

A Ritual Title: ‘He of the Incensing’ or ‘Incenser’

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Start: Tuesday, October 20, 2009
Finish: Monday, March 5, 2012

Introduction¹

This short note identifies two glyphic spellings related to copal incense-burning, attested on K8075, a pot with a dedicatory formula around the rim, four glyphic captions, and six portrayed personages (**Figure 1**). The focus here lies on the ritual role of the main personage and the related information provided by his glyphic caption and by the iconographically-embedded glyphs associated with the incense-burning imagery, as well as on its relationship to other instances of the same root elsewhere in the hieroglyphic corpus and exhibiting different morphology.

Figure 1. Roll-out photograph of Mayan pot K8075.



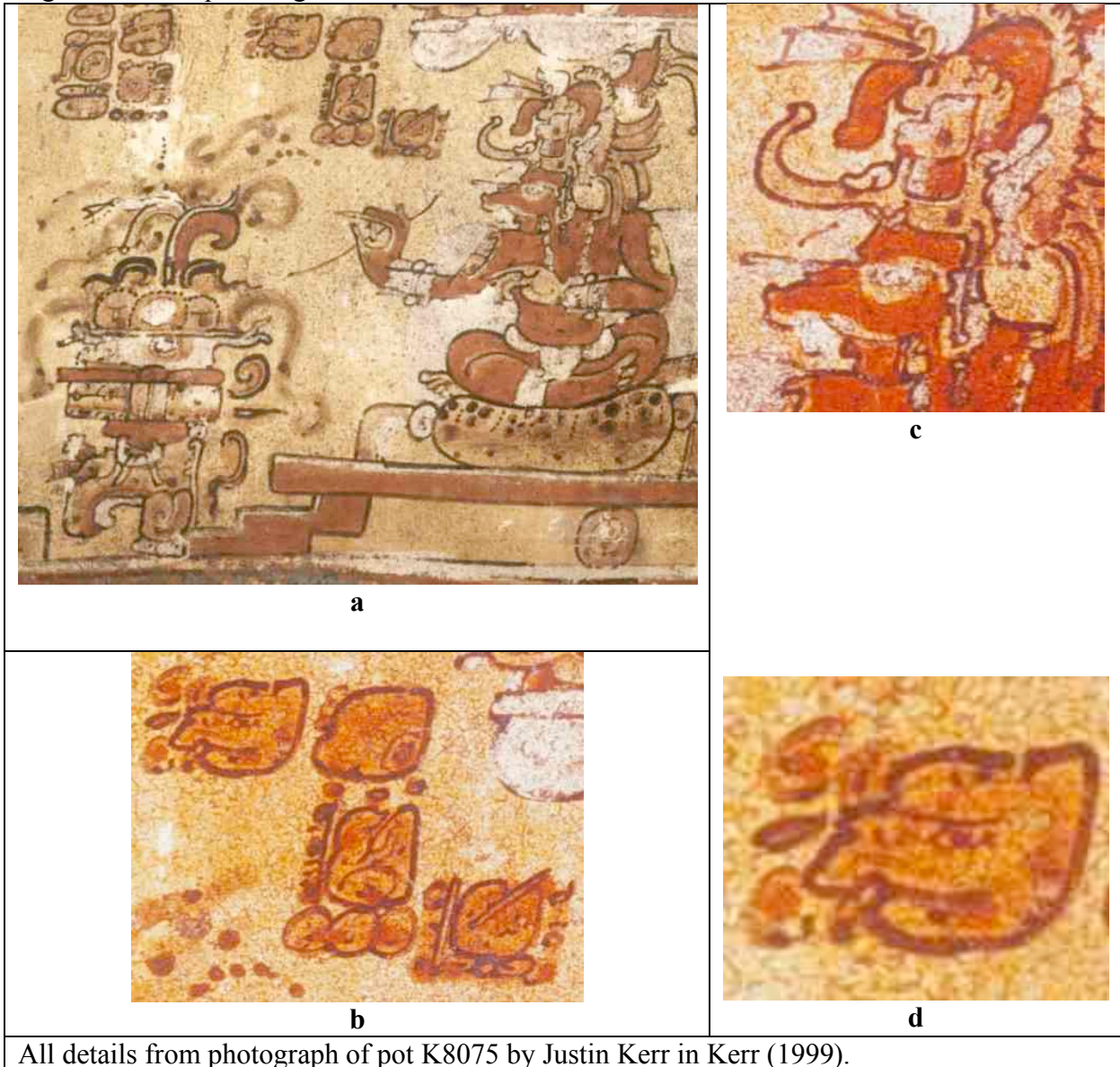
Photograph by Justin Kerr in Kerr (1999).

The Main Personage

The main personage is the figure seated on a cushion on top of a small, stepped platform (**Figure 2a**). He is characterized by a long snout, suggestive of a supernatural identity; the glyphic caption in front of him (**Figure 2b**) in fact opens with a glyph block whose main sign appears to show this personage’s head in profile preceded by the syllabogram **ya** (**Figures 2c-d**).

¹ My sincerest thanks to Justin Kerr for sharing a high-resolution photograph of K8075 with me. I have also greatly benefited from input by Barbara MacLeod, Nicholas Hopkins, and Terrence Kaufman.

Figure 2. Main personage.



All details from photograph of pot K8075 by Justin Kerr in Kerr (1999).

Main Personage's Glyphic Caption

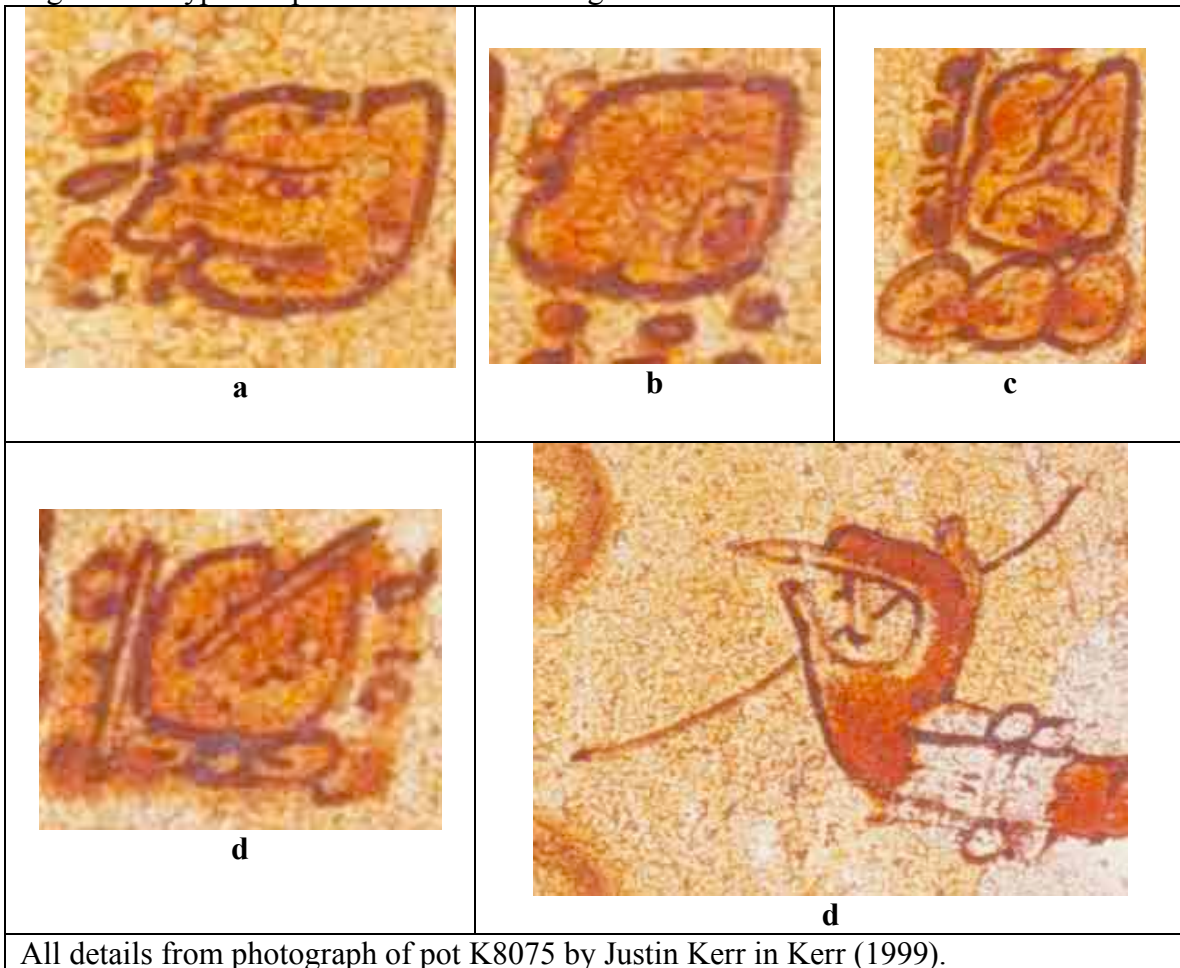
The glyptic caption (**Figure 2b**) identifies the main personage through what appears to be a lengthy appellative and epithet phrase. His name probably consists, at least, of the sign that resembles the personage's profile, as already mentioned (**Figure 3a**), preceded by syllabographic **ya**. Next is a glyph made up of two signs (**Figure 3a**) that resemble ZY8/T197 **k'e** and 33K/T142c **ma**; alternatively, the first sign could be ZY9 **chu**, ZY7 **ye**, or ZYB **ha**, and the second sign could be a simplified AMB/T178 **la**.² Next are two

² The diagnostic element in the first sign is simply not clear enough, but may be more consistent with the element in ZY9 **chu** or ZYB **ha**. At present, however, I do not offer a resolution to this problem.

expressions beginning with 1G4/T12 **ʔa(j)** to spell the male proclitic *ʔa(j)+ (**Figure 3b**). The first shows a hand sign very similar to MR7/T671 **chi** with a graphic suffix **yu**, perhaps rendering **ʔa(j)-chi-yu**. The second shows a hand sign that appears to match the personage's action, holding a very thin and delicate incense stick in his hand (**Figure 3c**). This one spells **ʔa(j)-?HAND.WITH.INCENSE.STICK-ma-ya**. I suspect this expression to be read **ʔa(j)-POM-(m)a-ya**, perhaps for *ʔaj+poom-a/ä-ya*, with the male proclitic *ʔa(j)+* followed by the root *poom* 'copal incense', and possibly two suffixes, *-a/ä* 'usative' and *-ya* 'nominalizer'. The suffix **-ä* 'usative (to use X)' is reconstructible to Proto-Ch'olan (Kaufman and Norman 1984), while the *-ya* 'nominalizer' suffix is present in Ch'ol, Chontal, and Ch'olti'. Feldman (1986) and Hopkins and Josseland with Cruz Guzmán (2010) provide several examples of its use, including examples where *-ya* follows the usative suffix *-ä*, e.g. *ts'ihb'-ä-ya* 'writer', based on the usative stem *ts'ihb'-ä* 'to write (i.e. to use writing)', itself based on the verbal noun *ts'ihb'* 'writing'. MacLeod (1998:98) describes *-y-ah* and *-oh-el*, both used to derive "verbal nouns from transitive stems or roots." Sattler (2004:386-387) provides examples of this *-ya* suffix, including several where *-ya* is used in conjunction with the agentive proclitic *aj-*, as in <ahchohbia> for *aj-chojb'-ya* 'amante (lover)'.

This renders the term 'He of Incensing' or 'Mr. Incenser', and thus, probably one of several titles for priests in the context of Classic Mayan society. It is noteworthy that this **HAND.WITH.INCENSE.STICK** sign closely resembles a set of signs that epigraphers have taken to be a **HAND.WITH.STYLUS** sign, and have thus read as **TS'IB'** for *ts'ihb'* 'writing'. However, in the case at hand, it is probably not related to writing, but incense-burning.

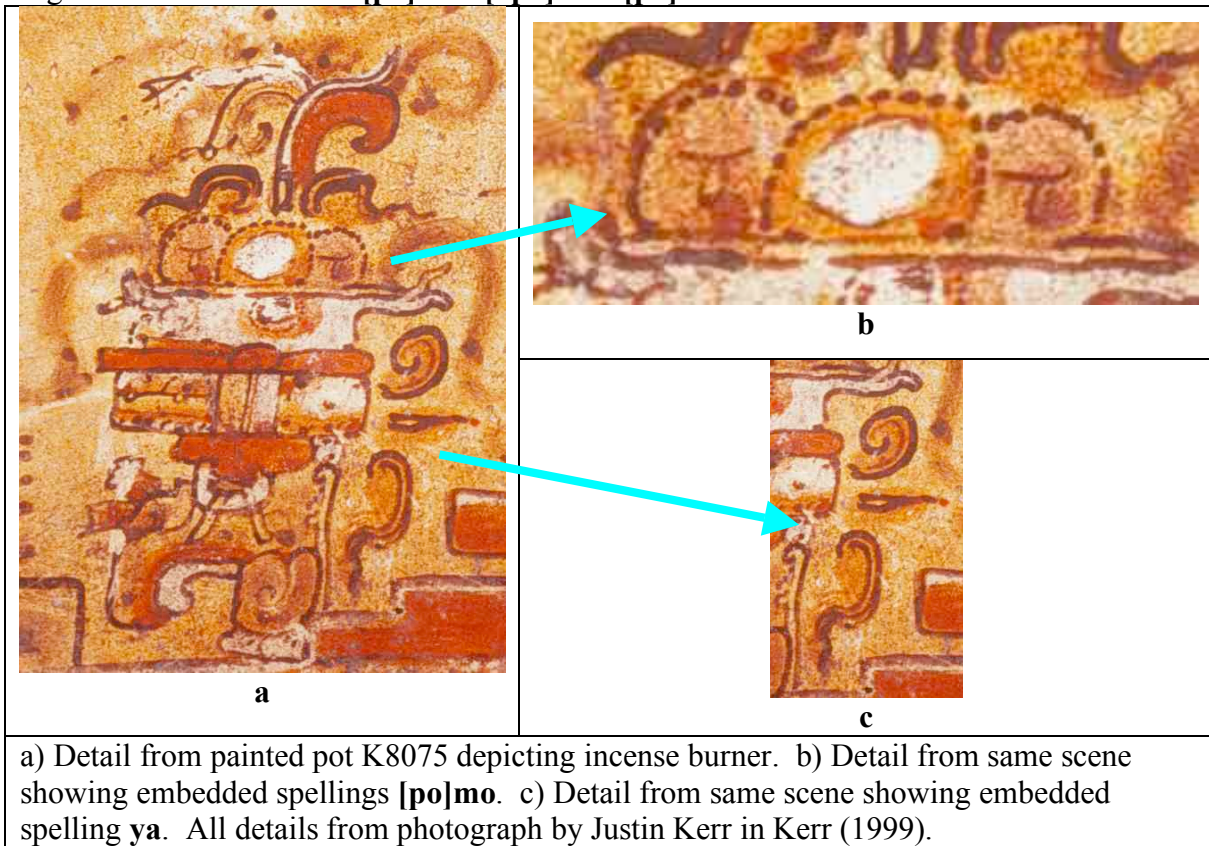
Figure 3. Glyphic caption for Main Personage.



Embedded Glyphs for *Poom* ‘Copal Incense’

Pot K8075 provides us with a marvelous example of an iconographically-embedded text. The embedded text is present atop the incense burner (**Figure 4a**), where one finds at least two clear spellings of **[po]mo**, *poom* ‘(Copal) incense’ (**Figure 4b**). Immediately above the embedded glyphs one finds smoke volutes emanating from the incense burner. These two instances provide evidence for the spelling of the root in isolation. Interestingly, there is a syllabogram **ya**, arranged vertically, on the right side of the incense burner (**Figure 4c**). Its presence could be related to the presence of the **ya** syllabogram in front of the glyphic head that appears to represent the proper name of the Main Personage (**Figure 2d**), but it could instead constitute a partial spelling of the incense burner’s name, or a term for incense burner.

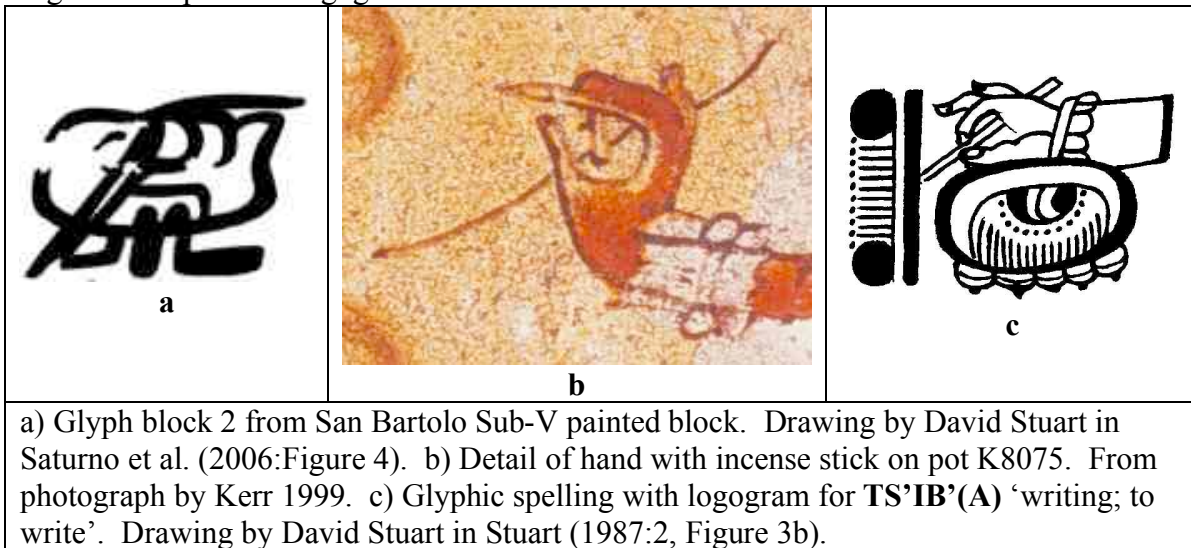
Figure 4. Embedded text: [po]mo / [ʔpo]mo / [po]mo.



Similarities to Other Signs—The ‘Writing’ Sign

The sign in question here also resembles a sign from a text from San Bartolo (Saturno et al. 2006), shown in **Figure 5a**. The San Bartolo sign is subfixed by what resembles an early instance of **ma**. Although it may be premature to assign it a value, the San Bartolo sign could be a spelling of **ʔPOM-ma**, *poom* ‘incense’. The bent implement is consistent with the bent incense stick in **Figure 5b**. A similar sign has been argued, persuasively, to represent a logographic spelling of **TS’IB’** (**Figure 5c**), with sign MR6. Stuart (1987:2-3) has proposed this to be the logogram **TS’IB’**, appearing in the spelling **ʔa(j)+TS’IB-b’a**, which that author translates as ‘scribe’. More precisely, I would argue, the logogram could be read in that particular instance as **TS’IB’A**, *ts’ihb’-ä* ‘to write’, yielding **ʔa(j)+TS’IBA-b’a** for *ʔaj+ts’ihb’-ä* ‘writer’.

Figure 5. A possible logogram for ‘to incense’.



Other Contexts of *Poom* ‘copal incense’

Boot (2009:29) notes spellings of **b’a-po-ma**, which he transliterates and translates as *b’a[h] pom* ‘first of the incense’, attested in Caption 34 of Room 1, Structure 1, at Bonampak, and on a painted pot, K5388 (Kerr 2007), from the Jay Kislak Collection. Boot (2008:151) also lists several instances of the collocation **[po]mo ~ [po]mo-li ~ POM-li**, each case preceded by a numeral (‘one’, ‘seven’, ‘nine’, ‘ten’), in the Madrid and Dresden codices, which he transliterates and translates as *X pomil* ‘X [times] incense’, where I have used “X” to stand for one of the associated numerals. I would transliterate these all as *po(o)m*. Also, there is no reason to transliterate **[po]mo-li** and **[po]mo** as *pomil* and *pom[il]*, respectively; they could simply be *po(o)m-ol* and *po(o)m-ol[l]*, and the optionality of the **li** in the **[po]mo** spelling could be explained by consonant deletion in either the spoken language or the written language, or both. And last, is likely that the numerical sign in each of these two spellings would have been read with a numerical classifier, which ought to be represented even if its lexical identification is uncertain, i.e. *b’olon=CL po(o)m-ol*, *huk=CL po(o)m-ol*.³

A few words about the structure of these terms are in order. In contemporary Maaya T’aan (Yucatec Maya), the root may surface as *pòm*, by itself, or *pom-*, as in *(x+)pomol=che?* ‘incense tree’ (Bricker et al. 1998:220), with the form *pomol* also attested, without *=che?* ‘tree’, as in the last name, as <Pomol> (Barrera Vásquez et al. 1980:665). To this author’s knowledge, no Ch’olan-Tzeltalan or Yucatecan language has a form *po(o)m-il*, only *po(o)m-ol*, nor is there reason to suspect there was one, at some point in the past. Thus, a transcription **[po]mo-l(i)**, and transliteration *po(o)m-ol*, for the two Dresden Codex examples is preferable.

Given the spelling on K8075 (Kerr 1999), it is possible that **b’a-po-ma** could be spelling *b’ah=poom-ä* ‘head/top incenser’, but only more detailed analysis, extended to a broader range of titles with parallel structures, will allow for a test of this hypothesis. For now, it

³ One option would be proto-Ch’olan *=*yahl* ‘times’ or Yucatec Maya =*téen* ‘times’.

can be said that one spelling, the iconographically-embedded glyph **[po]mo**, spells the root in isolation, *poom* ‘Copal incense’. Another, **po-mo-ja**, represents, by my analysis, a derived intransitive verb *po(o)m-oj* or *po(o)m-aj* ‘to incense’, but Wichmann (2006:2) has suggested it to be simply the original disyllabic form *pomoj*, prior to simplification, borrowed from a disyllabic Mije-Sokean form **poomoh* or **poomo[j]*.⁴ A third, **?a(j)+POM-(m)a-ya**, inflects the root as a derived noun with a male proclitic, *?aj+pom-a-ya(h)* ‘He of incensing’. And last, a fourth spelling, **[po]mo-l(i)**, constitutes a nominal derivation, *po(o)m-ol* ‘of *Poom*’. The possible attestation from the San Bartolo block, **?POM-ma**, cannot be analyzed at this moment, given that its context is not yet clear; however, I suspect the **ma** syllabogram is intended to spell both the final consonant of the root *poom*, and a vowel-initial suffix, *-a(C)*, of some sort, possibly the *-*ä* ‘usative’ suffix reconstructed to proto-Ch’olan (< Pre-Ch’olan *-*a* < Proto-Ch’olan-Tzeltalan *-*a*).

Conclusions

This fascinating pottery vessel (K8075) provides additional evidence for the root *poom* ‘Copal incense’ in the form of two previously undocumented contexts, one of them an iconographically-embedded spelling of the bare root *poom* ‘Copal incense’, the other a title *?aj+pom-a/ä-ya* ‘He of incensing’ or ‘Incenser’, one more title to be added to the list of terms for ritual specialists. This result once again points to the already well-known relationship between image and text in Mayan writing, a relationship which is nonetheless seldom highlighted in epigraphic studies.

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⁴ Kaufman with Justeson (2003:1358) reconstruct proto-Mije-Sokean **poomi*, without a final **h*.

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