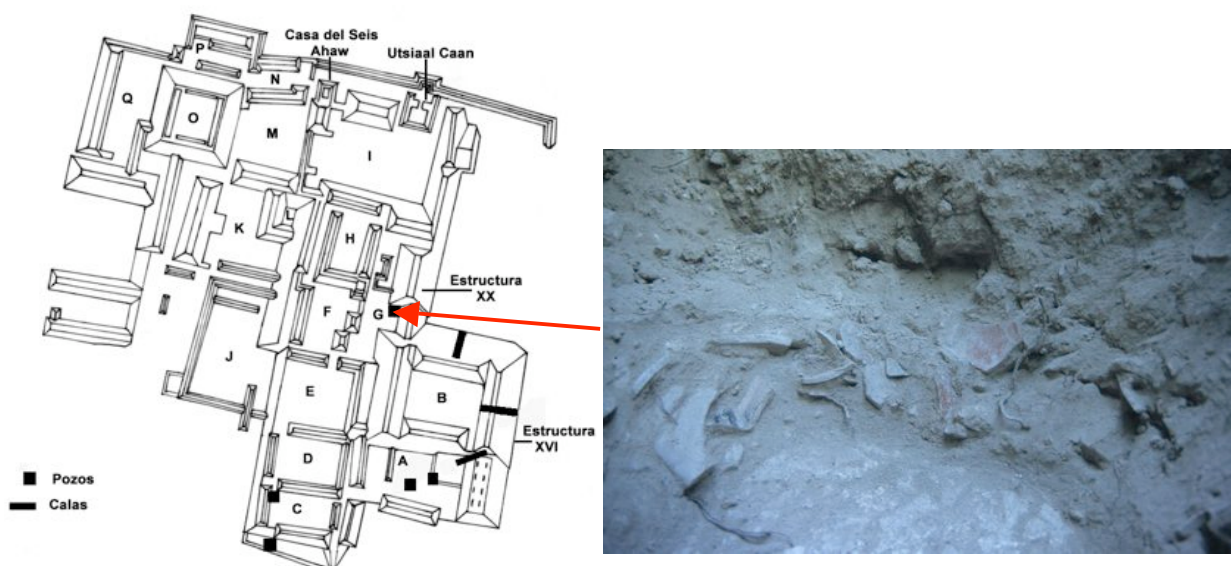


Codex-style fragments from Structure XX, Calakmul

by Kai Delvendahl

During excavations in 2001 and 2003 by the Proyecto Arqueológico Calakmul (PAC) under the general direction of Ramón Carrasco Vargas, a so-called 'trash deposit' was uncovered on the south side of Structure XX of Calakmul, consisting of more than fifteen thousand ceramic fragments (Fig. 1). Structure XX, located on the western extreme of the Plaza de los Prisioneros of the Grand Acropolis or 'West Group', was during much of the Late Classic probably the main entrance to the largest palace complex in the Maya Lowlands, the Grand Acropolis Group. This palace complex measures roughly 336 m north-south by 344 m east-west and consists of 17 courtyards, surrounded by an estimated 80 buildings. The deposit was associated with the latest floor of a relatively small courtyard immediately behind Structure XX, some 1.6 m underneath actual soil surface. During the building's use as an entrance to the Grand Acropolis Group at least from the early Late Classic onwards, the courtyard behind Structure XX might have functioned as a point of dispersion, granting relatively easy access to several of the other 16 courtyards of the palace complex (Delvendahl 2002, 2003, 2005, 2008).



Of course, the location close to the only entrance to the palace group and the fact that almost no other material (such as conch, obsidian, carbon, etc.) was found, makes the term 'trash' dubious. However, around 95% of the ceramics were of domestic kind, especially of '*Ciricote Compuesto*'-type, large bowls with wide necks used for storage, which were so popular in Calakmul that the same type was used all through the Early and Late Classic. Almost 90% of the material was of Early Classic (42.3%) and Late Classic (46.4%) origin, very little from the Preclassic, and only about 5% from the Terminal Classic (Delvendahl 2003). Notwithstanding the wealth of different types and shapes, the real surprise was a small percentage of finely painted ceramics, especially of the famed, so-called codex-style type, for the first time found at Calakmul in substantial quantity and up to this moment generally associated with Nakbé and the El Mirador Basin. The 2001 and 2003 excavations, as well as subsequent explorations in 2004, recovered more than 600 codex-style ceramic pieces which are still being analyzed in an ongoing investigation (Carrasco and Colón 2005; Delvendahl 2003, 2005, 2008; García 2008; García and Carrasco 2006). So far, fragments of at least 70 different vases have been distinguished (Sylviane Boucher 2008: pers. com.).

Among the codex-style ceramics found in 2001 was the fragment of a plate featuring the snakehead, *Kaan*, emblem glyph, certainly as part of royal *k'uhul Kaan ajaw*-title, but unfortunately with the name of the king missing (Delvendahl 2005: 435). Several other fragments feature the (on codex-style vases very common) *k'uhul chatan winik*, 'sacred man of *chatan*'-title, a not yet clearly understood designation (Fig. 2).



This title is found on monuments only on an altar from Altar de Los Reyes (Grube 2003, 2004; Sprajc 2003; Sprajc and Cossio 2003) and on three stelae at Calakmul: Stelae 43, 51 and 89 (Simon Martin 2002: pers. com.; cf. Martin 1998: 76; Martin and Grube 2008: 103; Wölfel 2007: 33). While Stela 43 from Structure II dates to 514 AD and is therefore clearly prior to the time in which codex-style ceramics were painted (during the

late VII and early VIII Century; see Reents-Budet et al. 1997), Stelae 51 and 89, both associated with Structure I, fall exactly into the assumed time period of manufacture. Both were erected by Yuknoom Took' K'awiil, who also raised Stelae 70-74 in front of Structure XVI and, reigning during the first three decades of the VIII Century (702 to at least 731 AD), might also have been responsible for the Late Classic modifications of Structure XX. A possible portrait of this ruler was found on a painted polychrome ceramic in the same deposit of the south side of Structure XX. The accompanying glyphs, most certainly part of a PSS (Primary Standard Sequence) identify Yuknoom Took' K'awiil as owner of the vase by the 'Scroll-head K'awiil' variation of his name, which was usually used on references from outside of Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2000: 112). However, since the vase was found fragmented and incomplete it is not certain that the person represented, shown with so-called 'deity-markings' is really the named ruler himself (Fig. 3).



Another series of fragments from the Structure XX deposit show the Maize God as he is dressed by several nude women (Fig. 4), a common theme in codex-style ceramics (see for instance K6979, in Kerr n.d.; Robicsek and Hales 1981: 67). The glyph naming the Maize God, a variant that might depict a crocodile's head, is the same as the one on the famous 'Resurrection Plate' (Simon Martin 2002: pers. com.; cf. Miller and Martin 2004:

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56). Also named is the mythic place, *wuk ha' nal*, 'Place of the Seven Waters', where the event takes place and the action, maybe *och ha* or *och bih?*, 'enter the water/enter the road', terms generally related to death and in this case probably specifying an episode of the life-death-resurrection cycle of the Maize God (Simon Martin 2002: pers. com.).

Another interesting codex-style fragment from this deposit shows God L (Fig. 5, left), one of the most important underworld deities, in profile, head and body slightly inclined, matching in mimic, posture and gesture exactly the God L portrait on the famous, so-called 'Princeton Vase' (Fig. 5. right, detail; Kerr n.d.: K511), suggesting that both were painted by the same master, possibly an artist from Calakmul (Delvendahl 2003, 2005: 436, 2008: 127; cf. Miller and Martin 2004: 76; Reents-Budet 1994: 39 & 356; see Cohodas 1989; Kerr and Kerr 1988: 236 ff, Figs. 7.1 & 7.2 for more paintings that might be attributed to this artist).



Two additional fragments recovered from the deposit feature part of a sequence known as "the Sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar" or "Sacrifice of Xbalanque" (Robicsek and Hales 1988; see also Kerr and Kerr 1988: 248-256; Robicsek and Hales 1981: 22-24). The Structure XX fragments show an anthropomorphic God Chaak, with an eccentric in his left hand, in front of the so-called baby-jaguar (with human body, but jaguar tail) lying with his (missing) head to the left on a stone/altar known as Cauac Monster (Fig. 6, left).



Even though complementary fragments are missing, it can be assumed from other existing scenes that Chaak is dancing and that on the opposite side of the stone/altar dances skeletal God A, another underworld deity (Delvendahl 2003, 2005: 454-455; cf. Kerr n.d.: K521, K1003, K1152, K1197, K1370, K1644, K1768, K1815, K2207, K2208, K3201, K4011, K4013, K4056, K4385, K4486, K8680, among others). The drawing style and certain features, as for instance the eccentric, make the Structure XX fragments

especially comparable with a vase of unknown provenience today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 6, right, detail; Kerr n.d.: K521; see also Cohodas 1989; Robicsek and Hales 1981: 22, Vessel 21; 1988: 265, Fig. 8. 5). This is particularly obvious if one compares closely the bracelets of both Chaak figures (with one jade piece missing) and the unusual twisted posture of his left hand holding the eccentric (Fig. 7).



Kerr and Kerr (1988: 247) attribute a total of at least seven vases of unknown provenience to the same artist, dubbed the "Metropolitan Master". Four of these depict similar themes and at least two (A and D) feature the *k'uhul chatan winik*-title, discussed above. Even though it is difficult to prove without further discoveries of similar pieces *in situ*, it is tempting to think that this master artist came from Calakmul.

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