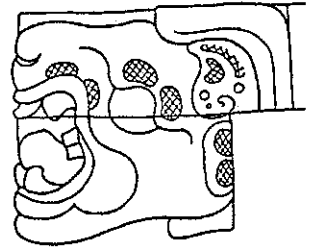


Copán Mosaics Project

Copan Note* 37

December, 1987
Copán, Honduras



Notes on the Rio Amarillo Altars

by Linda Schele

Sylvanus Morley (1920:382-384) reports on two altars found at the site of Rio Amarillo (Fig. 1), 30 kilometers northeast of the acropolis. Altar 1 is now on display at the museum in the modern town of Copán Ruinas, while at least one, and possibly two fragments of Altar 2 are in a bodega at the site itself.

Interesting data is recorded on both altars, but neither is easy to date. Altar 1, the most complete of the two, was published as a drawing by Morley (Fig. 3). Since the corners of the altar have been lost in the meantime, Morley's drawing is still useful, although Morley for some reason published it with the sides out of order. Even presuming that he began the text on the correct side, the sequential order in his drawing should be a,d,b,c.

I have begun the glyph block designations (Fig. 2) with the Calendar Round date 4* Cib 15* Kayab on his side c, thus ending the inscription

on his side d, which includes, I believe, a katun reference that sets the time of the chronology.

The coefficient of the day sign in the first Calendar Round is now broken, but the spacing of the surviving dots and Morley's drawing identify the number as a 4 and the day is clearly Cib. The month at B1 is also easily read as Kayab, although Cib requires a coefficient of 14 rather than 15 as recorded. This Calendar Round 4 Cib 14 Mol occurs at the following Long Count position during the Late Classic period at Copan:

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------|-------|----------|
| (1) | 9. 7.17. 7.16 | 4 Cib | 14 Kayab |
| (2) | 9.10.10. 2.16 | 4 Cib | 14 Kayab |
| (3) | 9.13. 2.15.16 | 4 Cib | 14 Kayab |
| (4) | 9.15.15.10.16 | 4 Cib | 14 Kayab |
| (5) | 9.18. 8. 5.16 | 4 Cib | 14 Kayab |
| (6) | 10. 1. 1. 0.16 | 4 Cib | 14 Kayab |

The first and last of these may be cast out as either too early or too late, leaving four positions: (2) in the reign of Smoke-Imix-God K; (3) shortly

* 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).

before the death of Smoke-Imix-God K and the accession of 18 Rabbit; (4) in the reign of Smoke-Monkey; and (5) in the reign of Yax-Pac.

I favor 9.10.10.7.16 4 Cib 14 Kayab as the Long Count position because of the final date on the altar. X1 records the date 1 Ahau without a haab notation in a form usually reserved for references to katun endings. The only katun ending within Late Classic history named 1 Ahau is 9.10.0.0.0.

This date is appropriate other stylistic features of Copan inscriptions. For example, the glyph at V2 (Fig. 2) occurs on Stela 10 (Fig. 4) at E2 with the katun ending 9.11.0.0.0, which also happened to be recorded by its tzolkin name alone.¹ Since to my knowledge, this glyph, T23:528.110 (reading something like *na:cu.co*), is unique to these two monuments and since the katun date of 1 Ahau is 9.10.0.0.0, only a katun earlier than Stela 10, I am accepting the final clause of the altar as locking the chronology in or shortly after katun 10.

The problem I see in this placement is that I would normally expect the historical date to fall within the named katun--in other words, it should occur before the final day of the katun. The closest date to Katun 10 in the list above 9.10.10.2.16 falls after that date. However, there may also be precedent for this in Smoke-Imix-God K's reign. On the east altar of Stela 5, he appears to record 9.11.15.0.0 with a 12 Ahau or 9.11.0.0.0 notation. The clustering of similar errors (or perhaps 'conventions' would be a better way to describe them) reinforces the placement of this altar in Smoke-Imix-God K's reign close in time to his 9.11.0.0.0 monuments.

On Altar 1 (Fig. 2), the opening date 4 Cib 15 Kayab is followed by the God N-lu bat phrase identified by David Stuart (n.d.) as meaning "to carve" and by Ruth Krochock (n.d.) as *tz'ilba* "to transcribe writing from one media to another." The event is the dedication of this altar and the word for the altar itself is probably recorded at C2 after the 'lu-bat' phrase. The protagonist is named at D2-I1 with his personal names at D1-F2. The corner is now lost, but Morley (Fig. 3)

shows an animal head at F1 and at G1 a most important glyph *u ahauil* "the child of father." The father's name completes the phrase with "three katun ahau" (H1-G2), the personal names of the father at H2 and the Copan Emblem Glyph, or at least a variant of it², at I1. The presence of the Emblem glyph of Copan here confirms that the father of the protagonist at least was an *ahau* of that polity.

I1 is the head variant of T679 *iwai*, a sign that usually precedes verbs. Here the verbal root occurs at I2-J2 with a third personage named with a turtle head, *ah* (K1), the head of the Cosmic Monster (L1), and finally at K2-L2 as 'blood *ahau*.' This may be the protagonist again, but without the original corners there is no way to confirm that the animal head Morley drew in the protagonist's name is the same.

The glyphs between M1 and P2 are and were lost when Morley saw the altar, but the last four glyphs of this damaged side are extremely interesting in their implications about the political structure in the Copan Valley. Q1 is the birth frog, although here I am inclined to believe it functions as a name rather than a verb. R1 is now lost, but Morley (Fig. 3) shows a sign that could be T89 *tu* or T57 *si* over T582 *mo*. Q2 is the crossed batons glyph that has been identified as a reference to founders of lineages (Schele 1986). The name of the founder is written at R2 and it is preceded by *Kinich*, a variant of the *Mah Kina* title that is particularly associated with founders in the inscriptions of Copan. The zoomorphic head that follows the *Kinich* title is emphatically not Yax-Kuk-Mo, the founder of the royal lineage at the main site.

Furthermore, there is no "successor" glyph in the text and the crossed batons title appear to be preceded by T12 *ah* or "he the founder." Morley presumed that there was once a date at the beginning of the panel on this side of Altar 1. I think he may have been correct, although there is no way to prove it. It seems unlikely that the founder of the Rio Amarillo ruling lineage was a

1 David Stuart first pointed out to me the occurrence of this glyph on both monuments in 1986.

2 Normally the bat will have a cauc sign infixed into the head and a *pi* attached to it. Neither sign is present on the Rio Amarillo altar. However, I do not doubt that the reference is to the main polity controlled from the acropolis at Copan.

direct participant in the dedication ritual for this altar. More likely, this side of the altar refers back to some important event in his life.

For the purpose of reconstructing the history of the political system in the Copan Valley, this altar offers two interesting bits of information. The protagonist, who was presumably the ruler of Rio Amarillo, was the son of a noble entitled to call himself an *ahau* of the Copan polity, and thus Rio Amarillo was considered to be part of the Copan polity. And the founder of the Rio Amarillo lineage was not the same personage as the founder of the lineage ruling the larger polity. From this we may deduce that lineages other than those of the kings calculated successions from their own founders.

Altar 2

Altar 2 (Fig. 1) was found to the south of Altar 1 in much worse condition. Morley (1920:384) reports finding only one piece of the altar, but his piece (Fig. 5) is stored at Copan with another fragment of exactly the same size and craved from the same dark red grainy stone (Fig. 6). I suspect this fragment is from the same altar.³

Morley's fragment has suffered considerable damage since it was found and again we must rely on his drawing from the majority of information. The first glyph is the "wing-shell" death glyph written in a very unusual form with the wing over the *ahau* and the *zac* sign conflated with the *ik* component rather than with the *ahau*, as would normally occur. The deceased person is recorded in the second glyph and interestingly, his name does not occur on Altar 1. The last glyph is blood prefixed to what appears to be the monkey variant of *ahau*. This title is equivalent to the "blood *ahau*" at K2-L2 on Altar 1 (Fig. 2).

Summary

The two altars from Rio Amarillo name five distinct personages, the protagonist of Altar 1, his father, another unknown noble, and the founder of the Rio Amarillo lineage, and on Altar 2 a deceased *ahau* who probably once ruled the site. The father of the Altar 1 protagonist is listed as an *ahau* of the Copan polity, thus confirming that Rio Amarillo, at least during the reign of Smoke-Imix-God K, was part of the larger polity. Finally, the ruling lineage of Rio Amarillo were *ahaus* of the Copan polity, but the calculated their descent from their own founder, not Yax-Kuk-Mo'.

References

- Krochock, Ruth
n.d. "Dedication Ceremonies at Chichen Itza: the Glyphic Evidence." A paper submitted for publication in *The Sixth Mesa Redonda de Palenque*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. Prepared and distributed in 1986
- Morley, Sylvanus Griswold
1920 The Inscriptions at Copan. *The Carnegie Institution of Washington, Pub.* 219. Washington, D.C.
- Schele, Linda
1986 The Founders of Lineages at Copán and Other Maya Sites. *Copán Note 8*. Copán Mosaics Project and the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia. Copán, Honduras.
- Stuart, David
n.d. The 'Lu-bat' Glyph and its Bearing on the Primary Standard Sequence, " A paper presented at the First World Conference for Maya Epigraphy, held in Guatemala City in August, 1986.

3 No number of any kind is recorded on the stone, although it should have a CPN number and sheet. I have not had the chance to go through the first 5,000 catalog sheets to see if it is registered with provenience information.

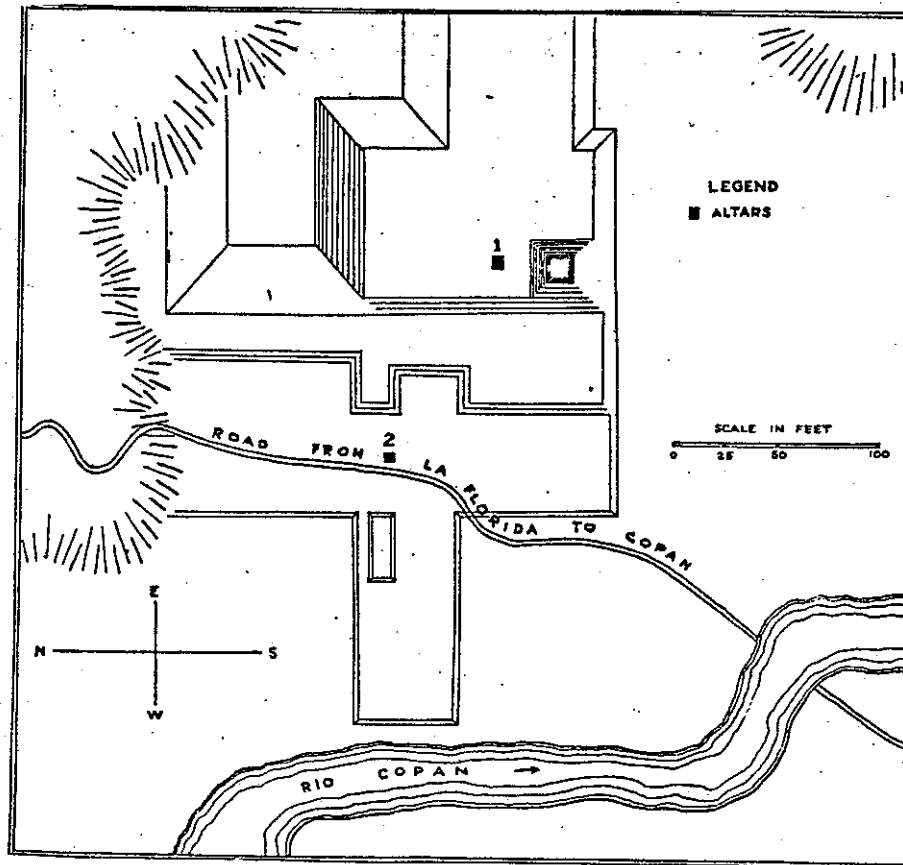


FIG. 58.—Plan of the ruins of Rio Amarillo.

Fig. 1 Map of Rio Amarillo after Morley (1920)

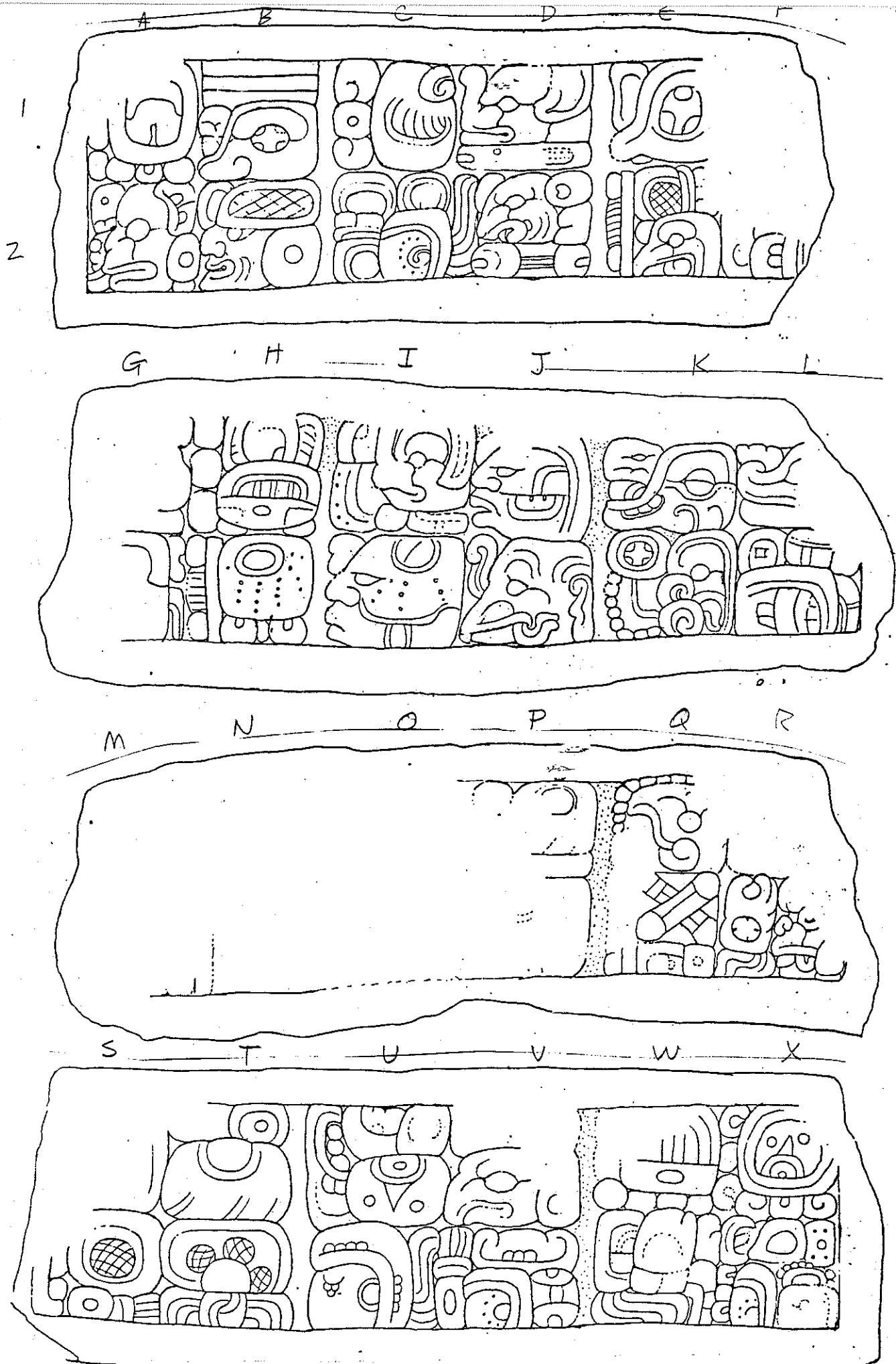
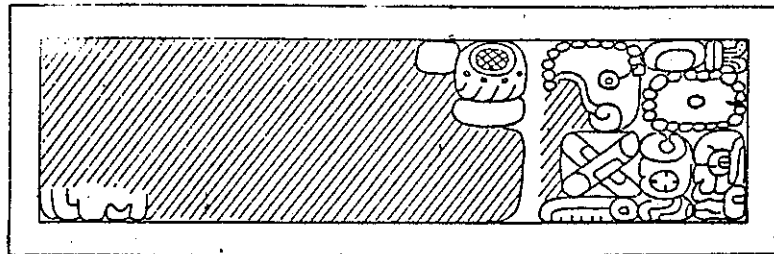
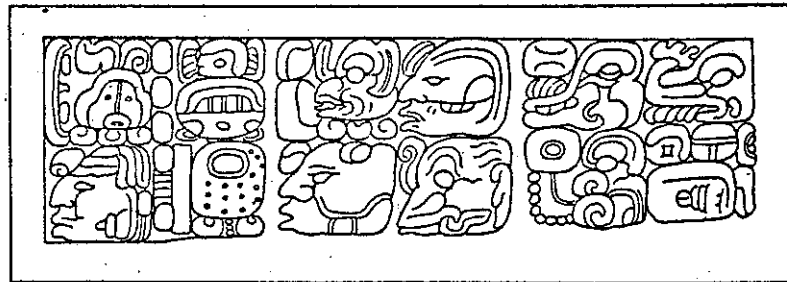


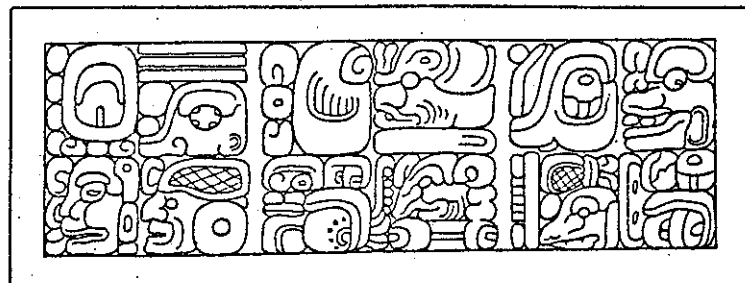
Fig. 2 Rio Amarillo Altar 1 (drawing by author)



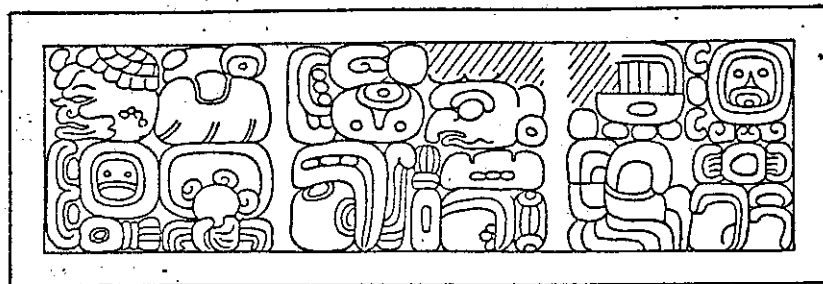
a



b



c



d

FIG. 59.—Inscription on four sides of Altar I at Rio Amarillo.

Fig. 3 Rio Amarillo Altar 1 (drawing after Morley [1920])

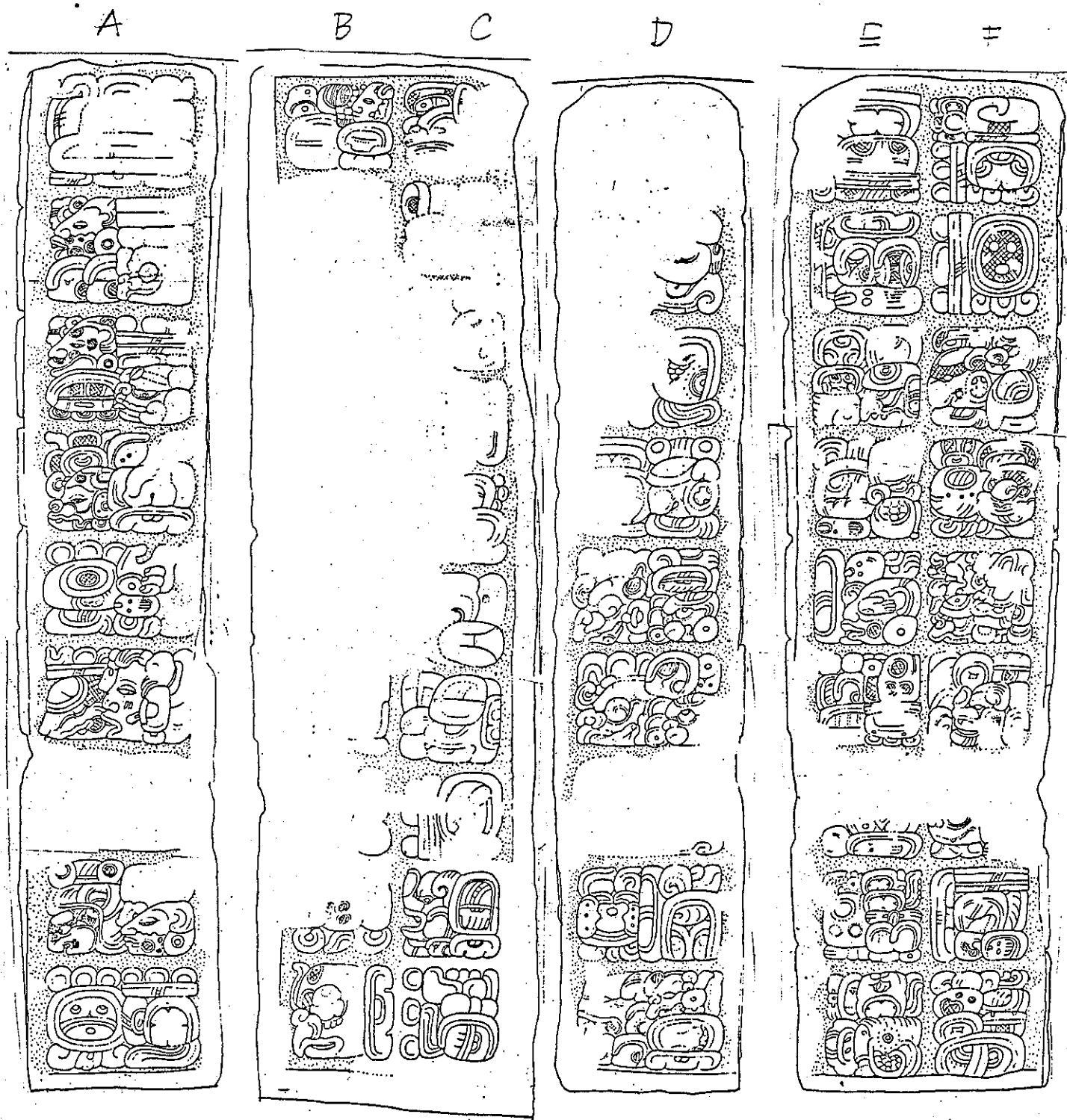


Fig. 4 Copan Stela 10 (drawing by author)

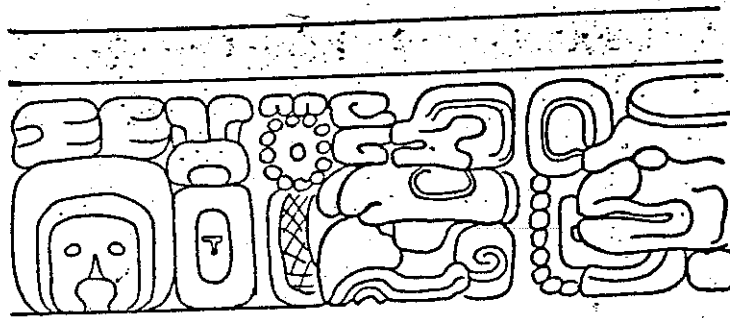
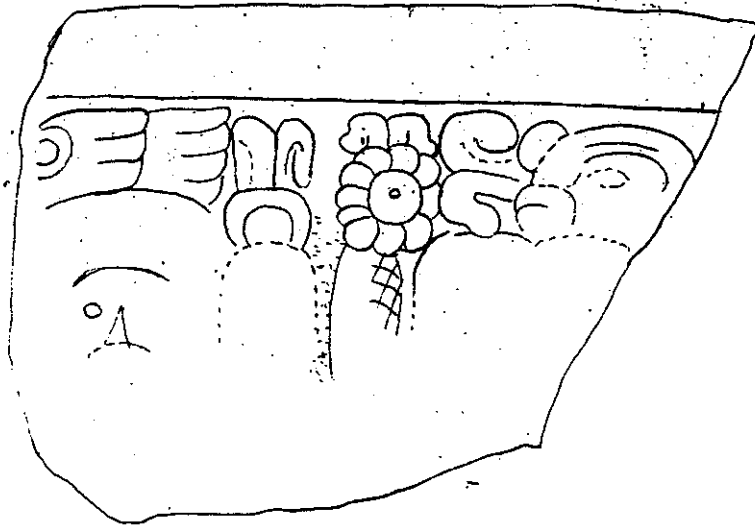


Fig. 5 Rio Amarillo Stela 2 (a) drawing by author (b) drawing after Morley (1920)

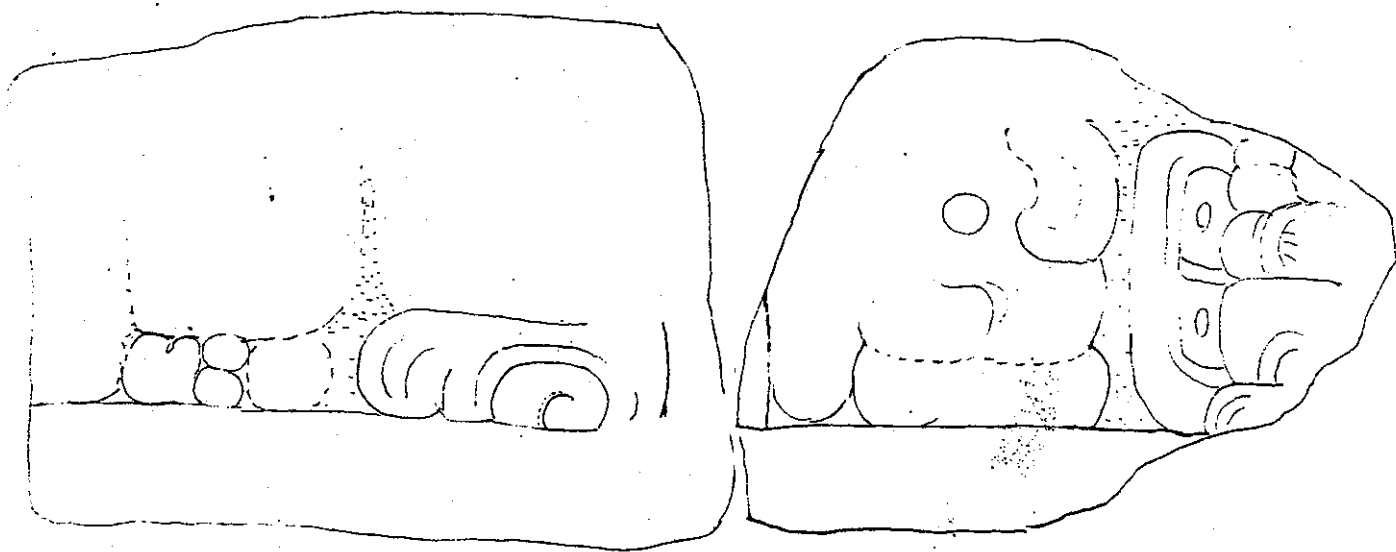


Fig. 6 A possible fragment from Rio Amarillo Altar 2 in a bodega at Copan.