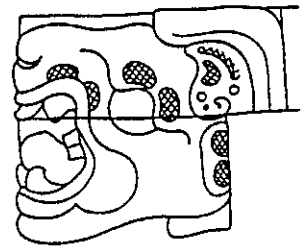


Copán Mosaics Project Copán Note* 94

April, 1991
Austin, Texas



A Scribe on Stela 63 at Copán

by Justin Kerr

In Copan Note No. 56, it is suggested that the icon inserted in the headband of the glyph ahau is a perforator (Fig.1.)



It is suggested here that this icon is not a perforator but instead is the scribal feather, inferring that the person to whom this glyph is dedicated is

indeed a scribe or assumes a title of scribe. The royal families did include among their members individuals who were versed the art of writing. David Stuart points out that a member of the house of Naranjo was indeed the artist who painted the vase known as Coe 47. The title of scribe, particularly that of the Ahau scribe would be in keeping with the practices of royal personages (Kerr 1987).

In the Copan area of Sepulturas a carved bench is shown to have been dedicated to a scribe who has connections to the royal house of Copan. A statue carved in the round of a scribe was found in the debris of the structure. One of the main hallmarks of the scribe as expressed in sculpture and on the vases is a feather worn behind the ear tucked into the headband. The icon shown in the glyph under discussion is this feather.

*The Copán Notes are a running series of commentaries and small reports deriving from the multidisciplinary research project designed to conserve, document, and analyze the architectural and sculpture monuments of the Classic Maya ruins of Copán. Originally undertaken by William L. Fash and known as the Copán Mosaics Project, this endeavor has since June 1988 formed part of the larger Copán Acropolis Project, funded and carried out by the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia through financing from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Funding for the Copán Mosaics Project, the Copán Hieroglyphic Stairway Project, and supplementary funding for the Copán Acropolis Project has been provided by the National Science Foundation (1986-1988), the National Geographic Society (1986-1989), the National Endowment for the Humanities (1986-1987), the Center for Field Research (EARTHWATCH; 1985-1988), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (1987; 1989), the H.J. Heinz Charitable Fund (1986), Council for International Exchange of Scholars (1987), and Northern Illinois University (1985-1989). The Copán Acropolis Project, as a dependency of the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia, is subject to the rules of that body. Regarding any re-use or subsequent distribution of these materials presented in the Copán Notes or in project publications, those rules stipulate that any publication using materials (either written or in the form of line drawings or photographs) derived from the Copán Acropolis Project must receive prior written consent from the Project Director (William Fash) and the Director of the Instituto (José María Casco). These notes are published by the Copán Acropolis Project and the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia.

A vase excavated at Copan (Fig. 2) shows two scribes both of whom have the feather icon behind the ear in the same position as the ahaw glyph above.

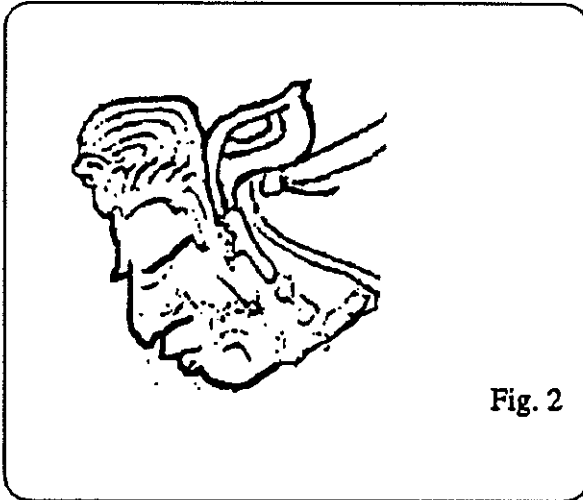


Fig. 2

The glyph is that of an Ahau as indicated by the spot on the cheek, a common way of identifying Ahau or lord. The headband twin, Hunaphu is shown with the spot on the cheek and a headband. This twin is also shown as a scribe. The half brothers Hun Batz and Hun Chuen are usually identified as scribes but the other set of twins, Hunaphu and Xbalanque may also be shown using the implements of the scribe (Fig. 3).

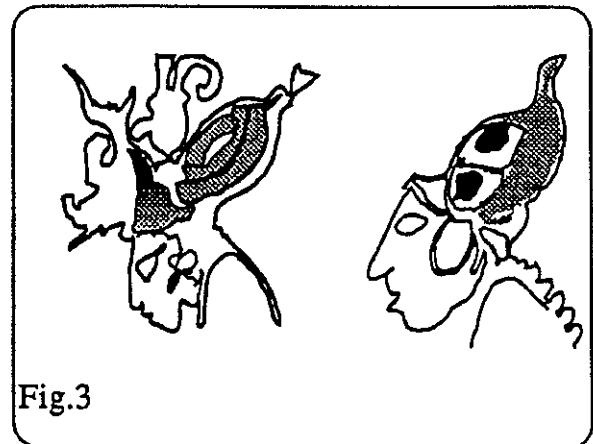


Fig. 3

Maya rulers use many titles to announce their power, the scribal title was one of them.¹

References

- Kerr, Justin
1987 The Popol Vuh as an Instrument of Power. Unpublished paper presented at the Maya Meetings, The University Museum, Philadelphia.
- Coe, Michael D.
1974 A Carved Wooden Box from the Classic Maya Civilization. In *Primera Mesa Redonda de Palenque, Part II* (edited by Merle Greene Robertson): 51-58. Pebble Beach: Robert Louis Stevenson School.

1. From Linda Schele: On the last day of the 1991 Advanced Seminar of the Texas Maya Meetings, Mathew Looper presented his findings on the wooden box from Tortuguero (Coe 1974) which includes a version of this glyph, one with a bird head rather than the ahaw head, as a title into which a lord was seating. As Matt presented his interpretations, Nikolai Grube leaned over to me and whispered that he thought the title might be *itz'at*, "sage." His suggestion is supported by the consistent presence of a *ta* or *ti* suffix as a phonetic complement and by the appearance of a *tz'a* prefix in examples on Caracol Stela 16 and the Step from Papagayo at Copan. Nikolai will write a later paper with full evidence for his reading, but I believe he has correctly deciphered the glyph and provided phonetic evidence for Justin's identification in this note.