

The Hieroglyphic Texts of Kerr No. 7786 and 4669: Performance and Competence of a Late Classic Maya Master Scribe

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In this essay a detailed comparison is made between the Primary Standard Sequences (henceforth PSS) as painted on Kerr No. 7786 (a small bowl) and Kerr No. 4669 (a wide tripod plate). Both ceramics are painted in the Codex Style and present two masterfully produced hieroglyphic texts in which the calligraphic skill of a master scribe can easily be recognized. As suggested in earlier research, both these ceramics may have been painted by the same scribe (cf. Boot 1997, 1999).

Kerr No. 7786

Kerr No. 4669

Measurements

height:	4.4 cm.	
diameter:	10.8 cm.	35.5 cm.
circumference:	34.0 cm.	
provenance:	unknown	unknown
style:	Codex Style	Codex Style
posted (Kerr n.d.):	September 26, 1997	September 1, 2000 (Kerr 1994: 582)

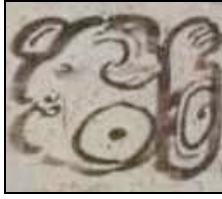


'a-LAY-ya
alay



'a-LAY-ya
alay

The scribe used two different patterns in the Initial Sign position to represent the introducing item *alay* “this, this one; here” (after independent research by Barbara MacLeod and Yuriy Polyukhovych, personal communication via e-mail, September & October 2000). He used two different signs for 'a, two different signs for LAY (the regular MIRROR sign and the MIRROR infixed with the upturned so-called TZUK head), as well as two different signs for ya.



GOD.N-yi
(?)y

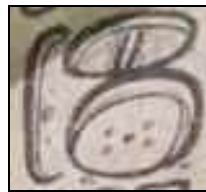


STEP[yi]
(?)y

After the Initial Sign the scribe continued in two different ways. In the first PSS he employed the GOD.N main sign, still of uncertain value, to which the syllabic sign **yi** was attached as a postfix. In the second PSS he employed the STEP main sign, also of still uncertain value, into which he infixed the syllable **yi**. The GOD.N and STEP collocation may provide different verb roots, as may be shown in the PSS text on Kerr No. 1921, the only PSS text which employs both GOD.N and STEP (cf. Reents-Budet 1994: 141, Fig. 4.36). If GOD.N and STEP do provide the same verb root, there are other examples of PSS texts which repeat a single particular item (e.g. Kerr No. 1348, note **ji-chi ji-chi** in two different spellings; Kerr No. 1810, note **ta-yu-ta-la ta-yu-ta-la**, both in the same spelling).



'u-tz'i-b'i
utz'ihb'



'u-tz'i-b'i-la
utz'ihb'al(?)

In the first PSS text the scribe employed a rare sign to represent the syllabic sign **'u**, namely the opened mouth of a howling dog, probably hinting at the sound “hoo” (or “huuuuuu”; Diego de Landa’s second sign for “**u**” may be a related case, cf. Bricker 1987). He continued with the regular signs for **tz'i** and **b'i**. In the second PSS he opened the collocation with one of the most commonly employed syllabic signs for **'u** and also using the regular signs for **tz'i** and **b'i**. The two small dots on either lower outer corner of the **b'i** sign may hint at the addition of the sign for **la**, which in rare cases may be found included into this collocation (Kerr No. 2295, 3744, and 6100). The syllabic signs **tz'i-b'i** combined lead to the intransitive verb root *tz'ihb'* - “to write”, as first suggested by David Stuart (1987).



na-ja[la]
najal



na-ja
naj

In the first collocation the scribe used the combination **na-ja[la]**, in which **la** is infixed into **ja**. In the second collocation he employed **na-ja**. At present I have not been able to detect a well-established pattern to the employment of **na-ja-la** and **na-ja** as used by Maya scribes. Codex Style PSS texts commonly reveal a pattern **tz'i-b'i na-ja** (e.g. Kerr No. 1523), but also **tz'i-b'i na-ja-la** (e.g. Kerr No. 1355). Although it has been proposed that **na-ja-la** and **na-ja** should be combined with **'u-tz'i-b'i** (*-n-aj-[al]* would serve as a verb suffix), there are sufficient examples in which one can find the **na-ja** item possessed, as in **'u-tz'i-b'a u-na-ja** (e.g. Kerr No. 0532) and even **'u-tz'i-b'a-li 'u-na-ja-ya** (Kerr No. 1398). Also note a PSS written as [**'a**]-LAY **na-ja ji-chi 'u tz'i b'a li** (Kerr No. 0796), which clearly seems to indicate that **na-ja** (also written **na-ha**) and **tz'i-b'**V (V/ is either /i/ or /a/) lead to independent roots (cf. Boot 2001a, 2001b).

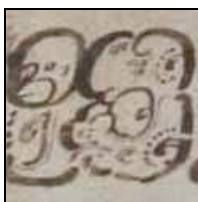


'u-po-ko-lo che-'e-b'u
upokolche'eb'

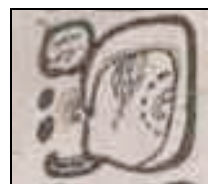


'u ja-wa-TE'
ujawa[n]te'

The next collocations provide the vessel type. In the first PSS text the scribe employed a rare collocation, namely **'u-po-ko-lo che-'e-b'u**. This spelling leads to a transliteration *upokolche'eb'* or “his quill-washing bowl” (cf. Boot 1997). The *che'eb'* or quill, probably made of some kind of indigenous bamboo (note Ch'ol *chejp* “bamboo”, *chejbol* “yellow bamboo”, *c'änchejb* “yellow bamboo”), was the writing implement par excellence and it can be found depicted in various Classic Maya images (cf. Coe and Kerr 1997). In the second PSS text a less rare vessel type can be found written, namely **'u-ja-wa-TE'** for *u-jawa[n]te'* “his wide (tripod) plate” (at present I have identified six examples, the most unique of which is Kerr No. 5723, a tripod plate with a PSS that contains the paired expression *yuk'ib' ujawa[n]te'*). The suffix *-te'* may indicate that originally these containers were made of wood, not ceramic material (all ceramic containers originally were made of some kind of vegetal material; the Classic cylindrical ceramic vessels possibly were made from cut mature bamboo, which also in the present day makes excellent drinking cups).



'a-ku
ahk[u'ul]



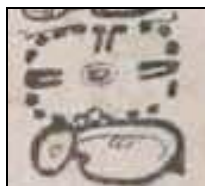
'a-ku
ahk[u'ul]

After the vessel type collocations there is generally a large variation in the continuation of the PSS text. In a majority of the examples information will be provided on the contents of the vessel or dish (*kakaw, sa', ul*), but other examples continue with the nominal and titles of its patron and/or owner. Here the PSS texts continue with the nominal and titles of its patron and/or

owner). In both cases 'a-ku is written; the scribe used two different signs for 'a as well as for ku. In the first PSS text he employed the celamorphic variant, in the second PSS the plain variant of T528.



NICH?-TE'
nichte'



NICH?-TE'
nichte'

In these collocations the scribe only employed slight variations to spell **NICH?-TE'** for *nichte'* “flower”. It is in these collocations that the single hand of workmanship can be recognized. The dots that make the outer circle of the **NICH?** logograph clearly have a similar outer shape and patterning. Combined with the previous collocation these spelled a personal name, probably *ahk nichte'* or *ahk[u'ul] nichte'* (there are cases in which 'a-ku seems to be an underspelling of 'a-ku-la, cf. Yaxchilan Lintel 10).



ya-K'UH-HU'UN-na
ya[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un



ya-K'UH-HU'UN-na
ya[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un

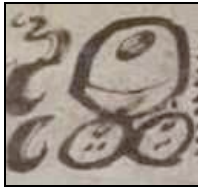
These collocations provide a relationship statement, the root of which is a title of still uncertain transliteration and meaning (cf. Jackson and Stuart 2001). Each PSS text provides a variant. In the first PSS the scribe attached the semi-circle of dots for **K'UH** above the **HU'UN** logograph. In the second PSS text he positioned the regular T1016 **K'UH** logograph between **HU'UN** and the syllabic sign **na**. The root of this relationship statement may be *a[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un* “he of the god-like headband”. The opening syllabic sign **ya** (note again the strong calligraphic similarities between the two signs) leads to *y-a[j] k'uh[ul] hu'un* or “he is the ‘he of the god-like headband’ of” someone else.



CHAK-tzu-la-ja
chaktzu[h]laj



SKY-na-YOPAT?-ta
chanyopat



K'AHK'-'O'HL-la
k'ahk'o'hl



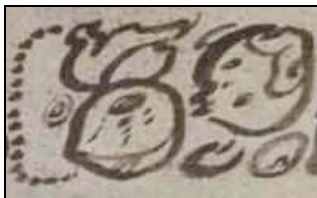
K'AHK'-'O'HL-la
k'ahk'o'hl

The nominal phrase of that “someone else” is provided in the next collocations. In the first PSS text the scribe employs a single collocation **K'AHK'-'O'HL-la**. In the second PSS he employs three collocations, namely **CHAK-tzu-la-ja SKY-na YOPAT?-ta K'AHK'-'O'HL-la** (tentative reading of the **YOPAT?** logograph after unpublished research by David Stuart). There are various examples in which the name of a Maya noble can be abbreviated to a few (or, as in this case, one) collocation. The full nominal may have been *chaktzu[h]laj chanyopat k'ahk'o'hl*.

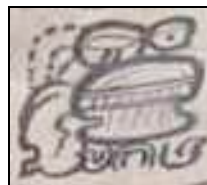


K'IN[chi]-ni
k'i[h]nich

This title is only employed in the second PSS text. The **chi** is infixed into the main sign, the celamorphic variant for **K'IN**. This collocation spells *k'i[h]nich*, an epithet possibly meaning “the hot one” (cf. Wichmann 2000).



K'UH-yo-tzi-'AJAW
k'uh[ul] yootz ajaw



K'UH-yo-YOOTZ-tzi-'AJAW
k'uh[ul] yootz ajaw

The final collocations provide the supreme title amongst the Classic Maya nobility, generally referred to as the “Emblem Glyph” (cf. Berlin 1958). It is probably best to refer to this particular kind of title as the paramount rulership title (although, as research by for instance Nikolai Grube and Simon Martin has shown, some *k’uhul ajaw* were more powerful than others).

In the first PSS the scribe opened the two collocations for the “Emblem Glyph” with **K’UH**, followed by the syllabic signs **yo** and **tzi**. The paramount title ends with **’AJAW-wa**. Note the celamorphic variant of **’AJAW**, indicative of which are the headband and the small dot on the cheek. In its totality this title can be transliterated as *k’uh[ul] yootz ajaw*, in which *k’uh[ul] ajaw* “god-like lord” frames the item *yootz*, the name of a polity in the neighborhood of Naranjo, still of unknown location. The adjective *k’uh[ul]* “god-like” (or “divine”) is frequently underspelled in Classic Maya texts. In the second PSS text the scribe opened the single collocation for the “Emblem Glyph” with **K’UH**, followed by **yo-YOOTZ-tzi**, which he superfixed with T168 **’AJAW**. This title also reads *k’uh[ul] yootz ajaw*. It was actually the substitution of **yo-tzi** for **yo-MAIN.SIGN-tzi** in these paramount rulership titles that led to the decipherment of the **YOOTZ** main sign (cf. Boot 1999).

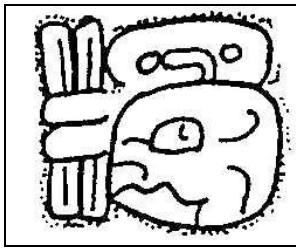
The scribe who produced these two PSS texts was a true master. Between the two texts a specific collocation in one PSS contained different signs than in the other PSS. His performance as a Maya scribe shows just how competent he was. On Kerr 7786 he employed 24 syllabic signs and 10 logographic signs in 12 collocations, while on Kerr No. 4669 he employed 25 syllabic signs and 16 logographic signs in 14 collocations. He included various rare signs (for instance the **’a** of the Initial Sign on Kerr No. 7786, the “howling dog” **’u** on Kerr No. 7786, and the **YOOTZ** on Kerr No. 4669), another clear sign of his competence. The calligraphic quality of these two texts is very high and not many Late Classic scribes can rival him. Possibly he produced a third masterpiece, Kerr No. 5164, which not only has superbly painted hieroglyphic texts, but also a masterfully executed iconography:



The fine quality of the hieroglyphic text and again certain calligraphic aspects (for instance, note **’u** sign in **’u-MAM?** collocation and compare to **’u-tz’i-b’i** collocation on Kerr No. 4669; note **ya** in **ya-’AL** collocation and compare to **ya-K’UH-HU’UN-na** collocations) may indicate that this vessel indeed was painted by the same scribe.

Possibly the most important contribution for Maya epigraphic studies made by the master scribe of these two, possibly three, vessels was the inclusion of a reference to the *che’eb’* or “quill” with which scribes painted their texts on various materials. The collocation **che-’e-b’u** only

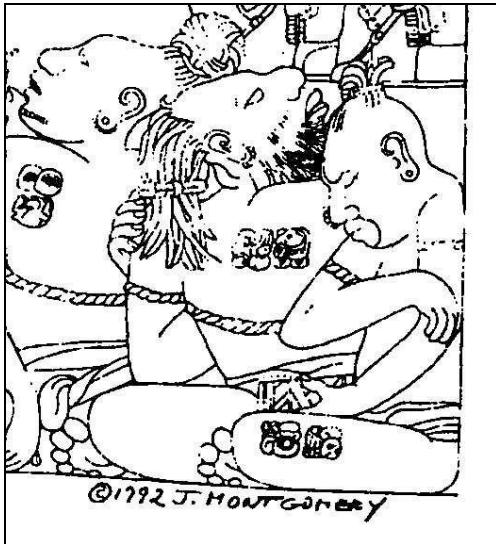
occurs once in the whole corpus of Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions, but a collocation **che-b'u** on Kerr No. 4022 provides another reference to the “quill” (cf. Boot 1997):



che-b'u

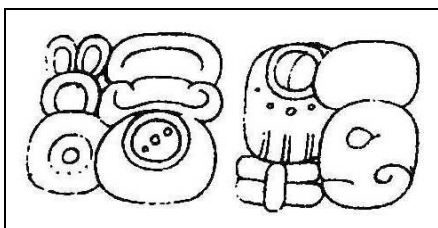
che'eb' (drawing by the author)

At present I am familiar with only one additional example that provides the noun *che'eb'* “quill”. At Piedras Negras the front of Stela 12 depicts Ruler 7 and below him various recently taken captives can be found seated, probably taken in the wars Ruler 7 fought against Pomona in AD 792 and AD 794 (Stela 12, side texts). The ropes around their upper arms and upper torsos, as well as the lack of any personal insignia, indicate their lowly status. The lower right corner of Stela 12 depicts three seated captives:



(after unpublished drawing by John Montgomery)

The left upper leg of the captive on the far right contains a name caption, a common device used by Maya scribes to reveal the identity and former status of a captive, here consisting of two collocations, illustrated below:

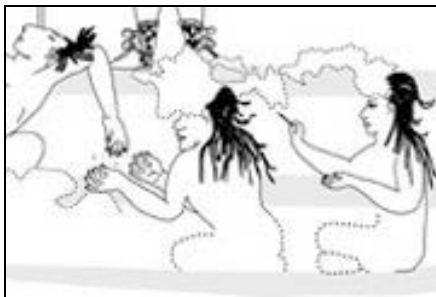


(drawing by John Montgomery)

SAK?-?-na-ja b'a-che-b'u
sak(?)naj b'a(ah)che'eb'

The first collocation seems to provide the personal name of this captive, which unfortunately can only be partially transcribed and transliterated. The second collocation spells **b'a-che-b'u** for *b'a(ah)che'eb'*; this is a title which opens with *b'a(ah)* “head, top; first” and provides a clue to common Late Classic Maya ranking system (e.g. *b'a(ah)ajaw* vs. *ajaw*, *b'a(ah)al* vs. *al*, *b'a(ah)ch'ok* vs. *ch'ok*; there are at least 16 different *b'a(ah)* titles, cf. Boot n.d.). In this case *b'a(ah)che'eb'* refers to the “head or top quill” or “head or top of he of the quill”; the underlying title may have been *ah che'eb'*, note as such as *ah uxul(?)* and *b'a(ah)uxul(?)* titles. Also note that in his left hand he holds a rectangular object. This object may be a rectangular box containing either his writing implements or, more probably, a book.

Sak(?)naj B'a(ah)che'eb' was not the only scribe taken prisoner in a war. Recent research by Kevin Johnston suggests that the Bonampak murals may depict several scribes taken captive whose fingers had been broken and cut and who possibly may even have been executed (cf. Mayell 2001):



Computer generated image of part of Bonampak Mural (Room 2)
 (Antiquity Publications & Kevin Johnston, illustrated in Mayell 2001)

The actual fate of Sak(?)naj B'a(ah)che'eb' is unknown, but as an important and high placed scribe he was taken captive in either AD 792 or AD 794 and shown on Piedras Negras Stela 12. There is an ironic twist to his story, as his captor Ruler 7 of Piedras Negras was himself taken captive by the last ruler of Yaxchilan in AD 808 (Martin and Grube 2000: 153).

At the end of this essay the tentative transliterations and provisional translations of the PSS texts on Kerr No. 7786 and 4669 are presented:

Kerr No. 7786

*alay (?)y utz'ihb' [u?]najal upokolche'eb' ahk[u'ul] nichte' ya[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un
 k'ahk'o'hl k'uh[ul] yootz ajaw*

“Here (?) the writing (the) *najal*, it is the quill-washing bowl of Ahk[u'ul] Nichte', he is the *a[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un* of K'ahk'o'hl, God-like Lord of Yootz”

Kerr No. 4669

*alay (?)y utz'ihb' [u?]naj ujawa[n]te' ahk[u'ul] nichte' ya[j]k'uh[ul]hu'un
 chaktzu[h]laj chantopat k'ahk'o'hl k'ihnich k'uh[ul] yootz ajaw*

“Here (?) the writing (the) *naj*, it is the wide (tripod) plate of Ahk[u’ul] Nichte’, he is the *a[j]k’uh[ul]hu’un* of Chaktzu[h]laj Chantopat K’ahk’o’hl, the Hot One, God-like Lord of Yootz”

Both texts indicate that the small bowl and the wide tripod plate were the personal items of Ahk[u’ul] Nichte’, who functioned as *a[j]k’uh[ul]hu’un* at the court of Chaktzu[h]laj Chantopat K’ahk’o’hl, god-like or divine ruler of the polity of Yootz. The importance of this *a[j]k’uh[ul]hu’un* at the Yootz court is stressed by the fact that he could “own” these beautiful painted luxury items, which were illegally removed from his probable final resting place. Unfortunately, the personal name of the master scribe who painted these hieroglyphic texts remains unknown.

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