A Hieroglyphic Block from the Region of Hiix Witz, Guatemala

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In recent years, private collectors in Guatemala have been registering their holdings of Pre-Columbian art with the Registro de Bienes Culturales. This agency, part of the Instituto de Antropología e Historia (IDAEH), is responsible for bringing privately held artefacts into the official registry of Guatemalan national cultural heritage. Not only does this process end any possibility of these works entering the international art market, but it makes them available for scholarly study—thereby enriching both our knowledge of the past and the cultural patrimony of Guatemala.

Where Maya objects carry hieroglyphic inscriptions there is the potential of “re-provenancing” them, using mentions of
The next term is formed from the three-part superfix and the pictographic position of the “flower” in the bird’s mouth. These constitute the sign TI’ “mouth,” whose standalone form combines the superfix with a stylized mouth. The issue is a little more complex, however, since this design also forms the basis for two other hieroglyphs, the verbs UK’ “to drink” and WE’ “to eat”—which are distinguished by the signs for “water” or “bread” set into the mouth area respectively (Stuart in Houston, Stuart, and Taube 2006:110, Fig. 3.5 a-d). Since these distinctions can be omitted in fused spellings such as this one, it can be hard to determine the correct reading. As we shall see in a moment, the comparable spellings suggest that a plain TI’ is intended in this case. Finally, we come to the avian itself which is read O’, the onomatopoeic name for a type of bird. As a whole, the reading is therefore JAN(AAB)-TI’-O’ or Jan/Janaab Ti’ O’.

The next glyph, pA1b, identifies this character as a human ruler by means of the emblem glyph HIIX-
WITZ-A|AW-wa “Jaguar Hill Lord.” This refers to a polity that has been recognized by epigraphers for some time, but only recently has evidence emerged linking it to the ruins of La Joyanca, Zapote Bobal, and Pajaral (Stuart 2003; see also Arnauld 2002:49-51; Breuil-Martínez et al. 2005:304-307; Gámez, Fitzsimmons, and Forné 2007; Stuart 2008). Lying in the western portion of the department of Petén, Guatemala, this area is bounded by the sites of El Peru to the north and Itsimte-Sacluk to the east (Figure 3). The distribution of Hiix Witz names and titles at three sites is unusual but not unprecedented, perhaps reflecting a system of multicapital governance or a sequence of shifting seats of rulership. Pajaral has at least one early monument and it has been persuasively suggested that its imposing hilltop acropolis is the original “Jaguar Hill” (Stuart 2008). Zapote Bobal is the largest of the three, with the greatest number of monuments, and may well have been the dominant center in the Late Classic period (Breuil-Martínez et al. 2005; Gámez, Fitzsimmons, and Forné 2007).

The same Janaab Tí’ O’ name and Hiix Witz title appear on at least four unprovenanced vessels in the Kerr archive at www.mayavase.com: K1387, K5646, K8665, and K8722 (Figure 4a–d). They provide good examples of the flexible spelling strategies used in the script, with the same sequence of terms represented in varied ways, especially in the emblem glyph. It will be noted that none of these expanded renderings shows evidence for the “eat” or “drink” derivations of the mouth sign, and its value is therefore to be understood as a plain TÍ’. One or more of these individuals may be the self-same Janaab Tí’ O’ of the new block, although given the enthusiasm with which Maya dynasties mined their own history for later regnal names we should not be surprised to find multiple kings with this appellative (in one especially common pattern new rulers took the names of their grandfathers). In addition, there is evidence for this name-title combination on one, or more likely two, stone monuments—to which we will...
The next block, pB1a, is filled with yi-chi-NAL-la for yichnal “before/in the sight of.” This term is used where the actions of one participant are “overseen” by another, in the sense of supervision or sanction.

The person who does the overseeing comes at pB1b, where we find the spelling yu[ku]-no-ma-CH'EEN Yuknoom Ch'een. This was the name of a well-known king of Calakmul, Mexico, who reigned from AD 636 to either 685 or 686 (Martin and Grube 2000:108-109). He is mentioned in the inscriptions of Dos Pilas, Cancuen, Uxul, El Peru, La Corona, Moral-Reforma, and an unknown site close to Piedras Negras—and of course at Calakmul itself (Martin 2000:43). The largest of the Classic Maya political centers, Calakmul lies approximately 130 km (80 miles) to the northeast of the Hiix Witz region.

The next glyph-block, pA2a-b, supplies the title “Five K'atun Lord” in the form 5-WINIKHAAB?-AJAW-wa. This is a marker of advanced age (beyond 79 years) that Yuknoom Ch'een achieved in 680 (Martin 2005:8). If used contemporaneously then it would place the now-missing event rather precisely to the period between this date and his death in 685 or 686. However, since there is some possibility that it is applied retrospectively, all we can be certain of is that the stone was carved after 680 and refers to an event before 686. The titles of Yuknoom Ch'een conclude at pB2a with the familiar emblem glyph of Calakmul: K'UH-ka-KAAN-AJAW-wa k'ukul kaan ajaw “Holy Snake Lord.”

The final compound at pB2b is another familiar term, this time u-ti-ya uhtiiy “it happened (at).” Often associated with Distance Numbers that count back to an earlier date, it is also used to introduce the location where a given event took place (Stuart and Houston 1994:7-12). In such cases it can define a particular locale within a home site—such as a building or architectural complex—or a different center entirely. Given the range of sites that used the Hiix Witz title we might appreciate the need for specificity, but it could refer to a distant place like Calakmul. Hopefully the emergence of additional blocks in the series will ultimately allow us to understand its role in this case.

Observations

This delicately carved block is a fine example of Classic Maya calligraphy in stone, but it is the content of the inscription that imbues it with historical importance. As well as it can be reconstructed, it refers to an action performed by the ruler of Hiix Witz under the supervision of the Calakmul king. As such, it supplies new information about the political circumstances of the Hiix Witz kingdom in the Late Classic and is the clearest evidence yet that it fell under the sway of Calakmul.

Other factors are relevant to this issue. The appearance of a Janaab Ti’ O’ of Hiix Witz on K1387 (Figures 4a, 5) is significant because this is a codex-style vessel of the kind closely linked to the Calakmul kingdom and the sites under its control. The chemical composition of this particular vessel, however, does not match those sampled at Calakmul, nor that at any site in the Mirador Basin that lies to its south—seemingly the core production area of this ware. Stylistically, K1387 is closely wedded to fellow codex-style vessels and perhaps this vase, and a matching dish K1388, were simply made at a Mirador Basin center for which we have no comparative material. In any event, it is extremely rare, even unique, for a polity outside the greater Mirador area to be named on a codex-style vessel, and this was already a clue to a connection between Calakmul and

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4 A stone of similar format but unknown size, also in a collection in Guatemala (Mayer 1991:Pl. 97a), could be another block from this series (David Stuart, personal communication 2009). The content of that text is entirely chronological, but cannot be fixed in the Long Count.

5 Stanley Guenter (2003:Note 9) has noted the resemblance of K1387 to a codex-style vessel naming Yuknoom Ch’een found in Tomb 4 of Structure 2 at Calakmul (although it does not appear to be in the same hand) and accordingly suggested that this king and the Hiix Witz lord were contemporaries. Additionally, a plate now labeled K3636 (originally published in Robicsek and Hales 1981:Table 2a) is said to be in codex-style and carries the name of a different Hiix Witz lord: yu-ku-la CHAN-na K'AWIIL.
Hiix Witz. The link was enhanced with the appearance of one of the aforementioned stone monuments. This features a ballgame scene with two players, one of whom is captioned with a clear Janaab Ti’ O’ name and an eroded but discernible Hiix Witz title, the other evidently identified as the Calakmul king Wamaaw K’awiil (Tunesi 2007:15-18, Figs. 4, 6). The latter is known from just one other text dated to 736 and could not have been in power before 731 (Looper 1999:270; Martin and Grube 2000:112-114). Falling some years after the last possible date of the new block, we might suspect that this ballgame involves a later namesake of our Janaab Ti’ O’. In fact, since an inscription at another site places a Hiix Witz ruler of a quite different name to the year 732, we can take this as very probable.

Another monument, this time a fragmentary block currently in storage at the Museo Sylvanus Morley, Tikal, Guatemala (Mayer 1991:Pl.155), provides a better candidate for our Hiix Witz lord. This is one of a group of stairway risers that David Stuart (personal communication 2006) has linked to matching blocks found at the site of El Reinado, Guatemala (Mejía and Laporte 2004:249-251, Figs.13-26)—just a little to the south of the Hiix Witz region. Here a Janaab Ti’ O’ name bears a suspected Hiix Witz emblem and has been dated to around 692, based on the record of the 9.13.0.0.0 Period Ending on a companion block (Stanley Guenter, personal communication 2006). There is a Calakmul connection here too, since this calendrical ceremony is performed at, or in some other way connected to, that city.

The nature of Calakmul’s influence across the central lowlands is clear from the hegemonic character of its relationships with other polities (Martin and Grube 1995, 2000). This is especially true of the foreign references to Yuknoom Ch’een, which consistently state or imply his dominant status. These include several cases in which he supervises the inaugurations of subject rulers, twice using the yichnal term employed on our new block. Whatever the precise nature of the missing verb, the new block is important in confirming that Hiix Witz was directly engaged in Calakmul’s sphere of interaction in the late seventh century and took a subordinate role. In this date, expressed only as a Calendar Round, is linked to the Calakmul toponym Uxte’tuun via an as yet unreadable term (David Stuart, personal communication 2006; see Mayer 1991:Pl.156, 158). But this intriguing monument could be rather later than 692. One phrase might describe the local ruler of El Reinado as the grandson of the Dos Pilas king Bajlaj Chan K’awiil (c. 648-692), as identified by a rare subsidiary name in the sequence pA3b-pA4a (Mayer 1991:Pl.127). (It is conceivable, but not without difficulty, that the same fragment names another grandson, the Dos Pilas ruler K’awiil Chan K’inich [741-761].) We should also recall that Dos Pilas was another polity with relations to Hiix Witz, since Bajlaj Chan K’awiil sought refuge there after a defeat by Tikal in 673 (Falsen et al. 2003; Guenter 2003:24).
this it joins a chain of contacts from Cancuen in the far south to Uxul on the periphery of the Calakmul polity (see also Freidel et al. 2007).

We cannot yet say if this stone originated at Zapote Bobal, Pajaral, or La Joyanca—or, indeed, at some other as yet unrecognized locale—but we can situate it with reasonable assurance within the ancient Hiix Witz kingdom. Once an isolated fragment, it now finds a home in our ever-growing understanding of Classic Maya political dynamics.

**Summary of the reading**

pA1a JAN(AAB)-TI-O' jan[Janaab Ti' O' Janaab Ti' O'
pA1b HIIX-WITZ-AJAW-wa Hiix Witz Ajaw
Jaguar Hill Lord
pB1a yi-chi-NAL-la yichmal overseen by
pB1b yu[ku]-no-ma-CH'EEN Yuknoom Ch'een
Yuknoom Ch'een
pA2a 5-WINIKHAAB? Ho Winikhaab? Five K'atun
pA2b AJAW-wa Ajaw Lord
pB2a K'UH-ka-KAAN-AJAW-wa K'uhul Kaan Ajaw
Holy Snake Lord
pB2b u-ti-ya uhtiiy it happened (at)

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