



Obviation and information structure in 16th century K'iche' Maya

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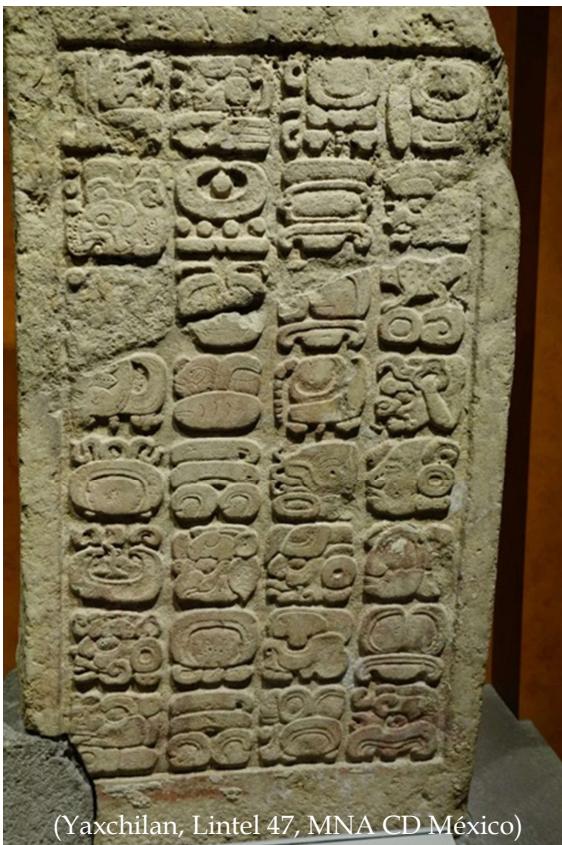
Berlin, February 8, 2024

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Prehispanic Mayan Writing

logosyllabic writing mainly used during „classic” period (250-900 AD)
by scribes from early Ch'olan and Yucatecan languages

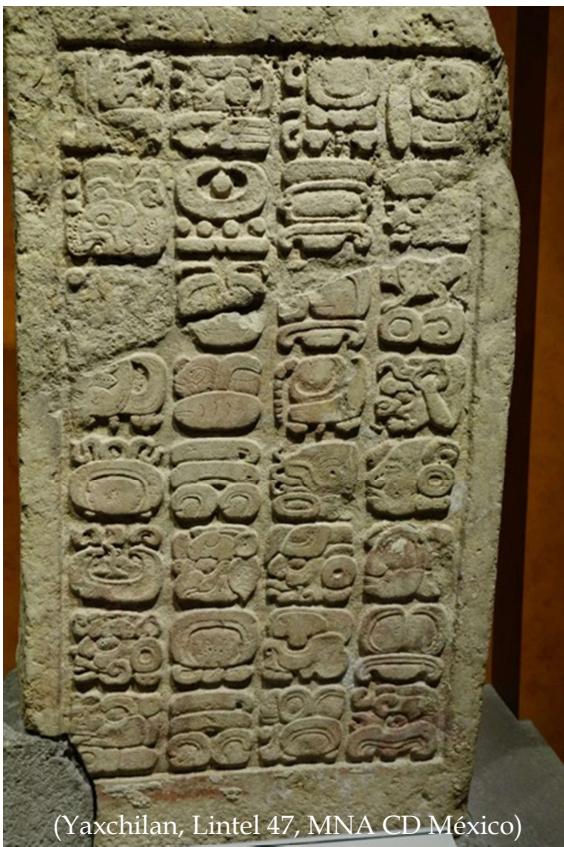


(Yaxchilan, Lintel 47, MNA CD México)



Prehispanic Mayan Writing

logosyllabic writing mainly used during „classic” period (250-900 AD)
by scribes from early Cholan and Yucatecan languages



Logogram *bahlam* ‘jaguar’



Logogram with additional syllabograms indicating
the initial and/or final consonants *b* and *m*



ba-bahlam



bahlam-ma



ba-bahlam-ma

purely syllabic writing of *bahlam* ‘jaguar’



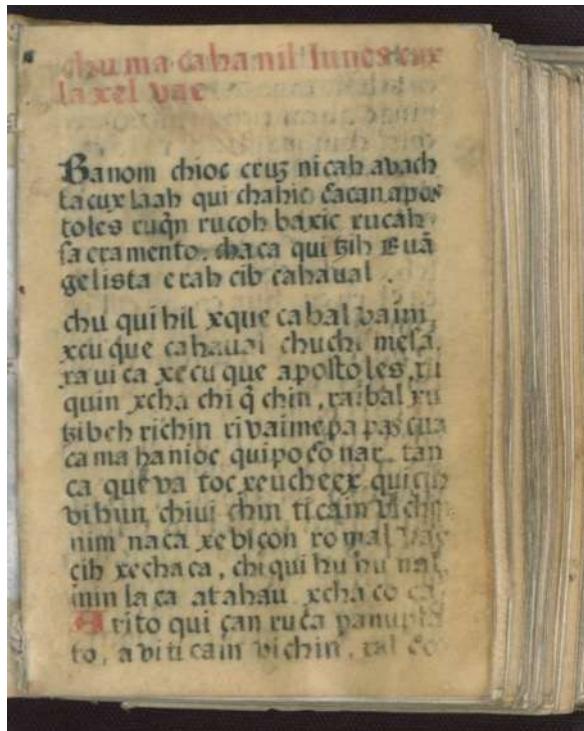
ba-la-ma

(from Dürr/Schlobinski 2022: 58 after Coe 1992: 264)



Mayan literature from the colonial period

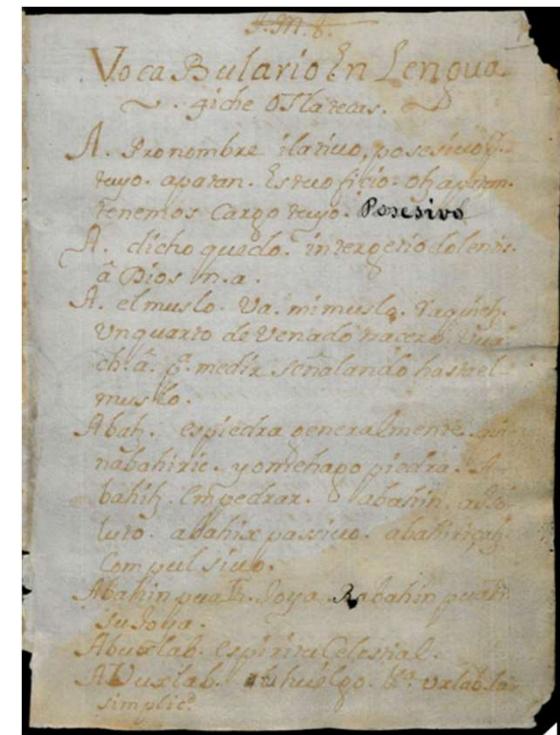
since the middle of the 16th century
use of the latin alphabet (sometimes with additional characters)



Luis de Granada, Libro de la oracion y meditacion, translated into Kaqchikel, ca. 1555-1570

K'iche' Dictionary
Vocabulario en lengua 4iche otlatecas
(18th century)

both ms. from
Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Berlin



Mayan literature from the colonial period

since the middle of the 16th century

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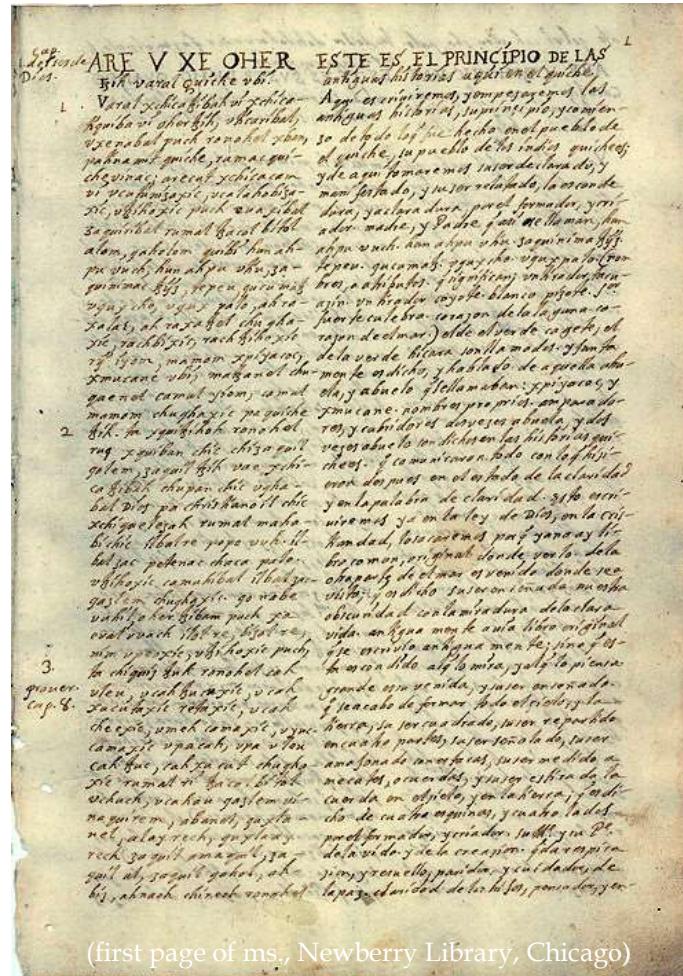


(Chilam Balam of Ixil, MNA CD México;
Yucatec Maya)



Mayan literature from the colonial period

Popol Wuj (or *Popol Vuh*)
from Highland Guatemala
written in K'iche' (ca. 1554-58)
only accessible copy from ca. 1700



(first page of ms., Newberry Library, Chicago)



Pronominal prefixes in 16th century K'iche'

	ABSOLUTIVE	ERGATIVE	
1 sg	in-	nu-	w-
2 sg	at-	a-	aw-
3	Ø-	u-	r-
1 pl	oj-	qa-	q-
2 pl	ix-	i-	iw-
3 pl	e-	ki-	k-

Intransitive verbs

Absolutive = subject

k-in-ulik 'I come'

k-Ø-ulik 'he/she comes'

k-oj-ulik 'we come'

k-e-ulik 'they come'



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Nouns

Ergative = possessor

nu-wuj 'my book(s)'

u-wuj 'his/her book(s)'

qa-wuj 'our book(s)'

ki-wuj 'their book(s)'



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3 pl	e-	ki-	k-

Transitive verbs

absolutive = direct object; ergative = subject

k-Ø-nu-sik'ij 'I (*nu-*) call him/her/them (*Ø-*)'

k-Ø-u-sik'ij 'he/she calls her/him/them (*Ø-*)'

ka-Ø-qa-sik'ij 'we (*qa-*) call him/her/them (*Ø-*)'

ka-Ø-ki-sik'ij 'they (*ki-*) call him/her/them (*Ø-*)'



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ka-Ø-ki-sik'ij 'they (*ki-*) call him/her/them (*Ø-*)'

k-in-u-sik'ij 'he/she (*u-*) calls me (*in-*)'

k-in-ki-sik'ij 'they (*ki-*) call me (*in-*)'

k-e-qa-sik'ij 'we (*qa-*) call them (*e-*)'



Transitive clauses (1)

- (1) ta x-Ø-ki-k'am k-ikaj
PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-take 3pERG-axe
'they took their axe(s)'
- (2) ta x-Ø-ki-chap jun winaq
PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-grasp one man
'they grabbed a man'
- (3) ta x-Ø-u-k'amo Majukutaj
PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-take <name>
'Majukutaj took it'
- (4) ch-Ø-u-sik'ij ri ajtz'ib' ajk'ot ojer
POT-3ABS-3ERG-call DEF writer carver in.past.times
'In the past, the artists used to invoke them (certain deities)'
- (5) k'ate puch x-Ø-ki-chapo
then PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-grasp
'and then they grabbed her'



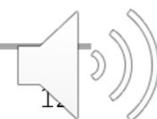
Transitive clauses (2)

- (6) **k'ate puch ta x-Ø-k-il** **Xib'alb'a ri saqi tok'**
 then PTL PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-see **Xibalbans** DEF white knife
 'and then the Xibalbans saw the white knife'

- (7) ta x-Ø-r-il k'ut Wuqub' Kaqix ri mama ati't
 PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-see PTL <name> DEF old.man old.woman
 'Wuqub Kaqix saw the old couple'

OBJECT (focused)

- (8) **xa tap ch-Ø-u-tzukuj chi taq ja'**
 only crab POT-3ABS-3ERG-seek LOC PL water
 'he only used to collect crabs in the water'



Pivot and topic assignment

- (9) x-Ø-ki-poroj ja keje ri qitzij chi-Ø-k'atik
PFV-3ABS-3pERG-burn house like DEF truly POT-3ABS-burn.PAS
'they set fire to the **house**. It seemed to burn ...'
- (10) ta x-Ø-ki-chap jun winaq
PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-grasp one man
k'ate' x-Ø-ki-pusu
then PFV-3ABS-3pERG-cut.in.pieces
'They grabbed **a man**. Then they cut **him** into pieces.'
- (11) are x-Ø-r-ixowaj K'iq'ab' x-Ø-u-b'an lab'al
DEM PFV-3ABS-3ERG-hate <name> PFV-3ABS-3ERG-make war
'(King) **K'iq'ab** hated them. **He** made war.'
- (12) ta x-Ø-ki-ta'o u-tzijel kik'
PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-hear 3ERG-story rubber.ball
ta x-Ø-u-b'ij ch'o
PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-say mouse
'they listened to **the story of the rubber ball** told by the mouse'



Embedding of the subject into the object (1)

- OBJECT —————
- possessum possessor (= subject)
- (13) ta x-Ø-u-k'am r-echa' ri xik
 PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-take 3ERG-food DEF falcon
 'the falcon took his meal'

- OBJECT —————
- possessum possessor (= subject)
- (14) ma wi x-Ø-u-tzonoj u-q'aq' ri kaqchikel-eb'
 NEG PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-ask 3ERG-fire DEF <name>-PL
 'The Kaqchikel did not ask for their fire.'



Embedding of the subject into the object (2)

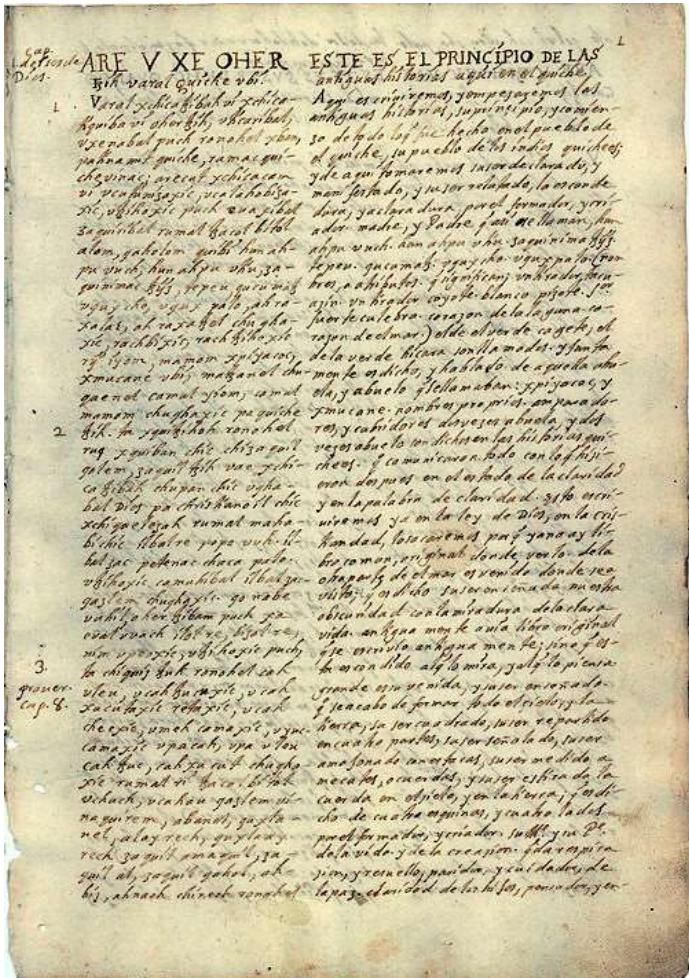
- OBJECT -----
possessum possessor (= subject)
- (13) ta x-Ø-u-k'am
 PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-take r-echa' ri xik
 'the falcon took his meal'

- OBJECT -----
possessum possessor (= subject)
- (14) ma wi x-Ø-u-tzonoj u-q'aq' ri kaqchikel-eb'
 NEG PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-ask 3ERG-fire DEF <name>-PL
 'The Kaqchikel did not ask for their fire.'

- (15) ma wi x-Ø-u-tzonoj u-q'aq' ri kaqchikel-eb'
 NEG PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-ask 3ERG-fire DEF <name>-PL
- ma wi x-Ø-u-ya' r-ib' chi ch'akik
NEG PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-give 3ERG-self LOC defeat
- 'The Kaqchikel did not ask for their fire.
They did not resign themselves to defeat'



Concluding remarks



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Michael Dürr

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