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# God N Iconography



## Part I, Photos from FLAAR Photo Archive

FLAAR Reports  
FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)

Nicholas Hellmuth  
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Fig. 1. Aged God N in "conch shell." I call any shell that has lower parts a conch shell. As you can see here, an obvious God N does not always wear his woven headdress feature.



Fig. 2. God N is seated inside a giant conch shell. Obviously no actual conch shell is this large. This God N has a woven extension to his headdress. God N is on the floor, discussing things with enthroned God D in front of him.



Fig. 3. Aged face. Eye has a band under it. The headdress has a woven segment extending out.



Fig. 4. God N is on the floor, discussing things with enthroned God D in front of him.



Fig. 5. God D has a taller head with a dome at the top. So both God N and God D are elderly men, but have different features. And God D is clearly of higher status.



Fig. 6. An unidentified supernatural person on the same vase.



Fig. 7. God N has his buttocks in the conch shell but all the rest of his body outside. His "woven" headdress extension is part of his identity. Chipoc style vase (so not Peten Lowlands).





Fig. 8. God N in conch-like shell. No woven motif extending from his headdress.

God N is one of three elderly male deities. God D and God L are the others. For the time being I prefer to study each one separately as each has their own headdress and context. On several vases God N is seated on the floor in front of the higher status God D on a throne (Part II, Fig. 8 and Fig. 11). God L is also of high status, especially in the underworld. There are other elderly individuals who have not yet been identified or named.

God N, as God D, occasionally has facial hair under his chin.

On several Chama style vases God N is being pulled out of his conch shell by a person with a large knife or short spear-like weapon (Part II, Figs. 33, 34 and 35).

God N is usually elderly but there are lots of young men issuing from a conch shell that I call young God N's.

God N is usually in a conch-like shell; occasionally in a snail-like shell. God N is often in a crocodile. On Codex Style vases God N issues from a snake monster (these are in Part II, rollout photos). The snake monster often ends with God K at the tail end. God N is occasionally in a turtle. At Chichen Itza some God N's are backed by a circular spider web. But God N can appear with no shell, no snake or spider web.

The clothing of God N varies but the most traditional is headdress material with a cross-cross woven pattern. Lots of God N's have a necklace with large round beads and an oval decoration at the bottom (Chipoc style God N's for example, Part II, Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Part II Fig. 3 God N has the same necklace.

Several God N's have a water lily pad across their forehead and a water lily flower stem tied around the lily pad (Part II, Fig. 23). Sometimes a fish feeds from the water lily flower (Part II, Fig. 11).

God N can be associated with the enema ritual (Part II, Fig. 22 and others). At Copan and especially at Chichen Itza God N can have one or both arms upraised to "hold up the cosmos above him." The designation Bacab or Pahuatun are often used for these contexts.

The Codex Style vases (from northern Peten and adjacent southern Campeche) frequently show God N fondling the breast of a female (Part II, Figs. 41 and others).

The best iconographic discussion of God N that I have found so far is by Simon Martin. In the same article he also discusses God D and God L.



Fig. 9. Aged God N in conch shell. A Kan Cross is incised onto the shell.  
No woven accessory to his headdress.



Fig. 10. Aged God N in small conch-like shell. Large eye area. No woven head decoration. This is probably a Highland Maya vase.



Fig. 11. This God N is wearing black clothing on parts of his body. He has a woven headdress accessory. There is an upside-down enema jug behind him and another enema jug (sideways) under him. An enema syringe is aimed at his tail end. God N is not the only deity associated with enema rituals.



Fig. 12. God N with a feathered conch shell. It is not common to find God N on a seat.



Fig. 13. Two God N's seated associated with their conch shells. No woven headdress accessory.



Fig. 14. God N at the left. Unidentified individual in the middle, with woven headdress feature. But I do not yet accept him as God N (no shell and face is not what I would expect for God N).



Fig. 15. Probably a Tepeu 1 bowl, Peten style.



Fig. 16. A challenge to ascertain whether the object across his chest is a shell (the shape of the back side is what suggests a possible shell). No headdress of God N. Black face but not black hands or feet. More likely God N than God D or God L.





Fig. 17. Two views of one of many God N sculptures at Copan, Honduras. A water lily flower stem is tied across the forehead. The water lily flower itself is at the left.



Fig. 18. The net-weave across the head at the right suggests this is the head of God N. Same with the head at the left of the middle. Rollout photograph by Nicholas Hellmuth.



Fig. 19. Probable God N as handle to a lid. No large shell is visible and no headdress.

# God N in a Turtle Shell

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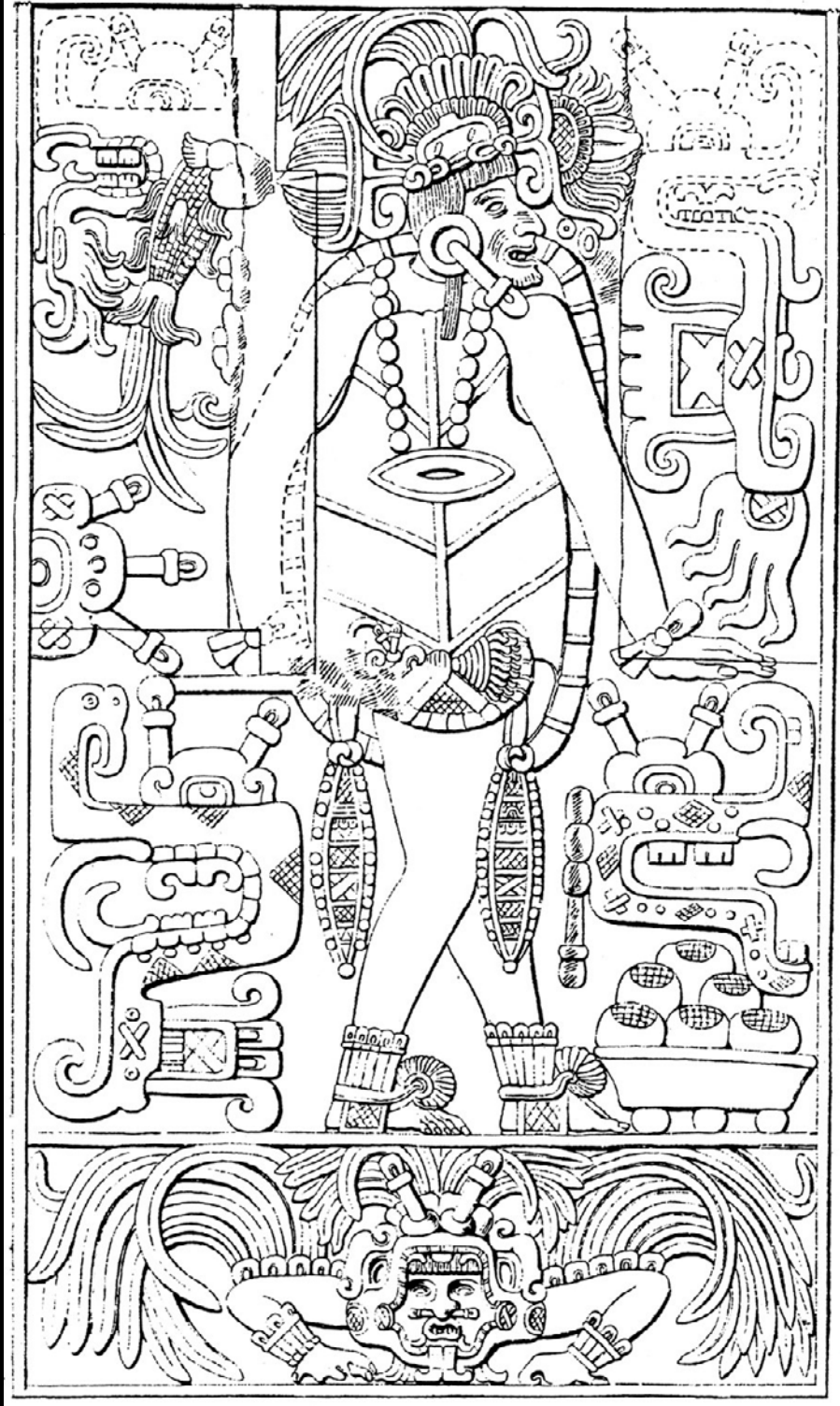


Fig. 20. God N inside a turtle shell. Water lily flower stems are tied around his forehead. A fish nibbles on the water lily flower at the left. No woven feature to his headdress.

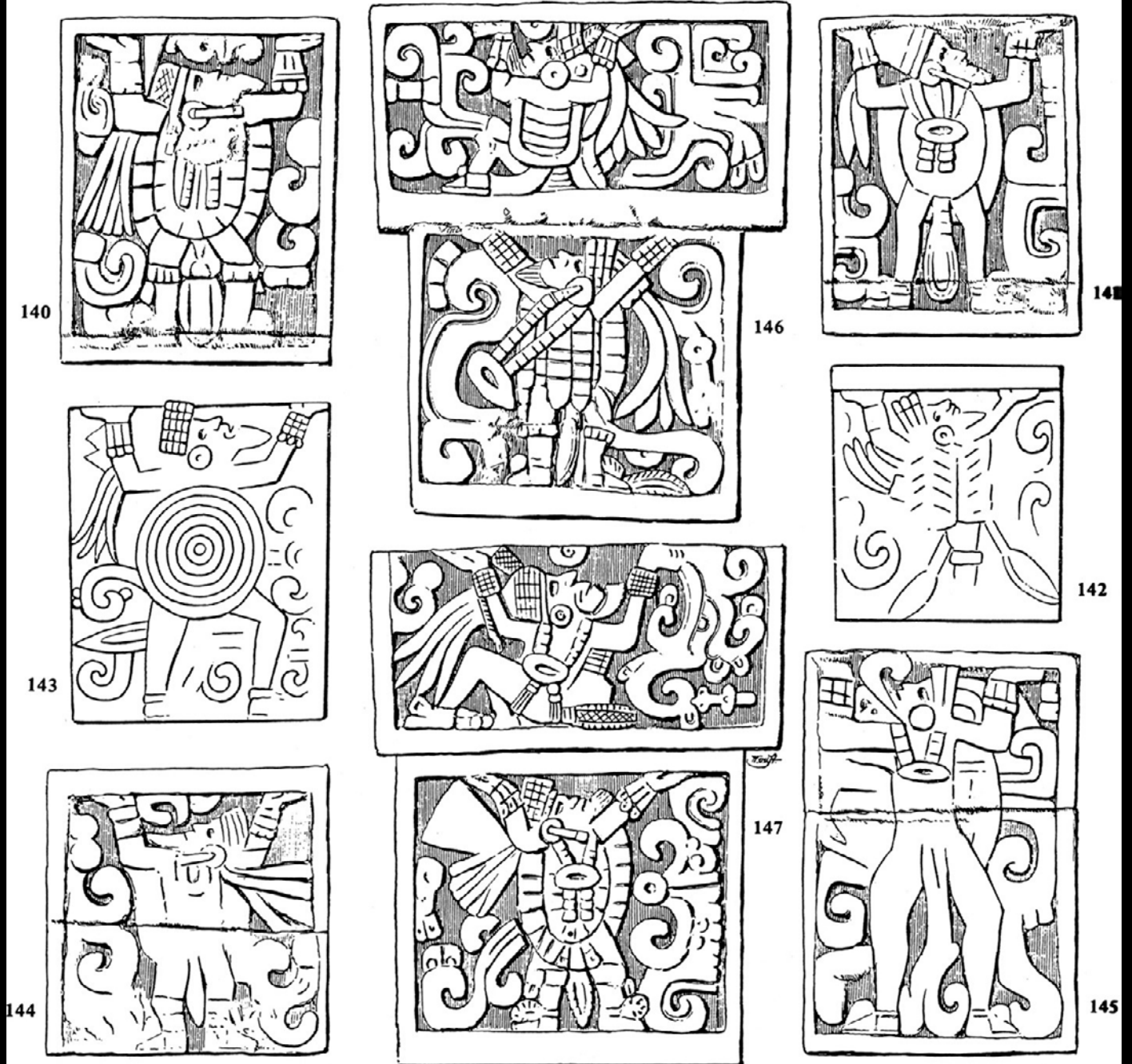


Fig. 21. Several God N's in turtle shells in art at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico; one God N in a spider web (middle left). All are "upholding" a part of the cosmos.



Fig. 22. God N sticks out of the left side of the turtle. God K sticks out of the right side. The Maize God rises from a split in the top of the turtle shell. A water lily bud and pad issue out of the bottom. Two water lily buds rise from the nose of the upraised turtle head. The God N here has characteristic head covering and extension. Peten area plate with beautiful PSS glyphs.

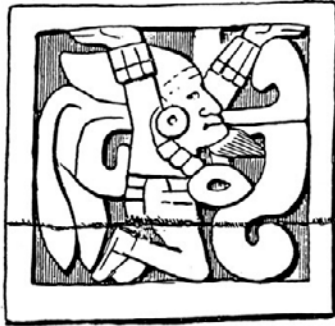


Fig. 23. God N issuing out of a turtle. Denver Art Museum.



Fig. 24. If you look at each individual you will notice that a God N has a turtle shell covering his back (third person from the left). Rollout photo either by Justin Kerr or by Nicholas Hellmuth. The entire rollout is in Part II of the God N series.

# God N Upholding “the World”



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Fig. 25. All these God N's are holding up the cosmos. At bottom left he has conch shell; at bottom right he is in a spider web. At top middle there is a probable shell on his back. There are dozens of line drawings of art from Chichen Itza in Eduard Seler's monograph.





Fig. 26. Seated God N with a cross-section of a seashell on his necklace. With one uplifted hand he is holding up part of the Maya cosmos. Copan Str. 9N-82 hieroglyphic bench.



Fig. 27. Water lily flower stem is tied around God N's forehead. A flower opens at the right. Copan Str. 9N-82 hieroglyphic bench



Fig. 28. An aged God N at the right and a non-aged associate at the left both are upholding the bench. Both have the identical "God N" seashell on their necklace. The elderly God N has a water lily stem around his forehead. A fish nibbles on the flower at the left. Copan Str. 9N-82 hieroglyphic bench.  
All photos by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Photo Archive.



Fig. 29. This God N associate is not elderly. He has a water lily stem around his forehead. Flower and fish at the left. He has a water lily pad on his knee. The person to the left is upholding the altar but this man is not.



Fig. 30. God N, Block 3 of the row of hieroglyphs across the front of this bench in Copan Str. 9N-82. He is not upholding anything.

# God N in a Crocodile

There are no alligators in the Maya Lowlands; there are two species of crocodiles (inland and coastal).

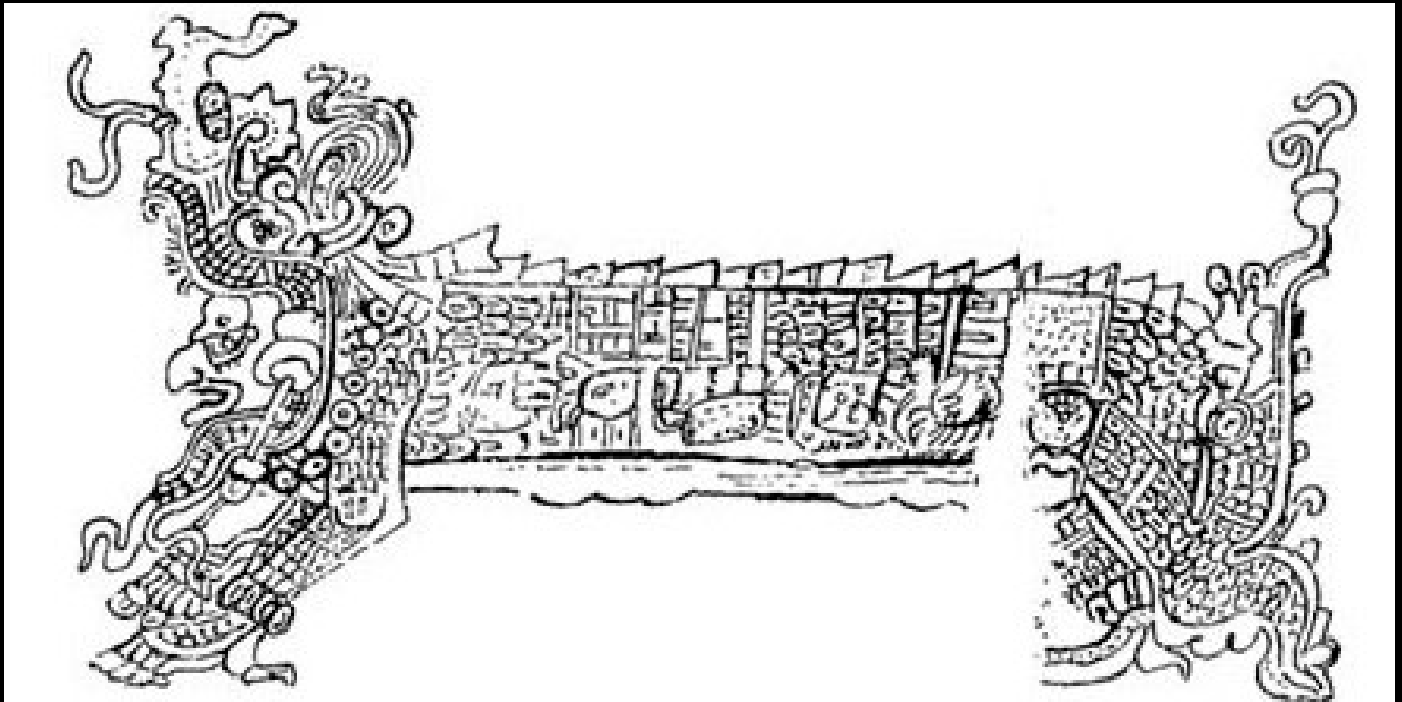


Fig. 31. This is the Maya crocodile most frequently pictured, Codex Dresden (Codex Tro-Cortesiano) from Villacorta's drawings.

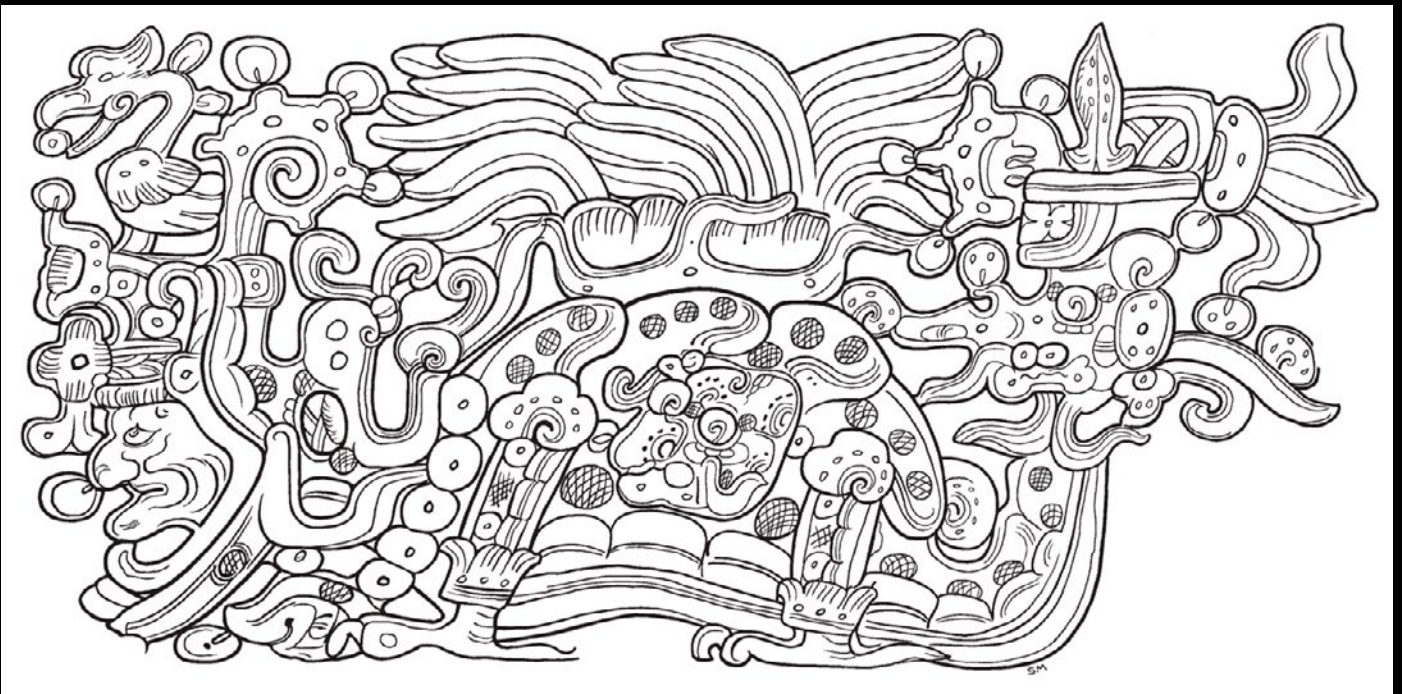


Fig. 32. This is a Cosmic Monster, with crocodile head at the left and Quadripartite Badge head at end of the tail. An aged God N sticks his head out of the jaws of the crocodile. A waterbird perches above. Drawing by Simon Martin (Martin 2015: Fig. 38).

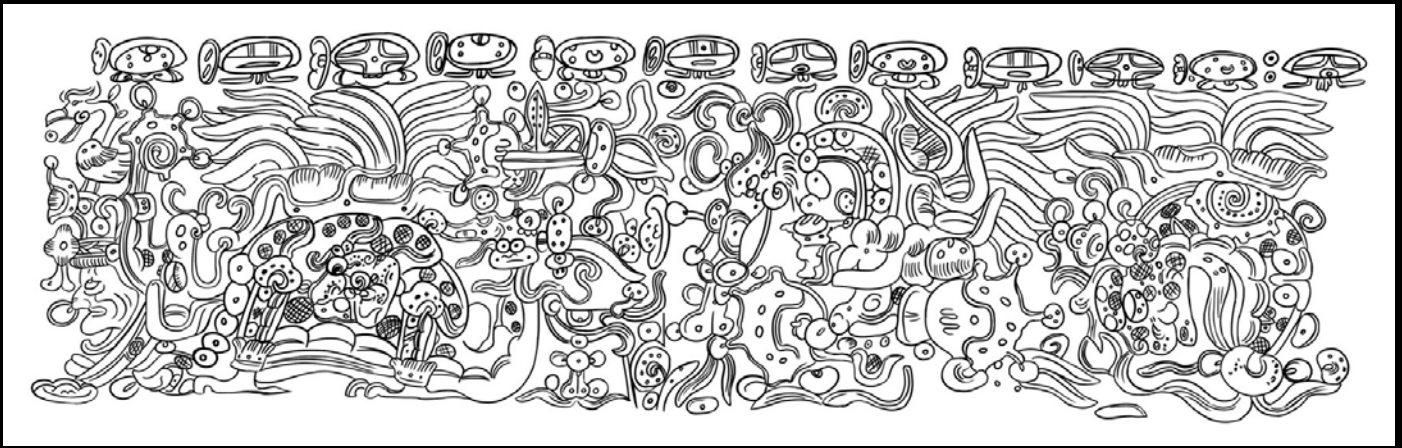


Fig. 33. FLAAR drawing of the entire rollout of this vase, based on Kerr rollout photo K6626.  
Drawing by Luis Molina.

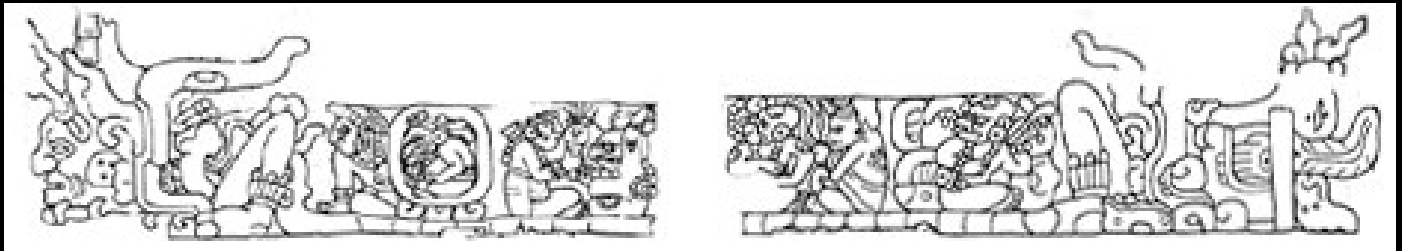


Fig. 34. God N often (but not always) comes out of the crocodile head of the Cosmic Monster.  
The expected Quadripartite Badge Headdress head is at the rear.  
Copan Str. 9N-82, drawing by Linda Schele, SD-7657.

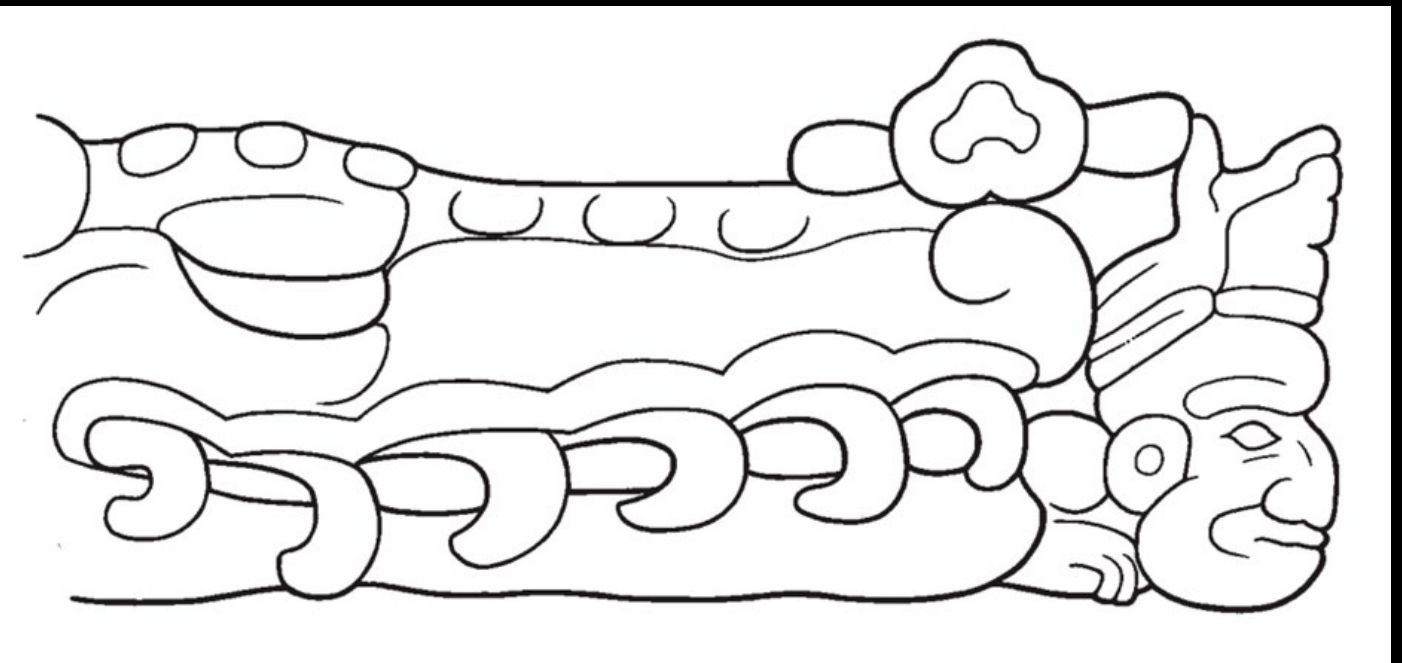


Fig. 35. God N coming out of the mouth of a crocodile.  
Unprovenanced stone block (Simon 2015: Fig. 16,b).

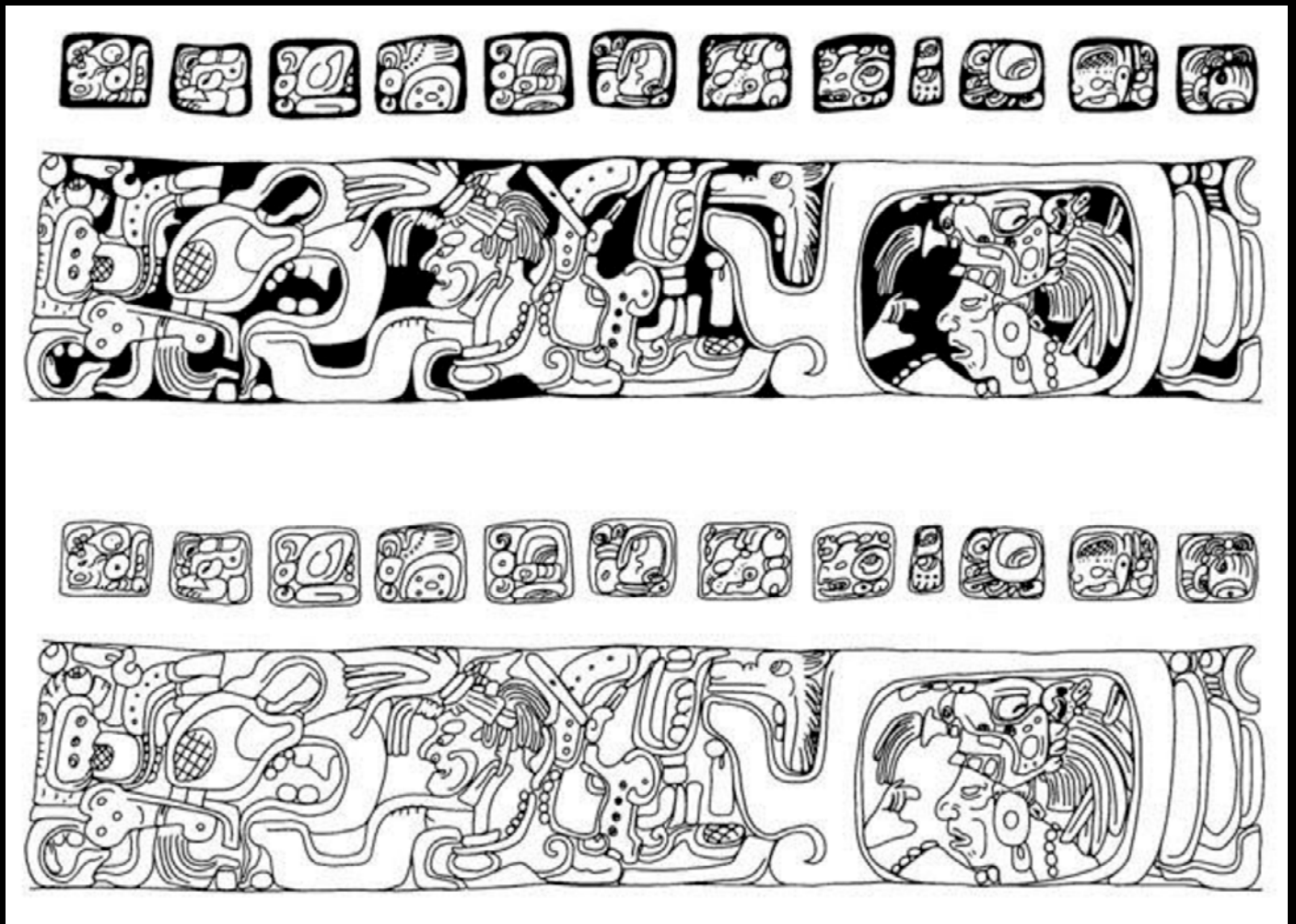


Fig. 36. God N coming out of the mouth of a crocodile-like creature.  
Carroll 2013 citing Arlen Chase and Diane Chase 2009.



Fig. 37. A God N hieroglyph is at the left. The complete body of God N is seated in the mouth of this stylized crocodile (so he is not just sticking his head out). Excellent drawing by John Hales copyright 1976, kindly provided by Donald Hales. Not to be reproduced without permission.





Fig. 38. God N coming out of the mouth of a crocodile-like monster.  
This God N has woven design on left part of his headdress.



Fig. 39. Remarkable reptilian monster.



Fig. 40. There are a series of these crocodilian monsters with a God N coming out of the front of each one. There is a monster head at the tail end of this crocodilian monster.



Fig. 41. The crocodile seems to have a monster's open mouth issuing from its tail. A well-preserved and nicely detailed Primary Standard Sequence runs around the upper part of this bowl. This bowl has supports of which you can see one under the front of the bowl.



Fig. 42. God N and atypical crocodile-like monster. PSSequene across the upper part of this bowl.



Fig. 43. Closeup view.



Fig. 44. The crocodile at the left is a 2-headed monster; this is the head at the tail end.

# Snake-like Creature may be the Animal living in a Conch Shell



Fig. 45. Feathered snake-like creature comes out of a large shell (which is also feathered). No God N.

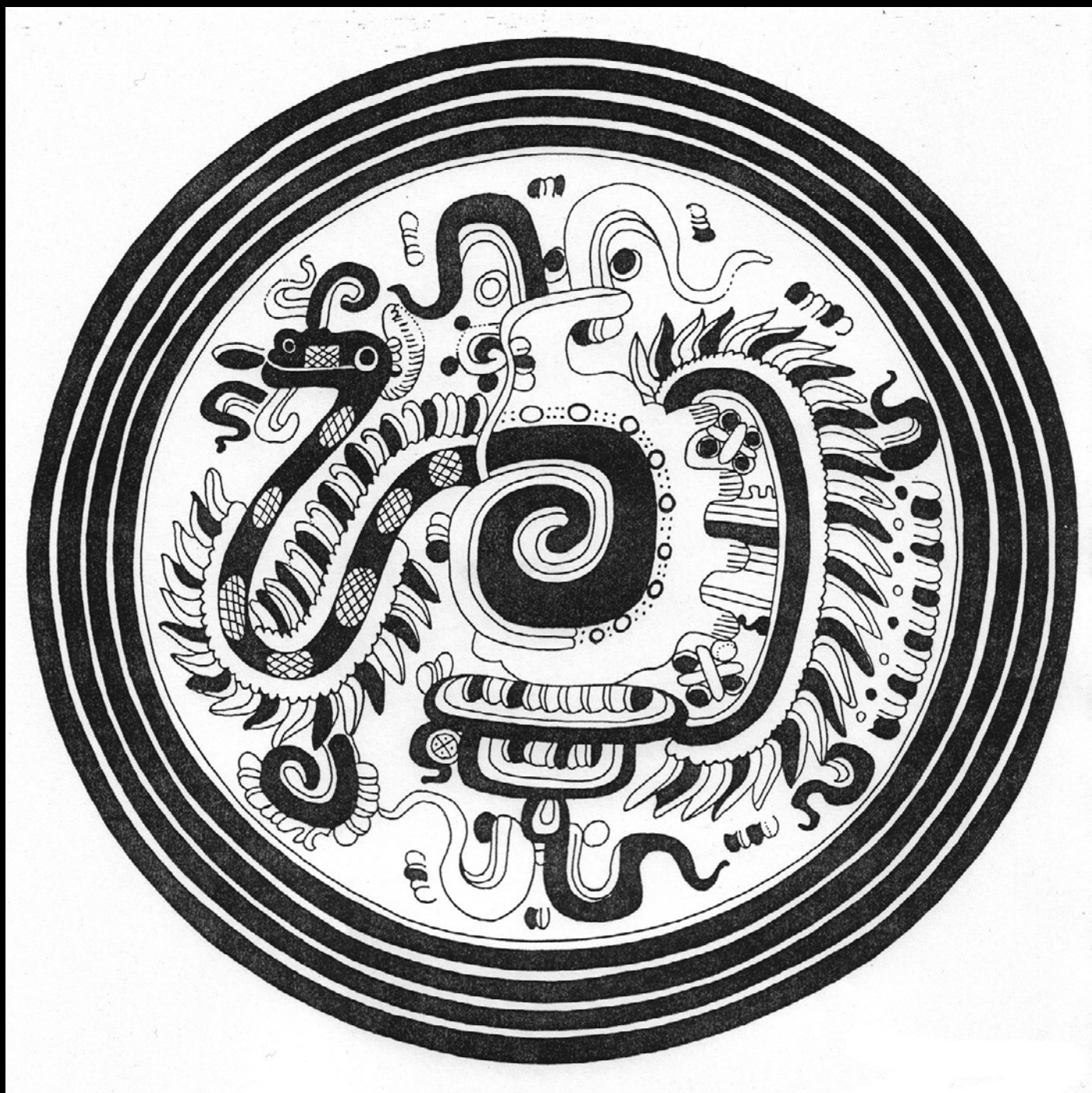


Fig. 46. Drawing of this plate by a FLAAR illustrator.

# God N in a Spider Web (most frequently at Chichen Itza)



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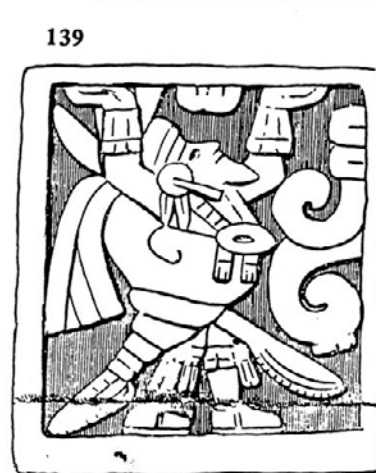
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Fig. 47. God N with conch shell or spider web. These God N's seem to be bearded. Seler 1998: Figures 134-139. These were originally published in the early 1900's and reprinted by Frank Comparato in 1998. Comparato was the manager of FLAAR in those years. Labyrinthos was his own personal project (to publish books on Maya research).

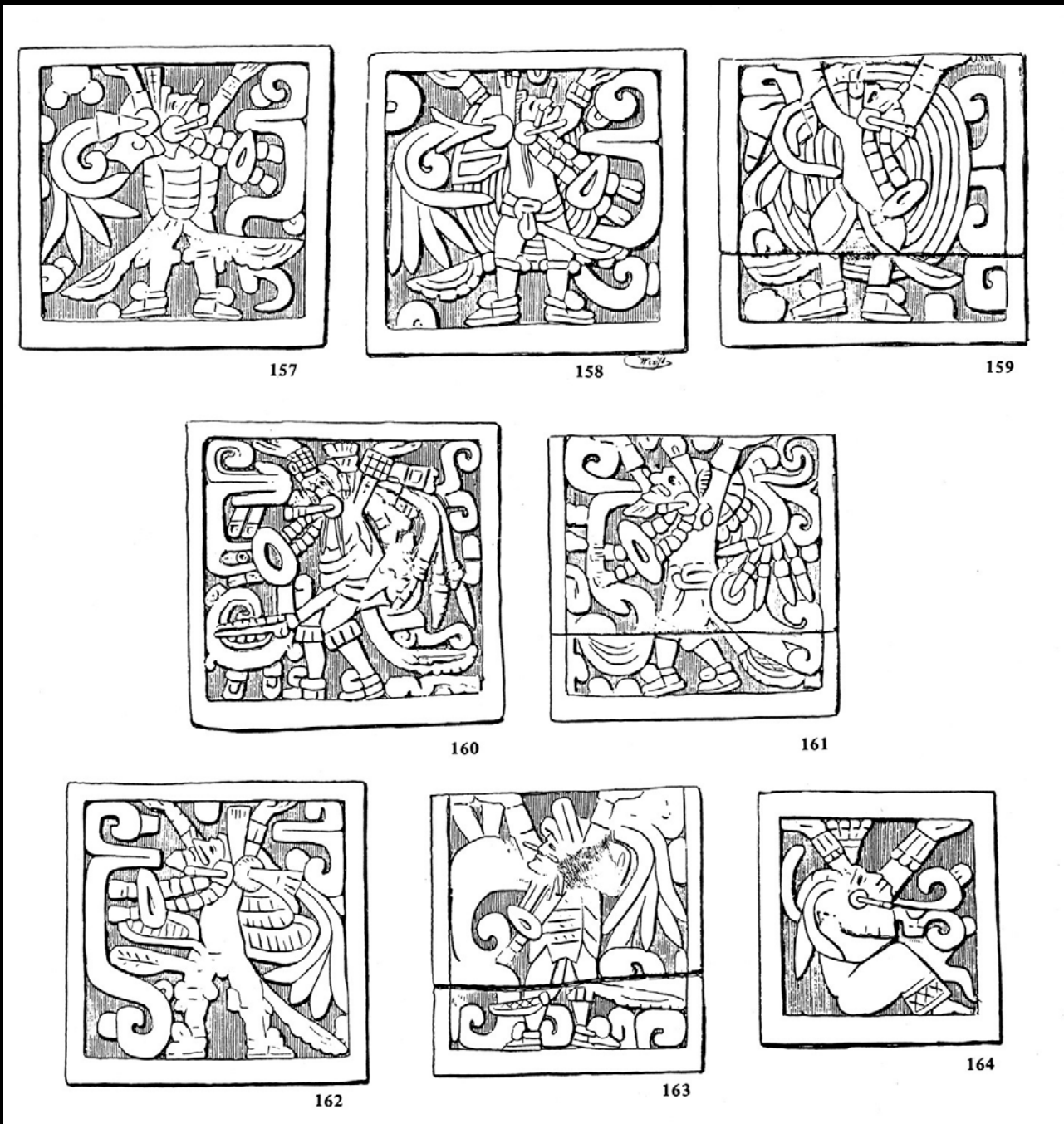


Fig. 48. Two God N's backed by a spider web. All the God N's are holding up their arms to support a part of the cosmos. Selser 1998: Figs. 157-164.



# God N that is not always elderly

God D is usually elderly; God L is usually elderly—exceptions are rare. Although God N is considered one of the elderly male deities, in fact there are lots of examples of non-elderly man residing in shells. We show these on the following pages.



Fig. 49. Two of the young God N's on this Peten area polychrome bowl. The conch shell has potential fish fins at its end. There is a giant cross-section of a flower at the back of this shell.



Fig. 50. Young man with conch shell (with feathered wing on its back). Because of the shell I suggest these are young God N's. A detailed Primary Standard Sequence (PSS) of glyphs is at the top.



Fig. 51. Another of the young men in a feathered conch shell. The Initial Sign of the PSS is at the top right.



Fig. 52. Polychrome Peten plate with crocodile headdress on man at the left; waterbird eating fish in front. Man dancing in the middle has a domed head. A large water lily flower sticks out the front of his forehead. A young man in a shell has same water lily headdress as dancer. A fish nibbles at the center of the flower. I would call him a young God N.



Fig. 53. More a snail-like shell than a conch. I suggest he is a youthful God N.



Fig. 54. A man is in a conch shell; he is not elderly. No photo of the whole plate so we show the segments that are available. Initial Sign of PSS at the lower right.



Fig. 55. God N who is not elderly.

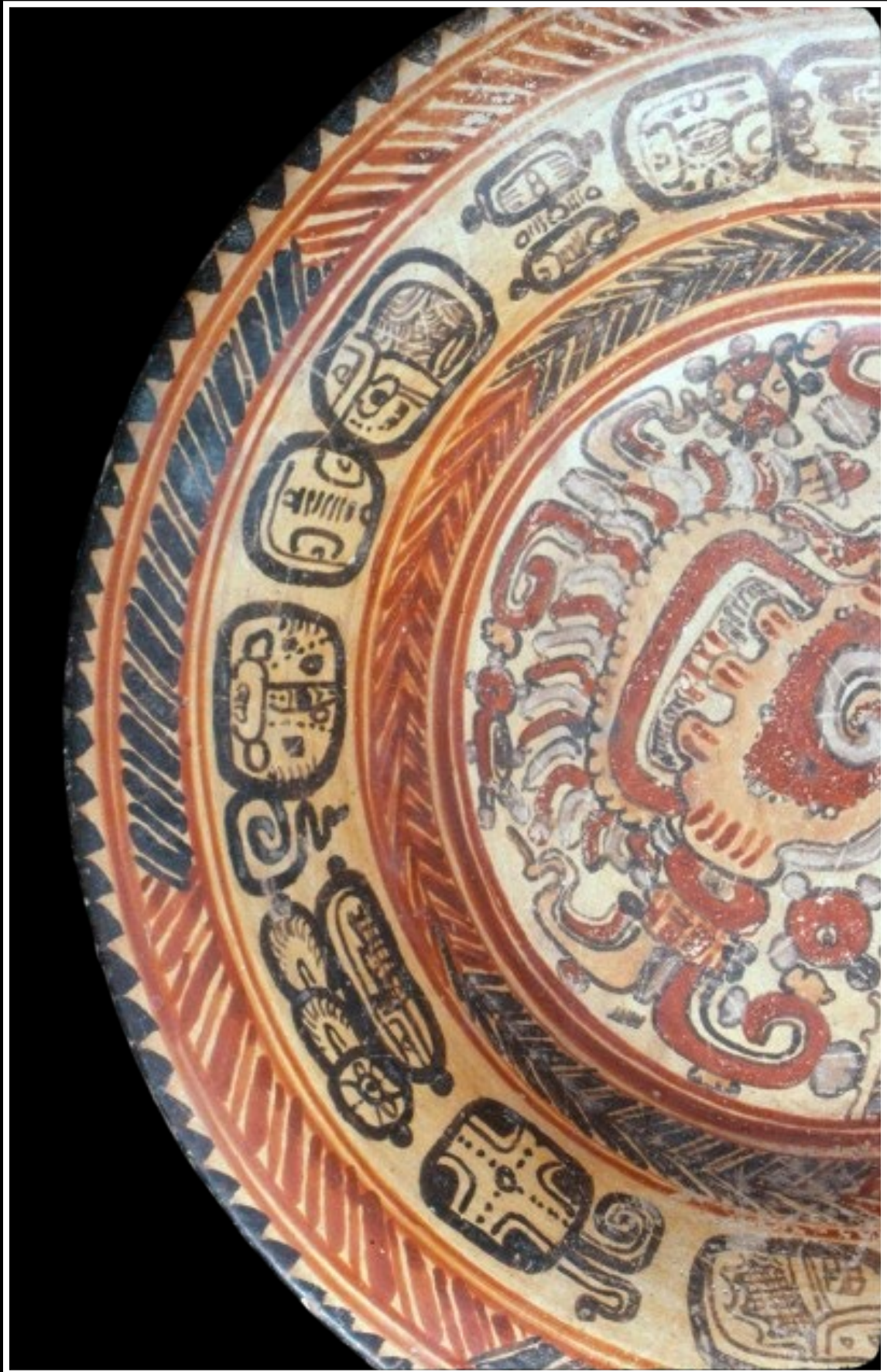


Fig. 56. Back of the shell with feathers adorning it.





Fig. 57. God N who is not elderly. Feathers adorn the shell.

# God N as a Hieroglyph



Fig. 58. The head of God N is often found as a hieroglyph. He has the woven material covering his head and on a piece of material sticking out the front. FLAAR drawing by Barbara Van Heusen.



Fig. 59. God N after the Initial Sign in a short PSS on a Codex Style Plate. No God N issues from this turtle.



Fig. 6o. God N glyph in this PSS is not associated with the Initial Sign.



Fig. 61. Here the God N glyph is the third, not the second.



Fig. 62. Initial Sign in the middle, followed by God N, then clenched hand.  
No God N's are in the scene itself.



Fig. 63. The actual PSS on this bowl is "backwards" but I have turned it to face left so you can more easily compare this with other PSSequene God N's.

# God N head as Body of Waterbird



Fig. 64. I first noticed a God N-like head as body of a waterbird while doing research for my 1980's PhD dissertation. This head has a kill hole for the plate. A Sky Band goes around the right part.





Fig. 65. This is even more obviously a God N head. We show the entire rollout of each of these in Part II. Cropped from Kerr rollout K3536 from Dumbarton Oaks enhanced data base.



Fig. 66. Waterbird with God N's head as the front of its body.  
Cropped from Kerr rollout K6438 from Dumbarton Oaks enhanced data base.



Fig. 67. Another waterbird with God N's head as the front of its body. Cropped from rollout. This rollout may be by Nicholas Hellmuth.



Fig. 68. Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth of this Peten area vase with PSS around the top.



Fig. 69. Another waterbird with God N's head as the front of its body. Cropped from Kerr rollout K6181 from Dumbarton Oaks enhanced data base.

Part II is horizontal format for rollouts by Justin Kerr and by Nicholas Hellmuth.

There is also a comprehensive iconographic catalog of God N's known in the 1990's. This is a separate publication by Hellmuth, available on [www.Maya-archaeology.org](http://www.Maya-archaeology.org).

# References Cited

There are lots of iconographers who discuss or picture God N. Here are the ones we cite so far.

**CARROLL, Patrick B.**

2013 Reevaluating the Late Classic Lu-Bat Glyphic Phrase: The Artist and the Underworld. MA thesis.

God N is shown as Figure 51 at the left of a Kerr rollout, K2774. And on page 122.

**CHASE, Arlen and Diane CHASE**

2009 Interpreting the Maya "Collapse": Continued Investigation of Residential Complexes in and near Caracol's Epicenter: 2009 Field Report of the Caracol Archaeological Project. [www.Caracol.org](http://www.Caracol.org)

**MARTIN, Simon**

2015 The Old Man of the Maya Universe: A Unitary Dimension to Ancient Maya Religion. In *Maya Archaeology 3*, edited by Charles Golden, Stephen Houston, and Joel Skidmore, pp. 186–227. Precolumbia Mesoweb Press, San Francisco.

This shows more God N's than any other article or monograph.

**SELER, Eduard**

1998 The Ruins of Chichen Itza. Chapter 3, pages 41-165 in A. *Wide Contributions in Mexican and Maya Archaeology. Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology*, Vol. VI. Labyrinthos.