Glyph Dwellers

Report 26   December 2008

Dated Monuments in the Maya Hieroglyphic Database

MARTHA J. MACRI
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

This is the first in a series of reports on the current state of the *Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project*. It was begun in the late 1980s. Its first funding came from a University California President's Fellowship 1990–1991. Since 1992 the work has received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities: RT 21365-92, RT21608-94, PA22844-96, and the National Science Foundation: SBR9710961 and SBR9905357.

The goal of the project is to increase accessibility to the Maya glyphic texts by the creation of a database. Each record of the database represents a single glyph block, the organizational unit of Maya writing. A glyph block may be composed of one or more graphemes, and may represent a single syllable, a single word or phrase, and sometimes a complete sentence. The glyphs blocks have been associated with a line drawing of the block and in most cases a line drawing showing immediate context, and have been coded for several categories, among them are: region, site, structure, item (stela, lintel, etc.), coordinates (A3, B3, A4, etc.), transcription, transliteration, translation, semantic domain, event date, text date. The data is organized in a flat file that can easily be exported to a text file or to any database software. The images are accessed through the database, but are not copied into the data file itself. Although the database is far from complete, the author has been able to generate reports for a number of scholars on specific items of interest.

As of December 2008 texts from the Classic Period and those of the Codices are in two separate files. The database of Classic texts has records for 36416 glyph blocks from 186 sites; the database of the Maya codices has 7976. Figure 1 shows the number of Classic period monuments that can be dated with a precise long count date. Some of these texts have full initial series dates, others have period ending statements or calendar rounds that locate them in the long count system. The chart is not a count of all known recorded intial series or long count dates, nor is it a count of a glyphic texts. It simply shows how many texts can be dated within each k'atun, that is, 20 periods of 360 days, from 200 to 910 CE (the Hauberg Stela is included providing the earliest

estimated date of 8.8.0.7.0, 199 CE; the next earliest date comes nearly a century later on Tikal Stela 29, with a long count date of 8.12.14.8.15, 292 CE).

Of over 1650 items currently coded in the database, 1100 are associated either with long count dates or approximate dates, such as Early Classic, Late Classic, etc. Of these, over 900 items can be associated with specific long counts. These include approximately 360 stelae, 110 lintels, 90 altars, 80 panels, 70 items designated only as monuments, as well as additional texts on piers, zoomorphs, capstones, columns, ballcourt markers/rings, murals, vases, and various portable objects.

The shape of the chart in Figure 1 is similar to those of Morley (1956) and Sydris and Berger (1979) in showing the gradual increase in items up to an apex in the Late Classic, with a precipitous drop off as the Classic period ends. The number of items counted contrasts dramatically with both of these earlier studies. For example, the peak on all of these charts come about 9.16. Morley's chart shows 20 items, Sydris and Berger's shows 40 (with their highest number of 45 at 9.18). Our highest total is 105 for the k'atun 9.16, and 98 for k'atun 9.15. Our numbers are larger because we consider items containing calendar round dates or period ending statements that can be associated within long count chronology, while both of the others are limited specifically to monuments with long count dates. Additionally, of course, the number of known texts has increased dramatically.
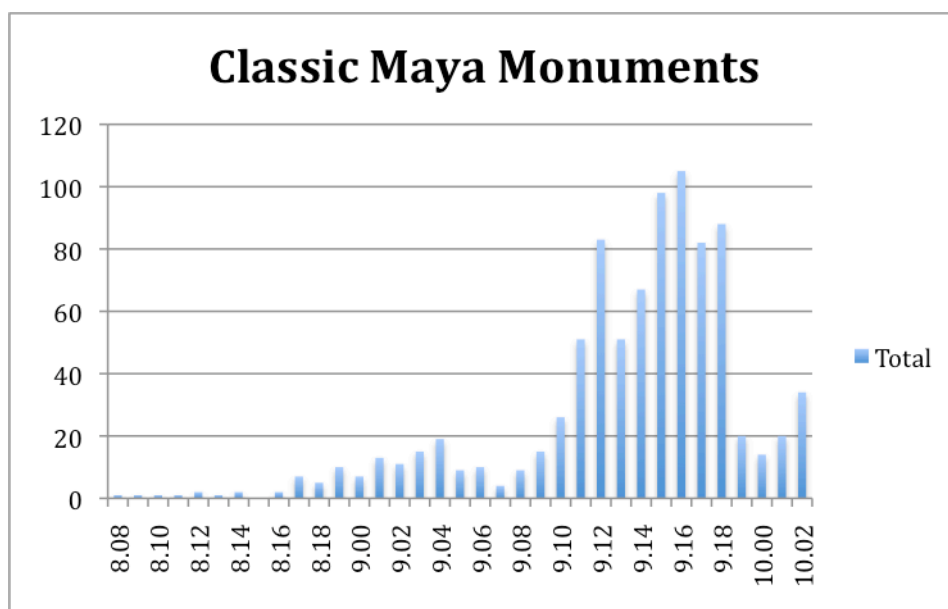

Figure 1.

REFERENCES

Macri, Martha J. and Matthew G. Looper
    1991–2008   *Maya Hieroglyphic Database*. Beta version available at the Native American Language Center, University of California, Davis.
Morley, Sylvanus G.
    1956   *The Ancient Maya*. Revised by Georger W. Brainerd. Originally published 1946. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Sidrys, R. and R. Berger
    1979   Lowland Maya radiocarbon dates and the classic Maya collapse. *Nature* 277:269-274.