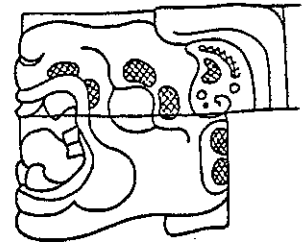


## Copan Mosaics Project

### Copan Note 13

May, 1987



## The Figures on the Central Marker of Ballcourt Allb at Copan

by Linda Schele<sup>1</sup>

### The Left Player

The central marker from level Allb at Copan (Pl. 1) shows two figures flanking a ball marked with the glyph *k'an-tun*. The figures kneel in the position of play with the ball suspended between them as if it is in play. In contrast, the north and south markers display the ball bound in twisted cord and hung from a house rafter.

Two columns of glyphs stand between the figures and above the ball; at first glance they appear to name the two players. The text on the right begins with T1:501:??, a variant of the T757 general verb that is used to introduce names in texts at Copan, Yaxchilan, Naranjo, and other sites. The name of the left player consists of the remaining signs--the number one and an anthropomorphic head marked with cross-hatching in the upper right corner. Combined, the two signs rendered the name

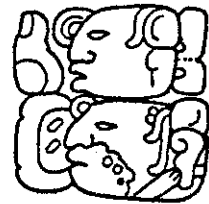


One Ahau

Hun Ahau, the name glyph of a deity appearing on Classic period pottery, in the painting of Nah Tunich, and the inscriptions of Quirigua. Hun

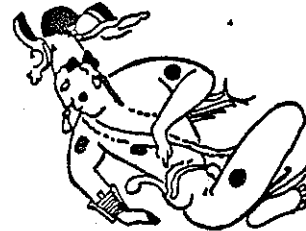
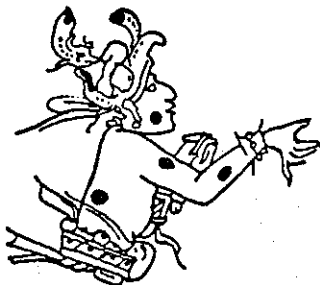


Nah Tunich

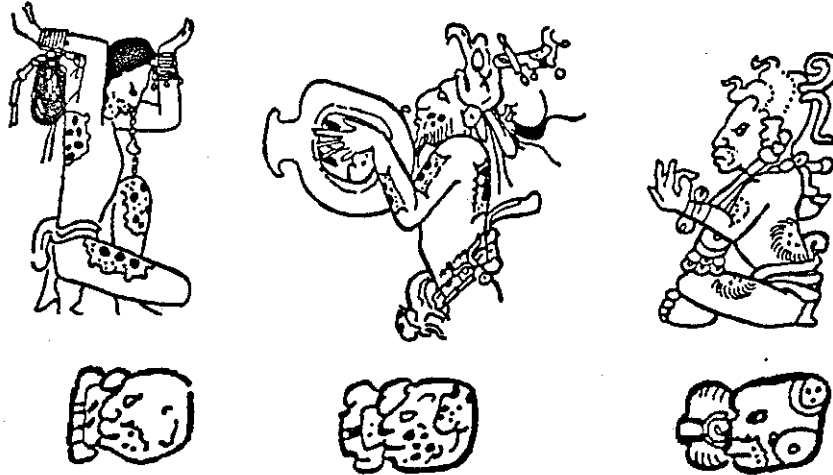


Quirigua

Ahau is often paired with the god of Number Nine, an anthropomorphic being marked by jaguar pelt on arm, legs, and jaw. In Classic period examples, these two gods are generally called the Headband Twins, and they are now accepted as the prototypes of the Hero Twins of the *Popol Vuh* (Robicsek and Hales 1982:40-41). In the codices, they are called the Chicchan



Hun Ahau from Pottery



The Jaguar God of Number Nine

gods, presumably because the facial marking on both were thought to resemble snake markings. Classic period examples are clear, however; the jaguar twin has *yax* preceding the human face with its jaw covered with jaguar pelt. Neither god has any association with serpents or the *chichan* glyph.

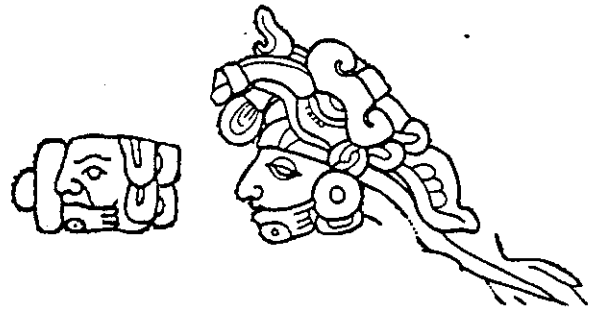
The Hun Ahau Twin usually carries large black marks on his body and generally on his cheek. This facial dot is characteristic of the anthropomorphic version of *ahau*, an association supported by the appearance of the standard *ahau* glyph in at least one example of his name. The head variant of the gods name has both the facial dot and the serpent-like markings. This same head occurs as *ahau* in an accession expression on the Hieroglyphic Stairs at Copan, thus, confirming its meaning as *ahau* and the name of the god as *Hun Ahau*. The left player is identified as Hun Ahau,



Copan HS one of the Headband Twin and the Classic period prototype of Hunahpu of the Hero Twins.

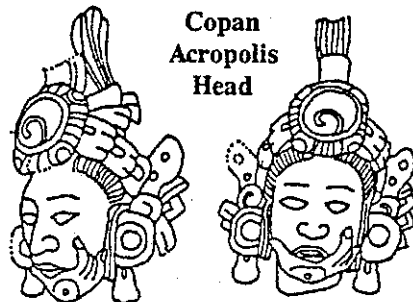
### The Right Player

The right player on the ballcourt marker is identified by the hand over its jaw and the skeletal headdress as the God of the Number Zero, a death god that may represent sacrificial death by removal of the lower jaw. The first glyph in the right column presents a head with a human head



God of Zero from the Ballcourt Marker

as the lower jaw. It is clearly the portrait head of the god, although I have no idea why the portrait head is preceded by the number six. This same death god appears on the south marker from Ballcourt IIa (Pl. 2). The face is unfortunately badly eroded, but the presence of the *cimi* signs on the clothing is expected with the God of Zero. Most importantly, the headdress matches a three-dimensional portrait of the God of Zero that once decorated a building in the East Court of the Copan Acropolis.



Copan Acropolis Head

**The Third Name**

Column B begins with the name of the God of Zero and continues with the T1.757 general verb and the name of the king 18-Rabbit. Since the two players are clearly identified as Hun Ahau and the God of Zero, I must assume the 18-Rabbit name does not name either figure, leaving the possibility that he is meant to be understood as the ball, a metaphorical reference he used on Stela D, or that he is named patron of Ballcourt IIb.



**Summary**

The players on the central marker of Ballcourt IIb are Hun Ahau, one of the Hero Twins, and the god of Zero, a deity of death and the Underworld. The occurrence of the God of Zero on the south marker of Ballcourt IIa suggest that the narrative theme of both manifestations of the

ballcourt were the same, a suggestion supported by the identification of macaw markers for all levels of the ballcourt (Fash, personal communication, 1987). The identification of the actors as one of the Hero Twins and a god of sacrificial death associates the iconography of Ballcourts IIa and b at Copan with the Hero Twin myths that survived in the *Popol Vuh*. The use of the quadrifoil frame may, in fact, indicate we see the action through openings into the Underworld. The appearance of the same frame shape on the badly effaced markers of the final ballcourt suggests that the narrative theme of the Copan Ballcourt was consistent through its existence.

**References**

Robicsek, Francis and Donald M. Hales  
 1982 *Maya Ceramic Vases from the Classic Period. The November Collection of Maya Ceramics.*  
 Maya Publishing Co., Charlotte, N.C.



**Pl. 1: Central Marker from Ballcourt IIb**



**Pl. 2 South Marker from Ballcourt IIa**

**Notes:**

1. The Copán Notes are a running series of commentaries and small reports deriving from the multidisciplinary research project designed to record and analyze the monolithic and architectural sculpture of Copán. The Copán Mosaics Project has received support from the Center for Field Research (Earthwatch; 1985 and 1986), Northern Illinois University (1985 and 1986), The National Science Foundation (1986 and 1987), The National Endowment for the Humanities (1986 and 1987), the National Geographic Society (1986), The H. John Heinz III Charitable Foundation (1986), and the *Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia* (I.H.A.H.; 1985 and 1986), and is conducted under the authority and jurisdiction of the I.H.A.H. through a five-year agreement between the I.H.A.H. and Northern Illinois University. According to the terms of that agreement, any publication using materials (either written or in the form of line drawings or photos) derived from the Copán Mosaics Project must receive prior written consent from the Project director (William Fash) and the Director of the *Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia* (Victor C. Cruz Reyes).