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## Two Letters to Tatiana Proskouriakoff from J. Eric S. Thompson (1958-1959)

CARL CALLAWAY

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The correspondence between Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1909-1985) and Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson (1898-1975) spanned over the course of many decades and reveals a continuous collaboration and a sharing of ideas between two titans of twentieth century Maya scholarship (Solomon 202:138). The generous depth and candor of their collaboration is revealed in two letters written between 1958 and 1959, during the time Proskouriakoff was formulating her “dynastic theory” on the historicity of Classic Period Maya inscriptions. Her dynastic investigations later formed the basis for her groundbreaking work, *Historical Implications of a Pattern of Dates at Piedras Negras, Guatemala* (Proskouriakoff 1960). A striking feature of Proskouriakoff’s approach was its fearlessness in trespassing on territory already staked out and defended by Thompson. His astronomical approach believed the bulk of the Classic Period inscriptions dealt “entirely with the passage of time and astronomical matters” (Thompson 1954:168). Thompson monopolized the debate and aggressively defended his claims that historical events (i.e., births and accessions of Maya kings) were not recorded on the monuments or that Maya writing could not be read phonetically (Thompson 1954:165, 1959a:349-364). In 1959, he gave his most detailed assessment in *Grandeza y decadencia de los mayas*<sup>1</sup> (Thompson 1959b:152, after Ruz Lhuillier 1973):

Ni un solo nombre de lugar o de persona ha sido definitivamente reconocido y traducido... no conocemos (entre los cente-



**Figure 1.** Tatiana Proskouriakoff at Piedras Negras, c. 1936-38. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

nares de glifos de Copan y Palenque) los nombres reales de estas ciudades o siquiera sus símbolos. No encierran en manera alguna la glorificación de una persona..., no refieren historias de conquistas reales, ni registran los progresos de un imperio; ni elogian, ni exaltan, glorifican o engranden a nadie: son tan completamente impersonales y no-individualistas que hasta

<sup>1</sup> *Grandeza y decadencia de los mayas* (1959b) is the Spanish translation of Thompson’s *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization* (1954). Yet, the Spanish version professes an even stronger Thompsonian viewpoint on the “impersonal and non-individualistic” nature of Maya inscriptions and is therefore quoted here rather than the original English text.

es posible que jamás se hayan grabado en ellas el nombre de algún hombre o de alguna mujer. Hasta donde llega nuestro conocimiento, los monumentos mayas con inscripciones —hasta hoy día se han encontrado algo más de 1,000 de ellos con textos glíficos— tratan exclusivamente del paso del tiempo, de datos sobre la Luna y el Planeta Venus, de cálculos calendáricos y de asuntos sobre los dioses y los rituales implícitos en estos temas.

[Not a single name of a place or person has been definitely recognized and translated... we do not know (among the hundreds of glyphs from Copan and Palenque) the actual names of these cities or even their symbols. They do not contain in any manner the glorification of a person... they do not refer to real historical conquests, nor do they register the progress of an empire; nor praise, glorify or aggrandize anyone: they are so completely impersonal and non-individualistic that it is possible that they may never have engraved on them the name of any man or any woman. As far as we know, the monuments with inscriptions—currently comprising over 1,000 glyphic texts—deal exclusively with the passage of time, information on the moon and the planet Venus, calendar calculations and issues about gods and rituals implicit in these topics. (author's translation)]

In his final analysis, Thompson maintained his chronocentric view that the bulk of Maya inscriptions dealt mainly with the “secrets of time and the movements of the celestial bodies” (Thompson 1954:9; 1971:64). He believed that they in no way stooped to the ordinary level of historical records of individuals.

Two letters housed in The University of Philadelphia's Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology archives (Proskouriakoff 2010) reveal the extent to which Proskouriakoff kept Thompson informed of her progress in deciphering the recorded dates of Piedras Negras. About these inscriptions, she would later note in her breakthrough work, “the distance between the initial date of a series and inaugural dates of the next does not exceed the limits of a normal lifetime ... and that each series can be construed as recording a sequence of events in the life of a single individual” (Proskouriakoff 1960:460). As the patterns of dates unfolded, she strongly suspected they spoke of individual rulers rather than astral bodies and calendar calculations.

In a letter from July 28, 1958, Thompson congratulates Proskouriakoff on her new insights with the Piedras Negras inscriptions and accepts her revisions of several dates (Figures 2 and 3). Yet, he comments that her “dynastic speculations” are possibly at fault. He compares her calculated reigns to those of Aztec rulers, and then to English monarchs. By doing so, he hopes to persuade Proskouriakoff that the ancient Maya could not have enjoyed such lengthy reigns and that her “accession theory” was in obvious error:

Harvard, Ashdon, Saffron Walden, Essex  
July 28 1958

Dear Tania:

I have your letter with the interesting account of your discovery that the niche motif introduces a new group of monuments dealing with a single series of dates. That opens up all sorts of possibilities. My congratulations. I am sure that no one has published the new readings of Stela 6 which you propose; I usually write them in Vay's book if there are changes proposed.<sup>2</sup> All I have is a query mark against the 10 Imix 4 Zip reading, indicating that I was dissatisfied with it, but hadn't anything better to offer.

Your reconstruction seems reasonable enough to me: the day coefficients are clearly 2 and 7, and the short distance number can be reasonably read as 4.19.

The month signs don't look much like Pax, but they don't look like anything for that matter. Anyhow, I am copying your new readings into my copy of Vay's opus ...

Your accession theory is an interesting one, but it makes very long reigns. I calculate that the last 8 Aztec rulers from Acampichtli [sic] in 1375 to the death of Ahuitzotl in 1503 average out at 16 years rulership per head. The Maya may not have had the same system, but I bet they had no infant rulers.<sup>3</sup> This, of course, in no way affects your general interpretation, but merely to cast doubt on your dynastic speculation. A rough calculation shows in England from the accession of Queen Anne in 1702 (if my memory isn't fooling me) to 1952 (about year present queen came to the throne) we have had 11 sovereigns in England which works out at about 22.5 years per reign. Edward VIII was the only one who didn't die a natural death, a stability seldom reached in the monarchical institution. When one considers the tropical climate of the Maya area and the complete lack of medical knowledge, I feel the figure that the Aztec figure ought to be a good guide. I deliberately started after the troubled times of the Stuarts, but counting the Commonwealth as a reign for the Stuarts from 1603 (James 1) to death of Queen Anne (17<sup>th</sup>) we have 7 reigns of 16 years each, same as the Aztec. The Tudors did better because Elizabeth I was 45 years on the throne: 118 years for 5 monarchs from Henry VII to death of Elizabeth, average 23 years, and all died in their beds. If you include the approximately 2 weeks reign of Lady Jane Grey, you bring down the average considerably, but she is never given the title of queen, although she was proclaimed queen and reigned for those few days till “Bloody” Mary overthrew her and chopped off her head. My impression is that Inca reigns averaged quite short...

<sup>2</sup> Vay is the nickname of Sylvanus Griswold Morley.

<sup>3</sup> The assumption that the Maya had no infant rulers would prove utterly false by later scholarship. At Naranjo Aj Wosal assumed the throne at about age 12 as did K'inich Janaab Pakal of Palenque (see Martin and Grube 2000:71, 162).

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July 28 1958

Dear Tania:

I have your letter with the interesting account of your discovery that the niche motif introduces a new group of monuments dealing with a single series of dates. That opens up all sorts of possibilities. My congratulations.

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Your reconstruction seems reasonable enough to me; the day coefficients are clearly 2 and 7, and the short distance number can be reasonably read as 4.19. The month signs don't look much like Pax, but they don't look like anything for that matter. Anyhow, I am copying your new readings into my copy of Vay's opus.

I am inclined to believe that both these dates are determinants for 9.12.0.0.0, an earlier poor one and a later very good one:

Correction by Gregorian for 9.12.0.0.0 is 187.5 days, 378 1/2 years having elapsed  
Therefore 8 Yaxkin + 188 = 16 Pax or 5 Pax + 188 = 8 Yaxkin.

9.11.12.7.2 is 8 years earlier, so correction should be 185.5  
9.12.14.13.1 is 1 1/4 years later, so correction should be 191 days

10 Pax + 183 = 8 Yaxkin (2.5 days under Gregorian)  
8 Yaxkin + 191 = 19 Pax (checks with Gregorian)

Your accession theory is an interesting one, but it makes very long reigns. I calculate that the last 8 Aztec rulers from Acampichtli in 1375 to the death of Ahuitzotl in 1503 average out at 16 years rulership per head. The Maya may not have had the same system, but I bet they had no infant rulers. This, of course, in no way affects your general ~~the~~ interpretation, but is merely to cast doubt on your dynastic speculation. A rough calculation shows in England from the accession of Queen Anne in 1702 (if my memory isn't fooling me) to 1952 (about year present queen came to the throne) we have had 11 sovereigns in England which works out at about 22.5 years per reign. Edward VIII was the only one who didn't die a natural death, a stability seldom reached in the monarchical institution. When one considers the tropical climate of the Maya area and the complete lack of medical knowledge, I feel that the Aztec figure ought to be a good guide. I deliberately started after the troubled times of the Stuarts, <sup>but</sup> counting the Commonwealth as a reign, ~~for the Stuart~~ from 1603 (James I) to death of Queen Anne (1714) we have 7 reigns of 16 years each, same as the Aztec. The Tudors did better because Elizabeth I was 45 years on the throne: 118 years for 5 monarchs from Henry VII to death of Elizabeth, average 23 years, and all died in their beds. If you include the approximately 2 weeks reign of Lady Jane Grey, you bring down the average considerably, but she is never given the title of queen, although she was proclaimed queen and reigned for those few days till "Bloody" Mary overthrew her and chopped off her head. My impression is that Inca reigns averaged quite short.

I gather there is intense competition between Ed Shook and Bill Andrews as to which is digging the largest/most important/greatest/most thrilling/emotionally most intoxicating/longest inhabited/Maya site. Linton wrote me that one of the great discoveries this past season was Izta. I wrote back to ask what the heck was Izta, and his latest reply, received this morning, is that he really had no business to mention it, and that I would have to write Ed if I wanted to know what it meant!

Figure 2. Letter by J.E.S. Thompson July 28, 1958, page 1 (photo by Carl Callaway courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives).

I must say it sounds very silly to me as though the Tikal project were going to get tied up with the Hearst press to counteract the Tulane-Nat. Geog. Andrews axis. Linton is also advancing the theory that Tikal was the intellectual leader of the Maya area, and there he has obviously got one on Bill Andrews for the old stelae of Dzibilchaltun are so smashed and eroded that they might have once carried the collected works of the Bard of Avon in Maya glyphs on them and no one would now be any the wiser. Linton's theory is that Tikaleños were the intellectual leaders because (as he believes) they were the first to group moons in sixes, but as that has about as much intellectual stimulus behind it as led to the grouping of pounds of potatoes in fourteens (pecks) or base ball innings in nines (if that is the way they are grouped), I am somewhat reluctant to elbow my way into the serried ranks of Tuscany who could scarce forbear to cheer.

Meanwhile, I plod along with the compilation of the glyph catalogue, an intensely boring business, and in my spare time I grow carnations, mow the lawn (nearly 3 hours work with the good sized gas mower I have), and listen to the village gossip and speculate why Joy Davies turned down Bob Bartram, and why he started walking out with Monica Moore, daughter of the landlord of The Rose & Crown, and wonder why the villagers who for generations have called their sons and daughters by such good English names as John Mary, Henry and Susan, now name their daughters Marylene, Vanessa, Marlene, Heather etc. and their sons Gary, Wilbur and other names more at home in Hollywood than in our quiet village.

I trust all goes well in Cambridge. We are expecting friends from Harvard, Mass. to stay with us next week-end, and I am awaiting receipt of a copy of my Thomas Gage book, out in U.S.A., but no copy has yet reached me.

If you learn the secret of Itza (cousins of the Itza once removed? Iztapa influence? new species of toucan?) the possibilities are infinite, let me know. Best to Harry.

Yours  
Yours

*Enc*

← First fold here →

↑ To open cut here ↑

AN AIR LETTER SHOULD NOT CONTAIN ANY ENCLOSURE; IF IT DOES IT WILL BE SURCHARGED OR SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL.

Sender's name and address:

← Second fold here →

Miss Talane Paskamoff,  
c/o Peabody Museum of Archaeology  
& Ethnology  
Harvard University  
Cambridge 38, Mass  
U.S.A.

BY AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION  
AIR LETTER  
AÉROGRAMME

WASHINGTON  
SIXPENCE-POSTAGE  
6

Figure 3. Letter by J.E.S. Thompson July 28, 1958, page 2 (photo by Carl Callaway courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives).

Fortunately for Maya Studies Proskouriakoff held steadfast to her calculations. She dug even deeper into the data and produced a final argument so eloquent and detailed that it would completely overturn her predecessor's entrenched arguments and reveal the historical content of Maya inscriptions. Correspondence from May of 1959 relates Thompson's acquiescence of his "cherished theory" in favor of Proskouriakoff's historical approach:

Howard, Ashdon, Saffron Walden, Essex  
May 7, 1959

Dear Tania:

Many thanks for your letter of May 1, and I was very glad to hear of your progress in the "dynasty" research. It will upset a cherished theory of mine that the Maya were so superior to the rest of mankind that they kept themselves out of the stelae, and forbore to record their wars, triumphs & extinctions! However theories are made to be upset, & if you can or, I should say, have cracked the problem, it will be a huge stride forward.

I enclose the material for the toothache & upended frog glyphs, Unfortunately, I can't get you information on the [T188] sign...

In these few lines, the preeminent authority of the times on Maya hieroglyphic writing recognizes Proskouriakoff's irrefutable breakthrough (Solomon 2002:138). The master scholar has now become the student. He fully admits that her dynastic research will no doubt upset his long-held view that Maya monuments were devoid of personal history of their creators. Thompson fulfills Proskouriakoff's request for source data, information that he knows by now will aid to completely upturn his former position that impeded progress into Maya dynastic research for decades. Graciously at the letter's end, Thompson gives Proskouriakoff the source data she needs to drive the last nail into the coffin and bury forever his "cherished theory" (Figures 4-7). To his credit, he supportively offers her the various locations of the glyphs informally dubbed the *toothache*, *upended frog* from his then unpublished Catalogue of Maya Hieroglyphs, a compendium and cross-index of over 860 signs (Thompson 1962). As a preeminent authority on Maya writing, Thompson maintained a complete index of all known inscriptions. It was vital that Proskouriakoff understood the distribution of these two glyphs and their comparable patterns from other sites. Ultimately, she deduced that the *toothache* glyph recorded royal accession while the *upended frog* glyph denoted birth. Both these deductions would prove absolutely correct in later years with the phonetic decipherment of the script. With Thompson's data in hand, Proskouriakoff charted patterns that, like an internal Rosetta Stone, cracked the code behind which the dynastic record lay hidden for centuries.

Proskouriakoff's willingness to question the

orthodoxies of her professional field and to challenge the intellectual monopoly of a tenured academic took courage and fortitude. As a leading authority on Maya writing and a dear friend, Thompson served as both an intellectual foil and collaborator during her breakthrough moment. Their letters reveal an openness to share and explore new ideas and approaches on decipherment despite clashing viewpoints. Moreover, the letters speak of an enduring friendship that assisted readily, advised openly and adventured boldly into the world of the ancient Maya writing.

### Acknowledgements

Many colleagues and friends contributed to the present study. I thank Alessandro Pezzati of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology who shared with me the Proskouriakoff files and the importance of the Thompson letters. Also, a special thanks goes to Paul Johnson for his aid in enhancing the photos of the letters and for preparing the final illustrations. I am grateful to those who read and commented on the earlier versions of this paper including Peter Mathews, Elaine Day Schele, Erik Boot, Jeff Buechler, Sven Gronemeyer, Mark Van Stone, Tyson White and Hutch Kinsman. Also, I thank Sandra A. Jobling and Cheryl Lambert of Geelong Writers for their critiques. Finally, I give thanks to La Trobe University Department of Archaeology for their continuing support of my research.

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1962 *A Catalog of Maya Hieroglyphs*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Harvard, Ashdod, Saffron Walden, Essex  
May 7 1959.

Dear Tania: Many thanks for your letter of May 1, and I was very glad to hear of your progress in the "dynasty" research. It will upset a cherished theory of mine that the Maya were so superior to the rest of mankind that they kept themselves out of the stelae, and failed to record their wars, temples & extinctions! However, theories are made to be upset, & if you can or, I should say, have cracked the problem, it will be a huge stride forward.

I enclose the material for the toothache or upended frog glyphs. Unfortunately I can't get you the material on the ~~(S) (S) (S)~~ signs. I have no clue to its record until I get the photostats of my drawings back from Avis - I have written her but as I've had no reply, I fear she may be sick again.

In any case, I'm afraid I will not be able to give you all its occurrences, for if the sign is allowed to exist, as for instance with the ~~(S) (S) (S)~~ glyph, I would not be able, at present, to list it, as my cross-index of attested real signs has not yet been made. However, I'll do what I can when I receive the photostats of my drawings.

I would certainly favor using "toothache glyph" in print, for it is a fine descriptive term & enables anyone to identify & remember the glyph.

Univ. of Oklahoma Press is going to bring out a second edition of Maya hieroglyphic writing: introductions at the end of this year. I've told them I think they will lose their collective shirt on the venture, but they've decided to go ahead, so now culpa mea if the shirt is lost. I am going to write a new page preface to the new edition, & in that I want to summarize what has been done in Maya glyphic work since 1950. In that

Figure 4. Letter by J.E.S. Thompson May 7, 1959, page 1 (photo by Carl Callaway courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives).

connections would you decide on a title for the paper you plan to give at the Christmas meetings in Mexico City, & let me know what it is so that I can mention that line of research in my preface. If you don't want to tie yourself to a definite title at this time, perhaps you can give me a tentative one. I shall be writing in the future letters so far as your paper is concerned, so a tentative label for the title would be quite in order.

The weather here is delightful, & the garden is ablaze with tulips, narcissi, wallflowers, apple etc. in full bloom. I used to cherish a fragile spring forget-me-not in Harvard, Mass, but here it grows everywhere as a weed & I have to root up masses of it. On the other hand, I proudly display a sumac, which in New England is a pest. The moral of this I leave to you to disentangle.

I have not heard from Lintas for a long time. I heard some jade had been found at Tikal, but no details.

I hope that this letter will cross one bringing me the photostats of my glyphs. I wrote Harry about a week ago about them when I failed to get any reply from Arie.

Good luck to your dynasty investigations

Eric

The key to the distribution sheets enclosed is in  
Maya Hieroglyphs.

P.N. 7 means Stela 7; L. Alt. are used to designate Lintel or Altar Plinths.

P.S. Would you mind asking whether there is any 2nd class rail for me anywhere around Peabody or 10 Frisbie. One or two publications I've expected never arrived, & I wondered whether they could have been sent to 10 Frisbie & never

forwarded. This is just a guess; quite probably there is nothing.

Figure 5. Letter by J.E.S. Thompson May 7, 1959, page 2 (photo by Carl Callaway courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives).

Upended Frog. Plain      15 Examples

Pal. Cross E17, R15, U2, T16, T13  
 Inscr. West K12 ; T. 18 Tablet, B13  
 Rug Tab. 2. A4, H5

Yaxchilan L.35 V6 ; L.42, E3  
 P.N. Ylmo K'4. *no date?*  
 P.N. 12, B21-Ann.  
 Skell in Tuxtle Mus. B7.  
 Tikal St. (23, B4) ~~Plattin, 1, D1.~~

---

Upended Frog. Compound.      5 examples.

Pal. Inscr. Mid, F4, J4, J6, K5.  
 Mar. 32, 24 ??

### Toothache Glyph

✓ El Cayo L1, E4 *also K next to last glyph. E2?*  
 ✓ P.N. Ylmo. 1 G'3 ; 15, B1, 16, C5 ; ART. 2, D3 ; L.3, A'1 (Variant)  
 Animal: L.2, K'1, 25, I8, I'2 ; 36, B6 ; L.2, X9  
 Yaxchilan L.30, H5 ; 20, D1 ; 11, C4 Animal L.26, K'1  
 Cop. T. 11, Slep, 12 ; 9, C9 Animal: 9, F3 ; F'1, C3  
 Pusilha E C3, D6 — *not not, no "lip shape", different denture.*  
 Marajo 20, A4 ; 6, A3  
 ✓ Seibal 7, A2  
 Pal. Animal: Sarcopl. Glyph 19 ; Cross S15 ; Sun, P4 ; Rug, 1, P9 ;  
 Rug 2, A3, Curved I.S. pit, G1

✓ Bonampak, 2, C1 —

Codex Madrid 90a, 91a, 92a, 93a  
 Dresde 67a Animal D23b

Figure 6. Letter by J.E.S. Thompson May 7, 1959, page 3 (photo by Carl Callaway courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives).

<sup>no date</sup>  
 Copan 6, D8; 4, A2; 7, B12; H.S. Frag. <sup>no date</sup> Group XII I; Cop. T. east; 12 Past, B13, <sup>no date</sup> ?  
 127, 12 fr. 1, B10; 3, A7; 7, F8 no gl.  
 Pal. Cross A17, D2, E7, P5, P7, P11, P13, S4, S9, U7  
 Pal. Arch. Cross, B16, N2  
 Pal. Sun, P13, C1  
 Pal. Inscr. West E2  
 Pal. Ru3 Tablet 1, C4, S3  
 // Pal. H.S. A5  
 // Pal. Hand D, Pica G; T.18, Tablet C6; Sarcophagus  
  
 Yax. L. 30 H1  
 P.N. Pl. 1, Q1; R<sup>2</sup>4. ; 3, A8; 3, D6; Alt. 3 A2, 365 CS;  
 P.N. 1, B3; 8, A9  
  
 Pusilla H D14  
Naranjo 24, B13; 22 F6; 22, G3; 10, A2; 12, B2;  
Tonina 20 D4; 30 A4.  
Postac 1 D4  
Morales 2, B9  
Maxacta 7, C2 date illegible.  
Chichen 3 tablets, 3, A1; 4 tablets, 3, frat, A1; 4 tablets 2, C8  
Neabaj 7 tablets var CS.  
  
~~Tikal st 23~~  
 ← Kuma, L1, M2.

---

Witt Forward Prefix  7 examples.  
 Palenque Cross C17; E13, U9  
 Sun, C10  
 Inscript. West K9; N3, O6

L  
2/5/50

Figure 7. Letter by J.E.S. Thompson May 7, 1959, page 4 (photo by Carl Callaway courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives).

# Beans and Glyphs: A Possible IB Logogram in the Classic Maya Script

ALEXANDRE TOKOVININE

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Although the pace of the decipherment of the Maya writing has markedly slowed in the past ten years or so, hundreds of logograms remain to be read. The present paper offers a set of arguments in support of the decipherment of the variant of the character T709 in Thompson's catalogue (Thompson 1962) as a logogram **IB** "lima bean" (*Phaseolus lunatus*). The identification of textual references to lima beans provides the first evidence of their use in Classic Maya cuisine before 750 C.E.

There is probably no epigrapher who has never pondered the fascinating labels on two polychrome plates deciphered by Marc Zender more than a decade ago (2000). In addition to the curious reference to venison tamales with calabash seeds (Tokovinine 2013:294), these inscriptions mention a distinct category of Classic Maya ceramic vessels—"eating utensils" or *we'ib* in Classic Ch'olti'an or Hieroglyphic Mayan. Three years after the publication of the article, Eric Boot spotted a third plate with a reference to *we'ib* in an obscure auction catalogue (Boot 2003:Figs. 1, 3a; Galerie Wolfgang Ketterer 1991). Boot (2003) suggested that the spelling in the dedicatory text on the vessel contained **u-WE'-i-bi-li** for *uwe'ibil* "the eating utensil of" (Figure 1a) which could be compared to **u-WE'-i-bi** spellings discussed

by Zender (Figure 1b, c) except that the new example featured an *-il* suffix at the end. Yet while there could be no doubt about the overall reading of the word, the sign identified as a variant of T679 **i** by Boot did not quite look like any other example of the **i** grapheme. In fact, the sign seemed to be a head variant of T709 (Figure 2a). Consequently, it could be a previously unknown allograph of **i** or a logographic sign which was either acrophonically reduced to **i** or functioned as a phonetic spelling of the *-ib* suffix. In the latter case, the reading of the sign would be **'IB**. The use of logograms to spell suffixes is uncommon, but examples like **CHAN-NAL** for *chanal* "celestial" or **AK'-TAJ-ja** for *ak'taj* "he dances" suggest that Maya scribes occasionally adopted this approach.

The variant of T709 in question shares some of its elements with a number of graphemes. The **ABAAK/SABAAK/SIBIK** "ink/soot" logogram (Stuart 2012) is one of the closest (Figure 2b), but it has a distinct upper element which resembles T174 and dots on the main body which probably represent ink or soot splashes. The **TI'** "edge/mouth" variant that is particularly common at Tonina (e.g., Monument 146:I, Monument 159:B1; see Graham et al. 2006:79, 94) has two antenna-like upper elements and a different lower section of the main body

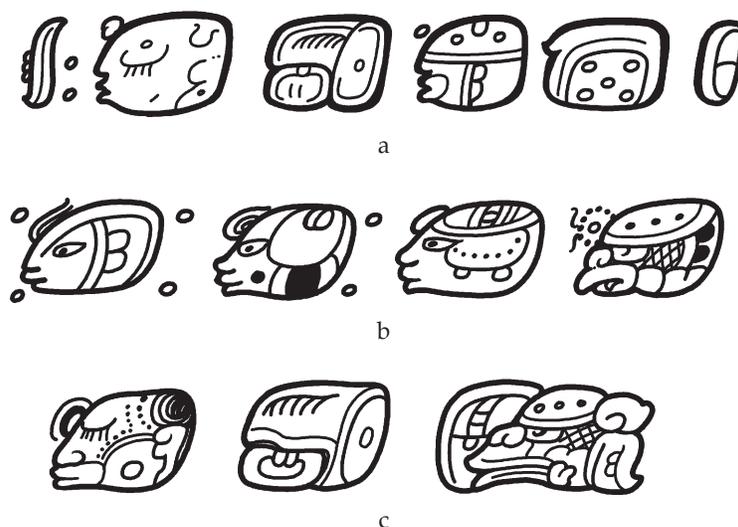


Figure 1. T709 in the spelling of *we'ibil*: (a) detail of a Late Classic vessel (after Boot 2003:Fig. 3a); (b) detail of a Late Classic vessel (K5460, after Zender 2000:Fig. 9a); (c) detail of a Late Classic vessel (K6080, after Zender 2000:Fig. 9b). All drawings by the author.

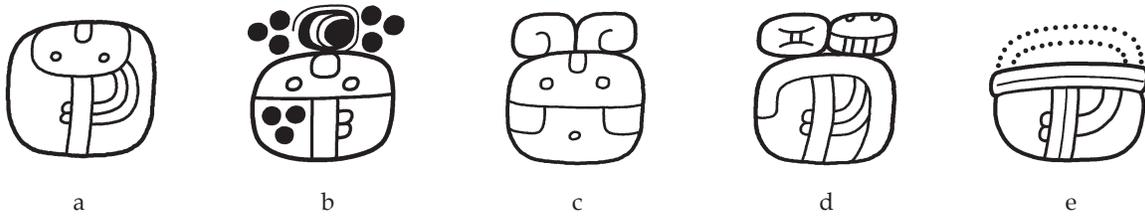


Figure 2. T709 and similar signs: (a) T709; (b) SIBIK/ABAAK; (c) TI'; (d) AJAW; (e) CH'AAJ.

(Figure 2c). The lower part of the T709 variant discussed here—a possible reference to straps or other means of attachment—resembles those of the T168:518 logogram AJAW “lord” (Figure 2d), which may have originally represented a strapped headdress (Davletshin 2006), and a somewhat rare (e.g., Copan Stela 6:A6) glyph that was possibly read as CH'AAJ “liquid incense” (Figure 2e), which looks like a bowl or an open bundle full of incense. Interestingly, all these comparable graphemes are containers, even the headdress as it wraps around one’s head.

The hypothesis that this T709 variant is a mere allograph of *i* is refuted by an inscription on a Late Classic Codex Style vessel from Calakmul (Schmidt et al. 1998:Cat. 448). The painted scene shows a baby-like maize god emerging from a split T533 sign that probably stands for a flower or bud of some sort or simply corresponds to one of the SIH “birth” logograms. The caption to the nascent maize deity reads 1-IXIIM

i-T709-?la-AJAW (Figure 3). Here, a common syllabic *i* sign serves as a phonetic complement to the same variant of T709 as on the plate analyzed by Boot. Therefore, the T709 should be a logogram with the initial *i*-vowel and not an allograph of *i*, because the *i-i-la* spelling would be very unlikely.

Two key contexts for the reading of the T709 variant are provided by the captions to a



Figure 3. Detail of a Late Classic vessel, Calakmul (after photograph by Alexander Safronov).

*wahy* demon on the unprovenanced vases—K791 and K1901—in Justin Kerr’s data base at [www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com). That particular *wahy* looks like a death deity with a conch shell. The caption on K791 reads u-ku-li chi-CHAM-ya u-WAHY-ya K’UH-T709-AJAW (Figure 4a). The caption on K1901 is nearly identical except for a full phonetic substitution for T709: u-ku-li chi-CHAM i-bi-li (Figure 4b). The words *uwahy* and *ajaw* are abbreviated in the inscription on K1901, but other captions to *wahy* demons on the same vessel show comparable abbreviations and a tendency to spell-out the place names phonetically. For example, the caption to the *wahy* of Kanuul lords, *chijil tal chan*, known from several

depictions and captions on Classic Maya pottery (Grube and Nahm 1994:693) is **chi-hi-li TAL-CHAN-na ka-nu-la**, also omitting *uwahy* and *ajaw*. The omission of *uwahy* and/or the final word in the place-incorporating title of the *wahy* owner (*ajaw*, *winik*, *baah tuun*, etc.) occurs in captions to *wahy* creatures on many other vessels. Moreover, extensive abbreviations may be found in other kinds of Late Classic period captions (Houston and Martin 2011).

The only way to interpret this T709 variant in the inscription published by Boot, in the caption to the maize god on the Calakmul vessel, and the caption to the *wahy* on K791 and K1901, is that it is a logogram that can be read as **IB** (‘**IB**’). However, this reading is based on the phonetic substitution alone. None of the three contexts would be very helpful in figuring out the meaning of *ib* or in explaining why the grapheme looks the way it does: the first inscription uses the character for its phonetic value alone and the other two examples feature **IB** as part of the spelling of a place name (“a place of *ib*”).

The linguistic data summarized in Table 1 indicate that there are several candidates for the translation of the **IB** grapheme. One gloss is *ib* for “armadillo” which is reconstructible all the way to proto-Mayan \**iib*. The problem is that, with the exception of Ch’ol, the Ch’olan gloss is *ibach*. There is also a corresponding hieroglyphic spelling **i-ba-?cha** *ibach* “armadillo” in the Dresden Codex on page 21 (Boot 2009:72), although there is no accompanying picture to make sure that the intended

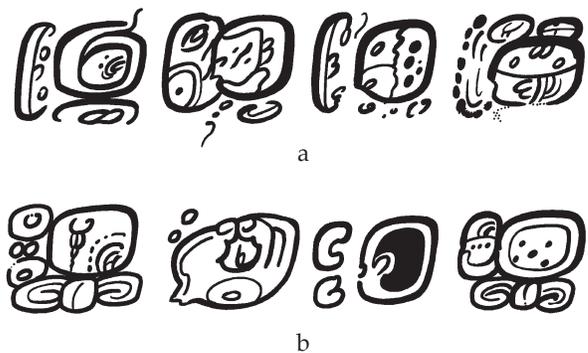


Figure 4. Substitution of T709 by *i-bi-li*: (a) detail of a Late Classic vessel (K791); (b) detail of a Late Classic vessel (K1901) (after photographs by Justin Kerr).

Table 1: Possible cognates of the *ib* gloss in Hieroglyphic Mayan

|         |                   |   |   |
|---------|-------------------|---|---|
| pM      | <i>iib</i>        | armadillo   | (Kaufman and Norman 1984:120)   |
|         | <i>*ib</i>        | foundation, root                                  | (Wichmann and Brown n.d.)   |
|         | <i>*iib</i>       | bean plant  | (Wichmann and Brown n.d.)   |
| pWM     | <i>*ib</i>        | armadillo   | (Kaufman 2002:599)  |
|         | <i>*iib</i>       | bean plant  | (Wichmann and Brown n.d.)   |
| pEM     | <i>*ibooy</i>     | armadillo   | (Kaufman 2002:600)  |
| pCh+YUK | <i>*ibach</i>     | armadillo   | (Kaufman 2002:600)  |
| CHU     | <i>ibach</i>      | armadillo   | (Diego et al. 1998:76)  |
|         | <i>ibnh kapey</i> | coffee bush                                       | (Diego et al. 1998:76)  |
| YUK     | <i>iib</i>        | lima bean ( <i>Ph. lunatus</i> ), bean vine       | (Bricker et al. 1998:10)  |
|         | <i>ibil</i>       | bean field  | (Bricker et al. 1998:10)  |
|         | <i>ibach</i>      | armadillo   | (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1995:261)   |
| ITZ     | <i>ib</i>         | lima bean ( <i>Ph. lunatus</i> ), cultivated vine | (Hofling and Tesucún 1997:247)  |
| MOP     | <i>ib</i>         | black lima bean                                   | (Ulrich et al. 1976:90)   |
| TZO     | <i>ibes</i>       | runner bean ( <i>Ph. coccineus darwinianus</i> )  | (Breedlove and Laughlin 1993:2:121-122, 297;<br>Delgaty 1964:20; Laughlin 1975:53, 112) |
|         | <i>ibel</i>       | root, tooth, plant, vine, tree                    | (Delgaty 1964:19; Laughlin 1975:53)   |
|         | <i>ib</i>         | armadillo   | (Delgaty 1964:19; Laughlin 1975:53)   |
| TZE     | <i>ghib</i>       | armadillo (original spelling)                     | (Ara 1986:290)  |
| TOJ     | <i>iboy</i>       | armadillo   | (Lenkersdorf 1979:125)  |
|         | <i>ibel</i>       | below   | (Lenkersdorf 1979:125)  |
|         | <i>ibe</i>        | bush, shrub                                       | (Lenkersdorf 1979:125)  |
| CHL     | <i>ib</i>         | armadillo   | (Aulie and Aulie 1978:58)   |
|         | <i>ebal</i>       | below   | (Aulie and Aulie 1978:142)  |
| CHR     | <i>ibach</i>      | armadillo   | (Wisdom 1950:484)   |
|         | <i>ebar</i>       | below   | (Wisdom 1950:467)   |
| CHN     | <i>ibach</i>      | armadillo   | (Keller and Luciano 1997:115)   |
| HUA     | <i>ibiil</i>      | root  | (Larsen 1981:32)  |

Abbreviations: pM – proto-Mayan; pWM – proto-Western Mayan; pEM – proto-Eastern Mayan; pCh – proto-Ch’olan; CHU – Chuj; YUK – Yukatek; ITZ – Itzaj; MOP – Mopan; TZO – Tzotzil; TZE – Tzeltal; TOJ – Tojolabal; CHL – Ch’ol; CHR – Ch’orti’; CHN – Chontal; HUA – Wastek

meaning is indeed “armadillo.” The “armadillo” reading also fails to explain the iconography of **IB**. The graphemes which stand for the names of animals in Maya writing usually look like those animals or their body parts. Typically, it is the head, which may be reduced to a smaller element like a feather, an eye, or an ear. Animal heads are usually shown in profile. The **IB** sign looks nothing like an armadillo head in profile or any other part of its body.

The other *ib* gloss is “foundation, lower part, root.” The examples of this lexical item come mostly from Eastern Mayan and Greater Q’anjobalan languages

(Wichmann and Brown n.d.). The Western Mayan languages where *ib* for “root” is reported are Tzotzil and Wastek. *Ib’el* in Tojolabal means “below.” The words for “below” in Ch’ol (*ebal*) and Ch’orti’ (*ebar*) could be related to pM *\*ib* but they have a different initial vowel.

The third *ib* gloss is “bean plant.” The more restricted meaning of “lima bean” (*Ph. lunatus*) along with a general “cultivated bean vine” may be found in the Yukatekan languages. This gloss is not present in Ch’olan languages, but there is no shared Ch’olan lexical item for *Ph. lunatus*. For example, lima beans are just



Figure 5. Detail of the lid of an Early Classic tripod vessel (K1446; after photograph by Justin Kerr).

called “large beans,” *nukta’ buur*, in Ch’orti’ (Wisdom 1950:546). The gloss *ibes* designates runner beans (*Ph. coccineus*, ssp. *darwinianus*) in Tzotzil, whereas *ibel* means “root.” As pointed to the author by Terrence Kaufman (personal communication, 2013), this bean species is distinguished, among other traits, by its large, starchy and eatable roots and hypogeal (cotyledons remain below ground) germination (Freytag and Deboucq 2002:60). There may be, therefore, a connection between “root” and *Ph. coccineus* glosses in Tzotzil, but this is just a speculation. Redfield and Villa report that Lima bean roots were also eaten (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:38). Chuj and Tojolabal glosses apparently denote a broader category of plants (bush/shrub), which may comprise beans.

The inscription on the lid of an Early Classic tripod vessel from the Rio Azul region (K1446) offers additional evidence in support of the identification of the **IB** logogram with the *ib* gloss for “bean plant” or “lima bean.” The text labels the vessel as **yu-k’i-bi ta-?IB-li** (the **li** reading is a bit problematic because Early Classic **la** looks very similar) **ka-[ka]-wa y-uk’ib ta ibil kakaw** “his drinking utensil for *ib-y* cacao” (Figure 5). It is unlikely that the text refers to “armadillo cacao” or “root cacao.” In this context, the *ib* gloss should rather stand for a specific plant ingredient that can be mixed with and give a certain flavor to a cacao beverage. A *pinole* drink may indeed be made out of toasted and ground bean seeds. Even wild varieties of lima beans are still used for cooking in parts of Mesoamerica (Zizumbo Villarreal et al. 2012:332, 336). Diego de Landa mentions ritual drinks made of beans and squashes (Tozzer 1978[1941]:158). Redfield and Villa Rojas describe a paste from cooked lima beans and ground squash seeds that is then dried to be stored for later consumption (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:40). Therefore, “lima bean cacao” seems to be the best fit for a translation of the label on the lid, although there is no direct ethnographic analogy of this particular mixed drink (cacao and lima bean *pinole*). It must have been rare even for the Classic Maya because this text is the only known reference. Some rare mixed drinks mentioned in Classic Maya inscriptions have no direct ethnographic analogies (Beliaev et al. 2009), so there is nothing unusual in yet another one.

The Early Classic **IB** grapheme on K1446 offers additional visual clues to its meaning. The “straps” in the

lower part are already present, but the overall contour of the sign looks like a type of bead and also like a common representation of part of a flower. Early Classic images of the maize god like the one on the Dumbarton Oaks stone bowl (PC.B.209) typically show his head adorned with such beads, often with strands of hair or some plant stalks coming through and out of them (Figure 6a). As suggested by Martin (Martin 2006, 2012a), the Classic Maya maize deity was perceived as a source of all cultivated plants, sometimes depicted growing out of his body. It may seem a bit far-fetched, but these **IB**-like beads with stalks or vines might as well represent bean pods/flowers and vines on the maize god’s body just as real bean vines which rely on the corn stalks for support in the *milpa*. Given that Classic Maya plant iconography is more abstract than animal representations, the **IB** logogram might well represent a bean plant or its part like a pod or a flower (Figure 6b). Lima beans and black beans were usually planted with corn in the *milpa* (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:46). A close association between corn and beans is also hinted by the maize god’s name in the caption on the Calakmul vessel discussed above (Figure 3): *juun ixim ibil ajaw* “First Maize (Seed), Bean Field Lord.”

There also seems to be a curious overlap of graphic elements between the **NAL** “corn plant” logogram (T86) and **IB**. The name of the owner in a tag on one of the earflares from Tomb 4 in Structure 2 at Calakmul (Fields et al. 2005:255, cat.no. 151) ends in a head variant of **IB** with **NAL**-like (T84) upper element above and prefixed by **K’UH** (Figure 7a). Something along the lines of *k’uhul ib ?nal [winik]* was probably intended given the frequent omission of *winik* in titles with place names. Yet even though there seems to be a full substitution between T84 and T86 in Late Classic texts, epigraphers have long suspected that the two graphemes once belonged to different compound signs, of which only T86 was **NAL**. The title on the earflare looks suspiciously like an abbreviated spelling of the *k’uhul ibil winik* “holy bean field person” title found, for example, in Drawing 29 at Naj Tunich (Stone 1995:fig. 7-8) where it is spelled in full

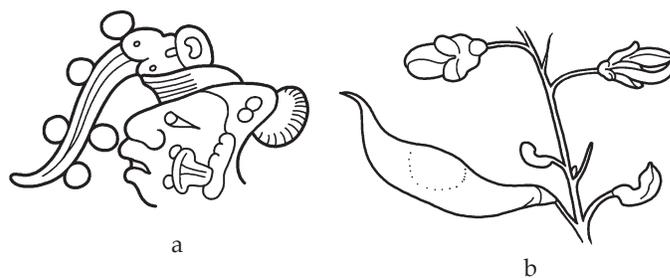
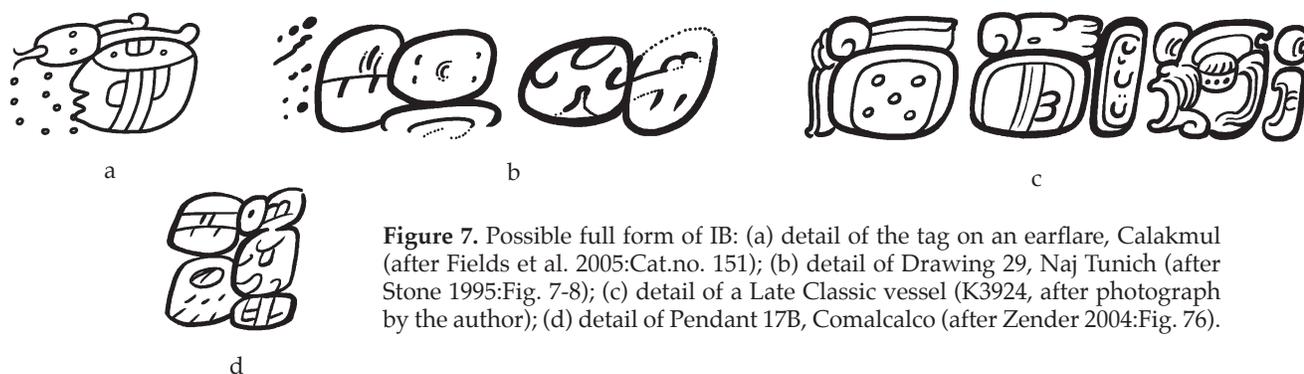


Figure 6. Iconography of beans: (a) head of the maize god, detail of an Early Classic carved stone bowl (Dumbarton Oaks PC.B.209, after photograph by the author); (b) flower buds and pods of lima bean (after Blanco 1877:370).



**Figure 7.** Possible full form of IB: (a) detail of the tag on an earflare, Calakmul (after Fields et al. 2005:Cat.no. 151); (b) detail of Drawing 29, Naj Tunich (after Stone 1995:Fig. 7-8); (c) detail of a Late Classic vessel (K3924, after photograph by the author); (d) detail of Pendant 17B, Comalcalco (after Zender 2004:Fig. 76).

(Figure 7b). Could T84 on the Calakmul earflare be part of a full form of **IB**? The dedicatory text on a Late Classic vessel (K3924) substitutes a typical reference to **IXIIM TE'-le ka-ka-wa** *ixiim-te'el kakaw* with a different spelling that looks like T86-**bi TE'-le ka-[ka]-wa** (Figure 7c). The presence of the **-bi** phonetic complement indicates that **IXIIM** or **NAL** were not the intended readings, but **IB** would be quite plausible. If one accepts Martin's interpretation of *ixiimte'el kakaw* as a reference to the mythical origins of cacao from the tree-like body of the resurrected maize god (Martin 2006), then a "bean tree cacao" reference would be just as appropriate. The "bean tree" gloss is also attested in the inscriptions at Comalcalco in the name of a local manifestation of the rain deity who is mentioned on pendants 17 and 18 found in a priestly burial at the site (Zender 2004:250-263). The name is spelled as **i-ba-TE'-cha-ki** (Figure 7d) and **i-ba-TE'-CHAHK-ki** that probably stands for *ibal te' chahk* "bean tree *Chahk*."

Besides the toponym on the Calakmul vessel and the lists of *wahy* creatures on K791 and K1901, there are also historical references to "Ibil lords." A caption to a standing figure of a young lord on the side of Yaxchilan Stela 1—this part of the monument has unfortunately been lost by now, but it is visible in Morley's photographs—identifies him as a son of the "Ib[il] lord," **IB-AJAW-wa** (Figure 8a). Another mention comes from the dedicatory text on a Late Classic incised vessel, K4372 (Figure 8b). The name of the vessel's owner, *Juun Tzakab Took'*, resembles those of *Lakam Tuun* lords of El Palma and *Itza'* lords of Itzimte' (Tokovinine and Zender 2012:55), but his emblem glyph is different: **K'UH i-bi-li a-ja-wa**, *k'uh[ul] ibil ajaw* "holy Ibil lord." The third example in Caption 4 in Room 1 of Structure 1 at Bonampak is less certain because of its preservation and style.

There are no references to events at *Ibil*, one cannot be sure if it was an actual locale or some mythical first lima bean field to which a particular royal dynasty of "Ibil lords" traced itself. On the other hand, the title of "holy Ibil person" may be tentatively attributed to lords in Southeastern Campeche. The "holy Ibil person" *Upakal K'inich* mentioned in Drawing 29 at Naj Tunich (Stone 1995:fig. 7-8) also carries the titles of *sak ook* and *wak piit*

*ajaw* ("six palanquins lord"). This pair of titles is present in the name phrases of El Palmar rulers (Octavio Esparza, personal communication 2014) and individuals on a set of stylistically uniform ceramic vessels of which at least one was found at the site of Icaiche to the east of El Palmar (Cortés de Brasdefer 1996; Tokovinine 2012). However, the author is not aware of any example of the "holy *Ibil* person" title at El Palmar or Icaiche.

The decipherment of the **IB** logogram expands the list of known references to *Phaseolus sp.* in Classic Maya texts. The more common Ch'olan gloss for beans—*bu'ul* spelled **bu-la**—appears only once in tags on three bags depicted in a household scene on a Late Classic vase from the Rio Azul area (K2914). A possible reference to beans in Caption NE-N1 on the murals of Structure Sub 1-4 in the North Acropolis at Calakmul has been called into question on paleographic grounds (Martin 2012b:69-70). The specific identification of *ib* as lima bean also adds a new piece of evidence in support of its use in the Maya area during the Classic Period. The earliest archaeological evidence of the cultivation of *Phaseolus lunatus* in the Maya area at Dzibilchaltun is dated to the late 8th century C.E. (Kaplan 1965:367, fig. 4). The more recent DNA evidence, however, suggests somewhat earlier cultivation of lima beans and even a possible second Mesoamerican domestication event in the Maya area (Andueza Noh et al. 2013). As we have seen above, the reconstruction of *ib* as a term for specifically lima beans all the way to proto-Mayan is unlikely. The Classic period epigraphic data supports a more



**Figure 8.** "Ibil lords" in Classic Maya inscriptions: a) detail of Stela 1, Yaxchilan (after photograph by Sylvanus Morley, CMHI archives); b) detail of a Late Classic vessel (K4732, after photograph by Justin Kerr).

generic significance of *ib* as “bean plant” as in the maize god titles, but also a specific significance as “lima bean” in *ibil kakaw*—“lima bean cacao.”

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