

A Comment on the Initial Sign of Kerr No. 4961

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Kerr No. 4961 is a ceramic bowl painted with a Primary Standard Sequence (henceforth PSS) just below the rim of the bowl. The first part of this rim text is illustrated below:



Although the bowl and its glyphic text are somewhat eroded, the PSS opens with an Initial Sign collocation which in one specific detail deviates from the majority of Initial Sign collocations (see Boot 2003). Instead of being prefixed with the regular T228/229 'a' sign, it is prefixed with T12. The first image is taken from the web published rollout, the second image from a photocopy I made of a Kerr rollout photograph in Austin, Texas, during the 1992 Maya Meetings:



This bowl is painted by a scribe who was part of a school of artists that painted a reasonable large selection of ceramic objects that contained references to the 22nd Tikal ruler K'i[h]nich Waaw (nominal recently deciphered by Stanley Guenter; personal communication via e-mail, November 2001). K'ihnich Waaw (aka. Animal Skull) ruled circa AD 593-628 at Tikal (cf. Martin and Grube 2000: 40). No dates for his birth, accession, and death are currently known. He was buried inside Temple 32 in Burial 195. His nominal and supreme title can also be found on Kerr No. 4961:



(K'i[h]nich) Waaw K'uhul Mutal Ajaw

The other vessels and plates that refer to the Tikal ruler K'i[h]nich Waaw are (this list may not be exhaustive):

1. Tikal MT 216b (found in Burial 195) (note 1)
2. Tikal MT 217 (found in Burial 195)
3. Kerr No. 0772

4. Kerr No. 1261
5. Kerr No. 3390 (“Welt der Maya”, 1992, Catalog No. 81)
6. Kerr No. 3642
7. Robiscek and Hales 1981: Figure 57
8. “Welt der Maya”, 1992, Catalog No. 75

Of these vessels and plates numbers 4 to 8 provide a PSS after which the owner/patron K'i[h]nich Waaw is mentioned. These five PSS texts open with an Initial Sign collocation:

No. 4:

Kerr No. 1261

Initial Sign written: T229-MIRROR-ya



No. 5:

Kerr No. 3390

(“Welt der Maya”, 1992, Catalog No. 81) Initial Sign written: T229-MIRROR-ya



No. 6:

Kerr No. 3642

Initial Sign written: T238-HEADVARIANT



No. 7:

Robiscek and Hales 1981: Fig. 57

Initial Sign written: T229-HEADVARIANT



No. 8:

“Welt der Maya”, 1992, Catalog No. 75

Initial Sign written: T229-MIRROR-ya



These different Initial Sign collocations (T229- or T238-HEADVARIANT and T229-MIRROR-**ya**) do suggest that the Initial Sign identified on Kerr No. 4961 is simply a variant of the others. If that is the case, T12 may represent the same value as T228/229 and T238 (also T743 can be found as prefix in the Initial Sign collocation, e.g. Kerr No. 5838), glyphic signs which since long have been identified as syllabic **'a**. However, in a recent study Søren Wichmann (2002) proposed a differentiation between those vowel signs which represented a simple vowel (i.e. /V/) or a long vowel (i.e. /VV/), based on a differential distribution of those particular syllabic signs in specific and possibly limited phonological environs. According to his research T12 would represent a syllable /**aa**/. T229 would represent /**a**/. In his “Data” section Wichmann writes the following:

T229-“PSS intro glyph”(-**la**)(-**ya**) (text introducer of uncertain reading) (Altar de Sacrificios, St. 9, vessel; Caracol, St. 25; Copan, Rio Amarillo Altar; Ikil Str. 1, West, Lintel 1; Quirigua, St. 1; Palenque, Tabl. Sun, Pot from Group III Burial; Piedras Negras, Panel 12, Shell Plaques, Pyrite Disk; Tikal, St. 31, Manik Complex ceramics from Burial 10; Tortiguero, M. 6; Uxmal, Capital 5, Column 1-2, Jamb 5?, L. 1; there are hundreds of instances of unprovenanced ceramic vessels and not a single instance of overlap with T12 here) (Wichmann 2002: 99)

Now, with the identification of an Initial Sign spelling T12-MIRROR-**ya** on Kerr No. 4961 Wichmann’s claim in the last sentence (“and not a *single* instance of overlap with T12 here”, emphasis mine) can not be substantiated any longer. Within the environment of the Initial Sign collocation in the PSS there is now a clear instance of overlap between T228/229 **'a** and T12.

This might mean that T12 does not represent a long vowel (as in /**aa**/) and thus may simply represent **'a**. After informing him of the Kerr No. 4961 example, Wichmann suggested “that the phonological distinction is highly vulnerable since in the western dialects **a/aa** merged in initial position and in the eastern ones **a/aa** merged in all positions (loss of vowel length)” (e-mail to the author, dated May 27, 2003). More research in this phonological area may thus be in need. Even if the current finding challenges Wichmann’s proposal that T12 represents a long vowel, it does still support his basic assumption that T12 must function as a syllabic sign in the context of the PSS Initial Sign (as well as other contexts) (Wichmann 2002: 98) and can not represent a logograph /**AJ**/, as assumed by many epigraphers past and present.

Note

1) The primary rim text on Tikal MT 216b may be a PSS text starting with the vessel type collocation(s). The rim text opens with (A) **ya-ja-la** (B) **ji** and is as such very close to the opening collocations for the vessel type on a plate currently residing in the public collection of the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, Belgium (Anonymous 1976: Cat. No. 100, illustrated with small black-and-white photograph). That particular text opens with (A) **ya-ja** (B) **ji-b'i**. A similar pair of glyph collocations (A) **ya-ja** (B) **ji-b'i** can be found in the PSS (which opens with STEP[**yi**] **yi-chi**) on a plate at the Museo de Sitio de Pomoná (Schmidt, De la Garza, and Nalda 1998: Cat. No. 447). The Tikal MT 216b example seems to indicate that an intermediate *-l-* is part of the Classic Maya item, while the RMAH Brussels and Pomona plates seems to indicate that the gloss for the vessel type ends in *-ib'*, a common instrumental suffix (note for instance, *uk'ib'* and *we'ib*). The Tikal example may underspell the *-ib'* suffix, while the Brussels and Pomona examples may underspell the intermediate *-l-*. Although

tentative, this Classic Maya vessel type item may have been **yajal(a)jib'*. In this item, *y-* would provide the third person possessive pronoun and *-ib'* the instrumental suffix. The root of the putative vessel type expression is *-ajal(a)j-*, to which the verb root *aj(-al)* “to dawn, to create” may be related. In good order, all three vessel type sequences are illustrated below:

Tikal MT 216b
(after drawing from the Tikal Report)

Vessel Type written: **ya-ja-la ji**



RMAH Ceramic Plate
(after Anonymous 1976: Cat. No. 100)

Vessel Type written: **ya-ja- ji-b'i**



Pomona Plate
(after color photograph supplied by Luís Lopes)

Vessel Type written: **ya-ja ji-b'i**



The Brussels and Pomona examples also mention a lord from the Maan polity. The Maan polity may be located in the west section of the central Petén area, possibly the site of La Florida as proposed by several researchers (cf. Lopes 2003: 1, 18). La Florida is located some 120 kilometers due west of Tikal. The Tikal spelling **ya-ja-la ji** to my knowledge has not been discussed before.

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