

PREFACE

The background of the present study is as follows. After 1955, when Philip Drucker and Robert F. Heizer excavated the site of La Venta on a Smithsonian Institution—National Geographic Society—University of California sponsored expedition, a number of problems remained to be worked on. Drucker (1961) made a study of the area where it was believed the peasant population that had built and maintained the La Venta site had lived, and Heizer, with the expert assistance of Howel Williams, made a series of two or three week trips—usually in January, between semesters—to the Olmec area in search of the geological sources of the stones used for monumental sculpture at the sites of Tres Zapotes, La Venta, and San Lorenzo (Williams and Heizer 1965).

Prominent among the examples of monumental Olmec sculpture studied by Williams and Heizer were the colossal heads. While photographs of most of these had been published, no really detailed study had been made, and toward this possible end we recorded them and took numbers of photographs. When, about four years ago, these data were reassessed, it was obvious that they had been collected in too casual a way, and that a good deal of necessary information on one sculptured head or another was lacking. In the summer of 1963, Miss Tillie Smith, then a first-year graduate student at Berkeley, was commissioned to go to Mexico and complete the recording task. Her investigation was financed by the Archaeological Research Facility, and the data recorded by her are part of the permanent field records of that organization. Many of the photographs which appear in this report were taken at that time. Notwithstanding Miss Smith's energy and care, the information needed for a full report was still incomplete, and when the opportunity presented itself in the Winter Quarter, 1967, for us to take four graduate students on a short research trip to Mesoamerica, we settled upon the project of completion of the recording of the Olmec colossal heads and the preparation of this report as one of our main activities.

Our group, joined in Mexico by Philip Drucker and Howel Williams, became a party of eight, and during the course of the group's travel all twelve known colossal heads were observed and studied.

The students had spent two weeks before the trip in an intensive briefing seminar, learning as much as possible about the heads in order to determine what information was still lacking. The result of this preparation was the compilation of a checklist of missing or uncertain data that proved to be a great help in making efficient use of available time.

After returning from the Mesoamerican tour (which lasted for one month) the descriptive sections of the papers presented here were drafted, illustrations prepared, and the report assembled. This phase of the work took another month. From start to finish, therefore, this study represents the product (although not the sole one) of a ten-week Quarter devoted to research. This program, as outlined above, was experimental, and, in our opinion, turned out successfully.

The study that follows has been wholly a cooperative project of the four students. We have helped where we could with information, loaned books and reprints, critically read first drafts, entered into discussions, encouraged the students to persevere when they began to say that they wished they had never heard of the Olmecs, and arranged for publication, but this does not alter in any way the fact that this report is wholly theirs.

Many persons and organizations have provided assistance in one connection or another with the project, and we wish to express our deep appreciation to the following:

Dean S. S. Elberg, of the Graduate Division, was especially helpful in providing a grant from Opportunity Funds to support the trip to Mexico, as well as some incidental expenses connected with preparing the report. Without his willingness to approve our project proposal, we would not have had the opportunity to participate in a research Quarter. This report, therefore, could not have been written without his support, and we hope that he will find the study worthy of his approval.

The National Geographic Society, through its Committee on Research and Exploration, allowed us to use a portion of the funds granted earlier for archaeological investigations in Guatemala for the Mexican investigation. Our original plan to excavate the site of Templo de Montezuma at Papalhuapa (Depto. Jutiapa) was inadvisable due to continued insurgent activity in the area. We are especially indebted to Dr. Alexander Wetmore, Dr. Melvin M. Payne, Mr. Edwin W. Snider, and Mr. Richard Stewart of the Society. Dr. Matthew Stirling's encouragement has been very helpful to us, and we trust that, as the discoverer of eight of the twelve colossal heads, he approves our present effort.

For funds to cover other costs of this research we are grateful for aid provided by the University of California Associates in Tropical Biogeography, through its Director, Professor Herbert G. Baker.

Dr. Michael Coe, Director of the Yale University expedition, was kind enough to offer us the hospitality of his camp at San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán on the Río Chiquito and to furnish us with useful information when we visited

that locality to observe his excavations and examine the recently discovered colossal head called by us San Lorenzo No. 6.

Dr. Philip Drucker accompanied us on our wanderings and was of great assistance in making local arrangements. We are especially grateful to him for smoothing over a particularly uncomfortable confrontation at a native village (unnamed) in Veracruz.

Dr. Howel Williams continued, as a member of our group, his studies of the petrography of Olmec monuments, and all of the information on that subject in this report has been provided by him.

Dr. Ignacio Bernal, Director of the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, graciously permitted us to study the colossal head (San Lorenzo No. 2) now on exhibit there.

Ing. Roberto Gutierrez Gil, Superintendente General de Exploración, Zona Sur (Coatzacoalcos) of Petroleos Mexicanos, saved the day (a notably rainy one) for us by providing a four-wheel drive vehicle and driver to enable us to visit Punta Roca Partida, where, on Terron Cagado, we saw columnar basalts that turned out, unfortunately, not to be the source of the basalt columns that occur at the La Venta site.

Dr. Richard Randolph, then of Rice University, provided us with excellent photographs of the San Lorenzo 2 head taken when that specimen was on exhibit in Houston.

Drs. Willard F. Libby and C. Rainer Berger, Institute of Geophysics, University of California at Los Angeles, determined the age of two carbon samples from the La Venta and Tres Zapotes sites, and we express to them our appreciation for this service. One by-product of the 1967 project has been the reassessment of the dating of the La Venta site, the results of which have already been published (Heizer, Graham and Berger 1967).

Mrs. Hazel Wald and Miss Donna Chong have prepared the black and white illustrations. To all of these we extend our thanks.

Robert F. Heizer
John A. Graham