



Glyph Dwellers

Report 33

October 2015

A Possible Phonetic Substitution for T533 or “Ajaw Face”

Yuriy Polyukhovych

Department of Art and Art History, California State University Chico

A sign frequently used in the ancient Maya script was designated by J. Eric S. Thompson as T533, by Martha Macri and Matthew Looer as AM1, but in the literature it is also known as “Ajaw face” (Thompson 1962:145–148; Macri and Looer 2003:65). There have been many ideas and interpretations regarding this enigmatic grapheme, which is surely a logograph. Most proposals take into consideration the fact that T533 frequently appears with **-ki** as final phonetic complement, which confirms that this logogram ends with **-vk**. One of the most widely considered of these is Nikolai Grube’s 1992 reading for the sign as **NIK** “flower;” though in 2006 he abandoned this idea (Grube and Nahm, in Schele 1992:217–220; Grube and Gaida 2006:131). The problem is that so far, no reading has been based on a full phonetic substitution or initial complementation – key criteria in the decipherment of Maya writing.

In 2005, Barbara MacLeod and Luis Lopes (personal communication 2005) suggested that on K6395 there appears a possible initial complement **mo-**. But further studies confirmed that actually it was not T533 but T535 and recorded a collocation (**si-jo-mo-MIHIIN**) that names the historical individual Yuklaj Sijom, known from the texts on several ceramic vessels.

It is important to mention that one other possible candidate for an initial complement (**bo-**, yielding **BOOK**) was indicated by Christian Prager in 2006 in the Madrid Codex (page 36) (see Prager 2006). But the problem is that the rest of the text on page 36 contains many unidentifiable signs and incorrect spellings that, unfortunately, make this proposal problematic. Yet another recent proposal, by David Stuart, suggests a **SAAK** reading for this enigmatic sign (Tsukamoto 2014:287).

A suggestive example that possibly contains full phonetic substitution for T533 was recently identified by the author on Stela 2 from Moral-Reforma which is now on display at Museo Regional de Antropología Carlos Pellicer Cámara in Villahermosa (Tabasco, Mexico) (**Fig. 1**).

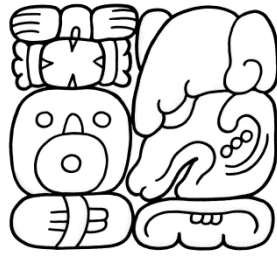


Fig. 1a. K’INICH T533-ki ye?-na, from Moral Reforma Stela 2 (E1). Preliminary drawing by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 1b. K’INICH mo-ki ye?-na, from Moral Reforma Stela 2 (F11-E12). Preliminary drawing by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

Here we have name of an historical individual, a king of Moral-Reforma who dedicated this stela in 731. The text itself is quite simple and contains typical historical information: birth, parentage statement, accession, period ending, and dedication of the monument. It is worthy of note that name of his father also contains T533. It is quite common for a son’s name to include parts of the name of his ancestor.

It is essential to note that the sign used for the syllable **mo** is the parrot head, which usually functions as the logogram **MO’** in the Maya script. Nevertheless, the parrot head was also used as the syllable **mo** on the carved bone Miscellaneous Text 41 from Tikal Burial 116 and the Dumbarton Oaks panel from the Usumacinta region (**Fig. 2**).

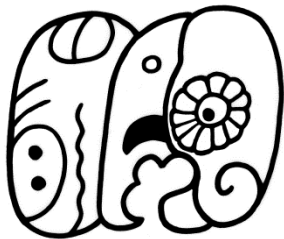


Fig. 2a. bo-mo, from Tikal Miscellaneous Text 41. Drawing by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 2b. mo-cho, from carved panel, Dumbarton Oaks PC.B.539 (C2). Drawing by Stephen D. Houston and Alexandre Tokovinine, after Houston (2012:Fig. 25).

Thus, we have a full phonetic substitution that confirms the **MOOK** reading for T533.

I should emphasize that my conclusion for the reading of T533 is the same as that proposed by Barbara MacLeod and Luis Lopes in 2005, though it is based on different evidence. In any case, MacLeod and Lopes made key observations and linguistic analyses of the *mook* lexical item (MacLeod, personal communication 2005). *Mook*, meaning “maize,” is a loan from Mixe-Zoquean languages (Engel et al. 1987:93; Nordell 1990:275). It is also interesting to note that word *mocohc* existed in Ch’olti’ (Mayan),



where it means “young ear of corn, spike of maize, corn flower (before kernels)” (Morán 1935:44; Stross 2007:file 9). Iconography and the context of hieroglyphic texts confirm this meaning perfectly. Most importantly, in the common parentage expression, in which T533 refers to the relationship of a child to the father, *mook* is an ideal metaphor, likening the child to the young flower of the paternal maize plant.

Acknowledgment: I would like to thank Dmitri Beliaev for his excellent photographs of Miscellaneous Text 41 and Stephen Houston and Alexandre Tokovinine for their drawing of the Dumbarton Oaks panel.

References:

Engel, Ralph, Mary Allhiser de Engel, and José Mateo Alvarez

1987 *Diccionario zoque de Francisco León*. Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, México, D.F.

Grube, Nikolai, and Maria Gaida

2006 *Die Maya: Schrift und Kunst*. SMB-DuMont, Berlin.

Houston, Stephen D.

2012 Carved Panel. In *Ancient Maya Art at Dumbarton Oaks*, edited by Joanne Pillsbury, Miriam Doutriaux, Reiko Ishihara-Brito, and Alexandre Tokovinine, pp. 48-57. Pre-Columbian Art at Dumbarton Oaks 4. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D. C.

Macri, Martha J., and Matthew G. Looper

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

Morán, Fray Francisco

1935 *Arte y Diccionario en Lengua Choltí: a Manuscript Copied from the Libro Grande of Fr. Pedro Moran of about 1625*. Vol. 9. Maya Society, Baltimore.

Nordell, Norman

1990 Vocabulario comparativo Mixe. Mexico. Bartholomew Collection of Unpublished Materials, Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Prager, Christian M

2006 Is T533 a Logograph for BO:K “Smell, Odour”? Unpublished manuscript.



Schele, Linda

1992 *Notebook for the XVIth Maya Hieroglyphic Workshop at Texas, March 14-15, 1992; Palenque: the Group of the Cross*. University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

Stross, Brian

2007 Cholti Project 1. Website:
<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/stross/choltiproject/choltiproj1.htm>

Thompson, J. Eric S.

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

Tsukamoto, Kenichiro

2014 *Politics in Plazas: Classic Maya Ritual Performance at El Palmar, Campeche, Mexico*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, Tucson.



Glyph Dwellers is an occasional publication of the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project at California State University, Chico, California. 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, grants #SBR9710961 and IBSS1328928, the Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis, and the Department of Art and Art History, California State University, Chico.

(c) 2015 Matthew G. Looer. All rights reserved. Written material and artwork appearing in these reports may not be republished or duplicated for profit. Citation of more than one paragraph requires written permission of the publisher. No copies of this work may be distributed electronically, in whole or in part, without express written permission from the publisher.

ISSN 1097-3737