Leaflet 3, P. N.

[J. A. MASON]

# THE INSCRIPTION.

The decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs has been, and still is, a slow and difficult task. It is probable that the meanings of the glyphs were known only to the priestly class and that at the time of the Spanish Conquest all Maya culture was at a very low ebb owing to civil wars, pestilences, and other plagues. The Conquerors took drastic steps to stamp out whatever native culture remained, considering it all the work of Satan, burning all the native books which were the repositories of all Maya science, and repressing the native priesthood. Probably only a vestige of the old knowledge remained when chroniclers first began to take an interest in it and to record whatever they could then elucidate. No bilingual inscription or Maya "Rosetta Stone" has aided epigraphers in their researches upon the Maya hieroglyphs, and it is very unlikely that one will ever be found. A few vague and generally inaccurate statements in the oldest chronicles have given some help, but most of our present knowledge of the hieroglyphs has been the result of painstaking work upon the three old books or codices which still exist, especially upon the famous Dresden Codex, and upon the inscriptions, testing them by various hypotheses by processes of "trial and error" as one would an unknown code or cipher, until an interpretation was reached which afforded a cogent result in every case. By these means the meanings of about one half of the glyphs have been determined. Students are still wrestling with the remaining half, and every year or so some one of them succeeds in establishing the meaning of another glyph or group of glyphs. Eventually, we hope, the complete meanings of all the inscriptions will be clear to us.

As one should expect, the glyphs that can be read are those that are susceptible of mathematical proof, that is, they are arithmetical, astronomical and calendrical. Apparently the inscriptions refer mainly to calendrical matters;

they are dates and recount the passage of days, the positions of the sun, the moon and several of the planets, as well as eclipses. It is possible that the total of every inscription relates solely to these matters, though it is likely that some of the undeciphered glyphs give the names of deities, persons and places, and refer to events which took place upon the dates given.

The inscription, or inscriptions, on the lintel comprise about one hundred and fifty-eight glyphs, a very few of which have been broken away and a few more eroded so as to be undecipherable. This makes it the largest known Maya inscription on any lintel by nearly fifty per-cent, the next longest being on lintel number two from the same temple, now in the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, which contains one hundred and eleven glyphs. These glyphs are found in fourteen groups as follows:

1. At the left margin a vertical row of six large glyphs in relief of the "Initial Series" commencing with the "Initial Series Introducing Glyph", each of the six occupying the space of four relief "glyph-blocks". Two of these are missing.

2. At the foot of this Initial Series, two glyphs of usual size.

3. Along the upper margin two horizontal rows of eighteen relief glyphs each.

4. Along the right margin two vertical rows of twelve relief glyphs each. The uppermost four glyphs may be considered as belonging either to this or to the preceding series, the two being probably continuous.

5. Along the lower margin a horizontal row of sixteen incised glyphs in three groups.

6. At the left, at the right edge of the Initial Series, a vertical row of three or more incised glyphs, now practically eroded.

7. On the upper left triangular border, seven or more incised glyphs, one of them broken off.

8. At the upper right, in the same position, four incised glyphs.

9. On the border at the lower right, two horizontal rows of five incised glyphs each.

10. On the lower border between the two seated figures to the right, a vertical row of three incised glyphs.

11. On the right support of the altar, one incised glyph.

12. In the left background, above the group of standing figures, a vertical row of three incised glyphs.

13. In the left background, to the right of the preceding, a panel of four vertical rows of seven incised glyphs each, with two separate glyphs to the left. The lowermost glyph of the right row is broken away.

14. In the right background, two vertical rows of incised glyphs, one containing eight, and the other five glyphs.

Maya inscriptions are read, practically without exception, in pairs of vertical columns, and to each glyph-block is assigned a characterizing letter with coefficient. Since the large glyphs of the Initial Series occupy each the space of four glyph-blocks, columns A and B are assigned to this, the twenty small glyphs in the upper horizontal row being considered as heading columns C to V. The Initial Series therefore occupies spaces $A^1$ to $B^{12}$, the small glyphs at the base being $A^{13}$ and $B^{13}$. The eighteen columns of two glyphs each at the upper border are denoted as $C^1$ to $T^1$ in the upper row, $C^2$ to $T^2$ in the lower row. The last columns on the right are designated as $U^1$ to $V^{12}$. The other groups of glyphs may be ignored for the present except for the panel of thirty glyphs in the left background, the four symmetrical columns of which may be considered as $A^1$ to $D^7$.

This inscription being unusually long, the proportion of unknown and undecipherable glyphs is much larger than is usual in Maya inscriptions, and of the one hundred and fifty-eight glyphs the meanings of only twenty-six are known, these giving six dates. Possibly the majority of the others refer to astronomical and calendrical features, but there probably remains a considerable residue which may give personal names and refer to the events which took place upon these dates.

In the upper left, occupying glyph-blocks A1-B2, is a magnificent example of the Initial Series Introducing Glyph, in which may be seen the characteristic features of this glyph, the trinal superfix, the lateral fishes and the tun sign.

The next glyph, occupying glyph-blocks A3 to B4, is a combination glyph, consisting of two heads, that to the right being the sign for the cycle or baktun of four hundred years of 360 days each. The diagnostic criterion of this glyph is the hand which replaces the lower jaw. The head to the left is the (head-variant) for the number nine, the entire glyph thus denoting "nine cycles".

Occupying the next glyph-block A5-B6 is a glyph which denotes fifteen katuns or periods of twenty years, the Katun head being at the right, the head-variant for fifteen at the left, much eroded but decipherable.

The next two glyphs, occupying glyph-blocks A7 to B10, are unfortunately missing, but can be calculated arithmetically from dates given later in the inscription. They denote eighteen tuns or years of 360 days each, and 3 uinals or months of twenty days each.

The final date of the initial series, in glyph-block A11-B12, denotes thirteen kins or days, the kin glyph to the right being almost illegible, the head-

variant for the number thirteen decipherable to the left.

Small glyph A13 gives the actual day, or rather one part of the actual day, 5 Ben, the head being that of Ben, the horizontal bar above denoting the numeral five.

The lower right glyph of this group, B13, is the first glyph of the Supplementary series. It is known as Glyph G of this series and is the form employed when there is a remainder of one after a division by nine. Thus three uinals are sixty days; plus the thirteen kins makes seventy-three days; this divided by nine gives eight and one ninth.

The inscription continues without a break with glyph C1 at the top; this is Glyph F of the Supplementary Series, of unknown meaning. The next glyph to the right, D1, is glyph E of the Supplementary Series plus a coefficient of nine, represented by the bar meaning five, with four dots. This glyph is interpreted as the sign for the moon and signifies twenty days, the meaning of this glyph and coefficient being "moon twenty-nine days". (add to the date line)

Glyph C2, beneath C1, without coefficient, is termed Glyph C of the Supplementary Series and seems to mean that the date fell on the first lunar month of a group of six. The next two glyphs, D2 and E1, glyphs X and B of the Supplementary series respectively, are of unknown meaning.

In glyph-block F1 is found Glyph A of the Supplementary Series with a coefficient of ten, denoted by the death's head. This means that the month in which the date fell had thirty days, denoted by the moon sign for twenty plus the coefficient of ten.

Glyph E2 gives the other part, 16 Chen, of the exact day, the first part of which was denoted by Glyph A13. The complete Initial Series date is therefore as written by Maya epigraphers, 9. 15. 18. 3. 13. 5 Ben 16 Chen.

The sign is that of Chen with the coefficient of sixteen to the left, three bars plus one dot, the crescentic elements above and below the dot being ornamental.

The glyphs are of unknown, but probably of calendrical significance until we reach Glyph L1, denoting two kins or days. This belongs to the Secondary Series and denotes two days after the preceding date. Adding two days to 5 Ben 16 Chen we reach in the Mayan calendrical system the day 7 Men 18 Chen, which day is given in the glyphs K2 and L2 immediately beneath.

Again a number of unknown glyphs intervene before another calculation in the Secondary Series is found in the four glyphs to the upper right, S1, T1, U1, and V1. The first two of these note the addition of eight tuns or years, eight uinals or months and two days, this addition arriving at the day given in the latter two glyphs, 7 Caban 0 Pax.

Continuing down the last two columns, after passing several glyphs of unknown meaning, another secondary Series calculation is reached in U4 which records a passage of three days. Adding these three days to the last date of 7 Caban 0 Pax, the day 10 Ahau 3 Pax is reached, which date is recorded in glyphs V4 and U5.

All the rest of the glyphs are unknown to us except for four in the left panel of incised glyphs which apparently also record calculations in the Secondary Series. In glyph blocks A6 and B6 is shown the day 2, (3?) Cauac 2 Muan, which is one month and one day before the date 9. 16. 6. 12. 0. 10 Ahau, 3 Pax, the last date given in the relief glyphs. Again in glyph blocks D4 (and C5) is given the day 5 Cib (19 Mac), one month and three days before the other date 2 Cauac 2 Muan in this same panel. (same ?)

There are therefore six dates shown in this inscription, all within a period of about eight years and four months by solar calendar. ~~It is probable that the contemporary date of the erection of the lintel was the latest date given, the last date in the relief glyphs, 9. 16. 6. 12. 0. 10 Ahau, 3 Pax. This~~

On almost all Maya monuments there is one date that ends in a round number, and this is presumed to be the contemporary date, the close of a period of time, which termination the monument if supposed to commemorate. On this lintel there is no such date, and some of the best Maya students suggest that the inscription was continued on the companion lintel from this same temple, Lintel 1, very similar in artistic feeling, but of which only a small fragment is known. This contemporary date is presumed to be 9. 16. 10. 0. 0., 1 Ahau, 3 Zip. This

places it towards the close of the occupation of Piedras Negras, but, as would be expected, from the location of the lintel, among the very earliest of the dates in the East Group, the last group erected, and preceding by several years or decades the magnificent stelae, such as numbers 12, 13, 14 and 15, which stood on or at the base of the pyramid crowned by the temple in which the lintel stood. Of these, Stela 13 is nearest to it in date.

While the dates thus recorded are exact to the very day, giving us the most exact dates found in any chronology except ours, since they are counted, day by day, from a definite date of remote antiquity, yet their correlation with our chronology is disputed and still uncertain. The question of Maya epigraphy is very much as would be the problem should our modern civilization be entirely destroyed, and discovered a millennium later. Our mathematical and calendrical systems, being based on natural fact, would easily be interpreted by later archeologists, but our lingual inscriptions might forever evade their research. They would find inscriptions such as "In this building met the First Continental Congress, September 5, 1774", and "On this spot stood the building in which President Lincoln was shot, April 14, 1865". They would be able to read the dates and to figure that exactly so many years and days intervened between these two dates, but the meaning of the text would be unknown to them, as would the correlation between the dates and their own calendar, based on a different system and having a different starting point. It is exactly this difficulty that Maya epigraphers have with Maya inscriptions. Nevertheless great progress has been made in determining this correlation and we may be confident that within a few years the question will be settled to the satisfaction of all authorities. Since the inscriptions frequently give the phases of the moon and the positions of several of the planets, these give a key which astronomers will soon employ to unlock the mystery. The most promising clues lie in glyphs which apparently

record eclipses, phenomena which can be definitely dated by astronomers at any period of past history. At present the question of correlation is by no means hazy but rather lies between two possible systems, each of which proposes an exact correlation, two hundred and sixty years apart. By that which is accepted by the best American students, the date 9. 16. 10. 0. 0. 1 Ahau 3 ~~Pax~~ Zip fell upon ~~December 2~~ March 17, 761 A. D. The proponents of the alternative system of correlation would date it two hundred and sixty years earlier.

---

Thompson Notes:
Central element of Initial Series Introductory Glyph indicates that the month of the I. S. is Chen. The sign is a moon glyph ( Beyer, Anthropos, XXVI, 1931, pp. 99-108.
Glyph D1 reads 9D not 9E and means moon 9 days old not 29.
D2 is form only found when Glyph C of Lunar series has no coefficient or a coefficient of 1.
C5, which is obliterated may represent 19 Mac, the date nearest to that last recorded.
The final date of the inscription probably given on other lintel of the same building. Possibly the lahuntun ending 9.16.10-0-0, 1 Ahau 3 Zip (March 17th 761).

Should study and add data from Guthe and Morley on Glyph E. Morley thinks E was used in place of D deliberately; that they did not differentiate at P. N. ∅ Glyph E is used in place of D ∅ in Stela 1 at $A^{10}$. Five similar errors in glyphs D-E made at Yaxchilan. Apparently inscriptions should be 9D, not 9E as carved.