Tepatic Glyphs

Klût i Tepat

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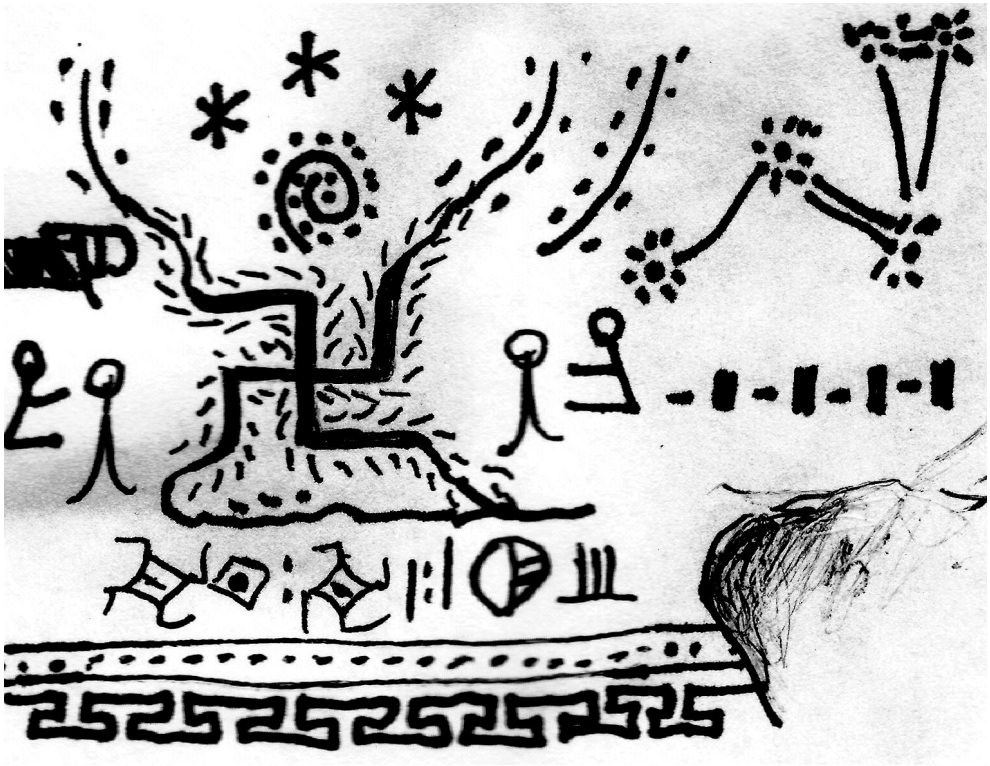
The orthography, or writing system, of Classical Tepat consisted of a large set of logographic *klût* (glyphs), and later a smaller complementary set of phonetic symbols. The *klût* are called logographs because each written symbol represented a word (and a syllable, because most words were monosyllabic). Glyphs could be combined or altered to make new glyphs. In fact, most glyphs could be broken into at least two parts - one part suggesting the sound of the glyph, and one part suggesting the meaning.

SYLLABLE	*hoq*	LANGUAGE	*yuk*
klût	GLYPH	*mwen*	WRITING

History

Milim pictographs

The region now known as Tepat was originally inhabited by the people later called Milim. They left behind no intelligible records, but there is an uncanny continuity in art and writing between the Milim and the Tepat who replaced them. The Milim watched and charted the heavens, erected monuments, similar to Stonehenge, which may have been calendars or temples, and created ornate pottery. They covered walls, stones, caves, and pots with bright, almost psychedelic paintings. In the paintings are many repetitive, recognizable symbols. They must have meant something to the artisans of Milim, even if we cannot read them.



A Milim cave painting

Archaic Script

The first Tepatic dynasty, the Nyow, came down from the foothills of Notoq to establish loose feudal hegemony over the plains. Their kings raised cleanly hewn, polished white monuments, announcing the boundaries of their lands, the locations of their burials, and the dates of their reigns with inscriptions. These archaic glyphs were stiff, blockish, and angular, suitable to etching in stone. The most iconic signs continued directly from Milim art. For example, the swastika of prehistoric paintings became the symbol for “sun” and “day.” But this new writing was much fuller, representing everything from easily visualized objects to grammatical particles of the most elusive senses. For the first time writing was complex and powerful enough to express narratives, and they began to incise into tablets the chronicles of their quasi-mythical Phlat rulers, who allegedly preceded the Nyow.

Brush Writing

When the Nyow crumbled amidst civil war, the monumental tradition persisted among local lords, who established their legitimacy physically with imposing monuments to echo the might of the former kings. But as with many aspects of Tepatic culture, the Period of Division was the period of greatest creativity in writing. The eyes of society turned to the emerging class of *lyup*, intellectuals who served as advisors to competing lords. The Lyup attempted not merely to record, but to interpret history, and defend their interpretations against schools of rival Lyup. New ideas flowered and new glyphs

sprouted.

The Lyup began using brushes and ink to write, and poured out millions of words onto thin planks of reeds. The planks much cheaper and more plentiful than marble and granite, were bound into folding books like Venetian blinds. Soon Tepat discovered how to make parchment and paper. Writing much more rapidly and smoothly with brushes than chisels, glyph segments ran together and their angles were smoothed into curves and loops During this time, the "One Glyph - One Stroke" principle appeared.

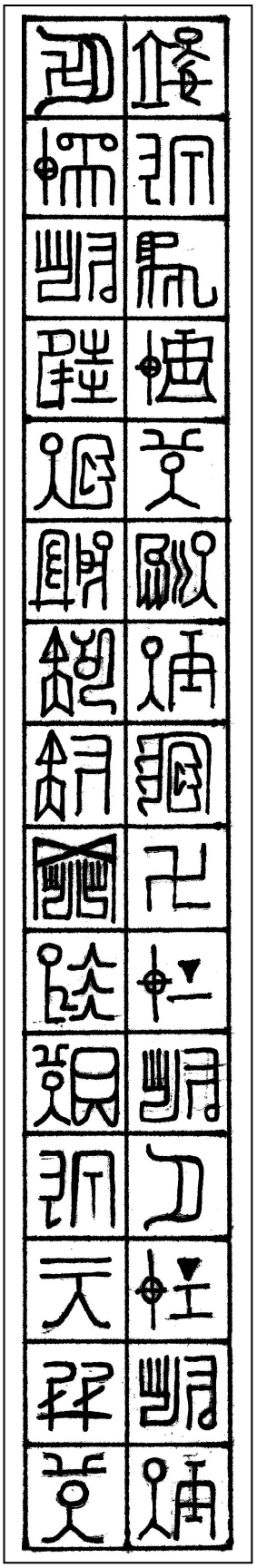
The first true calligrapher was Lyem, a Lyup who is better known for advocating self-interested political apathy. Playing with the shape of glyphs, Lyem linked and turned and bent glyphs around each other in ways he liked, and invented the so-called "enclosure" form of glyphs.

Instability in politics permitted instability in script. Although all the warring states had evolved more fluid forms of lettering, it was a parallel evolution. A particular glyph might not resemble its equivalent in another region, even if both were equally curvy.

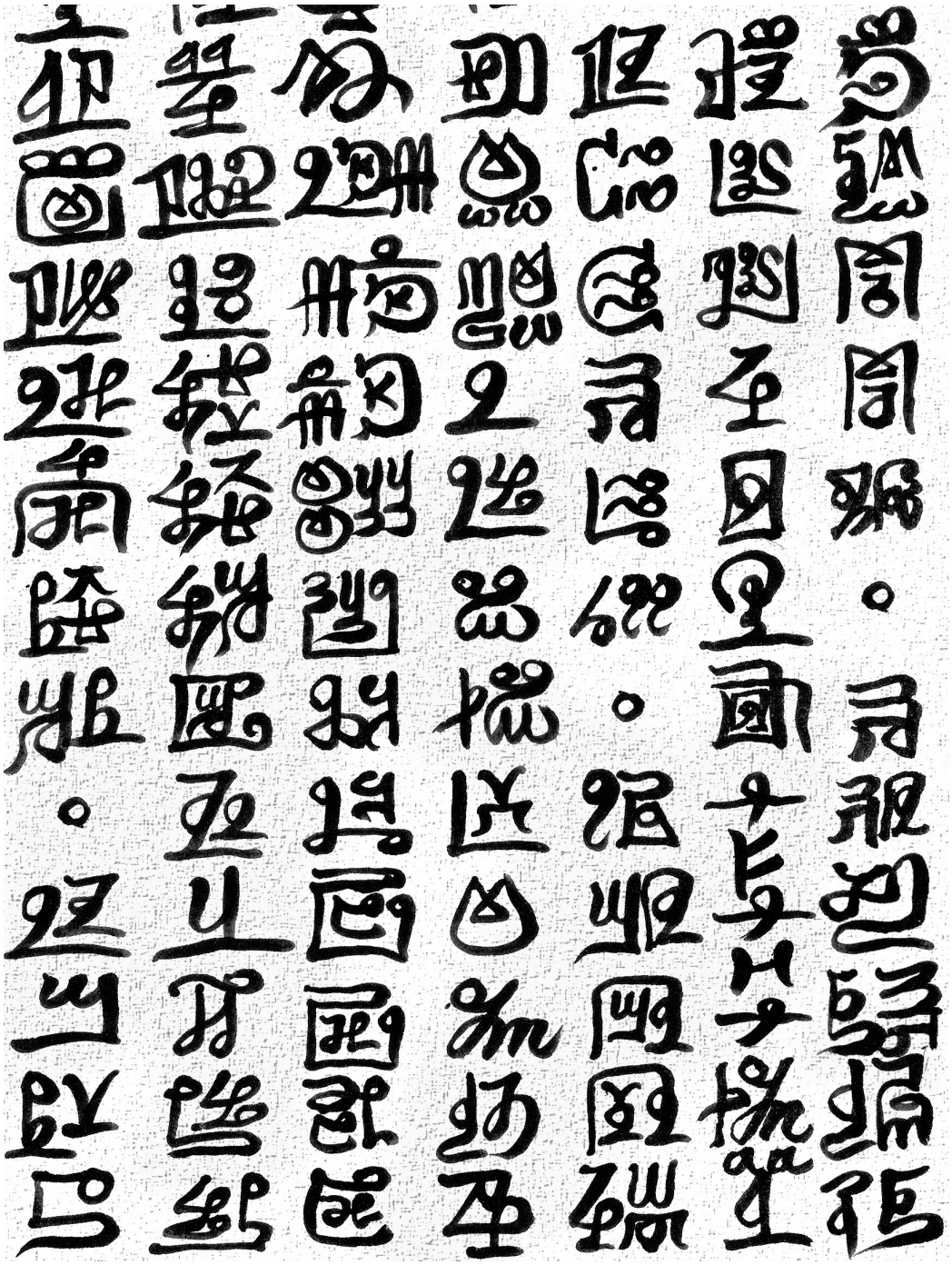
The Classical Script

The period of division ended after 400 years when the state of Kwan succeeded in conquering almost the entire area of historical Tepat. In addition to promulgating a new calendar (so the beginning of his dynasty was now Year 0), Lord Kwan sought to unify the nation in everything from the size of a wine flask to the way people wrote, and put his chief advisor Lyep in charge. Lyep aimed to reduce number of variants for each glyph to exactly one, and codified the result in the oldest dictionary in Tepat. His reform also included punctuation and specified that glyphs fit within a square block.

Lyep himself did not last long in the king's favor, and was put to death a couple of years later. Heck, the whole dynasty ended within 76 years. However the rules of orthography Lyep laid down defined the Classical Tepatic Script for hundreds of years. Classical script was soon adapted to write unrelated languages in Moqali and on the eastern coast of the continent. Resistance came in the form of Notoq, the only ancient province that was not reincorporated into Tepat, and which deliberately preserved otherwise obsolete forms in order to be contrarian.



To the right: one of the better-preserved stone inscriptions, on a stela from the early period of the warring states. "Lord Divine Might of Kwan raised this monument to comemmorate his capture of Lord Thousand Horses of Luk on the 4th day of the 10th month of the 6th year [of his reign]."



Part of a manuscript with Classical Script written on it

"Barcode" Script

During the early Age of Councils, when Classical Script had been firmly established, sorcerers explored methods by which mirrors and other magical objects could store texts, and "remember" them when invoked. Early attempts were frustrated because the devices could not read the handwriting of the sorcerers. It was discovered that they dealt with

highly regular square forms more easily than with the curvy Classical Script, so the glyphs given to mirrors were retooled. Exaggerating the rigidity of the stone inscriptions, the resulting glyphs featured almost exclusively horizontal and vertical straight line segments with right angles. The densely stacked parallel lines sometimes resembled product bar codes. Due to its form and function, I call this "Barcode Script."

Annoying to sight-read but convenient for machines, it flourished among sorcerers and libraries and was unpopular with everyone else. It also spawned a parody: the city of Luqtal, which has exhibited a fascination with the number six ever since Khangnôq laid it out on a hexagonal plan, created (naturally) a hexagonal script, which has 60- and 120-degree angles and can be plotted on an isometric grid.

The glyph *myaq* PROVINCE written in Classical script (left), and rectilinear (middle) and hexagonal (right) 'barcode' script

Glyph Simplification

Although new glyphs and even radicals were occasionally admitted, Classical script hardly changed for 700 years. Eventually the government decided that a modified system would improve literacy. The Glyph Reform Council banished obsolete glyphs, altered the rest to make them easier to write, and published a new list. Some of the new glyphs were unofficial abbreviations of official glyphs, while others were deliberate inventions. The new glyphs were less tangled, and more abstract. Additionally, they lost any resemblance they may still have had to objects in the real world.

The simplification movement never got very far before Tepat disintegrated again. The Notoq and Hamtum states, which were never subject to simplification, carried on using old forms. The Swíra who replaced Tepat also adopted the old forms instead. The remainder of the old Tepat state, which regrouped in Wasak, eventually reverted as well when they decided that nostalgia for traditional glyphs better served their nationalist agenda.

Two glyphs with their simplified forms. Left, *sopak* DOG. Right, *lûy* SUN.

The Origin of Phonetic Symbols

By providing clues to the pronunciation and semantic class of words, the logographic system served well for most speakers and writers of the standard Tepatic language. Problems arose when new words entered from vastly different languages, or when speakers from different parts of the country used different words or different pronunciations of glyphs. In these cases, much more finesse was demanded in representing sounds.

The grammarian Tlamat came up with a new system of indicating sounds by using two glyphs with an agreed pronunciation to represent a third glyph. The first glyph represented the beginning sound of the third glyph, and the second glyph represented the ending sound of the third glyph. He used them in his Yuktepat dictionary to indicate regional pronunciations, which sometimes varied wildly.

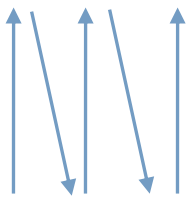
Fifty years later, a convention of Lyup created another system. In principle it was almost identical to Tlamat's system.[1] But instead of reusing regular glyphs, they combined archaic glyphs, parts of glyphs, and random shapes to make a set of special phonetic symbols. This system never replaced the logographic glyphs, but was used to explain them.

Tlamat's system continued in the form of a game. Instead of simply saying a word, the players replaced a word with two other words, which together include the onset and rhyme of that word. Basically, it was Tepat's version of Pig Latin.

How it Works

This explanation deals mostly with the logographs of the Classical Period of the Script. It is conventional to cite glyphs (called *klût* in Tepat) this way: first, the glyph itself as written in Tepat; second, its transliteration, in italics; and third, its English translation, in small capitals.

Since Lyep's reforms, Mwentepat is written in vertical columns, from top to bottom. The columns are arranged left to right across the page, like so:



Written this way, the words appear to move *forward* in relation to the writer, and Tepatic culture places a lot of value on being forward-thinking.

Writing Glyphs

Each simple glyph is also a single long line (*clew*), which bends, turns, curves, and folds back on itself. Similarly to Chinese, each glyph fits inside an imaginary square. Two or more glyphs can be combined to make a more complex glyph. In the process, the

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[1] Incidentally, the slight differences make it possible to document the history of Yuktepat with very precise certainty in some cases. For example, we know that the initial consonant /ŋ/ disappeared from the valley dialect some time in the fifty years between the two systems.

component glyphs, or radicals, may be moved around or altered, so the entire thing fits together inside the imaginary square. However, the radicals of compound glyphs are still written separately, not as part of the same line (*usually*).

Both Chinese and Tepatic logographs reduce figures to abstract forms, but in different ways. Chinese simplifies figures by reducing the number of *kinds* of strokes and the ways the brush can move. A character can have an indefinite *total* number of strokes, but there are only a definite few *different kinds* of strokes. Each stroke can move downward, rightward, or diagonally right-downward, and each character is constructed from the same tiny set of well-defined strokes.

Tepatic simplifies figures by reducing the *total* number of strokes to one: one long, continuous stroke, which can go on indefinitely and bend in indefinitely man ways. Each glyph is written with a single meandering brush movement. Once begun, it can go in any direction - including upward, leftward, and left-upward - and change direction any number of times. A Chinese writer can stop and lift the brush after each stroke, but in Tepat it is bad form to lift the brush before the end of the glyph. (This applies only to the basic glyphs. Each of the simpler glyphs inside a compound glyph is usually written separately.)

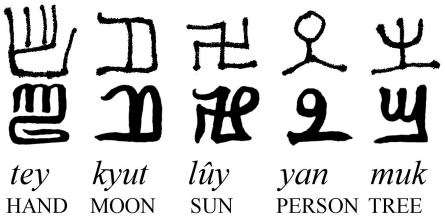
Variant forms of Glyphs

Each *klût* can have several variant forms, or allographs (*klût wal*), depending on whether it stands alone or makes up part of a compound glyph, and its position inside a compound glyph. A glyph's shape may change depending on whether it occurs on the left, right, top, bottom, inside, or outside of a compound glyph.

Kinds of Glyphs

Basic Glyphs

Basic or simple glyphs stand alone. They cannot (synchronically) be analyzed into simpler parts. They are the oldest glyphs, originating from simplified pictures of things, or symbolic representations of ideas.



tey *kyut* *lûy* *yan* *muk*
HAND MOON SUN PERSON TREE

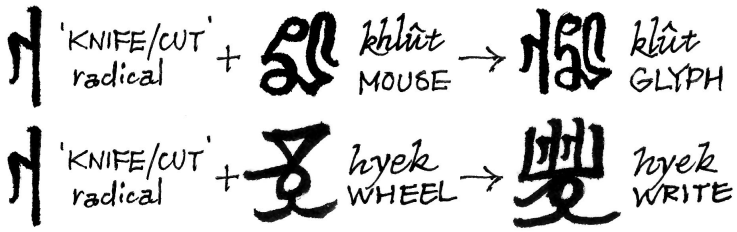
Some basic glyphs derived from pictures

Compound glyphs

Glyphs that are made of two or more glyphs are compound glyphs. A glyph that makes up part of a compound is considered a radical/determiner, or a "piece" (*xet*). Each part contributes to the meaning of the compound (a semantic radical, *xet i yem*) or to its sound (phonetic radical, *xet i hôp*). There are three basic kinds of compounds:

- semantic compounds (two parts that both suggest the meaning)
- phonetic compounds (two parts that both suggest the sound)
- semantic-phonetic compounds (one part suggests the meaning, one part suggests the sound)

The great majority of glyphs are semantic-phonetic compounds, while the other types of compounds, and simple glyphs, combined make up much less.



Semantic-phonetic compounds. Remember, writing was originally 'cut' in stone.

Semantic Parts

The semantic part of a compound, or *xet-i-yem* indicates that the word belongs to a certain class of things, such as people, plants, emotions, etc. Most semantic radicals are *klût* in their own right, and have *klût mut* forms. However, when they are used as semantic radicals, they are written in an alternate form. Usually, they occur on the left side, top side, or as enclosures.

Glyphs used as radicals represent categories which are much broader than the meaning of the glyph by itself. Sometimes the meaning will be only symbolically related. For example, *til* ARROW forms glyphs for directions like north, south, east, and west. The glyph *huy* KNOT forms glyphs for numerals like one, two, three, etc.

Glyphs as Semantic Determiners		
SOUND	MEANING	CATEGORIES
sopak	dog	animals (especially domestic animals)
huy	rope/knot	numbers
sotoy	book/bundle	groups of things
til	arrow	directions
wan	bowl	foods
xaw	flower	flowering plants, fruits
nok	corner	lines, shapes
lûy, kyut, sûy	sun, moon, star	time, seasons, colors, light
mun	gate	open, close, pass, hole
thing	tongue	speaking verbs
wot	intestines	emotions
hep	ear	sounds

Phonetic Determiners

Phonetic determiners usually occur on the bottom, right, or middle of a glyph. They are usually a glyph that rhymes with the compound glyph.

Operators

Operators are small strokes that never occur alone. They are added to other glyphs to modify them. The most common one takes the shape of a small 'v,' although it can be turned in any direction. It is used to indicate a part of the glyph it is attached to.

Recursion: Compound Compound Glyphs

Recursion is essentially glyphs within glyphs within glyphs. A compound glyph can itself form a part of an even more complex compound glyph. So there are some semantic determiners that are themselves compounds. For example: the BOOK radical (for groups of objects) and the PERSON radical together make the radical found in glyphs for countries and ethnicities.

Ligatures

Ligatures are glyphs which are combined so they are written together with one stroke. Usually this works by finding an a element, such as a loop, that both glyphs have in common, and joining them there. Some ligatures are so conventionalized that they have become glyphs in their own right. For example, *plit* LOOM is a combination of *muk* TREE and *wap* ROBE. Eventually, these parts became abbreviated into a single glyph, which is now a semantic determiner for machines.

Compound Phonetic Elements

Of course, some compounds are much more complex. Their parts are related in indirect ways, or multiple ways. A good example of compounding in phonetic elements occurs in the sequence:

Punctuation

Tiptumic languages had periods to mark the end of sentences, but no question or exclamation marks. This may be due to the fact that all such languages had explicit interrogative and exclamatory particles, which made special punctuation marks for them redundant. The usual ending punctuation is a large open circle.[2]

[2] Some texts have used simply a blank space to divide sentences.

Several glyphs sharing the rhyme -*yaq*.
til ARROW (representing directions) + *lûy* SUN + DOWN → *syaq* WEST
(*syaq* WEST - *til* ARROW) + *yan* PERSON → *yaq* AGENT RELATIVIZER
nwong EARTH + *yaq* AGENT RELATIVIZER → *myaq* PROVINCE