PRIMERA MESA REDONDA DE PALENQUE PART I.

A Conference on the Art, Iconography,
and
Dynastic History of Palenque

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PACAL

Probably the greatest ruler of Palenque. He ruled from 9.9.2.4.8 (A.D. 615) to 9.12.11.5.18 (A.D. 683). He ascended the throne at age 12 years 125 days, and died at age 80 years 158 days. He is entombed in the sarcophagus of the Temple of the Inscriptions.

Above is one of several forms of the glyphic expression of his name. It is from the west panel of the Temple of the Inscriptions, column A, row 3.

LEFT GLYPH. Superfix: *Mah K'ina*, a title of honor and respect for lineage heads and rulers. Main sign: An iconic sign for Shield, possibly read as *Pacal*, a Mayan word for shield, or as *Chimal*, another widely used word for shield, which was a borrowing from Nahuatl.

RIGHT GLYPH. Top: a phonetic sign for the syllable *pa*. Center: a phonetic sign for the syllable *ca*. Bottom: a phonetic sign for the syllable *la* or for a final *l* following *a*. The three together read *Pa-ca-l*, a spelling of the Maya word for shield.

His name was probably a double name, with a personal name 'Shield' (either *Pacal* or *Chimal*) and a lineage name 'Shield' (certainly pronounced *Pacal*). The name Pacal is well documented as a lineage name among the Quiché, still in use throughout the sixteenth century. It was probably known and so used among other Mayan peoples also.

The title *Mah K'ina* was also known in the highlands still in colonial times and is documented for that period. It too must have had wide currency. It is of two parts, which could be used separately or as a compound. The first part was current in colonial times as a Cakchiquel title for heads of lineages, and it is still in use today among the Chol for the chief mayordomos of their principal saints.

Floyd G. Lounsbury

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Notes on a Floral Form Represented in Maya Art and its Iconographic Implications

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THE ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON SCHOOL

There is a plant indigenous to tropical America which could possibly broaden the scope of our knowledge about a type depicted on Maya sculpture, and I would like to present what seem to be some valid relationships and implications between this present day plant and certain representations in Maya iconography in the following steps:

1. In Palenque iconography there are certain representations of plants formerly identified as "water lilies" which have "leaves" that possibly represent a plant identified as *Dorstenia contrajerva*.
2. This *Dorstenia contrajerva* possesses certain properties that possibly give reason for its significance in Maya art.

Throughout the iconography of Palenque there are representations of a plant heretofore referred to as the "water lily" by Maudslay (1889-1902, vol. 4:37-38), Spinden (1913: 18-20), Lothrop (1926: 159-162), and others. This suggested identification has also been presented in great detail by Rands in his dissertation on "The Water Lily in Maya Art" (1953). Rands, however, qualifies his identification of these plant forms on several occasions by stating that the identification of these plants shown in Maya iconography ". . . might apply equally to other types of flowers" (Rands, 1953: 81). He also goes to great lengths to point out the possibility of other plants being depicted in Maya art which may *not* be the water lily.

1. The "leaf" or "leaves" of these "water-lily representations" are recognized in Palenque iconography by their rather rectangular shapes, their raised and serrated boarders and a grid motif into which "dots" are occasionally placed. The Palenque examples of this supposed "leaf" are found in profile on piers c (fig. 1) and f (fig. 2) of House D, on both Palace throne legs (fig. 3 Madrid leg), on the outer step to the inner sanctuary of Temple 14 (fig. 4), surmounting the head of the left figure in the Tablet of the Palace (fig. 5), and in frontal

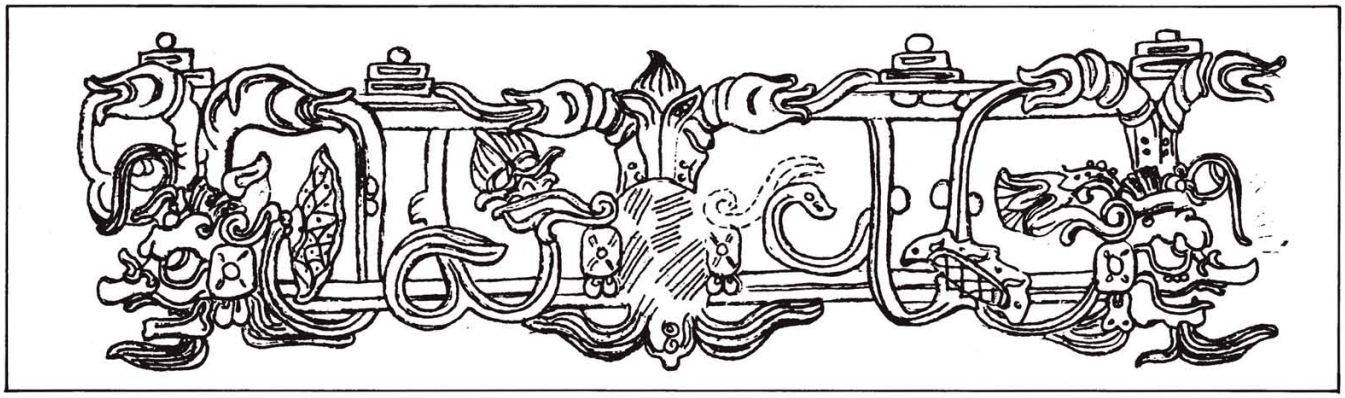

Fig. 1 Palenque, Palace. pier c, House D. After Maudslay, vol. IV, pl. 35.

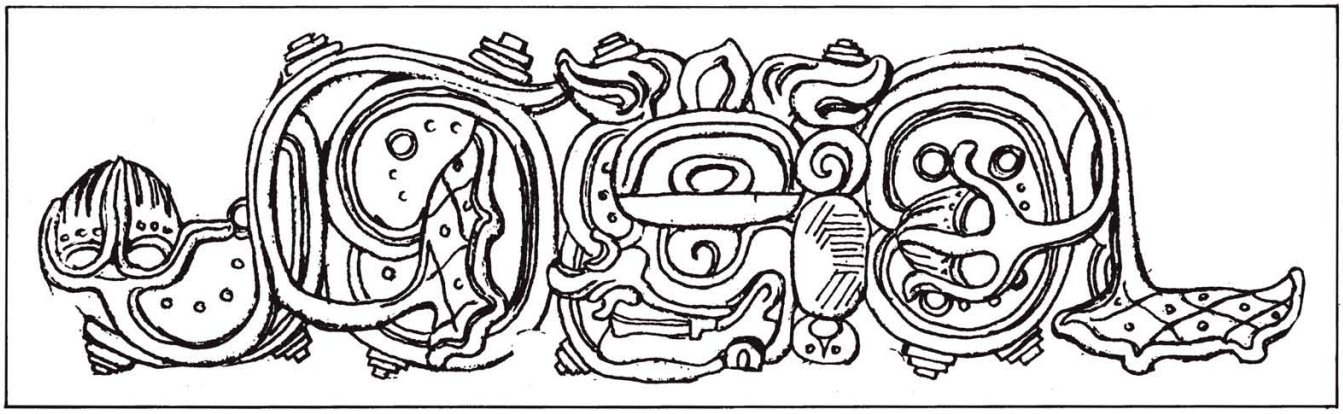

Fig. 2 Palenque, Palace. Pier f, House D. After Maudslay, vol. IV, pl. 37.

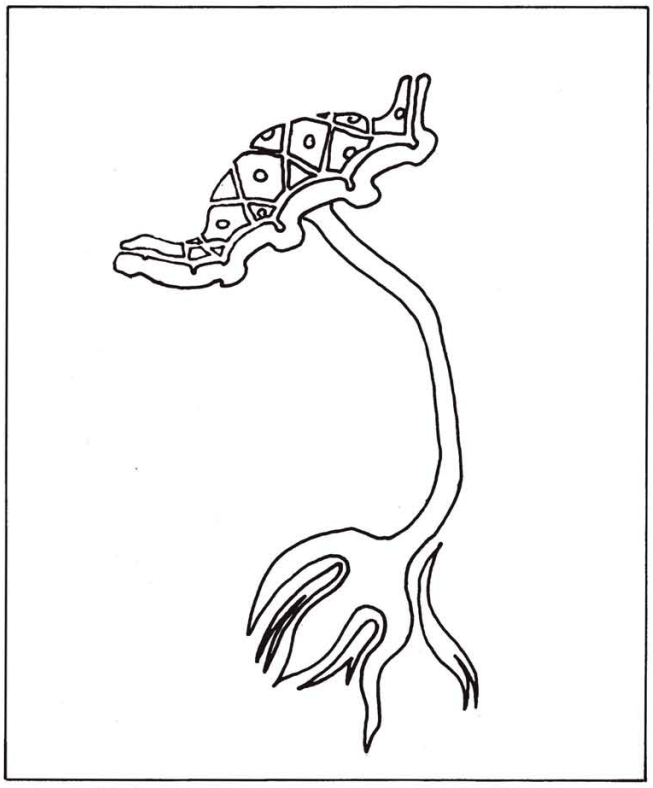

Fig. 3 Palenque, Throne Leg, "Madrid Stela".

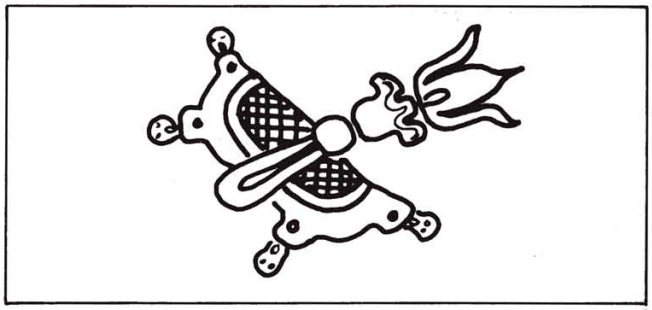

Fig. 5 Palenque, Tablet of the Palace - left figure.

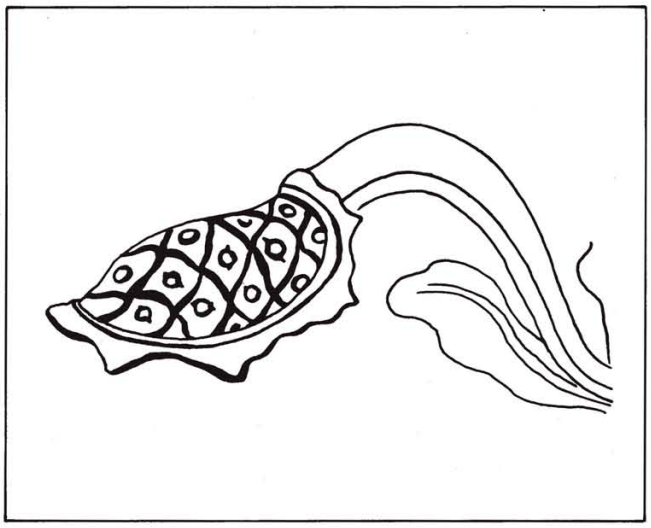

Fig. 4 Palenque, Stucco from the outer step to the inner sanctuary of Temple 14.

Fig. 6 Palenque, Palace. Mask 8, House C. After Seler, 1915, fig. 70.

view portrayed on Mask 8 of House C (Rands, 1953: 105), (fig. 6), and on the right figure in the Tablet of the Palace (fig. 9).[1]

Merle Robertson first pointed out to me the similarity of a plant which grows at the Palenque ruins to the one depicted on the Palenque throne legs (fig. 3) and Mask 8 of House C (fig. 6). I believe that these "water-lily leaf" illustrations possibly represent the flower receptacle and stem of the *Dorstenia contrajerva* (fig. 7) which in Yucatec Maya is *X-cambalhau* or *Ix-cabalkau* (Roys, 1931: 222). This plant is indigenous to tropical America and usually grows on a scape (a long erect stem arising from below the surface of the ground). Baitey (1900: 500) states that its ". . . fig is a hollow (cup-like) receptacle (rectangularly) formed of the axis of the fl.-cluster", the raised borders of which are serrated and notched. The flowers are very numerous, tiny, green, bead-like nodules imbedded in the entire upper surface of the flat section of the cup-like receptacle. According to Standley (1928) "The large green quadrangular receptacles are borne on long erect penducles" and the plant is "common in moist forests and thickets, is an inconspicuous perennial herb with long-petiolate deeply lobed leaves".

Fig. 7 "Dorstenia contrajerva". Photo by M.G. Robertson.

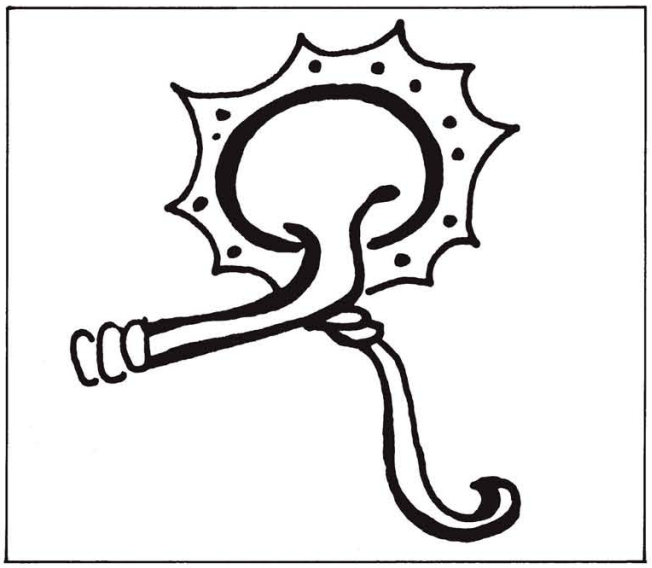

Fig. 8 Tulum, Temple of the Frescoes, West Passage. After Lothrop, 1924, pl. 7.

In relating "water-lily leaf" representations to the anotomical parts of the *Dorstenia contrajerva* we can say that the rectangular "leaf" with its serrated border corresponds to the *Dorstenia's* flower receptacle, the long stem to its scape, and the grid and dot elements probably represent the rough appearance of the central flower-bearing portion of the receptacle (this last relationship will be discussed later at greater length).[2]

It is also noteworthy that although the size of the "water-lily leaf" manifestations in proportion to the context in which they appear often seems to suggest that they represent a plant larger than the *Dorstenia*, it should be noted that the Maya often represented animals, plants, reptiles and other living things in larger or smaller proportion than their context would realistically dictate, such as illustrated by the snake heads and the mythological bird represented on the Palenque sarcophagus lid.

Occasionally these "water-lily leaf" manifestations are supplemented by another type of leaf such as shown on piers c and f of House D (figs. 1 and 2) and on the Palace Tablet (fig. 9). As far as the *Dorstenia* identification of plant forms in Maya iconography is concerned, the Palace Tablet example here is a good case in point. Here we see one stem bearing both the "water-lily leaf" and a secondary leaf of a totally different nature. This represented relationship of two types of leaves on one plant is biologically impossible, and thereby further questions the "water-lily leaf" identifi-

[1]Similar "leaf" representations are found throughout Maya art, especially at Machaquila (Stelae 3, 4, 7 and 8). For further representations see Rands, 1953: 131-136, Entries #7, 13, 15, 22, 24, 27, 53, 62, 63, 66, 68, 69, 76, 77, 78, 81e, 81f, 92, 95, 103b, 118, 121, 129, 131, 132, 142, 208, 219, 301, 310.

[2]At the Primera Mesa Redonda de Palenque it was suggested that certain of these "water-lily leaves" might be representations of the water lily rhizome. Upon a close examination of rhizomes this now seems improbable due to the lack of visual similarities that rhizomes (fig. 12) bear to the plant forms under question.

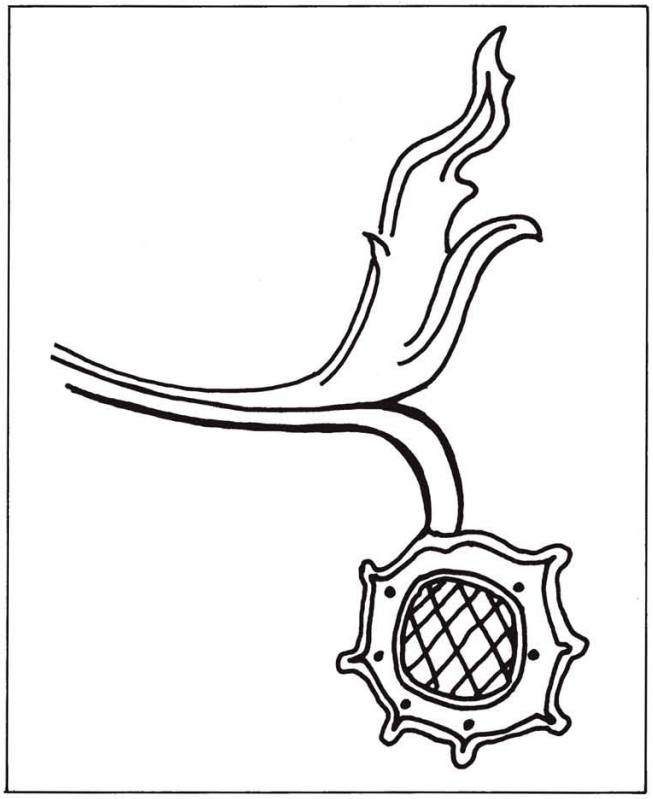

Fig. 9 Palenque, Tablet of the Palace - right.

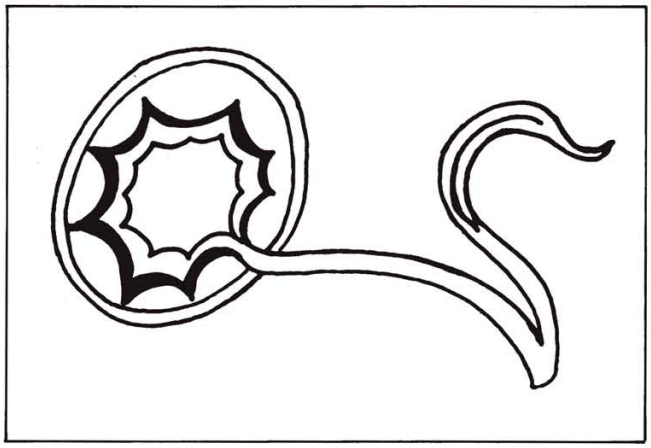

Fig. 13 Tulum, Temple of the Frescoes, North Passage. After Lothrop, 1924, pl. 8.

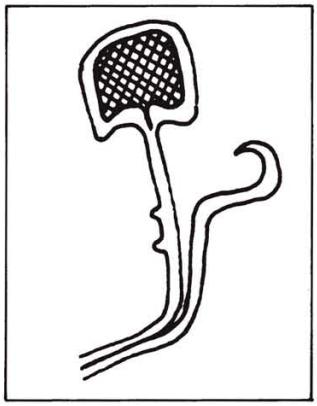

Fig. 10 Tulum, Temple of the Frescoes, North Passage. After Lothrop, 1924, pl. 8.

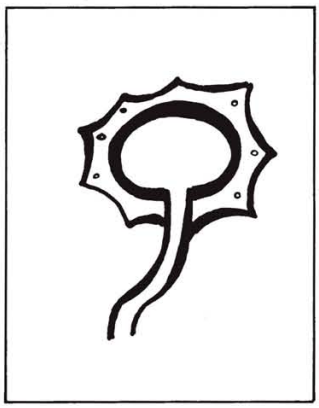

Fig. 11 Tulum, Temple of the Frescoes, West Passage. After Lothrop, 1924, pl. 7.

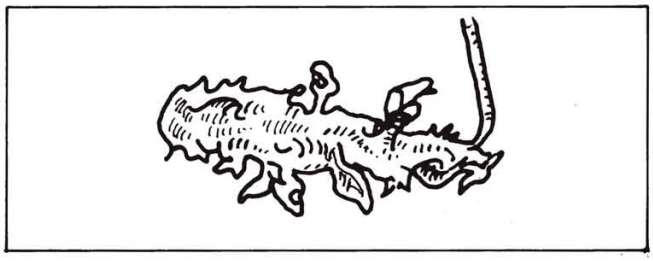

Fig. 12 Rhizome of the Nymphaea. After Alexandre, 1935: 237, Fig. 61.

cation, especially when the larger "leaf" resembles the *Dorstenia contrajerva's* receptacle and the deeply lobed secondary leaf resembles so closely the *Dorstenia's* leaf.

A second case in point is an identification of the *Dorstenia contrajerva* by Lothrop (1924: 58) in Tulum iconography (fig. 8). This representation (and others at Tulum [figs. 10, 11, and 13]) bears striking resemblance to the Palace Tablet representation (fig. 9) and other manifestations of the "water-lily leaf" found at Palenque.

Let us propose then that in form and shape these certain "water-lily leaves" illustrated at Palenque and similar representations found throughout Maya art correspond to the anatomical parts of the *Dorstenia contrajerva*.

2. Assuming that this relationship is valid, one should next try to determine what reasons the Maya would have had to give the *Dorstenia contrajerva* such a prominent place in their iconography.

In so far as the significance of the *Dorstenia contrajerva* is concerned, I don't believe that this plant was highly venerated for its aesthetic qualities, for its color is dull green and its shape is awkward and grotesque. But although the *Dorstenia* lacks from an aesthetic point of view, its chemical properties are indeed impressive.

The plant is reputed as a remedy for a phenomenal number of sicknessess. Contrajerva literally means "counter-herb" and indeed it "is an antidote for every poison" (Roys, 1931: 222) from spider to snake bites. Roys (1931: 222) describes this herb as:

> ". . . abundant in the forest, this plant is one of the most popular and ancient Maya remedies . . . Maya texts prescribe the plant for colds (11), pain in the heart (74), spider-bites (46), bites of other insects (58 and 61), diarrhea (68), dysentery (80), childbirth (94), blood-vomit and liver complaint (127), and as a poultice for a swollen knee (244). The root is prescribed as an antidote of poisoning (278). Both plant and root are a cure for skin-diseases

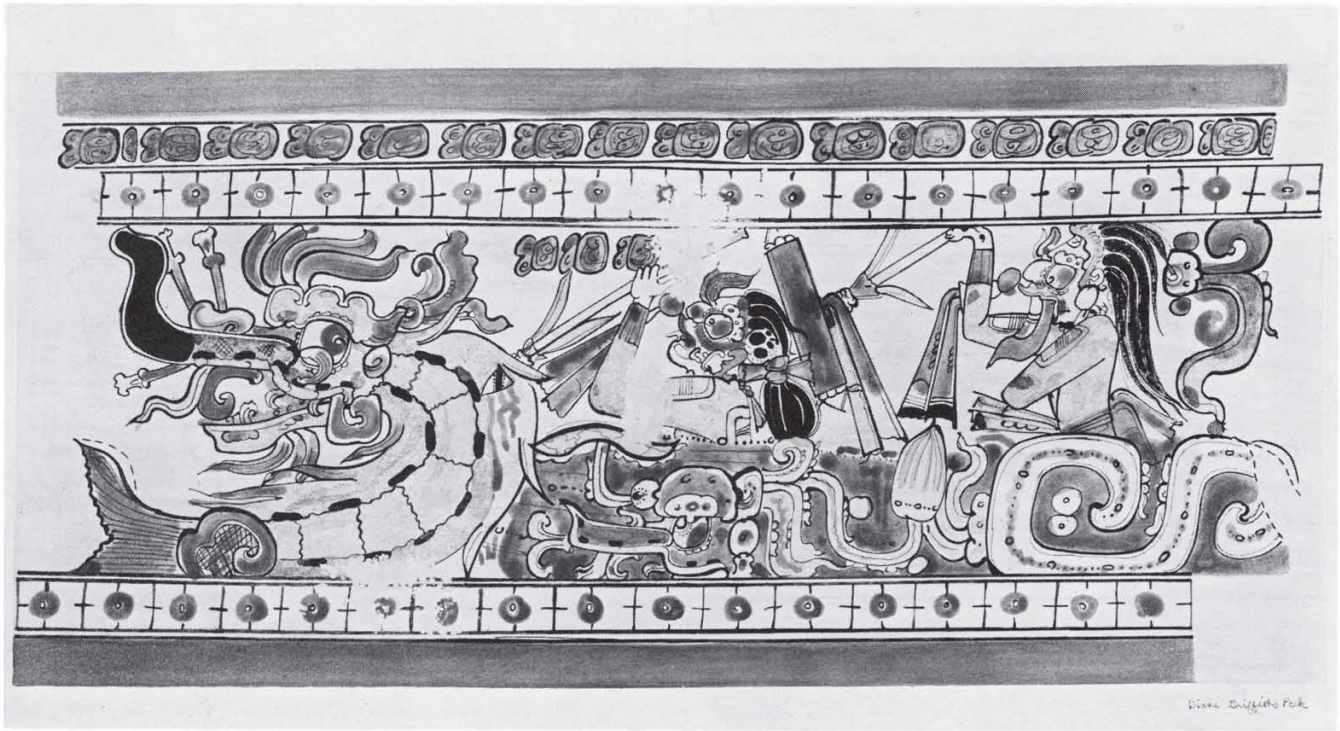

Fig. 14 Polychrome pottery vase at Dumbarton Oaks. Drawing, Diane Griffiths Peck.

(208, 320, 333, 339 and 369). The plant is prescribed for infected gums (395)."[3]

Certainly, it isn't out of the realm of possibilities that a plant so medically valuable would be esteemed by the ancient Maya to the extent of including it in their iconography.

An iconographic problem concerning these *Dorstenia contrajerva* identifications was brought to my attention by David Joralemon. A vase in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (fig. 14) shows the plant form under question floating in lily-pad fashion on the surface of what appears to be water. This manifestation is clearly representing the water-lily leaf and is so similar in form and context to the other representations of the plant forms under question that it becomes a formidable obstacle to the *Dorstenia* theory.

Dr. Donald Robertson (1973: Primera Mesa Redonda de Palenque) suggested that the *Dorstenia's* grid and dot motif may denote a "quality" such as the rough texture which the *Dorstenia* certainly does have. In fact, its surface suggests a "sandpaper-like" quality. This "textural quality", one of "roughness", so characteristic of the central receptacle portion of the *Dorstenia*, could also be ascribed to turtle shells, crocodiles, frogs, lily pads, and bat wings.[4] Thompson (1966: 177) brings out that it is the quality of "furriness" which is a significant characteristic of bats. Robertson also suggested that the motif may signify different meanings at different levels. At a conventional level the motif represents a "turtle shell" (such as T.625), whereas at a simpler level it may represent an appearance of "quality". An example of appearance of "quality" motifs in western art can be found in heraldic tinctures. Here traditional motifs are used to convey qualities such as color, fur, and metals.

To conclude, it appears that in Maya iconography there are floral forms representing the medicinally valuable *Dorstenia contrajerva* and that these forms contain a motif which has been applied to a variety of objects denoting a rough "textural quality".

[3]The *Dorstenia contrajerva* is used by the present day Chol Maya at Yaxchilan and Palenque, and the Maya in the southern Peten (Delores and Ixtutz area) for a remedy against poisonous snake bites and diarrhea (personal communication 1974).

[4]Indeed, such illustrations of this textural motif can be found embellished on: Turtle shells - Rands (1953: fig. 2d); Proskouriakoff (1965: fig. 16); Codex Madrid p. 71 (fig. 17). Bat wings - Easby and Scott (1970: fig. 183) (fig. 16). Crocodiles - Cook de Leonard (1965: 432, fig. 15). Frog - Smith and Kidder (1943: fig. 51a).

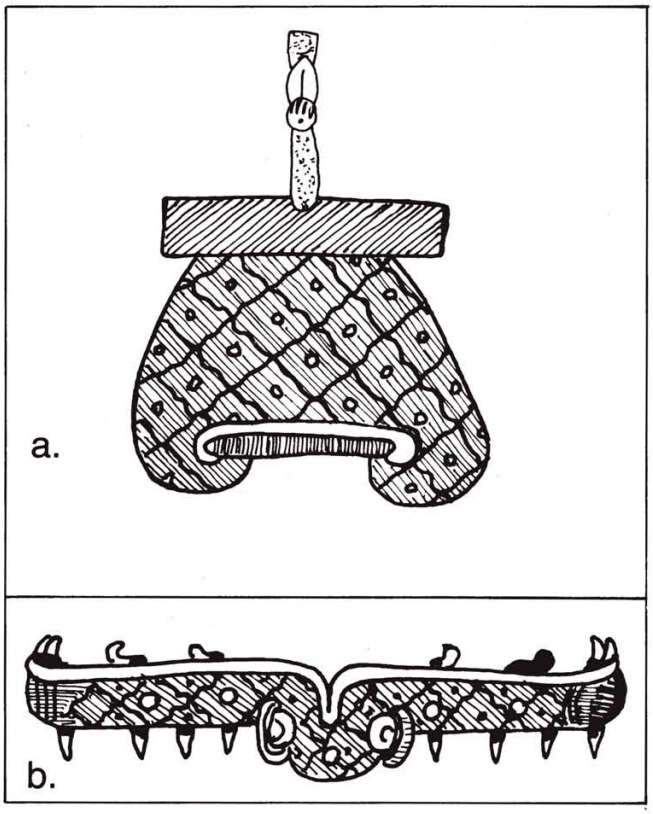

Fig. 15 Crocodile texture - from Cook de Leonard p. 432, figs. 3 and 4. a from Codex Borbonicus, b from Codex Borgia.

Fig. 16 Bat wing texture "furriness". Drawing from photograph in Easby fig. 183.

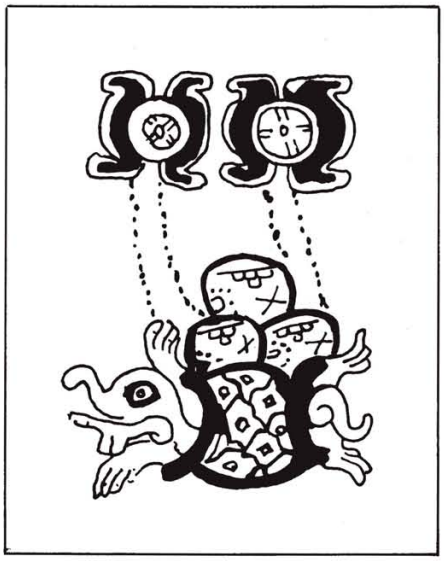

Fig. 17 Turtle texture. Codex Madrid 71.

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