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The Emblem Glyph of Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico

by Peter Mathews

In this brief paper, I propose an identification of the Bonampak Emblem Glyph. David Kelley (1976:216, 218) has independently made the same identification, but as his illustration of the Emblem Glyph is somewhat unclear, a more lengthy discussion here is perhaps not out of order.¹ The Emblem Glyph occurs on Stelae 1, 2, 3 at Bonampak, as well as on Wall Panel 2, Lintel 3, and in the painted inscription of the murals in Structure 1 (Figure 1).

In each case, the glyph-group is composed of the affixes usual for Emblem Glyphs, namely a prefix of the so-called "water group," and the *ben-ich* suffix (T168), read as *ahpo* by Floyd Lounsbury (1973). In the example from Wall Panel 2 (Figure 1d), it should be noted that the "water group" prefix is affixed to the head of God C, T1016. This substitution occurs in other glyphic compounds nor-

mally containing the "water group" affix; I regard it as merely the "head variant" of the "water group" affix. The "main sign" of the Bonampak Emblem Glyph has three variants. One is what may be called a "geometric form," T512b (Figure 1d); the other two are head variants: one that of a long-snouted animal (Figure 1a), the other most probably that of a turtle (see especially Figure 2e). The major diagnostic feature of the Emblem Glyph, however, is the bone affix, T197, which in every example protrudes from the upper left-hand corner of the main sign.

Since this Emblem Glyph occurs in the majority of the Bonampak inscriptions, and since there is only one other discernible Emblem Glyph at Bonampak (on Stela 1, where the main sign seems to be a bat head), the conclusion that it is the Bonampak Emblem Glyph is virtually inescapable.

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Figure 1.
Bonampak Emblem Glyphs. a) Stela 1; b) Stela 2; c) Stela 3; d) Wall Panel 2; e) Lintel 3

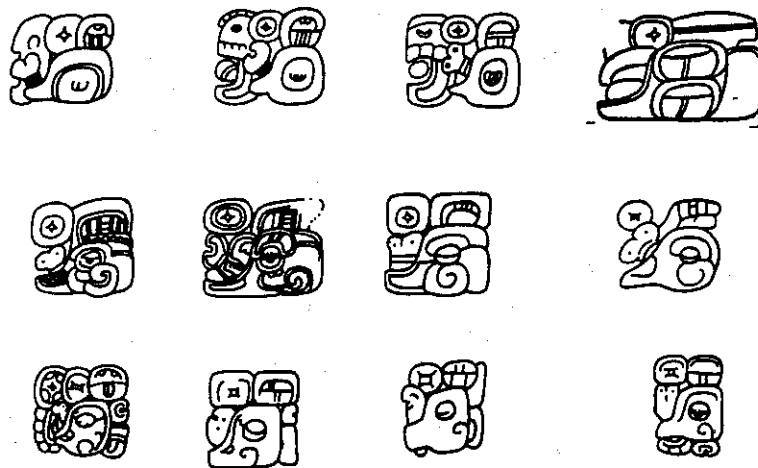


Figure 2. Bonampak mentioned at other sites. a) Yaxchilan Lintel 49; b) Yaxchilan Lintel 37; c) Yaxchilan Lintel 35; d) Tonina Wall Panel; e-f) Panel, unknown provenance; g-h) Panel, unknown provenance; i) Cylindrical Stela, unknown provenance; j) Kuna-Lacanha Lintel 1; k) Panel, unknown provenance; l) Stela, Piedras Negras Region.

As do those of other Maya sites, the Emblem Glyph of Bonampak occurs in several texts from outside the site. All the occurrences I have been able to find are shown in Figure 2.

Unfortunately, most of these occurrences are on monuments of unknown provenance. The early examples (Figure 2a-g) are of interest, for all but two are associated with one ruler (Figure 2b, d-g). In a paper hopefully to be published soon (Mathews 1976MS), I argue that this Bonampak ruler was perhaps one of the most important personages of the Early Classic Maya period.

Notes

1. This essay was originally distributed in manuscript form as *Maya Glyph Notes, No. 1* in 1979. We here make it more widely available — Kristaan D. Villela, editor.

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