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Zeitschrift für Mesoamerikaforschung

Journal of Mesoamerican Studies – Revista sobre Estudios Mesoamericanos

Vol. XXXVIII

Februar 2016

Nr. 1



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mexicon XXXVIII (1)

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Cover

Front Cover: The Late Preclassic Cache Deposit from Structure H-XVI Sub, Uaxactun, after removal of the upper lid (Photograph: Milan Kováč, 2015)

Back Cover: The Incised Bloodletter-Sceptre from Structure H-XVI Sub, Uaxactun (Preliminary Drawing: Guido Krempel, 2015)
see pages 9-29

News

Descubren restos de la principal cancha de Juego de Pelota de Tenochtitlan

MÉXICO D.F. (INAH/www.inah.gob.mx). En el mismo predio de la calle Guatemala, en el Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México, donde en 2010 se localizó el Templo de Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, arqueólogos del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) detectaron restos del costado norte de la principal cancha de Juego de Pelota de la antigua Tenochtitlan (Figura 1).

El descubrimiento dado a conocer públicamente en la pasada Primera Mesa Redonda de Tenochtitlan, organizada por el INAH, fue registrado como parte de los trabajos de salvamento del Programa de Arqueología Urbana (PAU), bajo la coordinación del arqueólogo Raúl Barrera Rodríguez. Durante las excavaciones efectuadas en 2014, se descubrieron los vestigios de una plataforma orientada de este a oeste



Figura 1. Restos de la principal cancha de Juego de Pelota de Tenochtitlan (Foto. PAU-INAH).

y cuya longitud aún se desconoce. Dicha sección de la estructura prehispánica, que mide 9 m de ancho y se encuentra a 6.45 m al sur del Templo de Ehecatl, presenta tres etapas constructivas correspondientes a las fases V, VI y VII del Templo Mayor, y abarca el periodo comprendido entre 1481 y 1521. La fase VI, edificada hacia 1486-1502, es la mejor conservada. En el costado norte de la plataforma que delimita al Juego de Pelota, se localizaron rematadas dos escalinatas superpuestas de cuatro peldaños, con sus respectivas banquetas que comunicaban con el Templo de Ehecatl. En el otro extremo (lado sur), se identificó la superposición de los restos de tres muros estucados en forma de talud de aproximadamente 1.95 m de altura.

Bajo uno de los pisos de la escalinata norte del juego de pelota a una profundidad de 1.60 m, en un reducido espacio de aproximadamente 45 centímetros de diámetro, se encontraron una ofrenda única por sus características, respecto con otras localizadas en estructuras del Recinto Sagrado de Tenochtitlan. Ésta la conformaban varios grupos de cervicales humanas - entre dos y seis vértebras en cada conjunto - que aún guardaban su posición anatómica y presentan buen estado de conservación, juntos con navajillas y puntas de maguey entre otros materiales que aluden al sacrificio (Figura 2).



Figura 2. Ofrenda con grupos de cervicales humanas (Foto: PAU-INAH).

The Legacy of an Early Maya King: Text, Imagery and Ritual Contexts of a Late Preclassic Cache from Structure H-XVI Sub, Uaxactun

Milan Kováč, Eva Jobbová, Guido Krempel

Introduction

Structure H-XVI is a pyramidal structure located on the southern side of the lower platform in Group H North at Uaxactun, Guatemala (Lieskovský *et al.* 2015: 426) (Fig. 1). It has a rectangular form with dimensions of 21m (EW) x 16m (NS) and 5m in height. Its main axis is oriented to the North, with a small westward deviation (2,18 deg.).

The Group H-North has been under investigation by the Slovak Archaeological and Historical Institute and Comenius University under the direction of Dr. Milan Kováč since 2009, and Structure H-XVI was excavated for the first time by Eva Götting in 2010. Although it is one of the smallest structures of the group, already after the first season of excavations it became evident that the structure had an important ritual function. The excavations were originally motivated by the presence of large stones, parts of which were protruding from the surface on the northern side of the structure (Figs. 2-4). These large stones were revealed to form a niche with paved stone floor. Subsequent excavations, led in 2011 and 2013 by Eva Jobbová, defined the form and the dimensions of the structure. The excavations provided evidence for three levels of terraces and the final ground plan and architectural style of the building was defined, featuring two inset corners, apron mouldings and round corners, corresponding to the Preclassic style also found in surrounding structures in Group H North (Jobbová 2012, 2014). In 2014, Franklyn Solís, by means of a tunnel, discovered another construction phase underneath the main Structure H-XVI, a Substructure H-XVI Sub, which required a change in exploration strategy (Solís and Guzmán 2015). In 2015, excavations were again carried out by Eva Jobbová, with the objective of fully defining the form, the dimensions and the chronostratigraphic sequence of the newly discovered Substructure H-XVI Sub. During this work a ritual cache was discovered, hidden deep below the centre of the substructure (Fig. 5). Its contents are vibrant testimonies to early royal rituals, attesting to a wealth of important findings, including early evidence of writing, which are presented and discussed in the present contribution.

Structure H-XVI and the Archaeological Context of the Niche

On the northern side of Structure H-XVI, our attention has been drawn by a sizable niche, the borders of which were formed by monolithic stones up to a metre high (Figs. 2,3). The niche is approximately two metres wide (EW) and three metres deep (NS). Ceramic material found in the niche indicated that the period of its use corresponds with the last phase of use of the entire structure, which is associated with

the Tzakol 1 phase (AD 250-300, with a possible cross-over to Tzakol 2, but in no case exceeding the end of this period at AD 378). Nearly all ceramic material identified in this object is therefore associated with the beginning of the Early Classic period (Götting 2011: 501). This is so despite the fact that the construction of Structure H-XVI itself is clearly linked to the final phases of the Chicanel period (300 BC - AD 250), and before the temporary abandonment of Group H North, which we place roughly around the year AD 150 (Kováč 2013a: 111).

During a subsequent period, a small plain stela collapsed on top of the niche (Figs. 3, 4), which, based on its stratigraphic position, appears to have fallen forwards during the collapse of H-XVI, when the niche was already largely covered by collapse debris. We assume that the stela was erected above the niche, probably on top of the three-tiered Structure H-XVI, or on its second terrace. Excavations showed that the niche was flanked on both sides by stairs - this, however, could possibly be a remnant of the original staircase (although so far no clear evidence of it has been found), standing there before the niche was incorporated into the structure (Götting 2011: 501). Despite its characteristic Tzakol ceramic phase the dating of the niche is problematic. While Structure H-XVI seems to have been in use until around AD 150, an actual use of the niche itself has been dated approximately one or two centuries later, during the Early Classic period. It is quite possible, however, that the niche was already included in the Preclassic construction plan of the structure. This would correspond with the idea of an “artificial cave“, which it may likely represent, and which was already applied - as we found out later - in the case of the substructure. Such a repeated construction, for which there are no further parallels in Uaxactun, probably did not happen too far apart in time. On the other hand, it is clear that the niche originally looked different. Although its floor was paved with stones from the onset, the side facings, built from large stones, did not sit directly on the floor but on the layer of collapse, so they must have been placed there when the floor was already partly buried (Götting 2011: 501). It is possible that the stones were placed there only in the Tzakol phase, but more likely they were readjusted at that time, possibly being first removed and then put back, in a “reconstructed“ manner.

Fragments of large stones in the upper layers indicate that the niche might originally have been taller, its possible height instead of the present 1m being around 1.5m. It represented an interior space defined by stone “walls“ with dimensions 3m x 2m x 1.5m, which might have been covered (and even raised) by a wooden construction or roof attached to the stone walls. During the supposed Early Classic “reconstruction“,

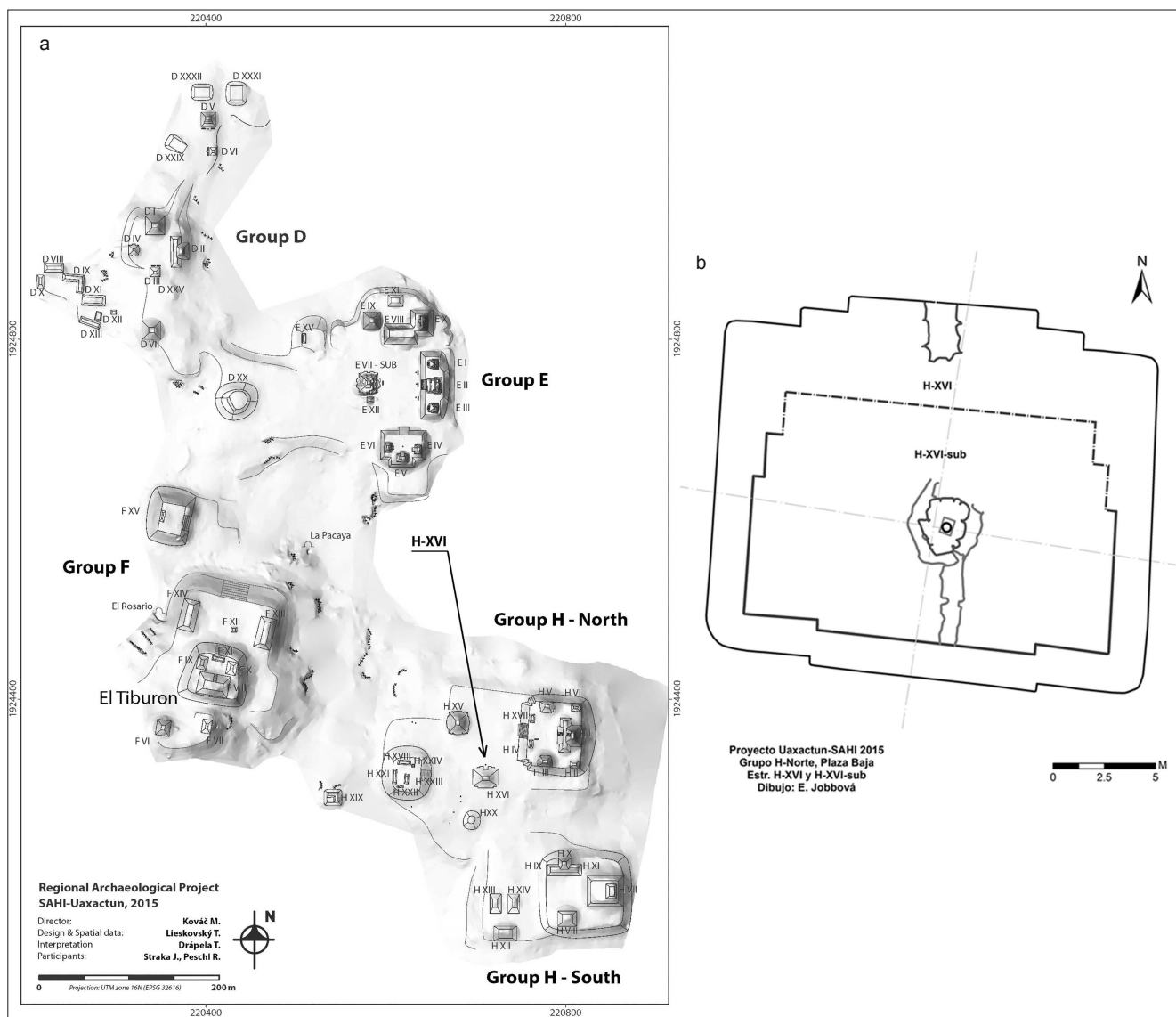


Figure 1. a) Map of Group H North, indicating the location of H-XVI (Drawing: Tibor Lieskovský and Tomáš Drápela); b) Structure H-XVI, H-XVI Sub and the cave-like structure with the cache offering (Drawing: Eva Jobbová).

the niche would have had to be cleaned and repaired after at least one century of decay (Kováč 2013a: 117). What we can observe today is apparently connected with ritual use of the “refurbished” or reconstructed niche, to which they started to bring offerings around AD 250, and, judging by the several individual layers and related ceramics, it was in continuous use for 50 to 130 years.

Within the niche were found offerings in several groups and multiple layers, such as 50 limestone and ceramic discs measuring between 5 and 15 cm in diameter (Götting 2011: 480-495) (Fig. 4b,c). The function and the meaning of these discs are still unknown. They appear in ritual contexts, mainly as offerings. During our excavations these discs were also found in relation to the giant stucco masks (at the same Group H North), on the Preclassic ballcourt (at Group H South), and also under the Early Classic stela near the Preclassic ballcourt at the site of Dos Torres located 5 km away (Spišák 2012). Although the discs were in all cases associated with Preclassic objects, they were most likely Early Classic deposits of as yet unknown ritual function, which, more broadly speaking, might most simply and best be described as offerings. To find parallels, in terms of well identified ritual function, we

would have to go relatively far. For example, very similar stone discs, so called “discoidals”, were used by members of the Mississippian Culture (Cahokia) during the ritual game Chunky (Kelly 2000: 70) and they were also placed in caches and graves (Iseminger 2010: 70). Despite the discussed similarities between this culture and Mesoamerica (Hall 2000: 31), we have no evidence of similar games or rituals for the ancient Maya. Another possibility is that these are a kind of miniature models of small “personal” altars, on which blood was offered and which were then deposited as offerings, similar to miniature plates from a ritual cache at El Ujuxte, Guatemala (Guernsey and Love 2005: 41-42). However, until some iconographic scene or favourable circumstances are forthcoming that may assist in elucidating their context, we can only speculate about their function and significance.

In addition, in front of the niche is preserved a group of stones, whose form and position allows them to be interpreted as an altar dated to the Early Classic period (Götting 2011: 486). Therefore, it seems that whereas ritual offerings were also made in front of the niche; no discs or traces of any other offerings were found there. Thus, if it was an altar, it must have served a different purpose. On the other hand, inside the



Figure 2. Structure H-XVI, with the niche in its northern façade (Photo: Eva Jobbová, 2011).

niche numerous traces of fire and ash were identified, which accompanied all offerings in various layers (Götting 2011: 485). Also found in the niche were numerous *manos* (grinding stones) and other types of round stones. Other important offerings were two small ceramic vessels from the Tzakol 1 phase, placed lip-to-lip (Götting 2011: 494). If there was any offering inside these vessels, it must have been organic in nature, since no contents have been preserved.

The stela erected above the structure, as well as the spacious niche with stone walls filled with offerings leaves us in no doubt that this is an exceptional edifice. As a means to recovering additional information pertaining to the original

function and dating of this structure, additional excavations were conducted in 2011. During this season, Eva Jobbová extensively cleared and exposed the niche, and the area below, although no cultural feature was discovered, the matrix below being completely sterile and devoid of cultural materials (Jobbová 2012: 252-253).

Substructure H-XVI Sub and the Archaeological Context of the Cache Offering

In 2015 excavations were led by Eva Jobbová, with the objective to finalize the form and the dimensions of the sub-

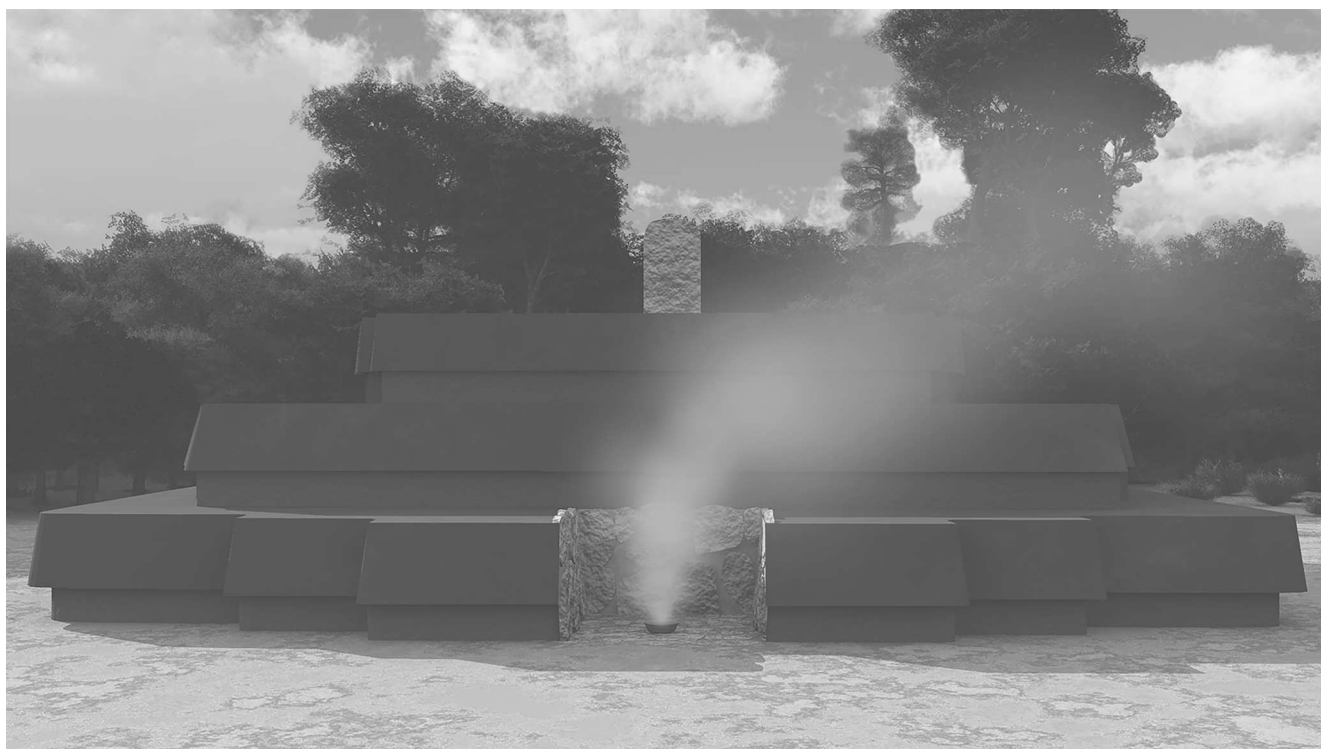


Figure 3. 3D Model of Structure H-XVI (Massimo Stefani, 2015).



Figure 4. a) The niche of Structure H-XVI (Photo: Eva Jobbová, 2011); and selection of b) stone and c) ceramic discs found within (Photos: Milan Kováč, 2010).

structure, and also to clarify its chronostratigraphic sequence – specifically in order to date the construction of the substructure and to see if it has yet another (earlier) construction phase. In addition, to date H-XVI is the only structure in Group H North found to have a substructure, therefore another goal was to clarify its function and thus possibly also the reason for its apparent importance and long term use.

The first phase of excavations during 2015 have shown that the form of the Substructure H-XVI Sub is rectangular with dimensions 17m (EW) x 11m (NS) (NS dimension is reconstructed). It was also confirmed that the form of the substructure, with its inset corners and the orientation to the north, corresponds to the form of Structure H-XVI and to the Preclassic style of Group H North structures in general. The entire ceramic material recovered from the layers between the structure and its substructure belongs to the Late Preclassic period (ceramic phase Chicanel) (S. Alvarado, L. Horáková, personal communication, 2015).

To further clarify the construction date of the substructure and to see if it has yet another construction phase, a tunnel was opened at the southern side of Structure H-XVI, leading from the surface to its centre (Fig. 5a). During this work, an accumulation of very large stones was discovered in the centre of the substructure, roughly aligned in circular shape. Moreover, between the two large stones on the eastern side of the group, a worked stone of semi-circular shape was discovered partially burned. Eventually a small opening was

made on the eastern side of the group of stones (just above the burnt stone), and on entering the accumulation it was discovered that the stones form a well-built round artificial cave, not unlike the one constructed in the northern façade of the upper Structure H-XVI. The cave-like structure with its domed roof and an interior height of approximately 1.18m is formed by very large boulders of hard material.

After removing the fill of stones and soil from the feature, three worked stone slabs were discovered on its floor; underneath them were placed another two stone slabs worked into a circular shape, which were used as the cover of a pit excavated in the natural limestone layer (Fig. 6). The pit was two metres deep, with dimensions of 0.8 m (NS) x 0.55m (EW), filled up to a height of approximately 0.5m. The fill of the pit consisted of several different layers: the topmost layer consisted of *sascab* (decomposed limestone), underneath of which was found a thin layer of dark red pigment (most likely hematite, based on its colour). Underneath the red pigment layer was another layer of very fine soft soil of powder-like consistency and cinnamon colour, possibly a mixture of *sascab* (powdery limestone) and hematite. This layer was covering an offering, a cache consisting of two large ceramic plates exhibiting forms and models of the Chicanel complex, 40 cm in diameter each, which were placed lip-to-lip (Fig. 7). Inside these two vessels was placed a third vessel of cylindrical shape containing a small green stone bead, a fantastic zoomorphic animal figurine and an anthropomorphic sceptre

or perforator covered by finely incised hieroglyphs. A large green stone celt (0.37 m long) was positioned between the two lip-to-lip vessels in east-west direction, while the face of the human figure on the sceptre was facing north. The cache was surrounded and covered by a layer of similar cinnamon-coloured soil of the same powdery consistency as the layer above the cache. Curiously, however, in this layer, the soil surrounding the cache was of a redder hue on its eastern side than on its western side, where the soil had more natural white-yellowish colour of *sascab*. It is possible that this was incidental, as there were no signs of colours corresponding to the other cardinal directions. On the other hand, given that, for the Maya, the east is associated with the colour red, it is possible that the redder hue of the soil on the eastern side of the cache was intentional - especially because the placement of the sceptre and the celt suggests an orientation according to the cardinal directions, or at the very least a cruciform arrangement.

The cache was placed directly on the floor of the pit, which was also red, caused most likely by sprinkling or painting the bottom of the limestone pit with red pigment. In this case the red pigment was of a more pinkish hue, possibly being cinnabar, in contrast to the dark red-brown hue of the upper layer, which is more likely a hematite. From Uaxactun in general, we so far know of 54 caches from both, the Preclassic and Classic period. Of these, 14 caches are from Group E (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937), 28 from Group A (Smith 1931, Smith 1950), 8 from Group B, one from Group C and 3 caches from Group D (Smith 1950).

Only two of these are from the Preclassic period and both contained some jade/green stone objects (Krejci and Kulbert 1999: 112). In most cases, however, the jade objects are represented only by one or two jade beads, which is not that surprising, since Preclassic caches from the Maya Lowlands are rather poor in general (Krejci and Kulbert 1999: 113-114). The new Late Preclassic cache found in the centre of H-XVI Sub can thus be regarded as an exceptional and considerably important one.

Substructure H-XVI Sub and the Ritual Context of the Cache Offering

Based on the observed construction sequence of the structures, it is evident that the cave-like structure located in the centre of H-XVI Sub is chronologically the earliest construction. The structure was constructed from large boulders on top of the low platform, and their transport to the place and construction of the structure would have required considerable effort. The cave-like shape of the structure and the placement of the cache within it indicate a deep ritual meaning.

In 1959 William Coe made a distinction between dedicatory caches and termination caches or deposits, defining dedicatory caches as those placed within a structure during its construction in order to sanctify the building (Coe 1959: 78). Similarly, Brian Stross (1998: 35) suggested that "cache offerings can be interpreted as a way of animating the building by inserting a 'heart' that in some cases may replicate the cosmos with representatives from each cosmic level." On the other hand, Becker (1992: 188-191) noted that some structures could actually have been built to commemorate

the burial or the cache placed beneath them. As noted by Stross (1998: 35), dedicatory caches, especially those from the Preclassic period, sometimes contain elements that represent cosmological levels and are directionally oriented. For example, in the elaborately layered caches from Caracol, Belize, the contents seemed to be organized in layers representing the "underworld" and the "heavenly" spheres (Chase and Chase 1998: 318); and the Middle Preclassic cache of Ceibal, Guatemala consists of cluster of vessels and jadeite axes laid out in a cruciform arrangement (Smith 1982: 245). In other cases, green jade and contrasting white and red shells are incorporated in a manner relating to the colour symbolism of the world's cardinal directions (Joyce 2011: 545; Chase 1988; Cox 1991). In the case of the cache from H-XVI Sub, the sceptre/perforator and the stone axe were positioned in a cruciform arrangement corresponding with the cardinal directions.

Yet further evidence of ritual use are the traces of burning visible on the stone block, which virtually closes the circular form of the cave-like structure. Dedicatory and termination rituals were often accompanied by burning events (Chase and Chase 1998: 302, 324; Coe 1990: 938, Stuart, 1998), and the numerous passages of Maya hieroglyphic texts mentioning such occasions indicate their great importance in ancient Mesoamerican and Mayan religion (i.e. Stuart 1998, Fitzsimmons 2009). More specifically, rituals involving fire in Maya architecture include: the house "fire-entering" ritual (*och k'ahk' ta yotoot*), the "house censuring" ritual (*k'ahk'el naah*), "tomb renewal ceremonies" (*och k'ahk' tu muhkil / tu muhknal*), or the ritual translated as "the fire entered his dormitory" (*och k'ahk' tu waybil*), and seem to refer to the dedication of a very specialized type of a religious structure, usually a place where "the images of gods or supernatural images "resided" or were kept in relative seclusion" (Stuart 1998: 384-400). Traces of burning on the stone placed by what was most likely the entrance to the cave-like structure might be remnants of such a ritual, perhaps of the "fire entering" or "fire censuring" which in contemporary Maya communities, such as the Tzotzil Maya of Zinacantan or Lacandon Maya, still take place after a new house is built "to give the house a 'soul'" (Vogt 1969:461, Stuart 1998: 393).

In addition, in the immediate vicinity and in the walls of the cave-like structure ceramic sherds were found, which could be refitted, as they belonged to the same vessels (8 fragments belonging to 3 different vessels) and could possibly also be part of the dedicatory ceremony (one known in Classic Maya contexts as *mahkaj uwahy* "chamber-sealing/closing", see Lacadena 2003: 24-48), perhaps related to the closing of the cave-like structure.

The latter feature is closed on the northern side (forming a full circle), but excavations have shown that there are large stone blocks placed north of it. These stone blocks are clearly worked, so they may have been taken from the destroyed northern façade of the substructure, perhaps in order to build something else - possibly a niche or an altar similar to those built later in front of the structure. It is also possible that the northern façade of the substructure was destroyed when the construction of the niche in the northern façade of Structure H-XVI took place. It is hoped that the excavations scheduled for the upcoming season will bring answers to some of these latest questions.



Figure 5. a) The tunnel within H-XVI Sub, with part of the cave-like structure visible on a small platform, b) Cache offering *in situ* after removal of the fill layers (Photos: Eva Jobbová, 2015).

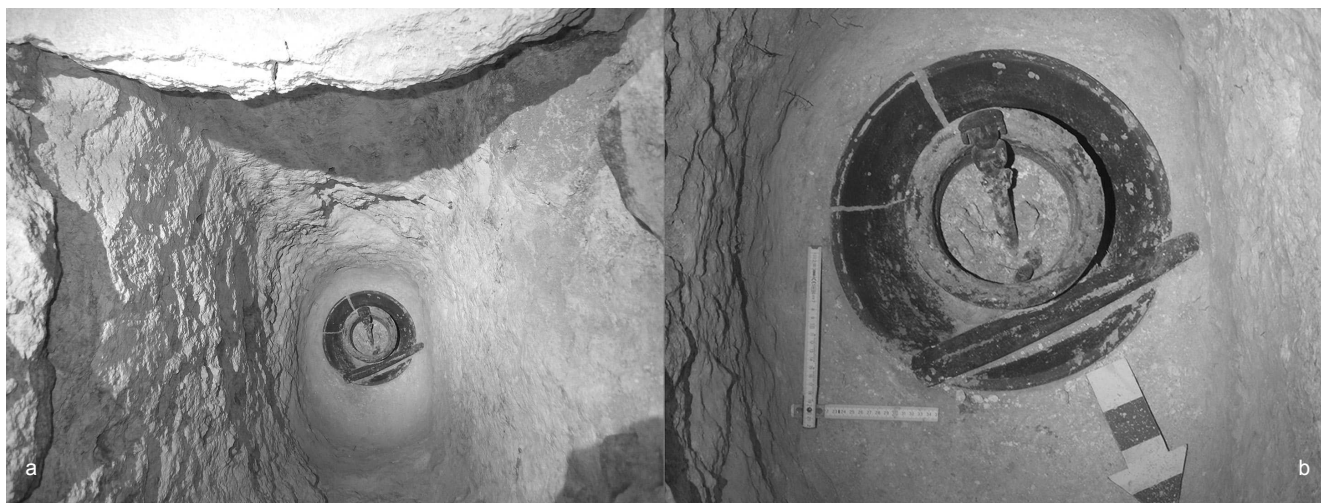


Figure 6. The Cache offering *in situ* after removal of the upper lid; a) view of the context, from the floor of the cave-like structure; b) close-up of the cache *in situ* (Photos: Eva Jobbová, 2015).

Description of the objects from the cache

The first object that was placed inside the two lip-to-lip vessels of Sierra Red type (Chicanel phase) was a ceramic bowl of cylindrical shape. The vessel/container is of Alta Mira Fluted type, associated with the Chicanel phase, with height 16.4 cm and diameter 23.4 cm. It is plain, without paintings or other adornments, which is common for Chicanel phase vessels, the only decorative elements being its shape and the lateral ridge. Considering its contents and the inscriptions on the sceptre, which are all being further analysed, it is possible that this vessel was used as a receptacle for blood offering. It might be a very early Maya equivalent of a Cuauhxicalli - eagle bowl, as already defined by Selser (1902-1923 704-716). Their function in the Maya area has recently been described insightfully by Karl Taube (Taube 2009).

Celt/axe

The stone celt, made of green stone, is 37 cm long, with a smooth polished surface and no signs of practical use, therefore most likely of ceremonial function as symbol of power. It was placed with EW-orientation on the rim between the two lids of the cache vessel. Axes or celts of similar shape are attested from several caches from the Olmec as well as the Maya area and feature prominently in iconography, often related to early lightning, rain and maize deity representations (Miller and Taube 1993: 58; Taube 2000).

Green stone Bead

A small green stone bead, measuring 8 mm in width, and 6 mm in diameter. There was only one bead placed in the cache, so it most likely had a specific symbolic and ritual meaning, possibly related to a spiritually loaded "soul-giving" power placed within a "soul bundle cache" (see Freidel and Guenter

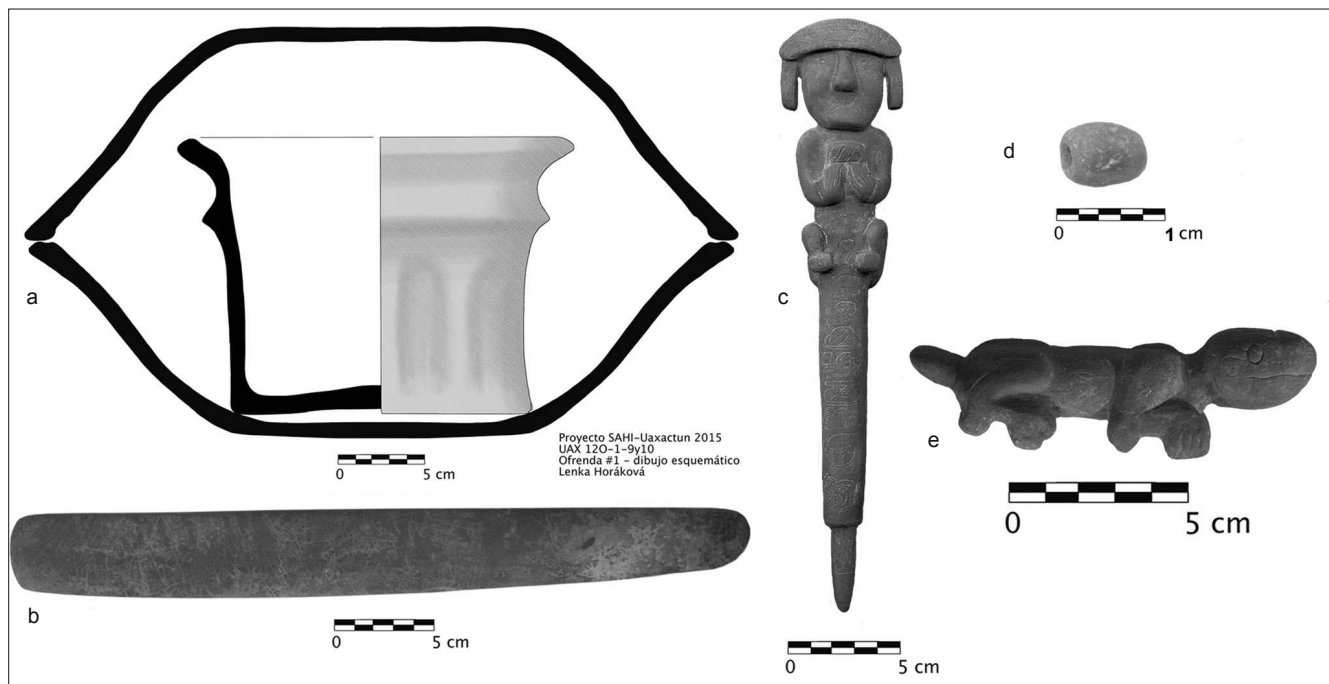


Figure 7. The artefacts found in the Cache of Structure H XVI Sub; a) lip-to-lip cache vessels with offering bowl; b) the ceremonial celt/axe; c) the sceptre/bloodletter; d) the miniature greenstone bead; e) the zoomorphic figurine (Photos: Tibor Lieskovský, Robert Peschl, Lenka Horáková, 2015; Drawing: Lenka Horáková, 2015).

2006; Stuart 2006), a widely distributed ritual in Maya culture. As such, small jade beads are ubiquitous in caches and other ritual contexts. For example, it was a common custom to place a jade bead in the mouth of the dead, representing the breath of the person (Coe 1959, Fitzsimmons 2009).

Zoomorphic Figurine

The animal figurine is made of dark green stone, possibly a serpentine. It is 11.5 cm long and 3.5 cm tall at maximum height at its head. The animal seems to represent a hybrid creature with mammalian characteristics, possibly resembling the body of a canid, but with unusual (or non-naturalistic, diverging) shape of its head and tail. Its tail appears conspicuously flattened and bears fine incised lines rendered in a way similar to depictions of stingray spines in Maya art. The head is incised with facial details, such as the mouth, nose section and ears of the animal; the latter looking similar to depictions of canid ears in Classic Maya art. In addition, the figurine shows several fine incised lines all over its body, resembling fur. From the general characteristics and body proportions we assume that the figurine may depict a canid, possibly a dog, and comparisons with dogs in Maya art, such as the Late Classic dog sculpture (Monument 89, see Graham and Matthews 1996; Stuart 2014) from Toniná (which next to the similar body proportions also shows a slightly upturned position of the head) may confirm this proposal.

Nevertheless, the rather unusual body proportions and conspicuously flat tail (which may resemble a stingray spine), could also be associated with unnatural characteristics and indicate a mixed supernatural being, such as a *wahy*, thus, showing a mixture of a dog (or feline) with another animal. In fact, the habit of placing dogs in cache offerings and burials was a widely distributed practice throughout Mesoamerica, and animal transformation figurines are also well known in

Olmec and Maya traditions. One should, therefore, consider the possibility that the figurine from the cache of H-XVI Sub represents an “animal soul companion”.

Such hybrid animals, especially when showing a mixture of various species and death or sacrifice symbolism, are known from Classic Maya art as *wahy*, representations of animal companion spirits (or animated soul companions), supernatural beings or “co-essences” of Maya rulers (Houston and Stuart 1989, Grube and Nahm 1994, Stuart 2005, Helmke and Nielsen 2009, Scherer 2015); an idea already rooted in Olmec origins centered around the idea of a predetermined destiny and a mystical identification of the human “soul” with “companion-” and “guardian spirits” culminating in the “alter ego animal concept” (Paz 1995: 454). *Wahy* figures can be represented in many different ways, often combining features of certain animals, but also natural elements/forces (such as lightning, fire, death, etc.), some of which represented malevolent beings as personifications of diseases (*siitz chamiy winik* “gluttony death person”) or aspects of painful deaths (*u chamiy tahn bih* “death at the crossroads”) (Grube and Nahm 1994). But it also appears clear that spiritual specialists were thought to be able to manipulate and conjure their spirit companions in order to cause harm. Nevertheless, since *wahy* companion were an integral part of each persons’ soul, too, they certainly had beneficial aspects as well and were, at least in Classic times, also related to kinship ties and specific dynasties, their courtly residences as well as to mythological places (Calvin 1997). Stuart (2012) suggests that *wahy* could represent “animate dark forces” used by court sorcerers or even rulers to cause harm. Until nowadays *wahy* creatures are perceived as malicious entities in contemporary Maya communities (Scherer 2015: 15), while others argue that these animal companion spirits can also be beneficial (Kaplan 1956). Given that animal transformation figurines are attested not only in Maya, but also in earlier Olmec and other mesoa-



Figure 8. The sceptre before (left) and after (right) cleaning of the covering layer of debris (Photographs: Teresa Navarro and Lenka Horáková, 2015, digitally enhanced by Guido Krempel)

merican cultures, we assume that the animal figure placed in the cache of H-XVI Sub might represent such a “*wahy* companion”, in shape of a dog with additional (maybe stingray spine and with it sacrifice symbolizing?) elements. By all means, the animal must be considered in relation to the sceptre and as an important part of this ritual cache. Nevertheless, any interpretation of this animal figurine as a personal *wahy* of a ruler should be taken with caution, given that there are currently not many comparative figurines from the Preclassic period which would allow for a more precise identification.

Sceptre/Perforator

The sceptre/perforator (Figs. 7c and 8) is made of the same dark stone as the animal figurine and celt. It measures 26 cm in height and 2.3 cm in maximum width at its handle. The upper part of the sceptre/perforator represents a human figure with bent extrimities holding an object, possibly a precious stone. The head of the figure is elaborately sculptured, crafted with fine details, such as the prominent headdress and nose of the person. More details are represented by fine engravings showing details such as the headband, almond-shaped eyes and eyebrows, mouth, markings on the face, as well as the outlines of hands and details of the object being held. The back of the human figure shows further details such as a rectangular cavity on the back of the head with a single glyph incised inside the cavity, outlines of arms, legs and the spine

of the individual, the latter rendered as fine incised line ending in three dots. The narrowing part below the human figure contains 20 finely engraved signs; 17 of which can be identified securely as Preclassic Maya hieroglyphs, 10 at the front and 7 on the rear side, with two additional symbols on the bottom-most part, one on each side of the perforators' tip, plus the sign incised inside the cavity at the back of the head. There are also visible traces of red pigment both on the front and on the back side of the object. At first sight, the object resembles common Classic Maya K'awiil sceptres (or staffs) (also known as “manikin-sceptres” since Spinden 1913). However, the anthropomorphic object from the H-XVI Sub cache is missing typical attributes of K'awiil. In this respect it is more similar to another sceptre-like object - the wooden figure from Xmuqlebal Xheton, found in a cave in southern Belize (associated with the

Late Classic centre Muklebal Tzul) (Prufer *et al.* 2003). The Xheton Xmuqlebal sceptre represents a figure that is holding objects potentially representing power (such as a fan), and it also shows hieroglyphs carved below the antropomorphic figure (Prufer *et al.* 2003). It doesn't show any characteristics of god K'awiil either, and Prufer *et al.* (2013: 229) concluded that although it still might be a sceptre, it is not a “manikin (or K'awiil-related) sceptre”. On the other hand, according to Coggins (1988: 143), figures on manikin sceptres represent different manifestations of deities, all of which, however, can be associated with ancestor divination, divine kinship and continuity or legitimacy of rulership. Very likely, these sceptre-like objects functioned as emblems of divine kingship and power (Prufer *et al.* 2003: 230), maybe also related to the stone clubs with figural representations labelled *umuk'uuht* in later times (Taube and Zender 2009; Krempel 2014); the bladed haft of the Uaxactun “sceptre”, however, leads to assume that it also had a clear practical function, despite its assumed representation of a symbol of power. In this regard - and in our view the most likely possibility - the object in question resembles a perforator (or bloodletter) in size and shape. Perforators were used in rituals of self-sacrifice, by means of drawing of blood from various body parts. Bloodletting rituals were performed by Maya rulers e.g. to communicate with the ancestors, in the veneration of deities and to ensure continuity of the proper world order (changing seasons, sufficient rainfall, soil fertility, etc.). Perforators are

clearly important instruments as they are often shown as part of the rulers' elaborate ritual costumes and they are also found in tombs as part of funerary offerings (Coe 1996, Lacadena 2003: 82). Perforators can vary in shape, material and also in their symbolism. They were made from all kinds of sharp materials, such as stingray spines, bone, jade, obsidian, shell, flint, shark teeth, spines, and many more. The blade usually ends in a thin sharp point, but in some cases the point is blunt, which may suggest that they have not been actually used in bloodletting, but rather had a symbolic function (Benson and de la Fuente 1996, Coe 1996).

Considering the similarity between this object and some Olmec or Early Maya perforators, it appears likely that it is a perforator rather than a sceptre. This hypothesis is further supported by the presence of a sign carved on the pointed tip of the object that might represent drops of blood, and also by the preliminary interpretation of the hieroglyphic inscription, based on which part of the text supposedly discusses the act of bloodletting. The object's blunt point indicates that its function may have been more symbolic than functional, but perhaps also served for the secondary collection of blood (into the cavity at the back of the head), after piercing with a different perforator. Thus, the artefact may have served as bloodletter and spoon at the same time. Nevertheless, the closest comparable depictions of Preclassic perforators from San Bartolo's West Wall (Taube *et al.* 2010) or Uaxactun's stucco decorations from the Group H South (Valdés 1999: 82, Fig. 54) certainly look different and do not show any figurine-like designs. Therefore, it is possible that its function as a sceptre was also accounted for since it represented the king's divine authority legitimized through his ritual bloodletting.

The Cultural and Temporal context

The cache was dated on the basis of associated ¹⁴C dates on charcoal samples, collected from within the two ceramic plates placed lip-to-lip inside the pit. Charcoal was found in front of the third vessel, which was placed inside the two plates and contained the sceptre/perforator, the animal figurine and the small bead. The charcoal remains indicate a burning which most likely took place during the ritual related to the offering. The charcoal remains were found in sealed, uncontaminated context and therefore promised obtaining reliable dates. The sample was sent to Beta Analytic Inc. Miami, Florida for AMS radiocarbon dating. The results indicate the following dates:

1. Using 2 sigma calibration (95% probability), the dates obtained are: 85 - 75 BC and 55 BC - AD 60.

2. Correction based on the combined measurements of the sample, representing 1 relative standard deviation statistics (68% probability) provided the date 45 BC - AD 25. If we take this correction as the basis and calculate its mean (which in this case also corresponds with the median), we can, given its unimodal distribution and relatively flat course reasonably propose 10 BC +/- 35 years as the most likely date.

Unfortunately, in the area around Uaxactun there is little to compare in terms of objects, artistic style, and writing from this period. The closest comparison geographically

and chronologically is presented by San Bartolo's famous Late-Preclassic murals (Saturno 2009).

Spatially, San Bartolo is located only 35 km from Uaxactun, and, if the proposed radiocarbon date of the mural around 150 - 100 BC (Saturno, Stuart and Beltrán 2006) is correct, the "distance" in time would be only 90 - 140 years. Regardless, the iconography of the figure on the Uaxactun sceptre is very different from that of the anthropomorphic figurines of San Bartolo. It seems, therefore, that some time passed between these two Preclassic phenomena, moreover during a very dynamic period.

The sceptre's iconography shows very little Olmec influence, but it does not possess attributes typical of early Maya figurines known so far either. The date falling to a few decades before, or around the BC/AD transition, perfectly corresponds with the period associated with the construction of Group H North. When dealing with the masks in previous seasons, we have already noticed that unlike those of Group H South; the masks from Group H North have lost their dependence on Olmec patterns (Kováč, Desprat and Pallán 2015: 129), and show first developments of independent Maya symbolic ideas, although not yet as fixed as one or two centuries later. Thus, for neither the masks nor the sceptre we do have close enough parallels for direct comparisons. They probably represent a moment of cultural change, when Olmec style was being abandoned and experimenting with a new style began – however neither of the elements which are later defined as typical of the Classic Maya were set yet. As the epigraphic analysis confirms, there are, however, several clues indicating early variants of glyphs and symbolism that can be interpreted as forebearers of the later Classic Maya script, maybe providing further evidence for a period of transition at Late Preclassic Uaxactun.

In addition, in Uaxactun the period around 10 BC represents more than just a change of style. It seems that around this time Group H South lost its status as the centre of royal power, and the new seat of the king(s) moved to Group H North. It is also possible that at the local scale, this event could be related to some of the mentioned stylistic changes and that the power brought new cultural elements linked with a newly established dynasty. The owner of the sceptre may, therefore, have been the same king who founded Group H North. The dates attributed to the charcoal samples from the construction levels of this architectural group (Kováč 2013b: 387-388) correspond well with the date assigned to the cache containing the sceptre.

Approaching the Glyphs and Imagery of the Sceptre

The handle of the sceptre is topped by a nude human figure with angled extremities wearing an exceptional headdress and carrying an oval shaped object in his hands (Figs. 8, 9). This conspicuously shaped object strongly reminds of the still not fully deciphered Classic Maya glyph T24 representing a glossy or polished object made from precious stone, possibly a fruit or stone bead for which the readings **HUT?** *hut* "fruit, jade, face" (Stone and Zender 2011: 71), **ICH?**, and **LEM?** (Stuart 2010) have been suggested for the Classic Maya script, and **WIN?** for its equivalent in Preclassic Maya writing (Mora Marín 2012b), while it also stands for the syllabic

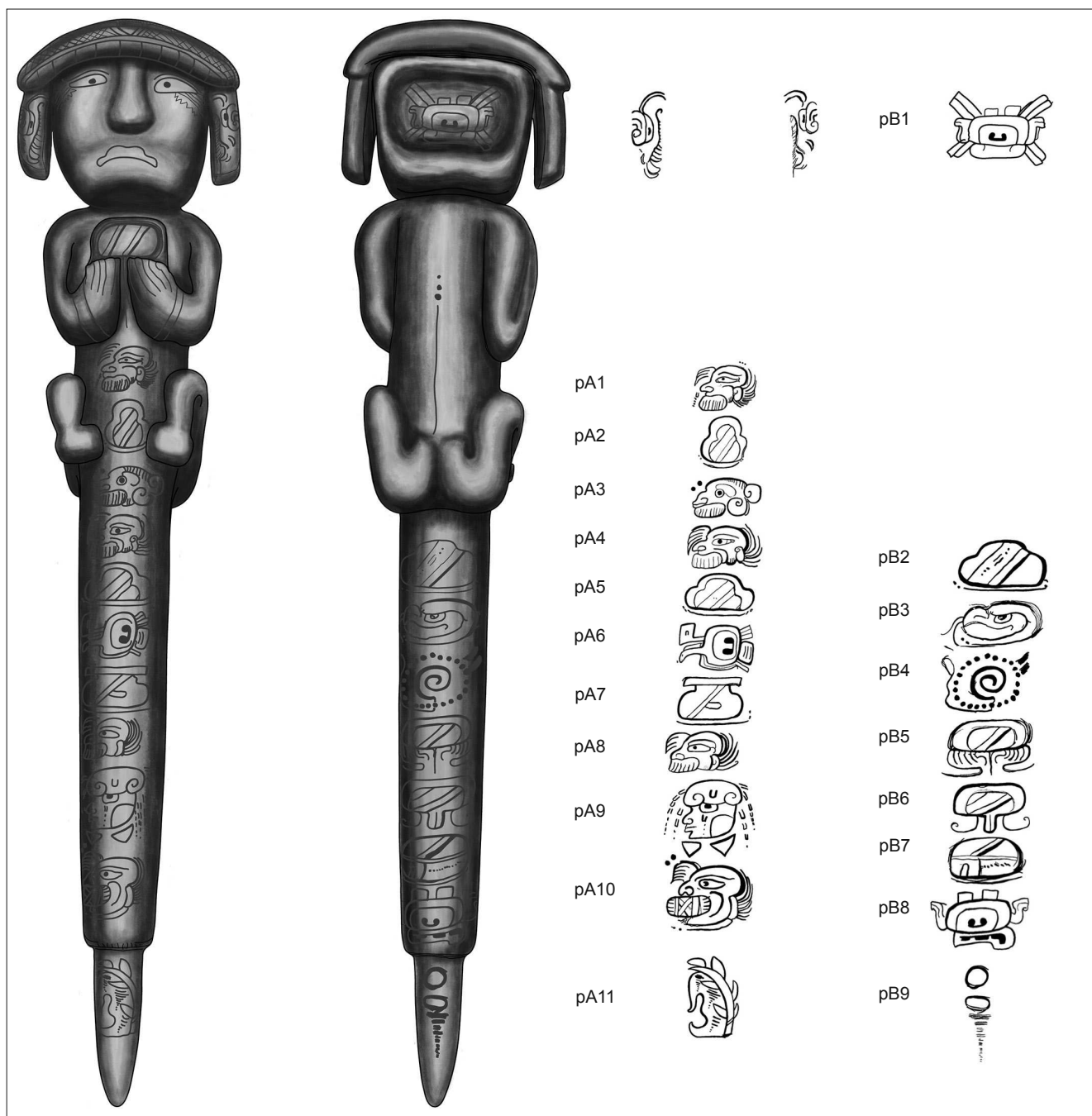


Figure 9. Drawing of the perforator-sceptre and preliminary line-drawing of the incised glyphs and symbols (Drawings: Guido Krempel, 2015).

sign **li**. All authors generally agree regarding its logographic meaning as either a fruit and/or a glimmering, polished greenstone-object (probably a celt or a bead), which can be used “as a modifier on nouns (“shiny”) or as noun itself (“a shiny thing”)” (Stuart 2010) and as such designates glimmering “surfaces” of several objects in iconography. According to Stuart (2010: 291), “[*l*]em exists too as a word for “lightning bolt”, as in Ch’olti’ *u lem chahak* (*vlem chahac*) “resplendor de rayo, relámpago” (light of lightning, lighting bolt)” or literally Chahk’s flash (Morán 1689-1695)”. It is worth noting that figurines of young men carrying jade beads or oval shaped paraphernalia in hands are well attested in Olmec art (compare, e.g. La Venta Monument 5), some of which show strong iconographic similarities with the Uaxactun sceptre. Also noteworthy are the general similarities and ritual contexts compared to the so called “Charlie Chaplin”-figurines,

which also frequently form part of dedication caches (see e.g. Lomitola 2012). Some of these figurines were kept for decades and were later, during the Late Classic period, placed in cache offerings of Maya nobles (Rich *et al.* 2010). It is further noteworthy that the glyph in position pB5 (Fig. 9) represents a logograph showing two arms holding an identical oval-shaped object in hands, a clear hint that the text and imagery correspond directly or even complement each other. The headdress of the figure looks like a mixture between a turban with long straps covering the ears, and a headband-diadem with incised rectangular elements seemingly resembling a diadem made from greenstone plaques. The ear-straps of the headdress are decorated with incised serpent-heads lacking the lower mandibles, a symbol which appears often in Olmec and Maya art in combination with, or substituted by, earflares out of which emerge serpents, and likely a symbol of “divini-

ty”, “godliness” and power (Clark and Colman 2014; Freidel and Guenter 2006). Anticipating the epigraphic analysis, the interpretation of this headdress as symbol of power is confirmed by the incision within the cavity at the back of the headdress (Fig. 11), wherein a common symbol has been incised which in the Preclassic period appears to be frequently associated with high ranking rulers and celestial or supernatural entities (Quirarte 1977). In many cases, it is the so called principal bird deity and/or humans as manifestations of this entity represented with dress, masks, and reptile-head-wings of the avian aspect of the creator god Itzamna, also known as Yax Kok(aj) Muut Itzamna in later times (Bardawil 1976; Boot 2004, 2008). As such the bicephalic serpents often flank the celestial-eye-sign in early Maya art (as is also the case for the sceptre). Because the sign appears as logograph in this text, and at the same time features as part of the imagery, it will be discussed further below by means of a more detailed epigraphic analysis (see glyph pB8). The face of the young man features two almond-shaped incised eyes, a “pout” or “fat lipped” mouth with down-curved, “grimy” looking feature, and two zig-zag and parallel lines as facial decoration or scarification incised from the eyes through the cheeks.

For the interpretation of the imagery and the meaning of the incised text it is important to bear in mind the supposed functionality of the object as ritual perforator, which can be associated with ritual bloodletting and hence with the ceremony known as *yax ch’ab* during the Classic Maya period (Houston 2007). Through several Early and Late Classic inscriptions, it is known that the Maya conducted the “first bloodletting/offering” as a sort of *rite de passage* for the legitimization of their future reign by means of offering the blood and pouring it into an offering container, accompanied by other ritual paraphernalia. As can be derived from Late Classic imagery on monuments and ceramics, the blood was poured into a ceramic vessel, often represented as one half of a so called lip-to-lip cache vessel, and the contents of the vessel, including the tools and blood-poured onto stripes of paper, were burned in order to conjure their ancestors or patron deities out of the emerging smoke (some renderings, such as several of the famous lintels from Yaxchilan, provide a vivid view onto these bloodletting and burning rituals, involving the divination of the serpentine *wahy* of K’awiil nicknamed the “vision snake”, see Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993). The symbolism and functionality of the sceptre as ritual bloodletter is further confirmed by the incisions at the tip of the perforator showing two circles and parallel fine lines which represent droplets of blood (compare to the renderings of blood-symbolism at e.g. San Bartolo, see Fig. 10). If the tree sign carved on the other side of the tip, which strongly resembles the so called “number tree” glyph read as AN or ANUL of the Classic corpus (Macri and Vail 2008: 179; Schele, Grube and Fahsen 1994: 6), also pertains to the blood-sacrifice imagery (note that blood sacrifice scenes were often related to “world-tree” imagery, e.g. Izapa Stela 5), or if it rather forms part of the text remains to be clarified. Momentarily, we consider the incised signs on the tip of the perforator (pA11 and pB9) as signs with symbolic meaning which complement the imagery and suppose that the same holds true for the “power-symbol” incised in the cavity at the back of the figure’s head(dress). The actual dedicatory text incised on two sides of the handle thus consists of a total

of 17 glyphs or glyph compounds, 10 of which decorate the front side, and 7 the reverse side, arranged in vertical order. We assume that the text begins with the glyph incised at the abdomen of the figure, here designated as pA1 (see Fig. 9).

Glyphs pA1, pA4 and pA8

The first glyph is a sign well known from the corpus of late Preclassic inscriptions, nicknamed the “bearded old man” glyph (Fig. 10). This sign appears to be written conspicuously often, three times rendered in its common form and two times in combinations with other signs, in the here discussed inscription. It shows the head of an old man with wrinkled face, a hooknose, waved lines resembling hair-like features attached to his ear, a seemingly vegetal element at his front, and the element with curved lines covering his mouth section resembling a beard (reason why the glyph has been nicknamed “bearded old man”/viejo barbudo, Saturno *et al.* 2005: 44, Mora-Marin 2001). Although the bearded old man glyph has been the subject of several discussions and it appears clear that it is commonly written at the beginning of sentences or preceding certain name or object tags, its actual meaning and translation has so far resisted clear decipherment. Nevertheless, due to its notable appearance at the beginning of many dedicatory texts, it has been suggested that it may function as some sort of verbal or stative construction which initiates either the patients or subjects of sentences. As such, it appears written after initial signs and calendrical captions. The bearded old man glyph bears some similarities with the likewise not yet deciphered God N dedicatory verb from the Classic Maya corpus, however, there are in fact a number of bearded old men attested in Preclassic iconography, such as Olmec and Izapan deities showing similar characteristics. Very similar variants of this glyph are known from several Preclassic dedicatory texts, including the jaguar figurine and the jade pectoral at Dumbarton Oaks, unprovenanced objects in the Museo de Jade in Costa Rica, and notably one partially preserved example on Uaxactun Stela 28, which was found close-by in Group H North (Kendrala 2014). Despite its interpretation as possible verbal phrase or term, it has been suggested by others that, due to its frequent appearance in dedicatory texts on portable objects, it could designate a kind of pronoun, such as the third person pronoun /u/ of the Classic Maya script. However, several arguments stand against this hypothesis, at the very least because it can seemingly be combined or merged with other glyphs, which would not discard the possibility, but rather points to a sign with logographic function. It is further suspicious that the glyph does not appear with any affixes, such as the often compared GOD.N dedicatory verb from the Classic Maya script, which is usually written with a terminating verbal affix *-yi*. Alternatively, however, one could interpret the fine lines attached to the ear or back of the old man as distinct sign, which in our opinion is not very likely. Bearing the positions of the three bearded man glyphs on the front side of the Uaxactun sceptre in mind, the text can be roughly divided into three sections, each beginning or initiated by the common variant of the bearded old man glyph: pA2-pA3; pA5-pA7; pA9-pA10.

Glyphs pA3 and pA10

Besides the three attested common variants of the bearded old man glyph, the text includes yet two more examples of

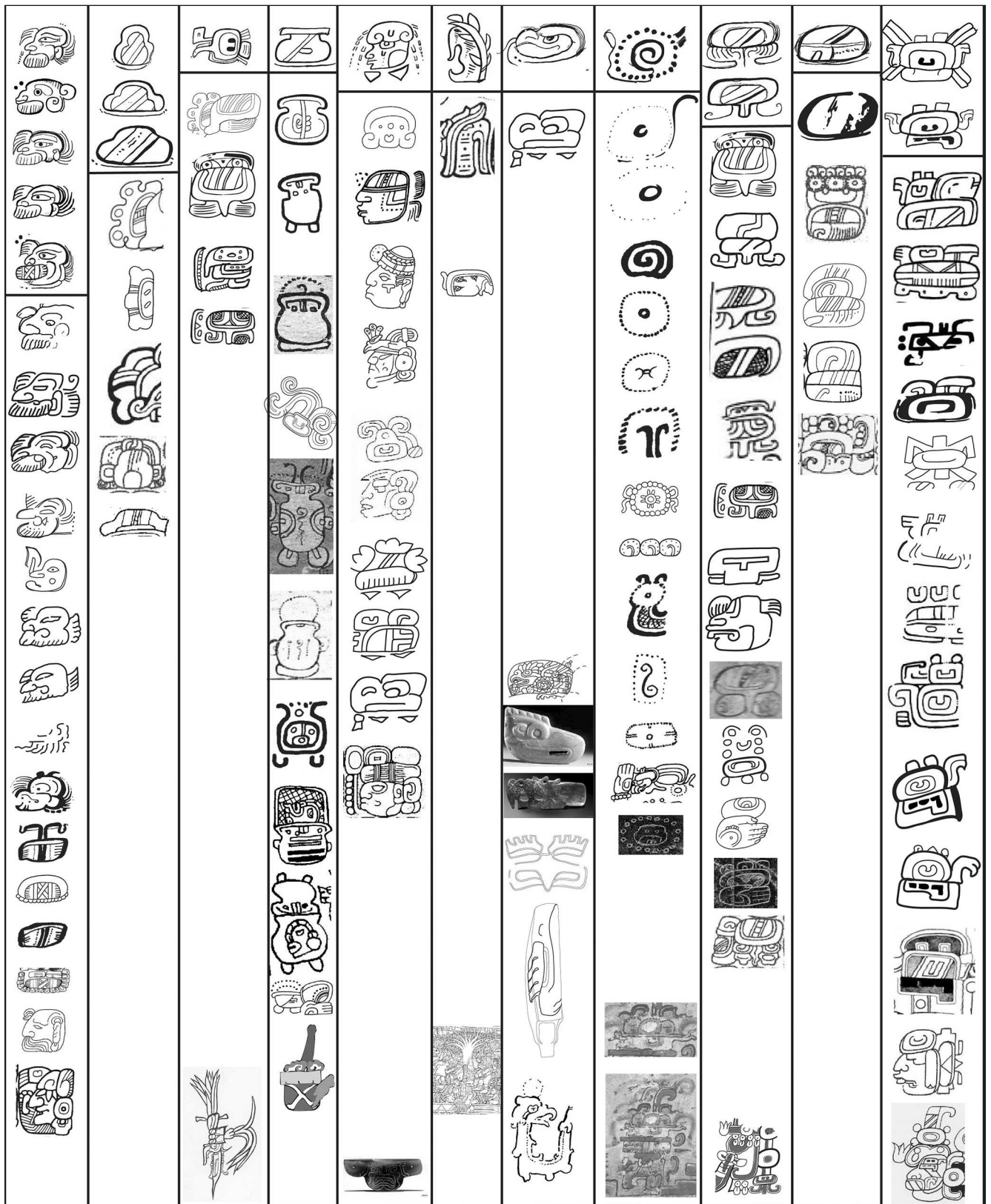


Figure 10. Chart illustrating comparable Preclassic and Classic Maya glyphs (Redrawn and compiled from various sources by Guido Krempe; photo captions by Justin Kerr, K1791, K8274, K8536, and K8658 taken from www.mayavase.com)

seemingly the same logograph, in positions pA3 and pA10 respectively, both of which are, however, combined with additional glyphs and notably both of them feature two perforated dots in the upper left corner. These two dots resemble the doubler-dots of the Classic Maya script, where they function as indicators of a repeated phoneme (e.g. *ka²-wa* for *kakaw*) (Stuart and Houston 1994: 46). Nevertheless, in the case of

the Uaxactun sceptre the doubler-dots seem to serve a different purpose. As has been mentioned before, this text provides us with an exceptionally large number of bearded old man glyphs written in a single text, and it is the specific pattern of signs conflated with the common variant of the bearded old man in combination with the doubler-dots appearing in the upper left corner of each of the two conflated examples

that may lead us to a possible understanding of the purpose of these “doublers”. We assume that the doubler-dots may indicate a sign conflation or sign combination. Given that the three before mentioned bearded man glyphs do not feature the two dots and are all written in their common form, and when comparing these with the sign conflations in pA3 and pA10, it appears clear that only the conflated variants are written with two dots in the upper left corner. It can be assumed therefore, that Glyph pA3 is a conflation of the bearded old man with a glyph rendered as two volutes protruding from it at the right hand side, whereas Glyph pA10 is a conflation of the same bearded old man, but in this case with a superimposed element covering the mouth section. The superimposed sign is the glyph T563 from the Classic Maya corpus, which forms part of the logograph **K’AK’** “fire”, **BUTZ’**, **TOK**, and when written as a separate sign stands for the syllable **tz’i** and **su**, depending on the context (comparable variants are attested in e.g. Glyph A12 of the Seattle/Hauser Stela) (Fig. 11).

Glyphs pA2, pA5 and pB2

Yet another glyph which appears to be repeated three times in this inscription seemingly initiates certain nominal phrases. Two times the glyph is written immediately after the bearded old man glyph (pA2 and pA5), while the third example (pB2) initiates the text incised on the reverse side of the sceptre’s handle. Due to its form and conspicuous similarities with the logograph **YAX** *yax* “green, first, unripe” of the Classic Maya corpus (see Stone and Zender 2011: 122-123), as well as very similar variants used in Preclassic imagery to designate jade objects and water-imagery, we find it reasonable to assume that the three examples written on the sceptre represent the same logograph. For reasons explained further below, we suggest the reading *yax* “first” for the glyphs pA5 and pB2 and consider this sign as precursor of the Classic Maya logograph **YAX**.

If the bearded old man glyph indeed initiates either an object, an event or the patient of a sentence, the first caption of the text consists of glyphs pA2-pA3 and may lead us to the following semantic structure: pA1 (VERB) – pA2 (ADJ) – pA3 (PATIENT). Since the meaning of the phonetic reading of the bearded old man glyph as well as the meaning of the conflated volutes in pA2 remains opaque, we are not able to suggest a proper translation of the initial caption of the text and leave this open for future discussions.

Glyphs pA5-pA7

The second caption initiated by the bearded old man glyph consists of three glyphs and the patient’s name likewise begins with a **YAX** sign. The following glyph is a unique variant bearing some similarities with the Classic Maya logograph for **CH’AB**, depicting a stylized bloodletting tool or perforator (Stone and Zender 2011:74-75). The third sign in this sequence depicts a ceramic bowl looking similar to the Classic Maya Tzolk’in day name *Muluk* (which depicts the same bowl upside-down); however, the same sign also designates the vocal **u** in Classic Maya writing. A comparison between this logograph and offering vessels depicted in the Preclassic as well as in Classic Maya art leads to suggest that this sign may also have logographic function and could depict an offering bowl, which resembles the bowl that was placed within the lip-to-lip cache vessels in H-XVI Sub. Note that the so

called quadripartite badge betimes also depicts censer bowl of similar shape, topped by bloodletting instruments (Hellmuth 1987, Ingalls 2012). Furthermore, the quadripartite badge appears frequently in the iconography of two-part cache vessels (Cox 1991), mostly forming the headdress of the deity known as G1, the nocturnal sungod. If glyph pA7 and with it the entire second caption refers to the cache deposit vessel itself, we can in turn tentatively assume that the glyph in pA5 refers to either the tool or the act of using it as a device for pouring blood into the offering bowl. In this regard, the glyph pA6 might designate a generic term for such a bloodletting tool, and the entire second caption of the text could thus describe the conducted offering as a “first bloodletting-vessel”. As already mentioned, the possible sequence **YAX-?-“BOWL”** strongly resembles the *yax ch’ab* “first bloodletting/offering” ritual attested on several Early and Late Classic inscriptions (if interpreted in this way; alternatively, the reading of the “BOWL” as third person pronoun **u** leads to a completely different semantic setting). The *yax ch’ab* ritual is mentioned on several Late Classic ceramics that are designated with the generic term *y-uk’ib tu yax ch’ab* “the vessel for his first bloodletting/offering” (e.g. Houston 2007, Krempel and Matteo in prep.). One noteworthy example from the Early Classic period bears the inscription *u ch’abjaw? ix ayin k’uk’ tu k’uhil akanyaxjal?* “the bloodletting-vessel(?) of Ixik Ayin K’uk’ for her god Akanyaxjal(?)”, incised on the bottom of a lip-to-lip cache vessel. The latter provides evidence that the vessel was not meant to be dedicated to the owner, Lady Crocodile-Quetzal (a high ranking noble woman from Tikal, wife of Sihyaj Chan K’awiil II and mother of K’an Chitam), but rather it was dedicated to her patron god Akanyaxjal. As is well known from other lip-to-lip cache vessels, these cache deposits often included certain paraphernalia, such as greenstones, eccentric flints, shells, and most importantly, tools that were used for auto-sacrifice and bloodletting rituals (e.g. obsidian or greenstone perforators, spondylus shells, stingray spines, next to other paraphernalia, often arranged in specific directionality and loaded with symbolic meaning; a ritual “micro-cosmos” (see Chase and Chase 1998: 318; Joyce 2011: 545; Stross 1998: 35). The vessel most likely contained a precious offering poured with her own blood that was ritually wrapped up in textiles and later burned as ritual bundle within a certain cache deposit placed in an edifice or shrine for the veneration of her personal patron god. In light of this and many comparable lip-to-lip cache vessels containing bloodletting devices, and given that the Uaxactun sceptre appears in shape of a perforator that was placed into such a lip-to-lip cache vessels, we suggest that the text caption pA5-pA7 refers to the offering vessel as **YAX CH’AB? BOWL** and may literally be read as the “first bloodletting?/offering? bowl?”.

Glyphs pA9 and pA10

Again initiated by a common variant of the bearded old man glyph, the third proposed text caption at the front side of the sceptre consists of two complex head variants. Glyph pA9 shows a male head in profile facing left. It depicts a young person wearing a headdress with infixed “u-shaped element” and two volutes which resemble in shape the Glyph T021 **na**, and are further comparable to the so called “Casper-glyph” and a logograph denoting “blood”, **K’IK’?**, possibly denoting a “bloody cartouche” (Stone and Zender 2011: 53). The

male head in pA9 has two fine parallel lines incised on his cheek and six lines of dashed elements dripping down at both sides of the head. We interpret the latter as some sort of liquid, maybe blood, dripping from his head. Due to the fact that the young man shows some similarities with the facial features of the sceptre's figure, e.g. the scarifications on the cheek, we find it reasonable to assume that glyph pA9 probably refers to this same figure represented by the perforator. If it refers directly to the object, provides its proper name, a title, or rather the name of the owner remains opaque for the time being. For the sake of simplicity and assuming that this complex glyph might well depict a conflation of an early variant for **K'IK'** "blood" and a human head, we find it appropriate to nickname this glyph "Blood-Head", although a clear linguistic decipherment still awaits to be clarified. Beneath the "Blood-Head" glyph is written a sign consisting of two triangular shaped elements which strongly resemble the common **-la** glyph, which is attested several times also in the Preclassic corpus. Since it is written beneath the "Blood-Head"-sign, as in all other attested examples, it obviously is a phonetic complement and there is little doubt that this is a forbearer of its Classic Maya equivalent **-la**. One may thus speculate that the "Blood-Head"-logograph (or sign-conflation) terminates in the syllabic sign **la**, and thus serves as phonetic complement in order to indicate the ending consonant of the term as...-l. Another significant hint how to interpret the syntax of this caption is the before mentioned bearded old man glyph. From other Preclassic inscriptions, the majority bequeathed to us on unprovenanced portable objects, it is known that the bearded old man glyph frequently appears before the captions referring to the generic terms of the dedicated objects, and in at least one case the proper name of the object is mentioned immediately after the bearded old man glyph. This leads to assume that glyph pA9 could designate a name tag for the perforator and if we accept the possibility that the perforator is a figural representation of the owner, it might even represent his proper name (or a title).

As discussed before, the meaning of the following glyph, pA10, remains opaque, however given that it terminates the inscription on the front side of the handle, we assume that it could form part of the same subject. As the semantic context is still unclear, it remains tentative whether the sequence pA9-pA10 provides the proper name of the object, the deity, or the person represented by the sceptre, or even the name of the owner. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that beneath this supposed name or title sequence, yet another sign is written on the tip of the perforator, which we currently interpret apart from the main text, however, there remains the possibility that the glyph representing a tree is related to the text. In fact, it bears strong similarities with the so called "number-tree" glyph, deciphered as **AN** or **ANUL** thanks to phonetic substitutions (**a-nu**), which often forms part of deity impersonation statements in later times (such as **u-ba-hi-li-AN u b'aahila'n** "the godly image/manifestation of" (Nehammer Knub, Thun and Helmke 2009). The latter would be in accord with a possible nominal sequence following on the reverse side of the handle.

Glyphs pB2-pB4

The section on the rear side of the handle starts with the **YAX** sign, this time lacking one incised line in the interior

(when compared to glyphs pA2 and pA5), however, it bears the outlines and the diagonal lines indicating a "green" or "shining/polished" surface and the thin line beneath the glyph is identical to the variants in pA2 and pA5. The following glyph, pB3, seems to depict the head of a bird in profile facing left. Out of the bird's beak protrude two curved lines. The shape of its head and beak suggest that it represents a bird of prey, possibly a hawk, which is in accord with comparable representations of raptorial birds showing body parts of smaller birds, such as legs and tail feathers in their beaks. An alternate interpretation could take the fine lines protruding from the mouth as "speech" scrolls resembling a "talking" or "singing" bird of prey (Christophe Helmke, pers. comm., remarked that the animal head in question could alternatively resemble a snake). A similar sign representing a bird of prey is attested on a Preclassic "jade spoon" in the Museo de Jade, Costa Rica, where it terminates in a supposed phonetic complement, **BIRD.OF.PREY-la** and may designate the name of the object or its owner, as it is preceded by the head of the sungod (**K'inich?**, G1? or maybe a cephalomorphic variant for **YAX?**, see Boot 2004). We thus assume that the "green-blue/principal/first bird of prey" may represent a hawk whose name possibly terminates in the consonant **-l**. The third glyph of this section is composed of a circle with 21 perforated holes, or dots, surrounding a spiral element in the center, a fine curved line protruding from the bottom to the left side, and two parallel bands in the upper right corner. The closest comparable match in Preclassic writing is one glyph at San Bartolo (Saturno *et al.* 2005:42, Fig.31), where it forms part of a nominal phrase written next to the rightmost figure of the North Wall. There, the glyph strongly resembles the Classic Maya sign for **mo** with an additional 'whiplash line', however, as has already been argued reasonably (Saturno *et al.* 2005:42, Fig.31), it likely designated a sign of different meaning. Glyph pB4 differs in many details from common **mo** variants, especially the spiral in the center and the two elements in the upper right corner, reason why it can be suggested that it probably represents another logograph, or a sign conflation of **mo** or other sign with yet another element. In this regard, it is noteworthy that many other glyphs from the Classic Maya corpus are represented by means of a dotted circle in combination with other elements. For example, the syllabic sign **ch'a** also shows a dotted line with a single circle in the center, as does the sign **ta**, as well as the logographs **NIK**, or **MUY/MUYAL**, a glyph showing a fire-volute surrounded by dots (T042 in Thompson 1967; or 1G8 in Macri and Vail 2008), next to others. Nonetheless, in combination with the spiral in its centre, the here discussed sign differs greatly from all before-mentioned glyphs attested in Classic Maya writing. The most significant difference to the mentioned comparable signs is the presence of the spiral sign (similar to ZUQ or T0577), which in other contexts – especially in the Postclassic codices – resembles burnt rubber offerings (Grube and Schele 1997: 234), possibly read *k'ik'* or *ch'ich'* and occasionally a gaming ball (*wol*) (Macri and Vail 2008: 187). An interpretation as rubber, mixed or surrounded with incense, would correspond well with some representations of incense-rubber-balls placed in incense burners, as bequeathed from Classic Maya imagery (see e.g. Mora Marín 2012b; Fig. 10). One may thus speculate whether the spiral element designates some sort of burnt incense, chicle/rubber, a cloud-like

element, a flower-blossom, pollen or yet a sign of completely different meaning.

In sum, the caption pB2 – pB4 seems to designate a subject composed of three terms and may be transcribed preliminary as “First/Principal? Hawk-Eagle? ...?”. So far, it remains to be debated whether the caption refers to a certain individual, a deity, or if this name rather has a more metaphoric meaning. The name caption may also relate to the act of bloodletting, given that several scenes depicting auto-sacrifices show the actors pouring blood in front of trees topped by the so called principal bird deity. Some Preclassic greenstone perforators also bear incisions of hawk profiles, and when considering the so called Shook altar from San Antonio Suchitepéquez (e.g. Fahsen 2010: 244, Fig. 10.7b), showing the body of a deity or ruler with the head of a raptorial bird covering his pubic region, it appears that the act of bloodletting was also intimately related to hawk- or bird of prey-symbolism. Nonetheless, due to the still elusive semantics of the entire inscription, it remains opaque for the time being whether this caption designates a nominal phrase, and if so, if it refers to the owners’ name, a deity, an additional epithet or title, or if it stands in an entirely different context.

Glyphs pB5 – pB8, and pB1

The final text caption on the rear side of the sceptre is composed of four glyphs, pB5–pB8. As the caption is obviously not initiated by the bearded old man glyph, there is good reason to assume that Glyph pB5 is a logograph designating a verb. Firstly, the glyph patently resembles the hand gesture and an object held in hand by the figure that forms the sceptre itself, showing the man with bent arms holding this oval-shaped object with both hands in breast height (Figs. 8, 9). Moreover, the object can securely be identified as some sort of greenstone object or bead with glimmering surface. In fact, the same object seems to be repeated in the following glyph, pB6, which can be interpreted as patient or object of this sentence, when assuming that pB5 designates a transitive verb. Due to its similarities with the Classic Maya logograph **K’AL** “to bind, wrap up, to present” (see e.g. Kettunen and Helmke 2010: 142), showing a human hand holding or presenting a jade-bead, and thanks to the obvious body position of the sceptre’s figure resembling a young man “presenting” an equally shaped (greenstone?) object, it can be suggested that glyph pB5 designates the transitive verb *k’al* “to present”, followed by the patient or object of the sentence. Alternatively, although less likely, pB5 may designate a title in the sense of “(he who) presents ...”. In any case, the logographic and semantic meaning of glyph pB6 needs to be clarified in order to understand this sequence. Although this glyph is attested frequently especially in Preclassic and Early Classic Maya script, neither Thompson nor more recent glyph catalogs listed this variant as distinct sign, but rather consider it as a variant of T712 which was first deciphered reasonably and independently by McLeod (1991, cited in Macri and Vail 2008: 194) and Houston (credited in Stuart 1995: 231, see Macri and Vail 2008: 194) as **CH’AB**, a reading widely accepted by most scholars. There is a general agreement that the sign represents in its common form (in profile view) an abstracted bloodletter with round or oval shape and a pointed tip or blade. The same glyph can be marked with varying infixed features, the most common being “either a reflection sign – like the one

marking jade celts and other smooth-surfaced objects – or the sign for darkness/night appropriate to dark-colored obsidian.” (Stone and Zender 2011: 75). Yet a third variant, painted on an Early Classic stuccoed and painted lidded vessel from Uaxactun burial A31 (Smith 1955: Figs. 1ab, 80q), shows the sign in frontal view with a combination of the “reflection sign” and additional stone markings (the latter probably resembling flint stone or in combination designating the object as “precious (green?)stone”). In a parallel sequence written right next to this text caption, the scribe wrote a second impersonation statement and substituted the logograph **CH’AB** by a syllabic spelling, **ch’a-ba** (pers. comm. Albert Davletshin 2015), which confirms the supposed logographic meaning of the sign in question as **CH’AB**. Having clarified the logographic meaning of the sign, the question regarding its semantic function remains, given that the term *ch’ab* appears to be written in many different semantic contexts. From several early name tags on Preclassic portable objects it is assumable that the glyph provides a proper name tag for the tagged objects, as the sequence **u-CH’AB? HUT?/li?/LEM?/WIN?** initiates the dedicatory text on e.g. two Late Preclassic jade celts (not unlike the celt or axe found as part of the Uaxactun cache offering in H-XVI Sub). More frequently, however, the **CH’AB** logograph is used in relationship and impersonation statements (*u b’aah ch’ab*; *u b’aah u ch’ab u mijin* ...), as well as in accession-rituals (*u ch’ab u*; *u ch’ab ta joy ajaw*) and deity veneration ceremonies (*u ch’ab tu k’uhil*, followed by the names of the venerated deities as agents and/or the names of the person who conducted the offering). Besides the many textual attestations, the glyph further appears frequently in Preclassic and Early Classic iconography. Significant examples are rendered as features of ritual paraphernalia and dresses on the West Wall of the murals at San Bartolo, where the “shiner”-infix is substituted by a “u-shaped” element and forms part of a Hu’nal-head-dress and ear ornaments, presented by one principal figure to the seated lord, while the presenter wears the headdress of the Principal Bird Deity featuring the same symbol attached to and decorated with this sign. Note that the same sign also features as part of the bleeding snake-heads protruding from the beaks of the Principal Bird Deities and “sky-bands” at San Bartolo (Fig. 11j).

If the reading established for the glyph **CH’AB** holds true, and it has been shown that at least in some cases the profile view surely substitutes for the frontal view of the same sign, three possible interpretations of the text caption on the Uaxactun sceptre seem plausible, in order to explain its semantic context as object (or patient) of a verbal phrase: 1) the logograph may simply designate the sign **CH’AB** and its logographic meaning could straightforwardly depict a stylized bloodletter shown in frontal view. As the Uaxactun sceptre is manufactured in the shape of a perforator/bloodletter and also made from greenstone, the term could thus refer to the object itself as *ch’ab* “bloodletter”; 2) the reading **CH’AB** could still hold true, but with a wider semantic meaning in the sense of “offering” or “creation”. In this scenario, the sentence would state something like “presented (was the) offering”, 3) and yet a third option could take the logographic meaning in a different way, by interpreting the sign as greenstone or precious stone/paraphernalia, maybe “(stone-)celt” in a wider sense of its meaning, which could in turn be applicable to any kind

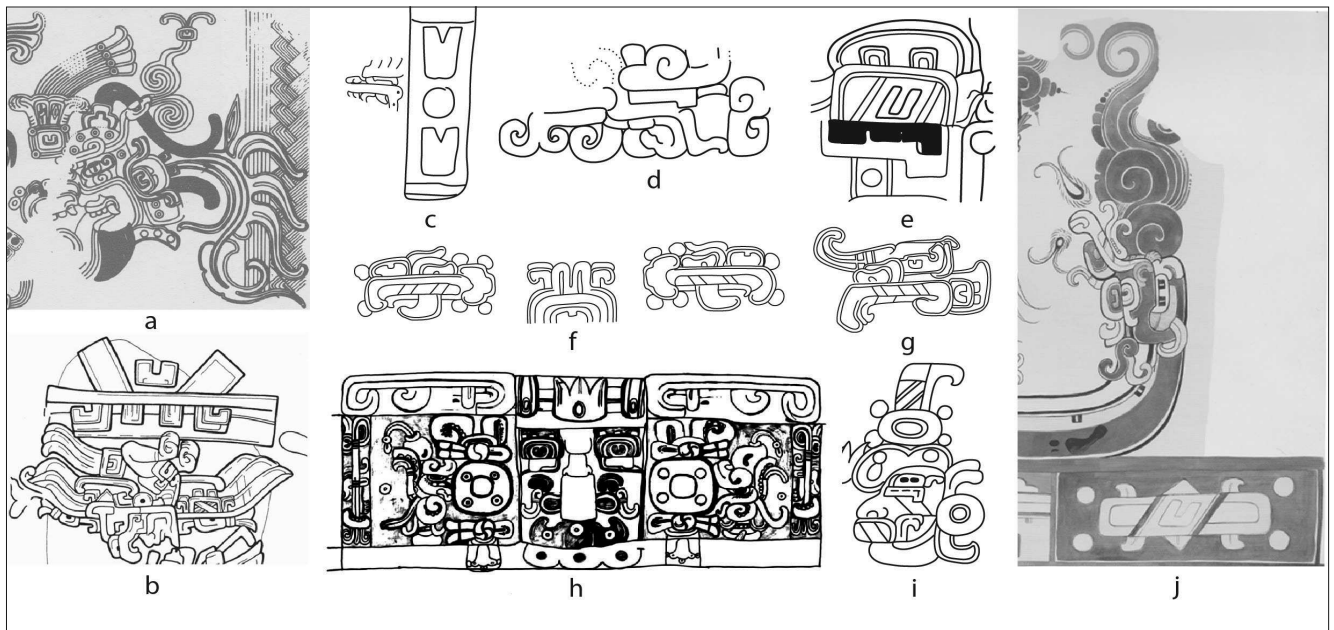


Figure 11. The „celestial eye“-bundle and bicephalic snake-sky-bands. a) Detail of Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 (Smith 1984: Fig. 42); b) Detail of Izapa Stela 6; c) Eye-lashes of the Rio Pesqueño Statuette; d) Detail from El Mirador stucco frieze; e) Cival, Structure 1 Sub; f) Lower band of Tak'alik' Abaj Stela 3; g) Detail from Kaminaljuyu Stela 11; h) Giant Stucco Mask of Cerros Structure 5c-2nd; i) Detail of deity bundle at San Bartolo West Wall; j) Detail of San Bartolo West Wall (all drawings by Guido Krempel, except a), h) by Linda Schele, www.famsi.org; and j) by Heather Hurst, in Taube *et al.* 2010).

of object made from greenstone and thus explain the many name tags of distinctly shaped portable objects (tubular beads, diadems, pectorals, “spoons”, celts, blades, etc.) described with this logograph. For the moment, we prefer the second interpretation and suggest a preliminary reading as *k'al ch'ab* “presented the offering(?)”.

The next glyph, pB7, looks similar to the Classic variant of the glyph T565a *ta* and appears to be written in other Preclassic as well as in Early Classic inscriptions, including San Bartolo and the Hauberg Stela (where it forms part of the sequence *yi-ta-ji?* *yitaj*). We therefore assume that it serves as the preposition *ta* “to, for”. The sentence pB5-pB7 can thus be translated or interpreted as “the offering is presented to/for ...”.

The dedicatory text then ends in pB8 with a glyph which looks strikingly similar to the sign incised in the cavity at the back of the figure's head (pB1). This sign is also attested frequently in the Preclassic and Early Classic writing and it is further well known from Izapan and Preclassic Maya iconography, where it mostly forms the eye or another attached feature as part of the Principal Bird Deity dress and celestial frames (see Fig. 11). Notably, in textual sources, the sign is mostly associated or combined with early **AJAW** variants, either followed by, topping, or conflated with, the common **AJAW** glyph depicting a ruler's bench or seat. It is noteworthy, however, that common variants of the **AJAW** sign already appear in the inscriptions at San Bartolo, the reason why the lack of the **AJAW** glyph in the text of the Uaxactun sceptre is suspicious. When appearing in the imagery, however, the sign is mostly represented as the eye of certain (mostly celestial) deities, among them ranging the principal bird deity, the maizegod, the sungod, as well as early representations of **K'UH** “god, deity, divinity”, “celestial” snakes, as well as the “earth-turtle”. The sign further forms the eye and supraorbital of the giant façade sculptures at Cerros Structure

C5-2nd (Freidel and Schele 1988: 61, Fig. 2.3), Cival Structure 1 (Estrada-Belli 2011), Holmul, El Mirador, as well as at Uaxactun (e.g. Structure H-X Sub), which likewise bear this same sign as a substitute for the eyes and supraorbitals of deities. Furthermore, the jade-figurine found in Burial A-20 at Uaxactun (Kidder 1947, Fig. 74), which depicts a nude sungod representative, also shows parts of this “divinity” or “celestial”-eye symbol as his supraorbital. Strikingly often, the sign is used throughout the Preclassic period as so called “sky-band” or “celestial-frame” and it seemingly functions also as a sort of toponym tagging the bottom band of the North and West wall at San Bartolo (where it likewise was meant to depict a celestial sky-band decorating the upper molding of the rooms' interior in each corner of the murals; see Taube *et al.* 2010) (Fig. 11j).

As shown by several examples, the “celestial-eye” symbol needs to be considered in combination with the two serpent-heads that frequently appear flanking this sign, either as part of the celestial bands, emerging from the ear-plugs of sun-deities, or as in the case of the Uaxactun sceptre and other examples, incised as part of the headdress-decoration and mostly related to ear-spools (see e.g. the Arroyo Pesqueño Statuette at Dumbarton Oaks, in Benson 1971; Freidel and Guenter 2006) (see Fig. 11c).

In summary, the “celestial-eye” sign still remains mysterious; however, as the semantic and logographic contexts lead to suggest, it is strongly associated with celestial or supernatural beings, be it high ranking deities or human impersonators in the guise of celestial gods such as the sungod, Itzamna, and his avian aspect, the Principal Bird Deity, the sungod K'inich Ajaw, or the generic representation of *k'uh* “divinity”. In iconography, the sign further forms the eye of the Principal Bird Deity (a.k.a Yax Kokaj Mut, see Boot 2004, 2008), and in combination with two flanking snake heads, the collocation substitutes for celestial sky-frames resembling the

body and reptile wings of this deity. In textual contexts, it is semantically strongly related to the common **AJAW** glyph, and some examples lead to assume that it is either a symbol designating **AJAW**, **K'UH** or in a wider sense of its meaning maybe a concept such as “rulership”, “coronation” or “godliness/divinity?”. This might be confirmed by the proposed syntax of the sceptre’s dedicatory text as *k'al ch'ab? ta ...* “presented was the offering/diadem? for ...”, which comes close to the composition of accession statements, such as *u ch'ab ti joy ajaw*, *u ch'ab ta ajawle*, etc. A reasonable conclusion thus would be to read the sentence as follows: “... presented (was?) the (bloodletter?) offering for the divine?/ ruler?/deity? (or coronation?)”. In this regard, the symbol incised in the cavity at the back of the headdress would confirm that the sign designates a symbol of royal power used as headdress-ornamentation or “crown” in the shape of the body or eye of a supernatural or celestial deity.

To conclude, the grammar and semantics of the new inscription remain mostly obscure for the time being, but at least the meaning of some glyphs, such as early variants for the logograph **YAX**, the syllabic sign **ta**, the verb **K'AL** as well as the logograph **CH'AB** can be identified and provide new insights into the evolution of Late Preclassic writing. In sum, we assume that the inscription refers in some way to the dedication of the object(s) found within the cache of H-XVI Sub. We further suggest that it mentions the owner and possible commissioner of the cache, either in pA9-pA10, or in pB2-pB4. Certainly, the text refers to the act of presenting an offering (*k'al ch'ab ta ...*), and when considering the shape of the object, its ritual context, as well as the evident blood symbolism, there remains little doubt that the object represents a figurative bloodletter with dedication text which confirms its purpose as offered bloodletting device of a Late Preclassic ruler.

Conclusions

Structure H-XVI and its Substructure H-XVI Sub are hiding two cave-like shrines with exceptional contents and message. The chronologically earlier substructure was built around 10 BC +/- 35 years. As revealed by the inscription, its purpose was to hold an important ritual cache, possibly of a high ranking person. Taking into account the subsequent veneration and the deep ritual meaning of Structure H-XVI, in combination with glyphs PB1 and pB8 on the sceptre which semantically strongly relate to a title or “wrapped” emblem of power (such as the later *ajaw* or *k'uhul ajaw* coronation rituals), we tentatively interpret this person as a king. The owner or commissioner of the cache was very likely a founder of a new dynasty, with its seat in Group H North, which he may have established. The text links his initiation to power with the first bloodletting ritual – a practice well documented by numerous texts and depictions from the Classic Maya period – and it indicates that it was an important inthronisation act already during this early period. The ritual involved bloodletting and the offering of precious objects for the Principal Bird Deity, which represented royal power and with whom the Preclassic Maya kings, when acceding to the throne, ritually identified themselves (Cortez 2005: 44-45).

Based on the tentative proposal that the two glyphs at positions pA9-pA10 represent the king’s name (or name and title), and given that the first part of the name (pA9) looks like

a conflation of a possible **K'IK'** “blood” sign and a human head, we find the nickname “Blood-Head” for the owner of the sceptre appropriate for the time being, until a more firm translation can be offered. The blood symbolism might be supported by the form of the sceptre/perforator, as it may at the one hand depict a personification of the king, and at the same time the cavity at the rear side of the head may have had the purpose of collecting and pouring sacrificial blood (or incense?). From various examples we know that since the early period the names of Maya kings were often metaphorically expressed as parts of their heads or headdresses (or close vicinity), however, the figure on a sceptre does not show any signs of such a custom. Instead, there might be a connection between the king’s name and the blood in the head cavity; where the sceptre/perforator representing the king – in the act of bloodletting metaphorically expresses his name as “Blood-Head”. Thus, the same name might perhaps be designated by the glyph at position pA9. It will take some time before we are on a more certain footing regarding Preclassic texts and iconography; nevertheless, we can, for now, keep this name as a preliminary nickname of the king, not at least in order to facilitate the use of terms and discussions about the early history of Uaxactun (however, thereby also keeping in mind that another possible name caption in position pB2-pB4, *Yax Hawk(?)/Snake(?)...?* would alternatively likewise provide a fitting personal name).

It can be assumed that this king, “Blood-Head”, was in charge or enthroned around 10 BC in Uaxactun as representative of the new apogee of Uaxactun. It was probably him who commissioned a new residence, a decorative program including 200 m² of stucco façade friezes depicting two giant masks, and an astronomical program incorporating an orientation to the constellation of Orion (Kováč and Karlovský 2015). All these programs are clearly new and do not represent direct continuity of style and symbolism from Group H South. The king himself, or his close descendant from Group H North, most likely also erected Stela 28 – with one of the first complex stone inscriptions from the Maya Lowlands (Kováč *et al.* 2015: 172, 178). Although we still need to clarify the chronological relationship between his reign and the development of Groups E and F, we believe that for the area of our intensive excavations – Groups H North and H South – we have a good understanding of how they relate to each another within the cultural and political development of the Late Preclassic Uaxactun. Especially because most of “Blood-Head’s” buildings have only one construction phase, we can define his architectural program very clearly. We also know of his symbolically complex decorative program and have evidence of his artistic and stylistic preferences. Based on all this, we can presuppose that “Blood-Head” established a period of cultural and political apogee of Uaxactun, and his reign could be considered as one of the most important in the early history of the site.

After a certain period of time, which will be defined in the near future on the basis of additional collected carbon samples (we can assume, however, that it was within a few decades, so either directly after the death of the king, or after one of its *katun* anniversaries) another, larger structure was built, which encased H-XVI Sub. While the Substructure perhaps personified the “spiritual centre” of a place for dynastic foundation, the second, larger Structure H-XVI had an ap-

parently commemorative function. In its northern façade was built a cave-like shrine which was supposedly related to the ancestral worship of the king. Ancestral veneration seems to have been one of the key elements of the social organization of the Classic Maya period. Maya texts and images present numerous examples of how the power of the elite was based on alleged links with powerful ancestors (McAnany 1995: 53, Houston and Stuart 1996). In this aspect, the cave-like form of the shrine makes sense, since caves figure prominently in the beliefs associated with the veneration of ancestors (Carlson, 1981: 201), and had an integral role in Mesoamerican religion for over 3,000 years (Prufer *et al.* 2003: 231). As elements of sacred geography, the Maya perceived caves as portals to the underworld, a feared and revered place where supernatural deities, malevolent creatures and powerful ancestors lived.

This new dynastic shrine did not function for a long time. After the unfortunate events happening after the date 8.6.0.0.0. or AD 159 (Walker, Reese-Taylor and Mathews 2006) associated with the fall of El Mirador and the majority of other Preclassic centres (Hansen 2001: 63, Estrada-Belli 2009: 119), Uaxactun was also completely, or at least partially, abandoned. A period of decline followed. The building fell into disrepair and its lower parts were covered with collapse deposits. Circa AD 250, however, a resettlement of Group H North took place. It is characterized by the fact that the new inhabitants only rarely used cut stone blocks; demonstrably these are decadent groups that have survived a century of existential turmoil. Their main intention was to renew the ritual activity at Uaxactun's groups H-North, F and E. They restored the dynastic shrine H-XVI; a new very thin floor of poor quality was laid down on top of the rubble (Jobbová 2012: 247), and the large stone blocks of the shrine were reset. The comparative lack of skill visible in their actions is more than compensated for by their intensive efforts to revive the dynastic cult, centre of which becomes Structure H-XVI. A large amount of offerings from the dawn of the Early Classic period were identified there. The intention must have been unequivocal – to re-connect the interrupted dynastic sequence and reaffirm the legitimacy of new rulers. It is noteworthy that only a single royal tomb (Structure E-X) dating to this period has been found in Uaxactun so far (Valdés, Fahsen and Escobedo 1999: 26). It contained remains of a woman, nicknamed Thorny Queen (Kováč 2013b: 117) and was located at the Group E, which temporarily became a new centre of Uaxactun. After the males in the line were either slaughtered or died out, it was probably Thorny Queen who represented the connecting link between “Blood-Head’s” dynastic line and the returning groups of people. However, the renewed dynastic cult at H-XVI probably survived only while the descendants of Thorny Queen remained in power; which was surely not long. Members of the restored dynasty were probably eliminated either in the first half of the 4th century – which might represent the tomb of the entire royal family buried at Structure B8 (Laporte 1989: 630) – or at the latest upon arrival of Teotihuacanos in AD 378. No offerings from the later period were identified in the H-XVI shrine, perhaps because there were no more rulers in Uaxactun genealogically connected with the illustrious founder of the dynasty from Group H-North. Unfortunately, there are very few anchor points, such as Preclassic texts or reconstructed historical

contexts which could be used for direct comparison, reason why our interpretations of the text from the sceptre, its ritual as well as its historical context might be flawed or inaccurate. We therefore welcome any further opinions and opening of future discussions.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Albert Davletshin, Dmitri Beliaev, Christophe Helmke, Alfonso Lacadena and Alexandre Tokovinine for insightful epigraphic comments and expressed opinions. We are also grateful to Teresa Navarro for her careful cleaning and first preliminary drawing of the sceptre; as well as to Lenka Horáková, Mauricio Díaz García and Enrique Pérez Zambrano for further drawings of the cache and the sceptre. Further thanks go to Tibor Lieskovský and Robert Peschl for professional pictures, to Tibor Lieskovský also for the 3D models of the sceptre, and to Massimo Stefani who created 3D models of Structure H-XVI. The archaeological investigations would not have been possible without the support of the Slovak Archaeological and Historical Institute and Centre for Mesoamerican Studies, Comenius University in Bratislava. This work was also supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract APVV-0864-12. Epigraphic research in Uaxactun was carried out within the project VEGA 1/001/13.

Finally, we would also like to acknowledge many people who helped with the excavations. In this regard, behearted thanks to all volunteers who guarded or supported the excavations at H-XVI: Ivan Savchenko, Jana Zatvarnícka, Dominik Čisárik, Tomáš Drápela, Alejandro Guillot Vassaux, Felix Kupprat and to everyone else who assisted in some way. Last but not least, our sincere appreciation belongs to the people from the Guatemalan excavation team, especially Isaías García Gualip, Rudy Misael Quim Nuñez, Américo Nuñez, José Angel Peralta and Manuel García, without whom it would not have been possible.

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SUMMARY

Structure H-XVI, one of the smallest structures in Group H North, Uaxactun, continued bringing new surprises since the very beginning of its investigation. The first season revealed a small plain stela, an altar and a sizable niche built in the northern façade of the structure. The niche was formed by large monolithic stones, with a tiled floor containing offerings such as limestone and ceramic discs, and an Early Classic lip-to-lip cache vessel, whereas the architecture of the structure itself corresponds with the Preclassic period. In addition, an earlier construction phase, Structure H-XVI Sub, was discovered; the only substructure discovered so far in Group H North. Recent excavations of the substructure revealed that it is hiding an "artificial cave", which in style of construction and material used resembles a niche built later in time in the façade of Structure H XVI. In this cave-like structure, deep below the centre of the substructure, was placed a ritual cache dating to approximately 10 BC (+/- 35 years). Its contents, which may have belonged to one of the early kings of Uaxactun, possibly even the founder of Group H North, not only serve to clarify the reason for its apparent importance and deep ritual meaning, but also provide new evidence of Preclassic Maya writing, symbolism and ritual practice. The cache included an exceptional anthropomorph bloodletter with a finely incised Late Preclassic dedication text showing partially hitherto unattested hieroglyphs. An in-depth study of the contents' iconography and a first approach for a proposed readings of the corresponding inscription provides new insights regarding the meaning and evolution of certain signs in early Maya writing and sheds new light on the Late Preclassic history of Uaxactun.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Gebäude H-XVI, eines der kleineren Bauwerke in Gruppe H Nord, Uaxactun, brachte bereits zu Beginn der Untersuchungen überraschende Funde zutage. Während der ersten Saison wurden eine kleine Stele, ein Altar sowie

eine große Nische in der nördlichen Fassade des Gebäudes gefunden. Die Nische bestand aus monumentalen Steinen und einem ebenen, gekachelten Boden, und beinhaltete Kalkstein- und Keramik-Scheiben sowie ein frühklassisches Opferdepot-Gefäß, während die Architektur des Gebäudes mit der Präklassischen Periode korrespondiert. Zusätzlich wurde eine frühere Konstruktionsphase, Gebäude H-XVI Sub entdeckt; der bislang einzige bekannte Unterbau aus Gruppe H Nord. Jüngste Ausgrabungen des Unterbaus zeigten eine darunter befindliche Art „künstliche Höhle“, die in ihrer Form und Material jener Nische entspricht, die später in der Nordfassade von H-XVI gebaut wurde. In dieser „höhlenartigen“ Konstruktion, tief unterhalb des Gebäudezentrums, wurde ein rituelles Depot platziert das auf ca. 10 v. Chr. (+/- 35 Jahre) datiert. Dessen Inhalte, die einem der frühesten Herrscher von Uaxactun, eventuell gar dem Gründer von Gruppe H Nord gehörten, lassen Rückschlüsse auf die Wichtigkeit und Bedeutung dieser Opfergaben zu, und geben zudem neue Hinweise auf Präklassische Schrift, Symbolik und rituelle Praxis. Nebst anderen Opfergaben enthielt das Depot ein figuratives Blutaderlass-Zepter mit präklassischer Inschrift und teilweise zuvor unbekannten Hieroglyphen. Eine detaillierte Analyse der Ikonographie und erste Lesungsvorschläge zu der Inschrift erlauben neue Einblicke in die Bedeutung und Evolution bestimmter Zeichen der frühen Maya Schrift und werfen zudem neues Licht auf die Präklassische Geschichte von Uaxactun.

RESUMEN

La estructura H-XVI en Grupo H Norte, Uaxactun, continúa guardando sorpresas desde que se iniciaron sus estudios. La primera temporada de campo reveló una pequeña estela plana, un altar y un nicho de dimensiones considerables, este último ahuecando la fachada norte de la estructura. El nicho fue construido con grandes piedras monolíticas cuyo fondo contenía ofrendas tales como discos calcáreos y cerámicos y un recipiente ofrenda del tipo labio-a-labio que data del Clásico Temprano, en tanto que la estructura misma corresponde al Preclásico. Adicionalmente fue descubierta una fase constructiva aun más temprana, la Estructura H-XVI Sub; constituye la única subestructura que abre a una "cueva" artificial en el Grupo H Norte, la cual asemeja en estilo de construcción y material usado a nichos diseñados en siglos ulteriores dentro de la fachada H XVI. En esta estructura cavernaria, muy por debajo del centro de la subestructura, se depositó un escondite ritual que data aproximadamente 10 aC (+/- 35 años). Su contenido, el cual podría haber pertenecido a uno de los reyes tempranos de Uaxactun y posiblemente hasta el fundador del Grupo H Norte, no solo da indicios para esclarecer las razones que hablan de su aparente importancia y profundo significado ritual sino además proporcionan evidencias nuevas de la escritura, el simbolismo y la práctica ritual de los mayas del Preclásico. El escondite incluía un sangrador excepcionalmente figurativo que contaba con un texto finamente esgrafiado y algunos glifos desconocidos a la fecha, toe refiriendo su dedicación durante del Preclásico Tardío. Un estudio profundizado de las lecturas propuestas de la inscripción provee nuevas pistas sobre el significado y la evolución de ciertos signos de la escritura maya y pone bajo una nueva luz el pasado vivido por Uaxactun durante el preclásico Tardío.

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