



Glyph Dwellers

Report 40

May 2016

A New Drawing of the Denver Plaque

Matthew Looper
Yuriy Polyukhovych

Department of Art and Art History, California State University Chico

In May 2015, we were given the opportunity to photograph and study the important jade plaque in the collection of the Denver Art Museum (accession no. 30.2002; **Figs. 1-4**). This object has been discussed before (Grube and Martin 2001:II-38; Mora-Marín 2010; Reents-Budet and Fields 1987; Wanyerka 2001), and our interpretation of the text follows that of Nikolai Grube and Simon Martin to a large extent. We do, however, have some observations regarding specific glyphs. The plaque inscription does not include any dates; however, based on the style of its text and image, a date during the first half of the fifth century CE seems likely.

Many of the signs used on the plaque are familiar; however, the precise content of the inscription has been difficult to discern. The plaque features three columns of text; one on the front, adjacent to the figure, and two on the back. The text that accompanies the figure begins with the expression *ubaah ujuuntahn*, "it is the image/display of his/her cherished one(s)" (A1-A2), which typically introduces the name of the mother of the protagonist. However, here the next two blocks (A3-A4) are *ux al k'uh*, possibly "three speaking? gods." Logically, the following blocks (A5-A9) should name the three gods. These include an unclear sign (**ti** or **hi**) superfixed to what is likely the feline head **HIX** (A5), an unknown deity head (A6), then K'inich Kokaaj Muut Ajaw (A7-A9). We suggest that the A5 and A6 name the first two gods, while K'inich Kokaaj Muut Ajaw is the third deity, probably an aspect of the Principal Bird Deity. At Palenque, *ujuuntahn* alone is used to relate lists of gods to a ruler (see Temple of the Inscriptions, Middle Panel, F7, and West Panel, A1, Temple of the Cross Jamb, Ap7, Temple of the Cross lintel, pF1). However, a parallel construction in which *baahaj ujuuntahn* "the cherished ones are imaged/displayed" introduces a list of patron deities may appear on El Encanto Stela 1 (see Grube and Martin 2001:II-46). The alternative explanation of column A, that it is a "child of mother" expression, is less likely, as the clause seems to function as an independent caption to the scene and is not clearly paired with a "child of father" expression.



Fig. 1. Jade plaque, front. Denver Art Museum 30.2002. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych, 2015.

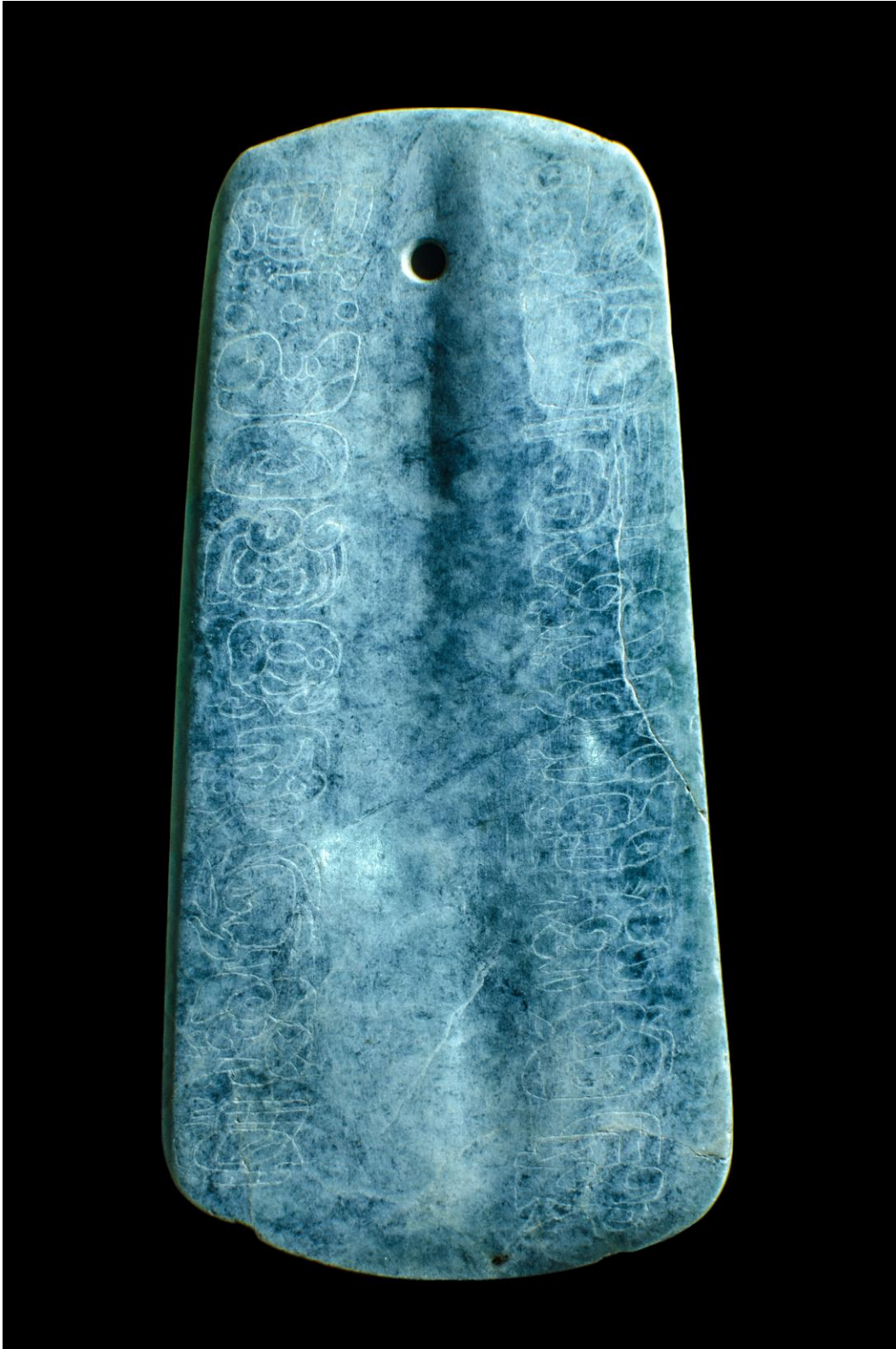
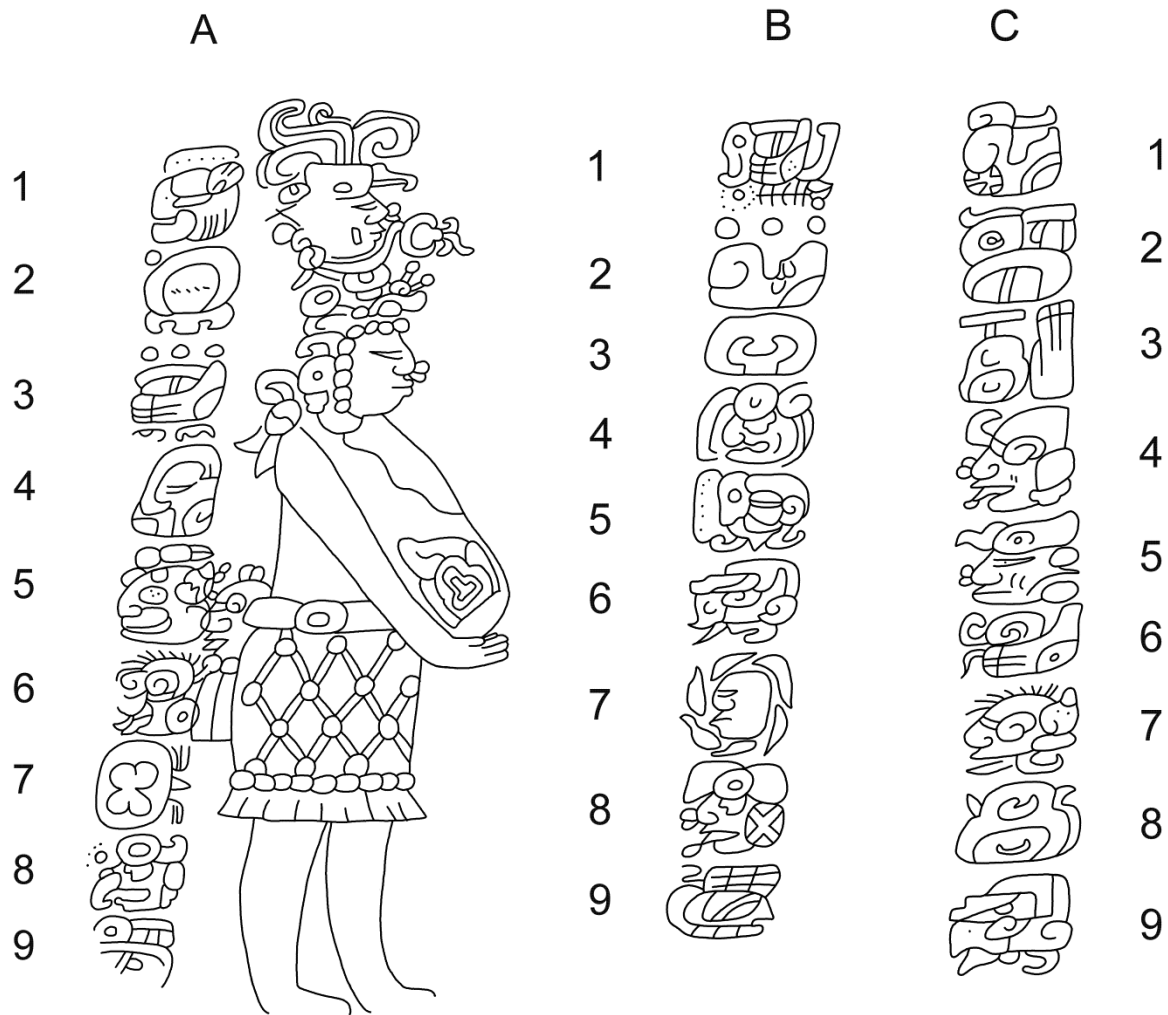


Fig. 2. Jade plaque, back. Denver Art Museum 30.2002. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych, 2015.



Figs. 3, 4. Jade Plaque, front and back. Denver Art Museum 30.2002. Drawing by Matthew Loper and Yuriy Polyukhovych, 2015.

Moving to the back of the plaque, it seems reasonable to assume that the two glyphic columns read as a continuous text, with column B read first, then column C. The first block of column B consists of a prefix (T238 **a**), then **AL**, followed by T181 **ja**, typically used in the script to form the passive verbal suffix *-aj*. The verb might therefore be *alaj*, possibly an unusual form of "said," perhaps "it was said" (see Grube and Martin, in Wanyerka 2001:87). Below this is T53 **ta**, here likely functioning as a preposition. The location of the event appears in the next two blocks. B2 is **UX WITZ**, followed by **CH'E'N(?)**, meaning "cave/territory." Grube and Martin (in Wanyerka 2001:88) identified this toponym as a simplified version of *ux witz'a'* "three mountain-waters," associated with Caracol. In the Maya script, there are a number of examples in which this toponym is truncated, lacking the final *(h)α'* (see, for example, Caracol Bone pin 27/185-1:334, Caracol Ballcourt Marker 3 E5, Copan Stela J east 22).

Next in the text comes a long series of names and/or titles. Just how many individuals are mentioned is debatable. At B4 is the glyph **MAM** "grandfather/ancestor(s)," followed by **u-WAW(?)** (B5), and then



EHB XOOK(?) (B6). This sequence of three blocks seems to be a personal name, perhaps associated with the event written at B1. The name is highly suggestive, as it contains the "reptile with tooth" grapheme possibly reading **WAW**, known to be a component of several early rulers of Tikal, notably Animal Skull (ruled around 593), and perhaps his predecessor Bird Claw, who ruled in the early sixth century CE (see Guenter 2002:303–310; Martin and Grube 2008:38–41). The **EHB XOOK(?)** combination is well known from many inscriptions as the principal element of the name Yax Ehb Xook, the founder of Tikal's Classic period dynasty of kings (see Martin and Grube 2008:26). Thus, the name and title sequence of this individual on the Denver plaque includes two elements that suggest his possible ties to the dynasty of Tikal. Indeed, it makes sense in the political context of the Early Classic for a person associated with Tikal to have acted at Caracol, since the Tikal ruler Wak Chan K'awiil oversaw the accession of a king of Caracol in 553 (see Martin and Grube 2008:39). Of course, shortly thereafter, Caracol was attacked by Tikal, which likely led to the defeat of Tikal, perhaps under the auspices of Calakmul (see Martin and Grube 2008:39, 89-90).

Next in this column is a glyph consisting of a human head surrounded by tadpoles (B7). This glyph seems to be the same as a sign that introduces the fathers of women on La Corona Panel 6 (the "Dallas Altar;" Martin 2008). A related grapheme, T831, read as **ATIK** by Erik Boot (2004; see also Martin 2008:6-7) is also used in the Palenque Temple of the Cross Tablet (E4) in an expression that suggest a translation as "child;" however, in this case the "children" are male gods. On the Denver plaque, however, this glyph may not have the same function, given that the glyphs that precede it do not seem to refer to females. We conclude, then, that the sign at B7 is yet another nominal or title, as are the next two blocks. These are **K'INICH** (B8) and a compound formed by an undeciphered wing with an emerging scroll over a possible turtle shell **AHK** (B9). The "scroll-wing" grapheme is very rare in the script, appearing in the Maya area on Copan Stela 63 (A3) and Tikal Stela 6 (A9).

Moving to column C, the first two blocks read *k'an witznal ajaw*, or "Ucanal lord" as observed by Martin and Grube (2001:II-38). This title is important, as it seems to indicate some connection between a person possibly from Tikal, Uyaw Ehb Xook, and a person from Ucanal, K'inich ? Ahk. If we are interpreting the text correctly, then this inscription records some sort of political connection between Caracol, Ucanal, and Tikal during the Early Classic period, expressed through names, titles, and ritual action.

The next two glyphs of column C (C3 and C4) are well known to epigraphers as nominals for the god GI of the Palenque triad (see Stuart 2005:121, fig. 90). Although undeciphered, this expression is not only used to refer to a god (as on Tikal Stela 31 A24-B24), but also as a title for females (as on Tikal Stela 3 and 6). On the Denver plaque, they may also be titles for a woman, named at C5 (Grube and Martin, in Wanyerka 2001:88-89). Her name glyph is composed of a possible female head (**IX**) surmounted by a bird with a slight crest and curved bill. A "star/Venus" T510 sign is located in the ear area of the head. As observed by Grube and Martin, this compound also appears as a component of the headdress of the figure depicted on the front of the plaque. In Maya art, it is common for rulers to carry their name glyphs in their headdresses (Houston and Stuart 1998:83).

Next, at C6 is a possible **ya** preceding **AL**. Both Grube and Martin (in Wanyerka 2001:89) and Mora-Marín (2010) entertained the possibility that this is a "child of mother" expression, though Grube and Martin concluded that it represents an unknown verb. We think that it may be another example of the use of **AL** to refer to an act of speaking, here by a different individual. The scroll-in-hand form of **AL** employed here is also used to represent the word "speak/say" in other Early Classic inscriptions, such as Tikal Stela 31 (B23). The name of this second individual is given in three glyph blocks: (C7) a sacrificial jaguar deity known from many other inscriptions, yet still undeciphered (T1058); (C8) a glyph we very



tentatively identify as an early example of "Foliated Ajaw" **UX YOP HU'N** (see Stuart 2012); and (C9) **EHB XOOK(?)**. So once again, the text mentions an individual whose name may express a connection to Tikal. In summary, the text on the back of the plaque may record two "speaking" events. The first involves perhaps three individuals, Uwaw Ehb Xook, K'inich ? Ahk, and Lady 'Bird'-Star, who is pictured on the front of the plaque. The second is a repetition of the act by another individual, 'Jaguar-god' Ux Yop Hu'n Ehb Xook. Such reenactments of ritual events are a common subject of Maya texts, often referenced using the term *kob*, as at Palenque (see Polyukhovych 2012:308, 310, 405–406, 464).

In addition to her nominal headdress, the figure on the front of the plaque wears a knee-length skirt decorated with beads arranged in a lattice design. Related "netted" garments appear frequently in Maya art and have been discussed extensively (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:466, note 56; Joyce 2000:80–81; Miller and Martin 2004:98; Proskouriakoff 1961:91–92; Schele and Miller 1986:71; Stone 1991:201–202). The full significance of the garment is impossible to cover within the scope of this paper, but in a forthcoming article,Looper argues that it is worn by various gods, including Maize gods, the Jaguar God of the Underworld, Water Serpents, and (possibly) the Moon Goddess, as well as by both male and female rulers who impersonate these deities (Looper n.d.). The bundle that this figure holds is intriguing, and is inscribed with a glyphic symbol composed of an inverted **IK'** "wind" sign, surrounded by foliage. Although more research is needed, it may be possible to suggest that this is an instance of the glyphic compound *ik'nal*, which appears in various inscriptions with reference to shell pendants (see Stuart 2005b:118). So perhaps this glyphic tag somehow refers to the precious contents of the bundle.

Front:

A1	u-BAAH	ubaah	it is her image/display
A2	1-TAHN	ujuuntahn	the cherished one of
A3	3 AL-la	ux al	three speaking?
A4	K'UH	k'uh	gods
A5	ti/hi?-HIX?	(Til?) Hix?	(Til?) Hix? [deity name?]
A6	?	?	? [deity name?]
A7	K'INICH	K'inich	K'inich [deity name]
A8	KOK/KOKAAJ MUUT	Kokaaj Muut	Kokaaj Muut [deity name]
A9	AJAW	Ajaw	Ajaw [deity name]

Back:

B1	a-AL-ja ta	alaj ta	it was said at
B2	3 WITZ	ux witzá'	Ux Witzá' [Caracol]
B3	CH'E'N?	ch'e'n?	cave/territory?



B4	MAM	mam	the ancestors?
B5	u-WAW?	Uwaw?	Uwaw?
B6	EHB XOOK?	Ehb Xook?	Ehb Xook?
B7	?	?	? [title?]
B8	K'INICH	K'inich	K'inich
B9	? AHK?	? Ahk?	? Ahk?
C1	K'AN WITZ-NAL	K'an Witznal	K'an Witznal [Ucanal]
C2	AJAW	ajaw	lord
C3	?	?	? [GI title]
C4	?	?	? [GI title]
C5	IX ? EK'?	Ix ? Ek'?	Lady ? Ek'? [personal name]
C6	ya?-AL	yal/yalajiiy?	he/she said it?
C7	?	?	?
C8	UX YOP HU'N?	Ux Yop Hu'n?	Ux Yop Hu'n?
C9	EHB XOOK?	Ehb Xook?	Ehb' Xook?

Acknowledgment: We would like to thank Margeret Young-Sanchez for allowing us to examine and photograph this object.

References

Boot, Erik

2004 Kerr No. 4546 and a Reference to an Avian Manifestation of the Creator God Itzamnaj.
<http://www.mayavase.com/Kerr4546.pdf>.

Freidel, David A., Linda Schele, and Joy Parker

1993 *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

Grube, Nikolai, and Simon Martin

2001 *Notebook for the XXVth Maya Hieroglyphic Forum at Texas: The Coming of Kings: Writing and Dynastic Kingship in the Maya Area Between the Late Preclassic and the Early Classic*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin.



Guenter, Stanley P.

2002 Under a Falling Star: The Hiatus at Tikal. M.A. thesis, La Trobe University.

Houston, Stephen D., and David Stuart

1998 The Ancient Maya Self: Personhood and Portraiture in the Classic Period. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 33: 73–101.

Joyce, Rosemary A.

2000 *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Looper, Matthew

n.d. Celestial Raiment: Beaded Net Garments in Classic Maya Art. In *Dressing the Part: Power, Dress, Gender, and Representation in the Pre-Columbian Americas*. Billie Follensbee and Sarahh Scher, eds. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Martin, Simon

2008 Wives and Daughters on the Dallas Altar. Mesoweb Articles. <http://mesoweb.com/articles/author.html> Accessed 02/29/12.

Martin, Simon, and Nikolai Grube

2008 *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*. 2nd edition. London: Thames and Hudson.

Miller, Mary Ellen, and Simon Martin

2004 *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya*. [San Francisco]; New York: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Thames & Hudson.

Mora-Marín, David F.

2010 Incised Belt Plaque. In *Nature and Spirit: Ancient Costa Rican Treasures in the Mayer Collection at the Denver Art Museum*. Margaret Young-Sanchez, ed. Pp. 184–185. Denver: Denver Art Museum.

Polyukhovych, Yuriy

2012 Polityko-Dynastychna Istoriya Derzhavy Maya Baikal' Za Materialamy Korpusu Epigrafichnykh Dzherel Palenke (Lakamkha') [Political and Dynastic History of the Maya State of Baikal According to the Sources of the Epigraphic Corpus of Palenque (Lakamha')]. Ph.D. dissertation, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Proskouriakoff, Tatiana

1961 Portraits of Women in Maya Art. In *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*. Samuel K. Lothrop, ed. Pp. 81–89. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Reents-Budet, Dorie, and Virginia M. Fields

1987 Insised Classic Maya Jades and Slate Disks from Costa Rica. Paper presented at the Denver Jade Conference, Denver.



Schele, Linda, and Mary Ellen Miller

1986 *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*. Fort Worth: Kimball Art Museum.

Stone, Andrea

1991 Aspects of Impersonation in Classic Maya Art. In *Sixth Palenque Round Table, 1986*, Palenque Round Table Series. Virginia M. Fields, ed. Pp. 194–202. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Stuart, David

2005a *The Inscriptions from Temple XIX at Palenque: A Commentary*. San Francisco: Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute.

2005b *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum, March 11–16, 2005*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin, Department of Art and Art History.

2012 The Name of Paper: The Mythology of Crowning and Royal Nomenclature on Palenque's Palace Tablet. In *Maya Archaeology 2*. Charles Golden, Stephen Houston, and Joel Skidmore, eds. Pp. 116–142. San Francisco: Precolumbia Mesoweb Press.

Wanyerka, Phil, ed.

2001 The Proceedings of the Maya Hieroglyphic Workshop, March 10-11, 2001, University of Texas at Austin. Manuscript.



Glyph Dwellers is an occasional publication of the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project at California State University, Chico, California. Its purpose is to make available recent discoveries about ancient Maya culture, history, iconography, and Mayan historical linguistics deriving from the project.

Funding for the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, grants #RT21365-92, RT21608-94, PA22844-96, the National Science Foundation, grants #SBR9710961 and IBSS1328928, the Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis, and the Department of Art and Art History, California State University, Chico.

(c) 2016 Matthew G. Looper. All rights reserved. Written material and artwork appearing in these reports may not be republished or duplicated for profit. Citation of more than one paragraph requires written permission of the publisher. No copies of this work may be distributed electronically, in whole or in part, without express written permission from the publisher.

ISSN 1097-3737