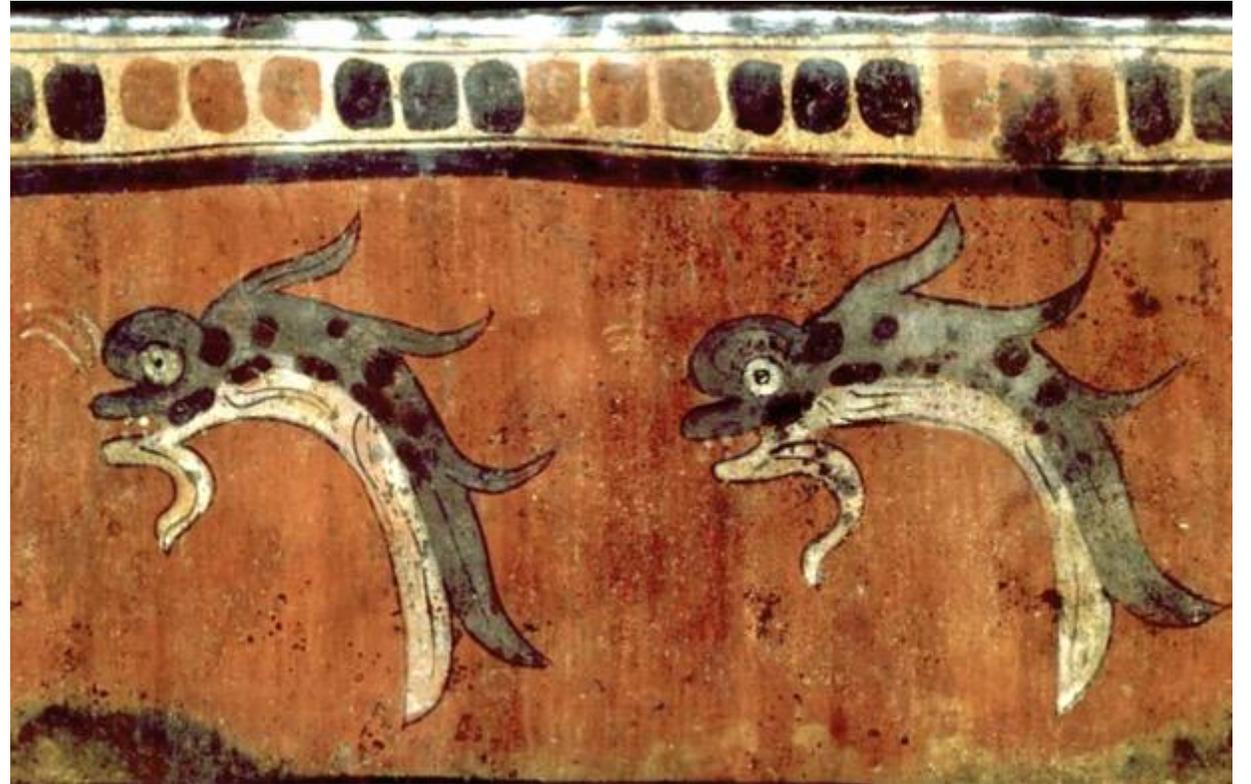


Maya Pseudo-Glyphs on Catfish Red Style & Related Styles of Late Classic Lowland Maya Vases



Chapter 3 for multi-chapter Presentation:
Que tal si los pseudoglifos en cada region maya son un dialect regional?

Nicholas Hellmuth

Conferencia Presencial
Jueves 26 de febrero 2026, 7:00 pm
Edificio del Museo Popol Vuh, Universidad Francisco Marroquin

Chapter 1: Pseudo-Glyphs on Gouged-and-Incised Late Classic Lowland Maya Vases

Chapter 2: Pseudo-Glyphs on Chama & Related Styles of Late Classic Highland Maya Vases

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Chapter 4: Maya Pseudo-Glyphs and Rare PSSequence Dedicatory Formula
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Final Chapter, Chapter 6:
Pseudo-Glyphs on Vases, Bowls, and Plates from the Maya Lowlands

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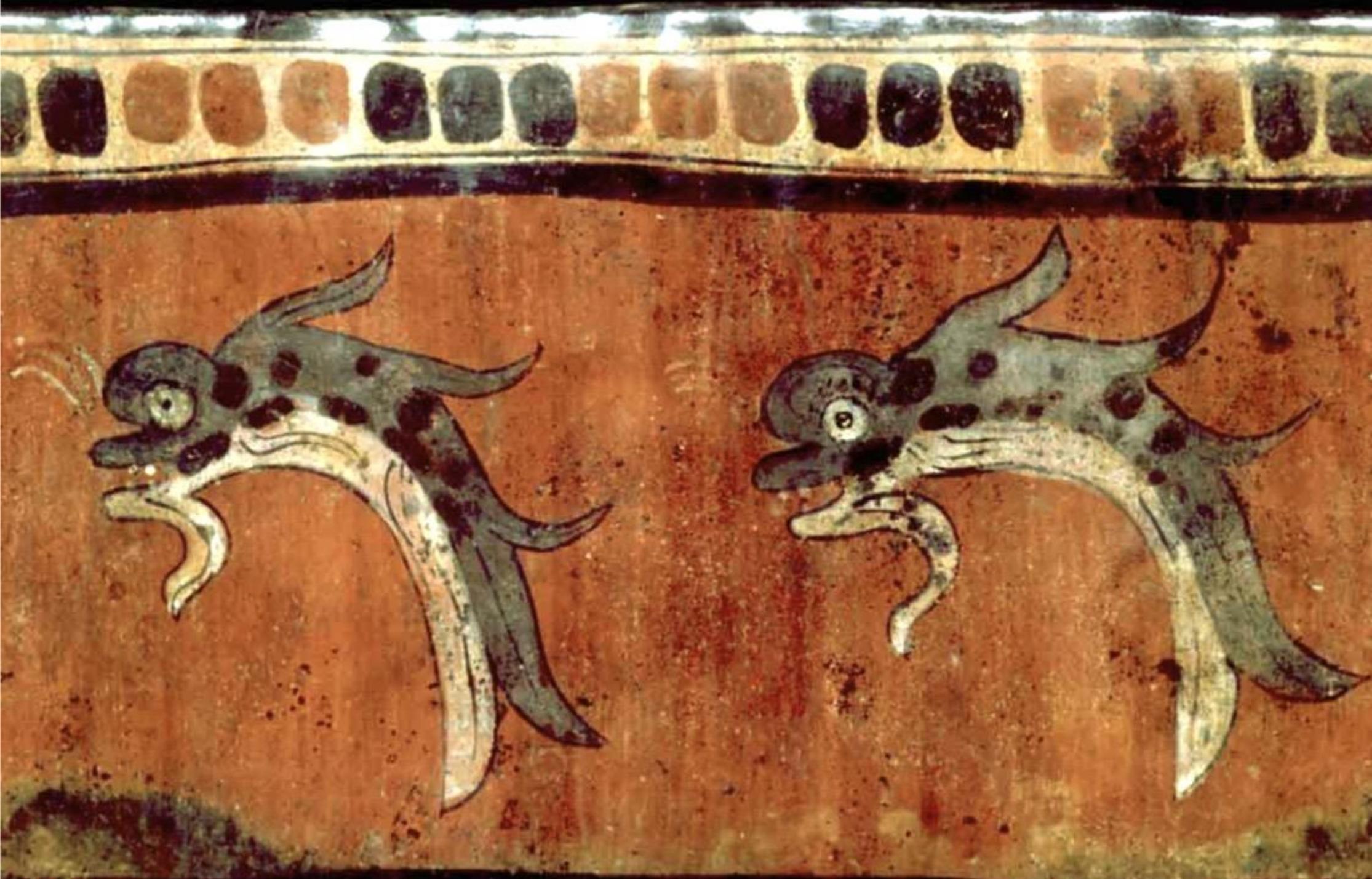
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80% of Catfish Red Style vases have jaguar pelage designs around the upper part, but two have Pseudo-Glyphs.

This painter clearly was not an expert in writing Maya hieroglyphs.

Catfish Red Style, Kerr rollout, K5389.

These are not Terminal Classic or anywhere near Tepeu 3.

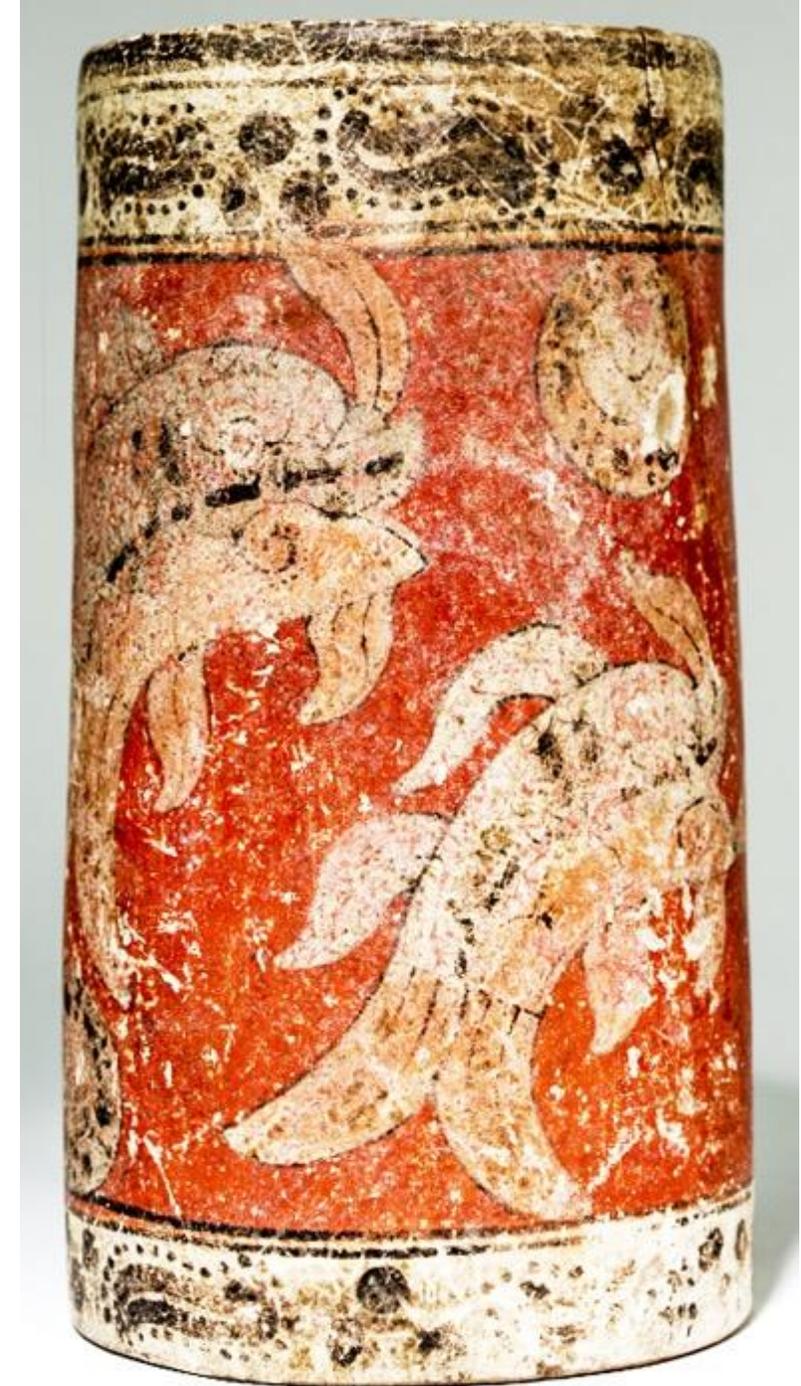


Catfish Red Style, Late Classic Maya Vases, Central Maya Lowlands

In the 1970's I noticed that all the vases that had giant catfish all had the same or similar dark deep red background. So I named these "Catfish Red Style".

Then in the 1980's-1990's, every year or so, I would find another vase elsewhere in another museum around the world that had the same red background but not always with a catfish. But in addition to the catfish and the red background, another aspect is that lots of these vases have a row of stylized feline pelage designs around the upper part (and sometimes also around the lower part). So far, I have not yet found any PSSequene dedicatory formula text on any of these Catfish Red Style vases. But some have pseudo-glyphs, so I include these in this present chapter.

So farm I have not found any of this style in the helpful book of Culbert on ceramics from grave lots, caches, etc. Would help to also search the Tikal Project book on sherds to see if any sherds were found, since the Carnegie (CIW) teams found several incomplete vases with catfish that we show in this chapter.



So far, of the corpus of dozens of Catfish Red Style vases, only two with actual catfish have Pseudo-Glyphs. Both are helpfully available from the Dumbarton Oaks database of improved digital resolution, K8679.

This painter does not include barbels on the fish, so we nonetheless call them catfish because that's the logo of vases with this vertically painted red background.

This painter knew even less about how to write hieroglyphs, but obviously he had seen enough in order to facilitate him painting literal PSEUDO-glyphs.



Pseudo-Glyphs on "Catfish Red Style" Maya Vases



Repeated
pseudo-
glyphs.

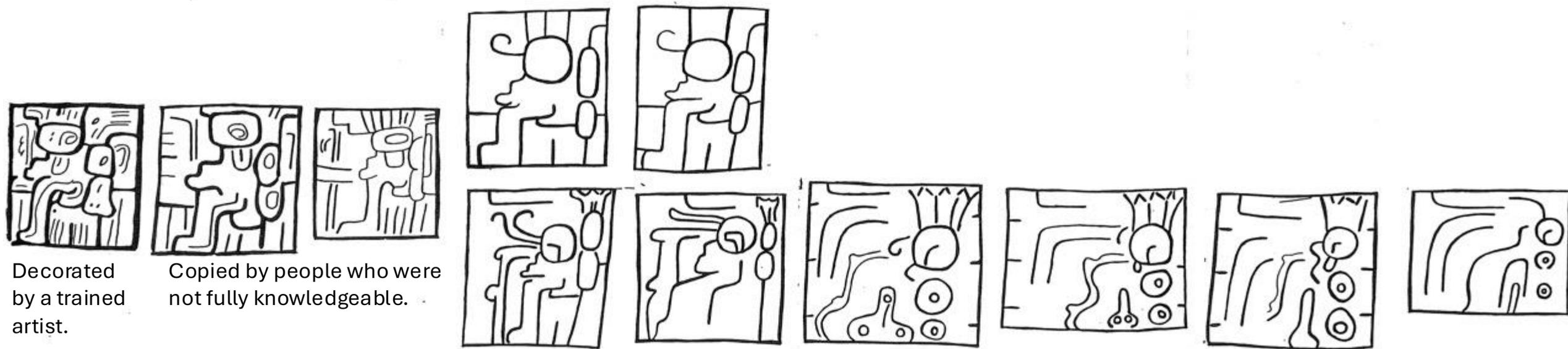
Catfish Red
Style, probably
late Tepeu 1, is
a classification
by Hellmuth
over decades,
since most of
these scenes
with this
background
color have
catfish. If
archaeologists
can document
these as Tepeu
2, that would
help.







I doubt that one person painted all these glyphs—I think that each was painted by a different person—each of whom was expected to show their respect for the deceased individual, who was either a family member or a leader in their social group.



Decorated by a trained artist.

Copied by people who were not fully knowledgeable.

This was my drawing in my 1967 Harvard honor's thesis after discovering lots of vases with the "same" decoration, but gouged and incised by people who were not artists. Tikal Burial 196, Tomb of the Jade Jaguar, Tikal Str. 5D-73, facing the south side of Temple II.

Copied by people who never saw the original, they only saw the one gouged in front of them. These were either children or grandparents who were traditionally responsible for each donating on vase filled with food or drink for the afterlife—and were traditionally responsible for themselves decorating the vase.



Repeated, simplified grasping-hand hieroglyph, on “Orange” variant of a style that is usually more red.

Surely epigraphers can read the various versions of a clenched-hand.

The vase background is painted with vertical colors—and some are a different tint than others. That is a characteristic of Catfish Red Style. Another feature of that style is the band of stylized feline spots—here a giant Hix motif—so even though not “Red” and even though wider, they are part of the heritage of Catfish Red Style—and definitely have Pseudo-Glyphs.





Simplified Pseudo-Glyphs in the several diagonal panels. But curious whether they name the adjacent birds. Over decades I have noticed lots of vases with red backgrounds that feature catfish, so I called these Catfish Red Style. Lots had no catfish, but the same band of stylized jaguar pelage designs. Probably Central Maya Lowlands (Hellmuth 1998). Although a quarter-century ago I estimated them as Tepeu 2, they could be late Tepeu 1 (best for a ceramicist to decide). The vase we show here has the band of stylized feline-like spots but the other ones have a different color and no feline spots around the upper area). All are digital rollouts by Hellmuth, FLAAR Digital Photo Archive, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University. The dark red here is not the usual hue for a Catfish Red Style vase. But since several ateliers produced these vases, their color palette varied.



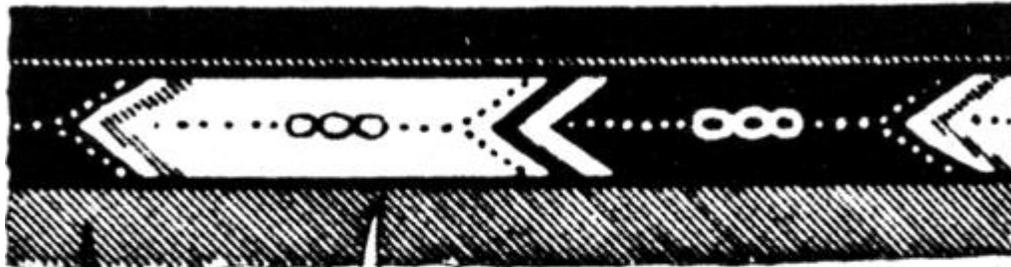
Catfish Red Style is clearly regional but the glyphs are generic—so best compared and contrasted with other regional texts.



K5389



K8679



There is not always a row of feline pelage motifs around the top—sometimes there is a geometric decoration.



The round white object is possibly a shell (that I can see on other Catfish Red Style vases, but since those don't have pseudo-glyphs, they are not in the present PPTx—but we are preparing a FLAAR Reports on “Catfish Red Style Vases” where we will show the complete corpus.

Stylized feline pelage motifs.



The triangular set of three black circles is the Hix glyph in the eye of some Maya jaguars and in the ear of Winal face-variant glyphs of the Long Count. The Winal face-variant and full-figure variant are Bufo Toads. We will have a lecture for the July 2026 MPV UFM symposium on epigraphy on Hix in Maya hieroglyphic texts and as a decoration on the cheek, ear, and eye of animals and supernaturals.

Bibliography on Catfish Red Style Vases

For later in 2026, we are preparing a lecture and FLAAR Reports to show the entire corpus of Catfish Red Style vases. 90% have no Pseudo-Glyphs, so this chapter in Pseudo-Glyphs lecture shows only 10% of the corpus of the FLAAR Photo Archive.

HELLMUTH, Nicholas

During the 1980's-1990's we produced several thousand pages of lists of the ceramics photographed in those years. So there are at least a chapter on Catfish Red Style. This work started with a grant from the OEA for Guatemalan citizens for a scholarship at Yale University. This was granted to Hellmuth because both OEA (OAS) and Yale recognized that Hellmuth had dedicated most of his life to research in Guatemala. More corpus notes were written up for MINPAKU who awarded Hellmuth a six-month fellowship in Japan (to teach the curators and staff about digital photography, scanning of 35mm color slides, and how to print the resultant scans digitally). This was in the late 1990's, when almost no university professor was into digital photography, digital scanning, or digital inkjet printing.

KERR, Justin

2003 A Fishy Story. Maya Vase Database. <https://www.mayavase.com/fishy.html>

LOVE, Bruce and Meghan RUBENSTEIN

2021 La Colección del Museo Dr. Juan Antonio Valdes, Uaxactún, Guatemala: Volumen 1. Contributions to Mesoamerican Studies. 617 pages in the downloadable PDF on-line.

Vol. 1: page 228-229, 332-333, eroded but clearly examples of Catfish Red Style. Pages 288-289 is possibly this style.

REENTS-Budet, Dorie

1994 Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period. Duke University Press.

Shown on page 242.

SMITH, Robert E.

1955 Ceramic Sequence at Uaxactun, Guatemala. Two volumes. Middle American Research Institute, Publication No. 20, Tulane University.

Catfish Red Style vases are clearly pictured in Vol. 2, Fig. 39, b, 5 and 7. Smith dates these to Tepeu 2.

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