K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’: A New Snake King from the Early Classic Period

SIMON MARTIN
University of Pennsylvania Museum

DMITRI BELIAEV
Russian State University for the Humanities

What we know of Classic Maya dynasties are, with few exceptions, patchwork assemblies. Without the relatively complete lists we have for Copan or Palenque, sequences of rulers can only be gleaned from scattered clues—fragments of information with which we try to identify individuals and close temporal gaps. Such is the case with the dynasty of the kaanul “Snake” kings whose major seats of power were located at Dzibanche and Calakmul. Here we will set out the evidence for a previously unknown Kaanul king from the Early Classic Period, one whose obscurity today in no way reflects his significance in the past.

We begin with a ceramic vessel excavated from Burial 23 at Uaxactun in the 1930s, a small bowl with a series of figural roundels on a black background, its rim bearing a text painted in an orange slip (Smith 1955:Fig. 7f, 80d) (Figure 1a–b). Attributable to the Tepeu 1 polychrome ceramic phase, it is notably similar to a vessel now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art designated as K6813 in the Kerr Archive (www.mayavase.com) (Figure 1c). This was produced for the Naranjo king Aj Numsaj(?) Chan K’inich (reigned 546–615+), and, given the parameters imposed by the Three-K’atun Ajaw title ascribed to him in its text, it was made between 573 and 595. We can therefore presume that the owner of the Uaxactun bowl lived in the late sixth or early seventh century. Aj Numsaj(?) Chan K’inich

Figure 1. (a–b) Tepeu 1 bowl from Uaxactun Burial A23; renderings in Smith 1955:Fig. 7f, 80d; (c) K6813 (photograph by Simon Martin).
was a client of the Kaanul kings throughout his long reign (see below) and so we can expect that the lord the Uaxactun vessel was made for fell into their political ambit in some way. This is the period when the Kaanul kingdom was beginning to challenge for primacy in the central lowlands, largely at Tikal’s expense.

After a brief introduction, the rim text features an extended nominal sequence that ends with an emblem glyph closely matching a variant used by Tikal, which normally reads *k’ahk* *ma’at* *ajaw* (Figure 2, glyphs K and L). 1 Although this name shows some similarities to those of other Tikal kings of this era, it remains unique. 2 Significantly, the text next gives ties to those of other Tikal kings of this era, it remains unique. 2 This is the period when the Kaanul reign (see below) and so we can expect that the lord the

1 This alternate form of the Tikal main sign MUT is seen in a rather later version on Tikal Stela 5 at D12, and again in portrait form at De Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 8. It recur within the title MUT a–AJAW on an unpublished vessel photographed by Nicholas Hellmuth, where it is directly preceded by a compound spelled *PET*MUT*a* featuring a conventional MUT main sign of T569. The selection of different logograms there suggests a desire to avoid repetition in adjoining glyphs. This

1 Marc Zender (personal communication 2017) points out that position G reads WI–OHL–K’INICH, making this king a partial name of the so-called “Dynastic Vases” listing early Kaanul kings, where it identifies the 16th in line (Kerr and Kerr 1997:846; Martin 1997:861) (Figures 5 and 6). A connection to the name was one used by the Kaanul dynasty in primary royal position, and (c) this second overlordship would generally thought of as the “Preclassic heartland.” Conceivably, this reflects a shift in Chak Tok Ich’aak’s allegiance from Tikal to the Snake dynasty that later becomes closely associated with those titles (Guenter, personal communication 2013, Freidel 2015:2, 26). If so, it would join a scenario of mounting strategic losses for Tikal, coming at much the same moment that Caracol fell from its control (Martin and Grube 2000:39). We believe that another part of the text on El Peru Stela 44 is an important piece of evidence for this process. The accession of Wa’oom Uch’ab Ahk(?) in 556 is followed by another ajaw statement, demonstrating that El Peru was indeed subject to a foreign power. The name of this overlord is somewhat eroded but, as Guenter notes, the outline of K’AHK’T I’ CH’ICH’/K’IK’ (using the abstract form of the TI’ logogram) are

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2 David Stuart has proposed that 1728 is the sign for “blood,” though we currently lack the phonetic data that would reveal its phonetic form at D6 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 8). It recur within the title MUT a–AJAW on an unpublished vessel photographed by Nicholas Hellmuth, where it is directly preceded by a compound spelled *PET*MUT*a* featuring a conventional MUT main sign of T569. The selection of different logograms there suggests a desire to avoid repetition in adjoining glyphs. This

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Figure 6. Ruler 16 from codex-style Dynamic Vase K6751, KIB drawing by Simon Martin.)

2015-25-26). This would be consistent with the kind of hegemonic domination Tikal is believed to have exercised in the Early Classic, especially after it became the core of the Teotihuacan-orchestrated New Order after 378. The presumed mother of Wa’oom Uch’ab Ahk(?) bears the titles *sak* wayin and *k’ahk* ch’ahal winik, which distinctively originate in the northern Peten, the region generally thought of as the “Preclassic heartland.” Conceivably, this reflects a shift in Chak Tok Ich’aak’s allegiance from Tikal to the Snake dynasty that later becomes closely associated with those titles (Guenter, personal communication 2013, Freidel 2015:2, 26). If so, it would join a scenario of mounting strategic losses for Tikal, coming at much the same moment that Caracol fell from its control (Martin and Grube 2000:39). We believe that another part of the text on El Peru Stela 44 is an important piece of evidence for this process. The accession of Wa’oom Uch’ab Ahk(?) in 556 is followed by another ajaw statement, demonstrating that El Peru was indeed subject to a foreign power. The name of this overlord is somewhat eroded but, as Guenter notes, the outline of K’AHK’T I’ CH’ICH’/K’IK’ (using the abstract form of the TI’ logogram) are

3 Nonetheless clear (Figure 4). An emblem glyph once followed, but sadly is now almost completely illegible and cannot help to identify him at present. The recurrence of overlord status and the general chronological fit together suggest that this is the same person as the one sighted on the bowl.

K’ahk’ TI’ Ch’ich’ is not a common name. On Tikal Stela 40 (C17) it appears as a secondary apellative carried by the Tikal king K’an K’an (reigned 458–4867) while he was still a prince (Yaldes et al. 1997:41). It turns up again on the codex-style vase K6751, one of the so-called “Dynamic Vases” listing early Kaanul kings, where it identifies the 16th in line (Kerr and Kerr 1997:846; Martin 1997:861) (Figures 5 and 6). A connection to this kingdom seems distinctly possible, given that (a) the K’ahk’ TI’ Ch’ich’ named on the Naranjo-style bowl at Uaxactun was foreign to the Tikal kingdom, and (b) this name was one used by the Kaanul dynasty in primary royal position, and (c) this second overlordship would coincide with the sixth-century expansion of the Kaanul hegemony, when a number of important kingdoms fell under its influence or control.

The 556 accession date from Stela 44 offers our first fixed point for K’ahk’ TI’ Ch’ich’s reign, since most hierarchical relationships were initiated at inauguration events. In theory, the tie could have begun anytime up to the 564 period ending recorded on the stela, but the aforementioned origin of the El Peru ruler’s mother, and her potential links to the Kaanul dynasty, suggest that 556 is a viable starting point. It follows that the *k’ahk* *ma’at* *ajaw*
mutul ajaw named on the Uaxactun vessel should have been active in this same general timeframe.

The major figure at Tikal at this point was Wak Chan K’awiil, the 21st king of the line whose tenure seems to have begun in 537 and may have lasted until 562 or later (Martin 2003:23-24). His is certainly not the name spelled out on the bowl, so we are obliged to explain its owner’s lingual title in some other way. We currently lack the name of Wak Chan K’awiil’s predecessor, the 20th Tikal king, and he might be considered a candidate, if a rather weak one.4 Alternatively, Wak Chan K’awiil could have had a rival for his throne, with one or more “anti-kings” who claimed legitimacy of their own. We have come to realize that Classic Maya kingdoms were not inherently stable and on more than one occasion splintered into competing factions. We already know that Tikal’s sixth century saw a degree of dynastic turbulence, with the elevation of a six-year-old queen in 511 and irregularities in the rise of Wak Chan K’awiil (Martin 2003:18-24, 2005a:6-8). We also have the precedent of the Dos Pilas dynasty, which arose in the seventh century as an offshoot and antagonist to the in situ Tikal line (Houston 1993:99-102; Gudert 2003: Martin and Grube 2008:56-57). Evidently caused by a fraternal dispute, both groups used the full mutul title and the division between them became a permanent one. Notably, Dos Pilas did not stand alone in its claim to rule, as we will support by subject to the Kaanul dynasty, as intends to confirm our claims. Conceivably, K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ acted in a similar manner as the overlord and protector to a Tikal faction almost a century earlier.5 A third possibility is that our mystery Tikal king ruled after Wak Chan K’awiil, who would seem more in keeping with the date of the bowl. This would place him after the military defeat Tikal suffered in 562 (Houston 1991:40) and therefore would make good political sense. The only difficulty here is that we already have a 22nd Tikal king, Animal Skul, so if that were the case the ruler on the vase was not one counted in Tikal’s dynastic list.6

Thus far we have demonstrated no more than countertical links between K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ and the Kaanul line, but another inscription offers a tangible connection to the Kaanul dynasty, so we have to consider what role this person may have played, if any. The Uaxactun vessel is by no means alone in providing the name of an unknown “holy lord” of Tikal; there are several others in this general timeframe.7

One might wonder if a king strongly beholden to Tikal’s conquerors could have been excised from the list. There is some doubt that K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ listed beyond 561 (see note 10), but this king could have been a former protégé, installed at Tikal after 562. The bonds between vassals and overlords were highly personal ones and knew to extend beyond an overlord’s death.8

Kaanul kings at Calakmul used the “west” Ajaw title, and the contrasting designation “east” would be appropriate if K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ ruled at the earlier center of Dzibanche (also see Martin 2014:350-351; Carter 2015:11). Another bearer of this “east” Ajaw title from the Kaanul dynasty was Itz Uih Chan, a princess who married into the Kaanul dynasty. In 2015, the last two positions on the bone, A10 and A11, resemble parts of the Kaanul emblem, but not closely enough to advance the idea with any conviction.10

The plain “east” Ajaw-T533 has been a debated point among epigraphers for a considerable time. Here we use David Stuart’s proposal of SAAK “seed” (personal communication 2006). inscription mentions three other Kaanul kings and states that they are 4-TZ’AK-bu K’AHK’-ka’ [KAAN] AJAW chan tz’ak’bulat’ “his kaanul ajaw” “(the) four Snake kings in order,” referring to the four successive overlords of the aforementioned Aj Numsa’aj Chan Kinich (Figure 9). The bone inscription gives us every reason to believe that Aj Saakil and K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ are one-in-the-same person. Moreover, returning momentarily to the bowl, it seems hardly coincidental that the lonten sign at the very end of the text after the K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ name is AJ—which would not be an arbitrary filler in this case but a truncated reference to Aj Saakil (see Figure 2, glyph 0). There are precedents on other painted vessels for this kind of stunted spelling.11 Aj Saakil occupies the second position in the Stela 47 list, juxtaposed between the well-known kings Tuun K’ah Hix and Sky Witness. Our c. 556 mark fits into this scheme very well, since the last date we have for Tuun K’ah Hix falls in 546 and the first for Sky Witness is in 561.12

Preceding from our current assumption that all the Early Classic kings of Kaanul were based at Dzibanche, the likelihood that this tangential range leads us to consider one of only two firmly dated monoliths at that site, Lintel 1 from Don Rudzate VI (Figure 10). Carved into three wooden beams, the text on Lintel 3 is the conclusion of a continuous narrative whose first two installments are heavily damaged or destroyed. Featuring the period ending 9.6.0.0.0 from 554, it refers to the elevation of a king (one who comes unnamed on Lintel 3 into the 3rd tenure of the Kaanul dynasty).13 This text describes only the most powerful of Maya rulers and its appearance within an accession phrase suggests one of just two examples outside Tikal—where it only appears in its late period and reflects its return to political ascendancy. Working out the chronology of the lintel text is complicated by damage and some unusual phrasing, but the best reconstruction in our view

Figure 7. Detail of an inscribed bone weaving pick from Tomb 6, Calakmul Structure II (photograph by Rogelio Valencia, drawing by Simon Martin, Proyecto Arqueológico Calakmul).

Figure 8. Naranjo Stela 47, front face (drawing: Alexandre Tokovinine).

Figure 9. Tzalka-’ajaw’-“his drinking cup” to follow. The breaking of text to fill the available space is well-attested on “east” Ajaw-T533 (Figure 8). This unusual

Mays scribes sought to fill all the available space on vessel bowls, closing any final gap with narrow signs and motifs that have no real significance. However, some instances clearly suggest the truncation of prototypical texts. On K1355, for example, the filler text is exactly where we would expect ya’-ki’-bi’-i’ “his drinking cup” to follow. The breaking of text to fill the available space is well-attested on “east” Ajaw-T533 (Figure 8).

One intriguing possibility is that K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ is named as the “star war” victor against Tikal in 562, a conflict described on Caracol Altar 21 at Q5. Little of this nominal glyph survives, but a tendril at the upper left would be consistent with K’AHK’ (Martin 2005:8 n 4). However, if the date of 561 we have for Sky Witness at Los Amarances (Grube 2008:193), then that glyph may instead be the prefixed vision of the “eye” biyel glyph that begins that king’s name (Martin 2005:3, 5, Fig 7).

There can be no doubt that Dzibanche hosted a line of major Snake kings (Velasquez 2015, 2018), and that its Kaanul toponym makes it the origin of the dynasty (Martin and Velasquez 2016). Yet much remains to be learned about the history and organization of the Kaanul dynasty, especially in this early period, and we do not rule out greater complexity. On K1355, for example, the filler text is exactly where we would expect ya’-ki’-bi’-i’ “his drinking cup” to follow. The breaking of text to fill the available space is well-attested on “east” Ajaw-T533 (Figure 8).

A small portion of Lintel 1 survives and appears to contain the verb pit “to form/make.” Dmitri Beliaev and Alexandre Sahnoy have considered the possibility that this verb names the lintel’s commissioner rendering as a’-be’-ya, comparing it to a name seen on El Richo Shield. Though Sahnoy and Beliaev, more recently Helene Vepretskii (personal communication 2015) has made a better case that they are both forms of the “focus marker” spelled a-AL-ya.

Figure 10. Detail of glyphs A3-Ab of Naranjo Stela 47 (drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine).
for the present we can say that K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ was finding will be elaborated elsewhere (Martin n.d.), but K’ahk’ Ti’ Ch’ich’ Aj Saakil was one of the illustrious

In conclusion, we hope to have demonstrated that what we know from monuments, but this connection is shown in Table 1.

It will be noted that an accession date in 550 fits the available space.

This revised scheme takes the shrinkage and edge-erosion of the beams into account, making it necessary to switch the Distance Number from 7 to 12 to fit the available space. 18

References


Freidel, David 2015 Memory and History in The Fire Shrine at El Peru-Waka’. A report of research supported by the National Geographic Society in the 2015 Field Season Committee for Research and Exploration Grant # 9688-15.


Table 1. Date scheme of Dzibanche Lintel 3.

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<td>Building dedication?</td>
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<td>6.15.1.02</td>
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15 This revised scheme takes the shrinkage and edge-erosion of the beams into account, making it necessary to switch the Distance Number that concludes the king list on K6751 (see Figure 5, M-E-M). This figure of 5.4.4.11, or 104 years, would be ideal to link to the era of Scroll Serpent (Ruler 19) to the period when dyes-style vases were in production about a century later (Martin 1997:862-863, n.d.).

16 The only previous hint of an Early Classic setting was the Distance Number that concludes the king list on K6751 (see Figure 5, M-E-M). This figure of 5.4.4.11, or 104 years, would be ideal to link to the era of Scroll Serpent (Ruler 19) to the period when dyes-style vases were in production about a century later (Martin 1997:862-863, n.d.).

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In this essay I provide epigraphic information on the correct reading order of a particular Classic Maya collective theonym. A collective theonym is a deity name that refers to or encompasses more than one god. Common examples include the Palenque Triad and the various gods identified as Chanal K’uh “Celestial God(s)” or Kabal K’uh “Terrestrial God(s).” After introducing known examples of this particular collective theonym, I will present a short text from a well-known Classic Maya vase which provides what I argue to be some definitive clues to its proper reading order. Additional epigraphic and iconographic observations are presented through the introduction of related visual narratives that provide important additional details.

The collective theonym here under discussion is known from Classic Maya hieroglyphic texts as well as the Postclassic Maya screenfold books. Here I introduce ten examples. The first and second can be found in the text on Panel 1 from Pomona (Figure 1a–b). Importantly, as will be seen, this must originally have included four individuals, each bearing the theonym (Schele and Miller 1986:Fig. III-12). The third and fourth examples come from a panel from the site of ‘Laxtunich’ (Figure 1c–d). The fifth and sixth examples are from Cancuen: one on Panel 2 (Figure 1e), the other from two shell plaques that comprised portions of a necklace belonging to the ruler K’an Maax (Figure 1f). The Codex Dresden provides at least two variants of the collective theonym. The first features the T528 TUN sign (Figure 1g), while the second features the T548 or HAB variant (Figure 1h). The Codex Paris provides the T548 HAB variant with an additional bottom element, possibly a reduced H (no inner detail) (Figure 1i). The Codex Madrid example follows the common composition with TUN (Figure 1j).

The theonym is spelled through a combination of several identifiable hieroglyphic signs. The first sign is CHAN or “4,” which appears in all known examples (Figure 1a–j). The second and third signs are T528 TUN (Figure 1c–g, j) and/or its optional phonetic complement T116 ni (Figure 1a–d, f). In those cases where only the ni element is visible, the implication is that TUN is nonetheless present, but overlaid with another sign (a portrait head in the case of Figure 1a–b). The fourth sign is a portrait head of an old man, a mam or “grandfather” (Stuart 2000; Martin 2007; Boot 2008), with a diagnostic “netted” headdress (Figure 1a–b, e). If the full portrait is not present, only the netted headdress element is included (Figure 1c–e, g–j). This portrait head of an old

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**Figure 1.** Various examples of the collective theonym: (a–b) Pomona, Panel 1; (c–d) Laxtunich, Lintel 4; (e) Cancuen, Panel 2; (f) Cancuen, K’an Maax necklace; (g) Codex Dresden 24; (h) Codex Dresden 47; (i) Codex Paris 03; (j) Codex Madrid 071A1 (drawings a–d and f–h by Simon Martin).
man with netted headress and the netted headdress element alone (through overlay as well as pars pro toto abbreviation) most likely can be read as ITZAM, as first proposed by David Stuart (2002; see also Martin 2007; Boot 2008), a reading supported by occasional examples with prefixed - and postfixed -ma phonetic complements. Potentially, Itzam may be a contraction of a reconstructed composite noun “itz mam” (perhaps signaling “itz, the dweller, enchanter,” “mam, grandfather; ancestor”), distinguishing this particular mam from others, especially mortals (Boot 2008, 2009:78, n. 100). As noted, in the TUN sign can be replaced by the T548 HAB (Figure 1h–i), perhaps suggesting that both T528 and T548 could be read as tula/hu, at least in the contexts illustrated in Figure 1f.4

In most examples the compound illustrated in Figure 1 combines all signs organized in such a way that a canonical reading order is difficult to establish. All but one of the examples open with CHAN “4,” the exception being the shell plaques from the burial of Cancuen king K’aan Maax (Figure 1f). However, the order of the sign may be incorrect if we consider that the shell plaques could well have shifted before excavation by archaeologists. Unfortunately I do not have a full published report which may contain some indications concerning the order of the plaques as found, or at least the evidentiary basis for the published arrangement of the plaques (compare Demarest et al. 2006:833-834).5 Alternatively, the shells may have been arranged in the burial in an order contrary to the one beginning with CHAN as in the other examples. This naturally leaves us with a question, namely: what is the correct reading order of the theonym? If rearranged, the naturally leaves us with a question, namely: what is the arrangement of the plaques (compare Demarest et al. 2005:833-834). This sign group occurs in short texts on several other vessels as well, in the context of old gods, women, and deer (e.g., K1339, De Young Museum L.10.4.4), and there are some indications that the collection might be verbal. The lower element is likely to provide syllabic bi, and may indicate a verb terminating in -bi. If so, then a root intransitive along the lines of u-bi, u-k’ot bi, “it happened, it occurred” is likely, and the following blocks would represent the verb’s subject(s). At D1, we find the common Classic Maya compound for katun, a twenty-year period known in Classic Mayan as WINAK-HAB for winaak halaj “twenty years.” At C2 follows the collocation ch’a-ho- ma for ch’a hol’um. Combined, blocks D1–C2 provide the common title Winaak Haab Ch’a ho’om, to which I will return below. The glyph blocks at D2–D3 provide the actual nominal phrase. At D2 we can identify the compound CHAN-na for chan. Here chan “sky” is employed, targeting chan “four” through homophonic play (Houston 1984; Boot 2010a). At C3, despite some inscrutible repainting, we can identify the cephalomorphic variant for TUN, complete with its usual phonetic complement ni, providing tula/hu. And finally, at D3, we can recognize the ITZAM portrait head for itzam. Thus D2–D3 likely provides CHAN-na TUN-ni ITZAM for Chan Tun Itzam. This text, in my opinion, provides the correct reading order for the collective theonym and all other examples as illustrated in Figure 1 can now also be read as Chan Tun Itzam. The order of the Cancuen example in Figure 1f thus needs to be corrected. The Cancuen example actually provides confirmation of a sort for the now-established order, as Chan Tun Itzam is written on one shell plaque and Itzam on the other. Given this, only two reading orders are possible: itzam chan tula/hu or chan tula/hu itzam. As Chan refers to that which is the head, and Itzam the collective theonym would open with this number, as is also seen in the Palenque Triad collective theonym, Ux […] Kuh, “Three […] Gods.”

With the reading order established, we can continue with the text in order to glean additional insights. The text ends with two collocations, at C4–D4. Here I identify particularly heavily repainting, most probably executed at some time during its sojourn on the art market. While conjecture at present, based on the outlines I suggest these glyphs were once intended to read ba(laj) (C4) tula/hu (D4). If anything, what remains at D4 looks rather like a TUN-ni collocation. The BAH identification I base only on what remains of the outline of the marginal sign on the fact that BAH-TUN-ni for balaj tula/hu is a common title for high-ranking individuals. Semantically, it may make sense as well, as the Chan Tun Itzam (collectively) would here be identified as Baah Tun. Another balaj title is associated with an itzam old god. The god known as Itzam K’a’A’ni “[It]zam Precious Turtle” elsewhere carries the title Baah Kab (Maquazina, Plaza F, Structure 4, Hieroglyphic Bench: P.5-8;P.5; Graham 1967:Figs. 38, 39A). Baah Kab is also taken as a title by high-ranking individuals. Most importantly, on a finely incised Late Classic vessel that takes its name from its find spot in the Museum of Corté, Tikal (LaMonte 1987:32) the fronted by Itzam K’a’A’ni, may well constitute a variation of the Chan

1 Although T548 lacks any phonetic complements in this context, note spellings such as tu-T548 hu (Codex Madrid, 66A2) and T548 hu (e.g., Codex Madrid, 68B1). In the section 65-72 in the Madrid codex the T548 component is once substituted by the T528 or tu-TUN (Codex Madrid, 69B2) providing suggestive evidence that T548 can indeed be read as tula/hu, depending on context, phonetic complementation, and substitution.

2 Published photographs of the shallow burial of K’aan Maax show his body lying on the floor, with the collar around his neck (e.g., Moran and Koumenalis 2005). However, it is impossible to discern precisely how the individual shell plaques of the collar were arranged when they were excavated by the archaeologists. It would be interesting to know whether any excavation report reveals the order as initially encountered.

3 Because of these questions, I opted for Chan Itzam Tun Itzam in the most recent version of my Preliminary Vocabulary (Boot 2009:47). Simon Martin (2007) proposes Itzam Chan Tun Itzam, while nonetheless leaving the matter open for additional investigation.

Figure 2. Rollout photograph of K530 (photo K530 © Justin Kerr).

Figure 3. Glyphs A1–84 and C1–D4 of K530.
The scene on K530 shows a manifestation of Chahk seated cross-legged on an elevation within a cave, identified as the open mouth of an animated tuun or mountain (e.g., Boot 2003) (Figure 4). Note the owl-like bird in the upper left corner. This is the o’ “bird of omen” to which reference is made in the theonym O’ Chahk. O’ Chahk is a specific manifestation of Chahk known from four texts at Yaxchilan, where Lintels 35 shows a small O’ feather on the tip of Chahk’s nose (Figure 5a, left glyph). The O’ Chahk name on Lintel 35 is followed by another theonym defined by a god head with Roman nose and cruller around the large spiral eye. This is the head and mouth of O’ Chahk himself serving as the cave and its entrance.

Let us turn now to the Chahk manifestation seated in the cave marked by O’ Chahk (Figure 4). He fully extends his left arm, the hand of which is placed in an upright position. This particular Chahk, with this hand and arm gesture, is unique in Classic Maya iconography, but in my estimation he is known from hieroglyphic renderings in several early Maya texts (Figure 6).

In front of Chahk one can identify four old gods, the Chan Tuun Itzam, sitting one in front of the other in two rows. Each row opens with a double-column hieroglyphic text that provides detail on the visual narrative. Unfortunately, text A1–B4 in front of the top row has suffered from both breakage and heavy retouching (Figure 3). The opening collocation at A1 is no longer recognizable except for, perhaps, a prefixed witz or mountain (to which the inter- 

tuun


digraphs are indeed the three gods mentioned in the upper text and that they are Chahk impersonators.

The top row features five protagonists (Figure 8). In providing the opening of another ch’abo’m title (compare C2); the –ho-ma part is repainted. There follow three nominal phrases, unfortunately all retouched to a greater or lesser degree. The first appears at A2, a Maize God portrait head IXIM (ixim “maize grain”), still recognizable from the inverted “IL” marking on the cheek and the forehead jewel. The second appears at B2, but only the prefixed CHAK “red, great” is clearly recognizable, although also retouched, and the following jaguar-like sign is dubious. The third nominal appears at A3, opening with JUN or ju[n] “one.” The remaining element might comprise a complex variant of ajaw, in which case Juun Ajaw might be named.

The fact that three nominals are recorded may provide a direct connection to the visual narrative on the vessel. Behind the four old gods and the six female consorts one can find three musicians, each wearing a Chahk mask (Figure 7). Note especially their facial characteristics and shell ear ornaments, which compare favorably to the seated Chahk in the cave. Their tophatknots are fashioned in a similar manner as well. The Chahk musicians play shakers of some kind, a cylindrical drum, and a turtle carapace beaten with deer antler (compare Starr 1902:72, Fig. 51). The one who plays the drum has a single hieroglyphic sign associated with him, perhaps serving as a name caption. It likely does not belong to the female in front of him, as she has her own name caption consisting of two glyph blocks. Instead of a female portrait glyph, this may represent a portrait of the Maize God, similar to the one found at A2. If so, this would provide confirmation that these three musicians are indeed the three gods mentioned in the upper text and that they are Chahk impersonators.
on the vessels that depict the humiliation of this god by a rabbit (K1398) and the Maize God and his dwarf and hunchback assistants (K1560, on exhibit at the Louvre, Paris). God L is the deity who sits on a jaguar throne in his cave palace and presides on 4 Ajaw 5 Kum'u over a court scene that features seven gods (K2790) and eleven gods (K2750) and who is tricked at his palace by five maize-related female consorts on 8 Kaban 5 Kej(?), an impossible Calendar Round combination (K311, now at the Princeton University Art Museum). The Itzam At theonym is followed by a compound consisting of three signs, of which MI and TA are still readable identifiable. The third sign may be YI or BI, but the remaining detail is more suggestive of BI. If correctly deduced, does this collocation perhaps spell MI-TA-LI for mitaali or mitialti? Although a bit of a stretch, this could perhaps represent an early Maya approximation of a foreign word (see Boot 2010b), namely the Nahuatl term Mixtlan “place of death” (Karttunen 1992:146-147, Siméon 1992:274-275). At the time of the conquest and up to the present day in various Mayan languages, Mitnal (e.g., Yucatec; Barrera Vázquez et al. 1980:524, in mitnal “cosa internal”), Metnal (e.g., Lacandon; Bruce 1968:30), and Metnal (e.g., Yucatec; Barrera Vázquez et al. 1980:522) are all attested adaptations of this toponym referring to the “Underworld.” If my estimation is correct that this Itzam At refers to God L, it would identify him directly and definitively with the Maya underworld. Also it would identify another Mayan loanword from Nahuatl, sometime prior to the eighth century AD.  

Behind this Itzam, a female consort extends her left arm below his left arm (thus mirroring the top row arrangement). She is elaborately dressed, and her name caption identifies her as IX [TUN]NAL for Iskx Tun Nal “The Stone Place.” Perhaps Iskx Tun Nal could thus represent a female counterpart or “hechicera (witch).”

Next in line are the three remaining protagonists. In the center is another Itzam, again nearly completely naked. He has a single collocation in front of his head which perhaps reads [ITZAM][K’AB] for Itzam K’ab. The identification of the hand sign as K’AB finds corroboration in a short hieroglyphic phrase written on the Stucco Facade at Tonina. At the top of the Itzam At hand sign is employed as on K530. At Tonina the u-k’ab spelling refers to the lowered lower arm and hand of the reclining figure, which is identified as Chan (“Flower”) K’ab. The “Bat hand” on K530 may actually refer to the hand that the Itzam protagonist raises. His right hand gesture—the palm of the hand is turned towards him, as can be seen from the position of the thumb—seems to indicate that he is engaged in applying some sticky black substance from the small container in his left hand, also explaining his blackened digits. The thick, black outline of the front of his face may thus be original and intentional, and the thick black outline of the hand sign (especially in comparison to the outline of the itzam sign) may be related to this particular aspect as well. Tentatively, the name caption may thus read Itzam K’ab. Itzam K’ab, if correctly analyzed, is reminiscent of the name Itzam Na[b][K’ab 13], given by the local Colonial inhabitants to a pyramidal structure at Izamal, Yucatan (Lizana 1995:Fol. 6v).

The Itzam observes himself in a mirror held by the female consort facing him. She is simply named by the female portrait head IX for Iskx, like the consort portrayed above in the top row. On her face she too has a red lacandon curl. The second female consort, seated behind the Itzam, is elaborately dressed and has extended facial markings. She seems to be named IX [TE?] NAL for Iskx Te(?o) Nal, “The Lady Tree Place.”

I identify the visual narrative of K350 as an elaborate ritual or ceremony in which the Chan Tuun Itzam participate, all four paired with one or two female consorts or assistants. Three of the four Chan Tuun Itzam are identified by their individual names, Itzam K’an At(?), Itzam At Mitan[la](?), and Itzam K’ab(?). Most likely, as noted, the name of the fourth was once provided but is now lost. But there is another late Classic Maya vessel that might provide a pertinent clue to the missing name of the fourth Itzam. This vessel, which has also suffered some repainting, is cataloged as K5763 (Figure 11). Here we are at the court of the same Chabk portrayed on K530. This can easily be
Four of the six female consorts have important natural and this idea in any Mayan language). Note that the pair suggests that Ixik Te’ Nal and Ixik Ha’ Nal may be as Nal may be the title of a religious specialist (hechicera) Ixik (twice). Perhaps the occurrence of the double names Nal (twice), Ixik Tun Nal, Ixik Te’(?) Nal, and simply Ha’ Nal, Ixik Tun Nal are individually named. The second one is named Ixam K’an (ITZAM/K’AN), reminiscent of the Ixam K’an At name on K530. The first, directly in front of O’ Chahk, is named Itzam “Shell.” The same nominal occurs in the Dresden Codex (41B-2), where an associ- ated image depicts an Itzam who emerges from a shell. An “Old God” or Itzam emerging from a shell is quite a common theme in Maya visual narratives (e.g., K2787, K8798; De Young Museum 2002:84.1.123; Fundación La Ruta Maya 1.2.144.213). I propose that this may be the missing name caption from K530 identifying the fourth of the Chan Tuun Ixam.

To return to K530, the consorts are named Ixik Ha’ Nal (twice), Ixik Tun Nal, Ixik Te’(?) Nal, and simply Ixik (twice). Perhaps the occurrence of the double names indicates that only four consorts are present, rather than six. I consider this unlikely, as more than one person can have the same name or title. The possibility that Ixik Tun Nal may be the title of a religious specialist (hechicera) suggests that Ixik Te’ Nal and Ixik Ha’ Nal may be as well (although I have not yet found confirmation for this idea in any Mayan language). Note that the pair te’ and tuun was mentioned in the opening text at A4–B4. Four of the six female consorts have important natural elements in their name, ha’ “water,” tuun “stone,” and te’ “wood,” all of which end in nat. In Classic Mayan this nat can mean “person,” but it can also indicate a “profes- sion” (Booth 2005, 2009), as well as a “place (of origin)” (Stuart and Houston 1994). At present I prefer the last option. Thus, if Ixik Tun Nal meant “She-of-the-Stone-Place,” the same may be true of the others: Ixik Ha’ Nal “She-of-the-Water-Place” and Ixik Te’(?) Nal “She-of-the-Tree/Wood-Place.” Their names hint at the presence of different locations in the Classic Maya “under/ otherworld”: names associated with regions defined by stone, water, and wood, and which may identify these women as alluring female protectors of some sort (as well as consorts and/or assistants). As such, they can be compared to the women associated with the Old God and the deer (e.g., K1182, now at the MFA, Boston), pos- sibly Classic precursors to the well-known Itzab from present-day Yucatec Maya folk stories (e.g., Booth 1989). Also relevant to the consorts on K530 is a vase in the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 12). It presents a scene very similar to K530, but now it is young men who are placed between female consorts. The visual narrative features a large central vessel and various scoops or small bowls. Note that the first young man imitates the posture and gesture of Itzam K’abal(?) on the Berlin vessel. This aspect is stressed by the elon- gated netted headdress they both wear. Now note the well-dressed female on the right and her name caption. This caption reads IX7-HA’/NAIL for Ixik Huk Ha’ Nal, Lady Seven Water Place.” Huk Ha’ Nal “Seven Water Place” is an important aquatic location in Classic Maya mythology iconography referenced on ceramics and architecture. The similarity of the visual narrative on this vase and the name caption of the female consort suggests that the nominal Ixik Ha’ Nal on K530 is likely to be an abbreviation of Ixik Huk Ha’ Nal. The Huk Ha’ Nal location is thus a watery location with which spe- cific women are associated, entitled Ixik Huk Ha’ Nal or Ixik Ha’ Nal (the abbreviated form). The most important conclusion that I draw here is that these female consorts are not necessarily courtesans as Houston (2014) has proposed. They seem instead to have very specific functions and are associated with important mythological locations. Their frequent appearances and wide associations actu- ally warrant more in-depth research before any further conclusions can be drawn.

The elaborate ritual of the Chan Tuun Ixam on K530 is directed towards Chahk seated in his cave house or residence. Two of the Chan Tuun Ixam on this vessel are seated fully dressed in front of Chahk, while the other two are still in the process of being dressed and groomed. In front of the two dressed Chan Tuun Ixam we see broad-rimmed vessels on which a shell implement of some sort is placed, which I have tenta- tively identified as a scoop. Note the small bowl in the left hand of the Tuun Ixam in the upper row. This scene presents the Chan Tuun Ixam in front of a specific mani- festation of Chahk, the rain god. Two of the Chan Tuun Ixam have a broad-rimmed vessel with a (putative) scoop on top. Perhaps the visual narrative on K530 sets the stage for the Chan Tuun Ixam to scoop the contents from the broad-rimmed containers and sprinkle them. This might resonate with the title Ch’ahom, mentioned in both the first text (at B1) and the second text (at C2), in the modified form of Winaak Haab Ch’ahom’s preceding the Chan Tuun Ixam nominal phrase. The root of the title ch’ahom is commonly taken as ch’aj which can be analyzed as “drop (of liquid).” Final –om can in turn be analyzed as an agentive (compare to k’aj/m “fisher- man,” k’aaj/m “singer”), suggesting that Ch’ahom might signify “dropper” or “sprinkler.”

I suggest that Ch’ahom indeed means “sprinkler” and that in the visual narrative on K530 we can observe the Chan Tuun Ixam behaving as “sprinklers” of drops. They are seated in front of Chahk, the rain god; in front of them they have broad-rimmed vessels with scoops, with which they would sprinkle the liquid contained in the vessel. As “sprinklers” the Chan Tuun Ixam thus might be service to Chahk, the rain god. In present-day Yucatan, Chahk has a number of helpers who lend him service. One particular group of helpers is collectively known as the Joya’ob (Love and Peraza 1984:270), Aj Joyoab, and Aj Joyoabil (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:115, 315-316, 352), which in Yucatec Maya means “Water-sprinklers” (cf. joy “to sprinkle” and ha’ “wa- ter”). I propose that the Classic Maya title Ch’ahom “Sprinkler” is semantically cognate to the Yucatec Maya Joya’/Aj Joyoabil “Sprinkler (of water).” The fact that the Chan Tuun Ixam are collectively referred to as Winaak Haab Ch’ahom’s “K’atun Sprinklers” may mean that they are associated with this particular ritual on a twenty-year cycle.

The visual narrative on K530 may thus reference the court of Chahk, who is seated on an elevation inside his cave “house/structure” marked by the o’ “bird of omen” and the portrait of O’ Chahk, and is fronted by the Chan Tuun Ixam and their female assistants. Two of the Chan Tuun Ixam are in the process of being dressed and groomed and two are already fully dressed and groomed. Two of the Chan Tuun Ixam have broad-rimmed vessels with (probable) scoops associated with them. Perhaps, then, we see them being dressed and equipped for their function as “Sprinklers” in service to the rain god.

Still another Classic Maya ceramic, K8654, also relates to K530 (Figure 13). This less skillfully executed scene features five protagonists. They all look to the left and the first is a Chahk figure, perhaps even O’ Chahk. He holds a torch (stressing his fire association) and faces a two-part date that opens with 8 Ajaw inside a red cartouche. Behind him is seated one of the Chan Tuun Ixam, also holding a torch, with an abstracted shell of...
some sort wrapped around his upper body. Behind him stands a second Chahk figure, with torch, and a female attendant with some kind of implement (perhaps a bowl or a scoop) in her right hand. The last protagonist is the second seated Chan Tuun Itzam, again holding a torch, and now more easily recognizable through his facial features and beadwork. The second Chan Tuun Itzam also has an abstracted shell of some sort wrapped around his upper body.

Earlier in this essay I suggested that there are various local manifestations of the Chan Tuun Itzam. Just as K530 introduces such a set of this collective, so does the Mundo Perdido Vase from Tikal (Figure 14). A short discussion of the narrative on this vessel is warranted here, as it supports many of the suggestions presented above. At the far right of this scene is a bipedal deer standing in front of four seated old gods. The deer and the old gods constitute four old gods. Their portrayals and particular body coverings, including various shells and a spider web, can be found all over Chichen Itza on carved panels on pillars and columns. To conclude, the Berlin Vase (K530) provides several pivotal epigraphic clues which have helped to establish the correct reading order of the collective theonym Chan Tuun Itzam. This vessel also provides three of the four old gods has t'oon markings on his body, providing further evidence that they are indeed the Chan Tuun Itzam. As such there would perhaps be different collectives of four “old gods” comprising the Chan Tuun Itzam, perhaps even regionally differentiated.

Another vessel at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, portrays a set of the Chan Tuun Itzam associated with the celestial realm; each has t'oon markings on his body, and three of them are individually named (Figure 15). Finally, a most interesting potential collective of Chan Tuun Itzam can be identified at Chichen Itza within the western facade of the building known as the Iglesia. On the left and right of a central figure, seated cross-legged and elaborately dressed, one can find a pair of figures that face towards the central figure, who is crowned with a bifurcating headdress. Although their heads are missing (as is that of the central figure), all four must have been “old gods.” Their portraits and particular body coverings, including various shells and a spider web, can be found all over Chichen Itza on carved panels on pillars and columns.

To conclude, the Berlin Vase (K530) provides several pivotal epigraphic clues which have helped to establish the correct reading order of the collective theonym Chan Tuun Itzam. This vessel also provides three of the four individual names of the Chan Tuun Itzam. Additional relevant information was derived from the text and images of K530 and related ceramics depicting the interactions of the Chan Tuun Itzam and the rain god Chahk, and as a result we have been able to infer a supportive rainmaking role for the Old Gods. In future work I hope to delve into the pronounced regional and chronological variations apparent in the depictions of the four old gods constituting the Chan Tuun Itzam collective theonym, as well as into the various architectural settings in which they can be identified.

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