

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 Teutonized 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 Pasztor (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 Pasztor (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.

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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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