A Unique Absolutive Antipassive in the Name of a K'uhul Chatahn Winik

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Codex-style vessels are characterized by a distinctive painting style defined by a fine black line drawing against a white or light-yellow background, framed by a bright red rim (Robicsek and Hales 1981). For many years the geographical origin of these vessels remained a mystery, as none had been recovered in an archaeological context. The advent of neutron-activation analysis (NAA) allowed the chemical tracing of the clay used to produce these ceramic masterpieces to the El Mirador region, in Guatemala (Hansen et al. 1991; Reents-Budet 1994; Reents-Budet et al. 2010). At El Tintal, Nakbé, and and El Mirador several codex-style vessels and sherds were discovered in archaeological contexts by the project Regional Archaeological Investigation of Northern Peten, Guatemala (Hansen et al. 2006), and later at Calakmul (Delvendahl 2008) and Uxul (Delvendahl 2013). A recent study of this ceramic style and its masters can be found in Aimi and Tunesi (2017).

Codex-style vessels are also unique in that the dominant iconographic theme is mythical or supernatural, often painted with highly symbolic representations of deities and scenes from mostly lost fables such as the "Sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar," the "Burning of the Jaguar God of the Underworld," the "Conjuring Young Woman," and the "Birth and Resurrection of the Maize God" (Figure 1). Another common theme is the "Bestiary of *Wahyob*" (Grube and Nahm 1994). Notable exceptions are the so called "Dynastic Vases" (Martin 1997), which are completely covered with texts describing the accessions of long lists of Kaanul kings. At first thought to be mythical, recent research suggests that the lists indeed correspond to sequences of historical kings and that the vessels were probably commissioned by Late Classic Kaanul kings (Martin 2017, 2020:140).

The Owners of the Vessels

It has long been noted that the owners of these vessels frequently carry the title K'uhul Chatahn Winik, apparently working as a non-standard emblem glyph (Stuart and Houston 1994; Boot 2005; Velásquez García

Figure 1. K1892, the "Resurrection of the Maize God" in a plate naming Titomaj K'awiil (drawing by Linda Schele © Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

and Barrios 2018). Boot (2005) provided mounting evidence that Chatahn was a toponym within the El Tintal–Nakbé–El Mirador region. Another common title carried by these individuals is Sak O' Wahyis (Martin 1993; Zender 2004; Velásquez García and Barrios 2018), a little-understood epithet that seems to have had a similar geographical range as the emblem glyph, appearing as far north as Uxul and Calakmul, as far south as La Corona and El Peru, and to the west as far as La Florida. The Dedicatory Formula (Coe 1973) in most of these vessels is quite compact and, most often, does not identify the owners. Two individuals break this apparent "anonymity rule" in codex-style ceramics: Yopaat Bahlam and Titomaj K'awiil (Lopes n.d.).

The Puzzle of Titomaj K'awiil

This short note discusses the grammatical interpretation and translation of the name Titomaj K'awiil, present on at least six vessels: K1650, K1892, K2226, and K8498 in the Justin Kerr database at www.mayavase.com, and RH11c, and RH23f (items C in Table 11 and F in Table 23, respectively, in Robicsek and Hales 1981). The vessels present a variety of iconographic motifs:

K1650 – a vessel (*uk'ib*) that features a transitional scene with characters from the "Sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar" and the "Conjuring Young Woman" myths.

K1892 – a superb plate (*lak*) featuring the "Resurrection of the Maize God" myth (Figure 1).

K2226 – a unique and magnificently executed shallow gourd-shaped cup (*uk'ib*) with the bottom part decorated with a firefly head smoking a cigar (Lopes 2004). The inside of the vessel is decorated with a sky band with several red stars attached. The Dedicatory Formula also presents a parentage statement indicating that the father of Titomaj K'awiil was a four Winikhaab lord. Such statements are so rare in codex-style vessels that one cannot avoid making a connection with K1560, another codex-style vase with a very similar calligraphic style, which names Yopaat Bahlam as a four Winikhaab lord as the owner. Yopaat Bahlam may have been the father of Titomaj K'awiil (Lopes n.d.).

K8498 – a vessel (*uk'ib*) that features a "Procession of *Wahyob*." The Dedicatory Formula indicates that the owner is a *ch'ok* with the general meaning of "youth, sprouting one" but used with the more specific meaning of "prince." This is consistent with his possible link to Yopaat Bahlam and further suggests a dynastic line.

RH11c (Robicsek and Hales 1981:212) – a small vessel (*uk'ib*) with aquatic iconography and a short inscription that names the owner as Titomaj K'awiil.

RH23f (Robicsek and Hales 1981:222) – a superb plate (*lak*) depicting a type of "Waterlily Serpent," the embodiment of waterfalls and streams. It is surrounded by a circular sky band and further representations of the serpent in the rim, amidst the Dedicatory Formula.

K1650: **ti-*to-ma-ja K'AWIIL**
K1892: **ti-to-ma[ja] K'AWIIL-la**
K2226: **ti-*to-ma[*ja] K'AWIIL-la**
K8498: **ti-to-ma-ja K'AWIIL**
RH11c: **ti-to-ma-ja K'AWIIL**
RH23f: **ti-to-ma-ja K'AWIIL-la**

Figure 2. Spellings of Titomaj K'awiil's name.

Figure 3. Hieroglyphic spellings of Titomaj K'awiil's name on K1892, K8498, and RH23f (top to bottom, respectively, drawings by Luís Lopes).

The spellings for Titomaj K'awiil on these vessels are listed in Figure 2. Despite the phonetically transparent first collocation in the name of this lord, its syntactic interpretation and translation have been something of a puzzle. While the spellings are consistent with each other, some are less legible or eroded. The best set of examples can be observed on K1892, K8498, and RH23f (Figure 3). On K1892 the **ja** syllabogram is infixed into **ma** but the other two examples disambiguate the reading order. The example from RH23f is particularly important as it presents a variant spelling of the name of the lord with the full form of the **to** syllabogram (see Houston 1988:130, Fig. 2) and also a clear final –**ja**. The presence of a **to-ma** sequence has suggested that the common agentive suffix *-oom* may be involved, attached to a verbal root that, in this case, should be *tit* (or something similar, accounting for possible internal vowel complexity). Such a transitive root is attested in

lowland Mayan languages with the general meaning "to shake," as shown in the following entries:

proto-Ch'olan **tihti* (tv) 'to shake' (Kaufman and Norman 1984:132, item #524)
Ch'olti' <tihtin> (tv) 'limpiar, sacudir' (Morán 1695:35)
Ch'orti' *tijti* (tv) 'shake' (Hull 2016:404)
Ch'ol *tijtin* (tv) 'sacudir' (Aulie and Aulie 1978:112)
Colonial Tzeltal <titin> (tv) 'sacudir' (Ara 1986:383 [f.101r])
Colonial Tzotzil <gtitin> (tv) 'sacudir' (Charencey 1885:34)
Yucatec *tíit* (tv) 'shake' (Bricker et al. 1998:277)
Itzaj *tit-* (afv) 'shake' (Hofling 1997:593)

Intimately associated with royal power, K'awiil was the embodiment of lightning, an anthropomorphic snake (Figure 4) associated with the axe of the rain god Chahk (Martin 2020). As such he is a frequent actor in royal names that refer to reverberating activities in the sky, e.g., *yuhklaj chan k'awiil* > "K'awiil Shakes (repeatedly) in the Sky" (a king of the Hiix Witz polity) and *bajlaj chan k'awiil* > "K'awiil Hammers (repeatedly) in the Sky" (the famous Dos Pilas king) (Zender 2010). In view of these examples, the root *tiht* "to shake" provides a natural activity for the god. However, this interpretation leaves uncertain the grammatical function of the final -**ja**.

An alternative scenario might involve the assumption that the **to** syllabogram (here T44) is working as the logogram **TOK** (also represented as T563b or as T44+T563b). This root is well attested in Lowland Mayan languages with assumed cognates *tok* "to burn" (Yucatecan) and *tokal* "cloud" (Ch'olan). There are several examples of names in the corpus that incorporate this logographic alternative in either form, e.g., the name of the Tikal and El Peru kings *chak to[o]k ich'aak* > "Great/Red Burning Claw" and the *wahy* demon *jats'al tok[al] ek' hiix* > "Striking Burning/Cloud-Star-Jaguar." Returning to Titomaj K'awiil, while **TOK** would be theoretically possible, it would leave the rest as an unproductive aggregate of morphemes more problematical than the final -**ja** alone.

Thus, the simplest explanation for the consistently fully phonetic spelling of the name is that a verbal root, in this case *tiht* "to shake" (cf. Kaufman and Norman 1984:132, item #524), with derivational suffixes, must be involved. Recent work by Robin Quizar (2020) on the history of Ch'orti' antipassive constructions provides a straightforward interpretation of the derivational pattern observed. As Quizar notes (2020:251),

> Absolutive antipassives marked with *-ma* typically refer to habitual actions done by humans where the patient is generic, such as in 'fishing,' 'sewing,' and 'hunting.' However, numerous forms fall outside this characterization, such as *ab'asma* 'he wraps (things) up,' *apisma* 'he unwraps (things),' *atijtma* 'he shakes (things),' *atz'otma* 'she rolls (things) up,' or *ajatz'ma* 'he hits (people),' in which the generic patient may be known or clear from the context.

In tracing the evolution of the aforementioned *-ma* absolutive antipassive for transitive roots in Ch'orti', Quizar (2020:278-279) cites prior work by Becquey (2014:472–473) and Law (2014:118–119) in positing that this suffix arose from an agentive nominalizer *-oom* found commonly in the Classic script. She further argues that Ch'orti' *-ma* represents two morphemes: the antipassive *-m-* (from **-oom*) plus intransitivizing *-aj*. Citing Kaufman (2015:315), she notes that antecedents to *-ma* may be reconstructed for proto-Greater Tzeltalan due to the presence of agentive *-om*/*-um* in Ch'olan, Tzeltalan, and Chujean languages, with a noteworthy *-(o)maj* antipassive suffix listed in charts for Tzeltal and Tzotzil (Dayley 1981:43-44, Table 10, 70; Heaton 2017:447). Kaufman (2015) states that *-om-aj* indicates "engage in customary activity" for intransitive verbs in Tzeltal. Dayley (1981:43) provides a single example

Figure 4. The anthropomorphic aspect of K'awiil with its snake leg. Detail from codex-style vessel K5164 (adapted from photo © Justin Kerr).

tz'is-omaj "sew" and considers *-omaj* to be a "fairly productive" antipassive suffix in Tzeltal, albeit not as commonly used as the absolutive antipassive *-awan*.

Thus, the verb stem of the Ch'orti' entry *atijtma* cited above in the quote from Quizar (2020) may be understood to have developed from **tiht-i* "to shake" plus an absolutive antipassive **-om-aj* with a sense of "customary activity." As such, its Classic antecedent was apparently nominalized without further suffixation in the name Tihtomaj K'awiil:

ti-to-ma-ja K'AWIIL >
tihtomaj k'awiil > "K'awiil [who] Shakes (things)"

Figure 5. A wonderful representation of the Teotihuacan war snake in K5424, one of several vessels owned by Yopaat Bahlam, the presumed father of Tihtomaj K'awiil (adapted from photo © Justin Kerr).

Conclusions

We propose that the name of Tihtomaj K'awiil can be interpreted as a thus-far-unidentified absolutive antipassive construction, based on similar constructs documented in Ch'orti'. Consequently, the name can be translated as Tihtomaj K'awiil, or "K'awiil (who) Shakes (things)." This lord and Yopaat Bahlam, possibly his father, are the most frequently named owners of codex-style vessels (Figure 5). This likely familial connection and the fact the Tihtomaj K'awiil carries the title *ch'ok* "prince" is the first hint of a dynastic line in the still largely opaque Chatahn polity.

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