



# Glyph Dwellers

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## A Plate from the Xultun Area in the FUNBA Collection

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The FUNBA (Fundación Nacional para las Bellas Artes y la Cultura) collection in La Antigua Guatemala contains several inscribed Classic Maya ceramic vessels. Among these is a finely-painted black-on-cream tripod plate, sometimes known by its Maya Survey/Maya Ceramic Project number MS5320 (**Figs. 1-3**; Palacios Porta 2007:36). The registration number on the underside of the plate is: 84-A-6-320-1. The plate has been referred to as Chinos black-on-cream, a type known to have been produced in western Belize and eastern Guatemala (Reents-Budet et al. 2000:Fig. 2e). The artistic composition of the plate's interior consists of a central ring framing a deity head painted in black, surrounded by a band of 14 finely-painted glyph blocks. The outwardly flaring walls of the plate are defined by black lines, which frame two negative-painted deity heads with elaborate scrollwork and foliation, arranged opposite each other. The exterior walls of the plate are decorated with a chevron pattern.



Fig. 1. Legged plate from the Xultun area in FUNBA collection (MS5320). Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 2. Legged plate from the Xultun area in FUNBA collection (MS5320). Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 3. Legged plate from the Xultun area in FUNBA collection (MS5320). Photograph by Yuriy Polyukhovych.



Fig. 4. Inscription of plate in FUNBA collection (MS5320). Drawings by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

The plate's text consists of a straightforward PSS or dedicatory formula, beginning with *alay* "here," followed by the dedication verb, and *utz'ihbnajal*, "its painting/writing," of which only the syllables **u-tz'i-bi-na** are visible (Fig. 4). The undeciphered dedication verb in block B has three or four dots and a "haab"-sign above a damaged element, followed by a portrait head similar to God S. This grapheme is a single unit, combining elements of the 4-"haab"-hand-deity head grapheme (see Grube and Gaida 2006:65; Stuart 2005:152; Zender 2000:1040) and a God S-like grapheme used as a dedication verb on vessels mainly in El Zotz and Hix Witz (Pajamal/Zapote Bobal) styles, such as K1092, 5509, 8722, and 9254. Forms similar to the dedication verb on the plate appear on vessels in various styles, including K1183, K4997, K5452, Denver Art Museum 2004.956, and Fundación La Ruta Maya reg. no. 1.2.179.9 (Fig. 5; see also Luín et al. 2018:Fig. 3b). One of these vessels, K4997 (Fig. 6), is painted in a style related to the FUNBA plate, and refers to the vessel's owner as K'ahk' Hoplaj<sup>1</sup> Chan K'inich, probably an abbreviated version of the name K'ahk' Hoplaj Chan Yopaat Yax We'nel Chan K'inich, a lord of Xultun who is named on several vessels, including K2324, K4572, K9271, and a vase in the Fundación La Ruta Maya collection inv. no. 1.2.179.7 (Garrison and Stuart 2004; Krempel and Matteo 2012; 2013:11–13; Matteo and Krempel 2011; Rossi, Stuart, and Saturno 2015). Yax We'nel Chan K'inich is also depicted in the mural of Structure 10K2 at Xultun (Saturno et al. 2017).



Fig. 5. Detail of dedication verb similar to that which appears on the FUNBA plate. From a bowl in the Fundación La Ruta Maya reg. no. 1.2.179.9. Photograph by Matthew Loper.



Fig. 6. Bowl from the Xultun area with a dedication verb similar to that which appears on the FUNBA plate. Rollout photograph by Justin Kerr (K4997).

<sup>1</sup> The reading of this component of this personal name is based on a reinterpretation of T559 in these contexts as **HOP** (Sergei Vepretskii, personal communication, 2017).

The text refers to the vessel itself using paired terms: *jawante'*, which is associated with legged plates, and *ajalhib*, sometimes spelled *ajaljib*, found on plates (Boot 2004; Stuart 2005:128–130). The text assigns the plate to an elite person, the Lady We'(nel) Om Yo'hl Ch'e'n. As such, it is one of only a handful of Classic Maya vessels whose inscriptions explicitly refer to a female owner (Houston 2018:68–70).

In the text, the female owner is stated to be an *ajaw* of a place spelled with a curved spotted sign read **BAAX** (Prager et al. 2010), followed by a “kawak”-marked sign. While this second grapheme looks like T528 **TUUN** “stone,” it can be identified as T529 **WITZ** “mountain” by comparison with the title sequence of the same lady, who is named as the owner of a cylinder vase in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Figs. 7, 8; accession number M.2010.115.616; MS1721; K5976). In this example, the lady is stated to be an *ajaw* of Baax Witz, the ancient name for Xultun (Garrison and Stuart 2004:Fig. 9b; Houston 1986; Matteo and Krempel n.d.; Prager et al. 2010).<sup>2</sup> In the example of the FUNBA plate, the **WITZ** identification of this sign may be indicated by the slight “dimple” on the right-hand side. It is significant that on the Los Angeles County Museum of Art vase, the owner is also given the title *ix kalo'mte'*, “lady kalo'mte',” employing a title associated with leaders who head regional hegemonies that is also borne by Yax We'nel Chan K'inich of Xultun (see Martin and Grube 2008:17). This indication of her high status was apparently typical of female rulers at Xultun, who are even mentioned on monuments at other sites, such as Caracol (Garrison and Stuart 2004:834).



Fig. 7. Vase from the Xultun area, Los Angeles County Museum of Art M.2010.115.616. Rollout photograph by Justin Kerr (K5976).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the LACMA vase M.2010.115.616 (MS1721) bears a superficial resemblance to Naranjo-style pottery; however, its paste chemistry is divergent from the Naranjo sample, suggesting Xultun as a likely area of manufacture (Matteo and Krempel n.d.; Dorie Reents-Budet, pers. comm. 2019).



Fig. 8. Name and titles of owner of vase from the Xultun area, Los Angeles County Museum of Art M.2010.115.616 (K5976). Drawing by Yuriy Polyukhovych.

In conclusion, this plate provides a second example of the name of Lady We’(nel) Om Yo’hl Ch’e’n, who also owned Los Angeles County Museum of Art M.2010.115.616 (MS1721; K5976), though it is painted in a different style. Its inscription and painting style are suggestive of its creation in the Xultun area.

Table 1. Transcription and translation of text from plate in FUNBA collection (MS5320).

A	<b>a-AL-ya</b>	alay	here
B	<b>?</b>	?	[dedication]
C	<b>u-tz’i-bi</b>	utz’ihbnajal	its painting
D	<b>na_</b>	“	“
E	<b>_ja-wa</b>	ujawante’	her legged plate?
F	<b>TE’</b>	“	“
G	<b>ya-ja-la</b>	yajalhib	her plate/vessel?
H	<b>hi-bi</b>	“	“
I	<b>[IX]-WE’ o-mo</b>	Ix We’/We’nel Om	Lady We’/We’nel Om Yo’hl Ch’e’n
J	<b>yo-O’HL-li</b>	Yo’hl	“
K	<b>CH’E’N-na</b>	Ch’e’n	“



L	<b>IX</b>	ix	lady
M	<b>BAAX-WITZ -AJAW</b>	Baax Witz ajaw	Xultun [Quartz-Mountain] lord
N	<b>IX-ba-ka-ba</b>	ix baahkab	lady <i>baahkab</i> [title]

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