



Glyph Dwellers

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Codex-style Inscribed Vessels in the Fralin Museum of Art

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In this note, we discuss five inscribed Maya vessels that we were given the opportunity to examine and photograph in the Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, Charlottesville during Summer 2015. Many of these objects are unknown to epigraphers. All of these vessels are decorated in the "codex style" associated with Calakmul, Mexico and the El Mirador basin, Guatemala.

1980.EL.48.33

This vessel is a low bowl of a type often designated for serving atole (**Fig. 1**). This vessel features a fully readable Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) or Dedication Formula, as well as a radiating design of spotted feathers on its underside. The inscription is carefully painted and complete but unfortunately does not name a specific individual. Instead, it refers to the owner only by a series of common titles: "holy Chatahn person, Sak Wahyis, artist/sage."



Fig. 1. Codex-style bowl. Fralin Museum of Art 1980.EL.48.33. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

**Table 1.** Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1980.EL.48.33. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

| | | | | |
|--|---|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| | A | a-LAY-ya | alay | here |
| | B | tz'i-bi- | tz'ihbnaj | is painted |
| | C | -na-ja | " | " |
| | D | ji- | jich | the surface |
| | E | -chi | " | " |
| | F | yu-k'i-bi | yuk'ib | his drinking vessel |



| | | | |
|---|-------------|------------|-------------|
| G | ti u-lu | ti ul | for atole |
| H | K'UH | k'uhul | holy |
| I | cha-TAHN-na | chatahn | Chatahn |
| J | wi-WINIK-ki | winik | person |
| K | SAK WAHY-si | sak wahyis | Sak Wahyis |
| L | i-tz'a-ti | itz'aat | artist/sage |

**1989.31.34**

This vessel is another codex-style atole bowl (**Fig. 2**). Its text consists of a PSS indicating that it is a "drinking vessel for atole," owned by the famous artist/sage and ballplayer Yopaat Bahlam. This person is named on vessels painted by a number of different artists. These include K1335, K1560, K2583, K3433, K5424, K5721, K8479, Nakbe 103A.20.72 (López and Fahsen 1994:Fig. 4), and a vase from Tintal (Hansen et al. 2006:743, fig. 5a; Reents-Budet and Bishop 1998; Reents-Budet et al. 2011). See also discussion of 1982.12.33, below.



Fig. 2. Codex-style bowl. Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.34. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

**Table 2.** Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.34. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

| | | | | |
|--|---|------------------|------------|---------------------|
| | A | a-LAY-ya | alay | here |
| | B | tz'i-bi- | tz'ihibnaj | is painted |
| | C | -na-ja | " | " |
| | D | ji-chi | jich | the surface |
| | E | — | — | — |
| | F | yu-k'i-bi | yuk'ib | his drinking vessel |



G

ta u-lu

ta ul

for atole



H

i-tz'a-ti

itz'aat

artist/sage



I

pi-tzi-la

pitziil

ballplayer



J

YOPAAT-ti

yopaat

Yopaat Bahlam



K

BAHLAM-
ma

bahlam

"

**1982.12.33 (MS1197)**

This vessel of a slightly flaring cylindrical shape is painted with an inscription of eight blocks (**Figs. 3-5**). A still photograph of it was published by Robicsek and Hales (1981:211, Tab. 10f). According to chemical analysis, this vessel was made in the El Mirador Basin, most likely at a site in its northern region (Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald Bishop, personal communication, 2016). The inscription consists of a PSS beginning with the formula typical for this style: *alay tz'ihbnaj jich* "here is painted the surface" (A-D). Following this are the blocks **yo-OTOOT-ti** and **u-K'IN-ni** (E, F). The inscription concludes with two titles that are well known on codex-style ceramics: Sak Wahyis and "great youth" (G, H).

In PSS inscriptions from codex-style ceramics, the vessel type usually follows **jich** or **yich** (see Grube 1991; MacLeod 1990; Stuart 2005). In the case of Fralin vessel 1982.12.33, the relevant sign is *yotoot* "his house." In fact, "*yotoot*" is used with reference to vessels in several cases, such as the pedestal bowl in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 1988.1284; the chile bowl from Calakmul (Stuart 2016); the Berlin tobacco vessel (Coe 1973:138; Grube and Gaida 2006:fig. 28.2); codex-style bottles in the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (acc. no. 247641) and Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología de Guatemala (Inv. no. 16.313; Muñoz Cosme, Vidal Lorenzo, and Valdés Gómez 1999:158, no. 131; see also Robicsek and Hales 1981:220, Table 20b); bowl Kerr 6882 (private collection); the El Peru alabaster nodule (Daues 2012); Tikal Miscellaneous Text 140 (Kerr 8009); and the Tortuguero Box (Kislak Collection, Library of Congress) (see also Stuart 2005; Grube and Gaida 2006:189-191). Many of these vessels are lidded or have constricted mouths, while others are small and rounded and may once have had lids. Thus, Maya scribes seem generally to have reserved the "*yotoot*" term for containers that were relatively enclosed or could be lidded (or "roofed"). In addition, many of these vessels mention the contents immediately following *yotoot*.

In addition to Fralin 1982.12.33, a few codex-style plates also have *yotoot* following *jich*. These are Los Angeles County Museum of Art, accession no. M.2010.115.5 (Kerr 7185); PC.M.LC.p2.213 (Hellmuth Archive, Dumbarton Oaks); PC.M.LC.p2.162 (Hellmuth Archive, Dumbarton Oaks); Mint Museum, Charlotte, accession no. 2000.90.3 (see also Robicsek and Hales 1981:186, vessel 175); and a plate excavated at Uxul (Delvendahl and Grube 2012:74).

While in these cases, it is plausible that *yotoot* is a reference to the object itself, we may argue against this on several grounds. First is the fact that we know of no other plates or vases that are designated as *otoot* "houses." Moreover, on two of these plates (Mint Museum 2000.90.3 and PC.M.LC.p2.162), there is an explicit reference to the plate as *ulak*, preceding *yotoot*. Finally, on all of these vessels, *yotoot* is followed by a consistent name/title sequence. On the plate in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (acc. no. M.2010.115.5; Kerr 7185) we see the sequence: **yo-OTOOT-ti u-K'IN-ni-li MUY-ya-la xi-wa MIHIIN [MOOK]-ki** (**Fig. 6**). On the plate in the Hellmuth archive at Dumbarton Oaks (PC.M.LC.p2.162) we see: **yo-OTOOT-ti u-K'IN-ni-li u-CHAHK-li IHK' MIHIIN [MOOK]-ki** (**Fig. 7**). The other plate in the Hellmuth archive (PC.M.LC.p2.213) contains this sequence, followed by the proper name of the individual, Yopaat Bahlam: **yo-OTOOT u-K'IN-ni-li MUY-ya-la xi-wa? MIHIIN [MOOK]-ki YOPAAT-ti BAHLAM-ma** (**Fig. 8**). A comparison of these name/title patterns suggests that the full title reads: *yotoot uk'inil mugal xiiw uchahkil ihk' mihiin mook*.¹ The plate in the Mint Museum, Charlotte (acc. no.

¹ The interpretation of the *mihiin mook* component of this title is still problematic. Similar sequences on Kerr 7750 (IHK' mi-na MIHIIN-[MOOK]-ki), Kerr 8622 (IHK' MIHIIN-na-[MOOK]-ki), and Tortuguero Frag. 1 (ya-xi-wa MIHIIN-[MOOK]-ki; yax xiiw mihiin mook) suggest that Maya scribes frequently conflated the graphically similar MIHIIN (T535) and MOOK (T533). The name/title sequence on Kerr 1116 seems to present IHK' MIHIIN and MOOK in successive glyph blocks, and the two graphemes also appear in sequence in the Holmul Frieze (see Estrada-Belli



2000.90.3; see also Robicsek and Hales 1981:186, vessel 175) also preserves part of the *yotoot...* sequence, ...-ti u-K'IN-ni-li, followed by two titles, *i-tz'a-ti pi-* (itz'aat pitzil "sage/artist, ballplayer"), then **YOPAAT-ti BAHLAM**. The use of known titles to separate the *yotoot...* sequence from the proper name Yopaat Bahlam in this example demonstrates that the *yotoot...* sequence is titular.



Fig. 3. Codex-style vessel. Fralin Museum of Art 1982.12.33. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

and Tokovinine 2016) and parentage expressions on the Dumbarton Oaks Panel, Piedras Negras Stela 8 (B12), Bonampak Stela 2 (G3) and Stela 1 (K1). We presume that the entire title sequence is derived from a deity name; however, its literal meaning is elusive. On the reading of T533 as **MOOK**, see Polyukhovych (2015).



Fig. 4. Codex-style vessel. Fralin Museum of Art 1982.12.33. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 5. Codex-style vessel. Fralin Museum of Art 1982.12.33. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 6. Plate, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2010.115.5. Photograph ©Justin Kerr K7185.

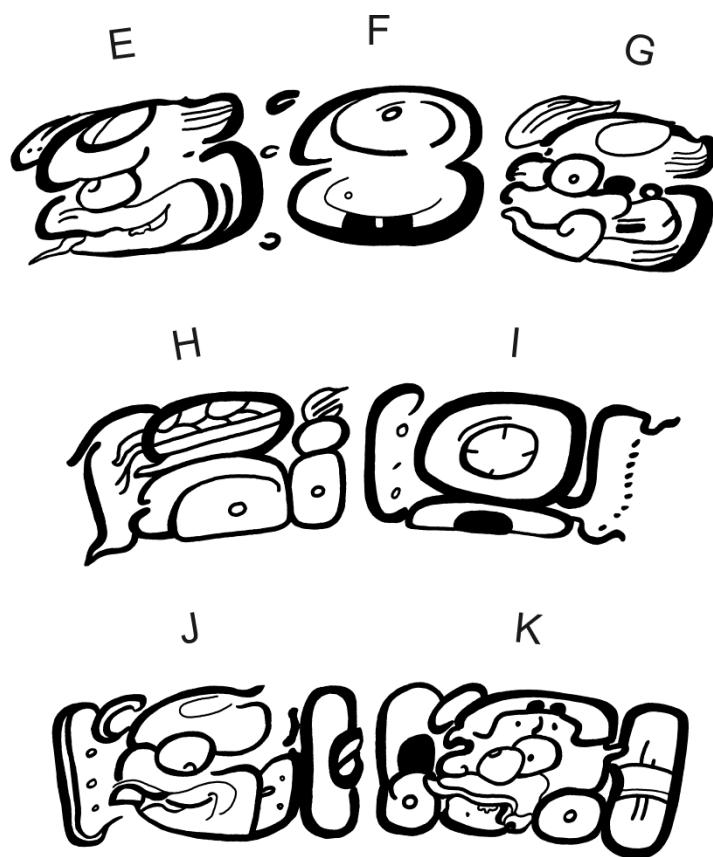


Fig. 7. Detail of inscription from codex-style plate,
PC.M.LC.p2.162: u-la-ka yo-OTOOT-ti u-K'IN-ni-li u-CHAHK-li
IHK' MIHIIN MOOK-ki. Drawing by Matthew Looper.



Fig. 8. Codex-style plate, PC.M.LC.p2.213.4. © Dumbarton Oaks, Pre-Columbian Collection, Washington, DC.

Other truncated examples of the title sequence appear on a codex-style sherd: **K'IN-ni-li MUY-ya** (Hansen, Bishop, and Fahsen 1991:233) and the plate excavated at Uxul: **yo-OTOOT-ti K'IN** (Fig. 9). In the case of the Uxul plate, Delvendahl and Grube (2012:74) interpreted this as a name, which they read as Yotoot Til. However, based on comparison with other vessels mentioned above, we understand the vulture head to be part of the syllable **ti**, rather than **li**, which typically has a large scroll emerging from its mouth. A **K'IN** sign is infixated into the vulture head. Fralin Museum vessel 1982.12.33 has the same two components of this title, *yotoot uk'inil*, but spelled in a slightly different manner.

In conclusion, the inscription of 1982.12.33 associates this vessel with Yopaat Bahlam, referenced only through a truncated form of his title *yotoot uk'inil* (*muyal xiiw uchahkil ihk' mihin mook*).



Fig. 9. Detail, Codex-style plate excavated at Uxul: yo-OTOOT-ti K'IN. Drawing by Matthew Looper after Delvendahl and Grube (2012).

Table 3. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1982.12.33. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

| | | | |
|---|----------|------------|-------------|
| A | a-LAY-ya | alay | here |
| B | tz'i-bi- | tz'ihibnaj | is painted |
| C | -na-ja | " | " |
| D | ji-chi | jich | the surface |



E

yo-OTOOT-ti

yotoot

Yotoot [title]



F

u-K'IN-ni

uk'nil

Uk'nil [title]



G

SAK WAHY

sak wahyis

Sak Wahyis



H

CHAK ch'o-ko

chak ch'ok

great youth



1980.8.9

This vessel has a banded design on its interior, featuring a bundle motif, "sun" like disks, stepped frets, and deity heads. The bottom of the vessel is decorated with a frontal skeletal deity head (**Figs. 10, 11**). The exterior wall bears a partially pseudoglyphic PSS (**Fig. 12**). It begins with the standard *alay tz'ihbnaj*, but then, following the *ji* syllable (probably part of *jich* "surface") at block D is a **bi** syllable at E. This may have been adapted from *tz'ihbnaj* on another vessel. Next is *jich* written twice more at F and G. H is probably pseudoglyphic. Yet another *jich* is written in block I. This is followed by *ihk' mihiin* in block J. *Mihiin* appears on codex-style ceramics in various contexts, including parentage expressions (as *uk'ahk'al mihiinil*; see K2226) and titles, such as Yotoot Uk'inil Muyal Xiiw Uchahkil Ihk' Mihiin Mook, discussed above with reference to 1982.12.33. *Ihk' Mihiin* appears on the codex-style vessel Kerr 8660 as part of a title sequence preceding the name Yat Wahyis. Perhaps the text of 1980.8.9 was partly copied from a vessel or manuscript that included this title, or something similar.



Fig. 10. Codex-style vessel, interior. Fralin Museum of Art 1980.8.9. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 11. Codex-style vessel, bottom. Fralin Museum of Art 1980.8.9. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 12. Codex-style vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.8.9. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

**Table 4.** Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1980.8.9. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

| | | | | |
|--|---|----------|-----------|-------------|
| | A | a-LAY-ya | alay | here |
| | B | tz'i-bi- | tz'ihbnaj | is painted |
| | C | -na-ja | " | " |
| | D | ji | jich? | the surface |
| | E | bi? | — | — |
| | F | ji-chi | jich | the surface |
| | G | ji-chi | jich | " |
| | H | _ ba? | — | — |



| | | | |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| I | ji-chi | jich | the surface |
| J | IHK' MIHIIIN-na | ihk' mihiin | Ihk' Mihiin [title] |
| K | - | - | - |
| L | K'UH cha-TAHN WINIK | k'uhul chatahn winik | holy Chatahn person |
| M | _ bi/KAN? | - | - |
| N | _ ka? | - | - |

**1983.75.1**

This calligraphic cylinder vessel represents two *wahy* spirits holding plates containing disarticulated human body parts (**Figs. 13-15**). Unfortunately, parts of both figures are eroded. The remains of the caption for the furry creature with jaguar paws and a flaming tail (**Fig. 13**) indicates that this is a *wahy* belonging to the K'abte' lord(s), followed by a title that may read *baah tuun* "first stone." The K'abte' lord(s) is stated to be the owner of similar *wahy* on other vessels, where the being itself is named as Tihl Hix [Feline Tapir] (e.g. K1228, K1442, K8733). The other being is of uncertain identification, as most of the image is damaged (**Fig. 15**). However, its seated anthropomorphic form and the remains of the tassel dangling from its nose suggest the possibility that it may be the skeletal spirit K'ahk' Ohl May Chamay/Chamiyy (see K1652 or Denver Art Museum 1988.424).



Fig. 13. Codex-style vase, Fralin Museum of Art 1983.75.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 14. Codex-style vase, Fralin Museum of Art 1983.75.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 15. Codex-style vase, Fralin Museum of Art 1983.75.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Table 5. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1983.75.1. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

| | | | | |
|---|---|----------|-----------|--------------|
|  | A | _ WAHY | uwahy? | his spirit? |
|  | B | K'AB-TE' | k'abte' | K'abte' |
|  | C | a-AJAW | ajaw | lord |
|  | D | ba TUUN | baah tuun | first stone? |

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