

Notes on Ancient Maya Writing

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A New Variant of the Hieroglyph **CHANUL** "guardian"?



U CHAN(UL)-nu



cha-nu

Introduction

This short note about a minor observation concerns a hitherto unknown hieroglyph that is displayed on a so called Ik'-Site (cf. Reents-Budet 1994:164ff.) ceramic vessel labelled as Kerr 1896. The grapheme is unique and it exhibits, similar to T644 **CHUM**, a seated human torso, but with its arms tied behind its back, a dislocated hand on the right upper corner of the torso, finely traced toes and a rope or necklace hanging down in front of the chest. Scanning the literature one notices that this sign has not been classified in any hitherto published signary of Maya writing. A glance at Houston, Stuart and Taube's compendium of bodily expressions and experiences in Maya art and writing reveals beyond doubt that this hieroglyph must represent a captive "compressed into a pose of extreme discomfort" (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006:203). It is thus highly suggestive that the semantic meaning or probably the phonemic reading of the sign gravitates toward the main domain of "captivity" or "guardianship" in a more defined sense. The latter assumption is mainly based on the observation that the nature of the relation between captives and victors was often quasi-parental (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006:205) with the victor being the guardian of this victim. In the following discussion I will thus argue that this hieroglyph most probably is another sign denoting the well-known Classic Mayan term *chanul* "guardian".

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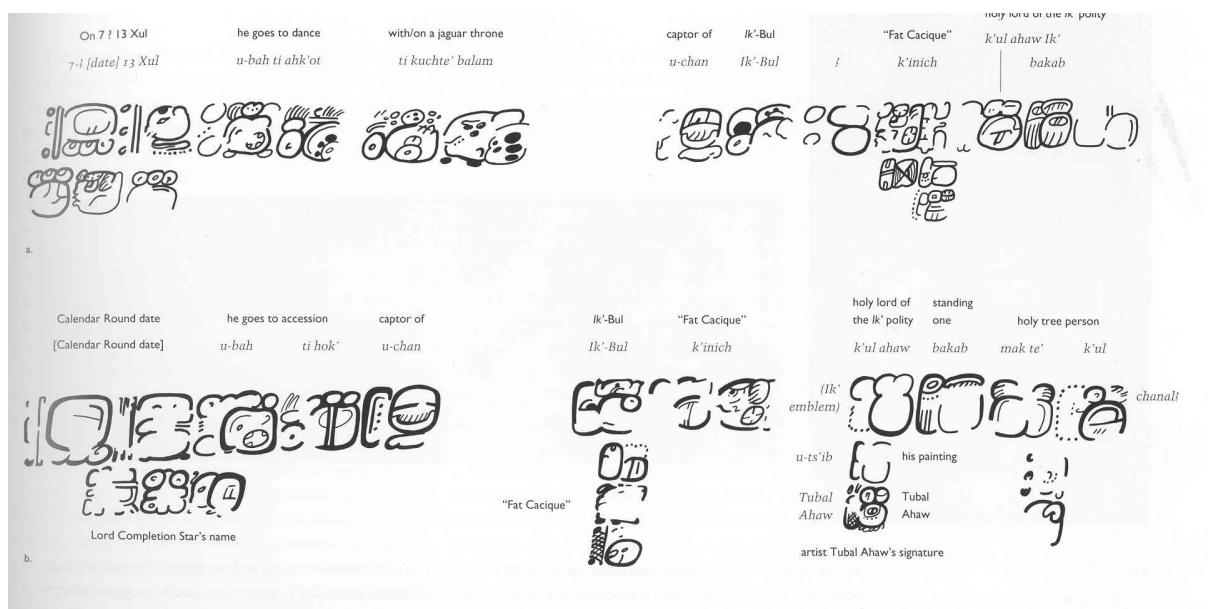
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Context



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	K
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Thanks to a high resolution photograph of K1896 by Justin Kerr, kindly provided to me by Erik Boot (email dated July 10, 2008), the collocation can be doubtlessly classified as T13.nn:263 reading **U ?-nu**. The context of this collocation reads _Au b'ah _Bti ak'Vt ti sij _Cbix? _Dyajante' _Ek'inich _{obl} chan _Fu ?-nu _Gik' bul _Hkaloomte' _Ik'ubul'T503 ajaw _Kte'tan [...], loosely paraphrased as "he his dancing with the *sij bix* (costume), Yajawte' K'inich Ohl Chan, he is the ? of Ik' Bul, sacred lord of the 'Ik'-Site', *te'tan*-title (unknown)". As for a possible phonetic reading of the torso hieroglyph under discussion can be deduced from other Ik'-Site ceramics that are published and discussed by Dorie Reents Budet (Reents-Budet 1994:164ff.). A page from the latter source (p. 167) exhibits different contexts from Ik'-Site vessels that may clarify the meaning of the torso hieroglyph (see the following examples)



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A series of texts display the Ik' Bul collocation preceded by the hieroglyphic expression *u chan* "his guardian". This compound has been identified semantically and deciphered linguistically by several scholars in the 1980s (cf. Bricker 1986; Houston and Stuart 1989; Riese 1982), an updated linguistic discussion and a list of the various contexts can be found in dictionaries independently compiled by Erik Boot (MESOWEB) and Peter Mathews & Peter Biro (FAMSI). The latter give *chan* as a transitive verb "to watch over, to own, to master" and Erik Boot has compiled a useful list of different contexts with their respective interpretation. According to him, and of course other scholars of the field, **U-CHAN** can be analyzed '*chanul* (2) n. guardian, custodian » **cha-nu** > *chanu*[*l*] "guardian, custodian" (Boot 2008:45). His list of contexts contain the following entries.

CHAN-nu > *chanu*[*l*]

- 'u **cha-nu** > *uchannu*[*l*] "the guardian" COL Incised Shell
- 'u **cha-nu** > *uchannu*[*l*] "the guardian" K1092, LTI Lintel 1: F1 52
- 'u **cha-nu** > *uchannu*[*l*] "the guardian" K8889
- 'u **CHAN-nu** > *uchanu*[*l*] "the guardian" YAX Stela 11 Back: E2
- 'u **CHAN** > *uchan*[*ul*] "the guardian" YAX Lintel 1: A7
- 'u **CHAN-na** > *uchan*[*ul*] "the guardian" IXZ Stela 4: A4a 53
- 'u **CHAN-nu** > *uchanu*[*l*] "the guardian" NTN Drawing 52: A5
- 'u **CHAN-na** > *uchan*[*ul?*] "the guardian" MQL Stela 6: B1b
- 'u **cha?-CHAN-na** > *uchan*[*ul*] "the guardian" IXZ Panel 1: XI, 1 54
- 'u **4** > *uchan*[*ul?*] "the guardian" YAX HS 5 Step 37, 152

As it has been shown by previous scholars the affix cluster of the CHAN expression displays a substitution between /na/ and /nu/, most probably indicating different vowel qualities (the latter sign T592, T106, T263 were independently deciphered as **nu** by David Stuart and Werner Nahm in 1990) (Macri and Looper 2003:282). As for the torso sign under discussion several implications can be presented now. On K1896 the 'torso' sign is contained in the following compound

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U ?-nu

IK' bu-lu

A comparison to Erik Boot's compilation of U CHAN expressions yields that the suffix cluster exhibits a substitution between /na/ and /nu/ and a glance at the Ik'-Site ceramic texts yields that Ik' Bul is a prominent captive of the Ik' Site Ruler expressed by the **U CHAN** hieroglyphic compound denoting a relation between captive and victor. This two factors may indicate one plausible solution to the question about the meaning and reading of the so called "Torso hieroglyph".

1) The torso hieroglyph takes the suffix /nu/ and it precedes the personal name Ik' Bul. Ik' Bul is a captive of an Ik' Site Ruler who regards him as his guardian or possessor (*chanul*): The torso hieroglyph thus may represent an allograph or unique spelling of the collocation *u chanul* and I therefore suggest that it reads **CHANUL**

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