



Glyph Dwellers

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Five Inscribed El Zotz-Style Vessels in the Fralin Museum of Art

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In Summer 2015, we had the opportunity to study the Maya ceramic vessels in the Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, in Charlottesville. Not only does this museum house a number of important inscribed vessels (as well as many iconographically and artistically significant uninscribed works, not discussed here), but almost all of these have been unknown to the scholarly community until the present. In this note, we discuss the inscriptions of five of these vessels. All are painted in styles associated with the site of El Zotz, Guatemala (see Houston 2008).

1989.31.33 (MS1185)

This vessel is a rounded bowl with a yellowish cream ground and black and red bands around the rim (**Figs. 1-3**). The inscription is painted in shades of orange with black outlines. The inscription is a Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) or Dedicatory Formula, beginning with the initial sign and the "haab-hand" dedication verb typical of El Zotz ceramic inscriptions. The next two words, *yich utz'ihbaal* "its painted surface," are distributed one syllable per block, which is also typical for El Zotz inscriptions. At positions H and I, the vessel is referred to as a *Pa'chan jaay* "Pa'chan [El Zotz] cup."



Fig. 1. Bowl, Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.33. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 2. Bowl, Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.33. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 3. Bowl, Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.33. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

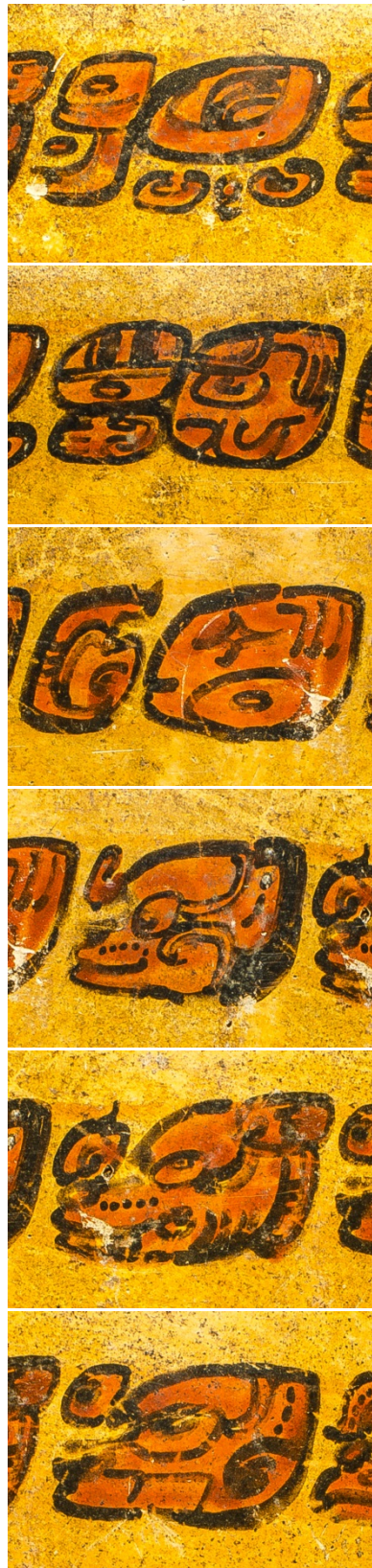
Next, the text states that this is a drinking vessel for *is ul*, or "sweet potato atole" (see Beliaev, Davletshin, and Tokovinine 2010:263–264). The *i* syllable used to spell *is* has a hatched lower section, similar to the analogous grapheme on Fralin Museum of Art 1980.5.8 (Fig. 4; see Loper and Polyukhovych 2016). Note that both terms *is* and *ul* are abbreviated on 1989.31.33. The owner is named only as a youth.



Fig. 4. Comparison of *i* graphemes spelling *is* "sweet potato." Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.33 and 1980.5.8. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Table 1. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1989.31.33. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



A	a-LAY-ya	alay	here
B	?	?	is dedicated?
C	yi-chi	yich	its surface
D	u-	utz'ihbaal	its painting
E	-tz'i-	"	"
F	-ba-	"	"



G -li " "



H pa-CHAN-
na pa'chan Pa'chan [El Zotz]



I ja-yi jaay cup



J yu-k'i- yuk'ib his drinking vessel



K -bi " "



L ta ta for



M i is sweet potato



N lu ul atole



O ch'o-ko ch'ok youth



1980.56.2

This small cylindrical vessel is heavily eroded, but enough of the text and image survives to identify it as an example of a familiar theme in El Zotz ceramics, an array of *wahy* spirits (Figs. 5-7; see Houston and Stuart 1989; Grube and Nahm 1994; Stuart 2005:160–165). The Primary Standard Sequence, painted in polychrome on an orange-cream ground, consists of an initial sign, dedication verb, and *utz'ihbaal*, written over four glyph blocks, in typical El Zotz style. The dedication verb is possibly a God C-like variant similar to that which appears on numerous El Zotz-style vessels, including K3392, 4548, 4552, 4962, 5084, 8339, and 9099. The rest of the rim text is eroded.



Fig. 5. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.56.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 6. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.56.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 7. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.56.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

The main field of the vessel originally featured three *wahy* images, but only two of these, as well as two captions, survive. One caption names K'ahk' Ohl May Chamay/Chamiiy ("Fiery Heart Deer Death"), a spirit that appears on other vessels in the form of a corpse with a flaming belly, who holds a staff studded with three blades (Fig. 8; see also K1646; see Stuart 2005:164; Grube and Nahm 1994:706). Unfortunately on 1980.56.2, the figure is almost completely eroded, though the column of flames adjacent to the caption probably represents the fire that explodes from the belly of this *wahy* (see Fig. 5). This *wahy* is stated to be associated with Ux Haabte', a toponym identified with the Río Azul area

(see Tokovinine 2013:121). The same toponym is linked to K'ahk' Ohl May Chamay/Chamiy on Kerr 1389, K1646, Denver Art Museum 1998.424, and K1256 (here called K'ahk' Ohl May Tuun).



Fig. 8. K'ahk' Ohl May Chamay/Chamiy. Photograph ©Justin Kerr K1652.



Fig. 9. K'ahk' Neh Tz'uutz'. Photograph ©Justin Kerr K1181.

The caption pertaining to the next *wahy*, a deer with a long tail, is lost (Fig. 6). However, we know this being from other vessels (e.g. K3392), where it is named Ochil Maax ("? Monkey;" Grube and Nahm 1994:695-696). On K1203 and K2010, this *wahy* is linked to the lord of an unknown location indicated with the compound "vertical loop"-TE'.

The third *wahy* shown on this vessel has the form of a coati with jaguar spots and paws and a flaming tail (Fig. 7), similar to beings called K'ahk' Neh Tz'uutz' that appear on other vessels (Fig. 9; Grube and Nahm 1994:699; Stuart 2005:164). However, on 1980.56.2, this being is referred to as Hix Tz'uutz' ("Feline Coati"). The same being appears and is named on Kerr 5084, though with an added "fire" before HIX. The lord with whom this being is associated is difficult to discern. The AJAW superfix is clear enough, but the main sign looks like a bundle. It could be that this is the Tikal main sign, as seems to be the case on Kerr 0927 (though we caution that this may be an artifact of modern restoration). Elsewhere, however, the main sign associated with the location of K'ahk' Neh Tz'uutz' seems to be different from the Tikal main sign, lacking the horizontal knot (see K1181, 1259, and possibly 3459 and 9254). We consider that this is a distinct, unknown location, referred to using grapheme HB6 in the revised Maya Hieroglyphic Database catalog. If the HB6 "bundle" location with which these *wahy* are associated is the same, then it may be the case that K'ahk' Neh Tz'uutz', Hix Tz'uutz', and K'ahk' Hix Tz'uutz' are simply variant names of the same being.



Table 2. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1980.56.2. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



A **a-LAY-ya** alay here



B ? ? is dedicated?



C **yi-chi** yich its surface



D **[u-]** utz'ihbaal? its painting?



E **-tz'i-** utz'ihbaal its painting



F **-ba-** " "



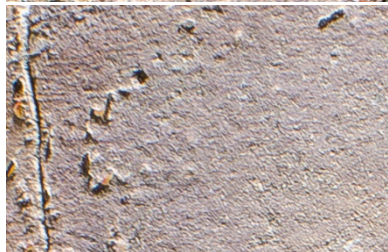
G -li " "



H - - -



I - - -



J - - -



K - - -



L - - -



M

—

—

—



N

—

—

—



O1

K'AHK' OHL

k'ahk' ohl

K'ahk' Ohl May
Chamay/Chamiiy



O2

MAY CHAM?

may chamay/
chamiiy

"



O3

wa-WAHY-

uwahyal

his spirit



O4

-la

"

"



O5

3 HAAB-TE'

ux haabte'

Ux Haabte'



P1

HIX

hix

Hix Tz'uutz' [Feline
Coati]



P2

tz'u-tz'i

tz'uutz'

"



P3

-la

uwahyal

his spirit



P4

wa-WAHY-

"

"



P5

? AJAW

? ajaw

? ajaw



1980.58.9 (MS1196)

This cylinder vessel features a black rim and upper and lower zones painted in thin vertical overlapping orange washes, as seen on other El Zotz-style vessels such as Kerr 5350 (Figs. 10-12). The truncated PSS, consisting of nine glyphs painted in black, red, and orange, appears on a cream ground in the middle zone of the vessel. After the initial sign, there are two dedication verbs: the female head, followed by the "haab-hand" sign. Next is *yich utz'ihbaal* "its painted surface," spelled syllabically over six blocks, in typical El Zotz fashion.



Fig. 10. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.58.9. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 11. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.58.9. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 12. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.58.9. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Table 3. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1980.58.9. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

	A	a-LAY-ya	alay	here
	B	?	?	is dedicated?
	C	?	?	is dedicated?
	D	yi-	yich	its surface
	E	-chi	"	"
	F	u-	utz'ihbaal	its painting



G

-tz'i-

"

"



H

-ba-

"

"



I

-li

"

"

**1988.63.1**

This elaborately painted plate is decorated with black and red lines framing a glyph band on an orange-cream ground (Fig. 13). In the center of the plate is a flaming deity head, punctured by a small "kill hole."

The plate's inscription of twenty glyph blocks comprises a PSS. It begins with an initial sign, followed by what is likely a simplified variant of the "haab-hand" dedication verb plus *ja* suffix at position B. In blocks C-H, we have *yich utz'ihbaal* written out one syllable per block. Next, at block I is *pa'chan*, the ancient name for El Zotz, and then *lak* "plate," spelled out in blocks J and K. At block L is the captive head variant of *u*, followed by a head with a "tamale" glyph in the eye, reading **WE'** (M), followed by **bi-li** (N). This combination refers to the function of this vessel as *uwe'ibil* "his eating vessel/instrument." The same term appears on two other El Zotz-style plates, Kerr 5460 and Kerr 6080 (see Zender 2000). Next, at block O is another captive head *u*, followed at block P by *sak chijil* "white deer." Next, at block Q is the same head with a "tamale"-sign in place of the eye that typically functions as **WE'**. On Kerr 5460, the "tamale"-mouth grapheme appears in this position, probably reading *we'e/* 'food' (Zender 2000:1044-1045). We suggest an analogous function for the sign at block Q on Fralin 1988.63.1.



Fig. 13. Plate, Fralin Museum of Art 1988.63.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

The titles of the owner of the vessel appear in blocks R and S, "great youth," while the personal name occupies the final block, T. The name consists of two signs, the first seemingly T58 **SAK**, the second



possibly T99 o. The same combination of Sak O' appears as well on Calakmul Stela 51 as part of the name of the artist Sak O' Yibah Tzak Bahlam, though the person named on 1988.63.1 is not likely to be the same individual. The name on the plate could be a truncated form of some other name. In sum, the inscription on this vessel identifies it as a plate of El Zotz manufacture, specifically designed for presenting white deer food/tamales, like K5460 and K6080. It was owned by a "great youth" possibly named Sak O'.

Table 4. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1988.63.1. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

	A	a-LAY-ya	alay	here
	B	?-ja	?	is dedicated?
	C	yi-	yich	its surface
	D	-chi	"	"
	E	u-	utz'ihbaal	its painting
	F	-tz'i-	"	"



G -ba- " "



H -li " "



I pa-CHAN-na pa'chan Pa'chan [El Zotz]



J la- lak plate



K -ka " "



L u- uwe'ibil his eating vessel



M -WE'- " "



N -bi-li " "



O u- usak chijil his white deer



P SAK chi " "



Q WE' we'el food



R CHAK chak great



S ch'o-ko ch'ok youth



T SAK? o? sak o'? Sak O'?



1980.53.16



Another well preserved (legged) plate in the El Zotz style is in the Fralin Museum collection, though its text is largely unreadable (**Fig. 14**). Its attribution to the El Zotz sphere is suggested by the red and black lines that frame its inscription and the flaming deity-head motif in the center. This plate is very similar in style to Kerr 9071.

The inscription is a PSS, starting with the initial sign (monkey-scribe form), followed by the "haab-hand" form of the dedication verb, typical for El Zotz ceramics. Next, at C, is *yich* "its surface," which is repeated in blocks E, F, and G, interspersed with pseudoglyphs.



Fig. 14. Plate, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.53.16. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

Table 5. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1980.53.16. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

	A	a-LAY	alay	here
	B	?	?	is dedicated?
	C	yi-chi	yich	its surface
	D	—	—	—
	E	yi-chi	yich	its surface
	F	_ yi-	_ yich	_ its surface
	G	-chi	"	"

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