

## CLASSIC MAYA PLATES IDENTIFIED WITH A RARE VESSEL TYPE SPELLED AS **ya-ja ji-b'i** AND **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**

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### **Introduction**

In a preliminary survey of vessel type designations within a corpus of over 550 examples of the Primary Standard Sequence on Classic Maya painted, incised, and modeled/carved ceramics a total of 25 different types could be identified, one of which was identified recently on a Uaxactún-style plate (cf. Boot 2003a, n.d.). Several vessel types are common throughout the Maya area, while other less common vessel types can only be found in rare and even unique examples of the Primary Standard Sequence (cf. Coe 1973; henceforth abbreviated to PSS). In this essay the examples that contain a reference to the vessel type **ya-ja ji-b'i** or **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]** will be discussed<sup>1</sup>.

The spelling **ya-ja ji-b'i** for the vessel type has been identified by several epigraphers on a plate in the collection at the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels, Belgium (most of this research has remained unpublished). A parallel spelling was additionally noted on a plate in the local museum at Pomoná (cf. Lopes

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<sup>1</sup> In this essay the following phonemic orthography is employed in representing lexical items in Classic Maya: ' , a, b', ch, ch', e, h, i, j, k, k', l, m, n, o, p, p', s, t, t', tz, tz', u, w, x, and y. In this orthography the /h/ represents a glottal aspirate or glottal voiced fricative (/h/ as in English "house"), while /j/ represents a velar aspirate or velar voiced fricative (/j/ as in Spanish "joya") (cf. Grube n.d.). In this essay no reconstruction of vowel complexity or quality is provided, as originally suggested by Houston, Stuart, and Robertson (1998), and amended and extended by Lacadena and Wichmann (n.d.). Absence or presence of vowel complexity would have been indicated by specific harmonic and disharmonic spellings. At present I follow a proposal by Kaufman and Justeson in which disharmonic spellings are identified as spelling a reflection of their most common -V/ («-V:l») suffix (cf. Kaufman 2003: 29-34). All transliterations are only reconstructions of Classic Maya items, not "true" linguistic items (cf. Boot 2002: 6-7). In the transcription of Maya hieroglyphic signs uppercase bold type letters refer to logographic values (i.e. **MAN**), while lowercase bold type letters refer to syllabic values (i.e. **na**). Transliterations thereof will be placed in italics (i.e. *naman*). Infix signs are placed between square brackets (i.e. **ji[b'i]**). Original spellings from source material (i.e. dictionaries, grammars, or previous publications) will be retained and placed between double pointed or angular brackets (i.e. «hihihib»). T-numbers, if applicable, refer to the hieroglyphic signs as cataloged by Thompson (1962).

2003), while the present author identified a third example in the rim text on a plate excavated at Tikal (cf. Boot 2003b). In recent epigraphic research the present author identified a fourth but incomplete example on a ceramic sherd excavated at Piedras Negras.

All four examples will be discussed and illustrated in this essay. Further, it will be suggested that this vessel type can be placed within a category of instrumental nouns that end in *-Vj-ib'* and of which the root is formed by an intransitive verb root *aj-* "wake up".

### ***The Four Examples***

A plate currently on public display at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, Belgium, contains the first example. The long and beautifully painted rim text opens with a short PSS that only identifies the vessel type and continues with the patron or owner of the vessel; the opening collocation is marked by the white arrow in Figure 1a. The two collocations for the vessel type can be transcribed as **ya-ja ji-b'i** (Figure 1b)<sup>2</sup>.

A plate currently on exhibit at the local museum at the site of Pomoná, Tabasco, Mexico, contains a rim text very similar to the Brussels plate mentioned as the first example (Figure 2a). The rim text of this second example opens with a short PSS, in this case the so-called STEP[**yi**] collocation, followed by **yi-chi**. This is a rare example of a PSS in which the so-called Initial Sign is absent (cf. Boot 2003c); currently there are some seven examples known (this example, Kerr No. 1609, 3636, 5976, 6436, 8007, and Robiscek 1978: Fig. 170 [see note 2]). After these two opening collocations one can identify the glyphic compounds that spell **ya-ja ji-b'i** (Figure 2b); only in small calligraphic details this spelling differs from the first example. These first two examples can be found on plates that contain information relative to their possible provenance. Epigraphic research by Lopes shows that both plates belong to the same individual who carries an "Emblem Glyph" pertaining to the Naman site (spelled **na-MAN-ni**). The Naman site has been identified tentatively as La Florida (see Map) by epigraphers as Stephen Houston and Stanley Guenter (cf. Lopes 2003: 1-2).

The third example of this vessel type can be found on a plate excavated in archaeological context at Tikal; found in Burial 195, the plate cataloged as MT216b (Figure 3a) contains a long primary rim text. The rim text opens with two collocations that spell **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]** (Figure 3b). This spelling is a variant of the two previous spellings and may spell an alternative rendering of the vessel type or it may indicate that those two spellings are abbreviated or underspelled. The vessel type does end in **ji[b'i]**; note that the syllabic sign **b'i** has been infixated into the

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<sup>2</sup> An additional, larger photograph of this plate can be found in a 1975 Belgian catalog entitled "Vergeten Indiaanse Grootheid" as its exhibition number 49. The catalog was published as *America Antigua*, Nr. 5 (1975) (Mechelen, Belgium: Vlaams Instituut voor Amerikanistiek). This catalog also illustrates a side of the vessel illustrated in Robiscek 1978 as Figure 170, indicating that at that time this vessel was probably part of a Belgian private collection ("Vergeten Indiaanse Grootheid", No. 50). Its present whereabouts are unknown.

earflare of the rodent-like animal that serves to spell the syllable **ji**. The vessel type is the only part of the PSS that has been written on this plate and the rim text continues with the full name and title phrase of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Tikal ruler named K'inich Waw (as recently deciphered by Guenter [2002: 303-310]) a.k.a. Animal Skull (Martin and Grube 2000: 40-41).

A sherd of the rim of a plate, excavated at Piedras Negras, contains the fourth example of this vessel type (Figure 4). The sherd, only a small fragment, contains three glyphic signs. It opens with **ja**, followed by **ji[b'i]**; note that in this example the T585 **b'i** sign is infixed into the forehead of the animal employed to represent the syllable **ji**. The sequence **ja ji[b'i]** is clearly reminiscent of the above examples that are spelled **ya-ja ji-b'i** and **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**<sup>3</sup>. This small fragment thus provides large part of the two collocations that spell this specific vessel type.

In total there are thus four examples. Two examples can be found on unprovenanced plates, the rim texts of which refer to the "Emblem Glyph" of Naman, possibly the archaeological site of La Florida. A third example can be identified on a plate excavated at Tikal, while a fourth example has been excavated at Piedras Negras. These three locations triangulate a substantial part of the central Classic Maya area (see Map).

### ***Discussion***

At present there are four spellings which provide the same vessel type:

|           |                 |                |
|-----------|-----------------|----------------|
| Plate 1:  | <b>ya-ja</b>    | <b>ji-b'i</b>  |
| Plate 2:  | <b>ya-ja</b>    | <b>ji-b'i</b>  |
| Plate 3:  | <b>ya-ja-la</b> | <b>ji[b'i]</b> |
| Plate 4 : | <b>-ja</b>      | <b>ji[b'i]</b> |

The rare variant on the Tikal plate which provides the T178 **la** syllabic sign may indicate that there were two possible spellings for this vessel type or that the other three known spellings are abbreviated or underrepresented spellings. As such the tentative transliterations may be:

|          |                    |    |                         |
|----------|--------------------|----|-------------------------|
| Plate 1: | <i>y-aj-aj-ib'</i> | or | <i>y-aj-al-(a)j-ib'</i> |
| Plate 2: | <i>y-aj-aj-ib'</i> | or | <i>y-aj-al-(a)j-ib'</i> |
| Plate 3: |                    |    | <i>y-aj-al-(a)j-ib'</i> |
| Plate 4: | <i>y-aj-aj-ib'</i> | or | <i>y-aj-al-(a)j-ib'</i> |

The *y-* prefix and the *-ib'* ending are at present the most certain parts of the transliteration suggested here; the third person prevocalic possessive pronoun *y-* indicates that the root of the vessel type opened with *a-* (as suggested here *aj-* or *aj-*

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<sup>3</sup> To the lower right of the large sign for **ja** one can identify a small black dot. It would not surprise me if another such small black dot was originally present on the lower left side of the **ja** sign. If so, these two small black dots may not have been ornamental but instrumental in providing the syllabic sign **la**. If correct, this would be the second spelling as **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**; it may be additional evidence that the remaining spellings without **-la** are abbreviations or underrepresentations.

*al-*), while the monosyllabic suffix *-ib'* is a common instrumental suffix. This kind of suffix derives an instrumental noun from a root or derived intransitive verb (cf. Wichmann 1999: 94-109; compare to Bricker 1986: Table 20). Examples of other instrumental nouns in the PSS are the rare gloss *we'ib'* "eat-instrument" (*we'* "iv. eat", *-ib'* "instrumental suffix") or the common gloss *uk'ib'* "drink-instrument" (*uk'* "iv. drink", *-ib'* "instrumental suffix").

The root of these four collocations perhaps was *aj-*. In languages belonging to the Yucatecan group the following items can be found:

|          |                 |                         |
|----------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Lacandon | <i>'aaj-ech</i> | "are you awake?"        |
|          | <i>'aaj-en</i>  | "wake up!" (imperative) |
|          | <i>'aj-al</i>   | "wake up"               |
| Yucatec  | <i>'ajal</i>    | "wake up"               |
| Mopan    | <i>'aj</i>      | "wake up"               |
|          | <i>'aaj-AI</i>  | "wake up"               |

(after Dienhart 1989: 697, "wake up"; compare to Kaufman 2003: 1251-1252, "awake")

These entries seem to indicate that *aj-* was the root of an intransitive verb with the meaning "wake up" (there are no cognates in the Ch'olan language group). As such *-aj-* within *y-aj-aj-ib'* may represent the verb "wake up", while *aj-al* may be a gerund of the root *aj-* (MacLeod, personal communication, November 17, 2003)<sup>4</sup>.

In three examples the root seems to be *aj-* followed by a bisyllabic suffix *-aj-ib'*. While *-ib'* is the most common monosyllabic suffix to derive an instrumental noun, there is a bisyllabic variant known in for instance Ch'ortí', namely *-(o)n-ib'* or its reduced form *-n-ib'* (cf. Wichmann 1999). Bricker identifies the suffix *-on* as an antipassive suffix "that appears in instrumental nouns derived from root transitives in Chol" (Bricker 1986: 44). The suffix *-(o)n-ib'* can also be found in Chontal instrumental nouns, note for instance *ch'uy-on-ib'* "vitrina", *ix-on-ib'* [*\*ixim-on-ib'*] "desgranador", *jus-on-ib'* "ampolla", *pät-on-ib'* "trabajadero", *p'is-on-ib'* "medida, metro", *wix-n-ib'* "vejiga", and *xec'-on-ib'* "chuzo, vara, lanza" (Keller and Luciano G. 1997: 109, 122, 144, 189, 201, 282, 286). A search in vocabularies of several languages belonging to the Ch'olan language group provided the following two lists of examples of instrumental nouns pertinent to the present case; also the noun or verb root is included on which the instrumental noun is based.

<sup>4</sup> Wichmann (1999: 105) lists several instrumental nouns that contain a *-Vr* suffix (the Ch'ortí' variant of a *-V/* suffix):

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>sut</i>  | (pos) 'al revés, volteado'                                     |
| <i>sut-ur-n-ib'</i>                                 | 'beater for liquids (molinillo)'                               |
| <i>tzak</i>   | (pos) 'manojeado'  |
| <i>tzak-ar-n-ib'</i>                                | 'goading stick (used for oxen)'                                |
| ( <i>yuk</i>  | [pos?] 'stirring, trembling; shaking of the body, convulsion', |
| added by the present author after Wisdom 1950: 771) |  |
| <i>yu'k-ur-n-ib'</i>                                | 'stirring stick'   |

This *-Vr* (*\*-V/*) suffix may identify positional roots, as it does in the derivation of positional verbs according to one specific verb paradigm (e.g. Classic Maya *chum-l-aj*, *yuk-l-aj*).

The Ch'ol language of Tumbala provides the following examples:

(/A/ represents the /shwa/)

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| e'tel       | s. trabajo (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 58)  |
| *e'tijibAl  | el equipo de trabajo (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 58, 161)                         |
| loq'uel     | vi. salir (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 74)   |
| loq'uib ja' | vertiente (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 74, 182)                                    |
| misujel     | vi. barrer (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 80)  |
| misujib     | escoba (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 80, 162)                                       |
| pAc'        | vt. sembrar (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 97)                                       |
| pAc'ojib    | macana (palo con punta para sembrar maíz)<br>(Aulie and Aulie 1978: 97, 168) |
| tic'an      | vi. cocer (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 111)  |
| tic'Ajib    | estufa, lumbre (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 111, 162, 168)                         |
| toj'esan    | vt. guiar (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 113)  |
| toj'ijib'   | enseñanza (Aulie and Aulie 1978: 113, 161)                                   |

These examples from the Ch'ol language indicate that in specific cases the root of the verb is suffixed by a bisyllabic suffix *-Vj-ib'* when an instrumental noun is formed. Note as such «e't-el» and «\*e't-ijibAl» (this linguistic item only exists in possessed form, thus *y-e't-ijib'-Al*), «pAc'» and «pAc'-ojib» as well as «toj'-esan» and «toj'-ijib» (these two verbs are transitive). Other instrumental nouns use the monosyllabic *-ib'* suffix, for instance «misuj-ib» from «misuj-el», but these instrumental nouns are derived from intransitive verbs. Possibly in Ch'ol there is a bisyllabic instrumental suffix *-Vj-ib'* present that derives an instrumental noun from both a noun and a transitive verb root. It is of interest to note that Barbara MacLeod has identified in her Ch'ol language notes a bisyllabic suffix *-Aj-ib'* that derives instrumental nouns (personal communication via e-mail, November 17, 2003).

Another set of instrumental nouns can be found in Ch'oltí' (cf. Morán 1935 [1625/1695]: "Vocabulario en lengua ch'olti"; the actual vocabulary is Spanish-Ch'oltí):

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| boho            | barrenar  |
| bohonahib       | barreno   |
| cantez          | enseñar   |
| cantesnahib     | el lugar donde se enseña  |
| hihiel          | descansar   |
| hihihib         | descanso  |
| paza            | urdir   |
| pazmahib chucuh | urdir   |
| tontei          | apuntalar   |
| tontenahib      | puntal de casa  |
| tziba           | escribir  |
| tzibaib         | l. tzibahib tintero<br>(the introductory l. probably stands for <i>lacandon</i> ,<br>indicating an entry in any Guatemalan Maya language<br>instead of "only" Lacandon) |

The opening paragraph of Chapter 2 entitled "Los nombres Ynstrumentales Y Verbales" of Morán's "Arte en lengua Ch'olti" provides the following:

Los Ynstrumentales se forman de la simplicidad de los verbos de esta manera; a los verbos que acaban en n añadirle aib, Y a los que acaban en z añadirle naib, Y a los q~ acaban en uocal sola esta particula ib ; Vg. ch'ocben amar, ch'ohbenaib. aquello con que amo; tzatlez. fortalecer. tzatzleznai. lo que sirue de fortaleza; c'olo librar, c'oloib. con que se libra; xama. andar, xamaib. aquello con que ando; tziba. escriuir, tzibaib. aquello con q~ se escriue; c'ach'a. atar o amarrar, c'ach'aib. con que se ata o se amarra. Aqui i en otros se come la A: maian vc'ach'ib c'a cabayu, no ai con que atar nuestro cauallo. (Morán 1935 [1625/1695]: "Arte", p. 3 [original spelling retained])

These three different suffixes «aib», «naib», and «ib» can be recognized in the examples in this paragraph of Morán's "Arte", but entries from the "Vocabulario" deviate from this description. In stead of a suffix «naib» one can recognize a suffix of the shape «nahib» or *-n-aj-ib'* («boho-n-ah-ib», «tonte-n-ah-ib», «cantes-n-ah-ib») or «mahib» or *-m-ah-ib'* («paz-m-ah-ib»; /-n-/ to /-m-/ shift due to a process of metathesis). This suffix «nahib» or *-n-aj-ib'* may be the full form of Morán's «naib» as described in his "Arte". In present-day Ch'ortí, the suffix of the shape *-n-ib'* (cf. Wichmann 1999: 94-95, 103-107) may be derived from this earlier Ch'oltian suffix «nahib» or «naib». Other examples seem to contain a suffix of the shape «hib» or *-j-ib'* («hihi-h-ib», «tziba-h-ib»), possibly the full form of Morán's «ib» (Morán's 'h' in the suffix «-nahib» and «-hib» represents the /j/). The suffix «hib» actually may be a reduction of the bisyllabic suffix *-aj-ib'* as found on the Classic Maya ceramic plates.

Noteworthy is Morán's remark that the /a/ in «aib» can be deleted («se come la A»); possibly this indicates that the /a/ is optional, and, if correctly deduced, this may also apply to the part *-aj* in *-n-aj-ib'* («nahib» > «naib» > *-n-ib'*) and *-aj-ib'* («hib» > «ib»/ *-ib'*).

Based on the Ch'ol and Ch'olti' entries one can identify a bisyllabic suffix of the shape *-Vj-ib'* that derives instrumental nouns, in which *-V-* in some cases echoes the root vowel, while in other cases it does not. The examples from Ch'ol that contain this bisyllabic suffix are derived from nouns or transitive verb roots; possibly in those examples the suffix *-Vj* is a detransitivizing suffix to which the suffix *-ib'* was attached to derive the instrumental noun. The Ch'olti' examples are more complex as these seem to contain the *-n-* (or *-m-*, due to a process of metathesis) that might be a reduction of the *-on* antipassive suffix as identified by Bricker (1986: 44) and which serves detransitivization. Noteworthy are Morán's instrumental suffixes registered as the pairs «nahib»/«naib» and «hib»/«ib». If correctly identified, this would strengthen the case that there was indeed a bisyllabic suffix *-aj-ib'* that derived (a certain class of) instrumental nouns.

The epigraphic Classic Maya examples *y-aj-aj-ib'* and *y-aj-al-aj-ib'* (possibly reduced to *y-aj-al-j-ib'* due to stress on the final syllable) also contain a bisyllabic suffix *-aj-ib'*. As *aj-* is an intransitive verb root, there is no need to add a detransitivizing suffix. This may support the idea that all four spellings lead to *y-aj-al-(aj)-ib'* and that only in one clear case the **-la** is spelled out; thus *-aj-ib'* may be a bisyllabic suffix to derive (a certain class of) instrumental nouns.

The possible meaning of the plates marked as *y-aj-aj-ib'* and *y-aj-al-aj-ib'* may be "wake up or awake-instrument". This particular denomination seems to indicate that certain plates may have served a more ceremonial purpose than "simply" being an "eat-instrument" (*we'-ib'*) or a "drink-instrument" (*uk'-ib'*). In the Classic Maya period there are rare examples of ceramic containers and plates that can be found identified through metaphorical expressions as *y-otot* "the house (in sense of home)", *y-otot u-k'inil* "the house of the sun", and *u-lak y-otot u-k'inil u-chanil* "the plate, the house of the sun and sky" (cf. Boot n.d., Houston 1998). In three cases the name of the owner of the "wake up or awake-instrument" is given; twice it is the ruler of the Naman polity, once it is the ruler of the Tikal polity. In the fourth example no further collocations survived, but the sherd was found at Piedras Negras.

### **Final Remarks**

In a corpus of over 550 Primary Standard Sequences there are four plates that are defined as **ya-ja ji-b'i** or **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**. These collocations tentatively can be transliterated as *y-aj-aj-ib'* and *y-aj-al-aj-ib'* (or *y-aj-al-j-ib'*), the root of which might be the intransitive verb *aj-* "wake up; awake". These possessed epigraphic Classic Maya instrumental nouns employ a bisyllabic suffix of the shape *-aj-ib'* to derive an instrumental noun. These plates were possibly identified by the Classic Maya as "wake up or awake-instruments"; as such food stuffs or other objects served on these plates were "wakened up" and thus were ceremonially empowered before they were presented by their respective owners. The precise function of these plates in Classic Maya ceremonies needs to be researched further.

## ***Acknowledgments***

I would like to thank Joel Skidmore for providing a color photograph of the Pomoná plate as exhibited at the site museum of Pomoná. I also thank Barbara MacLeod for her comments on the linguistic contents of earlier drafts of this essay; her suggestions improved the final version considerably. As always, unless stated otherwise, the opinions in this essay are mine.

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Electronic version transcribed and transliterated by Brian Stross and available at URL: <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/stross/chorti/>

Essay History

First version: **April 2, 2003**

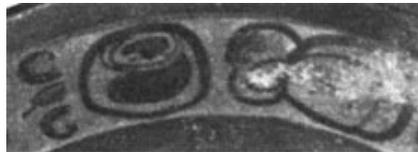
Revised: April & November 2003, January & March 2004

This version: **March 29, 2004**





Plate in the Collection of the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels, Belgium,  
marked as **ya-ja ji-b'i** (Inv. No. A.AM 66-14)  
(after Anonymous 1976: Cat. No. 100)



Detail of the PSS text showing the Vessel type spelled **ya-ja ji-b'i**  
(after Anonymous 1976: Cat. No. 100)

**Figure 1**



Plate in the collection of the Museo del Sitio de Pomoná, Tabasco, Mexico,  
marked as **ya-ja ji-b'i** (Inv. No. 10-422277)  
(after Schmidt, De la Garza, and Nalda 1998: Figure 447)



Detail of the PSS text showing the Vessel Type spelled **ya-ja ji-b'i**  
(photograph by Joel Skidmore)

**Figure 2**

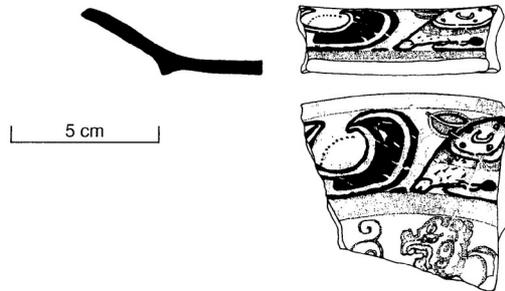


Plate (MT 216b) excavated at Tikal (Burial 195), Guatemala, marked as  
**ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**  
(after Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruíz 1979: 225)



Detail of the PSS text showing the Vessel Type spelled **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**  
(drawing by the author after Culbert 1993: Figure 51)

**Figure 3**



Ceramic Sherd found at Piedras Negras, Guatemala, with the Glyphic Sequence  
**ja ji[b'i]**  
(after Houston et al. 1998: Figure 2)

**Figure 3**



Plate 1: **ya-ja ji-b'i**



Plate 2: **ya-ja ji-b'i**

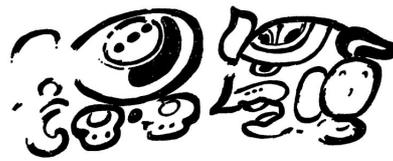


Plate 3: **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**



Plate 4: **ja ji[b'i]**

**Figure 5:** The Four Examples of this Rare Vessel Type