



# Glyph Dwellers

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## A Drawing of the Teotihuacan-style Vessel at the University of Kansas Introduced to Mesoamericanists by the Late Erik Boot

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This brief note serves the purpose of providing a line drawing of the inscription on the Teotihuacan-style ceramic vessel housed in the archaeological collection of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. The vessel, cataloged as A0668-0593, and its inscription were initially described in detail by Erik Boot in an unpublished manuscript dated to October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, henceforth (Boot 2011). Both Boot and the present author have relied on the generosity of Dr. Mary J. Adair, Senior Curator of Archaeology, for information pertaining to the vessel, as well as, in the present author's case, the possibility of visiting the collection and examining the vessel in person on two days in January 2016.

The origin of Mesoamerican writing can be traced back to the Early Formative period, starting around 1200 BCE, in the form of text-formatted remains on a variety of media, such as cylindrical clay roller stamps, clay figurines, stone monuments, painted cave walls, and greenstone objects, among other media. It seems likely that by ca. 650 BCE the Olmecs had developed some form of writing that had a direct influence on the fully glottographic scripts that emerged by ca. 400-300 BCE: Zapotec writing in the Valley of Oaxaca; Epi-Olmec writing in the Gulf Coast of Mexico and the highlands of Chiapas; Greater Izapan writing in the Pacific piedmont and coasts of Chiapas and Guatemala; and Lowland Mayan writing. Several authors (Justeson 1986, 2012; Justeson and Mathews 1990; Justeson et al. 1985; Prem 1973) have proposed a major division early on between a Oaxacan tradition (Zapotec), and a



Southeastern tradition (Epi-Olmec, Greater Izapan, Lowland Mayan). It is clear that by ca. 200 CE, Teotihuacan in Central Mexico had already developed a script, still undeciphered. Taube (2000, 2011) has made a very cohesive case for the definition of the script. However, what is not entirely clear yet is how old such script is, nor what writing tradition it aligns with more closely. Some traits suggest a Oaxacan affiliation, but others could point to a Southeastern (Epi-Olmec-like?) affiliation.

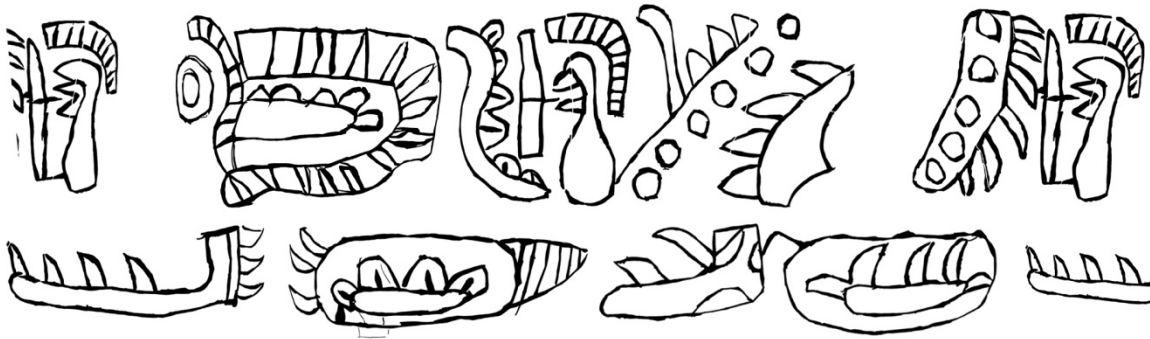
Boot (2011) adds a piece to this interesting puzzle: he recognized the significance of the unprovenanced Teotihuacan-style vessel at the University of Kansas. The vessel, a cylindrical tripod vessel with its three feet missing and measuring 11.5 cm in diameter and 11.3 cm in height, with red pigment surviving in some of the incisions, could date to the Tlamimilolpa (ca. 150-350 CE) or Xolalpan (ca. 350-550 CE) phase, according to Boot (2011: 5). As Boot notes, the shape of the missing feet could have helped in distinguishing between the two options. A careful and detailed first-hand examination of the vessel by a ceramics specialist would be necessary to narrow down the dating.

Although the vessel appears to be indeed a Teotihuacan-style artifact, its inscription, Boot (2011: 6) was quick to point out, “is not Teotihuacan writing of the sorts previously identified at the site,” a statement that I generally agree with. After a thorough analysis of the inscription, including a detailed comparison of each sign with known signs from Teotihuacan and other scripts elsewhere in Mesoamerica, Boot (2011: 11) initially considers the possibility that the inscription could constitute “a completely new writing system.” Nevertheless, he then proceeded to suggest, after a detailed comparison with some of the signs from another, recently identified script, the Olmec-style Cascajal Block from the Gulf Coast of Mexico (Rodríguez Martínez et al. 2006), that this Teotihuacan inscription could be related to the Cascajal Block script.

The purpose of this note is not to provide further analysis of the text, but simply to introduce the high-resolution line drawing produced by the present author during his visit to the collections at the University of Kansas. The drawing was prepared on the basis of photographs of the individual glyphs taken by the present author. After the preliminary drawing was prepared, I visited the collection again and checked each glyph against the original. Although I drew each glyph in isolation, I have arranged a composite image of the whole text; it is based on the digital roll-out prepared by Boot (2011: 5, Fig. 4), seen in **Figure 1**, on the basis of the photographs that he obtained from Mary Adair. The composite image with the line drawings of each glyph prepared by the present author can be seen in **Figure 2**.



**Fig. 1.** Ceramic vessel, Museum of Anthropology at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas A0668-0593. Reproduced from Boot (2011: Fig. 4).



**Fig. 2.** Ceramic vessel, Museum of Anthropology at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas A0668-0593. Composite line drawing prepared by present author.

Any scholar interested in close-up photos and line drawings of the individual glyphs should email the author at [dauidmm@unc.edu](mailto:dauidmm@unc.edu). For now, I am including lower resolution photos of each glyph. I follow Boot's (2011: Figures 6 and 7) sign number designations shown in **Figures 3** and **4**. **Figures 5-13** provide photos of each glyph or glyphic collocation alongside this author's drawings.



**Fig. 3.** Ceramic vessel, Museum of Anthropology at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas A0668-0593 showing sign number designations 1-15. Figure 5 from Boot (2011: 6).



**Fig. 4.** Ceramic vessel, Museum of Anthropology at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas A0668-0593 showing sign number designations 16-19. Figure 7 from (2011: 9).



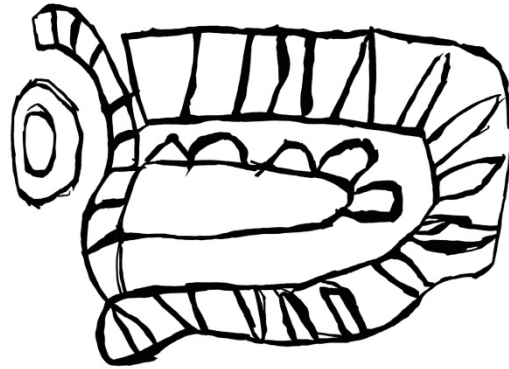


Fig. 5. Photo and Drawing of Boot signs 1-4.

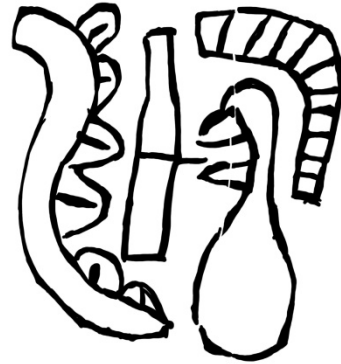


Fig. 6. Photo and Drawing of Boot signs 5-8.



Fig. 7. Photo and Drawing of Boot signs 9-11.



Fig. 8. Photo and Drawing of Boot signs 12-15.



Fig. 9. Photo and Drawing of Boot sign 16.



Fig. 10. Photo and Drawing of Boot sign 17.



Fig. 11. Photo and Drawing of Boot sign 18.

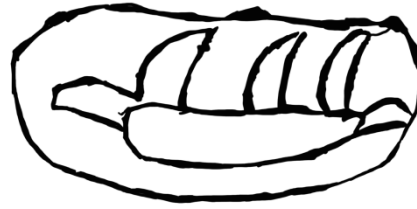


Fig. 12. Photo and Drawing of Boot sign 19.



Fig. 13. Signs 18-19 with additional linking sign.

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