


Is  the Syllable sa?

Some confusion exists in the distinction of the following signs:



I am certain these are three distinct sets. The first (a) I prefer to read as ts'i (Stuart 1987). The second is sometimes called the "double-comb" sign (b), and occasionally this is halved into a single comb with a bar-like element (c). Its head variant is illustrated as (d). The third set above (e, f), all are agreed, stands for ka. (Note: Where possible, the illustration shows early versions of these signs.)

The double-comb and the ka comb are seen by some as two variants of one sign, but the graphic differences are noteworthy. The comb-like ka sign, for instance, only rarely has dots. It surely originated as a fish fin, being a simple yet adequate stand-in for the fish. Moreover, I know of no examples where this sign, surely working as ka, is doubled in the manner shown in (b). The head variant of the double-comb never substitutes for the established ka forms.

What, then, is the reading for the double-comb? Towards addressing this question I first wish to point out one glyph at Palenque that refers to "Chan Bahlum" upon his accession:



PAL: Palace Tablet

su-ku-winik-ki

I assume that winik (with ki complement) means "man" in this instance. Winik soon appears in this text in another glyph that somehow refers to "Kan Xul," the younger brother of Chan Bahlum:



PAL: Palace Tablet

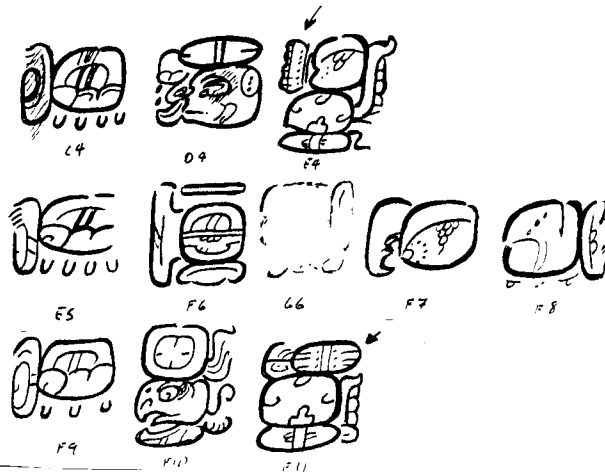
i-ts'i-winik

I believe these glyphs belong to a common category. I would read them as sukun winik, "elder brother," and its'in winik, "younger brother," respectively (these decipherments were outlined in a letter to colleagues dated February 10, 1988). A few other examples of the its'in winik compound exist in the inscriptions, and I have already proposed (Stuart 1987) the reading yi-ts'i-ni for y-its'in, "younger brother of..." As yet I have not found other occurrences of sukun winik written precisely the same way as shown at Palenque.

There are, however, some suggestive associations that may point to a variant spelling of this term.

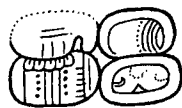


Najtunich



In the painted texts of Najtunich cave one extensive passage names an individual -- probably a ruler, as indicated by the emblem glyph -- and three of his relatives. Each of the three related names follows yi-ta-hi (?), a common grouping of signs that may recall modern Chorti itan, a term meaning "sibling" or "sibling's spouse" (Again, this was suggested in my letter of February 10). In any event, the last of the names ends with its'in winik, now with a wi complement, shown here as a suffixed element (this unusual arrangement is known in other spellings of winik). Interestingly, another winik reference accompanies the name of the first "sibling." Here the modifying elements are the halved double-comb (compare with illustration (c) on previous page) and cauac.

The double-comb sign also appears in these very similar groupings:



El Zofe stela

An early form of yi-ta-hi may precede the first example, and ch'o-ko (for ch'ok, "child"?) accompanies the second.

The association at Najtunich of the two winik titles with possible siblings of course recalls the Palenque glyphs already discussed.



Are these two glyphs variant spellings of the same expression? If so, something must account for the shared position of the double-comb and the su sign. The structural equivalence is only suggested by this one context, and I would strongly hesitate to posit a su value for the double-comb and its variants until more indications are available.

Suku'n is a Yucatecan term for "elder brother" or "elder cousin." In Cholti and Chorti this appears in a slightly different form:

CHOLTI (Moran vocabulary): hermano mayor - çacun, zacun

CHORTI (Wisdom): sak'un - elder sibling, cousin

As you can see, it is possible that cousin references play a role in the relationships expressed at Najtunich.

Perhaps, then, that the double-comb represents sa for sa-ku-(n)-winik. Whatever the vowel may be, a sV value for the sign at least seems possible in this situation.

One test strengthens the possibility. The double-comb appears in the name of the sixteenth Copan ruler:



The double-comb follows pa, and together these somehow replace a "sunrise" logograph. The following entries may account for the equivalence:

CHONTAL (Smailus): pac-el - macharse
pase - salir

CHOL (Aulie and Aulie): pasel - salir (el sol)
pasib q'uin - oriente

CHORTI (Wisdom): pas - an opening up, becoming clear

Of course a reading of sa or something similar should remain tentative, yet kept in mind for future evaluation.

Stuart, David
1987 Ten Phonetic Syllables. Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing, 14. Washington, D.C.: Cetner for Maya Research.