XI. EARLY ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE IN MESOAMERICA

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However one defines "civilization", in actual practice there is often no choice but to recognize it by the monumentality of its remains. Massive constructions indicate a technology and an organization that could concentrate human energies and talents on pursuits other than subsistence activities. More significantly, they testify to a concern with permanence: an awareness of the past and a purposeful regard for the future beyond the immediate interests of the living. To regard culture as a response to economic needs, is to ignore the fact that cultural activities always outrun the exigencies of existence, and form a pool of intellectual resources, which can be drawn upon when occasions arise. The Mesoamerican ceremonial center, in addition to being a focus of social and political organization, promoted the development of arts and sciences, which, in their early stages, were dedicated largely to ritual purposes.

The origin of temples and of ceremonial centers in Mesoamerica is still a matter of speculation. Currently, it is customary to postulate a period of settled agricultural villages which antedated the development of specialized ritual centers, but an alternate possibility -- that meeting-places with permanent constructions preceded settled village life -- cannot be altogether ignored. The fact is that we have not yet tapped the earliest remains of temple construction, and do not know under what circumstances the religious citadel became the focus of social life. Evidence of Early Preclassic constructions is still limited to scattered finds of levelling fill, to deeply buried floors, and to one fragment of a platform.

Coe's excavations at San Lorenzo, in southern Veracruz, indicate massive constructions there during the Bajio Phase, which, according to his estimate, covers the period between 1350 and 1250 B.C. (M. D. Coe, 1969). In addition to some steps leading to a platform, Coe notes "vast quantities of fill", levelling off the rise on which the ruins stand, and making additions to it. The scale of the operations implies a ceremonial center of considerable size, but its architectural layout cannot be uncovered without destruction of overlying remains and the removal of an immense mass of later accumulation.

In fill pertaining to the Chicharras Phase (1250 to 1150 B.C.), fragments of carved monuments were found, and the next phase, the San Lorenzo (1150 to 900 B.C.) yielded a splendid collection of large sculptures in the round made of imported basalt boulders, long drains constructed of shaped stones, and many luxury items of other imported materials. We have no data

however, either on architectural assemblages or on the forms of buildings at that time.

Surface remains at San Lorenzo and at La Venta apparently represent the Middle Preclassic era. The core of the larger constructions was evidently of clay and earth, and their profiles are completely eroded, showing only natural slopes of debris. There is no stone in the vicinity of La Venta, but it was imported from some distance away and used for special features. Within two of the mounds were found tombs lined and roofed with columnar basalt, and a carved stone sarcophagus. More interesting, but rather perplexing, are deep foundations of horizontally laid stone and of adobe bricks laid in clay, which once may have supported enclosures formed of basalt columns backed by thick clay walls. Two buried foundations of this sort, built at least partially underground, and arranged symmetrically on the sides of a court or plaza, were flagged with slabs forming a mosaic design. Sections of the buried southwest platform published by Drucker, Heizer and Squier (1959, figs. 26-28), suggest that walls had been removed from this construction for the salvage of columnar basalt. It occurs to me that the deep foundation may have been laid down to prevent the seepage of water, and that such constructions may have been pools, similar in function to the depressions observed by Coe at San Lorenzo.

The architectural assemblage of the main group at La Venta is very distinctive. It is dominated by a single high structure, now eroded to the shape of a conical mound. Smaller constructions are laid out on its north-south axis. North of the main "pyramid", two long mounds delineate a rectangular court, and two other mounds and a low platform are disposed on its extended central axis. A somewhat similar disposition of mounds, forming two parallel elongated plazas, was observed by Shook in some abandoned Preclassic sites of Highland Guatemala (Shook, 1952). Here, however, the largest structure tends to be on the side of the Plaza, and the orientation veers considerably to the east of north. These very early assemblages are consistent with Kubler's observation that Mesoamerican architecture is designed primarily with a view to the organization of exterior spaces (Kubler, 1962, p. 29). Other, more complex arrangements were developed in various regions during the Classic Period, but the dramatic effects of Mesoamerican architecture remained inherent in the contrast of pyramidal masses of temples and low, extended facades of secular buildings. In the larger sites of the Maya area, soaring pyramids contrast with compact quadrangles of "palace" buildings, and the Street of the Dead at Teotihuacan preserves a vestige of the early elongated plaza in the long rows of low temples and courts, punctuated by the great Pyramids of the Sun and of the Moon.

The principal building materials of the Preclassic Period were earth, puddled adobe, and wood. Masonry construction gradually replaced them, but adobe fill continued to be used in regions where stone was not readily at hand. At Kaminaljuyu, facing of masonry and lime plaster was used sparingly even in Classic times. In Oaxaca, an early structure recently excavated at

Dainzu (Bernal, 1967) shows a facing of large vertical slabs topped by huge blocks of stone. The slabs are carved individually with figures, recalling a very similar use of "Danzante" slabs at Monte Alban. Bernal suggests a date of about 305 B.C. for this structure, a time that may precede the use of true masonry in this area. In the Valley of Mexico, the innermost platforms of the large round structure at Cuicuilco, built of clay without masonry facing, pertain to the Middle Preclassic Period (Heizer and Bennyhoff, 1969). The first of three superimposed cobble-faced platforms, however, was built before this period ended. The assemblage of this site is obscured by lava-flow which covers it, and it is not clear whether the stepped round structure is the foundation of the main temple at this site, and whether it is truly representative of Preclassic architecture of the valley.

The most dramatic architectural developments took place in the heart of the Maya area, in the limestone region of central Peten, where materials for masonry construction were readily available. So far, no early Preclassic architectural remains have been uncovered here. The Middle Preclassic Period is also poorly represented, and only at Altar de Sacrificios, at the confluence of the Chixoy and Pasion rivers, are there clear indications of a ceremonial assemblage of buildings before the Chicanel Phase. Remains of deeply buried and dismantled platforms pertaining to the San Felix Phase (600 to 300 B.C.) were found under several buildings of Group B, suggesting that the plaza of this group was already laid out (Willey and Smith, 1969, p. 25). The earliest platforms are faced only with adobe, but overlying them are Late Preclassic terraces faced with lime-encrusted mussel shells. Since there was no stone in the vicinity of Altarde Sacrificios, masonry was not used here until the beginning of the Classic era, when it could be brought in from a distance. The scarcity of stone inhibited the development of the vault and other heavy masonry construction, and the architectural sequence at this site remained atypical for the Peten.

At Uaxactun and Tikal, the known sequences of temple platforms probably begin in the latter half of the Late Preclassic Period, although their complex forms and well-developed masonry techniques are evidence of an earlier origin. The best preserved structures are Pyramid A of Complex A-1 at Uaxactun, and Pyramid E-VII-sub. They are built with a core of rubble, earth, and marl, and a facing of horizontally laid stone, roughly shaped and finished with a thick coat of lime plaster. Post holes on the summit indicate that they once supported buildings of perishable construction. Although in restorations these perishable buildings are usually shown as simple thatched huts, they were probably much more elaborate, and may even have been plastered and designed in much the same way as later stone temples. The foundation platforms are not truly pyramids, but a monumental intent in their design is quite evident. Pyramid A of A-1 (R. E. Smith, 1937) is a single low terrace supporting a three-level building platform. At the back, the two units are merged into a single slope by a projecting panel with a typical apron molding. Smith distinguishes three developmental stages that overlie

the two lowest buildings. The typical Maya pyramid, with its multiple terraces and inset corners, emerges only in the last two Classic stages of these constructions.

Structure E-VII-sub (Ricketson and Ricketson, 1937) is designed in three superimposed units: a unit of four low terraces with almost vertical aprons, a unit comprised of a single sloping terrace with two simple mouldings, and a unit which is a typical two-level building platform. The building platform is differentiated from the substructure by being slightly set back, and by having a single stairway, instead of steps on all four sides, as on the lower terraces. Each of the three units is decorated with a distinct set of large stucco masks. Group E was excavated before the ceramic sequence was firmly established, and the order of constructions there is not altogether clear, but it is worth noting that the elongated rectangular plaza, oriented slightly west of north, suggests a Preclassic layout, though the surface buildings are Early Classic in date. At one end of the Plaza is a raised terrace supporting three small temples facing inward on a court. This is also the arrangement of the first Classic stage of Structure A-V. Pyramid E-VII, on the west side of the Plaza, faces a long platform on which are three temples set in a row, which, when viewed from the steps of the pyramid appear to mark the position of the solstices and equinoxes on the horizon. We can recognize this arrangement in a number of other early Maya sites, and as this is being written, a communication from Edwin Shook to Lee Parsons (Dec. 30, 1969) reports an arrangement of three stelae and a mound at Monte Alto, similarly oriented and presumably Preclassic.

The development of masonry architecture in the Peten shows progressive improvement in the techniques of burning and mixing lime. This led to the construction of buildings made entirely of stone and conglomerate, with corbelled vaults strong enough to uphold the heavy load of high roof-combs. The sequence of temples recently excavated under the floor of the North Acropolis at Tikal illustrates this development. It begins, according to present estimates, in the final century before the Christian era, which corresponds to the Cauac Phase at Tikal and is correlated with late Chicanel at Uaxactun. The earliest assemblage here is very similar to the grouping of three temples around a court in Structure A-V at Uaxactun, and in both locations elaborate tombs were put through the floor of the main terrace. The earliest preserved temple, Structure 5D-Sub.1-1st, (W. R. Coe, 1965, p. 15) had masonry walls, an upper facade decorated with modelled and painted stucco, and large stucco masks on the upper terrace of its platform. The platform and the walls of the building are designed as a unit. The slope of the heavy apron moldings below is repeated in the slope of the upper facade of the building. The rise of the rear room is reflected in the rise of the upper platform, which follows the building walls and is marked by only a very slight projection. The stairway is inset into the room through the doorway. The lower terrace of the platform is integrated with the upper by a single projecting panel at the back, so that the whole design is seen as a single form. The building may have been

vaulted, or may have been roofed with beams and mortar. The latter is most probable, since its walls are lighter than in Early Classic temples. Nevertheless, it is clear that the exterior form was the focus of its design. From the beginning, the Maya temple is more like a sculptured monument than like a building.

The Cauac Phase reveals also the earliest known mural paintings, on tomb walls and on exterior walls of a small shrine associated with a tomb. Fragments of stone sculpture were found in the fill, but no stelae were associated with the early temples. The question remains whether the multi-terraced pyramid and the stela represent later developments, perhaps due to influences from Guatemala, or if they were located elsewhere on an open plaza, and simply were not suitable to the kind of assemblage which was excavated here.

Several times in the years that followed, the North Acropolis was raised and enlarged. On the final terrace built in Early Classic times, the plan remained substantially the same, although more temples were added from time to time, until there were finally fifteen in all, two of them, partly off the terrace and facing the plaza, set on high multi-terraced pyramids of standard design. Clearly, there is here a continuity of development from at least 100 B.C. through the Classic Period, and the well-developed details of masonry construction suggest a much earlier beginning.

In Highland Guatemala, the situation was somewhat different. Here we have evidence that many Late Preclassic sites were abandoned at the end of the period, and Classic assemblages differ radically from arrangements in earlier sites. Unfortunately, none of these sites has been investigated, and excavation has been concentrated at Kaminaljuyu, where centuries of later constructions obscure the pattern. The earliest high mound so far observed is Structure C-III-6, partially excavated by Shook in 1951. It contained no sherds of the Late Preclassic Period, and an intrusive cache, made in its summit in later times, was lined with columnar basalt in the manner of Olmec tombs. These columns were clearly reused, since one of them was carved on three of its five sides, and included with the columns were broken tenons of what are called "pedestal" sculptures. The material inside the cache was attributed to the "Majadas" Phase, now sometimes linked with Providencia. The practice of building tombs on the summit of other such mounds at Kaminaljuyu perhaps suggested to Michael Coe the idea that the Maya pyramid developed from the burial mound (M. D. Coe, 1956). Sanders and Michels (1969, p. 166) further propose "that the pre-Miraflores civic centers all consisted of mounds, many of them conical structures, arranged along a street-like plaza and that they functioned as a ritual center for the funeral of an elite element in the population." This suggestion contradicts Shook's observations in the Valley of Guatemala. His description of the site of Piedra Parada, for example (Shook, 1952, pp. 22-24), which he believes was abandoned before the Miraflores Phase, shows clear evidences of temple construction. Adobe

foundation platforms are often completely eroded on the surface and may appear as "conical mounds", but the places to investigate early architecture are such abandoned sites as Canchon and Piedra Parada, where there may not have been such massive destruction of early remains as at Kaminaljuyu.

The Late Preclassic Miraflores constructions under Mound E-III-3 at Kaminaljuyu (Shook and Kidder, 1952, figs. 4-8) are of interest because they show low-U-shaped platforms, suggesting an arrangement of buildings not unlike early three-temple arrangements in the lowlands. The adobe-faced walls of the terraces are vertical, but at the side of a step leading to one of the higher platforms is a well-finished apron molding, a typical feature of the Peten. Structure D-III-13, excavated by Berlin (1952), falls in the earliest Classic Phase, Aurora. Its first structures were built entirely of adobe and show vertical terracing and inset stairways. None of the evidence so far adduced indicates a derivation of Peten architecture from the highlands. It shows only that during the Late Preclassic era the two regions show some similarity in architectural arrangement, notably, the disposition of buildings on elongated rectangular plazas, a feature probably of much earlier origin. They show also a common tendency to inset stairways, but in the profile of the terraces and in the location of tombs they differ sharply. In part, the differences are due to the use of entirely different materials, but to test the hypothesis of highland derivation of Peten sites, we need more information on earlier periods.

Even the Esperanza Phase, inspired by influences from Teotihuacan, poses some problems. The first Esperanza platforms do not have the typical "talud-tablero" profile, but rise in a single slope capped with a rectangular molding, over which is a low building platform. Evidently the adobe construction could not uphold a heavy "tablero", and the Teotihuacan design came into use only after pumice began to be included in the fill.

On the early stages of architecture at Teotihuacan I have no information at present. Cuicuilco offers no precedence for this architecture, and there seems to be a discontinuity also in ceramics. There is a possibility that the Teotihuacan style originated in central Veracruz, for the decorative style of the coast is strongly represented in Teotihuacan II, but Preclassic architecture in central Veracruz is virtually unknown, and the direction of influences is still in dispute. We await final publication on Tehuacan and Izapa, and the results of the Cholula project. Parson's excavations at Monte Alto promise to give us important data on the early architecture of the Pacific coast, but the stratigraphy of this site has not yet been studied.

To sum up what we do know: for the Early Preclassic Period we have definite indications of large earthen construction with some use of stone

in southern Verzcruz. The Middle Preclassic reveals the typical Olmec assemblage, but not the form of the larger structures. There is reason to think that at this time there were ceremonial centers in the highlands of Mexico and Guatemala, on the Pacific coast, and on the Pasion River, but their character is poorly defined. Stone faced constructions appear at Cuicuilco and in Oaxaca at the end of the Middle Preclassic Period. Typical Late Preclassic assemblages can be defined in the highlands of Guatemala, and there is evidence that the mounds served as substructures for temples, at least as early as the Providencia Phase. Only for central Peten, near the end of the Late Preclassic Period, is there sufficient data to allow us to observe the development of an architectural style. The transition to the Classic Period here is gradual. It is marked by the adaptation to masonry buildings of the stone vault used earlier only in tombs, and by the differentiation of the building platform, which remains integral with temple design, from the design of the pyramid that supports it. Increasing emphasis on secular buildings and improved masonry techniques later resulted in more efficient design, with larger vault spans, but it was only in the Postclassic Period, when interior columns were introduced, that building plans began to take precedence over exterior effects in architectural design.

Monumental sculpture, in addition to being used on architectural forms, had an independent development as a representative art. There is a rich body of early sculptures, but most of it has not been correlated with ceramic sequences, and there has been no systematic comparative study of styles. Spinden's study of Maya art (Spinden, 1913) was followed by sporadic investigation of particular iconographic elements, but intensive study of modes of symbolic formulation in the arts was only recently initiated by George Kubler (Kubler, 1967, 1969). Although writing is often mentioned as a criterion of civilized life, and it is recognized that mathematics is a basic factor in industrial civilization, the importance, in developing societies, of visual communication through the medium of the arts is often overlooked. When writing and mathematics were still specialized esoteric arts, the community relied largely on visual imagery, both for the creation of efficient and amenable surroundings and for the expansion and refinement of ritual sentiments. The monumental arts, hand in hand with spectacular ritual, provided validation for hierarchal society and maintained communication between administration and the populace. The invention of visual forms capable of denoting complex non-material entities and relations was no mean accomplishment of the fine arts.

In Mesoamerica, the monumental arts apparently developed concurrently and in close association with writing. Monuments 41 and 42 at San Lorenzo, the earliest sculptures we know, clearly exhibit a pictographic intent. Monument 42, found at the very base of San Lorenzo deposits, is a broken column of basalt, shaped and carved in very low relief. Its upper portion is missing. At the top of the surviving fragment is carved a forearm and hand,

and just above it is a trace of what may be another hand. Monument 41 is similar and is almost complete. At the top is a mask with grotesque features, which is assumed to be a jaguar mask, but which is not at all clear. Below, are two forearms, one hand with fingers curled, and the other overlying it, with fingers spread wide apart. There is no indication of other anatomical features. This can hardly be a pictorial representation; it is more like a composition of signs of conventional meaning: a visage and a gesture. A similar use of hands, arms, and masks occurs in inscriptions on Olmec jade celts (M. D. Coe, 1965, figs. 18, 19). Masks in profile and gestures of hands are signs which are used frequently in later Maya writing. On Monuments 41 and 42, we have a kind of symbol that bridges the gap between artistic representation and the written word. It may be that at this time (1150 B.C.) writing was still in the process of formation.

There is a marked difference between these low-relief carvings and the full-round buried sculptures of San Lorenzo. In the latter, the integrity of the visual image is paramount, and any detail that may have extraneous meaning is muted. Images are overwhelmingly concerned with a heroic presentation of man and his affinity to the jaguar, a beast embodying the virtues of valor and nobility. There has been much speculation about the meaning of this mystical component in Olmec art, and especially the theme of the jaguar-infant, who has been identified as a victim of sacrifice, as a god of rain, and as a result of inherited abnormality. What is more important, however, is that the mysticism does not interfere with fine sensitivity to natural forms, although the symbolism is inherent in the subject, in which human and transcendent qualities are blended into a single being. Even in dominantly human subjects, such as the colossal heads, there is a subtle exaggeration of normal racial features in which we sense a feline aspect, and some of the seated figures (as, for example, the figure from Cruz Milagrosa, in Piña Chan and Covarrubias, 1964, unnumbered plate) lean forward with their fists on the ground, reflecting the pose of a seated beast.

The more explicit portrayal of jaguar faces on human bodies may come somewhat later, but the decapitation of many Olmec statues leaves the point uncertain. What is indicated more clearly is the later shift of symbolic content from the figure itself to its dress and accoutrement, suggesting conferred rather than intrinsic status, consequent to a growth of officialdom. The fine incision of masks and other ideographic forms on human faces is another feature probably lacking in the San Lorenzo sculptures, but more important is the absence of sculptured stelae. Presumably the La Venta stelae were erected during the Middle Preclassic era, but whether their origin is indigenous or the inspiration came from outside remains a moot question. The stelae appear to represent a new emphasis on historical themes and a gradual return to bas-relief carving. Rock carvings in the Olmec style outside the "Olmec heartland" reflect a similar historical concern. The large cliff carving at Chalcatzingo introduces new features in the seated pose of the personage, in the Serpent grotesque which surrounds him, and more particularly in the round bifurcated scrolls that distinguish the Late Preclassic styles

of the Pacific coast of Guatemala, and that do not occur at La Venta. A recent report by Grove (1969, fig. 2) describes a polychrome painting high on a cliff face above the grottos of Oxtotitlan, Guerrero, which shows a figure in bird-costume seated on a mask that is clearly derived from the Olmec style. It is impossible at present to date either the rock-carvings or the paintings, but stylistic comparison suggests that the expansion of the Olmec art style took place after the abandonment of San Lorenzo and possibly even after the occupation of La Venta.

The major difficulty in appraising the significance of the Olmec development is that we have virtually no information on what was going on in surrounding regions at that time. Too little is known of the early periods in central and northern Veracruz to indicate whether local styles were present there. On the Mexican plateau there is no body of sculpture that we can attribute to the Middle Preclassic era, with the possible exception of the Olmec rock-carvings at Chalcatzingo. The southern highland of Puebla, which Covarrubias suggested may be the locus of the origin of the Olmec style, has been insufficiently explored. The center of the Yucatan Peninsula seems to have been at that time a marginal region of minor settlements, and there have been no major excavations on the gulf coast, but only superficial surveys, which have not located any major Preclassic sites. Only from Guatemala do we have sufficient early sculptural material to give an indication of possible regional styles distinct from the Olmec and comparable in date.

Miles (1965) has outlined four "divisions" of Preclassic sculpture in the Guatemala highlands and on the Pacific coast. Her first division consists of various boulder sculptures. The most numerous and most widely dispersed group depicts putty-cheeked, pot-bellied figures carved on rounded boulders. At Monte Alto they are associated with colossal heads in much the same style. These are much cruder in execution than the colossal heads of the Olmec, and their closed puffy eyes may connote death or sleep. Hachas and small crested heads from Veracruz have the same low, puffy cheeks and somnolent expression (Proskouriakoff, 1960, fig. 10, k-n), and, apparently much later, similar faces reappear on certain dwarf-like figures from northwestern Yucatan (Proskouriakoff, 1950, figs. 95, i, 97, a). Excavations at Monte Alto have so far yielded no confirmation of the very early date ascribed to the colossal heads by Miles, but proof or disproof of their antiquity will not be easy to establish. In the same early division Miles includes the headless figures on pedestals which Shook found re-erected in a Late Classic group at the site of Sin Cabezas (Shook, 1950). These figures, in contrast to the figures of Monte Alto, are carved in full round, and sit cross-legged and leaning forward, recalling certain early Olmec figures. Parsons and Jenson (1965) reviewed the problem of boulder sculpture on the coast, and suggest a date transitional from Middle to Late Preclassic for the Monte Alto group, but the style itself can hardly be termed "transitional", for it shows little relation to Late Preclassic sculpture that has been coming out of Kaminaljuyu in recent years.

Somewhat better related to stratigraphy is the columnar basalt relief from the Majadas cache in Structure C-III-6 at Kaminaljuyu, which Miles assigns to Division 2. Since it was clearly reused in an intrusive cache, it was probably dismantled from a construction earlier than the cache itself, and the material suggests a Middle Preclassic date. The figure, however, shows none of the characteristics of the Olmec style. It is slim in proportions and angular in body lines. Behind and around the feet of the figure is a complex composition of formal elements, difficult to make out but suggestive of a grotesque being, and in front is a geometric figure that may be a hieroglyphic sign. The uniqueness of this carving suggests an early highland style of which other examples are still to be found.

Miles' Division 2 contains a great variety of sculpture, most of it probably Late Preclassic, and covers also some of the stelae at Izapa. Her Division 3 includes more elaborate compositions, as well as the two monuments discovered at Kaminaljuyu in Miraflores fill: Stela 11, which, though a single figure, has elements in common with the Izapa style, and Stela 10 (probably not a stela) which is more closely related to the Classic Maya style, and contains the earliest known inscription arranged in a compact block, in the manner of the Maya script. It is difficult to conceive the rich variety of sculpture found at Kaminaljuyu as the product of a single developing style. Apparently sculptors from many localities resided and worked in this cosmopolitan center.

In this respect, the style of Izapa is much more uniform and consistent. It is mainly in the compositions of this style that we find precedents for some compositions of the Classic Maya. Archaeological reports on Izapa are not yet available, and I do not know on what stratigraphic evidence rests the assumption that the sculptures are Late Preclassic in date. Nevertheless, this was the era that saw the formulation of a very complex iconographic symbolism which later characterizes the Classic styles. The dominant sculptural form at Izapa is a small stela with its accompanying altar, often carved in the form of a saurian monster, or, in one case, a crab. The monuments often depict human figures in action, but these figures are usually subsidiary to a larger composition of fantastic forms. Among these are various serpent and bird-masks, a winged figure descending from the sky, a grotesque creature that may be the prototype for a widespread Earth Monster of later times, and round, tightly curled volutes that suggest a representation of clouds. The upper register of many monuments contains a band of conventional figures signifying the sky, possibly derived from the upper jaw of a monster, which is drawn in more realistic form on Monument 2. These monuments bear no inscriptions, but a single glyph occurs in at least two of the compositions.

Miles interprets these monuments as predominantly religious, illustrative of myth, and without historical import. I seriously question this conclusion. Mythical and religious themes are usually presented in fixed conventional compositions, but each monument of Izapa is original in its arrangement and forms. I do not know if there is any parallel in the arts of the Old World to the remarkable visual symbolism that was developed here. Certain

elementary principles they hold in common, such as the combination of various zoomorphic forms, as well as the human form, to represent transcendent beings; but the free recombination of symbolic elements in individual compositions seems to be uniquely characteristic of Mesoamerican arts. It implies a highly organized symbolic system, more pictographic than pictorial in character, which, by the manipulation of images derived from animate forms, achieves a wide range of expression, depicting various events or social conditions validated and controlled by the natural order of the universe. I believe that the real difference between the stelae of Izapa and the Classic stelae of the Peten is not thematic, but lies in the emphasis of the Classic art on the individual figure, the portrait of the ruler, implying perhaps the formation of a higher aristocracy, and the growth of autocratic rule.

A number of monuments in coastal areas, from Tres Zapotes on the gulf, to El Baul on the Pacific coast, are representative of this transition to individual portraiture. These monuments are accompanied by numerical series that seem to record dates in the last quarter of Baktun 7 (about 30 B.C.) (M. D. Coe, 1957). Not all scholars accept these dates as valid, but early Cycle 9 dates from Cerro de las Mesas, written in the same fashion without period glyphs, appear to be normal Initial Series, and a tentative acceptance of the Cycle 7 dates probably would not greatly distort the historical sequence even if the monuments are found to be somewhat later.

All Classic Mesoamerican arts make use of heteromorphic symbols to express cosmic ideas. The grotesque forms are probably derived from ancient ritual dances and were preserved in the ceremonial vestments of the priestly office. However, it was only in the great Classic centers of Teotihuacan and in the Maya area that this symbolism was used with the virtuosity of a great art. Elsewhere it takes fixed conventional forms as, for example, the sky motif in the Classic sculpture of Monte Alban.

Earlier Monte Alban sculpture, represented in the figures of the Danzantes, in its simplicity and lack of extraneous symbols is similar to the early sculpture of the Olmec, but in its themes and in its intent it is completely different. The nudity of the figures, their phallic emphasis, and their contorted poses contrast with the restrained dignity of the Olmec style. The carving is done almost entirely in line incision, and there seems to be no scheme of composition in the assemblage of the stones. If the buildings in which they were used were covered with a thick coat of plaster or adobe, as most early buildings are, the carvings could not have been seen, and perhaps were not intended to be. Their use may have been entirely magical in intent. The figures are accompanied by hieroglyphs, some with bar-and-dot numerals, and Caso's study of them (Caso, 1947) shows an uninterrupted transition to Monte Alban II. The representations, however, have little relation to the Classic sculptures of Monte Alban, and constitute a very special case which needs further elucidation.

The origin and development of the art of Teotihuacan remains another unsolved problem. We have no examples of sculpture or of painting attributable to Teotihuacan I. In Teotihuacan II times, appear sculptures with decorative motifs in the style of Classic Veracruz, but these motifs were not incorporated into later Teotihuacan sculpture of painting, and their relation to the native style is problematical. The mural art here was probably derived directly from pictorial manuscripts, for, as Kubler has noted, it reflects some of the aspects of pictographic description. Early paintings and reliefs, if they were executed on adobe, may have left very few traces.

It would be futile to attempt a synthesis of the disjointed information we now have on the early development of the fine arts in Mesoamerica. In concluding, I can only call attention to some peripheral problems that had to be solved before the arts could achieve their classic maturity. In architecture, the quarrying and transport of stone had to be provided for before any degree of permanence of constructions and refinement of detail could be achieved, especially in regions where stone was not immediately at hand. Equally important were improvements in the preparation of mortars and plasters. This is a subject that requires intensive technical study, for we can only conjecture what materials and methods were used.

Sculpture and painting, though also dependent on availability of suitable materials, were relatively free of technical difficulties. The Olmec of San Lorenzo could already handle a hard material like basalt with superb artistry. The main problem of the sculptor was to discover how to convey the significance and value of historic events and ritual occasions by means of visual images. He did this by presenting the human world against a background of cosmic order, drawing on mythology, on forms used in ritual dances, and on many signs used in writing. Relief sculpture was probably often copied from manuscripts. Where manuscripts were mainly pictorial, as in Mexico, reliefs and paintings share many symbols with pictographic writing. Among the Zapotec and the Maya, the formal script took on explanatory and descriptive functions, so that the artist was once more free to concentrate on the visual image, but on many early Peten stelae, the subject of the representation is all but lost in a complex arrangement of symbols, many of which are conventional pictographs

During the Classic Period, regional styles were sharply distinct, and the two dominant styles - the lowland style of the Maya and the highland style of Teotihuacan - expanded their influences, meeting finally on their frontiers in Highland Guatemala. Stylistic regions are not so clearly defined for the Preclassic periods, but whether this is because there was a more diffuse cultural sphere, or because we lack precise information, remains to be seen. We have made great progress in recent years in correlating stratigraphies at many key points and in conducting superficial surveys, but no Preclassic site has been excavated yet with the thoroughness of Uaxactun or Tikal. Any synthesis of early cultural progress that we attempt now must draw heavily on presuppositions, and cannot avoid being prejudiced according to what periods are exposed in surface remains of different regions and where and what sort of archaeologic work has been done.

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ADDED REMARKS by T. Proskouriakoff

Since this paper was written, Susanna M. Ekholm has published an important report on the excavations in Mound 30a at Izapa. If we accept the suggested estimate of 700 to 600 B.C. for the inner constructions of this mound, it will extend the use of stone for terrace facing and in the fill of platforms back for at least two centuries. No plans of the constructions were recovered, but the stepped profiles of pyramids upholding differentiated building platforms demonstrate a greater antiquity for building practices of later periods than any other site has revealed so far. Although in these early constructions the stone is unshaped and serves merely to strengthen essentially earthen masses, later developments made possible by the use of lime mortar are clearly foreshadowed here. Thus, the architecture of the lowlands known so far presents an entirely consistent sequence of development from the Middle Preclassic period to the Classic. In the Mexican highlands, however, the sequence appears to be discontinuous, and Cuicuilco remains the sole example of its type, offering no precedent for later developments at Teotihuacan. Neither Cuicuilco nor Teotihuacan in its earliest stage yielded any examples of the major arts, even after Teotihuacan had become a large urban center. The significance of this fact was not made clear.

The first problem to be brought up in discussion was the origin of painting, and in this connection mention was made of the polychrome cave and cliff paintings of Guerrero. Their Olmec style was not in question, but their chronological relation to the arts of San Lorenzo and La Venta remains in doubt. Also mentioned was the possibility that numerous plain stelae at Monte Alto and in the Guatemalan highlands may once have been painted with

designs or with hieroglyphic texts. The perishable nature of pigments and of the materials other than stone to which they were applied makes it extremely difficult to trace the early development of painting. At Teotihuacan, polychrome seems to precede monochrome rendering, and it was suggested that color symbolism played an important role in mural decoration from the very beginning.

Another point discussed was the giantism of some of the Preclassic sculptures. Aside from the technical considerations discussed by Kubler, giantism may have been an expression of authority and power. I would like to point out that today huge portraits are linked to the popular adulation of individual leaders rather than to honors accorded to traditional office, and perhaps the colossal statues of the Olmec reflect a chieftainship by popular acclaim intermediate between rulership by tribal council and an established hereditary autocracy.

The final topic of discussion was the importance of gesture in virtually all the arts, beginning with the stelae of La Venta. Although gesture is reflected also in writing, the question of the development of coded iconography and its relation to writing was not discussed further, though Kubler's paper presented some cogent arguments for the primacy of image over sign. The suggestion that in the sculptures of San Lorenzo we are observing the product of a long evolutionary process, rather than its incipient stages, perhaps discouraged further consideration of the early development of complex symbolic systems. It is possible that the unresolved question: whether the peoples of San Lorenzo and of Teotihuacan had or had not systems of writing, hinges on the particular definition of "writing" that we espouse. In any case, without the specification of a particular system and its uses, the argument seems to have little cogency.