

## A Vessel Fit for a Feast: Kerr No. 3091

by Erik Boot (e-mail: [wukyabnal@hotmail.com](mailto:wukyabnal@hotmail.com))  
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The Maya Vase Data Base Archive of Rollout Photographs, as developed and maintained by Justin Kerr (n.d.), contains a wide range of Classic Maya ceramics with different kinds of painted, incised, carved, and stamped rim texts. Some of these ceramics provide long and unique versions of the Primary Standard Sequence (e.g. Kerr No. 0635), a common but important standardized dedicatory formula, while others contain repeating pseudo-glyphs (e.g. Kerr No. 6608) or even empty glyph outlines (e.g. Kerr No. 8793).

There is one ceramic vessel that, as far as I know, has a unique rim text. This text can be found painted around the rim of Kerr No. 3091, a polychrome vessel which illustrates two full body portraits of the supreme god Itzamnaj (Figure 1). The vessel has a height of 17 cm., a diameter of 13.8 cm., and a circumference of 44.4 cm.

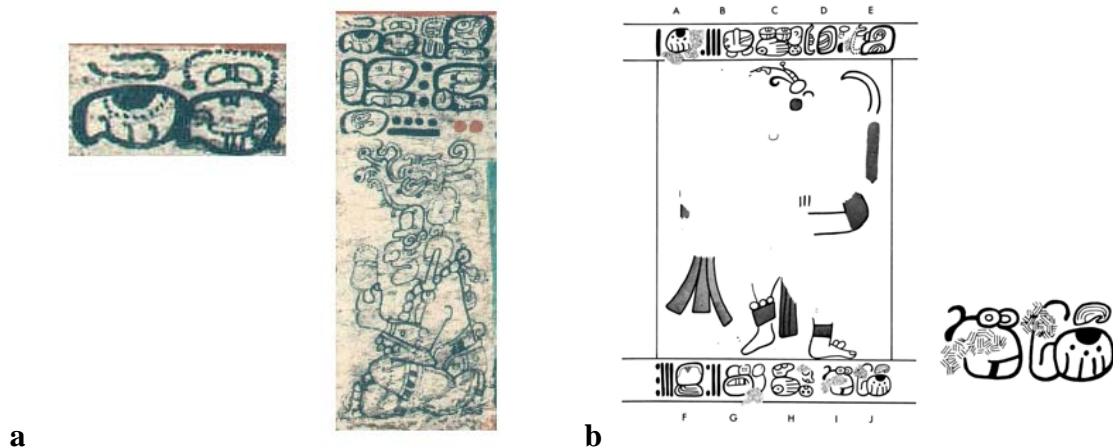


**Figure 1:** Rollout of Kerr No. 3091 and Detail of the Rim Text  
(photographs by Justin Kerr)

The rim text consists of a combination of two well-known hieroglyphic signs, T504 DAYSIGN.K'AN and T501 DAYSIGN.IMIX, that alternate with what seem to be glyph-like oval-shaped ornamental (and empty) signs (note 1). However, in this context these two signs do not refer to the days K'an (fourth day sign) and Imix (first day sign) of the Maya 260-day calendar.

This particular combination of T504 and T501 is not unique to Maya writing. The combination of these signs forms the heart of a common expression in the Postclassic Maya

screenfold books as well as a number of painted capstones from northern Yucatán (cf. García Campillo 1998) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** a) Codex Dresden Page 5C2, with detail, b) Uxmal, Capstone 1, with detail (Graham and Von Euw 1992: 139)

In studies of the Maya screenfold books the hieroglyphic compound of which detailed images are provided in Figure 2 is generally referred to as a positive augury, prognostication, or attributive (cf. Grube 1997: 79-88). The glyph compound in the Codex Dresden is spelled T128[501.504]; the glyph compound on the Uxmal capstone is spelled T128?[504].128[501]. These two examples indicate that the order of the combination or couplet consisting of T504 and T501 is not fixed.



**Figure 3:** The Logograms for EAT WE' and DRINK 'UK', a) The Gardiner Plate (Kerr No. 6080), drawing by Mark Zender, b) The Mundo Perdido Vase, drawing by Gustavo Valenzuela

Although the epigraphic arguments have not yet been published in full detail (cf. Stuart, Houston, and Robertson 1999: II-36, II-60; Stuart 2005: 126-127), it was David Stuart who recently suggested that T128 (**TI'** MOUTH, and allographs) infixed with T504 **WAJ** (or allographs) represents the value EAT or **WE'**, while T128 (and allographs) infixed with T501 **HA'** represents the value DRINK or **'UK'** (Figure 3). He also suggested that the augury or prognostication T128:504.501 may have held the value FEAST, as it included both references to EAT and DRINK, the common components of a commemorative or ceremonial meal at a

feast or banquet. Recently I suggested that T128[504.501] may have had the value MEAL (cf. Boot 2005a: 278, note 30) (note 2).

I take Stuart's suggestions in large measure to be correct. If his suggestions are indeed correct, what does this mean for Kerr No. 3091? The rim text on this vessel contains the sign combination or couplet T504 and T501 or BREAD **WAJ** and WATER **HA'**, the main ingredients of both eating (T128[504] EAT **WE'**) and drinking (T128[501] DRINK **'UK'**), the heart of the T128[504.501] FEAST or MEAL augury, prognostication, or attributive (note 3). I suggest that the sign combinations or couplets consisting of "bread" and "water" in the repetitive rim text on Kerr No. 3091 refer to a feast or meal. If correct, this vessel may thus have been produced specifically to be employed in an elite feasting context. A large corpus of Classic Maya visual narratives depicts elite feasts in which ceramic vessels of every kind are used (cf. Reents-Budet 2000). It may thus be no surprise that the supreme god Itzamnaj or God D is depicted twice on this vessel in an animated (festive?) state (note 4); the sumptuous feast or meal may have been in his honor.

While many Classic Maya vessels can be identified as being employed as a drink- (*yuk'ib'*) or eat-instrument (*uwe'ib'*) (cf. Boot 2005b), to my knowledge Kerr No. 3091 is at present the only vessel that through a simple but effective hieroglyphic sign compound refers to both eating and drinking. This vessel thus, through the reference to bread (*waj*) and water (*ha'*) in the rim text, was fit for a feast, Classic Maya style.

### Acknowledgment

I thank Christophe Helmke for reading and providing comments on an earlier version of this essay. As always, unless noted otherwise, the opinions expressed in this essay are mine.

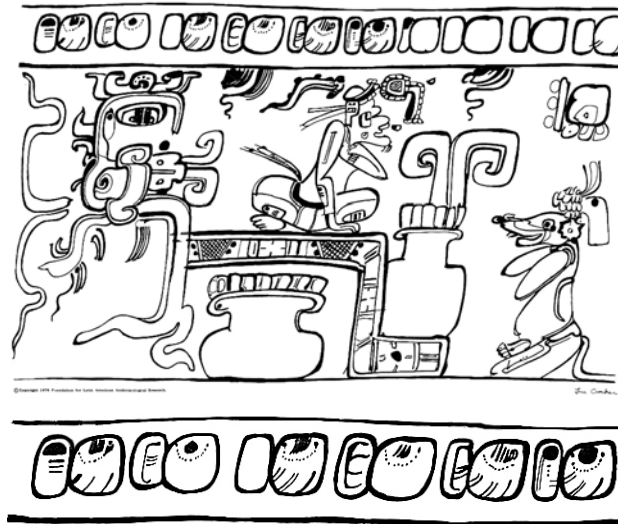
### Notes

1) In this essay the following orthography will be employed: ', a, b', ch, ch', e, h, j, i, k, k', l, m, n, o, p, p', s, t, t', tz, tz', u, w, x, and y. In this orthography the /h/ represents a glottal aspirate or glottal voiced fricative (/h/ as in English "house"), while /j/ represents a velar aspirate or velar voiced fricative (/j/ as in Spanish "joya"). There is no reconstruction of complex vowels based on disharmonic spellings. In the transcription of Maya hieroglyphic signs uppercase bold type face letters indicate logograms (e.g. **'UK'**), while lowercase bold type face letters indicate syllabic signs. Items placed between square brackets are so-called infix signs; order of the transcribed signs indicates the epigraphically established reading order (e.g. T128[504]). Queries added to sign identifications or transcribed values express doubt on the identification or the assigned logographic or syllabic value (e.g. T128?). As a caveat, all reconstructions (i.e. transliterations) in this essay are but approximations of the original intended Classic Maya ("epigraphic") linguistic items. Occasional citing of so-called T-numbers (e.g. T501) refers to the hieroglyphic signs as numbered and cataloged by Thompson (1962).

2) In his discussion of this particular augury, prognostication, or attributive Grube introduces the concept "food", after Thompson's 1950 suggestion "food and drink" (cf. Grube 1997: 84).

3) Additionally it should be noted that the hieroglyphic sign combination "bread-water" thus has a greater time depth than just the Postclassic screenfold books. This important *difrasismo* or disphrasic kenning for "feast", "food", or "meal" was already known in the Classic period.

4) Christophe Helmke (e-mail to the author, April 11, 2005) suggested that the serpent with the T533 'AJAW sign in its forehead may be an elaborate version of the “mirror/celt-T533-mirror/celt” augury, prognostication, or attributive (as also included in the short explanatory text associated with Itzamnaj as illustrated in Figure 2a). This is indeed possible. Personally I take this serpent to be a fully abbreviated version of the “Sky Band Serpent throne” on which occasionally Itzamnaj is found seated (e.g. Kerr Nos. 1183 and 3056; compare to “Sky Band throne” on for example Kerr Nos. 0504 and 3049). Kerr No. 3056 is most interesting in this context as it has T501 “water” signs combined with (variants of) T24 “mirror/celt” as its primary repeating rim text (drawing by Lin Crocker, © 1976 FLAAR; digitally cleaned by the author):



The visual narrative on this particular ceramic vessel illustrates Itzamnaj seated on a “Sky Band Serpent” throne or seat with two large (liquid containing?) vessels close to him. Kerr No. 3056 and 3091 seem to be variations on the same theme and, if correct, thus both vessels are fit for a feast.

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### **File History**

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