

## A Comment on the Initial Sign Collocation of Kerr No. 8123

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In early May I had the opportunity to do research for a joint paper on the subject of the Initial Sign which opens the Primary Standard Sequence (henceforth PSS) on Classic Maya ceramics. In the afternoon of May 8, 2003, I browsed through my archive of rollout photographs looking for good examples of Initial Sign collocations and I came upon an interesting example. My archive contained a color rollout image of Kerr No. 8123, a polychrome ceramic vessel which provides a vertical written PSS. The image I had available is illustrated here below:





Although there was a light obstruction covering part of the Initial Sign enough detail survived to identify a purely syllabically written variant. The main sign is clearly T534 **la**, prefixed with T228/229 'a and postfixed with T126 **ya**. As such the collocation here in Initial Sign position can be transcribed 'a-**la**-**ya**. This collocation confirms recent epigraphic research by Yuriy Polyukhovych and Barbara MacLeod, who during late 2000 proposed a transliteration *alay* for the Initial Sign collocation, based on the occasional suffixing of the MIRROR main sign and its HEADVARIANT with syllabic signs for **la** and **ya**. The item *alay* contains *lay*, a gloss which can be defined as “this, this one” or “here” in several Maya languages.

This new finding was promptly communicated to Yuriy and Barbara. The syllabic variant spelling **'a-la-ya** on Kerr No. 8123 may thus provide conclusive evidence that the Initial Sign collocation indeed is to be transliterated as *alay*. Other former proposals, which include *\*aliy* and *\*al-ya*, which will not be discussed here.

I additionally emailed Justin if he possibly had a better photograph available of the PSS on No. 8123, and within a few days he posted the high resolution images of the PSS as well as the other glyphic texts on this ceramic vessel. The high resolution image of the Initial Sign clearly shows that the main sign indeed is T534 **la** and that the correct transcription for this collocation is **'a-la-ya** for *alay*. Further research focussing on Initial Sign collocations, mostly done in the late night hours (that is epigraphy for me!), provided the following variation in spellings. This research specifically derives from a database of PSS texts which I have constructed during the last years. It currently contains over 470 PSS texts (the database is continuously growing). Of those over 470 PSS a total of 368 examples contains an introductory section that generally opens with the Initial Sign collocation, with the exception of three examples. Note that, for example, Kerr No. 6436 does not open with Initial Sign, but with FLAT.HAND-**ja**:



These three examples indicate that Initial Sign is optional. There is a wide range of variants which can be found in Initial Sign position. The following illustrated table provides these different variants and their number of occurrence within my present database. In this table MIRROR refers to a variety of glyphic signs which operate as the main sign of the Initial Sign collocation. HEADVARIANT refers to a smaller set of glyphic signs which seem to be the anthropomorphic variant of the MIRROR set of signs. The abbreviation IS simply means Initial Sign.

Spelling	Amount of Examples	Example
no IS	003	Kerr No. 6436, 8007, Robiscek 1970: Fig. 170
'a-MIRROR	010	Kerr No. 0758 
MIRROR-ya	001	Kerr No. 5198 

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'a-MIRROR-ya

255

Kerr No. 1355



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'a-la?-MIRROR

001

Kerr No. 0791



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'a-la-MIRROR-ya

001

Kerr No. 5458



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la-MIRROR-ya

003

Kerr No. 8009



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'a-la-ya

001

Kerr No. 8123 (high res. image)

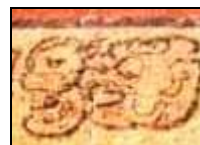


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'a-HEADVARIANT

066

Kerr No. 0595



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HEADVARIANT-ya	001	Kerr No. 1335
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'a-ja-ya	004	Kerr No. 0558
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While the amount of examples on which this table is based can not be considered complete it can be concluded that the MIRROR and the HEADVARIANT main sign seem to represent the value **LAY**. This value is particularly stressed in rare examples as HEADVARIANT-ya (Kerr No. 1335, thus **LAY-ya**) and MIRROR-ya (Kerr No. 1355, thus **LAY-ya**) which do not contain the prefixed 'a.

There are additionally a few examples which do not conform to any of the spellings as illustrated above. These “abberant” examples are:

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na?-MIRROR-ya	001	Kerr No. 5940
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'u-MIRROR-ya	002	Kerr No. 7602
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'a-HA'?'-ya	001	Kerr No. 4652
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To these “abberant” examples one other spelling can be added which may shed further light on the possible identification of *alay* as “this, this one” and “here”.

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ha'-'i

0001

Kerr No. 1728



This last example can be found on a ceramic vessel painted and written in the tradition of the Ik' site (Motul de San José in the Late Classic period). If one compares the PSS texts on two ceramics from this tradition one can observe the substitution between *alay* and *ha'i* in initial position (both texts do continue after the vessel type collocation, here written **yu-'UK**).

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Kerr No. 1728



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Kerr No. 0791



Both texts open with a Calendar Round date after which the variant for the Initial Sign can be found. The structure of these two texts seems to hint at the fact that both *alay* and *ha'i* have the same grammatical function. The item *ha'i* is known to operate as the demonstrative “this one” in Classic Maya inscriptions.

A Late Classic incised vessel of unknown provenance (but the inscription provides clues to a Jaina/Coastal Campeche provenance) provides a PSS text which in structure is quite close to the above two PSS texts from the Ik' site.

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Kerr No. 4340



This text opens with a Distance Number which reaches the *tzolk'in* date 4 Ajaw, after which the text continues with 'i-GOD.N[*yi*] and **yu-xu?-lu-li?** and the vessel type collocation (the actual

PSS text continues with the contents). Again, here there is no Initial Sign collocation included in the PSS text, but the GOD.N verb is preceded by the particle 'i “then, and then”.

### **Final remarks**

In these illustrated comments, just short notes, I hope to have shown that most of the variant Initial Sign collocations can now be transliterated with confidence as *alay* based on the spelling in PSS text on Kerr No. 8123 as **'a-la-ya**. This syllabic spelling confirms recent epigraphic research by Yuriy Polyukovych and Barbara MacLeod who in late 2000 proposed that the Initial Sign collocation read *alay*. More epigraphic and linguistic evidence will be found in the joint article which currently is in the process of being written.