

## The Logogram JALAM

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Several logographic signs in Maya hieroglyphic writing resist decipherment because they occur only in a few contexts that are semantically very limited. One of these idiosyncratic logograms is the sign which is listed as T284 in the Thompson catalogue (1962) and as 2M2 in the sign catalogue of Macri and Looper (2003). The sign consists of two circular elements (Figure 1). The left circular element has an indented shaded area, and the other is the main sign of the day sign *Ben* “Reed” (T584).



**Figure 1. T284 in the Thompson catalogue (Drawing by Eric Thompson)**

The distribution of the logogram is extremely limited. It appears only as part of the common female name “Lady Six Sky”. Under normal circumstances, a sign with such a limited appearance in the corpus of Maya texts could not be “cracked”. However, in the case of this sign, a series of syllabic spellings provides the key to its unequivocal decipherment.

The name “Lady Six Sky” is used by various important Maya women from the Late Classic period. Certainly the most important female to bear this name was “Lady Six Sky” of Naranjo, who took over the throne of Naranjo during a period of dynastic crisis (Figure 2). She was the daughter of King *Balaj Chan K’awil* of Dos Pilas and gave birth to *K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chahk*, who became one of the greatest kings of Naranjo (Martin & Grube 2008: 74).

Another lady with the same name was “Lady Six Sky” of La Corona (Figure 3). Her personal name was Lady *Chak Tok Chahk*, and she was the wife of *Chakaw Nahb Chan* and mother of two sons, *K’inich ? Yook* and *Chak Ak’ach Yuk* (Stuart et al. 2014: 439).

At Yaxchilan, one of the wives of Bird Jaguar IV was “Lady Six Sky” from Motul de San José (Mathews 1997) (Figure 4). Finally, a lady from the site of La Florida, the ancient place of *Namaan*, also bore the name “Lady Six Sky”.

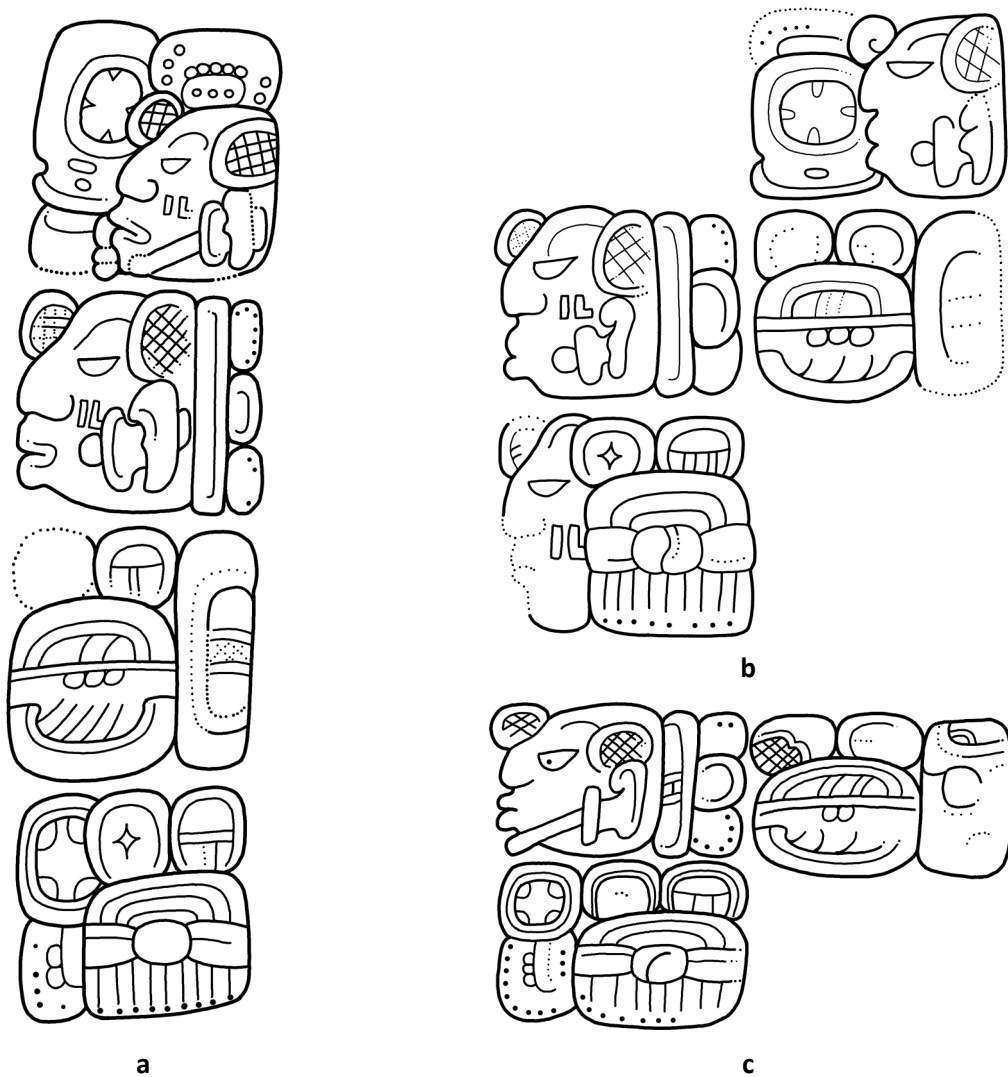


Figure 2. Examples of the name of “Lady Six Sky” from Naranjo. a) Stela 24, front; b) Stela 24, right side; c) Stela 29, back (Drawings by Nikolai Grube)

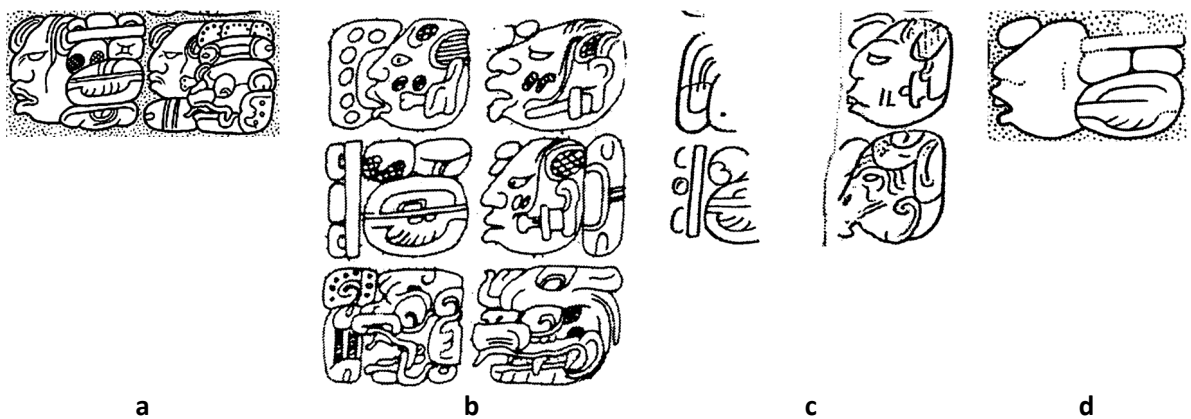


Figure 3. Lady Six Sky of La Corona. a) Element 53 (Drawing by David Stuart); b) Panel 3 (Drawing by William Ringle); c) Panel 2 (Drawing by David Stuart); d) Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Block 2 (Drawing by David Stuart)

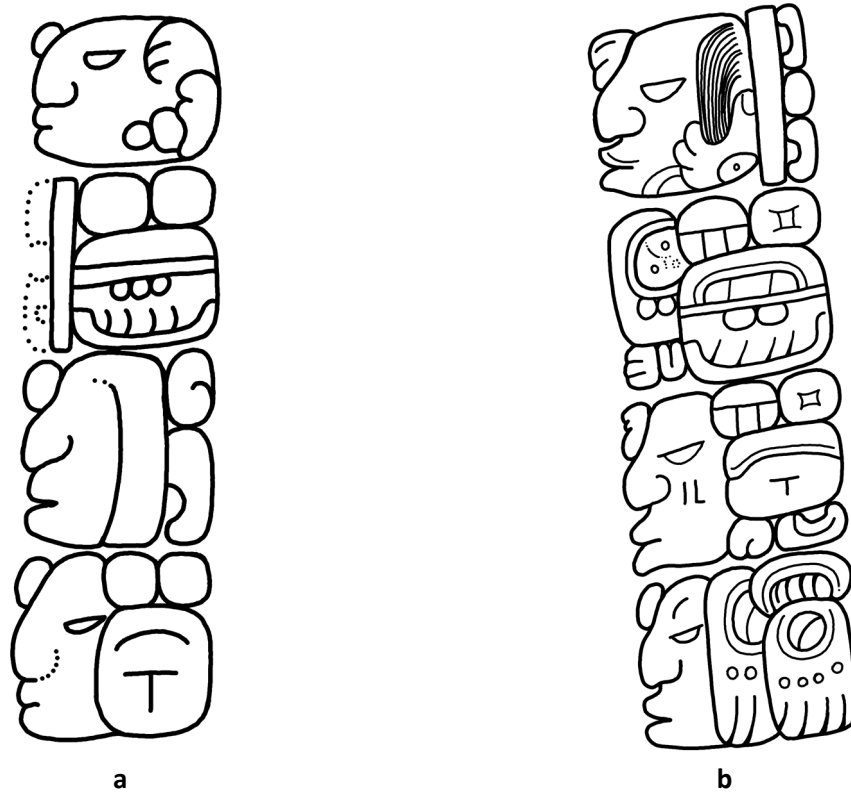


Figure 4. Two names of Lady Six Sky from Motul de San José at Yaxchilan. a) Lintel 5, b) Lintel 41 (Drawings by Nikolai Grube)

The nominal phrases of each of these women consist of several glyph blocks, which seem to refer to their personal name, and the hieroglyph “Lady Six Sky”. A close inspection of this latter name shows that it always includes the female prefix **IX(IK)**, the number coefficient **WAK** “six”, the glyph **CHAN-na** “sky”, on top of which appears the small T284 sign discussed here. The key to the reading of this rare sign is a full phonetic substitution in the nominal phrase of “Lady Six Sky” from Motul de San José on Yaxchilan Lintel 41 (Figure 4b). Here, the T284 sign is replaced by the syllables **ja-la-ma**. Given that this is a direct substitution, the logogram represented by T284 must read **JALAM**.

Further confirmation that *jalam* is indeed the intended spelling is found in two other female names (Figure 5). On Oxpemul Stela 5, there is another Lady *Wak Chan* (Figure 6). Her name appears in a parentage statement introduced by the phrase **u-B’AAH-hi u-JUN-TAHN-na**, “he is the beloved one of”, followed by the still undeciphered “vase title” that introduces female names. The main part of the female name is written **IXIK-WAK ja-la-mi CHAN-na**. In this example, the syllabic spelling appears in exactly the same position as the sign T284 in other instances of the name, providing independent confirmation for the **JALAM** reading. Finally, the title **ja-la-ma** also appears without the *wak chan* elements on a ceramic from Río Azul (Kerr 1383, Figure 7).



Figure 5. A Lady Six Sky on a Plate in Brussels (Drawing by Sebastian Matteo)

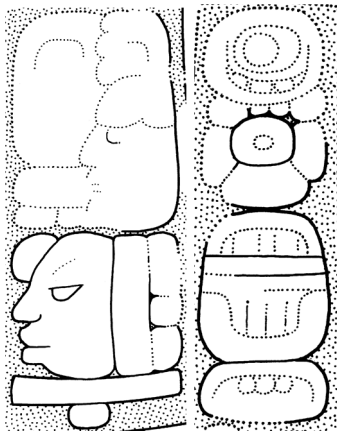


Figure 6. IXIK WAK ja-la-mi CHAN-na on Oxpemul Stela 5 (Drawing by Nikolai Grube)



Figure 7. Lady ja-la-ma on Kerr 1383 (Photo by Justin Kerr)

Although we can be very confident about the linguistic decipherment of the logogram, its semantic interpretation is problematic. The position of the sign between a number and a noun could be that of a numeral classifier. However, I have not been able to find any classifier which could be related to the *jalam* reading in the relevant dictionaries. At the moment, the most plausible interpretation of the word *jalam* is that it consists of the root *jal* “weave” and a suffix *-am*.

The transitive verb root *jal* for “to weave sth.” is found in all Mayan languages except in those belonging to the Yukatekan and K’ichean branches (Table 1).

pCh	<i>jäl</i>	weave	(Kaufman & Norman 1984)
CHL	<i>jal</i>	tejer (red, hamaca, moral, costal)	(Aulie & de Aulie 1978)
CHN	<i>jäle’</i>	tejer (hamaca, red)	(Keller & Luciano 1997)
CHT	<i>hal</i>	tejer	(Moran 1695)
CHR	<i>har</i>	weaving, braiding, netting, weaving technic	(Wisdom 1950)
TZE	<i>ghalauon</i>	tejer	(de Ara 1986)
TZE	<i>ghalom</i>	<i>tejedor</i>	(de Ara 1986)
TZE	<i>jalab</i>	tejer	(Slocum & Gerdel 1971)
TZO	<i>jal</i>	interweave, weave	(Laughlin 1988)

Table 1. Linguistic evidence for *jal*.

The suffix *-am*, on the other hand, is not easy to explain. In lowland Mayan languages, words ending with *-am* include *chilam* “translator”, *k’inam* “strength, pain”, *atz’am* “salt”, *chikam* “jicama”, *lakam*, “banner”; and several animal names, such as *bahlam* “jaguar”, *kitam* “peccary”, and *kusam* “golondrina/swallow”. At Chichen Itza, we find the word *k’ayam* as part of a female name. A spelling **cha-la-ma** is also known from a panel from the Palenque region (Mayer 1980: pl. 65). It is possible that *-am* functions as a suffix for a certain class of (derived) nouns. Another possibility is to interpret *-am* as a realization of the *-Vm* suffix that derives agentive nouns from verbs. The most common shape is –

oom, such as in *kayoom* “fisherman” (lit. ‘person who will fish’), *k’ayoom* “singer”, *yuhknoom* “shaker”, *kohknoom* “guardian”, and perhaps also *ch’ahoom* (of unknown translation).

If this identification is correct, *jalam* would translate as “weaver”, a title which would be very appropriate for royal women. Weaving was a gendered activity and one of the principal tasks of elite women. At many Maya sites, the distribution of spindle whorls can be used as evidence to detect female space and labor in elite households. Several sets of looted weaving bones from sites such as Naranjo and Dzibilchaltun that are inscribed with a queen’s name suggest that even royal women of the highest status claimed to be weavers (Houston & Stuart 2001).

Weaving was also an activity closely associated with the moon goddess. In the Mopan myth of the Sun, Moon and Venus recorded by Thompson in San Antonio, Toledo, the Moon Goddess lived with her grandfather and spent much time weaving before she became the wife of the Sun (Thompson 1930: 119-140). In the Postclassic Codices, Goddess I, who is the young Moon Goddess, bears a name that includes a female head and a prefix **SAK**. Thompson (1972: 47) already noted that this colour prefix may refer not only to the paleness of the moon, but also to the root *sakal*, which means “to weave” in Yukatekan languages.

The *jalam* title is always used in connection with the “six sky” expression. The examples from Oxpemul and Yaxchilan show that **JALAM** should be read between the number six (**WAK**) and the sky sign (**CHAN**). Assuming that the “weaver” translation is correct, this order results in the sequence *wak jalam chan* “six weaver sky”. The names from La Corona and Yaxchilan have **AJAW** attached as the last element, so that the full name must have been *ixik wak jalam chan ajaw*, “Queen Six Sky Weaver”, or “Lady Six Weaver Sky Queen”.

The “six sky” expression without the **JALAM** sign is a common epithet for the Maize God, as well as for a particular celestial location. A *wak chan ajaw* Maize God is credited on Quirigua Stela C with the completion of the thirteenth *Bak’tun* at 4 *Ajaw 8 Kum’u*. On the offering vessel MT 140 from Tikal’s Central Acropolis, a *wak chan winik* glyph labels the image of the tonsured Maize God. *Wak chan* also seems to refer to a specific celestial places. The Temple of the Cross at Palenque may be a particular manifestation of this location, modified by the sign T170.

Places with the number six are associated with the dancing Maize God, in particular in “Holmul dancer” scenes (Tokovinine 2013: 115-123). In many of these scenes, the maize god is dressed in an outfit very similar to that of the Moon Goddess (Figure 8). Both display a wide belt adorned with the head of a shark with scroll pupils eyes, triangular teeth, and cheek barbels, and their lower jaw is replaced by a Spondylus shell. Another common feature is the beaded skirt, which tends to be longer when worn by women. These details of dress and accoutrements, as well as the association with *wak chan* or other “six places”, clearly establish the Moon Goddess and the Maize God as parallel beings. A possible explanation for this association could be that moon is regarded as having a very strong impact on vegetation periods and plant growth. As Karl Taube has noted, the moon and maize are also linked in contemporary Maya ethnography, where it is often reported that the moon is used to time the planting of crops (1992: 68).

The **JALAM** sign, however, is a specific attribute of the Moon Goddess as the weaver, distinguishing her from the male Maize God by referencing this archetypical female activity. Historical women in Maya inscriptions apparently use this title to identify themselves with the Moon Goddess in the same way as Maya kings take the role and embody as the Maize God. The *jalam* title may even survive in a similar function in Bachajon Tzeltal, where *jalamé’tic* is glossed in Spanish as “Virgen María” (Slocum and Gerdel 1971: 145).

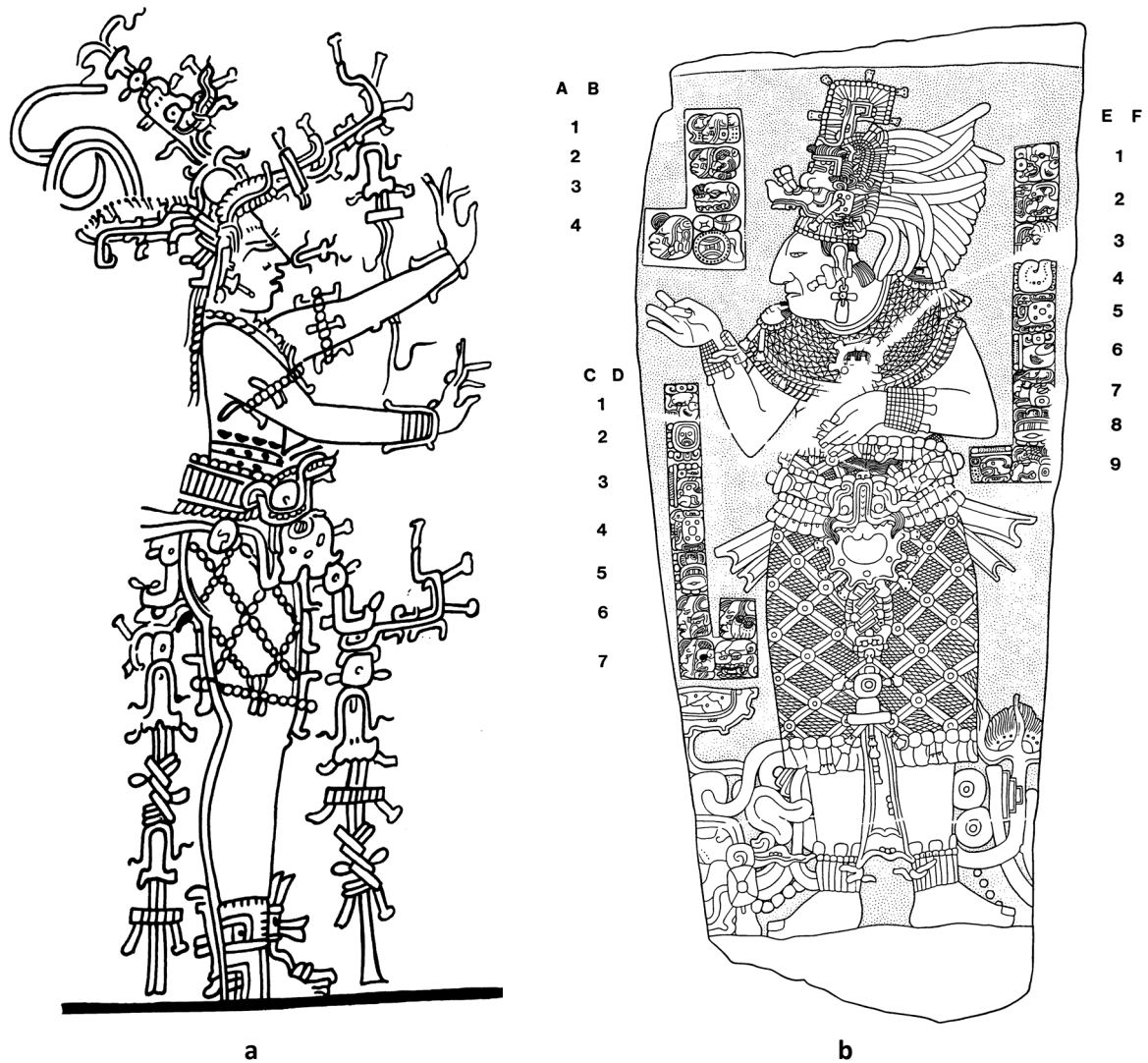


Figure 8. The Moon Goddess and the Maize God in similar dress a) The Maize God on the Buena Vista Vase (Drawing by Oswaldo Chinchilla) b) Lady *Ook Ahiin* on the “Yomop Stela” (Drawing by Nikolai Grube)

### Acknowledgements

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