

V. INVENTORY OF SOME PRE-CLASSIC TRAITS IN THE HIGHLANDS AND PACIFIC GUATEMALA AND ADJACENT AREAS

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Fundamental to any concept of what constitutes "civilization" are those physical manifestations readily available for study, critical analysis and assessment. When research is focused upon physical manifestations found in one particular area, in this instance Mesoamerica, and during a specific time range, the Pre-Classic, one is impressed by the wealth of data at hand and the incredible imbalance of that data. This condition is especially apparent in the limited region of Mesoamerica dealt with in this report - - the Southern Highlands and Pacific Coast of Guatemala and adjacent areas.

Most of the data presented in this report has been extracted from my field records compiled over the past thirty years. I shall summarize some of the physical manifestations of human activity within this limited region covered by maps published in the Handbook of Middle American Indians, Vol. 2, p. 184 and 239 and also include information derived from well-known published sources listed at the end of Vol. 2 of the Handbook.

Obviously, when referring to the Pre-Classic, an extremely long range of time is involved, so long, in fact, that students have already found it expedient to divide it into Early, Middle, and Late Pre-Classic. As knowledge expands one will undoubtedly be faced with such nomenclature as Early Early, Middle Early, Late Early Pre-Classic, etc. In this paper, because of my ignorance as to when and where a certain cultural feature or trait may have started, I shall often refer to the Pre-Classic as a whole, roughly the period of time from 1500 B.C. to 200 A.D. However, if the evidence permits an assignment with greater accuracy, I shall then provisionally employ the terms Early (1500 to 800 B.C.), Middle (800 to 300 B.C.) and Late Pre-Classic (300 B.C. to 200 A.D.).

Throughout the Pacific Coastal Plain of Guatemala and of adjacent Chiapas in Mexico there is an astounding number of Pre-Classic archaeological sites. Here the topography and ecology is generally more uniform than in the Highland area just north of the volcanic rampart which separates the two zones. In the Highlands, Pre-Classic sites are less dense and less uniformly distributed, and although they are found sporadically as far north as the southern base of the Cuchumatanes mountains in Huehuetenango and eastward to Livingston on the Caribbean sea, nowhere, other than in the Guatemala Valley and adjacent plateaus to the east and west, does the density of Pre-Classic sites equal or surpass that of the South Coast.

As a convenience for distinguishing Pre-Classic sites according to size, I have classified them as villages, towns and cities; the smallest, villages, simple surface concentrations of cultural debris without observable mounds or with one or several low artificial mounds; larger sites, towns, containing about a dozen or so mounds; and, finally, cities, large population centers of from twenty to hundreds of man-made structures. In large centers, individual pyramidal mounds twenty meters or more in height, still exist after almost twenty centuries since their abandonment despite the ravages caused by vegetation, tropical rains, and man. Kaminaljuyu in the Highlands and Izapa in the Pacific coastal plain are examples of major Pre-Classic sites in their respective areas. Although there was considerable occupation in both of these sites following the Pre-Classic, their greatest building activity seems to have occurred during the Pre-Classic.

Characteristically, Pre-Classic archaeological sites of all sizes are situated in open terrain without artificial or natural defenses. The primary concern of their agricultural and sedentary founders seems to have been availability of an adequate supply of food and water. In settlements located close to the Pacific shoreline, the food supply may have been derived partly from marine sources and partly from agriculture, while sites further inland depended basically on agricultural products. Only a few small Early Pre-Classic settlements have so far been discovered and excavated. Three of these, Altimira, La Victoria and Salinas La Blanca are located in close proximity on the lower coastal plain of Soconusco. Middle and Late Pre-Classic sites, however, are far more common, no doubt because their physical size makes field recognition easier for the archaeologist. In both the Coastal Plain and the Highlands, Middle and Late Pre-Classic sites, when not modified by later constructions, are often identified by a formal plan of mounds arranged around a narrow, elongated north-south plaza. Generally, a single prominent structure closes the extreme ends, and both of the long sides are marked by opposing east-west units facing each other. Occasionally, the principal plaza is paralleled by others on one or both sides. Another variant of this site plan is found, for example, at El Jardin and Izapa, where the elongated plaza is somewhat obscured by a series of single structural units within the narrow plaza, aligned at intervals on its central axis thus forming a continuous series of four-sided courts. At El Jardin on the Guatemala coast 25 kms. S.S.E. of Izapa, the principal plaza exceeds 500 meters in length and is broken into six contiguous courts by the addition of these individual mounds on its central axis.

Pre-Classic mound construction is basically similar in both the Highlands and the Pacific coast. Substructures are predominantly of earth fill, although where readily available from nearby stream beds, unworked water-rolled cobbles may be included in the earth fill and occasionally in retaining walls built over earthen core structures. Throughout the area, substructures were most commonly modelled into the form desired and then surfaced with thin clay or adobe plaster. Traces of painted decoration in red, orange-red, yellow, blue-green, or black encountered sporadically suggest that the

use of color for embellishment of architectural units was quite widespread. Nowhere, in either the Highlands or South Coast of Guatemala, has the use of cut and dressed building stones, lime plaster or mortar, and the modelling of adobe for architectural ornamentation during the Pre-Classic been reported. There is evidence that temples and houses built of pole and thatch were erected upon the earthen substructures, sometimes with walls of wattle and daub, particularly in the Highlands where lower temperatures prevailed.

By Middle Pre-Classic times, a trait had become established in the Highlands and South Coast of Guatemala and in Chiapas which apparently continued in certain parts of Mesoamerica through Late Pre-Classic and Classic times - - that of erecting plain stelae in towns and cities. These stelae may be exceedingly rough unworked shafts of stone, unworked sections of columnar basalt, or partly well-shaped and dressed stones in the typical stela form. They were erected in formal positions in courts or plazas, at the base, on the frontal slope, or on top of the earthen substructures. From my sporadic surveys and often inadequate field notes, I have recorded plain stelae in 28 out of the 114 sites with Pre-Classic remains in the Guatemala Highlands and South Coast. These range from sites with a single stela, to 11 stelae at El Jardin, 15 at Monte Alto, 35 at Naranjo and a still larger uncounted number of stelae at Kaminaljuyu. The least disturbed sites with numerous plain stelae are Monte Alto and Naranjo. One alignment at Monte Alto forms an astronomical observatory and at Naranjo the stela placement also strongly suggests an observatory. Still other sites with probable astronomical observatories are Kaminaljuyu, Virginia on the Canchon plateau southeast of Kaminaljuyu, and El Balsamo on the Pacific coastal plain south of Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa. The example at Monte Alto consists of three large plain stelae erected in a north-south line along the west base of a low platform opposite and east of a pyramidal substructure. Early astronomers probably observed sunrise from this substructure, presumably from a point on top of the pyramid. On field recognition of the astronomical observatory, I arbitrarily selected the center of the top east edge of the mound and observed the azimuths of sunrise from the north star, Polaris, at various intervals from December 9, 1969 to April 9, 1970. I had assumed that the three stelae marked the solstices and equinoxes, but this assumption proved incorrect. The south stela did, in fact, mark the winter solstice on December 21st, but, contrary to expectations, the sun rose over the central stela on February 19th, sixty days later, and over the north monument on March 15th or 84 days after December 21st. Thus it appears that the Monte Alto observatory and possibly those at other Pre-Classic sites served primarily as a means for recording days and the position of the sun for agricultural purposes. The observatory may have therefore provided such vital knowledge as the appropriate time for clearing milpa land, burning, the expected arrival of the rainy season, and the first planting of the maize. At Naranjo, just north of Kaminaljuyu, the astronomical observatory, if it proves to be one, may pertain to the Las Charcas Phase and thus predate the observatory recently discovered at Monte Alto.

It is important to bear in mind that the erection of stelae, sometimes in position for astronomical observations, was a well established practice in the Southern Highlands and South Coast of Guatemala during Middle Pre-Classic times, long before this trait became so prominent in the Lowland Maya area during the Classic period.

Sculpturing of stone begins in the Las Charcas Phase at Kaminaljuyu with a few minor crude sculptures and vigorously executed effigy mushroom stones, all carved in full round. The fashioning of mushroom stones evidently continued through the Pre-Classic and into the Classic and possibly later times. The distinctive features which early examples have in common are a grooved or incised line encircling the mushroom head, effigy stems depicting either anthropomorphic figures, jaguars, toads, or birds and a solid base either rounded or square. From the Late Pre-Classic Verbena Phase through the remainder of the Pre-Classic, mushroom stones have tripod supports but retain the other features. In Classic and later periods they are often plain, and occasionally, especially in El Salvador, the typical form is modelled in pottery.

The variety of stone sculpture produced during the Pre-Classic possibly exceeds that produced in Classic and Post-Classic periods. To demonstrate the range I will list a number of types and in parenthesis the ceramic phase or time period known at present for the earliest occurrence of the type.

1. Carved stela or monument without recognizable hieroglyphs (Stela 9, Kaminaljuyu, Majadas phase).
2. Carved stela, altar or monument with recognizable hieroglyphs (Stela 10, Kaminaljuyu, Verbena phase - actually a large rectangular altar).
3. Pedestal sculptures: anthropomorphic, jaguars, monkeys, pisotes, armadillos, birds (Kaminaljuyu, Majadas phase).
4. Monte Alto style, pot-bellied sculptures (Monte Alto, Late Pre-Classic; Kaminaljuyu, Arenal phase).
5. Toad or "sapo" sculptures (Kaminaljuyu, Verbena phase).
6. Silhouette sculptures (Kaminaljuyu, Arenal phase).
7. Small bench figures (Kaminaljuyu, Verbena phase).
8. Individual miscellaneous unclassified stone sculpture, minor to monumental in size (Kaminaljuyu, Las Charcas phase).
9. Doughnut stones or digging stick weights, carved and plain (Kaminaljuyu, Santa Clara phase).
10. Carved stone vessels (Kaminaljuyu, Verbena phase).
11. Stone and jade ornaments (Kaminaljuyu, Las Charcas phase).
12. Pictographs, carved or painted (Olmec style rock carvings at Santa Margarita, Chalchuapa, etc. --stylistically Pre-Classic).

Many of the sculptured types listed are limited in distribution not only to the general area under discussion but quite a number are found only within a very restricted zone within that area. For example, silhouette sculptures have been surely documented only at the Kaminaljuyu site and immediate surroundings. The small bench figures, some showing Olmecoid features, are reportedly found exclusively in a restricted Highland plateau region centered around Tecpan, Patzun and Patzicia, although fragments of such figures have been recovered from mound fill under controlled excavations at Kaminaljuyu. Other types, such as pedestal sculptures, are more widely distributed throughout the Highland and South Coast of Chiapas and Guatemala and into El Salvador. Also, pedestal sculptures persist with stylistic changes beyond the Pre-Classic and through the Classic and conceivably into the Post-Classic. They may relate to the well-known "alter-ego" pedestal sculptures of Nicaragua and comparable sculptures in Costa Rica and Panama.

The Monte Alto style, pot-bellied sculptures and colossal heads, has a known geographic distribution extending from Monte Alto northwest along the coastal plain and volcanic foothills to Tonalá in Chiapas, east as far as Copan in Honduras, and southeast to Apaneca in El Salvador. In the Guatemala Highlands these sculptures may be limited exclusively to the area in and around Kaminaljuyu. Numerically there are more of the Monte Alto style sculptures at Kaminaljuyu than at the type site. At Kaminaljuyu, the sizes of individual specimens range from miniature seated human figurines about 25 cm. in height to others approximately 1 m. in height. Their smaller size alone distinguishes them from the Monte Alto sculptures. Another striking feature which segregates all known pot-bellied sculptures from the eleven huge ones at Monte Alto is that the latter are true boulder sculptures carved only on a portion of a rough natural boulder, while outside the type site the sculptures are carved completely in the round and often show more elements of dress and ornament.

S. W. Miles, in her excellent paper on the stone sculpture of the same area, (Vol. 2 of the Handbook), places Monte Alto style sculpture in Division 1, the oldest division of stone sculpture. She implies (p. 252) as have other students of Pre-Columbian art, that Monte Alto style sculptures are Pre-/or Proto-Olmec. Miles equates the style with the Arevalo and Las Charcas ceramic phases at Kaminaljuyu and this placement may ultimately prove correct. However, the two long and intensive field seasons of excavation at Monte Alto have not produced archaeological evidence to prove that chronological placement; we were unable to assuredly place the sculptures in the sequence of the site. The vast quantity of sherd material from the excavations is now under laboratory analysis, but the analysis is far from complete. Nevertheless, it may be stated tentatively that the occupation of Monte Alto extends from Middle Pre-Classic, roughly around 800 B.C., into the earlier part of the Late Classic, approximately 700 A.D. Occupation of the site does not appear to have been continuous for the estimated span of

1500 years. The ceramics suggest a sparse occupation in the Middle Pre-Classic with the peak of population density and architectural activity during Late Pre-Classic times, a moderate Early Classic habitation and perhaps no more than an agricultural village among the ruins in Late Classic times.

At Monte Alto we recorded 11 sculptured and 68 plain boulders, 15 uncarved stelae and 3 altars. The estimated weight of these stones ranged from 300 kilos to 16 metric tons, some of the plain stelae and carved boulders being particularly heavy. If one assumes that the physical transportation of these huge stones and the carving of eleven of them, even in a primitive fashion, indicate the time of maximum population and societal organization, then the Monte Alto style sculptures should date approximately 300 B.C. to 0 A.D. Undoubtedly many students of Pre-Columbian art will object to this dating on stylistic grounds. Therefore, for future studies it may be well to state the meager archaeological evidence presently available for dating the Monte Alto style sculptures. Practically all known examples, including those from the type site, have been moved in ancient and modern times from their original positions and context. Possible exceptions of such displacement may be three sculptures excavated and recorded by Stanley H. Boggs on Finca Leticia, near Apaneca, Department of Ahuachapan in El Salvador. Fortunately, Boggs recovered a sherd sample together with a small amount of charcoal (as yet undated) from beneath one of these sculptures prior to its removal by the property owner to his finca house. The more than a dozen examples from Kaminaljuyu were discovered mostly in unrecorded diggings at the site, the majority of them being heavily eroded, broken or mutilated. Our Carnegie excavations at this site recovered two examples of Monte Alto style sculpture -- one, a concave disc from the chest portion of a figure from the fill of a Pre-Classic Arenal Phase mound and the other, a human head from within an Early Classic Esperanza Phase structure. This head had apparently been broken from a full figure in ancient times and the neck portion had later been re-worked so as to form a complete sculpture. At Bilbao, on the outskirts of Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa, the Milwaukee Public Museum's excavations recovered a severely worn or weathered complete human figure with Late Classic sculptures. At Copan, a pot-bellied figure, worn, broken and lacking the head, was found in the foundation fill of a Late Classic stela.

Evidence for dating the Monte Alto style, as previously indicated, is woefully meager and unsatisfactory. The finding of the Kaminaljuyu fragment in an Arenal Phase context proves that the style is definitely Pre-Classic, but from the results at the Monte Alto excavation, the style's Late Pre-Classic placement in time is no more than suggestive.

One of the perplexing aspects of the Pre-Classic in the area under discussion is the general scarcity throughout of worked and unworked shell, despite proximity to the Pacific Ocean and easy access to marine fauna. No

shell was recovered in the two seasons at Monte Alto, none at Finca Arizona, a site very near the coast, and none at other Pre-Classic sites excavated by me near the Guatemala-Mexico border. The earliest recorded occurrence (approximately 400 B.C.) of worked shell comes from Chiapa de Corzo (Lowe, Handbook article p. 215). At Kaminaljuyu, shell was absent in all Pre-Classic phases except for one find in the Verbena phase. Here, a very richly stocked tomb - - Tomb 1 in Mound E-III-3 -- contained about 45 small disc beads and a single plain pendant of shell. To my knowledge the Chiapa de Corzo and Kaminaljuyu examples, both from burials, represent the only worked shell found in the entire area during the Pre-Classic. The high esteem and popularity of shell for personal ornaments and its obvious ceremonial significance evidently came into vogue during the later Classic Period.

The Pre-Classic has an abundance of pottery, both fine and coarse wares, much of it technically excellent. Vessels in an extraordinary variety of shapes comprise the largest category of pottery, while in certain phases other artifacts -- human, animal and bird figurines, figurine whistles, "napkin ring" ear spools, etc. are present.

The most ancient ceramics at present identified come from Altamira, a village site 2 kms. inland from the Pacific on the lower coastal plain of Chiapas. Green and Lowe (1967) date this oldest pottery, the Barra Phase, as beginning about 1600 B.C., slightly earlier than the date postulated for the Ocos phase of the similarly situated village site of La Victoria near the Guatemala port of Ocos. The Barra Phase included several excellent ceramic types in forms of tecomates, jars, and flat-based vertical and flaring walled bowls and vases. The inventory of stone artifacts is small but, as Lowe clearly states, these stone artifacts and the pottery indicate that the Barra Phase represents the refuse of a sedentary agricultural community. Undiscovered as yet on the Pacific coastal plain are the remains of still older sedentary, agricultural and ceramic producing cultures. These and many more Early Pre-Classic sites quite certainly will be found when archaeologists take advantage of the extensive land clearing of the lower plain which has taken place in recent years for cotton planting, cattle grazing and agricultural colonization.

The Ocos and Cuadros Phases at La Victoria and the equivalent Chiapas I or Cotorra Phase in the Upper Grijalva Basin of Chiapas apparently succeed the Altamira Barra Phase. These coastal and highland phases, though seemingly spanning the same Early Pre-Classic time level in sites not too widely separated geographically, already demonstrate cultural distinctions and regionalization. The differences in cultural traits between the Pacific Coastal plain and the Guatemala-Chiapas Highlands are manifest from these early times throughout their Pre-Columbian cultural history and exist even to the present day. To point out one seemingly insignificant trait as an example of the many differences, the Ocos Phase tecomates bear long tripod supports while Chiapa I tecomates lack supports. The presence in one and the absence in

another Pre-Classic Phase of hand-modeled human, animal and bird figurines and whistles in both the Lowlands and Highlands may prove to be an indicator of cultural continuity or discontinuity of a site or particular region and may even serve to indicate population shift.

The Middle Pre-Classic appears to be the period of rapid increase of population, a formalization of ceremonialism, societal organization, city planning and utilization of the agricultural and ritual calendar. However, the cultural apogee of the Pre-Classic was reached in Late Pre-Classic times somewhere between 300 B.C. and 0 A.D. with the widest inter-regional cultural affiliation and trade relations, a proliferation of stone sculpture and styles and the development of Maya hieroglyphic writing. The final phase of the Pre-Classic from 0 to 200 A.D., often termed Proto-Classic, suggests from the evidence at Kaminaljuyu a decline in cultural attributes and achievements when the area under discussion was apparently segmented into localities of relative isolationism. An exception to the general pattern may be the great site of Izapa where the high intellectual plane of the Late Pre-Classic Period was evidently maintained into the Proto-Classic.