

A RARE FORM OF THE "SI" SYLLABLE

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Twenty years ago, David Stuart (personal communication, 2006) noticed an intriguing substitution in the parentage statement *u sij u chit ch'ab*, at Yaxchilan, Lintel 10. Here, the usual T57, **si** syllable, is replaced with the head of a rodent in the spelling **u-si-ji** (Figure 1). The passage, transcribed as **u-RODENT-ji-u-CH'AB[CHIT]**, may be compared to a similar statement from Machaquila, Stela 11, where we have **u-si-ji-u-chi-ti-CH'AB-ba** (Figure 2).

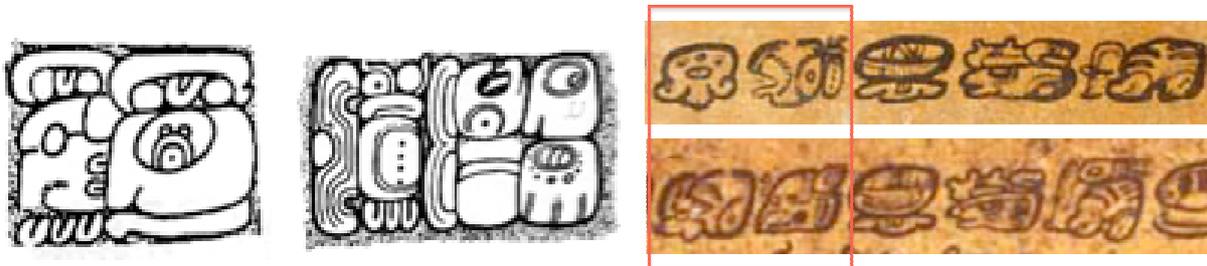


Figure 1. Detail of Figure 2. Detail of Figure 3. Parallel passages in two vessels (photos Yaxchilan, Lintel 10 Machaquila, Stela 11 by Justin Kerr, 5465, K8393, www.mayavase.com) (drawing by Ian (drawing by Ian Graham, Graham, in Graham in Graham 1967). 1977).

Many years later, Alexandre Tokovinine (personal communication, 2006) and the author independently noticed a similar substitution in the Primary Standard Sequences of two vessels: K5465 (Figure 3, top) and K8393 (Figure 3, bottom). Both passages name the same individual, the owner of the vessels. The first two collocations start with the glyph T628, which probably reads **CH'ICH'** (or **K'IK'**), for "blood" (Stuart, 2002). The next glyph is the head variant for T128, a glyph that reads **TI'**, for "mouth, edge" (Stuart, 1998). Thus, in K5465, the first two blocks read **CH'ICH' TI'-si**. The **-si** suffix attached to the **TI'** logogram works as the absolutive marker **-is**, present when body parts are named outside possessive constructs (Zender, 2004). As for K8393, the first two blocks also span the same part of the

name and read **CH'ICH'-TI'** RODENT. The context is well controlled and it is clear that the rodent head seen in K8393 directly substitutes for the **-si** in K5465.

Another example in a similar context can be found in a bone artifact in the collections of the Dallas Museum of Art (Figure 4). The fragmentary text is part of a name and reads **TI'?-CH'ICH'-RODENT BLEEDING.JAGUAR 6-NAH-HIX MO'-BALAM**. As in the previous example, the rodent head sign should be working as an absolute marker, for either **TI'** or **CH'ICH'**, both body parts.

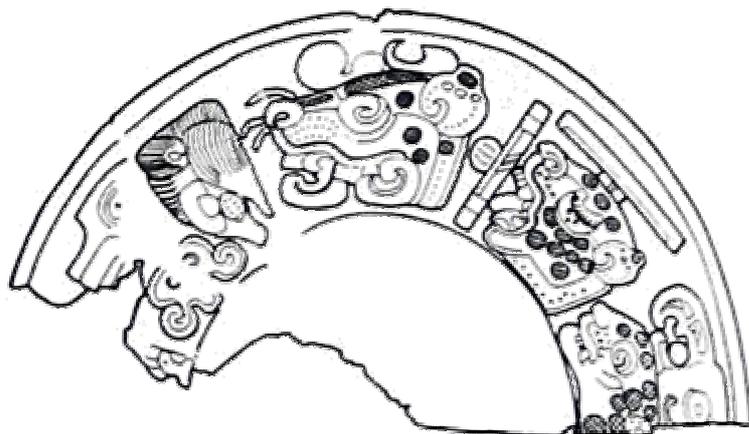


Figure 4. Detail of bone artifact DMA 1968.12 (drawing by Nikolai Grube, in Mayer, 1989).

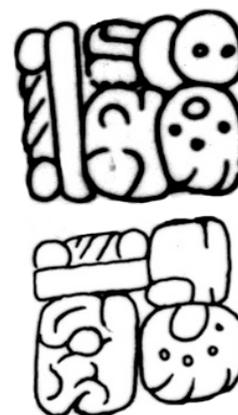


Figure 5. *aj sik'ab* spellings from Palenque (drawings by Linda Schele, in Schele, n.d.).

It is also possible that the collocation **CH'ICH'-TI'** works as a single logogram that stands for a body part, perhaps **PUKSIK'AL** ("material heart"), which again explains the absolute marker that invariably follows (Albert Davletshin, cited in Beliaev, 2002). A similar pattern has been observed for the logograms for **UCH'** (or **UK'**, "to drink"), where the water logogram **HA'** is combined with **TI'**, and for **WE'** ("to eat"), where the tamale logogram **WAAJ** is combined with **TI'** (Stuart et al., 1999).

Another important example (Alexandre Tokovinine, personal communication, 2006) can be found in an *incensario* from Palenque, which names a character called *aj sik'ab*. His name is alternatively written in the engraved inscription as **AJ-si-k'a-ba** and **AJ-RODENT-k'a-ba** (Figure 5). Again, clearly, the rodent head is playing the part of the **si** (T57 form) syllable in the first example.

A final example of this rare glyph can be found in the incised text on the back of an unprovenanced jade celt (Figure 6) but, unlike the previous examples, the analysis of this collocation is somewhat problematic. In this context, the collocation **u-RODENT-ji** is often assumed to read *u kabij*, and **RODENT** a form of the syllable **ji** (Dmitri Beliaev, personal communication, 2010). However, in the cases where the rodent head variant of the syllable **ji** appears in such a statement, it is conflated with the logogram **KAB** (Figure 7). As a result, the rodent heads in *u kabij* statements can be recognized as **ji** syllables due to the **KAB** markings they carry. Given the level of detail with which the glyphs have been drawn in this celt, it is hard to believe that the scribe would choose not to represent these markings in the **RODENT** glyph, if *u kabij* was the intended meaning. Moreover, if **RODENT** was indeed the **ji** syllable in this example, then the spelling would also be redundant, with **u-[KAB]ji-ji**, and

while there are examples of this redundancy in the script (e.g. Figure 7, Palenque Temple XXI) they are rare.

Thus, with this example, I propose an alternative view for this collocation and tentatively interpret RODENT as another example of the **si** syllable.



Figure 6. Possible **u-si-ji** collocation in the text of an unprovenanced jade celt (drawing by John Montgomery, in Montgomery, n.d.).



Figure 7. Left to right, top to bottom: **u-[KAB]ji** (Palenque, TI, East Panel, drawing by Simon Martin), **u-[KAB]ji** (Naranjo HS, Step VI, drawing by Ian Graham), **u-[KAB]ji-ji-ya** (Palenque, Temple XXI, drawing by David Stuart), and **u-[KAB]ji-ya** (Palenque, Temple XIX, drawing by David Stuart).

The text starts with the date for the end of the 9th Baktun (9.0.0.0.0), 8 Ajaw 13 Keh, with G9 in between, and then continues:

u-TZUTZ-li 9-PIK OCH-RATTLE-NAL-la u-RODENT-ji ma-ye[se] CHAN-na-YOP'AT

u tzutzuul 9 pik och [?] u sij masey chan yop'aat

"(it is) the completion of the 9th baktun, entered ? the gift of Masey Chan Yop'aat"

After the date, the text begins with a reference to the completion of the 9th Baktun. Then, another sentence begins with the verb **OCH** ("to enter") followed by a toponym **RATTLE-NAL-la**. The subject then follows as **u-RODENT-ji ma-ye[se] CHAN-na-YOP'AT**. The occurrence of RODENT in this context is consistent with a syllabic value **si**, giving the spelling **u-si-ji** for *u sij*, "the gift of". The gift owner is Masey Chan Yop'aat¹. So, it appears that on the occasion of the end of the 9th

1 The main part of the name is formed by a syllable **ma** and the head of the toothy old **ye** God, the later having what may be a **se** syllable infixed in the eye (it could also be a **cha** syllable, although I find the first possibility more likely given some substitution patterns of the **se** syllable namely in the month name *Kasew*). That the final syllable in the spelling is **ye** is clear from the text of a similar celt naming the same individual.

baktun, the gift of Masey Chan Yop'aat entered a place whose name is given by the undeciphered RATTLE glyph (David Stuart, personal communication, 2010). The gift mentioned in the text might actually refer to the jade celt itself, objects otherwise known as *kaywak* from other contexts (Houston, 1998).

Final Remarks

The proposed head variant for the syllable **si** is relatively rare, and seems most frequent in Early to Middle Classic texts. The later examples tend to be almost indistinguishable from other rodents in the script, especially the head variant of syllable **ji**. It is often the case that the iconography of a given syllabic sign hints at its origin (e.g. the syllable **mo** as the eye decoration of a macaw **MO'**). So, one might expect RODENT to depict the head of some critter with the name starting with syllable **si**. One possible contender is the coati or pizote (Marc Zender, personal communication, 2010) which features the long snout observed in the glyphs and that is called *sis* in many Mayan languages (Kaufman, 2003), albeit it is apparently not attested in the Cholan-Tzeltalan branch. Interestingly, however, the Greater-Tzeltalan word for coati is **kohtom* which is likely a loan from Totonakan (Kaufman, 2003) and it is thus possible that *sis* could have been used in Classic Mayan and later replaced (Marc Zender and Harri Kettunen, personal communication, 2010).

Finally, although the above examples are fully consistent with a syllabic value of **si** for RODENT, the number of known examples is not large and it remains to be seen whether the glyph is used in the same contexts as the common T57 form (Stephen Houston and Marc Zender, personal communication, 2006).

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