

A Linguistic Approach to the Classic Maya Term *iximte'el kakaw*

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This article presents a proposal for the translation and interpretation of the Classic term *iximte'el kakaw*, based on a review of Mayan lexical sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although in the past several scholars have proposed interpretations of the term largely based on epigraphy, iconography, and/or linguistics, this review presents a slightly different vision. It is my hope that this approach will help deepen understandings of the Classic Maya economy with regard to the names of beverages and foods—especially that of cacao.

Antecedents and State of the Issue

It is well known that, among ancient Mesoamericans, the cacao bean was considered a type of “currency” or “money” that was used for the exchange of products (see Thompson 1956; Rojas 1987:77; Thiemer-Sachse 2000). Antonio de Ciudad Real mentioned that cacao served “as a small coin in all New Spain, as in Castile the copper one; they buy with cacao all the things that money would buy” (García and Castillo 1976:1:182; Spanish: “de moneda menuda en toda la Nueva España, como en Castilla la de cobre; cómpranse con el cacao todas las cosas que con el dinero se comprarían”).¹

The *Relación de Mama y Kantemo* recounts that in the Yucatan region “the contracts they have are salt and cotton mantles; cacao, which is a grain like almonds, is a currency that has worth among them” (Garza et al. 1983:1:115, Spanish: “los contratos que tienen son sal y mantas de algodón; cacao, que es un grano a manera de almendra el cual es moneda que entre ellos vale”). The *Relación de la provincia de Tabasco* emphasized that cacao was considered to be “the greatest wealth of this land,” and the *Relación de la Villa de Santa María de la Victoria* also mentions that the tribute collected by Motecuzoma was specifically cacao (Garza et al. 1983:2:371, 427).

A section of the *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* relates that the merchants who came to Ulúa and Tabasco

exchanged salt, clothing, and slaves for cacao and stone beads (Rivera 1985:78). Among the Nahuas of Central Mexico, Bernardino de Sahagún recorded “heart-blood” as a diphrasism used for cacao. Cacao was considered a drink for “brave lords and senators, noble and generous men,” because “it was worth a lot and there was very little.” Sahagún also commented that, “if some of the popular ones drank it, if they drank it without a license, it cost them their lives. That is why it was called *yollotli eztli*: price of blood and heart” (Garibay 1969:2:247, Spanish: “si alguno de los populares lo bebía, si sin licencia lo bebían, costábale la vida. Por esto se llamaba *yollotli eztli*: precio de sangre y de corazón”).

Since the second half of the last century, with the decipherment of *kakaw* (see Lounsbury 1973:114, 138; Stuart 1988), it has been known that this was one of the favorite beverages and one of the most valuable products among the Classic Maya.² Thus it has been

¹ This is also reflected in the Xinka language, where *tuwa* means both “cacao” and “money” (Kaufman and Justeson 2007:194).

² Here I consider the Classic period from AD 250 to 900, the Postclassic period from 900 to 1521, and the Colonial period from 1521 to 1821. In this text I transcribe non-English words in italics, but I have chosen to write Colonial Mayan words in angle brackets <>. The Colonial Yucatec and Kaqchikel Maya orthography did not always represent long, rearticulated vowels or glottal stops. The digraph / dz / represents the modern / ts' / or / tz' /, the / chh / represents the modern / ch' /, the / c / corresponds to the / k / and the / k / to / k' /, while / u / is equivalent to the current / w /. The spelling / h / can represent the velar fricative or glottal fricative sound, sometimes represented in current spelling with / h / or / j /. In old Spanish, the cedilla was equivalent to the sound / s / or / z /. The elements in brackets [] represent reconstructed sounds or words. I opt for a broad transcription of the Maya logograms, which are represented in capital letters, while the syllabograms are represented in lowercase (both in bold). Although I am aware of the proposals for disharmonic spellings accepted and used by various authors, in this work I have decided to simply transcribe the term as *iximte'el*.

possible to document epigraphically drinks such as *tzi(h)il kakaw* perhaps “pure/fresh cacao,” *tzihte'el kakaw* “cacao of *tzihte*,” *yutal kakaw* “fruity cacao” or “seeds of cacao,” *ach' kakaw* “fresh/new cacao,” *k'an kakaw* probably “ripe cacao,” *chabil kakaw* “cacao with honey” or “honeyed cacao,” *tzah kakaw* “sweet cacao,” *sa'al kakaw* “gruelish cacao,” among other combinations (see MacLeod 1990:391-392; Stuart 2005:133-135, 2006:191-199; Beliaev et al. 2010; Hull 2010:237-244).³ We note that an extensive review of the literature—in both English and Spanish—related to cacao and chocolate has been produced in recent years, among which are the texts published or edited by Coe and Coe (1996), McNeil (2006), Grivetti and Shapiro (2009), Staller and Carrasco (2010), Ruz (2016), and Ardren (2020). These works deal with practically every aspect related to those products; therefore only a linguistic review of the term *iximte'el kakaw* and its relationship with the Classic Maya economy will be made here.

As most researchers agree, the first part of the term has been confirmed based on the presence of an *i*-syllabogram before the **IXIM** logogram, leading to a secure reading of *ixim* “grain maize/corn.” On the other hand, the transliteration *te'el* is based on the appearance of the logogram **TE'** read as “tree,” the syllable *e* and the syllable *le*, but sometimes also **TE'-le**, or simply **TE'** (García 1994; Stuart 1995:116, 2006:196; see also Zender 2014) (Figure 1).⁴

Two translations for *iximte'el* are among the more widely accepted ones.⁵ Simon Martin, in his 2006 article (see also Martin 2005) first proposed the translation of *iximte'el kakaw* as “Maize Tree-like cacao” or “Maize Tree cacao” referencing the mythological origin of cacao fruit and corn. His proposal derives from iconographic depictions of the Maize God with cacao pods on his body and the **IXIM-TE'** label directly referencing that god. Martin also considered episodes of Mesoamerican mythology related to the growth of various fruits from the body of the Maize God. His epigraphic and iconographic analysis led him to propose that

equally clearly, cacao was but one among many products of the Maize God's “death,” an event of universal fruitfulness with greater implications for human sustenance than corn or cacao alone. As such, he is the provider of all food plants and the center of wider concepts of fecundity and abundance. (Martin 2006:163)

More recently, on the basis of linguistic data alone, Kaufman and Justeson (2007:224) have proposed the translation “(a drink made from) maize (and) tree cacao” and emphasized that *ixim* and *te'el* could be two different elements (though this does not explain the *iximte'* label for the Maize God).

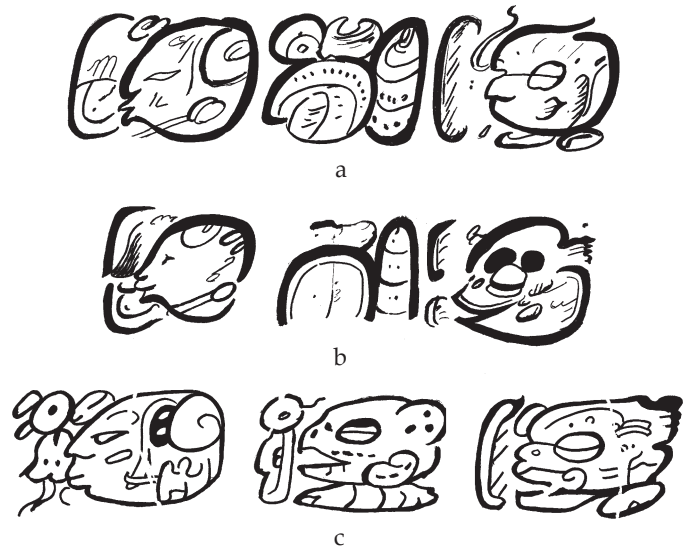


Figure 1 Examples of the *iximte'el kakaw* term in the PSS on Classic Maya pottery: (a) *i-IXIM TE'-le ka-ka-wa*, detail of K791; (b) *i-IXIM TE'-le ka-ka*, detail of a photograph by Inga Calvin of the Cylinder Vessel from Altar de Sacrificios; (c) *IXIM TE'-e-le ka-ka-wa*, detail of K8008 (drawings by William Mex).

iximte'el kakaw was so important and transcendent that, as Stuart (2006:197, 121) has remarked, it was among the predominant types of cacao during the Classic period. According to Carter and Matsumoto (2020:110-113), *iximte'el* (with its variants) is the third most common modifier or qualifier applied to *kakaw* in the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) during the Classic period, since it appears at least 28 times in ceramics from different regions, particularly in those related to the Holmul and Naranjo style and with Codex-style ceramics.⁶ The term seems to be sufficiently important to merit ongoing review.

³ I am aware that some of the proposed transcriptions and translations are still under discussion.

⁴ See vessels K791, K3120, and K9115 in Justin Kerr's ceramic database at www.mayavase.com. It is worth noting that Stuart (1995) connected *iximte'el* to the potentially cognate form *iximche'el*. A complete reading of *i-xi-ma ixim* appears in the murals of Chik Nahb, Calakmul (see Martin 2012:16).

⁵ Stuart (1995:116, 2006:198, 199) has considered the possibility that *iximte'* or *iximche'* refers not to corn, but to another type of plant, such as *guiligiuste* or *Cascaria nitida*. Also, Martin (2006:180, Note 3) has also noted that *iximte'~iximche'* refers to plants not related to corn, such as *ramón*.

⁶ The authors also suggest that terms such as *yutal*, *tzi(h)il*, and *iximte'el* (the three most common in the Classic period) might not refer to prepared drinks, but to some type of cacao “in a broad sense that included dry beans (perhaps stored or presented in decorated cylinders) and drinks made from them” (Carter and Matsumoto 2020:111). At this moment, I do not have all the material consulted by them for their analysis.

The Terms <iximte> and <ximte> in Colonial Yucatec

The most valuable source for this analysis is undoubtedly the *Bocabulario de maya than*, a manuscript compiled in the Mani region (Yucatan). It contains words and descriptions mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Acuña 1993:18). The first two entries that interest us are <ixim> and <te>, given that both were recorded as “cacao, quenta para ello (cacao, account for it)” (Acuña 1993: 160).⁷ Here, we have expressions such as <ho te> and <ho xim u tulul cuchi>, both translated as “balfía cinco cacaos (it was worth five cacaos)” (Acuña 1993:161).

We need to clarify that in general the cognates for *ixim* in the Mayan languages have the meanings of “corn” (*Zea mays*), “corn grain,” “corn ready to be shelled,” or “corn in grain” (see Acuña 1993:458; Kaufman 2003:1034-1035). In Southern Mayan (SM), the word is **ixi'm* “maize kernels on or off the cob,” related to the proto-Mayan stem **ix(i)* “shelling corn” (Kaufman 2017:87).⁸ In both Colonial and modern Yucatec Mayan, the word for “(grain of) corn” appears with some dialect variants and has been registered as *ixim*, *ixi'im*, *xim*, or *xi'im* (see Barrera Vásquez 1980:275).⁹ The fact that the word *xim* or *ixim* “grain of corn” was used to account for cacao seems to imply that, in some parts of the Maya zone (or perhaps originally), *ixim* designated a type of valuable grain or seed.¹⁰

When we review in detail, it is revealed that *ximte'* or *iximte'* denotes an economic action related to the gathering up of products. Thus, we have in the same *Bocabulario*:

<xim te> “*escote*, each one contributing among many” (Acuña 1993:327; Spanish: “*escote*, contribuyendo cada uno entre muchos”);¹¹

<mol ixim te> “to collect *derrama*” (Acuña 1993:181; Spanish: “*coger derrama*”);¹²

<mol xim te> “to gather or put together *derrama*” (Acuña 1993:249; Spanish: “*derrama hechar [allegar] o jun[t]ar*”);

<xim te, tah> “contribute all” (Acuña 1993:202; Spanish: “*contribuir todos*”);

<u dzaabob u chhehob, u ximteob> “they gave or paid for the *escote* this way” (Acuña 1993:327; Spanish: “*dieron o pagaron el escote assi*”);

<xim, ximil[a]> “*arras*, money, others that were given to women in marriage” (Acuña 1993:114; Spanish: “*arras, otras que daban en casamiento a las mujeres*”);¹³

<tac ximila> “to invite, giving a gift or present to marry the daughter” (Acuña 1993:187; Spanish: “*conbidar, dando algún don o presente para casar la hija*”);

<ximila> “present or gift of cacao, money or *cuzcas*, and to make them” (Acuña 1993:138; Spanish: “*presente o don de cacao, dineros o cuzcas, y haçerlos*”).¹⁴

Some important observations are obvious with respect to *iximte* or *ximte*. The first is that both terms

refer to “*derrama*, *escote*, contribution” and to “*arras*, present, gift, treat.” That is, they refer to what has been collected or gathered by several people, voluntarily or through coercion; this suggests that it is related to tribute collection. The second observation is that this term was employed during negotiation of such events as marriages among the ancient Maya. This surely has to do with the idea that cacao was a type of “money” or “currency” (as with *cuzcas*) in ancient Mesoamerica.

The relationship between the corn seed/grain and the cacao bean, implied by the terms <ixim> and <xim>, is reaffirmed by the *Calepino maya de Motul*, a text from the Motul region (Yucatan) that collects words from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Acuña 2001:19-20). The manuscript explicitly records that <xim> is the “account for cacaos” and thus <hun xim, ca xim> was “one or two cacaos” (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: “*cuenta*”).

⁷ The translations from Mayan to English or from Spanish to English of the Colonial glosses are my own. It should be mentioned that Acuña (1993:160, Note 11) transcribes <ixim> as <xim>, apparently believing that it is an error by the copyist of the manuscript. However, later he does not make any correction with the term <mol ixim te> “to take *derrama*.” As has been expressed, in this case <xim> is a variation (with the elision of the first vowel) of the <ixim> stem. A review of the facsimile of the manuscript helped me to confirm that in both cases it is <ixim>, and Prager (1988-1989:114, 136) also transcribes the words in the same way. Some authors, such as Vail (2009:22) and Tokovinine (2019:290) have also noted the existence of the *ximte'* classifier but have not linked it to *iximte'el kakaw*.

⁸ From the transitive verb **ixi* derives the word **ixi'm* (participle), which also refers to what has been “shelled like corn” (Terrence Kaufman, personal communication 2021).

⁹ In Maya hieroglyphic writing, only the *ixim* variant has been deciphered.

¹⁰ I thank Martin Sobrino for having suggested this idea to me.

¹¹ In Old Spanish *escote* means “part or quota that corresponds to each one for the expense made in common by several people. Each one paying the part that corresponds to him in a common expense” (RAE 2021). The manuscript also registers <chheh>, with the same meaning.

¹² The *derrama* is the “distribution of an eventual expense, and more specifically of a contribution” and the “temporary or extraordinary contribution” (RAE 2021). The manuscript also collects <mol chheh, mol lot>, with the same meaning.

¹³ The word *arras* refers to the “pledge or signal given as a guarantee in a contract or concert,” to some “coins that the bride and groom give each other as a symbol of their union” (like wedding coins), or to the “presentation of a part of the price or consignment of an amount with which the fulfillment of an obligation is guaranteed” (RAE 2021).

¹⁴ The word *cuzcas*, of Nahuatl origin, can be considered equivalent to <kan> “stones that served to the Indians as currency and ornaments around the neck” (Acuña 2001:325; Spanish: “*cuzcas, o piedras que servían a los indios de moneda y de adorno al cuello*”), and we also have <u kan> “necklace of *cuzcas* or stones of value” (Acuña 1993:185; Spanish: “*collar de cuzcas o piedras de valor*”). The manuscript also contains phrases such as <yan ua a kamic u ximila ah kat justicia teche?> “Have you, by any chance, received a present like this from the one who asks you for justice?” (Acuña 1993:138; Spanish: “*has, por bentura, r[ecibi]do presente así del que te pide just[icia]?*”).

para cacaos" and "uno o dos cacaos").¹⁵ Other entries that interest us are:

<xim> "account for the corn cobs that are saved for seed" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "cuenta para las maçorcas de maíz q[ue] guardan para semilla");

<hun xim> "there are two cobs, because, for one cacao, which is *hun xim*, they give two cobs" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "son dos maçorcas, porque, por vn cacao, que es hun xim, dan dos maçorcas");

<ca xim> "there are four cobs" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "son quatro maçorcas").

These entries reveal that <hun ixim>, literally "one (corn) seed" was also what stored corn was called, and that one cacao bean was equivalent to two corncobs. I will mention the equivalence between cacao and corn among the ancient Mesoamericans below.¹⁶ The meaning of "derrama, escote, arras" and "present" are also found in the *Calepino*:

<ximte> "the *derrama* or *escote* or contribution of cacao, or money, between principals and non-principals" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "la derrama o escote o contribución de cacao, o de dineros, entre principales y no principales");

<ximila> "present or gift of cacao, or money or *cuzcas*, that one offers" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "presente o don de cacao, o de dinero o cuzcas, q[ue] uno ofrece");

<ximila> "the *arras* they gave to women at their weddings" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "las arras que daban a las mujeres en sus casamientos");

<ximil,tah,te> "to make these presents or offer them" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "hazer estos presentes o ofrecerlos");

<ximte,tah,te> "give to such *derrama* or contribution" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "dar a tal derrama o contribución");

<ximte tex; ximte nenex cacau> "contribute with cacao" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "contribuid [con] cacao");

<ximtean> "thing contributed by way of *derrama*" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "cosa contribuida por vía de derrama");

<mol ximte> "to take, gather *derrama*" (Acuña 2001:410; Spanish: "coger o allegar derrama").¹⁷

In summary, Colonial Yucatec clearly had recourse to a term (*iximte'* meaning "present, gift, contribution" and, by extension, "tribute." In some Mayan languages the suffix -*VI* derives relative adjectives from nouns (Houston et al. 2001:7-8; Meléndez 2007:39). Thus *iximte'el* could conceivably be translated as "contribution/tributary cacao" or as "contribution/tributary cacao-beans," and by extension it could also designate the drink prepared with this type of cacao.¹⁸

It has already been mentioned that *te'* seems to be a classifier, and furthermore in both Colonial Yucatec and Classic Mayan we have examples of *te'* and *-te'el* in

words related to tribute. The best-known term is *yubte'*, translated as "tribute mantle," a product that served as a type of payment (Houston cited in Stuart 1995:358-359; Tokovinine and Beliaev 2013:175-176). The *Calepino* has the terms:

<yub te> "tribute mantle or leg of these mantles, which are three *cuartas* wide and four *varas* long" (Acuña 2001:298; Spanish: "manta de tributo o pierna de estas mantas, que son de tres cuartas en ancho y de quatro varas de largo");

<yub teel [kuch]; yub teil kuch> "yarn/thread to make these mantles" (Acuña 2001:298; Spanish: "hilaza para hacer estas mantas").¹⁹

The *Bocabulario* also records the following related entries:

<yub te> "tribute mantle paid for by the Indians" (Acuña 1993:463; Spanish: "manta de tributo que pagan los indios");

<yub teil kuch> "very thin cotton thread, as for tribute mantles" (Acuña 1993:401; Spanish: "hilo de algodón muy delgado, como para mantas de tributo").

Thus it is possible that <(i)ximte> is related to <yubte>, both involving a classifier *te'* used to designate this type of merchandise, selected for tribute or as a product of tribute. Other Colonial documents also emphasize that cacao was used for marriage arrangements and other similar types of payments. In the *Vocabulario* of the Kaqchikel language by Thomas de Coto, it was recorded that among the different types of "presents" they used to make, there was one that included:

"Those from a Chinamital to the father of the girl with whom the boy of such Chinamital is to be married, and to this present, which they usually put together (that the ordinary thing is cacao to drink at the wedding) they

¹⁵ The manuscript also compiles <xim> as a "count of the yndias for the threads of its fabrics, which are from four to four" (Acuña 2001:589; Spanish: "cuenta de las yndias para los hilos de sus telas, que van de cuatro en cuatro"). However, this <xim>, although orthographically the same, appears to have a different origin than the term <ixim>. Another Colonial source registers <xim che> and <ximib che> as "bastidor" (see Bolles 2018:95). This <xim> for the threads of clothes is related to the proto-Mayan **xim* that originates in words of many Mayan languages (mainly from the Guatemalan highlands) related to "tie up" or "knot" (see Kaufman 2003:1001).

¹⁶ It may be relevant that *Jun Ixim* is one of the names of the Maya Maize God (see Taube 1985:172-174 and Zender 2014:2).

¹⁷ The *Calepino* also records <mol chheh, mol lot> with the same meaning.

¹⁸ I thank Martin Sobrino for suggesting this last translation to me.

¹⁹ Among other terms, the *Vocabulario* also records <u holmal yub te> "tribute from one *real*, which the Indians give in addition to their mantles" (Acuña 1993:623; Spanish: "tributo de un real, que dan los indios demás de sus mantas"). In Classic Mayan inscriptions, another word for "tribute" is *patan*, and *ihkatz* "load, bundle" also appears, with special reference to jade (see Stross 1988; Stuart 1995:361; Speal 2014).

call <nut> or <cuchuh>” (Acuña 1983:438; Spanish: “los de vn chinamital al padre de la muchacha con quien a de casar el muchacho del tal chinamital, y a este presente, q[ue] suelen juntar entre ellos (q[ue] lo ordinario es de cacao para beber en la boda) llaman <nut> o <cuchuh>”).²⁰

Another entry registers that <nut> was the “cacao collected among them” but it could also have another function, such as, “when in each chinamital [they asked] in each house ten or twenty cacaos to help to release someone from jail, or for the marriage of someone” (Acuña 1983:80; Spanish: “quando en cada chinamital [pedían] en cada casa a diez o veinte cacaos para ayudar a sacar a alguno de la cárcel, o para el casamiento de alguno”). And <nut> was also recorded as the “derrama of cacao that each one gives, ten or twenty [grains], or more, for a dispute or to help to arrange marriage” (Acuña 1983:23; Spanish: “derrama de cacao q[ue] cada vno da, diez o veinte [granos], o más, para pleito o para ayuda a casamiento”).

A Colonial Pokom source records <nut> as, “the contribution, the *escote*, the *derrama*, *stipendium*” and it is specified that it could consist of coins or cacao for the wedding (Feldman 2000:279).²¹ Among the Lacandon Ch’ol it was recorded that the exchange of five cacao beans and a bench—by the bride—and five cacao beans and clothing—by the groom—helped to arrange the marriage (Thompson 1938:602). And among the modern Awakatek, it has been recorded that the customs to conclude the marriage contract are named *kyikyuj* “cacao” or “chocolate” (McArthur and McArthur 1966:209).²²

With the evidence already considered, it is suggested that *iximte’el kakaw* could include at least three types of product: cacao collected through tribute, cacao collected to arrange marriages, or cacao as payment for another person (who possibly has been captured).

An Observation about the *ixim* Grain

A reconsideration of some entries in the *Bocabulario maya than* indicates that *ixim* referred to a valuable type of grain/seed or a corn-like grain. Thus, we have <u pucçikal yxym> as “heart of the corn grain, almond, cacao” (Spanish: “corazón del grano de maíz, alme[n]dra, cacao”), <kaxal bat; kaxal ixim bat> as “stoning, falling stones or hail” (Spanish: “apedrear, caer piedras o graniço”), and <ixim ocçabil cebollaob> as “chives to transplant” (Spanish: “çebollino para trasponer”) (Acuña 1993:204, 104, 224).²³ The first entry is explainable if we consider that *ixim* not only referred to corn seed, but also to almond, cacao, and other seeds.²⁴ The second entry is explained if we consider that *ixim* refers to something that resembles a seed, like hail. The third description designates a seed that can be “sown” such as a grain of corn, so we should consider *ixim* as a “seed” or something that is used “to be sown” (like

chive roots).

These entries may also shed some light on the relationship between the Classic Maya Maize God, usually known as *Jun Ixim*, and other types of valuable seeds. In addition to the link between the Maize God and cacao—as Simon Martin (2006) emphasized some time ago—this god is related to some type of bean, the *ib* (see Tokovinine 2014). The most logical inference is that *Jun Ixim* could refer (in certain contexts) to the “first seed” or to the “primordial seed” in general, and not exclusively to the maize seed. This is an idea that may be worth exploring in more detail.

Some scholars have noted that in Mayan languages there are a variety of trees or plants named *ixi(i)mche’* ~ *ixi(i)mte’* (see Stuart 1995:116, 2006:198-199; Martin 2006:180).²⁵ Based on the sources reviewed, it seems at least possible that they are so named because their fruits are like corn grains. It is also likely that *ixim* designated not only what is like corn seed, but also a group of small and valuable grains or seeds. That would explain why, on K4331, *iximte’* is the tag for the Maya Maize God with cacao pods on his body (see Martin 2006:155, Fig. 8.1). In that context, *iximte’* should be translated as “grain/seed tree” as a reference to the cacao beans tree (and not as “contribution”).

Some Observations Regarding the Cacao Bean

It is well known that among the Postclassic Mexica, cotton mantles and cacao beans (in their four varieties, *cacahuatl*, *mecacahuatl*, *xochicahuatl*, and *tlalcacahuatl*) were among the most valuable products and, in some sense, the most fundamental part of the tribute collected and in the exchange of products. Both those who owned cacao plantations, and those who prepared and

²⁰ The same *Vocabulario* records <cuchuh> as “present,” although the same linguistic root is the origin of words related to “cover, shelter, gather” (Acuña 1983:CV). Also, <nut> was registered as “*alcabala*,” a word that refers to a type of tax or tribute (Acuña 1983:CLXXIV).

²¹ The *stipendium* could be defined as the “payment or remuneration that is given to someone for a service” (RAE 2021).

²² See also Tedlock (2002:168-170). In Colonial Mixtec, a term equivalent to “*arras*, money for marriage” was also recorded: <ino dzehua>. Although it is translated as “*arras*, present, that occurs between lords in marriages; gift, *preseas* that they usually wear for ... weddings,” it is literally a diphrasism that means “tobacco-cacao” (Jansen 1997:84; Jansen and Pérez 2009:45).

²³ In these examples <ixim> works as an adjective. The word <pucçikal> is “heart,” <bat> is “hail,” <kax> refers to a type of rain, and <ocçabil> means “sowable.”

²⁴ Jennifer Loughmiller-Cardinal (personal communication 2021) considers that it can also refer to the shape of the seed (“almond shaped cacao beans”) and not to almonds themselves.

²⁵ Kaufman (2017:84) reconstructs SM **ixi’mtye’* “ramón” (*Brosimum alicastrum*), literally “shelled corn tree.” Therefore, the name of these trees must refer to fruit that is shelled like corn.

sold cacao, had specific names, with the figure of the “importer” and the “retailer” being important (Hirth 2016:72, 112-118). Some written sources establish a certain equivalence between cacao, cotton mantles, and other products. For example, a small mantle was worth 65 cacao beans, a medium one was worth 80 beans, and a large one worth 100. A peacock was worth 200 beans, a turkey 100, and a slave for slaughter 3,000 to 4,000 beans (Hirth 2016:250-254). The load or sack of cacao (what one person could carry) consisted of approximately 24,000 beans (Aranda 2005:1443).

Due to the importance of cacao tribute, it is not surprising that *iximte'el kakaw* would be one of the most common classifications on Classic Maya vessels. The translation proposed here would help to resolve the question of why in the Classic Maya epigraphic or iconographic corpus there are no representations that explicitly refer to cacao as tribute.²⁶ Perhaps it was not necessary to explicitly mention this in other contexts because the cacao-tribute was already quite visible, as a part of the PSS in ceramic objects.

Another significant issue to address refers to the possibility that some ceramic containers (usually called “vessels,” “vases,” or “cylinders”) were used to deposit cacao beans, dried seeds, or some type of dry product. Many years ago, some authors suggested that the *uk'ib* / *uch'ib* were not necessarily used to drink something (see MacLeod 1990:13, 391-393).²⁷

A recent publication on chemical residue analyses of just these vessels by Loughmiller-Cardinal (2018; see also Loughmiller-Newman 2012; Loughmiller-Cardinal and Cardinal 2020), revealed that some cylindrical vessels in whose PSS the *kakaw* word is recorded, show no evidence to date of having contained it, at least as a liquid. Her proposal and results suggest that the content of the cylinders was not determined by the text or by the PSS and that these objects were not necessarily used for the consumption of any beverage or food that contained cacao (Loughmiller-Cardinal 2018:3).²⁸ These types of studies suggest that in many cases the mention of *kakaw* in the vessels served to:

- (1) reference one of the other aspects of the plant rather than a subsequent beverage;
- (2) as a symbolic reference to cacao use rather than the vessel's use; and/or
- (3) the text is commemorating an event where a specific cacao concoction was consumed (Loughmiller-Cardinal 2018:3).

In some cases, small areas of abrasion on the interior of the ceramic cylinders could indicate that they were used to store dried cacao beans, since there is archaeological evidence that some ceramics contained them. Furthermore, the fact that they did not necessarily contain liquids (and a label on a container was not necessary to drink chocolate), highlights the symbolic value of the piece and its display by elites (Loughmiller-

Cardinal 2018:7, 9). Another proposal to consider regarding the study is that

the vessel was used to present either dry content of *kakaw* or otherwise to signal that the owner/possessor of the vessel was permitted access to it and the PSS labeling used to sanctify or authorize that use as ritually correct. These data thereby narrow the possible range of potential purposes for both vessel and PSS. (Loughmiller-Cardinal 2018:14)

For several reasons, it is important that we consider the possibility that containers labeled with the word *kakaw* could contain a dry product. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, sixteenth-century documents specify that the *iximte'el* ~ *ximte'* designated seeds or cobs, that is, dry products, not drinks. The second reason is that, if the *iximte'el kakaw* was tribute cacao, it is obvious that this was gathered dry, perhaps as cargo packages (and not as a drink). Whether indicated as *arras*, *derrama*, or *escote*, cacao had to be collected in seed or on the cob, so the linguistic data analyzed here support the archaeological evidence offered by Loughmiller-Cardinal and suggested by other academics on the topic.

Final Remarks

The analysis presented here supports the idea that *iximte'el kakaw* refers to the contribution of cacao beans/seeds, gathered or collected by many people,

²⁶ See Tokovinine and Beliaev (2013:174) for a review of Classic Maya terms related to tribute. The same authors consider that the representations of bundles with the word *kakaw* are ambiguous and do not necessarily refer to cacao as tribute, while other authors have also proposed that the bundles with the *pik* label could refer to cacao.

²⁷ Similarly, Alfonso Lacadena (personal communication, cited in Beliaev et al. 2010:258), proposed the translation of *yutal kakaw* as “the seeds of *kakaw*,” which would indicate that some vessels contained dry food. However, the same authors also mentioned that “this interpretation is not supported by the obvious function of the *yuch'ib* as a vessel for liquids nor the linguistic data. There is no doubt that *yuch'ib* vessels were used for liquids, not for seeds or other hard foods” (Beliaev et al. 2010:358). The problem is that an “obvious function” of objects cannot be established only by considering linguistic or epigraphic data. It is worth mentioning that Justin Kerr (personal communication, cited in LeCount 2001:948) had suggested that some vessels may have contained seeds or “corn kernels for the gods of the underworld.” His interpretation was based on the supposed reading of the word “seed” in a section of vessel K504. Some of the recently proposed readings for the label of some ceramics also suggest a dry product, as with a tripod from the Río Azul region, with the *y-uk'ib ta ibil kakaw* tag, given that *ib* is a type of bean (see Tokovinine 2014:12-13).

²⁸ The Loughmiller-Cardinal paper is based on the study of 70 cylindrical ceramics. Loughmiller-Cardinal (personal communication 2021) informed me that at present she has analyzed 128 pieces with the same results. I should mention that at the time of writing this article, I do not have access to the full database or all the information that Loughmiller-Cardinal worked with.

either for self-interest or as taxation/tribute. This term applies to what is kept as seed (to sow), and the translation of *iximte'el kakaw* has been offered as “cacao from the *derrama/escote/arras*,” “tribute cacao,” and as “contribution / tributary cacao-bean.” *Iximte'*, then, may be translated generally as “contribution” in some contexts and more narrowly as “tribute” in others. In still other cases, the *iximte'el kakaw* may have exclusively referred to cacao for marital agreements.

Although the “tributary cacao beans” could have been presented as a dry product in the Classic vessels, it cannot be ruled out that *iximte'el kakaw* was a drink prepared with this type of cacao. The proposal related to cacao as a dry product is supported by archaeological information and chemical analyses that have been carried out on some Classic ceramic pieces. If the *iximte'el kakaw* of the PSS was the cacao that was collected through tribute, this might help to explain why explicit mentions of cacao tribute have not been found, either in Maya iconography or in the epigraphic corpus. Also, if the term was more prominent during the Late Classic, this could indicate that the collection of tribute increased during that time.

The words *ixim* or *xim* refer in some contexts to grains or small pieces (such as precious stones) like corn kernels or “coins” that could belong to the category of “money” and did not necessarily refer to a drink, or to corn. This peculiarity must be analyzed in more detail.

I am aware that many contexts have not been addressed here, including other variants such as *yutal iximte'el kakaw*, *tzih iximte'el kakaw*, and *te'el kakaw*. It is still possible to delve into the etymology of *iximte'* and its semantic development. It would be interesting to find out what other uses the containers designated as *uk'ib* / *uch'ib* might have had. It is possible that they served as the method of cacao tribute in certain contexts, or that they served as objects of measurement of a certain amount of cacao beans, perhaps a product of the tribute or of some type of negotiation.²⁹ We need to analyze the archaeological context and the iconography of the objects that bear the label *iximte'el kakaw*, if possible. For example, pieces K0511, K6418, K8008, K8469, K1775, K2796, K7750, K2323, and K5847 show scenes of the royal court, some with representations of bundles that can be interpreted as some type of tribute or reward, or as products for negotiation. Surely a more extensive analysis of these cases will continue to reveal interesting findings.

²⁹ One possibility is that the polychrome ceramic vessels exchanged or offered during the Classic may have included cacao beans inside, as a part of the exchange.

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