

## A Classic Maya Ceramic Vessel from the Calakmul Region in the Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen, Switzerland

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### Introduction

The Ebnöther collection of antiquities and ethnographica at the *Museum zu Allerheiligen* in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, contains a unique example of Late Classic Maya pottery (museum inventory number Eb11413). Although studied before (Berthold Riese 1992, 1999; Grube 2003; Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube 2000:108; David Stuart 1996), the complete details of the iconography and inscriptions on this vessel have not yet been published. The present study aims to complete the published description of the vessel through analysis, drawings, and photographs. The

photographs appearing here are published with the kind permission of Werner Rutishauser, curator of the Ebnöther collection.

### Description of the ceramic vessel

Eb11413 is a slightly flaring cylindrical vase, 18.5 cm in height, with a maximal diameter of 13 cm (Grube 2003: 340). The vase has been dated to 686 CE (see discussion below), although its provenience and date of acquisition by the museum are unknown. Found in fragments but finely restored, the vase's remarkable state of preservation,



Figure 1. Medallion 2, day sign cartouche enclosing the portrait of Yuknoom Ch'een II or Yuknoom the Great (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen)



Figure 2. Medallion 1, portrait of Yuknoom Ch'een's spouse (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)



Figure 3. Caption C, name phrase of Yuknoom Ch'een II (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)

the style of its carving, and the content of the inscriptions make it an exceptional piece of Classic Maya art. The surface of the vessel is smooth and burnished; the carved areas show some remains of red pigment. In comparison to the pronounced and elaborate bas-relief on some portions of the vessel (Figs. 1 and 4), other portions (Fig. 3) are not worked as bas-relief, but seem to be incised, thus possibly incomplete or unfinished. These irregularities may indicate that the potter had to complete his job hastily and had no time to add the finishing touches to his work.

Examples of Maya iconography and inscriptions appear in various positions on the vessel. The vase is surmounted by a fitted, domed lid, topped by a handle that is modeled as an effigy head. The effigy head has elongated, sunken eyes, an open mouth showing buck-teeth, ear rings, and



Figure 4. Caption B, name phrase of the female dignitary (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)

has a headdress made up of a stylized serpent's jaw and a long braid curling to the back (Fig. 2). Thirteen hieroglyphic blocks encircle the rim of the lid (Figs. 5–9), and the vessel's body is furnished with two day sign cartouches enclosing the depiction of male and female individuals whose accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions contain their proper names (Figs. 1 and 2).

**Hieroglyphic Texts**

Three hieroglyphic captions (designated A–C) and two medallions (designated 1 and 2) in the form of Tzolk'in day-cartouches are carved on the lid and on body of the ceramic vessel (Table 1). Caption A (Fig. 12), the circular rim text, consists of thirteen hieroglyphic blocks, whereas the two smaller captions contain seven blocks each, thus

| Designation           | Iconography | Inscription         | Description      |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------|------------------|
|                       |             | Caption A (Fig.12)  | main text on lid |
| Medallion 1 (Fig. 13) | Female      | Caption B (Fig. 10) | name phrase      |
| Medallion 2 (Fig. 14) | Male        | Caption C (Fig. 11) | name phrase      |

Table Hieroglyphic inscriptions on the Schaffhausen vessel.



Figure 5. View of caption A, the circular hieroglyphic inscription on the lid (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)



yielding a total of 27 hieroglyphic blocks. The two medallions are separated by the hieroglyphic captions B (Fig. 10) and C (Fig. 11), which provide the proper names of the individuals depicted. Caption B is associated with the female individual enclosed in Medallion 1 (Fig 13), and caption C

is associated with the proper name of the male individual depicted in Medallion 2 (Fig. 14).

In the epigraphic analysis that follows (see Tables 2–4), hieroglyphic signs are classified on the basis of the new catalogue by Macri and Looper (2003), hereafter abbreviated ML. The relative positions of individual elements within each glyph collocation are indicated using punctuation



Figure 7. Caption A, hieroglyphs A12–A4 (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)



Figure 8. Hieroglyphs A3–A7 of caption A (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)



Figure 9. A close-up of hieroglyphic blocks A13–A4 (photograph by Museum zu Allerheiligen, Ebnöther Collection, Schaffhausen, 2003)

adopted from Zimmerman (1956) and Thompson (1962: 32–34). The transliteration of the texts in the third column of tables 2–4 is mine. Signs on the vessel that cannot be identified from the ML catalogue are designated as *nn* with a provisional number.

### Iconography

Both medallions are designed as a day-sign cartouche (ML-ZZ1) enclosing the bas-relief of a dignitary. Medallion 1 (Fig. 13) is only partially elaborated as bas-relief; its top right border is simply indicated by an irregular incision in the surface of the vessel. The woman portrayed in Medallion 1 is looking out from the day sign cartouche, resting her left arm on the border of the day-sign cartouche and putting forth her right hand. Fine lines suggest that the day sign cartouche includes the *k'in* hieroglyph for “day” (ML-XQ3) as background to the female and male figure. According to Patricia McAnany, cartouches containing the *k'in* hieroglyph are probably a symbol of ancestral iconography, “a stylized way of presenting royal ancestors” (McAnany 1995:43). Ancestors are associated with celestial bodies such as the sun and moon, and it is therefore likely that the individuals depicted in the day sign cartouches are royal ancestors.

The female’s body is rendered frontally; the head is in profile and facing left to the hieroglyphic Caption B that contains her proper name. She is a richly clad and costumed royal female wearing an elaborate headdress, jade-bead wrist cuffs and a beaded collar. An ear ornament consisting of a bead with small feathers, a diagonally hung cylinder, and counterweights behind the ear, hangs from her left earlobe. The headdress is a zoomorphic head, with ritual paraphernalia surmounted by short, long, and loose-hanging feathers. Grube (2003) notes that this kind of headgear is usually worn by Maya queens. The zoomorphic being can be identified as the “quadripartite monster,” a personification of the bloodletting bowl, consisting of a shell, a stingray spine

in the center, and crossed bands probably symbolizing the three basic cosmic dimensions: Underworld, Middleworld and Heavens. Affixed to the collar of the female figure are three effigy heads, probably jade masks.

Her richly dressed male companion in Medallion 2 (fig. 14) is also rendered frontally. His head is in side-view and faces left to his name caption. The jaguar-shaped headgear overlaps the upper part of the day sign cartouche, and with his left hand the male clings to the inner border of the cartouche. The male wears an elaborate costume including breast collar, a necklace and a headdress. The latter consists of a cloth headband with a jester-god effigy topped by a jaguar head, adorned with a large feather panache. The jester-god effigy on the cape has been interpreted as an emblem of royalty and served as a crown for Maya kings (cf. Easby 1961). A carved pectoral representing crossed bands and feathers is suspended from his neck. The crossed-bands pectoral often appears in the context of period ending rituals (Tate 1992:99ff) and it probably signals that he is in the guise of an ancestor or a specific deity associated with bloodletting (see for example the ancestor figure depicted in the cartouche on Yaxchilan Stela

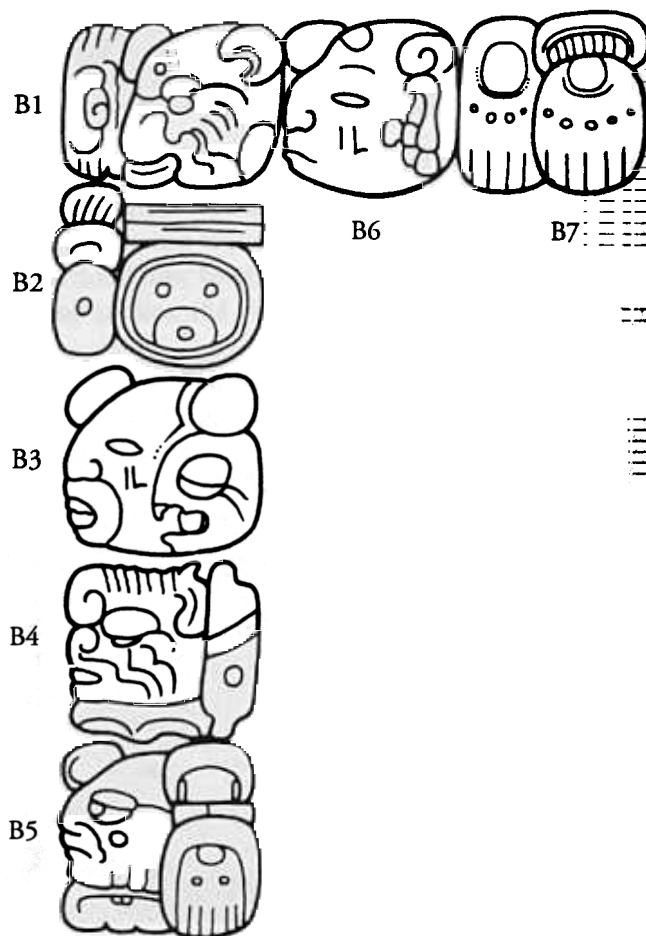


Figure 10. Drawing of hieroglyphic caption B (drawing by Christian M. Prager, 2004)



| Block | Transcription              | Transliteration         |
|-------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| B1    | AA4.AP9                    | <i>u baah</i>           |
| B2    | 3M2.010:ZZ1*AM1            | <i>ti lajuun ajaw</i>   |
| B3    | PC1*BP1                    | <i>ix ahk</i>           |
| B4    | nn1:nn2.1C1                | ? <i>tok'</i>           |
| B5    | nn3:1G1.1G2:005?:1SB / XE1 | ?-na nah hol / ?-na nah |
| B6    | PC1                        | <i>ix</i>               |
| B7    | XE2.AA1:XE2                | <i>ba kab</i>           |

Table 2. Epigraphic analysis of Caption B (Fig. 10)

30 carrying the crossed-bands pectoral or Bird Jaguar IV on Yaxchilan Stela 9).

### Epigraphic analysis

#### Caption B (Fig. 10, Table 2)

Caption B contains the name phrase of the female dignitary and is introduced by the clause (B1) *u baah* (B2) *ti lajun ajaw* or “her self as 10 Ajaw,” or “she is depicted as the day 10 Ajaw.” According to David Stuart, the expression *u baah* “her/his self/person” is generally used to introduce the name phrase of individuals portrayed in the imagery, meaning “this is the image of” (Stuart 1996:162). An alternative interpretation for *baah* as “to perforate, to prick, to pierce, to nail” has been suggested by Victoria Bricker (1986: 135–138). In this specific case, however, I prefer David Stuart’s reading of the *baah* verb, because no iconographic features of the Schaffhausen vessel point to the depiction of bloodletting.

The hieroglyphic caption yields that the woman encircled by the day sign cartouche (Medallion 1) is the impersonation of the Tzolk’in day 10 Ajaw. This is most probably a short version of the calendar round 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk’in that appears in caption C. As Stuart (1996:167) indicates, “royal persons were the embodiments of time and the concept of personifying time or supernatural beings constituted a powerful and religious statement of royal authority.” The name phrase of this seemingly royal female consists of a proper name (B3–B5) and an epithet (B6–7), both introduced by the female classifier *ix* or *ixik* (ML-PC1). Her proper name reads <sub>B3</sub>IX AHK <sub>B4</sub>?-? TOK’ <sub>B5</sub>?-na NAH-li, although hieroglyphic block B5 may read alternatively as NAH ho-li or na-ba. In Stuart’s (1996:

| Block | Transcription   | Transliteration       |
|-------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| C1    | AP9             | <i>baah</i>           |
| C2    | 3M2.010:ZZ1*AM1 | <i>ti lajuun ajaw</i> |
| C3    | 008.ZUJ:XQ3.1S2 | <i>waxak yaxk’in</i>  |
| C4    | 32D.ZC1:ZD2:33K | <i>yuknoom</i>        |
| C5    | BT6:1G1         | <i>ch’een</i>         |
| C6    | 1B1/1B2.ACN??   | <i>ta / ki? och ?</i> |
| C7    | BT6:1G1         | <i>ch’een</i>         |

Table 3. Epigraphic analysis of Caption C (Fig. 11)

168) drawing of this hieroglyphic block, the portrait hieroglyph (here designated nn3) seems to be the female head or ML-PC1. But a close look at the photograph and the original reveals that this identification is not correct. In the absence of other inscriptions that contain the name phrase of this royal woman, her proper name cannot be read securely. Her royal status, however, can be deduced from the last part of the name phrase consisting of the title *ix ba kab* “she, the first of the world.” This epithet is linked to the Classic Maya conception of the royal person as the first-ranking being of the world, and therefore this title is usually related to the king or the queen of a political entity (Grube 2003:340).

#### Caption C (Fig. 11, Table 3)

Hieroglyphic Caption C is structurally identical to the name phrase discussed above. It includes the name phrase of the male individual portrayed in Medallion 2. His caption is introduced by the phrase *baah ti lajuun ajaw waxak yaxk’in* “his self as 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk’in,” or “he is rendered as the calendar date 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk’in.” Riese’s proposal (1999:283) that this calendar round is associated with the period ending date 9.12.0.0.0 (June 26, AD 672) has been adopted by other authors (e.g., Stuart 1996:167; Grube 2003:340). This date seems consistent with the form and

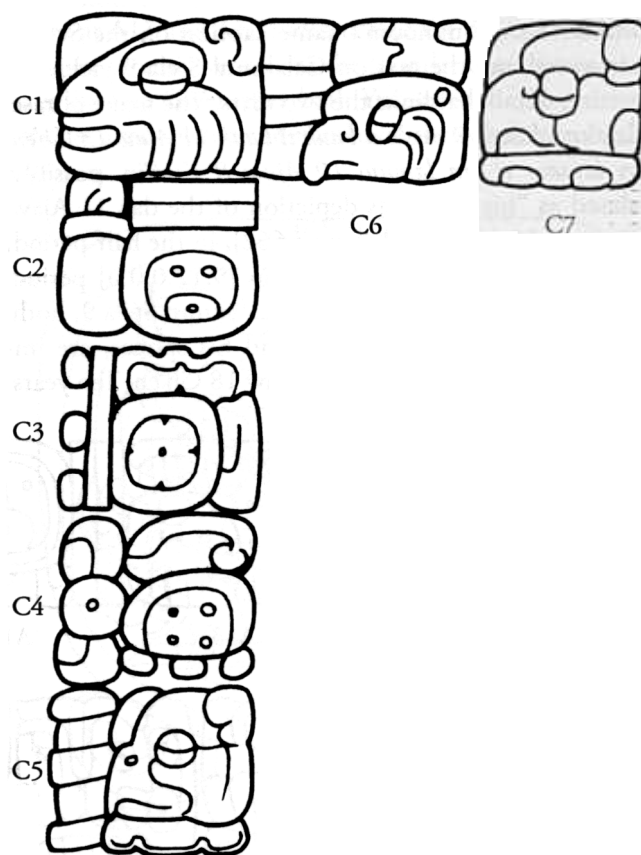


Figure 11. Drawing of hieroglyphic caption C (drawing by Christian M. Prager, 2004)

style of the vessel and, thus, is helpful in contextualizing the characters depicted on it. The royal person embodying this calendar date is named <sup>C4</sup>yu-ku-no-ma <sup>C5</sup>CH'EN-na, *yuknoom ch'een*. Two unreadable epithets at C6 and C7 conclude the name phrase of this male individual. Martin and Grube (2000:108ff) identify the male figure as Yuknoom Ch'een II or Yuknoom the Great, a prestigious sovereign of Calakmul (Campeche, Mexico). This king, born 9.8.7.2.17 (11 September 600) acceded to the throne in 9.10.3.5.10 (28 April 636) and remained in power for 50 years. Yuknoom the Great commissioned at least 18 stelae at Calakmul, but due to heavy erosion of the Calakmul monuments, most biographical information about him comes from outside Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2000: 108ff). Apart from his image on the Schaffhausen ceramic vessel, no portraits of Yuknoom the Great survive in good condition at Calakmul itself. On Calakmul Stela 9 (see Ruppert and Denison 1943: plates 48a,b), for example, Yuknoom the Great is depicted with his spouse. Unfortunately, the name caption of Yuknoom's spouse on the Calakmul stela is eroded, so it is impossible to determine if the female figure depicted on the Schaffhausen vessel has the same name as the female figure on Calakmul Stela 9. Polygamy is attested for various rulers from Yaxchilan (Martin and Grube 2000:126, 131), and we can therefore not be sure that Yuknoom was married only to one woman. A comparison of Yuknoom's name caption on the Schaffhausen vessel and the text on Calakmul Stela 9 yields an interesting detail that links the two texts. The name phrase on Calakmul Stela 9 reads *u baah ti baah 11 Ajaw 13 Ch'en ti tan lamaw ti tan lamaw 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk'in*, possibly translated as "his person as depiction of the day 11 Ajaw 18 Ch'en [9.11.10.0.0, 23 August 662], in the half-period, in the half of the 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk'in [9.12.0.0.0] period ending." According to the texts on Calakmul Stela 9, both individuals, Yuknoom Ch'een II and his spouse, are impersonating the calendar date 11 Ajaw 18 Ch'en. Ten years

later, as depicted on the Schaffhausen vessel, Yuknoom Ch'een the Great and a spouse celebrate the k'atun ending and are embodying the corresponding calendar date 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk'in (9.12.0.0.0). The latter date seems to be important in the life history of Yuknoom the Great, since he commissioned four stone monuments to celebrate this period ending, and possibly the Schaffhausen vessel as well (see conclusion).

#### Caption A (Fig. 12, Table 4)

The hieroglyphic inscription on the lid (Caption A), consists of a formulaic text known as the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS), followed by the proper name of an individual. The PSS on this vessel is shortened and contains information indicating the vessel type, its content, and the proper name of the vessel as well the name of its owner. The text starts with the abbreviated calendrical expression <sup>A1</sup>*lajuun ajaw* ("10 Ajaw" for 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk'in) and continues with <sup>A2</sup>*chapaat chan* <sup>A3</sup>*k'inich ajaw* <sup>A4</sup>*u k'aba'* <sup>A5</sup>*yuk'ib* <sup>A6</sup>*ti kaw* (A1–A6). This can be paraphrased "<sup>A1</sup>10 Ajaw-<sup>A2</sup>centipede-snake-<sup>A3</sup>'Sun God' <sup>A4</sup>is the proper name <sup>A5</sup>of the drinking vessel used <sup>A6</sup>for chocolate beverage." Naming objects, such as ritual paraphernalia, architecture, or even natural features, was a common cultural trait among the Classic Maya and has been noticed and interpreted by various authors as a means of animating objects (cf. Stuart 1998). The vessel's proper name, "10 Ajaw-Centipede-Snake-'Sun God'," has also been identified as the proper name of a zoomorphic supernatural elsewhere known as *huk chapaat chan k'inich ajaw* (cf. Boot 2000:189–193) or *huk chapaat chan k'awiil chan* (Pusilha Stela D) (Prager n.d.: 9), and seemingly combines attributes of various gods, such as the Sun God (*k'inich ajaw*) or the god K'awiil, with a snake-centipede-like creature.

The vessel's proper name is followed by the collocation HE6.ZX4:1M4, which may be read as *u tumil*. Although the reading of the main sign ML-ZX4 as /TUM/

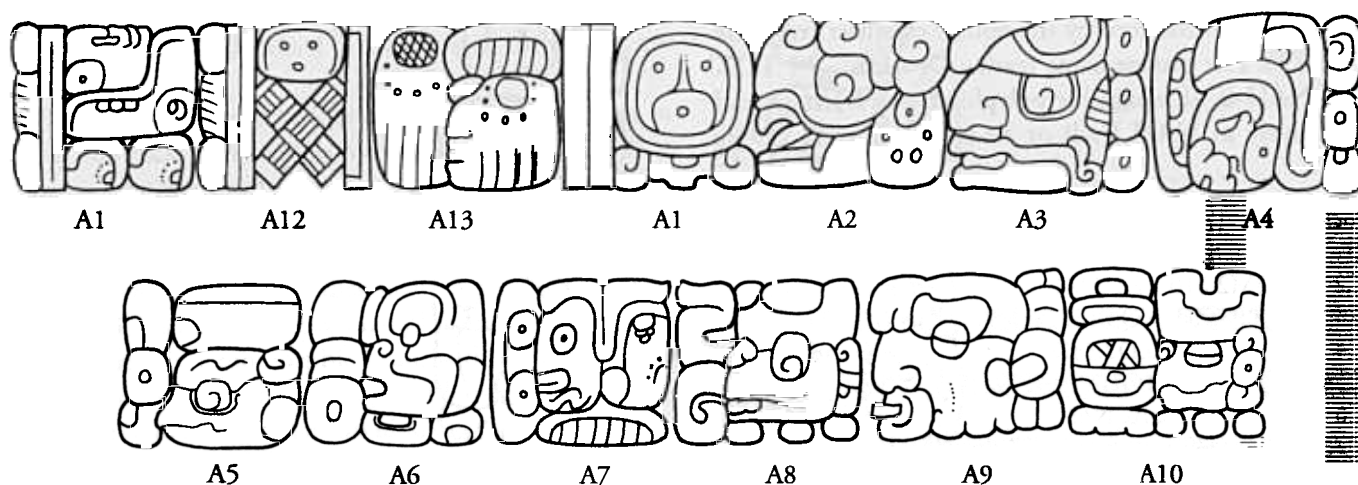


Figure 12. Drawing of hieroglyphic caption A (drawing by Christian M. Prager, 2004)

| Block | Transcription    | Transliteration      |
|-------|------------------|----------------------|
| A1    | 010.ZZ1°AM1      | <i>lajuun ajaw</i>   |
| A2    | ACK              | <i>chapaat chan</i>  |
| A3    | SN4              | <i>kinich ajaw</i>   |
| A4    | HE6.ZE1:AMC      | <i>u k'aba'</i>      |
| A5    | 32D.BM2:AC6      | <i>yuk'ib'</i>       |
| A6    | 3M2.AA1:2S2      | <i>ti kaw</i>        |
| A7    | HE6.ZX4:1M4      | <i>u tumil?</i>      |
| A8    | SSF              | <i>k'awiil</i>       |
| A9    | PT4?             | ?                    |
| A10   | 006.XH3:1G1.ZC2? | <i>wak chan witz</i> |
| A11   | 1G4.MR7:ZE5      | <i>aj chih?</i>      |
| A12   | 1G4.ZQB.1G2      | <i>aj wi? nah</i>    |
| A13   | XE2.AA1:XE2      | <i>ba kab</i>        |

Table 4. Epigraphic analysis of Caption A (Fig. 12)

is confirmed by a substitution pattern found at the cave sanctuary of Naj Tunich and the archaeological site of Caracol (Martin and Grube 2000:96), the meaning of this morpheme is still problematic because it is only attested in 16<sup>th</sup> century Yucatec. Nevertheless, I propose the tentative translation “his tasting” based on the Colonial Yucatec Mayan terms *tum* or *tumtah* for “to taste, to try, to sample wine or other liquid” (Michelson 1976:351). Given that the preceding expression (A6) is “chocolate beverage,” the interpretation of the collocation in question as “his tasting” is likely. This expression probably indicates that the chocolate beverage was sampled by the individual named in subsequent glyph blocks A8–A13. This name includes A8 *k'awiil* A9? A10 *wak chaan witz* (see Figs. 12 and 15). The

classification of the portrait glyph (A9) as ML-PT4 stands on shaky ground as it cannot be read. The proper name of this individual is comprised of the name of the god K'awiil (A8) and *wak chan witz* (A10) which includes the name for a mythological snake-like being elsewhere known as *wak chan* (e.g. Hauberg Stela). The subsequent two collocations (A11–12) include titles and are introduced by the hieroglyph ML-1G4 /AJ/, the agentive affix. Grube and others have interpreted the hieroglyph at A11 as a founder title that is often nicknamed “chi-witz” and borne by early kings considered by their Late Classic successors to be the founders of their respective cities (Grube 1988; Schele 1986). Its phonemic reading, however, is unknown. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that the title refers to a mystified location considered to be the place of origin of divine kingship in the Classic Maya Lowlands (Grube n.d.:10ff). The next collocation (A12) consists of the sign ML-ZQB, depicting crossed torches and a bundle. This is probably read as *aj wi? nah* “he from the root-house.” This epithet has been identified as referring to the first king of a city, the founder of a lineage (Grube 1988; Schele 1986). The name phrase concludes at block A13 with the well-known title *ba kab* “the first of the earth.”

### Conclusion

Who, then, is the individual named in the rim text? Both titles at A11 and A12 indicate that the owner of the Schaffhausen ceramic vessel was the founder of a city and its ruling lineage. Given that both Yuknoom the Great and his spouse are depicted and named on the vessel, it seems likely

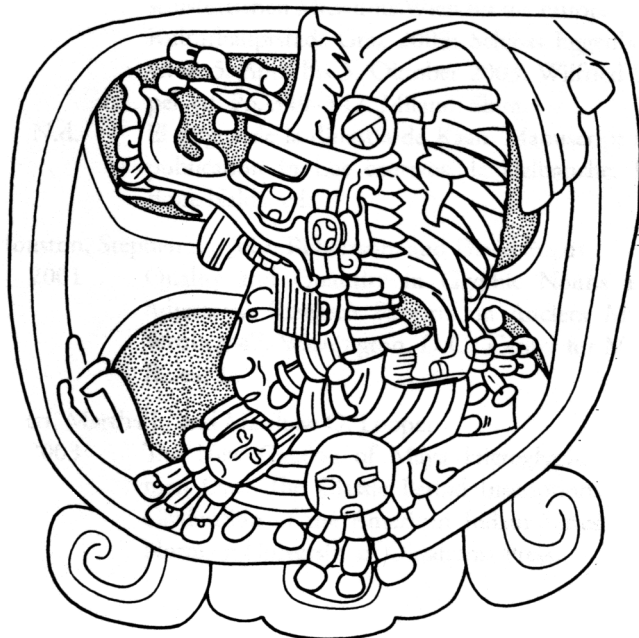


Figure 13. Drawing of medallion 1 (drawing by Christian M. Prager, 2004)



Figure 14. Drawing of medallion 2 (drawing by Christian M. Prager, 2004)

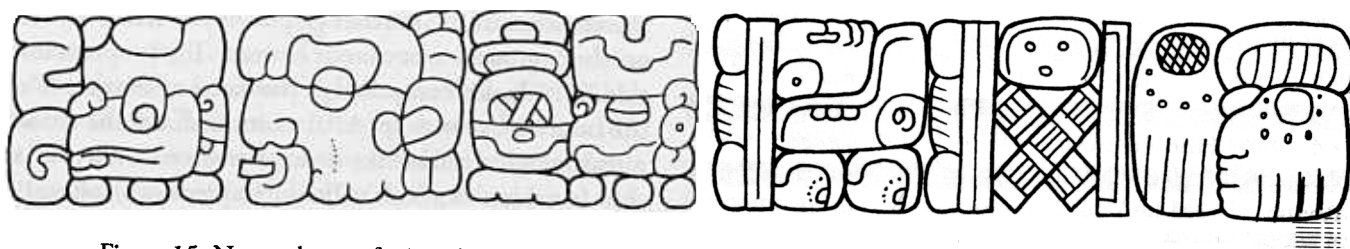


Figure 15. Name phrase of *K'awiil ... Wak Chan Witz*, the probable founder of Calakmul and its ruling lineage (drawing by Christian M. Prager, 2004)

that the individual mentioned on the rim text is also associated with Calakmul and may, thus, be the dynasty founder and the founding father of this site. This hypothesis cannot be confirmed, however, owing to the unreadability of the eroded Calakmul monuments in order to furnish further evidence.

In summary, the Schaffhausen vessel provides new information on the dynastic history of Calakmul. This remarkable piece of Classic Maya pottery not only portrays Yuknoom the Great and his spouse, but also most likely yields the proper name and titles of the founder of Calakmul and its ruling dynasty. According to the rim text (Caption A) the ceramic vessel served as a drinking vessel for chocolate and was owned by *k'awiil ... wak chan witz*, the alleged founding father of Calakmul whose biography, except for his proper name, remains a mystery.

Given that both figures are depicted as royal ancestors, it seems likely that *Yuknoom Yich'aak K'ak'*, Yuknoom the

Great's heir to the throne, commissioned the ceramic vessel venerating his famous predecessor. Born in 9.10.16.16.19 3 Kawak 3 Keh (6 October 649) *Yuknoom Yich'ak K'ak'* acceded to Calakmul's throne in 9.12.13.17.7 6 Manik' 5 Zip (3 April 686). Assuming that the ancestor hypothesis is correct, it is likely that the vase from Schaffhausen dates to around 9.12.13.17.7 (3 April 686).

The ownership of the vessel is very interesting: according to the PSS, the vessel was owned by the late dynastic founder. Ceramic vessels were not only owned by living individuals, but could also be possessed by individuals from the otherworld, such as ancestors or gods. This so-called "otherworldly" possession of objects was first noticed by Houston, Robertson and Stuart in association with the possession of writing, engraving, dwellings and burials (2001: 27ff). It seems that objects, such as ceramic vessels, ritual paraphernalia or dwellings were equally possessed by living individuals and by characters from a world beyond.



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