



Fig. 6: Owner of the Deer, K4336

be his messengers, a widespread concept, familiar among the Yucatec Mayas as well as the Mosquitos and Sumus of Central America (cf. Redfield and Villa 1934: 351; Zerries 1959: 146 f.).

The young women would appear to be the Game Mothers and to represent the mythological type of the Owner's Daughter.<sup>26</sup> In Mesoamerica, Owners of the Game are stereotypically said to ride on deer<sup>27</sup>; and both here and in related representations, some of the young women emulate their father in this. In those cases where the mounts are antlered, one is reminded of the Chorti principle that whereas the Owner of the Deer protects the does, his female counterpart protects the stags (Wisdom 1940: 400). Suggestively, in Kekchi Hummingbird myth, the Owner's daughter is said to be conducted to the sky, where Sun preceded her, by a stag (Burkitt, in Thompson 1970: 365). Seen in this light, the stag could be viewed as a bride carrier on his way towards

the groom. More importantly, however, the Game Mother riding a stag embodies the female and marriageable aspect of the game vis-à-vis the hunter.

As to the deer themselves, they appear to reflect the agony of their Owner. Their eyes are blackened or broken, their faces evince a row of black spots indicative of death (compare also CC 138), and their pose, especially the turned-back head, is that of a victim.<sup>28</sup> They would appear to have returned to the cave of their Owner either to die there, or to be cured.

It is not immediately apparent how we should explain the agony of the Owner. There is, however, reason to assume that he may have fallen victim to intruding hunters. The shooting of the Yucatec deer guardian, the cervine Zip, is suggestive in this respect. That killing constitutes an exceptional feat with serious consequences, since the deer holding the funeral wake are without defense and can all be slain (Redfield and Villa 1934: 118). Various features of the vase scenes support this comparison,<sup>29</sup> and we might, therefore, consider the deer guardian a special form of the Owner.

The fate of the deer guardian may also have befallen the Owner directly. In a discussion of Classic Mayan hunting scenes, Boot (1989: 36 f.) called attention to a remarkable story from Nicaragua, communicated to him by the late Wolfgang Haberland. In this story, a hunter wounds a deer and follows its trail high up the slopes of a mountain. There, the deer is seen to enter a house. When he opened the door, the hunter "saw a young woman. Asking where the deer had gone, he just saw the door at the back of the house shut. He went to the door, opened it, and saw a badly wounded man struggling onto a bed. Asking where the deer had gone, the young woman answered: 'You

26 In various cases (Figs. 3, 4, 7), the women evince the mouth pieces of an aquatic serpent, such as are also found with the Moon Goddess and other water-related figures (e.g., the Bacab-Chac-Pauhtun). It may be noted that among various Mesoamerican groups the Owner of the Game is identical with the Lightning Deity (e.g., Mixe: Lipp 1991: 30, 37, Nahua: Taggart 1983: 126). Nahua tales relate encounters between hunters and Lightning's daughters, or "earth mothers" (Taggart 1983: 126-135).

27 To give only a few examples of these deer-riding deities: Kanjobales, the Guardian of the Game (La Farge and Beyers 1931: 132); Tojolabales, the Niwan Winik or Sombbrero, another Owner of the Game (Ruz 1982: 63 f.); Tzotziles, the subterranean chank or Thundergod, collecting rain powder during the dry season (Laughlin 1975: 111); Mazatecs, the Owner of Animals (Benítez 1973: 44 f.).

28 The turned-back head explicitly identifies a victim on DC30 c (speared deer), DC47 (speared puma), DC45 c (dead deer), and Coe 1978: pl. 8 (deer killed by a puma, cf. Braakhuis 1987: 245).

29 On CC 15 (Fig. 3), there is a suggestion of the miasmas believed to surround a dying Zip (Redfield and Villa 1934: 118). The Owner's protruding navel (a feature shared with certain demonic apparitions) may be connected to this. Some of the birds under the deathbed (Figs. 2, 3, 5, 7) could be the *ppaap-zipob* (Redfield and Villa 1934: 351), possibly Brown Jays (Tozzer 1941: 155, fn. 780), whose task it is to warn the deer. The Game Mother embracing a deer may have been called *ix-meklah-u-sip* (*ix-mek-Lahu[n]-sip*?) "She who embraces the Sip [deer guardian]" (or "She who embraces Lahu[n]-Sip"?). The Ritual of the Bacabs (Roys 1965, fos. 107, 109) mentions this woman among the mothers of a personified inflammation which is to be removed by the hunting deity Ah Tabay at the place of Uuc-yol-Sip, apparently a guardian of the deer.