Stone Trees Transplanted?

Central Mexican Stelae of the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic and the Question of Maya 'Influence'

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Preface

All presentations of Mesoamerican art require authorial decisions regarding the choice of spellings of indigenous names from the array of alternative readings present in the past and current literature, as well as choosing among the often controversial options available for naming various deity images and other motifs. I would like here to explain my selection of a few usages.

In the rendering of Maya names in English, I have tried to adopt the most recent versions of both hieroglyphic decipherments and spelling conventions. Given the rapid progress of decipherment over the past few years alone, and the changing fashions in transcription, the results will no doubt appear dated in the not so distant future, but this is unavoidable. Some of these conventions are more contentious than others. For example, I render the Yucatec Maya term for both a hilly region of Yucatan and an associated

Terminal Classic architectural style Puuk rather than the alternative Puuc. This spelling is consistent with the recent shift towards using the Latin 'k' instead of 'c' in spelling Maya words, and was employed by Schele and Mathews (1998), two leading Maya epigraphers. It has not, however, been accepted by the Mexican government, which in its tourist literature still uses the older and still common variant 'Puuc.' With the name of a Pasión Maya site in Guatemala I discuss extensively in Chapter 6, Ceibal, on the other hand, the name is currently favored by the modern government of the region, although the competing alternative 'Seibal' does still appear in the archaeological and art historical literature. As I discuss in reviewing the site's history in Chapter 7, the locality was christened after nearby stands of ceiba trees by the Austrian archaeologist Teobert Maler at the close of the 19th century. However, Maler Teutonicized the spelling by changing the 'c' commonly used to render the name of the tree into an 's' for the name of the ruined city. I have opted for the 'c' to bring the tree and its eponymous archaeological site into congruence, as well as to remove the European twist on this indigenous name.

The renderings of the names of deities depicted in Mesoamerican art are also often disputed matters. A frequently appearing character in this book is the goggle-eyed, fanged Central Mexican rain deity whose face appears on Stela 2 at Xochicalco and on the headgear of at least two of the Tula stelae, as well as in the art of Classic Teotihuacan, and via contacts with that metropolis in some of the Classic Maya works under examination here. The Mexica (or Aztecs) and other Central Mexican speakers of Nahuatl at the time of the Spanish Conquest called this figure Tlaloc. We have no evidence to determine with absolute certainty what he was called in earlier times and in areas outside the Nahuatl area. But from the 19th century, scholars, like the Sufi holy fool looking for the keys he lost in the house not there but under the street light because the light was brighter there, have used the better documented Mexica material to name and interpret these earlier images. For the greater part of the 20th century, the images of this deity in Teotihuacan art were referred to as Tlaloc even though the linguistic affiliations of this city were (and remain) unknown. In last few decades of the last century, George Kubler (1985) and Esther Pasztory (1997) argued strongly against this label for the Teotihuacan version on the basis of both the probable linguistic differences and on art historical grounds, noting, following Erwin Panofsky and other historians of Western art, that the same image may acquire radically disjunctive meanings over the centuries. (A small winged figure on a Roman sarcophagus, for example, will have a quite different intended meaning than one gracing a Christian painting of the Renaissance.) The arguments and influence of these writers lead to the common use in recent writings of the term 'Storm God' to describe this god in Teotihuacan art. Both writers stressed the uniqueness of Teotihuacan among Mesoamerican art traditions and deemphasized its connections both with contemporary Mesoamerican cultures and later developments in Central Mexico. Yet, recently the pendulum has begun to swing once again in the direction of using apparent continuities of Teotihuacan's art and religion with those of its Central Mexican successors as the basis of hypothesis formation. Consistent with this development, some recent writers have referred to the Teotihuacan deity as Tlaloc, not to demonstrate linguistic but what they perceive as ideological continuity. Thus in the most recent monograph on Teotihuacan art at the time I write these words, Annabeth Headrick calls the goggle-eyed figure at Teotihuacan Tlaloc, explaining that 'As of late it has become more common to refer to Tlaloc as the Storm God…so as not to confuse the Teotihuacan manifestation of the god with the later Aztec version. While I find much merit in this strategy, I have retained the name Tlaloc because I see so many continuities between the Central Mexican cultures. However, this decision must acknowledge that there are differences, and it is critical to be sensitive to the Classic period manifestations of this deity' (2007:172). A more cautious tactic is taken up by Karl Taube (Miller and Taube 1993; Taube 2000a), who employs the more qualified epithet 'the Teotihuacan Tlaloc,' adopting a term used in the past by Pasztory (1974). I have adopted this usage for this god, both at home in Teotihuacan and abroad among the Classic Maya, as a compromise stressing continuities and differences simultaneously.[1]

[1] As will be seen in Chapter 7, historians of Maya art like Linda Schele (Schele and Freidel 1990) and Andrea Stone (1989) call him Tlaloc when

At Xochicalco, this supernatural is called Tlaloc by all of the pundits involved with the interpretation of the stelae at this Epiclassic site (e.g., Smith 2000), although this city's ethnic and linguistic affiliations are also uncertain. For ease of communication, I use this consensual label, but it is not to be interpreted as reflecting a belief that this is what the citizens of ancient Xochicalco called him or how he might have differed in cult and concept there from later Postclassic cultures, matters on which I remain agnostic. At Tula, the same name is used for this divinity by most of the handful of scholars concerned with the site's iconography (e.g., Diehl 1983; Jiménez García 1998; Mastache, Cobean, and Healan 2002). The majority of the very small community of Toltec scholars agrees, on ethnohistorical and historical linguistic grounds, that the Tula Toltecs included Nahuatl speakers, removing the linguistic disjunction objection to the use of the name. Cynthia Kristan-Graham represents an exception to this consensus (2007). She is deeply skeptical of the historical veracity (in a European sense) of Mexica traditions about Tula, and points to DNA evidence (Fournier and Bolaños 2007) suggesting a great time depth for the presence of speakers of Otomí in the Tula region. However, since both archaeology and ethnohistory (Davies 1977) point to the multiethnic makeup of the Tula polity, and Fournier and Bolaños (2007:496) report that DNA analysis of skeletons from the Early Postclassic in the Tula area shows the presence there of other lineages or ethnicities beside the Otomí, I accept the probability that Nahuatl speakers were present at the site, at least during the Early Postclassic Tollan Phase. In addition, Jiménez García sees much iconographic and by implication, conceptual continuity between Toltec and later Mexica deities. For these reasons, I have retained the 'T-word' to describe this god in Toltec art, but again it is not to be understood that conceptions of this deity were the same in their entirety between the Toltecs and their Aztec successors and admirers, no more than concepts of the nature of Christ among the creators of catacomb paintings, Coptic art, or Byzantine icons were identical.

In terms of geographical nomenclature, I employ the term Central Mexico in its narrower sense to designate the highland regions of the center of the country, encompassing the states of Mexico, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, and Morelos, as distinct from the Mixtec and Zapotec regions to the south in Oaxaca, and the coastal lowlands of Veracruz and Tabasco.

All translations from Spanish are mine, with the exception of works cited as their English translations in the Bibliography, where the translator is credited. I have commonly employed abbreviations in the text for some agencies and museums. Although each name is given in full in the first usage, a few common ones bear explaining at the start as well:

INAH Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City
MMA Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MNA Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City

he occurs in Classic Maya art to distinguish him from the very different indigenous Maya rain deity Chaak (formerly Chac), and to emphasize his Central Mexican origins. Among the Terminal Classic and Postclassic Maya of Yucatan, these two gods seem to have syncretistically merged (Taube 1992c:133-135), but during the Classic they occur in very different contexts, with 'Tlaloc' associated mostly with warfare rather than water.

Acknowledgements

A book is never really the work of one individual, traditions or conventions of attribution and authorship, and intellectual property laws, aside. It is a reflection of one writer's engagement and interaction, at one stage of scholarly and personal development, with the broader field and discipline as it stands at a particular juncture in its history. Both the individual and the field exist within broader social, economic, and political contexts that shape, constrain, and provoke the forms of the thoughts expressed in its pages. Beyond these macrosocial contexts, the contents of a dissertation are conditioned and shaped by the more immediate networks of support and feedback surrounding its author and the processes of research and writing. I would like here to acknowledge the crucial help received from individuals and institutions that permitted, facilitated, and stimulated the work presented here.

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My field research in Mexico in 2005 for the dissertation upon which this book is based was assisted by a Professional Development Fellowship from the College Art Association. As part of the benefits of receiving this honor, I was also able to present an early summary of my research at the Professional Development Fellows panel at the 2006 annual CAA meeting in Boston. I would like to thank Stacy Miller and Beth Herbruck of the CAA for their support and assistance in insuring the disbursement of the funds and making the Boston meeting a positive experience for me. A Dissertation Research Fellowship from the City University of New York Graduate Center funded my field research in Guatemala in January 2007. I would like to thank Dr. Linda Merman of the Research Office at the Graduate Center for processing this fellowship. Additional fieldwork in Mexico in February 2007 was made possible by an additional fellowship from the Art History Department at the CUNY Graduate Center. Thanks are due to the Executive Officer, Dr. Kevin Murphy, for providing this funding. Last, but far from least in terms of institutional support, my receiving a Milton Brown Doctoral Dissertation in the Arts from the CUNY Graduate Center for the academic year 2006-2007 made it possible for me to complete the writing of the first draft of the dissertation during that time.

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This book would never have come to fruition without the support and assistance of several of my esteemed colleagues in the small subfield of Toltec studies. I am indebted to Dr. Cynthia Kristan-Graham of Auburn University in a number of ways. She served as my outside reader for the original dissertation, taking time out from her busy academic schedule to comment on my drafts and provide critical feedback and encouragement, and served as one of the reviewers of the book form for Archaeopress. She has continued to assist my inquiries into the art tradition of Tula and the issue of the interactions among Epiclassic Mesoamerican art traditions that form the focus of Chapter 4 of this volume. As the only art historian, present or past, to devote the focus of her scholarly attention to the neglected and marginalized art of Toltec Tula, she has provided an indispensable fund of data and knowledge, a standard for research in this area, and inspiration to look more closely at an often devalued Mesoamerican art tradition, via her numerous publications over the past two decades and her 1989 doctoral dissertation. Her writings are the temple platform upon which any research efforts in this area by anyone else must rest. Without her pioneering scholarship on the art of Tula as a base, a large part of this book could never have been possible.

Another exemplary Toltec scholar, Dr. Robert Cobean of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the chief excavator at Tula over the last two decades, contributed to my research efforts, by his numerous and excellent publications on the site, co-authored with his late wife Dr. Alba Guadalupe Mastache; by providing me with information on the present location of Stela 6 at the site and helping arrange my visit to the bodega of the Nuevo Museo Jorge R. Acosta at Tula in February 2007; and by serving as a reviewer of the book manuscript for Archaeopress. He also provided me with information about his excavation of reliefs of the Tula Chico phase, and with a copy of his publication of them in the May-June 2007 issue of *Arqueología Mexicana*, and gave me permission to reproduce a photo of one of these works of Epiclassic Tula art. He has continued to provide ongoing advice and encouragement.

It is through Bob Cobean that I met another Toltec scholar who has been an incredible help in my research, Elizabeth Jiménez García of UNAM. Elizabeth, like Cynthia Kristan-Graham, is the only scholar in her field, in her case archaeology, to devote much of her scholarly attention to the study of Toltec art. Her 1998 book, *Iconografía de Tula: El caso de la escultura*, is an indispensable catalog and analysis of the site's sculptural corpus. Her accompanying drawings, dissecting the elaborate costumes of the figures on the Tula stelae into their component elements, greatly facilitated my work of comparative analysis presented here in Chapter 7. At present, Elizabeth is working on a definitive catalog of Toltec sculpture that promises to be a landmark reference. An abbreviated preliminary version, in the form of a grant report for FAMSI, served as a key source for this book. Elizabeth graciously arranged and accompanied me on my visit to the bodega at Tula in February 2007, had the patience to converse with me at length about Toltec iconography despite my considerably imperfect Spanish, provided me with her digital photos of Stela 6, secured permission for me to photograph Stela 1, and guided me to the remaining ballplayer stela fragment in situ. She also provided at this time important information on the Toltec stelae of Tetmilincan, Guerrero. Over the years, she has continued to encourage my research, has sent me copies of her publications, and graciously provided permission to reproduce photos and drawings. Thank you, Elizabeth, for all your assistance.

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