



# A Possible Syllabic Spelling of the “Birth Glyph”

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Recently, while working on my Ph.D. dissertation, I analyzed a hieroglyphic text from the famous but not well-published shell plaque from Simojovel (Chiapas, Mexico) which is now on exhibit in the Tuxtla Gutiérrez Museum. In my analysis, I relied on the drawing made by Peter Mathews (Figure 1; see Robertson 1976:Figure 9). I have never seen the object personally, but thanks to photographs provided by Alexandre Safronov and Luis Adrian Rojas Yañez, I have noted previously undocumented details which may help in improving our understanding of the inscription (Figure 2).

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*Mesoweb*: [www.mesoweb.com/articles/polyukhovych/BirthGlyph.pdf](http://www.mesoweb.com/articles/polyukhovych/BirthGlyph.pdf).

The text begins with the date 5 Ajaw; from the available photos, it is hard to see all the finer details, so it might also be 10 Ajaw. But it seems to lack any indication of a month name in the 365-day calendar with its associated coefficient. The block at position B1 attracted my attention in particular, since I have never seen anything similar to it. Due to its overall structure it seems to represent a verb spelled with a main sign followed by the syllables **ya** and **ja**. These likely correspond to a suffix **-yaj**. The main sign in the spelling of this verb depicts a rodent-like creature—one which is similar to other known rodent-like glyphs such as **ch'o**, **si**, **ji** and **EHM**. Therefore, it seems reasonable to read the whole spelling at B1 as **si-ya-ja**, *sil[h]yaj* or “he was born”: a well-known verb that is usually spelled



**Figure 1.** The Simojovel shell plaque: (left) inside surface (drawing by Merle Greene Robertson after Miguel Covarrubias); (right) outside surface (drawing by Peter Mathews).



Figure 2. Outside surface of the Simojovel shell plaque (photos by Alexandre Safronov).

**SIHY-ya-ja.** If so, this would be the only attested syllabic spelling of the birth verb with the possible exception of the codex-style vessel from Calakmul, on which one finds a caption for a Maize God being born from a flower (Stuart et al. 1999:II-47).

Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine who was born on the day 5/10 Ajaw. From the available drawing and photos, the name of the protagonist at A2 may be read as **5-AHIIN-na** or **5-EHM-ma**. However, it is also possible that this is the month name Tz'ikin (Xul), which would require a coefficient greater than 5 (perhaps 8) to agree with Ajaw.

Recently, Luis Lopes published his analysis of a rare variant of the **si** syllable in the form of a rodent head (an observation also made by several epigraphers including David Stuart and Alexandre Tokovinine, see Lopes 2011). He counted five known examples of this sign. Therefore, the sign of block B1 from Simojovel shell plaque should be the sixth example known so far of the rare **si** syllable in the form of a rodent head.

It seems also that text from the Simojovel shell plaque contains a previously unattested title which is very similar to already known titles such as *ti' sak hu'n*, *ti' hu'n* and *aj k'uhu'n*. Blocks C8-C9: **a-ja TI'-HU'N-na**, *aj ti' hu'n*. This new reading is based on the author's examination of the finest details of the newly available photographs. The current drawing shows no indication of the **HU'N** sign placed above the **TI'** “mouth” logogram (see Houston et al. 2006:110, Fig. 3.5 for the decipherment of the **TI'** sign). As is the case with similar titles, the translation could be “the person who has *ti' hu'n* officials (crown keepers).”

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