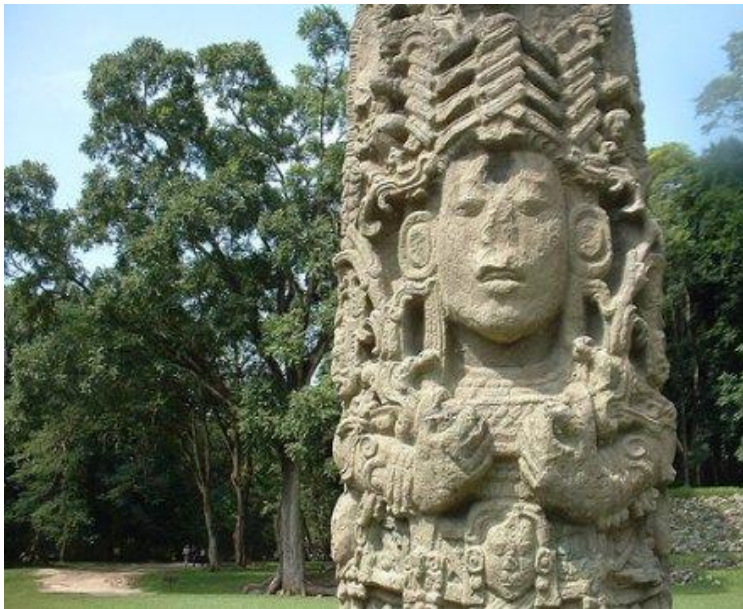


# The Performance of a Maya King: The Orientation, Iconography, and Manipulations of the Stelae of Copan's King *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil*

Jacki Erin Altman  
Department of Anthropology



*Primary Thesis Advisor*  
Inga Calvin, Department of Anthropology

*Committee Members*  
Douglas Bamforth, Department of Anthropology  
Reece Auguiste, Department of Film Studies

University of Colorado at Boulder  
April 2013

## **Abstract**

This paper was born from an evolving fascination with the ways in which an image can be manipulated to significantly affect one's perception of reality. This visual idea is applied to the Maya site of Copan, Honduras during the Classic Maya Period. This paper focuses on the visual impact of the eight stelae located in the Great Plaza of Copan and erected by the thirteenth king, *Waxaklajuun Ub'aah K'awiil*, or "18-Rabbit," who ruled Copan from 695-738 AD. I argue that an ancient king's manipulative power in the deliberate orientation and construction of his monuments affects the manner in which the stelae's images are initially viewed and received. Images function as tools for the advancement of the king's power. In these images, 18-Rabbit's knowledge of cosmological events, recording of his mythic interactions, and depictions of his kingly rituals are displayed. French philosopher Jacques Ranciere's sentence-image theory is used explain how the illustrated manifestations on the stelae instigate a myriad of connections with the reality of Maya religious life. The physical imagery of public rituals performed by 18-Rabbit manipulates Copan's image of its king as an elevated personage whose unique position allows him to engage in other-worldly activities that contribute to Copan daily life. By examining the construction and illustration of the stelae through a theatrical lens, it is possible to trace the orchestration of political and religious manipulations of 18-Rabbit's grand performance.

The manipulations of an environment in order to mold a certain reaction or convey a particular message is prevalent in a myriad of historical examples. Sigurd Bergmann, as reviewed in Bohannon (2012:116), discusses the concept of “built environments” in his analysis of deliberate spiritual trends in church architecture in which he maintains an emphasis on visual arts as a tool of theological imposition. Nancy L. Thompson (2007:28) discusses the role of art and power in ancient Rome by citing the sculpted portraiture, that were commissioned by political leaders in order to commemorate, remind, and flaunt their political prowess. These remnants of Roman art function not only as important archeological relics, but also as a way in which to study the manipulative tools of propaganda tools that emphasized authority and reaffirmed public opinion (Thompson 2007:31). Throughout history, there exist examples of art and architecture acting as instruments of exploitation by a political leader in order to affirm a certain agenda.

This paper will examine this topic by employing the Classic Period (300-900 AD) Maya city of Copan, Honduras, and, specifically, the reign of *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil*, whose name transliterates as "18 Are the Manifestations of K'awiil"<sup>1</sup> and who ruled from 695-738 AD. The king's political and economic agendas were encoded in public performances associated with, and the recognizable mythic references in the iconography of, the eight stelae he erected. These manipulative visual efforts correlated with the evolution of 18-Rabbit's continued ascent of power. As will be shown in this paper, his construction and modification of the Great Plaza of

---

<sup>1</sup> Before epigraphers deciphered the phonetic and logographic components of his name, they resorted to the nicknames of "18 Jog" or "18 Rabbit" to identify the 13<sup>th</sup> King of Copan Kelley, D.H.

1962 Phoneticism in the Maya Script.  
Thompson, J.E.S.

1954 The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.. For ease of identification, this paper will employ the name "18 Rabbit" rather than the longer, rather cumbersome, appellation.

Copan, is analogous to a theatrical performance. The king's carefully orchestrated monuments were placed strategically in the newly configured Plaza to influence, support, and exalt the public displays of his divine ritual and royal power. Using his royal authority and elements of theatricality, 18-Rabbit transformed the landscape of Copan's Great Plaza into an intimate and powerful sacred stage.

My thesis will begin with a brief review of the exploration and excavation of the site of Copan, Honduras, before giving an iconographic and textual analysis of the stelae erected in the Great Plaza during the reign of 18-Rabbit. Using the analogy of a theatrical performance, I will argue that through public ritual displays and the enduring visual impact of his stelae, 18-Rabbit manipulated both his environment and his audience in order to promote his own political motivations.

### **Exploration and Excavation of the Site Core**

As noted by Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube (2008:191), Copan is one of the most frequently visited and thoroughly investigated sites of the Maya world. The site of Copan has provided key evidence regarding the foundation of Maya dynastic rulership, provided material with which to make epigraphic decipherments and iconographic analysis, and revealed data for untangling the network of relationship between Maya cities. The site has also been significant in addressing the relationship between rulership and the effect of environmental degradation (Sanders and Webster 1994; Thompson 1954).

The annual flooding of the Copan River delivered fertile soils with which to produce an agricultural surplus (Fash 2001:37). The lush Copan Valley is surrounded by mountains, hills, and sacred caves that provide a locus for communicating with ancestral spirits and the Underworld. As Fash (2001:28) points out, this relationship between the revered caves and the

city was manifest through Copan's use of an emblem glyph consisting of a leaf-nosed bat like those that inhabit the valley's caves (Figure 1). At the center of the Copan Valley rises the Acropolis, a constructed hill next to the Copan River, over which the 16 kings of Copan built a series of successive pyramids, platforms and temples (Martin and Grube 2008:191).

The site of Copan was brought to European attention with a report by Diego Garcia de Palacio in 1576 in which he described the ruins to Philip II, the King of Spain (Fash 2001:48). Colonel Juan Galindo is credited with conducting the first "excavations" of Copan in 1834. Galindo's work was followed with John Lloyd Stephens's and Frederick Catherwood's bestselling narrative (Stephens 1969 (1841)). Catherwood's drawings of Copan's monuments, and especially the hieroglyphic inscriptions, showed the world the beauty of Maya writing. Stephens purchased the site of Copan for 50 dollars and brought back pieces of monuments in hopes of building a theme park around them (Drew 1999:62). Alfred Maudslay, who began excavating and rebuilding parts of Copan in 1885, produced a five-volume archaeological account that provided detailed descriptions, photographs, and illustrations of the monuments (Maudslay 1889). Maudslay also made plaster casts of the stelae and altars in the Great Plaza that he took back for the British Museum in London.

Charles P. Bowditch, director of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University, received permission to explore the ruins for 10 years beginning in 1892 (Traxler 2004:59). As part of the agreement, the Peabody Museum was awarded half the objects recovered during their research. Archaeologists produced the first detailed map of the Copan Valley and excavations focused on the monumental architecture of the Acropolis. Sylvanus G. Morley made a thorough study of the dates inscribed on Copan's monuments in order to establish a chronology of the site (Morley 1920). Under the direction of Gustav Strömshvik, many of the

collapsed buildings were excavated and restored. He also was involved resetting the stela in the Great Plaza and probing their offering caches (Strömsvik 1941).

In 1977 Harvard University initiated the Proyecto Arqueológico Copan (PAC). In addition to investigating Valley's ecology and settlement density, PAC produced a detailed map of the Acropolis employing state of the art survey equipment (Hohmann and Vogrin 1982). Charles Cheek (1983a) conducted important analysis of the Great Plaza that emphasized the construction history and identified the main structural features using electric resistivity to guide excavation. Beginning in the 1980s, the focus of research at Copan shifted to an emphasis on studying royal dynastic rule and the manipulation of power through a number of independently-financed academic projects.

### **THE STAGE IS SET**

The written history of Copan's royal dynasty began with the accession of *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo*, transliterated as "Radiant First Quetzal Macaw," in 426 AD. It has been postulated that this first king of Copan was of Mexican origin based on the quantity of foreign artifacts found in his tomb, the introduction of new architectural styles and Teotihuacan-inspired iconography (Bell, et al. 2004; Stuart 2004).

On July 19, 695 AD, *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil*, 13th ruler in the dynastic line of *Yax K'uk Mo*, ascended the throne (Schele and Mathews 1998:134). His father, *K'ahk' Uti Witz' K'awiil* ("Fire-Mouth Water-Spray K'awiil"), had ruled for 67 years; a reign that established Copan as an large, wealthy and successful Maya city with a network of alliances in the Southern Maya Lowlands (Martin and Grube 2008:201).

18-Rabbit utilized the space of Copan's Great Plaza to assert and affirm his authoritative royal power. Landscape often contains ancient clues that archaeologists attempt to piece together

in order to understand and study the past (Ashmore 1991). This paper will seek to resurrect the architectural motivations of the king 18-Rabbit using evidence provided by Copan's Great Plaza and by focusing on the eight stelae that he erected there from 704-735 AD. The construction of the Great Plaza by 18-Rabbit documents the king's rise to power through the creation of sacred space, presentation of carefully chosen tropes, and the reception by his people. At the start of 18-Rabbit's reign, the Plaza is an entirely different space, free of the stelae that were soon to dominate its landscape.

### **The Great Plaza of Copan, Honduras**

The construction of the Great Plaza into a stage, a place of performance, mirrors the Maya people's perception of 18-Rabbit's absolute power. The Great Plaza of Copan acted as a sacred space within which 18-Rabbit performed rituals and sent messages to his people. The northern part of the Plaza was reconstructed by 18-Rabbit, who, in addition to remodeling Structure 10L-4, erected eight stelae in a deliberate fashion around the plaza.

When 18-Rabbit took the throne in 695 AD, the Great Plaza was an unenclosed, open space (Newsome 2001:74). According to excavations conducted by Charles Cheek, Structure 10L-2 stood at the northern end of the Great Plaza opposite Structure 10L-4 to the south (Newsome 2001:73). 18-Rabbit's stelae transformed this open, public area into a theater for living ritual and a space of communication between a king and his people.

As shown in Figure 2, the plaza inherited by 18-Rabbit consisted of a few individual monuments scattered randomly over a large, single plaza. The shaded monuments indicate the configuration of the plaza around the year 700 AD. At this time, the northern section of Copan consisted of a single plaza without division into the Great and Middle Plazas and the ballcourt lay farther south than its current location. Although Structures 10L-1 and 10L-3, on the east and

west sides of the Great Plaza, are identified in Cheek's excavation there is no information about their construction sequence.

### **Structure 10L-2**

Before 18-Rabbit's epic program of stelae construction dominated the middle area of the Great Plaza, Structure 10L-2 stood alone at the north. The earliest phase of Structure 10L-2, known as 10L-2-3<sup>rd</sup>, contained sherds that dated to the Acbi Ceramic phase (400-700 AD) and provided an archaeomagnetic date of 572 AD (Cheek and Kennedy Embree 1983:130). Sherds recovered from 10L-2-2<sup>nd</sup> indicate Structure 10L-2 was enlarged and modified to a more rectangular form with a double terrace and central hieroglyphic staircase around 700 AD (Baudez 1994:149) (Cheek and Kennedy Embree 1983:132). These recovered sherds from Structure 10L-2-2<sup>nd</sup> indicate the monument was remodeled during the reign of the 12<sup>th</sup> king of Copan and father of 18-Rabbit, *K'ahk' Uti Witz K'awiil*.

### **Structure 10L-4**

Structure 10L-4 began as a narrow stage and was later modified into a more prominent, flatter platform upon which the king could conduct rituals in front of a live audience. Excavations by Cheek and Milla Villeda (Cheek and Milla Villeda 1983:79) revealed stratigraphic analysis indicating that the construction of 10L-4-sub1 commenced between 550-600 AD and included offerings and stela fragments that stylistically dated to the reign of Copan's founder, *Yax K'uk Mo* (426-437 AD). During none of its history did it form a north-south axis with Structure 10L-2, but always stood slightly to the southwest. This seems noteworthy in light of the ritual significance associated with aligned construction method in Maya architecture (Ashmore 1991:200). After 613 AD, Structure 10L-4 was modified and enlarged to include a stairway on its north side (Cheek and Milla Villeda 1983:79). Newsome (2001:69) notes that



*K'ahk' Uti Witz K'awiil* may have been the patron who sponsored this construction, because his Stela I, that was subsequently moved to the northeast of Structure 10L-4, was dedicated in 676 AD .

Structure 10L-4 underwent constructional changes under 18-Rabbit (Figure 3). Before 731 AD, the platform stood in the middle of the Great Plaza and contained “three terraces, a basal platform on the north side, and two flights of stairs, one each on its north and south facades” (Newsome 2001:74). In conjunction with the erection of Stela A in 731 AD (9.15.0.3.0 12 *Ahau* 13 *Mac*), 18-Rabbit added staircases on the east and west sides of Structure 10L-4 that emphasized the four cardinal directions while maintaining a rectangular, rather than a square, footprint at the top of the temple. This newly conformed structure may have been used in ritual exhibition. With this construction, the now-prominent platform acted as a more obvious stage upon which 18-Rabbit could perform and display acts of kingly power. It is conceivable that a large group of people would have stood near the southern end of Structure 10L-4 after its reconstruction and that 18-Rabbit, on top of the structure, was elevated away from the people and closer to the gods.

### **Retaining Walls**

During the reign of the 12<sup>th</sup> king of Copan, *K'ahk' Uti Witz K'awiil*, the accessible, public nature of the plaza was originally open on four sides, which would have permitted free access to the Great and Middle Plaza. 18-Rabbit, by adding retaining walls and stairs on the north, east, and west sides of the Plaza, limited access to the Plaza (Martin and Grube 2008:20). In this way, 18-Rabbit began manipulating the environment of the Plaza in order to control and direct the plebian traffic, eventually limiting or eliminating altogether, a population that may have previously had full access to the entire Plaza.

## THE MISE-EN-SCENE:

### The Stelae

Six of the seven stelae of 18-Rabbit are grouped in the center of the Great Plaza of Copan and commemorated the completion of different *k'atuun* periods during 18-Rabbit's reign (Figure 4). The stelae are approximately 3.5 meters tall, 1 meter in width, and 1 meter thick (Newsome 2001:105). Their orientation in the Plaza, proximity to other monuments in the plaza, iconography, and dates of construction provide clues to the evolution and reception of 18 Rabbit's reign of power. The stelae themselves present 18 Rabbit to his people as a king who transcends the mythic realm to communicate with and walk among gods (Newsome 2001:105).

With the exception of Stela J, the stelae depict 18-Rabbit representing the powerful nature of the gods in the guise of various deities, and, by wearing ritual garments and symbolically-charged symbols. He consistently represents himself through posture and hair style as the Corn God; symbol of the seasonal pattern of death, fruition, and reanimation. In each stela he holds a serpent bar in his arms (Newsome 2001:105). The serpent bar, so named because of the opened snake jaws at both ends of a horizontal tube orbal, reveal emerging supernatural anthropomorphic beings. The consistent presence of the serpent bar with its "vision serpents," mythological beings, references 18-Rabbit's ability to transcend the secular world to communicate with powerful, immortal entities (Schele and Miller 1986). Newsome (2001:108) notes that the iconography of the serpent bar evolves with each successive stela of 18-Rabbit; the bar begins as a writhing, live serpent, but becomes a ritual object, a rigid, royal scepter that forms a "tool of authority".

### Stela J

18 Rabbit erected Stela J to commemorate and celebrate the first major Period Ending of his reign, on 9.13.10.0.0.7 *Ahau 3 Cumku* or 704 AD<sup>2</sup>. It was placed at the eastern edge of the Great Plaza at the beginning of Sepulturas *sacbe* (Figure 5). Excavations directed by David Webster (1989) established that the Sepulturas Residential Compound, identified as Group 9N-8, was occupied by a succession of elite scribes who served the Copan court.

Stela J was set with its flat sides facing east and west (Figure 6). The east side of Stela J, with its text decorated in a complicated textile pattern, faced Group 9N-8. The text weaves a pattern that evokes the textile of a braided mat. Such physical mats covered the royal throne and iconographically symbolized a Maya king's right to rule. The text is frightfully complicated to read and would have required someone with knowledge of textile design in order to decipher the intricate glyphic pattern. This was not a monument whose message was obvious at first glance and the creation of 18-Rabbit's first stela would have proved time-consuming and costly.

---

<sup>2</sup> This thesis will employ the following orthographic conventions:

1. All calendric information will use the Colonial Yucatec spelling conventions of J. Eric S. Thompson  
Thompson, J.E.S.
2. 1954 *The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press. .
3. Transcription of hieroglyphic text will follow the conventions established by the Center for Maya Research  
Stuart, G.E.
4. 1988 *A Guide to the Style and Content*. *In* *Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing*, Number 15.  
Washington, D. C.: Center for Maya Research.
5. *ibid.* }
6. All site names use spellings that can be found on a map rather than orthographic reconstructions. To  
identify structures, I will use the nomenclature established by the Proyecto Arqueológico Copan Cheek,  
C.D.
7. 1983b *Introduccion a las Operaciones en la Plaza Principal*. *In* *Introduccion a las Arqueologia de Copan*,  
Honduras  
pp. 11-24. Tegucigalpa, D.C., Honduras: Secretaria de Estado en el Despacho de Cultura y Turismo..
8. However, because the identification of the stelae in the Great Plaza established by Maudslay Maudslay,  
A.P.
9. 1889 *Biologia Centrali-Americana, or, Contributions to the knowledge of the fauna and flora of Mexico  
and Central America*. Archaeology. 6 vols. London, UK: University of Oklahoma (reprint 1983). is better  
known, I will use it rather than the system developed by the Proyecto Arqueológico Copan.

The iconography and text on the four sides of Stela J emphasize the accessions of past kings, cosmological events, and performance of ritual. On dates correlated with significant celestial phenomena in the texts and the iconography of this stela serve to legitimate the rightful accession of 18-Rabbit. As noted by Newsome (2001:82), the accession of a Maya king often was associated through glyphs and iconography as being connected to the rising of stars and planets.

The text on the north and south sides of the stela emphasizes the similarities between the reign of 18-Rabbit and the founder of the Copan dynasty, Yax K'uk' Mo' (Newsome 2001:103). Newsome writes that 18-Rabbit may have felt as if he were ushering in a new Maya era and wanted describe himself "as a kind of founder in his own right." To emphasize this message, Stela J physically replicates a "house of lineage" (Newsome 2001:77). Originally, Stela J may have been surmounted by a stone carved to represent a thatched roof with symbolic roofcomb. This roof, now displayed as a triangular altar before the stela, may mark the stela as a stone house, or house of lineage (Newsome 2001:77).

### **Stela C**

Seven years after the erection of the complex, text-heavy Stela J, 18-Rabbit constructed a very different stela. Stela C, completed in 711 AD, is a visual masterpiece whose iconography features parallel images of 18-Rabbit engaged with and representing aspects of the gods. From Stela J to Stela C (704-711 AD), 18-Rabbit gains in power. The message shifts from a legitimization of 18-Rabbit's place in Copan's royal line to a visual foray of kingly power, divine connection, and the presence of various cosmic dualities balanced within the king himself (Schele and Mathews 1998:149-150).

Stela C was dedicated on the solar date 9.14.0.0.0 6 *Ahau* 13 *Muan* (December 1, 711 AD). It is located northwest of the center in the Great Plaza (Figure 7). Both the eastern and western sides of Stela C are noteworthy (Figure 8 & 9) and contain depictions of the king performing sacrifice, ensuring fertility, restoring order, and communicating with the mythic, godly world (Newsome 2001:113). Stela C refers to royal obligations and insinuates a purposeful connection between 18-Rabbit and the gods themselves.

The duality of life itself is emphasized in the representations of an older and younger 18-Rabbit, one on each side of the stela. The presence of the beard on the figure on west side expresses the wisdom of old age and the eternal nature of dynastic rulership. Newsome (2001:107) points out that the beard ritually would embody both the decay of age and wisdom acquired over time.

The western side of Stela C features a bearded 18-Rabbit with a headdress in the form of a Winal Frog, an anthropomorphic representation of a period of 20 days. The headdress is surmounted by a solar face and images of supernaturals marked with colors denoting the cardinal directions. The belt of the bearded king is decorated with three Jaguar God of the Underworld masks, the personification of the Night Sun in the Underworld. From the center mask, and forming 18-Rabbit's loincloth, hangs a symbol interpreted as the World Tree. The World Tree marks 18-Rabbit as the axis mundi center of the universe for the people of Copan. The aged 18-Rabbit holds a serpent bar from which emerges a leaf-nosed bat wearing a turban, a zoomorphic full-figure representation of the name of Copan (Schele and Mathews 1998:143). On the king's arms are knots and images of jawless supernatural beings, articulating the king's duty to engage in bloodletting to ensure the agricultural and human fertilities of his people. This

representation of power in iconography portrays 18-Rabbit, 14 years into his reign, engaging in significant Maya kingly rituals, such as bloodletting and communicating with gods.

The western side of this stela faces the direction of the setting sun. Rather than representing death, 18-Rabbit garbs himself in the guise of the Jaguar God who will pass through the underworld before reemerging with the sunrise. The bearded king depicts a venerable yet virile incarnation of 18-Rabbit as the controller of the movement of the heavens, renewal, and sacrifice. 18-Rabbit is shown reigning supreme as a link between the earthly world and the mythic world.

The eastern side of Stela C articulates the Maya king's assurance of fertility, world order, and renewal through sacrifice (Newsome 2001:113). A clean-shaven, young 18-Rabbit grasps a personified serpent bar in his arms, out of which scramble anthropomorphic spirits. The little figure coming out of the north skeletal jaw of the serpent bar is wearing a haircut diagnostic of the Corn God surmounted by a skeleton headdress alluding to the dried, skeletal corn kernel planted into the ground each spring that grows into the essential corn ear.

Atop the king's head rests a mammoth headdress adorned with supernatural masks that feature the Sun God at its apex in the sky. Characteristics of the Sun God mask includes large earflares, square eyes, the lack of a lower jaw, and a mirror on its forehead (Newsome 2001:113). Bloodletting ropes drip from both sides of 18-Rabbit's headdress (Newsome 2001:114). The presence these ropes, knotted three times to hold the heads of two leaf-nosed bats, as well as the knots bound around the king's wrists and ankles, signal one of the most important duties of the Maya king: penitential bloodletting.

The youthful 18-Rabbit has donned a skinned crocodilian belt as a loincloth, costume elements symbolizing the surface of the earth. Newsome (2001:114) writes that the belt is

composed of three earth monsters fused together into a saurian jaw. Newsome (2001:114) interprets this icon as an archetypal saurian/earth symbol plunging below the surface of the earth. She goes to write that 18-Rabbit represents a “tree growing from the body of the cayman as it descends to the watery underworld” (2001:115). Above the saurian jaw and forming the central image on the belt is a mask with the visage of Itzamnaah, the Creator Deity who ordered the universe on 13.0.0.0 4 *Ahau* 8 *Cumku* (11 August 3114 BC) (Van Stone 2010). This symbolism reinforces the message that 18-Rabbit creates and recreates fertility on the surface of the earth. The king likens himself to the center of the earth, which may have influenced the Maya people’s view of him as a king who was capable of bringing order and fertile success to the land.

Like the parallel faces of 18-Rabbit, the altars that rest in front of the eastern and western sides of Stela C are very different. On the western side lies a turtle-shaped altar portraying the surface of the earth. On the eastern side rests a plain, rectangular altar. Claude Baudez (1994:36-38) notes that the north-facing head is skeletal and alludes to the world of the dead while the south-facing head is fully-fleshed. When paired with Stela C, the two replicate an image seen on Classic Period Maya ceramics of the re-animated Corn God emerging from the crack in a turtle carapace to flourish again on the surface of the earth.

The altar on the western side represents sacrifice and imperial responsibility. The king is akin to the setting sun and the earth itself, indicated by the *cauac*’s mountain reference. Stela C’s western altar’s setting sun analogy is contrasted with the eastern image of 18-Rabbit rising from the earth. The western side is thought to represent night, as it faces the setting sun, and the eastern side, the day and sunrise (Newsome 2001:111). 18-Rabbit in this sense can transcend the mortal realm into the mythic world. It is also a representation of a cyclical day. This power statement would have a powerful effect on 18-Rabbit’s audience as they view their thirteenth

king as the harbinger of day and night. 18-Rabbit's use of space here indicates his display of power: he is the sunrise and sunset.

### **Stela F and Stela 4**

Stela F and 4 were dedicated five years apart and contain similar iconographic themes of ritual sacrifice. The Pan-Mesoamerican theme of royal penitential self-sacrifice is present in the text and iconography of these third and fourth stelae placed in the Great Plaza (Figure 10). Schele and Miller (1986) established that, like most of Mesoamerica, the roots of Maya religion were based in the concept of reciprocity. The Popol Vuh (Christenson 2007) records that the ancient Creators animated humans by pouring their divine blood into corn. In order to reciprocate this original gift and ensure godly favor, humans offer their own blood to the deities. This ancient obligation of the Maya king created a conduit by which he was able to interact with the gods through his bloodletting. Bloodletting ropes in iconography were used to represent tools of penance, to emphasize humility, and to indicate the subservient position of war captives. As depicted in the lintels of Yaxchilan (Schele and Miller 1986:186-190), royal bloodletting involved piercing the tongue or penis and then threading the rope through the lesion, saturating the rope with penitential blood that was subsequently burned. By burning the blood, along with incense and rubber, the Gods could consume the essence of the offering in the smoke. Many sacrificial bloodletting ropes and knots are represented on the stelae of 18-Rabbit as a sign of his piety. Through the use of this icon, 18-Rabbit presents himself willing to form this covenant on behalf of Copan's well-being.

### **Stela F**

Stela F was dedicated on 9.14.10.0.0 5 *Ahau* 3 *Mac* (October 9, 721 AD). The stela, erected ten years after Stela C, stands directly to its west. Newsome (2001:116) asserts that Stela



F portrays 18-Rabbit as a ballplayer and warrior (Figure 11). By contrast, Schele and Matthews (1998:147) believe that 18-Rabbit is garbed as the Baby Jaguar, a creature frequently shown being sacrificed atop a mountain by a deity known as *Chak Xib Chahk* (an incarnation of the Rain or Storm God). This argument is supported by the large altar in the form of a mountain known as the Stone Monster (or *Cauac* Monster) that stands in front of Stela F (Figure 12). According to Miller and Taube (1993:120), this icon represents a personified mountain upon which many mythic rituals are conducted. The Monster wears a band with three knots around its forehead from which tumble two young jaguars on the north and south sides. The sacrifice of the Baby Jaguar Deity was successfully reconstructed in an important analysis conducted by Simon Martin (Martin 2002). As an embodiment of a sacrificial entity, 18-Rabbit is depicting himself as willing to be sacrificed to maintain the cycle of death and regeneration.

Over the millennia, much of Stela F has been damaged, but certain symbols are still discernible. There is much to suggest that Stela F depicts the King as a Jaguar deity, whose cult denotes themes of war and sacrifice (Newsome 2001:122). The Baby Jaguar deity wears a shell beard, oval earpools, and a youthful face. The text of Stela F nestles between bound bloodletting ropes that flow down 18-Rabbit's feathered backrack before terminating in personified bloodletting flints with flames affixed to their heads.

18-Rabbit's headdress sports vision serpents out of whose mouths flow bloodletting cords. The serpent bar in the king's hands has not weathered the trauma of time, but the anthropomorphized figures that emerge from each side can be identified as more personified stone bloodletters. In the hands of these supernaturals may be sacrificial blades or other objects having to do with sacrifice (Newsome 2001:122). Bloodletting cords wrap around the king's legs to indicate that he is analogous to a sacrificial captive (Tremblay 2007:102).

### Stela 4

Stela 4 was erected five years after Stela F in 9.14.15.0.0 11 *Ahau* 18 *Zac* or September 13, 726 AD. This fourth stela further emphasizes the theme of bloodletting sacrifice. The stela is located to the west of the center of the Great Plaza and north of Structure 10L-4.

Unfortunately, the stela itself exhibits serious damage (Figure 13). It is difficult to discern the obscure figures that emerge from the serpent bar in the king's hands due to its obscure state. However, the bloodletting cord slithers through the entirety of the monument, forming a loop through a perforation in the king's penis, and coiling down the body ending in vision serpents (Newsome 2001:124). The figures emerging from the opened jaws of the serpents are difficult to distinguish, but Newsome (2001:124) believes them to be different incarnations of *K'awiil* (God K), the god who represents the power of royal ancestry. 18-Rabbit wears a short dancer's skirt decorated with tinkling shells. The skirt is held in place by an anthropomorphic sacrificial rope that forms the king's loincloth. This iconography suggests that by performing bloodletting through his penis, the king is able to communicate with his royal ancestors. Although badly eroded, the small figure of a deified ancestor sits at the apex of 18-Rabbit's crown. Based on analysis of the icons, Stela 4 appears to emphasize 18-Rabbit's ability to access the world of and communicate with his deified ancestors through bloodletting.

A spherical altar lies before Stela 4. The altar is a representation of a rubber ball encircled by a bloodletting rope. The Maya ballgame provided an opportunity for elite captives to be sacrificed as part of rituals that reenacted the ballgames played by the Hero Twins against the evil Lords of the Underworld (Newsome 2001:95-97). The theme was a popular one with 18-Rabbit, who depicted himself as a ballplayer engaged in competition with supernatural entities in the Great Ballcourt that he built to the south of the Great Plaza.

### **Stela H and A**

Stela H and Stela A were dedicated within a month of each other and, similar to Stelae F and 4, contain related themes. According to Newsome, the fifth and sixth stelae of 18-Rabbit depict “key points of a 260-day cycle” that began on 9.15.0.0.0 (Newsome 2001:126). The stelae also contain imagery that explores the afterlife of *Butz’ Chan* (Newsome 2001:127). *Butz’ Chan*, the eleventh king of Copan, ruled during a time of population growth in Copan and has been referenced in many stelae built by later kings (Martin and Grube 2008:200). The two Stelae A and H stand opposite each other (Figure 14), which is significant given their dedication dates and the fact that the hieroglyphic text of Stela A mirrors the events recounted on Stela H (Newsome 2001:127).

### **Stela H**

Stela H, dedicated on 9.14.19.5.0 4 *Ahau* 18 *Muan* or December 1, 730, is located in the southeast corner of the Great Plaza and directly south of Stela F. It faces west toward its mate, Stela A. The text of Stela H records cosmological dates that sanction 18-Rabbit’s ritual actions (Figure 15). In referencing cosmological occurrences that correlate with tangible ritual actions, 18-Rabbit evokes the larger, mythic powers of the cosmos in his spectacle.

Stela H depicts the king as the youthful and glorious Corn God garbed in the intricate apparel of the Holmul Dancer. The Corn God is commonly associated with themes of “new life and sacrificial death” (Newsome 2001:127). The Holmul Dancer is a manifestation of the Corn God whose history in Maya iconography involves a mythic ballgame, abundant fertility, and sacrifice (Newsome 2001:127).

The stela’s scene unfolds with 18-Rabbit, in the guise of the Holmul Dancer, representing the axis mundi and the abundant growth of the maize plant (Newsome 2001:129). The most

prominent icon on Stela H is the large husk of corn fixed to the top of the king's headdress. This corn, cut from the stalk and sacrificed to provide sustenance, represents the climax of the king's sacrificial rituals to ensure human and agricultural fertility. The entire stela features 18-Rabbit as a manifestation of a maize plant that provides for all humans (Newsome 2001:130). Four vision serpents slide down the sides of the stela and fumigate further manifestations of the Corn God. Themes of new life, fertility, and earth reinforce 18-Rabbit's role in his people's eyes as ensuring agricultural fertility through his divine connections.

An intriguing feature of 18-Rabbit's apparel is the netted jade skirt worn by royal Maya women in scenes of penitential bloodletting and rites of passage. In fact, several early archaeologists believed that Stela H depicted a woman. By donning attire typically worn by females, 18-Rabbit can be seen as a nurturing parent to his Maya people. The skirt could also be viewed as a metaphor for the appearance of the gods through 18-Rabbit's kingly visions. Newsome (2001:129) asserts that feminine skirts often symbolized "sacrifice and accession" and were worn by men during certain ritual events. The inclusion of this feminine-like garment could be argued to be a strategy on the part of the king to show his nurturing nature.

The text of Stela H, which exists within the feathers of the Holmul Dancer and along the sides of the stela, has proved a significant challenge to many epigraphers (Marcus 1976) (Martin and Grube 2008) (Schele and Mathews 1998). Although there is little doubt that the text associates 18-Rabbit with significant places, dualities, and divinities, much of the rhetoric remains unclear due to the fact that such expressions cannot be correlated with the ethnographic rituals documented in dictionaries.

### Stela A

Stela A's dedication date is 9.14.19.8.0 12 *Ahau* 18 *Cumku* or January 30, 731 AD. It was erected two months after Stela H and displays further adulation toward cosmological correlations in earth renewal rituals. Conclusive interpretations of the iconography of Stela A reveal references to the sun and its various apparitions (Figure 16 & 17). In this stela, 18-Rabbit is thought to represent the Sun God. Newsome (2001:132) interprets the text of Stela A as featuring an account of the death and divine glorification of the eleventh Copan king *K'ahk' Chan Yopaat*. 18-Rabbit's matted headdress indicates that a spirit of a past king is communicating with the present one. The skeletal head of *K'ahk' Chan Yopaat* above the matted pattern on 18-Rabbit's headdress contains features of the Sun God. This comparison indicates the sacred position of *K'ahk' Chan Yopaat* as a deified ancestor of Copan's royal line.

The thirteenth king is here portrayed in a costume modeled after his ancestor, *Butz' Chan*. His spirit is encompassed also in the celestial band, which acts as a belt and contains cosmological images that reference *Butz' Chan*'s godlike status. Mirrored celts and bags featuring the head of the perforator god hang from the king's waist (Newsome 2001:134). 18-Rabbit's loincloth suggests the practice of bloodletting and references fertility in the presence of the foliation which dangles from the vision serpents' noses. The bloodletting and fertility icons suggest that 18-Rabbit's blood sacrifice will fuel the growth and continued nourishment of fertile land (Newsome 2001:135).

The stela represents the progression of the sun through the different stages of the solstices (Newsome 2001:136). Newsome claims the entire stela, with its many forms of solar beings, could signify the lower, middle, and upper Maya cosmic worlds and that Stela A features

18-Rabbit as the axis between the worlds. The upper world, or top part of the stela, features *K'ahk' Chan Yopaat*, the deified king bathed in sun god references.

### **Stela B**

Stela B is positioned near Stela C and due north of Stela 4 on the western side of the Great Plaza. Dedicated on 9.15.0.0.0 4 *Ahau* 13 *Yax* (August 18, 731 AD), the seventh stela commissioned by 18-Rabbit was also the third stela erected in 731 AD. By the time Stela B is erected, Structure 10L-4 has been remodeled into a more prominent center of performance. The occurrence of Stela B's dedication in this significant year may concur with the cosmological sanctions Newsome associates with Stelae H and A.

Newsome (2001:136) notes that the iconography displayed in Stela B is similar to that of Stelae J and C in its mythology-entwined themes of sacrifice, cosmology, and “the power of kings to create the world.” Stela B features 18-Rabbit in the guise of *Chac* the executioner; this god is often linked with the planet Venus. In the stelae, the disguised 18-Rabbit is situated at the entrance of the underworld (Newsome 2001:136).

The costume worn by 18-Rabbit in Stela B contains imagery familiar to the Maya observers. As on Stela A a celestial band acts as a belt and from it hang mirrored celts, perforator bags, and shells. The loincloth is made of serpent snouts, which outline the image of a central deity who represents the world tree (Newsome 2001:137). The king's costume consists of a cloth-wound turban, a headdress diagnostic of “Copan's ruling house” (Newsome 2001:137).

The serpent bar in the king's hands is embellished with celestial motifs to indicate that its connection with the sky. The badly-damaged apparitions that emerge from the vision serpents mouths are recognizable as the deity *Chac* with shell beards and high knots of hair (Newsome 2001:137). Their gestures are hard to interpret due to the poor condition of the remaining stone,

but Newsome (2001:140) writes that the small deities are clutching at their costumes as if to offer them to 18-Rabbit to wear. According to Miller and Taube (1993:59-60), *Chac*, the Maya god of lightning and rain, was often associated with agriculture.

The western side of Stela B reveals a personified *witz* monster. The *witz* symbol means “mountain.” Dozens of *witz* masks and macaw heads are stacked in the upper sections of the façade. Newsome writes that the presence of the *witz* glyph and macaw masks indicate the stela’s direct connection with Temple 22, a personified structure built by 18-Rabbit to be used as ritual space (Martin and Grube 2000:204). Temple 22 is thought to represent the holy mountain where humans were first created from ears of corn (Newsome 2001:137). The text of Stela B identifies 18-Rabbit as the “Macaw Mountain Lord.” “Macaw mountain” refers to the world that the founder of Copan’s dynasty, Yax K’uk Mo’, established. The glyphs also reference the centers of the earth and sky, perhaps alluding to 18-Rabbit’s central role in the universe.

Stela B emphasizes growth and fertility through the presence of vines of foliage that drape the personified mountain. The agricultural world is sown with renewal and fertile promise as the figures draw out the many tendrils of foliage that adorn the monument. The god Chac exists as a figure of agricultural hope because of his mythic past. According to Maya belief, Chac was involved in the creation of the original maize plant (Miller and Taube 1993:60). By assuming the powers of Chac, 18-Rabbit revitalizes life on earth. The *witz* monster, numerous loops of foliage, and the presence of the deified royal ancestors represent the result of 18-Rabbit’s ritual for “earthly abundance” (Newsome 2001:140-141). Newsome also points out that the spirits of Copan’s past kings emphasize the linking of the spiritual world with the mortal world in that they bridge the gap between the past and the present, ensuring fertility for the

future. 18-Rabbit transcends the immortal realm in order to appeal for successful revitalization of the land (Newsome 2001:141).

### **Stela D**

Stela D was dedicated on 9.15.5.0.0 10 *Ahau 8 Ch'en* (July 22, 736 AD). The eighth and final stela of 18-Rabbit is located at the foot of Structure 10L-2 and was situated at the northern center of the Great Plaza (Figure 18).

The stela (Figure 19) features 18-Rabbit wearing the mask or possibly the flayed face of an aged person. Newsome (2001:141) writes that this usage has been interpreted as a manifestation of the Corn God, or perhaps a reference to the personified tree at the center of the world. The celestial belt, seen in Stelae A and B, is again present, as are the hanging celts, shells, and image of the perforator god. 18-Rabbit's blood-soaked loincloth is infused with symbols that indicate the king's holy sacrifice. Cloth bands are also present on the king's arms to show signs of bloodletting (Newsome 2001:144).

Much of the king's headdress is destroyed. The main figures in the stela's façade are the four vision serpents that slither around the king's body spewing apparitions of God K, who is the deity who communicates with 18-Rabbit in his dreams in this stela (Newsome 2001:141). The manifestations of God K offer gifts of fertility throughout the stela (Newsome 2001:149). Assisting the king in bringing forth these mythic visions are four figures with human bodies and bestial heads: twin saurians, a dwarf, and a deer (Newsome 2001:141).

### **The Grand Performance of 18-Rabbit:**

#### **An Analysis of the Theatrical Space and Further Description of the Iconographic Evidence**

“Theatre is first and foremost the space of visibility of speech, the space of problematic translations of what is said into what is seen” (Rancière 2009:88). 18-Rabbit recreates the Maya



ritual performance and immortalizes tradition into a visible reality. The king's power is elevated to a divine echelon through his treatment of the Great Plaza as a theatre. The Great Plaza begins as an unenclosed arena, which, we assume, permitted free access to all members of the Copan populace. After the construction of Stela J, 18-Rabbit adds retaining walls to spatially narrow his sacred arena. 18-Rabbit is staging a performance. Before, his stage was an unencumbered space, freely accessible to all. The addition of the seven deliberately-oriented stelae within the Great Plaza and the creation of a focused venue support this theatrical allusion.

### **Jacques Rancière: A Visual Dichotomy**

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2009:34) identifies an existing dichotomy within the image. An image consists of recognizable elements, such as a shared history, and at the same time represents singularly unique conceptual perspectives. Images act as instruments of demonstrated power in their uniquely decorated form within Copan's society. These images also encompass a clash of pictures akin to a cinematic montage, which displays many images in close succession so as to emphasize artistic connection or disassociation (Rancière 2003:55). Rancière (2003:45) coined the term "sentence-image" to describe the way in which multiple textual and visual representations emerge from a single image. There are a variety of chaotic associations present within a single image, including the image's context, history, and meaning. The sentence-image makes sense of juxtaposing concepts by inspiring a visual connection between the chaotic jumble of ideas (Rancière 2009:47). Rancière (2009:54) writes that the sentence-image serves as the link to previously unconnected meanings. Rancière's sentence-image theory can be applied in the theatrical perception of 18-Rabbit's stelae. The stelae's illustrated manifestations instigate a myriad of connections with the reality of Maya religious life.

### **Structure 10L-4**

18-Rabbit ensured that his Plaza became the artistic center of the city with his use of Structure 10L-4 as a place of public ritual performance in association; this role enlarged the continued construction of his stelae. The renovation of Structure 10L-4 implies an emphatic push toward the exploitation of 18-Rabbit's visual public performance. Newsome (2001:69) asserts that Structure 10L-4 may have been primarily orchestrated by *K'ahk' 'Uti Witz' K'awiil*, 18-Rabbit's father. In 731 AD, Structure 10L-4 is remodeled further into a staging venue with the additional roof flattening that represents an ancient theater. This sacred space was enlarged so that bigger and better rituals associated with Stelae H, A, and B could commence.

It seems likely that Structure 10L-4 was utilized as a sacred space before 18-Rabbit's reconstruction in 731 AD and that this message correlated with ritual performances in the minds of 18-Rabbit's people. By enlarging, rather than removing, the building reaffirmed the religious connection between his stelae and Structure 10L-4. This association supports the multi-layered rhetoric expressed in Jacques Ranciere's sentence-image theory. Due to the stelae's proximity to Structure 10L-4, upon which 18-Rabbit engaged in public performance, the audience can permanently link connections from the iconographic and textual imagery to 18-Rabbit's ephemeral performance. 18-Rabbit's stelae stand as privatized, yet immortal, reminders of the ritual performances that occurred on the reconstructed Structure 10L-4.

### **Stela J**

Stela J presents a different message and construction style that that articulated in the subsequent monuments erected by 18-Rabbit. In his first stela, 18-Rabbit did not start the visual pattern the remainder of his stelae would follow. Stela J's straightforward text links the activities of 18-Rabbit to dates of cosmological significance to the Maya. The monument itself represents a stone house of lineage. Essentially, this functions as 18-Rabbit's affirmation of his claim as part

of Copan's dynastic lineage. His legitimacy is written and captured in stone. The king acts as the producer and director of his stelae's theatrical production.

The complicated arrangement of the text and esoteric association of particular dates with unspecified celestial phenomena indicates that Stela J's text was not addressed to stimulate public discourse or promote general comprehension. Through the intentional location on the eastern edge of the Plaza and in its obscure content, the spectator spectrum of Stela J has been reduced to scribes and the literate elites. Stela J's east side is directed toward the scribe's village based on cross-cultural models and excavations directed by David Webster (1989). Scribes were the only ones sufficiently educated enough to decipher the complicated mat-pattern text of the stela. The scribes, to apply the theatrical metaphor, acted as the artistic directors of the series of stelae. In their role as actual constructors of the stelae, they create the tone and solidify the messages of 18-Rabbit in stone.

The stela's text and iconographic content, suggests that there was some question regarding the legitimacy of 18-Rabbit's claim to the throne. *K'ahk' Uti Witz' K'awiil*, his father, had ruled for 67 years and some of Copan's residents may have been hesitant to accept 18-Rabbit as their king after the lengthy and successful reign of his father (Martin and Grube 2008:203). Stela J, in its depictions of kingly icons and text referencing the patrilineal, dynastic history of Copan, was meant to convince the disbelievers of the future greatness of 18-Rabbit. However, although the stela was physically accessible, comprehension of the complicated text and esoteric allusions restricted its communication to a well-educated few. Its placement at the end of the causeway and orientation towards Group 9N-8 may suggest a specific literate audience was intended. Nonetheless, Stela J introduced 18-Rabbit as the *K'uhul Ajaw* (Holy Lord), thirteenth in the lineage of *Yax K'uk' Mo*, onto the Copan stage.

### Stela C

The deliberate placement of Stela C in northwest of the center of the Great Plaza indicates an important shift in the use of the Great Plaza. The addition of the retaining walls in the Great Plaza and the construction of the stairs on the sides of the plaza instigate the creation of a smaller space, a space designated specifically to carry out the motivations of 18-Rabbit. A reconstructed Great Plaza presents a limited viewing arena, and now, in 711 AD, there is something to see.

The text of Stela C talks about the erection of the monument itself, but also expresses the polarities that exist and form a balance within 18-Rabbit (Schele and Matthews 1998:149-150). The text features color dualities with the mention of “green” and “black.” These colors symbolize the polarities of life and death and further support the oppositional elements embodied in the king. He emphasizes these oppositions to promote himself as a divine being capable of exerting his personal power to control the dualities of the universe. The dualities of sunrise and sunset, day and night, and life and death are present within the iconography and text of Stela C. 18-Rabbit is depicted as the center of the universe, able to withstand the tugging of opposing forces of nature. Stela C embodies themes of rebirth, sacrifice, and fertile renewal, which are illustrated by the myriad of supernatural figures from Maya myth that cavort on the stelae. The presence of this iconography in this first public and early interpretable stela is an affirmation of the thirteenth king of Copan’s visibly divine ascension and opening display of power.

The iconography of Stela C is extensive and detailed. The visual impact of such a monument would have a colossal impact on the Maya viewers, who were presumably elite. Stela C showed the elites that their king possessed the divine power to cross over into the mythic realm. This divinity would also be associated with the king’s ability to control day and night. If

the Maya people did not already respect their fearsome king, then Stela C would surely solidify 18-Rabbit as a figure of immense power.

### **Stela F**

In the context of this construction period, visitors entering the plaza from the Sepulturas *sacbe* would pass Stela J, and then, on proceeding directly into the Great Plaza, be visually drawn to Stela F. Nine years later, this primary view was obscured by Stela H. In the nearly one decade before this obstruction, Stela F would be the first monument viewed on the way into the Great Plaza from the east side.

Until 730 AD, the Great Plaza consisted of Stela C in the approximate center, Stela F to the east of Stela C, Stela 4 located southeast of the plaza's center, and Stela J on the periphery of the eastern road that led to the Sepulturas *sacbe*. The space of the Great Plaza 35 years after 18-Rabbit's accession depicted the king in positions of supernatural power. Primarily, 18 Rabbit used his stelae to legitimize his power and right to rule by infusing complicated text within a framework of dynastic kingship and his visionary dreams. With Stela C, the king transitioned representations of his royal control and power to the public sphere by positioning the second stela in a central place in the Great Plaza. In the early stelae's iconographic content, 18-Rabbit distinguishes himself from the merely mortal to emerge as the single mediator between the gods and the Maya people.

Stelae F and 4 explore the duties of Maya rulership further in the theme of penitential sacrifice. Stelae F and 4 glorify 18-Rabbit's sacrifices, emphasizing his connection to the gods through bloodletting. Adrienne Tremblay (2007:103) describes Stela F's text as having extensive damage, but it is clear that the proper name of the stela includes the Jaguar God. Schele and Matthews (1998:149) decipher Stela F's glyphic title to read "Bearded Jaguar God First

Completion of the Sky.” Schele and Matthews (1998:149) write that 18-Rabbit depicts himself on this stela as the symbolic sacrificial figure of the Baby Jaguar God. According to Mary Miller and Karl Taube (Miller and Taube 1993:104), the Baby Jaguar God is often shown in close association with the executioner god Chac. Stela F stands facing Stela B, in which 18-Rabbit is featured as Chac, the executioner god. Tremblay (2007:102) notes that Stela F’s text concludes with an enigmatic allusion to penitential sacrifice.

### **Stelae A and H**

Stela H faces west toward Stela A, which makes sense given their close dedication dates and their entwined themes of agricultural fertility and renewal of life. At the time of Stela A’s dedication, Structure 10L-4 was newly renovated. 18-Rabbit inhabited the Great Plaza to perform public rituals from atop the flattened radial pyramid. The significance of the placement of Stela A near Structure 10L-4 is indicative of further strategic manipulation by the king in drawing attention to the correlation of his public performance and the stelae’s iconography.

Through the iconography and text of Stela H, 18-Rabbit’s people view their king, not only as a man capable of performing bloodletting and fertility rituals, but also as a divine hermaphroditic being. The complementarity of male and female representations existent in the presence of the skirt on Stela H further supports the existing dualism within the king. This multi-gendered duality is important in the presence of celestial and mythic phenomena on the stelae.

The cosmological themes embedded in dates recorded on the stelae, especially Stelae H, A, and B, serve to show 18-Rabbit and his court as possessing sufficient resources with which to document and understand cosmic material. The presence of these texts further illustrates 18-Rabbit’s homage to larger spiritual powers and displays his humble kingly devotion to both his court and the gods.

## **STELA A**

The presence of the ancestral king points to the power of the Copan royal line and the eventual apotheosis given to the king. This stela may foreshadow 18-Rabbit's deification after his death. The king, recorded as thirteenth in the line of succession, begins the process of immortalizing himself by showing the divine elevation of a previous king of Copan.

Wendy Ashmore (Ashmore 1991:201) describes a Maya universe that contains many different levels that were associated with mythological and cosmological connections in Maya culture. Stela A depicts 18-Rabbit as an influential and mythical conductor between the different echelons of the layered Maya world. According to ancient belief, the layers of the sky belonged to kingly ancestors, while "the watery underworld" was home to the Maya gods (Ashmore 1991:201). Stela A's iconographic representation of this many-layered cosmos accentuates 18-Rabbit's ability to concurrently inhabit all of the worlds of the Maya cosmos. It is feasible that this stela's message would reinforce the elites' spiritual faith in their king. His ritual communication with his deified ancestors and supernatural entities further emphasizes his ability to implant an evolving image of himself through the constructive evidence of his stela.

The themes of Stelae F and 4 encapsulate the sacrificial duties required of the king in order to appease and nourish the gods. The exposé of Stelae H and A, which describe the king's divine duties of agricultural renewal and fertility, further accentuates 18-Rabbit's power to initiate and control daily life in Copan. At this point in 18-Rabbit's reign, he has constructed himself as a figure of absolute power. Through the icons of prosperity and wealth depicted on his stela, he makes manifest his success in the fulfillment of his royal duties.

## **Stela B**

Stela B was erected in the thirty-sixth year of 18-Rabbit's reign and further affirms his theatrical intentions immortalized in stone. The stela captures a specific moment of ritual performance as 18-Rabbit emerges from a select group of Copan's elites (Newsome 2001:137). This image may have functioned as one Ranciere's "sentence-images" in the correlation between the "underworld" iconography and 18-Rabbit's emergence from a temple, or "man-made mountain" with a symbolic cave, during one of his ritual exhibitions. Ranciere's sentence-image theory functions here as the traceable connection of the actual and the associative expressed through the stela's image.

The significance of Stela B is embedded in the ritual space that would be recognizable to his audience. The representation of a ceremonial space depicted in Stela B accentuates the importance of sacred area, a venue specifically associated with the ritual actions of 18-Rabbit. It is possible that Maya elites recognized the specific moment memorialized on Stela B. Having witnessed and remembering the physical emergence of 18-Rabbit from the Structure 10L-22, the symbolic mountain, elite viewers would be raised to a rare level of understanding of their mythically-represented king.

The theme of Stela B goes back to the creation period of man. The stela's ancestral spirits help the present king in returning to that mythic past of fertile abundance. References to the god Chac reinforce this idyllic hope of earthly fertility. Stela B contains iconography that transforms 18-Rabbit into a living tree that emits corn and that represents a verdant Maya harvest (Newsome 2001:141). The stela captures the essence of a new era begun by 18-Rabbit, referenced in his depictions of the *witz* mountain and its significance in human creation. The renewal of the land and the renewal of an age are parallel. Through the thirteenth king, 18-Rabbit, not only the king but the entire dynastic lineage of Copan participates in the rituals of renewal essential Maya life.



## **STELA D**

Newsome (2001:147-149) writes that Stela D can be interpreted as a vision of 18-Rabbit sinking into the underworld as the setting sun, but embedded within this message is that of celestial and agricultural resurrection. The glyphic text refers to 18-Rabbit as “Lord of the Night.” This further supports the duality of day and night that exists within the thirteenth king. He embodies cosmic polarities and has the ability to both reconcile and control them. In this, his ultimately final stela, 18-Rabbit once again expresses the themes of willing sacrifice, death, reanimation, and fertility. He also emphasizes the importance of the dynastic power embodied in *K’awil* (God K).

### **An Audience Analysis:**

#### **The Impact of the Stelae of 18-Rabbit**

18-Rabbit’s stelae transformed the landscape of the Great Plaza into a controlled sacred theatre that employs infused icons to present a commanding image of the thirteenth king unto his people. 18-Rabbit’s monuments commemorate the evolution and increasing nature of his mortal and metaphysical authority in Copan. Importantly, the stelae not only manipulated the physical, inhabited environment, but also functioned as grand props in the ephemeral theatrical rituals and performance of 18-Rabbit. The manner in which 18-Rabbit deliberately assembled and placed his stelae around the Great Plaza contributed the overall artistic illusion.

#### **The Elusive Audience**

A discussion of audience is important in analyzing 18-Rabbit’s Great Plaza and its theatrical characteristics. A close examination of the evidence suggests that for 18-Rabbit the “audience” remains a very fluid concept. Originally, the notion that 18-Rabbit would place his stelae in a deliberate fashion around the plaza so as to induce a particular reaction by his

contemporaries is certainly valid. The living spectators of Copan witnessed ceremonial demonstrations of the king's ability to interact with the supernatural realm; rituals that evoked their awe and compliance to his control. Analysis of the icons depicted on each of the stela reveal how the king's political motivations evolved over time. They act as permanent reminders of the king's deified power and his ability to communicate with omnipotent, mythic powers.

Stela J, was erected on the outskirts of the Plaza. As a result of the stela's location on the edge of the Plaza as well as its esoteric messages and elaborate textual layout, its message was limited to a particular audience. Seven years later, the people of Copan had their attention directed to a more central point in the Great Plaza. The erection of Stela C instigates the transformation of the Great Plaza into a smaller, more sacred space. Walls were added to the east side of the Great Plaza and a series of steps led to elevated, private plaza to the east and west. Structure 10L-4 was enlarged and elevated by the addition of another tier and stairways were added to the east and west facades. Modifications to this building divided the large, open courtyard into two smaller, more intimate spaces. For the next ten years, the populace of Copan was channeled to either the north or south of this dominant structure. The elites formed the audience on the north and the greater population led to the south where they could only witness those rituals conducted atop Structure 10L-4.

In 721 AD, their aerobic trajectory led due east of Stela C to Stela F. Five years later, Stela F's archetypal mate was erected across the Plaza to the west. Stela 4 forms what will be the western edge of the stelae space. At this point, the elite of 18-Rabbit's court had most of the central and southeastern areas of the Great Plaza in which to walk, but the middle space was beginning to become more and more restricted as the stelae began engaging with one another. With the erection of Stela H and Stela A in late 730 and 731 AD respectively, the sacred space

becomes an off-kilter square. Newsome (2001:127) suggests that Stelae H, A, and B connected to form a triangle evocative of a celestial hearth to commemorate the cycle that occurred in the year 731 AD. Regardless, this communicative pattern would have significantly impeded audience mobility.

By 731 AD, the Great Plaza has been transformed into a venue of virtual discourse. The stelae begin to ignore their human audience and the elite bystanders are left with very little room in which to witness the transformations of 18-Rabbit.

By tracing the placement of the stelae within the Great Plaza, one can recreate the orientation and movement of the physical audience through space and over time, ultimately restricting the spectators to a small group of elite observers. The few elites allowed in the increasingly constricted space of the Great Plaza had to follow a distinct, chronological pathway based on the placement and orientation of each stela. The stelae and its increasingly constricted stage were not accessible to most of Copan's large population. The rituals and monuments would have been seen by a select audience, who could appreciate the esoteric messages, symbols, and text as an affirmation of their ruler's power. By restricting the space, 18-Rabbit made the ability to witness or possibly participate in the stela dedication rituals even more valuable. Over time, the stelae become obstacles, crowding the stage and enforcing a pathway designated for visitors to follow. By limiting access, 18-Rabbit increased the sacred power of the Great Plaza and allowed its stone inhabitants to appear immensely vital. This vitality is enhanced by 18-Rabbit's architectural decision to depict his stone manifestations in a lifelike manner. Shallow relief carving was common in many traditional Maya stelae. The conventionally flat style is offset by 18-Rabbit's sculptural three-dimensional style used by 18-Rabbit that inspires realistic

animation. The soft tufa material used to construct these stelae facilitates this conscious artistic effort, as well as features the king in a perpetual state of youthful athleticism.

Symbolic art gives 18-Rabbit theatrical power to transmit his self-promoting ideas unto his people. His influential performance uses iconographic and textual messages of his stelae to manipulate the way in which his audience retains comprehension of the image. 18-Rabbit manipulates his people's minds through art in a seemingly non-obtrusive way. In accordance with film theorist Hugo Munsterberg (2011: 314-324), privileged elites are endowed with their own interpretations of the stelae, but their viewing practices are architecturally-manipulated by the king by the strict monumental orientation. Their perception of the image is also manipulated because they have few artistic resources with which to compare the stelae.

All of the images of 18-Rabbit carved on the stelae face inward toward the center of the plaza. This orientation served to emphasize the many guises of 18-Rabbit and may have functioned as a tangible reiteration of his name: *Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil*, meaning "18 are the Manifestations of K'awiil" (the god who represents the power of deified royal ancestors). In accordance with the symbolism of 18-Rabbit's name and the stelae's increasing rate of production, it may have been the future intention of 18-Rabbit to someday fill the Great Plaza with 18 dedicated monuments.

Although the elite audience members are not the direct addressees of the stelae, they nevertheless play a key role in 18-Rabbit's performance. J.W. Palka (2002:429) discusses the significance of consciously oriented statues in the Maya world. The inward-facing orientation of the images of 18-Rabbit indicates a deliberate power gesture. This shift in audience orientation forces the elite observers to review the stelae as a holistic grouping, rather than solely analyze individual monuments.

Palka (Palka 2002:429) asserts that the viewer can actively transition into a performer through their receptive visual process. There are both internal and external perspectives at work in the presentation of a piece of art. Film theorist Hugo Munsterberg (2011) analyzes the transmittance of the film image from its origins in the psyche of the author into the minds of viewers. The intended impact of the author's initial message may shift due to the individualized experiences and biases of the audience member. Individual reactions to an artistic image may topple the author's desired universal reactionary outcome. This creates a dynamic effect that promotes the audience member into a position of authority within their own internal interpretation of the image. It is in this way, that the elite audience, as well as 18-Rabbit and his stelae, acted as witnesses and actors simultaneously.

18-Rabbit elevated political rhetoric to a divine artistic level. Art, in this case, acted not as a pleasurable device for human reflection, but as living and perpetual means for mythic engagement. Within the confines of art, lies the possibility of deified interaction. Only the king, whose image is captured on these austere monuments, can reach this supreme level of godly communication. 18-Rabbit used his stelae, and his public ritual display, to affirm his divine place in the Copan dynasty. His many references to his ancestors, including his grandfather Butz' Chan and Copan's dynastic founder Yax K'uk' Mo, foreshadowed his own future deification. 18-Rabbit manipulated his people through his construction efforts in the Great Plaza. He created for himself a sacred space. In the minds of Copan's citizens, their king's power is absolute, mythic, and supported by the orientation and iconographic significance of his eight stelae.

Beginning with his accession, 18-Rabbit creates a stage, gathers his props, and prepares for his performance. He is the star, the producer, and the director of a production meant to echo into the throes of eternity. His stelae stand as immortal reminders, a constant encore, as well as a

celebration of 18-Rabbit's role in creating a Golden Age Copan. Every play requires certain theatrical decisions. A self-reflexive play calls attention to itself by addressing the audience directly in the midst of the performance. A play in which the actors do not acknowledge the presence of the audience allows for the separation of the art form and the real world. The audience can observe, but not participate in the action. The great performance embedded in the stelae is never self-reflexive. It does not necessarily include the audience in its message. The few elites who are lucky enough to gain access to the immortalized garden of stelae are observers of the great set of stelae. The real performances were 18-Rabbit's public ritual exhibitions, which took place on the top of Structure 10L-4. The stelae stand just beyond the temple as staunch, stone-faced witnesses to 18-Rabbit's ability to engage with, transform into, and ultimately become the majestic powers of nature and the deified ancestors. Each successive monument built on the messages of the previous. In this way, the stelae themselves transformed into players and audience members. While on one hand, the stelae manipulated the living audience, they also form enduring interactions and discourse immortalized in stone. The stelae are the witnesses, the glorified props, which complete the *mise-en-scène* of 18-Rabbit's eternal message. 18-Rabbit is the glory of Copan, the sunrise and sunset, the bearer of fertility and the ultimate, if metaphorical, sacrificial captive, and the divine king. Through his eight stelae, his performance is immortalized.

## SOURCES CITED

Ashmore, W.

1991 Site-Planning Principles and Concepts of Directionality Among the Ancient Maya. *Latin American Antiquity* 2(3):199-226.

Baudez, C.-F.

1994 *Maya Sculpture of Copan: The Iconography*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bell, E.E., R.J. Sharer, L. Traxler, D.W. Sedat, C.W. Carrelli, and L.A. Grant

2004 Tombs and Burials in the Early Classic Acropolis at Copan. *In Understanding Early Classic Copan*. E.E. Bell, M.A. Canuto, and R.J. Sharer, eds., pp. 131-158. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Bohannon, R.

2012 Review: S. Bergmann (ed.): *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion, Architecture and Design*. S. Bergmann: *Beginning is the Icon: A Liberative Theology of Images, Visual Arts and Culture*. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 6(1):114-117.

Cheek, C.D., ed.

1983a *Introduccion a las Arqueologia de Copan, Honduras*. Volume 2. Tegucigalpa, D.C., Honduras  
Secretaria de Estado en el Despacho de Cultura y Turismo.

Cheek, C.D.

1983b *Introduccion a las Operaciones en la Plaza Principal*. *In Introduccion a las Arqueologia de Copan, Honduras*, pp. 11-24. Tegucigalpa, D.C., Honduras: Secretaria de Estado en el Despacho de Cultura y Turismo.

Cheek, C.D., and V. Kennedy Embree

1983 *La Estructura 10L-2*. *In Introduccion a la Arqueologia de Copan, Honduras, Tomo II*. C.D. Cheek, ed., pp. 93-142. Tegucigalpa, D.C., Honduras: Proyecto Arqueologico Copan & Secretaria de Estado en el Despacho de Cultura y Turismo.

Cheek, C.D., and D.E. Milla Villeda

1983 *La Estructura 10L-4*. *In Introduccion a la Arqueologia de Copan, Honduras, Tomo II*. C.D. Cheek, ed., pp. 37-92. Tegucigalpa, D.C., Honduras: Proyecto Arqueologico Copan & Secretaria de Estado en el Despacho de Cultura y Turismo.

Christenson, A.J.

2007 *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Drew, D.

1999 *Lost Chronicles of the Maya Kings*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Fash, W.L.

2001 *Scribes, Warriors, and Kings: The City of Copan and the Ancient Maya* (second edition). New York, NY: Thames & Hudson.

Hohmann, H., and A. Vogrin

1982 *Die Architektur von Copan, Honduras*. Gratz, Austria: Akademische Druk un Verlagsanstalt.

Kelley, D.H.

1962 *Phoneticism in the Maya Script*.

Marcus, J.

1976 *Emblem and State in the Classic Maya Lowlands*. Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks.

Martin, S.

2002 *The Baby Jaguar: An Exploration of its Identity and Origins in Maya Art and Writing*. In *La organización social entre los mayas prehispánicos, coloniales y modernos. Memoria de la Tercera Mesa Redonda de Palenque, Vol. 1*. V. Tiesler Blos, R. Cobos, and M.G. Robertson, eds., pp. 49-78. Mexico D.F., Mexico: Concultura, INAH.

Martin, S., and N. Grube

2008 *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* (second edition). New York, NY: Thames and Hudson.

Maudslay, A.P.

1889 *Biologia Centrali-Americana, or, Contributions to the knowledge of the fauna and flora of Mexico and Central America*. Archaeology. 6 vols. London, UK: University of Oklahoma (reprint 1983).

Miller, M., and K. Taube

1993 *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*. London, England: Thames and Hudson.

Morley, S.G.

1920 *The Inscriptions at Copán*. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Munsterberg, H.

2011 *Why We Go To the Movies*. In *Critical Visions in Film Theory*. T. Corrigan, ed., pp. 314-324. New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martin's.



Newsome, E.A.

2001 *Trees of Paradise and Pillars of the World: The Serial Stela Cycle of "18-Rabbit-God K," King of Copan.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Palka, J.

2002 *Left/Right Symbolism and the Body in Ancient Maya Iconography and Culture.* *Latin American Antiquity* 13(4):419-443.

Rancière, J.

2009 *The Future of the Image.*

Sanders, R., and D. Webster

1994 *Preindustrial Man and Environmental Degradation.* *In Biodiversity and Landscapes: A Paradox of Humanity.* K.C. Kim and R.D. Weaver, eds., pp. 77-98. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Schele, L., and P. Mathews

1998 *The Code of Kings: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs.* New York, NY: Scribner.

Schele, L., and M.E. Miller

1986 *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art.* New York, NY and Fort Worth, TX: George Braziller, Inc. and Kimbell Art Museum.

Stephens, J.L.

1969 (1841) *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan.* 2 vols. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers.

Strömshvik, G.

1941 *Substela Caches and stela Foundations at Copan and Quirigua, Contributions to American Anthropology and History No. 37,* Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 528. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Stuart, D.

2004 *The Beginnings of the Copan Dynasty: A Review of the Hieroglyphic and Historical Evidence.* *In Understanding Early Classic Copan.* E.E. Bell, M.A. Canuto, and R.J. Sharer, eds., pp. 215-248. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Stuart, G.E.

1988 *A Guide to the Style and Content.* *In Research Reports on Ancient Maya Writing,* Number 15. Washington, D. C.: Center for Maya Research.

Thompson, J.E.S.

1954 The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Thompson, N.L.

2007 Roman Art: A Resource for Educators. . New York,, NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art & Yale University Press.

Traxler, L.

2004 Evolution and Social Meaning of Patio and Courtyard Group Architecture of the Early Classic Acropolis, Copan, Honduras, Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania.

Tremblay, A.M.

2007 Building the Sacred: A Study of Proper Names of Monuments and Structure in Classic Maya Inscription, Anthropology, Tulane.

Van Stone, M.

2010 2012: Science and Prophecy of the Ancient Maya. Imperial Beach, CA: Tlacaelel Press.

Webster, D., ed.

1989 The House of the Bacabs, Copan, Honduras. Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

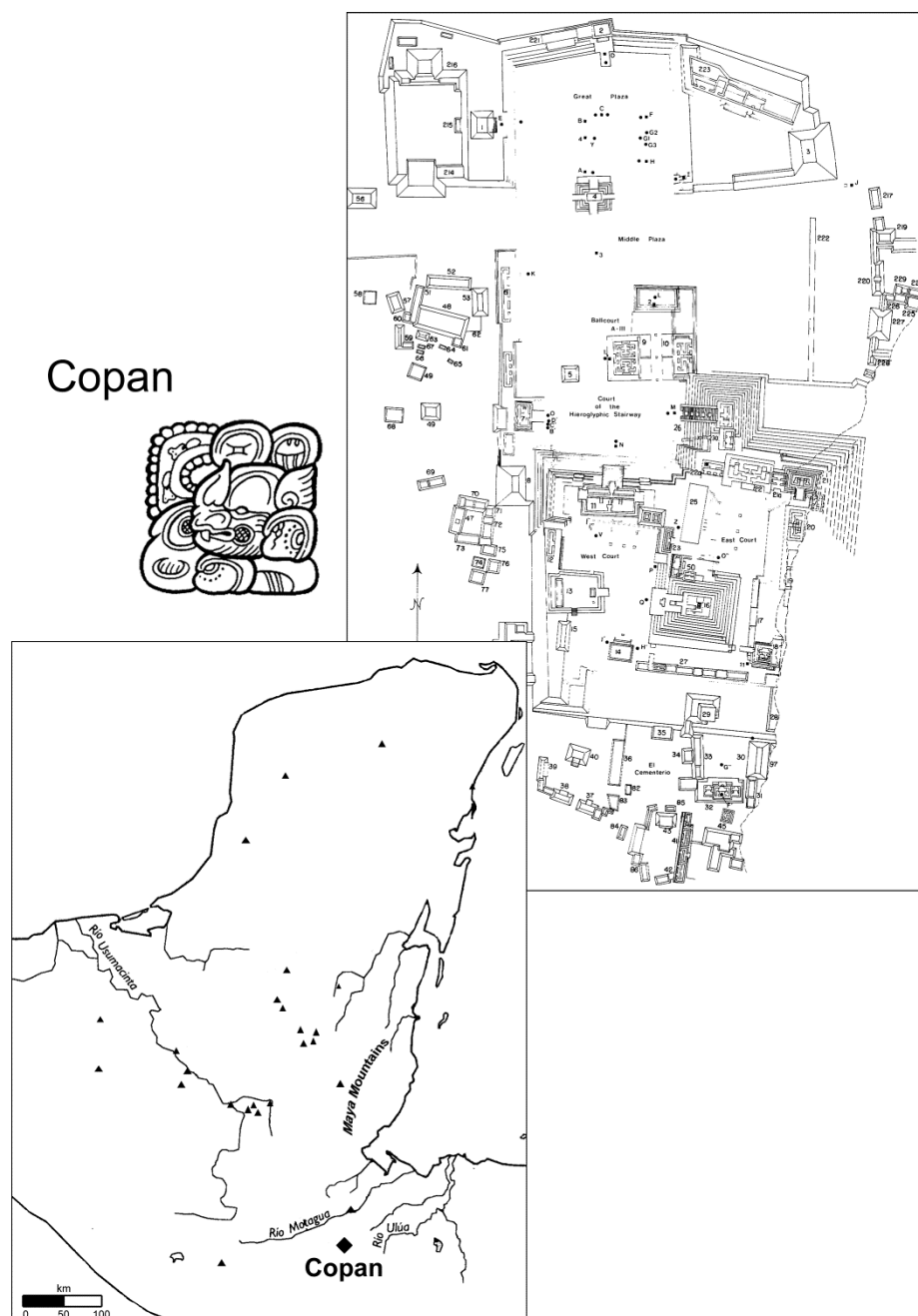


Figure 1. Illustration showing Copan's Leaf-Nosed Bat Emblem Glyph, the location of Copan, Honduras within the Maya world and a drawing of the Copan Acropolis (2013 [http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/calvin/royal\\_dynasties.pdf](http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/calvin/royal_dynasties.pdf)).

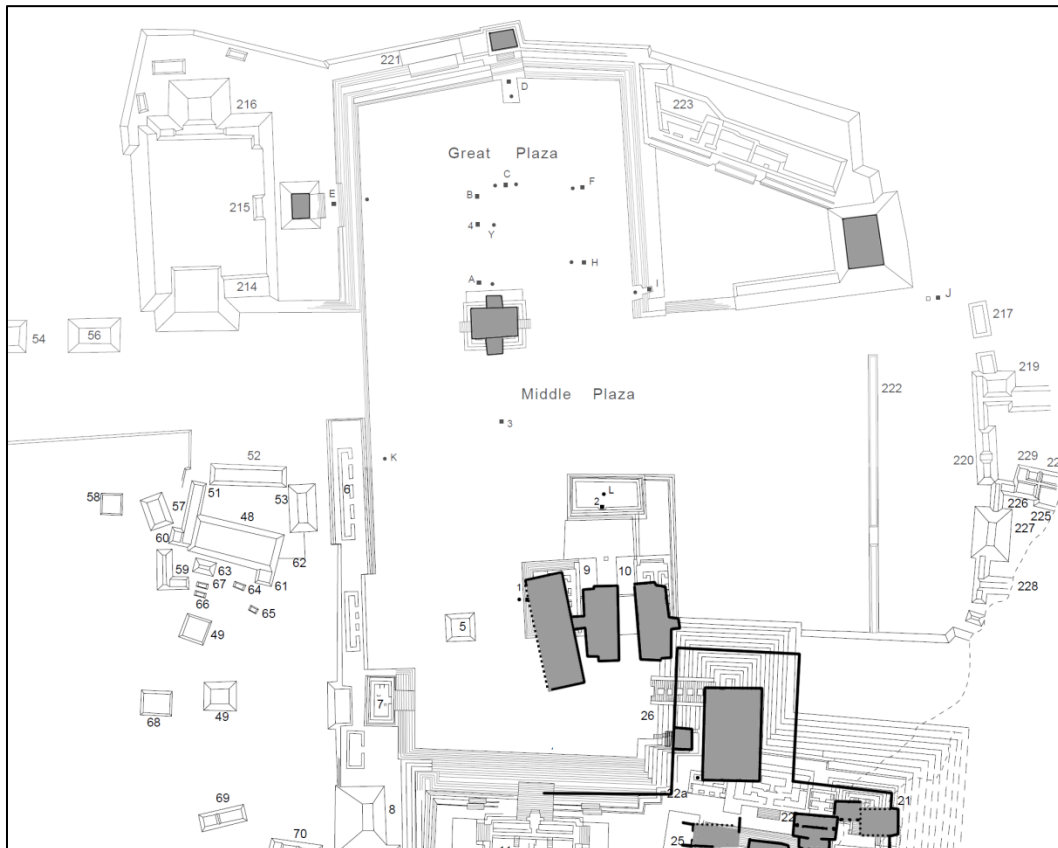


Figure 2. Map of the Great Plaza of Copan ca. 700 AD. In dark gray are the only buildings that would have been standing at that time; architecture rendered in lighter lines represent construction after 700 AD (reconstructed by I. Calvin from site reports of Cheek 1983 and Traxler 2004).

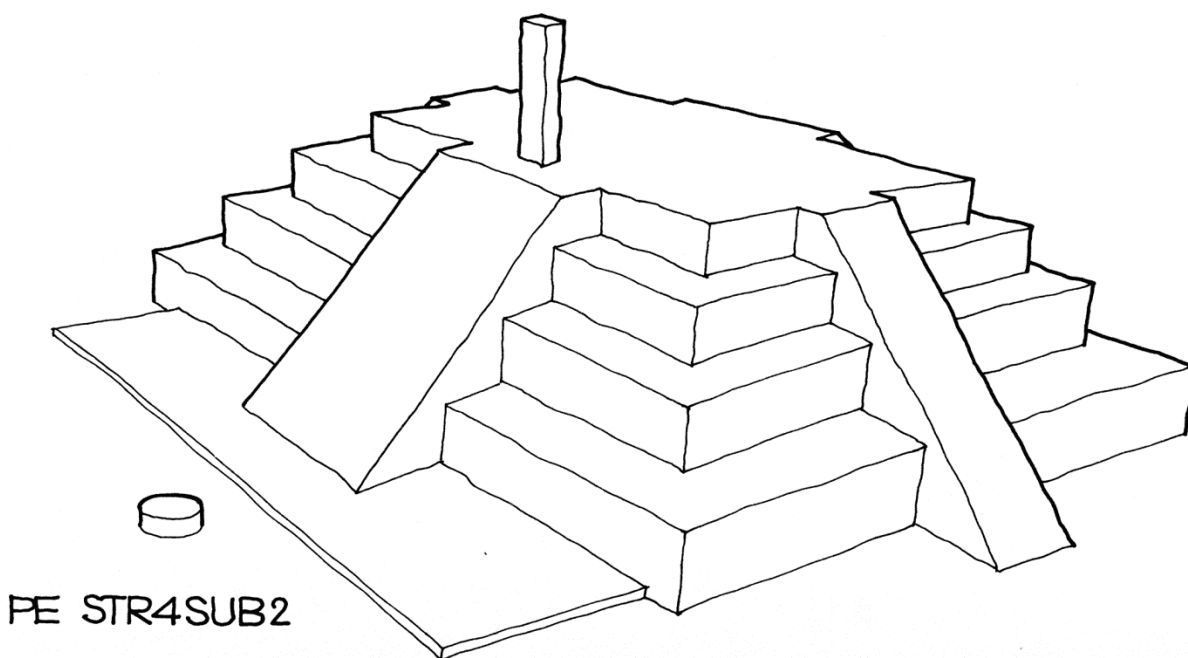
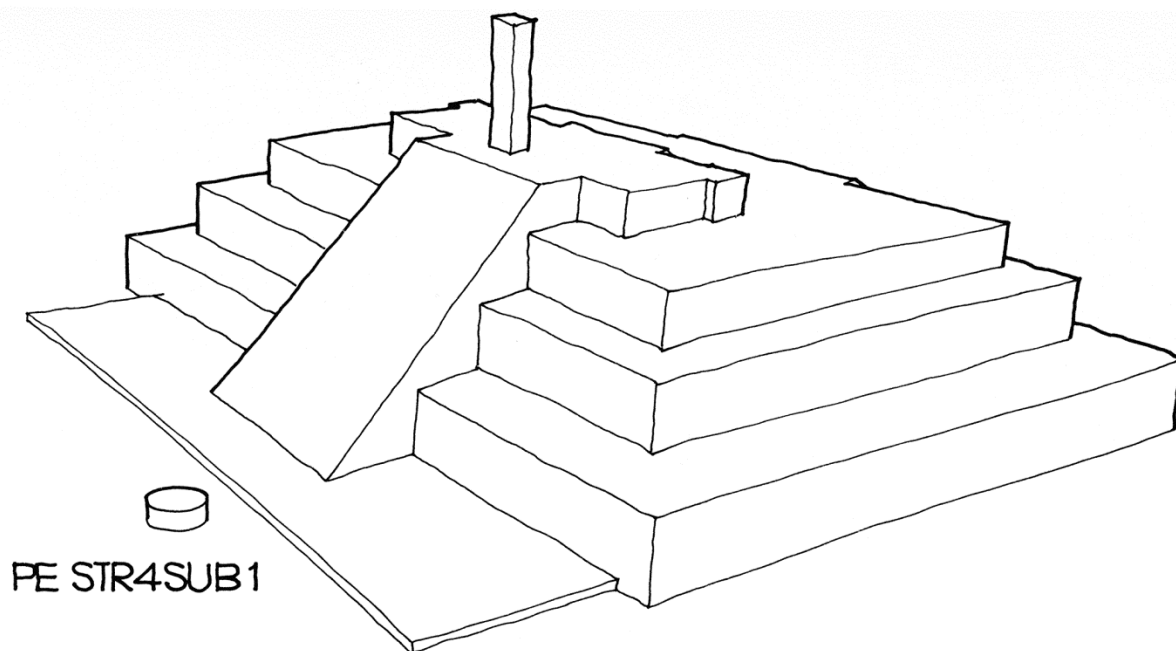


Figure 3. Isometric drawings of the construction phases of Structure 10L-4. Str4Sub 1 represents that built by 18 Rabbit's father and Str4Sub2 the modifications made by 18 Rabbit (after Hohmann and Vogrin 1982).

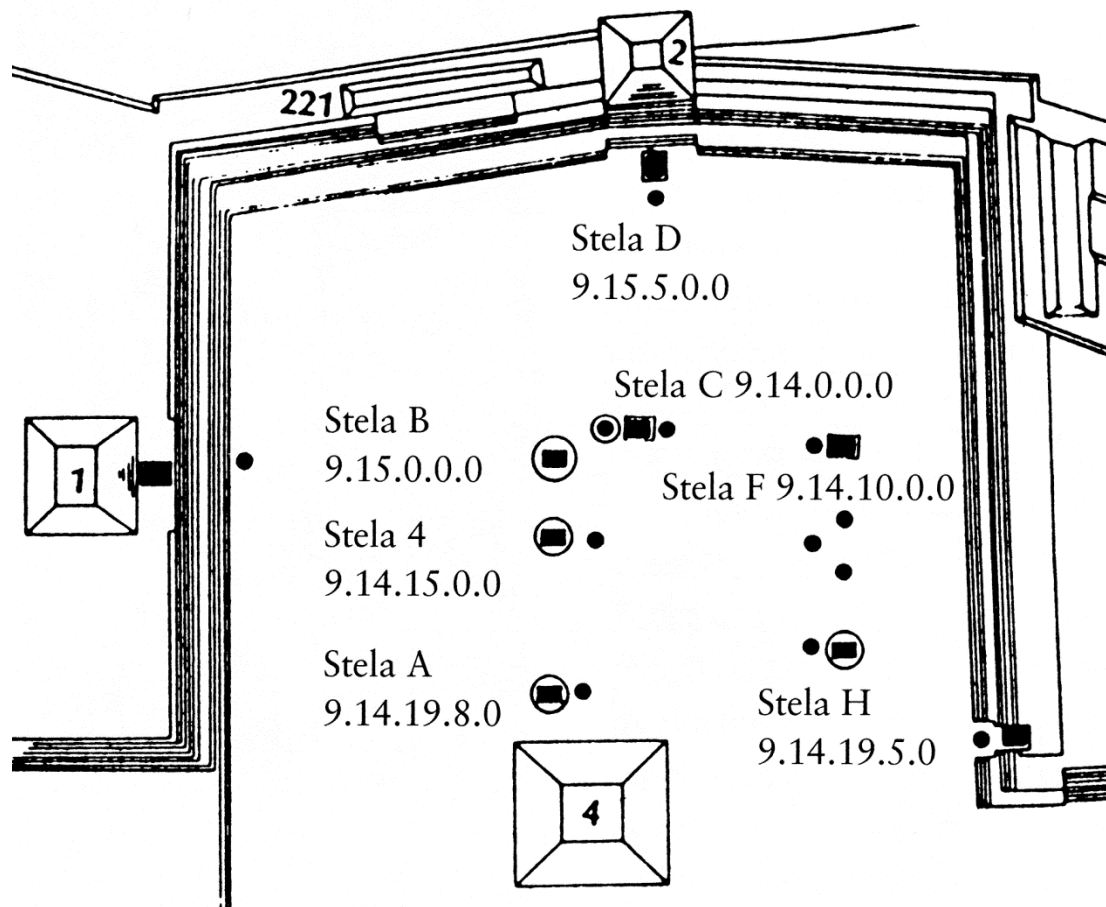


Figure 4. Map of Copan's Great Plaza showing the location and dedication date for each of 18 Rabbit's stelae (Newsome 2001:76).

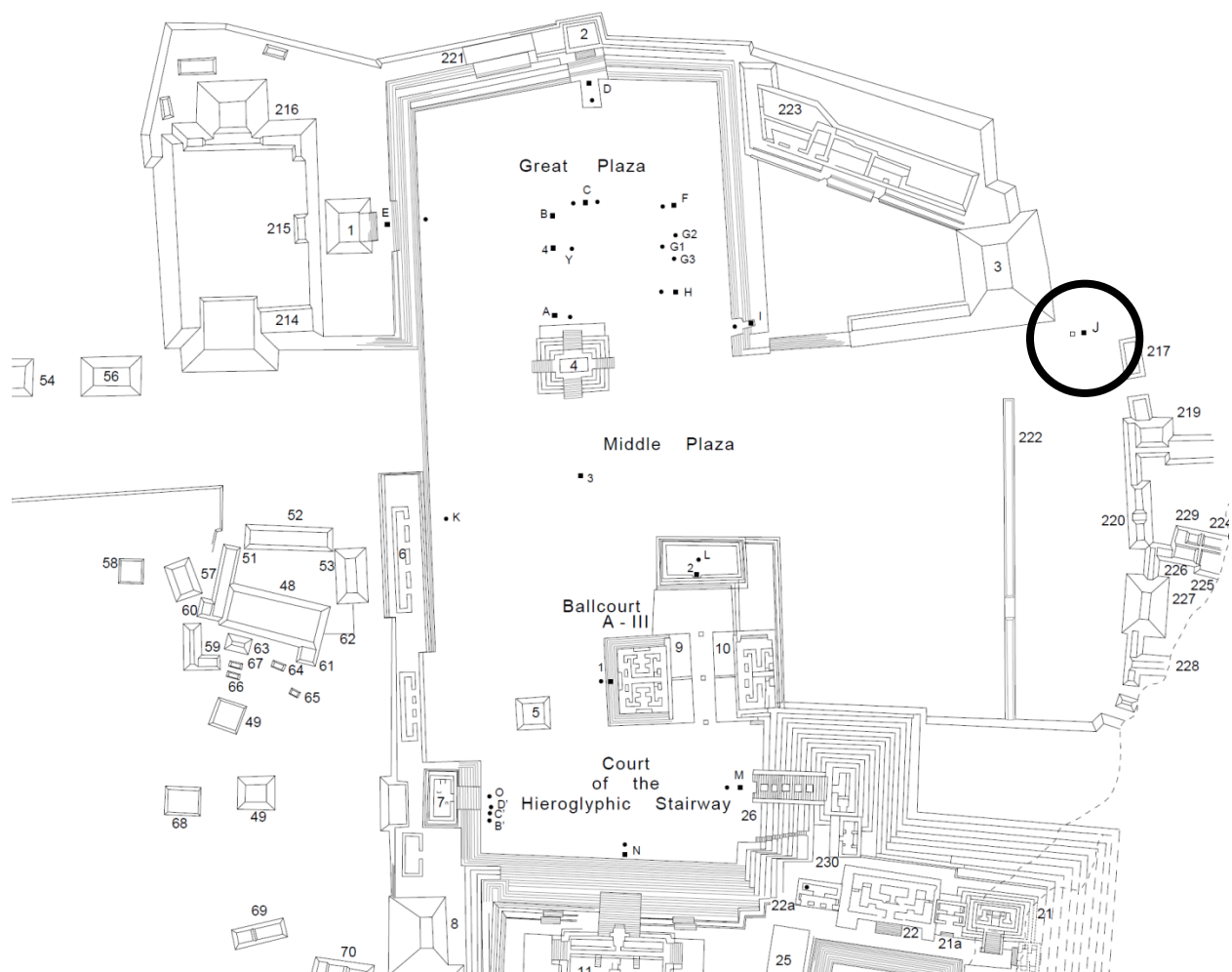


Figure 5. Map showing location of Stela J at terminus of Sepulturas (Group 9N-8) *sacbe* (after Fash 2003:23).

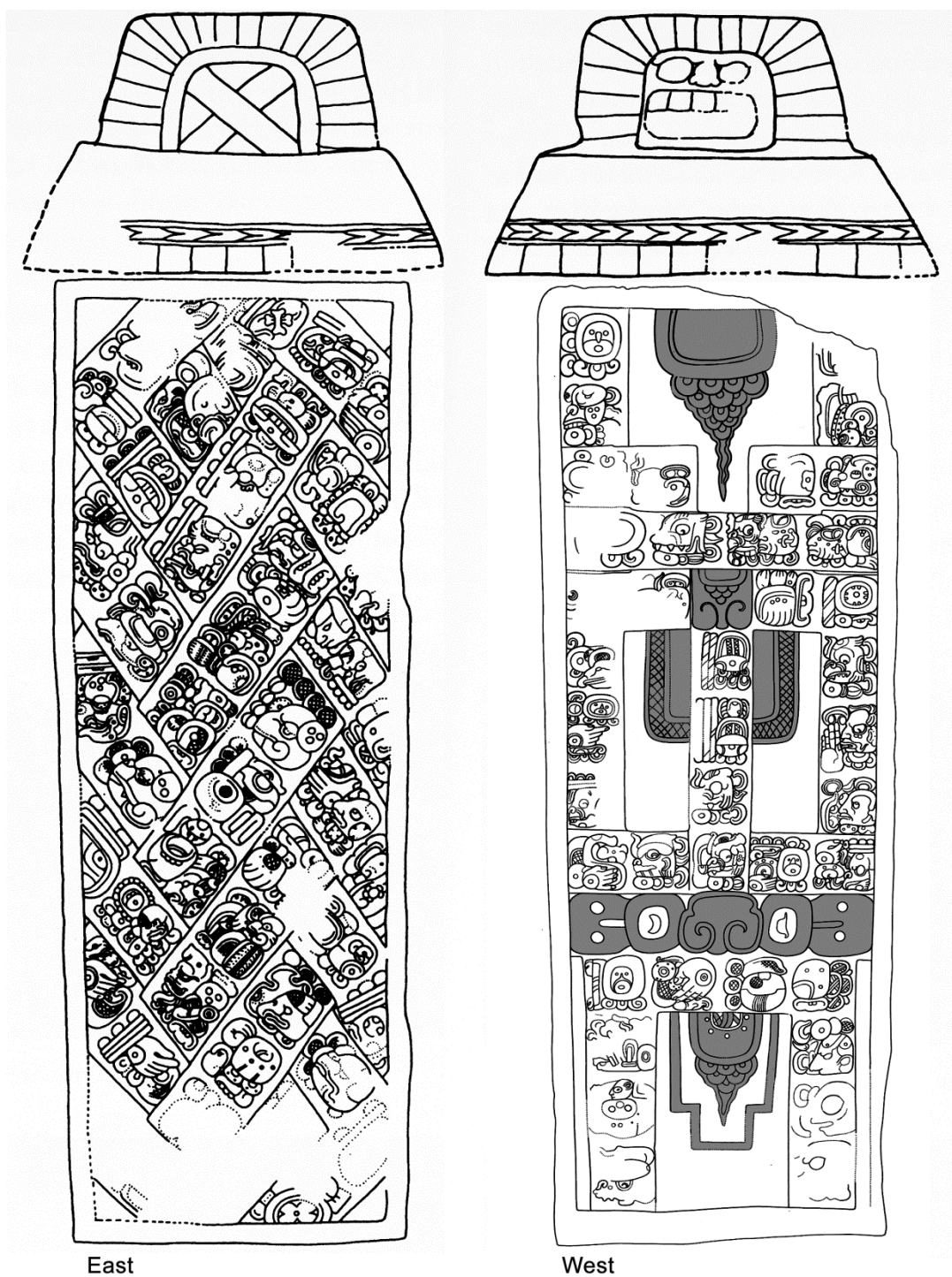


Figure 6. Drawing of Stela J with "altar" reinstalled as roofcomb for stela and west face highlighted to show anthropomorphic features (after Schele and Mathews 1998:137).



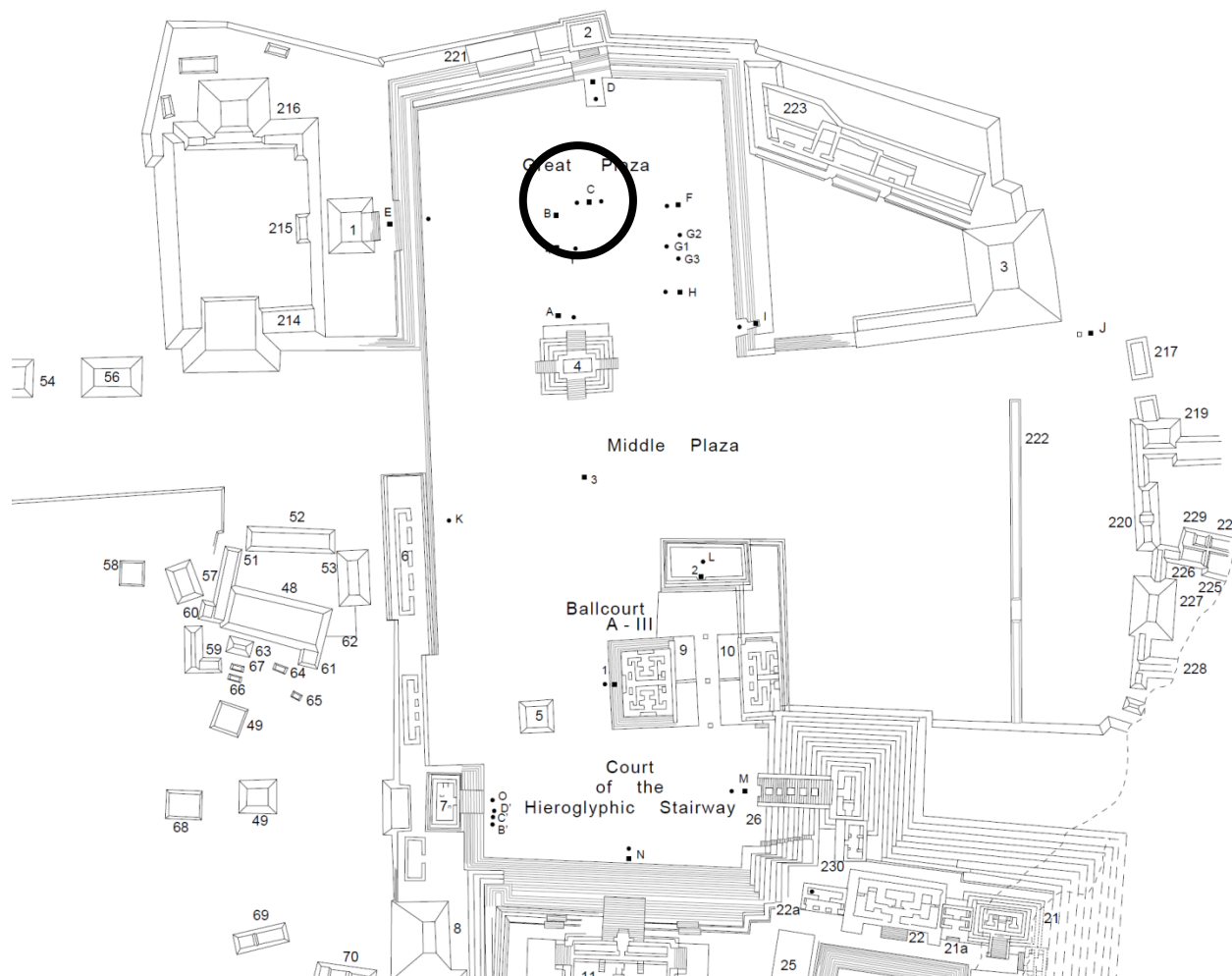


Figure 7. Map showing location of Stela C in Great Plaza of Copan (after Fash 2003:23).

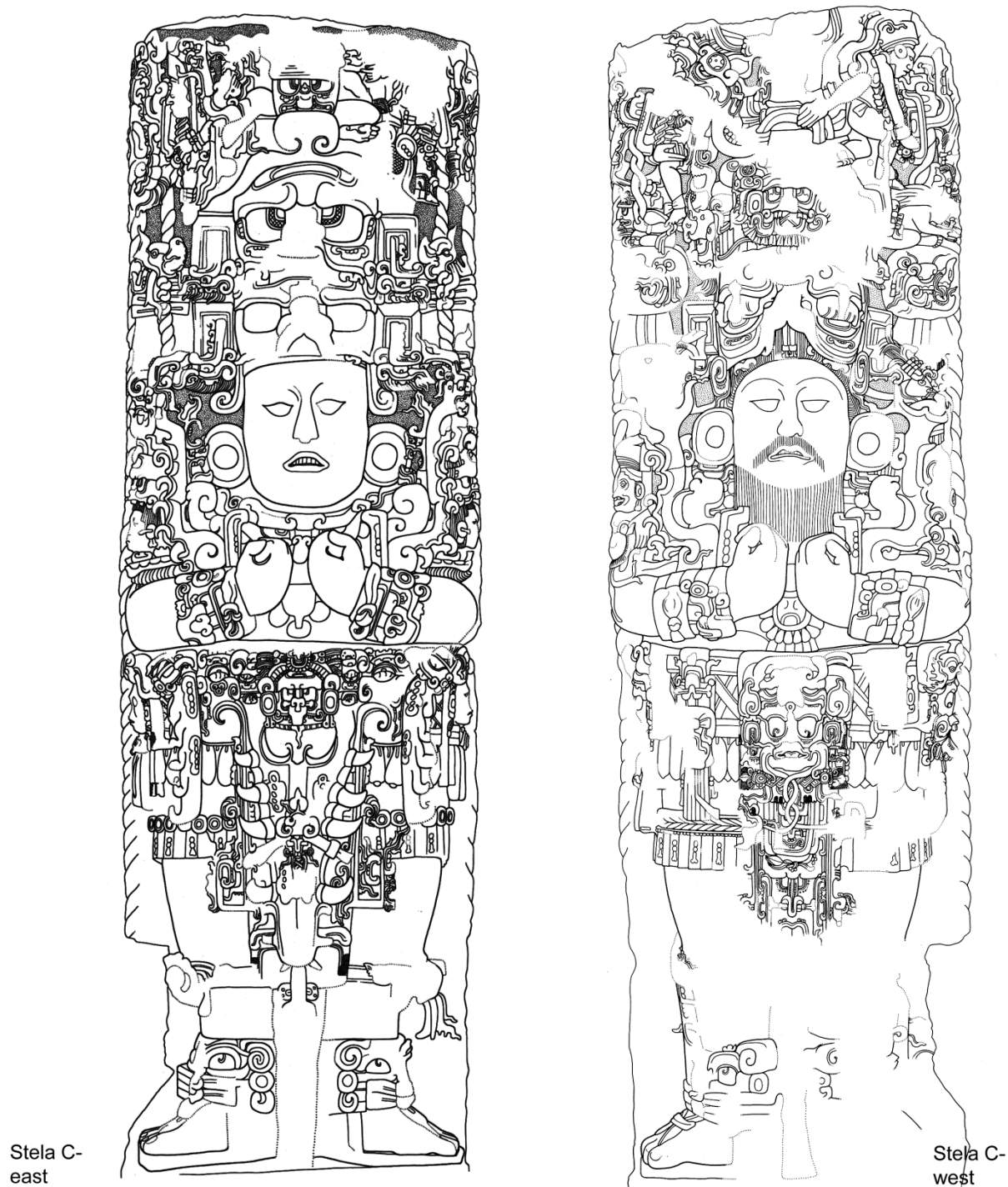


Figure 8. Drawing of Copan Stela C – east and west faces (after Baudez 1994:30).

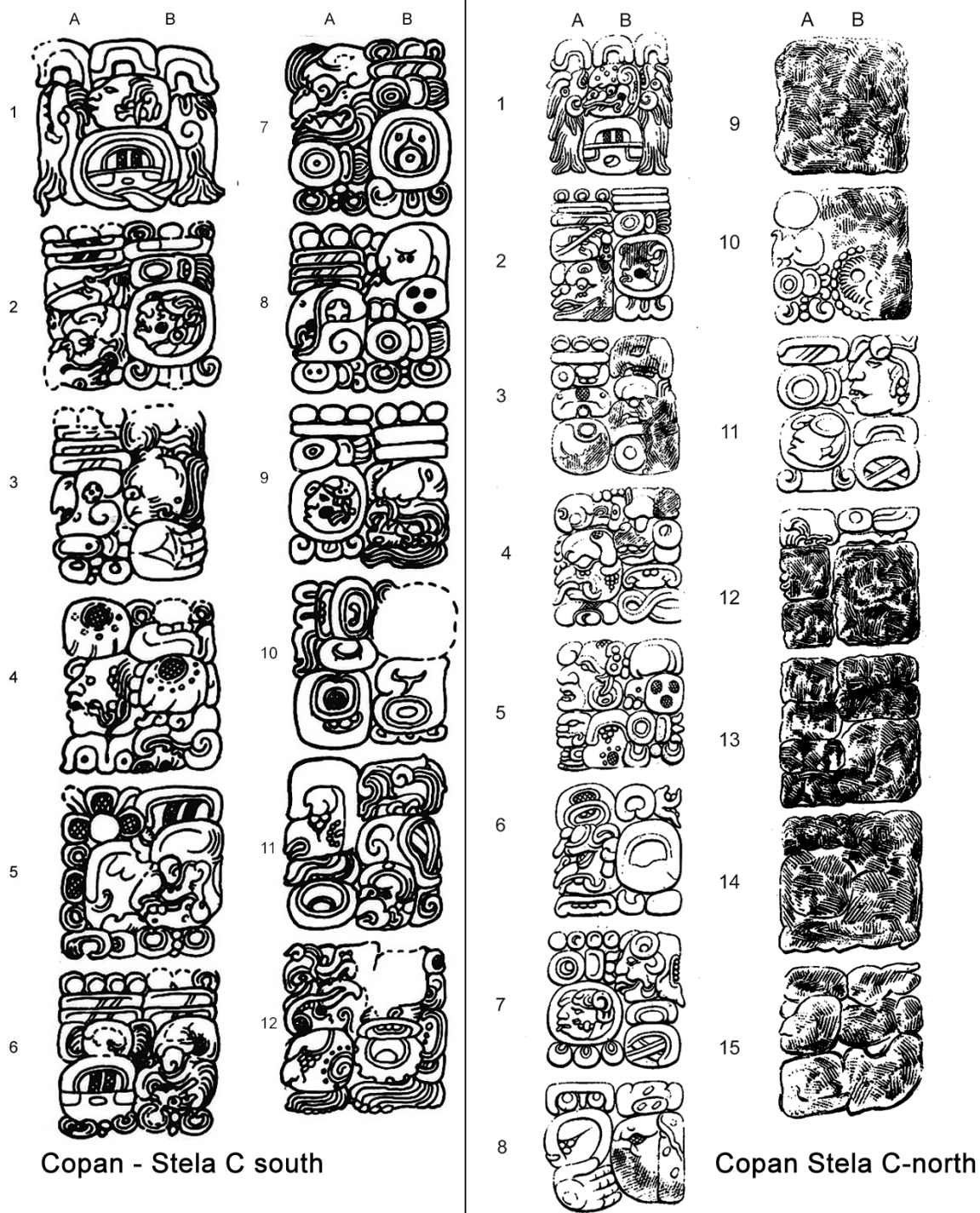


Figure 9. Drawing of Stela C texts on south & north face (south = Schele Drawing 1004 & north = Maudslay 1889).

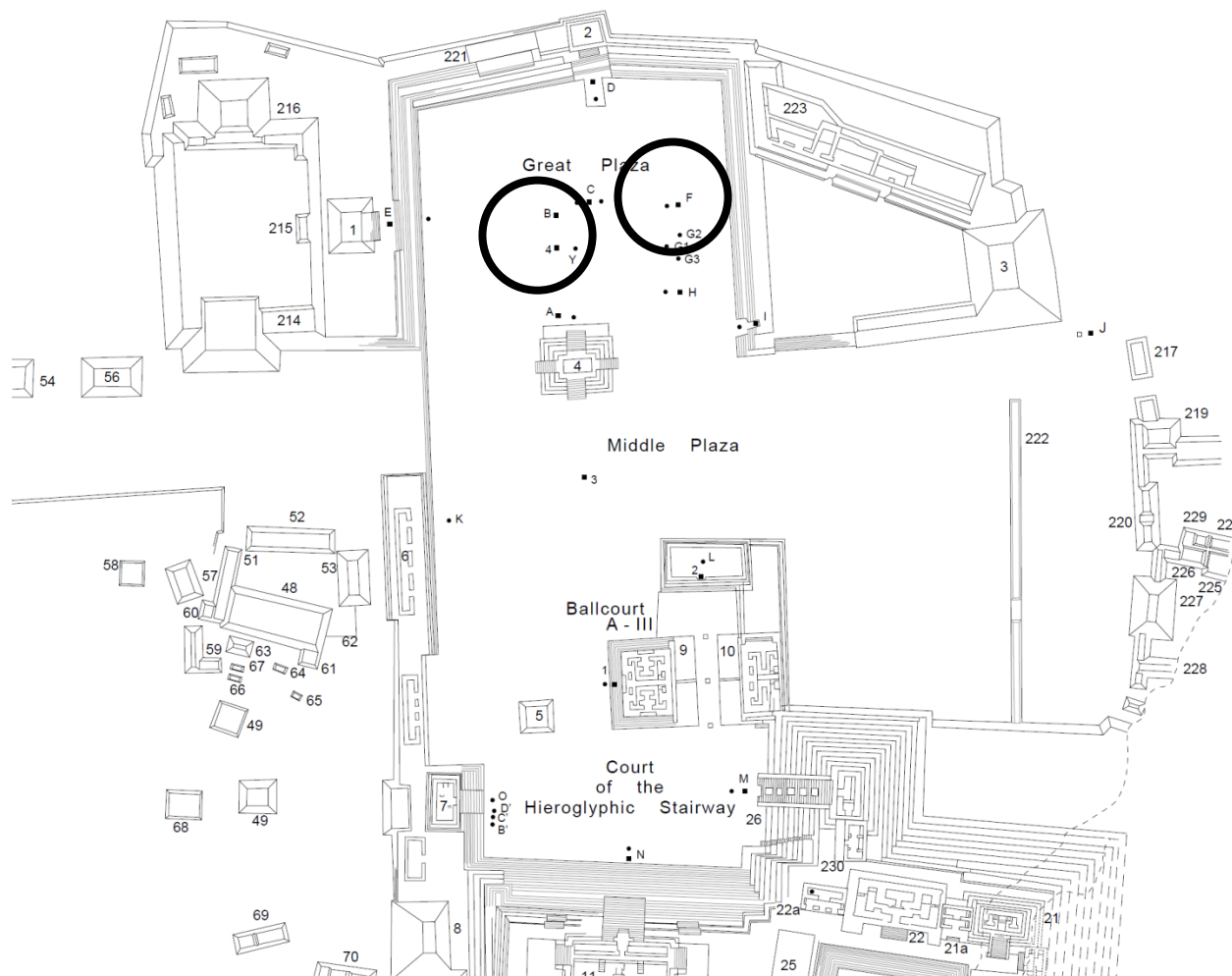


Figure 10. Map showing location of Stela F and Stela 4 in Great Plaza of Copan (after Fash 2003:23).

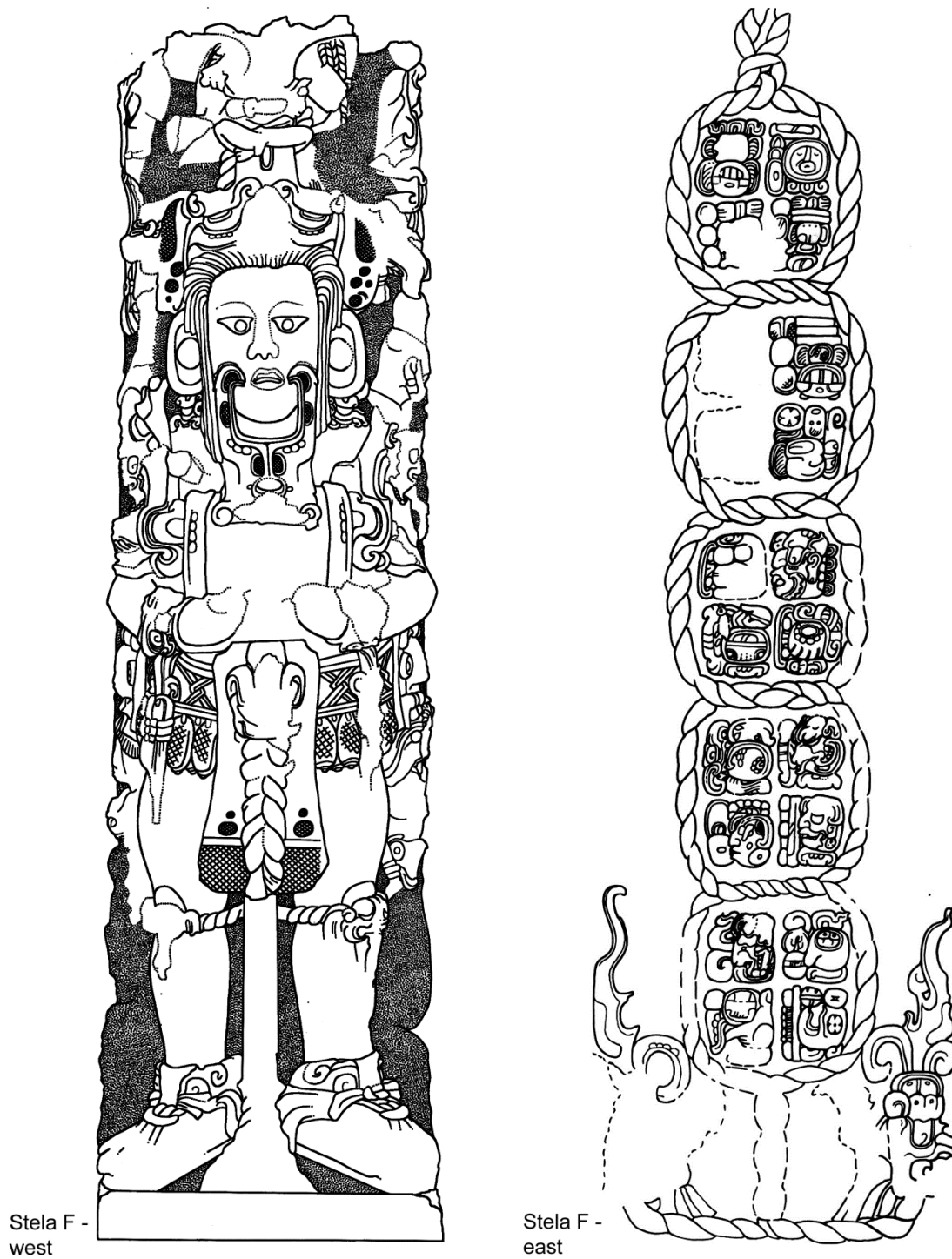


Figure 11. Drawing of Stela F – west & east (after Baudez 1994:49).

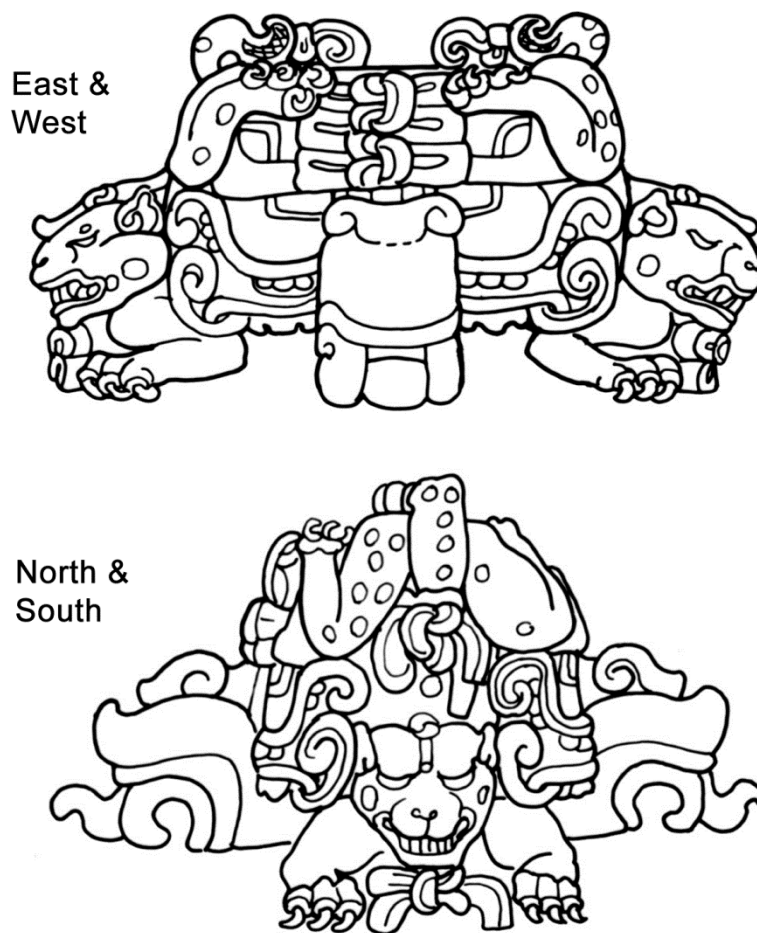


Figure 12. Drawing of *Cauac* Monster with tumbling jaguars altar that stands in front of Stela F (Schele Drawing 1064).

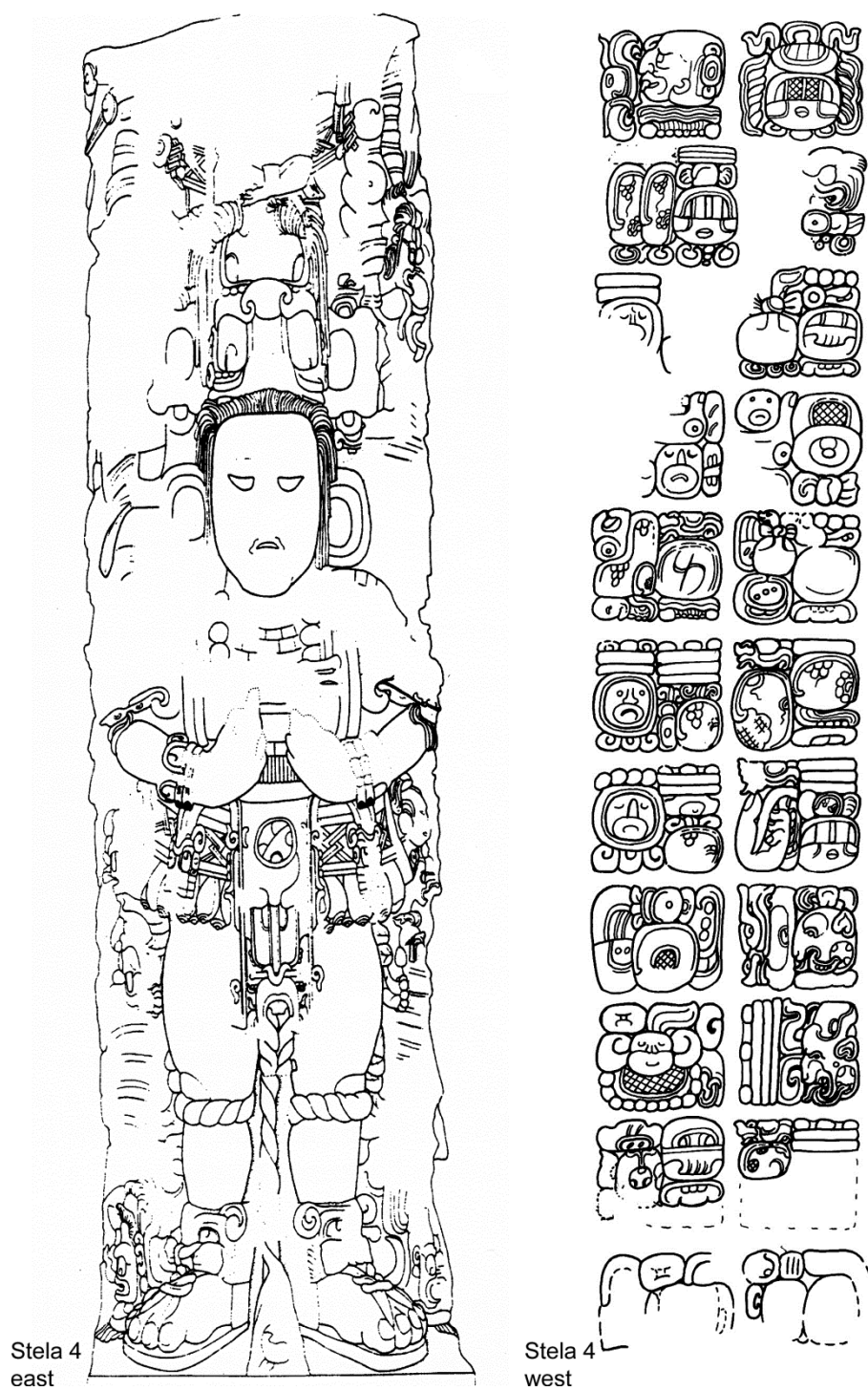


Figure 13. Drawing of Copan Stela 4 east & west faces (east = Baudez 1994:30; west = Schele Drawing 1028).



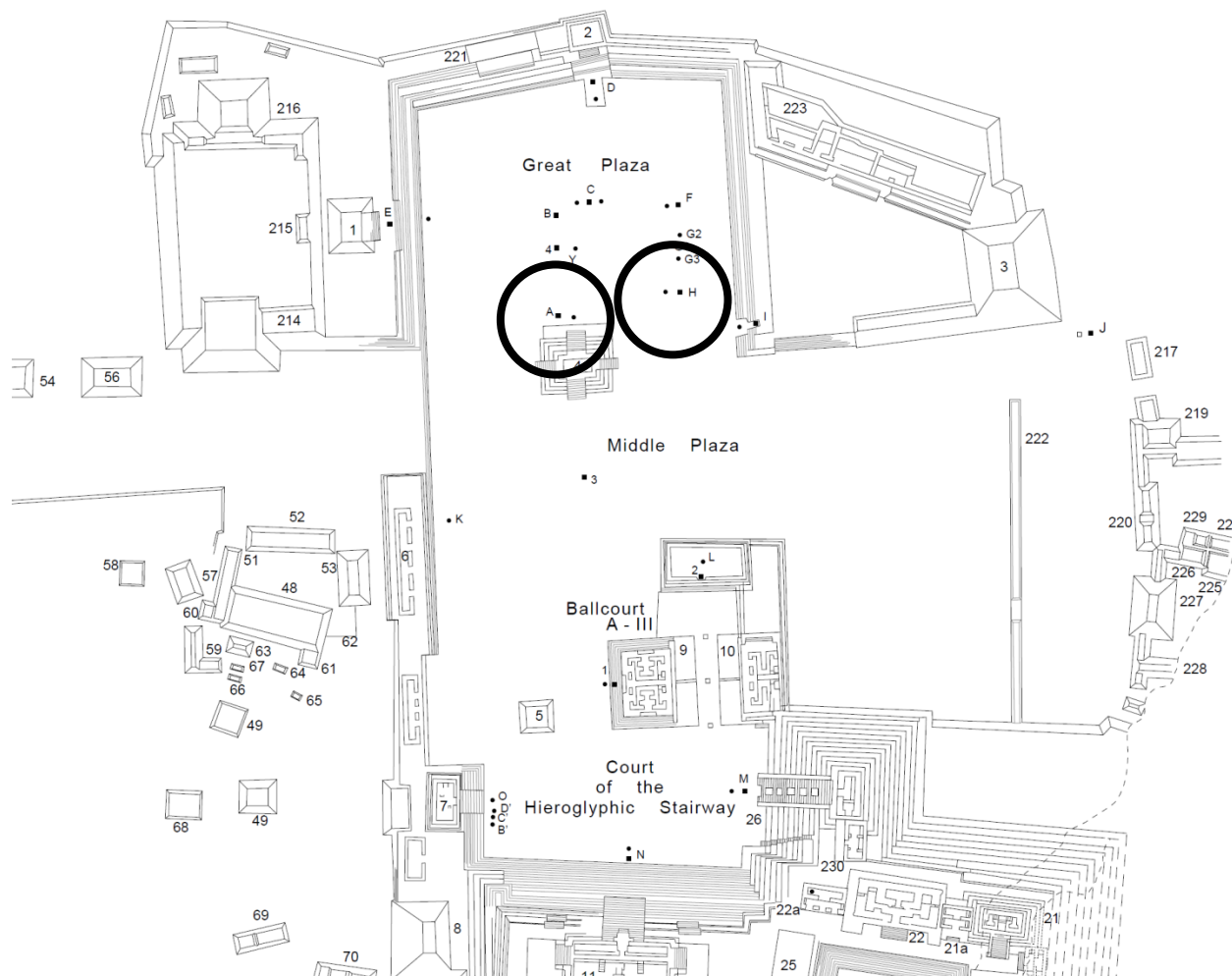


Figure 14. Map showing location of Stela A and Stela H in Great Plaza of Copan (after Fash 2003:23).



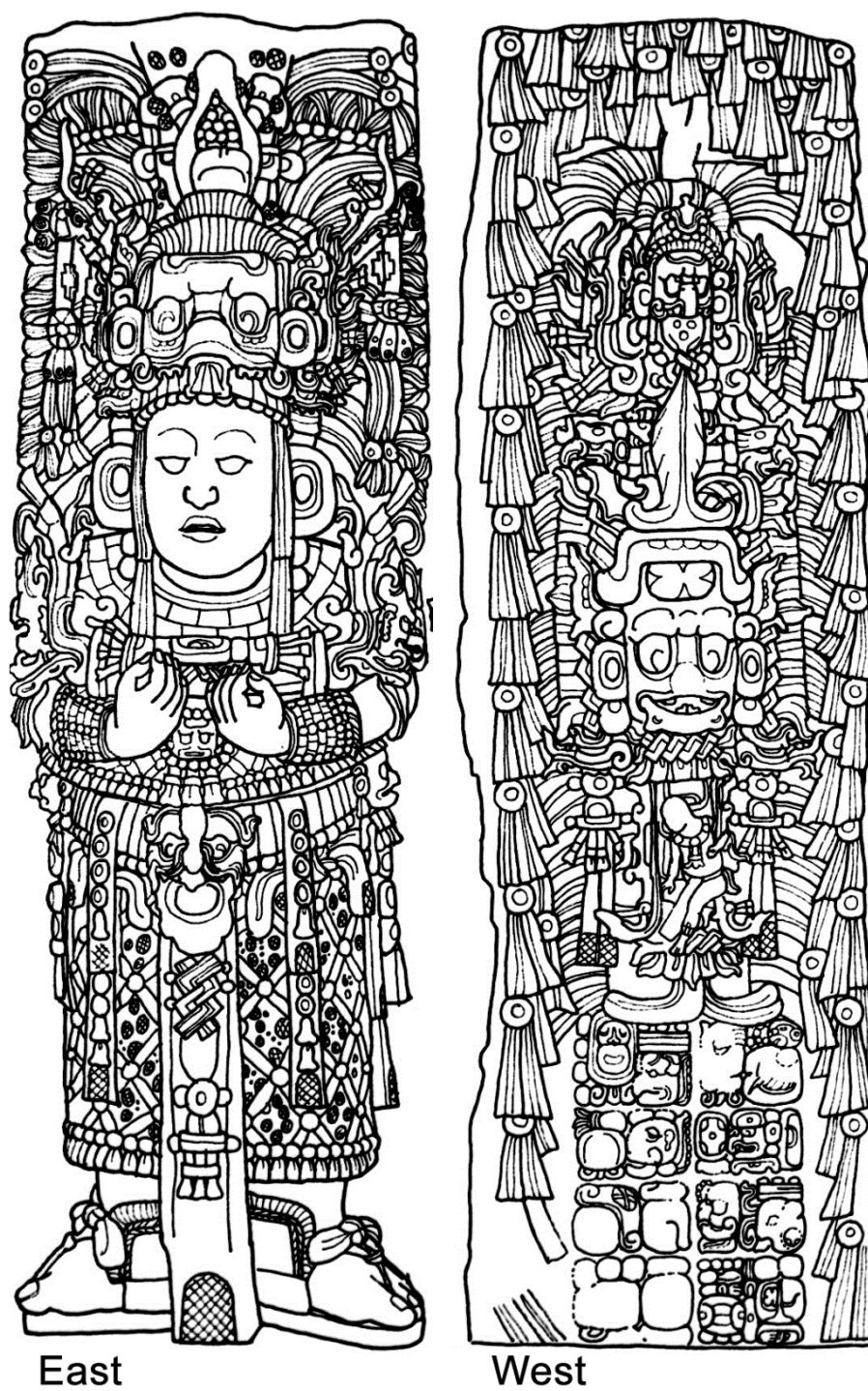


Figure 15. Drawing of Stela H showing east and west sides (Schele Drawing 1011).

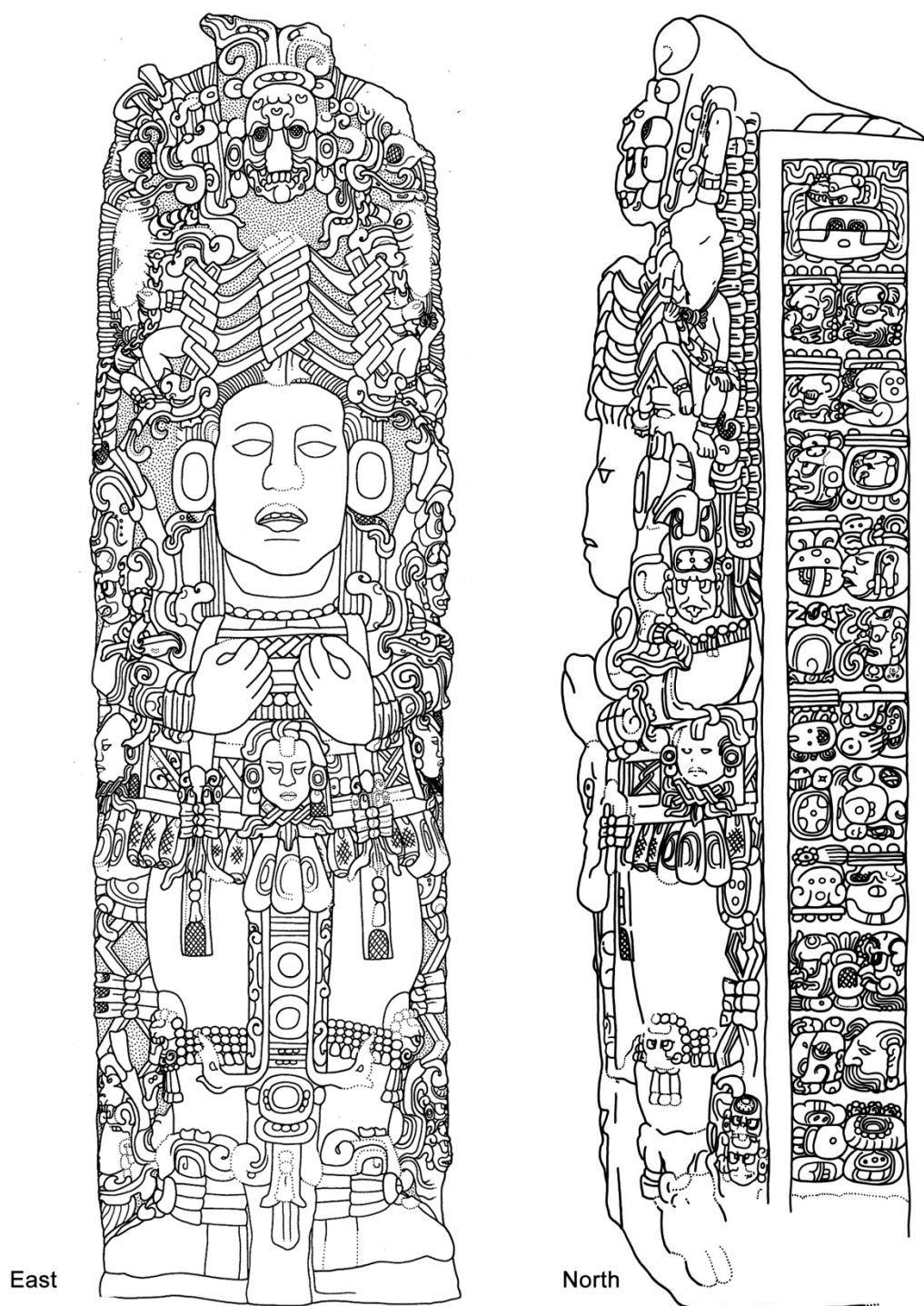


Figure 16. Drawing of Copan Stela A east and north faces – text begins on north (after Baudez 1994:22).

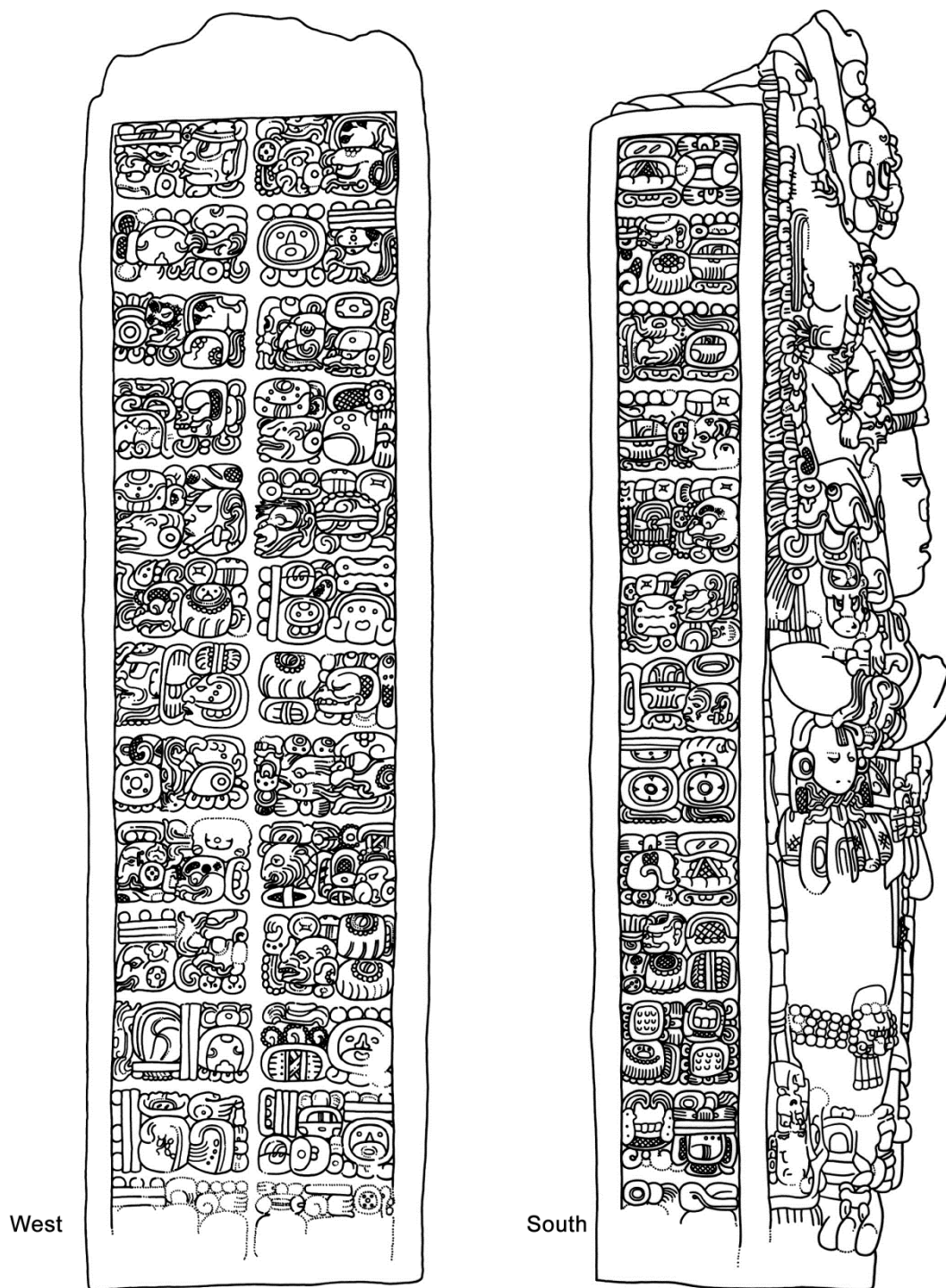


Figure 17. Drawing of Copan Stela A, west and south in glyphic reading order (after Baudez 1994:22-24).

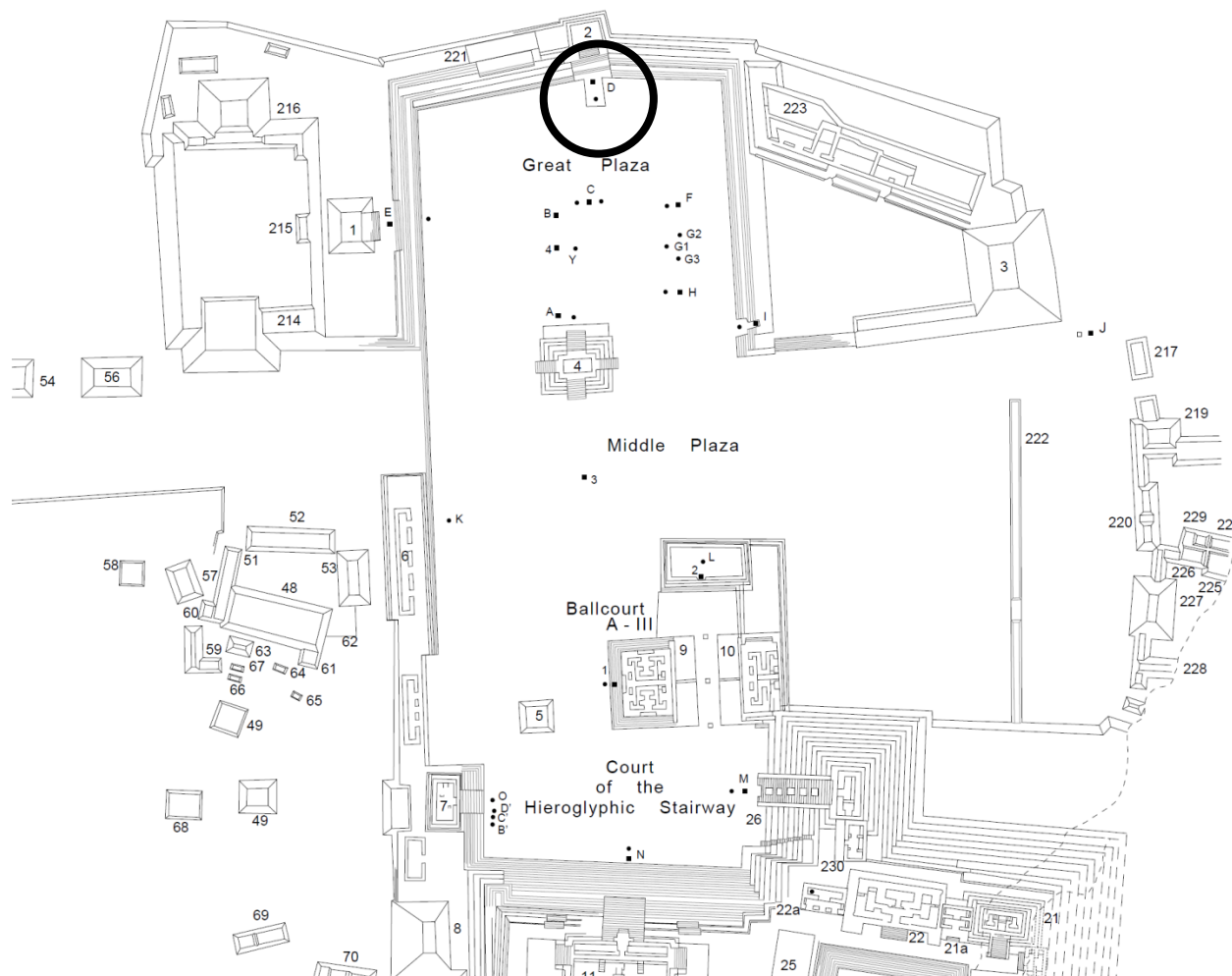


Figure 18. Map showing location of Stela D to the south of Structure 10L-2 in Great Plaza of Copan (after Fash 2003:23).

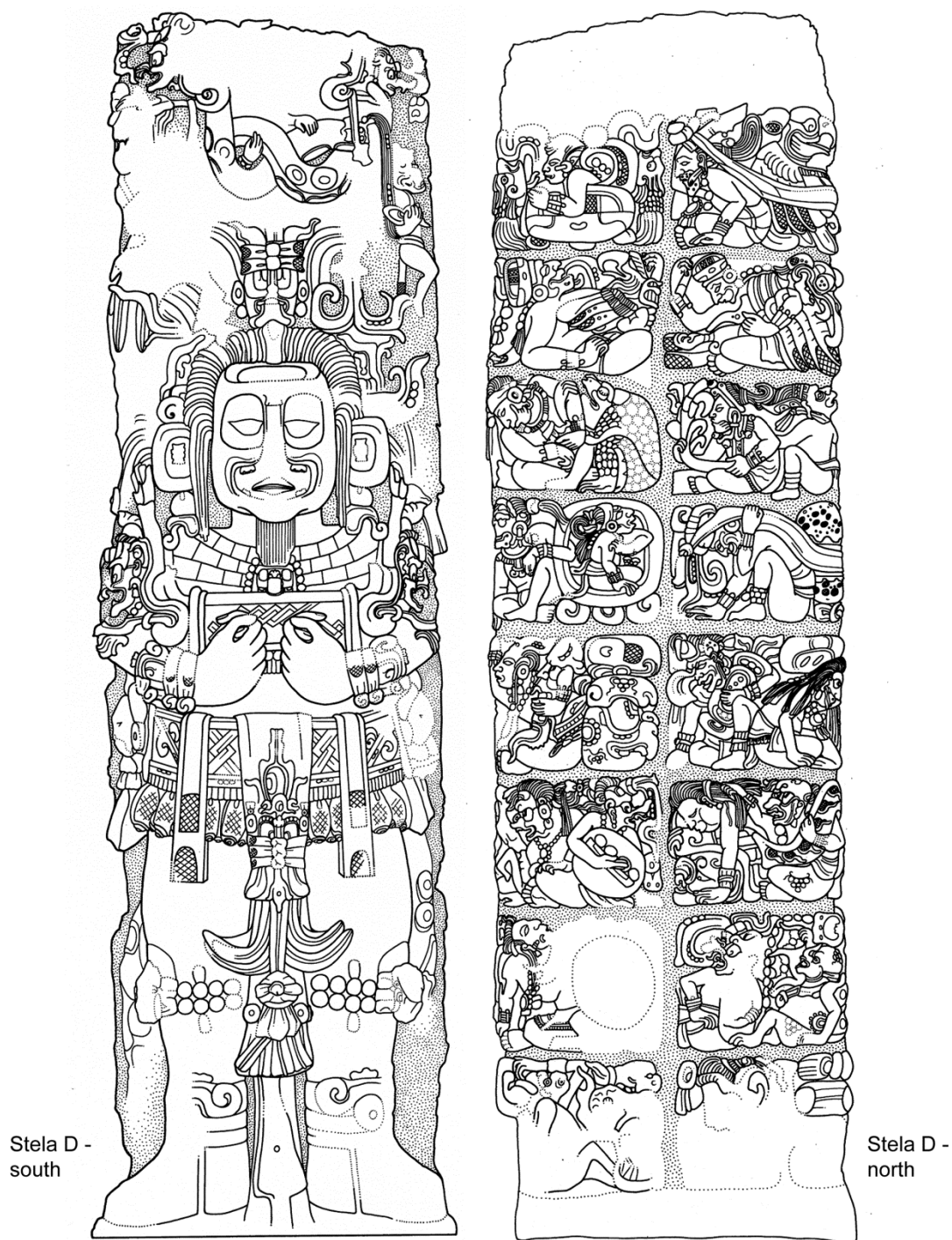


Figure 19. Drawing of Stela D (after Baudez 1994:39)