

"FLYING-PANEL" SCULPTURES FROM THE
ATLANTIC WATERSHED,
COSTA RICA

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"FLYING-PANEL" SCULPTURES FROM THE
ATLANTIC WATERSHED,
COSTA RICA

by

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INTRODUCTION

So-called "flying-panel metates" are a unique subgroup of a larger sculptural tradition that existed in Costa Rica for over one thousand years. They were the apex of a "ceremonial metate" art that was produced in all three of Costa Rica's archaeological zones, the Guanacaste/Nicoya, the Diquís, and the Atlantic Watershed/Central Highlands. * 1,2 (Figure 1) Discovered in the latter region, which encompasses the central and southeastern section of the country, they were made, according to all radiocarbon dates, between 1 - 500 A.D.

Carved from volcanic stone, a plentiful substance in the Atlantic Watershed area, "flying-panel metates" (which will be called "flying-panel" sculptures for the remainder of this thesis due to the uncertainty about their function) are tripod structures with three basic components. A plate with a raised rim is supported by three legs, often carved in effigy, which enclose the sculpture's most distinctive feature (hence the name), a central panel section. A multitude of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures is incorporated into each piece.

"Flying-panel" sculptures are reportedly all from elite burials. They were also, according to the scant archaeological data, accompanied by a cache of luxury grave goods, typically non-utilitarian and often of foreign origin. The Severo Ledesma site, for instance, A.D. 150 ± 200, had an elite burial that was filled with an assortment of luxury items including ceramics, jade necklaces, ocarinas, and several

** For practical considerations, as well as to corroborate with most scholarly writings, the Atlantic Watershed/Central Highlands area will be primarily referred to as the Atlantic Watershed throughout this thesis.*

rimmed "metates" including a "flying-panel" variation (Snarskis, 1984:32).

Archaeological studies of "ceremonial metates" in general have shown that there were often several of these sculptures placed within a grave. Usually positioned on the bottom of the tomb, they may have served as a type of burial platform for the body.³

"Flying-panel" sculptures are extremely rare, a result of their elite, ceremonial nature and, unfortunately, the uncontrolled looting that has plagued Costa Rica. My research has unearthed only eight of these sculptures, although there may be a few more in private collections.

My thesis will examine this important sculptural tradition in three main sections. The first part, following a brief summary of past scholarship, will describe in detail the eight "flying-panel" sculptures. This will include ordering them chronologically (a subject only superficially explored in the past). I will then discuss the iconography of the individual carved figures using archaeological evidence, ethnohistorical and ethnographic studies, and art historical research. The thesis will conclude with a discussion of the "flying-panel" sculptures in the context of the society in which they were carved. I will make inferences about the reasons for their creation and their value or meaning to the community.

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Scholarship has tended to neglect Pre-Columbian lower Central America. Archaeologically, art historically, and ethnographically, ancient cultures from Mesoamerica and South America have taken precedence, most likely a result of their more visible cultural manifestations. Lower Central America, on the other hand, did not produce and leave such obvious remains. Its inhabitants did not develop grand socio-political structures with the attendant centralized populations and vast architectural/ceremonial complexes (Haberland, 1973:135).

Pre-Columbian Costa Rica, of all the countries in this region, is perhaps the least understood. Research began late and has only recently been able to move beyond defining archaeological sequences.⁴ The Atlantic Watershed, of the three cultural zones, seems to have been particularly neglected. A 1988 publication edited by Frederick Lange, Costa Rican Art and Archaeology contained only one chapter (out of the book's thirteen) that addressed the Atlantic Watershed in any way.

Along with the subjective reasons noted for the negligence of lower Central America and Costa Rica in general, the Atlantic Watershed has been avoided for practical considerations. With its numerous mountain ranges, dense forests, and a rainy season that lasts for nearly nine months, the Atlantic Watershed is a formidable area geographically. This has contributed to, until very recently, a lack of stratigraphically developed periodizations (Haberland, 1973:135). Without a chronological framework, further studies have been nearly impossible.

Archaeological Research

Michael Snarskis, in several of his publications, succinctly outlines the major, albeit few, archaeological studies concerning the Atlantic Watershed and the other prehistoric cultural zones of Costa Rica. According to Snarskis, Carl V. Hartman, in 1896 and '97, conducted the first modern excavations in the Atlantic Watershed area (as well as the rest of Costa Rica). He excavated burials, although not stratigraphically, at the Las Mercedes site and established the Curridabat/Stone Cist sequence for this area. Samuel K. Lothrop's analyses of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan ceramics in his two volume publication of 1926 also included the Atlantic Watershed zone. This work, however, can not be considered truly archaeological as it is basically descriptive and involved pottery that came from looted and unscientifically researched sites. Doris Stone, beginning in the 1940's, also carried out several excavations which included sites in the Atlantic Watershed.

The first stratigraphic studies, according to Snarskis, were done by Matthew Stirling, looking at sites in the Linea Vieja area in 1969, and William Kennedy and Carlos Aguilar, working in the late 1960's and early '70's, in the Reventazón River Valley. These publications included radiocarbon dates and, in Kennedy and Aguilar's study, a new archaeological sequence that was based on Early/Middle/Late terminology. Snarskis' 1978 dissertation, Archaeology of the Central Atlantic Watershed of Costa Rica, concerned this area as has much of his subsequent work. Snarskis rejected the earlier periodizations, establishing the following sequence: Middle Formative, Zoned Bichrome 1, Zoned Bichrome 2, Transitional, Stone Cist. These, however, have subsequently been replaced by the time line developed at the

School of American Research in 1980 for all of Central America. It established the following major cultural sequences:

Period I (? - 8000 B.C.)

Period II (8000 - 4000 B.C.)

Period III (4000 - 1000 B.C.)

Period IV (1000 B.C. - 500 A.D.)

Period V (500 - 1000 A.D.)

Period VI (1000 - 1550 A.D.)

Ethnographical Research

The first, and until about a hundred years ago, only ethnographic study of the Atlantic Watershed area was done by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (also known simply as Oviedo). His Historia General y Natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano, first published in 1535, is an involved report of most of lower Central America at this time, including the area in question. Oviedo's initial cultural explorations were finally renewed at the turn of this century with the work of William M. Gabb. He primarily analyzed Costa Rican tribes in general but also completed more specific research with the Talamanca tribes (which includes the Cabecar and Bribri) of the Caribbean side. Henri Pittier, working slightly later, also studied these cultures and published a book entitled Folklore of the Bribri and Brunca Indians of Costa Rica. Doris Stone's writings, however, are the most well-known concerning the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Watershed. She has very detailed accounts of the Boruca (The Boruca of Costa Rica, 1949) and the Talamanca tribes

(The Talamanca Tribes of Costa Rica, 1962). María Bozzoli de Wille has also researched the latter culture, beginning with her 1975 dissertation, Birth and Death in the Belief System of the Bribri Indians of Costa Rica.

Art Historical Research

Art historical studies of the Atlantic Watershed are extremely sparse. The few writings that do exist concentrate on lithic work, the most distinctive art form to have been recovered from this area. Carved jade, discovered throughout Costa Rica but particularly prominent in the Atlantic region, has been studied sporadically by scholars such as Carlos Balser and Elizabeth Kennedy Easby. The other primary lithic tradition, large works carved from volcanic stone, has been similarly neglected. Although these objects are perhaps the most progressive of their kind in Costa Rica (or for that matter in Central America), they are usually relegated to a brief chapter in a book or more typically, quickly dismissed in a couple of paragraphs in an article. Wolfgang Haberland's chapter in The Iconography of Middle American Sculpture, while providing some information on Atlantic Watershed lithics, is of necessity brief as it describes southern Central American sculpture in general and only examines figural sculpture. Mark Graham's essay in the 1981 exhibition catalogue, Between Continents/Between Seas: Precolumbian Art of Costa Rica is a bit more complete. His general overview of Cost Rican lithics pays special attention to work from the Atlantic Watershed area.

With so little interest displayed towards this area, especially in terms of art historical research, it is not surprising that its lithic "metates" have also been neglected. One of the few works to deal with this tradition in some depth is Mark M.

Graham's aforementioned chapter in Between Continents/Between Seas. This is a good, albeit brief, introduction to "metates" from the Atlantic Watershed as well as from the rest of Costa Rica. It is a particularly informative essay as it includes an iconographic as well as a descriptive analysis. Graham also examines, in some detail, "flying-panel" sculptures. Doris Stone and Carlos Balser, in their 1957 article "Grinding Stones and Mullers of Costa Rica", summarily discuss Atlantic Watershed "metates". Although their observations are basically descriptive, they do include theories on possible utilitarian and symbolic uses. Fred Lange also investigates these "metates" in terms of function in his thesis on the Sapoá River Valley in the Guanacaste/Nicoya region. He promotes several alternative uses besides grinding maize or another agricultural product. Finally, Snarskis' dissertation contains some information on Atlantic Watershed "metates". It is, however, little more than a descriptive examination.

Related Research

The deficient bibliography on "flying-panel" sculptures, and the Atlantic Watershed in general, obviously necessitates research into other sources. There are actually quite a few as this region maintained ties with many neighboring, and even distant, civilizations. Nancy Lee Kelker's 1985 dissertation on the "Southwest Caribbean Lowlands", a region she believes had a common ideology and artistic tradition at one time, is an excellent source for relevant ethnographic and iconographic data. Mary Helm's writings on Pre-Columbian Panama, including Ancient Panama: Chiefs in Search of Power, are appropriate references as the Atlantic Watershed had a close relationship with the Pacific side of this country. This is suggested by, among

other things, the similar religious and cultural beliefs among groups such as the Bribri and Cuna of Panama (Tillett, 1988:57) and the related languages, derived from a Chibcha base. Bozzoli de Wille, in fact, notes that at the time of the Conquest only one or, at the most two, interpreters were needed for southeastern Costa Rica and Western Panama (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:61). Studies concerning northern South America are also worthwhile sources as this area shares similar ideologies with the Atlantic Watershed area. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff's 1971 book, Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians, explores the mythical aspects of this Colombian tribe while Jean-Paul Dumont's 1976 work, Under the Rainbow: Nature and Supernature Among the Panare Indians, is an examination of a Venezuelan belief system. Historical and ethnographic information on West Indian tribes, such as Irving Rouse's articles on the Carib and Arawak in The Handbook of South American Indians, are also useful as these cultures were probably distantly related with Costa Rican tribes. Both groups came from South America, fairly recently in terms of the Carib, and have similar languages and cultural traits (Rouse, 1948:547). Maya and Olmec mythology and iconography are pertinent to this study as the Atlantic Watershed traded goods, and perhaps ideas, with these two cultures. Maya pyrite mirrors have been found in Costa Rican elite graves as have many Olmec jade pieces. The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art, by Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, and the Popol Vuh, the edition translated by Dennis Tedlock, are only two of the many excellent sources for Maya myths and symbolism while Peter David Joralemon's publications provide a beginning for Olmec sources.

CHAPTER II
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF
"FLYING-PANEL" SCULPTURES

A description of this study's "flying-panel" sculptures will proceed chronologically, from the oldest carving to the most recent. This will be based, as previously noted, on my observations and study as no one has defined developmental stages for this sculptural tradition before. Previous scholars have simply appointed these objects to a vague time period. As exemplified by the 1981 catalogue, Between Continents/Between Seas: Precolumbian Art of Costa Rica, all known "flying-panel" sculptures have been dated to late Period IV, which encompasses the years 1 - 500 A.D. Although I am not able to pinpoint specific years or even centuries for the individual sculptures, I have ordered them and hypothesized as to the comparative ages of each. These ideas were reached by contemplating various factors such as technique, style and type of imagery.

#1) Object S-3252 from the Frederick R. Mayer Collection, Denver, Colorado

Height = 8.5 inches (approximately 21.6 cm.)

Diameter = 14.0 inches (approximately 35.6 cm.)

From the Atlantic Watershed region

(Figure 2)

Object S-3252 from the Frederick R. Mayer Collection in Denver is, I believe, one of the oldest "flying-panel" sculptures discovered thus far. This is immediately implied by the simple technique (simple, though, only in comparison to other "flying-panel" sculptures, not contemporary lithic traditions) used in its carving. The figures, for instance, quite limited in number, are relatively primitive in form. They are primarily defined by incised lines and low relief work rather than sculpted, in-the-round carvings. These figures, typically complete, unadulterated representations, are also more literal and less symbolic in form. This suggests an earlier prototype from which later ones were refined to become more complex forms.

This object is not in the best condition. While the figures' basic forms are distinguishable, their details are often obscure. Decidedly a "flying-panel" sculpture, however, it was carved from one block of volcanic stone and is composed of the basic requisite elements, a rimmed plate, three legs, central panel section, and incorporated carved images.

The plate that caps this sculpture is flat and round, an almost perfect circle. It is surrounded by a slight raised rim which is deeply notched, at regular intervals, on its bottom half. The plate appears relatively thick and sturdy, although this may simply be a result of its fairly large dimensions relative to the rest of the sculpture.

The three legs, spaced uniformly under the rim, are carved in effigy. What they are meant to represent, however, is quite undecided. The head, attached at the rim, appears to be human. The heavy brow and short, flat nose, though, give it some feline characteristics. Out of the mouth spouts a voluminous arched object. It terminates in a hook, or square donut-shaped object, that is attached to the torso of the figure. This piece could be interpreted as a beak, that is either curved or folded at the end (or perhaps even holding an undefined object), or an instrument of some kind placed in the figure's mouth. It could also be a type of speech scroll, a prevalent image in Pre-Columbian art. The bodies of these effigy figures are unsophisticated in form. They can be described as a rectangular mass from which legs and arms are superficially carved. The arms, with no hands defined, could actually be construed as other objects, wings perhaps or part of a vestment, like a cape.

The panel section consists of one figure which is in a reclining position. Its front feet, differentiated into three toes, grasp one of the sculpture's legs. Although this creature is perhaps feline, a theory which receives further support from the large fangs, the head bears some resemblance to a human skull.

2) *Object S-3220 from the Frederick R. Mayer Collection, Denver, Colorado*

Height = 8.0 inches (approximately 20.3 cm.)

Width = 14.0 inches (approximately 35.6 cm.)

Length = 17.5 inches (approximately 44.5 cm.)

From the Atlantic Watershed region

(Figure 3)

This sculpture is again from the Mayer Collection in Denver and, like the previous one, is in rather poor condition. The surface is quite corroded and rough and details are hard to distinguish. Also like the previous sculpture, S-3220 is, I believe, from an early time period. This is first suggested by the uncomplicated technique and somewhat antiquated style of the carving. The figures, again limited in number, are simple, blocky and stiff in posture. They do not appear to move freely but are confined, like the sculpture in general, to a minimalist structure with few individuated components. They further lack refinement and delicacy, a quality that characterizes the entire sculpture. Simplicity is also a hallmark of the images. They are whole, singular representations that are easily distinguished and identifiable.

This sculpture's plate is of a rectangular shape, although the corners are somewhat rounded. It is basically flat with an almost imperceptible raised rim surrounding it. This is incised, on the lower half, with evenly-spaced notches that are a bit more subtle than the preceding metate's. Like the last one, however, the plate seems quite thick relative to the rest of the sculpture.

The three legs, carved in effigy, are very similar to the previous sculpture except that they take an avian form. They are also slightly more defined and

complicated in technique. An extremely long neck is the primary feature of this figure. This is bent, at a sharp angle, and connected to the rim of the plate. A few inches from this union, a head, of sorts, becomes apparent. This is actually just a pair of large eyes and other indistinguishable facial features attached to the mid-section of the neck. Below this area is a slight bump or protrusion. Although questionable, it appears very similar to a cranial feature, called a carbuncle, found on King vultures (Figure 4). The bird's beak, which is quite pronounced and curved, ends like S-3252 in a square shape with a depressed hole in the center. This is attached to the bird's stomach or pelvis; it is unclear which. A strange object, it can be interpreted in several ways. It is either the end of the beak, coiled into a geometrically obscure knot, or an ambiguous object grasped by the beak. It could also be another speech scroll. The wings of this bird are carefully carved so that they lift slightly away from the sides of the body. This is a more complicated representation than that of object S-3252 whose arms/wings/cape lie flat against its body without any attempt to depict their individuality. The avian's feet, which serve as the base for the sculpture, are large and bulky and have individually defined toes. They look nothing like a delicate bird claw but are instead almost paw-like.

Like S-3252 the panel section is composed of one figure which is most likely a feline creature. It is again in a reclining position with its front paws clutching onto one leg of the metate.

#3) *Object S-3324 from the Frederick R. Mayer Collection, Denver, Colorado*

Height = 9 7/8 inches (approximately 25.1 cm.)

Diameter = 13.0 inches (approximately 33 cm.)

From the Atlantic Watershed region

(Figure 5)

"Flying-panel" sculpture S-3324, again from the Mayer Collection, is also in rather dubious condition. One side of the plate is significantly chipped and the surface is uneven and pockmarked. It is, I believe, also another older sculpture as exemplified by the previously defined reasons. The technique is unsophisticated and still evolving. The carvings, once again restricted in number, are not yet independent and can still be clearly identified with the original volcanic block. The images are also very literal, complete representations.

The plate, which is basically flat and oval in shape, has a slightly raised rim. This is also notched, on the bottom half, with parallel incisions. Although a little more pronounced than the preceding sculpture's, they do not cut through. The plate again looks fairly thick and strong.

Carved in effigy, the legs look very similar to those of object S-3220 and are probably avian creatures. The neck, connected to the rim and supporting it, transforms into a head which is again just an assemblage of vague facial features. There is also a protrusion, perhaps a King vulture carbuncle, below these markings. The pronounced beak of this bird is curved and pointed but this time does not terminate in the square shape. The wings, with decorative incisions defining

feathers, lie at the birds' sides. And once again, the creatures' feet are large and bulky with individual toes.

The central panel piece is one figure that is winged, with arms raised and outstretched. Perhaps avian, the wings and stance are also reminiscent of several native American bat representations. Similar images, for instance, are found on Chamá style Maya funerary vases (Figure 6). A bat identification is further supported by the head which has no beak. It does, however, also look very human in many of its characteristics.

4) Object S-3303 from the Frederick R. Mayer Collection, Denver, Colorado

Height = 20.25 inches (approximately 51.4 cm.)

Width = 30.0 inches (approximately 76.2 cm.)

Length = 44.0 inches (approximately 111.8 cm.)

From the Atlantic Watershed region

(Figure 7)

Object S-3303 from the Mayer collection in Denver belongs to a slightly later period in the "flying-panel" sculpture tradition. Although there are only a few figures which are basically realistic, complete images, it is definitely more sophisticated in its carving technique. The figures are more refined and delicate and are fully carved rather than shaped by simple incised lines or low relief work. Each image is clearly an individuated form or sculpture in its own right, distinct from the metate.

The plate, which is flat although slightly depressed towards the center, is rectangular in shape with softened corners. It is once again encircled by a raised rim whose underside is decorated with a scalloped edge. This plate, however, appears thinner and more fragile than previous ones.

Supporting the plate are three solid columnar legs which metamorphize, on their upper exterior, into nearly complete bird representations. Slightly hunched over with wings tucked at their sides, they appear roosted rather than in flight. Each has an extremely long beak which clutches a head, most likely human, that emerges from the lower leg.

Another avian-like figure comprises the central panel section of the sculpture. Situated under the plate and between the three legs, its most significant features are the large outstretched wings and prominent beak. This creature grasps, with simple,

pronged feet, a bar that acts as both a foundation for the sculpture and a link that connects two of the three legs and thus, the opposing sides. This last element is decorated with incised geometric designs.

5) Object 25679 from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, San José

Height = 75.5 cm.

Width = 77.0 cm.

Length= 79.0 cm.

From the Atlantic Watershed region

(Figure 8)

Object 25679, from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, appears to have been carved towards the middle of the "flying-panel" tradition. Less constrained to its original volcanic boulder and more complex in carving technique, it is beginning to show signs of the elongated, graceful style that defines later "flying-panel" sculptures. It is still, however, relegated to a few figures which are quite literal in form.

The plate, with its rounded corners, is more oval than rectangular in shape. It is again encircled by a rim that is notched with thick, evenly-spaced, incisions. These, however, are more pronounced than in earlier examples and look like a set of teeth. The plate appears even thinner and more delicate than the preceding sculpture, although this may be simply due to its juxtaposition against the more robust carving below.

The three legs are thin, delicate columns which are fettered, on their exterior, to identical birds. Like all of the avians thus far, they are perched, rather than in flight, and have pronounced beaks. The latter are actually significantly longer than their bodies. Also quite unusual is the direction the birds face. With the bird's legs attached to the metate leg's lower third, the birds face the plate instead of standing

away from it. The tips of their beaks come in contact with the upper part of the leg and lower rim section.

The middle figure, comprising the central panel section, is another bird. His pointed, raised wings, however, are reminiscent of typical bat representations while his feet, with what appears to be toes, are definitely more anthropomorphic than avian. The beak of this creature can be interpreted in several ways. It is either very long and bent into a semi-roll or it grasps another object. I believe in the latter explanation as the large slit on the outside of this mass suggests an incision that might have been found on a whistle, musical instrument or pipe. Again, it could also be a speech scroll or a related image. This figure is also notable for the subtle style change initiated with its carving. While his head and legs are rounded and three-dimensional like the other birds, his wings are flat two-dimensional forms. The variant style of the panel section will become more noticeable with later "flying-panel" sculptures. This creature also stands on a thin bar like that of the preceding sculpture.

6) *Object 73.981 from Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social, on loan to the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, San José*

Height = 46.0 cm.

Width = 80.0 cm.

Length = 82.0 cm

Reportedly from La Unión de Guápiles, the Atlantic Watershed region

(Figure 9)

I would categorize object 73.981, from Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social, as a later sculpture, carved towards the beginning of the last stage in "flying-panel" sculpture production. A later date for this object is immediately implied by the more complex and intricate carving. There are more figures, of a greater variety, which are quite refined and complicated in detail, movement, and the individuation of parts. Another indication that this is a more recent sculpture is that some of the figures are polymorphic. The avians that constitute part of the legs have mammalian feet while the figure that comprises the central panel section has a crocodilian head. This, I believe, demonstrates a sophisticated sculptor who is more secure with developing non-traditional images. I would still, however, hesitate to distinguish this sculpture as a fully mature "flying-panel" sculpture. The figures, although clearly the most advanced of the objects thus far, are still somewhat rigid and inanimate.

The plate, which is flat, is rectangular in shape with a raised rim. The latter has the familiar notches carved at regular intervals along the lower half. This plate is once again relatively thin, or an insignificant aspect of the sculpture. (A rectangular shape, by the way, is the only type used for the rest of the sculptures in this study. If

my dating is correct, it appears that oval or circular plates (along with rectangular shapes) were only used with earlier "flying-panel" sculptures.)

The three legs that support the plate are thick undecorated pillars. They look solid and strong. Attached to the top, on the exterior, are complete birds representations. These avians, who look down and away from the plate, are interesting in their composition. They are an assemblage of various geometric forms. A square tail lies next to rectangular wings that, in turn, is next to a round head. While almost completely avian in appearance, this bird does have legs and feet which are at odds with the rest of his form. With thick calves and ankles and five differentiated toes, they are decidedly more human. The birds have pronounced, semi-circular curved beaks that clutch human heads, connected to the bottom section of the legs. Another interesting thing about the birds, and also the other images on the sculpture, is the relief work that embellishes them. While some of the incised scrolls, "v"s and lines are used to render physical characteristics, such as eyes, feathers and fingers, there are additional engravings that are purely decorative. I have not encountered this with any of the other objects in this study.

The central panel section is composed of two figures, with a vertical larger one standing on a smaller, horizontal one. The latter is equivalent in position to the bars of the earlier sculptures. This is the first time we have seen an effigy figure for this piece. I believe that this can be used as further proof of a later age for this object as it demonstrates increased sophistication in terms of thought and carving techniques. The larger figure appears to have a human body, although with long angled arms. A long snout and pronounced pointed teeth appear crocodilian. It also has two ears which look feline. The hands are very large, not proportioned to the rest

of the body. Again, we have decorative incised work covering the body. This figure appears to continue the trend that was noticed with the last sculpture. His body is slightly more angular and two-dimensional than the other figures. This stylistic change is slight, however, and downplayed by rounded, three-dimensional elements such as the legs and feet and the geometric nature of the other animals.

The lower figure of the central panel section is definitely a feline by its ears and open, fierce mouth that shows off its teeth. It reclines with its front paws grasping one of the legs while its hind quarters are tucked under. The jaguar's long tail becomes part of the support system of the sculpture as it curves upward, supporting the plate and is attached to the central man/crocodile's arm.

7) Object MN 20788 from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, San José

Height = 56.0 cm.

Width = 52.0 cm.

Length = 77.0 cm.

Reportedly from Azul de Turrialba, the Atlantic Watershed Region

(Figure 10)

Object MN 20788, from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, is one of the more complicated and advanced "flying-panel" sculptures. This is exemplified by the the incorporation of many and varied figures, intricate, detailed carving, and employment of unusual polymorphic images.

The plate, which is rectangular in shape, is basically flat although it appears slightly concave in the center. The usual raised rim that encircles it is now decorated with a frieze of simple heads. Human in feature, they are identical in both size and form. The plate, in contrast to the rest of the sculpture, again appears rather small and insignificant.

The three legs, which are situated at the two corners of one end and in the middle of the opposite end, are carved in effigy. Although each leg can be viewed as a cohesive design whole, there are also two figures that can be distinguished. Attached to the plate's rim is a cylindrical, curved form that can be interpreted as the beak of a bird. This is united, at both ends, with another figure. Slightly hunched with its head turned away from its body, it is a complete figure that, on first glance, appears to have human characteristics. It, however, most likely represents a monkey, due to its broad facial features, posture, and grasp of the cylindrical, beak element.

The latter, I hypothesize, has several meanings which might include a monkey's tail. It could also have phallic connotations. While the monkey's left hand grasps this element, his right is raised to its mouth. It is unclear whether this hand also covers an object that is being put in the figure's mouth.

The central panel piece, connected to both the plate and legs, is composed of two figures. A larger, vertical one stands on a smaller horizontal one. The former is interesting in that it appears to combine both human and avian characteristics. Although slightly exaggerated in form and size, the body appears to be that of a man while the head, with its pronounced beak-like projection seems avian. This figure is also noteworthy for its unusual design. Unlike the other figures of the sculpture which emphasize curves and rounded elements, this figure is flat, angular, and two-dimensional in appearance. It stands apart from the others. The seemingly abstract bar it stands on is really, upon closer inspection, two identical human figures. Connected at the head, they lie on their backs with their arms resting on their hips.

8) Object 15150 from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, San José

Height = 70.0 cm.

Width = 85.0 cm.

Length = 77.0 cm.

Reportedly from San Rafael de Coronado, Central Highlands

(Figure 11)

Object 15150, again from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, is the most sophisticated and progressive of the "flying-panel" sculptures in this study. It is composed of a panoply of figures which are delicately carved and fully in the round. They are also unusual, complicated images, a veritable hodgepodge of various zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms.

The plate, rectangular in shape and flat, is surrounded by a rim which is decorated with incised notches, evenly-spaced on the lower half. It is again, like all of the later "flying-panel" sculptures, dwarfed and rather insignificant compared to the rest of the sculpture.

The legs are not effigy figures but simple, smooth posts that act as a foundation for a group of attached zoomorphic figures. Like the preceding sculpture, these figures are both intimately connected and independent of each other. The uppermost one, attached to both the top of the leg and the lower rim area, appears to be the long beak of a bird, the end of which neatly connects to the pelvic area of the second figure. (Like the preceding sculpture, this could also be interpreted as the second figure's tail, coming through its legs, or its penis). Although anthropomorphic in many respects, this figure's features, especially the broad head

and face, are more like that of a monkey. Standing erect with a slightly turned head, it raises its right hand to its mouth while its left hand grasps onto the beak/tail/penis. It is unclear, due to erosion, whether the right hand grasps another object. This figure stands on the hind quarters of another animal, most probably a jaguar, who has bared teeth and a tail that is raised and angled towards its head. A fierce-looking animal, it holds a human head with both paws.

The panel section consists of a large figure which stands on the back of another smaller figure. The former's head, with its long mouth and pronounced set of teeth, recalls that of a crocodile. With its mouth wide and open as if about to attack, it emits from its jaws a coiled, serpentine-like creature. (This could again be interpreted as a speech scroll.) The top of the head is transformed into another object which might be a large, intricate headdress. This creature's body, although somewhat exaggerated in terms of the individual features, resembles that of a human. It stands straight with its arms raised and outstretched. Once again, a significant aspect of the body is the seemingly different design that was employed. Flat, angular, and two-dimensional, it is very different in appearance from both the creature's head and the other figures of the sculpture. It has more in common with the plate, legs and other inanimate components of the sculpture than it does with the other "living" figures.

The lower section of the "flying panel" consists of a creature that can be interpreted in several ways. Focusing on the scutes or scales of the figure's back, it can be viewed as two crocodiles, attached at the waist with symmetrical heads and front legs. The two heads and legs, however, can also be looked upon as the eyes and front claws of a crab that faces the viewer.

CHAPTER III

FIGURAL ICONOGRAPHY

The following section, which will discuss the iconography of the individual figures in "flying-panel" sculptures, will proceed according to the images' relative popularity or number of appearances within these sculptures.

Bird Symbolism

As exemplified by the many tales, abundant imagery, and significant associations, birds are important animals in both Pre-Columbian and contemporary native American societies. They constitute a complex iconography, however, as the plethora of natural species is mirrored in the many and diverse representations. A discussion of the avian iconography as related to these sculptures will thus naturally begin with an analysis of the possible species of birds portrayed. This is rather difficult due to the unspecific nature of most of the depictions. As described earlier, only the King vulture presents itself as a feasible interpretation for one of the sculptures' images. A prominent characteristic of all of the "flying-panel" sculptures' avians, however, is their long, pronounced beaks. Research was done, therefore, on birds with this feature, as well as birds in general, and their symbolism and mythology. It was subsequently discovered that all of the species shared a similar iconography.

As would be expected, due to its diet of dead animals, the vulture is typically linked to morbid themes. Alice Tillet, in her 1988 thesis on the Nicoya area, states that vultures and owls represent darkness, sacrifice and death for modern northern Costa Rican Indians and probably for Pre-Columbian tribes (Tillet, 1988:69). Doris

Stone, while acknowledging these associations for the Boruca, also notes a paradoxical affiliation. While this avian's black coloring connotes the underworld and death, his white plumage is related to the sun (Stone, 1949:91). This is usually symbolic, in native ideology, with life, this world and the upperworld. Alice Tillet also associates this scavenger with the supernatural, referring to vultures as "emissaries" between different levels of the cosmos (Tillet, 1988:69).

Hummingbirds, because of their long beaks, have phallic connotations for many native cultures (Figure 12). This is true for the Desana who also associate this species with curing illness (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:101). This again is attributable to its long beak although the exact reasoning behind it is unclear. Perhaps it has something to do with the extirpation of substances (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:102). Woodpeckers, with their pronounced bills, symbolize similar ideas. The Desana, for instance, associate this species with male fertility (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:101).

Mark Graham, in his chapter on stone sculpture in the catalogue Between Continents/Between Seas, categorizes the vast majority of avians on early Nicoya "metates" as parrots or raptors (Graham, 1981:118) (Figure 13). These birds, he hypothesizes, express themes related to the daytime sun (Graham, 1981:119). Reichel-Dolmatoff corroborates this association, stating that the Desana correlate macaws with the sun (Figure 14). Like the jaguar and other similarly-hued animals, this bird's yellow coloring symbolizes solar affiliations such as fertility and renewal (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:100).

Harpy eagles might also have been represented on "flying-panel" sculptures (Figure 4). They are popular images in the art and mythology of the area, most likely initiated by the Olmec. According to Peter David Joralemon, one of the premier

Olmec deities was the Bird Monster who was the Harpy eagle (Joralemon, 1976:52). This god was related to the sun, sky, upper world and associated powers. Consequently, he also symbolized agricultural fertility, specifically in terms of maize, and trances. The Desana view the Harpy, as well as the buzzard, as symbolic of removing illness because they are carrion eaters (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:101).

Ethnographic studies have shown that waterbirds are also important in this area. Bozzoli de Wille, in her work with the Bribri, found that waterbirds, along with small birds who fly low, are viewed as mediators who "carry messages to God or give warning sounds to the shamans" (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:150). They also have phallic connotations, most likely because of their long beaks (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:150). The Maya indirectly relate waterbirds to supernatural abilities and reproductive powers. A common image in their artistic oeuvre is a waterbird, portrayed with a long neck and beak, who occasionally grasps a fish in its mouth. This avian is often associated with GI, a deity that is linked to Venus and the Sun.

Generalized descriptions and stories concerning birds tend to associate them with similar powers and abilities. The Bribri, for instance, feel that all birds are born above, in the same realm as the Sun and important deities like Sibú (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:166). Stone and Balser note a comprehensive belief system regarding long-beaked birds on the Caribbean side of Costa Rica. Like the preceding related species, they are associated with reproductive matters, particularly fertility rites (Stone and Balser, 1957:175). This, again, is presumably based on the beak's resemblance to male genitalia.

Jaguar Symbolism

The Bribri tribe of eastern Costa Rica has a story in their mythological repertoire which Henri Pittier refers to as "The Tale of our Dying Away". Set in the Bribri's mythical beginnings, it relates the tribulations of a man who was abducted by an eagle. Transported to the bird's nest on top of a mountain, he is allowed to live overnight. The following day he is taken to another mountain. Again, the eagle refrains from killing him. On the third day, perched atop the mountain Nemoie, the eagle encounters a pack of jaguars. Using their wiles, they seduce the bird into eating the man with them. The conclusion of the story has the man's bones discarded down the mountainside and the jaguars transforming into stones that await the next foolish man who comes too close. A dramatic ending, it also clarifies for the Bribri the cluster of white spots on Nemoie and the reasons "why we are not permitted to live in these dangerous places" (Pittier, 1903:4).

Similar tales, according to Stone, are told by the Talamanca tribes in general. One story relates the adventures of a water jaguar, called Dinama, who eats people and kills trees (Stone, 1962:61). Another myth has an irascible jaguar/man who becomes angry and starts devouring humans (Stone, 1962:63). While the jaguar's power is typically of a malevolent nature regarding man, it is occasionally benevolent. Stone, for instance, translates a Talamanca tale in which a jaguar rescues their ancestral kin from a rival tribe (Stone, 1962:47).

As exemplified by the preceding tales, the jaguar is a powerful creature in native American folklore. Clever, swift, and predaceous in real life, the mythology mirrors these attributes. The jaguar's symbolic power is manifested in a number of forms, creating one of the more complex animal iconographies of the area. Perhaps his most prestigious ability, however, rests in his relationship with the supernatural.

Like several of the animals to be discussed, the jaguar is considered a spiritual being because he occupies numerous habitats. That natural ability was imbued with serious meaning for many cultures, symbolizing the ability to transcend cosmic levels.

Reichel-Dolmatoff, describing the beliefs of the Desana, states:

... the jaguar is an animal that lives in a number of different environments; it lives in the densest parts of the jungle, climbs trees, swims in the water, and roams about by day and night. It is then an animal that participates in various dimensions, air, land, and water, and belongs to light as well as to darkness (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:212).

Schele and Miller note this feline's connections with the underworld as they describe the Maya pantheon. One deity, represented with a pointed front tooth and a jaguar ear, is known as the "Jaguar God of the Underworld". Among his many responsibilities is his nocturnal representation of the sun as it traverses this lower realm (Schele and Miller, 1986:50).

Affiliations with the sun, and thus the upperworld, are prevalent in many Pre-Columbian and contemporary native American cultures. These associations evolved from many sources, including the jaguar's physical characteristics. The feline's color, for instance, has solar connotations. Yellow, according to Reichel-Dolmatoff, is also the color of the jaguar's semen (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:98).

The jaguar's associations with the sun, as hinted at by the semen association, could have more than just supernatural or divine connotations. It might also be interpreted as symbolic of procreative powers, on a universal scale. Agriculture, animals, and humans all depend on solar power. The jaguar, being related to this, is thus fully endowed with powers of universal continuance. Indeed, for the Desana, he is the "principle representative of the sun" and thereby "symbolizes the fertilizing energy of nature" (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:100).

Jaguars are also associated with authority and leadership qualities. This is hardly surprising in light of their perceived abilities and attributes. Bozzoli de Wille, in her dissertation on the Bribri belief system, exemplifies this in her discussion of the Tuborwak clan. Affiliated with jaguars and other felines, they generally appoint the Bribri's highest leaders or chiefs (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:34). Bozzoli de Wille also mentions a now extinct clan called the Suweutowak who were equated with jaguars and who were the source of the Bribri's most revered shamans (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:37). The Cabecars of the Talamanca group also have an elite clan, known as the UsegLa, who are typically priests and are supposedly protected by both crabs and jaguars (Stone, 1962:63).

The jaguar's power is occasionally related to military pursuits. The Jaguar God of the Underworld, for instance, can usually be distinguished on Maya warrior shields (Schele and Miller, 1986:50) while the Bribri, as just mentioned, associate the jaguar with the chiefly Tuborwak clan. Leadership implies participation in military matters and indeed this clan was closely aligned with war-related business (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:34).

Finally, the jaguar is related to human existence, both in terms of its beginnings and its continuance. Already discussed as a major symbolic figure in the perpetuation of human life, by his universal procreative powers, he also assumes more direct responsibility for several native cultures. Indirect reference is made to this in Part Four of the Popol Vuh, which discusses the beginnings of the Quiche lineage.

These are the names of the first people who were made and modeled. This is the first person: Jaguar Quitze. And now the second: Jaguar Night. And now the third: Mahucutah. And the fourth: True Jaguar (Tedlock, 1985:165).

Jaguars are thus associated with the initial peopling of the earth. The appearance of their name among succeeding generations might also demonstrate a Maya belief in the importance of this animal for man's continued survival.

Crocodile Symbolism

Before beginning a discussion and iconographic analysis of the saurian figures depicted on several of the "flying-panel" sculptures, it is necessary to mention a few problems that have evolved in the non-zoological study of these animals. Many scholars, when writing about the reptilian creatures of this area, refer to them as "alligators". Although this does not present major difficulties for studies such as ours, it is scientifically incorrect. Alligators do not inhabit Central or South America (Helms, 1977:53). These continents are home, instead, to caimans and crocodiles, similar species that are primarily differentiated by the latter's longer snout. A second problem that pervades the ethnographic and iconographic studies of these animals is the occasional disagreement as to a crocodilian identification. Mary Helms, for instance, believes that the saurians represented in most Pre-Columbian Central American art and mythology are iguanas, not crocodiles or caimans. She supports this theory in a 1977 article entitled "Iguanas and Crocodilians in Tropical American Mythology and Iconography with Special Reference to Panama". While her hypothesis contains many valid points, I believe that the saurians on the "flying-panel" sculptures are caimans or crocodiles. Thick scales or scutes on the back, a pronounced mouth and set of teeth, and an often ferocious stance implies one of the two with the latter being the most likely interpretation. I will continue, therefore, to refer to them in my thesis as crocodiles.

Crocodiles are viewed as powerful creatures in contemporary Central American native cultures. Their formidable mouth, size, strength, and aggressive nature ensure sovereignty over most species, including, on occasion, humans. The Talamanca tribes of eastern Costa Rica have several tales in which crocodiles terrorize

humans, attacking and eating them without provocation. Similar mythology exists for the San Blas Cuna of eastern Panama. In one story, a crocodile and jaguar guard the only body of water left after a severe drought. All who approach, except virgins, are consumed (Helms, 1977:80). This animal's powers appear to be relegated to two areas. The first, concerning life-affirming abilities, is most often identified with procreative powers. Long tails, for instance, have phallic connotations for many of these cultures. To the Desana of Colombia the lizard symbolizes a penis because of its pronounced tail (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:103) while the Bribri word for human penis is the same as their word for tail (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:189). The anatomy of the crocodile obviously concurs with these associations.

An interesting, although as yet unvalidated, association regarding the crocodile and male procreative powers concerns representations of semen. Many native groups from this region, like the Desana, depict semen, along with blood, as a series of drops or points (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:103). I theorize that this artistic conceptualization was either inferred from or transferred to the patterned rows of scutes on a crocodile's back.

The crocodile is also associated with female reproductive abilities as many Central and South American native cultures relate water animals with gynecological symbolism. This is probably due to interpretations of terrestrial waters as womb-like, encasing and nourishing the earth. The Desana, according to Reichel-Dolmatoff, accord turtles, fish, crocodiles and other aquatic animals uterine symbolism (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:203-204, 208-209), as do Panamanian cultures such as the Cuna (Helms, 1977:83).

Recreative powers are also associated with the crocodile on a larger scale, beyond the human perspective. The Talamanca, as previously mentioned, have several tales that involve a crocodile eating humans. In one of them, Sibú, their primary deity, became so incensed by the crocodile's actions that he had this animal's tongue and beard removed. These were given to the sun to become its rays (Stone, 1962:66). The crocodile is thus indirectly associated with the sun and its universal recreative powers.

Helms, in the aforementioned article on crocodiles and iguanas, promotes this broader interpretation of the crocodile's regenerative abilities in her remarks on the San Blas Cuna and their tree of life (Helms, 1977:64). As its name implies, this tree contains sexual, curative and other powers related to the creative process. Crocodiles are affiliated with these capabilities as both they and iguanas, according to one Cuna myth, were created from the bark of this tree.

Regenerative or healing powers appear to be a common association for the crocodile. Shamans of the San Blas Cuna, for instance, use crocodile references in several of their chants to cure illness (Helms, 1977:84). Wooden saurian figures, called *suar nuchus*, are also carved for the treatment of certain diseases (Helms, 1977:86). Crocodiles are also believed to act as transportation for the *neles*, or "chiefly seers", in their voyage to the underworld to cure various illnesses (Helms, 1977:85).

The illustrious reputation enjoyed by the crocodile is also due to his reputed powers of divine communication. Animals that are at home in several different habitats are often seen, by native American cultures, as special. They are blessed with unique attributes, the most important being their ability to traverse, on a literal as

well as figurative level, different realms. Crocodiles, along with other amphibious creatures and birds and jaguars, are among the most common of these animals. While the former is often associated with the underworld, since it lives in terrestrial waters, it can also be interpreted as having upperworld connections. This is implied, in part, by the foregoing story of the crocodile's beard and tongue being used for the sun's rays.

The crocodiles' mystical or otherworldly powers may also have been propounded by his skin type. The Desana, along with several other groups from this area, believe that certain lizards can communicate, through the spiny projections on their backs, with the supernatural (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:103, 213). The crocodile, whose hide is an intricate web of scales, may have been regarded in much the same light. Indeed, this animal may have been imagined to have even higher powers due to the size, number and prominence of these scutes.

It should not be forgotten, however, that crocodiles were considered an important and, in many mythologies, essential creature in this realm. There are many depictions, for instance, particularly in Pre-Columbian Mexican art, that have the earth supported on the back of a crocodile. One image, in the codex Borgia, even has a field of corn sprouting from his back (Thompson, 1970:216).

Monkey Symbolism

The monkey is a very ambiguous creature in both Pre-Columbian cultures and present-day native American populations. While mainly associated with negative connotations, he also possesses several positive characteristics. Regarding the former, Marie Bozzoli de Wille, in her dissertation on the Bribri, paints a rather unflattering portrait of this animal as she relates several folk tales concerning the origin of various Costa Rican tribes. In summary, Sibú, the Bribri's primary deity, utilized corn to create the earth's first inhabitants. While some kernels developed into people (the Bribri are included in this group), others first became animals. The Boruca, for instance, were initially wild hogs while the Terribe were monkeys (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:30). This is an unfortunate association for the monkey as the Terribe are the traditional enemies of the Bribri. The Desana of Colombia are even more critical of the monkey, describing him as immoral, a harbinger of evil tidings and bad luck, (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:213) and a practitioner of witchcraft (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:100).

The Talamanca, however, view a particular species of monkey, the Congo, in a positive way. His howling forewarns them of approaching rain and bad weather (Stone, 1962:68). The Boruca also associate positive qualities with the monkey. He, for example, is thought to have invented fire (Stone, 1949:91). Their belief in this animal's cleverness is further exemplified by the story that he saved his food, through various tricks, from a hungry jaguar (Stone, 1949:91).

Alice Tillet promotes the theory that several Central American Pre-Columbian cultures associated the monkey with shamanistic abilities. She points out, in her thesis on Rosales pottery, that several pieces of Nicoya art have the monkey in a

shaman-like stance. There are also several representations of monkeys that are either portrayed with or physically connected to whistles. Affiliation with the latter is significant in that, according to Terence Grieder, "whistling or flute playing seems to have been a common part of a shaman's art" (Grieder, 1970:26).

The ambiguous nature of this animal is perhaps most clearly exemplified with Maya mythology and beliefs concerning this creature. Hun-Batz and Hun-Chuen, occasionally called One Monkey and One Artisan, were the twin older brothers of the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Jealous of their younger siblings, they were cruel to them, ignoring them and denying them food. This ill-treatment was eventually met with severe punishment. As the older brothers climbed through the trees, "they left the ends of their loincloths trailing, and all at once these became tails. Now they looked like mere monkeys" (Tedlock, 1985:121).

Hun-Batz and Hun-Chuen, however, are also associated with being intelligent, clever and skillful in the arts (Schele and Miller, 1986:52). They were, in fact, the primary patrons of the arts. Portraits of monkey scribe twins, with books, paints, and brushes, can be found on pottery and other art forms. For the Maya monkeys are an interesting and often paradoxical combination of traits. Cunning and creative, they are also mischievous and untrustworthy.

Bat Symbolism

Bats, like many if not most of the animals represented on the "flying-panel" sculptures, are creatures of significant power and authority in the iconography and mythology of this area. They are intimately involved in universal affairs, both on a sacred as well as a mundane level. Regarding the former, anthropological evidence concerning other animal symbolism suggests that the bat's inhabitation of different environments was probably associated with supernatural abilities and divine communication. Physically apart of this world, they are also perceived as having a relationship with the underworld, due to their preference for caves, and the upperworld, as they are aerial creatures.

Bats are also associated with life-affirming powers, typically in terms of gynecological symbolism. The Kogi of northern Colombia have a circular ceremonial house which is symbolically representative of a uterus. A hole in the center of the ceiling is analogous to a vagina. Although poorly documented, there is a current practice in which tribal priests place a cross-like grouping of sticks in this hole to ensure fertility for the community. On this cross are attached numerous bat images (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1985, II:105-6; 1975:211-212). The Desana Indians of Colombia, also according to Reichel-Dolmatoff, compare the bats' inverted resting position to that assumed by the fetus while in the womb (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:101). They also associate him with blood due to the rapacious appetite of certain species. This, for the Desana, symbolizes menstruation and the reproductive cycle of humans (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:101).

The Desana, however, also associate bats and blood to illness and even death. In particular, they affiliate him with dysentery (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:101). This

mammal's power is thus of an ambiguous nature towards man. It can be both beneficial and detrimental.

These contradictory associations are, like the monkey, ingeniously united in Maya mythology. As related in the Popol Vuh, the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, were challenged by the Lords of the Underworld to enter their realm, Xibalba. Upon accepting this invitation, they were put to many tests. In the Dark House, they had to burn cigars and torches for an entire night without consuming them. At the Razor House, the gods "ordained that they be cut clear through with knives" (Tedlock, 1985:140). Similar tests awaited them at the Cold House and Jaguar House. Clever and utilizing various tricks, the Hero Twins escaped each ordeal. In the final test, however, they were sent to stay overnight at the Bat House. Here, the two brothers faced snatch-bats. As described by the Quiche, they are "monstrous beasts, their snouts like knives, the instruments of death. To come before these is to be finished off at once" (Tedlock, 1985:143). The Hero Twins survived for most of the night, shielded from the bats by their blowgun. Towards the morning, however, Hunahpu peeked out of one end to see if the dawn had arrived. He was immediately decapitated by a bat. It appeared as though the Hero Twins had finally been defeated.

As described in this tale, bats are dangerous and deadly foes. A deeper reading, however, reveals a complicated iconography. The Popol Vuh states that Hunahpu stuck his head out of the blowgun intentionally; "it was actually what they (the Hero Twins) were asking for, what they had in mind" (Tedlock, 1985:143). He was beheaded so that the brothers could trick the Lords of the Underworld at a ball

game and defeat them. The bats thus became inadvertent allies to Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

Crab symbolism

Pre-Columbian mythology involving the crab is positive and typically associates him with two important abilities. Most commonly, he is affiliated with life-affirming powers. The Desana, for example, note the color of the crab's meat and its resemblance to semen. They also emphasize his slow and cautious movements and relate this to his ability to help the sick (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971:103). He is, for the Desana, both procreational and regenerative.

The Cabecars of the Talamanca group of southeastern Costa Rica affiliate the crab with similar powers. One of their tales involves a crab that found water for the Cabecar's ancestors. Sent by Sibú, "he went to a dry place and dug halfway down. Water came up behind him" (Stone, 1962:63). As water is necessary for the survival and development of both plant and animal life, the crab, its discoverer, is an important species. He contributes to the continuity of the universe.

The crab is also associated with divine powers and knowledge. As was noted in the section dealing with jaguar iconography, one of the Cabecar's elite classes is the UsegLa clan. Members of this clan are generally priests and often affiliated, in the mythology, with jaguars and crabs (Stone, 1962:63). This correlation with the sacred is lent more credence by the crab's living on both land and water. This, as previously noted, connotes the ability to traverse several realms or levels of the universe.

Head and Notches Symbolism

As Snarskis, Graham and others have concluded, the heads carved on the rim of object MN 20788, or # 7 in this thesis, most likely symbolized trophy heads. This was a common image in Pre-Columbian art and was used to portray victory in warfare. It is more than likely that the Atlantic Watershed area employed a similar symbol. Warfare, as noted by several Spanish documents, was an activity that was practiced in this region at the time of the Conquest (Ferrero, 1981:101). Stone, in her writings on the Talamanca, also notes the many references to war-related activities and decapitation in this group's oral histories (Stone, 1962:47).

The notches displayed on most of the rims and the scalloped edge of object S-3303's plate (# 4) were an abbreviated or symbolic representation of trophy heads, according to Snarskis (Snarskis, 1978:156). This seems a reasonable inference considering the similar placement and spacing of the heads and notches.

Another interpretation, however, should be mentioned in reference to these incisions. This was first brought up with the discussion of crocodile symbolism, in terms of this animal's scutes or scales. The Desana, it was noted, represented semen and blood as a series of points or drops. Perhaps the notches on the "flying-panel" sculptures' rims symbolized these important bodily fluids.

CHAPTER IV
"FLYING-PANEL" SCULPTURES
AND POSSIBLE FUNCTIONAL USES

The word "metate" is rooted in the Nahuatl term metlatl (also spelled metatl) (Stone, 1957:166). This is generally defined as a utilitarian object used for grinding foodstuffs, typically in terms of corn. Although "flying-panel" sculptures are similar to pre-historic and contemporary grinding stones (hence their customary nomenclature), it is doubtful, in fact highly unlikely, that the same definition applies. Their context within elite burials, placement next to exotic, foreign artifacts, and technical achievements all suggest something other than a utilitarian object. This is corroborated by a plethora of evidence which tends to negate a domestic function.

Stone and Balser, for instance, note the absence of manos, the instrument for grinding substances against the metate (comparable to a pestle), in burials with "flying-panel" sculptures (Stone and Balser, 1957:168). If these sculptures were intended for a utilitarian function, even a symbolic one such as for use by the dead in the afterlife, they probably would have been interred with this complementary tool.⁵

Lange also notes the small size of "flying-panel" sculptures. This, he argues, would have made it extremely difficult to grind food. Although this is a legitimate observation and true for early "flying-panel" sculptures, for example object S-3252 or #1 in this thesis has a diameter of only 14.0 inches (or 35.6 cm.), it is not true of later "flying-panel" sculptures. Object 25679 or #5 is 77 cm. wide and 79 cm. long while object S-3303 or #4 is 30.0 inches (or 76.2 cm.) by 44.0 inches (or 111.8 cm.).

These are fairly large dimensions and would have been more than sufficient to grind food.

More valid is Snarskis' observation that "flying-panel" sculptures have very thin plates, generally only two to three centimeters thick (Snarskis, 1984:210). This would have made them very fragile and thus impractical for grinding food. Snarskis also points out that the wear patterns on these objects are very unusual. They are either lacking altogether or are a series of "hammer-like blows" towards the center of the plate (Snarskis, 1984:210). A wide, regular wear pattern would have been evident if these sculptures had been used for grinding maize or other food items.⁶

Although "flying-panel" sculptures were probably not used for a utilitarian grinding surface, they might have served a specific, serviceable function. Many scholars, in fact, have concluded that they were used for ceremonial purposes, such as grinding "nuts, berries, pigments, or ceremonial foods" (Lange, 1971:247). Snarskis has suggested that the central, hammered marks are indicative of the sculptures being used for grinding drugs, particularly in terms of war preparations (Snarskis, 1984:219).

While "flying-panel" sculptures might have been used for processing drugs or special substances in a ceremonial setting, it was probably in a funeral or mortuary context, due to their particular archaeological disbursement. Perhaps they were used for preparing "chicha", a drink made from fermented ground corn. This was primarily consumed at rituals, including burial services, in both Pre-Columbian and historic times. The contemporary Bribri, in fact, still drink it in conjunction with funerary rites (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:124).

It is also possible that "flying-panel" sculptures served other, more unusual purposes. Lange, for instance, notes Oviedo's reference to a headrest used by a cacique, or chief in the Guanacaste/Nicoya region. As described by this 16th Century adventurer, it was "a small 4-legged bench, somewhat concave, which they call duho, and of a very handsome wood, skillfully carved" (Oviedo, Book 42, Chapter 13). This sounds very similar to a Costa Rican "ceremonial metate".

Stone and Balsler have also suggested that these sculptures might have been used as sacrificial altars. Hearts or even heads (thus the decorative frieze on the rims) of animals or humans might have been placed on the plate following a ritual or ceremony (Stone and Balsler, 1957:169).

The most interesting and substantiated theory regarding an alternative function for these objects is discussed by several scholars, including Lange and Stone. Thrones, or seats signifying power, are prevalent in and used by contemporary native leaders of this area. The Panare tribe of western Venezuela, for instance, seat their higher ranking men on tortoise shells during collective dinners while men of lesser status stand (Dumont, 1976:145). While these special seats vary in appearance, many bear a striking resemblance to Costa Rican Pre-Columbian "metates". Lange's thesis identifies several examples noted by various scholars. Samuel K. Lothrop, for instance, in his 1926 study Pottery of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, states that "chiefs were wont to sit upon low stools" in Costa Rica and neighboring areas such as the West Indies. These stools recall for him "metates" from the same region (Lothrop, 1926:291). As a specific example, Lothrop describes a wooden stool, discovered in a Nicaraguan cave, that is nearly identical to a plain utilitarian metate from Costa Rica (Lothrop, 1926:243).

As demonstrated by Rouse in the Handbook of South American Indians, the Arawak tribe of the Caribbean have ceremonial stools that mimic late Atlantic Watershed "metates". Tripods or tetrapods, they display effigy heads, intricate relief carving, and occasionally tails (Rouse, 1948:528) (Figure 15). Kirchoff, in the same book, confirms the use of similar seats for the elite of several other Caribbean lowland tribes (Kirchoff, 1948:224). He also notes their use among the Guayupe of the Venezuelan-Colombian llanos (Kirchoff, 1948:387, 388).

It is my opinion, however, that "flying-panel" sculptures did not serve any of these functions. They were obviously not used for any utilitarian grinding and I hesitate to even associate them with a ceremonial grinding function due to the same reasons (i.e. absence of manos in the graves, thin plates, etc). The throne hypothesis is an intriguing one but again the delicate plates and fragile nature of these objects would have made this impractical, at least in a literal sense. I believe, instead, that these sculptures were created to be works of art meant for display and emblematic, symbolic purposes. This idea, too often ignored in the study of non-Western art, will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

CHAPTER V

"FLYING-PANEL" SCULPTURES AND SYMBOLIC USES

Chiefdoms and the Maintenance of Power

The Intermediate region's political structure, at the time of the Spanish conquest, was one of chiefdoms. A more complex and advanced type of government than most western definitions suggest, it was a permanent political system, stratified, that dominated a significant territory. The chief, head of the hierarchical system, was a powerful leader who had strong socio-political control. The territory of modern Panama, for instance, was ruled by a number (three dozen, according to some estimates) of chiefs at the time of European contact. Called "quevis", or "caciques" by the Spanish, each controlled, politically, economically, socially, and religiously, a fairly large defined area. The "quevi" was the head of a ranked society that included, from most influential to least, an elite class, including priests, warriors, and commoners.

The Atlantic Watershed of Costa Rica was governed by a similar system. Spanish documents refer to grand chiefs, or caciques mayores, and principal chiefs, or caciques principales. Each grand chief was responsible for a specific area and saw to a multitude of administrative matters. The principal chief carried out special assignments, for example meetings with foreign ambassadors or war-related duties, and, it is assumed, was answerable to the grand chief on all matters. Again, there was a lower elite class, a class of warriors, and a class of common people (Ferrero, 1981:100).

Our evidence is very incomplete for the exact functioning of chiefdoms in the Atlantic Watershed and rest of lower Central America. Archaeological investigations

are far from finished and Conquest writers were usually more interested in plundering local goods or converting the natives than writing detailed accounts of the politics of the area. We do know, however, that since one of the primary concerns of intermediate chiefdoms was the maintenance of authority, the political system emphasized competition to produce the most competent leadership.

Although patrilineal succession determined chieftainship in 16th century Panama. Oviedo notes that authority, or the perpetuation of authority, rested more on ability than on genealogical good fortune. Usurpation was a possibility and did occur (Oviedo, 1944-5, VIII:11). As Mary Helms writes,

... it is likely that when such a chief or heir held the necessary personal capabilities to outperform others of the elite his hold on his office was strong. If, however, his personal abilities were not commensurate with the demands upon him, another more capable member of the high elite could launch a successful challenge... (Helms, 1979:31).

Contemporary Panamanian societies, specifically the Cuna, are also very competitive. A predominant theme in many of their modern-day tales involves jealousy and rivalry (Howe, 1977:158). Tad Ibe, for instance, is a mythical culture hero who seems to be constantly challenged to contests of ability. He must be able to withstand fire with Poni Ibelel, an evil spirit, or swim faster than Olokisbakwalele, an "Iguana chief" (Helms, 1977:74-78). Other interesting beliefs among the Cuna, that

show that ability rated higher than inherited privileges, are the concepts of "niga" and "kurgin". Niga is a type of physical power and facility while kurgin is intellect and talent. Although all are born with these powers, they must be constantly maintained and reaffirmed through the use of medicines or the adornment of ornaments, like jaguar teeth (Helms, 1979:74). They can be lost or reduced if one is not careful.

A similar competition most likely existed in chiefdoms in Pre-Columbian Costa Rica. Although 16th century evidence is lacking regarding this, as well as archaeological data as previously noted, there are several ethnographical accounts that support a competitive elite class. Fernandez Guardia and Perez Zeledon, traveling in the mid 19th century, came upon not one, but several "kings" in central and eastern Costa Rica (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:51). Guardia, along with William Gabb, also remarked that Costa Rican officials were constantly barraged by individuals claiming "chiefly" authority (Bozzoli de Wille, 1975:51).

The Maintenance of Power through "Chiefly" Activities

To maintain his status and legitimize his authority, a chief had to continually demonstrate competence, leadership abilities and something more. Authority was granted by the people and not by birthright. He thus had to evidence special abilities and qualities that were unique to him, important for leadership and vital to the community. One way he achieved this was to participate in visible, "chiefly" activities that would have been observed by his people. These would have emphasized his right to rule.

Mary Helms' book Chiefs in Search of Power outlines several activities that were employed by Panamanian chiefs to evidence personal abilities. According to

Helms, Panamanian chiefs may have participated in games or sporting events to validate their rule. Ballgame courts, balls, and other paraphernalia have been found throughout the New World and there is significant evidence that chiefs or leaders of the various polities were intimately involved, perhaps for competitive reasons, with these so-called games. 17th century Panamanian documents, for example, mention a native sport called "krun" (Helms, 1979:28). A stick game, it was played both for pleasure and to prove strength, courage and other leadership abilities. Mary Helms believes that "krun", or a related game, was played in Pre-Columbian times to challenge or maintain chiefly positions.

Warfare was the most dramatic and consequential chiefly activity. Although relatively infrequent, warfare was important because it demonstrated a chief's ability to gather together warriors and resources necessary for combat and it proved that he could defend his area of influence. It also meant the attainment of new lands, which obviously increased a chief's status in the eyes of both his own and other communities. Acquiring new territories was also important for another chiefly pursuit, long-distance trading.

Foreign trade was essential to chiefdoms. Like warfare, it showed the ability to successfully administer a large and difficult operation. Time, labor, and resources had to be coordinated and organized. Alliances with both neighboring and distant peoples also had to be developed. Foreign trade also meant the acquisition of exotic goods. These were desirable items, scarce and typically non-utilitarian, which were given to thank old supporters and to court new ones, or to appease dangerous foes.

Participation in such activities, along with demonstrating specific abilities and leadership qualities, demonstrated an energetic and active personality (Helms,

1979:67). The chief had to be a dynamic, rather than a passive, force in the life of his community. This was vital to the chiefdom's survival, as well as his own. As Irving Goldman writes:

... in status, as in mechanics, the measure of force is the energy of motion. Mass must be moved. It must be assembled and circulated and moved outward into wider orbits. That which is inert is low in vitality and hence in standing (Goldman, 1970:498).

The Maintenance of Power through Symbolism

Symbolism, for societies both past and present, played a dominant and vital role. An important method of communication, whether developed in an artistic medium or in language and mythology, symbolism was, and still is, used for representing a variety of often complicated ideas or attitudes in a succinct and abbreviated format. World views, which include religious beliefs and customs, are often imparted through symbolism. One simple figure, like a jaguar for Pre-Columbian peoples or a cross for Western cultures, can convey a multitude of stories, themes or ideals. Symbolism is also frequently employed for political purposes. It can be a very effective piece of propaganda for the elite class, used to vindicate past and current authority. Chiefs from the Atlantic Watershed, I believe, utilized symbolism as another means to demonstrate leadership abilities and status.

16th century chiefs in the Atlantic Watershed area dressed in distinctive clothing that was symbolic of their class. Specially woven cloth, the inclusion of

shells, feathers and/or other accessories, connoted unique abilities and chiefly attributes that would have been recognized by the entire community. Chiefs from this region, as well as Panama, also covered themselves with a variety of gold ornaments. Along with signifying power through the type of material used, they also implied authority through their specific shape or design. An iguana-like figure, according to Helms, is found engraved on several gold ornaments which were worn by Panamanian chiefs. This motif, Helms believes, symbolized the chief's ability to maintain an ordered and "civilized" community as the iguana brought fire to the Cuna, thus initiating civilization (Helms, 1979:102).

Chiefs in the Atlantic Watershed, as well as Panama and probably other areas of this region, also employed distinctive emblems or insignias. These symbolic markings denoted elite status and were emblazoned on a variety of items, including clothing, jewelry, and the chief himself. Occasionally, these patterns were tattooed, as previously mentioned, on slaves and, less frequently, on the regular populace.

"Flying-panel" Sculptures and Political Symbolism

"Flying-panel" sculptures were another object imbued with symbolic meaning. As well as being exceptional works of art, they also communicated important information to peoples of the Atlantic Watershed. As earlier chapters have exemplified, ideologies and beliefs were made manifest through these sculptures. Each individual figure was emblematic of a multitude of cultural and religious ideas, related mythology and customs. These objects, however, were also important political symbols. Like the chiefs' clothing, jewelry, and distinctive insignia, the metates were created to advertise the chief's unique abilities and leadership qualities.

They were another propaganda tool, employed in the struggle to maintain power and status in the pre-Columbian Atlantic Watershed area.

An overt intimation of leadership and its corresponding abilities and powers is the "flying-panel" sculptures' similarity to thrones or seats of power. As discussed earlier, many cultures seat their leaders on special stools that bear a striking resemblance to Costa Rican "metates", including the "flying-panel" variation. The Arawak tribe of the Caribbean have chiefly stools that are similar to late Atlantic Watershed "metates" as do the Guayupe of the Venezuelan-Colombian llanos. The "flying-panel" sculptures' employment, although probably purely symbolic, as a throne is an obvious suggestion of high status. The same can also be said of the sculptures' resemblance, as noted by Lange, to a chiefly headrest from the Nicoya area.

Several of the animals represented in the carvings are also strongly associated with authority and leadership. The jaguar, for instance, is often a symbol of royalty for both pre-Columbian and contemporary cultures of the Americas. The heads and symbolic notches which are displayed on most "flying-panel" sculptures are another obvious suggestion of chiefly powers. As previously discussed, these designs probably represented trophy heads, a symbol or "badge" for most Pre-Columbian cultures of victory in warfare. The inclusion of trophy heads on these objects, I believe, reiterated the chief's skill in this important activity, and emphasized his control over territory, resources, and people.

A somewhat more subtle reference to chiefly abilities was first proposed by Olga Linares in her discussion of art in the central provinces of Panama. She notes

that most of the animals depicted within this tradition are aggressive. According to Linares, they are either:

... repellent (poisonous frogs, snakes, toxic marine worms); they are dangerous (sharks, stingrays, needle fish); they have hard body parts (turtles, crustaceans, armadillos); they 'charge' (curassows); they 'pinch' or 'sting' (crabs, scorpions, ticks)"....."they eat people (crocodiles, felines); or they are predatory (man-of-war birds, hawks)" ... "Animals that do not appear or are uncommon in the art have soft body parts or are vulnerable; deer, agouti, paca, raccoons, rabbits, sloths, monkeys, opossums, and so forth (Linares, 1977:70).

The same type of animals appear on "flying-panel" sculptures. Crocodiles and jaguars, which attack other animals as well as humans, are prominent figures as are crabs, which sting, and bats which are often considered dangerous "blood-sucking" creatures. Other animals, at first glance seemingly innocuous, can also be categorized within Linares' central Panamanian type. The hummingbird, for example, was viewed by the Zinacantecans as a ferocious, warrior-like creature. Zinacantecan men were even known to eat a hummingbird heart before a battle to gain "agility and quicksightedness" (Hunt, 1977:66). Monkeys, I would also argue, are hardly the "vulnerable" creatures Linares describes. Their rather nasty disposition seems to have been realized by the Bribri, who associate them with their traditional

enemy the Terribes, and the Maya, who affiliate monkeys with the Hero Twin's cruel older brothers. The depiction of aggressive animals, I hypothesize, was very deliberate and meant to imply similar chiefly characteristics. Warfare, foreign exchange, and control of his own territory required an aggressive and forceful ruler.

Pre-Columbian cultures tended to assign specific genders to animal species. Both the Cuna and the Desana, for example, place animals in defined male/female categories, although they also acknowledge the existence of both genders within each species. While there are several "female" animals, or rather figures with feminine associations, such as the crocodile and bat with their gynecological symbolism, most of the animals portrayed on the "flying-panel" sculptures are "male". The Desana, for instance, assign all animals with long, prominent parts a phallic symbolism and therefore the male gender (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1970:208). Hummingbirds, waterbirds, and other avian species with prominent beaks thus fall within this category. The crocodile, with his long tail, can also be considered to have masculine qualities. His affiliation with both sexes, seemingly contradictory, is explained by the Cuna. They believe that the caiman, a related species, is female while its ancestor, the original caiman, is male (Kelker, 1985:164). The jaguar, for the Cuna and most other indigenous cultures from this area, is also a masculine creature. This is probably based on his strong affiliations with the sun which gives him procreative powers. For unspecified reasons, the Desana also view toucans and macaws as male. I believe that this is a reflection of their prominent beaks (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1970:208). The emphasis on masculine animals, I theorize, was another subtle reference to chiefly abilities. The male gender, for most cultures (including our own), is associated with qualities such as aggressiveness, bravery, strength,

fearlessness, and other such stereotypical attributes. These are qualities that are important for leadership and authority and would have been expected of Costa Rican chiefs.

Sacred Symbolism

A relationship with the sacred was one of the most profound and important abilities a chief could possess. Like warfare or foreign trade, it validated a chief's rule by implying special powers. It connoted an understanding of the cosmic system and the origins of the world which was considered important, not only in itself, but for the administration and governance of the chief's realm. As Mary Helms states:

An understanding or interpretation of the origins and characteristics of the biosphere and the universe also provides a store of sacred-secular knowledge useful for controlling the forces and energy of the cosmos and turning them to human benefit (Helms, 1979:88).

"Flying-panel" sculptures, I believe, symbolized this important relationship. They evidenced the chief's affiliation with the supernatural and his understanding of the greater universal order. This would have been immediately and most prominently implied with the majority of depicted animals having supernatural associations. The jaguar, crocodile, and various avian species were all related to spheres and powers beyond their earthly domain.

"Flying-panel" sculptures also acknowledged the supernatural in its manifestation as a dynamic, living force. Cyclical processes, whether on a human or

universal scale were recognized, respected, and often feared by Pre-Columbian peoples. Artistic endeavors reflected this as did ceremonies which also acted to ensure the continuity and perpetuation of universal processes. "Flying-panel" sculptures recognized this essential aspect of the universe simply through their wonderful figures, seemingly alive due to their intricate carvings and active poses and expressions. A more blatant acknowledgement of these dynamic processes, however, is evidenced in the images' iconography and symbolic connotations. This is most pronounced with the figures' strong associations with life-affirming powers, particularly in terms of procreation. On a small scale, in terms of the human perspective, there are many figures, such as the long beaked birds and crocodile, who have suggestive phallic components. There are also several animals, although less prominent, that are associated with the female side of reproduction. Bats, for the Kogi, are affiliated with blood and therefore menstruation and are also noted for their fetal-like resting position. Crocodiles, a hermaphrodite creature mythologically, are associated with gynecological symbolism because of their aquatic nature.

Regeneration and recreation is also evidenced in these sculptures on a broader scale, particularly in terms of the many figures' relationship to the sun, the universal life force.

Universal processes and forces, however, are not always of a benevolent nature. Illness and death are a predominant and integral aspect of cosmological events. "Flying-panel" sculptures recognize these opposing natural processes in their iconography. Bats, for example, are associated by the Desana with disease and death as well as procreation and life-affirming powers. And the King vulture, for

contemporary northern Costa Rican Indians, is most commonly linked to darkness, sacrifice and death.

The "flying-panel" sculptures' affiliation with the supernatural and sacred, I believe, is consolidated with the object, as a whole, representing the cosmos. Mark Graham points out that there are three areas of imagery on "flying-panel" sculptures, the rim or plate, the legs, and the central panel section (Graham, 1981:123). This could be interpreted as representing the Pre-Columbian conception of three levels of the universe. The idea of this type of sculpture as a model of the cosmos is supported by the fact that the animals depicted on each sculpture connote the supernatural universe on all of its planes or dimensions. Earlier "flying-panel" objects, less complex with fewer figures, typically represent these three levels in one or two figures. S-3252, for instance, or # 1 in this thesis, consists of only two figures, an anthropomorphic creature which forms the legs and a jaguar which constitutes the central panel section. The jaguar, although mostly associated with the underworld, could also have implied all three levels of the universe.

Later "flying-panel" sculptures are more sophisticated in their cosmological associations, demonstrating the various levels of the universe with a multitude of figures. Object 73.981, or # 6 in the descriptive section, has birds, most commonly associated with the upperworld, attached to the legs and an anthropomorphic figure with a crocodile mask in the top of the central panel section. Crocodiles, it was discussed, are often associated with terrestrial waters and therefore this realm. Completing the universal triad is the jaguar, generally affiliated with the underworld, who is at the bottom of the panel piece. Object 15150, or # 8 in this paper, has a similar iconography. Jaguars grasp all three of the lower legs, a man with a crocodile

head is in the central panel section (he, in turn, stands on another crocodilian or perhaps crab-like creature), and birds, or actually long beaks, are attached to the rim and upper section of the legs.

The figures' placement on later sculptures (older ones, due to their simple carvings, usually have the figures placed side by side) also corresponds to their placement within the universe. The last two objects exemplify this perfectly. #6's avians, or upperworld creatures, are perched on top of the legs, near the plate's rim. This would correspond to this realm's location within the universal order. The crocodile/man figure of the central panel section (the terrestrial representative) is in the middle of the sculpture or where our visible world would be represented. And the underworld jaguar, making up the bottom section of the panel piece, approximates the location of this universal level. Object #8 has a similar arrangement with the long bird beak attached to the rim and upper section of the leg, the crocodile/man figure in the middle of the central panel, and the jaguars towards the bottom of the legs.

My interpretation of the "flying-panel" sculpture as a symbolic representation of the universe is further corroborated by the three-dimensional, cubic shape of the sculpture. J. Eric S. Thompson theorized that the Maya viewed their world as being a box-like space. According to Thompson:

... from representations in Maya art, it is known that the visible universe was a cube, the ceiling of which turned down at right angles to form the sides, the flat surface of the earth completing the cube (Thompson, 1973:59).

Thompson supports this interpretation with a number of examples. He believes, for instance, that the piers from the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque depict the ruler surrounded by the "complete house", his reference to the universe (Thompson, 1973:59) (Figure 16).

Costa Rican cultures may have held similar beliefs about the universe, incorporating perhaps the entire cosmos rather than just the "visible world" within this space. Terence Grieder supports this theory with his conclusions regarding the "spatial complexity" in both the art and life of this area. He hypothesizes that:

... lower Central American and their relatives in the southwest Caribbean region clearly had a different conception of space, one made up not of plane surfaces, but rather of penetrable multidimensional space (Grieder, 1991:13).

Complex, three-dimensional spaces seem to have been implied with certain pieces of Costa Rican jewelry. A gold ornament, reportedly from the Diquís area, has a number of tiny ambiguous creatures which stand on an entwined cord. Shaped to form a square, or perhaps flattened cube, they enclose four upright creatures which are probably feline. These figures then form another square or box which surrounds a larger figure, most likely a man with a jaguar mask (Figure 17). A Costa Rican jade pendant utilizes a similar representational format. An ambiguous figure, probably human although his broad face also suggests a feline creature, is encased by a frame

or two-dimensional box with two small birds perched on top (Figure 18). The "flying-panel" sculptures, I surmise, can be interpreted as another box-like enclosure (this time fully three-dimensional rather than simply implied) which would have been understood to represent the universe.

The chief's affiliation with the universe and cosmological processes is symbolized with the central figure of the sculptures. I hypothesize that this creature, in its many manifestations, was meant to symbolize a shaman. In earlier "flying-panel" sculptures, for example, it is usually represented as a jaguar. This animal, it was noted, is often associated with shamans and the priestly class. In later sculptures, this central figure is always depicted with outstretched arms. This is reminiscent of the universal prayer gesture. Many of these later objects also display an anthropomorphic body with an animal head, typically a bird or a crocodile. Perhaps this was meant to represent a man with a mask on, another obvious suggestion of shamans and ritual practice. Object 15150 from the Museo Nacional de Costa Rica, or # 8 in this thesis, along with displaying a crocodilian mask and outstretched arms, also has a headdress on. The religious elite in native America often employed such a costume in their ceremonies. The style, as noted in the descriptive section, is also quite distinctive for the later "flying-panel" sculptures' central figure. It is flat, two-dimensional and angular, very different from the rest of the figures. This individualizes him and implies uniqueness and special properties. Shamans, of course, would have had to possess such qualities to have access to the supernatural world. Finally, this figure is always placed in the center, at the heart of the sculpture. Like a shaman, he seems to be directing the activities around him. The inclusion of this shaman-like figure, I believe, was meant to imply chiefly control

over sacred proceedings and universal events. Shamans, in pre-Columbian cultures, were either the chiefs themselves or employed by the chiefs to reach the supernatural.

Chiefs and the Acquisition of Knowledge

Knowledge, particularly of an esoteric nature, was obviously extremely important for chiefs. Warfare, long-distance trading, and the administration of his realm required insight and intelligence. Sublime knowledge, according to Helms, was also viewed as a scarce and therefore valuable commodity. It was difficult to obtain and required expending much time and effort. The *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, a Yucatecan Maya book, suggests the importance of esoteric knowledge with its series of difficult questions that were asked of all chiefs. If the chief answered these questions correctly, he was inaugurated into office. If he incorrectly answered them, he was tortured and then hanged (Roys, 1967:88-98). Helms notes that contemporary Cuna chiefs compete in acquiring knowledge. Their education includes learning a special "chiefly" language and participating in pilgrimages to teaching centers (Helms, 1979:122,145).

"Flying-panel" sculptures, I theorize, demonstrated the acquisition of chiefly knowledge. Their complicated iconography and its esoteric, usually supernatural, affiliations would have connoted sublime understanding and intellectual capacities. Special knowledge would have been further suggested by the fact that these objects are all very personal works of art. While they often share similar figures, poses, or iconography, each is a singular, individual work of art. This implies chiefly influence, either directly or indirectly, in the creation of these objects. Chiefs had to have enough knowledge of the supernatural and related mythology to be able to

choose, or at least approve of, particular images and their placement within these sculptures.

"Flying-panel" Sculptures as Works of Art

Finally, these objects symbolized chiefly status and power simply in their creation and identification as works of art. "Flying-panel" sculptures are extremely complicated carvings. Even the simple, early ones (simple, though, only in comparison to later versions) exemplify an advanced knowledge and mastery of the sculptural tradition. Each carved figure, a complete work in itself, is only one of several such works which are ingeniously united into an intricate, cohesive whole. Even more astonishing is the fact that these sculptures were carved from a single block of stone. There were no separately made pieces which were later joined together.

"Flying-panel" sculptures, as just discussed, are also unique, individual objects. This, along with the complexity of the work, implies powerful patronage. One had to have access to the most skilled artists, the wealth, and the power and prestige, to command an original design. The individuality of "flying-panel" sculptures also implies uniqueness, a quality that, as we have seen, distinguishes a chief from his constituents and ultimately empowers him.

The ability to hire skilled artists, the foremost of their day, and significantly influence their work was perhaps reiterated or further suggested with the inclusion of monkey figures on several of the sculptures. As stated earlier, monkeys, for the Maya, represented the Hero Twins' older brothers who were creative and skilled in the arts. This, I theorized, might have been an association for many other pre-

Columbian cultures, including the Atlantic Watershed area. By "capturing" these patrons of the arts in stone, the chief might have demonstrated his association with, and control over, artisans and the crafts.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Related Burial Goods

I will conclude this thesis and my argument for "flying-panel" sculptures symbolizing chiefly status with a discussion of the other items discovered in Atlantic Watershed elite graves. These goods, I believe, resonated with similar, symbolic meanings and were created by chiefs to suggest leadership abilities and powers.

Costa Rican elite burials typically yielded a multitude of exotic artifacts. Ocarinas, rattles, and even occasionally a Maya pyrite mirror or an Olmec jade figurine have been discovered interred with the body. The most common items that were placed in elite graves, however, were "ceremonial metates", including the "flying-panel" type, ceramics, jade axe-gods and mace heads. The latter two, in particular, were found in abundance throughout Costa Rican high status burials.

Jade Axe-Gods

Jade axe-gods are exactly what their name implies. A celt or blade forms the bottom half while a "god" or effigy figure distinguishes the top. While there are several of these carvings that are anthropomorphic, incorporating human figures or faces into the upper section, the majority of axe-gods take the shape of birds (Figure 19). There are also a few imaginative combinations of humans and avians. Axe-gods were an important tradition in the pre-Columbian Costa Rican jade industry. Lothrop, in fact, determined that over 30 percent of all Nicoya jades take this form (Easby, 1968:28).

Jade axe-gods imply chiefly status and leadership abilities with their prominent spiritual connotations. As was mentioned in reference to the "flying-panel" sculptures, an association with the supernatural was vital for chiefdoms and implied special powers. Jade axe-gods suggest the sacred through their material, specifically its blue-green color. Grieder has surmised that this hue, for many Pre-Columbian cultures, symbolized the heavens and communication with this realm (Grieder, 1982:182). This is probably a reflection of the sky's color and/or the color of water and rain which originate from the sky. The striking color of jade axe-gods, one of the first things one notices about these sculptures, might have been immediately associated with sacred powers.

The shape of jade axe-gods, in terms of both the celt and handle, is also emblematic of the supernatural. The Maya, for example, associate axes with lightening and therefore the upperworld. The word for axe is also linguistically affiliated to the word for lightening bolt (Schele and Miller, 1986:46). The axe-gods predominant representation as birds also suggests a divine interpretation. As noted several times, birds are commonly associated with the upperworld due to characteristics such as the inhabiting of multiple environments and specific coloring. Avians, typically long-beaked ones, are also imbued with phallic and thus procreative symbolism. Regeneration was a constant and obviously important universal process.

Snarskis believes that the Olmecs associated jade axe-gods with agriculture, particularly in terms of maize. This is a logical inference as the blades can be interpreted, literally or symbolically, as agricultural tools (Snarskis, 1984:218). Their association with agriculture might have been meant to demonstrate the chief's control over the community's food production. This would have obviously implied a

number of important abilities, including responsibility for his constituents' welfare and well-being.

Jade is an extremely hard stone. It is, in fact, the toughest of all stones and even harder, according to Elizabeth Easby, than steel (Easby, 1968:16). This was undoubtedly realized by the chiefs and probably exploited by them symbolically, promoting the chief's strength and durability as a leader. The hardness of jade also means that it is difficult to work. It requires time, patience, and the most knowledgeable craftsmen. Like the "flying-panel" sculptures, the creation of jade axe-gods demonstrated a chief's access to skilled artisans and his power to commission a technically masterful work of art.

Although it is almost certain that Costa Rican artisans worked and fashioned the jade themselves (evidenced by the use of distinctive Costa Rican motifs and the unique perforation of most pieces), it is unclear as to where they obtained this raw material. There are no known sources of jade in Costa Rica, although as Easby has pointed out, it might have been used up or lost to later generations (Easby, 1968:87). If, however, it was imported from somewhere outside the country, it would have connoted the chief's participation in, and obvious success with, long-distance trade.

Mace Heads

Mace heads are lithic sculptures that capped the end of a long wooden staff. Usually carved of volcanic stone or quartz, they were also occasionally made of jade. Although these sculptures are most commonly in the shape of a human head, often as a skull, they have also been found carved as avians, bats, monkeys, felines and crocodiles (Figure 20).

This tradition's symbolic implications of chiefly status and ability was first implied with one of its purported functions, (probably only symbolic, however) that of a war club (Graham, 1981:118). Chiefly participation in this important activity was further suggested by the predominant imagery of human heads and skulls. This would imply trophy heads and victory in warfare.

The inventory of other mace head images also supports a political, symbolic function for these sculptures. Avian representations, as we have noted, hold divine or sacred implications while monkeys are symbolic of shamanistic powers and/or access to individuals with these powers. And felines, in particular jaguars, are affiliated with leadership qualities in general.

Finally, jade mace heads would have implied all of the values and meanings associated with this type of stone. The blue/green color would have carried celestial connotations while the hardness of the stone would have implied chiefly strength, longevity and access to specialized labor. And the possible foreign nature of the material would have suggested chiefly control over long-distance trade and access to exotic goods.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Doris Stone distinguished these three pre-historic cultural areas in 1958. They have been used by scholars ever since. A brief synopsis of the three areas geographically follows.

The Atlantic Watershed/Central Highlands

The Atlantic Watershed/Central Highlands archaeological zone is really two areas geographically and climatically. Studies, however, have demonstrated that it shares a pre-historic cultural affinity. An important geographic feature of this area is the Reventazón River which flows in the center of this broad landscape and empties into the Caribbean Sea. There are also two important mountain ranges, the Cordillera Central, situated in the middle of this zone, and the Talamanca range, which lies to the south. While the Highland area is quite dry, like the Guanacaste/Nicoya area, the Atlantic Watershed area is very wet with lots of rainfall. This, along with the perennial high temperatures, has contributed to a landscape dominated by lush rainforests.

The Guanacaste/Nicoya

The Guanacaste/Nicoya area is composed of two areas, the Nicoya Peninsula and the Guanacaste province on the mainland. This archaeological zone also belongs with the Greater Nicoya cultural area which includes western Nicaragua. Important geographical features of this area are the Guanacaste and Tilaran mountain ranges, which separate this zone from the Atlantic Watershed, and the Tempisque River which divides the peninsula from the mainland and empties into the Gulf of Nicoya.

The Pacific coast, compared to the Atlantic Watershed area, is quite dry and has distinct seasons.

The Diquís

Separated from the Atlantic Watershed cultural area by the Talamanca mountain range, the Diquís archaeological zone consists of two areas, the Osa Peninsula to the west and the mainland to the east. The Golfo Dulce lies between the two. While most of the Diquís is dry and seasonal, like the Nicoya area, the Osa Peninsula and Golfo Dulce are unusually wet due to strong ocean winds.

² So-called "ceremonial metates" were an important aspect of Costa Rican lithic work for many years, predominantly in the Atlantic Watershed and Guanacaste/Nicoya cultural zones. The two areas, however, produced vastly different traditions.

Guanacaste/Nicoya "ceremonial metates"

Guanacaste/Nicoya "metates", recognized by their curved, rimless plate, were first carved between 300 B.C. - 300 A.D. Early ones, discovered in elite burials like all Costa Rican "ceremonial metates", are typically plain, tripod sculptures with little decorative work. The next phase, significantly more complex in both structure and design, usually has geometrical or figural carvings on the underside of the plate. The legs are also usually carved, sometimes in effigy (Figure 21). The most advanced type of Nicoya "metate", still tripod, has wonderfully carved legs which are geometrically designed with plenty of openwork. Effigy heads often sprout from one

end of the plate (Figure 22). The carving of "ceremonial metates", along with other lithic work, significantly declined in the Guanacaste/Nicoya area after 1000 A.D.

Atlantic Watershed "ceremonial metates"

"Ceremonial metates" from the Atlantic Watershed area can always be distinguished from their Guanacaste/Nicoya counterparts by their flat, rimmed plate. The first Atlantic Watershed "metates", carved around the same time as the earliest Nicoya sculptures, are tripod and very simple in design. Occasionally, though, the underlying section of the plate is decorated with geometric patterning, usually of evenly-spaced projections (Figure 23). The next and most complex phase of Atlantic Watershed "ceremonial metates", is the "flying-panel" variation. Around 1000 A.D., two new types of Atlantic Watershed "metates" emerged. Tetrapod sculptures, usually in effigy form with a head and tail sprouting from the two ends, were accompanied by plainer, circular "metates" with a pedestal base. (Figure 24)

³ An excavation was carried out in 1977 at an elite cemetery at the Tibas site, outside of the modern city of San José. One tomb, A.D. 250 ± 150, contained a skeleton buried on top of three Atlantic Watershed metates. Accompanying this was the usual offering of exotic grave goods, mace heads, jade axe-gods, pottery, and even an older Olmec jade piece (Snarskis, 1984:32).

⁴ The following is a brief summary of research completed with the Guanacaste/Nicoya and Diquís cultural zones.

Guanacaste/Nicoya Research

Archaeological studies of the Guanacaste/Nicoya area, although sparse in comparison to Mesoamerica and South America, are the most numerous and advanced in terms of Costa Rica. Continuous, albeit smaller-scaled and not always scientific, work has been conducted since the late 19th century. According to Michael Snarskis, J.F. Bransford, in 1884, was the first modern scholar to study the Nicoya Peninsula. He was followed, about ten years later, by Anastasio Alfaro who investigated this area as well as numerous other sites throughout Costa Rica. The first real archaeological work in the Guanacaste/Nicoya region (and Costa Rica in general) however, was initiated by Carl Hartman at the turn of the century. He excavated several burial complexes at the Las Huacas site. Samuel K. Lothrop's studies of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan ceramics also included this region as did Doris Stone's excavations, beginning in the 1940's. Perhaps the most important archaeological studies concerning this area, however, were initiated by Michael Coe and Claude Baudéz in the 1950's. They stratigraphically excavated in the Guanacaste region and published the first archaeological chronology for this zone. Frederick Lange, Lynette Norr and Winifred Creamer, among others, have continued the work in this region.

While at one time (actually up until 1980), the periodization of Zoned Bichrome, Linear Decorated, Early Polychrome, Middle Polychrome, and Late Polychrome was used for the Guanacaste/Nicoya area, this has been abandoned in favor of the unified periodization established for all of Central America.

Ethnographically, or ethnohistorically, the Nicoya sub-area is not as well documented. While Oviedo's 1535 account of lower Central America, Historia General y Natural de las Indias. Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano, contains substantial information about the people and cultures of the Guanacaste/Nicoya region, there has been little ethnographic research initiated since then. Most recent studies have tended to ignore the current indigenous populations, preferring to reinterpret Oviedo's and the few other Spanish conquistadors' observations.

Artistically, studies have concentrated on the most distinctive Greater Nicoya art form, ceramics. Lothrop, as previously mentioned, published a descriptive analysis of the pottery from this region as well as neighboring areas. Jeanne Sweeney, in her 1975 dissertation, examined all the known ceramic traditions of this sub-area while Alice Tillet studied a particular complex, the Rosales, in her 1988 thesis. Jane Stevenson Day has also published research concerning Guanacaste ceramics. Jade work and other stone traditions have also merited some research studies and publications.

Diquís Research

The Diquís area is almost virgin territory in terms of scholarship. Archaeologically, there have been very few excavations, perhaps a consequence of the terrible looting that has plagued this area since the discovery of intricate gold work at the time of the Conquest. Snarskis, however, does mention a few noteworthy studies. Haberland, in the 1950's, looked at ceramics from the Diquís while Lothrop conducted excavations, again primarily with pottery, in this area in 1963. Both,

though, are little more than descriptive reports as they did not include radiocarbon dates. Doris Stone has also explored this region in some depth.

Ethnographical research is also minimal for the Diquís area. Data, from both historical and modern time periods, is typically ensconced in the more comprehensive studies of Costa Rica. Juan Vázquez de Coronado, a 16th century Spanish adventurer, for instance, briefly discusses the Turucaca, a Diquís tribe, in his notes on Costa Rica. William M. Gabb, writing in the 19th century, also mentions Diquís indigenous populations in his book, On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica.

Artistically, the Diquís area has been primarily studied for two traditions, giant stone spheres and gold metallurgy. Lothrop and Stone have written on the former, strange objects which might have had astronomical significance, while Warwick Bray, among others, has published on the gold work discovered here. These pieces are typically small delicate items, often cast as pendants.

⁵ The absence of manos in most of the graves with "flying-panel" metates might be explained, according to Stone and Balser, by wooden manos. If this type of pestle was indeed buried in the tomb, it would have disintegrated long ago due to the Atlantic Watershed's archaeologically inhospitable climate (Stone and Balser, 1957:168).

⁶Wooden manos might also explain the lack of wear on "flying-panel" metate plates (Stone and Balser, 1957:168).

Lange theorizes that the centralized, hammered marks on the metates could be the result of trying to finish or polish the sculpture (Lange, 1971:244).

Figure 1

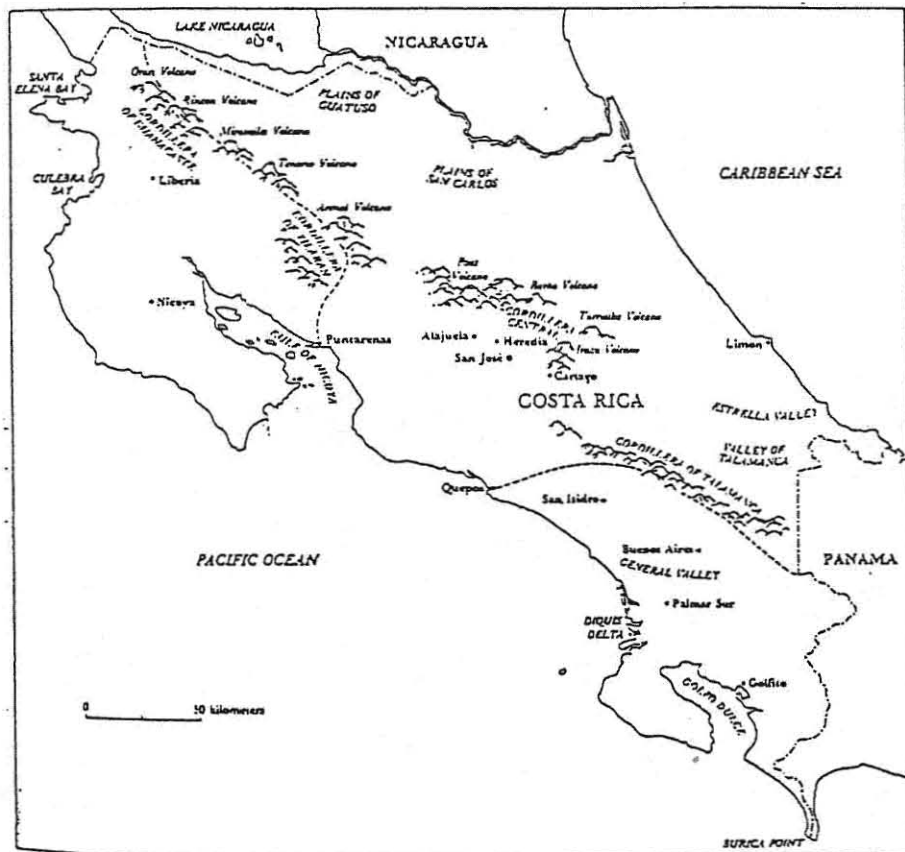


Figure 2

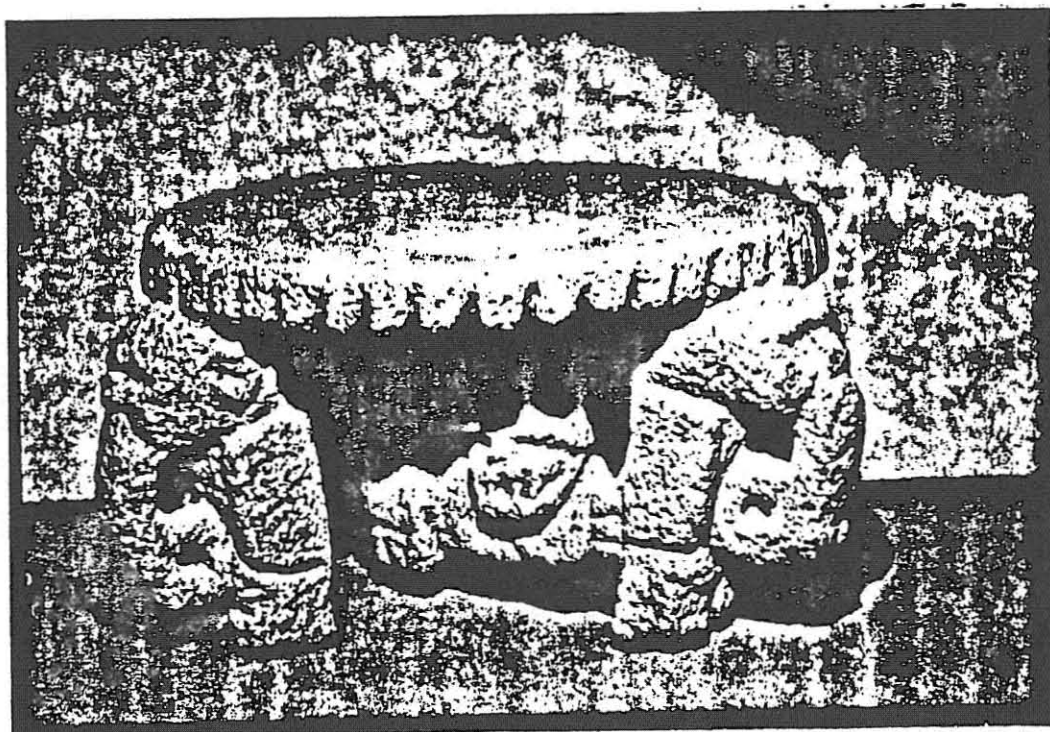


Figure 3

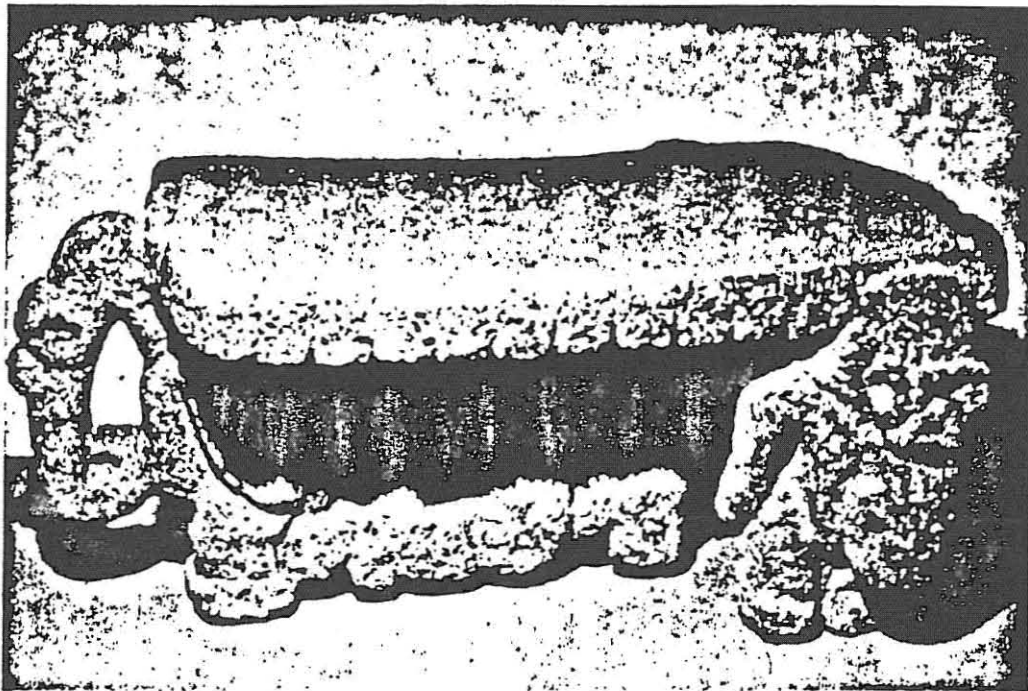
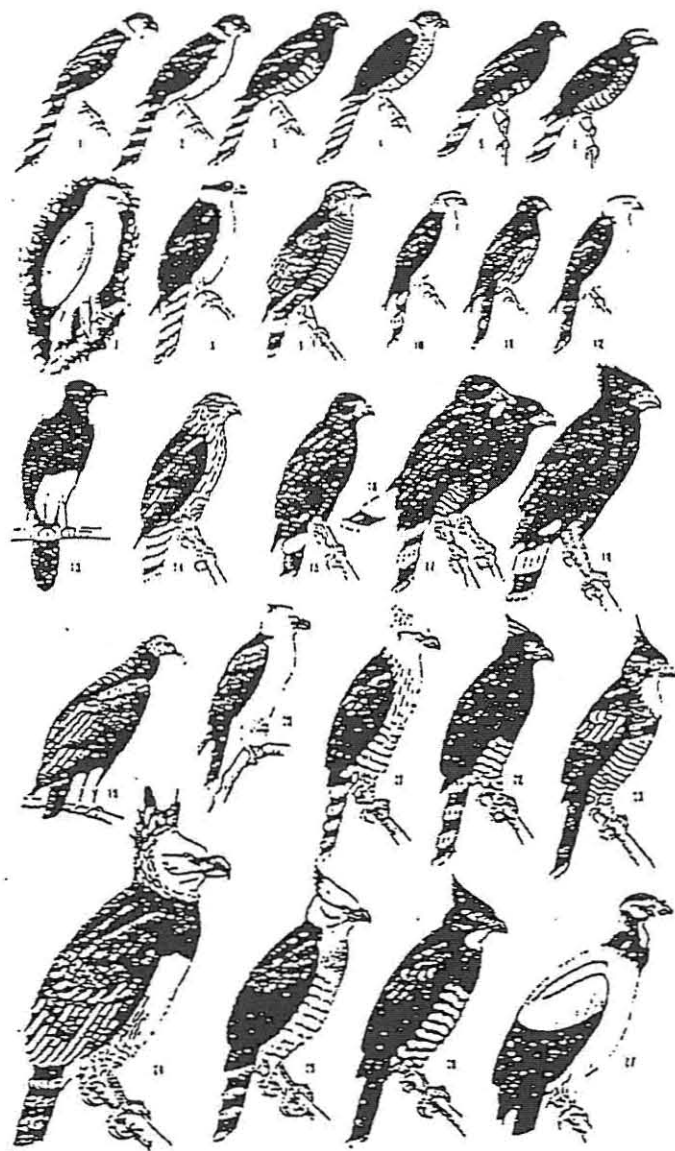


Figure 4



#24: Harpy eagle
#27: King vulture

Figure 5

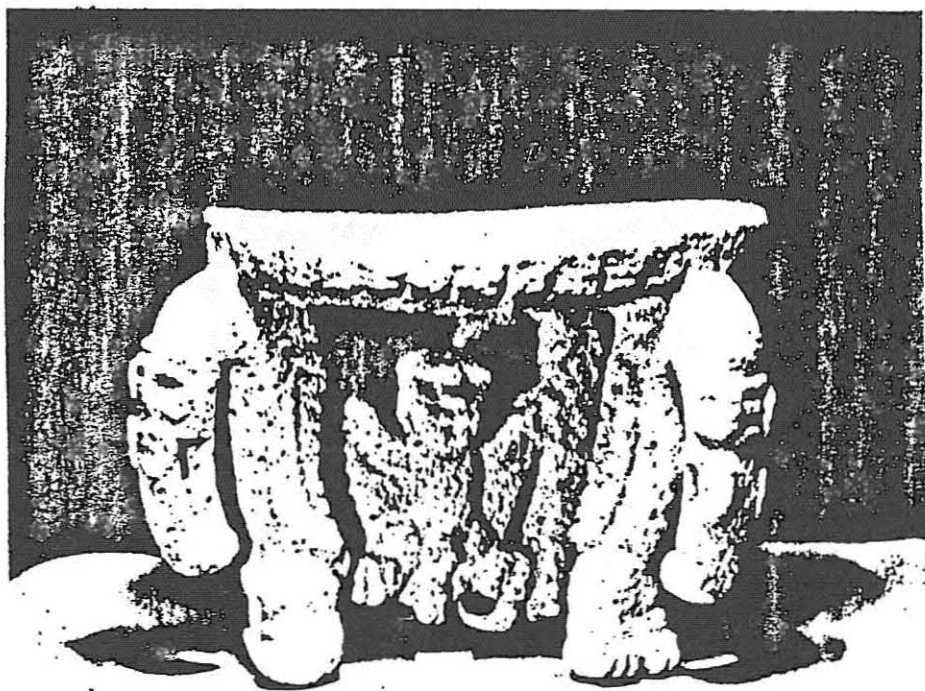


Figure 6

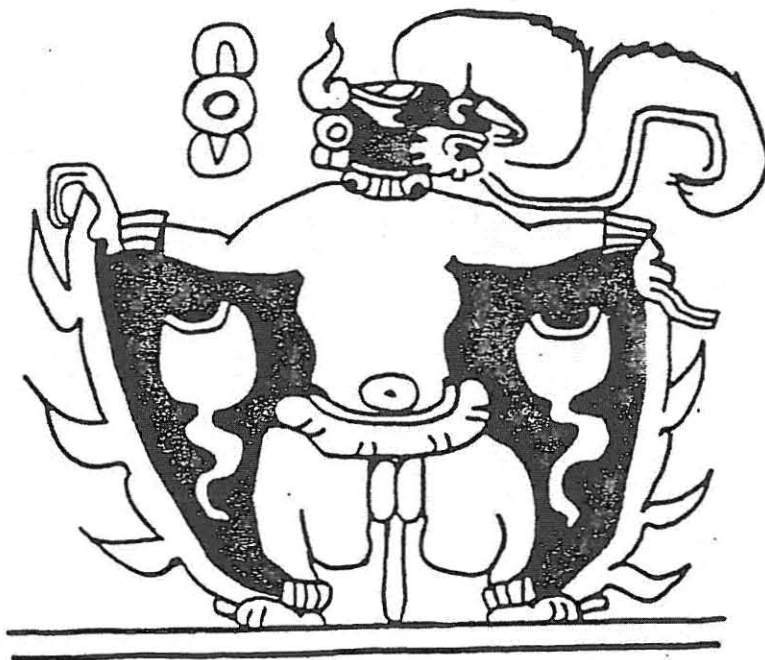


Figure 7

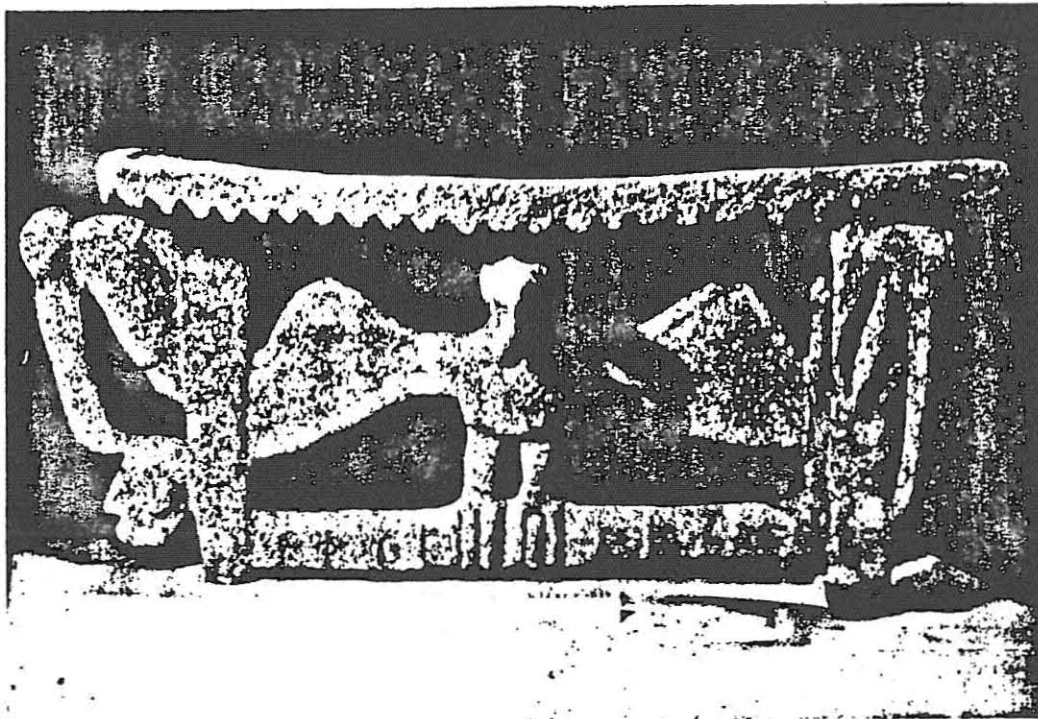


Figure 8

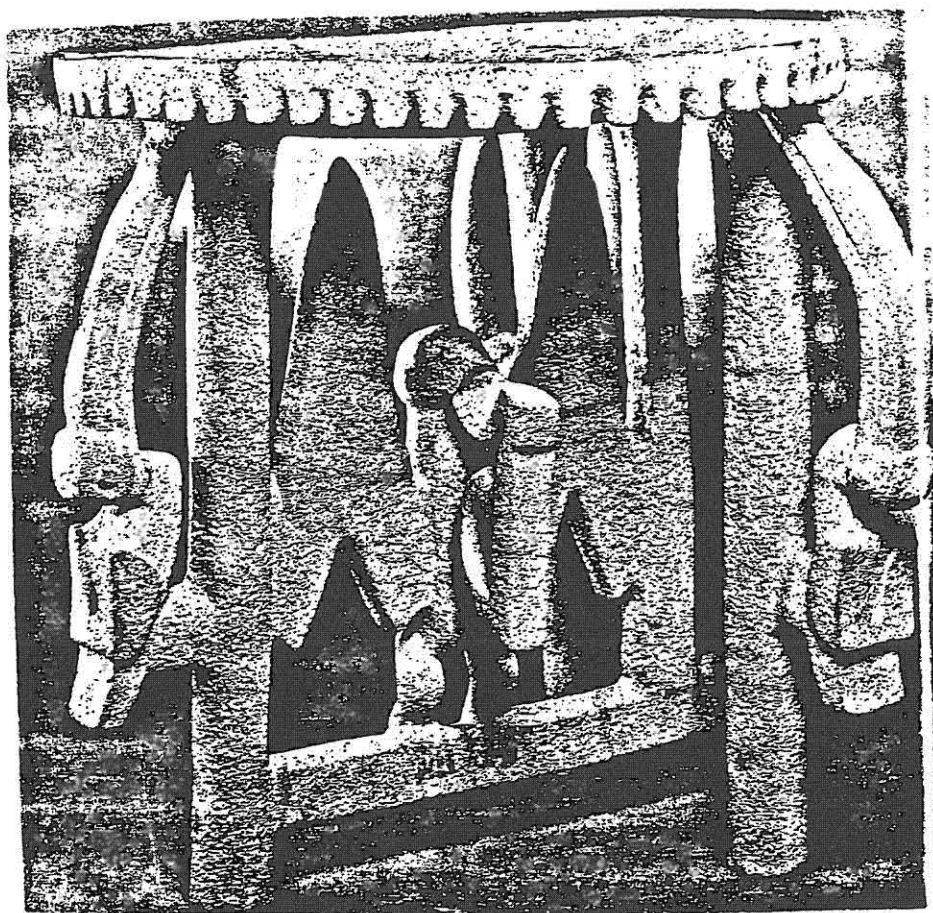


Figure 9

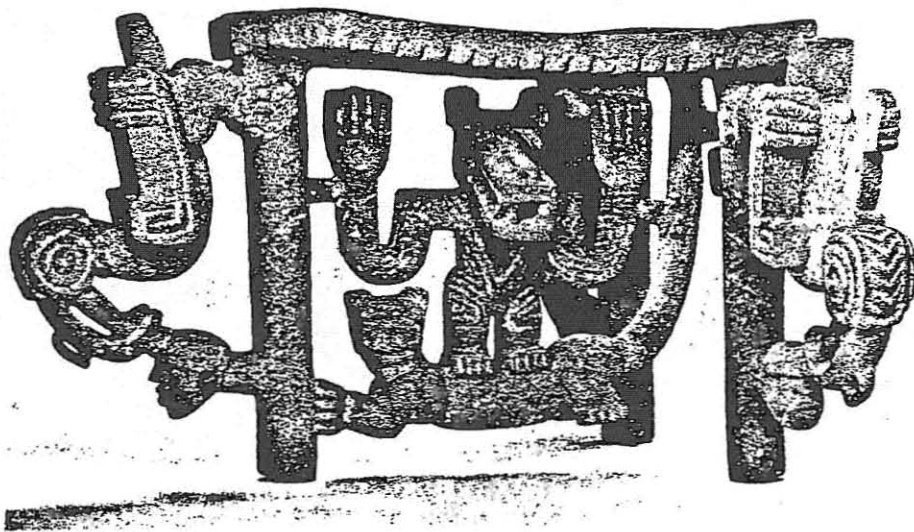


Figure 10

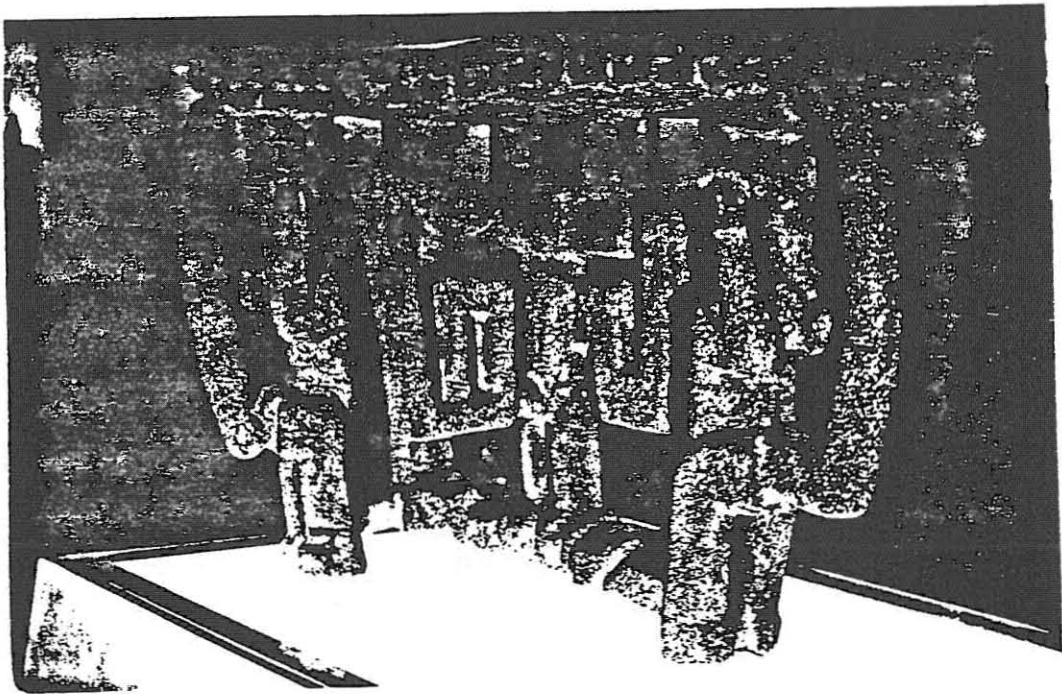


Figure 11

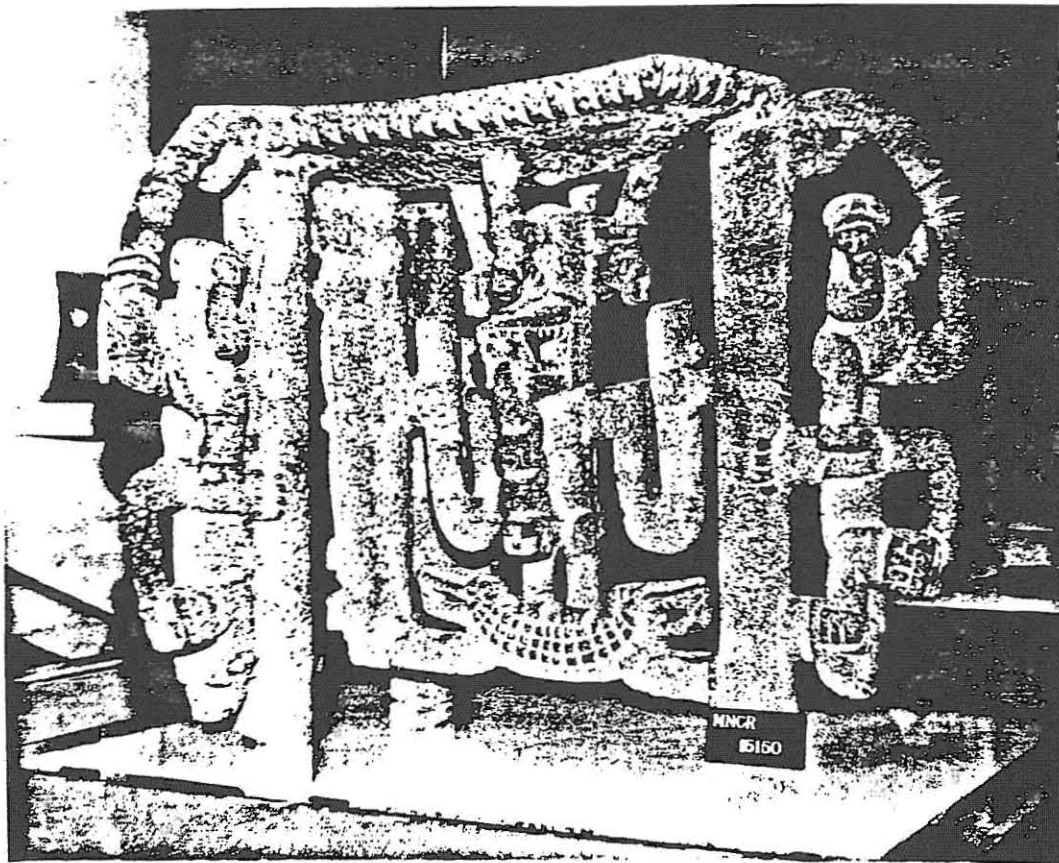
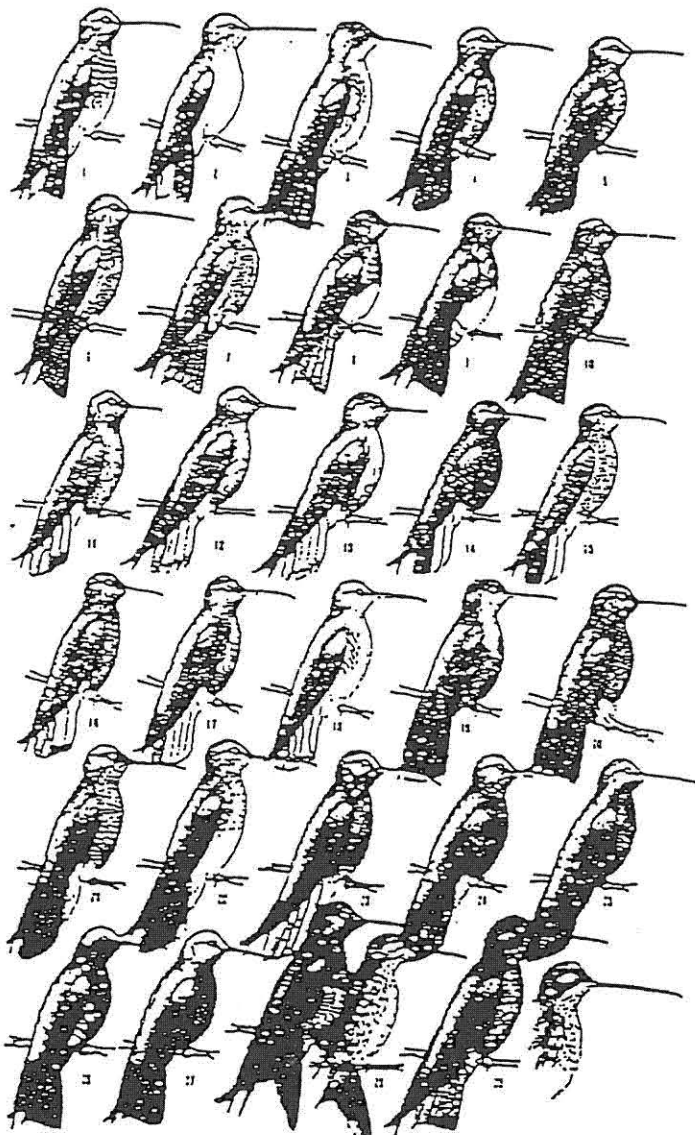


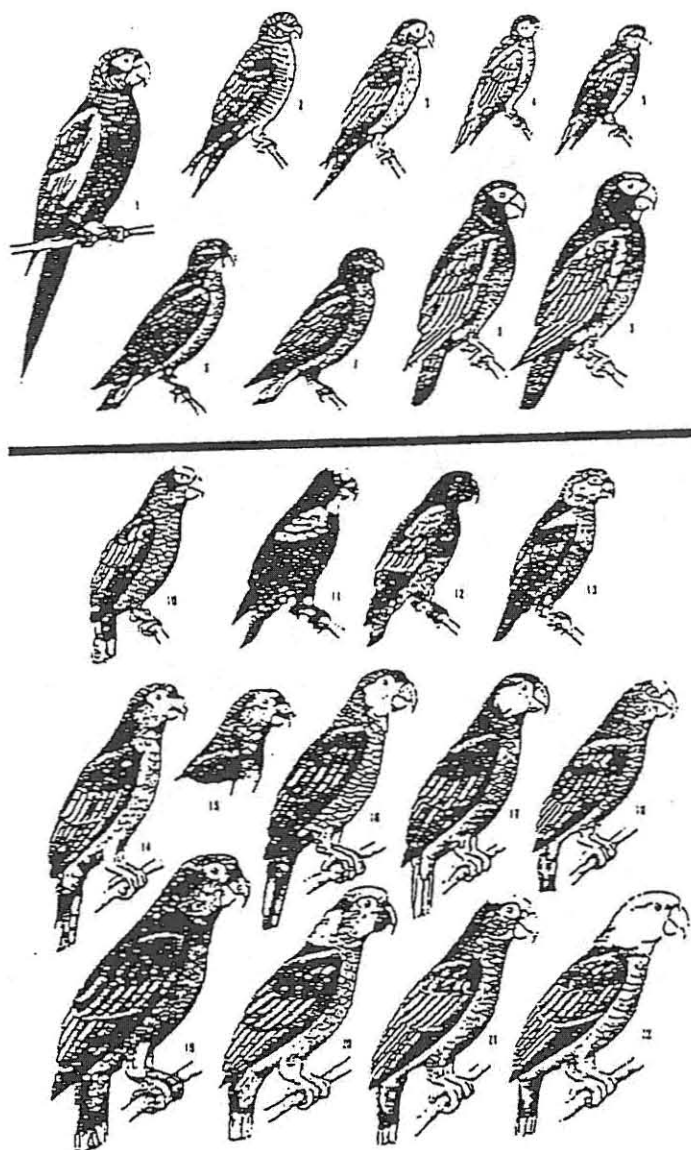
Figure 12



Hummingbirds currently found in Costa Rica:

- #5: Blue-tailed hummingbird
- #7: Cinnamon hummingbird
- #10: Sophia's hummingbird
- #14: Black-bellied hummingbird
- #19: Irazu hummingbird
- #29: Admirable hummingbird

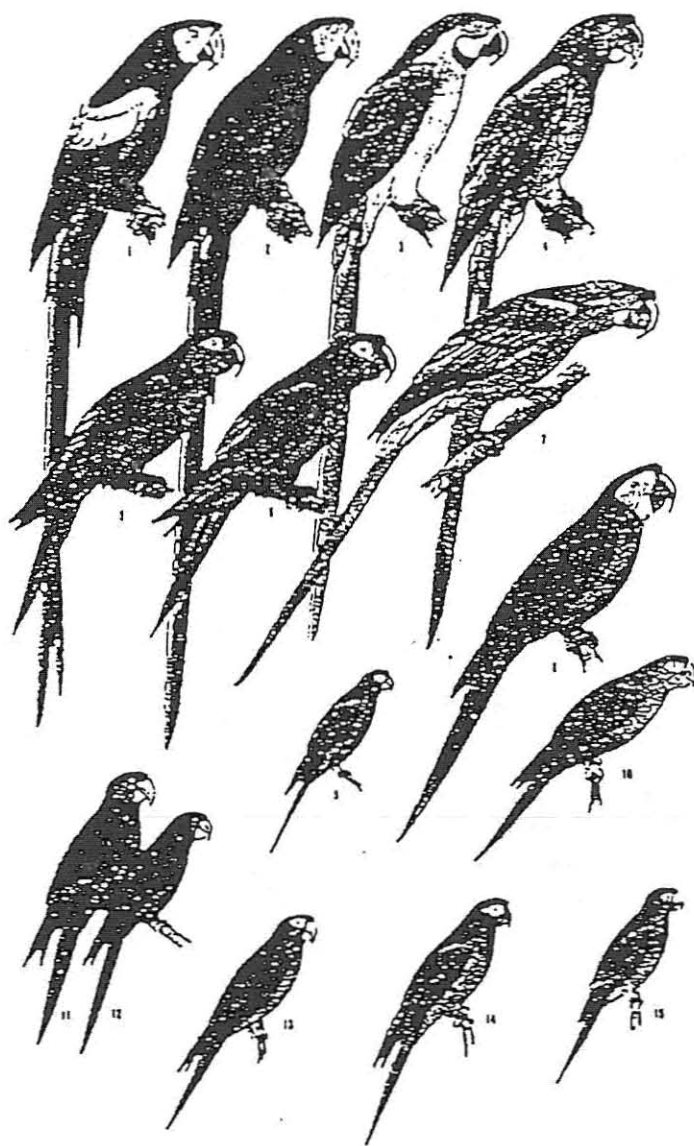
Figure 13



Parrots currently found in Costa Rica:

- #8: Red-eared parrot
- #12: Blue-headed parrot
- #19: Blue-crowned parrot

Figure 14



Macaws currently found in Costa Rica:

#4: Green macaw

Figure 15

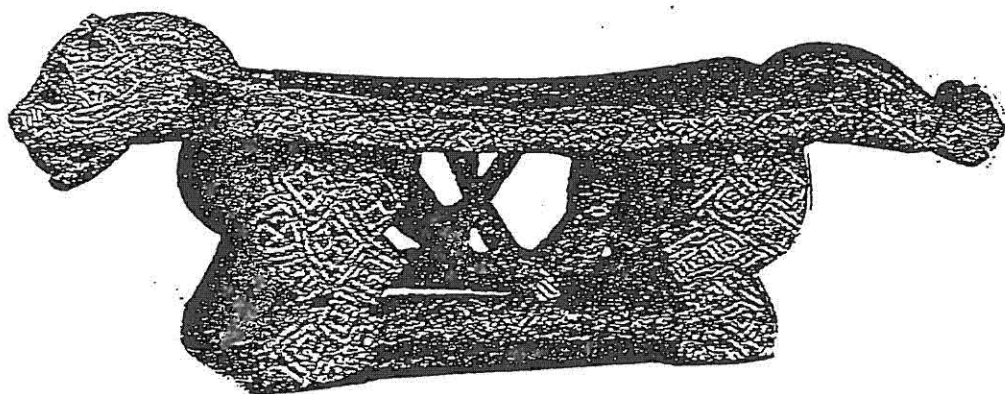
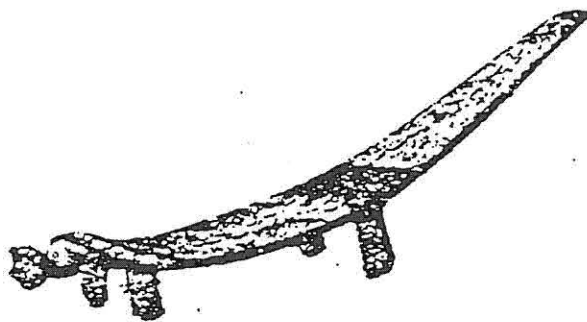


Figure 16

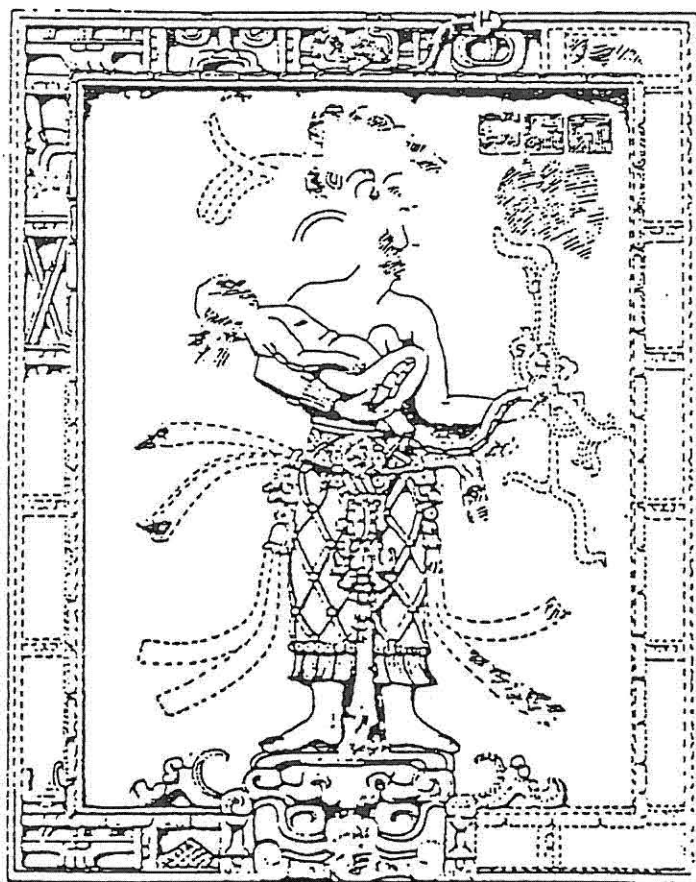


Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

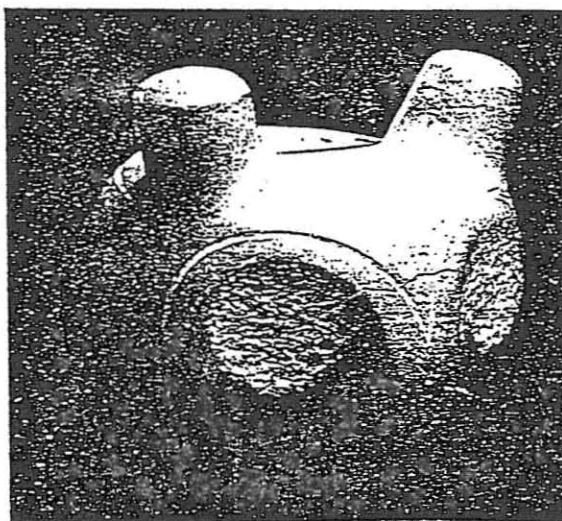


Figure 21



Figure 22

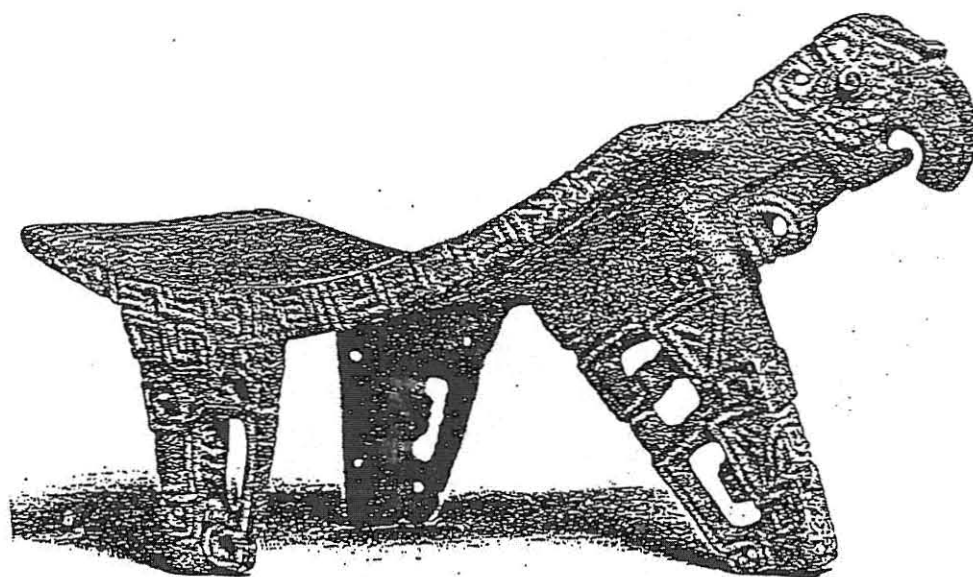


Figure 23

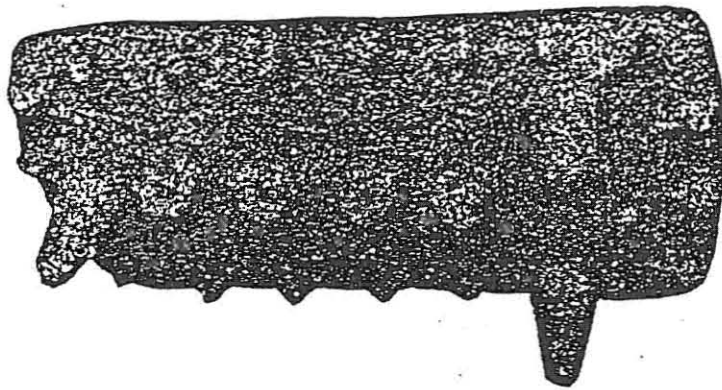
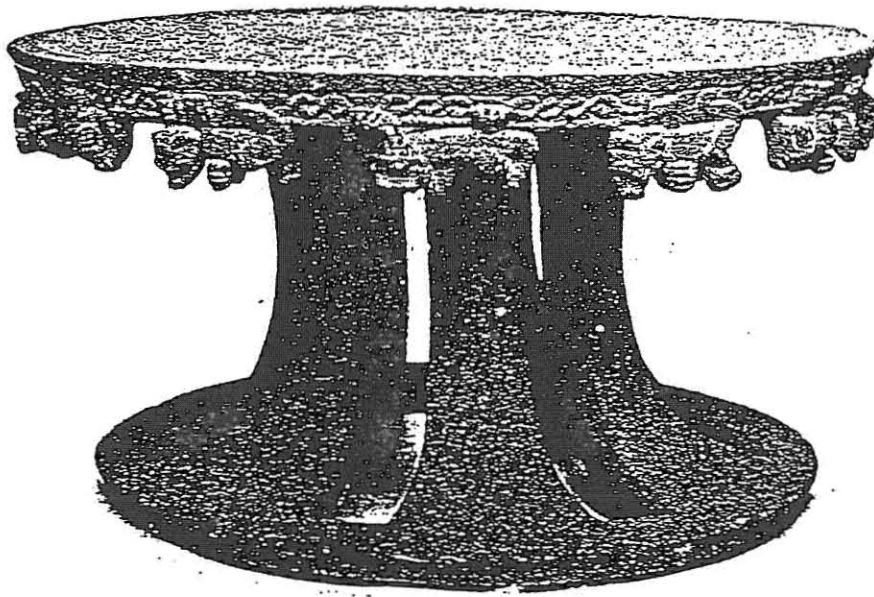


Figure 24



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