



Glyph Dwellers

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A Familial Relationship Between Nobles of El Peru (Waka') and El Zotz (Pa'chan) as Recorded on a Polychrome Vessel

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Inscribed ceramics in museum collections often preserve important historical information about the ancient Maya elite. A good example is a vessel located in the San Diego Museum of Man (2010.001.0014; **Figs. 1-3**). This vessel is a polychrome painted bowl with a yellowish ground and black and red lines highlighting the rim and base. The main pictorial field is dominated by two images of the Quadripartite Badge or Emblem (Robertson 1974), placed on opposite sides of the vessel. Elsewhere in Maya art, this motif serves as the headdress of the god *GI* and the Maize God as well as an independent icon, often representing the bowl of an incense burner with sacrificial implements (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993:216–217; Taube 2009:99–105). Located between the two Quadripartite Badge icons are two short vertical captions of three blocks each, framed in red. These simply list sequences of day names: *Imix, Ik', Ak'bal* and *K'an, Chikchan, Kimi*.



Fig. 1. Bowl, San Diego Museum of Man Acc. no. 2010.001.0014 © San Diego Museum of Man. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 2. Bowl, San Diego Museum of Man Acc. no. 2010.001.0014 © San Diego Museum of Man. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 3. Bowl, San Diego Museum of Man Acc. no. 2010.001.0014 © San Diego Museum of Man. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

From an epigraphic standpoint, the most interesting aspect of this vessel is its rim inscription, rendered in black and red pigments and introduced with three dots. Unfortunately, the first couple of blocks seem to have been partially effaced through retouching. The first block has a clear **yu** sign, followed by a sign that looks like **AJAW**, probably copied from the block to the left. It is likely that this block was originally *yuk'ib* "his drinking vessel." The next block seems to be T501 **ba**, with the lower part restored, and a clear **ki** suffix. The next two blocks are heavily overpainted.

Fortunately, the remaining blocks are clearly readable and convey important information. They begin with the name of the vessel's owner, spelled out over three blocks (E-G). These are: Chak "Animal-with-Fish" Ahk, a name familiar from monuments and ceramics associated with El Zotz polity (see Houston 2008). A good example of this name appears on vase Kerr 0679, where this person is said to be the child of a woman from El Zotz (Fig. 4). Importantly, the San Diego Museum of Man vessel preserves crucial

information regarding the sociopolitical identity of Chak "Animal-with-Fish" Ahk, as blocks H and I spell out the toponymic title **wa-ka AJAW**, or Waka' [El Peru] ajaw. This title is spelled in the same way as on Kerr 8777, using the centipede head **wa** with a **ka** fish-fin inserted into its mouth (Fig. 5; see Guenter 2014:149). As far as we know, this person does not seem to have been mentioned on monuments at El Peru-Waka' and therefore may not have been a ruler of the site.



Fig. 4. Detail of inscription from polychrome vessel owned by Chak "Animal-with-Fish" Ahk, son of a lady from El Zotz. Photograph ©Justin Kerr K0679.



Fig. 5. Waka' ajaw titles from Kerr 8777 and San Diego Museum of Man 2010.001.0014. (a) Photograph ©Justin Kerr K8777; (b) © San Diego Museum of Man; Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

The San Diego Museum of Man vessel inscription also indicates the partial parentage of Chak "Animal-with-Fish" Ahk. Block J is **ya-la**, which indicates the relationship between a child and his mother. Next is the *ixik k'uh* title borne by noblewomen from many sites during the Classic period. The San Diego Museum of Man vessel renders this title in a manner similar to many other texts, in which the two logographs are compressed into a single glyph block. In other contexts, when the title is spelled out over multiple glyph blocks, the **IX** grapheme precedes **K'UH**. This is the pattern seen in the following texts:

Museo Rufino Tamayo Stela

La Corona Stingray Spine (Barrientos Q., Canuto, and Bustamante 2015:476)

Naranjo weaving bones 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10

Naranjo Stela 13

Pomona Jamb 2/Element 2

Pomona Jamb 3 (Dallas Museum of Art)

Yaxchilan Lintel 25

Yaxchilan Lintel 32

Yaxchilan Lintel 38

Yaxchilan Lintel 40

K'UH precedes **IX** only rarely, as on Naranjo weaving bone 4, plate K5458, and vessel 1980.5.8 in the Fralin Museum of Art (see Loooper and Polyukhovych 2016). Because of this pattern, in most cases, we read this title as *ixik k'uh*, which may translate as something like "lady god." The reading of the female head as *ixik* rather than *ix* in this context is confirmed by Yaxchilan Lintel 32, which reads **IX-ki K'UH**.

The inscription of the San Diego Museum of Man vessel concludes with a second title for the mother of Chak "Animal-with-Fish" Ahk. In blocks L and M she is stated to be a Pa'chan [El Zotz] lord. This information is significant as it provides evidence of a familial relationship between nobles at El Peru-Waka' and El Zotz. Because of its parallel inscription, we think that Kerr 0679 also names the same individual and his mother (see **Fig. 4**). Apparently, the prestige of this family was connected to the female line, which justifies the deletion of the name of the father on two separate vessels.

The evidence of connected families of El Zotz and El Peru-Waka' is consistent with other epigraphic data indicating a political relationship between the two polities in the Early Classic. For example, a mirror back from Bagaces, Costa Rica contains a reference to a "gift" of the Early Classic El Peru-Waka' king K'inich Bahlam, following the name of Chak "Animal-with-Fish" Ahk of El Zotz (probably a different individual than the person named on the SDMM vessel; see Houston 2008:4-5). Whether the connection between El Zotz and El Peru-Waka' extends to the royal line of the latter site is a topic that remains to be explored as more monumental texts are discovered and published.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the place of origin of the vessel. Stylistically, we consider the San Diego Museum of Man vessel to be reminiscent of Kerr 1670 (Princeton University Art Museum 2002-9), a vessel understood to be in a style associated with the royal court of La Florida (**Fig. 6**; see Matteo 2008). Although Kerr 1670 has much more elaborate imagery, it shares several features with the SDMM vessel, including the treatment of the rim, the placement of two large images on opposite sides of the vessel, and the use of vertical captions, framed in a thick red line. If the SDMM vessel was in fact painted in a workshop associated with La Florida, it would be no surprise, as this center was located down the Río San Pedro from El Peru-Waka', which is in turn linked geographically to the Valle Buenavista in which El Zotz is located. The style and inscription of this vessel hint tantalizingly at political relationships between three centers in the western Peten. As more inscriptions come to light, perhaps the precise nature of these connections will be clarified.



Fig. 6. Rollout of vessel painted in a style associated with La Florida. Princeton University Art Museum 2002-9. Photograph ©Justin Kerr 1670.



Table 1. Inscription from San Diego Museum of Man 2010.001.0014 © San Diego Museum of Man. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

	A	yu- <u> </u>	yuk'ib?	his drinking vessel?
	B	ba?-ki	?	?
	C	bu?- <u> </u>	-	-
	D	-	-	-
	E	CHAK	chak	Chak
	F	?	?	"Animal-with-Fish"



G **a-ku** ahk Ahk



H **wa-ka** waka' Waka' [El Peru]



I **AJAW** ajaw lord



J **ya-la** yal her child



K **IX K'UH** ixik k'uh lady god



L **pa-CHAN-na** pa'chan Pa'chan [El Zotz]



M **AJAW** ajaw lord



N1-N3

?
IK'
AK'AB

?
ik'
ak'ab

"Imix,
Ik',
Ak'bal"



O1-O3

?
?
?

?
?
?

"K'an,
Chikchan,
Kimi"

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