

THE ESSAYS

## THE PRIMARY STANDARD SEQUENCE ON CHOCHOLA STYLE CERAMICS

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A certain group of carved ceramic vases of unknown provenance which share the same stylistic and physical features was named “Chocholá” Michael Coe (1973: 144). who was the first to publish a group of these in the exhibition catalogue “The Maya Scribe and His World”. The most remarkable feature of Chocholá ceramics is that they are carved or molded rather than painted. The highly elaborate carvings share many iconographic motifs with ceramics from the Southern Lowlands, though most scholars think that the Chocholá style originates somewhere in the Northern Lowlands. Chocholá ceramics are usually between 10 and 15 cm in height and use simple vessel shapes (bowls and cylindrical vessels). The most detailed treatment of the iconography of Chocholá ceramics was presented by Carolyn Tate at the 1983 Palenque Round Table Conference (Tate 1985).

Unfortunately, the Chocholá ceramic style is known only from looted vessels. Thus we do not know their provenance nor the archaeological contexts in which they were found. In 1843 John Lloyd Stephens was shown a Chocholá vessel in the village of Ticul in Yucatan (Stephens 1961: 163). Seventy years later Herbert Spinden illustrates two Chocholá ceramics, one of which came to light in Peto in the south-

eastern part of Yucatán. The other reportedly originated in Calcehtok Yucatán (Spinden 1913: Figs. 185, 186). According to information by Michael Coe, most ceramics in the style of Chocholá that are published in the Grolier Catalog originate from mounds close to the present villages of Chocholá and Maxcanú which are southwest of Mérida. Therefore he called this unprovenanced style “Chocholá”. Since Coe’s provenance information is not absolutely reliable we should regard the whole style as unprovenanced until the first Chocholá ceramics are found in archaeological excavations. Even then, the location of workshops which produced this extraordinary style could not be known until extensive comparative data from epigraphy and chemical analysis of clay sources become available.

The corpus of Chocholá ceramics has never been published together. The largest group of Chocholá ceramics was published in the Grolier Catalog (Coe 1973). Carolyn Tate (1985) first discussed the iconography of the Chocholá ceramics and illustrated several vases in line drawings. A group of Chocholá ceramics is published in this volume, as a special section (Pages 298 - 314).

## THE PRIMARY STANDARD SEQUENCE ON Chocholá STYLE CERAMICS

This short study will concentrate on Primary Standard Sequences (hereafter abbreviated as PSS) on Chocholá ceramics. The PSS is a highly repetitious text that occurs usually as a rim text on many ceramic vessels from all parts of the Maya Lowlands. The PSS is a glyphic formula that refers to the dedication of a vessel, its method of adornment, the class of vessel involved, its use and content (cacao drinks and maize gruels), and sometimes the owner or artisan (Houston and Taube 1987; Houston, Stuart and Taube 1989; Stuart 1989; MacLeod 1989; MacLeod and Grube 1989; Grube 1986). Recent epigraphic research has shown that dedication texts structurally similar to the PSS can occur on all carved, incised or painted objects, and even on architectural structures.

Hieroglyphic texts on Chocholá ceramics are either written under the rim of a vessel, or they form diagonal bands on the opposite side of the vessel from the carved scene. In the latter case, hieroglyphic texts are usually placed in one or several cartouches. Among the texts on Chocholá ceramics, the PSS represent by far the

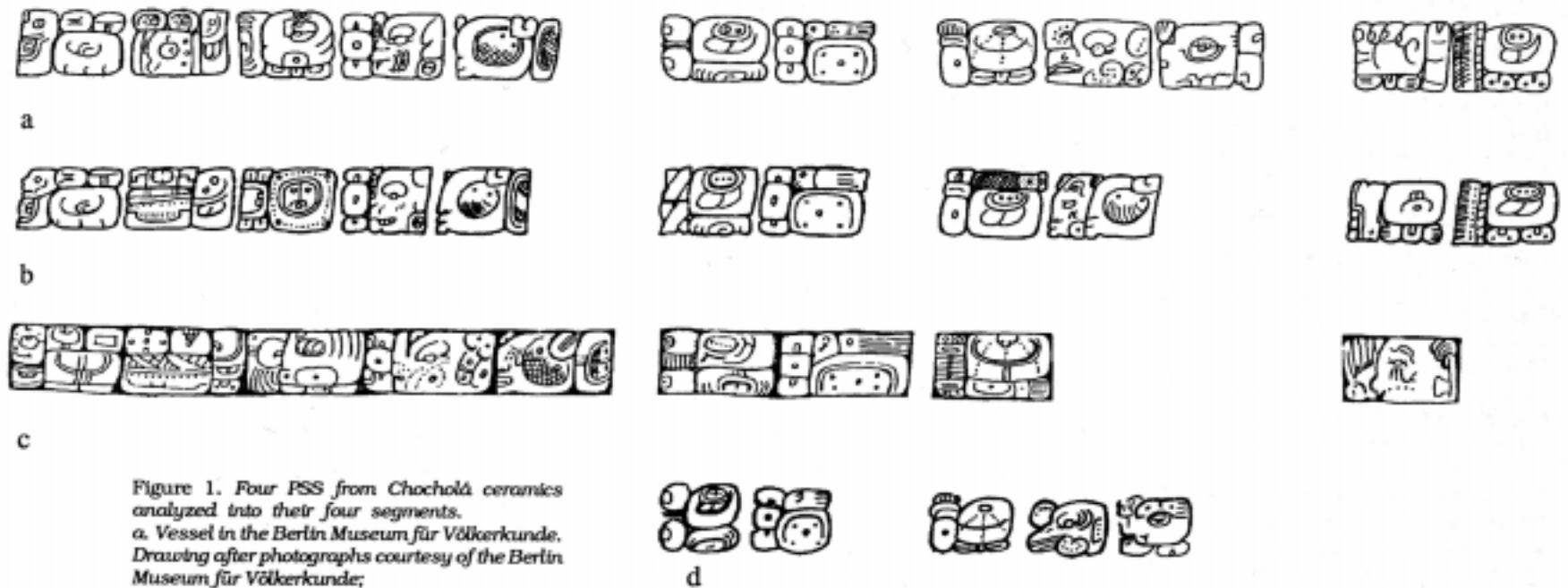


Figure 1. Four PSS from Chochohá ceramics analyzed into their four segments.  
 a. Vessel in the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde. Drawing after photographs courtesy of the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde;  
 b. Drawing after Kerr No. 3199;  
 c. Drawing after Coe 1973:73 (text reversed);  
 d. Drawing after Kerr No. 4542

largest group. Other kinds of texts, like glyphic captions which refer to the painted scenes are less frequent on Chocholá ceramics than on those from the Southern Lowlands. The PSS on Chocholá ceramics have variations and unusual glyphs which make them different from the PSS on polychrome vases from the Petén. In the following paragraphs it will be shown that it is not so much the general structure of the PSS that differs from that of the Southern Lowlands but variations in the composition of single glyphs.

Like other PSS, the Chocholá PSS can be divided into several segments (Figure 1). The first segment contains introducing glyphs which refer to the dedication of the vessel and its particular decoration. The second segment consists of a possessed nominal phrase which spells the name of the object, the vessel. Next comes a section which is introduced by a preposition and therefore is called “prepositional phrase”. Finally, a sequence of personal names and titles may be present in the last segment of the PSS. Of these four segments, only the possessed nominal phrase is always present. The nominal phrase can be called the most basic component of the PSS. On most Chocholá

ceramics, the nominal phrase is represented by two glyphs, of which the second is the “Wing Quincunx” glyph, now known to spell the Maya word for “his drinking cup”, or /y *uch’ib* (Houston and Taube 1987; Grube and MacLeod 1990: Houston, Stuart and Taube 1989). A characteristic feature of the Chocholá PSS is that the wing of the Wing Quincunx is often replaced with a full-figure bird. On a few ceramics, however, not even the Wing Quincunx is present. Here, the PSS is reduced to the first glyph of the nominal phrase which reads u



*ha-yi* (Figure 2). Apparently, *u hay* is the most basic “name tag” for Chocholá ceramics. The word *hay* is translated as “thin in Cholan and Yucatecán dictionaries (Barrera Vasquez 1980: 189). When *u hay* alone is used as a name tag, it is always followed by the names and titles of the owner of the vase and possibly translates as “the thinness of. Such short texts

Figure 2. The PSS is reduced to its most basic form, the glyph for u hay, “its thinness”. (K4333)

are not very common. It is more usual to find *u hay* together with the Wing Quincunx glyph. Both glyphs together can be translated as “his thin-walled vase.” In this case the *yu* of the Wing Quincunx may just be a liaison and not the bearer of a pronoun. The *hay* obviously was treated by Classic scribes as a noun root, but in present day Chol and Yucatec it is an adjective.

The word *hay* is not only found in the Chocholá PSS, but is also present on red background ceramics from Uaxactun. On these ceramics the main sign of the Uaxactun emblem (T562) is often inserted between the *u* and the *hay*, qualifying the vases as “his Uaxactun thin-walled vase” (Figure 3a). On a stuccoed tripod vessel that was excavated at Uaxactun, *hay* is called *u k’ul k’aba* “the holy name” of Wing Quincunx, the vase (Figure 3c). Thus, the whole noun phrase in the Chocholá PSS refers to a certain quality of the vases, namely the thinness of their walls which certainly was regarded as superior craftsmanship in contrast to the thick walled ceramics for everyday use.

The passage that precedes the noun phrase takes several forms. The first glyph seems to be a variant of the Initial Glyph

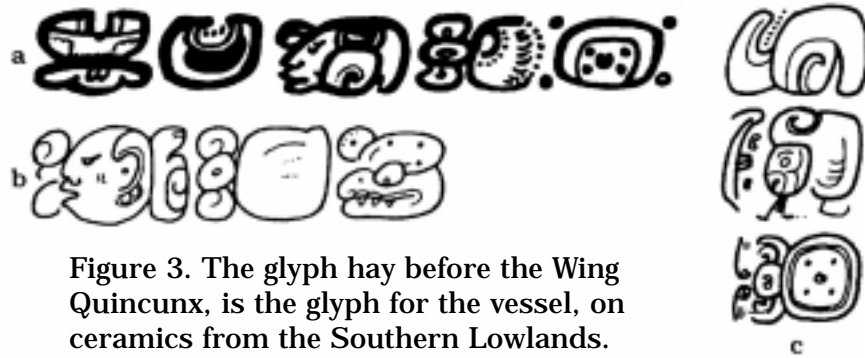


Figure 3. The glyph *hay* before the Wing Quincunx, is the glyph for the vessel, on ceramics from the Southern Lowlands. a. “Uaxactun” -*hay* - Wing Quincunx” after Coe 1973: 38; b. *u hay* “Wing Quincunx” or “his thin- walled vase”, after Schele 1985: Fig. 3; c. *hay k’ul k’aba*, “thin(ness?) is the holy name of the vase”, after Smith 1955: Fig. 1a.

of the PSS (Figure 4). The Initial Glyph is used in the PSS and other texts to highlight the glyphs which follow. In the Chocholá PSS it consists of three signs; a prefix which spells the vowel *a*, a superfix reading *ahau* “king” and a main sign, which is similar to the main sign often found in the Initial glyph from other PSS. The presence of the *ahau* sign in the Initial Glyph is highly unusual if compared with Initial Glyphs from inscriptions in the Southern Lowlands. In the inscriptions of Chichen Itzá, however, there are many Initial Glyphs introducing dedication texts which have either *ahaw* or T506, *wa* as their main sign.

tution with *u ts’ib*, “his writing” on ceramics which are carved rather than being incised. It has been identified as a glyph for “carving” (Stuart 1986, Grube 1986), but no reading has been suggested yet. All of the signs which form part of the *lu*-bat glyph can be read syllabically. Though the bat-head is some times found in replacement for *ts’i* (Stuart 1987: 8), a *ts’i* syllabic value is questionable in this context. When the *lu*-bat is used as a sculptor’s title, the *yu* sign is substituted by the male agentive *ah* that is usually found before titles in Yucatec and the phonetic sign *u*. This indicates that the word for “carving” expressed by the *lu*-bat

Only a very few have the *yich* glyph which is found so often in PSS from the Southern Lowlands (Figure 1a,c). The *yich* glyph has been analyzed by Barbara MacLeod (1989) as the possessed form of the word *hich*, “writing surface”. Another glyph which is more frequent in the introductory part of the Chocholá PSS is the so-called *lu*-bat. This glyph is found in substi-

glyph begins with *u* and that the *yu* sign found otherwise, spells the *y*-pronoun. Unfortunately, no such word has hitherto been discovered in any of the Cholan or Yucatecan dictionaries.

Another glyph which sometimes surfaces in the introductory part of the Chocholá PSS between the Initial Glyph and the *lu*-bat is a verbal glyph. This specific position in other PSS is characteristic for the “Flat-hand Verb”. The glyph occurs in many forms in the Chocholá PSS (Figure 5). The only constant element is the *ha* sign (T181) which may be present here to spell a verbal suffix. The first sign is ei-

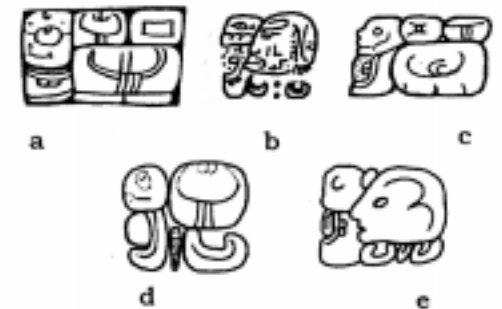


Figure 4. The Initial Glyph. a. after Coe 1973:73; b. from a vessel in Chocholá style said to be from near Xcalumkin; c. from a vessel in the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde; d. Chichén Itzá Monjas Lintel 4, B5 (after a drawing by Ian Graham in Thompson 1977); e. Chichén Itzá, Temple of the Four Lintels, Lintel 1a, A1.

ther a *k'in*-knot or a sign deciphered by David Stuart as the syllable *pi* (Stuart 1987: 11-13). Several signs occur in main sign position, either the 'sky' sign T561 (Figure 5a, b), the *cauac* sign T528 (Figure 5c, d) or a death head corresponding to T232 in the Thompson (1962) catalogue (Figure 5e). Since the *k'in*-knot occurs

with the *chaan* "sky" sign as well as with the 1528 *cauac* sign, it is very likely that all the variants spell the same word. The meaning of the whole glyph is unknown. The T561 *chaan* main sign also occurs in a few Flat-hand verb glyphs on polychrome ceramics from the southern lowlands (Figure 5g, h).

the *lu*-bat (Figure 1b). Neither the reading nor the function of this glyph are known to me.

We will now turn our attention to the glyphs that can follow immediately after the possessed noun phrase, "his thin walled vessel". As was already mentioned earlier, the first of the one to four glyphs that constitute this phrase is always preceded by a preposition (Figure 6). These glyphs provide information about the content of the vessels (Stuart 1986; Grube 1986; MacLeod and Grube 1989). The glyphs refer directly to the kind of beverages which were held in them. In its most abbreviated form the prepositional phrase is made up of only one glyph. This glyph consists of a preposition *ti* "for" and a noun which spells the name for the beverage involved. Thus we find very short statements about the contents of the vessels: *ti ul* "for Atole" (Figure 6a), (Kerr No. 4378, von Winning 1986: No. 152) *ti tsih* "for the fresh (drink)" (Coe 1973: No. 58 and No. 64), or *ti sakha* "for Atole". (Hellmuth, Dumbarton Oaks photo Archive No. 148). When the prepositional phrase has two or more glyphs, a preposition is always prefixed before the first glyph. In these more elaborate prepositional phrases the name of the beverage

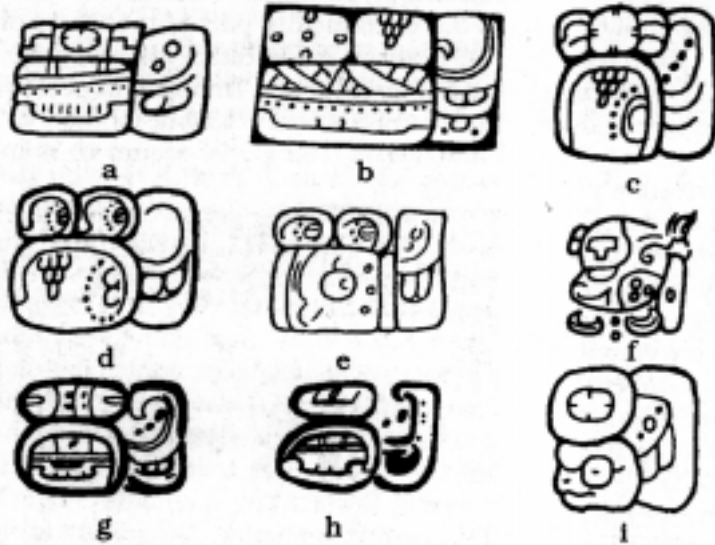


Figure 5. Glyphs that substitute for Flat-hand verb on Chochohá style ceramics. a. Kerr 3199; b. Coe 1973: 73; c. after Tate 1985: Fig. 6; d. Pearlman 29 (Coe 1982: 63); e. Vessel in the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (Eisleb 1969: 19); f. *uti-ya* replacing the Flat-hand verb on a vessel in Chochohá style said to be from Xcalumkin; g. T561 substituting for the T713a-hand, (Kerr No. 4021); h. Kerr No. 1775; i. Itzintle, Lintel 1, J1 (drawn after von Euw 1977: 31)

Interestingly, the glyph in discussion is substituted by an *uti-ya* glyph on a vase which reputedly is from near Xcalumkin, Yucatán (Figure 5f. The Cholan word *ut* and its Yucatecan equivalent, *uch* mean "to come to pass" and "to finish" (Kaufman and Norman 1984: 135; Barrera Vasquez 1980- 897). The Flat-hand verb which is otherwise used in this syntactical position therefore represents a verb with a very broad and general meaning, an assumption which is confirmed by the wide distribution of the glyph in many different contexts (Grube 1986: 3-4).

Finally, two PSS on Chochohá ceramics insert a variant of the glyph for the day sign Ahau between the "Flat-hand Verb\*" and

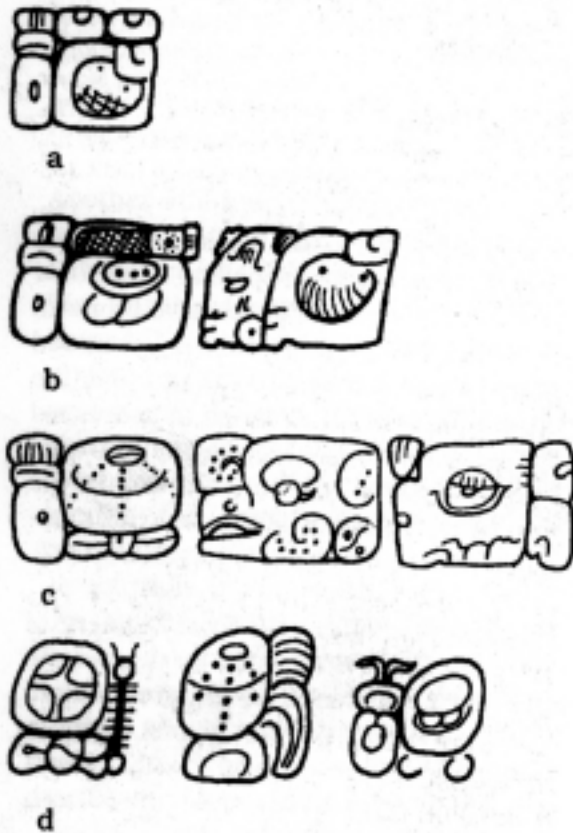


Figure 6. Examples of prepositional phrases, describing the contents held by the vessels.  
 a. *ti ul* "for Atole", (Kerr No. 4378);  
 b. *ti ch'ah ul* "for bitter Atole", (Kerr No. 3199);  
 c. *ti tshil kakaw* "for fresh Cacao", Vase in Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (Eisleb 1969: 19);  
 d. *ti k'an tshil sakha* for yellow fresh Atole", (after Tate 1985: Fig. 8).

is represented by the last glyph, while the other glyphs spell adjectives that qualify the drink as "fresh", "sweet", or "precious". Examples for such extended prepositional phrases are *ti ch'ah ul* "for bitter Atole" (Figure 6b), (Kerr No. 3199) *ti tshil kakawa* "for fresh cacao" (Figure 6c), (Coe 1973: No. 55, Coe 1982: No. 30, Tate 1985: Fig. 3, Eisleb 1969: Fig. 19), and *ti k'an tshil sakha* "for yellow fresh atole" figure 6d) (Tate 1985: ft 8). The Chocholá ceramics correspond to other ceramics in that vessels with rounded or globular interiors were designed for Atole, and tall-sided vessels held other drinks, like Cacao (Houston, Stuart and Taube 1989).

The glyphs that follow the prepositional phrase constitute the end of the Chocholá PSS. Much less is known about this final segment of the PSS than about the other ones. In its most complex form this segment is composed of five glyphs. The first glyph is Coe's "Rodent Bone-", a glyph now deciphered as *chak chok*. Without the *chak* "great. red" prefix, this title is very common in the inscriptions as a reference to young lords. *C'hok* means young and "unripe" in the Cholan and Yucatecan languages and is often used to refer to members of the elite before their acces-

sion to power. With a prefixed *chak* this title is very often found in the PSS, but only rarely in stone inscriptions. Though we can read both parts of the title, the specific meaning of the combination of the word *chak* "red" before *ch'ok* "unripe" is not known. In inscriptions from Piedras Negras and Xcalumidn, *chak chok* is sometimes employed as a title by sculptors and artists. When *chak chok* is used in Xcalumkin, it precedes the individual name of an artist (Figure 7b). This syntax is paralleled by the Chocholá PSS, where the glyph next to *chak chok* also is a name glyph (Figure 7c). Next to this nominal glyph we often find the "cahal" title first recognized by David Stuart for subsidiaries and minor lords (Stuart 1983). It is a very common title in the Usumacinta drainage and in Yucatán. In contrast to the Southern Lowlands, the "cahal" title is never spelled with its head variant T1004 in inscriptions from Yucatán and in the Chocholá PSS. Unfortunately, the exact meaning of this title is not yet known, because the reading of the first sign (T630) still is in debate.

The fourth glyph in this sequence of names and titles is a syllabic spelling for *u yul* or *u yulul*. The prefixed possessive pronoun *u-* marks this glyph as another

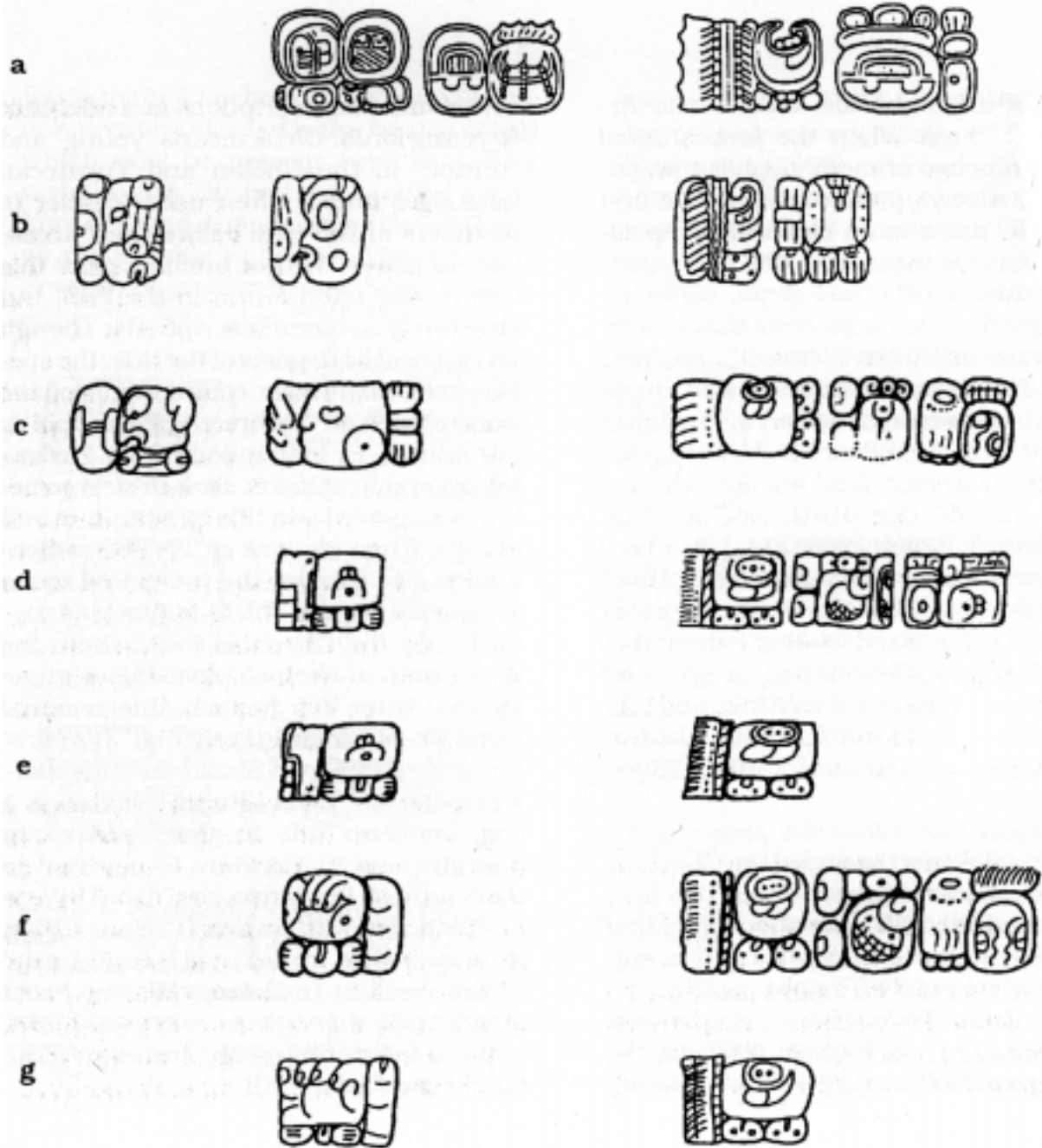


Figure 7. A comparison of title sequences from the Chochola PSS and hieroglyphic texts from Xcalumkin. a. Xcalumkin, Hieroglyphic Group Column from South Building, North Entrance (after Pollock 1980: Ag. 739); b. Xcombec Column, C5-D6 (after Mayer 1984: Plate 77); c. Vessel in the St Louis Art Museum; e. Kerr No. 3199; f. Pearlman No. 29 (Coe 1982: 63); g. Vessel in the Berlin Museum Volkerkunde (Eisleb 1969: 19).

possessed noun. The noun itself is *yul* or *yulul* (the-*ul* ending is often attached to possessed nouns in Yucatec), a word which is translated as “polish” or “smoothness” in the Cordemex dictionary *yul* (bruñido; bruñimiento, lisura”, Barrera Vasquez 1980: 982).

The last position in the final segment of the Chocholá PSS is held by the *bakab* title. In monumental inscriptions *bakab* is always one of the last glyphs within a nominal passage. It customarily follows Emblem glyphs and is often paired with the *Batab/Makuch* title.

Unfortunately, the syntactical structure of the glyphs following the prepositional phrase is anything but clear. The last two glyphs, *u. yulul bakab* may translate as “the polish of the *bakab*”. This could be interpreted as a reference to the vase, if *u yulul* is another descriptive term for this type of ceramic, emphasizing the smoothness of the surface, a noted feature of the Chocholá style. The *bakab* title could re-



fer to the royal owner of the vessel.

Another still inscrutable problem is the interpretation of the variable nominal between *chak chok* and the “cahal” title. Was this the signature of the artist, or the name of the owner of the vessel? In hieroglyphic inscriptions from northern Campeche and Yucatán much emphasis is given to the names of artists and sculptors. Especially in the texts from Xcalumkin and neighboring sites we find many references to scribes which are structurally similar to the title phrases of the Chocholá PSS. In these texts the signatures of scribes are introduced either by the *lu*-bat glyph which was already discussed above, or a glyph which reads *u wohol* “his glyph”. The actual name of the scribe usually consists of one or two glyph blocks. Almost all scribes signatures from Xcalumkin and other sites in that region have the “cahal” title (Figure 7a, b). Obviously the scribes of Xcalumkin were not only of fairly high social status but pertained to the royal families. Scribe’s signatures play an extraordinary role in the texts of Xcalumkin. It is almost impossible to distinguish between the names of rulers and those of scribes. The title *its’at*, artist, learned one- (Figure 7a), which sometimes concludes scribes sig-

natures at Xcalumkin is another expression for the high esteem in which scribes were held in Xcalumkin.

The problem of whether the name glyph is that of the owner or that of the artist cannot yet be resolved. Interestingly, a few vessels share the same name glyphs: Kerr No. 3199 and Kerr No. 4378 share a name which probably reads *cholom* (Figure 7d, e), a vessel in the Pearlman collection (Coe 1982: No. 29), a Grolier vase (Coe 1973: No. 57) and a vase in the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde (Eisleb 1969: 19) share a glyph which consists of a hand and the syllables *ma* and *le* (Figure 7f, g). Were these vases made for the same lord, or were they formed by the hands of the same artist?

Unfortunately, none of the name glyphs are found in stone texts from Yucatán. If one of the name glyphs could be located in a monumental inscription from a site somewhere in Yucatán we would probably be able to define his status, and, perhaps even more importantly, could locate the area where the Chocholá style originated.

#### THE PROVENANCE OF THE CHOCHOLÁ STYLE

In publications of Chocholá style ceramics their origin is generally given as Yucatán. It is true that the first two vessels of this style appeared in Yucatec collections. However, not one vase, nor even a fragment of a Chocholá style vessel has ever come to light in one of the archaeological excavations in the Yucatán peninsula. This suggests that Chocholá style ceramics were not manufactured in Chichen Itzá, Uxamal, Kabah, Oxkintok, Jaina or along the coastal line of Yucatán, where archaeological excavations had recorded ceramic sequences (Tate 1985: 132), nor were they traded to these sites. Carolyn Tate thinks that the style was produced by a ceramic workshop which was cognizant of Peten iconography.

Based largely on epigraphic evidence, I suggest that the Chocholá style was manufactured in northern Campeche, or more specifically, in the vicinity of the site of Xcalumkin, Campeche. The region roughly defined by the archaeological sites of Xcorralche, Cacabec, Halal and Ichmac is well known for an extraordinary large number of inscribed monu-

ments. Of all Puuc sites, Xcalumkin certainly exhibits the largest sum of Petén traits. It is one of the few sites on the Yucatán peninsula with a complete Initial Series date. The dated monuments from Xcalumkin and adjacent sites fall in the period between 9.14.0.0.0 and 9.17.0.0.0, when Maya sites in the Petén were flourishing. The buildings which are associated with these dated monuments in Xcalumkin and its surrounding sites can be attributed to the “Early Puuc” style (Pollock 1980, Andrews 1986).

Dedication texts syntactically parallel to Chocholá PSS constitute the majority of texts from the Xcalumkin area. Almost every text from Xcalumkin, Xcocha, Xcochkax and nearby sites begins with a dedication phrase. Very often the sculptors and artists who carved the texts are named in the inscriptions, usually with the same sequence of titles (*chak chok - "cahal"*) known from the final segment of the PSS on Chocholá ceramics. On one of the most beautiful Chocholá style vessels, which was drawn by George Stuart around 1959 we find not only a Short Count date 9.16.14.0.0, but also names



Figure 8. *The name of a scribe from Xcalumkin on a Chocholá vessel a. Xcalumkin, Initial Series Building entrance to east room, J1-N1 b. the same name on a vessel in Chocholá style.*

and titles of an artist who is also recorded on a Lintel from the Initial Series Building in Xcalumkin (Figure 8).

Furthermore, there is a variant for the *u* sign on Kerr 3199 and Kerr No. 4378 which consists of two crossed bands. The same sign occurs as an *u*-sign on capitals and glyphic fragments in the Hecelchakan museum (Mayer 1984: Pl. 89, Pl. 97) which certainly were taken from sites in the southern Puuc region of Campeche.

The Xcalumkin region thus could well be the area where the workshop which produced the Chocholá style was located. Regrettably, no archaeological work has

ever been initiated in this area. Scientific excavations in Xcalumkin or one of the other sites in that area would certainly yield many breathtaking discoveries. They could help to investigate the role of Xcalumkin as an intermediary between the Southern Lowlands and the Puuc.

*Dieter Eisleb provided me with detail photographs of a Chocholá style vessel in the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde. Barbara and Justin Kerr not only allowed me to use their photographic archive but also sent many rollout photographs of Chocholá vessels on which this study is based. Many ideas in this paper were shaped in discussions with Barbara MacLeod.*

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