

SHORT EPIGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE VASE K2914

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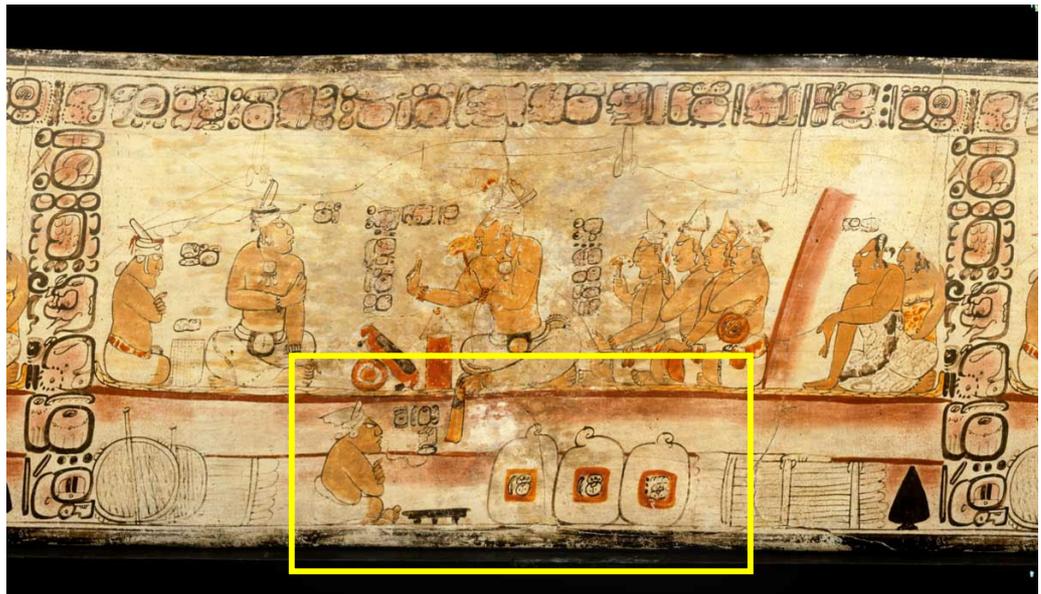


Figure 1: Rollout of the polychrome ceramic vase K2914 (photograph by Justin Kerr)

Figure 2: Glyphs representing Rio Azul place name (Kerr 2914)

The cylindrical ceramic vase K2914, is the subject of this short note (see Fig. 1). Though unproven, the vessel bears epigraphic data (Fig. 2), that suggest that it comes from the Classic Maya site of Rio Azul. The scene portrays, in the central part, the ruler of the region (Rio Azul) inside his palace, with four of his attendants, and two women seated behind them. On the left, a guest (probably a noble from a neighbouring locality) and his subordinate are seated before him. It may depict negotiations for the marriage of one of the two women pictured; in fact, in the lower section, an assistant of the ruler is checking



Figure 3: Detail from the vase K2914, with a drawing that recalls for us the little speech “scrolls” we find in modern comic books

the various offerings that have been brought as a tribute, these consisting of sacks of beans, stacks of textiles, fans and a item that seems a black vase.

It is just this scene, from the lower part of the vase (see Fig. 1, within the yellow square; Fig. 4) that shall be considered in this epigraphic analysis.

Epigraphic Analysis

In the glyphic text in question the assistant of the ruler is speaking in the first person (see a little curly lines like a tongue issuing from his mouth in Fig. 3), attracting the attention of the whole scene upon himself. The transcription of the glyphs is as follows:

	tz'a ka b'a aj	
A		<p>A: tz'a-ka-b'a-aj <i>tz'akab'aj / tz'akb'aj</i> to count - ? - THM PAS → “counted was”</p>
B		<p>B: ke-le <i>kele['m]</i> “young man”</p>

The syllables **tz'a-ka** produce the verbal root *tz'ak*, meaning “to count, to pile up” (*ts'ak* “contar”, Barrera Vasquez 1995:872) and it could be the syllabic sequence for the **TZ'AK** logogram substitution (Stuart, 2003). The syllabic sign **b'a** that follows, may produce *tz'ak-ab'* or *tz'ak-b'*, though no ready solution exists as yet (Erik Boot, personal communication by mail, October 2005). The affix **ja**, joined to the root of the verb marks the thematic suffix –aj that is associated with passive verbs (Bricker 1986, Lacadena 2004). The syllables **ke-le** form the morpheme *kel*, which may be connected with *kele'm*, a Mayan title that means “young man” (Boot, 2003). The glyph for **ke** (representing a hand) is frequently used to spell the title *kele'm*, it is used in many other texts (Boot 2003), and this may confirm the reading *kele'm*, causing one to think of the deliberate omission of the syllable **ma** on the part of the scribe (possibly for reasons of style).

A tentative transliteration, translation and free paraphrase might be:

tz'akb'aj / tz'akab'aj kele['m]
 “counted was (the offerings of the) young man”

In support of the above reading there are three containers (sacks) placed in front of him (Fig. 4) presumably containing beans, because two containers carry the glyphic collocation **ka-b'u-la**¹ → *ka bu'ul* "our beans", and as confirmation that the tributes have been counted there is the last sack bearing the glyphic group **3-ka-b'u-la** → *ux ka b'u'ul* "our three (sacks of) beans".

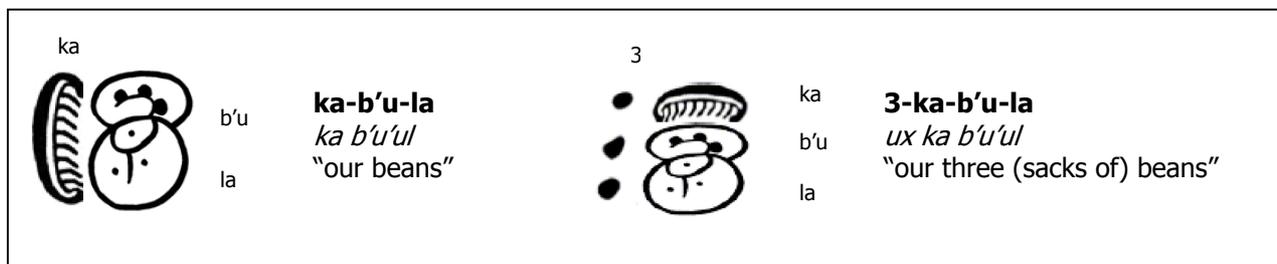


Figure 4. Court assistant seated in front of the tributes.

Final remarks

It has been suggested above that the scene represented on K2914 may represent the ruler of Rio Azul, together with four of his counsellors, receiving a *kele'm* (the young man) - who in turn may be the son of the governor of a neighbouring area- in his palace, in order that they may negotiate a marriage with one of his daughters. The tribute that has been brought by the guests consists of various offerings. These are checked by a court assistant who has administrative functions; he counts them, and communicates to the ruler (in the first person) the types and the quantities, referring to them as "ours"; thus perhaps indicating that the marriage negotiations may have reached a satisfactory conclusion.

¹ The syllabic sign **ka** in this collocation represents the ergative pronoun of the first person plural (we/our), and it is comparatively rare to find it represented in the glyphic Mayan texts.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Erik Boot for his comments (exchanged by e-mail) on the texts that have been the subject of this essay, Justin Kerr for access to his web database and for his permission to publish the illustrations.

A special word of thanks to Dr. Carlo Seberich, without whom this work would never have been written.

Unless noted otherwise, the opinions expressed in this essay are mine.

Notes

- 1) The photographic illustrations in colour which have been used in this essay come from the web archives of Justin Kerr (web site <http://www.mayavase.com>), while those illustrating glyphs block in black and white, have been drawn by me.
- 2) In the present essay the following phonetic orthography has been used for Mayan terms: **' a, b', ch, ch', e, h, j, i, k, k', l, m, n, o, p, p', s, t, t', tz, tz', u, v, x, y.**
The apostrophe /'/ represents a glottal sound, the letter /h/ represents a glottal voiced fricative, pronounced as in the English "hotel", while the letter /j/ represents a velar voiced fricative, pronounced as in Spanish word "jarabe".

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