

# The “Stone-in-Hand” Glyph Revisited

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The “stone-in-hand” glyph has been the object of numerous attempts of decipherment. The rarity of the glyph in both ceramic and monumental inscriptions, and the absence of sufficient phonetic information, has made this a difficult task. The decipherment of this glyph is most important. In fact, the glyph appears in verbal collocations where it seems to refer to the dedication of ballcourts and hieroglyphic stairways.

Grube and Nahm [1], in their census of *wayob*’, discuss the collocations where the glyph appears and the problems in obtaining a reading for the glyph. Knowlton [2] reviewed the available information for the glyph and interpreted it as evidence for a reading of *tok*, meaning “1) quema o quemar; 2) tomar, quitar, arrebatar, usurpar, robar, privar, tomar por fuerza casas y cosas muebles; 3) defender o librar”.

In this short note I interpret the available evidence in a distinct way and propose a new reading for the glyph.

## II. THE “STONE-IN-HAND” GLYPH IN THE INSCRIPTIONS

The “stone-in-hand” glyph is most common in codex ceramics, in the name phrases of *wayob*’, and in sculptured monuments where it appears in verbal collocations associated with the dedication of ballcourts and hieroglyphic stairways. The following are, to my knowledge, all the known collocations for this glyph.

- star jaguar in K1230, K1652 and K2284 (figures 1, 2 and 3): **to-“stone-in-hand”-la-EK’ HIX** – note the *to* prefix and *la* suffix;
- *’akan* holding a stone in K791 (figure 4): **“stone-in-hand”-ni ’AKAN** – note the *ni* suffix;
- *’akan* holding a stone, in K3395 (figure 5): **“stone-in-hand”-ni ’AKAN** – note the *ni* suffix;
- another *’akan* creature, in K5070 (figure 6): **“stone-in-hand” ’AKAN** – note the absence of affixes;
- the name of the blowgunner in K4546 (figure 7): **?[K’IN] to-“stone-in-hand”-la** – notice the *to* prefix and *la* suffix;
- the examples in the Dynasty Vases (figure 9): **CHAK-[JOL]”stone-in-hand”** – notice conflation of skull and hand.
- slate sceptre in private collection in Brussels (figure 10): **“stone-in-hand”** – note the absence of affixes;
- verb collocation at Caracol stela 21 (figure 11): **“stone-in-hand”-na** – note the *na* suffix;
- verb collocation at Yaxchilan hieroglyphic stairway 2 (figure 12): **“stone-in-hand”-na-ja** – note the *na* and *ja* suffixes;
- verb collocation at Copan hieroglyphic stairway (figure 13): **ja?-ts’i-na-ja** – note the phonetic spelling and, *na* and *ja* suffixes;

- verb collocation at El Peru hieroglyphic stairway (figure 14): “**stone-in-hand**”-**na-ja** – note the *na* and *ja* suffixes;

### III. INTERPRETING THE PHONETIC DATA

Observing these examples the first inference we can make is that the “stone-in-hand” glyph has at least a CVC logographic value as it stands by itself in a number of occasions (e.g., K5070, the Brussels sceptre).

The glyph presents two distinct prefixes:

- *to* in K1230, K1652, K2284 and K4546;
- *ja* in K2068 and possibly Copan HS;

The presence of two distinct prefixes implies that at least one of them is not functioning as a phonetic complement to the logogram. In fact, it is interesting that all examples of the logogram with a *to* prefix appear in the name of the “star jaguar” and in K4546. All of these vases have some sky related iconography and creatures. The *ja* prefix however appears in two distinct contexts: a nominal sentence in the PSS of K2068 and possibly a verbal collocations at Copan HS.

As for suffixes, the glyph presents more diversity. The several possibilities are:

- *la* in K1230, K1652, K2284, K4546 and, some Dynasty Vases;
- *na-ja* at Yaxchilan HS2, Copan HS, El Peru HS;
- *na* at Caracol stela 21;
- *ts’i* at Copan HS;
- *ni* in K791 and K3395;
- *ma* in K2068;

The suffixation of the glyph, in all its verbal collocations, with *na* and *ja* may be interpreted as indicating that “stone-in-hand” is a non-CVC root that is being passivized. Here, the *-na* is the passivizer and the final *-ja*, a thematic suffix. So, the verbal collocations can be analysed as “*stone-in-hand*”-*n-aj*. Based on such a consistent use in the verbal collocations we assume henceforth that “stone-in-hand” was, at least up to some time, a non-CVC root and indeed we will provide some evidence for that.

In the example from Caracol stela 21, only the *na* suffix is present and this makes the interpretation a bit difficult as to what is going on. However, cases of underspelling in the script are common and this may be such an instance. The next two glyph blocks start with *u k’ahk’ naal?* (“the fire of the maize god”) which seems to be the patient of the action (figure 11).

The example from Copan HS, on the other hand, is most revealing. Structurally we have what seems like a phonetically transparent spelling for the “stone-in-hand” glyph. The top glyph is consistent with a *ja* syllable (or eventually with a much flattened “stone-in-hand” glyph). Next comes a bat head that commonly reads *ts’i*. Finally we get the usual *na* and *ja* suffixes as described above. This leads us to a reading for “stone-in-hand” of *jats’*. Moreover, the disharmonic *ts’i* syllable likely indicates that the root has a long vowel reading *jaats’*. This is consistent with the interpretation of the “stone-in-hand” as a non-CVC root and the observed pattern of suffixation.

The *-la* suffix can thus be seen as a straightforward case of an adjective being derived from the verbal root “stone-in-hand”. This can also nicely explain its appearance in name phrases as classifying nouns. Often, these *-la* suffixes are omitted which can explain the example in the Brussels slate sceptre and in K5070.

The context in K2068 is again a name phrase describing the owner of this codex-style vase. The *ma* suffix could either be thought as a true phonetic complement to “stone-in-hand” or, as it is so commonly used, as an agentive suffix indicating an agent that performs the “stone-in-hand” action. Thus, starting with the non-CVC root *jaats’* in its logographic form we would reconstruct *jaats’o’m* or perhaps *jaats’am*. The iconography of the vase, namely *chaahk* striking the building with an axe, agrees well with the presence of an agentive in the PSS as “the one who strikes”. Another point to consider in this example is the remarkable similarity between the “stone-in-hand” glyph and the “atl-atl-in-hand” glyph in the name of “Spearthrower Owl”, the early classic Teotihuacan ruler mentioned at Tikal (figure 15). The “atl-atl-in-hand” glyph has been recently deciphered as *jats’o’m*.

The context of “stone-in-hand” in K791 and K3395 is a name phrase and therefore *ni* might be taken as a true phonetic complement for the logogram. However, as in the case of the *to* prefix, the suffix *ni* is unique in that it appears only in the context of the name of these *wayob’* that clearly hold a stone in their hands. To explain this suffix we turn to the examples in the Dynasty Vases. Here we see the result of the conflation of a “stone-in-hand” glyph with a “skull” glyph (*jol*). Thus one might argue that the *ni* suffix is a phonetic complement to the object held in the hand (and conflated with “stone-in-hand”). A clear possibility hinted by the iconography itself is *tuun*. Also note that graphically the conflation in this case is not really evident as the *tuun* in the “stone-in-hand” is overwritten with a similar *tuun* glyph.

To explain the *to* prefix, we might again turn to the Dynasty Vases and assume that it is a phonetic complement to an object held in the hand. A possibility would be that the object is a “flint-stone” and so, the *to* might be complementing *took’* (flint). In the *took’* example, the result of the conflation would not be visible, since the flint markings are similar to the *tuun* markings and the glyphs are also quite small and thus difficult to represent accurately by the artist.

However, Kerry Hull (personal communication) suggested that the *to* might be acting as the logogram *tok*. As it turns out I find this suggestion more appealing as it matches the iconography very nicely. First observe that two kinds of signs are attached to the bodies of the “star jaguar” and of the snake: stars (*ek’* signs) and smoke scrolls (*tok*). This seems to indicate that this is a celestial creature, surrounded by stars and clouds. But how would you represent a jaguar in the sky? The conspicuous snake curled around the jaguar, but otherwise not mentioned in the jaguar’s name, may hold the key. I believe the snake is there as a conceptual representation of the sky, the Maya playing with the fact that *chan* is a name for both sky and snake. Thus interpreting the *to* scrolls as the logogram *tok* (for “cloud”) is in good agreement with the iconography. Moreover, *tok* should perhaps be read after the “stone-in-hand” glyph in the “star-jaguar” name. The maya scribes preferred to place some glyphs in specific locations sometimes even violating the usual reading order in a compound. The *tok* sign was commonly placed by scribes on top of compounds even if it was to be read afterwards. A good example for this is the name of the early classic *mutul* king, *chak tok ich’aak* which is often spelled **TOK-CHAK-ICH’AAK**.

#### IV. THE PROPOSED READING

If the above reasoning holds, then we are left with a logogram for a non-CVC verbal root *jaats’*, bearing the general meaning of striking, beating, hitting, injuring, as implied by the associated iconography.

If we check the lowland Maya languages for appropriate terms we find the following interesting entries:

- Barrera Vasquez [3]:
  - *hats'* - aporrear, golpear o herir generalmente, azotar geralmente;
  - *hats'* - (vt) chicotear, flagelar, vapular, zurrar, tundir, fustigar;
  - *haats'al* - ser azotado;
  - *haats'al tumen bo'oy* - pasarse algún miembro;
- Ch'olti' (Moran [4]):
  - *hatz'a* - (tv) beat, whip, execute by hanging;
- Ch'orti' (Wisdom [5]):
  - *hatz' kutin* - beating of the drum;
- Ch'orti' (Diccionario del Idioma Ch'orti' [7]):
  - *jatz'a* - (vt) azotar, chicotear, pegar, aporrear, clavar, perforar;
- Ch'ol (Aulie&Aulie [6]):
  - *jats'* - (vt) pegar (persona o animal); golpear (con objeto);

Notice that the above entries present *jats'* as transitive verbal root which is fundamental to the above reasoning. Moreover, some entries from Barrera Vasquez also hint that the root might originally have been *jaats'*. The loss of vowel length is an attested process in Maya languages and in the inscriptions and this may explain why most current entries in the dictionaries for the root have a single vowel. Assuming the reading of *jaats'* for the logogram we would have the following translations for the collocations:

- the “star jaguar”: *jaats'al tok ek' hix* (“striking cloud star jaguar”);
- the blowgunner in K4546: *? k'in jaats'al tok ajaw?* (“? sun striking cloud lord?”);
- the *way* in K791 and K3395: *jaats'(al) tuun 'akan* (“striking stone tobacco/wine god”);
- the *way* in K5070: *jaats'(al) 'akan* (“striker tobacco/wine god”);
- the examples in the Dynasty Vases: *chak jaats'al jol* (“great striking head”);
- the example in the PSS of K2068: *jaats'oom* (“stricker”);
- the verbal collocations: *jaats'naj* (“was striked”, “was beaten”).

The above entries give appropriate translations for most of the contexts. However, it is not at all clear how these might be applied to the verbal collocations where they represent an action performed to ballcourts. A possible explanation comes to mind if we view these collocations as specifying ballcourt dedications. Ballcourts usually carried round stone markers much similar to altars. Perhaps the dedication of ballcourts was performed by setting these markers, that is, (symbolically) striking the floor of ballcourt with them.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

In this short note I reviewed the occurrences of the “stone-in-hand” glyph in the inscriptions. From this analysis I conclude that a reading of *jaats'* is consistent with the phonetic evidence and provides a straightforward interpretation of the known contexts for the glyph as well as of the associated iconography.

## VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### FIGURES



Fig. 1. Detail of K1230



Fig. 2. Detail of K1652



Fig. 3. Detail of K2284



Fig. 4. Detail of K791



Fig. 5. Detail of K3395



Fig. 6. Detail of K5070



Fig. 7. Detail of K4546



Fig. 8. Detail of K2068



Fig. 9. Detail of K5863



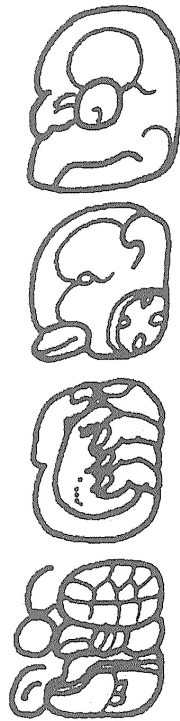


Fig. 10. Detail of Brussels Sceptre

Fig. 11. Detail of Caracol stela 21

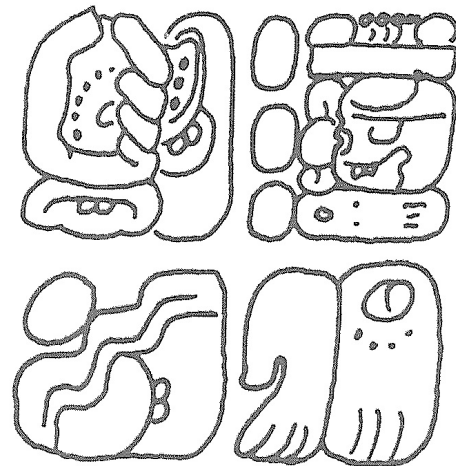


Fig. 12. Detail of Yaxchilan HS2



Fig. 13. Detail of Copan HS

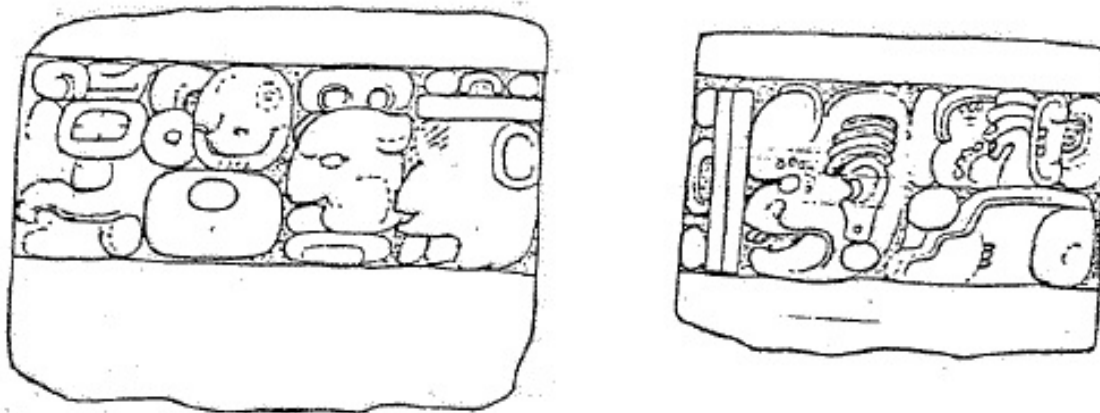


Fig. 14. Detail of El Peru HS



Fig. 15. The "atlatl-in-hand" glyph