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Defining the Red Background Style:
The Production of Object and Identity in an Ancient Maya Court

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Defining the Red Background Style:
The Production of Object and Identity in an Ancient Maya Court

by

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Abstract

Defining the Red Background Style:
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As one of many other distinct painting styles that appeared on ceramics throughout the Guatemalan Lowlands of the Late Classic Period (AD 600-900), the Red Background vases represented the economic reach of the owner into local and foreign courtly culture. Supernatural processions, playful hieroglyphic texts, and the distinctive red background circulated on vases, plates, and bowls in order to perform prestige and the elite identity in public feasts.

The diverse narrative content of these vessels reveals the importance of mytho-historic origin stories and supernatural identities to the prevailing political order, while the unique hieroglyphic texts link the style and its imagery to the royal court of Pa' Chan. However, the lack of context for most of these vases thwarts a straightforward understanding of their role in Maya society as objects from a specific geographic place with archaeological provenience.

Despite this inability to embed the Red Background vases within a robust archaeological framework, the production and circulation of a visually distinct style by a named community still indicates that the creators of these objects wished to communicate a unique artistic identity through an intersection of formal qualities. Refocusing the question of agency through the lens of the final product reveals that these works acted as part of a larger campaign to create the typical courtly trappings of master artisan production and public social feasting with representatives of other powerful polities.

This Master's Thesis aims to examine the current corpus of almost sixty vases in order to describe how the Red Background style manifests. In addition, my study explores the tendency of many polychrome styles to link a specific royal court with the artistic product through hieroglyphic emblems. I conclude that the unique Pa' Chan emblem takes this extroverted statement of belonging to a higher level, providing an emic classification of the vase where the text comprises a social category of art that performs identity through its distinct visuals.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Collectors, curators, and academics alike have prized the Red Background vases of the Classic Maya since their appearance on the art market in the 1960s. During this boom of archaeological excavation and clandestine looting in the Lowlands of Guatemala, emerging vases of different styles exhibited a diversity of color, composition, iconography, and narrative. The Red Background vases stood out to collectors and scholars for their dynamic figures, vibrant warm backgrounds, and playful hieroglyphic text.

Today, more than sixty possible Red Background vessels exist in museums and private collections. These vases exhibit the popular themes of supernatural figures in procession or visual catalogs, as well as narrative moments from mythological or historical narrative.[1] Called *jaay* or *uk'ib* by the Late Classic Maya, these cylindrical vessels or deep bowls held *cacao* or *atole* for feasts and rituals. In addition to the functional use, these vessels provided ample painting surface for the display of narrative scenes and hieroglyphic texts.[2]

Many of these vessels bear a specific emblem that reveals the local or regional network in which the vessel originated. This emblem, the Pa' Chan hieroglyph, typically appears in the royal title referred to as the *emblem glyph*, which connected a person to a

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1 Stephen D. Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant," *Mesoweb*, Research at El Zotz, Guatemala, 2008a, 8; Michael Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1973) 81, 84, 85.

2 David Stuart, "The Language of Chocolate: References to Cacao on Classic Maya Drinking Vessels," in *Chocolate in Mesoamerica: A Cultural History of Cacao*, ed. Cameron L. McNeil (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 184; Bryan R. Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom* (New Haven: Princeton University Art Museum, 2012) 59.

royal court, geographic place, or city of origin.[3] While vases of various painting styles bear specific emblem glyphs that loosely correlate with the styles' spheres of production and trade, Red Background ceramics such as K7413 embeds the main sign of the emblem glyph into the portion of the dedicatory text that describes the vase [**Figure 1**]. I argue that the attachment of this emblem to a vase instead of a person reveals the local or regional ties of the object and casts the vessel as an actor that can perform specific claims of identity for the owner. In addition to placing the object in a geographic sphere of production or circulation, the textual attachment of the emblem directly to the object casts that object as part of the region's cultural milieu.

Past attempts by modern scholars to understand polychrome styles and their relationships to place focus on these styles' physical connections through production origins, trade patterns, and the loose correlation of these styles to certain geographic regions.[4] These questions reveal important information about the use-life of unique styles

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[3] Peter Mathews, "The Sculptures of Yaxchilan" (Dissertation, Yale University, 1988); Peter Mathews, "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs," in *Classic Maya Political History: Hieroglyphic History: Hieroglyphic and Archaeological Evidence*, School of American Research Advanced Seminars (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Joyce Marcus, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1976); Sven Gronemeyer, "Statements of Identity - Emblem Glyphs in the Nexus of Political Relations," *Contributions in New World Archaeology* 4 (2012): 13–40.

[4] Dorie Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press Books, 1994); Dorie Reents-Budet et al., "Out of the Palace Dumps: Ceramic Production and Use at Buenavista Del Cayo, Belize," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 11, no. 1 (2000): 99–121; Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald L. Bishop, "What Can We Learn from a Maya Vase? High-Tech Analysis Enables Once-Enigmatic Ceramic Vessels to Tell Their Tales," *Archaeology* 56, no. 2 (2003): 26–30; Dorie Reents-Budet et al., "Codex-Style Ceramics: New Data Concerning Patterns of Production and Distribution" (presented at the XXIV Symposium of Archaeological Investigations in Guatemala, Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala, July 19, 2010); Dorie Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala," in *Motul de San José: Politics, History, and Economy in a Classic Maya Polity*, ed. Antonia E. Foias and Kitty F. Emery (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 67–93; Antonia E. Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies," in *Continuities and Changes in Maya Archaeology: Perspectives at the*

in the Classic Maya period, but do not address how the Classic Maya utilized style as a tool to proclaim identity or evoke the cultural connotations of a polity or social sphere.

This Master's Thesis aims to examine the current corpus of almost sixty vases in order to describe how the Red Background style manifests.[5] In addition, my study explores the tendency of many polychrome styles to link a specific royal court with the artistic product through hieroglyphic emblems. I conclude that the unique Pa' Chan emblem takes this extroverted statement of belonging to a higher level, providing an emic classification of the vase where the text comprises a social category of art that performs identity through its distinct visuals.

HIGH CULTURE IN THE LATE CLASSIC MAYA COURT

As distinct as vases of the fine-lined monochrome Codex style or of the naturalistic historical content of the Ik' style, Red Background vessels circulated in the social and political spheres of the elite Maya court to display the prestigious economic ties and political affiliations of the owners. The presence of a distinctive vase style from a foreign court not only revealed the cosmopolitan connections of the elite in question, it also demonstrated his or her access to the higher echelons of the economy.[6]

On the greater stage of Maya society in the Late Classic period (AD 600 to 900), these highly mobile art objects circulated alongside vases of other distinct painting styles

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Millennium, ed. Charles Golden and Greg Borgstede (New York: Routledge, 2004), 143–76; Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*.

[5] It is worth noting that, while this study addresses sixty published vases, many are only accessible through photographs. In addition, more examples exist unpublished in private collections. As a result, many details have been overlooked out of necessity. These and other little-published examples must be studied further for the appearance of the emblem glyphs and to determine the *way* creatures present in the tableau.

[6] Dorie Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators," in *Craft and Social Identity* (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1998), 72-74.

throughout dozens of independent kingdoms in southern Campeche, Belize, and the Guatemalan Lowlands [**Figure 2**]. Much like the combative city-states of fourteenth century Europe, those in the social and economic upper tiers of Classic Maya society used painted vases and other art objects to bridge political instability among the city-states and fortify social ties with superiors or upper-class courtesans of similar station. Artistic signatures and the inclusion of personal names in the dedicatory texts on these vessels documents the growing importance of individuals as actors who negotiated their station or proclaimed identity through the creation or gifting of these objects.[7] The aforementioned royal title of the emblem glyph also appears alongside these signatures and personal names to reveal the status and origins of the owner or creator of the vessel.[8] The emblem glyph acts in tandem with the painted vase to proclaim the owner as an elite, or a member of the economic social and upper class.

For the purpose of this paper, the term *elite* refers to a Classic Maya person of economic or social power who participated in the courtly culture that blossomed around the royal family and their nonroyal subsidiary lineages. Those circulating in these spheres often occupied posts within the court hierarchy due to their social station, and had access to specialized knowledge in areas such as hieroglyphic writing, astronomy, history, religious and ritual ideologies, and the arts.[9] Using literacy as a method to draw distinctions, Dorie Reents-Budet defines the Classic Maya nobility as the learned

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[7] Mathews, "The Sculptures of Yaxchilan", Mathews, "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs"; Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators." 72-76.

[8] Alexdandre Tokovinine and Marc Zender, "Lords of Windy Water: The Royal Court of Motul de San José in Classic Maya Inscriptions," in *Motul de San José: Politics, History, and Economy in a Classic Maya Polity*, ed. Antonia E. Foias and Kitty F. Emery (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 5.

[9] Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 58.

individuals who spoke, wrote, and read the language of the glyphs. However this definition does not address those who consumed or created the fine ceramics decorated with pseudoglyphs. These groups still participated in courtly events at the core of the city.[10] In addition, a strict archaeological dichotomy does not completely apply, either: while the presence of prestige goods such as jade, greenstone, pyrite mirrors, and incised seashells at a residential complex suggest the inhabitants to be of high enough social or economic standing to access such goods, these luxury items were produced and exchanged widely across social groups. As a result, the presence of luxury items indicates the social status of a Classic Maya individual or household than the more intangible aspects of civil and political relations.[11] A simple dichotomy of "wealthy, learned elite" and "illiterate commoner" does not satisfy the complex levels of access or restriction that a Classic Maya citizen might encounter in these moments of social negotiation and performance.

Claude Levi-Strauss defines the royal court as a household where descent and kinship loosely steer the power relationships of those involved. This court has a corporate aspect, where the household seeks to perpetuate material wealth and power along the lines of kinship.[12] For the Classic Maya, this court might involve both the sovereign and the individuals supporting this sovereign's power and function through a regimented hierarchy. The presence of vassal courts and households at secondary sites add a further

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[10] Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 56, 66.
[11] LeCount, "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society," *Latin American Antiquity* 10, no. 3 (1999): 239, 240.
[12] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Way of Masks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 184.

level of complexity to this equation, as these subsidiary lords might act as "sovereigns" with associated courtiers and control over resources in their local area. The duplication of court structure at both large and small sites suggests that the concept of elite depended on relative power and hierarchy, rather than on simple social categories. In addition, the presence of peoples of multiple ranks in textual and image records challenges notions of outright restriction of the economic and social lower class from courtly proceedings.[13]

Since the Preclassic Period, Mesoamerican elites are more defined by their control over political, economic, social, and religious institutions rather than their possession of luxury goods or a segregation of their space to the large monumental and exclusive private spaces.[14] Even the architecture of the central core of the city, where small building interiors suggest that the action occurred outside in full view, reveals a large amount of court activity to be "public" and "active" with an emphasis on performance.[15] These complexities then frame the Classic Maya elite as "not so much to the category of persons… [but] their patterns of interaction, cooperation, and coordination of corporate activities through communal relationships."[16] In other words, for the Classic Maya the

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13 Takeshi Inomata and Stephen D. Houston, "Opening the Royal Maya Court," in *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya*, vol. Volume I: Theory, Comparison, and Synthesis (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001) 3, 6-7; Takeshi Inomata, "King's People: Classic Maya Courtiers in a Comparative Perspective," in *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya*, vol. Volume I: Theory, Comparison, and Synthesis (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001) 27, 28.

14 Julia Guernsey, *Sculpture and Social Dynamics in Preclassic Mesoamerica* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2, 114, 115.

15 Dorie Reents-Budet, "Classic Maya Concepts of the Royal Court: An Analysis of Renderings on Pictorial Ceramics," in *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya*, vol. Volume I: Theory, Comparison, and Synthesis (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 202, 225.

16 Stephen D. Houston and David Stuart, "Peopling the Classic Maya Court," in *Royal Courts of the Ancient Maya*, vol. Volume I: Theory, Comparison, and Synthesis (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 54.

category of *elite* depends not on a specific set of social ranks but rather on participation, control, and benefit from the court's processes.

However, obvious hierarchies remained in place to distinguish power and privilege within this social sphere. Theories by Baines and Yoffee characterize this distinction as a side effect or goal of the phenomenon of "high culture." When a court participated in a regional or local high culture, the inner elite could bolster and maintain power through luxury material products and specialized knowledge meant to distinguish themselves from the larger social sphere.[17] For the Classic Maya, this difference possibly found expression in the restriction of esoteric knowledge and ritual goods unique to the elite sphere of operations.[18]

For the region of Mesoamerica, Esther Pasztory describes elite or high culture as a "known world", where shared customs and institutions were passed through long-distance trade, intermarriage, political or economic alliances, and war. These traditions spread and permeated across the landscape, pressuring local polities to create a basis for individual interaction in the form of unique artistic styles or goods.[19] Scholars such as Rosemary Joyce attempt to blend the "high culture" model of Baines and Yoffee with current understandings of the Preclassic Maya "known world". The traits shared across vast regions of Mesoamerica primarily features materials such as cuisine, costume, and

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[17] John Baines and Norman Yoffee, "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia," in *Archaic States*, ed. Gary M. Feinman and Joyce Marcus (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1998), 232.

[18] Takeshi Inomata, "The Power and Ideology of Artistic Creation: Elite Craft Specialists in Classic Maya Society," *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 3 (June 2001): 324.

[19] Esther Pasztory, "Identity and Difference: The Uses and Meanings of Ethnic Styles," in *Cultural Differentiation and Cultural Identity in the Visual Arts*, ed. Susan J. Barnes, vol. 27, Studies in the History of Art (Hanover and London: National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1989), 25, 35.

architectural building styles, which Joyce characterizes as primarily "elite" luxuries, suggesting that the elite used these goods to control and perpetuate the existing hierarchy. Joyce also criticizes the inability of the "high culture" model to properly treat craft, production, and wealth as a primary motivator, particularly in the Preclassic and Classic Maya "political economy", where the luxury object acts as a claim of legitimacy rather than occurs as a byproduct.[20] In addition, I would argue that the relationship between the "upper" and "lower" class of the Classic Maya remains only loosely defined, with the distinctions between the "inner" and "outer" elite of the Baines and Yoffee model seeming especially vague. Their model of high culture does not address the active roles of those who participated in courtly culture outside of the hypothetical elite inner circle.[21]

Comparative examinations of Aztec culture by Elizabeth Brumfiel suggest that elite culture transcended political boundaries and created a network for those in power to mediate relationships with those above and below them in the social or political hierarchy. Art and trade allowed for the elite to negotiate their power at home and abroad, resulting in a shared cultural institution that transcended local interests but allowed for the accumulation of local power.[22] Aztec high culture also emphasizes the role of wealth

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[20] Rosemary A. Joyce, "High Culture, Mesoamerican Civilization, and the Classic Maya Tradition," in *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States*, ed. Janet Richards and Mary Van Buren (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66.

[21] John Baines and Norman Yoffee, "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth: Setting the Terms," in *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States*, ed. Janet Richards and Mary Van Buren (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16, 17.

[22] Elizabeth M. Brumfiel, "Opting In and Opting Out: Tula, Cholula, and Xaltocan," in *Settlement and Subsistence in Early Civilizations: Essays Reflecting the Contributions of Jeffrey R. Parsons*, ed. R. E. Blanton and M. H. Parsons (Los Angeles: Cotsen Insitute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 2005), 65; Michael E. Smith, "The Aztec Empire," in *The Aztec World*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brumfiel and Gary M. Feinman (New York: Abrams, 2008), 133-134.

and art in the court, but Brumfiel stresses that participation in high culture through luxury goods was not limited to the inner elite. Rather, other segments of the population who did not directly interact with the royal family – such as warriors and traders – still participated in elements of high culture and the courtly sphere. In addition, the giving of gifts and tribute to the royal court did not so much emphasize material worth as status and symbolic allegiance. For the Aztec, high culture did create a hierarchy as per the Baines and Yoffee model, but did not necessarily exclude the outer elites or 'common' people from participation. Instead, the establishment of a more solidified hierarchy worked off of previous cultural tropes of tribute, gifting, and esoteric knowledge to increase social cohesion.[23]

While the Aztec Empire formed in the Postclassic Period and many miles away in Central Mexico, some of the basic models of interaction remain the same. In both societies, the ability for the ruler to gather wealth allowed him or her to "materialize" order through the claim of tribute and production of fine art. The Classic Maya expanded this idea further, as many elites and members of the royal family directly participated in the production of art and materials of high value.[24]

Considerations of the Maya court and its relationship with polychrome vases and art production must include an examination of the courtly artist. Unfortunately, the role of the artist in the court and the larger realm of Classic Maya society offers a particularly

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[23] Elizabeth Brumfiel, "The Politics of High Culture: Issues of Worth and Rank," in *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States*, ed. Janet Richards and Mary Van Buren (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131–39.

[24] Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators", Brumfiel, "The Politics of High Culture: Issues of Worth and Rank"; Inomata, "The Power and Ideology of Artistic Creation: Elite Craft Specialists in Classic Maya Society."

cloudy and complex example. Scribes and artists appear sparingly in the archaeological record.

Objects related to scribal and artistic works - inkwells being a primary indicator - appear in elite graves.[25] In addition, narrative imagery and individual signatures on polychrome vessels often portray artists as elite literate craftsmen who function within the confines of court hierarchy.[26] These examples do not necessarily preclude the possibility of non-aristocratic artists in the Classic court. And while many of the dedicatory rim texts name the creators and recipients of the gift, the relationship between those who request, physically create, and receive the object remains vague. While some examples of vessels from the Classic Maya world suggest the presence of master artists and workshops that specialize in certain styles, it is unclear whether this tradition spreads throughout this region evenly.

The direct production, claim to production, or control of production allows the Classic Maya elite to control communication. However, according to theories of artistic agency by Cathy Lynne Costin, the artisan also participated in the creation of these identities through the materialization of the ideas.[27] Whether the elite acted as artist or exercised creative control over an artist executing the idea, both worked to give material expression to Classic ideologies of elite social interaction.

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25 Inomata, "King's People: Classic Maya Courtiers in a Comparative Perspective", 325.

26 Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*; David Stuart, "The Maya Artist: An Epigraphic and Iconographic Study" (Undergraduate Thesis, Princeton University, 1989) 33, 36, 37; Joseph Ball, "Pottery, Potters, Palaces, and Polities: Some Socioeconomic and Political Implications of Late Classic Maya Ceramic Industries," in *Lowland Maya Civilization in the Eighth Century A.D.*, ed. Jeremy A. Sabloff and J. S. Henderson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 258.

27 Cathy Lynne Costin, "Introduction," in *Craft and Social Identity*, ed. Cathy Lynne Costin and Rita P. Wright (Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1998), 3, 5.

The true nature of the court's relationship to artistic production remains vague, but the efforts of the elite to co-opt artistic production in visual imagery reveal the court's interest in using art as a larger metaphor for their ability to maintain order. In *Craft and the Kingly Ideal,* Mary Helms postulates that public figures claim skilled crafting as a metaphor for their ability to craft civilization.[28] In addition, the access to art objects or the materials for crafting these objects from outside the polity demonstrates their ability to accumulate personal and provincial wealth within the rigid formalities and etiquette of the court. The ability of elites to access these foreign resources – "foreign", in the sense of distant polities with which the elite or elites have special connections, or "foreign" in the sense of the elite's ability to mediate with higher spiritual powers and funnel this connection into a skilled work.[29] As both creators and acquirers of crafted goods, the Classic Maya elite sought to emphasize these special connections to enhance the prestige of their products and claim closer access to the divine.[30]

PAINTED VASES AND FEASTING IN COURTLY CULTURE

Circumstantial evidence from text and image characterizes "elite" Maya high culture of the Late Classic as a series of performative stages for both ruler and his subsidiaries, where the creation or gifting of art, the display of personal goods, and the accumulation of titles could be used strategically to either gain power or unite the

28 Mary W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*, 1st ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), 70, 75, 83.

29 Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*, 161-165; 174-178.

30 Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators."

community.[31] Hieroglyphic evidence records events of alliances, marriages, pilgrimages, and feasts on both stone monument and ceramic text, suggesting the importance of these artistic mediums as binders for the relationships taking place in courtly life.[32] In addition, royal titles multiplied and diversified as the courtly sphere became more populated, suggesting that the imagined community of the Maya court became a more competitive area for self-identification on a regional scale.[33] In other words, heterarchichal competition emerged among the courtly class with titles such as the emblem glyph, creating extra designations to divide levels of authority for the elite.[34] Such occasions allowed for elites at varying levels of the regional hierarchy to vie for power outside of war against the ruling authority or other rival polities.[35]

Art provided an avenue for diplomatic competition among the Maya of the Late Classic. The painted vase, in particular, provided an avenue for rulers and courtiers to solidify social and political alliances across far distances.[36] The tradition of gifting elite service ware at these special events caused scholars such as Dorie Reents-Budet to call it

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31 Lisa J. LeCount, "Like Water for Chocolate: Feasting and Political Ritual among the Late Classic Maya at Xunantunich, Belize," *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 4 (December 2001): 935–53.

32 Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 58.

33 Sarah E. Jackson, *Politics of the Maya Court: Hierarchy and Change in the Late Classic Period* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 82-85.

34 Alexdandre Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art & Archaeology 37 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2013), 3, 125; Mathews, "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs."

35 Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators", 72.

36 Jeremy A. Sabloff, "Interaction among Classic Maya Polities: A Preliminary Examination," in *Peer-Polity Interaction and Socio-Political Change*, ed. C. Renfrew and J. F. Cherry (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 109–16; Jennifer Taschek and Joseph Ball, "Lord Smoke-Squirrel's Cacao Cup: The Archaeological Context and Socio-Historical Significance of the Buenavista 'Jauncy Vase.,'" in *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases*, ed. Justin Kerr, vol. 3 (New York: Kerr Associates, 1992), 490–98.

"trade ware", a term that emphasizes the process of display and exchange.[37] Marcel Mauss first outlined how the gifting of art and other resources exerts social force in *The Gift.* The gifting of a Classic Maya vase, for example, whether commissioned or hand painted by the giver, stabilized shifting alliances and intimated social debt in place of war or aggression. In addition, these gifts retained the identity of both the giver and the receiver, and acted as visible proof of their relationship.[38] In such an environment, public and private elite-led feasts provided an avenue for the negotiation of social influence. These elites commissioned and traded food service vessels of distinct styles as "social currency".[39] In this context the gifting or display of these items implicates those involved as in control over the artisan community and economic system, as well as the images and ideologies unfolding on the vases.[40]

Decorated polychromes and feasting vessels appear early in the archaeological record, revealing that the formal event of feasting played a large role in the building of community relationships as early as the Preclassic Period (c.BC 2000 to AD 200). Excavations have revealed feasting events spread across households of various economic wealth at sites such as La Blanca, while other sites such as Ujuxte reveal evidence of

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37 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 88.

38 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls, reprint (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000) 1, 3, 63, 80.

39 Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 93; Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 151; Lisa J. LeCount, "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society", 239–58; LeCount, "Like Water for Chocolate: Feasting and Political Ritual among the Late Classic Maya at Xunantunich, Belize."

40 Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators", 72-74.

restriction of the feasting events to elite households.[41] Since this period, feasting appears as "an archaeologically visible social context where the economic, political and ideological dimensions of society intersect", where the upper tier of the population simultaneously enhanced community cohesion and demonstrated social status.[42] In other words, the growing presence of elite control over an initially widespread social event in the Preclassic Period foregrounds and shapes the Classic Period's performative atmosphere of elite-sponsored feasts, highlighting later elite control over feasting as the ability to appropriate private, domestic spaces and events for their agendas.[43]

In addition, the tradition of using vases to signify the identity of a group had roots in the Preclassic Period, where communities developed unique ceramic styles based on superficial features. These unique ceramics appeared in ritual deposits, making their importance as part of the community and marking style as something that accompanies an individual into the realm of the dead to further signal their group associations in the afterlife.[44]

Early Classic vessels displayed "name-tagging" decoration that announced the vessels' uses or material form as early as AD 250-300 at sites such as Tikal and Uaxactun, but the transition into the Late Classic brought more complex dedicatory texts

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41 Joyce, "High Culture, Mesoamerican Civilization, and the Classic Maya Tradition."; Rosenwig 2010: 162-164; Guernsey 2012: 112

42 Robert M. Rosenswig, *The Beginnings of Mesoamerican Civilization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162-164; Guernsey, *Sculpture and Social Dynamics in Preclassic Mesoamerica*, 112.

43 Guernsey, *Sculpture and Social Dynamics in Preclassic Mesoamerica*, 2, 114.

44 Joyce, "High Culture, Mesoamerican Civilization, and the Classic Maya Tradition", 71; Mary Lee Bartlett and Patricia McAnany, "'Crafting' Communities: The Materialization of Formative Maya Identities," in *The Archaeology of Communities: A New World Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2000), 102–22.

and narratives with a focus on individuality and the unique identity of the vessel owner.[45] In addition, distinct visual programs developed in regions ranging from Quintana Roo and Campeche in Mexico, Southern Belize, and the Central Usumacinta region to the far northeastern region of the Petén.[46] These stylistic differences show a heightened awareness of how art conveys the identity of a place-oriented community, whether ethnic or political.[47] To trade, collect, and juxtapose these vases at a feast would reveal the collective reach of the court and its sovereign to a mixed audience of visiting elite and participating nonelite community members. The discovery of place-centered ceramic styles in archaeological contexts outside of their production area supports such a notion.[48]As a result, feasting events, already arenas of performance for both secular and religious occasions, began to explicitly focus on these vases as visual proof of access to certain communities.

In her article "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society", Lisa LeCount points out that ethnographic studies from the Contact Era and archaeological evidence all suggest that feasting was not solely an elite ritual, but rather a communal event of celebration. Like gifting, feasting "provided a social backdrop where political negotiations to consolidate support and amass tribute

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45 Stuart, "The Language of Chocolate: References to Cacao on Classic Maya Drinking Vessels", 188, 189; Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators", 71, 72.

46 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period,* 170.

47 Pasztory, "Identity and Difference: The Uses and Meanings of Ethnic Styles", 18-20.

48 Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*, 174-178.

could occur."[49] The pottery-rich middens in civic and royal contexts suggests that the event itself was widespread but the access to fine pottery via gifts or creation was controlled by the elite, resulting in a visual segregation of certain goods.[50] As a result, public feasts where multiple tiers of the community participated in the celebration created a situation of high visibility for the painted vase. When depicted as part of these courtly occasions, the vessels are held in presentation or set out on display, particularly when the king meets visiting elites.[51]

Unlike most stone monuments that rested in public space and spoke to a wide audience, painted vessels could cross between public and private contexts and broadcast identities to those close enough to view the image and recognize the text.[52] This high degree of visibility and the importance of group identity frame the Late Classic proliferation of painting styles as a response or side effect to the increasing political and social competition that accompanied polity expansion.[53]

RED BACKGROUND VASES AS EXPRESSIONS OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Polychrome styles of the Late Classic period thus exhibit intimate ties with personal prestige, social negotiation, and political or community affiliation. The Red Background style displays a particular level of self-awareness regarding the role of these

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49 LeCount, "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society", 241.

50 Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 152, 153.

51 Houston, Stuart, and Taube, "Folk Classification of Classic Maya Pottery", 724; Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 74.

52 LeCount, "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society", 240.

53 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 6.

polychromes as active tools that link surface decoration with the identity of gifter, owner, and social sphere.

Which specific community or communities did the Red Background corpus symbolize? A little under half of the Red Background vase texts showcase the aforementioned Pa' Chan or "split-sky" glyph, an emblem that refers to the mysterious dynasty of Pa' Chan [**Table 1**]. Scholars have attempted to link Red Background vase origins to various polities in the Uaxactun-El Zotz' region of Guatemala, an area of political rivalry that regularly challenged the powerhouse capital of Tikal.[54] What identities and connotations would the Red Background style communicate as a representative of such a contentious region?

An assessment of the narrative content and epigraphic information potentially reveals how these objects resulted from strategic choices to convey a distinct artistic statement. Past descriptions of the Red Background style have focused perhaps on the procession scenes, blood red background, unusual phonetic hieroglyph style, and presence of a unique court brand as parameters.[55] These initial descriptions stem from a small sample set, and do not fit the wide array of Red Background vases published today. In fact, many vases that scholars currently categorize as Red Background vessels do not fit all of these guidelines. This fluidity and variation beg a more nuanced approach to

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54 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant"; Stephen D. Houston, "The Epigraphy of El Zotz," *Mesoweb*, Research at El Zotz, Guatemala, 2008b, 1–6; Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*.

55 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8; Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*; Bryan R. Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," *Record of the Princeton University Art Museum* 68 (June 2009): 3.

understand how the Classic Maya might have conceived of this style and its relationship to a larger social network.

However, the examination of Maya social and political thought through polychrome vases encounters several stumbling blocks. While this medium features a more intimate view into Classic daily life of the nobility not seen on stone monuments and public architecture, these glimpses into upper-class life, social organization, and religious ideologies only shed light on certain sections of the region's society.[56] In addition, these images still filter through the lens of the Maya courtier who conceived of or created the object, and thus asserts a certain view of society that ultimately aims to claim identity rather than convey factual information.

Data on the spheres of production and use would help contextualize and moderate our understanding of the surface imagery, but very few polychrome vases appear in scientific exclamations relative to the large amount of looted examples. Only the Initial Series Vase has been documented in a scientific excavation from the 1930s, and this work emerged from a tomb in Uaxactun [**Figure 3**].[57] Work by Ronald Bishop and Dorie Reents-Budet has endeavored to use Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis, commonly called INAA, to chemically trace the paste – the clay used to create the vessel

56 Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 59.

57 A. Ledyard Smith, "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun," *Contributions to American Archaeology*, Publication No. 436. Carnegie Institution of Washington, 2, no. 5 (1932 2005): 1–25.

– and the temper – materials such as ash, sand, or crushed ceramics that help fortify the clay - from these looted vessels to possible origin points or areas of use.[58]

This information, coupled with stylistic analysis and the emic declarations of social sphere, provide a web of information that helps to restore a measure of this lost context. While not a replacement for archaeological excavation, the refocusing of inquiry into the material nature of the vase provides an intersection between where the vase emerged and where it possibly circulated, and what identities were explicitly broadcast by its surface.

Despite this inability to embed the Red Background vases within a robust archaeological framework, the production and circulation of a visually distinct style by a community still indicates that the creators of these objects wished to communicate an identity through an intersection of formal qualities. Refocusing the question of agency through the lens of the final product reveals that these works acted as part of a larger campaign to create the typical courtly trappings of master artisan production and public social feasting with representatives of other powerful polities.

While much remains to be understood about the larger cultural understandings of the Pa' Chan court and the Red Background style, this paper argues that the extroverted claim of belonging made by the emblem of Pa' Chan on Red Background vases seeks to connect the common mythological narratives and themes to the name of the court in the eyes of the viewers of the vases.

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[58] Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 71; Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 166.

In the following second chapter, “Approaches and Problems in Defining the Red Background Style”, I seek to examine the Red Background style as an art historical question. How does the observant scholar define a style, especially when lacking knowledge of chronology and geographic origins? After viewing the comparative methodologies used to contextualize the Codex and Ik’ styles, I define the boundaries of the Red Background stylistic sphere.

In third chapter, “The Court of Pa’ Chan in Emblem and Painted Vessel”, I ask what identities the Red Background style seeks to broadcast, especially for the Pa’ Chan court.

In the conclusion, this thesis wishes to embed the Red Background stylistic sphere into a greater tradition of unique polychrome styles that express both polity and individual identities on the performative stage of the Classic Maya court.

Chapter Two: Approaches and Problems in Defining the Red Background Style

As an under-studied genre of polychrome painting, the Red Background style lacks the defined visual parameters that accompany discussions of the Codex or Ik' style. Scholars in the past have described the typical Red Background vessel as a combination of a distinctive red background, processional figural compositions, and unique hieroglyphic rim texts that encapsulate one syllable per glyph [**Figure 1**].[59] This initial definition no longer fits the wide array of sixty intact examples that exist today and many vases that visually relate to the Red Background set do not embody all of these qualities [**Table 2**]. The discussion of this style as an aesthetic sphere rather than a rigid rubric allows the observer to better glean the attributes that connect the various works and culminate in a style.

As one of many unique styles that overlapped and coexisted in the Late Classic, the Red Background style did not persist in the social and political landscape as a monolithic entity. The variety of subjects and quality of these vases in today's scholarship reveals the widespread consumption of the popular style, as well as its flexibility in appealing to multiple classes and polities. How did producers of these vases construct a flexible and unique style without losing the trappings of prestige? The spirit of competition and collaboration in the increasingly entropic social and political relationships of the Late Classic period allowed artisans to stretch the boundaries of the

[59] Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8, Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God", 3; Houston 2013, personal communication; Just 2013, personal communication.

familiar and expand the Red Background style from a potentially rigid tradition to a diverse aesthetic sphere that resonated with other location-oriented artistic styles.

THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF STYLE IN LATE CLASSIC MAYA SOCIETY

As evidenced by the fluorescence of the Red Background style and its peers, the Late Classic Maya producers operated with an awareness of visual distinction and creative control. To create a new style, artists experimented with line quality, color palettes, composition, and linguistic and pictorial narratives to create unique traditions. The resulting "constellation" of technical, formal, and iconographic choices coalesced into styles which others could then emulate or reject.[60] The results of these innovations are viewed mainly in hindsight by modern scholars, when a large corpus of surviving objects gives shape to the common aesthetic choices that culminate in a similar visual experience. However, during the time of the Late Classic, artists produced their works in reaction to previous experiences.[61] The explosion of diverse painting styles in this period reveals a highly self-conscious "cult of the aesthetic" where visual culture played an active role in social display.[62] The success of a style in displaying desirable characteristics correlates to its proliferation throughout the region's visual culture. As a polychrome tradition that circulated throughout a broad region during the Late Classic,

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60 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 7; Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators", 73.

61 James S. Ackerman, "Style," in *Distance Points: Essays in Theory and Renaissance Art and Architecture* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: The MIT Press, 1991), 3, 4, 5, 7.

62 Esther Pasztory, "Aesthetics and Pre-Columbian Art," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, The Pre-Columbian, no. 29/30 (Spring-Autumn 1996): 318, 323.

the Red Background style successfully communicated these characteristics for the consumers.

When viewed as a social process, the Red Background style and its peers act as "social iconography" that performs the identity of certain groups through visible stylistic differences. Comparisons of these various styles reflect the degree of intellectual and material communication across social and geographic boundaries.[63] In the case of the Classic Maya producer, the chosen styles also express intentional rejections and appropriations of the prevailing aesthetic conditions for strategic use. As a result, the style of painting on a polychrome vase functions as a "visual index of social cohesiveness" where the variations in style express the values of intertwined social groups of artists, patrons, and consumers.[64] The creator's choice to emulate an existing style communicates a relationship with those who produce similar objects, while the fluorescence of a new painting style reveals an interest in using art to symbolically break from the past and express new claims to identity and self-determination.[65]

However, modern attempts to understand the processes that drive the formation of style suffer from gaps in the archaeological and epigraphic record. As a result, little data exists to contextualize the artistic conditions in which the Red Background style emerged. When confronted with questions of creative control, scholars of Renaissance

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63 James R. Sackett, "The Meaning of Style in Archaeology: A General Model," *American Antiquity* 42, no. 3 (July 1977): 376, 378.

64 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 164; Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators", 73.

65 Claudia Brittenham, "Style and Substance, or Why the Cacaxtla Paintings Were Buried," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 55/56 (Spring-Autumn 2009): 140.

and Ottoman art history often have the option to refer to written records. These letters and contracts yield a host of information, including the patron's desires, the evolution of the artist's personal style, and both figures' interactions with the tastes and aesthetics of the prevailing visual culture.[66] No such materials survive for the Late Classic Maya. Instead, the investigation of stylistic change must be framed through the surviving polychromes and the information that survives as part of the overall work.

Individuals that might have exercised creative control survive in the names recorded in dedicatory rim texts that adorn many Red Background polychromes. With hieroglyphic literacy a vital aspect of elite culture, these names shed light on the social sphere and geographic location in which the vase and its style circulated. However, even when the text explicitly links certain characters to production or use, little survives of the interactions between patron, artist, and the elite court that would encounter the product.[67] Even less information endures of the artists who produced polychromes outside of the court system and did not use the hieroglyphs in their work. The products of artists operating outside of the court surface in architectural fill and trash middens in the non-elite areas of archaeological sites, suggesting a widespread access to lower-quality wares.[68] The market murals discovered recently at Calakmul show polychrome vessels in

66 Michael Baxandall, "Conditions of Trade," in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3-12.

67 Stuart, "The Maya Artist: An Epigraphic and Iconographic Study," 33, 36, 37.

68 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 66, 98.

the many scenes of exchange and commerce, framing large-scale ceramic production and consumption as an activity for many below the royal class.[69]

In *Painting the Maya Universe,* Reents-Budet examines what text, narrative content, and archaeological context might communicate about creator, artist, and recipient identity by focusing on the Holmul Dancer vessels and their role as crafts in the larger Maya region.[70] Her work built off of previous research that found that polychrome vessels often circulated as gifts and offerings between elites to express friendship or alliance during a time of ritual celebration.[71] Her updated approach in the "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators" further explores the elevated social identities of master artists as a component of material value. This work echoes a general movement in scholarship towards the recognition of how artisans functioned in the competitive and collaborative sphere of elite Classic Maya relationships, suggesting that the individual – through autograph or distinctive imagery – establishes a prestigious social identity that can be used as political leverage.[72]

This production most likely occurred in workshops, where painters and potters worked together to produce on a large scale. The division of labor probably allowed artists to trade ideas and pass on techniques and styles to apprentices.[73] Clay sourcing

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69 Ramón Carrasco Vargas, Verónica A. Vázquez López, and Simon Martin, "Daily Life of the Ancient Maya Recorded on Murals at Calakmul, Mexico," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 106, no. 46 (November 17, 2009): 19247.

70 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 1994.

71 Stuart, "Hieroglyphs on Maya Vessels", 258; Jeremy A. Sabloff, "Interaction among Classic Maya Polities: A Preliminary Examination"; Jennifer Taschek and Joseph Ball, "Lord Smoke-Squirrel's Cacao Cup: The Archaeological Context and Socio-Historical Significance of the Buenavista 'Jauncy Vase".

72 Reents-Budet, "Elite Maya Pottery and Artisans as Social Indicators."

73 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 219, 222.

with Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) from Red Background vessels points to production in various areas throughout the Uaxactun-El Zotz' region, suggesting that several individuals or workshops contributed to the trade network that operated outside of Tikal.[74] While these samples reveal the presence of master artists and workshops that specialized in certain styles, it is unclear whether this tradition spreads throughout this region evenly and which economic classes accessed the workshop's products. Archaeological excavations such as at Aguateca reveal that artists producing art objects for the court worked on a smaller scale in royal or elite residential contexts.[75] In fact, narrative imagery and individual signatures with powerful titles often portray artists as elite masters who function within the confines of court hierarchy, a system that differs from Western norms of a wealthy benefactor who commissions an artist of lower status.[76]

Regardless of social sphere, stylistic change occurred after viewing and reacting to previous works in marketplaces, feasts, and similar occasions of social and visual display. After encountering these objects, artists who chose to emulate a style possessed knowledge of the aesthetic choices that contributed to its "stable" form.[77] Complicating our attempts to understand the development of the Red Background style is a lack of knowledge over what the Late Classic artist considered to be the "stable" form of the Red Background style. In addition, the lack of a specific chronological or geographic framework for the surviving Red Background vases muddles attempts to understand

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[74] Barbara MacLeod and Dorie Reents-Budet, "The Art of Calligraphy," in *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press Books, 1994), 155.

[75] Inomata, "King's People: Classic Maya Courtiers in a Comparative Perspective", 324, 32.5

[76] Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*.

[77] Ackerman, "Style", 5, 7.

which works impacted others. And as with all polychrome vases that first entered the academic conscience due to looting, some of these examples suffer from over-restoration that cloud important iconographic or hieroglyphic content.

The repetition of color palette, composition, and subject matter throughout the corpus of Red Background vases suggests that knowledge of a stable form existed, even if only in the abstract. However, the great variation of vessels that might qualify as Red Background implies that the geographic extent and the diversity of class in producers and consumers allowed for several conceptions of what contributed to a stable form.

Without further information, the origins and evolution of the Red Background style cannot come to fruition. A more prescient question to ask would recast the object as the main actor: What identities does the Red Background style communicate? What role does the toponym of Pa' Chan play in communicating these identities? Before attempting to define the Red Background style and, in the following chapter, understand what identities the polychrome tradition communicates, a review of better-understood ceramic traditions and their relationships might help to inform our explorations.

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES: THE CODEX AND IK' STYLES

As vases of distinctive styles emerged into museum collections and academic study in the 1970s, scholars began to question the implications of such diversity. The Codex and Ik' styles drew particular attention for their complexity and the presence of common emblem glyphs that linked the works to specific locations. Academics first defined the various formal, technical, and iconographic parameters of each style and then contextualized their role in specific locations of Late Classic society. While scholars

defined a "stable" core definition of these unique regional styles, other examples within their corpuses show a more fluid treatment of pictorial constraints. This "stable" form admittedly stems from the etic perspective of modern hindsight, but the ability to define such works and outliers reveals how these works mirrored and innovated upon their respective corpuses. Understanding the processes of defining these styles in Late Classic culture will help my effort to contextualize the Red Background vases as one of many elite ceramic corpuses that expressed common regional identities.

The Codex Style

Codex style ceramics first gained recognition through art historical analysis by Michael Coe in *The Maya Scribe and His World.*[78] In this work, Coe named the style after its visual similarity to Late Postclassic Maya divinatory texts called codices. In the exhibition catalogue *Lords of the Underworld* in 1978, Coe presented more examples and further defined the aesthetic limits of the style as a monochrome palette of black or brown line on a cream or white background [**Figure 4**]. He also described the style's typical subject matter, which at this point in time included moments of mythological narrative with recognizable deities. Initial discussions of this style also focused on the integration of hieroglyphic labels into the composition of the image, as well as the probability that the Snake Emblem glyph referred to the city of Calakmul.[79]

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[78] Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*, 91.

[79] Michael Coe, *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Classic Maya Ceramics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 16, 28; Mary Ellen Miller, "The History of the Study of Maya Vase Painting," in *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases*, vol. 1 (New York: Kerr Associates, 1989), 137, 138; Erik Velásquez Garcia, "Reflections on the Codex Style and the Princeton Vessel," *The PARI Journal* X, no. I (Summer 2009): 1.

In the following years, scholars linked groups of vases by artistic hand and sought to understand the content of the imagery. Justin Kerr's article "Some Observations on Maya Vase Painters," connected vases to specific artists or workshops by the flourishes and body parts of the calligraphic style. Such research frames the Codex style as a widespread tradition with the participation of many individuals throughout a larger region.[80]

Iconographic research on Codex style vases during this period related the narrative scenes on the vases to instances of a larger mythic cycle with reoccurring characters. Much of the imagery on these vases features repetitive scenes of sacrifice and rebirth from popular mythic cycles. The sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar, *Unen Bahlam,* by a death god and Chaak appears on a large fraction of the vases, as does the resurrection of the Maize God [81]

Later articles have also studied the *way* figures found in processions on Codex style vases, using the glyphs to link these supernatural entities to the historic kings and courts they represent. Many of these vessels picture the same *wayob'* seen on Red Background vessels, with some picturing *wayob'* from Pa' Chan such as the skeletal "Deer Death" [**Figures 4, 5, 6**] and other creatures connected to certain polities through hieroglyphic labels.[82]

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80 Justin Kerr and Barbara Kerr, "Some Observations on Maya Painters," in *Maya Iconography*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillett Griffin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Art Museum, 1988), 236–59.
81 Garcia, "Reflections on the Codex Style and the Princeton Vessel", 4.
82 *Ibid.*, 5.

In addition, epigraphers accessed the dynastic content on some vessels to understand the recorded history of the state's royal lineage.[83] Eleven Codex style vessels provide lengthy lists of up to nineteen kings all the way back to a mythohistoric founder, creating a royal genealogy over four hundred years in length. The Snake Emblem glyph, translated today as a reference to the kingdom of *kaan* or *kaanul*, accompanied the mythical royal names on these dynastic vases and would resonate with the historical names of kings on other Codex style vessels. The dissemination of this emblem on Codex style wares prompted scholars such as Coe to view the style as a unique product of the social or political sphere of the Snake kingdom.[84]

Archaeological investigations at Calakmul and the Mirador Basin area linked the production of Codex-style production to sites such as Nakbé and El Mirador and framed the period of production to AD 672-731.[85] The latest investigations have defined the area of trade to Calakmul and the Mirador Basin. Excavations place workshop production at Nakbé and El Mirador, with a substantial presence of royal production present in the elite residences in Calakmul.[86] While the majority of sherds appear at these sites and other allied polities in the Mirador Basin, the appearance of fragments at El Zotz' and

83 Simon Martin, "The Painted King List: A Commentary on Codex-Style Dynastic Vases," in *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases*, vol. 5 (New York, NY: Kerr Associates, 1997), 846–67.

84 Simon Martin, "Of Snakes and Bats: Shifting Identities at Calakmul," *PARI Online Publications* 6, no. 2 (2005): 5,8; Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicles of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 102.

85 Garcia, "Reflections on the Codex Style and the Princeton Vessel", 1.

86 Kai Delvendahl, *Calakmul in Sight: History and Archaeology of an Ancient Maya City* (México: Unas letras industria editorial, 2008), 124-128.

Uaxactun suggest that these rival sites of Tikal occasionally participated in a joint trade network.[87]

The latest research concentrates on contextualizing the sub-styles and recognizable hands on particular vases in the archaeological record. Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis sources the clay and tempering materials on many whole looted vases and archaeologically excavated sherds to link particular artists and sub-styles to specific sites of production. Dorie Reents-Budet et al. have also identified a "pseudo-Codex style" made by the workshops within the Codex style sphere for consumers outside of the main production area.[88] This distribution to other sites suggests the style's success as a tool to broadcast prestige and cultural affiliation.[89] The generic dedicatory rim texts and wide variation in quality for both the true Codex style and the pseudo-Codex style suggest that the style existed at multiple levels of society and class, a condition also applicable to the Red Background style.[90]

The monochromatic Codex Style circulated within Calakmul and the Mirador Basin, mirroring the political reach of the capital in Campeche into the Petén region. Ceramics in burials and at feasting occasions visually signified the consumers as part of a larger political and social sphere. The presence of a common emblem glyph on many of these vases united the users at moments of visual display, while the dynastic content and mythological narratives advertised the restricted knowledge of the participants. The

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87 Garcia, "Reflections on the Codex Style and the Princeton Vessel", 1, 2; Reents-Budet et al., "Codex-Style Ceramics: New Data Concerning Patterns of Production and Distribution", 3-5.
88 *Ibid.*
89 *Ibid*.
90 Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 153, 154.

repetition of historical or mythological content and emphasis on elegant aesthetics bolstered the popularity of this style and fortified its importance as both a symbol of superiority and affiliation.

Ik' Style

The Ik' style also appeared early in Classic Maya scholarship. While the Codex style vases marked the presence of the *kanuul* polity before scholars identified the location of the related state, the *Ik'* site appeared on the archaeological record long before the vases emerged into scholarship. Teobert Maler identified the site of Motul de San Jose in 1895 and recorded a stela with the *Ik'* emblem, although scholarship in this period.[91] Joyce Marcus first proposed that the *Ik'* emblem – which translates to wind or breath – referred to the site of Motul de San Jose near Late Petén.[92] In 1978, Michael Coe's *Lords of the Underworld* drew the connection between the *Ik'* emblem and vases of a muted palette and historical content, which Nicholas Hellmuth named the "Pink Glyph Style" [**Figure 7**].[93] Barbara and Justin Kerr identified seven vases of this style, using the pink glyphs, *Ik'* emblem and the presence of a recurring king nicknamed the "Fat Cacique" as parameters. In a study similar to that which examined artistic hands of the

91 Teobert Maler, "Explorations in the Department of Petén, Guatemala," *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University* 5, no. 1 (1911); Kerr 1989: 32

92 Marcus, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization*, 9.

93 Coe, *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Classic Maya Ceramics*, 130; Nicholas Hellmuth, *Tikal, Copán: A General Introduction to Maya Art, Architecture, and Archaeology* (Guatemala City: Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, 1978), 196; Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 59, 62-64.

Codex style, the Kerrs identified five different hands from this single school.[94] In this period, David Stuart also used Ik' vessels to examine the signatures of artists.[95] The same painter's name appears on more than one of these vessels, suggesting that reputation and notoriety played into value for the style.[96]

Out of more than one hundred vases, only twenty of these examples have been excavated archaeologically.[97] Explorations of the style depend on the information provided by epigraphic, stylistic, and chemical analysis in hopes of defining a geographic distribution of the objects.[98] In later years, scholars such as Ronald Bishop, Dorie Reents-Budet, and Barbara MacLeod used a combination of INAA and epigraphy to identify five sub-styles and workshops outside of the site of Motul de San Jose, expanding the Ik' style's parameters and considering the Pink Glyph style as a sub-type of a larger movement.

Rather than a standard dedicatory text, vases in this style record historical events with enough detail to reconstruct a loose chronology of the vases' production and major events in the state's past. In addition, the imagery focuses on creating portraits of historic individuals with personal names and titles. These portraits of individual kings diverge from other Maya vase scenes which tend to romanticize elite bodies into youthful ideals.

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94 Justin Kerr, "A Maya Vase from the Ik' Site," *Record of the Princeton University Art Museum* 48, no. 2 (1989): 32; Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 64.

95 David Stuart, "Ten Phonetic Syllables," *Mesoweb* 14 (1987): 1–52.

96 Stuart 1987: 4; Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 64.

97 Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 55.

98 Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 67.

On many Ik' style vases, nobles visit the *Ik'* king to offer goods and fealty, or appeal to the powerful lord for his intervention in political matters or marriage contracts. Others perform in elaborate masks and costumes or engage in hallucinogenic rituals to transform into *way* creatures. The cutaway technique that pictures both the mask and the face of the noble also reinforces this emphasis on portraiture and identification, as if the actor's visibility on the vase acts as a witness to his actual presence at the event.[99]

The focus on realism and historicity also provides scholars an avenue to understand the social and religious aspects of the royal court. In the chapter "Dance on Classic Maya Ceramics" from *To Be Like Gods,* Matthew Looper et al. accesses these images as primary sources to explore the variety of historic dances, all of which necessitated different costumes and ritual proceedings.[100]

Recent publications by the Motul de San Jose Project, run by Dr. Antonia Foias and Dr. Kitty Emery, and an exhibition at Princeton University spurred further historical inquiry into the personages pictured on the vessels. In the culminating publication, *Motul de San José: Politics, History, and Economy in a Classic Maya Polity,* various chapters explore the political sphere of the *Ik'* kingdom and analyze the archaeological excavations of the proposed capital at Motul de San Jose and its secondary centers. This work confirms the presence of workshops in the royal core of the site and identifies

99 Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 65, 131; Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 69, 70.
100 Matthew Looper, *To Be Like Gods: Dances in Ancient Maya Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

various workshops at other polities under the capital's control.[101] In addition, Alexandre Tokovinine and Marc Zender juxtapose surviving carved monuments and the Ik' vases to provide a more text-based record of the kingdom's activities and alliances over time.[102] The Princeton Art Museum's 2012 exhibition and accompanying catalog *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom* also interprets the historical side of the vases in order to trace the development of the style into substyles and various "schools". Epigraphic analysis also allows a historical treatment of the life of Yajawte' K'inich, formerly only known as the Fat Cacique. Examinations into the eighteen Ik' vases from his period of rule in the mid-eighth century illuminated the relationship between this ruler and the master artist named *Tuubal Ajaw,* who held an elite title for a different region or court.[103]

Today's scholarship defines the typical Ik' style scene as a historical tableau with a muted palette of earth tones, glyphs outlined in dark rose with a pink wash, detailed calligraphy, historical imagery, and the presence of the *Ik'* emblem glyph.[104] The discovery of ceramic workshops at the capital and secondary centers suggests that the

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101 Kitty F. Emery and Antonia E. Foias, "Landscape, Economies, and the Politics of Power in the Motul de San José Polity," in *Motul de San José: Politics, History, and Economy in a Classic Maya Polity*, ed. Antonia E. Foias and Kitty F. Emery (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 401–418; Christina T. Halperin and Antonia E. Foias, "Motul de San José Palace Pottery Production: Reconstructions from Wasters and Debris," in *Motul de San José: Politics, History, and Economy in a Classic Maya Polity*, ed. Antonia E. Foias and Kitty F. Emery (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 172, 189; Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 71.

102 Tokovinine and Zender, "Lords of Windy Water: The Royal Court of Motul de San José in Classic Maya Inscriptions", 44; Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 84-85.

103 Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*.

104 Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 69.

court participated in the creation of these works alongside the rest of the *Ik'* political and social sphere. These vessels also appear in both burial and feasting contexts, suggesting their importance for religious ritual and social display. The gifting and use of such objects at feasts allowed the owners to display their concrete political ties to the *Ik'* king, who was pictured individually in the scenes with historic dates.

When encountering the Codex and Ik' styles, observant scholars engaged in discussion, definition, and attribution of visual characteristics on polychrome vessels in order to understand how these objects formed their respective stylistics spheres. A similar look at the updated corpus of Red Background vessels creates a better picture of how the creators of these vessels chose to push the boundaries of style while maintaining the essential visual program of the Red Background style.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE RED BACKGROUND CERAMICS

Collectors, curators, and academics alike have prized these Red Background vases since their appearance on the art market in the 1960s. However, the earliest Red Background appears in the archaeological record as early as 1931, in "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun" by A. Ledyard Smith [**Figure 3**].[105] The Initial Series Vase, a Red Background vessel excavated from an elite burial at Uaxactun, appeared on the archaeological record during a time of systematic investigation. Eric S. Thompson interpreted the glyphs as a meaningless framework that mimicked hieroglyphs from stone sculpture. By 1943, Pal Kelemen commented on the "dignity and movement" in the

[105] Smith, "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun."

composition and the narrative qualities of the vase as evidence of its rarity.[106] Later translations have noted that the Pa' Chan toponym glyph appears in the dedicatory rim text alongside the phrase for "thin-walled drinking cup".[107] In this place, the glyph acts not as an emblem but as a description. The inclusion of this toponym glyph influenced many scholars to signify Uaxactun as the Pa' Chan site, while epigraphic evidence suggests El Zotz' as a possibility in recent years.[108]

After this initial find, World War II interrupted the importation of new polychrome ceramics until 1973 when Michael Coe's *The Maya Scribe and His World* presented three new examples. In this period, museums and collectors in the United States endeavored to collect more artifacts for display. As a result, many vases collected lack provenance and even fewer received scholarly treatment before Coe's formative work.[109] The first in the exhibition catalogue, the Vase of Thirty-One Gods, presents thirty-one supernatural figures in four registers and a hieroglyphic text on the inner rim [**Figure 8**]. The vibrant red background frames these figures, which all have distinctive paraphernalia, costumes, and animal attributes.[110] Coe also features the Vase of the Eleven Gods, a lidded pot with eleven supernaturals that raise their legs in dance and hold sacrificial weapons or wear prisoner collars [**Figure 9**]. This dedicatory rim text echoes

106 Miller, "The History of the Study of Maya Vase Painting," 133-135.

107 David Stuart and Barbara MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, The Maya Meetings at UT Austin (University of Texas at Austin, Austin: Department of Art and Art History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2005), 128.

108 Mathews, "The Sculptures of Yaxchilan", 384; Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*; Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant"; Houston, "The Epigraphy of El Zotz"; David Stuart, "El Zotz and the 'Split Sky' Emblem Glyph," *Peabody Museum, Harvard University.*, n.d.

109 Miller, "The History of the Study of Maya Vase Painting," 136, 137.

110 Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*, 81-83.

the next vase in the catalogue. Both vases have the same patron and also bear a Pa' Chan toponym glyph as a description [**Figure 10**]. In addition, the hand matches on both rim texts.[111]

In the period before serious academic inquiry into the origins of the style, various other museum catalogs featured Red Background vases with little analysis.[112] Eventually, projects by Dorie Reents-Budet and Robert Bishop sought to source the clay samples in some of the ceramics.[113] In *Painting the Maya Universe,* the chemical "fingerprints" of these samples link many of these vessels to workshops in the Uaxactun-El Zotz' region. For instance, the chemical composition of a vase that features supernatural scribes chemically matches sherds from the archaeological site of El Zotz' [**Figure 11**]. The match suggests the site to be at least one locus of production, but the study does little to support or refute the long-held assumption that the Pa' Chan glyph in the dedicatory rim texts refers to Uaxactun.[114]

By 2008, archaeological excavations and epigraphic advances that translated several monuments led to the hypothesis that the Pa' Chan glyph referred to El Zotz'.[115] Houston defined the Red Background style using eight vessels. The parameters included red backgrounds, warm palettes, single-syllable glyphs, *way* characters and the Pa' Chan

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111 Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*, 84, 85; Stuart 2013, personal communication.

112 Nicholas Hellmuth, *Monster Und Menschen in Der Maya-Kunst* (Verlagsanstalt, Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck, 1987); Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art* (New York: George Brazilier, Inc., in association with the Kimbell Art Museum. Fort Worth, 1986).

113 Miller, "The History of the Study of Maya Vase Painting," 141.

114 Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 155.

115 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8.

emblem.[116] While some of these vases include imagery that does not utilize all aspects of his definition, the presence of the Pa' Chan glyph in all examples acts as a linking force. Bryan Just set forth one more candidate in an article for the *Record of the Princeton University Art Museum* that fits the usual parameters of composition and color palette in previous examples except for the presence of the Pa' Chan glyph, suggesting that the style branched beyond a strict checklist of qualities [**Figure 12**].[117]

Red Background vessels appear in recent articles as examples that illustrate various aspects of Late Classic Maya culture. Several articles address the anthropomorphic *way* creatures and mentions of feasting culture in the dedicatory texts.[118] The bulk of this research characterizes the use and meanings of these vessels but adds little to the discussion of what defines the Red Background style.

THE RED BACKGROUND STYLE

Today, more than fifty possible red-background vessels exist in museums and private collections. These vases commonly picture portraits of supernatural figures and processions of specific *way*, as well as narrative moments from mytho-historical narrative. Calligraphic hieroglyphs that accentuate each syllable of the text encircle the

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116 Houston, "The Epigraphy of El Zotz", 4.

117 Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 3.

118 Diana Fridberg, "Peccaries in Ancient Maya Economy, Ideology, and Iconography" (Master's Thesis, Harvard University, 2005); Pilar Asensio Ramos, *El Venado, El Pecarí E Itzamnaaj*, Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Guatemala (Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala: Asosiacion Tikal, 2007); Christophe Helmke and Jesper Nielsen, "Hidden Identity & Power in Ancient Mesoamerica: Supernatural Alter Egos as Personified Diseases," *Acta Americana* 17, no. 2 (2009): 49–98; Dmitri Beliaev, Albert Davletshin, and Alexdandre Tokovinine, "Sweet Cacao and Sour Atole: Mixed Drinks on Classic Maya Ceramic Vases," in *Pre-Columbian Foodways: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Food, Culture, and Markets in Ancient Mesoamerica*, ed. J.E. Staller and Michael David Carrasco (New York: Springer, 2010), 257–272.

vase's rim, encouraging the viewer to handle the vase and experience the unfolding narrative as the object turns.[119] However, the great diversity of these vases led to a variety of experiences and possible broadcasted identities, suggesting that the popular style survived through flexibility and appeals to common cultural ties throughout the Petén region.

Formal Qualities and Variation

The attached **Table 2** lists the fifty-four vessels that share attributes of the Red Background style, resulting in a spectrum of examples. A majority of these Red Background vases exhibit the distinctive red background, the unique hieroglyphic treatment of syllables, and an organization of space and text that emphasizes individual figures. In addition, the Pa' Chan toponym glyph plays a prominent part in over half of these vessels, either as a descriptive glyph or as part of royal titles [**Table 1**]. However, like the Codex and Ik' styles, the surviving corpus does not adhere to the style's description in a stringent and obvious pattern and instead demonstrates an intersection of formal similarities. Rather than viewing the Red Background style as a monolithic concept, we should understand that these vases appeared among many overlapping and interacting styles produced from experimentation and imitation.[120] When viewing the formal aspects of these vases, variation and local experimentation produced noticeable diversity within the style that can be framed as "micro-traditions".[121]

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119 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8; Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*, 81, 84, 85.
120 Ackerman, "Style", 16.
121 Sackett, "The Meaning of Style in Archaeology: A General Model", 376.

The motivations of the creators behind each vase led to variation in aspects thought to be vital to the recognition of the Red Background style, including color palette and the organization of image and text. Examples thought to be the hallmarks of the Red Background style reserve the lighter hues of orange and yellow for the characters in the composition and carefully separate the active characters with labels or decorative motifs [**Figures 5 and 11**].

However, other examples reverse the palette and meld common Red Background characteristics with compositions and content more common to vases of other styles. For instance, a vase featuring a supernatural court with Itzamnaaj and an armadillo recall mythological scenes from the Codex style [**Figure 13**]. Similar Red Background vases with palette reversals such as a vase now in a private collection suggest that such mixing might occur in occasions where artists innovate upon popular styles for greater appeal to consumers [**Figure 14**].[122] In addition, the stretching of the boundaries of the Red Background style show an interest in extending the "visual index of social cohesiveness" that common polychrome style signaled.[123] Emulation of some of the Red Background conventions reveals the artists' response to examples of the "stable" style, but whether these producers were experimenting Pa' Chan artists or artisans operating on the periphery of the region remains unknown without archaeological or epigraphic context.

The distinctive hieroglyphs in the rim text unite the various treatments of color and composition seen on this large corpus of vases. However, some examples forsake

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122 Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 8.

123 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 164.

hieroglyphs in favor of an emphasis on the visual content of the vessel [**Figure 8**]. This flexibility of formal qualities encouraged the success and popularity of the Red Background style across class and geographic area.

Genre and Visual Content

The majority of imagery on Red Background vases addresses mythology and ritual, characterizing their context as part of a greater network of cultural religious familiarity. Supernatural figures and events reference historical points of affiliation and specialized knowledge, suggesting that Red Background vases performed prestige for the user during feasts or communal rituals. Several key genres use aspects of the Red Background style to dispense or withhold information while broadcasting a cultural commonality with those participating in the events of display.

The first and largest group is the procession of *way* [**Figures 1, 5, and 6**]. These creatures that mix human, animal, and supernatural elements are commonly thought to act as unique spiritual counterparts to certain rulers. Scholars such as David Stuart and Christophe Helmke have recently connected the *way* to ailments and diseases over which rulers or those with access to the supernatural could use to defeat enemies.[124] These *way* occur in a catalog in specific orders or as common pairings and triads. Hieroglyphic labels name specific rulers or courts as owners, suggesting the involvement of both *way*

124 David Stuart, "The *Way* Beings" *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, The Maya Meetings at UT Austin (University of Texas at Austin, Austin: Department of Art and Art History, The University of Texas at Austin, 2005, 160-165; Christophe Helmke and Jesper Nielsen, "Hidden Identity & Power in Ancient Mesoamerica: Supernatural Alter Egos as Personified Diseases," *Acta Americana* 17, no. 2 (2009): 49–98.

and historical court in alliance.[125] For instance, a Pa' Chan *way* on vessel K2023 also appears on K3061 with the same accompanying *way* figures [**Figure 5 and 6**]. While the imagery addresses mythological content, these catalogs record historical relationships between the competing courts of the Late Classic. Owners of these vessels placed value on images that linked supernatural power and the power to mediate political interactions in the physical world.

Such catalogs appear on many vases and form the bulk of the Red Background style. In the second group, other catalogs of supernatural figures make use of this composition that emphasizes order and comprehensibility [**Figures 8, 10, 15, 16**]. These characters include gods, mythical heroes, deified scribes, and other entities that do not function as *way*. The lack of labeling text on many of these examples suggests that specific identifications do not play as large a role for this subgroup. Instead, understanding of costume and iconographic references help identify the characters on these vessels. The references to ritual paraphernalia and mythological interactions depend on restricted knowledge to fully comprehend, linking the owner of the vessel to prestige and special supernatural connections.[126]

The third group, which focuses on narrative action and mytho-historical memory, also depends on specialized knowledge for full appreciation [**Figures 3, 12, 13, 17**]. The insertion of text directly into the scenes suggests that specific identification of characters

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125 Stephen Houston and David Stuart, *The Way Glyph: Evidence for "Co-Essences" among the Classic Maya*, Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing (Washington, D.C.: Center for Maya Research, 1989), 8; Helmke and Nielsen, "Hidden Identity & Power in Ancient Mesoamerica: Supernatural Alter Egos as Personified Diseases."

126 Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*, 81.

remains a priority for full appreciation. The Initial Series Vase, the first Red Background vessel to surface, features both the Pa' Chan label and a mytho-historic event related to visiting of a royal court by foreign dignitaries.[127] The other examples feature scenes often pictured on vases of the Codex style, including a complex tableau from the life of the Maize God and a narrative moment featuring a disrobed God D, the Moon Goddess, and the rabbit.[128] Too few examples of this type of vessel exist to draw conclusions about the relationship between the toponym and the narrative content.

The last group depends only on the distinctive hieroglyphic rim text. The rest of the vessel either remains blank or integrates geometric design in various shades or red or orange [**Figure 18**]. The majority of these vessels uses a warm palette and fills the hieroglyphs with a red hue to visually recall the more ornate Red Background vessels. The example of K5465 stands out as a black-on-orange example with a fine, precise hand that still uses the single-syllable hieroglyph style and incorporates the Pa' Chan toponym [**Figure 10**].

The artist behind K5465 also painted the hieroglyphs on K8393 and K2699 [**Figures 16 and 19**]. In addition, the Vase of the Eleven Gods (K5509) also displays similar imagery and hieroglyphic hallmarks, although hand is harder to identify in a drawing of a vessel [**Figure 9**].[129] Many of these vessels share a common owner, linking

127 Smith, "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun", 6, 9, 15.
128 Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God", 3; Just 2013, personal communication.
129 Kerr and Kerr, "Some Observations on Maya Painters", 236.

creative control with the unique product.[130] This group of vessels best encapsulates the idea of a "micro-tradition", as this visually distinct subset of the larger Red Background tradition reveals personal experimentation and local variation while retaining regional style markers.[131]

Like the Codex and Ik' styles, the Red Background style depends on the repetition of familiar content such as the *way* figures and narrative stories through an unique visual filter. The shared historical and mythological knowledge of consumers throughout the region gave artisans room for stylistic flexibility while retaining common subject matter. The perpetuation of the Red Background style and its common imagery signaled an interest in displaying the knowledge and order of the *way* catalog and other mythological underpinnings, especially because those relationships broadcasted political affiliation and prestige by association. As with the Codex and Ik' vases, the Red Background corpus mediated social relationships by projecting identities of prestige and the special knowledge.

While not a formal quality, the Pa' Chan glyph unites the diverse aesthetic parameters of a large section of the Red Background style. According to rough estimates, almost half of these vessels include the Pa' Chan toponym glyph within the dedicatory text [**Tables 1 and 2**]. Other vases in the catalogue might contain the Pa' Chan glyph, but erosion and over-restoration have obscured much of their surfaces. The relation of this

130 Jacinto Quirarte, "The Representation of Underworld Processions in Maya Vase Painting: An Iconographic Study," in *Maya Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, ed. Norman Hammond and Gordon R. Willey, Texas Pan American Series (University of Texas Press, 1979), 116–48; Stuart 2013, personal communication.

131 Sackett, "The Meaning of Style in Archaeology: A General Model", 376.

toponym with the visual aspects of the Red Background style raises questions of how these objects circulated on a larger social stage alongside vases of other styles to broadcast the collective identities of a certain place or group of people.

Chapter 3: The Court of Pa' Chan in Emblem and Painted Vessel

The group or groups that produced vessels in the Red Background style did not just visually break from those producing other styles. By creating a new style and identifying these visuals with a polity in the dedicatory text, the creators distinguished their region and made a more active claim for identity. The unique insertion of the Pa' Chan emblem into the dedicatory text's descriptive section took this association between artistic product and sphere of use to a new level [**Figure 20**]. By associating the Pa' Chan emblem with the Red Background style, the Pa' Chan polity invented or appropriated this style in order to layer claims to identity and self-determination.

How does the relationship of the Pa' Chan toponym glyph with the Red Background style differ from the appearance of emblem glyphs in the Codex and Ik' styles? These comparative vessel corpuses also link their unique visuals with spheres of trade and use through the royal title known as the *emblem glyph*, a concept to be expanded below. For all three styles, the emblem glyphs have allowed scholars to pinpoint real archaeological sites as centers of production. However, the Red Background style carries this identification of the style with a geographic or social sphere a step further by attaching an emblem to the vase itself. As an intersection of the material location of the court and the larger "relational" social sphere, the main sign of an emblem links the unique visual program of the Red Background style to specific geographic, political, and social connotations.[132]

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132 Inomata and Houston, "Opening the Royal Maya Court", 3.

For those producing the Red Background vessels, the Pa' Chan main sign was an optional tool to link social sphere and vessel qualities in the descriptive section of the dedicatory text. The active role of the emblem linked the court of Pa' Chan to the whole vessel, rather than just the owner. This unique approach to a dedicatory text allows the creators of the vessel to provide their own identification of the object to the viewer. While today's scholars strive to categorize the surviving Classic Maya vases through critical observation, the makers of the Red Background vessels defined their own category in a highly self-conscious manner.

CURRENT METHODOLOGIES

Previous endeavors to understand the role of polychrome painting in the commercial and social networks of the Classic Maya have concentrated on linking ceramics of distinct material or style to geographic and temporal spaces. However, these connections remain tenuous due to a lack of archaeological context for a majority of the Red Background vases. In addition, vessels excavated through strict archaeological procedures still might not yield information about their origins or the majority of their use-life.[133] Today's scholars continue to combine analysis of the material's technical aspects and the surface details of text and image in order to fill these gaps.

The ceramic type-variety system emerged as the backbone of archaeology when scholars established formative typologies at the sites of Holmul, Mayapan, Chichén Itzá, and Uaxactun. Robert E. Smith's work at Uaxactun, in particular, established the ceramic chronology and classification system used for Late Classic ceramics in the Maya

[133] Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 166.

Lowlands in which the Red Background ceramics circulate.[134] This system classifies ceramics by form and paste into categories called type-varieties, which can be compared across time and space to produce visible proof of changes in social conditions and wealth.[135]

Modern criticisms focus on the tendency of the type-variety system to emphasize decoration and appearance over the function of ceramics. For instance, type-variety analysis does not consider how the Maya possibly conceived of their products. The dedicatory rim text often names the contents of the vessel and the self-described class to which the work belongs.[136] Phrases in the dedicatory text that describe the vessel include: *u lak* (his dish), *y-uk'ib* (his drinking cup), *u jaay* (his [thin-walled or clay] cup), and *u-jawate'* (his wide dish, or platter). These terms focus on function and loosely correlate with shape, with dishes or platters holding solid food such as tamales and vessels used to hold liquid *kakaw* or *ul*, the Classic Maya term for maize gruel *atole*. For the Classic Maya, the "types" of ceramics probably depended on this intersection of form and function rather than the materials or decorations used in production.[137]

The introduction of chemical analysis further complicates the simple picture of production and distribution provided by the type-variety system. While establishing basic parameters to explore the material differences of pots of the same painted style and the individual person's ceramic creation techniques that contribute to the finished product,

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134 Smith, "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun."

135 Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 143, 144.

136 Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*.

137 Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 144, 145; Houston, Stuart, and Taube, "Folk Classification of Classic Maya Pottery", 720, 722-725.

the type-variety system did not conclusively link vases to particular clay sources.[138] As previously mentioned, Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis (INAA) compares the chemical constituents of unprovenienced polychromes to matches ranging from clay sources to ceramic debris at archaeological sites. Scholars use this technique to compare stylistically defined groups and pinpoint the geographic locations of workshops.[139]

The Maya Polychrome Ceramics Project, the largest project to undertake such an endeavor, Ronald Bishop, Dorie Reents-Budet, *et al.* to juxtapose vases of individual painting styles through their the paste-temper recipes to determine different workshops of the same stylistic group. The diversity of sources suggests a regional exchange network of many localized dispersed urban and non-urban production where prestige and utilitarian goods were exchanged with differentiated marked spheres. While the urban (and presumably royal) residential centers of some sites such as Quirigua participated in the production of utilitarian and elite wares, other residential centers from sites like Tikal only produce elite ware.[140] In addition, the data from these projects suggest that elite artists and possibly lower-rank specialists typically produced at the cores of Maya centers, and more likely produced ritual and prestige ceramics. However, an absolute distinction between utilitarian and prestige goods does not completely reflect the nuances of how social practice and meaning plays into the production of these goods.[141]

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[138] Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 166.
[139] *Ibid.*, 166, 169
[140] Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 160-162.
[141] Halperin and Foias, "Motul de San José Palace Pottery Production: Reconstructions from Wasters and Debris", 168, 172.

The dedicatory rim texts often name the persons and places involved in the creation of the object and hint at the use and social context of the vessel. While drawing little distinction between creation and ownership, the inclusion of a personal name and the person's royal titles suggests that possession played an important role in the function of these vases as display items.[142] In addition, the names of scribes and patron-owners on these vessels link certain painted styles to historical points of consumption and use across the Lowlands.[143] The *emblem glyph* – a hieroglyphic compound that communicates the name of a physical location or geographically-located social grouping – is especially pivotal in revealing how the creator of art objects constructs identity on a larger scale for inter-polity relationships by linking the production and exhibition of this artistic style with a specific place.[144]

The frequent appearance of the Pa' Chan emblem glyph within the dedicatory text links the Red Background style with these vases circulating in the Pa' Chan court. In addition, the nesting of the Pa' Chan main sign among other names such as *uk'ib* and *jaay* reveals the importance of this hieroglyph as a descriptive marker. However, while the tags of *uk'ib* and *jaay* refer to the form or use of the vessel, the inclusion of the Pa' Chan sign refers to a social classification.

142 Houston, Stuart, and Taube, "Folk Classification of Classic Maya Pottery", 720.
143 Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 148.
144 Tokovinine and Zender, "Lords of Windy Water: The Royal Court of Motul de San José in Classic Maya Inscriptions", 5.

EMBLEM GLYPHS AND IDENTITY: A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

Scholars have debated the meaning of emblem glyphs since their recognition and description as a distinct main sign with associated glyphic embellishment by Heinrich Berlin in1958. Berlin did not offer a specific function of the emblem glyph, instead suggesting that these signs could stand for dynasties, deities, or city names. Shortly after his publication Tatiana Proskouriakoff further contextualized their meaning by linking their appearance to royal dynastic sequences.[145] In 1976, Joyce Marcus echoed one of Berlin's original interpretations that the main sign of distinct emblem glyphs related to geographic localities or territories, whether the capital or the surrounding area. In her estimation, the distribution of these glyphs over geographic spaces revealed hierarchical networks of dependence, participation, and displacement.[146] Peter Mathews and John Justeson bolstered the argument that these main signs referred to territories controlled by the city in power, but argued that the emblem glyph functioned as a royal title linking the named person to a relatively independent city-state under their rule.[147] By the publication of "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs" Mathews conceded that the main sign of the emblem glyph could refer to geographic places, dynasty or lineage names, or loosely-defined ethnic groups.[148]

David Stuart and Stephen Houston demonstrated that the main signs of emblem glyphs, whether embedded into a hieroglyphic phrase or used alone, could stand for

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145 Tatiana Proskouriakoff, "Historical Implications of a Pattern of Dates at Piedras Negras, Guatemala," *American Antiquity* 25, no. 4 (1960): 454–75.

146 Marcus, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization*, 10, 11.

147 Mathews, "The Sculptures of Yaxchilan", 352, 357-359.

148 Mathews, "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs," 24.

historical or mythological toponyms of vastly different sizes.[149] Placing the main sign into a royal title evoked the region under the elite's control or linked their geographic or social origin to the royal court.[150] The blending of the identity of the court with the encircling city or region results in the use of a geographically-situated toponym to reference an abstract notion of community. In addition, the insertion of mythological places into emblem glyphs allowed those in power to claim special connection to supernatural legitimizing forces such as founding ancestors or patron gods.[151]

Scholars have also adopted and elaborated on the view of emblem glyphs as symbols of dynasties of royal houses that included both the main royal lineage and the extended family.[152] Such models contextualize emblem glyph relocation and erasure as social shifts rather than geographic changes. Alexandre Tokovinine extends these hypotheses, suggesting that a geographic element only enters the equation when the emblem glyph is used to evoke common memory of an original dynasty or location.[153] In addition, rather than referring to a distinct spatial category or a large swath of land, the emblem might refer to space within a site most important for defining identity. This "space" might be physical – such as in the royal court – or abstract – such as the

149 David Stuart and Stephen Houston, *Classic Maya Place Names*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art & Archaeology 33 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1994), 7-12.

150 Stuart and Houston, *Classic Maya Place Names*, 19-33, 81-89.

151 *Ibid.*, 93

152 Martin, "Of Snakes and Bats: Shifting Identities at Calakmul", 11,12; Tokovinine and Zender, "Lords of Windy Water: The Royal Court of Motul de San José in Classic Maya Inscriptions", 5.

153 Alexdandre Tokovinine, "People from a Place: Re-Interpreting Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs," in *Acta MesoAmericana: Ecology, Power, and Religion in Maya Landscapes*, ed. Christian Isendahl and Bodil Liljefors Persson, vol. 23, 2011, 92–106; Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*.

community in which these vases circulate.[154] When referring to these socially charged locations, the emblem conveys an intersection of the material location in the immediate vicinity of the ruler and a larger "spatial and relational" social sphere filled with his lineage and allies.[155] This model allows the main signs of emblem glyphs to evoke all three aspects which scholars sought to emphasize: geographic, political and social.

Many emblem glyphs might still refer to mythological places as referenced by Stuart and Houston in 1994. Christophe Helmke postulated that the insertion of a mythological emblem glyph allowed an emic viewer to recall the connotations of overarching cultural narratives. The use of mythological emblem glyphs in the titular phrase of an elite person tied the holder of the title and his subordinate region to a particular aspect of rule or mythology, rather than simply to a geographic location.[156]

Today's efforts also strive to better understand how the Classic Maya conceived of the social aspects of the emblem glyph from an emic point of view. Mathews first postulated that the emblem glyph defined group identity among the elites of a court with cosmological or political underpinnings.[157] When paired with the *ajaw* glyph, the emblem links the status of the named person to a social and geographic sphere while accessing the underlying narratives and identities of the named place.[158]

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154 Tokovinine, "People from a Place: Re-Interpreting Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs", 92, 100, 104.

155 Inomata and Houston, "Opening the Royal Maya Court", 3.

156 Christophe Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings," ed. Christophe Helmke and Jaroslaw Zralka, *Contributions in New World Archaeology* 3, no. Special Issue: Proceedings of the 1st Cracow Maya Conference Archaeology and Epigraphy of the Eastern Central Maya Lowlands February 25–27, 2011, Cracow (2012): 92, 93.

157 Mathews, "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs," 21.

158 Gronemeyer, "Statements of Identity - Emblem Glyphs in the Nexus of Political Relations", 31, 34; Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*, 85.

The combination of emblem glyphs with other titles reveals how elites of varying importance and power expressed their identities and justified their presence in the court.[159] When an emblem glyph appears in inscription, the sign refers to the particular site or the site that dominates the wider region. In other words, the linking of an elite's name to the emblem glyph provides an emic identifier and political statement about the person's political affiliations through the invoking of dynastic ties and/or geographic locality.[160] The personal use of emblem glyphs not only separates the actor from other foreign elites, but also serves as an "extroverted" claim of self-representation.[161]

The success of these emblem glyphs in preserving memory results from a combination of community and personal experience. Interpretations of Classic Maya place memory can draw from more general anthropological theoretical texts that inquire into how place memory forms. For instance, both Dusan Boric and Alasdair Whittle describe memory as a fluid, created experience that culminates from inner and outer experiences. Celebrations and the creation of art help to solidify the memories of these events while fictionalizing certain aspects, essentially forming a shared community memory of a place at a moment in time.[162] For the Classic Maya, the polychrome styles that use emblem glyphs to exert claims of origin to courts across the Maya Lowlands depend on a similar coalescence of personal experience, material encounter with an

159 Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 93.

160 Gronemeyer, "Statements of Identity - Emblem Glyphs in the Nexus of Political Relations", 13.

161 *Ibid.*, 32.

162 Dusan Boric, "Introduction: Memory, Archaeology, and the Historical Condition," in *Archaeology and Memory* (Oxbow Books, 2010), 2, 3; Alasdair Whittle, "The Diversity and Duration of Memory," in *Archaeology and Memory* (Oxbow Books, 2010), 42.

object or location, and collective community memory passed down over time. The blending of immediate events, active social bonds, and past evidence of identity that survives in the accumulation of architecture and settlement patterns of the site all contribute to an understanding of these sites as real locations and social spheres. The placement of an emblem on a piece of art rather than a person similarly anchors the work to these remembered geographic and social spheres. Within the dedicatory text of a polychrome vase, the emblem glyph defines the local ties of the owner and also makes an outward assertion of belonging to the elite class of a specific royal court.

EMBLEM GLYPHS AND THE NOTION OF "PLACE" ON COMPARATIVE STYLES

The Codex and Ik' styles have a greater depth of scholarship than the Red Background style, and thus more fully exemplify the complexities of style and its role as an artistic marker of political and social identity. For the two polities linked to these styles, the *Kaanul* and the *Ik'* polities, the emblem glyph's appearance in art made claims of affiliation for different purposes. The historical context of these regions allows for an examination of how the Classic Maya elite used style and place as tools to express their belonging to certain groups. The emblem glyph plays a vital role in this belonging, as does the common imagery projected from the painted surface of the vessel.

The Snake Emblem and the Codex Style

Joyce Marcus first hypothesized that the Snake emblem referred to the kingdom of Calakmul.[163] Shortly after, Michael Coe tied Codex style vases to this political sphere

163 Marcus, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization*.

based on the emblem glyph's presence in dedicatory texts and painted imagery of hieroglyphic dynastic vases.[164] Current research seeks to correlate the production of the Codex style vases with the polity of the Snake Kingdom, often referred to as *Kaan* or *Kaanul*. The majority of Codex style vases date to the late seventh and early eighth centuries (AD 672-731), a time in Calakmul for expansion and competition with the other regional superpower, Tikal.[165]

The production of Codex style vessels in the Snake Kingdom's reign also coincides with the relocation of the Snake Dynasty from Dzibanche to Calakmul, shortly before the city achieved a golden age of expansion.[166] The Snake Emblem's appearance on Calakmul monuments in the seventh century replaced the Bat Emblem of the Early Classic, symbolizing the relocation of the royal lineage to this larger city.[167] According to monumental texts on sites throughout the Lowlands, the Late Classic Snake Kingdom at Calakmul extended its military expansion far into the Petén region. Monumental stelae and staircases document the Snake Kingdom's support of Dos Pilas in the Petexbatun region for a war against Tikal.

The city focused not only on martial power, but on political and cultural consolidation. The Snake Kingdom oversaw a variety of activities at conquered and subordinate centers. After defeating the kingdom of Naranjo, the Snake lord established a

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164 Coe, *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Classic Maya Ceramics*, 28.

165 Dorie Reents-Budet, Simon Martin, and Ronald L. Bishop, "Codex-Style Pottery: Recovering Context and Meaning," in *III Texas Symposium* (presented at the The Maya Meetings at Texas, The University of Texas at Austin, 1997); Martin and Grube, *Chronicles of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 104; Garcia, "Reflections on the Codex Style and the Princeton Vessel," 1.

166 Martin and Grube, *Chronicles of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 101, 108.

167 Martin, "Of Snakes and Bats: Shifting Identities at Calakmul", 11, 12.

new dynasty more malleable to its control. The Calakmul king Yuknoom the Great also managed the inaugurations of K'inich Balaam at El Perú and other notable kings of powerful vassal sites. Panel 1 at La Corona even documents the raising and schooling of a young elite male at Calakmul before his return to rule the site of La Corona.[168]

This spread of Calakmul's influence over the vast region also appears in the production of Codex style vases with and without the *kaanul* emblem glyph. This vast spread of the Snake emblem throughout the region suggests that the emblem stood for far more than the capital city. Instead, the sign stood for the area united under a powerful central authority and by a common political rule.[169]

In addition, the Snake Emblem glyph linked the Codex style vases marked with this emblem to the Snake kingdom's political and social sphere. While many scholars such as Michael Coe initially hypothesized that the capital of Calakmul produced these fine wares, sourcing of the clay and the discovery of ceramic workshops reveals that the majority of vases originate from secondary city centers. Archaeological investigations found that Nakbé, a secondary site in north central Petén near the Mexican border, produced a large section of this pottery for broad segments of Classic Maya society.[170]

When secondary centers use Calakmul's name on their wares, the emblem glyph emphasizes the power of the capital as a unifying entity. As a city seeking to expand and maintain foothold on the turbulent political stage of the Late Classic Codex style vessels

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168 Martin and Grube, *Chronicles of the Maya Kings and Queens*, 108, 109.
169 *Ibid.*, 104.
170 Coe, *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Classic Maya Ceramics*, 28; Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 153, 154.

acted as visible proof of solidarity and political belonging to a larger political sphere. The wide variation of painting and hieroglyph quality in vessels with or without the *kaanul* emblem also reinforces the interest of non-royal elites in sharing this tradition. The carefully labeled narrative content of the vases proclaims the privilege of the owner in sharing the mythological and historic knowledge of the capital's high culture. Nobles across the Lowlands who created, used, or gifted these items participated in the building of a collective identity under one city while competing to display their knowledge of common cultural tropes and religious ideologies. I would suggest that the appearance of the Snake Emblem on most polychrome vases describes a larger region united under one authority, rather than a specific historical court.

The Ik' Emblem and the Ik' Style

After Joyce Marcus proposed that the seat of the *Ik'* court rested in Motul de San Jose and Michael Coe related the Pink Glyph style to the *Ik'* site, scholars compared the historical content on the vases and stelae in order to compile a loose chronology of rulers and activities.[171] This wealth of information informs our understanding of prestige item production and distribution in a way that the Codex and Red Background styles cannot. Many of these vases date to the eighth century, a time of growing power of subsidiary sites and increasingly decentralized power. However, the *Ik'* court enjoyed a remarkable level of stability that lasted well into the ninth century at Motul de San Jose. After this

171 Marcus, *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands: An Epigraphic Approach to Territorial Organization*, 9; Coe, *Lords of the Underworld: Masterpieces of Classic Maya Ceramics*, 130.

point, evidence points to the relocation of the *Ik'* court to the nearby sites of Tayasal or Flores, where the lineage continued into the Conquest period.[172]

The *Ik'* emblem occurs as a reference to the social sphere of the court and its place in the site of Motul de San Jose, while the toponym *Ik'a'* – which translates to "windy water" – refers to the geographic region encompassing the lake. These similarities suggest that the dynasty in power derived their name from the local environment.[173] Many residents of the court used the *Ik'* emblem without the *kuhul* prefix. The presence of this prefix separates the ruler from junior members of the royal family. A large number of *Ik'* titles on these polychrome vases also suggests that many courtiers did not stem from this local group but still had some claim to the social sphere.[174]

Evidence for a palace workshop for elite ceramics of the Ik' style suggests that the court either produced a range of utilitarian and feasting ware or focused on using the local clays to produce only the most elaborate of painted vessels.[175] Examinations of the epigraphy and distributions of workshops reveal that courtly scribes produced ceramics

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[172] Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 90, 91.

[173] Just, *Dancing into Dreams: Maya Vase Painting of the Ik' Kingdom*, 58; Tokovinine and Zender, "Lords of Windy Water: The Royal Court of Motul de San José in Classic Maya Inscriptions", 31, 35.

[174] *Ibid*., 49, 64.

[175] Halperin and Foias, "Motul de San José Palace Pottery Production: Reconstructions from Wasters and Debris", 172,189.

over the careers of several rulers for a local audience, with some foreign artists paying homage to the court through multiple works in the Ik' style .[176]

These secondary centers also produced a large section of Ik' pottery. The wide spread of unknown lords named on these vessels One major example, K2784, echoes the style of painting favored by master artists of the *Ik'* court [**Figure 21**]. In "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", Antonia Foias notes that the paste and temper of the vessel locate the materials to a site on the periphery of the *Ik'* polity's sphere of relations. The dedicatory rim text names the owner as a son of the holy lord of the *Ik'* polity and describes the event as an accession ceremony for the ruler of La Florida, a site to the west of Motul de San Jose. These discrepancies point to the commission of a vessel for the *Ik'* noble by a peripheral site as an act of social negotiation, where the vase acts as a sign of solidarity.[177] Other vases with similar patterns of commissioning and gifting suggest that secondary members of the nobility at the main capital and subsidiary sites participated in this shared artistic tradition. This broad network of production and patronage resulted in a corpus of vases with works produced by artists of widely varying skill-sets over a large region that drew from different materials.[178]

When juxtaposed with the wide distribution of the *Ik'* emblem in this region, the multiple origin points of Ik' ceramic production suggests that style played a role in social cohesion. The emphasis on portraiture and the specific delineation of titles reveals the

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176 Tokovinine and Zender, "Lords of Windy Water: The Royal Court of Motul de San José in Classic Maya Inscriptions", 60.

177 Foias, "The Past and Future of Maya Ceramic Studies", 153.

178 Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 81, 93.

hierarchies of those involved in specific events and implies their importance in local relationships. Rather than competition, the *Ik'* polity used pictorial ceramics as a tool to solidify ties and preserve order between potentially conflicting elites.[179]

In my interpretation, the appearance of the *Ik'* emblem on a polychrome vase refers to a specific location and period in time, rather than the abstract notion of political belonging. The *Ik'* emblem glyph provided a statement of affiliation for the owner of the vase, even when that person or the object originates from outside the specific *Ik'* court. In addition, the connection between the historic subject matter and the emblem also provides a concrete setting for the narrative and emphasized the court as a locus of powerful relationships. Rather than expressing general ties of affiliation to a political sphere, these objects acted as proof of interaction with the ruler. The display of such a vase at a public or private feasting event increased the prestige of the owner by acting as a witness to his social ties and political importance.

Now that the Codex and Ik' style vases have transitioned from mysterious corpuses to well-defined traditions, scholarship can analyze their role as social tools. These two famous styles exemplify the complexities of style and its role as an artistic marker of regional belonging, especially when communicating political identity. Each style intertwined their respective emblem glyphs with common tropes and images in order to link visual qualities with the group or class of consumers from a specific location or social sphere. These precedents for linking visual style to concrete places of social

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179 Reents-Budet et al., "Identity and Interaction: Ceramic Styles and Social History of the Ik' Polity, Guatemala", 90, 91.

interaction provide a foundational methodology that I can use to understand the Red Background vases as a set of objects that actively communicate the ideas of their creators and owners.

THE PA' CHAN EMBLEM AND THE RED BACKGROUND STYLE

Unfortunately, the dearth of surviving Lowlands monuments that bear Pa' Chan emblem and the lack of contextual material on most Red Background vases blocks such a thorough examination of how the style fit into the historical and social circumstances of the Pa' Chan region. However, a study of how the Pa' Chan emblem appears in the archaeological record and on Red Background vases allows several conclusions to be drawn about the relationship of the court to the production of these art objects in the Late Classic.

Heinrich Berlin first identified the Pa' Chan emblem glyph as part of the main sign for Yaxchilán, a site in the Usumacinta Region that exerted influence over a large area. As previously mentioned, the sharing of emblems across sites in different geographic locations or time periods suggests the extension or relocation of a dynastic lineage.[180] The co-existence of the Pa' Chan emblem at Yaxchilán and El Zotz' suggests an extension from El Zotz' to Yaxchilán rather than relocation, but no current texts characterize the relationship between these sites clearly.[181]

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180 Martin, "Of Snakes and Bats: Shifting Identities at Calakmul"; Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives.*

181 Simon Martin, "A Broken Sky: The Ancient Name of Yaxchilan as Pa' Chan," *The PARI Journal* 5, no. 1 (2004): 3; Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 2, 9.

Well-preserved monuments reveal much about Yaxchilán's history, but place its central sphere of activities outside of the area in which Red Background ceramics appear.[182]Although appearing after the Pa' Chan's first regional use in Bejucal, the evolution of the Pa' Chan toponym appears on Yaxchilán's Monuments from the Early to Late Classic.[183] The earliest appearance of the Pa' Chan toponym appears on Stela 27 of Yaxchilán, where the carved monument marked a scattering ceremony on that celebrated a major period ending overseen by Knot-Eye Jaguar on 9.4.0.0.0 (approximately 514 AD). Another early version of the emblem appears on a dynastic lineage list from the mid-sixth century. The list of kings up to K'inich Tatbu Jol II repeated the emblem of Yaxchilán throughout the text, with this pattern continuing on monuments into the ninth century.[184] Rather than insert a cleft into the *chan* hieroglyph, the Early Classic king list placed a completely broken *chan* sky glyph on top of a whole *ajaw* glyph [**Figure 22**].

Both early and late versions of this emblem appears on monuments at Bejucal, an Early Classic site, the Early and Late Classic period site of El Zotz', and at a stela on the long-surviving site of Uaxactun [**Figure 23**].[185] Initial confusion over the true seat of the Pa' Chan court has been somewhat mitigated through archaeological excavations in the region. Stephen Houston's study of the monuments bearing the Pa' Chan emblems argues the Early Classic dynasty seated at Bejucal, where the Pa' Chan emblem glyph appears

182 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 6.

183 Martin, "A Broken Sky: The Ancient Name of Yaxchilan as Pa' Chan", 3.

184 Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 100.

185 Martin, "A Broken Sky: The Ancient Name of Yaxchilan as Pa' Chan", 3; Stephen Houston et al., *A La Sombra de Un Gigante: Epigrafía Y Asentamiento de El Zotz, Petén*, Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Guatemala (Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala: Asosiacion Tikal, 2007), 413, 417; Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 7; Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 94.

on Stela 1, eventually moved to the site of El Zotz' as part of a larger effort to challenge the capital of Tikal.[186] This dynasty later expanded to the larger aforementioned site of Yaxchilán.[187] The distribution of the glyph at these various sites resonates with Tokovinine's arguments, where non-local royal dynasties used emblem glyphs as a reference to mythological or historical beginnings. After reviewing the many functions and connotations of the emblem glyph for the Classic Maya, Tokovinine, Helmke, and Houston all argue that the Pa' Chan emblem's distribution over the region reveals the royal family's interests in connecting their expanding dynasty with a place of shared origin points. [188]

However, before these scholars established the possible historical framework for the spread of the Pa' Chan court and its associated emblem, the distribution of this glyph across the region has led to conflicting claims for the seat of the Pa' Chan court after their establishment in Bejucal. Stela 2 of Uaxactun bears the Pa' Chan main sign outside of a royal title in a text commemorating the date of 9.16.0.0.0 2 Ajaw 13 Tzek, a date from the Late Classic approximately 751 AD) [**Figure 24**]. On this date, an offering or monument was dedicated at the Pa' Chan site.[189] The comparison of the emblem on this monument to the excavation of the Initial Series vase [**Figure 3**] and other ceramics led

186 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 2, 9.

187 Houston et al., *A La Sombra de Un Gigante: Epigrafía Y Asentamiento de El Zotz, Petén*, 395.

188 Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*, 71, 79, 81; Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings"; Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant"; Houston, "The Epigraphy of El Zotz."

189 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 7.

Peter Mathews to declare Uaxactun as the seat of the Pa' Chan dynasty in 1982.[190] However, Stela 12 and 14 of Uaxactun provide a different local emblem for Uaxactun that consists of a *k'an* and *ko* compound glyph, suggesting that the Pa' Chan emblem on Stela 2 acted as a toponym for a different place.

By the 1990s, stronger epigraphic and material evidence linked the Early-to-Late Classic seat of the lowland Pa' Chan dynasty to the site of El Zotz'. David Stuart documented the Pa' Chan main sign in emblem glyph titles on two monuments, Lintel 1 from the Early Classic period and Stela 4 from the Terminal Classic.[191]

Ian Graham identified Lintel I of El Zotz' in the Denver Art Museum by comparing the work to wooden shards left after the looting of the monument. While badly weathered, the zapote wood lintel exhibited a royal portrait and name.[192] Stela 1 links this king's name, which mirrors the structure of kingly names on monuments at Bejucal and other inscriptions referring to the Pa' Chan site, to the Pa' Chan emblem glyph.[193]

The other main material bearing the Pa' Chan emblem – the mobile Red Background vases – provides little in the way of concrete locative value. Stylistically,

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190 Houston et al., *A La Sombra de Un Gigante: Epigrafía Y Asentamiento de El Zotz, Petén*, 413; Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 155, 197-198; Marc Zender, "A Study of Two Uaxactun-Style Tamale Serving Vessels," in *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases*, vol. 6 (New York, NY: Kerr Associates, 2000), 1038–55; Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 100.

191 *Ibid.*, 101; Stephen Houston et al., *Al Valle de Buenavista: Investigaciones Recientes En El Centro Dinástico de El Zotz Y Sus Cercanías*, Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Guatemala (Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala: Asosiacion Tikal, 2011).

192 Stuart, "El Zotz and the 'Split Sky' Emblem Glyph", 1,3; Houston et al., *A La Sombra de Un Gigante: Epigrafía Y Asentamiento de El Zotz, Petén*, 413.

193 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8.

these vessels date to the transitional period between the Early and Late Classic (approximately the seventh or eighth centuries).[194] Originally attributed to Uaxactun due to the Initial Series vase's discovery in a scientific excavation, today's scholarship considers the Red Background vases to stem from El Zotz'.[195] Limited chemical analysis of the clays in some vessels such as K4962 [**Figure 11**] suggest that source clay matches sherds found at El Zotz'.[196] However, much like the production infrastructure at Calakmul and Motul de San Jose, production might not have stemmed from El Zotz's court alone.

During this debate on location, Simon Martin deciphered the meaning and pronunciation of the main sign as *pa'-CHAN*. Known as a variant of the *chan* glyph where the cleft shows a different in pronunciation, the added "Pa'" syllable emphasizes the split in the upper register of the glyph. The addition of tendril elements found on other glyphs with *pa* as a prefix (such as the month of *Pax*) and the *nah* suffix also reinforce this reading of this emblem.[197]

The resulting meaning most likely refers to the literal image – a "split sky". Such a name might refer to a landscape feature or a mythological origin story. The multiple connotations to a "split sky" – whether the breaking of dawn in later colloquialisms, a mythical celestial event, or a feature of the landscape, problematize a specific reading of the emblem's subtleties. In 2012, Helmke also related the tendrils of the *pax* glyph to the

194 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8.
195 Smith, "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun."
196 Stuart, "El Zotz and the 'Split Sky' Emblem Glyph" 3; Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 155.
197 Martin, "A Broken Sky: The Ancient Name of Yaxchilan as Pa' Chan", 1, 3, 4-5.

sensory experience of a sound, and cites later ethnography by Sahagún and from the Florentine Codex where the breaking and rending of the sky occurs as a miraculous meeting of the heavens and earth.[198]

A secondary emblem often accompanies the Pa' Chan hieroglyph on monuments at El Zotz' and Yaxchilán. David Stuart refers to the sign as a *muluc* variant, while Sven Gronemeyer translates the sign as *kaaj*, a modified *kab* or earth glyph [**Figure 26**]. The darkened spot with a descending tail perhaps refers to a jade ear ornament. In an iconographic study undertaken by Christophe Helmke, this glyph possibly refers to the cavernous court of underworld gods. Such a connotation provides an important contrast and juxtaposition with the heavenly connotations of Pa' Chan.[199]

To date, no texts reference this emblem as a real geographic location or in political titles from before the Late Classic; although the emblem's dynastic line displays an extra score of mytho-historical kings that extend into the deep past much like the *Kaanul* dynasty.[200] The sign primarily appears in reference to Yaxchilán kings, but the Late Classic El Zotz' Lintel 1 and the Terminal Classic Stela 4 also feature *kaaj* as part of the double emblem.[201] However, *kaaj* rarely appears on painted ceramics and does not appear on any of the examined fifty-four Red Background vases. The Pa' Chan main sign

198 Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings"; Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*, 73, 74.

199 Stuart, "El Zotz and the 'Split Sky' Emblem Glyph", 1, 2; Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 7; Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 107-114.

200 Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*, 73.

201 Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 101; Houston et al., *Al Valle de Buenavista: Investigaciones Recientes En El Centro Dinástico de El Zotz Y Sus Cercanías*.

and emblem glyph often appear outside of the context of the duo emblem, suggesting the "split sky" to be the more important of the two signs.[202]

These underlying connotations of heavenly portent and divine kingship lend a new facet to Red Background vessels that bear the Pa' Chan emblem. However, the placement of the main sign of Pa' Chan in the dedicatory rim text adds another layer of meaning that must be considered outside of the realm of emblem glyphs.

RED BACKGROUND VASES AND THE PA' CHAN EMBLEM: AN ANALYSIS OF TEXT AND IMAGE

Scholars such as those defining the Codex and Ik' styles up to this point have focused on analyzing the main sign as a political reference or toponym marker. The emphasis on emblem glyphs, in particular, provided a connection between the identity of a historic individual and a location and allowed scholars an etic, or outsider's, method to classify style to a time or place. The Classic Maya also displayed the interest in linking style and polity in an indirect way through the inclusion of the emblem glyph title in the name of the owner or creator of the vessel. While an indirect link, the relation of these styles with specific emblematic titles suggests that the Classic Maya envisioned an emic classification of certain styles into respective social spheres. The Red Background vase uses a more direct and self-aware route through the integration of the main sign into the text describing the vessel, reinforcing the importance of style as a locative or social marker to the Classic Maya.

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202 Gronemeyer, "Statements of Identity - Emblem Glyphs in the Nexus of Political Relations", 24; Tokovinine, *Place and Identity in Classic Maya Narratives*, 69-70.

While the Pa' Chan emblem does appear as part of royal titles in the same manner as Codex and Ik' style vases, the Pa' Chan main sign also appears in the hieroglyphic formula to describe the vessel on at least twenty-six vases [**Table 1**]. No other painted style on record customizes the dedicatory text in such a way.

Michael Coe first recognized the recurring pattern of ceramic dedicatory texts in *The Maya Scribe and his World*. He first conceived of this text as the written expression of a funeral chant or rite, such as the prayers recorded in the Egyptian Book of the Dead.[203] After this initial description, many scholars have endeavored to better characterize the nature of the text as the completion of the vessel and often names the use and owner.[204] Like other hieroglyphic inscriptions on monuments, the dedicatory text often uses the formula:

"date + verb phrase + possessed noun + prepositional phrase + name of the owner".

Dedicatory texts range from simple to complex, choosing to convey the type of vessel, the food which the vessel holds, or the owner and his or her royal titles. When stripped down to its barest elements, the dedicatory text emphasizes the completion of the painting of the vase. Even simpler painted vessels only bear the words for "cup" – *u jaay*

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203 Coe, *The Maya Scribe and His World*, 22.

204 David F. Mora-Marin, *The Primary Standard Sequence: Database Compilation, Grammatical Analysis, and Primary Documentation* (FAMSI, 2004); David F. Mora-Marin, *La Secuencia Estándar Primaria: Compilación de Base de Datos, Análisis Gramatical, Y Documentación Primaria* (FAMSI, 2008); Nikolai Grube, "An Investigation of the Primary Standard Sequence on Classic Maya Ceramics," in *Sixth Mesa Redonda de Palenque, June 8-June 14, 1986*, ed. Merle Green Robertson (London and Hamburg: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 223–32; Barbara MacLeod, "Deciphering the Primary Standard Sequence" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1990); Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*; Brian Stross, "Glyphs on Classic Maya Vessels: The Introductory Formula of the Primary Standard Sequence," in *Seventh Palenque Round Table, 1989*, ed. Merle Green Robertson and Virginia M. Fields (San Francisco: The Pre-Columbian Art Research Institute, 1994), 187–93; Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 2005.

(his/her cup) and *y-uk'ib'* (his/her drinking cup) – to suggest that the conceptual use of the vessel mattered greatly.[205] On ceramics, this standard structure results in the typical phrase "Here ascends/ is painted the drinking cup for *kakaw* of [name and titles]". Such constructions result in a phrase typical to vases such as K771 [**Figure 4**], which contains a rim text that reads:

"ay tz'ibil nal? jich yuk'ib' ta yutal kakaw paat? aj-pitzal aj-Chan aj-tij a-1?-bak".

This phrase loosely translates to: "Here is the painted drinking cup, for his fruited cacao dedicated for he the youthful, he of the sky, he of ?, he of one captive". These compound glyphs not only adhere to the typical dedicatory text, they stylistically mirror the Codex style's aesthetics of graceful, calligraphic lines and complex detail.

Red Background vases also reference the same standard dedicatory rim text, but draw out the syllables into Head Variants [**Figure 1**]. For instance, the Head Variant dedicatory text of K1743 reads:

"ay ? yich u-tz'ibil Pa' Chan jaay y-uk' ib' na?".

This text translates to: "Here is? his painted Pa' Chan cup, his drinking cup."

The tendency toward Head Variants and greater spacing of syllables often results in shorter, more basic dedicatory texts on Red Background vessels. In addition, these Head Variants resonate with the *wayob'* in the lower register through direction and proportion to reinforce the link between the unusual hieroglyphs and the painted subjects of the vase.

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205 Stephen D. Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube, "Folk Classification of Classic Maya Pottery," *American Anthropologist* 91, no. 3 (September 1989): 720–26; Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 121-122.

However, this syllabic spacing is not the most unique difference. The Pa' Chan emblem glyph does often appear as a royal title after the owner's name, similar to the Ik' and Codex style. At letter I of the dedicatory rim text on K7413, the Pa' Chan emblem appears before the hieroglyph for *jaay,* the term for the vessel, which results in the emblem acting as a description of the vase rather than the *ajaw,* or lord, as occurs in an emblem glyph.

After attributing the Pa' Chan emblem to an object rather than a person, the resulting translation for this vessel interprets Pa' Chan as an adjective, reading "his or her Pa' Chan drinking cup". The Pa' Chan emblem appears before *jaay* and does not precede *uk'ib'* in the corpus of vessels addressed in this corpus, suggesting that "Pa' Chan" maintained a conceptual tie to the descriptive term "thin-walled or clay cup" in the dedicatory text.

How does the Pa' Chan emblem act as a descriptive marker? Red Background vessels that insert the Pa' Chan emblem do not display vastly different visuals than the remaining Red Background corpus. If not describing a visual or material difference from other Red Background vessels, this description pertains to use or ownership. When considering the Pa' Chan emblem in its original meaning of a social or political sphere, the dichotomy of "Pa' Chan" or "not-Pa' Chan" then shifts from a stylistic distinction to a situational one. While Red Background ceramics might stem from multiple sources of production at the Pa' Chan site, those bearing the Pa' Chan emblem explicitly tie the

royal court into its sphere of circulation.[206] As a result, the appearance of the Pa' Chan main sign in the descriptive section of the dedicatory text explicitly links the social sphere or geographic area to the style.

The Pa' Chan "designer label", a term coined by Reents-Budet to describe the insertion of this glyph into the dedicatory text of Red Background vases, might appear in the descriptive text as a symbol of increased quality. After examining the material, she claims that Uaxactun-produced vessels claimed this marker and that the nearby site of El Zotz' coopted the style without the symbol.[207] Recent shifts in text analysis no longer consider Uaxactun to be the origin of the Pa' Chan vases, but a similar scenario of location-based branding might hold up with more chemical analysis of Red Background vases. Regardless, further research into the material differences between Pa' Chan and unmarked Red Background vases must occur before assigning this level of intent to the inclusion of the emblem as a brand name.

Instead of assuming the emblem to be a brand name that distinguishes these products through a material or qualitative difference, a more conservative interpretation of this marker postulates that this glyph proclaims a difference in use. Artists creating Red Background vessels outside of the court, whether the actual location or the social sphere, might not have the privilege to use the main sign in this way, while vessels with different visuals but still from the Pa' Chan court could insert the sign into the description. While not the only possibility, this hypothesis best explains the overlap of

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206 Tokovinine, "People from a Place: Re-Interpreting Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs", 104.
207 Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 155.

Red Background vessels and those using the main sign of Pa' Chan. Further research should expand the clay sourcing of these vases in order to provide a picture of their production in the region.

Of the surviving material, only the Pa' Chan emblem appears within the dedicatory texts of Red Background vessels, suggesting that the visual content expresses something of this royal court's aesthetics and values. What does the common imagery proclaim about the Pa' Chan court? The bright red background divide these vases from the palettes of other styles, while the appearance of the Pa' Chan emblem highlights certain narrative scenes or tableaus as inherent to the identity of Pa' Chan. As previously outlined in the second chapter, the Red Background style pictures four main categories of visual content: supernatural figures, wayob', mythological or mytho-historical narrative, or only the unique dedicatory rim text.

The most obvious relationship between the appearances of the Pa' Chan emblem and the visual aspects of this unique style is the red background. On the most literal level, the Classic Maya word for red (*chak*) refers to a range of hues and shades that might also encompass orange.[208] Similarly, Red Background vases do not exhibit a uniform shade of red. Instead, the background red varies from crimson to maroon, with others verging on red-orange [**Figures 1, 8, 11, 12**].

208 Stephen Houston et al., *Al Cielo Quebrado: Investigaciones En El Zotz, 2008*, Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Guatemala (Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala: Asosiacion Tikal, 2009), 30, 31.

Chak also referred to the direction of East, and mimics the color of the sky at daybreak and sunset.[209] I suggest that the use of red for a background might refer to either this liminal space of daybreak, embodied in the emblem of Pa' Chan and all of its mythical or physical connotations. In addition, the use of red in spiritually charged locations such as tombs and temples suggests that this color evokes either an imagined underworld or the interior of the earth itself.[210]

While the Red Background vessels give no indication of place for the action in the painted scene, the color of the background and presence of *way* creatures suggests a space of penetration into the supernatural. Current theories about the Pa' Chan emblem's connotations and connections to a mythical place from which divine authority and kingship emerged augments this interpretation of the scene as an otherworldly space – especially if kingship is as intimately tied into the possession of *way* creatures as epigraphy suggests.[211]

On this red background and possibly supernatural space, *wayob'* dance or perform ritual sacrifice [**Figures 1 and 26**]. In these images, common patterns and combinations of *way* perform alongside their text labels. About more than half of all red background vases contain images of *way* creatures, with almost thirty percent of these *way* vases bearing the Pa' Chan glyph [**Table 1**].

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209 Houston et al., *Al Cielo Quebrado: Investigaciones En El Zotz, 2008*, 27, 28; Michael Coe and Mark van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005):123; Alyce de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala" (M.A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Brown University, 2013), 29.

210 Quirarte, "The Representation of Underworld Processions in Maya Vase Painting: An Iconographic Study", 144.

211 Helmke, "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings", 107.

Out of fifty-seven different *way* identified by Nikolai Grube and Werner Nahm , at least one creature is epigraphically related to Pa' Chan.[212] This skeletal *way* bears a basket and conch shell on his back, and often holds a staff. The character's name transliterates to *u ku chi kimi* on K2023, where the text also marks him as the *way* of the *pa' chan ajaw.* In other words, this *way* named "Deer Death" belongs to the lord of Pa' Chan. This creature also dances in procession with other *way* identical or similar to those accompanying him on K2023 on the vases K3061, K4922, and the Codex style vase K771 [**Figures 5, 6, 27, 4**]. While K2023 explicitly links him to the region or social sphere of the Pa' Chan court, Deer Death commonly appears without a specific location or exhibits ties to mythological places.[213]

Today's scholars still struggle to characterize the complicated relationship between king and *way* creature. For the modern Maya, every individual has a *way* spirit companion such as a deer or rabbit that comprises part of their self and shares their fate.[214] However, the Classic Maya seem to focus this notion of "co-essence" through a different lens. As anthropomorphized creatures with the traits of deer, snakes, jaguars, and even clothed humans, the *way* cannot be mistaken for creatures of the mortal plane.[215]

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212 Nikolai Grube and Werner Nahm, "A Census of Xibalba: A Complete Inventory of Way Characters on Maya Ceramics," in *The Maya Vase Book: A Corpus of Rollout Photographs of Maya Vases*, vol. 4 (New York: Kerr Associates, 1994), 686–715.

213 Grube and Nahm, "A Census of Xibalba: A Complete Inventory of Way Characters on Maya Ceramics", 705.

214 James L. Fitzsimmons, *Death and the Classic Maya Kings*, The Linda Schele Series in Maya and Pre-Columbian Studies (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 47.

215 Inga Calvin, "Where the Wayob Live: A Further Examination of Classic Maya Supernaturals," in *The Maya Vase Book*, vol. 5 (New York: Kerr Associates, 1997), 868, 876.

The hieroglyph for *way* emphasizes the roles of kings and kingship in this act of communing with a spiritual co-essence [**Figure 29**]. In the common representation of *way*, an *ajaw* sign is partially obscured by a jaguar pelt. The literal meaning of *way* as a verb refers to "sleeping", "dreaming", or "transforming", where individuals could access their specific co-essences. Kings especially accessed these *way* in rituals and occasions of sacrifice.[216] However, as more ethnographic evidence gathers and scholars begin to delve deeper into the text, many such as Inga Calvin suggest that *way* primarily belong to "sacred locations from which elite *ahaw* derive their power and charter for political domination".[217] For the modern Maya, certain sacred places or sites contain a soul or *way*. The Classic Maya might have welcomed similar thought patterns, especially considering that *way* could textually belong to historic individuals, deities, or locations.[218]

In texts such as the label for Deer Death on K2028, which describe the *way* as belonging to the lord of Pa' Chan, the text mixes the connotations of an individual ruler with his social and political station with his geographic sphere of influence. The *way* becomes a co-essence of kingship itself, where the ruler proves his ability to rule by enjoying special access to a restricted supernatural entity that embodies his domain.[219] This relationship rises over an individual partnership and suggests that this access to the *way* of a royal station appears as part of the ruler's "self".

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216 Houston and Stuart, *The Way Glyph: Evidence for "Co-Essences" among the Classic Maya*, 6, 13.
217 Calvin, "Where the Wayob Live: A Further Examination of Classic Maya Supernaturals", 868.
218 Fitzsimmons, *Death and the Classic Maya Kings*, 46.
219 Kathryn M. Kucharski, "Wayob and Their Meaning Among the Classic Maya" (M.A. Thesis, Harvard University: Anthropology and Archaeology, 1998), 2, 52-53.

The second largest set of vases that feature the Pa' Chan glyph as a description expand little on the projected identity of the court. The Red Background hieroglyph vessels such as K5465 and K5350 exhibit only the dedicatory rim text and focus the viewer's attention on the unique hieroglyphs [**Figures 10 and 18**]. Because today's scholarship on Head Variants and their intersection with formality and humor in the Classic period remain limited, the connotations of the Head Variants in the dedicatory text cannot be adequately explored.

Outside of these two sub-genres that regularly feature the Pa' Chan emblem, the vases on which the emblem appears picture popular myths and general supernatural figures do not include the Pa' Chan into the dedicatory rim text as often. K7727, a famous vase at the Princeton Art Museum that pictures key episodes of the Maize God's mythic cycle, exemplifies all the elements of the Red Background style with a finely honed hand [**Figure 12**].[220] In addition, a vase from the Linda Schele archives that possibly pictures the disrobing of God L by the moon rabbit also accesses the stylistic sphere of the Red Background corpus without claiming the object for Pa' Chan [**Figure 17**].[221] Two exceptions includes the Initial Series vase, which outlines a mytho-historic political scene from the seventh b'aktun, and K4548, which pictures a god welcoming an armadillo into his supernatural court [**Figures 3 and 13**]. The tableau of divine scribes, a scene popular in other styles, appears on vessels in the Red Background style both with and without the Pa' Chan description [**Figures 11 and 16**].

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220 Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God", 3, 4.

221 Just 2013: personal correspondence.

When viewing the corpus of material, Red Background ceramics overwhelmingly favor mythical themes. The *way* creatures, which depict elements of kingships and perhaps of the relationships and alliances between courts, and scenes of courtly life (such as the Initial Series Vase and K 4548) still firmly root these narratives in mythology. Owners of such vases proclaim knowledge of not only larger cultural notions of spiritual and religious belonging; they also claim special knowledge to the *way* creatures of certain kings and locations.

THE COURT OF PA' CHAN AT EL ZOTZ'

Few sherds or whole vessels of this type have emerged in archaeological excavations, but chemical matching of some works by the Maya Ceramics Project with Dorie Reents-Budet and Ronald Bishop confirms a link between the production of Red Background ceramics and the political sphere of Pa' Chan. This region stretches from Uaxactun to El Zotz', an area that often came into conflict with the regional power of Tikal.[222]

If the seat of the Pa' Chan court rests in El Zotz', the polity produced Red Background vases as part of a larger campaign to participate in courtly culture. As mentioned in the introduction, unique ceramic styles often accompanied the typical courtly trappings of secondary elites, master artisans, and social relationships with other powerful polities that found expression in public feasting and ritual.[223]

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[222] Stuart and MacLeod, *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 155; Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8.
[223] *Ibid.*, 9.

While circumstantial evidence suggests the Pa' Chan court to be intimately tied to the red Background style, the archaeological connections between the Red Background style and El Zotz' remain tenuous. Much of this confusion results from extensive looting in the late 1960s and 1970s, where illegal and unscientific excavations left almost 90 trenches through major structures and mounds. In fact, many of these vessels emerged shortly before the first mapping and official registration of the El Zotz' site with the Guatemalan government by Marco Antonio Bailey in 1977.[224] George F. Andrews, an archaeologist known for his wide-spread surveys of architecture the Maya area, also noted the appearance of complex stucco decoration and looters' trenches on structures in El Zotz' around the same period.[225] Ian Graham also visited El Zotz' in this period, and created a more detailed map. In addition, he recorded glyphs on surviving stelae and identified the butts of at least two stolen monuments, including Lintel 1 which now resides in the National Museum at Guatemala City after repatriation from the Denver Art Museum. In addition, the Guatemalan Institute of Anthropology and History, as well as the Proyecto Nacional Tikal, further mapped the area throughout the late 1980s and 1990s with a major field season in 1983. These explorations focused on the Acropolis, the Late Classic royal compound.[226]

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224 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 6

225 Juan Pedro Laporte, *Trabajos No Divulgados Del Proyecto Nacional Tikal, Parte 4: Rescate En El Zotz, San Jose, Petén*, Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Guatemala (Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala: Asosiacion Tikal, 2006); George F. Andrews, "Notes on 'El Zotz': A Little-Known Site in Peten, Guatemala," *Mexicon* 8, no. 6 (1986): 123–25.

226 Laporte, *Trabajos No Divulgados Del Proyecto Nacional Tikal, Parte 4: Rescate En El Zotz, San Jose, Petén.*;Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 6-7.

The current project at El Zotz' (Proyecto Arqueologico El Zotz') formed in 2006 under Dr. Stephen Houston at Brown University and Ernesto Arredondo Leiva.[227] Investigations initially concentrated on the Late Classic polity and its relationship with the rest of the Lowlands.[228] The discovery of a royal tomb in the middle of "El Diablo", a major mound first named by George Andrews, aroused interest in the Early Classic portion of the site and increased the time depth of elite occupation of the area.[229]

Investigations into the Early Classic period at El Zotz' trace the increasing importance of red ware in the early elite section of the site. The surge of red-hued ceramics of any type over black ceramics suggests that the color became the defining feature of vessels, rather than form. While the greater context behind this shift requires further investigation, preliminary findings frame this change as an elite phenomenon restricted to the upper-class compound of El Diablo. In other words, the elite court

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227 Stephen D. Houston et al., *Levantamiento Preliminar Y Actividades de Registro En El Zotz, Biotopo San Miguel La Palotada, Petén*, Report submitted to the General Office of the Cultural and Natural Patrimony of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2006; Stephen Houston et al., *Proyecto Arqueológico El Zotz: Informe No.2, Temporada 2007*, Report submitted to the General Office of the Cultural and Natural Patrimony of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2008; Ernesto Arredóndo Leiva and Stephen D. Houston, *Proyecto Arqueológico "El Zotz" Informe No. 1: Temporada de Campo 2008*, Report submitted to the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2008.

228 Griselda Pérez Robles, Edwin Román, and Stephen D. Houston, *Proyecto Arqueológico "El Zotz" Informe No. 4, Temporada 2009*, Report submitted to the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2009; J. L. Garrido Lopez, Stephen D. Houston, and Edwin Román, *Proyecto Arqueológico "El Zotz" Informe No. 5, Temporada 2010*, Report submitted to the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2011; J. L. Garrido Lopez et al., *Proyecto Arqueológico "El Zotz" Informe No. 6, Temporada 2011*, Report submitted to the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2012; J. L. Garrido Lopez et al., *Proyecto Arqueológico "El Zotz" Informe No. 7, Temporada 2012*, Report submitted to the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2013; J. L. Garrido Lopez et al., *Proyecto Arqueológico "El Zotz" Informe No. 8, Temporada 2013*, Report submitted to the Institute of Anthropology and History of Guatemala, Guatemala City, 2014.

229 Román-Ramírez, "Living the Sacred Landscape: The Process of Abandonment of the Early Classic Maya Group of El Diablo at El Zotz, Petén, Guatemala" (Master's Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2011a); Ewa Czapiewska, "Social, Economic and Political Transformation in the Acropolis Group at El Zotz, Guatemala" (UCL Institute of Archaeology, 2011b); de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala", 9-11.

created or encouraged these changes on an insular stage away from the rest of the production areas of the site. In fact, other residences of varying economic level outside of this section do not show a significant change in preference or production in terms of color. These Early Classic red elite ceramics eventually phased out with the shift of the court to the Acropolis in the center of the city, and do not act as predecessors to later ceramics of the Red Background style.[230]

However, I would argue that this shift reveals the interest and ability of the court in appropriating a color or surface decoration to set the ruling dynasty of Early Classic El Zotz' apart from other citizens. In the latter half of the Classic period, where prestige items spread more evenly across a section of the upper class, the insertion of the Pa' Chan glyph would have similar qualities of separating the royal inner court from others using Red Background vases.[231]

Archaeological evidence of a slow and deliberate abandonment of El Diablo in favor of the more central Acropolis in the Late Classic hints at a shift in relations or ruling strategy between the court and the greater polity.[232] In addition, analysis of the Late Classic deposits does not find evidence that the inhabitants of this area produced a great amount of ceramic material. Instead, the Classic actors participated in feasting activities centered on food production and the housing of large feasting occasions.

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230 de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala", 22, 28, 29, 33.

231 LeCount, "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society"; LeCount, "Like Water for Chocolate: Feasting and Political Ritual among the Late Classic Maya at Xunantunich, Belize."

232 Román-Ramírez, "Living the Sacred Landscape: The Process of Abandonment of the Early Classic Maya Group of El Diablo at El Zotz, Petén, Guatemala."

Debitage from these feasts includes sherds with fine polychrome painting, including a sherd that exhibits the emblem glyph of Pa' Chan [**Figure 29**]. At least two other sherds from this context bear the distinctive hieroglyphic dedicatory text that parses specific syllables, proving that such vessels did circulate in this sphere [**Figures 30 and 31**]. Such evidence encourages an image of ceramic consumption by the El Zotz' elite and implicates areas outside of the Acropolis as loci for Red Background and other elite ceramic production.[233]

Perhaps the extent of damage to large mounds throughout the site by looting obfuscates the secondary evidence of a ceramic workshop or palace school. Further investigations at El Zotz' might identify such remains in the elite core. However, such as with the Codex style of Calakmul, the Pa' Chan elite possibly outsourced their production to subsidiary sites or the periphery of the city. Such a model still melds with the use of Pa' Chan as a social marker, although this emblem would refer to an intended social circle rather than an origin point of production.

While Red Background vases might not originate from the royal interior of the city, the relationship between the visual content of the vase and the intended area of use still coalesce into an identity dependent on imagery and display. The aforementioned theories about the meaning of a red background reflect esoteric ideas of kingship and cosmic access at El Zotz'. Aside from solely referring to the color red and the direction of east, *chak* also refers to "something large or intense." This usage often describes deities

233 Czapiewska, "Social, Economic and Political Transformation in the Acropolis Group at El Zotz, Guatemala."; de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala", 62, 64.

or appears as part of a larger royal title. For instance, *chak chok* refers to either a great or fierce youth of the elite class.[234] The elites at El Zotz' accessed these connotations by incorporating *chak* into the royal names that appear on monumental inscriptions and ceramic texts.[235]

The associations of red to the El Zotz' elite extend beyond epigraphy into the built environment. Excavations uncovered red items such as pottery, cubes of hematite, and red painted stucco in the royal tomb of the Early Classic king. In addition, traces of red painted stucco on the façade of the Temple of the Night Sun – a structure that rests atop the royal tomb – enhances this connection for a public audience.[236] Other tombs and temples at sites throughout the Lowlands use red in such a way to denote the supernatural nature of the structure, but the color's level of integration into the written and oral history of the site suggests that red played a large part in the identity of those crafting identity at the site.

If the Pa' Chan court resided at El Zotz', I submit that the directional connotations of red as East, or the direction of daybreak, would have resonated with the "broken sky" reading of the Pa' Chan emblem. The connotations of a liminal space in the conceptual identity of the court, the spiritually-charged built environment, and the painted vessels' mythological imagery depends on the color red to access the imagined landscape of the

234 Houston et al., *Al Cielo Quebrado: Investigaciones En El Zotz, 2008*, 16, 31.

235 Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 8; de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala."

236 Edwin Román et al., *El Diablo: Grupo Cívico-Ceremonial Del Clásico Temprano En El Zotz, El Petén*, Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Guatemala (Museo Nacional de Arqueologia y Ethnologia, Guatemala: Asosiacion Tikal, 2011a; de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala", 31.

underworld.[237] Such an interpretation also explains the disinterest in picturing the historical side of the Pa' Chan court even on vases described as "Pa' Chan drinking vessels". Rather than depict the worldly concerns of the Pa' Chan kings and courtiers, the imagery focuses on mythohistory or, more popularly, on the *way* creatures that personify historical courts.

The repetition of certain *way* in combinations on the surface of many Red Background vessels might describe historical relationships between real Classic courts. As representatives of not only the king but his court, the Pa' Chan *way* embody the specific king's link to the dark side of the supernatural world.[238] The appearance of Deer Death and other Pa' Chan-specific *way* on these vessels visually link the concept of the king to his sphere of his rule, suggesting his special access to mediate with the supernatural forces of disease and control the fortune of the polity [**Figure 5, 6, 28**].[239]

This preoccupation with legitimizing kingship and emphasizing the power of the royal court agrees with interpretations of El Zotz' as a local contender of Tikal who achieved power in the Late Classic. In 2008, Houston characterized the city's sudden explosion of architecture and political reach as an "opportunistic" response to the economic decline of Tikal. Indeed, El Zotz' grew to be a major competitor on the local

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237 Quirarte, "The Representation of Underworld Processions in Maya Vase Painting: An Iconographic Study", 144; Fitzsimmons, *Death and the Classic Maya Kings*, 46.

238 Kucharski, "Wayob and Their Meaning Among the Classic Maya", 52, 53; Fitzsimmons, *Death and the Classic Maya Kings*, 46.

239 Grube and Nahm, "A Census of Xibalba: A Complete Inventory of Way Characters on Maya Ceramics", 705; Kucharski, "Wayob and Their Meaning Among the Classic Maya", 44, 52, 53; Stuart and MacLeod, "The Way Beings," *Sourcebook for the 29th Maya Hieroglyph Forum*, 160, 161; Helmke and Nielsen, "Hidden Identity & Power in Ancient Mesoamerica: Supernatural Alter Egos as Personified Diseases."

political landscape as the Red Background style reaches its zenith. Hieroglyphic texts throughout the Lowlands note the expanding reach of El Zotz' through its allies, as well as growing conflict with Tikal and its political sphere throughout the Late Classic. A massive manmade divide between the two territories gives visible proof of hostilities.[240] Calakmul exerted political influence over El Peru and El Zotz' from the sixth century onward, which undoubtedly intensified hostilities over trade routes and territorial control.[241]

If this connection between artistic style and location solidifies with future data from the ongoing excavations at El Zotz', I suggest that the red-background polychromes could reveal how this upstart rival of Tikal used visual culture to establish itself as a contender on the social and political stage. The economic distribution and official gifting of these vases would visually mark the expansion of this polity throughout the region, while the spreading imagery of mythohistory and the esoteric aspects of kingship would proclaim ideas of Pa' Chan as a court with earthly and heavenly powers.

The makers of these vases actively created new identities through the development of the Red Background style. Those who attached the Pa' Chan main sign to the descriptive section of the dedicatory text linked this vessel to a sphere of trade and use. The level of self-awareness apparent in this section of the corpus suggests that the Pa' Chan court wished to either craft or coopt this style to assert their own identity as contenders on the elite stage.

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[240] Houston, "In the Shadow of a Giant", 2, 8-9; Stuart, "El Zotz and the 'Split Sky' Emblem Glyph", 1-3.
[241] de Carteret, "The Red Shift: Changing Tastes and Their Implications at the Elite Maya Residence of El Diablo, Guatemala", 32

Chapter Four: Conclusions

The insertion of the Pa' Chan emblem into certain vessels of the Red Background style reveals the highly self-conscious process through which the Pa' Chan court emulated other powerful political spheres. These other courts and subsidiary sites shaped and produced objects in the parameters of their own unique artistic aesthetics. The creation or co-opting of a unique style allowed Pa' Chan to communicate their prestige to allies and aggressors alike. The presence and absence of the Pa' Chan emblem on Red Background vessels – while signifying the use of a certain vessel within the social sphere of the Pa' Chan court – reveals that elites could participate in this visual performance regardless of their membership in the topmost-tier of royalty. The sheer number of Red Background vases, the varying levels of skill in the execution of the surface painting, and the presence of the Pa' Chan emblem on half of the current corpus accords with the evidence that polychrome ceramics functioned as prestige items for people of varying social and economic tiers rather than the innermost circle of the royal elite.[242]

The presence of the emblem as an extra marker of prestige reveals that two levels of identity came into play while using the Red Background vessels. While an individual of high standing outside of the court could use and display a Red Background vessel, only certain individuals possessed the privilege to display a Pa' Chan vessel. This establishment of a social or political hierarchy within the Red Background corpus most

[242] LeCount, "Polychrome Pottery and Political Strategies in Late and Terminal Classic Lowland Maya Society."

likely took place between the literate elite of the Maya court, but could also act as an easily recognized "brand."[243]

If acting as a brand, the Pa' Chan emblem might emphasize the quality of the vessel's materials. Further inspection of the quality of vessel paste and temper might shed light on the concrete differences between Pa' Chan and unlabeled Red Background vases. If the inclusion of this emblem emphasizes a special level of quality, the owner of the vase broadcasts his ability to create or secure prestige items of a higher level.[244]

The brand also potentially acts as a symbol of special access, where the inclusion of the emblem increases prestige. The presence of the Pa' Chan descriptor in the dedicatory rim text possibly signals the efforts of the royal family and its closest allies to establish a circle of "inner elites" through the restriction of symbolic resources such as prestige, much like the model of Baines and Yoffee.[245] This model casts the brand as a reaction against the widespread popularity of the style and a necessary marker to create a hierarchy of prestige.

In either case, the gifting and display of these items formed bonds, cemented alliances, and incurred social debt. On display, the vases performed the identities of the giver and the owner, linking both to a sphere of interaction or a community. [246]

Further research into the chronology and geographic origins of these vases might provide some answers into whether the Red Background style emerged before vases with

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243 Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, 166; Pasztory, "Identity and Difference: The Uses and Meanings of Ethnic Styles", 25, 35.

244 Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power*, 161, 174-178.

245 Baines and Yoffee, "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia", 232.

246 Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, 1, 3, 80.

the Pa' Chan label. Two main options readily appear: In one model, the Pa' Chan court appropriated an already existing popular style into its repertoire of products in order to reinforce the superiority of high elite culture over producers of lower rank. Another model suggests a trickle-down effect, where the Pa' Chan court created or refined this style and those producing ceramics outside of the royal sphere desired to copy the product for the masses.

Regardless of these subtleties, the Red Background vases circulated throughout the Maya Lowlands as social currency and visible proof of the owner's participation in the elite sphere. The presence of the Pa' Chan emblem on a vase does not simply anchor the owning individual in a social and geographic sphere.[247] The Pa' Chan marker also roots the object into this network, allowing the surface content to continuously perform the connections of the user to his court.

In addition, the Pa' Chan emblem interacts with the surface content of the vessel to extol the power of the Pa' Chan nobility (or the Pa' Chan dynasty in particular) to commune with the essence of the court and exert power over the larger region. Many Maya elite proclaimed their special access and authority over the supernatural in order to legitimize their social and religious standing. However, the Pa' Chan court carried this association further by emphasizing the arcane knowledge of the king and the equal spiritual standing of Pa' Chan to other courts and mythical places via the tableau of the *wayob'* procession.

[247] Gronemeyer, "Statements of Identity - Emblem Glyphs in the Nexus of Political Relations", 34.

Those sporting the Pa' Chan emblem enjoyed a particular level of prestige, and participated in the construction of a city identity through the display of the object in public occasions. As a unique example of self-awareness, the Pa' Chan court found an avenue to link its name to a product and assert its identity in a more powerful context.

Table 1. Frequencies of Red Background Vases by Genre

Subject:	# of vessels	% by subject	Pa' Chan on vessel	Pa' Chan as description	% out of all with Pa' Chan descriptor
Way	32	53%	9	9	14.75%
Supernatural	11	18.30%	8	7	11.47%
Text	9	15%	8	8	13.11%
Narrative	8	13.30%	3	2	3.27%
Total	61		28	26	**42.60%**

Table 2. List of Current Possible Red Background Vases

Subject	Database No.	Dedicatory Text	Pa'chan Glyph	Pa'chan Main Sign Description
Way				
	K1379	X		
	K1743	X	X	X
	K1901	X		
	K2023	X	X	
	K3060	X	X	X
	K3061	X		
	K3312			
	K3392	X		
	K3459	X		
	K3831	X		
	K4922	X		
	K5017			
	K5084	X		
	K5112	X		
	K5367	X		
	K7220	X	X	X
	K7525	X	X	X
	K8091			
	K9098	X		
	K9254	X	X	X
	K9291	X	X	X

Table 2 (continued). List of Current Possible Red Background Vases

	Christies5094-400	X		
	Mint-P1060750	X		
	Quirarte 1AI-1	?		
	Quirarte 1AI- 2	?		
	Quirarte 1AI- 3	?		
	Quirarte 1AI- 4	?		
	Quirarte 1AI- 6	?		
	Quirarte 1AI- 7	?		
	Quirarte 1AI- 8	X	X	X
	Quirarte 1AI- 9	?		
	Quirarte 1AII-1	?		
	Robiscek 1978 f.146	X	X	X
Supernatural				
	K1386			
	K2669	X	X	
	K3387	X	X	X
	K4605	X	X	X
	K4962	X		
	K5509	X	X	X
	K7147	X	X	X
	K7431	X		
	K7979	X	X	X
	K8252	X	X	X
	K8393		X	X
Text				
	K4511	X		
	K5350	X	X	X
	K5465	X	X	X
	K5647	X	X	X
	K5658	X	X	X
	K6618	X	X	X
	K8418	X	X	X
	K9099	X	X	X
	K9183	X	X	X

Table 2 (continued). List of Current Possible Red Background Vases

Narrative				
	K679	X	X	
	K4143	X		
	K4548	X	X	X
	K5637	X		
	K7727	X		
	Initial Series Vase	X	X	X
	Christies5068-502	X		
	Schele Vase	X		

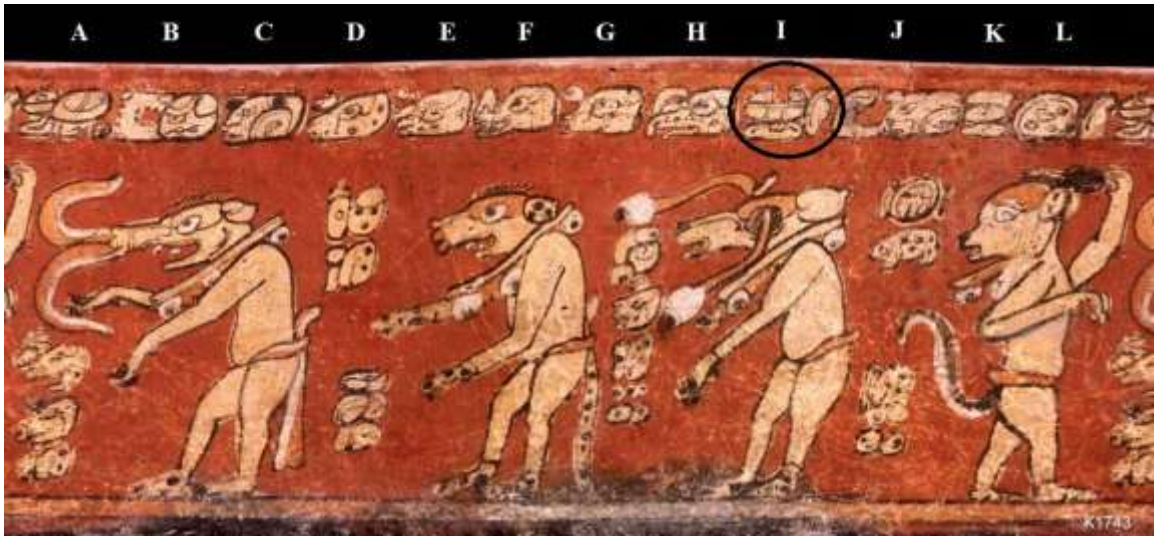

Figure 1. *K1743 with the Pa' Chan emblem circled at place I.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 1743.

Figure 2. Section of map of the Southern Maya Lowlands with the El Zotz'-Uaxactun region circled and major sites linked to Pa' Chan in blue. Edited from Alexandre Tokovinine's "People from a Place: Re-Interpreting Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs." From Acta MesoAmericana: Ecology, Power, and Religion in Maya Landscapes, ed. Christian Isendahl and Bodil Liljefors Persson, vol. 23, 2011, 92–106: figure 1.

Figure 3. *Initial Series Vase from Uaxactun.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Watercolor reproduction from A. Ledyard Smith, "Two Recent Ceramic Finds at Uaxactun." *Contributions to American Archaeology* 2, no. 5. Publication No. 436. Carnegie Institution of Washington (1932, 2005): Plate 5.

Figure 4. *K771: Codex-Style Vase with "Deer Death" at far left*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 771.

Figure 5. *K2023:* Way *vessel featuring Deer Death at the far right.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 2023.

Figure 6. *K3061:* Way *vessel featuring Deer Death at far left.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 3061.

Figure 7. *K1439: Ik' Vessel featuring Yajawte' K'inich.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 1439.

Figure 8. *K1386: Vase of the Thirty-One Gods*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 1386.

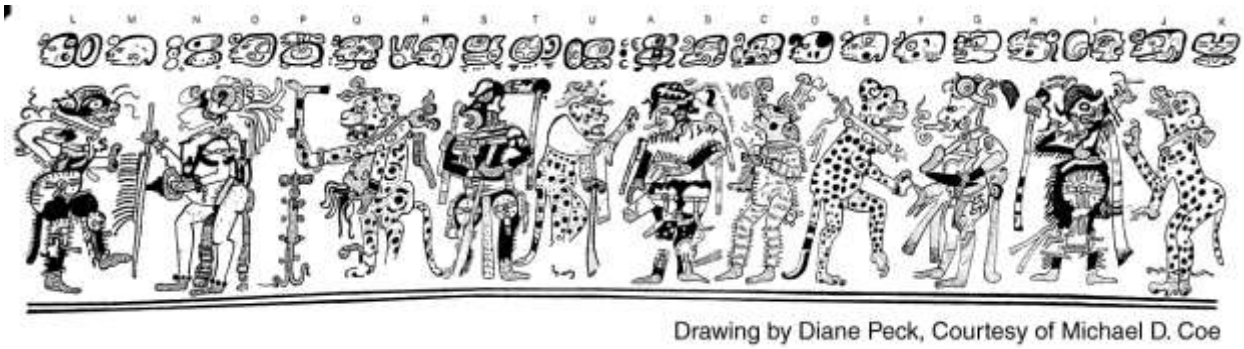

Figure 9. K5509: Vase of the Eleven Gods. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 5509.

Figure 10. *K5465*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 5465.

Figure 11. *K4962.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 4962.

Figure 12. *K7727*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 7727.

Figure 13. *K4548*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 4548.

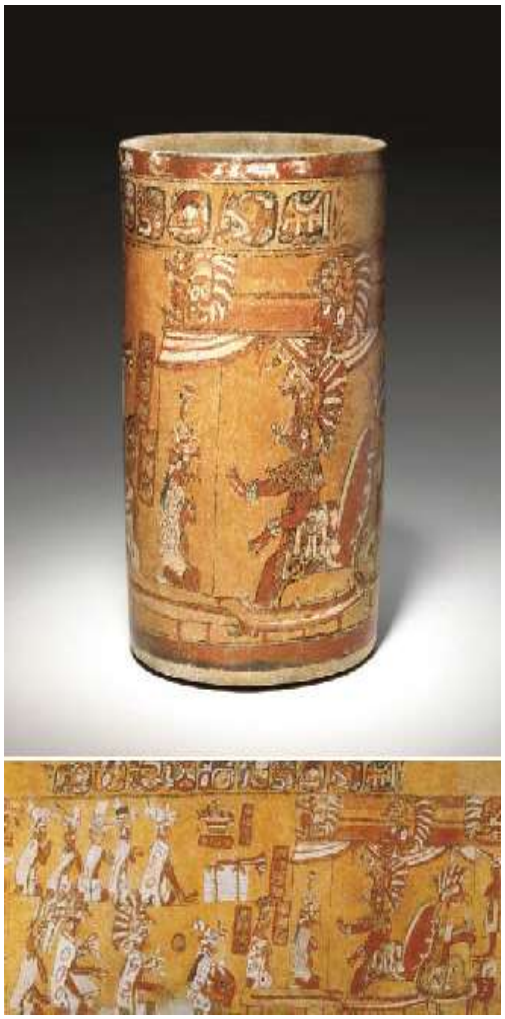

Figure 14. *Maya Vase*. From *Sale 5068 - ART AFRICAIN, OCEANIEN ET PRECOLOMBIEN,* Paris. Date of Sale 10 December 2003, Lot 5068-502. Christie's Auction C.

Figure 15. *K4605*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 4605.

Figure 16. *K8393* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 8393.

Figure 17. *Moon Goddess Vase.* Unpublished, from Linda Schele Archives.

Figure 18. *K5350.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 5350.

Figure 19. *K2669*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 2669.

Figure 20. *Detail of Rim Text of 1743.* Transliteration: *pa' CHAN ja-yi yu-ki BI.* Translation: "(the) Pa' Chan (thin-walled) cup, his drinking up."

Figure 21. *K2784*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 2784.

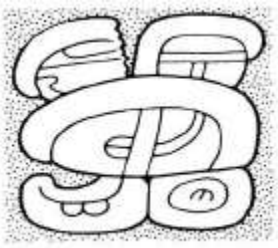

Figure 22. Early Classic version of Pa' Chan from Yaxchilán Lintel 35, B2. From Christophe Helmke "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings" in "Contributions in New World Archaeology. Special Issue: Proceedings of the 1st Cracow Maya Conference Archaeology and Epigraphy of the Eastern Central Maya Lowlands February 25–27, 2011, Cracow." 2012. 91-126. Figure 5b.

Figure 23. Pa' Chan emblem from El Zotz' Lintel 1. From Stephen D. Houston's "In the Shadow of a Giant," *Mesoweb*, Research at El Zotz, Guatemala, 2008a, 1–13: Fig 5c.

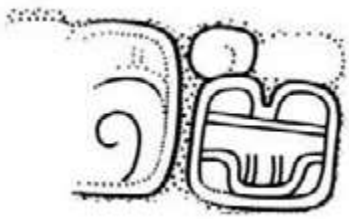

Figure 24. Pa' Chan from Stelae 2 of Uaxactun. From Stephen D. Houston's "In the Shadow of a Giant," *Mesoweb*, Research at El Zotz, Guatemala, 2008a, 1–13: Fig 5e.

Figure 25. Example of *kaaj* emblem glyph when paired with the *pa' chan* emblem glyph. From Christophe Helmke "Mythological Emblem Glyphs of Ancient Maya Kings" in "Contributions in New World Archaeology. Special Issue: Proceedings of the 1st Cracow Maya Conference Archaeology and Epigraphy of the Eastern Central Maya Lowlands February 25–27, 2011, Cracow." 2012. 91-126. Figure 10a.

Figure 26. *K7525.* Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 7525.

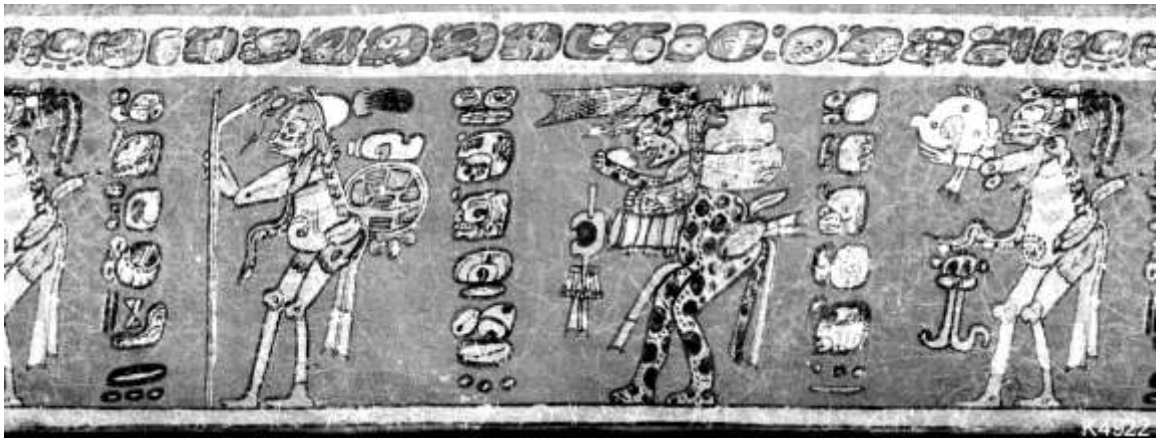

Figure 27. *K4922*. Late Classic. Ceramic. Rollout photo of ceramic vase. Photograph by Justin Kerr. Source: Maya Vase Database, 4922.

Figure 28. *Way* hieroglyph. Detail from K2023.

Figure 29. *Saxche-Palmar type-variety sherd with a fragment of the Pa' Chan emblem*. From "Social, economic and political transformation in the Acropolis Group at El Zotz, Guatemala" by Ewa Czapiewska. Master's Thesis, University College London, Figure 41.

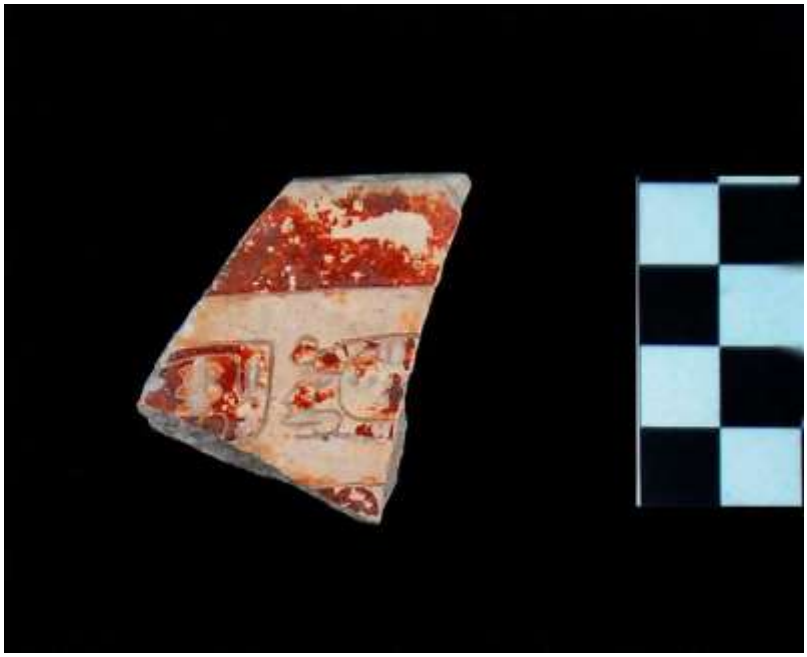

Figure 30. *A polychrome sherd with partial dedicatory text.* From "Social, economic and political transformation in the Acropolis Group at El Zotz, Guatemala" by Ewa Czapiewska. Master's Thesis, University College London, Figure 29.

Figure 31. *A polychrome sherd with partial dedicatory text.*From "Social, economic and political transformation in the Acropolis Group at El Zotz, Guatemala" by Ewa Czapiewska. Master's Thesis, University College London, Figure 31.

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