conjoinings may change the interpretation of the glyphs rather markedly. The glyph block remaining in column pA has as its main sign the head of the gopher (wherein only the nose and mouth remain) functioning as the logogram **BAH** (T757; see Thompson 1962), but used as part of rebus constructions for the homophonous lexeme *baah*, 'head, portrait' (see Proskouriakoff 1968: 248-249; Houston 1993: 129, 2012: 159; Zender 2004: 200). Since rebus can be deemed antiquated in some contexts, some researchers may prefer designating the use of this logogram in this context as "near polysemic homophony" (e.g., Boot 2010). From the preserved edge it seems clear that the logogram was not preceded by any other sign, and as such it is unlikely that it was prefixed by a pronominal marker and functioned as a noun in a possessive construction. On the contrary, it is most likely that the **BAH** logogram was used here in its adverbial capacity, since *baah* also carries the meaning of 'first, chief' (Houston 1993: 129; Houston et al. 2006: 72-81; Boot 2010: 256-263, 274-276). Below the main sign is an elongated sign that has as its
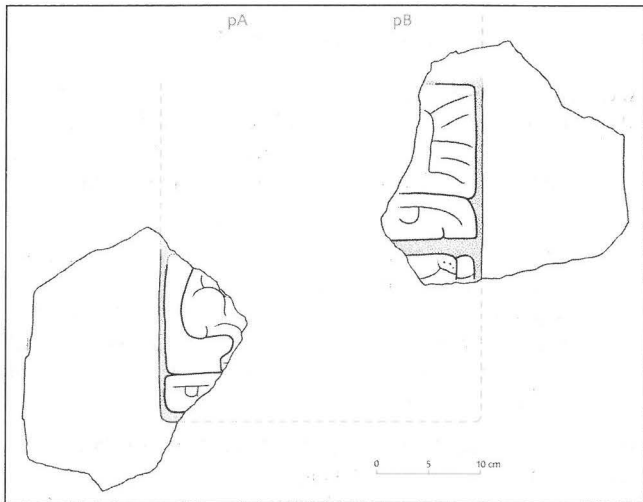
Fig. 4. Hypothetical reconstruction drawing of Monument 2 (drawing by C. Helmke).
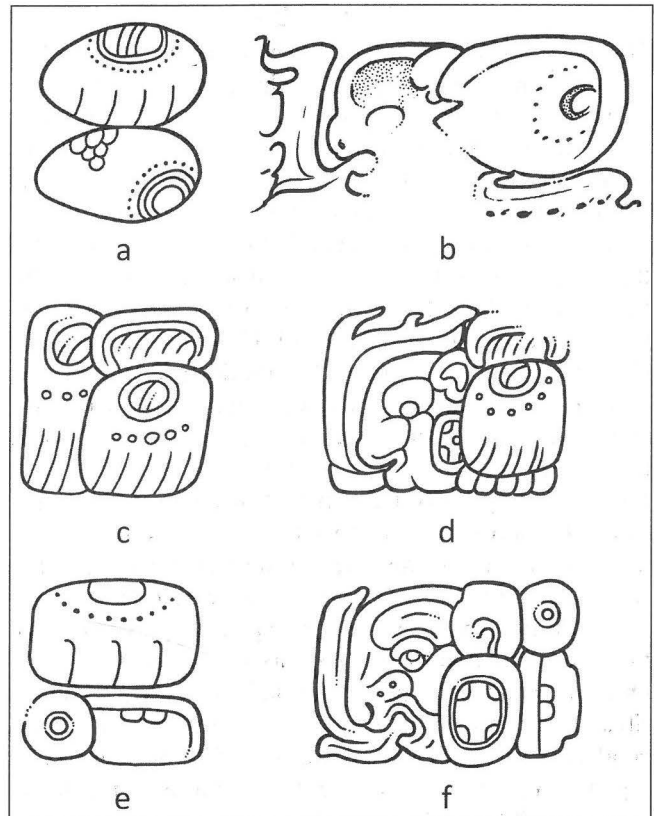

Fig. 5. Examples of titular expressions written variously with the syllabogram **ba** and the logogram **BAH**: *baah-tun*, lit. 'head-stone' a) Yaxchilan, Lintel 18 and b) K7042; *baah-kab*, lit. 'head-earth/land' c) Yaxchilan, Stela 11 and d) Bonampak, Stela 1; *baah-te'*, lit. 'head-tree/staff' e) Chichen Itza, Akab Dzib lintel and f) Dos Pilas, Hieroglyphic Stair 4, Step IV (drawings by C. Helmke).

diagnostic element the markings of the **TE'** 'tree, plant' logogram. This may either form part of the vegetal elements that occur in some graphic variants of the **BAH** sign, depicting gophers nibbling on plant material (see Figure 5b, 5d and 5f), or alternatively indicates that the subfix was the T87 variant of the logogram **TE'** (Thompson 1962: 446). Considering the occurrence of this glyph block towards the end of the text, it is likely that it helped to spell a titular construction, since these occur predominantly towards the end of clauses. As such, one possibility is that this glyph spelled the initial part of a title, such as the relatively common, and yet exalted *baah-kab* (lit. 'first of the land' ~ 'chief'), although it is exceedingly rare that this title is written with the gopher head, since it is usually written syllabically as **ba-ka-ba** (Houston & Stuart 1998; Kettunen and Helmke 2010: 31) (Figure 5c-d). Alternatively, and accounting for the possible **TE'** logogram, it may well just record the title *baah-te'* (Figure 5e-f). Quite literally this title can be translated as 'first-tree', but one alternative is that it should be understood as 'first-staff' based on captions to iconographic scenes depicting possible bailiffs or heralds (Houston 2008) and analogies to central Mexican martial titles (Alfonso Lacadena pers. comm. 2006). The occurrence of this title in the Bonampak murals alongside *baah-pakal* 'first-shield' and *baah-took'* 'first-flint', all suggest that the *baahte'* title was one borne by martial officers (see Houston 2012: 165-166; but see also Houston 2008). As a result, it would seem that the protagonist of the text on Monument 2 bore an exalted title, possibly *baahkab* although *baahte'* appears as a more likely candidate.

Of the other glyph blocks remaining in column pB, only little can be said. The first is composed of the right portion of a main sign, quite possibly a head variant. The top edge is partially preserved revealing that no superfix was present. Below the main sign is what we assume to be a phonetic complement, written with the syllabogram **na**. As such this limits the possible identifications of the main sign, since it implies that it is a logogram ending in –*n*. Based on the remaining features no secure identification of the main sign can be provided. Nevertheless, one tentative possibility is that the main sign once depicted the simplified profile of the youthful maize deity known as *Ajan* (T1000h ~ T1006; see Thompson 1962; Zender 2014; Stone and Zender 2011:21-22), assuming that the stacked lines along the back represent the leaves and husks of maize that are so characteristic of this sign. Whereas this is the name of a deity, when it occurs in the glyphic corpus it tends to appear as part of anthroponyms, and the names of royalty in particular, and also as part of post-mortem names (see Colas 2009). If the identification of this glyph block is correct and it is equally true that this is a recorded part of a name, then syntactically it stands to reason that the name preceded the title, since that is the basic word order of the Classic Ch'olan recorded in the glyphic corpus (Lacadena 2010). The reconstruction of the panel and the placement of the fragments relative to each other are certainly in keeping with these interpretations. Unfortunately, the anthroponyms involving the segment *Ajan* are exceedingly rare and as such the text of Monument 2 appears to refer to a heretofore unknown individual. What remains of the glyph block below the putative *Ajan* is so little that nothing can be said with any confidence.

In summary, the surviving portions of Monument 2 appear to record the end of a glyphic clause and parts of the name and titles of the protagonist of the text, or at least the subject of the sentence. Using Monument 1 as well as the *tableritos* of Palenque as analogues, the missing portion of the text of Monument 2 would have included a date, presumably written as a Calendar Round, followed by a verb, probably recording the forming and/or dedication of the panel, followed by the initial portion of the anthroponym of the individual credited with the erection of this panel. Whereas these are plausible hypotheses, without additional fragments of Monument 2 these suggestions will remain in the realm of conjecture.

115

Final Thoughts

The discovery of a second carved monument at Tipan Chen Uitz reaffirms the importance of this site and allows us to appreciate the meaning of this site within this little known area of the Maya world. Based on present evidence, the carved monuments of Tipan Chen Uitz can be dated to the final decades of the seventh century and the first few decades of the eighth (see also Andres et al. 2014: 58-59), meaning that these are squarely Late Classic, which is at odds with the greater pattern of the Belize Valley area wherein carved monuments predominantly date to the Early Classic and the Terminal Classic (Helmke et al. 2003). Thus, the dearth of Late Classic monuments has been one of the defining characteristics of the area, and Tipan Chen Uitz exhibits precisely the opposite trend. While the factors responsible for this difference require further investigations, the presence of Late Classic monuments at Tipan Chen Uitz may well imply a degree of autonomy not seen at other nearby sites, as we have suggested elsewhere (Andres et al. 2014; Helmke and Awe 2014).

In addition, the discovery of two glyphic texts in association with the royal palace speaks of a period wherein the ruling elite retreated to the confines of their courts, within which rituals progressively became more and more exclusive affairs, conducted away from the prying eyes of the populace. This is part of a broader pattern evident across the Maya Lowlands, arguably reinforced by the built environment, the advent of *audiencia* structures, and increasingly limited access to epicentral architecture (Andres 2005; Awe 2009). The creation of texts in private contexts is a contemporaneous pattern that has also been documented at Caracol and Xunantunich. At both of these sites, texts are dedicated within palaces after AD 670, and those at the summit of the Caana at Caracol were eventually concealed and engulfed by later architecture (Grube 1994: 102-104). In contrast, Panel 1 at Xunantunich was ultimately torn from its original context and smashed to pieces, its fragments scattered widely (Helmke et al. 2010: 98-107). Significantly, the wilful destruction of carved monuments *within* royal palaces speaks of a period of socio-political instability and restructuration, and precisely the same type of actions can be inferred for Tipan Chen Uitz since Monument 2 has suffered the same ill-treatment as Panel 1 of Xunantunich. We hope that future investigations at the site will yield additional fragments of the two monuments already discovered as well as other carved monuments, since these will allow us to flesh out the ebb and flow of Tipan's history.

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RESUMEN: En este trabajo se presenta un análisis de Monumento 2, descubierto en 2013 por el Central Belize Archaeological Survey en el sitio arqueológico de Tipan Chen Uitz, en el distrito de Cayo de Belice occidental. Este monumento fue descubierto en un estado altamente fragmentado a lo largo de la escalera axial que conduce a la acrópolis palaciegas del sitio. Su contexto sugiere que el panel fue sujeto a destrucción intencional en el momento del abandono del sitio. El texto jeroglífico mal conservado de este panel se describe y se procura reconstruir su contexto textual original.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Der Beitrag präsentiert die Analyse von Monument 2 der archäologischen Stätte Tipan Chen Uitz im westlichen Cayo District von Belize, das im Jahr 2013 durch das Central Belize Archaeological Survey entdeckt wurde. Das Monument wurde in einem sehr fragmentarischen Zustand nahe der zentralen Treppe zur Palastakropolis der Stätte gefunden. Der Kontext deutet an, dass das Panel während der Aufgabe der Stätte intentional zerstört wurde. Der hieroglyphische Text ist nur schlecht erhalten. Die Inschriftenfragmente werden hier analysiert und gleichzeitig der Versuch unternommen, den originalen Textzusammenhang zu rekonstruieren.

117