

Two Vessels from Xultun Workshops in the Tikal Center for Conservation and Research

Guido Krempe¹, Sebastián Matteo², Dmitri Beliaev³

¹ University of Bonn

² Independent Researcher

³ Russian State University for the Humanities/Higher School of Economics, Moscow

During the past decade the corpus of inscriptions pertaining to the Baax Witz court of Xultun has been significantly amplified thanks to recent archaeological investigations (e.g., Rivera Castillo and Saturno 2014; Saturno and Beltran 2016; Saturno *et al.* 2015, 2017; Hurst and Beltran 2020; Rossi 2015; Rossi and Stuart 2020) as well as newly identified polychrome vessels with dedicatory texts in private and institutional collections (e.g., Krempe and Matteo 2012, 2013; Matteo and Krempe 2011, 2020; Polyukhovych and Loper 2019). Here we present two heretofore unpublished polychrome vessels of unknown provenance (Figures 1-3 and 7-9), both of which can be ascribed to the pottery workshops of Xultun. One of these vessels provides us with additional evidence for Ix Yax We'n Chaak, a female ruler whose existence has just recently been revealed thanks to new *in situ* finds (Hurst and Beltran 2020:209-211; Rossi and Stuart 2020). The other fragmented vessel can, by means of a comparative analysis, stylistically be attributed to a Late Classic palace workshop of Xultun that operated during the reign of Yax We'n Chan K'inich (e.g., Garrison and Stuart 2004; Krempe and Matteo 2012, 2013).

Both vessels were likely confiscated from looters who got caught with their contraband goods in the Tikal area. Unfortunately, no information about their original place of encounter is known to us. In May of 2013, the two vessels were documented in the course of the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project, directed by Dmitri Beliaev, which had its focus on the documentation of Maya inscriptions in the storages of the Tikal National Park. They are currently preserved in the Tikal Center of Conservation and Research (Centro de Conservación e Investigación de Tikal, CCIT) among other ceramic objects (see also Beliaev and de León 2013:340-346; Beliaev *et al.* 2015:680-681).

A cylindrical vessel mentioning Ix Yax We'n Chaak

The first here discussed vessel is a restored vessel registered as "Vaso #8". It measures 23 cm in height and 9.1 cm in diameter (Beliaev and de León 2013:343). This cylindrical drinking cup has an elongated, slightly barrel-shaped form (Figures 1-3).



Figure 1. Still views of CCIT 'Vaso #8'. Photographs by Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project, CEMYK, 2013, with the permission of Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural y Natural, Ministerio de Cultura e Deportes de Guatemala; digitally enhanced by Guido Krempel.



Figure 2. Rollout of CCIT 'Vaso #8'. Photo-Stitching by Guido Krempel, 2019, based on the photographs by Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project.

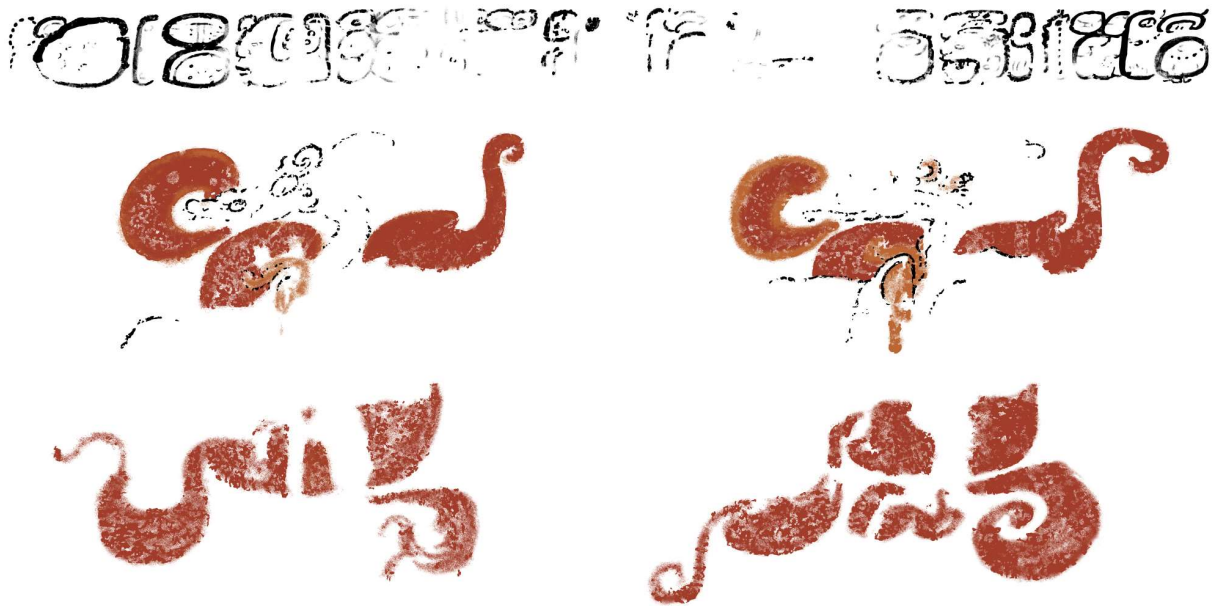


Figure 3. The dedicatory text and iconography of CCIT ‘Vaso #8’. Drawing by Guido Krempel, 2019.

It is adorned with two thick black horizontal lines, one decorating the upper rim and one at the bottom. Below the upper black rim is painted a dedicatory text that is partially eroded. The body of the vessel has a white slip and is decorated in the central section with two repeating motifs. The imagery is, however, barely recognizable due to the heavy abrasion of the vessel surface. Still discernible are remains of a central anthropomorphic figure, the upper part of its head being preserved on one side, and the head of a long-necked creature on top being visible on both sides. Out of the creature’s mouth are emerging volutes that are painted in gaudy red and orange hue. While the black contours of the figure as well as the body of the zoomorphic creature are almost completely eroded, the thick red volutes coming out of its mouth and enclosing the entire motif are still clearly visible.

The dedicatory text consists of twelve glyph blocks, six of which are severely abraded. Notwithstanding the advanced damage, most of the text can still be read or reconstructed, except for two glyph compounds that are almost completely gone and therefore not deducible anymore:

(1) UH?/T’AB? (2) u-tz’i-bi (3) na-ja (4) yu-k’i-bi (5) ti-yu-ta* (6) ka-ka*-wa* (7) yo?-[...] (8) [...] (9) [...] (10) YAX-IX[WE’-CHAAK]-ne (11) BAX-WITZ-AJAW (12) ba-ka-ba

uh[uy?]/t’ab[ayi]? utz’i[h]bnaja[l] yuk’ib ti yuta[l] kakaw? [...] ix yax we’n chaak baax witz ajaw bakab*

“It got sanctified? (it got raised?) the painted drinking cup for fruity cocoa (of) yo?[...] [...] Ix Yax We’n Chaak, sovereign of Baax Witz, chief of the land”

Remarkably, the text does not start with the usual initial **a-ALAY-ya** but instead begins directly with the dedicatory verb. The absence of the initial term *alay* is not unique and known from Xultun ceramics, especially when used in conjunction with the intrinsic (not yet firmly deciphered) dedicatory verb(s?)

utilized here. On two other ceramics originating from Xultun workshops the initial sign is likewise absent: K5976 (dedicated to Ix We'om Yohl Ch'e'n), and K8007 (dedicated to Ix Yax We'n Chaak), the latter also having been confiscated from looters in the Tikal area (see Figure 4a). The text starts with a head variant of the dedicatory verb depicting a male head or skull with “breath”-element that is foremost attested in the region around Uaxactun, Xultun and the (north-) eastern Peten. A possible reading **UH-yi uhuuy** “got sanctified(?)”, was first proposed by Nikolai Grube (Grube and Gaida 2006:66). In the here attested case it could be merged with the ‘God N-dedicatory verb’ with the reading value **T’AB** (Stuart 1998:416-417; Martin 2015:206, note 29; Zender 2005:11-12; Helmke, Beliaev and Vepretskii 2020). When appearing in combination, as is scarcely attested (see K2914, from the Rio Azul region), the two signs seem to be merged, and, to our current knowledge, there is so far no evidence for the occurrence of **UH-yi** and **T’AB-yi** following each other, reason why it is not yet clear if the merged variants have just one reading (see, for example, Zender 2019:30, note 4) or if, eventually, both dedicatory verbs have their proper reading value. The initial verb is then followed by the generic term for the vessel function and intended content: “the painted drinking cup for fruity cacao” (Beliaev, Davletshin and Tokovinine 2009:258-260). Note that this section is almost identical in calligraphic rendering and textual content compared to the other confiscated vessel from Xultun (the already mentioned K8007, today exhibited in the Museo Sylvanus G. Morley in Tikal, Inv. No. 394-83-1; see Figure 4a).

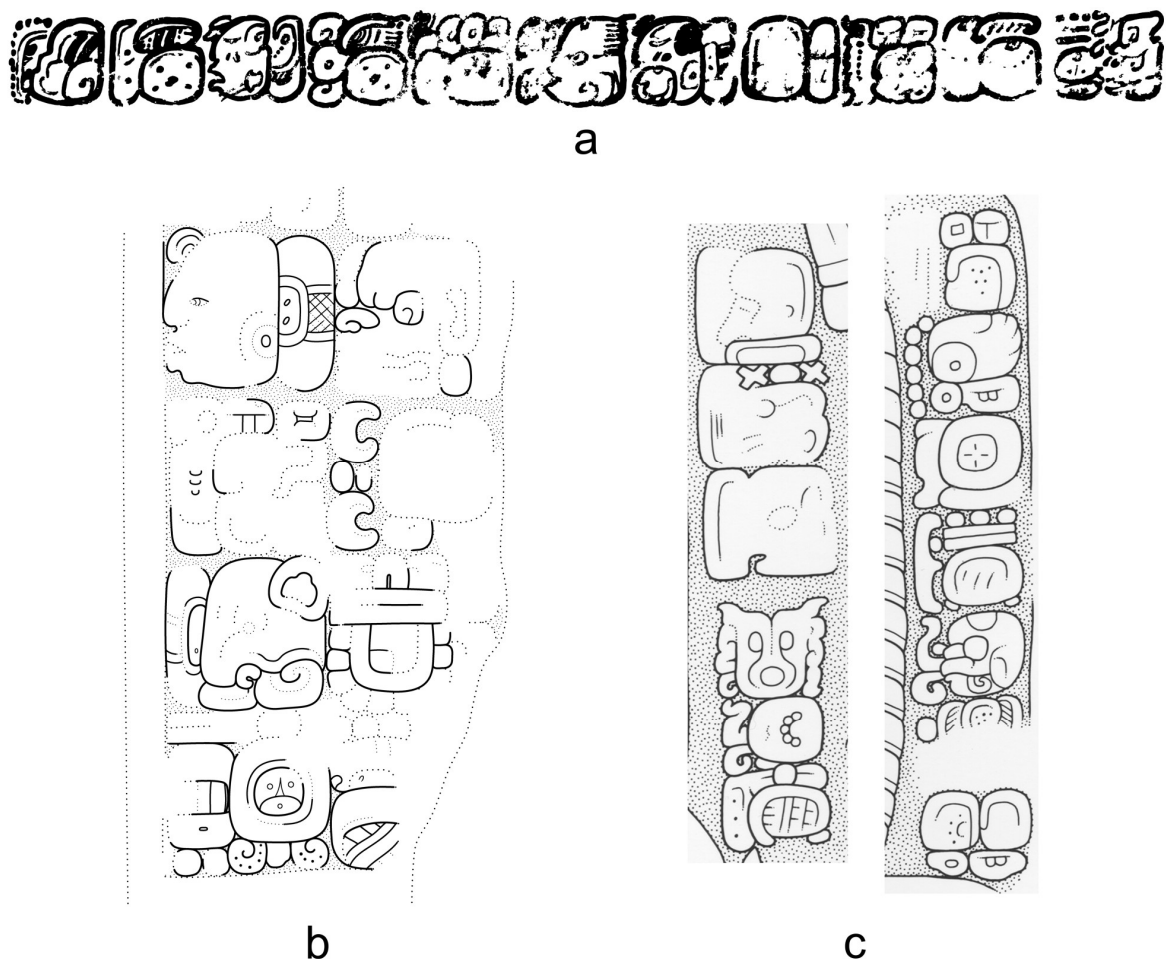


Figure 4. Other attestations of the nominal phrase Ix Yax We'n Chaak; a) K8007. Drawing by Guido Krempel, 2020; b) Xultun Stela 30. Preliminary drawing by Guido Krempel, 2021 (based on Rossi and Stuart 2020:13, Fig. 1); c) Xultun Stela 25, front, detail. Drawing by Eric von Euw, © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 2004.15.6.12.11.

Thereafter are following two glyph compounds that are barely discernible due to the heavy erosion of the surface in this section. The last three glyph compounds are partially eroded but can confidently be reconstructed. They do form the personal name and regal titles of the owner, namely Ix Yax We'n Chaak Baax Witz Ajaw Bakab. Even though the name can easily be confused with a similar name pertaining to the better-known ruler Yax We'n Chan K'inich, striking is the absence of the sequence **CHAN-na K'INICH**, which follows in most of the other known attestations of this name (see, e.g., Krempel and Matteo 2012; Matteo and Krempel 2020). Instead, at closer look, it can be recognized that the logogram **WE'** is here merged with the logogram **IX** (indicated by the tuft of hair in front of the head and tight bun at the back of the head that is painted black) and probably **CHAAK**. The latter sign is almost completely eroded but can be reconstructed due to the presence of a stylized spondylus shell valve forming the ear jewelry of the female head. The reduction (or merging) of the logogram **CHAAK** rendered by means of a spondylus shell valve that forms the ear jewelry of head variants is a common manner that is attested in several other Late Classic nominal phrases. Thus, it can be suggested that the scribe merged three logograms into one complex sign with the intention to write a condensed version of the name **YAX-IX[WE'-CHAAK]-ne**, Ix Yax We'n Chaak.

As Rossi and Stuart (2020:12-13) first noted, this name is also recorded on the vessel K8007, and furthermore on the recently found fragment of Xultun Stela 30, as well as on Xultun Stela 25 (Figure 4a-c; Von Euw and Graham 1984:87-88; see also Hurst and Beltran 2020:209-211). The attestation on K8007, there written **WE'[IX]-YAX cha*-ki** confirms the reading of the same name on the vessel presented here. Thus, following the arguments pointed out by Rossi and Stuart (2020:13), it is reasonable to assume that the sequence **cha-ki** is a syllabic substitution for the almost completely eroded **CHAAK** infix. In all attested examples her personal name is followed by the Xultun emblem glyph, **BAX-WITZ-AJAW** *baax witz ajaw* "Lord of Hammerstone-Mountain" (see Prager *et al.* 2010), and the regal title **ba-ka-ba** *bakab* "chief of the land". The here presented example is thus the fourth so far known attestation of the name of Ix Yax We'n Chaak. Despite the similar textual contents compared with K8007 (see also K2324), the two vessels further have the thick black bands at their upper rim and bottom in common, as well as a peculiar calligraphic style (compare Figures 2 and 4a), leading to the assumption that both may stem from the same palace workshop and were, eventually, created by the same artist.

As for the severely eroded imagery of the vessel, similar smoke -or fire- volutes surrounding a central figure are known from a vast amount of other polychrome vessels, many of which show the head or torso of the deity K'awiil as their central motif. In most of the so far known examples, the surrounding volutes emerge from a torch at K'awiil's "smoking-mirror front" (Figure 6; see K2970, K3025, K3500; see also Smith 1955:Fig. 38b, 40). Other examples with comparable flames painted in bright red or orange colour emanate from a serpent's mouth, whereas yet other vessels show flames coming out of a centipede's maw (Matteo and Krempel 2011: Fig. 6; see also K7149). Interestingly, a notable number of vessels with this motif (K'awiil/Snake/Centipede surrounded by flames) can be attributed to either Xultun (e.g., K3025, K3500, K7149; note that the shape and composition of the latter is, furthermore, similar compared to the here discussed example) or Rio Azul (Matteo and Krempel 2011), respectively. Yet other examples showing K'awiil motifs with surrounding flames/smoke pertain to Codex Style vessels (e.g., K2970, K6708, see also Robicsek and Hales 1981:163-165).

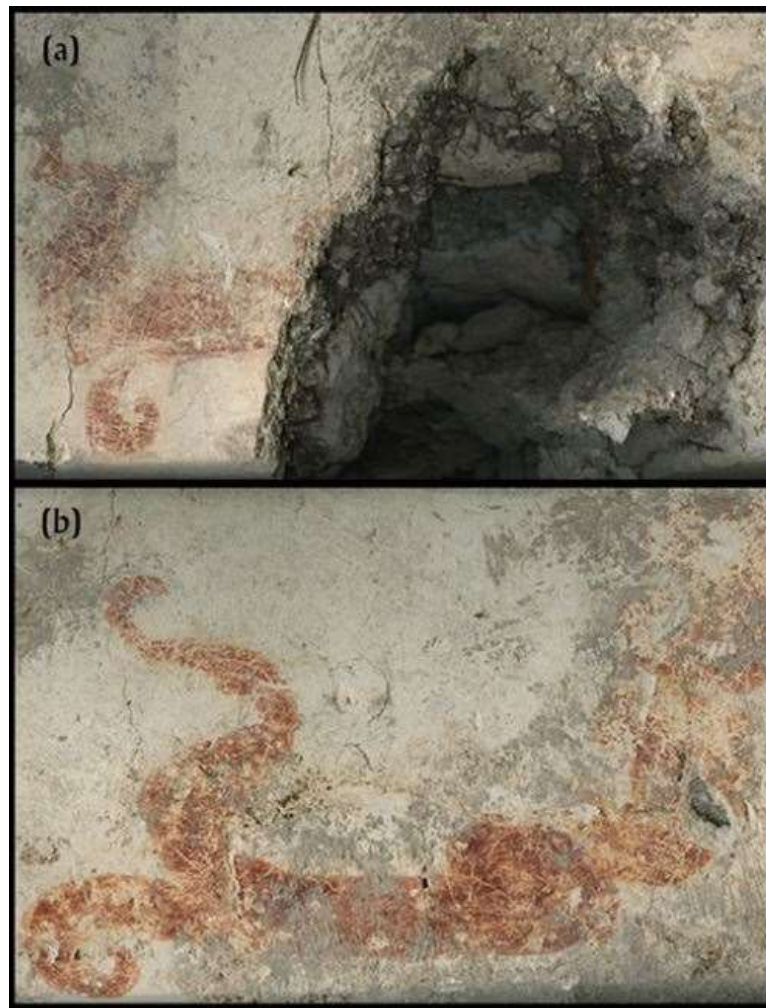


Figure 5. Remains of red volutes as part of textiles pertaining to Individuals 4 and 5 painted on the interior vault of Room 2, Structure 10K-2, Xultun. Photographs by Franco D. Rossi and Jon Roll, Proyecto Arqueológico San Bartolo-Xultun (PRASBX), reproduced from Saturno *et al.* (2017:6, Fig. 9).



Figure 6. Other comparable vessels with K'awiil-motifs and similar volutes; a) Vessel found in a looters trench at Tz'aknal, Guatemala. Photograph by Lenka Horáková, courtesy of Regional Archaeological Project Uaxactun; b) K7149. Photograph courtesy of Justin Kerr; c) Vessel with K'awiil motif (after Smith 1955:Fig. 38-40); d) K3025. Photograph courtesy Justin Kerr; e) K3500. Photograph courtesy Justin Kerr.

Also noteworthy is the presence of comparable red volutes on the interior vault of the mural paintings in Structure 10K-2 at Xultun (Figure 5, see also Saturno *et al.* 2017:6, Fig. 9), the building containing the famous depiction alongside a mention of Yax We'n Chan K'inich who is the main protagonist

painted into the northern niche of Room 2 (David Stuart, Email to Guido Krempel, dated April 14, 2013; see also Rossi, Stuart and Saturno 2015; Saturno *et al.* 2017:4). Unfortunately, these two motifs are heavily eroded and damaged so that in case of the figures designated Individual 4 and 5, respectively, the main motifs surrounded by the volutes are not recognizable in detail anymore. In turn, the original complete imagery depicted on the here-presented vessel remains somewhat elusive due to the severe erosion that obliterates a wide part of the motif. Nonetheless, as Rossi (2015:45, 58-59, see also Saturno *et al.* 2017:4) argues, the red volutes seem to form the terminating ends of textiles worn by warriors (Individuals 4 and 5, respectively) shown with scorpion tails. According to Saturno *et al.* (2017:8), the impersonated deities with scorpion's tail textiles, possibly aspects of the Maizegod, "was petitioned to invoke the first winds and first maize harvest that mark the dry season -all, perhaps uncoincidentally, this period of seasonal transition regularly occurred when the constellation Scorpio would have been strongly visible in the night sky (potentially explaining the scorpion) (Bricker and Bricker 1992:157, Bricker and Bricker 2011:734; Rossi 2015:58-59)".



Figure 7. Compilation of the 'Shell Wing Dragon' motif; a, b) K6167. Caption from rollout photograph by Justin Kerr; c) K4958. Caption from rollout photograph by Justin Kerr; d) Detail from the stucco wall from Palenque Palace, House B. Caption from photograph by Alfred P. Maudslay, Google Art and Culture Project, File No. 00893266; e) Detail from an unprovenanced vessel in Museo Palacio Cantón, Mérida, Reg. No. MM2005-1:199. Drawing by Guido Krempel, 2020; f) Detail from a ceramic plate in the Princeton University Art Museum, Reg. No. INV016181. Reconstruction drawing by Guido Krempel, 2020; g) Detail from a plate found in Avocado Cave, Belize. Drawing by Guido Krempel, 2020, based on photographs by Christian Christensen.

However, in the here presented case there is reason to assume that the eroded zoomorphic creature neither resembles a scorpion, nor a snake or centipede but instead might represent the so called "shell-wing dragon" (Hellmuth 1987:167-179), a zoomorphic representation of an animated conch or mollusk (Figure 7; see also, e.g., K4958, K6167). Due to the advanced erosion, it appears hard to draw final conclusions, nonetheless, we tentatively propose that the anthropomorphic heads with flat forehead and ear jewelry painted in the center could either represent the head of the Maize God, or, alternatively, might have represented portraits of the vessel owner Ix Yax We'n Chaak that were merged with the body of the "shell-wing dragon". Notably, the "shell wing dragon" can be merged with different deity heads (as well as bird-features), among them the Maize God, the Sun God (K'inich

Ajaw), G1, as well as God N, for which the advanced state of abrasion makes it hard to spot its identity in the here depicted instances.

A fragmented Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Pana Variety vessel (PNTF-192, Inv. No. 17.1.1.3815)

The second, here presented vessel is a fragmentary low bowl with vertical walls said to proceed from the looting somewhere in the Uaxactun region to the north of Tikal. It measures 12 cm in height and 35 cm in diameter (Beliaev and de León 2013:343). Approximately 20% of the material is missing. Except for one sherd, all remaining fragments can be reassembled to a coherent body (Figures 8-10).



Figure 8. Still Views of PNTF-192, Inv. No. 17.1.1.3815. Photographs by Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project, CEMYK, 2013, with the permission of Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural y Natural, Ministerio de Cultura e Deportes de Guatemala; digitally enhanced by Guido Krempel.



Figure 9. Rollout of PNTF-192, Inv. No. 17.1.1.3815. Photo-stitching by Guido Krempel, 2020, based on photographs by Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project, CEMYK, 2013.

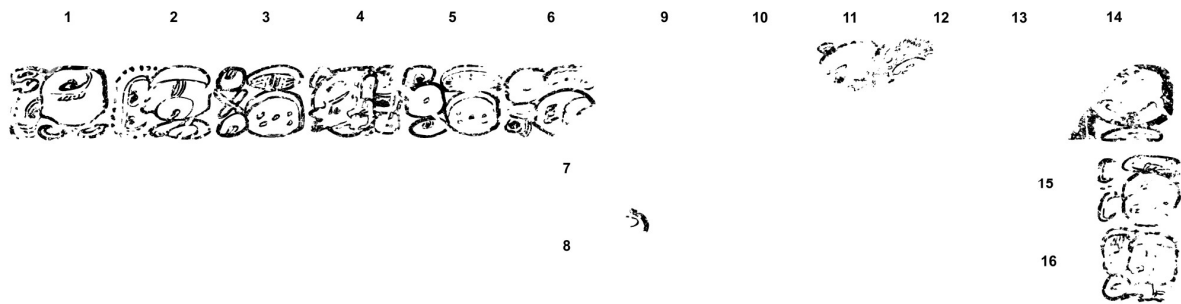


Figure 10. Dedicatory text of PNTF-192, Inv. No. 17.1.1.3815. Drawing by Guido Krempel, 2020.

It pertains to the Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Panela variety, which is characterized by contour lines rendered in orange-red colour, solid orange and pink brushstrokes, and a black background on a cream slip. The dark red contour lines of the glyphs are usually painted on an orange background, as is the case here. Unfortunately, few samples of the Panela group have been found in archaeological contexts. One sherd was found during a rescue survey in the residential zone called El Delirio, located about 2 km north of Xultun central area (Hermes Cifuentes 1998:341, Fig. 14). Three other finds from Uaxactun are known: one complete vessel, one fragmentary piece and one sherd (Smith 1955:Fig. 3c; Fig. 33.23; Fig. 80h; Ricketson 1937:Plate 86).



Figure 11. Compilation of Zacatel Cream Polychrome: Panela variety vessels; a) K6882. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych; b) K1837, in Le Fort (2011:117); c) K5366. Photograph courtesy of Justin Kerr, www.mayavase.com, Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina; d) Sotheby's, Sale N07996, Lot 192; e) Museo de América, Madrid, Inv. No. 91/11/31. Photograph by Sebastián Matteo; f) K9153. Photograph kindly provided by the owner; g) Hitherto unpublished vessel in private collection. Photograph courtesy of Donald Hales, used with kind permission; h) Example with pseudo-dedicatory text. Photograph by Guido Krempel, 2015.

While most of these vessels are of unknown provenance, at least a couple of examples bear the name and regal titles of Xultun's best-known 8th century ruler Yax We'n Chan K'inich (K4752, K9271; Krempel and Matteo 2012:150-154, 2013). A comparative analysis of the calligraphy and style leads to assume that some other ceramics are directly related to this last set (see Figure 11a,f,g) and, thus, can convincingly be attributed to a Xultun pottery workshop, eventually even to one single scribe (Krempel and Matteo in prep.). All that implies that one of the main production loci of the Zacatel Cream-polychrome: Panela variety pottery were the palace workshops of Xultun (see also Krempel and Matteo 2012:150-154; 2013), even though at least one of the finds from Uaxactun (Smith 1955:Figs. 3c, 80h) seems to bear the dynastic title **K'AN-na-wo?-ko-ko** (see also Safronov and Beliaev 2017), thus likely relating it specifically to Uaxactun. Note that a similar title ascribed to an individual named Boboch appears on another unprovenanced Panela variety vessel, there written **K'AN-na-wo-ko AJAW-wa k'an wok(ok?) ajaw** "Lord of K'an Wok(ok?)" (Fig. 11g). Despite the examples that can be ascribed to Xultun artists, there are also several ceramics of unknown provenance pertaining to the Panela group that are held in private and institutional collections (e.g., K1837, K5366, Sotheby's 2004: May 14, lot 192; see Fig. 11), some of which are currently not accessible for detailed studies but could, hopefully, lead to widening our understanding of the geographical distribution of the Panela group vessels in the future.

In its original state, the dedicatory text consisted of approximately 16 glyph compounds, 12 of which are arranged in horizontal reading order beneath the upper rim of the vessel. The other four glyphs are arranged in two distinct vertical panels that serve to divide the central motifs (compare again K6882 for similar vertically arranged glyphs and almost identical imagery; Fig. 11a). Unfortunately, only one row of the vertical glyph panel is completely preserved whereas only a small section of the other two glyphs survives. In large part the dedicatory text can be read as follows:

(1) **a-ALAY-ya** (2) **T'AB-yi** (3) **u-tz'i-bi** (4) **na-ja-la** (5) **yu-k'i-bi** (6) **ti-u-lu** (7-11) [...] (12) [...] (13) [...] (14) **AJ?-tzi-li** (15) **ya-na-bi*** (16) **KAL-TE'**

alay t'abaay utz'i[h]bnajal yuk'ib ti ul [...] aj? tzil y-anabi[l] kal[oom]te'

"Here is presented the decoration of the drinking vessel for atole [...], Aj? Tzil, the servant?/auxiliary? of the *kaloomte'*"

The beginning of this dedicatory text is clearly readable and stylistically comparable to several other vessels pertaining to the Panela group and related varieties from Xultun (see Krempel and Matteo 2012:148-157, 2013). Unfortunately, the section recording the regal titles and likely the name of the owner is almost completely missing. Nonetheless, the final three glyph compounds of the text are of special importance as they seem to record the terminating section of a personal name, followed by the sequence **ya-na-bi KAL-TE' y-anabi[l] kal[oom]te'** "the auxiliary of the *kaloomte'*" (see Sheseña and Navarrete Cáceres 2017:231). Given that the title *anab* is written in its possessed form with the third person ergative marker *y-* "his, her, its", we can conclude that the vessel belonged to a subordinate of a high-ranking dignitary. Interestingly, like on our vase, there are several other Late Classic Maya vessels that mention individuals who were the servants or auxiliaries (*anab*) of bearers of the *kaloomte'* title (see, e.g., Beliaev *et al.* 2018:835, Fig. 4b; Looper and Polyukhovych 2016:7, for a brief discussion of the *anab* title see Sheseña and Navarrete Cáceres 2017:231 and Houston 2016:405-408). So far, we know of three 8th century rulers from Xultun who bore the *kaloomte'* title: Ix We'om Yohl Ch'en (K5976), Yax We'n Chan K'inich (K2324), and Ix Yax We'n Chaak (Xultun Stela 25). The first two individuals can be associated with the handwriting of one particular scribe. However, for the time being, Yax We'n Chan K'inich is the only *kaloomte'* whose name is bequeathed to us on ceramics pertaining to Panela group pottery (see Krempel and Matteo 2012:150-154, 2013). Yet another argument in favour of Yax We'n Chan K'inich might be the absence of the female agentive **IX** (but this is not obligatory for female nominal phrases). Therefore, we tentatively assume that the here-

presented vessel may eventually have belonged to a ritual servant subordinate to Yax We'n Chan K'inich, even though this assumption calls for additional confirmation based on more evidence. The personal name of the artist remains ambiguous as, unfortunately, the corresponding section that likely recorded his name did not survive completely, with the exception being the sequence *aj? tzil*, which could either designate a rare title, or, alternatively, provides us with his personal name: Aj Tzil. Despite this vessel there are additional Panela group ceramics that can be ascribed to his handwriting (K4572, K6682, K9153, K9271, see also Krempel and Matteo 2013, in prep.). Furthermore, several looted ceramics pertaining to other styles with different colour palettes can be attributed to the same scribe (e.g., K5722, K7055, K8728, MS5320, for the latter see Polyukhovych and Looper 2019; see also Krempel and Matteo 2012:152, Fig. 5b; Krempel and Matteo in prep.; Robicsek and Hales 1981:Table 3c).

Concluding remarks

The study of calligraphy, style, and textual content of the here discussed ceramics in combination with the archaeological evidence allows for a good estimation of their dating. Two different contemporaneous scribes working for the Xultun lords Yax We'n Chan K'inich, (~749 A.D., see Rossi, Stuart and Saturno 2015; Krempel and Matteo 2012) and Ix Yax We'n Chaak (~761 A.D., see Rossi and Stuart 2020), can be made out. The first scribe painted a notable number of elaborate vessels, among them specimen that were made for Yax We'n Chan K'inich (K4572, K9271) and Ix We'om Yohl Ch'e'n (MS5230, see Polyukhovych and Looper 2019), respectively. The other scribe realized two vessels for Ix Yax We'n Chaak (K8007 and Tikal CCIT 'Vaso #8'), at least one for the son of Yax We'n Chan K'inich (K2324), and possibly yet another for 'Scroll-head' Ti' Kuy (K3500). In sum, even though one of the here-presented vessels is heavily eroded and the other one only partially preserved, both objects are significant additions to the corpus of inscriptions pertaining to Xultun's Late Classic pottery workshops.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mónica Pellecer, Oswaldo Gómez and Elizabeth Marroquín and the personnel of Centro de Conservación e Investigación de Tikal for their help and assistance during the fieldwork at Tikal in 2013. Dmitri Beliaev's research was conducted with the support of the Russian Science Foundation (Project # 18-18-00454). Warm thanks also to Donald M. Hales, Ángel Sánchez Gamboa, and Alejandro Sheseña for comments and reviews of an earlier draft of the present note, Claudia Zehrt and the Google Art and Culture Project for permission to reproduce a caption from Maudslay's photograph of the stucco from Palenque's House B (Figure 7d), Yuriy Polyukhovych for permission to reproduce his photograph of K6882 in private collection (Figure 11a), as well as Christian Christensen for having provided a photograph template for the drawing of the plate found in Avocado Cave, Belize (Figure 7g). We also thank Heather Hurst, Franco Rossi, Jon Roll and the Xultun Archaeological Project for permission to reproduce the photographs from Structure 10K-2 (Figure 5), as well as Barbara Fash and Cynthia Mackey of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, for permission to reproduce the drawing of Stela 25 by Eric von Euw and for having facilitated the process (Figure 4c).

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