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# God L Iconography



## Part I, Photos of God L from FLAAR Photo Archive

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

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September 2024



# Introduction

God L, God D, and God N are the three best known gods that are elderly males. God L is defined by his wide-brimmed hat with a row of short feathers and a bird's head or complete bird rising out of the middle. God L is also defined by a round-ended mass of hair rising out front from under the headdress. God L often (but not always) smokes a cigar. God L often has a motif on the top part of his ear that has feline spots. God L usually has a necklace with beads that go down his back and down his front. God L often wears a cape.

God L is of high status but loses this status when the rabbit companion of the Moon Goddess grabs all his clothing. God L is almost always elderly but I have found two non-elderly examples. God L is often in the same scene as God K. On one vase God L interacts with a God D.

God L is a "merchant god" so is often occasionally shown carrying a walking staff and a cargo of merchandise. The Cacaxtla murals are the best example.



Fig. 1. God L has feline earring at top; God L has mass of hair coming out; God L has wide sombrero with bird head sticking out. Bird has a wide flower-like motif on his head. His necklace is of small beads; it hangs down in front and down in back. Vase is Chama style.



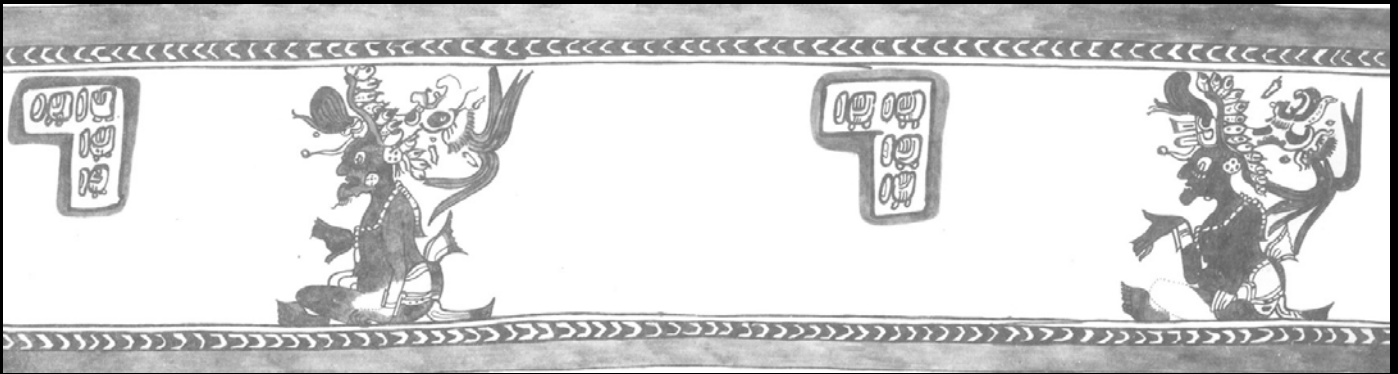


Fig. 2. This is a FLAAR rollout drawing of this Chama God L vase by Lin Crocker. Kerr includes this FLAAR drawing as K3044.



Fig. 3. Highland Maya God L. Bird headdress has the same "flower-like" puffy material. Base of sombrero is not very wide compared with other God L sombreros. Since sometimes in the past century the 35mm color slides were scanned from the wrong side, often the personage will be facing right instead of left. But some vases do have personages facing to the right. I am curious whether his necklace of large beads has previously been listed as a characteristic of God L.





Fig. 4. God L holds what could be a large cigar. His sombrero has a wide base. The mass of hair is conspicuous. He wears a cloak of jaguar hide. This Chama vase has most of the traditional characteristics that define a God L but no necklace of large beads, and no jaguar hid earring.

The Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, North Carolina. Same vase as Kerr rollout K0702.





Fig. 5. God L is smoking tobacco. He is "carrying" a load on his back (but no system is shown to attach it to his back). The bird in the headdress has different size and shape beak than on most other God L's (plus the bird is complete, not just the head). A similar bird is in front of this God L. A snake-like creature floats above the headdress. Another snake issues out from the God L's belt. The same plate is in the Kerr photo archive, K9279.





Fig. 6. God L has a short sombrero.  
The unusually large bird's head sticks out of the front (not the middle).





Fig. 7. God L on a Late Classic plate of the Maya Lowlands. As soon as we can find a 35mm slide of the whole plate we will include that. His necklace is of medium-sized beads.





Fig. 8. This is a God L that is often shown. The sombrero is quite wide; the bird is more than just a head. God L is smoking tobacco. He has a feline hix symbol atop his earring and his throne is covered by an entire jaguar hide. Cape is short. There are two other Maya vases that show the same scene. This may be a Kerr photo or perhaps a Hellmuth photo.



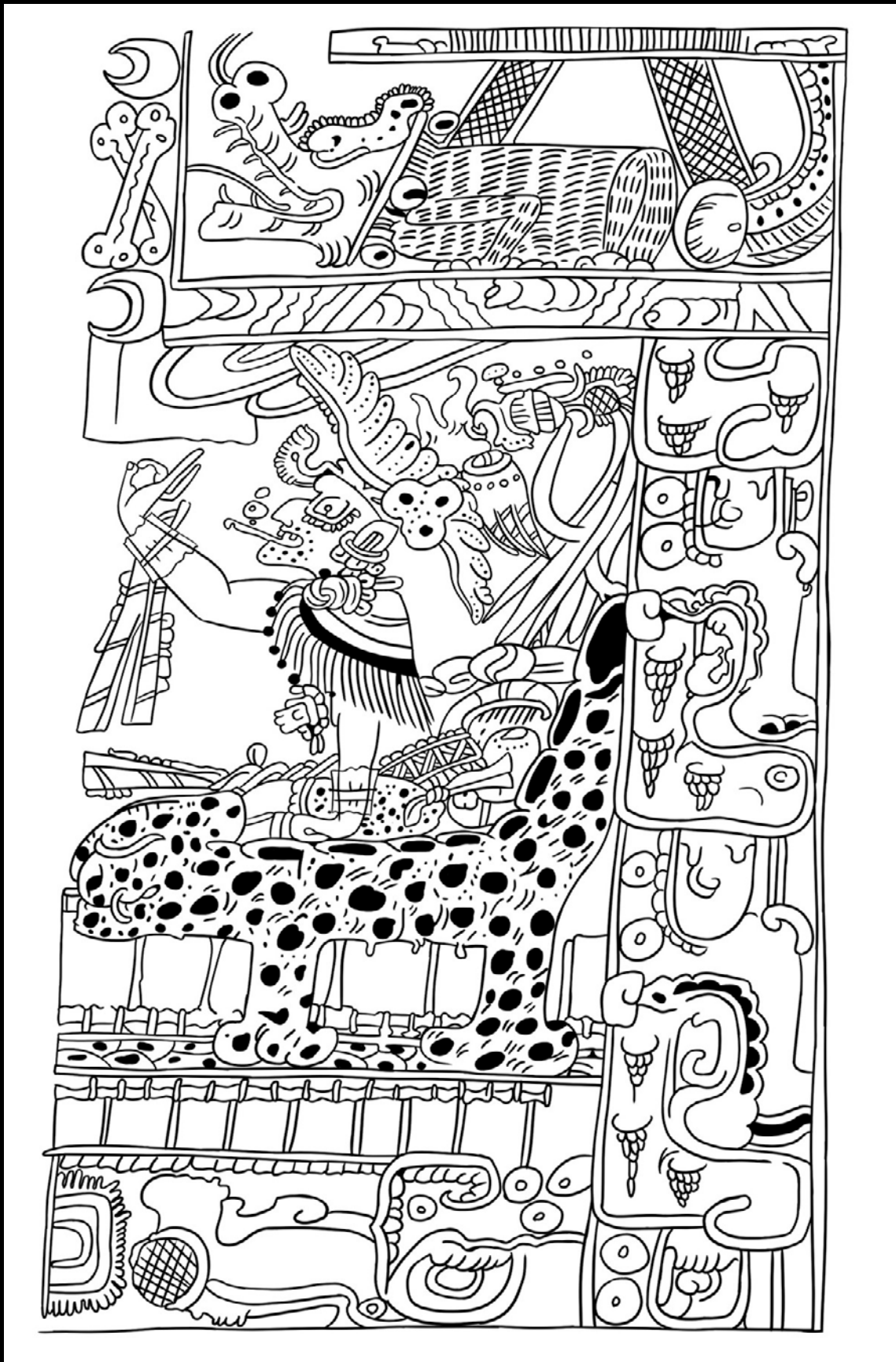


Fig. 9. Line drawing by FLAAR illustrator Luis Molina.  
The back of the throne room is a tower of Cauac Monsters.





Fig. 10. This is the second of three nearly identical scenes. The third scene is in MUNAE and was documented by Camilo Luin and co-authors. The shawl of larger and more conspicuous than on most God L's. The sombrero is quite wide. This is a rectangular vase (not a circular one). Photo by Justin Kerr, K7750.



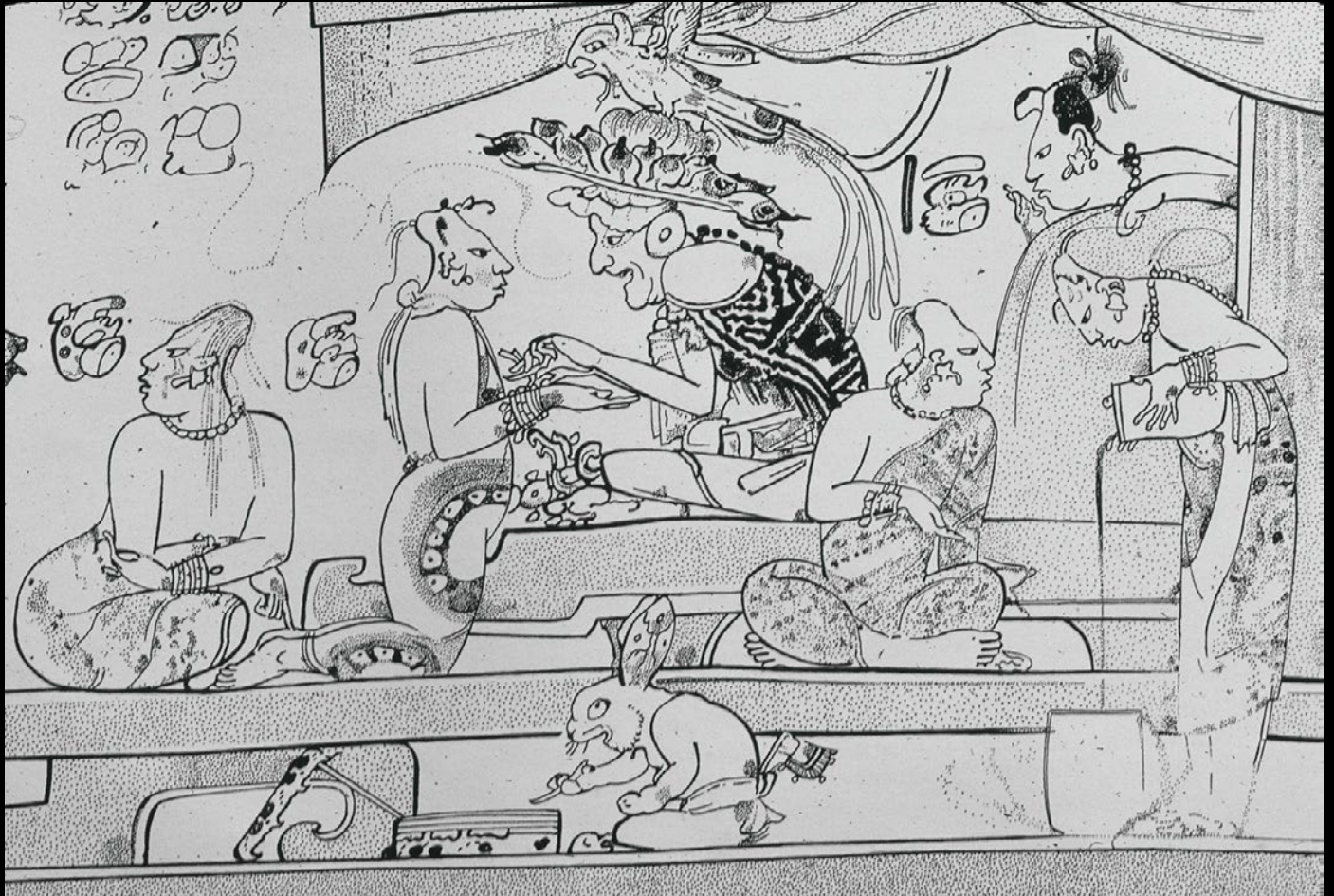


Fig. 11. This Princeton University museum scene of God L is one of the most often published, initially by Michael Coe (1973). The bird is not as low as normal; the bird is perched on a wide flower-like motif in the center of the sombrero. The necklace beads go down his back (his front is hidden by his shoulder and his arm). Three of the women seem to have removed most of their hair.



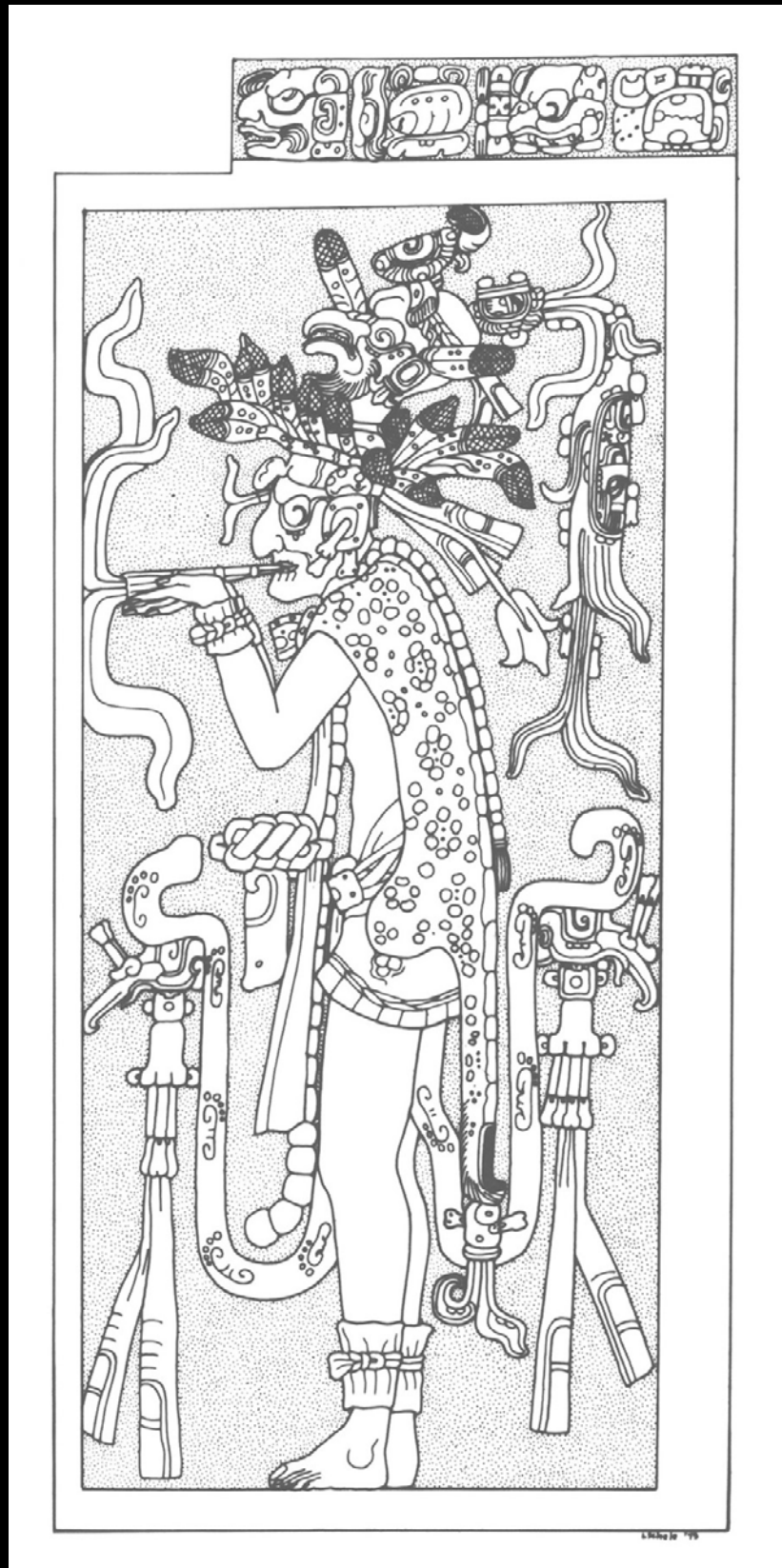


Fig. 12. God L on east sanctuary jamb of the Temple of the Cross, Palenque. God L smokes a giant cigar. His shawl is jaguar hide. His sombrero has a row of feathers and a bird's head above. But there is no wide base of this particular sombrero. His necklace is of small beads but is the longest down the front that I have seen. Drawing by Linda Schele, 176, in FAMSI data base.



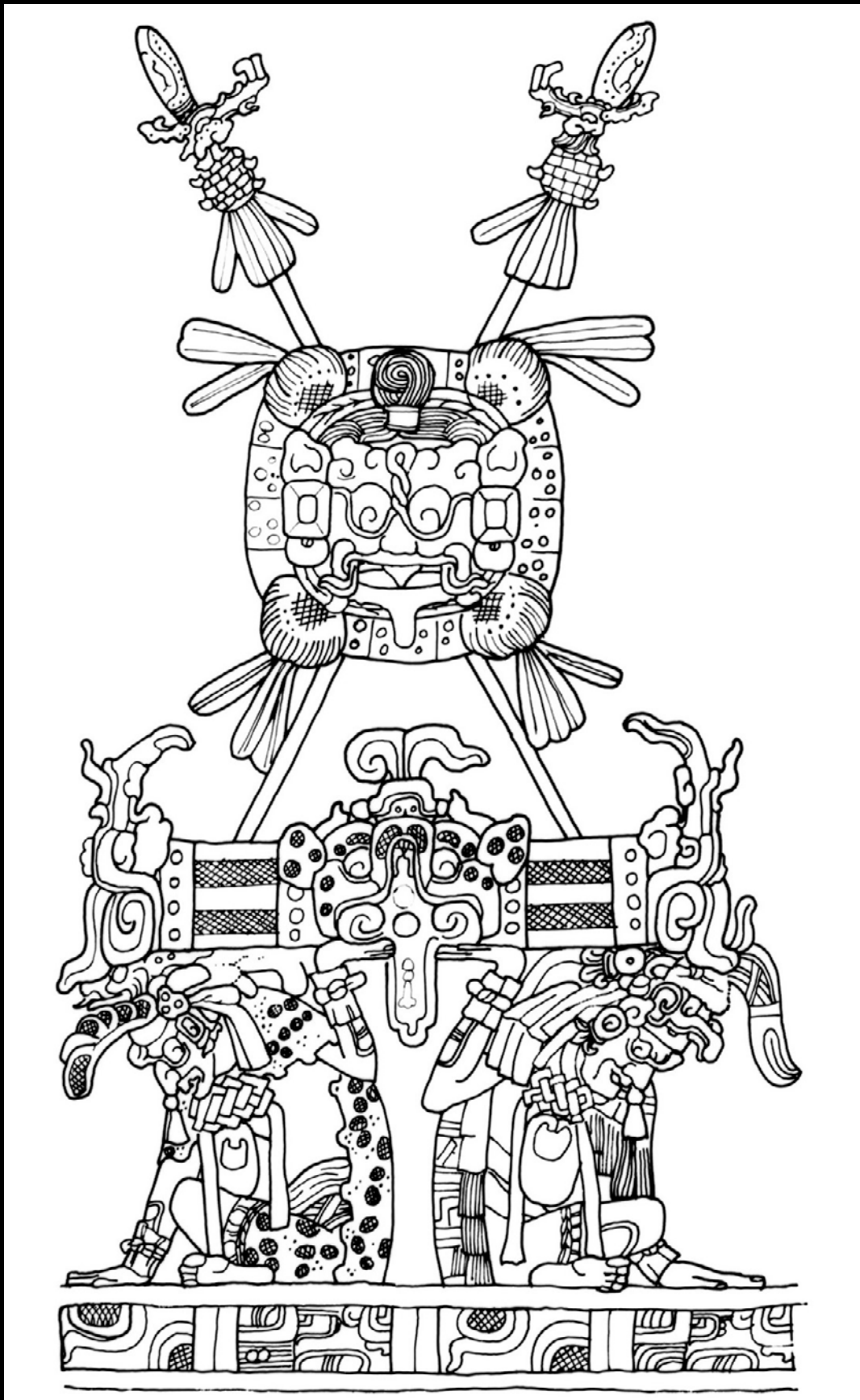


Fig. 13. God L is at the lower left. He has his sombrero; top of his earring is 3-circle sign for *hix*, feline. He wears a jaguar hide cape. Usually it is God N who upholds a segment of the cosmos. Cropped from the Temple of the Sun panel, Palenque. Drawing by Linda Schele, 236, FAMSI data base.





Fig. 14. The sombrero of this God L has a row of completely different motifs. The mouth of God L has feline-like pelt around it. The designs on this shawl are atypical. No necklace down front or back.



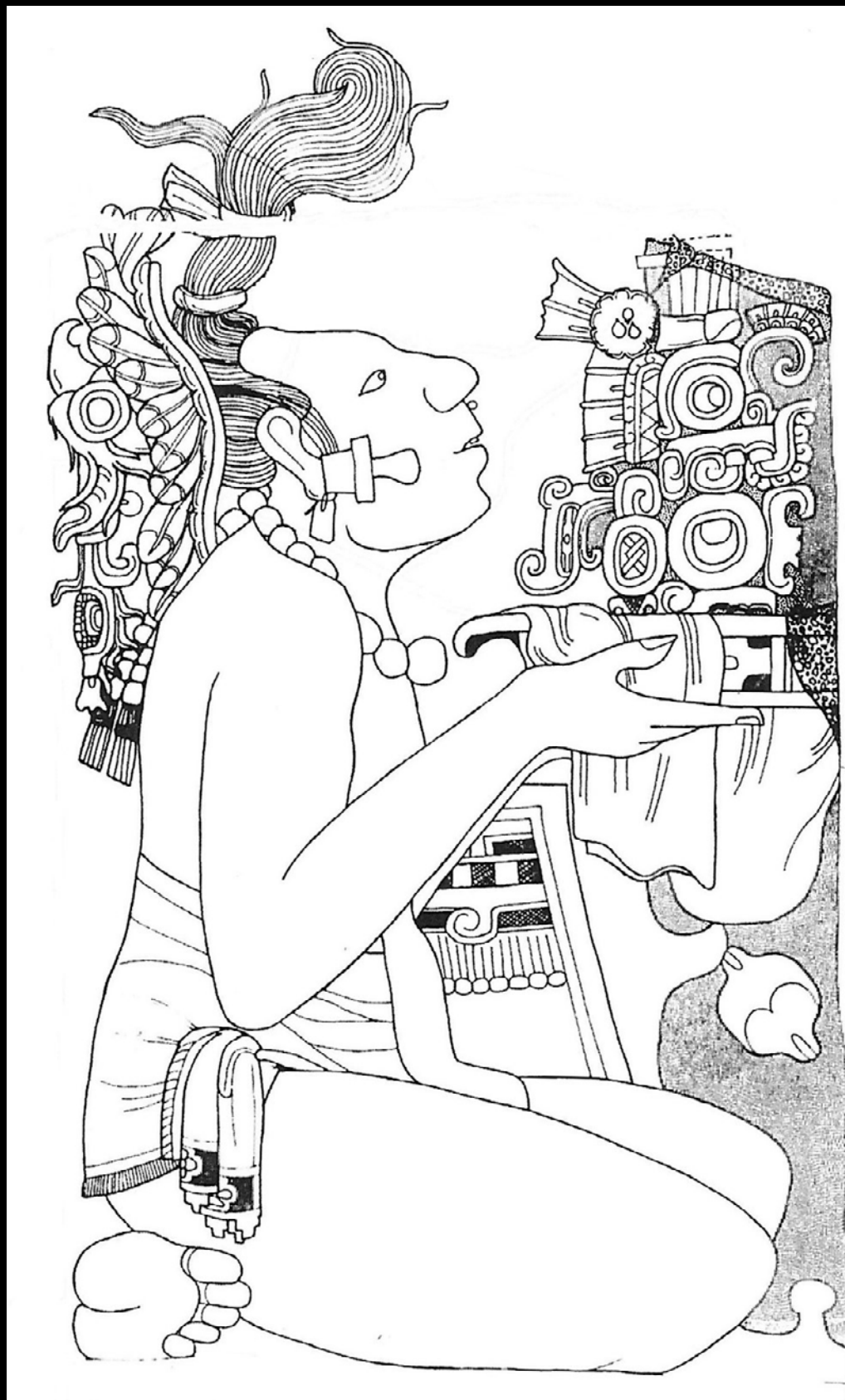


Fig. 15. Most God L's are elderly, but so far I have found two that are non-elderly. This panel is from the Palenque region, drawing courtesy of Donald Hales. The Tlaloc-like eye on what he is holding is Late Classic and is a design found frequently on polychrome plates of the Maya Lowlands. Normally there are no Teotihuacan aspects associated with God L.



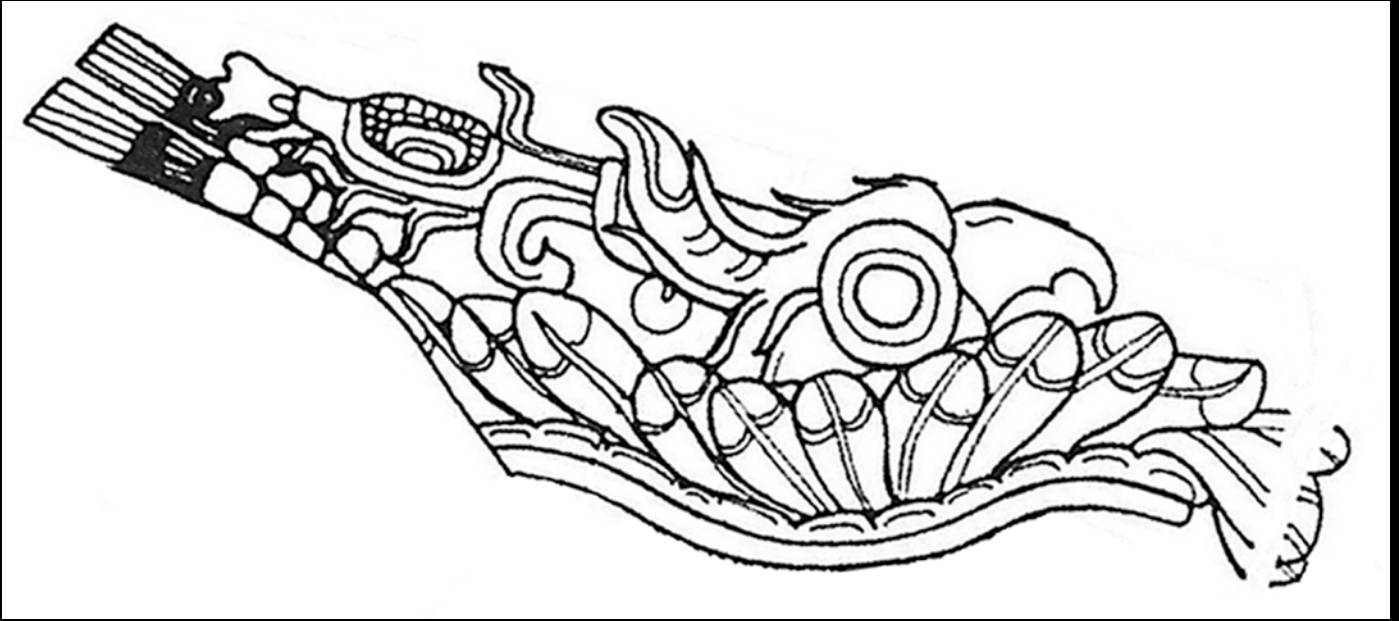


Fig. 16. This is the God L headdress turned so you can see the bird's head rising out of the sombrero.



Fig. 17. This youthful God L is part of a larger sculpture. Photo courtesy of Donald Hales.





Fig. 18. This is the second non-elderly God L that I have found so far.  
The black-white-black pattern is atypical.





Fig. 19. Lots of "venom bottles" have God L on the right and God K on the left. Both have similar necklaces (down the back in addition to down the front).



Fig. 20. Closeup of God L on this venom bottle. Large beads are common for the necklace but some other portraits of God L have smaller beads.





Fig. 21. "Venom bottle" with God L on the right and God K on the left.



Fig. 22. Other side of this same venom bottle.



Fig. 23. Venom bottles come in at least two shapes: circular or rectangular.





Fig. 24. View of the other side of these three venom bottles. Only the one in the middle has God L.



Fig. 25. Rectangular ceramic container with God L at the right and God K at the left. So, clearly there is a relationship between these two deities. Kerr photo, K3801.

The walking staff here is also a spear. The mass of hair sticks out the front, under the headdress. God L is smoking a large cigar. He has a beard under his chin to his neck. His cape has oval designs. The cloth hanging from the back of his belt has footprints on it. No necklace down the back.





Fig. 26. Closeup view of the God L. Kerr photo, K3801.



Fig. 27. The walking staff suggests this bearded old man may be a God L. A possible Principal Bird Deity is carried on his back. His necklace is different than what a full God L has.





Fig. 28. The large rabbit (usually a companion of the Moon Goddess) holds the walking staff and headdress in one hand, and necklace plus what is probably the cape of God L in his other hand.





Fig. 29. Here the large rabbit is held by the Moon Goddess. The Rabbit is holding the wide headdress and cape of God L. God L is humiliated and shows subservience to the rabbit and Moon Goddess. Cropped from Kerr rollout, K5166.

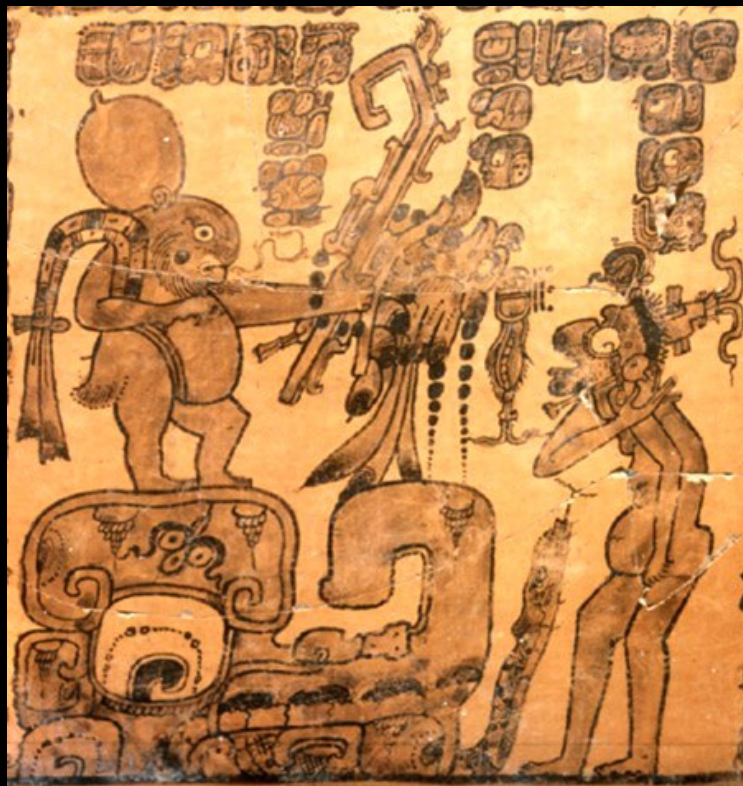


Fig. 30. On another vase God L renders subservience to the large rabbit. The rabbit holds the walking stick, headdress, bead necklace and other clothing of the now nearly naked God L. Cropped from Kerr rollout, K1398.





Fig. 31. Tepeu 3, Pabellon Molded-Carved vase with two mold-impressed God L's. They wear wide-brimmed sombrero with bird head, but no mass of hair sticks out underneath. They both wear capes. In Part II we show Kerr rollouts of comparable vases. This rollout is by Nicholas Hellmuth.

LeMoine, Halperin and Salis 2022: 4) list that God L on molded-carved pottery is discussed by (Adams 1971; Helmke 2001:14 Figure 4 K4635; McAnany 2013; Werness 2003).





Fig. 32. God L in last phase of the Late Classic.  
All the other God L vases are Tepeu 1 or Tepeu 2. Pabellon Molded-Carved vases are Tepeu 3.





Fig. 33. God L on the other side of the same panel.





Fig. 34. God L in a better preserved and better mold-impressed Pabellon Molded-Carved vase.  
The molds used were similar but not identical for each vase.





Fig. 35. We show several Kerr rollouts of Pabellon Molded Carved vases with God L in Part II.





Fig. 36. The "same scene (same setting)" but details are not identical to the other vase.





Fig. 37. God L.





Fig. 38. God L.





Fig. 39. God L; there was not space for his sombrero to be as wide as the other God L.





Fig. 40. Here you can see the different width of the sombreros of God L.





Fig. 41. God L.





Fig. 42. God L seated on the head of a monster with the head of a reptilian monster in front.



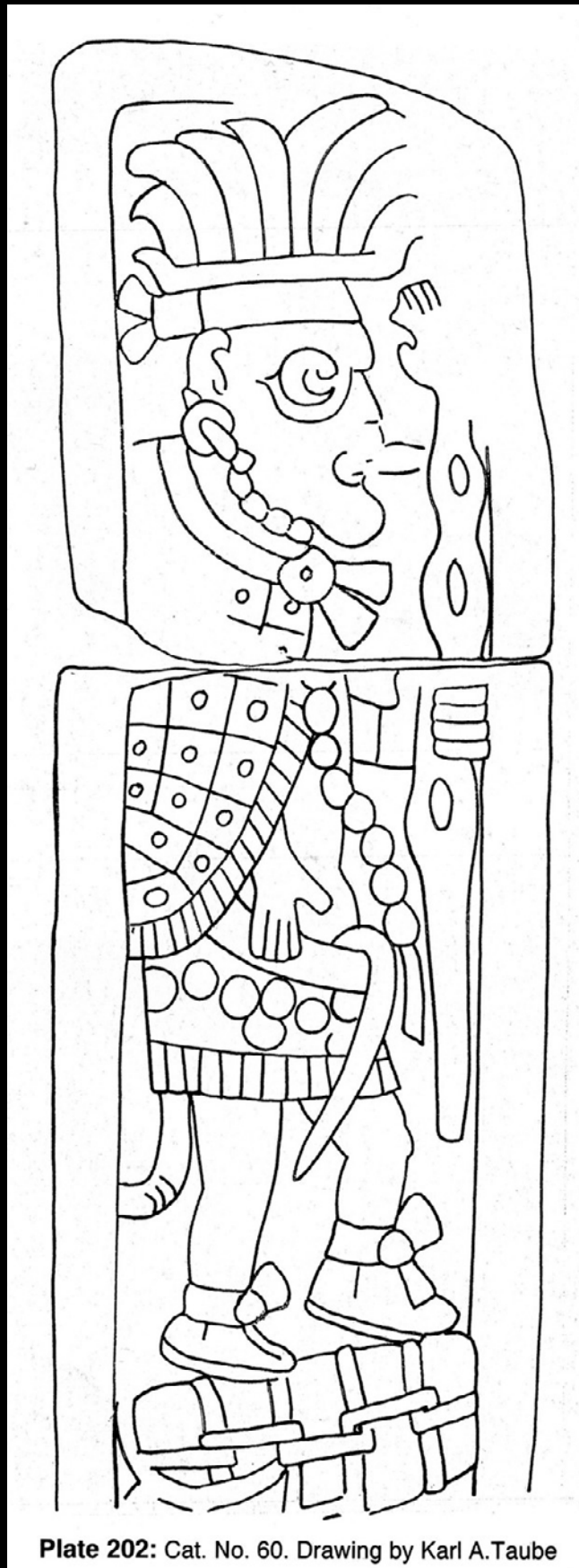


Plate 202: Cat. No. 60. Drawing by Karl A. Taube

Fig. 43. There are several of God L sculptures from Campeche. This is a nice drawing by Karl Taube. God L here has the beaded necklace quite long in front (no space to show the back).





Fig. 44. God L is walking across the cargo that he normally would be carrying on his back.  
Photo courtesy of Donald Hales.





Fig. 45. This is the God L headdress from one of several jambs or columns in the Yucatan Peninsula which show God L. This is the most complete since it has the rounded mass of hair below the bottom of the sombrero.



Fig. 46. God L is seated. His cargo is in front (similar to the cargo that he is walking on in one of the other sculptures). His mass of long hair sticks out. God L has his headdress in his hand. A second bird is in front of him. Museo de la Escultura Maya, Baluarte de la Soledad, Campeche. Drawing by Raphael Tunesa.





Fig. 47. God L is at the left, holding his cargo in his hands (so it is not on his back). God D, of higher status, is gesturing while seated on his jaguar-hide throne. Unfortunately we have not yet found the 35mm color slides of the other sides of this vase.





Fig. 48. God L outside of Peten. The bird is stylized (not naturalistic). God L wears a necklace of large beads that falls far down to the back and to the front. His cape is quite long also.



Fig. 49. God L with long cape with stylized feline spots. His necklace of large beads is identical to that of the previous sculpture, but not as long. There is not space to show a bird in his headdress. Cleveland Art Museum.





Fig. 50. God L has his walking stick in front. His cargo is propped up behind him. His hat is on the back of the cargo. Cacaxtla is far from the Maya areas yet has a mixture of Maya and non-Maya styles. Photographs by Nicholas Hellmuth in the 1990's with lighting and tripod.





Fig. 51. The sombrero is very wide but does not have the row of feathers.





Fig. 52. A mass of hair sticks out from God L's head. He has a feline-spotted motif above his ear. His head sticks out of a puma-like head. Cacaxtla murals.





Fig. 53. I rotated the headdress so you can see the similarities (the bird head rising up) and the differences (the bird head is part of the entire sombrero and there is no row of short feathers).





Fig. 54. Maximon is revered by many Highland Maya today. The hat and smoking ally him as a probable descendant of God L. Two cigars are in the bowl.



# Rollouts listed in the God L category that are mostly not God L

Kerr K0114, I do not see any God L on this vase scene.

Kerr K0631, I do not see any God L on this vase scene.

Kerr K0727, I do not see any God L on this vase scene.

Kerr K1364, I do not see any God L on this vase scene.

Kerr K1774, has two obvious God D's and one other unidentified aged deity but with no sombrero headdress and no cape or shawl, I would not yet call that other aged person a God L.

Kerr K2669, I do not yet see any God L on this vase scene.

Kerr K3801 does show God L but since there are FLAAR photos of this ceramic box, we show this in Part I.

Kerr K4932 is not a Peten or Yucatan style vase, so I do not include it, but the individuals have hiking sticks.

Kerr K4934, several individuals have elderly male face, jaguar hands and jaguar feet, so I can understand why Kerr put this rollout into the God L catalog, but without a mass of hair up front or wide sombrero, I do not yet see these as fully God L's. They lack God D headdress and the faces are unlikely God N, so a regional variant of God L remains a possibility.

Kerr K4988, one man has a mass of hair sticking out in front, but since he is not elderly, I do not yet see him as a God L. The only aged deity face on this vase has a 4-petalled flower on his forehead (as does another elderly deity on another Kerr rollout). But I do not accept either as a God L, although the one on Kerr 4988 has an earring decoration with potential feline spots. But most of the younger men on this vase also have the same earring decoration.

Kerr K5354, even if these are armadillos they do not have any horizontal bands of black triangles. Also I do not see any other aspect of God L.

Kerr, K5455, I do not see any aspects of God L in this scene.

Kerr, K6626 is a remarkable scene with God N issuing out of the front jaws of a Cosmic Monster. But I do not yet recognize enough God L features on the other aged personage's face or headdress.

Kerr, K8009 is from Tikal; has Paddler Gods, Quadripartite Badge Headdress god, and the other elderly face is not convincing to me as God L.

Kerr, K8075, the person on the throne has too long a nose, too high a domed head, and has no convincing God L features.



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