



Glyph Dwellers

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Inscribed Maya Vessels in Various Styles in the Fralin Museum of Art

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In this note, we discuss five inscribed Maya vessels painted in various styles located in the Fralin Museum of Art, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. One of these is painted in a red-on-cream style seen in the El Mirador basin, while another polychrome work is probably from the same general area. A third vessel is linked with the upper Río San Pedro valley, while another is painted in a style correlated with Pajamal-Zapote Bobal (Hix Witz) polity. The last object—a plate—is painted in a style likely centered on production in the vicinity of Motul de San José.

1979.36.24 (MS1209)

This cylinder vessel is painted in orange slip on a yellowish cream ground (**Figs. 1-3**). Except for palette, its execution is highly reminiscent of the codex style. It has wide black frame lines at the rim and base, and the lower zone is decorated with stylized eyes within rosettes. This iconography is seen widely in Maya art, emulating the styles of Teotihuacan (see Fash and Fash 2000:451–456; Robicsek and Hales 1981:206, Tab. 5).

The inscription is fully legible, constituting a partial Primary Standard Sequence (PSS). It states only that the cup is a drinking vessel for fruity/tasty cacao. The owner's name is omitted. The style of this vessel may be compared to that of a vase excavated at Tintal (see Hansen et al. 2006: fig. 5a, b). The owner of the Tintal vase was Yopaat Bahlam, who is also mentioned on numerous codex-style vessels (Hansen et al. 2006:743). According to paste analysis, these vessels were produced widely throughout the El Mirador Basin (Reents-Budet et al. 2011). Similarly, analysis of 1979.36.24 (MS1209) indicates that this vessel was made in the El Mirador Basin, most likely at a site in its northern region (Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald Bishop, personal communication, 2016).

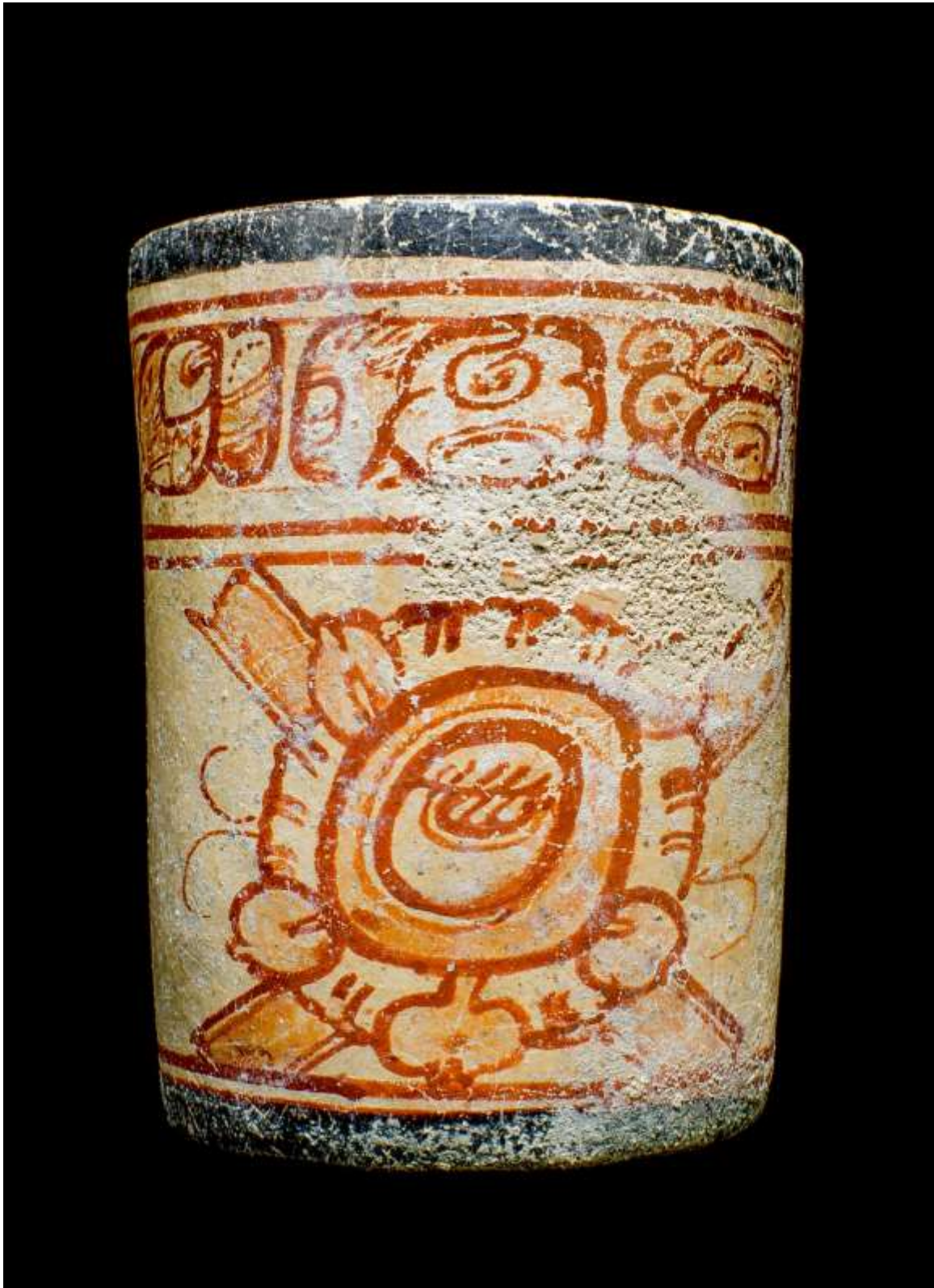


Fig. 1. Red-on cream cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.24. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

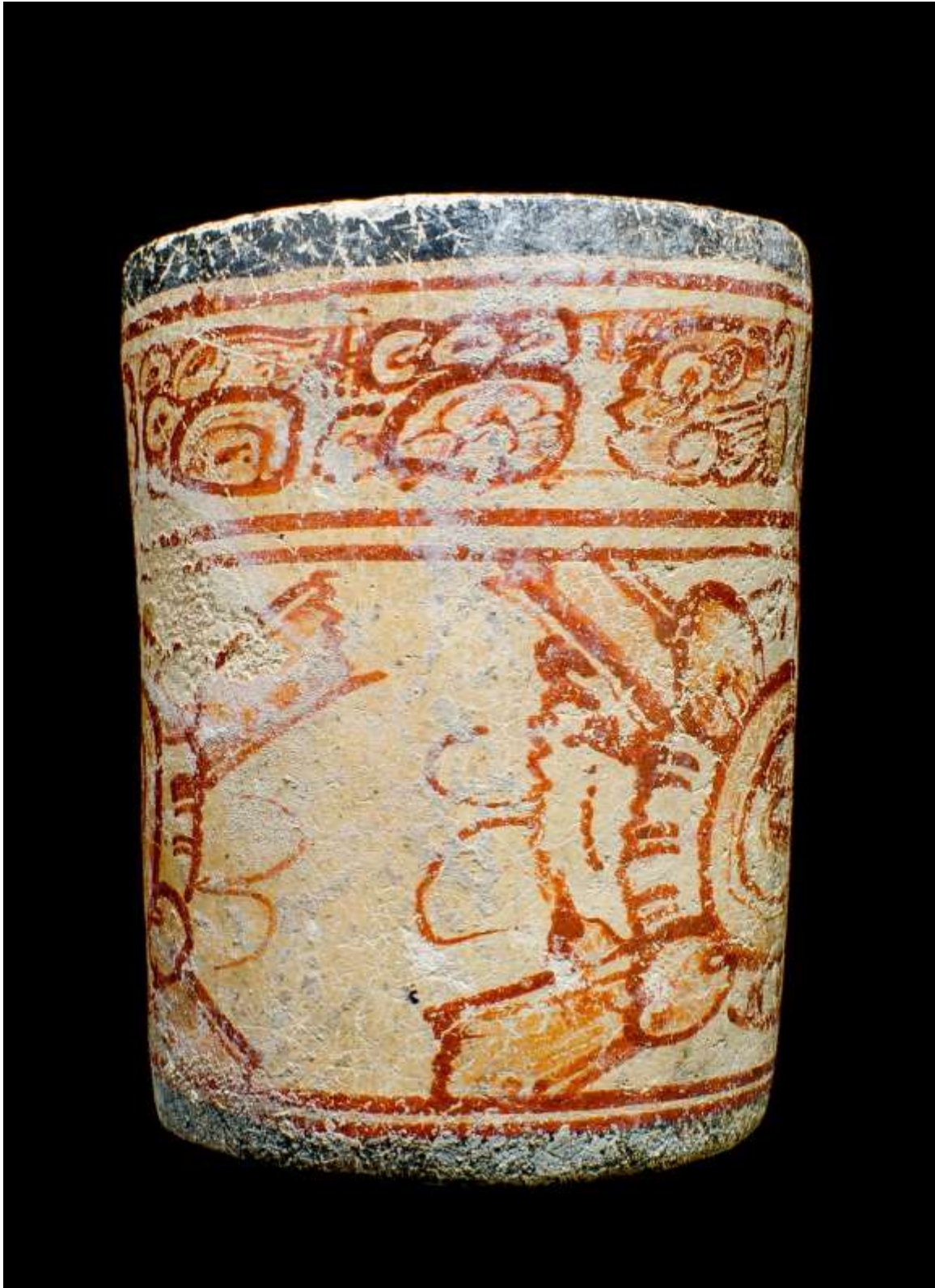


Fig. 2. Red-on cream cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.24. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

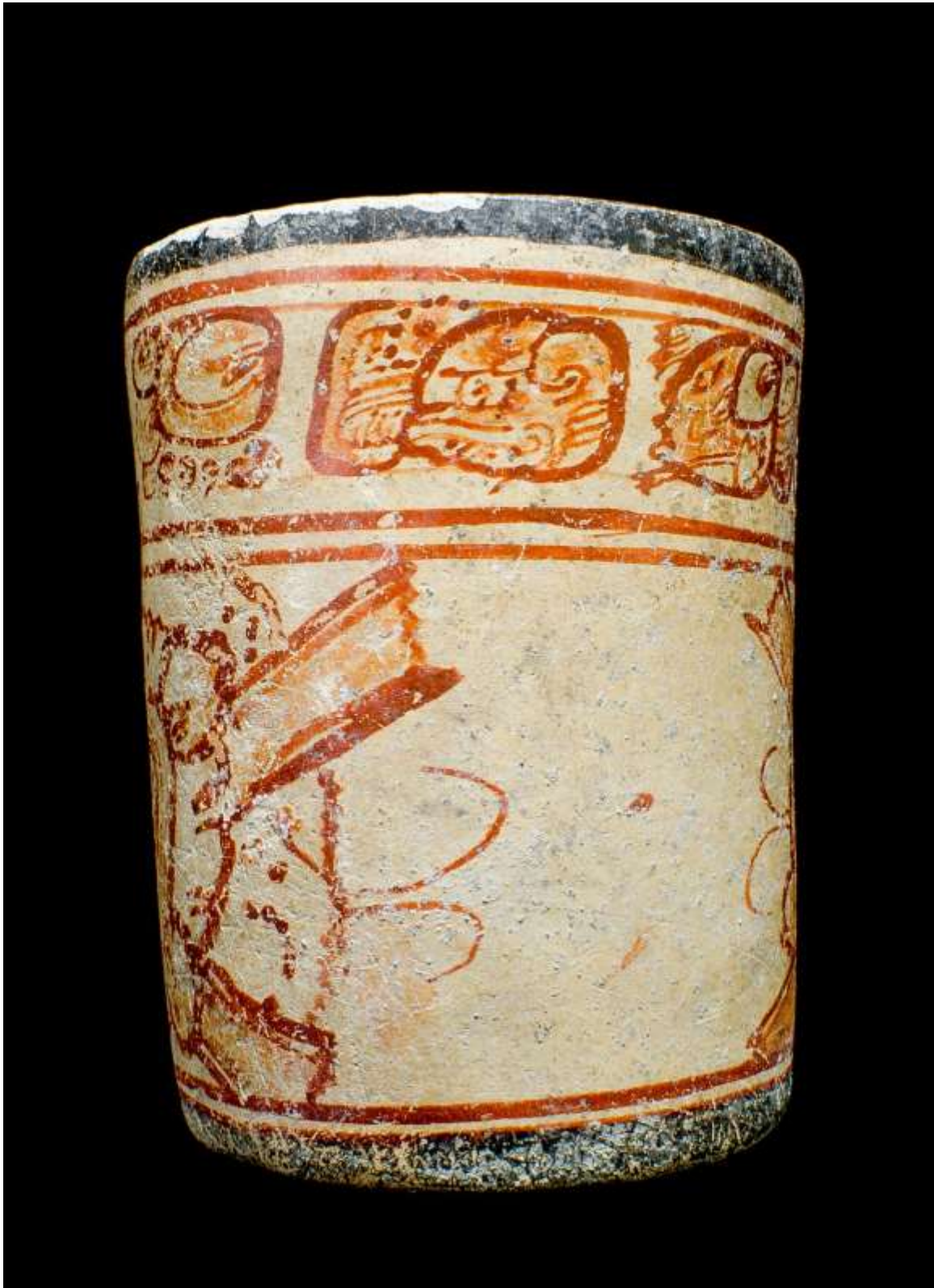








Fig. 3. Red-on cream cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.24. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

Table 1. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.24. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

	A	a-LAY-ya	alay	here
	B	tz'i-bi-	tz'ihbnaj	is painted
	C	-na-ja	"	"
	D	ji-chi	jich	the surface
	E	yu-k'i-bi	yuk'ib	his drinking vessel
	F	ta yu-ta-la	ta yutal	for fruity/tasty



G

ka-wa

kakaw

cacao

**1980.54.2 (MS1211)**

This cylinder vessel has a cream ground with a red zone near the base, and small black and red circles in the middle zone (**Figs. 4-6**). The upper zone features a band of seven glyphs, framed by black and red lines. The inscription is mixed, featuring some readable glyphs, while others are pseudoglyphs. The initial sign appears at position A, though the main sign is not identifiable. Next are the terms that refer to the dedication of the drinking vessel (B and C), while the rest of the text consists of pseudoglyphs. Block D seems to be the Maize God head with a **wa**-like suffix. Block E also looks like a Maize God head, this time with a moon-sign suffix. Block F might originally have been based on *te'e'* of a normal PSS, while G is unrecognizable. Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald Bishop (personal communication, 2016) indicate that the paste chemistry of this vessel points to production in the Pacaya area of the southern Mirador basin.

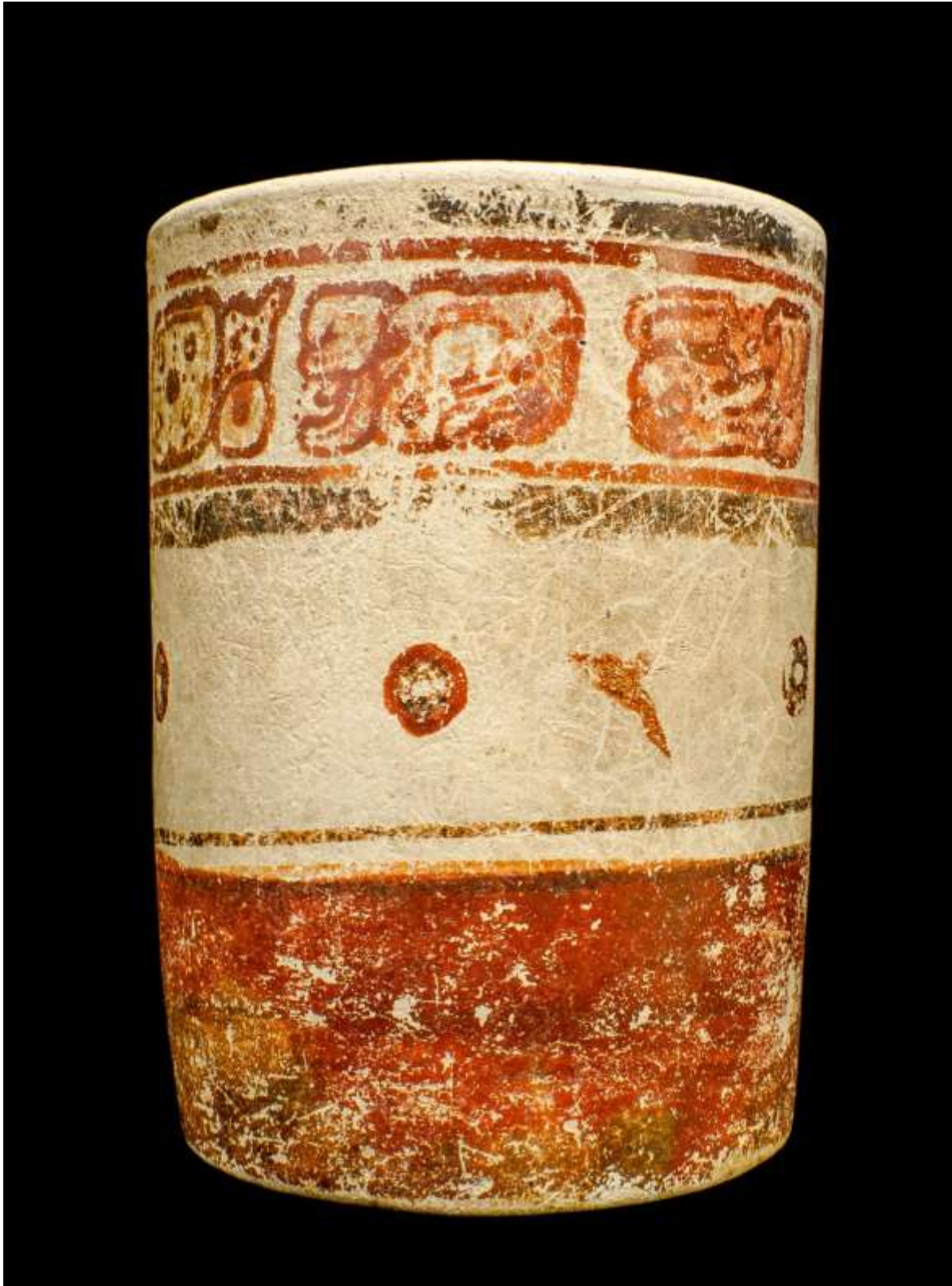


Fig. 4. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.54.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 5. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.54.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

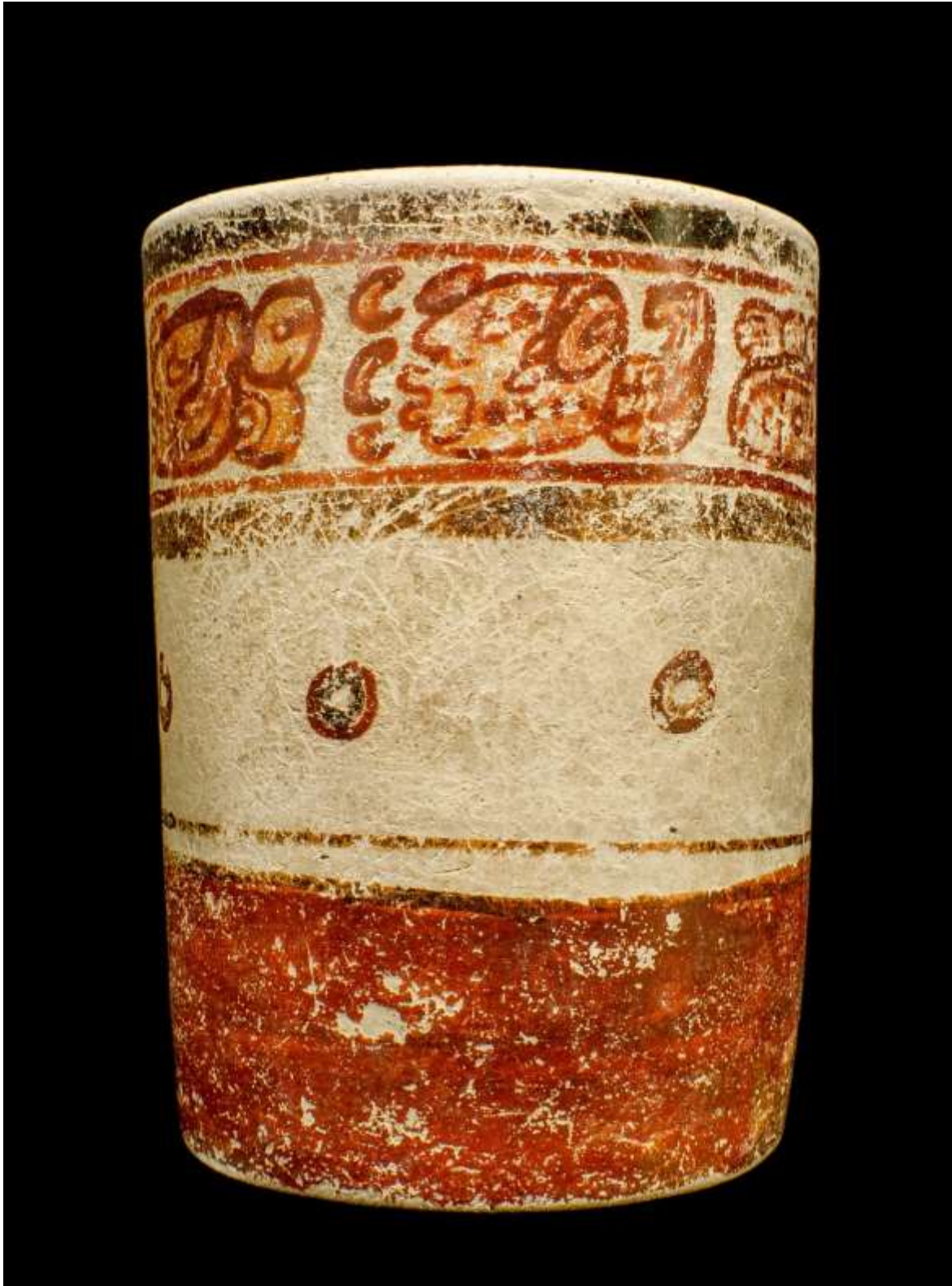


Fig. 6. Cylinder vessel, Fralin Museum of Art 1980.54.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Table 2. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1980.54.2. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



A	a_	alay?	here?
B	K'AL-ja	k'ahlaj	is made
C	yu-k'i-bi	yuk'ib	his drinking vessel
D	-	-	-
E	-	-	-
F	-	-	-



G

—

—

—

**1979.36.7 (MS1189)**

This vessel is executed in an orange slip on a cream ground (Figs. 7-9). The pictorial field is dominated by images of serpents and rosettes, while the rim inscription is almost totally obscured by a layer of blue stucco. Only a couple of the glyph blocks can be made out, spelling *tz'ihbnaj* "is painted." The style of this vessel is similar to objects owned by individuals associated with Waka'-El Peru (e.g. Kerr 9112), and Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald Bishop (personal communication, 2016) confirm that its paste recipe corresponds to the upper Río San Pedro area.

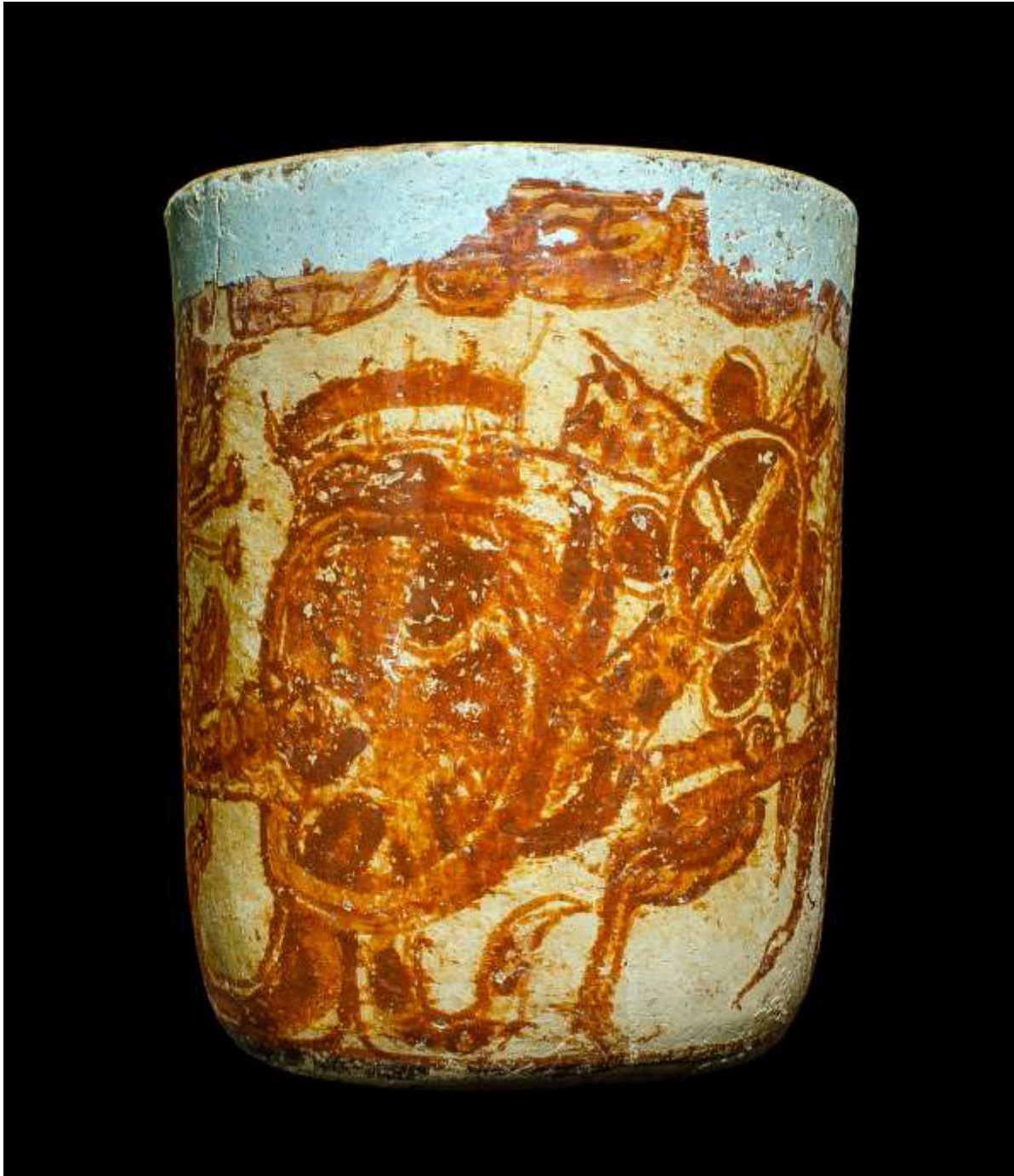


Fig. 7. Red-on cream cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.7. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.










Fig. 8. Red-on cream cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.7. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

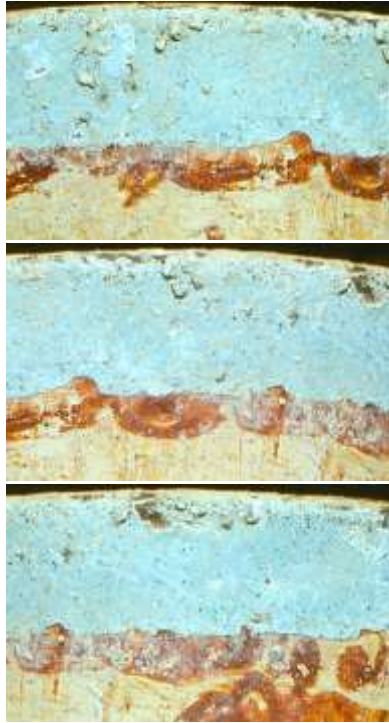


Fig. 9. Red-on cream cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.7. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Table 3. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1979.36.7. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

	pA	—	—	—
	pB	tz'i-bi-	tz'ihbnaj	is painted
	pC	-na-ja	"	"
	pD	—	—	—
	pE	—	—	—
	pF	—	—	—
	pG	—	—	—



pH	—	—	—
pl	—	—	—
pJ	—	—	—

**1984.53.1**

This vessel has a relatively slender flaring cylindrical form (Figs. 10-12). It is painted in black line on yellowish cream ground with occasional fill in shades of orange. The main pictorial field of the vessel is decorated with images of scribes, probably mythical, owing to the mirror-markings on their bodies. One points at the page of an open book, while the other gestures toward a cylinder vessel placed on the ground before him. Although there are no glyphic clues that suggest a provenience, an attribution to the Pajamal/Zapote-Bobal (Hix Witz) area is indicated by its style (compare to K1186, K1836, K2220, K2803, K5646, K8469, K8665, K9244).

The inscription of this vessel begins with a standard PSS, but after *yuk'ib* is an unreadable block (F) followed by block G, which contains a possible **tzi**, suggesting *tzih* "fresh." Next is another illegible block (H), then yet another block containing what looks like a personified **tzi** (I). At J is another unreadable block, and then the inscription concludes with a block composed of a headband **HUUN** placed over what seems to be the eyeball grapheme, possibly reading **HUT**. This rare combination of signs or single grapheme may be part of the name of an otherwise unknown owner of the vessel.

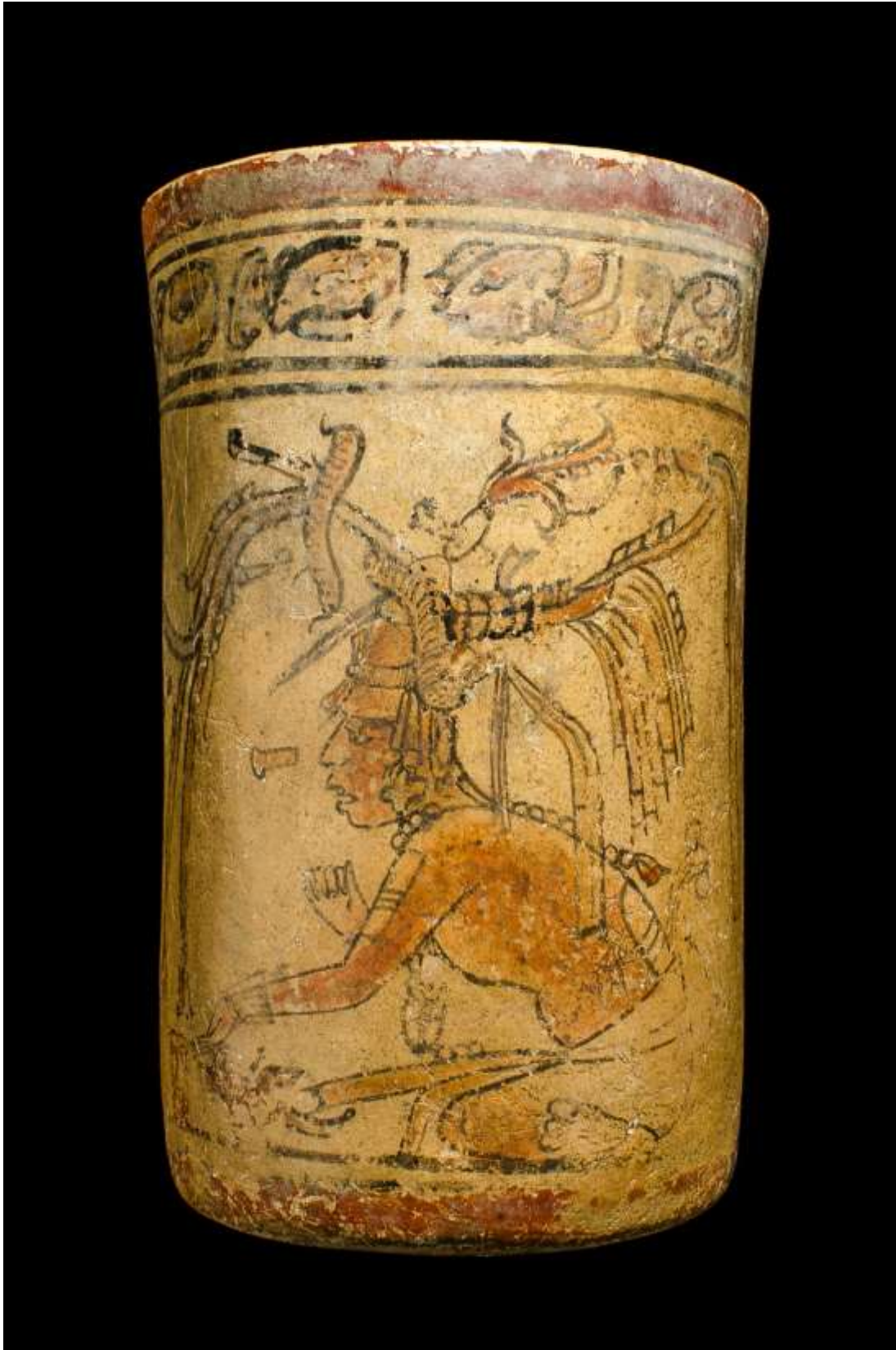


Fig. 10. Polychrome cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1984.53.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

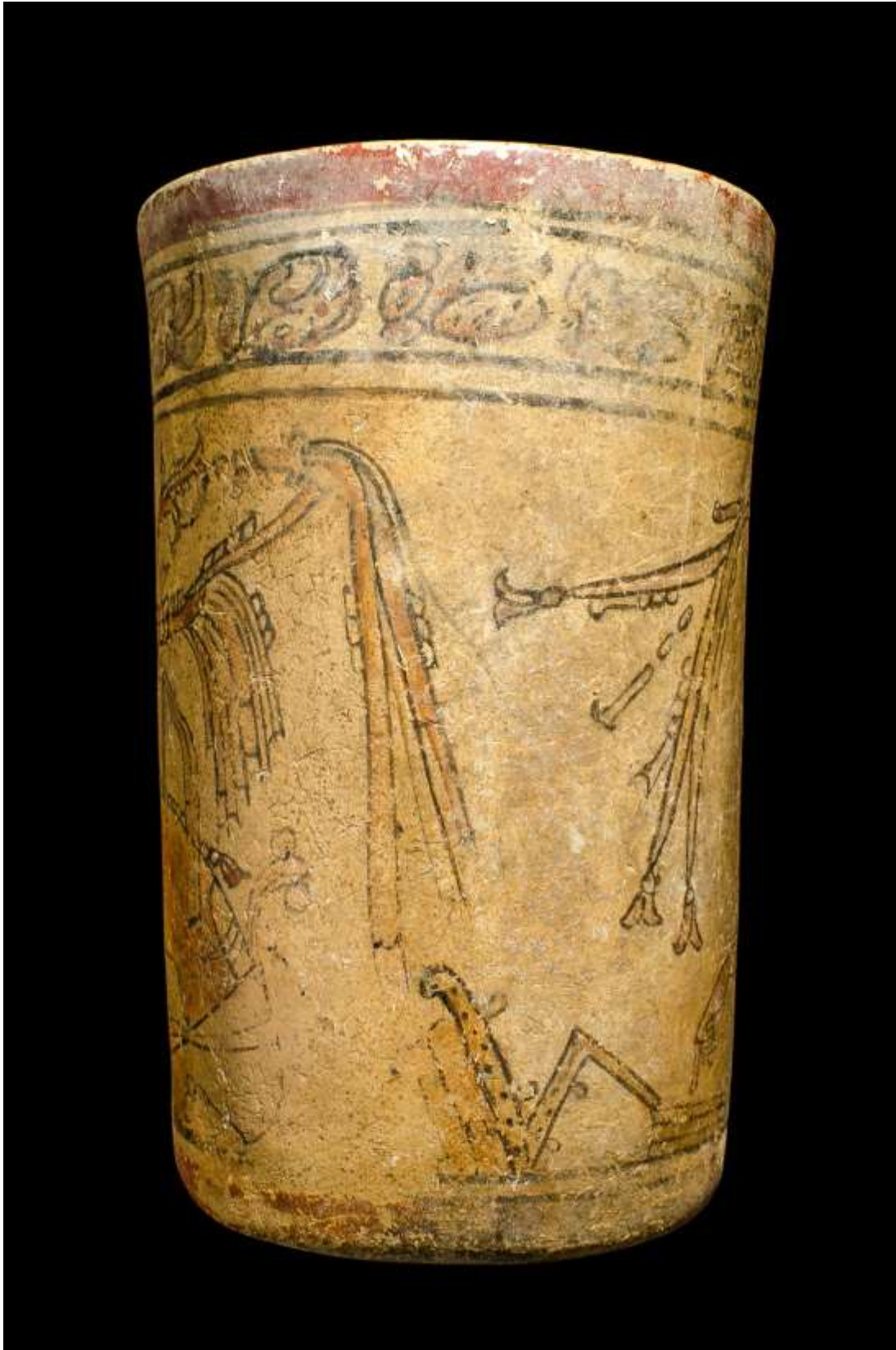


Fig. 11. Polychrome cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1984.53.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 12. Polychrome cylinder, Fralin Museum of Art 1984.53.1. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

Table 4. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1984.53.1. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



A	a-LAY	alay	here
B	tz'i-bi-	tz'ihbnaj	is painted
C	-na-ja	"	"
D	ji-chi	jich	the surface
E	yu-k'i-bi	yuk'ib	his drinking vessel
F	—	—	—



G

_ tzi?

_ tzih?

_ fresh?



H

_ ba?

_

_



I

_ tzi?

_ tzih?

_ fresh?



J

_

_

_



K

HUUN HUT?

huun hut?

Huun Hut(?)

**1981.22.2**

We conclude our discussion of inscribed vessels in the Fralin Museum collection with 1981.22.2, a plate painted with an image of a heron catching a fish, executed with black outline, with shades of orange for detail, and a yellowish cream ground (Fig. 13). The glyphs also have black outlines, and a dark red line encircles the rim. The inscription of twelve glyph blocks consists of a PSS, though it also has several pseudoglyphic elements.

Its inscription begins with the initial sign and dedication verb, followed by two pseudoglyphic blocks (C and D). Next, written across blocks E-G is *ujawante* "his legged plate." After this is a pseudoglyphic block (H), followed by two blocks reminiscent of the nominals of Tayel Chan K'inich, a Motul de San José ruler as written on a plate excavated from the tomb of Ruler 2 at Dos Pilas (Burial 30) (see Tokovinine and Zender 2012:41–43). The glyphs in block I might possibly have been adapted from the **u-CHAHK-ki** nominal/title seen for instance on the Dos Pilas plate in block H. Next, at J, is what might be the syllable **ye** together with **CHAN** and **K'INICH**, likely spelling the name Tayel Chan K'inich. The **CHAN** grapheme may have been placed in front of **ye** because of the typical manner of spelling this ruler's name, with **CHAN** infixed into the **TAYEL** hand. Confirming this identification is the partially pseudoglyphic Motul de San José emblem glyph next, at K. The title *baah kab* follows in block L. The stylistic similarity of this plate the Dos Pilas plate suggests that both may date to shortly before the Dos Pilas burial was made, in 726 CE (see Tokovinine and Zender 2012:43).



Fig. 13. Plate, Fralin Museum of Art 1981.22.2. Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 14. Plate, private collection. Photograph and drawing by Raphael Tunesi (after Tunesi and Lopes 2004:Figs. 1, 2).

In addition to its textual content, the style of Fralin plate 1981.22.2 may suggest the Motul de San José area as its zone of origin. A close analogy for the inscription of the Fralin piece may be found on a plate in a private collection (Fig. 14; see Tunesi and Lopes 2004). For example, one may compare the rendering of the *ka* grapheme in block F on the Tunesi and Lopes plate to the pseudoglyphic sign in block H on Fralin 1981.22.2. Interestingly, the text on the Tunesi and Lopes plate may contain a scribal signature. Following the Tikal emblem glyph at block I is a probable *utz'ihb* "it is his painting" (J) and then *ik'a' ajaw* "Motul de San José lord" (K, L). If the artist of the Tunesi and Lopes plate was from Motul de San José, then the Fralin plate, which is painted in a similar style, may have been from this area as well. In conclusion, even though vessels naming Tayel Chan K'inich are associated with various sites (see Just 2012:105–111), we think that there is some justification for identifying the Motul de San José area as the locus of manufacture for Fralin 1981.22.2.

Table 5. Inscription from Fralin Museum of Art 1981.22.2. Photographs by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



A **a-LAY?** alay? here?



B **K'AL-ja** k'ahlaj is made



C **_bi?** _ _



D _ _ _



E **u-** ujawante' his legged plate



F **-ja-** " "



G -wa-TE' " "



H - - -



I u?-_ - -



J **ye CHAN
K'INICH** tayel chan
k'inich? Tayel Chan K'inich?



K **K'UH IK' _** k'uhul ik'a'
ajaw? holy Ik'a' [Windy
Water] (Motul de
San José) ajaw?



L **ba-ba** baah kab first (on) earth?

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Jean Lancaster for giving us access to these objects in the Fralin collection. We also thank Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald Bishop for sharing their thoughts with us regarding the origins of some of these vessels based on paste chemistry.



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