Confirming the Date AD 998 for El Osario, Chichen Itza
Bruce Love and Greg Reddick

In 1999 Daniel Graña-Behrens, Christian Prager, and Elisabeth Wagner published an article in *Mexicon* that concluded, in effect, that Eric Thompson was correct in 1937 when he stated that the south-east pillar on top of El Osario[1] (Figure 1) at Chichen Itza bears the date AD 998. It is now eighteen years since Graña-Behrens et al.’s article appeared, during which time we have heard some colleagues question this date, mainly because it is so late and so far outside the cluster of other dates from the site, which lie mostly in the second half of the ninth century (for summaries of Chichen dates see Boot 2005: Table 4.4; Volta and Braswell 2014: Table 13.1).

![El Osario (3C1 in the Carnegie Institution of Washington system of nomenclature), east stairway (Photo by Bruce Love, June 6, 2014).](image)

The pillar with the inscription that is the subject of this blog is one of four standing within the temple walls at the top of the pyramid (Figure 2). In 2014 Love re-photographed the pillar, presented here with Peter Mathews’s drawing of the same (Figure 3a, b), and took close-ups of the text (Figure 4a) using numerous light angles.[2] From these photographs, Love made a new drawing of the text (Figure 4d) and compared them with drawings by Peter Mathews (Figure 4b) and Graña-Behrens, Christian Prager, and Elizabeth Wagner (Figure 4c).
Figure 2. Plan view of El Osario temple on top of building (Maudslay 1974 [1889-1902], Vol. 3: Plate XXIV [annotated]).

Figure 3a-b. East side of SE Pillar in El Osario temple: a, photo by Bruce Love, June 6, 2014; b, drawing by Peter Mathews (Lincoln 1986:162, Fig. 5.1).
Reviewing and comparing these drawings, it seems evident that the text does indeed begin with the calendar round 2 Ajaw 18 Mol and that F2-F6 can be translated as “10 K’an [the] day, 2 Sotz’, eleventh tun [of K’atun] 2 Ajaw.”

These dates were examined for their possibilities by Greg Reddick using his Xoc Maya Calendar program (Reddick 2014) with the result that the only year in which these two calendar rounds fall in the eleventh tun of a K’atun 2 Ajaw is the year AD 998.

2 Ajaw 18 Mol; 10.8.10.11.0; May 6, AD 998[3]
10 K’an 2 Sotz’, 10.8.10.6.4; Jan. 30, AD 998

The second date is extremely solid if the glyphs are being read correctly, as there is no other date in Maya history that meets the parameters of 10 K’an 2 Sotz in the eleventh tun of K’atun 2 Ajaw, and the fact that the first calendar round also falls in the eleventh tun of K’atun 2 Ajaw doubly confirms its correctness.
Addressing the question of “if the glyphs are being read correctly,” the syntax of the final phrase, F2 to F6, is typical of Tun-Ajaw dates at Chichen Itza as expounded by Thompson (1937), examples of which can be found on some seventeen monuments listed by him (ibid.:8).

Although AD 998 is 90 years later than the last Long Count date in the Classic Maya lowlands, which is on Monument 101 at Tonina (Martin and Grube 2008:189), and, as already mentioned, falls outside the range of other Chichen dates, we would say that rather than being anomalous, it fits comfortably within the “Toltec” or “Mexican” or “International Style” period to which El Osario belongs. Intriguingly, there is a cluster of dates from the Dresden Codex Serpent Numbers pages that also encompasses the El Osario dates.[4]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dresden Codex</th>
<th>10.4.6.15.14</th>
<th>October 28, 915</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dresden Codex</td>
<td>10.6.10.6.3</td>
<td>September 1, 958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden Codex</td>
<td>10.7.4.3.5</td>
<td>April 22, 972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden Codex</td>
<td>10.8.5.0.6</td>
<td>November 4, 992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Osario Pillar</td>
<td>10.8.10.6.4</td>
<td>February 4, 998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Osario Pillar</td>
<td>10.8.10.11.0</td>
<td>May 11, 998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden Codex</td>
<td>10.11.5.14.5</td>
<td>September 30, 1052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. A group of Long Counts and their Gregorian equivalents reached by Serpent Numbers in Dresden Codex (pp 61-62, Thompson 1971:80) and the two dates from El Osario, arranged in order from oldest to youngest.*

In a recent archaeological synthesis of the site, based in part on new excavations in the gran nivelación or great central platform, Geoffrey Braswell states that “most of the structures currently visible in the northern portion of the site were built during the interval 900/950 to 1050.” He sees Chichen Itza thriving “throughout the tenth and well into the eleventh century” (Braswell 2012:21; see also Braswell and Peniche 2012). This view agrees with that of Peter Schmidt who sees Chichen Itza as an “important economic and political center at least sometime through the eleventh century” (Schmidt 2007:194).

More recently, William Ringle has reviewed Braswell’s material and, although offering counter arguments regarding much in Braswell’s article, in essence concurs with Braswell’s dates stating that Modified Florescent Chichen Itza (the architecture that includes El Osario), while for the most part a tenth century phenomenon, had constructions that “may well have continued into the eleventh century” (Ringle 2017:15-16).
Obviously this short article is not the place to enter into the grand debate surrounding the Toltecs and Chichen Itza; the purpose of this blog is to report that the two calendar rounds and the Tun-Ajaw date falling within the year AD 998 have been confirmed independently from new photographs and drawings. Students of Maya history may use this date with confidence.

References

Boot, Erik

Braswell, Geoffrey

Braswell, Geoffrey and Nancy Peniche May

Graña-Behrens, Daniel, Christian Prager, and Elisabeth Wagner

Lincoln, Charles E.

Martin, Simon, and Nikolai Grube
2008 *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens: Deciphering the Dynasties of the Ancient Maya*. 2nd ed. Thames and Hudson, London.

Maudslay, Alfred Percival

Reddick, Greg
Ringle, William M.
2017 Debating Chichen Itza. *Ancient Mesoamerica* [https://www.cambridge.org/core](https://www.cambridge.org/core)

Schmidt, Peter

Thompson, J. Eric S.
1937 *A New Method of Deciphering Yucatecan Dates with Special Reference to Chichen Itza*. Contributions to American Archaeology, No. 22, Publication 483, Carnegie Institution of Washington, Washington, D.C.


Volta, Beniamino, and Geoffrey E. Braswell

**Suggested citation**: Love, Bruce and Greg Reddick. "Confirming the Date AD 998 for El Osario, Chichen Itza" *Contributions to Mesoamerican Studies*, December 21, 2017. [https://brucelove.com/research/contribution_002/](https://brucelove.com/research/contribution_002/)