

The Lazy-S: A Formative Period Iconographic Loan to Maya Hieroglyphic Writing

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Iconographic analysis of the recently discovered Monument 31 from the highland site of Chalcatzingo demonstrates for the first time that at least by the Middle Formative Period (900-500 B.C.), the Lazy-S motif, like its Classic Maya counterpart, was associated with both clouds and bloodletting. Although the Lazy-S motif figures prominently in the iconographic corpus at Chalcatzingo, until the analysis of Monument 31 no context existed for its meanings. The monument depicts raindrops falling from the motif, hence a strong support for a cloud identification. Immediately below the Lazy-S cloud, a carved feline rips a victim apart, surely a strong argument

for a bloodletting association. With Monument 31's close iconographic association between clouds and bloodletting, we find not only one of the longest persisting clusters of symbolic communication in the history of Mesoamerica, but further evidence of the Classic Maya's meaningful use of the Formative Period legacy.

In their groundbreaking article "A Decipherment of Epi-Olmec Hieroglyphic Writing," Justeson and Kaufman demonstrated that the recently identified Epi-Olmec or Isthmian hieroglyphic script inscribed on La Mojarra Stela 1 was the writing system of a Late Formative Period Mixe-Zoquean speaking population. The authors also stated that "the script may itself descend from an Olmec hieroglyphic system, but too little of the Olmec script has been recovered to confirm or disprove a connection (1993:1703)." However, if evidence supporting the existence of an Olmec writing system is limited, evidence for the Olmec symbol system that would be the precursor to such a writing system is abundant.

More specifically, even though 700 years separates the demise of Olmec culture from that of the Classic Period Maya civilization (A. D. 200-900), the central relationship of Olmec symbols to the art and writing of the Maya and other later Mesoamerican cultures has been recognized by researchers since Covarrubias (1946). Certainly, iconographic investigations of specific elements of the Olmec symbol system have shown them to be directly ancestral to major elements in the symbol system of the Classic Period Maya (Coe 1965, 1976; Joralemon 1971, 1976; V. Fields 1989, 1991; Reilly 1990, 1991). However, it is with the recent discovery of Monument 31, a Middle Formative Period sculpture from the highland site of Chalcatzingo that, for the first time, an element of the Olmec symbol system can be shown to convey a meaning almost identical to that of a Classic Maya hieroglyph T632, (fig. 1a).

The central curly-Q or Lazy-S that comprises the main element of T632 was originally interpreted by Stuart as a blood scroll (1988: 203-204). More recently Stone (personal commu-

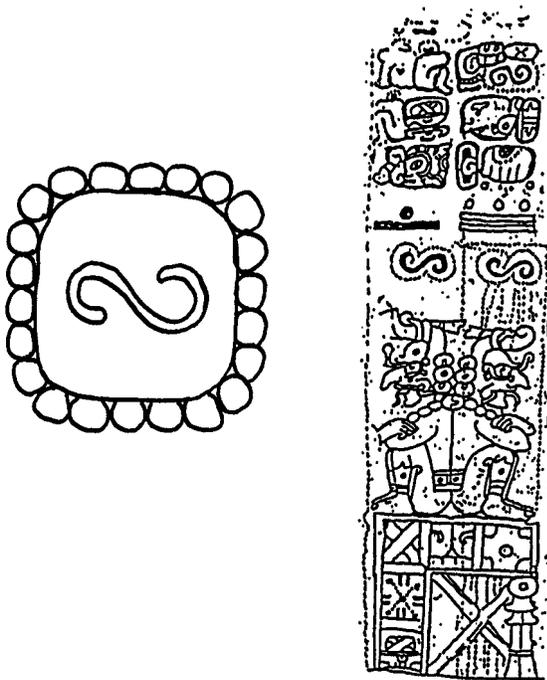


Fig. 1 a. The Classic Maya hieroglyph T632 (redrawn from Thompson, 1962:248). b. Left scene, Page 68a, the Dresden Codex (after Villacorta and Villacorta 1976: 456). Streams of water fall from a T632/muyal onto one of a pair of Chacs seated atop a sky band. The water continues falling through the sky band into the space below thus strongly suggesting that the Maya celestial realm was a layered configuration.

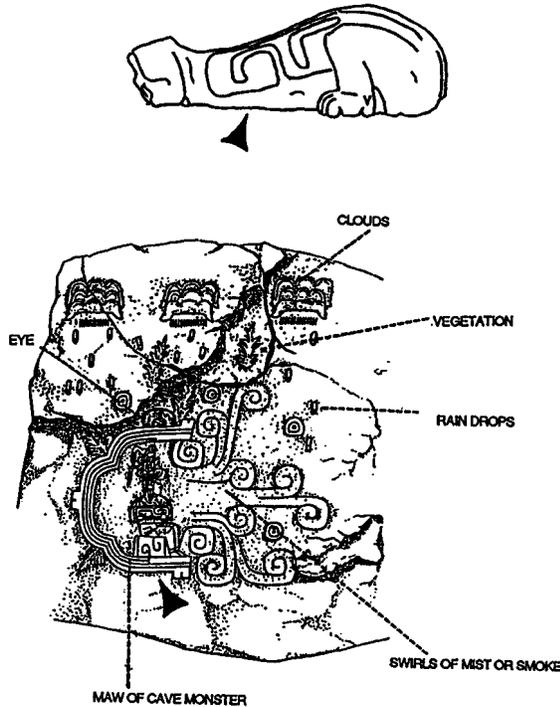


Fig. 2 a. San Lorenzo Monument 7 (redrawn after F. Dávalos G. in Coe and Diehl, 1980, vol. I: 312, fig. 430). b. Chalcatzingo Monument 1 (drawing by Frances Pratt in Gay 1972: 41, fig. 11).

nication to MacLeod 1991), Houston and Stuart (1990) have independently read T632 as *muyal* or cloud. As Stuart and Houston have observed (n.d.), besides the phonetic and semantic proofs that make the *muyal* reading possible, the iconographic association of the T632 main sign with a cloud interpretation is supported in the Dresden Codex (fig. 1b): On page 68a of this Post Classic document, two of the central, curly-Q elements of the T632/*muyal* are positioned above two Chacs, who are seated back to back on top of a sky band. One of the two Chacs is drenched in the liquid that falls from the T632/*muyal* immediately above. Certainly, in this instance, the curly-Q main sign of T632 definitely appears to be functioning as a rain cloud.

Houston and Stuart (1990, Stuart and Houston 1994), and Stone (1993) have noted that the main sign of T632 occurs as an iconographic element in the headdresses of Maya deities and rulers; Stone has not only linked this “cloud diadem” specifically with the headdress worn by the Maya rain deity, Chac, but also suggests that the T632/*muyal* can function as part of a celestial toponym (1993). Stone, convincingly argues, that the sky realm identified by this toponym, *Ho Muyal*, is the celestial location of royal ancestors, and a certain category

of meteorological deities (Stone 1993).

A Formative Period (1200-500 B. C.) Olmec-style symbol strikingly similar to the T632 main sign is the Lazy-S symbol (F. Fields 1967: 34, fig. 37). Examples of this Lazy-S motif in the Olmec Gulf Coast heartland are scarce—although this may be an accident of the limited archaeological evidence. Despite this scarcity, San Lorenzo Monument 7 (fig. 2a), is a dramatic example that the heartland Olmec knew and used the Lazy-S (Coe and Diehl 1980: Vol. I, 312). In the case of this San Lorenzo sculpture, the Lazy-S is carved on the left flank of a headless couchant feline. The pairing of the Lazy-S symbol with a feline zoomorph will become particularly important as we examine the much more plentiful examples of the Lazy-S on the sculpture at the Formative Period highland site of Chalcatzingo.

The best known of the Chalcatzingo relief sculptures is Monument 1. A structural analysis of Monument 1 reveals the central position of the Lazy-S element within the overall sculptural composition. Chalcatzingo Monument 1 is a Olmec-style bas-relief, located on the talus slope of an eroded cleft-volcanic core that rises above Chalcatzingo. Chalcatzingo Monument 1 (fig. 2b) depicts a centrally placed, seated human figure wearing a tall headdress and long tunic. The seated figure is positioned within the gaping jaws of a giant zoomorphic supernatural which is often identified as a “cave monster” (Grove 1968, 1984; Angulo 1987). The elaborately costumed human figure is seated on a bench or throne in the shape of a Lazy-S scroll; in his arms the human figure also holds a Lazy-S in a ceremonial bar posture.

By placing this human figure in the

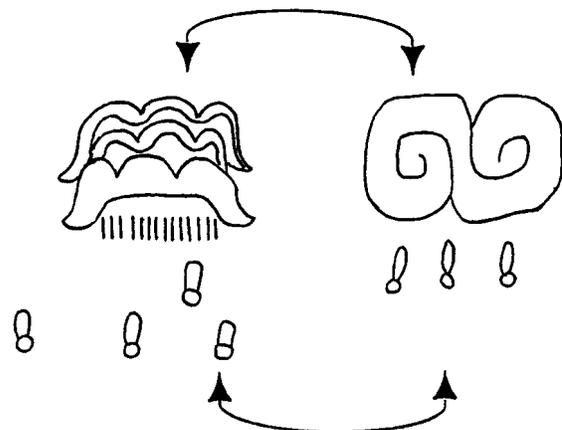


Fig. 3 The Chalcatzingo Lazy-S/Cloud substitution set (drawn by the author).

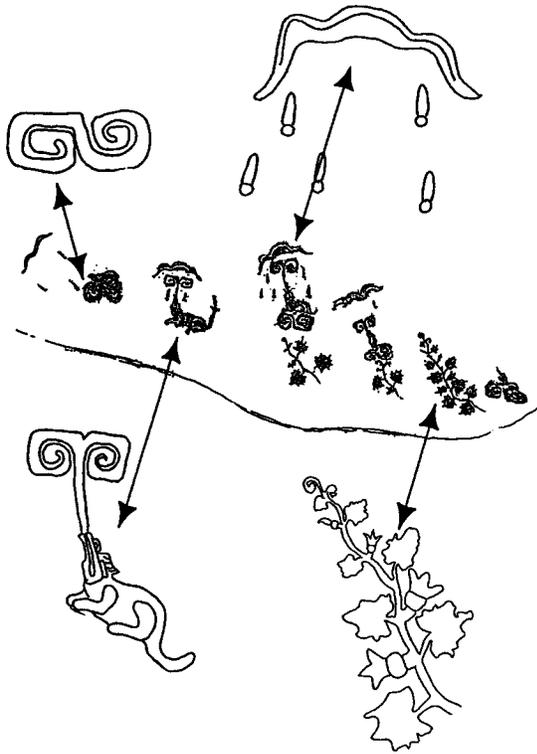


Fig. 4 The Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group (drawn by the author after photographs taken by the author and comparisons made to Angulo V. in Grove 1987: 133, figs. 10.1, 10.2; 134, figs. 10.3, 10.5; 135, fig. 10.4).

mouth of this zoomorphic cave monster, the artist used the metaphor of the gaping maw to define the location of the seated figure as the junction of the natural and supernatural worlds (Angulo 1987, Reilly 1990). In other words, the gaping maw is a portal between the natural and supernatural worlds. Above the seated figure and the gaping maw portal, are two depictions of sprouting vegetation—perhaps maize. Above this vegetation, presumably in the sky are three sets of triple-layered clouds. From each of these cloud sets falls a curtain of heavy rain, with no indication that this rain curtain ever hits the ground. Anyone who has spent time in the Mexican highlands, or the U.S. Southwest, is familiar with the phenomenon of rain, falling in curtains from thunderheads, but evaporating before hitting the ground. Falling from these same layered cloud motifs, but this time descending onto the ground, are exclamation point-shaped raindrops that appear to water sprouting vegetation.

The great scrolls of smoke or mist that emerge from the gaping maw of the cave monster have been interpreted as the emerging clouds—

which have entered the cave to become fertilized—and thus become the source of the rain (Gay 1972: 38; Grove 1984: 110-111). According to this interpretation, the central, elaborately dressed, seated figure within the gaping maw portal is linked both to the supernatural otherworld and the life sustaining rainfall.

The question now arises as to the relationship between the Lazy-S elements, so prominently displayed on Chalcatzingo Monument 1, and T632, the Maya *muyal* or cloud glyph. In order to answer that question, I must propose a simple principle of iconographic substitution similar to the principle of substitution which is used in hieroglyphic decipherment. The principle of substitution in Maya hieroglyphic writing states that if one has two independent signs which substitute for each other in the same glyphic context, then they are probably phonetically equivalent (Thompson 1944; Schele 1992: 11-12). My proposed principle of iconographic substitution would argue that if two or more symbolic elements substitute for each

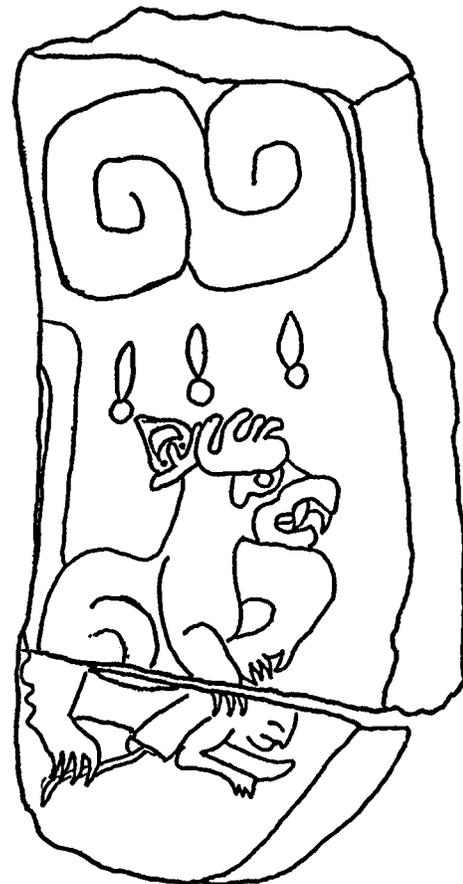


Fig. 5 Chalcatzingo Monument 31, (drawing by the author after a photograph by Logan Wagner).

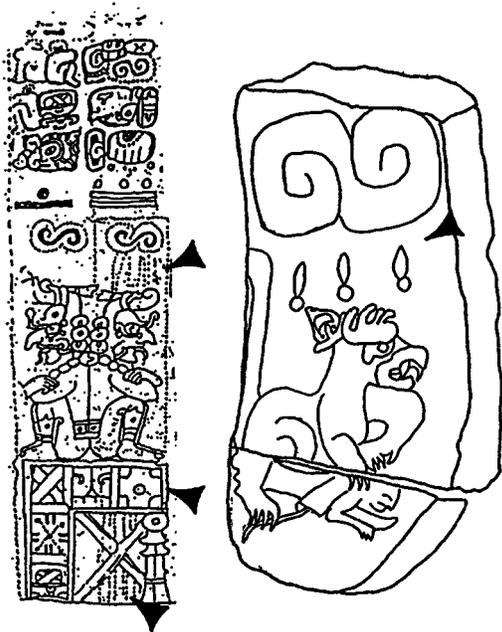


Fig. 6a Chalcatzingo Monument 31, (drawing by the author after a photograph by Logan Wagner). b. and page 68a of the Dresden Codex. Left scene, Page 68a, the Dresden Codex (after Villacorta and Villacorta 1976:456). Streams of water fall from a T632/muyal onto one of a pair of Chacs seated atop a sky band. The water continues falling through the sky band into the space below thus strongly suggesting that the Maya celestial realm was a layered configuration.

other in a similar iconographic context, then they probably carry similar, if not exact, meanings. At Chalcatzingo, the major elements of my proposed iconographic substitution consist of the Lazy-S, the phallic rain drops, and the cloud symbol from Chalcatzingo Monument 1 (fig. 3). I propose that the substitution set established from these symbols will not only help to identify the meaning of the Formative Period Lazy-S symbol, but will also allow a possible identification of the individual seated on the Lazy-S throne on Monument 1.

As I have pointed out, the phallic-shaped raindrops falling from clouds are a prominent feature in Chalcatzingo Monument 1. However, Monument 1 is not the only Chalcatzingo monument that contains the Lazy-S element or phallic-shaped rain drops. Separated from Monument 1 by only Cerro Chalcatzingo's primary natural runoff channel (Grove 1984: 45) is a series of reliefs currently identified individually as Monuments 11, 8, 14, 15, 7, and 6. These boulder carvings are collectively classified, along with Chalcatzingo Monument 1, as a part of Monument Group I-A

(Angulo 1987). Monuments 11, 8, 14, 15, 7, and 6 are, in some areas, badly eroded but share a theme which links supernaturals and vegetative fertility (Gay 1972; Grove 1968, 1984; Grove and Angulo 1987; Angulo 1987). These rock carvings, hereafter referred to as the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group, are comprised of five individual symbols: phallic-shaped rain drops, single leveled clouds, zoomorphic supernaturals, squash plants, and the Lazy-S (fig. 4). From three of the single leveled clouds fall phallic-shaped raindrops. Below these rain clouds are positioned small saurian supernaturals perched atop Lazy-S elements. In the case of three of these saurian supernaturals, double scrolls emerge from their closed mouths. Beneath three of Lazy-S elements which support the saurian supernaturals, three squash plants are depicted as growing out of the living rock.

The four rain clouds in the Water Dancing Group differ from those depicted on Monument 1 in two ways. Whereas the rain clouds on Monument 1 are tri-leveled and have a realistic, almost comb-shaped, depiction of rain falling from them, the clouds depicted in the Water Dancing Group are single leveled and only drop phallic-shaped rain drops. Thus within the context of the Water Dancing Group, there can be little doubt that the

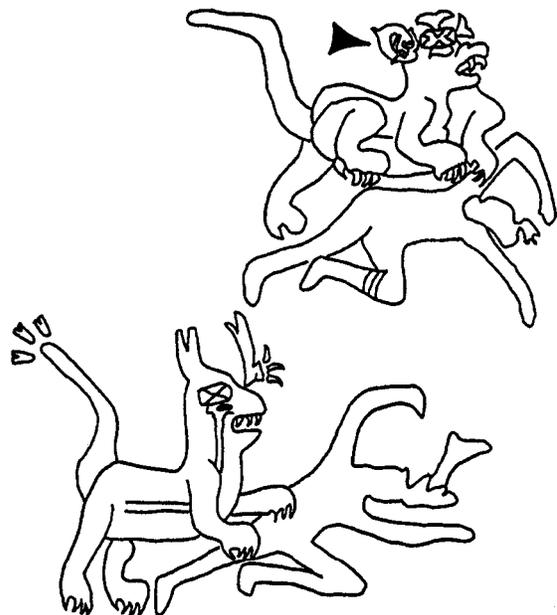


Fig. 7 Chalcatzingo Monument 4 (drawn by the author). Note the similarity of the symbol contained in the ear of the upper feline on Monument 4 and the feline ear on Monument 31.

phallic-shaped rain drops fall directly from the clouds overhead.

Directly below the rain clouds are positioned saurian supernaturals which in two instances, and possibly three, are depicted with raised heads, and in two instances raised tails. From the mouth of at least three of these saurian supernaturals, emerge double scrolls, highly reminiscent of the speech scrolls depicted in the Postclassic codices. All five of the saurian supernaturals are placed atop Lazy-S elements. Beneath these saurian supernaturals supporting Lazy-S elements are depicted at least three squash plants in different stages of growth.

So far we have seen the Lazy-S element, cloud symbols, and phallic-shaped rain drops associated on two major Chalcatzingo bas-reliefs. On both of those monuments, the theme is the interaction of the natural and supernatural realms for the purpose of vegetative fertility. The newly discovered Chalcatzingo Monument 31 (fig. 5) takes major elements of this fertility theme, the Lazy-S and the phallic-shaped rain drops, and links them with the themes of felines and bloodletting. More importantly for my hypothesis, however, Monument 31 provides the context to identify the Lazy-S as a Formative Period cloud symbol. Monument 31, approximately one meter tall, is a stela-like slab of rock. It was recently uncovered during a general site clean up at Chalcatzingo. It depicts a feline ripping apart a human victim, above which three phal-

lic-shaped raindrops fall from a Lazy-S. Certainly this substitution of the Lazy-S for the cloud symbol is strong support for a cloud identification for the Lazy-S. There is also a strikingly thematic similarity between Chalcatzingo Monument 31 and Page 68a of the Dresden Codex. In the Dresden (fig. 6) rain falls from a T632/muyal onto the rain deity, Chac. On Chalcatzingo Monument 31, the exclamation-point-shaped raindrops fall from a Lazy-S shape onto a supernatural; however, on this Middle Formative monument, the supernatural is a feline in the act of ripping a victim apart.

The supernatural identification of this ferocious feline is supported by two iconographic elements, a flame eyebrow and an element carried in its ear which has been compared by some scholars to the Venus or Lamat glyph of the Classic Period Maya (Grove 1972: 157; and Angulo 1987: 121). This element also appears in the ear of a feline on Chalcatzingo Monument 4 (fig. 7). The feline on Monument 4 is one of a pair, both of which are rendered with flame eyebrows and are depicted in the act of ripping apart a human victim. However, only the upper feline carries the same ear element as the feline depicted on Monument 31. The fact that felines on monuments 31 and 4 both carry the symbolic element in the ear and that both are shown in the same sanguinary act suggests that the two sculptures depict the same supernatural feline.

Applying my principle of iconographic

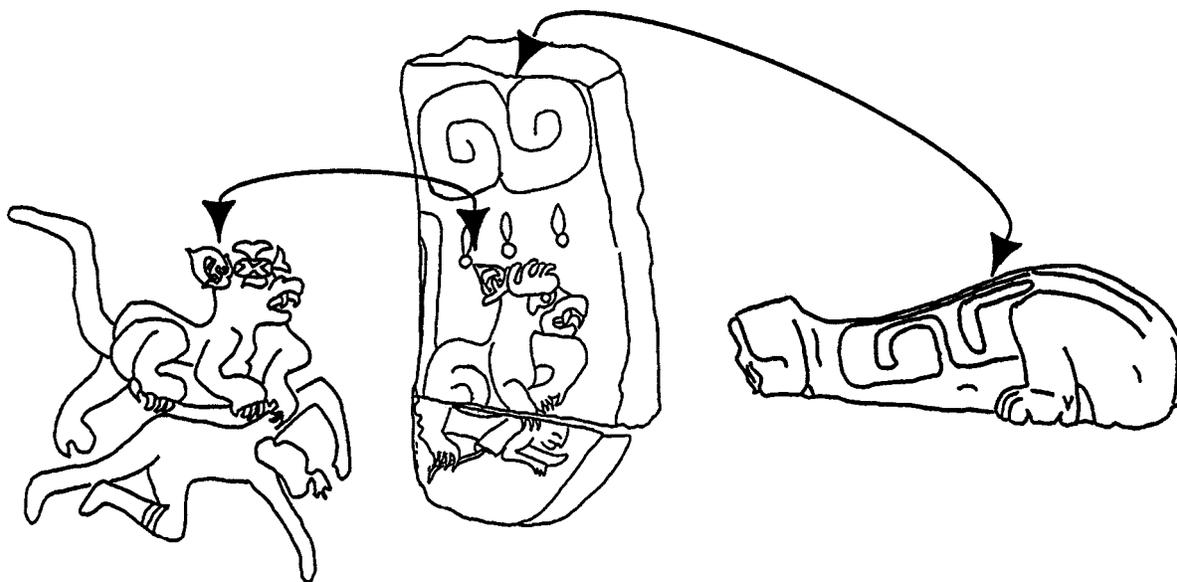


Fig. 8 The Lazy-S/feline substitution set (drawn by the author). The felines depicted on San Lorenzo Monument 7 and Chalcatzingo Monument 31 both are positioned in relationship to the Lazy-S symbol. Chalcatzingo Monument 4 and 31 both depict felines that bear a symbol in their left ear which several scholars have pointed out is similar to the Classic Maya Lamat/Venus hieroglyph.

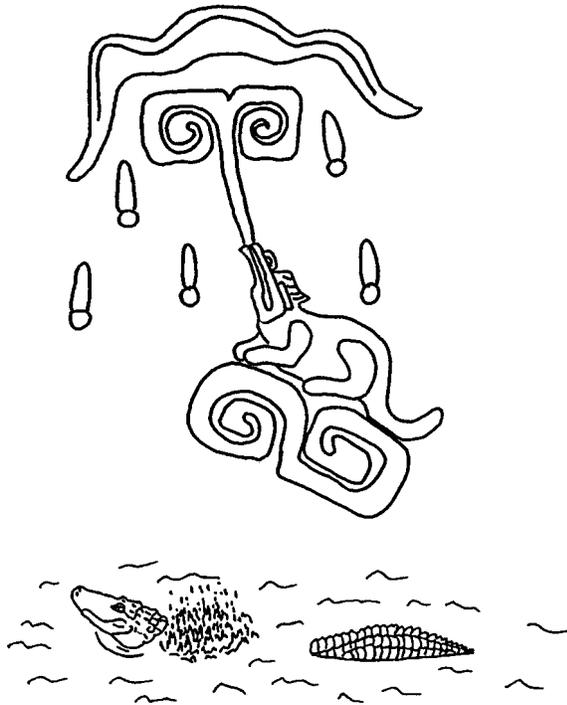


Fig. 9 Crocodilian “Water Dancing” which occurs with the social displays of bellowing and headslap (redrawn from Vliet 1989:1021 fig. 1d; 1025, fig 6d.). The real life posture of raised head and arched tail is very similar to the postures of several of the zoomorphic supernaturals depicted in the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group.

substitution to feline representations from the Formative Period sculptural corpus, at least three feline images can be shown to be associated with the Lazy-S, the feline ear symbol, and bloodletting (fig. 8). San Lorenzo Monument 7 bears the Lazy-S on its flank. Chalcatzingo Monument 31 depicts the Lazy-S dropping phallic-shaped rain drops above a feline who is depicted in the act of savagely dismembering a human victim. The Monument 31 feline, among its other supernatural attributes, carries a specific symbolic element in its ear. Chalcatzingo Monument 4 also carries the image of a savage feline who is depicted in the act of destroying a human victim and who carries the same symbolic ear element as the feline on Monument 31. Perhaps San Lorenzo Monument 7 would carry the same ear element if its missing head were found. Thus by two examples of direct evidence, and one example established through substitution, the Lazy-S element, felines, and bloodletting are combined into a symbolic complex of sacrifice and fertility.

Now that we have seen the Lazy-S function iconographically in a similar manner to T632/

muyal, I believe that a strong case can be made for a middle Formative Period iconographic loan to the hieroglyphic writing system of the Classic Period Maya. However, the Lazy-S symbol cannot be left without taking note of the obvious question as to why two cloud symbols were needed in the iconographic corpus of the Middle Formative Period. As Stone (1993) has suggested, the Lazy-S not only symbolizes cloud, but it also functions as a symbolic designator for a specific level of the sky.

Stone, in her analysis of the inscription on the Cleveland Museum plaque, suggests that for the Classic Period Maya, T632/muyal could not only be read as simply cloud, but could be used metaphorically as a sky realm associated with ancestors (1993). Stone also cites contemporary Yucatecan sources which identify the word *muyal* as a name for one of a number of heavenly levels located between the earth and the sun. According to these Yucatecan sources, this *muyal* celestial level is both a location for ancestors as well as for meteorological events (Stone 1993). Stone’s sky level interpretation of T632 as a sky level toponym is iconographically supported by the same illustration in the Dresden Codex which helped in the iconographic identification of *muyal* as cloud.

On page 68a of the Dresden Codex, a *muyal* glyph is shown dropping rain on one of two Chacs who are seated back to back; however, these two Chacs are seated on *top* of a sky band, (see fig. 6). Moreover, the rain which falls from the *muyal* onto the Chac continues falling through the sky band into another space thus strongly supporting both the concept of a layered sky, and the hypothesis that in certain contexts the *muyal* identifies a celestial level which is somehow different from the sky band itself. Iconographic composition of page 68a of the Dresden Codex is somewhat analo-

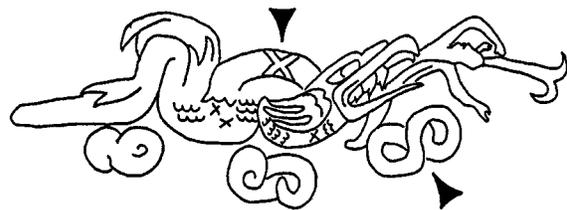


Fig. 10 Chalcatzingo Monument 5 (drawn by the author). The body of this celestial dragon is marked by prominent crossed bands, and both are depicted in postures of either disgorging or swallowing an object. In the case of Monument 5 that object is a human figure.

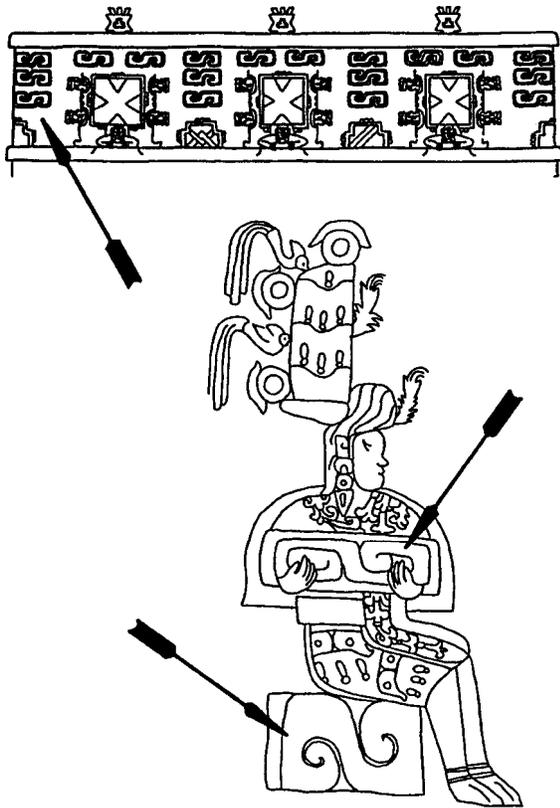


Fig. 11 a. Copan Structure 10L-29 (From Freidel et al. 1993: 189, fig 4.4). The T632/muyal façade details help to identify this Late Classic Maya structure as a temple devoted to ancestral contact. b Detail from Chalcatzingo Monument 1 (drawn by the author). The enthroned figure from Chalcatzingo Monument 1 is seated on a Lazy-S and carries a Lazy-S-shaped ceremonial bar. In this context, the Lazy-S motif may be functioning as a symbolic locative identifying the sky as the location of the enthroned figure.

gous to the depiction of the Water Dancing Group at Chalcatzingo. A close examination reveals these similarities. However, a brief analysis of the subject content of the Water Dancing Group is necessary in order to more fully realize those similarities.

The posture and the overall context of the saurian supernaturals depicted in the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group are strikingly similar to real life crocodilian behavior (Reilly 1990: 162). During the mating season—which on the Mexican Gulf Coast corresponds to the beginning of the rainy season—crocodilian species engage in a courtship rituals commonly referred to as Bellowing, Headslap, or *water dancing* (Ackerman 1988; Vliet 1989) Crocodilian water dancing, known to occur in at least 10 species of crocodilians (Ackerman

1988: 66; Vliet 1989: 1030), begins with crocodilians belly-down in shallow water: they then lift their heads at an angle of some 30 or 40 degrees. They then arch their tails and puff up their throats behind closed jaws. From the clenched jaws a mighty bellow comes which often can be heard for at least a mile (Vliet 1989: 1021). However, before this roar or boom is heard issuing from the crocodilian's raised head and clamped jaws a remarkable phenomena occurs. "In males, the alligator then visibly tenses and produces an infrasonic single so powerful that water 'dances' up around the alligators torso" (Vliet 1989: 1021). The overall effect of these vibrations is analogous to a struck tuning fork being immersed in a glass of water (Toops 1979: 28). In the case of the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*), the frequency of the vibrations sometimes sets the water *dancing* to a height of 25cm behind the crocodilian's head. This incredible vibratory display has even been known to cause nearby solid objects to vibrate (Vliet 1989: 1022). The overall visual effect of water dancing is that of the splashing of raindrops on the surface of still water, or as Ackerman describes it:

A large alligator stretches high out of the water, swinging its tail up as a counterweight, so it can lift its enormous head. Then it puffs up its throat, and its tail waves like an Irish setter's. The water suddenly dances high all around its body in an effervescent fountain full of sparkle in the sunlight, and a thundering bellow fills the air like distant war games. Another alligator rises up with tail waving, gulps hugely, drops down, tenses up; then the water frizzles all around it, as if someone were spraying diamonds from an atomizer, and at last it bellows. Few sights are so astonishing (1988: 65).

As Ackerman also observes, crocodilians answer each other's booming; in fact, alligators at the St. Augustine, Florida alligator farm have been known to bellow in response to sonic booms emitted by the space shuttle as it flies overhead after taking off from Cape Canaveral (Ackerman 1988: 64). But more importantly, for my argument, crocodilian booming has been compared to thunder (Ackerman 1988: 64), and occurs among the crocodilian species of the Gulf Coast Olmec heartland at the time of year when heavy thunder storms announce the beginning of the rainy season. It is not then too far fetched to see, in the ideology of Formative Period Mesoamerica, an association between crocodilians, water dancing, thunder-like

bellowing, and the rainfall responsible for vegetative fecundity

When the posture of the saurian supernaturals placed atop Lazy-S elements in the Water Dancing Group is closely examined, it is difficult to deny that several of them appear to be engaged in water dancing and bellowing (fig. 9). Just as with their real life counterparts, the tails of two of these saurian supernaturals are arched, their heads are raised, their jaws are closed, and from those closed jaws what appear to be speech scrolls emerge. It is important to add that “alligators can emit vapor from their nostrils when they bellow (Ackerman 1988:52).” Directly above these posturing supernaturals, the cloud symbols disgorge their load of phallic-shaped raindrops, perhaps in response to the booming of the water dancing supernaturals perched on their Lazy-S elements directly below. In response to the falling rain drops, the highly naturalistic squash plants sprout in different stages of development directly beneath the Lazy-S elements. The implication of my hypothesis is that within the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group, saurian supernaturals, depicted in the act of water dancing and

bellowing, are linked, by what is, in effect, sympathetic magic, with rain fall and vegetative fertility.

Within the overall composition of the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing group, exclamation point-shaped rain drops fall from the clouds onto the saurian supernaturals perched atop Lazy-S elements. Furthermore, beneath these Lazy-S elements, squash plants flourish, strongly suggesting a concept of layering similar to that depicted on page 68a of the Dresden codex. In the Dresden Codex, rain falls from the T632/muyal onto a Chac and through the sky band into another space. Within the overall composition of the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group, this layered concept is identified by three elements. The first of these, the cloud motif depicts a meteorological and thus a sky event, rain falling from a cloud. The Lazy-S element appears to function as a symbolic locator, placing the saurian supernaturals above the earthly level, thus in the sky, but below the celestial level in which the cloud motifs are positioned. That the Lazy-S could identify a specific celestial level location is further supported by the double scrolls which emerge from the mouths of the saurian supernaturals and almost

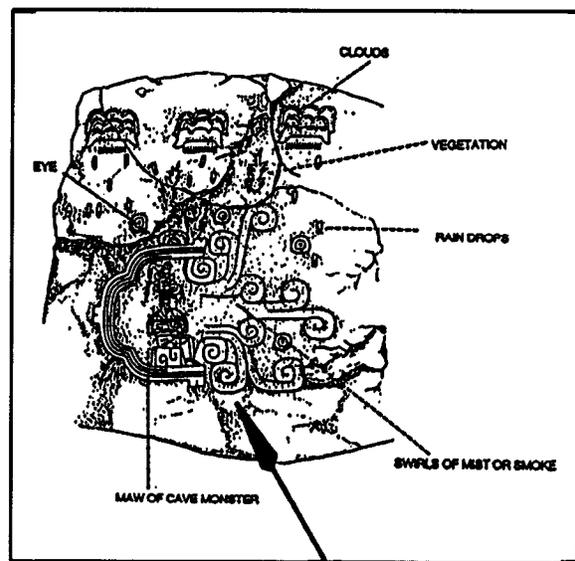


Fig. 12 a. Maya Vision Serpent, arising from a bloodletting bowl and disgorging an ancestor (drawing from Schele and Freidel 1990: 69, fig. 2.3). b. Chalcatzingo Monument 1 as a Formative Period equivalent to Classic Maya depictions of vision serpents (drawing by Frances Pratt in Gay 1972: 411, fig. 11).

seem to touch, but not quite, the clouds above. Below the Lazy-S elements are positioned the squash plants which both metaphorically and actually represent the earthly domain. Thus it can be argued that the cloud motif and the Lazy-S element are not only interchangeable as meteorological elements but are also representative of different celestial levels.

Another rock carving at Chalcatzingo that supports a celestial identification for the Lazy-S as well as the concept of a Middle Formative layered sky realm is Monument 5 (fig. 10). Chalcatzingo Monument 5 consists of a “large undulating reptilian-like creature with a crocodilian head (Grove and Angulo 1987: 122).” The body of this zoomorphic supernatural is incised with a crossed bands motif and other badly eroded markings that have been variously interpreted as feathers, fish scales, or crocodilian skin (Angulo 1987: 147). This fearsome creature is depicted in the act of either devouring or regurgitating a human figure. This human figure is clearly delineated except for his left leg which is deep within the zoomorphic supernatural’s throat. Beneath the zoomorphic supernatural are three Lazy-S motifs.

The crossed bands motif, which is incised at the top of the largest “hump” in the zoomorphic supernatural’s body has long been recognized, along with its other associations, as a prominent sky symbol (Coe 1977: 189). The crossed bands symbol is contained within the sky band on which the two Chacs sit on page 68a of the Dresden Codex. The crossed bands is almost always featured in Classic Maya sky bands as well as being frequently placed on the body of the celestial dragon (Pax 1982: 38). The presence of the crossed bands motif on the zoomorphic supernatural is highly reminiscent of the Maya celestial dragon. The added fact that the Monument 5 zoomorphic supernatural is placed above three Lazy-S Symbols helps not only to identify that zoomorphic supernatural as a celestial dragon, but further supports my contention that the Lazy-S, like its Maya counterpart, the T632/muyal hieroglyph, can designate a celestial level.

Monument 5 and the Water Dancing Group contain iconographic evidence which supports my contention that the Middle Formative inhabitants of Chalcatzingo shared, with the Classic Maya, a belief in a layered sky realm. Chalcatzingo Monument 1 contains dramatic evidence that the sky level identified by the Lazy-S symbol, like its Classic Maya counterpart, T632/muyal, has a strong association with ancestors. Stone’s argument that the Classic Maya T632/muyal sky level has an ancestor asso-

ciation is based on ethnographic, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence. However, Stone’s hypothesis is also supported by the façade elements on Structure 10L-29 at the Classic Maya site of Copan. Freidel, Schele and Parker (1993) have commented on the use of the muyal glyph as an element in the architectural detail of Copan Structure 10L-29. This recently excavated Late Classic Period Maya structure has been identified by its excavators as an ancestral temple (Andrews and Fash 1992). This identification is based on the fact that the façade is decorated with ancestral cartouches, inverted Ik niches, death masks, the number 10 with its strong death associations, and multiple representations of the T632/muyal symbols (Andrews and Fash 1992: 73-74), (fig. 11a). The excavators state that in the case of these T632/muyal façade elements on structure 10L-29 “the scrolls could conceivably double as both clouds and the smoke from a bloodletting ritual used to call forth the ancestors (Andrews and Fash 1992: 74).”

Certainly, the central seated figure in Chalcatzingo Monument 1 is enthroned on a Lazy-S while carrying a Lazy-S in its arms in a ceremonial bar posture. In several sculptural contexts, I have demonstrated that the Lazy-S carries a strikingly similar meaning to the Classic Maya T632/muyal glyph. Taking this analogy one step further, it appears that here, on monument 1, the Lazy-S on which the central figure is seated, functions as a locator in the same way that it established a sky location for the saurian supernaturals in the Chalcatzingo Water Dancing Group. Quite literally this bench is a sky throne while the Lazy-S held by the seated figure is an equivalent to the Classic Maya double-headed sky bar (fig. 11b).

If in the Classic Maya context, ancestors are strongly associated with a celestial location, they are manifested in natural space by the smoke arising from burning, bloodied, bark paper. The smoke arising from the bloodletting bowl was not only understood to be the vision serpent which disgorged the ancestral vision, but was so depicted in artistic compositions (Schele and Miller 1986: 187; Schele and Freidel 1990: 68-69; Tate 1992: 88-92), (fig. 12a). Just as Classic Maya ancestors are depicted as emerging from the mouths of smoke generated vision serpents, the seated figure in Chalcatzingo Monument 1 is framed by the mouth of a supernatural (fig. 12b). Just as the Classic Maya vision serpent is generated in smoke, this gaping maw which holds the sky enthroned figure also disgorges great swirls of smoke. If my hypothesis is correct, then the central seated figure on

Chalcatzingo Monument 1 can be classified as an ancestral figure who is being manifested into natural space through the swirls of smoke which generates from the gaping mouth zoomorphic supernatural. This ancestor figure interpretation is further supported by the Lazy-S throne which locates the seated figure in a celestial realm.

In conclusion, I have tried to do four things in this article. First I have demonstrated that there is a functional iconographic similarity between T632/muyal and the Formative Period Lazy-S symbol. Secondly I have established a rule of iconographic substitution using the cloud, Lazy-S, and rain drop motifs from the Formative Period corpus of symbols. Thirdly even though Maya scholars do not now necessarily exclusively associate the Main sign of T632 with blood, there appears to be definite bloodletting associations contained within the layers of meaning carried by the Lazy-S in the Formative Period. Finally, I have shown that there exists a “grammar” within the Formative Period corpus of symbols. Within this symbol composed grammar, some elements function as symbolic locatives and others as symbolic verbs. Recognizing the existence of this symbolic grammar allows interpretations of actions, locations and identities within Formative Period art which was not wholly possible before. Thus further proof exists to support not only Justeson and Kaufman’s hypothesis that the origin of Mesoamerican hieroglyphic writing should be sought amongst the Formative Period Olmec culture, but that the origin of the symbols which visually defined Mesoamerican ideology, throughout its long history, should be sought in the Formative Period as well.

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