The Hatzcap Ceel (Mountain Cow) Axe Inscription: Recent Documentation and Epigraphic Analysis

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Abstract

The paper describes the results of a recent epigraphic documentation and analysis of the diorite axe recovered from the site of Hatzcap Ceel, Belize, by Thompson (1931). After an introduction reviewing the archaeological context of the piece, which was part of a complex ritual cache possibly dating to the Late Preclassic or beginning of the Early Classic period, the paper proceeds with a description of previously published drawings of the inscription on the diorite axe, including the most recent, based on first-hand examination of the object by the author. Then the paper describes and analyzes the hieroglyphic text, noting some of its paleographic traits, as well as analyzing its syntactic structure and content. It is argued that the inscription refers to a priest bearing the "God C" title, read *ʔaj k'uh-un* 'he who worships' (or *ʔaj k'uh=huʔn* 'he of the god book(s)'), that the person bearing such title was a subordinate of another individual, probably another priest, and that the text concludes with a reference to the carving (*ch'a[h]k[-aj]*) of an image or portrait (*win=b'ah*), likely a wooden figure or mask. It is concluded that the content of the text and the archaeological context in which the axe was recovered reveal a complex social organization of ritual specialists during the beginning of the Early Classic Maya society.

Resumen

El presente artículo presenta los resultados de una nueva documentación y un análisis epigráfico detallado del hacha de diorita excavada del sitio Hatzcap Ceel, Belice, por Thompson (1931). El artículo

comienza con una introducción al contexto arqueológico del artefacto, el cual deja en claro que fue parte de un depósito ritual muy complejo posiblemente remontándose al período preclásico tardío o clásico temprano. Después de una introducción al contexto arqueológico de la pieza como parte de un depósito ritual complejo, el artículo continúa con una descripción de los dibujos de la inscripción previamente publicados, incluyendo el más reciente, realizado por el autor mediante una examinación de primera mano del artefacto. El artículo prosigue con la descripción y análisis del texto jeroglífico, señalando algunos de sus rasgos paleográficos, así como el análisis de su estructura sintáctica y su contenido. Se argumenta que la inscripción menciona una acción (talvez la manipulación del hacha misma) realizada por un sacerdote que lleva el título de "Dios C", leído *ʔaj k'uh-un* 'el que adora', y que éste era un subordinado de otro individuo, presuntamente otro sacerdote, y que el texto concluye con una referencia a la talla (*ch'a[h]k[-aj]*) de una imagen o retrato (*win=b'ah*), probablemente una figura de madera o máscara. El artículo concluye que tanto el contenido del texto como el contexto arqueológico del hacha misma revelan una compleja organización social de los especialistas rituales mayas a finales del preclásico tardío o principios del clásico temprano.

Introduction

This paper reports on the inscribed axe from Hatzcap Ceel (Montain Cow), Belize, discovered and published by Thompson (1931), and housed at The Field Museum in Chicago, as number (1928.1773.)188135. This work represents a continuation of the author's documentation of early Mayan inscriptions (Mora-Marín 2001a; Mora-Marín 2001b), and its primary import lies in its relevance to the history of Mayan writing. It is also part of the ongoing effort to document the corpus of Maya jade plaques as well as related, i.e. celt-inspired, artifacts, a process begun by Fields (1989), Reents-Budet and Fields (1991), and soonafter by the present author (Mora-Marín 1995a; Mora-Marín 1995b; Mora-Marín 2001a), and more recently as a collaborative effort (Mora-Marín, Reents-Budet, and Fields 2013). The paper begins with a description of the ritual context in which the axe was deposited. This is followed by a review of previous documentation efforts, focusing on the drawing that the author prepared in the summer of 2016 by means of first-hand examination of the artifact. Next, the paper presents an analysis of the inscription, glyph-by-glyph, with a summary of the structure and content of the text as a whole. This analysis leads to an interesting set of results: the possible allusion to a ritual specialist bearing the "God C Title," as well as to such individual's superior, and to the sculpting of a portrait. Thus, the text on the Hatzcap Ceel axe is of major relevance to discussions of ancient Maya ritual practices, the roles of priests, and the organization of the priesthood (e.g. Jackson and Stuart 2001; Prufer, Wanyerka, and Shah 2003; Zender 2004; Zender 2005).

Hatzcap Ceel and Votive Cache 1

Thompson (1931:248-249) describes Hatzcap Ceel 'Cold Dawn' as lying less than a mile southeast of the "Mountain Cow Water Hole," and consisting of two groups (I and II), the larger of which (Group I) is characterized by twelve mounds, and the smaller (Group II). Thompson (1931: 261) notes that "two carved altars and six plain stelae" were discovered at the site. Altar 1, originally found somewhere within Group II, dates to 10.0.5.0.0 (Thompson 1931: 261, 263), while Altar 2, "found at the north end of a passage between Mounds C and D" within Group I, dates to 9.19.0.0.0 (Thompson 1931: 264, 265).

After describing the six plain monuments, some of them altars, others stelae, Thompson (1931: 270) continues by stating that "The bases of all the stelae and altars at [Hatzcap Ceel and Cahal Pichik] were examined, with the exception of Altar 1 at Hatzcap Ceel and Stela 6 at Cahal Pichik, but in no case was any cache or sign of votive offering found." Nevertheless, votive caches were in fact discovered "in pyramids and below the floors and walls of temples" (Thompson 1931: 270) at both Hatzcap Ceel and Cahal Pichik. And here is where our story begins, for it was in Votive Cache 1, located within Pyramid Q, Group II, where the inscribed axe was found. Thompson (1931: 270) notes "the cache was found resting on a kind of bench below five other floors," adding that the cache "was contained in a vessel," whose contents are illustrated in Plates XXX-XXXIII of the publication. Thompson (1931: 270) notes that: "The tall vase contained all the objects except the large jade ear-plug (Plate XXX, Fig. 2), which served as a top to the vessel, the real top being placed leaning up against the side of the vessel." Next, I reproduce the description of the vessel and its contents, including the inscribed axe, in part (Thompson 1931: 270-271):

> The vessel (Cat. No. 188137) is made of poorly baked unslipped and unpainted pottery. Tall cylindrical jars of this type with lids seem to have been very commonly used for votice caches at Hatzcap Ceel, and we shall find them associated with other caches. Inside the contents were piled up with a considerable admixture of earth. On top was the long celt with hieroglyphic inscription (Cat. No. 188135), which is illustrated in Plate XXXIII. This celt had been broken into three pieces which allowed of its insertion in the vessel. The material is a hard green black diorite, highly polished, and with a good cutting edge. The cross-section is elliptic.

Thompson (1931: 271) also provides the measurements of the axe as "27 cm long, 8 cm wide at the widest point, and 3 cm deep across the short axis." In addition to the large jade ear-plug and the diorite axe, several other artifacts were placed within the vessel: a small ear-plug (6 x 2.5 cm), a jade amulet with a human face (6.5 x 4.5 x 1 cm), a jade amulet possibly representing a monkey (3 x 4 x 2.5 cm), three small jade figurines (about 3 x 1.4 cm in length on average), and nine shell figurines similar to the jade figurines in which "the feet are turned out" and "the arms are bent at the elbows (Thompson 1931: 272-273). Several other marine objects (shells, coral), bones from different non-marine animals (feline, birds), a circular slate disk, a pumice stone, a soft limestone, and "a few small jade beads" (Thompson 1931: 274) were also placed within the vessel. Thompson (1931: 274) suggests that the unworked animal materials may constitute the remains of a food offering.

Further information is now available for the site. Morris (2004: 187–188) discusses the evidence for the dating of the Hatzcap Ceel axe itself, concurring with previous authors (e.g. Coe 1976) on an early dating, possibly Late Preclassic. He notes that Hatzcap Ceel "had an important occupation in the Late Preclassic period" (Morris 2004: 188). Lomitola (2012: 35-47) also offers an overview. She attributes the contents of the Votive Cache 1, which contained the axe, as "typical for the lowland area during the Preclassic" (Lomitola 2012:35).

I review Thompson's (1931) comments and observations on the axe inscription below, on a case-by-case basis. Next I describe the documentation of the axe itself, and its inscription.

Previous Documentation

Thompson (1931: Plate XXXIII) provides a fine photograph of the axe, showing the inscription in more than adequate detail.[1] In fact, the photograph in question provides the only clear view of a few details that have since been blurred by the application of paint, it would seem, during the process of restoration. The Field Museum's files include paperwork on the removal of adhesive mounts that took place in March of 2005, which notes the removal, in the process, of brown and black paint that were not original, and also a conservation report from the same month. It is unclear to this author exactly when the paint that hides some of the inscribed details was added, but it may be the black paint mentioned as "not original" in the conservation report. The conservation report describes the dimensions of the axe as 27.6 x 8.1 x 3.8 cm, and the inscribed area as "measuring 12.0 x 5.5 cm." Another document in the file reports its weight as 2 lbs.

A tracing of the inscription is on file at The Field Museum, and reproduced as **Figure 1** below. The records do not provide information on who prepared it, or when. The drawing is generally accurate, but lacks or misrepresents many smaller details.

Fig. 1. Drawing of the inscription of the Hatzcap Ceel axe on file at The Field Museum.

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[1] The available electronic version of the publication exhibits glitches with a few of the images, including that of the diorite axe. I would recommend the original print version instead.

A drawing of the inscription alone is provided by Coe (1976: 115, Fig. 9) in his discussion of early Mayan texts, seen in **Figure 2**. The drawing is missing many details, and also exhibits a few extraneous details. The drawing's objective is to depict the basic outlines and most important details. It is generally accurate. Coe's comments on the inscription are cited below.

Fig. 2. Drawing of the inscription of the Hatzcap Ceel axe in Coe (1976: 115, Figure 9).

To this author's knowledge, the first detailed documentation of the inscription in the form of a line drawing aimed at reproducing all incised lines was carried out as part of this author's research in the late 1990s, and reported in Mora-Marín (2001a: Fig. 31); the same drawing is included also in Mora-Marín (2001b). The drawing in question is reproduced as **Figure 3** below. It is a tracing of the photograph in Thompson (1931: Plate XXXIII). The author scanned the photograph at high resolution, enhanced it and inverted it into its negative, and printed it out at a larger scale. Then, the author used tracing paper to ink a line drawing of the inscription, aided by a light table in the process, and assisted by a view of the digital image on a computer screen, which could be magnified for clarity, throughout the process. However, such drawing was preliminary, for it was clear that some details were not properly resolved in the photograph, and that mistakes had likely been included in the drawing. After having examined the artifact in person with the benefit of a magnifying lens and a lamp, the author now recognizes that this original drawing, while mostly accurate, bears a few erroneous details, only one of which affects the analysis of the linguistic structure of the text (in a key way): the author had previously drawn a possible

instance of T1 **ʔu** at B1a that could serve to represent the ergative/possessive agreement marker *u*, but upon close inspection, it is clear that this was an error. Although a simple revision would have sufficed to fix that specific detail, enough small details of relevance to paleographic concerns needed revision that a new drawing was warranted. Thus, the author's earlier drawing should be disregarded.

Fig. 3. Drawing of inscription on the Hatzcap Ceel axe by Mora-Marín (2001a: Figure 31).

The next documentation of the inscription, seen in **Figure 4**, is by Nikolai Grube (Grube and Martin 2001: 28); a lower-resolution version also appears in Morris (2004: 187). The drawing is generally accurate, but it is missing a few details, and also exhibits a few extra details that are not present on the piece. The piece exhibits a lot of pecks and scratches, as well as naturally occurring white inclusions, which together have the effect of making it difficult to clearly isolate intended incisions. One consistent effect of Grube's drawing is the rounding off of angular lines, and the merging of double outlines into thick lines. None of the missing or extraneous details in this drawing affect the analysis of the linguistic structure of the text. Thus, it can be regarded as adequate for epigraphic analysis.
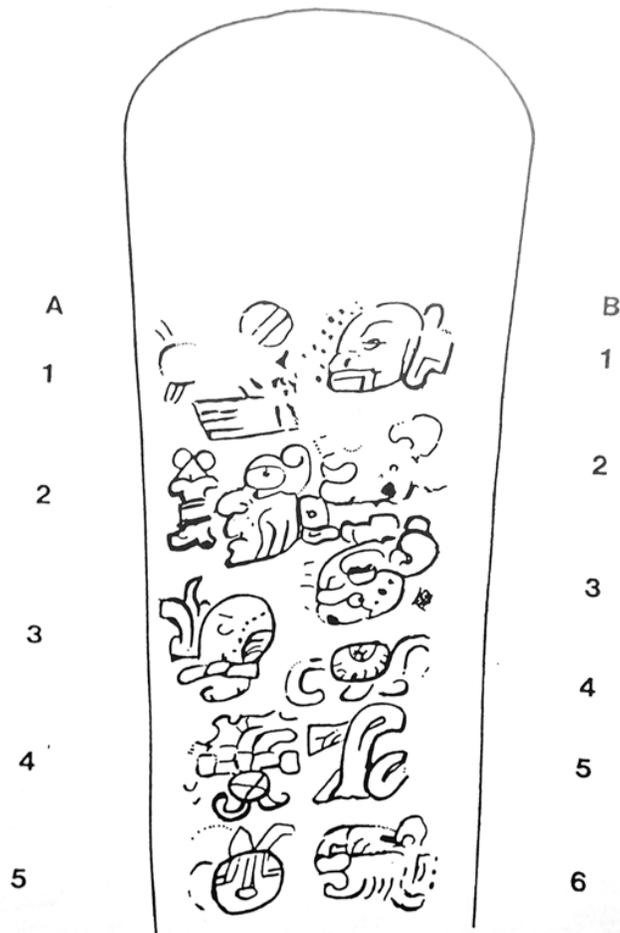
Fig. 4. Drawing of the Hatzcap Ceel axe by Nikolai Grube in Grube and Martin (2001: II-28).

Present Documentation Work

The author visited the Field Museum on Wednesday, 6 July 2016, and spent a total of six hours making observations, taking photographs, and annotating previous drawings of the inscription for corrections. Over the following week, the author prepared a new line drawing, using a digital pen and tablet, and traced, using Photoshop Elements, the photograph in Thompson (1931: Plate XXXIII) while paying close attention to the close-up photographs taken of the artifact and noting errors in previous drawings. The drawing was prepared in layers, one layer for the inscription, another for the outline of the axe, and another for the major cracks and breaks on the axe. **Figure 5a** provides the completed drawing of the axe showing the major cracks and breaks, while **Figure 5b** lacks the cracks and breaks.[2] **Figure 6** reproduces, for convenience, the inscription by itself.

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[2] Although Thompson (1931: 271) describes the axe as having been found in three pieces, and the Field Museum documents state the same, the piece has three major cracks that seem to cut all the way through, and if that is the case, instead of three pieces, it would have been broken into four pieces. Presumably, one of the cracks (the topmost one?) does not cut all the way through, or else the artifact was damaged at some point since the Field Museum's documentation reports were written.
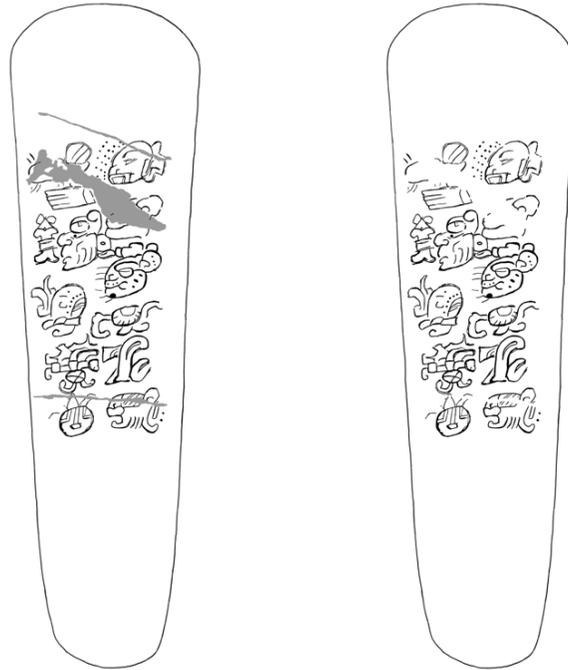
Fig. 5. Drawing of axe by the author showing cracks (left) and without cracks (right).

A   B
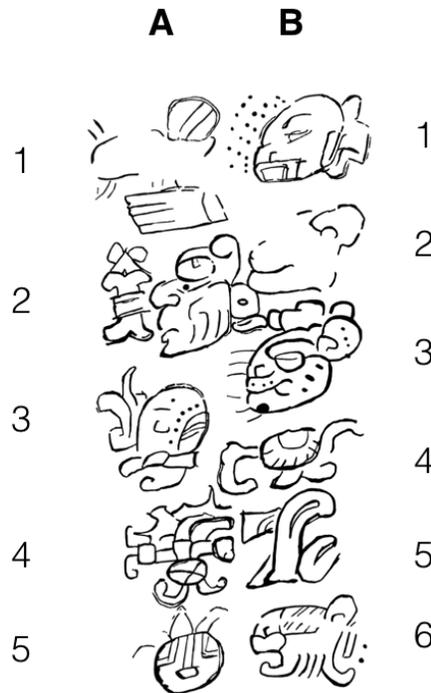
Fig. 6. Most recent drawing of Hatzcap Ceel axe text by the author.

Analysis of the Text

Previously, Coe (1976: 115) had stated that "On this celt," unlike other early Mayan texts exhibiting two columns of text, "the columns are not paired." Unfortunately, he did not justify his assessment. Mora-Marín (2001b: 181, 265) proposed that the text is read in a single-column format, based on two grounds: (1) first, the rows do not match each other, as is especially clear when comparing the mismatch between A3 and B3 or A4 and B4; (2) column A has five rows, while column B has six; and (3) the glyph at B3 was originally intended to be in position B2, where its rough outline was incised but not completed due to lack of space, showing that the scribe moved one row down, and therefore used a single-column reading format, to relocate the intended sign. Though this is rare, it is not unattested.[3] Thompson (1931: 271) seems to have misanalyzed the format, although it is not entirely clear due to an apparent error on his part. He explicitly states that column A has five glyphs and column B six, but then he says, regarding glyph B5, that "the following Glyph A6 is probably an Ahau sign." There is no Glyph A6, so he either meant Glyph A5 or Glyph B6.

The first glyph, seen in **Figure 7a**, is composed of at least three separate signs, although it is not complete due to a major break in the axe, and is thus not entirely legible. Thompson (1931: 271) did not address this glyph in his discussion. The first sign is at A1a (**Fig. 7b**), and it is incomplete: the breakage in the axe has rendered its central part illegible. It consists of a squarish component with dangles on at least two of its corners. The second sign is at A1b (**Fig. 7c**). This sign could correspond to T617/1M2 or T528/ZC1.[4] T617/1M2 (**Fig. 7d**), the mirror or celt sign, is likely polyvalent, with possible syllabographic (perhaps related to T24/1M4 **li**) and logographic (perhaps **ʔAY(AL)** for *ʔay(-al)* 'there is' or **ʔALAY** *ʔalay* 'here'; also **WIN** for *win* 'eye, face') values; in at least one example described by Stuart (2007), a partly destroyed collocation appears to show T1/HE6 and T617/1M2, perhaps as **ʔu-**CELT 'his/her celt'.[5] T528/ZC1 (**Fig. 7e**), is also polyvalent, with syllabographic (**ku**) and logographic (**TUN** for *tuun* 'stone'; **CHAK/CHAHUK** for *chah(u)k* 'lightning, thunder') values.[6] I favor its identification as T617/1M2; nevertheless, the reading for this sign is context dependent, and it is not entirely clear what reading the present context calls for. I discuss A1a and A1b further below in connection with the possible identification of A1c.

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[3] There is at least one Early Classic text, incised on a slate mirror-back disk from Costa Rica, datable stylistically to ca. 400-450 CE, based on very close calligraphic similarities with the Ballcourt Marker and Stela 31 from Tikal, that is also read in single columns even though it shows two adjacent columns. There is also a Late Classic text consisting of three columns read individually at Bonampak.

[4] I utilize both Thompson's (1962) and Macri and Looper's (2003) catalog of Mayan signs.

[5] Stuart (2007) tentatively reads the collocation as **ʔu-LEEM**?, suggesting a possible reading **LEEM** for T617/1M2. The present author does not find support for such reading, but does not offer a better alternative in this context.

[6] The script represented a language, or several languages, with the following phonemic inventory: /p, b', t, t', ts, ts', tʃ, tʃ', k, k', ʔ, s, ʃ, x, h, m, n, l, w, y, i, i:, e, e:, a, a:, o, o:, u, u:/, and possibly also /p'/, as well as /ə/ (but not /ə:/). In the orthographic transliteration of Mayan signs, this paper uses <ch(')> for [tʃ(')], <ts(')> for [ts(')], <j> for [x], and <x> for [ʃ]. Many scholars differ in this regard, utilizing <'> instead of <ʔ>, and <tz> instead of <ts>, for example, based largely on the orthographic standard for the Mayan languages of Guatemala, although the Mayan languages of Mexico typically utilize <ts>. Additionally, this paper uses <+> to separate a clitic from a lexical root, and <-> to separate inflectional or derivational affix from a lexical root. I assume Pre-Ch'olan and Proto-Ch'olan forms for transliteration, following Kaufman and Norman's (1984) reconstructions in the process.
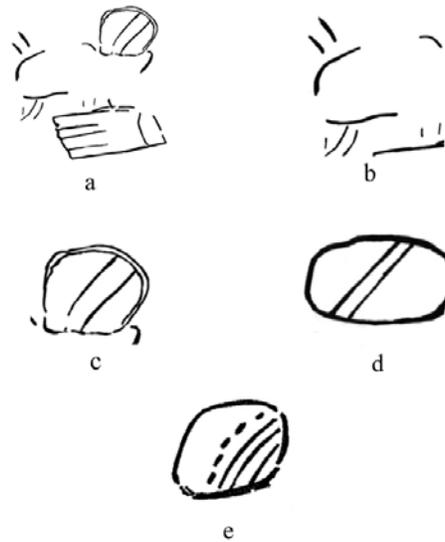
Fig. 7. **a**. A1 glyph on Hatzcap Ceel axe; **b**. A1a; **c**. A1b; **d**. Example of **ʔAY-ya/ʔALAY-ya** collocation on Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral; **e**. Example of T528 sign. Drawings by the author.

The main sign at A1c is a hand sign (**Figure 8a**), resembling most closely either T713/MR2, a logogram typically read **K'AL** for *k'al* 'to close, wrap' (**Figure 8b**), or T670/MZD, a logogram typically read **CH'AM** for *ch'äm* 'to hold, receive' (**Figure 8c**). The primary difference between these hand signs lies in the position of the thumb: for T713/MR2 the thumb is positioned parallel to the rest of the fingers, while for T670/MZD the thumb is perpendicular to the rest of the fingers. Since the damage to the axe affects the region where the thumb would be, it is not clear whether we are dealing with T713/MR2 or T670/MZD. There *is* an incised line below the second sign at A1b (**Fig. 8a**) that could correspond to the tip of the thumb that goes with the hand. If so, the identification of A1c as T670/MZD, **CH'AM** for *ch'äm < ch'am* 'to hold, receive', would be preferable. It is also possible for A1c to correspond to T713/MR2, when functioning as a verb, since in such function it is often combined with T617/1M2 (**Fig. 8d**), the mirror or celt sign, which appears right above the hand sign at A1b. Although the T713/MR2 hand most often points toward the right, instead of toward the left, as does the hand in A1c, some early examples do point toward the left (**Fig. 8e**). And while T713/MR2 and T670/MZD differ in the semantic determinatives they used to distinguish their verbal functions from other lexical and phonetic values, with the former typically utilizing using T617/1M2 to disambiguate its **K'AL** reading from its other values (**Fig. 8d**), and the latter typically utilizing T533/AM1 to disambiguate its **CH'AM** reading from its other values (**Fig. 8c**), as discussed in Mora-Marín (2016), the fact is that T670/MZD can co-occur with T617/1M2 in a specific context, where it is apparently preceded by the numeral '5' (**Fig. 8e**). But instead of '5', the example at hand shows a squarish sign with dangles, already mentioned (**Figs. 7b, 8g**). The author suspects that this sign could be an elaborate version of T1/HE6 **ʔu** akin to that found on a jade clamshell pendant from Nakum (**Fig. 8h**) described by Źrałka et al. (2011:897); although those authors identify the collocation in question as consisting of the signs **(yu)-UH** 'his/her jewel', the present author believes the main sign is probably a mirror or celt sign, T617/1M2, referring to the pectoral jade pendant itself as a 'stone', rather than the term for 'bead' or 'jewel', and that the first sign is probably simply an

elaborate version of T1/HE6 **ʔu** for 'his/her/its'. If these identifications for A1 of the Hatzcap Ceel axe are correct, then one may obtain the following reading for the whole glyph: **ʔu-CH'AM**-CELT, for *u ch'am[-aw]-Ø* [celt] 's/he held the celt'. Such a reading could be perhaps related to the expression in **Figure 8f**.

Fig. 8. **a**. Glyph A1 on Hatzcap Ceel axe, drawing by the author; **b. ma-cha-?ma/la-K'AL-TUN**; **c**. **ʔu-CH'AM-wa** on Dos Pilas Stela 8, F15, drawing by Houston (1993: 111, Fig. 4-14); **d. K'AL**; **e. ʔu-ya-?K'AL-TUN**; **f. V-?WIN-?CH'AM** on Tonina Monument 149, B, drawing by Ian Graham; **g. ??u**, Glyph A1a on Hatzcap Ceel axe, drawing by the author; **h. ʔu**-CELT, Glyph A1 on Nakum clamshell jadeite pendant. Drawing by Simon Martin in Źrałka et al. (2011: 898, Fig. 7).

The following glyph, A2 (**Fig. 9a**), may correspond to the name of the actor, the person who carried out the action of holding (*ch'am*) or wrapping (*k'al*) the stone. A2 is composed of three signs. The first sign is rendered as half of T510/ZQD, the STAR sign, read **ʔEK'** for *ʔeek'* 'star', seen as the first sign in a collocation in another early text (Figure 9b). The second sign appears to be an early form of T109/1B9 that resembles a long bone, read **CHAK** for *chak* 'red'; two Early Classic examples are shown for comparison (**Figs. 9c-d**). If A2a-A2b make up in fact a compound glyph, and its component signs are correctly identified, it could be read **CHAK-ʔEK'** for *chak ʔeek'* 'red/great star'; in fact, this is known ethnohistorically as the name for the planet Venus. The third sign is a profile head sign characterized by a headdress with a curl on the top, and an earflare. Thompson (1931: 271) argued that it "probably represents the head of the black god, Schellhas' God M," an identification that the present author regards as plausible, given the possible U-shaped element above the eye, but not definitive. The identification of this sign is at this point uncertain.[7]

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[7] It could represent a noun referring to the actor, perhaps by title. However, some syllabograms are head signs, and some syllabograms that represent inanimate objects can on occasion be animated,
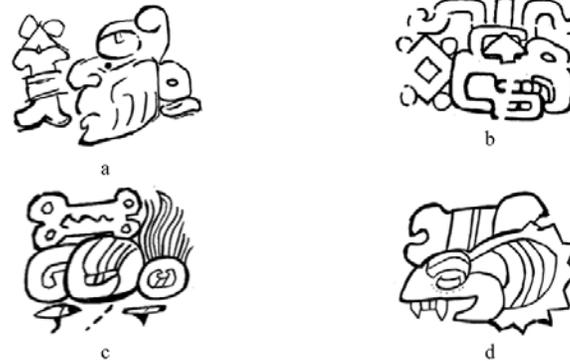
Fig. 9. a. Glyph A2 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe; **b**. Glyph 5 on inscribed tubular jade bead from the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itzá; **c**. **CHAK-mu-ti-l(a)** 'red bird', Glyph 1 on inscribed avian effigy vessel; **d**. **CHAK-?CHAPAT**, Glyph B1 on inscribed jade plaque at Cleveland Museum of Art. All drawings by the author.

The glyph at A3 (**Fig. 10**) may be composed of three signs: A3a, a sign that resembles foliage and could thus be a version of T262, the logogram **LAKAM** for *lakam* 'big, great, wide'; A3b, which resembles T528, the logogram **TUN** for *tuun* 'stone'; and A3c, which resembles T116 **ni** or T120 **ne**. If correct, A3 could be read *lakam tuun* 'great stone'. A fourth sign may be present between the possible **TUN** sign and the possible **ni/ne** sign, perhaps a sign shaped like a knot. A number of different signs resemble knotted cloth or hair, for example. Not enough details remain to determine the precise identification of the sign.

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either through zoomorphicization or anthropomorphicization, so that option cannot be discounted yet, not until the sign can be positively identified.

Fig. 10. **a**. Glyph A3 on Hatzcap Ceel axe, drawing by the author; **b**. **LAKAM**, Glyph B1 on Bonampak Lintel 4. Drawing by Matthew Looper.

A4 appears to be made up of three signs (**Fig. 11**). A4a resembles a vegetal leaf or pad, such as ZF2, the logogram **NAB'** for *nahb'*. A4b appears to be an elongated object, perhaps knotted, with the left end exhibiting two curling elements. A4c appears to be a crossed-bands sign with two curled signs below it.

Fig. 11. **a**. Glyph A4 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe; **b**. Glyph B6 on Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral. Drawings by the author.

A5 seems to be made up of two signs (**Fig. 12**): A5a likely corresponds to T126/32M, the syllabogram **ya**; A5b likely corresponds to T504/XH9, the logogram **ʔAK'AB'** for *ʔahk'ab'* 'darkness, night', but possibly

also a syllabogram **ʔa**, through acrophony.[8] Thompson (1931: 271) misidentified A5b as an Ahau sign. Zender (2005) convincingly argues that T122:504 or 2S6:XH9 functions to spell the male proclitic ʔaj in some expressions. A5 may thus be transliterated as *y-ahk'ab'* for 'his/her/its darkness/night'. Alternatively, if A5b is interpreted as spelling the male proclitic ʔaj, without the use of T122/2S6, then a different interpretation is obtained, one that takes into account the following glyph block, B1.

Fig. 12. a. Glyph at A5, consisting of sequence of signs **ya-ʔa(j)/ʔAK'AB'**;   **b**. Glyph C6 on Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral, spelling **[ʔu]ya-ʔAK'AB'**. Drawings by the author.

B1 appears to be made up of two signs (**Fig. 13a**): B1a is T1016/AMC, the logogram **K'UH(UL)** for *k'uh(ul)* 'god(ly)'; and B1b resembles T23, the syllabogram **na**. Together, they give **K'UH(UL)-na**. At first, it would seem to be a spelling of *k'uh nah* 'temple (i.e. god house)', as originally proposed by Ringle (1988). However, another, more likely alternative is available, given the preceding glyph block, A5. As already noted, if A5b is interpreted as spelling the male proclitic ʔaj, then a close, but imperfect parallel is obtained with the passage from Toniná Monument 183 provided by Zender (2005: 3), with the phrase **ta-ʔa(j)-K'UH(UL)-na-li** (**Fig. 13b**), which Zender transliterates and translates as *ta-ajk'uhuun-il* 'in *ajk'uhuun*-ship'. In that phrase, the male proclitic ʔaj is spelled jointly by T122.504 or 2S6:XH9, as Zender (2005) has argued convincingly. I believe it is possible that T122/2S6 may not have been crucial to allow for the *ʔa(j)* value of T504/XH9. If so, and given the preceding observations, it seems probable that A5-B1 make up an instance of the God C Title, which Zender (2004) has successfully argued to pertain to priesthood. Putting the pieces together, the sequence at A5-B1 might spell **ya-ʔa(j)-K'UH-na** for *y-a[j]-k'uhun* 'the *ajk'uhun* of' ; a Late Classic instance of an equivalent expression is shown in Figure 13c as **ya-ja-K'UH-na**. The example at A5-B1 on the Hatzcap Ceel axe could be the earliest example of this priestly

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[8] Ayala (1983: 201–202) had already observed the presence of T504 at A5b in the Hatzcap Ceel axe, an identification that Mora-Marín (2001b:269-270) agreed with. Mora-Marín (2001b: 348) had already proposed the presence of T126 **ya** to spell the third person ergative/possessive prevocalic prefix, *y-*, which in turn is an innovative trait of the Greater Lowland Mayan (Ch'olan-Tzeltalan, Yucatecan) languages.

title. The name of the personage bearing this title would be the name occurring prior to A5. However, this interpretation should be regarded as very tentative given the absence of T122/2S6 preceding T504/XH9, and the fact that this would be the earliest example of this title known to date. Also, the possible instance of T23 **na** is similar to T503 **ʔIK'**, as observed by one of the referees of this article.

Zender (2004: 167–195) reviews the scholarship on the **ʔa(j)-K'UH-na** title, concluding that it is analyzable as a derived term based on *k'uh* 'god' and a Ch'olan-Tzeltalan denominative transitivizer of the shape *-uun*, and related to Ch'olan and Tzeltalan forms such as Chontal *ch'uh-un* 'to celebrate' and Tzeltal *ch'uh-un* 'to worship, believe, obey'. Zender translates the title as 'worshipper'. Although I agree with Zender's analysis, there are two problems that should be considered. The first lies in his transliteration as *ajk'uhuun*, which assumes that the suffix had a long vowel, *-uun*. This assumption is based on his acceptance of the disharmony hypothesis by Houston et al. (Houston, Robertson, and Stuart 1998; Houston, Stuart, and Robertson 2004); such hypothesis, nevertheless, cannot be supported by the comparative and historical linguistic evidence for this suffix, and Mora-Marín (2010) has also demonstrated a significant number of orthographic problems with it too. Thus, I transliterate the term as *ʔajk'uhun (ʔaj-k'uh-un)*. The second problem is, of course, the fact that the term appears to be based on *k'uh*, rather than *ch'uh*. Since T1016/AMC, the God C glyph, is a logogram, it is possible that Ch'olan-Tzeltlan scribes may have read it as **CH'UH** for *ch'uh* 'god', and Yucatecan scribes may have read it as **K'UH** for *k'uh* 'god'. It is also possible that the term may have been preserved among the Classic elites, including the priestly groups, as *k'uh*, even after the **k(') > ch(')* shift.
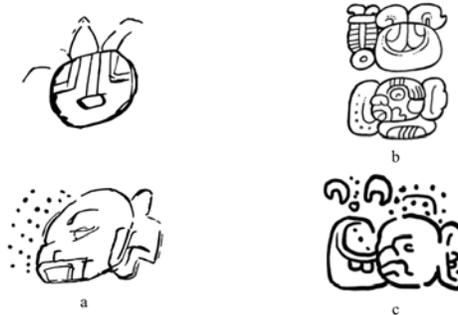
Fig. 13. a. Glyphs A5-B1 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe, drawing by the author; **b**. Detail of accession phrase on Tonina Monument 183 showing T122:504 sign spelling **ʔaj** '(male/large) proclitic', drawing by Zender (2005: 3); **c**. Detail of Yib'an pot showing **ya-ja-K'UH-na** expression on Dumbarton Oaks vessel, drawing by the author after photograph by Justin Kerr, K4340.

If this analysis is correct, then what precedes A5, namely, A4 (and perhaps the preceding glyphs at A2-A3 also), is likely the name of the person bearing the priestly title, and what follows B1, starting at B2 (**Fig. 14a**), is the possessor of the God C priestly title at A5-B1, and thus, B2 corresponds to the priest's superior. B2 exhibits the general outline of T751/AT1, the logogram **B'ALAM** for *b'ahläm* 'jaguar'. But interestingly, it is incomplete—not just partly erased due to damage, but incomplete. Indeed, the scribe

left the sign unfinished, leaving only the general outline, without filling in details. B3 (**Fig. 14b**), which follows, is made up of two signs, an unidentified sign at B3a, followed by T751/AT1, **B'ALAM**, at B3b. Thompson (1931: 271) suggested that it "possibly represents the head of a rabbit," but that interpretation is no longer likely. The author suspects that the scribe halted the incising the glyph at B2, and instead restarted the glyph, this time with an additional sign on top, at B3.

Fig. 14. a. Glyph B2 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe; **b**. Glyph B3 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe; drawings by the author.

The glyph at B4 (**Fig. 15a**) appears to be made up of as many as four signs, possibly all syllabograms. Thompson (1931: 271) stated that it "may represent a hand holding a glyph, a common Maya combination," but the present author does not regard this as likely. B4a is unclear, but could be an example of a horizontally flipped T181/ZU1, the syllabogram **ja**, or a version of T238/743/BP1/BP3, the syllabogram **ʔa**. B4b resembles T501/XE1, the syllabogram **b'a**. However, there are several other signs that are characterized by the same cartouche, differing only in the internal element on the top (e.g. T556/XE2 **HAʔ** for *haʔ* 'water'; T502/XE3 **ma**; XE4 **t'u**); since that specific part of the sign is extremely unclear due to scratch marks and natural inclusions of the rock, it is not possible to distinguish the internal element in it at this time. B4c, underneath B4b, resembles T25/AA1, the syllabogram **ka**, or T130/2S2, the syllabogram **wa**. And B4d resembles part of T117/1S1 **wi**. For now, I do not have too much confidence in the identifications of the individual signs to hazard so much as a guess for the whole glyph. Since it follows what may be part of a proper name, the glyph for 'jaguar', and since it precedes a likely verb at B5, it is more probable that it constitutes a continuation of the name phrase of the individual named at B2-B3.

Fig. 15. Glyph B4 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe. Drawing by the author.

B5 (**Fig. 16a**), as Thompson (1931: 271) correctly observed, appears to be a hafted axe. Thompson (1931: 271) observed that an AXE sign is used occasionally with the glyph for the numeral '6' (and '16'), and suggested that perhaps in this case it functioned as such. However, in such instances, the AXE sign is contained within the eye of the head variant for the numeral six. In the present instance, it is more likely that the AXE sign constitutes an example of T190(/333)/2M7, the logogram **CH'AK** for *ch'ak* 'to chop/cut'. As such, it likely represents a verb: given the absence of a sign spelling an ergative person agreement marker, it more than likely represents a passive or mediopassive form of the transitive root *ch'ak*, hence, *ch'a[h]k* or *ch'a[h]k-a*j, for example. In either case, a meaning such as 's/he/it was/got chopped/cut' is possible here. Below I argue specifically for 'it was/got chopped/cut'.


Fig. 16. **a**. Glyph B5 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe, drawing by the author; **b**. Hand holding a hafted axe in depiction on Madrid Codex, page 95, after de Rosny.

And finally, B6 (**Fig. 17**) is composed of two signs. B6a (**Fig. 17a**) is an example of T757/AP9, the syllabogram **b'a**, also **B'AH**, derived acrophonically from *b'ah* 'gopher', which is what T757/AP9 depicts iconographically—the head of a gopher. Thompson (1931: 271) misidentified this sign as a jaguar sign; later Thompson (1962: 375) classified it as T788. Mora-Marín (2001b: 352–353) also identified this sign, in a much more stylized form, in the Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral, at D6 (**Fig. 17b**) on that text (Coe 1966). Interestingly, there appears to be a second sign, B6b (**Fig. 17a**), embedded or infixed within T757/AP9, namely, T617/1M2, the aforementioned polyvalent sign that has the logographic value **WIN** for *win* 'eye, face' when combined with T757/AP9 (**Figs. 17c-f**), which in this case serves to spell *b'aah* 'head' (Mora-Marín 2012). The diagonal lines present on the gopher head's brow are in fact the diagnostic trait of T617/1M2. Thus, B6 is read **WIN:b'a** for *win=b'aah* 'eye=head; portrait'. Paleographically, B6b, the gopher head sign, is interesting because of the apparent earflare element with the two dots, resembling the examples of earflare elements on the Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral (Mora-Marín 2001b: 342), as seen in **Figure 17g**.
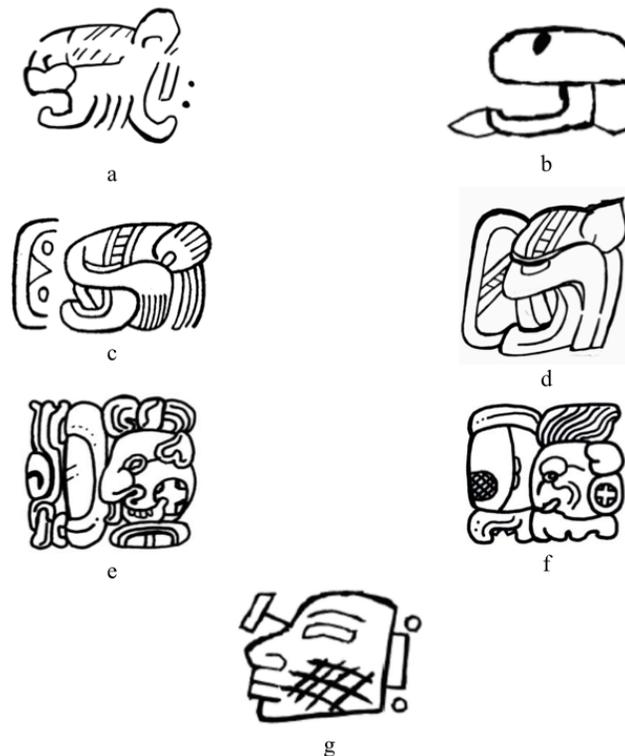
Fig. 17. a. Glyph B6 on Hatzcap Ceel Axe, spelling **[WIN]b'a/B'AH**; **b**. Glyph D5 on Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral, the syllabogram **b'a**; **c**. Glyph block from slate disk reportedly from Bagaces, Pacific Northwest, Costa Rica, spelling **ʔu-[WIN]b'a/B'AH**; **d**. Glyph block from "Creation Text" on greenstone mask reportedly from Río Azul, spelling **WIN-[WIN]b'a/B'AH**; **e**. Glyph block from Copan Stela 4, spelling **ʔu-WIN-b'a-hi-li**, after drawing in Houston and Stuart (1998:83, fig. 9c); **f**. Glyph block from Palenque Temple XVIII, spelling **ʔu-wi-ni-b'a**, after drawing in Houston and Stuart (1998: 83, Fig. 9a); **g**. Glyph block from Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral, spelling **ta-ʔ[pa] or [pa]ʔ-ta**, drawings by the author.

Looking back at B5, **CH'AK**, more than likely as a passive or mediopassive verb (inflected with *-h-...-aj*), it is now possible to contextualize B6: the phrase at B6 may constitute the subject of the **CH'AK** verb. If so, we obtain 'the eye/face-head was chopped/cut'. In most instances, the *win=b'aah* expression is associated with portraits, e.g. *u win=b'aah(-il)* '(it is) the portrait of'. Perhaps this phrase refers to the sculpting (through cutting) of a portrait of a deity, or perhaps a mask, out of wood, i.e. one of the actions that a ritual specialist would have performed. Such actions are depicted on the Madrid Codex (**Fig. 18a**), where the action is referred to by the glyph **CH'AK-ka-ja** for *ch'a[h]k-aj-Ø* 's/he/it was chopped/cut' (**Fig. 18b**), occasionally spelled simply as **CH'AK-ja** (**Fig. 18c**); the Hatzcap Ceel version points in the opposite direction (**Fig. 18d**), but is otherwise equivalent. The portraits being crafted in the depictions are made of wood, spelled **TE?/CHE?-?e** for *te?/che?* 'wood', in the accompanying captions. The interpretation favored by the present author is one of sculpting: **CH'AK WIN:B'AH** for *ch'ahk-aj-Ø win=b'aah* 'the portrait was/got carved'. Thus, the axe seems to refer to the practice of preparing religious images by means of carving, for which the axe itself was probably used. Alternatively, the author originally entertained the idea that B5-B6 constitute an example of a "head-chopping" or "self-chopping" expression (Mora-Marín 1996: 129). However, such a possibility cannot be sustained given the presence of **WIN** infixed within the **B'AH/b'a** sign; nor is there accompanying evidence from its archaeological context to support a 'self-chopping' interpretation. Instead, the evidence of the ritual deposit suggests the activities of a ritual specialist who may have been responsible for the crafting of a variety of artefacts, some of which could have required the use of the axe itself.
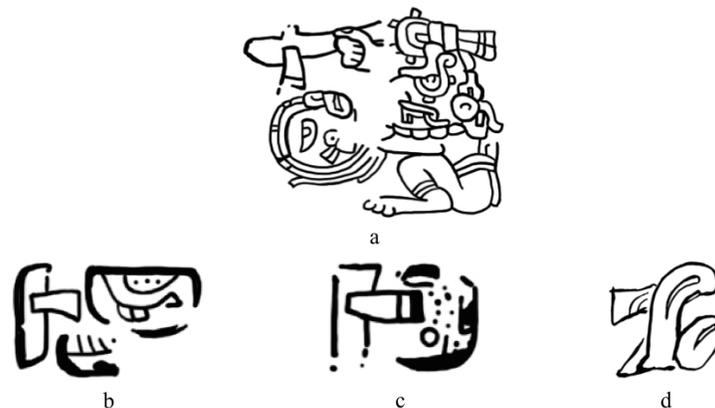
Fig. 18. a. Detail from Madrid Codex 92 (De Rosny's facsimile); **b**. **CH'AK-ka-ja** for *ch'a[h]k-aj-Ø-Ø* 'it was/got cut/chopped/axed', detail from Madrid Codex 92; **c**. **CH'AK-ja** for *ch'a[h]k-aj-Ø-Ø* 'it was/got cut/chopped/axed', detail from Madrid Codex 92; **d**. B5 from Hatzcap Ceel axe text: **CH'AK(AJ)**. All drawings by the author.

The structure of the text, as a whole, can be summarized as follows. The text opens at A1 with the verbal phrase *u ch'am[-aw]-Ø* CELT 's/he held the celt', followed by the name of the personage, likely a

priest of some sort, whose name is likely mentioned in whole or in part in glyph blocks A2-A4. From A5-B1 the priest in question is mentioned by title, *ʔaj k'uhun* 'worshipper'; if correctly identified, given the various anomalies. The title is possessed (*y-aj k'uhun* 'the *aj k'uhun* of'), grammatically, by another individual; in other words, he is the subordinate of another individual, presumably another religious specialist, who would have higher rank, and whose name is mentioned from B2-B3, and possibly also including B4. B2-B3 may be a repetition of the same term, *b'ahläm* 'jaguar', as part of the proper name of the priest's superior. Finally, the text closes at B5-B6 with the phrase *ch'ahk-aj win=b'aah* 'the portrait was cut (sculpted)'. It is very likely that the Hatzcap Ceel axe was the very instrument used for sculpting said portrait, probably out of wood.

Further analysis is required to securely identify some of the signs and sign collocations on this text, and to determine how the collocations fit into clause structures.

The Carving of Ritual Images

The Hatzcap Ceel axe could bear the first instance of the *ʔajk'uhun* 'he who worships' title, at A5-B1, that appears to refer to an office of priesthood (Zender 2004). This is supported by the last two glyph blocks, B5-B6, that may read *ch'ahkaj winb'aah* 'the portrait was cut', referring, most likely, to the carving of a statue or mask, or more specifically, to the portrait part of a statue or mask. Such task—the carving of religious imagery—was apparently one of the charges of the priesthood, and is a practice documented in the Postclassic Madrid Codex. Prufer, Wanyerka, and Shah (2003) argue for a correspondence between attested ritual wooden figurines, such as the one from the ceremonial cave of Xmuqlebal Xheton, Belize, and the depictions in the Madrid Codex of carving of wooden figurines with axes; they point to the insight that such correspondence offers for understanding the roles of religious specialists. Together with the archaeological context of Hatzcap Ceel axe, which was placed in a very elaborate ritual cache among many other offerings of various kinds, the conclusion that the Hatzcap Ceel axe was a ritual object, the tool of a priest in charge of preparing ritual figurines, seems probable. The name of the priest, at A2-A4 (or at least part of this sequence), is not yet clear (although it may have contained the term for the planet Venus), but the name of his superior, at B2-B4, although not entirely clear, does bear the term for 'jaguar', *b'ahlam*. Indeed, the priest is said to be 'his/her *ʔaj k'uhun*', in other words, a subordinate of the personage named at B2-B4.

It is likely that the first glyph of the text refers to the action of 'holding' of a celt/axe; perhaps the diorite axe itself. In the Madrid Codex, the personages portrayed in the act of carving portraits are shown holding the wooden portraits on one hand while wielding an axe with the other hand. So another possibility would be that the first glyph of the text refers to the action of holding the raw material (a celt?) for the purpose of carving it into a *win=b'aah* 'portrait/image', but this seems less likely: axes of this type may not have been very useful for carving a stone celt. Instead, saws, drills, abrasives would be required for such a task.

Conclusions

The paper has reviewed the history of documentation of the rather idiosyncratic inscription on the Hatzcap Ceel diorite axe, an important document likely dating to the transition between the Late

Preclassic (400 BCE-200 CE) and Early Classic (200-600 CE) periods. It is read in single columns, rather than double columns, an unusual trait for texts that exhibit paired columns of glyphs. A more thorough comparative analysis with contemporaneous texts is required, and will likely yield insights into the evolution of Mayan writing, such as the paleographic changes that signs undergo across time and space. But such a task goes beyond the goals of the present paper.

The Hatzcap Ceel diorite axe, itself a ritual offering, was inscribed with a text that pertains to the ritual process itself, as well as to the personage in charge of such process, a priest bearing the title *aj k'uhun*, who may have used the axe for carving ritual objects. Although much of the text remains difficult to analyze and interpret, it does offer a glimpse into the religious practices of the ancient Mayans, and it probably constitutes the earliest references to this priestly title and the act of carving religious images.

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