CARACOL THIRTY YEARS LATER
A Preliminary Account of Two Rulers

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This year marks the beginning of the third decade since the University Museum began its interest in the ancient Maya site of Caracol, Belize. April 3rd will be the thirtieth anniversary of the day that Linton Satterthwaite first spied the stunted Caracol sulking behind its curtain of forest. In early 1930, Satterthwaite was in the process of examining several ruins in the western part of what was then British Honduras. During this exploration, he worked in cooperation with the then Commissioner of Archaeology, A. Hamilton Anderson. Anderson directed Satterthwaite's attention to Caracol following visits to several other sites in the Belize River Valley.

Incredibly dense tropical forests conceal Caracol where it lies behind the barrier formed by the Mountain Pine Ridge. Anderson had faced a long trip by mule to the site along overgrown chicheros trails when he first visited it in 1930 just after its discovery. At that time he noted several carved monuments projecting through the foliage. Satterthwaite had a keen interest in Maya hieroglyphic writing and this fact prompted Anderson to suggest the trip to the site. Facilitating the visit was the fact that logging operations were in full swing around Caracol, and roads had been built by the loggers. As a result, access to the site was easier than it had been before and than it ever has been since.

Caracol is not a large site in comparison to major Maya centers such as Tikal or Palenque (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, it does possess a number of structures of considerable size. Dates recorded on the Caracol monuments indicate that the site was occupied from at least the Maya “Early Classic” through to the end of the “Late Classic” period—A.D. 494-900. Everything is now covered by topsoil and vegetation. The buildings are all partly tumbled-down from the assaults of tree roots and rainfall. The entire site was once cleared by the Museum expeditions of the early 1950’s. But within a year Caracol had again cloaked itself with its mantle of green.

During Satterthwaite’s first short visit, the expedition found many additional monuments. In two weeks of surface survey, twenty-four new stelae and altars turned up. Satterthwaite subsequently organized a field season in 1951 and another in 1953 to record and salvage the monuments. The total count rose to 29 stelae and 19 altars. There was a concern about leaving so many finely-carved stones alone in the bush. Thus the Government and the Museum cooperated in a project of shipping out the best stones. Under the then-current law, equal division of archaeological materials was made. British Honduras chose to keep only intact monuments, while they lacked the facilities to conserve and reconstruct the fragmented ones. The Museum brought back mostly broken pieces which were subsequently re-assembled to be displayed.

The three seasons of field exploration resulted in the compilation of a massive quantity of notes, drawings and particularly photographs. Satterthwaite began to analyze the calendric portion of the inscriptions immediately after the fieldwork ended. However, just as he was reaching the point of preparing some of his results for eventual publication, the University Museum began its fifteen-year involvement in the enormous Tikal Project. From 1956 onwards, Satterthwaite’s time was entirely taken by the analysis of the Tikal monuments. Two articles in the University Museum Bulletin by Satterthwaite (1953, 1954) and one by Horace Wilcox (1954), a student who worked at Caracol, were all that was published regarding the Museum’s efforts at Caracol.
By 1970, research into the monuments of Caracol had been all but abandoned. The materials languished on the shelves of the American Section offices. In response to the death of Dr. Satteredthwaite's wife Margaret in January of 1977, a memorial fund was formed in her name for the purpose of making the completion of a publication on Caracol. My own evident fascination with Maya writing prompted Dr. Coo to trust the task of completing the Caracol monuments volume to me in exchange for a small honorarium from that fund. Within a year, I had finished the minimal task of completing the half-written manuscript in a straightforward manner (resulting in a typewritten text of some 230 pages with about 100 line drawings and halftone reproductions for publication by the Museum). Shortly after this, in late winter of 1978, Dr. Satteredthwaite died.

My involvement had shown me several weaknesses in the original text. When Satteredthwaite began the effort, the field of Maya epigraphy was dominated by the study of calendrical notations and calculations. This emphasis had predominated for over fifty years, and Satteredthwaite had been very thoroughly trained within the tradition. However, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the whole field of study was turned on its ear by work that revealed site names on the monuments (Berlin, 1958) and, more importantly, names of rulers with their dates of birth and accession to power (Prosopography, 1960, 1961, 1963). These representations of people on monuments, which had previously been seen only as priests or perhaps deities, were revealed as actual historical characters. This pattern of research into the historical context of Maya inscriptions has reversed the emphasis on dates, titles and possibly death. In contrast to this, the Caracol monuments volume represented the hard-won tradition of study as it stood after I had completed it to Satteredthwaite's outline. While completing the calendar analysis and presentation for publication, I had observed the opportunities for gaining historical data from the Caracol inscriptions. The monuments of the site, through large in quantity, offer relatively few well preserved texts. Nature's efforts at destroying the stones and their carvings through erosion, falling trees and root action had been complemented in antiquity by ancient residents or visitors to the site who had broken into some monuments and moved many others.

The technique pioneered by Prosopography for historical analysis relies on exactation and comparison of glyph "clauses" of similar date or content in order to isolate those that are unique and recognize glyphs by their repetition in a variety of contexts. Both the original work and subsequent successful efforts have been carried out at sites with relatively high proportions of legible inscriptions. The shortage of chronologically overlapping sites at Caracol virtually obviates the substantiation of new readings there. Rather than working with the explicit absolute chronology and homochronous internal hieroglyphic analysis must rely upon advances made at other sites. The problems involved in this approach are fairly basic. How can we identify personalities? What allows us to point at a glyph and say that it is a ruler's name? These difficulties hinge upon the proper identification of ancient Maya clauses. These clauses might be taken as roughly analogous to a sentence. As defined for the monuments (Kahler, 1971), these clauses begin with a time statement (either a year

important people or of royal relatives. Prosokoukioff suggested that there was a strong but not direct connection between the association with an EG and connection to a "royal lineage" (1964: 90). Also, names of rulers can be distinguished by relative frequency of appearance. The name of a ruler is simply far more often represented that of a non-royal relative. An additional clue to rulership is provided by a title recently recognized in the inscriptions of Pakal which has been translated into Maya as "mah-kin-ah" (Lounsbury, 1974: 4). This allows apparently limited to the name phrases of ancient Maya leaders. It may be considered a reliable indicator of rulership when found in company with a name (Fig. 5d).

The monuments have been sited in time by calendrical inscriptions preserved on them. The only long-well preserved texts at Caracol occur in the middle of the

monument sequence, dating to A.D. 520-642. The inscriptions are, although numerous, are too poorly preserved to allow the detailed sorted analysis necessary to our discussion here, we will concentrate on two large and important stelae, Stelae 6 and 3. Their texts, in addition to being the longest readable from Caracol, also conveniently overlap in time. The earliest known monument from Caracol in Altar 4 which bears an abbreviated calendrical record. This, coupled with our dependence on the records, allows the placement of Altar 4 at around A.D. 494. 9.3.0.0.0.0 in the Maya calendar. (The Maya calendar and counting system operated basically on a system of twenties. The middle digit of our notation for recording their dates represents the number of 360-day historical years, or "tuns," that have passed since an arbitrary starting point. The next space to the left records these units in units of twenties. The far left space records them in units of 400s. Thus 9.3.0.0.0 notes a count of 9,000 plus 3,020.)
The earliest Caracol monument with a sizable inscription is Stela 13. This stone is dated to 9.4.0.0.0, some twenty years after After 4. Unfortunately the date is about all that is readable on this monument. Tumultuating vestiges remain of other hieroglyphs, but nothing that is really readable.

The earliest probable ruler known is found on the next monument in the sequence, Stela 18 (Fig. 6). Its weathered text opens with a date followed by what is apparently a single long clause some sixty glyphs blocks long. Portions of the text are unreadable. The inscription is very difficult to translate because it lacks colofrantic notations to subdividde it. An additional obstruction arises from the fact that the event glyph following the opening date is lost. An apparent ruler’s name does appear shortly after the date, where the mah-ki-an-siu affix is attached to a glyph representing an animal-head (Fig. 7a). Since this is the single known occurrence of this ruler’s name, it is impossible to know whether the glyph is actually a “name” glyph or just a title.

Jumping ahead somewhat in time, the next identifiable ruler appears on Stela 6 between 9.5.10.1.2 and 9.8.10.0.0. His name glyphs bears the mah-ki-an-siu title in all but one manifestation. The same glyph can be isolated because it appears in a short clause that shares only with the Caracol

Glyph at one point in the event (ES) (Fig. 5a). There is therefore no possibility that it represents merely a title. Stela 6 opens with the date 9.5.10.1.2 and a clause with an unknown event glyph followed by a parentage expression for a ruler: Lord Water (Fig. 7b). The context of this event does not allow us to postulate with any certainty its nature. The uncertainty at this point raises difficulties with the interpretation of another event later in the text, as will be noted.

The events most likely to be recorded at the beginning of a text are birth or accession to office. The two are equally possible mark the acquisition of a new title or perhaps the birth of a son. It definitely cannot mark Lord Water’s death since we know from elsewhere that he lived well past this date. The final preserved clause on Stela 6 follows this and brings the count of time to a half-katun end at 9.8.19.0.0. At this point, Lord Water is stated to be in the third katun of his life. That is to say, he was between 41 and 60 years old at the time. Calculating back, it can be seen that this means that he must have been born between 9.5.10.0.0 and 9.8.10.0.0. This agrees with the interpretation of the opening event glyph as birth. It also indicates that the sovereign could have been no more than 6 years old when he acceded to power if we interpret that first event as accession.

Stela 3 opens with a record of some events that happened during the time of Lord Water’s reign (Fig. 11). The first event marked in the birth of a character called God C Star. This person and a later ruler, Lord Storm-water Moon, were first identi-
The discussion presented above necessarily takes a few short-cuts and even out some of the difficulties in interpretation. The full dynastic interpretation will be presented with the Caracol monuments volume, which is nearly ready for publication. The present exposition also passes over the enormous possibilities for field-work that the expanding knowledge of the historical component of the inscriptions opens up. Indeed, the American Section of the University Museum will be sponsoring a season of research at Caracol beginning late this year with the intent of actually tying some structures and possibly tombs to the reign of Lord Water or possibly Lord Storm-water Moon. The historical analysis of the inscriptions of Caracol is giving some character and reality to the people who made the site and carved the stones.

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