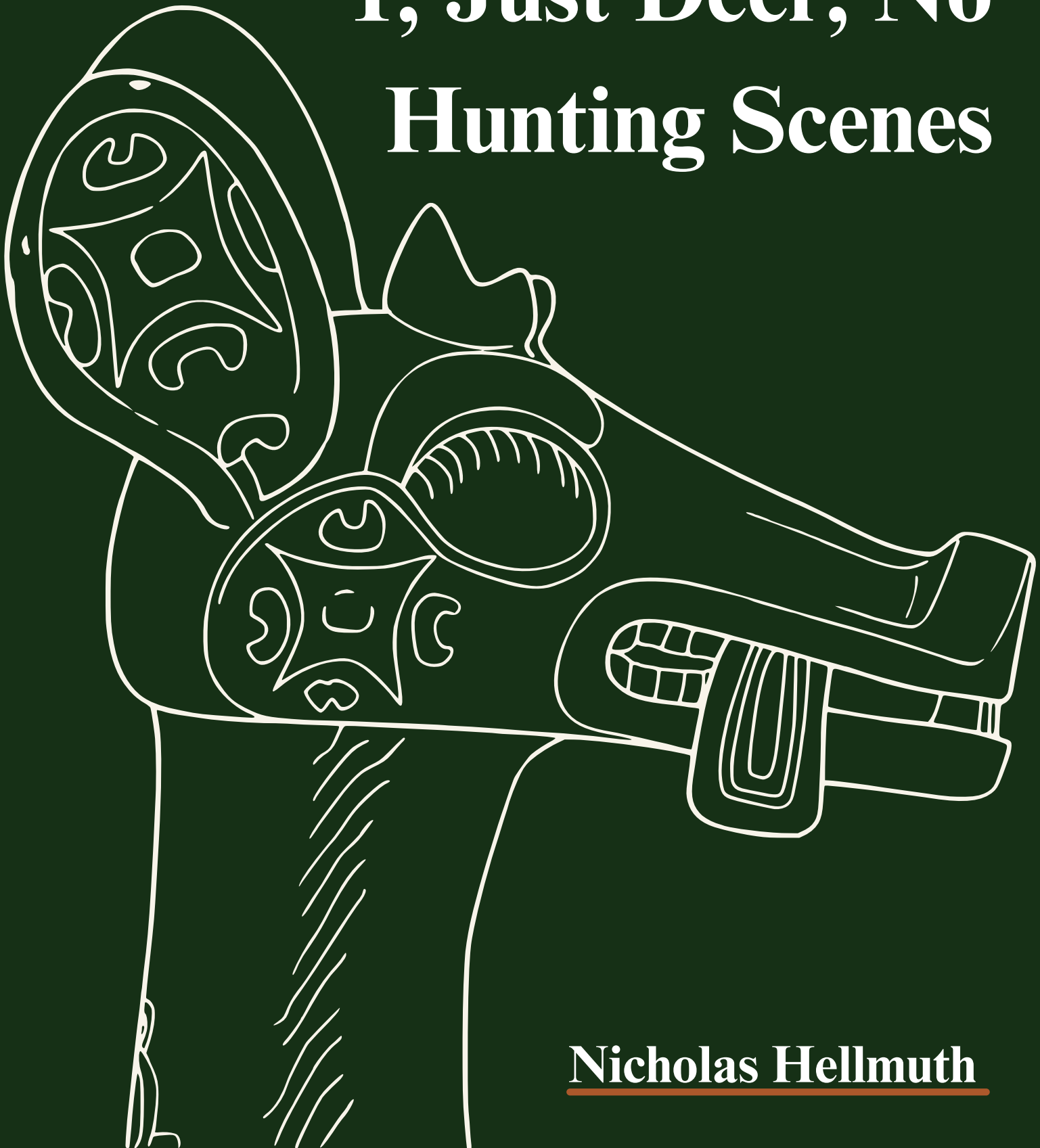


# Deer Iconography in Classic Maya Art Part 1, Just Deer, No Hunting Scenes



Nicholas Hellmuth

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## Part 1, Just Deer, No Hunting Scenes

Nicholas Hellmuth, with drawings by Dana G. Moot II

FLAAR Reports

FLAAR (USA) and FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)

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# **Acknowledgements and Appreciation for Illustrations for the present Part I on Iconography of Deer in Maya Art**

Simon Martin has provided okay to use his excellent drawings, such as of Copan CPN 25, altar of Stela M, and Copan Margarita façade.

Matthew Looper and Dana G. Moot II have provided both drawings and okay to use them.

There are drawings of Stephen Houston that are essential to iconographic studies of many themes.

It is not realistic to produce studies of iconography without helpful drawings by David Stuart.

The drawings of Yaxchilan by Carolyn Tate are appreciated.

Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)) has provided the drawings by Linda Schele and permission to publish them.

The drawings by Ian Graham, David Stuart and the other illustrators of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Harvard University (CMHI, PMAE) are helpful in almost all studies of iconography of many subjects.

The drawings by John Montgomery, available on-line by FAMSI are essential for studies when drawing so of these sculptures are not yet on line by PMHI, PMAE.

Barbara Fash has illustrated dozens of artifacts from Copan that are essential to illustrate Maya iconography.

It is not realistic to produce studies of iconography without helpful drawings by Heather Hurst of the murals of San Bartolo.

FLAAR illustrators over decades: Persis Clarkson in the previous century and nowadays Bryon Pacay, have produced helpful drawings.

Most drawings and photographs are on-line such as the very helpful Kerr Maya Vase Data Base and the improved digital quality of Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.

The Art Institute of Chicago has a helpful public domain permission for photos of helpful photographs.

What is missing totally is a database of line drawings by Merle Greene (Merle Greene Robertson). To illustrate iconography her drawings are more helpful than her nice rubbings.

In most of our iconographic research drawings by Karl Taube are essential—but these are in other volumes of the four-part series on deer iconography—so not in the present Part I.

# Introduction to studies of Deer in Maya Art

For the recent six years we have been accomplishing field work in remote areas of Peten (for six years) and remote areas of the Municipio of Livingston, Izabal (18 months during those six years). There are two deer species in Peten, plus spider monkey and howler monkey. In Izabal we found the rare, endangered Mantled Howler Monkey, which no longer can be found in Peten. It helps to show the world the Neo-Tropical flora and fauna when we can also show the Classic Maya representations of these animals, such as paintings of deer that often wear monkey tails and monkeys that often wear deer ears and deer antlers. There are also scenes of a monkey carrying a deer and a deer with a monkey held by a tumpline (we show these in Part II, the volume of Kerr rollouts and Hellmuth digital rollouts).

The iconography of deer and the iconography of monkeys are several separate FLAAR Reports. For deer we have:

- Part I: the present report on deer not in hunting scenes and not in ballgame scenes
- Part II: then a report on deer in Kerr rollouts and Hellmuth rollouts and drawings by FLAAR illustrators
- Part III: then a report on deer and deer hunters, to show the kind of hats and outfits worn by Maya hunters
- Part IV: then a report on Kerr rollouts and FLAAR illustration rollouts that show ballgame scenes where some players wear either a deer headdress or a hunter's hat

Deer in Maya art have been thoroughly covered by Matthew Looper (2019). There is an introductory book on monkeys in Maya art by two Spanish-speaking scholars (unfortunately someone borrowed this and I can't find it in my library to cite). For armadillos in Maya art there is an article (Newman and Rossi 2023). For fish there were two presentations at symposia in Guatemala a year or so ago. For jaguars I have not yet found a monograph or PhD dissertation on iconography of felines in Maya art. The FLAAR Photo Archive has hundreds of views of this topic for future FLAAR Reports. There are too many snakes in Maya art for me to tackle this subject but it would be a great PhD dissertation for an energetic student. No monograph that I have yet found covers peccary in Maya art so I have produced FLAAR Reports on this topic. I have work-in-progress on Bufo Toads in Maya art and separate opus on rabbits in Maya art. For insects in Maya art I have found lots of vases and bowls and can help rewrite earlier discussions of these insects which claimed most were bees (they are not) and that the rhomboidal-shaped creatures were toads (usually they are not and I can document this). My goal is to make all the FLAAR Photo Archive photos on these animals available to students for their thesis or PhD dissertation and to professors for their PowerPoint presentations and their research articles. For deer I have found so many portraits in Maya art that I am producing four "volumes". The following pages are a general introduction to Maya art that show deer per se. We appreciate the drawings by Dana G. Moot II and permission to use these and other illustrations from Matthew Looper's 2019 book on deer in Maya culture.

Obviously there are dozens of articles on deer in Maya art and chapters in book on Maya art where that chapter focuses on deer. A good example is Chinchilla's 2011 book for the Museo Popol Vuh that has a series of excellent photos (including a rollout citing Nicholas Hellmuth) and drawings of ceramics that show deer.

In October 2024 FLAAR donated the entire 30+ years of photography of Nicholas Hellmuth of Mesoamerican art around the world and monumental architecture of Maya sites to Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. We are still organizing our digital rollouts and photos taken with digital cameras—this is a separate archive, FLAAR Digital Photo Archive. It will be donated in a coming year. For now, all photos (that are not credited to other photographers) should be credited Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Photo Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. To save space in our captions we don't have that below each of the scores of photos that follow.



Fig. 1. Wild deer at Tikal, in front of Temple I. With this photo you can notice that the tail is furry but not very long. You can also notice the oval shape of the ears and their large size compared to the size of the deer's head. Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth.

Any 35mm color slides from the previous century that show plants or animals of Maya areas are also included in the FLAAR Photo Archive that has been donated to Dumbarton Oaks. But the over 30 TERAbyte digital archive of digital photos of flora, fauna and biodiverse ecosystems of remote areas of Guatemala is a separate archive. This is best donated to a university or museum dedicated to Neotropical biology and ecology though we would also consider Dumbarton Oaks to get a heavy hard drive of this decades of hiking deep into ecosystems that no intelligent professor has wanted to hike that far to reach.





Fig. 2. Close-up photo by Nicholas Hellmuth allows you to see the fur pattern of this Guatemalan deer.

The FLAAR Photo Archive has a lot more than just monumental architecture (pyramids, temples, palaces, acropolises, and ballcourts) and a lot more than Maya artifacts. We also include even more flora and fauna in our completely separate 30 TERAbytes of digital photos in the FLAAR Photo Archive of Flora, Fauna and Ecosystems.

Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Photo Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.

# Deer in Early Classic Maya Art



Fig. 3. No hunters associated with this deer. We show all the Early Classic cylindrical tripods with deer hunters in a separate volumes of this deer series. On those other photographs you can see how Early Classic Peten Maya painters used rows of parallel lines to show the hair on the hide of a deer—not always diagonal and often with light color underneath.

Both ears are shown for this deer.

The fur is shown in diagonal parallel lines, as on some but not all other deer. No fur shown for the tail. Fur in parallel lines in Maya art is more common for peccaries.

This deer has a curl issuing below its lower jaw.

Tzakol (Early Classic) basal flange bowl.

During three decades of scanning, often a scan was done “inside out” by mistake. This same basal flange bowl is in Hellmuth’s 2024 basal flange report, showing the deer facing left, which is the way that is expected. But we found other scans that had the deer facing right. Since facing right is only seldom the traditional way, we have digitally shown the deer and Recurved Snout Monster both facing left.

As soon as we learn where this basal flange bowl is today, then we can judge which position is correct.

All photographs are by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Photo Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. To save space in the captions we don’t put this text under all the photographs.



Fig. 4. This is the other deer on the same basal flange bowl. His deer hooves are clearly shown. His ears are not very large. A motif curls out from his mouth.

The fur is shown as continuous diagonal parallel lines. Not all portraits of deer in Maya art have any fur marks. These are more common in Early Classic paintings on ceramics.

Since the Kerr Maya Vase Data Base focuses primarily on vases and bowls, I decided to try to find as many Early Classic ceramics that were available to study and photograph in the previous century.



Fig. 5. This mammiform tetrapod is the earliest painting of a deer that I have found in Classic Maya art so far. Mammiform tetrapods come before peccary-head tetrapods which come before basal flange bowls which come before cylindrical tripods.

This early painting of a deer already has a thick curled motif on its body. Plus a motif sticking out of the front of the head that has not yet been identified.

Around the top of the deer's body and across the entire bottom are furry symbols. Since this painting is a century or so earlier than any other known Maya portrait of a deer it is no surprise to see different style.

There is either a simplified conch shell or a simplified Caban symbol on the body of the deer.

This deer portrait is also shown on [vasosparlantes.blogspot.com](http://vasosparlantes.blogspot.com)



Fig. 6. Deer painted on the inside of an Early Classic basal flange bowl. He has zig-zaggy lines issuing from the bottom of his jaw. This same photograph is in Hellmuth 2024a: page 48). Most basal flange bowls are painted only on the outside. It is rare to find a scene on their inside. But this shows how important deer were to the Early Classic Maya.



Fig. 7. These are probably baby deer. In our FLAAR Reports on Maya deer hunting, seen on Maya plates, you can see other baby deer-like animals running.

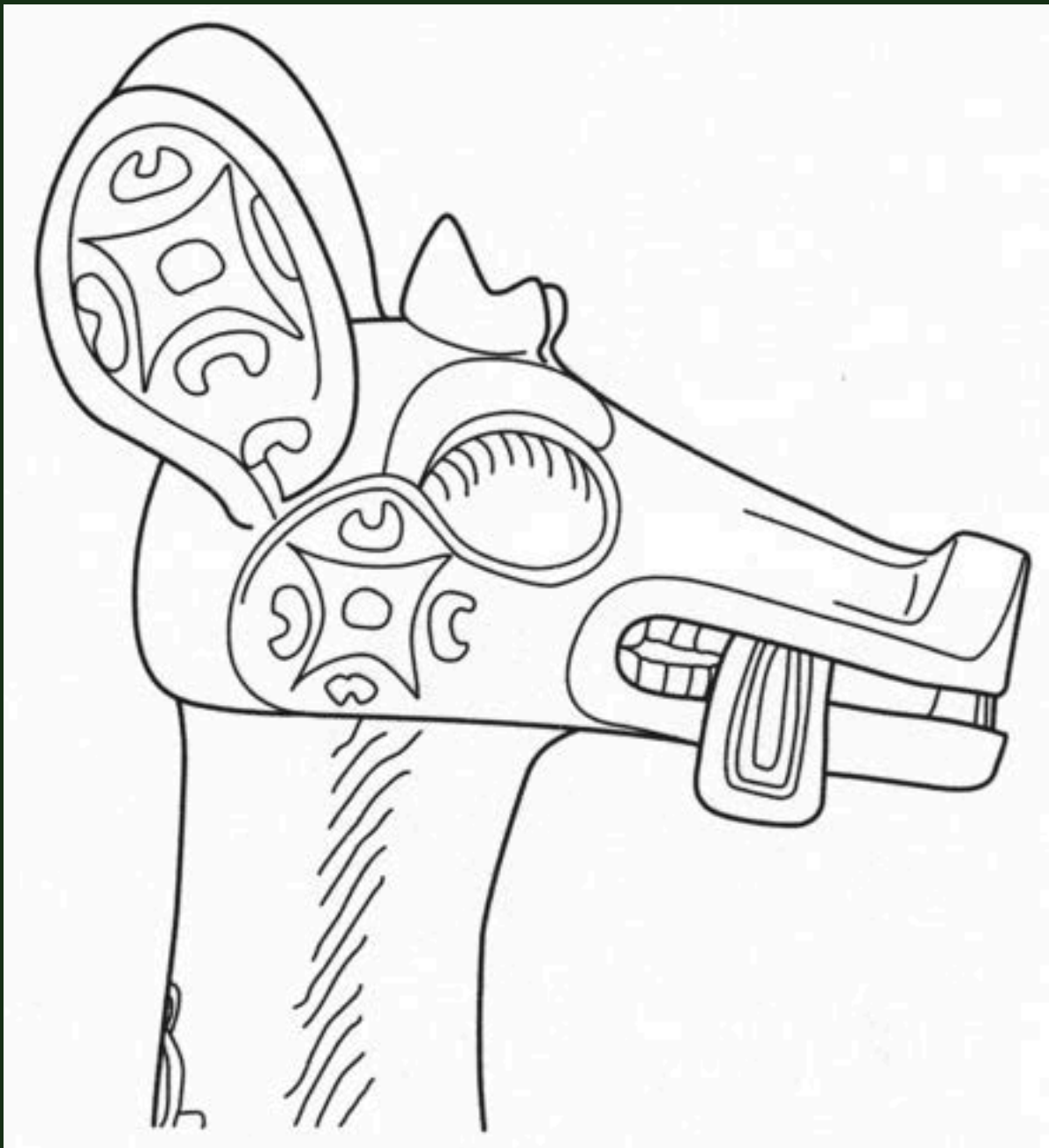


Fig. 8. Loooper says that the motif on the ear and on the cheek are a Venus/star motif (2019: 106). Most Late Classic deer ears have either a squiggly-?-mark (Caban) or crossed-bands.

Drawing by Dana G. Moot published in Loooper 2019: page 107, Figure 5.14.

Lid handle of an Early Classic ceramic. The entire lidded container is featured on the front cover of Loooper's book on deer and on his page 107. The body of the deer (not shown in this drawing) has a conch shell design. You can see that on the front cover of Loooper's 2019 book.

Cleveland Museum of Art.

This remarkable potentially Early Classic vessel was also pictured on the front cover of Lin + Emile Deletaille catalog, *Primitive Art*. The front cover was kindly sent to me by Donald Hales but I can't find a download of the entire catalog on the Internet.

# Deer in Late Classic Maya Art: 3-Dimensional Figurines



Fig. 9, a and b. There are probably dozens more deer figurines in museums around the world. It will take several years to find which artifact was photographed by FLAAR in which museum in which country around the world. Often we photographed an artifact in a private collection that was donated to a museum many years later. So we can't cite museums until all the photos are cataloged at Dumbarton Oaks starting this year.





Fig. 10. 3-dimensional deer figurine.

Photographed with permission of Edgar Castillo Sinibaldi, Museo VIGUA, Antigua.



Fig. 11. Aged deity seated atop a 3-dimensional ceramic animal. Since the animal seems to have antlers, is potentially a deer though legs are not size or shape of a deer.

The aged individual is potentially the same elderly god who is shown on lots of Codex Style vases dying in bed with lots of topless females in the room with their deer.

This photo appears to be a copy-and-paste from a Museo Popol Vuh publication, Universidad Francisco Marroquin.



Fig. 12, a and b. I estimate that this beautiful rendition of a 3-dimensional deer on top and a playful young deer running below are from the Guatemalan Highlands. The bottom part is the same in both photos; only the top part was rotated. Photographed with permission of Edgar Castillo Sinibaldi, Museo VIGUA, Antigua Guatemala.

# Deer in Late Classic Maya Stucco or Stone Sculptures

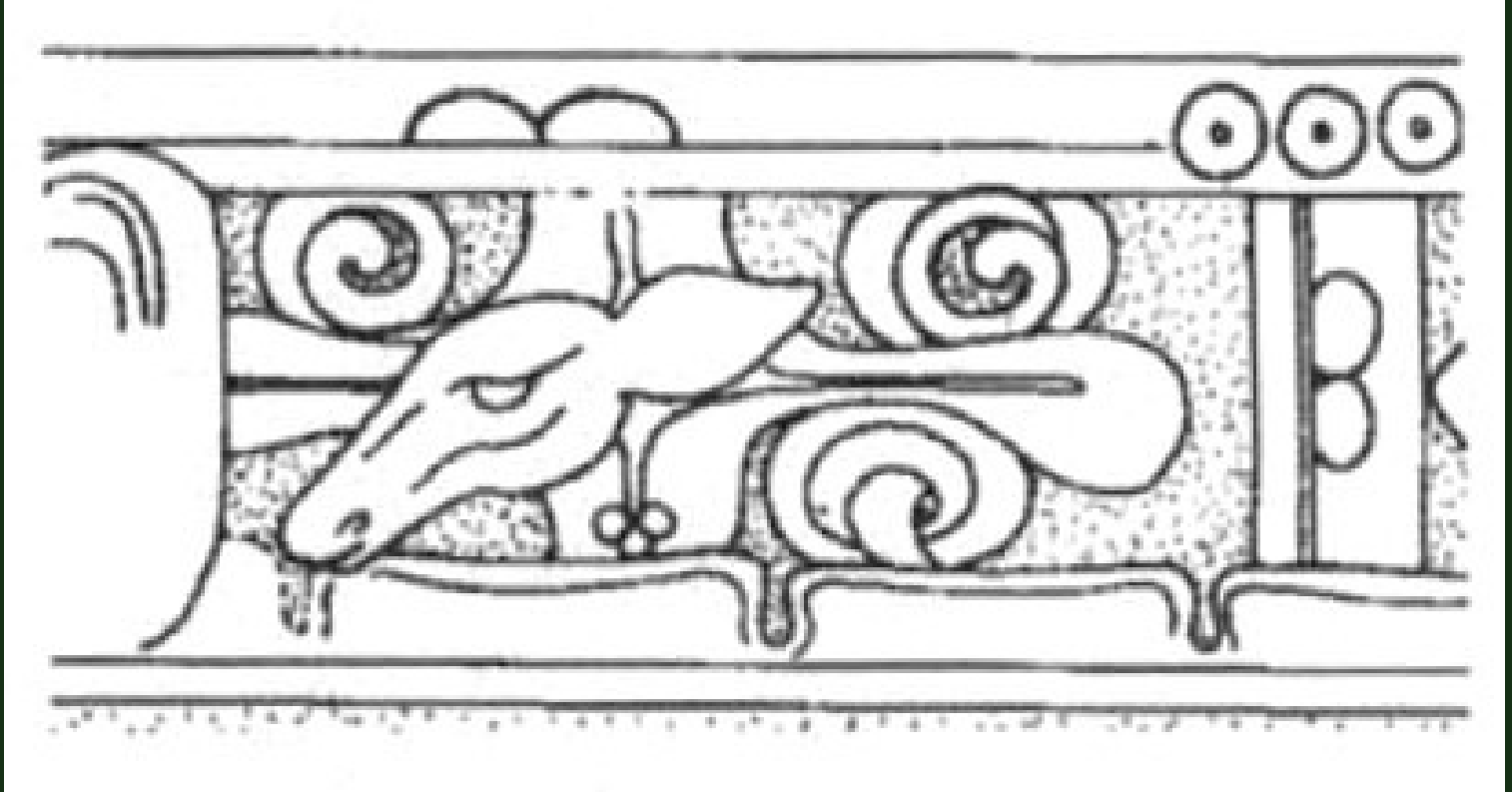


Fig. 13. Deer issuing from a celestial motif of a Sky Band on Pier B of the Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico.

Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson (1983: Fig. 21). The deer and the celestial motif behind is shown in a drawing by Matthew Loooper in Loooper 2019: page 106, Fig. 5.13. Loooper calls the motif Venus/star (Ibid.).

There is another celestial deer on the front cover of Loooper 2019 and Fig. 5.14.

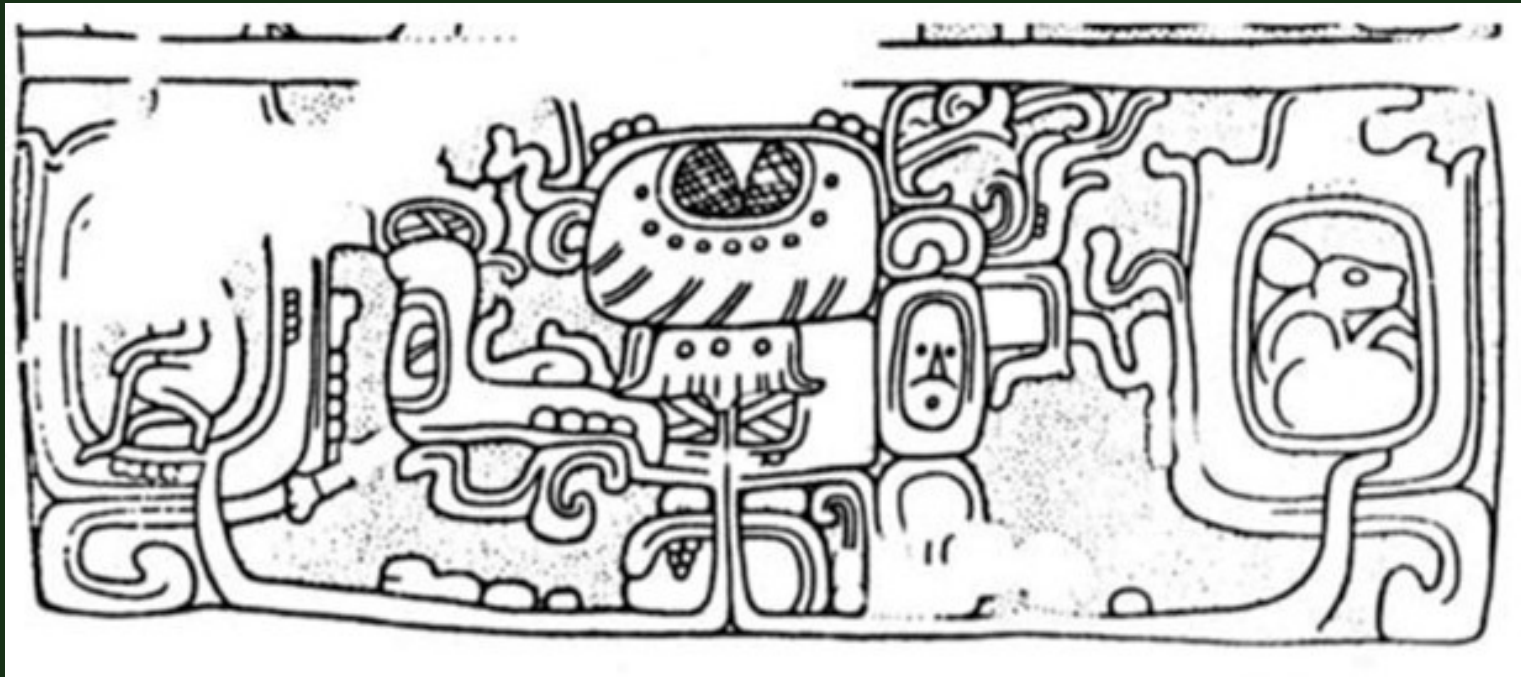


Fig. 14. A complete deer, albeit scrunched due to lack of space, is in a cartouche-like frame. The animal on the other side is eroded.

These framed animals are sprouting like a flower from a vine-like form issuing from the eye or from the upper jaw of the mythical monster with probable celestial motif in its eye.

Yaxchilan Stela 7, drawing by Ian Graham in Carolyn Tate's helpful book on Yaxchilan sculpture (1992: page 89).

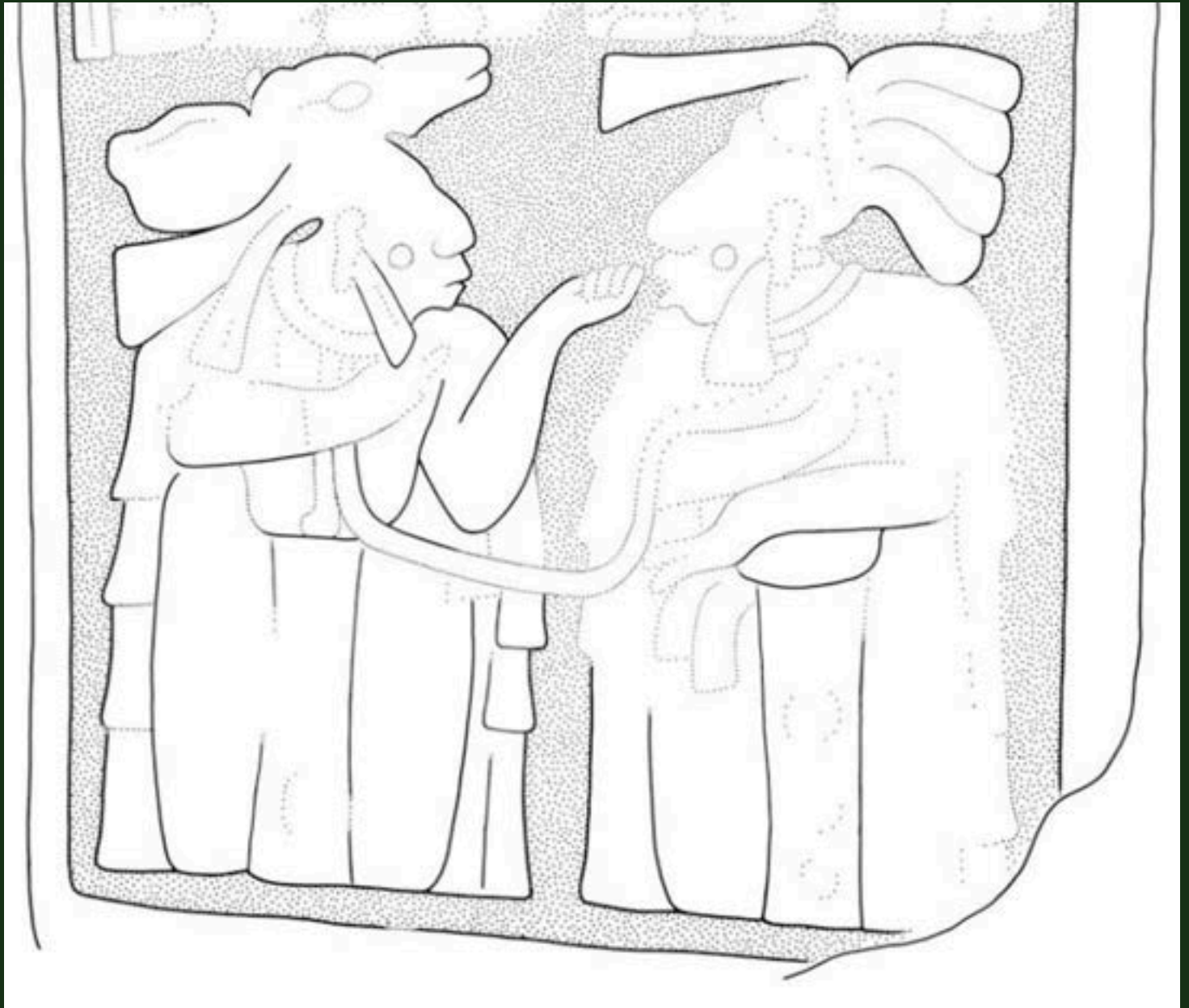


Fig. 15. There are dozens, scores of Maya elite wearing a deer head as a headdress on Maya vases, bowls, and plates. We show these in Part II (rollout photos and rollout drawings). Deer headdresses are less common on stone sculptures (stelae, altars, lintels, panels).

Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Step VI, drawing by Ian Graham, CMHI, PMAE, Harvard University.

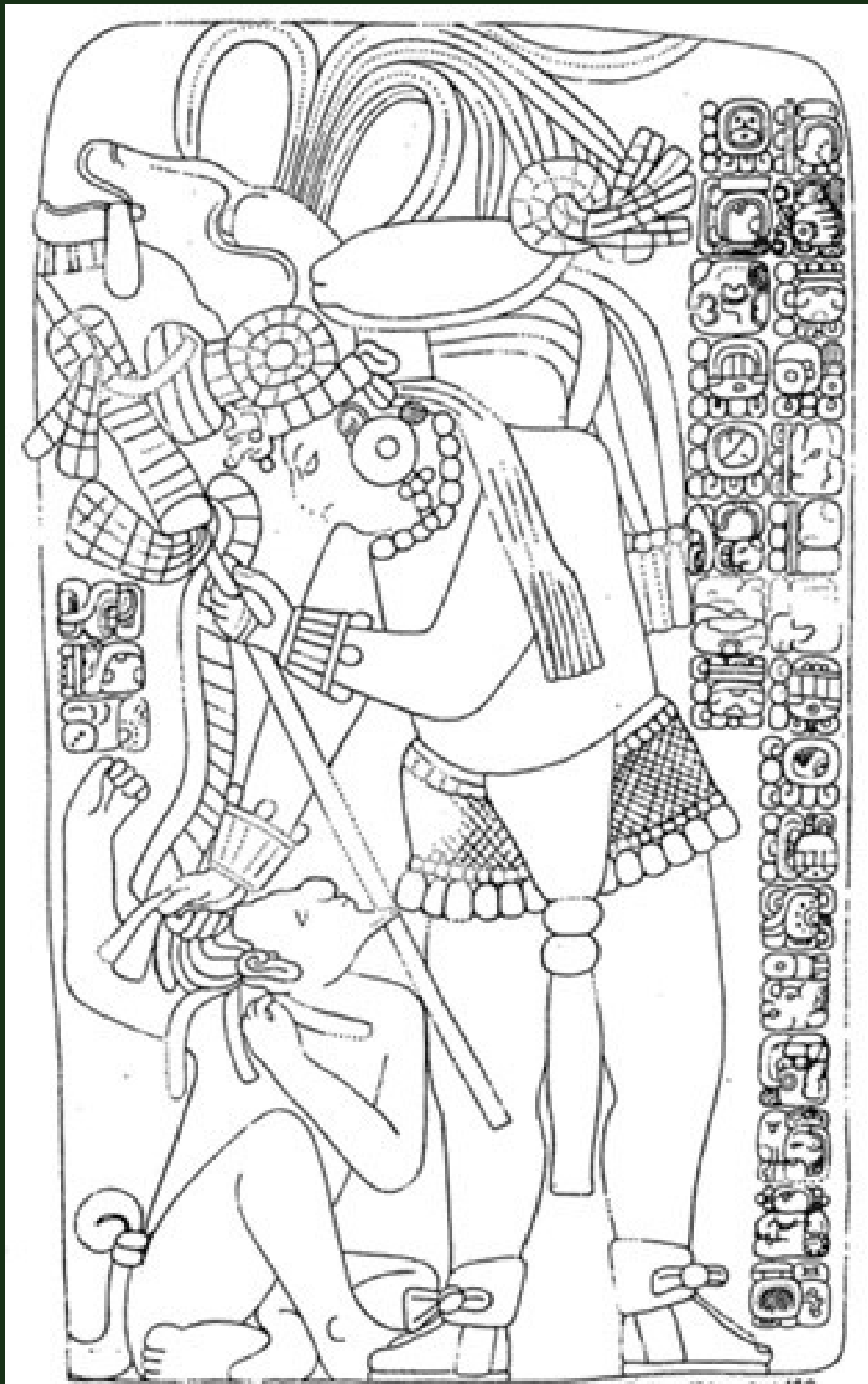


Fig. 16. The artist for some reason wants to show that this unfortunate deer head in the headdress is dead, so the tongue is shown hanging sadly out of the mouth.

The deer ear is very large but has no decorations inside.

La Mar Stela 3, LACMA, drawing by John Montgomery, JM00919.



Fig. 17. Very astute for Matthew Looer to have noticed the deer head as the central vertical feature of this elite person's headdress.

The chin of this deer is "bearded".

The wearer is a warrior leader, not a deer hunter.

El Kinel, Monument 1, drawing by Stephen Houston in Looer 2019: page 103, Fig. 5.9.



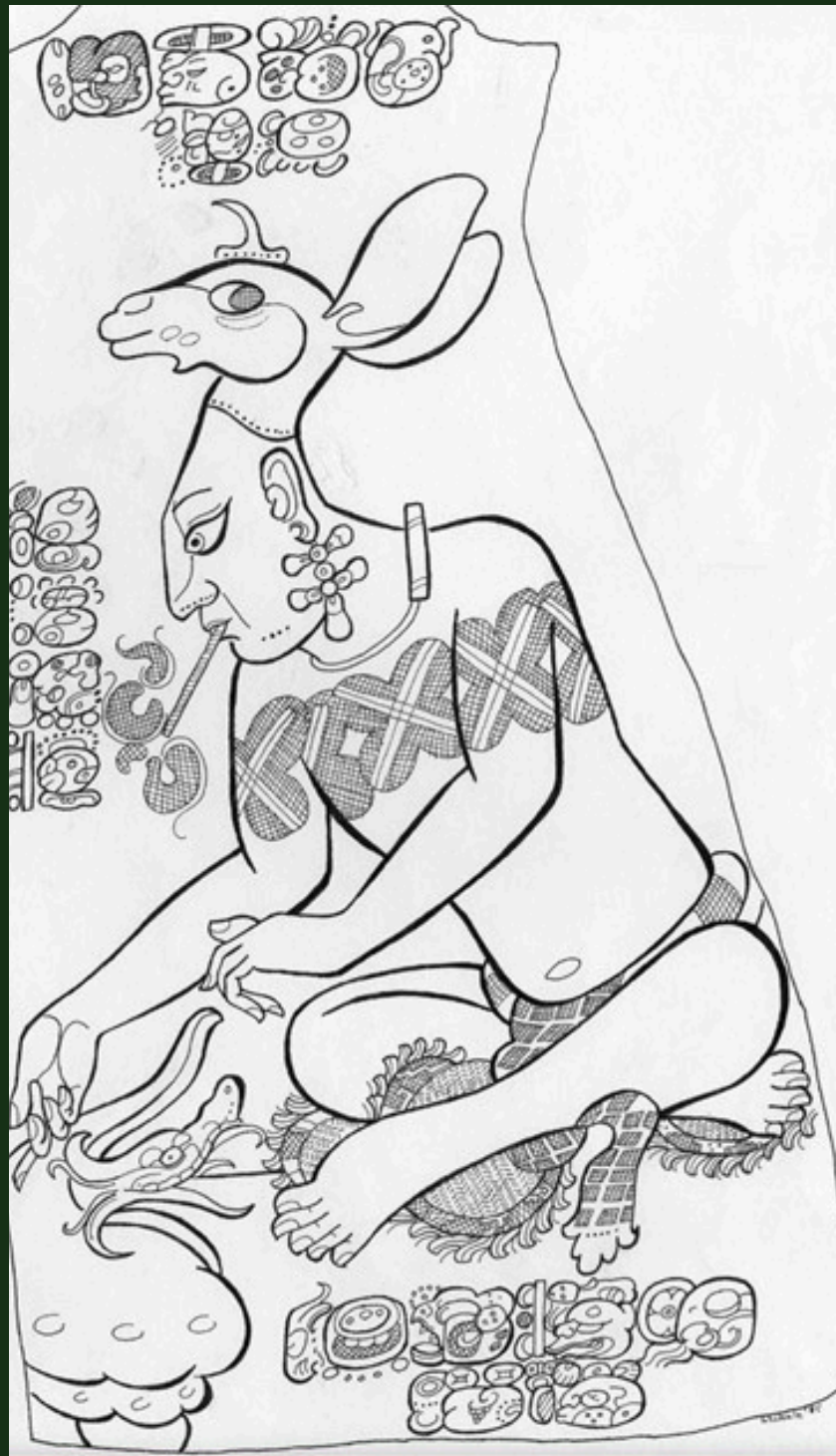


Fig. 18. Antler is shown as for a young deer. Ears are of appropriate natural size and shape. No decorations in the ear. No beard or facial hair.

A creature is issuing out of a conch shell. It would be helpful to learn how long the conch lives after it is taken out of the Caribbean or other reef areas, because I doubt many artists in Peten would have seen a live conch creature.

Incised conch shell, drawing by Linda Schele SD-7203 © David Schele, drawing courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)).

The Cleveland Museum of Art.

# Deer Head as Headdress in Scenes on Pottery Vases and Bowls and Figurines



Fig. 19, a and b. Ceramics of this low height are not as often seen in the Kerr rollout Maya Vase Data Base. So we worked hard around the world to fill this gap. Here two well-fed men, each with a simple large black “earring” and each holding a cup, have a large deer head as a headdress.

The deer has a long beard issuing down from under his chin. No symbols on the deer ear.



Fig. 20. Drawings and photographs of other angles of this man (tied to a scaffolding in the position of a deer) with a deer headdress exist (Taube 1988: page 335, Fig. 12.4). But this photo is the best angle to see the deer head and the deer ear. Rubenstein shows this in her dissertation as Fig. 157 but in the line drawing used by Taube. What is not often published elsewhere is what Rubenstein shows in her Fig. 157,a, citing Narro Robles 2011: 347. That shows a kneeling “Jaina figurine” person with the same deer head headdress as the “down on all fours in deer position” that we show now.

Rubenstein’s illustrations show another scaffolding scene but the quality is not viable to see what is represented and the PhD dissertation that she cites in the caption is not on-line.

This scene shows that the deer head as headdress is enough to show that this man is intended to be viewed as an actual deer.

Several other similar scaffolding scenes have been published elsewhere.

I have not yet been able to find the publication, 1992, “Emblems of Passage” to cite the author. I can’t find it on the Internet either.

# Starry-Eyed Deer in Bicephalic Cosmic Monster

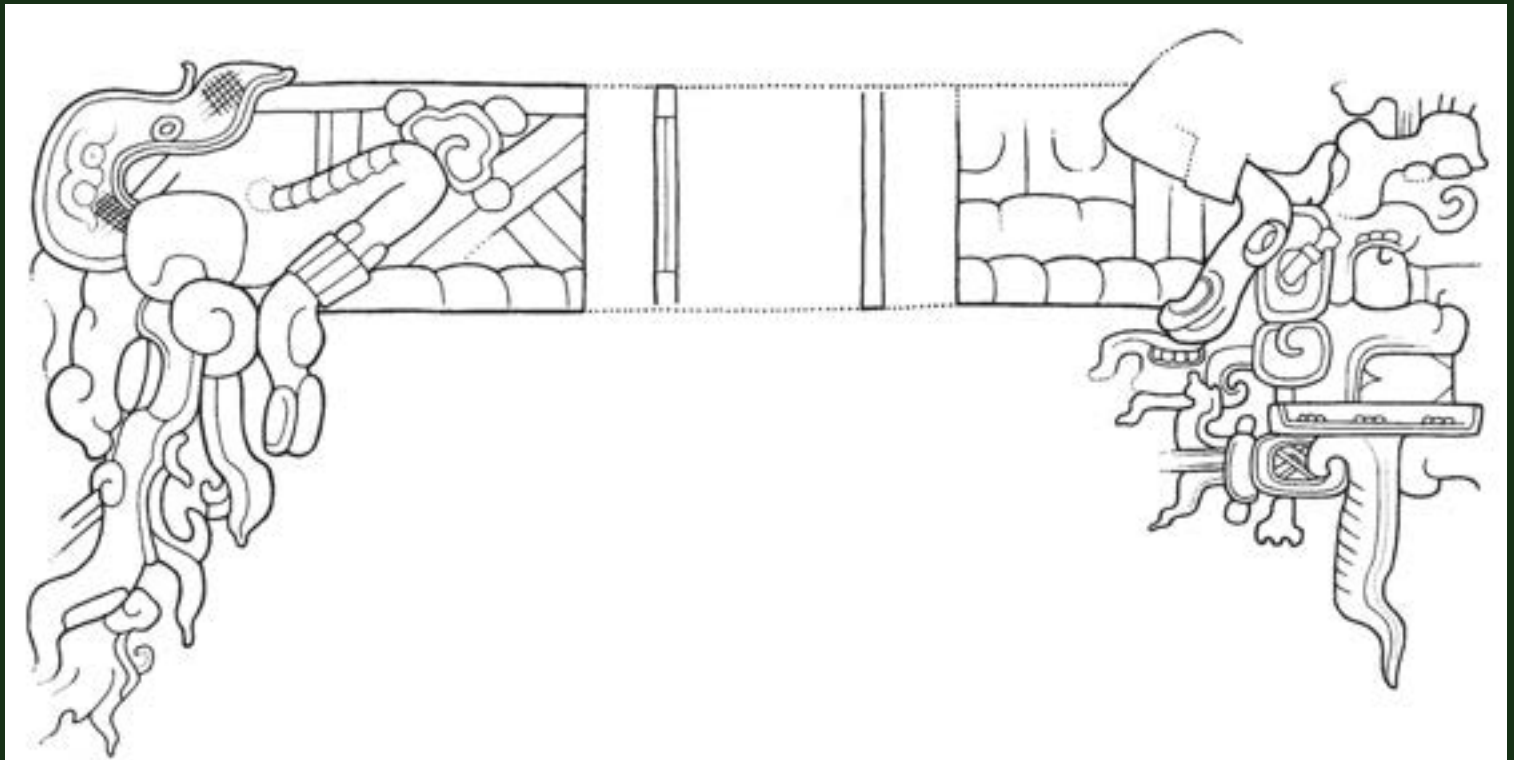
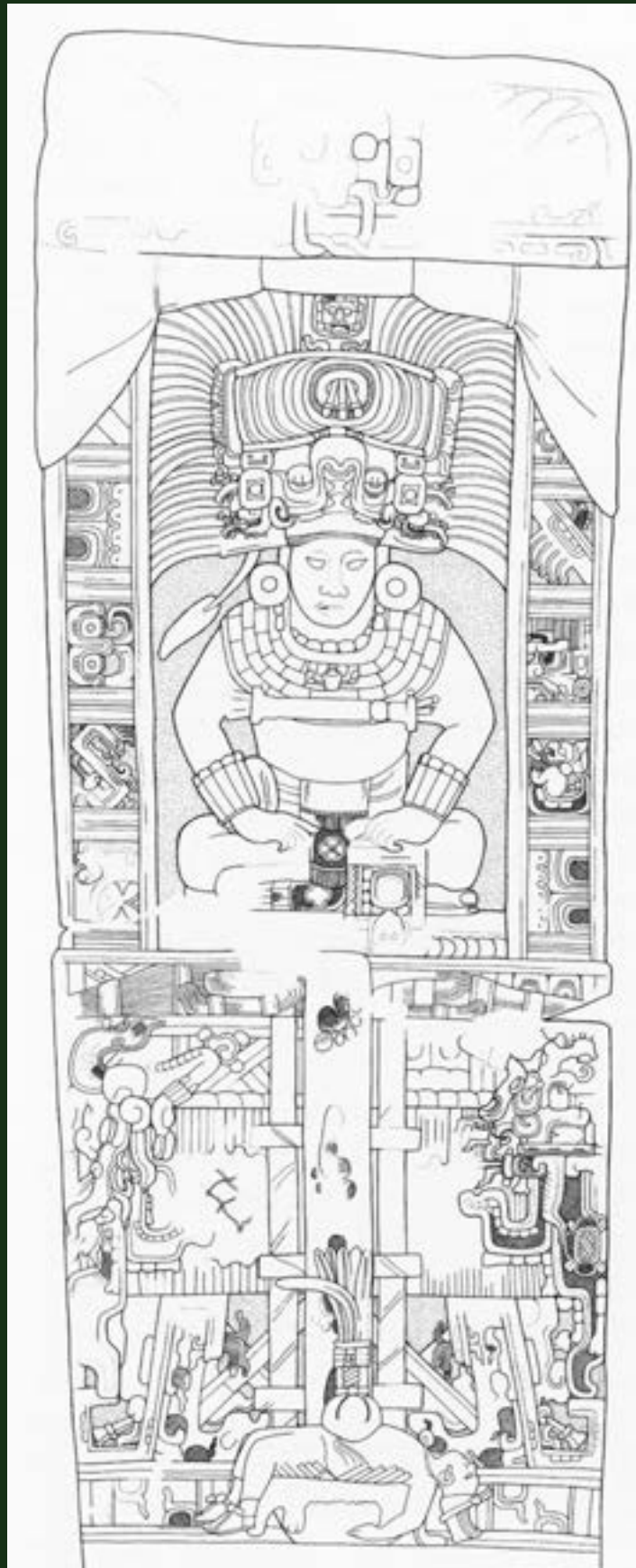


Fig. 21. The body of the Bicephalic Cosmic Monster is a Sky Band, commonly found atop stairs leading to a throne room hut. The “tail end” usually has an upside-down Quadripartite Badge Headdress Monster. Drawing by David Stuart, CMHI, PMAE in Martin 2015: Fig. 12,a. Same illustration is cropped and shown a larger size in the illustration below.



FFig. 22. Piedras Negras Stela 11, drawing by David Stuart, CMHI, PMAE inLooper 2013: Fig. 5.8.

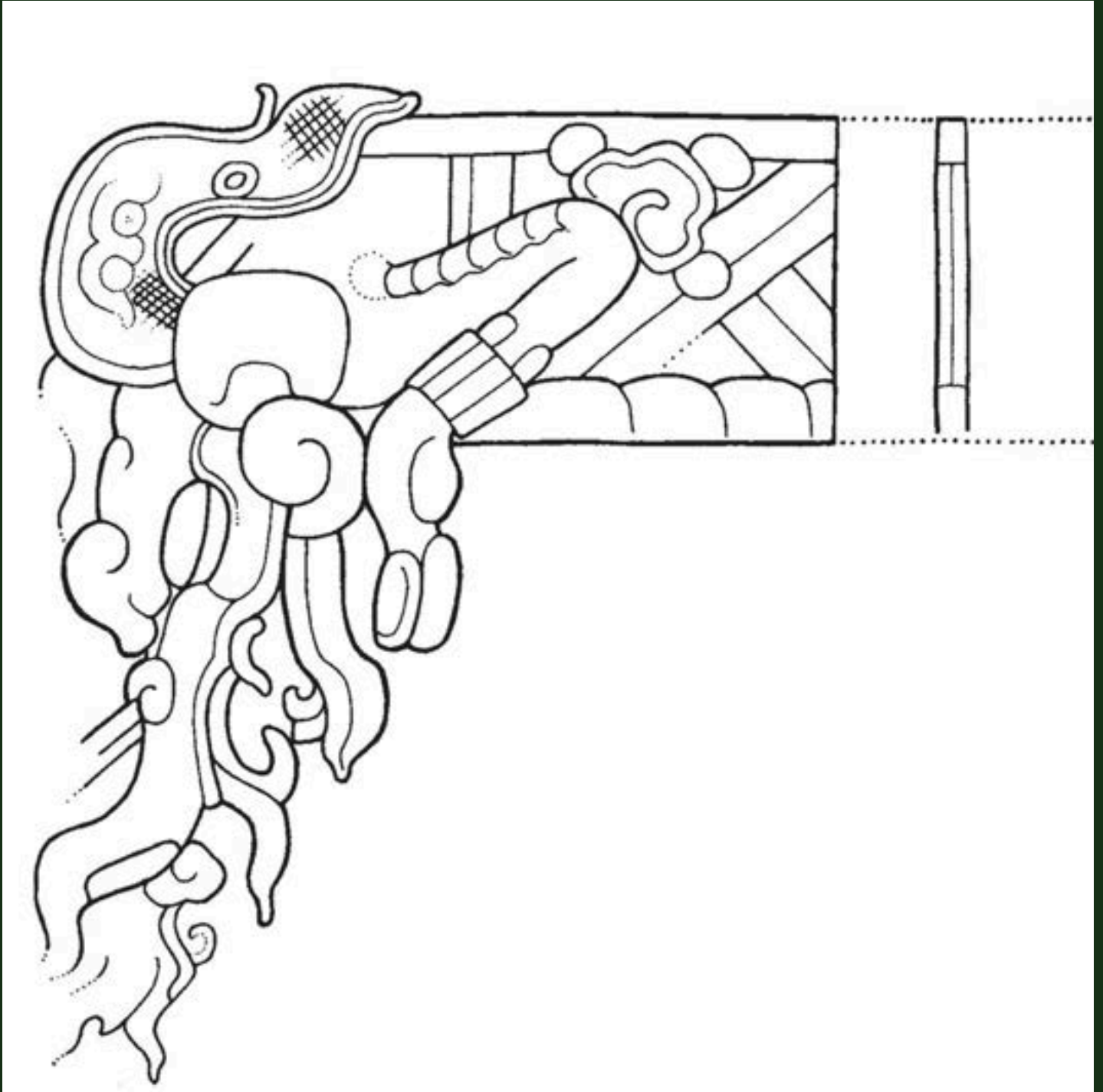


Fig. 23. The left (front) end of the Bicephalic Cosmic Monster usually has a pure crocodile or a deer with crocodile fangs. Here the animal has deer hoof and a deer ear (with a celestial motif).

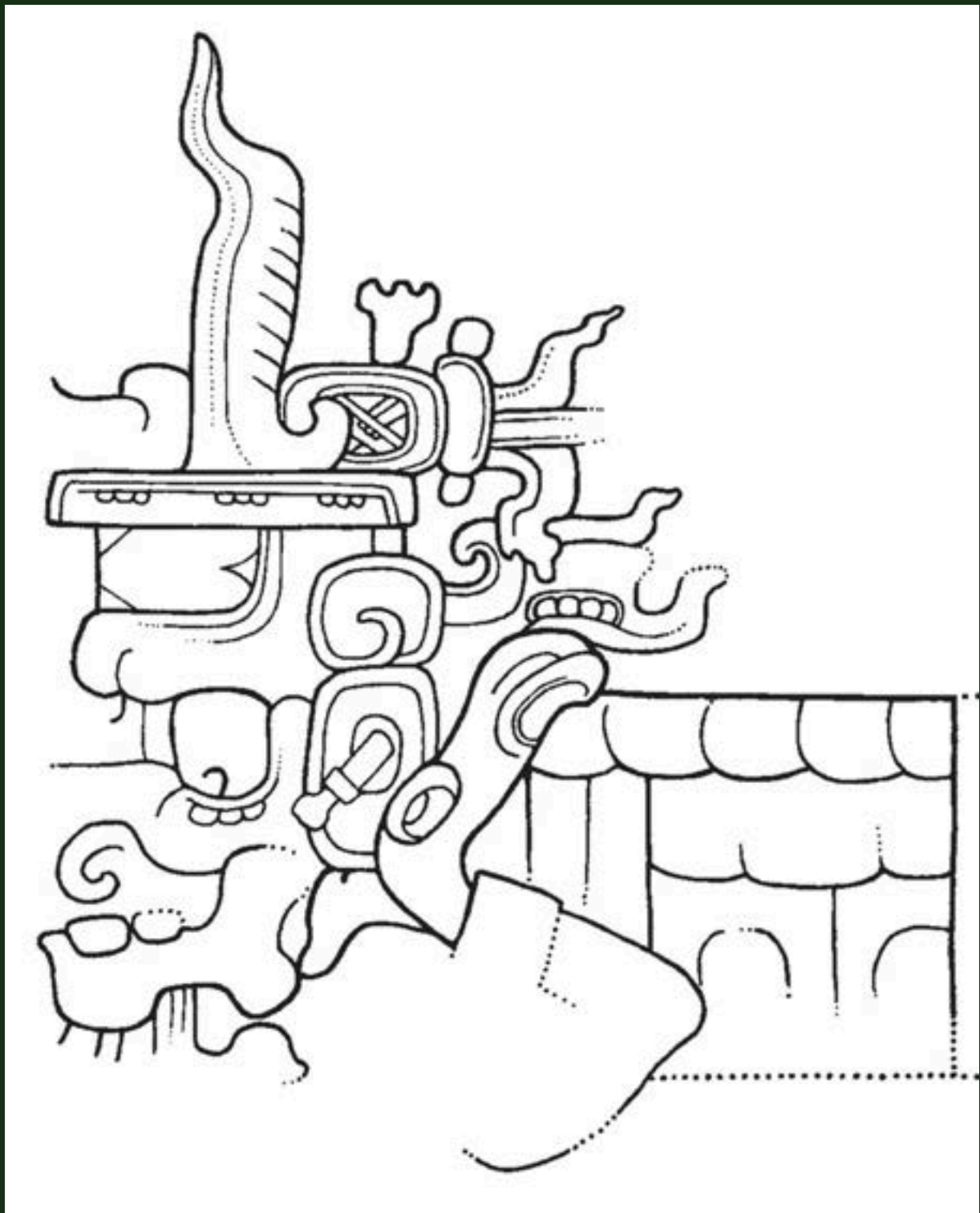


Fig. 24. This is the Quadripartite Badge Headdress Monster. He has deer hoof diagonally over his earring. You can better understand this creature when in frontal view such as at Palenque.

Other deer-like ears on Cosmic Monsters can be found on a jade nicely drawn by David Stuart (2005: page 74, Fig. 47a). Stuart provides a helpful discussion of Starry Deer Crocodile in that article,

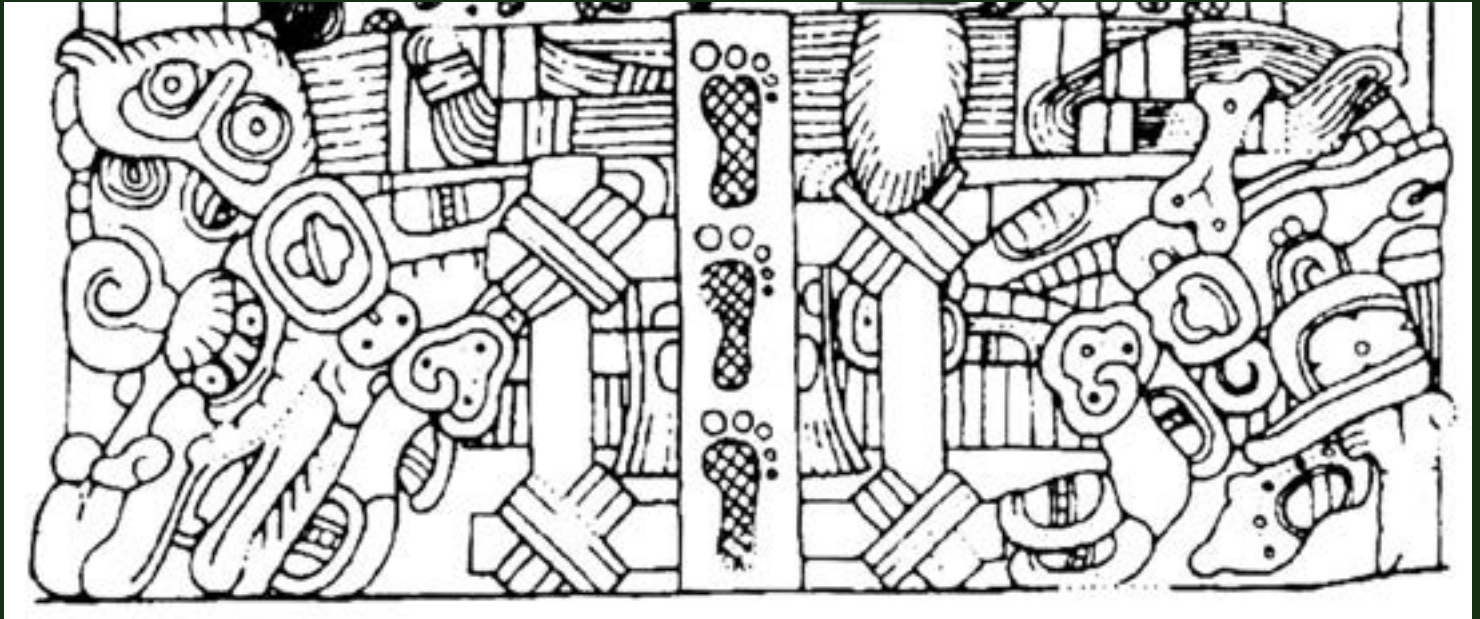


Fig. 25, a and b. There are many helpful iconographic and epigraphic reports on the Bicephalic Cosmic Monster. I have covered several of these in my year 2024 FLAAR Reports on Sky Bands, since often the horizontal body of the monster is a Sky Band. The “Sky Band Cosmic Monsters” are often atop the steps leading up to a ritual throne room hut whose walls or pillars are vertical Sky Bands. A Principal Bird Deity is usually perched atop the roof.

I show here Piedras Negras Stela 25. Piedras Negras Stela 11 also has an outstanding example of a recognizable deer ear and deer hoof. The celestial symbol in the deer’s eye and deer’s ear is not a crossed-bands (as on other Cosmic Monsters).

Some of these steps leading up to throne rooms have a bird’s head at each end and no Cosmic Monster.

The bound animal across the top is usually a peccary. The deer with celestial symbol in the eye and elongated snout is below. Deer hooves are visible at both ends.

Piedras Negras Stela 25, CMHI, PMAE



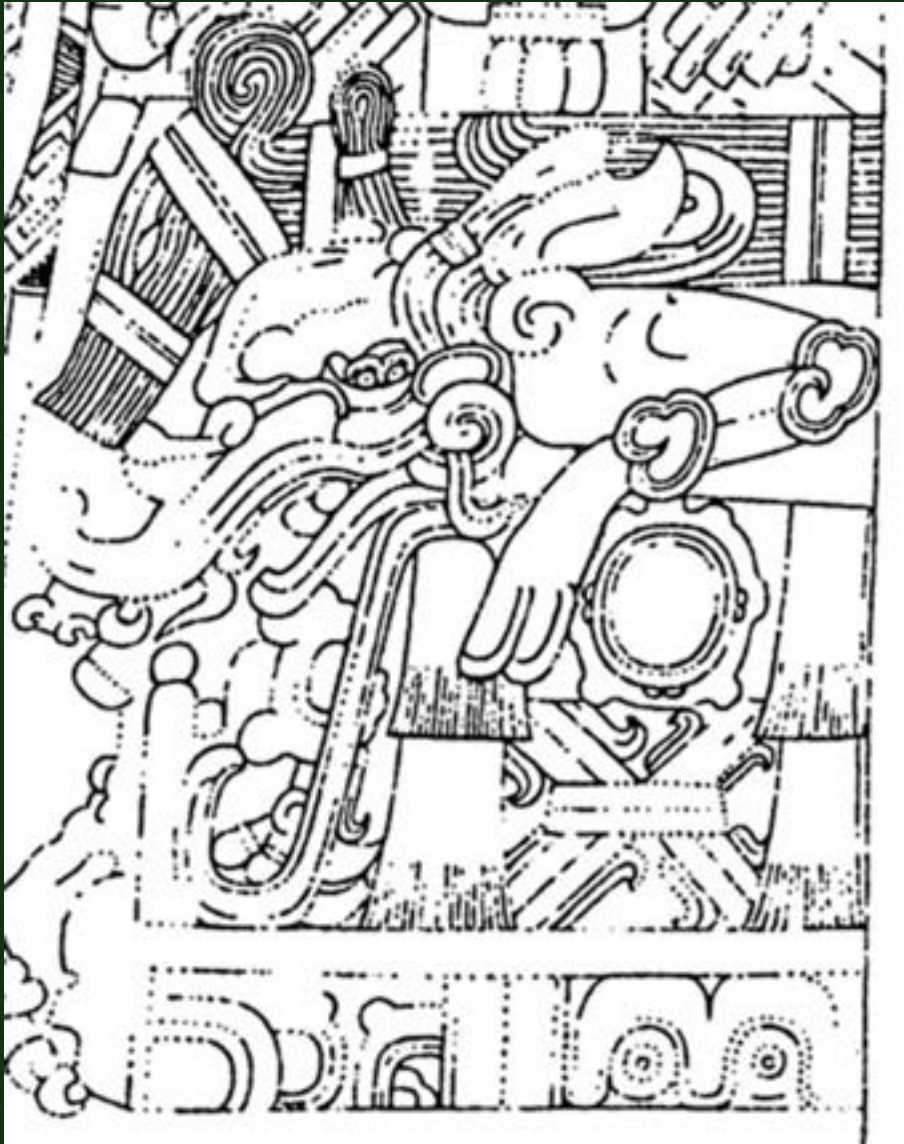


Fig. 26, a and b. Tied up peccary is atop the Cosmic Monster. This peccary on Piedras Negras Stela 33 is more obvious than the tied up animal on Piedras Negras Stela 25.

The horizontal lines across both the head and body of these Piedras Negras peccary are not found on peccary in other scenes (where they are not tied up). This aspect of showing a peccary with these horizontal lines and tying it up need further study—is this a cosmological statement—that access to the throne room requires stepping up over many different celestial areas.

Deer hoof, “Starry Eye” but not on ears. Curiously two ears issue from same side of the head. Head is a composite mammal/reptile.

An unidentified and undocumented band of symbols is under the deer. Then a Sky Band is across the bottom.

Drawing by John Montgomery, JM05460

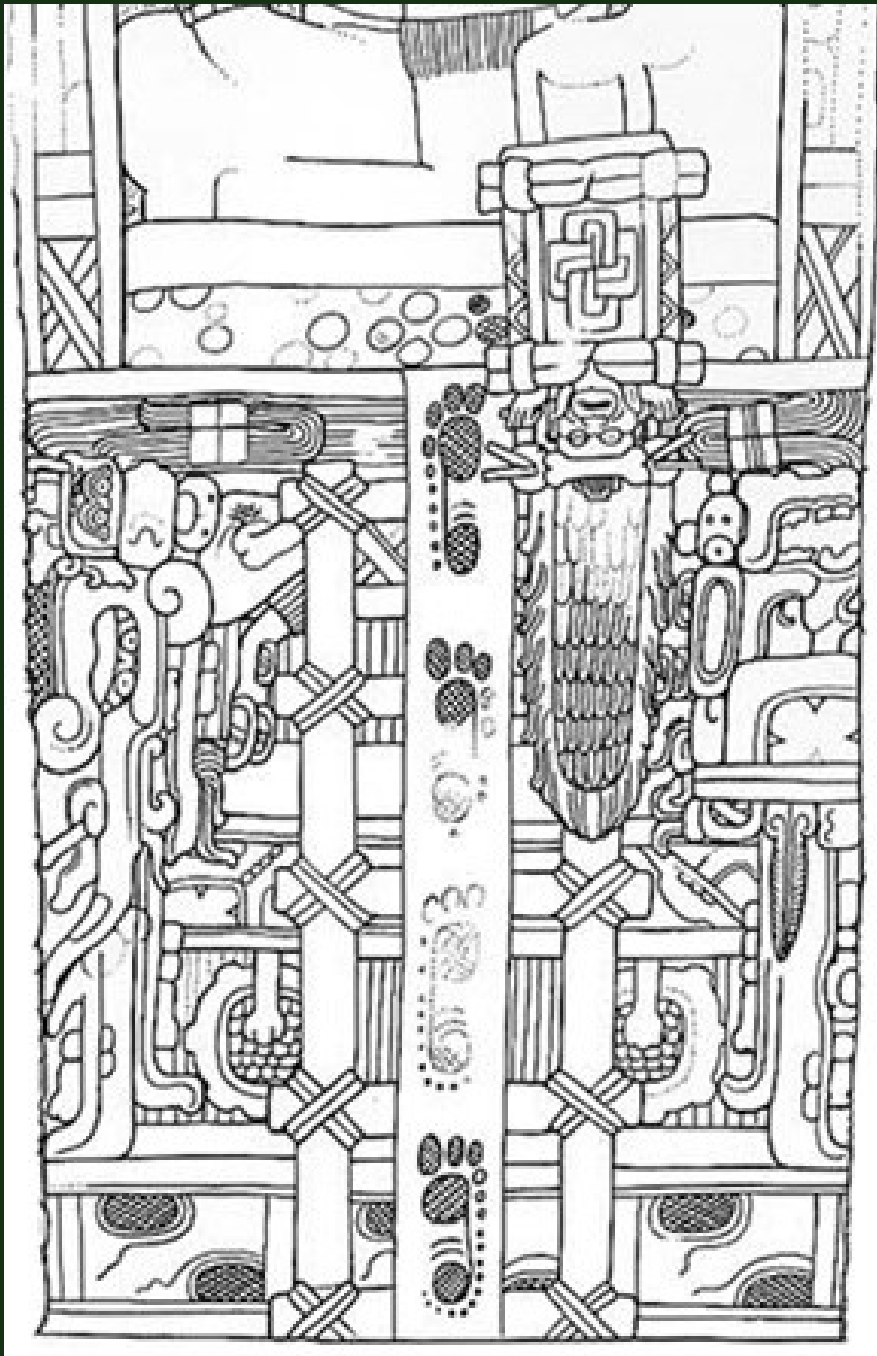


Fig. 27, a and b. Deer ear and eye both have “star” motif. No space for the leg or hoof to be shown. Not enough space to show the peccary head but his tied-up body is visible with horizontal lines all over. Profile Quadripartite Badge Headdress Monster upside down at right end. Piedras Negras Stela 6, drawing by David Stuart on-line, CMHI, PMAE, Harvard.



Fig. 28. Deer ear on Copan CPN 25, altar of Stela M, south end, has same celestial symbol as on several Piedras Negras stelae.

Digital photo by Nicholas Hellmuth. All the scanned 35mm digital color slides are now at Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. But all the digital photos from 1990 onward are in a different archive, FLAAR Digital Photo Archive. This will also be donated in the future.

We had two digital photography field trips to Copan during the first half of 2024.

Naranjo Stela 32 also has a Sky Band Stairway leading up to a throne room, but there is no Cosmic Monster.

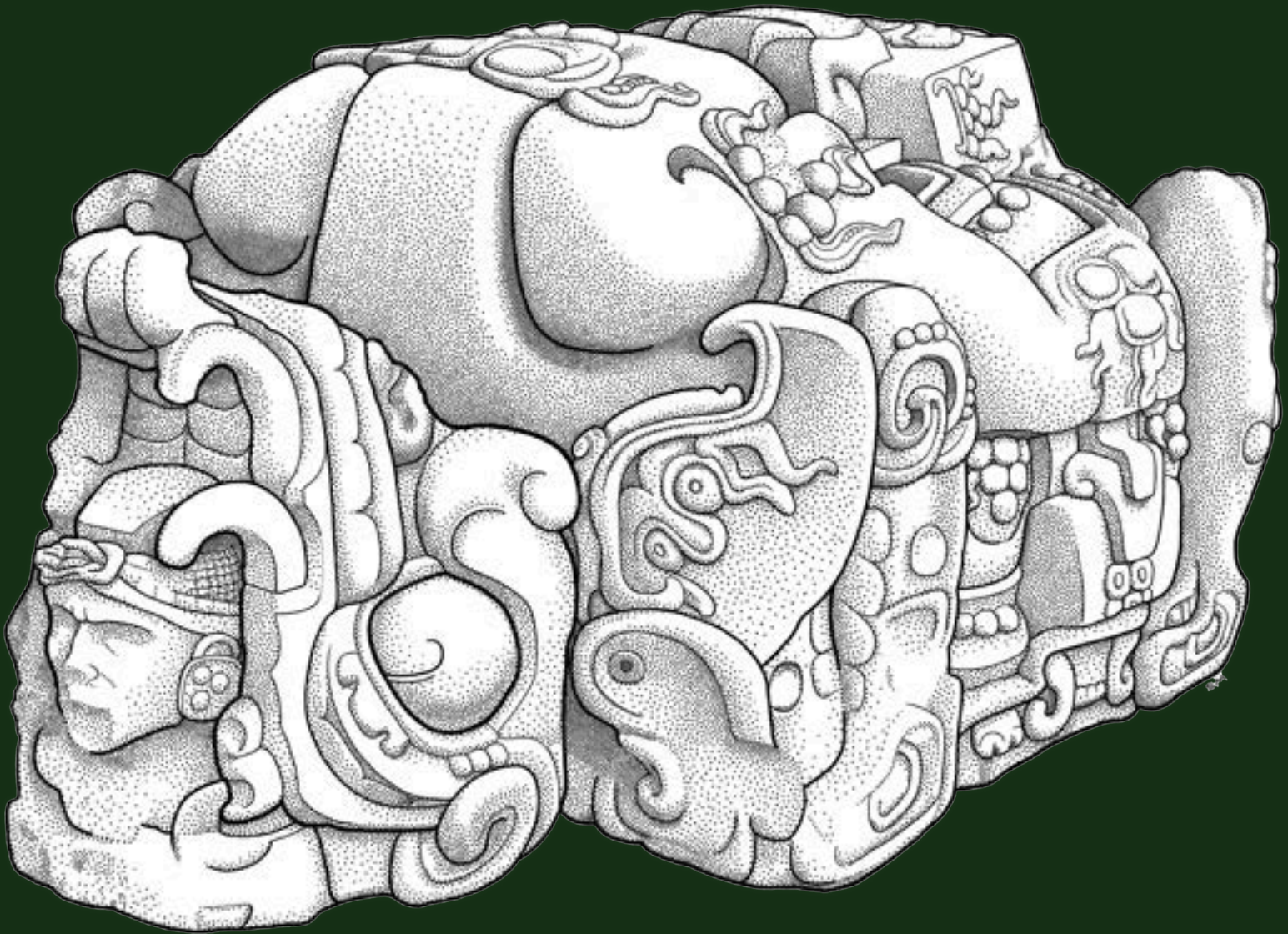


Fig. 29. Excellent drawing of Copan CPN 25, altar of Stela M, by Simon Martin (Martin 2015: Fig. 39,b) allows you to see the large deer ear with celestial symbol on the crocodile. Notice there is no celestial symbol in the crocodile's eye. God N has his head peeking out.



Fig. 30. This angle of the Copan altar allows you to see the deer ear on this side. You can also see the deer hooves, both front legs and back legs. This is one of the few Cosmic Monsters where the deer legs with hooves are visible front and back. On many Cosmic Monsters the legs are of the actual crocodile.

This deer is “down on his stomach” so the legs are in the positions that you see here.

You can tell from the lighting across the sculpture that FLAAR brought an entire portable photography studio, powered by a portable electric generator. All our photos of this altar are in a recent Hellmuth publication.

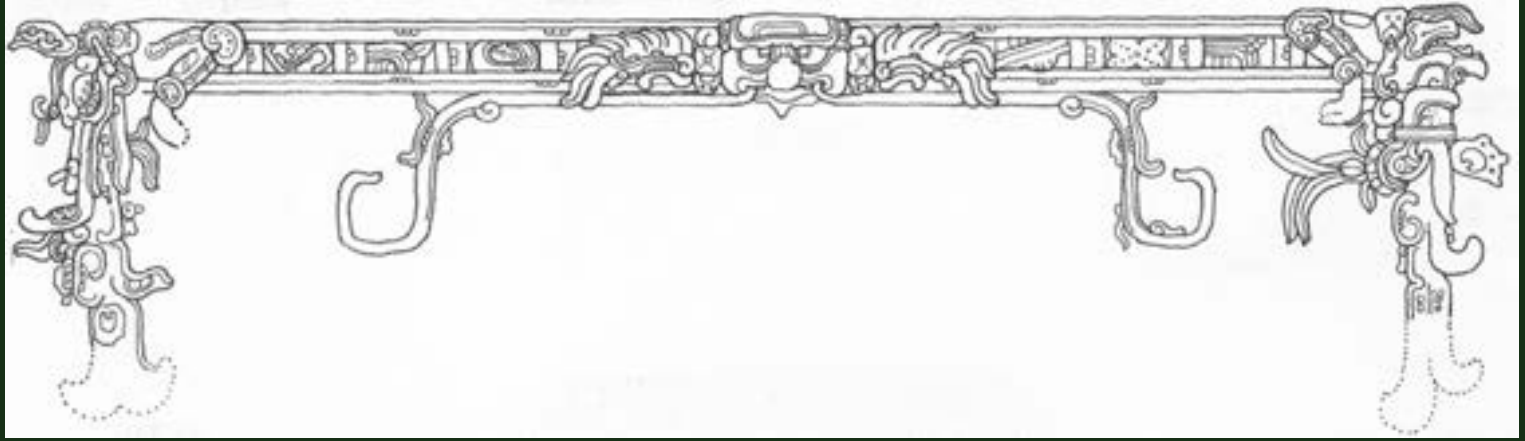


Fig. 31. Both eye and ear of the “deer-crocodile” have the same celestial symbol. Has deer legs with deer hooves but with snake underbelly scale pattern. In the middle is a Principal Bird Deity with a snake going in and out of its mouth. This is why in my 1980’s PhD dissertation research I named this a Snake Eating Hawk (same bird has different name, Laughing Falcon). Palenque House E, stucco relief sculpture, drawing by Linda Schele, SD-1106 © David Schele, drawing courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)).

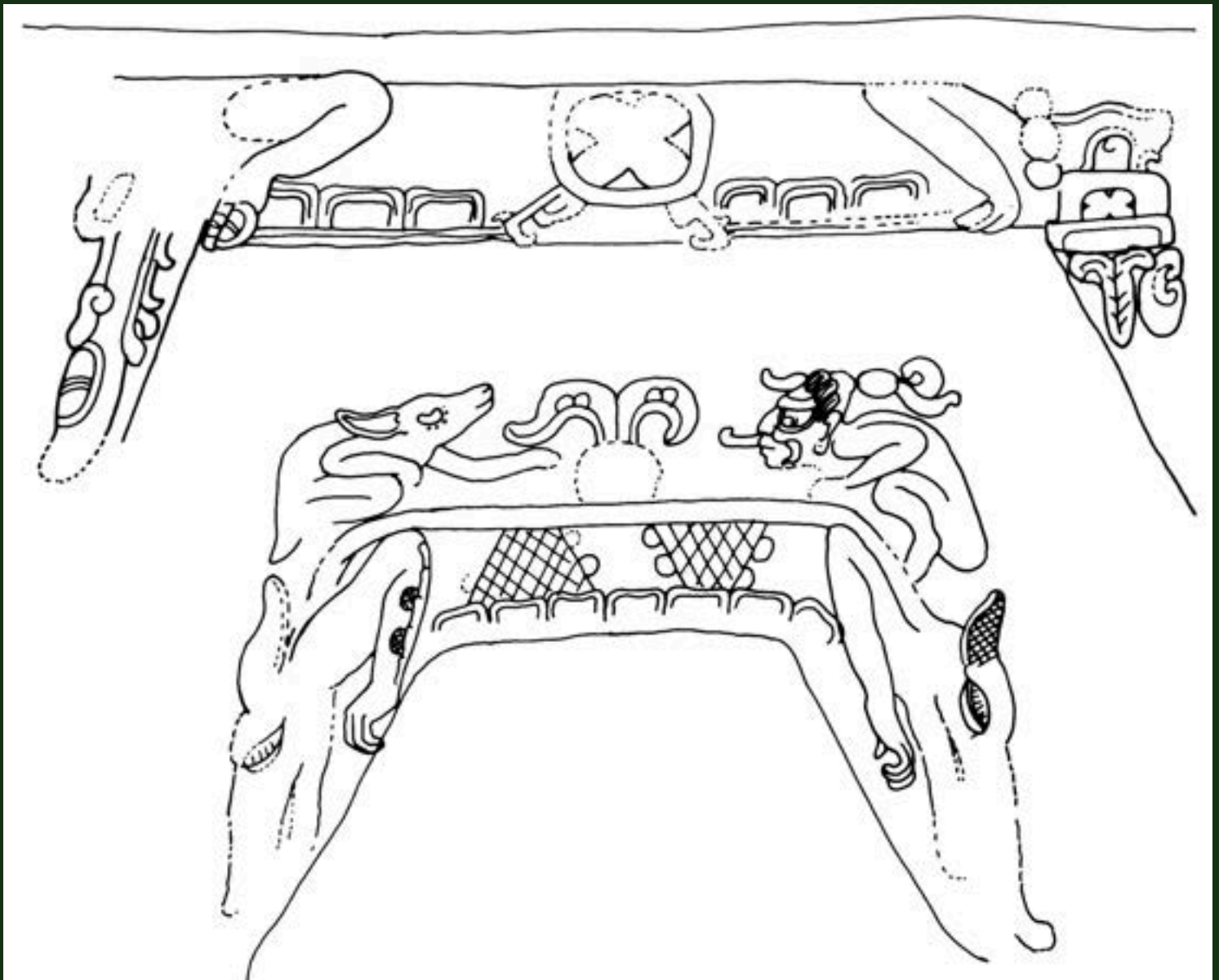


Fig. 32. Lots of deer here at Palenque, House E.

The upper image is a Bicephalic Cosmic Monster. The feet have deer hooves but the deer ears are eroded and no longer visible.

The underneath of the body are reptilian scale motifs that are along the underside of reptiles.

The lower Image shows a deer interacting with the supernatural Maya person at the other side.

Underneath are two deer with a snake's body and triangular snake scale design motifs. These deer have anthropomorphic hands instead of hooves.

Drawing by Linda Schele, SD-130 © David Schele, drawing courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)).



Fig. 33. Monster head at the left at Palenque has a deer ear with celestial motif, just as on Piedras Negras Stela 11. A Quadripartite Badge Headdress Monster is sideways at the tail end because there is no space to turn it downwards. Drawing by Merle Greene Robertson, 1985: Fig. 423 in Noble 1999: Fig. 20. Also in Stuart 2003: Fig. 1 but from drawing by Ian Graham. Palenque South Subterranean Building, South Room, Bench 1.

Normally the front of the Cosmic Monster is a pure crocodile, with human legs or crocodile legs. So it is not common to find the front as a Starry Eyed Deer so only a few sculptures have the deer legs and deer ear at the left (on rare occasions the heads switch position and the Quadripartite Badge Headdress Monster is at the right).

It is sad that the great drawings of Merle Greene Robertson are not in a database for easy downloads as is the Kerr Archives. The rubbings of Merle are nice, but line drawings are more helpful.



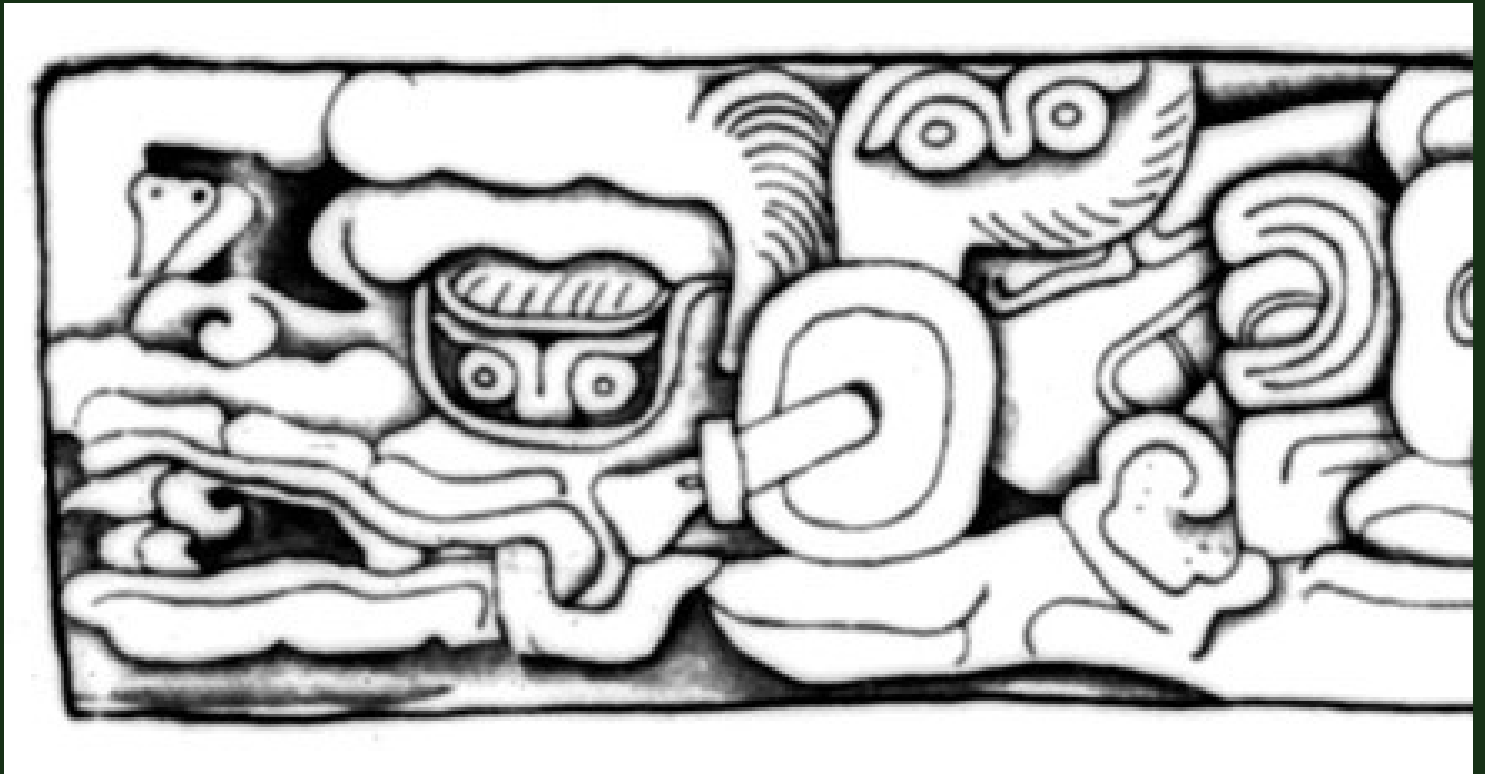


Fig. 34. The ear is a pure Maya deer ear with celestial motif (so that instead of crossed-bands or squiggle-?-mark motif). The deer hoof is visible under the large earring. So although the mouth is reptilian, the ear and hoof are of a deer, as is common on many (but not all) Bicephalic Cosmic Monsters.

The deer has the “star symbol” which is why it is called Starry Eye Deer (Crocodile, because often a cosmic monster has crocodile features).

Left head of a Bicephalic Cosmic Monster, Palenque, Palace, South Subterranean Building, South Room.

Drawing by Linda Schele, SD-123 © David Schele, drawing courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)).

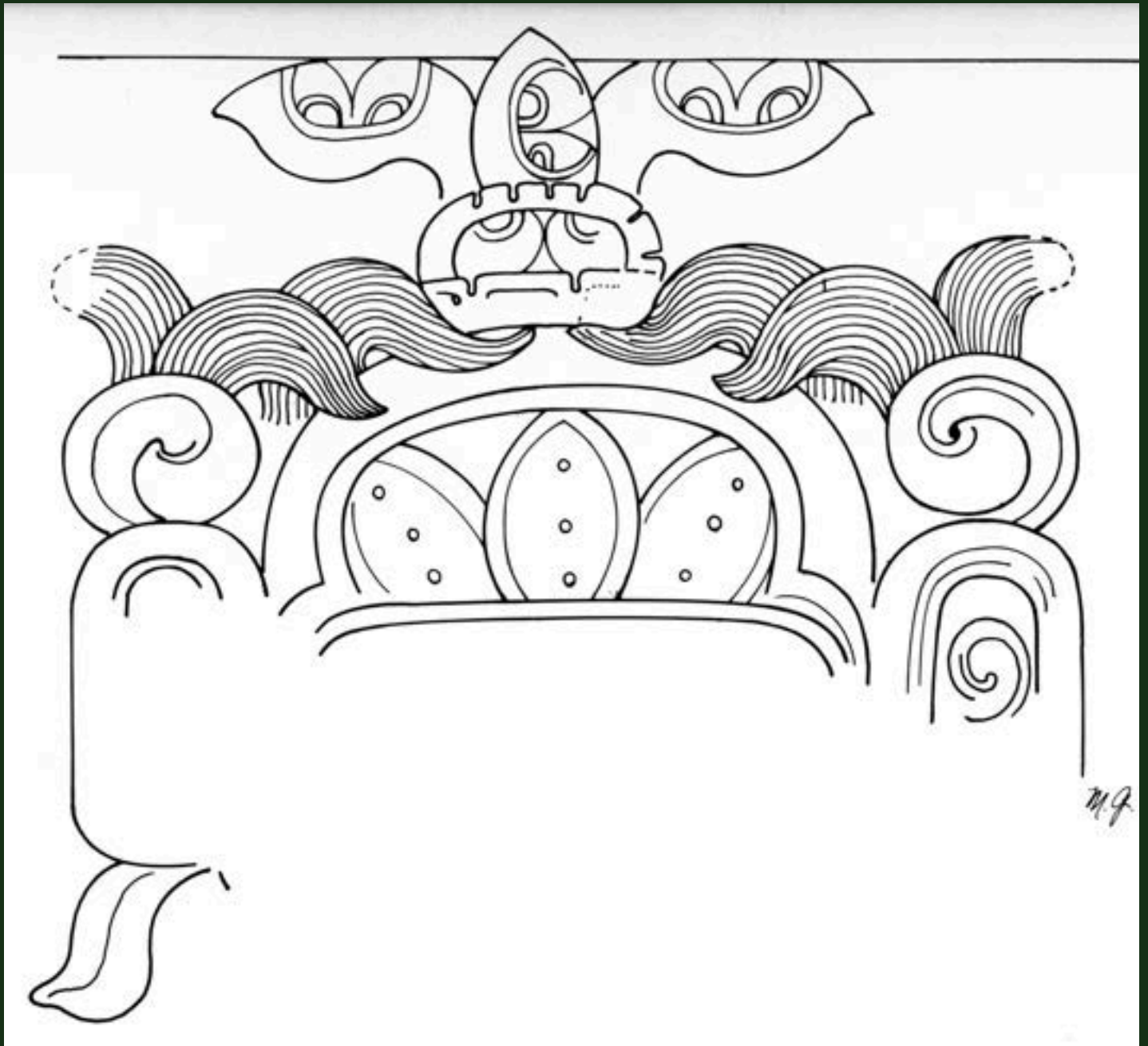


Fig. 35. Based on day-after-day, week-after-week, month-after-month of studying the iconography of deer in Maya art, I estimate that the upper motifs are two deer ears. No deer head or body, but those two vertical shapes are the size and shape of a deer ear, especially the far end of each shape.

Palenque, House C, Mask 3, drawing by Merle Greene (Robertson) published in Robertson 1985, Vol. II: page 208. Her "autograph" is M.G. at lower right corner. She was known as Merle Green until she married and then used the name Merle Greene Robertson.



Fig. 36. A deer looks rather unhappy with the weight of the woman sitting on it (the captives being sat on by the other nobles look rather unhappy as well).

Palenque, Tablet of the Slaves.

Drawing by Linda Schele SD-131 © David Schele, drawing courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)).



Fig. 37. An Early Classic Bicephalic Cosmic Monster has the Starry Eyed Deer at the right, not the left. And at the other end there is no Quadripartite Badge Headdress Monster.

This Starry Eyed Deer has no deer ear and a paw with human thumb and three fingers. The eye is a celestial motif. The tooth is a shark's tooth since a stingray spine is long and thin, not short and wide.

Copan Margarita façade, drawing by Matthew Looper, 2012: Fig. 8.1.

# Deer on Late Classic Maya Vases and Bowls

There are lots of deer on ceramics from Campeche and Yucatan (such as the INAH museum in Campeche. Plus lots of deer on Maya vases, bowls, and plates from the rest of the Maya Lowlands. We show the photos taken by Hellmuth during the 1970's-1980's-1990's.





Fig. 38, a, b, and c. Once the FLAAR Photo Archive, now at Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, is unpacked, sorted, and cataloged, it will hopefully be possible to find the other 35mm color slides of the other sides of this vase.

Looper (2019: page 90, caption for Fig 4.18) list this vase as in The Art Institute of Chicago 1991.480. Their photos are in public domain but I estimate that the photos we show here may be from the FLAAR Photo Archive.



Fig. 39. Closeup photo of a deer head held by a man. I would need to see other photos of this same vase before I can say whether he is a hunter with a trophy, or not.

The deer ear has the thick ?-mark as decoration.

Since this is a copy-and-paste the original photo was possibly by someone else though it is possible that a student scanner used the .png designation (which is not a good idea—RAW is best). Nonetheless, even though a .png, the quality is outstanding to be able to enlarge this detail to full-page size.

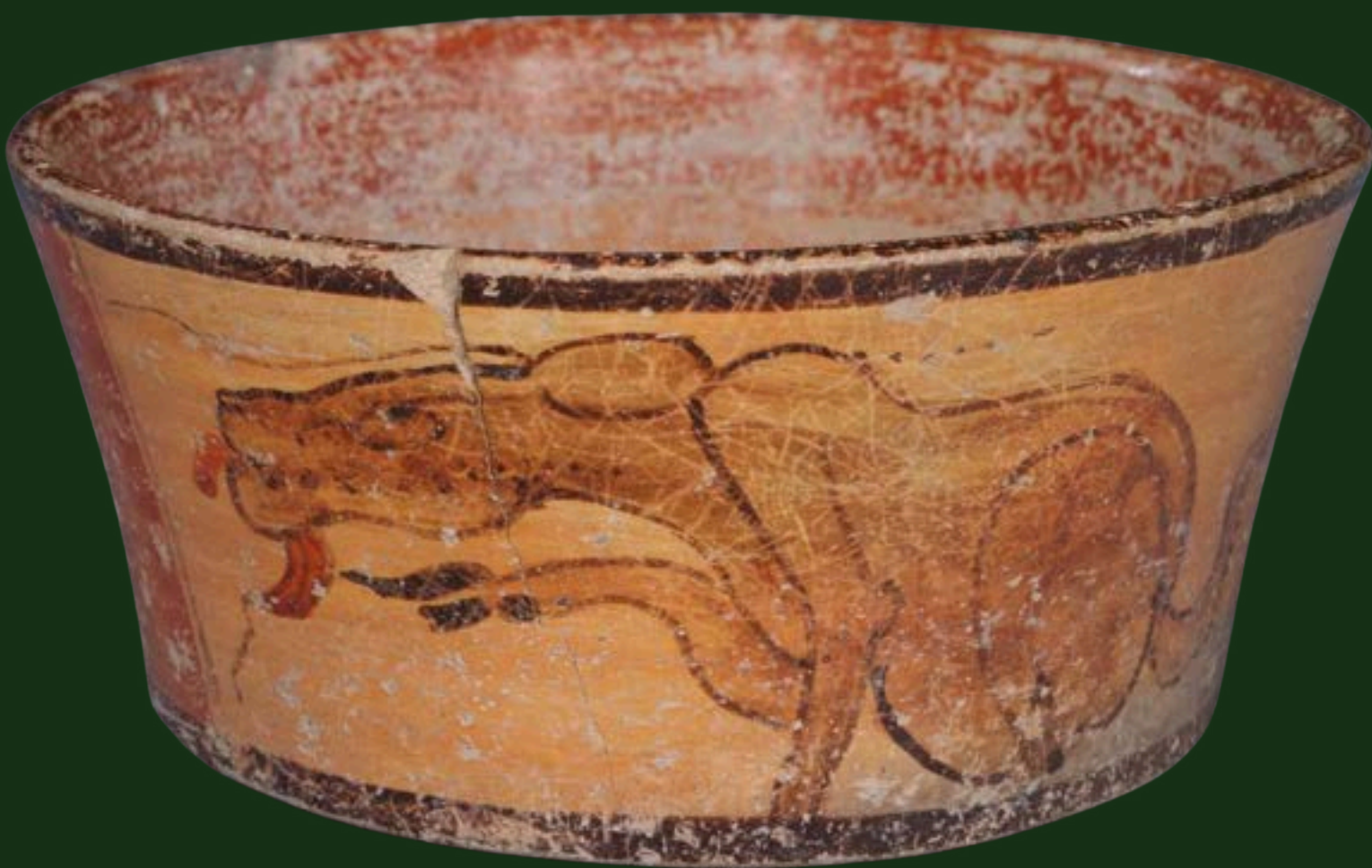


Fig. 40. This deer is pointing at something in front of it. Hopefully when Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, will be scanning these transparencies in the coming years, so we can find the other sides of this bowl.

This deer has his tongue sticking out. He has a narrow red “beard”. A thin winding line issues out of the back of his head. He has no antlers.

This Hellmuth photo was taken with a 4x5 Linhof camera with 4x5 inch film, so it can be enlarged and still show detail. We used this camera primarily when an archaeologist in Mexico would ask us to take photos for their project (which we donated). Or during the 18 months photographing across Mesoamerica for a Japanese coffee table book project.



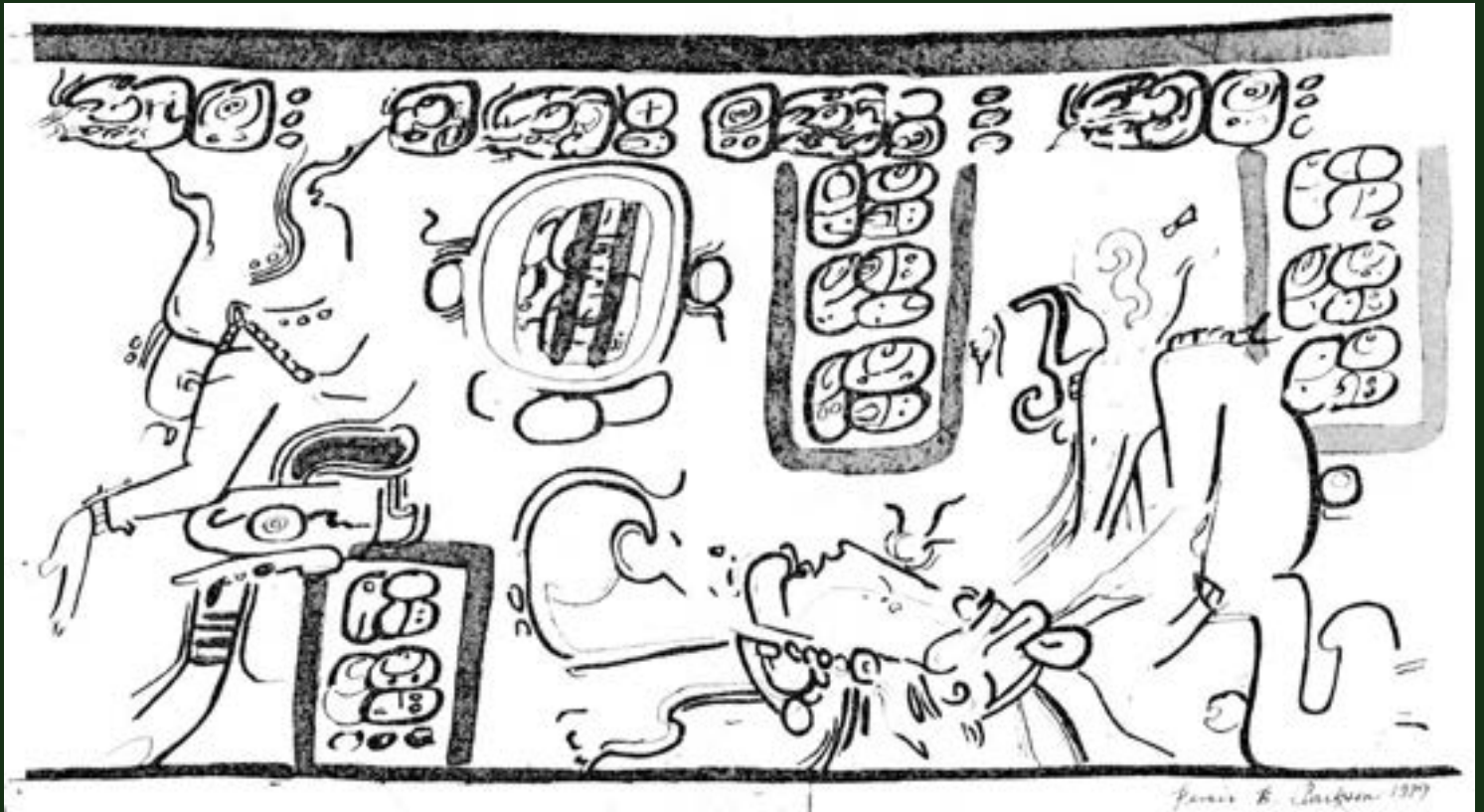


Fig. 41. Helpful drawing by Persis Clarkson in her MA thesis (1979: Fig. 9). This layout and style is similar to a different vase in Hellmuth 1976: Fig. 22.



Fig. 42, a and b. Preliminary drawing by Bryon Pacay from K9149. The Kerr Maya Vase Data Base says “Not for publication” but, no surprise, it has indeed been published by scholars. We show only the deer—the rest of the vase and especially the hieroglyphs are too eroded to provide a good drawing. The area where the deer are is also eroded but at least these provisional drawings show a deer seated on a common Maya throne. The other deer is in typical anthropomorphic seated position.

The animal which seems to have its arms tied has head of deer length and a vaguely enhanced deer tail—but no deer ears.

The other animal is more clearly a deer though it is hard to tell which is the actual tail—the one above his lower back or the overly thin and of non-deer length.



Fig. 43. This deer is running away from something, but there is no hunter behind him. His mouth is open in fear.

If my brain cells function for what is on the other side of this bowl, it is a Teotihuacan-related Yearsign.

This bowl may have been in a regional museum in southern Mexico.

The white underbelly is well pictured as is the white on the back of this “white tailed deer.” Same species as deer across much of USA.

His fur is shown as parallel diagonal lines just along the edges, not across the whole body. There are similar fur marks on Early Classic paintings—the one here is Late Classic.

When the 35mm color slides of the FLAAR Photo Archive are eventually scanned at Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, we can hopefully find the other sides of this bowl.



Fig. 44. Deer with antler and ear. The head, ear, and front leg have diagonal often slightly curved rows of fur (found on many Maya portraits of deer but not all of them). Very similar rows of parallel lines are found around the area from which the deer is emerging.

Looper suggests the deer is surrounded by rain.

Drawing by Dana G. Moot II from a polychrome ceramic vessel. We do not know of a photo of the actual vessel, but it is listed as being from the Museo Arqueologico Santa Barbara, Peten (Looper 2019: 107). This drawing was published by Looper 2019: page 108, Figure 5.15.

# Deer in Maya Murals or other Paintings



Fig. 45. Matthew Loper was very astute to find this anthropomorphic deer head on the Bonampak Murals (Room 3). He discusses the iconography on page 138.

The head has deer ears and deer antlers. The deer antlers are on the front of the upper part of the human-sided head. But there seems to be a domed head above, like you see on God D. But Loper astutely suggests this is a hunter's hat (Ibid.).

But this face has not quite enough God D features, albeit is an elderly man, perhaps related to the dying old man on many Codex Style vases (mentioned by Loper, page 138).

Or could be the bald supernatural with an extended lower lip/extended lower jaw that I show in other parts of this four-volume FLAAR Reports on deer iconography.

Helpful drawing by Dana G. Moot II in Loper 2019: page 139, Figure 6.13.



Fig. 46. Man with deer headdress on the walls of Naj Tunich cave, Peten, Guatemala.

What he has in his hand I have not yet identified.

Traditional hunters Hunahpu and Xbalanque are pictured in another scene (seated, not actively hunting). <https://www.ancientartarchive.org/naj-tunich-pictographs/>

There is a three-hour video by Barbara MacLeod on the Naj Tunich cave, from Aztlander <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vfmmn4SrPMQ>

Drawing by Dana G. Moot II in Looper 2019: page 124, Fig. 6.2.



Fig. 47. Deer being burnt on probably flaming platform. The deer is vomiting or spitting out probably as a result of the pain and suffering (if it was still alive when its heart was carved out).

The sacred tree with a Principal Bird Deity perched on top is a separate topic that we are working on.

Cropped from mural of San Bartolo, Str. Sub-1A, Las Pinturas, west wall.

Excellent drawing by Heather Hurst in 2010 publication by Taube, Saturno, Stuart and Hurst (Fig. 7).

# Deer on Late Classic Plates



Fig. 48. This deer has a furry tail and ear with the naturalistic blip at the end (actual deer ears are a tad longer).

As is frequent there is a resumed red tongue sticking out of his mouth.

No furry beard, instead has two geometric forms sticking out from his lower jaw.

Registered collection of Fundacion La Ruta Maya, on exhibit in the Hotel Hyatt Centric, Guatemala City.





Fig. 49. This deer has wide stylized antlers and his tongue (or a plant part) sticking out of his mouth. He has a “beard”

The face, ears, and body (but not the tail) have the fur shown in often diagonal series of parallel lines. This is found on other Maya portraits of deer, but not all of them. Usually the parallel areas are continuous across larger areas—here they are in short segments and at different angles.

Parallel lines to show animal fur is more frequent for peccary (Hellmuth 2024).

Drawing by illustrator working for FLAAR while Hellmuth was in Graz, Austria, doing research for his PhD dissertation. He was also studying lots of other topics besides just the Surface of the Underwaterworld.

These drawings may be used by scholars for articles and classroom presentations and presentations at symposia or conferences. These drawings may be used by students for term papers, theses and PhD dissertations—just cite the illustrator (when that is known) and cite the publication.



Fig. 50. This deer has something sticking out of his mouth, as is found with other deer (but the plant or object is always slightly different). The deer ears are more rectangular than normal. The hooves are very stylized. They are almost always pictured as solid black.

This deer has widely spaced curled blobs decorating its entire body. Would help if an epigrapher or iconographer could identify this symbol and the reason for having it all across the deer's body. It does not squiggle like the usual Caban signs.



Fig. 51, a and b. "Sound" or something is coming out of the mouth of this deer. His fur is shown by widely spaced black lines rather than closely spaced lines. His tail is thick.



Fig. 52. Seated deer but otherwise not too anthropomorphic—albeit the front legs are arm-like and nowhere near as thick as his legs. He has fur under his lower jaw. Tongue is sticking out. A black space covers the upper part of his face. The antler is naturalistic in size and shape, white color as usual. Two ears are shown, not oval, but stylized as long non-erect ears, with a row of spots down the middle and a larger black spot at the end. The deer has several sets of double black spots on his “arms” and legs. A glyph-like motif is on the middle of his body.

The deer is carrying a fabric-like bundle on his back.

The monster under the deer is a common seat or throne in other scenes.

So far I have not yet found a photograph of this Late Classic Maya plate. A color photograph of the actual plate would help.

Helpful drawing by Dana G. Moot II in Loope 2019: page 159, Figure 7.8.



Fig. 53, a and b. Dancing deer in anthropomorphic pose. Has a plant-like form issuing out from his head and slightly separated curls above.

There are two rows of circles in the scene.

The hieroglyphs remind me of what are called pseudo-glyphs, but best if an epigrapher makes a decision.

Deer with human hands and legs—meaning no deer hooves—are found in other scenes including vases.

Photographed many decades ago with permission of Edgar “Cush” Castillo in the Museo VIGUA in Antigua Guatemala.



Fig. 54. Deer with a monkey tail. We show more deer with monkey tails and monkeys with deer antler and deer ears in other volumes of our four-part series on iconography of deer in Maya art.

The ear is acceptable size and shape for a portrait of a Maya deer. No antler is shown. A wandering black line issues out from the head.

The hands and feet of the deer, and his sitting position, are anthropomorphic. No deer hooves are pictured.



Fig. 55. This walking anthropomorphic animal has his tongue sticking out. His ear is small, nowhere near the size of a deer ear. The head is not as long as a deer. What tops his head could be considered a stylized deer antler, or not. Thus it is unsure whether this is an actual deer.

He is holding a narrow bowl in his outstretched hand.



Fig. 56, a and b. Deer headdress but no hunting weapons or nets, and no ballgame associations. This deer's antlers are larger than normally portrayed elsewhere, keeping in mind that this plate has plenty of space for this size. This elite Maya man has his hands out suggesting perhaps that he is dancing (though this may be an ethnocentric interpretation). The Maya literally spoke with hand gestures (Ciura 2015 and Bishop and Cartmill 2021).

The Primary Standard Sequence is beautifully detailed. To have sixteen glyphs so well preserved in a PSS is rare. Several epigraphers have asked for copies of the photo of this plate so they can translate the text. Dana G. Boot II kindly sent me a drawing he made—I show it here in black-and-white so the colors do not distract you from seeing the details of the glyphs visible in this excellent drawing. Looper and Polyukhovych (2024) provide a translation for this PSS. We show other deer heads as headdresses in a chapter of that name and also in chapter on deer in stone sculptures.





Fig. 57. Large deer headdress with very large ears. The probably had a question-mark scroll motif.

The seated lord is “speaking with his hand” but there is no one in front of him. And why is he so far front on his seat? There is nothing else occupying the other 40% of the seat.

The three glyphs are so small they are tough to even call pseudo-glyphs.



Fig. 58. Nice rendering of the head of a deer. The ears have the usual blip at their end. The deer's tongue is sticking out as is very common. I estimate this means that the deer is dead.

He has the usually "beard" under his jaw.

Several decorations float over his head and a wandering line is behind his head.

The right part of the rows of motifs share some aspects with a Sky Band.

Photo by Justin Kerr, K2995.



Fig. 59. Polychrome plate with a deer coming out of the open fangs of a giant mythical Maya reptile. Probably snake-like though no body is pictured. Another reptile head is shown diagonally behind.



Fig. 60. Four deer repeated around the edge—three have a young deer seated in front of them. In the middle is a larger deer.

All have bands of parallel “fur marks”—horizontal on the neck and head and legs, vertical on the body. The tail has very thick black lines. The ears are of exaggerated length. The eye of each deer is solid black.

A kill hole was drilled in the middle but this is not to kill the deer, but to mean that any liquids will flow out of the plate when it is placed into the tomb.

Kerr photo, K5440.

Fig. 61. There are lots more deer pictured in the art of Campeche and Yucatan, just Google venado, ceramica Maya, Campeche, Yucatan. Our focus is on deer pictured in the regional styles of the Central Maya Lowlands.



There are obviously several more plates showing deer on plates from archaeological sites. One is from Holmul T93.76.2.2, shown in a nice rendering by Tokovinne. A hunter is featured in this scene, with a long-beaked bird behind him.

# Anthropomorphic deer—deer with human arms and legs and walking or standing like a human



Fig. 62. A deer is offering or receiving a container or simply an animal to another unidentified person at the left. Would need a rollout drawing at super-high resolution to be able to see all the detail.

The deer has human arms and legs. He has a long monkey tail curling up behind him (lots more to see in the volume on Kerr rollouts and other rollouts).

He has oval shaped ears and normal deer head, including with basic antlers.

It would help if we knew where this vase is today and to accomplish modern digital photography with cross-lighting to rescue more of the details.



Fig. 63. Deer standing up with human-like feet but front legs have hoof-like shape. The deer's furry skin is shown in splattered cross-lines.

He has a long monkey tail.

Incised peccary skull from Copan, published in dozens of books and articles.

There are lots of drawings of this incised peccary skull, but the one we show here is a drawing by Barbara Fash.

# Deer in Maya Hieroglyphs

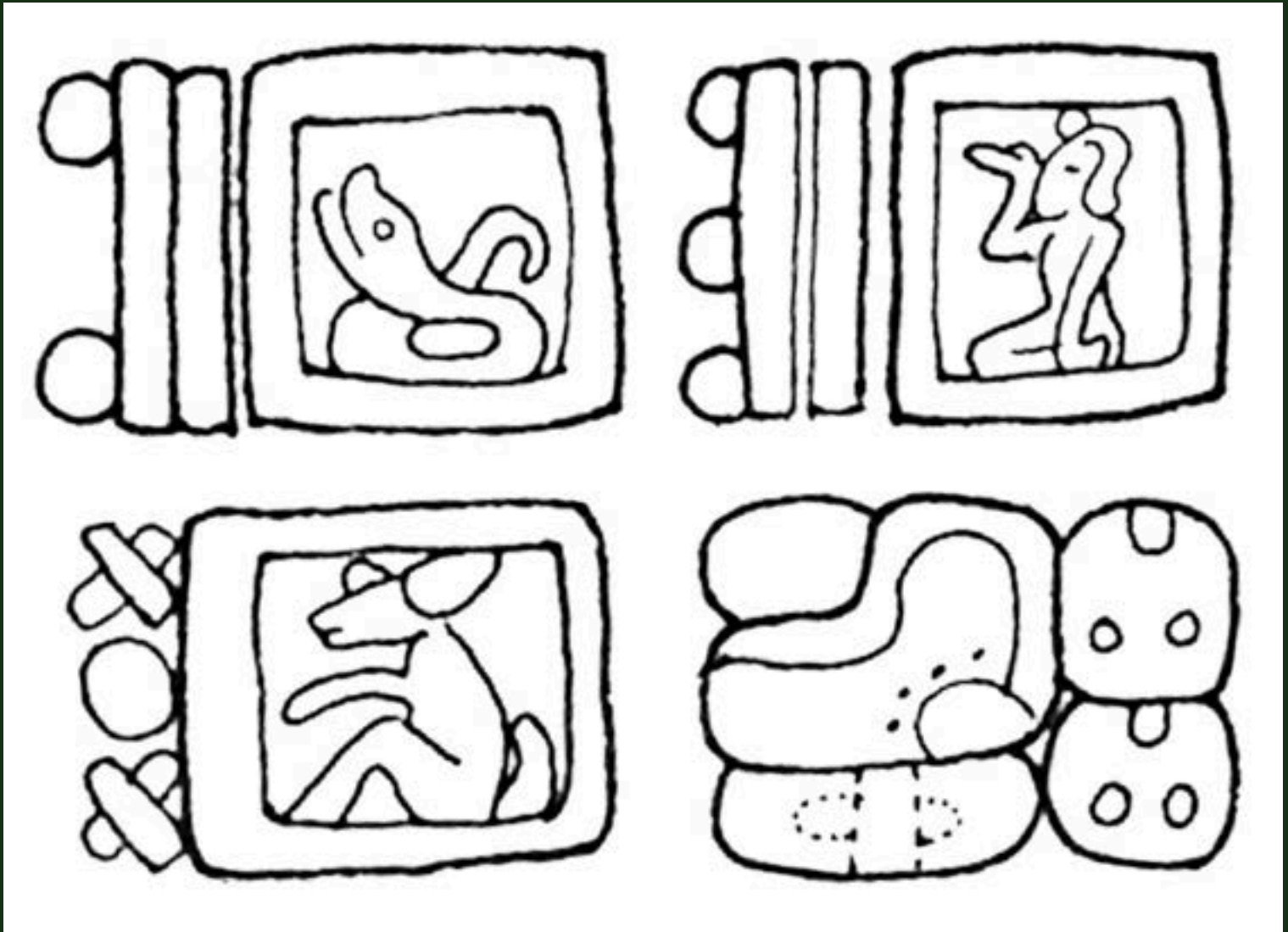


Fig. 64. Snake in one glyph, seated person in another, full-figure seated deer in the square cartouche of the lower left.

Square cartouches are what I would expect of non-Maya writing systems but this is on a Jimbal (Stela 1) in the Maya heartland.

Drawing by Linda Schele, SD-2029 © David Schele, drawing courtesy Ancient Americas at LACMA ([ancientamericas.org](http://ancientamericas.org)).

There should be lots more Maya hieroglyphs where deer or a deer head can be found. Additional examples can be found in Stuart 2024: Figure 3.



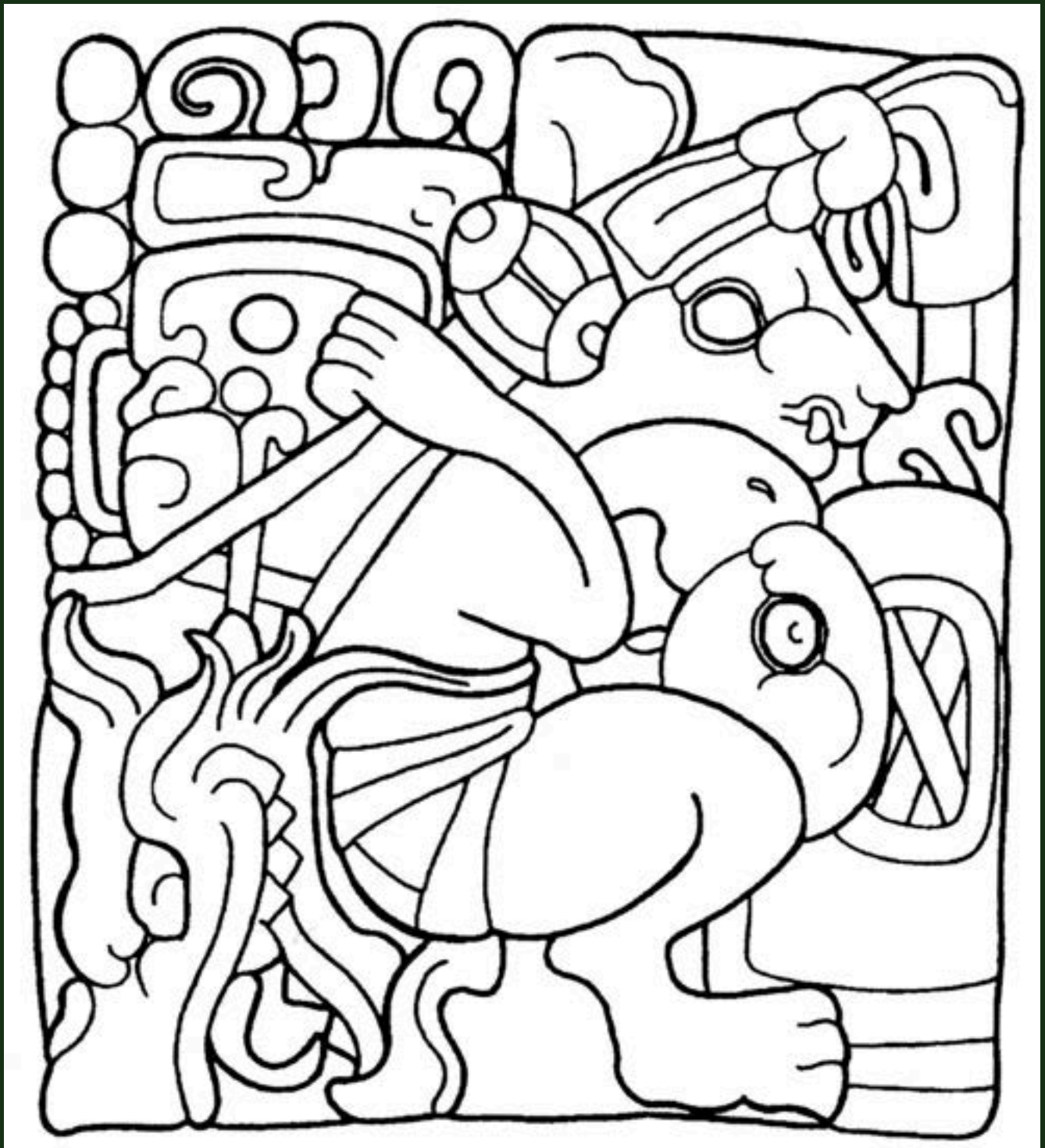


Fig. 65. Possible deer, though face is short and it could be another animal.

A possible upward-turned bird head has a beak that you could expect of a macaw, but the eye area lacks the background that is a noticeable aspect of a real macaw.

The animal is carrying another glyph in a tumpline.

Quirigua Zoomorph B, Glyph 10 (Looper 2003: page 175, Fig. 5.29).

Lots more deer, especially the head of a deer, can be found in Maya hieroglyphic writing. Our goal is to see a complete-bodied deer, or a royal Maya person with a deer headdress, so we show just samples. Other examples are from San Bartolo (<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/maya-calendar-hieroglyph-date-oldest-evidence>). This can probably also be found in publications on the San Bartolo murals.

Throughout the Bilbao area of Cotzumalguapa, Escuintla, you can see many sculptures that depict deer or hieroglyphs of a deer head. The Bilbao culture is non-Mayan—a fascinating mixture of diverse Mexican cultures that took root in Guatemala and developed a unique Guatemalan adaptation of a mixture of Teotihuacan, Classic Veracruz and other sources from Mexico. (Hellmuth 2011).

You can read about deer in Maya hieroglyphs in articles by David Stuart (2024).

There are dozens of three-dimensional figures of deer or Jaina-style or Peten equivalent of people with deer heads for headdresses. So there is a lot more to study but what is presented in the present Part I is together lots of material together and show them at a large size not realistic for a journal or commercial book publication.

# Summary and Conclusions on Deer in Maya Art

Deer are among the animals most commonly pictured in Classic Maya art. Jaguars, snakes and birds are also ubiquitous — then come monkeys, peccary, rabbits, large insects and other creatures. Armadillos and foxes can be found. Other animals are not as easy to identify. Scorpions and centipedes are also shown.

That deer are associated with monkeys is featured in the volume on rollouts of Maya vases.

Deer heads are often used as a headdress by Maya elite. I estimate these are fabricated heads—that only rarely did they use an actual physical head of a deer—it would need to be cleaned out so there was nothing that would rot. And the ears would no longer stand up. The most remarkable scene of deer heads as headdress are on three-dimensional figurines that show the unfortunate Maya individual who is up on a scaffold, probably about to be sacrificed.

The best source on the role of deer in Maya life is by Looper 2019. Hellmuth provided lots of FLAAR Photo Archive scans to Looper for his book. In the five years since that publication it has been possible to find and scan more 35mm color slides in the FLAAR Photo Archive so that is the purpose of the four volumes by FLAAR in 2025—to show additional images.

There are probably more images of Early Classic deer in this FLAAR Reports than in other studies. Today in year 2025 we have lots more scans available of vases, plates and bowls than we had in 2018-2019 when we sent sample photos to Matthew Looper.

Starry-Eyed Deer/Crocodiles in Bicephalic Cosmic Monsters have been studied by Looper and many other iconographers. But we show additional examples and all at large format so you can see the details better. Our recent digital photos of Copan altar of Stela M are the best photos of this sculpture that have yet been published. This involved taking an entire photo studio to Copan and photographing at night when the sunlight did not create unwanted angles of lighting. The remarkable drawing by Simon Martin (2015: Fig. 39,b) shows this Copan altar in the same quality as a drawing, which is often more helpful for iconographic research than a photograph. The advantage of having an entire photo team at Copan is that we can photograph both sides and at different angles (Hellmuth 2023).

Although Kerr also photographed Maya plates, most photography and publications have been on vases and bowls, so Hellmuth dedicated years to finding and photographing plates—that we show in the chapter on plates here and in other parts of this series on iconography of Maya deer.

Surely there are a lot more deer in Maya hieroglyphs, but we introduce several examples in that chapter plus show more in the chapter on deer in the Maya codices.

Lots more topics and conclusions on the iconography of deer in Maya art are in Parts II, III, and IV.

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Page 478, Fig. 26.8,a shows a victim bound on a scaffolding, he has a deer head headdress

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