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T855: A Numeral Classifier

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Glyph T855 is a cartouche containing a bar with two dots above it-the number seven (fig. 1). It occurs only once, on Aguateca Stela 7 B2, in a period ending expression, "11 Ahau 18 Mac, the eighteenth _" (fig. 2). It follows the number 18 in place of an expected k'atun sign. Thompson (1962:396) recognized that it must have signified 'k'atun'.



Figure 1. T855 (drawing by Matthew Looper).



Figure 2. Aguateca Stela 7, A1-B2 (detail from Rubbing #T23742 by Merle Greene Robertson 1995).

John Justeson and Peter Mathews suggested that T855 may be a "sportive writing" of k'atun with the two dots representing the word *ka'* 'two' and tun represented by the bar for 'five'.

A useful working hypothesis is the principle that any glyph immediately following a number should be looked at as a likely numeral classifier. Are there any classifiers homophonous with the Ch'olan word for 'seven', *huk (Kaufman & Norman 1984:138)?

Attinasi (1973:329) does in fact record *uk* 'a short period of time' and gives two examples of it, both in the position of a numeral classifier suffixed to the number one: *hum-uk* 'while' and *ti hum-uk* 'in an hour, in a while'. Aulie & Aulie (1996:60) list *jumuk'* as 'ratito'. The final consonant in Aulie & Aulie's entry is glottalized, but it is not glottalized in any of Attinasi's three examples.

This unique glyph provides evidence that the Ch'ol numeral classifier *uk* was used in the Pasión area during the late Classic Period. A motive for this scribal improvisation may have been that the three bars and three dots for the number 18 left little room for a larger, more detailed sign. As a classifier for 20 years (of 360 days) it probably meant 'time period' without the sense of 'a short period of time' recorded for Ch'ol of today.

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