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ON NUP~ 'TO MARRY' AND THE TEXT OF BONAMPAK STELA 2

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The representation of women on Classic Maya (AD 300-900) monuments was treated extensively the first time by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1961), which was followed by numerous studies in articles and books (for example Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002; Ardren 2002).

Although rare, there are at least one female ruler attested in Classic Maya inscriptions, Ix Yohl Ihk'nal¹ in Palenque (583-604) and other 'strong' women include Ix Wak Chan 'Jade' Ajaw of Naranjo (died in 741) and Ix Winikhaab' Ajaw of Namaan (La Florida, born in 674), both exalted to high esteem on monuments of their son or husband (Martin and Grube 2000; Lopes 2003).

Various women from several sites reasonably thought to be wives, adorn the monuments of Itzamnaaj B'ahlam III (682-742) and Yaxu'n B'ahlam IV (752-769?) of Yaxchilan (Proskouriakoff 1961, Mathews 1988, Freidel and Schele 1990:262-305).

Women participated in ceremonies with their husbands and sons, and shared several titles with men such as *ajaw*, *kalo'mte'*, *sajal*, *aj k'uhu'n* etc. always prefixed with the female classifier *ix*. Sometimes they were explicitly designated as the *atan~* 'wife of a king' (e.g. Naranjo Stela 23:F13) or a deity (e.g. Dresden Codex 21c-22c), and with the undeciphered *ya-?~* 'mother of' expression (e.g. Bonampak Stela 2:F1-see Schele et al. 1977, Lounsbury 1984, Stuart 1997).

¹ In my transliteration of Classic Maya words I follow the rules proposed by Alfonso Lacadena and Søren Wichmann (2004), however I am aware of other suggestions.

Nevertheless, there is no glyph in the inscriptions which would actually indicate the marriage of two persons, and the wife-husband relations are inferred from parentage statements (which does not rule out the possibility of a concubine as polygamy is well attested (Tuszyńska 2009) or iconographic representation of rulers/non-royal elites with women other than their mothers.

There are at least three women who participated in ceremonies which were interpreted as parts of marriage. The best known example to epigraphers is the case of Ix Winikhaab' Ajaw in Piedras Negras (Stuart 1985; Lopes 2003). Here on Stelae 1, 3, 8 and the beautifully carved shell plaques from Burial 5, there is a complete record of two rituals, one concerned her 'covering' (*ma[h]kaj* or *ma[h]kjiy*) while the other, a couple of days later, was her presentation (*na[h]waj*) once in the presence of K'ihnich Yo'nal Ahku'ul II (Figure 1) and then in the presence of a woman, perhaps an earlier wife of her future husband (Stuart 1985).²

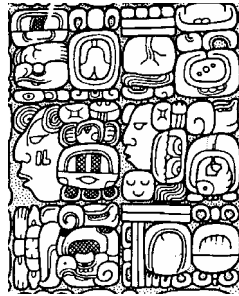


Figure 1. *Na[h]waj* (Piedras Negras Stela 1:C2-D2; Drawing by David Stuart)

² The translations of the transitive verbal roots *mak-* and *na-* went through several phases and their interpretations in Piedras Negras texts have a long history. The most recent treatment of the verb *mak-* is by Kerry Hull and Michael David Carrasco (2004) who argued that its general meaning was to cover over a certain space and list various rituals which all used this particular verb. *Mak-* is a reflect of proto-Mayan **maq-* and all of its cognates have the general meaning of "to cover, to close" (Kaufman 2003:866-867). It frequently occurs in parallel constructions with the verb *pas-* which is the Classic Period form of the transitive verb **päs~* "to show, uproot, uncover" (Kaufman and Norman 1984:128). Marc Zender (2005:5-6) also detailed the derivations of the root *mak-* and he explicitly translates the Piedras Negras *mahkaj* as "she is enclosed".

The *na-wa-ja* spelling is usually interpreted to represent the root *naw-* with the *h...-aj* composite passive suffix and in turn connected to the Ch'olti' root *nau* "to adorn, to paint". The translation is therefore "he/she/it was adorned, painted". The problem with this interpretation is that the actual transcription of the Ch'olti' gloss is *nab'* which is already attested in Classic Ch'olan. David Stuart (in Guenter 2007:21, note 21) suggested that the Classic Period spelling was based on the Ch'olti' root *na* "to know (someone)" as in a public presentation and which has many cognates in all Mayan languages. In this case, the verb should be analysed as *na-w-aj* where the composite *-w-aj* passive suffix indicates a non-CVC root, probably a derivation. The translation would be "he/she/it was known" (publicly) akin to presentation, and in a parallel structure with *mak-* it may had the implicit meaning of unveiling (as also suggested by Christophe Helmke and Harri Kettunen, personal communication with Christophe Helmke, 22 November, 2010).

Another reference to marriage may be found in the Palenque Western Tablet of the Temple of the Inscriptions where there are two difficult short passages recording ceremonies whose main participant was Ix Tz'akb'u Ajaw, the mother of two kings of Palenque and the wife of K'ihnich Janaab'nal Pakal. The events happened on 9.9.13.0.17 (626) and involved the anointment? (*t'ab'aayi?*) and hiding (*nak'aw*, an antipassive form) of the later queen, and her seating into an office or with an object (*chumliiy ta ho' ya?-?*) otherwise unattested in the inscriptions (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Possible marriage rituals of Ix Tz'akb'u Ajaw (Palenque West Tablet Q4-Q9; Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson)

It seems that covering or perhaps closing in and hiding the bride were part of the marriage ceremony. However, there is at least another verb which can refer to marriage which has not yet received attention by epigraphers.

The marriage of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II of Bonampak

Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II was the last known Bonampak king and he is well known as the commissioner of various beautiful monuments, especially as the patron of the marvellous murals of Structure 1 which portrays eloquently the darkness of battle and ensuing ceremonies filled with musicians, clowns, singers and several messengers from neighbouring kingdoms (Miller 1986, 2000).

From these monuments Stela 2 (Figure 3) stands out as it is representing not just one, but two women with Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II in the middle of them holding an incense bag. Both are clad in sumptuous clothes and headdresses holding sacrificial plates with paper and the right one has a sacrificial knife for the king.



Figure 3. Bonampak Stela 2, (Drawing by Peter Mathews)

One of the women has her own caption where she is named *Ix Yax Chiit Ju'n Witz' Noh Kan* or the name of the 'Waterlily Serpent' a deity frequently impersonated by Classic Period kings (Houston and Stuart 1996; Stuart, Houston, and Roberston 1999:II-56; Nehammer Knub, Thun and Helmke 2009), and also has the titles *Ix Pa'chan Ajaw* and *Ix B'aahkab'* (H1-H4). These titles indicate that she was a high ranked woman from Yaxchilan (about the *Pa'chan* see Martin 2004) and certainly contributed to the relations between her polity and Bonampak which is otherwise attested by the joint campaign against Sak Tz'i' of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II and Itzamnaaj B'ahlam IV in 787 commemorated on Lintel 2, 3 and the magnificent murals.

That these relations between the two sites go back earlier is indicated by Bonampak Stela 1 which was dedicated in 9.17.10.0.0 and which has the 'signature' of three sculptors, one Aj Matuna', an *anaab'* of the ruler of Yaxchilan.

Back to Stela 2, in his original interpretation Peter Mathews (1978) suggested that the woman from Yaxchilan was the wife of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II while

the other woman was his mother, Ix Ahku'ul Patah. Nevertheless, the reading of the verb in D4 was pursued further neither by Mathews nor by other epigraphers.

The text of Stela 2 begins with the accession of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II in 9.17.5.8.9 6 Muluk 17 Yaxk'in (776), and is followed by a second event in 9.17.18.15.18 12 Etz'nab' 1 Kej (789). The verb in D4 (Figures 3 & 4) is spelled **nu-pa-ja**³ which can be transcribed as:

nu[h]paj
 nu-h-p-aj-Ø
 nu[PASS]p-INTRZ-3sA
 he/she was *nup*-ed

As I shall show below, there is a problem in identifying to which person the actual 3rd person absolutive pronoun refers.



Figure 4. Photo of upper text, Bonampak Stela 2, (Photo by Giles Healey)

³ After I finished the first draft of this paper, Christian Prager (personal communication July, 2010) kindly let me know that Stephen Houston (1997:292) already mentioned **nu-pa-ja** as "is joined/married", however he did not analyse this verb in detail. In 1984 Lyle Campbell and John Justeson suggested that T151 is a **Cu** syllable (Justeson and Campbell 1984:347). According to Christian Prager (e-mail dated to 17.08.2010) T151 as **nu** was published the first time in the Workbook for the First Annual Duke-UNC Workshop on Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, by Barbara MacLeod and Dorie-Reents Budet in 1992. Another example of **nu-pu-** is found in the text of Tortuguero Monument 6:F10. Gronemeyer and MacLeod (2010:47) interprets the spelling **nu-pu-TE'-ja** as *nu[h]paj te'* or as a construction of a passive verb and a noun. I disagree with this interpretation and rather suggest to accept the spelling order and interpret this as an intransitive verb *nupte'aj*~"to spear-join" parallel to *k'alhu'naj*~"to paper-wrap/coronate" (Lacadena 2003). In both cases a transitive verb (*nup*, *k'al*) is preposed to a noun (*te'*, *hu'n*) and this compound noun is later intransitivised by the suffix –*Vj*. I transliterated the –*Vj* suffix as –*aj*, but there is no direct evidence for this vowel, and it is equally possible that it was –*ij*.

Passives are derived from transitive verbs which help to reconstruct the root as **nup* with the following meanings in various Mayan languages (all examples from Kaufman 2003:64):

YUK	<i>nup</i>	aj	junto
CHT	<i>nup-u</i>	v	juntar
CHR	<i>nup'</i>	v	juntar
CHL	<i>nupjun</i>	aj	casarse
CHL	<i>nup'</i>	v	cerrar
TZE	<i>nuhpun</i>	vi	casarse
TOJ	<i>nup-an</i>	vi	casarse

Based on the above cognates, Kaufman and Norman (1984:127, entry 370) reconstructed **nup/nup'* as a transitive or intransitive verb meaning 'casar(se)/to marry'⁴.

I suggest, therefore that the first event recorded after the second date on Bonampak Stela 2 referred to the marriage of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II. Nevertheless, the following part of the clause is quite complex and it is difficult to identify who was married to whom.

The next block after D4 contains a possessed compound noun *uk'altuuniij⁵* or 'it is the stone-wrapping of...', unusual on two counts: first this expression here is clearly not a period-ending ceremony, and also it follows a passive verb. In D6 comes another rare collocation which can be transcribed as **ye-ta K'AB'A'-a-li/ye't-k'ab'a'il** or 'namesake' (see Zender and Guenter 2000), followed by the name of Ix Ahku'ul Patah and the titles *ix sajal ya-?* Yajaw Chan Muwaahn (E6-F2). Thus the whole passage is the following:

*nuhpaj uk'altuuniij ye't k'ab'a'il ix ahku'ul patah ya-? yajaw chan
muwaahn u chan[a']n aj ho' b'aak umihiin ?-il ch'aho'm aj sak tele'ch
aj usijj witz[nal]⁶ xukalnaah ajaw k'uhul ak'e ajaw*

There is more than one possible translation of that short clause as it is not clear who is/are the actor(s). One plausible translation is:

⁴ The same root is found in the name of one of the several *way* characters painted on Classic Maya ceramics as **nu-pu-lu B'ALAM/nupul b'a[h]lam**, however it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of this derived form as the semantic field of *nup* includes (outside of join, marry) 'enemy' and 'familiar' (both from Classical Yukatek (Barrera Vázquez 1980:588-589).

⁵ Although at first sight it looks like there is a **wi** syllabic sign under the **K'AL** logogram, the **u** ergative pronoun makes this interpretation unlikely as this usually indicates active transitive constructions which are written with a **wa** syllabic sign. Therefore I think this is a **ni** syllable complementing the **TUN** logogram. Together the whole expression is spelled **u-K'AL-TUN-ni-ja** and I transcribed it as *uk'altuuniij* which is a possessed verbal-nominal compound where *-Vj* is a nominaliser.

⁶ It was David Stuart (2007) who deciphered the place name of Bonampak as *Usijj Witznal*.

"she was married [and] it is the stone wrapping of the namesake of Ix Ahku'ul Patah, Ix Sajal, the mother of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II who is the guardian of Aj Ho' B'aak, the son of the strong one, Aj Sak Tele'ch, He from Usij Witznal, Xukalnaah Lord, Divine Ak'e Lord"

This translation would make necessary to reinterpret the identity of the two women on Stela 2. First the marriage did not happen with Yax Chiit Ju'n Witz' Noh Kan of Yaxchilan, but with another woman who had the same name as the royal mother. In this case the namesake was the one in front of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II. Nevertheless, a second possible translation would be:

"he was married and it is the stone-wrapping of the namesake of Ix Ahku'ul Patah, Ix Sajal, the mother of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II who is the guardian of Aj Ho' B'ak, the son of the strong one, Aj Sak Tele'ch, He from Usij Witznal, Xukalnaah Lord, Divine Ak'e Lord"

In this translation, the absolute pronoun of *nu[h]paj* would refer back to Yajaw Chan Muwahh II (as it was his accession which was mentioned before in the text) while the stone-wrapping ceremony would have been done by the royal mother who was indeed a namesake of a certain Ix Ahku'ul Patah otherwise not attested in the inscriptions of Bonampak. In that case, the only person to get married with the king of Bonampak would have been Yax Chiit Ju'n Witz' Noh Kan, represented behind the king but not mentioned in the text. This would be a case of a necessary interplay between text and image where the identity of the marriage partners is spelled out by both glyphs and image.

A third translation is also plausible in which the absolute pronoun refers to the two participants:

"they were married and it was the stone-wrapping of the namesake of Ix Ahku'ul Patah, Ix Sajal, the mother of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II who is the guardian of Aj Ho' B'aak, the son of the strong one, Aj Sak Tele'ch, He from Usij Witznal, Xukalnaah Lord, Divine Ak'e Lord"

This translation corresponds better to the imagery on the monument where the three figures are actively participating in the represented ritual, however Ix Ahku'ul Patah has seemingly a higher role among the women as it is she who was facing the king (although in reality both of them were in front of him during the ceremony). The stone-wrapping (*k'altuunij*) is not represented but it is most probably describing the action of wrapping the ready-made monument for the commemoration of the marriage, or Stela 2 itself.

The use of the expression of 'namesake' is rare in the inscriptions but when it occurs it connects male individuals who are grandparents and grandsons. Interestingly, when it occurs with female names the context is also a possible marriage ceremony as recorded on Piedras Negras Burial 5 Shell Plaque 4 (Figure 5):

na-wa-ja-ye-te-k'a-[*b'a]-li IX-ma-ta-wi-la-SUTZ' u-KAB'-ji-IX-na?-MAN-AJAW

na[h]waj yet k'ab'a'il ix matwiil suutz' ukab'[i]j ix namaan ajaw

"she was presented, the namesake of Ix Matwiil Suutz', she made it to happen, Ix Namaan Ajaw"



Figure 5. Piedras Negras Tomb 5 Shell Plaque, detail (Drawing by David Stuart 1985:1)

There are further parallels between the shell plaques text and Bonampak Stela 2 as in both narratives one woman participates in the marriage or adornment of another. Indeed as was pointed out before, Shell Plaque 4 is a repetition of a like-in-kind event recorded on Shell Plaque 3 where the adornment of Ix Namaan Ajaw is commemorated as it happened 43 years earlier (Stuart 1985, Lopes 2003:9) under the auspices of a woman from B'ik'il, an unknown polity in the surroundings of Piedras Negras.

According to these three inscriptions women were active participants in marriage ceremonies. In the case of Bonampak Stela 2 it might be that the 'namesake' expression refers to a different woman from the mother of Yajaw Chan Muwaahn II, possibly another wife of the ruler. It is also plausible that she was indeed the mother of the king and her grandmother had the same name therefore the playful use of the *yet k'ab'a'il* term. In the Piedras Negras Burial 5 Shell Plaque inscriptions the identity of the first woman who oversees the adornment ceremony of Ix Namaan Ajaw is unknown, while this latter one was clearly an earlier wife of Ruler 3 (K'ihnich Yo'nal Ahku'ul II) who took the namesake of Matwiil Suutz' as his wife.

It might be that the first wife of a king was betrothed by the mother while the next wife was betrothed by the ruler's first wife in a pattern where she overtook the role of the mother. That fathers participated in the ceremony is confirmed by the texts of Piedras Negras Stelae 1, 3, 8 and the shell plaques where the rituals are happened to be in the presence (*yichnal*) of Ruler 2.

As is usual in Classic Maya discourse, a complex ritual is telescoped into one or two crucial culturally chosen terms. An accession can be expressed by the verbs of *chum*, *joy* and even *k'al* - all having different connotations and referring to different parts of a ceremony. Marriage as such could have been a similarly complex ritual composed of various phases which had their names. To cover (*mak*) and to present (*naw*) could be such terms, while *nup* probably was a general expression for the whole ceremony or the final part of it when the sequestered and finally adorned bride showed up in front of the groom and they were joined together as was represented commonly in Postclassic and Colonial Highland Mexican codices.

Whatever is the correct order of the marriage ceremony it does not affect the basic translation of the morpheme *nup*- as 'to marry', of which a unique example is found on Bonampak Stela 2.

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