



# Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture

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## Pi as "Bundle"

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The set of glyphs that appear the position of the "bak'tun" in the long count were identified long ago, although the term used for this cycle and higher one are modern inventions combining the Yucatek numbers with the word for "year," *tun* (Thompson 1950:147). Thompson (1950:Fig. 26-27) illustrated the variation pattern for the "bak'tun" glyph in both its geometric and head variant forms. The geometric form (Fig. 1) consists of a double "kawak" sign often appearing with a suffix (Justeson and Fox 1984) read as *hi*. The head

variant is a bird head with a hand substituting for its lower jaw. David Stuart (1987:11-13) deciphered both of these glyphs as phonetic *pi*. With the *hi* sign attached, the "bak'tun" glyphs read phonetically as *pih*.

The substitution pattern within the "baktun" context includes two examples in which a "sky" glyph replaces the *pi* signs. In both examples, the phonetic complement *na* that obligates the *chan/kan* reading of the sky glyph is missing in both these examples. Furthermore, the example from Lacanja Lintel 1 seems to carry a T236 *hi* suffix (Stuart 1987:42-43). The suffix on the Dos Pilas example is not identifiable in the drawing, although we suspect it is the same suffix as in the Lacanja example. This substitution pattern suggests that the "sky" sign, like the T528 "kawak" sign, is polyvalent depending on its phonetic complementation. Without the *na* sign, we suspect the sky sign was *pi*.

We have known for many years that the glyphs in this "bak'tun" context do not record a word for "four-hundred tuns." The mini-conference team (i.e., Schele, Mathews, Lounsbury, and Kelley) became aware of this when they realized that the "bak'tun" and "k'atun" heads are interchanged on the Leiden Plaque (Fig. 2a), and that the double "kawak" *pi*

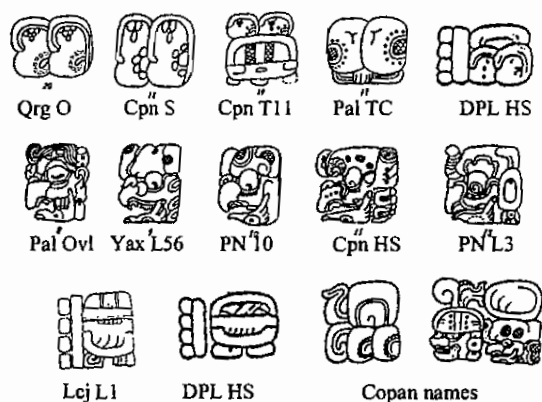


Fig. 1

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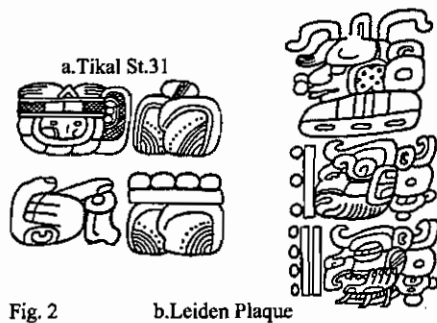


Fig. 2

b. Leiden Plaque

combination occurs on Tikal Stela 31 (Fig. 2b) in the position of a cycle that must refer to a k'atun, rather than a bak'tun. Kelley (1976) had noted this coincident even earlier and suggested *kuk*, "cycle," as a reading for the double kawak glyph.

The most important information bearing on this matter springs from the work of the mini-conference group led in this instance by Floyd Lounsbury's studies on the texts of the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque. In his 1975-76 seminar at Yale, he presented a structural analysis of the east panel of the Temple of Inscriptions in which he identified a repetitive pattern of glyphs associated with period-ending expressions. Over subsequent years, the signs in this pattern have been read by combined efforts of many epigraphers so that today we know how to read the components of this phrase. In the east panel (Fig. 3), it reads *yak'wa u pih u ch'ul*, "he gave it, the 'pih' of, the soul (or god) of." In the first passage on the panel this

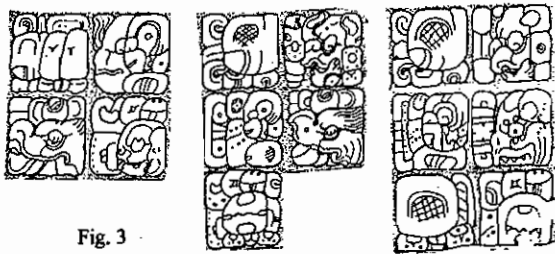


Fig. 3

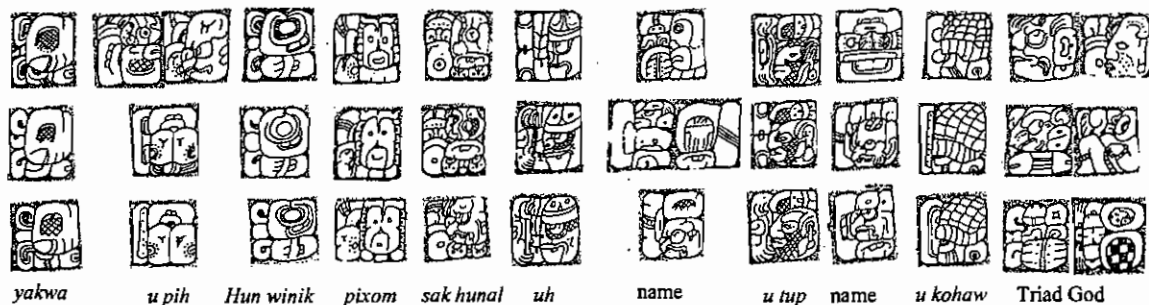


Fig. 5

phrase is followed by the names of the Palenque Triad gods. In the following phrases, the phrase is followed by the name of the then-reigning king. In 1992, the mini-conference group interpreted this structure to mean that the kings gave a *pih* owned by the soul of the patron gods of the city.

For K'atuns 11 and 12, the scribes expanded the formula to specify what constituted the *pih*. For K'atun 11 (Fig. 4), they recorded a separate passage for each god of the Palenque Triad. Each passage consists of *yak'wa* ("he gave it"), the name of a

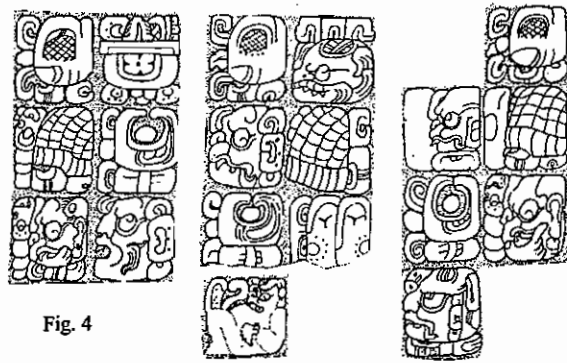


Fig. 4

headdress, *u kohaw* ("his helmet"), *Hun Winik* ("One Person"), *u pih* ("his ???"), Triad God's name. Paraphrased it reads: "he gave it, the such-and-such headdress, the helmet of the One-Person." This structure suggests that the headdress was the *pih* of the Triad God.

For 9.12 the formula got even more elaborate. A working group at the 1989 Texas Meetings consisting of Peter Mathews, Floyd Lounsbury, Martha Macri, Janis Indrikis, and Schele solved this pattern. Each passage (Fig. 5) again begins with *yak'wa*, but this time the verb is followed by *u pih* and *hun winik*. We take this to read that "he gave it, the *pih* of the One-Person," with the One-Person phrase standing in for the Triad God. Then the passage continues with *pixom* ("head covering"), *u sak hun* ("his white

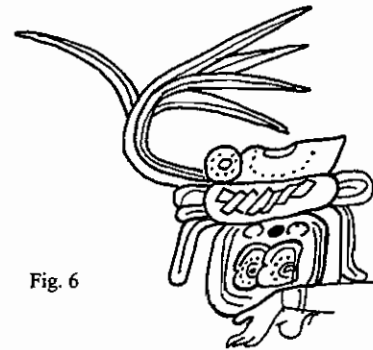


Fig. 6

headband"), *uh* ("collars"), "name" and *u tup* ("his earflares"), and finally, name and *u kohaw* ("his helmet"). The passages close with the name of the Triad God appropriate to each. This is a list of the costuming distinctive to each god. These passages suggest that the *pih* is a part of this costuming or something appropriate to a context in which costuming is given or displayed.

A series of pots published in Robiscek and Hales (1981:73-74) and Kerr (1990:216) include a picture of *pih* as an object. This set of related scenes in which a series of figures standing in waist high water holding bundles. A variety of gods, including Chaks and the god of number eleven, confront each other. One group hold shields and spears, which another facing them hold two kinds of bundles. One bundle consists of bound layers with a shell and feathers atop it; which the other is large and round with a mat and feathers atop it.

On RH 104 (Fig. 6) one of these figures holds out the round bundle, which has a shell above it as well as the mat sign. Written in the center of the bundle is the glyph *hun pi*. Although this is the clearest example, similar bundles (Fig. 7) with glyphs occur on RH 101 and 102. A similar scene on Kerr 2096 shows another one of these bundles, and while the glyph on it is partially obscured by a hand, it appears to read *hun pi*.

We believe that the *pi* referred to in the Temple of Inscriptions passages is exactly this bundle, and that in those contexts, the bundles held the

headdresses and other costume elements of the patron gods of Palenque—known as the Palenque Triad. If this identification is correct, then the *pi* reading may also explain how the "bak'tun" and other cycle glyphs work. One example in Thompson's (1950) sample of "bak'tun" glyph, the *pi* appears over a *haab* glyph. In the higher cycles the distinctive sign for each cycle sits above a *pi* sign or a *haab* glyph. We suggest that "bundle" fits each of these contexts, and that cycles above twenty tuns were known by the generic term of "bundle." This metaphor for "cycle" is not only supported by phonetic and iconographic evidence from Maya sources, but "year bundles" are are prominent references in the Mexica system. A *pi* is a bundle of years or deity accouterments, or of other sacred objects.

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## Notes

1. In the *Ritual of the Bakabs*, *hun* is combined with several god names to identify them as deities of the creation times. We think the use of "one" in deity names may signify that they were members of the first generation of gods or were present in the time of the creation. If this is the usage here, then *hun-winik* may mark each of the Triad gods as "first people."



RH 101

RH 104  
Fig. 7

Kerr 2096