



Research Article

Classic Maya mirror conjurors of Waka', Guatemala

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Abstract

The Classic period lowland Maya used iron-ore mosaic mirrors and deposited mirrors in the burials of rulers and other people. Depictions of mirrors suggest that they were used for scrying, as were mirrors in Mesoamerica at the time of the Spanish arrival. Maya mirror users of this kind were conjurors, who used a variety of other divining and conjuring instruments and materials, including plates and shallow bowls. Three rulers at El Peru-Waka', now called Waka' by researchers at the site, an ancient city in northwestern Peten, Guatemala, were buried with mirrors and associated divining and conjuring materials. Following a brief introduction to the city and its temples, we describe the arrangement of mirrors and associated materials in three royal tombs. We suggest that the mirrors in these tombs were used in conjuring supernatural beings into existence, particularly Akan, a death god and *wahy* spirit who was a patron of the Waka' realm. We propose that the rulers and mirror conjurors of Waka' were oracles and that Waka' was known for prophecy. References to Sihyaj K'ahk' in text and iconography at Waka', and his association with oracular paraphernalia such as mirrors, lead us to propose a prophetic aspect of the visit of Sihyaj K'ahk' to the site eight days prior to his famous arrival at Tikal in A.D. 378. We suggest that the three rulers we discuss were mirror oracles sustained by the prestige of the prophecy of Sihyaj K'ahk'.

Resumen

Los mayas de las tierras bajas del período clásico utilizaron espejos de mosaicos de hierro y los depositaron en los entierros de gobernantes y otras personas de alta importancia. Las representaciones de los espejos sugieren que fueron utilizados para la adivinación, tal como fueron utilizados otros espejos a través de Mesoamérica en el tiempo de contacto con los españoles. Los que utilizaron tales espejos eran prestidigitadores quienes usaron además una variedad de instrumentos para adivinar y conjurar, como platos, cuencos hondos, fichas, palillos, y otros materiales. En lo siguiente, discutimos el arreglo de espejos y materiales asociados en tres tumbas reales a través de la ciudad antigua de El Perú-Waka' en el noroeste de Petén, Guatemala. Sugerimos que los espejos en estas tumbas fueron utilizados para conjurar entidades sobrenaturales. Además, sugerimos que Waka' fue el lugar de un oráculo basado en textos históricos que narran de eventos importantes en la historia de la ciudad, y que los tres gobernantes discutidos aquí fueron adivinadores.

Keywords: Classic Maya; mirrors; oracles; southern lowlands

Classic Maya mirrors and associated divining bowls

The Classic Maya (A.D. 200–900) used mirrors with iron-ore mosaic surfaces glued onto stone (schist or slate) backs (Healy and Blainey 2011). Mesoamerican mirrors were, generally, magical or enchanted instruments, as the sixteenth-century European conquerors knew and acknowledged. John

Dee, court magician to Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603), had Mesoamerican obsidian mirrors in his possession for scrying (Campbell et al. 2021). Taube (2016, 2018a [1992], 2018b [1992]:223, Figure 21), in his wide-ranging and detailed review of the depiction and use of mirrors in Mesoamerica, with special attention to the art of Teotihuacan, and with clear reference to the Maya, shows that they could function as metaphorical caves, portals through which deities, supernatural powers, even human forms and probably ancestral beings could emerge. Healy and Blainey (2011), in their comprehensive review of Maya mosaic mirrors, make the case that they were used for divinatory scrying (see also Miller and Martin

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2004:24–25), commensurate with the use of magic mirrors elsewhere by interlocutors with the supernatural world (Harrison-Buck and Freidel 2021).

In his seminal discussion of the iconographic conjoining of mirrors and bowls in the mural art of Teotihuacan, Taube (1983: Figures 5c and 5d) discusses the profile mirror bowl with what he identifies as the Tetitla depiction of the goddess as Spider Woman. He suggests (Taube 1983:113) that the mirror bowl was an elite version of water-filled reflecting bowls used by ordinary sages for scrying in divination. He shows (Taube 1983: Figure 18b) that an Early Classic painted stone mirror-back from Kaminaljuyu, excavated by Kidder and colleagues (1946), depicts the goddess with a mirror vertically positioned on a profile crescent-shaped bowl (Taube 1983:Figure 21). Taube (1983) further provides examples of profile crescent-shaped shallow bowls or plates with oval side-views of mirrors from both Late Classic Maya and Teotihuacan paintings. As he notes, archaeologists at Nebaj (Smith and Kidder 1951:Figure 65e) found an Early Classic iron-ore mosaic mirror in a flaring walled shallow bowl. In his later synthesis of mirror use in Mesoamerica, Taube (2016: Figure 13.2) provides additional examples of profile mirrors and mirror bowls in Late Classic Maya vase paintings (see also Healy and Blainey 2011:232–234, Figures 11, 13, 14). While it is plausible that the bowls and dishes associated with mirrors were used for water scrying, as proposed by Taube (2016), it is also possible that they were also used as surfaces for the casting of divining tokens (Freidel and Rich 2015; Freidel et al. 2017). Suffice to say that ancient Maya mirrors and shallow bowls or plates together are implicated in scrying, in divining, and, we would argue, following Taube (2016), in conjuring.

Following background on the site of Waka' in northwestern Peten, Guatemala (Figure 1) and data from monuments central to our conjunctive approach (Fash and Sharer 1991) to the history of this city, we discuss the contexts in which three iron-ore mosaic mirrors and their associated plates and divining paraphernalia were archaeologically excavated in Classic royal tombs identified as Waka' Burials 37, 39, and 61. Based on these contexts at Waka' and on other relevant archaeological, iconographic, and textual evidence, we propose that the interred individuals used these mirrors, among other artifacts, for divining, conjuring, and prophecy. We focus final attention on one of these mirrors, that of Lady K'abel, seventh-century queen of ancient Waka' and the last of the three royal oracles we discuss. She was interred in Burial 61, a vaulted chamber cut through the stairway of Structure M13-1 Sub. II, the penultimate version of the Wiinte' Naah fire shrine.

Waka', oracle center

Called Waka' by its ancient inhabitants, the epicenter of the city (Figure 2) covers roughly 1 km² (Marken et al. 2019b) on an elevated basin (Canuto and Auld-Thomas 2021), commanding the lower reaches of the San Juan River in Laguna de Tigre National Park, northwestern Peten, Guatemala (Navarro-Farr and Rich 2014). The center is the densest urban settlement so far recorded by LiDAR survey

in the Peten (Canuto et al. 2018). Ground surveys of 19 km² in ambient terrain by Marken and colleagues (2019a, 2019b) register a significant hinterland population that no doubt interacted with the center on a regular basis. Waka' was the seat of a precocious dynasty (Gunter 2014) and a strategic Classic royal kingdom on riverine and overland trade routes (Freidel et al. 2007; Navarro-Farr et al. 2020a). The Wak kingdom rose to power after the fall of the Mirador state in the second century A.D., during the same period that saw Tikal's rise. Waka' was along Tikal's route to the west (Garrison and Houston 2019). Canuto and Barrientos Q. (2019) argue that Tikal and Calakmul, great adversaries in the Classic period (A.D. 150–900; Martin 2020; Martin and Grube 2008), were trade rivals from the Preclassic onwards. However, it was in the sixth century A.D. that the rivalry took a distinctly military turn and Waka' became a strategic stronghold in the ensuing conflicts, resulting in its vassal status to the Kaanul regime of Dzibanche and Calakmul by the mid-sixth century A.D. This is when the first of the three Wak royal oracles we discuss lived, a king we identify as Chak Tok Ich'aak (Kelly 2019; Meléndez 2019). He was interred in Burial 37 in Structure M12-32, a steep-sided pyramid (Freidel et al. 2013; Meléndez 2014) at the northeastern edge of the city center.

The center of Waka' is on top of a steep 100 m escarpment overlooking the San Juan River, a tributary of the San Pedro Mártir, in turn a major corridor running east to west from the core of the southern lowlands to the western rivers region. At the eastern end of the city, the landscape is dominated by a hill 45 m high. It was dedicated as a sacred space in the Late Preclassic period (Rich 2011) and terraced into a great acropolis, colloquially referred to as the Mirador group. Three summit localities form a triad curving from southwest to northeast; two are occupied by pyramids and the third supports a group of ritual structures (Rich 2011). Cleared of forest, the terraformed acropolis and temples would have been visible for many kilometers to the west and south. Rich's research (2011) demonstrated that Structure O14-04, the central temple, with its pyramidal structure and frontal *adosada* platform, was constructed in the Early Classic. The *adosada* was modified in the mid-seventh century A.D. by the placement of Burial 39, a tomb chamber in which the second of the Wak royal oracles we discuss was interred. Subsequently, a seventh-century masonry shrine was built over the tomb. Rich discovered a larger-than-life stucco head, sculpted in Teotihuacan style, with close-fitting goggles over the eyes, a buccal mask, and tasseled goggles in the hair, in the ritually terminal debris of this seventh-century shrine. The head likely adorned the shrine and was deliberately removed from it to place it in this deposit, associated with the ritual leave-taking following the re-entry into Burial 39 in the early ninth century A.D. (Rich 2011). The elaborate Early Classic *adosada* maintained into the later Classic, along with the Teotihuacano stucco head, archaeologically attest to the significance the people of Waka' attached to their relationship with the Teotihuacanos of the fourth- and fifth-century Entrada era.

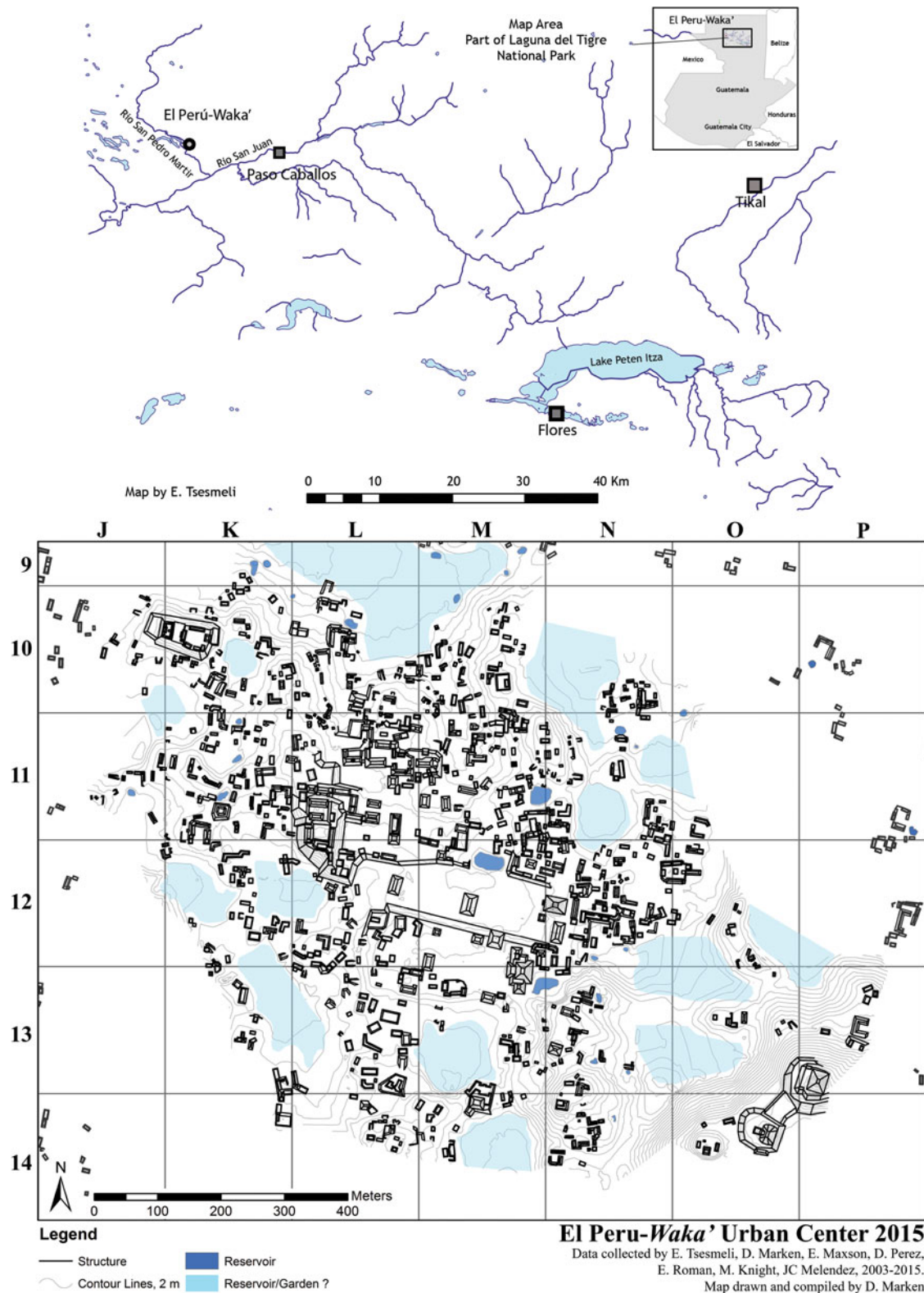


Figure 1. Map of the Southern Maya Lowlands, showing El Perú-Waka', Tikal, and Calakmul. Courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

The Mirador group was connected from the Late Preclassic period by a causeway to the city temple, Structure M13-1 (Marken et al. 2019a, 2019b). The

eighth-century version of this temple features a monumental hearth at the summit of the building's *adosada*, which Navarro-Farr and colleagues (2020a, 2020c, 2022a) interpret

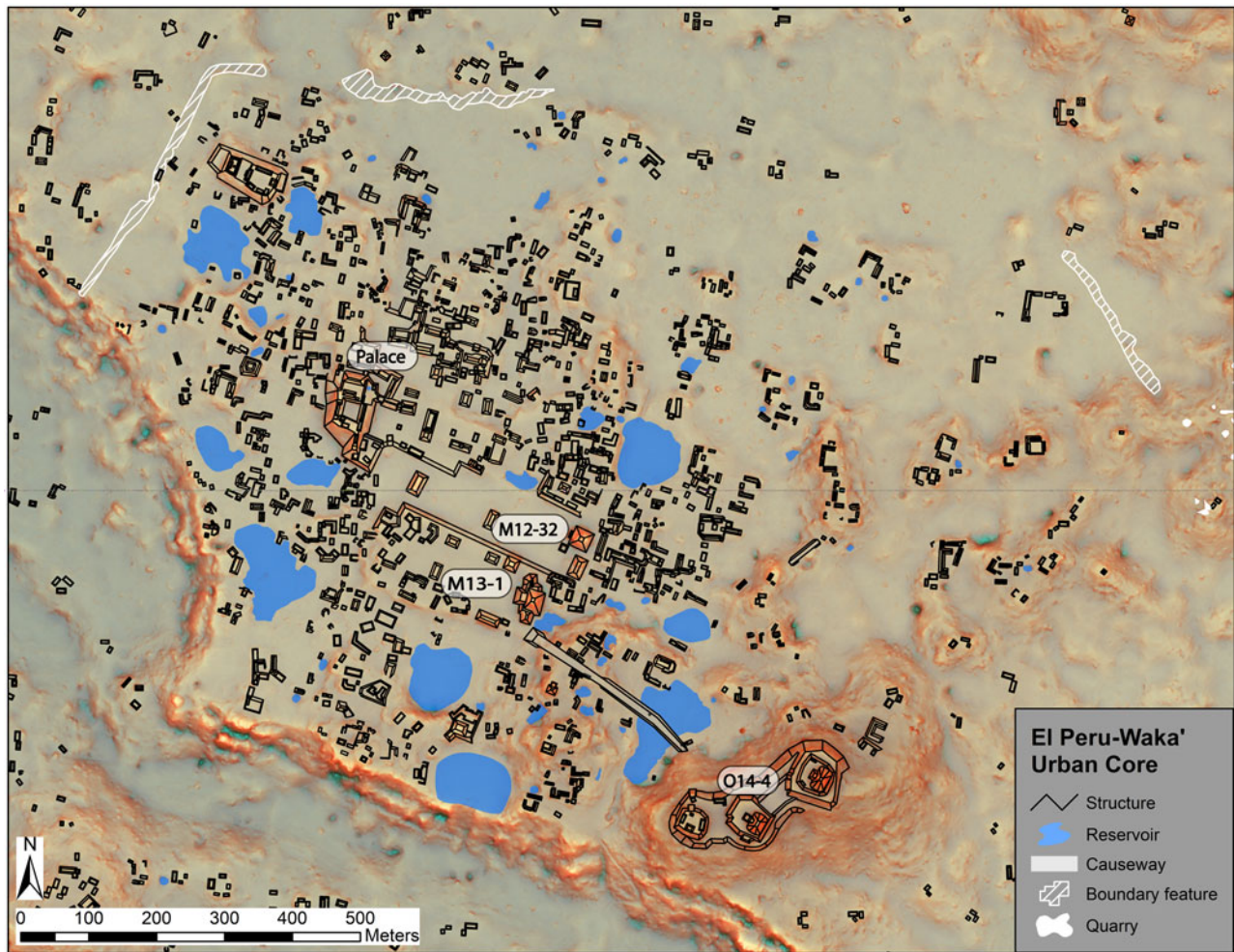


Figure 2. Map of the epicenter, showing causeway revealed by LiDAR data between the Mirador hill and the city temple, based on LiDAR. LiDAR imagery courtesy of PACUNAM; data compiled by Damien Marken; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

as a revival of the Early Classic cult of the *Wiinte' Naah*, “fire shrine.” The term *wiinte' naah* refers to a Teotihuacan temple (Estrada-Belli and Tokovinine 2016; Fash et al. 2009; Stuart 2004) that had commemorative expressions in the Maya Lowlands (e.g., Taube 2004), beginning in the fourth century A.D., if not earlier.

The ritual importance of Waka' is underscored in the historical narrative that connects Waka' to both *wiinte' naah* ceremonialism and the Teotihuacan lord, Sihyaj K'ahk'. The arrival of Sihyaj K'ahk' and his Teotihuacan associates impacted the Early Classic central lowlands (Estrada-Belli et al. 2009; Houston et al. 2021; Martin 2020), and Waka' was fundamentally engaged in this historical event. Key Early Classic data presented below are primarily epigraphic and iconographic and bear on the archaeological data regarding mirror conjurers; such data have long been central to archaeological interpretation of the Classic Maya historical record of the Entrada era (Fash and Sharer 1991). Waka' Stela 16, dedicated in A.D. 470, portrays Sihyaj K'ahk' at a grand scale (Freidel et al. 2007). The all-text Waka' Stela 15 announces the arrival of Sihyaj K'ahk' on the date

3 Kan 7 Mac (8.17.1.4.4, January 9, A.D. 378; see Martin and Skidmore 2012 regarding recalculation of this date in our calendar), eight days before he conquered Tikal on the famous date of 11 Eb 15 Mac (8.17.1.4.12, January 17, A.D. 378; Freidel et al. 2007; Guenter 2005; Stuart 2000). Martin (2020:122–123) acknowledges the plausibility of Stuart's (2000) suggestion that the arrival at Waka' denotes this lord's journey from a western locale, possibly Teotihuacan. However, Naachtun Stela 24 (Nondédéo et al. 2019), the decipherment of which references Sihyaj K'ahk' as overlord there two days before the 11 Eb date of the Tikal conquest, has prompted Stuart (2014:n.p.) to emphasize the existing political relationship between Naachtun and Teotihuacan as follows: “One might surmise that this indicates the actual presence of Sihyaj K'ahk' at Naachtun as he was making his way to Tikal, but it should be cautioned that the text merely states a political relationship, not an itinerary. This is itself important, for the inscription might well imply that Sihyaj K'ahk' had some sort of political infrastructure in place in the Petén before his arrival to Tikal. Remarkable” [original

emphasis]. We believe a similar relationship existed between this great Mexican and Waka’.

Returning to Stela 15 at Waka’, we see a term associated with the arrival date of Sihyaj K’ahk’, which bears the **wi** and **TE’** elements of *wiinte’*, but where we would anticipate **NAAH** is an eroded, ovular glyph, with what appears to be the “shiny” marker (Stuart 2000: Figure 15.13, Stuart 2010: Figure 12:15). Two examples of references to *wiinte’ naah* are known from Waka’, the first on Stela 9, and the second on the recently discovered Stela 51. Stela 9 mentions a *Wiinte’ Naah* and features a ruler named, in part, Chan Yopaat standing atop a fire mountain, around A.D. 500 (Freidel et al. 2013; Guenter 2014; Navarro-Farr et al. 2022a). The context of the *wiinte’ naah* glyph is not clear, but it is in an incised text next to the figure, indicating that it likely gives the location of the event portrayed.

The other instance of a *Wiinte’ Naah* mentioned at Waka’ is on the left side of recently discovered Stela 51, the glyphs of which are still being drafted, so we here illustrate just the front (Figure 3). The front gives the dedication date, 9.0.0.0.0 in A.D. 435. It also gives a name identified by Mary Kate Kelly (personal communication 2023) as K’inich Bahlam I. This important vassal of Sihyaj K’ahk’ was deceased, so it is likely that he is being referenced retrospectively. The name of the individual portrayed may have been given on the upper left-hand incised section of this monument,



Figure 3. Waka’ Stela 51, front. High-resolution photogrammetric image by Mark Willis, based on photographs by Olivia Navarro-Farr; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

where he is declared to accede in A.D. 432. This monument depicts him dressed as a Teotihuacano, decapitated, and later reset in front of the Late Classic version of the city temple, Structure M13-1 Sub. II, used by Lady K’abel. The left-side glyph block reads, in part, **yi-NAL wi-TE-NAAH-AJAW**, *yichnal wiinte’ naah ajaw* (“before/in front of the *wiinte’ naah* lord”). We suggest that this Waka’ king (Figure 3) was, like Sihyaj K’ahk’ on later Stela 16, shown as the mirror oracle. The individual portrayed is in male Teotihuacano garb, bearing a feather scepter and a rectangular shield depicting an owl. On his groin is a large profile bowl of the kind identified by Taube (1983: Figure 5d; 2018b [1992]) as a mirror bowl. The vessel is decorated with netting commensurate with the goddess in her spider aspect and with the Olin net mirrors of Teotihuacan (Taube 1983: Figures 14, 15). The bowl has an in-line triad of three flames/feathers on it and two more flames/feathers rimming the edges. The in-line triad of dots accompanies the downturned variant of the profile mirror bowl as an insignia of Teotihuacan, taken by scholars to be an abbreviated Storm God mask (Nielsen and Helmke 2017). We think it actually signifies the name of the goddess. Teotihuacan depictions of mirrors are often rimmed with feathers (Taube 2018b [1992]), as are the mirrors on feathered staves like the Tikal Marcador effigy (Freidel et al. 1993:300–301; Headrick 2003). When downturned, the profile mirror bowl on the Tepantitla mural depiction of the goddess (Milbrath 2000; Robb 2017) pours liquids and shell tokens, an expression of birthing the spring waters that nurtured Teotihuacan from adjacent Cerro Gordo (Berlo 1992). Helmke and Nielsen (2014:96–97, following personal communication with Headrick in 2010) suggest that Cerro Gordo, with its gurgling caves and crevasses, may have been the prototype for the oracular “Shouting Mountain” of the Aztecs. The Tepantitla girdle motif, with downturned mirror bowl, has an in-line triad of three dots above it, analogous to the three flames above the bowl on Stela 51. In our interpretation, the bowl birthing water and tokens, as seen on the Tepantitla mural, is upturned on Stela 51, where it births an in-line triad of flames/feathers. We identify this as a rebus conveying the name Sihyaj K’ahk’ and the flame/feather bowl as the insignia of the oracle of Waka’. One implication of this reasoning is that Sihyaj K’ahk’ was a fiery manifestation of the goddess—whose Tepantitla depiction displays flames rising from the hands and droplets pouring off them. Whatever event of the *Wiinte’ Naah* Stela 51 recorded, we suggest that it took place in the presence of the image of the Waka’ king wearing the mirror bowl name of Sihyaj K’ahk’, in his role as oracle of Waka’.

K’inich Bahlam I was king of Waka’ just after the arrival of Sihyaj K’ahk’ and allied himself to the Teotihuacano (Guenter 2005:151), although it is unclear whether he was installed by Sihyaj K’ahk’ as Yax Nuun Ahyin of Tikal was. What is clear is that Stelae 15, 16, and likely 51 all indicate the profound importance that Sihyaj K’ahk’ had on the political history of Waka’, and his exalted title, *kaloonte’*, appears with both instances of the name of Sihyaj K’ahk’ on Stela 15. In A.D. 470, a descendant of K’inich Bahlam I dedicated the posthumous portrait of Sihyaj K’ahk’ on Stela 16

(Freidel et al. 2007). On this depiction, the *kaloonte'* carries a throwing stick with the head of an owl, signifying his overlord Spearthrower Owl, and while the image is eroded, he appears to be wearing on his belt a feathered mirror in a bowl, with the mirror in the vertical position.

We infer that Sihyaj K'ahk' went to Waka' before he campaigned against Tikal's King Chak Tok Ich'aak I, for a reason other than practical itinerary. Specifically, we argue that the reason was to predict his conquest of Tikal at the shrine of Waka' on the hill of the Mirador group, Turtle Mountain (Freidel et al. 2013), and at the temple in the city he dedicated or recognized as a Wiinte' Naah. Mesoamericans had oracles of special historical moment, as referenced above in the Aztec case. As Ashmore (2009:185) states in her definitive article on landscape: "In other cases, ritual travel is more contingent and occasional, if again often arduous, as in visiting an oracle. Mixtec Lady 9 Grass, prominent oracle of late pre-Hispanic times, imparted decisions shaping episodes of political history from her base at the funerary cave of Chalcatongo (Pohl 1999)." We find Ashmore's concise definition, following Pohl, fits our understanding of the historically celebrated presence of Sihyaj K'ahk' at Waka' eight days before his conquest of Tikal.

And the focus of these events may very well have been on the Wiinte' Naah at Waka'. As mentioned, the fragmented, early sixth-century Stela 9, the crown portion of which was built into the wall of the final version of that building's *adosada*, depicts a king standing on a misty Fire Mountain, flanked by a text mentioning the Wiinte' Naah. The final eighth-century version of that building was designed as a clefted mountain with a monumental fire hearth (Navarro-Farr et al. 2022a). Stela 51, with the contemporary Waka' ruler wearing the flaming/feathered mirror bowl and the allusion to a *wiinte' naah ajaw* (Navarro-Farr et al. 2021b:27), a title with which Sihyaj K'ahk' is associated (Bassie-Sweet 2021), was reset in front of the building's Late Classic Sub. II phase and buried inside the final phase (Navarro-Farr et al. 2021b). Stela 10, which depicts another person wearing the feather-eared jaguar headdress of a Teotihuacano, carrying a rectangular shield and bundle or spear (Guenter 2014), was reset at the northwestern base of this temple. Monument fragments at the base of the temple were surrounded by a dense pattern of ritually deposited non-elite offerings, dating to the Late and Terminal Classic periods (Navarro-Farr 2009, 2016). These offerings surround the same Wiinte' Naah fire shrine, where, in the early eighth century, the third Waka' royal oracle we discuss, Lady K'abel, was interred (Burial 61; see Navarro-Farr et al. 2021c). We now review the three tombs to describe how certain materials reflect the role of conjuror and diviner as central to royal practice in Waka'.

The sixth-century conjuror king

In the mid-sixth century A.D., a large tomb was excavated into the bedrock under Structure M12-32 (Figure 2), a pyramid located on the northeastern edge of the center of Waka' (Freidel et al. 2013). This vaulted sepulture was

identified as Burial 37. Above the vaulted tomb chamber, mourners built a small, single-roomed masonry shrine, with a distinctive talud-tablero superior façade and with a severely burnt interior (Escobedo and Meléndez 2007; Meléndez 2014, 2019). The robust bones of the only individual buried in this chamber suggested this was a male (Piehl 2010). Analyses of the ceramic offerings in Burial 37 (Meléndez 2019) indicate that they are directly comparable with the predominantly sixth-century A.D. assemblage from a separate royal tomb at the site, Burial 8 (Lee and Piehl 2014), which housed the remains of a royal woman, later identified as queen Ix Ikoom. We follow Meléndez (2019) in identifying the individual in Burial 37 as King Chak Tok Ich'aak, consort of Ix Ikoom. King Chak Tok Ich'aak of Waka' was the most prominent sixth-century monarch, portrayed posthumously on Stela 44 at Waka' in A.D. 564 (Kelly 2019, 2020). He was likely the patron of Waka' Stela 22, dedicated in A.D. 554, because he died in A.D. 556, and possibly depicted in A.D. 524 on Waka' Stela 23, a half-*k'atun* jubilee, where he wears the same costume as on the other two monuments and displays the same rigid ceremonial bar, with deity or ancestor masks and rosettes and tassels (Guenter 2014). We identify these rosettes with their four dots as mirrors, following the iconographic analyses of mirror depiction by Taube (2016, 2018a [1992]). This is likely the same man depicted on Altar 5 from La Corona, dated to A.D. 544 (Stuart et al. 2018), where he is entitled *sak wahyis*, the local regnal epithet. On La Corona Altar 5 he wears the same wide belt and skirt and carries a rigid bar with god masks. Evidently, he conjured the local patron deities there, as he did the local deities at Waka' in A.D. 564 on Stela 44. His interment in the most prominent funerary pyramid in the center of Waka' would be commensurate with his historical importance (Escobedo and Meléndez 2007).

In his contextual analysis of Burial 37 (Figure 4), Meléndez (2014, 2019) identified five concentrations of distal phalanges of jaguar claws, and obsidian and chert blades and flakes framing the body of the ruler, which could be an indication of his name. Even though the name Chak Tok Ich'aak is deciphered as Great Misty Claw (Martin and Grube 2008:28), we think that the blade/flake-claw concentrations in Burial 37 may signal the name of the king (*tok ich'aak*), in the same way that the eccentric sacrificial knife attached to a jaguar claw held by King Chak Tok Ich'aak I depicted on Stela 39 of Tikal, dated to A.D. 376 (Laporte and Fialco 1995), alludes to the name of this king. Stela 1 from Uolantun (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: Figure 76) seems also to depict the Tikal ruler Chak Tok Ich'aak I, who wears a paw at his waist with three knives projecting from it, also very likely a signifier of his name. Whether or not this is the case, the ceramic dating of Burial 37 to the time of the historical death of that king, the presence of a large mirror in the tomb such as that which is likely depicted as being displayed by Chak Tok Ich'aak on Stela 44, and the prominent location of the funerary precinct, all strongly suggest that the person in Burial 37 is King Chak Tok Ich'aak Wak Ajaw, or Great Clawing Jaguar (Meléndez 2014).

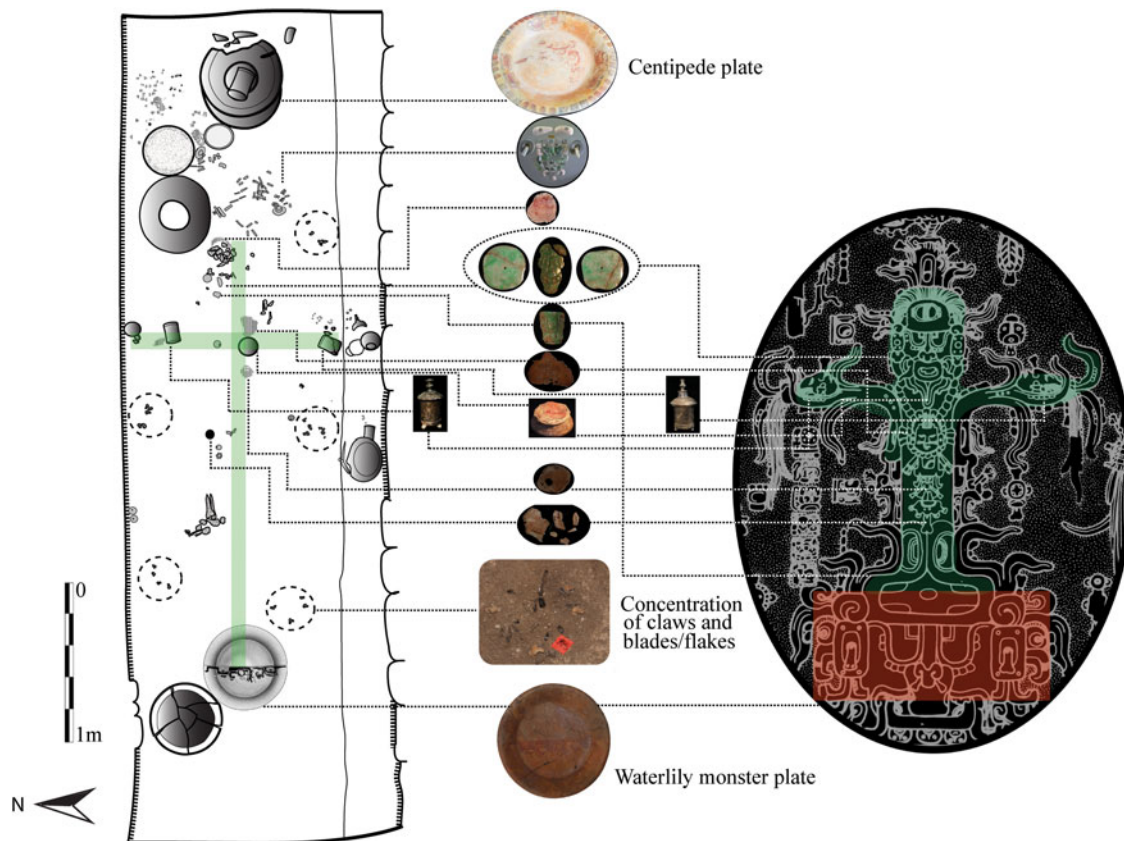


Figure 4. Burial 37, the cruciform arrangement of the materials around the deceased, including the centipede divining plate at the top, the Waterlily Monster divining plate at the bottom, *Spondylus* shells on the vertical axis, and lidded cups on the horizontal axis. The mirror, mosaic mask, and tokens are above the head and to the right. Figure and interpretation by Juan Carlos Meléndez; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

The interred wore on his head a jade diadem of the Maize God with the body of a crocodile (Figure 4), a deeply ancient royal motif (Meléndez 2019). He also wore a pectoral of a downward-facing crocodile head. Above his crowned head was an elaborately arranged array of materials (Figures 5 and 6). These items include a distinctive, shallow, flaring walled dish, with a circular hole where the bottom should be; the dish bottom was carefully cut away. Adjacent to this dish with a hole was a large, stone-backed iron-ore mosaic mirror and the tesserae of a greenstone mosaic mask (Figure 6; see also Meléndez 2014, 2019). The mirror-back was painted red, with blue-green edging. Around the mirror, and underneath it, was a thick scattering of finely worked small discs of *Spondylus* shell. These tokens were pierced for affixing to cloth, and they resemble the spangles sewn on turbans worn by artists and scribes in Classic vase paintings (Coe and Kerr 1998:106; Reents-Budet 1994). We suggest that these shell beads were used for casting, calculation, and divination, analogous to the tokens, seeds, and found objects used by contemporary and ethnohistorically documented sages (Freidel and Rich 2015, 2018:111; Freidel and Schele 1988; Freidel et al. 1993, 2017). The casting gesture

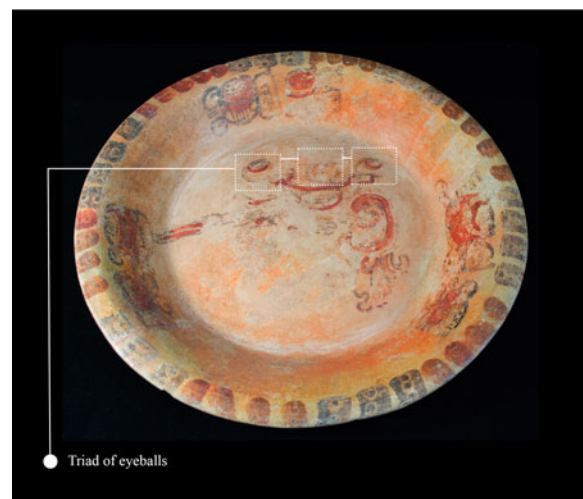


Figure 5. The divining plate in Burial 37 depicting the Wak centipede, with an in-line triad of extruded eyeballs of the patron god Akan. Photograph and interpretation by Juan Carlos Meléndez; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

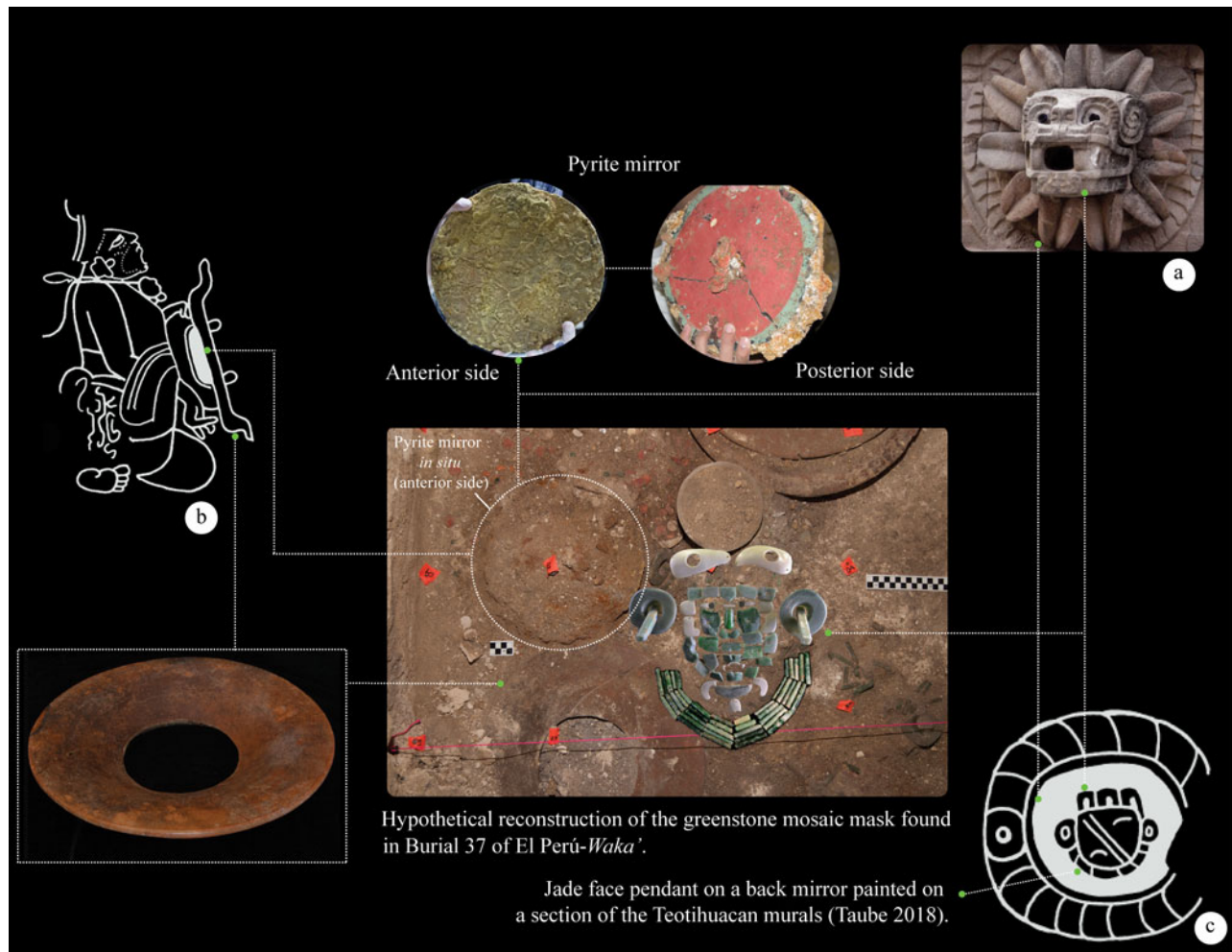


Figure 6. The relationship between the mirror, an adjacent shallow dish, and the greenstone mosaic mask, in Burial 37. Composition by Juan Carlos Meléndez; drawings by Karl Taube from Taube 2018b; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

is pervasive in Classic Maya depiction of rulers, usually into receptacles, but sometimes onto surfaces. Stuart (1988) makes a persuasive case that cast objects are sometimes droplets of blood. Houston (2014:82–83) segues to the clear depiction of droplets and preciousities in *k’uh* (“holiness”), to make the cogent observation: “The Classic Maya seem to have believed in segmented, concentrated, and controllable *k’uh*.” Regarding the same depiction of droplets and objects marked *k’an* (“precious”) and *yax* (“green”), carved on a speleothem stela as being cast by a “ruler” (Houston 2014:Figure 50), we add that the Maya used red shell beads termed *k’an* and green jade beads termed *yax* as currency tokens at the time of the Conquest (Masson and Freidel 2012), and likely for divining (Freidel et al. 1993; see Freidel and Schele 1988 for a discussion of *am*, the casting tokens painted green by sages in honor of the goddess Ix Chel). Because small shells, worked shell beads, and jade beads were clearly also used as ornaments and probably as currency, the contexts in which they were deposited are significant to the interpretation of their function (Freidel et al. 2017).

Returning to Burial 37, García (2012) proposes it is possible that the disassembled greenstone mosaic mask is a kind of mask depicted in the painted vase corpus of the Late Classic (A.D. 550–800), which, according to Freidel and colleagues (2017), appears as being held and gazed at by scribal individuals scrying. We suggest that the tesserae which form Classic mosaic masks were also likely used as some of the tokens that Freidel and Rich (2018:101) propose were utilized for divination purposes. Boot (2006:9) carefully reviewed examples in the corpus epigraphically and iconographically, and argued that the verbal action associated with these masks was, given the range of possibilities, “to shape by hand,” but it also read “to arrange.” While this might refer to actually making such a mask, as suggested by García (2012), it could refer to the manipulation of tokens such as those found all around this one, and, more generally, to scrying through gazing in the course of divination.

There are greenstone ear flares found in association with the mosaic mask (Figure 6). Taube (2016) shows that ear flares are depicted on the frames holding Classic Maya

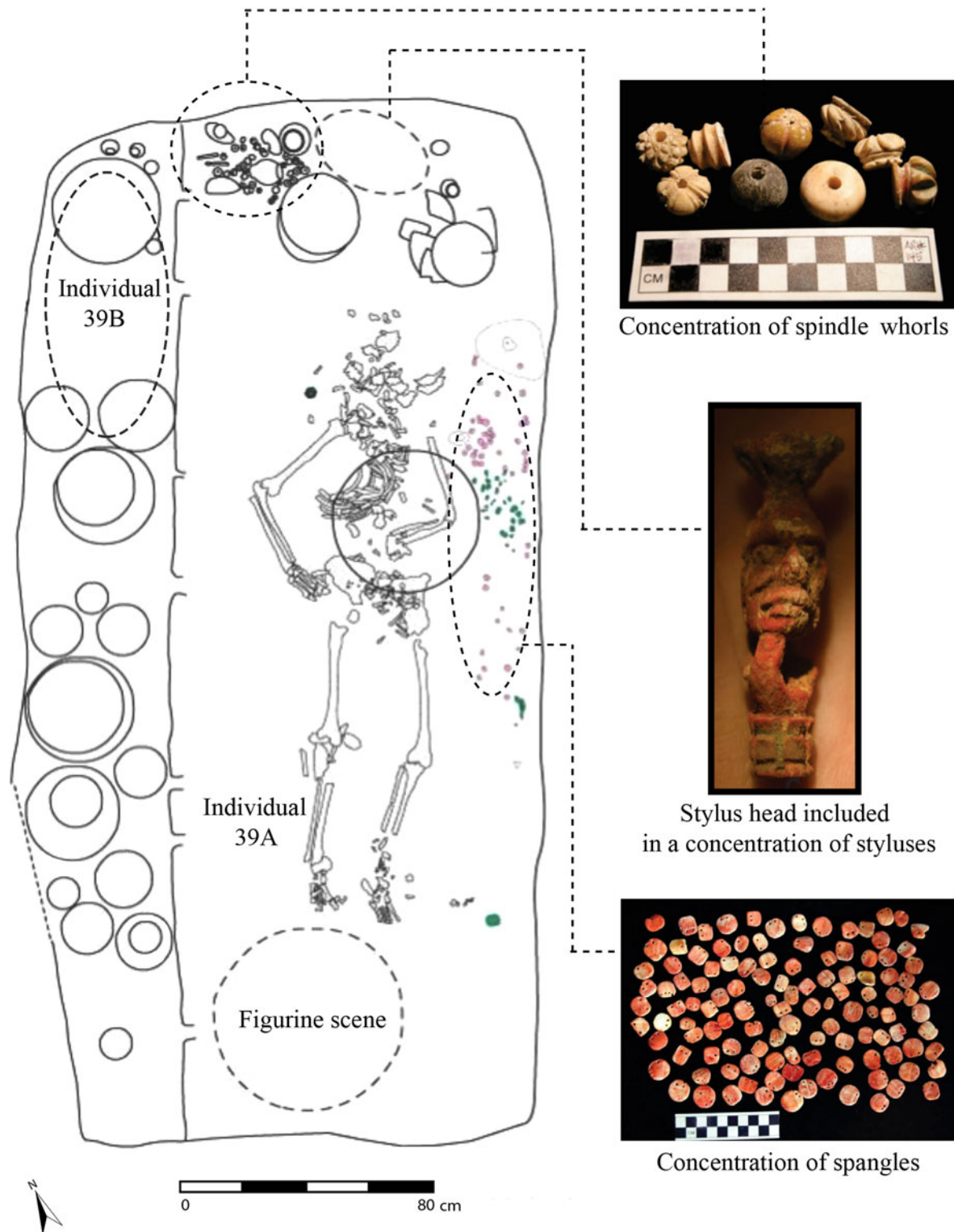


Figure 7. Burial 39, showing the arrangement of materials relative to the deceased. Composition by Michelle Rich, Varina Matute, and Jennifer Piehl; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

mirrors, and he suggests that these emphasized the reflection of a face, with the mindfulness and intention of a person. By this understanding, the arrangement of the Burial 37 ear flares as part of the mask assembly and the mask, a living supernatural, can be understood as situated to

show its emergence from the mirror. A concentration of spherical and tubular beads in this same area, well above the individual, again suggests tokens rather than costume adornment, although a headdress is also a possibility. In the middle of this collection of materials was a finely

made white stone cup. Very simple, and without marking or inscription, the cup, by association, was somehow powerful and sacred. Freidel and Guenter (2006) suggest that this is one form of the White Soul/Seed Flower containers (see Fitzsimmons 2009; Scherer 2015 for discussion of this concept) of the kind referenced on royal monuments. Finally, a large plate at the eastern end of the assemblage depicts a profile head of a centipede, crowned with a cleft and three extruded eyeballs (Figure 5). Extruded eyeballs are associated with several *wahy* spirits (Grube and Nahm 1994), but especially with Akan, a patron god of Waka' (Baron 2016; Guenter 2014; Kelly 2019). The cleft may denote a variant mountain mask, centipede mountain (Freidel et al. 2013), and the centipede likely references the animal's name of the city, Waka', and polity (Guenter 2007). There are monumental carvings of the centipede mountain at the site and this animal was likely a powerful presence. The presence of this image on a plate next to the mirror, mask, and tokens suggests to us that the deceased was associated with conjuring the centipede, and possibly Akan. Akan Yaxaj (Kelly 2019; Marc Zender, personal communication 2019) is listed as the first of the patron gods at Waka' and regarded as a battle beast worth stealing by Tikal's eighth-century A.D. king, Yik'in Chan K'awiil (Baron 2016; Guenter 2014; Martin 2000, 2020). The *wahy* spirit figures into our story of the next conjurer as well.

The oracle on the mountain

The primary interred individual in Burial 39 in Structure O14-04 (Figure 2) was, in our hypothesis, an oracle who lived in the first half of the seventh century A.D. (Figure 7). According to Piehl (2009:195–197), the individual was of advanced age and was accompanied by offerings of a juvenile fox and a child of about seven years (Rich 2011; Rich et al. 2007). Strontium isotope analysis of dental enamel suggests values outside the local value range for Waka', which indicate it is possible the individual did not grow up at Waka' (Rich 2011:273). Calakmul is one possibility, as it was the seat of the Kaanul hegemony and home of the overlords of Waka' since the early seventh century A.D.

We think the ruler in Burial 39 was a diviner (Freidel and Rich 2015), with discrete bundles of ritual paraphernalia arranged east of (above) the head. We note at this juncture in our contextual analysis that Burial 39 had been re-entered in the late eighth or early ninth century A.D. (Rich 2011). This re-entry ritual was very carefully performed, although the collapse of the vault shattered ceramics and other fragile offerings in the tomb. Complex intact arrangements discussed below (Figures 7 and 8a–8c) suggest that these leave-taking ritualists went to lengths not to disturb the placement of objects by the original mourners. Continuing our analysis, at the northeast end of the bench was a concentration of 60 carved small spindle whorls of stucco, basalt, bone, and shell (Figure 8a). Such whorls were likely used to spin fine cotton thread. At Tikal, Moholy-Nagy reports on a total of 51 comparable Late Classic whorls from all contexts, of which six had been found in three burials, clearly not concentrated

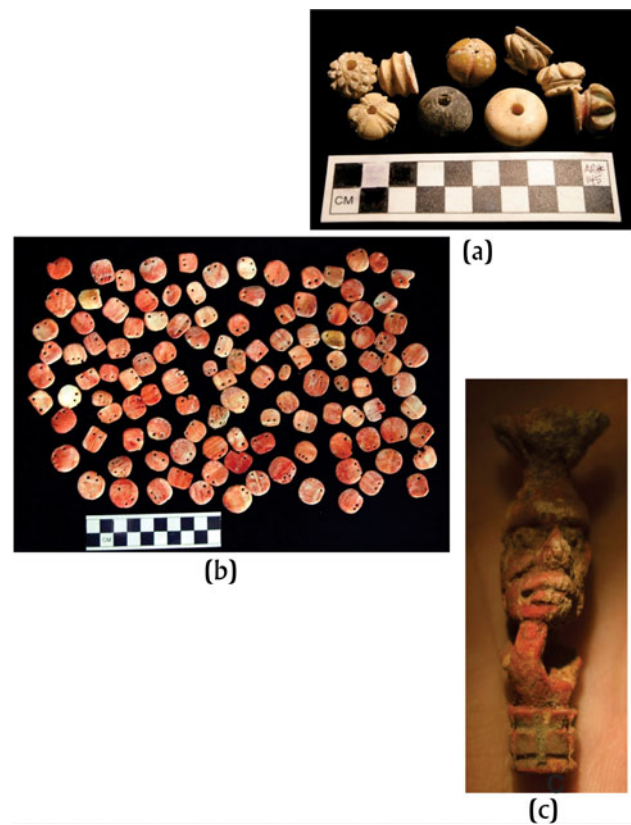


Figure 8. (a) Burial 39 miniature spindle whorl casting tokens; (b) Burial 39 *Spondylus* disc casting tokens; (c) Burial 39 carved bone stylus head in the form of a scrying mask. Photographs and figure by Michelle Rich; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

(Moholy-Nagy and Coe 2008:46–47, Figure 106). At El Pilar, Kamp and colleagues (2006:413) discovered 198 Late Classic limestone whorl fragments in a 7 m² area, with a dense concentration in 3.5 m². They conclude that the whorls were deliberately broken and that this is a ritual deposit, possibly associated with the goddess Ix Chel and a calendrical celebration (Kamp et al. 2006:420). The extraordinary number of whorls in the Burial 39 bundle concentration, their context with a giant cowrie amulet, next to a concentration of carved bones and a mirror, suggests to us that these objects were used ritually as well, and in this case as divining tokens. To the east of the body lies a concentration of numerous perforated *Spondylus* shell spangles (Figure 8b). Like the Burial 37 assemblage, these spangles likely also functioned for the purpose of casting in divinatory rites.

Next to the aforementioned spindle whorls was a concentration, probably a bundle, of exquisitely carved and painted bone sticks (Rich 2011:278, 309). The bodies of these sticks are lenticular in cross-section. Some of these many dozens of sticks, which were broken by vault collapse when found, were carved on both ends (Rich 2011:278, 309), while others had one ornamental head and a sharpened point at the other end. The carved ends depict hands holding masks (Figure 8c), hands holding shell dorsum amulets



(a)

0 10 cm 1/4"



(b)

Figure 9. (a) Pseudoglyph inscription incised on the neckless jar; (b) neckless jar (tecomate) in Burial 39, with incised inscription made with a sharp stylus on leather-hard clay. Drawing by Mary Kate Kelly; photograph courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.



Figure 10. The assemblage of figurines in Burial 39, arranged as found, but photographed as restored. Photograph by Ricky Lopez; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

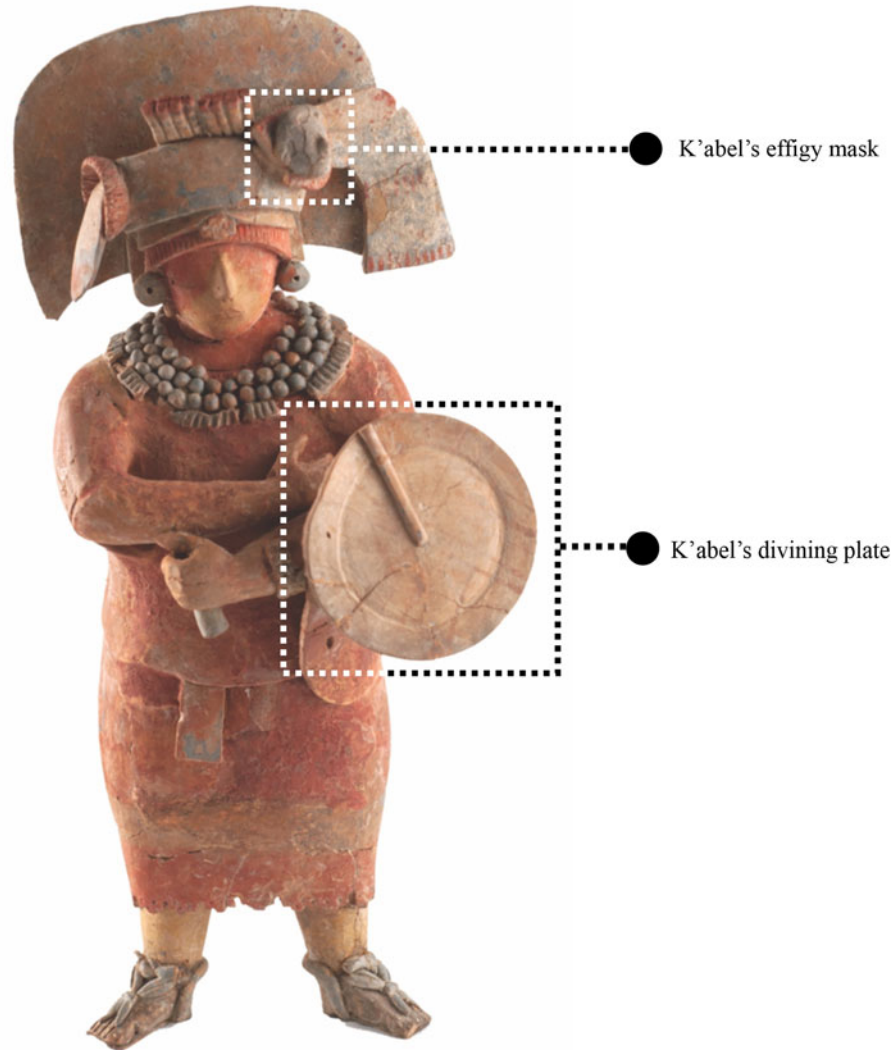


Figure 11. The queen figurine in Burial 39. Photograph by Juan Carlos Pérez; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.



Figure 12. The mirror in Burial 39. Photograph by Michelle Rich; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

with masks inside them, paint brushes, and birds, all themes associated with divining and the scribal arts (Freidel and Rich 2018; Freidel et al. 2017). The double-headed sticks were perhaps microcosmic effigy ceremonial bars. The pointed sticks could have served as styluses for writing and calculating on soft surfaces, such as fresh stucco, wax, and leather-hard clay (Freidel et al. 2017). In fact, one tomb vessel was elegantly inscribed with pseudoglyphs, indicating they were incised when the vessel clay within the lines while the vessel was leather hard (Figures 9a and 9b).

A scene of 23 figurines depicting funeral rites, placed at the foot of the deceased (Figure 10; Freidel and Rich 2018; Rich 2018), presided over by a queen (Figure 11) and king, included four figures that carry square or rectangular boards and a stylus-shaped instrument in the hand. The effigy writing boards are painted yellow, with blue edging. Yellow was the usual color of the square iron-ore mosaic

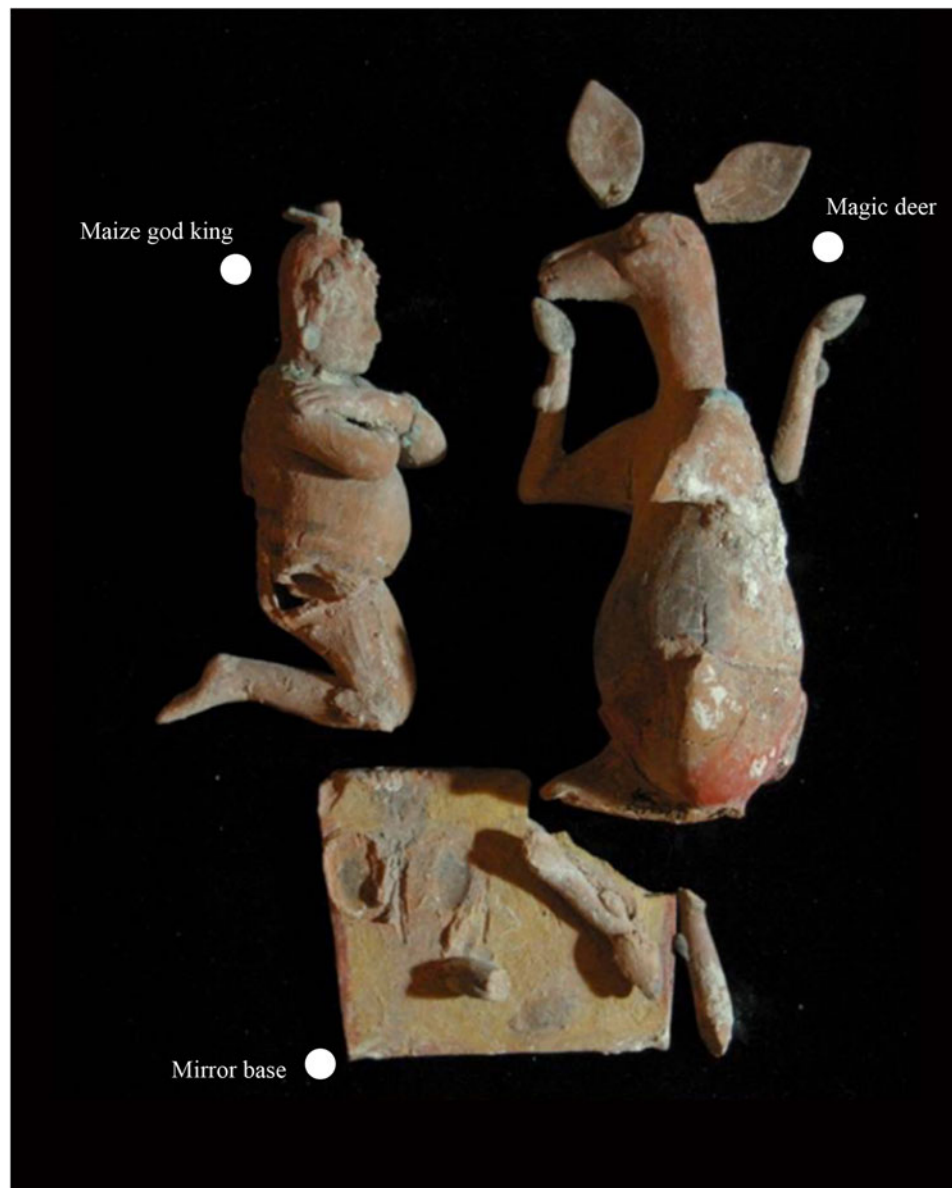


Figure 13. The penitent king, the deer, and the effigy mirror on which they were performing in Burial 39. Photograph by Griselda Pérez Robles; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

mirror surfaces when discovered. Rich found the occupant’s mirror (Figure 12) in a lip-to-lip ceramic dish bundle cache, adjacent to the bone sticks. Yellow is also the color of tablets in the Bee Pages of the Paris Codex, which Freidel and colleagues (2017) suggest depicts wax surfacing for purposes of temporary writing and calculating with sharp styluses. Ceramic effigy mirrors are established in the corpus of Mesoamerican figurines (Taube 2018a [1992]).

The most complex part of the figurine assemblage includes a kneeling individual being prayed over by a seated deer spirit (Figures 10 and 13). The kneeling penitent individual wears three jewels in the coiffure, which is stepped like that of the Maize God. The penitent has a tiny leaf and socket on the top of his head, suggesting that it is sprouting—a metaphor for resurrection. The rectilinear

platform below the individual and deer (Figure 13) is painted yellow, with red edging. We suggest that this is another effigy writing tablet mirror, like those carried by participants. The emergence of the deer and penitent king from the tablet, as vision or written words, is materially manifest.

The queen figure next to this supernatural performance (Figure 11) wears a small, green-painted mask in her head-dress (see Navarro-Farr et al. 2020b); this is a feature we return to below. According to INAA analyses (Rich et al. 2019), this figurine, along with the king figure next to her, the Maize God king and magic deer, and the seated, singing old woman at the center of the assemblage, feature the same paste signatures as items recovered from Calakmul Structure II Tomb 4, strongly suggesting they were made



Figure 14. The jade effigy of a primordial sacrifice on the deceased in Burial 39. Photograph by Michelle Rich; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

in Calakmul’s royal workshop. The figurine has bunches of painted sticks in her headdress, like scribes and sages wear (Coe and Kerr 1998), and like the stick bundle in this tomb. She wields as a shield a shallow plate that is marked with parallel black lines (Freidel and Rich 2015), like the lines that mark the space to write with a sharp stylus on the jar in this tomb. The plate has an effigy stick stuck to it, facing upwards, clearly not a depending tassel. This could be a writing stylus, or it might have been used to move cast tokens on the plate.

The deceased in Burial 39 has a large plate over the torso. This vessel, face down, has a large painted image of GI in the center, specifically the initial sign in the Primary Standard Sequence (MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994). In this case, the giant glyph stands alone and, given its position, would seemingly present the bundled deceased. Adjacent to the plate was a concentration of *Spondylus* disc tokens, identical to those found in Burial 37.

Directly under the plate was a jade, stylistically an heirloom (Figure 14), carved as a ruler, with hands in the cradling pose (Scheper Hughes 2016) associated with nurturing gods and activating bundles. The jade ruler is a “tuerto,” blinded in the left eye, the empty socket covered with a tiny jade patch. This person is also just an upper torso, the rest of the body severed away and replaced with trefoil blood scrolls. This figure, severed in such fashion, alludes to an ancient myth of the sacrifice of three people by severing (Taube and Houston 2010). As Taube and Houston (2010) explain, this act of sacrifice is textually *yax ch’ahb* (“first penance”), related to the powerful act of conjuring, *ch’ahb ak’baal*, noted by Stuart as “complementary operating principles of ‘generation’ and ‘darkness’” (Stuart 2021:200; see also Harrison-Buck 2021:579–581). This jade may be conjured from the inverted plate.

Queen or king, we believe that the deceased was a diviner and conjuror and, we would argue, an oracle. Soon after the entombment of the individual in Burial 39, K’inich Bahlam II, named after the vassal of Sihyaj K’ahk’, was placed in power and raised a single stela in front of this summit temple and tomb. Waka’ Stela 1 can be identified as him by the distinctive jaguar head in sun cartouche diadem that this ruler wore and that K’inich Bahlam wore on Stelae 12 and 35 (Guenther 2014). Stela 1 celebrates his reign at Waka’ just as Lady K’abel embarked upon her influential co-reign there. Stela 1 was dedicated on the *hotun*, a prophetic interlude in the *k’atun* calendar cycle, in A.D. 657, months after Yuhknoom Ch’een II conquered Tikal in a “star war” (Martin 2020:235), when the Waka’ king had just completed his twentieth year of life (Just 2007) and his overlord his twentieth year of reign (Martin 2020:139). Again, this conquest may have been prophesized at Waka’. The Waka’ king’s regnal name was distinct from his birth names (Just 2007), and perhaps it was given at the funeral of the oracle in Burial 39, just before the military campaign, the conquest of Tikal, and the accession under the Kaan sovereign. We now turn from the beginning of Lady K’abel’s reign to its end.

Lady K’abel, *ix kaloomte’*, and conjuror

The terraced Mirador hill with Structure O14-04 and Burial 39 (Figure 2) was connected by a grand stairway on the northwestern side of the hill and a causeway to the city center and Structure M13-1, the principal temple and Wiinte’ Naah, as discussed previously. The main building of Structure M13-1 in its final form is composed of a pyramid surmounted by a masonry temple. Excavation of the last phase of the frontal *adosada* platform exposed a monumental hearth of nearly 4 m² in a central chamber evidently open to the sky: a fire shrine (Navarro-Farr et al. 2022a).

This building covered the fronting platform of an earlier temple; this temple (Sub. II) may also have served as an earlier Wiinte’ Naah used by Lady K’abel in her performances as conjuror and oracle. She was entombed in Burial 61, cut through the stairway of this frontal platform, Structure M13-1 Sub. II (Figure 15; see also Navarro-Farr et al. 2021c). We believe that she died between A.D. 702, when she evidently planted Waka’ Stela 6 with her husband’s stela 8/43 in front of M13-1 (Kelly 2019, 2020), and A.D. 711, when K’inich Bahlam II planted Stela 35, arranging this monument with Stelae 33 and 34 on Plaza 1 to frame his wife on her most glorious monument with portraits of himself.

Lady K’abel is identifiable as the deceased because she is not only a queen who died at the beginning of the eighth century, the time of this tomb as gauged by ceramic chronology, but because she was interred with a personal possession that names her, a small white stone jar (Figure 15). This jar, carved as a cloud scroll or shell with an old deity emerging holding a paint brush, names Lady K’abel as an *ix kaan ajaw*, female lord of the Snake regime (Navarro-Farr et al. 2021c:198, Figure 8e).

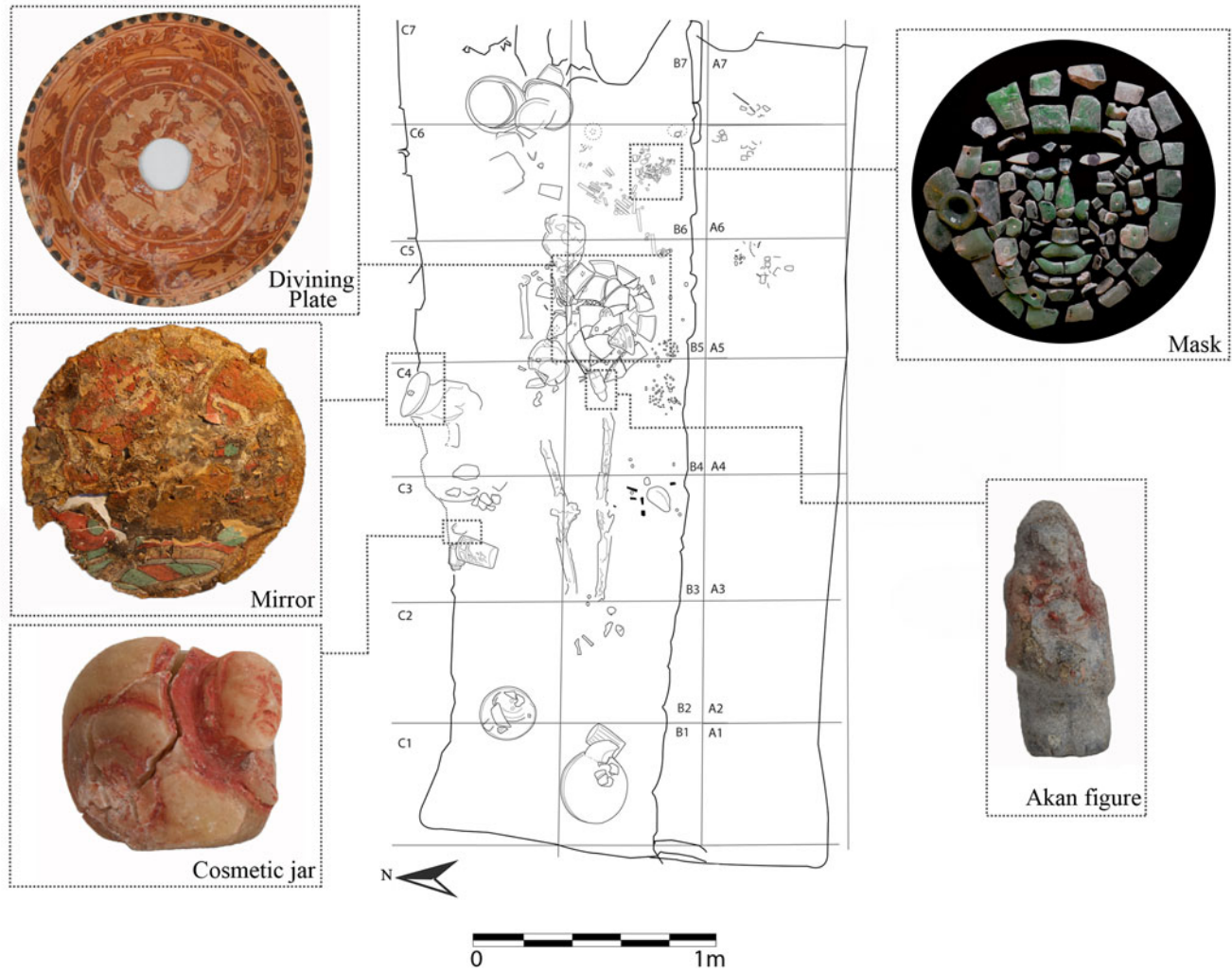


Figure 15. The arrangement of the deceased and offerings in Burial 61. Drawing by Olivia Navarro-Farr; offering association by Juan Carlos Meléndez; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.



Figure 16. The mirror-back from Burial 61. Overlay drawing by Rene Ozaeta; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka’.

The jar was discovered next to a fragmented iron-ore mosaic mirror (Figure 15). Once conserved, the preserved fragments of painted stucco that ornamented it could be understood as a depiction of a personage seated above a large insect (Figure 16; see also Navarro-Farr et al. 2021c: Figure 6c). The seated individual is posing with the casting gesture, his right hand extended downward. The person’s left arm is outstretched and holding the back of a thin object that is painted yellow on its obverse side. That yellow is a surfacing, defined by a black outline. We identify this as the profile of an iron-ore mirror. Yellow-surfaced effigies of mirrors are described above in the context of Burial 39. Following from this identification, we discern the white, hooked tail stinger of a centipede next to the mirror surface. The larger white fang of the centipede, along with a red second fang, are preserved in the mouth of the centipede, next to the casting hand of the seated personage. This symbolizes a manifestation of the Waka’ centipede emerging from the conjuror’s mirror. On the mirror, the image appears to

show a shawl over the chest, covered in small circles. It could be an extruded eyeball shawl, such as that carried by attendants in the figurine assemblage discussed above.

The groin area of the deceased in Burial 61 had a large *Spondylus* shell placed on it. Such a shell is part of the regalia associated with deity embodiment (Looper 2002; MacDonald and Strauss 2012; Vázquez and Kupprat 2018; Wanyerka 1996). Lady K’abel wore the Xok Shell girdle ornament associated with the womb (Wanyerka 1996:78) on Stela 34 more than a decade before her death. A more dramatically incised and red painted shell, certainly depicting the vulva, was found south of the left knee (Figure 17). Slightly to the southwest of the groin area, between the shell and the large plate over the queen’s left arm, was what appears to be a fragment of stalactite crudely fashioned into the figure of a pot-bellied person carrying a hafted axe in his right hand (Figure 15). The axe head against the neck of the figure, which is painted red with cinnabar, has been interpreted as a form of Akan (Navarro-Farr et al. 2020b,



Figure 17. The *Spondylus* shell with incised vulva on the back, near Lady K'abel's left knee. Courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

2021c). Akan (Grube and Nahm 1994) is depicted severing his own neck with a hafted axe in the painted vase corpus (K1230), with blood gushing out of the artery; he was a patron deity of Waka'. Navarro-Farr and colleagues (2020b; see also Navarro-Farr et al. 2021c) suggest that this is an effigy of Akan being born from Lady K'abel. We follow Navarro-Farr and colleagues (2021a) in their interpretation that Burial 61's tableau relates a process of conjuring: Lady K'abel births Akan (a metaphor for conjuring) and the Wak centipede is seen being conjured by the seated figure on her mirror.

The large plate (Figure 18) was face down over the left arm of the deceased. Recall that the queen figurine in Burial 39 is depicted wearing a lined divining plate, a shield with a stick on it that we interpret as a stylus for writing on a waxed surface or an instrument for moving tokens. Two nearly coeval plates likely used for divining were discovered in Tomb 4 of Structure 2 at Calakmul, one of which names the deceased, Yuhknoom Yich'aak K'ahk', the likely brother of Lady K'abel (Carrasco Vargas et al. 1999:Figure 9). This plate, and the other, a simple black plate with an incised Maize God head on it, show heavy use-wear in the form of horizontal stripes of abrasion through the surface. Given the precipitous demise of that king soon after his defeat by Tikal (Stuart et al. 2015), the heavy use is not surprising. Lady K'abel's plate is not worn, but the center of the figure on it was carefully cut out.

Ringling the central image on the plate are stacked water signs, perhaps referencing the use of plates and bowls for water scrying (Taube 2016). In a second ring, defined by

parallel lines, are single and double circles in red. These look like tokens, such as the miniature spindle whorls in Burial 39. The third ring depicts three profile creatures that each have three red feathers extending from their backs. Black dots ring the edge of the plate, possibly representing more tokens. We see the three-feather motif visible on the plate's third ring (Figure 18) as personifications of the three flames/feathers depicted on the mirror bowl of Stela 51. This symbolism is therefore a reiteration of the feathered mirror bowl trope depicted there. Notably, this monument is situated in front of the building that houses the queen's tomb, a likely non-coincidental juxtaposition. The placement of this plate over the shield arm of Lady K'abel in her tomb is a clear replication of the figurine that represents her likeness as a younger person in the Burial 39 figurine assemblage. In that figurine she bears a divining plate as a shield also in her left arm, a fact that supports the identification of the large plate in her tomb as a divining plate.

Finally, a small greenstone mosaic mask was uncovered face down on the headdress of the queen in Burial 61 (Meléndez 2019; Navarro-Farr et al. 2021c). That mask was associated with small effigy bones carved of *Spondylus* shell (Figure 19; see also Meléndez 2019). As noted above, a youthful Lady K'abel is depicted in Burial 39 wearing an effigy of the same greenstone scrying mask framed in a red shell in her headdress (Figure 19; Freidel and Rich 2018; Rich 2011; Rich et al. 2010). Waka' Stela 11 is a badly ruined depiction of a queen in A.D. 672, partnered with Stela 12 which references the overlord of Waka', Yuhknoom Ch'een II. The king on Stela 12 must be the reigning monarch K'inich Bahlam II and it depicts the jaguar emerging from the sun diadem worn by that king on Stela 1 and Stela 35. Stela 11 is surely his wife Lady K'abel, with whom he is prominently partnered on the next *k'atun* jubilee. The queen on Stela 11 has a small mask diadem as her principal jewel, framed by bones such as those found on the headdress in Burial 61. We follow Meléndez (2019), inferring that the greenstone mosaic mask in Burial 61 was Lady K'abel's conjuring amulet, like the mask amulets discussed in relation to Burials 37 and 39, here left intact, but placed face down. Meléndez (2019) argues that such greenstone mosaic masks were insignia of rulers in the Kaan regime; all these Waka' rulers fit that description. Among the complex elements of the headdress in Burial 61 were two *Spondylus* effigy scroll eyes. Such god eyes peer out of the mask Lady K'abel wore on Stela 34 when she planted her monument; she embodied the First Twins, water snake and land snake, a supernatural god particularly revered by the Kaan regime (Vázquez and Kupprat 2018).

Discussion

We conclude that these rulers were interred with carefully arranged iron-ore mosaic mirrors and other paraphernalia of conjuring and divination to emphasize their abilities, in life and in afterlife, to call on the supernatural powers to prophesize and aid their realm. Contextual analysis can show that while the Wiinte' Naah and the Mirador group



Figure 18. The divining plate of Lady K'abel, showing the three polymorphic feather beings framing the center. Courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

at Waka' were home to recognized mirror conjurers and oracles, there were other historically significant mirror conjurers. Tikal Burial 196 (Hellmuth 1967), for example, the likely resting place of Yik'in Chan K'awiil (but see Martin and Grube 2000:50, who question the modest edifice over it), shows the deceased dancing toward the largest of his four mirrors. Next to this mirror were elegant, inscribed bone styluses, one named the possession of the king of Tikal, *Oliva* shell casting tokens, and other bone and shell materials. The styluses interred with his father, Jasaw Chan K'awiil in Burial 116 included one owned by the *kaloonte'*, surely the king himself, incised with a hand holding a brush emerging from a centipede maw (Moholy-Nagy 2008:Figure 197a). Other styluses (Moholy-Nagy 2008: Figure 199) show lords peering from cartouches, effigy mirrors such as frame ancestors (Taube 2016). Jasaw Chan K'awiil had his actual mirror below his feet and a ceramic effigy paint pot above his head (Triuk 1963).

No doubt the Waka' mirror conjurers' responsibilities included caring for the welfare of their people, as all Maya royalty must have done. But the invoking of Akan, a

god of war, and the centipede, a deadly creature, points to royal responsibility in seeking to secure sovereignty. The vassal status of these Wak rulers, first to Sihyaj K'ahk', perhaps to Tikal rulers of the New Order era after that, and certainly to Kaan regime rulers from the sixth to eighth centuries, underscores the strategic value of their city in the wider geopolitics of the Maya world. We propose that these rulers, and very likely high elite members of their courts, were known to be potent oracles. The role of Lady K'abel as such an oracle shows that women as well as men could perform this responsibility. It is possible that her predecessor in this role, interred in Burial 39, was also a queen. A queen of the sixth century, Ix Ikoom (Freidel et al. 2013; Kelly 2019; Navarro-Farr et al. 2020a, 2020c) was likely a major Kaan Regime vassal oracle of Waka' after the death of her husband Chak Tok Ich'aak in A.D. 556. Her descendant K'inich Bahlam II commemorated her celebration of the period ending in A.D. 573 on Waka' Stela 43 (Kelly 2019, 2020). As a place of pilgrimage to the oracles, and of the trade that regularly flows to places of pilgrimage (Freidel 1981), ancient Waka' flourished for centuries, despite

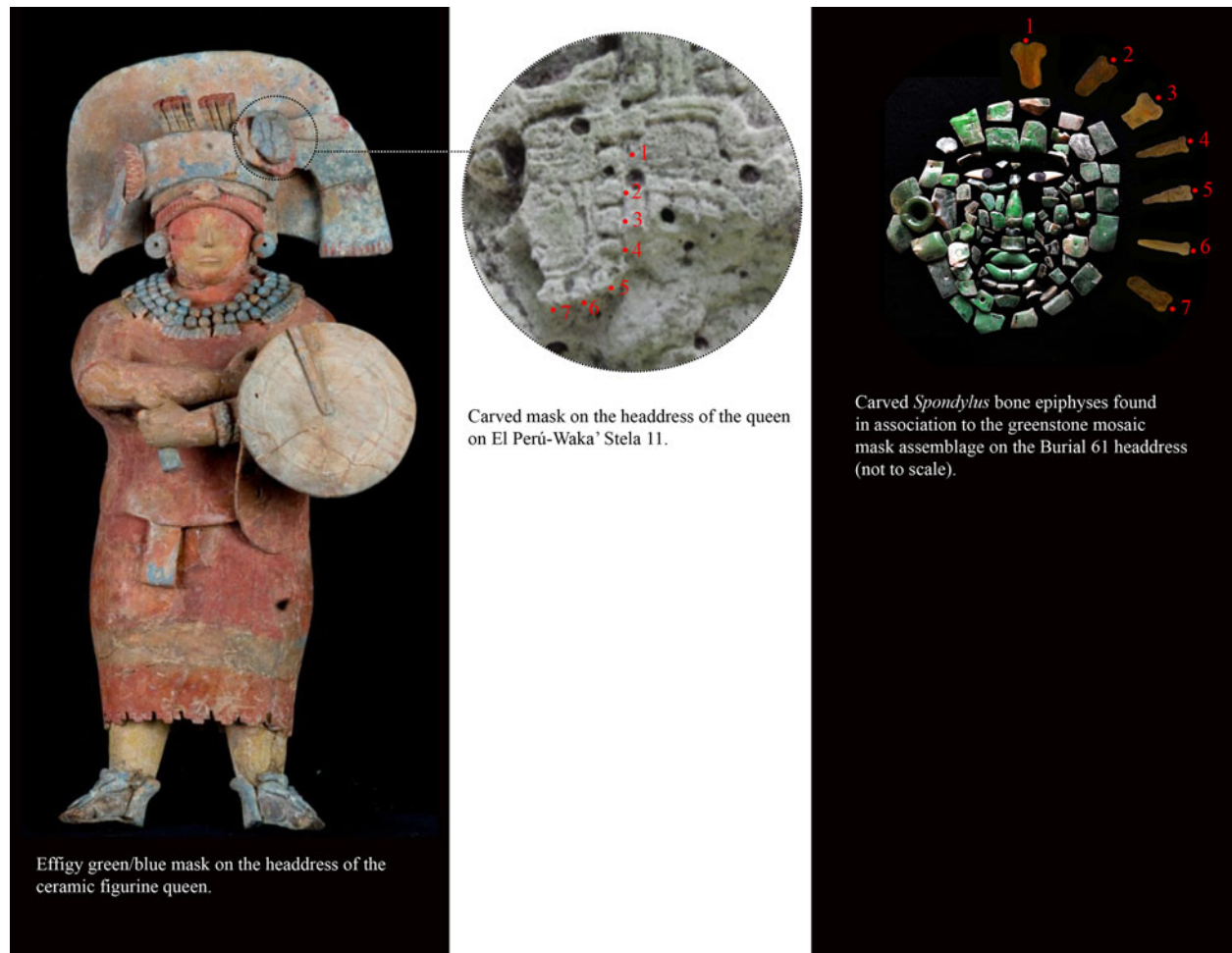


Figure 19. (a) The effigy green/blue mask on the headdress of the ceramic figurine queen; (b) the carved mask on the headdress of the queen on El Perú-Waka' Stela 11; and (c) carved *Spondylus* bones found in association with the greenstone mosaic mask assemblage on the headdress of Lady K'abel in Burial 61 (not to scale). Figure arrangement by Juan Carlos Meléndez; courtesy of the Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Guatemala and the Proyecto Arqueológico Waka'.

repeated attacks resulting in the destruction of large and finely carved stone images of their rulers and overlords (Freidel 2020). It continued as a place of pilgrimage for at least a century after the last rulers (Navarro-Farr 2009).

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