



Glyph Dwellers

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A Vase for K'inich Lamaw Ek' of Motul de San José in the de Young Museum

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Although Maya rulers identified by Emblem Glyphs frequently obtained their station by virtue of their lineage, there are some examples in which certain individuals rose through the ranks of the nobility to become kings. Such is the case for K'inich Lamaw Ek', a man known only from texts on unprovenanced "Ik'-style" ceramics associated with the court of Motul de San José (Halperin and Foias 2010; Just 2012:185–189; Reents-Budet 1994:172–179; Reents-Budet et al. 2007; 2012; Tokovinine and Zender 2012:45–46; Velásquez García 2009a; 2009b; 2011). Many of these vessels show K'inich Lamaw Ek' participating in ritual events in various contexts and on different dates; however, they also document his political ascent, through his association with various titles.

The first event in the series took place on 9.16.5.11.17 (756), as recorded on vase K5418 (**Fig. 1**), which was painted for K'inich Lamaw Ek', here referred to only as a *bahtz'am* 'first/head throne', a title elsewhere associated with minor functionaries, possibly having some role in running courtly receptions or audiences (Martin 2020:94; Stone and Zender 2011:97; Tokovinine and Zender 2012:45). The scene is one of accession, but of a ruler of a different court.



Fig. 1. Vase, K5418. Photo by Justin Kerr.



Fig. 2. Vase, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 2009.318. (K1463, MS1418). Photo by Justin Kerr.

Next, on K1463 [MS1418¹], associated with a date that may be either 9.16.6.5.12 (757) or preferably 9.16.14.7.12 (765) we see K'inich Lamaw Ek' (second figure from the left in the rollout photo), assisting in a *joyaj* 'debut' ceremony (possibly dressing) featuring the king of Motul, Yajawte' K'inich (the large figure in the center of the rollout) (Fig. 2). In this image, the subordinate status of K'inich Lamaw Ek' relative to Yajawte' K'inich is conveyed not only in the artistic composition, but also in the text, which again states that K'inich Lamaw Ek' is *bahtz'am*, while Yajawte' K'inich carries not only the Motul Emblem Glyph, but

¹ This vase, along with the other chemically-sampled vases mentioned in this article have been associated with archaeologically excavated materials from Motul and surrounding sites. Vase K1463/MS1418, along with K1728/MS1373 and K1399/MS1419, pertains to Motul Group 2, while K4120/MS1814 is part of Motul Group 1 (Reents-Budet et al. 2012:73, Tab. 3.2).



also *bahkab* and *kaloomte'*. This last title is often thought to imply the paramount status of the person who bears it (Martin 2017; Velásquez García 2011).

The next vase in the sequence is K3054, which bears a Calendar Round (CR) tentatively assigned to 9.16.17.6.2 (768) (Fig. 3).² It shows both men in fantastic frog/toad costumes and holding rattles associated with dance, but now, both individuals have the Motul Emblem Glyph, while K'inich Lamaw Ek' maintains the *bahtz'am* title. Although this can be taken as evidence of co-rulership (Martin 2020:94; Velásquez 2011:974), it is noteworthy that Yajawte' K'inich is still the pre-eminent figure here, as his name is the one associated with the date, his costume protrudes toward the rim of the vase, and his image is located to the right of K'inich Lamaw Ek'. As noted by Tokovinine and Zender (2012:58), one of the women who appears on the vase is a wife of Yajawte' K'inich, indicating her likely crucial role in the acknowledgement of the co-ruling status of K'inich Lamaw Ek'.



Fig. 3. Vase, K3054. Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth.

Importantly, these three vases were all painted by the same artist, who signed his work only as *tuubal ajaw*, or 'lord of Tuubal', an unknown site (Just 2012:185–189; Reents-Budet 1994:60; Velásquez García 2011:973). The artist's use of reddish outlines with pale pink fill emulates a painting style typical at the Motul court in the mid-eighth century, also associated with Yajawte' K'inich (Just 2012:177-184). Stylistic consistency among the vases suggests that they were likely painted at about the same time and well after the events that they depict, probably as part of a concerted effort of legitimation for K'inich Lamaw Ek'. A reasonable estimate for this commission would be ca. 9.17.0.0.0 (771), shortly after the event on K3054 and coinciding with a stela dedication at Motul itself, now surviving as a fragment (see Tokovinine and Zender 2012:46, Table 2.2).

² Reents-Budet et al. (2012:70, Tab. 3.1) give three alternative reconstructions for the date recorded on K3054, falling in 755, 765, and 781.



A vase by a different artist,³ K1728, provides a new political identity for K'inich Lamaw Ek', who is recorded as the owner of the vase but no longer with the *bahtz'am* title (Fig. 4). Instead, K'inich Lamaw Ek' takes on sole possession of the Motul Emblem Glyph as well as *kaloomte'*, and a parentage expression links him to a ruler who bears the Yax Ik'nal Emblem Glyph.⁴ Unlike the vases previously mentioned, the rim text of K1728 explicitly states that the vase was dedicated on 9.17.8.9.15 (779). Presumably, Yajawte' K'inich died sometime shortly before this vessel was painted, as his last recorded event is seen on K3054, discussed above. This pattern has suggested that the Motul Emblem Glyph could be borne by two individuals at once, with the *kaloomte'* title representing paramount authority in the polity, only held by one individual at a time (see Martin 2020:94; Tokovinine and Zender 2012:46; Velásquez García 2011). The scene is one of tribute presentation, though it is not clear that the enthroned figure represents K'inich Lamaw Ek' himself.

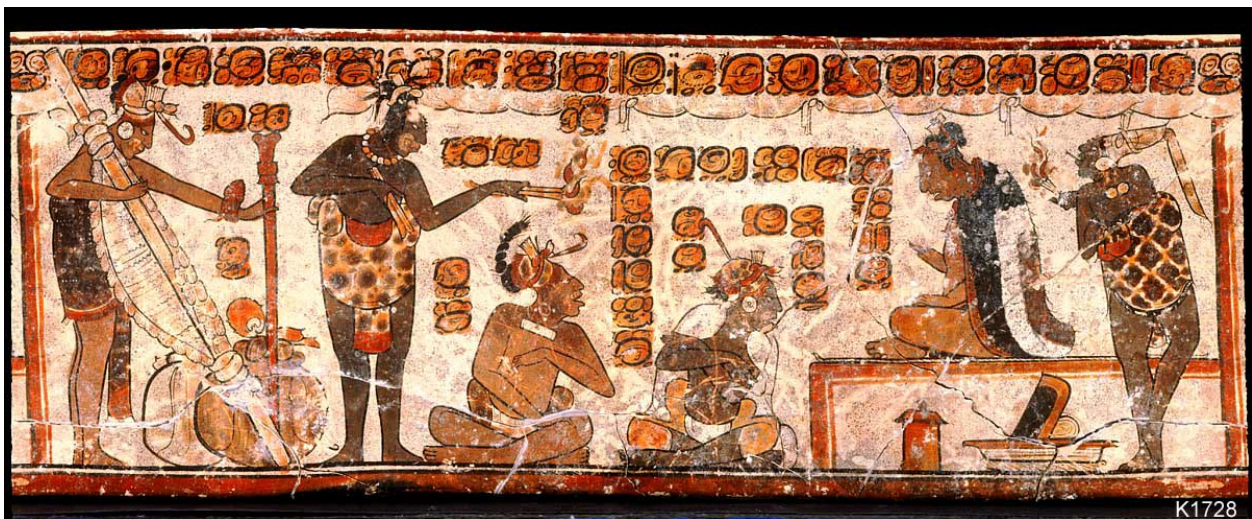


Fig. 4. Vase, K1728 (MS1373). Photo by Justin Kerr.

The next ruler in the dynastic sequence at Motul, known as Yehte' K'inich II, first appears in association with the date 9.17.10.8.17 (781) on vase LC.cb2.441 (Fig. 5; Tokovinine and Zender 2012:46, Table 2.2). This vase shows the same *joyaj* event as K1463, and the new ruler here even extends his right arm similarly to the earlier vase. The same ruler appears on two additional vases with dance imagery, K1399 and K534 (Fig. 6, 7), but only one date has been tentatively reconstructed, possibly corresponding to 783 or 796 (Tokovinine and Zender 2012:46, Table 2.2). Although not executed with the finesse of earlier vases, these works clearly emulate "Pink Glyphs"-related vessels from earlier decades (Just 2012:189-192).

³ Just (2012:149-153) discusses the attribution of K1728 to the same artist who painted K791, 792 and 793, known as "Mo?-n Buluch Laj" or more likely, T'an Buluch Laj. He suggests that K1728 and another vase were late commissions, painted decades after K791 and related vases.

⁴ This title, discussed by Tokovinine and Zender (2012:46) is also borne by the earlier Motul king Tayal Chan K'inich on a plate excavated at Dos Pilas, suggesting that K'inich Lamaw Ek' might have belonged to a non-ruling lineage at Motul, prior to his elevation as 'holy Ik'a' lord,' which he first displays in association with the (likely) 9.16.17.6.2 (768) event on K3054.



Fig. 5. Vase, LC.cb2.441. Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth.

Fig. 6. Vase, K1399 (MS1419). Photo by Justin Kerr.

Fig. 7. Vase, K534. Photo by Justin Kerr.

Yehte' K'inich II's name also appears on a wide-mouthed vase, K4120 (MS1814) (**Fig. 8**; see Reents-Budet et al. 2012:90). The text of this vase begins with a date written as 9 Ik' 0 Pop, likely corresponding to 9.17.15.4.2 (786). Although executed in a different style than the aforementioned "Pink Glyphs"-emulating vases, the scene depicted again relates to music and dance, which were of considerable importance at Motul (Looper, Reents-Budet, and Bishop 2009:132–150). However, the "barrel shape" with slightly flaring sides suggests that it could date to a few decades after its recorded date, as this form is typical of Late Tepeu II (800-830) and Tepeu III pottery (830-880) (Gifford 1976:265, fig. 166e,f; Reents-Budet et al. 2012:90; Smith 1955:v. 2, fig. 2p,q). This vase also belongs to a different chemically-defined group from the previously mentioned sampled vases, though still with ties to pottery samples excavated at Motul and vicinity (Reents-Budet et al. 2012:Tab. 3.2).



Fig. 8. Vase, K4120 (MS1814). Photo by Justin Kerr.

Significantly, both LC.cb.2.441 and K1399 give *kaloomte'* titles to Yehte' K'inich II, suggesting that he was paramount ruler of Motul at the time. Further, because none of these vessels mention K'inich Lamaw Ek', it has been assumed that K'inich Lamaw Ek' no longer ruled. Interestingly, a vase recently donated to the de Young Museum in San Francisco (accession number 2022.38.42) preserves the same name in



association with a date that postdates the reign of Yehte' K'inich II (**Fig. 9**). When this vase was illustrated previously in the *Dancing into Dreams* catalog (Just 2012:fig. 157), K'inich Lamaw Ek's name was identified on it. However, the full text was not illustrated. As can be seen in **Table 1**, the rim text of the vase begins with a CR date that is partly damaged and overpainted. The tzolk'in in block A is 9 Ajaw, while the haab period in block B is Mol, but the coefficient is incomplete, with only a single dot present and room for 2 or 3 bars. I hypothesize that this haab position could be 18 Mol. If correct, then the most likely corresponding date would be the period ending 9.19.0.0.0 (810). In contrast, a haab coefficient of 13 yields a LC date of 9.16.12.6.0 (763), which seems much too early, as K'inich Lamaw Ek' was still a *bahtz'am* at the time. One full CR after 9.16.12.6.0 9 Ajaw 13 Mol is 9.19.5.1.0 (815), which is several years after the LC corresponding to 9 Ajaw 18 Mol, but also possible. The next block (C) is likely **u-BAH-hi** *ubahil* 'his image', while block D gives the ruler's personal name, K'inich Lamaw Ek'. It is written in the same way as on K1728 with T184 **K'INICH** on the left and the other two signs stacked to the right. The next two blocks are the Motul Emblem Glyph and *bahkab*, the second of which was not borne by K'inich Lamaw Ek' on the earlier vases. The rest of the vase includes "captions" for the six figures depicted in the palace scene below, but they are all pseudoglyphic. There are six males depicted, three of whom hold bent staffs, Although it is not explicitly indicated, it is possible that the principal figure, whose hat protrudes into the rim text band, touching the curtain, is K'inich Lamaw Ek' himself.

The de Young vase differs significantly in style from both the "Pink Glyphs"-related styles as well as calligraphic vases like K1728, painted in 779. The tapered shape of the vase is, however, similar to K4120 (**Fig. 8**), as is the compositional device on both vases in which a semicircular drapery occupies a large portion of the upper band just below the rim, resulting in a shortened rim text. Unlike earlier Ik'-style vessels, a prominent pillar forms a visual break in the scene on both vases. Other shared features with K4120 are the (probably) pseudoglyphic captions and a readable, black-painted rim text consisting of a simple formula in which the CR date is followed by *ubahil* 'his image' and then the ruler's name and title(s). Thus, even though K4120 records a CR that may correspond to 785, a tentative date of circa 810 for the execution of both vases is suggested.⁵

⁵ Other vases also likely coming from ninth-century Motul workshops include MS1054 and MS2019, both of which have tapered forms, palace scenes with depicted pillars, and chemical similarity to MS1814 (K4120), however both vases have rounded tripod supports and projecting "eaves" below the rim texts, which are entirely pseudoglyphic. See Reents-Budet et al. (2012:Tab. 3.2).



Fig. 9. Vase, de Young Museum 2022.38.42. Gift of Gail and J. Alec Merriam. 6 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 in. (16.51 x 11.4 x 11.4 cm).



This analysis suggests that the de Young vase was painted close to the date reconstructed from its text, ca. 810. However, the person associated with this date is not the expected ruler Yehte' K'inich II, but rather K'inich Lamaw Ek'. While it is possible that the person named on this vase is the same as the K'inich Lamaw Ek' known from vases painted during the 770s, it is more likely that he is a different individual, here mentioned about 50 years after the ascent of his namesake to power during the reign of Yajawte' K'inich. Vase K4120 and the de Young vase may have been produced in the same or closely connected workshops as part of a concerted effort to commemorate a succession of rulers, with Yehte' K'inich II featured in a retrospective context on K4120 and the de Young vase featuring the contemporary ruler, K'inich Lamaw Ek' II. **Figure 10** shows the reconstructed sequence of Motul rulers from the late eighth to early ninth centuries.

In conclusion, the de Young vase names and probably depicts the ruler K'inich Lamaw Ek' II in association with the date 810, which is around the time that this vase was created. This work helps to fill in a long gap between the reign of Yehte' K'inich II and that of the next known ruler at Motul, Chan Ek', associated with the date 849 on Ceibal Stela 10 (Tokovinine and Zender 2012:48). If these interpretations are correct, then the de Young vase adds a new ruler, K'inich Lamaw Ek' II, to the dynastic sequence of Motul de San José.

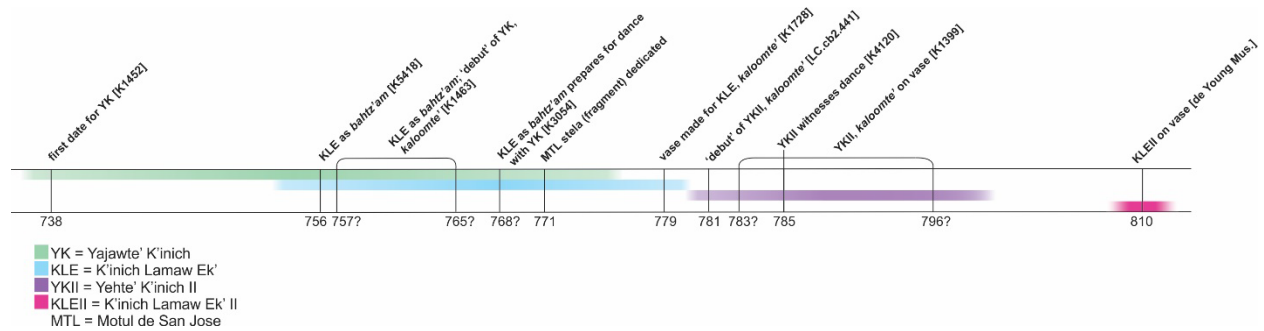




Fig. 10. Reconstructed reigns of Late Classic rulers at Motul de San José from ceramic texts.



Table 1. Text of vase, de Young Museum 2022.38.42. Photos by Matthew Looper.

	A	9 AJAW	balun ajaw	9 Ajaw
	B	18?-TE?-mo-lo?	waxaklaju'nte'? mol?	18? Mol
	C	u?-BAH?-hi?	ubahil?	his image?
	D	K'INICH-LAM-EK'	k'inich lamaw ek'	K'inich Lamaw Ek' II



	E	K'UH-IK'-AJAW	k'uhul ik'a' ajaw	holy Motul de San José lord
	F	ba-ka-ba	bahkab	first?-earth

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