

Problematic Emblem Glyphs: Examples from Altar de Sacrificios, El Chorro, Río Azul, and Xultun

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IN 1958 Heinrich Berlin identified a set of Maya hieroglyphs with specific links to Classic Period sites or dynasties (Fig. 1). He used the neutral term, "Emblem Glyph," to designate each member of this set, purposely avoiding any label (such as "Lineage Glyph" or "Toponym") that would imply a false certainty of interpretation of precise function. As elements of the typical Emblem Glyph, Berlin listed (1) a variable main sign specifying locale or dynasty; (2) T168, read as AHAW by most epigraphers, following Lounsbury (1973); and (3) the so-called "water group," which arguably represented royal blood or its metaphorical extension, with the sense of "dynastic bloodline" or "royal lineage" (Seler [1902-23] 1967:3,649; Barthel 1968:168; and, more conclusively, Stuart 1984).

Many variations seem to exist on the Emblem Glyph theme, particularly in the area of affixation. The water group, for example, may be omitted in the case of Emblem Glyphs that are part of female names (Proskouriakoff 1961). In addition, Emblem Glyphs with the water-group element appear only rarely in inscriptions of the 8th Baktun. The increased use of this affix in the 9th Baktun suggests subtle developments in the meaning of the Emblem Glyph and, possibly, in the benefits of individuals holding the title.

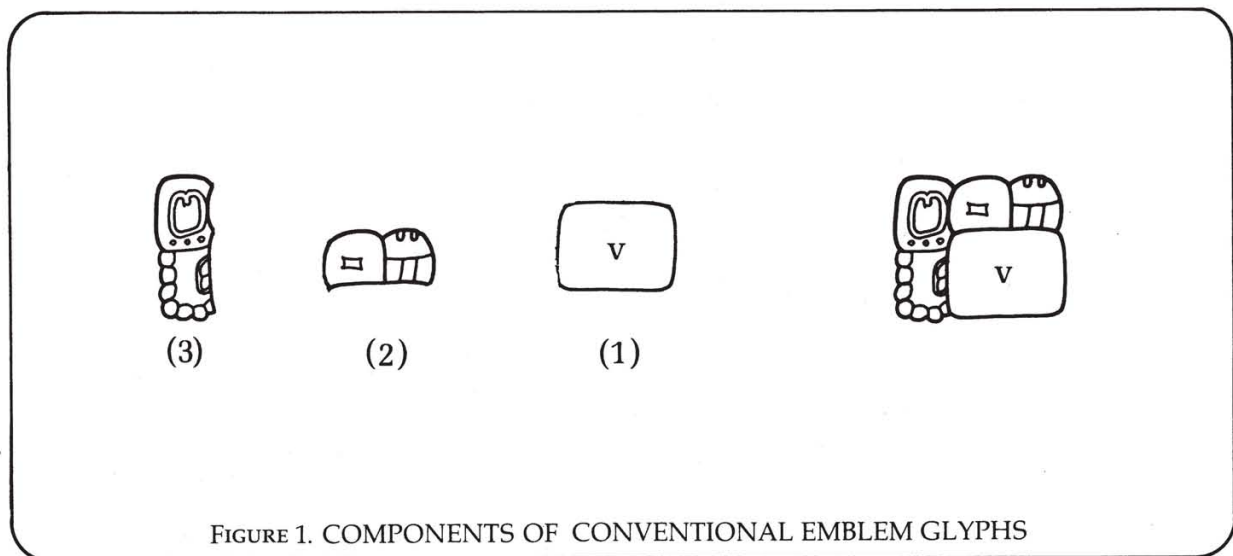
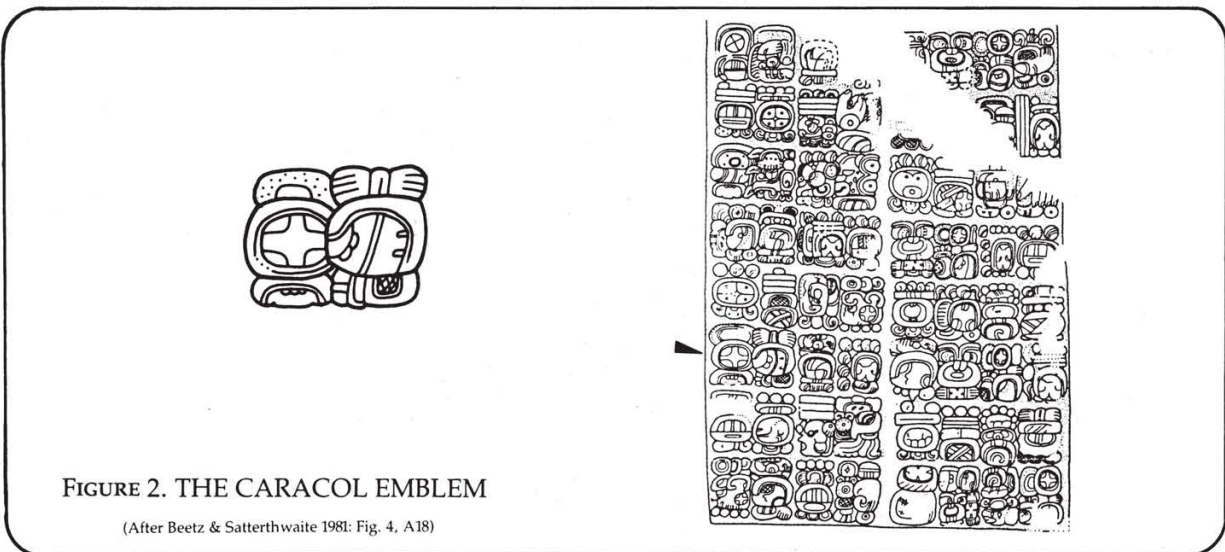


FIGURE 1. COMPONENTS OF CONVENTIONAL EMBLEM GLYPHS

Another category of Emblem Glyph variation appears to have nothing to do with either gender or chronology. Emblem Glyphs in this category consistently lack crucial elements of the conventional forms defined by Berlin, but nonetheless can be regarded as such by means of functional analogy. The hieroglyphs occupy the same position in texts as other Emblem Glyphs, and their use spans many generations, suggesting something more than idiosyncratic application to particular individuals.

The best-known example of such an aberrant Emblem Glyph is that which occurs at the site of Caracol, Belize (Fig. 2). Carl Beetz, who first published the Caracol example, noted that the use of the hieroglyph seemed consistent with that of an Emblem Glyph, but remarked on the peculiarities of the glyph, especially the absence of T168 (Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:115). He termed it the “Caracol Glyph” in order to distinguish it from more conventional Emblem Glyphs (Note 1).

The purpose of the present essay is to present four other aberrant, and thus problematic, Emblem Glyphs from the sites of Altar de Sacrificios, El Chorro, Río Azul, and Xultun. It is hoped that these examples — which, for convenience, I will term “Emblems” — will demonstrate that the Caracol Glyph is but one member of a set, and not a *hapax legomenon*, as has sometimes been supposed.



ALTAR DE SACRIFICIOS

ALTAR de Sacrificios, a site near where the Pasión and Chixoy Rivers meet to form the Usumacinta, contains a total of 29 known monuments with inscriptions, most of which are eroded beyond legibility (Graham 1972). Fortunately, enough glyphic details remain to allow the proposal of a likely candidate for the Altar de Sacrificios Emblem (Fig. 3). The hieroglyph is notable for its lack of the water group prefix. The elements present include T168, or AHAW; T239; T23/T116, which, according to Lounsbury (1984), corresponds to phonetic [n + vowel]; and T59.

At Altar de Sacrificios, the earliest occurrence of the alleged Emblem (Fig. 3a) is documented on Stela 8, with the date 9.9.15.0.0. Its next appearance is at 9.10.0.0.0, on Stela 9. There, the Emblem features a variant of the AHAW sign (Fig. 3b). Perhaps the clearest example occurs on Stela 4, dated at 9.10.10.0.0 (Fig. 3c), where it precedes a parentage statement (Schele, Mathews, and Lounsbury 1977). Stela 5, dated 9.10.11.12.17, contains another example of the Emblem in question (Fig. 3d), as does Stela 1, with an Initial Series date of 9.11.10.0.0 (Fig. 3e).

In addition to these clearly dated occurrences, a number of other Altar de Sacrificios Emblems appear on monuments of unknown or of highly conjectural date. These include Altar 1, possibly datable to 9.7.15.12.9 (Fig. 3f); the Late Classic Stela 16 (Fig. 3g); Sculptured Panel 4, perhaps dated to either 9.11.9.5.14 or 9.14.2.0.14 (Fig. 3h); and a Late Classic ceramic vessel excavated from the site bearing a Calendar Round date which Peter Mathews (personal communication) equates to 9.10.4.1.3 (Fig. 3i).

A reference to Altar de Sacrificios appears in the text of Stela 17 at Itzan, a site about 14 kilometers to the northeast. That monument records the name of a contemporary lord of Altar de Sacrificios, and the epithet, “[he] of seven captives” (Stuart 1985), followed immediately by the Altar de Sacrificios Emblem (Fig. 4a) and a Distance Number Introductory Glyph. This arrangement matches that of a phrase on Stela 17 at Itzan, which mentions a lord of that site (Fig. 4b). The parallel phrasing demonstrates the functional equivalence of the Itzan Emblem Glyph and the Altar de Sacrificios Emblem (Note 2). A possible foreign reference appears at El Chorro on a hieroglyphic stairway (Fig. 4c). Unfortunately, the worn condition of the inscription prevents certainty of identification.

A puzzling feature of the proposed Altar de Sacrificios Emblem is its apparent absence in

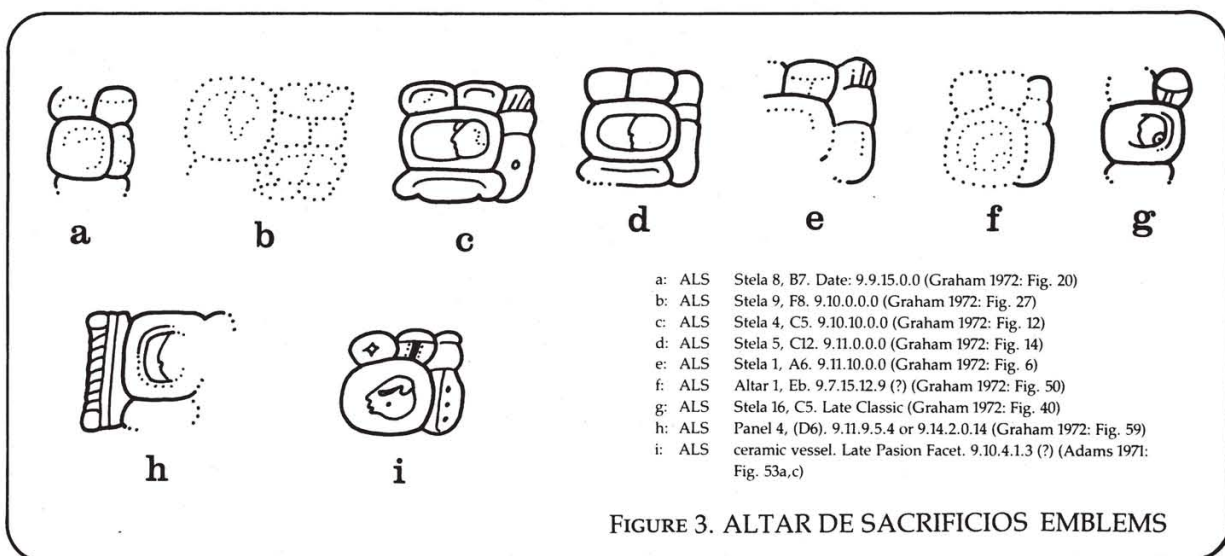


FIGURE 3. ALTAR DE SACRIFICIOS EMBLEMS

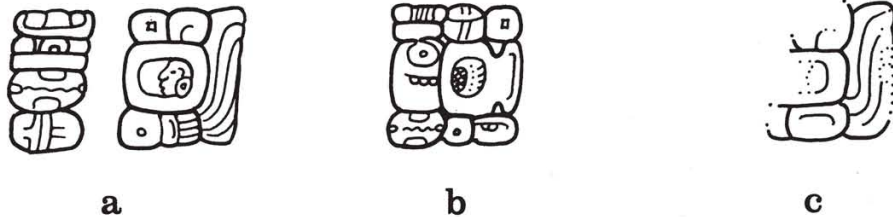
Early Classic texts at the site. Doubtless this results in part from the poor condition of the inscriptions, but in at least two instances — Altar de Sacrificios Stelae 10 and 11 — the final portions of carved texts are well-preserved. Neither monument shows anything even remotely resembling the Altar Emblem (Fig. 5a,b). This surprising omission may be accounted for, as Mathews (1984) suggests for a similar case at Uaxactun, by the adoption of an Emblem at Altar de Sacrificios at a time later than the erection of its first monuments. If so, this may reflect an as yet poorly-understood development of the site to a position of regional dominance.

EL CHORRO

SOME 22 kilometers north of Altar de Sacrificios lies the site of El Chorro (Note 3). It, too, employed an aberrant form of Emblem (Fig. 6). In it, T12 or T229, each of which is read by most epigraphers as *ah*, evidently replaces the usual *AHAW* variants. The water group appears in only one instance, in a glyphic context of obscure arrangement. The main sign resembles the month sign *Mol*, but with the addition of internal volutes. T116 and T178 are affixed below the main sign.

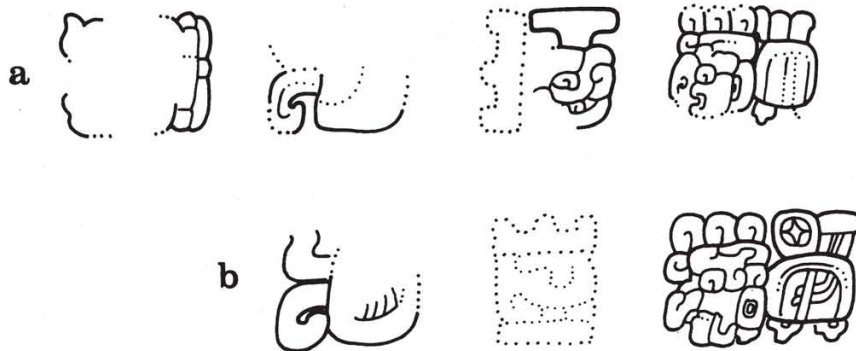
FIGURE 4. FOREIGN REFERENCES TO ALTAR DE SACRIFICIOS

- a: ITN Stela 17, C13b-D13. 9.15.11.16.15 (After photographs by Ian Graham and the author)
 b: ITN Stela 17, H12. 9.16.17.4.18 (After photographs by Ian Graham and the author)
 c: CRO Hieroglyphic Stairway, Msc. 9. Late Classic (After field drawing by Eric Von Euw)



The best examples of the proposed El Chorro Emblem appear on Altars 2 and 3 of the site (Fig. 6a,b). In both instances it appears as the final hieroglyph in texts containing the well-documented name of a local ruler. A collection of unprovenanced stelae also bear the El Chorro Emblem (Fig. 6c,d), with one (6d) exhibiting a unique (and unexplainable) complex of affixes which includes a water group element and an AHAW sign, and a main sign whose occurrence is unattested elsewhere.

The El Chorro Emblem appears at another site in a context which is somewhat clearer than its appearances at El Chorro itself. On Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, an inscription mentions the capture of a lord (Fig. 6e). Although the precise date of the event is uncertain, enough remains of the titles of the hapless individual to assign him to El Chorro which, in preceding generations, apparently enjoyed amicable relations with Dos Pilas (Houston and Mathews 1985:14). Itzan Stela 17 also records a probable reference to El Chorro in a partially effaced segment of the text (Fig. 6f). Since a shield glyph occurs in the same phrase, the reference may allude to warfare between El Chorro and Itzan.



- a: ALS Stela 10, C8-D9. 9.1.0.0.0 (Graham 1972: Fig. 31)
 b: ALS Stela 11, C9-D10. 9.2.0.0.0 (Graham 1972: Fig. 32)

FIGURE 5. AN EARLY CLASSIC NAME FROM ALTAR DE SACRIFICIOS

FIGURE 6. EL CHORRO EMBLEMS



a



b



c



d



e



f

- a: CRO Altar 2, D5. 9.16.0.0.0
 b: CRO Altar 3, II. 9.15.10.0.0 (?)
 c: COL Stela, A9. 9.17.10.0.0 (?)
 d: COL Stela, B1-B3. ca. 9.16.0.0.0
 e: DPL Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, I, D3b. ca. 9.15.10.0.0
 f: ITN Stela 17, III. 9.17.7.6.3
 (e & f from author's field drawing; others by Eric Von Euw and Ian Graham)

RIO AZUL

RIO AZUL lies in the extreme northeast corner of the Department of Petén (Adams and Gatling 1964). Recent excavations at the site have produced spectacular and well-publicized finds, including a group of painted tombs and a Late Classic stela (Adams et al. 1984; Adams 1986). Additional artifacts with hieroglyphic texts, unprovenanced yet almost certainly from Río Azul, are in museums or private collections in the United States and Europe.

The Río Azul Emblem is perhaps the most aberrant of the three discussed so far (Fig. 7). All known examples are composed of a human head with "cap," earspool, and a mouth containing the sign that has been read as *mo'* (Knorozov 1952:111,114). Optional affixes include T60v, T106, T116, and T151. No known examples of the proposed Río Azul Emblem bear the T168 or the water group prefixes.

Unlike the Altar de Sacrificios and El Chorro Emblems, that of Río Azul is found in only one context of secure date — that of the text of Stela 2 at the site (Adams et al. 1984: Figs. 35 & 36), which yields the following chronological information (Note 4):

A1-C3:	9.11.(10). (0). 0	11 Ahau (18 Ch'en)
	(10. 0. 0 . 0 . 0	7 Ahau 18 Zip)
C8-D8:	8. 10 .12 .18	
E1-F1:	(9.11. 9 . 5 . 2	13 Ik 5 Muan)

The 13 Ik date records the birth of a lord whose name glyphs are partially eroded. Fortunately, enough remains to detect the Río Azul Emblem, which appears just after his name, "[?] + God K" (Fig. 7a). What is probably a *bacab* glyph follows. The names and titles of the mother and father of the lord in question conclude the text, and the name of the father is also followed by the Río Azul Emblem and the Bacab title (Fig. 7b and Note 5). Another example of the father's name appears on a looted vessel, again with the Río Azul Emblem (Fig. 7c). Parenthetically, this name is much clearer in the painted text, with the "hand grasping fish" as the main sign and T181 as the suffix. Although this combination is identical to a well-known verb for bloodletting, its occurrence here is certainly nominal. It is also of interest that God K is a feature of the son's name, which also appears

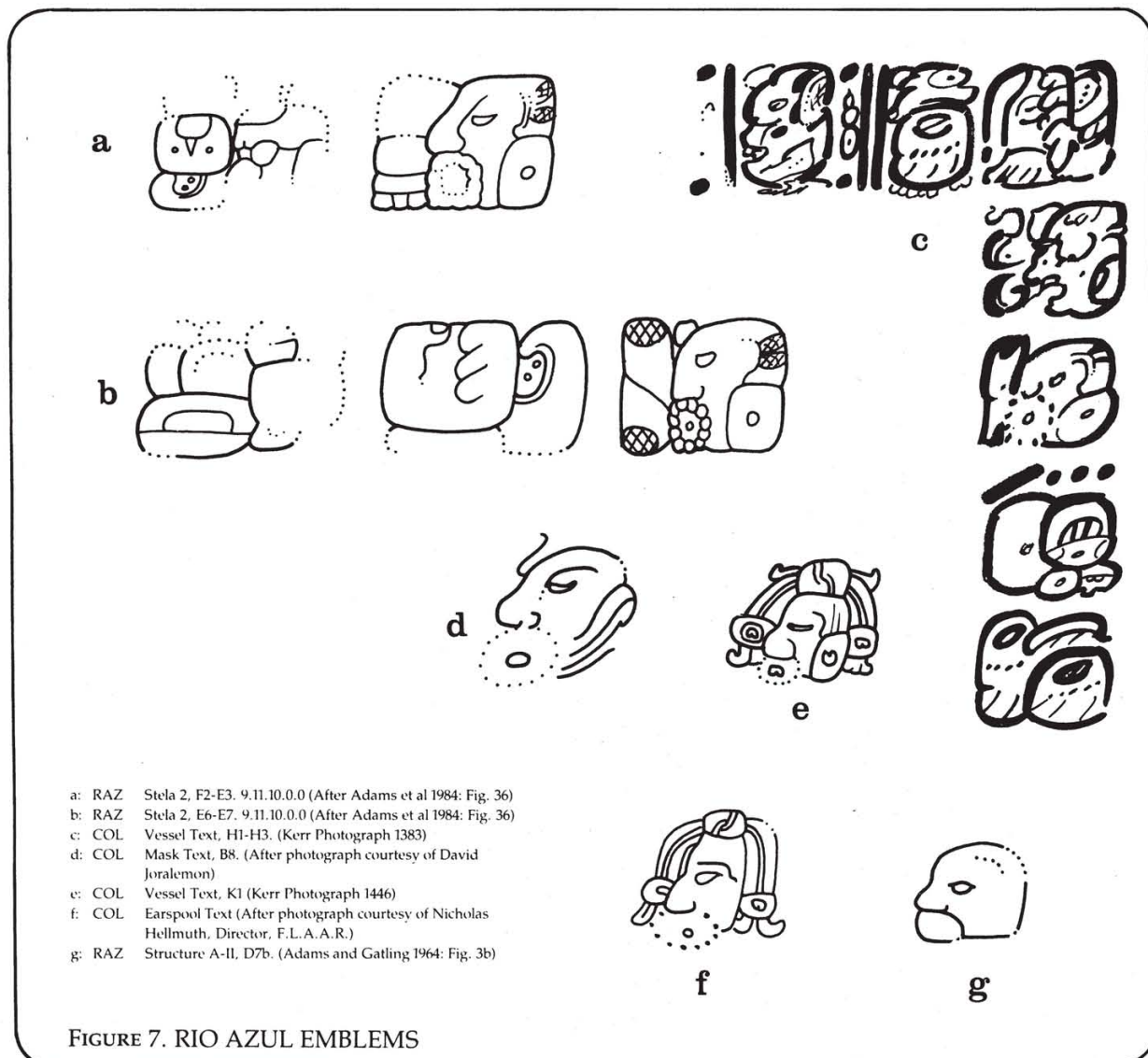
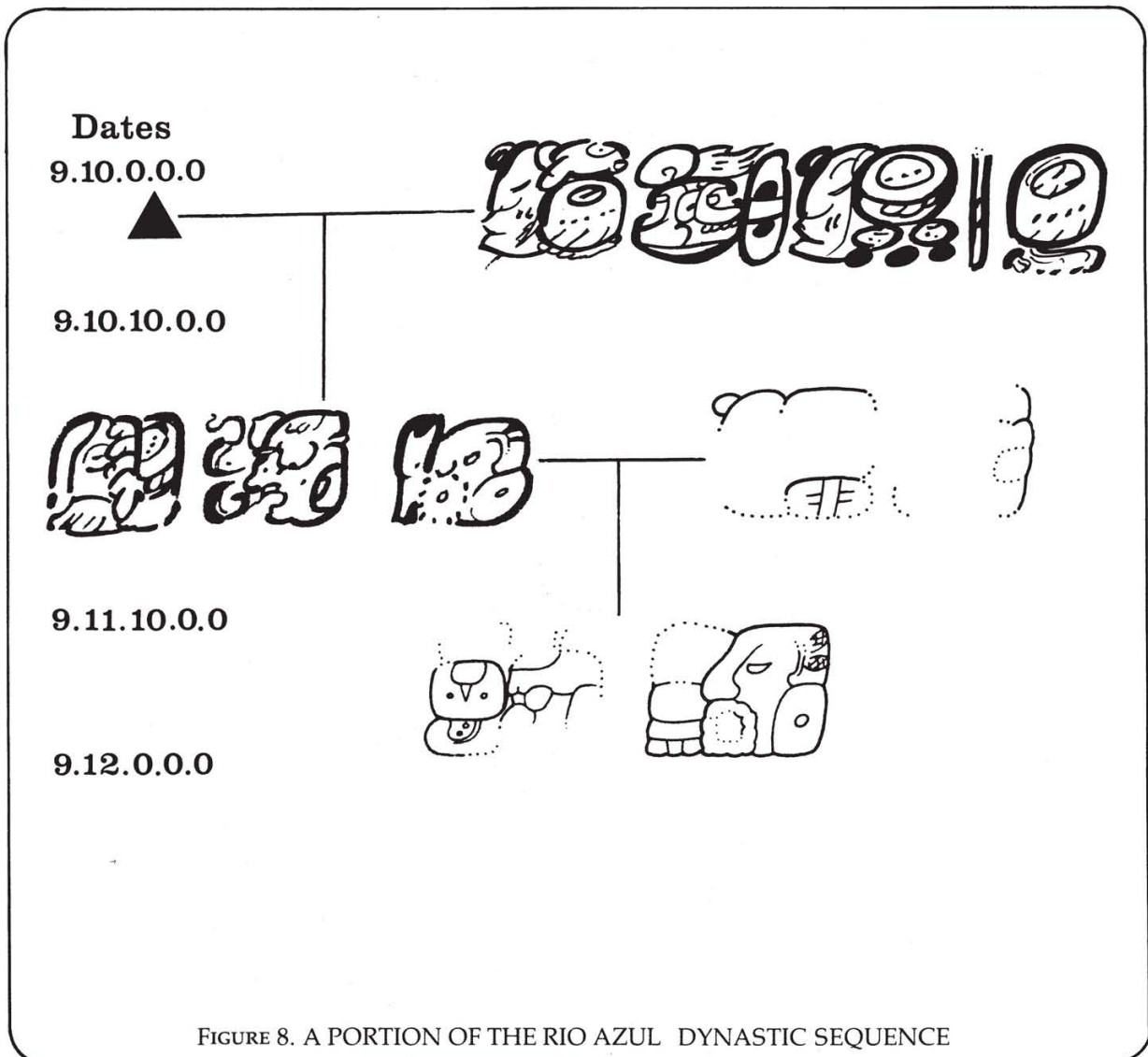


FIGURE 7. RIO AZUL EMBLEMS

in the text (Note 6). Curiously, the father's mother, but not his father, is mentioned in the painted text as well. The relationships between all these individuals appear in Figure 8.

There exist at least four other examples of the Río Azul Emblem, but none are securely datable. Three of these — one incised on a fuschite mask of GI (Fig. 7d); another on a stuccoed cylinder tripod vase in the Detroit Institute of Arts (7e); and a third on an ear flare (7f) — embellish apparently looted objects of probable Early Classic date. A fourth example of the Río Azul Emblem is part of the incomplete stucco text on the south edge of the roof comb of Structure A-II at the site (Fig. 7g). Its position between a name and a Distance Number indicates its emblematic character. Unfortunately, the Distance Number cannot be connected to any known Calendar Round date.

The Río Azul Emblem differs from those of Altar de Sacrificios and El Chorro in that no foreign references to Río Azul have been documented. This situation may result from several factors: First, Río Azul is located in a poorly explored area of El Peten. The discovery of additional sites may enlarge the sparse epigraphic inventory and contribute some external references to Río Azul. Second, much of Río Azul appears to have been constructed during the Early Classic Period, from which relatively few monuments survive. Río Azul may simply not have had many important neighbors during that period or, more likely, such hieroglyphic records of nearby sites may lie beneath constructions of Late Classic times.



XULTUN

XULTUN, a site about 36 kilometers southeast of Río Azul, contains at least 24 monuments. Although most of these are of friable stone and bear badly eroded inscriptions as a consequence, it is possible to elicit a list of dates for the site (Table 1). It is also possible to posit a likely Xultun Emblem, in this case an aberrant example with some of the features displayed by its counterparts at Altar de Sacrificios, El Chorro, and Río Azul (Note 7).

The proposed Xultun Emblem consists of a number of elements. The most important is a collocation of a prefix apparently representing flint or some other stone (T112v or T245v), a main sign in the form of a *cauac* glyph (T528), and T168. Additional elements appear to be optional: the *bacab* hieroglyph (T35:713b.87), and a final cluster of signs (T115.765c:116). These elements usually occur after the Cauac glyph, although in two instances (Fig. 9f,l) the bacab glyph appears before. Indeed, Xultun Stela 5 may record both versions (Fig. 9f,g).

The earliest expression of the proposed Xultun Emblem appears on Stela 18, which probably dates to the Early Classic Period, or perhaps the very first part of the Late Classic. The front of the monument bears a text with both the name "Turtle Shell" and the Emblem (Fig. 9a). The left side of the same monument shows another example of the Emblem preceded by the name glyph for Turtle Shell (Fig. 9b).

The next dated example of the Xultun Emblem appears on Stela 15, at 9.14.0.0.0. The front of Stela 15 shows an abbreviated form of the Emblem, without the optional elements (Fig. 9c). The left side of the same stela shows what is evidently an expanded form of the Emblem (Fig. 9d).

The last well-dated example of the Xultun Emblem occurs in the inscription of Stela 3, a late monument recording the birth of a ruler at 10.0.3.3.8 and the subsequent Period Ending celebration at 10.1.0.0.0. The left side of the text contains a Xultun Emblem in expanded form (Fig. 9e).

Other instances of the Xultun Emblem exist, but in eroded inscriptions with dates that are not decipherable. Such texts appear on Stela 5, front and left side (Fig. 9f,g); Stela 9, front (9h); Stela 16, front (9i); Stela 19, front (9j); and, perhaps most clearly, Stela 25, front (9k). In addition, at least two unprovenanced vessels display the same Emblem (Fig. 9l,m). It is interesting that one of these vessels (that bearing the Emblem shown in 9m) resembles a vase with paste characteristics similar to ceramics whose origin has been attributed to the area of Holmul, 25 kilometers southeast of Xultun (Reents and Bishop n.d.:11). It may be that vessels possessing these characteristics come instead from the area of Xultun which, according to Eric Von Euw (1978:10) has undergone extensive looting.

TABLE 1: DATES FROM XULTUN

Stela 20	Cp1-Cp11	(9. 0. 0. 0. 0	8) Ahau (13) Ceh	IS
Stela 6	A1-?	9. 3. 7. 0. 0	13 Ahau (3 Kankin)	IS
Stela 7	A1-?	9. 10. 10. 0. 0	(13 Ahau) 18 (Kankin)	IS
Stela 5	A1-B9	9. 12. 0. 0. 0	(10 Ahau) 8 Yaxkin	IS
Stela 4	A1-?	9. 13. 10. 0. 0	(7) Ahau 3 (Cumku)	IS
Stela 15	A1-B15	(9.) 14. 0. 0. 0	(6 Ahau) 13 Muan	IS
Stela 14	C1-D1	(9. 15. 0. 0. 0)	4 Ahau 13 Yax	
Stela 24	A1-B1	9. 16. 10. 0. 0	1 Ahau (3 Zip)	IS
Stela 21	Ap1-Bp3	(9. 18.) 10. 0. 0	10 Ahau (8) Zac	IS
Stela 8	?	(9. 19. 19. 7. 19	1 Cauac 2 Ceh	819
Stela 8	A1-D1	10. 0. 0. 0. 0	7 Ahau (18 Zip)	IS
Stela 3	A1	(10. 0. 3. 3. 8)	11 Lamat 11 Xul	
Stela 3	B1-B5	10. 1. 10. 0. 0	(4 Ahau 13 Kankin)	IS
Stela 10	A1	(10. 1. 13. 7. 17)	6 Caban 10 Zip	
Stela 10	B1-?	10. 3. 0. 0. 0	(1 Ahau 3 Yaxkin)	IS
Stela 9	A1-?	9. ?. 10. 0. 0	?	IS
Stela 25	F8	9. ?. 10. 0. 0	?	

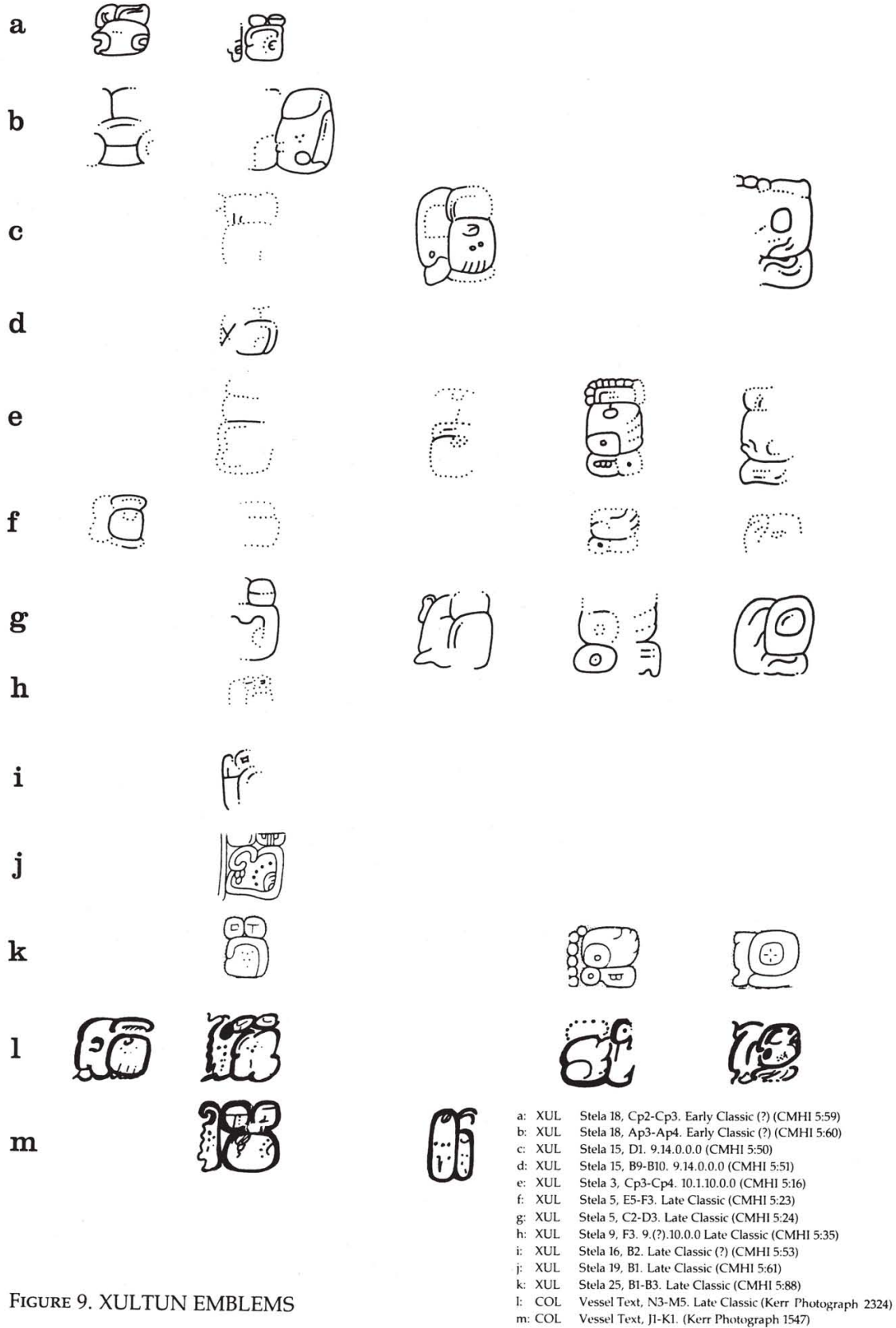


FIGURE 9. XULTUN EMBLEMS

SUMMARY

The proposed Emblems of Altar de Sacrificios, El Chorro, Río Azul, and Xultun share some features with conventional Emblem Glyphs as defined by Berlin (1958): All appear as the ultimate or penultimate title of a local lord. All function as such titles over several generations. And at least three — those of Altar de Sacrificios, El Chorro, and Xultun — occasionally exhibit affixation patterns common to conventional Emblem Glyphs. Presumably, these aberrant Emblems share with Emblem Glyphs the same general function, although their precise respective meanings may differ. It is possible, although difficult to demonstrate, that the Emblems connote a status somewhat different from, and perhaps inferior to, the positions of individuals using conventional Emblem Glyphs as titles. Alternatively, the anomalous Emblems may derive from titles of purely local use and origin, devoid of any connotation of inferiority or subordinancy. Indeed, the great formal variety of such Emblems, and other lines of evidence as well (Note 1), lends weight to this assertion. Of importance here is the fact that the “Caracol Glyph” no longer seems anomalous, but rather one of at least several members of a distinct set of unconventional Emblems.

NOTES

1. Ironically, the rulers of Caracol are specifically invested with the AHAW title (rendered glyphically as T1000d) on Caracol Stelae 5 (at C22), 6 (B3-C3 and C14-A15), and 15 (F2-E3). This pattern suggests that the rulers of Caracol possessed the same titles as lords of those places having conventional Emblem Glyphs.

2. The Itzan Emblem Glyph was first identified by Berthold Riese (1975).

3. Ian Graham has informed me that El Chorro (known briefly by the now-obsolete name of San Lucas) is one of a cluster of sites — among them El Pato — whose geographical relationships are not yet known with precision. Of these, El Chorro appears to have been the most important, based on its number of monuments.

4. The record of a date more than eight katuns in the future strongly recalls a chronological device employed on Naranjo

Altar 1. That monument not only displays a dedicatory date of 9.8.0.0.0, but also commemorates the completion of the 9th Baktun.

5. Note that the Emblems of father and son vary slightly. The Emblem used by the son includes a prefix unlisted in Thompson’s catalog (1962); the Emblem of the father instead contains the T106 sign. It is possible that these signs are allographs, or that the hieroglyphs involved denote a differing status between the two individuals using them.

6. As an alternative interpretation, the individual mentioned on the vessel may be another (earlier or later) lord with the same name as that of the ruler who appears on Río Azul Stela 2. It is also worth pointing out that God K, featured in the son’s name, also appears with the father’s name on the vessel in question.

Acknowledgments

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