Ian Graham and the Maya

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Ian Graham passed away at age 93 on August 1, 2017, at the close of an extraordinary and varied life. All future histories of Mesoamerican studies will highlight his unique contributions as an explorer, preservationist, and documentarian of Maya ruins and art. It is no exaggeration to say that Ian’s legacy will forever stand at least equal to those of Alfred Maudslay (his fellow Englishman and personal hero), Teobert Maler, Sylvanus Morley, and other famous explorers from the early years of Maya studies.

Ian James Graham was born on

Figure 1. Ian Graham, ca. 1975 (photo: Hillel Burger).
November 12, 1923, at Chantry Farm, Campsey Ash, Suffolk, to two aristocratic parents. His father, Lord Alistair Mungo Graham, was the youngest son of the Duke of Montrose, and his mother, Lady Meriel Olivia Bathurst, was the daughter of the seventh Earl Bathurst. She passed away suddenly at age 41, when Ian was only eleven years old, and was, in Ian’s own words, a woman of “notable beauty, intelligence and sensibility” with a keen sense of humor (Graham 2010:4). Ian inherited much from her.

His youngest years were spent at Chantry Farm, before he was sent to boarding school at the age of eight, where he “failed to be stimulated by most of the teaching.” Throughout childhood he had a persistent fascination with all things mechanical and electrical— an interest that would last his whole life, and which came in handy innumerable times in his years in Maya archaeology, with its seemingly constant need to repair camera equipment or Land Rovers in the field, or to tinker with the Rolls Royce he kept for years in his garage in England.

Ian later attended Winchester College and was educated at Cambridge University and Trinity College, Dublin, majoring in physics. The war years intervened in his university work, and between 1942 and 1947 he served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, helping to develop and test new types of radar equipment. Ian was very proud of this research and of the experiments in which he participated, and in his later years he would often excitedly describe the inner workings of these instruments. Throughout his education Ian never had any formal training in archaeology. His brief idea to pursue a degree in art history after the war nevertheless hints at an interest that would last his whole life, and which increasingly excited him in the eighties, where he “failed to be stimulated by most of the teaching.” Throughout his life Ian had an early and ever-present fascination with visual images and antiquities, interests that would steer him later in life to the world of the ancient Maya.

A fellowship at the National Gallery brought Ian to London in the early 1950s, where he worked as a technician in the art conservation lab. Soon he was earning commissions for his skills in photography, especially of architecture, and he contributed to a number of coffee-table books into the mid-1960s, including Sir Montague Verdant’s The Four Temples, Palaces and Fortresses of Asia (Wheelock 1966). After traveling to New York in 1957, Ian landed a brief job as assistant to the young Peneloperose in that capacity worked closely with Robert Freson, another noted photographer and archaeologist of the twentieth century.

His first encounter with the world of the ancient Maya came in 1958, as a result of having driven his 1927 Rolls Royce Torpedo all the way from New York to Mexico—a slight detour from his westward goal of California. Through a number of connections in Mexico City he began to hear for the first time about the existence of the Maya, and of wonderful ruins named Yaxchilan, located in what was then one of the most remote parts of Chiapas. “How could it be that I had never even heard of Maya civilization?” he wondered in retrospect (Graham 2010:138). Ian thought the Maya would be a ripe topic for a new photography book, and while researching the subject, both in Mexico and when back in London, he learned of Alfred Maudslay and his great work as a photographer and recorder of Maya ruins. He was hooked. Almost immediately Ian was back in Mexico, intent on exploring Maya ruins throughout Mexico, Guatemala, and beyond. In San Cristóbal de las Casas he met the noted Mayanist Frans Blom, who inspired Ian to further pursue his adventures. Over the following months he traversed the entire Maya region through Chiapas, Yucatan, Belize, Honduras, and then into northern Guatemala. He was eventually led to a site named Aguateca, which he was sure (correctly) no archaeologist had seen before. For Ian, by this time already 35 years old, this was a “Eureaka moment,” for his life’s purpose suddenly seemed clear.

Ian’s connection to document ruins were sponsored in part by the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University, which in 1967 published his Archaeological Explorations in El Petén, Guatemala, an instant classic that recorded a stupefying array of new finds at sites that few Maya archaeologists even knew existed at that time. These included Aguateca, Dos Pilas (Figure 2), Machaquila, Kinal, Nakbé, and El Mirador (Graham 1967). This last site is today one of the most important in ancient Mesoamerica, a vast Preclassic city that still keeps many secrets about the origins of Maya civilization in the lowlands. In early 1962 Ian was the first (even amateur) archaeologist to survey El Mirador and realize its true extent. With no formal training he accurately mapped and documented the immense ruins over the course of ten days and published a brief newspaper account of his finds that same year (Graham 1962). The Tulane volume was a great success (a second one was planned on Dos Pilas and other sites but never completed) and by the mid-1960s Ian was regularly corresponding with a number of important figures in tropical research, including J. Eric S. Thompson and Tatiana Proskouriakoff. While in the field, in the Petexbatun region, he came into close contact with the work of Charles Stuart and Willey. Together they explored ways to fund a joint venture that would take in inventory of all of the archaeological sites in Peten, using the records of previous archaeologists as well as oil companies (by the 1960s, Shell Oil and others were exploring and prospecting throughout northern Guatemala). This particular plan fell through due to a lack of money, but it was soon revived and expanded through the support of the Charles Guttman Foundation. By now it was clear to all that Ian was the person to spearhead the ambitious effort, and in 1968 he settled at Harvard as a Research Fellow at the Peabody Museum, poring through the photographic archives of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and those of Teobert Maler. These provided the basic raw materials that Ian sought to expand, and thus the CMHI program was born.

The Corpus project was a game changer, and the results were immediate. He spent many months in the field in both Mexico and Guatemala, and in 1975 produced the very first fascicle on the monuments of Naranjo (Graham and von Euw 1975). Volumes on Yaxchilan soon followed (Graham and Von Euw 1977). In the early 1970s the Cuyahoga hired an assistant, Eric Von Euw, who would concentrate most of his efforts in Yucatan and Campeche, while Ian focused on the Peten and Usucamaca regions. Ian opted to focus on poorly known sites or remote ruins that were under threat of looters, which by this time were running rampant, especially in northern Guatemala. Well-published sites such as Palenque, Copan, and Tikal were low priorities. Together these early Corpus efforts produced a trove of field drawings and photographs. Later collaborators who worked under Ian at the CMHI included Peter of Pennsylvania’s Tikal project, Robert Wauchope of Tulane University, and Willey. Together they explored ways to fund a joint venture that would take in inventory of all of the archaeological sites in Peten, using the records of previous archaeologists as well as oil companies (by the 1960s, Shell Oil and others were exploring and prospecting throughout northern Guatemala). This particular plan fell through due to a lack of money, but it was soon revived and expanded through the support of the Charles Guttman Foundation. By now it was clear to all that Ian was the person to spearhead the ambitious effort, and in 1968 he settled at Harvard as a Research Fellow at the Peabody Museum, poring through the photographic archives of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and those of Teobert Maler. These provided the basic raw materials that Ian sought to expand, and thus the CMHI program was born.
Ian’s drawings of Maya sculptures stand on their own merits as stunning artworks (Figures 4-6). Their intricate line-work and careful stippling set a new standard for accuracy and objectivity, built on that first developed by William Coe of the Tikal project. In those days and until very recently the drawings were produced using ink on mylar, tracing over a preliminary acetate version that was, in turn, traced from a photograph (see Graham 1975:12-13). A pencil field drawing, ideally made in the presence of the original sculpture, provided a check for all the relevant details of sculpture. In this way Ian created the ideal standard for the recording of Maya monuments. The same can also be said of the site maps he drew and published as part of the CMHI publications, many made from his own surveys undertaken under extremely difficult circumstances. Today those who make archaeological maps or draw sculpture strive to follow Ian’s methods and aesthetic sensibility, even when producing drawings and maps digitally on a tablet or on-screen.

The photocopies of field drawings and other output from the CMHI provided the single most important catalyst to the rapid decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs, a wave that crested during the 1980s. Hundreds of new texts were now available to the small community of epigraphers of that time, and no longer were source materials largely restricted to a handful of well-known sites. By generously sharing his visual archive, Ian provided epigraphers with much-needed raw materials to compare texts, analyze alternative spellings, and track dynastic histories. Without these basic raw materials to work from, little real progress would have been possible in deciphering the Maya script and analyzing the Classic Mayan language that underlies it.

In addition to his unending tasks for the Corpus, Ian had a deep interest in researching the lives of key personalities in very early Maya studies, writing important biographies of his famous predecessors in exploration, Alfred Maudslay (Graham 2002) and Teobert Maler (Graham 1997). I suspect that these historical exercises, researched while at Harvard or in Europe in between his field seasons, allowed Ian to understand and reflect on his own role and importance in the exploration and photography of Maya ruins. Through their stories he surely came to realize his own role as their successor, the last of a grand tradition of Maya exploration.

He was sometimes skeptical of new technology, always more comfortable with his tried and true methods and equipment—a Hasselblad 500C large format camera, a clipboard, and a compass. For mapping he would often measure distances between mounds simply by pacing in a straight line, always with astounding accuracy. He never once used a digital camera, to my knowledge, but late in life he foresaw how important it was not that of a decipherer, but as one uniquely suited to record, preserve, and disseminate the raw information for scholarship.
these new devices would be. He enthusiastically embraced computers, however (again reflecting his old love of electronics), and by the time I was working with Ian in our shared Corpus office, he would spend many hours on his Apple Macintosh, writing chapters of his planned autobiography. This was later published in 2010 as The Road to Ruins, a highly entertaining account of his life-long adventures (Graham 2010).

On a personal note, I had the tremendous honor, luck, and pleasure to know Ian in his later years, both as a colleague and as a friend. When in Cambridge I would occasionally visit the office he shared with Tatiana Proskouriakoff, then on the fifth floor of the Peabody Museum. In 1993 Ian hired me as his assistant—a true dream job for an epigrapher. As a result, Ian and I spent a good deal of time together in remote areas of the Maya world, often in the company of his trusted Petenero field assistant, Anatolio López. We teamed up for some weeks in the vast ruins of Calakmul, photographing and drawing the innumerable stelae there. The experience was unforgettable, with long days cleaning and drawing sculptures by day and wonderful evenings listening to Ian’s stories over dinners of tortillas and sardines (a favorite of Ian’s). One day I remember we were hit with a strong and unexpected nor’easter—a cold weather front that changed the steaming rain forest into a misty, chilly, and eerie place, quieting all the birds and animals around us. We weren’t prepared for the cold at all, and the nights were especially miserable. Ian and I shared a room at the site’s camp house, thanks to the hospitality of the head archaeologist Ramón Carrasco, but we had between us only one very light sheet for a blanket. (We did in fact have two sheets, but we had used one as a reflector for some of our photography of Calakmul’s monuments, and I think we must have destroyed that one after a week or so, not thinking much of it.) When the cold night came, Ian insisted I use our single remaining sheet so I could keep some semblance of warmth. Ian had his own solution: “Ah, but I can use the pages of my newspaper!” I remember him saying this with some endearment but wasn’t sure what he meant by this until I saw him reach into his sack and bring out a week-old issue of the Diario de Yucatán, separating its many sheets and carefully placing four or five of them over his very extended body as he lay down to sleep. He seemed genuinely proud of his ingenuity, and off we drifted to sleep. At least Ian did. All I can remember of that night was the constant noise of crinkling, crumpling paper as Ian tossed and turned to keep warm. It was a sleepless night for me. But I’ll always carry with me the sight as dawn broke of Ian Graham, the great jungle explorer, covered head to foot in newspaper, deep asleep. We next shared a tent a few years later, when Ian and I paid a visit to San Bartolo. It was cold once again, and of course Ian arrived without a proper blanket. But he was ready in his own way, for he had a newspaper in hand, a special Sunday issue of Prensa Libre. I knew I was in for a long night. Of our joint adventures perhaps the most memorable was our 1997 expedition to an intriguing new site we would together name La Corona. This soon was proven to be the source of many looted sculptures that had come to be known as “Site Q.” Our journeys together are now part of the official record, and few though they were they provided me with a glimpse of Ian’s life as a discoverer and adventurer in the old romantic sense, a true successor to the great explorers of the nineteenth century, and without doubt the last of a kind.

Ian stopped traveling in the Maya world in 2009, his last field visit being once again to Yaxchilan. There he had come full circle in a way, having first been attracted to the Maya area by hearing stories of this great Maya city, and devoting so much of his field work to the documentation of its monuments. The Corpus project, now under the direction of Barbara Fash, continues with more fascicles on Yaxchilan, La Corona, and other sites now in preparation.

Ian received numerous deserved honors and awards throughout his later career. One of the very first MacArthur Prize Fellowships was awarded to him in 1981, and Tulane University bestowed an honorary doctorate in 1998. In 2001 he was awarded the Orden del Pop by the Museo del Popol Vuh in Guatemala, and soon afterwards he received the Orden del Quetzal, the highest honor awarded by the Government of Guatemala. In 2004 the Society of American Archaeology honored Ian with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

It is worth reiterating that Ian’s transformative role as a documentarian and explorer was always difficult to reconcile with the professionalized academic world of late twentieth-century archaeology. He held no advanced degree, never taught a course, and never expressed much interest in interpreting his remarkable finds. It was an entrenched belief by necessity, allowing Ian to focus on exploring, preserving, and recording sites and monuments. And yet the singular importance of the Corpus project, with its focus on pure, old-school data-gathering, also posed certain challenges when it came to funding and institutional support. Harvard never directly contributed funds to Ian’s fieldwork, and without overarching “research questions” and theorizing, traditional grants were often hard to come by. It is an irony that is still very much with us today, with key data-gathering and efforts at preservation lacking the support they need. Basic, fundamental endeavors like the Corpus project must be funded well, for they create legacies that will last decades if not centuries. All too often they take a distant back seat to more monetized research projects that are short-term, heavy on theory, and potentially light on long-term relevance. Ian’s contributions were hard to categorize within the institutions of modern academia in the United States, but they were basic and will forever live on.
Ian’s “entering the path,” to use a Classic Maya expression for death, came several years after the onset of Alzheimer’s disease. He had returned to England and resided once more at Chantry Farm, unable to go to the field or even to make new drawings. His retirement put an end to nearly five decades of dedication and work that brought to light the precious records of an entire civilization, sealing a legacy that can never be equaled. His adventurous life will forever stand as one of the greatest in the history of archaeology.

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References


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The Maya Ceramics Project (formerly the Maya Survey Project), now centered at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, has as its primary focus the sampling and documentation of the chemical composition of ancient Maya decorated ceramics from a wide array of sites and collections throughout the Maya lowlands (for discussions of the INAA analytical technique, see Bishop et al. 1982; Blackman and Bishop 2007). This project combines nuclear chemistry, archaeology, and art history to investigate the socio-historical implications of Classic Maya (so 250–850) pottery vessels. The sampling program began in the 1970s and continues as an opportunistic pathfinding of chemical analyses with the collaboration of many colleagues and institutions. Project objectives include the production of a pottery paste compositional survey of ceramic production in Mesoamerica with a special emphasis on the Maya region. The compositional data allow the discerning of compositionally and stylistically similar sherds and whole vessels, which imply their being made from similar clay resources and ceramic recipes as well as being viewed as the products of a specific area, site, and perhaps even a group of aligned artisans and/or workshops (Bishop et al. 1986; Reents and Bishop 1985, 2003). The ultimate goal is the detection of patterns of use and exchange to shed light on ancient sociopolitical and economic interaction in Mesoamerica and especially among the Maya.

The Maya Ceramics Project was operating in Guatemala in 1993 at which point a pottery bowl in a private collection was brought to the attention of Ronald L. Bishop, which was promptly sampled and attributed the analytical number MS5331. This same bowl is now part of the Palacios-Weymann Collection that is managed by the Fundación para la Bellas Artes y la Cultura (FUNBA) in La Antigua, Guatemala. The FUNBA curates 4,000 pieces from the collections of the architect Amelia Weymann de Palacios (née Weymann Tejeda) and José María Palacios Porta, lawyer by profession. On account of their shared interest in history and culture, the Palacios-Weymann Collection was started at a very early date and enriched over five decades, until it grew to its current size, becoming one of the most important collections of Guatemalan art. The Palacios-Weymann Collection, which has been registered as national patrimony by the Guatemalan government’s Institute of Anthropology, Ethnology and History (IDAEH), covers three major periods: namely, a) Prehispanic, b) Colonial and Hispano-Guatemalan, as well as c) modern and contemporary.

Below we provide a description of this remarkable bowl, its physical properties, and iconography, but we will focus mostly on the chemical attributes and the paleographic features of the glyphs text that adorns the vessel, in order to consider the interplay of these two distinct lines of evidence and how they shed light on the socioeconomic and historical context of its manufacture.

Physical Properties and Chemical Analyses

The vessel is registered as 84-A-S-311-1 in the Palacios-Weymann collection. The shape of the vessel is that of a bowl according to the archaeological shape-hypology for Maya ceramics (Sabloff 1975:23-24) with a flat bottom and outsloping walls. Its maximal rim diameter is 20 cm...
The bowl’s interior is highly burnished and painted with a light orange slip, and a wide red band encircles the rim. Directly below the interior red rim band is a thinner line in the same paint, with regular half-circle loops dipping below the thin line. An unusual feature of the bowl is the large Ajaw date notation adorning the interior center of the bowl, likely recording the dedication date. This practice echoes that of the so-called “Giant Ajaw” altars best known for Caracol (see Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:77-102; Satterthwaite 1981:30-37) and to a lesser degree Tikal (Schele and Freidel 1990:213, Fig. 5:28). Similar Ajaw vessels are known from the Eastern Central Lowlands, particularly at Caracol (Chase 1994:163; Chase and Chase 1987:15, Fig. 5b, d, g), Baking Pot (Ricketson 1935:25, Pl. 17a) and most recently finds made at Xunantunich (Helmke and Awe 2017). We will return to this feature when we consider the dating of the bowl from the historical vantage of its place of origin.

Further, MS5331 does not chemically resemble the Jauncy Vase. The available evidence suggests the immediate Naranjo area as the place of origin for this unique bowl. The bowl’s compositional profile is not closely connected to any of the 146 Naranjo-excavated samples in the database, which may suggest that it was made from different clay resources and/or tempering materials and/or from an idiosyncratic potting recipe divergent from those used in the Naranjo workshops represented by the presently analyzed samples.

Of particular note is MS5331’s chemical dissimilarity to any of the unprovenanced vessels in the database whose workshop, patron, and/or artist have been successfully connected to Naranjo based on paste analyses, artistic or ceramic typological attributions, and/or epigraphic evidence (Table 1). For example, MS5331 is chemically unlike the three vases painted during the second part of the eighth century for the Naranjo ruler K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. 755–780+). Yet the three vases are similar to each other and represent the product of one workshop, while the especially strong chemical similarity between K633/K637 and K635/K6375 can be inferred to suggest that they represent two vessels made from a common clay preparation.

Another vase attributed to this artist is the so-called Jauncy Vase (K4464/MS1416) (Figure 4d) made at Naranjo for its 38th king, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. 693–728+ but excavated at Buenavista del Cayo, Belize) (Figure 6a–c). Yet unlike the Jauncy Vase, this one was specifically oriented to the wider Naranjo community. Unfortunately the data cannot confirm a specific provenience for MS5331. Yet there are so many shared paleographic features to suggest that these two vases may have been produced in the same workshop. The compositional variation stems from slight changes in resource utilization and/or paste recipe, as typically happens among aligned artists even in the same workshop. These may occur due to the routine changes in availability of resources and natural “potting behavior,” wherein adjustments are made in any workshop over even a short period of time to adjust to available resources.

Whereas a conclusive match could not be established on the basis of chemical profiles and trace elements, the NAA data does shed light on the place of MS5331 in the socio-ceramic milieu of the eastern central lowlands. The analyses also confirm that MS5331 is chemically similar to other Zacatel Cream-polychrome vessels in the database. Most notable are MS1420 (K4669) (Figure 3a), MS1866 (Figure 3b), NK0011 (excavated at Nakum) (Figure 3c), and BV8009 (excavated at Baking Pot, Belize) (Figure 3d), as well as other Naranjo-excavated sherds and whole vessels whose ceramic and artistic styles are consistent with Naranjo-area pottery in much the same way as MS5331. The available evidence suggests the immediate Naranjo area as the place of origin of these five Zacatel Cream-polychrome specimens, including MS5331. We interpret the group as a small subset of the larger corpus of greater Naranjo pottery production, yet separate and distinct from the known ceramic output of the royal workshops of Naranjo, including vessels bearing the name of ruler K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk, as the product of a workshop in the immediate Naranjo area territory. The analyses also confirm that MS5331 fits this description. Yet there are so many shared paleographic features to suggest that these two vases may have been produced in the same workshop. The compositional variation stems from slight changes in resource utilization and/or paste recipe, as typically happens among aligned artists even in the same workshop. These may occur due to the routine changes in availability of resources and natural “potting behavior,” wherein adjustments are made in any workshop over even a short period of time to adjust to available resources.

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Table 1. Comparison of MS5331 and a selection of vessels produced in workshops attached to the Naranjo court. Trace-elemental data in parts per million except where percentages are indicated. *CV = Coefficient of variation determined from 17 years of repeated analyses of SRM 679 Brick Clay, n = 311 (data from Blackman and Bishop 2007:327).
The decorative field is divided into six rectangular spaces, wherein each of the three largest ones is dominated by a depiction of a dwarf figure (exhibiting achondroplastic dwarfism), glancing upwards (Figure 4). Separating these depictions are three glyphic bands, which together form one complete glyphic clause. The dwarves' raised heels, bent legs (Grube 1992:201, 204; Looper 2008:88, 92, 124; Proskouriakoff 1950: 28, 145, Fig. 9.J1), upraised arms, and dynamic poses (Looper 2008:3, Fig. 1; Taube 2009:46-47) make it clear that they are performing a type of ritual dance or pageant. Whereas the dwarves are shown wearing plain loincloths and their hair is simply bound in cloth wraps, it is their earspools and necklaces adorned with shell gorgets that mark their distinctive status. In each arm they brandish bundles of long feathers swaying wispily in the air—undoubtedly the long and highly prized tail feathers of the quetzal (Pharomachrus mocinno). The same feather bunches are frequently paired with valves of spiny oyster shells (Spondylus sp.), placed atop stacks of folded cotton mantles, a combination comprising the idealized tribute package offered by vassals to higher nobles and their kings (see Stuart 1998:411). Without a doubt the dwarves and their dance serve to celebrate the time of the Maize God’s resurrection.

This is made abundantly clear by the many portrayals of this deity and the accompanying dwarves on cylinder vases and plates, often painted in the Holmul style, made at workshops at a variety of sites in the eastern central lowlands (Reents-Budet 1991; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:179-186). It is in this part of the Maya area that this mythic motif predominated, and it is evident that it was of particular importance to the rulers of the area (Helmke and Kurprat 2016:59-69; Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:179-188). In these scenes we see the Maize God shortly after his resurrection and resplendent in fine regalia, while he dances in the company of a dwarf (Taube 2009). This seminal mythology from a maize-based culture led to the dwarf becoming the model companion of Classic Maya kings who themselves often acted in the guise of the Maize God (Houston 1992). Although the Maize God is conspicuously absent on MS5331, the dwarves function as pars pro toto actors of the pivotal scene, their solitary dance conjuring the entire epic narrative.1

Epigraphy

The glyphic text on the exterior is evenly subdivided into three equal segments of three glyph blocks apiece, each segment serving as a diagonal dividing band between the dancing dwarf figures. These segments run diagonally from the rim to the base of the vessel, the uppermost and lowest glyphs each delicately touching at the red bands that define the exterior of the vessel. We will explore the text on the exterior first and will return to the Ajaw date in the interior at the end of the paper.

Dedicatory Segment and Vessel Type (A1–B1)

The first glyph block (A1) is well preserved and can be identified as an Initial Sign that initiates a dedicatory statement on ceramic vessels (see MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:109, 124) (Figure 5a). On monuments this same glyph serves as a type of focus marker, emphasizing the most salient clauses (e.g. at Tikal and Caracol) (see Grube and Martin 2000:69, 71, 109) and also serving as a type of final emphatic device in texts of the eastern central lowlands (e.g., at Dzibanche and Lamanai) (see Helmke in press). On portable objects, and ceramics in particular, this glyph functions as a type of demonstrative pronoun (if read alay “this, here”) (MacLeod and Polyukhovich 2005) or as a type of quotative device that

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1 Given the form of the ceramic vessel, we can also entertain the possibility that this bowl once formed part of a set or ware of vessels with different forms and functions, including a vase for beverages and a tripod dish for serving solid foodstuffs, such as tamales—the typical steamed maize breads of Maya cuisine. On the other vessels of this set other agents and elements of the same myth might have been represented. Ultimately, the relatively low height of the bowl may account for the election of subject matter that was deemed most suitable.
The verb is followed by a substantive (A3) that refers to the object that was dedicated. In this case the glyph block has suffered a fair bit of erosion, but the remaining elements can nonetheless be distinguished as yu-'k'ib for yu-'k'ib. This lexeme can be segmented as yu-'k'ib' and translated as “it is his drinking implement,” involving the verb ul’ “to drink” followed by an instrumental suffix -ib, the whole prefixed by the third-person singular pronominal possessive prefix (see Houston et al. 1989; MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:115, 127-128). As such it is clear that this bowl was primarily intended as an implement for drinking, which also implies that it was designed to contain a liquid. Ordinarily the forms of Maya ceramics tell us something of their contents, with tall vases with narrow orifices reserved for beverages, wide dishes of shallow depth for solid foodstuffs, and bowls of intervening size for broths and semi-liquids. This observation is borne out in this case also, since the following glyph block, at the start of the second column (B1), refers to the intended contents (Figure 5b). Here this is spelled fully phonetically as ti'-ul' and read ti’ “to steal/maze guerl” (MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:118-119, 128). As such we can see that the text corroborates the intended contents of the vessel as viscous maize gruel, one of the favored beverages of the Maya, both then and now. The -ib syllabogram used in this glyph block is also a distinctive variant, exhibiting two large dots in the upper portion of the sign, an otherwise uncommon feature. Interestingly, as far as we have been able to ascertain, this particular variant of ti does not appear on other ceramics of Naranjo workshops, suggesting that this is an idiosyncratic feature of the scribe who painted MS5331.

Patronage and Nominal Segment (B2–C3)
The initial portion of the text was given over to an abridged dedicatory statement, as well as specifying the type of vessel in ancient Maya typologies and its intended contents. The remainder of the text starts with the next glyph block (B2) providing an honorific titular expression that introduces the name of the original owner of the vase. Whereas it may seem a rather abrupt transition between the first and second portions of the text, the latter is linked to the former via the possessive prefix -ib, marking this drinking implement as the prized possession of a distinct and particular individual. Anthroponyms, or the names of human individuals (particularly royal names), are usually followed by titles, in keeping with the syntax of the Ch’olan language recorded in the glyphs, although at times additional titulary expressions precede the name. These can be identified as honorific expressions, and in this case one such is spread over the remaining two glyph blocks of the medial column. The first half is written CH’AK-OŁ (B2) followed by pi’-ći (B3). Together this was probably read ch’ak’ohl pitzl’, involving the verbal

The paleographic commonalities of the Initial Sign: a– and analogous variants on Naranjo ceramics: (a) 2085; (b) K7750; (c) K622; (d) K4646; analogous variants of the –ya syllabogram on the same ceramics: (e) 2085; (f) K622; (g) K1398 (drawings: Christophe Helmcke).
root ch'ak "to chop, axe," the substantive ohl "heart," and the head of the expression, pitziil. The latter probably serves as the substantive "ballplayer" and is a derived form of the verbal root pitz seen as part of the verb "to play ball" in reference to the fascinating ballgame of the "wise man/sage" (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

Figure 7. Honorary titles: (a) the itz'at pitziil honorific of K'ahk' Tiliv on K6622; (b) the same title of K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk on K7750; (c) the same title and the ch'ah-ohl pitziil honorific of Kat' A'wil on the Holmul tripod dish; (d) honorific designating Ukit Kan Lek as ch'ak-ohl bahte' pitziil (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

Figure 8. References to Komkom in the glyphic corpus: (a) Naranjo Stela 22; (b) Naranjo Stela 18; (c) sherd of a Black-on-cyan vase found at Buenavista del Cayo; (d) detail of the shell gorget found at Buenavista del Cayo; (e) detail of the pot discovered at Buenavista del Cayo (drawings: Christopher Helmke).

Concluding Thoughts

The compositional data for MS5331 indicate that this bowl was the product of a workshop located in the greater Naranjo area, although its paste chemistry is unlike that of other whole vessels associated with royal Naranjo patrons with the exception of K1698/MS1684. Yet the physical characteristics of MS5331 along with its location and translation of the name K'AHIL K'AL chan[al] mo AJAW, thereby forming a partial or so-called "problematic" emblem glyph (Houston 1986). Nevertheless, one finely painted vase, designated K1698/MS1684 (Figure 9), diverges from this pattern and instead bears the name of a foreign ruler, in this case the king of Ucanal, one "Iznanmaaj" Bahleem. The texts on monuments at Naranjo make it clear that the relationship between these two kings was rather turbulent and not always amicable. For instance, just twenty days after according to the throne of May 31 693, K'ahk' Tiliv Chan Chaahk unleashed war upon neighboring kingdoms. Whereas much of the warring may have been aimed at lesser localities to draw them once more under the domination of the Naranjo king after a period of dynastic disarray (see Martin and Grube 2002:76-77), some of these raids targeted prizes further afield, including Tulab to the west, Yootz to the north, Komkom to the dynamic house named Komkom. This locality is known from the texts of Naranjo as a place that was attacked and burned on March 30 696, not too surprisingly during the reign of K'ahilk' Tiliv Chan Chaahk (Figure 8a). The same locality may also be mentioned in connection with a "Star War" verb on April 24 726, towards the end of the reign of the same king (Figure 8b). The reason whether this is nuanced literary language or chillingly meant in a rather literal way remains unknown.

B) as well as first reference to first two glyph blocks of the final column (Figure 5c). Split over two glyph blocks, the first part of the name can be transliterated as TE'-ja-CHAN-na (C1) that modifies the syntactic head, the deity K'AWIL (C2), whose snout is partly eroded. Most individual elements are readily identified, save the second sign, marked with a question mark, which here may be rendered as a rarer variant of the OL logogram within a circular frame. This is reminiscent of the rare OL variant also seen in the nominal segment of the large jadeite plaque recently discovered at Nim Li Punit, involving what appears to be a T-shaped wind sign within a cartouche (Prager and Braswell 2016:271, Fig. 46). Together the name on MS5331 thus reads TE' OHL Chan K'awiil. Alternatively this name may involve a moon sign—designated as TI1 in the Thompson catalog (1962). As such one alternate transliteration would be as TE'-ja-la, in which case the name is read TE'[al Chan(al)] K'awiil, wherein the putative -jal would function as an attributive suffix. The same sign might also function as the logogram "K'AWIL Twenty" for Te' Ol Chan K'awiil, although at present we are unsure as to which of these alternatives is more likely, without additional examples of the name.

This type of name is typical of the eastern central lowlands, naming one particular aspect of a deity. The structure of these names is also well known, involving the name of the deity at the end of the nominal phrase, chan "sky," in the medial segment, and opening with either a verbal expression or a substantive (see Grube 2000 2014). Thus the naming along the lines of "K'AWIL is … in the sky" if the medial segment is understood prepositionally as ti chan" within the sky," alternatively, "the sky of" or "in the sky of," is meant in a rather literal way remains unknown. In fact, the regnal name K'ahk' Tiliw appears on all ceramics produced for K'ahk' Tiliw and which confirms the bowl’s origin at a site in the eastern central lowlands, although here the regal title is exceptionally preceded by k’ahul "godly." In all other cases the title presents the toponym in combination with ajaw, thereby forming a partial or so-called "problematic" emblem glyph (Houston 1986).

Here, in the transcription, we present the segment /baah-te'/ as a modifier to "heart," "to chop, axe," the substantive ohl "heart," and translation of the name is impeded by the initial iteration of the martial title /baah-te'/, which here may be rendered as a rarer variant the medial segment was meant to be treated in derived form.

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Stela 22, which records the attack on Ucanal in September shown pleading at the feet of K’ahk’ Tiliw on the front of an emaciated, near-naked, and powerless king of Ucanal is east, Bital to the southeast, and Ucanal to the south. The texts make it clear that this is none other than “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam, leaving little doubt as to which court ruled supreme in the region. Following this offensive period wherein K’ahk’ Tiliw sought to make his mark on the area, the reign’s maturity set in and the texts take stock of the king in his role as diplomat. The finely incised texts on the sides of Stela 2 record the accession of a king of Yootz in January AD 713 under the auspices of K’ahk’ Tiliw, who is clearly named as overlord. Similarly, in the same text the accession (possibly a re-accession as faithful vassal) of “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam is said to have taken place the year before in June AD 712, an event that is explicitly said to have taken place ichnich or “before / in front of” K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk. This interesting reversal, from defeat in AD 698 to re-accession 14 years later, demonstrates how fleeting power could be during Late Classic times. In addition, this historical event entails the most likely production date for K1698, with the vase perhaps specially commissioned to commemorate the enthronization of the Ucanal ruler and to cement his vassalage to his Naranjo overlord.

Truly remarkable in this regard are the many paleographic features seen in the text of K1698/MS1684 that represent salient points of commonality with the text of MS5331, in spite of the fact that their paste compositions are notably different although both pertain to Naranjo ceramic production. Among these paleographic details, we can point to the same a- vocalic sign (A1), the same variants of yu- and k’i in the vessel-type glyph (C1), and the identical AJAW logogram in the title of the Ucanal king (Figure 9). The latter is identical in every detail, including the cap on the “pillow” sign to the left, the cross that marks the center of the same sign, and the interior lines of the “throne” sign to the right (compare J1 on K1698/MS1684 with C3 on MS5331). All of these features together suggest that the texts on both vessels were produced—if not by the same scribe—by contemporaneous painters who produced vessels by closely following the same scribal template. Considering the evidence at hand it seems likely that—much like the Ucanal vase K1698/MS1684—MS5331 was also custom-made for a foreign ruler, in this instance the king of Komkom. Most likely, too, the bowl was commissioned, sometime after AD 712, during the more diplomatic phase of K’ahk’ Tiliw’s reign and as a direct corollary of the attack inflicted upon Komkom in AD 696.

It is in this respect that the date inscribed in the base of the bowl has direct bearing on this discussion. The date provides a record in the Tzolkin calendar and has been written in abbreviated form as 4 AJAW for chan ti [k’in] ajaw or literally “four on the day Ajaw” (Figure 10). Warranting such a degree of ellipsis is the significance of the date with regards to an important, well-known, and celebrated period ending in the Long Count. As such it is likely the record of a K’atun period ending with a “round” Long Count date, and the best match with these parameters is the date 9.15.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 13 Yax, or August 23, AD 731. What is surprising about this date is that it falls three years after the latest known date for K’ahk’ Tiliw’s reign, whereas one would expect the bowl to have been produced under his sovereignty. While this bowl cannot be used as tangible evidence for K’ahk’ Tiliw remaining in power until 731 it is certainly a tantalizing suggestion. Alternatively, the bowl may indeed have been manufactured to cement an alliance between Naranjo and the lord of Komkom, and this may have occurred under the reign of a successor. This alternative historical scenario could explain the idiosyncratic

Figure 10. The 4 Ajaw date at the bottom of MS5331 (photo: Fundación para la Bellas Artes y la Cultura, courtesy of Amelia Weymann de Palacios; drawing: Christophe Helmke).

7 This computation is based on the 584286 GMT+1 correlation coefficient (see Martin and Skidmore 2012). An alternate, but less likely, anchor to the Long Count would be to consider a labahun date, of which for Bak’tun 9 the only match is 9.10.10.0.0 or AD 603, which is too early given the style of the bowl, its iconography, and the paleographic features of the text. Alternate hotun and holahun-
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1982 Ceramic Compositional Analysis in Archaeological Dynasty and celebrates an alliance between Te’… Chan K’awiil and the rulers of Naranjo. If the bowl were commissioned to celebrate the accession of Te’… Chan K’awiil, then K’ahk’ Tiliw, at the very end of his reign, emerges as the likely patron. But then again, the bowl may have been a gift from the successor of K’ahk’ Tiliw on the occasion of his own accession in order to cement an erstwhile alliance with the kings of K'anjor, his allies to the east.

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