

Patterns in the Dresden Codex

CARA G. TREMAIN

University of Calgary

A frequently referenced yet poorly understood deity, Goddess I has suffered from a long tradition of misidentification. Much confusion and disagreement over this goddess persists in the literature but an analysis of her appearance and associated texts allows for some improved understanding. This article demonstrates that naming patterns within the Dresden Codex can be applied to eroded or absent texts to aid in the correct identification of this female deity. More than that, these newly-identified structures can also aid in the advancement of ancient Maya codex studies.

Early Studies of Goddess I

The first systematic study of the deities in the codices was made by Paul Schelhas in 1904. He classified each deity using a letter designation, and his system was later adopted by other scholars. He recognized two goddesses, whom he labeled Goddess I and Goddess O. He named Goddess I “the water goddess” and described her as an aged female with clawed feet and a brown body wearing a serpent headdress and commonly depicted pouring water from a jar (Schelhas 1967:31). He expressed uncertainty about her name glyph but paired it with what was later discovered to be one of the name glyphs associated with a youthful goddess (though he himself did not actually identify a youthful goddess in his studies). Goddess O was identified as “a Goddess with the features of an old woman” and her name glyph was recognised to have “wrinkles of age around the eye” (Schelhas 1967:38). This deity was only identified in the Madrid Codex and was described as an aged female frequently represented working at a loom.

Günter Zimmermann (1956) later applied an entirely different classification to these deities. He dropped Schelhas’s letter designations for a numbered series prefixed by the letter G, labeling the youthful goddess not described by Schelhas as G22/Goddess I and assigning the label G24/Goddess O to the aged goddess Schelhas had identified as Goddess I (Zimmermann 1956:167). This led to a great deal of confusion in the literature. Furthermore, Schelhas had correctly identified and separated two aged goddesses but Zimmermann had combined them. Eric Thompson also studied the



Figure 1. The Moon Goddess, Dresden Codex, detail of folio 49a and associated name glyph (from Kingsborough 1831-1848).

deities in the codices, and it is through his work that the association of Goddess I with the moon became a popular notion (1939). He argued that there were young and old aspects of the “Moon goddess”: one associated with floods and destruction and another associated with beneficial aspects.

The first steps to resolving the confusion created by the early studies were taken by David Kelley in 1976. He recognized four distinct deities: (1) the aged goddess with clawed feet and serpent headdress; (2) a goddess associated with the ‘wrinkled’ head glyph; (3) a youthful goddess; and (4) the actual Moon goddess. Kelley (1976:69) argued that the deity with the wrinkled head glyph identified as Goddess O by Schellhas is in fact an aged version of Goddess I. This deity was only identified in the Madrid Codex. The youthful goddess identified by Zimmermann as G22 and by Thompson as the “Moon goddess” is the youthful version of this goddess. Later scholars such as Andrea Stone (1990), Karl Taube (1992:64), and Gabrielle Vail (1996:115) have supported this interpretation. They also support the identification of four distinct female deities.

Consequently, the work by Kelley and others has demonstrated that Goddess I does not represent the Moon goddess. The only appearance of the Moon goddess—whose name glyphs include the T181 or T683 ‘moon’ signs—appears on page 49a of the Dresden Codex (Figure 1). Karen Bassie-Sweet (2008:201) notes that, unlike this illustration, none of the other depictions of youthful goddesses in the codices feature the moon sign on their bodies. Despite the glyphic and iconographic advances since Kelley’s study, scholars still routinely misidentify Goddess I as the “Moon Goddess” (Milbrath 1995, 1996, 2002; Schele and Friedel 1990:366, 413; Taube 2006:263; Taylor 1992). Whether classified as Goddess I or the “Moon Goddess,” this female deity is portrayed in the Dresden Codex as a youthful goddess and is often identifiable from her long black hair and bare chest (Figure 2).

Hieroglyphic Research

The identification of the female deities in the codices has relied in large part on their associated hieroglyphic texts. Those associated with Goddess I have been identified as the portrait glyph T1026, prefixed by either T171 or T58, and sometimes postfixed by T102 (Figure 3).

Various readings for the T1026 glyph have been suggested but the best supported and most widely accepted decipherment is IX(1K) “lady” (Stuart 1998:396, Note 7; see also Vail and Stone 2002:210). The glyph has often

been equated with the day sign Caban (Kelley 1976), and with the head variant of the number one (Thompson 1972:47), but although they share some formal similarities they cannot be equated. The apparent Caban infix in the portrait glyph is the same as the T171 prefix and

is commonly known as the “Caban curl” (Taube 1992:64). Like others before him, Thompson (1939:132, 141) suggested that it resembled a lock of hair, which probably developed to become a symbol of women (Bassie-Sweet 1991:99). Since *kab* is the Yucatec Maya word for “earth” and “honey” it has been suggested that Goddess I may be an earth or honey goddess (Bassie-Sweet 1991:98, 2008:210; Vail 1996:116). Thompson (1938, 1950, 1972:47) suggested that the Caban curl was similar to the symbol for the phonetic sound *u* in Landa’s alphabet (Tozzer 1941:170), itself similar to the Yucatec Maya word *uh* “moon.” But, as Ardren (2006:29) and Brisko (1994) have pointed out, none of the early colonial sources indicate any association of this deity with the moon.

The T58 prefix was long ago deciphered as **SAK** “white,” perhaps in association with the white light of the moon (Thompson 1972:47) or the similar term *sakal* meaning “weaver” (Thompson 1939:132; 1972:47). Bassie-Sweet (2008:202) has proposed that the “white” association might refer to cotton, salt, or even white corn. Kelley (1976:69) and Vail (1996:115) claim that William Gates (1932) refers to Goddess I as “the White Lady,” but I could find no evidence of this in his publication. Adam Herring (2005:74) notes that in colonial Yucatec *sak* can refer to newly-made works such as “worked stones” (*sak laktun*), “clean paper” (*sak hu’un*), or “fresh laundry” (*sak nok*). It would be interesting if the use of the T58 prefix had similar associations in the name of the goddess.

Nonetheless, the “white” association is not limited to Goddess I. The T58 prefix is used throughout the Dresden to name other deities, including Goddess



Figure 2. The Youthful aspect of Goddess I (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1993).



T171.1026

T58.1026

T171.1026.102



T58.1026.102

Figure 3. Name glyphs associated with Goddess I (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1993).



Figure 4. Dresden Codex, folios 16c and 17c (detail). The three name glyphs for Goddess I at the right of the almanac each have the T171 prefix and T102 postfix. None have a corresponding visual representation of the goddess (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1993).

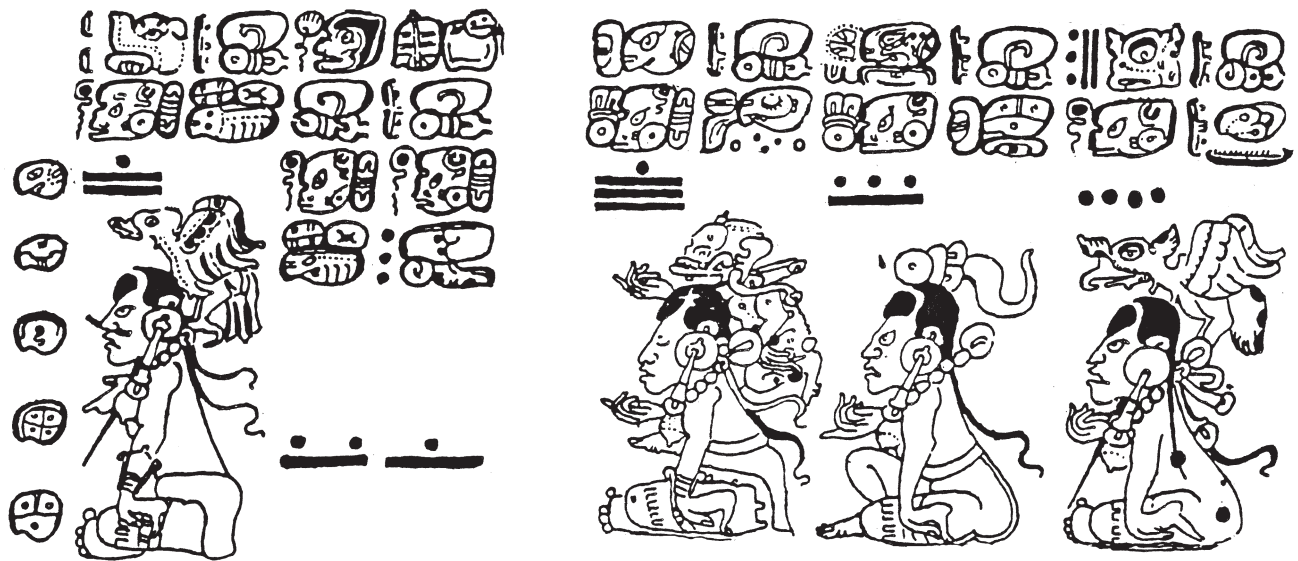


Figure 5. Dresden Codex, folios 17b (detail) and 18b. The prefixes used to name Goddess I at the beginning and end of the almanac are identical, despite different name glyphs being used within the almanac (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1993).

O, God H, and God B. Some scholars have attributed instances such as these to scribal errors. Yet in her study of the Madrid Codex, Vail (1996:59) found that although there is generally a close relationship between an almanac's text and its iconography, this is not always a one-to-one correspondence. Consequently, she argues that not all of these instances are scribal errors and may instead reflect the fluid nature of deities. She proposes that these so-called errors are actually patterned in

meaningful ways and might reflect the fact that deities have more than one manifestation, each perhaps associated with a different name (Vail 2000).

The postfix T102 is well known as the phonetic syllable *ki*, where it most likely serves as a phonetic complement or extension to T1026 IX(İK), leading to the reading *ixik* "lady" (Vail and Stone 2002:210). Both Vail and Stone (2002:207, 210) and Ardren (2006:31) have read T171 as **KAB** and suggest that the goddesses' name



Figure 6. Dresden Codex, folios 19a (detail), 20a, and 21a (detail). Based on the naming patterns observed for Goddess I, the name glyphs above the first and last images of Goddess I can be reconstructed as T171.1026 (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1933).



Figure 7. Dresden Codex, folios 21c and 22c (detail). The column of hieroglyphs at the far right of the image shows a name glyph for Goddess I but no corresponding image. The third image of the goddess does not have the T0126 portrait glyph in the corresponding text above her image. The name of the second goddess probably serves for this third goddess (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1933).

is to be read as *Ixik Kab* "Lady Earth." Alternatively, the reading *Kab Ixik* would make better sense of the order of the glyphs, in which case the name would mean "Earth Lady." By contrast, the T58 prefix in place of T171 leads to a reading of *Sak Ixik* "White Lady" (Bassie-Sweet 2008:202). Although there are two different prefixes to the T1026 glyph, and occasions when it is postfixed by

T102, which would seem to suggest that the text is naming between two to four different goddesses, various scholars have failed to differentiate between naming glyphs and images of the goddesses and have suggested that the glyphs represent various titles or names for the same goddess (Brisko 1994; Kelley 1976; Thompson 1939:163, 1972:47; Vail 1996).

Goddess I in the Dresden Codex

To better understand the loosely defined group of female deities in the Dresden Codex known as “Goddess I,” an analysis of her appearance and name glyphs was undertaken. As previously mentioned, the aged version of Goddess I has been identified only in the Madrid Codex and therefore this paper focuses exclusively on the youthful version of Goddess I. Most of her appearances in the Dresden Codex occur within the almanacs on pages 16-23.

Since various scholars have suggested that there is not a recognizable difference between the goddesses labeled with the T171 and T58 prefixes, images of Goddess I were categorized according to her naming glyph to verify whether or not this was true. This method of identification resulted in ten images with T171 as a prefix and T102 as a postfix, thirteen images with only the T171 prefix, one image with the T58 prefix and T102 postfix, and twelve images with only T58 as a prefix. There were eight images of the deity associated with a problematic glyph and seven with eroded texts. Problematic glyphs included unclear or absent portrait glyphs. This provided a total of fifty-one images of Goddess I.

In order to verify whether or not there were recognizable differences between the goddesses labeled with the T171 and T58 prefixes, specific aspects of Goddess I’s appearance were studied: type of headdress, hairstyle, adornment, and textiles. It became apparent that there was no significant difference in the presence or absence of the T102 postfix in the images. This makes perfect sense, since the best glyphic explanation of the postfix is as a redundant phonetic complement **ki** to the T1026 logogram **IX(İK)**. Consequently, the images with the T102 postfix were amalgamated with those images that did not have the postfix. A separation based on the T171 and T58 prefixes was maintained to verify the presence or absence of differences between these prefixes.

The analysis demonstrated that the greatest percentage of goddesses do not wear a headdress, which is similar to Vail’s (1996:161) findings for depictions of goddesses in the Madrid Codex. Ten different varieties of headdress are worn, including one that incorporates the T58 **SAK** “white” sign (see Figure 5, second figure from right). This headdress is not limited to Goddess I, however, since it is also worn by male deities such as God A and God D (see Dresden Codex, folios 13, 14, and 53).

Whereas the goddess does not appear to wear a headdress that defines her identity, it appears that the hairstyle of the goddess is a much more characteristic trait. It is very common for Goddess I to have one or more strands of hair visible in the image that accompanies her name glyph. As already mentioned, Thompson and others have suggested that the Caban curl in the T1026 portrait glyph and the T171 prefix represents a

lock of hair. Interestingly, the only example in which the hair of a goddess is not visible is the only time in which she is not named by either the T171 or T58 prefix, but rather the T45-semblant sign **HUL** (see Dresden Codex, folio 21b).

Adornment also does not differ significantly between goddesses identified with the T171 or T58 prefixes. In every image, the goddess wears an earspool and necklace (apart from four images in which the neck area is obscured). The bracelet is another common piece of adornment, and there were only seven instances in which the goddess does not wear a bracelet, and five instances in which the wrist area was obscured. A much less common adornment was a nose bar, occurring only six times.

Finally, an analysis of the textiles worn by the goddesses demonstrates that the most common representation of Goddess I is bare chested but wearing a skirt, with only one representation of a full length *huipil*. There is no significant difference between the frequency of short and long skirts. In only one instance is the goddess not wearing any visible textiles, yet even here she should probably not be considered naked, because she is “clothed” both by her adornments and her elaborate hairstyle.

Consequently, there is no significant difference between the appearances of goddesses named by the T171 prefix and the goddesses named by the T58 prefix. Attention was thus turned to the presence of what seem to be naming patterns within the text.

Goddess I Naming Patterns

One of the most noticeable patterns from the texts of Goddess I is that in every instance where a name glyph of Goddess I is given without a corresponding image, the glyph has the T171 prefix, and often also has the T102 postfix (see Figures 4, 5, 7). This may suggest that the T171 prefix was the standardized name glyph for Goddess I. That is, because it would have been so familiar, perhaps an accompanying image was not always necessary. In line with this, Goddess I with the T58 **SAK** prefix may have always been illustrated because she was a less familiar aspect.

Another noticeable pattern concerns almanacs containing the names of several goddesses. In these almanacs, the initial and final name glyphs will always have identical prefixes (Figure 5). A recognizable pattern naming the goddesses *within* the almanacs was not identified, but since the initial and final glyphs are always identical, it suggests that there was a structure to almanacs involving more than one goddess. Perhaps the same goddesses were always required to begin and end these almanacs.

This principle was applied against some of the eroded images in order to try and identify the name glyphs. One example in which this principle was applied with

success is shown in Figure 6. Most of the text in this almanac is eroded, but a comparison with other facsimiles of the Dresden Codex, including Kingsborough's edition—which Thompson (1950:26) suggested was accurate enough to be used for checking subsequently damaged glyphs—allows a reading of the initial glyph as the T1026 portrait head with the T171 prefix. Using the structural pattern discussed above, I propose that the end of this almanac would originally have featured the same collocation.

A final noteworthy pattern is the principle of a deleted text subject. Four images of Goddess I in the Dresden Codex do not have a corresponding name glyph. Three of these examples are part of an almanac with more than one goddess (Figure 7). Since there seem to be regular patterns involving the glyphs in these almanacs, I suggest that there was a pattern involving the images as well. I suggest that the name glyph associated with the preceding image names these goddesses, and that the scribes may have felt no need to repeat her name several times throughout the same almanac. Examples of deleted subjects are also known in Maya hieroglyphs from the Classic period, so there is some precedent for this feature. Consequently, the name glyph of these females can be suggested even without a text directly above her image.

By applying the patterns discussed above it is possible to increase the number of identified goddesses in the Dresden Codex. In comparison to the original numbers, the goddesses with the T171 prefix are increased by four images from twenty-three to twenty-seven, and the goddesses with the T58 prefix are increased by two images from thirteen to fifteen. Although this is only a small change, a 15% increase in both data sets is still significant, and it illustrates that a better understanding of Goddess I can be reached even without the discovery of new texts, merely by paying close attention to naming patterns within well-known sources.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the representation of Goddess I in the Dresden Codex through visual appearance and associated name glyphs as a means of overcoming a long tradition of misidentification. The analysis demonstrated that there is not a clear separation between the appearances of goddesses named with the T171 prefix and those named by the T58 prefix. Additionally, no significant difference was noticed for goddesses whose names included the T102 postfix. Several suggested naming patterns can be applied to eroded or absent texts to aid in the correct identification of Goddess I. Since there is no clear difference between the naming texts of Goddess I and her visual appearance it does appear that the variety of texts represent various titles or names for the same goddess. Just as Vail (2000) has suggested for the deities in the Madrid Codex, perhaps

the various name glyphs for Goddess I employed by scribes in the Dresden Codex reflected the goddess's various manifestations.

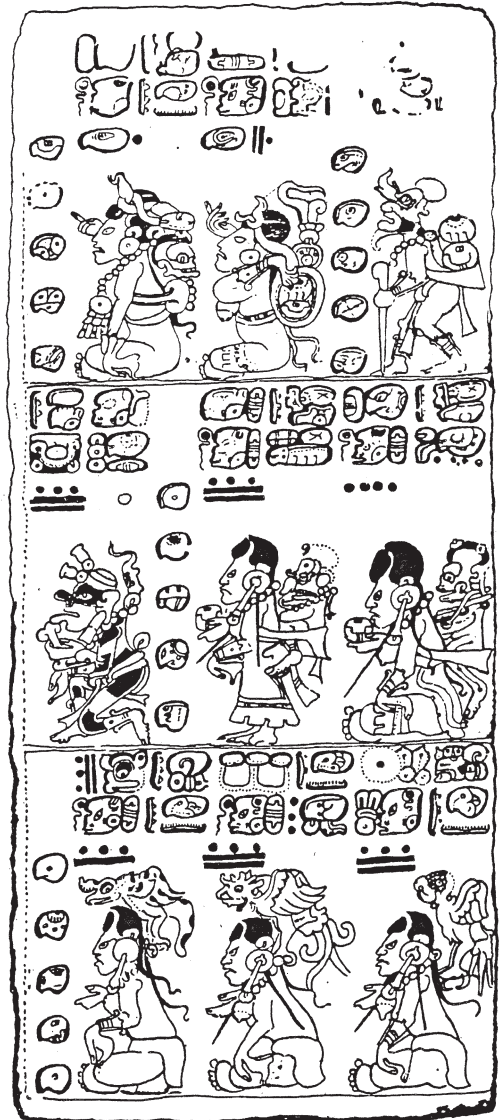
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Karen Bassie-Sweet and Geoffrey G. McCafferty for their contributions to, and assistance with, this study.

References

- Ardren, Traci
2006 Mending the Past: Ix Chel and the Invention of a Modern Pop Goddess. *Antiquity* 80:25-37.
- Bassie-Sweet, Karen
1991 *From the Mouth of the Dark Cave: Commemorative Sculpture of the Late Classic Maya*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.
2008 *Maya Sacred Geography and the Creator Deities*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.
- Brisko, Jo Ann Roman
1994 Maya Goddesses: By What Name Do We Call Them? In *U Mut Maya V*, edited by Carolyn Jones and Tom Jones, pp. 197-206. Carolyn and Tom Jones, Arcata, CA.
- Gates, William
1932 *The Dresden Codex*. Maya Society Publication 2. John Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.
- Herring, Adam
2005 *Art and Writing in the Maya Cities, A.D. 600-800: A Poetics of Line*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Milbrath, Susan
1995 Gender and Roles of Lunar Deities in Postclassic Central Mexico and the Correlation with the Maya Area. *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl* 25:45-94.
1996 Postclassic Maya Metaphors for Lunar Motion. In *Eighth Palenque Round Table, 1993*, edited by Martha J. Macri and Jan McHargue, pp. 379-391. Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, San Francisco.
2002 New Questions Concerning the Authenticity of the Grolier Codex. *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 18(1):50-83.
- Kelley, David Humiston
1976 *Deciphering the Maya Script*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Kingsborough, Edward K.
1831-1848 *Antiquities of Mexico: Comprising Fac-Similes of Ancient Mexican Paintings and Hieroglyphs*. Robert Havell, London.

- Schele, Linda and David Freidel
1990 *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. Quill William Morrow, New York.
- Schelhas, Paul
1967 [1904] *Representation of Deities of the Maya Manuscripts*, 2nd ed. Selma Wesselhoeft and A. M. Parker, trans. Papers 4(1). Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Stone, Andrea
1990 The Two Faces of Eve: The Grandmother and the Unfaithful Wife as a Paradigm in Maya Art. Paper presented at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans.
- Stuart, David
1998 "The Fire Enters His House": Architecture and Ritual in Classic Maya Texts. In *Function and Meaning in Classic Maya Architecture*, edited by Stephen D. Houston, pp. 373-425. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.
- Taube, Karl Andreas
1992 *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan*. Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology 32. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.
2006 The Classic Maya Gods. In *Maya: Divine Kings of the Rainforest*, edited by Nikolai Grube, pp. 262-277. Könemann, Cologne.
- Taylor, Dicey
1992 Painted Ladies: Costumes for Women on Tepeu Ceramics. In *The Maya Vase Book, Volume 3*, edited by Justin Kerr, pp. 513-525. Kerr Associates, New York.
- Thompson, J. Eric S.
1939 The Moon Goddess in Middle America, with Notes on Related Deities. *Contributions to American Anthropology and History* 5:24-29. Carnegie Institution of Washington, Washington, D.C.
1950 *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: Introduction*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.
1972 *A Commentary on the Dresden Codex: A Maya Hieroglyphic Book*. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.
- Tozzer, Alfred M.
1941 *Landa's Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán: A Translation*. Papers 18. Peabody Museum of American Archaeology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
- Vail, Gabrielle
1996 The Gods in the Madrid Codex: An Iconographic and Glyphic Analysis. Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Tulane University.
- 2000 Pre-Hispanic Maya Religion: Conceptions of Divinity in the Postclassic Maya Codices. *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11:123-147.
- Vail, Gabrielle, and Andrea Stone
2002 Representations of Women in Postclassic and Colonial Maya Literature and Art. In *Ancient Maya Women*, edited by Traci Ardren, pp. 203-228. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA.
- Villacorta C., J. Antonio, and Carlos A. Villacorta
1933 *Códices Mayas*. Tipografía Nacional, Guatemala.
- Zimmermann, Günter
1956 *Die Hieroglyphen der Maya-Handschriften*. De Gruyter, Hamburg.



Dresden Codex, folio 17 (from Villacorta and Villacorta 1993).