



A READING OF  
THE KOMKOM VASE  
DISCOVERED AT  
BAKING POT, BELIZE



Monograph 3

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THE KOMKOM VASE  
DISCOVERED AT  
BAKING POT, BELIZE

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## Introduction

On July 7, 2015, archaeologists of the Belize Valley Archaeological Reconnaissance (BVAR) project began uncovering a rich artifactual deposit at the site of Baking Pot in west-central Belize (Figure 1). On that day, the first sherds of a remarkable ceramic vase were found, decorated with a long and finely painted hieroglyphic text. Both the vase and the other ceramic remains of the deposit can be assigned typologically on the basis of form and decorative modes to the late facet of the Spanish Lookout ceramic complex (Gifford 1976:225-227) and therefore can be said to date to the Terminal Classic, the period (AD 800–950) associated with the Classic Maya “Collapse.” Based on some of the titles found on the vessel, we have named it the “Komkom Vase”<sup>1</sup> in reference to a locality of that name in the eastern central Lowlands that is cited in the texts of the nearby site of Naranjo in the Peten, as well as on portable objects found at Buenavista del Cayo in western Belize (see Houston et al. 1992:507-508; Yaeger et al. 2015:185-188; see also Helmke et al. 2017). As a status object produced in the Terminal Classic period, it is an exceptional piece of evidence of the tumultuous final decades of the centralized rule of “godly kings.” Its archaeological context testifies to the social upheavals and eventual abandonment of the royal courts and peripheral settlements. Here we will introduce the Komkom Vase, as well as describe its physical properties and the context and circumstances of its discovery, but we will devote most space to what might be termed a critical edition of the glyphic text that adorns it. We will conclude by comparing the text of the Komkom Vase to analogous ones from Naranjo, since these contain many important points of equivalence, while discussing the original manuscripts from which these texts were drawn and initiating an elementary textual criticism.

<sup>1</sup> We had initially entertained the idea of calling the specimen the “Kokom Vase,” reflecting what we believe was the historic pronunciation. However, given that the segment is written [ko]mo-[ko]mo, we have opted to follow the more transparent rendering as *komkom*, in keeping with the original spelling.



0 50 100km

**Figure 1.** Map of the Maya area showing the location of the archaeological site of Baking Pot and other sites mentioned in the text. For additional sites, see inset map (maps by Precolumbia Mesoweb Press).





**Figure 2.** Map of Baking Pot, showing the monumental epicenter, intrasite causeways, and intervening epicentral settlement (map by Christophe Helmke).



The BVAR project has been conducting extensive settlement surveys and excavations at the major center of Baking Pot since 1992 (e.g., Conlon 1993; Audet 2006; Hoggarth 2012; Helmke et al. 2015a) (Figure 2). In 2013, we initiated excavations within the monumental epicenter with the aim of recovering cultural features associated with the Terminal Classic, the final phase of the site's Classic-period occupation, to clarify the nature and timing of the political collapse and abandonment of Baking Pot (Hoggarth, Zweig, and Mzayek 2014; Hoggarth et al. 2016; Hoggarth and Sullivan 2015). Previous BVAR research had noted that such Terminal Classic deposits are not only rich in material culture but also contain human remains, some of which appear to represent purposeful interments. Excavations were thereby initiated as part of a research program under development, focused on building a high-precision Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS)  $^{14}\text{C}$  chronology to better understand the internal processes and timing of the disintegration of political systems as well as the depopulation and abandonment of regional political centers in the Belize Valley and broader Maya Lowlands (Kennett et al. 2012, 2015; Hoggarth, Zweig, and Mzayek 2014). By directly dating purified bone collagen from human remains recovered from the epicenter of Baking Pot over the past two decades and more (see Hoggarth, Culleton et al. 2014), we will be able to pinpoint the beginning and end of elite and royal activities and presence within the ceremonial center.


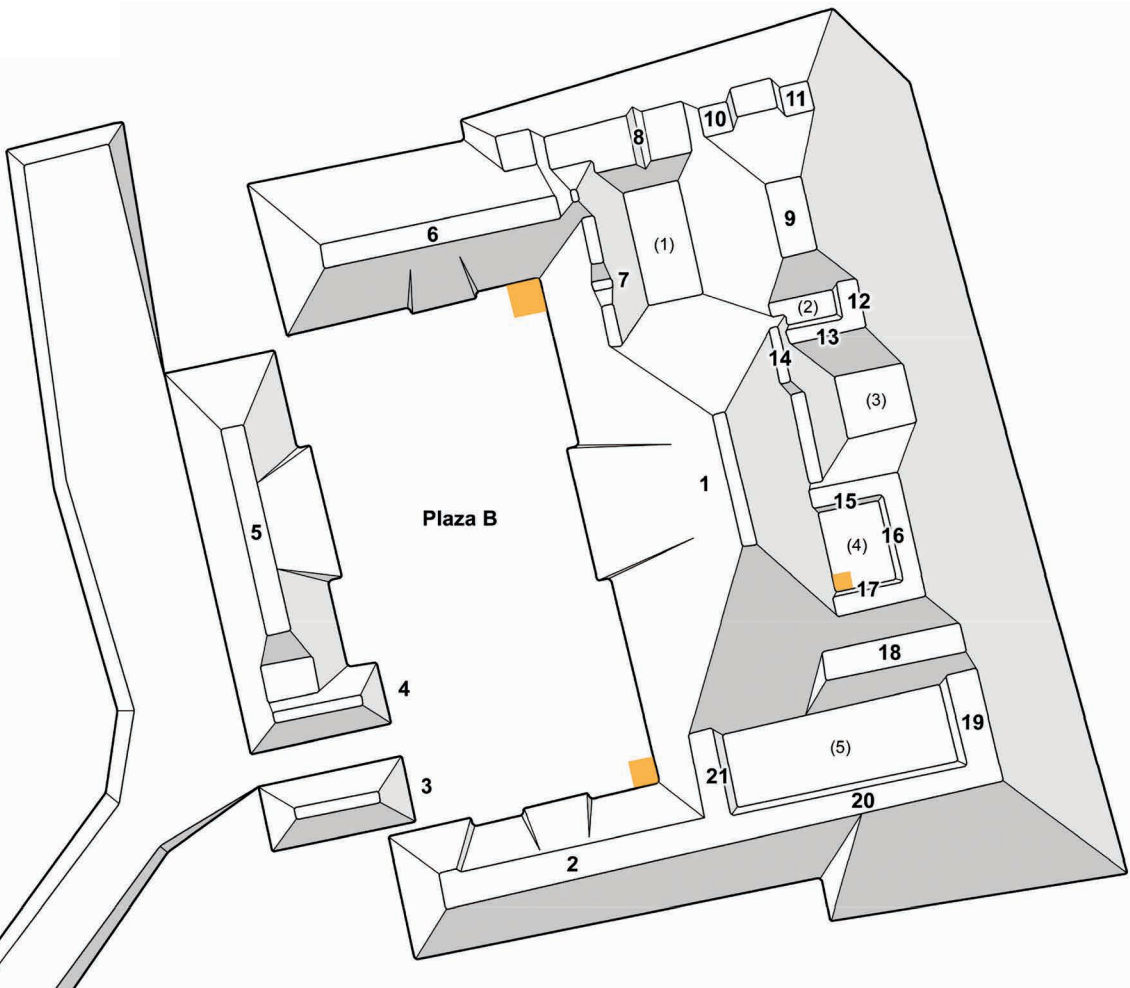
To elucidate the timing of the final activities that occurred in the monumental epicenter, research at Baking Pot was initiated to identify "terminal deposits" or what might be termed peri-abandonment deposits. These features consist of large quantities of broken ceramics (including a large number of serving vessels and polychromes) as well as faunal and human remains, in addition to a variety of other materials found above the terminal floors of plazas and courtyards. Terminal deposits may represent the final activities that occurred in these palatial settings, although the events responsible for the formation of these features remain debated. In the past, researchers have viewed the features as being associated with materials deposited or discarded as part of rituals or feasts (Garber et al. 1998; Clayton et al. 2005), the materials from final use of ceremonial public spaces (Guderjan 2005), de facto refuse associated with rapid abandonment (Chase and Chase 2004), domestic middens from post-abandonment squatters (Harrison 1999), and the remains of ritual activities from post-abandonment populations (Awe 2012; see also Stanton et al. 2008). As Awe (2012) and his colleagues (Awe et al. 2009) have noted, thin lenses (~2–5 cm) of matrix overlying the terminal plaza floors are present at times, often with materials from artefactual deposits found directly above such lenses. These data suggest that the ceremonial spaces were abandoned or fell into disuse for some time prior to the events that led to the formation of peri-abandonment deposits.

Based on the regional study of Awe and his colleagues (Awe et al. 2009; see also Awe 2012) focused on the spatial patterns associated with terminal deposits from sites across the Belize Valley, excavations were strategically placed in the plazas and courtyards at Baking Pot to identify deposits and to recover dateable materials therein. The artifact-rich deposits uncovered within the monumental

epicenter, especially in association with the courtyards and plaza of Group B (Figure 3), attest to a rich and prestigious court that traded far and wide and interacted with some of the most prominent city-states of the region. The inclusion of human remains may be contemporaneous with the formation of the deposits, or intrusive, thereby complicating the picture tremendously. Given that the stratigraphy of such deposits is often unclear and intrusive cuts are not always apparent, it will be important to ascertain whether the dates for each deposit are highly nucleated with few deviations, widely scattered over a larger period of time, or represent distinct depositional events. Presently these terminal deposits have been found throughout the monumental architecture of the B Group, the southern of the two epicentral groups at Baking Pot, particularly just above plastered surfaces and at the foot of the terminal-phase architecture, often lip-ping up and partially concealing the lowest courses of the architecture. During the last two years we have searched for these features in Courtyards 1 (Str. B7), 3 (Str. B14), and 4 (Str. B15 and B17) and Plaza B (in the corner of Strs. B2 and 21

**Figure 3.** Plan of Group B at Baking Pot, showing the locations where peri-abandonment deposits have been discovered. Note the deposit at the base of Structure B7, the *audiencia*, that extends over to the base of Structure B6, which contained the Komkom Vase. Courtyard designations are provided in parentheses (map by Christophe Helmke).

0 10 20 30m



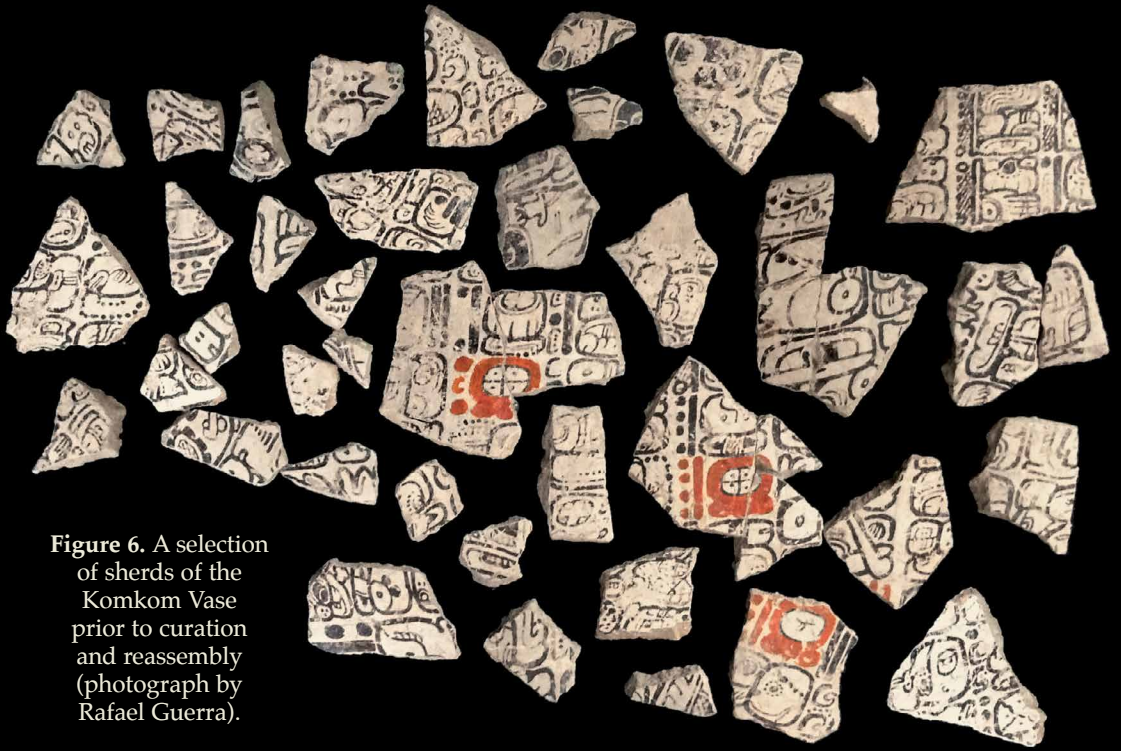
**Figure 4.** The southern portion of the peri-abandonment deposit exposed in 2016 within Excavation Unit 102 at the base of Structure B7 (looking southward); the artifactual remains were deposited along the lowest terrace and up against an axial outset, either the principal stair of Structure B7 or the northern stairside outset (photograph by Julie Hoggarth).

as well as Strs. B6 and B7) (Figure 3), resulting in the discovery of large deposits in the corners of the large plaza of Group B, especially in the northeastern and southeastern corners. These deposits are associated with Structures B6 and B7 to the north as well as B2 and B21 to the south (Hoggarth et al. 2016).

The deposit discovered in the southwestern corner of Courtyard 4 in 2013 measured over one meter in depth, testifying to the large volume and mass of materials that constitute these deposits (Hoggarth, Zweig, and Mzayek 2014). Continued research in 2015 identified two additional terminal deposits, located in the northwestern and southwestern corners of Plaza B (Hoggarth et al. 2016). All of these deposits have been identified in corners immediately adjacent to the royal palace complex and include large amounts of ceramics, including polychrome serving vessels featuring hieroglyphic texts (both viable and pseudoglyphic), as well as faunal remains, ground stone tools, and ceramic musical instruments, along with numerous special finds associated with elite craft specialization. The deposit that interests us here is that of Excavation Unit B7-100 (and its extensions) exposed in 2015 and Excavation Unit B7-102 that was excavated in 2016. These excavation units were placed in the northeastern corner of Plaza B, at the corner formed by Strs. B6 and B7. Structure B7 is a multi-room range structure with a central passageway, known as an *audiencia*,

which served as the primary and formal entrance into the royal palace of Group B (Helmke 2008:125-127; Hoggarth et al. 2016:246-255). The deposit covered approximately 11 m<sup>2</sup> and was amassed against the basal terraces, spanning the entire area between the axial stairs of Str. B6 and Str. B7, the *audiencia* (Figure 4). At its thickest, the deposit was 15 cm deep (in the NE corner), tapering down to 4 cm near its center (Hoggarth et al. 2016:250). The two elevated concentrations within the deposit, placed at the corners of the structures, suggest at least two distinct deposits, and thereby two discrete deposition events, either sequentially or gradually accreting through time. The temporality of these features will be evaluated when the complete radiocarbon dataset is available. The matrix level above the terminal plaza floor measured approximately 5 cm in depth along the west face of Str. B7, declining in thickness to around 2 cm in the center and western portions of the deposit. The feature consisted primarily of ceramic artifacts, including sherds of ceramic vessels (Figure 5), the fragmentary Komkom Vase (Figure 6), two small inkpots, and ocarina and flute fragments, as well as chert implements and flakes, obsidian blades, granite *metate* fragments, a fragmentary slate mace, a carved jadeite pendant (Figure 7), and faunal remains including animal bone and worked shell, such as a Caribbean conch pendant, mother of pearl *adornos* of freshwater mussels (*Nephronais* sp.), and three perforated dwarf olive shells (*Olivella* sp.) (Hoggarth et al. 2016:255-256). The quantity, diversity of materials, and their quality imply that these were part of the service wares and implements of the royal palace, the objects with which the quotidian, decorous, festive, and ritual activities of the court were carried out. Within the terminal deposit were also three human interments, two primary male individuals and one secondary burial (Hoggarth et al. 2016:250-252) (Figure 8). To some extent, human remains were also scattered throughout the deposit, including the cranium of a (likely) male individual (Roseanne Bongiovanni, personal communication 2016), much as faunal remains were also noted throughout the deposit.

The artefactual deposit in Excavation Unit B7-100 and B7-102 is entirely covered and sealed by a stratum of collapse debris several meters thick. As already remarked, a thin humic layer measuring 2–5 cm runs under the deposit, which suggests that the deposit accreted after a period of partial abandonment or structural decay and the cessation of maintenance works. The presence of the matrix lens in turn indicates that the deposit was formed with sufficient lapses of time to allow for the formation of organic matter and its decomposition. Both primary burials were located near the bottom of the deposit, with a small layer of ceramics and other materials directly below and above the interments. Thus it remains unclear whether the materials associated with these deposits are the product of two discrete events around the time of the site's abandonment, or even after complete abandonment. In the former scenario, many of the artifacts would represent the material culture of the royal court that has been cast aside, as part of a series of termination rituals and/or intentional discard. If the latter, the materials may have been accumulated by individuals rummaging through the abandoned palace, or alternatively they may represent materials that were gathered to conduct termination rituals prior to the demographic depopulation



**Figure 6.** A selection of sherds of the Komkom Vase prior to curation and reassembly (photograph by Rafael Guerra).



**Figure 7.** A carved jadeite pendant found within the peri-abandonment deposit in Excavation Unit B7-102 (photograph by Christophe Helmke).

**Figure 5.** Excavation of the peri-abandonment deposit in Excavation Unit 102 at the base of Structure B7 (photograph by Julie Hoggarth).



**Figure 8.** Burial 4-3, an inhumation in the northern extent of the deposit exposed in Excavation Unit 100, along the base of Str. B7, with feet at the corner with B6 and head to the south (photograph by Erin Ray).

of the site, or even shortly thereafter. Another alternative is that the deposits were formed through continued and recurrent, albeit intermittent, post-abandonment activities, including ritual observations in what was considered sacred landscape of the ancestors. With the aid of high-precision AMS radiocarbon dating, combined with microstratigraphic analyses, we aim to assess which of these models, or combination thereof, is more probable using depositional modeling and statistical agreement indices to elucidate the processes (discrete vs. gradual, pre- or post-abandonment, or a combination thereof) associated with these final activities.

Greatly contributing to this chronometric research program is the discovery of the elaborate Komkom Vase, which bears a clear calendrical date and a lengthy glyphic text. As the Long Count date may refer to its date of manufacture, this would provide us with a specific and finite *terminus post quem* for the formation of the deposit. As a unique and highly important prestige item, it is most likely that this vessel was part of the serving wares of the royal palace and was discarded as part of a peri-abandonment episode. This is especially true considering that the vase is not of local manufacture, but appears to originate from Komkom or one of the workshops associated with the Naranjo court. The presence of this vase at Baking Pot thereby represents a concrete material link between these royal courts and testifies to an alliance, or link of vassalage or matrimony, on a par with similar vases recovered at Buenavista del Cayo (Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 2000), Baking Pot (Reents-Budet et al. 2005; Helmke and Awe 2012:75-80), and other sites in the greater Belize Valley, such as Xunantunich to the west and Hershey to the east (e.g., McAnany et al. 2004:297, Fig. 3; Helmke and Awe 2012:61, 75, 78). The discovery of the Komkom Vase at Baking Pot,

therefore, speaks of greater patterns of allegiances between sites and suggests that Baking Pot played a significant part in the geopolitical processes behind the Terminal Classic “Collapse” in the eastern Maya Lowlands.

### Physical Characteristics

The Komkom Vase is a cylindrical ceramic vessel. As recovered, it now consists of 82 sherds, and preliminary curation reveals that the specimen has lightly in-sloping sides (Figure 9). The thickness of the vase varies and is relatively thick at the base (ranging between 6.0 mm near the middle of the base and 8.0 mm at the juncture between the base and the walls) and thins out towards the walls (averaging out at c. 5.0 mm) and especially at the rim (c. 4.5 mm). Preliminary

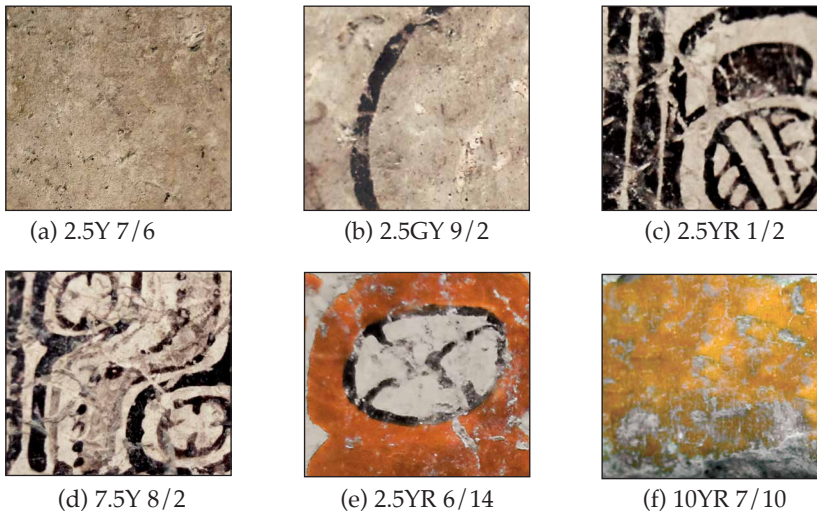


**Figure 9.** Cross-section and elevation of the Komkom Vase (section and graphic by Christophe Helmke).

curation and reconstruction of the vessel indicates that it now stands c. 20.3 cm in height. The rim has suffered chipping and was eventually trimmed in antiquity with a sharp object. As a result, the total original height of the vessel remains undetermined, but based on surviving features we estimate it at c. 21.7 cm. Using interior measurements, it has been possible to determine that the total volume approximates a little over 3 liters (c. 100 fl. oz.).

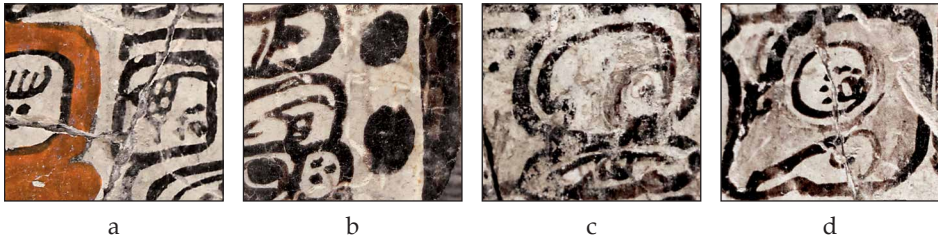
The exterior surface is very smooth and well burnished. The interior surface on the other hand is moderately rough and unslipped with many small voids and air bubbles. The juncture of the base with the walls was not well smoothed and shaping marks are readily apparent. The unslipped interior is an even yellowish-tan color (Munsell 2.5Y 7/6) (Figure 10a). In section, the paste is an equally homogenous yellowish-tan and fully oxidized throughout. The paste is very fine with small, well-sorted calcite inclusions, ranging from medium to coarse aggregate size.

The exterior cream slip is a coat that was secondarily added and exclusively to the exterior of the vase. The exterior slip is a fine grayish cream (2.5GY 9/2) background (Figure 10b) embellished with dark brown to black (2.5Y 2/4 to 2.5YR 1/2) painted glyphs (Figure 10c). Diluted grayish wash (7.5Y 8/2) was applied sparingly in certain areas to produce shading in certain glyphs (Figure 10d). An orange-red paint (2.5YR 6/14) was applied to the day signs (Figure 10e), but apparently only after the black pigment had dried since the red conceals the former, without clear traces of blending or bleeding. The bottom edge is embellished with a light orange band (10YR 7/10) (Figure 10f) and presumably the same would have decorated the rim. However, as we have mentioned above, the



**Figure 10.** The various colors and the painted surface finish of the Komkom Vase, each with associated Munsell color codes: (a) unslipped interior; (b) cream slipped exterior; (c) brown-black painted glyphs; (d) thin gray wash applied to produce shading (note the wash along the central sinuous band); (e) red slip applied to the day signs; (f) orange basal border (photographs by Christophe Helmke).





**Figure 11.** Details of the surface finish and execution: (a) faint gridline applied in highly diluted wash (between F3 and G3), and (b) a comparable graticule (between O12 and P9); use of the same gray wash as shading (c) including as the darkened section of the *ch'een* logogram (J4) as well as (d) on *witz* in a nominal segment (R3) (photographs by Christophe Helmke).

entirety of the rim has been chipped and spalled, and forcibly ground down in antiquity, thereby removing the upper half of the uppermost row of glyphs. This was presumably an attempt to remedy one or a series of chips, nicks, or spalls that affected the original rim. As much as 1.5 cm has been removed from the rim, but this fortunately does not generally pose too much of an inconvenience in reading the glyphs that remain, even those halved and affected by this remedial measure.

The execution of the glyphs is expert, and small vertical gridlines rendered in highly diluted wash are visible in parts (Figure 11a–b). The wash used to render the gridlines is the same as that used to shade portions of glyphs (Figure 11c–d), although these were clearly applied at different stages of production. At first sight the text is composed of a variety of glyph sizes that may provide a sense of disjunction and lack of cohesion. Nevertheless, the various sizes of the glyphs are relatively even and convey a sense of hierarchy, such that the initial date and the final segment that provides a parentage statement for the original owner are rendered in the largest glyphs, albeit at two distinct scales, whereas the long historical narrative between these larger fonts is rendered in fairly regular and smaller glyphs. This reveals how much planning was invested in producing the template of the text, the whole guided by these now faint and ephemeral gridlines.

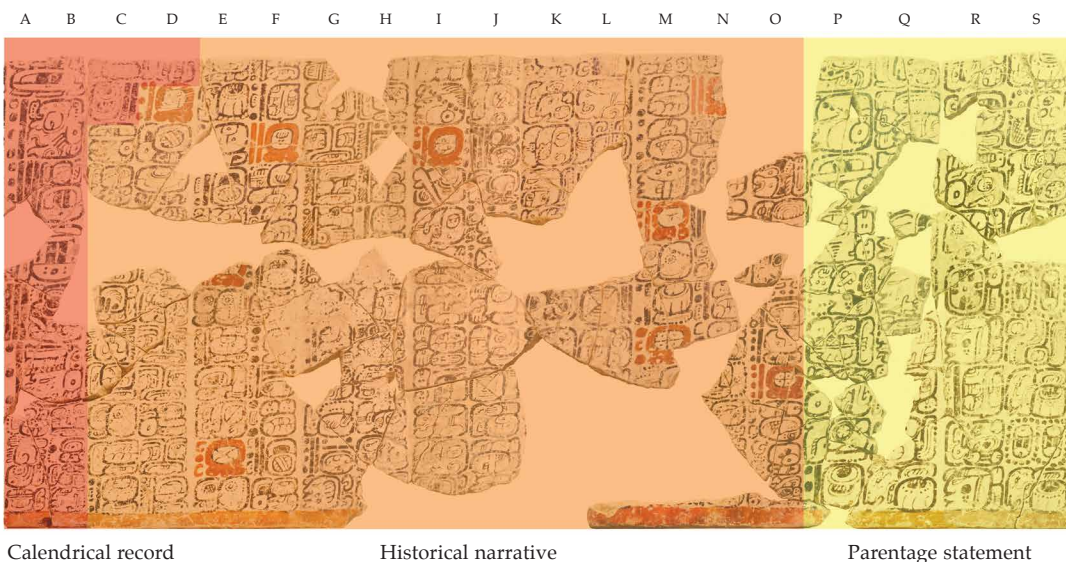
### Length of the Glyphic Text

Although only c. 62% of the vase has been recovered (computed on the basis of surface area), based on the regularity of the gridlines and the size of the glyph blocks we have been able to estimate the total number of glyph blocks that originally constituted the narrative on the vase. We have found that the text was divided into nine paired double-columns and one single column, these being divided into 9, 10, 11, or 12 rows, providing a stunning total of 202 glyph blocks (Figure 12 and [www.mesoweb.com/publications/PMP3/rollout.pdf](http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/PMP3/rollout.pdf)). This makes the narrative of the vase longer than the text of Caracol Stela 22. From its discovery in March 1990, until the discovery of the vase, it was Stela 22 that was the longest hieroglyphic text in Belize (Grube 1994:87). Consequently, the vase now holds the distinction of being the longest hieroglyphic text of Belize. A



Figure 12. Roll-out of the Komkom Vase (drawing by Christophe Helmke).





**Figure 13.** Roll-out of the Komkom Vase showing the various textual and thematic sections of the vase (graphic by Christophe Helmke).

comparison to some of the longest texts in the Maya area reveals that the vase is not only the longest Pre-Columbian text in Belize, but is also one of the longest Classic period texts of the Maya Lowlands as a whole (Table 1). For instance, the text of the Komkom Vase exceeds the longest texts known for the nearby major center of Naranjo. Its length is more on a par with the extent of hieroglyphic stairs or some of the longest monumental texts of Palenque and Tikal. Length should not be considered a measure of superlatives, but it does hold the potential of increased historiographic data and in this regard the text certainly delivers.

The text of the Komkom Vase can be divided into three major sections (Figure 13; Table 2). The first is an extensive calendrical record, providing both a Long Count and also an appreciable Supplementary Series, a rarity on ceramic vessels, since the like is much more typical for the onset of monumental inscriptions such as those found on stelae and murals during the Classic period. The second is a detailed historical narrative that spans most of the vase's breadth and as such can be considered to be the principal part of the text. The third and final section offers a lengthy parentage statement, providing the names and titles of the mother and father, in that order, of the original owner or patron of the vase (see MacLeod 1990a:422-451; MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:120-121, 128-133).

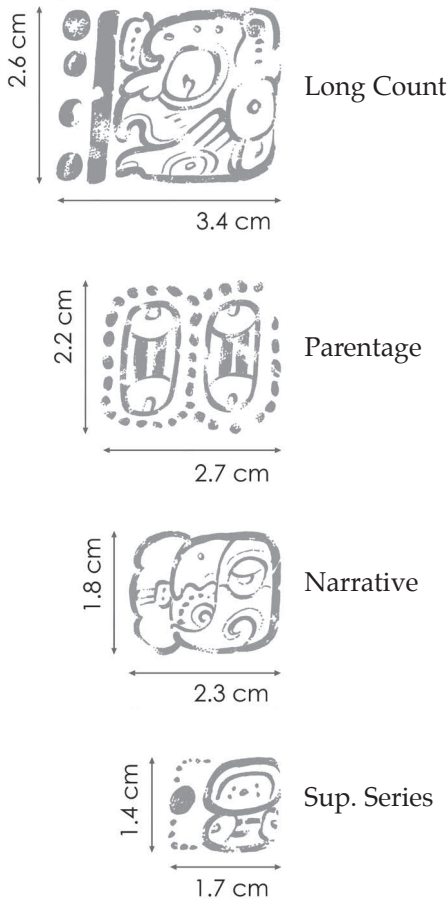
This division of the text is not only motivated by the thematic content of the respective parts but is also reflected in the size of the glyph blocks (Figure 14). Thus, the very largest glyph blocks (measuring on average 3.4 cm wide × 2.6 cm high) are those of the Long Count date at the onset. The second largest glyph blocks are those of the parentage statement (measuring 2.7 × 2.2 cm on average), whereas the historical narrative uses mostly one size of glyph, which is of an intermediate dimension (measuring c. 2.3 × 1.8 cm). Finally, there are the minute glyphs with which the Supplementary Series is written (measuring 1.7 × 1.4 cm). What these size gradations signal is a deliberate means of segregating textual sections as well as thematic content. This greatly improves the legibility of the overall text and shows a remarkable degree of planning and preparation on the

Site	Text	Length
Copan	Hieroglyphic Stair	c. 2200
Palenque	Temple of the Inscriptions	617
Yaxchilan	Hieroglyphic Stair 1	c. 493
Yaxchilan	Hieroglyphic Stair 3	343
Palenque	Palace Tablet	247
Tikal	Stela 31	> 221
Palenque	Bench, Temple 19	215
Tikal	Temple of the Inscriptions	206
Yaxchilan	Hieroglyphic Stair 2	> 203
Baking Pot	Komkom Vase	202
La Corona	Hieroglyphic Stair 2	> 198
Yaxchilan	Hieroglyphic Stair 5	c. 182
Dos Pilas	Hieroglyphic Stair 2	180
El Palmar	Hieroglyphic Stair	c. 164
Itzan	Stela 17	156
Uxul	Altar 2	c. 149
Caracol	Stela 22	140
Cancuen	Panel 1	140
Dos Pilas	Hieroglyphic Stair 4	140
Naranjo	Stela 28	139
Naranjo	Stela 31	138
Sabana Piletas	Hieroglyphic Stair 1	136
Tikal	Stela 24	c. 136
Naranjo	Stela 30	126
Caracol	Altar 21	129
Naranjo	Stela 23	113
Naranjo	Altar 1	107
Naranjo	Stela 46	> 105
Naranjo	Stela 29	104
Yaxchilan	Lintel 10	103
Naranjo	Stela 12	100
Palenque	Tablet of the 96 Glyphs	96
Ek Balam	Mural of the 96 Glyphs	96
Naranjo	Stela 18	96
Naranjo	Stela 22	91
Provenience Unknown	Vase of the 88 Glyphs (K1440)	88
Provenience Unknown	Dynastic Vase (K6751)	88
Naranjo	Stela 13	84
Edzna	Hieroglyphic Stair 1	c. 84
Yaxchilan	Hieroglyphic Stair 4	c. 82
Calakmul	Hieroglyphic Stair, Str. 13	> 79
Caracol (?)	Hieroglyphic Stair of K'an II	> 78

**Table 1.** The number of glyph blocks that once constituted the text on the Komkom Vase in comparison to a selection of the longest hieroglyphic texts documented in the Maya Lowlands, arranged in descending order.

	Glyph Blocks	Glyph Blocks	Surface Area
1) Calendrical Record	17	8 %	9 %
2) Historical Narrative	153	74 %	67.5 %
3) Parentage Statement	36	18 %	23.5 %

**Table 2.** The divisions of the text on the Komkom Vase, according to the number of glyph blocks that comprise each part and the relative percentages that these sections cover, both in terms of glyph blocks ( $n = 202$ ) and total surface area. The number of glyph blocks is based on reconstructed numbers, as is the surface area that treats the vase in its original form, prior to breakage.



**Figure 14.** A selection of glyph blocks illustrating the hierarchy of average size-gradations employed in the text on the Komkom Vase (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

part of a highly skilled scribe. As we will see, the textual sections and size gradations may also preserve characteristics of the original source since the historical narrative may well be a copy made from an earlier codical manuscript, which can be called an archetype (see Maas 1958; van Reenen and van Mulken 1996).

We will first present the unusually detailed calendrical record that starts off the lengthy text in order to establish the date that we take to record the vase's production. Although it is somewhat unorthodox, we will then examine the final portion of the glyphic text, that which records the parentage statement. This will allow us to situate ourselves both temporally and in socio-cultural terms and establish the pedigree of the owner of the vase and thereby inform us as to the historical situation and the specific vantage that the text provides. Thereafter, we will review, sentence-by-sentence, the lengthy historical narrative that constitutes the remainder of the text, before closing with some summary remarks and concluding thoughts.

## Initial and Supplementary Series

### *Initial Series*

The Initial Series consists of a complete Long Count date (A1–A6) that heads the entire text (Figure 15). Not only is the presence of a Long Count date on a ceramic vessel unusual, but few additional examples are known, and much like the Komkom Vase most of these also stem from the Central Lowlands and are restricted to the Late Classic period (see Smith and Morley 1932; Robicsek and Hales 1981:104, 122; Boot 2010).<sup>2</sup> As such, the extensive calendrical information on the vase is partly in keeping with the few previously documented examples of this practice, although it is clearly a later example. As we will see, this is but the first of a series of traits that distinguishes the Komkom Vase from other specimens.

In keeping with the practice of calendrical records found on carved stone monuments the Long Count is headed by a so-called Initial Series Introductory Glyph (ISIG) that provides a count of the year and names the supernatural patron that presides over a given month (A1) (see Thompson 1950:153). The reading of the ISIG in Maya writing remains the subject of discussion and has not yet been adequately resolved, especially since a similar glyphic collocation was used to initiate Long Count dates in Isthmian writing (see Kaufman and Justeson 2001; Lacadena 2010a). Since the rim was trimmed in antiquity to rectify damage, most of a supernatural patron has been removed. All that remains is the lower jaw and the little barbel that winds out of the corner of the mouth. Whereas these features may help in excluding some patrons, they are too fragmentary to positively identify the name of the “month” in the solar, Haab calendar that typically closes the calendrical record. As we will see, having the patron at hand would have helped to securely anchor the date, but we will have to do without. The Long Count proper is written somewhat inconsistently with a combination of signs, wherein the very first (A2) and the final two signs (A5–A6) are written with head-variant signs, whereas the two intervening signs (A3–A4) are written in what might



**Figure 15.** The Initial Series (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

<sup>2</sup> Some examples include the Initial Series vase of Uaxactun, with the date 7.5.0.0.0, although of Late Classic manufacture; K1440 in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts with a mythic date in the distant past including the Calendar Round 9 Kaban 10 Muwan; K1457, a dynastic vase bearing the date 9.?9.0.0; and a Chochola-style vase originally from Oxkintok with a truncated 9.15 date.

be called geometric forms. The numerical coefficients are all legible and well preserved excepting that which provides a record of the third position, the haab, or “vague year” of 360 days (A4). Thus, the extant Long Count date can be read as 9.19.#.15.8. This much is clear. It is also evident that this is an “uneven” or historical date, not an “even” date such as those that are seen as part of dedicatory dates that celebrate important Period Endings.

What remains of the third position shows the tail end of what might be the logogram TE' (T350), here presumably serving the function of numeral classifier appended to the preceding coefficient (e.g., Berlin 1968; Macri 2000; Boot 2002a:111). The coefficient itself has not been recovered, but just enough remains to suggest that a crescent “filler” was present, here in the form of an open bracket with a series of dots inside, a punctuation sign that is used throughout the text.<sup>3</sup> Based on such a “filler,” it is clear that the coefficient must be equal to or higher than one and less than five. On the basis of these parameters the four most probable Long Count dates are reconstructed below, which are correlated to the proleptic Gregorian Calendar using the 584286 (i.e., GMT+1) correlation coefficient (see Martin and Skidmore 2012):

Long Count	Tzolkin	Haab	Lord of the Night	Gregorian Date
9.19.1.15.8	1 Lamat	16 Sek	G2	27 April AD 812
9.19.2.15.8	10 Lamat	11 Sek	G2	22 April AD 813
9.19.3.15.8	6 Lamat	6 Sek	G2	17 April AD 814
9.19.4.15.8	2 Lamat	1 Sek	G2	12 April AD 815

As such, we can see that irrespective of the original haab coefficient in the Long Count, the Calendar Round consists of the same day in the Tzolkin calendar (i.e., the eighth day, Lamat) and same month in the Haab calendar (i.e., the fifth month, Sek) although their coefficients vary, and the Lord of the Night (i.e., G2) is also precisely the same, since that is locked to the coefficient of the lowest two positions in the Long Count. In standard practice one can thus look to the end of the Long Count, which is typically followed by the record of the Tzolkin and to the very end of the calendrical record, where the Haab calendar is usually written. However, in this particular text, there is no Tzolkin notation after the Long Count and instead we find the Calendar Round 8 Eb 5 Woh at the very end of the calendrical record (D2–D3), a rather conspicuous disjunction. As we will see, this Calendar Round initiates the historical narrative proper, which leaves us with an extensive calendrical record at the onset that is strangely without its own Calendar Round.

Although the projected Calendar Round did not help to narrow down the reconstruction of the Long Count date, a more careful scrutiny of the remaining filler accompanying the coefficient of the haab sign is instructive. Thus, considering the text-internal patterns on the Komkom Vase and the manner in which the scribe used fillers, it is clear that a single crescent is set between the two

<sup>3</sup> The following glyph blocks on the Komkom Vase include numerals that are accompanied by similar crescent fillers: C12 (7), F2 (7), E4 (7), F10 (2), F11 (11), H5 (7), N7 (6), R7 (7).



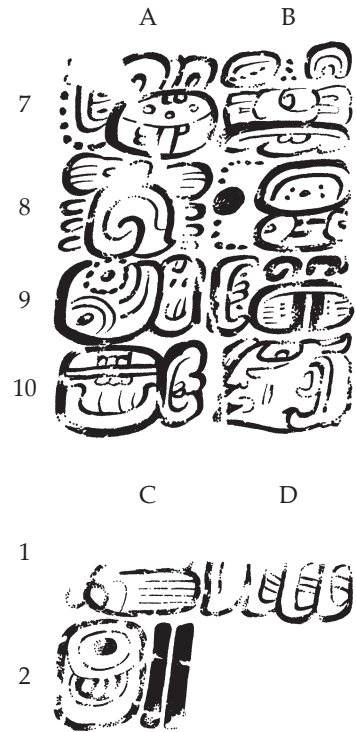
dots in numerals, such as 2 and 7 (see C12, F2, E4, F10, H5, and R7), which thereby forces us to exclude the 9.19.2.15.8 reconstruction. In contrast, numerals such as 6 and 11 (see F11 and N7) are provided with two lateral brackets that frame the dot, which matches the remaining elements. In contrast, numerals involving three dots, such as 3 and 8 (see A6, J5, and M3) and coefficients with four dots, such as 9, 14, and 19 (A3, F8, F9, H3, G8, G11, J3, M2, N4, O7, and O8) are all devoid of fillers, and considering the available space, do not appear to be probable either. As such the best reconstruction is that afforded by 9.19.1.15.8, corresponding to April 27, AD 812. As a historical date, we would expect to see a particular historical event tied to this date, but there is no specific mention made, something that we will touch upon again later, although on present evidence we suspect that this date commemorates the vase's manufacture, or at least its formal dedication. Alternatively it may commemorate a ritual action, a fire ritual event cited in the text that duplicates and calls upon another, albeit earlier, ritual. We will comment more on this to follow.

### Supplementary Series

The Supplementary Series provides a host of additional calendrical information that follows and supplements the Long Count, as the name implies (Figure 16). In this particular case, the Supplementary Series can be divided into four separate records, namely: (1) the Lord of the Night and its associated title, (2) an abridged record of the 819-day calendar, (3) a fire ritual and its associated supernatural patron, and (4) the lunar calendar.

The first cycle in the Supplementary Series is that which records the name of the so-called Lord of the Night, or Glyph G (Thompson 1950:208-210), a series of nine divinities that are thought to preside over the nocturnal hours, based on analogies to the central Mexican calendar of the Aztec (see Caso 1967:20, 22-23; Stuart 2012a:124). Here the Lord of the Night is G2 (A7), the second of the series, which matches the reconstructions for the Long Count provided above. The accompanying glyph (B7), designated as Glyph F, provides a title for these nocturnal lords, which can be read *ti'-huun* and translated literally as "mouth-paper," but which can also be interpreted as "spokesperson for the crown" since certain regal headdresses were made of paper and the qualifying *ti'* "mouth" serves here, by means of synecdoche, to designate the office (see Zender 2004b:215-221; Stuart 2012b:123, 128-139).

The second cycle recorded in the Supplementary Series is unexpected,



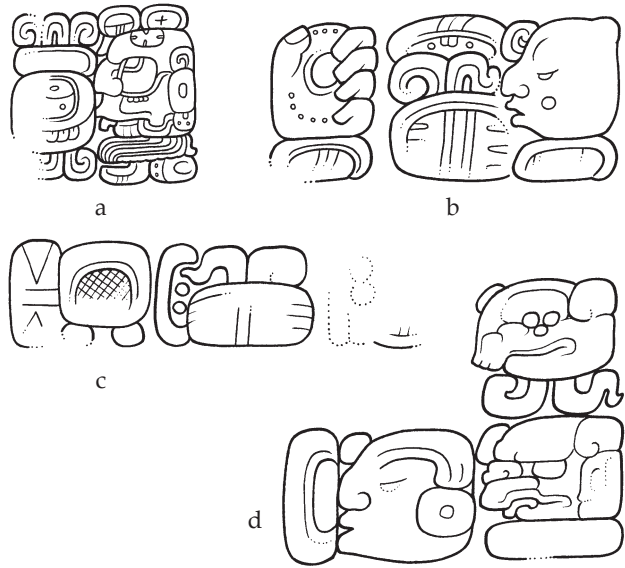
**Figure 16.** The Supplementary Series (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

since it one of only two occurrences of the 819-day calendar in a ceramic text, the other being the “Initial Series Vase” from Palenque (see Ruz Lhuillier 2007:126-130). The Initial Series Vase is similarly late, bearing a date in November AD 799. It names the last known ruler of Palenque as its owner, a late namesake of Janaab Pakal who bore the praenomen Wak Cham “Six Death,” an ominous calendrical name of central Mexican influence (Martin and Grube 2000:175). The Komkom Vase is also remarkable for constituting one of the few examples of the 819-day calendar in any medium, since at present fewer than two dozen examples of such records are known (see Kelley 1976; Valencia Rivera 2015:Appendix F). Interestingly, with regard to the 63-day factor recently identified by Guillermo Bernal Romero (2016) in relation to fire rituals, the Long Count on the Komkom Vase is not separated from other 819-day calendrical records by a multiple of 63 days, and thus it does not follow the pattern (Rogelio Valencia Rivera, personal communication 2017). Two of the closest dates that do conform to the 63-day pattern are found at Ek Balam and include 9.17.12.16.14 and 10.0.9.17.12, and although both are less than three decades from the Long Count on the Komkom Vase, neither is separated from it by an interval evenly divisible by 63. To find the 819-day calendar on the Komkom Vase is a particular surprise since the well-established examples of this calendrical record are known especially from the southwestern and southeastern reaches of the Maya world, with good examples found at Palenque, Tonina, Pomona, and Yaxchilan in the west and Copan and Quirigua in the east. Thus the 819-day record on this vase may be the first record of this calendar in the heart of the central Maya Lowlands, and would also be the latest example with secure archaeological provenience, considering that the aforementioned examples all date to between AD 643 and 805 (Valencia Rivera 2015:238). The example on the Komkom Vase demonstrates that even though local monuments in the greater Naranjo area and the eastern central Lowlands generally did not make records of dates using the 819-day calendar, it was nonetheless known and tallied, and when deemed opportune it was recorded on non-perishable media. The dearth of texts recording this type of calendar may not represent a regional trait so much as a deliberate suppression on the part of ancient Maya scribes charged with the preservation of written records.

That said, the notation on the Komkom Vase is rather unusual and highly abridged. Whereas most 819-day records provide a Distance Number leading from the date of the Initial Series back to the last station (see Thompson 1943, 1950:212-217), here the record starts directly with a reference to a cardinal direction (A8), which can be read as *nojol* or “south.”<sup>4</sup> The reference to a cardinal direction is in keeping with the 819-day calendar that records the names of deity effigies that were raised on such occasions to particular world directions. As the 819-day calendar provides references to the south with the days K’an, Lamat, Eb, Kib, and Ajaw, it bears remembering that the Long Count at the onset is surely

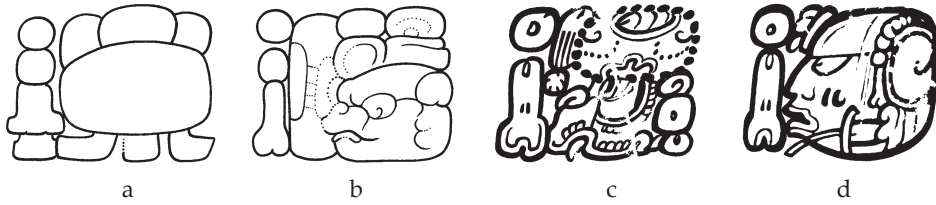
<sup>4</sup> Following Zender (personal communication 2016) we prefer *nojol* here (with voiced glottal fricative, rather than an unvoiced allomorph), considering that this derives from the greater Lowland form \*noj “right, large” (see Kaufman 2003:973), as well as Yukatek *nóohol* “south” (Bricker et al. 1998:199), where [h] usually reflects earlier \*j.

**Figure 17.** A selection of verbs pertaining to fire rituals, including (a) *jatz'al k'ahk'* followed by the name of the Sun God (Sacul, Stela 1, C3); (b) the stone-in-hand glyph as *jatz'aal* followed by what may be the elder Hero Twin (Caracol, Stela 21, A3b–B3); (c) *tapal uk'ahk'* preceding an eroded theonym (Ixkun, Stela 2, A7–A8); (d) the phrase *til k'ahk'* associated with a directional aspect of the thunder deity Chaahk (Motul de San José, Stela 3, B5–B6) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).



anchored to a Calendar Round involving Lamat, which is consistent with this cardinal direction. Occasionally the record of the 819-day calendar is closed with an expression written **1-T758-ko**, wherein the main sign represents the head of a rat, which usually carries the value **ch'o**. As such, a plausible reading for this expression is *juun ch'ok* "one youth," as was first suggested by Barbara MacLeod (1989:124-125, 1990:427; see also Houston 2009). Alternatively, the **1-T758-ko** sequence may prompt the reading *juun ok* "one leg," wherein the main sign representing the head of a feral dog functions as **OK**, probably functioning by means of rebus to refer to the one-legged K'awiil that figures so prominently in this calendar (Valencia Rivera 2015:234-235). However, in this case we see a rather different spelling, **1-bi-ko** (B8), prompting a very different reading, one that must contain underspellings. At present we cannot offer any conclusive reading for this segment, but note that this may provide a rather interesting substitution.

The third calendrical expression provides a record of a fire ritual and its associated patron (see Stuart 1998:402-409; Grube 2000a), spread over four glyph blocks (A9–B10). The first glyph block (A9) provides a verbal expression that specifies how the fire was brought about. Based on other texts we can see a variety of verbs, including *joch'* "to drill," *jatz'* "to strike" (Figure 17a–b), *til* "to stoke" (Figure 17d), and *puk* "to spread" (see Stuart 1998:403-404; Grube 2000a: 94-97). Although the form of the sign here is not altogether clear, it represents a hand that is grasping a circular element and is followed by the syllabogram **li**. Together this forms precisely the same spelling seen on Stela 21 at Caracol, where the hand grasps a stone marked with small dots around its perimeter to provide the logogram *jatz'* (Grube 2000a:Fig. 10b; Zender 2004a:Fig. 7c) (Figure 17b). In combination **JATZ'-li** may involve a participial suffix  $-VV_1l$ , which eventually becomes  $-V_1l$ , duplicating the example seen on Naranjo Stela 46, where we can see **ja-tz'a-li u-K'AK'** (A8–B8) (Martin et al. 2016), producing the same translit-



**Figure 18.** The tasseled bead as an elaborate numeral *juun* “one”: (a) qualifying *k’atun* date (Tikal, Stela 9, A2); (b) in the name *Juun Chakaw Naahb Chan* (La Corona, HS2, Element 33, E5); (c) part of the theonym *Yax Chit Juun Witz’ Nah Kan* (Cuychen Vase, G1); (d) the name of the mature Maize God (Cuychen Vase, R2) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

eration: *jatz’aal uk’ahk’*. Similarly, on Ixkun Stela 2 we can see **ta-pa-la u-K’AK’**, which can be segmented as *tap-al u-k’ahk’* “extinguished is the fire” (Alfonso Lacadena, personal communication 2016) (Figure 17c). Much as in the foregoing examples, this expression is followed on the Komkom Vase by a possessive construction (B9) *u-k’ahk’* “it is his fire.” Together *jatz’aal u-k’ahk’* can thus be analyzed as “struck is the fire of.” The name of the supernatural entity owning the fire follows. Whereas there are many such deities tied to these fire rituals, the one that appears most often is a youthful aspect of the maize god (Stuart 1998:404) and the same is true in this case, his name written as **CHAN-na** (A10) **AJAN** (B10), quite possibly for *chanal[ ] ajan*, or “celestial Ajan,” wherein the last segment provides the name of young maize (see Stone and Zender 2011:21-22; Zender 2014a). In comparison, the fire rituals recorded in the Supplementary Series at Naranjo mention the same maize god as the patron, here preceded by a celt sign (Stela 13, E9), whereas the Hero Twins may also figure in these rituals (Stela 6, D8) as well as the solar deity *K’inich Ajaw* (Stela 46, A9), also cited at Sacul (Stela 1, C3) (Figure 17a).

The fourth and final cycle to be recorded in the Supplementary Series provides a record of the lunar calendar. The very first segment (C1) may provide the relatively standard Glyph C that specifies the name of a lunar synodic month, divided into a series of three semesters that are numerically distinct (Teeple 1928:396). This expression is written by combining a human hand that holds one of three profiles (a human skull, the Maize God, and the Jaguar God of the Underworld) and a lunar crescent, and these are preceded by a coefficient ranging from one to six (Linden 1996). Here too, little remains to be confident of the original expression, but based on our reconstructions it should have been C2 or C3, with the latter slightly more likely (see Andrews 1934:347, 350), and we can assume that the head of the Maize God was once held by the hand (see Linden 1996:350). The following glyph block (D1) provided Glyph X, usually said to be the “youth name” of the lunation (see Teeple 1928:396-398; Andrews 1934). In this particular instance, we see the remains of a “tassel” preceding three celtiform objects that together name the lunation, as Glyph X3 (Andrews 1934:348). This tassel is perhaps an embellished form of the numeral **1**, since similar examples are found on the Cuychen vase (Helmke in press), a trait also seen in the monuments of Tikal (i.e., Stelae 9 [A2] and 40 [E4]) and La Corona

(Hieroglyphic Stair 2, Element 33 [E5]), not to mention the head-variant of the mature maize god Ixiim (see Zender 2014a:3, 4) (Figure 18). The final glyph block of the Supplementary Series provides Glyph A (C2), which records the number of days of the current lunation, in this case written with the logogram “twenty” (T683a) and two bars for ten at the end, for thirty in all, which accords well with the known parameters (see Linden 1996:350).

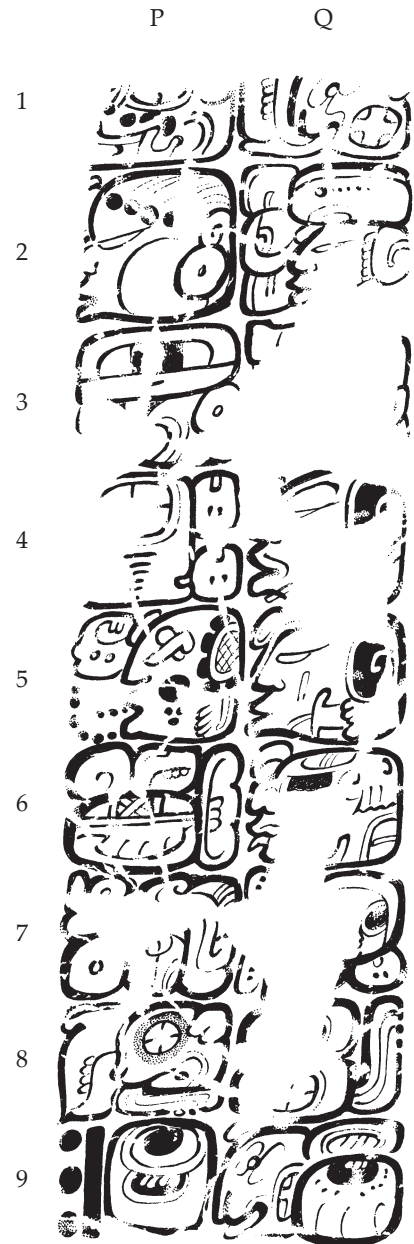
To summarize, the lengthy and detailed calendrical record presented on the vase provides us with a strong anchor, since we can correlate the 9.19.1.15.8 Long Count date to AD 812, meaning that the vase, despite its length and calligraphic flair is clearly a product of the Terminal Classic, which really sets it apart. The Supplementary Series is also unique in terms of its detail and the many peculiar truncations and odd syntax, all of which suggest that the vase preserves only parts of a lengthier record, the highlights sufficing to relate salient points. As we will see, the historical narrative that follows the calendrical record is not anchored to it and is retrospective, indicating that the various parts of the text were produced at different times and that the text at our disposal is in many ways a patchwork of different texts, something that we will explore further on.

## Parentage Statement

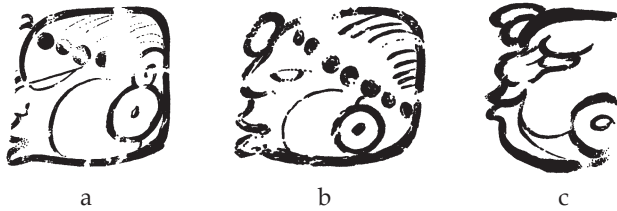
### *Name of the Mother*

Turning now to the very end of the text we can examine the lengthy parentage statement that runs along the edge of the Long Count at the start of the text (Figure 19). The parentage statement provides the

pedigree for the original owner of the vase, by naming the mother and father in turn, recording a detailed list of their names and associated titles (see MacLeod 1990a:422-451; MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:120-121, 128-133). This part of the vase shows a great deal of planning and foresight, since both parents are attributed precisely the same amount of space: each being given a pair of



**Figure 19.** The nominal sequence of the mother in the parentage statement (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

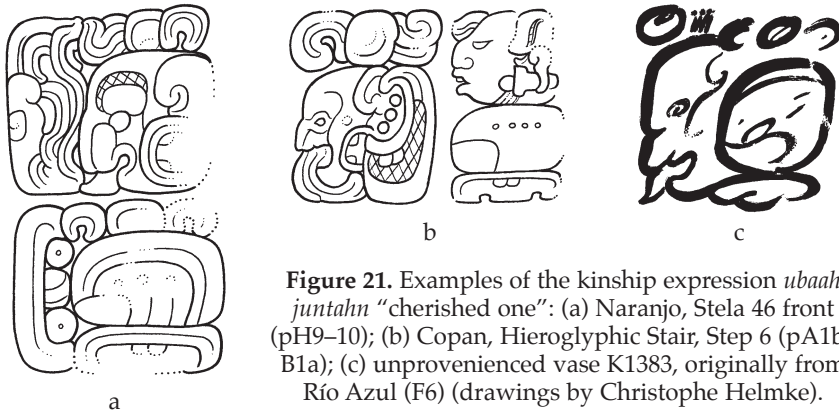


**Figure 20.** Rare variants of the *u* vocalic sign representing the head of a fat dwarf: (a) Komkom Vase (O2); (b) Komkom Vase (H2); (c) Naj Tunich, Drawing 19 (B2a) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

columns, spanning over nine rows, comprising 18 glyph blocks per set, 36 glyph blocks in all for this section. Since it seems unlikely that each parent inherently had the same number of terms comprising their names and titles, we surmise that the scribe took some liberties to make the names and titles fit within the allocated space, also using evocative metaphorical expressions, serving as parentage terms, to introduce each parent (see Stuart 1997).

The parentage expression that heads the section dedicated to the mother is split over four glyph blocks (P1–Q2), recording two terms that together form a poetic couplet, or *difrasismo*, a common poetic trope in Mesoamerican lyricism, eloquent language, and literature (León-Portilla 1969:77, 1992:54-55; Montes de Oca Vega 1997, 2004, 2008; Máynez 2009), also referred to at times as a “diphrastric kenning” (Knowlton 2002, 2012; Hull 2012). Here the *difrasismo* not only juxtaposes and contrasts two terms to produce a copulative or appositional compound, but each is also rendered in possessive form, being preceded by the pronoun *u-* marking the third person singular, “hers” in this case. The pronominal prefixes are each rendered by a single glyph block (P1, P2), providing unusual head-variants, which attest to the graphemic versatility and repertoire mastered by the scribe. The first (P1) is only partially preserved and represents a head marked with spots. Although the identity of this head variant is unclear it may well represent a large stylized shark, with barbel at the mouth and body spots not unlike those seen with a few other late sharks (e.g., the Randel Stela at F1 and on K9152) (Marc Zender, personal communication 2016). The second possessive prefix (P2) represents the head of a fat dwarf with a distinctive beaded headband, an unusual allograph for *u* that is seen elsewhere in this text (H2 and surprisingly also at M6 as part of *xi*) (Figure 20a–b). The graphic motivation for using the head of a dwarf to prompt the vocalic sign *u* remains unclear at present although another example is found in the texts of Naj Tunich as part of a captive statement serving to name a pilgrim to the site (Figure 20c).

The first term of the *difrasismo* (Q1) is *baah*, here written with the head of a gopher (and possibly a now missing *hi* bow, above), but usually intended by means of rebus to cue the substantive “head, image,” and by extension “top, summit” in anthropocentric spatial descriptors (see Campbell et al. 1986:549; de León 1992), or the adverbial “first” or even the reflexive “self” (Houston and Stuart 1998; Zender 2004c:199-203; Stuart 2005a:68-69). In this context, it seems most likely to be used as a type of exocentric augments to emphasize the poetic effect of the metaphorical expression. The second term of the couplet is writ-



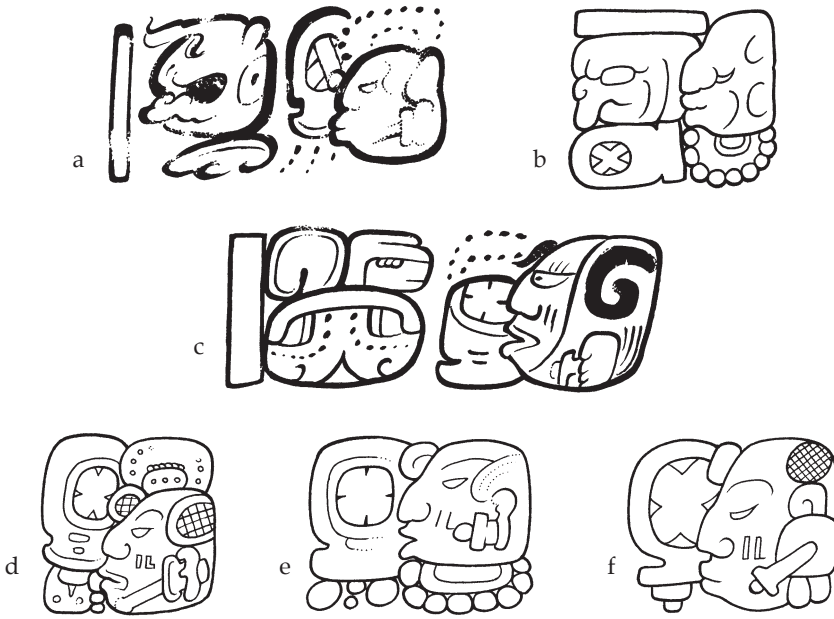
**Figure 21.** Examples of the kinship expression *ubaah juntahn* “cherished one”: (a) Naranjo, Stela 46 front (pH9–10); (b) Copan, Hieroglyphic Stair, Step 6 (pA1b–B1a); (c) unprovenienced vase K1383, originally from Río Azul (F6) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

ten **HUN-TAN-na**, for *huntahn*, for “cherished, beloved one,” literally “of one’s breast” a term of endearment used to describe the relationship shared between a mother and her child, but at times also used by kings to refer to their close affinity to certain deities (see Stuart 1997:8-9, 2006:97) (Figure 21). Interestingly, the initial part of this term is usually written with a dot for the numeral “one,” read *juun*, used as the pronominal quantifier “one” (Jones and Jones 1997:Fig. 60), but here the logogram **HUN** is used that usually serves to code words such as “paper” and items made of this material including headdresses and books (see Stuart 2012b), as seen with Glyph F at the onset. The use of the logogram for paper in lieu of the numeral “one” is suggestive since it demonstrates that the *j:h* phonemic contrast had eroded by this time (Grube 2004a:79-81) and that the relationship term by this juncture was no longer pronounced with a hard velar fricative /j/ but with a softer glottal fricative /h/. This process of sound change is known as debuccalization and is one that has been observed in a number of contemporaneous texts from the eastern central Lowlands, from AD 711 onwards (Grube 2004a:79), wherein an initial or final consonant loses its place of articulation and is instead replaced by a glottal, such as [h] or [ʔ].

As we will see, there are some other indications to this effect in the remainder of the text. Similarly, terms with [h] would undergo a process of elision, whereby *h* > Ø. Thus, the T757 gopher head sign that functioned as the logogram **BAH**, and was read [ba:h] during most of the Classic period, eventually served as [ba], as demonstrated by examples at Ek Balam<sup>5</sup> (Figure 23c) and another in the Tablet of 96 Glyphs at Palenque where it functions as the final sign in the sequence **ba-ka**-T757 for *bakab*. What is interesting is that these examples were commissioned in c. AD 770 and 783 respectively, indicating that the gopher sign was used essentially as a syllabogram **ba** and increasingly so after these dates (Houston 1989:42; Zender 2017:32-33). Thus on the Komkom Vase we can surmise that the title was probably read *bakab* at this late date.

The initial part of the mother’s name is headed by a reverential expression

<sup>5</sup> Another illustrative example at Ek Balam provides an early form of the toponym that has survived to this day as **EK’-ba-la-ma**, wherein the initial **ba** is the same T757 gopher head (Lacadena 2003a:Fig. 18a).

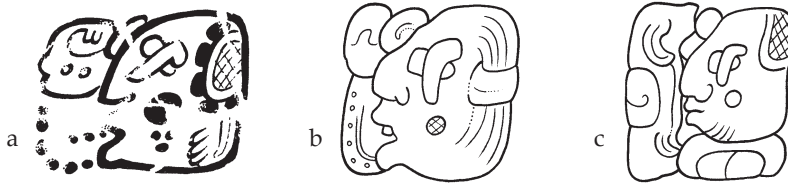


**Figure 22.** Exalted female reverential terms of address, including *ho'-huun* “five-headress”: (a) unprovenienced vase K2324, originally from Xultun (A7–B7); (b) Yaxchilan, Lintel 10 (C5); (c) unprovenienced dish, originally from Naranjo (V1–X1); and the ‘inverted olla’ title: (d) Naranjo, Stela 24 (A5); (e) Yaxchilan, Lintel 27 (C1); (f) Yaxchilan, Lintel 22 (A8) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

that has been split over two glyph blocks. The first (P3) provides the head-variant of the numeral “five” *ho'*, followed by another sign that is nearly completely spalled off (Q3). Nevertheless, comparison to other texts suggests that this now-missing sign should provide the segment *huun*, usually written **HUN-na**, for “paper, headdress” as we have already touched upon above (see also Stuart 2012b:136-139). As such, this titular expression, which appears to be the preserve of exalted women, may mean “five headdresses.” Analogous examples of this title are seen on a Black-on-cream vase, originally from Xultun (K2324) (Figure 22a), on Calakmul Stela 9 (A5), Yaxchilan Lintel 10 (C5) (Figure 22b), Lintel 3 of Temple I at Tikal (E2a), Naranjo Stela 29 (G8a), and an unprovenienced dish that once belonged to K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk, the son of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk of Naranjo (Figure 22c). In these examples this *ho'-huun* title is either followed by or partly merged with another, which is also represented here, spread over three glyph blocks (P4–P5).

The title in question is that which is headed by the so-called “inverted vase” (T182) sign (see Grube 2012:138), representing an upside-down *olla* or jar marked with the “sun” logogram, affixed by the expected final syllabogram *-la* (P4) (Figure 22d–f). The second part of the title is provided by the logogram **IXIK** “woman” (Q4). The third and final part of the title is provided by a composite sign that may represent the profile of one of the Hero Twins (also seen in the Dresden Codex and referred to in the literature as the “Chikchan head”; see Taube 1992:Fig. 60), with an axe infixed into the eye and preceded by the





**Figure 23.** A rare variant of the logogram **K'UH** as found on (a) the Komkom Vase, as well as the texts of Palenque: (b) Temple of the Foliated Cross, Main Tablet (D9) and (c) Temple of the Inscriptions, Central Tablet (J3) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

so-called “Water Group” (see Thompson 1950:274-277), a prefix that usually functions as the logogram *k'uh*, “god, deity” (Figure 23a). Despite this combination of distinct features it would seem that this amalgam is a rare variant of the logogram **K'UH**, since the same compound glyph is also found in the texts of Yucatecan sites where there is a clear substitution with **k'u-lu** (García Campillo 1995:99-100). In addition, in the texts of Palenque, most notably in the main panel of the Temple of the Foliated Cross, the same logogram is found, where it must function as *k'uh* “god, deity,” as part of a conjuring expression involving the mythic progenitor of Palenque’s triad of patron deities (see Stuart 2005a:159-189) (Figure 23b). In another example, in the Eastern Tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions, the same logogram is seen, albeit written **u-K'UH-li** for *u-k'uh-uul* “her deity” (Figure 23c), and is used to refer to a supernatural entity to whom Lady Yohl Ik'nal—ruler of Palenque at the end of the sixth century—made offerings in AD 593 on the occasion of the 9.8.0.0 Period Ending (see Guenter 2007:16). Based on these additional examples it is clear that this logogram functions as **K'UH** and is an integral part of a female honorific statement on the Komkom Vase.

In this and other female titles, the three segments “inverted *olla*”—*ixik-k'uh* provide an honorific statement that introduces the names of high-status women, especially well documented for the Usumacinta area, although the inverted *olla* is a logogram that continues to resist decipherment (see Tuszyńska 2016:116-124; Hull and Sheseña n.d.). Despite this limitation, at times we can see stylized water dripping from the inverted *olla*, resembling inverted “water stacks” as in the sign for rain **HA'AL** (see Schele and Miller 1986:47; Davoust 1995:565; Lacadena 2004:88-93) (Figure 22a, f), which makes us wonder whether the final **-la** serves to support this reading (Figure 22d–e), not least since we know from codical representations that the elder female divinity Chak Chel destroys the world in a deluge by spilling her *olla*, thereby unleashing torrential rains onto the earth (Stuart 2005:76, 178; Velásquez García 2006:6-7). Undoubtedly, the female title draws on this supernatural agent and mythological precedent and serves to impart attributes of divinity onto historical women.

Her name proper follows and is rendered in three glyph blocks (Q5–Q6). Although there are still some elements of her name that elude clear comprehension—due to the use of undeciphered logograms—a transliteration of her name is **IX** (Q5), **CHAN-na-NAL** (P6), and ? (Q6), which prompts the reading

*ixchanal*?. Whereas the initial segment provides the prefix that introduces female names *ix-*, the medial portion *chan* “heaven” is affixed with an abstractivation suffix *-al* for “heavenly, celestial,” which together qualify the name of a deity that appears in portrait at the end of the nominal string. This deity has a darkened squared eye, aquiline nose, a mirror sign in the forehead, and a shark’s tooth as incisor. Whereas the identity of this entity remains unclear it is noteworthy that it bears shining mirror-like elements as body markings, on both the top of the head and at the back of the neck. Together these suggest that this entity may be the personification of the polished stone celt sign (T24) for which David Stuart (2010:291-292) has proposed the reading of **LEM**. This identification also makes sense in terms of the onomastic precedent for women’s names involving the sequence *Chanal Lem*, much as in case of Lady Six Sky, the mother of the Naranjo king K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (see Martin and Grube 2000:74-77; Helmke 2017).

Titles proper follow in the following six glyph blocks, the first (P7) reading *sak chuwen*, a title that was the preserve of the elite of Naranjo (Closs 1984:80, Fig. 2:E10; Reents 1986:155; MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:129).

The following title only reifies the connection to Naranjo since the initial portion (Q7) can be transliterated as #-**KAB**<sup>6</sup>-**1a** and reconstructed as *wak kabal* “six earth.” Although the preceding numeral is now missing and only the smallest fragment of the bar remains, the crescent fillers are discernible that would have framed the central dot. This toponym is closely connected with the nobility of Naranjo since Wak Kab was one of its primary place names, apparently designating the greater territory rather than a specific feature of the landscape (see MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:129-130; Martin 1996:226). Here the toponym is used in a titular capacity and is presented with a derivational suffix *-al* as Wak Kabal. The title proper (P8), which is here qualified by the Wak Kabal toponym, involves a combination of signs that resists coherent reading. The title is headed by the syllabogram **yo-** and closed by **-ni**. The intervening main sign represents the head of a canine, the eye of which is infixed with the logogram **K’IN** for “sun.” Many different interpretations have been put forth for reading this title, ranging from *yokk’in* ~ *yok’in* to *yoon*, attributing the values **OK** ~ **OCH** and **ON** to the main sign, with or without accounting for the infixed **K’IN** as an independent sign or as a diagnostic element of the main sign (see Valencia Rivera and

<sup>6</sup> The palatization sound shift *k > ch* is well-known for Ch’olan branches of Mayan languages, and when considering Classic Maya hieroglyphs we have to be cautious to assess whether this shift affects particular lexemes or not, especially in such a late text as that recorded on the Komkom Vase. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the shift took place later than initially assumed (see Law et al. 2014), or at least that writing helped to maintain more archaic velar forms. Also in very general terms it would seem that the palatized, or palato-alveolar reflexes do not receive initial phonetic complements, whereas the velar forms tend to be written with an initial phonetic complement. As such one would expect the logogram “earth” to be read *chab* at the start of the ninth century, as is the case with the agency expression *u-chab-iiy* (N10, O6), which is set in contrast to *kab* in the title *bah-kab* ~ *ba-kab* (written phonetically as **ka-ba**), but here, as well as in other toponymic contexts, we suspect that the velar form is preserved, if not fossilized, and one spelling from Naranjo (Stela 12, C15) appears to provide an initial **ka-**, supporting this conclusion. This is why we use *chab* in agency expressions and more recent and neologistic titles (i.e., *aj-baluun-chab*), but maintain *kab* in toponyms.



**Figure 24.** Various spellings of the *bahkab* ~ *bakab* title in Classic Maya texts: (a) **ba-ka-ba**, Yaxchilan, Lintel 25 (F4b); (b) **BAH-ka-ba**, unprovenienced panel fragment known as the Denver Panel (pA7b); (c) **ba-ka-ba**, Ek Balam, Structure 1, Room 29-sub, Mural of the 96 Glyphs (M1); (d) T757-**ka-ba**, Komkom Vase (R7) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

Sheseña Hernández 2016). Despite these difficulties this title and its different numerical qualifications suggest that these may serve as regional markers for different geopolitical groupings (Valencia Rivera and Sheseña Hernández 2016; see also Tokovinine 2013:110-112). In this instance, being qualified by Wak Kabal, it is clear that the mother of the patron of the vase hailed from Naranjo.<sup>7</sup>

The third and final title is written over three glyph blocks (Q8–Q9), wherein the two first qualify the third. The first qualifier (Q8) has suffered from breakage but appears to have been written {**EL-K'IN**}-**ni** and read *elk'in*, “east,” followed by the numeral “28” (P9), and closed by T757-**ka-ba** (Q9). The latter title can be literally translated as “head-earth” or “first of the land,” based on /*baah-kab*/ and as such has a semantic domain that is culturally comparable to *princeps* as in “first, foremost” and *chief* “head, leader” (Figure 24). Interestingly, the title is here written with the gopher head logogram T757 (Figure 24d), and considering the elisive process *j* > *h* that we explored above and the comparable *h* >  $\emptyset$  shift that was also underway, we surmise that it probably functioned as [ba] by this time. As such, the title may here have been read as *bakab*, assuming that the latter shift was complete by this point. The title as a whole may be translated as “Eastern 28 Chief” and forms part of a greater titular scheme, wherein we see the titles *ajaw* “king” and *bakab* “chief” prefixed by the quantifier. This titular form is seen predominantly in the eastern central Lowlands, an assessment that is reified in the initial emic qualifier *elk'in* “east,” since this type of title is seen at Caracol, Ixkun, Machaquila, Dos Pilas, and Naranjo (see Helmke et al. 2006:18; Tokovinine 2013:113-115). Although the specific rationale behind the numeral quantifier remains unknown, without a doubt we can see that the mother is given one of the greatest array of titles, tying her squarely to the Naranjo dynasty.

<sup>7</sup> The same title is found on Naranjo Stela 20 (B4), Stela 21 (A13–A14), Stela 27 (pA3), and Stela 30 (B5–B6), borne by a selection of rulers, including Ajasaaj Chan K'inich (r. AD 546–615+), K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. AD 693–728+), K'ahk' Yipyaj Chan Chaahk (r. AD 746–?) (see Martin and Grube 2000:71-79). That the mother of the owner of the Komkom Vase was styled with the same title corroborates its longevity from the sixth to ninth centuries.

### Name of the Father

Much as with the parentage statement of the mother, that of the father is also initiated by a metaphorical expression tying him to his son (Figure 25). This particular expression is spread over three glyph blocks (S1–R2), wherein the first repeats that seen for the mother, namely *u-baah* (written **u-ba-(hi)**), “it is his head,” again probably serving as a type of augments or emphatic device. The following two glyph blocks provide yet another *difrasismo*, which despite some breakage can be transliterated as **u-{ch’a)-ba** (S1), **{ya)-AK’AB-li** (R2), and can be read as *u-ch’ahb y-ahk’ab-aal*.<sup>8</sup> Both terms are rendered in possessive form with the appropriate pronominal prefixes, with the preconsonantal *u-* and the prevocalic *y-*, both for third person singular “his,” in this instance. The first term (S1) has a relatively large semantic domain, occurring both as the transitive verb *ch’ab* and the nominalized form *ch’ahb*, and variously translated as “fast, do penance, abstention, creation” (Boot 2002a:28; Kaufman 2003:714)—“silence” may also be relevant here (Kaufman 2003:714)—although considering the many Christian overtones of the terms that have been chosen to gloss the lexeme we can see that while *ch’ahb* is a term of great religious import in its native Precolumbian context, the heavy semantic baggage of

<sup>8</sup> Although most published sources transcribe the logogram **AK’AB** as *ak’ab*, it seems more plausible that the correct transcription throughout most of the Classic period was *ahk’ab* (Marc Zender, personal communication 2016). This is based on the evidence afforded by Yukatek *áak’ab* “night,” Tzeltal *ahk’ab-ey* “anoche,” and Ch’orti’ *a’k’b-ar* “night” (where the morphophonetic process is *hC + C > ’CC*) (see Kaufman 2003:448–451). Together these speak convincingly of *ahk’ab* as the proper form during the Classic period, yet we can wonder whether by some point during the Terminal Classic the surface form was reduced to *ak’ab* due to the same elisive processes named above.

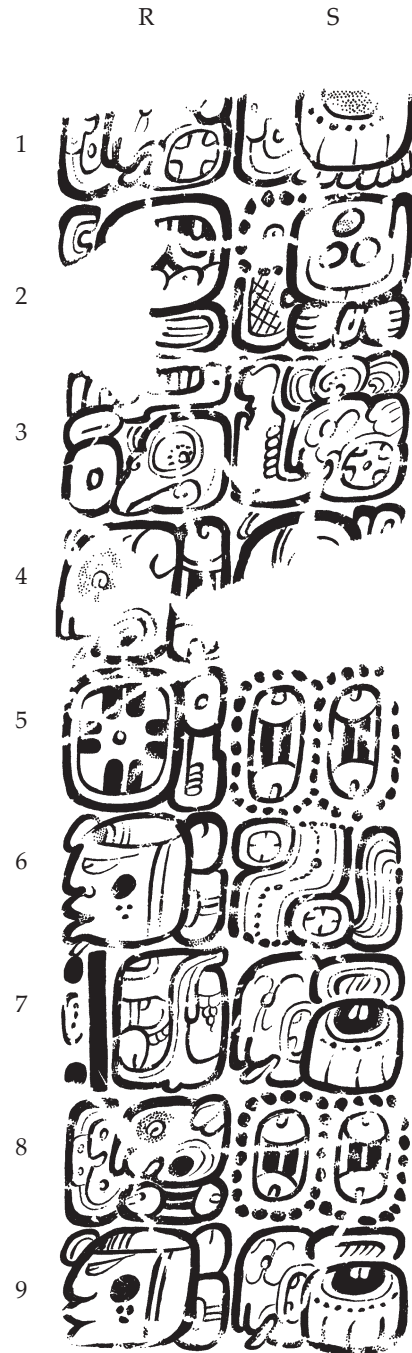
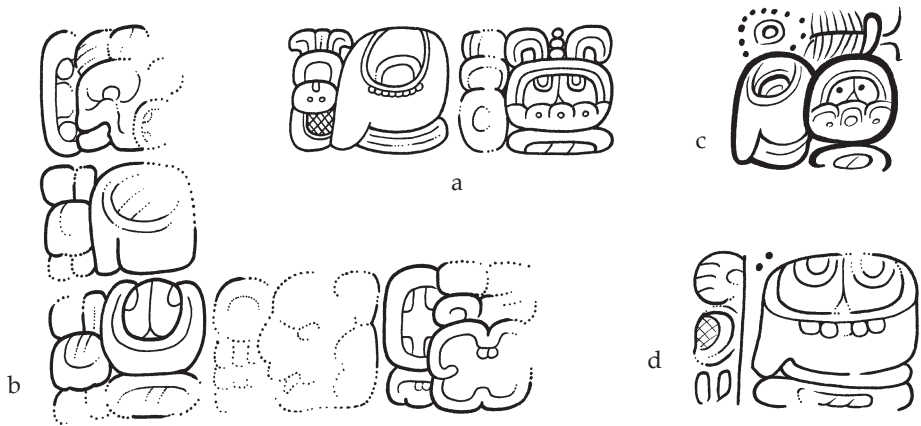


Figure 25. The nominal sequence of the father in the parentage statement (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

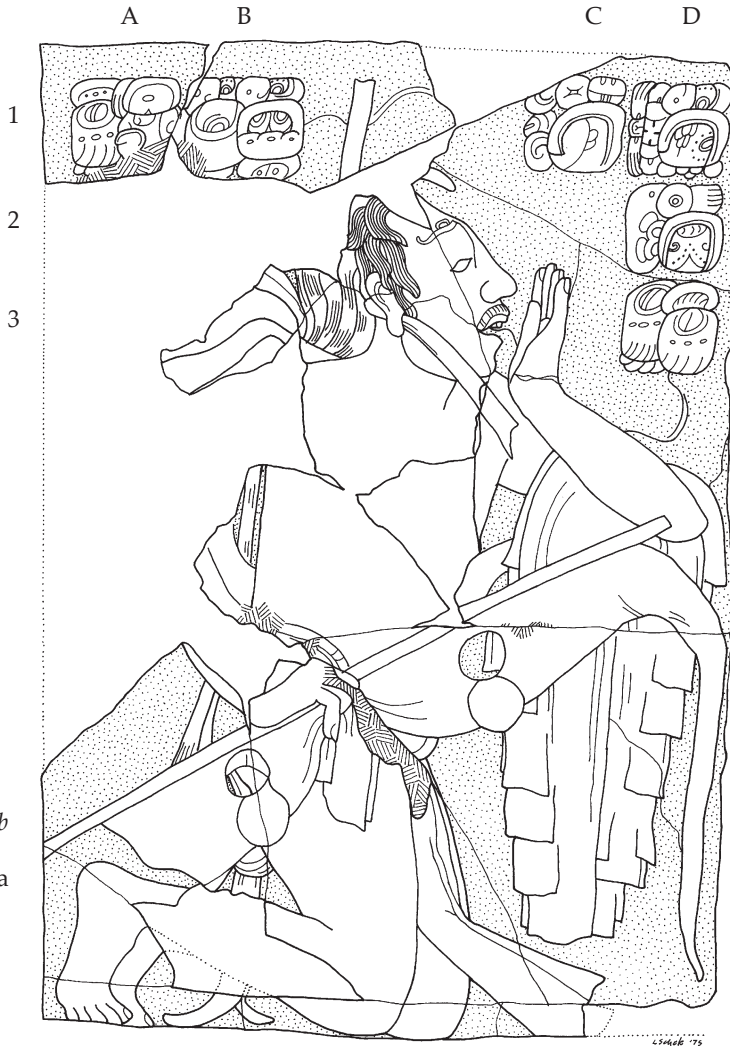


**Figure 26.** Examples of the difrasismo *ch'ahb ahk'abaa* in Classic Maya texts: (a) Tikal, Temple I, Lintel 3 (D3-C4); (b) Naranjo, Stela 22 (A7-C9); (c) Palenque, Temple XXI, bench upper edge (N'); (d) Tikal, Column Altar 1 (A4) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

the European terms shroud the exact meaning (see Law 2012).<sup>9</sup> The second term (R2) consists of the adjective *ahk'ab* “darkness” that is affixed by an *-aal* derivational suffix marking instantiation and thereby serves to both nominalize and to greatly refine the semantic domain, thus increasing specificity, precision, and definiteness by honing in on one particular instance (Langacker 1991:53; Lacadena 2010b:37). As such, *ahk'ab-aal* is not “darkness” in the broadest sense but rather one very specific type of darkness, namely “night,” as is made clear by the many dictionary entries for the same derived, albeit syncopated, lexical form *ahk'bal ~ ak'bal* seen in numerous Lowland Maya languages (Kaufman 2003:450). As such the difrasismo *u-ch'ab y-ahk'abaa*, “his creation, his night,” although clear both in its reading and literal sense, is much less intelligible to western minds than is to be desired. This is due in large part to the fact that we are not entirely clear as to the type of compound form that we see in this difrasismo, and what the relationship is between the two elements, whether they together serve as copulative or appositional elements, or whether the first segment of the difrasismo qualifies an endocentric compound, or alternatively whether both refer to a semantic head that is left unmentioned and as such together function as an exocentric compound (see Bisetto and Scalise 2005).

Outside of parentage expressions (Jones 1977:45; Knowlton 2012:261-262) this difrasismo is used to qualify victorious kings, such as Jasaw Chan K'awiil I after his decisive battle against Calakmul in AD 695, where it reads *tu-ch'ahb ti y-ahk'abaa* “with his creation, with his night” (Knowlton 2012:260-261) (Figure 26a). Much the same difrasismo is inscribed on the bench of Temple XXI at Palenque, written as *ta-ch'ahb ta-ahk'abaa* (Figure 26c), as is a very early example,

<sup>9</sup> At one juncture the lexeme *ch'ab ~ ch'ahb* was also drawn into the constellation of glyphs that were thought to record bloodletting rituals and therefore was also translated as “sacrifice” and “let blood” (Schele 1980; Schele and Miller 1986:187, 191). As this interpretation no longer seems tenable, it is not prudent to attach these glosses to the lexemes.



**Figure 27.**  
Palenque,  
Tablet of the  
Orator depicting  
a defeated  
subordinate of  
Piedras Negras  
calling out *a-ch'ahb  
aw-ahk'abaal* (B1)  
(drawing by Linda  
Schele © Los  
Angeles County  
Museum of Art).

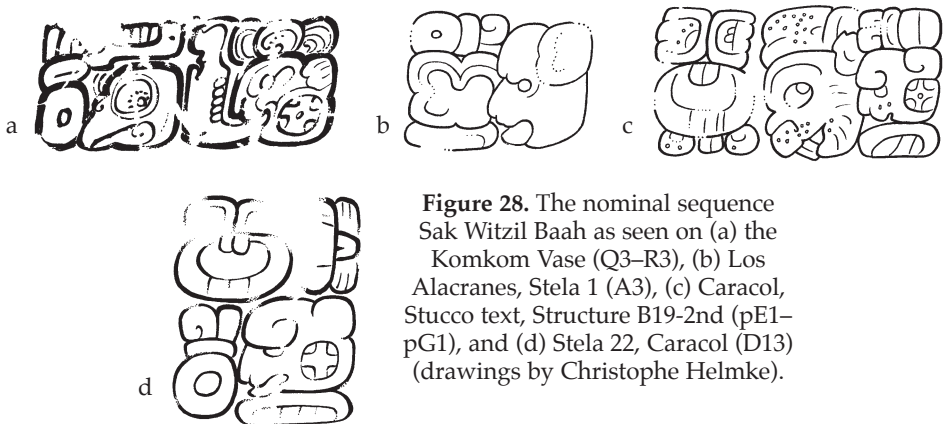
incised on the reverse of the Dumbarton Oaks plaque, commemorating as it does the accession of an early ruler around 200 BC (see Schele and Miller 1986:119-120). In contrast, captives, stripped of their clothes, bound in ropes, and begging in supplication are described in associated captions as *ma' ch'ahb ma' ahk'abaal*, “without creation, without night,” a clear and diametrically antithetical condition (Zender 1999:126-127; Stuart 2005b:278) (Figure 26d). Precisely this *difrasismo* describes the captured Ucanal king “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam, bare, weary, and emaciated as he implores a victorious K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk, after a battle in AD 698 (Schele and Freidel 1990:190-191; Zender 1999:126-127; Helmke and Kettunen 2011:45-46) (Figure 26b). These types of captions also accompany the subordinates of Piedras Negras seized by Chak Suutz’ of Palenque in AD 725 (Martin and Grube 2008:173), where the vanquished cry out in supplication *a-ch'ahb aw-ahk'abaal*, “it is your creation, your night,” as if to mollify their victors (Figure 27). Based on these examples one might surmise that the combined semantic domain of the *difrasismo* embraces meanings such as “power, force, strength” and by extension

“victorious,” and to append a negation is to be deprived of these qualities as “powerless, weakness” and “defeated” (see Zender 1999:125-127).

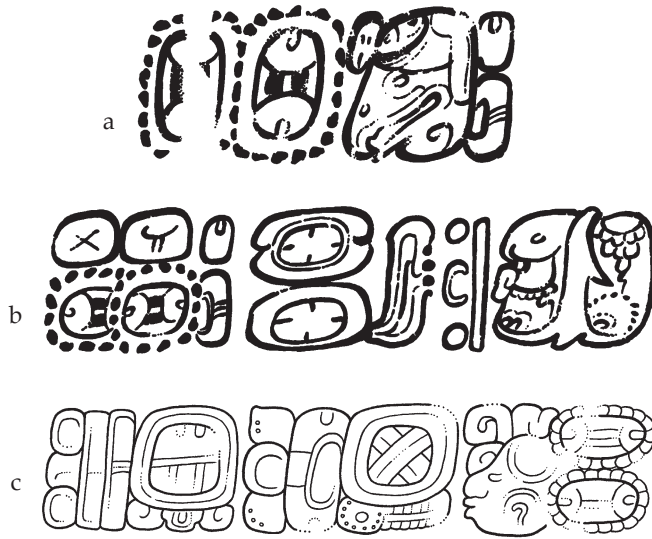
Fascinatingly, precisely the same *difrasismo* is found in the ethnohistoric manuscript known as the Ritual of the Bacabs, that may originally stem from Nunkini in western Yucatan (Roys 1965; Arzápalo Marín 1989:375-376). The Ritual of the Bacabs is an incredibly important source for understanding Pre-Columbian Maya medical practices since it is a collection of incantations against a host of different disorders, ranging from seizures, asthma, aches, respiratory ailments, fever, ulcers, sores, inflammations, and the ejection of the placenta (Roys 1965). It is as part of these incantations that the *difrasismo* appears, the *curandero* inquiring as to the identity of the disease, attempting to ascertain the source of its power, as well as the names of its envisaged mother and father, each tied to parts of the poetic couplet. Having identified the culprit, proper actions are thus taken and the patient can be set on the road to recovery. Whereas it is clear that the extant manuscript is a later copy of an earlier one—the surviving copy was completed sometime around 1779—this would make the *difrasismo* one of the single most important examples of continuity in Mesoamerican lyrical and magical language, enduring nearly completely unchanged for nearly two millennia.

Returning to the parentage expression we can thus see that this significant and evocative metaphorical expression qualifies the father of the patron of the vase essentially as the “likeness of the powerful one.” The *difrasismo* may well apply to the following segment of the nomino-titular string of the father, which is written **ch’a-ho-ma**, or *chaho’m* (S2), thereby describing him as a “varón” or “man” (see Lacadena 2001:226). As such, coupled with the *difrasismo* the father is described as a “powerful man.”

The following two glyph blocks provide his personal name and can be transliterated as **SAK-wi-[WITZ]tzi** (R3) **ba?-hi** (S3) and read as *sak witz[il] baah* (Figure 28a). This nominal segment is a late namesake of individuals known from the site of Los Alacranes in southern Quintana Roo including a ruler in the sixth century (Grube 2005:91-92), as well as multiple examples of the youth name of the Caracol king nicknamed K’an II, who ruled between AD 618 and 658



**Figure 28.** The nominal sequence Sak Witzil Baah as seen on (a) the Komkom Vase (Q3-R3), (b) Los Alacranes, Stela 1 (A3), (c) Caracol, Stucco text, Structure B19-2nd (pE1-pG1), and (d) Stela 22, Caracol (D13) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).



**Figure 29.** Details of texts that make reference to the place name Komkom: (a) sherds of a Chinos Black-on-cream vase discovered at Buenavista del Cayo; (b) the patron's titular segment on a black-on-orange bowl (K2730); (c) Naranjo Stela 22 recording the defeat of Komkom (G6–G7) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

(Grube 1994:104; Martin and Grube 2000:91; Simon Martin, personal communication 2016). In these latter cases the names are written **SAK-WITZ-li-BAH** (Los Alacranes, Stela 1) (Figure 28b), **SAK-[WITZ]BAH-li** (Caracol, slate mace as well as Stela 22 and the stucco of Str. B19-2<sup>nd</sup>) (Figure 28c–d), and **SAK-[WITZ]BAH-ji?** (Caracol, Stela 3). Due to the many instances wherein the signs for *witz* and *baah* are infixed into one another in the texts of Caracol, there has been some uncertainty as to the correct reading order, but these examples make it clear that an *-il* abstractivation suffix also accompanies the medial segment. Despite these doubts, the Komkom Vase makes clear that the name should be read as *sak witzil baah*, and understood as “white montane gopher.”

Another title follows his name (R4) and can be read as *ch'ok*, or “youth,” suggesting that he was deemed youthful and full of prowess (Grube and Stuart 1987:6–7; Houston 2009:157). Significant is his second title that is split over two blocks (S4–R5), and although much is missing of the first block enough remains that the head of the parakeet, serving as the *a* vocalic sign, and the top of the **SAK** logogram can be discerned without difficulty, followed by a clear spelling of *nikte'*, written with two logograms. Together this can be identified as a title of origin read as *Ajsak Nikte'*, or “he of Sak Nikte'” (see Stuart and Houston 1994:39), a toponym that has been increasingly receiving attention as a dynastic title of prominence at La Corona in addition to serving as the principal toponym of the site (Canuto and Barrientos Q. 2013:1). However, the use of this toponym at La Corona does not exclude the possibility that it functions predominantly in its titular capacity, nor does it preclude the possibility for the existence of multiple places called “white plumeria flower” (*Plumeria* sp.) or even “white flower woods”—if the complete form of the toponym is Sak Nikte'el. In this particular case we assume that Sak Nikte' names the place of origin of the father, a locality in the eastern central lowlands, in proximity to Naranjo. This conclusion is corroborated by the recent discovery of Stela 27 at Ucanal, which represents the lower portion of a carved monument. Preserved are the richly attired feet





Figure 30. Roll out of the Uacho Black-on-orange bowl K2730 (photograph by Justin Kerr © Kerr Associates).

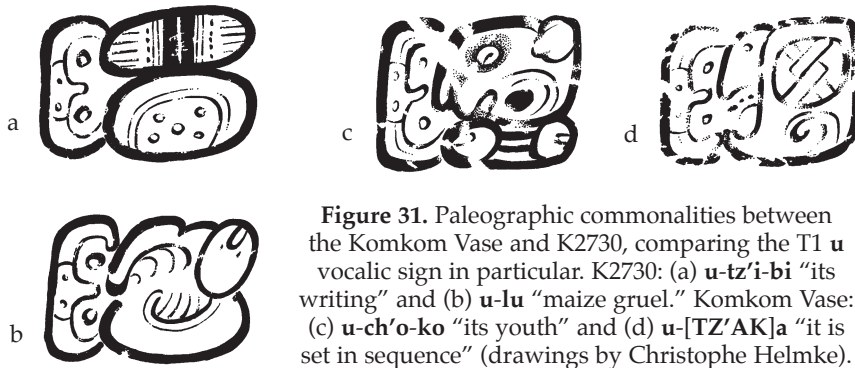
of a regal figure, standing above a basal register bearing incised glyphs (Martin 2017). Although only faintly preserved, this basal text may refer to a fire ritual, and in connection with this a title of origin appears, written **a-SAK-NIK-TE'** for *aj-saknikte'* "he of Sak Nikte'." This indicates that the person officiating the fire ritual was one who hailed from the locality of Sak Nikte', and its mention on a monument at Ucanal confirms that this is a toponym in the vicinity.

This is followed by a third title, written **[ko]mo-[ko]mo** (S5), **AJAW-wa** (R6), possibly read as *komkom ajaw*, or "Komkom king."<sup>10</sup> This Komkom place is mentioned in the monuments of Naranjo and therefore should be a locality in the vicinity; it is said to have been set ablaze as part of a military engagement in AD 696, nominally at the hands of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk—although he was only eight years of age at the time (see Grube and Martin 2004:137-139; Helmke and Kettunen 2011:63; Martin et al. 2016) (Figure 29).

Significantly, the titular pairing of Sak Nikte' and Komkom is in fact already documented from another source: a polychrome bowl in a private collection, designated as K2730 in the Maya Vase Database (Kerr and Kerr 1990:276). The pairing both on the bowl and the Komkom Vase suggest that Sak Nikte' is a specific locality within a greater area named Komkom. The light orange ware bowl is decorated with dark brown-to-black paint, with three finely rendered fleur-de-lys as well as a nice glyphic text along the rim that provides both a dedicatory expression and a statement of ownership (Figure 30). It is in this nomino-titular string that we once more see the titular pair, here written **a-SAK-NIK** (L1), **TE'** (M1), **[ko]mo-[ko]mo-AJAW-wa** (N1).

Fascinatingly, there are a few paleographic commonalities between this bowl and the Komkom Vase discovered at Baking Pot, especially the grapheme **u** in **u-tz'ihb** "his writing" (C1) and **ul** "gruel" (F1), the arcs of which are embellished on the spine with a type of rounded bracket with two dots, broadly resembling the markings for bone and the pincers of centipedes in particular

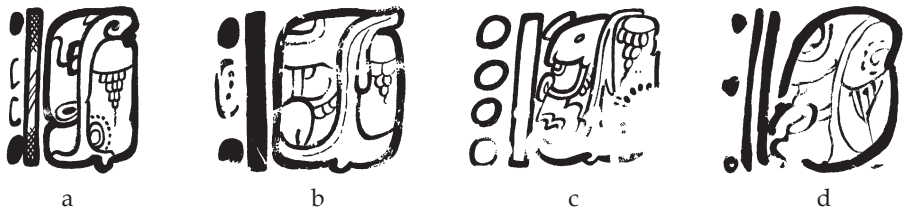
<sup>10</sup> We have long considered the possibility that the **[ko]mo-[ko]mo** spelling records a morphologically coherent form, but that the surface form was syncopated as *kokom*, thereby duplicating a comparable ethnonym that is also found in the texts of Chichen Itza, where it is recorded as **ko-ko-ma**, where the elision of the initial bilabial is apparent (Grube and Stuart 1987:8; Grube et al. 2003: II.46). The Komkom of the Classic period eastern central Lowlands may, or may not, be related to the ethnonym and patronym <*Cocom*> that is well known from the ethnohistoric sources, which was tied to the Itza of Nojpeten (Scholes and Thompson 1977:59; Jones 1998:13).



**Figure 31.** Paleographic commonalities between the Komkom Vase and K2730, comparing the T1 u vocalic sign in particular. K2730: (a) *u-tz'i-bi* "its writing" and (b) *u-lu* "maize gruel." Komkom Vase: (c) *u-ch'o-ko* "its youth" and (d) *u-[TZ'AK]a* "it is set in sequence" (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

(see Taube 2003:413-416) (Figure 31). This feature is so specific that it might just be the case that the painter of the bowl and the vase are one and the same, a hypothesis that we hope will be investigated further by means of chemical analysis of the two specimens. In addition, the bowl provides us with a clear name for the owner as one Kamal Xok, and considering the paleographic equivalences between the bowl and the vase we would venture to speculate that this was the name of the owner of the Komkom Vase himself. This is particularly significant since the owner of the Komkom Vase is not recorded specifically in the text, as though the reader should be able to know this implicitly from the parentage, or had prior knowledge which is lost to us. Such an omission is unusual and again suggests that the textual elements on the vase have been compiled from a variety of sources.

The titular section of the father continues in the following three glyph blocks. The first (S6) provides a unique allograph of the directional logogram read *elk'in* for "east." The reading of this unique sign is supported by the final phonetic complement *-ni* and by the fact that it substitutes for the more traditional *EL-K'IN-ni* spelling involving a brazier set atop a sun sign (see Stuart 1998:389-390, 392) on the K2730 bowl that provides precisely the same title (see Figure 30). The glyph in question represents what can be described as a bent stream flowing between two *k'in* signs for "sun," as though the east was characterized by a large river that flows between the horizons. While conjectural, the iconic value of the logogram may well represent the Belize River, one of the major riverine arteries in the Maya Lowlands. This directional glyph serves to modify the following title (R7) written *7-tzu[ku]* for *huk tzuk*, literally "seven partition" (Figure 32b), a territorial designation for a particular area of the eastern central Lowlands that encompasses a series of sites stretching from Motul de San José in the west to Holmul and Naranjo in the middle and presumably reaching into the Belize Valley in the east (Beliaev 2000; Tokovinine 2013:98-110; Helmke et al. 2015b:26-27, Fig. 19) (Figure 32). Interestingly, the area was deemed to be rather extensive such that it was necessary to specify if a given locality was within the *elk'in* "eastern" or *ochk'in* "western" extent of the territory. Notably, whereas Naranjo is never qualified by a cardinal direction in this scheme, Yaxha and Motul de San José are typically labeled as *ochk'in huk tzuk*, and these sites are patently to the west of Naranjo. In contrast, Komkom is repeatedly designated



**Figure 32.** Map of the eastern central Maya Lowlands showing the distribution of sites associated with different numbered *tzuk* titles (solid triangles) and approximate borders between the different “provinces”: (a) 7-*tzuk*, Naranjo, K1398; (b) 7-*tzuk*, Komkom Vase; (c) 9-*tzuk*, Cuychen vase; (d) 13-*tzuk*, unprovenienced vase from the northeastern Peten, K7459 (map and drawings by Christophe Helmke).

as *elk'in huk tzuk*, strongly suggesting that this locality was to the east of Naranjo and thus in all probability a site in the Belize Valley (Figure 32). The references made to Komkom on the artifacts found at Buenavista del Cayo (Houston et al. 1992:507-508; Yaeger et al. 2015:185-188) and Baking Pot strongly corroborate this conclusion.

Closing off the nomino-titular section is the exalted *bakab* title (S7), written **ba-ka-ba** in precisely the same way as in the titular string of the mother of the original owner of the Komkom Vase.

What may be the only reference to the original owner of the vase is provided in the following four glyph blocks (R8–S9). This segment is initiated by *u-ch'ok*, “it is the youth of,” here once more using the term *ch'ok* to designate a young dynast, but recorded in the possessive. The one that is said to be the possessor of this “youth” is none other than the Komkom king, perhaps the paternal figure cited in the parentage statement. Here he is attributed the title Komkom Ajaw (S8–R9), and the titular string is once more closed by *bakab* (S9). As such, it appears that it was deemed unnecessary to specify who the owner of the vase was, other than providing a tie to the father through the possessive prefixed to the “youth” term. This omission is difficult to remedy but cannot be definitely resolved at present. However, given the evidence afforded by the unprovenanced bowl K2730 it is tantalizing to conclude that the Komkom Vase may have been owned by Kamal Xok, ruler of Komkom at the start of the ninth century.

## Historical Narrative

### *Chronological Overview*

The historical narrative begins in earnest with the first clause following the lengthy calendrical record. As we have seen, the Calendar Round that initiates this clause (D2–D3) is at odds with the Long Count and associated calendrical cycles provided at the onset. There are a few possible interpretations for this disjunction, a situation that is complicated by the absence of a clear Distance Number separating the historical narrative from the Long Count. As such, it is as if the historical account just starts in mid stride, something that is also seen in the subjects of the text as well as the timing and sequentiality of the events narrated.

As with Codex Style vases produced in the court of the Kanu'l kings of Calakmul and nearby allies (e.g., Bishop 1994:41-43; Reents-Budet and Bishop 1998; Reents-Budet et al. 2010; Boucher Le Landais 2014), each separate historical episode is clearly initiated by a Calendar Round date, as is made clear by the Tzolkin that is colored in vivid red, which not only greatly improves the legibility of the text, but also helps to parse the headings of the text as though individual chapters (Figure 33). However, despite the superficial similarity to Codex Style vases, which belong to the Zacatel Cream-polychrome type (Ball 1994:364-365), we should be cautious about this attribution since the vase at hand is a Chinos Black-on-cream, a type established by Robert E. Smith and James C. Gifford (1966:156) that is well known from a series of workshops associated with Naranjo and Holmul in the eastern Peten (see Ball 1993:262). In the present case we are looking at a variety that uses both orange for the trim and red for the Tzolkin glyphs. Thus, whereas this vase is not a Codex Style vase strictly speaking in terms of ceramic typology, it most certainly renders a codical text, and much of the text may well have been copied directly from a codical source or archetype (see Coe 1978:16; Reents-Budet et al. 2010:2). The disjunction between the Long Count and the historical narrative may be due to precisely this process of copying, a salient feature of all cultures with manuscript traditions around the world, wherein the historical segment of the vase is a copy of a codical history



**Figure 33.** A Zacatel Cream-polychrome Codex-style vase showing the use of red slip for the Tzolkin day signs in each Calendar Round (K6751) (photograph by Justin Kerr © Kerr Associates).

or annals tracing earlier events, with the Long Count date possibly providing the date of the vase’s dedication. The differing sources and thematic content of the text are also signaled by the size of the glyph blocks employed, supporting our interpretation that we are looking at three separate segments, each serving discrete functions which do not quite weave together into a concerted whole, the seams between the sections being apparent not only visually but also textually.

The parting of the Long Count and the Calendar Round of the first clause means that the latter has to be anchored separately to the Long Count. That this first clause is headed by the Calendar Round 8 Eb 5 Woh<sup>11</sup> (D2–D3) is all the more remarkable since that exact date does not occur within the entirety of k’atun 19 of baktun 9. Also, throughout baktun 9 this particular Calendar Round occurs only seven times, of which the three nearest possible anchors to the Long Count are:

Long Count	Tzolkin	Haab	Lord of the Night	Gregorian Date
9.15.15.13.12	8 Eb	5 Woh	G2	4 Mar. AD 747
9.18.8.8.12	8 Eb	5 Woh	G1	19 Feb. AD 799
10.1.1.3.12	8 Eb	5 Woh	G9	6 Feb. AD 851

The baktun 10 date seems much too late (accounting for the style and paleography of the text) and therefore untenable, and the earliest date would relate events that transpired 65 years earlier than the date recorded in the Long Count, and while possible this is not all that plausible. The median date corresponding to 799 would provide a start to the narrative, recording events that occurred just 13 years before the dedicatory date at the onset. As such, we consider the k’atun

<sup>11</sup> The spelling of the month sign Woh is interesting since the first instance is written as IK’-AT-ta (D3) whereas all subsequent examples (E4, F6, F11) provide a more compact version, without the phonetic complement and with the logograms exhibiting infixation as IK’[AT].

18 date to be most promising anchor for the historical narrative and one that also provides some highly cogent points of equivalence to the contemporary monumental record at Naranjo. We will touch on these points of equivalence where relevant for each clause of the Komkom Vase and provide a more comprehensive overview at the conclusion of the paper.

Given the truncated 819-day record provided at the beginning of the text, it is noteworthy that the Long Count that heads the text cannot be adequately tied to this calendrical cycle, as we have already touched upon above. Attempting to correlate the 9.18.8.8.12 Long Count anchored to the initial 8 Eb 5 Woh Calendar Round date at the onset of the first clause on the Komkom Vase with other known 819-day records indicates that it also fails to conform to the same numerical structure as other 819-Day Long Count dates. Thus the abridged 819-day record at the onset cannot be related nor provide supplemental calendrical information to the very first clause of the text. The presence of the truncated 819-day record on the Komkom Vase thereby requires another explanation, which remains wanting at present.

Unlike the abrupt break between the Supplementary Series and the Calendar Round that opens the first clause, each subsequent clause in the historical narrative is provided with a clear Distance Number. On this basis, we have been able to reconstruct the entire chronological sequence for the historical narrative as in Table 3.

With the exception of one erroneous Distance Number (N4) which records nine days instead of the required twelve, and one only very partially preserved Distance Number and Calendar Round towards the end of the text (between Clauses 8 and 10), all the calendrical computations are essentially straightforward and internally coherent. One additional feature to note is that the Distance Numbers separating the events are all quite low, events being separated by only a matter of days. In all, the clauses are separated on average by approximately one winal, whereas the smaller Distance Numbers average around 6 days. Also, the whole narrative spans over a half-year from the spring to the summer of 799, but with most events concentrated in just two periods, one in the latter part of February, the other spanning from late July to the start of September. The largest Distance Number represented in the text is that which separates these two periods, and interestingly it counts back from the start of the historical narrative rather than from the immediately preceding sentence. We will discuss this further below under the relevant clause. As such, we can see that the historical narrative of the text provides us with a very detailed and rapid pace, something that we do not usually see in the monuments of the area, where the historical episodes are few, relatively terse, separated by multiple years, and have been the subject of considerable scribal emendation in antiquity, leaving these as somewhat terse and impoverished sources. The text of the vase is quite different in this respect, which is why we interpret the historical segment to be a reproduction of a codical narrative of events written year by year, transferred from one medium to another, as though the vase is essentially a skeuomorph of a codex (see Houston 2014a). This process of transference thereby sheds light on the

Clause	Coords.	Long Count	Tzolkin	Haab	Gregorian Date	Glyph Blocks
Clause 1	D2–D3 E3	9.18.8.8.12 + <u>2</u>	8 Eb	5 Woh	19 Feb. 799	26
Clause 2	F3–E4 F5	9.18.8.8.14 + <u>2</u>	10 Hix	7 Woh	21 Feb. 799	5
Clause 3	E6–F6 E10–F10	9.18.8.8.16 + <u>2</u>	12 Kib	9 Woh	23 Feb. 799	10
Clause 4	E11–F11	9.18.8.8.18	1 Etz'nab	11 Woh	25 Feb. 799	32
Clause 1'	D2–D3 G11	9.18.8.8.12 + <u>7.14</u>	8 Eb	5 Woh	19 Feb. 799	
Clause 5	I2–J3 M2	9.18.8.16.6 + <u>4</u>	6 Kimi	19 Ch'en	23 Jul. 799	47
Clause 6	N2–M3 N4	9.18.8.16.10 + <u>12*</u>	10 Ok	3 Yax	27 Jul. 799	5
Clause 7	M5–N5 N7	9.18.8.17.2 + <u>6</u>	9 Ik'	15 Yax	8 Aug. 799	6
Clause 8	M8–N8 N11	9.18.8.17.8 + <u>11</u>	2 Lamat	1 Sak	14 Aug. 799	8
Clause 9	M12–N12 O8	9.18.8.17.19 + <u>9</u>	13 Kawak	12 Sak	25 Aug. 799	10
Clause 10	O9–O10	9.18.9.0.8	9 Lamat	1 Kej	3 Sep. 799	4

**Table 3.** Chronological sequence for the historical narrative. Note: the sections shaded in gray are not preserved on the vase and are reconstructions.

types and the detail of information that was once recorded in such annals and underlines just how little historical data are left in the monumental corpus upon which we can anchor our reconstructions of ancient Maya dynastic histories. The wealth of historical information aside, if we had a comparable historical text as that preserved on the Komkom Vase for each and every year of the ninth century, we would actually be in a position to say something substantive about Classic Maya history and the Terminal Classic “Collapse” in particular.

### *Clause 1*

The initial clause that heads the historical narrative relates a series of events that transpired on the date 8 Eb 5 Woh, or February 19, 799 (Figure 34). As we have already touched upon above, the historical narrative and the initial Long Count date are at odds, with the narrative starting rather abruptly, without any sort of background, nor any introduction of the historical agents. In fact the most significant agents are referred to by their titles alone, as though we should already have been introduced to them in an earlier part of the original annals, which has not been reproduced on the vase.

To situate ourselves a little, at this date we are in the middle of the reign

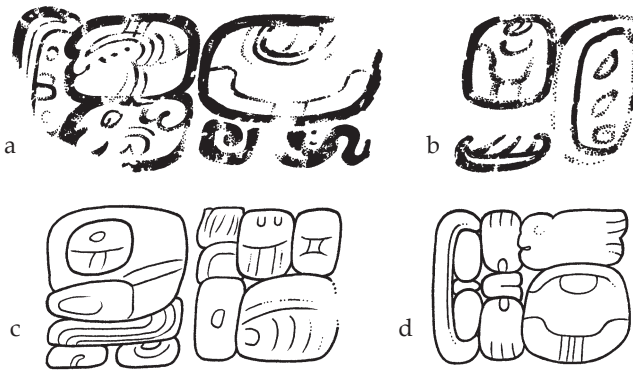
of “Itzamnaaj” K’awiil of Naranjo (r. c. AD 784–810+), the grandson of the famed K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. c. AD 693–728+), and this is just a few months before the accession of K’inich Joy K’awil at Caracol (r. c. AD 799–803+), whose reign would mark the beginning of Caracol’s Terminal Classic revival (see Helmke et al. 2006; Martin and Grube 2008:74–77, 82–83, 96–97). In contrast, this period is little known for Tikal, and Calakmul actually never recovered from its defeat at the hands of the latter nearly a century before in 695. Whereas the large network of alliances and vassalage that dominated the Late Classic landscape had dissipated by this time, we can see that this was a period of relative stability and ascendancy for Naranjo and Caracol. The might of these centers translated less into a consolidation of allies and more into a series of wars waged on their nearest neighbors. Whether these martial conflicts served to maintain territorial extent or were motivated by a desire for territorial gains and increased tributary networks remains unknown, but the regularity of the conflicts points to a period of increasing balkanization and competition between dynasties, with the primary intent being the destabilization of neighboring dynasties in the eastern central Lowlands.

The first clause is rather lengthy, spanning over as many as 26 glyph blocks before giving way to a Distance Number (E3) that leads to the following clause. As we will see, this clause does not just relate a singular event but a whole series of verbal expressions that are all said to have transpired on this date. As such we will review these sub-clause by sub-clause. The very first sub-clause starts with an interesting expression that is split over two glyph blocks and is written as **u-jo-ch’o** (C4), T506-K’AK’ (D4) (note the nice doubler contained within the right fire scroll, a feature repeated later in the text) (Figure 35a). Here the reading of the T506 sign is complicated by its polyvalence, since at times it functions as the logogram **WAJ** for *waj* “tamale” or **OL** for *ohl* “heart.” In the former case we may be



Figure 34. Clause 1 of the Komkom Vase (drawing by Christophe Helmke).



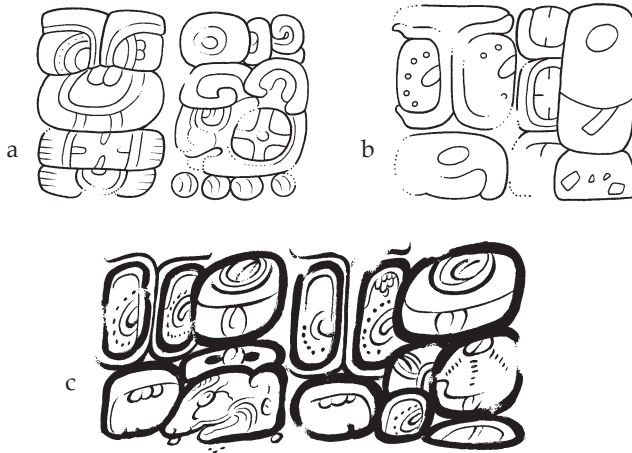


**Figure 35.** The use of T506 WAJ as *wa*: (a) Komkom Vase (C3–D3); (b) Drawing 34, Naj Tunich (B4); (c) Stela 12, Yaxchilan (C2–D2); (d) Stela 5, Machaquila (A3) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

observing another instance where a logogram closed by a velar spirant is used as a syllabogram *wa* (reflecting a [wa:x] > [wa] shift), almost as if by a neographistic process of syncopation. Support for this interpretation is the use of the same T506 in **CHUM[wa]-ni-ya** on Stela 12 at Yaxchilan (> AD 752) (Figure 33c) and **u-ma-ka-wa** on Stela 5 at Machaquila (AD 840) (Figure 35d) (Alfonso Lacadena, personal communication 2016; Marc Zender, personal communication 2016). Another example, from Naj Tunich (Figure 35b), provides what may be the sequence **wa-ka-xa**, ostensibly spelling the numeral “eight,” or an anthroponym Wakax (Helmke et al. 2018:130). As such, the verbal expression may be read *u-joch'-ow k'ahk'*. This expression involves the transitive root *joch'* that refers to the drilling of fire with a shaft and fire board, accompanied by the affixes of active transitive verbs and followed by the patient of the verb. This expression could thereby be translated as “he drilled the fire.”<sup>12</sup> The agent, the person who has drilled the fire, would have been named in the following glyph blocks (C5–D5), but unfortunately this part of the vase has not been recovered. The only remaining portion represents a part of the inside of a human hand, with the thumb touching the index finger. Although this has been rendered in fine detail, it is insufficient to propose a clear identification (cf. Boot 2003).

What may be the start of the second sub-clause (C6) is also badly weathered, but just enough remains to suggest that the glyph block ended with the syllabogram *yi*. Assuming that the syntax has been correctly discerned, then this sub-clause may have been initiated by a verb of motion or change of state such as *t'ab-aay* “he rose, ascended” or *lok'-ooy* “he emerged, fled” (Beliaev 2006; see also Tokovinine 2013:79-81). The following glyph (D6) is unfortunately broken but may be part of a syllabogram *su*. The end of the clause records what appears to be a toponym (C7) written **CHAK-MAY-ya-TE'?**. Although there is some

<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, if the T506 sign here functions as **OL**, rather than *wa*, then this expression may be read *u-joch'-ol k'ahk'*. Noteworthy is the spelling of the derivational suffix *-ol*, here possibly written by means of rebus with the logogram **OL**, “heart.” This would duplicate the example in Panel 3 at La Corona where we can see **u-BAH ti-CHOK-ko-la**, for *u-baah ti chok-ol*, “it is his image/portrait in (the act of) scattering.” In combination with the possessive prefix, the derived form of the verb with the suffix *-ol* appears to indicate nominalization from CVC-transitives. As a whole the expression *u-joch'ol k'ahk'* could thus be understood as “it is his drilled fire.”



**Figure 36.** The undeciphered T351v logogram recorded in nominal contexts: (a) Caracol, Stela 3 (C16a, B17b); (b) Comalcalco, Modeled Brick 2 (A4a–B4b); (c) Ek Balam, Structure 1, Room 29-sub, Mural of 96 Glyphs (R1–S1) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

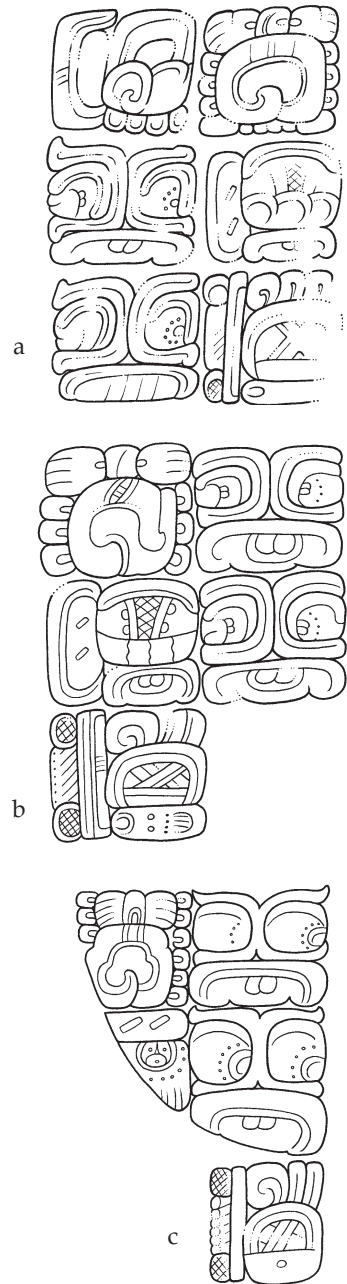
spalling, the first portion is quite clear, wherein the main sign—representing a deer hoof and its phonetic complement *-ya* that together provide the term *may*, which here means “red brocket deer” (*Mazama americana*)—is preceded reasonably enough by the adjective *chak* “red.” As such the place name appears to mean “red brocket deer.” The final sign resembles the logogram **TE’** “tree” and could therefore name a particular forest where these deer were found, assuming that the complete toponym was read *chak may te’el*.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, the toponym may name a place where a plant named after the particular type of deer was known to occur.

The third sub-clause is initiated by yet another predicate (D7) written **u-pe-ka** for *u-pehk-a*. The reading of this expression has been evident for some time, involving the rabbit head <*p*> found in Diego de Landa’s “alphabet” read **pe**. It was first studied by Dmitri Beliaev and Albert Davletshin (2002) and has recently been the subject of another perceptive study by Stephen Houston (2014b). In most other contexts this verb appears in what seems to be the passive voice as *pehkaj*, yet here we have both a Set A personal pronoun as a prefix and a suffix *-a*, indicating that we are looking at the active voice of a non-CVC transitive verb, involving the derived stem *pehk*. In Lowland Maya languages the verbal root *pek* variously means “to call, shout” and “to invite, summon,” the latter implying that this involves multiple individuals summoned to a meeting, especially since this verb is used to bind multiple agents together, as in the Dresden Codex as well as historical texts from the Usumacinta and Ek Balam. As such, we can see that this sub-clause relates a group of individuals who have been called to

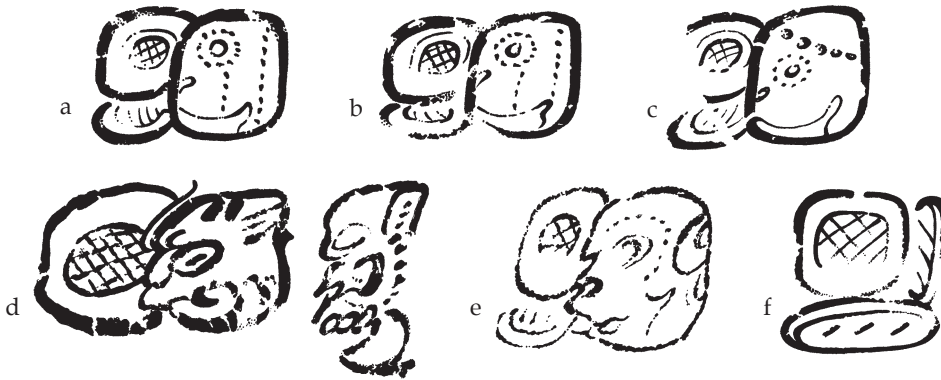
<sup>13</sup> The final sign in the toponym may not be the logogram **TE’** but another recently identified syllabogram. The sign in question looks like the lower part of a bow, and recent research into this sign by Marc Zender has identified it as a rare syllabogram **we**, used in a variety of contexts including the youth name of Shield Jaguar IV at Yaxchilan and the name of a supernatural feline (Zender et al. 2016). What this sign might be doing in this context is unclear, but it may well cue an underspelled term *weC* wherein the weak final consonant has been left unwritten (see Zender 1999:130-142). The ambiguity in the identification of the signs is caused by partial spalling rendering the two small beads along the medial line that are diagnostic of the **TE’** logogram indistinct on the Komkom Vase.

a meeting. The following four glyph blocks relate who two of the individuals were who were summoned. They are both referred to by their title and are differentiated by a cardinal direction. Thus the first individual is called the *nojol* “south(ern)” (C8) whereas the latter is the *xaman* “north(ern)” (C9). As such, these titles may refer to an idealized territorial division wherein subordinates to the king exercised control over the southern and northern reaches of the realm (see Tokovinine 2013:91-97). The title that these individuals share remains undeciphered and includes a tree sign to the left and a stone sign to the right (T351v) (although occasionally the order of these signs is reversed), separated by sinuous filament-like elements. What is clear is that the signs are logograms that are phonetically complemented by *-na*. Precisely the same logogram is used in the regnal names of a series of kings at Caracol (Grube 1994:84-86) (Figure 36a) and in titular strings at Ek Balam (Lacadena 2003a:52) (Figure 36c), as well as one example seen at Palenque in the name of K’an Joy Chitam II (Robertson 1985:Fig. 256).

Closer to home, these two titles, along with the cardinal directions that qualify them are found in three neat parallel clauses at Naranjo: The first in the lateral text of Stela 23, erected in AD 711, the second on the back of Stela 46 raised in 726, both during the reign of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk, whereas the third is in the initial clause of Altar 2, raised in around 790 by “Itzamnaaj” K’awiil, the grandson of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (Figure 37). On Stela 23 the clause in question refers to the crushing defeat of the kings of Yaxha in June 710 and the despoilment of the burial of one of its kings followed by the scattering of his bones (Grube and Schele 1994:4-5; Grube 2000b:257-261), an act that is credited to K’ahk’ Tiliw, but who is said to have acted “in company with the southern ... and northern ..., they of Naranjo” (see Grube 2004b:208-209; Grube and Martin 2004:48) (Figure 37a). On Stela 46 the two titles, qualified by cardinal directions and the same



**Figure 37.** The pairing of the same T351v title with *nojol* “south” and *xaman* “north,” as seen in parallel clauses on monuments at Naranjo: (a) Stela 23 (G4–H6); (b) Stela 46 (C15–C17); (c) Altar 2 (pB5–pD1) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).



**Figure 38.** The verb *pakxi* ~ *pakxi* as seen on the Komkom Vase: (a) glyph E7; (b) E12; (c) M6 in comparison to the examples from Naj Tunich: (d) Drawing 19 (A3–A4a), (e) Drawing 48 (A1), and (f) Drawing 65 (B2) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

demonym or title of origin, follow an event in February 726, wherein a series of rulers jointly partake in a ritual, apparently preparing the foundation of the stela (Martin et al. 2016) (Figure 37b). Interestingly, among the foreign lords is one who bears the so-called Water Scroll Emblem Glyph that is undoubtedly tied to Altun Ha, located near the Caribbean Coast of Belize (see Helmke et al. 2018). The text of Altar 2 records a series of construction events, either pertaining to paving of playing alleys in a ballcourt (Grube 2004b:208-209; Grube and Martin 2004:46-47) or to the building of paved roads (Stuart 2007). The first such construction is said to have taken place in AD 588 and is credited to the long-reigning Early Classic ruler Ajasaj Chan K'inich (r. c. AD 546–615+) (see Martin and Grube 2000:71-72; Helmke and Kettunen 2011:11-16). Following in the same phraseology, the two subordinates are once more introduced, here apparently with the predicate *u-tz'ahk-a*, “it is set in order,” and once more they are referred to as *aj-sa'uul*, “they of Naranjo” (Figure 37c). The clause on the vase is therefore all the more fascinating since it duplicates these same expressions seen on the monuments of Naranjo and implies not only a direct textual continuity, but also a permanence in sociopolitical organization over more than 22 decades.

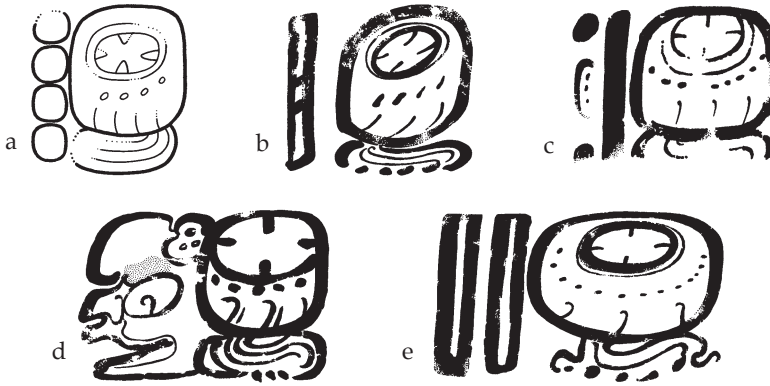
Heading the fourth sub-clause is the verbal expression **pa-ka-xi**, possibly read *pakaxi* and thereby duplicating the lexical forms of modern Ch'orti' (Hull 2004:92) or involving some syncopation and thereby read *pakxi*, and thereby anticipating the <*pacxiel*> forms documented for Ch'olti' (Morán 1695:91). This verb is another remarkable feature, since it is otherwise only known from the painted texts found within Naj Tunich (Helmke 2009:157-160), the important cave site in relative proximity to a number of archaeological sites in the Mopan Valley of the Peten and Caracol in Belize. Interestingly, this same verb appears another three times in the text of the vase (Figure 38a–c), making this the case with the highest number of examples of this verb outside of Naj Tunich, where three examples are also known (Drawings 19, 48, and 65) (Figure 38d–f). Based on the examples adorning the walls of Naj Tunich and the Ch'olti' entry <*pacxi*> “volver de alguna parte” (Morán 1695:91), Barbara MacLeod and Andrea Stone

(Stone 1983; MacLeod and Stone 1995) were able to interpret this verb as “to return,” which here as well as in Ch’olti’ involves a syncopated polymorphic form that is affixed by the root intransitive *-i*.<sup>14</sup> This verb was used predominantly in statements by individuals making ritual pilgrimages to the cave, wherein they state that they have “come back” or “returned” once more. Based on the examples known from Naj Tunich, a toponym usually follows the verbal expression specifying the locality to which the agent returned. To this we can contrast the use and meaning of this verb in modern Ch’orti’ where *pakaxi* can be glossed as “go for a walk, walk around in the town, walk to the town” (Hull 2004:92). As such, whereas the Classic Maya form is usually understood as “to return” we should be cautious and entertain the possibility that in certain cases this verbal expression refers to journeys going to particular named settlements. This may certainly be the case in the narrative presented on the Komkom Vase.

At both Naj Tunich and on the vase, the name of the agent—the person(s) who undertook the journey—are named. This indicates that the toponymic references must function as prepositional sub-clauses within the greater sentence (even though the locative prepositions are conspicuously underspelled in these clauses), since intransitive syntax stipulates that the verb should only have one argument, which functions as the subject and is the patient of the action. As such these sentences can be analyzed as “returned, to PLACE, SUBJECT.”

The locality that is being revisited is written **SAK-KAB-ni-li** for *sak kabnil*. The initial element is the adjective *sak* “white” and the main sign of the compound is **KAB**, which usually functions as the logogram for “earth, land” (see Tokovinine 2013:43-48); together they provide a plausible toponym as “white earth,” also attested in its hispanicized derivation *sascab* in Yukatek, for “marl” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:719). The same toponym may also be attested in the text of Naranjo Stela 12 (C15), apparently written **SAK-ka-KAB-ni?-li**, confirming that this toponym preserved the velar stop and was pronounced with a [k], and had not yet succumbed to the *k > ch* palatalization shift. On Stela 12, the toponym occurs as the name of a location that is affected by a martial action at the hands of Naranjo, on the date 1 Etz’nab 11 Woh, which is to say just eight days later than the date of Clause 1 and on precisely the same date as Clause 4 of the Komkom Vase. The presence of the toponymic suffix *-il* in this place name (again in its shortened form), and a comparison to the toponym *Yaxniil*—incorporating a syncopated form of *yaxuun* “cotinga”—attested in the glyphic corpus of the Usumacinta area, suggests that we have an equivalent example, involving the name of an animal, initially of the form CaCVn, but syncopated as CaCn, affixed by an allomorph of the *-iil* toponymic suffix (Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.:15-19). Remembering that the word for “bee” in Mayan languages is homophonous with “earth” (Kaufman 2003:414, 676-677), this same equivalence may well be intended here, in using the logogram for its phonetic value as

<sup>14</sup> Søren Wichmann (2006:287), who has parsed this verb differently, has offered the transcription *pakaax*, analysed as a CVC root suffixed by *-aax*, which has been interpreted as a marker that derives intransitive roots to the mediopassive voice of transitives (Wichmann 2006:287).



**Figure 39.** Examples of the T501[544]-ni title prefixed by a variety of numerals: (a) numbered title on Motul de San José, Stela 4; (b) example on K1383 of Río Azul; (c) Komkom Vase, title of agent in Clause 4; (d) title recorded at Naj Tunich, Drawing 82; (e) unprovenienced vessel K7042 (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

a rebus. In addition, *säk kab* “abeja blanca, abeja real” is attested for modern Mopan (Hofling 2011:105), demonstrating the existence of such an animal in the ethnozootaxonomy of the Lowlands. As such, the whole toponym can be translated as “where there are queen bees” although we have been unable to determine the placement of this locality in the landscape.

The individual who returns to Sak Kabnil is one of the two persons cited in the previous sub-clause, namely the “north(ern) ...” (C11–D11), although in this instance he is provided with a series of additional titles. The first of these (C12) is written 7-T501[544]-ni, wherein the intervening sign may function as a syllabogram (Figure 39c). Marc Zender (2014b:55-58, 2017:34; see also Awe and Zender 2016:163), based on the glyphs incised on the bone rings discovered at Cahal Pech, has suggested the value *so?* for the sign in question, whereas the senior author of the present study has worked with the value *si?*. Based on these values the title can be read as *huk soon* or *huk sin*,<sup>15</sup> although the exact meaning of the item quantified remains unclear but appears to provide a geographic label of origin. The same title is seen in the texts of Naj Tunich (Figure 39d) where it designates a person from Baaxtuun,<sup>16</sup> a locality that may be in the vicinity, in the southeastern Peten. The mother of the owner of the Cuychen vase, who may stem from the northeastern Peten, also bears the same title (Helmke et al. 2015b:25, Fig. 17; see also Tokovinine 2013:111). Based on the example on this vase we can see that the title was also used by members of the Naranjo court.

The individual is also referred to as *aj-sa’uul* or “he of Naranjo” (D12), as

<sup>15</sup> The quantified lexeme may be related to the transitive verbal root *sin* “to extend” attested in the Madrid Codex (Boot 2009:160), perhaps nominalized as *sihm* “extent.” Note also *si’in* in Ch’orti’ (Wisdom 1950:632) “extend, long, in a line or series.”

<sup>16</sup> Originally, and erroneously, this toponym was thought to refer to Xultun (see MacLeod and Stone 1995), but the recent decipherment of this particular toponym as Baaxtuun has made it clear that it cannot also be Baaxwitz, the toponym of Xultun of the Classic period (see Prager et al. 2010).

well as {**ya**}?-**AJAW**<sup>17</sup> (E1) using a playful way of spelling *y-ajaw*, literally “lord of,” but more broadly “vassal,” using the Tzolkin day sign rather than one of the more usual logograms for this title. The names and titles of the overlord are provided in the final three glyph blocks, but again omit the personal names and only make reference to titles, as though these individuals were already known from an earlier segment of the text that was not reproduced on the vase. The first title is only partially preserved (F1), but it can be read without difficulty as one of the highest sacerdotal titles, *aj-k’uh-u’n* “worshipper” (Zender 2004b:180-195).

This is followed by a toponymic expression (E2) specifying where the overlord operated. Upon closer scrutiny it seems clear that the initial sign of this glyph block resembles the other **KAB** ~ **CHAB** logograms seen in the text, with the following sign, a **ba** syllabogram, presumably functioning as a phonetic complement.<sup>18</sup> As a result we may have a simple spelling of *kab* ~ *chab* “earth, land,” serving as an initial qualifier to the segment to follow in the final glyph block. This glyph block (F2) can be read as *huk tzuk*, the same “seven partition” title that we saw earlier in connection with the father of the owner of the Komkom Vase. As such in terms of territorial designations we are still in the same general area, with agents bearing comparable regionally-specific titles. Whereas one would expect the figures named here who bear the T351v title to be subordinate to the king of Naranjo (based on Altar 2 as well as Stelae 23 and 46), the vase paints us another picture wherein they could be vassals of other lesser figures, such as a priest from the “land of seven partition.”

To quickly summarize, we have seen a series of different events that are said to have taken place on February 15, 799, including (perhaps in chronological sequence) the drilling of a fire by a figure whose identity escapes us, a verb of motion to a place that in part is called Chak Mayte’ (or possibly Chak Mayew), a meeting between the southern and northern subordinates of Naranjo, and the return to a place called Sak Kabnil by the northern subordinate, who is said to be vassal of the priest of Lakam Ha’. On its own, this sentence gives us an image of a single tumultuous day wherein key agents move across the landscape and position themselves within the narrative to better account for the events to follow. Unfortunately, the agents are only referred to obliquely and indirectly by their titles, and the places mentioned are heretofore unknown or generally obscure. Thus, whereas this single sentence provides us with a wealth of information, it is very difficult to account for its significance without additional anchors.

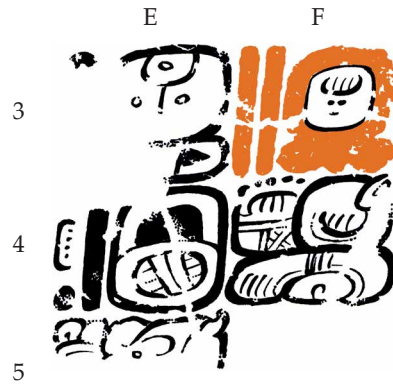
<sup>17</sup> One alternate possibility is that this collocation was written {1}-**AJAW**, providing *juun ajaw*. If this is correct, this would provide a personal name drawn from a date in the Tzolkin, possibly a birth name analogous to the priestly individual named **4-AJAW** who is depicted and named on the bench of Temple XIX at Palenque (Stuart 2005a:115-116, Fig. 82).

<sup>18</sup> In the initial reading of this vase, we identified this segment as **LAKAM-HA’**, for *lakam-ha’*, literally “large-water.” Although this toponym is well known as one of the ancient place names of Palenque (Stuart and Houston 1994:30-31), we were encouraged by the existence of an eponymous locality in the eastern central Lowlands that is also attested on a Terminal Classic carved bone recovered from Buenavista del Cayo (Helmke et al. 2008:47). As a result, we initially assumed that the presumed toponym on the Komkom Vase referred to a locality near Buenavista del Cayo, presumably a riverine location given its name, as “large water” is a pan-Mesoamerican calque for “river” (Smith-Stark 1994:19, 20; Helmke 2013:3)

### Clause 2

Bridging the first and the second clause is a Distance Number, written concisely as {2}-**la-ta**, a type of Distance Number notation that is used when temporal intervals are within a matter of days, especially fewer than 19 days (see Thompson 1950:169-170) (Figure 40). More recently, scholars have suggested that *lat* is less a substantive for “days” and more a numeral classifier used for counting units of days (e.g., Boot 2002a:56), a linguistic feature that is abundant in Mayan languages as well as a series of Mesoamerican languages generally (e.g., Morales Lara 2006). As such, this classifier is essentially a type of suffix that is appended to cardinal numerals, in this case as *cha'-lat*. Equivalent Distance Numbers are used throughout the remainder of the text (F5, F10, M2, N4, N7, O8), with one exception (G11), as we will see.

The second clause thus occurs two days later than the first, on the date 10 Hix 7 Woh (F3–E4), corresponding to February 21, 799. This clause covers just five glyph blocks and is thereby rather succinct, especially when compared to the previous clause that includes no fewer than three sub-clauses. Here the verbal action that transpired on this day (F4) is written phonetically as **pu-lu-yi**, yielding *pul-uuy*, a change of state inflection for the intransitive verb “burn, set ablaze.” This is a martial expression that is usually interpreted as setting alight an opponent’s home locality (see Stuart 1991; Wald 2007:187-188; Helmke and Brady 2014:203-204, 213-214). What is interesting in this example is the phonetic spelling of the verb, which typically entails a logogram (T1061) representing a flaming human head (Schele 1980:103-104) (Figure 41b–c), although phonetic examples are known from Palenque (see Stuart 2006:96) and Piedras Negras (Houston et al. 2000:333, 334) (Figure 41a). The subject and patient of this action is written in the following glyph block (E5) and although the lower half is missing we can still discern the logogram **SAK** followed by the head of a bat. Whereas there are several bat heads in Maya script with differing values, we assume that this should function as the logogram for “bat,” perhaps **SUTZ'** in



**Figure 40.** Clause 2 of the Komkom Vase (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

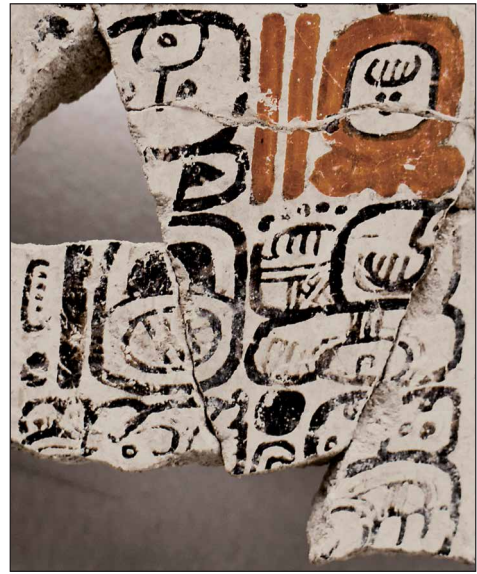


**Figure 41.** Examples of the *puluuy* verb in Classic Maya texts: (a) **pu-lu-yi** as seen in the text of Stela 23 at Piedras Negras (p18); (b) Naranjo, Stela 22, the burning of Tubal (E16); (c) the burning of Bital (F18) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

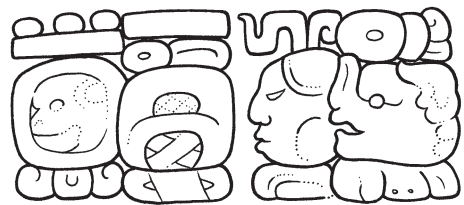


this instance, in order to provide a viable toponym, one named Saksuutz' or "white-bat." What is interesting about this locality is that it is also recorded in the glyphic corpus of Naranjo, although it has not been discussed at any length before. This is due to the fact that the monument that makes reference to this place, Stela 12—raised in August AD 800, during the reign of "Itzamnaaj" K'awiil—is quite eroded, and as such there are many details in the text that have resisted conclusive readings. What is noteworthy is that in the second clause of Stela 12, which is said to take place on the date 8 Eb 5 Woh—28 years after the birth of "Itzamnaaj" K'awiil and figuring as one of the inaugural acts after his accession in 784—is precisely such a *puluuy* action against a place called **SAK-SUTZ'-a**. Although the segment has suffered a fair amount of erosion, based on the equivalence with the text of the Komkom Vase the name of this locality is no longer in doubt (Figure 42b). What is stunning about this account is that it is said to take place on precisely the same date as the first clause of the narrative on the Komkom Vase. As such, we can see that we are probably looking at two different accounts of the same events, one recorded at Naranjo, the other from the vantage of Komkom. This is a fascinating feature of the Komkom Vase that we will discuss further below.

The suffix *-a'* following the "white-bat" toponym on the the Naranjo stela (which may also have been present on the Komkom Vase), appears to be an allomorph of *ha'* "water" and is at times omitted, but when present it is affixed to place names in the central Lowlands that are survivals of an earlier linguistic stratum, possibly of Yukatekan affiliation (Zender 2005a; Helmke 2009:194-196; Helmke and Kupprat 2016:41). This suffix is also seen on toponyms such as Yax-a' (for Yaxha) and Uxwitz-a' (for Caracol) (for an alternate interpretation of this suffix see Tokovinine 2013:58). As such there can be little doubt that this location is somewhere in the eastern central Lowlands, in the greater Naranjo region.



a

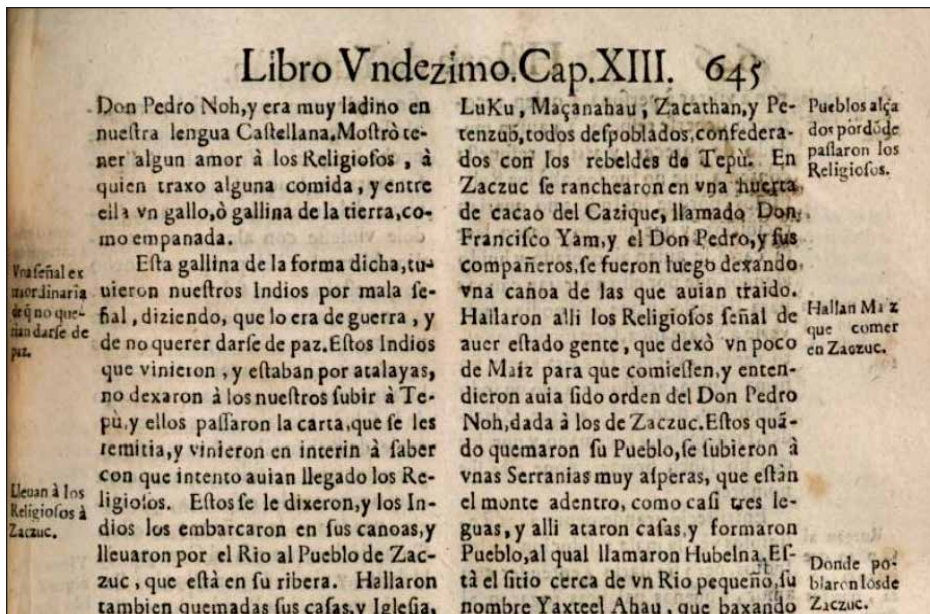


b

**Figure 42.** The burning of the locality named Saksuutz' as rendered in (a) Clause 2 on the Komkom Vase (E3–F5) and (b) the parallel clause on Naranjo Stela 12 (B7–C7) (photograph and drawing by Christophe Helmke).

One of the greatest aids to reconstructing the geopolitical history of the region is the ability to identify the physical locations in the landscape to which these ancient toponyms refer. As is often the case, we can only roughly surmise where such locations were, yet a few salient exceptions exist, wherein toponyms survive the vagaries of time, war, depopulation, and memory and survive to the present. In this part of the Maya world, this is the case with Yaxa', Monpaan, Mutu'l, and Sakha', which endure to this day as Yaxha, Mopan, Motul de San José, and Laguna la Blanca (Stuart 1985, 1993; MacLeod and Stone 1995:169-170; Helmke et al. 2010:103; Helmke and Nielsen 2014:79).

In this particular case there may be some evidence to offer a plausible location for ancient Saksuutz', based on the documentary evidence recorded in the early colonial period relating a series of incursions made by Spanish missionaries into the area to assess the situation and further their interests at the local missions. One text that is of particular relevance is the *Historia de Yucathan*, compiled by Fray López de Cogolludo (1688). In the passages describing the entrada of 1641 by the franciscan Fray Bartolomé de Fuensalida and the interactions between the Spanish and the Maya in central Belize on their way to the central Peten, they name localities along the Belize River, one of which was variously recorded as <Zaczuç>, <Zaczuz>, and <Cacçuuz> (Figure 43). Based on fine documentary work, France V. Scholes and J. Eric S. Thompson (Thompson 1972:13; Scholes and Thompson 1977:45-46, map 2-r) were able to suggest that this place should be located along the Belize River at the confluence with Roaring Creek, which at the time was called the <Yaxteel Ahau> (Figure 44). Since the area was popu-



**Figure 43.** Detail of page 645 of the 1688 edition of the *Historia de Yucathan* by Fray López de Cogolludo referring to <Zaczuz> near the top of the right-hand column.

A reference to <Zaczuç> occurs at the bottom of the facing column (Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid).



**Figure 44.** The eastern central lowlands with colonial toponyms indicated (map by Precolumbia Mesoweb Press and Christophe Helmke, after Awe and Helmke 2015:Fig. 3).

lated by Yukatek speakers and based on Thompson’s familiarity with the same language, he etymologized <Zaczuç> ~ <Zaczuz> as *sak-sus* or “white-sands” (see Awe and Helmke 2015:354), a plausible etymology for a riverine toponym. However, remembering that the name of the nearby <Yaxteel Ahau> is Ch’olan, we wonder if the toponym <Zaczuç> is likewise not Yukatek at all but is instead a Ch’olan survival from the Classic period, which may well have been corrupted by both Yukatek speakers and colonial orthography. If this is the case, then



Figure 45. Clause 3 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

relocating Saksuutz' may well be at hand, not least since two archaeological sites in the vicinity, Hanging Rock to the southwest of Belmopan and Saturday Creek to the north, are both promising candidates for the locality mentioned in the glyphic sources and the ethnohistoric documents.

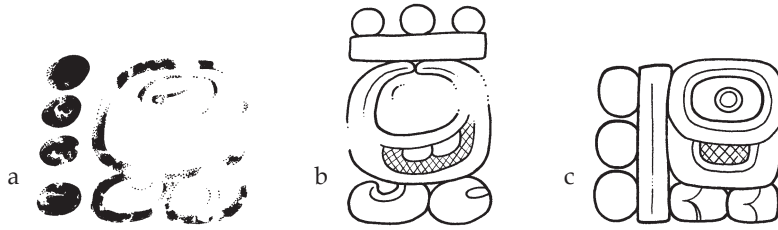
### Clause 3

The following clause is once more bridged by a distance number (F5) that again provides an interval of two days and leads to the Calendar Round 12 Kib and 9 Woh (E6–F6), or February 23, 799 (Figure 45). The event that transpired on this date (E7) is once more a *pakaxi* ~ *pakxi* verb “he returned,” and the place that the agent is said to travel to is expressed in the following glyph block (F7).

This place name is quite eroded and at a break in the sherds. It is therefore not all that clear, although we can discern the parts of the initial logogram followed by the what seems to be a phonetic complement –ka.

At first sight the eroded logogram can be thought to represent **CHAK**, but upon closer inspection an alternative identification would see this as the T533 logogram (Sergei Vepretskii, personal communication 2017) for which value **SAK** and the reading *saak* “seed” have recently been proposed by David Stuart (see Tsukamoto and Esparza Olguín 2014:35). In this instance the **SAK** logogram would be paired with a synharmonic phonetic complement –ka, instead of the more common –ki seen throughout the Classic period. This identification thereby bolsters the identity of the vowel of this sign as *CaC*, in keeping with the reading put forward by Stuart, as well as providing a late vowel-shortened form of the lexeme *saak* > *sak*. The main sign of the toponym is mostly weathered away, but may provide the **tzi** bird head that is used in the spelling of *witz* “mountain” (already seen above in the name of the father), the whole apparently topped by the logogram –NAL that provides a locative suffix (see Stuart and Houston 1994:20, 21, Fig. 22). As such the whole toponym is certainly along the lines of *sak witz-nal* or “seed mountain-place,” thereby duplicating the name of the Group Q Twin Pyramid complex at Tikal (see Stela 22: A3). In the Tikal case this probably names the complex as an architectural emulation of a mythological place, a primordial mountain of riches, seeds, and grains, whereas on the Komkom Vase we surmise that this names a terrestrial location, perhaps even a settlement (given the use of *pakaxi* ~ *pakxi*), in the relative vicinity of Komkom.

The remainder of the clause appears to be closed by titular references to

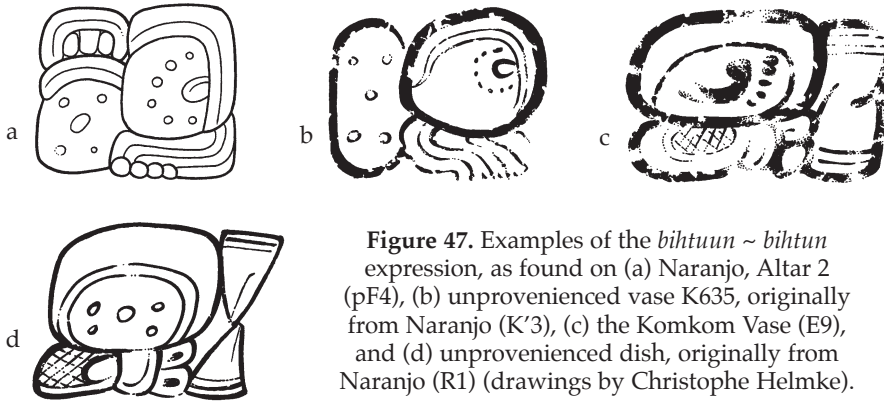


**Figure 46.** The logogram representing a vigesimal unit complemented by *-wa* as seen on (a) the Komkom Vase (F8), (b) Dos Pilas, Panel 19 (F1b), and (c) Naranjo, Altar 2 (pA5) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

the agent who has returned. First among these (F8) is written *a-wa-la-TE'* for *aj-wal-te'* or "he of Walte'," a title of origin specifying where this individual is from (see Stuart and Houston 1994:19, 27, 37). This is again the first we hear of a particular locality and therefore cannot say anything conclusive about the place, but we are in a position to offer a preliminary etymology since it seems to involve the name of a plant named *wal* "fan" (Kaufman 2003:933), a lexeme that occurs in the glyphic corpus as *wa-li* (Boot 2009:197). This plant, the bracken fern (*Pteridium caudatum*), is named in the ethnohistoric sources in composite form as *<xualcanil>* and is said to have been used to make fly whisks, such as the ceremonial *<caanil ual>*, or "heavenly fan," mentioned in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel (Roys 1931:291).

Between the title of origin (E8) and the following title (F9) is a pair of glyph blocks that together form a set. The first of these (F8) can be transliterated as 4-T683v/683a-*wa* and the second (E9) as *bi-tu-nu*. These two glyphs together may form a particular type of referent to the agent, akin to a title. The reading of this title is complicated by the main sign of the first glyph block, cueing a term that ends with *-w* (Figure 46a). Based on the contexts in which the sign occurs it may either provide a logogram for the number "twenty" or a numeral classifier, as seen for example on Tikal Stela 31 (F12), on Dos Pilas Panel 19 (Figure 46b), and on the reverse of Altar 2 at Naranjo, preserved in the caption of what once the front of a stela (Figure 46c). Based on these examples, one might conclude that the first segment on the Komkom Vase simply reads "four twenty." Precisely the same combination 4-T683-*wa* is also seen in an unclear context in the text of Naranjo Stela 12 (D10b), although it undoubtedly serves the same function in both narratives. The numerical interpretation of the T683 sign is hampered by the position of the numeral 4, which one would expect to follow the sign to produce a grammatically correct form (as in Glyph A of the Lunar Series), not precede.<sup>19</sup> As a result the interpretation of the sign as a logogram for twenty is unsatisfactory. In addition, on the Komkom Vase the main sign resembles more

<sup>19</sup> In the vast majority of cases Glyph A of the Lunar Series is followed by either 9 or 10, to produce the numerals 29 or 30, specifying the length of a given lunation. In the examples in question the placement of the lesser numeral differs since these are placed in front or above the sign in question, which is closed by *-wa*. There are naturally exceptions to the rule, such as the Marcador of Tikal, but for the most part these appear to form discrete and mutually exclusive sets.



**Figure 47.** Examples of the *bihtuun* ~ *bihtun* expression, as found on (a) Naranjo, Altar 2 (pF4), (b) unprovenienced vase K635, originally from Naranjo (K'3), (c) the Komkom Vase (E9), and (d) unprovenienced dish, originally from Naranjo (R1) (drawings by Christophe Helmke).

closely the syllabogram *ja* (T181), which makes us wonder whether we may be seeing a numeral classifier *-jaw*. In this interpretation the putative numerical classifier may have an enumerative function for measures of arm spans, from fingertip to fingertip, as seen for instance in the Tzeltalan reflex *haw* (Berlin 1968:161, 227).

The second part of the expression involves *bitun*, from the compound form */bih-tuun/* literally “road-stone,” a term that pertains either to the pavement of playing alleys in a ballcourt (Grube 2004b:208-209; Grube and Martin 2004:46-48) or to the building of paved roads and causeways (Stuart 2007; Zender et al. 2016:43, Fig. 8, H-I). (Figure 47) As such the preceding element qualifies this paved surface, and considering the numeral “four” we are probably looking at a reference to “four-breadth roadways” (assuming that the intervening element is a numeral classifier), not least since a similar reference is known from Stela 6 at Caracol (i.e., *chan u-bih*) and possibly also seen on Stela 6 at Naranjo.

The third and final title (F9) is more transparent and can be read as *aj-baluun-chab* or “he of nine lands” presumably a reference to the territorial extent of his dominions.

#### Clause 4

This clause is initiated not only by a Distance Number (F10) that again is of just two days, but also by a variant of the so-called Distance Number Introductory Glyph (DNIG) (see Thompson 1950:160-162) (E10) (Figure 48). Here it is written rather innovatively as *u-[TZ'AK]a*, wherein the logogram is infixed into the eye of what may be a parrot that functions as the vocalic sign *a* (T743), replacing the more usual T12 sign in this context. Another similar DNIG is found later in the text (I2–J2), which makes it unclear which Distance Numbers required this expression and which did not. When present, the DNIG provides a verbal predicate so that the temporal expression assumes the status of an independent sub-clause, headed by *u-tz'ahk-a*, stating that the days have been set in their proper order or sequence. These lead to the Calendar Round 1 Etz'nab 11 Woh (E11–F11), corresponding to the February 25, 799. The fourth clause is the second longest of the narrative, covering 32 glyph blocks.

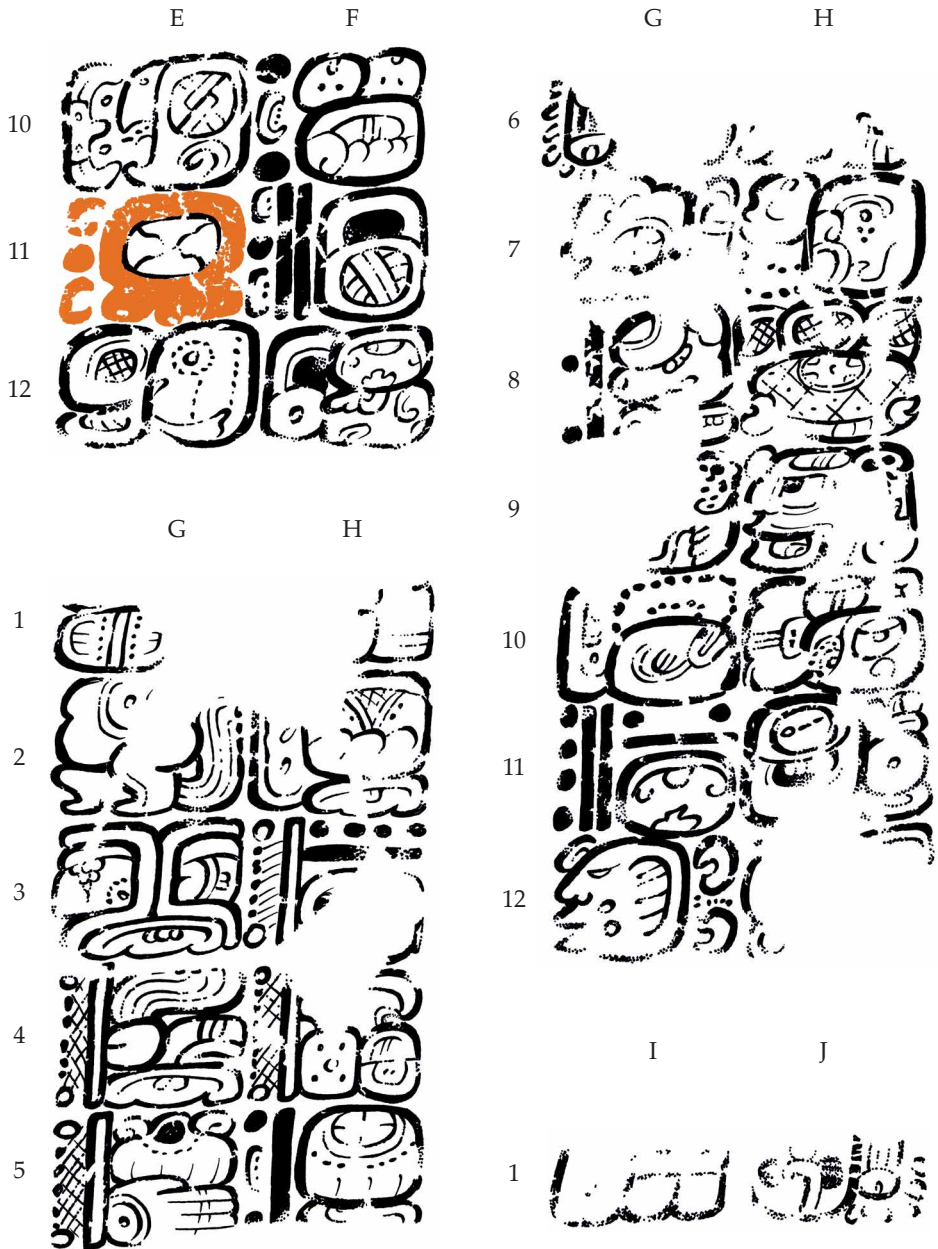


Figure 48. Clause 4 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

The clause proper is initiated by yet another *pakaxi* ~ *pakxi* verbal expression (E12). The place that is being returned to or travelled to follows (F12) and is written **IK'-NAB** for *ik'-nahbal*, or “black-pool/aguada.” A comparable toponym *Ik'nahbal* “black-pool” and *Wak Ik'nahbal* “six black-pool” is known from the texts of both Copan and Quirigua (Looper 2003:83-86, 114; Tokovinine 2007:20), but this is a supernatural place and does not appear to refer to the same terrestrial place named here. What may have been the remainder of the place name,

or the name of the subject who returned to this place, is found in the following two glyph blocks, but unfortunately very little remains with the exception of a solitary **sa** syllabogram in the first glyph block (G1) and a final **nu** syllabogram in the second block (H1).

A second sub-clause follows (G2) with the combination of signs **AN-ni**, the logogram representing a human abdomen with small bent legs as though running. Here we are probably looking at a root intransitive form *ahn-i* “he ran” (see Helmke 2009:161-164), providing yet another verb of motion to this narrative. Clearly, the distribution of agents afoot, across key points in the landscape, is one of the central leitmotifs of the narrative, which only highlights how much escapes us since the names of places and agents remain mostly unknown. As if to compensate for the compact and short titular references to the subjects of the previous clauses, the agent of the fourth clause is provided with a long and ample titular sequence, brimming with poetic language, through the use of alliterations and couplet constructions. To start off the agent is named as the “north(ern)” (H2) and the undeciphered subordinate title that we saw earlier in the first clause (G3). As such the person that presumably returned to Ik’naahb and ran from there is the second of the two individuals mentioned in the first clause. That this is also the same individual mentioned in the third clause is suggested by the following title (H3), which again is *aj-baluun-chab* “he of nine lands.” This title, along with the preceding one and the subsequent four, together provide the couplets arranged according to chiasmic structure, an extensive poetic oration that describes the virtues and stations of this individual (see Lacadena 2009; Christenson 2012; Hull 2012):

Coordinates	Transcriptions	Translations
(H2–G3)	<i>Xaman ...n</i>	“The northern ...”
(H3)	<i>Aj-baluun-chab</i>	“He of nine lands”
(G4)	<i>Aj-niwan</i>	“He who is great? / He of Niwan”
(H4)	<i>Aj-nahbi’</i>	“He who pools?”
(G5)	<i>Aj-tz’eh-k’ab</i>	“He the left hand”
(H5–G6)	<i>Huk soon/sihn ...</i>	“Seven ... / extents ...”

Based on this analysis of the segment of text, we can see two uneven titles at the start and end of the chiasmic structure, with two medial segments that are initiated by the agentive prefix *aj-*, wherein the apical titles are also both *n-* initial. Of these the higher level of the apical titles (G4) is *aj-niwan*, which is difficult to parse but may be segmented *niw-an*, wherein the root may be an archaic reflection of Western Branch *\*niwaq* (Kaufman and Norman 1984:127), also reflected in proto-Tzeltal-Tzotzil as *\*niwak* (Kaufman 1972:112), both for the adjective “great,” possibly suffixed by an existential particle *-an* (see Nehammer Knub et al. 2009:184-185). Of note is the occurrence of this same sequence, **ni-wa-na** in the text adorning the slate mirror back found in Burial 49 at Topoxte (Fialko 2000:144-149). In that context *niwan* may function as a toponym, labeling Took’ Naah Bahlam, the owner of the mirror. Based on this example, we may



be looking at a title of origin *aj-niwan*, for “he of Niwan,” likely a locality in the eastern central lowlands. At the lower level of the apical titles (H4) is *aj-nahbi'*, which may involve an intransitivization of the lexeme *nahb* “pool, aguada,” here apparently derived as a root intransitive. The penultimate title (G5) *aj-tz'eh k'ab* “he the left hand” duplicates that seen in the texts of Tikal andolja Cave (Stuart 2002) and serves as a descriptor of a lesser subordinate to a higher title, as seen in expressions such as *tz'eh k'ab ajaw* “king’s left hand” (Stuart 2002:3-4). Here the superordinate is not *ajaw*, but is instead *huk soon/sihn*, the same title seen with the same figure in the first clause.

The following two glyph blocks (G6–H6) are almost completely eroded, with the exception of the initial **ju**-syllabogram in the first block. Thereafter (G7) we can discern the vague outlines of what might be an impersonation statement, which at this point in time may have been pronounced *ubahilan* (see Helmke et al. 2015b:22-23). As part of such impersonation rituals a human agent took on the guise of a supernatural entity and donned some of the distinctive insignia of such a divinity and at times also adopted some of the deity’s traits and demeanor (see Stuart and Houston 1998; Nehammer Knub et al. 2009). Occasionally such rituals were deemed of such importance that the impersonation was commemorated by integrating the act and/or the name of the deity into the titular string (Nehammer Knub et al. 2009:187; Helmke et al. 2015b:22-24), something that may be the case here also. The most complete impersonation statements can be analyzed as */u-baah-il-a'n ta k'uh/* “it is his/her image in the state of being like a god,” which makes the Komkom Vase noteworthy in that the following glyph block (H7) records the logogram **K'UH**, “god, deity,” as though the phrase *ubahilan [ta] k'uh* was once rendered here.

Following expected syntax of such impersonation statements, the names of the divinities follow, here spanning over four glyph blocks (G8–H9). The first glyph block (G8) is not entirely clear but may have once recorded **9-OK-TE'** for *baluun yokte'*—based on a comparable example on K1398 (R4), an earlier vase from Naranjo—an abbreviated designation for a group of martial deities, subsisting into the Postclassic as Bolon Yokte' K'uh (see Stuart 1987:39-40; Eberl and Prager 2005). What may be the name of another divinity (H8) is written **ITZAM-[K'AN]AK** for *itzam k'an ahk*, an aged atlantean deity bearing a yellow turtle carapace, that is known not only from the Dresden Codex (Martin 2015: 188-192) but also from the texts of Naj Tunich (see MacLeod and Stone 1995:167) and Machaquila (see Graham 1967:Fig. 39a; Lacadena 2011:Fig. 14a). Of the third deity (G9) little remains but the ear of a spotted feline, suggesting that we may be looking at a figure with feline traits, which is followed in the subsequent block (H9) by what appears to be the head-variant of **TE'** (see Helmke 2013:10-11). As such, we wonder if the final two glyph blocks did not name the supernatural entity that is the patron of the month Pax, known as Sibikte' (see Thompson 1950:Fig. 23.36; Zender 2005b:12-13; Helmke 2013:10-12), a personification of the “soot tree” (possibly *Exostema caribaeum*; see Barrera Vásquez 1980:707). Together Baluun Yokte', Itzam K'an Ahk, and Sibikte' would thus have been impersonated by the “northern” subordinate, “he of nine lands,” and their names thereby

integrated into his extensive titular string.

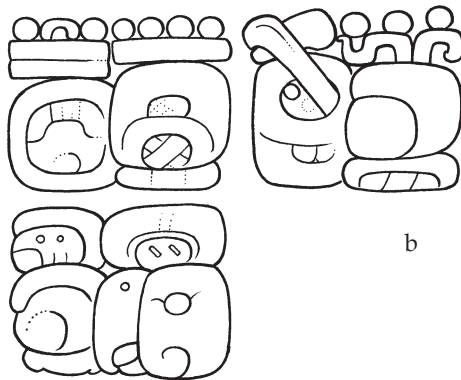
It is interesting that these gods are not said to be his own or even local ones, but are instead openly said to be (G10) **u-K'UH-lu** (G10) **YAX-[a]AJAW** (H10). The lexeme *k'uh* is here written in the possessive, preceded by the third-person pronominal prefix and followed by the synharmonic syllabogram **lu**, prompting the reading of *u-k'uh-ul*. Whereas *-ul* resembles the abstractivizing suffix that is usually seen on *k'uh-ul* during the Late Classic, deriving “godly, divine” from “god” (Houston et al. 2001:10, 17), here we are undoubtedly looking at a later vowel-shortened allomorph of the *-uul* possessive suffix (see Zender 2004b:173-174, 192; Lacadena and Wichmann n.d.:19-21). As such these are said to be someone’s gods, and the possessor promptly follows, in the title *yaxa' ajaw*, “Yaxha king.” We know that during the reign of “Itzamnaaj” K’awiil of Naranjo there were a series of martial engagements, wherein the king of Yaxha was ultimately seized and forced to play a role in the recreation of a mythological scene pitting the patron deity of Naranjo against that of Yaxha, one that was ill-fated for the latter since he seems to have been met with the business end of a torch (Schele and Mathews 1998:148-149; Martin and Grube 2000:82; Grube and Martin 2004:150-154). The revealing statement on the Komkom Vase may thus be in a similar vein, relating the re-creation of a mythological event, impersonating some of the titular deities of the Yaxha king, not only to seize their power, but also to diminish that of the original owner. With this intriguing statement the fourth clause is at a close.

#### *Clause 5*

The fifth clause is initiated by a different type of Distance Number, the largest one in the text, accounting for 14 days and 7 winal or “months” of twenty days (G11) (Figure 49). In this case the Distance Number is written in more standard fashion, in keeping with the format seen on monuments, using the logogram **WINAL** for “month” and suppressing the numeral classifier *-he'n* for days (this form appears in the texts of Stelae 12 [E14b, G11a], 32 [M1], and 35 [F7] at Naranjo). However, this distance number does not anchor to the Calendar Round of the preceding sentence, but instead counts forward from the start of the text and the date 8 Eb 5 Woh. Together this provides us with a Distance Number spanning 154 days, pushing the narrative forward by five months, from February to July—to the 19th of the month to be precise. As such we can see a break, or at least a leap, in the narrative, where all the previous events in February were only separated by two days apiece. The Distance Number was also elaborated further, with a verbal expression reading *jatz'-al-iiy* (H11–G12), involving the verbal root *jatz'*, “strike,” a derivational suffix *-al*, and a temporal deictic suffix (see Wald 2004). This segment was designed to state that the Distance Number counted from the start of the narrative, involving a kind of temporal adverbial construction, undoubtedly tied back to the *jatz'-aal* expression seen at the start of the text. The following three glyph blocks (H12–J2) are either completely missing or mostly eroded and therefore nothing conclusive can be said about them. Yet the second (I1) may repeat part of the name of the lunation, already seen in



Figure 49. Clause 5 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).



**Figure 50.** The two expressions that together form the (a) predicate of Clause 5 on the Komkom Vase (I3–J5) and (b) the parallel clause with the two expressions inverted on Naranjo, Stela 12 (B9–B10) (photograph and drawing by Christophe Helmke).

the Supplementary Series (D1). If so, then the Distance Number may have explained that the number of days were meant to be counted “since the arrival of the moon named ...” or something to that effect. This expression is followed by a partially eroded glyph block (J1) written **bu-ju**, possibly spelling a polymorphemic suffix, involving a causative *-bu* and a perfect suffix *-uuj* (Lacadena and Davletshin 2013:50), reduced to *-j* in its surface form.

Much more typical is the final portion of the Distance Number wherein the expression *u-tz’ahk-a* is provided over two blocks (I2–J2) much like the foregoing example, with the logogram **TZ’AK** infixed into the eye of a parrot, a vocalic sign **a** (J2), but also involving the head of dwarf as a standalone vocalic sign **u** (I2).

In all, this rather extensive Distance Number expression leads to the Calendar Round 6 Kimi 19 Ch’en (I3–J3). As preserved, the fifth clause exhibits parts of 36 glyph blocks out of the original 47 that once made up this clause. Even though a quarter of the original clause is missing, it is clear that this was the longest sentence of the vase, one originally encompassing nearly a third of the entire narrative. Due to the fragmentation of the clause only some parts of its sub-clauses remain legible.

The first sub-clause relates a martial action on July 23, recording *ch’ahkaj tahn ch’een yaxa’* (I4–I5) or “he axed the middle of the Yaxa’ cave” (Figure 50a).

This expression uses the passive inflection of the transitive verb *ch’ak* “to chop, axe” and the patient of the action is the *ch’een* or “cave” of Yaxha. The meaning of “cave” here is something that has been discussed for some time now (Vogt and Stuart 2005), but based on these martial expressions, Simon Martin has suggested that the term may be used as simile for “settlement” or even “polity capital” (Grube and Martin 2004:122–123) based in part on the Mesoamerican practice of ascribing caves to the sacred landscape of urban centers (see Brady

1997; Matos Moctezuma 2002:52, Fig. 40) and the use of metaphors for higher order sociopolitical units, such as the Nawaatl *al-tepetl*, literally “water-mountain” for “polity, capital” (Karttunen 1992:9; Molina 2001:Fol. 99v, 4r). Alternatively, such attacks on “caves” may be much more literal and refer to the sullyng of important ritual sites, actions that were tantamount to conquests of ritual sites by means of desacralization, thereby undermining the religious preeminence of an adversary (Brady and Colas 2005; Helmke and Brady 2014).

What is interesting is that just about the same event is recorded on Naranjo Stela 12, but this is said to have transpired on the date 2 Ik' 15 Ch'en (D8), which is to say just four days before the event recorded on the Komkom Vase (Figure 50b). At Naranjo the event is recorded more succinctly as *ch'ahkaj yaxa'* (E8), or “he axed Yaxa’,” and the name of the local ruler, K'inich Lakamtuun, follows (see Grube 2000b:262-263; Martin and Grube 2000:82). As such, we can see two attacks on Yaxha, just days apart, within two different narratives, as though these are each providing their own vantage, one focused on the perspective of Naranjo, the other on that of Komkom.

On the Komkom Vase the following glyph block (J5) is only partially preserved but includes the numeral 3 and a main sign topped by a flame, followed by the syllabogram *li*. Together this may prompt the reading of *ux k'awil* (Guido Krempel, personal communication 2016), wherein the main sign with flames<sup>20</sup> is the characteristic forehead of the deity also known as God K, here accompanied by a synharmonic phonetic complement *li* to prompt the vowel-shortened form of the name, which is typical of both the area and the time period (see Lacadena and Wichmann 2004:116-119; Helmke et al. 2006:6). Whereas the segment *k'awil* is usually taken to function as a theonym, it may have alternate functions, including in very tangible terms as a noun for “deity effigy” (see Freidel et al. 1993:444, n. 45), but also in more abstract way as “authority,” such as in political power (David Stuart, personal communication 2016) (see Helmke and Awe 2016:14-15). As such this segment may specify that three deity effigies were “axed” within the very center of Yaxha. The same combination of signs is also found in an earlier part of the text on Stela 12 at Naranjo, though here it is related to an event that took place on the date 12 Kib 9 Woh (B9)—precisely the same date as that which heads Clause 3 on the vase. The wording on both the vase and on Stela 12 are nearly identical although the sequence of elements is reversed (Figure 50):

	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Segment 1</b>	<b>Segment 2</b>
Komkom Vase	<i>ch'ahkaj</i>	<i>tahn ch'een yaxa'</i>	<i>ux k'awil</i>
Naranjo Stela 12	<i>ch'ahkaj</i>	<i>ux k'awil</i>	<i>tahn ch'een yaxa'</i>

Based on these parallels, it is clear that the main patient and subject of the martial actions is or are the Ux K'awil, which are qualified as being of or within the very center of Yaxha. Although the precise identity of the patient remains

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, the flames emanating from the mirror sign, which together constitute the diagnostic features of God K in this instance, are marked with a doubler, much as the logogram **K'AK'** in the fire ritual cited at the onset of the narrative (D4).



**Figure 51.** Some of the most recently recovered sherds of the Komkom Vase that recount the fate of the defeated king of Yaxha and his flight (photograph by Julie Hoggarth).

gram, confirming that this records part of a toponym that suffered the attack. We are not aware of another example of this toponym and as such cannot propose an equivalence with a known locality.

This short sub-clause is followed by a third, initiated by the verb *lok'-ooy* "to exit" or "flee," again with the change of state suffix *-VVy* seen on several of the foregoing verbs (Figure 51). Thus a figure is said to flee, as a direct consequence of these martial actions. The name of the person is seen further down the column, written **K'INICH-chi-ni** (J8) **la-LAKAM** (I9) **nu-nu** (J9), yielding *K'inich Lakam Nun*. This name is very similar to that of the king of Yaxha as recorded on contemporary monuments at the site as well as the texts of Naranjo, yet here the final segment is given as *nun*, rather than *tuun* ~ *tun*. As such, we wonder if this

unknown, we venture to conjecture that these were deity effigies of patron deities that somehow embodied royal authority at Yaxha. Their destruction through martial action would thereby be tantamount to the complete and utter defeat of the Yaxha dynasty, which is undoubtedly why these texts capitalize on these events.

Returning to the vase, only parts of the following two glyph blocks have been recovered (I6–J6) since they are along a break. The first (I6), although broken, is clearly another *puluuy* verb, thereby providing the start of the second sub-clause, and this is followed by the name of the locality that is torched (J6). Just enough remains that we can discern the numeral **4** and the uppermost portion of the **NAB** "pool, aguada" logo-

is not an inadvertent misspelling, since it seems most likely to refer to the ruler of Yaxha. What is interesting is that the ruler of Yaxha is not just said to flee from the attack but is also qualified by a poetic couplet that can be read as *ma' ch'ahb* (J7) *ma' ahk'ab-aal* (I8). This is the same couplet as that seen in the parentage expression naming the father of the vase's original owner, yet here each element is prefixed by the negative particle *ma'*, "none" (Kaufman 2003:1531). As such, K'inich Lakamtuun is said to be "powerless" and "defeated," adding insult to injury and casting him in very unflattering terms indeed.

The verb of the fourth sub-clause (I10) is here written with the head of the aged God N (T1014; see Taube 1992:92-99), the *yi* syllabogram infix into the lower portion of the head. Together this may spell *t'abaay* (Stuart 1998:409-417), a verb that is frequently seen in dedicatory expressions on ceramics and a selection of monuments (see MacLeod 1990a:128-164, 1990b), but here it appears to be used as a verb of motion "to rise, ascend." The same verb is used in the narrative of Hieroglyphic Stair 2 at Dos Pilas, describing the flight of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil and his retreat atop K'inich Pa' Witz' "radiant cleft mountain," the toponym of Aguateca, and later to another locality named Chaahknaah "Storm God House" (Guenter 2003:16, 22; see also Martin 2004), both of which he is said to have "gone up" or "ascended." The same verb is also seen in the text of Stela 12 at Naranjo (C12a and E1a) relating the mountainous locations that a figure from Yaxha and another from Sak Kabniil are said to have ascended in their flight from the Naranjo troops (see Clause 1, above, where this same toponym is mentioned).

On the Komkom Vase, the locality that is said to have been ascended is written **u-su-la**, for *us-u'l* (J10), and the patient of the verb follows, explicitly stated as Yaxa' (I11) Ajaw (J11), thus the same subject as in the previous sub-clause, but here referred to by title, rather than by name.<sup>21</sup> The locality Usu'l could well mean "where mosquitoes/flies abound," considering *aj'us* "jején, chaquiste" in Chontal (Keller and Luciano 1997:31), *us* "mosca" in Ch'ol (Aulie and Aulie 1978:126), <uz> "mosquito" in Ch'olti' (Morán 1695:139), *u's* "small fly" in Ch'orti' (Wisdom 1950:585, 751), and *us* "variedad pequeña de mosca" (Bastarrachea et al. 1992:128). As such, the Komkom Vase makes it apparent that the king of Yaxha fled to some rather undesirable place. The agent that follows, the one responsible for ousting K'inich Lakamtuun and seeing him go up to Usu'l, is introduced in the ensuing segment by means of an *uchabiyy* agency expression (I12), which is only partly preserved. This particular expression is used

<sup>21</sup> On the lengthy text adorning the back of Naranjo Stela 12 the same toponym may be named in a clause relating to an event on September 8, 799 (9.18.9.0.13), as has been noted independently by the senior author and by Sergei Vrepetskii (personal communication 2017). Although the text of Stela 12 is quite eroded, in that instance the toponym seems to be written **u-su-la-a** (D14b), suggesting a different transcription as *Usula'*. This alternate form has implications for the correct parsing of the toponym and its etymology, in this case involving a toponymic suffix *-a'* appended to the root. Noteworthy is the fact that the sub-clause in question can be reconstructed as *ahn k'inich lakamtuun, t'abaay usula'*, or "K'inich Lakamtuun ran, [and] he went up to Usula'," providing a remarkable parallel to the segment of Clause 5 on the Komkom Vase.

to introduce an agent into clauses whose syntax requires but one argument, the subject, which is typically the patient and thereby does not permit the explicit declaration of the agent. Such agency expressions can be said to be hierarchical since the individual mentioned first is inevitably of lesser status than the one that follows the agency expression. As a verbal expression, it involves *chab* “earth, land” as a root, but here in a denominalized sense as “cultivate, prepare one’s land,” used metaphorically for the relationship between two individuals wherein the one of higher status cultivates a relationship in much the same way that a farmer tends to his *milpa* or plot of maize (see Martin and Grube 1994). The name of the agent follows (J12) but unfortunately is not sufficiently well preserved to be read in its entirety; it may involve the profile of the thunder deity Chaahk.

The narrative continues at the rim of the vase, but on account of the ancient trimming the first two glyph blocks (K1–L1) are only partially preserved. The first (K1) appears to record the number 1 and is closed by the syllabogram *ki*, although the main sign is unclear. The second (L1) includes the syllabogram *ya* at the onset and a main sign that appears to include the diagnostic elements of the syllabogram *sa* but contained within a sign that has some smearing or fire-clouding along a ragged edge. Together these traits suggest that the main sign represents a flint that has been partially knapped and that its edge has been treated by fire-heating, a common practice documented in lithic studies (e.g., Crabtree and Butler 1964; Shafer 1983). These three signs undoubtedly spell the personal name *took’ yas*,<sup>22</sup> also seen in the following sub-clause (L3). Who this individual was is unclear at present but was undoubtedly introduced in the now-missing segment of the same clause.

What may be the fifth sub-clause is initiated by *u-baah* (K2), literally “his head, self,” a predicate that usually initiates captions to iconography, explaining what we are seeing in a given scene. In the absence of any iconography, we can either deduce that the original text contained imagery that has not been copied on the vase, or alternatively that this expression is serving as a type of emphatic device, to reiterate the agent and state that it is here that a particularly pivotal event is recorded. This is followed by the verbal expression proper (L2), providing another *t’abaay* statement, and the locality that is said to have been ascended to is none other than Yaxa’ (K3). The subject of the verb follows (L3), reiterating the protagonist of the previous sub-clause, Took’ Yas. The following glyph block (K4) records *sa-ni*, and may serve to provide a more complete form of the name with a suffix, to be read in full as Took’ Yasaan, possibly serving to spell an existential particle *-aan* (see Nehammer Knub et al. 2009:184-185). If this is correct, the name may include the transitive verbal root *yas* as attested in Ch’olti’ as

<sup>22</sup> This name is highly reminiscent of that attested on Lintels 1 and 2 at Yula in the Northern Lowlands. There the name of the individual is written **to-TOK’ ya-si AJAW-wa** for *took’ yaas ajaw* (see Love 1989), wherein the medial segment is written disharmonically as *ya-si*, rather than the synharmonic form seen on the Komkom Vase. We do not propose some equivalence between these figures, but merely to remark on this in terms of onomastic precedent and spelling patterns.

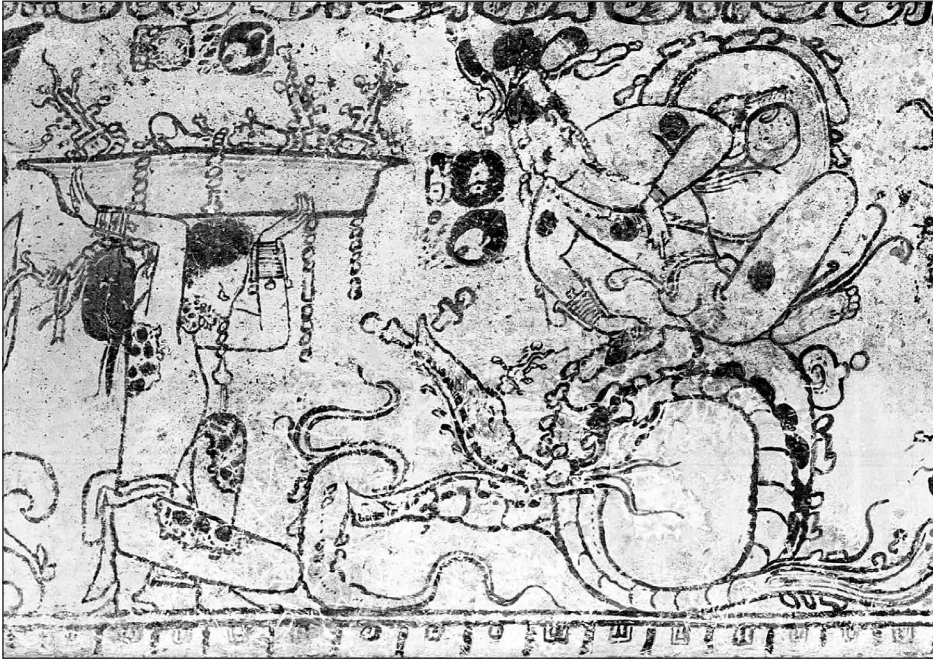


<yatzi> “rosar” (Morán 1695:123), in Ch’ol as *yāsan* “dejar caer” (Aulie and Aulie 1978:144), and in Chontal as *yāsen* “dejar caer algo, tumbar” (Keller and Luciano 1997:296). The next few glyphs all appear to form part of his titular string as is suggested by the row of dots (L4) that may be part of an Emblem Glyph and the uppermost portion of the title Sak Chuwen (K5)—identical to that borne by the mother of the vase’s owner (P7)—the preserve of Naranjo dynasts (see P7). As such, we can surmise the missing Emblem Glyph was that of Naranjo, read K’uhul Sa’uul Ajaw (Helmke and Kettunen 2011:17ff; Helmke 2017), and that Took’ Yas(aan) was a figure from the Naranjo court, whose name incidentally is reminiscent of Ajtook’ Ti’, the youth and pre-accession name of K’ahk’ Ukalaw Chan Chaahk (Martin and Grube 2000:81), a predecessor of “Itzamnaaj” K’awiil.

We surmise that another sub-clause followed after the close of the titular section of Took’ Yas(aan), but sadly now all that remains are four glyph blocks none of which are too clear (K7–L8). The first glyph block (K7) provides a logogram that depicts a disembodied human eye, complete with optical nerve on a blackened background. The other examples of this sign always include a chain of dots, either in front or at the top, the diagnostic element of the so-called “water group” that serves to identify the logogram *k’uh* “god, deity” (see Thompson 1950:274-277). Based on the contexts in which this sign occurs, Marc Zender (personal communication 2006) has suggested that the totality of this sign serves as a graphic variant of the logogram **K’UH**. Whereas this interpretation is certainly plausible, the senior author has also worked with the possibility that the “darkened eye” sign is an allograph for the cave logogram **CH’EN**, in which case the compound form may be read *ch’een k’uh* “cave deity,” serving as a titular element for supernatural entities that are tied to the underworld (Helmke 2009:552-554, Fig. C.1k). Given its importance as an underworld scene, a particularly revealing context for this sign is the titles provided the Hero Twins on a Black-on-cream vase (K1004) in the collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Here each is named and both are given the same descriptor, or title, written by means of this eye-sign, prefixed by the “water group” in each case (Figure 52). As such, these mythic heroes may well have borne the descriptor *ch’een k’uh* “cave deity,” in reference to their adventures in the underworld.<sup>23</sup>

Returning the Komkom Vase, the following glyph is another partial segment (L7) where we can read **nu-10**, an eroded block, possibly a profile head (K8), and **i-chi** (L8) although the exact meaning of this section remains unclear. The segment [**i**]chi is also seen in the text of Temple XIX at Palenque where it may serve to provide a part of the lexeme *ichiiw bak* “heron,” used as part of an anthroponym (see Stuart 2005a:114-115), although other possibilities remain for the Komkom Vase, such as part of an optative construction like *ichna’ik*, also seen at Palenque (Schele 1980:83). Nonetheless, based on what remains it would seem

<sup>23</sup> This is significant since the same descriptor applies to the nocturnal and underworld deities impersonated by Yik’in Chan K’awiil of Tikal in a ritual event commemorated in AD 743 (Martin and Grube 2000:49). As such, the deities he impersonated may also have been designated as “cave deities” in much the same way as the Hero Twins.



**Figure 52.** Detail of a Black-on-cream vase in the collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Art (K1004), showing the two Hero Twins in the underworld. Each is named in an accompanying glyphic caption and both are given a title written in the second glyph block, combining the so-called “water group” with the “darkened eye” logogram (detail of photograph by Justin Kerr © Kerr Associates).

that this part of the sub-clause provided a titular designation and part of a name, quite possibly of a supernatural entity tied to the underworld.

The very end of the clause and the final sub-clause is preserved in the last two glyph blocks (M1–N1). Again the trimming of the rim has removed the upper half of the glyphs, but enough remains to allow us to identify this segment as a “place name formula” (see Stuart and Houston 1994:7-18) that serves to make explicit where the last action took place. The first glyph block (M1) can be transliterated as {u}-ti-ya wherein the main sign is all but gone but can be reconstructed, providing the circumstantial adverb *uhtiiy*, “it happened,” here used in terms of locality and place, followed by a toponym (N1), and in this case we can just about make out {YAX-a}, making it clear that the fifth clause or at least the final part was squarely focused on events that occurred in and around Yaxha.

### Clause 6

After such a lengthy clause, the following sixth clause is remarkably short, and compares to the second clause and also the final Clause 10, which all only comprise five glyph blocks (Figure 53). The initial part supplies a Distance Number (M2) providing a bridge between the clauses and relating that the

ensuing events took place four days later, on the date 10 Ok 3 Yax (N2-M3). On this date, which corresponds to July 27, 799, we see another *puluuy* “burning” verb (N3), yet this time the place that is being set ablaze is one that is named by the T709 logogram, here rendered in a schematic human profile. In much previous research this sign was often mixed together with that which has been read *sibik* “soot, ink” (Coe and Kerr 1997:150-151; Helmke 2013:10-12), yet recent research by Alexandre Tokovinine (2014) suggests that this is in fact another logogram. Based on possible phonetic complements and substitution sets, he has suggested the reading of *ib* “lima bean” for this logogram, and if this value is applicable here, then it would name a place

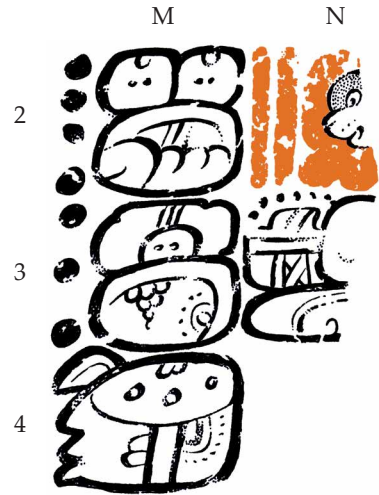


Figure 53. Clause 6 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).



Figure 54. Examples of *ib* ~ *ibil* as a place name: (a) unprovenienced vase K0791, caption to a supernatural *wahy* belonging to the king of *Ib* (photograph by Justin Kerr © Kerr Associates); (b) unprovenienced vase K4732, title of the divine king of *Ibil*; (c) detail of Drawing 29 at Naj Tunich, recording an ethnonym as that of a “divine *Ibil* person” (drawings by Christophe Helmke).



according to this natural feature, perhaps as a place where this plant abounded. That such a place existed and may have been named Ibil is supported by the texts of Naj Tunich, since in Drawing 29 we see the name of a pilgrim named *k'uhul ibil winik* or “godly Ibil person” (Figure 54c), and in the captions to *wahy* creatures on K791 the owner is specified as *k'uhul ib ajaw* “godly Ib[il] king” (Figure 54a), a title that is repeated on K4732 as *k'uhul ibil ajaw* (see Tokovinine 2014:11, 14) (Figure 54b). Unfortunately the same toponym does not appear in the texts of Naranjo and although we are not able to reconstruct a clear location for Ibil based on the reference on the Komkom Vase and in the texts of Naj Tunich, we can surmise that it should be located in the eastern central Lowlands, and presumably less than four days’ walk of Yaxha, to judge from the narrative.

### Clause 7

The following clause is also one of the shorter ones, with just six glyph blocks, and much like the other sentences is initiated by a Distance Number (N4) (Figure 55). Although parts of the Distance Number are missing, the coefficient of nine is clearly legible. Interestingly, this Distance Number is erroneous, since it should be twelve days in order to anchor the extant Calendar Round dates. As no other mistakes are evident in the text, this apparent blunder seems to require an explanation. One possibility is that there was another intervening clause in the archetype, which was not copied here although the distance number was slavishly copied. If this is the case, we can expect the missing sentence to have taken place just three days after Clause 6, and nine days before Clause 7, on the date

13 Ben 6 Yax, or July 30, 799. A search for this date in the corpus of Naranjo has turned up empty-handed unfortunately. However, on the date 9 Ik' 15 Yax (M5–N5) we can clearly see another *pakaxi* ~ *pakxi* verb (M6) and the place that was travelled to appears to be mentioned in the following glyph block (N6). Sadly much of the toponym is missing, save the *ya* syllabogram that appears at the start of the place name. Based on toponymic onomastics, the most probable place name is one that starts with *yax-* although why this should be written with a syllabogram here, rather than the typical logogram, is much more difficult to explain. Interestingly, a similar sequence is found in the text of Naranjo Stela 12, which follows another *ch'ahkaj* or “axing” event inflicted upon Yaxa' on July 19, 799 (9.18.8.16.2), resulting in the flight of K'inich Lakamtuun and his ascending to a locality named *ya...*, wherein the initial *ya-* is clear, but the remainder of the



Figure 55. Clause 7 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

toponym is indistinct on account of erosion. Accordingly, the toponym named on Stela 12 (E9b) may be the same as that cited on the Komkom Vase.

Alternatively, it may well be that the toponym, which functions as a prepositional sub-clause in such an intransitive sentence, was omitted and the verb was immediately followed by the subject, naming the person who has travelled. If so, then we are probably looking at the name of the same Took' Yas(aan) that was named before. The title that is provided this figure is recorded in the next glyph block (M7) and is the same title that we saw at the outset, in Clauses 1 and 4 in connection with the “north(ern) ...” As a result we can wonder if this is not the same person, although at the start of the narrative this individual is referred to predominantly by titles, whereas we see him named in the latter portion of the text. This is an interesting possibility and we hope that more corroborative evidence can, at some juncture, be garnered to provide a clear resolution to this dilemma.

### Clause 8

The bridge with the preceding clause is made by yet another Distance Number (N7) here providing six days as the intervening lapse of time (Figure 56). This leads to the Calendar Round date 2 Lamat 1 Sak (M8–N8), and although parts of the name of the month in the Haab are missing, sufficient details remain to corroborate the date. What follows is the verb itself (M9) and in the little corner remaining we can discern the syllabogram **pu** and beside it what may be **lu**. Thus, together these probably record yet another *puluuy* or “burning” event, the third in the text. Most of the remainder of the clause has not been recovered and as such it is very difficult to say much about its contents. Nevertheless, parts of glyphs remain, such

as that written {**pe**}-**ko**-**mo** (N9), presumably recording the toponym affected by the martial action. Just below it, the outlines of another *uchabiiy* agency expression (N10) can be seen. The use of such an agency expression here indicates that it was preceded by the name of the lesser subject (N10) and was followed by the name of the agent that is credited for the action (M11)—under whose aegis the events are said to have taken place. The following preserved glyph block (N11) includes a small **la** sign (T178) as a superfix and therefore probably serves to record the distance number linking this clause to the next. As such the name or descriptor of the agent was undoubtedly contained in a single glyph block (M11).

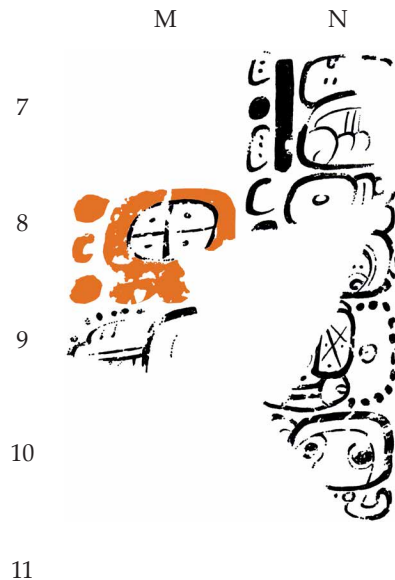


Figure 56. Clause 8 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

### Clause 9

Having noted the Distance Number (N11) we are thereby also able to identify the start of the penultimate clause (Figure 57). Almost nothing of the numerical coefficient remains, but using the Calendar Round of the final Clause 10, and knowing the distance number that links the ninth with the tenth clause, it is possible to count backwards nine days and reconstruct the intervening Calendar Round as the date 13 Kawak 12 Sak (M12–N12). Thus the penultimate clause can be said to take place eleven days after the preceding one, on August 25, 799.

After the Calendar Round that opens Clause 9, the very final part of the narrative is arranged along a single column, before giving way to the parentage statement of the owner of the vase that we have already reviewed at the onset, which once more is in double-column format. Thus, the very end of the narrative is as if squeezed up against the parentage, as though the latter had already been written by the time the narrative was added. The verb that would have followed the Calendar Round (O1) has not been recovered, but this action involved, or more likely affected, an individual who is referred to as **MAX?-li** (O4) and as **a-MUT-#** (O5). The first segment represents the head of a spider monkey known as *maax* in Ch'olan but is somewhat problematic since the same sign is used in the titular expression *kele'm* (see MacLeod 1990a:427-429; MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:133-134) and at times also functions as a vowel sign *u*. In this instance it is followed by the syllabogram *li*, suggesting that the head of the spider monkey is logographic **MAX** and presumably serves as part of an anthroponym read ... *maaxil*. The second glyph block is more straightforward since it appears to record a statement of origin to be read as *aj-mutu'l* "tikaleño." Interestingly, this is followed by another *uchabiyy* agency expression (O6) that introduces none other than *aj-baluun-chab* (O7), the same protagonist as seen in

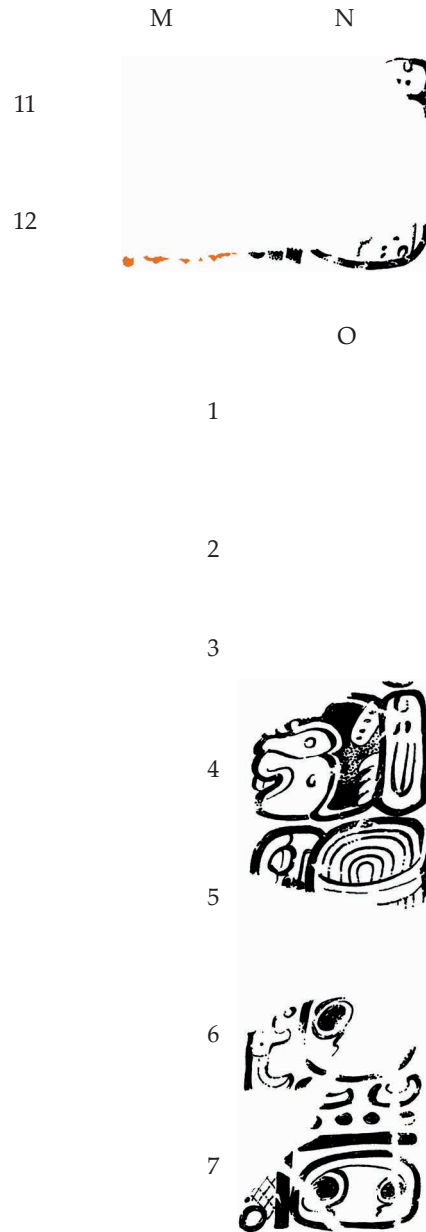


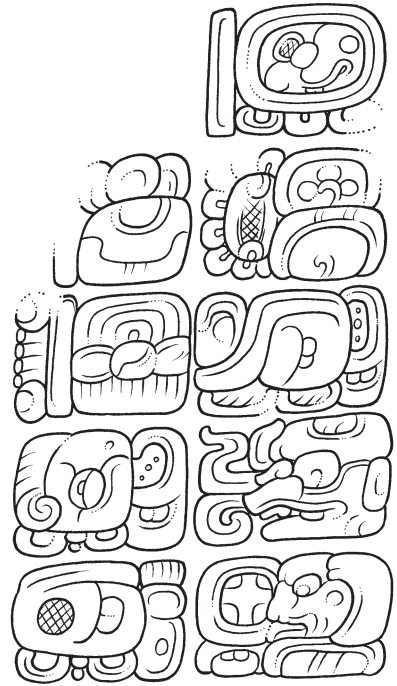
Figure 57. Clause 9 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

Clauses 3 and 4, who returned to several localities six months prior. As such we can see that this clause involves a person from Tikal, and credit for this is given to one of the principal protagonists of the narrative. On this high point the clause ends and gives way once more to another Distance Number (O8).

Given the structure and content of Clause 9, at least from what remains at present, we can surmise that the verb was a martial one, perhaps *chuhkaj* “he captured,” followed by the name of the individual from Tikal that was taken captive on this date. This would duplicate the record of the capture of another individual from Tikal in the monuments of Naranjo (Figure 58). The text in question records the toppling of Ajmutu’l or “they of Tikal” and the capture of one Siyaj K’awiil, at a place called K’an T’uuhl<sup>24</sup> or “Yellow Rabbit” as part of westward military forays by the forces of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk on February 2, AD 695 (Martin and Grube 2000:76). The capture appears to have taken place as part of a skirmish pitting Naranjo against Tikal forces and may well have been “part of a wider campaign that culminated in Tikal’s clash with Calakmul later the same year,” a decisive defeat from which the latter never fully recovered (Martin and Grube 2000:76). The structure of Clause 9 is thus highly reminiscent of this historical precedent and may well echo not only this event and the military success it implies, but also the textual record found at Naranjo.

### Clause 10

The final clause is headed by another Distance Number (O8), written in a clear fashion as nine days, leading to the Calendar Round 9 Lamat 1 Kej (O9–O10) (Figure 59). This date corresponds to September 3, 799, and is the culmination of the entire historical narrative, one that records a series of martial actions and



**Figure 58.** Excerpt of the lateral texts of Stela 22 at Naranjo (F20 and G1–H4), recording the toppling of Ajmutu’l and the capture of Siyaj K’awiil in February AD 695 (drawing by Christophe Helmke).

<sup>24</sup> The lexeme “rabbit” here deserves some comment. In Ch’olan languages the lexeme is *t’ul* “conejo” in Ch’ol (Aulie and Aulie 1978:117), *aj-t’ul* “liebre” in Chontal (Keller and Luciano 1997:27), <*tuul*> “conejo” in Ch’olti’ (Morán 1695:97), and *t’uhr* “rabbit” in Ch’orti’ (Wisdom 1950:508, 610, 708, 726), which are all reflexes of \**t’uuhl* “conejo, rabbit” in proto-Ch’olan (Kaufman and Norman 1984:133). On Naranjo Stela 22 the toponym is written T’UL-li, suggesting the transcription *t’uul*, although the post-vocalic /h/ in Ch’orti’ suggests a hypercorrect form *t’uuhl* in Classic Mayan.



Figure 59. Clause 10 (photograph by Christophe Helmke).

verbs of motion, wherein individuals with lengthy titular strings move across a geopolitical landscape. As such the predicate of the final clause (O11) can come as a surprise to Western minds bent on presumptions of historicity. The predicate in question is written *ya-AK'-ta*, quite possibly for *y-ahk't*. Typically one would expect a verb in this syntactic position, but here we may just see a possessive



construction involving the syncopated form *ahk't* (from the noun *ahk'ot*) “dance” (Grube 1992), prefixed by a third person singular pronominal prefix *y-*. As such this segment could be translated as “it is the dance of.”

True to form, the following glyph block (O12) provides the name of the dance, in a pattern that has been recognized since the dance verb was first deciphered (Grube 1992). The name is now mostly replaced by a series of cracks but is sufficiently legible to transliterate as **[ke]-k'e** (T220.nn), followed by T741, representing the head of a reptile. The T741 head in this context may represent that of a turtle, read *ahk*, or the syllabogram *e*. If the latter, this could yield *kek'e'*, and if the former could be either *kek' ahk* or an underspelled form *kek'eC ahk*. Proposing a translation or etymology for the name of this dance is difficult, not least since this is the first time this particular name appears in the Classic Maya corpus and considering the absence of clear reflexes in modern Mayan languages. Although the search in Ch'olan languages for *kek'* proved unsuccessful, Yukatekan languages exhibit a possible cognate *kech'*, for “rana, frog” in Itza' (Hofling and Tesucún 1997:345) and “rana” in Yukatek (Barrera Vásquez 1980:308), a plausible match considering the rarity of the lexeme and especially the common use of animal names to describe and designate dances (Grube 1992; Christenson 2003; Loooper 2009). As such *kek'e[l] ahk* may be the name of a “frog-like turtle” dance.<sup>25</sup> As such, the entire historical narrative appears to close and culminate in a dance event, as though a victory dance to celebrate the many conquests and the prevailing characters of the narrative. Presumably the dance formally closed this bout of martial engagements and served to celebrate the new geopolitical equilibrium that had been achieved by and in favor of Komkom.

This phraseology, with the lengthy historical narrative culminating in what is in essence a war dance celebrating the military successes of a given city-state, is also found in the text of Hieroglyphic Stair 4 at Dos Pilas. There the troubled years following the rift in the Mutu'l dynasty and the exile of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil were followed by what can be termed a civil war, pitting what may have been half-brothers against each other (Houston 1993:108-110; Martin and Grube 2000:56-57). The tumultuous years of the first half of the seventh century, as recorded on the hieroglyphic stair, saw Tikal and Dos Pilas engaged in a series of conflicts and skirmishes, and with the ousting of his rival from Tikal, Bajlaj Chan K'awiil, the victorious king of Dos Pilas, celebrated the precarious status quo with a triumphant dance in December AD 684 (Houston 1993:Fig. 4-11; Guenter 2003:34-35). The example from Dos Pilas thereby provides a precedent for the same type of celebration and narrative closure as seen on the Komkom Vase, and suggests that these were part not only of observed ritual practices following successful wars, but also part of a greater narrative tradition, wherein dance rituals culminated a series of historical events, with pivotal episodes perhaps reenacted and theatrically celebrated as part of the dance.

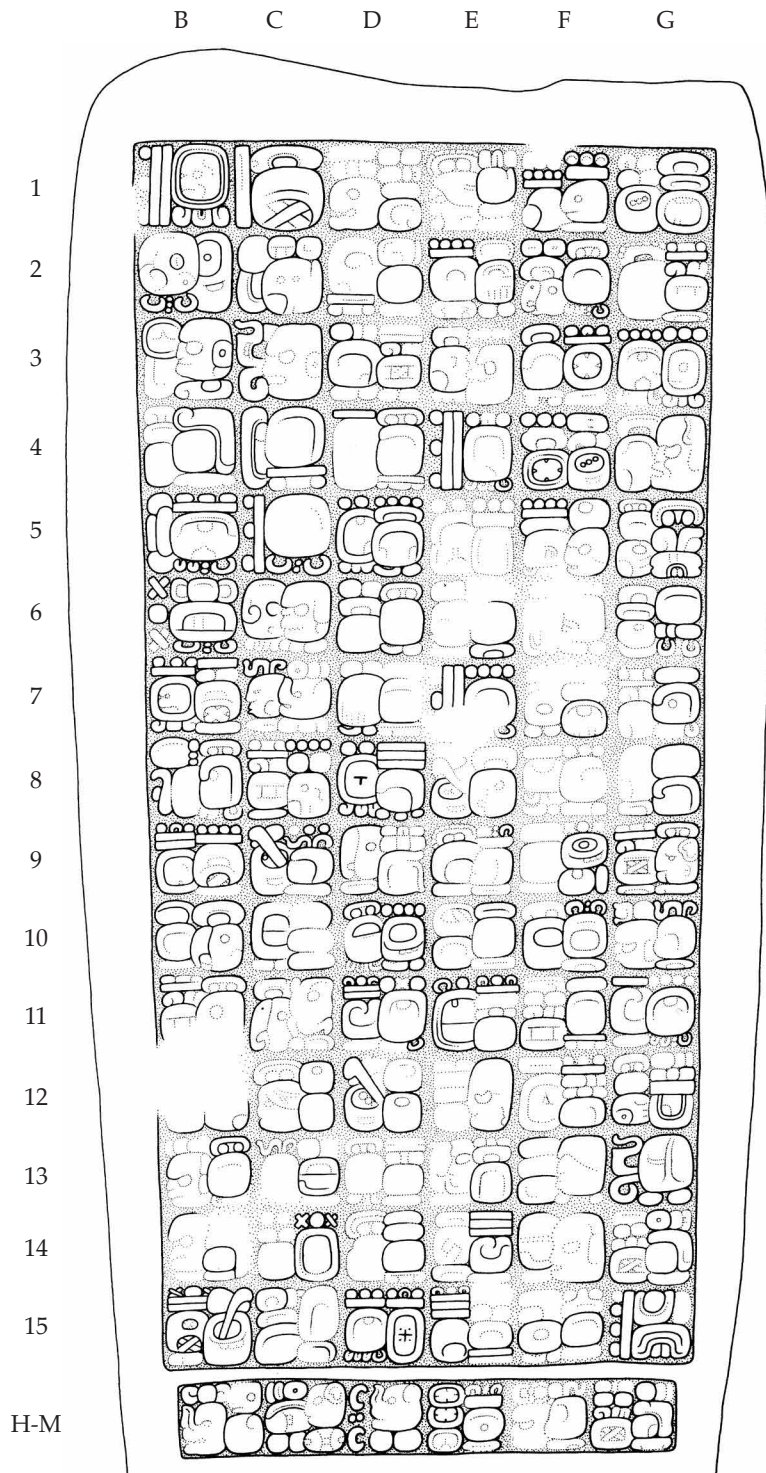
<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, the first portion may cue *kek'e[n]*, possibly “puerco, jabali” (see Barrera Vásquez 1980:394), paired off with *ahk* “turtle,” together providing another dance name involving the names of multiple animals.

## Summary and Concluding Thoughts

The discovery of the exceptional Komkom Vase helps to illuminate both the ritual and geopolitical context leading up to the Terminal Classic period in the eastern Maya Lowlands. The Long Count date that is recorded on the vase sets the manufacture and/or dedication firmly in the ninth century, while the retrospective narrative details a series of military conquests from the vantage of Komkom dynasts and the deeds of individuals from Naranjo and other affiliated and neighboring sites in the eastern Maya Lowlands. The glyphic corpus of nearby Naranjo greatly clarifies and corroborates the same historical narrative as that documented on the vase, detailing an unequalled series of martial actions in considerably greater detail than any recorded in the monuments of the area. Together, the texts point to the important role that the Komkom lords played in the geopolitical landscape of the region at the turn of the ninth century and their strong ties to the court of Naranjo.

The context of the discovery, in a peri-abandonment deposit located in the northeastern corner of Plaza B in Group B at Baking Pot, can also help us to better understand the internal processes involved in the breakdown of sociopolitical systems across the broader Maya Lowlands. Other material recovered in the deposit suggests those items were primarily articles of the royal court. However, the presence of the matrix layer above the terminal plaza floor and below the deposits themselves would imply that the palatial structures in Group B had already begun to fall into disuse, or had not been maintained for some time prior to the formation of the deposit. The Long Count date on the vase, combined with chronometric assays on dateable material within the deposit, will help to narrow the temporal parameters at play and thereby help to identify the processes by which this and other deposits at the site were formed. These, in turn, will be compared to burial dates from the epicenter and settlement areas at Baking Pot. Together, the context of the Komkom Vase, combined with its extensive narrative celebrating militarism and conquest, offers critical information about the regional processes involved in the breakdown of political systems across the central Lowlands in the ninth to eleventh centuries. The recovery of this unique vessel at Baking Pot may suggest some sort of allegiance with the polities to which the primary actors of the narrative were tied. The timing and the formation of the deposit may eventually help to illuminate this relationship. We would expect that if the Long Count date associated with the vase and associated AMS <sup>14</sup>C dates from burials and faunal remains are coeval with continued royal and elite interment at Baking Pot, then it is possible that the rulers of the site may have shared political ties with the protagonists of the vase which therefore resulted in its final deposition. However, if the deposit greatly postdates the Long Count date, it would suggest another scenario involving the movement of peoples and goods across the area prior to its deposition at the site. Given that the Komkom Vase names a number of locations that have yet to be identified, future work in the area may help to elucidate these places and the political relationships that connected them in antiquity.

The many points of continuity shared between the Komkom Vase and Stela 12 of Naranjo (Figure 60) suggest that these not only relate parts of the same nar-



**Figure 60.** The lengthy hieroglyphic text on the back of Naranjo Stela 12 (drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.2.21).

rative but may well reproduce elements of a shared archetype, presumably historical annals in codical form that were produced and circulated at the Naranjo court during the eighth century and later. If this is the case, the Komkom Vase may provide us with a unique opportunity to peer onto original Maya historical annals and begin to gain an appreciation for the depth and breadth of this ancient literary genre. This is a very exciting prospect that has heretofore not been attempted on inter-textual correspondences of the Classic period. The existence of an original archetype is supported by several features, including (1) the shared dates for the various events listed, especially in the initial segment of the accounts; (2) a general agreement between many of the places named and the sequentiality with which they appear in the texts; and (3) a partial agreement between the events that are said to have transpired at each location (Table 4).

Clause No.	Komkom Vase	Main Event	Clause No.	Naranjo Stela 12	Main Event
1	8 Eb 5 Woh (9.18.8.8.12)	<i>ujoch'ow k'ahk'</i> <i>pakaxi Sak Kabniil</i>	2	8 Eb 5 Woh (9.18.8.8.12)	<i>puluuy Sak Suutz'a'</i>
2	10 Hix 7 Woh (9.18.8.8.14)	<i>puluuy Sak Suutz'a'</i>	--	--	--
3	12 Kib 9 Woh (9.18.8.8.16)	<i>pakaxi ...k Witznal?</i>	3	12 Kib 9 Woh (9.18.8.8.16)	<i>ch'ahkaj</i> <i>Ux K'awil</i> <i>tahn ch'een Yaxa'</i>
4	1 Etz'nab 11 Woh (9.18.8.8.18)	<i>pakaxi Ik'naahb ...</i>	4	1 Etz'nab 11 Woh (9.18.8.8.18)	<i>ch'ahkaj Sak</i> <i>Kabniil</i>
5	6 Kimi 19 Ch'en (9.18.8.16.6)	<i>ch'ahkaj</i> <i>tahn ch'een Yaxa'</i> <i>Ux K'awil</i> <i>lok'ooy... K'inich</i> <i>Lakamtun</i> <i>t'abaay Usu'l</i>	5	2 Chuwen 4 Sek (9.18.8.11.11)	second founding (?) of Yaxa' dynasty
6	10 Ok 3 Yax (9.18.8.16.10)	<i>puluuy Ibil</i>	6	2 Ik' 15 Ch'en (9.18.8.16.2)	<i>ch'ahkaj Yaxa'</i> <i>t'abaay ya ...</i>
7	9 Ik' 15 Yax (9.18.8.17.2)	<i>pakaxi ya ...</i>	7	1 Ben 6 Kej (9.18.9.0.13)	<i>ahn K'inich</i> <i>Lakamtun</i> <i>t'abaay Usula'</i>
8	2 Lamat 1 Sak (9.18.8.17.8)	<i>puluuy Pekom</i>	8	7 Lamat 16 Woh (9.18.9.9.8)	eroded event

**Table 4.** An overview of the initial segments of the historical narratives presented on the Komkom Vase and Naranjo Stela 12, showing points of correspondence in the first five clauses and their departures from Clause 8 onwards. Analogous segments are color-coded.

Despite these similarities, there are nevertheless a great many differences that separate each text. For one, the clauses on Stela 12 are all rather short, especially when they are compared to the many sub-clauses and multiple events that are said to take place on each of the dates recorded on the Komkom Vase. One might also argue that there is little congruity in terms of the events that are cited



**Figure 61.** The western segment of Hieroglyphic Stair 2 at Dos Pilas (photograph by Merle Greene Robertson).

in each source, despite the precise duplication of dates. In addition, the two texts were produced at different dates, thereby complicating their textual relationship all the more. As a result, one might come to the conclusion that the disparities in the two merely reflect the rendition of two historical accounts detailing the same events but each produced at their own distinct court and relating different particulars to best serve each respective realm.

That being said, it is the very basis of historical records and human opinion that ensures that accounts, both oral and written, differ from witness to witness and from source to source. Without wanting to limit ourselves to the obvious, whereas Waterloo has become synonymous with the utter downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte, it is equally the triumphant peak of the Duke of Wellington's military career. Incidentally, perhaps, it was also a victory for the Prussian army under the command of the Prince of Wahlstatt, whose decisive role in the victory has been ignored, not surprisingly, by British historians since the First World War. Such an allegiance is certainly fertile ground for aggrandizement and divergent accounts that best serve to cast the various actors in favorable light, in much the same way that the account offered by Wellington differs in several points with that provided by the contemporary Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz (e.g., Bassford et al. 2010). This is undoubtedly what we are seeing on the Komkom Vase, wherein important martial engagements are recounted from the vantage of a lesser ally, albeit one on the victorious side of history.

In the Maya area, there are a few known cases where the same military

encounter is related in different terms. One notable instance is the decisive battle of May 4, AD 679, which saw Tikal's Nuun Ujo'l Chaahk vanquished by the forces of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil of Dos Pilas (Guenter 2003:27). Interestingly, this battle is recorded in two different versions at Dos Pilas as the climactic act of the civil war (Martin and Grube 2000:57). On the more public of the two monuments, Hieroglyphic Stair 2 (Figure 61), which adorns a major temple facing the grand plaza, the scale of the victory is described in grandiose and poetic terms as *naahbaj uk'ik'el, uwitzijj ujo'lil uxlajuun tzuk mutu'lnaal*, or "pooled (like a lake) is the blood, and piled (like a mountain) are the skulls of those of the thirteenth province, the Tikaleños" (Guenter 2003:27; Lacadena 2003b:852-853). In contrast, on the more secluded or private monument, Hieroglyphic Stair 4, within the royal palace, the same account is phrased in what can be described as more mundane terms as *jubuuy utook' upakal nuun ujo'l chaahk uchabjiij bajlaj chan k'awiil*, or "toppled is the flint and the shield of Nuun Ujo'l Chaahk, it is the undertaking of Bajlaj Chan K'awiil" (Houston 1993:105, 109; Boot 2002b:7). As such, it is clear that records of the same events, even when commissioned coevally by the same monarch at the same court, do not have to slavishly repeat the same wording.

Returning to the Komkom Vase, despite the appreciable differences that this narrative exhibits when compared to that presented on Stela 12 at Naranjo, there are clauses that closely duplicate each other in terms of wording and phrasings (Table 3). For instance, we have very similar wordings in Clause 7 on Stela 12 and Clause 5 of the Komkom Vase, where the flight of the Yaxa' king is phrased as him "running" (*ahn*) in one case and "fleeing" (*lok'ooy*) in the other, but in both cases he is said to have sought refuge atop an elevated place called Usu'l ~ Usula'. These examples thereby strongly imply that these do not just refer to the same events but also draw on the same source, since it is otherwise difficult to account for the same wording in each instance. Especially notable is the clause referring to the attack on, and defeat of, Yaxha, which employs two discrete segments, one read *tahn ch'een Yaxa'* "in the middle of the Yaxa' cave" and the other *Ux K'awil* "three K'awil." Both of these are found on the Komkom Vase and Stela 12 of Naranjo, yet the order in which they appear is reversed. This implies that the sculptors of Stela 12 and the scribe of the Komkom Vase both used the same written source, since the defeat of Yaxha could have been referred to and phrased in many different ways.

From the standpoint of philology, the existence of these two texts should enable the rigorous scholar to establish a basic *stematology* with which to start the reconstruction of the original archetype (i.e., the near-cladistic process that attempts to chart out how later versions of texts derive from an initial or at least ancestral form). That such an original document existed is supported by the Komkom Vase itself, since it provides a retrospective account that exhibits such a rapid pace and is filled with so many details that it is difficult to imagine that this could have been produced, and exclusively so, for the Komkom Vase. Instead, the style of the glyphs, their similarity to codices and Codex-style ceramics, and the retrospective nature of the narrative all support their identification as a copy or emulation of an earlier manuscript. The somewhat unclear mentions of the

various protagonists, especially by use of title rather than by name, also suggests that these were introduced during an earlier portion of the text that was not reproduced on the vase. The Distance Numbers are also suggestive in this respect, since the largest Distance Number, which occurs at the end of Clause 4, counts back from the start of the narrative, rather than the previous clause. Furthermore, the Distance Number linking Clause 6 with Clause 7 is erroneous (see Table 2), suggesting that the scribe omitted one sentence but simply copied the distance number of the ensuing sentence without emending it. Similarly, the comparison between the Komkom Vase and Stela 12 indicates that there has been an omission on the latter, since the clause headed by the 10 Hix 7 Woh Calendar Round has not been reproduced on the stela, also indicative of emendation and suggesting an editorial process. Furthermore, the Komkom Vase goes on to relate a whole series of events in the summer of 799, which the stela omits, focusing instead on the spring and summer of the following year. Together, all of these features speak very strongly in favor of a codical source for the historical narrative reproduced, in part, on both the vase and the stela.

However, how are we to begin reconstructing the original archetype by comparing the text of Stela 12 at Naranjo with that on the Komkom Vase? For one, we can reproduce the Calendar Round dates that are shared between both narratives as fixed anchors of the original archetype (Table 2). The sequence of places and events should also be fairly consistent, with Sak Sutz'a' appearing towards the beginning, and then going on to relate the axing of Ux K'awil, and also some of the initial attacks on Yaxa', and the travels to the place named *ya...*, although the place of Sak Kabniil in the narrative is more difficult to fix. That being said, and considering the great variance between the agents named, we can see that the texts were emended to better provide narratives from each respective angle, from that of the dynasts of Naranjo and from the vantage of Komkom. This implies that both available versions, or "witnesses," have been edited and emended to varying degrees. At Naranjo the main protagonist is none other than the ruling monarch, "Itzamnaaj" K'awil, also referred to by his praenomen K'ahk' Hoplaj Chan Chaahk,<sup>26</sup> although other figures do appear in the text such as an Ajsa'uul "he of Naranjo." While these are evidently not the main protagonists of the narrative on the Komkom Vase, there are multiple mentions of Naranjo and members of its court, but the complete omission of "Itzamnaaj" K'awil is a salient one, although not entirely surprising considering the differing distribution and intended audience.

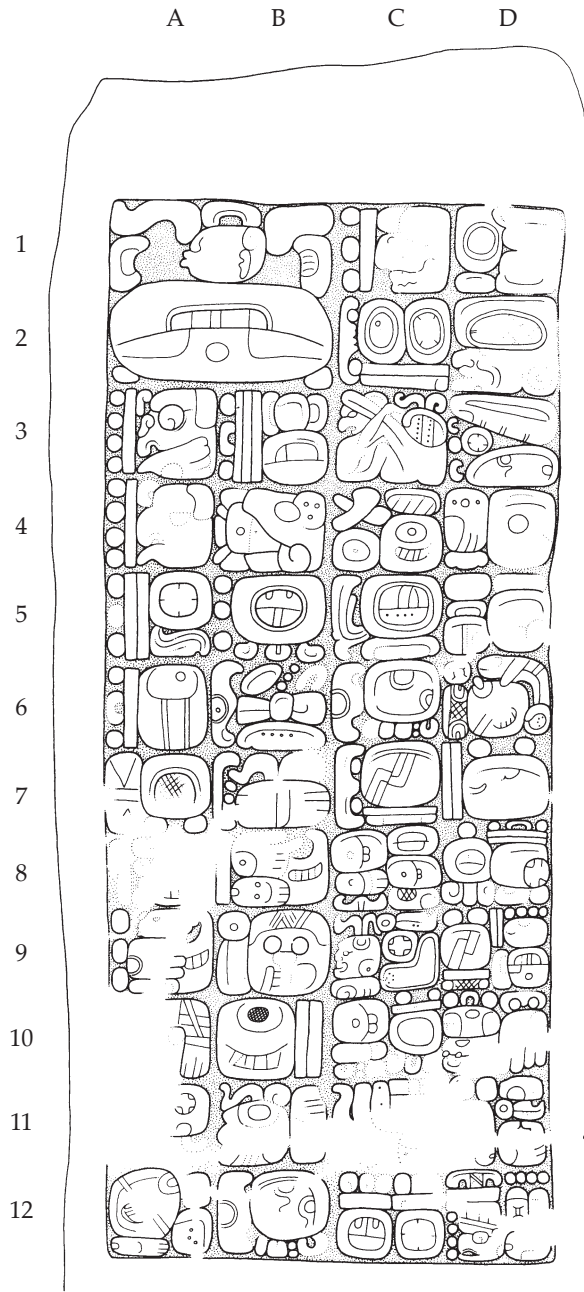
Considering some of the basic and fundamental assumptions employed in

<sup>26</sup> The reading of the verbal segment of this name is an observation that was pointed out to us by Sergei Vepretskii (personal communication 2017), based on notable substitution sets of the gourd sign and the sequence **ho-po** in analogous nominal segments on monuments of La Corona, suggesting that the former serves as a logogram **HOP**. In addition, on Naranjo Stela 14 the same nominal segment appears to be written **K'AK'-ho[po]-la CHAN-na-CHAK-ki** for *K'ahk' Hoplalaj] Chan Chaahk* wherein the head-variant of **ho** is used as the main sign of the first glyph block. A comparable name is recorded on Black-on-cream dish (K4669) where it is written **CHAK-HOP-Ia-ja CHAN-na-YOPAT-ta**.

the creation of a critical edition, we ought to be able to rely more heavily on the witness recorded on Naranjo Stela 12, since it is the older of the two sources and thereby one that is also closer temporally to the events that are narrated. Thus, Stela 12 records events less than 18 months after these occurred, whereas for the Komkom Vase this is at least 13 years after. Based on near-contemporaneity, the Naranjo monument therefore wins out. However, in terms of details, the Komkom Vase is clearly much more specific and exhaustive and reproduces clauses that have been omitted on the Naranjo stela. As such, this is potentially a much more significant source, not least since the text on Stela 12 is highly abbreviated, emended, and edited, and thereby provides only a very short and much more superficial narrative. Yet length is usually considered in philological stemmatics as a marker of derived sources, especially if older sources are shorter (Maas 1958). All the details that are found on the Komkom Vase may at first elicit some skepticism, especially if these are not already mentioned in another source. However, in this instance, just applying these basic precepts may be misleading, since it is difficult to imagine how the scribe of the Komkom Vase could have added all these details without further corrupting the original narrative, and as such the variations between these witnesses may reflect more differences in media and intended target audiences than the quality of the sources at hand. The final impression is that the Komkom Vase reproduces much more consistently the original archetype, but again only in parts, especially since the latter half of the narrative is not closely duplicated in other sources, making it difficult to substantiate. However, the great focus placed on the wars against Yaxa' and the eventual reprisals on Tikal is supported not only by Stela 12 but also by the similar narrative presented on Stela 35 at Naranjo, representing one of the most important martial actions and victories under the reign of "Itzamnaaj" K'awil (Martin and Grube 2000:82; Grube and Martin 2004:147-154). In fact, the most important clause on Stela 35 is duplicated in Clause 7 of Stela 12, and this event occurs only five days after the final clause on the Komkom Vase, again suggesting that these two narratives are integral reflections of the same series of historical events. These many points of equivalence mean that we can use the narrative of the Komkom Vase as a type of intermediate, albeit dominant source, which has to be augmented and corrected against other sources in order to more properly ascertain the nature, phraseology, and textual composition of the archetype.

Given the phraseology and composition of the narrative presented on the Komkom Vase, we can find analogies in other near-contemporary texts. One point of commonality in the texts of the greater Naranjo court is the mentions made of Tikal in the latter parts of narratives, particularly the capture of individuals from that capital, presumably as a result of skirmishes resulting from westward military incursions. This is something observed in the text of Stela 22 at Naranjo, during the reign of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk (Figure 58), as well as in the text of Stela 12 and that of the Komkom Vase. The repetition of this narrative structure appears almost like a literary device and suggests that this duplicates a earlier epic story that was well known within the courts of Naranjo and affiliated sites. As David Stuart (personal communication 2016)





**Figure 62.** The hieroglyphic text of Ixkun Stela 2 (drawing by Ian Graham © President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 2004.15.6.4.21).

has remarked, one analogous text that stands out is that recorded on Stela 2 at Ixkun (Figure 62). The text starts off with a calendrical record that also includes a reference to a fire ritual in the Supplementary Series (Figure 17c). The first event of the narrative is the now familiar *puluuy* or “burning” event, this one taking place in December 779 and resulting in the defeat of Ixkun at the hands of a figure from Ucanal (Helmke and Brady 2014:217). The retaliation was swift and on the following morning the forces of Ixkun attacked what may have been



**Figure 63.** Captured French cannon exhibited outside the Museum of Military History in Vienna, bearing the motto *Ultima Ratio Regum* (Wikimedia Creative Commons photograph).

an ally of Ucanal, an attack that is phrased as a *ch'ahkaj tahn ch'een* or “axed is the middle of the cave/settlement.” All of these events eventually led to an attack on Ucanal resulting in a decisive *puluuy*, less than two months later, in February 780 (Helmke and Brady 2014:218). Finally, the whole narrative is closed with a ritual celebration involving a series of supernatural entities.

All of the elements of the narrative resonate with that presented on the Komkom Vase, not only in their sequence but also in terms of the wording and the expressions used to relate the events that transpired. In terms of agents and principal actors, there are none to be discerned, something that the text of Ixkun Stela 2 shares with the Komkom Vase. Whereas there are a series of different actors, none serve as the primary agent, as one might expect from a regal text wherein the ruling monarch is given credit for major events and turning points. As a result, we are left with a text with rather unusual rhetorical qualities, as there is no dominant protagonist in the story and the agents named are all predominantly referred to by title alone.

Intriguingly, there may also be a type of cause and effect, wherein the fire ritual that is given prominence in the Supplementary Series is followed shortly after by a martial action involving fire, as though a pure and virginal fire that was brought about by ritual action was that which would eventually be used in the ensuing burnings. The same may also be implied on the Komkom Vase, which may better explain why such a *joch'ow k'ahk'* or fire-drilling ritual is found

in the first clause, and also why the analogous *jatz'aal uk'ahk'* ritual, or “struck is his fire,” is cited in the Supplementary Series and serves as a pivotal temporal anchor, as is made clear in the lengthy expression that bridges the two major episodes of the narrative (between Clauses 4 and 5).

Before concluding, let us briefly consider the Latin dictum, *ultima ratio regum*, which can be translated as “the last reasoning of kings.” As a metaphor for war, it makes reference to failed diplomacy and the king’s last recourse when no peaceful alternatives exist. This maxim is said to have been greatly favored by Cardinal Richelieu in his capacity as Prime Minister (1624–1642) (Jones 1929: 119), and Louis XIII of France (r. 1643–1715), taking this expression to heart, ordered the canons cast during his reign to bear this motto, as tangible manifestations of this ultimate recourse (Figure 63). Although the use of this dictum is best known from the French court, the earlier variant, *haec est ultima ratio regum*, can be traced back to works of the Spanish Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (1436–1517) (Høivik 2011). This maxim is a useful heuristic device for interpreting the historical narrative recorded on the Komkom Vase, since this text provides, in essence, an emic rationalization of the events surrounding and leading up to a series of hostilities embroiling Komkom with Naranjo, Yaxha, Tikal, and neighboring polities at the very end of the eighth century. While we have been able to reconstruct much of the original narrative, a few gaps in the text remain, as do a handful of sherds that have not been conjoined (Figure 64). Despite these lacunae, the Komkom Vase provides us with an astounding narrative that clearly retains much of its vigor and resonates as a moving testament to “the last reasoning of kings.”



**Figure 64.** The sherds that remain to be joined to the Komkom Vase, during curation (photograph by Christophe Helmke).

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## Illustration Credits

2 based on plans and surveys by William R. Bullard, James Colon, and Christophe Helmke; 3 based on plans and surveys by Christophe Helmke and James Conlon; 12, 13, 14, 16b, 16d, 17, 18a-b, 21a, 22a, 22d, 23, 24d, 26a, 26d, 29c-d, 30b-c, 32, 33a, 37c, 38, 43, 44a, 45c, 46, 47, 51, 53, 54, 55 based on photographs by Christophe Helmke and inspection of the original; 15a-b, 26b, 35c, 44c, 45a after a drawing by Nikolai Grube; 15c, 20b, 20d-f, 33d after a drawing by Ian Graham; 15d, 19a, 35b after a drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine; 16a, 24a after a drawing by William Coe, 16c, 44b after a drawing by David Stuart; 18c, 33b, 36d-e, 52c after a multispectral photograph by Gene Ware, courtesy of James Brady; 19b, 21c after a drawing by Linda Schele; 19c, 20a, 27b, 29a-b, 30a, 30d, 37b, 37e, 45b, 52b after a photograph by Justin Kerr; 20c, 45d after a photograph by Nikolai Grube; 21b after a photograph by Jorge Pérez de Lara; 22b after a photograph by Karl Herbert Mayer; 22c, 34c after a drawing by Alfonso Lacadena; 24b, 27c, 35a, 39b-c, 40b, 48b, 56 after a photograph by Teobert Maler; 24c after a photograph by Albert Davletshin; 26c after a photograph by Marco Vernaschi; 27a after a photograph by Jennifer Taschek; 33c after a photograph by Ian Graham; 34a after a photograph by Linton Satterthwaite in the archives of the Institute of Archaeology, Belize; 34b after a photograph by Michel Zabé; 37a after a photograph by Guido Krempel; 36f, 37d after a photograph by Chip and Jennifer Clark; 39 after a drawing by John Montgomery; 41 after a map by Frances Scholes and Eric Thompson.

Appendix I: Syllabary

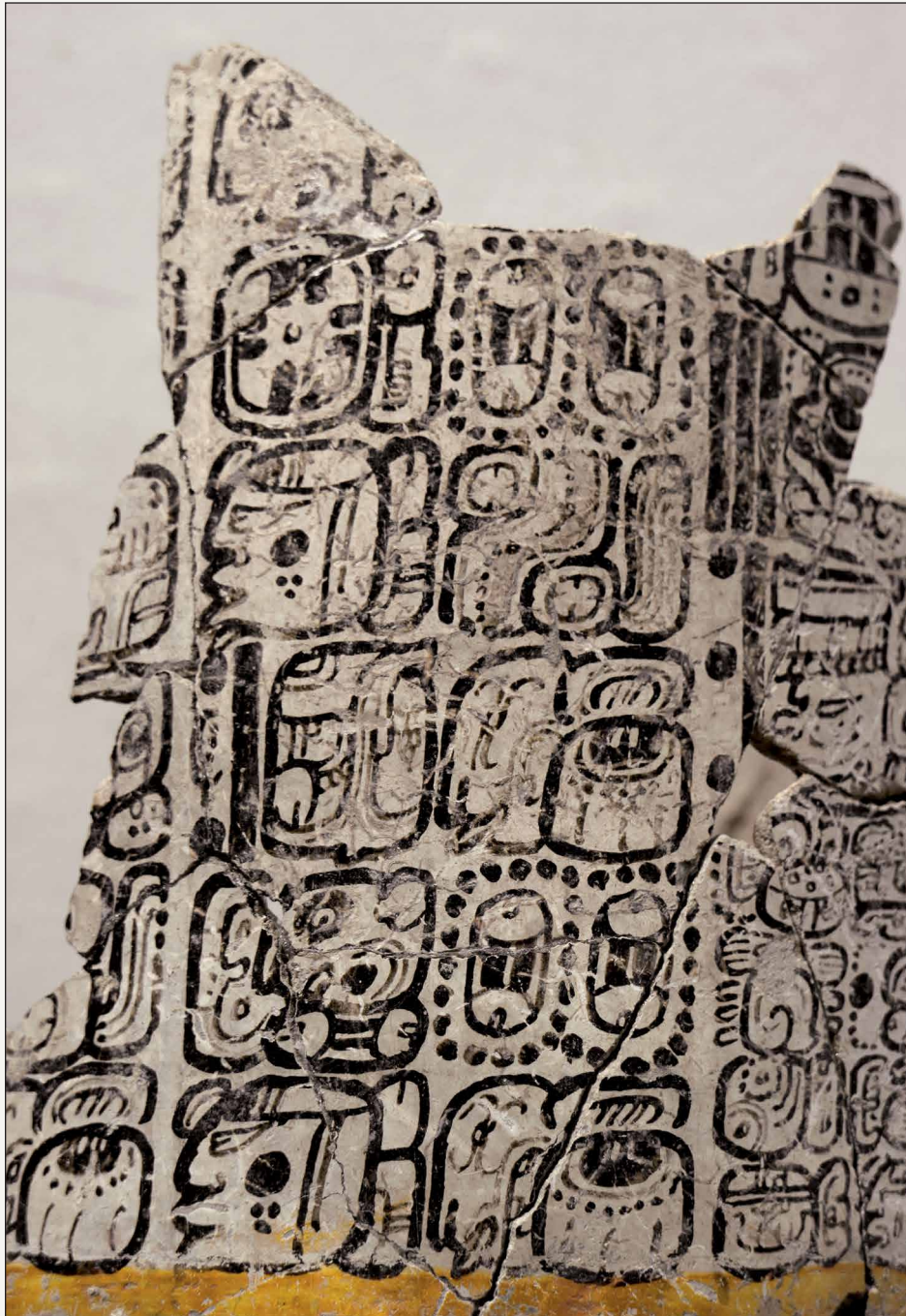
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a							
e							
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	tz'	w	x	y
a				
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i				
o				
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## Appendix II:

# Transliteration and Transcription

Note that the first level of analysis, the transliteration, aims to convey the original spelling of the glyphic text and thereby represents the manner in which the text was written. Each glyph block is referred to by an alphanumeric code that applies to the text as a whole, following the original reading order. Each glyphic sign within a glyph block is separated by a hyphen, with logograms written in uppercase and phonograms transliterated in lowercase. Simplex forms are represented throughout; as such complex vowels and glottal spirants are not rendered at this level of analysis. Each glyphic element of the transliteration is rendered in bold typeface, excepting for items that are not properly deciphered at present. These are provided by using numeric designations prefixed by T-, since they are drawn from their inventory numbers in the Thompson catalog (1962). Alternatively, undeciphered signs are referred to by descriptive nicknames (marked off by quotation marks) in instances where there are no designations for a given glyph in the same catalog. Square brackets marks off signs that are infixed into other signs. Items that are eroded and wholly illegible are transliterated with a pound sign (#). At times, where an item is eroded but can be reconstructed with confidence, these are transliterated within curly brackets {...}. Question marks follow signs with tentative readings or phonetic values, or stand for individual glyphs of unknown value, or follow a wavy bracket to indicate some doubt in the transliteration. Where alternate transliterations exist, these are presented.

The second level of analysis, the transcription, serves to present the manner in which we think particular glyph blocks were enunciated or read aloud in antiquity. As such, this level of analysis serves to convey the manner in which the original text was read. At this level all of the transcriptions are rendered in lowercase and in italic typeface. Items that were omitted in the original spelling but which can be reconstructed, and phonetic elements that were part of the original pronunciation but which were omitted from the actual spelling, are marked off by square brackets. Segments that are unclear in their reading are indicated by an ellipsis (...) and the final consonant is marked off for partially read items. Where these occur, alternate readings are provided and separated by a tilde.

**Initial Series:**

- A1: T124:25-?-**HAB** (ISIG)  
*... ha[a]b*
- A2: **9-PIK**  
*baluun pik*
- A3: {19}-**WINAK?**-**HAB[bi]**  
*baluunlajuun winaakhaab*
- A4: {1-**TE'**}-**HAB[bi]**  
*juunte' haab*
- A5: **15-WINAL**  
*ho'lajuun winal*
- A6: **8-K'IN**  
*waxak k'in*
- A7: **HUL-?-SIBIK?** (G2)  
*hul ... sibik*
- B7: **TI'-HUN-na** (Glyph F)  
*ti'huun*
- A8: **no-NOH**  
*noh[ool]*
- B8: **1-bi?-ko**  
*juun ...k*
- A9: **JATZ'?-li**  
*jatz'[aal]*
- B9: **u-K'AK'**  
*uk'a[h]k'*
- A10: **CHAN-na**  
*chana[l]*
- B10: **AJAN**  
*ajan*
- C1: ? (Glyph C2/C3)  
*...*
- D1: **JUN?-?** (Glyph X3)  
*juun ...*
- C2: T683a-10 (20+10)  
*...lajuun*

**Clause 1:**

- D2: **8-"EB"**  
*waxak ...*
- C3: **HO'**  
*ho'*

- D3: **IK'-AT-ta**  
*ik'at*
- C4-D4: **u-jo-ch'o wa-K'AK'<sup>2</sup>**  
*ujocho'w k'a[h]k'*
- C5: #  
...
- D5: #-?  
...
- C6: **#tyi**  
...y
- D6: **#-su?**  
...s
- C7: **CHAK-MAY-ya-TE'**  
*chakmayte'*
- D7: **u-pe-ka**  
*u-pe[h]ka*
- C8: **no-NOH**  
*noh[ool]*
- D8: T351v-na  
...n
- C9: **xa-MAN-na**  
*xaman*
- D9: T351v-na  
...n
- C10: **pa-ka-xi**  
*pakaxi ~ pakxi*
- D10: **SAK-KAB-ni-li**  
*sakkabnil*
- C11: **xa-MAN-na**  
*xaman*
- D11: T351v-na  
...n
- C12 : **7-T501[544]-ni**  
*huk si[h]n ~ soon*
- D12: **a-SA'-li**  
*a[j]sa'[uu]l*
- E1: **{ya}?-AJAW / {1}?-AJAW**  
*yajaw / juun ajaw*
- F1: **a-{K'UH}-HUN-na**  
*a[j]k'uhu'n*
- E2: **KAB/CHAB-ba**  
*kab ~ chab*

F2: **7-tzu[ku]**  
*huk tzuk*

E3: **{2}-la-ta**  
*cha' lat*

**Clause 2:**

F3: **10-HIX**  
*lajuun hix*

E4: **7-ik'[AT]**  
*huk ik'at*

F4: **pu-lu-yi**  
*puluuy*

E5: **SAK-SUTZ' / SAK-SUTZ'-{a}**  
*saksuutz' / saksuutz'a[']*

F5: **2-la-ta**  
*cha' lat*

**Clause 3:**

E6: **{12}-"KIB"**  
*lahcha' ...*

F6: **{9}-ik'[AT]**  
*baluun ik'at*

E7: **pa-ka-xi**  
*pakaxi ~ pakxi*

F7: **T533?-ka-{{WITZ}tzi-NAL}**  
*...k witznal*

E8: **a-watla-TE'**  
*al]walte'*

F8: **4-T683a-wa (4+20) / 4-ja-wa**  
*chan ...w ~ jaw*

E9: **bi-tu-nu**  
*bi[h]tun*

F9: **a-9-CHAB**  
*al]baluun chab*

E10: **u-[TZ'AK]a**  
*utz'a[h]ka*

F10: **2-la-ta**  
*cha' lat*

**Clause 4:**

E11: **1-"ETZ'NAB"**  
*juun ...*



- F11: **11-IK'[AT]**  
*buluch ik'at*
- E12: **pa-ka-xi**  
*pakaxi ~ pakxi*
- F12: **IK'-NAB**  
*ik' na[h]b[al]*
- G1: **#-sa-#**  
...
- H1: **#-nu**  
...*n*
- G2: **AN-ni**  
*a[h]ni*
- H2: **xa-MAN-na**  
*xaman*
- G3: **T351v-na**  
...*n*
- H3: **a-9-{CHAB}**  
*a[j]baluun chab*
- G4: **a-ni-wa-na**  
*a[j]nixwan*
- H4: **a-NAH?-bi-i**  
*a[j]nabi'*
- G5: **a-tz'e-K'AB**  
*a[j]tz'e[h] k'ab*
- H5: **7-T501[544]-ni**  
*huk si[h]n ~ soon*
- G6: **ju-#**  
*ju...*
- H6: **#**  
...
- G7: **{BAH-li}**  
*[u]baah[i]l ~ [u]baah[i]l[a'n]*
- H7: **K'UH**  
*[ta] k'uh*
- G8: **{9}-OK-TE'**  
*baluun [y]okte'*
- H8: **ITZAM-[K'AN]AK**  
*itzam k'ana[h]k*
- G9: **#**  
...
- H9: **SIBIK[TE']**  
*sibikte'*

G10: **u-K'UH-lu**  
*uk'uh[u]l*

H10: **YAX-a-AJAW**  
*yaxa['] ajaw*

**Clause 1':**

G11: **14, 7-WINAL**  
*chanlajuun [he'n], huk winal*

H11-G12: **ja-tz'a li-ya**  
*jatz'aliyy*

H12: #  
...

I1: #  
...

J1: #-**bu-ju**  
*...buj*

I2-J2: **u [TZ'AK]a**  
*utz'a[h]ka*

**Clause 5:**

I3: **6-CHAM?**  
*wak cham*

J3: **19-ik' -SIH(OM)**  
*baluunlajuun ik'siho'm ~ ik'sihom*

I4: **CH'AK[ka]-ja**  
*ch'a[h]kaj*

J4: **TAN-CH'EN-na**  
*ta[h]n ch'een*

I5: **YAX-a**  
*yaxa[']*

J5: **3-K'AWIL-li**  
*ux k'awil*

I6: **{pu}-lu-yi**  
*puluuy*

J6: **4-NAB-{NAL}**  
*chan na[h]bnaal ~ na[h]bal*

I7: **i-LOK'-yi**  
*ilok'[oo]y*

J7: **mat-CH'AB**  
*ma['] ch'a[h]b*

I8: **ma-AK'AB-li**  
*ma['] a[h]k'ab[aa]l ~ ma['] a[h]k'ab[i]l*

- J8:           **K'INICH-chi-ni**  
*k'inich*
- I9:           **la-LAKAM**  
*lakam*
- J9:           **nu-nu**  
*nun ~ tun*
- I10:          **T'AB[yi]**  
*t'ab[aa]y*
- J10:          **u-su-la**  
*usu'l*
- I11-J11:      **YAX-a AJAW-wa**  
*yaxa['] ajaw*
- I12:          **u-{CHAB}-ya**  
*uchab[ii]y*
- J12:          **{CHAK-ki}?**  
*chaa[h]k*
- K1:           **1-#-ki**  
*juun ...k*
- L1:           **ya-[sa]TOK'**  
*took' yas took'*
- K2:           **u-BAH-hi**  
*ubaah*
- L2:           **T'AB[yi]**  
*t'ab[aa]y*
- K3:           **YAX-a**  
*yaxa[']*
- L3:           **TOK'-ya-sa**  
*to[o]k' yas*
- K4:           **sa-ni**  
*saan*
- L4:           **{K'UH}-#**  
*k'uh[ul] ...*
- K5:           **{SAK-CHUWEN}**  
*sak chuwen*
- L5:           **#**  
*...*
- [...]
- L6:           **#**  
*...*
- K7:           **CH'EN?**  
*ch'een*

L7: **nu-10**  
*... lajuun*

K8: #  
...

L8: **i-chi**  
*ich*

K9: #  
...

[...]

M1: **{u-ti-ya**  
*u[h]tiy*

N1: **{YAX-a}**  
*yaxa[']*

M2: **4-la-ta**  
*chan lat*

**Clause 6:**

N2: **10-OK**  
*lajuun ook*

M3: **3-YAX-SIH(OM)**  
*ux yaxsiho'm ~ yaxsihom*

N3: **pu-(lu)-yi**  
*puluuy*

M4: **IB**  
*ib[iil]*

N4: **9-la-ta**  
*baluun lat*

**Clause 7:**

M5: **9-IK'**  
*baluun ik'*

N5: **15-{YAX-SIH(OM)}**  
*ho'lajuun yaxsiho'm ~ yaxsihom*

M6: **pa-ka-xi**  
*pakaxi ~ pakxi*

N6: **ya-#**  
*ya...*

M7: **7-T501[544]-ni**  
*huk si[h]n ~ soon*

N7: **6-la-ta**  
*wak lat*

**Clause 8:**

- M8:       **2-“LAMAT”**  
*cha' ...*
- N8:       **1-SAK-{SIH(OM)}**  
*juun saksiho'm ~ saksihom*
- M9:       **pu-{lu-yi}**  
*puluuy*
- N9:       **{pe}-ko-mo**  
*pe[h]kom*
- M10:      #  
 ...
- N10:      **{u}-CHAB-ya**  
*uchab[ii]y*
- M11:      #  
 ...
- N11:      **#-la-{ta} (11)**  
*... lat*

**Clause 9:**

- M12:      **{13-“KAWAK”}**  
*uxlajuun ...*
- N12:      **{12-SAK}-SIH(OM)**  
*lahcha' saksiho'm ~ saksihom*
- O1:       #  
 ...
- [...]
- O3:       #  
 ...
- O4:       **MAX?-li**  
*maax[i]l*
- O5:       **a-MUT?-{la}**  
*a[j]mutu'l*
- O6:       **u-CHAB-ya**  
*uchab[ii]y*
- O7:       **a-9-CHAB**  
*a[j]baluun chab*
- O8:       **9-la-ta**  
*baluun lat*

**Clause 10:**

- O9:           **9-“LAMAT”**  
*baluun ...*
- O10:          **1-CHAK-SIH(OM)**  
*juun chaksiho’m ~ chaksihom*
- O11:          **ya-AK’-ta**  
*ya[h]k’ta*
- O12:          **{ke}-k’e-e / AK**  
*kek’e’ / kek’ ~ kek’e[C] a[h]k*

**Parentage Statement – Mother:**

- P1-Q1:       **u BAH/ba-{hi}**  
*ubaah*
- P2-Q2:       **u HUN-TAN-na**  
*uhunta[h]n*
- P3:           **HO’**  
*ho’*
- Q3:           **{HUN}**  
*huun*
- P4:           **“INVERTED.VASE”[HA’AL?]-la**  
*... ha’al*
- Q4:           **IXIK**  
*ixik*
- P5:           **K’UH**  
*k’uh*
- Q5:           **IX**  
*ix ...*
- P6:           **CHAN-na-NAL**  
*chanal*
- Q6:           **?**  
*...*
- P7:           **SAK-CHUWEN**  
*sak chuwen*
- Q7:           **{6}-CHAB-la**  
*wak chab[a]l*
- P8:           **yo-“DOG”[T544]-ni**  
*yo...n*
- Q8:           **{EL}-K’IN-ni**  
*elk’in*
- P9:           **8-T683a (8+20)**  
*waxak ...*
- Q9:           **BAH-ka-ba / ba-ka-ba**  
*baahkab ~ bakab*

**Parentage Statement – Father:**

- R1: **u-BAH / ba-{hi}**  
*ubaah*
- S1: **u-{ch'a}-ba**  
*uch'a[h]b*
- R2: **{ya}-AK'AB-li**  
*ya[h]k'ab[aa]l ~ ya[h]k'ab[i]l*
- S2: **ch'a-ho-ma**  
*ch'aho'm*
- R3: **SAK-wi-[WITZ]tzi**  
*sak witz[il]*
- S3: **BAH-hi / ba-hi**  
*baah*
- R4: **ch'o-ko**  
*ch'ok*
- S4: **{a-SAK}**  
*a[j]sak*
- R5: **NIK'-TE'**  
*nik'te'*
- S5: **[ko]mo-[ko]mo**  
*komkom*
- R6: **AJAW-wa**  
*ajaw*
- S6: **EL[K'IN]-ni**  
*elk'in*
- R7: **7-tzu[ku]**  
*huk tzuk*
- S7: **BAH-ka-ba / ba-ka-ba**  
*baahkab ~ bakab*
- R8: **u-ch'o-ko**  
*uch'ok*
- S8: **[ko]mo-[ko]mo**  
*komkom*
- R9: **AJAW-wa**  
*ajaw*
- S9: **BAH-ka-ba / ba-ka-ba**  
*baahkab ~ bakab.*

Appendix III:  
Additional Photographs



Figure III.1



Figure III.2





Figure III.3



Figure III.4



Figure III.5



Figure III.6



Figure III.7



Figure III.8



Figure III.9



Figure III.10



Figure III.11



Figure III.12





Figure III.13



Figure III.14



Figure III.15

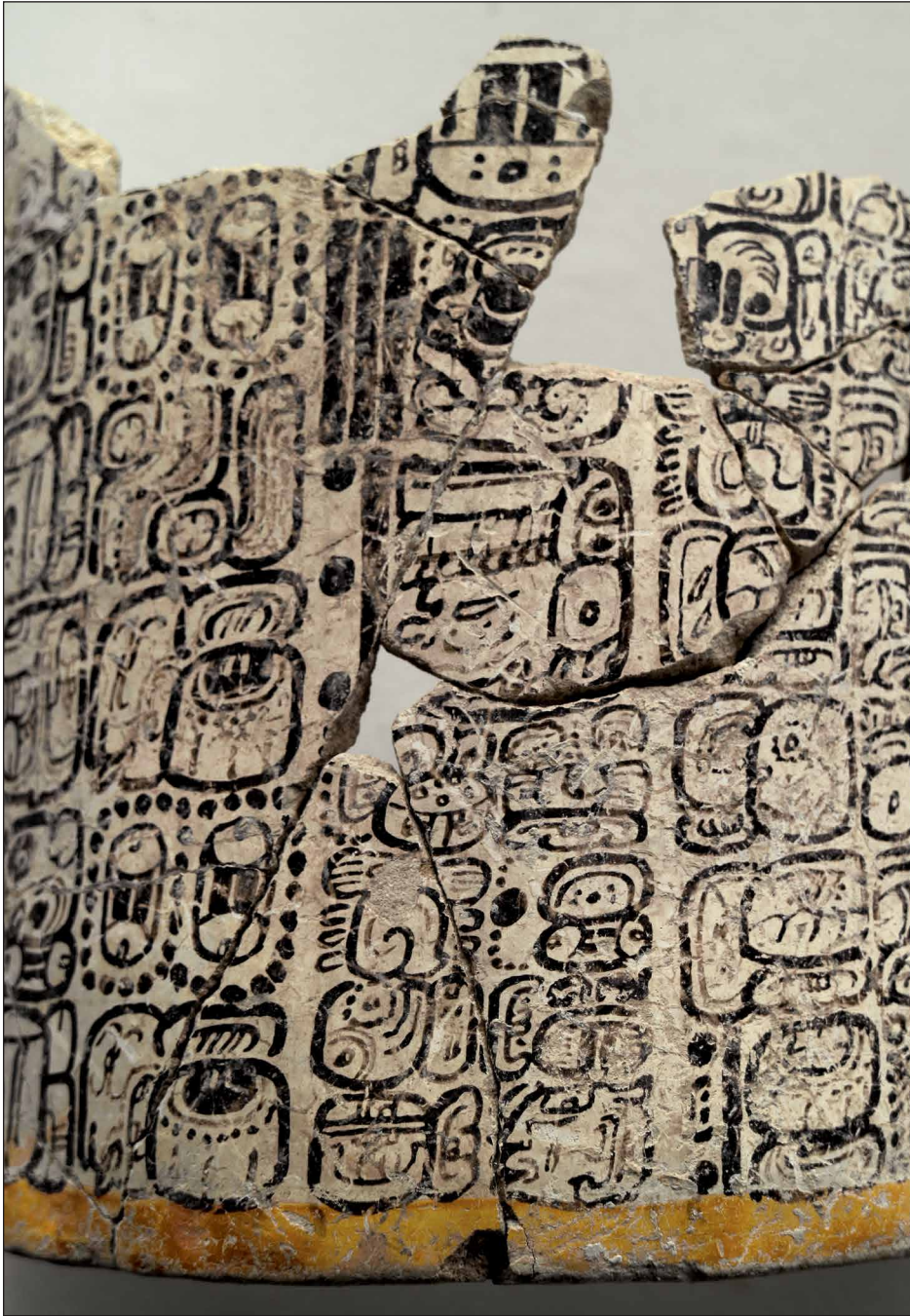


Figure III.16



Figure III.17



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