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## K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich': A New Snake King from the Early Classic Period

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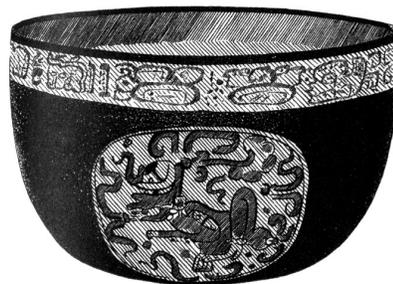
What we know of Classic Maya dynasties are, with few exceptions, patchwork assemblies. Without the relatively complete lists we have for Copan or Palenque, sequences of rulers can only be gleaned from scattered clues—fragments of information with which we try to identify individuals and close temporal gaps. Such is the case with the dynasty of the *kaanul* “Snake” kings whose major seats of power were located at Dzibanche and Calakmul. Here we will set out the evidence for a previously unknown *Kaanul* king from the Early Classic Period, one whose obscurity today in no way reflects his significance in the past.

We begin with a ceramic vessel excavated from Burial 23 at Uaxactun in the

1930s, a small bowl with a series of figural roundels on a black background, its rim bearing a text painted in an orange slip (Smith 1955:Fig. 7f, 80d) (Figure 1a–b). Attributable to the Tepeu 1 polychrome ceramic phase, it is notably similar to a vessel now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art designated as K6813 in the Kerr Archive ([www.mayavase.com](http://www.mayavase.com)) (Figure 1c). This was produced for the Naranjo king Aj Numsaaj(?) Chan K'inich (reigned 546–615+), and, given the parameters imposed by the Three-K'atun Ajaw title ascribed to him in its text, it was made between 573 and 595. We can therefore presume that the owner of the Uaxactun bowl lived in the late sixth or early seventh century. Aj Numsaaj(?) Chan K'inich



a



b



c

**Figure 1.** (a–b) Tepeu 1 bowl from Uaxactun Burial A23: renderings in Smith 1955:Fig. 7f, 80d; (c) K6813 (photograph by Simon Martin).

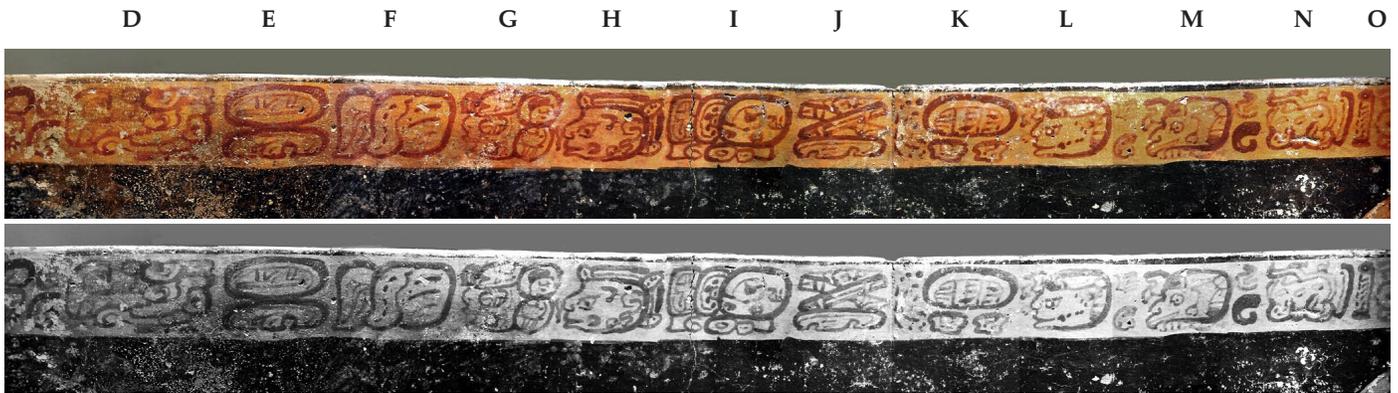


Figure 2. Rim text of Tepeu 1 bowl from Uaxactun Burial A23 (composite of photographs from the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project, courtesy of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, Guatemala).

was a client of the Kaanul kings throughout his long reign (see below) and so we can expect that the lord the Uaxactun vessel was made for fell into their political ambit in some way. This is the period when the Kaanul kingdom was beginning to challenge for primacy in the central lowlands, largely at Tikal's expense.

After a brief introduction, the rim text features an extended nominal sequence that ends with an emblem glyph closely matching a variant used by Tikal, which is normally read *k'uhul mutul ajaw* (Figure 2, glyphs K and L).<sup>1</sup> Although this name shows some similarities to those of other Tikal kings of this era, it remains unique.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the text next gives **ya-AJAW**, *yajaw* (at M), which introduces the name of an overlord (Martin 2005a:4 n. 8). His identity is of immediate interest since whoever held this position must have been a very important player in the political dynamics of the period. The published sketch of the bowl is not entirely accurate, and it took time before a compelling reading of the name (at N) emerged. Indeed, it was only after photographs taken as part of the Atlas Epigráfico de Petén project in 2015 that it was confirmed as **K'AHK'** "fire" followed by the "blood" sign **CH'ICH'/K'IK'** within the enclosing glyph for **TI'** "mouth" (a final arc

at right is part of the **TI'** sign) (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup>

Another, equally important, instance of this name comes from El Peru, where project epigrapher Stanley Guenter recently reported the discovery of Stela 44 (personal communication 2013; Pérez et al. 2014). Dedicated to the Period Ending 9.6.10.0.0 in 564, its text names the local king Chak Tok Ich'aak and his son and successor Wa'oom Uch'ab Ahk(?). The regnal moniker Chak Tok Ich'aak is only otherwise seen at Tikal, where it is carried by at least two rulers (Martin and Grube 2000:28, 37). Given the proximity of El Peru to Tikal, and the known practice of vassals employing the names of contemporary or recently deceased overlords, this is very likely a sign that El Peru was subordinate to Tikal in the first part of the sixth century (Freidel



Figure 3. Tepeu 1 bowl from Uaxactun Burial A23: close-up of **K'AHK'-TI'[CH'ICH'/K'IK']** (photo: Atlas Epigráfico de Petén Project, courtesy of the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, Guatemala).

<sup>1</sup> This alternate form of the Tikal main sign **MUT** is seen in a rather later version on Tikal Stela 5 at D12, and again in portrait form at D6 (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982:Fig. 8). It recurs within the title **MUT-la a-AJAW** on an unpublished vessel photographed by Nicholas Hellmuth, where it is directly preceded by a compound spelled 6-PET-MUT-la featuring a conventional **MUT** main sign of T569. The selection of different logograms there suggests a desire to avoid repetition in adjoining glyphs.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Zender (personal communication 2017) points out that position G reads **WI'-OHL-K'INICH**, making this king a partial namesake of the near-contemporary Ruler 8 of Copan.

<sup>3</sup> David Stuart has proposed that T628 is the sign for "blood," though we currently lack the phonetic data that would reveal its Classic Mayan reading. Kaufman and Norman (1984:119) reconstruct the word as *\*kik'* for Proto-Mayan and *\*ch'ich'* for Proto-Ch'olan. Tzeltalan (*\*ch'ich'*) and Yukatekan (*\*k'ik'*) cognates indicate that the assimilation of *\*k* to *\*k'* is peculiar to the Lowland Maya linguistic area. The timing of the shift from *k/k'* to *ch/ch'* has lately been reassessed using the hieroglyphic corpus, the evidence suggesting that the change was incremental and diffused, rather than inherited in systemic fashion (Law et al. 2014). If the Kaanul dynasty had a northern, Yucatek-speaking context then it might even have avoided the development, despite the dominant Ch'olan orientation of the script. Thus, we do not rule out **K'IK'** as the reading of the "blood" sign in this king's name and await further evidence that might settle the matter.

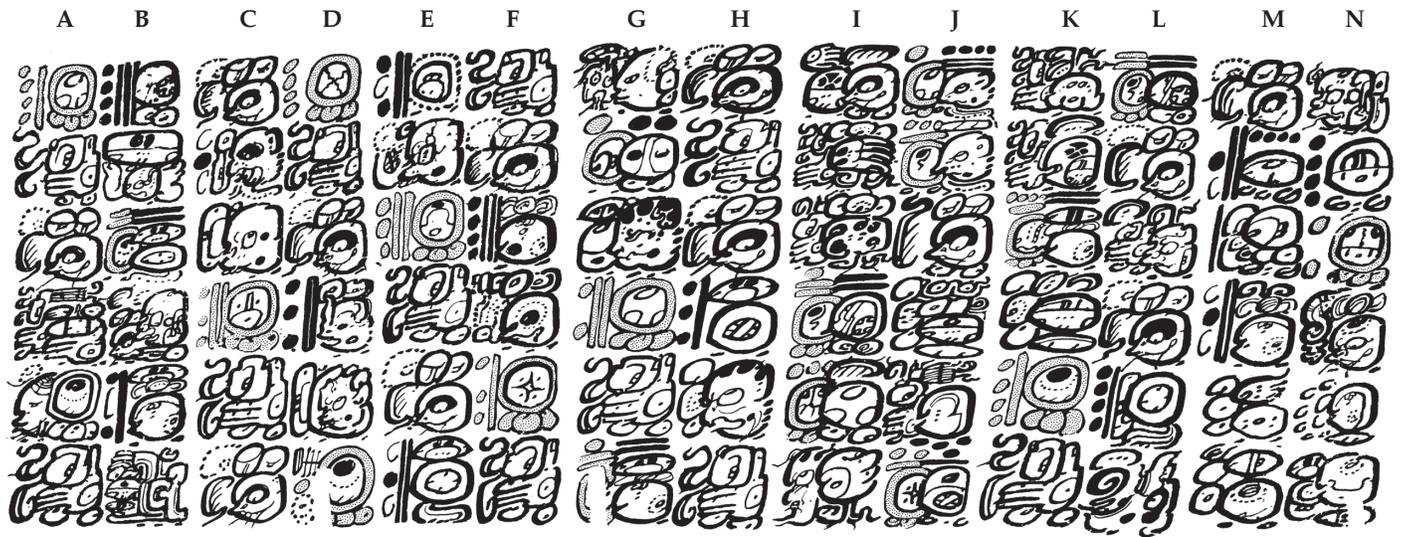


Figure 5. Codex-style Dynastic Vase K6751 lists a series of early Kaanul kings. K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich', the 16th in the sequence, is named at K1b. He is said to have "grasped K'awiil" (K1a) on 7 Lamat 6 Wo (J6). Rendering by Simon Martin after a rollout photograph by Justin Kerr.

2015:25-26). This would be consistent with the kind of hegemonic dominion Tikal is believed to have exercised in the Early Classic, especially after it became the core of the Teotihuacan-orchestrated New Order after 378. The presumed mother of Wa'oom Uch'ab Ahk(?) bears the titles *sak wayis* and *k'uhul chatahn winik*, which distinctively originate in the northern Peten, the region generally thought of as the "Preclassic heartland." Conceivably, this reflects a shift in Chak Tok Ich'aak's allegiance from Tikal to the Snake dynasty that later becomes closely associated with those titles (Guenter, personal communication 2013; Freidel 2015:2, 26). If so, it would join a scenario of mounting strategic losses for Tikal, coming at much the same moment that Caracol fell from its control (Martin and Grube 2000:39). We believe that another part of the text on El Peru Stela 44 is an important piece of evidence for this process.

The accession of Wa'oom Uch'ab Ahk(?) in 556 is followed by another *yajaw* statement, demonstrating that El Peru was indeed subject to a foreign power. The name of this overlord is somewhat eroded but, as Guenter notes, the outlines of K'AHK'-TI'-CH'ICH'/K'IK' (using the abstract form of the TI' logogram) are

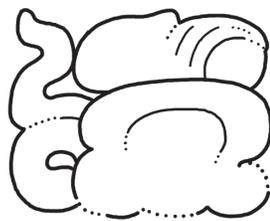


Figure 4. The K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' name on El Peru Stela 44, pE8 (photograph by Stanley Guenter, drawing by Simon Martin).

nonetheless clear (Figure 4). An emblem glyph once followed, but sadly it is now almost completely illegible and cannot help to identify him at present. The recurrence of overlord status and the general chronological fit together suggest that this is the same person as the one cited on the bowl.

K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' is not a common name. On Tikal Stela 40 (C17) it appears as a secondary appellative carried by the Tikal king K'an Kitam (reigned 458-486?) while he was still a princeling (Valdés et al. 1997:41). It turns up again on the codex-style vessel K6751, one of the so-called "Dynastic Vases" listing early Kaanul kings, where it identifies the 16th in line (Kerr and Kerr 1997:846; Martin 1997:861) (Figures 5 and 6). A connection to this kingdom seems distinctly possible, given that (a) the K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' named on the Naranjo-style bowl at Uaxactun was foreign to Tikal, (b) his name was one used by the Kaanul dynasty in primary royal position, and (c) this second overlordship would coincide with the sixth-century expansion of the Kaanul hegemony, when a number of important kingdoms fell under its influence or control.

The 556 accession date from Stela 44 offers our first fixed point for K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich's reign, since most hierarchical relationships were initiated at inauguration events. In theory, the tie could have begun anytime up to the 564 period ending recorded on the stela, but the aforementioned origin of the El Peru ruler's mother, and her potential links to the Kaanul dynasty, suggest that 556 is a viable starting point. It follows that the *k'uhul*



Figure 6. Ruler 16 from Codex-style Dynastic Vase K6751, K1b (drawing by Simon Martin).

*mutul ajaw* named on the Uaxactun vessel should have been active in this same general timeframe.

The major figure at Tikal at this point was Wak Chan K'awiil, the 21st king of the line whose tenure seems to have begun in 537 and may have lasted until 562 or later (Martin 2003:23-24). His is certainly not the name spelled out on the bowl, so we are obliged to explain its owner's kingly title in some other way. We currently lack the name of Wak Chan K'awiil's predecessor, the 20th Tikal king, and he might be considered a candidate, if a rather weak one.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, Wak Chan K'awiil could have had a rival for his throne, with one or more "anti-kings" who claimed a legitimacy of their own. We have come to realize that Classic Maya kingdoms were not inherently stable and on more than one occasion splintered into competing factions. We already know that Tikal's sixth century saw a degree of dynastic turbulence, with the elevation of a six-year-old queen in 511 and irregularities in the rise of Wak Chan K'awiil (Martin 2003:18-24, 2005a:6-8). We also have the precedent of the Dos Pilas dynasty, which arose in the seventh century as an offshoot and antagonist to the in situ Tikal line (Houston 1993:99-102; Guenter 2003; Martin and Grube 2008:56-57). Evidently caused by a fraternal dispute, both groups used the full *mutul* title and the division between them became a permanent one. Notably, Dos Pilas did not stand alone in its claims, but was supported by and subject to the Kaanul dynasty, by then based at Calakmul. Conceivably, K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' acted in a similar manner as the overlord and protector to a Tikal faction almost a century earlier.<sup>5</sup> A third possibility is that our mystery Tikal king ruled after Wak Chan K'awiil, which would seem more in keeping with the date of the bowl. This would place him after the decisive military defeat Tikal suffered in 562 (Houston 1991:40) and therefore would make good political sense as well. The only difficulty here is that we already have a 22nd Tikal king, Animal Skull, so if that were the case the ruler on the vase was not one counted in Tikal's dynastic list.<sup>6</sup>

Thus far we have demonstrated no more than circumstantial links between K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' and the Kaanul line, but another inscription offers a tangible connection. It comes from a small bone discovered by Ramón Carrasco, director of the Proyecto Arqueológico Calakmul, in Tomb 6 within Calakmul Structure II (Carrasco Vargas 1999:31). The tiny eleven-glyph inscription begins by naming a woman as the owner of the bone which, like others of its kind, was probably used as a weaving pick. She is then said to be the child of a lord whose name likely fills all the remaining positions in the text. This commences at A6 with a cursive version of the K'AHK'-TI'-CH'ICH'/K'IK' name that is much like the one we saw on the bowl (Figure 7). Further down the text at A9 we can further recognize a *kaloonte'* title, preceded at A8 by what is very likely to be *elk'in* "east."<sup>7</sup>

Most interesting for our purposes is the collocation



Figure 7. Detail of an inscribed bone weaving pick from Tomb 6, Calakmul Structure II (photograph by Rogelio Valencia, drawing by Simon Martin, Proyecto Arqueológico Calakmul).

directly following that of K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich', AJ-?SAAK at A7.<sup>8</sup> This is a close match to the name of a Kaanul king who appears on Naranjo Stela 47, recently uncovered by Vilma Fialko and her team, rendered there as AJ-?SAAK-li (Martin et al. 2016:617) (Figure 8). This unusual

<sup>4</sup> The missing 20th king ruled at some point after 527 (assuming that the Lady of Tikal was a ruler without a numbered place in the sequence, as was the case with another ruling queen at Palenque). He can be a contender for the Uaxactun bowl lord only if Wak Chan K'awiil did not come to power as early as 537.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Guenter (personal communication 2016) suggests that the occupant of Burial 23 at Uaxactun should be the original owner of the Naranjo-style vessel. If so, he believes that Uaxactun might have been the temporary seat of this potential Tikal "anti-king." The Uaxactun vessel is by no means alone in providing the name of an unknown "holy lord" of Tikal; there are several others in this general timeframe.

<sup>6</sup> One might wonder if a king strongly beholden to Tikal's conquerors could have been excised from the list. There is some doubt that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' lived beyond 561 (see note 10), but his vassal could have been a former protégé, installed at Tikal after 562. The bonds between vassals and overlords were highly personal ones and known to extend beyond an overlord's death.

<sup>7</sup> Kaanul kings at Calakmul use the "west" *kaloonte'* title, and the contrasting designation "east" would be appropriate if K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' ruled at the easterly center of Dzibanche (see also Martin 2014:350 n. 17; Carter 2015:11). Another bearer of this "east" *kaloonte'* title from the Kaanul dynasty was Ix Uh Chan, a princess who married into the Yaxchilan dynasty, and she too might have been a native of Dzibanche rather than Calakmul. The last two positions on the bone, A10 and A11, resemble parts of the Kaanul emblem, but not closely enough to advance the idea with any conviction.

<sup>8</sup> The plain "ajaw-face" T533 has been a debating point among epigraphers for a considerable time. Here we use David Stuart's proposal of SAAK "seed" (personal communication 2006).

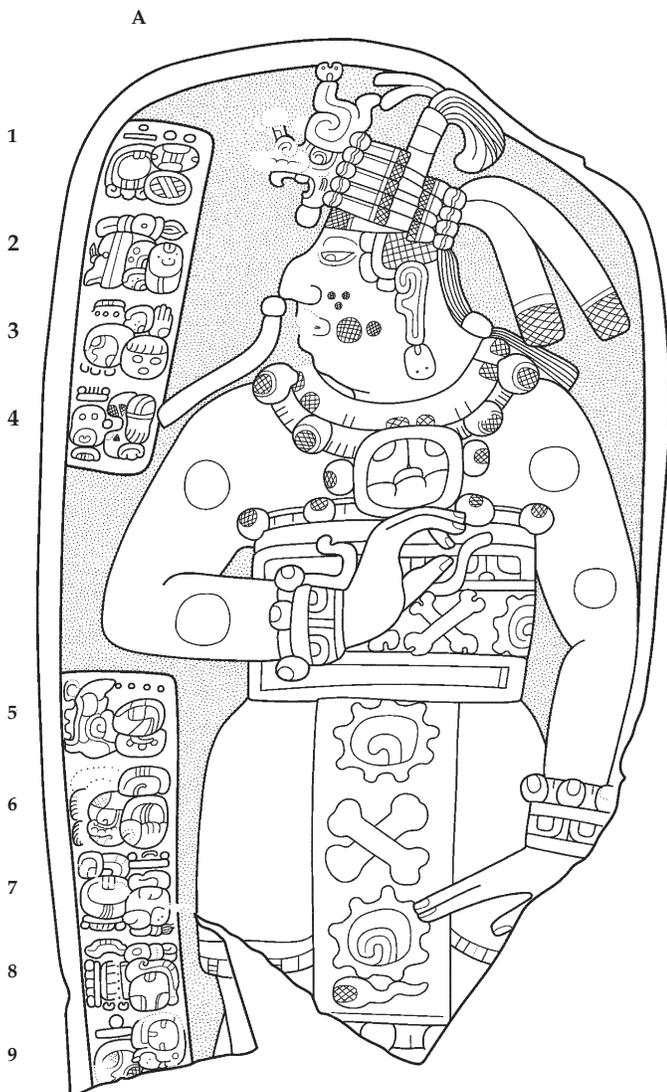


Figure 8. Naranjo Stela 47, front face (drawing: Alexandre Tokovinine).

inscription mentions three other Kaanul kings and states that they are **4-TZ'AK-bu K'UH-ka-[KAAN]AJAW** *chan tz'akbu(ul) k'uhul kaanul ajaw* "(the) four Snake kings in order," referring to the four successive overlords of the aforementioned Aj Numsaaj? Chan K'inich (Figure 9). The bone inscription gives us every reason to believe that Aj Saakil and K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' are one-in-the-same person. Moreover, returning momentarily to the bowl, it seems hardly coincidental that the lone sign at the very end of the text after the K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' name is **AJ**—which would not be an arbitrary filler in this case but a truncated reference to Aj Saakil (see Figure 2, glyph O). There are precedents on other painted vessels for this kind of stunted spelling.<sup>9</sup> Aj Saakil occupies the second position in the Stela 47 list, interposed between the well-known kings Tuun K'ab Hix and Sky Witness. Our c. 556 mark fits into this scheme very well, since the last date

we have for Tuun K'ab Hix falls in 546 and the first for Sky Witness is in 561.<sup>10</sup>

Preceding from our current assumption that all the Early Classic kings of Kaanul were based at Dzibanche, then this chronological range leads us to consider one of only two firmly dated monuments at that site, Lintel 3 from Building VI (Figure 10).<sup>11</sup> Carved into three wooden beams, the text on Lintel 3 is the conclusion of a continuous narrative whose first two installments are heavily damaged or destroyed. Featuring the period ending 9.6.0.0 from 554, it refers to the elevation of a king (one who goes unnamed on Lintel 3) into the high status of *kaloomte'*.<sup>12</sup> This title describes only the most powerful of Maya rulers and its appearance within an accession phrase is one of just two examples outside Tikal—where it only appears in its late period and reflects its return to political ascendancy. Working out the chronology of the lintel text is complicated by damage and some unusual phrasing, but the best reconstruction in our view

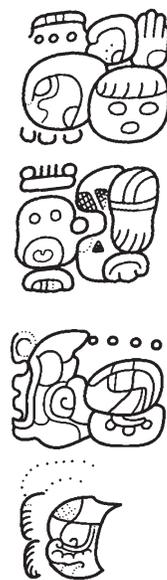


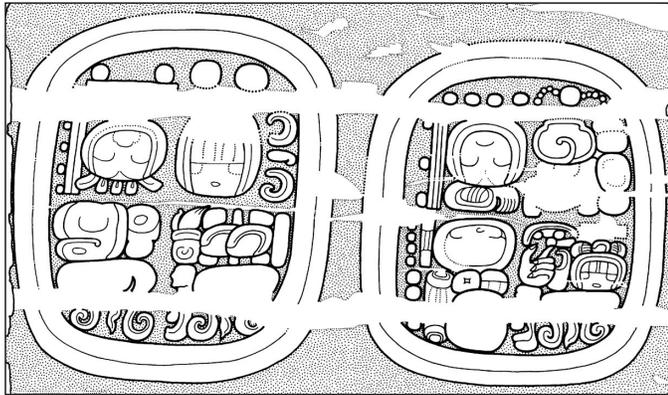
Figure 9. Detail of glyphs A3–A6 of Naranjo Stela 47 (drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine).

<sup>9</sup> Maya scribes sought to fill all the available space on vessel rims, closing any final gap with narrow signs and motifs that have no real significance. However, some instances clearly suggest the truncation of prototypical texts. On K1355, for example, the filler is **yu** exactly where we would expect **yu-k'i-bi yuk'ib** "his drinking cup" to follow. The breaking of text to fill the available space is well-attested on "Dynastic Vases," most of which end mid-passage (see Martin 1997:848-849).

<sup>10</sup> One intriguing possibility is that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' is named as the "star war" victor against Tikal in 562, a conflict described on Caracol Altar 21 at Q4. Little of this nominal glyph survives, but a tendril at the upper left would be consistent with **K'AHK'** (Martin 2005:4 n. 8). However, if the date of 561 we have for Sky Witness at Los Alacranes (Grube 2008:195) is correct, that tendril may instead be the projected vision of the "eye" hieroglyph that begins that king's name (Martin 2005:3-5, Fig. 7).

<sup>11</sup> There can be no doubt that Dzibanche hosted a line of major Snake kings (Velásquez 2005, 2008) and that its Kaanul toponym makes it the origin of the dynasty (Martin and Velásquez 2016). Yet much remains to be learned about the history and organization of the Snake dynasty, especially in this early period, and we do not rule out greater complexity (see Martin 2005b:11).

<sup>12</sup> A small portion of Lintel 1 survives and appears to contain the verb *pat* "to form/make." Dmitri Beliaev and Alexandre Safronov have considered the possibility that Lintel 3 twice names the lintel's commissioning ruler as **a-?be-ya**, comparing it to a name seen on El Resbalon Hieroglyphic Stairway 1. However, more recently Sergei Vepretskii (personal communication 2015) has made a better case that they are both forms of the "focus marker" spelled **a-AL-ya**.



**Figure 10.** Dzibanche Lintel 3 (drawing by Alexandre Safronov, with minor amendments by Simon Martin).

is shown in Table 1.<sup>13</sup>

It will be noted that an accession date in 550 fits the reign of K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich', but much more importantly, the corresponding Calendar Round position of 7 Lamat 6 Wo is precisely the one associated with Ruler 16 in the Dynastic Vase sequence (see Figure 5, J6). There are many problems with linking that painted king list with what we know from monuments, but this connection is so strong it must be concluded that the vase text records a historical sequence from the Early Classic period, albeit one with alternative names for some kings and "errors" in several dates (Martin 1997:862-863).<sup>14</sup> This finding will be elaborated elsewhere (Martin n.d.), but for the present we can say that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' was the 16th king in the Kaanul dynasty and that a record of his inauguration as *kaloomte'* was inscribed in a major structure at Dzibanche.

In conclusion, we hope to have demonstrated that K'ahk' Ti' Ch'ich' Aj Saakil was one of the illustrious

<sup>13</sup> This revised scheme takes the shrinkage and edge-erosion of the beams into account, making it necessary to switch the *winal* in the first Distance Number from 7 to 12 to fit the available space.

<sup>14</sup> The only previous hint of an Early Classic setting was the Distance Number that concludes the king list on K6751 (see Figure 5, M2-M3). This figure of 5.4.4.11, or 104 years, would be ideal to link the era of Scroll Serpent (Ruler 19) to the period when codex-style vases were in production about a century later (Martin 1997:862-863, n.d.).

line of Kaanul kings who held sway over parts of the central lowlands during the Early Classic, an overlord who exercised influence at Naranjo and El Peru, and even over some portion of the Tikal line. This shines additional light on the formative period of the Kaanul hegemony, the years in which it first rose to challenge its great rival Tikal and set a course toward regional dominance.

### Acknowledgments

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(9.05.18.13.02) 02.12.14 -	(6 Ik' 10 K'ank'in)	552	Building dedication?
(9.05.16.00.08)	(7 Lamat 6 Wo)	550	Seating as <i>kaloomte'</i>
(9.05.18.13.02) 01.04.18 +	(6 Ik' 10 K'ank'in)	552	Building dedication?
9.06.00.00.00	9 Ajaw 3 Wayeb	554	Period Ending

**Table 1.** Date scheme of Dzibanche Lintel 3.

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