



Glyph Dwellers

Report 37

March 2016

A Possible Rare Variant of “Flaming Akbal” in the Maya Script

Yuriy Polyukhovych

Department of Art and Art History, California State University Chico

The so-called “Flaming Akbal” glyph is a quite rare but well understood grapheme in the Maya hieroglyphic texts (see Zender 2005). It is a logographic sign with the phonetic value **AJ** which means “he of.” In the most cases it appears as an agentive in the names and titles of historical individuals from the Classic period (250-900 CE). Pictorially, it consists of the two main elements: a “fire” sign **K’AHK’** (T122) and “black shiny mirror” (T504) frequently used as the main element in **AK’AB** sign in the calendar. But without any doubt it is one single unit.

Recently I published a note on new polychrome ceramic vessels from Namaan polity with beautifully painted hieroglyphic texts (Polyukhovych 2016). One of the signs used in the name of an historical person mentioned on one of these vessels can be substitution for the “Flaming Akbal,” also used several times to spell the same name (**Fig. 1**). However, this interpretation is not secure since the name of that individual has many different variations. This possible allograph which appears in the name sequence on the vase shown in Figure 2 is the “Flaming god” sign consisting of **K’AHK’** “fire” (T122) and **K’UH** or “god C” (T1016) elements. In the case of the Namaan vessels, it may suggest a possible equivalency to the “Flaming Akbal.”



Fig. 1. Polychrome vessel in the Museo de Arte Precolombino y Vidrio Moderno, Hotel Casa Santo Domingo, La Antigua Guatemala. Note "Flaming Akbal" in block G. Photographs by Alexandre Tokovinine.

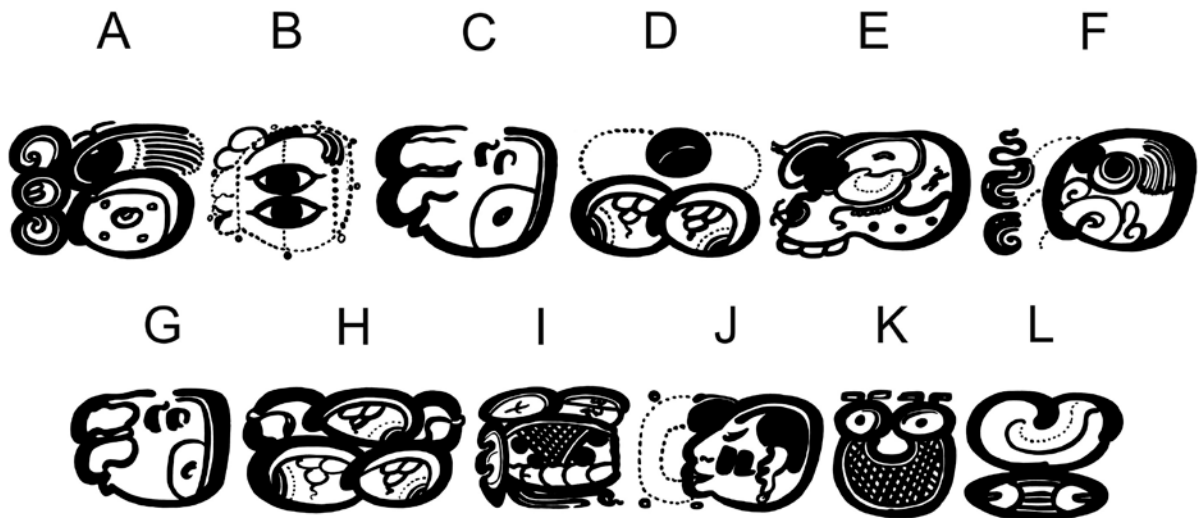


Fig. 2. Namaan polity Vessel 1. Note "Flaming god" in block F. Drawing by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

There are several known examples of **K’AHK’** plus **K’UH** in the corpus of Maya hieroglyphic texts (Figs. 3, 4, 5). In the case of Palenque Temple XXI bench edge (Fig. 3) we have [“Flaming god”] **u-xu i-cha-ma AJAW**, or Aj? Ux Icham Ajaw. This could be the name of an historical individual unknown from other sources or the name of a deity involved in the ritual conducted by the young princes Ahkal Mo’ Naahb III and Upakal K’inich Janaahb Pakal II, as described in the hieroglyphic text (Stuart 2006:184; Polyukhovych 2012:172, 441).

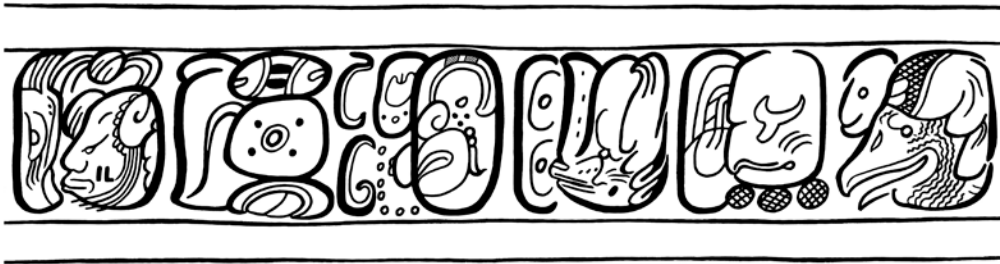


Fig. 3. Palenque Temple XXI bench edge, detail. Drawing by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

The text of Piedras Negras Panel 2 contains “Flaming god” in the name of the fourth warrior: [“Sun Raiser”] [“Flaming god”] **o?/PAT?-ta-la a-ki xu-ka-la-NAAH AJAW**, ? Aj? Otal/Patal Aak Xukalnaah lord (Fig. 4). It is interesting to note that 4 out of 6 names of the warriors that stand in front of the ruler contain either “Flaming Akbal” or “Flaming god.” So it seems obvious that the sculptor preferred to use rare signs rather than the usual T12 or other logographs that represent agentives. It may suggest that the “Flaming god” is a variant of “Flaming Akbal,” although there is no direct substitution in this text.



Fig. 4. Piedras Negras Panel 2, detail. Drawing by David Stuart.

Another example (Fig. 5) occurs in the rim text of the incised black and red vessel in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2012.2, Kerr 3844). It is also the name of a noble person, this time from Hix Witz polity (El



Pajalar - Sapote Bobal) and unknown from other texts. His name is **ICH'AAHK-wa KAB-nu** [“Flaming god”]-**AJAN?-na**, possibly Ich'aahkaw Kaba'n Ajan (or Ich'aahk Wakaba'n Ajan). It may be that in this context, the “Flaming god” grapheme works as a phonetic complement **AJ** to a possible **AJAN** logogram. Note that in this instance, T4, which is normally a logograph **NAH** or **NAAH**, is used in final position, possibly as syllabic **-na**. In the Maya script, T4 also functions as syllabic **na** in spellings such as **u-tz'i-bi-na-ja-la**, **JUN-na-ta**, **na-bi**, **na-wa-ja**, and **AHKAN-na**.



Fig. 5. Incised vessel, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston 2012.2, Kerr 3844. Photograph by Justin Kerr.

Unfortunately, none of the instances of “Flaming god” clearly substitute for other **AJ** graphemes. If these **K'AHK-K'UH** collocations are a distinct variant of the “Flaming Akbal,” then we have a new single logogram that reads **AJ**.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank Dmitri Beliaev and Matthew Loper for their comments and discussion regarding this topic.

References

Polyukhovych, Yuriy

2012 Polityko-Dynastychna Istorija Derzhavy Maya Baakal' Za Materialamy Korpusu Epigrafichnykh Dzherel Palenke (Lakamkha') [Political and Dynastic History of the Maya State of Baakal According to the Sources of the Epigraphic Corpus of Palenque (Lakamha')]. Ph.D. dissertation, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

2016 New Maya Polychrome Vessels from Namaan Polity. *Glyph Dwellers*, Report 36. <http://glyphdwellers.com/pdf/R36.pdf>.



Stuart, David

2006 *Sourcebook for the 30th Maya Meetings: The Palenque Mythology*. Austin: University of Texas at Austin, Department of Art and Art History.

Zender, Marc

2005 “Flaming Akbal” and the Glyphic Representation of the Aj- Agentive Prefix. *The PARI Journal* 5(3): 8–10.



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) 2016 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