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Probable Nature and Contents of the Santiago Staff

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Probable Nature and Contents of the Santiago Staff

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BUTINOV AND KNOROZOV (1956, 1957) report a sequence of signs on the Small Santiago Tablet, the pattern of which is compatible with a genealogy (Figure 1). They are, in Barthel's transcription system: 200-D350-280.76-200-280-D730.76-200-730-517a.76-200-517a-222.76. Note the systematic shift to the left of the second sign after each occurrence of sign 200, and the appearance of a new sign on its right:

200	D350	280.76
200	280	D730.76
200	730	517a.76
200	517a	222.76

Such a pattern is similar to that of a genealogy in which each person is identified by title, name, and patronymic:

King	Olaf	Magnusson
King	Magnus	Einarsson
King	Einar	Haraldsson
King	Harald	Linusson



200 D350? 280.76 200 280 D730.76 200 730 517a.76 200 517a 222.76

Figure 1. Pattern on line 6 of the verso of the Small Santiago Tablet, compatible with a genealogical list.

Under this hypothesis sign 76 is a taxogram for patronymics, and therefore the Santiago Staff, where sign 76 is extremely frequent, must consist mostly of personal names. The pattern of its signs, however, is incompatible with a genealogy. Oral tradition has it that some tablets consist of *ta'u*, that is, lists of warlike exploits with their authors and their murdered victims, the latter called *ika* "fish". The Santiago Staff was acquired in 1870 from the French colonist Dutroux-Bornier who claimed it had belonged to a king (Barthel 1958:25-26). Consider further in this excerpt from the Santiago Staff the sequence of signs 700-8-90.76 (Figure 2).

Under the hypothesis that glyph 76 denotes patronymics, the sequence 8-90.76 is a personal name. The preceding sign, 700, is a clear depiction of a fish, *ika*, which, we have just seen, also meant "the killed". It occupies the same relative position to the name as glyph 200 in the probable genealogy identified by Butinov and Knorozov, in which it probably represents a title. It is difficult at this stage to resist the temptation of a partial decipherment of that sequence: "Killed (700): So and-so (8)

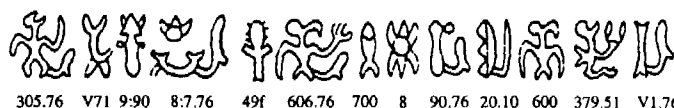


Figure 2. The sequence 700-8-90.76 on the Santiago Staff with

son of So-and-so (90.76)". The Santiago Staff, then, would be a *ta'u*. This hypothesis is congruent with the physical nature and reported origin of the staff. It is natural and reasonable to expect a chieftain's baton engraved with writing to contain either his genealogy or the war exploits of his tribe.

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