



Glyph Dwellers

Report 50

January 2017

Deer Signs in Two Isthmian Texts

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The later of the two initial series dates on La Mojarra Stela 1 is 8.5.16.9.7. According to a current correlation for Maya long count dates, this corresponds to the Gregorian day July 13, 156 CE. In the Mesoamerican sacred calendar of 260 days it is the day 5 Deer. On the La Mojarra monument, the space to the left of the animal head has been damaged so that no coefficient can be seen. The head of the animal is enclosed in a cartouche, similar to day signs following the long count on the earlier date on the La Mojarra, and on several other early texts: the Tuxtla Statuette, the Chiapa de Corzo Stela 2, and Tres Zapotes Stela C. The head is slightly larger and more equal in height and width (more square) than the majority of other signs in the text, most of which tend to be wider than they are high.

George Stuart (Winfield Capitaine 1988:14) remarks cautiously that the animal head that appears beneath the long count date cannot be positively identified. Most scholars, however, including Justeson and Kaufman (2001), accept the head as the day sign for the expected day 5 Deer. The sign shows an elongated ear along the right side, a curl at the nose and mouth, three dots in a triangular shape beneath the eye, and two lines curving downward from the top of the eye (**Fig. 1a**). A sign on the Feldspar Mask (Houston and Coe 2003; Macri 2016), though not enclosed in a cartouche, more angular, and a bit more naturalistic, also has a line circling over and around the back of the eye, and three dots in a triangle under the eye. While neither the lines around the eye, nor markings under the eye cannot be said to be strictly speaking diagnostic nor definitive features, they are nevertheless typical.

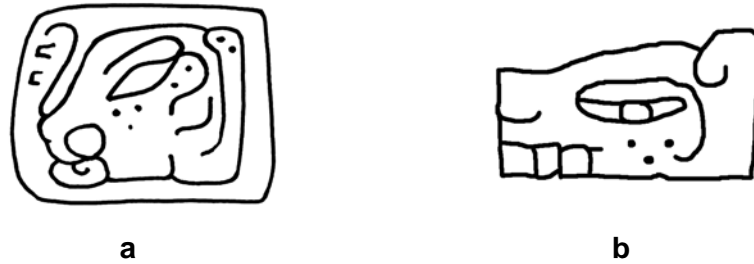


Fig. 1. a. La Mojarra Stela 1, M16 (after Winfield Capitaine 1998:19); b. Feldspar Mask F4 (Macri 2016).

Figure 2 shows several examples of deer heads in Mesoamerican art and scripts: a. a depiction of a deer from the Classic period Maya; b. and c., the name of 8 Deer from the Mixtec Codex Zouche-Nuttall; d. a glyphic image shown above the sign for corn (tamales) from the Postclassic Madrid Codex, and e. a calendrical sign from the Codex Cospi.

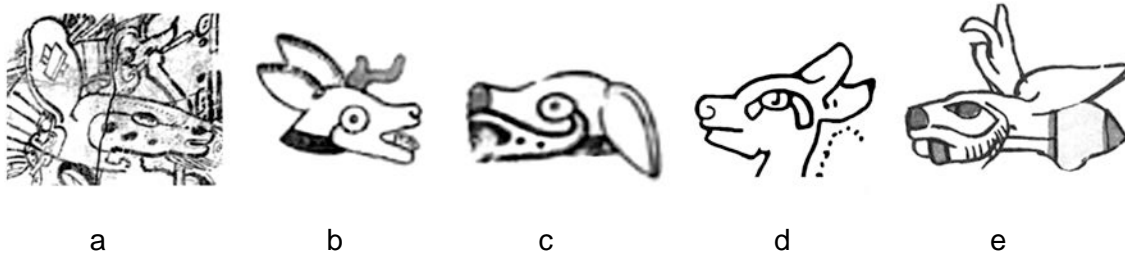


Fig. 2. a. Detail of a deer on a Maya vase (Kerr 1248, photograph by Justin Kerr); b, c. Day glyphs in the name 8 Deer (Anders, Jansen, Pérez Jiménez 1992:43, 57); d. Deer head over corn (Anders 1967:78), e. Day sign in Codex Cospi (Anders, Jansen, van der Loo 1994:29). All images redrawn by the author.

On the feldspar mask, the animal sign in question is preceded by the number nine. This may indicate a calendar round date, but given the lack of accompanying calendrical information, it may not refer to a date at all, but perhaps to a person named 9 Deer (Fig. 1b). A comparison of the two Isthmian signs, offers support for identifying both animal heads as equivalent, representing a deer. With this identification, a sign that Houston and Coe listed as previously unknown, appears to already have been identified on the La Mojarra Stela (MS154 in Macri and Stark 1993).

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Glyph Dwellers is an occasional publication of the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project at California State University, Chico, California. Its purpose is to make available recent discoveries about ancient Maya culture, history, iconography, and Mayan historical linguistics deriving from the project.

Funding for the Maya Hieroglyphic Database Project is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, grants #RT21365-92, RT21608-94, PA22844-96, the National Science Foundation, grants #SBR9710961 and IBSS1328928, the Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis, and the Department of Art and Art History, California State University, Chico.

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ISSN 1097-3737