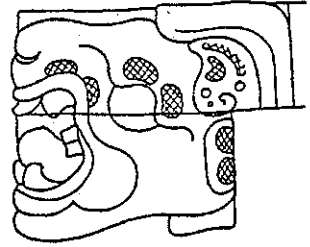


## Copán Mosaics Project

### Copan Note\* 34

November, 1987  
Copán, Honduras



## A Cached Jade from Temple 26 and the Wrold Tree at Copán

by Linda Schele

John Longyear (1952) published photographs of a number of jades found in the caches of Structure 26 at Copán. Most of these were stolen from the Copán Museum, with two of the Longyear jades recovered and returned to Honduras by the F.B.I. These are now stored in the vaults of the *Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia* in Tegucigalpa. In September of 1987, I was given the opportunity to study, photograph, and draw these two jades and found them extremely important to the study of Copan iconography and caching traditions.

Jade 1 is a large flat piece with saw marks surviving on its thin section. One side is flattened by a saw cut, polished, and carved with an image. The other is left as the raw cut. This particular way of cutting jade from a core piece is exactly the same form as uncarved jades recently found in termination caches of a much earlier building under Temple 26. These earlier caches, so far found on the north and west sides of the interior temple, each contain following:

(1) an earflare carved in a style identical to earflares found at El Cajón in Central Honduras<sup>1</sup>.

(2) both rough and polished remnants (as large as full quadrants) of jade cores.

(3) flat shapes cut from the sides of cores. These last may be drilled with large diameter holes and at least two fit together at the saw line.

(4) a spondylus shell.

The west cache in addition contained a greenstone carved in the form of a belly down bound captive.

The Tegucigalpa jade is cut identical to type 3 above, suggesting that this use of raw cut jade was a long tradition at Copán, at least in relationship to dedication and termination rituals involving Temple 26.

The iconography of the Tegucigalpa jade also is extraordinary, especially in relationship to its presence in a dedication cache. The image on the jade is the World Tree at the center of the Maya cosmos. This image is focal to the iconography of

<sup>1</sup> Ken Hirth gave me permission to study the El Cajón collection of jades. The earflares are range in size from 5 cm up 20 cm, and all are characterized by a round shape, a smooth front plane (that may also be slight convex), a penetration drill hole of very small diameter, and a vestigial shaft on the rear that is rounded off. The rear surface is often marked by the precusion pattern of the manufacturing process, although the front surface is usually polished. The two earflares from the Copán caches are manufactured exactly in this style.

the sarcophagus of the Temple of Inscriptions and the tablet in the Temple of the Cross at Palenque, but it is rare at Copán, with its most frequent appearances on the loin aprons of the kings.

The jade presents the image in a compressed composition, but all of the parts from the Palenque examples are there (Fig. 1). The bottom image is the Quadripartite Monster with its *kin* helmet supporting a stingray spine and spondylus shell.<sup>2</sup> The muzzle of this creature curves upward to terminated in a double scroll which may be a distant reference to the front head of the beast, which is usually crocodilian and often shown in the Early Classic period with this curving detail on its muzzle. An earflare assemblage rests at the right side of the head. The open mouth is filled with curving fangs and a long double scroll dropping into the lower corner of the jade. These last volutes represent, I believe, the blood scrolls shown emanating from both heads of this great Cosmic Monster.

The tree trunk rising from the top of the Monster's head with six parallel lines distinguishing the trunk at the base and three at the top. At the center of the tree rides a *kan*-cross with a square-nosed serpent attached to each side. The material in the mouths of these serpents in the same bead and cylinder motif that line the mouths of the square-nosed tree branches of the Tablet of the Cross at Palenque (Fig. 2a). The appearance of the *kan*-cross between the two branches appears to be related to another presentation of the tree at Palenque on the Tablet of the Foliated Cross. There the tree is represented as a maize plant growing from a monster with a *kan*-cross in its forehead (Fig. 2b). This combination is presented on the sanctuary panels of the same temple as *kan*-crosses with the square-nosed serpent attached (Fig. 2c). It is this combined symbol that represents the branches of the tree on the Copán jade.

On the Tablet of the Cross the tree is draped by a double-headed serpent. In the jade, the serpent is single headed, but the idea is the same. The

head drops below the left square-nosed serpent, and the bifurcated tail below the right.

The top is the Copán image is problematic for me. Emerging from the left side of the tree is a motif that appears to be the smoking torch (or axe head) worn by God K. The uppermost image is pure spaghetti, but if I force myself I can see a bird head with a crest. Since each of the Palenque trees is surmounted by a bird, this image is an expected one, and I may be manufacturing the recognition of the image with this expectation in mind.

Jade 2 is thin piece of jade cut to follow the contour of a human male standing with knees flexed and wrists turned inward in the royal gesture used to hold the Double-headed Serpent Bar at Copán and elsewhere. Longyear also reports this jade as a Structure 26 cached offering. It belongs to particularly Copán tradition which includes now includes this object, the jade pebble from the Stela 7 cache now in the Museum of the American Indian in New York, a jade without provenience published by Robiscek (1975: pl. 282)<sup>3</sup>, and one of the jades in the recently found cache under the altar of the Hieroglyphic Stairs. Two of these jades show the ruler seated and two show him standing in this curious position with flexed knees. All four show him the bar-holding gesture with a bar being present and all are Early Classic in style although found in Late Classic contexts.

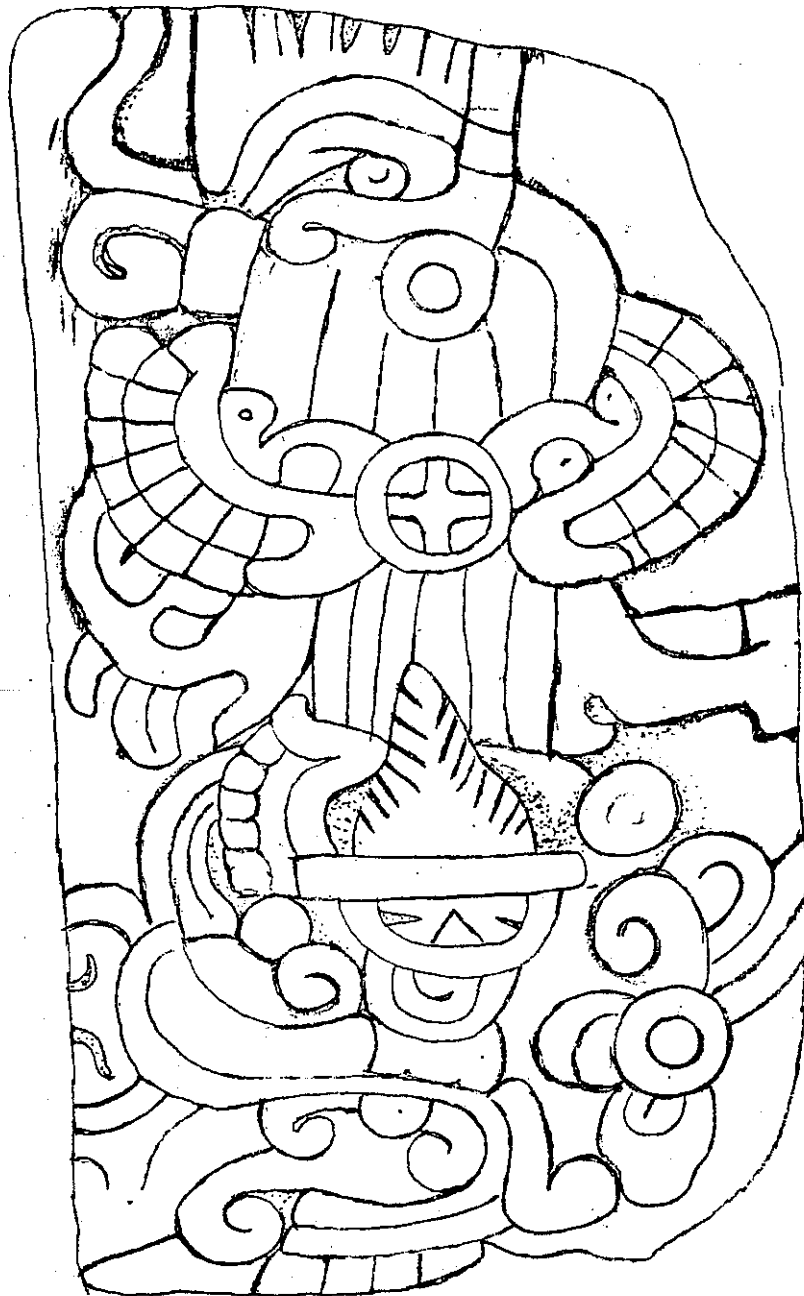
#### References

- Longyear, John  
1952 Copán Ceramics: A Study of Southeastern Maya Pottery. *Carnegie Institution of Washington Pub. 597*. Washington, D.C.
- Robiscek, Francis  
1972 *Copan, the Home of the Gods*. New York: Heye Foundation, Museum of the American Indian.

<sup>2</sup> The expected crossed-bands motif may correspond to the circle to the right of the stingray spine, but I could detect no crossed-bands within it.

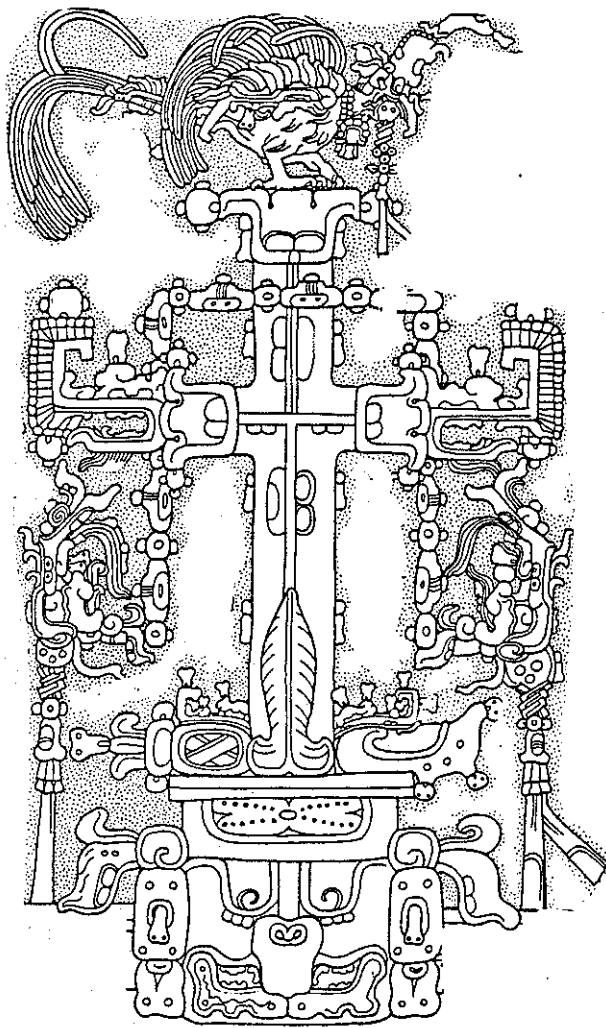
<sup>3</sup> and now in the Denver Art Museum.

\* 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, 1986, and 1987), Northern Illinois University (1985, 1986, and 1987), The National Science Foundation (1986 and 1987), The National Endowment for the Humanities (1986 and 1987), the National Geographic Society (1986 and 1987), The H. John Heinz III Charitable Foundation (1986), and the *Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia* (I.H.A.H.; 1985 and 1986), Council for International Exchange of Scholars (1987) 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 Cruz Reyes).

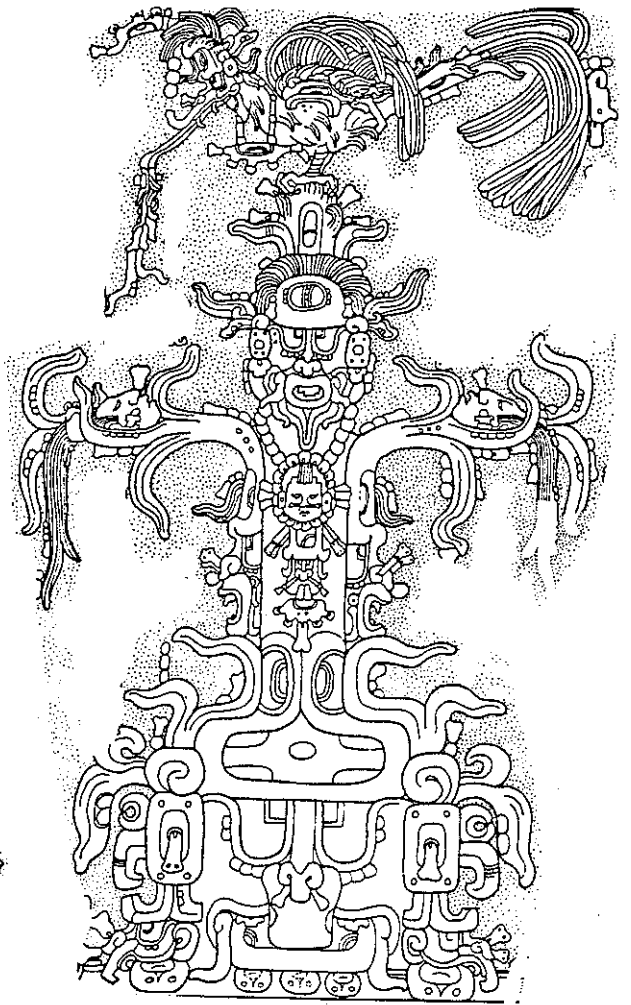


Jade  
drawn on Tegucigalpa  
Oct, 1987

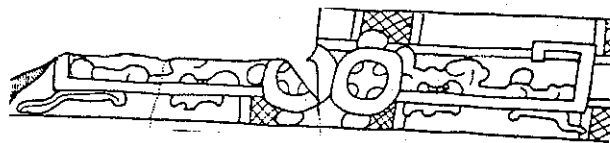
Figure 1 Jade 1 from Temple 26



a



b.



c

Figure 2 (a) Tree from the Tablet of the Cross  
(b) Tree from the Tablet of the Foliated Cross  
(c) Kan-cross and Square-nose Serpents

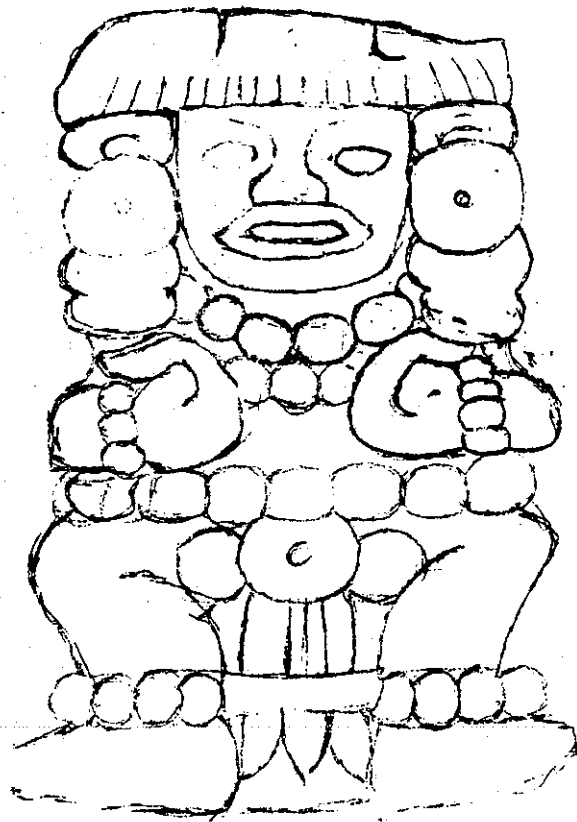


Figure 3 Jade 2 from Temple 26 and the jade from the Stela 7 cache