

Contextual Implications of Pictorial Vases from Tayasal, Petén

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Situated in the Central Petén of Guatemala, between the two arms of Lake Petén Itzá, is the site of Tayasal. The site center, as mapped by Carl E. Guthe in 1921, is located on the peninsula immediately north of the island of Flores and behind the modern village of San Miguel. The site is much larger than the few groups mapped and investigated by Guthe in 1921 and 1922. The almost continuous settlement extends from the peninsular tip along the higher spine of the peninsula to the site of Cenote, directly north of Lake Quexil.

The University Museum-University of Pennsylvania Tayasal Project began work on the Tayasal Peninsula in 1971, under the direction of William R. Coe; a subsequent season was carried out in 1977. The 1971 excavations disclosed that the entire peninsula showed evidence of a

long history of occupation, from the Preclassic through historic periods (Chase 1979). The program of excavation was divided to allow the project to engage in intensive structural investigation as well as extensive structure sampling. Investigation resulted in the recovery of sixty-seven special deposits. The special deposits discussed in this essay are Burial T7B-1, Burial T7B-3, and Cache T7A-1; a fuller discussion of these deposits will be provided in the final Tayasal reports. All three deposits were recovered by Doug Hancock and Stan Loten in a small structure group directly west of the Tayasal acropolis mapped by Guthe (Morley 1927-1928, V: pl. 208).

The Tayasal structure group (Fig. 1) from which these three deposits were excavated consists of five structures arranged around a common plaza area. The excavated

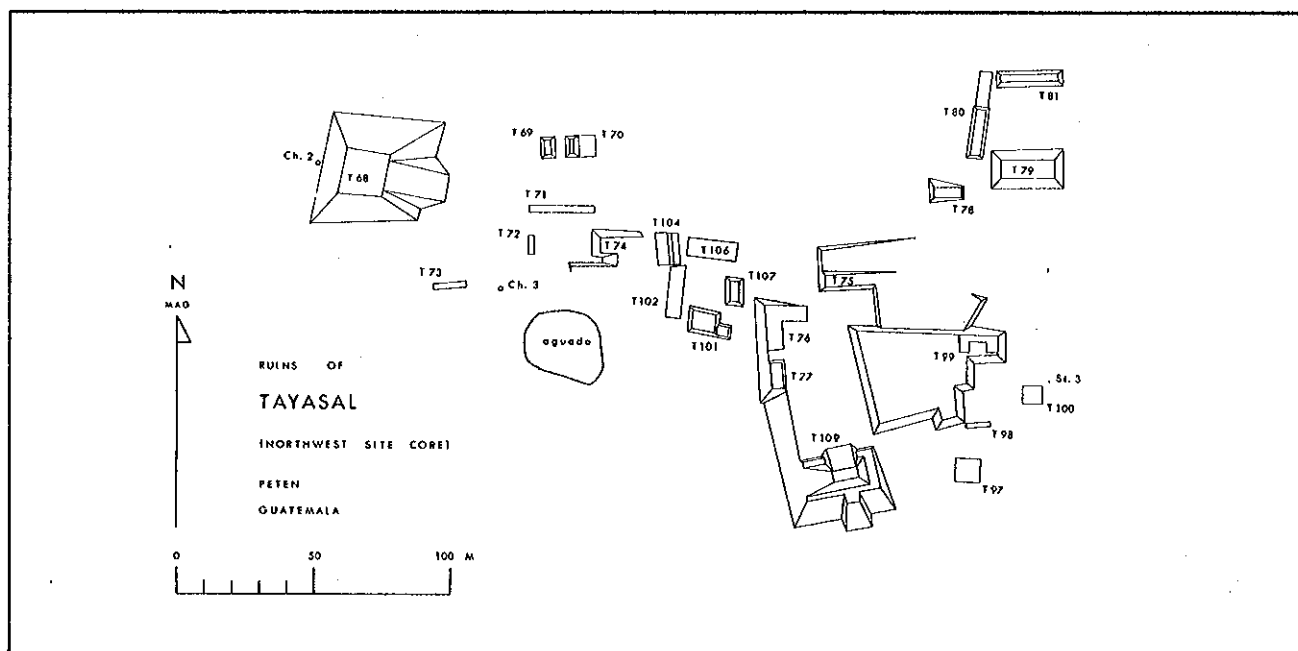


Fig. 1 Map of the northwest site core of Tayasal. The group with Structures T101 and T104 is located northeast of the aguada. The Tayasal acropolis, mapped by Guthe, lies immediately east of Structures T79, T80, and T81.

structures include T101, T104, and T107. No deposits were located during the excavation of Structure T107 (Excavation 7C). Structure T104 (Excavation 7B) produced a series of four stratigraphically related burials, all exhibiting the same general burial pattern. Excavations into Structure T101 (Excavation 7A) resulted in the controlled recovery of three burials and one cache. Two of the burials in Structure T104 and the cache in Structure T101 contained cylindrical vases with similar pictorial scenes. This paper will relate these three vessels to their archaeological context, describe their associated scenes, and then attempt to interrelate these vessels and interpret the events portrayed on them.

The fact that all three vessels were found in documented contexts is of particular importance, for, with the exception of such work as that by Coggins (1975), Pendergast (1969, 1979), and Adams (1963, 1971), very few Maya pictorial vases may be related to the circumstances of their deposition, let alone to other deposits. While catalogs of various pictorial vases (M. D. Coe 1973b, 1975a, 1978) are informative and allow for some insight into Maya belief systems, the interpretations based on these vessels are to some degree tautologous, for they cannot be confirmed by archaeological data. Any interpretations of the meaning of an undocumented vessel can only be speculation, for the total context in which the vessel was situated is not known.

There is disagreement over whether the content of pictorial vases is historical or purely funerary. Coggins (1975: 500-501), utilizing Tikal data and Coe's 1973 publication, subdivides pictorial scenes on cylinders into three categories: enthroned or seated Maya lords, mythological scenes, and historical episodes. She further notes that "all enthroned Lord scenes are at least semi-historical, since they probably represent historic personages in symbolic action." At Tikal, Burials 116 and 196 produced pictorial vases. Coggins comes to the conclusion that the larger cylinder in Burial 116 at Tikal was purely historical in content, whereas the ten accompanying pictorial cylinders in the tomb and one outside the tomb were funerary in nature (ibid.:501-548). Her conclusion, however, in no way detracts from the possible historical content of all the vases, even though one of the vases in Burial 116 depicts an underworld scene (perhaps of a "historical" nature to the Maya). The four pictorial vases in Burial 196 at Tikal are seemingly historical and may document a relationship between Tikal and Piedras Negras (ibid.:568-585). Adams (1971:76) feels that the Altar de Sacrificios vase is historical. It is also likely that the pictorial vases from Uaxactún are predominantly historical in content, and it is probable that at least two if not all three of the Tayasal vases discussed here are also historical. Apparently, then, the majority of excavated Maya pictorial ceramics from the central Petén are thought to represent historical scenes. This is directly counterpoised by the interpretations put forth in the various published catalogs (Coe 1973b:22; 1975a:7-8; 1978: 11) of other pictorial vases that were not recovered archaeologically. These scenes are held to be primarily mythological, dealing with death iconography. Perhaps

the recovery of further pictorial vases from known archaeological contexts can aid in resolving this apparent difference in interpretation.

Although Coggins (1975:499) notes that "tombs are most apt to have pictorial polychrome vessels," none of the Tayasal vessels came from a tomb; each was found in either a simple grave or a cache. The three vases discussed in the following pages are also significant in that they apparently show the same type of scene in three distinct deposits. Although the positioning of the figures on each vase differs, one figure, apparently, is seen on two of the vases. The similarity in the ceramic scenes and in the patterning observable in Structures T101 and T104 might well indicate that the structural group of which they are a part was occupied by associated people who buried their dead in similar contexts.

Vessel T7B/6-22 (Figs. 2 and 3) was found in Structure T104. Of the four burials excavated in Structure T104, Burial T7B-1, with which the figurative pot is associated, is the earliest. The burial, apparently dedicatory to Structure T104-1st-C, was sealed by the fill of the coring for this structure. Burial T7B-1 was laid out on a north-south axis. The body was extended on its back with the head to the south. Because of the poor preservation of the skeletal material, it was not possible to identify the sex of the individual. The individual, however, had reached a mature age. Two of the recovered teeth showed evidence of jade inlay. The individual was accompanied by three pottery vessels; one jade bead; two jade disks; two sets of shell earplugs; two shell "flowers" (probably part of the earplugs); three shell beads; one whole Spondylus shell, perforated for suspension; and one carved, single-piece shell frog, with associated inlays of obsidian and jade. This burial is very similar, both in accompanying grave goods and in formal layout, to the other three burials encountered in Structure T104.

Upside down, underneath the skull of the individual, had been placed an unusual vessel with a flaring wall (T7B/6-23; Fig. 2) and a slightly rounded bottom, to which were attached three slash-vent cascabel feet with pellets. The interior of the vessel was slipped orange and

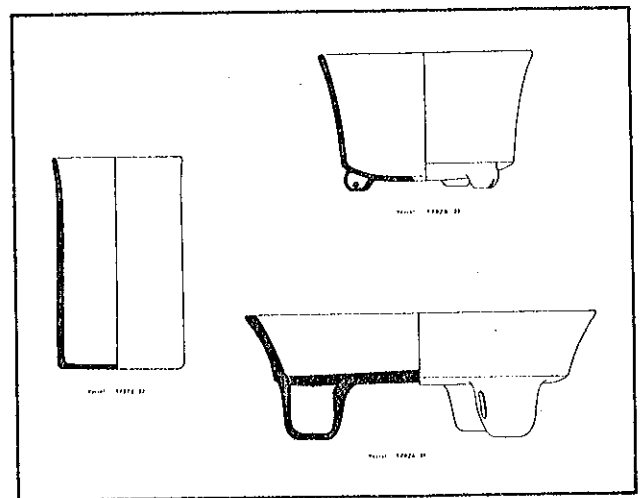


Fig. 2 Vessels for Burial T7B-1.

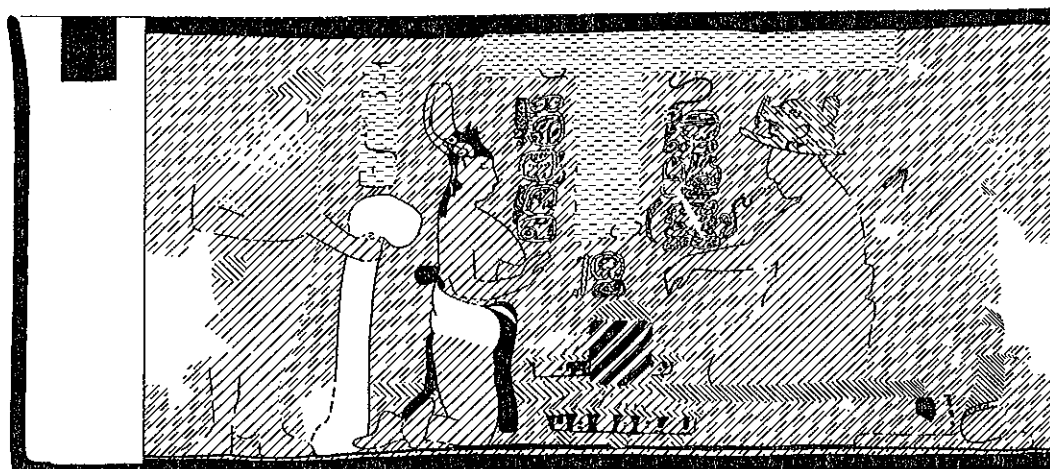
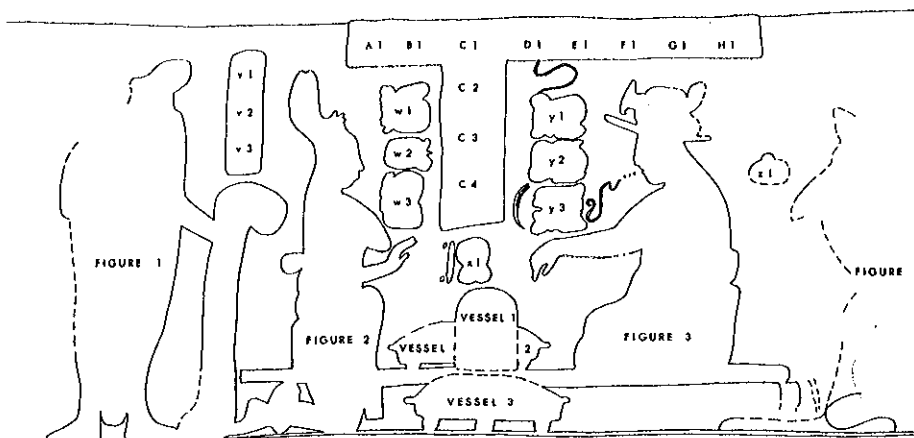


Fig. 3 Vessel T7B/6-22.

had tan firing clouds on the base. The exterior exhibited a stepped design of what may have been fugitive white on orange; the fugitive white apparently carried over onto the base and may have been applied to the legs as well. The vessel had been ceremonially "killed" in its base.

A tripod plate (Vessel T7B/6-21; Fig. 2) was located over the tibia of the extended individual. The exterior of the vessel, the feet, and the lip of the rim are painted red. Black bands adorn both the exterior and the interior; an additional black band is located just above the exterior basal break. The entire interior is slipped orange, and the exterior vessel wall, banded by black panels, is also slipped orange and contains alternating decorations of three grouped black circles on the orange background. In terms of ceramic grouping, this vessel is most similar to Lombriz Orange Polychrome (Adams 1971:39-40; Sabloff 1975:187-189), differing only in the fact that the bottom and legs of the vessel are slipped.

The vessel with which this essay is primarily concerned, T7B/6-22 (Figs. 2 and 3), was laid across the abdomen of the individual. Of the type referred to at Tayasal as Chumeru Polychrome, it contains the following colors: white, pink, red, orange, black, and maroon (specular hematite) on a buff background. The vessel is 17.4 centimeters high and has a rim diameter of 10.4 centimeters.

Vessel T7B/6-22 exhibits six separate groupings of glyphic material, three vessels, and definitely three, but more likely four, human figures (Fig. 3). As interpreted here, the scene consists of two flanking figures on either side of three centrally placed ceramic vessels. Each figure is apparently accompanied by an identifying glyphic text; the overall scene is, in turn, dated by yet another glyph (x1). The whole scene was accompanied by a T-shaped panel of eleven glyphs (A1-H1), which probably described the events depicted; this text, which is central to the scene, is totally effaced. It once consisted of black-lined glyphs painted on a specular hematite background.

The individual, Figure 1, on the far left side of the scene stands with feet spread apart and wears a loincloth which hangs almost to ground level. The overall figure is painted orange (2.5YR 6/8-5/8), but splashes of red (10R 4/6-4/8) slip occur in the vicinity of the waist and headdress. The figure faces the central vessels: both arms are extended in that direction. The palm of the right hand was most likely open, with the right arm bent at the elbow to extend across the body. The left arm is seemingly fully extended, with the hand open toward the viewer. Attached to the wrist of the left hand is a white flowing element, similar to the flowing elements found on Yaxchilán Lintel 26 (9.14.15.0.0) (Mahler 1965:582). This figure is associated with a series of three glyphs (v1-v3),

now illegible, which were once painted in black (10R 2.5/1) lines on an underlying specular hematite panel (10YR 4/4-4/6). The emphasis lent to the individual by this specially emphasized text may indicate that this is the most significant figure represented on the vessel.

Figure 2 is a kneeling person, with the right arm bent at the elbow and the fingers of the hand held up. The left arm may gesture in submission across the torso. The hair is swept upward, and the figure is seemingly unclothed above the waist. A sash of white (7.5YR 8/2-8/4) is worn around the waist, with black sashes hanging to the front and rear of it. The legs are bare, and the left foot is hooked over the right leg. The artist attempted to show a depth of background by placing Figure 2 in front of the bench on which Figure 3 sits and by making the left toe and right knee touch the black-lined base only lightly, while the right foot is at a higher level, surrounded by the buff (7.5YR 8/6-7/6) background – the artist apparently attempted to use the background as a floor. In front of Figure 2 is Vessel 3, a tripod platter filled with some unknown substance. Figure 2 is accompanied by three glyphs, painted in specular hematite, referred to here as panel W. Following are the J. E. S. Thompson (1960) numbers for these glyphs, as well as the Kelley (1976) commentary:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
w1	12 or 172.109:1016	? <i>.chac, ta, or yax:God C</i>
w2	528.126	<i>ba.ah or hi</i>
w3	117.528:671	? <i>.haab or cu:ce</i>

The T671 glyph in w3 could just as well be assigned Thompson's T219 affix number. The overall meaning ascribed by these glyphs to Figure 2 is not at all clear. Glyph w3, however, probably does not refer, as in its traditional sense, to a period ending.

The center of the scene on this pictorial vessel is dominated by the specular hematite glyph panel. Unfortunately, all the glyphic material in this panel is illegible, but beneath it resides one isolated glyph, referred to here as x1. A reading follows:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
x1	VII.501(544):238??	? <i>.nab(kin):a??</i>

This glyph, apparently associated in some way with the three vessels beneath it, refers either to the date of the event depicted or to some honorary title associated with the vessels or their contents. The lower tripod platter is associated with Figure 2 and is situated in front of the bench upon which the other two vessels rest. This vessel, Vessel 3, is typical in form for Late to Terminal Classic Maya plates; its decoration consists of "dress shirt" designs. The upper two vessels, associated with Figure 3, rest on the bench in front of this individual. Vessel 1, placed in front of Vessel 2, appears to be a "capped" cylinder vase which is fluted; the fluting is represented by alternate diagonal bands of orange and black. To some degree, it is similar to a vessel found in Structure T108 by Guthe in 1921. The "cap" on this vessel is dome-

shaped and painted red; it may be an integral part of the vessel or may represent the contents – the plates have domed contents. Vessel 2 is a tripod plate, which probably once had exterior "dress shirt" designs much like those of Vessel 3.

To the right of the vessels, sitting on the bench, is Figure 3, believed to be a woman. She sits cross-legged, with her right arm outstretched. The details of her clothing are totally effaced, although, from the outline of the figure, it is possible to ascertain that she was probably adorned with a sash at her waist. She wears a pink hat with a bird head, which recalls the bird in the headdress on Yaxchilán Lintel 57. The prominent figure in the scene, the woman faces Figures 1 and 2 and is probably accompanied by a fourth figure, located behind her and her bench. That she is speaking is designated by the speech scroll of specular hematite paint issuing from her mouth, enveloping glyphic text *y*, and then entering the major glyphic text. The glyphs contained in this utterance are as follows:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
y1	1.561:87	<i>u.caan:te</i>
y2	58?.nn(552):116	<i>zac?.(kat?):-il</i>
y3	751:74	<i>balam:ma</i>

The most important glyph in this text is y3, the jaguar head. Bounded on either side by the speech scroll, it may designate the role that Figure 3 is playing in the depicted scene. The glyphs in y1 and y2 probably represent the name or title, or both, of Figure 3.

To the right of Figure 3, the scene is largely effaced, and portions of the vase are missing. The existence of specular hematite lines, as represented by partial glyph z1, indicates that there was glyphic material in this portion of the vessel. This now illegible text should refer to a fourth figure, represented by the orange and red paint and black lines that are barely visible in this area. This missing Figure 4 probably faced the same direction as Figure 3, making the scene on the vase symmetrical.

Vessel T7B/7-37

Vessel T7B/7-37 (Figs. 4 and 5) was found in Burial T7B-3, which is located in the eastern part of Structure

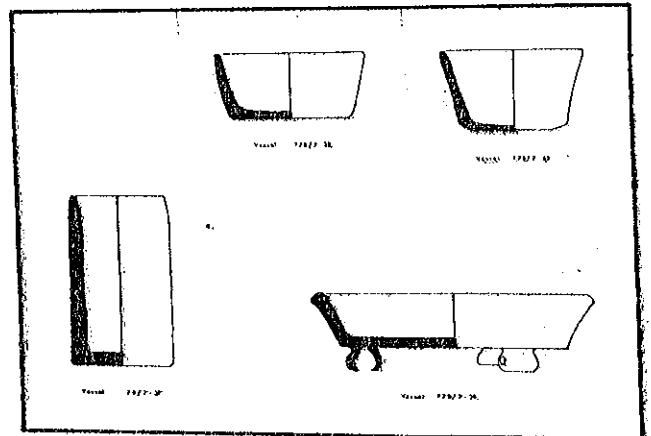


Fig. 4 Vessels for Burial T7B-3.

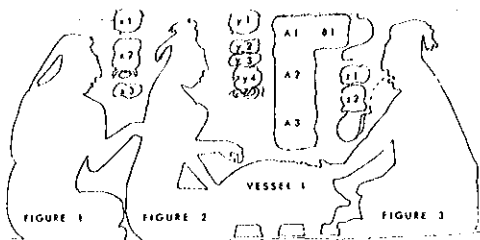


Fig. 5 Vessel T7B/7-37.

T104, just south of what is thought to be the central axis for the structure. The burial, one of the latest in the structure, was intrusive to the latest frontal step for Structure T104-1st-A. Although the structure may have remained in use following the deposition of this burial, the grave cut does not appear to have been sealed by means of a formal flooring. Burial T7B-3 consisted of an extended individual laid out on a north-south axis with the head to the south. Based on the eruption of the teeth, the individual was only three or four years old at the time of death. Burial T7B-3 was accompanied by four vessels (Fig. 4), four little shells, and one piece of jade.

The head of the individual may have rested on a miniature bowl (Vessel T7B/7-38), the base of which is slipped an orange-red and contains an inner ring of black paint. The design on the exterior vessel wall consists of stylized, circular *kin* signs, orange with black lines, in two rows on a black background. The vessel lip is painted red, the interior contains a buff-cream slip, and below the interior rim is an intersecting triangular design of specular hematite red.

Near the centerline of the burial, in the pelvis region, lay another bowl (Vessel T7B/7-40). Two concentric red circles are painted on the exterior base. A black band encircles the basal break of the bowl, the rim of the vessel is painted black, and two other black bands occur below the rim on the exterior wall. Between these black-lined boundaries, there is a series of alternating red and orange chevrons; matte red dots are visible in the polished red chevrons. The interior contains multistroke, alternating red and orange vertical lines on the wall, with a red horizontal line occurring about halfway down the interior wall.

Over the feet of the child was set a flat-based tripod plate (Vessel T7B/7-39) with a flaring wall and small hollow feet, open on their articular surface due to some sort of grinding. The exterior base and the feet of the

vessel are painted red, and the entire interior is slipped black. The exterior wall exhibits two circumferential cream panels, separated in the middle by a band of black and delineated, on the top, by a black band carried over from the rim and, on the bottom, by a black line in the basal break area.

Within the tripod plate, lying on its side on a north-south axis, was placed the cylindrical vase, Vessel T7B/7-37. The walls of this vessel are not perfectly vertical but taper inward toward the rim. The overall height of the vessel is 10.8 centimeters; the diameter of the rim is 6 centimeters. The rim is black (7.5YR 2/0 to 10YR 2/1), and black bands extend below the lip on both the interior and the exterior. Below the interior black band, the vessel is unslipped (7.5YR 7/6); the bottom is also unslipped. A band of black occurs at the basal portion of the wall, with another line of black just above it.

Between the black borders, a painted scene shows two figures facing another figure; there is a tripod plate with domed contents between them. A major glyph panel appears above the plate, and there is a glyphic text with each of the figures. A vertical band of background slip, delineated by two black vertical lines, separates the back of Figure 3 from the back of Figure 1. The entire scene is painted on a cream-buff (7.5YR 7/4-7/6) background.

Figure 1, located to the far left of the scene, is a woman, sitting cross-legged, with the bottom of her left foot visible. Although her body is painted an orangish (2.5YR 5/8) color, her face is almost entirely red (10R 4/8). Her entire form is outlined in black. She looks forward, in the direction of Figure 3. Her black hair is knotted, probably by means of a cloth wrap, and falls over her right shoulder. She is garbed in a full-length dress, which is strapless and is probably tied beneath her arms. The dress is largely black, with a side panel of red containing black dots; in the area of the torso, it is cream-colored. The woman's right hand rests on her lap; her left arm, bent at the elbow, is extended forward with her palm up. She is accompanied by a glyph panel (x), painted in red lines, which most likely gives her name:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
x1	1000b	young girl
x2	616 or 121:713a:196?	?:naab:?
x3	87	te

Although this inscription is probably meant to be read phonetically, it is interesting that, in x2, T616 is used, a glyph which Kelley (1976:199) believes means 'to offer blood.'

Figure 2 is seated slightly behind the vessel, which is in the "center" of the scene. This individual is also a woman; she stares ahead, like Figure 1, toward Figure 3. She sits cross-legged in a strapless dress of black with a white side panel. Her hair appears to be knotted with a piece of cloth on the top of her head. Her face is largely painted red, but some orange is evident in the area of her ear. Her left hand is either in the vessel or in her lap. Her right arm, crooked at the elbow, appears to be suspended over the vessel, palm downward, as if she were about to pick something up. Perhaps the most in-

teresting feature on Figure 2, however, is the black area on her right arm. It will be suggested later that this black area indicates that the person represented in Figure 2, and named in glyphic text y, was dead at the time Vessel T7B/7-37 was painted. The red-lined glyphic text that accompanies this woman may be read as follows:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
y1	1000b	young girl
y2	58	zac
y3	87	te
y4	nm(552):116	?(kat?):-il

The nominal phrase presented with Figure 2 is the same as that spoken by Figure 3 on Vessel T7B/6-22. It is, therefore, probable that the individual represented on Vessel T7B/7-37 as Figure 2 and that represented on Vessel T7B/6-22 as Figure 3 are one and the same.

Between Figures 2 and 3 appear the major glyph panel for the vase A1-A3) and a tripod plate. The tripod plate is positioned in front of Figure 3, whose hand appears to be touching its contents. The feet of the plate are red, as is its rim; its outer wall exhibits black "dress shirt" designs on a buff-cream background. The contents, domed upward from the sides of the vessel, are painted orange, and black-lined oval objects are visible in this orange-colored background. Above this vessel are the remnants of four glyphs painted in black lines. The panel or band on which these glyphs are located is purple, having been painted with a specular hematite-based paint (10R 6/4-5/4). To a large degree, this important text is illegible, but a partial reading can be made as follows:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
A1	1.757	u."jog"
B1	?	?
A2	?:212?	?:feather?
A3	??:103	??:al?

Kelley (1976:118) gives an informative discussion concerning T757, the first glyph in this text. In general, however, Proskouriakoff's reading of 'here is portrayed' (recorded) or 'in commemoration of' (1968:249) for T757 appears to fit the situation shown here better than Kelley's belief that the glyph is simply a title.

Figure 3, situated to the right, seems to represent a

male wearing only a sash or loincloth, which is cream-colored with black decorative elements. His hair is tied in a knot, and his face is an orange-red color, in contrast to his orange body. He sits cross-legged, with his right foot and toes visible, facing Figures 1 and 2 across the centrally placed vessel. His left hand rests in his lap; his right hand is outstretched and clasped shut -- he may be holding something that came from within the vessel. From his open mouth issues a red-lined speech scroll, enveloping glyphic text z which reads as follows:

Glyph	Thompson Numbers	Kelley Interpretation
z1	764?:74?	?ma?
z2	1009?:77?	deity?:?

This text probably contains both the name of the individual represented by Figure 3 and the role that he was playing in the depicted ceremony. The name of Figure 2 on this vessel occurs in the speech event for the same individual, Figure 3, on Vessel T7B/6-22. The lower glyph in the latter text is T751:74, which probably refers to the role that Figure 3, named immediately above T751:74, was carrying out in the event depicted on Vessel T7B/6-22. If the two spoken texts on the two vessels have a similar sentence structure, then glyph z2 above would refer to the role played by Figure 3 of Vessel T7B/7-37 in the event depicted on the vase, while glyph z1 probably refers to his name.

Vessel T7A/13-18

Vessel T7A/13-18 (Figs. 6 and 7) was found in Structure T101, where it had been placed in a bench as part of a cache. Cache T7A-1 (Fig. 6) consisted of a cylinder tripod and a footed plate. The footed plate (T7A/13-13) is now largely unslipped, but traces of red-orange slip are visible on both the exterior and the interior. The cylinder tripod is of the type designated as Chumeru Polychrome; it has a height of 11.6 centimeters and a basal and rim diameter of 8.2 centimeters. The base is flat and has three solid tripod feet applied to it; two of these are at an angle flush with the vessel wall, while the third is slightly inset. Because the vessel was so near the surface, its exterior decoration is not well preserved. The interior, however, exhibits a red (10R 4/6-4/8) band immediately below the lip; this interior color band differs significantly from the bands of the other two Chumeru

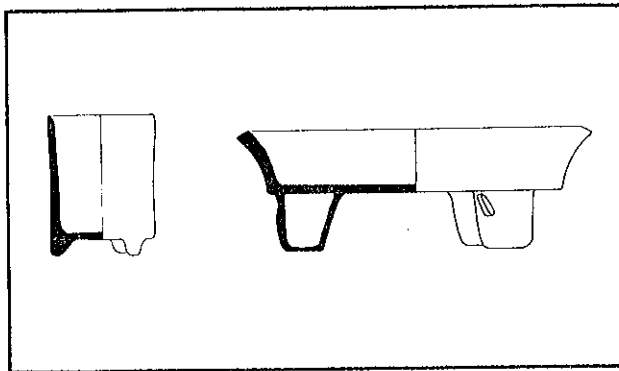


Fig. 6 Vessels for Cache T7A-1.

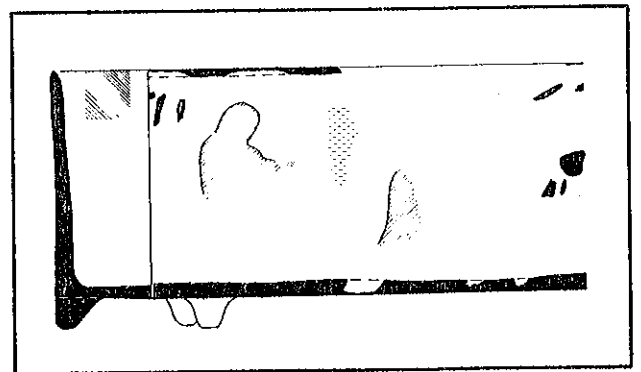


Fig. 7 Vessel T7A/13-18.

Polychrome vessels discussed here. It may be important that the vessel with an interior red band occurs in a cache, while the vessels with black-banded interiors occur in burials. One could hypothesize that vessel caches, such as Cache T7A-1, may be representative of individuals who died away from home, perhaps in war, and whose bodies could not be properly buried. The use of a figurative vase in this cache, the known disruption of Terminal Classic-early Postclassic central Petén, and the use of an interior red band in a cache may all support this hypothesis. Alternatively, the interior red band may represent no more than an aesthetic shift.

The exterior of Vessel T7A/13-18 (Fig. 7), although badly decomposed, exhibits the remnants of black (10YR 2/1) bands immediately below the lip of the vessel and above the base. These two bands enclose a scene painted on a buff (now 7.5YR 8/6-7/6) background, consisting of at least two figures separated by a vertical specular hematite (10R 4/4) panel, which probably contained a glyphic text. The panel is placed between two of the vessel feet, with each of the flanking figures, painted in red and orange and probably outlined in black, located above a foot. It is probable that a scene similar to that on the other two vases in the series was also shown on this vessel.

Interpretation

The three pictorial vessels illustrated here form a group through their common iconographic scenes. They may also be placed in a temporal sequence by means of their stratigraphic positions, their forms, and their associated scenes, as follows:

Based on

	Stratigraphy	Based on Form	Based on Scene
Latest	T71/13-18	T7A/13-18	T7A/13-18???
Earliest	T7B/7-37	T7B/7-37	T7B/6-22
	T7B/6-22	T7B/6-22	T7B/7-37

All three vessels are of the type referred to as Chumeru Polychrome at Tayasal, a type characterized especially by the use of purple or maroon specular hematite paint. In terms of the Tayasal sequence, Chumeru Polychrome is Terminal Classic in date; it may extend into the early Postclassic. On all three vessels, the major glyphic text is present on a purple band; on Vessel T7B/6-22, the nonband glyphs are painted in specular hematite lines.

It is impossible to elicit any glyphic understanding from the vase located in Structure T101, Vessel T7A/13-18. Based on an evaluation of the stratigraphy of Structures T104 and T101, however, it is possible that this vessel is part of a very late deposit. The form of the vessel and its three nubbin feet indicate, at a minimum, a Late Classic date for this vessel. It is most similar to Benque Viejo Polychrome (Gifford 1976:269-272), and it is interesting to note that "two small sherds" of the Barton Ramie type "contain patches of specular hematite pigment" (ibid:270); specular hematite is not, however, common to Benque Viejo Polychrome.

Of the two polychrome pictorial vases recovered from Structure T104, it is possible to say a great deal. Strati-

graphically, Vessel T7B/6-22 is clearly earlier than Vessel T7B/7-37, and it is also seemingly earlier in form. Vessel T7B/7-37 follows a pattern of late vessels at Tayasal in that it is almost miniaturized and the rim diameter is smaller than the basal diameter, a characteristic that occurs only in late cylinder vases. One could argue, however, that the scene represented on Vessel T7B/6-22 is later than that represented on Vessel T7B/7-37.

A case has already been made that Figure 2 on Vessel T7B/7-37 is the same individual as Figure 3 on Vessel T7B/6-22, based on the fact that the name in glyph panel y on Vessel T7B/7-37 is used again in glyph panel y on Vessel T7B/6-22, with the addition of the title *balam*, 'jaguar'. Figure 3, however, is clearly represented as older and of a higher status than Figure 2. Because of this, had both vessels been of an unknown context, it is probable that Vessel T7B/7-37 would have been considered to be earlier than Vessel T7B/6-22, in spite of form indications. The fact that Vessel T7B/7-37 is stratigraphically later than Vessel T7B/6-22, however, implies that an alternative interpretation should be sought to explain why the older-looking individual appears on the earlier vessel. The vessel that appears in the scene on the smaller vase may be equivalent to Vessel 3 on Vessel T7B/6-22, for each is similarly decorated. Clearly, much the same ceremony is represented on both vases; the ceremony on the early Vessel T7B/6-22, however, is definitely the more elaborate, containing three vessels to Vessel T7B/7-37's one. Figure 1 on Vessel T7B/7-37 could arguably be the same individual as Figure 2 on Vessel T7B/6-22; the hairstyle on both figures is the same, and their associated glyphic texts share some common elements. The case for this equivalence, however, is considerably weaker than that for the other individual. Figure 3 on Vessel T7B/6-22, with her bird-head hat and her position on the bench, is of some importance. The figure may be a representation of the individual interred in Burial T7B-1, in which the vase was found. This, however, in no way explains her presence on a vase in Burial T7B-3 as a younger individual, unless the vase in Burial T7B-3 was painted earlier than that in Burial T7B-1 or the scene represented on Vessel T7B/7-37 is historical in nature and earlier than that on T7B/6-22.

Coe (1978:11) has argued that all pictorial vases are funerary in nature, both functionally and iconographically. While I am not arguing with the assumption that these two vases were funerary in their ultimate use, it is not clear that they are iconographically funerary.

It is posed here that the scenes on both vases from Structure T104 are historical and that the scene on Vessel T7B/7-37 refers to a past historical event – possibly a ceremony at birth – depicted to aid the dead child in Burial T7B-3 (although not necessarily painted at the time of death). That this child had an important status ascribed to it prior to maturity is clear, on the basis of the wealth of grave goods accompanying it. On the arm of Figure 2 on Vessel T7B/7-37, the artist painted a black mark, which probably functioned as a death spot. The scene, however, is believed to have occurred prior to the

death of Figure 2. Figures 2 and 3 are adults and may be the parents, if they are in any way related to the child in the burial. It would appear, however, that the child's mother preceded it in death and may be located in Burial T7B-1. The fact that the tripod plate on Vessel T7B/7-37 is probably reutilized in a later ceremony as Vessel 3 on Vase T7B/6-22 seems to unite the two burials. The father of the child (Figure 3 on Vessel T7B/6-22) may, in fact, be saying not his own name but that of the child.

If the scenes are accepted as historical, the content needs to be explained. These two vases may portray ceremonies having to do with ritual bloodletting. Indicating this most specifically are the tripod plates that occur on each vessel, all three of which contain domed contents with elongated black-lined elements on the uniform orange background. These elements are most likely the piercers used in the bloodletting ceremonies, while the orange background may represent bark paper, cloth, or other organic absorbent material. As Thompson (1970: 176) remarks, concerning Maya society: "Commonly, blood was drawn from the tongue, ears, fleshy parts of the arm, and penis - more rarely from nose and legs - and was allowed to fall on sheets of bark paper or gathered in dishes and offered to the gods." Joralemon (1974) documents the widespread existence of bloodletting among the Classic, Postclassic, and historic Maya. Bowls used for ritual bloodletting are illustrated on Yaxchilán Lintels 15, 17, 24, 25, and 43.

That the two tripod plates represented on the two vases are the same vessel finds some confirmation in ethnohistoric accounts from Central Mexico. Durán describes a bloodletting sacrifice in detail:

They seated themselves, each one taking a maguey thorn to pierce the calves near the shinbone. They squeezed out the blood and wiped it on their temples. After they had smeared their temples, all the thorns used for piercing and for self-sacrifice were smeared with the remaining blood. Then the thorns were stuck into some large balls of straw which were placed between the merlons of the courtyard wall. These balls were always there for that purpose, decorated with branches. The thorns were left there so that everyone could see the penance and suffering which [the ministers] had inflicted upon themselves, being men who endured pain for the people. In certain chambers of the temple a large number of these thorns were stored; the used thorns were removed every day, were put away, and new ones set into the straw balls, since no thorn could be used twice. On their arrival the Franciscan friars burned many of these. The Spaniards found the thorns so carefully kept and revered that they were amazed. They were preserved as a memorial to the vast amount of blood that had been shed. (1975 [1971]:119-120)

While certain details of this Postclassic ceremony obviously differ from whatever ceremony may have been carried out by the Classic Maya, it is significant that the results of a bloodletting ceremony were kept and revered. If the results of an earlier bloodletting ceremony were kept on hand for a later one, the similarity between the

two depicted vessels is probably more than coincidental.

Additional support for the association with bloodletting may be found in the title taken by Figure 3 on Vessel T7B/6-22 and in the opening glyph of the main text on Vessel T7B/7-37. Figure 3 takes the title *balam*, 'jaguar' (y3), in a glyph heavily embellished by the accompanying speech scrolls. On a Uaxactún vessel (R. E. Smith 1955: Fig. 72b), a seated jaguar is shown holding an offering. At Yaxchilán, crosshatched circles, probably representing jaguar elements, are associated with bloodletting vessels (Greene, Rands, and Graham 1972:13, 22). Benson (1974:110), citing Ruppert, Thompson, and Proskouriakoff (1955), feels that these elements represent "drops of melted rubber," used in the blood-drawing ceremonies of Central Mexico, or "dark spots of coagulated blood." In the Tayasal vases, the substitution for these circular crosshatched elements appears to be the "dress shirt" design, which is perhaps a symbol for a bleeding wound.

Adams (1971:76) came to the conclusion that the pictorial vessel found in Structure A-III at Altar de Sacrificios is historical. The significance of the jaguar is again evident on the Altar vase, where both Figures 1 and 5 exhibit jaguar clothing. Figure 1 is definitely a male; what may be a "penis perforator" (see Joralemon 1974:Fig. 24n) is suspended from a beaded belt around his waist. Figure 5 is of more interest to the discussion here, however. Adams (in Greene, Rands, and Graham 1972:15) notes that Figure 5, who is involved with the sacrificed Figure 6, is engaged in "blood sacrifice with the blood collected by the man from Tikal in the vessel that he lifts up." Indeed, the text for Figure 5 on the Altar vase contains the same title "jaguar" (e2) that is spoken by Figure 3 on Tayasal Vessel T7B/6-22. Although Figure 5 on the Altar vase is consistently referred to as male (Adams 1963, 1971), it is just as likely that this figure is female and, in fact, portrays the young woman (Adams 1963:90) interred in the burial in which the Altar vase was found. Like Tayasal Vessel T7B/6-22 Figure 3, Altar vase Figure 5 also has an associated speech scroll.

The role of women in the bloodletting ceremony of the Classic Maya has not been stressed enough. In the majority of the known bloodletting scenes, women are prominent participants. If the interpretations of Altar vase Figure 5 and Tayasal Vessel T7B/6-22 Figure 3 as women are correct, it would appear that women undertook the major role in the offering of ritual blood to the Maya gods, at least in certain ceremonies. It would also appear that this role for women was well known throughout the Petén, for the two figures are apparently carrying out the same ceremonial role.

Associated with bloodletting ceremonies is the "jog" (T757) glyph (Proskouriakoff 1968), which opens the main text on Vessel T7B/7-37; this text is believed to describe the ceremony portrayed on the vase. The same glyph opens the texts referring to the bloodletting ceremonies on Yaxchilán Lintels 1, 2, 6, 14, 15, 17, 24, 26, and 43. Only on Yaxchilán Lintel 25 does the "jog" glyph appear to refer to something else. On the Altar vase, the

"jog" glyph begins the text associated with Figure 1. Likewise, La Florida Stela 9, showing a bloodletting ceremony, also opens its main text with a "jog." The bird headdress (Yaxchilán Lintel 57) and the wrist-attached sashes (Yaxchilán Lintel 26 – Lintel 16 shows a similar scene with no bloodletting) are also associated with bloodletting.

Bloodletting ceremonies were generally held for marriage alliances, warfare, death, or "any situation deemed worthy of or necessitating the blood-sacrifice" (Greene, Rands, and Graham 1972:14-15). P. T. Furst (1976) suggests that the ceremony may be related to the vision quest or to agricultural fertility. In the case of Vessel T7B/7-37, the represented ceremony probably relates to the birth of the individual in Burial T7B-3.

Conclusion

The site of Tayasal is largely devoid of Late Classic stelae and any accompanying glyphic texts. The vessels described above probably functioned in much the same way that stone monuments did, perpetuating the memory of Tayasal's Terminal Classic elite. It may be significant that all three of these deposits were recovered in rather small mounded structures, not in tomb contexts. In the past, Maya archaeologists have often assumed that pictorial ceramics occurred only in the largest of temples (Coggins 1975:499); the three Tayasal vessels clearly contradict this belief. Their existence may aid in explaining a possible sampling error in previous Maya excavations. On the other hand, it can be argued that the Tayasal vases are unique, either because of specific factors at the site or because of the late placement of the vessels. That so many pictorial vases exists in numerous private collections, however, may argue that the placement of the Tayasal vases in simple graves and caches in very low

structures is as much the Maya norm as placing them in tombs in the larger temple mounds.

Whereas Coggins (1975:545-546) sees the majority of the pictorial vases in Tikal Burial 116 as painted specifically for the interment of the individual in the tomb, and Adams (1963, 1971) would also agree with this position in terms of the Altar vase, it is still not possible to be sure that the Tayasal vases were painted solely for funerary purposes. Even if they were, they may have been painted long before the death of the individual whom they were to accompany, or they may have been painted for a specific ceremony which preceded the funeral by some length of time. Some of the pictorial vases may even have been used during the lifetime of the individual with whom they were interred. Although many questions concerning the purposes for which the Tayasal vessels were painted are still unanswered, the scenic content of the two vases that have been extensively discussed appears to be historical, referring to events in the lives of individuals; of some funereal significance; and referring to bloodletting ceremonies within one Tayasal "family."

Acknowledgments

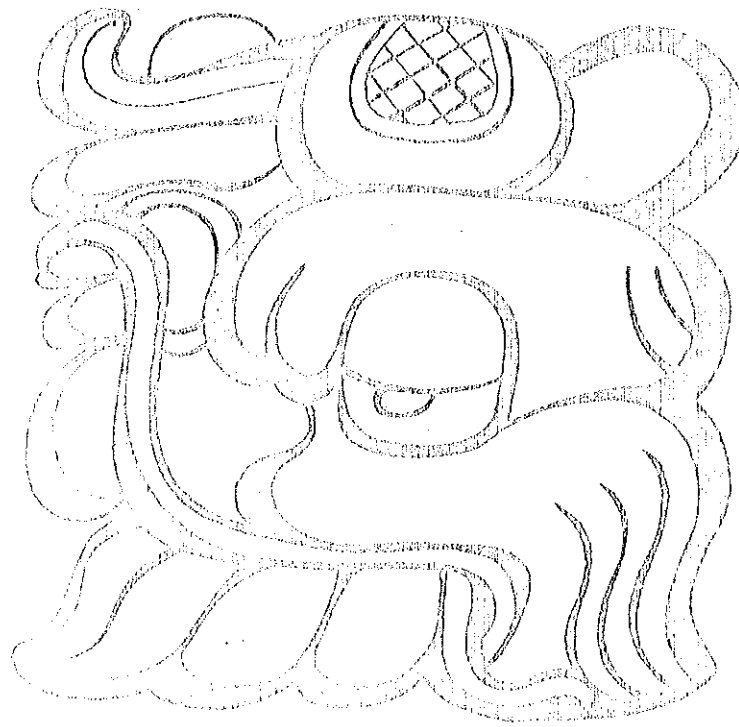
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Note

Figs. 1, 3, 5 and 7 are by the author. Figs. 2, 4, and 6 were drafted by Sarah Ruch.

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