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Drawing by Linda Schele

The “Count-of-Captives” Epithet in Classic Maya Writing

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The abundant hieroglyphic inscriptions of Yaxchilan, Mexico, contain far more references to war and capture than those of any other Maya site. It is only appropriate then, that one should look to Yaxchilan when in search of any epigraphic “scarcities” that fall within the broad theme of war, and which might not be common in texts elsewhere.

One such hieroglyph that occurs chiefly in the Yaxchilan texts appears to refer to the number of prisoners that a certain ruler captures. The compound itself is normally composed of three main elements: T12 or T229 (Figure 1a), a variable numeral, and T111 or T570 (Figure 1b). T111 and T570 in Thompson’s catalog (1962) are in fact the same sign, in affix and main sign forms respectively. Occurring with the name glyphs of a ruler, the compound seems to be an epithet that is specific to the individual. That is, the number element differs from subject to subject, while the other components remain constant.

A brief analysis of these components of the glyph reveals a tentative reading and translation. The first element, T12 or T229, is without much doubt a masculine article, probably *ah* or an equivalent (Knorozov 1955:105), which can be read “he of.” There is considerable evidence for such a reading of T12 and T229, much of it unpublished, although Closs (n.d.a) offers another interpretation that is not in total disagreement with suggestions made here. In many Mayan languages the word *ah* introduces various expressions that refer to an office, a status, or a profession. For example, such a use is seen in the Yucatec expression *ah men* (or simply *h men*), which can refer to a shaman, a teacher, or an artisan.

The next element is the variable numeral, which is in turn followed by the T111/570 “wavy bone” character. One meaning of the T111/570 element can be determined from a glyphic clause on the hieroglyphic stairway of Dos Pilas, Guatemala (Figure 2). Glyphs G4-H6 record the capture of one *Tah Mo’* (H3, H4a), a prisoner of a Dos Pilas ruler who is named by glyphs G5-H6.¹ Here, the verb “capture” (G4), read *chucah* by Knorozov (1967:99), is in the passive voice. As is true in Mayan

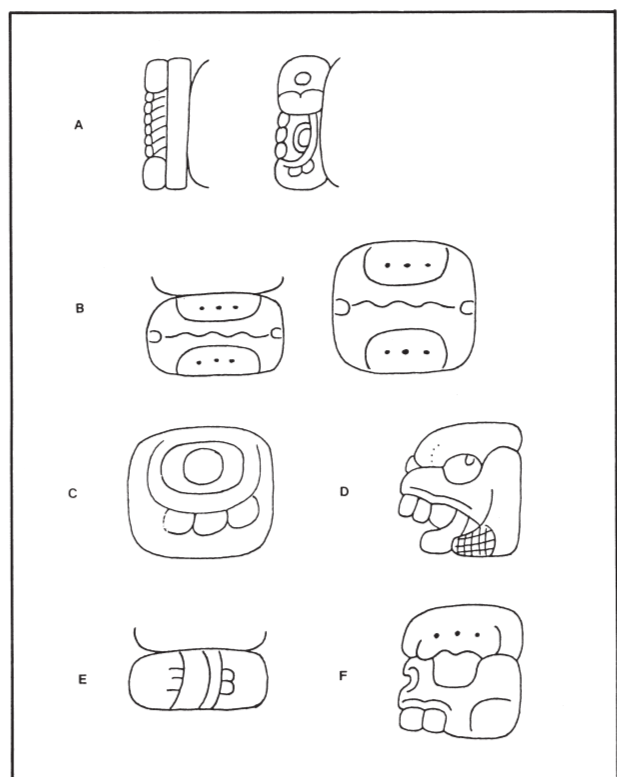


Fig. 1

grammatical structure, it occupies the initial position in the clause, preceded only by the date (9.11.11.9.17 9 Caban 5 Pop). What follows the “capture” event is the name of the captive. The agent of the verb (the one who acts), or the ruler, is not expressed literally as such, but appears to be the object of what can be roughly equivalent to a modifying phrase in English, which begins immediately after the captive’s name at H4b. The glyph at H4b consists of a variant of the possessive pronoun *u* (T11) (“his,” “her,” or “its”), followed by T570, the bone element. This is followed by the name of the ruler. In the case of the possessed noun at H4b, the possessive

u should refer to the ruler, and T570 refer to the name that precedes it (i.e., the captive). Thus, the glyphs from H4b on should function to modify the captive by placing him in relationship to the ruler. The agent of the verb, then, is implied. A reading of this clause without the meaning of T570 being understood would be: “(He) was captured (G4), *Tah Mo’* (H3, H4a), the ‘x’ of (H4b), the Dos Pilas ruler (G5-H6).” An obvious choice for the meaning of T570 in this case would be “captive.”

The word for “bone” in most Mayan languages is *bac*, and such a reading for T111/570 would be appropriate. Fox and Justeson (n.d.) convincingly demonstrate that the compound T501:102 (Figure 7a) is read *bac*, a word that has related expressions in Yucatec that refer to prisoners. Moreover, a close relationship between this compound and T111/570 will become apparent in discussions below. Thus, a reading *bac*, “captive,” for T111/570 seems to be plausible at least. The count-of-captives epithet, then, can be translated for now as “he of ‘x’ (number) captives.”

Of the numerous examples of the glyph so far encountered in the inscriptions of Yaxchilan, all but a few refer to the ruler identified by Proskouriakoff (1963:149-152) as “Bird-Jaguar.” Two instances of the count-of-captives glyph with the name glyph of “Bird-Jaguar” can be seen in Figure 3a. In his case, the compound has the conventional affixes, and the numeral is expressed with T683a (Figure 1c) – well known from the Maya codices as the number 20. If T683a does indeed record a numeral in this instance, it would seem that “Bird-Jaguar” had twenty captives to his credit.

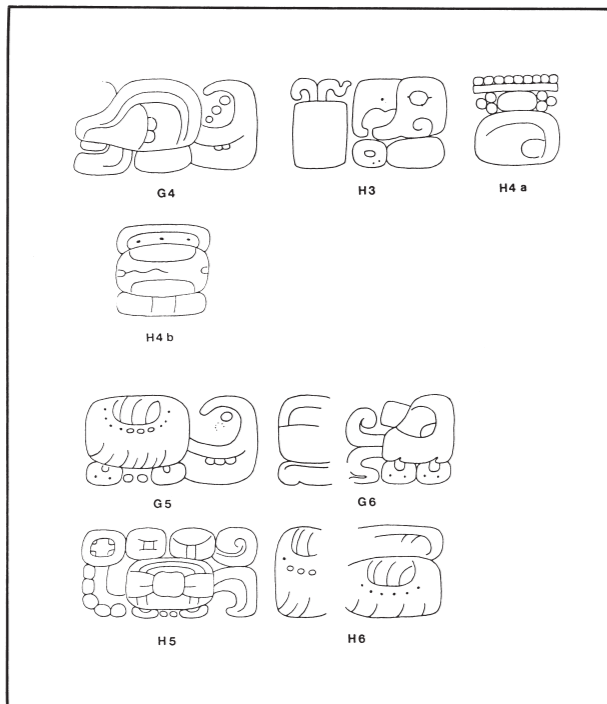


Fig. 2

Another personage of Yaxchilan who carries the count-of-captives epithet was not a ruler, yet was apparently an important noble, perhaps a brother of another Yaxchilan ruler dubbed “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” by Proskouriakoff (1964:190-200). Lintels 9 and 58 each portray two figures, one of whom can be identified by accompanying glyphs on both sculptures as the same individual. His name glyphs are far from being read with any certainty, but one compound that accompanies his name is the count-of-captives title which in both instances carries the number seven as the variable (Figure 3b). A notable substitution occurs here between the T111/570 bone and a skeletal rabbit head, T1045 (Figure 1d), in the titles on Lintels 9 (glyph C4) and 58 (glyph A), respectively. This equivalence can also be seen in the main sign of the Palenque emblem glyph, and all evidence suggests that T1045, like T111/570, is read *bac* and can mean “captive.” Thus, this Yaxchilan noble apparently had taken seven captives.

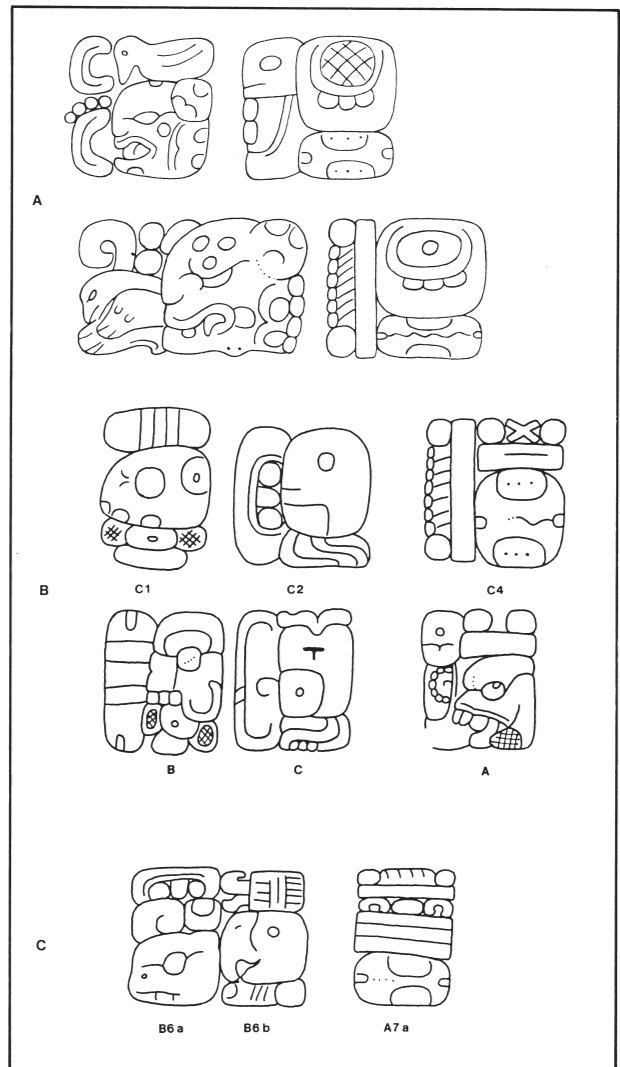


Fig. 3

A third individual of Yaxchilan also recorded the number of his prisoners. Lintel 10, the latest dated sculpture known from that site, mentions in its text some of the war activities of the ruler “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” and a later ruler as well. No name glyph of “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” is present, but the expression “captor of (B6a) *Tah Mo*’ (B6b)” can be seen.² “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” is named in numerous other texts with precisely this designation. This along with the chronological position of this inscription, supports the claim that this example, too, refers to him. In one instance on Lintel 10, the count-of-captives title (A7a) accompanies this reference to “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant,” and the number recorded is sixteen (Figure 3c). “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant,” then, was “he of 16 captives.”

Aside from the texts of Yaxchilan, there are a number of other examples of the count-of-captives epithet. At Aguateca, Guatemala, on Stela 1, the ruler “God K-*Mah K’ina*” is named as “captor of ‘Turtleshell,’” and as “he of two captives” (Graham 1967:Figure 3, A13-A14a). Two other rulers of Aguateca, on Stelae 5 and 7, respectively, are noted as having taken three captives each. It is notable that these and many other examples of the glyph carry T102 (Figure 1e) as a suffix to the *bac* bone. T102 is often suffixed to T570 in other contexts, and its use here will be elaborated upon below. Some other instances of the count-of-captives epithet are present in the texts of Seibal, Machaquilá, and other sites, but these are conventionally constructed and need no detailed explanation. The texts of Bonampak, Mexico, however, do offer a few noteworthy examples.

Lintel 1 at Bonampak records a capture by the ruler *Chan-Muan* on the date 9.17.16.3.12 8 Eb 10 Cumku (Mathews 1980) (Figure 4a). The glyph which refers to the prisoner taken on that day (A4) consists of T12 (*ah*), the number five, and a human skull (T1040) (Figure 1f). It appears that this glyph is a variant of the count-of-captives title, with the reasonable substitution between the *bac* bone and a skull, much like the example seen at Yaxchilan. On Bonampak Stela 2 (Figure 4b), *Chan-Muan* (G1-F2) is named as “captor of ‘*ah* five-skull” (G2-F3). Contrary to its more customary use, the count-of-captives epithet here refers to the prisoner himself, and not to the ruler. The captive, then, is one bearing the title, “he of five captives.”

Another reference to the same prisoner is found in the hieroglyphic captions of the famous murals of Structure 1 of Bonampak. The text accompanying the main figure on the north wall of Room 2 (Figure 5a) names the ruler, *Chan-Muan* (at D2, E1), as “captor of ‘*ah* five-T501:102” (D1,C2). Here, T501:102 apparently substitutes for the skull element that appears on Lintel 1 and Stela 2.

T501:102 is also commonly found in the texts of Yaxchilan, and there it substitutes for the T111/570 *bac* bone in another example of the count-of-captives title.

Mathews (personal communication, 1982) points out an occurrence of the glyph on the recently discovered Hieroglyphic Stairway 5 at Yaxchilan. Glyphs p83-p85

of that lengthy text appear to refer to “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant,” but again without the use of his actual name glyph (Figure 5b). As on Lintel 10, we find “captor of (p83) *Tah Mo*’ (p84),” followed by p85 as a count-of-captives glyph, but one using T501:102 in place of the bone or skull elements. In the example cited above from Yaxchilan Lintel 10, it was seen that the number accompanying the title of “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” was 16, but, interestingly, we see in this instance what is almost certainly the number 15. This difference suggests that, in the interval between the date of Hieroglyphic Stairway 5 and the probable later date of Lintel 10, “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” captured one prisoner.

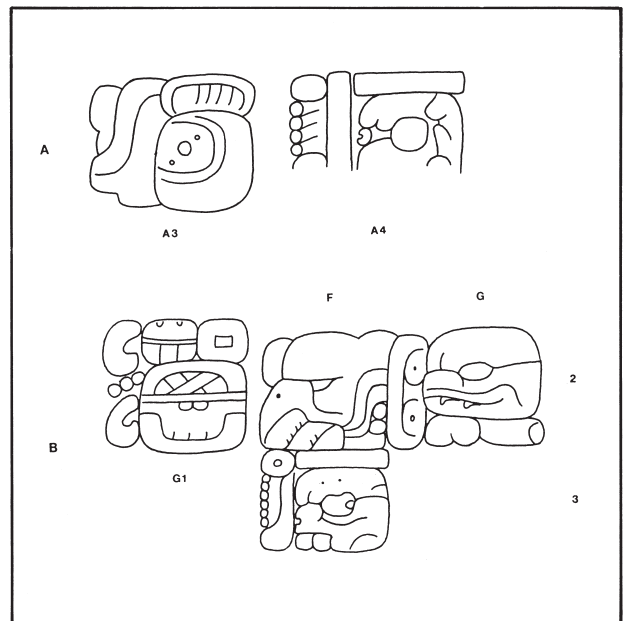


Fig. 4

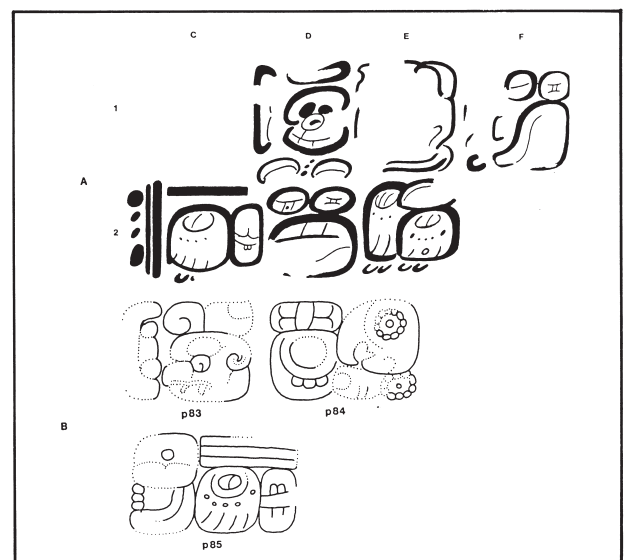


Fig. 5

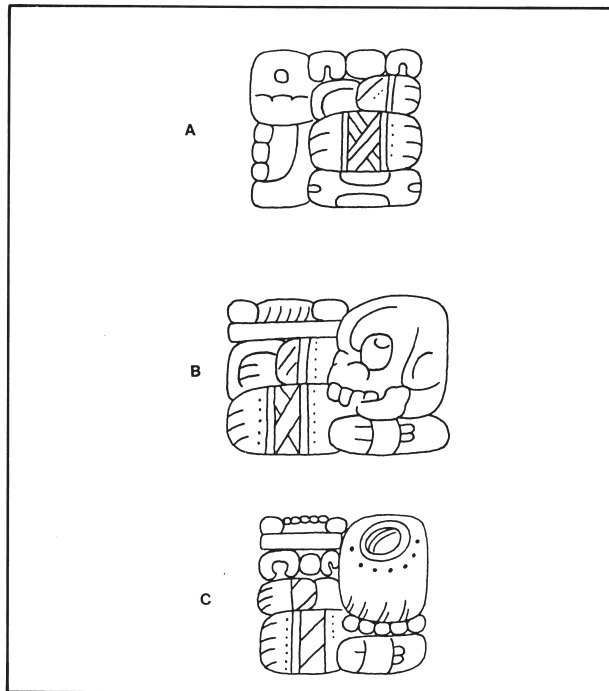


Fig. 6

One other instance at Yaxchilan demonstrates the substitution among T501:102, the T1045 and T1040 skulls, and the T111/570 bone. In a title carried by “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant,” but apparently not the count-of-captives glyph, the final element can either be T111 (Figure 6a), T1045 (with T102) (Figure 6b), or T501:102 (Figure 6c). Although this glyph is not the specific count-of-captives title, the presence of these elements suggests to me that it does refer to some belligerent duty. In any case, the equivalence of these three elements seems clear.

Because T501:102 substitutes for the skull and bone elements and occurs as well in the count-of-captives title, it would be reasonable, of course, to assume that this compound can also function as a reference to captives. This is in agreement with an identification made by Proskouriakoff (1963:152), who termed T501:102 the “captive collocation.” Also, as noted above, Fox and Justeson have extended this by reading T501:102 as two phonemes, respectively, *ba* and *c(i)*, or *bac*.

The reading of T102 as the phoneme *ci* is one that I tend to accept. It has been seen that this character is sometimes suffixed to the *bac* bone, as well as to the rabbit skull, in the count-of-captives title and another, possibly related, glyph. It is the existence of the examples where T102 is absent that tempts me to suppose that it works as the phonetic complement *-c(i)* to the *bac* reading of T111/570 and T1045.

Nevertheless, the use of T501:102 as a general reference to captives seems clear. At Yaxchilan there are instances in which the compound is inscribed directly onto the sculpted figures of prisoners (Figure 7b), apparently functioning as a label of sorts. However, the most

common usage of T501:102 is within texts, where it carries the possessive pronoun *u* and is placed between the names of a captive and a captor, in the exact same fashion as the *bac* bone is used on the Dos Pilas stairs (Figure 7c). This is another example of the substitution between the two.

Despite the rather straightforward details discussed up to this point, there are still some questions to be considered. If this glyph, as proposed here, designates the number of captives that one takes, then one would expect that number to increase through time as more war events take place. Indeed, we have seen this to be the case with “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant,” who had recorded fifteen captives on Hieroglyphic Stairway 5, and then sixteen captives on Lintel 10. Strangely enough, however, this is not the case with the earlier ruler “Bird-Jaguar.” His title contains the number twenty throughout his eventful and belligerent reign.

There are, however, some explanations for Bird-Jaguar’s title that come to mind. It is possible that the number of captives recorded in his case does not represent an actual accumulation of prisoners over time, but rather the amount taken on one noteworthy raid or ritually special occasion by the ruler. As with these Yaxchilan exam-

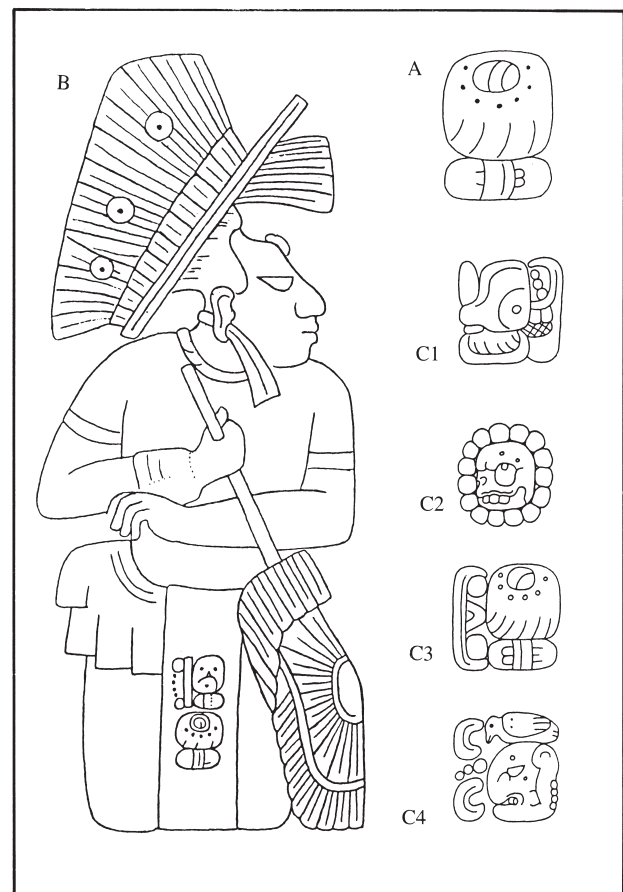


Fig. 7

ples, twenty is the highest number so far seen to accompany the glyph; a ruler at the site of Mountain Cow, Belize, is also named as “he of 20 captives” (see Altar 1). Because the number does not appear to change in the case of “Bird-Jaguar,” it is possible that twenty is not used as a specific amount, but instead, as the maximum number worth recording, with the essential connotation of “many,” or “a lot.” When dealing with big numbers, the scribes of Yaxchilan would certainly have had to consider the graphic space necessary to record them. It would have been difficult indeed – if not unnecessary – to record “twenty-five” or “thirty” in the little space provided, particularly since the corpus of Maya texts seems not to allow for the counting of things other than days beyond the unit “twenty” in their vigesimal system.

In any case, the count-of-captives epithet does offer more light on the broader subject of Maya warfare, and a further glimpse into matters which Maya rulers felt were important to record about their own activities and exploits, whether ceremonial or otherwise.

Notes

¹ There is some debate over the nature of glyph G5 (T501:178.181) in this portion of the Dos Pilas stairway. For the present, I am assuming that this compound is part of the name of the ruler, who is also referred to as “Flint-Sky God K.” The title “Sky God K,” which is common at Tikal and other sites with its emblem glyph (such as Dos Pilas itself), follows the glyph in question, so this might lend support to my assumption. In any case, T501:178.181 is rare in Maya inscriptions as a whole, as one might expect with the name of a local ruler. This and other examples at Dos Pilas, incidentally, occur only on monuments

erected within the reign of “Flint-Sky God K.” One other example to my knowledge, however, is of interest. In the text of Stela 24 of Naranjo, Guatemala, “T501:178.181-Sky God K” (D11-E11) is named in a male parentage expression (Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1977) as the father of “Lady from Tikal.” Because “T501:178.181-Sky God K” takes the emblem glyph that is known from both Tikal and Dos Pilas, I suspect that this names the same individual recorded in the Dos Pilas inscriptions. This would agree with the chronological placement of Stela 24 in relationship to the dates at Dos Pilas involving “Flint-Sky God K.” Thus, the “Lady from Tikal” may very well be the “Lady from Dos Pilas.”

² The reader will note that a *Tah Mo'* was recorded on the stairs of Dos Pilas as being captured by a ruler of that site. This *Tah Mo'* at Yaxchilan, the captive of “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant,” is, of course, not the same individual. This appellative seems to be quite exclusive to prisoners, and there are at least three instances of *Tah Mo'* in all, the third being a captive at Machaquilá, Guatemala. The reading *Tah Mo'* for this glyph is one of the more secure transliterations in Maya epigraphy. One can easily see in Figure 2 (Glyph H3) and in Figure 3c (glyph B6b) that the glyph consists of an element resembling a bound bundle of sticks with smoke-curls issuing from one end, which is followed by the head of a macaw (T744b). The word for “macaw” in some Mayan languages today is *mo'* (sometimes spelled *mo'o*, with the final *o* being rearticulated after the glottal stop). The glyphic evidence for such a reading for the macaw head is considerable. Knorozov recognized that a glyph on page 16c of the Codex Dresden, long known to have the connotation of “macaw” (Thomas 1888:355-356), was a collocation of the phonetic elements *mo* (T582), and a doubled *o'* (T280), yielding *mo'o* (Knorozov 1952:114). Further evidence for such a reading comes from Stela 7 of Yaxchilan, where “Shield-Jaguar’s descendant” is named “captor of *Tah* 'T582:280'” (pC4). Element T280 can be seen to suffix the macaw head in each example given here, apparently functioning as a complement to the *mo'* reading. The element that precedes the macaw sign, the smoking bundle of sticks, is probably a representation of a torch made of sticks of *acóte* pine. *Tah*, or its cognates, is the term for *acóte* torches in some Mayan languages today. Moreover, Mathews (personal communication, 1980) has noted that the torch element can be replaced by the elements T113:683b (see Figure 5b). These are known to be the phonemes *ta* and *ah*, respectively.