

The “Charlie Chaplin” Silhouette Figural Theme: A Pan-Middle American Ritual Performer Theme

David F. Mora-Marín

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, United States of America
davidmm@unc.edu

Abstract: The paper presents evidence for the definition and origin of a figural jade theme that is common in Costa Rica. It consists of a standing figure in a ritual pose, and it is argued that it originated in the context of the jade exchange network linking the ancient jade artisans of Pre-Columbian Costa Rica to their counterparts in the Maya region of Mesoamerica. In the Maya region, archaeologists have referred to this theme as “Charlie Chaplin” figurines because of the characteristic pose with knees bent and feet pointing to the sides. It is proposed that this theme was pan-Mesoamerican, that it may very well have originated in the Middle Preclassic Olmec tradition, and that it appears to be the template for the so-called Ruler-as-World Axis theme defined for the Olmec and Maya traditions by various scholars. The paper suggests that this theme was adopted by the jade artisans from Pre-Columbian Costa Rica, who then adapted to the local artistic canons through the addition of stylistic traits typical of their tradition, and who may have used it to derive a new theme, made up of a blend of the older avian celtiform (avian axe-god) pendant theme and the diffused “Charlie Chaplin” theme, resulting in the anthropomorphic celtiform (anthropomorphic axe-god) pendant theme. The exchange network that led to the spread of this theme strongly points to the need for a more inclusive framework, a Middle American framework (distinct from Central America and Mesoamerica), to the study of ancient Pre-Columbian societies of Mexico and Central America, and possibly beyond, given the possible presence of this theme in Colombia.

Keywords: Pre-Columbian jade; Costa Rica; Maya; exchange; iconography.

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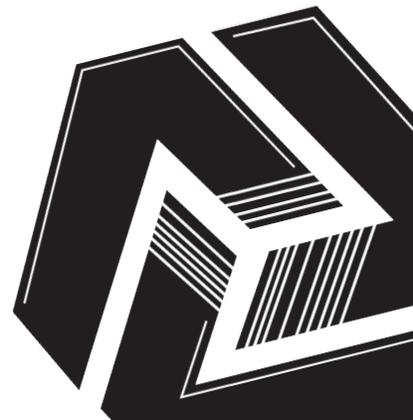
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El tema de figura en silueta “Charlie Chaplin”: Un tema de Ejecutante Ritual de la América Media

Resumen: Este artículo provee evidencia para la definición y origen de un tema de figuras de jade que es común en Costa Rica. Consiste de una figura de pie en pose ritual, y se argumenta que su origen se debe a la red de intercambio que conectó a los artesanos de jade de la Costa Rica precolombina y sus contemporáneos en la región maya de Mesoamérica. En la región maya, los arqueólogos les llaman figuras de “Charlie Chaplin” por su característica pose con las rodillas dobladas y los pies orientados hacia los lados. Se propone que este tema fue pan-mesoamericano, que pudo haber tenido origen en la tradición olmecas del preclásico medio y que pareciera ser el modelo para el tema del Gobernante como Eje del Mundo definido por varios escritores para las tradiciones olmecas y mayas. Se sugiere que este tema fue adoptado por los artesanos de jade de la Costa Rica precolombina, quienes lo adaptaron a los cánones artísticos locales a través de la adición de rasgos estilísticos típicos de su tradición, y quienes posiblemente derivaron un tema nuevo, compuesto de una mezcla del tema de pendiente de ave celtiforme (dios hacha aviforme) y el tema de “Charlie Chaplin” difundido, resultando en el tema de pendiente antropomórfico celtiforme (dios hacha antropomórfico). La red de intercambio que resultó en la difusión de este tema sirve para defender la necesidad de un marco teórico más inclusivo, un marco de la América Media (a diferencia de Centroamérica o Mesoamérica), para el estudio de las sociedades precolombinas de México y Centroamérica y posiblemente más allá, dada la posible presencia de este tema artístico en Colombia.

Palabras clave: Jade precolombino; Costa Rica; Maya; intercambio; iconografía.

Introduction

This paper defines a Ritual Performer Theme that was worked primarily on jade (jadeite or other greenstone) by the ancient lapidary traditions of Mesoamerica and Costa Rica. In the Maya region, it was worked primarily in the form of silhouette figures christened “Charlie Chaplins” by Eric Thompson (1931). Though seemingly modest and rare, upon reanalysis, this theme emerges as the basic template for the representation of the so-called *Axi Mundi* theme (Freidel, Schele, and Parker, 1993; Reilly, 1990) of Olmec and Maya art. Moreover, it is suggested, its presence in Mesoamerica, Costa Rica, and possibly Colombia, highlights the need to broaden the theoretical constructs of “Mesoamerica” (Kirchhoff, 1943) and “Isthmo-Colombia” (Hoopes and Fonseca, 2003) to “Nuclear America,” a suggestion by Hoopes (2001). This extension of the scope of analysis would not negate the validity of Mesoamerica and Isthmo-Colombia as useful theoretical constructs, but instead, it would allow for the study of the interconnections between these worlds.

First, I provide some background to the study of the Costa Rican jade lapidary tradition. Second, I describe the so-called Charlie Chaplin figural silhouette theme, as characterized for the Maya region, and show that it is actually a pan-Mesoamerican theme that can be more descriptively defined as a Ritual Performer Theme. Third, I proceed with the identification of Costa Rican-style versions of this theme. Fourth, I present a model for the adoption and adaptation of the theme by the Costa Rican artisans. Fifth, I argue that the Ritual Performer theme is in fact the basic template for the Mesoamerican *Axi Mundi* theme, while



Figure 1: Archaeological regions of Costa Rica. Map courtesy of John Hoopes.

leaving the problem of its meaning in ancient Costa Rica open. Finally, I present examples suggestive of the spread of this theme to Panama and Colombia, and then discuss the implications of the data for the archaeology and art history of the Americas.

Background to Costa Rican Jade

The Pre-Columbian jade lapidary tradition of Costa Rica (Figure 1) developed between ca. 500 B.C. to A.D. 900. Its peak of activity can be defined for the period of ca. A.D. 300-600 (Snarskis, 2003), or between A.D. 300-700 (Guerrero, 1998). A significant amount of evidence points to exchange of finished jades between the Maya lowlands and Costa Rica, as summarized in Mora-Marín (2002) and elsewhere (Easby, 1963; Fields and Reents-Budet, 1992; Hoopes, 1985; Lange, 1986; León, 1982; Mora-Marín, 2008; Sharer, 1984; Stone, 1964; Walters, 1982). Some of these authors have characterized the tradition as exhibiting an extremely high volume of production, perhaps the greatest for any lapidary tradition of Middle America (Fields and Reents-Budet, 1992). Interestingly, at most, only about 37% of all pieces may have been made of actual jadeite (Soto, 1993). In spite of this, this interaction was probably in the interest of the Costa Ricans, who had to procure raw jadeite from the Middle Motagua Valley, as suggested in Mora-Marín (2002), given the absence of findings of jadeite in Costa Rica (Bishop, Sayre and Mishara, 1985; Lange and Bishop, 1988; Lange, Bishop and van Zelst, 1981), and the likelihood that the compositional variability of the Middle Motagua Valley jadeites could account for the jadeite of the Costa Rican lapidary (Harlow, 1993). Although Bishop and Lange (1993) have offered a different view, arguing that multiple sources of jadeite may have existed, the single-source model (Harlow, 1993) has recently gained strong support by the findings of blue-green jadeite, the preferred form of jadeite used by the Costa Rican jade lapidary tradition, in the Middle Motagua Valley (Gendron, Smith and Gendron-Badou, 2002; Seitz et al., 2001; Taube et al., 2004). After A.D. 600-700 the tradition went into decline, and by A.D. 900 there were no jade-working centers left in Costa Rica (Guerrero, 1998).

There existed three major centers of jade-working in ancient Costa Rica: Pacific Northwest (southern half of Greater Nicoya), Central Highlands and Pacific, and Atlantic Watershed. The chronology for these regions is shown in Table 1.

The primary context for jade in Costa Rica consists of funerary offerings (Guerrero, 1986, 1993, 1998). As such, it was the most distinctive component of a mortuary complex that included goods such as elaborately carved metates and mace heads, fine pottery, and of course, jades; differentiation in this mortuary complex has been suggested to be indicative of ascribed status differences (Hardy, 1992). Variations of this complex, summarized in Table 2, are known for the Pacific Northwest, Central Highlands, Central Pacific, and Atlantic Watershed regions. The mace heads suggest that the individuals interred with such funerary offerings were perhaps distinguished in battle, while the other offerings are suggestive of ritual and “shamanic” abilities and practices (Day, 1993; Day and Tillet, 1996; Tillet, 1988). Guerrero, Solís and Vázquez (1994) suggest that the Pacific Northwest groups may have been organized into chiefdoms, given evidence from mortuary practices, such as the differential investment of labor in the construction of funerary mounds, and funerary offerings. Hoopes (1991), in contrast, suggests a concept of “complex tribes” based on analogies with ethnographically known groups that exhibited significant social differentiation of

Table 1. Chronology of Mesoamerica and Costa Rica

Time Periods	Mesoamerica (Maya)	Costa Rica			
		Pacific Northwest	Central Highlands and Pacific	Atlantic Watershed	Pacific Southwest
1500-1600					
1400-1500		Ometepe			
1300-1400					
1200-1300	Postclassic		Cartago	La Cabaña	
1100-1200					Chiriquí
1000-1100			Sapoá		
900-1000					
800-900					
700-800	Late Classic			La Selva	
600-700			Curridabat		
500-600		Bagaces			
400-500					
300-400	Early Classic				
200-300					Aguas Buenas
100-200					El Bosque
A.D. 1-100			Pavas		
100 B.C.-A.D. 1	Late Preclassic				
200-100			Tempisque		
300-200					
400-300					
500-400					
600-500					
700-600	Middle Preclassic		Barba	La Montaña	Sinacrá
800-700			Orosi		
900-800					
1000-900 B.C.					

wealth (e.g. Pacific Northwest Tlinglit) but were not organized into chiefdoms. Settlement data, at present extremely scarce, is necessary to distinguish between such models.

The tradition excelled in several techniques (Chenault, 1986, 1988), some of them held in common with the Olmec lapidary tradition or the Maya lapidary tradition, depending on the specific technique studied,

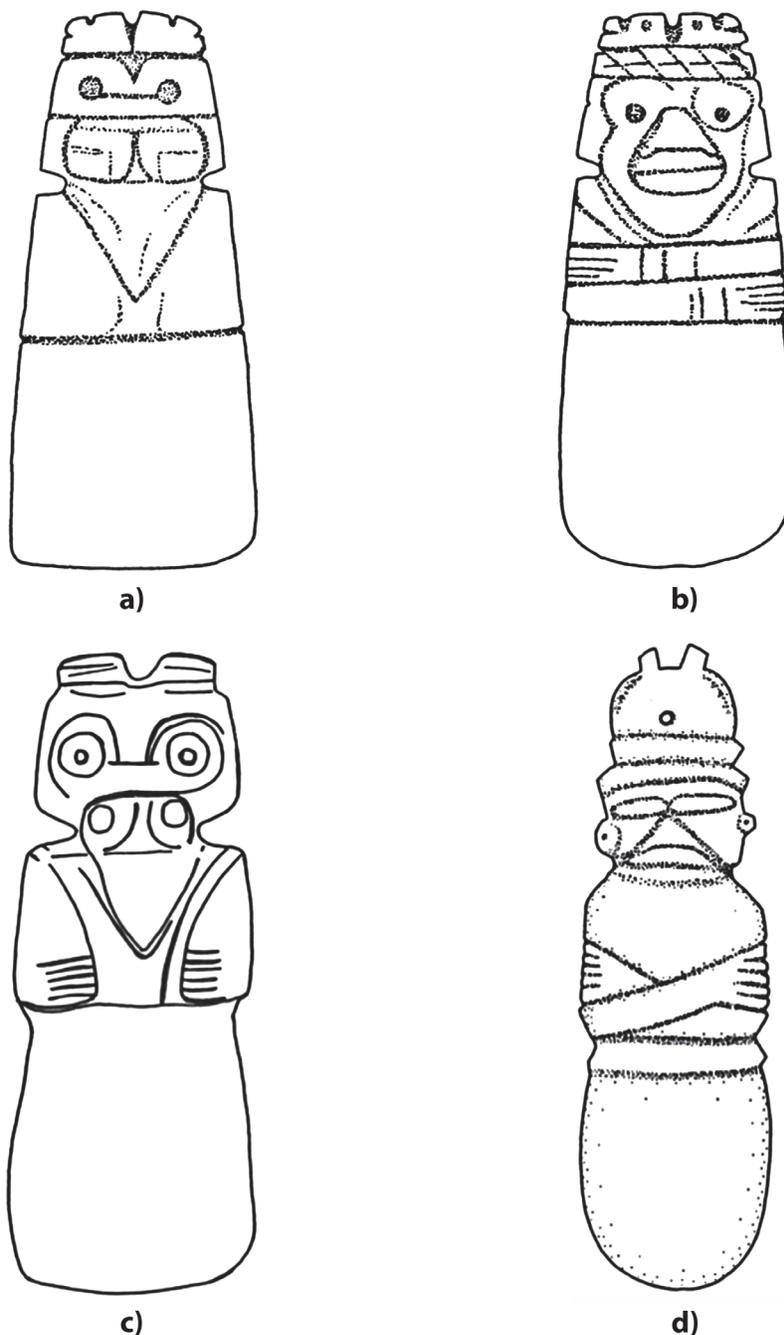


Figure 2. Avian and Anthropomorphic Axe-God themes with and without Double-Headed Zoomorphic motif. a) Avian Axe-God pendant. Drawing by the author based on drawing in Pfeiffer (1985, p. 309). b) Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant. Drawing by Frederick Lange (1993, p. 275, Fig. 21.6), used with his permission. c) Avian Axe-God pendant. Drawing by Frederick Lange (1993, p. 275, Fig. 21.6), used with his permission. d) Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant. Drawing by Frederick Lange (1993, p. 275, Fig. 21.6), used with his permission.

Table 2. Chronology of the Costa Rican jade lapidary tradition

Jade Period	Mortuary Complex
Initial: 500 B.C.-A.D. 300	Jades, elaborately carved metates and mace heads, bichrome ceramics; bundle burials (at La Regla), shaft and chamber tombs
Florescent: A.D. 300-700	Jades, local-style and imported from Mesoamerica, other prestige goods from Mesoamerica (slate mirror back disks, Ulúa marble vessels, obsidian from Honduras and El Salvador) and Isthmo-Colombian area (gold pendants), early local ceramics, including some polychromes, and local-style gold pendants; isolated tombs and circular stone mound burials
Terminal: A.D. 700-900	Jades, gold objects, polychrome ceramics; stone-cist tombs

and became characterized by a plethora of distinctive themes and motifs (Balser, 1953, 1961, 1974, 1980; Easby, 1968, 1981; Lange, 1993; Pfeiffer, 1985; Snarskis, 1998). Table 3 provides a summary of the major themes and motifs, along with their preferred form of drilling.

Foremost among the themes and motifs are the Avian Axe-God Theme (Fig. 2a) and the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme (Fig. 2b), each of which could exhibit the Double-Headed Zoomorphic Motif on the crest or head (Figs. 2c-d). Also worth noting at this point is the fact that most Costa Rican jades were drilled transversally for suspension, even figural forms such as Axe-Gods, a dramatic difference with respect to comparable figural jades from Mesoamerica, particularly Olmec and Maya ones, which were most of the time undrilled, and used as offerings in ritual caches, rather than as jewelry.

The scant archaeological evidence shows the first appearance of the Avian Axe-God Theme (Figure 3a) at the site of La Regla, in the Pacific Northwest of Costa Rica, dated by associated radiocarbon remains to ca. 500 B.C (Guerrero, Solís and Solano, 1992). Another stylistically similar pendant (Figure 3b) with the same theme was recovered from a jade cache near the site of Chaksinkin, Yucatan, Mexico; it has been interpreted as a Costa Rican import (Andrews 1986a, 1986b, 1987). The ceramic associations at this site place this find, in addition to the other Costa Rican-style jades reported from the same cache, around the late Middle Preclassic (ca. 400-300 B.C.) or early Late Preclassic (ca. 300-200 B.C.) periods, or roughly around 300 B.C.

Three Costa Rican sites are crucial to understanding the chronology of the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme. So far, the only published radiocarbon date associated with a pendant carved in this theme comes from the site of Severo Ledesma, Atlantic Watershed, Costa Rica (Figure 4a), dated also by associated radiocarbon remains to ca. A.D. 350 ± 60 (Guerrero, 1998). Consequently, there would seem to be a significant gap, of roughly eight-to-nine centuries, between the emergence of the Avian Axe-God Theme and the emergence of the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme.

Prior to this, at the site of Mercocha, Atlantic Watershed, Costa Rica, an Anthropomorphic Figural Pendant (Figure 4b) was recovered by Stirling (1969), together with a “mace head of blue thompsonite in the form of a human head” from the pit of a stone mound of circular shape; the associated charcoal yielded a

Table 3. Themes, motifs, drilling techniques

Themes	Motifs	Drilling
Axe-God	Avian figure Lightly drilled concavities for eyes Axe blade V-shaped outline of beak Folded wings (Feathers, nostrils, eyes) Feather horns atop head in some examples	Transversal across width of neck, done with two holes that meet in the middle
	Human figure Axe blade Most without legs; blade takes place of legs Most show human head with headgear, usually a double-headed bird or reptile head ornament	
Beak-bird	Long-beaked bird	Drill hole across thickness so beak projects outward from chest of pendant's wearer
Bar pendant	Bat-winged Double-headed reptile (rarely a shark, sometimes birds)	Two drill holes for suspension may meet along the length, or sometimes two holes may be drilled through the thickness, in parallel
	Open-winged bat (Interwoven bands) Bar with reptilian head on each end (Interwoven bands)	
	Combination Open-winged bat with reptilian heads on each end (Interwoven bands)	
	Plain No carved or incised details	

date of ca. A.D. 144, I-1436, 1820±140 B.P., 103-545 A.D. (Stirling, 1969). The form of this figural pendant is suggestive of the beginnings of the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme: the head, with all of its details, is rendered indistinguishably from the later Axe-God counterparts, while the legs reveal a shape that resembles the outline of the blade motif of the Axe-God representations, but no blade per se is shown. Also, the Mercocha and Severo Ledesma figures share a very similar stylistic realization of the facial details: the nose is triangular, the mouth is broad and oval, and the chin is triangular, as though meant to make allusion to the beak of the bird of the Avian Axe-God Theme. Several anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme pendants from the site of Las Huacas, Pacific Northwest, Costa Rica (Hartman, 1907), dated based on ceramic associations to ca. A.D. 300-500 (Hoopes, 2005), bear these same attributes; one of these (Figure 4c) bears the double-tufted head crest also seen with the Mercocha pendant. In fact, this double-tufted head crest is also seen in another pendant from Mercocha, only this time it is a representation of an Avian Axe-God Theme (Figure 4d). Because of these stylistic affinities between the Mercocha pendant and those from Severo

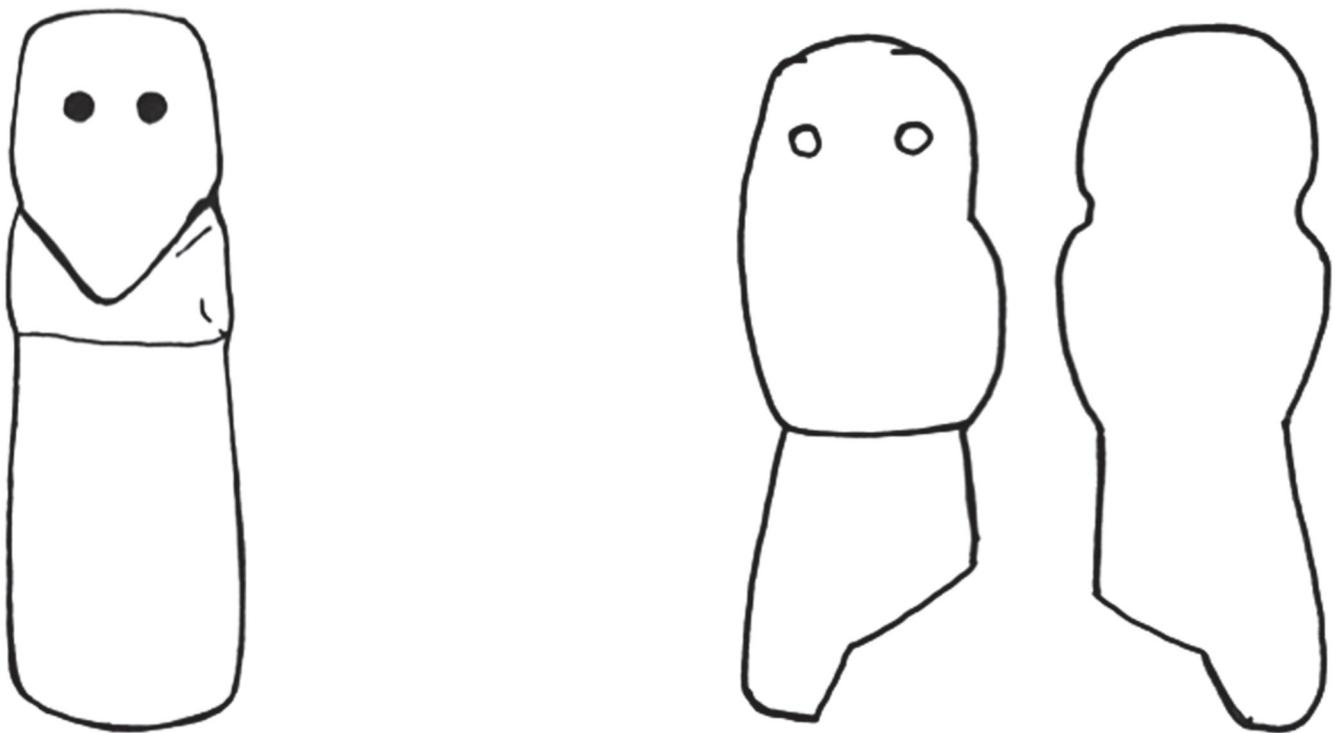


Figure 3: a) Avian Axe-God pendant from La Regla site, Pacific Northwest, Costa Rica, ca. 500 B.C. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Guerrero (1998, p. 27, Fig. 11). b) Avian Axe-God pendant from Chaksinkin, Yucatan, Mexico, ca. 300 B.C. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Andrews (1987, p. 83, Fig. 1b).

Ledesma and Las Huacas, and given the rather broad range implied by the radiocarbon date of 103-545 A.D, it is perhaps safer to suggest a dating closer to those of the latter two sites, perhaps ca. A.D. 300-500.

The third site, Loma Corral 3, attests to several Avian Axe-God pendants and Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant, which have yet to be described in detail. Several of the anthropomorphic pendants resemble those from Severo Ledesma and Las Huacas. Snarskis (2003) proposes a dating of the site based on ceramic associations consistent with “Izalco Usulután ceramics,” dated to ca. 200 B.C.-A.D. 100. However, Paul Amaroli (personal communication, 2014) suggests that the ceramics more closely resemble the Uapala Ceramic Sphere, which he notes is not yet well defined or solidly dated. Furthermore, Amaroli notes that the redating of the Ilopango eruption, now believed to have occurred around A.D. 534, could potentially call for the redefinition of ceramic dates, for it was based on the Ilopango’s ash deposits that several scholars had previously anchored a variety of ceramic types and modes in El Salvador to ca. A.D. 250 (i.e. end of Late Preclassic). This redating could imply later dates for said types and modes. Consequently, it cannot yet be established that the Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendants from Loma Corral date to before A.D. 100.

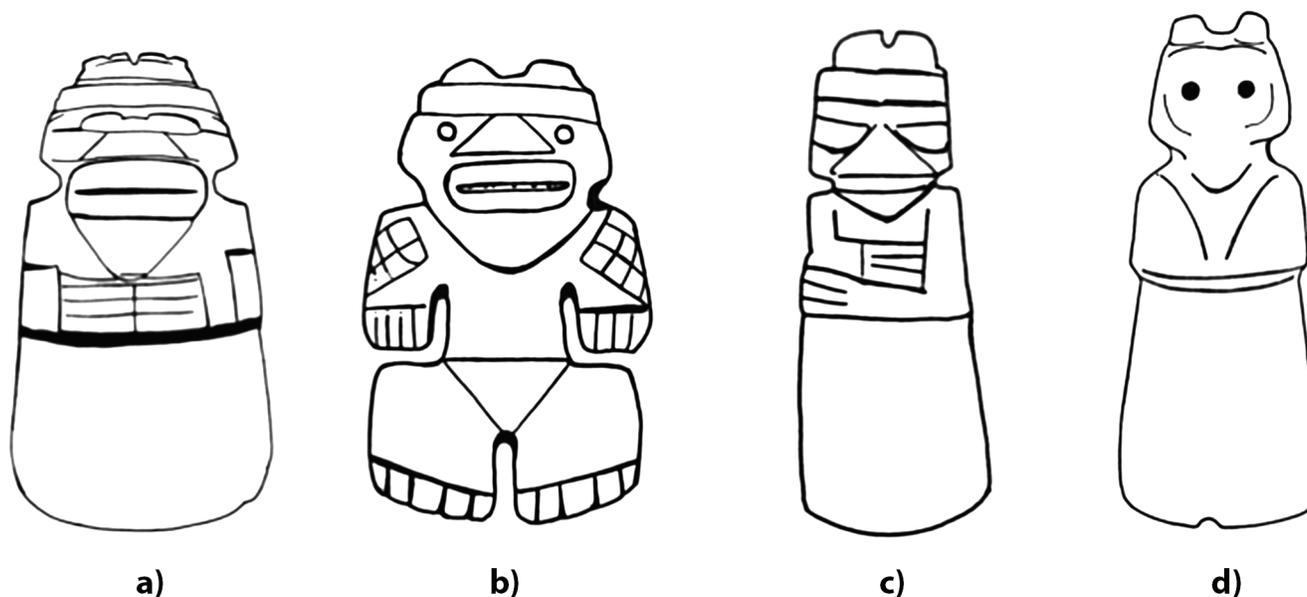


Figure 4: a) Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant from Severo Ledesma. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Guerrero (1993, p. 196, Fig. 14.6). b) Anthropomorphic Figural pendant from the site of Mercocha, Atlantic Watershed, excavated by Stirling (1969). Drawing by the author based on photograph in Jones (1998b, p. 16, Pl. 4). c) Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Jones (1998b, p. 16, Pl. 4). e) Avian Axe-God pendant. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Jones (1998b, p. 17, Pl. 7).

What is clear is that the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme is not as ancient as the Avian Axe-God Theme, and likely postdates it by a few centuries. As a tentative hypothesis, one could argue that the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme did not originate until around A.D. 100-300, and that the figural jade from Mercocha, dated to ca. A.D. 144, could predate the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme. Given this possibility, it is necessary to discuss the apparent stylistic and thematic relationships between the two themes. To this end, I propose a second hypothesis: the Avian Axe-God theme, and the Anthropomorphic Figural Theme attested at the site of Mercocha coalesced, giving rise to the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme. Furthermore, the Figural Theme in question can be shown to have foreign origins: it is the Costa Rican version of the so-called “Charlie Chaplin” Silhouette Figural Theme from the central and eastern Maya lowlands, first defined by Thompson (1931, 1939), which is itself simply the Maya version of an interregional theme attested in Central Mexico, Guerrero, Oaxaca, the Maya highlands, and as far south as El Salvador, and thus, a pan-Mesoamerican theme.

This conclusion, if correct, could have broad implications for the nature of archaeological research and theorizing in the region: it recognizes the need for returning to the Middle American framework utilized by archaeologists prior to Kirchhoff’s (1943) definition of “Mesoamerica” and Lange and Stone’s (1984) definition of “Lower Central America,” for the Costa Rican counterpart would imply a pan-Middle American distribution for the theme in question.

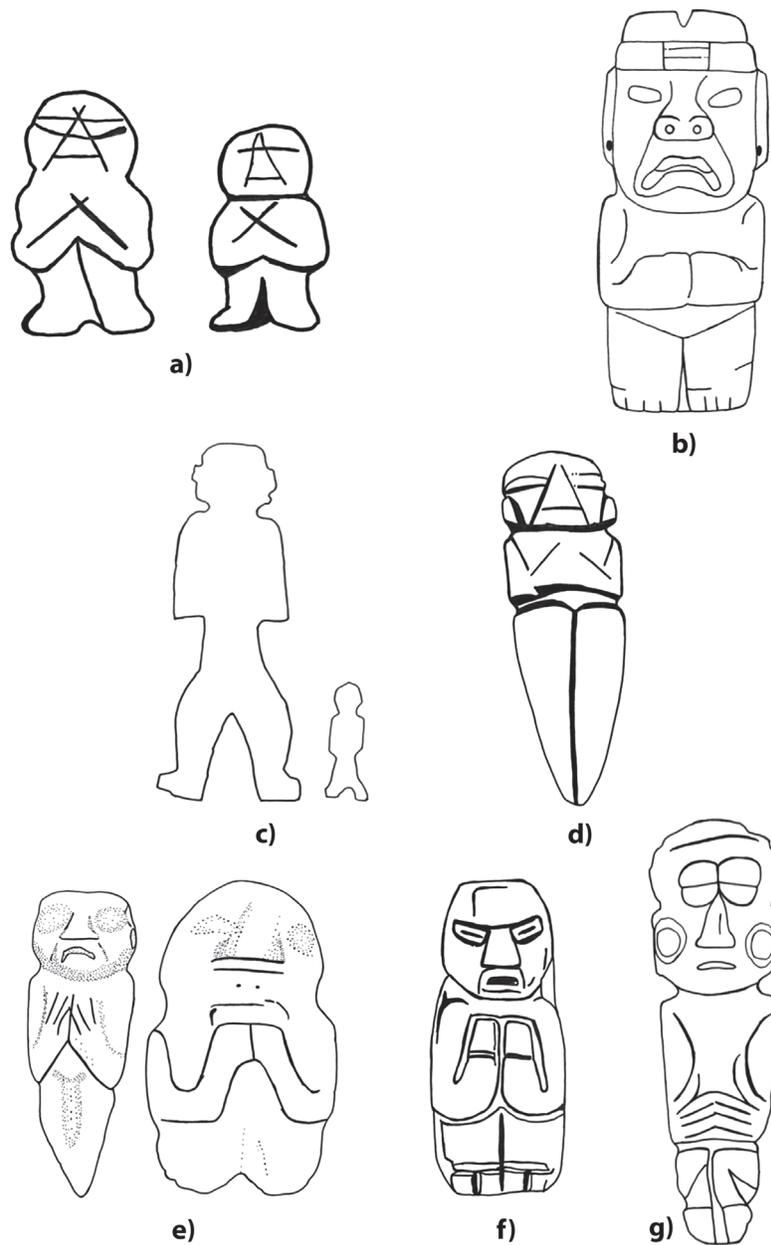


Figure 5: a) Jade silhouette figure from Cache D1 in Mound D1 at San Jose, Belize. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Thompson (1939, Plate 29b). b) Jadeite Olmec-style figurine. H. 3 3/8" (8.6 cm); W. 1 3/8" (3.5 cm). Drawing by the author based on Snarskis (2003, p. 166, Fig. 3a). c) Teotihuacan-style obsidian figurines. Dimensions: 12.8 x 4.6 cm and 4.4 x 1.3 cm, respectively. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Berrin and Pasztory (1994, p. 268). d) Figure in highland Guatemala style. Drawing by the author after available photograph. e) Mezcala-style figures from Xcambo, Yucatan, Mexico. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Sierra Sosa (1999, p. 47). f) Silhouette figure from Nebaj. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Smith and Kidder (1951, Figs. 57, 62e). g) Oaxaca jade figure. Drawing by the author based on photograph in Marcus and Flannery (2000, p. 399, Fig. 8.24).

Middle American Jade Traditions

Several jade and greenstone lapidary traditions developed in Middle America, including the following: the Olmec (1150-400 B.C.) (Coe, 1965; Covarrubias, 1942, 1946, 1957; Garber et al., 1993), Zapotec (1150 B.C.-A.D. 900) (Caso, 1965), Mayan (900 B.C.-A.D. 1521) (Digby, 1964; Garber et al., 1993; Kidder, 1949; Proskouriakoff, 1974; Rands, 1965), Teotihuacan (A.D. 100-700) (Turner, 1988a, 1988b), Mezcalan (Preclassic-Early Classic) (Gay, 1967, 1987; Griffin, 1993), Aztec (A.D. 1350-1521), Ulúan (A.D. 400-600) (Garber et al., 1993; Hirth and Grant, 1993), and Costa Rican (500 B.C.-A.D. 900) (Balser, 1958, 1974, 1980; Easby, 1968, 1981; Graham, 1998; Guerrero, 1998; Garber et al., 1993; Jones, 1998a; Snarskis, 1998). Naturally, the question of the possible relationships between these various traditions and the Costa Rican tradition has been one addressed by various authors (Balser, 1953, 1974, 1980; Easby, 1968, 1993; Mora-Marín, 2002, 2005, 2008; Snarskis, 1998, 2003).

This paper focuses on a specific theme exhibited by several of the above traditions: the so-called “Charlie Chaplin” Figural Theme. This theme was defined for the Maya lowlands by Thompson (1931, 1939), based on examples such as those in Figure 5a. However, the theme may have Olmec precursors (Figure 5b), as well as counterparts in the Teotihuacan (Figure 5c), Mezcala (Figure 5d-e), Highland Maya (Figure 5f), and Oaxaca (Figure 5g) traditions. There is evidence for its attestation in El Salvador and Costa Rica, as discussed below. In general, the theme was prevalent during the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods; later specimens are likely to have been heirlooms that were deposited centuries after their original manufacture.

The theme consists of a human figure standing or seated, with hands typically meeting along the waist or chest, and with feet together facing forward or sideways. When standing, the figure’s legs are sometimes bent, as though engaged in a dancing movement. These parameters define the typical variation present. It was realized in jadeite and other greenstones, as well as in other media, such as shell. Wherever contextual information exists, it appears that its preferred use was as a ritual item in dedicatory caches. Lastly, its origin may lie in Olmec ritual art. In fact, the Olmec representations are suggestive of a “shamanic” character of the personage represented in this theme, or more neutrally, a “ritual specialist” character. This and other problems are discussed below.

The Lowland Maya Versions

In the Maya area the theme is characterized by two variants: (1) a silhouette figure in a standing pose with legs bent to the sides, and arms bent upward toward the chest; (2) a silhouette figure in a sitting pose with crossed legs, arms bent upward toward the chest; and (3) on some occasions, closed eyes. Different poses of the arms are also known, such as the two arms bent sideways toward the waist with the fingers of both hands touching. Thompson (1931, 1939) discussed a variety of examples from the Maya lowlands.

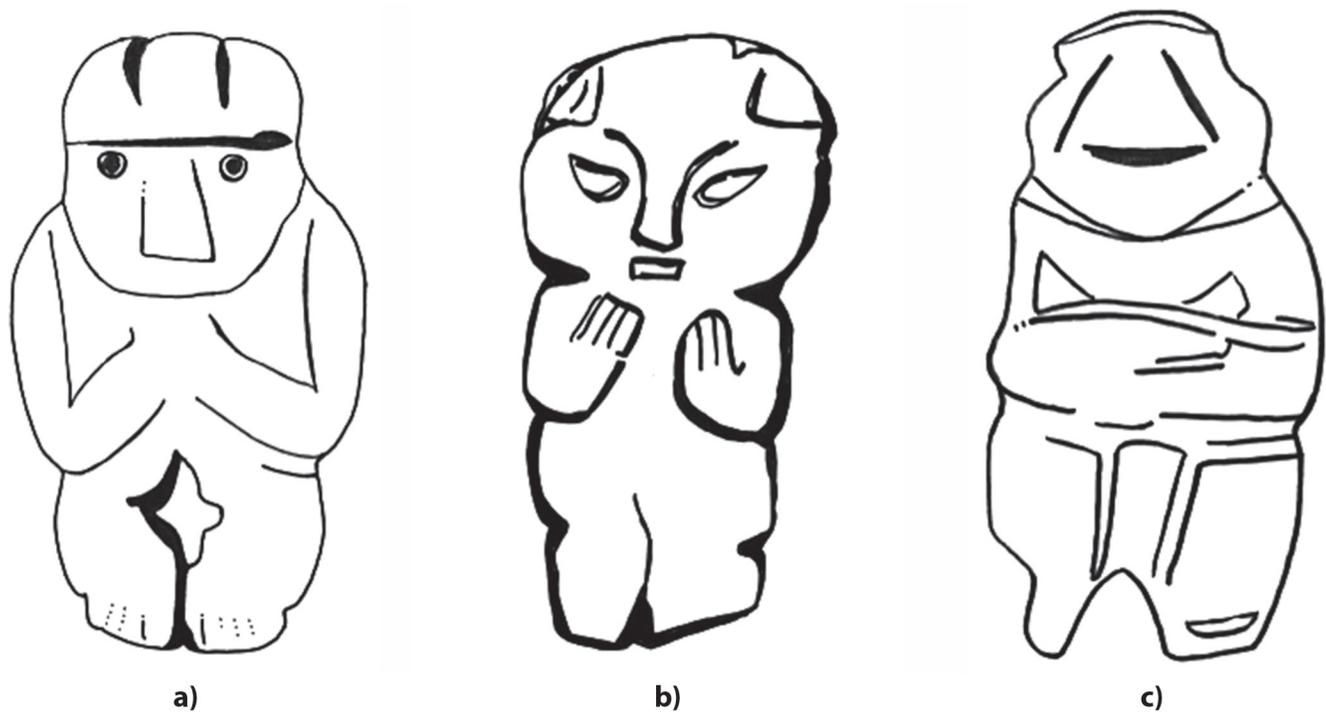


Figure 6: a) Charlie Chaplin figure from Piedras Negras. Drawing by the author based on photograph in [Coe \(1959\)](#). c) Charlie Chaplin figure from the Cenote of Chichen Itza. Dimensions: 3.9 x 2.3 x 1.0 cm. Drawing by the author based on photograph in [Coggins \(1984, p. 134\)](#). d) Charlie Chaplin figure from Santa Leticia. Drawing by the author based on photograph in [Demarest \(1986, p. 208, Fig. 118\)](#).

Additional examples are seen in [Figure 6a-c](#); the example in [Figure 6b](#), recovered from the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza, and argued by [Coggins \(1984\)](#) to be a Late Preclassic version of a Mayan Charlie Chaplin, could instead be an actual Costa Rican example, given the drilling of the eyes and incising of the nose, consistent with the Costa Rican versions, a suggestion first made to me by John Hoopes (personal communication, 2014) that I support and elaborate upon below. [Taschek and Ball \(1999\)](#) have discussed their presence at the site of Arenal in Belize. Whenever they are found in Late Classic contexts they are considered to be examples of heirlooms, as with several Copan-style jades described by [Easby \(1993\)](#).

Copan developed its own style of Charlie Chaplin figures, as seen in [Figure 7](#), which shows both standing ([Figure 7a-7b](#)) and seated versions ([Figure 7c-7d](#)). The seated versions, such as a famous example from Uaxactun, sometimes exhibit closed eyes ([Figure 7d](#)).

To my knowledge no previous author has adopted a pan-Mesoamerican perspective for the study of this theme of figure-pendants; nevertheless, it is clear that a thematic and stylistic connection existed. Furthermore, these silhouettes may be related to figures such as the Cache 1 (Structure 6B) head pendants

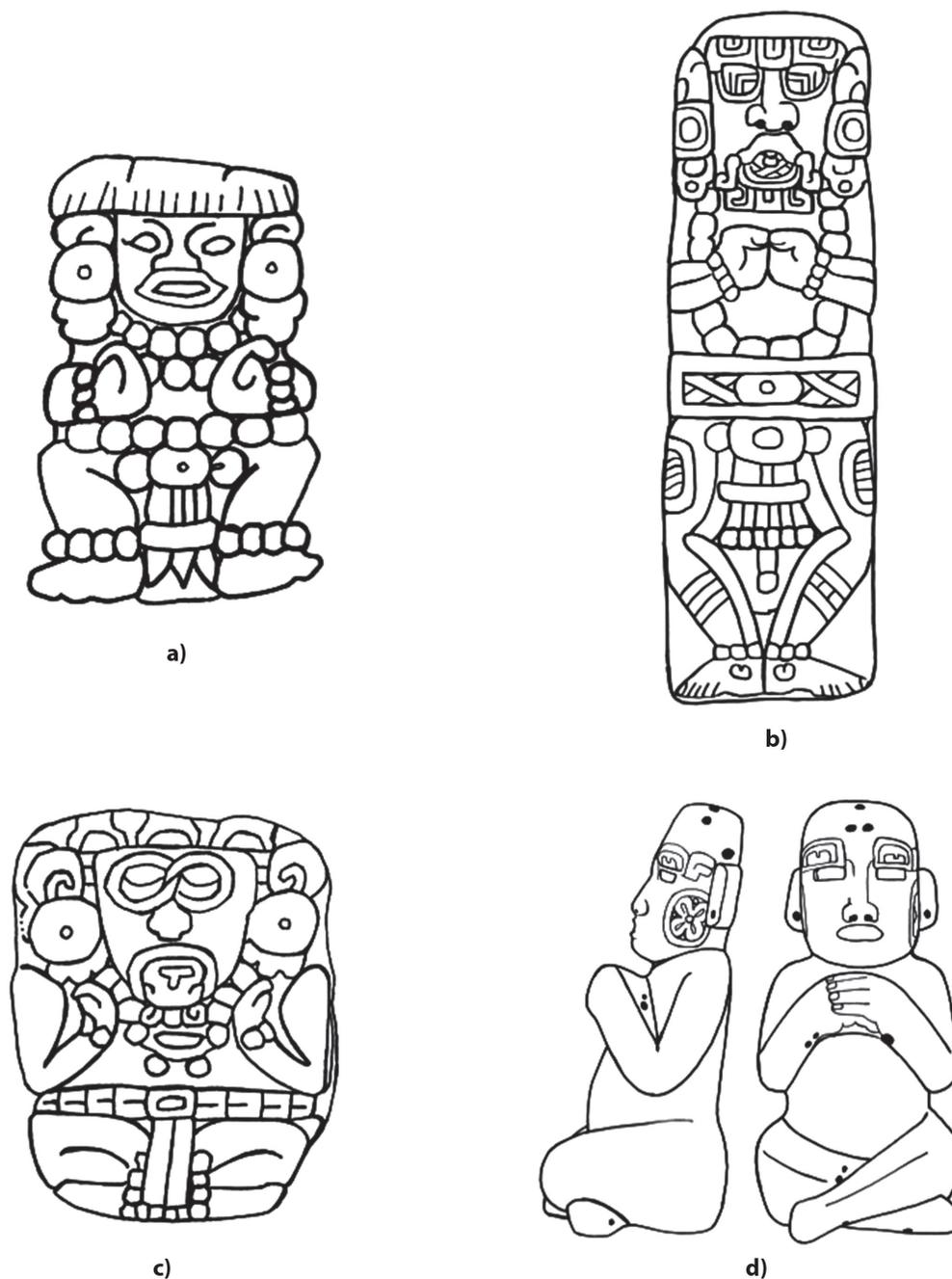


Figure 7: a) Jade figurine from cache under Hieroglyphic Stairway at Copan. Drawing by the author after drawing by Linda Schele (#7124) in Schele (2000). b) Jade figurine from Copan. Drawing by the author after photograph in Fash (1991, p. 127, Pl. IX). c) Jade pendant from Copan. Height: 23 cm. Drawing by the author after photograph by Justin Kerr (#3705) in Kerr (2003). d) Jade statuette from Uaxactun Structure A-XVIII. Height: 26 cm. Drawing by the author after drawing in Kidder (1947, p. 48 Fig. 37, Fig. 74).

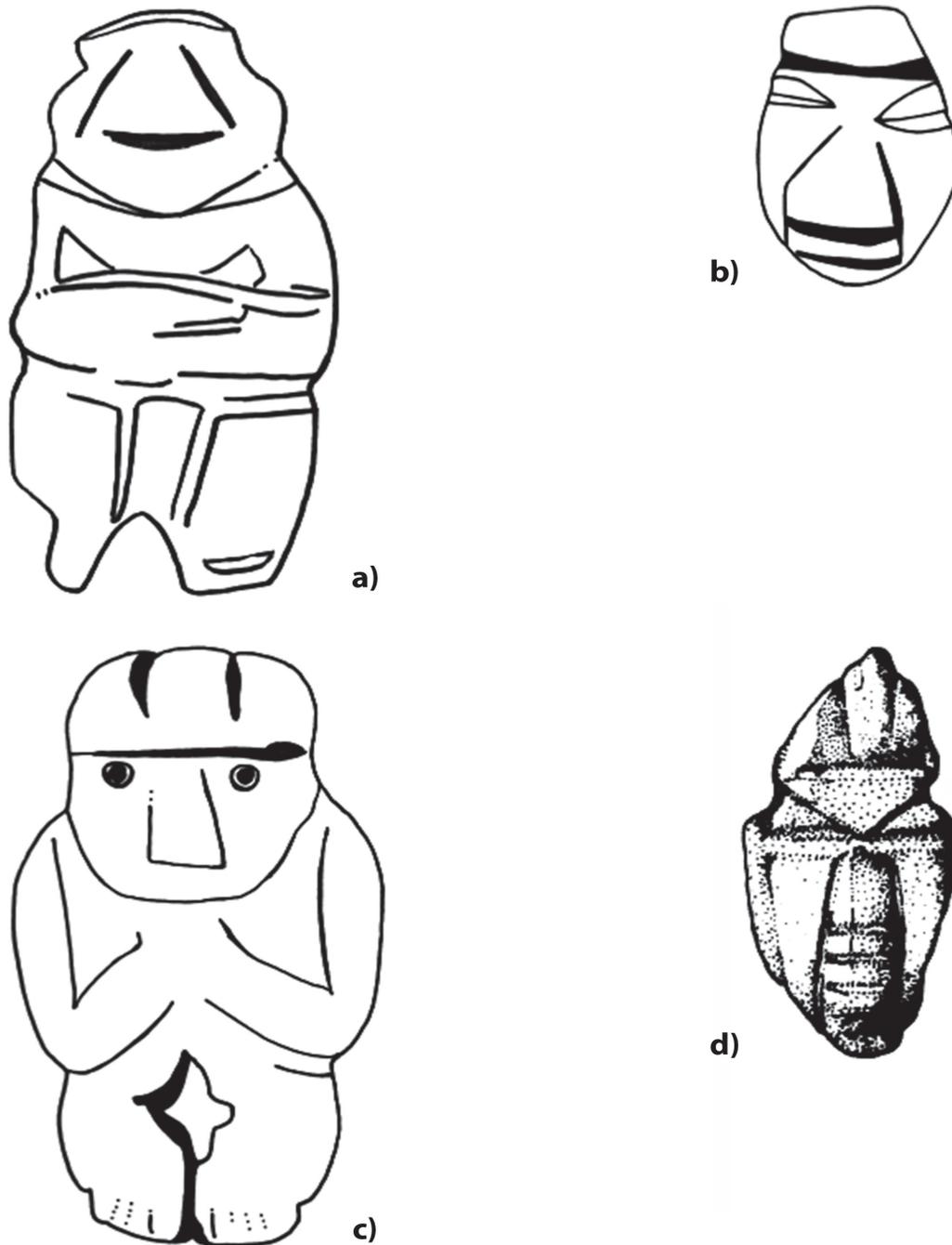


Figure 8: a) Charlie Chaplin figure from Santa Leticia. Drawing by the author after drawing in Demarest (1986, p. 208, Fig. 118). b) Jadeite head-shaped bead from Quelepa, El Salvador. Drawing by the author after photograph in Andrews (1976, pp. 167-168, Fig. 173). c) Charlie Chaplin figure from the Cenote of Chichen Itza. Dimensions: 3.9 x 2.3 x 1.0 cm. Drawing by the author after photograph in Coggins and Shane III (1984, p. 134). d) Jade jewel from Cache 1 at Cerros. Drawing from Freidel and Schele (1988) used with permission of David Freidel.

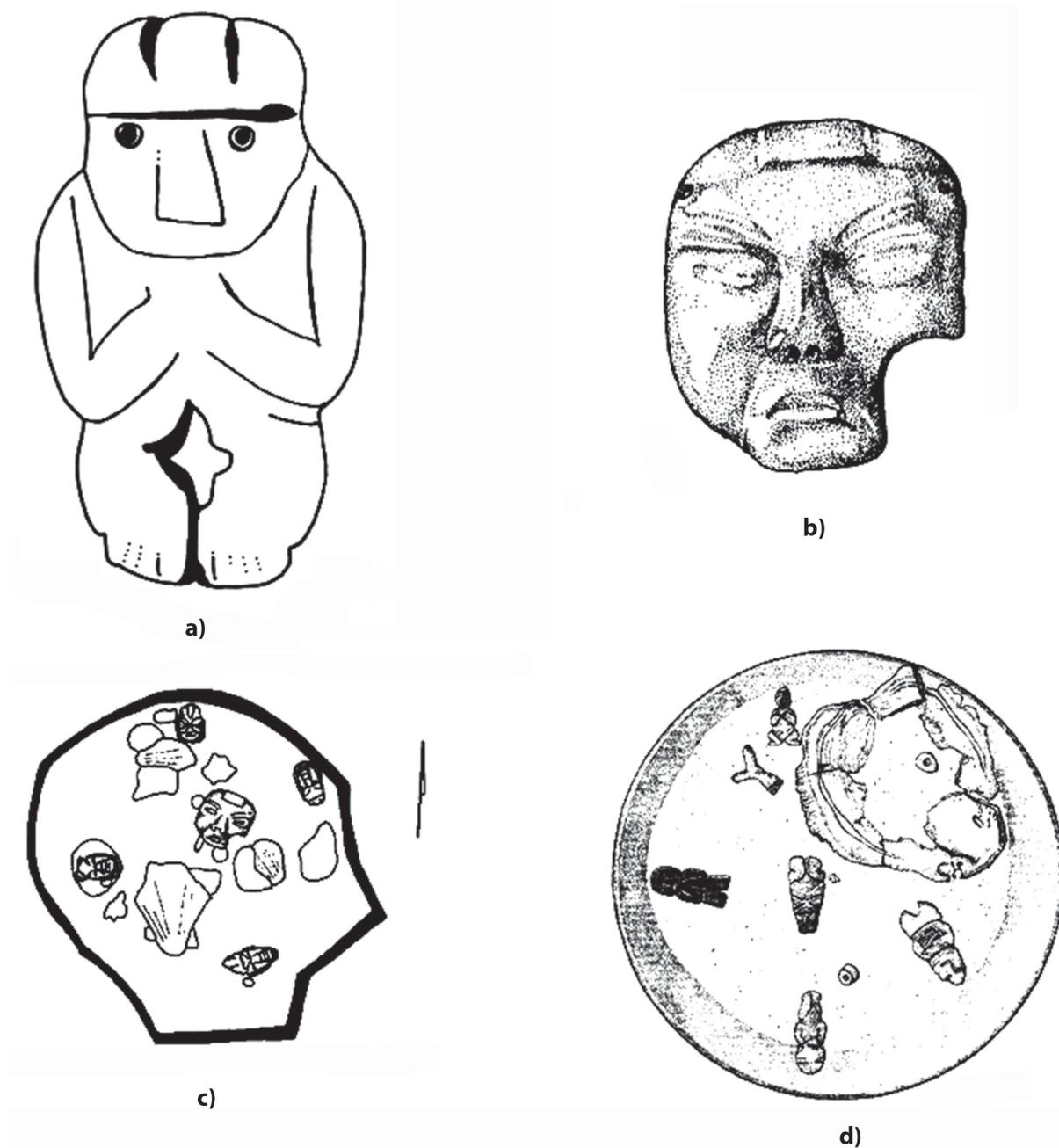


Figure 9: a) Jadeite figure pendant from the Cenote of Chichen Itza. Dimensions: 3.9 x 2.3 x 1.0 cm. Photograph from Coggins (1984, p. 134). b) Pectoral jade head from Cache 1 at Cerros. Drawing from Freidel and Schele (1988) used with permission of David Freidel. c) Cache 1 at Cerros showing placement of jade head pendants. Drawing from Freidel and Schele (1988) used with permission of David Freidel. d) Ritual deposit with “Charlie Chaplin” figures from Arenal. Drawing by Jennifer Taschek in Taschek and Ball (1999, p. 225, Fig. 11).

from Cerros, Belize (Freidel and Schele, 1988; Garber, 1981), and others elsewhere. For example, referring to a figurine from Santa Leticia, seen in Figure 8a, Demarest (1986, p. 208-209, Fig. 118) remarked that similar examples “with the same facial features and style” were recovered at Chalchuapa and Quelepa. The Quelepa examples by Andrews (1976, p. 167-168, Fig. 172), however, are not full-figure forms, but simply the heads, as seen in Figure 8b, indicating the practice of part-for-the-whole substitution. In fact, referring to a Late Preclassic-style figure pendant with a biconical horizontal suspension hole from the Cenote of Chichen Itza, seen in Figure 8c, Coggins (1984) not only notes a similarity with the “Charlie Chaplin” jade and shell figures from southern lowlands identified by Thompson (1939), but also adds that like the bib-helmet head pendant also found at the Cenote (Coggins, 1984, p. 135), this figure’s nose is “a triangle with the mouth serving as its base, and the pupils of the eyes are drilled,” common Late Preclassic traits, such as the ones from Cerros, as seen in Figure 8d.

Nevertheless, the Cenote “Charlie Chaplin” figure most closely resembles the Costa Rican counterparts in the way the eyes are drilled, as well as the rhomboidal drilling used to separate the legs, as observed by Hoopes (personal communication, 2014). The transverse biconical drilling on the piece, as a means for suspension of the pendant, is also more characteristic of the Costa Rican lapidary’s version of this theme. Interestingly, the form and style of the head of this figure is not only similar to the bib-helmet Late Preclassic head pendants, but also to the head pendant that served as the central axis of Cache 1 at Cerros, as compared in Figure 9a and 9b; both show a tripartite crown, although stylistically they differ in the eyes and mouth. For the Mayans, a Costa Rican-style “Chaplin,” which this Cenote example could constitute, would have fit quite nicely as a ready-made offering. Returning to the part-for-the-whole relationship, evidence of this principle is available elsewhere: just like the Cerros Cache 1 bib-helmet and central head pendants are arranged in a quincunx pattern, as in Figure 9c, two caches at the site of Arenal in Belize (Taschek and Ball, 1999) contain full-figure Charlie Chaplin silhouettes also arranged in quincunx patterns, as in Figure 9d. In other words, the head and full-figure pendants are equivalent. In fact, this was a very common process for the derivation of new signs forms in Mayan hieroglyphic writing, where a part (e.g. the head of the ruler) was used to stand for the whole (i.e. ruler).

The Costa Rican Version

Unfortunately, only one specimen of this type of jade pendant is known from archaeological contexts in Costa Rica: it is the example from the site of Mercocha, in the Atlantic Watershed, excavated by Stirling (1969), and it was radiocarbon dated to ca. A.D. 144 (A.D. 103-545). All other known examples lack contextual data, and thus, it is not possible at present to describe their chronological distribution within Costa Rica. However, they are clearly carved following the norms of the Costa Rican lapidary, including the transverse perforation for suspension at the base of the neck, and in some cases the addition of Costa Rican motifs, such as double-headed zoomorphs on top of the figure’s head, and female features. Balsler (1961, p. 213, Figs. 1b-c) first defined this theme as the Atlantic Watershed version of the Nicoya-style anthropomorphic

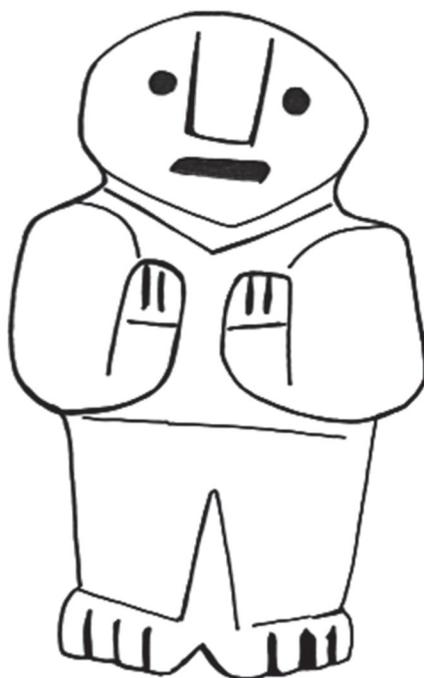


Figure 10: Jade figural pendant from Costa Rica. Drawing by author after photograph in Easby (1968, p. 40, Fig. 22).

Axe-God, adding that, as one of its diagnostic traits, the “Arms with well-marked fingers always point upward.” One example is seen in [Figure 10](#).

Like the Maya version, the Costa Rican version comes in two general varieties: (1) a standing form, and (2) a seated form. And like the Mayan versions, the nose is either triangular or rectangular, but it is quite prominent. The standing form is the more common of the two. Unlike the Mesoamerican versions, the Costa Rican version consistently shows gender variation: the figures may be male ([Figure 11a-b](#) and [11d, f](#)) or female ([Figure 11c, e](#)). It is possible that the Mezcala-style versions may occasionally show female forms as well, but this possibility is not explored in the present paper. If this assumption—that the dancing ritual represented by these figures was a ritual performed for healing by means of contact with and control of the supernatural—is correct, then the presence of female figures would be consistent with the fact that among indigenous Costa Ricans both women and men could be healers; in the Mayan case, though, healers were predominantly men, although midwives, by definition a type of healer, were women. Also, the figures may be plain, or elaborated with Costa Rican motifs, such as the Double-Tuft Motif, the Double-Headed Crest Motif, and Trophy-Head Hands Motif, and the Sideways-Pointing Zoomorphic Feet Motif. More commonly, as with their Mesoamerican counterparts, the hands are raised or level, and they may meet or remain separated. Like some of the Mayan examples, a few Costa Rican specimens show bent legs ([Figure 11c-d](#)); in such instances, a rhomboidal opening separates the legs, as with the Cenote example discussed above ([Figures 6b, 8c, 9a](#)).

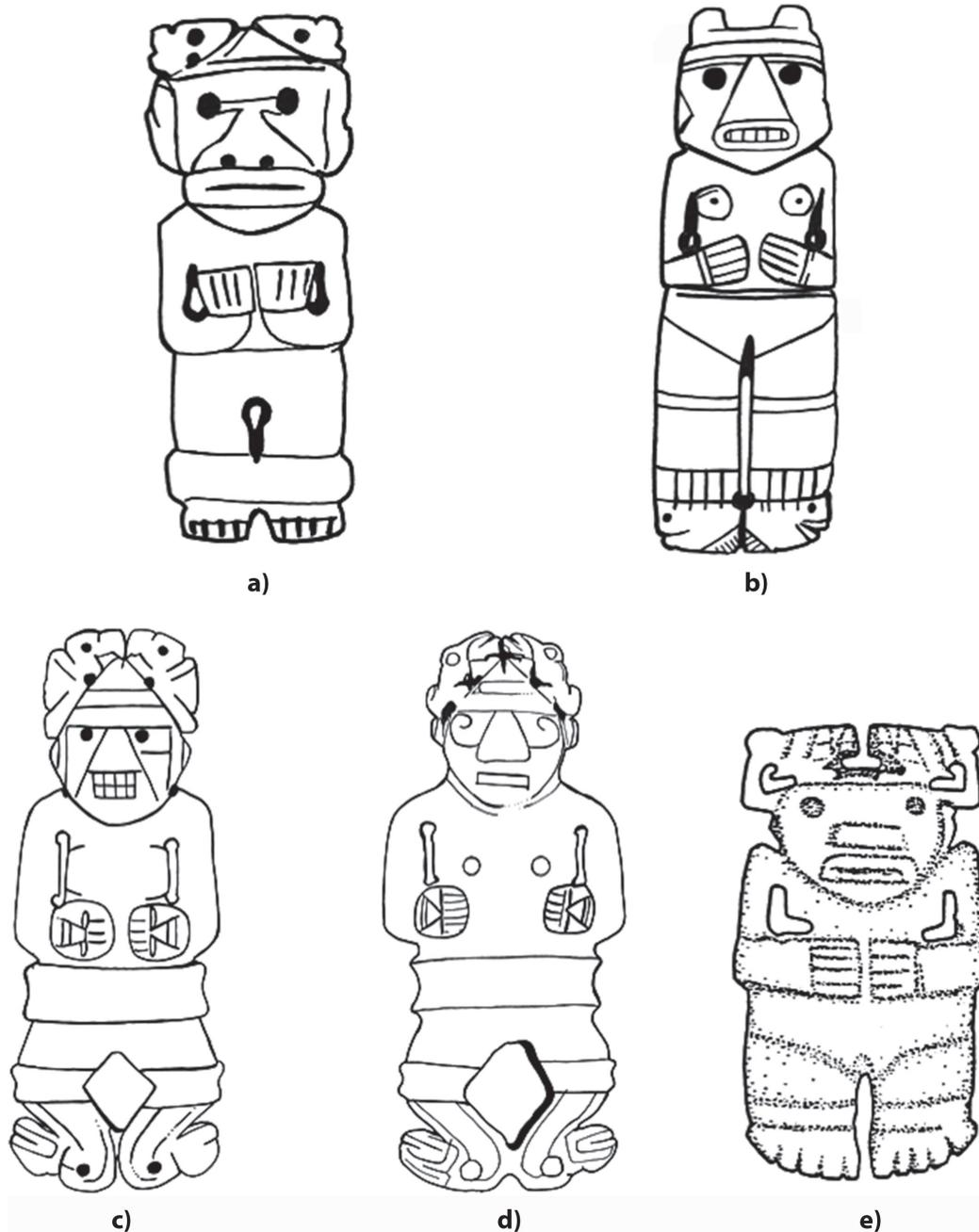


Figure 11: a) Looted object. Height: 8.6 cm. Reportedly from the Atlantic Watershed. Drawing by author based on available photograph. b) Looted object. Height: 17.5 cm. Reportedly from the Atlantic Watershed. Drawing by author based on available photograph. c) Jade male figure pendant with trophy heads and double-bird crest or headdress. Drawing by author after photograph (#5177jjj) in Kerr (2002). e) Jade female figure pendant with trophy heads and double-bird crest or headdress. Drawing by author after photograph in Easby (1981, Pl. 75). f) Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant, Museo del Jade, INS 1930. Height: 9 cm. Reportedly from the Atlantic Watershed. Drawing from Lange (1993, Fig. 21.13) used with permission of the author.



a)



b)



c)



d)

Figure 12: a) Looted object. Height: 7.0cm. Reportedly from the Atlantic Watershed. Drawing by author based on available photograph. b) Looted object. Height: 9.8cm. Drawing by author based on available photograph. c) Looted object. Height: 8.9cm. Reportedly from the Pacific Northwest. Drawing by author based on available photograph. d) Looted object. Height: 10.2cm. Reportedly from the Atlantic Watershed. Drawing by author based on available photograph.

The seated form is less common. Like the standing form, the seated form exhibits gender variation: at least one example is female (Figure 12a), and at least one example is male (Figure 12b). Interestingly, there may be a relationship between the seated form of this theme (Figure 12c) and the Frog Theme (Figure 12d), as suggested by the shape of the crossed legs, but this is a matter not pursued further here.

As I show next, the Costa Ricans modified the Ritual Performer (“Charlie Chaplin”) Theme further, by combining it with a previously existing theme, the Avian Axe-God Theme.

Diffusion: Adoption, Adaptation

It would appear that the ancient artisans of Costa Rica borrowed the Ritual Performer or “Charlie Chaplin” Theme from Mesoamerica, likely from the Lowland Mayans in particular. The Mesoamerican form predates the Costa Rican form by several centuries, given the Middle Formative Olmec precedents, while the earliest, archaeologically contextualized example from Costa Rica dates to ca. A.D. 144 (A.D. 103-545). The triangular nose, the slightly incised eyes, the characteristic arm postures (raised or straight), the bent legs, and the variation between standing and seated postures are all shared attributes (Figure 13). The sideways-pointing feet and bent knees are characteristics that occur together (optionally), to my knowledge, only in the Mayan and Costa Rican versions, and suggest a close relationship, making it likely that the ancient artisans from Costa Rica developed their version through contact with the Mayans in particular, not any other Mesoamerican group.

But as already noted, the ancient artisans from Costa Rica did not simply adopt this theme. They adapted it to their own artistic and iconographic canons. There was, in essence, a process of “stylistic translation,” exhibited by the preference for transverse perforations for suspension, typical of the Costa Rican jade lapidary tradition. And there was a process of “iconographic adaptation,” exhibited by the addition of uniquely Costa Rican motifs, such as the Double-Tuft Motif, the Double-Headed Zoomorphic Crest Motif, the Trophy-Head Hands Motif, and the Sideways-Pointing Zoomorphic Feet Motif.

More interesting, perhaps, is the evidence for the development of an entirely new set of related themes: Avian Axe-God, the Ritual Performer (“Charlie Chaplin”), and the Anthropomorphic Axe-God. At this point, the chronology is clear only in one respect: the Avian Axe-God theme, attested as early as 500 B.C. at the site of La Regla, precedes the other two by centuries. What is not yet clear is the chronology of the second two, as already noted, given the lack of precision of the radiocarbon date for the Ritual Performer pendant from the Mercocha site, and the potentially questionable dating of the Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendants from Loma Corral. Another point that appears to be clear is this: the Ritual Performer theme is likely Mesoamerican in origin.

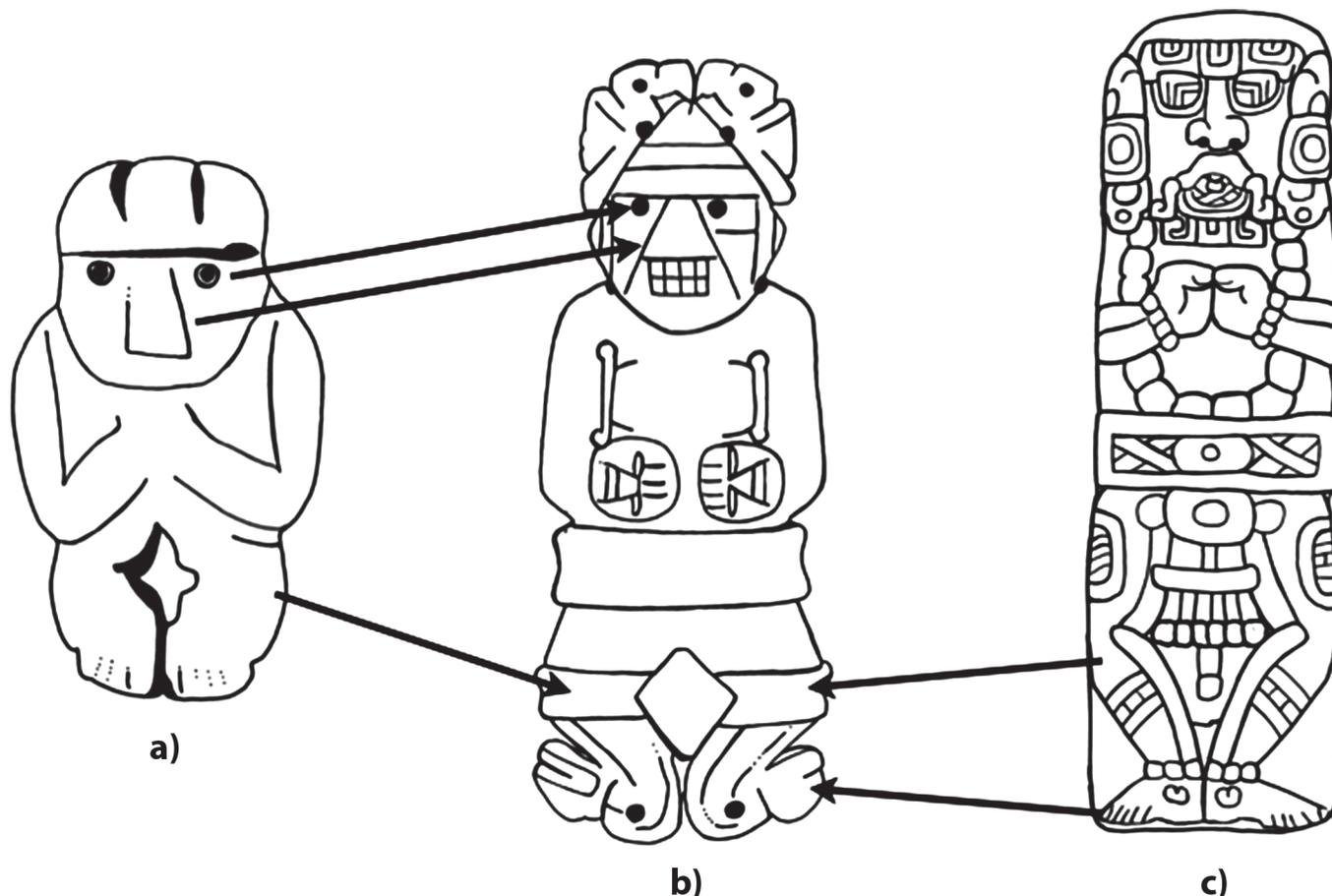


Figure 13: a) Charlie Chaplin figure from Piedras Negras. Drawing by the author based on photograph in W. Coe (1959). b) Jade male figure pendant with trophy heads and double-bird crest or headdress. Drawing by author after photograph (#5177jjj) in Kerr (2002). c) Jade figurine from Copan. Drawing by author after photograph in Fash (1991, p. 127, Pl. IX).

If the Costa Rican version of the Ritual Performer theme predates the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme, then an interesting possibility emerges: perhaps the Avian Axe-God Theme and the Ritual Performer Theme underwent fusion, resulting in the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme. It is possible that a transition from the figural to the axe-shaped forms, as proposed by the illustration in Figure 14. As already mentioned, the Mercocha example (Figure 13a), and other similar examples, exhibit a set of legs that seem to show a rough axe-blade outline, as suggested by the curved toe-line of the feet. Perhaps this development continued until an axe-blade, a motif taken from the Avian Axe-God Theme, enveloped the legs (Figure 13b), followed by the disappearance of the legs (Figure 13c), a development attested in the Severo Ledesma example two centuries or so later. Again, the triangular nose, the oval-shaped mouth, the optional double-tufted or double-headed crest, and the position of the arms are clearly transmitted from the figural to the

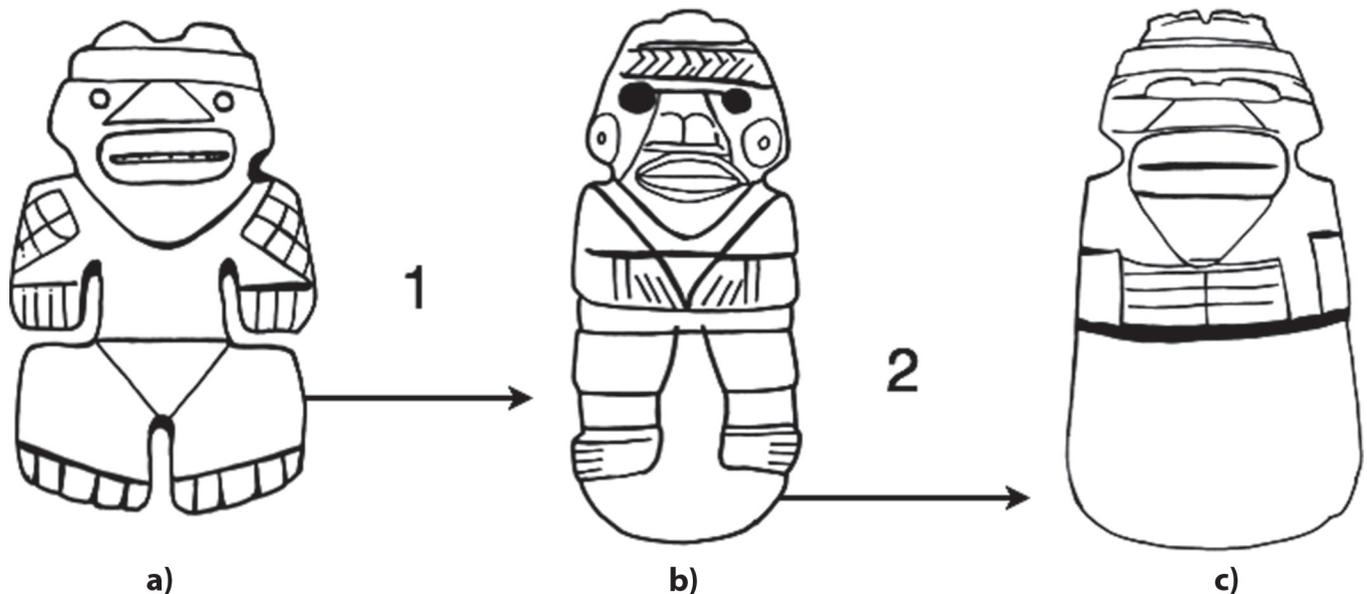


Figure 14: a) Anthropomorphic figural jade pendant from the site of Mercocha, Atlantic Watershed, excavated by [Matthew Stirling \(1969\)](#). Photograph in [Jones \(1998b, p. 16, Pl. 4\)](#). b) Possible transitional figural Axe-God pendant from Atlantic Watershed. Photograph from [Snarskis \(1998, p. 74, Pl. 53\)](#). c) Anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant from Severo Ledesma. Photograph in [Guerrero \(1993, p. 196, Fig. 14.6\)](#).

Axe-God jade pendants. This model of course relies on the currently available chronological information, and future archaeological work is required to test it.

A similar development may have taken place with the seated versions of the Ritual Performer Theme ([Figure 15a](#)); nevertheless, no reliable chronological data exist to support this scenario, and it is thus based entirely on its possible parallel with the scenario presented above for the standing versions of the Ritual Performer Theme. These also appear to have developed a blade that engulfed the legs ([Figure 15b](#)), followed by a process in which the legs and blade were fully differentiated, leaving only the blade ([Figure 15c](#)). After this development, these two anthropomorphic themes co-existed until the cessation of the jade lapidary tradition.

Another possibility is that the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme preceded the Ritual Performer Theme. If this is the correct scenario, perhaps by only a century or two, then the situation would be different. Perhaps the artisans from Costa Rica innovated the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme by analogy with the Avian Axe-God Theme, and subsequently, they adopted the Ritual Performer Theme from Mesoamerica, but adapted it by incorporating stylistic traits and motifs that were already part of the emerging Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme. In either scenario, the Ritual Performer Theme can be concluded to be a case of diffusion.

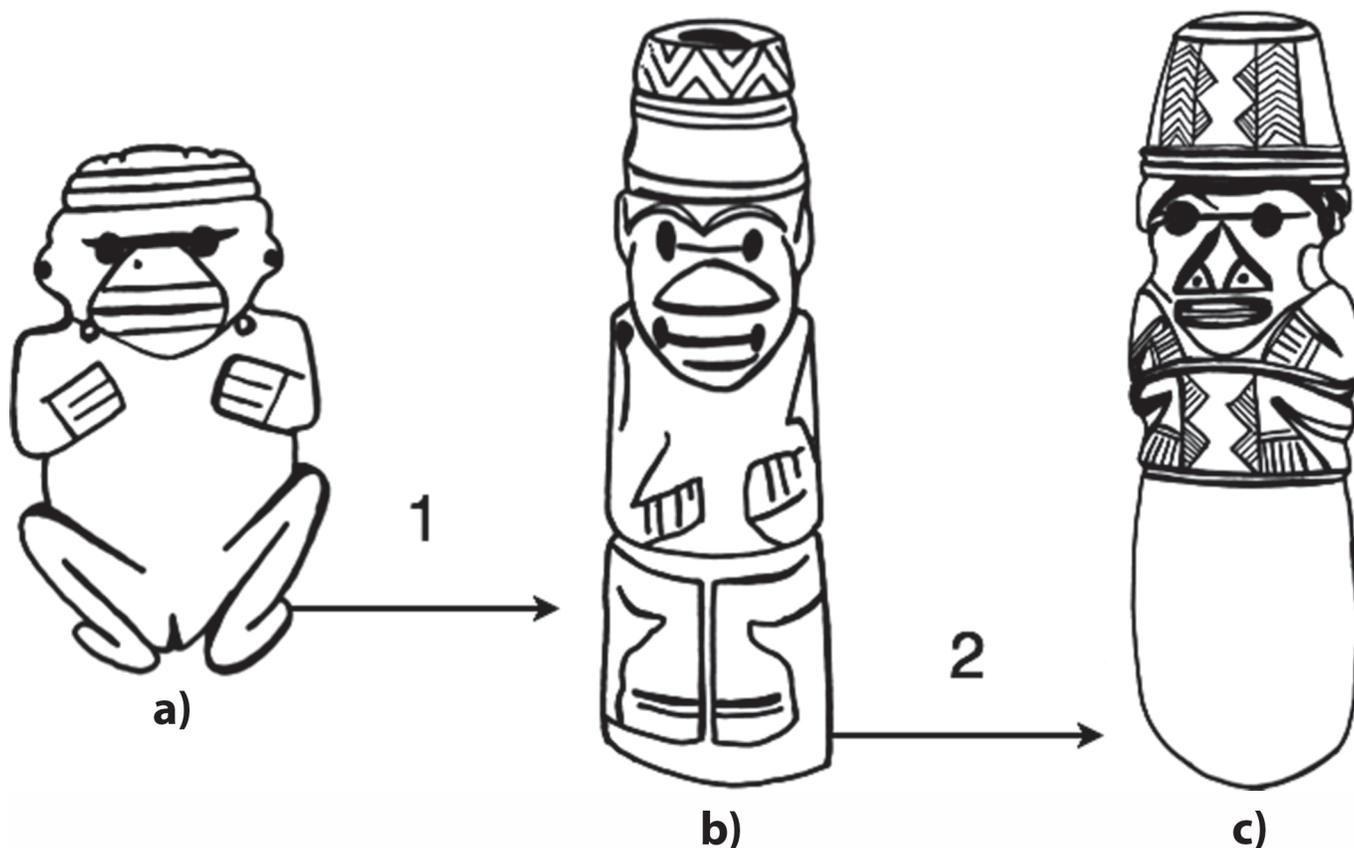


Figure 15: a) Looted object. Height: 8.9 cm. Reportedly from the Pacific Northwest. Drawing by author based on available photograph. b) Looted object. Height: 12.1 cm. Width: 5.1 cm. Reportedly from the Pacific Northwest. Drawing by author based on available photograph. c) Seated anthropomorphic Axe-God pendant. Drawing by this author after available photograph.

Origins of the Ritual Performer (“Charlie Chaplin”) Theme: The Axi Mundi Theme

The “Charlie Chaplin” Theme may have originated in Olmec ritual art during the Middle Preclassic period. More specifically, its origin may lie in the pose identified by Reilly (1990) as signaling the establishment of the “Axis Mundi”, wherein the religious specialist identifies himself with the World Tree, and as a conduit of communication between cosmic realms. As seen in Figure 16a, such pose is comparable to that of the typical Charlie Chaplin figure, if one simply deletes the ceremonial bar held in the arms. For while David Freidel (personal communication, 2005) has suggested that the “crab-claw” pose “is demonstrably the pose of cradling the ‘ceremonial bar’,” I think it is possible that the pose itself came first, potentially as a preexisting gesture or sign referring to a ritual action, and was retained conventionally whenever the bearing of the so-called ceremonial bar was incorporated ritually. In Figure 16b one can see a part-for-the-whole version of this pose and its components in two instances of Olmec art from the Middle Formative period (1000-400 B.C.). Such pose was later assumed by Maya rulers, who identified themselves with the

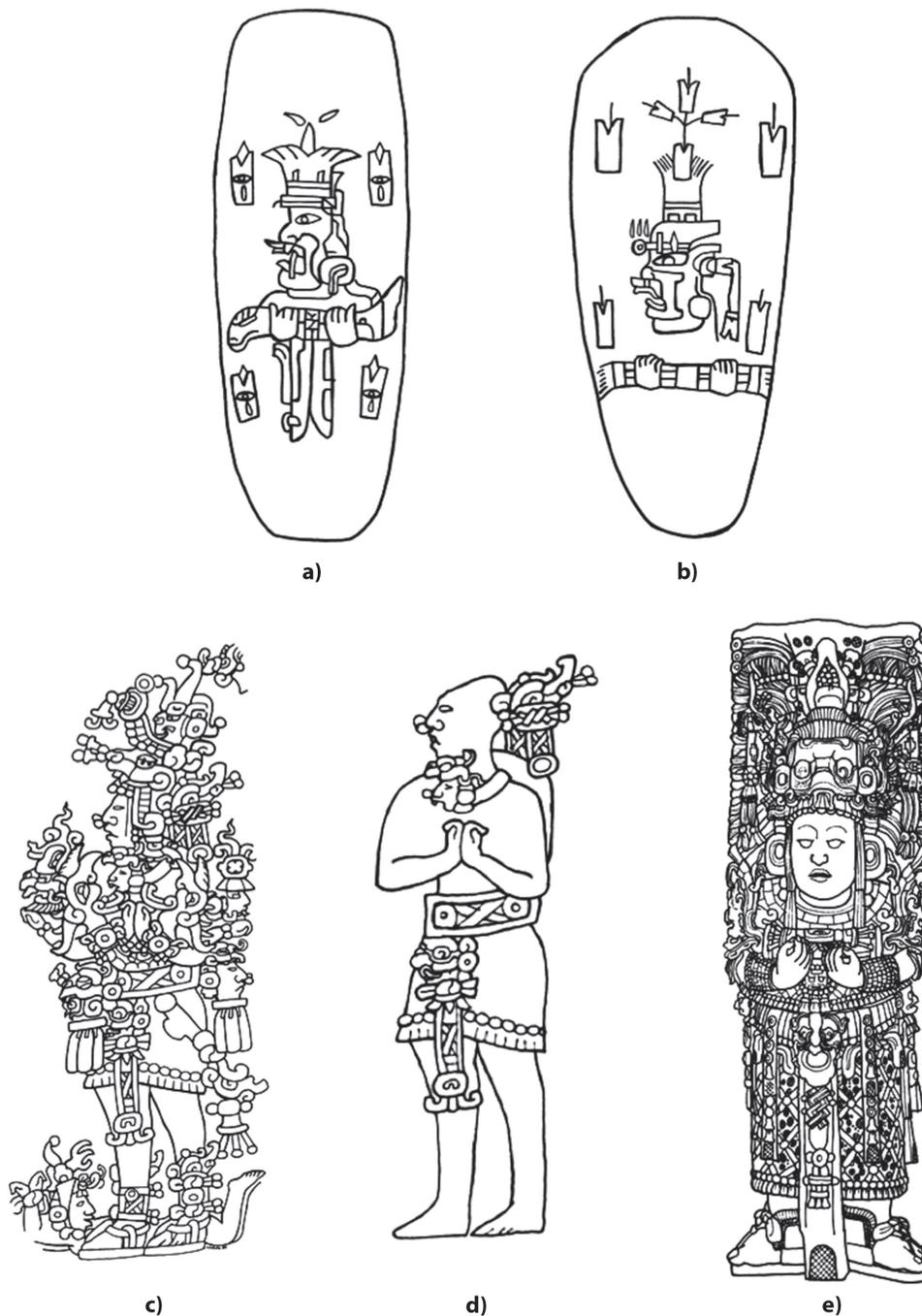


Figure 16: a. Arroyo Pesquero celt. Drawing by author after drawing by Reilly (1990). b. Arroyo Pesquero celt. Drawing by author after drawing by Reilly (1990). c. Leyden Plate: Front. Drawing by Linda Schele (#2006) in D. Schele (2000). d. Leyden Plate: Ruler without headdress and ceremonial bar. Drawing by Linda Schele (#2007) in D. Schele (2000). f) Copan Stela H Drawing by Linda Schele (#1011) in D. Schele (2000).

World Tree, portraying themselves with the typical Charlie Chaplin pose while holding a ceremonial bar and wearing jade celts or plaques, as seen in many Classic-period stelae, such as Naranjo Stela 6 (Graham, 1978), available online at <http://www.peabody.harvard.edu/CMHI/index.php>. The four celts that Reilly proposes to be in a quadripartite arrangement about the ruler in the Arroyo Pesquero celts can be seen as belt-celt trios arranged about the ruler's waist on the Maya counterpart, assuming the presence of a fourth belt-celt trio behind the ruler.

As Schele and Miller (1986, pp. 120-121) note, a key representation of this theme is found in the Early Classic Leyden Plate, seen in Figure 16c. Once stripped of its headdress and ceremonial bar through extrapolation, as in Figure 16d, it is clear that the personage exhibits the characteristic stance of the Charlie Chaplin figures. It is this stance that characterized the Early Classic royal portraiture on jade plaques and stelae (Mathews, 1985; Fields, 1989), although at some sites, such as at Naranjo and Copan, this conventional theme persisted well into the Late Classic, as in Figure 16f. Consequently, the figural theme of the Charlie Chaplin figures is not an isolated theme, but instead, the basic template of the Ruler-as-Axi Mundi theme, albeit one that is reduced to its bare minimum in terms of details. What this could mean is that the Charlie Chaplin theme describes the basic ritual poses that a ritual specialist must engage in for the purpose of establishing the Axi Mundi, whereas the portraits present on the Leyden Plate and Early Classic stelae depict, specifically, the ruler, engaged in such ritual action. In essence, the Ruler Portrait Theme of the highly elaborate Early Classic stelae was a continuation and elaboration of a more generalized ritual pose

Another interesting point to mention is that of scale. The scale of the Charlie Chaplin representations can differ. The situation is one akin to that of the Christian crucifix, which can be represented in a large, monumental scale, with significant elaborations for the purpose of public display, or in a small, minute scale, with simplified elaborations or no elaborations at all, for the purpose of personal adornment. It can also be rendered in a plurality of media. Similarly, the Pre-Columbian artisans created small- and large-scale versions of ritual performers engaged in the Charlie Chaplin pose, from the minute ones known from ritual deposits in Belize, for example, to the monumental ones present on stelae at sites like Copan. They also rendered it on various media, perhaps more commonly in jadeite and other greenstones, but also obsidian, shell, wood, and of course, monumentally, on stelae.

An obvious question now arises: Did the Costa Ricans adopt the Charlie Chaplin figural theme along with its ideological significance, related to the symbolism of the Axis Mundi and the World Tree? This is not a question I am prepared to address at this point, except to say that such a cosmological principle was likely present across the Americas, not as a result of diffusion at a late stage, but possibly as a result of shared inheritance of cultural practices from a distant past. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Costa Ricans adapted this theme to their own cosmological paradigm rather quickly.

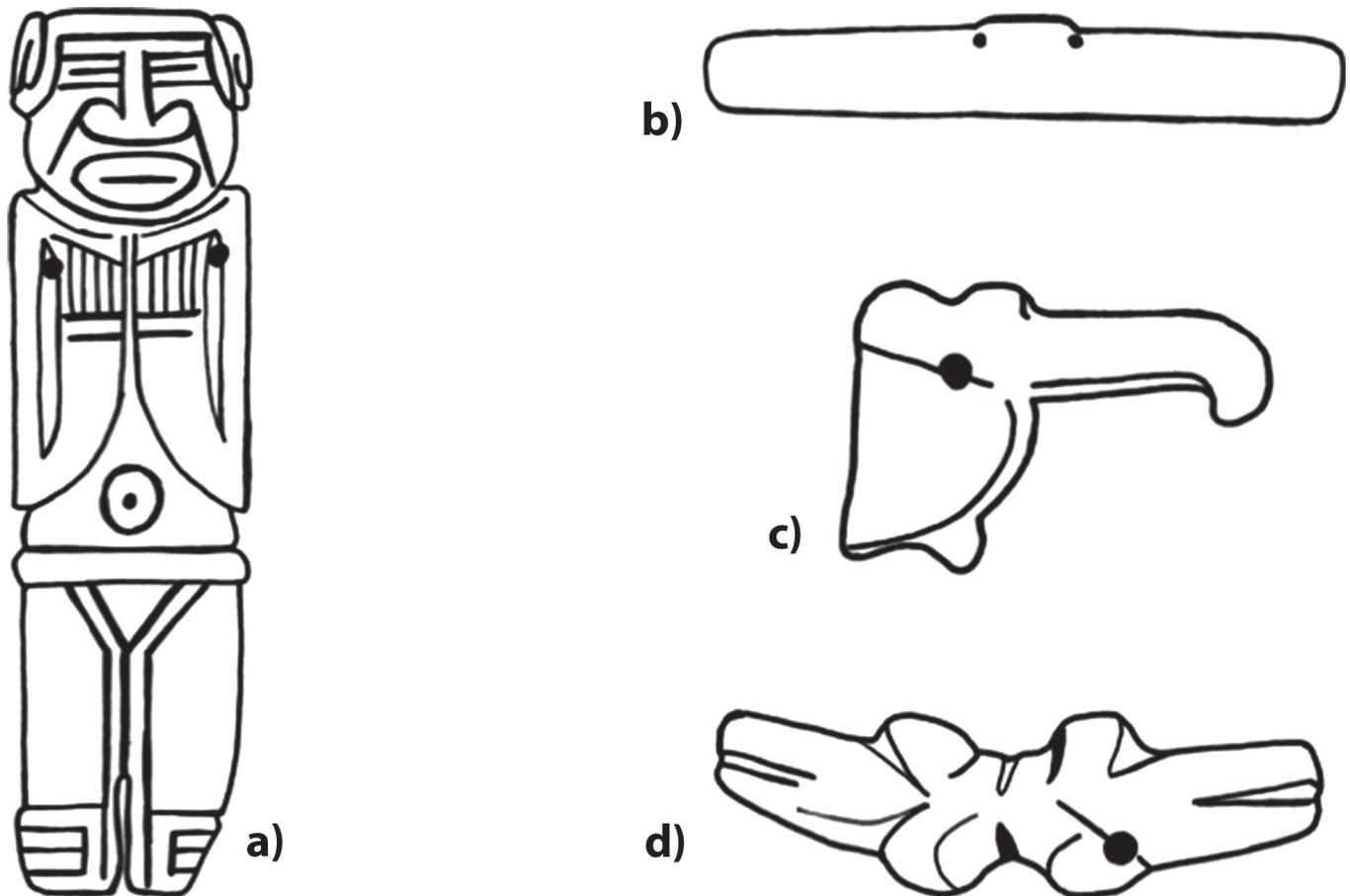


Figure 17: a) Stone figure pendant from Nahuange Site 1 tomb. Drawing by the author after drawing in Bray (2003, p. 328, Fig. 14). b) Winged pendants from Nahuange Site 1 tomb. Drawing by the author after Bray (2003, p. 327, Fig. 13). c) White marble beak-bird pendant from Sitio Conte. Drawing by the author after Lothrop (1937, p. 184, Fig. 175a). d) Agate double-headed crocodile pendant from cache 26 at Sitio Conte. Drawing by the author after Lothrop (1937, p. 170, Fig. 157a).

A Broader Perspective

As already proposed, the case study described here, that of the Charlie Chaplin figural theme, challenges the notion of “Mesoamerica” as a useful construct. Instead, it appears that significant interactions took place at broader scales, scales that blurred the lines between “Mesoamerica” and “Lower Central America,” for example, and in so doing a “Middle America” construct would seem to emerge as a more useful theoretical entity. But the fact is that this is not broad enough.

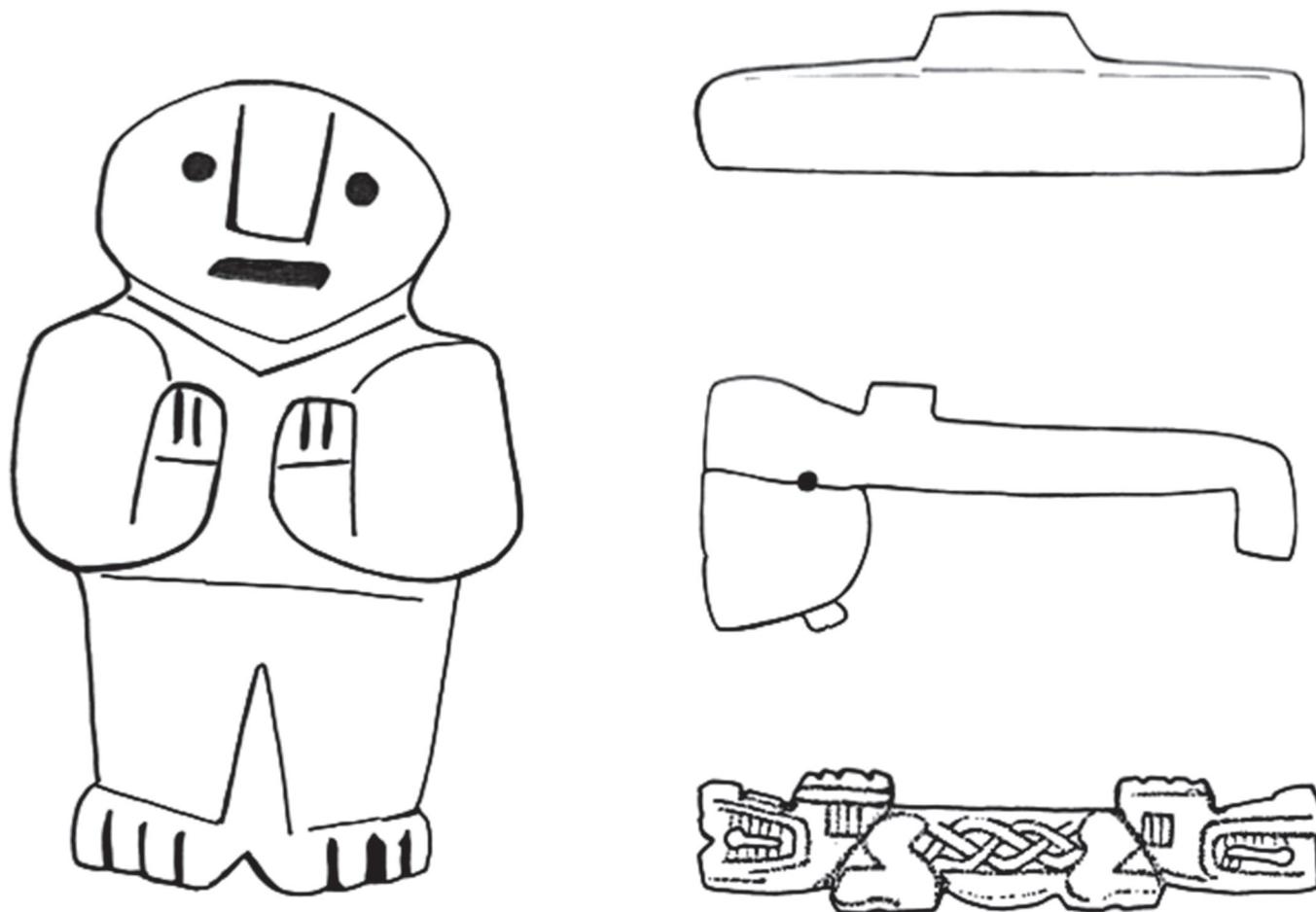


Figure 18: a) Semi-translucent olive chalcedony figural pendant. Height: 4.8 cm. Drawing by the author after photograph in Easby (1968, p. 40, Fig. 22). b) Jadeite winged pendant. Dimensions: 2.8 x 10.7 cm. Drawing by the author after photograph in Snarskis (1998, p. 90, Pl. 86). c) Quartz beak-bird pendant from Severo Ledesma, Atlantic Watershed. Dimensions: 3.4 x 2.6 cm. Drawing by the author after photograph in Guerrero (1998, p. 29, Pl. 15). d) Jadeite beak-bird pendant, reportedly from the Pacific Northwest. Dimensions: 6.6 x 16.5 cm. Drawing by the author after photograph in Jones (1998a, p. 97). e) Double-headed crocodile bar pendant, reportedly from the Pacific Northwest. Drawing from Lange (1993, p. 282) used with permission of the author.

There are several examples of Costa Rican-style jades at Sitio Conte, Panama, and Nahuange and Pueblito, both in Colombia (Figure 17). The Sitio Conte burials have been dated to ca. A.D. 750-950 (Lothrop, 1937), while the Nahuange and Pueblito burials date to ca. A.D. 300-800/1000 (Bray, 2003). These are sites where gold objects were the primary prestige items; the jade finds are therefore comparable both contextually and temporally to sites in Costa Rica where jade and gold have been found in situ in close association

with another, such as at Finca Linares, dating to A.D. 600-800, and La Fortuna, dating to A.D. 400-600 (e.g. Stone and Balsler, 1965). The Nahuange jades, described by Bray (2003) and Hoopes (2012), include the so-called “Charlie Chaplin” anthropomorphic theme, seen in Figure 17a, comparable to examples known from Costa Rica, seen in Figure 18a, but not attested thus far in Nicaragua or non-Mayan (i.e. extra-Copan) Honduras. This theme most likely originated in Mesoamerica, as already explained, with Olmec examples dating to the Middle Formative period.

The Nahuange examples from Tomb 1, dated to ca. A.D. 310 ± 70 (Hoopes, 2012), could suggest that they may have come from Costa Rica around that time or earlier. That these Nahuange examples came from Costa Rica, or at the very least were inspired by Costa Rican models, is strongly suggested by the fact that several of them are split in half: Costa Rican jade artisans in fact began the practice of splitting Axe-God and Charlie Chaplin pendants in half late in the history of the lapidary jade tradition, by ca. A.D. 300-500, as suggested to me by Juan Vicente Guerrero Miranda (personal communication 1995). There are several Maya and Olmec pendants reported from Costa Rica that were split in half; some of these may have been split in half within Mesoamerica, however, as several in situ Olmec (e.g. La Venta) and Maya (e.g. Calakmul, Lake Güija) pendants have been documented in a similar condition. But the fact is that Costa Rican artisans, whether motivated by the Mesoamericans, or their own inspiration, also split figural pendants in half. Thus, the Nahuange split pendants could point to a Costa Rican origin or inspiration.

In addition, the same tomb where the Charlie Chaplin-style pendants were found at the Nahuange site also yielded several jade winged pendants, seen in Figure 17b, very similar to numerous examples from Costa Rica, seen in Figure 18b, where the winged pendant was one of several themes of high frequency. Hoopes (2012, p. 14) argues that the similarities are somewhat superficial, not so much of style but of content, but do suggest contact between Costa Rican and Nahuange artisans. As Hoopes (2012, pp. 15-16) also notes, the bat-winged bar pendants are similar to forms also known, in greater quantity and degree of stylistic variation, from Costa Rica. The broad range of forms, from very explicit and naturalistic to very opaque and stylized evident in Costa Rican examples, Hoopes argues, would support a Costa Rican origin, rather than a Colombian origin, where only simple and stylized forms are known. In fact, as already pointed out, a fully elaborate bat-winged bar pendant is known from Las Huacas in the Pacific Northwest of Costa Rica (Hartman, 1907), dating to ca. A.D. 300-500. This makes it potentially contemporaneous with the examples from Nahuange Tomb 1.

Finally, the Sitio Conte Costa Rican-style jades include a beak-bird pendant, seen in Figure 17c, and a double-headed crocodilian pendant, seen in Figure 17d, comparable to Costa Rican examples such as those in Figure 18c-e. The Severo Ledesma example from Costa Rica (Figure 18c) may predate the Sitio Conte burials by three or four centuries, but stylistically closer, though unproven counterparts, are known in several private and museum collections of Costa Rican artifacts (Figure 18d).

Discussion and Conclusions

The hypothesis presented in this paper suffers from a significant weakness: only one of the proposed predecessors of the Costa Rican version of the Charlie Chaplin Silhouette Figural Theme, the Mercocha example, has been recovered archaeologically. That example, however, is suggestive of an ongoing transition toward the development of the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme. Thus, the hypothesis predicts that examples earlier than the Severo Ledesma Axe-God should be found to exhibit features transitional between the full-figure theme and the Axe-God theme. A problem that needs to be recognized, of course, is the likelihood that some jades were heirlooms, and therefore, deposited a significant amount of time after their original manufacture. But in any case, this hypothesis must wait for testing by future archaeological findings, ideally from sites dating to the period between 300 B.C.-A.D. 300.

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that an active information network linked the eastern Maya lowlands and northern Costa Rica, as already proposed in Mora-Marín (2002; 2005). This network explains the diffusion of Maya-style “Charlie Chaplin” figures, as well as the adoption and adaptation of this theme by the ancient artisans from Costa Rica. Furthermore, it is possible that the latter merged their version of the Charlie Chaplin Theme, defined here as a Ritual Performer Theme, with the Avian Axe-God Theme, resulting in the Anthropomorphic Axe-God Theme, possibly one of the most distinct artistic themes of Pre-Columbian art. Lastly, the information network in question may have reached as far south as Colombia, given the evidence for Costa Rican-style artifacts at the sites of Nahuange and Pueblito; among these artifacts are found several figural pendants reminiscent of the Ritual Performer (“Charlie Chaplin”) Theme, which may have arrived from Costa Rica or at the very least inspired by Costa Rican versions. These findings could lead to a point of departure for a broader perspective on the archaeology and art history of these regions, as recently argued by Hoopes (2001), and as might become necessary in order to more fully understand the beginnings of metalwork in Mesoamerica, and the spread of other technologies and cultigens in both directions.

Acknowledgments

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