PICTORIAL SYNONYMS AND HOMONYMS IN THE MAYA DRESDEN CODEX

J. ERIC S. THOMPSON

In painted books and sculpture of the Mexican plateau and Oaxaca conventional symbols were much used. Seizing a man by his hair to represent capture or a burning temple to denote conquest come immediately to mind. There are also rebus glyphs (i.e. one term used to represent a homonym with different meaning, e.g. writing *soldado* as a picture of the sun (sol) with a die (dado) beside it) in pictorial manuscripts from the same area. They are far commoner in early colonial times than before the conquest, but they have a long use behind them as Caso's identifications, for example of the rebus picture of Teozacoalco (Codex Bodley, Interpretación, p. 16) clearly show.

The existence of rebus glyphs in Maya writing is well established, but little attention has been paid to rebus pictures, which, for want of a better name I shall call pictorial homonyms, and still less to pictorial synonyms. By the latter term I mean scenes in codices which express a term, often a stock phrase, which is a synonym of the word expressed glyphically. It must be understood that in Maya codices the pictures supplement the hieroglyphic text; the text does not explain the pictures. Indeed, there are places where there is a glyphic text but no accompanying picture; but nowhere is there a picture without a text.

Dresden p. 45c is an excellent illustration of a pictorial synonym. The key glyph is that for drought (*kintunyabil,* Thompson, 1950, p. 269), the augury of that part of the tonalpoualli. Drought is an abstraction not easily expressed pictorially and so its representation presented the Maya artist with a problem. In this instance he solved it by painting an unhappy deer prostrate on the ground with head twisted up and protruding tongue. The deer is pretty clearly on the point of expiring. Over him crouches God B, the Maya rain god, with what appear to be torches in his hands although the flames are treated in an unusual manner. The Maya rain gods, the Chacs, like their cousins, the Tlalocs, could be both benevolent and malevolent.

The meaning of the scene is obvious when we recall that *cim cehil,* 'deer death,' is a stock Maya expression for drought and occurs in the Maya book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel in a prophecy for drought (Roys, 1933, p. 122). As it lent itself readily to illustration, the artist chose it to represent the less easily depicted abstraction, drought.

A second section of this tonalpoualli (p. 42c) also treats of drought, and the drought glyph is again prominent. The Maya artist, wishing to avoid repetition, treated the matter in a different way. This picture shows God B, Chac, brandishing his axe and menacing a seated and most unhappy figure of the maize god who has his left hand raised as though to shield his face from blows. Here the rain god in his malignant aspect clearly threatens the destruction of the maize crop. So far as I know, a Maya phrase corresponding to the scene has not survived, but that it is a pictorial synonym for drought can not be doubted. God B frequently carries an axe, as do the Tlalocs, but in Maya *baat* means both axe and hail, and the modern Maya call the stone axes they find in their milpas *baatchac,* Chacs' axes, and they are regarded as thunderbolts. Whether the axe here denotes drought caused by hail destroying the crops is not certain.

On Dresden 40b a macaw holding a blazing torch in each hand appears below a text with the drought glyph. Lizana, who wrote in 1633 informs us that Kinich-Kakmo, 'sun-faced fire macaw,' was a manifestation of the midday sun which descended at noon to burn, that is consume, the sacrifice offered him. Here the lighted torches clearly represent the scorching sun. The macaw's connection with the sun is well brought out by the fact that the sun glyph is often prefixed to the macaw glyph in texts on stelae of the Classic period, In Codex Dresden and occasionally on the monuments of the Classic period the number four stands before the macaw glyph. However, four is the number ruled by the sun god, and in these cases the number four represents its ruler, the sun. The reverse appears on one Copan stela: the sun glyph is used instead of the number four and, of course, his head invariably serves for the number four in the so-called head variant numbers. Here, then, drought is depicted as the sun-faced macaw with his blazing torches, Kinichkakmo.

To vary this somewhat arid discussion of aridity, on Dresden 38b a vulture is depicted standing in the rain. The text has the vulture's glyph, but no augural glyph of good, bad, or indifferent prospects. A Maya phrase which also appears in a prophecy of drought and evil times in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel is *ḳuch caan chacil,* "rains from vulture sky' (Roys, 1933, p. 154). The accompanying sentence, 'rains of little profit,' makes it clear that the *ḳuch caan chacil* are worthless rains of no benefit to the crops. A similar scene of the vulture standing in the rain appears in Codex Madrid (p. 10a) as part

of a weather almanac. The vulture glyph apparently serves as the augury. On Dresden 36b, also part of a weather almanac, a vulture is pictured above a snake. Snake is *can*, sky is *caan*, presumably another rebus picture. The glyphs read *ḳuch ti caanal.*

Rebus pictures or pictorial homonyms occur in the codices as already noted. Good examples occur on Dresden pp. 26-28 which deal with the ceremonies marking the close of the old year and the start of the new, a matter of prime importance to the Maya. Bishop Landa informs us it was customary to set up a stone called *acantun*, meaning set-up stone, to which was attached the name of the color associated with the incoming year. In the Ritual of the Bacabs manuscript (Roys, 1963) the word is paired with *acante*, set-up tree or post.

On the left of each of these pages is a column generally accepted to represent the acantun standing on a tun sign (the acantun is absent on p. 25, being replaced by a figure of the rain god). The outline of each column embodies the Maya symbol for wood (*te* or *che*) and around each is coiled a snake in a manner remarkably like the serpent in the apple tree in mediaeval representations of the temptation of Eve. At the top project four heart-shaped leaves which, I think, represent the *acan* or *acam* (perhaps *Orobanche* sp.) which the Pío Pérez dictionary defines as yerba de tallo anguloso y hojas cordiformes. Snake in Yucatec is *can*; the tun (stone) may represent either the pile of stones on which the acantun stood or the final syllable of *acantun*. Rebus fashion the whole reads *acan*(*can*)*te*, *tun*, the snake — *can* — probably repeated to help identify the plant *acan* for the drawing would not permit precise identification. Alternatively we have the acante represented standing on the pile of stones (tun).

Within the wood outline of the column or post is the cauac sign, which, I think, has the sonic value *ḳu* or *ḳul* (god or holy in addition to its other meanings of storm, year, and perhaps rain clouds. Landa assigns it the sound *cu*, but the good bishop never learned to differentiate between glottalized and non-glottalized sounds (he wrote Cuculcan, Cayom, Cinchahau, Holkan for Kukulcan, Kinichahau, Holcan etc.). *Ku* with the enclosing *che* sign gives us *ḳuche*, literally god tree, the name for cedar. We know that the Maya made their idols always of cedar wood, and as the acantun and acante were idols, it is logical that they also should have been of cedar. These pictures, therefore, give us a lot of information by rebus.

On these same pages of Codex Dresden the Bacab gods who were very prominent in the new year ceremonies are shown disguised as opossums, the Yucatec name for which is *och*. One of the names for the Bacabs was *tolil och*. *Xtol* is a Maya term for actor, and the masked and disguised dancers who performed until a few years ago in Mérida were called *xtoles*. The root *och* (*uch* in Kekchi) carries the idea of imitation or substitution, perhaps because the *och* (opossum) feigns death when attacked. It seems probable therefore that the Bacabs were shown as opossums on these pages because they were disguised actors, that is *tolil och*.

In the prophecy for katun 3 Ahau in Chilam Balam of Chumayel the general omens are of dire catastrophe. With prophecies of rains of little profit couched in figurative and semi esoteric phrases occurs the expression *pek u mut*, 'the *pek* is its *omen*.' At the head of the prophecy for the next katun, 1 Ahau, are drawn a quadruped which pretty clearly represents a dog, and below it what with a somewhat lively imagination one can recognize as a flag. The relevant text, as translated by Roys (1933, p. 155), runs: "The dog [*pek*] is its tidings, the vulture is its tidings. The flag is the second of the figures." As the flag is beneath the animal, we can be confident that the identification of the picture as a dog is correct, and that it is called *pek*, the common Yucatec name for dogs in general.

In this and the parallel Tizimin text (Barrera Vasquez & Rendon, 1948, p. 132) the *pek* is mentioned in the prophecies for Katuns 5 Ahau, 3 Ahau and 1 Ahau, always in the direct contexts and usually associated with rains of little or no value.

In three places in Codex Dresden a dog with flaming torch in each paw descends from the sky. Two of the final glyphs in the texts which the pictures illustrate have a cauac sign with flame prefix to left and the wood (*te* or *che*) affix above. Among the meanings of cauac is storm and lightning, and I think the flame affix here signifies lightning (*ak* is tongue and flames are called *yak kak*, 'tongues of fire'). Another possibility is that as a meaning of cauac is *haab*, 'year,' and *ak* in the sense of damp is used with it to form the terms *akyaab* or *akyaabil*, "rainy season,' but that doesn't fit the context so well. There is a possibility — and it is no more — that the wood symbol is used as a sort of determinative to indicate that *ak* is here used with the meaning of tongue of fire in conjunction with the storm meaning of

cauac. Against that must be set that in Maya, as in Spanish, firewood and timber have distinct names. At least the above shows how difficult the matching of word to glyph can be when the former, as here, have quite diverse meanings.

Luckily, we are not without guidance. Seler (1902-23, pp. 165-68), in discussing the two versions of the lost Zapotec Mapa de Santiago Guevea of 1540, noted that the picture of *tani quie goxio,* cerro de rayo, appears in Copy B as a hill, covered with European-style trees, above which is a lightning zigzag descending from heavy clouds. On the other hand, Copy A (in the Museo Nacional), which shows far less European influence, represents this same place as a mountain and above a dog (Seler's identification) descending from the sky. Seler, on the strength of this parallel identifies the dog as the lightning animal, and cites as corraboration these same pages in Codex Dresden and others in Codex Madrid. In view of the essential unity of so many, many religious concepts all over Middle America, Seler was undoubtedly justified in his conclusions.

There is a final confirmatory passage. Gates (1931, p. 33) discusses these same pictures and glyphs of Dresden and reaches the same conclusion, but adds a clinching argument: dictionaries of the Pokoman and Poconchi Maya dialects list the yerba llanten, a weed, as *rak' tzi,* adding "quiere decir la lengua del trueno, su lengua de perro." Here then we have another association of the dog with thunder, and the tongue of thunder presumably is lightning.

Neither Seler nor Gates had any knowledge of the *pek* prophecies in the books of Chilam Balam. In view of the direful contexts in which the *pek* prophecies occur, one must conclude that the *pek* thunders and lightnings were not accompanied by heavy rains. This seems to be born out by the glyphic texts which the pictured lightning dogs accompany, for there is a marked association with the glyph of the sun god. In a previous discussion of the weather aspect of the *pek,* I had associated it with drought (Thompson, 1959, p. 359) and with *pek,* water tank. This was wrong, although drought might well be the outcome of rainless lightning storms. I must also return to the question of the dog glyph.

Pek is the common, generic name for dog in Yucatan, and as the clearly parallel passages in the books of Chilam Balam use the term *pek* in the prophecies for bad weather, I think there can be little doubt

that the dog glyph in Codex Dresden should also be translated as *pek*. However, Knorozov and, following him, Kelley read this dog glyph as *tzul* in their syllabic-alphabetic system, and, indeed, use this interpretation as a fundamental proof of the correctness of their approach.

Tzul is a rare name for domestic dog which appears in no early Maya colonial text or dictionary, and only in two rather late Maya-Spanish vocabularies which, having much in common, probably derive from one source. The word is unknown in present-day Yucatan. I feel responsible for having led them astray, for I listed this word in a discussion of terms for dog (Thompson, 1950, p. 78), and Knorozov, on his own admission not having access to the two sources, undoubtedly took his information from me. Unfortunately, I did not expand my information, having no idea that it was to become a fundamental argument for the syllabic-alphabetic approach, and even to be fed into, and emerge at the far end of, the Siberian computing machines.

I should have pointed out that *tzul* is defined in those two rather late vocabularies as perro domestico, and is contrasted with the usual terms for perro de la tierra, just as the native turkey was called 'gallina de la tierra.' It is, then, highly probable that *tzul* was adopted in colonial times to describe the quite different dogs which the Spaniards brought with them. There is a Maya word tzula, seal or sea-lion (the *ha*, sometimes *a* in compounds means water).

Now, there are several cases where the Maya applied names of native fauna and flora to species introduced from Spain, and then modified the original term to distinguish it from the introduced species. *Tzimin*, tapir, was taken over as a name for the horse, and then to distinguish the two, the tapir was called *tzimin kax* or *tzimin che* (forest tapir). *Keken*, wild boar, was extended to describe the Spanish pig, and then the former was renamed *kekenche*, 'forest boar.' *Haas*, mamey, became *chacal haas*, 'red mamey,' when *haas* was used to describe the newly introduced banana.

It is, therefore, not unlikely that *tzul*, seal, was adopted by the Maya to describe the newly introduced Spanish dogs (the heads of the two species are not unalike, and whether you put the name for the dog or the seal first, the Maya must have seen a resemblance — horse and tapir certainly are not close, yet the Maya linked them together) and then added (*h*)*a*, 'water' to distinguish the seal from the dog, just as they had added *che* and *kax* to *tzimin* and *keken* and *chacal* to *haas*.

Tzul appears in no other Maya language or dialect as a term for dog, and except for its appearance in those two lateish dictionaries, probably derived from a single source, is unknown in ancient Maya sources and modern Maya speech. The dog glyph clearly stands for *pek* for this is not only the every-day name for dog in Yucatec but precisely the word used in the prophecies to describe those unfavorable weather conditions. The *tzul* interpretation has had too long a life, but as the saying is "todo junto, como al perro los palos."

Two other clear examples of rebus pictures in Dresden I have discussed elsewhere (Thompson, 1958). The moon goddess in almanacs which, in my opinion, treat of diseases, carries on her shoulders the glyphic representation of each disease. The word for disease (literally, divine punishment) is *koch* and *koch* is also to carry on one's shoulders. An easy eaxmple of a pictorial homonym among the diseases is the burning fire on the back of the moon goddess in one picture, for *kak* is both fire and certain skin diseases, including, in post-Columbian times, small pox. Here, then, the *kak* disease is shown as *kak*, fire. This particular example occurs in an adjacent almanac, where, in contrast to the load on the shoulders, *koch*, the goddess bears the load on her back by means of tump line, *Cuch* is the word for a load thus carried, but *cuch* also means fate, yet another pictorial homonym. The passage thus declares in picture and glyph: "On these dates the fate the goddess has for us is skin disease." The contrasting of two rather similarly sounding words, *koch* and *cuch*, is typical of Maya writing in the books of Chilam Balam. The Maya dearly loved punning.

There is an unusual picture of Chac, the rain god, on Dresden 37b, in part of a tonalpoualli treating of the weather. He has a flaming torch in one hand, but from between his legs emerges the long neck of a heron which curves round to terminate in the bird's head. Identification as a heron was made by Tozzer and Allen (1910, p. 324; Plate 15, 3). In the caption the bird is called a heron; in the text "probably" qualifies the identification.

The neck is joined to the god's penis, represented in the peculiar manner familiar to us from bood-drawing scenes in the codices. This particular representation was drawn to my attention by my colleague, Dr Thomas Barthel. Rain is sometimes shown as blue-green streams emerging from between the gods' legs and on Madrid p. 3a, in scenes also treating of rain, an eroded glyph, probably the Chuen sign, is

attached to the end of the rain god's penis (the possibility that this is a rain symbol is being studied by me). Elsewhere the rain emerges from a jar between the god's legs. The representation of a heron is, however, unique.

The white heron is *bac-ha* or *baac ha* in Yucatec (Ticul and Vienna vocabularies), but *bac* or *baac* is "derramar agua o otro licor de vasija angosta." Probably, therefore, *bac ha,* white heron, is used as a rebus for *bac ha,* derramar agua. In think two ideas merge here. The Chacs, like the Tlalocs, had jars or gourds, from which they poured water, *i.e.* rain, on earth, but they are also called *Ah Hoyabilob.* This means sprinklers, but it can also mean urinators.

On the adjacent page 36b and forming part of the same weather almanac, a god with upraised hands squats in the rain. His elongated head terminates in the curved neck and head of an indubitable heron (with fish in beak). This is not a headdress, but part of the head. Nothing is known of any heron-headed personage in Maya mythology, and this is the only representation, although occasionally a heron is set in a headdress (Temple of Cross, Palenque). In view of the pouring rain, there is a distinct probability that this representation also refers to *bac ha,* pour out water.

Although I am not completely convinced of the correctness of this rebus picture, it must be more than coincidence that the only herons in the codices appear in the same weather almanac.

These examples demonstrate the wide use of homonyms and synonyms in picture and glyphs. I think that also demonstrate, notably in discussion of *pek,* the thunder and lightning dog, the many refinements which a computing machine can never uncover. Rather, if I may quote from a letter from that scholar and gentleman, the late Pablo Martínez del Río, although referring to another matter, in this glyphic research one must be "como las gallinas, picoteando un grano aquí, otro allá."

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