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The 'Canoe Gods'

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It is becoming increasingly evident that many signs in Maya script have both logographic and phonetic values. Examples are the T526 'earth' sign read by MacLeod (1991) and Grube as both *kab* and *ka* and the 'God C variant' read by Grube and Schele (1991) as *tzuk* and *tzu*. Perhaps more universally accepted is the bivalence of T679 as both *iwal* and *i*. In the course of a discussion of the final passage of Naranjo Stela 23, I suggest in this note that the numeral 'one' may function in Maya script in a similar fashion, reading as either logographic *hun* or phonetic *hu*.

The section of the text with which I am concerned is G21-H22 (Fig. 1), which follows a period ending. After a distance number of seventeen days, eleven winals, *utom wak ahaw, oxlahun muwan homiy u kaanlahun k'atun tzuk? tun Butz' Til Wi Kaan Chak k'ul Sah ahaw*, 'and then it hap-

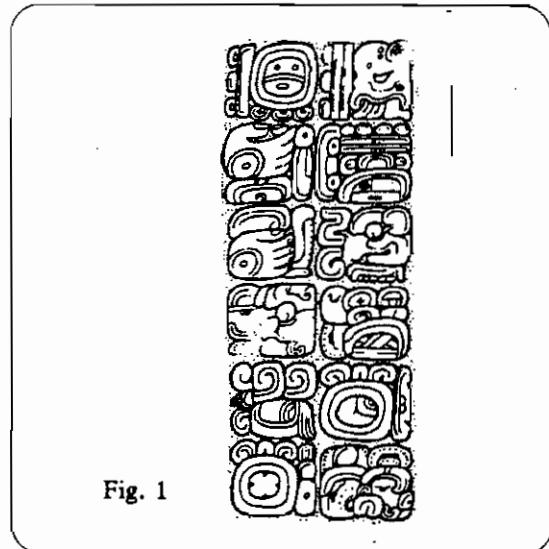


Fig. 1

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pened six Ahaw, thirteen Muwan was completed fourteen k'atuns, was set? the tun, 'Smoking Squirrel', holy king of Naranjo.' The next four glyphs name the entities who acted with 'Smoking Squirrel'. At G21 is *yatah*, 'his companion' (MacLeod n.d.) and the next two glyphs name the Paddlers, about whom so much has been written recently (summarized by Schele 1987 and expanded by Villela 1989, MacLeod 1992, Schele 1992).

The next glyph at H22 consists of a 'one' superfixed to the kawak *ku* and followed by the God C head *k'u*. If we assume that the 'one' may have a phonetic value *hu* as suggested above, this collocation makes sense. *Hu + ku* yields *huku*, which is glossed as 'dugout canoe' in Attinasi's Chol lexicon (Attinasi 1973:271). *K'u* is 'god', and, thus, the Paddlers are named here as 'canoe gods', a reference to their role of ferrying the souls of the dead into Xibalba along the Milky Way. Often Mayan dictionaries will have *hukub* or *hukup* for 'canoe' (such as Aulie and Aulie 1978:68 and Kaufman and Norman 1984:122), but Linda Schele (1992:p.c.) and I agree that in these cases, the *-ub* may be a derivational suffix.

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