

An Annotated Overview of “Tikal Dancer” Plates *

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This essay presents twenty-seven ceramic plates painted in the well-known “Tikal Dancer” style or tradition (Reents-Budet 1994: 339). Originally, the “Tikal Dancer” plates were nicknamed “Uaxactun Dancer” plates (Hellmuth, cited in Coe 1982: 88), after the fact that the first identified example was excavated archaeologically at Uaxactun. Subsequently other such plates have been excavated at Tikal (Culbert 1993: Figure 43a & Figure 48c). The remaining “Tikal Dancer” plates are generally without any indication of provenance, having been removed illegally from their original context (note 1).

The plates in this tradition are painted in different shades of orange, red, green, and black on a cream or sometimes tawny background. Most of the plates have an outflaring wall and a slightly accentuated exterior flange. The majority of the plates originally stood on three hollow (rattle) pedestals. The design on the bottom of the plate depicts an anthropomorphic male figure. In most of the examples the figure has been executed in a powerful fine black line drawing, while the body and costume have been colored in orange, red, and green. In most of the examples his arms are stretched out, while the hands are turned down with the thumbs parallel to the surface of the hands and fingers. The positioning of the legs is indicative of a dancing movement (cf. Grube 1992). The posture of the figure, his elongated head, headdress, and costume identify the male figure as the dancing resurrected Young Maize God (Reents-Budet 1994: 197-198, 339, Figs. 5.36-39). The earliest example of the Maya Maize God was recently (March 2001) identified in a mural painting at the site of San Bartolo (image from <http://www.sanbartolo.org>):



In this Late Preclassic mural (it is one of the earliest Maya murals currently known) the elongated head of the centrally placed Maize God has some distinctive but clearly recognizable Olmecoid features (note mouth, nose, and eyes).

Each of the currently available examples will be illustrated separately (private or not well-known public collections may contain additional examples), with short notes on dimensions and more elaborate notes on the particular iconographic and hieroglyphic design.

Example No. 1: Burial, Structure A-1, Uaxactun (Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, Inv. No. 532)



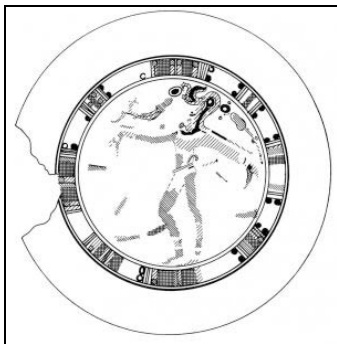
Photograph: E. Thiem

Published: Eggebrecht and Eggebrecht 1992: Cat. No. 87; Schmidt, De la Garza, and Nalda 1998: Cat. No. 338; Sharer 1994: Figure 15.17 (drawing)

Height: 7,7 cm. Diameter: 35,2 cm.

This plate, found at Uaxactun, depicts the Maize God seemingly in a dancing position. Note however that around the waist there seems to be some kind of protective gear or belt, also covering the upper part of the legs. Between two thick red lines (both accentuated with a thin black line) the painter has included a repetitive hieroglyphic design. None of the hieroglyphic signs can be identified with any certainty, but comparable glyphic designs occur on other “Tikal Dancer” plates. Also note the centrally placed drill hole.

Example No. 2: Burial 83, Tikal (Sibal Buff Polychrome, lateral-flange tripod plate)



Drawing: artist not known (note 2)

Published: Culbert 1993: Figure 43a (□ Copyright by University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; not to be reproduced without permission)

Height: not available Diameter: ca. 39,5 cm.

The center design of the dancing Maize God, who seems to move to the left, is encircled by two double lines. His long, oval face and headdress can be compared to the Late Preclassic Maize God as found at San Bartolo. The space between the lines is occupied by several polychrome designs which are somewhat reminiscent of the “I-shaped” designs or elements on other plates (e.g. Example No. 9).

Example No. 3: Burial 159, Tikal (Saxche Orange Polychrome, lateral-ridge tripod plate)



Drawing: artist not known (note 2)

Published: Culbert 1993: Figure 48c (□ Copyright by University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; not to be reproduced without permission)

Height: not available Diameter: ca. 34,5 cm.

A large part of the center design on the bottom of this plate has been lost (possibly due to intentional breakage or flaking). The dancing Maize God has a unique position here, as his head is turned over his right shoulder to look backwards, while his body seems to move forward to the right. The outer rim of the plate contains three very similar hieroglyphic designs or sequences, the main sign of which is some kind of anthropomorphic head.

Example No. 4: Kerr No. 1271



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: Coe 1982: 89; The Maya Vase Database
(<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: 30,5 cm.

The painter of this plate provided three hieroglyphic designs between the double black lines that circle the central dancing figure. The dancing Maize God is painted in a wonderfully dynamic position. He seems to wear a thick waist belt, possibly some kind of protective belt known from ballgame contexts (compare to Example No. 1). There are other examples, illustrated below, in which this protective gear is even more prominent.

Example No. 5: Kerr No. 3445 (Museo Popol Vuh, Inv. No. not available)



Photograph: Nikolai Grube

Published: The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: not available

The interior design of this plate is largely destroyed, but the image of the dancing Maize God is still recognizable (only a black-and-white image was available). The outer rim, defined by a broad inner line and a less broad outer line, contains a long hieroglyphic text. Although most of the hieroglyphic signs cannot be identified, the sign indicated by the white arrow seems to be a variant of the Initial Sign as known from the Primary Standard Sequence, a dedicatory phrase often painted, carved, or incised on Classic ceramics. If correct, the other less recognizable signs may have been painted to “emulate” such a dedicatory phrase.

Example No. 6: Kerr No. 5076 (Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies)



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: Reents-Budet 1994: Figure 5.39 (MS0657); The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: 9,3 cm. Diameter: 34,5 cm.

Black lines encircle the center design of the dancing figure (note the large irregular drill hole, destroying an important part of the iconography). Between these lines there are four red sections containing glyphic elements. The middle three glyphs (on a creamy background) of each section are the same, but can not be identified with certainty. These glyphic signs, however, actually look much like curled balls of maize dough, as identified by Taube (1989) in Classic iconography. The outer rim text contains an elaborate glyphic design repeated twice; unfortunately the glyphs cannot be identified with any certainty. The middle hieroglyphic sign

again is an anthropomorphic head. Similar glyphic designs appear on other “Tikal Dancer” plates. For a tentative comparison of some of these glyphic designs, see the section “*Pseudo-Glyphs*” or a *Name Phrase* below.

Example No. 7: Kerr No. 5358 (Duke University Museum of Art, Inv. No. 1981.33.7)



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: Reents-Budet 1994: Fig. 5.37 (MS0244); The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: 36,3 cm.

The black lines that encircle the center design in this example do not contain a repetitive glyphic design, but the design of a jaguar skin repeated four times. Around the waist there is a prominent waist band or protective device.

Example No. 8: Kerr No. 5375 (Duke University Museum of Art, Inv. No. not available)



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: not available

The center design of this plate depicts the dancing Maize God. He is framed by a red band and a high rim painted with two repetitive designs. A panel depicting a small version of the dancing Maize God himself is repeated three times. These three panels alternate with three red panels which each contain eight glyphic signs for the day “Ok”, the tenth day sign of the Maya 260-day calendar. At present it is unknown why the day sign “Ok” occurs, but eight is the “number” of the Maize God (see below).

Example No. 9: Kerr No. 5379 (Mint Museum of Art, Inv. No. 1983.172.25)



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: Reents-Budet 1994: Fig. 5.35; Whittington 2001: Cat. No. 135,
The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: 10,2 cm. Diameter: 30,5 cm.

This is one of the few examples in which the Maize God's whole body is turned to one side (note, for example, that both feet point to the left). A small drill hole can be found at the center of the plate. The center design of the Maize God is encircled by double lines.

The space between these double lines contains four sections of five day signs each. All twenty day signs in the order of the Classic Maya calendar have been included in such a way that each section opens with a Type II Year Bearer (cf. Boot 2003a). Note that the day sign for "Kab'an" is actually painted as "Kawak" (the day sign that opens the section directly above the headdress of the dancing figure), a possible error of the painter of this plate. The four "I-shaped" elements or designs separating the day sign sequences and on the outer rim may depict ballcourts or represent the quatrefoils occasionally found on ballcourt markers (Whittington 2001: 262).

Example No. 10: Kerr No. 5603 (Museo Popol Vuh, Inv. No. not available)



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: Reents-Budet 1994: Figure 5.38 (MS0845); The Maya Vase Database
(<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: 32,5 cm.

The center dancing figure is encircled by black lines, while the center of the plate has not been drilled but several surface flakes are missing (possibly removed intentionally). Between the black lines one can identify eight “I-shaped” designs. The outer rim provides four additional “I-shaped” designs. These designs or elements may be representations of ballcourts or the quatrefoils occasionally found on ballcourt markers (compare to Example No. 9).

The number eight is specifically associated with the Maize God; he is the so-called “Lord of Number Eight” (cf. Thompson 1950: Figure 24) (for illustration, see further below). Four is a more common number that may be indicative of the four cardinal or world directions. It also is worth mentioning that the fourth Classic Maya day was “K’an”, a day sign which can be found associated with the dancing Maize God on Example Nos. 12 and 21.

The glyphic sign for the day “K’an” represents a folded tamale or corn bread, *waaj* in Classic Maya. As Taube (1989: 42) suggested, “(t)he K[’]an sign is a graphic representation of the notched-ball tamale within the vegetal wrapper”.

Example No. 11: Kerr No. 5875



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi.9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: 12,0 cm. Diameter: 33,7 cm.

This rounded rectangular plate on four legs may come from an area north of Tikal, as a stylistically very similar cylindrical vessel cataloged as Kerr No. 8526 refers to *k’uhul chatahn winik*, a paramount title associated with sites in the Mirador basin (cf. Boot n.d). As its center interior design it contains the image of the dancing Maize God. Possibly he wears a protective waist belt, as also can be found on other examples illustrated above and to be illustrated below. Next to the Maize God one can find six glyphic collocations, but none of the signs can be identified (compare to Example No. 21).

The high and nearly vertical rim of this plate contains four pairs of hieroglyphic collocations; each pair contains the same (or very similar) collocations as the other pairs. Unfortunately, these collocations also cannot be identified with any certainty (only some of the glyphic signs used can be compared with known syllabic or logographic signs). Possibly, as a human portrait glyph is used in all four pairs, this may be a variant of the hieroglyphic design as found on other examples. Two bands of stepped fret motifs in alternating white-on-black and white-on-red frame the rim design.

Example No. 12: Kerr No. 5880



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi.9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: 28,7 cm.

This example provides two similar hieroglyphic designs in the broad outer rim. The band that directly encircles the center design contains four sections that each contain four glyphic signs. The center two signs in each section are very close in detail to the sign for the day “K’an”, the fourth day sign of the twenty Classic Maya day signs (see Example No. 10). The two hieroglyphic designs are framed by three “I-shaped” elements; ballcourts tend to have three ballcourt markers. The suggestion that these “I-shaped” elements represent the quatrefoils as found on ballcourt markers (Whittington 2001: 262) may be substantiated by this particular example. The Maize God seems to wear protective gear around the waist and the upper legs.

Example No. 13: Kerr No. 5881



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi.9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: 31,8 cm.

The centrally depicted Maize God has a very simple costume. His right arm seems to be covered by some feathered ornament (or is it a ballgame-related arm protector?). The outer rim of this plate contains two glyphic designs (note the portrait head with the large curl on the back of the head, and compare this example with the nominal glyphs as illustrated in the section “*Pseudo-Glyphs*” or a *Name Phrase* below), while the inner rim is highlighted by two black lines. Between the two black lines there are four sections that contain glyphic signs, but of which unfortunately insufficient detail is present to provide a proper identification. As in Example No.

12, the three “I-shaped” designs or elements may refer to the quatrefoils as found on ballcourt markers.

Example No. 14: Kerr No. 7266



Photograph: Justin Kerr

Published: The Maya Vase Database (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: not available Diameter: not available

This plate does not contain any glyphic design. It is the one of a few plates in which the dancing Maize God has a black body (see Example No. 24). Protective gear specifically around the waist and upper legs may indicate the presence of ballgame related paraphernalia.

Example No. 15: Kerr No. 8593



Photograph: Ilari Hilkku

Published: The Maya Vase Data Base (<http://famsi.famsi:9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>)

Height: 5,1 cm. Diameter: 25,5 cm.

The outer rim, defined by two broad red lines, contains a total of ten glyphic designs. One of these designs is repeated five times, alternating with five Classic Maya day signs. At present only the day signs for “Imix” and “Chikchan” can be identified with certainty. The other three day signs may be variants of “Men”.

The repetitive glyph design is comparable to the repetitive glyph design on Kerr No. 5076 (Example No. 6) and is reminiscent of the representation of curled balls of maize dough in Classic Maya iconography. The dancing Young Maize God seems to dance to the left (also note

the centrally placed drill hole, penetrating his upper right leg).

Example No. 16: Private Museum “Colección Juan Antonio Valdés”, Uaxactun



Photograph: Karl-Herbert Mayer

Published: Mayer 2001 (Mexicon, 23 [5]: Cover, in black-and-white)

Height: 5,0 cm. Diameter: 33,0 cm.

The center design of the dancing Maize God is encircled by an intricate, flowing band of interlocking and repetitive hieroglyphic signs. These hieroglyphic signs remain without certain identification. The arms of the dancing Maize God are fully extended, while the hands are stretched inwards. His very slim waist is enwrapped in some kind of protective belt that might be related to the ballgame, as seen in some of the previous examples. To the right, just touching the outside left leg of the dancing Maize God, there is a small drill hole.

Mayer provides a short note on the possible provenience, as the plate “is said to be from Dos Lagunas in the northern area of the Department of Peten” (Mayer 2001: 110).

Example No. 17: Private Museum “Colección Juan Antonio Valdés”, Uaxactun



Photograph: Karl-Herbert Mayer

Published: Mayer 2001 (Mexicon, 23 [5]: 110, in black-and-white)

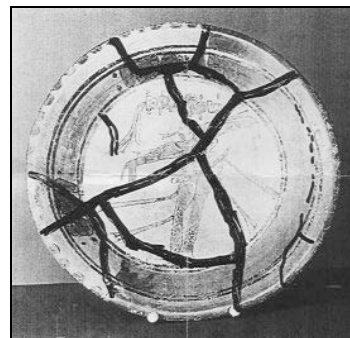
Height: 15,0 cm. Diameter: 35,0 cm.

The outer rim on this plate contains three versions of the same hieroglyphic design. Each glyphic sign, executed in a dark red with fine black lines to provide detail, is a rudimentary representation of some kind of skull-like anthropomorphic head.



Photograph: Mint Museum of Art
Published: Whittington 2001: Cat. No. 137
Height: 7,0 cm. Diameter: 36,0 cm.

This is yet another dancing Maize God (e.g. Example No. 14) that seems to wear (heavy) protective gear around the waist, a possible indication of a connection with the Classic Maya ballgame (note Miller 2001: 86-87, Figure 94). The center of the plate has been drilled. To either side of the dancing (and “ballplaying”?) figure there are glyphic captions, but none of the signs can be easily identified. The outer rim contains a twice-repeated hieroglyphic design comparable to those identified on other plates (see the section “*Pseudo-Glyphs*” or a *Name Phrase* below).



Photographs: By the private collector
Published: Boot 2002: Figure 1
Height: not available Diameter: 31,1 cm.

The outer rim of this plate twice contains a hieroglyphic design that can be compared to the hieroglyphic designs or sequences on “Tikal Dancer” plates illustrated earlier. The black-and-white image to the right of the color photograph shows the division of the separate pieces of the plate before restoration. As it is the only plate (besides Example No. 17) for which I have this kind of information (as provided by the private collector) it is here presented as such. As can be seen, the hieroglyphic designs were once separated (the black lines to identify the separate pieces are thicker than the actual separation). The cracks were filled in, but the designs were not painted over.

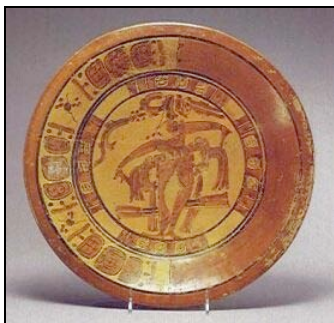
Example No. 20: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology),
Leiden (Cat. No. 4363-1)



Photograph: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde
Published: Van Bussel and Leyenaar 1991: Plate 4; The RMV Website
(<http://www.rmv.nl>)
Height: 10,0 cm. Diameter: 31,0 cm.

This center figure also wears protective gear around the waist and lower torso (there is a tiny drill hole to the left of the protected upper legs). As for instance in Example No. 14 and Example No. 18, this may indicate a relationship with the Classic Maya ballgame. The outer rim contains two very similar hieroglyphic designs or sequences. The two hieroglyphic designs or sequences are framed by three “I-shaped” elements. Again, as noted earlier, these three “I-shaped” elements may represent the ballcourt or the quatrefoils as found on ballcourt markers.

Example No. 21: Sotheby's 1999 Sale Catalog 7391 No. 82



Photograph: Sotheby's
Published: Sotheby's Sale Catalog, Sale 7391, No. 82
Height: not available Diameter: 35,6 cm.

A single and a double black line encircle the center design of the dancing figure. The area between these black lines contains four sections, executed in red, that contain three glyphic signs each on a cream or tawny background. This particular glyphic sign is repeated three times in each section. Some of the glyphic signs are very close to the fourth Classic Maya day sign “K'an”, as in Example No. 12 (Kerr No. 5880). If correct, this would be the second “Tikal Dancer” plate specifically associated with the fourth Classic Maya day sign “K'an”.



Photographs: (1) Andrea Baguzzi
(2) Instituto de Antropología e Historia, Guatemala
(<http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/guatemala/fi/0000003c.jpg>)
Published: Schmidt, De la Garza, and Nalda 1998: Cat. No. 337
Height: 8,0 cm. Diameter: 33,8 cm.

This plate illustrates a fine example of the dancing Maize God, but there is no associated hieroglyphic design on either the inner or outer rim. The inner band contains eight repetitions of the same design (compare to Example No. 10). The heavy protective gear around the waist may again be indicative of a ballgame association. If correct, this is the ninth “Tikal Dancer” plate with a clear ballgame association in the costume of the dancing Maize God. Other comparable “ballgame” associations could be found in Example Nos. 1, 4, 7, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20.



Photograph: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Published: MFA - Online Collections Database (<http://www.mfa.org>)
Height: 10,1 cm. Diameter: 30,9 cm.

A fine example of the Tikal Dancer tradition, currently at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The pose of the dancer is quite dynamic. His left foot is slightly lifted from the ground, while his right arm is extended, the hand also stretched out. His waist is very thin, and below this very thin waist the Maize God seems to wear a heavy protective belt. This plate may also thus provide an association with the ballgame. The center design is encircled by two black lines containing four times the “I-shaped” design, possibly the depiction of a ballcourt or the quatrefoils found on ballcourt markers (see above). Also four repetitions of a glyphic design can be found of which the center sign is the glyph for *k'in* “sun; day; festival”. The rim contains two compartments with a hieroglyphic design or sequence. These glyphic designs are framed by three “I-shaped” designs or elements. This Tikal Dancer plate is the tenth example in which the Maize God wears ballgame related protective gear (see Examples Nos. 1, 4, 7, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, and 22).

Example No. 24: Present location unknown



Photographs: photographer not known

Published: (images from internet, site not cataloged)

Height: not available Diameter: not available

This is the second example of the twenty-seven Tikal Dancer plates illustrated in this essay in which the Maize God has a black body (see Example No. 14). Around his waist he clearly wears protective gear. Black lines circle the center design, and between the lines four repetitions of a jaguar skin design can be found (compare to Example No. 18). Two glyphic designs can be found in the band on the outer rim, but in both cases the center sign seems to be a day sign. One day sign may be “Imix”, the other “Lamat”. In antiquity this plate was broken and repaired, as is shown by the two pairs of drill holes. This kind of repair is a good indication that these plates were frequently used in elite contexts prior to final deposit. When the plate was deposited, probably as part of a ceramic funerary assemblage, the center drill hole was made.

Example No. 25: Arte Xibalba (stock number M301)



Photographs: Arte Xibalba

Publication: Arte Xibalba - Online Catalog (<http://www.trocadero.com>)

Height: not available Diameter: 20,9 cm.

This plate was probably made in the Ulua Valley area in Honduras, judging by its distinctive rendering of the center design and the rim designs. As with most of the plates discussed in this essay, this plate was also illegally removed from its original location.

At the center of the plate there is an anthropomorphic figure, the Maize God, as indicated by his elongated head. He is standing between two straight stalks with foliage (bent leaves), possibly the

abstract rendering of two maize plants. The rim depicts two series of three forward-bent human figures (compare their faces to the anthropomorphic Maize God), each possibly carrying long planting sticks. These six human figures may thus be representations of Maya farmers who are in the process of planting corn in their fields.

Example No. 26: Arte Primitivo Auction 18 Catalog (Lot Number 102259)



Photograph: Arte Primitivo

Publication: Arte Primitivo Online Catalogs (<http://www.artep primitivo.com>)

Height : not available Diameter: not available

The general appearance of this Dancer plate can best be compared with the example found at Uaxactun (Example No. 1), although the current example seems to have a more vertical rim. Note as such specifically the background color as well as the glyphic designs presented between the double red lines, highlighted by a thin black line. The center figure is depicted from the side, and only his stretched right arm is indicative of any dynamic movement. Around his waist there clearly is protective gear present, an indication of an association with the ballgame (as seen already in ten examples illustrated above). Two of the glyphic designs can easily be compared with similar designs on other plates, but the bottom two glyphic designs are very close to the Initial Sign and the God N variant as found on a ceramic vessel cataloged as Kerr No. 0530. If correctly identified, this would be the second Tikal Dancer plate with a (partial) Primary Standard Sequence.

Example No. 27: Arte Primitivo Variety Sale Catalog (Lot Number 105983) (ex-Sotheby's)



Photograph: Arte Primitivo

Publication: Arte Primitivo Online Catalogs (<http://www.artep primitivo.com>)

Height : not available Diameter: not available

The background on this plate is a light cream or orange. The center area is encircled by two double lines which form the borders of the outer rim, a band painted in a dark orange. The band contained between these double lines does not provide any further design.

The central figure on this plate is the Maize God, as indicated by the elongated head and the foliage serving as his headdress. In this example he is fully dressed as a ballplayer; noteworthy are the protective gear around the waist, the protection of his upper legs, and the protection around the lower right arm. To the left of the ballplaying Maize God one can find the ball, which contains the abstract depiction of a decapitated and skull-like human head. Skulls depicted on a game ball can for instance be found depicted in the bench panels at Chichen Itza and Tiquisate tripod vessels (e.g. Leyenaar and Parsons 1988: Cat. No. 131). Also note the La Esperanza (“Chinkultic”) ballcourt marker; the ball in that scene may possibly contain a “Hunahpu” portrait glyph (cf. Kowalski 1989); in the Classic period he was known as Hun Ahaw. In the “Popol Wuj” there is a scene in which Hunahpu is decapitated, after which his head serves as the ball in a game between him and his twin brother Xb’alanq’ej (in the Classic period known as Yax B’ahlam) against the Lords of Xibalba (Tedlock 1996: 125-129).

Another plate contains the image of a fully dressed ballplayer (also note the black rubber ball):



There is too little iconographic information to positively identify the center figure as the ballplaying Maize God (the headdress and cloth strings attached to his waist protection may suffice), but this plate (cataloged as Kerr No. 5376) may also be a part of the Tikal Dancer tradition, in which the Maize God through a dance is transformed into a ballplayer.

In sum, possibly the Tikal Dancer plates present the transformation of the Maize God, and the dance the Maize God performs is the medium to effectuate this particular transformation. The plate cataloged here as Example No. 27 seems to represent the culmination of the dancing Maize God who transforms into a ballplayer. On at least thirteen plates as presented above the Maize God wears protective gear around the waist, indicative of an association with the ballgame. Possibly the Tikal Dancer plates illustrate single frames of a long transformation sequence in which the Maize God obtains ballgame protective gear to finally transform into a fully dressed ballplayer. The Maize God and the ballgame may thus be intricately connected with each other.

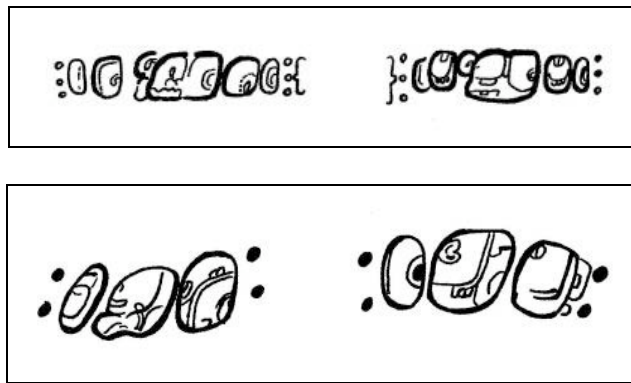
To summarize the contents of the twenty-seven different Tikal Dancer plates the following table has been designed:

Ex. No.	Protective Gear	“I-shaped design”	“Glyphic Design”	Possible Day Signs
1	present	-	present	-
2	-	present	-	-
3	-	-	present	-
4	present	-	present	-
5	-	-	-	-
6	-	-	present	-
7	present	-	-	-
8	-	-	-	“Ok” (4 series of 8)
9	-	present	-	all 20 days signs
10	-	present	-	-
11	present	-	(present?)	-
12	present	present	present	“K’an”
13	-	present	present	-
14	present	-	-	-
15	-	-	-	5 possible days signs
16	present	-	(present?)	-
17	-	-	present	-
18	present	-	present	-
19	-	-	present	-
20	present	-	present	-
21	-	-	present	“K’an”
22	present	-	-	-
23	present	present	present	-
24	present	-	-	“Imix(?)”/“Lamat(?)”
25	-	-	-	-
26	present	-	present	-
27	present (plus ball)	-	-	-

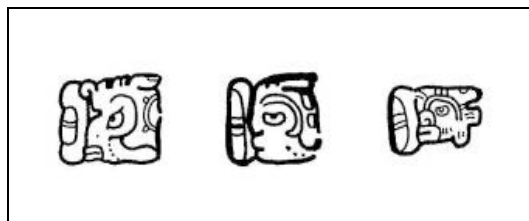
“Pseudo-Glyphs” or a Name Phrase: The Classic Maize God?

Of the twenty-seven plates illustrated in this essay, ten plates contain hieroglyphic designs or sequences that in certain details can easily be compared. Three other plates seem to present slightly different variants of these glyphic designs. Some epigraphers may refer to these “glyphic designs or sequences” as “pseudo-glyphs” or “glyphoids” (i.e. glyphs for decorative purposes and no direct meaning), but these glyphic designs actually may present a name phrase.

To illustrate these particular glyphic designs, one can find below the drawings of the glyphic designs on Example No. 13 (Mint Museum of Art) and Example No. 14 (Private Collection, Europe) (drawings by the author):

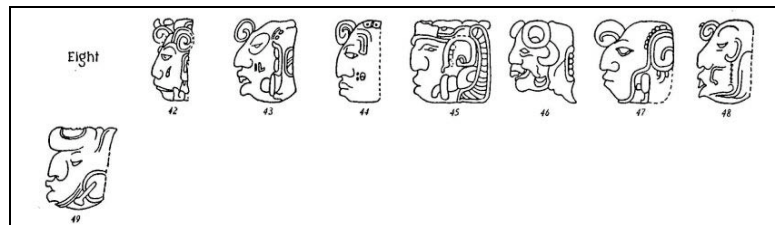


Each glyphic design seems to open and end with either a double or a triple dot. These dots seem to be ornamental, as the remaining hieroglyphic signs are reasonably easy to compare. In certain details, these hieroglyphic designs or sequences can be compared with a particular nominal phrase as found in the Late Postclassic Maya codices (after Taube 1992: Figure 17a):



This nominal phrase, that identifies God E or the Maize God in the Late Postclassic Maya codices, opens with the T24(var) MIRROR sign. In the Maya codices this particular glyphic sign opens specific nominal phrases of gods (only God A and God E in the Dresden Codex; mainly God A and E in the Madrid Codex, but less frequently also for instance God C, CH, H, and Q; in the surviving text parts of the Paris Codex this sign only opens the nominal phrase of God E) (note 3). A comparable hieroglyphic sign seems to open the two double hieroglyphic designs or sequences as illustrated above. The main sign, that is the large hieroglyphic sign in the middle of these hieroglyphic designs or sequences, is somewhat reminiscent of a kind of portrait glyph. In three of the four examples as illustrated, the main sign indeed has anthropomorphic features. The postfixes do not occur in the Maya codices (at least not associated with the nominal phrase of the Maize God). These postfixes may have been infixed into the portrait of the Maize God (compare infixed half-circular element in first example of Maize God nominal phrase with the postfix of the first hieroglyphic design on the plate in a private collection in Europe). The combination of the T24(var) MIRROR prefix and the anthropomorphic main sign suggests to me that these “hieroglyphic designs or sequences” thus may represent the nominal phrase of the Classic Maya Maize God. If correct, the center figure would indeed be the Maize God as identified by this nominal phrase (note 4).

This assumption may be strengthened through the fact that the name phrase of the Classic Maize God, as known from Classic inscriptions, shares certain features with the “hieroglyphic designs or sequences” on the “Tikal Dancer” plates and the nominal phrase of God E in the Late Postclassic codices (after Thompson 1950: Figure 24):



The celamorphic hieroglyphic variant of Number Eight, which is the head of the Maize God, can be compared to the main sign in the codices (note vegetal elements, curled element on forehead), while the last example presented by Thompson (“49”, to be found at Palenque, Tablet of the 96 Glyphs: C3a) apparently contains the T24(var) MIRROR sign, present in both the codices and the “Tikal Dancer” plates. Naturally it has to be noted that the “hieroglyphic designs or sequences” as painted on these plates represent a more cursive version of the putative Maize God nominal phrase than those carved in the Classic inscriptions or painted in the Late Postclassic codices. Future examples of “Tikal Dancer” plates may provide additional epigraphic detail to substantiate the present suggestion.

The Maize God and the Ballgame

This essay presented twenty-seven examples of “Tikal Dancer” plates. The bottom of the plate depicts the Maize God in different dancing positions. Twelve of the depictions of the dancing Maize God combine elements of the Classic Maya ballgame, specifically protective gear around the upper-legs, waist, and lower torso area (compare to Miller 2001: 86-87, Fig. 94). Specific iconographic elements, the so-called “I-shaped” designs or elements, may also provide a connection with the ballgame, either as a stylized and abstract ballcourt or a reference to the quatrefoils occasionally found on ballcourt markers (Whittington 2001: 262). One example illustrated the Maize God as a fully dressed ballplayer with game ball. This association between the Maize God and the ballgame may not be accidental, as one of the overarching themes of the Mesoamerican ballgame may have been (human and/or agricultural) fertility (note 5). The beautifully carved ceramic vessel (Kerr No. 5226) depicted below stresses this particular theme:



A small anthropomorphic figure stands within the architectural representation of a stepped ballcourt. In his arms he holds two giant circular feathered serpents that may represent the ballcourt rings (note for instance the ballcourt rings at the Great Ballcourt at Chichen Itza that depict feathered serpents set with small disks). From the opened jaws of the feathered serpents emerge aged ancestral or godly anthropomorphic figures holding offerings in their stretched-out hands.

This particular scene can be compared to Kerr No. 8009 (excavated archaeologically at Tikal; dedicatory cache, west stairs, Structure 5D-46, or Chak Tok Ich’aak’s palace at the

Central Acropolis) on which an Early Classic representation of the resurrected Maize God (note the corn cob and the extensive maize foliage as his headdress) holds a double headed serpent set with small mirrors or disks from whose opened jaws emerge the Paddler Gods (the “Stingray Paddler”, associated with the day, on the left; the “Jaguar Paddler”, associated with the night, on the right):



A slightly different version of the same narrative can be found on Kerr No. 7019, a ceramic from the Palmer Collection, currently at the Hudson Museum, Orono, Maine (Inv. No. HM1175) (rollout electronically cut and pasted by the author to provide image of Maize God in the center):



In this image the aged ancestral or godly anthropomorphic figures (note the wrinkles to the side of the mouth to indicate old age) emerging from the double headed serpent again may be the Paddler Gods. On Kerr No. 5226 the aged ancestral or godly anthropomorphic figures may thus also be the Paddler Gods. The small architectural ballcourt on Kerr No. 5226 is specifically marked with blossoming vegetal elements, indicative of fertility as referred to above. The small anthropomorphic figure may thus be the Maize God standing in a ballcourt. If correctly identified, two different iconographic narratives provide a relationship of the Maize God with the ballgame (the Tikal Dancer plates and these carved vessels).

As noted by Justin Kerr (line of comment to Kerr No. 5226, The Maya Vase Database, at <http://famsi.famsi.9500/dataSpark/MayaVase>), the ceramic vessel cataloged as Kerr No. 5761 seems to represent a similar theme associated with fertility, but here the Maize God emerges from a kind a seed pod or bulb root (also note the giant feathered serpent and the two male figures, possibly again the Paddler Gods):



This particular scene is very reminiscent of the complex iconographic narratives as carved on the upper zone of the walls of the Temple of the Caracols at the Initial Series Complex, Chichen Itza, Yucatan:



Elaborately dressed anthropomorphic figures wearing bird masks seem to emerge from cracked seed pods or the bulb roots of the blossoming and fruit-bearing vines which they hold in their hands and in which they are entwined. The figure emerging from a seed pod or bulb root, as shared between the carved ceramic vessel (Kerr No. 5761) and the upper wall zone of the Temple of the Caracols, is particularly intriguing (photograph above by Joel Skidmore, posted at http://mesoweb.com/chichen/features/old_chichen_rubbings/18.html). This complex iconography, excavated and restored in the last couple of years, is currently under detailed investigation by the Proyecto Arqueológico Chichen Itza, directed by Dr. Peter Schmidt. The particular relationship between Maize God, fertility, and the ballgame (as described above) requires additional research.

Final Remarks

Many of the “Tikal Dancer” plates originally stood on three hollow (rattle) pedestals. Recently it has been suggested that the pedestals on tripod plates of the Tikal Dancer tradition may have represented the three hearth stones of the primordial fire, from which the dancing Young Maize God was resurrected or emerged (Reents-Budet, lecture presented on March 6, 2002, Department of Art and Art History, University of Texas at Austin). Some of these plates show a clear burn mark between the three pedestals, but, it has to be noted, not all of them. Although I have no particular objection to this interpretation, there are many tripod plates (outside of the “Tikal Dancer” plates) and not necessarily all of them refer to the three hearth stones.

On the origin of the “Tikal Dancer” plates Reents-Budet recently wrote:

It has been suggested that these Dancer plates were produced at Tikal and nearby Uaxactún or only at Tikal. The stylistic variations within the corpus point to multiple workshops, each expressing their individuality through minor yet consistent variations in the use of pictorial space, in iconography and in vessel shape. When compared chemically to the corpus of lowland Classic Period polychrome pottery, these plates cluster together based on their similar compositional profiles and chemically resemble pottery excavated from the Tikal area. However, the group’s internal chemical diversity points not only to Tikal but also to smaller subsidiary sites within the greater Tikal sphere as the locations of the workshops where the plates were created (Reents-Budet 1994: 197-198).

In general, most of the plates are clearly of a Late Classic manufacture and thus date to the second half of the Classic period (circa A.D. 670-830). The fact that two “dancing Maize God” plates have been found at Tikal seems to justify the denomination “Tikal Dancer plates”. Actually, these plates can be found in a wide variety of regional styles and they represent the possible transformation of the Maize God from a dancer into a ballplayer. Probably the best denomination would be the “Maize God Transformation Plates”.

In conclusion, the “Tikal Dancer” plates in most cases present an image of a dancing Young Maize God. Many of these plates contain hieroglyphic designs or sequences that may represent a cursive version of the Classic Maya nominal phrase for the Maize God. Perhaps additional examples will provide more epigraphic detail to substantiate this particular suggestion. There also seems to be a relationship between the Maize God and the ballgame. One example even illustrates the Maize God fully dressed as a ballplayer leaning towards a gameball. This possible relationship, within a ballgame-related theme of fertility, should be investigated further too.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Karl-Herbert Mayer, who provided the color photographs of the Tikal Dancer plates currently at the private museum “Colección Juan Antonio Valdés”, and Walda Metcalf, director of University Museum Publications at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, through whose permission the images of two Tikal Dancer plates as illustrated in Culbert’s 1993 “The Ceramics of Tikal” can be reproduced. Additionally I thank Barbara MacLeod for her comments on epigraphic matters, and Joel Skidmore for his constructive and editorial comments during the preparation of this essay. As always, unless stated otherwise, the opinions expressed in this essay are mine.

Notes

*) An earlier, shorter version of this essay was distributed among a small circle of fellow epigraphers in June and November 2002, under the title “Miscellaneous Maya Ceramics. Report Series on Maya Ceramics in European Private Collections, MMC Report No. 2: A New Tikal Dancer Plate”, dated June 5, 2002, Rijswijk, the Netherlands.

1) The web site “International Cultural Property Protection”, maintained by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, contains the largest selection of documents on U.S. and international laws and conventions that guard the cultural patrimony of all nations (see the web site at <http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/sindex.html> and scroll down to the section “U.S. and International Laws”). This site also contains all relevant material, both in text and image, to identify illegally imported Precolumbian artifacts into the U.S.

2) In the introduction to Tikal Report 25A the names of various artists are given who made the drawings; in order of appearance the names are: Virginia Green, Mona Brown, Elizabeth Christensen, William R. Coe, Bobbi Culbert, LaBerta Mann, Fern Taylor, and Jayne Watts. There are no separate credits.

3) The T24(var) sign opens nominal phrases of other gods (e.g. “Centipede Death God”, Tikal, Temple IV, Lintel 3: A6-B6 [here the name of a captured litter]; “Jaguar War God”, Tikal, Temple IV, Lintel 3: F5) and some supernatural entities or *wayob*’ (e.g. a toad-shaped *way*, Kerr No. 2041; a vomiting jaguar *way*, Kerr No. 1973). In 1997 I came across an interesting substitution in the Madrid Codex of the T24(var) MIRROR sign, which in the Primary Standard Sequence in the Initial Sign seems to represent the value **LAY** (a logographic value independently proposed by Barbara MacLeod and Yuri Polyukhovich, for which there now is a fully syllabic version ***a-la-ya**, cf. Boot 2003b):



The first example (Madrid 21C2) provides the regular usage of the T24(var) MIRROR sign in the Late Postclassic codices. The second example (Madrid 24B1) provides a unique prefix **ki** to the T24(var) MIRROR sign (note other examples of T24[var] combined with **ki** in the Madrid Codex, 37A1-B3 and 63C1-A2) (images scanned from Anders 1967). Although tentative, in the present context I would like to suggest a logographic value **KILICH** or **KICH** for the T24(var) MIRROR sign when prefixed to nominal phrases of gods. The syllable **ki** may thus serve as a phonetic complement (**ki-KILICH?** or **ki-KICH?**). In Yucatec Maya *kilich* and *kich* mean “good and pure; saintly, reverential name”. In Mopan Maya *ki’* («ci’», possibly an abbreviation of *kilich* or *kich*) means “good”, while Itzaj Maya has *kich’* “good” (with added glottal stop, but synonymous with *utz* “good”; note Yucatec Maya *kichpam* and Itzaj Maya *kich’pan* “beautiful”). The root of the expression *kilich* or *kich* is *ki’* “sweet” (MacLeod, personal communication, June 24, 2003); a gloss with this meaning is found in many Mayan languages (cf. Dienhart 1989: 625-626). As such *ki’* means “sweet”, *ki’il* means “that which is sweet”, and *ki’ilich* (*ki’il* plus vowel harmonic intensifying suffix) means “that which is very sweet”. *Kich* is simply a contraction of *ki’ilich*. As a metaphor, *kilich* and *kich* came to stand for “good, pure; saintly”. In general, the God C nominal phrase is simply T1016 **K’UH**, and as such T24(var) MIRROR seems to operate as an optional prefixed adjective. The two examples illustrated above can be tentatively transliterated as *Kilich* or *Kich K’uh* and, following the meaning in colonial Yucatec Maya, may mean “Good, Pure or Sweet God”. In the main text I mentioned the fact that specifically in the Postclassic Maya codices the nominal phrases of the God A (“Death God”) and God E (“Maize God”) opened with the T24(var) MIRROR sign, possibly thus indicative of the fact that *Kilich* or *Kich* opens their nominal phrases. In present-day Yucatán, in the *ejido* of Mucel (Pixoy, Valladolid), the Maize God is known as *Kiríich Ixíin* or *Santo Ixíin* (Valle Peralta et al. 1982, vol. 2: 292; common /l/ to /r/ phonemic change), while *Kich Kimil* may be the present-day reference to the “Death God” (a particular cenote in the environs of Homun was described in 1987 as *te kich kimil* “for/at Kich Kimil”) (Boot 1987: 277 & 1988: 149, note 5). Note that the God A name phrase often ends with **-la** (his Postclassic Maya name may have been *Kilich* or *Kich Kimiil/Chamiil* “Good, Pure or Sweet Death” based on spellings as **KILICH?-KIMI’?/CHAMI’?-la**, e.g. Dresden Codex 12b1-B1). More linguistic and epigraphic research is necessary to substantiate this proposal, as the T24(var) MIRROR sign may be a (context-dependent) polyvalent sign, or different signs with different values may have been grouped together erroneously (note specific spellings as **wi**-T24[var] possibly for *win* “portrait”, **la**-T24[var]-**ya** for *lay* “here; this one”, and **ki**-T24[var] possibly for *kilich*, *kich* “good and pure; sweet; saintly”).

- 4) A plate of which I do not have a photograph, only a FLAAR drawing, can be found depicted below (plate cataloged as Kerr No. 3637, drawing by Barbara Van Heusen □ 1976 FLAAR):



This plate clearly is painted in the same iconographic tradition as the plates illustrated in this essay as Example Nos. 4, 18, 19, and 24. It is particularly reminiscent of Example No. 18, as that example also incorporates hieroglyphic signs into the center design (in the present case two spider monkeys). The outer rim contains three repetitions of the “glyphic design” as associated with the Maize God on ten of the

twenty-seven Tikal Dancer plates. The inner rim contains five times a pair of *k'in* glyphs; as such note Example No. 23 which also contains *k'in* glyphs in its inner rim. The fact that this plate contains the possible cursive version of the nominal phrase of the Maize God may militate against that very identification. However, as this plate fully participates in the iconographic complex of the Tikal Dancer tradition it may indicate that even plates with a different center design referenced the Maize God.

5) This is not the place to discuss the various themes that supposedly have been (re-)enacted in the Mesoamerican ballgame in general and the Maya ballgame in specific (e.g. Leyenaar and Parsons 1988; Tokovinine 2002, n.d.; Van Bussel, Van Dongen, and Leyenaar 1991; Whittington 2001). These various themes include the settling of political and boundary disputes, the settling of military disputes, religious sacrifice, ceremonial battle, the alignment of kin groups, a means for enacting the sun's passage through the surface of the earth (Robertson 1991: 92), fertility, and the installment of a new ruling lineage and its paramount (through a process called the *toma de posesión*) as well as the investiture of its successors (cf. Boot 2003c; compare to Schele and Mathews 1998). It should be noted that at any given ballcourt in Mesoamerica, or the Maya area in specific, none of the supposed ballgame themes needs to be mutually exclusive.

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