

# The Baah Kab “First of the World” of Comalcalco: On Two Incised, Stuccoed Vessels and a Name at Comalcalco, Tabasco, Mexico

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The article deals with iconography and text of two incised vessels, which are marked by Kerr number as K7669 and K2799. One of them is situated at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, while latter is at the Dallas Museum of Art. They are probably made in the same workshop, based on the iconographic style. The present paper tries to connect the origin of the vessels to Comalcalco, which is supported by analysis of iconographic style, and also by mention of Baje´w Ka´n To´k´ Baah Kab on vessels and also on clay brick from Comalcalco.

*Key words:* Comalcalco, incised vessel, Maya Epigraphy, hieroglyphic writing, iconography

In 1992, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York purchased a tall, cylindrical, stuccoed, incised Maya vessel portraying a seated lord. Before the Met Museum purchase, in the 1960s, the vessel was part of a private collection in Switzerland (Doyle, 2014). Justin Kerr published a rollout photograph of the vessel as K7669 in *The Maya Vase Book*, Vol. VI (Kerr and Kerr 2000, 1001) and posted it on his website.<sup>1</sup> Nearly two decades earlier, the Dallas Museum of Art obtained a tall, cylindrical, stuccoed, incised Maya vessel portraying a seated lord as a gift from several private individuals and foundations. Justin Kerr has also made a rollout photograph of this vessel, available on his website.<sup>2</sup> In 2006 I saw the vessel at the Dallas Museum of Art and in 2008 I saw the vessel at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 1).

After seeing the vessel at the museum in New York, it dawned on me that both vessels were of the same style. The vessels were so close in appearance, style, type, and size<sup>3</sup> that they must have been created by the same artist or, at the very least, in the same workshop. For several years, I did not study these vessels until I came to work on updating and extending my 2009 classic Maya vocabulary (Boot 2009) sometime in 2012. This note presents my data and preliminary suggestions, both about the text on the Met Museum vessel and the visual narratives<sup>4</sup> on both vessels (Figure 2).

From these rollout photographs, it becomes even more obvious that both these vessels are not only executed in a similar style, but that both vessels also indeed could have been produced by the same artist or at least two closely related artists working in the same workshop.

1 Available at [http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya\\_hires.php?vase=7669](http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_hires.php?vase=7669).

2 Available at [http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya\\_hires.php?vase=2799](http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya_hires.php?vase=2799).

3 Both examples are large, near-straight walled cylindrical vessels, slightly incurving at the top. Met Museum vessel: h=24,13cm, d=18,73cm. Dallas Museum vessel: h=22,86cm, d=18,09cm. Note that the diameter divided by height for the Met Museum vessel gives 0,78 and for the Dallas Museum 0,82, a good indication that perhaps the vessels were produced with some set of fixed proportion in mind (of the pottery maker, who is not necessarily the artist who embellished the vessel). I am aware of the fact that the vessel measurements are approximations, as such so are the proportions obtained through diameter divided by height.

4 In the analysis of art works, such as classic Maya pictorially embellished painted, modeled, or incised ceramics, one can describe a work of art as providing a “narrative illustration” or “visual narrative” if the work of art is a pictorial representation of one or



Figure 1. a) Vessel at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1992.4; photographed by the author on June 6, 2008); b) Vessel at the Dallas Museum of Art (1973.34; photographed by the author on March 22, 2006).

Both ceramic vessels are covered with a thin layer of stucco and subsequently incised. Figure 3 presents a comparison of two particular details to show the stylistic closeness in the execution of the incision on both vessels.

The details in Figure 3a show the head of the Maize God emerging from (or, more neutrally, set within or upon) bifurcating elements (of vegetal origin or perhaps of smoke). The details in Figure 3b show the upper torso and the hands of a seated anthropomorphic figure. In both cases, the upper torso is rendered similarly, broader on top (at the level of the upper chest) and narrower at the bottom (at the level of the belly and hips). Most peculiar are the curvy or bent fingers on both portraits. On K2799, the index finger of the right

hand is fully bent backwards, while on K7669, the pinky finger of the left hand is bent in a curvy but (nearly) impossible manner.

There is a site in the Maya region containing a substantial corpus of incised objects which provide a clue to the origin of the bent fingers. This site is Comalcalco, Tabasco, where several clay bricks illustrate human portraits and show curvy or bent fingers (Figure 4).

The clay bricks in Figure 4 clearly show these curvy and bent fingers. In one example, the fingers of the right hand are playfully interwoven while the left hand is fully flexed backwards (Figure 4a).<sup>5</sup> In the other example, the portrayed human figure seems to look at his right hand, the fingers of which are bent backward (Figure 4b).

more (sequential) events, illustrates a probable relationship, or implies an interaction or association that may bring about a change in condition (compare Murray 1995, 17). As such, one could perhaps distinguish between *interactive* visual narratives (those pictorial representations that portray interactions of any kind) and *non-active* or *static* visual narratives (those pictorial representations that do not portray an interaction). (Also see Cohn 2013, who presents a theory of “Narrative Grammar” of the graphic form, more precisely of those graphic expressions that provide sequential images.)

5 While the fingers are playfully interwoven and the left hand is bent backwards, this particular posture actually may illustrate contractures of the arms and hands and identify a person affected by spasticity (cerebral palsy). If correctly identified, this physical condition (of an unnamed individual) can be added to the physical deformities and congenital conditions of polydactyly of various royal individuals at Palenque (e.g., six fingers, House A, Pier D; six toes, Temple of the Inscriptions, Piers B-C) and the cleft lip (a craniofacial anomaly) of *k'uhul ajaw* Ukit Kan Le'k at Ek' Balam (e.g., Str. 1, Capstone 15) represented in classic Maya art.

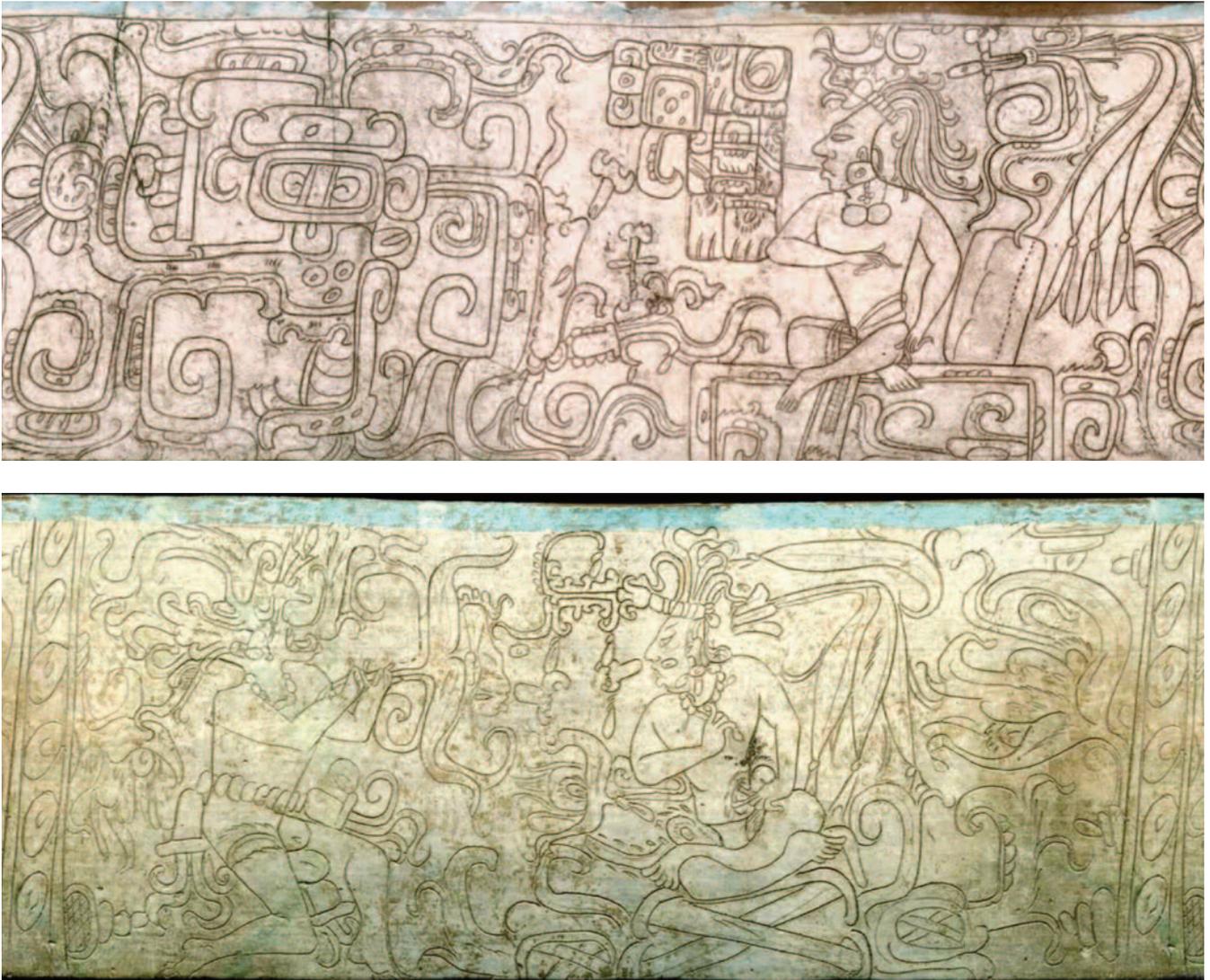


Figure 2. Rollout photographs by Justin Kerr of a) K7669 (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and b) K2799 (Dallas Museum of Art).

Other clay bricks provide facial renditions which are very close to the facial rendition of the human figures on the Dallas and New York museum vessels. While one clay brick shows a human face (Figure 5a), the other clay brick portrays a more complete portrait of a human being, and also shows the upper torso rendered in the same manner as on K2799 and K7669 (Figure 5b). Also note the necklace with two large discs (compare to Met Museum vessel).

Also of particular interest is a cylindrical ceramic vessel with an outward curving upper rim. This vessel (I do not have the measurements) shows that the ceramic vessel was covered with a thin layer of white stucco, but it remained without incision (Figure 5c). The cover

or thin wash or slip with stucco is parallel to the other two vessels.

The similarities presented above can be coincidences based on location.

However, the similarities go much further. In an online essay on the Met Museum vessel (K7669), James Doyle (2014) notes that the iconography is executed in a style close to a ceramic vessel illustrated by Heinrich Berlin found at the site of Jonuta and which has a “white slip through which geometric and/or human figures are incised.”<sup>6</sup> This establishes a connection to the western Maya region. This connection becomes stronger through the very short analysis Doyle (2014) presents of the hieroglyphic text on the Met Museum vessel. He reads

<sup>6</sup> The Jonuta site museum shows a selection of sherds of ceramics made in this tradition (e.g., Ochoa and Espinosa 1987, 58). Note that Brainerd (1941) suggested that the Veracruz littoral functioned as a place of origin of the specimens of Fine Orange ceramics found in Yucatan (see note 10).



Figure 3. Details for comparison, a) emerging Maize God on K2799 compared to emerging Maize God on K7669 (horizontally inverted), b) curvy or bent fingers on K2799 compared to curvy or bent fingers on K7669 (images by Justin Kerr; digitally edited by the author).

the text as “*yuk’ib baje wa-KAAN TOOK’ bakab*,” or “the drinking cup of B’aje(?) Kaan (or Chan) Took’, the ruler”, and notes that Stephen Houston “spotted a similar name on one of the inscribed mud bricks from the acropolis of the site of Comalcalco, Tabasco, Mexico.”

What Doyle and Houston failed to recognize is that the epigraphic connection is much stronger than this reference on a clay brick at Comalcalco (which Doyle incidentally does not illustrate, but which appears below on both the drawing and the photograph.)

How can this connection to Comalcalco be established? In preparation for an update of my 2009 classic Maya vocabulary I checked all the texts I have available, including the inscriptional record of Comalcalco. For some time, I have had knowledge of a brick from this site which provided a short hieroglyphic name caption, but that only provided a partial connection to the Met Museum vessel (Figure 6a). A drawing of that brick was published in 1990 (Álvarez Aguilar, Landa and Rivera 1990, Fig. 192), and in 2006 as a photograph (Armijo



Figure 4. Examples of human portraits with curvy or bent fingers at Comalcalco, a) clay brick at the Comalcalco site museum (left image from Armijo Torres and Gallegos Gómora 2006, 27; right images by Hutch Kinsman, photographed August 15, 2011), b) clay brick at the Comalcalco site museum (images by Hutch Kinsman, photographed August 15, 2011).

Torres and Gallegos Gómora, 2006, 30) (Figure 6b). There is another short text parallel to the Met Museum vessel (Figure 6c).

The text on the Met Museum vessel is a name tag identifying the object and its owner (Figure 6a). The text, spoken by the seated human figure, can be tran-

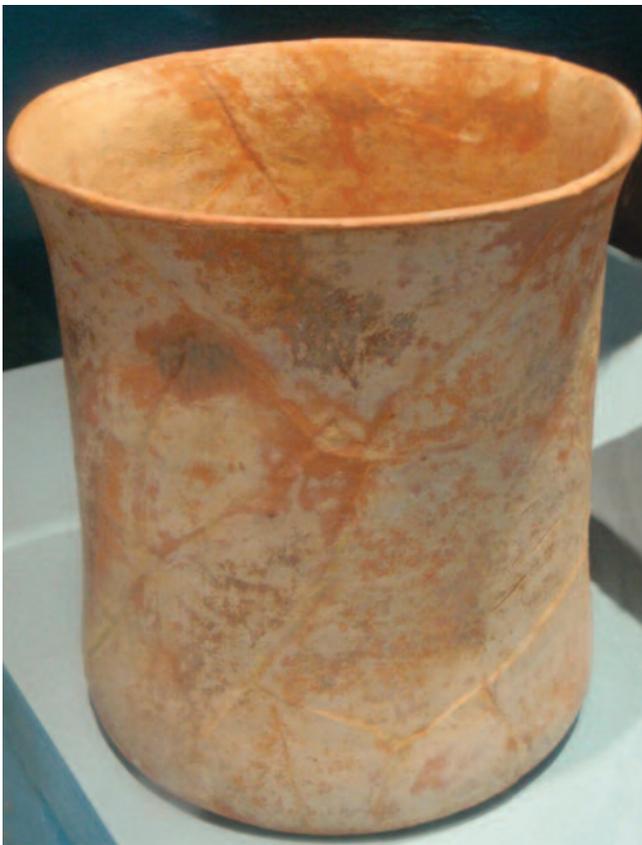


Figure 5. Clay bricks and a stuccoed vessel at the Comalcalco site museum, a-b) clay bricks showing the human face and upper torso, c) stuccoed, cylindrical ceramic vessel (photographs by Hutch Kinsman, August 15, 2011).

scribed<sup>7</sup> as **yu-k'i-bi ba-je wa-SKY-na-TOK' ba-ka-ba** for *y-uk'ib baje[<sup>7</sup>w ka[<sup>7</sup>n to[<sup>7</sup>k' ba[ah] kab* “(it is) the drink-instrument of Baje’w Ka’n To’k’ (who is entitled) Baah Kab, First of the World.” The name of the owner of the vessel is Baje’w Ka’n To’k’, where I identify *baje’w* as a verbal conjugation (*-e’w*) of the root *baj-* “to hammer” (Zender 2010). His name can be paraphrased as “Hammers Sky Flint” or, more fluently, “Flint that Hammers the Sky.” My transliteration of T561 SKY as *ka’n* is built upon a text to be analyzed shortly. As it is spoken by the human figure portrayed, it identifies him as Baje’w Ka’n To’k’.

The text that Houston referred to (as cited by Doyle 2014), can be found on a clay brick (Figure 6b), retrieved from the rubbish heaps on the west side of the Acropolis (Álvarez, Landa and Rivera 1990, 179). The text can be transcribed as **SKY-na-TOK' ka-[JOY[SKY]-na]’AJAW** or *ka[<sup>7</sup>n to[<sup>7</sup>k' joy ka[<sup>7</sup>n ajaw* “Ka’n To’k’ (who is) Joy Ka’n Ajaw or King.” On this brick, the part Ka’n To’k’ can be found, a prominent part of the full nominal Baje’w Ka’n To’k’ on the Met Museum vessel.

However, while this partial name can be directly compared to the name on the vessel, it may refer to a (partial) namesake. Furthermore, it terminates with a paramount title, Joy Ka’n Ajaw (the “Emblem Title” sported by the ruling elite of Comalcalco), where *ajaw* means “king” and where Joy Ka’n refers to the polity of Comalcalco. The same collocation provides the pertinent clue to the transcription of the main sign T561 SKY

<sup>7</sup> In this essay, bold type letters are used in the transcription (transference of individual components from one system to another) of Maya hieroglyphic signs; upper case for logograms (i.e., logographs), lower case for syllabograms (i.e., syllable signs, syllabic signs). Hyphens separate individual signs in a glyph block (i.e., compound, collocation, composite sign group), square brackets indicate infixed or super-imposed signs (e.g., **ba-je, ka-[JOY[SKY]-na]’AJAW**). In transcription, English words in upper case indicate a known logograph, but leave the reading to the transliteration (e.g., **wa-SKY-na-TOK’**). Order of the values in transcription is based on the common classic Maya compounding principles (top-to-bottom, left-to-right; to which there are exceptions due to scribal preference, errors/mistakes, as well as aesthetics). Transliterations (complete phrasings based on transcriptions) are placed in italics; reconstructed phonemes are placed between square brackets (e.g., *ka[<sup>7</sup>n*). An added query between



Figure 6. a) The hieroglyphic text on the Met Museum vessel (left, photograph by Justin Kerr; right, drawing by James Doyle with amendments by the author), b) clay brick from Comalcalco (left, drawing after Álvarez Aguilar et al. 1990, Fig. 192; right, photograph after Armijo Torres and Gallegos Gómora, 2006, 30), Spine 9 from Urn 26, Comalcalco (drawing by Marc Zender).

normal brackets indicates a certain level of doubt on some aspect of the transliteration. In transliteration, phonemic reconstructions are presented. These follow historical reconstructions for Mayan languages based on cognate sets, not some set of spelling principles (linguistic data based on Dienhart (1998), Kaufman (2003), and additional dictionaries and vocabularies not contained in these works). All reconstructions are tentative, under review, and subject to change as cognate sets on which they are based are extended and reanalyzed. Occasional T-numbers (e.g., T561) refer to the Maya hieroglyphic signs as cataloged by Thompson (1962).



Figure 7. The inverted head of the Maize God on the Met Museum vessel (left, photograph by Justin Kerr; right, drawing with colored detail by James Doyle).



Figure 8. The left side of the visual narrative on the Met Museum vessel (photograph by Justin Kerr, digitally edited by the author), with the number 9 set apart and colored in.

as **KAN** for *ka'n*. It opens with the syllabic sign **ka** which cues the *ka'n* “sky” transliteration.

The third text provides the most important clue that links the Met Museum vessel to Comalcalco. Urn 26 was excavated in 1998 and was located on the first platform between Temple II and II-a (Zender 2004, 250-251). The urn contained a large assemblage of objects, among them a series of inscribed pendants and spines. On Spine 9, a text can be found. The text runs perfectly parallel to the text on the Met Museum vessel, and, while

the surface of the spine is damaged and part of the text has not survived, it can be confidently transcribed as **ba-je-wa SKY-TOK' ba-ka-ba** or *baje[ʔw ka[ʔn to[ʔk' ba[ah] kab* “Baje'w Ka'n To'k' (who is) Baah Kab, First of the World.” This text may support the hypothesis that the Baje'w Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab on the Met Museum vessel is indeed an individual from Comalcalco or its direct environs, as the name Baje'w Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab occurs within a sealed context at Comalcalco. The stylistic comparisons between the Met Museum vessel, and

various ceramic media excavated at Comalcalco, as presented above, may further substantiate this fact. But, there is still a possibility that two individuals carry the same name and title (note the historic Itza kings named Kan Ek' at Tayasal or the various classic Maya kings named Yaxuun Bahlam at Yaxchilan).

However, is Bajew Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab, as mentioned on the Met Museum vessel and Spine 9 from Comalcalco Urn 26, the same individual as named Ka'n To'k' and entitled Joy Ka'n on the clay brick? As the complete nominal seems to be Bajew Ka'n To'k', the part Ka'n To'k', especially as it is followed by Joy Ka'n Ajaw and not Baah Kab, may signal this particular name (abbreviated and with Baah Kab not included) or any other name that terminated in Ka'n To'k'. Note as such in the northern and central Maya areas, the part Cha'n Chahk, which terminates nominal phrases as Uk'uw Cha'n (**cha**-SKY-**na**) Chahk at Dzibilchaltun (e.g., Structure 42, Tomb, Incised Bone), K'ahk' [...] Cha'n (**cha/cha-na**) Chahk at Uxmal (e.g., Ballcourt Sculpture 1 & 2), and K'ahk' Tiliw Cha'n (SKY-**na**/SERPENT-**na**) Chahk at Naranjo (e.g., Naranjo Stela 21, K0927, K1398, K2085), or the part Cha'n K'awiil, which terminates nominal phrases as Yuklaj Cha'n (SKY-**na**) K'awiil of Hixwitz (K3636), Bajlaj Cha'n (SKY/SKY-**na**) K'awiil at Dos Pilas (e.g., Dos Pilas HS 4, Dos Pilas Stela 7), Jasaw Cha'n (SKY-**na**) K'awiil at Tikal (e.g., Tikal Temple IV Lintel 3), and Sihyaj Cha'n (SKY-**na**) K'awiil at Tikal (e.g., Tikal Stela 31).

The visual narrative on the Met Museum vessel deserves further attention, as it includes the most important entity. Only a small part that belonged to this entity was analyzed by Doyle (2014): the inverted head of the Maize God (Figure 7). The actual entity is much larger (Figure 8).

The first observation that I make is the presence of the integrated number 9 or *balun* (perhaps *bolon* in this case) into the design. This particular identification opens a new avenue of research, namely into the "9 place" in Maya iconography (Figure 9).

The design on the Met Museum vessel could be a variation of the "9 Place" as known, for example, at Copan, Tikal, and Palenque.<sup>8</sup> Most important are the examples at Copan and Tikal, which not only feature the number 9 and the head of the supernatural entity with a skeletal lower jaw, but also feature vegetal elements which can be identified as maize plant leaves. The Met Museum ves-

sel clearly features the same entity, note as such the skeletal lower jaw and the u-shaped element with center dot (with an even smaller inner dot) in the crown of its head. On top of its head and on its right side, large vegetal elements appear, the leaves of the maize plant. From one of these bifurcating maize plant leaves, the Maize God head emerges. This particular arrangement suggests that the leaves and Maize God head stand for *nal*, not just the name of the Maize God and thus identifying the Maize God as Nal (Boot 2013; 2014), but through its homonym *nal*, "place," and thus identifying the "9 Place" as a true mythological *location*. Except for the fact that this important mythological location opens with *balun* (or *bolon*) "nine" and terminates with *nal* "place," I do not venture a further decipherment.

In sum, the Met Museum vessel portrays a human figure who speaks a short text. This text is a name tag, identifying the cylindrical vessel itself as an *uk'ib*, "drink-instrument," owned by Bajew Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab. This nominal and titular phrase identifies the human figure as a high-ranking individual. He is seated on a monolithic elevation adorned with vegetal elements. On his backside, there is a large cushion, and his posture is common to many high ranking individuals seated on elevations (Boot 2000; 2005). Not only does he speak (as indicated through the speech scroll), his vision is also directed to the design on his right (our left), a huge supernatural entity marked with the number nine and bifurcating maize leaves, from one pair of which emerges a Maize God head. This design defines a location named the "9 Place," or, Balun or Bolon [...] Nal, the actual location where Bajew Ka'n To'k' "Flint that Hammers the Sky," entitled Baah Kab "First (*baah*) of the World (*kab*)," is seated. As Bajew Ka'n To'k' is turned towards the huge "9 Place" toponymic sign, he directly interacts with the sacred geography in which he is seated.

How does this relate to the Dallas Museum vessel? The vessel was described and published in a book by Robicsek (1978, 190-192). There is no hieroglyphic text on this vessel. The human figure is also seated on an elevation, marked by large crossed bars (do they indicate wooden bars and thus a wooden elevation?), to the sides of which two smaller elements are placed with crossed bars. He is seated with crossed legs on this elevation.

He fronts a supernatural entity which holds bifurcating vegetal elements in his hands. I identify these vege-

8 The "9 Place" is often paired with another mythological location, which opens with the numeral seven and which, based on its constituent parts, can be deciphered with some confidence as 7- [IK'-KAN]NAL or Huk Ik' K'a[h]n Nal "Seven Black Bench/Seat(?) Place." Examples of monuments that present this pairing include Copan Stela D, Palenque Temple of the Sun Tablet (center panel), and Tikal Stela 2 (the monuments that provided "9 Place" examples in the main text). This location is of great mythological and ceremonial importance as well, note as such that at Huk Ik' K'a[h]n Nal (now paired with K'ahk' Witz "Fire Mountain") the completion of the 8.18.0.0.0 *katun* is celebrated at Tikal (Stela 31: F15-F18).

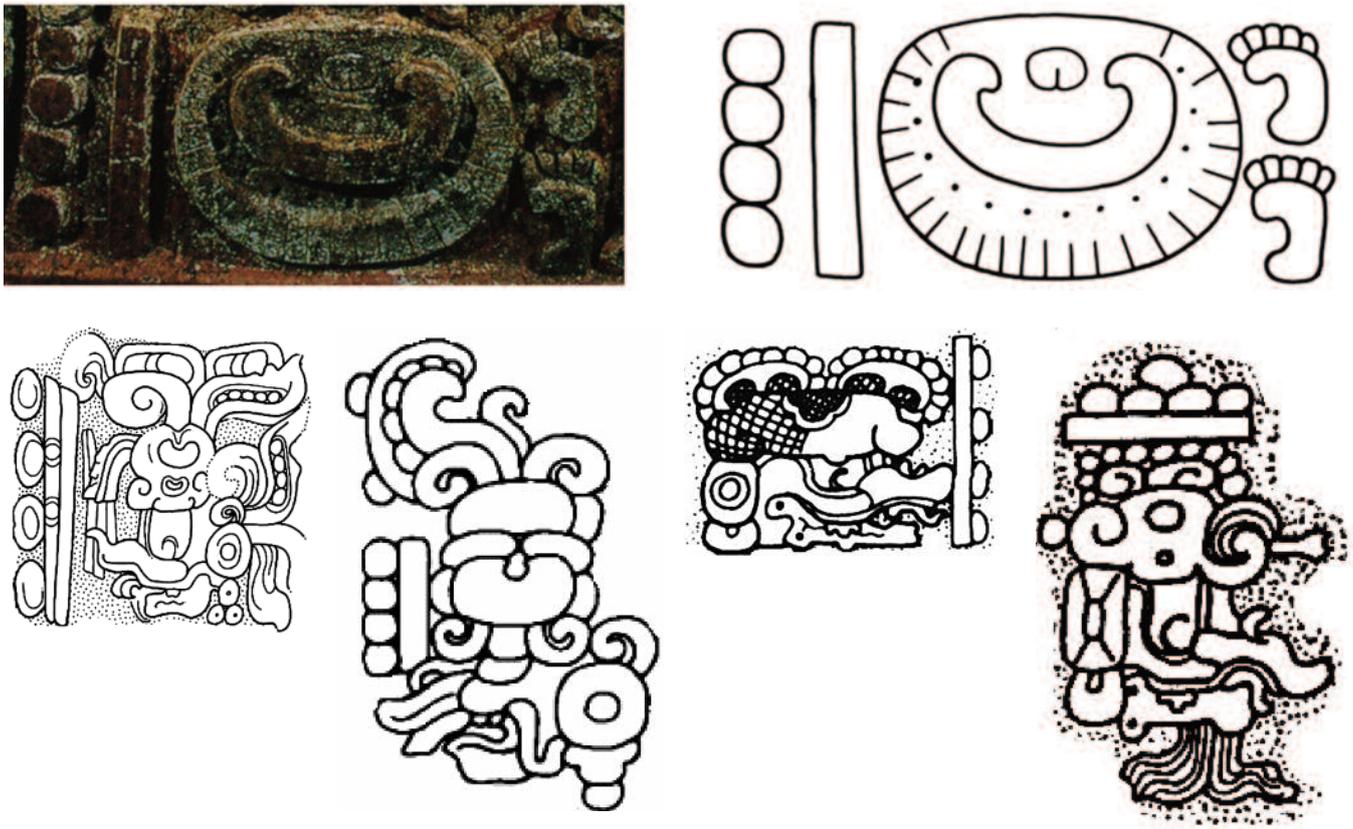


Figure 9. The "9-Place" in Maya iconography, a) Copan, bottom of the Margarita Panel (left, photograph by Kenneth Garrett; right, drawing by Linda Schele), b) Copan Stela D (drawing by Barbara Fash), c) Tikal, Stela 2 (drawing by William R. Coe); d) Palenque, Temple of the Cross (drawing by Linda Schele), e) Palenque, Temple of the Sun (drawing by Merle Green Robertson).



Figure 10. A comparison between the supernatural entities on a) K2799, the Dallas Museum vessel, and b) K0631 (photographs by Justin Kerr).

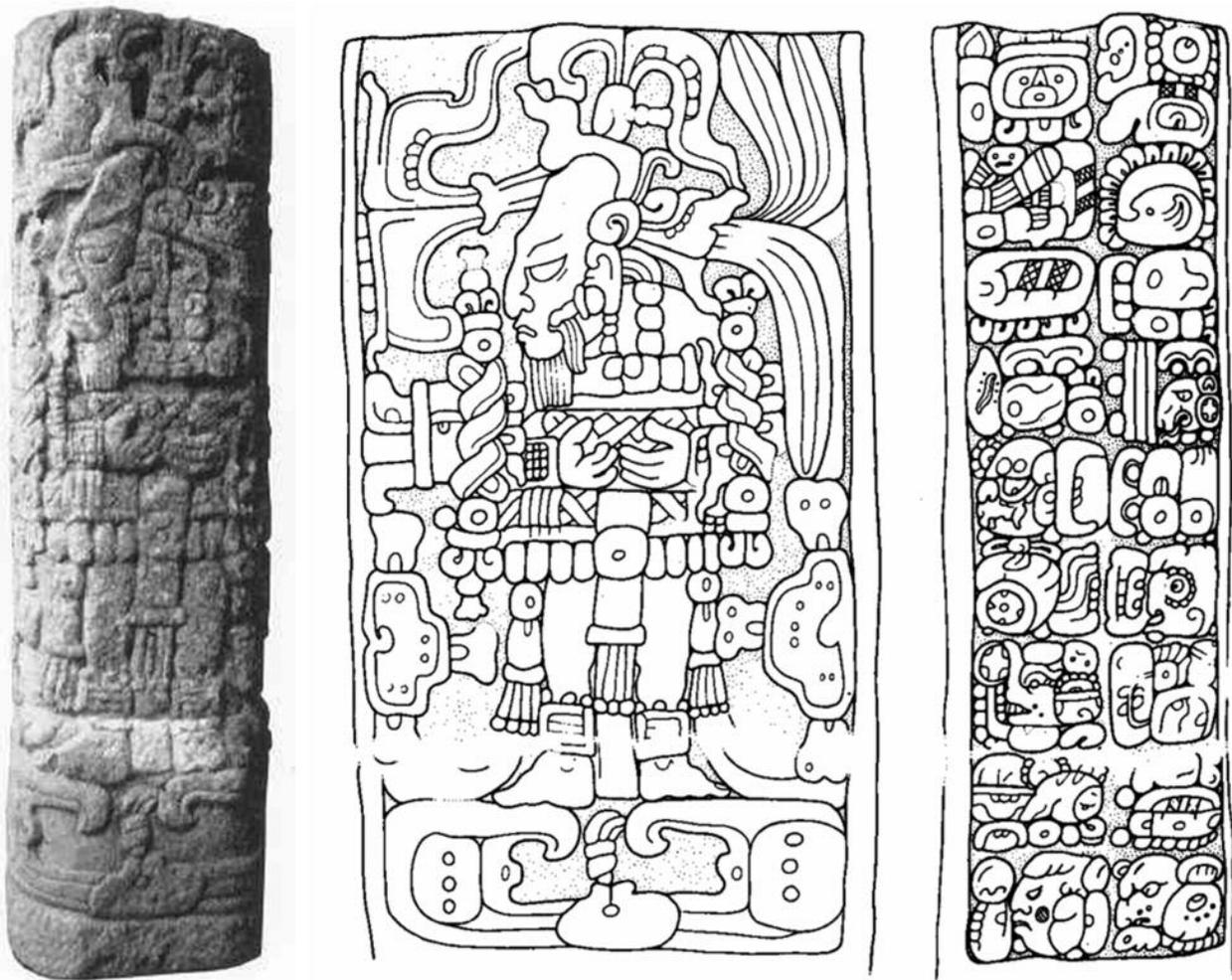


Figure 11. Copan Stela 11, photograph (by unknown photographer), front (visual narrative) and back (text) (drawing by Linda Schele).

tal elements as large maize leaves and, as on the Met Museum vessel, the head of the Maize God is present. Again, this might indicate *nal*, the integration of the Maize God as *Nal* to signal *nal* “place.” Although there is no number 9, it is tempting to suggest that the Dallas Museum vessel also shows the “9 Place” or Balun or Bolon [...] *Nal* in its full somatomorphic manifestation. However, the anthropomorphic entity may be a manifestation of *K’awiil*. It lacks the common diagnostic serpent leg or foot and a clearly defined mirror and torch on its forehead, but this rendition of a potential *K’awiil* on the Dallas Museum vessel is very close to a portrait of *K’awiil* on a polychrome tripod vessel of unknown provenance cataloged as K0631 (Figure 10).

The complex visual narrative on K0631, which may have been produced in the central to eastern Maya highlands, includes the pairing God L-*K’awiil* (a common pairing on small round ceramic flasks which probably contained *may*, “tobacco”). The *K’awiil* on K0631 (Figure 10b) does not have a serpent leg (both his feet are visible as he sits in a cross-legged position on an ele-

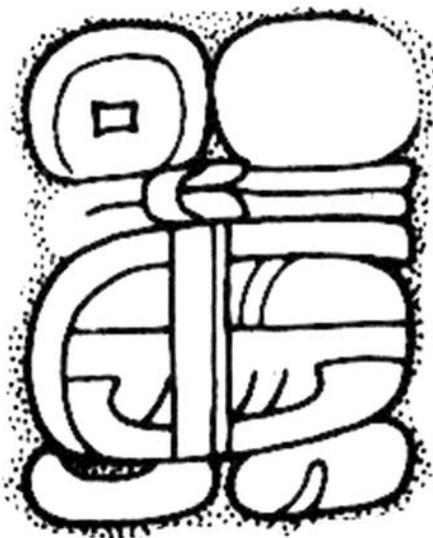
vation). Specifically note the rendition of his facial and cephalic features which includes the typical smoking element “penetrating” the top of his head. His facial expression is close to the supernatural entity’s face on the Dallas Museum vessel.

Furthermore, the visual narrative on the Dallas Museum vessel is framed by a vertical band of discs indicating a water surface, which is supported by the attached triple water stacks and a large water lily flower (on the left side of the vertical water band).

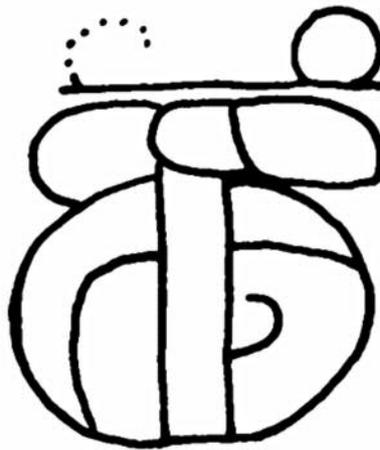
If the supernatural entity on the Dallas Museum vessel is indeed *K’awiil*, combined with the emerging Maize God, this could produce an interesting alternative identification. In this particular case I interpret the Maize God as targeting the name *Ajan*, a nominal of the Maize God based on the Maya word *ajan* “roasting ear (of maize).” The combination of *K’awiil* and the Maize God as *Ajan* may hint at a supernatural entity named *Ajan K’awiil* or *K’awiil Ajan*, named in various classic (e.g., Lacanha, Panel 1: N2-M3; Tikal, Temple 1, Lintel: F5-G6; Quirigua, Altar P: U1), and postclassic Maya



Figure 12. Examples of the Comalcalco "Emblem Glyph": a) Comalcalco, Acropolis, West Side, rubbish dump, brick (photograph after Armijo Torres and Gallegos Gómora 2006, 30), b) Tortuguero, Monument 6: H5 (drawing by Ian Graham), c) Tortuguero, Jade Ring: B4 (drawing by Sven Gronemeyer), d) Tortuguero, Monument 8: 59b (drawing by Sven Gronemeyer).



b



c



d

contexts (e.g. Codex Dresden 26C, coll. 5) (Boot 2009, 13, 111). The watery surroundings integrated on the vessel and the occurrence of the potential Ajan K'awiil (or K'awiil Ajan) may hint at a postmortem, commemorative visual narrative. Deceased Maya kings can be found in the guise of the god Ajan K'awiil and in watery contexts (on the inclusion of the imagery of the watery location in funeral temples or tombs, see for example Hellmuth (1987a, b); Fitzsimmons (2009, 23, 35-36, 50, 53, 61, 68-72, 91-92, 158). I also note that at least one death expression is related to water, namely the expression *och-ha*, "enter water" (e.g., K1004; Tikal, Stela 31: D23) (Boot 2009, 139). A monumental example of a commemorative visual narrative set in a watery surrounding featuring a dead king in the guise of Ajan K'awiil can be found on Copan Stela 11 (Figure 11).

This monument (a small sculpted column, an extremely rare monument type at Copan) portrays a deceased Yax Pasaj Chan Yopaat Ux Winaak Haab Ajaw

("Three Twenty Year King") Baah Kab ("First of the World") in the guise of Ajan K'awiil and placed within (upon) a cenote, defined by the stylized, opened jaws of a centipede. Note inclusion of the characteristic torch element of K'awiil on the forehead and a diagnostic maize plant leaf element that signals Ajan, and to which a bundle of feathers is attached on the back of the head. The cenote sign targets the watery location, as do the two dotted scroll elements placed on either side just above the cenote sign. The fact that the cenote sign indeed directs to a watery location is perhaps more obvious in the Codex Dresden, as in several examples, the cenote sign is filled with water (e.g., pages 36C2, 38C1, 39C3). The cenote sign depicts the stylized opened jaws of the centipede, the classic Maya way to envision the cave entrance to the Underworld, into which kings enter and from which kings will be reborn as the Maize God (as found on the Palenque sarcophagus lid in reference to king or *k'uhul ajaw* K'ihnich Janaab Pakal).

Within contemporary Maya communities, caves and cenotes are said to be watery places (e.g., Brady and Pfurber 2005, 305, 356, 363). In the community of Homun in Yucatan, Mexico, caves and cenotes are not just watery places; they are places where the *u kilich kimilob*, “the revered dead,” can be found (personal fieldwork, March 1986).

Close to cenotes, where virgin water is found, it is thought that the burial of a Maya priest can be found (Boot 1988, 29). In the Tzotzil community of Chamula, Chiapas, Mexico, the watery underworld, accessible through caves, is where the dead go (and/or their souls, more correctly, tongue-souls or *ch'ulel*) (Gossen 1974, 21-22; 2001, 1028, 1035, 1045, 1051-1052). The same is true for the K'iche' community of Santiago Momostenango, where the underworld is entered through a cave in the east, the domain of Corpus (the lord of the dead), where the human dead and liminal beings reside (Cook 2000, 164, 231). In the K'iche' community of Zunil in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala, caves are considered places “to contact the ancestors” (Molesky-Poz 2006, 110).

The Dallas Museum vessel may thus portray its human figure (most probably Baje'w Ka'n To'k') as deceased and paired with Ajan K'awiil (K'awiil Ajan), the supernatural entity associated par excellence with death and rebirth. Note the small oval element on his cheek. Is this perhaps a “death spot,” indicating he has passed to the realm of the dead? This spot may have its origin, in the black spots on the body of the skeletal Death God (God A) (e.g., Codex Dresden 10A2, 10C1, 11A3, 12B1, 13A2). Also note the wonderful frontal extended headband ornament worn by the human figure; this ornament he has adopted from the Maize God (specifically note the large headband ornament of the Maize God on the Met Museum vessel, K7669). On the Dallas Museum vessel, the Maize God does not have a headband or a headband jewel. Does this headband jewel perhaps indicate his participation in the process of rebirth after he has passed to the realm of the dead?

The vessels show a human figure at the “9 Place” on the Met Museum vessel and associated with Ajan K'awiil (K'awiil Ajan) on the Dallas Museum vessel. These vessels may even portray the same individual, Baje'w Ka'n To'k'; his name is included in the name tag on the Met Museum vessel. As they are executed in a style so similar to each other, it is even possible that they were produced by the same artist or at least artists from the same workshop. The style of both vessels, as exam-

ples presented above indicate, is intrinsically related to the site of Comalcalco (and its direct environs).

The same name and title, Baje'w Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab, was identified on Spine 9 in Urn 26 from Comalcalco. This text formed part of a larger assemblage of texts providing an entry dating the two vessels more precisely. Both vessels can be ascribed to the late Classic period, circa AD 650-900. The urn at Comalcalco provided 23 hieroglyphic texts (out of a larger number) containing 18 dates and which date between AD 763-777 (Zender 2004, Table 6). This date range may also bear on Spine 9, which carries the Baje'w Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab nominal and titular phrase, but which does not carry a date. Generally speaking, that spine may thus date from the same period as the other dated texts in the Urn 26. This may also bear on the two ceramics at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Dallas Museum of Art. As the spine and the Met Museum vessel contain the same nominal and titular phrase, Baje'w Ka'n To'k' Baah Kab, it may identify the very same individual or, at the least, a close contemporary. This would mean that the two vessels can be dated to a period between AD 763 and AD 777. A general assignment to AD 650-900 thus does fit both vessels well, but may be narrowed down further to AD 750-800.

I want to return now to the spelling **ka-[JOY[SKY]-na]'AJAW** (Figure 6b, 13a) which led to the transliteration *joy ka['n ajaw* or Joy Ka'n Ajaw, the paramount title of the Comalcalco ruling elite. This spelling with prefixed **ka** to T561 SKY indicates that *ka'n*, “sky” is the correct reading for the SKY sign. As such, other examples of this title need to be transcribed accordingly, for example at Tortuguero, Monument 6 (at H5), which provides **[JOY[KAN]] 'AJAW-wa** for Joy Ka'n Ajaw (Figure 12b). Besides these two “Emblem Glyphs,” there are two examples of a “title of origin” (Stuart and Houston 1994) at Tortuguero which feature the main sign combination.

On Jade Ring 1 and Monument 8 appear the collocations **'AJ-JOY[SKY]** (Figure 12c) and **'AJ-JOY[SKY-na?]** for Aj Joy Ka'n (Figure 12d). These “titles of origin” indicate that Joy Ka'n functions as a toponym identifying the seat of the Comalcalco polity and may name the central Acropolis and its direct surroundings (just as the toponym Lakamha' at Palenque refers to the Palace and its direct surroundings). Ultimately, the spelling **ka-[JOY[SKY]-na]** as recorded on the Comalcalco brick shows that the T561 SKY leads to *ka'n* and thus not to *chan*, as has been suggested in previous research.<sup>10</sup> Joy Ka'n Ajaw is thus the correct reading of

9 This adoption of the Maize God headband jewel, in my estimation, would be parallel to the adoption of the Maize God costume as practiced by K'ihnich Janaab Pakal on the Palenque sarcophagus lid in his presumed rebirth from the realm of the dead.

10 Joy *Chan* Ajaw and Aj Joy *Chan*, e.g., Gallegos Gómora et al. 2003, 5; Gronemeyer 2004, I, 156, 2004, II, 34, 76; Martin et al. 2002, II-21.

the Comalcalco polity paramount title, and Aj Joy Ka'n is the correct reading of the title of origin.<sup>11</sup>

In the future, I hope to dedicate additional research to further support the idea that the Met Museum and Dallas Museum vessels portray the same individual and location and were produced by the same artist (or same workshop).<sup>12</sup> This artist (or workshop) and the high ranking individual portrayed on these vessels can be directly linked to the archaeological site of Comalcalco. Not only through stylistic comparisons of the vessels with various material remains excavated at this site (i.e., clay bricks, ceramics), but also through the fact that the full name Bajew Ka'n To'k' with the associated title Baah Kab is identified on the Met Museum vessel and Spine 9 from Urn 26 at Comalcalco. The Met Museum and Dallas Museum vessel indicate, through the link with Comalcalco, that the archaeological site of Comalcalco and its direct environs constituted one of the production areas of a particular kind of style of (partially) stuccoed and incised fine paste ceramics (of various shapes and fine pastes, i.e., orange, grey, café, red) that ulti-

mately saw a wide distribution during the Late Classic to Terminal Classic period from Tabasco, Usumacinta drainage, Campeche, to Yucatan (e.g., Armijo Torres 2006; Jiménez Alvarez 2015).

One of their high ranking elite members was titled Baah Kab "First of the World" and was named Bajew Ka'n To'k'. His nominal to be paraphrased as "Flint that Hammers the Sky" will find a way into the upcoming update of the classic Maya vocabulary (Boot 2016a).

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11 While I prefer *ka'n* "sky" to be the correct reading resulting from the *ka*-[JOY]SKY-*na* spelling and historical linguistic research, other epigraphers may prefer *ka'an* or *kaan*. Any reconstruction of a classic Maya word, especially in the realm of vowel reconstruction, is but an approximation of the original intended linguistic item (Boot 2009, 7). As previously stated (see note 4), "[a]ll reconstructions are tentative, under review, and subject to change as cognate sets on which they are based are extended and reanalyzed."

12 As noted by Doyle (2014), the Kerr archive includes some rollout photographs of this kind of ceramic, but he gives no examples. Here, I mention those vessels: K1391, K4972, K6024, K6495 (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, inv. nr. 67.11), K7015 (Hudson Museum, Orono, HM1204). Most interesting is K1391 (h=19.3cm, d=14.7cm, d:h=0.75). K1391 is proportional to the two vessels discussed in this essay (see note 3), has stuccoed upper and lower rims, and provides a complex visual narrative featuring the Rain God Chahk with heron headdress and the Maize God, both in canoes, on opposite side of a speared "serpent" (actually a huge eel) (see Boot 2016b). It has a short linear hieroglyphic text featuring calendrical signs and combinations, the placement of the numerals and the arrangement of the main calendrical signs of which show direct parallels with texts at Comalcalco (e.g., Álvarez Aguilar, Landa and Rivera. 1990, Figs. 160, 176, 185-187, 194, 197-199). Perhaps also this vessel can be assigned to a production center at or in the environs of Comalcalco. For further examples, see Brainerd 1958, Figs. 36g,i, 59a-b, 72a-b, 76k-t, 77a-dd, 80a-e,q-gg, 81j-s, 103m (complete vessel, Dzibilchaltun; comparable to K6495; note both have "curvy" fingers, perhaps also directing to a Comalcalco [and/or environs] origin).

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