Maya Hieroglyphics on Sabana Piletas Staircase Deciphered
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More than 130 hieroglyphics, most of them still legible, inscribed on the Sabana Piletas staircase, located in northeast
Campeche, is the most extensive reported Maya inscription of Yucatan Peninsula. According to recent studies, rulers
could have used the Glyphs Building staircase to celebrate sacrificial rituals.

According to archaeologists Antonio Benavides Castillo and Sara Novelo Osorno, from National Institute of Anthropology
and History (INAH) Center in Campeche, the text is exceptional due to its extension and conservation state.
As part of the Non-Open to Public Archaeological Zones Maintenance project MANZANA), several constructions at
Sabana Piletas - occupied from 600 to 1000 AD - have been consolidated between 2007 and 2008, among them, the
Glyphs Building staircase, due to its historical importance.
The eastern staircase of the Glyphs Building had ten steps, being the first and fourth which count on inscriptions. There
are 34 panels, each with 4 hieroglyphics, summing 136. Each panel was adorned with triangles that evoked serpent
designs.
Epigraphists Nikolai Grube, of the University of Bonn, Germany, and Carlos Pallan Gayol, member of the INAH Maya
Glyphic and Iconography Heap (AGIMAYA), made preliminary deciphering, which allowed understanding the general
structure of the mentioned staircase.
Deciphering revealed that the date inscribed in the first eight glyphs of both steps corresponds with December 18th or
25th of 858 AD. According with another epigraphist interpretation, Dr. David Stuart, from the University of Texas at
Austin, USA, would be equivalent to 864 AD.
For Antonio Benavides and Sara Novelo, this confirms that Sabana Piletas participated in the political panorama of
western Yucatan Peninsula during 9th century of the Common Era, at the Late Classic period.
Another important discovery is a glyph which phonetic meaning (kikel) is translated as “ball”; it seems to
refer to the rubber ball used in the ritual game. Another inscription (pitzil-na) alludes specifically to the ball game,
meaning this could be a “sacrificial staircase”.
It is known that Maya greatest rulers celebrated sacred ball games at staircases, where they recreated the “Other
World”.
“Evidence of a fine blue stucco covering, a color that frequently appeared in rituals and sacrifices, supports this
theory. The presence of two monolithic phalluses, located near Glyphs Building, reinforces this hypothesis”.
“It is possible that a ball game court existed in Sabana Piletas, but we still have to verify it”, concluded
archaeologists Benavides and Novelo.
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