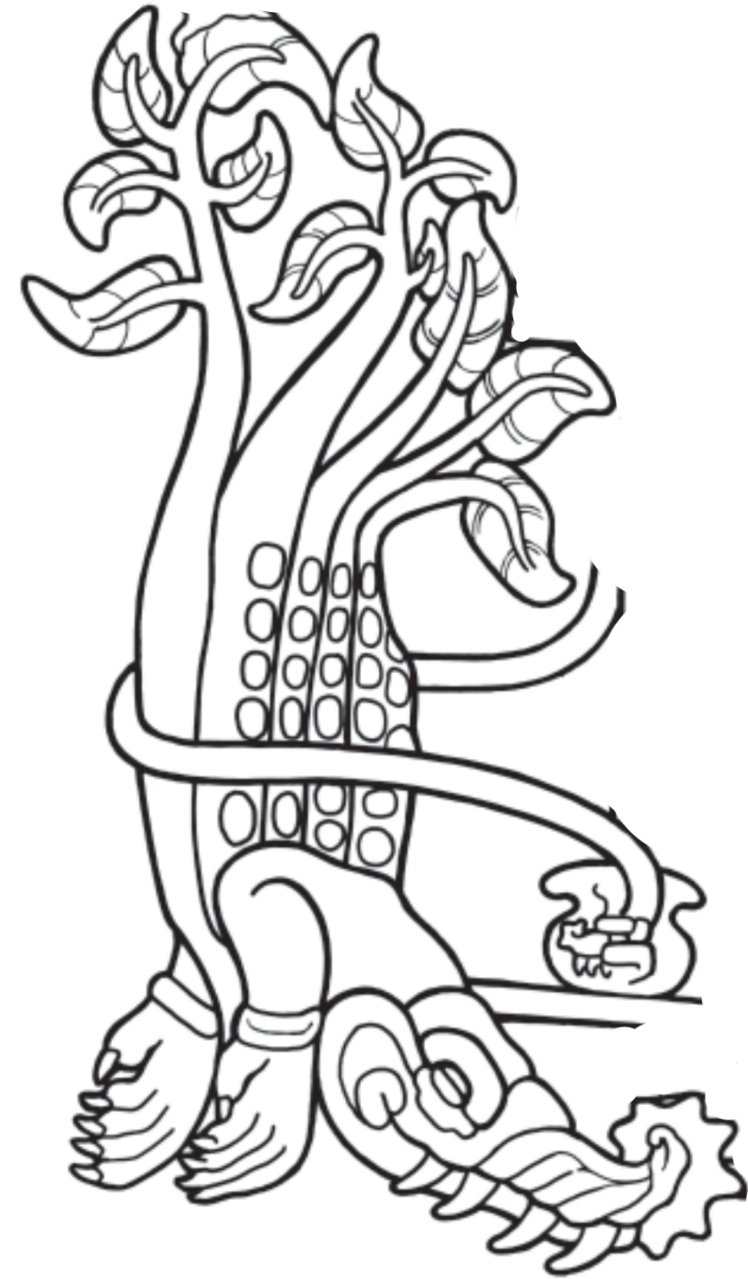


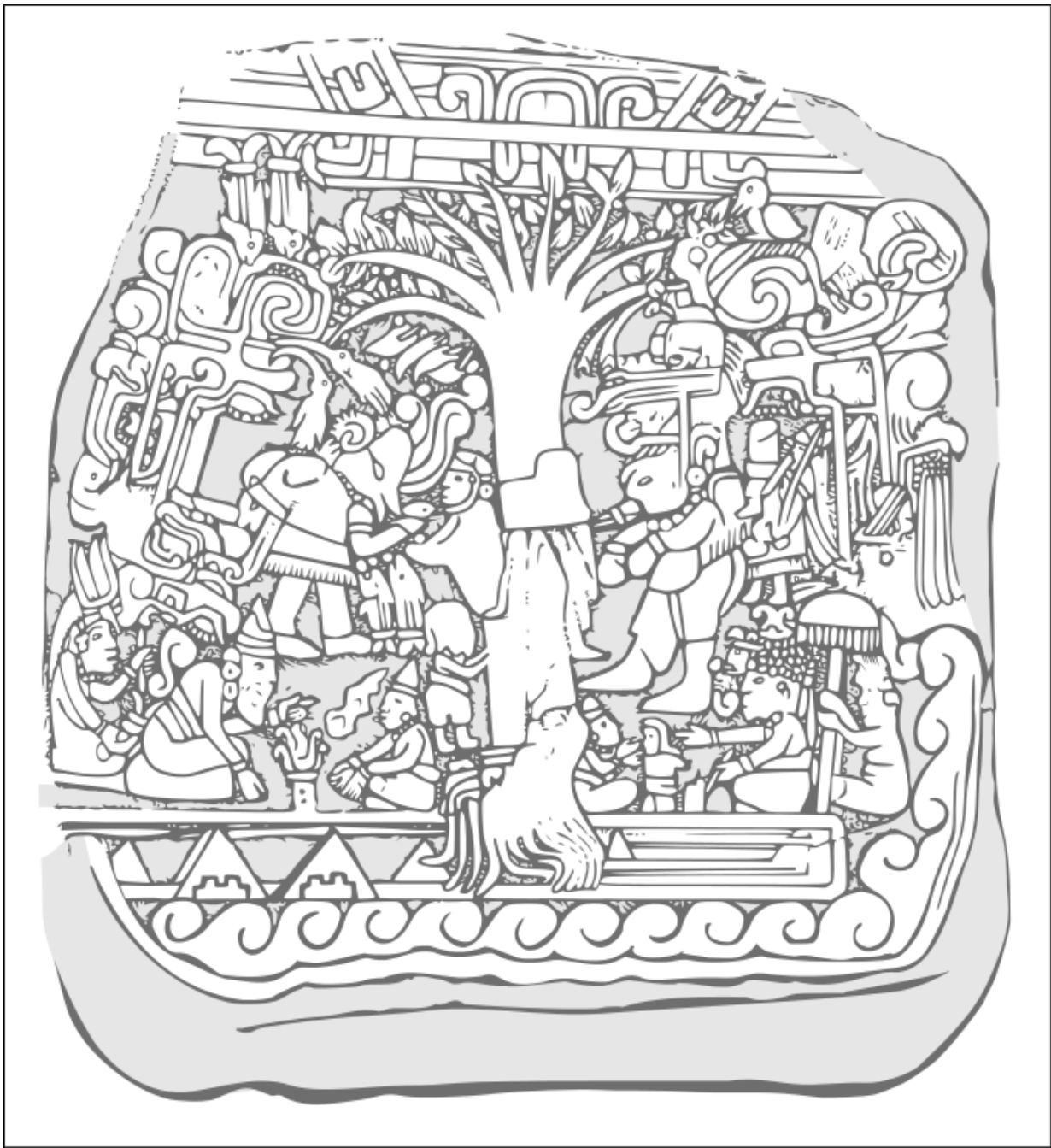
Crocodile Trees,  
Jicara/Morro Trees,  
Loincloth Apron Face Trunk-base Trees

In Symposium Presentation July 27, 2023

Iconography and Ethnozoology  
of the Crocodiles and Caiman of Mesoamerica  
and their relation  
with the Cosmology of the Underworld and the Heavens

Nicholas Hellmuth





Crocodile Tree, unidentified leaves, Izapa Stela 5, Chiapas, Mexico.



Crocodile Tree, stylized *Crescentia kujete* leaves and seed pods, Izapa Stela 2, Chiapas.





Crocodile tree, *Crescentia kujete*, Izapa Stela 5



Crocodile tree, Izapa-Stela-25, drawing by Moreno in Moreno and Clark 2007: Fig.13.24

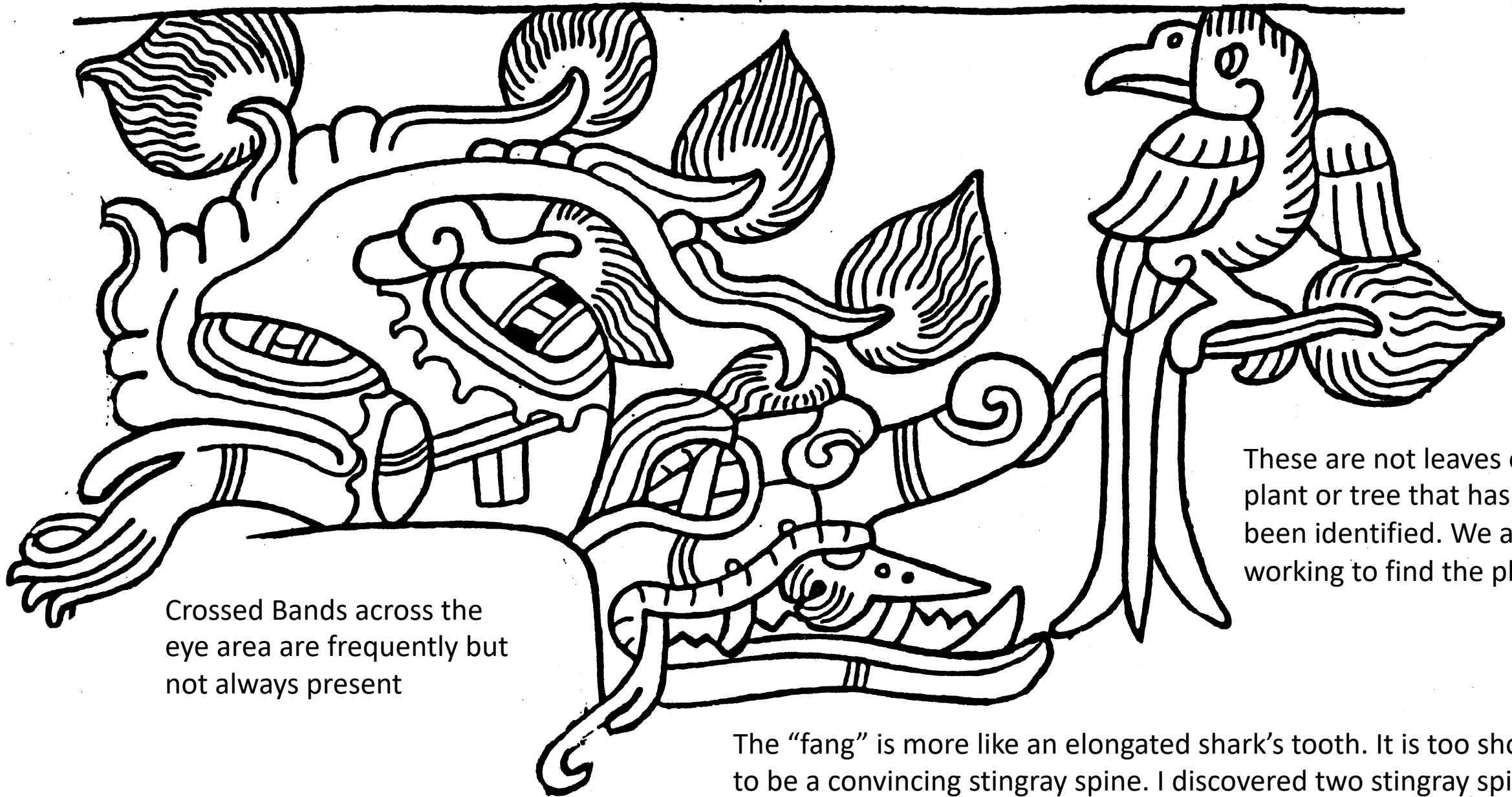
Izapa Stela 10,  
drawing by  
Moreno  
(Moreno and  
Clark 2007: Fig.  
13.12).



At far right,  
Izapa Stela 27,  
drawing by  
Moreno  
(Moreno and  
Clark 2007: Fig.  
13.26).



So far we have  
not been able to  
get original  
quality digital  
editions of  
these excellent  
drawings.

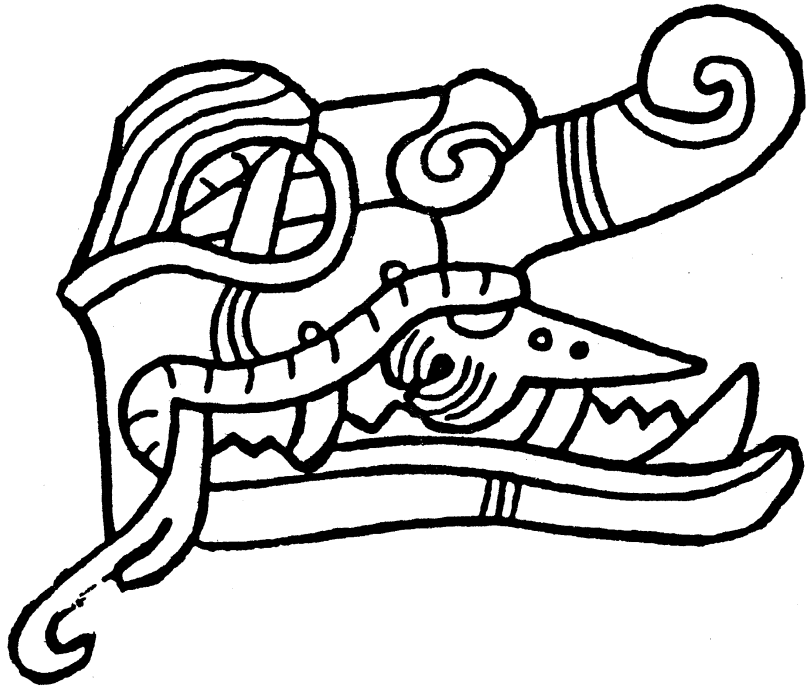


Crossed Bands across the eye area are frequently but not always present

These are not leaves of a plant or tree that has yet been identified. We are working to find the plant.

The “fang” is more like an elongated shark’s tooth. It is too short to be a convincing stingray spine. I discovered two stingray spines when I excavated the Tomb of the Jade Jaguar at Tikal, in 1965.

Crocodile Tree, Drawing by Lin Crocker of the large Early Classic Deletaille Tripod.



Cropped and cleaned by Hellmuth to show the shark's tooth in the crocodile jaws. From drawing by Lin Crocker. The image from Tikal is from the Penn project illustrators of Stela 31.



The front of Tikal Stela 31 has lots of aspects not often singled out (because most studies are of the "Teotihuacan" warriors on the two sides and on the hieroglyphic text on the back of this important monument. But I noticed and pulled out the crocodile head with a tooth very similar to that of the other illustration. No lower jaw visible on this stela.

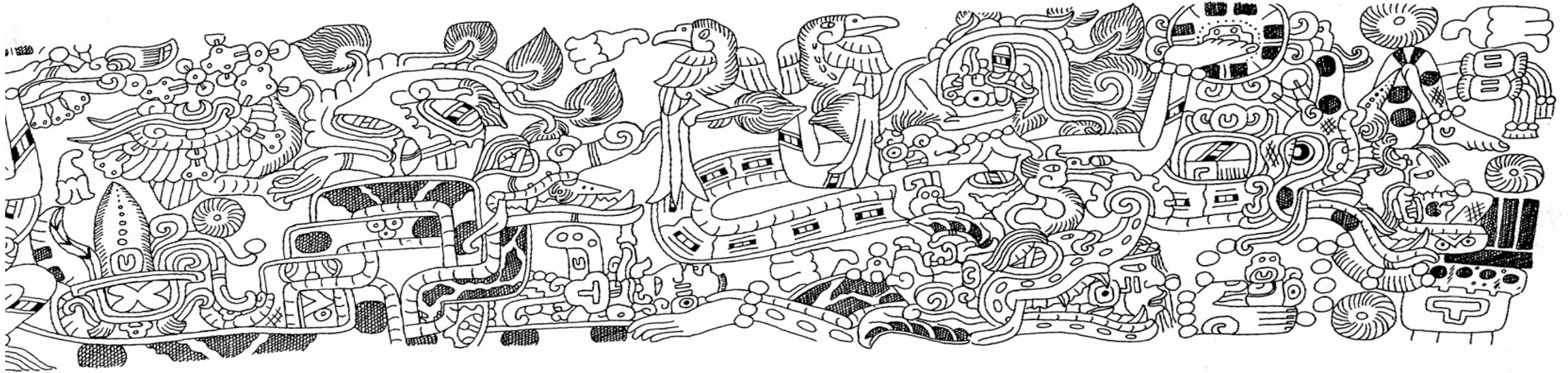
Would be interesting to find more reptile heads with "shark's teeth" featured. I would not be surprised if some are snakes or composite reptile monsters (snake + crocodile).<sup>98</sup>





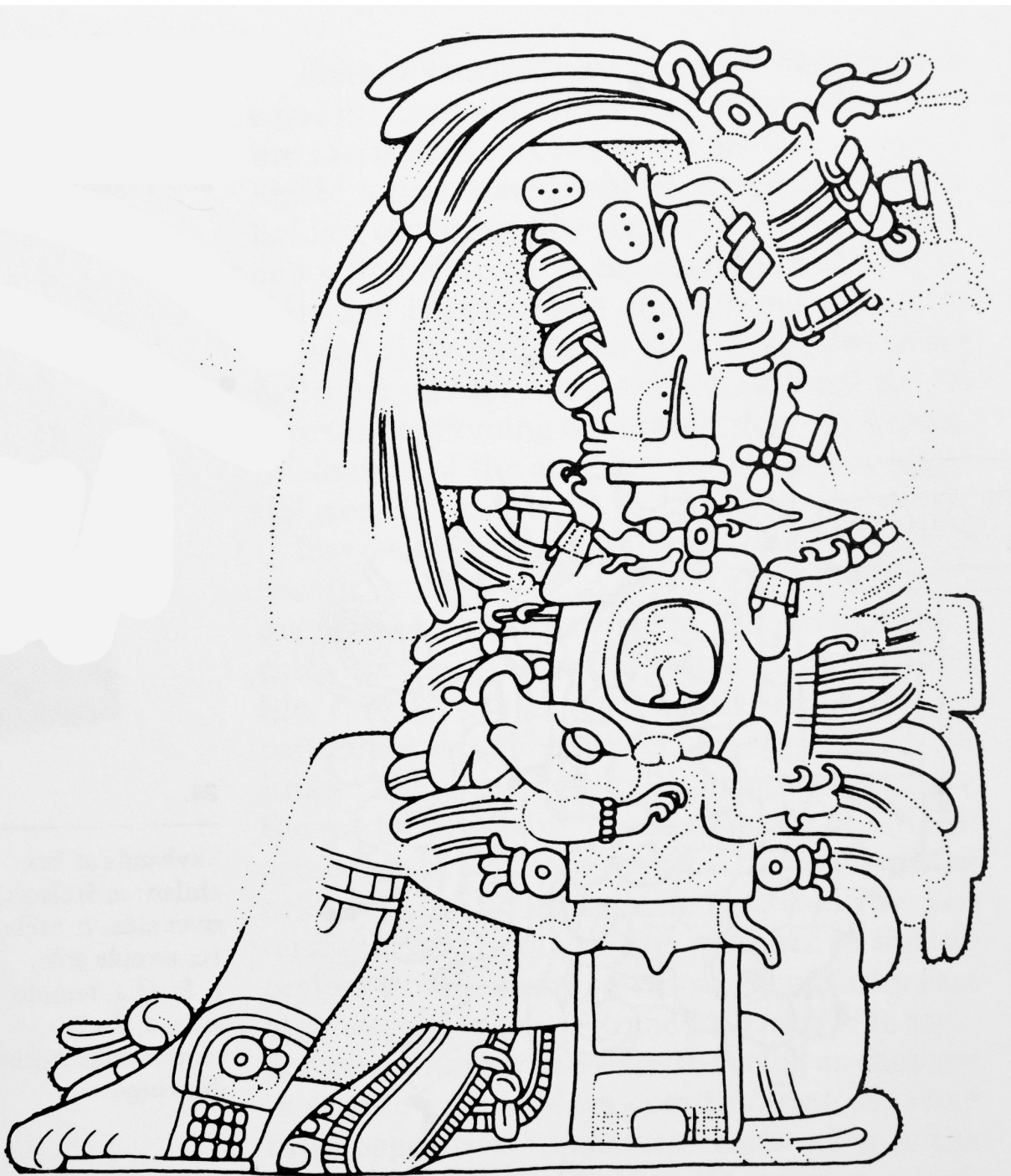
Surely there are a lot more “crocodile headdresses” on stelae. I hope to find a thesis, dissertation, or academic report where Tikal Stela 31 is pictured in many if any discussions of iconography of crocodiles. A helpful team of illustrators help me show the details after I find an image buried under other symbols. I thank Norma Cho Cu for her experience in this task.



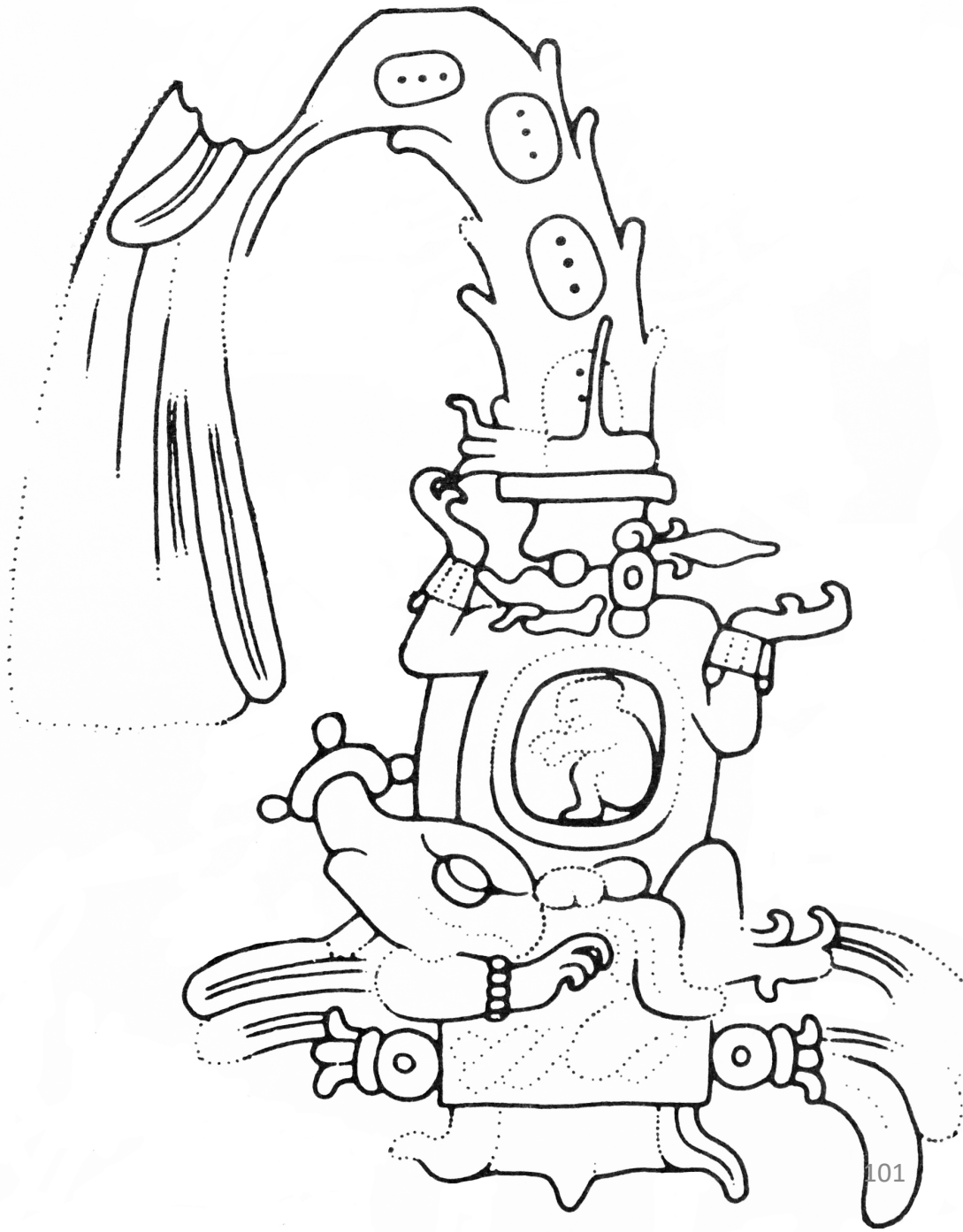


I first wrote about this scene decades ago. This is one of the most amazing ritual mythological scenes of an early Classic cylindrical tripod. The excellent, detailed, and accurate line drawing by Lin Crocker shows there is a lot still to study here.

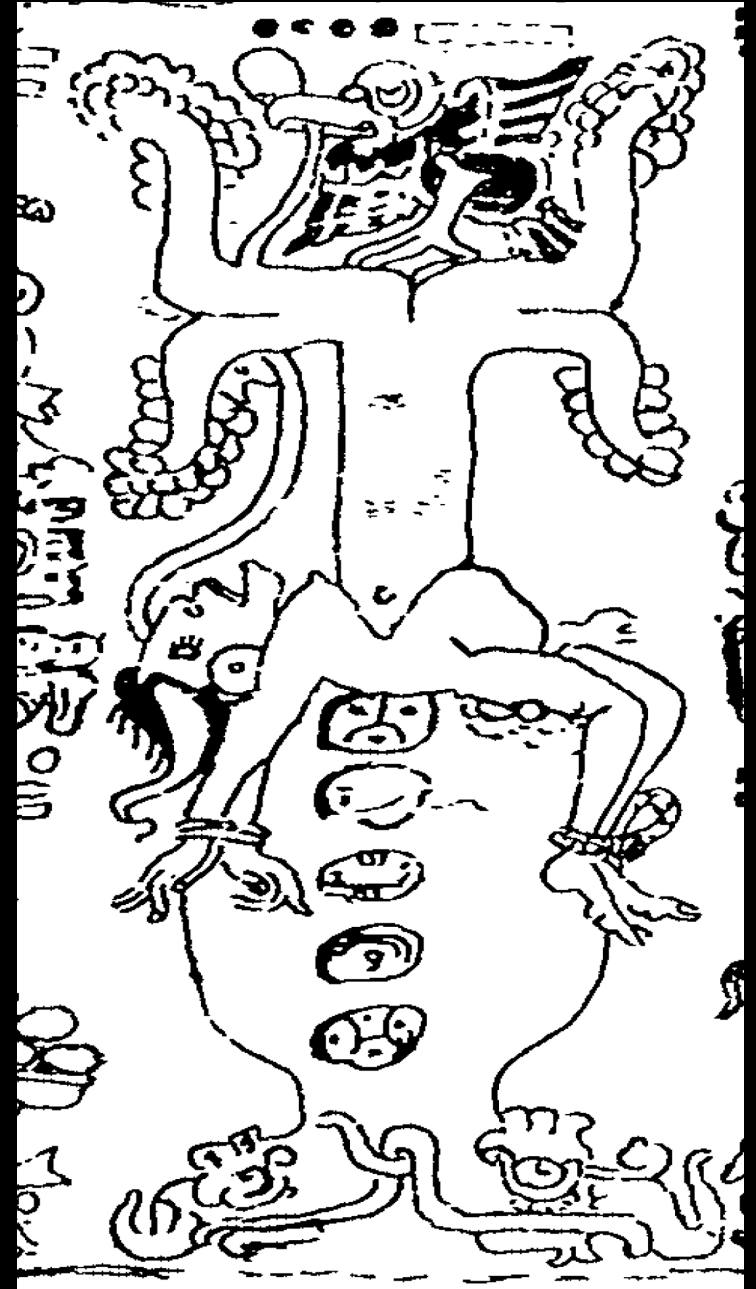
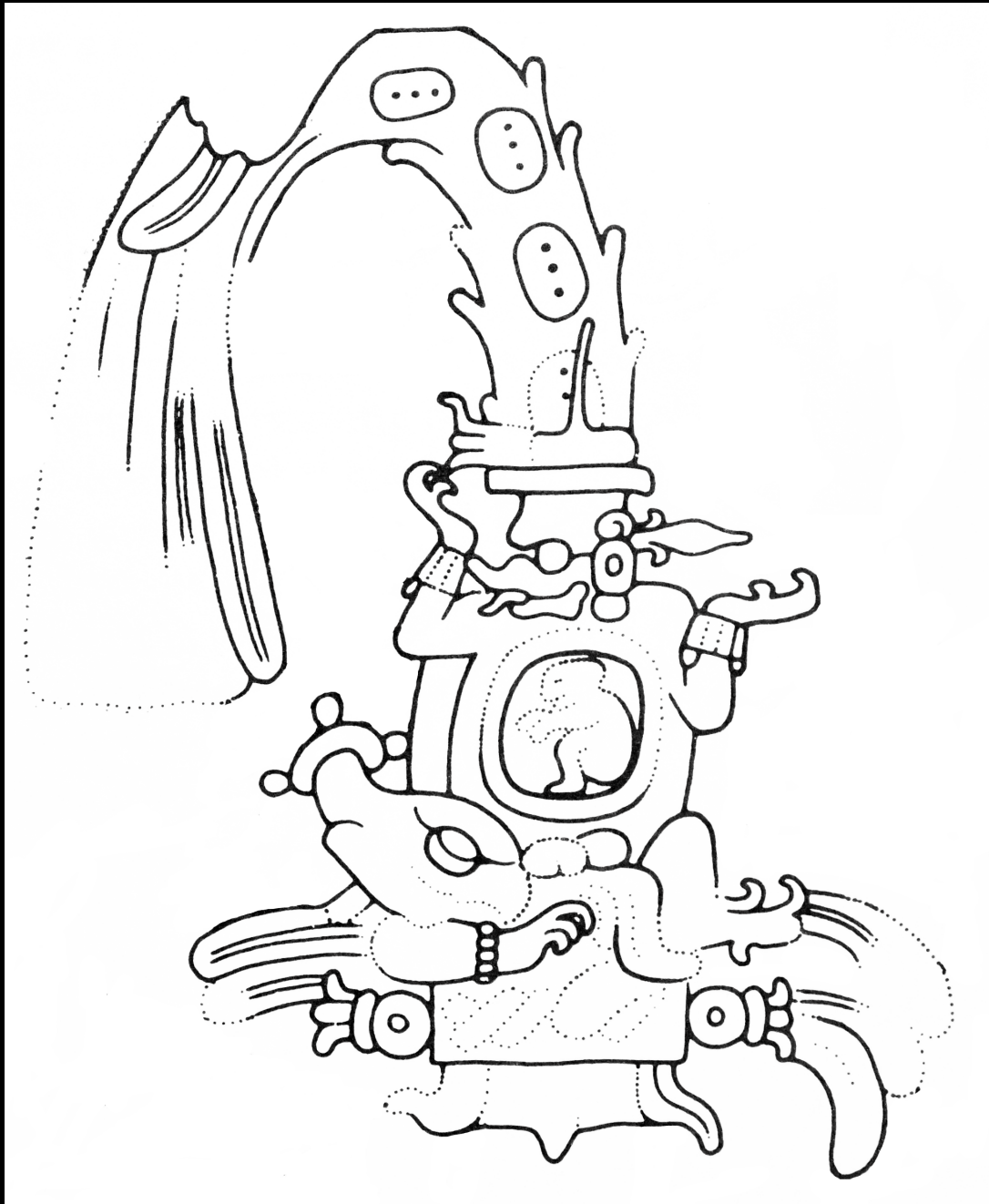
Which are snakes? Which are crocodiles? Which are composite reptilian Monsters? How many “crocodile trees” or other sacred trees are pictured here?



Crocodile  
Tree on  
chest of  
royal  
ballplayer  
at  
Yaxchilan,  
Chiapas,  
Mexico,  
illustrated  
in book by  
C. Tate.











The leaves are appropriate for *Crescentia cujete*, as are the fruits hanging from the trunk. Codex Style, no mention of degree of repainting. Kerr rollout, K1247.



K1247draw Drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine

This excellent drawing by Alexandre Tokovinine makes it easier to see that the tree seems to be carried by the now seated man, and the person behind is starting to plant it. The top of the tree reminds me of the stylized head of a deer. Even with two paddles, neither of these personages is a Paddler God.





Cauac Monster tree on steroids. Degree of repainting not mentioned. Kerr rollout, K1815. The leaves are *Crescentia*-like but the oval at the end I need to study.





Another crocodile tree rises from a bowl-like container. Codex Style. Hellmuth digital rollout. This painting is authentic and was not “repainted” (pretending to “restore” but really just a clever way to create a glossy modern rendition (a fake)). This Codex Style was is not faked not restored.

Since the digital rollout camera took a rollout that was several HUNDRED Megapixels in file size, we usually set the software to take at lower resolution, so this was at 37% of available resolution. This was a digital rollout camera from many decades ago. Today there is no computer OS that can handle it and no computer that can accept the size and shape of connector cords.



This crocodile tree is very different. First, it rises out of a bowl. Second, the sprout at the top and the “leaves” are not what you see on other Codex Style crocodile trees. Yet this painting is authentic.

A bat-man waves hello as an Old God points at the base of the tree.







Crocodile Tree rising out of some kind of a symbolic container. These flowers ticking out are not of any calabash tree species.

Codex Style, Kerr rollout photo, K1607.



Codex Style,  
Kerr rollout  
photo, K1607.





Leaves of this tree are *Crescentia* species. Fruits are gourds NOT cacao fruit. The Hero Twins or comparable are using their blowguns to shoot the Principal Bird Deity. Late Classic, Codex Style, Kerr rollout, K4546.

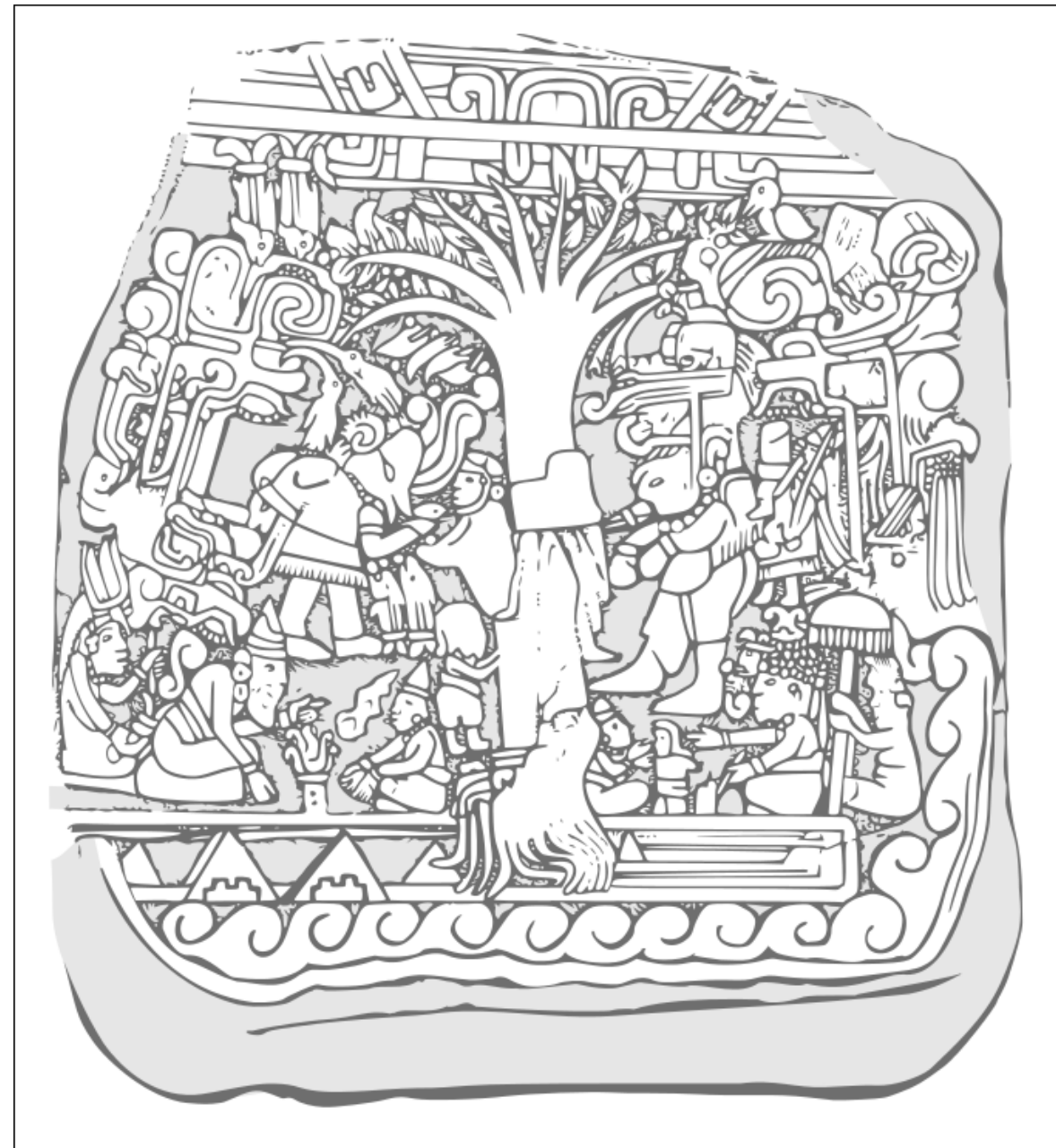




These leaves are neither *Crescentia alata* nor *Crescentia kujete*. These trees have no gourds on their limbs or trunk.

Nonetheless, the Izapa Stela 25 tree has a Principal Bird Deity nearby.

Simplified drawing of Izapa Stela 25, Schele, SD-6904.



Simplified drawing of Izapa Stela 5.





There are several different trees of the Maya Lowlands that are named Palo de Lagarto. Lagarto means crocodile in local slang; not lizard.

But most of these Palo de Lagarto trees have rough bark as here; so no conical spines.

So a lot more study of trees are needed to identify those “Crocodile Trees” that are not *Crescentia*.

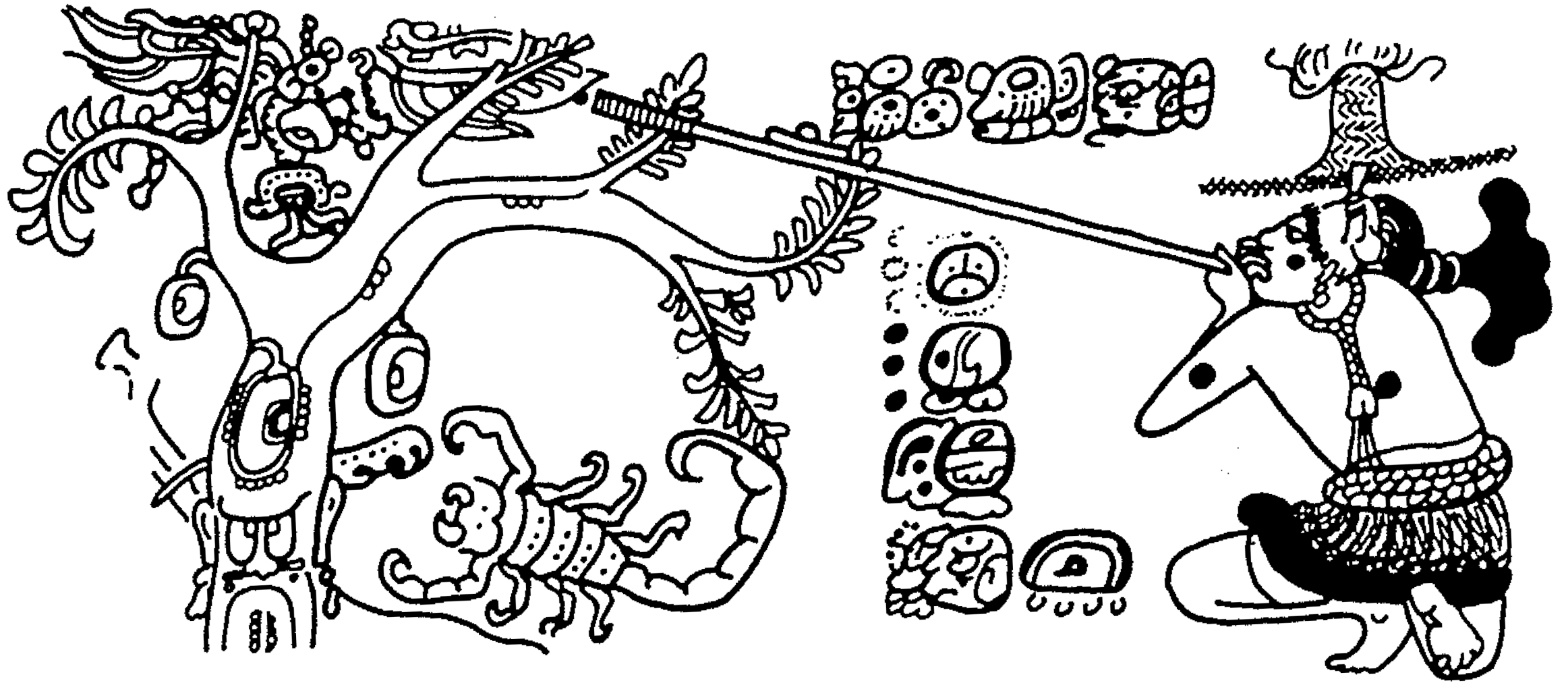






Anthropomorphic tree of different kind, with open deity face and open mouth instead of crocodile. The tree is clearly pictured as a jicara tree, *Crescentia cujete*. These grow in moist areas that are also seasonally dry. We have found crocodiles in Peten not far from *Crescentia cujete* trees (PNLT Savanna #13).

The Hero Twins are shooting their blowgun pellets at the Principal Bird Deity. Kerr rollout photo, K4546.



Here is this kind of a tree in front view (so you can see the tree trunk variant of the Loincloth Apron Face). Hunapu is shooting Seven Macaw (The Principal Bird Deity), atop a *Crescentia cujete* tree. The leaves and fruits are what we find in seasonally inundated savannas throughout the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya (RBM), Peten. Drawing by Karl Taube in Tedlock 1996: 78 edition of Popol Vuh.



Tree with deity head at base of trunk. This tree trunk deity head has more details than most others.

This is not a Crocodile Tree because it has no crocodile at its base, but nonetheless it has a Principal Bird Deity perched on its top.

No noticeable leaves and no noticeable fruits.

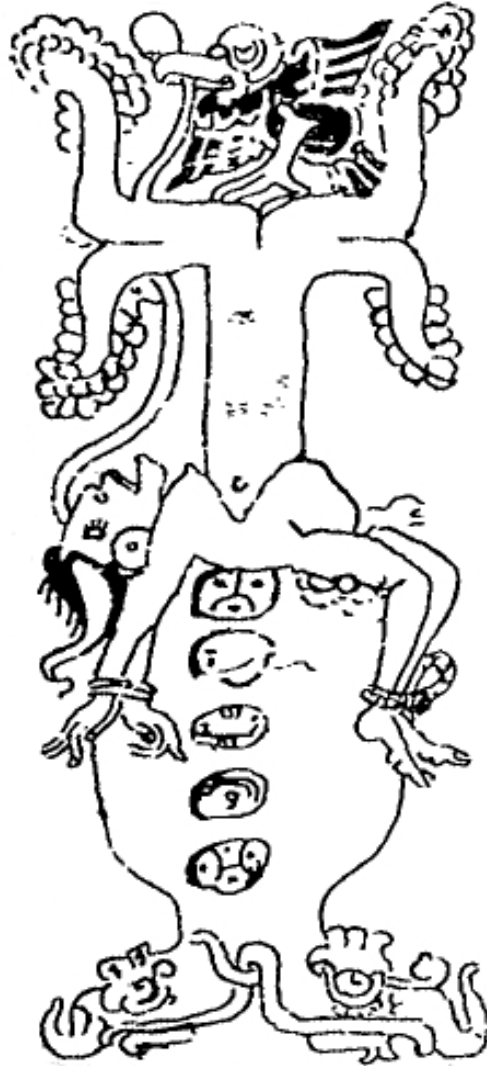
Drawing by Simon Martin, based on and cited to photograph of Hellmuth from FLAAR Photo Archive; Martin 2015: Fig. 37,a.

I estimate this is God D, since God N is more associated with wetlands.





The crocodile trees of the codices are worth studying.



Dresden Codex, Page III, Villacorta and Villacorta page 16.



The swollen trunks are Ceiba-like; the triangular spines are Ceiba-like. But the cluster of leaves is not related to any Ceiba tree.