

PART III: HIEROGLYPHIC GRAMMAR AND LEXICON

A brief introduction to Classic Maya writing is no place to get into a detailed discussion of all the current issues involving the grammar and lexicon of the inscriptions. Nonetheless, a beginner needs at least some acquaintance with the most common words and phrases. What follows is an attempt to provide useful information, with the caveat that there is not presently complete agreement among epigraphers and linguists about just how to treat the hieroglyphs.

Put simply, there are (1) honest differences of opinion about how to interpret glyphic spellings, especially in final syllables. Some epigraphers (like us) argue that the vowels in final syllable signs should be read, at least in some contexts; they may mark suffixed verbal conjugations, for instance. Others (Houston, Stuart) argue that final vowels should not be read, but final disharmonic vowels signal complexities in the preceding root nucleus – long vowels instead of short, internal glottal stops or other complications. These differences of opinion result in: (2) Depending on how you read the spellings, you transcribe the words differently. Then (3) the distinct forms of transcribed words lead to different grammatical analyses, and (4) Different grammatical analyses lead to distinct views on the rules of text composition and discourse phenomena. Linguists develop an independent view of all these phenomena by comparing and contrasting modern languages and applying well developed techniques of reconstructing earlier stages of language. As a result of these various viewpoints, the details of analysis of hieroglyphic inscriptions will be distinct in the works of almost any two authors, and there is currently no way to determine who holds the high ground..

The good news is that no matter how you read the glyphs, there is widespread agreement on their general meaning, and there is little argument about the content of most inscriptions. Obviously if we had perfect knowledge of the Classic written language we could produce more reliable interpretations. As things stand, we can at least function as well as we can when dealing with speakers of a language that we do not dominate but have only a working knowledge of. We more or less get the meaning of what is being said, and with enough external clues about the possibilities we can guess what is meant. What follows is *our* best guess, influenced by many years of work with modern Mayan languages as linguists as well as considerable time studying Classic texts, about how the inscriptions are to be interpreted. Not everyone would agree.

A Brief Outline of Grammar

In all Mayan languages, the verb and its companions constitute the central part of grammar. Nouns and pronouns are reasonably simple, adjectives present no difficulties, other parts of speech are minimal in number, but verbs are complicated. However, in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, the verbal complexity we see in the modern spoken languages is greatly reduced (although some epigraphic linguists would argue that the grammar is not as reduced as we take it to be!). In any case, verbs are a logical place to begin a discussion of epigraphic grammar, because they are – for the most part – easy to identify and essential to understand. Since normal word order is Verb-Object-Subject (VOS), verbs tend to occur at the beginning of sentences. In historical texts, where the temporal information is often fronted to the beginning of the sentence, the old workshop adage: "What comes after the date? A verb!" is a good rule of thumb.

Verbs

What greatly reduces the complexity of epigraphic verbs is the fact that most texts are written in the completive aspect (what amounts to the past tense), and most verbs take third-person subjects and objects (in Mayan languages, the same form for he, she, it; him, her, it). There are

Fig. III-1. The Pronoun u- and Some of its Variants.

John Montgomery (2002:132)



David Stuart (1987:47)



Eric Thompson (1962:445)

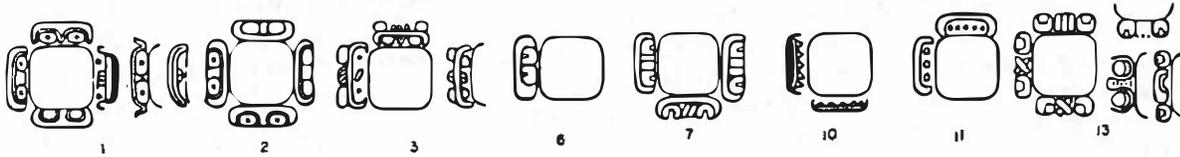


Fig. III-2. Aspect Markers on Three Verb Classes.

Common Verb Endings (Montgomery 2002:149)

VTR	VIN	VPO	
u-...-w(a)	...y-i	-wa-n(i)	-la-j(a)
a	e	j	i

Other VIN Endings

...b'-i	...ch-i	...h-i	...j-i	...k-i	...l-i	...m-i		
...w-i	...p-i	...s-i	...t-i	...tz-i	...tz'-i	...w-i	...x-i	...y-i

exceptions to these rules, but they are found mostly on ceramics, and beginners can get by without knowing anything about them. What is needed, then, is to know what verbs look like in the completive aspect with third-person subject and objects. The first complication is that there are three classes of verbs in the Classic language (as there are in modern Chol and many other Mayan languages): transitive, intransitive, and positional verbs (VTR, VIN, VPO). Transitive verbs are the ones that can take an object, i.e., they represent actions that can "fall on" something – hit, see, think, etc. These verbs are the only verbs that can take both a subject and an object. Intransitive and positional verbs take only subjects. Intransitive verbs are those that have only an actor – walk, talk, live, etc. (In English, of course, the corresponding verbs can take objects: walk the walk, talk trash, live life, etc.; English is peculiar that way...) Positional verbs relate to being in positions and states, and generally take the place of adjectives in English – to be standing, to be bent over, to be soft and mushy.

Subject and Object Markers

The first simplification is that third-person objects and many third-person subjects are "zero" suffixes (- \emptyset), that is, they are unmarked. (Linguists like to treat these empty positions as if there were something in them for reasons of symmetry; first- and second-person suffixes have substance.) Intransitive and positional verbs take zero subjects. The only subject marking that will occur in most texts is that of subject of transitive verb. That reduces the problem of identifying the subjects and object marking on verb to a simple problem: What does the third-person subject marker on transitive verbs in the completive aspect look like? The answer is *u-*, written with some variant of the syllable signs read *u*.

The Pronoun *u-*: He, She, It and More!

The next complication is that there are myriad ways to write *u*, and *y-* substitutes for *u-* before vowels (Fig. III-1). As we will see below, *u~y-* is also the third person possessive prefix on nouns (his, her, its), so it is extremely common. It is no accident that the most common form of *u* is Thompson's (1962) glyph number 1, T1 (and some of its variants are T2, 3, 6, 7, 10, and 13). The syllable-sign chart in John Montgomery's (2002) book shows nine variants of the syllable *u*, and there are still more. There are also several variants of the *y-* prefix, because it is written in combination with the following vowel, so it shows up as the syllable signs *ya*, *ye*, *yi*, *yo*, and *yu*.

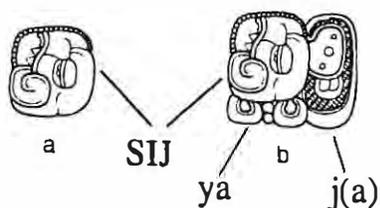
Aspect Markers

Aspect is something like tense, but it is less tied to time and more concerned with manner. Completive aspect refers to things that are finished, completed, which implies past time. Incompletive aspect, however, refers to things ongoing, and could be placed in the past, in the present, or in the future. For practical purposes, we can think about completive aspect as being the same as past tense (but for other purposes, we talk about aspects). The three classes of verbs take distinct suffixes to mark their status as completive or incompletive (Fig. III-2). Completive transitive verbs often take no distinctive suffix, but if they do it is written *-wa*, although it probably isn't read that way (nobody said this stuff was easy). Completive positional verbs end in *-laj* or *-wan*, written *-la-ja* or *-wa-ni*. Completive intransitive verbs end in *-i*, but since this suffix is usually written combined with the last consonant of the verb, it turns up in *b'i*, *ji*, *ki*, *li*, *mi*, *ni*, and so on. Since it has so many forms, and final vowels are often ignored by epigraphers, this suffix is the last to be generally recognized (and is not in fact recognized by some).

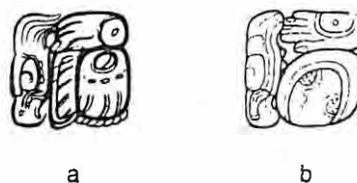
The common conjugations of verbs in the Classic script, then, are *u...(-wa)* for transitive verbs, *-la-j(a)* or *-wa-n(i)* for positional verbs, and *-Ci* for intransitive verbs. Actually, the latter three forms have unseen subject marking, *-laj- \emptyset* and *wan- \emptyset* , e.g., *CHUM-la-j(a)*, *chum-laj- \emptyset* , *CHUM-wa-n(i)*, *chum-wan- \emptyset* "he is seated," and *-i- \emptyset* , e.g., *CHAM-mi*, *cham-i- \emptyset* "he died."

Fig. III-3. "Birth" Glyphs.

"Birth" Glyphs (Montgomery 2002:162-163)



Thompson's "upended frog," T 740
SIJ-ya-j(a), *siyaj* "was born"

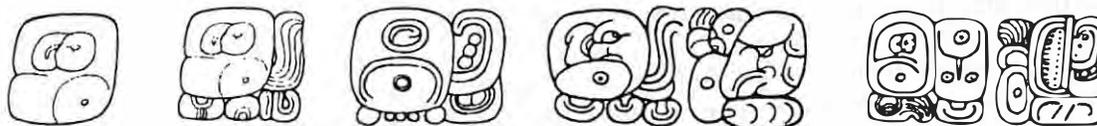


u TAL ka-b(a), *u tal kab'*
 "touched the earth"

Fig. III-4. "Accession" Glyphs.

"Accession" Glyphs (Montgomery 2002:165-170)

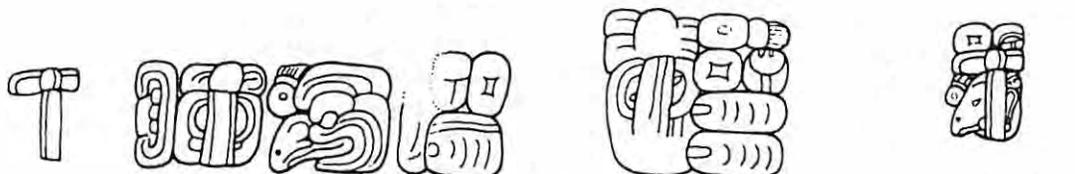
VPO: **CHUM-** "to be seated (as X)"



CHUM-(mu) CHUM-wa-n(i) CHUM-la-j(a) chumwan ti ajaw le

chumla j ti kajal

VTR: **JOY-** "to tie (on the headband)"



JOY JOY-aj ti ajaw le joyaj ti ajaw lel joyaj ti ajaw

VTR: **K'AL- / CH'AM-** "to hold the headband (or sacred object)"



CH'AM hun CH'AM sak hun CH'AM sak hun-n(a) CH'AM hun-n(a) CH'AM sak hun

Fig. III-5. "Scattering" Glyphs.

La Pasadita, Lintel 2 (Linda Schele)

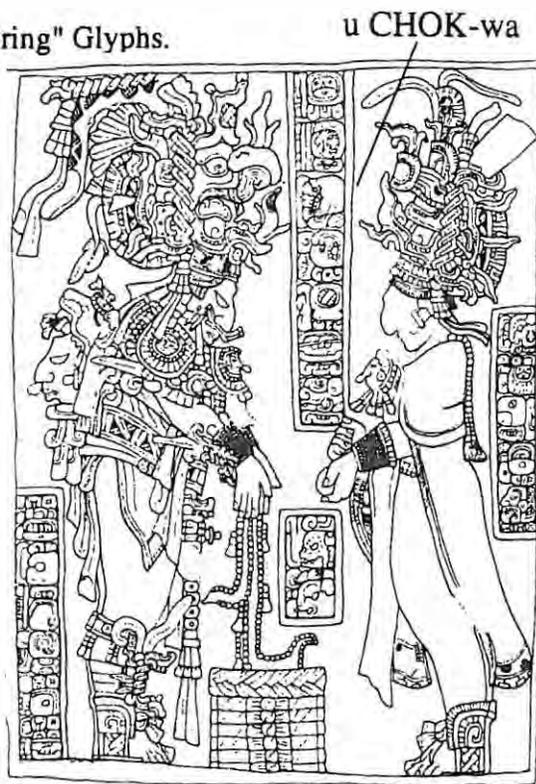
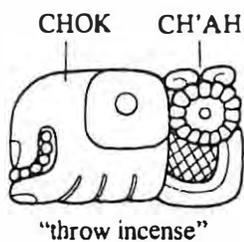
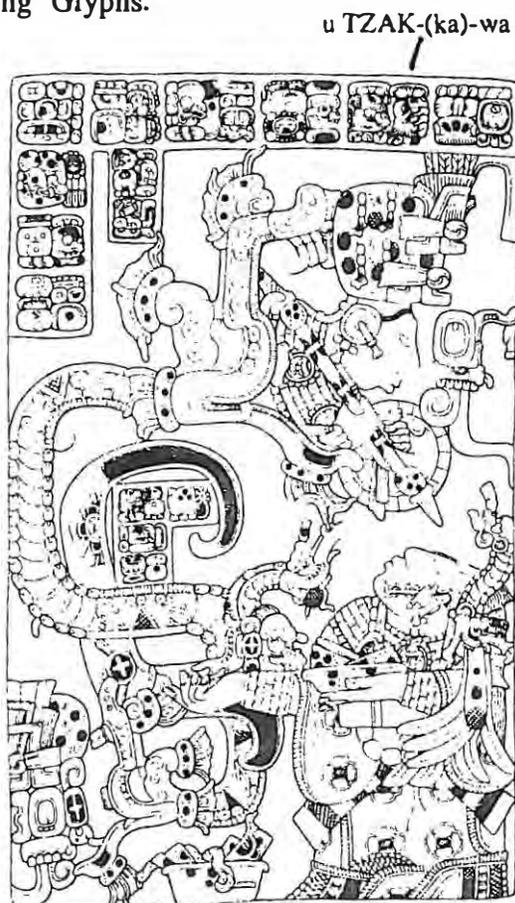


Fig. III-6. "Conjuring" Glyphs.

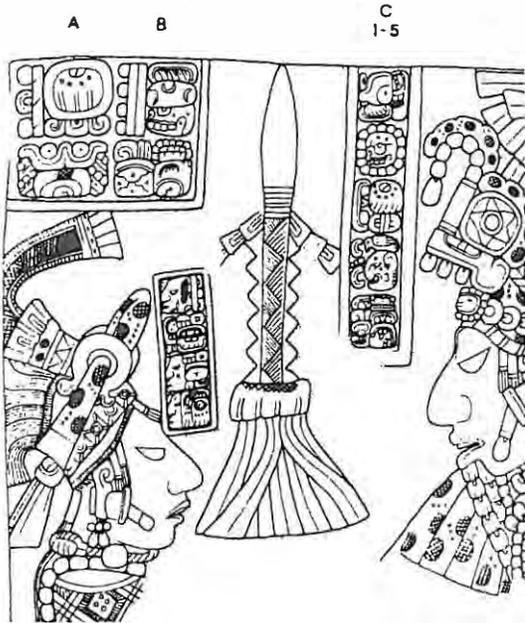


Yaxchilan, Lintel 25 (Ian Graham)

Fig. III-7. "Warfare" Glyphs.

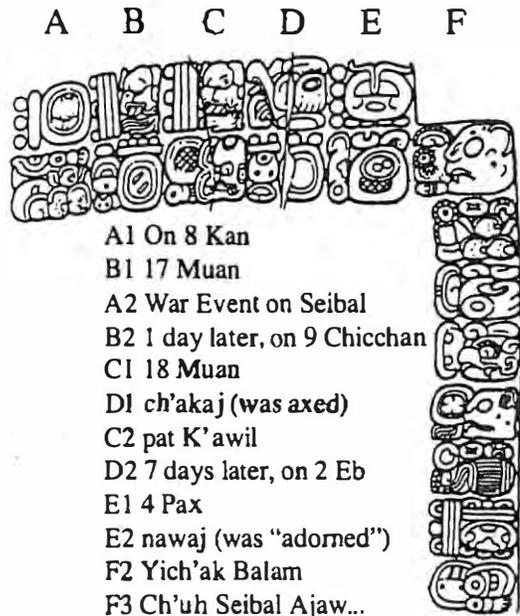


Yaxchilan, Lintel 41



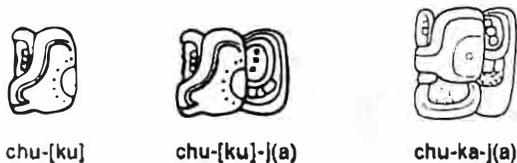
A1-B2 On 7 Imix 14 Zec, war on [Place Name]
 C1-5 Chukaj (was captured) Jewel Skull.
 U bak (He is the prisoner of) Bird Jaguar,
 the captor of Aj Uk.

Aguateca, Stela 2



A1 On 8 Kan
 B1 17 Muan
 A2 War Event on Seibal
 B2 1 day later, on 9 Chicchan
 C1 18 Muan
 D1 ch'akaj (was axed)
 C2 pat K'awil
 D2 7 days later, on 2 Eb
 E1 4 Pax
 E2 nawaj (was "adorned")
 F2 Yich'ak Balam
 F3 Ch'uh Seibal Ajaw...

Fig. III-8. "Capture" Glyphs.



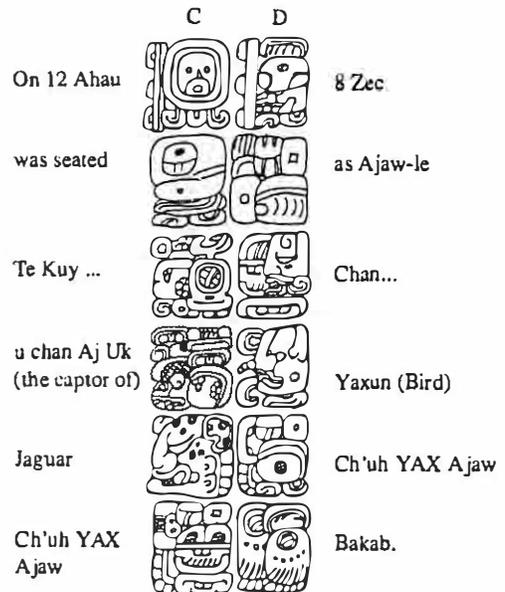
chu-[ku]

chu-[ku]-(a)

chu-ka-(a)

chuk-aj-ø "was captured"

Yaxchilan, Stela 12



On 12 Ahau 8 Zec.
 was seated as Ajaw-le
 Te Kuy ... Chan...
 u chan Aj Uk (the captor of) Yaxun (Bird)
 Jaguar Ch'uh YAX Ajaw
 Ch'uh YAX Ajaw Bakab.

Some Common Verbs

This is not the place to try to give a complete inventory of epigraphic verbs (see John Montgomery's book for a much longer list), but listing a few may be in order. A lot of verbs have to do with the life cycle of the elite, from birth to death, and all the major activities in between. **Birth.** There are two major variants of the "birth" verbs. The one first deciphered was Thompson's "upended frog" glyph, identified by Proskouriakoff as referring to birth. A lot of paper has been expended trying to explain all the possible metaphors that might relate an upended frog or toad to the concept of birth – none of them particularly convincing! However, the meaning is clear, and since the suffix *ya* is frequently written, epigraphers have settled on the reading *siyah*, attested in Yucatec Maya names and titles, e.g., *siyah ka'an* "heaven born."

The other "birth" expression is more transparent, a hand touching earth, the compound being conjugated as a transitive verb expression, thus, literally, "he touched the earth." This is supported by the Chol expression *k'el pañimil* "to see the world" as a metaphor for birth. It is also possible that the touching hand is to be taken as a rebus for "arrive," the Chol terms *tyäl* "touch with the hand" and *tyal* "arrive" being historically related.

Accession to Office. During his (or her) life, many of the activities recorded for Classic elite involve being inducted into ritual office, including supreme rule. The metaphor for most of these is "to be seated" in office, expressed as a positional verb, i.e., "to take a sitting position," not for someone to put you in office. The logographic glyph showing a truncated torso in a seated position is marked as a human body part (the circle within a circle) and sometimes carries phonetic helpers (e.g., **mu**); the reading is taken to be the positional verb *chum* "to be seated." Positional verb affixes are common, **CHUM-la-j(a)** or **CHUM-wa-n(i)**. In fact, this is almost the only positional verb you will see. The verb is usually followed by a statement of the office: *ta ajawlel* "in kingship" or some such.

Another metaphor for taking office is "tying on the headband." Epigraphers generally read the verb as **joy**, but Chol *joy* means "to surround something" or "to wind around something (or somewhere)." Another verb used for ceremonial induction is the "holding" of some ritual object. The act of holding is indicated by a "flat hand," a hand stretched out horizontally, with something being held or supported by the hand. The object may be a mirror, an *ajaw* head, or a combination taken to represent a headband (symbol of rulership), marked with the color "white." This phrase is often followed by **tu b'ah**, interpreted as "to himself," so that the whole is read "he took the [object] to himself." A hand holding a deer hoof is also recorded (called, reasonably enough, the "deer hoof event"). Many epigraphers consider the verb to be **k'al**, but this verb usually means "to bundle things," "to tie things together" (as in **k'al-tun**, a bundle of years). The act of holding might be read **ch'am** (cf. Chol *ch'äm* "to take, grasp").

Offerings and Blood Sacrifice. One of the ritual functions of the rulers and other elite was the feeding of the gods, a contractual relationship of exchange (I give to you, you give back to me). The most common activity is "scattering," the burning of numerous small balls of incense. The ruler is shown dribbling incense into a sacrificial vessel (hence the nickname "scattering"); this act is sometimes spelled out **cho-k(o)**, the transitive verb *chok* now meaning "throw" in Chol. The substance offered is often specified, usually **ch'ah** "incense" (not "blood" as was thought a few years ago).

There is blood offering, however; males are seen drawing blood from the penis, females from the tongue. This act of bloodletting can lead to the conjuring of ancestors, as in the famous lintels of Yaxchilan (L 24-25). The transitive verb in the description of these scenes is called "fish-in-hand" and has been given a reading of **tzak**, i.e., **tza-k(a)**, where the fish stands for **ka**.

Fig. III-9. "Death" and "Burial" Glyphs.



ne-b'i
neb'-i-ø
 "he died"

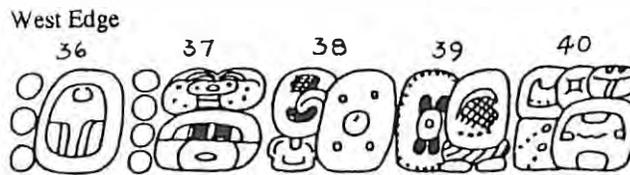


CHAM-mi
cham-i-ø
 "he died"



CH'UY-yi u-[pus]-ik'-al
ch'uy-i-ø u-pusik'al
 "flew away his spirit"

Palenque, Sarcophagus Rim



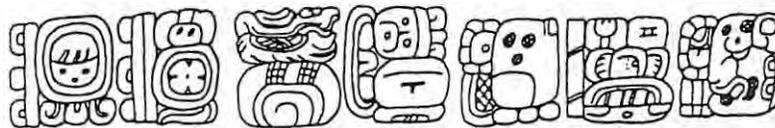
3 Chuen 4 Uayeb neb'i Janab' Pakal, Ch'uh Bak Ajaw
 On 3 Chuen 4 Uayeb died Janab' Pakal, Holy Palenque Lord.

Emiliano Zapata Panel, A3-C1



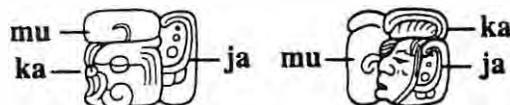
0 k'in, 13 winal, 7 tun, 3 k'atun siyajy, i chami (KB) 7 Cimi 3 Pop.
 It was 3.7.13.0 after the birth (of Kan Balam), then he died on 7 Cimi 3 Pop.

Yaxchilan, Stela 12, A1-A4



6 Ix 12 Yaxkin ch'uyi u pusik'al ch'ahom ho'k'atun ajaw Itzamna Balam.
 On 6 Ix 12 Yaxkin flew away the spirit of Sacrificer 5-K'atun Lord Itzamna Balam.

"Burial" Expressions



mu-ka-j(a), muk-aj-ø, "he was buried"

Warfare and the Capture of Prisoners. There is a glyph that reports attacks on a site or something similar. It generally has three elements: the "star" or Venus sign above, lines of droplets on the sides, and a central element that can be either a shell (**yi**), "earth" (Caban), or the name of a specific site, e.g., Seibal. Readings vary; we favor **ek'-i X** "he went out (against) X," reading the star as *ek'* as a rebus for *ek'* "to leave," the shell as the suffix *-i*, and noting the use of such phrases in Colonial Chontal documents (like the old English term "sally forth" from French "to go out, leave").

One of the purposes of raids seems to have been the acquisition of prominent prisoners, because the capture of such is widely recorded. The verb "to capture" is rendered **CHUK-ka-j(a)**, the passive form of a transitive verb, "to be captured." The verb is followed by the name of the person captured. The prisoner is referred to as **u b'ak** "the prisoner of" the person whose name follows. At Yaxchilan and some other sites, it appears to have been the custom that the heir to the throne was expected to engage in raids and take a prominent prisoner; he then took "the captor of So-and-so" as a title, **u chan X**. The Yaxchilan ruler Bird Jaguar takes the title **Aj Jun K'al B'ak**, "he of twenty prisoners." Similar titles are known from elsewhere (with lower numbers!).

Death. The last thing to happen to anybody is their death. Three common expressions have been deciphered, but not all deciphered to everyone's satisfaction. We will, of course, present our own interpretations as being correct! The first is a quincunx (circle with four dots spaced around a central dot) with a prefixed serpent's tail with adornment. Since the quincunx is in Landa's "alphabet" as the syllable *bi*, David Stuart has read this as **och b'ih** "to enter the road," positing a metaphorical posthumous route taken by the departed soul (the verb "enter" presumably deriving from the snake entering the **b'i** glyph). We see this as problematic in the lack of affixation on the putative "enter" verb and the otherwise unattested use of a tail as either *och* or "enter." On the other hand, our proposal, to read the tail as *ne* ("tail") and the whole as *neb'i* "to die," the intransitive verb *neb'* with completive suffix *-i*, has a little support in the Chol term *ñejp'-añ* "to grow old." Go figure. More transparently, the verb *cham* "to die" is also common, e.g., **CHAM-mi**, "he died."

A third expression for "to die" also has various interpretations. The complex collocation features a wing over the **yi** shell and a possessed **AJAW** head with decorations, and an **IK'** glyph suffixed with **li**. Our interpretation is that the wing represents "to fly," an intransitive verb (suffixed by *-yi*, read *ch'uy-i*) and a phrase meaning "his soul," perhaps related to Chol *pusik'al* "heart."

Burial. There are a few recorded burials, the verb being spelled out **mu-ka-j(a)**, *muk-aj-ø* "he was buried," the passive form of a transitive verb.

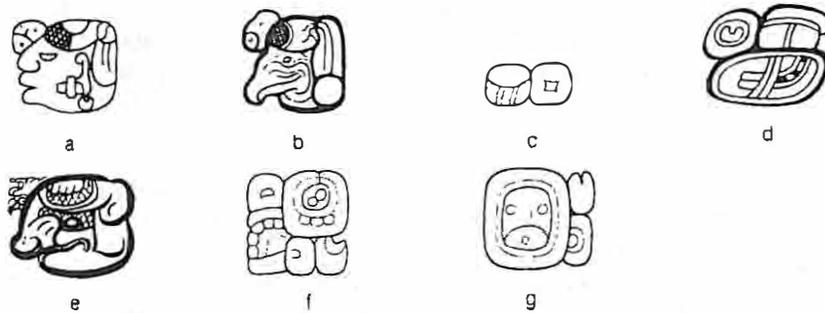
Other Verbs

There are several verbs that do not take human subjects. Time periods, for instance, "end," represented by a flat-hand with beads dangling from its tips, still unread. Buildings "are dedicated," sometimes with a verb that may be read **payi** (featuring the head of the old god with a net [*pa*] head). The symbols of military might, the **tok'-pakal** "flint and shield," can "fall" **jub'i**, when a site is conquered. The "writing" of a site, presumably its inscriptions, can "be axed," **ch'a-ka-j(a) u tz'i-ba-l(i)**, "was axed its writing." (People can also be **ch'akaj**, interpreted as decapitation.)

Non-verbal Predicates

There are two non-verbal things that can stand in the position of verbs. The two kinds are the Predicate Nominative (where a noun stands in for the verb) and the Predicate Adjective (where an adjective plays the role of verb). In English, the corresponding sentences would use the verb "is," as in "John is a man, John is tall." Mayan languages, like a lot of languages in the world, can do without the "to be" verb, and put the noun or adjective in the Verb position, before the subject: Chol

Fig. III-10. "Lord" and "Lady" Glyphs.



Variants of *ajaw* 'lord': a,b,e, with headband; c,d, with "ah po" prefix; f, spelled *aj-ja-wa*; g, logographic AHAU with *wa* suffix.

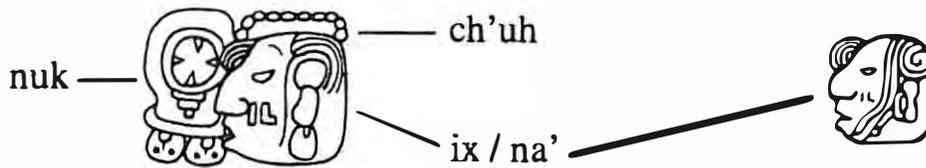
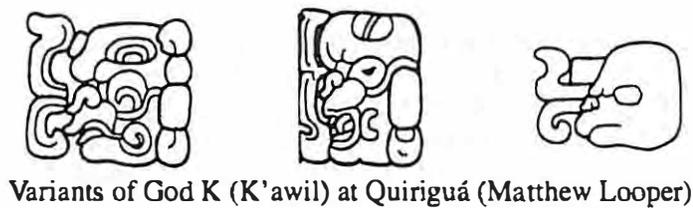
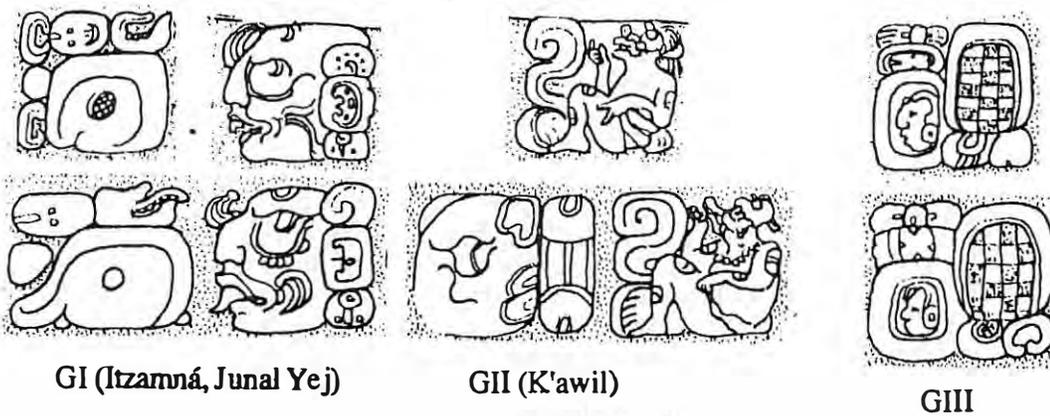


Fig. III-11. Deity Names.

The Palenque Triad: GI, GII, GIII



Variants of God K (K'awil) at Quiriguá (MatthewLooper)

winik Xun "(is a) man John," *chan Xun*, "(is) tall John." There is no aspect marked on these constructions, and as far as subject marking is concerned, they are marked like intransitive verbs, that is, there is no visible marking. Now, let's go to the simple: Nouns.

Nouns

Nouns are "the name of a person, place, or thing." Grammatically, Maya nouns are fairly inert. About all you can do to them is possess them; plurals are optional and rare. Possession is indicated by a prefixed **u-**, one of the most common hieroglyphs and among the earliest to be deciphered (Thompson's Glyph number 1, T1). Being so common explains the myriad variants of this affix; scribes apparently hated to write the same glyph over and over. Examples include the ordinal numbers of k'atuns, discussed above: **u-15-K'ATUN**, "the fifteenth k'atun." Prefixed to nouns that begin with a vowel (or a glottal stop), the possessive prefix takes the shape **y-**; see below, under **ajaw**. Possession also turns up in parentage statements, below.

Nouns are usually written with logographic glyphs; personal names are more likely to be spelled out than other nouns since there may not be any object that could be used to represent them graphically. In some cases we have both a logographic and a phonetic spelling of a name, notably in the case of **Pakal** of Palenque. His name (or the principal part of his name) is often spelled out **pa-ka-l(a)**, and the corresponding logograph represents a shield, **PAKAL**.

Names and titles (names of offices held) are among the most common nouns, and paradoxically they are the nouns we have most trouble reading. Modern Maya don't continue to use the same sorts of names, and the Classic offices have long since disappeared, so we get little help from the modern languages. As a result, many of the names of royals that we use are really nicknames, based on the graphic quality of the glyphs used to represent their names. Some epigraphers try to go beyond nicknames and establish phonetic representations of the names in the absence of glyphic spellings, but we have little confidence that the names they construct would be the ones the Classic Maya would have used. In any case, a compilation of most of the elite Maya names, organized by site and site history, can be found in Martin and Grube's (2000) *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*.

Lord and Lady titles often precede the names of Classic personages. The male title is usually **Aj-**, written **aj** or **ja** prefixed to some other element, a name or further title. In modern languages, this prefixed element is common in titles of craftsmen, civil and religious officials, etc. The common female title **Ix** is represented by the head of the young maize god, now read **ix** (cf. *ixim*, "maize"); this is a common prefix to modern female names.

Some of the civil and religious offices held by Classic Maya elite are well understood, others remain a mystery. The most frequent title, also the best understood, is the title taken by kings, **ch'uh X ajaw**, "Holy Lord of X," the supreme ruler of a kingdom or polity. The hieroglyphs were first deciphered by Heinrich Berlin, a German scholar living in Guatemala; he designated these title "emblem glyphs," because while he could establish the fact that each variant was associated with a particular site, he couldn't determine if the glyph referred to the place, to a royal family, or to a civic office. We still use that terminology, although we are now sure that the title refers to the office of ruler.

Emblem Glyphs. An Emblem Glyph has three parts, "holy," "place or polity," and "lord." The first element, **CH'UH**, usually placed to the left side as a prefix, has a string or scattering of dots descending from a variable element that may be a Spondylus shell, a **YAX** or **K'AN** sign, or an inverted **AJAW**. Just what these variables mean is not known. An alternate reading for **CH'UH** (based on Yucatec Maya, not Chol) is **K'UH**.

Fig. III-12. Emblem Glyphs

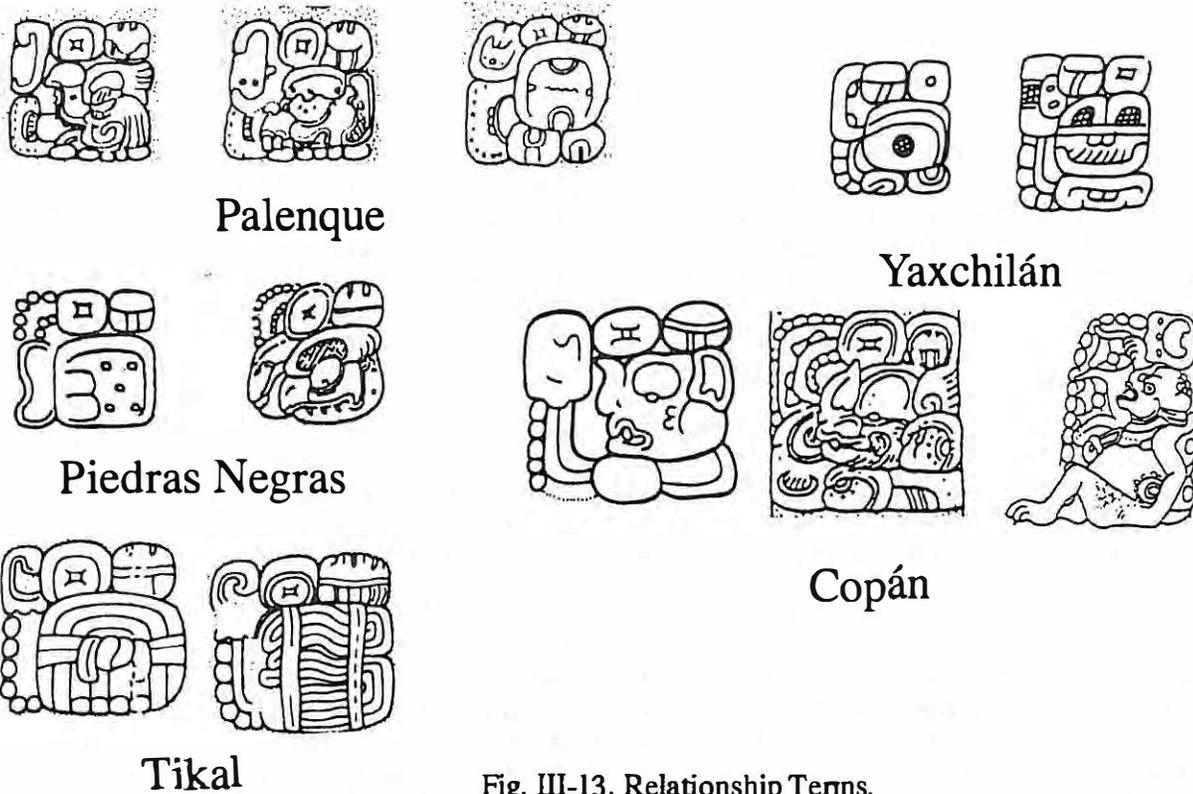


Fig. III-13. Relationship Terms.



The second part, representing the polity ruled, varies from site to site, and even within a site there may be several variants. Palenque, for instance, has both a stylized bone and a bird head. Tikal has what appears to be a tied bundle, arguably the back of a king's head with the knot of a headband. Yaxchilan has two emblem glyphs that are often used together, one a "split sky" glyph, the other a jade celt. Copan's emblem glyph features a bat head marked as stone. Seibal has three stones with flames, apparently a hearth. And so on. Needless to say, most of these do not correspond to the modern names of these sites, since those are largely the invention of modern archaeologists and explorers.

The third part of an emblem glyph is the part that reads **ajaw** "lord." This typically spans the site glyph, part on top and part on the bottom, as if the site glyph were superimposed on the glyph for lord. Above there are two round glyphs, one resembling a cushion (with an indentation in the middle – and these actually do appear being sat on in scenes), the other more or less looking like a throne (with a horizontal bar and legs). Whatever. Below is a phonetic glyph reading **wa**, the last syllable sign in what is sometimes spelled out **a-ja-w(a)**. We know that the reading order of these elements is as stated because on one Yaxchilan monument the combination is broken out into three glyph blocks: **CH'UH, YAXCHILAN, AJAW**.

Ajaw "lord" also occurs outside the Emblem Glyphs, in logographic form, as the head of a young male (sometimes marked as Hunajpu, with a dot on his cheek), or, for that matter, the head of almost anything with a headband on it, e.g., a vulture. A frequent suffix is the glyph **le**, sometimes doubled to **le-le**; this may be a nominal suffix **-lel** (i.e., **AJAW-lel** "kingship") or the noun **le**, literally a "rope," but a metaphor for "lineage" (i.e., *ajaw le* "lineage lord"). The former is the usual interpretation. **Ajaw** also occurs in possessed form, as a title of a subordinate lord, *y-ajaw NAME*, i.e., "one of the lords of So-and-so." This may also occur with a little understood suffix, e.g., at Palenque (96 Glyphs), *y-ajaw TE'*.

Other common titles include offices subordinate to the paramount ruler, probably regional or provincial chieftains. Two common titles are *b'akab'*, **ba-ka-b(a)**, "ruler," a title also taken by kings, and *kahal*, **ka-ha-l(a)**, "(village) chieftain." The latter is usually read *sahal*, **sa-ha-l(a)**, but we find little support in the languages for such a reading. Females, supposedly the wives of the office holders, can also take these titles: *Ix Bakab*, *Ix Kahal*. Another such title is represented by the head of Chak, holding an axe, with a suffixed glyph **TE'**, often read **CHAK TE** or **IX CHAK TE'**. Another title is *aj pitzlaw*, **aj pi-tzi-la-w(a)**, "ballplayer."

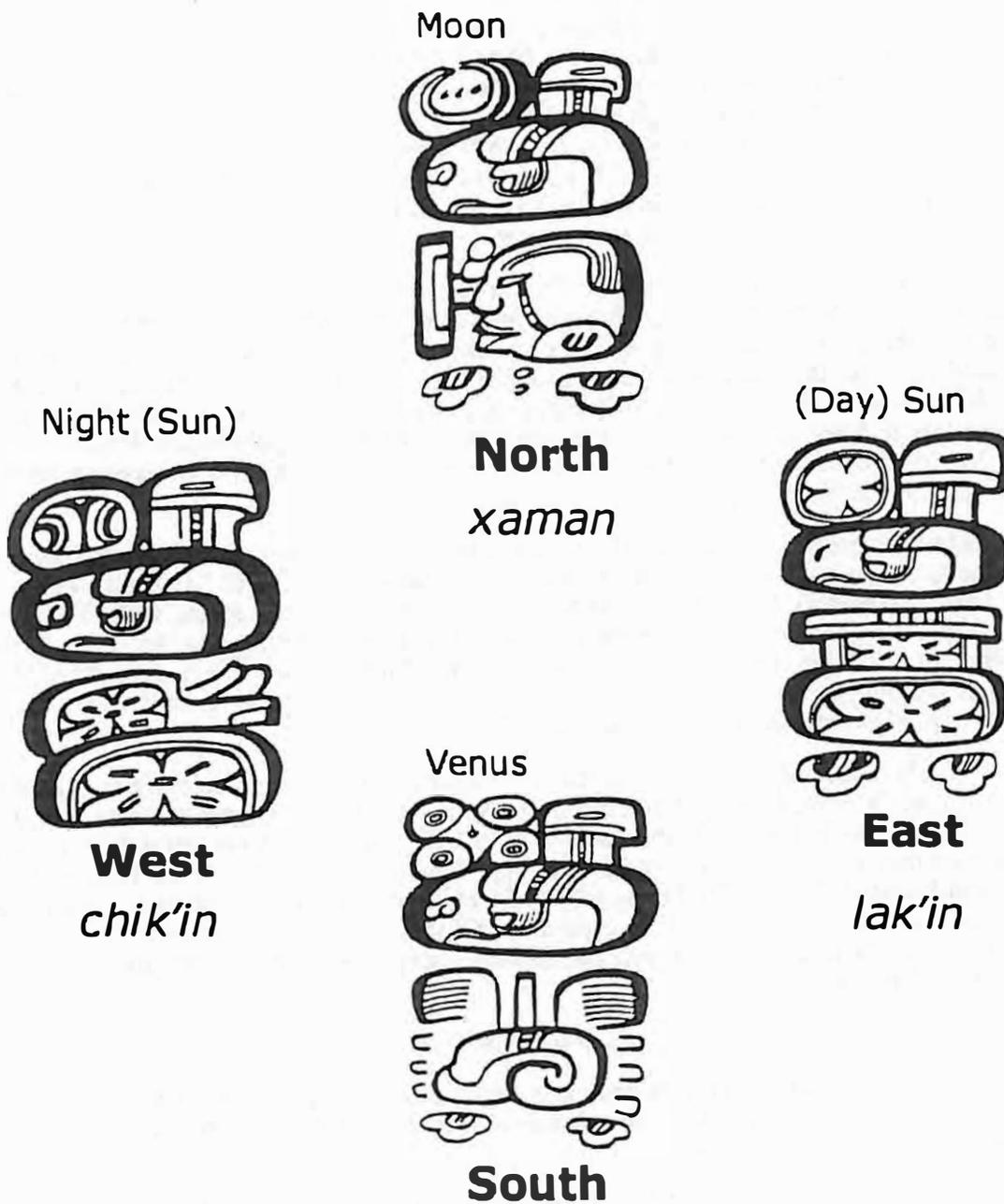
Gods. Many deities are mentioned in the inscriptions. Some of them we can identify, others' identities are lost in antiquity. Collectively they are sometimes referred to just as **ch'uh** or **k'uh** "holy (ones)." At Palenque there is a triad of patron gods and an ancestral deity as well. They feature prominently in the mythological history of the site (especially on the Tablets of the Cross, Sun, and Foliated Cross). The Palenque Triad were first just given numbers to identify them, GI, GII, and GIII. Now it is generally accepted that GI is Chak, the rain god/earth lord; GII is K'awil, who becomes the patron of royal rule (kings hold a scepter with his image), and GIII is the Jaguar God of the Underworld.

Relationship Glyphs

There is a class of glyphs known as "relationship glyphs" that express various kinds of connections between people. One prominent set consists of kinship terms; others express political relationships like subordination.

Kinship terms. The most frequently seen kin terms are those that constitute the "parentage statement," the identification of a ruler's mother and father. But the terms "mother" and "father" are not used here. Rather, the child is identified as the "child of female X," the "child of male Y."

Fig. III-14. Terms for Directions.



Traditional Maya kinship terms use different terms for "child" depending on the sex of the parent. This is a logical (and widely attested) feature for patrilineal kinship systems, in which the child of a male is of his own lineage or clan, but the child of a female is not of her kin group (but belongs to her husband's line); the child-parent relationship simply isn't the same in both cases.

The mother is often identified first, and a common expression is the possessed noun **y-al** "the child of female" followed by the name and titles of the mother. Thus, "Bird Jaguar [is] **yal** (the child of) Lady Ik' Skull." Three common variants of this phrase feature a hand holding either a speech scroll (*al* "to speak"), an upside down **ajaw** head (the syllable **la**) and the glyphs T126 and Ben (unknown reading). There is an identified glyph for "mother of," but no accepted reading (T126 and a bat's head).

The father's name is frequently preceded by a glyph still unread to everyone's satisfaction: an **AJAW** head "decorated" with scrolls at the top. This was read **nik** "flower" for a while, but this reading seems to have lost favor. We favor the reading **ajaw**, since there is a widespread Mesoamerican pattern in which the terms "lord" and "child" are identical (e.g., Nahuatl *pilli*, Mixtec *iya*).

Two other expressions may be connected to either parent. One is a term borrowed into Western Mayan languages from Mije-Soke, **une(n)**. It occurs in possessed form as **yu-ne**, the syllable sign **yu** and a tail, **ne**. The other is spelled out **u 1 ta-na**, and is interpreted as **u jantan** "the cherished one of (someone)." This term may not be strictly kinship, since it also connects rulers to gods.

There are terms for siblings as well. In Palenque a pair of brothers are referred to as **su-k(u) winik** and **i-tz'(i) winik**, related to the modern terms (Yucatec) *suku'un*, Chol metathesized *äskuñ*, "older brother," and *'itz'in* "younger brother." A term for "mother's brother," **ichan**, also occurs as **yi-cha-n(i)**. A less well understood term, **yi-ta-j(i)**, *y-ita*, appears to be a sibling term related to Chol *ijtyañ* "sister," perhaps not strictly "female sibling," but "clan sister, woman of my lineage."

Political Relationships. Two common terms express political subordination. Many acts of lesser rulers are described as taking place **u kaj** "under the authority of" someone else. (This is commonly read **u KAB'-ji**, which seems unnecessary, since *Caban*, the **kab'** in question, can be read as **ka**). Subordinate lords are sometimes identified as **yajaw** So-and-so, "a lord of So-and-so," that is, the *underlord* of So-and-so.

Accompaniment or Companionship. A couple of terms are understood just to refer to common or joint action by two or more people. One is **yi-chi-NAL**, *y-ichnal*, between two names. The other is **ye-e-te'**, *yet*, probably related to terms like Yucatec *yet-meyah* "companion."

Adjectives

The most common adjectives in the inscriptions are colors and directions. Mayan languages have five basic color terms, "red, white, black, yellow, and blue/green," and these are associated with the directions "east, north, west, south, and center."

Directions

The directions are not cardinal directions (focussed on a single point); that is, "east" is not just due east. Rather, "east" is a whole quadrant, the eastern horizon from the summer solstice point to the winter solstice point. "West" is the corresponding quadrant from where the sun sets in the summer to where it sets in the winter. "North" and "south" are just the areas in between, and for that

matter, it is hard to find terms for these "directions" in Mayan languages. They are mostly just ignored. Some languages call them "to the right" or "left" of the sun's path, but there is no consistent pattern, some languages calling north "to the right," some calling it "to the left." In Chol dictionaries, the term glossed "*norte*" is the word for a winter storm, not a term for the direction: *chäk 'ik'lel*, "big wind."

The Classic terms for the directions are *lak'in*, **la-K'IN** "east," *xaman*, **xa-ma-n(a)** "north," *chik'in* **chi-K'IN** "west," and a term that is harder to interpret for "south." The latter is perhaps somehow related to the Yucatec Maya term *nohol*, since *noh* is "big," and the Classic glyph has the superfix **ma**, *ma* also meaning "big."

An Aside: A Bit of Epigraphic History

"East" and "west" as written in the Classic – **lak'in** and **chik'in** – are ancient terms that have been worn down to near-unrecognizable forms. The original terms (our hypothesis, supported by comparative evidence) refer to the places where "the Sun exits (his house)" and where "the Sun enters (his house)," the house being the Underworld, where the Sun spends the night. We worked these terms out with Terry Kaufman in the 1980s when he was going through our data from Chol and Chuj for the Etymological Dictionary. The Chuj (from Nick's 1960s field notes) was the clue; the terms there are *tz'el k'uh* "the Sun exits" and *tz'och k'uh* "the Sun enters," based on the verbs *'el* and *'och*. That gave us the *l* and *ch* of **la-k'in** and **chi-k'in**. Terry remembered the Tzeltal terms *el-ab'* and *och-ib'* for 'exit place' and 'entrance place', the first being the "patio in front of a house" and the second a "doorway." That gave us the vowels *a* and *i*. So we reconstructed **el-ab' k'in* and **och-ib' k'in* as the original terms. The processes by which the original terms were reduced over time were (1) reduction of the consonant clusters *-b'k'-* to just *k'* (giving **ela k'in*, **ochi k'in*) and (2) the loss of the unstressed initial vowels *e* and *o*, leaving *lak'in* and *chik'in*. Jealous glyphers heard about this without getting the details straight, decided to beat us to the punch, and started to read the directions as *el k'in* and *och k'in*, terms which are bogus, not grounded in evidence. The directional terms are never written ***el k'in** and ***och k'in**, but are most often written with a mixture of phonetic and logographic signs as **la-K'IN** and **chi-K'IN**.

Color Terms

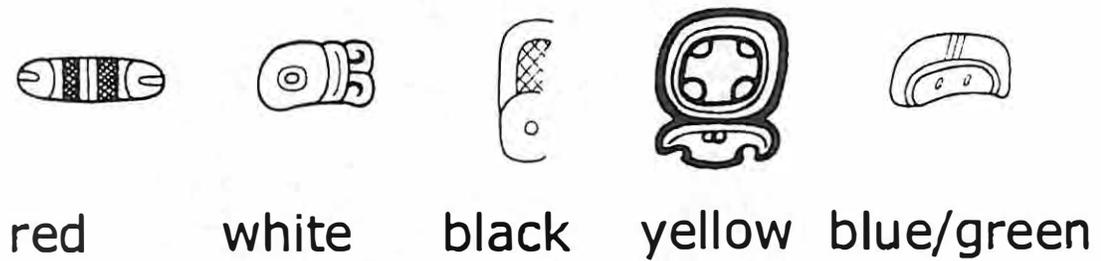
The color terms, all written with logographic glyphs, are *chak* "red," *sak* "white," *ek'* "black," *k'an* "yellow," and *yax* "blue/green." These correspond closely to the terms in modern languages, where there are lots of other color terms derived from these, but these are what are called the Basic Color Terms, the major divisions of the color spectrum. The "blue/green" term spans both the referents, from sky color to leaf color.

These are used as adjectives in Classic texts to somehow aggrandize the modified noun, usually a title. They all apparently have metaphorical meanings. "Red" seems just to mean "great," but "white" may have a sense of "resplendent" or "brilliant, shining." "Yellow" implies "precious," as does "blue/green," which also has connotations of "young, virile, emergent." "Black" is often glossed as the direction "west." Note that black, blue/green, white, and red prefixes are the distinguishing elements of four successive month names, Ch'en ("cave"), Yax, Sak, and Ceh (the latter probably related to the "red" terms in Tzeltalan, *tzah*).

There are also directional associations of the five color terms. The basic referent is the Sun and its movements. East is associated with red, the color of the sunrise. North is associated with white, the brilliance of the sun at its zenith; in the tropics, the summer solstice sun passes far to the north. West is associated with black, the darkness of sunset. South is yellow, perhaps because it is the opposite of zenith, nadir, and conceptually related to the Sun's passage through the Underworld at night. In Maya iconography, underworld creatures are often oozing pus and other distasteful

liquids. Finally, blue/green is associated with the world center, the place where humans live. These color associations are used in modern ceremonial activity, where altars are laid out with respect to the four directions, each marked with its typical color of candles. The center is sometimes marked by a combination of blue and green candles, green for the earth's surface, blue for the sky, giving the layout a third dimension.

Fig. III-15. Color Terms.



IV-1. Piedras Negras Stela 36

