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 (AD 250–850) painted ceramics. The sampling program began in the 1970s and continues as an opportunistic patchwork 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 workshop(s) (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-Weyman 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-Weyman 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 glyphic 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-5-311-1 in the Palacios-Weyman collection. The shape of the vessel is that of a bowl according to the archaeological shape-typology for Maya ceramics (Sabloff 1975:23-24) with a flat bottom and outsloping walls. Its maximal rim diameter is 20 cm
Relative to the overall patterning of ceramic paste and composition divisions in the Maya lowlands, MS5331 fits comfortably within the compositional pattern for pottery made in the eastern central lowlands. That being said, for archaeological sites located in present-day Guatemala we can exclude Holmul, La Sufragaya, Yaxox, Chunhuitz, Ucancal, Yaxha, and Nakum as probable locations of manufacture. Similarly, on the opposite side of the border in adjoining western Belize, we can equally exclude the sites of Xunantunich, Buenavista del Cayo, Las Ruinas de Arenal, Baking Pot, Barton Ramie, and Caracol. Unfortunately the data cannot confirm a specific workshop locale, although it does point to the immediate Naranjo area as the most promising and probable candidate. However, the bowl’s compositional profile is not notably close 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 unprovenienced 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+) (Figure 2a–c). Yet the three vases are so similar to each other as to suggest they are products of one workshop, while the especially strong chemical similarity between K633/MS374 and K635/MS1375 can be used to infer that they represent two vessels made from a common clay preparation.

Further, MS5331 does not chemically resemble the so-called Jauncy Vase (K4464/MS1416) (Figure 2d) made at Naranjo for its 38th king, K’ahk’ Chan Bahlam, who is named as its owner (Reents-Budet et al. 1994:300). The paste compositions of the Jauncy Vase and K633/ MS1374 are similar, as is that of the K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. 755–780+) (Figure 3a–c). Yet the three vases are so similar to each other as to suggest they are products of one workshop, while the especially strong chemical similarity between K633/MS374 and K635/MS1375 can be used to infer that they represent two vessels made from a common clay preparation.

It is difficult to assess whether the vase as a whole resembles other Zacatel Cream-polychrome vessels in the database. 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 BV009 (excavated at Baking Pot, Belize) (Figure 3d), as well as other Naranjo-excavated sherds that form the whole vessels whose ceramic production 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 vessels, that MS5331 was probably produced in the Naranjo area and/or that it was a gift for the Ucancal ruler “Itzamnaaj” Chan Bahlam, who is named as its owner (Reents-Budet et al. 1994:303–304). The paste compositions of the Jauncy Vase and K633/MS1374 are similar, as is that of the K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. 755–780+) (Figure 3a–c). Yet the three vases are so similar to each other as to suggest they are products of one workshop, while the especially strong chemical similarity between K633/MS374 and K635/MS1375 can be used to infer that they represent two vessels made from a common clay preparation.

The combined features identify MS5331 as a member of the Zacatel Cream-polychrome ceramic type. Lacking a secure provenience and sufficient numbers of similar examples, a variety assignment is not warranted. The bowl’s stylistic and iconographic attributes unquestionably point to its being a product of a workshop located somewhere in the eastern central lowlands. The origin of the bowl can be ascribed to a more circumscribed location in the greater Naranjo area, based on an analysis of paste composition combined with paleographic features in the glyphic text, including the title borne by the historical owner of the vessel. We explore these data below.
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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).
in with a lighter red/orange wash. 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 Kupprat 2016). 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.

Dedicatorial 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

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.
 initializes the clause (if read *adly* “it is said”) (Lacadena 2003:15). Despite this continued ambiguity, it clearly serves to initiate clauses and is written -AL-ya (or alternately as -LAY-ya). Of the several variants that can be used to write this expression, in this case the main sign is the mirror variant.

The phonetic signs bracketing this logogram are highly distinctive variants and serve as diagnostic paleographic markers of a particular workshop, or perhaps even a specific scribe. The first a- phonetic complement represents the upper and lower beaks of a parakeet with the dotted circular element in the middle of the darkened tongue. It is the two small wavy lines that emanate from the nostril that distinguish this variant from other allographs of this vocalic sign. Precisely the same variant is found on ceramics produced at a royal tomb at Buenavista del Cayo in Belize (Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 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).

This is spelled fully phonetically as ti'iu-uy, and read ti a "to steal / maize gruel" (MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:118-119, 128). As such we can see that this 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 ya 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 ya 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 abbreviated dedicatory statement, as well as specifying the type of vessel in question, 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 uk'-, 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 titulature 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-OL (B2) followed by pi-li (B3). Together this is probably read ch'ak-ohl pitzil, involving the verbal

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**Figure 5.** The glyphs of the A–C columns on MS5331: (a) the A column; (b) the B column; (c) the C column (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

**Figure 6.** The paleographic commonalities of the Initial Sign: a- and analogous variants on Naranjo ceramics: (a) 2085; (b) K7750; (c) K622; (d) 4464; analogous variants of the -ya syllabogram on the same ceramics: (e) 2085; (f) K622; (g) K1398 (drawings: Christophe Helmke).
A Bowl Fit for a King

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 quite unlike that of other whole vessels associated with royal Naranjo patrons with the exception of K1698/MS1684. Yet the physical characteristics of the vessel as a whole are very similar to those of other pottery vessels produced during the reign of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk. The iconography of MS5331 represents a small segment of the greater Maya mythic narrative that is best known from the Holmul Dancer scenes that are typical of pictorial pottery produced in this part of the Maya area. This feature also complemented the iconographic landscape of the eastern central lowlands. More specifically, the distinctive graphic variants employed in the text of this vessel are in keeping with additional features introduced for K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk and which name him as owner.

In fact, the regnal name K’ahk’ Tiliw appears on all but one of the vessels whose stylistic and epigraphic features suggest they were produced under his patronage. Thus even though most ceramic vessels were often gifted between sovereigns as a means of cementing alliances, those vases of K’ahk’ Tiliw were personal, with a short vowel since morphophonetic processes are at play, and translation of the name is impeded by the initial variant also seen in the nominal segment of the whole text. It provides a complete emblem glyph with the regal title is exceptionally preceded by the toponym “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).

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 “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam. 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 on May 31 695, K’ahk’ Tiliw 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 2000:72-76, some of these raids targeted prizes further afield, including Tubal to the west, Yootz to the north, Komkom to the east, and burned on March 30 696, not all too surprisingly during the reign of K’ahk’ Tiliv Chan Chaahk (Figure 8a).

The same regal title also appears on Late Classic ceramic found at Buenavista del Cayo (Figure 8c) and Baking Pot (Figure 8d) in western Belize, suggesting this ancient locality was probably tied to a site in the vicinity (Helmke and Kettunen 2011:42, 63; Helmke et al. 2016; Houston et al. 1992:507-508; Yaeger et al. 2015:185-188). Whereas the ceramic texts and the mentions made at Naranjo spell this locality as [kimo-ko-], on a recently discovered Early Classic shell gorget found at Buenavista del Cayo the title of the original owner is written more synoptically as [kimo ajaw] (Yaeger et al. 2015:185-186) (Figure 8e), abbreviating the toponym in precisely the same way as seen on MS5331. Based on these numerous examples, and the attribution of MS5331 to a Naranjo workshop, we are thus on rather secure footing to suggest that this is the same title as seen at sites in the eastern central lowlands, although here the regal title is exceptionally preceded by k’ahk’ “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).
Stela 22, which records the attack on Ucanal in September shown pleading at the feet of K’ahk’ Tiliw on the front of emanciated, near-naked, and powerless king of Ucanal is east, Bital to the southeast, and Ucanal to the south. The 698 (Schele and Freidel 1990:190-191). The texts make Roll-out of K1689 and drawing of the glyphic text (photo © Justin Kerr; drawing: Christophe Helmke).

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 U-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 9.15.0.0.4 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

It is 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 yichnal 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.

Figure 9. Roll-out of K1689 and drawing of the glyphic text (photo © Justin Kerr; drawing: Christophe Helmke).

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).
paste chemistry of this specimen within the larger cor-
pus of sampled pottery attributed to K’ahk’ Tiliw and
other Naranjo kings.
Irrespective of the particulars, this unsung bowl re-
fects an important event in the history of the Komkom
dynasty and celebrates an alliance between T’… Chan
K’awiil and the rulers of Naranjo. If the bowl were
commissioned to celebrate the accession of T’… 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 Komkom, his al-
lies to the east.

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