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## Glyph Dwellers



Report 1

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### A Venus god as patron of Quiriguá

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This note concerns a title that occurs frequently in hieroglyphic texts at Quiriguá. The title is composed of three syllables. The first (**ja**) and last (**ta**) have generally undisputed values, while the central sign has proven difficult to decipher. This grapheme is the T77 "wing," which most commonly occurs in the "wing-quincunx" expressions on the Primary Standard Sequence of Classic-period vases. Substitutions of the T77 for the T669 **k'a** "fist" in the Copán Hieroglyphic Stairs indicate its reading as **k'a** (Schele and Loooper 1996:20-21). The wing also conflates with other **k'a** syllables, such as T128. Therefore, in the "wing-quincunx", the T77 gives the **k'a** element of *yuk'ab'*, "his drinking vessel."

In sum, the title reads *jak'at*. Since useful translations of this word do not appear in Mayan dictionaries, we must look to its context to suggest an interpretation. Elsewhere (Loooper 1994, 1995), I proposed that this title refers to either a patron god of Quiriguá or a noble. Several contexts of the *jak'at* title now suggest that it was associated with Venus, which probably was venerated as a supernatural patron of Quiriguá.

The *jak'at* title occurs six times at Quiriguá: on Stela D (B24), Altar O' (C'2), Altar P' (W2), Str. 1B-1 step (I1, T1), and Str. 1B-1 cornice (glyph 27)(fig. 1). In all but one of these examples, it is named *yitah*, "the companion of," a person. Where readable, this person is identifiable as the king of Quiriguá, either K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yo At (14th ruler) or Jade Sky (16th ruler). The one example not preceded by a *yitah* expression (Altar P') names the *jak'at* as the actor in an unknown event. At several Maya sites, such as Tikal, patron deities are named as "companions of" the king (Houston and Stuart 1996).

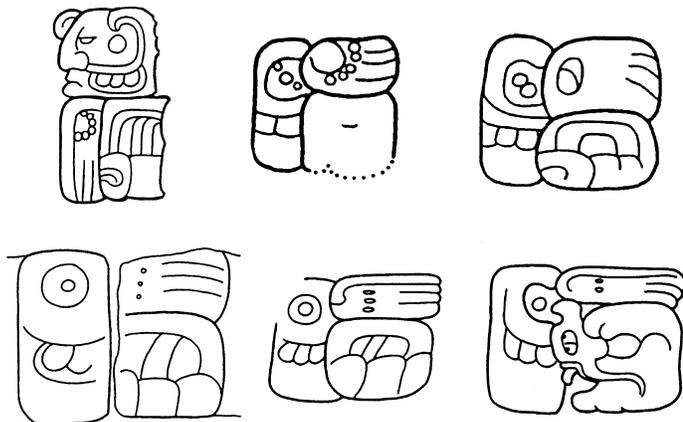


Figure 1. Examples of the *jak'at* title at Quiriguá: a. St. D, B24; b. Alt. O', C'2; c. Alt. P', W2; d. Str. 1B-1, cornice glyph 27; e. Str. 1B-1 step, I1; f. Str. 1B-1 step, T1 (drawing (c) Matthew G. Looper).

The key to the interpretation of *jak'at* as a supernatural being occurs in the last dated inscriptions at Quiriguá, associated with Structure 1B-1 (fig. 2). In addition to the inscriptions carved on the steps of the three rooms of this building, the cornice of Str. 1B-1 bore a lengthy text around its entire circumference. When it was discovered, the 1B-1 cornice had already fallen completely and was possibly looted in antiquity. I have documented at least 84 glyph blocks from the cornice (57 stones), which represent perhaps only half of the original number. Nevertheless, on both the step and cornice of Str. 1B-1, the *jak'at* title is seen paired with a title that consists of a T229 **a**, either T753 "k'ank'in dog" or T559/560 "gourd", and a T168 **AJAW** superfix. Although Closs (1979; 1989; 1994) read the main sign of this title **TZUL**, **ki** signs complement the "gourd" on both the Str. 1B-1 bench (glyph J) and the cornice (glyph 28), implying that the main sign reads **TZUK**. (As the haab' period K'ank'in, the "dog" and "gourd" logographs can also read **UNIW**.) Substitutions in another title at Quiriguá and Copán indicate that the T559/560 "gourd" can be logographic **TZUK** in addition to syllabic **tzu** (fig. 3).

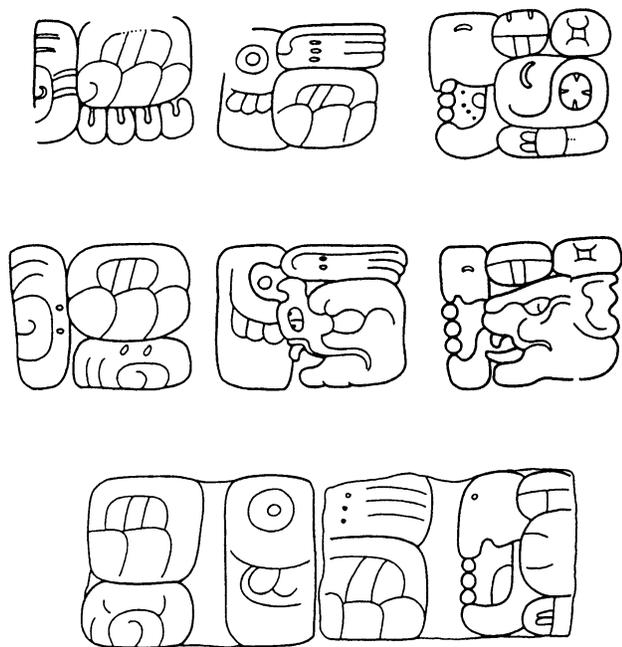


Figure 2. Str. 1B-1 text, a. step, H1-J01; b. step, S1-U2; c. cornice, 26-28 (drawing (c) Matthew G.Looper).

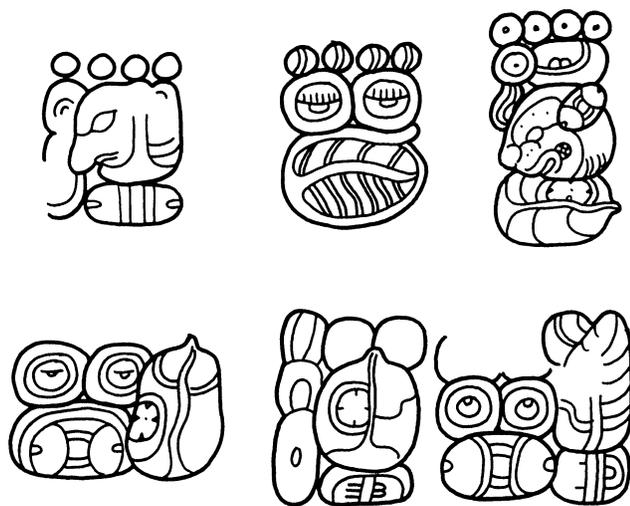


Figure 3. Variants of the *chante ch'ok tzuk* "four sprout partitions/groves" title: a. QRG St. J, G8; b. CPN St. 7, C10; c. CPN St. I, C2; d. CPN St. 6, B8; e. CPN St. H, B4; f. CPN St. 12 C4 (drawing (c) Matthew G. Looper).

Important to this discussion is the identification by Closs (1979; 1989; 1994) of the *aj tzuk ajaw* title on Str. 1B-1 as a Venus title, which also appears in the Dresden Codex Venus tables. Closs confirmed this identification by noting that the Structure 1B-1 *aj tzuk ajaw* is cited in the context of the date 9.18.19.16.0 (19 May 810), which was close to a maximum elongation of Venus as Eveningstar. Closs also identified the *aj tzuk ajaw* Venus title on Quiriguá Stela E (D20b), but could not link it to a Venus event (fig. 4). However, close examination of the monument shows that the verb for the event is composed of the *u-* pronoun, a **b'u** syllable, and the sign recently deciphered by Stephen Houston as **t'u** (C20b). Thus, the verb reads *ub'ut'* or "it covers/fills". The patient, which occurs at D20a includes a personification head that looks like a

moon sign. This verb might refer to the action of Venus as an agent of the solar eclipse which was expected for this date (9.17.0.0.0), causing the moon to cover the sun (see also Closs 1994). On this day, Venus was still 16 days from the heliacal rising, as recorded at Copán Temple 11. Thus, the sun set with the moon and Venus within a few degrees.

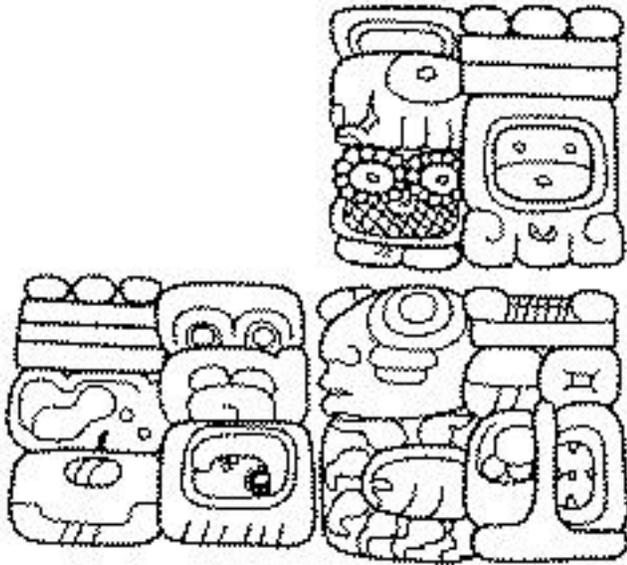


Figure 4. Quiriguá Stela E text, D19-D20 (drawing (c) Matthew G. Loper).

Zoomorph G mentions another event at Quiriguá which involved the *aj tzuk ajaw*, taking place on the date of death of the king K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yoat on 9.17.14.13.2 (31 July 785)(fig. 5). The event is *yilaj*"he witnesses," followed by a series of entities that includes the Venus god name. Interestingly, on this date, Venus hovered above the western horizon at sunset, less than 2 degrees from Mercury. The two planets reached minimum separation (~0.5 degrees) four days previously (27 July 785). The *aj tzuk ajaw* may appear in this text because the Eveningstar was had been in conjunction with Mercury shortly before the death of the king.

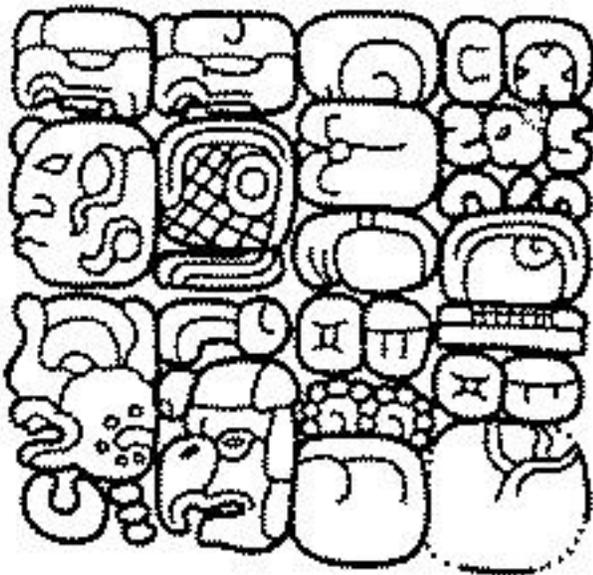


Figure 5. Quiriguá Zoo. G text, G'1-H'2 (drawing (c) Matthew G.Looper).

Because the *aj tzuk ajaw* title is used in conjunction with the *jak'at* title on Str. 1B-1, *jak'at* might also be a Venus title. This hypothesis is supported by the texts of Altars O' and P', which name the *jak'at* alone in association with a Venus date (fig. 6). In both texts, the *jak'at* is associated with the date 9.17.12.7.8 9 Lamat 1 Sek, which is connected in turn to the date 9.17.7.8.7 8 Manik' 5 Yaxk'in (3 June 778). This second date is close to maximum elongation of Venus, occurring almost exactly 20 Venus cycles before the event recorded on Str. 1B-1. The text of Altar P' makes the relationship between the *jak'at* and the Venus day clear, by locking the *jak'at* event to the 9 Manik' 5 Yaxk'in date at the very end of the text.

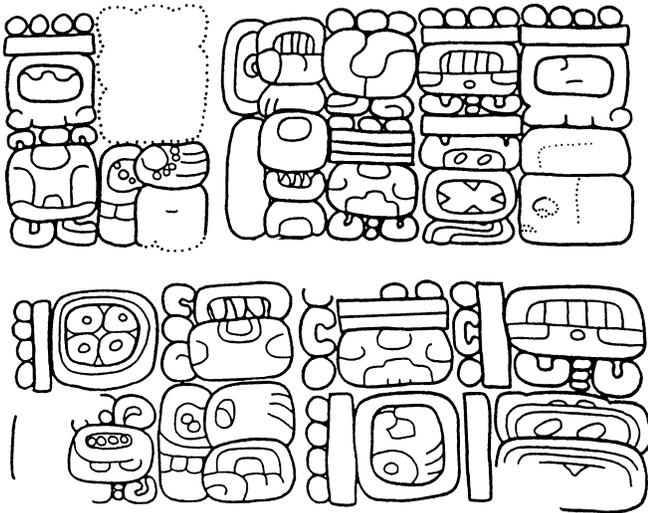


Figure 6. Quiriguá Altar O' text, C'2-E'1 and Altar P' text, W2-X2 (drawing (c) Matthew G.Looper).

The *jak'at* is also mentioned on Stela D, here, as the companion of the king K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yoat (fig.7). The date associated with this event was 9.16.15.0.0 (19 Feb. 766), when Venus was near last appearance as Morningstar. As I have discussed elsewhere (Looper 1995), the imagery of the monument's north face may reflect astronomy associated with the period ending (fig. 8). The name of the monument, *k'an te' na chan yo at* (D17-C18), includes the name of the Maize Tree conformation of the Milky Way, *k'an te' na* (see Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:85, fig. 2:17). On the night of dedication at sundown, the Maize Tree conformation of the Milky Way was visible. In addition, the king wears sun-marked earflares. Atop the doubled celestial birds of his headdress is a skull with moon signs emerging from the mouth. This image may refer to the identification of the day as the first of the skull lunation in Glyph C of the lunar series. Under the king's feet is an image which I previously identified as the Jaguar God of the Underworld, but which now may be more securely identified as a Venus/sun deity. The same deity is shown on Stela F at Copán, where he is given various titles including the *aj tzuk ajaw*.

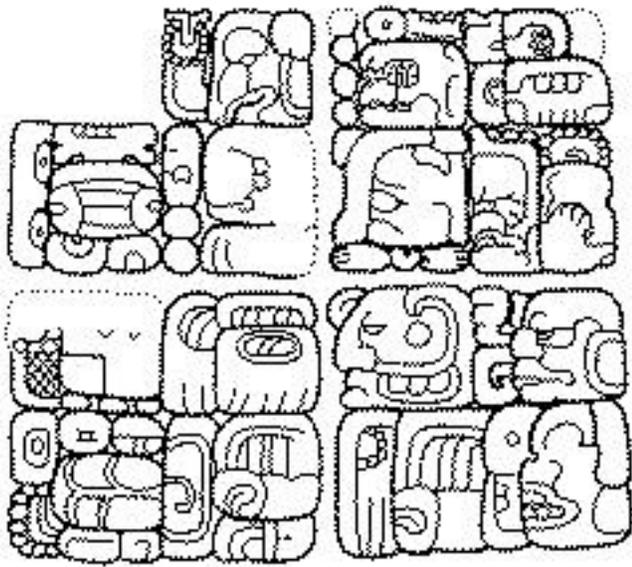


Figure 7. Quiriguá Stela D text, A23-B24 (drawing (c) Matthew G.Looper).

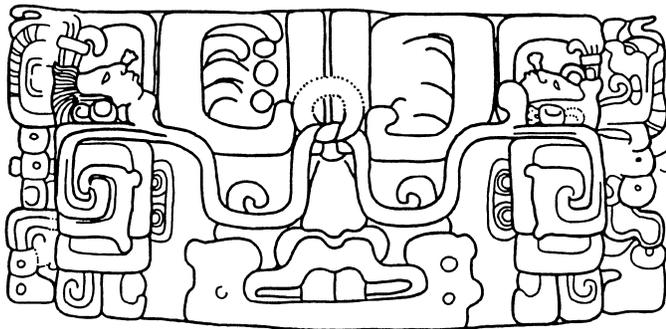


Figure 8. Quiriguá Stela D north, detail (drawing (c) Matthew G.Looper)

On Quiriguá Stela D north, the deity bears a *sa* syllable on its forehead, which, as far as I know, is unique in Maya texts and images. Although it is not clear to me exactly what is the reference of this *sa* sign, it might be related to a word such as *satay*, which is used for "lost" in the Palenque Temple of Inscriptions east panel (O8, O9) (Grube 1996:6). Thus, the north face of Stela D may complement the reference to the *jak'at* Venus god that appears in the text, which was located below the horizon at sunset and was "lost" into the sun's corona at dawn (~5 degrees altitude). The reference to the *jak'at* on Stela D is significant, in that it appears in association with a Morningstar event. Thus, while the *aj tzuk ajaw* title may name an Eveningstar deity, the *jak'at* is associated with both Morningstar and Eveningstar, and may be a more general name for Venus.

At Quiriguá, as at Copán, there is evidence that from an early date, Venus was a celestial body of great importance. As pointed out by Kelley (1977:70), the ruler on Quiriguá Altar L wears a star sign in his headdress. It is also possible that the *aj tzuk ajaw* title appears on this altar at G3, where it is mentioned as the entity that is witnessed (*ilaj*) (fig. 9).



Figure 9. Quiriguá Altar L, detail (drawing (c) Matthew G.Looper).

The date of this monument was 9.11.0.0.0, which was maximum elongation of Eveningstar. At Copán, the ruler K'ak' Uk'a Nahb' K'awil (Smoke Imix God K) celebrated this coincidence with an elaborate program of monuments, and is even cited on Quiriguá Altar L (Fash and Stuart 1992:158-159). At Copán, many dynastic events were timed to Venus events, suggesting that the planet may have been a special royal patron there (Schele 1991; Schele and Fash 1991; Schele and Larios 1991; Schele and Grube 1992). It would seem that the close ties between Copán and Quiriguá throughout most of their history extended to the two cities' sharing of Venus as a supernatural patron. Interestingly, however, the *jak'at* does not appear at Copán and, therefore, seems to be a special title for the local patron of Quiriguá. The prominence of the *aj tzuk ajaw* title at Quiriguá may also point to a localized cult of this avatar. One wonders if the name of Quiriguá, which is composed of the "gourd" sign, is related to the name of its particular patron deity.

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