

**Deer  
Hunting  
Hats worn as  
Headdresses  
by Maya  
Ballplayers**

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# Deer Heads worn as Headdress by Maya Ballplayers



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# Deer Hides worn by Maya Ballplayers

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# Introduction to Ballplayers and Deer Hunters often Wearing Identical Hats or Deer Heads

It has long been recognized that hunter's hats are often worn by Maya ballplayers (on vases and bowls). This was documented in detail by Hellmuth (1991, 1996e, 1996f, 1996h, 1996i). We can now show over 80% of the ballgame scenes where at least one but often two players feature a deer head as the ballplayer headdress or the same type of sombrero as worn by deer hunters. Plus many Maya ballplayers wear a deer hide as an open skirt-like leather to protect their hips and legs. So the present FLAAR Reports shows as many of these scenes as we have found so far in the Kerr archives and in the FLAAR Photo Archive. Plus we introduce the "pseudo-God L" wide brim feather headdress, worn by warriors and also ballplayers (Hellmuth 1996i). This raises the question, were some Maya ballgames a "deer hunt" and also "warriors fighting the enemy"? Or were these headdresses emblematic of the status and history of the Maya man that wore that headdress: "I am a successful deer hunter," or "I am a successful warrior". The headdresses of ballplayers that show birds raise additional unanswered questions.

Deer are so common in Maya scenes on ceramics and occasionally on stone sculpture and murals, that we have researched and produced four different FLAAR Reports on iconography of deer in Maya art:

Part I: Deer Iconography in Classic Maya Art, Just Deer, No Hunting Scenes

Part II: Deer in Maya Art, Iconography, Deer in Kerr Rollouts, Hellmuth Digital Rollouts, Rollout Drawings from FLAAR Illustrators and Rollout Drawings by Dana G. Moot II

Part III: Deer Hunters' Headdresses and Conch Shell Musical Instruments

Part IV: Deer Heads worn as Headdress by Maya Ballplayers, Deer Hunting Hats worn as Headdresses by Maya Ballplayers

You can also find abundant iconographic and archaeological documentation of deer in the thorough 2019 book by Matthew Looper, *The Beast Between: Deer in Maya Art and Culture*. We appreciate his permission to utilize drawings from this book in FLAAR Reports. Drawings by Kornelia Kurbjuhn have been helpful in several of our FLAAR Reports on deer (Kurbjuhn 1983). A helpful painting by Heather Hurst in Miller and Martin 2003 shows a very fancy version of the "pseudo-God L warrior headdress". A drawing by David Findlay in the report by David Pendergast (1969: Fig. 12) is appreciated. Dana G. Moot II kindly provided drawings that include deer as did Matthew Looper. Decades of rollout photography by Justin Kerr and years of re-organizing his rollout photos by the team at Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University are essential to any and all studies of Maya iconography. I thank Camila Morales for assisting FLAAR for decades to scan thousands of our 35mm color slides so that I have a digital corpus with which to document all the iconography reports that I am producing especially in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

In October 2024 the FLAAR Photo Archive of an estimated 30,000+ 35mm color slides and tens-of-thousands of black-and-white negatives (35mm and medium format film) have all been donated by Hellmuth and FLAAR to Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. So the citation of each photo should now be Photo by Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR Photo Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. The entire physical archive was picked up by a truck sent by Dumbarton Oaks and delivered there in mid-November. It will obviously take time and staff to unpack the 124 boxes, sort, arrange, and then start to catalog and start to scan the slides for an eventual database. But the goal of Hellmuth is to make all these multiple decades of photography of the previous century, with Leica for 35mm and Hasselblad for medium format, available to students and scholars around the world. There are not 30,000 artifacts—each vase, bowl or plate was photographed multiple times. And often each individual hieroglyph of a vase, bowl, or plate was photographed one-by-one at 1:1 macro close-up size. So a single vase could produce 20 different photographs. We often photographed the same ceramic in color and separately in black-and-white.

The digital rollouts by Hellmuth with a special digital rollout camera and also digital photos with a regular Canon, Sony or Nikon digital camera, are together in a separate FLAAR Digital Photo Archive which we will donate when it is better organized

# Deer Headdresses Worn by Maya Ballplayers on Late Classic Vases, especially in Kerr Rollouts



Fig. 1. Obvious deer head headdress on the ballplayer at the left. The player down on his padded knee has a “pseudo-God L headdress” whose association with royalty and warriors I have discussed in Hellmuth 1996i. The flowers sticking out in front of two headdresses is also present on other ballgame scenes. The iconography of the long-beaked bird needs to be researched. A Primary Standard Sequence, PSS, is across the top. This should allow epigraphers to find other vases painted at least by the same scribe.

Kerr rollout K2803, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.





Fig. 2. Deer head has antlers and small ear. A stem with a flower sticks out, as also on the opposing standing player. In this scene it is the player at the left who is down on his knee. The two standing players have “pseudo-God-L headdress” similar to the preceding vase scene. The animal hides are clearly actual hides due to the widely spaced blips on that of the standing central player. These blips are the result of a hide being pegged down and as it dries the hide shrinks a centimeter or so but the pegged areas stay in their original position.

The “laughing” God N in the PSS should allow epigraphers to find other dedicatory texts by the same scribe on other vases. The vertical glyphs are “blank”. Kerr rollout, K1921, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size. This scan has a yellow tone—compare with same scene on Maya Vase Data Base.

# “Pseudo-God-L Warrior Headdresses” worn by Warriors and by Ballplayers, often in same Ballgame as Deer Heads as Headdresses



Fig. 3. Deer headdress at the right—pseudo-God-L headdress at the left. We can now see that this wide-brimmed row of feathers is common in ballplayer scenes when playing against a player with deer headdress. Hellmuth 1996i shows the same headdress being worn by elite and warriors.

The ballgame ball in this scene is huge, possibly to make space for the two hieroglyphs? The largest balls are pictured at Yaxchilan and elsewhere. A good example is Yaxchilan, Structure 33, Step VII where an entire person is decorating the ball, meaning potentially that as a human sacrifice he is inside this ball. If actual balls this size existed they were most likely used for ceremonies, rather than a complete game.

In the Early Classic Tiquisate area, shown on cylindrical tripods, and in very Late Classic on the Chichen Itza ballcourt sculptures, skulls were featured on the ball, suggesting that a skull could have been inside (or painted on the outside).

Kerr rollout K3842 is not yet in the Dumbarton Oaks database so the digital file size is so low you can't show it without fuzziness at full-page width. This is why the Dumbarton Oaks database is so helpful for other scenes.





Fig. 4. The headdress has a wide brim with a row of vertical features (probable feathers on other headdresses) with a center part rising above, albeit not as far above as in Tepeu 2 paintings. I estimate the present painting is more likely Tepeu 1. There is not space on this bowl for the upper part of the headdress to be in actual position, so it is shown diagonally.

Even though a variant, I call this a pseudo-God L warrior headdress (so not really a God L headdress but shares some features).

This bowl is from same region or potentially same atelier as a bowl that shows a deer hunting scene that we show in that volume.

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

An even larger example of this headdress is in a Heather Hurst drawing of the Lord of the jaguar-pelt throne vase, AD 650–800, from the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (Miller and Martin 2003).



Fig. 5. In front of the throne and behind the throne are two warriors each with a slightly different variant of the wide-brimmed pseudo-God-L warrior headdress. This is not a ballgame scene—this is an event after a successful battle.

Kerr rollout, K4549, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.





Fig. 6. At the left several possible warriors wear the wide-brimmed hat with a horizontal row of “feathers” and a dome sticking out of the top often with additional mass of feathers on top. This scene also has two medium-sized parasols, often seen in battles.

This scene deserves a rollout line-drawing so you can see the details of the mass of people at the left and so you can see the incredible scene behind the throne hut. Once fresh higher resolution professional scans have been finished then the Dumbarton Oaks database will have rollouts at an even better resolution so illustrators can see details to help their drawings. It would really help to have RAW files available of the scans, because with a RAW file an illustrator would be able to see much more. Plus, if you use Capture One software from Phase One in Denmark you can see and process more detail than in Adobe Photoshop.

The hieroglyphs on this ceramic are of an excellent scribe whose style I recognize since I found the identical style on several painted vases or bowls in the FLAAR Photo Archive.

Kerr rollout, K7716, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.





Fig. 7. The ruler seated on the throne has an unusually fancy headdress where the row of vertical feathers are much longer and wave in different directions. Rising from the middle is the same dome as on other pseudo-God-L warrior headdresses, but here no spears or other warrior aspects are present other than the parasol at the far left.

Helpful drawing by Heather Hurst in Miller and Martin 2003. I have not found any Kerr rollout photo that shows this throne scene. The vase is in the National Gallery of Victoria.



Fig. 8,a. Unclear whether the kneeling player is really this short or not. The standing player in front has a pseudo-God-L headdress.





Fig. 8,b. A variant of a hunter's hat is worn by this ballplayer. All the kneepads seem to be on the left leg but that may be because that is the only way to show them.





Fig. 8,c. The player at the right has a “pseudo-God L warrior headdress”.



Figs. 8,d, e, f. Another view of the two common ballplayer headdresses. Curiously all these players face in one direction as though they are all one team? Or, are they players of two teams joined together in a pre-game or post-game ceremony? It is rare to have more than three players on one team, though there are so many different games and different contexts that anything is possible.



# More Ballplayers with Deer Heads as a Headdress



Fig. 9. Four of these Maya ballplayers have deer headdresses. Their ears are a regional style (oval instead of long). So these are hand-made headdresses, not actual deer heads. The ballplayer down on his knee wears the headdress of a supernatural that needs more study—may be related to a deer hunting deity. It is notable that players on both teams wear identical headdresses and have identical decorations on their animal hide protective clothing. I estimate these are deer hides. It is curious that one team has three players and the other only two players (probably due to lack of space for everyone to be pictured). The back person on each team is “speaking with identical hand gestures. The unexpected dwarf in the middle is also speaking with a hand gesture.

The person at the end is not a player, he is a musician blowing his conch shell.

No ballcourt architecture is visible in this scene. The glyphs are not a PSS—they are mostly repeated images, potentially to be labeled as pseudo-glyphs. Kerr rollout, K1871, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size. This Kerr scan is a completely different color (more yellow, more red) than the version shown on Maya Vase Data Base.



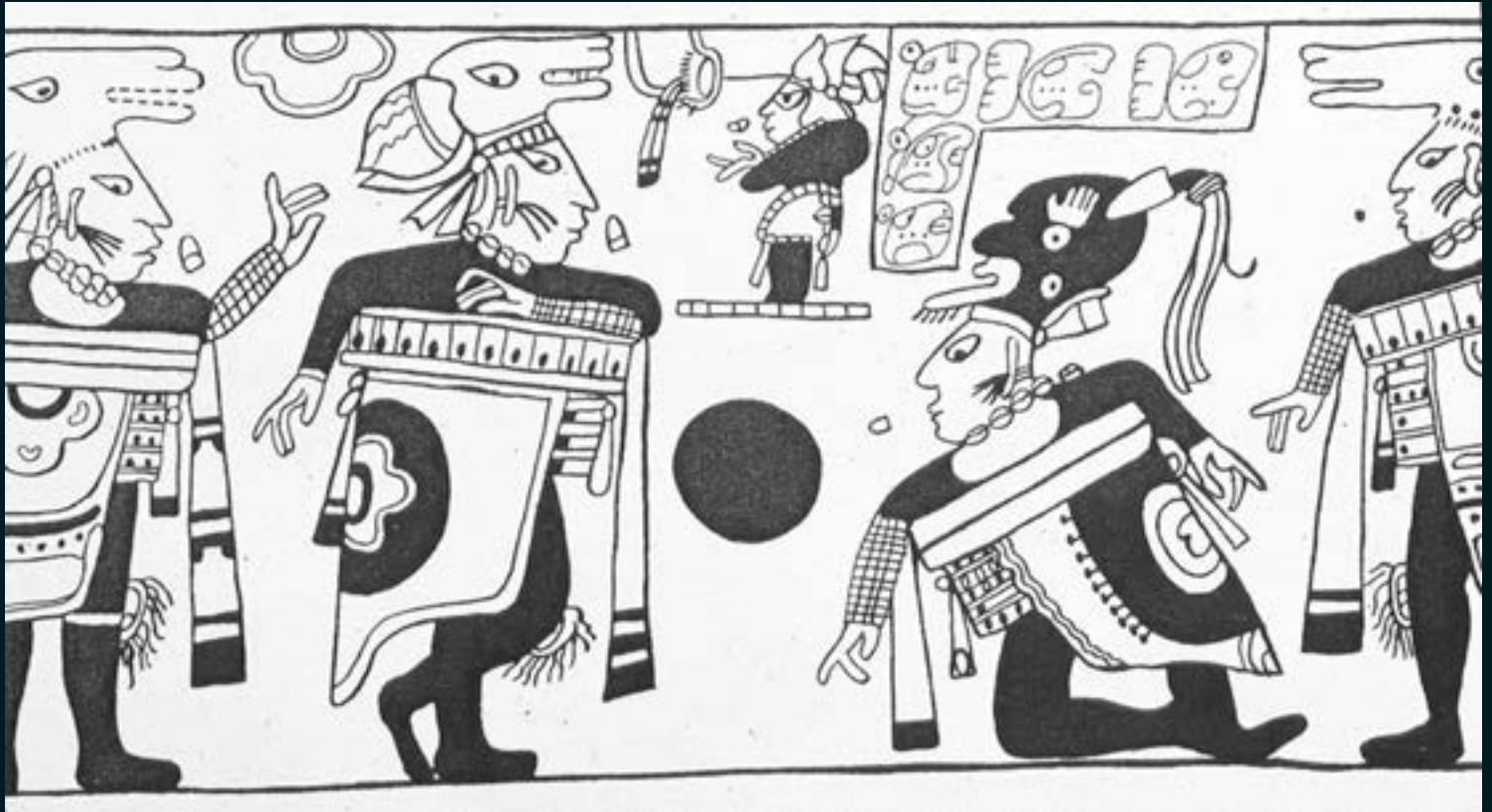


Fig. 10, a. This is the only part of this FLAAR drawing that I found. The black headdress reminds me of another headdress of a bald man with facial hair growing from an extended lower jaw (on front cover of Hellmuth 1996e).



Fig. 10, b and c. Studying ballgame gear is a totally separate future research project. The present report is on the headdresses that are related to deer hunting or to warfare.





Fig. 10, d and e. One player has horizontal aspects to his chest-high ball deflector. The player in front has vertical aspects. Both have a knee protector on their left knee, since they are the team on the left. The team on the right has kneepad on their right knee.





Fig. 11, a. Although the headdress is eroded, I estimate this is the same bald head with extended lower lip/extended lower jaw as is in hunting scenes and on a ballplayer of Kerr rollout K1871.



Fig. 11, b. This ballplayer's headdress is either a short flat-snouted deer or a peccary (but no bristles are shown). Both the ballplayers on this bowl have protective covering of their left hand. One player has his knee pad on this right leg; on the other player no knee pad is visible.





Fig. 12. Deer headdress on 3-dimensional ceramic figurine of a Maya ballplayer.

Surely there ought to be additional examples of such 3-dimensional ballplayers with deer headdresses.



Fig. 13. This hunter in the middle has similar head but no extended lower lip/lower jaw, but has a beard. Not yet documented whether the same hunter patron as headdress in the ballplayer scene. Actun Balam vase published as a drawing by David Findlay by David Pendergast, used with his permission (we show this also in the deer hunting volume).





Fig. 14. Hunters also wearing animal hides as cloaks—here on Kerr rollout K0414 the hides even have an obvious deer tail. Maya ballplayers wear the animal hide lower on the body, not from the shoulders.



Fig. 15. This helpful drawing by Dana G. Moot II, also with permission from Matthew Looer (Looer 2019: page 67, Fig. 3.6). show a peccary, deer, and four Maya hunters wearing deer hides as clothing, but as a shawl from the shoulders, not mainly on the lower body as for ballplayers.





Fig. 16. An obvious deer head as a headdress. As on over 90% of ballplayers, this deer has no design in the ear. The mouth has a tongue-like design in front and the deer has facial hair under his lower jaw.

The necklace of the deer-headdress ballplayer has an iconic design that can be found elsewhere and thus may help to further identify the role of this player.

The other ballplayer's headdress has a row of identical-sized triangular teeth—no fangs. Its ear is very large with an unexpected empty space at the top.

The horizontal hieroglyphs include several glyphs that are also in a traditional PSS. But the text here has only 8 hieroglyphs. A PSS around a plate can have 21 or 22 (or occasionally more glyphs) and a PSS around a vase will normally have between a dozen to a score of individual glyphs.

Kerr rollout, K2022, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.



Fig. 17, a, b, c. The ball is large and is being played with two steps behind the player. The player has the usual horizontal ball deflector.

To save space in the captions we do not credit each photograph, but all photos that are not from the Kerr database are Hellmuth photos from the FLAAR Photo Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.





Fig. 17, d, e. A third “step” has a slightly diagonal front. The animal headdress has not yet been identified.



Fig. 18, a, b, c. Terraced architecture alongside these two players. The deer headdress has the usual squiggle-?-mark design as on deer in mythical situations. The back player has his body painted black.





Fig. 18, d, e, f. Rare for a ballgame ball to be shown like this. The deer head has the usual squiggle-?-mark design as on deer in mythical situations. The back player has his entire body painted black.



Fig. 18, g, h. This is one of the few Maya ballgame scenes where a slope is shown in the associated architecture (but the slope is continuous, with no separate lower area). But terraces are clearly shown at the end of the sloped part. So I estimate that this scene is in the end-zone, and the slopes are shown pinched near each other in order to show both sides of a ballcourt alley. All the architecture pictured on all the ballgame scenes needs to be shown architecturally (lots more in Kerr database and Hellmuth photos).

This vase we have not found in a Kerr rollout. The rollout drawing is probably from FLAAR illustrators but no reference is in the scan name.

This is one of the few ballplayer scenes where the deer heads have spiral-?-mark symbols in the ears. The ball is shown as a ball-within-a-ball. The player is moving his wrist padding to hit the ball (not his ball deflector). So this wrist protection needs to be further studied.

The necklaces of three of the players are very similar and need further study.





Fig. 19. Notice the two architectural aspects of this ballcourt. One is a stack of four “steps” or levels (this Kerr rollout repeats that segment of the scene both at the left and repeated at the right). In the middle is a six-stepped platform. No diagonal slope of an actual ballcourt alley is shown whatsoever. The player at the left has a decorated deer head as headdress. The player at the right has a waterbird whose beak is holding a fish. Both players are quite tall, especially their legs. The player at the left is painted dark gray; the player at the right is painted red with an unpainted outline. The round banner I would expect to see in a battle scene or in a palace scene with warriors present.

Kerr rollout, K1209, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.



Fig. 20, a, b, c. This deer head has no squiggle or crossed-bands in its ears. The antlers are small probably due to lack of space. The kneepad seems to be a face. Both players are using their right leg/right knee to play. Both players have a lot of decoration on a wide strip of “cloth” at the front of their side ball deflector.





Fig. 20, d, e, f. An epigrapher can advance our knowledge of who and what is being discussed by the hieroglyphs. For this player to wear a waterbird with a fish still in its mouth shows how important this waterbird is to this elite player. Both his wrists are slightly protected (so not just one wrist). He wears a jaguar hide (or a deer hide painted with stylized feline spots).



Fig. 20, f, h. Parasols of similar size can be seen in Bonampak, Room 2, battle scene in drawings by CIW and Heather Hurst, published in several monographs and articles by Mary E. Miller. Parasols (also called battle standards) are found in many palace scenes.





Fig. 21. The player at the right has the deer headdress. But in other scenes it is a player on the left. Only two players are in this game—everyone else is an attendant or a conch shell musician (especially the person in the middle, who using his hand gesture to “speak” to the player).

Ballcourt architecture is pictured—pure steps—no sloping area.

Rollout photo by Kerr, K2731, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.



Fig. 22. This scene can help rewrite monographs on the Maya ballgames, since this scene shows each athlete holding a medium-sized ball in their hand. And no knee pad, no ball deflector. This vase is totally authentic as you can tell by the PSS hieroglyphs and all the details of the scene. The yellow tone is a scanning software error, not the original color used by the Maya painter in the Late Classic.

The player in black paint wears a high domed hat. The other player wears a deer head, including a modest-sized antler.

God D is sitting atop a monster head. At the right of the players two owls and other birds are featured, including a large bird sitting in the tree with a deity head as the lower part of the trunk (deity head trees are common in Maya art). What all this has to do with a handball game needs to be researched.

This scan of K1288 has the same yellow tone as other scans provided to Dumbarton Oaks. They are now rescanning the original Kerr transparencies to achieve a much better resolution, and hopefully these new scans will not have the yellow tone as you see here (compare this scan to the one in the original Kerr Maya Vase Data Base).

Kerr rollout, K1288, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.





Fig. 23. Three long trumpets are visible in this scene, so clearly for a ballgame these are present but there is not space in many scenes to include them. The kneeling person in the middle holds a giant conch shell and gestures with his fingers towards the ballplayer below (same as in another ballgame scene, K2731). On both scenes the ballplayers are in front of steps or terraces (on K2731 the terraces or steps do not go very high). On K3814 there are at least five terraces. And these are terrace-height, not step height except perhaps for the lowest one. Kerr lists this as Peabody Museum, Yale.

This scene could fuel an entire PhD dissertation on Late Classic Maya ballgame outfits, since the deflectors here are around the waist and are tied around the back (so more like a Mexican yoke than a chest-high Peten area “ball deflector.” But no hacha, no ballgame handstone, and no palma are being used in Tepeu 1 or Tepeu 2 times in the Central Maya Lowlands. Exceptions can be found (with “Mexican ballgame accessories” but these examples are rare).

The bundle at the upper right reminds me of bundles stacked on the ground or carried by skeletal Xibalba demons on Red Background Tepeu 1 parades of wayob. We show these parades in other volumes on deer and on iconography of spider monkeys.

The scans in the Dumbarton Oaks database are a definitely improved digital resolution. These scans are by Kerr, I would assume in past years. Many have a yellow tone that is not easy to get rid of. If the file were RAW it would be easier to correct. Kerr rollout, K3814, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.



Fig. 24. This is one of the most helpful of the many Maya ballgame scenes in part because there are hieroglyphs next to each individual. Additionally, the ballgame outfits are tied on around the waist not wrapped around the chest. These tied-on yoke-sized outfits are probably wood though other materials are possible. Compare these to K3814. If you look at all the ballgame outfits shown on carved stone stelae, panels, and steps you see even more sizes, shapes, and positions for ballgame outfits made to hit the ball.

One player wears a deer head as headdress, with the tongue coming out of the mouth to suggest that it is an actual deer. He has a deer-like hieroglyph at the bottom of the vertical column of glyphs in front of him. There are two players on the “bird headdress team” and three players on the other team. They wear knee pads on their right leg. On the other team the forward player wears kneepad on his left leg while curiously the right player wears it on his right leg (perhaps because of lack of space to show it on his left leg).

The gesturing man on the upper terrace has a conch shell as a hieroglyph in front of him. What he holds in his hand is either a conch shell or a bird (too eroded to tell from this photo). The other person “dancing and singing” on the steps or terrace is definitely carrying a bird. His dance partner is shaking rattles for music. Lots of swirls are all over the scene.

This ballgame is clearly in front of a set of steps or terraces—not being played with any sloping ballgame architecture. The Copan ballcourt has lots of steps on other parts of its architecture. Kerr rollout, St. Louis Art Museum, K5435, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.





Fig. 25. These are clearly ballplayers because the team on the right has knee pads (on their right foot but the other two on their left foot but that is more likely just to show the knee pad more easily). On the team to the left, he also has his pad on his right foot. Two of the players wear narrow brimmed, curved-top hats that can be compared and contrasted with hats worn by deer hunters. There were hundreds of Maya cities with ballcourts across the Lowlands and Highlands and more hundreds of Maya towns. So far, all ballgame scenes on vases are from the Lowlands, specifically the Peten area but some could be from adjacent southern Campeche and adjacent Belize. So different kinds of ballgame outfits should be expected.

They have hip-level outfits like the previous two scenes, but the ones on K2801 are not shown as tied—they appear to go all around the entire body, though perhaps they are tied at the back? Or, open at the back like a stone yoke? I have worn a stone yoke on several occasions, once while playing the ballgame for a TV documentary. I actually played in a ballcourt at Xochicalco. The yoke that was worn by another player that was leather, filled with stuffing, collapsed after being hit by the ball on just several occasions. The stone yoke was easy for me to wear and run around in, even though I myself am not an athlete. But I practiced for many weeks, before the game, walking around wearing a sand-filled yoke to get my muscles accustomed to the weight around this part of my body.



Fig. 26. Is the player's hand down on the step that is alongside him? This may be a pre-game or post-game ceremony since no other team is present. Instead of the expected other team, there are three people all with similar clothing and similar headdresses. One is down on his knees in a subservient gesture. Behind are two musicians—one playing the traditional conch shell, the other playing a trumpet. Look at some of the Chama/Nebaj palanquin procession scenes to see if trumpets are being carried there.

The headdress can be identified as a deer by the large oval ears with crossed-bands motif and the beard on the lower jaw. Next hunter has headdress of another animal. Final player has a bird's headdress. Kerr rollout, K5937, downloaded from Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital file size.



# Trumpets, Hunter's Hats (Sunburn Protection Hats), and Conch Shells in Chama and Nebaj Style Processions



Fig. 27. Maya trumpets come in several different sizes and shapes. But the trumpets in this Chama style procession are clearly similar to those in the ballgame scene of K5937.

Drawing used by Sheseña 2014: Fig. 13 citing Sharer 2003: 657, drawn from Kerr K594 (K0594). Same drawing is in Kurbjuhn 2008: Fig.1 from Morley 1956 Pl.92,b.

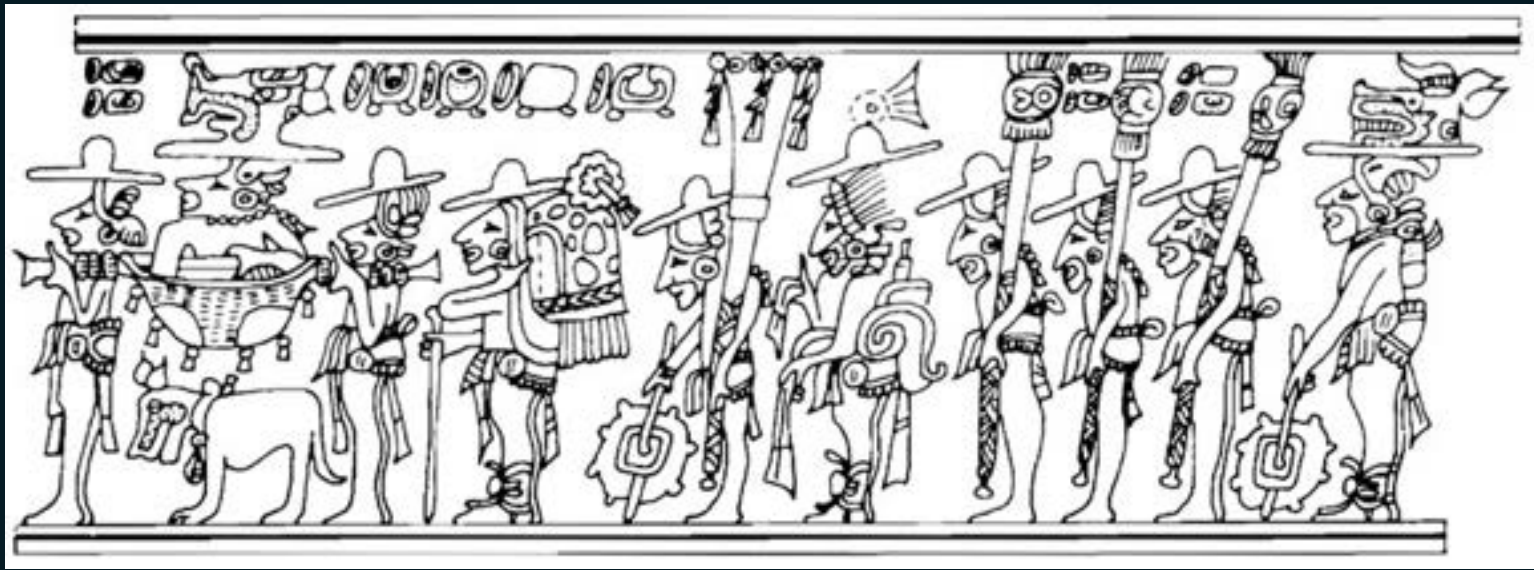


Fig. 28. Trumpets and conch shells are used in many Maya ceremonies. Here are trumpets and a giant conch shell being carried in a Chama-Nebaj style procession. Drawing courtesy of Kornelia Kurbjuhn (1983: Fig. 3). Peccary-like head atop the elite individual in the palanquin; deer head in the last person in this parade.



# Summary and Concluding Remarks on Deer Heads and Hunting Hats being worn by Maya Ballplayers in Tepeu 1 and Tepeu 2 Ballgame Scenes

It is notable that deer heads in many ceremonial scenes have crossed-bands or other celestial symbols, especially in the Starry-Eye Deer Crocodile on the Bicephalic Cosmic Monster. But deer heads as headdresses for ballplayers usually have no celestial symbols decorating their ears. However some do have the squiggle-? Sign.

The trumpets shown in several ballgame scenes remind us of trumpets carried by attendants with a noble being carried in a palanquin on Chama/Nebaj style vases. It is widely considered that he is deceased and being guided to life after death by a faithful dog. But it also could be another type of procession. I am open to various options.

Most Tepeu 1 and Tepeu 2 ballplayer scenes, whether on vases, bowls, figurines or sculptures, show the ballplayers wearing chest-high outfits that I have long-ago named ball deflectors. None of these are yokes, so more than 50% of the reports on ballgames have incorrect captions. That said, the yokes were already known throughout the Costa Sur on Tiquisate style ballgame scenes. And stone yokes have been found in many areas south of El Tajin and other areas. So the Classic Maya would have known about yokes for many centuries. I have worn actual stone yokes and have worn yokes made for TV documentary. If you are a trained athlete you can easily wear a stone yoke while playing. I have researched the ballgames of Mesoamerica for several decades and have written over 2,300 pages of documents already by the 1990's. There are several Kerr rollouts that show yoke-sized ballgame outfits instead of chest-high ball deflectors. So the Late Classic Maya had various options.

Headdresses for ballplayers include lots more than just deer heads. Other players wore heads of other animals, various bird heads, and a potential deer-hunter-related supernatural. When not wearing an animal or deity headdress, other players wore the pseudo-God L-warrior headdress (Hellmuth 1996e). Several other sizes and shapes of hats were worn by ballplayers—many of these remind me of the hats worn by deer hunters (that we show in the several volumes on Maya deer hunters).

The size of the ball ranges from impressive size to larger than expected. But in the Maya Lowlands, on scenes on vases and bowls, none of these balls shows a skull. But stone sculptures that feature balls show different things, so ballgame balls are an entirely different research project—for example, were they hollow? If solid rubber these would have been very heavy.

Most ballgame scenes on pottery that show ballcourt architecture show steps or terraces rather than the sloping side of the ballcourt alley. Keep in mind that the present report shows only ballgame scenes where the players wear same hat as a hunter, or wear a deer head. There are lots more ballplayer scenes in the Kerr rollouts that show other ballcourt architecture. To see dozens of photos and drawings of the steps associated with the Copan ballcourt, you can download the double-page horizontal width Hellmuth 2023 photo album and description. Most ballcourts had steps, often on many sides of the end zone and behind the main platforms. Yes, all ballcourts had the playing alley, but it is rarely pictured in Maya art. An exception is a Tikal graffito that shows the players clearly in the playing alley, and shows the ballcourt clearly with steps on the back of both sides of the ballcourt (Trik and Kampen 1983: Figure on page 46).

Conch shells are occasionally shown held by attendants in the ballgame. Conch shells are used in many situations but especially by deer hunters. So the Maya ballgames have several associations with deer hunting: hats and conch shells. Several ballgame scenes show large trumpets. Large trumpets are also carried on palanquin procession scenes on Chama/Nebaj Highland Maya vases.

One vase (K5435) shows a bird being held by an attendant. Curiously, no vase or sculpture or mural shows crowds watching the game—at most a few musicians on the stands (K5435) or attendants at the level of the ballcourt.

Everyone (tour guides and scholars) say that “the hands were not allowed to play the game.” Of course, they should realize that there were several different types of ballgames, just as today we have basketball, baseball, soccer, tennis, etc. The Maya had hand-ball games, as also you see in Cotzumalhuapa-Bilbao area. A handball Maya game is clearly pictured on K1288 in front of a terraced stone structure.



# References Cited and additional Suggested Reading

My first report on ballgames was in 1974. Then a longer report especially on Maya ballgames was 1975. Then two-thousand more pages in the 1990's. Lots of other scholars have written helpful reports. I show samples below.

CLARKSON, Persis Banvard

1979 Classic Maya attire as indicators of status, role and function: or you can dress them up but you can't take them anywhere. MA thesis, University of Calgary. 217 pages.

COE, Michael D.

1982 Old gods and young Heroes: the Pearlman collection of Maya Ceramics. Israel Museum.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1974 Veracruz-style thin stone heads and ball game yokes from Escuintla, Guatemala. *Katunob* 8(2):41-45. Univ. of Northern Colorado, Museum of Anthropology. Greeley, Colo.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1975a Pre-Columbian Ballgame, Archaeology & Architecture, Tikal and Copan. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research Progress Reports. Vol. 1 No. 1. March 1975. 30 pages.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1975b The Escuintla Hoards, Teotihuacan Art in Guatemala. F.L.A.A.R. Progress Reports, Vol. 1 No. 2, June 1975. 76 pages.

Although not specifically on the ball game, there are so many ballplayer scenes in the cylindrical tripods of the greater Tiquisate / Costa Sur area that ballplayer scenes are included as Plates 8, 9, 10, 11. Ball game is mentioned on five more pages. So total of 9 pages on the ball game.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1976 Teotihuacan, Cotzumalhuapa, Veracruz Art in Escuintla, Guatemala. Symposium on the Middle Classic Period in Mesoamerica, E. Pasztory, Editor. Columbia University Press.

Same observation as for 1975 Tiquisate area report (The Escuintla Hoards). The ball game is one of the most common scenes on cylindrical tripods of the Costa Sur.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1987a Human Sacrifice in Ballgame Scene on Early Classic Cylindrical Tripods from the Tiquisate Region, Guatemala. FLAAR, Culver City, CA. 182 pages of text. 62 pages of illustrations, numbered but no pagination but final Index page has calculated the illustrations. Final page # at bottom is 245. XIV front matter + 245 pages = 259 pages.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1987b Ballgame Iconography and Playing Gear: Late Classic Maya Polychrome Vases and Stone Sculpture. FLAAR. Culver City, CA. 295 pages.

Continues pagination from Volume 1, so first page of Vol. 2 is 246. Continues to numbered page 472. Illustrations Fig. 63 through 122, then pages numbered 525-541. Final pagination should be a few numbers more, but 541 is enough (so Vol. I of 259 pages + Vol. 2 of 295 pages = 554. Not bad for the year 1987 (I hate to think of how many pages I would write today when hundreds more illustrations and photographs of ballgame related items are available).

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1991 A hunting god and the Maya ballgame of Guatemala: an iconography of Maya ceremonial headdresses. pp. 135-160 in *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. Gerard W. van Bussel, Paul L. van Dongen and Ted J. Leyenaar, editors.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1992 Los juegos de pelota maya en México y Guatemala durante los siglos 6-7. Pages 169-197 in: *El Juego de pelota en Mesoamérica: raíces y supervivencia*. Maria T. Uriarte, editor. Siglo Veintiuno Editores. Mexico.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1994 Notes on the ballcourts pictured in 16th century Mexican Codices: Aztec & Mixtec. FLAAR. 160 pages.

A working paper of research still in progress. ADEVA announced it would publish this as a book, but then ADEVA faded away for several years.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995a Review of everything the Spanish wrote about ancient Ballgames. FLAAR. 67 pages.



HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995b An Annotated Bibliographic Introduction to the various pre-Hispanic Rubber Ballgames of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras: Olmec, Maya, Teotihuacan, Mixtec, Aztec, El Tajin. FLAAR. 311 pages.

Other than the impressive bibliography of Eric Taladoire on ballcourts, the 1995 FLAAR bibliography on all ballgame aspects is one of the largest such bibliographies of its date (over a quarter of a century ago). The over three-hundred pages are filled with descriptive books and articles on the ballgame. Reviews and discusses everything ever written on the ancient ballgames of Mesoamerica up to 1995, plus informs the reader which theories are useful, and which are nonsense. This is a copy of the author's own notebook (in other words, a work-in-progress). Even in its preliminary state it contains a wealth of information and serves as a standard desk reference on iconography and archaeology of the ballgames. This bibliography will save you weeks of searching for information elsewhere, since everything is neatly in alphabetical order and is cleverly cross-referenced. Today (2025) of course you can surf on the Internet and find even more articles, symposium reports, and web pages on the ballgames. But it helps to have tons of pre-Internet material available up front.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995c Who are the supernatural characters on the three Copan ballcourt markers? Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 126 pages.

Distributed to attendees at FLAAR/BCC symposium on Maya archaeology.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995d Ballgame Maya Sculpture of Guatemala. The Ballgame Murals of Tikal and the Complete Corpus of all Maya Sculptures in Guatemala which pictures the Sacred Rubber Ballgame. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 186 numbered pages plus 58 unnumbered drawings and full-page photographs = 244 pages.

Distributed to attendees at FLAAR/BCC symposium on Maya archaeology.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995e All Eight Ballplayer Stelae of Bilbao, Cotzumalhuapa. XIII pages of Introduction by Dr. Lee Allen Parsons, 1991. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). Xiii pages of Introduction + 129 numbered pages text + 123 pages of unnumbered photos, rubbings and line drawings = 265 pages.

I had taken an entire portable photography studio: cameras, tripods, lighting, light stands, etc. to the German museum where the eight ballplayer stelae of Bilbao had been exhibited for decades. The museum personnel were very helpful and cooperative. It's not easy to move that much equipment in the EU when you don't have your own large vehicle; but "when I needed to do something, I got it done."

Distributed to attendees at FLAAR/BCC symposium on Maya archaeology. These FLAAR+BCC symposia were attended by scholars and people from around the world. During the 1990's the other great Maya symposia of MUNAE-Asociacion Tikal, University of Texas, Maya at the Playa, Dumbarton Oaks, etc. did not yet exist.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995f Iconography of Maya sculpture in Mexico which portrays the sacred rubber ballgame: The Complete Corpus. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 139 pages + 59 pages of unnumbered photos and line drawings = 198 pages.

Distributed to attendees at FLAAR/BCC symposium on Maya archaeology.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1995g Iconography of Seven Maya Ballplayers Sculpted in a Rio Usumacinta Style. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 150 numbered pages of text. 32 unnumbered illustrations = 182 pages.

Distributed to attendees at FLAAR/BCC symposium on Maya archaeology.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996a Iconography of Seven Maya Ballplayers Rio Usumacinta or Calakmul? Edited by Jack Sulak and updated from 1995 symposium workbook, with additional illustrations. 156 pages + 31 numbered but not paginated photos and line drawings = 187 pages.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996b Iconography of Maya sculpture in Mexico which portrays the sacred rubber ballgame: The Complete Corpus. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). Edited by Jack Sulak and updated with additional illustrations. 156 pages + 32 not paginated photos and line drawings = 188 pages



HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996c All the Ballplayer Decapitation Stelae of Aparico, Vega de Alatorre, Veracruz, Mexico. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 38 pages text and 10 unnumbered pages of map, drawings, and full-page photographs = 48 pages.

My focus has primarily been on Early Classic and Late Classic Maya iconography. But since the Olmec, Teotihuacan, Classic Veracruz, Oaxaca and other civilizations of Mesoamerica had trade networks with the Classic Maya, lots of ballgame rituals and symbolism are shared. Since the ballgame friezes of El Tajin were thoroughly published by Michael Kampen already back in 1972, I did not focus on writing about El Tajin ballgame rituals: I prefer sculptures and ceramic scenes that are not as well known or not as thorough analyzed.

I also did not do a FLAAR Report on the ballcourt sculptures of Chichen Itza since they also have been published as line drawings elsewhere. Plus to photograph these at night would take a large team (for the needed lighting) and would take several evenings. I preferred to go to remote areas and photograph semi-abandoned stelae and steps in remote Maya sites that showed ballplayers.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996d Ballplayer Scenes Chochola Style. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 52 pages + frontmatter of 6 pages + 26 pages of photographs = 84 pages.

Almost all my iconographic research in the 1990's was on stelae showing ball games or ballplayers, ball court markers (especially at Copan Ruinas, Honduras), steps (at Yaxchilan and elsewhere) that showed Maya ball games and rubber balls in action, and other stone sculptures. Obviously I also studied vases, bowls and plates that had ball game scenes (Hellmuth 1987), keeping in mind that the Kerr Database was not available so nicely arranged in the 1990's as it is in recent years courtesy of FAMSI.

But I could not avoid noticing that a series of vases in Chochola Style showed ballgames, so I devoted a special short report to these.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996e Headdresses and Skirts Shared by Deer Hunters and Ballplayers. Minpaku program Data Base of Slides of Maya Pottery National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan and Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research at Brevard Community College, Florida. 86 numbered pages + v pages of frontmatter + 55 unnumbered pages of photos and drawings = 146 pages.

[https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Headdresses and Skirts shared by Deer Hunters and Ballplayers Nicholas as Hellmuth 1996-NC.pdf](https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Headdresses_and_Skirts_shared_by_Deer_Hunters_and_Ballplayers_Nicholas_Hellmuth_1996-NC.pdf)

The MINPAKU museum, in a suburb of Osaka, Japan, had provided a Japanese government visiting research professor position for six months in Japan for Hellmuth to teach digital imaging to the museum curators and to initiate descriptions of Maya pottery style and iconography. Since I had been working on the ballgame iconography the previous year (1995), I decided to continue and add hunting iconography. So most of the year 1996 FLAAR reports were written while in Japan. I worked from 8:00 am until early evening (when the museum building closed) and then hiked by foot back to my apartment 45 minutes walking. In the morning I hiked the same 45 minutes because I did not want to be scrunched on a bus and then changing bus lines and waiting for the next bus. Besides, by walking every morning and evening all six months: rain or snow, sun or darkness, I could experience Japanese culture in a way no tourist would ever have a chance to experience.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996f Hunting pictured on Early Classic Maya Pottery: Cylindrical Tripods and Basal Flange Bowls. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research. 60 pages.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996g Four Peten Style Plates showing Hunters surrounded by their pack of Yapping Dogs. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 18 numbered pages + unnumbered pages of photos and drawings = 16 unnumbered pages of illustrations = 34 pages.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996h The Old Deer Hunter and the Woman riding the Mythical Deer. The Actun Balam Vase, Belize, Tepeu 3 and the Prototype Actun Balam Scene, Peten, Tepeu 1. Report on work-in-progress, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan: Project: Image Data Base of Slides of Maya Pottery. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research, Cocoa, Florida (Brevard Community College). 18 numbered pages of text + 23 unnumbered line drawings and full-page photographs = 41 pages.

[https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The Old Deer Hunter and the Woman Riding the Mythical Deer-NC.pdf](https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The_Old_Deer_Hunter_and_the_Woman_Riding_the_Mythical_Deer-NC.pdf)

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996i The Pseudo-God L Headdress on Warriors and on Ballplayers. Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research at BCC (Brevard Community College). 27 numbered pages; no bibliography. 16 illustrations not numbered nor paginated (since this was a handout at a symposium). Total 43 pages.

<https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/The-Pseudo-God-L-Headdress-on-warriors-and-on-ballplayers-Nicholas-Hellmuth-FLAAR-scan-by-SB-NC.pdf>

HELLMUTH, Nicholas M.

1996j Hunting the Principal Bird Deity as pictured in Maya Ceramic Art. National Museum of Ethnology (MINPAKU, Japan). 41 numbered pages of text + 28 full pages of illustrations and photographs = 69 pages.

Illustrations and photos are not on numbered pages since we did not know until the last minute what photos and what illustrations were available to pack into the report in Adobe PageMaker (which was the software that I learned in the 1990's).

This is not specifically on the ballgame, but shows hunters of birds (not deer). But since I was working full-time around the clock on hunting deer, I decided to add this FLAAR report on hunting Seven Macaw (which is normally not a macaw but is the Laughing Falcon, also called Snake Hawk (as I showed in my PhD dissertation).

HELLMUTH, Nicholas

2008 Sacred Ballgames of Mesoamerica: Iconography & Ballcourt Architecture. FLAAR. 91 pages.

Powerpoint presentation of ballgame regional diversity and iconography. 91 slides (in digital format).

HELLMUTH, Nicholas

2023 Copan Maya Ballcourt Architecture & Scarlet Macaw Logo Goalstones. FLAAR Mesoamerica. 50 pages large horizontal format.

<https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Copan-maya-ballcourt-architecture-Scarlet-macaw-logo-goalstones-photos-forweb-2023-10-04-NH.pdf>

KURBJUHN, Kornelia

1983 Introducing the Vase from Nebaj, An Iconographic Examination. INDIANA 8 (1983: 127-148).

The year 2008 date is probably when this was posted on-line.

[https://www.iai.spk-berlin.de/fileadmin/dokumentenbibliothek/Indiana/Indiana\\_8/IND\\_08\\_Kurbjuhn.pdf](https://www.iai.spk-berlin.de/fileadmin/dokumentenbibliothek/Indiana/Indiana_8/IND_08_Kurbjuhn.pdf)



Miller, Mary and Simon Martin

2003 The Lord of the Jaguar-Pelt Throne Vase. In *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 43, edited by Isobel Crombie, pp. 69-75. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

MORLEY, Sylvanus

1956 *The Ancient Morley*. 3rd edition. Stanford University Press.

PENDERGAST, David M.

1969 *The Prehistory of Actun Balam, British Honduras*. Art and Archaeology Occasional Paper 16, Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum.

SHARER, Robert

2003 *La civilización maya*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

SHESEÑA Hernández, Alejandro

2015 *Joyaj Ti 'Ajawlel La Ascensión al Poder entre los Mayas Clásicos*. Afinita Editorial, Universidad De Ciencias Y Artes De Chiapas.

<https://brucelove.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/shesenc83a-2015-book.pdf>

TALADOIRE, Eric

2012 *Ballgames and Ballcourts in Prehispanic Mesoamerica, A bibliography*. Paris Monographs in American Archaeology, 29. 108 pages.

A bibliography on ballgames and ballcourts would be over 100 pages. Plus the present FLAAR Reports is on hunter hats and deer heads in the ballgame. Other aspects Hellmuth has covered in several thousand pages during the 1970's-1990's.

TRIK, Helen and Michael E. KAMPEN

1983 *The Graffiti of Tikal*. Tikal Report No. 31. The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.