



A NOTE ON A GLYPH FROM THE SAN BARTOLO MURALS: A POSSIBLE REBUS BASED ON *AJ 'REED' FOR *7AJ+ 'MALE/LARGE/OCCUPATION PROCLITIC'

David Mora-Marín¹
UNC-Chapel Hill

This note pertains to one of the signs from the glyphic captions of the North Wall from San Bartolo (Saturno et al. 2005:41-44), seen in **Figure 1**.



Figure 1. a) Glyphic Caption “N-I” from the North Wall at San Bartolo. Drawing by David Stuart (Saturno et al. 2005:Fig. 31). b) Glyphic Caption “N-II” from the North Wall at San Bartolo. Drawing by David Stuart (Saturno et al. 2005:Fig. 32).

The captions have been discussed so far in two publications. First, Saturno et al. (2005:41-44) have suggested the presence of a spelling **po-mo-ja** in the first caption (**Figure 1a**), that could relate to *pom* ‘copal (incense)’—in particular with regard to the sequence **po-mo**—adding that “the addition of **ja** must remain unexplained.” Wichmann (2006) has further proposed that the glyphic caption in question might be a full spelling of *pomoj*, i.e. **po-mo-j(a)**, and as such, that it might reflect a much closer reflection of the original Mixe-Zoquean *pomoh* ‘copal (para incienso)’, from which several Mayan languages borrowed the term *pom* (Campbell and Kaufman 1985). Kaufman (2003:1358) reconstructs it to Proto-Mije-Sokean as **poomt*, and reconstructs it to Proto-Mayan as **poom*, which he suggests is a loanword from Mixe-Zoquean.

¹ eMail: davidmm@unc.edu

The second caption (**Figure 1b**) has only been discussed previously by Saturno et al. (2005:41-44), who transcribe it as **?-?mo-mo-cha**, this time commenting that “the initial sign is unknown.” It is this sign that I discuss in more detail here, for it may not be “unknown” after all. Mora-Marín (2001:170, Fig. 6.23) had already identified this same sign, which appears to be pictorially motivated as a depiction of a REED tassell, on a painted pottery text from Tikal, dated to the Manik 1 phase (200-300 d.C.), as seen in **Figure 2a**. This sequence from Tikal is composed of the following signs: **7IX-REED-K’IN**. This spelling closely parallels that of a known title from Xcalumkin, as in **Figure 2b**, transcribed as **7IX-7a-K’IN-ni**, for *ix+a[jj]+k’in* ‘priestess’. The iconic motivation could be explained in terms of a linguistic sourceword such as Central Mayan **7aaj* ‘reed’ (Kaufman 2003:1157), with a reflex attested in Tzotzil as **7aj*, suggesting a value **7a/7AJ** for this REED sign, based on its apparent contextual equivalence to T12 **7a/7aj** and T229 **7a**.



Figure 2. a) Glyphic caption on pottery plate from Tikal dated to the Manik 1 phase (A.D. 200-300), showing a probable female title: **7IX-REED-K’IN-?ni** ‘priestess(?)’. b) Female title from Xcalumkin Panel 4 with T229 **7a**: **7IX-7aj-K’IN-ni** ‘sacerdotiza’.

The following comparison of several Late Preclassic and Early Classic examples, seen in **Figures 3a-d**, to the male flower of the cattail reed, seen in **Figure 3e** and contrasted to the female flower in **Figure 3f**, should suffice to establish the REED iconic motivation for the sign in question, and that it therefore corresponds to sign T696/ZSE.²

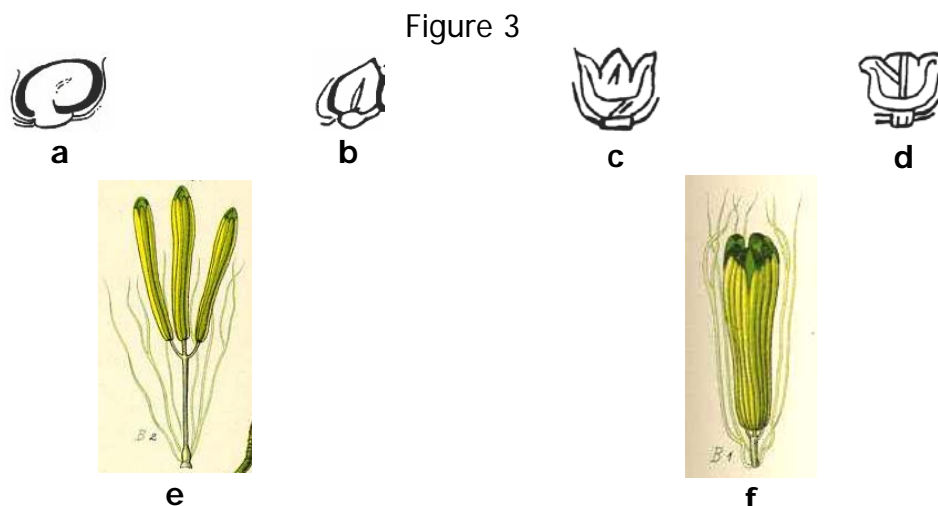


Figure 3. a) Sign 1 from the N-II glyphic caption at San Bartolo. b) REED sign from the Tikal Manik 1 phase pottery vessel. c) REED sign from the Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral. d) Sign on an unprovenanced, inscribed turtle shell. e) Male flower of the cattail reed, *Typhaceae* family. Detail of image at http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/bigphoto/TYPLAT_KSOL.jpg (Points 2009). f) Female flower of the cattail reed, *Typhaceae* family. Detail of image at http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/bigphoto/TYPLAT_KSOL.jpg (Points 2009).

² The sign codes correspond to the Thompson (1962) and Macri and Loooper (2003) sign catalogs, respectively.

In the Ch'olan languages the attested term for 'reed' is **jalal*, attested also as such in Yucatec, Itzaj, and Tzeltal (Kaufman 2003:1158).³ However, the distribution of the term **7aaj* 'reed', with the related meaning 'vara (rod)', in the Central Mayan languages, including Tzotzil, suggest it was once present in Proto-Ch'olan-Tzeltalan, and therefore, that it once could have been present in Ch'olan. Recently, Boot (2006) has put forth evidence for a value **JAL** 'reed' for T214, seen in Figure 4a. His evidence, based on substitutions of T214 and the spelling **ja-la**, which would spell *jala(l)*, is strong. The sign differs from the REED sign discussed in this paper in one important respect: T214 depicts a patch of reeds, not an isolated reed tassel, as does the glyph discussed in this paper. Nevertheless, the tassels on the reeds of T214 are identical to those on the glyph in question here, as seen in Figures 4b-c.

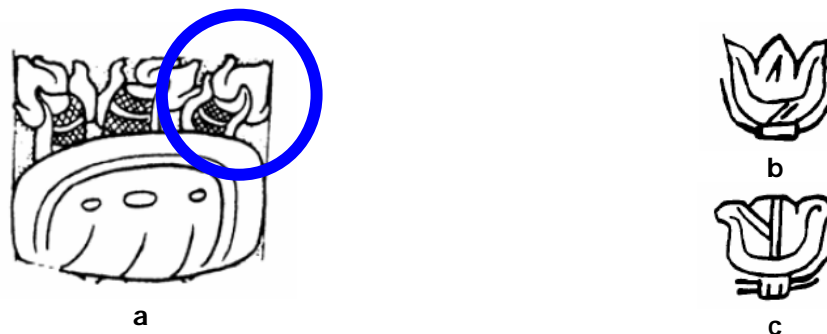


Figure 4. a) Patch of reeds on glyph at Palenque, Temple XIX Lime Stone Panel, Caption (Drawing by David Stuart). b) REED sign from the Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral. c) Sign on an unprovenienced, inscribed turtle shell.

Despite this correspondence, it is possible that the two differ in value. It is more likely that the REED sign of relevance is the same as the original sign for the day Ben, based on a REED sign, as seen in an iconically transparent example from Early Classic Calakmul Stela 114 in Figure 5a, compared to that on the Dumbarton Oaks pectoral in Figure 5b, and the more stylized version corresponding to the Ben glyph from the Uaxactun murals in Figure 5c. For now this seems to be the best hypothesis for the REED sign on the N-II glyphic caption at San Bartolo.

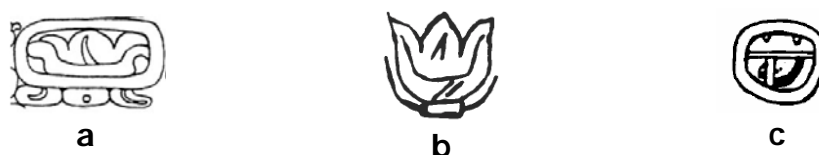


Figure 5. a) REED day sign on Calakmul Stela 114, from Pincemin et al. (1998: 316, Fig. 7). b) REED sign from the Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral, drawn by the author. c) REED day sign from Uaxactun murals, drawn by author.

³ The term *puj* 'cattail reed', well known now as the iconic and phonetic motivations of the syllabogram T854/XH7 **pu**, as deciphered by David Stuart, is a Greater Lowland Mayan (Ch'olan, Tzeltalan, Yucatecan) term, as far as its distribution within Mayan according to Kaufman (2003: 1153), who cites the meanings 'tule' (from Nawa *tullin*, *tillin*, *tollin*) and 'amol [type of *bejuco* or vine]'. The present author believes it is possible that this term could be a case of diffusion from Zoquean **poh* 'vine' (Wichmann 1994: 433).

Keeping this suggestion in mind, if the N-II caption refers to one or more of the represented personages, then it is possible that the N-I caption, given its position preceding a caption that could represent the name of an individual or more, could represent a verb, a predicate. In other words, N-I could be referring to the action as *po(o)m-øj* 's/he incensed', followed by the subject's name at N-II, 'Mr. *Mo(ni)moch(a)*', and the two of them together could thus make up a sentence. If so, then the verb would be made up of a noun, *po(o)m* 'incense', plus a suffix *-øj* 'intransitivizer'. Interestingly, the glyphic captions appear in association with images of two personages carrying bundles or litters with smoke, possibly incense smoke, emanating from the top; if the association between the glyphic captions and the imagery is in fact direct, then the term spelled **mo-ni-mo-cha** or **mo-mo-cha** could be an allusion to these bundles or litters, or to the action of carrying them about.⁴ The imagery therefore lends partial support to this proposed interpretation of the glyphic captions.

References

Aulie, Wilbur H., and Evelyn W. de Aulie

1998 *Diccionario Ch'ol-Español, Español-Ch'ol*. Mexico City: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.

Boot, Erik

2006 *On the Proper Name of Buildings at Copan, Tortuguero, Palenque, and Río Azul*. Note distributed electronically by author on December 26, 2006.

Campbell, Lyle, and Terrence Kaufman

1976 A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs. *American Antiquity* 41(1):80-89.

Kaufman, Terrence

2003 *A Preliminary Mayan Etymological Dictionary*. <http://www.famsi.org/>.

Macri, Martha, and Matthew Looper

2003 *The New Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs. Volume One: The Classic Period Inscriptions*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Mora-Marín, David F.

1997 The Origins of Maya Writing: The Case for Portable Objects. In *U Mut Maya VII*, edited by Tom and Carolyn Jones, pp. 133-164. Arcata: Humboldt State University.

2000 Proyecto *Documentación de Inscripciones del Preclásico Tardío*. Traducido del Inglés por Alex Lomón. <http://www.famsi.org/reports/99049es/index.html>.

⁴ If the first sign is **7a/7aj**, then **mo-mo-cha** or **mo-ni-mo-cha** could be spelling a title, one probably representing two roots, or one root and one or two suffixes. Titles can be made up of a variety of stems, whether proper nouns referring to places, verbal nouns, or verbal stems—transitive or intransitive. The Western Mayan term **mon* is reconstructed as 'to take care of children', being attested in Tzeltal as **mon*, while **mo7ch* is reconstructed as 'basket', and is attested in Tzeltal as *moch* (Kaufman 2003:980). Aulie and Aulie (1998:74) list *mon* as 'alentar', and *mochin* as 'amarrar', in Ch'ol. Ch'orti' has *mochwan* 'acostado' (Pérez Martínez 1994:57). Further evidence is needed to determine the precise lexical value of this expression, but it may be possible that a sequence spelling *mon-moch* could refer to 'basket kindler' or perhaps 'basket guardian', presumably referring to the scaffolding-like object carried by these figures above their heads.

Mora-Marín (fol.)

2001 *The Grammar, Orthography, and Social Context of Late Preclassic Mayan Texts*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University at Albany, Albany, New York.

Pérez Martínez, Vitalino

1994 *Gramática del Idioma Ch'orti'*. La Antigua, Guatemala: Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín.

Pincemin, Sophia, Joyce Marcus, Lynda Florey Folan, William J. Folan, María del Rosario Domínguez Carrasco, Abel Morales López

1998 Extending the Calakmul Dynasty Back in Time: A New Stela from a Maya Capital in Campeche, Mexico. *Latin American Antiquity* 9: 310-327.

Points, Stevens

2009 *Wildflowers of Wisconsin and the Great Lakes Region*. University of Wisconsin. <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/>.

Saturno, William, Karl Taube, and David Stuart

2005 *The Murals of San Bartolo, El Petén, Guatemala, Part I: The North Wall*. Ancient America, 7. Barnardsville, North Carolina: Center for Ancient American Studies.

Thompson, Eric J.

1962 *A Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Wichmann, Søren

1994 *The Relationship Among the Mixe-Zoquean Languages of Mexico*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

2006 *A Mixe-Zoquean Loanword in the Late Preclassic Murals of San Bartolo?* Mesoweb: www.mesoweb.com/articles/wichmann/Loanword.pdf.