

Grammar in the Script: Tortuguero Monument 6: Part One, Tales of Destruction

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The seventh essay in the series will begin a two part analysis of Monument 6 from Tortuguero. This monument is in the midst of becoming famous because so far it is the only surviving (extant) inscription containing the future 13th bak'tun ending date of 13.0.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in, 21 (or 23)¹ December 2012. Because this end date occurs at the end of the monument, the entire inscription will be studied to understand the end event.

Our approach will center on a literary approach as discussed in the fifth essay, **“Grammar in the Script: Literary and Visual Devices in Grammatical Constructions”**. The purpose of this essay will be twofold: 1) to discuss the couplet features of the narrative and 2) to discuss the nature of the verbs of destruction found in the first series of events, labeled Episode One. “Episode” is an epithet applied by Josserand and Hopkins (in print, University of Colorado Press, 2010) used to describe “paragraph-like divisions of a narrative text.” Monument Six conveniently and succinctly breaks down into four clear episodes, which the author has labeled One through Four². This particular essay will discuss the monument as a whole in general and then take Episode One in more detail, focusing on the verbal structure. The transliteration and translation of Episode One has been placed in Appendix A for reference as well as the drawings for Monument Six in Appendix B.

From essay five, “The well formed Classic text has:

- a) an opening and a closing,
- b) an internal structure built around couplets,
- c) internal sections marked by topic change, distinct patterns of syntax, and/or a backstep in time,
- d) special effects near the peak.

¹ In an attempt to correlate the Maya calendar to the Gregorian calendar, the closest dates have been determined to be one of two dates separated by 2 days.

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² These segments are strictly a product of the author's observations. It is possible that other authors would devise different yet equally as acceptable divisions. There is evidence of a missing initial episode, the upper left part of the “T” shape of the monument (Gronemeyer, (2006:136) which would be labeled the Opening. The last four glyph blocks of the Opening as chosen by the author are the first four glyph blocks located in the upper left corner of the remaining monument and will not be discussed here.

A typical opening would be an initial series and a typical ending might be a period [ending date]. Special effects near the peak might include increased coupling, fancy language, and possibly a ‘zone of turbulence’, or an area of the text that diverts grammatically from the norm, giving emphasis to the event that occurs at the ‘peak’, or point of focus for the main event” (Hopkins, 1996).

TORTUGUERO MONUMENT 6 NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION

Monument 6 conforms closely to the parameters of a well-formed Classic text. Episode One has a short introductory phrase including the seating date of the protagonist, Bahlam Ajaw, and then follows with a narrative starting with “distance number since he was seated.” Episodes Two and Three each begin directly with the phrase, “distance number since he was seated”:



E9F9 (**Episode One**). 16 *k'in*, 5 *winik*³ -*jiiy*, *chum-wan-ø-iiy*,

(It was) 16 *k'in*s, 5 *winiks* since he was seated,



H9G10H10 (**Episode Two**). 1 *k'in*, 16 *winik-jiiy*, 3 *haab-iiy*, *chum-wan-ø-iiy*,

(It was) 1 *k'in*, 16 *winiks*, 3 years since he was seated,



I3J3I4J4 (**Episode Three**). 8 *k'in*, 6 *winik-jiiy*, 5 *haab-iiy*,
1 *winikhaab-iiy*, *chum-wan-ø-iiy*,

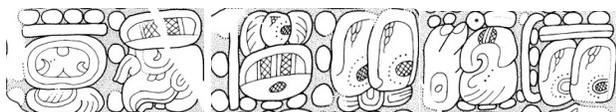
(It was) 8 *k'in*s, 6 *winiks*, 5 years, 1 *k'atun* since he was seated,

These three episode each anchor to the seating date, 1 Ok 3 Kumk'u, 9.10.11.3.10 Long Count. The three *chumwaniiy* statements form a triplet, or quadruplet if the first *chumwani* statement is included.

The fourth (and last) episode breaks with this pattern not by counting forward from the seating date, but by counting forward from the contemporaneous date of the monument, 9.11.16.8.18 to arrive at the 13th *bak'tun* date of the beginning of the new future Calendar Round date, 4 Ajaw 3 K'ank'in, 13.0.0.0.0, December 21, 2012.

M5N5: 2 *k'in*, 9 *winik-ij*, 3 *haab*, 8 *winik-haab-om*, 3 *pik-om*, *tzutz-om-ø*, *u-13 bak'tun*.

³ *winik* in the counting and calendrical context represents 20, or a “score” of days. *K'in* equals one day.



(It will be) 2 k'ins, 9 winiks, 3 years, 8 k'atuns, and 3 bak'tuns until it finishes, the 13th bak'tun.

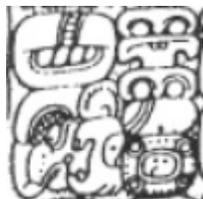
Thus the break in the anchor-to-seating date as the initial statement in each episode is one indicator that marks the beginning of the fourth and final episode as a peak event. The last episode contains the final date of the monument and another event, and therefore seems to serve two functions, one a peak event and the other the monument closing. Undoubtedly the Opening contained an Initial Series date (Gronemeyer,2006:136) and that with the final episode most likely formed a matching couplet that encompassed the intervening episodes.

A second marker for indicating a new episode is a back-step in time. One back-step is located at the end of Episode Two just prior to Episode Three. The other back-step occurs at the end of Episode Three just prior to Episode Four. These two back-steps will be discussed in further detail in the future essays. Couplets regularly prevail throughout the narrative in all the episodes; at this point the discussion will focus on the details of Episode One.

EPISODE ONE: A TAIL OF DESTRUCTION

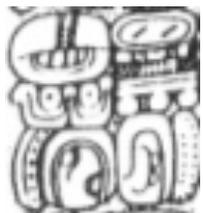
Episode One is nested inside the couplet *Bahlam ajaw, K'uhul Baak Ajaw* that occurs first at E3F3 and finally at H8G9 (see Appendices A and B). Several couplets make up the body of the first episode, most of the main ones being war related.

First Couplet E10-E11



After the introductory phrase relating to the seating as stated above, the scribe opens with the enigmatic phrase at E10 followed by a “Star Wars” event at E11, both beginning with a focus marker⁴, “and then.”

E10: *i ehmey u-nah-u-tok'pakal*. “And then it came
down the first of his flint-shield.”



E11: *i hay xal⁵/xam Aj-Uhx-Te'-K'uh*. “And then he collapsed, ?,
he of Uhx Te' K'uh.”

⁴ A focus marker points out new information to the reader.

⁵ If the subfix to **xa-** is **-la**, it is possible this word is *xal*, from Ch'ol meaning “broken to bits” (B. MacLeod, personal communication, 2010).

In other inscriptions, Pusilha Stela D, D13C14, for instance, the “coming down” of *utok’pakal* means its (the “flint-shield” possibly a merismus⁶ referring to the “army”) destruction; the verb employed here and in other similar instances is *jubuy*. However, in this case the verb *ehmey* is used. In Marc Zender’s discussion of the *ehm*, “Raccoon” glyph (2005:6-16), he identifies the “raccoon” glyph in the verbal position meaning “to descend, go down”, and gives several examples using this verb. *Ehm* is a CVC root intransitive verb that sometimes takes a **-ye** suffix. When *ehm* is written without the *ey* suffix, it is expected that that *ehm* would be written *ehm-i-ø*, where *-i-* is the inflection for a single argument predicate marker and *-ø* is the 3rd Person Singular Absolutive Subject Pronoun (ibid:10). The *ehmey* form of the verb seems to follow other *-Vy* verbs of motion and change of state (for instance **T’AB?-yi**, *t’ab-ay-i-ø*, “he goes up”) and so both forms would be considered of the same verb. Zender’s translation reads, “then Bahlam Ajaw came down (from) the house of his flints, his shields” and most likely the phrase involves some type of preparation for war, maybe even an “amassing of troops in preparation for attack” (ibid:13-15).

However, the subject of this clause must be *u-nah-u-tok’pakal*, because it directly follows the verb. Among the five clear examples that Zender (ibid) offers, the location follows immediately after the *ehm* verb if indeed a place is mentioned at all, followed by the one who did the descending. Could the “*u-nah*” be a place from which the *u-tok’pakal* came down? This interpretation is not likely since *u-nah-u-pakal* seems to operate as a couplet. The following phrase that occurs at F10 appears to be a parenthetical astronomical statement (see Appendix A) that involves a lunar eclipse and at least for the current essay will be considered to be just that, a parenthetical statement that has no direct bearing on the syntactics of the previous phrase. Parenthetical statements also appear in Episodes Two and Three.

The question is, “who is the owner of *nah tok’pakal*?” Answering the question of who is the antecedent of *u* is important because that would indicate the manner of descent or destruction, i.e. if Bahlam Ajaw is the antecedent, then *ehmey* would probably mean an “amassing of troops” as indicated above. Hopkins states (2010), “Within an episode there is a common setting, common protagonists, and a common theme: narrative events are directly related to each other. There may be a ‘topic,’ a personage who is the featured actor, and within an episode, this person may be the unstated subject of verbs....When the subject is not this person, the subject is stated overtly. The recognition of episode topics is critical for the identification of the antecedents of third-person pronouns (as Josserand 1995 has shown for hieroglyphic inscriptions).”

Although the antecedent could be the protagonist of the complete episode, Bahlam Ajaw, it appears that because of the coherency, visually and textually, of the “and then” couplet at E10 and F10 as shown above, that it is *Ah Uhx Te’ K’uh* who is the subject of

⁶ Merismus: the pairing of complementary elements to represent a whole; for example, the idea of “sky” and “earth” in couplet form to represent the idea of “totality,” or “everywhere.” (Hull,2003:famsi.org).

the topic, or “mini-episode” stated here and the owner of *u-nah u-tok’pakal*. (MacLeod initially offered this interpretation, however this author supplies these premises as evidence, personal communication, 2010). Therefore that would say that the “coming down” was a destructive descent and a prelude to the verb that follows at F10.

The “Star Wars” verb, or “Star over Earth” that occurs at F10 and then again at G4 has been intensely scrutinized for decades and will be discussed below in conjunction with the next couplet.

Second Couplet

The second couplet is actually composed of a nested couplet within another couplet of the form ABBA. And the first A line of this set is actually the last line of the previous couplet. Line A is made up of the verb of “collapse or destruction”, and line B consists of another verb of destruction, also known as the “axing”, or “decapitation” verb. As above, the discussion will center on the verbal phrases. The reader may refer to Appendices A and B for the complete drawing of the monument and transliteration/translation of Episode One.



E11: *i hay xal/xam Aj Uhx Te’ K’uh.*

And then it was the destruction/collapse, he of 3 Gods.



F14: *i ch’akhaj ?.* And then it was axed, ?



G1: *i ch’ahkaj Yomoop.*⁷ And then it was axed, Yomoop.



G4: *hayiy u tok’pakal* after it collapsed, his flint-shield...

⁷ *Yohm Pi*, or *Yomoop*, along with *Uhx Te’ K’uh*, are sites that have not been archaeologically located (Gronemeyer, 2006:12). Other Tortuguero inscriptions also record aggressive actions against these polities by Bahlam Ajaw.

Hay: destruction, collapse

The verb transliterated here as *hay*⁸, occurs in the script as the star sign, *ek'*, placed over the earth sign, *kab'*, and also as *ek'* over the shell sign *yi*. Usually water droplets, or water “stacks” occur on either side of the *kab'* sign emanating from either side of the star sign. Most scholars now seem to agree that the *yi* sign is stacked on the *kab'* sign and therefore the basic sign consists of the star over earth with water stacks on either side. When the *yi* sign is present, it performs two functions, 1) a complement for the *y* ending of *hay* and 2) supplies the *-i* suffix marking an intransitive verb (B. MacLeod, personal communications, 2010).



Figure 7.1. a. EK' “star” sign over KAB' “earth” sign with water stacks on either side, Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway 4 Step 3 (drawing by J. Montgomery). b. EK' “star” sign over yi “shell” sign with water stacks on either side, Yaxchilan Lintel 41, Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions (Drawing by Ian Graham) c. EK' “star” sign over KAB' “earth” sign with -yi complement and -ya suffix underneath, Tortuguero Monument 6 (photo by P. Mathews).

The **HAY**, or possibly **HAY KAB** (B. MacLeod, personal communication, 2010) reading stems from an original proposal by Erik Boot in 1995, “THE ‘STAR-OVER-SHELL/EARTH’ AS HAYKAH ‘DESTROY VILLAGES’” (paper in possession of author). *Hay* was translated “destroy” by Boot. MacLeod (personal communication, 2010) provides linguistic evidence for this proposal but credits the decipherment to Boot. Both MacLeod and Boot put forth the suggestion that the water stacks can be interpreted as the logograph **HA'**, and that this logograph is a phonetic complement for **HAY**, cueing the initial *h*.

The “Star over Earth” sign is found in many war-related contexts with other verbs of destruction such as *jubuy*, “knocked down”, *ch'ak*, “axed or destroyed”, *nahb ch'ich'aj*, *jol witzaj*, “blood flowed, skulls piled up”, and *chuk*, “capture”. A typical example is shown below:

⁸ Other proposals for the “Star-Over-Earth” sign include: **EK'MAY** (David Stuart), **CH'AY** (Marc Zender), **NAY** (Christian Prager)

On Tortuguero Monument 8, Bahlam Ajaw records a “Star-Over-Earth” victory over a person of Comalcalco followed by a capture event (Gronemeyer,2006:181):



Ex. 7.1 B59: *hay Aj-Joy?-Chan chu[h]kaj ...*

It was a destruction of he (or they) of Comalcalco. He was captured,...

Exactly what type of verb is *hay* and how is it used? By its uses (syntax) and inflections it can be seen that *hay* operates as both an intransitive verb and a noun. Barbara MacLeod (personal communication, 2010) confirms that meanings found in appropriate dictionaries conform to these parameters, and also the meaning generally involves general destruction, widespread mortality and often an association with destructive floods.

There are at least two straightforward cases where *hay* operates as a noun--both involve a preposition:



Ex. 7.2 A2 (Aguateca Stela 2): **HAY-yi ti-SEIBAL.** *hay ti Seibal.*

“(On 8 K’an 17 Muan) there was destruction at Seibal.”

In example 7.2 the *hay* stands alone because it is followed by a prepositional phrase involving the location of the occurrence, therefore it must be translated in the stative, “there is/was...”. In example 7.3 from the Piedras Negras Throne 1, inscriptions on Legs (drawing by J. Montgomery), *hay* is nominalized with *u* prefix (part of *tu*) and *-la* suffix. As the object of a preposition, *hay* is required to be a noun.



Ex. 7.3. **tu HAY-yi-la,** *ti uhayil,* “at the destruction of...”

In the above case, the suffix **-yi** acts as a complement and may or may not be considered to supply the *i* vowel for the *il* suffix. Since *hay* is an intransitive verb, it cannot be directly derived to a passive, medio-passive, or antipassive. Therefore, the **-yi** ending cannot be considered a medio-passive ending. Although some linguists advocate translating an uninflected verb as a noun, at times linguists will advocate adding an *-i* suffix to a bare root as an intransitive marker. Zender above provides examples with *ehm* and Wald (2007:Figure 106) provides an example of *och[i]bi[h]* where this is such the case. One has to consider the context before deciding whether to advocate an intransitive verb or stative noun for the translation of *hay*.

In the case above at Tortuguero, the **-ya** suffix cues the deictic “after/since”, and the **-yi** suffix provides the *-y* complement for *hay* and the *i* for the spelling of the deictic: *hayiy*.

A typical simple intransitive construction of the Star War verb was expressed by superimposing the emblem glyph over the **kab'** sign. Such is the case on Step VI of the Hieroglyphic stairway found at Naranjo:



Ex. 7.4. HAY NARANJO..., *hay Naranjo...*, “Naranjo collapsed...”

Ch'ak: to axe, decapitate

In the late 1990 Jorge L. Orejel wrote Research Report 31 (<http://www.mesoweb.com/bearc/cmr/31>) in support of reading the “Axe/Comb” Glyph as *ch'ak*. This reading of the axe and comb has withstood the test of time. The “axe” logograph **CH'AK** sometimes appears alone and at other times it appears with the **-ka**, “comb” complement.

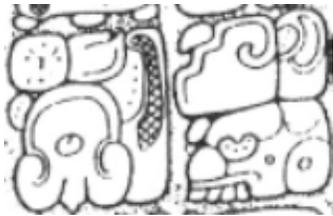
Simon Martin (2005:3) discusses the uses of the “axe” event in the inscription on Caracol Altar 21 (O2-P3): “The verb concerned, widely read as **CH'AK-ka** *ch'ak* “to chop” (Orejel 1990), appears in two distinct contexts in the inscriptions. As *ch'ak ubaah* ‘his head was chopped,’ it refers to human decapitation (Houston and Stuart 1998:77-78), but when applied directly to place names as *ch'ak uch'een* ‘his *ch'een* was damaged’ was employed (where *ch'een* ‘cave’ is a contraction from *kab ch'een* ‘earth-cave,’ a metaphorical term for ‘place’ or ‘settlement’), followed by the defeated lord’s names and titles (Martin 2004:107-108).”

In each of the two occurrences on Tortuguero Monument 6, the subject of *ch'ak* refers to a polity: the first one unidentified because of damage to the panel and the second read

as *Yohm Pi* (or *Yomoop*, see above). The transitive verb *ch'ak* is written in the passive voice with the 3rd Person Singular Absolutive Pronoun \emptyset referencing the subject, the infix *-h-* marking the passive (Lacadena, 2004:165-194), and the *-aj* indicating an intransitive verb: *chahk-aj- \emptyset* . Occasionally the *-j* is not represented and it is thought that the *-a* of the *-ka* marks the intransitive.

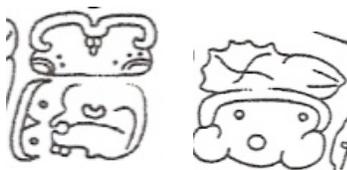
Third Couplet: *Nahb'aj ch'ich', witzaj jol*: blood flowed, skulls piled up

Following the statement beginning at G4 of the collapsing (Star-Over-Earth) of the *tok'pakal* of 3 Bahlam of Comalcalco, the **NAHB'-ja-CH'ICH'**⁹ **WITZ-ja-JOL** phrase occurs at G6H6:



Ex. 7.5. *nahb'aj ch'ich' witzaj jol*, “the blood pooled, the skulls piled up.”

Also written *naahb'iij ch'ich' witzij jol* (Alfonso Lacadena, emails, n.d.), the phrase is found at Naranjo Altar 1 and Dos Pilas hieroglyphic Stairway 2, West Step 3.



Ex. 7.6. Naranjo Altar 1. *witz-u-jol nahb'-ch'ich'*

“his skulls piling up, his blood pooling?”

⁹ **CH'ICH'**, *ch'ich'*, “blood” is also written *k'ik'*, the first being of the Cholan branch of Maya origin and the second being of Yukatekan origin. It is possible that both pronunciations were used depending on the origin of the writers of the glyphs.



Ex. 7.7. Dos Pilas HS2, West Step 3. *nahb'aj-u-ch'ich' witzaj-u-jol*

“his blood pooled, his skulls piled up”

The *nahb'aj* and *witzaj* intransitive verbs (non-CVC/Derived) are formed by adding a *-j* suffix to the noun, usually with a **-ja** syllable. The vowel immediately following the verb is inserted and could be an *i* or *a*. Therefore, *witzaj* could be written *witzij* (Lacadena, n.d.).

Following this compact couplet descriptive of death in conflict, Episode One ends with a phrase having to do with “white maize spirits”, and then the final couplet, *Bahlam Ajaw, K'uhul Baak Ajaw*.

SUMMARY

First it has been shown how the scribe sets up the inscription on Tortuguero Monument Six to conform to the literary canon of Classic Inscription narrative, and then with a vivid array of war verbs how he knits a poetic tale of dominance on the battlefield by Bahlam Ajaw. *Hay* and *ch'ak* are the main verbs: *ch'ak* relatively securely defined and translated, and *hay* still a matter of some debate. The author favors the single transliteration *hay* as opposed to a dual phrase or CVC-CVC combination such as *hay kab* or even *ek'may*. The reason for this leaning is that the Star-Over-Earth seems to represent a merismus: two or even three elements if the water *ha'* is included, in a paired-element configuration so that the actual translation would be a third meaning not directly apparent by the graphic representation of a star, earth or unlikely, the shell. In fact, the Star-Over-Earth glyph has been linked to warfare events connected with Venus positions (Milbrath,1999:189). Adding a direct *kab* or *ek'* transliteration seems counterproductive to the purpose of the merismus.

“Collapse” is a viable translation for Star-Over-Earth, even for an interpretation of the canoe scenes depicted on the carved bones found in the tomb of Hasaw-Ka'an K'awil, Burial 116 at Tikal (Freidel, Schele, Parker,1993:90,91). The canoe and its occupants “collapse” into the water and disappear.

The impact that Episode One has on the meaning of the entire monument, especially the right panel containing Episode Four, remains to be seen; however ongoing discussions (see Acknowledgments below) portend a significant event occurring in this fourth and final episode.

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