

Theonyms in Royal Titulature Among the Classic Maya: A Follow-Up

Los teónimos en la titulación real entre los mayas clásicos: un seguimiento

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Abstract: This article complements a previously published study on the unusual Classic Maya onomastic pattern of certain theonyms appearing among the titles of noblemen. The approach that identifies this pattern as a “short formula” of deity impersonation allows for exploring more peculiar cases and distinguishing them from theophoric anthroponyms.

Keywords: Mesoamerica; Classic Maya onomastics; Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions; theonyms; theophoric names.

Resumen: Este artículo complementa un estudio previamente publicado sobre el inusual patrón onomástico maya clásico de ciertos teónimos que aparecen entre los títulos de los nobles. El enfoque que identifica este patrón como una “fórmula corta” de impersonación de dioses permite explorar más casos peculiares y distinguirlos de los antropónimos teofóricos.

Palabras clave: Mesoamérica; onomástica maya del período Clásico; inscripciones jeroglíficas mayas; teónimos; nombres teofóricos.

Some Classic Maya hieroglyphic texts (ca. 250–900 CE) provide cases of an uncommon onomastic pattern, which is that certain theonyms appear within the expanded name phrases of noblemen (Beloborodov, 2020). While many regnal names were theophoric and consisted of a clause, with a theonym as a subject (Houston & Stuart, 1996, p. 295), the names analyzed in this

study differ in that they do not contain any predicate and only include theonyms. Such examples should be considered in the context of deity impersonation, a well-known Mesoamerican phenomenon. The positioning of these theonyms among the royal titles resembles the “impersonation formula.” The latter usually involves the expression *ʔubʔaahil ʔaʔn*, “the embodiment/impersonator of,” followed by a theonym (Houston & Stuart, 1996, pp. 298–299). The examined examples do not feature this particular expression, but the use of these theonyms strongly correlates with the syntax of the formula. Furthermore, they belong to deities closely related to impersonation. The name of a bellicose aspect of the Sun God, *ʔUhuk Chapaah Tzʔikiin Kʔihnich ʔAjaw* appears several times as part of royal titlature, and it was actually the most frequently impersonated entity in the Classic period (Nehammer Knub et al., 2009, p. 189). Another name found in this context, *Juʔn ʔAjaw Kʔuh*, belongs to one of the renowned Hero Twins, whose impersonation is linked to the Maya ballgame, as shown by both epigraphic and iconographic data. The incorporation of theonyms into human name phrases can be explained by the existence of a “short impersonation formula” that only represented a theonym and omitted *ʔubʔaahil ʔaʔn*.

More cases should be discussed in the proposed framework. The inscription on La Corona Element 33 (Beliaev et al., 2016, pp. 211–215) contains the following sentence: *ʔi-huli haʔi Waxaklajuʔn ʔUbaah Chaʔn/Chaan Yuhknoʔm Yichʔaak Kʔahkʔ kʔuhul Kanuʔl ʔajaw*, “then he arrived, he [who is] Waxaklajuʔn Ubaah Chan, Yuhknoʔm Yichʔaak Kʔahkʔ, sacred king of Kanul.” The independent emphatic pronoun *haʔi*, which occupies basically the same slot here as does *ʔubʔaahil ʔaʔn* in the standard formula, highlights that the ruler Yuhknoʔm Yichʔaak Kʔahkʔ is here to be perceived as Waxaklajuʔn Ubaah Chan, a deity associated with Teotihuacan symbolism (Houston & Stuart, 1996, p. 299). The phrase functions as a short impersonation statement and not

a theophoric anthroponym, which is further supported by the fact that this deity also occurs in the context of the standard impersonation formula in other texts.

On Bonampak Stela 2, a woman is called *ʼIx Yax Chiit Juʼn Witzʼ Naah Kaan ʼix Paʼchan ʼajaw ʼixba[ah]kab*, “Ix Yax Chit Jun Witzʼ Nah Kan, princess of Paʼchan, lady *bakab* [title]” (Bíró, 2011, p. 4). Yax Chit Jun Witzʼ Nah Kan, or the Water Lily Serpent, is a frequently impersonated deity with ambivalent gender traits (Nehammer Knub et al., 2009, p. 190). With the Classic Mayan feminine prefix *ʼix-*, Ix Yax Chit Jun Witzʼ Nah Kan is the female form of this “androgynous” entity. The typical *ʼubʼaahil ʼaʼn* statements on El Perú Stela 34 and a lintel stored in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (AC1992.76.1) indicate its impersonation by the noble women. The suggestion is that *ʼIx Yax Chiit Juʼn Witzʼ Naah Kaan* on Bonampak Stela 2 is not a female personal theophoric name involving a theonym, but rather the theonym itself, which functions as a short impersonation statement. Thus, the inscription does not mention the woman’s personal name and only refers to her as an impersonator of the deity.

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