III. THE OLMEC REGION - OAXACA

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A few remarks seem pertinent before going into the subject itself; they bear on most of what follows and, if placed here, will clarify the background and avoid continuous repetition.

1. It is obvious that there is still much digging to be done and therefore much information to be gathered in Mesoamerica -- as everywhere. But even supposing that everything attainable had already been found and every possible theme of archaeology duly studied, a huge amount of past cultures would remain unknown and lost forever. Educated guesses will always be necessary. Furthermore a culture historian's point of view always changes as he himself changes and as the times change. We all clearly realize the fortunately continuous shifts in our conclusions derived from the continuously different world view of each generation and from new data made available for study. Thus history is always contemporaneous. Therefore what follows--except for factual data--is only what I hope may be considered serious hypothesis although I fear some of it may be wild surmises.

2. The archaeologist of necessity tends to place emphasis on material culture and so has generally based his definition of past civilizations on recovered objects and their direct implications. Social anthropologists and the philosophizing historian of our days see mainly social organization, values and invention. I am convinced that civilizations are a combination of many factors that range from ecology and economy to political or social organization, to art or religion, and to such even less comprehensible things as world view, attitudes, incentives, etc. Another basic factor is the interplay of various cultures with similar backgrounds but which have each evolved along slightly different routes without however losing contact and thus having a "parallel history." Civilization thus always has an international flavour.

3. The previous paragraph is truer yet when we deal with a remote culture, remote not so much in terms of years as differing from us in terms of culture and of development. It can be said that the very primitive periods are more remote from us in both aspects. Quite true. But when dealing with the Mesoamerican Preclassic we try to understand not primitive man but the beginnings of precisely that type of human society we call civilization; we pertain to the same family if in another genus. So there is more to absorb and study, the whole situation is of another complexity and degree of possible confusion as interpreted by us, and a much wider range of possibilities is present in

the Olmec world than would occur among primitive hunters.

4. The best possibility for understanding recovered archaeological fact is to see our data in the ethnographic light or to use historical sources. We have no ethnography of the Olmecs at 1000 B.C. and certainly no historical sources. But we do have a rich ethnography and a plentiful historical record for later times. Is this information applicable to the Olmec period? I think it is if we go about it in a cautious way. For this technique to be valid--and here is the first educated guess--we must accept that the Olmecs are the beginning of that same civilization that ended in the 16th Century, i.e. the Mesoamerican. If we accept this I believe we must also accept that later data are valid for interpreting Olmec archaeology, as long as our interpretation is based on known finds. This is the course I have chosen to follow. The pitfalls are obvious and need not be repeated here; some scholars object to this method but I can see no other if we want to go beyond a listing of material traits and the very scanty hypotheses we might extract out of them.

5. In order to accept Mesoamerica as one civilization and the Olmecs as the earlier manifestation of it, we must prove continuation of at least some basic traits all through Mesoamerican history, that is, even after the Olmecs had stopped being the central focus. Fortunately, even in our ignorance, we can do today what the Olmecs themselves could not have done, that is to know which of their ideas and their inventions survived and also which aspects of their culture came to a dead end. By survival of cultural traits I do not mean of course that they continued being identical but that in spite of changes produced in time and place the essential, basic ideas were still present in later times even if under new meanings and with great alterations of shape.

6. One of the great problems about Mesoamerica is that although it is a civilization, it is (a) a "first generation," independent one, thus harder to understand since its antecedents are on another level of development and, so far, relationships and hence comparisons with other civilizations have not been established; (b) it is one of the least developed civilizations we know of. It does stand above the "cultures" but below comparable counterparts such as Egypt or early China.

7. Our interest in civilization at this meeting is limited to the problem of how it emerges from the primitive matrix. Therefore only the pristine or first generation civilizations are now our concern. This excludes all the still living ones and I would stop even beyond this point, actually before the rise of Greece and the beginnings of the Classic World. From then on a large new set of factors intervenes and the situations, the <u>modus operandi</u> of societies, is on another scale. On the other hand civilizations, like all processes, cannot be separated from their antecedents and rigid limits cannot be established. As in any classification it is easy to distinguish be-

tween the extremes of the series but almost impossible to divide the line objectively in the center. So the difference between a pristine civilization and its predecessors is mainly a question of size and degree. It is more and larger but not all traits are new.

8. For the readers of this paper it is superfluous to describe and catalogue Olmec objects. They are much too well known and most of you are familiar with them. So I will not even attempt an inventory in the strict sense of the word but will stress those aspects basic to our symposium that show the Olmec world as a budding civilization and divide it from the lower cultures that precede it in time. Also I try to show the implications of those traits. In the case of Oaxaca the situation is slightly different since publication is more incomplete. A fuller coverage of the known data is useful only for specific points, however, and I will therefore concentrate only on these.

The Heartland Olmecs

It was in 1949 in New York during the XXXIX Congress of Americanists that we--at least I--heard for the first time, in Libby's paper, about his sensational new way of dating. Carbon 14, said a friend, is going to save us a lot of work and will do our stratigraphy for us. I never believed in such a thing because no matter how exciting a new technique may be or how immensely useful it may become, the archaeologist will never, thank God, be spared the chore and the pleasure of careful digging and of working and reworking over his data. His ability, his knowledge, and his wits are the main thing although this does not exclude some inventions from being a godsend.

The Carbon 14 readings for La Venta have become quite a problem. Still, after considerable deliberation, I have followed Berger, Graham and Heizer, 1967, with the more recent additions of 1968. I have introduced now very little change, actually suggested by Heizer himself, to what appears in Bernal, 1969. The rest is simply a re-use of all dates available except for the obviously impossible or unacceptable ones. The reasons for rejecting them have been expressed by the authors previously mentioned. These limitations leave us with twenty-two dates from various parts of La Venta Island. The oldest (M535) is 1255 B.C. and the most recent is 500 B.C. (UCLA 1283). In the Table I have placed all the dates in chronological order whether they come from Complex A or from the Stirling Group at La Venta.

They all seem to fall into three clusters:

(1) Those that correspond to phase I at La Venta: ten dates ranging between 1255 and 900 B.C.

(2) The dates of Phase II: seven dates between 865 and 655 B.C.

(3) The dates of Phase IV: five dates between 580 and 500 B.C.

I never can believe that we have found the oldest or the most recent moment at any site even within a phase. Thus the oldest date should, I believe, be moved backwards to the next round number, and the most recent date moved forwards to the next round number. Not of course that periods end with our centuries or half centuries but they are easier to remember and a few years more or less cannot be ascertained. Thus we can propose the following limits for each phase:

Phase IV . . . 600 to 450 B.C.

Phase III . .

Phase II . . . 900 to 600 B.C.

Phase I . . . 1300 to 900 B.C.

This does not correspond closely to the division of phases and their durations as given by the excavators. Period III seems to disappear. Late dates for Phase II (M 536, UCLA 1284 A and B, and UCLA 788B, all within the 7th Century B.C.) could correspond to phase III but this is not possible since most of these dates are precisely those that define phase II. Whatever the truth, what I called Olmec II in La Venta now should move from 1200-650 B.C. (Bernal 1969:107) to 1300-450 B.C.

The San Lorenzo dates (Coe, 1968:61) equate pretty well with the oldest cluster of dates at La Venta; thus the contemporaneity of the San Lorenzo phase with phase I at La Venta is clear, as it should be, since all other archaeological data agree. In effect ceramics and other minor traits are very similar in the two main Olmec sites excavated; they are also in the same general style and sometimes identical to objects found in other badly known Olmec sites and in many Olmecoid areas like the Valley of Mexico, Puebla and Morelos, Oaxaca and Chiapas, and Guatemala.

There is of course the problem of stone monuments. Most are obviously contemporaneous. By now, I believe, scholars in the field agree that the Colossal Heads at La Venta, San Lorenzo and Tres Zapotes must all have been carved within a relatively short period of time, probably less than a hundred years. This does not mean that all work necessarily came from one atelier; each site separately sculptured its own pieces. The contemporaneity of them all poses a considerable stratigraphic problem. The ones at San Lorenzo pertain to the San Lorenzo phase (1200-900 B.C.) whereas many at La Venta were found in strata corresponding to late phases dated between 850 and 500 B.C. Coe (1968:62) has suggested that they had been removed from their original positions by the makers of phases III and IV at La Venta and thus appear within these phases when actually they had been carved much earlier, during phase I. Here may lie the explanation of the difficulty. Similar moving of sculpture could also explain why so many of the monuments published by Medellin (1960) were found associated with ceramics of much later periods--

sometimes Late Classic. In these instances I have no doubt that the monuments do correspond to the Olmec period but in the La Venta-San Lorenzo problem it is to be hoped that further research in the field will bring a clearer answer.

There is another reason for worry. If the La Venta and San Lorenzo monuments are mainly from phases before 900 B.C., considerable changes in our views on the history of the Olmec world and on the possible causes of its downfall would ensue. In effect it might mean that the ascending road was very quickly traversed, a breakdown occurred towards 900 B.C., and then at the summit followed a long platform, with new heights at the end before the downward slope. It is most important in the future to determine precisely the phase during which those great sculptures were carved.

Anyway, whatever the truth, monuments were also being carved in the later phases and many of those found in other Olmec sites and even in neighboring Olmecoid places, but in typical Olmec style, correspond to the Olmec III period.

Besides the thirteen Colossal Heads (four from La Venta, two from Tres Zapotes, and seven from San Lorenzo), the monolithic rectangular blocks with a figure emerging from a niche that we call altars (two at San Lorenzo and seven at La Venta) are also contemporaneous and form part of the same culture. The atlantean altar at Laguna de los Cerros may be later. Much of the statuary depicting humans in a seated or crouched position and animals or combinations of animals and men, are also very similar in the sites of the Olmec heartland and also show that they are mainly contemporaneous between themselves and must pertain to the same phases as the Colossal Heads and altars.

I have dealt at some length with this point of dating and time relationships between Olmec sculpture because I believe it is essential to show from the start that we are concerned not with separate entities or sites, as the archaeologist calls them, but with a culture common to a certain area. We can study the Olmecs as a people within a geographical frame and not as isolated places. This is basic to understand what little we can of them and to think about them in historical terms. In other words I will refer in this paper mainly to the Olmec heartland in general, and not to specific sites, since I think that these cannot be understood when extracted from their context. It is the interplay of Olmec cities among themselves, their rural surroundings, the general ecology of the area, and even the relationships with neighboring peoples or more distant areas, that can help to explain the rise of this first civilized epoch, its history, the constitution of the larger cultural area we call Mesoamerica and suggest the future of this civilization.

The Olmec heartland has already been geographically defined (Bernal 1969:15-23). In it lie some sites that are large for the period, and many smaller ones. This heartland is the subject of our present enquiry concerning the efflorescence of civilization in Mesoamerica. In the same book I proposed tentative conclusions as to its demography, by suggesting 350,000 inhabitants in its 7000 square miles or some 50 inhabitants per square mile.

A very small number of people, it has been suggested, lived at La Venta and at San Lorenzo, to speak only of the two best known Olmec sites. Even if this were so the total number in the Olmec area is quite large and suggests not only an evolved situation and a secure economy, but also the need for expansion into less populated or less advanced areas.

In the best known sites digging has only uncovered ceremonial buildings or groups of them; the smaller sites, more rustic in all probability, still lie unexplored. Thus it seems very difficult to discuss with any certainty the problems concerning settlement patterns in the Olmec heartland. If we are, to a certain extent, at the beginning of the road that was to lead to Maya culture and to developments in Highland Mexico, then Olmec sites should contain the seeds of what was to become ceremonial centers in one area, and real cities in the other. I have already expressed my opinion as to the existence and meaning of ceremonial centers and cities (Bernal 1969:49-54). In resumé this states that notwithstanding contrary opinions, I fail to see how a civilization can exist without an urban core; an urban core is found only in cities; therefore if Mesoamerica is a civilization it must have cities. This bit of deduction seems very pleasing but let us not forget the joke that ethnography destroys logic.

Of course urbanism, like verything else, comes in varying degrees, and cities will take different forms. Perhaps the dispersed city is the criterion that best fits the Maya pattern and even the Olmec, whilst the compact city is the Teotihuacan type. This looks like a semantic game if ceremonial centers equal dispersed cities. But there are some basic differences. A city means specialized groups, habitation of the distinct social classes in separate sections, elaborate religion and ceremonial life, a state, concentration of population, monumental art, and other requisites of civilization. The ceremonial center is of course sometimes found in non-civilized groups.

The prevalent type of agriculture was slash and burn with the possibility of obtaining two crops a year. Riverine areas and annually flooded ones were used to considerable profit. Olmec economy was supplemented by hunting, fishing and gathering.

Still the production of foodstuffs would become insufficient for a growing population and thus trade was bound to develop more and more. We can observe both internal and external commerce even without considering the perishable goods that were irrecoverably lost. The great stone monuments

were carved from boulders carried over considerable distances, although within the Olmec heartland. This shows relations and communications of an interior nature. Other materials, such as jade and iron ores, came from the outside. Thus "international" commerce is also involved. Natural roads--the rivers--lent themselves admirably to such trade since they mainly run into the Olmec area, thus constituting a centripetal force in the Olmec world. Conversely, some small sculptures of undoubtedly Olmec origin have been found in remote places showing the enormous extension of Olmec influence. There is thus little question as to the existence of relations with other areas. Trade might have been the basic means, although the Olmecs may have obtained many products through another source; that of tribute. But tribute--and I believe trade--are so intimately linked with the socio-political system that I will briefly discuss them all together.

We know nothing of Olmec organization except from inferences or by later modes of life. An urban situation has been mentioned above with some kind of cities. Were people organized, like the Aztecs, in a sort of split society divided into a ruling elite quite free from tribal rights and obligations, and the people living within the framework of the calpulli? It would not be surprising if the whole social system that prevailed in later Mesoamerica originated with the Olmecs, and that precisely in the rise of such an elite lies the main reason for the rise to civilized levels.

On the political side, are we already dealing with a state in the fashion of later times? Certain things tend to show the existence of one state, with perhaps La Venta as a capital, at least from 900 B.C. onwards, others suggest a group of city states, an amphictyony. If later situations are of Olmec origin, then both possibilities should be valid. Trade in Mesoamerica is linked to war and thereby to tribute. In other words armies are to be supposed, and a power to command them. Faint traces of this can be detected in some of the stone monuments, particularly in the stelae at La Venta and Tres Zapotes. It is quite possible that stelae came later than monuments in the round. They would thus reflect phases III and IV of La Venta or the second part of Period II. During these times war and armies are more to be expected. Of course I am not suggesting an organization as complex and complete as the one we know for the Aztec empire, but the seed of such an organization, on a simpler level, might already have existed with the Olmecs, containing an incipient state, war, tribute, and a ruling elite above the common tribal man. This elite and these rulers of Olmec society, were they priests, as seems most probable? Perhaps the answer lies in the interpretation of the colossal heads, and again in our general view of Mesoamerican civilization, where religion and therefore priesthood recalls the many headed monster with the multiple arms of an octopus encompassing everything.

At the moment, our knowledge of religious organization is hazy. I think, however, that we can already speak of religion, as different from

tribal magic, as a more advanced step in the history of belief. The typical pattern of Mesoamerican polytheism with a large number of anthropomorphic deities frequently combined with animal forms is not yet present amongst the Olmecs. Gods must be recognizable, with fixed attributes represented in such a manner that the devout will know which deity he is beholding. I have stated (Bernal 1969) that the Olmecs had not reached this point and had no specific gods. I now believe however that one deity had probably already arisen, the were-jaguar. He was to survive through many transformations until the 16th century. Other gods were not born yet or at least remain undetected by us.

In any case the Olmec jaguar combined with human features, or a human being associated with jaguar features, inaugurates the long story of such Mesoamerican combinations. Quetzalcoatl in time will become the most famous. So on this point as on so many others the Olmecs are the initiators of this manner of thinking, and more specifically of the future rain god who seems to have evolved from the original were-jaguar. Was he a nahual of the Olmecs, still in a rather tribal fashion? Or has the man-animal ascended to the rank of a god? Perhaps in the Olmec world--that is including the Olmecoids--he was a vehicle of Olmec diffusion and the source for other deities invented by the Olmecoids, mainly the pre-Zapotecs of the central Oaxaca valleys.

Other religious or rather other ceremonial aspects are already clearly present: the building of cities along central lines with an approximate north-south axis, possibly the association of cardinal points with colors, special rites to celebrate the end of each century, sacrifices--perhaps human, an emphasis on death, and necrophilic practices with the divinization of certain dead.

Clearly related to religious practices but mainly a great intellectual achievement is of course the calendar and all the astronomical and mathematical knowledge it implies. A written calendar obviously requires the knowledge of writing, an advance that occurs late in Olmec II times. The Long Count only appears towards the very end of Olmec III times, when the great centers were dead. It means, apart from other knowledge, the discovery of the concept of zero and therefore the possibility of numbering by position. We can be certain that this extraordinary intellectual feat occurred in the Olmec world but there is no certainty that it occurred in the Olmec heartland. Stela C at Tres Zapotes is the most remarkable but not the only monument depicting Long Count Preclassic calendrical inscriptions. As interpreted, and it seems we are correct, it marks the second oldest date recorded in the Americas. The threeother stelae of Baktun 7 pertain to the Olmecoids. But more of this later.

Another remarkable Olmec achievement are the stone mirrors of La Venta. As Gullberg (1959) has said, "They stand out as the most unique pieces of precision stoneworking."

In the beginnings of pristine civilizations, some aspects of culture are notably advanced while others lag behind. Thus architecture, which was to become Mesoamerica's main esthetic feat, can hardly be said to have existed amongst the Olmecs. Constructions were made of earth or of colored clays and the basic element--stone--was hardly used. There is of course an ecological reason for this. We therefore find stone used only in drains, palisades, minor veneers, and the La Venta tomb. The use of natural basalt columns is an immensely costly technique probably inspired by buildings made of wooden logs. It had no future. Nevertheless planned centers, massiveness and extravagant use of labor, and a clear sense of space and proportion are already present--all traits characteristic of Mesoamerican architecture. With richer materials and new ideas, future peoples would continue the trends initiated by the Olmecs in this field. Whether to escape from floods or for religious reasons, the idea was now conceived of building temples and houses on a higher level, above solid mounds. On a relatively modest scale we find also low platforms surrounding courtyards in a symmetrical pattern.

Their bid for greatness, sculpture, is outstanding. The Olmecs had a real sense for sculpture in the round, as rarely found amongst the Maya, the Zapotecs, or the Teotihuacanos and which will only reappear in similar greatness with the rise of the Aztec empire two thousand years later. Theirs is definitely an art of sculptors and not of painters on stone, as often happens in Classic Maya times. Some of the most naturalistic pieces of Mesoamerican sculpture, such as the wrestler of Santa Maria Uxpanapa, go hand in hand with the entirely conceptual were-jaguars. Size was a concern of theirs as we see not only in the Colossal Heads and altars; even small objects are given a concept of monumentality. Olmec statuary is uncluttered and only becomes confusing in the great stelae of La Venta or of Tres Zapotes, or in the stone boxes, where a mass of figures and decorative elements suggests the beginning of that horror vacui so typical of many pieces of Maya art. Perhaps this is another reason for considering these Olmec objects as rather late.

Work in jade again shows not only profound artistic sensitivity and refinement but considerable technical skill. Besides figures and other sundry objects, the axes and celts are outstanding. Olmec ceramics are generally uninteresting and the great pieces produced by the potters of those times are mainly to be found among the Olmecoids.

Mural painting is absent. The lonely exception of two Guerrero caves of unknown age but certainly in Olmecoid style has no reflexion on the heartland. I would place those paintings in the late formative when mural decoration is also present at Monte Albán and early Teotihuacan as well as in other sites and some inheritance from Olmec art is still to be observed.

Can we seriate these great or small aesthetic achievements and thus gain some idea about development of art in the Olmec area? In general we

cannot and whatever seriation could be done--as for the Colossal Heads, the altars or the axes--falls within a short span of time and gives little idea of the whole process between 1200 and 500 B.C. I can see no clear trend yet in what we know of ceramic periods.

There may be an important truth in Coe's suggestion that there are two periods of florescence, an older one corresponding to large monuments in the round and a later one corresponding mainly to stelae and sculpture in low relief. This would link the coastal Guatemala sculptures with the first period and Izapa, and then the Maya world with the second. This second efflorescence may also have been influenced by the Olmecoids of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Guatemala, reaching as far as Salvador.

Preclassic art has in Mesoamerica a freedom, a sense of individuality, a lack of the socio-esthetic rules that enhance and fetter Classic production. Each Preclassic work is unique, in contrast to the production in "series" of later times. Thus the appearance of "official" art, of ordained works, may be linked to a higher general level of political organization. This seems another reason for considering the Olmecs as already within civilization since only in the Olmec heartland and the Olmecoid regions do we find objects that suggest the mass production of an atelier and compliance with commands of a hierarchy. In this sense the Colossal Heads and the altars seem made by Classic period artists.

Nobody any more believes in civilizations starting by a "miracle" or in the sudden appearance of a civilized situation in full bloom materializing from a near vacuum. Digging shows more clearly every day that the Olmec efflorescence we call Olmec II is based on local antecedents. Both at La Venta and San Lorenzo earlier constructions have been found and materials from these were used to construct later buildings. Pottery figurines and other ceramic forms of the Olmec II period stem directly from earlier types and wares. Even the stone monuments have local ancestors, small and coarse as they may be. The stone objects found under La Venta floors and some very simple carvings that Coe suggests may pertain to the pre-San Lorenzo phase at that site, may indicate this. They are all of Olmec type, thus providing at least an inkling of local antecedents of the tradition that was to bloom in Olmec II times.

If we date Olmec I as prior to 1300 or 1200 B.C., then Olmec influence outside the Olmec heartland during this epoch is small or nonexistent. It only begins later, according to sequences in other areas like the valley of Oaxaca; therefore it seems to correspond to the first phases of period Olmec II which again corresponds to the first stirrings of civilization.

So the "miracle" can be bracketed within reasonable limits. But the vital core of the question--why did those simple antecedents lead in the Olmec heartland to such great developments?--is still in the realm of

hypothesis. Was it an effectively organized social pattern based on a proselytizing outthrusting religion that produced the Olmec state and thence civilization?

The Oaxaca Formative

I have already mentioned the interaction of cultures that I consider essential for reaching civilized levels. Cross fertilization between different peoples and languages seems to be mainly productive when it occurs amongst groups having similar origins in the sense that the basic traits of their cultures are alike. This of course is the case between the Olmecs and the Olmecoids. Their mutual advances were to submerge the primitive world and start Mesoamerica.

During Olmec times a number of Mesoamerican areas were linked more or less directly with the heartland. Only those regions sufficiently sophisticated on their own could understand and use the advances of the Olmecs, collaborate with them by an exchange of cultural traits, and on occasion even improve upon the successes of the heartland. Of these Olmecoid areas, the only one I am asked to discuss is Oaxaca.

Period Olmec II, as I have already suggested, might be divided at least into two main parts: 1300 to 900, and 900 to 500 B.C. With similar dating this is true for the valley of Oaxaca. A first period containing the San José and Guadalupe phases would go from 1300 to 700 and a second period, Monte Albán, from 800 to 400 B.C. There is a short but noticeable overlapping between the two.

Unless we go into minor details, stray finds and unrelated ceramic wares or objects impossible to interpret--and that is not the spirit of this meeting--we can deal usefully at this point only with one region of Oaxaca: the central valleys. The Mixtecas will be mentioned occasionally when they might help to clarify the picture.

The Central Oaxaca Valley is formed by the union of three large valleys that meet at the point where the city of Oaxaca is today. It has an average altitude of 1550 meters above sea level and is entirely surrounded by rather high mountains. These form an enclosed area that has a common history from at least Formative times until the present. It has been proven that no lake ever existed in the lower parts; the Atoyac River is the main drainage system. Flat valley floors with thick alluvial deposits offer obvious advantages to an early type of agriculture, except for the considerable aridity of the land. This was partially remedied, at least since mid-Formative times, by small scale irrigation along canals and by shallow well irrigation that can be traced back, in Mitla, to sometime during the Guadalupe phase. The system is still prevalent in some areas. Early villages were concentrated in the high alluvium lands and the tips of piedmont spurs.

Ceramically the San José phase is clearly related to the Olmec heartland and to some Olmecoid areas and contains designs and figurines of types C and D with obvious Olmec or Olmecoid influence. Its eponym site, San José Mogote, was a village that already at that time covered an area of some 20 hectares. Flannery (1968) from whom all my data are taken, considers that three areas of distinct manner of habitation can already be noticed at San José Mogote. In the first two, the objects found suggest the living quarters of potters in one case, and cutters of ordinary stone in the other. Wattle and daub rectangular houses with partial stone foundations and walls plastered and white-washed, contained hearths and bell-shaped sub-floor cooking pits.

The third area is littered with fancy pottery and a high proportion of valuable iron ores and imported shells. In one house a recessed circular area plastered and painted red contained a number of figurines and fragments of magnetite mirrors. We can surmise some social and barrio differentiation in which this third group controlled the sources of the magnetite, ilmenite and hematite exported to the Olmec heartland; it may constitute proof of early long distance trade. It all suggests difference in status amongst this early society and formal contacts with other groups both on the Pacific and the Gulf coasts.

In this "barrio" of the site a rectangular stepped platform of low height and north-south orientation is faced with stone. No matter how miserable looking it may be, it is, to our knowledge, the oldest stone monument in the area and ancestor to the great architecture that evolved later. Another structure at Barrio del Rosario, of the same phase, is built in much the same way and has similar orientation.

The second phase, Guadalupe, has pottery also related to the Guatemala-Chiapas sites, to Tehuacan and to La Venta, and figurines mainly in the A tradition. Interestingly enough they are both male and female. Houses are similar to the ones of the previous phase. Platforms, mainly made with the curious bun shaped adobe of the period, were covered with white plaster, again what seems like a "first" use of this all pervading material in later Mesoamerican sites.

Two types of settlement patterns begin to occur. In the low areas habitation villages would grow continuously. San José exceeds 45 hectares in extension. Ceremonial centers begin their life on the hill tops. Many of them were to expand to huge proportions in later periods. The best known and most important is Monte Albán almost on the confluence of three valleys. Already by the beginning of the phase some of the larger early formative sites in Mesoamerica rose above the valleys.

The bun shaped adobes were being substituted by the rectangular ones still in use today and stone was becoming the main building material, at

least for the large monuments.

From what has been said it is obvious that the basic economic problems had been adequately solved by then in the Valley of Oaxaca, and solved along different lines than those also successfully followed in the Olmec heartland. Thus one culture is not the result of another but both stem from much earlier initial steps that were intelligently continued along diverging lines. This is due mainly to the different local situations.

One clear result of these two successful groups, due perhaps to land division among village farmers, was the tendency to concentrate in larger and larger villages instead of scattering the houses in wider areas and in smaller communities. Thus the large nucleated village took form both amongst the Olmec and among people in the Valley of Oaxaca and became the origin of future cities that, in this latter area, were to become so extended in later times. Concentration of the population in fewer but larger towns led to hereditary social differentiation, specialization, and a greater possibility of developing the major arts and sciences. This situation maintained an hereditary elite in both areas that probably held not only political power but in whose hands were kept the secrets of knowledge and religion. This of course is clear in later times but it was already an appreciable trend from the middle Formative onwards, if not earlier. Status and rank are the outward manifestations of the situation frequently sustained by sumptuary laws. Flannery presents a good hypothesis suggesting that all luxury trade was connected with the necessities of status linking high ranking lineages of both areas, and thus the Oaxaca nobility would tend to imitate a number of upper class traits from their more evolved Olmec relatives "whilst patterns of settlement and subsistence remained unchanged."

The Olmecs reached their peak earlier than their Oaxaca counterparts but in the long run these, either through being more solidly constituted or through having more permanent possibilities of developing, reached a more complete urban life. The end result was that whilst the Olmec heartland disappeared as a main focus of culture long before the beginning of the Christian era, the Oaxaca Valley continued--with the Zapotecs--a brilliant career, and in the sixteenth century A.D. was one of the leading nations of Mesoamerica.

In all we have for the two regions not only a set of fundamental relationships but also a set of fundamental differences that seem to explain the little we know about what occurred at that time, and our slightly lesser ignorance as to what occurred later. The earlier success of the Olmecs is perhaps best shown by their earlier greater art, their clearer caste differentiation and in the fact that, particularly in the San José phase, it is Olmec iconography and symbolism that prevails in the then far more modest production of the Oaxaca Valley. This is also reflected in the failure of the valley people--they were not yet ready for it--to imitate major sculpture

in the round such as the Olmecs had already achieved or to try their hand at their own style. Even if artistically they never succeeded in reaching the sculptural levels of the Olmecs, they did, as we shall see, reach far greater success precisely in the iconographic areas, when a complete writing system was inscribed on the stelae of Monte Albán I.

All these differences and all these connections are what I have meant by the perhaps ill chosen term of "Olmecoid." I don't mean subjugated or culturally inferior peoples even if they were so in the beginning--these to me are the Colonial Olmecs--but human groups already possessing a degree of advancement precisely due to which they were capable of absorbing with success the Olmec culture although without becoming imitators or following the chariot of the victor. Thus they not only received a stimulus from the more evolved Olmecs, but they sent luxury products into the heartland. We only know about the imperishable materials but many more--not necessarily luxuries--may have been involved. This established, through peaceful or warlike means--and I rather believe in the unfortunate second possibility--a permanent flow of products, men, and ideas that cross fertilized and sustained both the Olmecs and the Olmecoids. I shall later refer briefly to another Olmecoid group, of the Guatemalan-Chiapas coast. Certainly one of the main vehicles of Olmec cultural expansion--if not of its imperialism--was the jaguar cult. The jaguar was not only established in Oaxaca as a permanent deity of first importance but there exists the possibility that Monte Albán may even have been called the Hill of the Jaguar, as we might discover if we knew its Zapotec name.

Whatever the reasons and processes were, at least from 1000 onwards to 800 B.C. a great symbiotic area had undoubtedly been formed in which through different channels and in different degrees most people of nuclear Mesoamerica were already sharing. This is how I understand the constitution of the super-area, and the role of the Olmecs and the Olmecoids in its creation.

Thus when we reach the epoch marking the dawn of Monte Albán I, a syncretism has already occurred in the valley merging Olmec traits with local ones and hastening the advancement towards greater levels.

In the attached chronological chart are given the few formative dates we know for Oaxaca. I have backdated Flannery's estimate for the San José and Guadalupe phases for two reasons: (1) the two dates for Guadalupe are 900 and 975 B.C.; corrected to the 5570 half life they would be approximately 930 and 1000 B.C. Thus it seems better to place this phase between 1050 and 750 instead of 900-600 B.C. Therefore we must push back proportionately the San José phase. (2) The Monte Albán IA phase clearly corresponds to Monte Negro in the Mixteca which has been dated as <u>ending</u> towards 670 B.C. So it appears more probable that Monte Albán I, and therefore the contemporaneous Monte Negro, started towards 800. The end of Guadalupe is certainly contemporaneous with the beginnings of Monte Albán I.

The end of Monte Albán I in phase C can be dated by a Yagul reading of 400 B.C. and so the whole period would stretch from 800 to 400 B.C. It cannot be later since two dates of the Monte Albán II period indicate 380 (C-425) and 350 (O-1300) B.C. Thus Monte Albán II should start around 400 B.C. Its end is difficult to establish at present but 100 B.C. seems appropriate. This new dating throws some light on certain obscure relationships and allows for a better understanding of the later Teotihuacán influence over the Oaxaca Valley. According to all the above this Monte Albán I corresponds in time to the later phase of period Olmec II whilst Monte Albán II is coeval with Olmec III.

Except for some ceramic wares that are distinctive, in other aspects of the culture it is so far impossible to distinguish the three postulated phases of period Monte Albán I. We can be certain that Monte Albán IA is a continuation of the Guadalupe phase.

A still incomplete survey of the Oaxaca Valley indicates that there were no less than 50 sites in existence during Monte Albán times. A number of others developed in the Mixtecas and the coastal region, including the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. We know of a few, with great Olmec influence, in the mountainous area south of Tuxtepec. And so this culture--at least ceramically speaking--is not limited to the valley but it is only here that we know a little more about it.

The sites known are very different in size and appearance. Some are obviously residential--mainly in the valley bottom or in the lower piedmont--whilst others on hill tops seem of a more ceremonial nature. No fortified places correspond to this period. To attempt an estimate of population is hopeless at the moment.

Most of our information must come from the only site that has been more amply dug, Monte Albán itself, which shows a long span of time for period I. At the climax of the period its influence extended over a large area that included most of the modern state of Oaxaca and parts of southern Puebla and western Guerrero. But this influence seems exerted more by the whole valley, not only by a single site. Indeed so extensive a culture was apparently the only one at the time. I have therefore suggested that the period should be termed Oaxaca I instead of Monte Albán I, but names are not important if we understand their meaning and it is easier to move heaven than to change a label.

There is no certainty about the first buildings erected in Monte Albán. These may have followed the Guadalupe pattern of using adobe and uncut stone. However, the known constructions of period I--unfortunately very few and possibly corresponding to phases B or C--are made of faced stone. From that time onwards this would be the basic material with stucco abundantly covering walls and floors. It is clear that a real architecture had been born, far

more advanced than that of any Olmec building. The great central plaza of Monte Albán was at least already envisaged since both the substructure of the Danzantes and the North Platform limit the main plaza with the same orientation and following the same layout that the plaza would later have when completely paved in period II.

The old Temple of the Danzantes (a later one was erected over it) is a pyramidal platform with vertical retaining walls dressed with large stone slabs of more or less rectangular shape. They were placed in alternating rows and held together with clay. Another platform was attached to the front and to the central one and was reached by way of a staircase formed with large stone blocks lying in horizontal position. The stairway, without balustrades, protrudes from the main body of the platform. Another stairway of the same type leads from the lower platform to the upper part of the main structure. It all rests on deep, strong foundations. Nothing remains of the temple that stood on top, though we know the floor was stuccoed. The roof may have been of straw. Masonry columns dividing entrances were frequent in this period, expecially in Monte Negro, a contemporaneous site in the Mixteca.

These architectural features were to be characteristic of all formative Oaxaca buildings even into the end of period II, when Teotihuacan architecture would introduce considerable change.

The most remarkable feature of the Danzantes temple consists in the figures engraved on the large rectangular slabs mentioned. On each stone there is only one figure, always male, in rather violent posture. Most are naked though the male sex is only once indicated realistically. On the others it was replaced by what might be tattooing or body paint, although in at least one case the design is separate from the figure. It has been suggested that these decorations may represent blood as a result of mutilation. All the figures wear ornaments and occasionally hats. A few slightly different elongated <u>danzantes</u> have been found in reused contexts. They seem to be later, probably from the very end of period I.

Recently another set of some 40 low reliefs has been uncovered at Dainzú, a site also in the valley of Oaxaca, near Tlacolula. Here, in similar fashion, the figures are inscribed on separate slabs, are all male, refer to one idea, and are placed in the lower vertical wall of a monument with characteristics rather similar to those of the temple of the Danzantes. But in Dainzú the figures represent ball players in the varied and violent positions required by the game. Each one carries a ball in his right hand, and most have a sort of mask to protect the face. Arm bands and leg shields would also protect those parts of the body from dangerous strikes from what appears to be a stone ball. It is certainly not the same game that we know was played in the courts of later times, but an ancestor to this favored Mesoamerican sport.

There is little doubt that the Monte Albán danzantes and the later Dainzú ball players are related to, if different from, the Olmec art. We may consider them parallel products of separate but intercommunicated histories.

Perhaps the most important feature of the danzantes is the fact that numerous hieroglyphs are engraved on the slabs, and these also appear with the Dainzú figures. Some of the glyphs are associated with numerals thus indicating a calendar in the Mesoamerican fashion. They represent the days Jaguar, Turquoise, Ehecatl, Water, Monkey, Xipe. Other probable day signs but without numerals also appear: glyphs I, J, S, arrow and death. Some are to be found in the stelae of this period, like numbers 12 and 13 at Monte Albán, where rows of glyphs are placed vertically giving the oldest "texts" so far found in Mesoamerica, even if we cannot read them. Many other glyphs, unrelated to numerals, also occur. Some apparently stand for place names and others might be verbs, thus indicating action.

The system of the Long Count, however, does not appear to have been born in Oaxaca, but amongst other Olmecoids, in the Chiapas-Guatemala Pacific area. As already mentioned it is there that three of the four known cycle 7 inscriptions have been found. The fourth one is of course Stela C at Tres Zapotes. In the vagaries of research and hypothesis, for many years the classic Maya were considered as the inventors of this extraordinary system; later it was attributed to the people of the heartland Olmec area, even in their decline. Now the wheels of fortune turn partly back and the coastal Maya are suggested as the possible inventors. But this theme lies outside the scope of my paper.

The writing system of Monte Albán I is not the only great contribution the Oaxaca valley gave to Mesoamerica. We have already mentioned the considerable progress in architecture; and let us now turn to yet another aspect. In the Olmec heartland we can think of at most, one god, the jaguar. By the end of the Monte Albán I period, at least ten deities are sufficiently well characterized as to be easily recognized. They are all masculine and include such well known later gods as the Jaguar, Tlaloc, Quetzalcoatl, Xipe, and the Old God. I give the Nahuatl names since they are better known. The existence of temples over large mounds and the well built if still simple tombs of the period suggest, together with the pantheon, a far more elaborate and important religious organization that must include a professional priesthood. Its members would retain as a basis of their prestige most calendrical and astronomical knowledge, and the art of writing, and would foster the progressively more evolved necrophiliac complex. Would they also be the ruling elite?

The very sophisticated and technically perfect pottery of Monte Albán I period has certain Olmec traits and frequently an Olmec flavor, but is quite distinct and hardly ever suggests anything resembling Olmec

iconography. Jade figurines or objects of some importance made in semiprecious stones are unknown; only beads or small jade mosaics and earplugs have been found in the site. From other areas of Oaxaca come excellent jade pieces; they are entirely Olmec and I think were exported from the heartland.

Even if later periods were to bring further advances I believe that civilization had emerged by the end of Monte Albán I, as it had in period Olmec II. There is thus no point, for the purposes of this paper, of going further along in time and describing the Monte Albán II period. It is still a pre-Teotihuacan epoch but the real formative has ended in Oaxaca and civilization is already a going if modest concern.

Postscript

After this paper was finished Mr. Gareth Lowe of the New World Archaeological Foundation very kindly lent me his manuscript on San Isidro Mound 20. This site is located in Chiapas, outside--although near--the Olmec heartland. Mr. Lowe finds two main phases, an early one he equates with San Lorenzo, and a later one apparently contemporaneous with La Venta.

In the first phase the ceramics are almost identical to those of San Lorenzo and there is hardly anything to suggest a different local culture or an influence from some other place. He found some low platforms made of sandy clay with no stucco but a sort of whitish volcanic ash.

The second phase has a pyramid made of earth with numerous offerings of celts (in one instance as many as 65). The celts are crude, certainly non-functional, and placed in groups just as in La Venta. Another cache contained jade earplug flares and some burials were surrounded with other celts. The bodies were placed in a sitting position. The ceramics were also mainly Olmec.

The discoverer of this important site believes it to be a minor ceremonial center. To my mind the implications are very important because for the first time we have a totally Olmec site outside of the Olmec heartland with no stone sculpture of any importance. In other words it suggests a less developed Olmec site of which we had no previous example. It also suggests that Olmecs at one time lived outside of that area without mingling with other peoples. Thus it is not Olmecoid.

Years B.C.	LA VENTA *	SAN LORENZO all Yale	OLMEC Periods and Phases	OAXACA Periods and Phases	OAXACA
0					
50					
100					
150					
200					
250				MONTE ALBAN II	
300					
350					• O-1300
400					• C-425 • O-1210 (Yagul)
450					
500	• 1283				
550	• 1351 • 1287				
600	• 903 • Y-2378				
650	• 1284A • M-536 • 1284B				• C 424 (Monte Negro)
700	• 788B				
750				MONT ALBAN I	
800	• 1350				
850	• 1280 B • 1281 B				
900	• 1276 A		OLMEC II - - - - - - - - - - PHASE II		• (Guadalupe)
950	• 1280 A • 1355 • 1285	• 1802		GUADALUPE	• (Guadalupe) • (Guadalupe)
1000	• M 529				
1050	• 1276 B • 902	• 1908 • 1930 • 1934 • 1937			• (San José Mogote)
1100		• 1797			
1150	• 1286	• 1800 • 1801 • 1939 • 1911	- - - - - - - - - - PHASE I	SAN JOSE MOGOTE	
1200	• 1288	• 1798			
1250	• M 535	• 2379			
1300			OLMEC I		
1350		• 1933			
1400					

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ADDED REMARKS by I. Bernal

It has become apparent during the Conference sessions that on occasions we discuss the same facts without understanding one another too well. This occurs, I believe, because the basic postulates of the core of our subject are seen in quite a different light by various participants. Since the symposium deals with the general problem of the emergence of civilizations and specifically with the emergence of Mesoamerican civilization, contributions by the participants have shown--either directly or by inference--the differing ways in which the speakers understand civilization as a stage of societies, and Mesoamerican civilization in particular. Although only incidentally stated, it is clear that we cannot discuss with profit the problem of the emergence of something if we are not quite clear in our minds what this is. Not of course that uniformity of criteria is to be sought or even desired, but each one must construct his image of how civilization emerged on the basis of what it is that is emerging. With no apostolic zeal let me give my own opinion, on the narrower issue, or in other words, how I envisage Mesoamerican civilization.

It is an original one, that is not derived from a parent civilization but emerging from lower cultures. This point needs no comment, being obvious, but obliges us to understand as much as possible that remote and less evolved matrix. I do not refer to the problem of origins of man on the continent, or the long stages of hunting and gathering peoples, but mainly to the second millennium before our era when the fundamental steps that would lead to civilization had already been taken.

Like all civilizations, the Mesoamerican is formed by a number of different peoples with sufficient individuality to cross-fertilize one another but close enough to have a common basis for all. Thus a large number of traits--mentioning now only some of the pre-civilized ones corresponding to that second millennium--were common to all. Similar agriculture, plants, domesticated animals, magic, tribal systems, sedentariness, pottery, weaving....From this basic culture the civilized one would emerge, having a common origin but differing somewhat in later developments.

Among all the different nations of Mesoamerica they managed to build a number of typical traits that taken together separate the area from any other culture. Many aspects of their social and political organizations, of their commerce or warfare, of their religious beliefs and practices, of their art or their philosophy, or their ceremonial concept, are not shared by their northern or southern neighbors nor indeed by any other people.

Evidently not all Mesoamericans possess all the traits nor are some common ones equally shared by the different areas. I believe this is typical of any civilization. Some areas went further along one path whilst others followed a diverging course.

Besides, we must consider civilization as encompassing at least four main human groups:

(1) The urban elite, without which I can't see how we may speak of a civilized level. This elite lives mainly in cities--of whatever type they may be--and is formed by the leaders of various fields: intellectual, priestly, political, merchant or military.

(2) The rural population, the feeders of the society, usually oppressed by the elite. I think that this is today the only surviving group, no matter how much changed by Western culture. By themselves they are incapable of forming a civilization but were indispensable to the ancient one.

(3) The marginal groups <u>within</u> the frontiers of the civilization. Apart from internal islands of this type, I would think that Western Mexico fits this category. If Mesoamerica had been fashioned on the Western Mexico type, we could hardly consider it a civilization.

(4) The <u>outside</u> neighbors, the barbaroi, on various levels of development. Although they did not pertain to the civilization, they influenced it at different moments and were an important factor in some of the breakdowns.

A different but related aspect is the apparent tendency of civilizations to be formed of two cores or two main groups. In Mesoamerica it would be Maya and non-Maya, as in the Hellenic society there were Greek and Roman, and in our own world Latin and Anglo-German.

It is clear by now that in my view we can only speak adequately of one Mesoamerican civilization. Such expressions as Maya civilization or Aztec civilization I consider misleading, since both the Maya and the Aztecs and many others are only part of a larger whole, even if particularly distinctive in different ways and moments; both have been to a considerable degree fashioned by this larger whole.

This leads to another important point of whether it is one civilization from its emergence in Olmec times until its final downfall in Aztec times, thus making a continuum, or whether along those three millennia a break of such intensity occurred as to make it more probable that we should consider two civilizations, one succeeding the other. I do not hold this view for many reasons too long to enumerate here, but I quite agree that a good case could be made for the opposite position.

All these matters would have to be considered and many more--demography, ideology, intercommunication are basic--if we are to understand not only the emergence but the very nature of Mesoamerica. How much can be done depends of course on archaeology for the more remote periods, and on archaeology helped by the written sources and other sciences for the more recent ones, but even if we gather an immense amount of factual information it will not be fully useful without a theoretical approach to the problem of civilization. Only this will allow for a real understanding of that information.