



Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture

No. 51

March 1993

Wuk Ah, the Fourth Lord of the Night

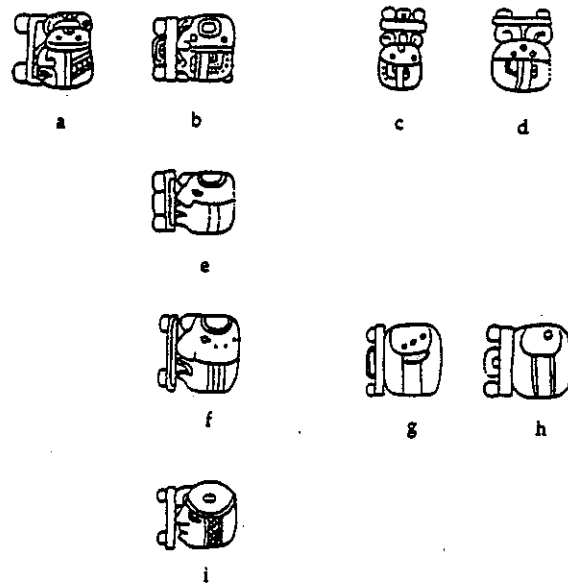
by Bruce Frumker

With the recognition that the Maya could use the Lords of the Night for their qualities or attributes as well as for their sequential position in a cycle of nine, the question of the identity of the "Lords" has gained interest (Frumker n.d.). The identities of the Aztec Lords of the Night were known, but it was thought that the Maya sequence did not directly correlate with the Aztec list (Thompson 1971:210). Recently, Barbara MacLeod has suggested that there may be a correlation with G1, G8, and G9 in the Aztec sequence (MacLeod 1991a, 1991b). A correlation of the sequence of deities may be more appropriately thought of as a correlation of job descriptions, or spheres of influence, rather than of necessarily being the same deity in both the Aztec and Maya lists. If the lists do correlate, then the Aztec Lords of the Night would

assist in the identification and understanding of the Maya deities and their glyphs.

The Aztec Fourth Lord of the Night was Centeotl, the God or Goddess of Maize. If the Maya Fourth Lord of the Night directly correlated with the Aztec, there would likely be reference to maize in the glyphs used for G4. In Figure 1, examples of G4 are grouped according to general form. They all have a coefficient of 7. They all have a vertical strap-like device, in most cases descending from a division of the glyph into a separate top and bottom section. The first four examples all have three dots or circles on a cap-like device, arranged with one dot or circle in the upper center (sometimes larger [Figure 1b], sometimes divided [Figure 1a]) and with the other two dots or circles lower on the "cap" on either side of the center, forming a triangular pattern. Those four

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- | | |
|------------|------------|
| a - TIK 31 | f - NAR 24 |
| b - DPL 8 | g - DKK 2 |
| c - CAY L2 | h - DKK 2 |
| d - CPN A | i - NAR 29 |
| e - NAR 24 | |

Figure 1

glyphs also share, in their bottom parts, a strong resemblance to the T518 Ahaw. I have placed Figure 1e where it is because it may belong to the group of the first four (missing the other two circles), or it may be related to the next three examples. Figures 1f and 1g share three circles, but this time in a straighter row running diagonally (Figure 1h looks like it is missing the bottom two circles in the row, most clearly seen in 1g). Figure 1i dif-

fers from the others by having a much larger circular cap which divides the glyph just over the eye rather than just under the nose.

On the surface, none of these seem to include direct reference to maize. There is a superficial resemblance to some glyphs for the day Kan, and Kan glyphs do contain strong maize and tamale associations. The glyphs for Kan, however, do not appear to go further than just a resemblance to

some G4 components. They do not explain the range of G4 variation patterns. There is, however, another day glyph associated with maize, Ben. Ben is usually thought to be associated with cane rather than maize, but as Thompson noted:

Ah, the name used in the highlands of Guatemala, appears to stand for the green corn, and also reed or cane...According to Ximénez, the day represents young maize which has not ripened, and cane. The word *caña* has the general meaning of cane or reed but specifically it is sugar cane. That would, of course, be a colonial mutation since sugar cane was unknown in pre-Columbian America; the resemblance of the sugar cane to a maize plant is quite striking...Accordingly, it is probable that Ben represents the growing maize plant, whereas Kan is the grain of ripe maize and the seed. The fact that this day is favorable for children among the Ixil and the Quiche may well be an extension of the concept of growth to the human race (Thompson 1971:81-82).

León-Portilla, in *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*, wrote that "Ben is the day of the lord who fosters the growth of the maize stalk. He may also symbolize the growth and development of man (1988:40). Karl Taube noted that "The Ben sign may well represent the *tamale de elote*, or tamale prepared from fresh, green maize" (1989:45). Taube has also shown bi-directional substitution between the T584 Ben glyphs and the corn-curl tamale sign in both a T518 context (Figure 2a), and in a "child of mother" statement (Fig-

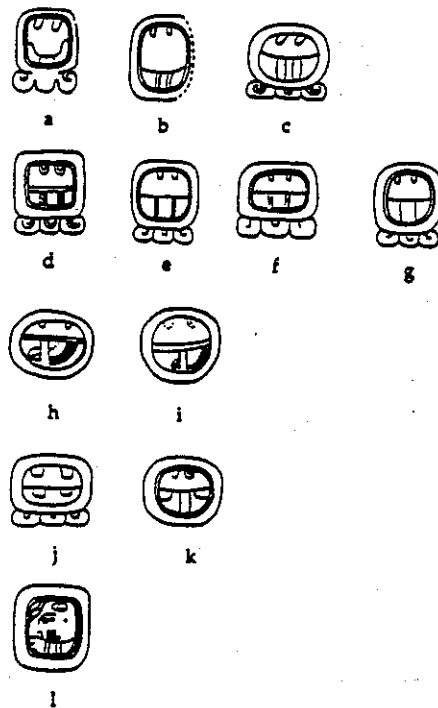
ure 2b) (Taube 1989:43-45). In addition, the *ah* value of the Ben glyph is reinforced by such usages as in the *Wakah-Chan* phrase (Figure 2c).

Figure 3 shows typical Ben ("Ah") glyphs, divided by variations in form. In general, they have one or two strap-like devices coming down from the dividing line, and all but the head variant (Figure 3l) have the two distinctive notches at the top. These two notches are easily recognized, and are diagnostic. The Piedras Negras head variant has a circle on the forehead with a curved line through it instead. Can this be firmly fixed as a proper Ben glyph? The substitution shown in Figure 4 demonstrates that it can. In this inscription, a circle with curved line through it directly substitutes (in the T518 Ahaw of the last glyph block) for the two notches at the top of the Ben segment. The Ben glyph head variant (Figure 3l) strongly resembles G4 examples 1e and possible 1f (Figure 5), and suggests that it could be worthwhile to pursue further associations.

If we look for G4/Ben substitution patterns, we begin to find interesting connections. We should remember that substitution patterns were not meant by the Maya to be puzzles. They may sometimes seem like puzzles to us, but that is another matter. A Maya would have had to be able to *readily* recognize the variation or substitution as representing the same value or information. Copán Temple 11, West Door, North Panel, is the most obvious G4/Ben substitution (Figure 6). Here the G4 head variant at A3 has the strap and two notches of a regular Ben glyph! Except for the coefficient of 7, it could stand alone as a Ben glyph. If we choose



Figure 2



- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| a - YAX L53 | g - NAR 35 |
| b - PN L9 | h - UAX Fresco |
| c - PAL House A | i - UAX Fresco |
| d - TIK L2 | j - Chichen 10 |
| e - PN A2 | k - CPN Q |
| f - YAX L30 | l - PN L3 |

Figure 3

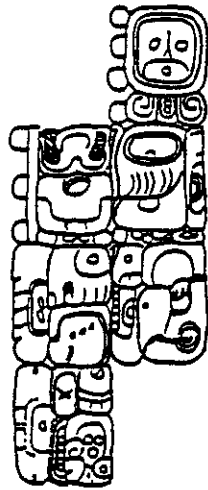


Figure 4
Unprovenienced Panel
After Schele 1992.



31-



1e



1f

Figure 5

to take this glyph at its face value (no pun intended), we read the 7 as *Wuk*, and use the day name *Ah* for the Ben glyph. The result is that the G4 glyph here reads *Wuk-Ah*.

Next to be considered is the G4 type shown together as Figures 1a-d. The example from Dos Pilas Stela 8 (Figure 7) has the Fourth Lord of the Night at F6. In the same inscription, in the same passage, the Ben portion of the T168 Ahaw in the Emblem Glyph at G9 has substituted for the usual

Ben notches at the top, an arrangement of three circles like those on the G4 glyph. This is a substitution of G4 elements directly into an unequivocal *Ah* context. It appears these examples also read *Wuk-Ah*.

The Fourth Lord of the Night from Naranjo Stela 29 (Figure 1i) has as its identifying feature a much larger circular cap dividing the glyph just over the eye rather than just under the nose. Figure 8 shows that it also substitutes directly into the

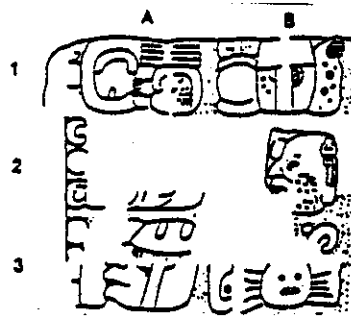


Figure 6
Copan Temple 11, West door, north panel
9.17.2.12.16 1 Cib 19 Ceh G4

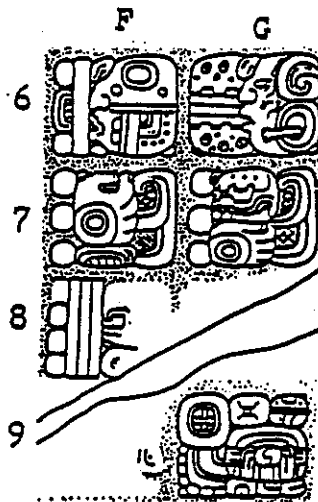


Figure 7
Dos Pilas Stela 8



TIK 31

1a



DPL 8

1b



CAY L2

1c

Ben portion of T168. It is an especially popular substitution at Yaxchilan. Again, the T168 Emblem Glyph substitution is into an unequivocal *Ah* context. Example 1i also appears to read *Wuk-Ah*.

Among the differing forms of G4 glyphs, the remaining group (examples 1f, 1g, and 1h) has as its special feature a diagonal row of circles. In considering the glyphs 1f and 1g, Kelley ventured a read-

ing of "Seven Moon" (Kelley 1976:91). I agree that there are resemblances with the moon sign. If that is so, then, remembering that the phonetic value of the moon sign is *ha* or *ah*, this group of G4 examples also likely reads *Wuk-Ah*.

The association of the number 7 with corn noted by Thompson (1971:209) among the Aztec may have grown (!) from this deity of the earlier

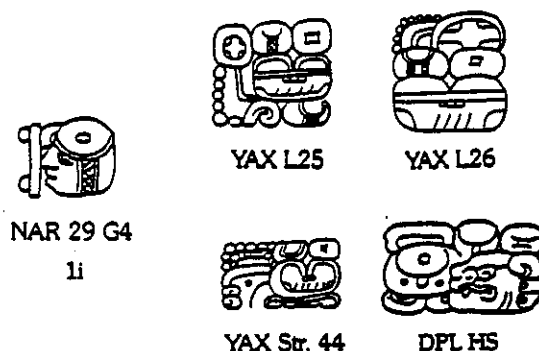


Figure 8

Maya, or perhaps both had a deeper common ancestor for which evidence is still lacking or not understood. For the Aztec, "Chicomecóatl, Seven Serpent, is without a doubt the most important of all gods of vegetation...She was also called "seven ears of corn," Chicomolotzin. In this connection, a piece of sculpture in the form of a rattlesnake...is of great importance. It has a peculiar decoration of seven ears of corn on its body...It is curious to observe that in the esoteric language of sorcerers and fortunetellers those calendar names that have the numeral 7 signify seeds. For example, "7 Serpent" is the esoteric name of corn..." (Caso 1988:45).

All of the differing forms of G4 glyphs discussed here have suggested a reading of *Wuk-Ah*, "Seven Young Corn." It is this kind of substitutional continuity that appears to indicate that *Wuk-Ah* really was what was intended. This is certainly strengthened by the obvious *Wuk-Ah* in the Copán Temple 11 inscription (Figure 6). Among the modern Quiché, *Wucub Ah* is the day that "...augurs good luck in all the affairs of life and a potential career as a dutiful priest-shaman or official (Tedlock 1985:359-360). This might help to explain the popularity of the Fourth Lord of the Night in the inscriptions (Frumker n.d.:Figure 7). As previously mentioned, Barbara MacLeod's work has begun to demonstrate correlations between the Maya and Aztec Lords of the Night. The associa-

tions shown here between G4 and young corn show that, for the Fourth Lord of the Night, there was a direct correlation between the Maya and Aztec lists and sequences.

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