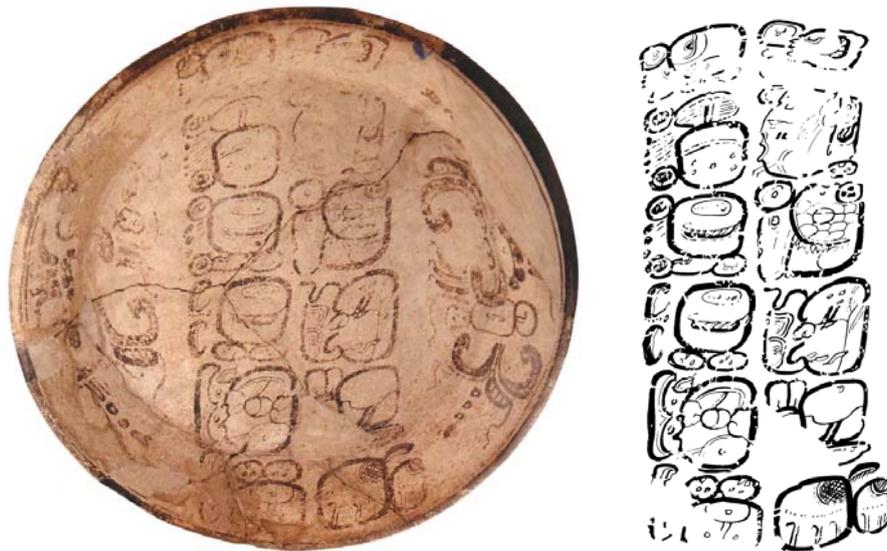


# A Short Epigraphic Analysis of the Hieroglyphic Text on a Tripod Plate in a Private Collection (Guatemala)

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## The Plate \*

This tripod plate is illustrated in the “Calendario 2005 Historia viva” (month of July), published by the Universidad Rafael Landívar. The plate is part of a private collection.



## The Text

The inside rim and floor of the plate are painted with a double column hieroglyphic text which can be identified as a Primary Standard Sequence (Coe 1973) or dedicatory formula. This text can be analyzed as follows:<sup>1</sup>

### A1-B1



A1	'a-LAY?-ya	alay	a-lay	“Here; this one
B1	T'AB'?-yi[eroded]	t'ab'[a]y	t'ab'[a]y	ascended(?)

The Initial Sign at A1 is a local variant in which an allograph for LAY has been employed. The collocation at B1 may read T'AB' “ascend”, based on the ascending breath emanating from the mouth of the “death head”. This particular hieroglyphic sign is common to texts from the greater Xultún-Río Azul area (e.g. Kerr No. 5366, illustrated below).

A2-B3



A2	<b>u-tz'i-b'i</b>			
B2	<b>na-ja-la</b>	<i>utz'ib'najal</i>	<i>u-tz'ib'-n-aj-al</i>	the writing

The collocations at positions A2-B2 provide the expression *utz'ib'najal*, the possessed form of the nominalized shape of «tz'i[h]b'naj» “be painted” (Lacadena 2004) or “be written”. The expression *utz'ib'najal* would mean “the writing” (or more literally, “that which is painted or written”). Also this spelling is common in painted texts from the greater Xultún-Río Azul area (e.g. Kerr Nos. 5229, 6100, illustrated below). Alternatively, *utz'ib'najal* is an abbreviation of a paired expression *utz'ib'(il) (u)najal*; note for instance Kerr No. 0532, a vessel on which one can find the sequence 'u-tz'i-b'i 'u-na-ja.<sup>2</sup>

A3-B4



A3	<b>'u-ja-wa</b>			
B3	<b>TE'-'e</b>	<i>ujawa[n]te'</i>	<i>u-jawa[n]te'</i>	the (tripod) plate,
A3	<b>ya-ja-la</b>			
B4	<b>ji-b'i</b>	<i>yajaljib'</i>	<i>y-ajal-j-ib'</i>	the wake-up instrument (of)

This is the first plate that I am familiar with that is referred to as *ujawa(n)te' yajaljib'*. As Houston suggested first in 1989 the glyphic '**u-ja-wa-TE'** can be compared with the entry *hawante* in Colonial Yucatec Mayan with the meaning “container with a wide mouth and shallow depth”. Not all plates marked by *jawante'* are tripod plates. The next collocation provides the second half of the paired expression, it spells **ya-ja-la ji-b'i**, the second example of such a spelling (the first example can be found on Tikal MT 216b: **ya-ja-la ji[b'i]**).

This new spelling example clearly indicates that *ajal* is the root of the expression, not *ajaj* or *ajij* as recently suggested by Stuart (2005: 130). The alternative spelling **ya-ja ji-b'i** is thus an abbreviated spelling. As suggested at another occasion (Boot 2004a, 2005a), following a suggestion by Barbara MacLeod, *ajal* is the gerund of a verb *aj-* with the meaning “to wape up; to awaken”. The suffix *-j-* (an abbreviation of *-Vj-* or *-aj-*) is added to derive an intransitive root, after which the suffix *-ib'* can be added to derive an instrumental noun. As such *yajaljib'* can be analyzed as *y-aj-al-(a)j-ib'* or 3rd.POSS.pc-WAKE.UP-GERUND-suff.INTR-suff.INSTR for “(it is) the wake-up instrument (of)”. The previously known four examples of *yajaljib'* were all found on plates.<sup>3</sup>

**A5-B5**



A5	'u-KNOT.EYE	<i>u-(?)</i>	<i>u-(?)</i>	(?)
B5	<b>che-he-na</b>	<i>chehen</i>	<i>che-h-en</i>	as said

The glyph at A5 is common to dedicatory texts that can be found on ceramics produced in the greater Xultún-Río Azul area (marked by the arrow):

Kerr No. 5229



Kerr No. 6100



Kerr No. 7459



In the past I suggested a logographic value **HUN** for the KNOT.EYE sign, based on the large knot (**HUN**) as well as the substitution with a sign that may represent a jaguar skin covered screenfold book (**HUN**) (Galerie Mermoz 1990: 72). This sign also appears in inscriptions from northern Campeche (e.g. Xcalumkin) (Boot 1996). At present I am less convinced of this identification, as such I have chosen for the added query. The next collocation is somewhat eroded, but it can be transcribed as **che-he-na**. The same sequence 'u-KNOT.EYE **che-he-na** can for instance be found on Kerr No. 7459 (illustrated directly above). *Chehen*, following Grube (1998), can be paraphrased as “as is said, so is said”.<sup>4</sup>

**A6-B6**



A6	?-la-la	<i>(?)lal</i>	<i>(?)lal</i>	<i>(?)lal</i>
B6	<b>b'a-ka-b'a</b>	<i>ba[h]kab'</i>	<i>b'a[h]-kab'</i>	First of the World”

In this part of the text the plate has suffered considerable breakage, to the point that part of the collocation at A6 has been lost. This breakage makes it difficult to identify the opening sign, which is followed by the spelling **-la-la**. A comparable spelling can be found twice on Kerr No. 5366 (indicated by the arrows):

Kerr No. 5366



On this vessel one can find the collocation spelled **CHAK-la-la** for Chaklal. Also this ceramic vessel is from the greater Xultún-Río Azul area. The geographic identification of this group of related ceramics is based on the inclusion of the Xultún “Emblem Glyph”, a Río Azul-Los Alacranes related paramount title (Uxhab’te’ Ajaw), as well as references to Huk Tzuk and Uxlajun Tzuk in the primary and secondary texts (compare to Reents-Budet 1994: 156-157).

The last glyph collocation at B6 simply spells **b’a-ka-b’a** for *b’a[h]kab’* “First of the World”, the most important *b’ah* “first, head, top” title in the Classic Maya area (of which there are more than twenty, e.g.: *b’ah ajaw*, *b’ah ch’ok*, *b’ah sajal*, *b’ah te’*, *b’ah uxul*).

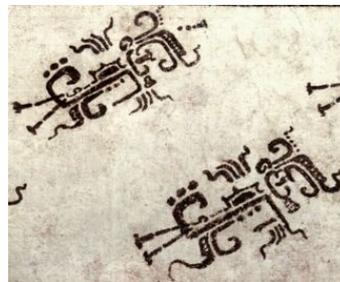
Also the two iconographic elements can be compared to an iconographic theme common to ceramics from the greater Xultún-Río Azul area:



Plate



Kerr No. 4572



Kerr No. 8015

While only the best surviving element of the two elements is illustrated above it is clear that this element depicts the same element as depicted on Kerr No. 4572 and Kerr No. 8015. I identify these elements as the fully animated shoot or branch of a *Ficus* tree, of which the leaves are indicative (see Kerr No. 4572), either the *Ficus cotinifolia*, H.B. et K., or the *Ficus pertusa*, Linn.f.

The plate that is the subject of this short epigraphic analysis is part of a tradition common to the greater Xultún-Río Azul area, to which specific calligraphic details as discussed above as well as the surviving iconography direct. The plate is identified through a paired expression that can be transliterated *ujawa[n]te’ yajaljib’* or “(it is) the (tripod) plate, the wake-up instrument (of)”, the first of its kind of which I am aware. In total it is the fifth plate marked by the expression *yajaljib’*.

## Acknowledgments

I thank Markus Eberl for making available a high resolution scan of the plate illustrated in the 2005 calendar of the Universidad Rafael Landívar, providing permission to use his line drawing, as well as his comments on a previous version of this essay. As always, unless noted otherwise, the opinions expressed in this essay are mine.

## Notes

\* Photograph of the plate by José Carlos Flores, drawing of the hieroglyphic text by Markus Eberl (July 2005). High resolution images of both the color photograph and the drawing can be found in the Appendix.

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”) (Grube 2004). In this essay there is no reconstruction of complex vowels based on disharmonic spellings (compare to Houston, Stuart, and Robertson 1998 and Lacadena and Wichmann 2004, n.d.; for counter proposals see Kaufman 2003 and Boot 2004b, 2005b). In the transcription of Maya hieroglyphic signs uppercase bold type face letters indicate logograms (e.g. **TE'**), while lowercase bold type face letters indicate syllabic signs (e.g. **la**). Items placed between square brackets are so-called infix signs; order of the transcribed signs indicates the epigraphically established reading order (e.g. **'a[la]**). Queries added to sign identifications or transcribed values express doubt on the identification of the assigned logographic or syllabic value (e.g. **LAY?**). Items placed between double pointed brackets are cited in their original spelling (e.g. «tz'i[h]b'naj»). All reconstructions (i.e. transliterations) in this essay are but approximations of the original intended Classic Maya (“epigraphic”) linguistic items (Boot 2002: 6-7). Citing of so-called T-numbers (e.g. T12) refers to the hieroglyphic signs as numbered and cataloged by Thompson (1962; complete sign list online at [www.famsi.org/mayawriting/thompson/index.html](http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/thompson/index.html)).

2) There are various examples of the PSS in which one can identify the collocation **'u-na-ja**. Independent research by Stephen Houston, David Mora-Marín, and the present author in the past years suggests that *naj* may be a separate (possessed) lexical item of (still) unknown meaning (compare to Lacadena 2004: 188, note 122). Alternatively, it is possible that different spellings **na-ja** with different meanings are involved, one being the passive suffix *-n-aj*, the other *-naj* as a noun.

3) In an e-mail dated July 23, 2005, Markus Eberl suggested that the paired expression *ujawa[n]te' yajaljib'* may be a diphrastric kenning, an expression that conveys a single concept by employing two complementary semantic concepts (Knowlton 2002; compare to Boot 2000). This could be possible, but at present I am of the opinion that the paired expression *ujawa[n]te' yajaljib'* contains a reference to both a type of ceramic (*ujawa[n]te'*, a plate of shallow depth) and a function (*yajaljib'*, a wake-up instrument). For instance also the paired expression *ujay yuk'ib'* can be interpreted that way, *ujay* is the type (a thin walled clay cup/cylinder), while *yuk'ib'* conveys its function (a drink-instrument), as well as *ulak uwe'ib'* (*ulak*, a ceramic plate/object by type, *uwe'ib'* an eat-instrument by function). It would explain the odd instance in which a (deep) plate has been marked as a *yuk'ib'* “drink-instrument” (Kerr No. 5073) as it would refer to the function of that particular plate as a drink-instrument. The fact that on many vessels only the functional component can be found may mean that when paired expressions were abbreviated function took precedent above type.

4) Note that the spelling **che-he-na** on Kerr No. 7459 is followed by a **-la**, possibly an indication of a full spelling **che-he-na-la** or *chehenal*. Also note that on Kerr No. 6100 one can find the spelling **'u-CH'EN-na-la**, a probable example of a full spelling, in contrast to the common **'u-CH'EN-na** as found on many ceramics from the greater Xultún-Río Azul area (compare to Boot 2005b).

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### **File History**

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## Appendix

High resolution image of the plate  
(from “Calendario Historia viva”, Universidad Rafael Landívar)



High resolution image of the drawing  
(drawing by Markus Eberl)

