

**Preliminary Transcription and Photo Composite
of the Palenque House E Painted Text
By Carl D. Callaway**

Abstract

This report provides a preliminary transcription of the Palenque House E Painted Text, and includes a partial reconstruction of the Initial Series date that starts the passage. The text itself is located in House E and sits directly above the Oval Tablet. It consists of two horizontal bands of glyphs that were painted to commemorate the reign of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Naab III (721–736 AD). The report also provides a new photo composite of the text by merging three photographs taken by Alfred P. Maudslay in 1891 and two photos by Linda Schele in 1973. Linkage of the incomplete records of the Maudslay and Schele photos was initially determined with the aid of Merle Greene Robertson's 1971 drawing and later confirmed by a detailed comparison study of the photos.

Location and Present Condition

The Palenque House E painted text is situated on the rear wall of the western corridor just above the Oval Tablet and below the vault spring (figure 1 and 2). It consists of two horizontal rows of glyphs roughly three meters long. Today, sections of the text are badly damaged or completely effaced (figure 28). Fortunately photographs taken by Alfred P. Maudslay in 1891 (figure 3–5) and Linda Schele in 1973 (figure 6–25), record many details now lost. The photos reveal four distinct passages (each separated by dates and intervening distance numbers) that were written in commemoration of the accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Naab III in 721 AD¹. Figure 26–27 shows a modern photo composite of the entire text with a preliminary number and lettering system.

Figure 1

► Palenque Palace House E photographed on the west side from the tower courtyard. The painted text panel is situated on the wall above the Oval Tablet directly through the central doorway and is currently protected from public access by a steel grating. - Elaine Schele photo.



Figure 2

▼ Photo illustration showing the location of the painted text panel above the Oval Tablet. This image was composited from several photos taken through openings in the doorway grating since direct access to the wall was not possible at the time of photography. Proportions and scale are only approximate. - Elaine Schele photos.



Previous References to the Text

It was Alfred P. Maudslay who was the first to record and comment upon the text (Maudslay 1889–1902). He took three photographs (figure 3–5) of the painting yet published only one of these plates (Plate XLII., b in his *Biologia Centrali-Americana Vol. IV*)². Here is Maudslay's short description of the painting:

. . . Extending along the wall just beneath the spring of the roof, a long double line of glyphs had been painted in black on plaster. This inscription had subsequently been covered over by another layer of plaster which had fallen away in small patches. By carefully chipping away this top layer more of the glyphs were brought to light, and a photograph of part of the inscription is given . . . (Maudslay 1889–1902:Vol. IV, pp. 23).

Eduard Seler and his wife visited Palenque in 1911. Seler published a hand sketch of the painted text in his work *Beobachtungen und Studien in den Ruinen von Palenque* (1915: figure. 123). Importantly, his drawing records portions of the opening Long Count date (see figure 29), a section that Maudslay unfortunately did not photograph (or if he did the photos were subsequently lost). Speaking of these glyphs as well as those along the north side of the second door, Seler wrote:

*These glyphs are unfortunately not preserved in complete rows anywhere, but it is clear that they are closely related in style and type of writing to certain Maya manuscripts, namely the Dresden Codex and the Paris Codex Perez . . . The glyphs forming the frieze on the rear wall in the west wall clearly concern dates and time periods. Besides dates of days, like *bolon ik*, “nine wind”, at the right side of the lower row in Figure 123d, particularly the glyph *tun*, representing the period of 360 days occurs frequently in combination with bars and dots meaning five and one. But a few glyphs can be determined, such as, for instance, the glyph in the lower row of Figure 123e of the dog falling from the sky (the lightning animal).*

These glyphs, as I mentioned, were brought to light by Maudslay's removal of a surface stucco layer that apparently bore no figure and glyph paintings. But apart from this covering coat, the layer with the glyphs seems to be the most recent wall covering (translated by Gisela Morgner, see Seler 1976:73).

Merle Greene Robertson made a drawing of the painted text in 1971 (Personal Communication, November 2007) of which she later published (figure 30) in *The Sculpture Of Palenque Vol. II: The Early Buildings Of The Palace And Wall Paintings* (see Greene Robertson 1985:figure 103). She noted that Schele and Mathews believed that the text recorded data concerning Ahkal Mo' Naab II (then known as Chacal II). In 1973, Linda Schele photographed (figure 6–25) portions of the painted text. Linda Schele also made sketches (the date of which are unknown) of the text (figure 31). These drawings are now recorded in the FAMSI Schele Archive as drawings number 208 and 209 (Schele n.d.). By 1973, the original stucco surface that held the glyphs was falling off the wall and the glyphs were covered with mold and grime. Despite the weathering, the Schele

photos show details not captured by any drawing. In 1991, Karl Herbert Mayer took a photograph of a portion of the text showing glyph blocks pL1–pR2 (Personal Communication, November 2007). During May 13–14, 2002, multi-spectral photos of portions of the text were taken by Gene A. Aware. (Alfonso Morales, Personal Communication 2007). These photos remain unpublished.

Recently, David Stuart (2005:85) published all three of Maudslay's original photos of the text. In the same work, he added a partial drawing illustrating the name of the Triad Progenitor (glyph blocks pQ2–pS1) (Stuart 2005:179). Also in 2006, Stuart published a second sketch of glyph blocks pF1–pI1 while commenting:

One of the most important mythological texts at Palenque is the painted band of glyphs in House E, running above the Oval Palace Tablet. Much of it is damaged, but it once recorded at least one event of the deep past, falling several hundred thousand years after the Temple XIV narrative. None of the dates can be reconstructed as of yet but one participant looks to be the Sun God, or some aspect of him. The distant event is then linked to the accession of the Triad Progenitor and ultimately to the accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Nahb who commissioned the text (Stuart 2006:100).

Undoubtedly, more unpublished photos and drawings were made of the painted text by a visitor or scholar. The author hopes that future research will reveal new sources for comparison and study.



Figure 3 – 1891 left section photograph of the Palenque House E painted text panel by Alfred Maudslay. Stucco sculptural elements surrounding the Oval Tablet are visible in this photo. *Photo courtesy of the British Museum.*



Figure 4 – 1891 center section photograph of the Palenque House E painted text panel by Alfred Maudslay. A photo composite made from these three photos and two 1973 Linda Schele photos is presented in this paper (figure 27 and also available as a larger separate downloadable pdf file) for a continuous view of the nearly complete text passage. *Photo courtesy of the British Museum.*

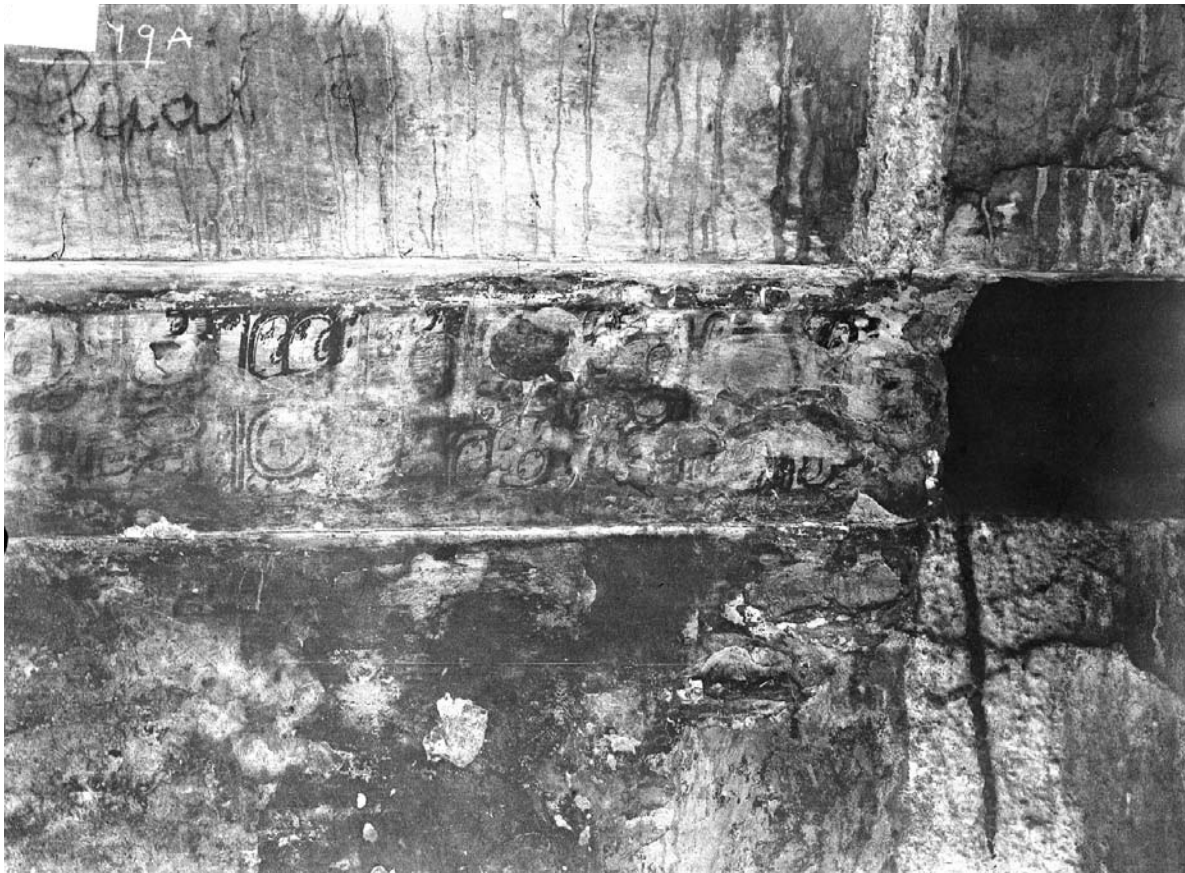


Figure 5 – 1891 right section photograph of the Palenque House E painted text panel by Alfred Maudslay.
Photo courtesy of the British Museum.



Figure 6 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of the Long Count section. Dotted line indicates approximate location where Schele and Maudslay photos match up. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 7 – Color-adjusted and tonal-balanced version of figure 6 above. Color corrections made by personal judgement. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 8 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of closer view of long count. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 9 – Color-adjusted version of figure 8 above. Fragments of at least one subsequent plaster layer as well as partial and complete plaster losses complicate the reading. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 10 – 1973 Linda Schele detail slide photo of the PIKTUN glyph. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 11 – Color-adjusted version of figure 10 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 12 – 1973 Linda Schele detail slide photo of the K'ATUN glyph. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 13 – Color-adjusted version of figure 12 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 14 – 1973 Linda Schele detail slide photo of the TUN glyph. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 15 – Color-adjusted version of figure 14 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 16 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of the central section of the text panel. A large plaster void at bottom left shows a loss of glyphs that were still covered by an outer plaster layer in Maudslay's photographs. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 17 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of detail view of glyph columns pK, pL and pM. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 18 – Color-corrected version of figure 17 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 19 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of detail view of glyph columns pM and pN. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 20 – Color-corrected version of figure 19 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 21 – Color-adjusted version of Figure 16 photo on previous page. - *Linda Schele photo.*

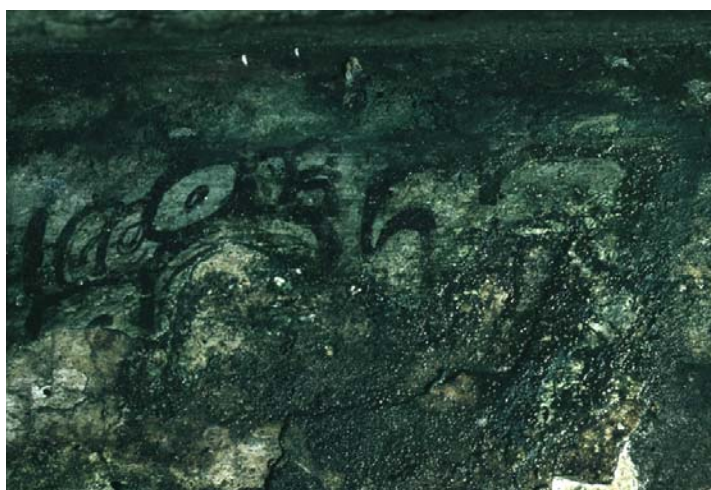


Figure 22 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of detail view of glyph columns pO and pP. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 23 – Color-corrected version of figure 22 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 24 – 1973 Linda Schele slide photo of detail view of glyph columns pA', and pB'. - *Linda Schele photo.*



Figure 25 – Color-corrected version of figure 24 photo at left. - *Linda Schele photo.*

A New Composite Photo of the House E Painted Text

A composite image to accompany this report has been made from the known photographic studies of the House E Painted Text in order to provide a continuous view of nearly the entire glyph panel. Linkage of the incomplete records of the Maudslay and Schele photos was initially determined with the aid of Merle Greene Robertson's 1971 drawing and later confirmed by detailed comparison study of the photos. The composite is included in a single page segmented format as figure 27 in this report but is more easily viewed as a larger separate pdf file available for download. The composite also provides a preliminary number and lettering system ranging from pA1–pD'2.

A Short Summary of the Painted Text³

Passage I (glyph blocks pA1– pI2) begins with a Long Count set deep into the mythic past of the previous era. As we shall see, several parts of this initial Long Count may be mathematically reconstructed from the given data. The event associated with the Long Count is lost. As noted above, a participant in the event may be the Sun God or an aspect of him (Stuart 2006:100). Passage II (glyph blocks pJ1–pS2) records the accession of the Triad Progenitor on 2.0.0.10.2. 9 Ik' Seating of Sak. Passage III (glyph blocks pT1–pU2) may record a conjuring event by the Triad Progenitor one WINAL before or after his accession. Passage IV (glyph blocks pU2–pD'2) records the accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Naab on 9.14.10.4.2. 9 Ik' 5 K'ayab.⁴

Reconstructing the Initial Series Date

Information taken from Seler's 1911 drawing and Schele's 1973 photos allow for the following reconstruction of the opening LC from Passage I:

K	P	B	K	T	W	K
?	10	?	2	12	?	?

One hopes that the missing parts of this Long Count can be reconstructed via calculations. The LC reconstruction relies on the fact that parts of the distance number at the start of Passage II (glyph blocks pJ1–pM1) are clearly visible and the event that follows (glyph blocks pM2–pS2) on 9 Ik' Seating of Sak (the Triad Progenitor's accession), is a previously known Long Count date of 2.0.0.10.2. 9 Ik' 0 Sak. The same date is also recorded on Palenque's Temple XIX Text and Temple XVIII jambs (Stuart 2005:84).

To calculate the opening Long Count date, one "should" be able to subtract the intervening distance number from the Triad Progenitor's accession on 2.0.0.10.2: 9 Ik' 0 Sak. Here is the basic equation:

$$(\text{Accession of T.P.}) - (\text{DN}) = (\text{LC})$$

Below, is a “plausible” and partial reconstruction given the information so far: (Note: numbers within parentheses (#) equal mathematically reconstructed values while underlined numbers # represent known values):

K	P	B	K	T	W	K	
(13.)	(13.)	<u>2.</u>	<u>0.</u>	<u>0.</u>	<u>10.</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9 IK' 0 Sak</u> (Access. of T.P.)
<u>1.</u>	<u>2.</u>	(17.?) (18.?) (19.?)	(17.)	<u>11.</u>	<u>13.</u>	<u>6?</u> – <u>5?</u>	(subtract) (Distance Number)
(11?.)	<u>10.</u>	(4.?) (3.?) (2.?)	<u>2.</u>	(8?)	(14.?)	(16?) (17?)	(? KIB) (Haab?) (LC Date) (?KABAN) (Haab?)

Our plausible reconstruction produces immediate disagreements between the mathematical reconstruction of the opening LC coefficients of Passage I and the actual recorded coefficients. This is especially true between the recorded LC TUN value of 12. The drawing by Eduard Seler (the earliest drawing, and thus, recording of the text with the least amount of data loss) records a clear LC Tun value of 12 (see figure 29) and not the mathematically reconstructed value of 8. On the other hand, the recorded and calculated values of the PIKTUN coefficients agree perfectly well. So, the disagreement between the TUN values strongly infers that an intervening date (one that counts forward or backward from the opening LC) must exist somewhere between glyph blocks pF2–pI2. Therefore, a full reconstruction of the opening LC is not possible given the current data.

The Photo Composite

The photo composite of the House E Painted Text was created for illustrative purposes to give an overall view of the complete glyph passage. However, the composite is not intended to be taken as a precise archaeological recording since it was made from several photos taken at different times and angles without onsite measurements or reference points. The individual photos have been squared, skewed, stretched and squeezed as necessary to fit them together into a reasonably accurate recreation of the original glyph text on the wall. Although the average height of the glyph panel is known to be about 24 cm, the width is only estimated here to be about 10 ft. wide, roughly corresponding to the width of the doorway lintel across the hallway. This is based on the scale of Maudslay's elevation drawing of House E, Merle Greene Robertson's drawing of the Oval Tablet wall, and an onsite measurement by Elaine Schele of 94 inches square for the doorway (a steel grating blocking the doorway bars access to the oval tablet wall for an accurate measurement).

The composite was made from three photos taken by Alfred Maudslay in 1891 combined with two photos taken by Linda Schele in 1973. Although the glyph panel has irregularities in height and would not conform to a horizontal laser line, for practical presentation purposes the component photos of this composite have been squared, skewed, and leveled to varying degrees so some glyphs may appear slightly more perpendicular than in actuality. Without accurate reference measurements to work from, the width-to-height ratios of sections of glyphs had to be determined by personal judgment. The merge point where the Maudslay and Schele photos match up was determined from the few surviving glyph fragments visible in the Schele photos common to both, as well as by comparing the shapes of clumps of plaster layers in the Maudslay photo to corresponding plaster vacancies in the Schele photos. This was confirmed by comparison to the few surviving reference features still visible in recent photos taken by Elaine Schele. The photos were joined precisely with a photo-merging function of Adobe Photoshop so no information was lost or added at the joints, but further scaling and skewing had to be done by personal judgment. Tonal and color adjustments were made digitally to the Maudslay and Schele photos in an attempt to improve the at-a-glance readability of the entire glyph passage. Individual photos were first adjusted for an overall balance of lights and darks before merging them together where they overlapped. Regional adjustments were then made to dark and light areas of the composite image with digital techniques analogous to the dodging and burning process used in traditional darkroom photography. This compensates for the problems caused where an overall brightening of the dark sections of a photo causes the lighter areas to get too bright and lose information. Care was taken to only attempt to bolster and enhance subtle areas of the image and not to alter the information subjectively. Color adjustments were made to the Schele photos to diminish the heavy dark green cast the original slides now have. This also could only be done by personal judgment. Before making any conclusions or judgments of glyph information from this composite image, it would be important to compare the elements of study to their appearance in the original unaltered photos.

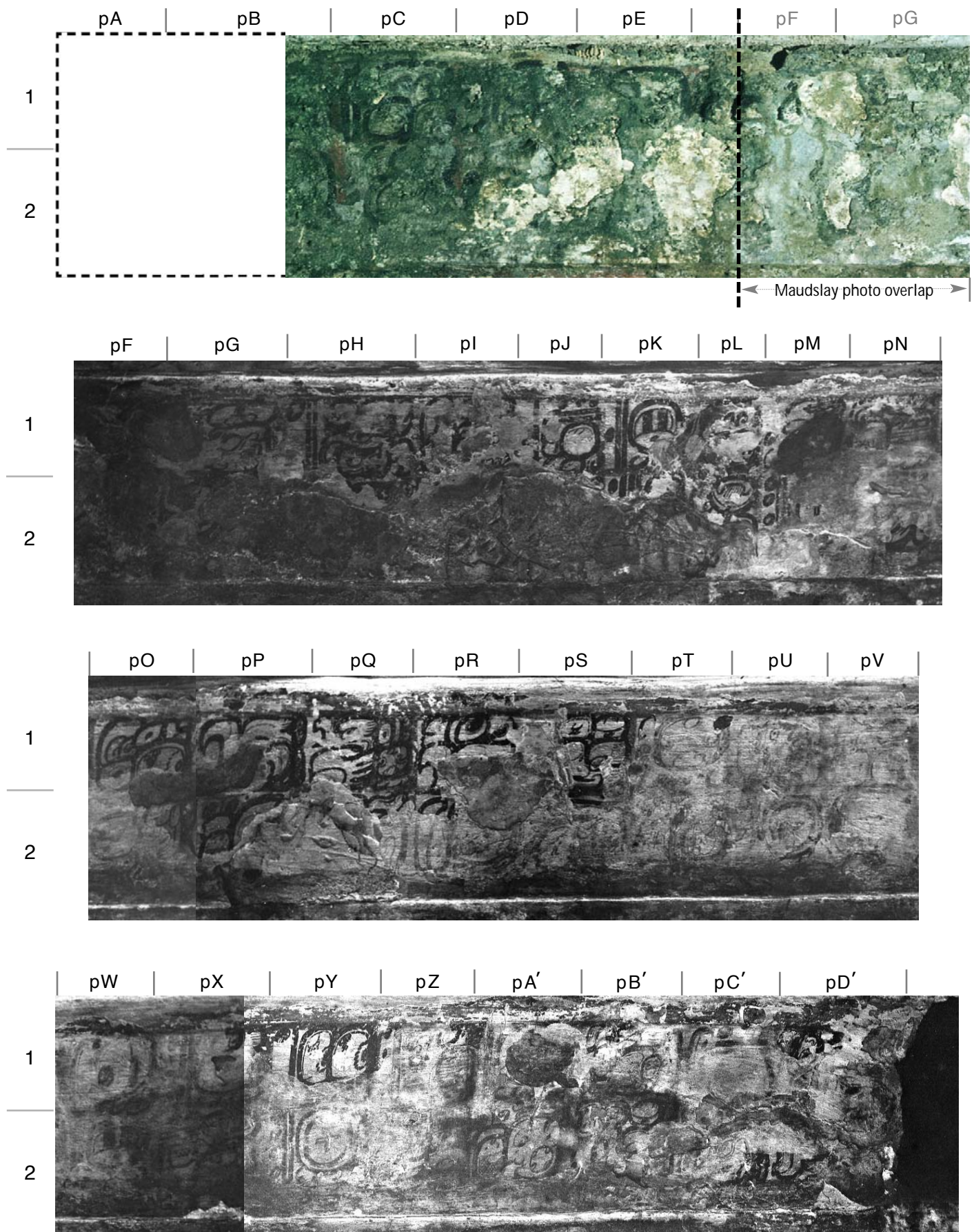
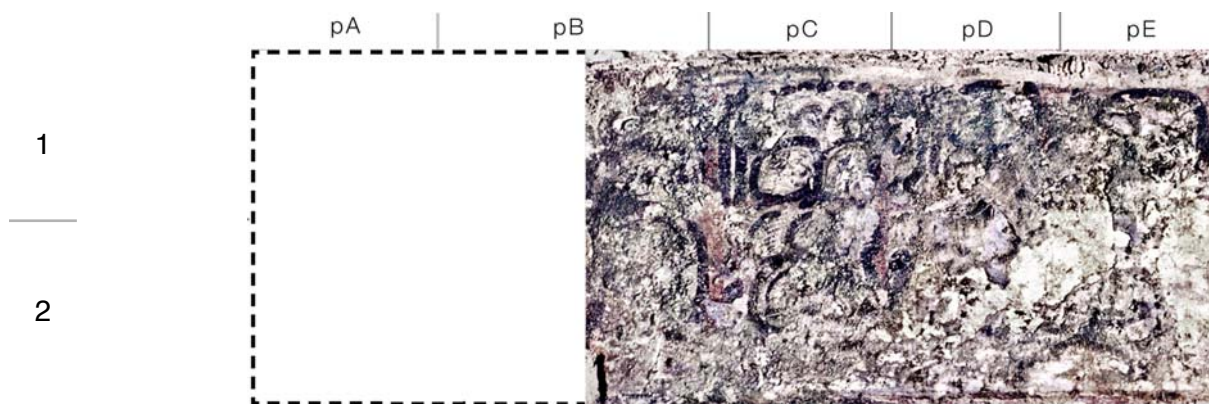
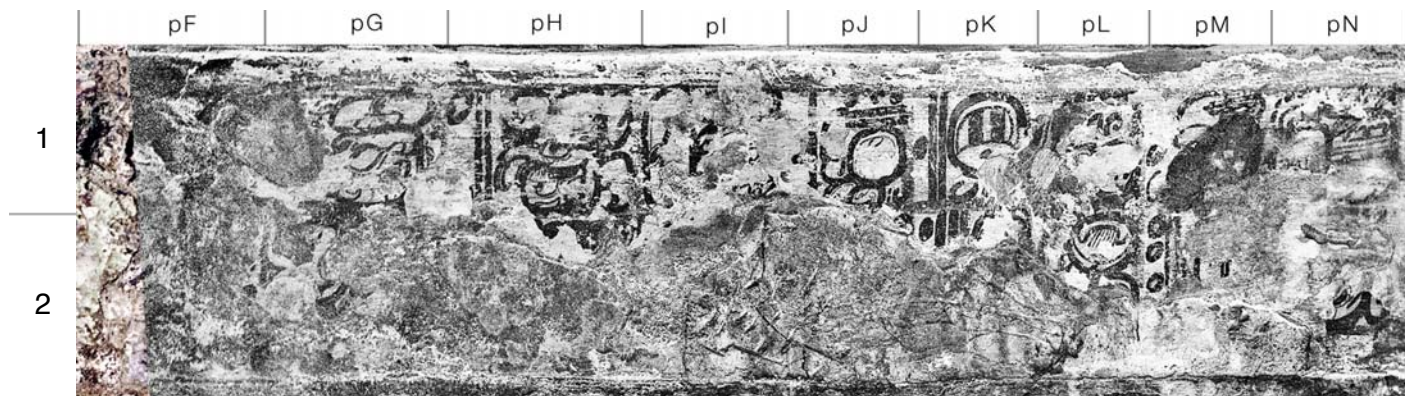


Figure 26 – **Original unaltered Schele and Maudslay photos**

Linda Schele photos courtesy of David and Elaine Schele. Alfred Maudslay photos courtesy of the British Museum.



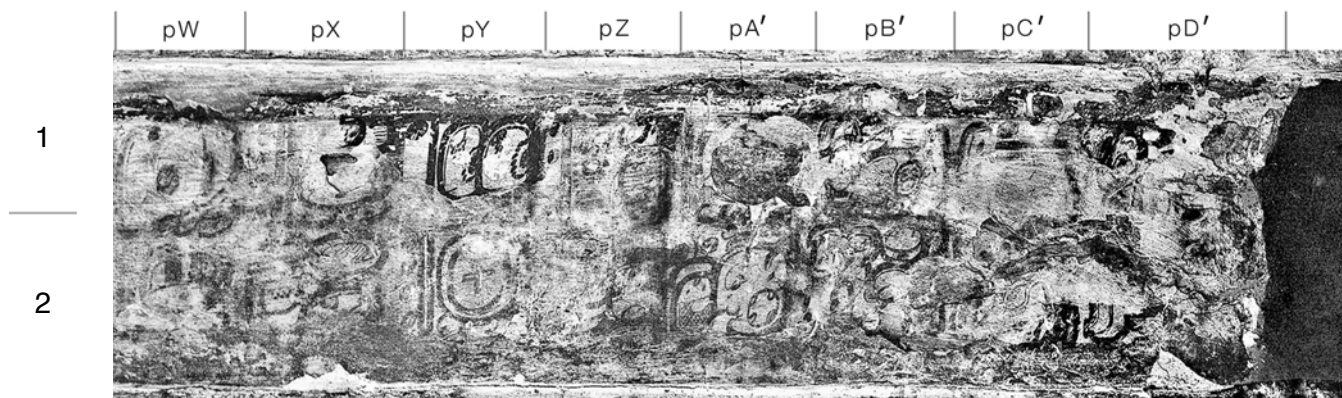
► **Passage I** – An opening Long Count and mythic event from the previous era



► **Passage II** – The accession of the Triad Progenitor on 2.0.0.10.2 9 Ik' Seating of Sak



► **Passage III** – A conjuring event by the Triad Progenitor one WINAL before or after his accession?



► **Passage IV** – The accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Naab III on 9.14.10.4.2 9 Ik' 5 K'ayab

Figure 27 – **Composite of Schele and Maudslay photos with color and tonal adjustments**

This photo composite is also available in a larger continuous format as a separate downloadable pdf file.

Linda Schele Photo courtesy of David and Elaine Schele. Alfred Maudslay photos courtesy of the British Museum.

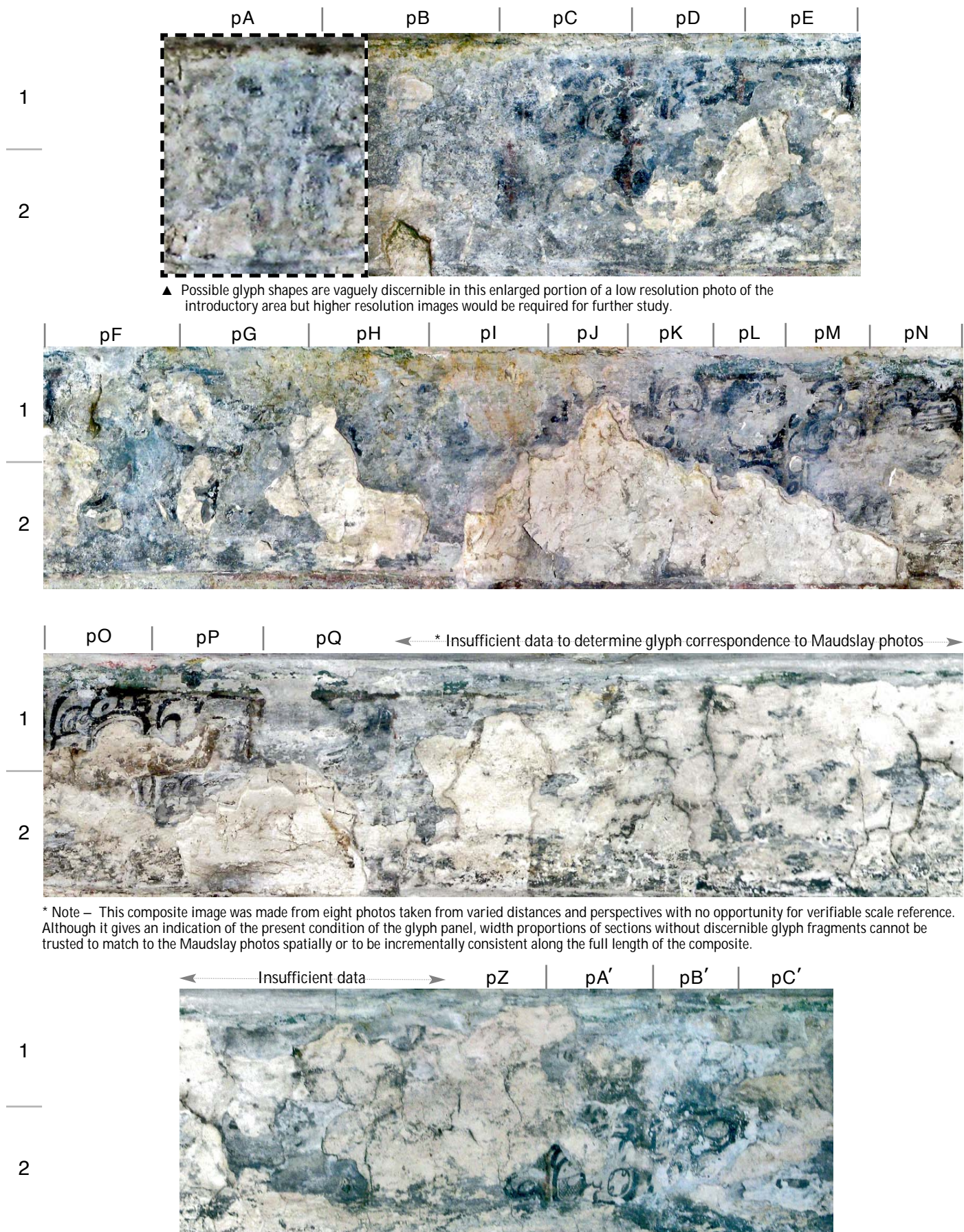


Figure 28 – **Photo composite of the present day condition of the House E painted text panel**

Photos courtesy of Elaine Schele.

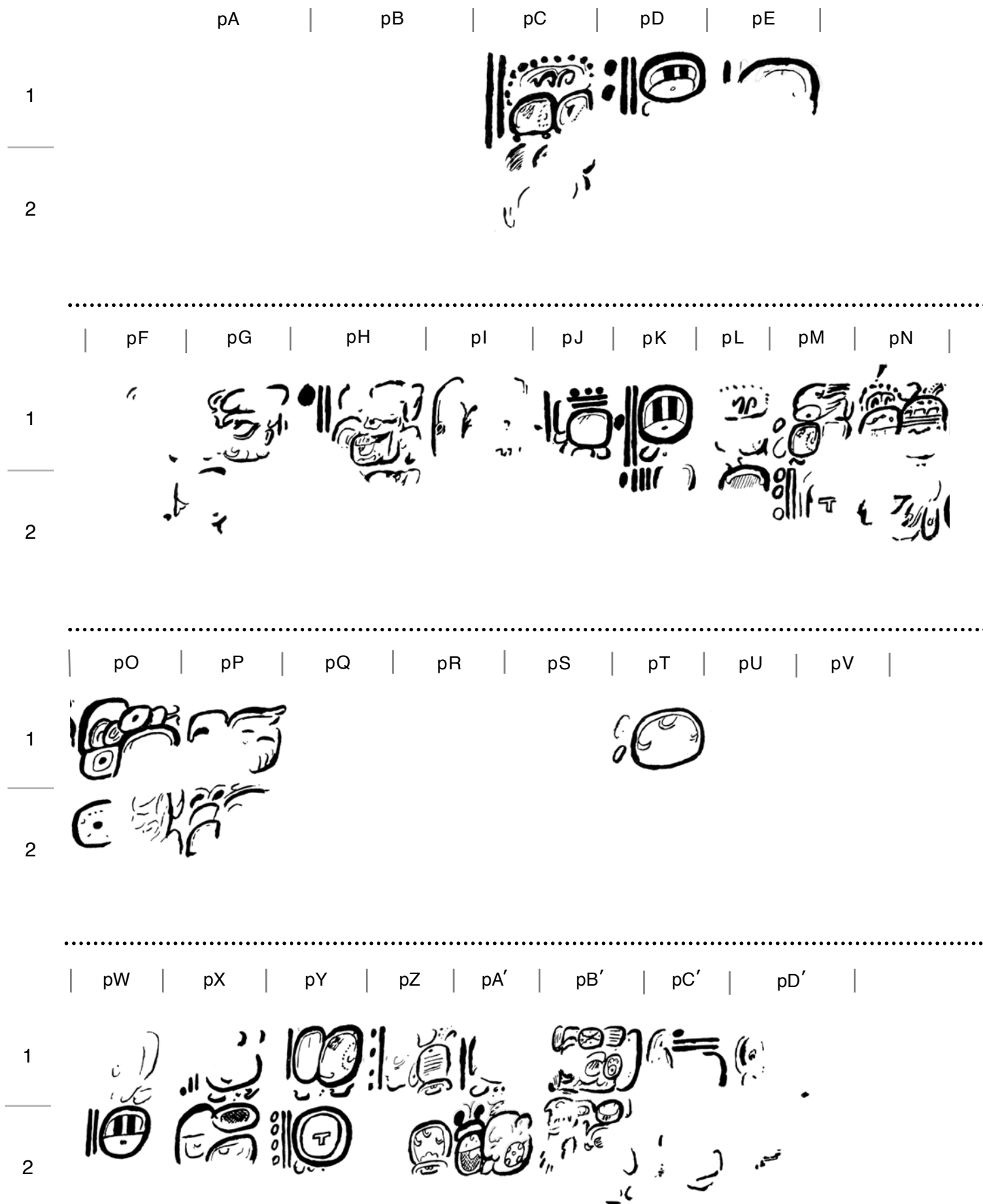


Figure 29 – **Eduard Seler drawing, 1911**
 (Drawing has been scaled and adjusted to approximate proportions of Maudslay photos as presented in this document – precise dimensions and proportions of glyph text panel are not known).

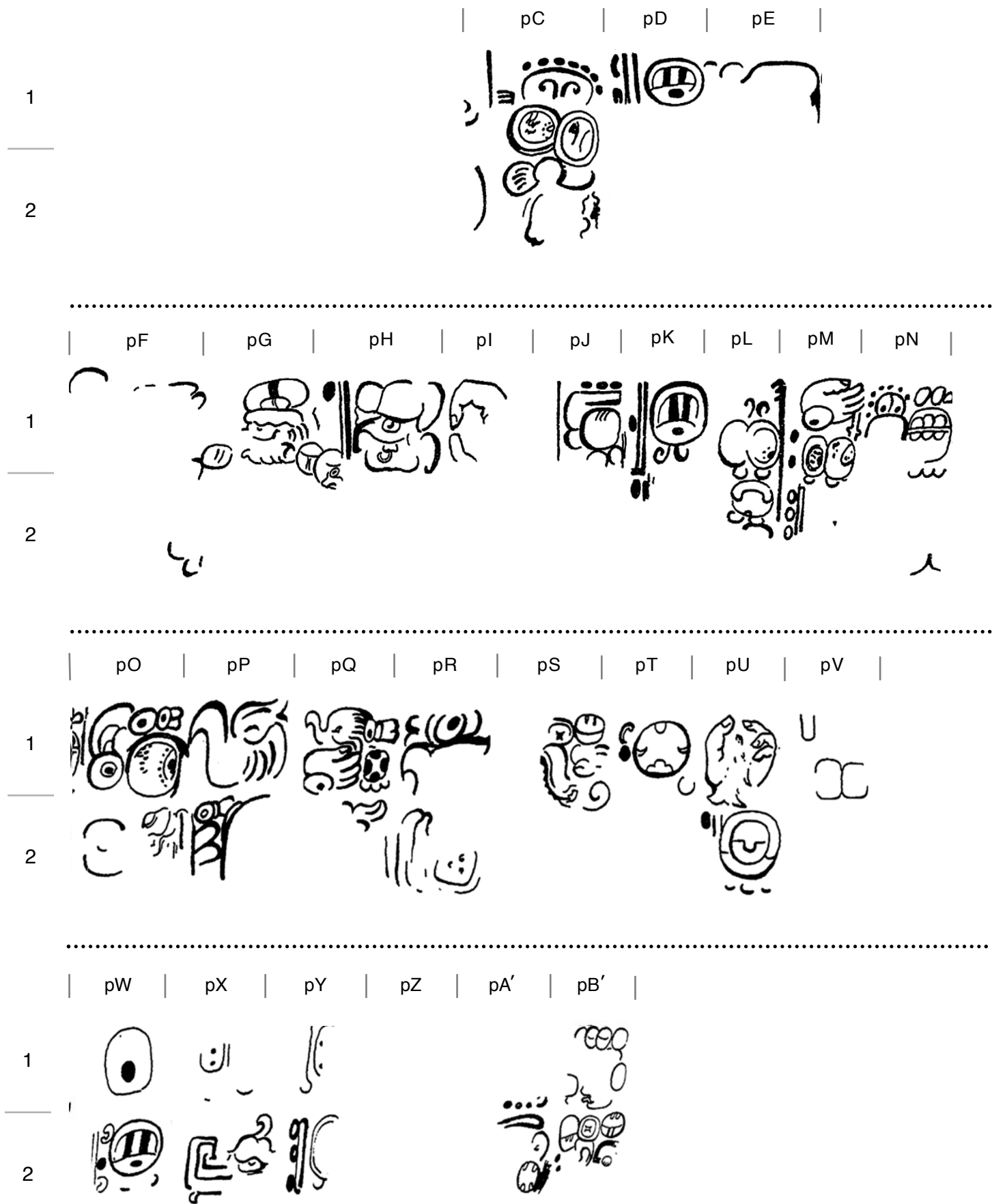


Figure 30 – **Merle Greene Robertson drawing, 1971**
 (Drawing has been scaled and adjusted to approximate proportions of Maudslay photos as presented in this document).
Drawing courtesy of Merle Greene Robertson.

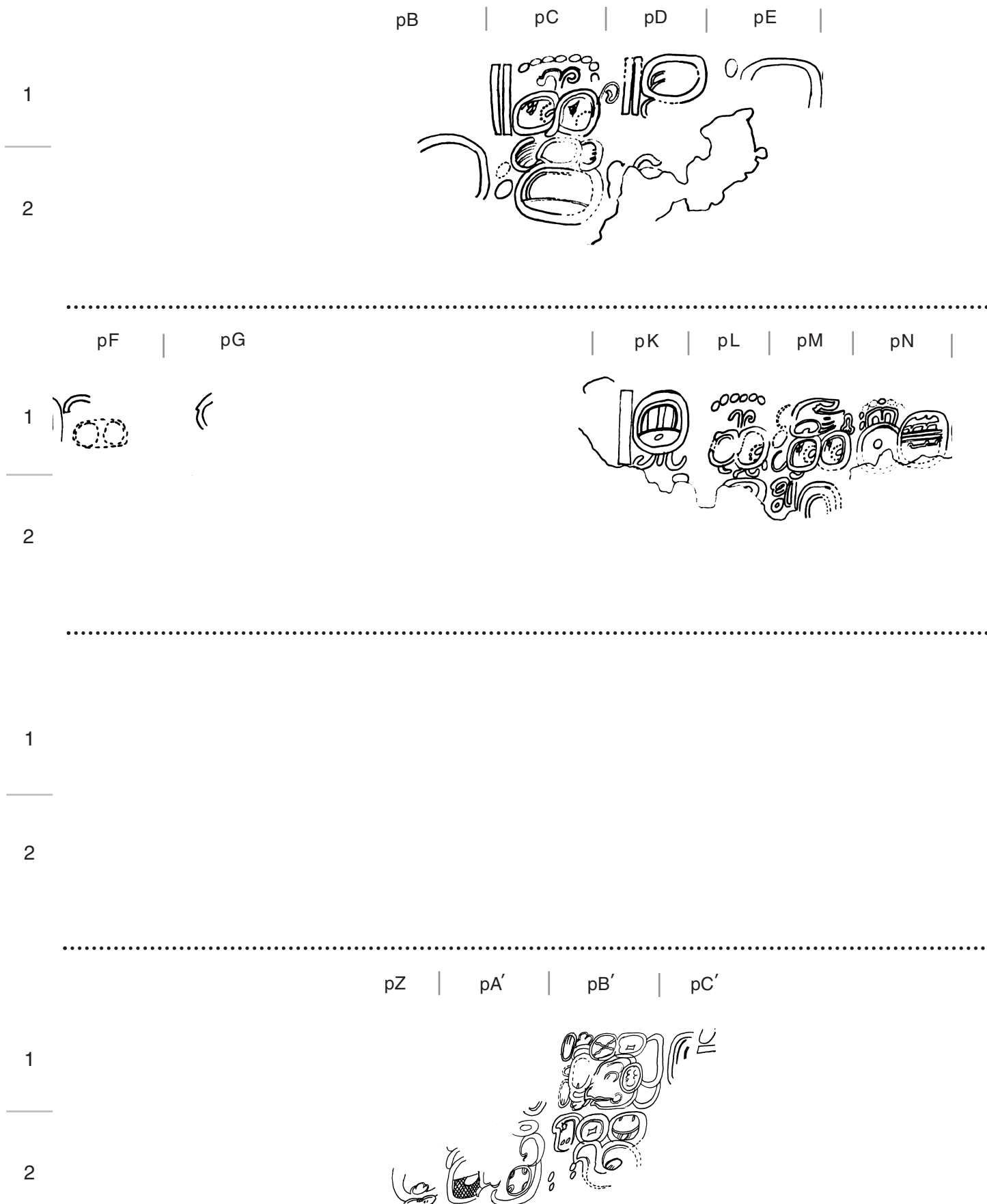


Figure 31 – **Linda Schele drawing, unknown date**
 (Drawing has been scaled and adjusted to approximate proportions of Schele and Maudslay photos as presented in this document).
Linda Schele drawing courtesy of FAMSI Schele archive.

Preliminary Transcription of the House E Painted Text

(Note: A transcription of the House E Painted Text, accompanied by a photo of each corresponding glyph block, is found in Appendix A of this work).

Passage I—An Opening Long Count and Mythic Event from the Previous Era

pA1 [missing a photo]

pB1- [? KALABTUN]
pB2- [? BAK'TUN]

pC1- 10 PIKTUN⁵
pC2- 2 K'ATUN⁶

pD1- 12 TUN
pD2- [1? K'IN]

pE1- [? WINAL]
pE2- [?]

pF1- ?
pF2- ?

pG1- K'UH?-YAX?
pG2- ?

pH1- 7 CHAPAT [TZ'IKIN]-??-AJAW-wa
pH2-?

pI1-yi-ta-ji?
pI2-?

Passage II-The Accession of Triad Progenitor on 2.0.0.10.2 9 Ik' Seating of Sak

pJ1- 6?/5?-he-wa?-13-WINAL-[ji]ya
pJ2- [17? K'ATUN]

pK1- 11 TUN
pK2- 17?, 18?, or 19? BAK'TUN

pL1- [2?] PIKTUN
pL2- i?-PAS?

pM1-1 KALABTUN
pM2- 9 IK'

pN1- G4 and F?
pN2-?

pO1- CHUM- SAK-?
pO2- ?-AJAW?

pP1-MAT-la?
pP2-tu- BAH

pQ1- K'AL [MAT?] SAK HUUN-na
pQ2- [Title of Triad Progenitor]⁷

pR1- MAT?
pR2- yi-[ta]-ji?

pS1-K'UH MAT AJAW
PS2- 1 IX KINUW?⁸

Passage III—A Conjuring Event by the Triad Progenitor One WINAL Before or After Accession?

pT1- **1? WINAL-ji-ya**
pT2- **IX?**

pU1- **TZAK**
pU2- **9 IK'**

Passage IV—Accession of K'inich Ahkal Mo' Naab III on 9.14.10.4.2 9 Ik' 5 K'ayab

pV1- **?**
pV2- **[12 WINAL]**

pW1- **U-?**
pW2- **[9 TUN]**

pX 1- **[14 K'ATUN]**
pX 2- **i-PAS?**

pY1- **[7 BAK'TUN]**
pY2- **9 IK'**

pZ1- **G1 and F**
pZ2- **K'AL [MAT]⁹ SAK HUN-na**

pA'1- **5 K'AYAB?**
pA'2- **tu-[BAH]-hi**

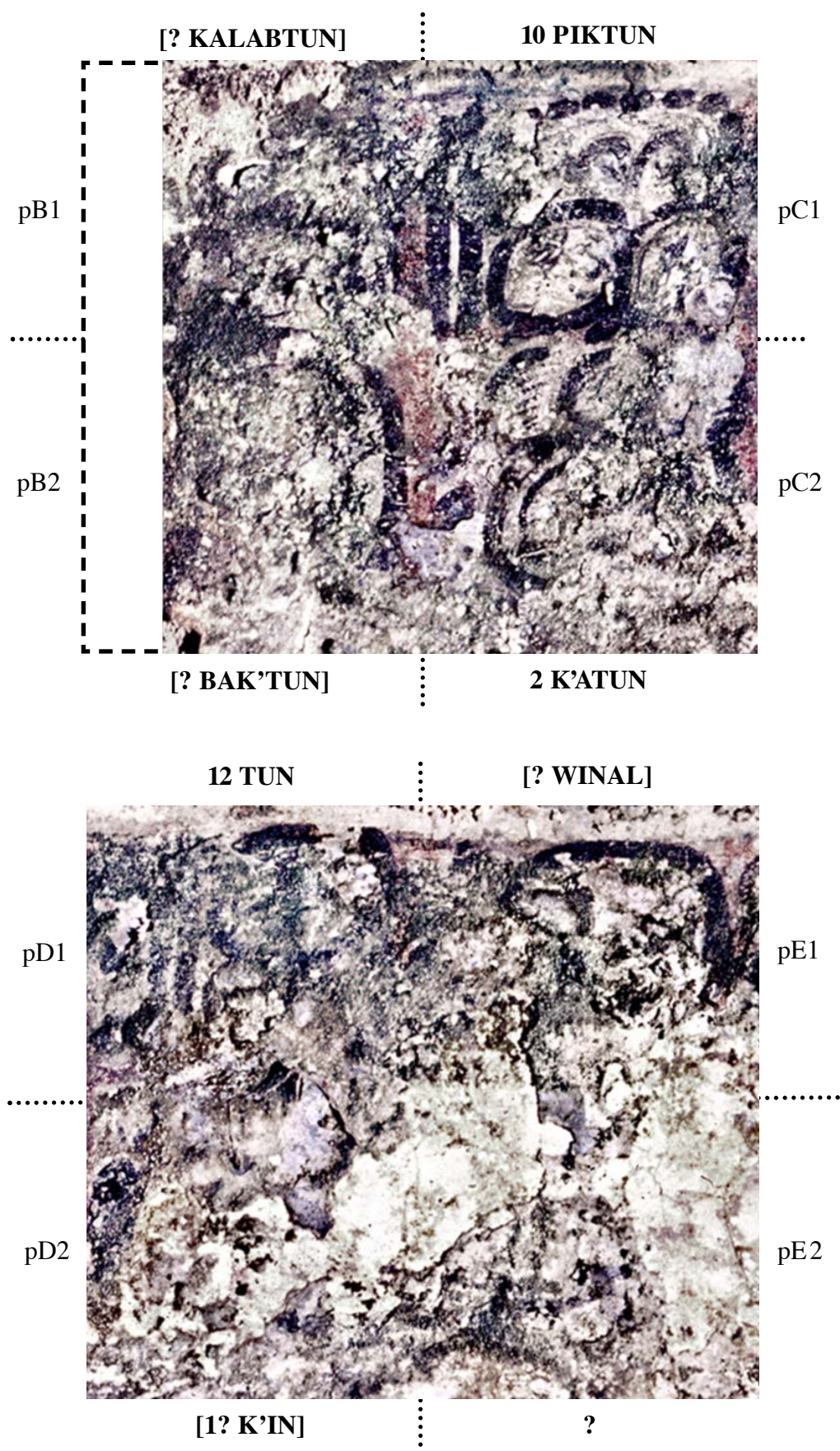
pB'1- **K'INICH AK-MO'-NAHB**
pB'2- **K'UH MAT AJAW-wa**

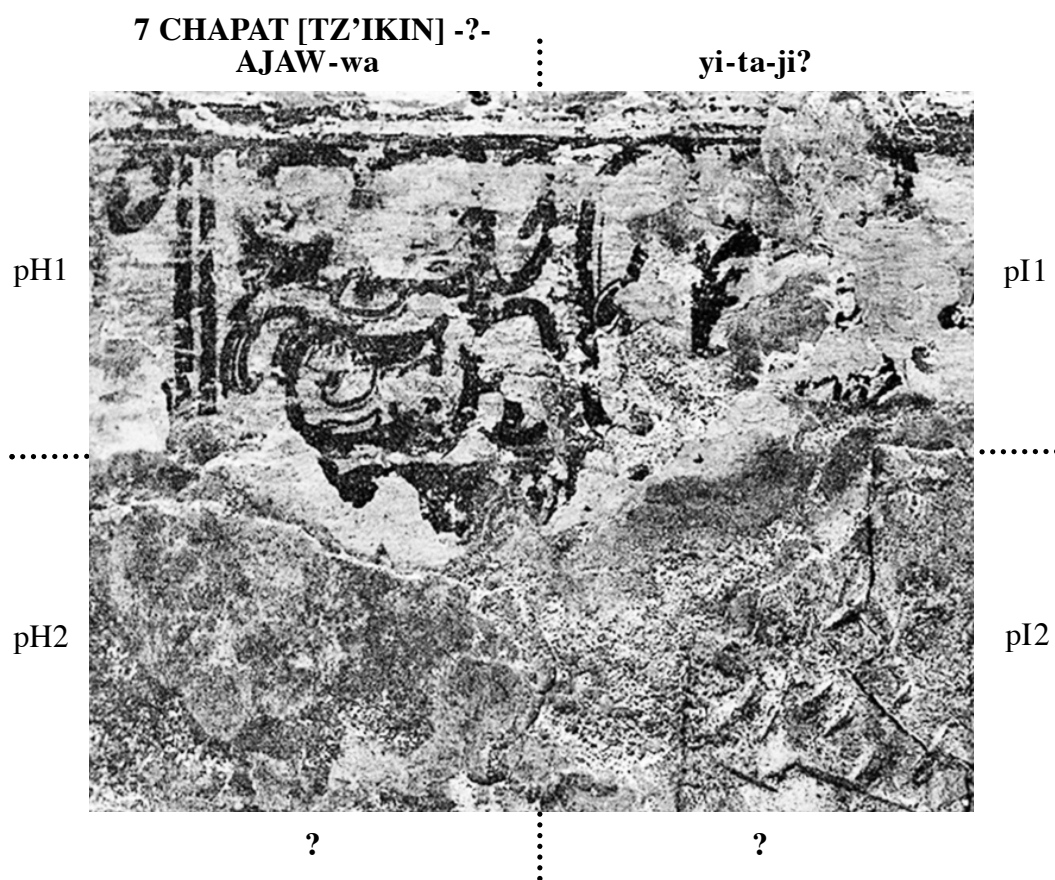
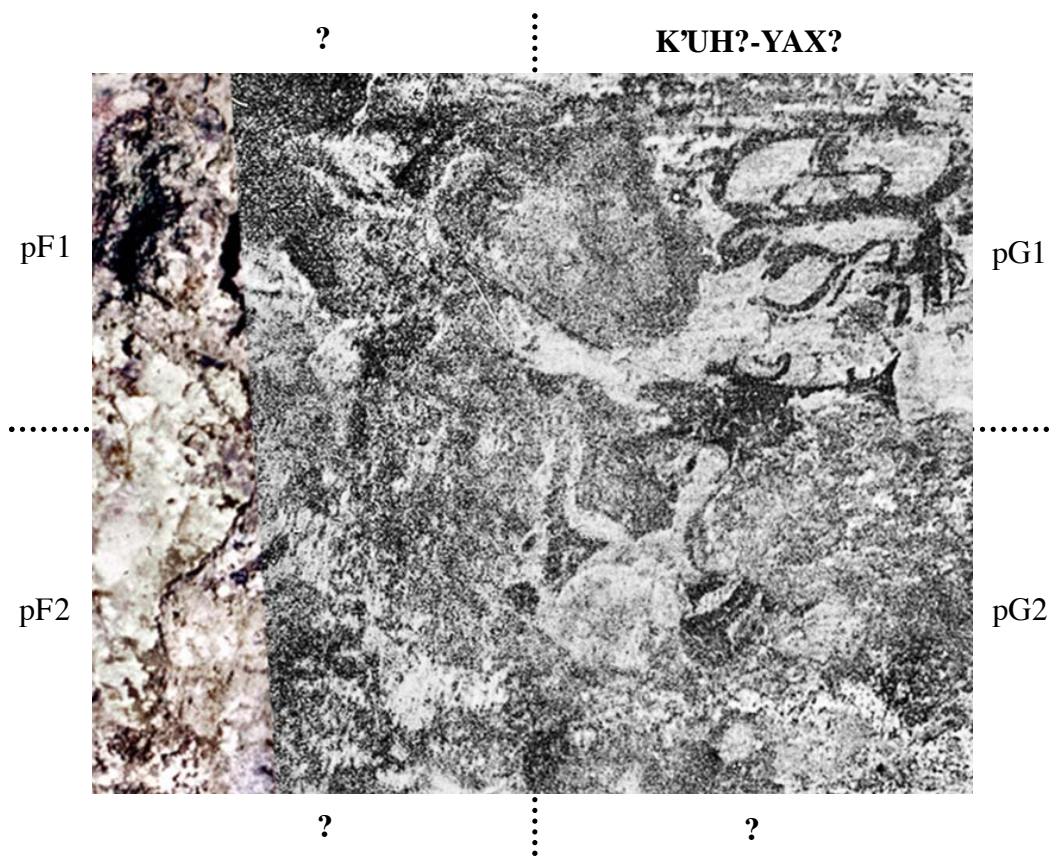
pC'1- **u-12-(TZ'AK/TAL?)¹⁰**
pC'2- **K'UH BAAK AJAW?**

pD'1- **?**

pD'2- **?**

Appendix A
Preliminary Transcription of the House E Painted Text





6?/5?-he-wa?-
13-WINAL-[ji]ya

11 TUN

pJ1

pK1

pJ2

pK2



[17? KA'TUN]

17?, 18?, or 19?
BAK'TUN

[2?] PIKTUN

1 KALABTUN

pL1

pM1

pL2

pM2



i?-PAS?

9 IK'

G4 and F?

CHUM - SAK-?

pN1

pO1

pN2

pO2

?

? - AJAW?

MAT-la?

**K'AL [MAT?]
SAK HUUN-na**

pP1

pQ1

pP2

pQ2

tu-BAH

[Title of Triad Progenitor]

MAT?

K'UH MAT AJAW

pR1

pS1

pR2

pS2

yi-[ta]-ji?

1 IX KINUW?

1? WINAL -ji-ya

TZAK

pT1

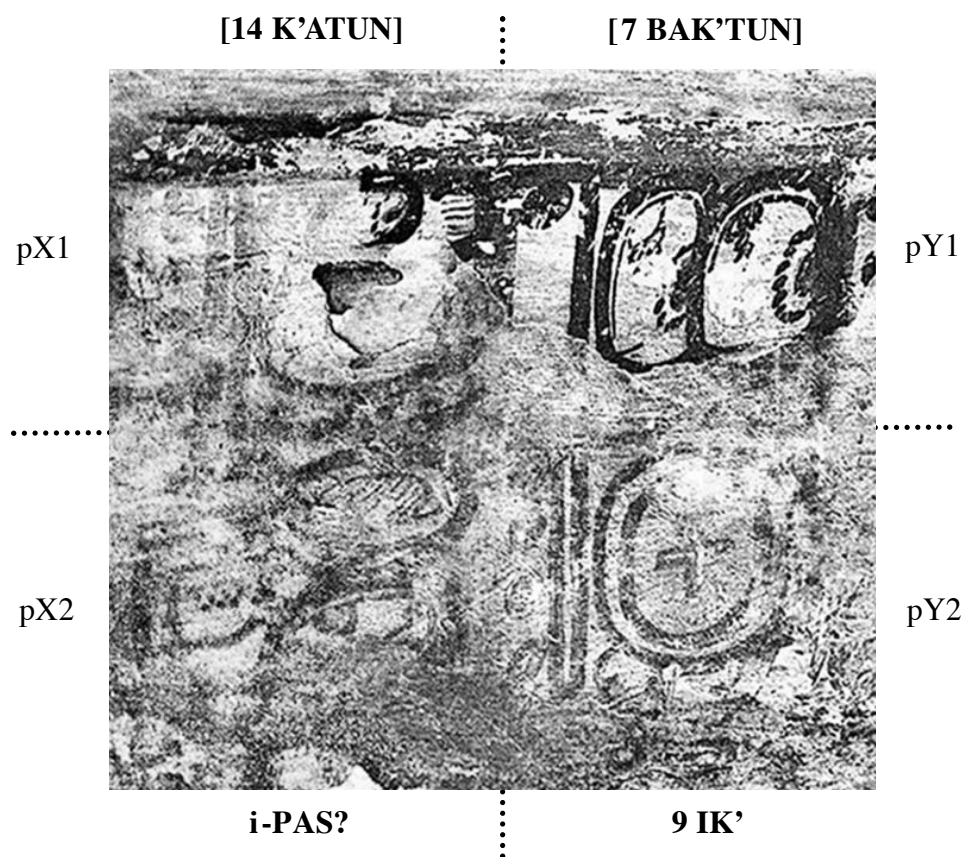
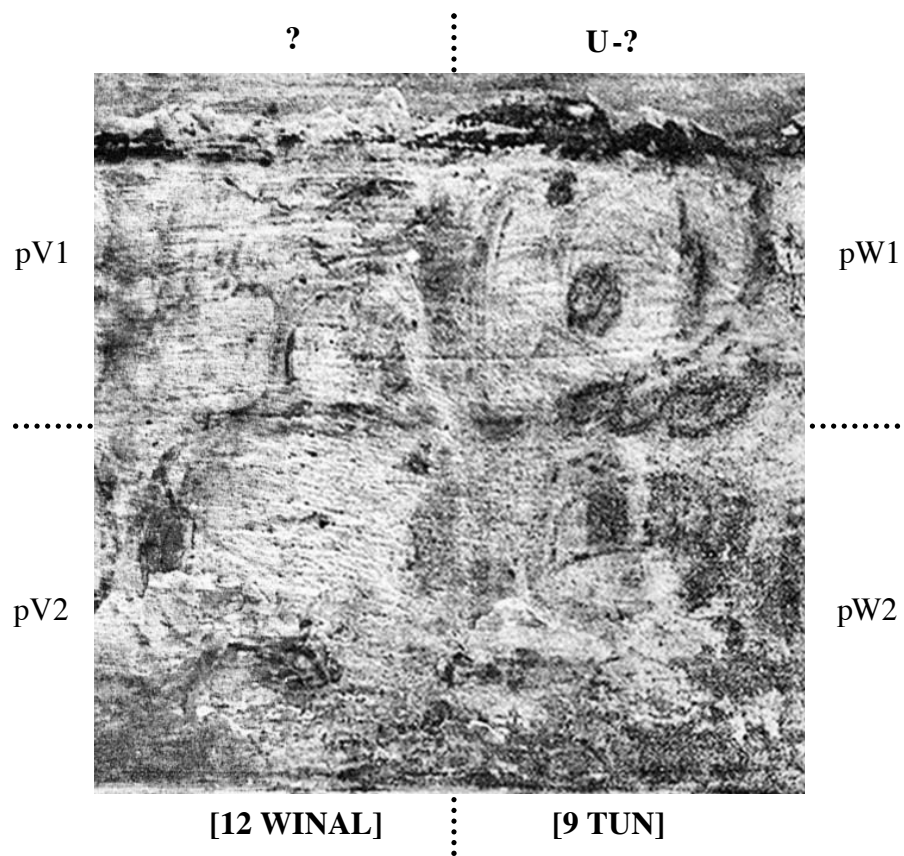
pU1

pT2

pU2

IX?

9 IK'



G1 and F

5 K'AYAB?

pZ1

pA'1

pZ2

pA'2

**K'AL [MAT]
SAK HUN-na**

tu-[BAH]-hi

**K'INICH
AK-MO'-NAHB**

u-12-(TZ'AK / TAL?)

pB'1

pC'1

pB'2

pC'2

**K'UH MAT
AJAW-wa**

K'UH BAAK AJAW?

?

.....

pD'1

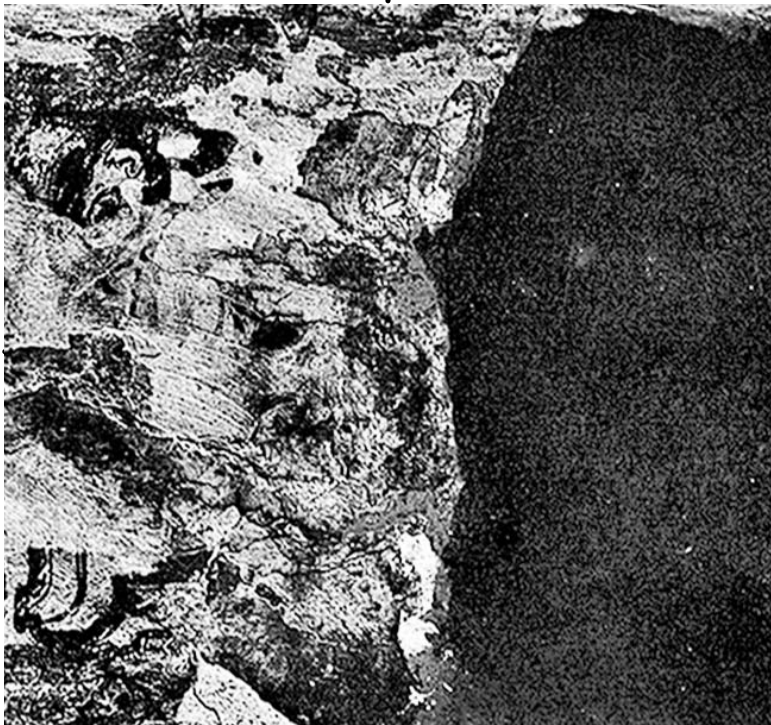
.....

pD'2

.....

?

.....



Acknowledgments

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Paul Johnson for his excellent work in rendering the photo composites and photographs used in this paper. Also I would like to thank Harry Persaud, the Curator of Library Collections at the British Museum, Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, Centre for Anthropology, for helping me track down and obtain the digital photos of the Maudslay House E Painted Text. Many thanks also go to Dr. Colin McEwan, Assistant Keeper, Central and South America in the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum, for referring me to the right people and securing me permission to publish the Maudslay photos. I render special thanks to David and Elaine Schele, for allowing me to search Linda Schele's slide collection and in allowing me to make prints and publish the results. Elaine Schele also assisted me by providing recent photos of House E and the House E Painted Text. I thank Dr. David Stuart for his encouragement to pursue this new line of investigation and for his helpful comments. Lastly, because most recently, I am deeply appreciative of the invaluable suggestions and support offered by Jeffrey Alex Buechler, Leigh Bassett, Merle Greene Robertson, and Dr. Erik Boot.

End Notes

¹ It is very interesting to consider the fact that the portion of the painted text sitting directly above the Oval Tablet (Pakal's accession monument), speaks about the accession of the Triad Progenitor who is strongly associated with the Maize God (Stuart 2005:183). Pakal as well made an apparent link to the Maize God on the Oval Tablet, by declaring in his name caption that he was the "HUN YAAX IXIM" or "First Green Maize."

² David Stuart is the first to publish and comment on these additional two photos, see Stuart 2005:85.

³ Of all the sources mentioned previously, I will use the Maudslay and Schele photos along with the Seler drawing to recreate and interpret numerical coefficients of time periods in the painted text.

⁴ As David Stuart points out (Stuart 2005:85), the accession date of 9 Ik' 5 Kayab and its accompanying time interval of 7.14.9.12.0 days (in connection with the Triad Progenitor's accession date on 2.0.0.10.2. 9 Ik' Seating of Sak) is recorded elsewhere at Palenque (see Temple XIX text and the Temple XVIII jambs). Therefore, the associated distance number and event connected to Passage IV are verifiable from other sources.

⁵ For evidence of the Numeral 10, see Seler's drawing.

⁶ For evidence of the Numeral 2, see Schele FAMSI drawing #208 of the text (figure 31).

⁷ See Stuart 2005:179 for more examples name variants.

⁸ See Palenque Temple XVIII jambs for a parallel reference of the "yitah hun ixkinuw" goddess who is present at the Triad Progenitor's accession.

⁹ Thanks to Erik Boot for pointing out the MAT bird head.

¹⁰ See Seler drawing for a clear drawing of the numeral 12.

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