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Untying the Headband¹

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In 1985, when I² was preparing the chapter on the supplementary series for *Ancient Maya Writing*,³ I collected a full sample of the variations of Glyph F. This sample made it clear that all of the signs that appear as the main center element of Glyph F (Fig. 1) also occur as the element in the hand of the T713\757 accession (Fig. 2) expression first identified by Mathews and Schele (1973).

Over the years since its first identification, many people have offered interpretations leading to a slow and remarkable accumulation of evidence as

to its meaning. Following an erroneous set of clues, Schele (1976) proposed that the second component of the phrase was a metaphor for "succession" based on the metaphor of "following in the footsteps of the ancestors." Disagreeing with this argument, many people, especially John Justeson, followed the more logical course of simply reading it as *tu bah*. Vicky Bricker (1985), however, was the first to propose a viable interpretation of this reading that is, that *tu bah* functions as a prepositional phrase containing the reflexive "to himself."

1. This note came out of work done by the three authors at a miniconference sponsored by funds from the John D. Murchison Regents Professorship of the University of Texas, currently held by Linda Schele. It took place between August 9-16, 1990, and was held at the Anthropology Department of the University of Calgary.

2. The use of the first person is always difficult in a co-authored paper. In this context, "I" refers to the senior author, who is writing this note. "We" refers to all three authors, who participated in the discussion that led to these conclusions.

3. This is a still-born introductory book on the Maya writing system begun by Linda Schele, David Stuart, and George Stuart. Much of the research for it was conducted in 1985 when Schele was resident at George Stuart's house in Washington, D.C.

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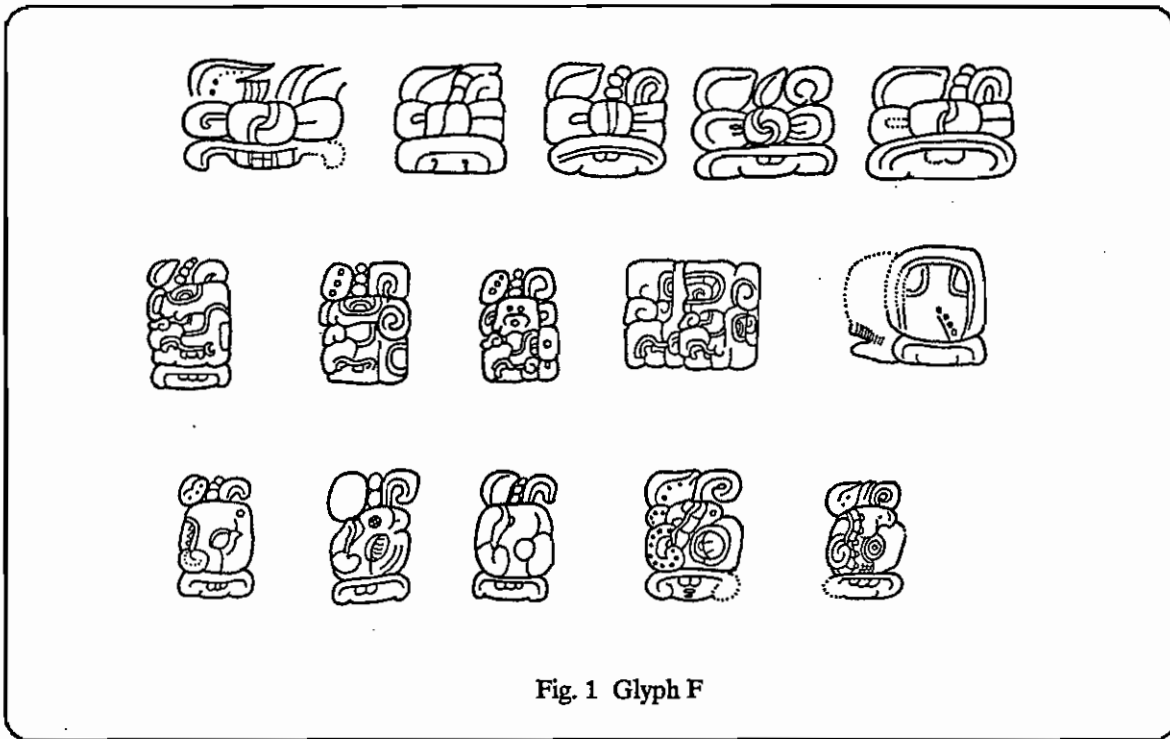


Fig. 1 Glyph F

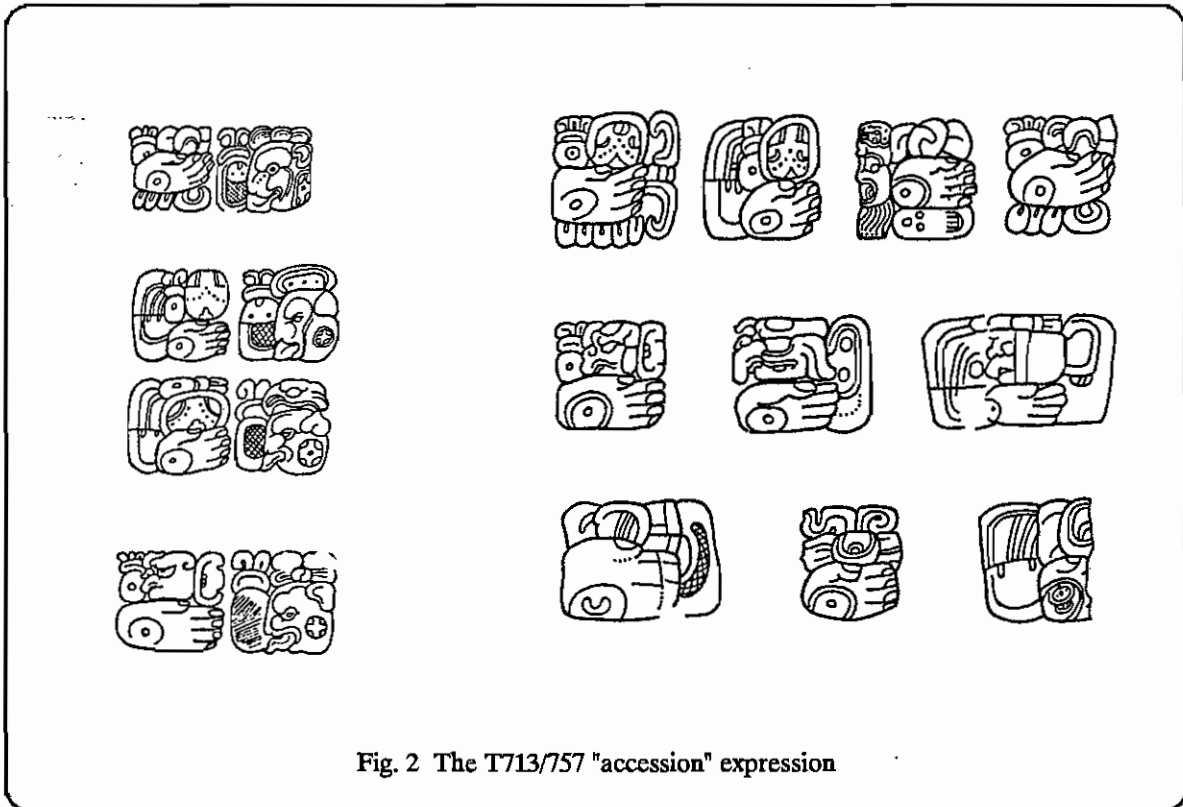


Fig. 2 The T713/757 "accession" expression

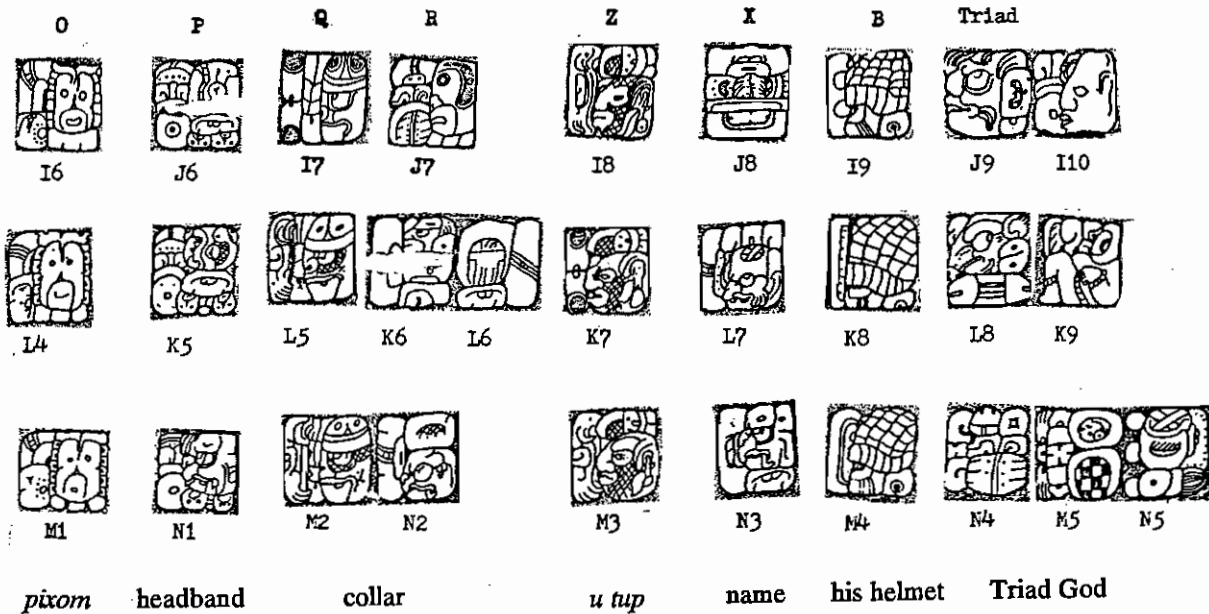


Fig. 3 The Costume Section from the Temple of Inscriptions middle panel

At the time she proposed this solution, Schele resisted it because of disagreement with Bricker's reading of the T713 part of the phrase, but more importantly, because it did not seem logical that only this accession expression of all those then known would require reflexive. If not one, why not all? Other discoveries have since confirmed her analysis and explained why only this particular accession phrase requires the reflexive.

The next clue came from Martha Macri's⁴ work on the middle panel of the Temple of Inscriptions. By 1984, she had begun to propose decipherments for parts of the Triadic passages (Fig. 3) originally identified by Heinrich Berlin (1963). She proposed that Berlin's component Z is *u tup*, a phonetic value that Schele (1975) has also proposed in earlier analysis. Macri, however, fol-

lowed Mathews' (1979) interpretation of this phonetic sequence as "his earflares." Using that as the guide she suggested that the helmet glyph in component B was simply "his helmet"⁵ with the type of helmet preceding it at variable X and the owner of the helmet recorded in the phrase after. In other words, we have the Quadripartite Badge as the helmet of GI; a undeciphered combination recording the helmet of GIII; and the Jester God as the helmet of GIII. Macri further added a decipherment of component O as *pixom*, a well documented term for "hat" derived from the verb *pix*, "to wrap."

At the 1989 Advanced Seminar of Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, we organized a special team to work on Palenque consisting of Martha Macri, Janis Indrikis, Peter Mathews, Floyd Lounsbury,

4. Martha shared many of these ideas with Linda Schele at the 1983 and 1984 workshops, although it took many more years for them to mature in Schele's mind. As far as we know, she is the first to realize that these passages refer to various parts of clothing.

5. In a study of the T670 hand and its function as a "verb", Schele (1989) identified a phonetic spelling of the helmet on Piedras Negras Lintel 2 as *kohal*. Terry Kaufman identified this as a known term for "hat."

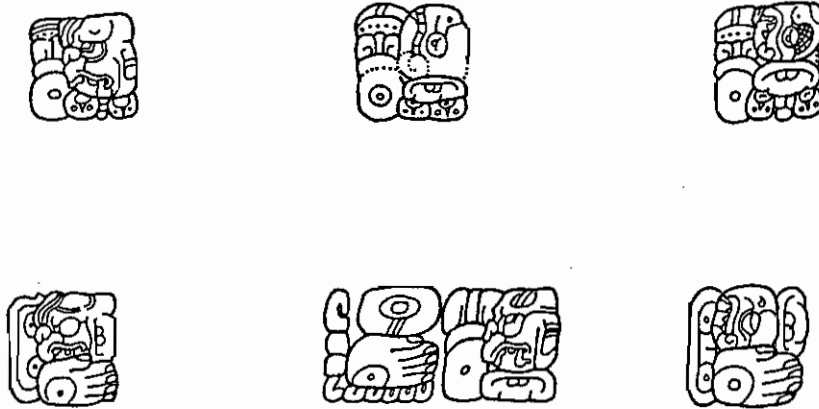


Fig. 4 Jester God spellings

and Linda Schele. Beginning from the base of Macri's work, the team realized that these passages record the upper part of a costume in the order they would be put on in a ritual dressing. The repeated sections record this costume for each of the Palenque Triad gods.

After the introductory passage,⁶ we have *pixom* (the wraparound headgear Chan-Bahlam wears in the Group of the Cross); *u sak hunal* (the spelling of the Jester God's name); *uh*, the word for necklace with a variable following specifying which kind of necklace goes with which god; *u tup*, "his earflares"; and finally a variable naming the kind of helmet followed by *u kahaw*, "his helmet" and the name of the god. The sequence of objects is, thus, the binding cloth that held the hair in place, a white headband with the Jester God attached, the collar of the particular god, earflares, and finally the helmet associated with the god. Presumably these costume elements were brought out in

the k'atun rituals and perhaps donned for ritual dances.

The most important thing for our purpose is that the *sak hunal*⁷ spellings of the Jester God's name in these passages and others (Fig. 4) must refer to the cloth headband that is worn by kings.⁸ Several of the accession expressions (Fig. 2) also include the *sak* glyph so that it is fairly clear that the verb means to tie on or to don this headress. The *tu ba* after the hand has the proposition with the reflexive because it records that the king tied the headband "on himself."

This leads us to the new discovery. During a recent mini-conference, the three of us were looking at the Palace Tablet as I demonstrated to my colleagues the evidence for reading the "knot-skull" sign as *ha* and the combination of "knot-skull" with T679 as *hi* or *hil*, "to expire" or "to die."⁹ In previous work on the Palace Tablet (Schele 1979), I had used structural evidence to

6. This passage seems to read: *yak'wa u hul plh hun winik* ("it was offered to the arriving period of one score").

7. Nikolai Grube (personal communication, 1990) has developed a brilliant argument that the "birth frog" was syllabic *hu*. We have tested this reading and found it very productive, although we think that in the context of "birth" the sign is logograph and represents a word ending in *lh*. Since a number of Classic period parentage statements have *u slh*, "the born one," as the term for child, we think the verb was most likely *slh*. We take the pattern of phonetic complements, that is *li* in one case and *hi* or *ha* in the other to indicate which reading is the correct one.

8. See Freidel and Schele (1988) for a full discussion of the origin and function of this headband.

9. Evidence for this reading is presented in Schele and Friedel (n.d.), but it evolved from cooperative work between Schele and Nikolai Grube.

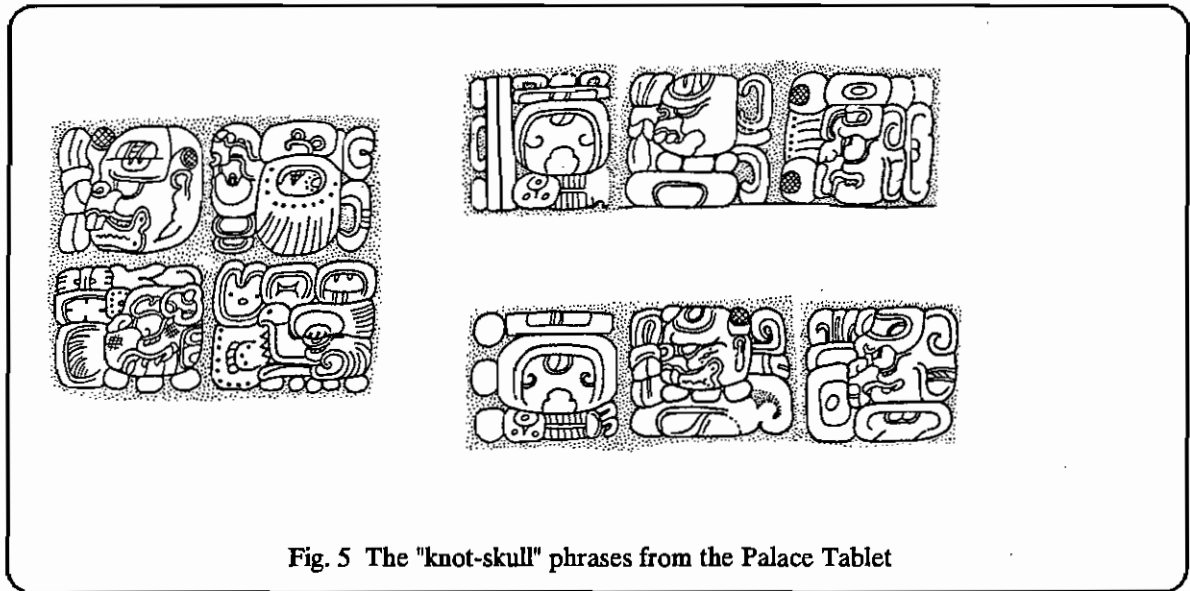


Fig. 5 The "knot-skull" phrases from the Palace Tablet

argue that another "knot-skull" phrase (Fig. 5) on the Palace Tablet also recorded death, but in this case, the phrase recording who died is either *u sak hunan* or *sak hunan*. At other times and in other analysis, I had ignored the third person pronoun and it had really not impacted that the spelling of this "knot-skull" is entirely different than the other examples. However, Peter Mathews noted that fact when we were looking at these examples.

In both examples, the verb is spelled *ha:ma:li:ya* or *hamali*. Challenged by Mathews' question, we looked up this word to see if it would yield something and indeed it did. Aulie and Aulie (1978) list *jam* as "abrir (casa, libro, caja)." Kaufman and Norman (1984:121) list *jām* in proto-Cholan and *jam* in proto-Maya as "open." *Hamali* is an inflected form of this verb recording that something was opened. The glyph that follows is the white Jester God headband that kings tied around their heads in their accession rites. The Palace Tablet phrases restate death statements from the clauses immediately in front of each as bases of distance numbers designating the time to the next accession. A paraphrase is "so much time passed after the *Sak Hunan* headband opened until the next event." Thus, to become the king was to tie on the white headband. At death it opened.

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