

THE NOMINAL *YAXHA'(AL) CHAK* ON CLASSIC MAYA CERAMICS AND A POSSIBLE CEPHALOMORPHIC VARIANT FOR *YAX*

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In this short essay I propose that there might be a cephalomorphic or head variant for the hieroglyphic sign *YAX*, normally represented by T16 (note 1).

A large series of Classic Maya ceramics depicts the Classic Maya God B, in the literature identified as Chak (cf. Taube 1992: 17-27). In a few instances the painter-scribes provided a nominal the image of the ax wielding Classic Maya God B which identified him as *YAX-HA' CHAK-ki* or Yaxha'(al) Chak (Figure 1). These three Classic Maya spellings *YAX-HA' CHAK-ki* can be compared to two other examples in which the nominal phrase is extended to include the syllabic sign *-la* attached to the part *HA'* (Figure 2).



Kerr No. 1152



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Figure 1: Three Images of the Ax Wielding God B named as *YAX-HA'-CHAK*
(photographs by Justin Kerr)

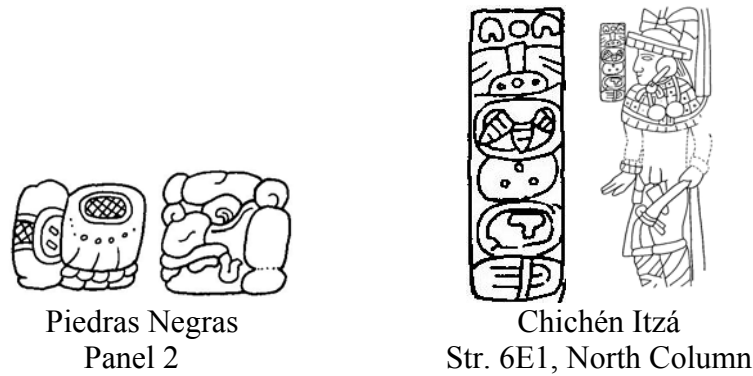


Figure 2: Examples of the spelling **YAX-HA'-la CHAK** and **ya-YAX HA'-la cha-ki** (drawings by Karl Taube [1992: Fig. 4f,h])

The example at Piedras Negras is written as **YAX-HA'-la CHAK**, while the example at Chichén Itzá is written **ya-YAX HA'-la cha-ki** for Yaxha'al Chak. The opening **ya** sign serves as phonetic complement to **YAX**. The example at Chichén Itzá substantiates, through the syllabic spelling **cha-ki**, the logographic value of the God B hieroglyphic sign as **CHAK**. Both these examples suggest that the spellings **YAX-HA' CHAK** are abbreviated or underrepresented spellings as the part **HA'-la** is abbreviated to simply **HA'**. While *ha'* means "water", *ha'al* (noun *ha'* with derivational suffix *-al*) means "rain". The nominal Yaxha'al Chak provisionally can be glossed as "First (*yax*) rain (*ha'al*) Raingod (*chak*)".

Recently I came across another example of the ax wielding Chak, as depicted on a polychrome vessel belonging to the greater Codex Style tradition (to which attest the light cream colored background and the top and bottom red rim with accentuating black lines).



Figure 3: Ceramic Vessel with ax wielding Chak named as **YAX-HA'-cha ki** (Arte Xibalba, Inv. No. M299, URL www.trocadero.com/Wayob)

The vessel, of which both the provenience and its current location are unknown, depicts two anthropomorphic god figures (note 2). One of the figures on this vessel is K'awil, the other is the ax wielding Chak (Figure 3). Like in the other representations on Classic Maya vessels Chak holds a stone object ("hand-stone") in one hand, while he wields his ax with his other hand. To the back of this ax wielding Chak one can find his nominal phrase, but written in a slightly different manner in regard to the opening sign. A comparison of the available nominal phrases for Yaxha'al Chak shows how the difference can be explained (Figure 4).

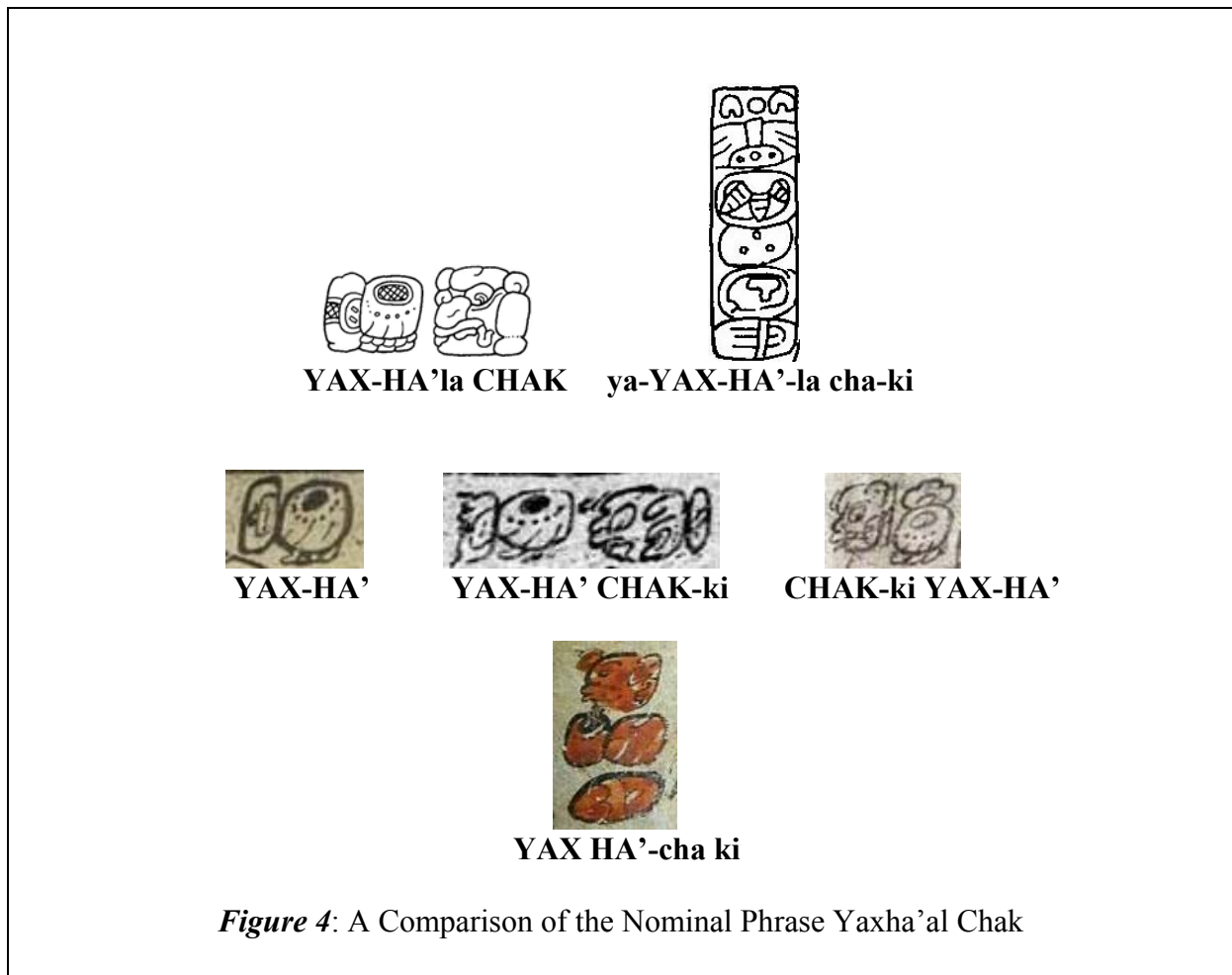


Figure 4: A Comparison of the Nominal Phrase Yaxha'al Chak

The new example opens with a cephalomorphic sign, a sign that represents some kind of human head; in comparison to the other existing examples this sign can only represent the opening value **YAX**. If correctly identified, this nominal phrase also can be read Yaxha'al Chak. Additionally, this nominal phrase contains a cephalomorphic or head variant for **YAX**. It is the first time that a possible cephalomorphic or head variant of this sign has been identified. A search of Classic Maya texts on monuments as well as on ceramics has not yet provided additional examples of the cephalomorphic variant of **YAX**. Future epigraphic research may substantiate or invalidate the present identification.

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") (cf. Grube n.d.). In the transcription of Maya hieroglyphic signs uppercase bold type face letters indicate logographs (e.g. **YAX**), while lowercase bold type face letters indicate syllabic signs (e.g. **la**). In this essay I do not reconstruct complex vowels (cf. Houston, Stuart, and Robertson 1998), as disharmonic spellings may provide a reflection of the most common -Vl suffix (cf. Kaufman 2003). All reconstructions (i.e. transliterations) in this essay are but approximations of the original intended Classic Maya ("epigraphic") linguistic items (cf. Boot 2002: 6-7). Occasional citing of so-called T-numbers (e.g. T16) refers to the hieroglyphic signs as numbered and cataloged by Thompson (1962).

2) A recent search (February 4, 2004) at www.trocadero.com/Wayob showed that images of this vessel are no longer available on the web. Images of this vessel were available in 2003.

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