

A New Plate Naming a K'uhul Mutu'l Ajaw

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Introduction

In this short note we describe a new plate that, among other interesting features, names an unknown Mutu'l lord as its owner (Figure 1). The plate, currently in a private collection, is thirty-four centimeters in diameter and footed, does not show any signs of overpainting and is Late Classic (A.D. 600-900) in style. The main scene depicts a lord and a bird of some sort seated on a bench and engaged in conversation. The inner rim of the plate carries an inscription with a fairly standard Primary Standard Sequence (PSS).

Drawings of the plate and its PSS are presented in figures 2 and 3, respectively. The drawings were done by the first author based on personal inspection of the piece and from photos and notes taken on that occasion.

Analysis of the PSS

Although the structure of the PSS is rather standard, the text contains some noteworthy features. The PSS may be transcribed, transliterated and translated as follows:

(1)	'a-LAY?	<i>'alay</i>	"this one"
(2)	GOD.N[yi]	<i>?</i>	<i>?</i>
(3)	yu-k'i-b'i	<i>y-uk'ib'</i>	"his drinking vessel"
(4)	ta-IXIM	<i>ta ixim</i>	"for maize (flavored)"
(5)	TE'-le/li	<i>te'el</i>	"from the tree"
(6)	ka?-wa	<i>kakaw</i>	"cacao"
(7)	'o-SAAK-he?-wa	<i>'o saak he'w?</i>	"? shining ?"
(8)	[CHAN?-na?][K'AWIIL	<i>chan? K'awiil</i>	"sky? k'awiil"
(9)	K'UH-MUT-'AJAW	<i>k'uhul mutu'l 'ajaw</i>	"divine mutu'l lord"
(10)	'u-hi?-b'a	<i>'u b'aah</i>	"(it is) the image of"
(11)	'IK'-a	<i>'ik'a'</i>	"windy place"
(12)	'AK'AB'-ti-la-tsi	<i>'ak'ab' ti laats</i>	"darkness to ?"

(1) The introductory glyph, usually represented in its head variant form with the head of the GI deity (one of the patron gods of Palenque), is here represented with the head of another deity. This same deity seems to be represented further ahead in the text at position (12), but with a distinct value. Indeed, the heads of

deities in the PSS at (1), (8) and (12) have several similarities, namely in the details of the mouth, eyes and head decoration. Interestingly, positions (1) and (12) are contiguous in the PSS.

The value **LAY** was recently (and independently) proposed for the main sign of this collocation by Barbara MacLeod and Yuriy Polyukhovych. According to this proposal the collocation works as a demonstrative pronoun meaning "this, this one". Support for this proposal was recently put forward by Erik Boot (2003) who found an example of a phonetically transparent spelling of the collocation.

(2) The reading of the **GOD.N** glyph is still an open problem. Here, seemingly, it has an infixed **yi** syllable, likely indicating a mediopassive construction (Houston, Stuart & Robertson 2000).

(3) This is the very common collocation that indicates the possession of the vessel and its type. It is composed of the third person ergative pronoun **y-**, followed by a verbal root *uk'* ("to drink") and the instrumental suffix **-ib'** that transforms the root into a name of an instrument used to perform that action. It is interesting to note that *yuk'ib'* ("his drinking vessel") is used although the piece is actually a plate. A collocation *'u jawante'* ("his footed plate") would be expected instead.

(4-6) The following collocations are also quite common and inform the reader of the contents of the vessel. Here we have the preposition **ta-** followed by a sign that likely reads **IXIM** ("maize") from the occasional **i-** and **-ma** phonetic complements it takes (Marc Zender, personal communication 2003).

The drink itself is described as *te'el kakaw*, or "tree-cacao", possibly referring to the fresh fruit. The word *kakaw* is written in a most unusual way, with a single unidentified glyph, perhaps a variant of a **ka** syllable or perhaps a logograph for **KAKAW** itself, followed by a **-wa** suffix. It is also possible that, as in the case of the Introductory Glyph, the scribe used some artistic license when representing glyphs whose meaning would be easily reconstructed from context and phonetic complementation.

In the collocation *te'el*, the middle **'e** syllable is underspelled, as is normal in PSS texts. The **-le** or

perhaps **-li** syllable at (5) is rather unusual. At (10) a rather similar glyph is written possibly standing for a **hi** syllable in that context.

(7-9) This is the name of the owner of the plate followed by a Divine Mutu'l Lord title. The name of this lord is possibly *'o saak he'w chan? k'awiil*. The meaning of the initial **'o** is unclear but it also appears in the names of other lords and deities, e.g., the Yaxchilan patron god *aj k'ahk' 'o chaahk*.

The presumed **he-** syllable at (7) is rather unusual, especially because of the dotted lines and the very short inner curl. A similar example with dotted lines may be found in the PSS of K1256, in the context of a **che-he-na** (*chehe'n*, "so it says") quotative collocation. Some of the characteristics of the glyph are also consistent with the syllable **k'a-**, namely, the dark mark near the top-right corner that looks quite similar to the "finger nail" and the absence of a clear curl. Another possibility is that it is a conflation of two symbols or perhaps another glyph altogether. Our assumption that it is a **he-** syllable is based essentially on the unusual calligraphic style of this scribe and the occurrence of similar collocations **he-wa** in the script, namely in the context of Distance Numbers, where apparently it has the semantic value of "a time lapse of one day". In the context of Distance Numbers, this collocation substitutes freely with the head of a deer or a dog with crossed bones or jaw bones for eyes.

The **K'AWIIL** head at (8) may be conflated with a **CHAN** glyph. A hint that this may be the case is the apparent **-na** suffix represented as an unusual mirror-like sign in the back of the deity's head (Marc Zender, personal communication 2003). While this is impossible to establish without other references to this character, it would make his name structurally similar to many royal names from Mutu'l.

(10-12) The collocation at (10) is problematic since the upper glyph is not readily recognizable. It has some similarities to the **-le** syllable at position (5). However, searching for a meaningful root *leb'* or perhaps *leb'* was unproductive.

On the other hand, the collocation matches the structure also found in other Primary Standard

Sequences where we have 'u b'aah [deity-name] ti [verb-root]. In K2777 for example, we have the phrase 'ix saak wayis k'uhul chatan winik 'u b'aah ? ti ts'ihb' and in K2358, 'u b'aah ? ? 'u chaahkil 'ik' ? ti pits. We could perhaps reconstruct (10) as 'u-hi-b'a. In doing so we assume that either the scribe made a mistake or that this is just another instance of his very unusual calligraphic style. Both assumptions are of course debatable.

The following glyphs at (11) and part of (12) give us the name of the deity. They read, 'ik'a' 'ak'ab' or translating freely, "windy place darkness". Several points must be made here. First, the exact value and semantics of the suffix to 'IK' is an open issue. In some contexts it seems to work as a suffix for place names and hence our translation as "windy place". The 'ak'ab' head variant can be readily identified from a few examples, namely one from Tonina, where it appears in a "flaming ak'ab'" collocation (Zender 1999:115, 204, fig. 40, Martin 2000).

Finally, we have *ti laats*, based on the assumption that the top glyph is a **la-** syllable, which seems reasonable given the observable contours. If the collocation (10-12) is indeed an instance of such a formula, then *laats* should be a verbal root. It is noteworthy that the collocation 'a-la-tsi or sometimes **AJ-la-tsi** appears in the PSS of a number of vessels and seems to function as a title of the vessel owner (e.g., K771 'a-la-tsi, K1377 'a-la-tsi, K1547 **AJ-la-tsi**, K4572 'a-la-tsi). One may perhaps establish a parallel between *aj laats* and titles like *aj ts'ihb'* or *aj b'ik'*.

Final Remarks

Besides the idiosyncrasies of the text of the PSS discussed above, the reference to a Divine Mutu'l Lord is by far the most important information provided. Who was this Mutu'l lord after all? As far as we know there is no reference to this character in the inscriptions of Tikal. It is a fact that the names of rulers, and in general of elite individuals, can be quite long and include many titles. So it is possible that we are just seeing a small part of the name phrase of some ruler of Mutu'l. Given the style of the painting and writing it could be from the Terminal Classic, a period when almost nothing is known about the Mutu'l dynasty.

Another possibility is that this plate names a ruler of some lesser polity that by the Terminal Classic claimed to be the rightful heir of the Mutu'l dynasty. Such an appropriation of the Mutu'l emblem glyph can be observed in the inscriptions of several of Mutu'l's satellite polities (e.g., Ixlu).

The lack of a *kalo'mte'* title in the name phrase of this lord may imply that this was not a Mutu'l ruler but simply a high ranking lord. There are other examples of inscriptions that refer to individuals who carried the Divine Mutu'l Lord title but most likely were not Mutu'l rulers. On the other hand, at least one prominent Mutu'l ruler, K'inich Waaw (Animal Skull), never carries the *kalo'mte'* title in ceramic texts.

Given the fact that the texts in ceramics are often quite contracted, it is admissible, though perhaps unlikely, that the scribe chose to write the three final collocations (10-12) and skip the *kalo'mte'* title.

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Figure 1.



Figure 2. Drawing by Raphael Tunesi.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

(7)

(8)

(9)



(10)

(11)

(12)

Figure 3.