

A Short Note on *Winte' Nah* as “House of Darts”

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The process of Maya decipherment is sometimes like a long and winding road with no clear end in sight, and at other times more like a labyrinth of blind alleys with no exit. All too often, after the epigrapher puts a tick for “no result” and begins anew the arduous journey to find some key to unravel the full meaning of a glyph or expression. Sometimes the solution comes from the discovery of a new monument or the pure chance of finding an entry in a previously unconsulted dictionary. In this paper I will suggest a new meaning for the *winte'* expression, but first I will give a short history of the more-than-three-decades quest for the decipherment of the T600 “founder” glyph (Figure 1).

In 1986, Linda Schele and David Stuart identified an expression which they dubbed the “cross-batons” title and which they believed referred to the founders of dynasties (Schele 1986; Schele and Stuart 1986). Later, in 1992, Schele tried anew to find a productive solution leading to a phonetic reading. Incorporating suggestions from Nikolai Grube and David Stuart, she proposed the reading of *ch'ok te' na wi'* or “sprout-tree-house-root” (Schele 1992:142). Some years later, Stuart (2000:492-493, 509 n. 17) published a seminal paper about the “arrival of strangers” in which he confirmed that the expression would be the name of a “house” or building. Based on Early Classic occurrences in Tikal, Tres Islas, and Río Azul, he proposed the reading order of *wi-te-nah* (Figure 2) and tentatively suggested that it might be an important ancestral shrine found at many sites.

Nikolai Grube and Simon Martin (2000) added further insight when they noted that the starting point of the *entrada* of Sihyaj K'ahk' into the Maya lowlands was called *Wi Te' Nah*, identified with one of the many buildings in Teotihuacan. Stuart (2004:235-238) offered the reading “Tree-root House,” but he also mentioned the *Ch'orti' wih* root as “source, origin, navel, umbilical cord, root” (in Wisdom n.d.), on the basis of which he suggested that the true import of the expression might be “Origin House.” Although Stuart (2004:236) could not explain the “crossed-bundles” element (T600), he suggested a possible connection to ritual fire. Iconography aside, Albert Davletshin (2014) suggested that T600 was a Maya glyph created by Maya scribes because it never occurred in the iconography of Teotihuacan but still referred to the metropolis. Søren Wichmann suggested to Davletshin the reconstructed **wilde'* “tapanco” noun in several Mayan languages, the etymology of which is comprised of **wil* “to tie” and **tye7* “tree” in Proto-Mayan; thus, combined, *Wilde' Nah* would be “Loft House” (Davletshin 2014:17).

In a key recent contribution, Francisco Estrada-Belli and Alexandre Tokovinine (2016) published an Early Classic text from Holmul (from c. AD 593). As they noted, this new context at last provides the proper phonetic reading of the collocation as T600-na NAH-TE'-AJAW (Figure 3), which can be fully read as *winte' nah ajaw* (Estrada-Belli and Tokovinine 2016:160-161). Thus, thirty years after Linda's pioneering discussions of the “cross-bundles” glyph, T600 can finally be read as WIN (or WIIN if one accepts the disharmonic principle). Nevertheless, the authors mention that the translation is very uncertain. They have linked it to entries such as Tzotzil *win* “to appear, to be seen” (Laughlin 1975:370) or Yucatec *winba* “image, statue” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:923). Potentially, the same term appears in *wi-ni-BAH* at Palenque and in *3/4-wi-ni-ti-ki, ux/chan wintik*, at Copan in the toponym of the city, where *-tik* is a plural suffix for humans or gods. The authors have correspondingly explored *winte'* as a bonfire on a pyramid, or a scaffold, or “wood that appears in the distance” (Estrada-Belli and Tokovinine 2016:161).

Building on these exciting discoveries, and incorporating one of the chance dictionary finds alluded to above, I would like to suggest a new interpretation of *winte'*. Recently, Nicholas A. Hopkins, J. Kathryn Josserand, and

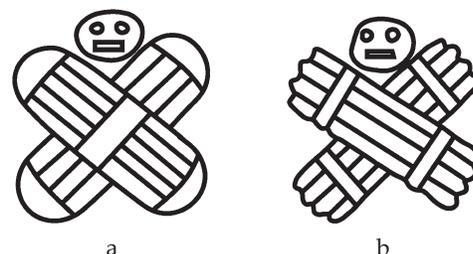


Figure 1. T600 (drawings by Péter Bíró, after Eric Thompson 1962:224)

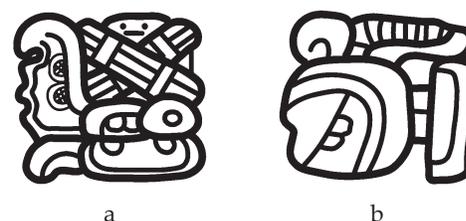


Figure 2. (a) *wi*-T600-TE'-NAH; (b) *wi*-TE'-NAH (drawings by Péter Bíró, after Alexandre Tokovinine in Estrada-Belli and Tokovinine 2016:156, Fig. 7).



Figure 3. T600-na TE'-NAH-AJAW (drawing by Péter Bíró, after Alexandre Tokovinine in Estrada-Belli and Tokovinine 2016:156, Fig. 7).

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|---|---|
| winte' | n, bow and arrow; arco y flecha. Obsolete. A&A /jaläjp/ 'arco (arma, puente) |
| winte', n. arrow; flecha. Stoll 1938:55 <uintié> | |
| winte', n phr. bow (weapon); arco. Becerra 1935:253 <güintié> | |
| winte', n. arrow; flecha. Becerra 1935:261 <Tielap, güin-tié> | |

Table 1. The *winte'* entry from Hopkins et al. (2011:267).

Ausencio Cruz Guzmán (2011) published a historical dictionary of Chol, compiling several early vocabularies containing obsolete words and expressions that no longer appear in the spoken language, nor in other dictionaries. Here we can find some obsolete words and expressions that otherwise do not appear in modern dictionaries. On page 267 there is a curious entry for *winte'* associating the lexeme with the bow and arrow (Table 1).

The weapon and hunting tool of the bow and arrow was adopted by Mesoamerican people rather late in the Postclassic Period; therefore, it is clear that if the word had occurred in the Classic Period it would have had another meaning. One possibility to consider is that it would instead have referred to an atlatl and darts

Added to T600 in the Late Classic Period is the “human face” element, which substitutes with the “goggles” in Copan in certain contexts (Figure 4a and b). These symbols (the face and the darts) pretty well describe the warriors of Teotihuacan and their Maya counterparts such as Yax K'uk' Mo' in Copan. Perhaps the best example is the marching warriors in the La Sufricaya mural (Wagner 2004).

Another inscription from the Late Classic period, the famous “bone-codex” buried in Tomb 116 of Tikal (see Callaway and Bíró 2015), narrates the starting point of Sihyaj K'ahk' to the Maya lowlands. One of the bones mentions that Yax Nun Ahin of Tikal “descends” from *Winte' Nah* (see Grube and Martin 2000:28) after he was crowned by Sihyaj K'ahk' (according to the text on Tikal Stela 31).

If this is correct, *Winte' Nah* might be a house or a building in Teotihuacan in some way associated with the army or functioning as a “warrior house.” At present we do not know the exact original meaning of *winte'* because the bow and arrow would be adopted

later in Mesoamerica. Nevertheless, we can extract the concept behind the Chol word to make a connection to war and its weapons. *Winte' Nah* was a quintessential place to which the subject lords travelled to receive the symbols of rulership, just as later in the Postclassic the kings marched to Tollan (at present we have examples from the Classic at Tikal, Copan, and Piedras Negras). Metaphorically then, we might see *Winte' Nah* as “House of War” or “House of Weapons” or simply “House of Darts.”

Ultimately *Winte' Nah* as “House of War/House of Darts” joins the list of toponyms and buildings at Teotihuacan: *Puj* “At the Place in the Vicinity of Rushes” (Stuart 2000), *Ho' Tinam Witz* “Five Cotton [i.e., Snowy] Mountains” (Stuart and Houston 2018), and so on (see Helmke and Nielsen 2014 for a summary article about place names in Teotihuacan). It is very intriguing that Claudia García Des Lauriers (2008) recently identified a “House of Darts” in the iconography of Teotihuacan. She has associated it with the Postclassic *Tlacochoalco* (in Classic Nahuatl) which appeared not just among the Aztecs but also in many other sites in the Mexican Highlands. According to her this house is strongly connected to the group of tasseled-headress merchant-warriors who are mentioned frequently in the art of Teotihuacan and other Mesoamerican sites (Paulinyi 2001).

It is interesting that in Classic Maya iconography, as Karl Taube (2004:268-273) has pointed out, the “face” would be the goggle eyes of the Teotihuacan Storm God. In one instance at Tohcok, Campeche, the iconography depicts a schematic human face in the crux of the wood bundles in a burning censer. Furthermore, he has noted the *tlacochoalli* or *tlacochoalco* (house of darts) is associated with funerary ceremonies among the Aztecs (Taube 2004:271). According to Durán (1867:102) *tlacohtli* was “vara o lanza arrojadiza, dardo, azagaya” or in English “throwing darts.” Also according to Durán (1867:155, 295, 306, 408) *tlacochoalli* or *tlacochoalco* was a temple in which the mortuary bundle was burned by priests. In addition to being a funerary temple, the House of Darts also functioned as an arsenal, or a storehouse of weapons (Des Lauriers 2008:36). It is crucial that the first ritual of the would-be emperor (*huei tlahtoani*) took place at *tlacochoalco quauhquiuauc* or “House of Darts at the Eagle Gate,” a place of transformation (Des Lauriers 2008:36-37).

Other inscriptions indicate that Yax Nun Ahin I (of Tikal), Yax K'uk' Mo' (of Copan), and Yat Ahk I (of

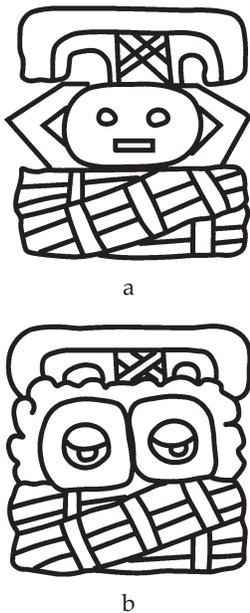


Figure 4. (a) T600-NAH; (b) T600-NAH (drawings by Péter Bíró, after Linda Schele in Schele 1992:142, Fig. 8).

Piedras Negras) all traveled to the Winte' Nah, where they received respectively "the 28 provinces," "the image of K'awil," or "the helmet of ko'haw" under the watchful eyes of an overlord at Teotihuacan. Although almost a thousand years elapsed between the Early Classic Maya and the Late Postclassic Aztecs, the above evidence strongly indicates that Winte' Nah and Tlacochoalli/Tlacochoalco are but the same structure with similar functions. As a final word, Winte' Nah, "The House of Darts," has confirmed anew the complex and intertwining connection between the Classic Maya and the later Postclassic Central Highland civilization and their rich mutual inheritance from Teotihuacan. Strikingly, it was but a single Chol dictionary gloss for *winte'* which provided the catalyst for this reanalysis of the iconographic and linguistic evidence, ultimately making possible a new interpretation of Winte' Nah as "House of Darts."

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