

OLMEC SCULPTURE AND STONE WORKING: A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Since 1869 a distinctive sculptural style in jade and other stone media, now known as Olmec, has been vaguely recognized. However, it was not until 1938 that Dr. Matthew W. Stirling, then Chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution, began to excavate and bring to light substantial archaeological evidence of this culture. The history of the development of Olmec studies has been sketched by Drucker, Heizer and Squier (1959) and Jones (1963:1-2). While Olmec can properly be called a culture, it is important to note that it is primarily definable through its distinctive art style. The excavation of the site of La Venta (Drucker 1952; Drucker, Heizer and Squier 1959; Stirling 1940 et seq.) has provided us with excellent information regarding the architectural aspects of Olmec culture, but to date no adequate study has been made of the homely or prosaic pursuits of the people who built and maintained the great ceremonial centers of Tres Zapotes, San Lorenzo, and La Venta. Thus, while we can infer something about the techniques employed in working jade or sculpturing large stone monuments from an inspection of the pieces themselves, we are quite in the dark as to where such work was done or what instruments were employed in stone working.

In connection with the research which we have done in an attempt to discover the sources of the stones used by the Olmecs of the southeastern Mexican lowland, we believe it to be expedient to include here a reference bibliography of Olmec stone sculpture. No suggestion is made that the bibliography is a complete one, but the student interested in the subject can surely find a majority of known Olmec pieces illustrated and/or described in the references which are listed here.

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