

## II. THREE SANDSTONE MONUMENTS FROM LA VENTA ISLAND

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During the month of April, 1942, while conducting excavations at La Venta, we found a group of three large sandstone monuments approximately a quarter of a mile south of the long mound, on a sandy ridge near what was then the Blasillo trail. The two larger sculptures had fallen face down, while the third and smallest of the group was lying on its back, more or less face up. On the latter the carving had become somewhat eroded, although it was almost completely buried when we found it.

We excavated around all three monuments, tunneling under the two larger ones to determine whether the undersides had been carved. This was accomplished, but we did not clear them sufficiently to demonstrate the nature of the sculpture. Since the group may not properly belong to the main complex of La Venta, I have designated these monuments by letters.<sup>1</sup>

Monument "A" is in the form of a bust, resting on a flat bottom. The head and shoulders are depicted, with the arms across the chest. The upper part above the face is dome-shaped and probably represents a large headdress or helmet. This area constitutes about one-third of the length of the stone. I have apparently lost the measurements for Monument "A," but its proportions may be judged by the figure of the boy shown in the photo (pl. 1).

Monument "B" is 9 feet 9 inches long, 6 feet 2 inches wide, and 3 feet 4 inches thick (pl. 2).

Monument "C" is of huge proportions, being 12 feet 4 inches long, 6 feet 8 inches wide, and 4 feet 8 inches thick (pl. 3).

With no mechanical equipment available, the task of turning these sculptures over presented a rather formidable problem. As it happened, however, being occupied with other activities, we never did complete their excavation, and I did not publish them as I felt at the time that we should have more data.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1968 all known La Venta sculptures were numbered. Monument "A" here is Monument 52, Monument "B" is Monument 53, and Monument "C" is Monument 54.

These sculptures present several interesting problems, and perhaps some day they may be properly studied. Being detached some distance from the heart of the La Venta ceremonial center, one wonders whether the monuments were contemporary with the carvings from the main site. The features on Monument "A," while not typical, appear to be Olmec in character; however, as a group they present a picture different from that of the carvings at the main site. Sandstone was used at La Venta, but rather sparingly. Monument 5, the sarcophagus, is the most outstanding example of this rock used in sculpture. Tomb "C," the cist, is also constructed of sandstone slabs, and there were a few minor examples scattered about the site.

There are sandstone outcroppings in the vicinity of La Venta, and it would not have been necessary to transport the stone for considerable distances, as was the case with basalt and other materials. Monument "C" is probably the heaviest stone monument on La Venta island, exceeding even Stela 3 in this respect.

Since the carving on the three monuments differs in style from that on the sculptures in the ceremonial center, it is a matter for speculation whether they are earlier in time. Excavations in the vicinity for sherds or other materials might determine this important point. Since the sculpture is primitive rather than degenerate, I am inclined to believe that it is early. It seems natural that in the beginning artists would have used sandstone, the only readily available material. Later, as they became more skilled, they would have imported basalt, the working of which, and its transport, would have presented an additional challenge.

Although I have had the photos of these monuments for twenty-five years without publishing them, it seems proper that their existence should be brought to the attention of archaeologists.

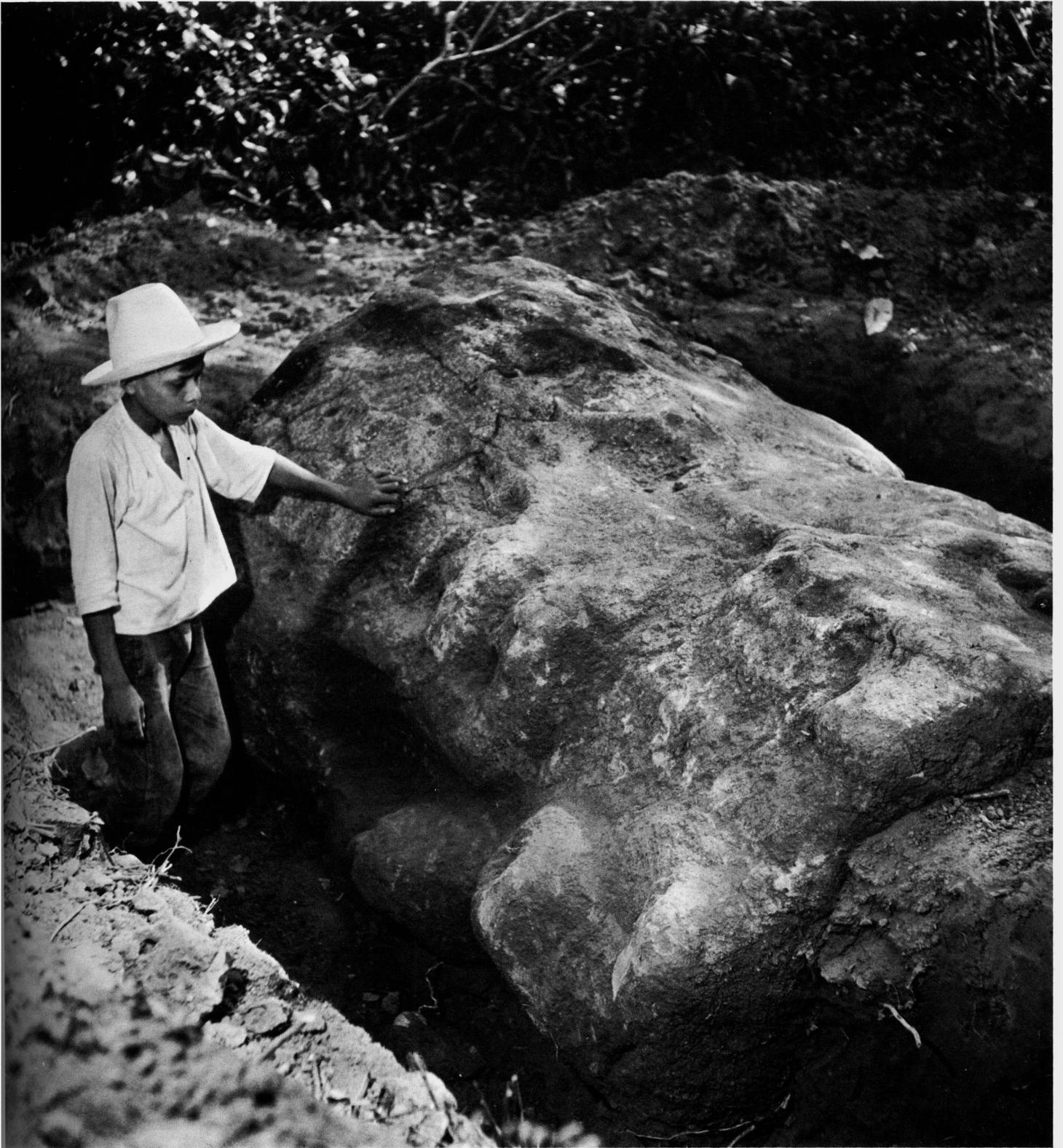


Plate 1. Monument "A"

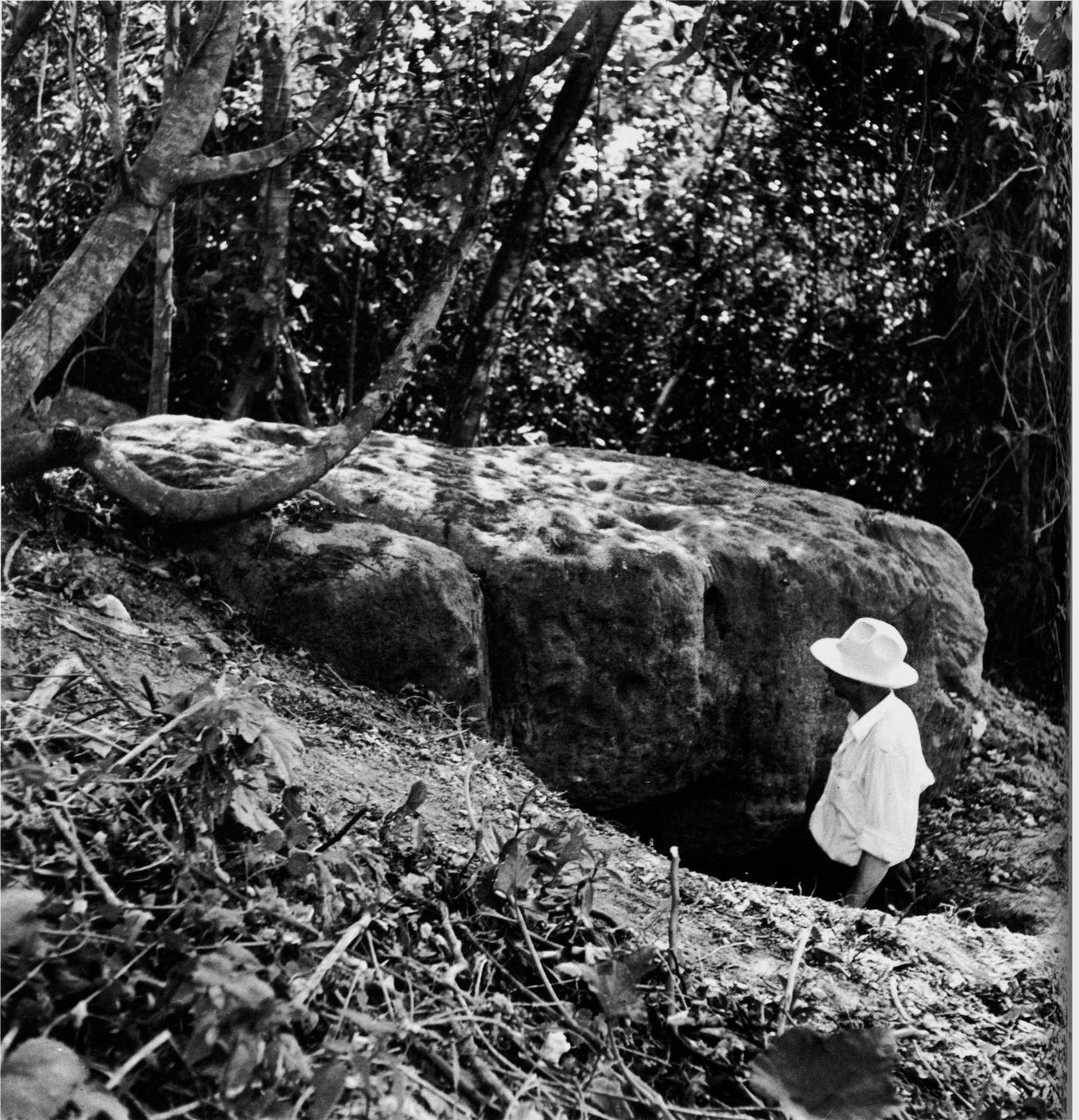


Plate 2. Monument "B"

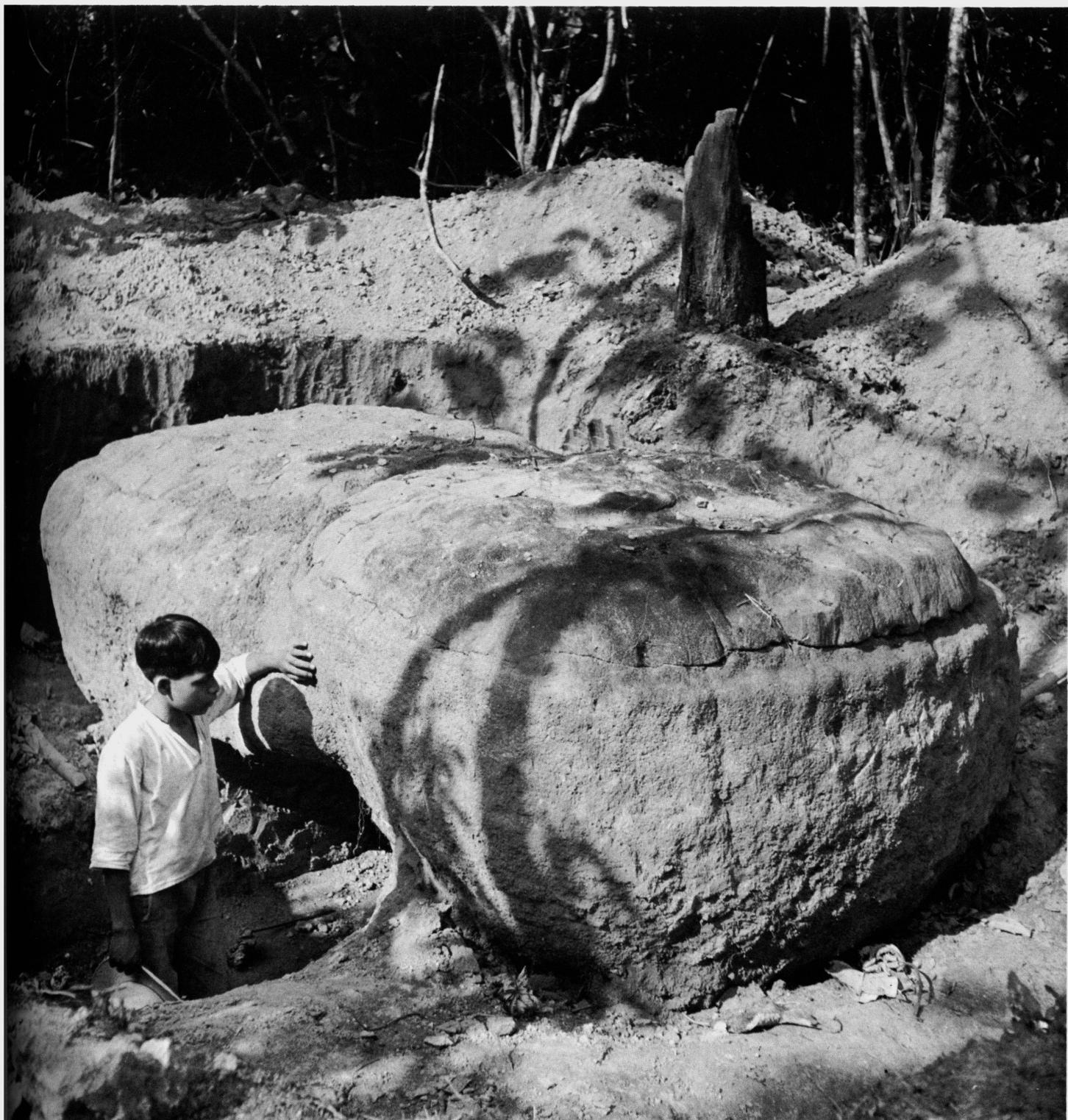


Plate 3. Monument "C"