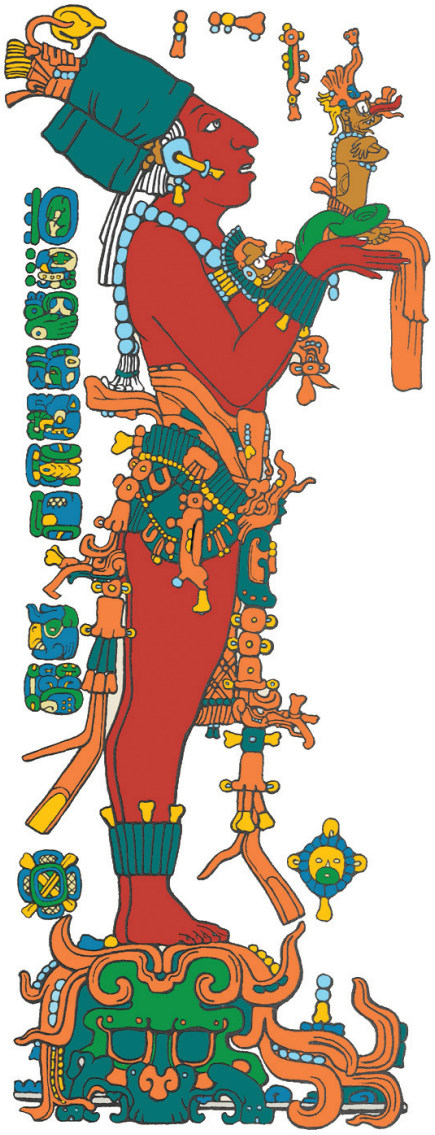
The San Bernardino County Museum Guest Lecture Series

The Murals of San Bartolo

and the mythic origins of ancient Maya gods and kings

Karl A. Taube, Ph.D. • Professor of Anthropology, U.C. Riverside

Wednesday, April 28, 2010 • 7:30pm • Free Admission



Discovered in 2001, the buried mural chamber at San Bartolo, Guatemala, constitutes one of the richest bodies of information concerning ancient Maya creation mythology. Not only of exceptional beauty, the murals are also extremely ancient, and are hundreds of years before such Classic Maya sites as Tikal, Copan and Palenque. Dating to the first century b.c., the San Bartolo murals form an important link between the religious beliefs and practices of the still earlier Olmec and the later Classic Maya. In this presentation, Professor Taube will discuss the discovery and excavation of these murals and their symbolic significance, including such themes as the creation of mankind, the world directions, and the mythic origins of Maya kingship. In addition, the presentation will include some of the most recent findings at San Bartolo, including still finer murals from another structure and the earliest writing and mural painting known for the ancient Maya.

Karl A. Taube, Ph.D. (Yale University), is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside. In addition to extensive archaeological and linguistic fieldwork in Yucatan, he has participated on archaeological projects in Chiapas, Mexico, coastal Ecuador, highland Peru, Copan, Honduras, and in the Motagua Valley of Guatemala. Taube is currently serving as the project iconographer for the San Bartolo Project in the Peten of Guatemala. He has broad interests in the archaeology and ethnology of Mesoamerica and the American Southwest, including the development of agricultural symbolism in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica and the American Southwest, and the relation of Teotihuacan to the Classic Maya. Much of his recent research and publications center upon the writing and religious systems of ancient Mesoamerica.

San Bernardino County Museum

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