



# Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture

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## Further Adventures with T128 *ch'a*

by Linda Schele

During the last several years, T128 has been the subject of intensive study because of its appearance in the Primary Standard Sequence. Barbara MacLeod and Brian Stross (1990, written and circulated 1987) first proposed the "wing-quincunx" in this sequence reads *y-uch'ib*. Although the rationale for this reading has since changed, their suggestion has proven out, giving T128 possible values of *ch'i*, *ch'a*, *k'i*, or *k'a*. Confusion about the exact context, oddities in the substitution pattern, and other considerations made many hesitate to commit to any one of these phonetic values.

This state began to change when David Stuart (in a letter circulated in February, 1989) associated the wing-shell death glyph with the Tzot-

zil entry *chay ik'*, thus making a value of *ch'a* more likely. The spelling of the "drinking vessel" word *uch'ib* still obviated against the vowel. New information supports the *ch'a* value strongly. The first of these new data came from Terry Kaufman at this year's workshop. He informed us that instrumental made from transitive verb like "drink" are derived with *-ab* rather than the *-ib* we have been supposing. His observation makes *uch'ab*, rather than *uch'ib*, the proper form of "drinking vessel," thus supporting the *ch'a* value.

The tale continues with this year's workshop, where I decided to present the *sah* phoneme as an example of a substitution set. This led me to the T713/757 accession phrase at Palenque and to Glyph F. To make a long story short, Nikolai's demonstration of the *hu* value for the birth frog

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head produced to a clear reading of the knot and *na* and their substitutions in both contexts as *hun*, *hunal*, and *sak hunal*. These were both the name of the Jester God and the headband worn by kings during the Classic period.

This left T128 to explain, and taking a chance that the most likely reading was *ch'a* because of David's *chay*, I looked up *ch'a* in Attanasi and found the following entries:

- ch'ah* "bitter, bark, fumigate"
- ch'ah-en* "tumpline, bark used for tying"
- ch'ahnal* "tie, strip of bark, cord for bag"
- ch'ahun* "fumigate with incense, tie with."

These entries explained for me how T128 works in glyph F, especially when they are considered in the light of Stela A at Copan where Glyph G and F are followed by God K's name. I had always taken this to be Glyph Y, but it now occurs to me that Glyph G is the name of the headband that is tied on God K who rules the day. In other words, the hat changes in a nine day cycle.

In recent days, the *ch'a* reading for T128 has clarified glyph in territory of the era expression already trodden by Barbara in her *Hieroglyphic Hunch #4* (MacLeod 1991). She and I have been looking at 4 Ahaw 8 Kumk'u expression at Quirigua and Palenque since my 1990 seminar of hieroglyphic writing in which I focused on the inscriptions of Quirigua. There are four constants (Fig. 1) that occur in these expressions in most examples—the "crossed-planks" verb, a fist-imix

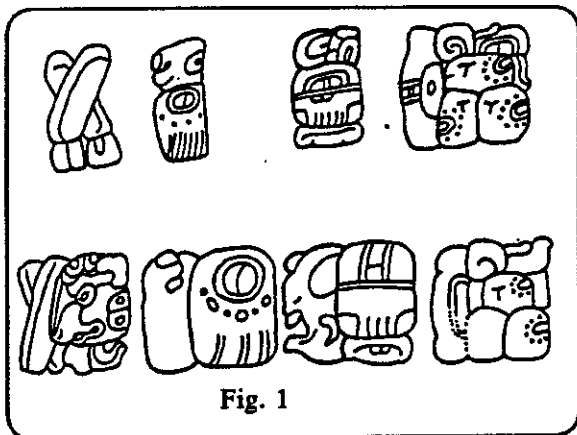


Fig. 1

glyph, T128 over sign, and *yax* prefixed to a stack of three stones. The last glyph is the main sign of the Seibal emblem glyph.

Barbara in her *Hieroglyphic Hunch #2* provided good substitution evidence that the "crossed planks" read *hal*, which she linked to the Yukatek verb *ha'l* "to say" and "to manifest." The second glyph in the phrase consists of a closed fist and a *ba* sign and on the new altar from Copan, a *ho* between the fist and the *ba*. I do not know the value of the fist sign, but I suspect it has an *o* vowel.

The last two glyphs are the subject of my concern. On Quirigua Stela C, these two pairs of glyphs are separated by a long passage recording the placement of three altars. As Stuart and Houston (1991) have noted, the final two glyphs—*ch'a chan* and "first three-stone"—occur following *utiy* in a context that identifies them as place names (Fig. 2). Although Stuart and Houston recognized the "First-three-stone" glyph as a location, to my knowledge Barbara and I were the first to

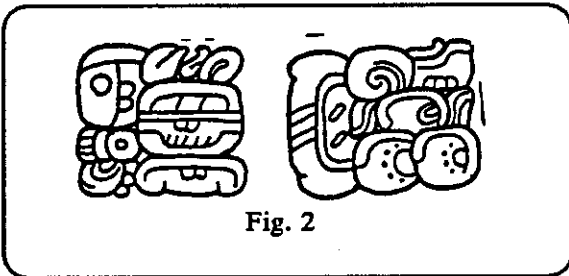


Fig. 2

recognize that the three-stones refer directly to the three thrones erected in the Quirigua version of the creation event.

Stuart and Houston (1990) did not comment on the *ch'a chan* glyph that precedes the *Yax-Ox-Tun-nal* location, but since it clearly followed the *utiy* it must also be part of the place name. By the way, comparing the TS and TC versions of this place name led me to the identification of the head variant of T128 back in 1985 when I was researching the chapter on the supplementary series for *Ancient Maya Writing*, the defunct book I was writing with George and David Stuart.

In her *Hieroglyphic Hunch #2*, Barbara also worked on this place sign suggesting it is a shortened version of *ch'ak*, a word that can mean "divide" and in this context "sky divisions." I wasn't entirely satisfied with the absence of the *k* in *ch'ak*, so when I was working on this location for my new book, I decided to see if *ch'a* might have a value appropriate to the context. I chose

Wisdom's Chorti vocabulary first and found the following:

*ch'a'* "lying down, horizontal, horizontal position

*ch'a'an* "lying down, reclined, trailing (on a vine), level, lie down

*ch'a'an k'in* "west, afternoon, early evening"

*ch'a'ar* "lying down in bed, horizontal"

Kaufman and Norman (1985) have reconstructed *ch'a* as "lying down."

These entries didn't make much sense to me until I started thinking about the 13 Ik end of Mol event on the Temple of the Cross a house named *wakah chanal waxaknal* is dedicated. We also know this is the name of the *pib na* and the World Tree. Based on a suggestion made by Nikolas Hopkins back in 1978, I have been interpreting this name as "Stood up sky." "Lying down sky" is its reciprocal opposite.

Furthermore, this sense of lifting the sky from its lying down position is reflecting in the the *pas*/"dawn" logograph (Fig. 3), which shows the sky being lifted from its lying down position by the sun. I think the place of creation was called



Fig. 4

the "lying down sky" because the sky did not get lifted away from the earth until the World Tree was erected when the *Wakah-Chanal* house was dedicated 1.9.2 after creation. Furthermore, the Vase of the Seven Gods (Fig. 4) shows the Ix throne from the Quirigua monument with its occupant sitting in front of six gods. The text has a verb—I prefer *tzaki*, "put in order"; Barbara prefers *ha'l* "manifested"— and a location written as *Ek' u tan*, "Black its center." The center is black, I think, because the sky has not yet been pushed away from the earth to give room for light of the sun to shine.

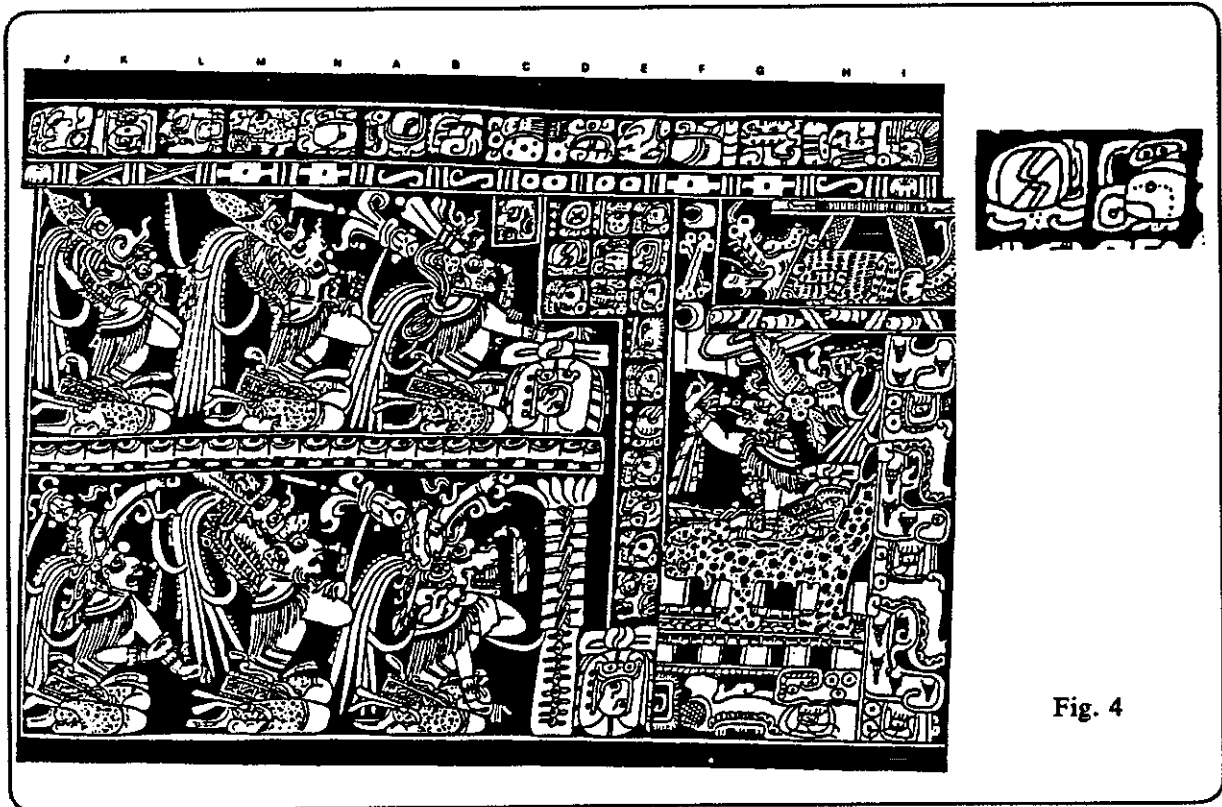


Fig. 4

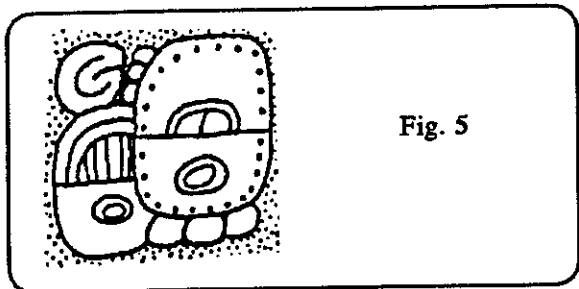


Fig. 5

Finally, in my glyph seminar of April 4, 1991, I presented the information above and in the subsequent conversation, someone asked about the "end of" expressions. I explained the substitution pattern, disclaiming knowing how to explain the use of *ch'a* in this context, when Barbara piped up and said "the lying down of the month." I think she was exactly right. The last day was either the lying down point in the current month or the seating of the on-coming month. Neither

of us can yet explain why the tun glyph also appears in this expression. However, at Copan and Palenque the tun can be eliminated apparently without changed the meaning of the expression.

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