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Nominal Glyphs on the Palenque Sarcophagus

by Heinrich Berlin

Translated by Khristaan D. Villela

In his most recent publication, Alberto Ruz finally made public the rest of the illustrations of the sarcophagus discovered in the so-called secret room, or crypt, of the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque, Chiapas (Ruz 1958a).¹ Interpreting and taking advantage of this vast quantity of material will be the work of many scholars and much time. In this article, we will limit ourselves to exploring the possibility that some of the glyphs sculpted on various areas of the sarcophagus are names. So as not to delay us unnecessarily, we presuppose the reader is familiar with both Maya writing and with the books of Thompson (1950) and Zimmermann (1956). The reader should keep in mind the difference in hieroglyphic writing between the codices and the monumental inscriptions when Zimmermann's nomenclature is cited.²

With reference to the distribution of glyphs on the sarcophagus, four zones are clearly evident.

- 1) The upper face of the stone sarcophagus lid
- 2) A chronological band on all four sides of the lid's rim [2]
- 3) The four sides of the sarcophagus proper
- 4) The four pier supports of the sarcophagus

As we will see, Zones 1 and 4 are closely related. Likewise, Zones 2 and 3 are also closely connected. We will therefore describe these relationships in order.

See Ruz's publications for most inscriptions discussed in this essay (1955, 1958).

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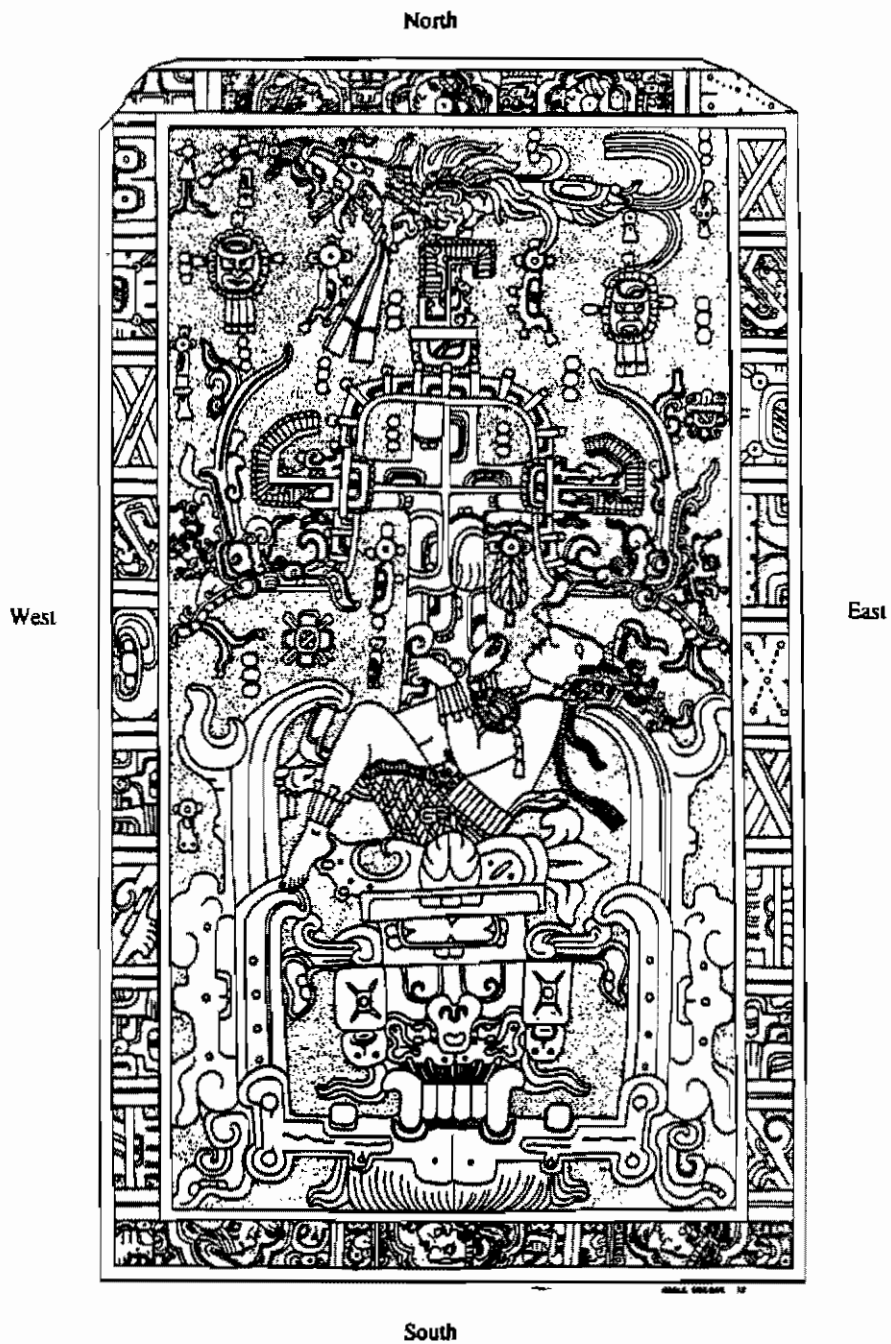
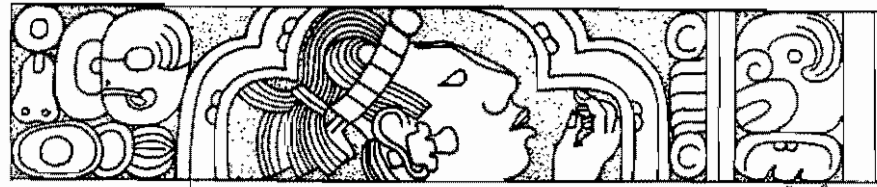


Figure 1. Palenque Sarcophagus. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson



Southeast



Center (South)



Southwest

Figure 2. South Border of the Palenque Sarcophagus Lid.
Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson.

I

The sculpted monumental stone lid of the sarcophagus portrays an elaborate symbolic scene enclosed by a border [Fig. 1].³ There are three human heads in medallions on the lower border (South) [Fig. 2]. Glyphs flank each side medallion, and paired parallel vertical bands separate the central medallion with its glyphs.

In the same way, the upper border (North) also has three heads in medallions [Fig. 3].³ However, these are smaller and the central medallion is not separated by the vertical bands. For this reason, the glyphs are both smaller and stacked. Single glyphs flank only the central medallion.

Each head corresponds, then, to a pair of glyphs. We designate each head and its respective glyphs according to position, North, Northeast, etc. and present the sarcophagus lid border data in the following table:

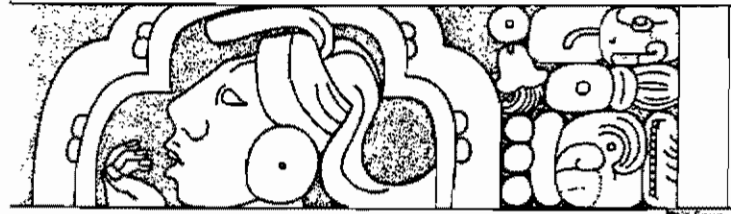
Characteristics of Head	First Glyph	Second Glyph
NW Turban flower ear ornament	Cauac and Prefix 41 ⁴	sui generis
SW Turban, flower ear ornament	Cauac and Prefix 41	sui generis
NE Bare-head, disc ear ornament	"Seating" compound	Pseudo-numeral, Main sign unclear
SE Bare-head, flower ear ornament	"Seating" compound	Pseudo-numeral, God C with suffix
N Bare-head, disc ear ornament	3 elements including Prefix 20 (?) ⁵	Pseudo-numeral, God C (?) with suffix
S Bare-head, flower ear ornament	3 elements including Prefix 24(?) ⁶	Pseudo-numeral, God C with suffix

As shown in the table above, the glyphs of the East side are virtually identical, as are the pair on the West side. In contrast, the glyphs of the central medallions have different prefixes: 20 (?) for the North, and 24 (?) for the South.⁷

Moving on, four heads and glyphs also appear on the monumental pier supports of the sarcophagus proper [Fig. 4]. They are distributed with the heads on the South and North sides and the four pairs of glyphs on the East and West sides. In order to repeat the type of analysis above, the following table presents the following data for each support:

Characteristics of Head	First Glyph (above)	Second Glyph (below)
NE Turban, flower ear ornament	Cauac with 3 dots	Identical to NW above
SE Turban, disc ear ornament	"Seating" compound	Pseudo-numeral, God C and suffix [4]
NW Bare-head pendant ear ornament	3 elements, including Prefix 20 (?)	Pseudo-numeral, God C and suffix
SW Bare-head flower ear ornament	3 elements, indistinct superfix	Pseudo-numeral, God C and suffix

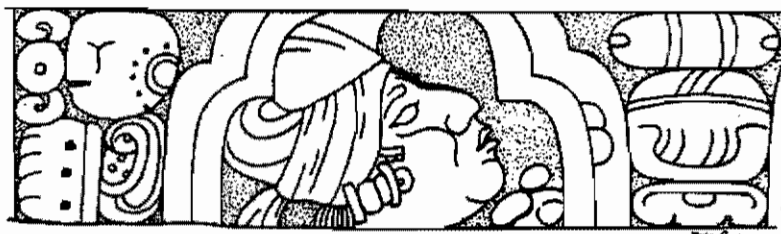
As Prefix 41 is similar to 3 dots, the prefix of the first glyph on Northeast pier is likely just carelessly executed. The same carelessness is obvious in the upper glyph of the Southwest pier, which was never completed.



Northeast



Center (North)



Northwest

Figure 3. North Border of the Palenque Sarcophagus Lid.
Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson

Up to now, we have considered 10 pairs of glyphs. Considering variants, 2 pairs repeat twice, and three pairs also repeat twice:

2 identical pairs on the North (lid North, support Northwest)

2 identical pairs on the South (lid South, support Southwest)

3 identical pairs on the East (lid Northeast, Southeast, support Southeast)

3 identical pairs twice on the West, and once on the East (lid Northwest, Southwest, support Northeast)

For symmetry, we have compared the inscriptions of the Northwest and Northeast supports. However, perhaps the Maya wanted to stress the North-South opposition.

The heads associated with these glyphs differ, in general terms, according to the same model determining their placement, although there are several inexplicable discrepancies.⁸ In spite of these, I believe there are enough similarities to suspect an intimate connection between each type of head and its respective pair of glyphs. Likewise, within each head combination the pair of glyphs and the cardinal direction of their physical placement may be connected.

The glyphs which seem to be connected to the cardinal directions are not those known from the codices or other monumental inscriptions.⁹ They perhaps describe a more specific association, rather than a general connection.

II

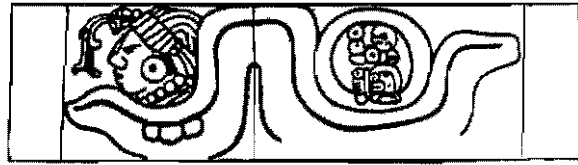
On the upper band of the sides of the sarcophagus proper are carved human figures emerging from a band decorated with Caban signs [Fig. 5]. There are ten figures in total: three on the East side (which, counting always from the left to right, we shall designate E1, E2, and E3), three on the West (W1, W2, and W3), two on the South (S1 and S2), and finally, two on the North (N1 and N2). Two glyphs are associated with each person; [5] only the central figures on the East and West (E2 and W2) have four glyphs each.

The final glyph in each set seems to be identical in nine cases (it is absent in W1). This is the grapheme which I called Emblem Glyph P-1 in a previous study (Berlin 1958). It is composed of a skeletal element, the so-called Ben Ich superfix, and Thompson's Water Group prefix. The skeletal element is a mandible in the texts of S1 and N2, and a lunar postfix occurs instead of the normal prefix. The Emblem Glyphs of E2 and W2 also occur without the prefix. However, in these cases, the head of God C in the preceding glyph stands for the prefix. Glyph 36 of Quirigua Stela A has a similar example of the God C head placed between the Water Group and the rest of the Emblem Glyph, though there it is, naturally, the Quirigua Emblem Glyph.

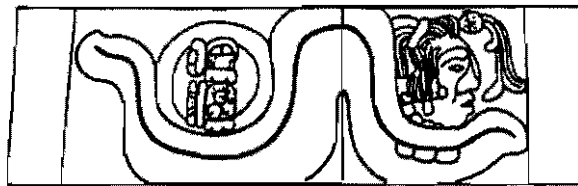
Comparing the glyphs on the North and South side, it is immediately obvious that they are the same pairs of glyphs merely transposed. The same occurs with the individuals pictured. *The individuals pictured belong with the glyph pairs, as we have already demonstrated in Section 1.*¹⁰

Individual N1, the same as S2, has long hair and is apparently a woman. Her glyph is composed of the head of a young person with a kind of curl in front. A pseudo-Kayab with a Zac superfix follows. To me, this head is identical to the young goddess head-variant of the number one. Its presence here suggests that it also functions as a glyphic indicator of female individuals. As the feminine prefix in Yucatec is *Ix*, I shall call this head—when it occurs in contexts I believe refer to feminine individuals—provisionally, *IX* (in upper-case letters to distinguish it from the name of one of the days).

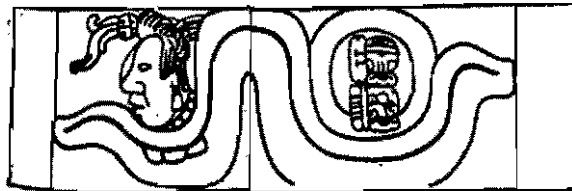
Individual E3 also has long hair and a mantle covering the breast. (Note that the other two individuals on the East side have no mantle covering the breast. This article is obligatory for women, but optional for males.) Her distinctive glyph, the upper grapheme, is composed of the *IX* head and an *Ik* with superfix. (As a linguistic aside, I would like to note that the Motul Dictionary has the following entry: *ix ikal*: señora principal.) The same woman also occupies the central place on the West side, W2 (long hair, mantle; the other two individuals on the same side do not have these). The Palenque Emblem Glyph, which repeats on the sarcophagus as though it were a surname, here ap-



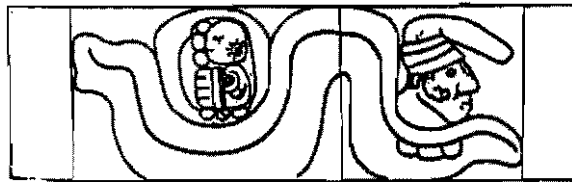
Southeast



Southwest



Northeast



Northwest

Figure 4. Sarcophagus Pier Supports. Faces correspond to the North and South sides, glyphic panels to the East and West. Drawing after Ruz 1958.

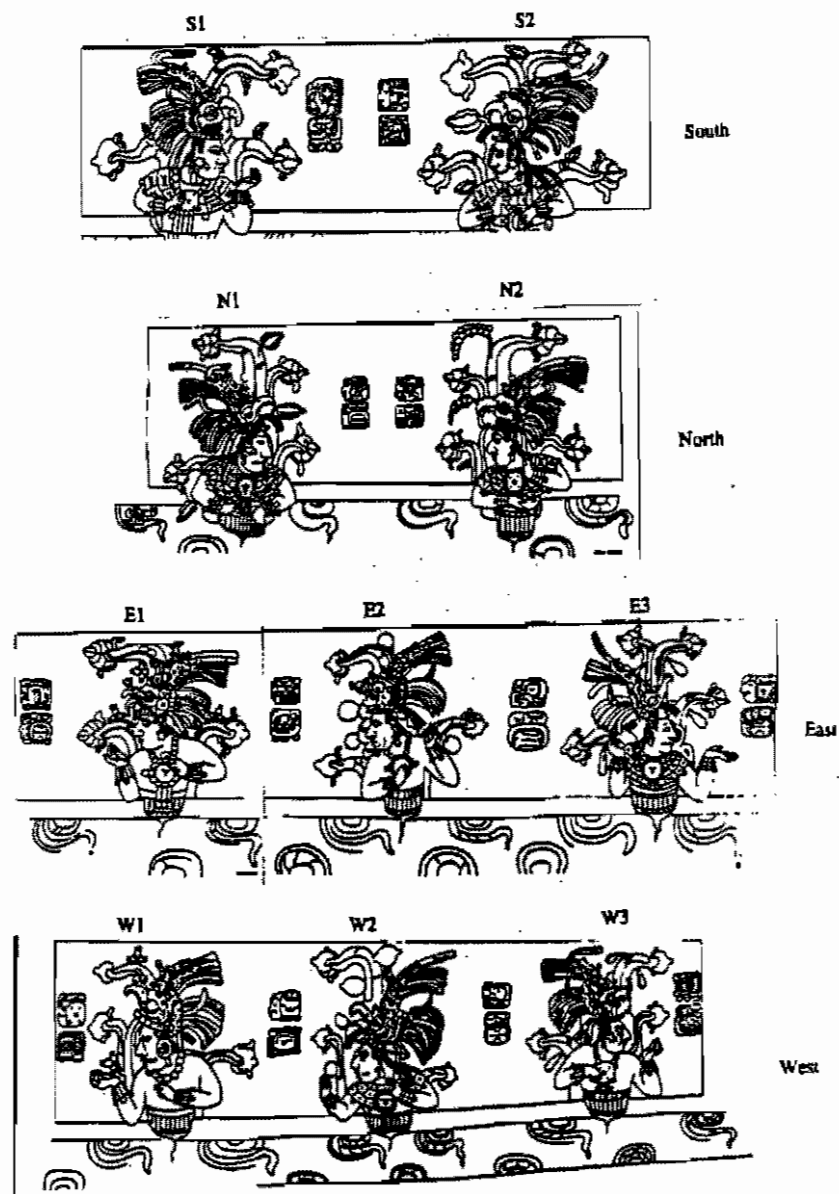


Figure 5. Sarcophagus Sides. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson

pears separated into two glyphs. These are the second pair of glyphs associated with the middle figure. Her characteristic identificatory glyphs [6] are on the left side. They include the *IX* head, to which is attached the Kan sign. The second is the *Ik* sign with superfix. *IX* and *Ik* with a superfix also occurs on the chronological rim text of the sarcophagus, side East Qb-R [Fig. 6, nos. 29-30] (with cross-hatching on the head and a Kan tatoo) and on the tablets of the Temple of Inscriptions at L4-K5 and L8-K9 [Fig. 7a, 7b].

In his discussion of the figures on the Palace Tablet and Tablet of the Slaves, Alberto Ruz identified some of the attendants as women on account of their long hair and mantles (Ruz 1952a:57, 1952b:35). This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the *IX* glyph in the inscriptions of Palenque, but I do wish to note that Tatiana Proskouriakoff, in her study "A Pattern of Dates and Monuments at Piedras Negras, Guatemala," has arrived, by an entirely different path of reasoning from ours, at the interpretation of the young face with curl as a marker for feminine individuals.¹¹ Above I noted the belief that the same head also has the numerical value of "1." Correct interpretation is therefore difficult; for example, the *1* or *IX* Katun compound at Piedras Negras, analyzed by Proskouriakoff. Another example of this ambiguity occurs at block A14 on the south tablet of Temple XVIII at Palenque, where the compound "1-head with curl Spider Web" occurs. Reading the head with curl glyph as 1 yields the apparently redundant "*Hun-hun*-Spider Web." In contrast, the compound read "*Hun-IX*-Spider Web" has a parallel in the name of the goddess *Ixhumie* or *Ixhunieta* of Landa (1938:7).

To reinforce our identification of the glyph, we note that it occurs in texts associated with two women portrayed in the upper register of Bonampak Structure 1, Room 2.

Returning to the sarcophagus, I believe I recognize, in the chronological rim text, the glyphs of several persons discussed above, whether clearly or only in passing. I propose the following correspondences:

Sarcophagus Side	Rim Text
E3=W2	East Qb-R ¹²

W3
W1
N1=S2
N2=S1

East Gb¹³
West D-E (?)¹⁴
West Kb¹⁵
West Nb¹⁶

I have found no correspondences for individuals E1 and E2.

It seems to me that the following can be securely affirmed: the glyphs which appear beside the figures portrayed on the sarcophagus sides serve to identify the names of these individuals. These same names can appear in the [7] chronological rim text associated with Calendar Rounds and punctuated by a Quincunx. The key now is to understand the meaning of the Quincunx (Birth? Marriage? Death? Conquest? Accession?, etc.)

The glyph compound on the rim text, at North D-F, appears, with slight variation, two times on Tablet I of the Temple of the Inscriptions. There the second glyph includes the so-called "Serpent Segment" in the first example (at K12) [Fig. 7c]. In the second example (at M5), the glyph consists of an animal head with an upturned upper lip [Fig. 7d] (perhaps the main sign of Emblem Glyph P-2?). The same substitution occurs in other cases of parallel clauses at Palenque (Palace Tablet F8, E9 and O8, P3; Tablet of the Slaves caption texts). The head with an upturned upper lip at Palenque can be considered, at the very least, the head-variant of the so-called "Serpent Segment."

At this point the question arises: Are the named persons on the sarcophagus historical individuals or deities, or perhaps, priests with their titles?

In exploring first the possibility that they might be deities, we have to keep in mind the poverty of our knowledge on the Maya pantheon.

However, it is immediately obvious that neither the persons nor their glyphs correspond to the deities of the codices. Although some of the individuals are young like the Maize god, that possibility must be discarded. Maize is not among the plants and trees sprouting behind each individual on the sarcophagus sides.

The skeletal element present in the last glyph of the names could suggest that they are underworld deities. However, we have already seen that the skeletal element is one of the Palenque Emblem Glyphs, and I do not believe it could, at the same

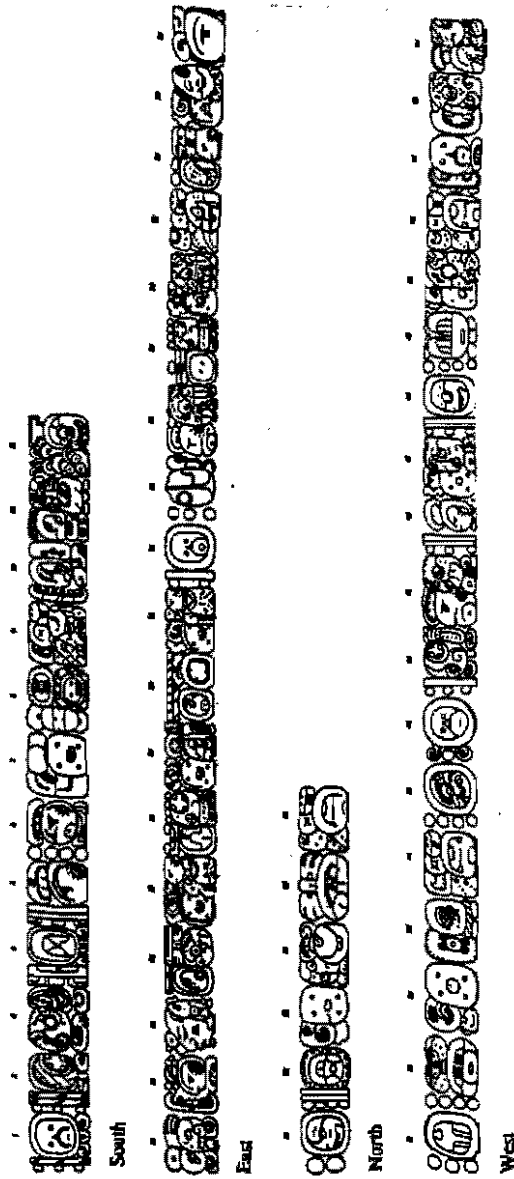


Figure 6. Sarcophagus Rim Text. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson

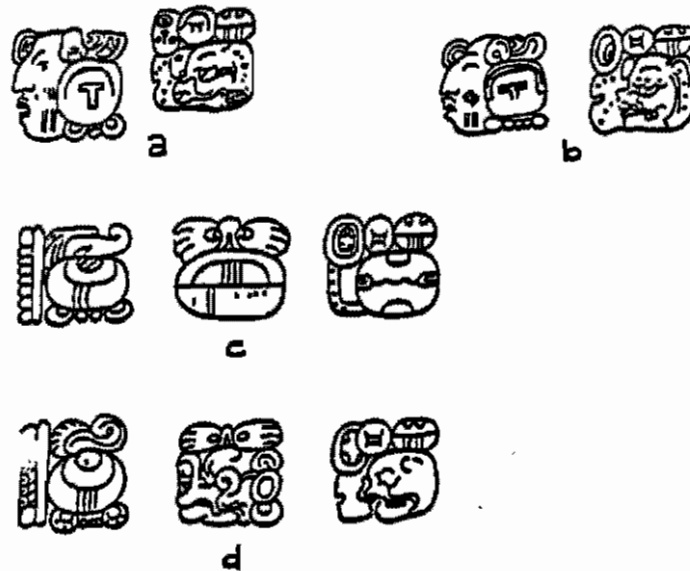


Figure 7. Clauses from the East Tablet of the Palenque Temple of the Inscriptions

time, have both this value and also refer to the underworld. The glyphic clauses of the sarcophagus appear not only on this monument, but also in other Palenque inscriptions. That latter do not, in any way, suggest a connection to the underworld gods.

Given the connection between the number nine and the underworld in the Mesoamerican mind [there are nine priests—or whoever they may be—on the walls of the Temple of Inscriptions crypt, exactly the number found in the Comalcalco tomb (Blom and La Farge 1926:1:116), we could take the individuals on the sarcophagus sides to be the nine Lords of the Night. That is, if their number happened to be nine. There are only seven different persons on the sarcophagus. Thompson hypothesized that there were seven earthly or agricultural gods, perhaps associated with the 819 Day Count (Thompson 1950:214). If the seven individuals were these gods, then the associated plants and

trees would make sense. However, once again, it is more than odd that the maize plant does not appear with any individual on the Sarcophagus sides.[8]

The principal argument in favor of interpreting the figures as historical individuals rests on the fact that the nominal glyphs appear elsewhere in the inscriptions, especially on the sarcophagus rim, where they are associated with non-Period Ending Calendar Rounds.¹⁷

We have to keep the solution to the problem open. We must first study the names and nominal clauses of Palenque. This investigation should keep in mind the advances already achieved by Tatiana Proskouriakoff with respect to the possible historical interpretation of the inscriptions of Piedras Negras.

In conclusion, I would like to note another possible nominal association: in front of the small priest on the left of the tablet of the Temple of the Cross

are glyphs A and B, according to Maudslay's classification. Maudslay's glyphs C and D appear in front of the tall figure on the right of the same tablet. On the Tablet of the Foliated Cross, the priests change places and also their glyphs: here glyphs B and C (identical to the previous C and D) for the tall one, and F and G (the same as the earlier A and B) for the small one. However, it is strange that the same glyphs do not accompany the identical figures, tall and small, on the panel of the Temple of the Sun.

Notes

1. This article originally appeared as: Glifos Nominales en el Sarcófago de Palenque, by Heinrich Berlin. *Humanidades* 2(10):1-8, 1959. Mexico. This is a preliminary translation. Berlin's numbered graphemes are according to Zimmermann's catalog. See Thompson's 1962 *Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs* for the equivalent graphemes in his system. Original pagination occurs in brackets []. The notes are mine. I have converted citations and references according to the American Antiquity Style Sheet.
2. That is, Zimmermann's glyph catalog, which like Gates's, covered only the codices.
3. Illustrations of the lid, North and South borders, pier supports, sarcophagus sides, and rim text do not appear in Berlin's original. I include them here for clarity. My Figure 7 is Berlin's sole illustration, Figure 1.
4. Thompson's T63 for the codices, and T61 for the monumental inscriptions.
5. Thompson's T109.
6. Thompson's T17. It is more likely T109, as in the North border central medallion.
7. As noted above, both are almost certainly Z20, or T109.
8. Las cabezas con que van asociados estos glifos se ajustan, en términos generales, al mismo patrón que los diferencia según su lugar, aunque quedan algunas discrepancias sin explicación.
9. That is, they are not the glyphs for North, South, etc., known from other hieroglyphic sources.
10. Italics in original.
11. Berlin had an advanced copy of Proskouriakoff's 1960 essay. The final title was "Historical Im-

plications of a Pattern of Dates at Yaxchilan." (*American Antiquity* 25:454-475).

12. Figure 6, nos. 29-30.
13. Figure 6, no. 19.
14. Figure 6, nos. 40-41.
15. Figure 6, no. 47.
16. Figure 6, no. 50.
17. Berlin's *Ruedas Calendáricas no redondas*. By "unround" Calendar Rounds, I assume he means dates which do not fall on Period Endings. Historical events would not always occur on Period Endings, and their placement might seem arbitrary and thus "unround."

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