



The Teo Mask of King Ngbe of Ahuelican, Mexico

By

Dr. Clyde A. Winters

Uthman dan Fodio Institute

The Teo mask is from a private collection of Olmec artifacts. The mask is very important because it provides a large corpus of Epi-Olmec symbols. The Epi Olmec writing is usually assigned to the late B.C. period. In this paper we discuss information that the Epi Olmec script may have been in use as early as 600-900 BC, because the personage mentioned on the artifact: Ngbe, is also mentioned in two other Olmec artifacts from Guerrero that date back to the earlier period.



Front Mask



Back Mask

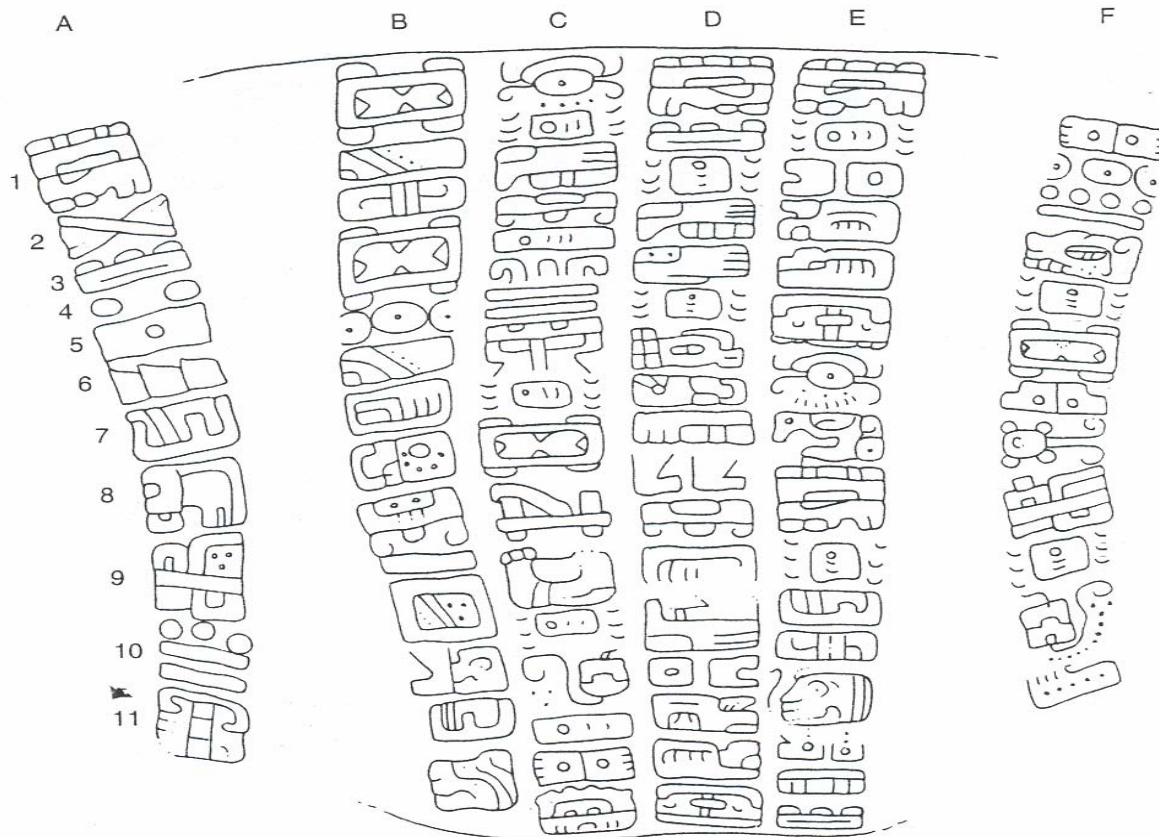

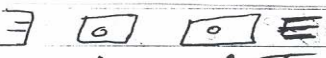


Figure 2. The Teo Mask, text (drawing by Stephen Houston, based in slight part on drawing by David Joralemon; checked against object).

Teo Mask










- On the back of the Teo mask we find an inscription. There are six columns of text on the Teo mask. Some researchers refer to this writing as Epi-Olmec or Isthmian. In reality this is just the hieroglyphic form of Olmec writing. This form of writing combines two or more singular Olmec signs to form messages.

1.  
tu ni ni tu



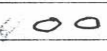
2.    
li a ku li a

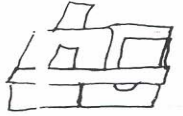





3. 
gyu

4.   
yu po ta gyo












5.    
Na po Ngbe

6.   
lu ta

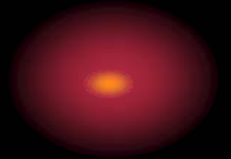
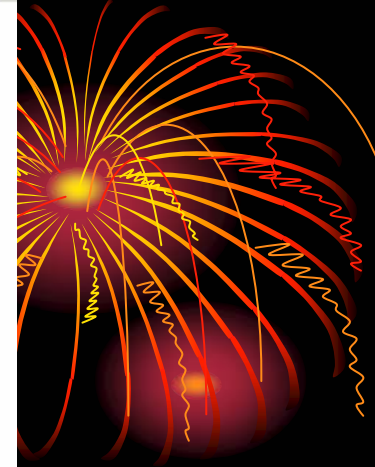
8.    
ta pe ki

9.      
ba na tu po yo

10.    
yo gyo ta po yo

11.           
Na ba yo ta su gyo-gyo pe

12.    
gyu sey ba

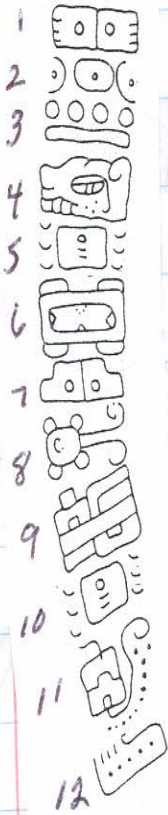


Hieroglyphic Olmec



- Coe and Houston have divided the inscriptions on the Teo mask into six columns labeled A-F. Above we see column F, which in reality is column A, since the Olmec writing is read from right to left. In this figure you can see how each sign in column F has been broken down into its constituent parts. Once this is done you can clearly see the syllabic Olmec character which was used to make the hieroglyphs in column F.

F



1. Jumi Netu

2. a li ku li a

3. gyu i

4. Jagan (B'alam)

5. yo po ta gyu yo

6. Na po Ngbe

7. lu ta lu ta

8. H gyu ki gyu ta gyu ki

9. ba na nani iyo

yo po ta gyu yo
10. ~~ku ta gyu yo~~

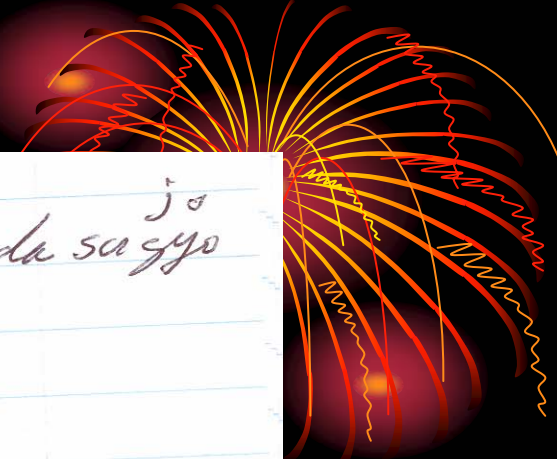
11. lu fe gyu gyu su yo ba na

12. Be sey gyu

- “(1) Cause (here) the conferring of all virtue to this very good abode.(2)Admiration indeed (Oh) Governor. Indeed (you are) wonder. (3) Thou (art) a spirit of tranquility .(4) (Thou art like) the Jaguar (a master of the bush).(5) Righteousness takes root here in this tomb of (6) Na Po Ngbe.(7) This habitation of the devotee (is) a habitation of propriety. (8) Order (Na Po Ngbe) this object of respect to be an envoy on a mission (9) (to) hold upright purity. He who is a powerful spirit (in) thine tomb.(10) Righteousness takes root here (in your) tomb.(11) [Na Po Ngbe] A boundless source of great spiritual tranquility (your) abode. The tomb is powerful.(12) lay low (the celebrity) [in the tomb] to realize spiritual tranquility.”



	E		
1	⊠	—	gyu na da sa gyo ^{jo}
2	⊠	—	yo ta gyo yo
3	⊠	—	na yo
4	⊠	—	Kyu a tu la ta
5	⊠	—	yo gbe yo tu
6	⊠	—	Kyu yo ta ka Ni'li Ni'li se gyo
7	⊠	—	gyu a tu la ta
8	⊠	—	gyo su da na gyo
9	⊠	—	yo ta gyo yo
10	⊠	—	po Kyu gyo ^{jo}
11	⊠	—	po su ku
12	⊠	—	
13	⊠	—	
14	⊠	—	
15	⊠	—	
16	⊠	—	yo ta yo ta ja po tu se ni



Line D

- | | D | |
|----|---|--------------------|
| 1 | | Gyo se do na gyu |
| 2 | | se ni |
| 3 | | yo ta gyo/jo yo |
| 4 | | se po gyo/jo |
| 5 | | bo ho po pe |
| 6 | | yo ta yo yo |
| 7 | | lu da po ga gina |
| 8 | | po lu ita ta se lu |
| 9 | | lu jo tu |
| 10 | | fe lu fe lu |
| 11 | | po tu yu |
| 12 | | yo tu |
| 13 | | po se lu |
| 14 | | yo na |
| 15 | | tu lu tu a kyū ??? |
| 16 | | ?? tu lu tu a kyū |
| 17 | | tu yo ge yo |

yobe i po lu tu

Line C



11a'ki ta ku ngu ki'ki'

se po ta gyo

pu tu vi (po yu)

po vi tu

po se ta

su

gyo

po fo jo ghe ngu po fo

se tu gyo se

po-nyhe

ghe le lu

? ??

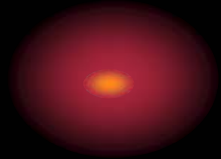
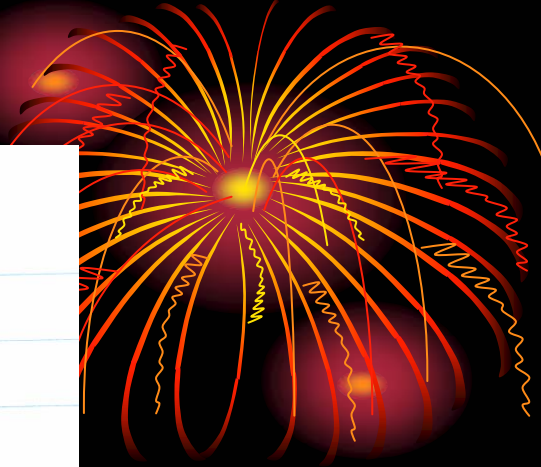
se jo ta se

byu ba su bu

po jo ta

su vi ni tu

ki ni po jo ta gyo



Line B.

B



Na Po Nghe

Po gyu ku

Po ku so ni

Na Po Nghe

li ku lia

Po gyu ku gba

Po tu lu po

po ta gyu po yo

po tu pe tu

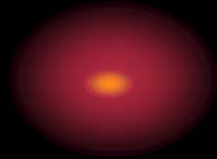
po

po bu ku

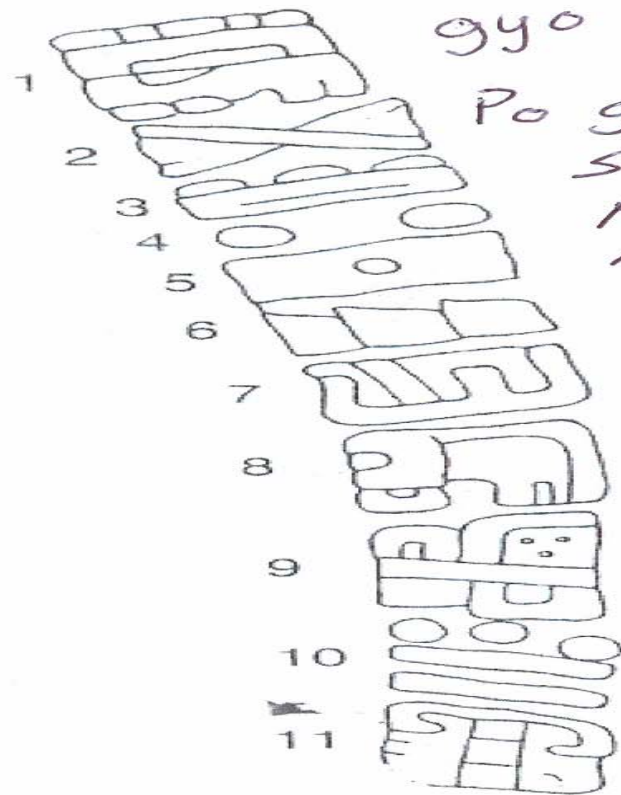
lu a su fe

Po tu jo nu fa se

Dog



Line A



gyo su da na gyu

Po gbe Po
se i
pe
mbo

Potuku

???

po yu i yobu polu

gyo
se

po fa po-ni

Guerrero Inscription of Ngbe



Calt #127 pg 2
 Read right-left
 ① La' style p'o tu
 ② i fa po-tu

	gyo
	kye
	po ngbe
	ku
	po
	tu
	se fa
	alle kye
	gta
	ta me
	fa

Guerrero

- The Guerrero celt makes it clear that Ngbe was recognized as a member of the craftsmen caste. He was ruler of the place where these artifacts were found.
- This celt also makes it clear that Ngbe was probably buried in a pyramid. This view is supported by the Ahuelican, Guerrero Tablet. This artifact was made of the same stone as the Teo mask and the Guerrero celt.



Ahuelican



Sanctuary
of ~~the~~ Virtue
Noble

Wade to Note to
"indeed purity" "indeed purity"

1. Tu-gbe * 2. Tugbe *
3. gbe gbe *

"The Temple"

ga "the hearth"

fa exist (here)

ga zeal, equines
hearth, grow

se, realize; destination

gyo ga



Ahuelican

- (Sanctuary) Po Ngbe
- Nde po Nde po
- Tu gbe Tu gbe
- Gyo gbe
- The Pyramid (Temple)
- Ya
- Fa
- Ga
- Se

- "The sanctuary of Po Ngbe. Indeed purity is King Gbe. Ngbe (was) obedient to the order; the unblemished society consecrated to the cult. The temple (tomb??), the heart (here) purity exist. The growth (of purity to be) realized (here).

