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The "Bee Man" of Tonina

by Peter Mathews

Monument 5 of Tonina is a statue of a standing male dignitary who holds a ceremonial bar across his chest (Figure 1).¹ Presumably he was a ruler of Tonina, but since no inscription accompanies M.5, this cannot be known for sure. The feature of M.5 which is of special interest is the costume which the ruler wears.

As is the case with many other statues at Tonina, the man on M.5 wears a long cape, which flows down his back to the ground (Figure 1). But there is something on the upper part of his back in addition to the cape: it looks for all the world like a pair of wings.

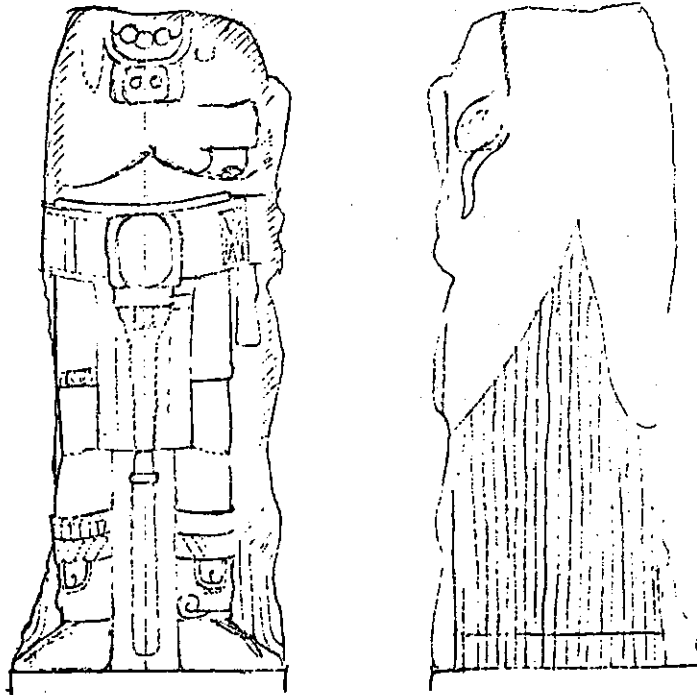
Inscribed on these wings are two scroll-like elements which very closely resemble the curl which forms the main element of the *caban* sign.

The sign which Thompson (1962:127-133) gave the number 526 is usually called *caban*, from the

Yucatec name of the 17th day. However, in the "bee sections" of the Madrid Codex, the same sign occurs regularly in references to *cab*, "bee." A typical example is on p.106b (Figure 2), where the first three glyphs of the explanatory text read *u-pak-u-cab-God C*, "God C looks after his bees" (literally, "his keeping, his bees, God C"). The frame illustrated in Figure 2 is actually the last of a long series of references to events and ceremonies conducted on successive *Cib*, *Caban*, and *Etz'nab* days of the sacred 260 day period. There are 13 frames in all, spanning pages 103-106 of the Madrid Codex.

In this and other "bee sections" of the Madrid Codex, the reference to bees is written in several ways. By far the most common form (54 examples out of 66) is what would be transcribed in Thompson's system 526:251 (Figure 3b). Five ex-

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1. Tonina Monument 5, front and rear. Drawing by Ian Graham.

amples record the "bee" referent in the form 526.558 (Figure 3c), although in one example (M103c) the order of the two signs is reversed. In 6 cases, the reference to bees is written 526:585a (Figure 3d), and in one case (M.106b), it is recorded simply as 526 (Figure 3a).

We have already seen that T526 is the day sign *caban*: in these "bee sections" of the Madrid Codex we could reasonably expect it to read simply *cab*, "bee." The postfixes in the "bee" examples above confirm this view, for all are phonetic signs which contain *b* as their principal phoneme. It can be shown for other contexts that T251 is read *b(a)*, as is T558; T585a is *b(e)*. These signs thus function as phonetic complements, confirming that *b* is the final phoneme of T526 in these passages. (It could perhaps be noted here that in the monumental inscriptions, *cab* is often composed of purely phonetic elements, *ca* and *b(a)*. See Figure 3e).

Thus the presence of both "wings" and the *cab* sign on Tonina M.5 strongly indicates that the indi-



Figure 2. Madrid Codex, page 106b, second frame. After Villacorta and Villacorta 1930.

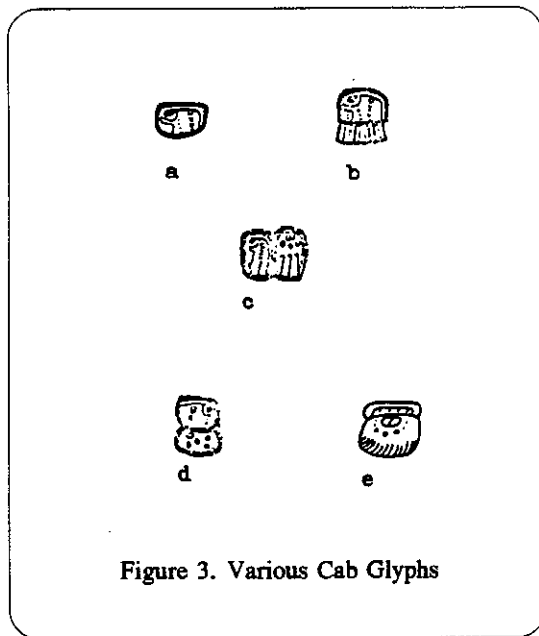


Figure 3. Various Cab Glyphs

vidual portrayed was dressing up as a bee. For what reasons will probably never be known. Bees and the honey they produced were clearly very important to the ancient Maya. It is possible that Tonina was an ancient center of honey production: certainly today a great many bees are kept in and around the Ocosingo Valley.

Notes

1. This essay was originally distributed in manuscript form as *Maya Glyph Notes, No. 4* in April 1979. We here make it more widely available --- Khristaan D. Vilella, editor.

References

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