

**SCULPTURES, SETTLEMENT AND LANDSCAPE
IN THE GUATEMALAN HIGHLANDS:
A RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

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The discovery of two sculptures with pedestals in the year 2003 at finca Pacaño, Patzicía, Chimaltenango (Figure 1), encouraged investigation on one part of the Middle and Late Preclassic sculpting tradition. The tradition of this type of sculptures is well represented in the Guatemalan Highlands, though they are also present in Chiapas, Mexico, in the Pacific Coast, in Honduras and El Salvador, so that it is possible to compare them with Late Preclassic stelae, altars and sculptures for a better understanding of these small sculptures category (Miles 1965; Parsons 1986).

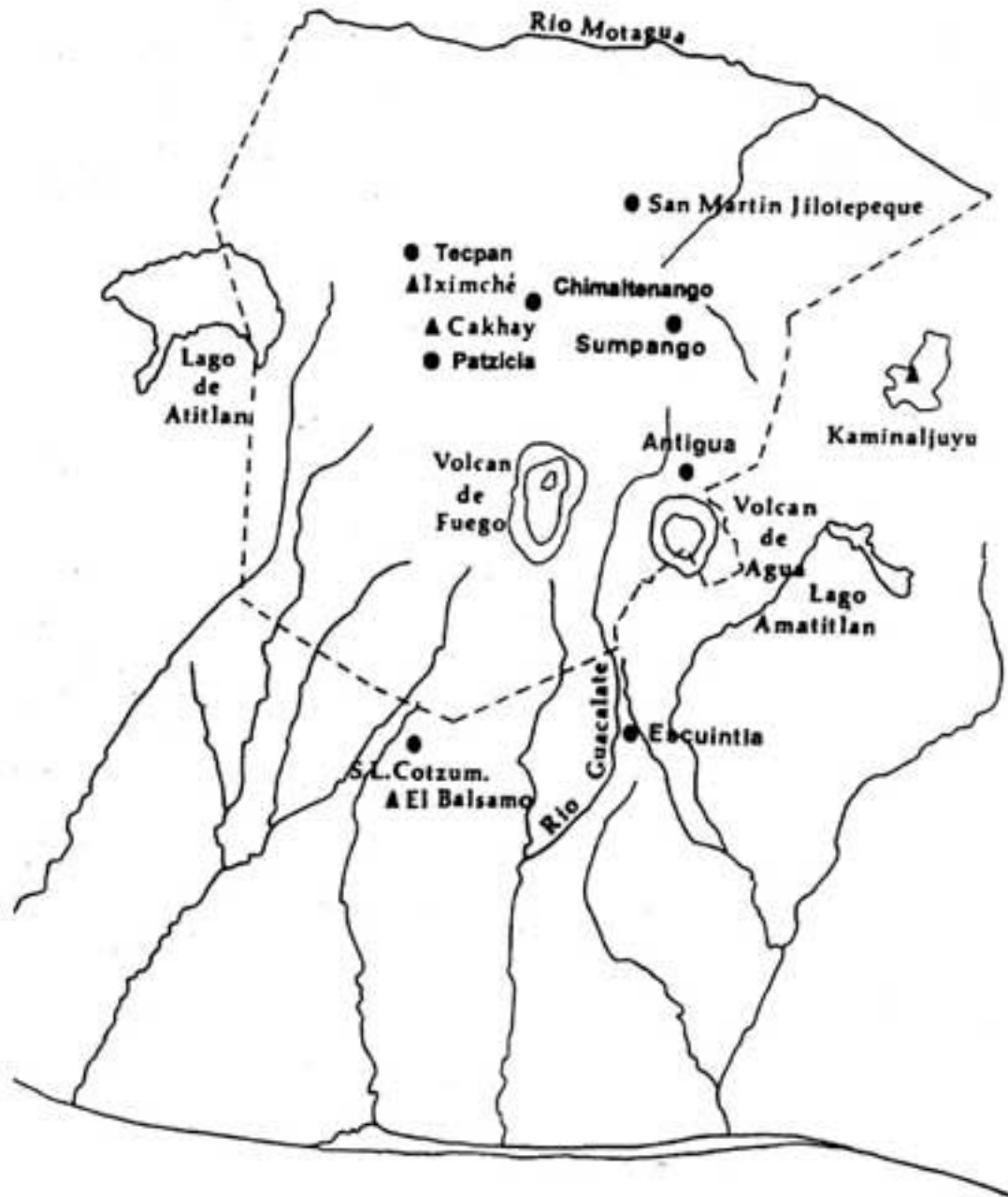


Figure 1. Main sites and centers in Highland Guatemala.

During the summer of 2003, two almost identical sculptures with pedestals (Figures 2 and 3) were found during an excavation carried out for the construction of a septic tank. In a relatively flat area, at a depth of 1.80 m and within a uniform yellow clayish soil, the sculptures were placed in a vertical position. Close to them and in the same excavation, some pottery was also found.

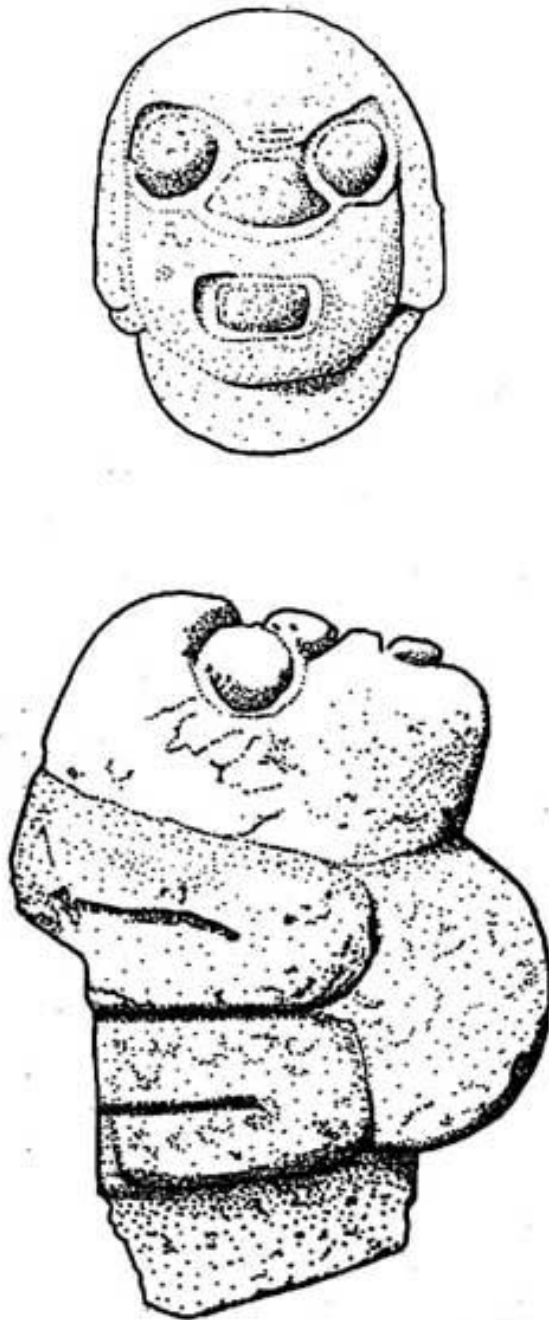


Figure 2. Sculpture 2, site of Pacaño.

The site is located in a relatively flat area at the base of the Soco Mountain (C 251176), a large water reservoir which provides the whole region with streams. At a distance of 120 m west of the site there is a cave and the source of the Julimax brook (*Hulim* stands for cave or hole, and *Hulima* stands for pond, but according to oral tradition, the meaning of *Hulimax* is a sorcerer's cave). There were but few artifacts visible on the surface; in addition, in a nearby area it was observed that another earth removal had taken place, with no cultural materials left at sight. Towards the east, 25 m away from where the sculptures were found, a few Preclassic and Classic sherds were observed. The scant amount of ceramic may suggest that the place was at no time densely populated (though additional

reconnaissance should be accomplished to observe whether there is pottery or some other type of cultural material present in other terraces on the slope).

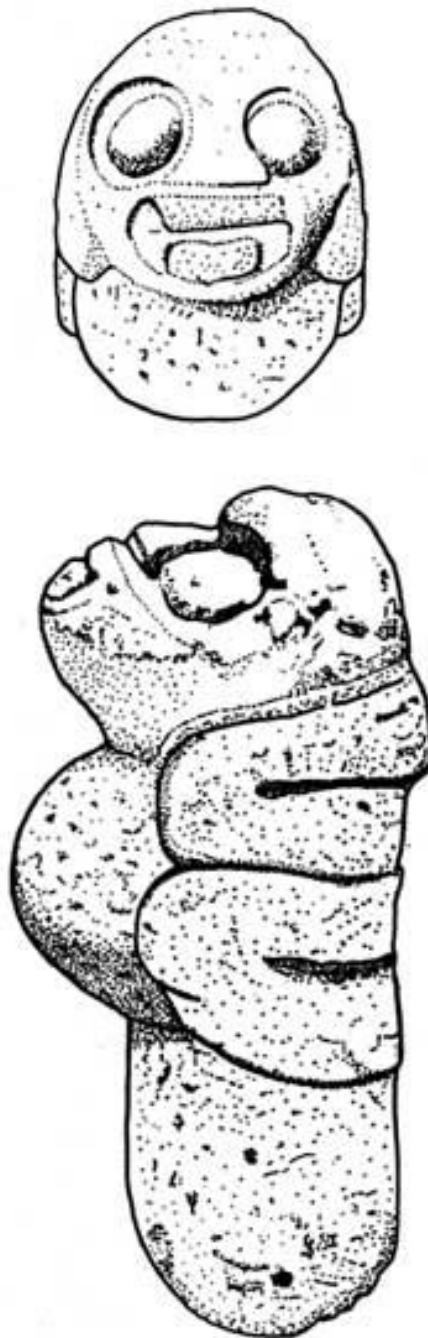


Figure 3. Sculpture 3, site of Pacaño.

DESCRIPTION

The sculptures of Patzicia are human figures made of clay (initially it was believed that they had been sculpted with sandstone). Sculpture 1 is the largest and more complete one, with measures of 0.42 m long and 0.20 m wide (Figure 3). Sculpture 2 is smaller, with measures of 0.33 m long and 0.20 m wide (Figure 2). They both present several levels of depth that grant the figures animation and realism, although

face and body proportions do not match those of a normal human form. The heads and faces are about the same length than the torsos (faces are 0.17 m long, and torsos 0.22 m long). The arms are somewhat shorter than the legs, thus providing the figure with some appearance of proportionality. Stomachs are extremely pronounced, so that one is under the impression that the figures are pregnant.

The faces have bulbous traits. Eyes are very big, round and open, and noses are quite wide and flat, covering a good portion of the face; mouths are big and pronounced but they vary in their position –one is rectangular, is opened and shows the tongue, giving the impression that it is receiving a sacrifice, while the other one has its lips tightly closed-, but Sculpture 1 shows that the lower portion of the mouth and the mandible are broken. The ears are small, poorly delineated at the sides of the head, and pronounced at the front. The hands are merely represented with a few areas in relief. The back side of the sculptures is plain and shows no additional details.

The position of the figures is unusual. Their heads are exaggeratedly bent backwards, with their faces turned up to the sky, their hands close behind their necks, their stomachs are large and bulging, and legs are bent under their bodies. The full pedestal measures 0.14 m long, and is rather short compared to other sculptures with pedestals 1 m long or more. The possibility exists that in ancient times these were tenons, because of some burnt areas observed on their faces, perhaps the result of some offering with a fire lit in the lower portion or of burnings made right on top of them. But, in fact, the spike should be longer, because with such a short proportion as the one observed, no support would have been feasible.

Within the area where the sculptures were located, also ceramic was recovered. This consisted of:

- One bowl with handle and red on white rim, and a red paste (Figure 4), a type already identified in Urías, dating to the Agua phase (BC 900-700).



Figure 4. Red on White ceramic.

- A small red paste bowl, red paint on the rim and outer part of the body (Figure 5), possibly dating to the same period.

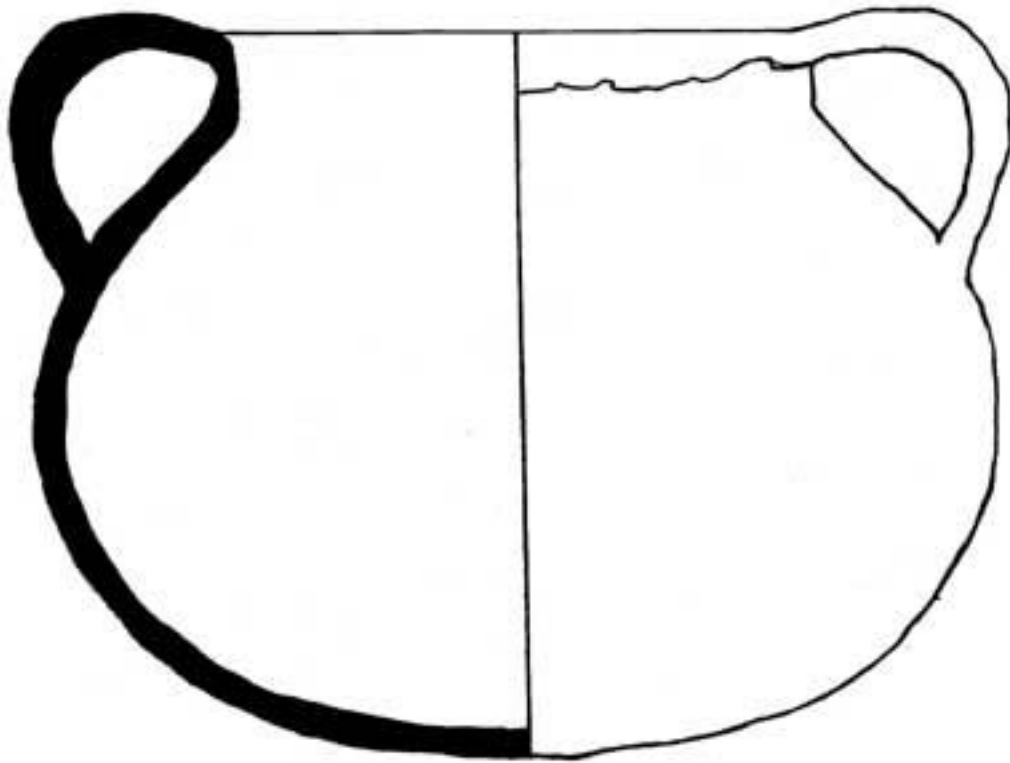


Figure 5. Ceramic. Red paste with red paint.

- One white paste bowl with short walls (Figure 6), of the Sacatepéquez White Paste ware dating to the Middle Preclassic period (BC 700-300).

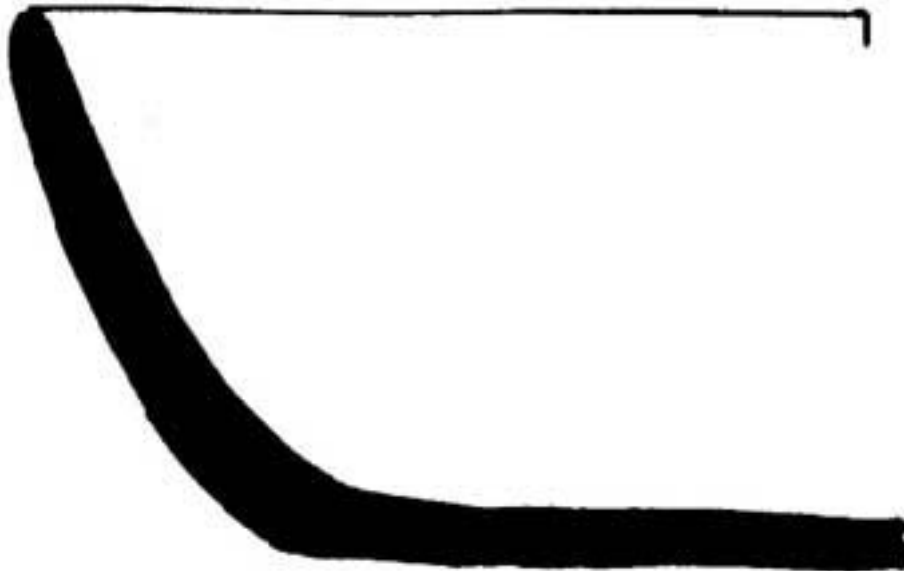


Figure 6. Sacatepéquez ceramic, White Paste.

- One smoothed orange bowl with divergent rim and pointed supports (Figure 7), probably of the Late Preclassic period.

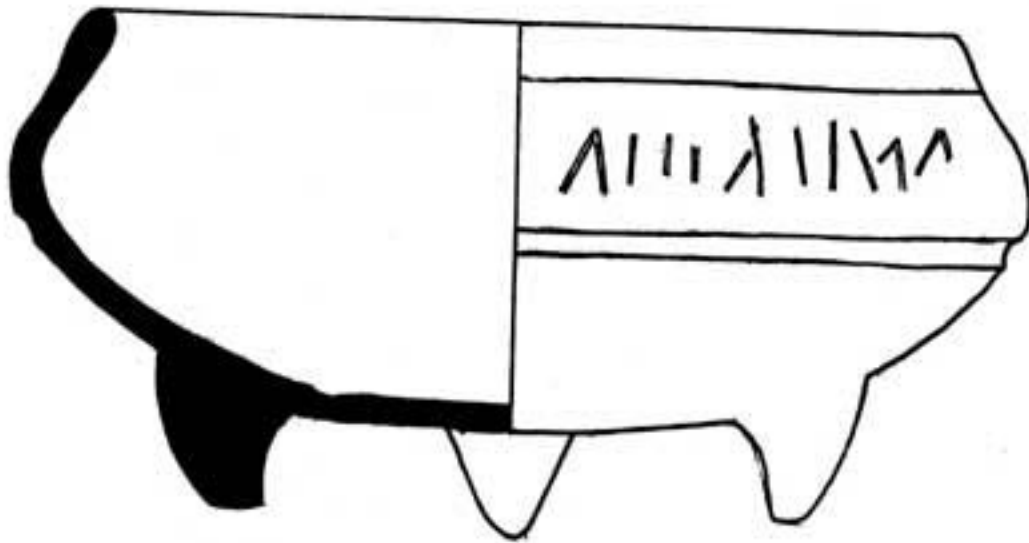


Figure 7. Smoothed Orange bowl, with pointed supports.

- One bowl with a broken annular support, and a coarse decoration with parallel incised lines around the rim (Figure 8), possibly of the Late Preclassic period.

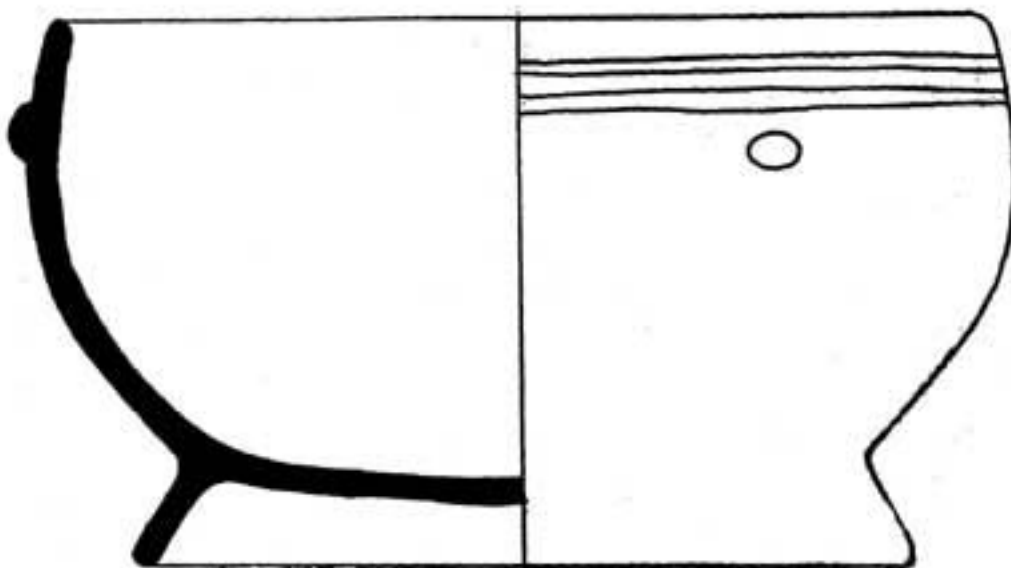


Figure 8. Smoothed Orange Ceramic, with annular support.

- Two Esperanza Flesh fragments.
- One fragment of red on orange ceramic, possibly a part of a censer.
- One fragment of handle with the typical Early Classic punched decoration.

COMPARISONS

Comparing the sculptures with other examples published has made it easier to establish a probable date as well as to advance several relevant interpretations. There is some evidence about the date of the sculptures with pedestals originated in highland areas. Some originate in early Kaminaljuyu contexts. Shook (1951) reported two sculptures with pedestals and three basalt fragments around Stela 9, associated with artifacts of the Providencia phase used around 700 to 300 BC. Another one, from San José Pinula and dated by Doris Stone to the same phase, shows a leader sitting on a bench. The large and protruding stomachs recall the pot-bellied sculptures. These are seated figures or deities, big and pot-bellied, found throughout the Pacific Coast and the Guatemalan Highlands, while some others were found in Chiapas, Mexico, and in the Maya Lowlands. These sculptures probably correspond to the Late and Terminal Preclassic periods (BC 400 to AD 100), but also, reference is made suggesting that they could be earlier (Hatch 1997; Bove 1989; Demarest 1982; Navarrete 2000; Rodas 1993). The interpretation of this sculpture indicates they could have been offerings or cult objects of pregnant females. Mandeville has interpreted them as a winged bird, and Karl Taube has argued that they are the predecessors of an obese god of the Late Classic period (Chinchilla 2003). Some of them seem to be blowing, a gesture indicating that the characters were deceased (Kappelman, personal communication 2003).

The figures of Patzicia are similar to the pot-bellied figures in their large stomachs and heads, which at times are looking upwards, though other important characteristics are still to be defined. Pot-bellied figures usually have closed eyes and popped up navels with arms surrounding the bodies and hands resting on their stomachs. The position of bodies of the Patzicia figures is clearly different. There are two standing sculptures, one at Parzun and the other at the Popol Vuh Museum (Stone 1972:69), both with round and open eyes, different than the typical closed eyes of the pot-bellied figures, outlining perhaps a stylistic position typical of the area.

These sculptures could correspond to a different expression of Middle or Late Preclassic art. One sculpture from Tecpán representing a monkey with its hands on its head (Stone 1972:68), in a similar position, is suggesting a parallelism. Other similar minor comparisons are: in the Izapa Late Preclassic Stela 89 (Norman 1976), there is a humiliated captive showing his bent legs and his protruding stomach, but his hands appear tied at his back. Another possible example consists of a deity that flies above two similar smaller figures, in an attitude of attention or worship, like in the Patzicia figures (Love 2002).

The best possible analogy with Middle Preclassic features is that these were small, portable figures of unborn individuals (fetuses) or of dwarfs, who in Olmec art are associated with the harvest of corn. One such figure was made of greenish blue jade, and has been interpreted as a fetus, with his hands on his head and his legs bent under his body (Guthrie 1995). An additional example is a figure with an elongated head, with his arms at the sides of his head and his legs in a crouched position. Some of these figures in Olmec iconography, together with saurian and

birds suggest a connection with the supernatural. The position of the arms would explain a sculptural detail, as if they were carrying a bundle of corn with his hands, held in a position of triumph over the back of their necks or heads.

INTERPRETATION

There are two possible interpretations. The best one is that the Patzicia sculptures could be simple representation of fetuses or infants born dead, that consecrate a new life and are the bearers of the sacred corn, if we compare this with the examples of the Olmec elite. This interpretation is reinforced by the localization of the site within the setting of the Highlands. These sculptures are located in a sacred place, given the natural characteristics close to the site, and which in the Mesoamerican Maya thinking are considered as such, at the foot of a mountain, close to a cave, and to the largest water reservoir in the region. The site lies at the base of the Soco Mountain, which provides abundant brooks and water to the region. Only 120 m at the west of the site there is a cave, of which the Julimax stream springs.

The present investigation poses that the sculptures define a ritual place associated with fertility, water and life, giving new strengths, including birth, and perhaps, corn. Could these figures be used in a local cult to fertility and life in this place? Or do they point to an extension with feminine looks and to fertility?

An additional simple and more reasonable idea is that one rural community created sculptures that represented adult dwarfs that defined an enchanted place. The faces of these sculptures are clearly of adult individuals, and that is the reason why this interpretation is being considered. Today, the belief of the Guatemalan population is that the dwarfs (*alux*) are marginal people who live in the woods and enchanted areas. In Honduras they are called *sipitios* and feature identical characteristics. Perhaps these Patzicia creatures were dwarfs protectors of fertility who watched over the cave and the water source. The places considered to be enchanted are presently avoided by the rural population, and this might explain the paucity of evidence regarding ceramic and domestic occupation of the place.

The presence of Preclassic and Classic ceramic recovered in the excavation of the septic tank at Pacaño together with several superficial sherds, suggests that perhaps the site was uninterruptedly used for an extended period of time. Perhaps the sculptures were found at their place of origin, but the broken pedestal of Sculpture 2 and the broken mandible of Sculpture 1 suggest that they may have been moved. Parsons and other scholars have noted that the sculptures were moved from their original position or relocated in a different context in that which is broadly considered as "*reused art*".

This place is important because it represents a place in the Highlands with a Preclassic to Classic uninterrupted occupation where no abrupt change was observed, like those occurred in Kaminaljuyu, widely documented by Hatch, with the Solano Ceramic Tradition establishing the beginning of the K'iche' occupation during the Early Classic period at that major center. Could this ritual place located towards

the west region have managed to somehow maintain itself as a zone independent of the new hegemony of Kaminaljuyu?

Possibly, the sculptures from Patzicia imply a new level of cultural development that characterizes this zone with a sculptural production typical of the Chimaltenango region. At this time, a more thorough study should be carried out to answer these questions and to confirm the hypothesis posed. Hopefully, more comprehensive information on this zone will be made available in the future.

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