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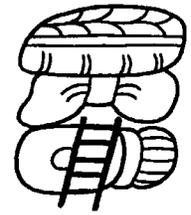
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# Glyph Dwellers



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## *The Quatrefoil T510cd as ‘Cave’*

MATTHEW G. LOOPER

Thompson’s hieroglyph catalog lists several signs as variants of T510 ‘Lamat-Venus’ (Thompson 1962:108-110). Variants ‘a’ and ‘b’ are widely recognized as reading **èek’/ek’** (Yukatekan/Ch’olan), referring to ‘star, planet,’ or specifically ‘Venus.’ T510cd, however, is usually considered a distinct grapheme (see Schele 1987). Instead of representing a star, it depicts a concentric quatrefoil, usually with ‘kawak’ markings (fig. 1).



a. CPN Alt. G1 A3



b. DPL St. 15 B7

Figure 1. Variants of T510cd (author drawings).

There has been little agreement concerning the reading or interpretation of T510cd. Peter Mathews and Linda Schele suggested that the sign depicts an eccentric flint (Justeson 1984:339). Later, in view of the varied contexts of the sign in monument names, Schele (1987) proposed a tentative logographic value as **tun** ‘stone’. Noting its frequent associations with hieroglyphs for ‘water’ and its use as a basal register in iconography, Schele and Grube (1990) suggested another possible interpretation of the sign as **nab**, which they took to be a reference to plaza spaces.

There are several problems with these interpretations. First, there is no substitution or complementation evidence in support of either the **nab** or **tun** readings. T510cd does not substitute for the usual “tun” sign, T528. In addition, the sign is never given a prefix, but does occasionally bear a postfixed **nV** complement. On Dos Pilas Stela 15 B7, T510cd has a T23 **na** complement (fig. 2). On Copán Altar S J1, the sign is postfixed by T116 **ni** (fig. 3). Copán Altar G1 A3 has T510cd followed by **li**, which probably functions as the noun suffix *-il* (fig. 4). The complementation patterns do not support a **nab** reading.

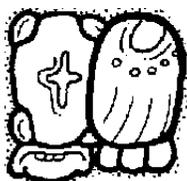


Figure 2. DPL St. 15 B7  
(after Houston 1993:fig. 3-25).

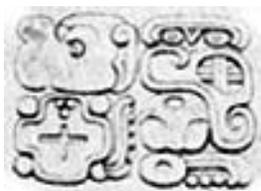


Figure 3. CPN Alt. S J1, K1  
(after Maudslay 1889-1902:pl. 94).



Figure 4. CPN Alt. G1 A3  
(after Maudslay 1889-1902:pl. 52b).

The iconic value of the sign suggests an alternative interpretation. In particular, the quatrefoil shape and prominent ‘kawak’ markings are consistent with the iconography of caves in Maya art (Bassie-Sweet 1991; 1996; Stone 1995; Tate 1980; Taylor 1978). In fact, Davoust (1995:582) proposed a reading for the sign as **witz tun**, which he translated as ‘entrée du monde souterrain’. While I do not accept this literal decipherment, his iconic identification seems correct. In my view, a reading of the glyph as **ch'é'en/ch'en** fits not only the iconic significance of the sign, but also the final consonant suggested by the complementation pattern.

In both Yukatekan and Ch’olan languages, this term refers to caves and openings in the earth in general:

Yukatek	<i>ch'é'en</i>	well (Bricker et al. 1998:82)
pCh’olan	* <i>ch'en</i>	cave (Kaufman and Norman 1984:119)

Further, the glyph appears in contexts that suggest that the ‘cave’ reading is metaphorical. For example, on Quiriguá Altar O’ at O’2 and probably P’2, T510cd appears twice in the name sequence for the altar (fig. 5). Clearly, in this case, the glyph refers to the main image of the altar, which depicts the lightning deity Chahk leaping out of a cave which is rendered as a ‘kawak’-marked half-quatrefoil (see Stone 1983). However, the glyph also refers to altars in other forms. On Copán Altar S, the glyph refers to the altar, which is rendered in a square shape. On Copán Altar G1, T510cd is preceded by a ‘snake’ sign, a clear reference to the form of the altar itself, which is a legged serpent effigy. These examples suggest that if T510cd had a primary reading of **ch'é'en / ch'en**, ‘cave’, it could be used metaphorically to refer to ‘altar’.

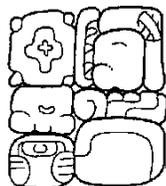


Figure 5. QRG Alt. O’ O’02  
(author drawing).

This interpretation of T510cd also has implications for the understanding of combinations of T510cd and ‘water’ signs. On Seibal Stela 8 C5, a sign that is probably the crosshatched imix **ha** ‘water’ is infixed into T510cd. On Dos Pilas Stela 15 D7, however, the water sign follows T510cd, suggesting that the compound may read **ch’é’en ha**’ or **ch’en ha**’, ‘cave of water’ or ‘cenote’ (fig. 2). As Stuart and Houston (1994:33) observed, the combination of signs in this case refers to the main plaza at Machaquilá, which is actually framed by stones arranged in a quatrefoil pattern. However, this should not be taken to mean that T510cd itself refers to plazas. In each of its occurrences in the Petexbatun, the crosshatched imix and quatrefoil appear together. Similarly, at Copán, in iconographic contexts on Temple 18 and Altar Z, the signs are combined. This distribution suggests that only by combining the two signs could plazas be referenced. In addition, it is not at all certain that this diaphrase had the same meaning outside the local contexts of Machaquilá and Copán. Nonetheless, the appearance of the quatrefoil grapheme in varied contexts may indicate that the Maya had a conceptual relationship between altars and plazas.

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