

The Story of the Blom Plate: a Masterpiece of Maya Iconography and Primary Standard Sequence, PSS, Hieroglyphs



Chetumal, Quintana Roo, Mexico

Nicholas Hellmuth

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Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Reports

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Introduction

When I was first studying Maya iconography from the 1960's into the 1980's, I kept finding references to the "Blom Plate." I wanted to have a nice line drawing of the Hero Twins with their blow guns for my 1980's PhD dissertation on Classic Maya cosmology and iconography. But all that was published was a 1940's black-and-white photo (Blom 1950). I needed more detail so an illustrator could make a precise line drawing. So I wanted to learn where the plate was so I could photograph it, and from the photograph to have a line drawing made.

I learned, much to my surprise, that "no one had seen the plate since the 1950's when Frans Blom photographed it."

So I began to check around. The plate had been photographed by Frans Blom in Oaxaca, in a private collection. Frans Blom was a Danish anthropologist who worked in Mexico. He is known for several things, one being his infamous wife, Trudy Blom, the piquant champion of the Lacandon Maya at Na Bolom in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. The saga of the sadly alcoholic Frans and the choleric Trudy are worth of a movie in themselves (his biography uses lots of other adjectives; the biography is listed in the Bibliography at the end of this report). Frans, before he unfortunately drowned himself in alcohol, co-authored "Tribes and Temples" (with anthropologist Oliver Lafarge) and other key early anthropological studies, based on his travels throughout southern Mexico.

I remember that as a teenager, I knocked on the door of Na Bolom in San Cristobal de las Casas to visit and speak with them, but was told by the person who answered the door that he was not available. In the later 1960's I stayed at Na Bolom to make my bibliography on the Lacandon Maya. By then Frans had passed away and Trudy was totally in charge of the library and facilities. But in the 1960's I was not yet studying the Hero Twins: that started when Michael Coe published the Grolier art exhibit catalog in 1973. This book revolutionized Maya iconography; evolved from the previous Carnegie Institution of Washington style research into the new era that continues today with dozens of capable and experienced iconographers, epigraphers and archaeologists.

Starting in the latter 1970's, it took me several years to find where the plate was, but I finally met someone who had seen the Blom Plate in the 1960's. And evidently it was still in Oaxaca, after all these years (this was in the late 1970's or early '80's). The person said the plate was in a trailer court, in the house of the American engineer who had worked as engineer for the constructing the landing field for the Chetumal airport, Quintana Roo (the first time I explored Quintana Roo it was a territorio federal, it was not yet an Estado until 1974). Same for Peten, it was not yet a departamento when I explored Peten in 1963, again in 1964 and then for 12-months of 1965 as a student intern for the Proyecto Tikal). Peten was still under the control of FYDEP in the 1970's when we initiated the Yaxha mapping project with archaeologists Carlos Rudy Larios the first days and then Miguel Orrego helped map the site with Hellmuth.

So to find the Blom Plate in the early 1980's, I drove all the way from the USA, with a complete portable photo studio in my vehicle, to the trailer court in Oaxaca, Mexico. When I got there, the court had just recently been sold. The gringo who had the Maya plate was no longer living there and no one at the court knew where he had moved. Thousands of retired gringos live in Oaxaca, so not easy to find one single person in the pre-Internet decade of the 1980's. So no Blom Plate. Bummer, bummer.

Then I had to drive many THOUSANDS OF MILES back to the USA, where I kept checking around. You get information by networking. Another year went by. By now I had the name of the former trailer court owner, Roy H. Jones. I made contact. Yes, the plate was still with him, wrapped in paper, in a box, in storage in his back room. The most priceless treasure imaginable, not only not available to Mayanists, but abandoned in a bodega. What a travesty.

So I drove to Oaxaca again. It's about a 5,000 mile drive; so about 10,000 miles round trip. With a full photo studio: Hasselblad cameras, tripod, light stands, Lowel Tota-lites (portable camera studio lighting), backdrops, etc. The owner, retired engineer Roy H. Jones, very kindly let me photograph the plate.



Here is my first photograph in color of the Blom Plate, in Oaxaca, many decades ago. Leica camera with natural sunlight. The plate has metal hooks since it had to be protected (you can see the diagonal crack at the lower right). I was so eager to take this first snapshot that the black cover strap material at lower right was not yet removed.



Here is a better photo with the black strap now removed and the whole plate nicely illuminated out in the sun. This is in Oaxaca, in the garden of Roy Jones, the engineer who was given the plate by the bulldozer operator and construction crew who were leveling an entire archaeological site to make flat runways for airplanes to land at Chetumal in the 1940's.

Sometime later the owner contacted me and asked said, "I am getting older, what should I do with this plate? Do you want the plate?"

- Just calculate how many museums would drool to have this plate on exhibit.
- Just think how many collectors would love to show this plate on their mantelpiece.
- Calculate how much money could be made by selling this plate if it was given to you!

But instead, I suggested that he donate the plate to INAH so it could be in a Mexican museum to be appreciated by the descendants of the people who painted the scene. INAH is the Mexican government anthropology institute. Besides, I have no interest in collecting any kind of art: I only collect good camera equipment, good tripods, tripod heads, and lighting for field work photography.

So this is how the plate ended up donated to a museum in the Yucatan Peninsula. I vaguely remember it first went to a museum in Chetumal circa 1985, since the plate was originally from Chetumal. But because of the artistic beauty and iconographic and epigraphic value, the plate was subsequently transferred to

the impressive Museo Regional de Antropología, Palacio Cantón, in Merida, where I re-photographed it several years later (estimated to have photographed in 1994). We appreciate the permit from IHAH to photograph in local museums.

We are working now to find the original slides from Oaxaca to document what year I found and photographed it in Oaxaca. Kodachrome 35mm slides often have the month and year when the film was developed at the lab.

Frankly, when I rephotographed the Blom Plate in Merida, I was very proud to stand in front of this masterpiece of pre-Columbian Maya art and realize it was here in a museum in Mexico because of several years of tracking it down, and my suggestion that it should stay in Mexico and not go to me or a foreign collection or foreign museum. Circa 2012, the Blom Plate was transferred back to Sala de Arqueología de Quintana Roo, in the Museo Maya de Cancún, a bit closer to its point of origin (Chetumal, Quintana Roo).

Where was the Blom Plate actually from?

Unlikely but not totally impossible to have a striking Maya plate being found in Oaxaca. The Zapotecs and Mixtecs “collected” art, just as did the later Aztecs. Aztec caches included Olmec masterpieces. The Aztec actually dug up buildings and sculptures at Teotihuacan and reconstructed them in Tenochtitlan. Plus the Zapotecs had a trade route to the north to the imperial capital of Teotihuacan. And the Zapotecs participated in the trade route down through Soconusco and the adjacent Boca Costa and Costa Sur of Guatemala (and then up into the mountains to reach Kaminaljuyu. I have found bowls in museums of Tiquisate style from the Costa Sur with local renditions of Zapotec deities. Same deity I have found in publications at Kaminaljuyu, and on Early Classic material in museums from Peten. So there was trade back-and-forth from Zapotecs in Oaxaca throughout the main trade routes to Guatemala (and probably further south as well).

But the Blom Plate ended up in Oaxaca because the person got the plate out of a pre-Hispanic grave under a temple bulldozed to make the new airport near Chetumal. To make a flat landing field all the mounds were bulldozed in the 1940's. When the airport construction engineer retired, he moved to Oaxaca (with a retirement business, the Oaxaca trailer courts). He kept the plate in a closet.



Blom Plate with scene from Popol Vuh. Museo Regional de Antropología de Yucatán, Mérida (where the plate was in the 1990's). These are pages and back cover from Hellmuth 1987 PhD dissertation.

But the Blom Plate ended up in Oaxaca because the person got the plate out of a pre-Hispanic grave under a temple bulldozed to make the new airport near Chetumal. To make a flat landing field all the mounds were bulldozed in the 1940's. When the airport construction engineer retired, he moved to Oaxaca (with a retirement business, the Oaxaca trailer courts). He kept the plate in a closet. Having the plate exhibited in a museum in Chetumal was especially appropriate because that is where it was excavated. Jones said that the bulldozer driver who was leveling an entire Maya site for the Chetumal airport found a complete burial. The jade went to the then-alcalde or governor or whomever "appropriate." The engineer in charge, the American who later retired to Oaxaca, got the plate. Frans Blom somehow heard about it and photographed it in the 1950's, I tracked it down more than two decades later, and this is how the photograph became available in my "Monsters and Men in Maya Art," the published German language version of my PhD dissertation. The plate of course has since been republished by others. But not really many footnotes as to the actually rather long history of how this plate became available for Mayan students, scholars, and interested lay people to study and enjoy.



Helmuth 1987

Scene from the Blom Plate showing, potentially, Hunahpú and Ixbalanqué shooting a skeletal water bird perched above the Principal Bird Deity (7 Macaw of the Popol Vuh). A skeletal water bird is not common, especially not in this position. The Principal Bird Deity at Copan, Honduras and in the Popol Vuh is a macaw. But from pre/proto-Maya stelae of Izapa, Chiapas through San Bartolo murals (Peten) then Early Classic and Late Classic Maya Lowlands (Peten and surroundings), the mythical bird is a composite of a Snake-Eating Hawk (same bird is also named Laughing Falcon). So the usual raptor is *Herpetotheres cachinnans*. But what the Principal Bird Deity is perching on is quite standard representation of features of the Surface of the Underwaterworld, as pictured throughout the 1987 publication of my 1985 PhD dissertation. This is Abb.425 from the ADEVA publication, 1987. Normally the Principal Bird Deity is up at the top of a calabash tree, *Crescentia* species.

I hope Mayanists and aficionados enjoy learning some of the history of Maya studies. Shortly I will be also writing on the other FLAAR projects that we have dedicated many years to, namely being responsible for the protection and founding of the Parque Nacional Yaxha, Nakum (other eco-friendly individuals and organizations intelligently added Naranjo). I had never been to Naranjo in those years so I knew only Yaxha, Nakum, Topoxte Island, etc. If you watch TV, you know the Survivor was filmed in the Lake Yaxha area in past years. This would not have been a park if FLAAR had not labored for five years and encouraging FYDEP and the President of Guatemala (who visited Yaxha while we were there) to develop this park and to protect it until the government finally took over and posted their own caretakers.

We are also working to find our 35mm color slides, medium format Hasselblad 6x6cm transparencies and black-and-white negatives of our months of architectural photography at Santa Rosa Xtampak. The main palace there is a remarkable combination of all three regional styles: Chenes monster mask main doorways, Rio Bec towers, and Puuc style facades. We worked there especially during 1989. Once we find the original images and scan them, we can use the digital images to improve the quality of the over hundred photos in the several volumes by Hellmuth on the lintels, stairways and other architectural aspects of Santa Rosa Xtampak, Campeche, Mexico. We will then provide all these digitized images to INAH in Campeche, to INAH headquarters in Mexico City, and to the archaeologists who are still working at Santa Rosa Xtampak today.

Iconography, Epigraphy, Ceramic Phase

The Blom Plate is Late Classic, roughly equivalent to late Tepeu 1 or more likely early Tepeu 2, and is closer to Peten styles than anything in Yucatan or adjacent parts of Campeche. The plates of southern Campeche, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Quintana Roo are not as well published as are the artifacts of Uaxactun or Tikal, so it is hard to make further statements on what regional workshop it came from, until publications of this millennium catch up with the standards set by the Carnegie Institution of Washington back in the 1940's through 1950's.

The iconography and epigraphy of this plate could take two dissertations to write: one on the hieroglyphic text, the other on the iconography of the Hero Twins of the Popol Vuh. The semi-circle of hieroglyphs are in a typical position where you usually expect to find a PSS, Primary Standard Sequence, or at least a local regional variant of the PSS. Michael Coe is the first to write a complete monograph (1973) where he named the glyphs on ceramics that were in a special sequence as the Primary Standard Sequence (PSS or my nickname, PSSequences). And for modern times, Mike Coe is also the champion of showing once and for all the usefulness of the Popol Vuh as a resource for better understanding the Classic Maya iconography, especially of Chiapas, Peten, Campeche, Belize and Copan areas of Mesoamerica.

I already wrote my own comments on the remarkable iconography of Xbalanqué and Hunahpú and the Principal Bird Deity in my 1986 PhD dissertation, Karl-Franzens Universtaet, Graz, Austria, published by ADEVA and distributed by FLAAR. We still have a few copies left and can present all this iconography in PowerPoint presentations to museums, social clubs, Pre-Columbian societies, university classes, in-person or via Zoom.

**Iconography:
The study of the motifs and symbols of the Blom Plate**



You could write an entire thesis on the "message" of a series of bejeweled ornaments coming out of the waterbird whose fleshless bones rise out of the top of the head of the Principal Bird Deity.

I doubt any study of the Popol Vuh has studied this aspect of the "jewels" of the Principal Bird Deity. Obviously the Izapa edition was a tad different than Tzakol Maya edition and in turn different than the Late Classic edition of where the Blom Place was painted.

I photographed each part of the plate as a separate individual close-up because each epigrapher and each iconographer will be able to see new aspects that are not as noticeable when the entire plate is in front. (with so many motifs all together).

So this is not cropped, this is a complete 35mm Leica photo.





Most Principal Bird Deities have pit viper snake heads as main underside design on outstretched wings. If you watch raptors flying in the rain forests, with the tropical sun shining through their open wings, you can often notice the design created by the bones and feathers that are illuminated by the sun (when the wings are wide open in flight).



The Sea Anemone (or Columnar Sponge) Headdress Monster is common. But snakes sticking out like here is rare.



"Twins yes", but clearly not identical twin accessories. His throne is wider and is covered with traditional feline pelage. So he is seated on a common "portable royal seat" whereas the brother is on a small seat that is not well known (especially not for kings).

Normally only one "Twin" has widely spaced black spots. He is usually the younger (yes, he looks younger in other scenes than the "twin" with jaguar indicators). The T-shaped "Wind" sign is on the small seat.

What is curious is that the estimated Ixbalante' at the left has his left foot touching a ball-shaped object with the same T-shaped (Ik', wind) as his estimated twin brother is seated on. The blowgun aspect of the Hero Twins are well known. Their life-and-death enactment is also documented in the Popol Vuh. Need to see whether in the Popol Vuh myths or in Classic Maya paintings a giant snake or dragon monster gobbles up their round seat. Or... is this Ik' object a game ball (neither is wearing ballgame or other athletic gear). So a lot to study.

There have been astute iconographic and ethnohistoric suggestions that "not all twins in Maya art are the Hero Twins." These here are obvious twins, more so than on Red Band Tepeu 1 canoe scenes, because normally the "older twin" has obviously feline patch and the "younger twin" as the widely spaced black spots. So on the Blom plate you could suggest that you see "two iterations of Hunahpu". But as I mention in the caption, the feline-covered cushion under the hunter at the left suggests that he is the jaguar-associated twin. But I am open to additional suggestions.

The PSS, Primary Standard Sequence

The PSS that runs around the lower half is an impressive text because it is original, not repainted in Miami or repainted in New York.



This is a crop from a previous photo (which is turned around from the main photo below). So this segment is less than 1% of the entire photo, but with the quality of a Leica camera of 1994 and a better-than-average flatbed scanner, with good scanner software, you can still see the introductory glyph plus the second glyph that shows a foot about to climb up the steps of a temple or palace; then a clenched hand. This photo is not at a close-up angle; this photo is parallel to the flat bottom central area of the plate, but until I can find the close-up photos, this view at least helps epigraphers see the introductory glyphs of this PSS.



Since the clenched hand (at the right) is same height as the full glyphs, I am naming it as an independent glyph, C1. But epigraphers may find it's a suffix of the glyph following it? Then I saw that Mora names it glyph C (Mora-Marin 2004: Fig. 8c).

The Introductory Sign is a great example. I am curious whether focused studies on the PSS have used this as an example. Same for the obvious foot "print" "climbing" up the steps of the Witz pyramid.

No fish in this text (at least not one that I have noticed). Because fish are part of the hieroglyph for cacao that is held in bowls and vases. Plates held other kinds of food or offerings.

Mora (2004: caption for his Figure 8,c) shows that (for Dumbarton Oaks quartzite pectoral) the pyramid steps are directly associated with the hand glyph. So the large clenched hand of the Blom plate is mas o menos an enlarged post-fix for the step glyph. There are dozens more studies of PSS hieroglyphs. By publishing the text I am making this PSSsequence available to epigraphers for their research and their PowerPoint presentations and for student for their term papers, theses, and dissertation.



Clenched Hand, then D1 and segment of E1.

All photographs: Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Photo Archive.

Once I find all the many-decades-old 35mm color slides and also the black-and-white negatives, I will publish as many close-ups of the PSSsequence hieroglyphs as I can find. This way epigraphers should be able to find PSS glyphs of other scribes and learn what regional atelier produced this text. This photo is relatively parallel to the glyphs (so I can better record them). A few of the PSS photos are a crop from the complete plate, so parallel to the main area of the plate (not parallel to the raised edge). It would help to photograph each single individual glyph with a modern digital camera and have these available to epigraphers to improve the shape of their drawing (so the drawing is not imprecise because the photo was at an angle).



E1 with bar-and-dot numerals in front.
F1 bird whose beak helps you find same bird on hundreds of other PSSequences



PSS hieroglyphs E1, F1, G1. 100% original Classic Maya scribe. No fakes by people trying to earn money for "restoration." Even "retouching" is a first step into forgery.



Hieroglyphs H1 and I1.



Once we find all the negatives and color transparencies of this plate we will send digital scans of all the original photos to INAH. We also worked in Campeche for the Santa Rosa Xtampak project (1989) and all the INAH and local archaeologists and park rangers knew us since we brought tour groups ever year to learn about Maya culture of Mexico. When local museums needed photographs we would bring our portable studio and do photography for them and then donate the photos to the archaeologists of the Yucatan Peninsula who had requested our help. Polychrome plates are hard to photograph because even with a polarizing filter the different angles of the plate still reflect too much. So to photograph each hieroglyph we would rotate the plate for the best angle of lighting for each individual hieroglyph.



At least you can see the entire PSS hieroglyphic text better by turning the plate around. But we need to find the glyph-by-glyph close-up photos, one glyph area at a time. We have so far found only one photo (shown in the previous photo above).



Here the lighting is at a different angle so the PSS hieroglyphs are not reflecting light. The photo of the first glyphs is cropped from this image.

References Cited and Suggested Reading on the Blom Plate, Chetumal, Mexico

Would be helpful to learn what is the name of the archaeological site that was bulldozed to make the landing field for the Chetumal airport in the 1940's.

I am curious whether at least some of the mounds escaped.

And, Goal #1 for an archaeologist or student in Mexico, where are other plates, bowls, or vases made of the same ceramic material and painted in the same colors?

BLOM, Frans

1950 A Polychrome Maya Plate from Quintana Roo. In *Notes on Middle American Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, Vol. IV, Number 98, pages 81-84, Carnegie Institution of Washington,

Curiously this important report by Frans Blom is NOWHERE mentioned in his biography by Leifer et al.; and this 1950 report is NOWHERE in their list of his publications??

CHINCHILLA Mazariegos, Oswaldo

2021 The Solar and Lunar Heroes in Classic Maya Art. Pages 1-21 in the PDF, but in the original book pages 251-267, Part 4 of *The Myths of the Popol Vuh in Cosmology, Art and Ritual*, editors: Holley Moyes, Allen J. Christenson, and Frauke Sachse. University Press of Colorado.

His Figure 2 has an excellent photograph (by Guido Krempel) of the upper half of the Blom Plate.

COE, Michael D.

1973 *The Maya Scribe and his World*, New York, The Grolier Club.

Mike Coe has Blom's 1950's report in his bibliography, but the plate is not shown (since it was obviously not available in 1973 for the Grolier exhibit); Hellmuth did not rediscover the Blom Plate until about a decade later; and Coe's comments were one of many that inspired me, since I was a Post Graduate Research Fellow at Yale University for over a decade (starting in 1968 and with about three sequential appointments, each with a different professor; the final one was with Mike Coe for research on ethno-zoology, iconography of felines and other fauna in Maya art). The Blom Plate, however, clearly inspired Coe to recognize the "Headband Gods" as the "Twins" (Coe 1973: 56, 83). Later on his page 149 they are named the Hero Twins; Hero Twins is the designation used by iconographers still today (keeping in mind that not all "twins" are Hunahpu and Xbalanque).

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1987a *Surface of the Underwaterworld Iconography of the Gods of Early Classic Maya Art in Petén, Guatemala*. PhD Dissertation. FLAAR. Two Volumes (one text; second illustrations).

Updated English version of *Monsters und Menschen*.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1987b *Monsters und Menschen in der Maya-Kunst*. ADEVA, Graz, Austria. 403 pages, including over 700 illustrations (line drawings and photographs).

LEIFER, Tore, NIELSEN, Jesper and Toka Sellner REUNERT

2017 *Restless Blood*, Frans Blom, Explorer and Maya Archaeologist. With preface by Michael D. Coe. Middle American Research Institute (MARI), Tulane University and Precolumbia Mesoweb Press. 159 pages.

The "Blom Plate" report of Frans Blom (1950) is totally missing from this biography.

Available as helpful; even though it ignores the Blom Plate part of Frans Blom's life, the biography is entertaining and educational.

MORA-Marín, David

2004 *The Primary Standard Sequence: Database Compilation, Grammatical Analysis, and Primary Documentation with Addenda: Description of Digital Database of PSS Texts Database of PSS Texts*. FAMSI.

David Mora-Marin mentions PSS glyphs on the Blom Plate in Fig. 8

PINTO Bojórquez, Landy and Edgar MEDINA Castillo

2011 *El Plato Blom: la confrontación entre los Héroes Gemelos y Vucub Caquix*". En "Gaceta de Museos", núm. 50, septiembre-noviembre, 2011. Conaculta-INAH.

Webpages:

https://lugares.inah.gob.mx/es/inicio/opinion/12747-el-plato-blom.html?lugar_id=

Says the plate is Saxché Naranja Polícromo, dated between 600 and 750. Has part of the history from the saga of Hellmuth but omits the time-line of the re-discovery of the plate in the 1980's etc. A bibliography and citation would help this nice web page of INAH. The INAH photos they use are very nice.

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.974720402589352&type=3>

This page mentions the fact that it was Hellmuth that got the Blom Plate donated to IHAH.

Introductory Bibliography on Saxché Naranja Polícromo

If you Google Saxché Naranja Polícromo you get hundreds of links to Maya site reports that have sherds of Saxché Naranja Polícromo. Plus museum pages that have this ceramic (or at least have ceramics that got stuck with this name). But of the dozen that I looked at, none had either the specific PSS hieroglyphs nor the style of scene as on the Blom Plate. So it would help for the Blom Plate to be studied in more depth (and take samples) to really define it and then find out where this ceramic paste is found in southern Campeche to the west of Chetumal and northern Peten to the southwest of Chetumal. And, where is it found in Belize?

Was this plate made in Quintana Roo or brought here in the 7th century as a gift. Here is one mention:

Responsable: Ivan Šprajc

Colaborador: Vicente Suárez Aguilar

Proyecto de Reconocimiento arqueológico en el sureste del estado de Campeche, como parte de las funciones del INAH en el PROCEDE

Informe de la temporada febrero-abril de 1998

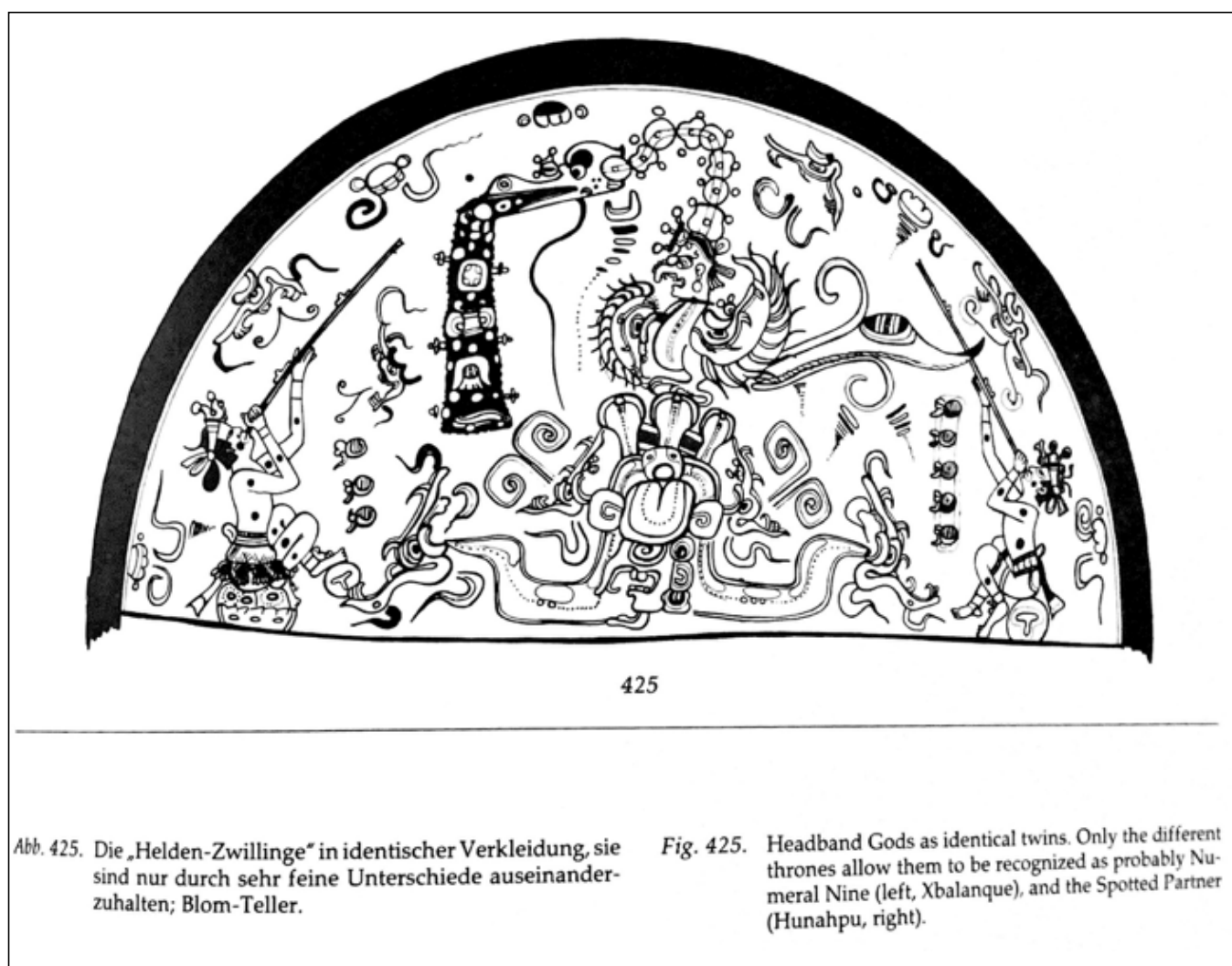
Figure 20, shows a fragment of Saxché Naranja Polícromo from the site of Oja de Agua II.

https://iaps.zrc-sazu.si/sites/default/files/Sprajc_Campeche_1998.pdf

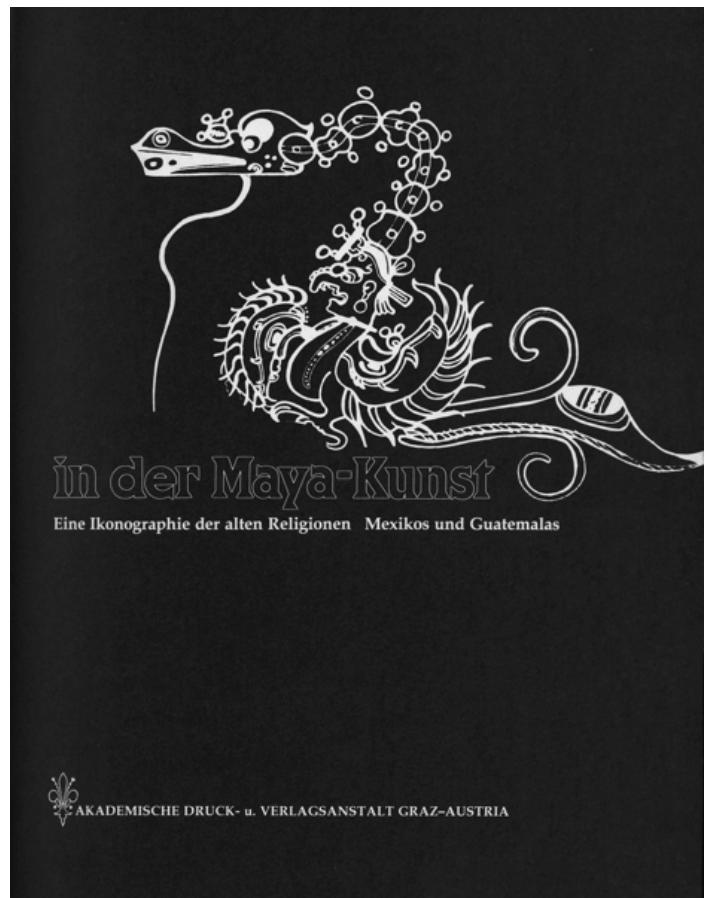
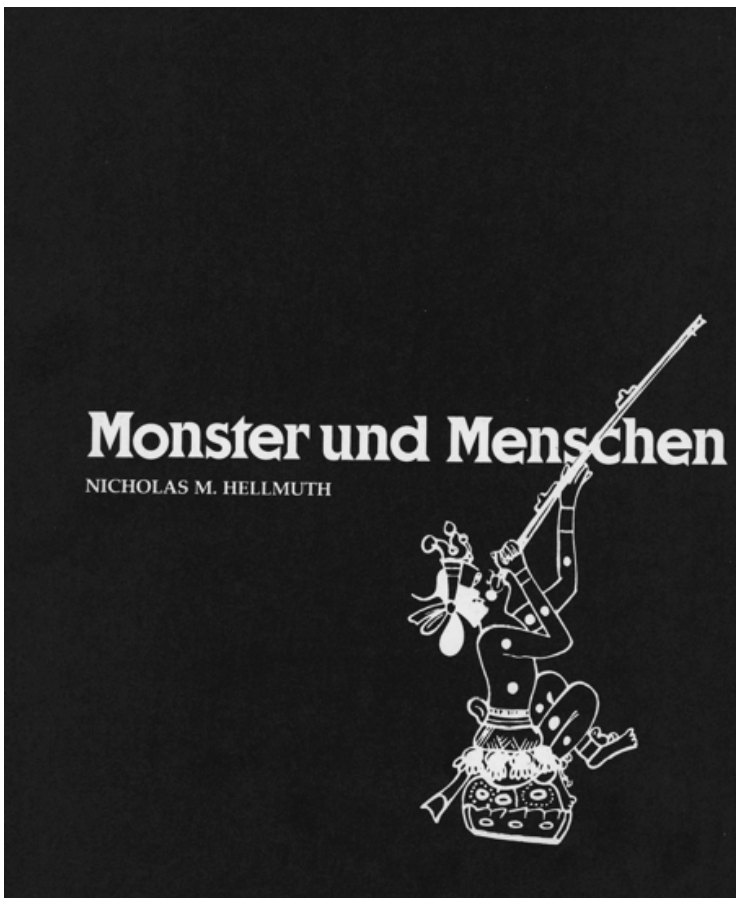
Most recently updated and adding bibliography and extra photographs, September 2023

Previously updated April 2011.

First posted July 2006.



This is Fig. 425 (Hellmuth 1987b) that shows the line drawing that the FLAAR illustrators rendered for my 1986 PhD dissertation. This is the drawing that was only possible by having driven 20,000 MILES (two trips, back-and-forth) to find and photograph the Blom Plate.



I discuss the iconography of the Hero Twins in my PhD dissertation, but include the Blom Plate primarily because it has a Sea Anemone Headdress monster, since the dissertation was on the Surface of the Underwaterworld more than the sky above. The two images here show the front design of the ADEVA coffee-table book publication. We still have original copies available to benefactors who wish to be Platinum Level benefactors (in the Maya era would be Ajaw (Ahau) Level).

Appendix A

Discussion of the discovery of the Blom Plate in Mexico

Cultura y Lengua Maya's albums

El Plato Blom. Una obra maestra de la iconografía maya

El llamado Plato Blom fue hallado en la bahía de Chetumal en los años 40's del siglo pasado por un ingeniero, durante la construcción del aeropuerto de esa ciudad. Esta persona conservó la pieza hasta que se la entregó al arqueólogo danés radicado en México, Frans Blom, quien poco antes de morir la donó para su resguardo al Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). Se le ha datado entre 600-850 d.C., durante el Periodo Clásico Tardío. El Centro INAH Quintana Roo lo tiene bajo su resguardo y actualmente se exhibe en el Museo Maya de Cancún.

Cuenta la historia que nadie había visto este plato desde la década de los 50's, cuando Frans Blom, el antropólogo danés, lo fotografió en Oaxaca, en una colección privada. El Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth le siguió la pista por muchos años y al final encontró a alguien que había visto el plato en la década de los 60's. Y, evidentemente, todavía estaba en Oaxaca, después de todos estos años (esto fue en la década del 70 o principios de los 80's). La persona dijo que el plato estaba en un patio de remolques. Así que el Dr. Hellmuth se dirigió al patio con un estudio fotográfico completo. Cuando llegó, el patio había sido vendido recientemente. Paso un año mas y solo había logrado saber el nombre del antiguo propietario del patio de remolques, así que se puso en contacto con él. Para fortuna suya, el plato estaba todavía en su poder, envuelto en papel en una caja, en el almacén de su trastienda. El más inimaginable tesoro no sólo no está disponible para los mayistas, sino que además estaba abandonado en una bodega.

Hellmuth se dirigió a Oaxaca, a 5000 millas de distancia, con un estudio lleno de fotos: cámaras Hasselblad, trípodes, soportes de luz, telones de fondo, etc.; el propietario amablemente le dejó fotografiar el plato. Tiempo después el dueño lo contactó y le dijo: "Me estoy haciendo viejo ¿qué debo hacer con este plato? Rápidamente le sugirió que lo donara al INAH, ya que así podría estar en un museo mexicano y ser apreciado por los descendientes de las personas que pintaron la escena. Fue de esta manera que el plato terminó donado a un museo de la Península de Yucatán. Primeramente fue mostrado en un museo de Chetumal y posteriormente fue trasladado al Museo de Mérida.

¿Dónde estaba el plato Blom en realidad?

Es muy posible que el plato (procedente de una tumba prehispánica) haya terminado en Oaxaca debido a que la persona que lo recibió se trasladó a ese estado para retirarse (con un negocio de jubilación: el patio de remolques). Exponer el plato en Chetumal es especialmente apropiado debido a que es ahí donde fue encontrado. El conductor de una excavadora, que estaba nivelando un sitio maya por completo para construir el aeropuerto de Chetumal, encontró el entierro. El jade fue para el entonces alcalde o gobernador, o para quien se lo "apropiara". El ingeniero a cargo, un estadounidense que más tarde se retiró a Oaxaca, recibió el plato.

Frans Blom escuchó algo al respecto y lo fotografió en la década de 1950; el Dr. Hellmuth lo rastreó durante más de dos décadas y fue así que la fotografía llegó a estar disponible en su "Monsters and Men in Maya Art", la versión publicada de su tesis doctoral. Por supuesto que el plato ya ha sido publicado por Michael Coe y otros. Pero no es realmente ninguna nota en cuanto a la larga historia de cómo esta pieza estuvo disponible para los investigadores y eruditos interesados en estudiarla y disfrutarla.

Fuentes:

- "Blom Plate History. A masterpiece of Maya iconography". Nicholas Hellmuth, julio 2006.
- "El Plato Blom: la confrontación entre los Héroes Gemelos y Vucub Caquix". Landy Pinto Bojórquez y Edgar Medina Castillo, en "Gaceta de Museos", núm. 50, septiembre-noviembre, 2011. Conaculta-INAH.

Fotografías: JT

[September 6, 2015](#) ·

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.974720402589352&type=3>

Appendix B

The Original 1950's report by Frans Blom

Moan Bird is a generic term for dozens of birds that are not identified so they get stuck with the generic word Moan or Muan Bird. Hellmuth 1987a and 1987b document this bird is a snake-eating hawk, also called a laughing falcon. It is described as a snake-eating bird in the Popol Vuh but is named Seven Macaw. And in Mesoamerican art it is more often associated with a calabash tree. Plus, the monster on which the bird is perched has now been identified in Hellmuth 1987a and b. All that documentation was not known to the Carnegie era of the 1940's-1960's.

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CARNEGIE INSTITUTION OF WASHINGTON
DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

No. 98

December 1, 1950

A POLYCHROME MAYA PLATE FROM QUINTANA ROO

Frans Blom

In a private collection in Oaxaca City is a Maya plate which probably is one of the most magnificent pieces of Maya ceramics and certainly one of the most intriguing (fig. 1, a). It was found in Quintana Roo, Mexico, not far from Chetumal Bay. I am much indebted to the owners for permission to reproduce it; it was first called to my attention by Mr. Frederick A. Peterson.

The plate measures 44 cm. in diameter. Its surface is divided into two fields of equal size, the upper of which is covered with a multitude of figures and scrolls painted in black and brown with occasional red dots on an orange slip. The base is flat, the low sides are curved. The exterior of the base is slipped reddish orange, somewhat redder than the interior.

The center of the scene is occupied by a bird, which I shall discuss later, flanked by two seated men, each holding a blowgun. So far as is known, this is the only representation of users of blowguns in Maya art, in spite of the fact that the Popol Vuh constantly refers to this weapon. The black spots on the blowgunners' bodies indicate that the men are dead. Note the sights on the guns. I have made a quick but unsuccessful search of the Popol Vuh to find a passage which would describe this scene.

The strange bird, the Moan, sometimes with a human head and sometimes with a bird head, is quite frequent in Maya art. It appears at least three times at Palenque, once at Tikal, and at Tonina the stucco relief over a temple door, described by Stephens, shows this bird from the front (figs. L, b; 2, a, b, d). It is also depicted as a clay whistle which was found in a milpa at the foot of the slope where Tonina stands and which was given to me some years ago but is now in the Museo Nacional in Mexico City (figs. L, c; 2, c). Further search would no doubt reveal more representations.

In the plate illustrated here, the bird sits on the head of the earth monster, shown in profile. The outstanding characteristic of this bird is its wing, part of which shows a serpent head in profile. Whatever head the bird have, the serpent-head wings are always shown.

The lower half of the plate has a border of hieroglyphs along its edge. I like to imagine that they are a quotation from the Popol Vuh.

San Cristóbal Las Casas, Chiapas

Fig. 1

- a: Polychrome plate, with representations of blowgun users.
- b: Stucco design, The Palace, Palenque. After Maudslay.
- c: Pottery figurine whistle. Tonina.

Fig. 2 - REPRESENTATIONS OF SERPENT-BIRD

- a: Temples of Cross and Foliated Cross, Palenque. After Maudslay.
- b: Wooden lintel, Tikal. After Maudslay.
- c: Detail of pottery figurine whistle (fig. 2, f).
- d: Stucco design over sanctuary, Structure a, Tonina.



a

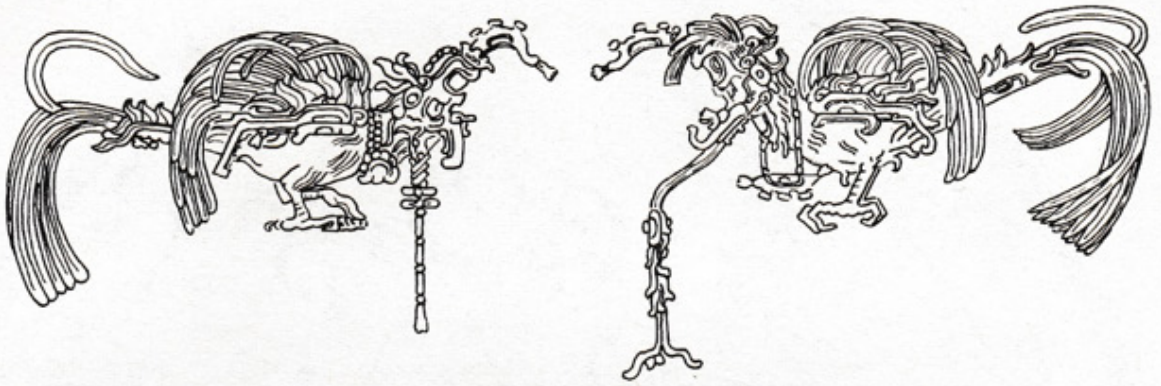


b



c

Fig. 1



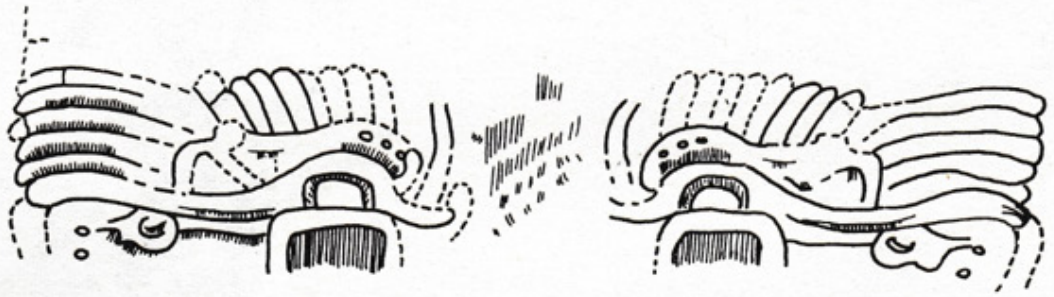
a



b



c



d

Fig. 2

Forthcoming publications of the FLAAR Photo Archive

Our long-range goal is to find all our 35mm and medium format film (1960's-1990's) and scan at good resolution. And simultaneously to find all our digital photographs from circa 1998-2015 that we have taken at the ruins and museums of Copan, Honduras. Once we have all the digital images we will sort them into topics so we can present the images topic-by-topic. Most of these publications will be in 2024 because we are still working on flora, fauna, and biodiverse ecosystems of the Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, Peten, Guatemala. But during the rainy season, when you can't fly a drone due to weather and the roads are too deep in mud even for a 4x4 pickup truck, we are working on preparing our decades of photography at Copan Ruinas. Below we list the first eight topics (lots more to come), plus we are looking for our Nim Li Punit stelae photos, our Santa Rosa Xtampak, Campeche photos, and lots more).

All of these are work-in-progress; not all are published.

Cauac Monster, Cosmic Monster with Quadripartite Badge Headdress, Crocodile, Deer and God N, Copan CPN 25, Altar of Stela M

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 1,
Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 1

Scorpion, Venus, Moon Goddess with Rabbit Companion, Celestial Deities on Sky Band Motifs on Copan Structure 8N-66C Bench Front

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 2,
Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 2

Copan Ceramic Incensario Lids, Local adaptation of Teotihuacan Style

Volume I, Photos in full-page Height, Vertical Format
FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 3,
Maya Ceramics of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 1A

Copan Ceramic Incensario Lids, Local adaptation of Teotihuacan Style

Volume II, Vertical Format
FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 4,
Maya Ceramics of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 1B

*Full-Figure Personified Hieroglyphs
on front of Bench in Copan Str. 9N-82 (House of the Bacabs)*

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 5,
Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 3

Beards on Kings of Copan

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 6,
Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 4

Paddler God Faces and Hieroglyphs at Copan

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 7,

Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 5

Cauac Monsters at Copan, especially in Stacks on Corners of Palaces and Mythical Structures

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 8,

Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 6

Copan Maya Ballgame Players,

Maya Outfits: Chest Protector & Deflector and Thigh Protector

Mexican Ballgame Outfits: Yoke, Hacha and Ballgame Handstone

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 9,

Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 7

Copan Maya Ballcourt Architecture & Scarlet Macaw Logo Goal Stones

Stepped Areas were as important as Playing Field down the Center

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 10,

Maya Architecture of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 1

Maya Ballcourt Architecture

3-Dimensional Architectural Reconstruction Drawings by David Morgan

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 11,

FLAAR Drawings Archive Segment, Publication Number 1.

Toads and/or Frogs in Art and Iconography of Copan, Honduras

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 12,

Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 8

Bats in Sculpture and Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of Copan, Honduras

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 13,

Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 9

Samples of Classic Maya Ceramics of Copan, Honduras

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 14,

Maya Ceramics of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 2

Jade and Greenstone Craftsmanship of Copan, Honduras

Finished Jade Ornaments plus Documentation of Jade Working on Raw Stone

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 15,

Artifacts of Jade, Obsidian, Flint (Chert) and other Materials of Copan, Honduras,
Publication Number 1.

Full-Figure Personified Hieroglyphs:

Bench Front inside Copan Structure 9M-146

FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 16

Maya Sculptures of Copan, Honduras, Publication Number 10

*Iconography of Incense Scattering and Maya Hieroglyphs,
Face-Variant Long-Count Glyphs on Nim Li Punit Stela 15, Belize*
FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 17
Maya Sculptures of Belize, Publication Number 1

*The Story of the Blom Plate: a Masterpiece of Mayan Iconography
and Primary Standard Sequence, PSS, Hieroglyphs, Chetumal, Quintana Roo, Mexico*
FLAAR Photo Archive Publication Number 18
Iconography of Maya Ceramics of Mexico, Publication Number 1
Primary Standard Sequence, PSS, Maya Hieroglyphs in the FLAAR Photo Archive,
Publication Number 1

