



## **A Bowl Fit for a King**

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# A Bowl Fit for a King: A Ceramic Vessel of the Naranjo Court Bearing the Komkom Emblem Glyph

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The Maya Ceramics Project (formerly the Maya Survey Project), now centered at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, has as its primary focus the sampling and documentation of the chemical composition of ancient Maya decorated ceramics from a wide array of sites and collections throughout the Maya lowlands (for discussions of the INAA analytical technique, see Bishop et al. 1982; Blackman and Bishop 2007). This project combines nuclear chemistry, archaeology, and art history to investigate the socio-historical implications of Classic Maya (AD 250–850) painted ceramics. The sampling program began in the 1970s and continues as an opportunistic patchwork of chemical analyses with the collaboration of many colleagues and institutions. Project objectives include the production of a pottery paste compositional survey of ceramic production in Mesoamerica with a special emphasis on the Maya region. The compositional data allow the discerning of compositionally and stylistically similar sherds and whole vessels, which imply their being made from similar clay resources and ceramic recipes as well as being viewed as the products of a specific area, site, and perhaps even a group of aligned artisans and/or workshop(s) (Bishop et al. 1986; Reents and Bishop 1985, 2003). The ultimate goal is the detection of patterns of use and exchange to shed light on ancient sociopolitical and economic interaction in Mesoamerica and especially among the Maya.

The Maya Ceramics Project was operating in Guatemala in 1993 at which point a pottery bowl in a private collection was brought to the attention of Ronald L. Bishop, which was promptly sampled and attributed the analytical number MS5331. This same bowl is now

part of the Palacios-Weyman Collection that is managed by the Fundación para la Bellas Artes y la Cultura (FUNBA) in La Antigua, Guatemala. The FUNBA curates 4,000 pieces from the collections of the architect Amelia Weymann de Palacios (née Weymann Tejeda) and José María Palacios Porta, lawyer by profession. On account of their shared interest in history and culture, the Palacios-Weyman Collection was started at a very early date and enriched over five decades, until it grew to its current size, becoming one of the most important collections of Guatemalan art. The Palacios-Weymann Collection, which has been registered as national patrimony by the Guatemalan government's Institute of Anthropology, Ethnology and History (IDAEH), covers three major periods: namely, a) Prehispanic, b) Colonial and Hispano-Guatemalan, as well as c) modern and contemporary.

Below we provide a description of this remarkable bowl, its physical properties, and iconography, but we will focus mostly on the chemical attributes and the paleographic features of the glyphic text that adorns the vessel, in order to consider the interplay of these two distinct lines of evidence and how they shed light on the socioeconomic and historical context of its manufacture.

## Physical Properties and Chemical Analyses

The vessel is registered as 84-A-5-311-1 in the Palacios-Weymann collection. The shape of the vessel is that of a bowl according to the archaeological shape-typology for Maya ceramics (Sabloff 1975:23-24) with a flat bottom and outsloping walls. Its maximal rim diameter is 20 cm

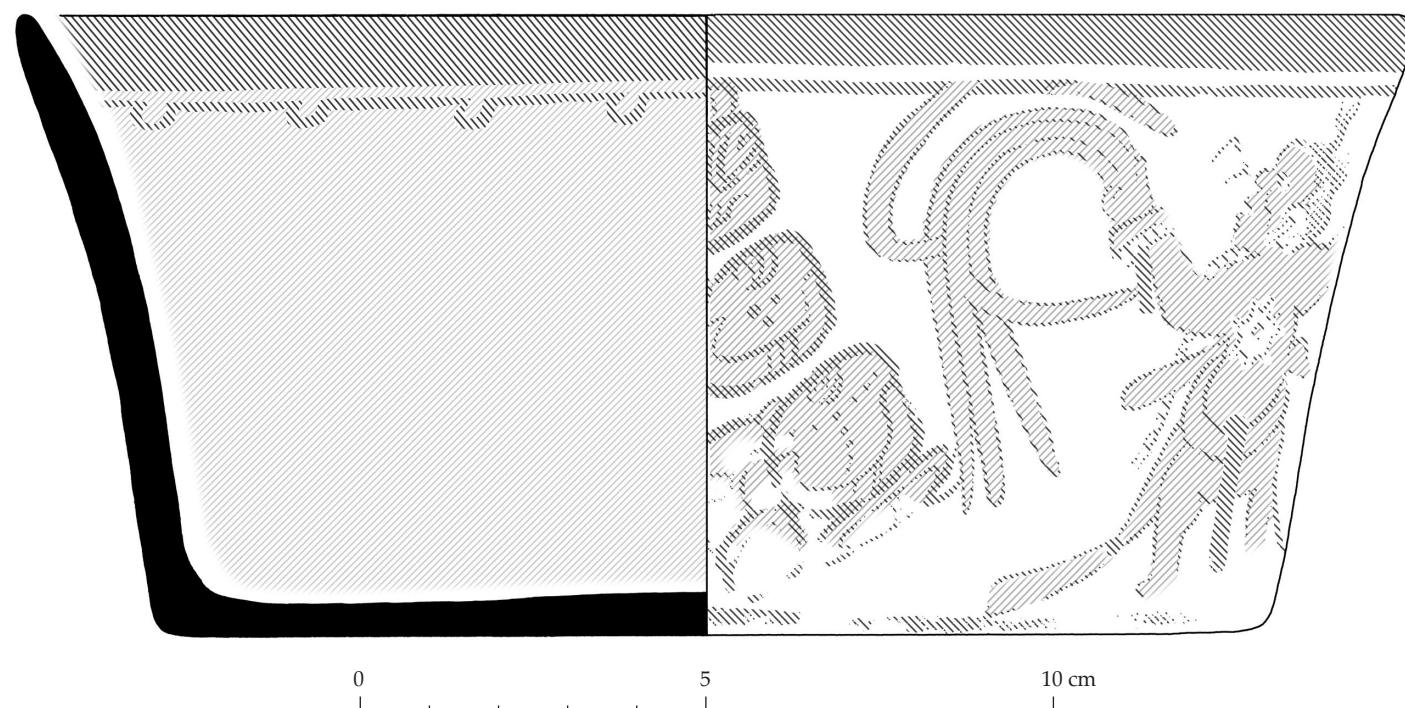


Figure 1. Section and elevation drawing of MS5331 (drawing: Christophe Helmke).

(16 cm at the base), with a total height of 9 cm (Figure 1). The bowl's painting style resides in the greater Holmul style, first defined at the site of Holmul, Guatemala (Merwin and Valliant 1932; Reents 1985). The Holmul pottery style features a cream-white base slip and painted imagery using shades of red, particularly a red outline and orange interior wash, the wash perhaps a dilution of the red slip. An unusual feature of MS5331 is the replacement of a deep black slip for image accents—as is typical for the Holmul style—with a dark-value red slip. These darker areas may simply have been painted over multiple times using the same red slip rather than comprising a separate paint recipe. The pictorial scene is an abridged version of the so-called “Holmul Dancer Theme” (Reents-Budet 1991), with only the dancing dwarf present (which is to say without the Maize god figure that usually dominates such scenes). Diagonal texts, of three glyphs each for a total of nine hieroglyphs, separate three dwarves.

Based on examination of the original surfaces of MS5331 it is clear that it was found in fragmentary condition and with a partially eroded exterior (with minor exfoliation evident also in parts). This weathering is due in part to the relatively soft surfaces typical of this ceramic ware. The repaired breaks are visible on the interior of the bowl with a sizable amount of fill material added to restore lost areas. The exterior imagery has been repainted in selected areas to mask the repair lines and restore areas of eroded imagery.

The bowl's interior is highly burnished and painted

with a light orange slip, and a wide red band encircles the rim. Directly below the interior red rim band is a thinner line in the same paint, with regular half-circle loops dipping below the thin line. An unusual feature of the bowl is the large Ajaw date notation adorning the interior center of the bowl, likely recording the dedicatory date. This practice echoes that of the so-called “Giant Ajaw” altars best known for Caracol (see Beetz and Satterthwaite 1981:77-102; Satterthwaite 1951:30-37) and to a lesser degree Tikal (Schele and Freidel 1990:213, Fig. 5:28). Similar Ajaw vessels are known from the Eastern Central Lowlands, particularly at Caracol (Chase 1994:163; Chase and Chase 1987:15, 17, Fig. 11b, d, g), Baking Pot (Ricketson 1931:25, Pl. 17a) and most recently finds made at Xunantunich (Helmke and Awe 2017). We will return to this feature when we consider the dating of the bowl from the historical vantage of its creation.

The combined features identify MS5331 as a member of the Zacatel Cream-polychrome ceramic type. Lacking a secure provenience and sufficient numbers of similar examples, a variety assignment is not warranted. The bowl's stylistic and iconographic attributes unquestionably point to its being a product of a workshop located somewhere in the eastern central lowlands. The origin of the bowl can be ascribed to a more circumscribed location in the greater Naranjo area, based on an analysis of paste composition combined with paleographic features in the glyphic text, including the title borne by the historical owner of the vessel. We explore these data below.

Relative to the overall patterning of ceramic paste compositional divisions in the Maya lowlands, MS5331 fits comfortably within the compositional pattern for pottery made in the eastern central lowlands. That being said, for archaeological sites located in present-day Guatemala we can exclude Holmul, La Sufricaya, Yaxox, Chunchutz, Ucanal, Yaxha, and Nakum as probable locations of manufacture. Similarly, on the opposite side of the border in adjoining western Belize, we can equally exclude the sites of Xunantunich, Buenavista del Cayo, Las Ruinas de Arenal, Baking Pot, Barton Ramie, and Caracol. Unfortunately the data cannot confirm a specific workshop locale, although it does point to the immediate Naranjo area as the most promising and probable candidate. However, the bowl's compositional profile is not notably close to any of the 146 Naranjo-excavated samples in the database, which may suggest that it was made from different clay resources and/or tempering materials and/or from an idiosyncratic potting recipe divergent from those used in the Naranjo workshops represented by the presently analyzed samples.

Of particular note is MS5331's chemical dissimilarity to any of the unprovenanced vessels in the database whose workshop, patron, and/or artist have been successfully connected to Naranjo based on paste analyses, artistic or ceramic typological attributions, and/or epigraphic evidence (Table 1). For example, MS5331 is chemically unlike the three vases painted during the second part of the eighth century for the Naranjo ruler K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk (r. AD 755–780+) (Figure 2a–c). Yet the three vases are so similar to each other as to suggest they are the product of one workshop, while the especially strong chemical similarity between K633/MS1374 and K635/MS1375 can be used to infer that they represent two vessels made from a common clay preparation.

Further, MS5331 does not chemically resemble the so-called Jauncy Vase (K4464/MS1416) (Figure 2d) made at Naranjo for its 38th king, K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk (r. AD 693–728+) but excavated at Buenavista del Cayo (Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:303–302; Taschek and Ball 1992). The Jauncy Vase was painted by an artist who produced distinctive vessels for Naranjo's court under the reign of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk, these works being distinguished by singular hieroglyphic and pictorial styles. Another vase attributed to this artist is K1698/MS1684, based on shared similarities in pictorial composition and paleography discussed below (Figure 2e). Yet unlike the Jauncy Vase, this one was specifically produced as a gift for the Ucanal ruler “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam, who is named as its owner (Reents-Budet et al. 1994:300). The paste compositions of the Jauncy Vase and K1698/MS1684 are similar enough to suggest they were made from the same general clay resources, although there is sufficient variation in the rare earths and differences in the volcanic glass inclusions, specifically in

the volcanic ash used as tempering material. Similarly, differences also are noted in the surface quality of the red slips used to paint the two cylindrical vases: That of MS1684/K1698 is significantly shinier, harder, and thicker than the Jauncy Vase's slip paint. Such surface characteristics typically indicate slightly different slip paint preparations (or “recipes”; see Reents-Budet et al. 1994:301). Also divergent is line quality seen especially in the glyphic texts, which from an art historical perspective imply that these are works of different painters. Yet there are so many shared paleographic features to suggest that these two vases may have been produced in the same workshop attached to the Naranjo court. In summary, the paste compositional data, paleographic details, and stylistic features lead to the interpretation of the two vases as being made by two artists who, if not working together, were certainly intimately knowledgeable of each other's works. The compositional variation stems from slight changes in resource utilization and/or paste recipe, as typically happens among aligned artists even in the same workshop. These may occur due to the routine changes in availability of resources and natural “potting behavior,” wherein adjustments are made in any workshop over even a short period of time to adjust to available resources.

Whereas a conclusive match could not be established on the basis of chemical profiles and trace elements, the NAA data does shed light on the place of MS5331 in the socio-ceramic milieu of the eastern central lowlands. The analyses also confirm that MS5331 is chemically similar to other Zacatel Cream-polychrome vessels in the database. Most notable are MS1420 (K4669) (Figure 3a), MS1866 (Figure 3b), NK0011 (excavated at Nakum) (Figure 3c), and BVB009 (excavated at Baking Pot, Belize) (Figure 3d), as well as other Naranjo-excavated sherds and whole vessels whose ceramic types and artistic styles are consistent with Naranjo-area pottery in much the same way as MS5331. The available evidence suggests the immediate Naranjo area as the place of origin of these five Zacatel Cream-polychrome specimens including MS5331. We interpret the group as a small subset of the larger corpus of greater Naranjo pottery production, yet separate and distinct from the known ceramic output of the royal workshops of Naranjo, including vessels bearing the name of ruler K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk. As the product of a workshop in the vicinity of Naranjo, the bowl's paste chemistry cannot assist in the search for the geographic location of the elusive Komkom site unless it were positioned within the wider Naranjo community.

### Iconography

The exterior of MS5331 is decorated with both pictorial imagery and a hieroglyphic text. All elements of the imagery are outlined in red, and resulting areas are filled

Element	MS5331 (K1698)	MS1684 (K4464)	MS1416 (K633)	MS1374 (K635)	MS1375	CV*
Na%	1.85	1.50	1.51	1.57	1.26	2.2
K%	1.72	1.93	1.30	2.35	2.19	5.3
Ca%	0.00	2.99	0.00	5.15	4.59	—
Sc	7.05	5.47	8.04	8.99	8.59	1.7
Cr	11.0	15.0	29.2	21.3	21.6	3.1
Fe	1.44	1.67	2.34	2.29	2.15	3.0
Co	5.14	6.35	—	6.04	5.66	2.0
Zn	89	109	65	72	84	10.6
As	7.1	4.2	5.4	10.6	9.9	5.4
Rb	135	99	60	169	167	7.7
Zr	139	87	214	216	185	—
Sb	1.45	0.76	1.00	1.53	1.47	16.8
Cs	5.50	4.45	2.61	7.55	6.90	3.1
Ba	575	938	1260	621	468	12.2
La	21.6	23.2	23.3	36.5	32.7	1.6
Ce	48.4	36.0	45.8	66.1	60.0	2.4
Nd	13	14	11	29	26	11.6
Sm	4.67	3.33	4.32	6.22	5.61	2.5
Eu	0.63	0.58	0.72	0.94	0.83	3.0
Tb	0.76	0.52	0.46	0.87	0.98	13.8
Yb	3.22	1.95	1.81	3.05	2.54	5.3
Lu	0.39	0.27	0.23	0.42	0.29	6.9
Hf	6.05	3.59	6.53	6.58	5.33	4.0
Th	13.20	7.06	11.80	13.20	12.10	2.7
U	2.00	1.42	1.10	1.73	1.65	15.3
La/Yb	6.7	11.9	12.9	12.0	12.9	
Th/Sc	1.9	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.4	
Cr/Th	0.8	2.1	2.5	1.6	1.8	
La/Sm	4.6	7.0	5.4	5.9	5.8	
La/Lu	56	87	102	87	111	
La/Ce	0.45	0.64	0.51	0.55	0.55	
Cr/Sc	1.56	2.74	3.63	2.37	2.51	

**Table 1.** Comparison of MS5331 and a selection of vessels produced in workshops attached to the Naranjo court. Trace-elemental data in parts per million except where percentages are indicated. \*CV = Coefficient of variation determined from 17 years of repeated analyses of SRM 679 Brick Clay, n = 311 (data from Blackman and Bishop 2007:327).



**Figure 2.** Vases produced at the royal Naranjo workshop for K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk and K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk: (a) K633/MS1374; (b) K635/MS1375; (c) K2796/MS1763; (d) K4464/MS1416; (e) K1698/MS1684 (photos: Maya Ceramics Project).



**Figure 3.** Zacatel Cream-polychrome ceramics with Holmul Dancer scenes that are close in chemical composition to MS5331: (a) K4619/MS1420; (b) MS1866; (c) NK0011 discovered at Nakum, Guatemala; (d) BVB009 discovered at Baking Pot, Belize (photos: Maya Ceramics Project and Christophe Helmke).



**Figure 4.** Two of the iconographic panels on MS5331 showing the dancing dwarves (photos: Yuriy Polyukhovych and Ronald Bishop, courtesy of Amelia Weymann de Palacios).

in with a lighter red/orange wash. The decorative field is divided into six rectangular spaces, wherein each of the three largest ones is dominated by a depiction of a dwarf figure (exhibiting achondroplastic dwarfism), glancing upwards (Figure 4). Separating these depictions are three glyphic bands, which together form one complete glyphic clause. The dwarves' raised heels, bent legs (Grube 1992:201, 204;Looper 2008:88, 92, 124; Proskouriakoff 1950: 28, 145, Fig. 9.J1), upraised arms, and dynamic poses (Looper 2008:3, Fig. 1; Taube 2009:46-47) make it clear that they are performing a type of ritual dance or pageant. Whereas the dwarves are shown wearing plain loincloths and their hair is simply bound in cloth wraps, it is their earspools and necklaces adorned with shell gorgets that mark their distinctive status. In each arm they brandish bundles of long feathers swaying wispily in the air—undoubtedly the long and highly prized tail feathers of the quetzal (*Pharomachrus mocinno*). The same feather bunches are frequently paired with valves of spiny oyster shells (*Spondylus* sp.), placed atop stacks of folded cotton mantles, a combination comprising the idealized tribute package offered by vassals to higher nobles and their kings (see Stuart 1998:411).

Without a doubt the dwarves and their dance serve to celebrate the time of the Maize God's resurrection.

This is made abundantly clear by the many portrayals of this deity and the accompanying dwarves on cylindrical vases and plates, often painted in the Holmul style, made at workshops at a variety of sites in the eastern central lowlands (Reents-Budet 1991; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:179-186). It is in this part of the Maya area that this mythic motif predominated, and it is evident that it was of particular importance to the rulers of the area (Helmke and Kupprat 2016:59-69; Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:179-188). In these scenes we see the Maize God shortly after his resurrection and resplendent in fine regalia, while he dances in the company of a dwarf (Taube 2009). This seminal mythology from a maize-based culture led to the dwarf becoming the model companion of Classic Maya kings who themselves often acted in the guise of the Maize God (Houston 1992). Although the Maize God is conspicuously absent on MS5331, the dwarves function as *pars pro toto* actors of the pivotal scene, their solitary dance conjuring the entire epic narrative.<sup>1</sup>

### Epigraphy

The glyphic text on the exterior is evenly subdivided into three equal segments of three glyph blocks apiece, each segment serving as a diagonal dividing band between the dancing dwarf figures. These segments run diagonally from the rim to the base of the vessel, the uppermost and lowest glyphs each delicately touching at the red bands that define the exterior of the vessel. We will explore the text on the exterior first and will return to the Ajaw date in the interior at the end of the paper.

#### *Dedicatory Segment and Vessel Type (A1-B1)*

The first glyph block (A1) is well preserved and can be identified as an Initial Sign that initiates a dedicatory statement on ceramic vessels (see MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:109, 124) (Figure 5a). On monuments this same glyph serves as a type of focus marker, emphasizing the most salient clauses (e.g. at Tikal and Caracol) (see Grube and Martin 2000:69, 71, 109) and also serving as a type of final emphatic device in texts of the eastern central lowlands (e.g., at Dzibanche and Lamanai) (see Helmke in press). On portable objects, and ceramics in particular, this glyph functions as a type of demonstrative pronoun (if read *alay* "this, here") (MacLeod and Polyukhovych 2005) or as a type of quotative device that

<sup>1</sup> Given the form of the ceramic vessel, we can also entertain the possibility that this bowl once formed part of a set or ware of vessels with different forms and functions, including a vase for beverages and a tripod dish for serving solid foodstuffs, such as tamales—the typical steamed maize breads of Maya cuisine. On the other vessels of this set other agents and elements of the same myth might have been represented. Ultimately, the relatively low height of the bowl may account for the election of subject matter that was deemed most suitable.

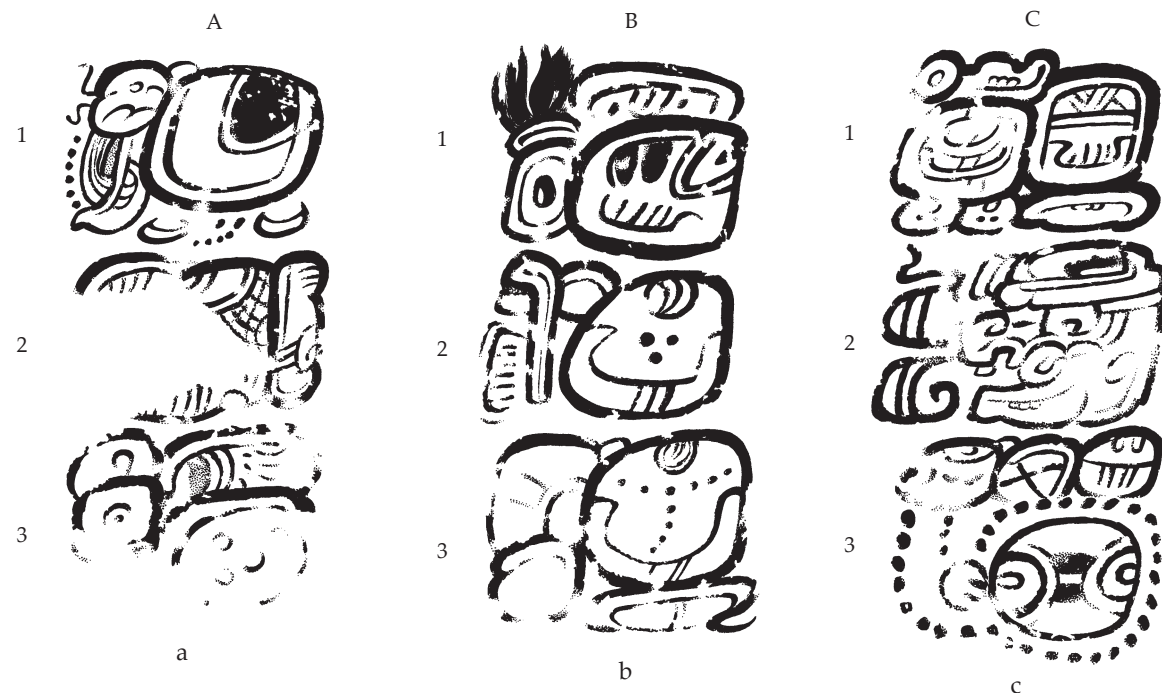


Figure 5. The glyphs of the A–C columns on MS5331: (a) the A column; (b) the B column; (c) the C column (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

initiates the clause (if read *aliyy* “it is said”) (Lacadena 2003:15). Despite this continued ambiguity, it clearly serves to initiate clauses and is written **a-AL-ya** (or alternatively as **a-LAY-ya**). Of the several variants that can be used to write this expression, in this case the main sign is the mirror variant.

The phonetic signs bracketing this logogram are highly distinctive variants and serve as diagnostic paleographic markers of a particular workshop, or perhaps even a specific scribe. The first **a-** phonetic complement represents the upper and lower beaks of a parakeet with the dotted circular element in the middle of the darkened tongue. It is the two small wavy lines that emanate from the nostril that distinguish this variant from other allographs of this vocalic sign. Precisely the same **a** variant is found on ceramics produced at a Naranjo workshop under the patronage of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk (Martin and Grube 2000:74-77). Salient examples in the archives of Justin Kerr include K927,<sup>2</sup> K1698, K2085 (Figure 6a),<sup>3</sup> K7750 a rare quadrangular vase (Figure 6b), and K8622 (Figure 6c). A very similar example, but with some minor idiosyncratic differences, is found on the Jauncy Vase (i.e., K4464/MS1416) (Figure 6d) that also names K’ahk’ Tiliw as its original owner, although as we have remarked above, it was found in a royal tomb at Buenavista del Cayo in Belize (Houston et al. 1992; Reents-Budet et al. 1994:303-302; Taschek and Ball 1992).

Similarly, the **-ya** syllabogram in suffix position to the main sign is also highly distinctive. What sets it

apart from other variants is that the right crescent is visible whereas the left one is wholly or partly concealed by the initial vocalic sign. In addition, in this particular variant there are three main dots between the crescents, arranged in triangular fashion, a line of small dots trailing from the lowest of these larger axial dots. The same feature is found once more on K927, K2085 (Figure 6e), and K8622 (Figure 6f), as well as on K1398 (Figure 6g)—also known as the Regal Bunny Pot (see Beliaev and Davletshin 2006; Helmke 2012; Stuart 1993).<sup>4</sup> The use of the same **a-** vocalic sign and **-ya** syllabogram, as

<sup>2</sup> On this vase, the Initial Sign has been repainted as part of restoration work, and although the restorer has attempted to be faithful one can see that there are small discrepancies, which is why this particular example is not reproduced here.

<sup>3</sup> It may well be that this vessel dates from the initial part of the reign of this king, as is suggested by a distinctive spelling of his name as **K’AK’-TIL-wa**, instead of the more common **K’AK’-TIL-wi** or **K’AK’-ti-li-wi**. The latter spellings are synharmonic and prompt the transcription *K’ahk’ Tiliw*, with a short vowel in the **-Vw** suffix. In contrast, the spelling found on K2085 is disharmonic and suggests the transcription *K’ahk’ Tiliw*, with a long vowel **-VVw**. The shift from disharmonic to synharmonic spellings is a feature of texts of the eastern Maya lowlands and is usually attributed to a period between AD 747 and 849 (Lacadena and Wichmann 2002:293-302), yet this instance demonstrates that experimentation with this process is at least a few decades earlier, since K’ahk’ Tiliw reigned between AD 693 and at least 726 (Martin and Grube 2000:74-77).

<sup>4</sup> This sign is eroded on K7750, and on both K1698 and K4464 a GI head-variant is used, which is not accompanied by a **-ya** sign.

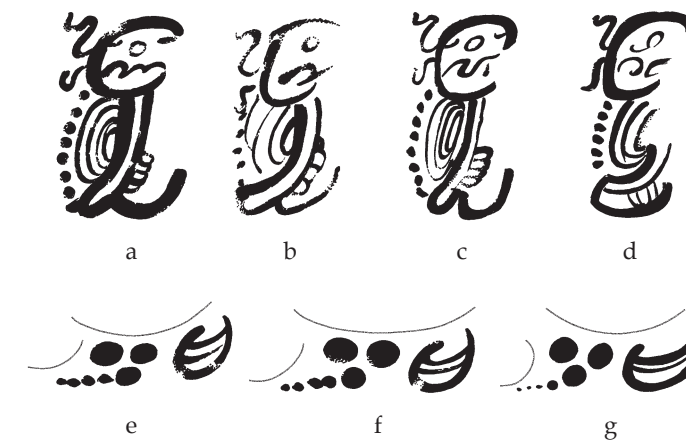


Figure 6. The paleographic commonalities of the Initial Sign: **a-** and analogous variants on Naranjo ceramics: (a) 2085; (b) K7750; (c) 8622; (d) 4464; analogous variants of the **-ya** syllabogram on the same ceramics: (e) 2085; (f) K8622; (g) K1398 (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

well as the use of the mirror main sign (also used on K927, 1398, 1689, and 2085) speak in a very evocative manner of MS5331 as a vessel that was produced in a Naranjo workshop during the reign of K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Chaahk. We will return to this observation after we have determined the name of the original owner of the vessel under scrutiny.

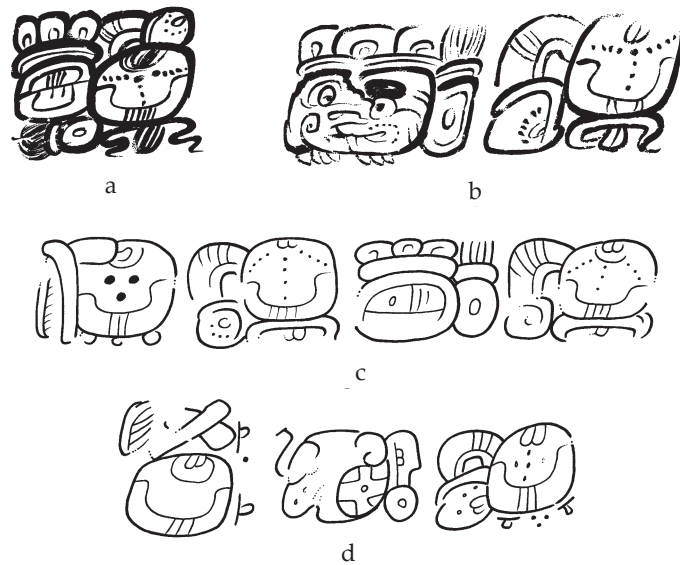
The second glyph block (A2) has, unfortunately, suffered from breakage and thus only little remains. Syntax and comparison to other vessels from the area suggest that this should record the dedicatory verb, the manner by which the vessel was formally activated or brought to life, enabling it to serve its intended function in society. What remains includes the **-yi** syllabogram in final position. Whereas this particular syllabogram is less distinctive than the foregoing phonetic signs, the variant in use in Naranjo workshops during this time has a noticeable cleft or gap between the main rounded portion of the sign (the “paw”) and the lined protrusion at the top (the “claw”) (see K927, K1398, K4464, and K8622). The preferred main sign at this period in the Naranjo workshops presents the head of the aged male divinity known as God N (see Martin 2016; Taube 1992:92-99) although in one instance (K8622) a stylized footprint, an abridged form of the Step sign, is present. On MS5331 what remains suggests that the dedicatory verb was written with the head of God N, especially the characteristic netted headdress and the pronounced wrinkles along the jaw. In almost all cases a **-yi** syllabogram closes each of these verbal expressions to mark them as change-of-state verbs, presumably read *t’ab-aay* “it was raised / it got lifted” (see Stuart 1998:409-417), in reference either to the production of the ceramic vessel or to its ceremonial presentation as part of a dedicatory ritual.

The verb is followed by a substantive (A3) that refers to the object that was dedicated. In this case the glyph block has suffered a fair bit of erosion, but the remaining elements can nonetheless be distinguished as **yu-k’i-bi** for *yuk’ib*. This lexeme can be segmented as *y-uk’-ib* and translated as “it is his drinking implement,” involving the verb *uk’* “to drink” followed by an instrumental suffix **-ib**, the whole prefixed by the third-person singular pronominal possessive prefix (see Houston et al. 1989; MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:115, 127-128). As such it is clear that this bowl was primarily intended as an implement for drinking, which also implies that it was designed to contain a liquid. Ordinarily the forms of Maya ceramics tell us something of their contents, with tall vases with narrow orifices reserved for beverages, wide dishes of shallow depth for solid foodstuffs, and bowls of intervening size for broths and semi-liquids.

This observation is borne out in this case also, since the following glyph block, at the start of the second column (B1), refers to the intended contents (Figure 5b). Here this is spelled fully phonetically as **ti-u-lu**, and read *ti ul* “for *atole*/maize gruel” (MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:118-119, 128). As such we can see that the text corroborates the intended contents of the vessel as viscous maize gruel, one of the favored beverages of the Maya, both then and now. The **lu** syllabogram used in this glyph block is also a distinctive variant, exhibiting two large dots in the upper portion of the sign, an otherwise uncommon feature. Interestingly, as far as we have been able to ascertain, this particular variant of **lu** does not appear on other ceramics of Naranjo workshops, suggesting that this is an idiosyncratic feature of the scribe who painted MS5331.

#### Patronage and Nominal Segment (B2–C3)

The initial portion of the text was given over to an abridged dedicatory statement, as well as specifying the type of vessel in ancient Maya typologies and its intended contents. The remainder of the text starts with the next glyph block (B2) providing an honorific titular expression that introduces the name of the original owner of the vase. Whereas it may seem a rather abrupt transition between the first and second portions of the text, the latter is linked to the former via the possessive prefix *y-* appended to *uk’ib*, marking this drinking implement as the prized possession of a distinct and particular individual. Anthroponyms, or the names of human individuals (particularly regnal names), are usually followed by titles, in keeping with the syntax of the Ch’olan language recorded in the glyphs, although at times additional titular expressions precede the name. These can be identified as honorific expressions, and in this case one such is spread over the remaining two glyph blocks of the medial column. The first half is written **CH’AK-OL** (B2) followed by **pi-tzi-li** (B3). Together this was probably read *ch’ak-ohl pitzil*, involving the verbal



**Figure 7.** Honorific titles: (a) the *itz'aat pitzil* honorific of K'ahk' Tiliw on K8622; (b) the same title of K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk on K7750; (c) the same title and the *ch'ahk-ohl pitziil* honorific of Bat K'awiil on the Holmul tripod dish; (d) honorific designating Ukit Kan Lek as *ch'ak-ohl bahte' pitziil* (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

root *ch'ak* “to chop, axe,” the substantive *ohl* “heart,” and the head of the expression, *pitziil*. The latter probably serves as the substantive “ballplayer” and is a derived form of the verbal root *pit* seen as part of the verb “to play ball” in reference to the fascinating ballgame of the ancient Maya (see Freidel et al. 1993:337-391; Miller and Houston 1987:60; Stuart 1989:24-25).

The honorific title *itz'aat pitziil* “wise man/sage ballplayer” is also found in the nominal segment of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk on K8622 (Figure 7a) and of his son K'ahk' Ukalaw Chan Chaahk on K7750 (Figure 7b) as well as in reference to a Naranjo ruler nicknamed Bat K'awiil, who ruled sometime in the 780s (Figure 7c) (Martin and Grube 2000:81). The latter example is found in the rim text of a tripod dish discovered in a royal tomb at the site of Holmul (Str. F in Group 1) (M1-N1) (Reents 1986). In the same text, Bat K'awiil is not only referred to as an *itz'aat pitziil*, but also as a *ch'ak-ohl pitziil* (K1-L1) (Figure 7d). At Ek Balam, the remarkable tomb of Ukit Kan Lek contained among other things an incised ceramic vase, where its text designates the king as a *ch'ak-ohl bahte' pitziil* (Lacadena 2003:77).<sup>5</sup> The intrusion of the martial title */baah-te'/* (possibly “head-spear”) indicates that the initial portion of the honorific serves as a modifier to *pitziil* and the latter is the discrete

<sup>5</sup> Here, in the transcription, we present the segment */baah-te'/* with a short vowel since morphophonetic processes are at play, wherein *VV > V*, since compounding involving a stressed syllable eliminates preceding vowel length (see Lacadena and Davletshin 2013:16).

syntactic head of the expression. The example from Ek Balam, as well as the pairing of *pitziil* titles on the Holmul vessel, suggests that these are references to the king as a ballplayer, whose various virtues are emphasized, serving to qualify what type of ballplayer he was. As such, the owner of K5331 likewise appears to have been designated as a “heart-chopping ballplayer,” although whether this is nuanced lyrical language or chillingly meant in a rather literal way remains unknown.

The name proper follows over the first two glyph blocks of the final column (Figure 5c). Split over two glyph blocks, the first part of the name can be transliterated as **TE'-?-la-CHAN-na** (C1) that modifies the syntactic head, the deity **K'AWIL** (C2), whose snout is partly eroded. Most individual elements are readily identified, save the second sign, marked with a question mark, which here may be rendered as a rarer variant the **OL** logogram within a circular frame. This is reminiscent of the rare **OL** variant also seen in the nominal segment found on the large jadeite plaque recently discovered at Nim Li Punit, involving what appears to be a T-shaped wind sign within a cartouche (Prager and Braswell 2016:271, Fig. 6b). Together the name on MS5331 thus reads *Te' Ohl Chan K'awiil*. Alternatively this name may involve a moon sign—designated as T181 in the Thompson catalog (1962). As such one alternate transliteration would be as **TE'-ja-la**, in which case the name is read *Te'jal Chan(al) K'awiil*, wherein the putative *-jal* would function as an attributive suffix. The same sign might also function as the logogram **K'AL**, “twenty” for *Te'k'al Chan K'awiil*, although at present we are unsure as to which of these alternatives is more likely, without additional examples of the name.

This type of name is typical of the eastern central lowlands, naming one particular aspect of a deity. The structure of these names is rather methodical, involving the name of the deity at the end of the nominal phrase, *chan* “sky” in the medial segment, and opening with either a verbal expression or a substantive (see Grube 2002; Colas 2014). Thus the name may mean something along the lines of “K'awiil is ... in the sky” if the medial segment is understood prepositionally as *ti chan* “within the sky,” or alternatively, “... is the celestial K'awiil” if the medial segment was meant to be treated in derived form as *chan[al]* “celestial.” Clearly a coherent understanding and translation of the name is impeded by the initial compound, the constituent parts of which are patent enough in isolation, but less so in compound form.

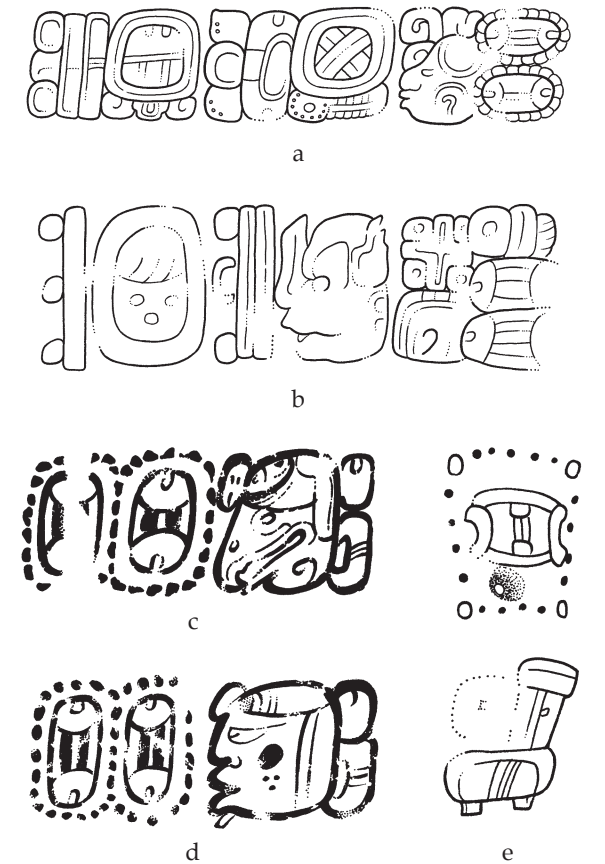
The final glyph (C3) provides the title proper of the original owner and in many ways is the most fascinating part of the whole text. It provides a complete emblem glyph, the exalted title of ruling kings, here written as **K'UH-[ko]mo-AJAW**. While somewhat abridged this can be read *k'uh[ul] kom[kom] ajaw*, wherein the medial segment is the most truncated. As such this provides us with the dynastic title of the “divine king” of a place or

dynastic house named Komkom. This locality is known from the texts of Naranjo as a place that was attacked and burned on March 30 AD 696, not all too surprisingly during the reign of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk (Figure 8a). The same locality may also be mentioned in connection with a “Star War” verb on April 24 AD 726, towards the end of the reign of the same king (Figure 8b). The same regal title also appears on Late Classic ceramics found at Buenavista del Cayo (Figure 8c) and Baking Pot (Figure 8d) in western Belize, suggesting that this ancient locality was probably tied to a site in the vicinity (Helmke and Kettunen 2011:42, 63; Helmke et al. 2016; Houston et al. 1992:507-508; Yaeger et al. 2015:185-188). Whereas the ceramic texts and the mentions made at Naranjo spell this locality as **[ko]mo-[ko]mo**, on a recently discovered Early Classic shell gorget found at Buenavista del Cayo the title of the original owner is written more synoptically as **[ko]mo AJAW** (Yaeger et al. 2015:185-186) (Figure 8e), abbreviating the toponym in precisely the same way as seen on MS5331. Based on these numerous examples, and the attribution of MS5331 to a Naranjo workshop, we are thus on rather secure footing to suggest that this is the same title as seen at sites in the eastern central lowlands, although here the regal title is exceptionally preceded by *k'uhul* “godly.” In all other cases the title presents the toponym in combination with *ajaw*, thereby forming a partial or so-called “problematic” emblem glyph (Houston 1986).

### Concluding Thoughts

The compositional data for MS5331 indicate that this bowl was the product of a workshop located in the greater Naranjo area, although its paste chemistry is unlike that of other whole vessels associated with royal Naranjo patrons with the exception of K1698/MS1684. Yet the physical features of the bowl are very similar to those of other pottery vessels produced during the reign of K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk. The iconography of MS5331 represents a small segment of the greater mythic narrative that is best known from the Holmul Dancer scenes that are typical of pictorial pottery produced in this part of the Maya area. This feature also confirms the bowl's origin at a site in the eastern central lowlands. More specifically, the distinctive graphic variants employed in the text of this vessel are in keeping with ceramics produced for K'ahk' Tiliw and which name him as owner.

In fact, the regnal name K'ahk' Tiliw appears on all but one of the vessels whose stylistic and epigraphic features suggest they were produced under his patronage. Thus even though most ceramic vessels were often gifted between sovereigns as a means of cementing alliances, those vases of K'ahk' Tiliw were personal effects that were bestowed upon others, as is made clear by the Jauncy Vase found at Buenavista del Cayo.



**Figure 8.** References to Komkom in the glyphic corpus: (a) Naranjo Stela 22; (b) Naranjo Stela 18; (c) sherd of a Black-on-cream vase found at Buenavista del Cayo; (d) title found on the Komkom Vase discovered at Baking Pot; (e) detail of the shell gorget found at Buenavista del Cayo (drawings: Christophe Helmke).

Nevertheless, one finely painted vase, designated K1698/MS1684 (Figure 9), diverges from this pattern and instead bears the name of a foreign ruler, in this case the king of Ucanal, one “Itzamnaaj” Bahlam. The texts on monuments at Naranjo make it clear that the relationship between these two kings was rather turbulent and not always amicable. For instance, just twenty days after acceding to the throne on May 31 AD 693, K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk unleashed war upon neighboring kingdoms. Whereas much of the warring may have been aimed at lesser localities to draw them once more under the domination of the Naranjo king after a period of dynastic disarray (see Martin and Grube 2000:72-76), some of these raids targeted prizes further afield, including Tubal to the west, Yootz<sup>6</sup> to the north, Komkom to the

<sup>6</sup> An alternative reading, preferred by the second author, is *Yomootz* based on the example on K7786, wherein the toponym may be spelled **yo-mo-tzi** (compare with Boot 1999).

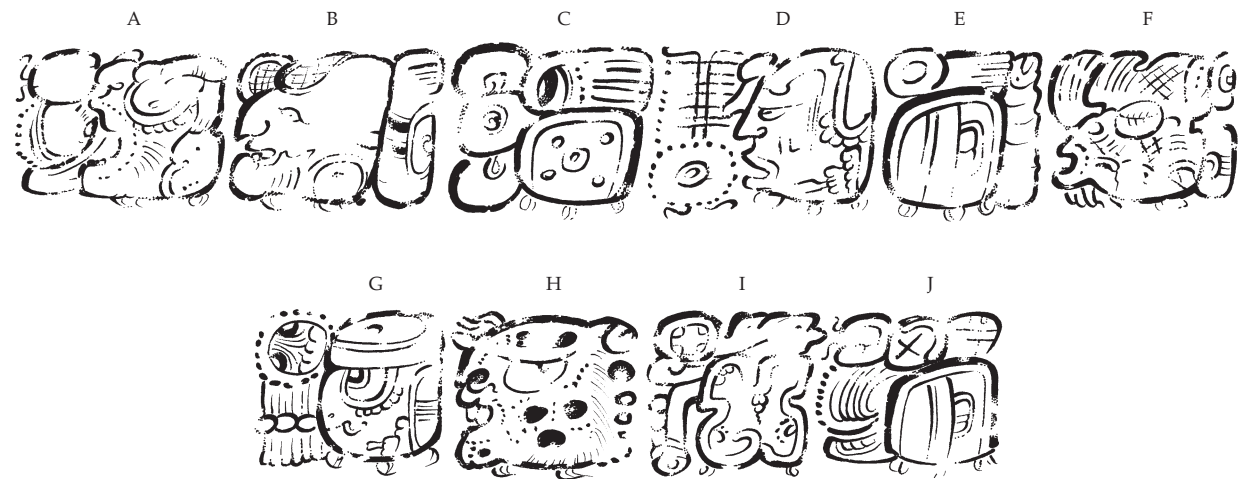


Figure 9. Roll-out of K1689 and drawing of the glyphic text (photo © Justin Kerr; drawing: Christophe Helmke).

east, Bital to the southeast, and Ucanal to the south. The emaciated, near-naked, and powerless king of Ucanal is shown pleading at the feet of K'ahk' Tiliw on the front of Stela 22, which records the attack on Ucanal in September AD 698 (Schele and Freidel 1990:190-191). The texts make

it clear that this is none other than "Itzamnaaj" Bahlam, leaving little doubt as to which court ruled supreme in the region. Following this offensive period wherein K'ahk' Tiliw sought to make his mark on the area, the reign's maturity set in and the texts take stock of the



Figure 10. The 4 Ajaw date at the bottom of MS5331 (photo: Fundación para la Bellas Artes y la Cultura, courtesy of Amelia Weymann de Palacios; drawing: Christophe Helmke).

king in his role as diplomat. The finely incised texts on the sides of Stela 2 record the accession of a king of Yootz in January AD 713 under the auspices of K'ahk' Tiliw, who is clearly named as overlord. Similarly, in the same text the accession (possibly a re-accession as faithful vassal) of "Itzamnaaj" Bahlam is said to have taken place the year before in June AD 712, an event that is explicitly said to have taken place *yichnal* or "before / in front of" K'ahk' Tiliw Chan Chaahk. This interesting reversal, from defeat in AD 698 to re-accession 14 years later, demonstrates how fleeting power could be during Late Classic times. In addition, this historical event entails the most likely production date for K1698, with the vase perhaps specially commissioned to commemorate the enthronization of the Ucanal ruler and to cement his vassalage to his Naranjo overlord.

Truly remarkable in this regard are the many paleographic features seen in the text of K1698/MS1684 that represent salient points of commonality with the text of MS5331, in spite of the fact that their paste compositions are notably different although both pertain to Naranjo ceramic production. Among these paleographic details, we can point to the same *a-* vocalic sign (A1), the same variants of *yu-* and *k'i* in the vessel-type glyph (C1), and the identical AJAW logogram in the title of the Ucanal king (Figure 9). The latter is identical in every detail, including the cap on the "pillow" sign to the left, the cross that marks the center of the same sign, and the interior lines of the "throne" sign to the right (compare J1 on K1698/MS1684 with C3 on MS5331). All of these features together suggest that the texts on both vessels were produced—if not by the same scribe—by contemporaneous painters who produced vessels by closely following the same scribal template. Considering the evidence at hand it seems likely that—much like the Ucanal vase K1698/MS1684—MS5331 was also custom-made for a foreign ruler, in this instance the king of Komkom. Most likely, too, the bowl was commissioned, sometime after AD 712, during the more diplomatic phase of K'ahk' Tiliw's reign and as a direct corollary of the attack inflicted upon Komkom in AD 696.

It is in this respect that the date inscribed in the base of the bowl has direct bearing on this discussion. The date provides a record in the Tzolkin calendar and has been written in abbreviated form as 4-ti-AJAW for *chan ti [k'in] ajaw* or literally "four on the day Ajaw" (Figure 10). Warranting such a degree of ellipsis is the significance of the date with regards to an important, well-known, and celebrated period ending in the Long Count. As such it is likely the record of a k'atun period ending with a "round" Long Count date, and the best match with these parameters is the date 9.15.0.0.0 4 Ajaw 13 Yax, or August 23, AD 731.<sup>7</sup> What is surprising about this date is that it falls three years after the latest known date for K'ahk' Tiliw's reign, whereas one would expect the bowl to have been produced under his sovereignty. While this bowl cannot be used as tangible evidence for K'ahk' Tiliw remaining in power until 731 it is certainly a tantalizing suggestion. Alternatively, the bowl may indeed have been manufactured to cement an alliance between Naranjo and the lord of Komkom, and this may have occurred under the reign of a successor. This alternative historical scenario could explain the idiosyncratic

<sup>7</sup> This computation is based on the 584286 GMT+1 correlation coefficient (see Martin and Skidmore 2012). An alternate, but less likely, anchor to the Long Count would be to consider a lahuntun date, of which for Baktun 9 the only match is 9.8.10.0.0 or AD 603, which is too early given the style of the bowl, its iconography, and the paleographic features of the text. Alternate hotun and holahuntun dates provide no good matches either, being too early or too late.



paste chemistry of this specimen within the larger corpus of sampled pottery attributed to K'ahk' Tiliw and other Naranjo kings.

Irrespective of the particulars, this unsung bowl reflects an important event in the history of the Komkom dynasty and celebrates an alliance between Te' ... Chan K'awiil and the rulers of Naranjo. If the bowl were commissioned to celebrate the accession of Te' ... Chan K'awiil, then K'ahk' Tiliw, at the very end of his reign, emerges as the likely patron. But then again, the bowl may have been a gift from the successor of K'ahk' Tiliw on the occasion of his own accession in order to cement an erstwhile alliance with the kings of Komkom, his allies to the east.

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