

# Disaster, Deluge, and Destruction on the Star War Vase

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*The aims of this short paper are threefold. First and foremost, it serves to bring a remarkable Late Classic Maya cylinder vase in a private collection to the attention of a wider audience. Although unprovenanced, and not without some indications of repair and repainting, the vase is nonetheless undoubtedly genuine, and provides numerous welcome points of contact with parallel scenes and hieroglyphic texts from archaeologically-recovered objects whose origins and integrity are not in question. Second, it highlights the significant contributions of the text and imagery of this new context to our evolving understandings of the enigmatic ‘star war’ verb, its mythological underpinnings, and the kinds of bellicose events it references. Third, although still undeciphered, we are now in a position to recognize that all contexts of the ‘star war’ verb in Maya writing reference the same event, an ancient mythological episode relating to the defeat of the Maize God in a disastrous deluge overseen by Baluun Yooke’ Kuh and several other antagonistic deities. (Previously, scholars have supposed that such scenes were distinct from the seemingly more quotidian references to ‘star war’ as a military action.) Due in large part to these new associations and understandings, it can now be shown that the ‘star war’ verb represents a term referring to ‘deluge’, and that a frequently associated ‘earth’ sign most likely comprises a generalized incorporated noun rather than a core element of a single visually-complex logogram.*

*Keywords:* decipherment, epigraphy, iconography, mythology, warfare



## Introduction

This paper builds on the imagery and hieroglyphic text of a little-known Late Classic Maya cylinder vase to investigate the ‘star war’ phenomenon, its underlying mythology, and the significance of the military events it references. Parallel scenes and hieroglyphic texts of several well-known objects are then examined from the fresh perspective offered by this ‘new’ context, and it will be seen that these objects cast frequent and mutual light on one another, greatly illuminating the ‘star war’ event itself. This procedure allows us to recognize that the ‘star war’ was an ancient mythological episode recounting the defeat of the Maize God in a deluge sent by Baluun Yookte’ K’uh and other gods of warfare. An additional contribution is a vastly improved understanding of the epigraphic contexts of the ‘star war’ verb itself. This can now be recognized as a term meaning ‘deluge’, to which the noun *kab* ‘earth’ is frequently joined in a general reference to world-destroying floods.

## The Star War Vase

In the collections of the Kislak Foundation in Miami Lakes, Florida, is a remarkable Late Classic Maya polychrome cylinder vase (Figure 1). Visually, the first thing that strikes the viewer is the vessel’s lurid yellow background, framed by upper and lower bands of red wash and painted black lines, providing a striking if somewhat unsettling contrast for black-lined figures picked out in tones of a predominantly ruddy brown. The viewer’s impression of any one ‘side’ of the vessel is a crowded and chaotic one, with half a dozen figures visible at a time. A rollout view relieves the sense of crowding (Figure 2), revealing several distinct registers dominated by different actors, though such a vantage would have been unavailable in antiquity, with the possible exception of reference material on long-perished codices. Several prominent cracks and patches of surface erosion (especially at the upper right of the rollout) indicate that the vessel itself was encountered in fragments. Two pairs of drill-holes straddling cracks in the upper left suggest it was also damaged and repaired in antiquity. That several cracks pass through painted figures and text without apparent gaps or loss of detail is the surest sign of at least some degree of modern restoration and repainting. Other indications include botched iconographic details, such as the turtle shell drum and deer antler held by the figure perched in the tree at the upper right, rendered almost unrecognizable by the efforts of a modern artist (see Zender 2006:Figure 9b for a parallel scene). The same can be said for several glyphs in the long horizontal text encircling the vessel, especially where cracks or drill-holes are likely to have contributed additional damage. Yet much of the original iconographic and hieroglyphic contents must be fairly well-preserved, for numerous tell-tale details from parallel scenes and texts remain clearly visible here. As with so many other unprovenanced vessels, then, the result is a mixture of trustworthy elements and modern inventions which must be carefully parsed.

## The Scene

The scene can be broken down into several registers focused on different actors and events. I discuss each register below, frequently drawing on parallel scenes on other objects to clarify or expand upon the events depicted on the Star War Vase.

*The Canoe Passengers.* The scene is dominated by a canoe borne upon turbulent waters. The



**Figure 1.** The Star War Vase, Jay I. Kislak Foundation, Miami Lakes, Florida. Photograph by the author.

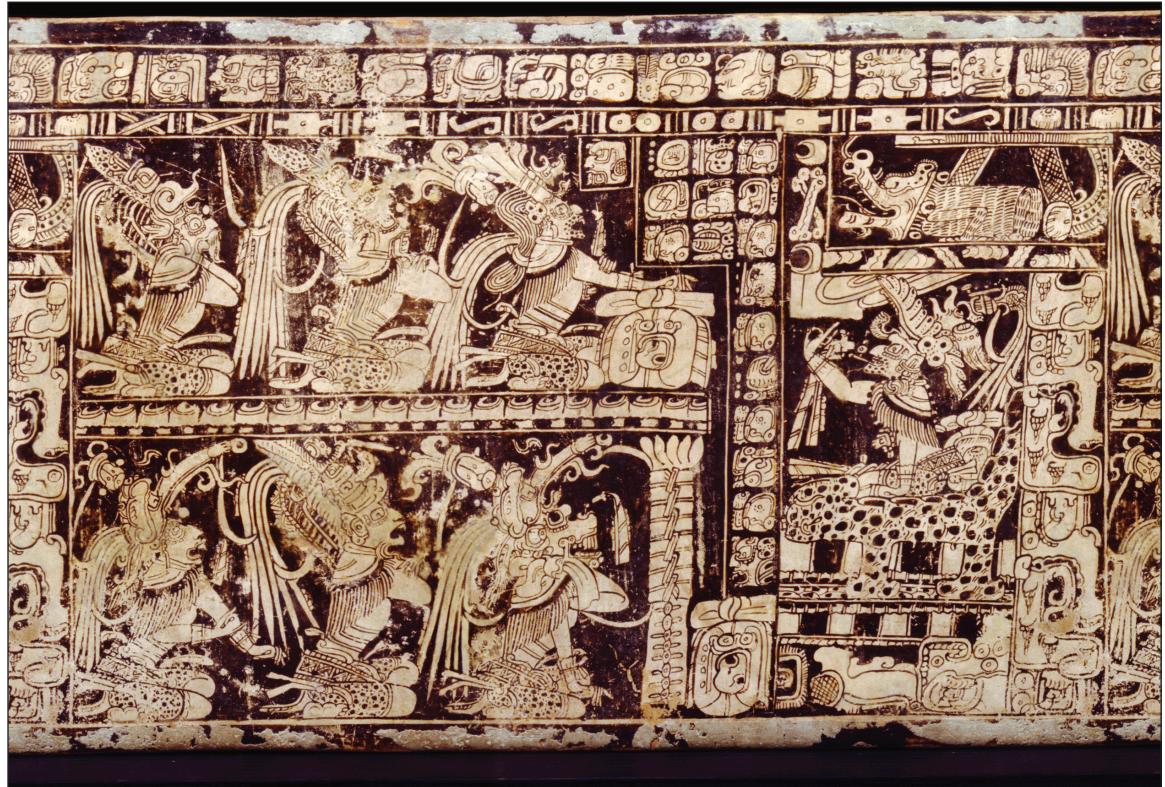


**Figure 2.** Rollout image of the Star War Vase. Photographs by the author, orthorectification and composition by Simon Martin.

fast-flowing medium below is indicated by dotted arches and rounded steps representing waves and spray. These are a characteristic of many aquatic scenes in Maya art, as well as of the **NAHB** ‘pool’ and **?POLAW** ‘ocean’ logograms in Maya writing (Stone and Zender 2011:140–141, 172–173; see also Kettunen and Helmke 2013:19). Lest there be any doubt, the waters are replete with fish and a large supernatural turtle with crocodilian characteristics (although the latter may also represent a participant in the mythological narrative). The canoe holds six figures. In the bow and stern, their eponymous paddles in hand, are the Jaguar Paddler and the Stingray Paddler, respectively. A complex pair of underworld deities, the Paddler Gods are rain-makers and known antagonists of the Maize God, whom they are frequently shown ferrying to his probable demise (see Chinchilla 2017:207–214; Freidel et al. 1993:90; Schele and Miller 1986:270–271; Stone and Zender 2011:50–51). That the journey is an unwelcome one is indicated by the Maize God’s despairing pose, with one hand held limply before his face. In this case, there are two Maize Gods, in a pattern occasionally seen in other depictions (see Chinchilla 2017:120, Figure 120). Both face towards the stern of the canoe, as if unwilling to face the reality of their grim destination. Between them, a spider monkey rather unwisely stands and looks up animatedly, his hands out in shock and dismay at the rain that threatens to capsize the tempest-tossed vessel. Falling rain is indicated by the frequent convention of inverted ‘water stacks’, a series of five or six attenuating horizontal lines filling much of the negative space between figures and texts (Stone and Zender 2011:162–163). An equally despairing dog, situated between the Maize Gods and the utterly unphased Stingray Paddler in the stern, is the last occupant of the canoe.

*The Sky.* Dominating the heavens above the canoe is an elaborate iconographic representation of the so-called star sign, *ek'*, which in fact refers to all manner of celestial lights (see Stone and Zender 2011:150–151). In the eye orbits of this imposing icon are two deities. At the left is the Jaguar War God, a fire deity and patron of warfare frequently marked by stellar symbolism. His most

recognizable features are the large hank of hair tied up above his head, his jaguar ear, spiral eye, and jaguar paws. As Susan Milbrath (1999:126) notes, this imposing being is frequently “associated with the dry season, the epoch of warfare”. Similarly, Oswaldo Chinchilla (2017:75) notes an intriguing depiction of the Jaguar War God, his body decorated with star signs, on a Late Classic vessel where he is “[a]pparently leading a group of victorious stellar warriors” perhaps in evocation of “a Mesoamerican myth that explained the origin of warfare in terms of a primeval confrontation among the stars” (see also Chinchilla 2005). In the other eye of the star is the Pax God, so-called because of his role as patron of the month Pax. His attributes include a large jaguar paw over his ear and great gouts of blood pouring from a jawless mouth. The Pax God’s most common role in Maya art is to mark the base of supernatural trees, from which stems his role in Maya writing as the personified head variant of the logogram TE’ “tree, wood” (Houston and Martin 2012). That said, and although he has no other obvious celestial or military associations, the Pax God is nonetheless frequently depicted in joint activity with the Jaguar War God (see, e.g., the Maya vessels designated K5053, K8540, K9152). Most significant is the scene on the Vase of the Seven Gods (Figure 3), where the Pax God sits directly behind the Jaguar War God in the upper register of a group of deities gathered together on the Maya creation date 4 Ahau 8 Cumku (September 9th, 3113 BC in the Martin and Skidmore 2012 correlation). In front of the Jaguar War God is a large bundle labeled 9-EK'-KAB, *baluun ek'* [*baluun*] *kab*, “many stars (and) many lands”, suggesting that the



**Figure 3.** Rollout image of the Vase of the Seven Gods. Photograph by Justin Kerr (K2796).

pair were in some manner responsible for the luminous bodies of the heavens. On the Star War Vase, the Pax God appears to hold aloft a hafted stingray spine bloodletter, perhaps in offering to the heavens. A penitential petition for rain seems probable. The large star in which he and the Jaguar War God are ensconced is labeled with several ‘water stacks’, indicating that the star is itself the source of the deluge which threatens the canoe and its occupants below.

The image of a great star flooding lands below is of course a potent and familiar militaristic symbol in Maya art and writing. As Martin and Grube (2000:16) explain:

For Mesoamericans the celestial patron and harbinger of war was not Mars but Venus. Known by the Maya as Chak Ek’ or ‘Great Star’, its motion across the sky was carefully charted and the subject of much prognostication. Tables to this effect can be seen in a Postclassic book called the Dresden Codex, where Venus’ malevolent effect is represented as darts spearing unfortunates below. During the Classic period key points in its progress were seen as favourable for warfare and some battles seem to have been timed to exploit this supernatural advantage. The appropriate hieroglyph, a still undeciphered verb known as ‘star war’, shows a star showering the earth with liquid [...] It usually marks only the most decisive of actions, the conquest of cities and the fall of dynasties.

Immediately to the left of the great star and just above the Jaguar Paddler at the prow of his canoe is precisely the hieroglyph mentioned by Martin and Grube, a point to which we will return once we have considered the remaining iconography.

*The Temple.* The canoe appears to be destined for a temple, conventionally depicted in profile. Within the temple is a bundled effigy of the Pax God on a serpent throne, perhaps indicating the recent ‘birth’ of the effigy in question. Indeed, this element is evocative of a series of parallel scenes on a series of codex-style cups (see, especially, K1382, K1813, K5164, K6754, and K7838). In these scenes, a beautiful young woman is depicted in the coils of a large snake (itself the foot of the lightning god K’awil) while being accosted by the lecherous old god Itzam. Associated texts provide an inconsistent date (perhaps best reconstructed as 13 Muluc 17 Pax), at which time several deities are said to have been “born” (*siyaj*). One of these deities is clearly an aspect of Chahk, the Storm God. Occasionally, the scene is expanded to show one or two bundled deity effigies inside a stylized temple. Sometimes this is Chahk (e.g., K1382), other times the Pax God (K6754); but not infrequently both are present (K1813, K7838). It is surely not coincidental that this mythological event falls on a day Muluc (symbolized by a downturned vase, and parallel to the day ‘water’ in other Mesoamerican calendars) and the month Pax (of which the Pax God is patron). However, only the bundled Pax God is present in the temple depicted on the Star War Vase. Yet Chahk is close by, hovering in the sky above the temple, and is evidently engaged in demolishing it with his lightning weapon, a chert axe (see K2068 and K2772 for parallel scenes.) The temple roof itself appears to be canted at an ungainly angle, perhaps indicating that it is already collapsing. There may even be thick, black smoke (indicated by the cross-hatched scallops) billowing from the temple’s eaves, between the curtains and the tumbling roof comb. The destruction of temples by fire is of course a well-known symbol of Mesoamerican warfare. In the Codex Mendoza, each of the Culhua-Mexica rulers of Tenochtitlan is depicted with the toponyms of towns added to the empire during his reign, each of them directly associated with burning and collapsing temples (Figure 4).

Chahk’s role as a destructive axe-wielder is further linked to the Maize God’s defeat and death



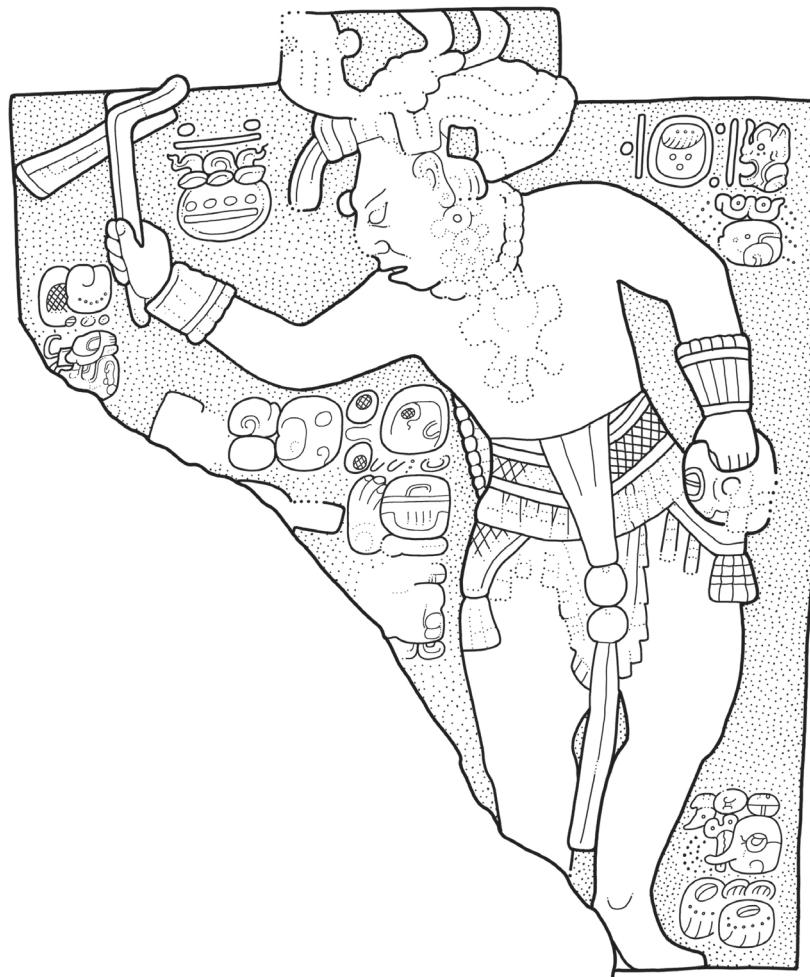
**Figure 4.** Ahuizotl's Conquests. Codex Mendoza, folio 13r.



**Figure 5.** Rollout image of cup in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. MFA 1988.1178 (K731).

in other scenes from both ceramic and monumental contexts. Such a scene can be found on a Late Classic cup in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 5). Here, as long ago recognized by Freidel et al (1993:92-94), the Maize God emerges from a split turtle carapace bearing corn and a gourd water vessel as three deities follow along behind him (see also Chinchilla 2017:220; Zender 2006:8). The first of these is the Storm God, Chahk, wielding another lightning weapon. The second is a still unidentified deity bearing a turtle shell drum and antler: almost certainly the same being perched in the mountain-top tree at the upper right of the Star War Vase (Figure 2). The third deity is clearly the Jaguar War God. Although this scene has long been taken as an episode in the resurrection of the Maize God from the turtle earth, the presence of the militaristic Storm God and War God suggest that this may instead represent part of a larger mythology of the origins of warfare and the defeat of the Maize God by meteorological and stellar beings.

A particularly evocative parallel appears on the recently-published Lacanjá Tzeltal Panel 1 (Figure 6). Here, as recognized by Golden et al (2020:78-80), the Sak Tz'i' ruler K'ab Chan Te' appears in the guise of the Storm God menacing a (now lost) captive. Nearby is a caption describing a successful 'star war' against what may be the nearby site of Bubul Ha' (glyphic **bu-lu-a**), although erosion admittedly renders the identification of the victim uncertain (see Zender 1999:115 for other examples of the local Bubul Ha' toponym). "The glyph order, as notated on the drawing, 'crosses' the body at its head or chest, then moves back across at the knees" (Golden et al. 2020:79). In other words, the text and image are interactive, and since the text refers principally to a 'star war', the depiction of Chahk the Storm God actively wielding his lightning weapons clearly served as an adequate illustration of the concept: yet another indication that the event refers principally to defeats at the hands of meteorological and stellar forces.



**Figure 6.** Detail of Lacaná Tzeltal Panel 1. Drawing courtesy of Stephen Houston (after Golden et al. 2020:Figure 4).

### The Hieroglyphic Text

I now turn from the complex iconography of the Star War Vase to the hieroglyphic caption accompanying the scene (Figure 2). Note that, as on Lacaná Tzeltal Panel 1, the reader is required to read through the body of the Storm God. The text comprises eight hieroglyphs, which can be analyzed and read as follows:

6-AHK'AB-K'IN 16-SAK-SIJOOM-ma CVY-KAB u-KAB-?ba u-CH'EEN-na  
6-IXIIM-AJAW u-KAB-ji-ya 9-yo-?OOK-?TE'-K'UH

*wak ahk'ab k'in waklajuun saksijoom CVy kab ukab uch'een wak ixiim ajaw ukabjiiy  
baluun yookte' k'uh*

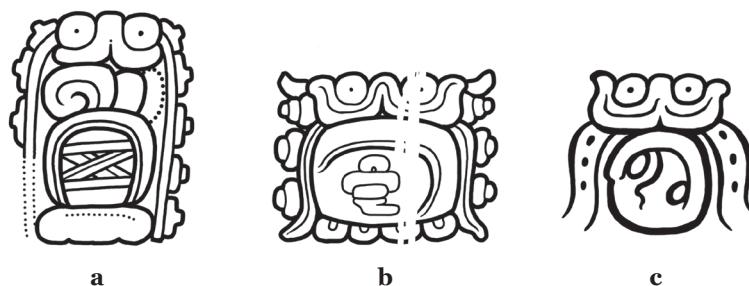
"(On the) day 6 Akbal 16 Zac, there was a (?)deluge (on) the lands/realm of Wak Ixiim Ajaw by Baluun Yookte' K'uh"

While much of the structure of this passage is familiar from numerous parallels elsewhere in Maya writing, other aspects are rather less straightforward, and require more detailed commentary.

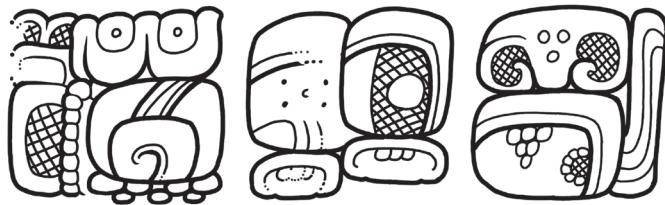
*The Date.* As the sign for ‘darkness’, Akbal is a singularly appropriate day for a mythological event of deluge, disaster, and military destruction. As will be seen below, the Calendar Round 6 Akbal 16 Zac also appears in parallel texts, indicating that this represented a well-known and widespread association in antiquity.

*The ‘Star War’ or ‘Deluge’ Verb.* This verb has long been recognized to incorporate the T510 EK’ ‘star’ sign (Figure 7). Coupled with the verb’s pronounced military contexts, this accounts in large measure for the term ‘star war’ popularized by Linda Schele (Schele and Freidel 1990; Witschey and Brown 2012:288). Because of the ‘star’ element, astronomical associations of the ‘star war’ verb, especially a putative correlation with the phases of Venus, have been extensively explored in the literature (e.g., Aveni and Hotaling 1994; Carlson 1993; Closs 1978, 1981; Kelley 1977; Lounsbury 1982; Nahm 1994). More recently, however, Aldana (2005) has examined the dates of ‘star war’ events statistically and refutes the Venusian association. This makes sense given that Venus is always referred to as *chak ek*’ (literally ‘great/red star’), and that *ek*’ is in fact a general term referring to stars, planets, and constellations (Stone and Zender 2011:151). For these reasons, David Stuart (1995:310–311; 1998) has suggested a possible connection of the ‘star war’ verb with meteors. The key consideration is that *ek*’ is a generic descriptor of bright, heavenly objects, any or all of which might conceivably provide the source of the Maize God’s misfortune. The next element in the sign’s imagery is the great gouts of turbulent water issuing from it, indicated by the aforementioned ‘water stacks’ or streams of dots. Connecting this to the imagery of the Star War Vase, it now becomes clear that the concept of a heavenly ‘deluge’ is at the core of the ‘star war’ verb. In the representative examples culled in Figure 7, it can be seen that the ‘star’ explicitly showers earthly locations: Naranjo (in the first example), a *kaaj* ‘settlement’ (in the second), or the more generic T526 KAB ‘earth’ sign (in the third).

There is no longer any doubt that the ‘star war’ verb appears in historical inscriptions to signify only the most decisive battles, such as territorial conquest and regime change (Houston 1991,



**Figure 7.** Examples of the ‘star war’ verb: (a) NAR HS, Step VI, N1b; (b) TIK T.IV, L.2, B8; (c) TIK MT-38a, Glyph 3. Drawings by the author.



**Figure 8.** A passage from Piedras Negras Throne 1, E'6-F'2.  
Drawing by the author.

1993:137; Martin 2001:178; Martin and Grube 2000:16). Still unresolved is the precise means by which this is accomplished: the sign remains undeciphered and therefore without a lexical link to Mayan languages. Without this tether, there will continue to be competing explanations for variations in the verb's spelling. Of the 42 examples known to the author, the 'star' and 'rain' elements are the most consistent, appearing in all but the most visually-abbreviated of contexts; these must therefore comprise the core logogram. The two variable elements are T526 **KAB** and T17 **yi**, which are mutually exclusive apart from just two contexts where both appear (i.e., Tonina M. 91, pA1, and Tortuguero M. 6, pG4-pH4). Although it is tempting to view **KAB** as a visual component of a complex 'star-rain-earth' logogram—occasionally eclipsed by superimposed place names or **yi**—it is now clear that **KAB** represents a separate noun, for its presence correlates strongly with individuals (or armies) as subjects, while it is usually absent when the subject is a toponym (Aldana 2005:313; Simon Martin, personal communication 2004). Given the syntax of the 'star war' verb, with an immediately following subject, *kab* 'earth' must be a non-referential noun incorporated into the verb stem (see Sullivan 1984). Several parallel constructions such as Colonial Yucatec *haycabal* "destrucción del mundo" (Barrera Vásquez 1980:191) and Modern Yucatec *bulkabal* "flood" (Bricker et al. 1998:38) give some idea of the senses achieved by such incorporation. As for **yi**, this must either provide a phonetic complement, thereby indicating a logogram of the shape CVY (as first suggested by Erik Boot 1995), or provide a partial indication of the -VVy suffix typical of intransitive verbs of motion or transitive verbs in the mediopassive voice (e.g., Aldana 2005; Golden et al. 2020:79; Stuart 1995:310-311). However, phonetic complementation provides the only explanation for a unique but telling form of the 'star war' compound on Piedras Negras Throne 1 (Figure 8). There, in a brief passage spanning the two supports, can be found the sequence:

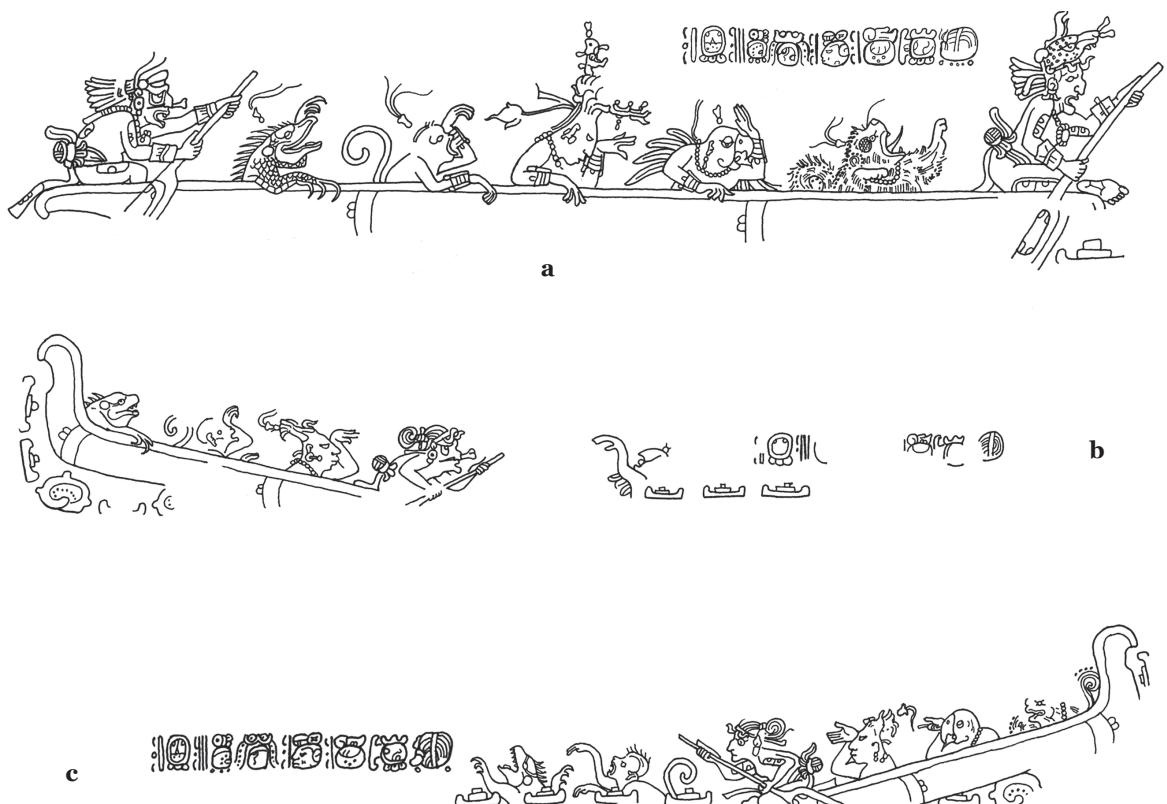
**tu-CVY-yi-la TAHN-na-CH'EEN-na ?-TUUN-ni**

*t-u-CVY-iil tahn ch'een ... tuun*

"in the (?)deluge of the center of Piedras Negras"

The **tu** prefix clearly indicates that the 'star war' logogram is consonant initial, and the following **yi** just as securely indicates that it was CVY in shape. In this context, the **yi** must have appeared in order to bridge the final *-y* of the verb root and the initial *i* of the possessive or relational suffix *-iil*. Coupled with the considerations enumerated above, these observations form the basis of the tentative translation here offered for the 'star war' verb.

*The Victim and the Victor.* To return to the passage on the Star War Vase (Figure 2), note that



**Figure 9.** Parallel scenes from three carved bones from Tikal Burial 116: (a) first scene, TIK MT-38a; (b) second scene, TIK MT-38c; (c) third scene, TIK MT-38d. Drawings by Linda Schele after Andy Seuffert, SD-2014; slightly amended by the author. Used with permission.

the victim of the ‘star war’ is identified as Wak Ixiim Ajaw, an aspect of the Maize God incorporating the terms *ixiim* ‘maize’ and *ajaw* ‘lord’. The victor can probably be identified as Baluun Yookte’ K’uh. (A break passes through the glyphs providing this name, which also appear to have suffered some repainting; nonetheless, 9, **yo**, and **K’UH** are all tolerably well preserved.) Although not an infrequent deity epithet in Classic Mayan inscriptions (Eberl and Prager 2005; Zender and Guenter 2003:111-117), and one also attested in the Postclassic codices and several Colonial Yucatec texts (Thompson 1950:56), Baluun Yookte’ K’uh is not a particularly well-understood divinity. He is certainly associated with conflict, as established by one Classic Period depiction in which a Baluun Yookte’ K’uh impersonator is arrayed for war (Zender and Guenter 2003:111, Figure 15). There is also a Postclassic depiction of the deity in an explicitly military context (Dresden Codex, p. 60; Eberl and Preger 2005:32-33). Most important for our purposes, on the aforementioned Vase of the Seven Gods (Figure 3), Baluun Yookte’ K’uh is named as one of the gods present at the ‘creation’ event, and seems to be depicted directly below the Pax God, in the middle of the lower register. Whatever his other associations, then, he was evidently in league with the stellar deities depicted

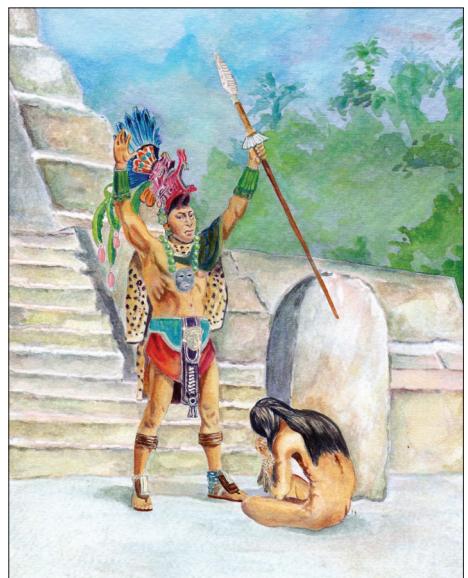
assailing the Maize God.

It is also tempting, given the shared ‘nine’ and ‘god’, to see some connection between Classic Mayan Baluun Yookte’ K’uh and Colonial Yucatec Bolontiku, a group of underworld deities who are said in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel to have “seized” Oxlahuntiku, prompting “a sudden rush of water” after which the “sky fell upon the earth” (Roys 1967:99-100). The association of the actions of the Bolontiku with a world-destroying flood certainly resonates with the scene and text on the Star Wars Vase, but clearer parallels will be needed to establish firm links between these mythological episodes.

### The Tikal Bones

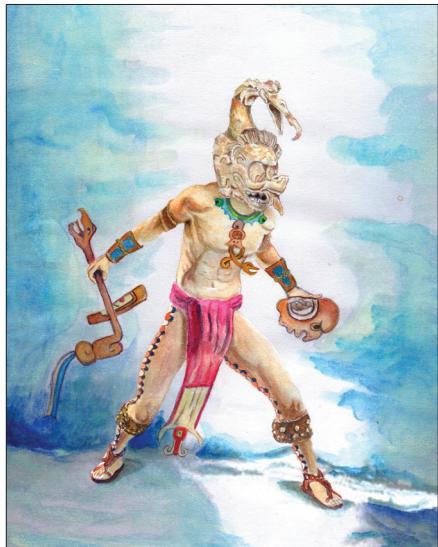
In November 1962, the Tikal Project of the University of Pennsylvania Museum entered the tomb of Jasaw Chan K’awiil deep within Tikal Temple 1 for the first time in over 1200 years (Trik 1963). Among numerous other remarkable and informative finds were a series of 37 carved bone objects, three of which also depict the dire journey of the Maize God (Figure 9). The bones are in various states of preservation, but all of them seem to convey essentially the same visual and textual narrative. As long ago discerned by Aubrey Trik (1963:12), the scenes focus on canoes with “[d]ivine paddlers at stern and bow” (whence our present term for them); he also correctly identified the animals, noted their changing seat assignments from scene to scene, and observed that the canoe was riding “through rough water” which occasionally “hides the bow”. Thanks to the parallels with the Star War Vase, we can support Trik’s observations that the water stacks and water scrolls do not merely mark the water’s surface, but indicate turbulent, spraying flood waters threatening to capsize the vessel. However insightful, Trik’s observations preceded Karl Taube’s (1985) identification of the Maize God by two decades, and so he identified the central figure as a “gesturing priest” (Trik 1963:12). Ensuing discussions of these scenes in the 1980s and 1990s captured most of the broad outlines sketched above (Freidel et al. 1993:90, 245; Schele and Miller 1986:270-271). However, the grief-stricken gestures of the Maize God and the animals—when the latter are not gesticulating even more wildly, such as the iguana in the third bone scene and the monkey on the Star War Vase—were not consistently recognized as such before the early twenty-first century (Grube and Gaida 2006:13-14; Houston 2001; Kettunen 2006:241-242, 302-305).

Even more striking than the shared scenes, however, are the parallel caption texts (Figure 10). In the 1960s, Trik was already able to recognize the first two glyphs as the date “6 Akbal 16 Zac” (1963:12) shared by all three of the canoe scenes on the bones, and this is of course also the date on the Star War Vase. The verb is obliterated in the second bone scene, but the ‘star-rain-earth’



elements are clear in the first and third scenes, and are once again echoed on the Star War Vase. This helps establish that, while the Tikal bones depict neither the great star in the heavens, nor the Jaguar War God and Pax God, they nonetheless capture precisely the same event, albeit in a medium

that precluded their inclusion. The parallels continue with the main subject(s) of the verb, which include the same Wak Ixiim Ajaw cited on the Star War Vase, but also included a Wak Hix Winik, and one or more additional titles. (The final glyph is of course the main sign of the Tikal emblem, and may have been intended as a bridge between a more widespread mythology and a local, Tikal-centric interpretation.) The absence of a following agency clause on the bones has been one of the contributing factors to mistaken understandings of the ‘star war’ verb in these scenes as distinct from those in military contexts on monuments (e.g., Aldana 2005:314). This interpretation can no longer be sustained. The *ukab uch'een* and *ukabjiiy* on the Star War Vase—elements frequently seen in bona fide military contexts—strongly indicate that we are looking at one and the same verbal expression in both mythological and historical contexts.



## Conclusion

Close analysis of a previously unpublished vase has established that it depicts a mythological scene of deluge, disaster, and the destruction of the Maize God at the hands of various meteorological and stellar forces. By investigating several close iconographic and epigraphic parallels between the contents of this vase, several other Maya vessels, and the famous Tikal bones, it has been further demonstrated that the same disastrous deluge is depicted on all of these ancient objects. Finally, given the close ties between these scenes and the so-called ‘star war’ verb, it can be concluded the latter itself depicts and references this ancient event, which would seem to provide nothing less than the mythological origins of Classic Maya warfare.

## Acknowledgments

I thank the Jay I. Kislak Foundation for their kind permission to publish the Star War Vase in this venue. I also thank Simon Martin for transforming my serviceable but somewhat-less-than-aesthetically-pleasing iPhone 5S photographs (4.15mm f/2.2) into the handsome rollout in Figure 2, as well as for his friendly nudge to prioritize the publication of this important object. Stephen Houston, Simon Martin, and David Stuart all have my appreciation for fruitful conversations and correspondence about the Star War Vase. All three of them have greatly influenced my thinking about this vessel, and about the ‘star war’ verb and its attendant iconography more generally, though none of them bear any responsibility if I’ve deviated from their sage counsel and better judgement. A previous version of this paper was given at the 15th Annual Tulane Maya Symposium and Workshops,

	6 Akbal 16 Zac	star-rain-earth	ukab uch'een	6-IXIIM-AJAW	6-HIX-WINIK	?	MUT-la	u-KAB-ji[ya]	9-yo-OOK-TE'-K'UH
a									
b		ERODED		ERODED					
c									
d									

**Figure 10.** Parallel texts from the Tikal bones and the Star War Vase: (a) TIK MT-38a; (b) TIK MT-38c; (c) TIK MT-38d; (d) the Star War Vase. Drawings by the author.

March 11th, 2016, and I am indebted to the participants and attendees for numerous perceptive comments and constructive criticisms. Finally, I offer my appreciation to two reviewers and to the journal editors for helpful comments which have greatly improved this article.

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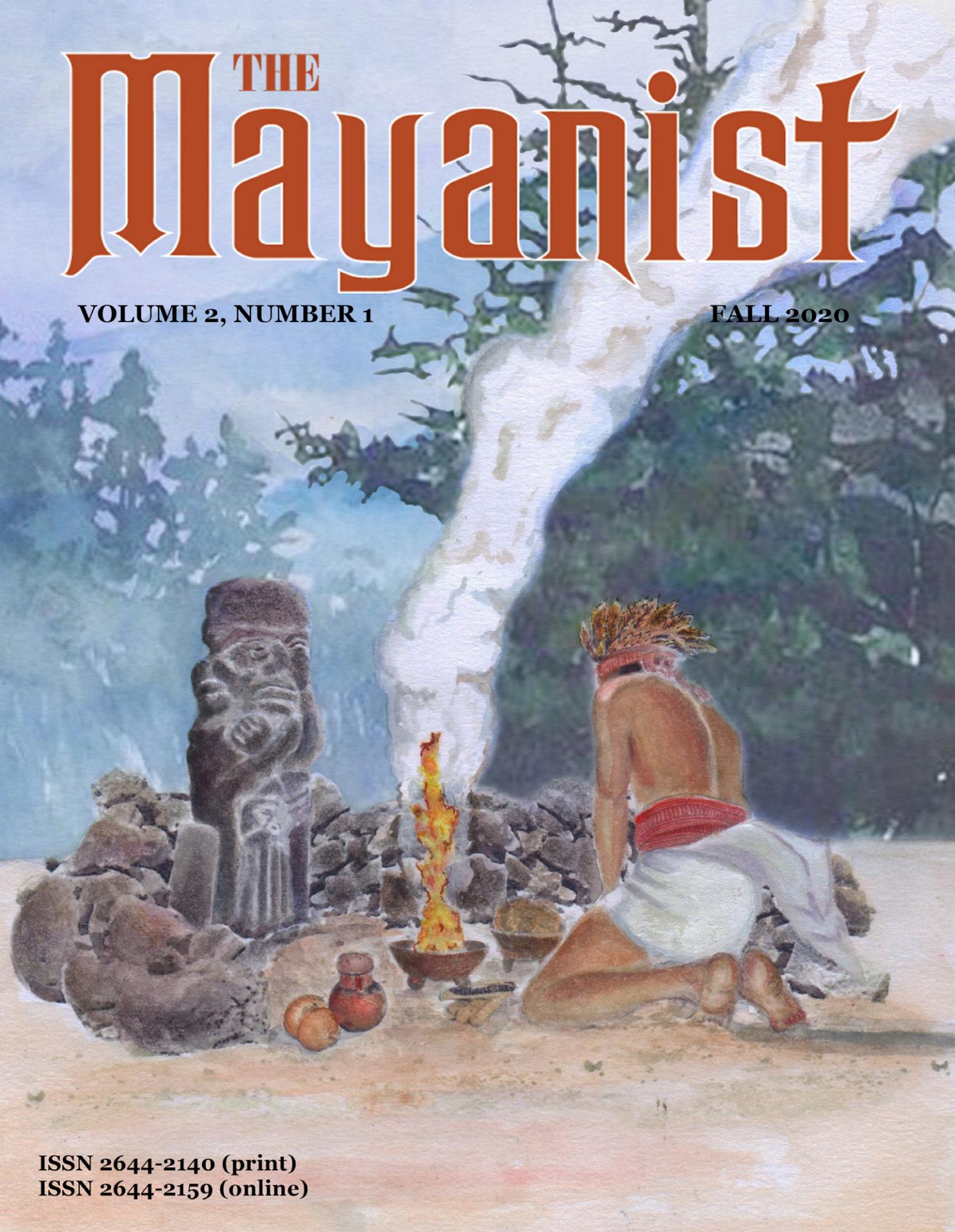
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