

# Obviation and information structure in 16<sup>th</sup> century K'iche' Maya

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# Prehispanic Mayan Writing

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



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(Yaxchilan, Lintel 47, MNA CD México)

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*

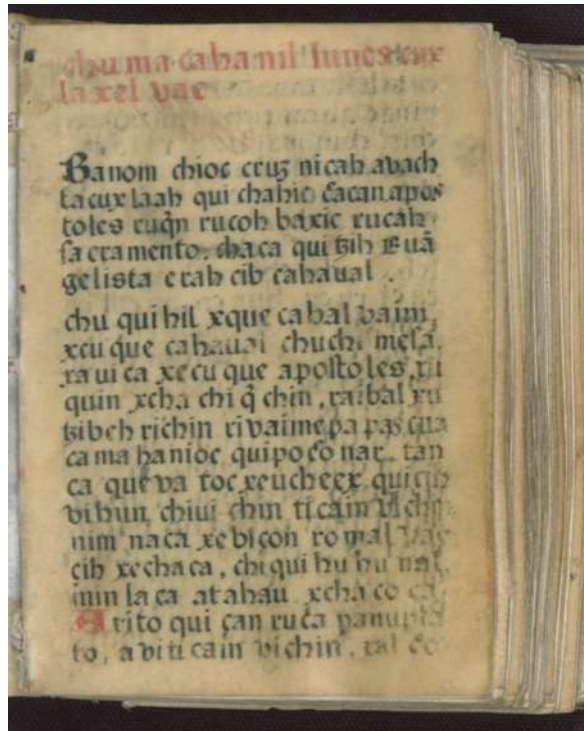
(from Dürr/Schlobinski 2022: 58 after Coe 1992: 264)



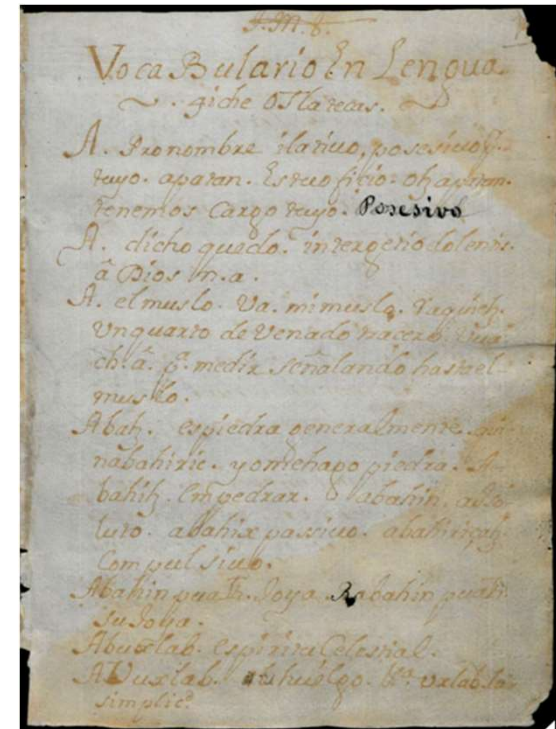
# Mayan literature from the colonial period

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 k'iche otlatecas  
(18th century)

both ms. from  
Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Berlin



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# Pronominal prefixes in 16th century K'iche'

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	ABSOLUTIVE	ERGATIVE	
1 sg	in-	nu-	w-
2 sg	at-	a-	aw-
3	∅-	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-∅-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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## Transitive verbs

absolutive = direct object; ergative = subject

- k-∅-nu-sik'ij*      'I (*nu-*) call him/her/them (*∅-*)'  
*k-∅-u-sik'ij*      'he/she calls her/him/them (*∅-*)'  
*ka-∅-qa-sik'ij*      'we (*qa-*) call him/her/them (*∅-*)'  
*ka-∅-ki-sik'ij*      'they (*ki-*) call him/her/them (*∅-*)'



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## Transitive verbs

absolutive = direct object; ergative = subject

<i>k-∅-nu-sik'ij</i>	'I ( <i>nu-</i> ) call him/her/them ( <i>∅-</i> )'
<i>k-∅-u-sik'ij</i>	'he/she calls her/him/them ( <i>∅-</i> )'
<i>ka-∅-qa-sik'ij</i>	'we ( <i>qa-</i> ) call him/her/them ( <i>∅-</i> )'
<i>ka-∅-ki-sik'ij</i>	'they ( <i>ki-</i> ) call him/her/them ( <i>∅-</i> )'
<i>k-in-u-sik'ij</i>	'he/she ( <i>u-</i> ) calls me ( <i>in-</i> )'
<i>k-in-ki-sik'ij</i>	'they ( <i>ki-</i> ) call me ( <i>in-</i> )'
<i>k-e-qa-sik'ij</i>	'we ( <i>qa-</i> ) call them ( <i>e-</i> )'



# Transitive clauses (1)

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- (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'





# Pivot and topic assignment

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(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.'

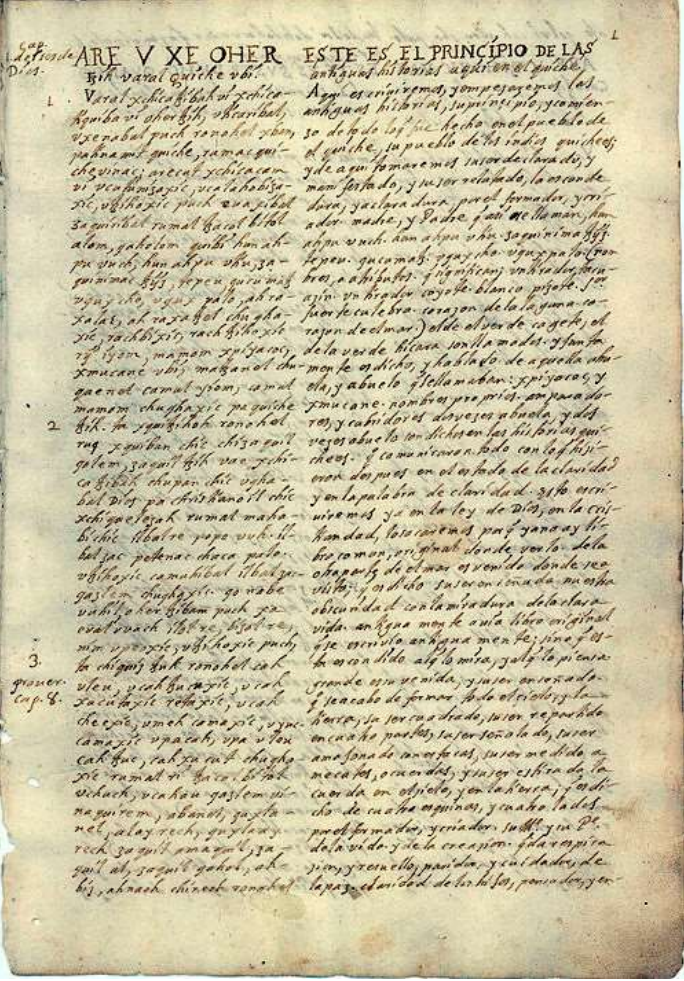
(12) ta x-Ø-ki-ta'o u-tzijel kik'  
PTL PFV-3ABS-3pERG-hear 3ERG-story rubber.ball  
ta x-Ø-u-b'ij ch'o  
PTL PFV-3ABS-3ERG-say mouse  
'they listened to the story of the rubber ball told by the mouse'







# Concluding remarks





# References

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Michael Dürr

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<[https://home.snafu.de/duerr/PDF\\_Doku/Kichekurs.pdf](https://home.snafu.de/duerr/PDF_Doku/Kichekurs.pdf)>

# this lecture

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is part of the series *Glottothèque: Mayan languages*. Berlin, Göttingen, Mexico City: online resource.

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