



Glyph Dwellers

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A New Drawing of the Inscription on the Kimbell Art Museum Early Classic Shell Trumpet

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Introduction

This note describes the author's drawing of the inscription on the Early Classic conch shell trumpet at the Kimbell Art Museum (AP1984.11), measuring 29.3 x 13.4 cm, and retaining traces of red pigment (cinnabar) in incisions. This artifact was first published in Schele and Miller (1986), and more recently described and discussed in Grube and Martin (2001:II–34), Fields and Reents-Budet (2005), and Taube (2010).¹ The goal of attempting a new drawing was to check the accuracy of Linda Schele's original drawing, less with the intention of retrieving new epigraphic evidence, and more with an eye for paleographic details that could inform the development of Mayan signs during the Early Classic period. Next, I describe how the drawing was prepared, review the epigraphic and iconographic information on the conch shell, and address the interesting issue raised by Beliaev and Tunesi (2005) regarding the full form of the T62 **yu** syllabogram, with reference to the elaborate form evident on the conch shell.

Drawings

The original drawing of this inscription, seen in **Fig. 1**, was published in Schele and Miller (1986:83-84, Pl. 27), and is in most respects that matter accurate. However, after I had a chance to examine the piece through an exhibition display case at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2006, I noticed that there were a very few minor details that required slight improvement, mostly for paleographic and stylistic analysis.

¹ The Kimbell Art Museum's description of the artifact may be found at <https://kimbellart.org/collection/ap-198411>.

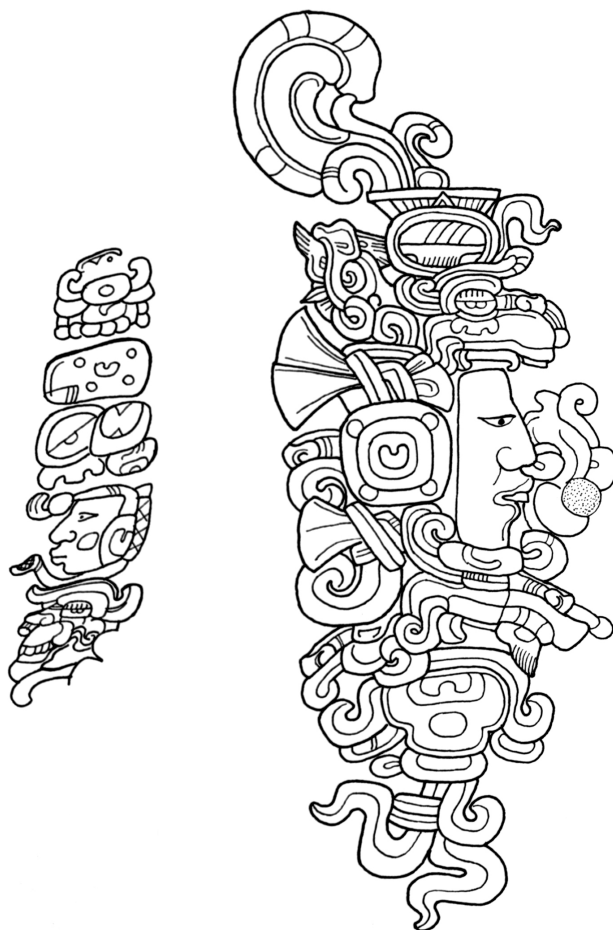


Fig. 1. Drawing by Linda Schele, first published in Schele and Miller (1986:84). Drawing 6912 in the Linda Schele Archive, <http://www.famsi.org/research/schele/index.html>.

My drawing of the inscription, seen in **Fig. 2**, attempts to faithfully match the incisions rendered by the scribe; however, it is preliminary, for I have not yet checked the drawing through a careful examination of the artifact itself. I have utilized two sets of high-resolution photographs: the first was provided to me by Shelly Threadgill and Jennifer Casler Price at the Kimbell Art Museum in June of 2017, and the second by Matthew Looper in November of 2018. The photographs, though, do not provide for different angles of lighting that could elucidate incisions, and it is evident that some incisions seen by Schele and Miller (1986) through their first-hand examination of the shell were not very clear or visible at all in any of the photos I examined. My line drawing, prepared by means of a Wacom Intuos Pro M tablet and pen, is a composite: it is the result of combining two separate drawings, the first a tracing of Glyph Blocks 1-3 based on the top photograph, and the second a tracing of Glyphs 4-5 based on the bottom photograph. It should therefore not be regarded to be a tracing of the whole text.

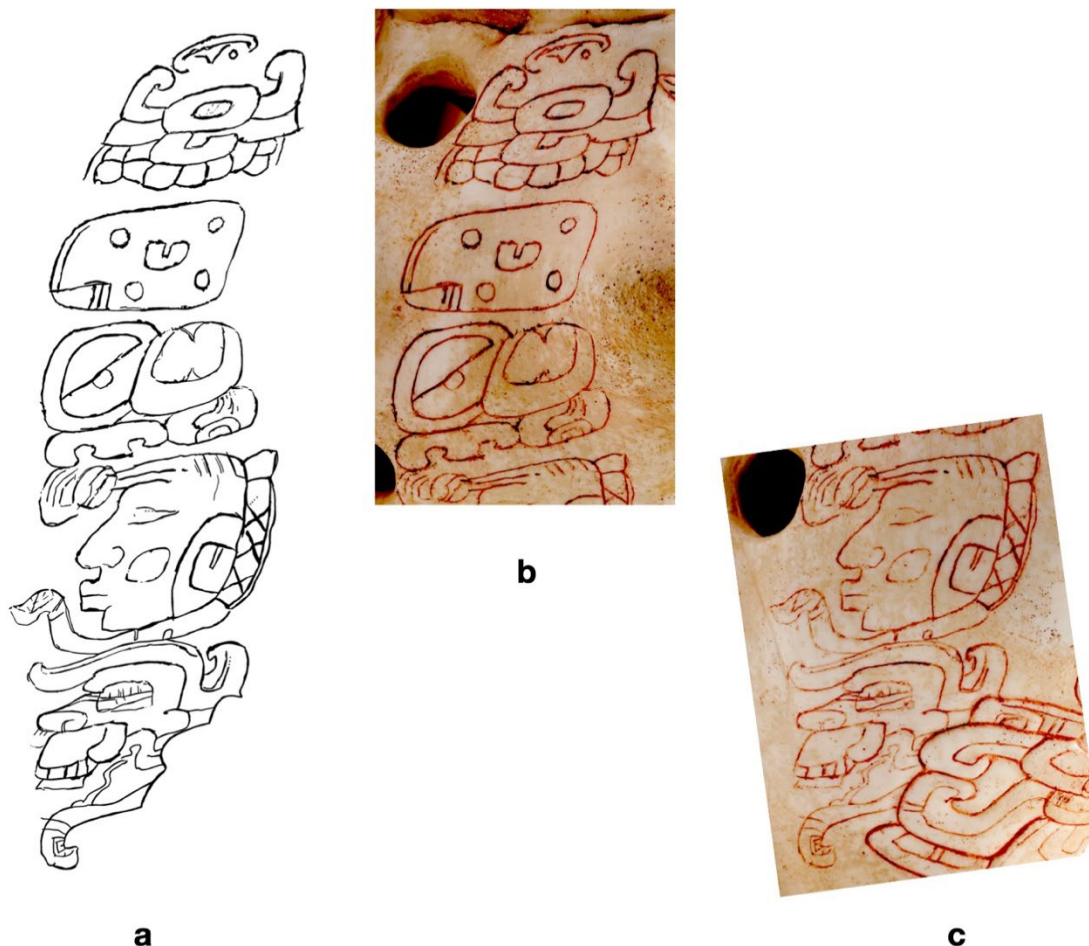


Fig. 2. a. Drawing of the inscription on the Kimbell Art Museum conch shell trumpet, AP 1984.11, 29.3 cm x 13.4 cm, ca. 250-400 CE, prepared by this author, **b.** Detail of photograph of top three glyph blocks of inscription on shell, enhanced for clarity and sharpness with Adobe Photoshop, **c.** Detail of photograph of bottom two glyph blocks of inscription on shell, enhanced for clarity and sharpness with Adobe Photoshop. Both photographs courtesy of the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

A few differences worth highlighting are illustrated in **Fig. 3**. The first is that, contra Schele's drawing, the circle at the center of T62 **yu** does bear evidence of a U-shaped element, however faint. Glyph block 2 is generally accurate. Glyph block 3 presents two key differences. In my drawing T23 **na** exhibits an additional line missing from Schele's drawing, a line that completes the outline of that sign. Also, the T544 **K'IN(ICH)** logogram bears two additional lines also missing from Schele's drawing. Glyph Block 4 exhibits two parallel lines within a circular element that may indicate a knot of hair. Two of the differences may constitute cases in which Schele's drawing is undoubtedly more accurate: specifically, the bead ornament emanating (as breath) from the nose of the zoomorphic glyph block 5, shown in Schele's drawing; and a curved line that connects the jaw or chin of the same glyph block to the tail or tendril below the mouth. Evidence for the bead is present in the likely iconographic version of the same zoomorphic head, which clearly bears such a bead.











	Present paper	Linda Schele's drawing	Comments
1			Full design of T62 yu clearer in new drawing
2			Same
3			T23 na outline clearer in new drawing
4			Some details clearer in new drawing, others clearer in Schele's drawing
5			Some details clearer in new drawing, others clearer in Schele's drawing

Fig. 3. Comparison of this author's drawing with that by Linda Schele.

The Inscription

The reading of this inscription, presented in Fig. 4, has been discussed by Schele and Miller (1986). Glyphs 1 and 2, together, may read **?u-yu** (Glyph 1) and **-b'i** (Glyph 2) for *uy-ub'(-il)* 'his/her shell trumpet', a form of *hub'* 'shell trumpet' inflected for third person singular possession, as proposed by Schele and Miller (1986:83).



		Transcription	Transliteration	Gloss
1		?u-yu-	uy-ub'(-i(l))	his-shell.trumpet
2		-b'i/TAN		
3		?CH'EN-na-K'IN-chi	?ch'en(-al) k'ihnich	cave/well Sun God
4		XIB'-?	xib' ?	male ?
5		?	?	? (part of nominal headdress)

Fig. 4. Reading of the inscription.

Glyph 2 could be read T606/YM3 **TAN** for *tahn* 'chest', instead of T585/XQ6 **b'i**. Indeed, the rectangular element on the bottom, left corner of this sign is typically diagnostic of the logogram **TAN**. But given the context of the inscription, present on a conch shell trumpet, for which the term *hub'* is well documented, I opt for **b'i**. But this is a matter for further evaluation with more data.

Glyph Block 3 can be read as **CH'EN-na-K'INICH-chi** (i.e. HH3:1G1.XQ3:MR4s). Given its placement after the possessed noun 'his/her shell trumpet', it can be assumed that Glyph Block 3 constitutes the beginning of name phrase of the trumpet's expressed owner.

Glyph Block 4 was proposed by Schele and Miller (1986:83) to correspond to the head variant allograms for **?AJAW**, for *?ajaw* 'lord, ruler'. However, while the profile head glyph does bear the mole on the cheek that is characteristic of the **?AJAW** head variant allogram, it lacks the royal headband that is diagnostic of such glyph. Instead, there is an element that wraps around the back of the head and the jaw, and which resembles a feline's tail. Without the royal headband, the head variant with the mole on the cheek corresponds to T1037/PY1 is read **XIB'** for *xib'* 'male'. Nevertheless, the feline tail suggests that another sign, perhaps **B'ALAM** for *b'ahläm* 'jaguar' was meant to be read as part of this glyph block.

Glyph Block 5 was suggested by Schele and Miller (1986:84) to be the personal name of the shell's owner. Those authors also noted its correspondence with the zoomorphic head depicted on the headdress of the

individual in the figural portrait beside the inscription. **Fig. 5** shows the correspondence between Glyph Block 5 (**Fig. 5a**) and part of the figure's headdress (**Fig. 5b**), which thus constitutes an example of a nominal headdress (Burdick 2010)—a headdress that includes the glyphic name of its wearer. More specifically, those authors suggested such zoomorphic head to be the Waterlily Jaguar, an assessment also supported by Fields and Reents-Budet (2005:180). Taube (2010:125) interprets this glyph block as T1030/SR7, the logogram **CHAK** for *chahuk/chahk* 'rain, thunder (Rain God)'. Nevertheless, this glyph does not bear the diagnostic traits of *Chahk*, the Rain God (spiral pupil, prominent shark tooth, prominent shell-shaped earflare, hair bun, elongated snout, etc.), except perhaps for the fish barbel. Another example of the same zoomorphic head is seen on part of the headdress of the figure portrayed on the Lake Güija plaque (Houston and Amaroli 1988), as seen in **Fig. 5c**. Overall, I support Schele and Miller in their assessment of the feline traits of both Glyph Block 5 and the corresponding iconographic version. More specifically, the eyelid (**Fig. 5a–c**) and double-pupil detail (**Fig. 5b**) support a possible reading as **HIX** 'feline species (possibly jaguar)'. Schele and Miller (1986) also argued that the portrayed figure represented an ancestral personage, which would mean that the conch shell was an heirloom, as it is explicitly referred to as owned by such ancestral personage. Interestingly, the iconographically-embedded glyphic name for the portrayed individual also bears T561/XH3 **CHAN** for *chan* 'sky', and possibly the sign **WAK** for *wak* = 'six' sign. It is also possible that the top of the headdress shows T85/86/ZF7 **NAL/nal** for *näl* 'maize', although it could potentially be grapheme 2G2, of unknown value.²

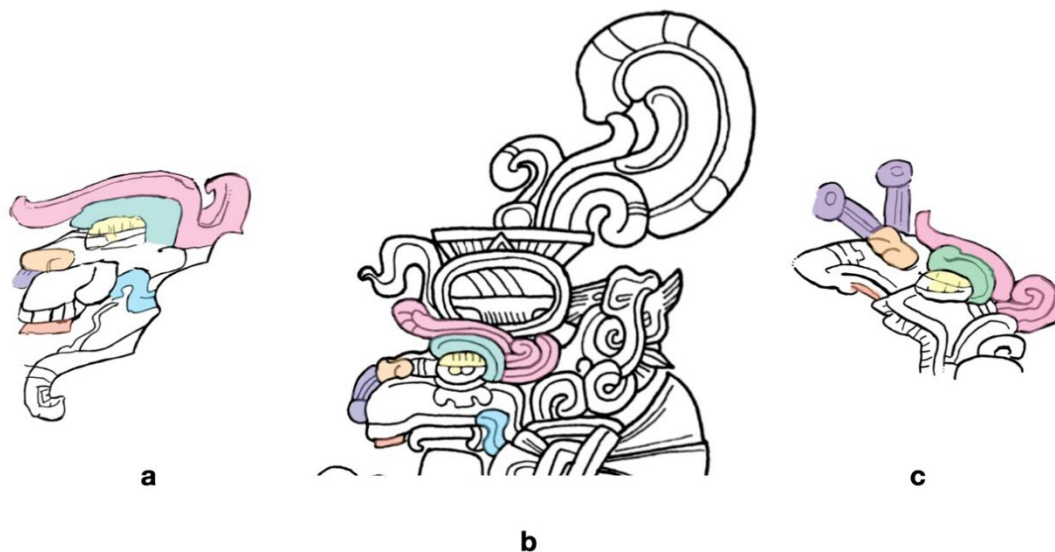


Fig. 5. Color-coded comparison between **a.** Glyph Block 5 of inscription and **b.** bottommost headdress component on portrayed figure, **c.** Bottommost headdress component on portrayed individual from Lake Güija plaque. Drawing by the author based on photograph provided by Paul Amaroli.

² Incidentally, 2G2 does appear graphically prefixed to the conflated **B'ALAM:CHAK** composition in three instances representing rulers' proper names (cf. MHD COLMay95c28, PMTHPan0807, PMTPan01; mayadatabase.org), so perhaps Glyph Block 5 could represent both a feline and Chahk.



The inscription's translation may read as follows: 'It is the conch shell of Ch'en(al) K'ihnich, Xib' ?[Glyph 4b] ?[Glyph 5]'. It provides an early example of the *uy-* allomorph of the prevocalic Set A (ergative, possessive) third person singular agreement marker, which exhibits analogical leveling on the basis of the *aw-* Set A second person singular agreement marker. Another Early Classic conch shell trumpet described by this author (Mora-Marín 2022) spells the same word with **yu-b'i**, for *y-ub'*, using the allomorph that preceded such reanalysis, *y-*.

The "Full" Version of T62/ZBF **yu**

Previously, Beliaev and Tunesi (2005) proposed that the "full form" of the syllabogram **yu** consists of the pairing of T62/ZBF **yu** and XE1/T501 (**Fig. 6a**), attested in an Early Classic spelling of the 'drinking cup' expression (**Fig. 6b**). I do not dispute that such pairing functions as a syllabographic unit with the value **yu** in the texts those authors discuss, and that it does so in contexts outside of the spelling of the 'drinking cup' expression (**Fig. 6c**). However, I would argue that such pairing is not iconographically motivated, but collocationally motivated: it is likely the result of the common co-occurrence of T62 and T501 in the syllabographic (**Fig. 6d-e**) and logographic (**Fig. 6f**) 'drinking cup' expressions, leading some scribes to conceive of their common co-occurrence as a graphic unit.



Fig. 6. **a.** Apparent use of full form of T62 consisting of T62:501 in spelling of **yu-k'i-b'i**. Beliaev and Tunesi (2005:3, Fig. 2), **b.** Beliaev and Tunesi (2005:3, Fig. 1), **c.** Beliaev and Tunesi (2005:6, Fig. 5), **d.** **yu-k'i-b'a** on Early Classic bowl. After photograph in Coe (1973:110), **e.** **?u-k'i-b'a** for **?uk'-(i)b'-äl** 'cup (of someone)', on Late Classic pottery vessel. After photograph in Coe (1973), **f.** **yu-?UK'(IB')** collocation. Drawing by G. Stuart (2001:6, fig. 3).

The form present in the first glyphic collocation of the conch shell (**Fig. 7a**) is a more iconographically elaborate version of T62, with three hook-shaped volutes emanating from the central, drilled bead, instead of the normal two, and what appear to be additional beads forming an assemblage dangling from the main circular bead. In fact, Mora-Marín (2001:226) suggested that the inscription on a tubular jade bead recovered in the Sacred Cenote (**Fig. 7b**) contains two instances of T62 in a sequence within a single glyph block, spelling either **yu-yu** or **yu-?UY** for **y-uhy** 'his/her/its bead/necklace'. Mora-Marín (2003:212–213) has suggested that the second instance of T62 in that spelling constitutes a more iconographically elaborate version that may have been intended as a logogram **?UY** for **?uhy** 'bead, necklace', and consistent with actual iconographic depictions of jade bead pectorals (**Fig. 7c**).

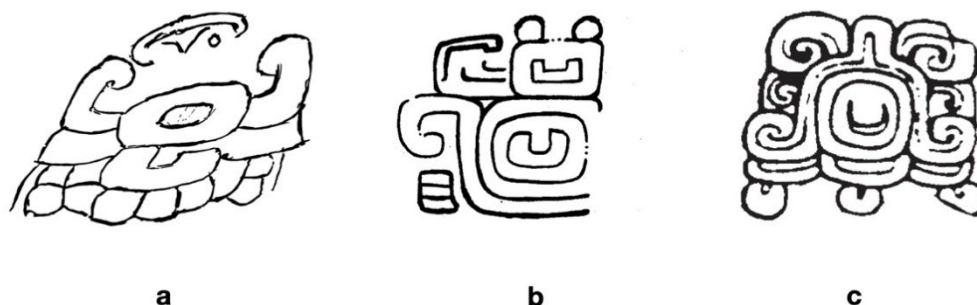


Fig. 7. Full iconographic form of T62 **yu**. **a.** Glyph Block 1 on Early Classic conch shell at Kimbell Art Museum (with **?u** prefix). Drawing by the author, **b.** Glyph Block 2 from tubular jade bead recovered from the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza. Drawing by the author after photograph in Proskouriakoff (1974:pl. 45-1) and first-hand examination, **c.** Example of T62 used pictorially as depiction of perforated pectoral bead ornament on Tikal Stela 31. Drawing by author after drawing in Jones and Satterthwaite (1982:fig. 52).

Conclusions

The present drawing documents some details missing from Linda Schele's drawing of the inscription in question, but it is missing other details that are almost certainly accurately rendered in her drawing. Thus, this new drawing should not be regarded as a replacement to Schele's; instead, the two should be used in tandem. None of the details missing in one or the other drawing is crucial to the epigraphic analysis; several of the new details support previously proposed readings. The newly recognized details do add to the evidence needed for more careful paleographic analysis of the graphemes.

In this last regard, the paper has offered some observations on the "full form" of T62 **yu**, based on the evidence from the version present in the conch shell trumpet examined here. It is suggested that the "full form" of T62 **yu** discussed by Beliaev and Tunesi (2005) may have arisen as a reanalysis of the common collocation of T62 and T501 in certain spellings of the 'drinking cup' expression; it is probably no accident that, so far, such full form only occurs in texts present on pottery vessels. Such reanalysis may be relatively common in the history of Mayan graphemes, as has been suggested for the graphic components of T168 by Mora-Marín (2016), though it deserves much more study. The form of T62 **yu** present on the conch shell, I propose, constitutes a more complete graphic design of T62 in and of itself. Consequently, it may be possible to speak of a "full (icono)graphic form" of the sign, versus a "full collocational form" of the sign.

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