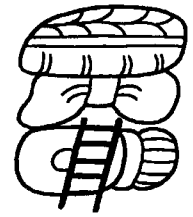


Glyph Dwellers is an occasional publication of the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project, at the University of California, Davis. Its purpose is to make available recent discoveries about ancient Maya culture, history, iconography, and Mayan historical linguistics deriving from the project. Funding for the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, grants #RT21365-92, RT21608-94, PA22844-96, the National Science Foundation, #SBR9710961, and the Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis. Links to Glyph Dwellers from other sites are welcome.

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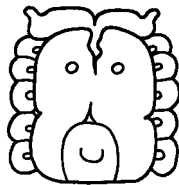
Report 11

October 2000

T536 Xo, from Nahuatl Xochitli 'Flower'

MARTHA J. MACRI

Several graphemes in the Classic Maya script are based on the stylized Ajaw face. T536, named by Thompson "decorated Ahau 2" is an ajaw face with a split forehead and u-shaped elements down both sides. One of the earliest of over 20 occurrences is on Vessel 15, an Early Classic cacao vase from Tomb 19 at Río Azul (Adams 1999:98). A later occurrence is on the middle panel of the Temple of the Cross at Palenque, it occurs in a sequence **pi xo ma/la** spelling *pixom* or *pixol* 'folded cloths, wrappings' (also interpreted as 'hat').

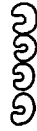


T536

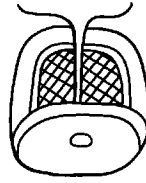
Drawings of grapheme by Matthew Looer.

Knorozov (1967:100) was the first to suggest a **x(o)** phonetic value, however, without providing any explanation. Stuart (1987:47) lists the sign in his syllabary, but also without comment.

In a few examples the glyph for **xo** is identical to the Ajaw day sign. Usually, however, it includes "decorative" features. The frame of u-shaped elements on each side is T134, with the syllabic value **o** (Schele and Grube 1988).



T134



T549

Drawings of graphemes by MatthewLooper.

The split forehead is reminiscent of the split of the **haab'** glyph in T549, the Pax month sign, or the split in the **xi** skull when it occurs in the phonetic spelling of the Pax month. It may be that the side elements function as phonetic complements for the vowel /o/ in **xo**. The split may have the effect of recalling the /x/ in Pax, or it may simply represent a flower.

The face itself is the sign for the day Ajaw. We lack any direct evidence for how the day name may have been pronounced by the lowland Maya during the Classic Period. When the sign occurs logographically in non-calendrical contexts it may have the value **nik** (Yukatekan) or **nich** (Ch'olan) 'flower' (Grube cited by Schele 1992:217-220). 'Flower' occurs frequently in two contexts: as 'child' in "child of father" phrases and in the death phrase for the ending of one's **sak nik nal** 'white maize flower' (or **sak nik ik** 'white flower breath').

The day *Xochitli* is the Nahuatl equivalent of Ajaw in the Mexican calendar. The semantic value of the day sign Ajaw as 'flower' corresponds to the meaning of *Xochitli* 'flower', protoNahuatl *xo:-chi (Dakin 1982:167). The Mexican day is represented visually by a stylized image of a flower.

I propose that the syllabic value of **xo** for the decorated ajaw derives acrophonically from the first vowel and consonant of the Nahuatl word *Xochitli*.

This derivation, however, implies contact between the Maya and speakers of a Nahua language in the early centuries of the Classic Period (c. 250-900 CE). This would suggest that a Nahua language may have been playing a role in Mesoamerican culture far earlier than the Postclassic founding of Tenochtitlan by the Aztecs.

A Nahua presence in the Valley of Mexico from the early Classic has implications regarding the language of Teotihuacan, the most powerful urban center at that time. Teotihuacan influence is documented in trade items, architecture, iconography, and in historical texts at such sites as Tikal, Copan, and Kaminaljuyu. Perhaps it influenced some aspects of the Maya script as well.

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