

---

## 10. The Chalcatzingo Reliefs: An Iconographic Analysis

JORGE ANGULO V.

---

### *Takuhón* illustrations by Chappie Angulo

---

Local, regional, and long-distance economic interaction between distant culture groups existed very early in Mesoamerica's prehistory. For instance, Michael Coe's data from the Ojochi phase levels (1500–1350 BC) at San Lorenzo indicate that the obsidian utilized there derived from sources associated with the Orizaba volcano (Guadalupe Victoria, Pico de Orizaba) 300 km to the northwest (Cobean et al. 1971). The establishment of local and long-distance exchange and trade systems is a recurring phenomenon in Mesoamerica. Such systems moved raw materials and manufactured goods common to one area to other places lacking these products. Such exchange or trade was usually reciprocal and could be relatively local (within one valley) or pan-Mesoamerican (e.g., between Tikal and Teotihuacan during the Classic period). It is certainly evident that if groups could trade or exchange raw materials, manufactured goods, technology, and other material elements, then they could also exchange their astronomical knowledge, religious concepts, ideas, and cultural features, often translated into symbols and graphic elements that would have been understood among the elite. This way of communicating and transmitting ideas has been classified and studied under the rubric "iconography."

This exchange of materials, as well as intellectual-spiritual concepts and traditions, was established at least by the Early Formative period. The collective cultural traits that developed in Mesoamerica as a result of this exchange have much to do with the similarities in glyphic and symbolic elements that appear to be characteristically "Olmec" but are also manifested in later cultures. Though these elements are similar, they show particular adaptations to different areas in terms of stylization of their characteristics. Nevertheless these sym-

bols conserved the basic elements of the "mother culture," as Miguel Covarrubias (1957: 83) called it. Only a cultural unity of this type explains the stylistic evolution of certain iconographic traits that lasted for three thousand years until the time of the Spanish conquest. It is amazing to note how some celebrations and ceremonies today contain identifiable traits of prehispanic origin, although often barely recognizable in the rituals of a hybridized religion. Examples of this can be seen in the traditional dances related to agricultural fertility and the petitions for food performed to the deities related to natural elements. A list of these dances with their explanations would require an exhaustive chapter in itself; therefore it is enough to mention only the dances of Los Tecuanes, La Pescada, and those performed during the Easter period in isolated parts of Mexico, especially in the mountains of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Jalisco, and Nayarit.

A concept opposed to cultural unity and persistence as presented here has been popularized and repeated in the past decade by George Kubler (1967; 1972). This has been an attempt to invalidate any comparisons or analogies that might be established between archaeological cultures and ethnic groups either before the conquest or today. The theory condemns comparison between Mesoamerican cultures, particularly when they do not correspond to the same cultural subarea or if they did not reach similar levels of development at the same time. It is based on the "law of disjunction," formulated by Erwin Panofsky, which Kubler (1967: 11–12) adapted for Mesoamerica, arguing for "... different meanings in similar representations." The concept favors a pluralistic interpretation of Mesoamerican religions based upon "intrinsic evidence" from the art forms (Kubler 1972: 1).

One principle followed in this chapter

is that the art form transmits a message as a complement of the social, political, economic, religious, and historical factors that constitute the culture of any group. I conclude, however, that many of the precolumbian iconographic representations do share the same basic concepts, and that they conserve a certain degree of continuity throughout the chronological horizons of their development. The various examples of this expression that have endured for more than three thousand years in Mesoamerica would require a lengthy list and a work dedicated exclusively to that theme, so only one example will be mentioned. This is the persistence of *chalchihuitl*, the jade bead that symbolically represents precious water (blood of the gods), as an element that frequently appears associated with representations of water-laden clouds. The most ancient expression known of this motif appears on a rock carving at Chalcatzingo (relief I-A-1, "El Rey"). It is also found with the same significance in the *Codex Telleriano Remensis* (Pl. 25) and in the copy *Vatican II*, both painted in the period immediately after the conquest, almost 2,500 years after the carving of the Chalcatzingo reliefs. This same motif is without question still found in drawings and paintings executed today on *amate* paper by artists in rural villages in the mountains of Guerrero and sold in folk-art stores throughout Mexico.

The following analysis of the monuments is based upon lengthy in-the-field studies of each relief under a variety of light conditions, supplemented with *takuhón* technique "rubbings" (which illustrate this chapter) and photographs. Because the concept of a continuity of beliefs and symbolism through time is followed, the analysis draws heavily upon ethnohistoric and Postclassic data. The presentation of the reliefs does not follow the sequential numbering order of

the catalog (Chapter 9), but discusses the most important reliefs in groups which exhibit unifying themes. The reader is referred to the catalog for additional locational and descriptive data.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE RELIEFS

##### *Group I-A (Mons. 11, 8, 14, 15, 7, 6, 1)*

The carvings of Group I-A convey the idea that they form a pictorial sequence, rather than each carving simply being an isolated phenomenon. At least three symbolic motifs are repeated in most of these carvings, with only minor variations between them. The first is a cloud, which appears to be growing thicker and changing its position from left to right in the sequence. Another is the raindrop motif which terminates in a small concentric circle (the *chalchihuitl*, which in later Mesoamerican cultures symbolizes rainwater, precious water, and the blood of the gods). The raindrops change in quantity, size, and position in the sequence of carvings. The third motif is a double scroll element that winds and unwinds, forming a horizontal S. This last element serves as a base for most of the zoomorphic figures of Group I-A and as the seat of the principal personage, "El Rey," of relief I-A-1 (Mon. 1), who sits within the mouth of an earth monster, the entrance to the underworld (Grove 1968a:486–487). El Rey holds within its arms a bar with the same scroll design, bringing to mind the ceremonial bars found in Maya carvings.

The Group I-A sequence must be viewed from left to right. Unfortunately, this is exactly the reverse of the sequence in which the reliefs were found and originally numbered. Relief I-A-7 (Mon. 11; Fig. 10.1), on the extreme left, begins with a cloud set at an angle of 60°. Beneath the cloud, but at some distance below it, raindrops fall perpendicularly, seemingly blown away by the wind. They do not quite reach the zoomorphic figure, which appears to represent a crouching jaguar lying in wait on top of the horizontal-S symbol and looking upward in the direction of the cloud.

The second relief in this series, I-A-6 (Mon. 8; Fig. 10.2) has been severely eroded and is barely perceptible today. It also includes a thin cloud, in this case directly over the zoomorphic figure. The head of this heavy-bodied figure is again upturned, facing the cloud. A bifurcated scroll emerges from its mouth. Where the scroll is close to the cloud, two rain-



Figure 10.1. Monument I-A-7 (Mon. 11).



Figure 10.2. Monument I-A-6 (Mon. 8).

drops are produced. It is difficult to determine whether the muzzle of the animal is large and the bifurcate element emerging from its mouth is short, or vice versa. The figure's face has remains of a wide eyebrow that could be interpreted as a "flame eyebrow." Two short legs terminating in claws protrude from the heavy body. The left leg appears to be shriveled and held close to the body, while something protrudes downward from the stomach. The most disconcerting part of this figure is the tail, which can be interpreted in different ways. One is to view the animal as a fish with some long element attached to its tail. Another is to view the zoomorph as a representation of a crocodilian with a long tail that branches out from the center and again at the tip.

It is difficult to identify the zoomorph based on the data available. It seems to be a fish-like animal with a large snout and large tail like a crocodile or *cipactli*, often referred to in Nahuatl mythology as the symbol of the material world, composed of earth and water. Or it may be the *acipactli*, which lives in the rivers and estuaries and has been frequently mentioned in sixteenth-century sources as *peje lagarto*, or alligator gar.

The third zoomorphic figure of this sequence, I-A-5 (Mon. 14; Fig. 10.3), was uncovered in 1972 and is in a good state of preservation when compared to the others. The figure is crouched over the horizontal inverted-S motif. The structure of a quadruped can be clearly seen. It may be a dog or a coyote with its tail curving upward. It also faces upward toward the cloud. The face has a clearly incised wide eyebrow, as is common among flame eyebrows in Olmec carvings. Emerging from the elongated snout is again the bifurcated scroll. When this touches the cloud above, it produces three drops of water that fall on each side of the figure. Below the figure is a plant consisting of a large stem with four large leaves, all morphologically characteristic of squash plants.

The fourth carving, I-A-4 (Mon. 15; Fig. 10.4), also found in 1972, is almost completely destroyed except for portions of the cloud's right half, one drop of falling rain, and the upper part of the bifurcated scroll. The destruction has removed almost all of the zoomorphic figure in this instance, as well as the scroll upon which these figures normally crouch. In the lower part of the carving another squash plant can be seen. This squash



Figure 10.3. Monument I-A-5 (Mon. 14).



Figure 10.5. Monument I-A-2 (Mon. 7).



Figure 10.4. Monument I-A-4 (Mon. 15).

plant contains at least one flower with incipient fruit. Although we have no way of knowing how long this relief has been destroyed or what caused its nearly total destruction, its position on the hill suggests that it may have simply disappeared through erosion.

The following scene is composed of two carvings on different sides of the same rock that seem to represent the same animal–scroll–squash–plant complex shown in the previous two reliefs. During the 1972 field season, a *takuhón* was made of I-A-2 (Mon. 7; Fig. 10.5). I believe it shows the zoomorphic figure to be an iguana. As with the other carvings, the zoomorphic figure is looking upward and also crouches over the horizontal-S scroll. Apparently missing here are the bifurcated scroll, the rain cloud, and the drops of rain. The other side of the same rock has a well-executed carving representing the vine, leaves, and young fruits of a squash plant, I-A-3 (Mon. 6; Fig. 10.6). The positioning of the zoomorphic figure and squash plant leaves little doubt that these two carvings form one unit.

Interestingly, the animal looks upward toward MCR-2 (Chapter 11), a small rock-carved canal about 2 m uphill. This canal may have symbolically or magically guided the torrents of water that during the rainy period formed the beginnings of a drainage system that started at the feet of El Rey and descended the hill, crossing the artificial terraces to irrigate the fields below.

The last relief of the sequence is “El Rey,” I-A-1 (Mon. 1; Fig. 9.3). On the uppermost part of the relief are three large double clouds, apparently filled with water. Vertical lines below these undulating clouds transmit the image of a fine but heavy rain (Fig. 10.7). Below the clouds, raindrops occur in abundance. Concentric-circle *chalchihuitl* glyphs larger in size than the raindrops are also present.

From the open mouth of the earth-monster niche, large scrolls curl outward in diverse directions, as if describing a torrent of wind. Previous classifications have identified this large zoomorphic earth-monster profile as the jaguar-serpent. The triple lines of the jaw mark the gums of a feline, while the eye motif with its St. Andrew’s cross is considered that of a reptile.

The St. Andrew’s cross here may relate to the “crossroads” (*omaxalli*) that Edward Seler (1963) frequently mentions in his analysis of symbology. The *omaxalli*

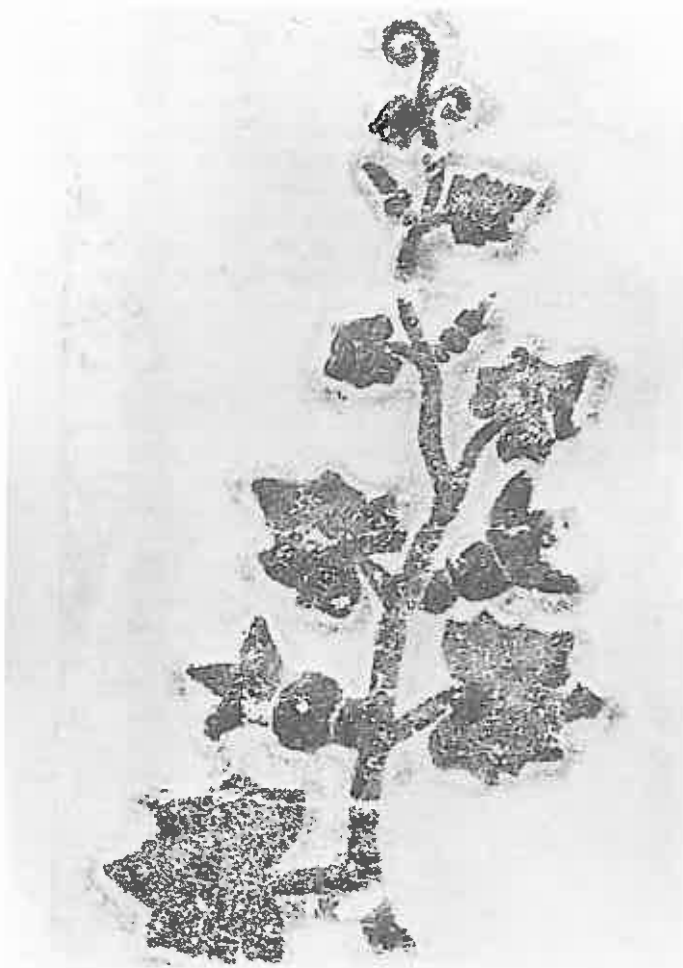


Figure 10.6. Monument I-A-3 [Mon. 6].



Figure 10.7. Cloud above "El Rey," Monument I-A-1 (Mon. 1).

probably had a mythical significance related to the cardinal points and to the definition of the five regions of the universe, of which the most important point was the center. This core would be where two different dimensions merge, as geographic space in the chronological moment of living experience, a combination of space and time that forms the present.

In the Mexica culture, the place where the roads crossed (*omaxalli*) was an important space destined for the construction of temples and altars dedicated to deities of the earth, especially Tlazolteotl, Tezcatlipoca, and Xipe Totec.

The St. Andrew's cross could also represent the dual deities of heaven and the underworld. The symbol would graphically express the crossing of the path of the sun in its daily journey with that of the Milky Way in the nocturnal sky.

Above the eye of the earth monster is a flame-eyebrow-like element which probably was derived from the eyebrow area of the quetzal bird or *guacamaya*. Donald Lathrap (1982) identifies it with the crest of the harpy eagle. In both instances it would personify the symbol of the sun.

In three areas of the open jaws of the earth-monster are plants, previously interpreted as maize (Coe 1965a:18), but identified below as a bromeliad that grows and adheres to the fissures of the rocks at Chalcatzingo.

The personage seated within the earth-monster's mouth not only sits upon a rectangular block which contains the horizontal-S symbol, but also holds in his/her arms a "ceremonial bar" with that same symbol (Fig. 10.8). This personage, popularly called "El Rey," wears an enormous headdress placed at the back of the head. The tall and tubular form of this headdress evidences certain similarities with the headdresses worn by personages shown in other Olmec art such as in Juxtlahuaca cave, Guerrero, Stelae 2 and 3 at La Venta, and to some extent on Altars 3 and 5 at the same site.

Within the headdress of "El Rey" are two rows of three raindrop symbols each. Three large concentric circles (as in the *chalchihuitl* glyph) are distributed along the back and top of the headdress and are adorned with eyebrow-like elements. Above and below the central circle are the figures of two quetzal birds with long tail feathers. Two bromeliad-like plants are present, one in the front and center of the headdress, the second emanating forward from the turban or dressed hair that



Figure 10.8. Seated figure, "El Rey," Monument I-A-1 (Mon. 1).

covers "El Rey's" crown and forehead. Where the hair or turban covers the side of the head there is an elongated ornament which includes a circular element like an earplug. A triangular form with the long point facing downward hangs from the circle. The circle and triangle combination evolved into the year symbol used by later central Mexican cultures.

"El Rey" appears to have an adornment covering the cheek and nose, and there is some type of element emanating from the mouth. In both cases the effects of erosion or intentional mutilation prohibit definite identification.

A cape covers "El Rey's" shoulders and falls to elbow level. Any designs on the cape have been lost through weathering. Raindrop symbols occur on the personage's skirt-like garment, but the designs on the *maxtlatl* or hanging belt are too eroded to identify. Ankle bands are clearly worn, but it is difficult to de-

termine if the feet are bare or shod in sandals.

With the idea in mind that the Group I-A carvings represent a pictorial sequence, this sequence can now be analyzed. One very significant feature is that all of the zoomorphic creatures executed in the reliefs are shown with their heads facing upward. Similar representations (especially of fish and birds) are found on Early Formative vessels from Tlatilco and Las Bocas (Coe 1963a: Figs. 22, 59, 61; Piña Chan 1958: 2: Pls. 4, 10). Three Late Formative ceramic figurines found during the 1974 excavations on T-27 (Fig. 8.17) wear duck-billed masks over their mouths in the manner of the Mexica Ehecatl and are also facing upward.

Various Gulf Coast sculptures are found in the same position, although at times they have been mistakenly set up horizontally. Examples include La Venta

Monuments 11 and 56, Tres Zapotes Monuments F and G (de la Fuente 1973: 68–70, 103–104, 295–299), and a carving from Arroyo Sonso, Veracruz (Fig. 10.9). This position is also repeated in Mexica sculptures such as the dog or *ahuizotl* displayed in the Puebla Museum and the statue of Coatlicue found during the subway excavations in Mexico City. Thus, just as people today kneel in church, these carvings suggest that an upward-facing posture may have been a common ritual position from the Early Formative period until the destruction of the indigenous culture by the Spanish.

This position is of significance for another reason as well. Among the recent discoveries related to the decipherment of Maya glyphs has been the identification of a glyph that signifies the "birth" of important personages. This glyph is always a zoomorphic head (usually identified as a frog) looking upward (Fig. 10.10; Barthel 1968: 134–135). Chalcatzingo's zoomorphic figures with upturned faces could possibly have been carved for the same reason, to indicate "birth," or the initiation of some special event in the celebration of a ceremony. The other sculptures and the ceramic vessels mentioned above could likewise have been related to the same concept. The special event celebrated might have been the birth or beginning of the rainy season, the rebirth of the vegetation that covers the surface of the earth after the first rains, the act of fertilization, and the giving of the "new life" that annually bursts forth from Mother Earth, assuring the survival of the inhabitants.

While the zoomorphs looking upward could be the symbol of the initiation of an event, the bifurcated volutes emerging from their upturned faces would have been the energy emitted as breath, materializing the prayers and chants directed to the clouds to give forth their precious drops of water (*chalchihuitl*). Similar single volutes were used by later cultures in highland Mexico as the symbol of speech and communication. When speech scrolls were adorned with flowers they represented prayers and chants. Without adornment they signified ordinary communication.

The bifurcated volute emerging from the zoomorphic figures at Chalcatzingo can also be simplified into the geometric form of a T. Among the Maya this form is a glyph known as *ik*, whose literal translation is "wind." *Ik*, as god of the wind, is part of Itzamna, a greater god. In addi-



tion, according to J. Eric S. Thompson (1960:73), "Ik . . . means not only wind but breath and by extension life itself." In referring to the usage of the *ik* sign in one portion of the *Codex Madrid*, Thompson says, "Here again, the Ik must carry the idea of germination, of coming to life." The bifurcated volute conceived as a supplication rising to the clouds could be an earlier expression of the Maya glyph, the breath of Ik. Among the Maya of the Petén and the area of the Usumacinta-Grijalva during the Classic period, glyphic writing consisted of a mix of pictographic and ideographic symbols which complemented other abstract symbols grouped as affixes, suffixes, prefixes, and others which generally represented a sound or phoneme (Kelley 1962). It is possible that Chalcatzingo's Group I-A reliefs are one of the first manifestations of this type of symbolic-representative writing, which may have begun in the Early or Middle Formative, although few examples exist from these early times to verify such a hypothesis.

The pictorial sequence of zoomorphic figures facing upward may imply a deeper meaning than simply the initiation of a new phase of life related to the fertility of the earth brought about by the coming

of the rains. The advent of the rains could have marked a new annual phase in the system of time measurement or calendric counts, the birth of a new year. All known calendars have seemingly arbitrary beginnings. It is possible that in the Formative period the calendar began the new year with the rainy season.

The passage of the sun across the true zenith is a phenomenon which occurs only in tropical latitudes. As Anthony Aveni (1980:40–46) has noted, the passage of the sun through the zenith may have been used in the prehispanic period, as it is today, to fix dates in the agricultural calendar. "The first (zenith passage) announces the rains at the end of April telling that it is time to clear the fields for a planting, the second . . . also signals rain accompanied by wind. These events are attended by elaborate ritual" (Aveni 1980:40).

Other scholars offer different beginning points for the precolumbian calendar. Alfonso Caso (1967:50–63) suggested that the calendric count began with the month of Atlcahualo, which he correlated with February 14. Coe (1975:13) suggests that the Maya year began during the second ten days of the month of July, when the sun passed over the zenith without leaving a shadow on a vertical stick. Aveni (personal communication) believes that the same zenith phenomenon took place at Tres Zapotes during the third week of May. He also notes (1980:245) that the initiation of the rainy season in Copán in the first week of May can be determined when Venus can no longer be seen through the window of the "observatory" at that site.

Today one of the principal festivals of Chalcatzingo is the Christian celebration of Santa Cruz on May 3. On this day a nearly constant procession of villagers can be seen climbing the Cerro Chalcatzingo to the cross which is erected atop the hill. They carry food and fruits as offerings for the year. Since the colonial period the indigenous populations have selected Christian festivals which coincided in time with their traditional ceremonies and festivals. However, it cannot be determined with certainty today whether the festivals are more important for their original indigenous aspects or for their more recent Christian significance.

Festivals and ceremonies today emphasize the continued importance of the beginning of the rains to Mesoamerican agriculturalists. In precolumbian Mesoamerica, in a cognitive system in which

the elements of nature and the obsession with agricultural productivity were so important, the rainy season undoubtedly marked the beginning of a new cycle, the rebirth of a new life.

Another important and not unrelated theme in the Group I-A reliefs can be found in the horizontal-S scroll that serves as a base for almost all of the crouched zoomorphic figures. This symbol, with its winding and unwinding, visually expresses two aspects of the same movement, but in opposition. In the double scroll we find the dual principle of the giving of life and taking back through death, the dryness and later the humidity that cyclically cover the surface of the earth.

Although the extremes of this horizontal-S symbol diverge in opposite directions, at the same time it forms an inseparable unit as a dual principle of contrary forces that compose the order of the universe, the essence that maintains all of the elements of creation in permanent equilibrium. The scroll is a clearly explicit visual form of the principle of equilibrium of contrary forces, the eternal duality of oppositions found in all philosophical theories, the same principle or scientific premise that explores the eternal dynamics which maintain active and alive all the components affecting the constant rhythm of transformation of life in nature. These eternal oppositions, notable in the contrast between night and day, heat and cold, rain and drought, life and death, express the concepts of duality that have been manifested in Mesoamerica from the Early Formative period to the Spanish conquest.

Because of the common association of the scroll as a symbol for sound, the horizontal-S scroll may also represent sound in one direction and the echo in the opposite direction. As noted below, the echo has an important association with the Lord of the Mountain as personified by the "El Rey" relief (I-A-1). Caves and mountain cliffs are an appropriate place for echoes, and it is likely that this opposing scroll motif represents the chants, prayers, and supplications projected toward the sacred cliffs of Chalcatzingo to obtain rain from the "Heart of the Mountain."

It is possible that the horizontal-S scroll, the symbol of dual opposition, evolved into glyphs such as *hurakan*, the *xonecuilli*, and others used during the Classic period. The constant use and



Figure 10.9. Arroyo Sonso carving, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City.

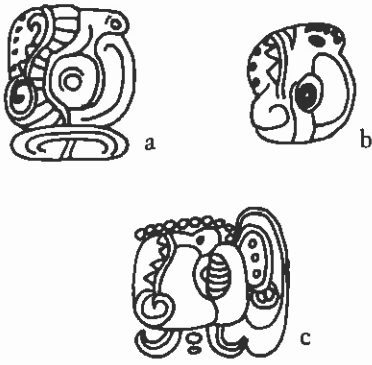


Figure 10.10. Maya "upended-frog" glyphs: a, T740:24; b, T740; c, T740 (after Kelley 1976: Figs. 55, 68, 73).

repetition of this symbol throughout many centuries may have converted it into a familiar and traditional motif applied to ceramics as decoration but no longer directly related to the mythic-religious symbolism of the original.

From the above discussions it can be seen that the zoomorphic figures in Group I-A are extremely complex iconographically, for they encompass concepts such as birth, new life, and oppositions. Their variety suggests a further interpretation, that they may also be totemic representations of clans or other kinship-oriented groups from the settlement of Chalcatzingo or the valley, who participated in ritualistic petitions for rain here on the side of the sacred mountain.

The first animal (I-A-7), identified here as a jaguar, would have been the most important clan or lineage, related to the sun or creator from the east who is crouched in wait.

The second relief (I-A-6) depicts a figure related either to the *cipactli* (crocodile) or the *acipactli* (alligator gar or *peje lagarto*), both of which represent the water from ponds, lakes, rivers, and estuaries, and are considered as a link between water and earth. There are some similarities between this figure and Izapa Stela 25, in which the *cipactli* is converted into a strong tree, evidently related to fertility (Norman 1976:37). Here this animal could also represent another clan participating with petitions in the ritual.

In the third relief (I-A-5) the figure is considered to be a coyote or some type of canine. It could have been related to a clan from the vicinity whose mythical

animal would have guarded the *milpa* from rodents and other predators. It would also have been the symbol of a cosmic star, the moon, or some other form of cosmic energy.

Since the fourth relief (I-A-4) is almost completely eroded, it is impossible to identify the figure. However, in the sequence of zoomorphic figures there is none related to water and air; thus it might have been a duck or a bird. In the black ware ceramics from Tlatilco and Las Bocas, many vessels have been found in the form of birds, especially ducks. The duck would be considered here as an animal related to human groups as well as to the aquatic and aerial elements of nature, since it is often represented in Olmec and Middle Formative iconography.

The last zoomorphic figure of the sequence (I-A-2) depicts an iguana, a well-known symbol of fertility related to both plants and human beings.

This whole sequence of reliefs may in one aspect represent the collaboration of the clan groups, each one related to natural elements, in their petitions through prayers and ritual to bring the rain clouds from afar to the mountain of Chalcatzingo, in a ceremony associated with fertility.

As a complement to the fertility rites, the sequence clearly shows the progressive growth of the clouds. Relief I-A-7, at the extreme left of the sequence, shows a cloud on the distant horizon. The cloud keeps growing in the subsequent reliefs until it reaches its full size (repeated three times) above "El Rey" (I-A-1), where each cloud is three layers thick (Fig. 10.7), giving the impression of rain falling from three different levels to the earth-monster below.

A further complementary sequence occurs with the squash plants. Carving I-A-5 shows a vine with four leaves, while on the following relief, I-A-4, the vine (heavily eroded) bears a small flower with an incipient fruit. The adjacent relief, I-A-3, depicts a third squash plant in full florescence with two ripe fruits which are represented with flowers, while two other small fruits are beginning to grow at the end of the exuberantly carved vine. These three representations leave no doubt that they form part of a sequence showing the florescence of one of Mesoamerica's oldest cultigens, as a result of the rains brought through the fertility rituals depicted by this entire sequence.

A completely different type of plant is depicted in the "El Rey" relief, where it grows from the exterior of the earth-monster mouth. Although often identified as maize, these plants are more probably bromeliads, common on the Cerro Chalcatzingo (Fig. 10.11). The granodiorite of the cerro regularly weathers and flakes, forming large and small vertical rock faces and clefts into which the humid outside air penetrates. Here moisture condenses into drops of water which run down the fissures, providing sustenance to a variety of plants such as bromeliads and even to large *amate* trees which grow clinging to the mountain's vertical cliff faces.

The bromeliad is a plant that has the ability to store rainwater at the base of its large leaves, which sprout from a central core, and also to absorb atmospheric humidity through these same leaves. Bromeliads are native to the western hemisphere, ranging from the southern United States to South America. The pineapple is the most familiar of the two thousand bromeliad species, some of which house "mini-kingdoms" of bacteria, algae, insects, frogs, and spiders in and around their stored water (Zahl 1975). Large bromeliads have supplied water for human use, but Chalcatzingo's small plants certainly did not serve such a function.



Figure 10.11. Bromeliads growing near Monument I-A-1 (Mon. 1).



Bromeliads occur in quantity on the cliffs and fissures of the Cerro Chalcatzingo. Considering that they retain water that gives life to the dry mountain, and because they visually resemble the plants carved on the "El Rey" relief, it seems likely and logical that these rather than maize (which does not grow on the mountain) are the plants growing from the earth-monster mountain-cave symbol. The carved bromeliads can be seen as symbols of the life-sustaining water gathered from the air, and intimately related to the deities of the mountain, caves, and water.

This fits in well with the sequence of zoomorphic figures who attract the rain and humidity from the clouds, so that they will condense and drip their precious liquid over the sacred mountain of Chalcatzingo.

The personage of "El Rey" clearly played the most important role in the scene depicted in the Group I-A reliefs, perhaps as the Lord and Heart of the Mountain that converted water from the air into the streams of water that formed the ravines of Chalcatzingo. Symbolically speaking, the personage would be the mediator between human beings and the gods.

The concept of Lord of the Mountain is extremely important in Mesoamerica as well as other world areas. It is crucial to a complete understanding of Chalcatzingo, and thus is explored in detail here. The Lord of the Mountain may be a very ancient belief, for it occurs in the Old World as well as the New. For instance, in Korean folklore certain mountains are considered sacred and given the name Miruk. In these sacred mountains ceremonies have been carried out for centuries to attract rain. There are carved reliefs which predate the Buddhist conversion in this area (AD 370). Buddhist temples were constructed in various parts of the mountain in different periods, while large and small villages were established around them (Strom and Strom 1972). On the 38th parallel which now divides Korea into two independent countries, people still speak of the "spirit of the sacred mountain" called Koo Weal, which is identified as a legendary white tiger that the Koreans call "the king of the Mountain." In other references to Korean folklore, Yong-Hun Shing (1966: 5-7) relates a story of Tan Gun as "... a heavenly King (who) sent his minister of wind, rain and clouds to visit the earth ... descending at the top

of the mountain. The mountain and its spirit become the intermediary between men and Heaven with all elements of nature."

For Mesoamerica, Barbro Dahlgren de Jordan (1954: 237-238) points out that in the Mixteca "That the peaks of the hills were sacred areas has been confirmed by archaeology and historical sources" (my translation). The Mixtec had their idols on the highest points in the mountains, where they performed ceremonies to the gods of rain.

Calixta Guiteras Holmes (1965: 231-234), in a study on symbiotic concepts of the religion of the Tzotziles of Chiapas, says that "They believe that the hills and mountains are apart from the earth, that these constitute the home of Angel, God of Rain, Lord of Animal life and protector of 'our sustenance.'" Later, with respect to caves, she notes, "... they are entrances to the mansion of the God of Rain ... the water sources and springs are the givers of that which is offered to man ... The angel is the god of rain, Lord of the Mountains, he that gives us maize, master of the animals and of the divinity of the waters. The lightning belongs to him. The angel guards the planted fields at the foot of the hills and the ones on the pine-covered slopes" (my translation).

These Tzotzil concepts closely parallel the symbolism of the relief of "El Rey," who sits within the mouth of the earth-monster and may be related to the figure of Tepeyollotl of centuries later, the Lord of Caves and Heart of the Mountain. These attributes were also associated among the Mexica with the figure of Tlaloc, god of rain, whose most ancient name in Nahuatl is Tlaloc-Tlachpan-quiahuitl, meaning "the one who sweeps the rain toward the earth." The Spanish chronicler-priest Diego Durán (1967: 1:81) translates it as "road under the earth" or "large cave," while Edmundo O'Gorman in the index to Bartolomé de las Casas' *Los indios de México y Nueva España* (1971: 220-221), translates it as "the one who is inside the earth" (my translations to English).

Both Tlaloc and Tepeyollotl may have derived from a single concept in the Middle Formative. Both are associated with the wind that pulls the clouds filled with rain to the Lord of the Mountain, who then absorbs the water from the clouds, storing it in the caves and releasing it as rivers.

In the Maya area there are myths de-

scribing U C'ux Cah as the heart, the guts, and the living principle of the heavens, the spirit of the lakes, and the heart of the sea. This god is a triple deity who controls lightning and thunder. Caculha Hurakan is the one-legged lightning, Chi'pi Caculha is the small lightning, and Raxa Caculha is the green lightning bolt, lightning, or thunder (*Popol Vuh* 1947: 90-91 footnote).

In the *Popol Vuh* (1947: 23-24) it is mentioned that the gods "... joined their words and thoughts [and] brought forth the creation and the growth of man. It was brought forth in the fog and in the night by the heart of the heavens who is called Caculha Hurakan" (my translation).

Seler (1963: 1:114) considers U C'ux Cah related in some form to Tezcatlipoca because it represents the solar deity of the west who is introduced to the earth from that point to reappear in the east. In reality U C'ux Cah is another version of Tepeyollotlicuhtli, the jaguar god who inhabits the caves and is similar to Tlaloc in many of his attributes (Seler 1963: 1:174). He also controls the waters that come out of the caves, and he is surrounded by clouds, lightning, and thunder. This god keeps the fire of the lightning hidden behind the clouds and is a dual deity who produces water and fire at the same time.

Thompson (1960: 74) makes a similar observation: "... Tepeyollotl, according to commentaries of *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, was the echo and lord of animals; his name means heart of the mountain ... he is invariably in association with a temple, which in one case has a façade shaped as the open jaws of the earth monster. He usually has features which suggest the jaguar ... His association with the echo suggests a clear connection with another earth god, Uo'tan, deity of the Tzeltales and Tzotziles whose name signifies "heart." Uo'tan corresponds to the day of Akbal in the Maya calendar and, according to Seler (1963: 1:175-176) "was the Lord of the hollow tree, the *Atabal* [drum] of wood called *Teponaztli* [who] was the first male that god sent to divide the earth among men ... he owned a temple inside a cave—a somber house—a great treasure that he had produced by blowing ... it was protected by a female priest and some *Tapianes* [guardians]" (my translation).

Uo is also the name of the second month among the Mayans. Its glyphic

representation is formed by the St. Andrew's cross and the affix that symbolizes the color black and represents the jaguar god of the underworld. Uo could have been the patron of one of the pre-Mayan calendric months that marked fertility rites such as expressed in the reliefs of Group I-A.

One wonders if relief I-A-1, "El Rey," represents a deity who preceded the concept of Tepeyollotl among the Mixtecs and Mexicas. The relief seems to symbolize the ancient concept of the God of the Mountain who lives in the caves and in the interior of the earth, the one who controlled the echo expressed graphically as sound and resound. It is evident that the concept personified by "El Rey" underwent change through time and that the attributes became distributed among various later Mesoamerican deities. Other scholars generally agree in identifying the personage "El Rey" with rain and fertility, a type of Tlaloc, sitting at the entrance of the underworld in the mouth of the earth-monster.

To summarize, the Group I-A carvings should not be viewed simply as individual reliefs, but as the earliest pictorial sequence now known in Mesoamerica, a sequence probably meant to be viewed from left (east) to right (west). Important features of the sequential reliefs are the upward-facing animals, their bifurcated scrolls, the clouds, raindrops, and squash, and the horizontal-S motifs. The sequence is brought to a climax in the "El Rey" relief, which contains the essence of the total message. The wind coming out of the cave carries the clouds of rain to the top of the mountain, where they are transformed into raindrops, the precious water (expressed by the *chalchihuitl*) that will permit the green mantle of vegetation to return, covering the earth once more. This completes the cycle of renovation, produced by seasons of rain and drought in the eternal dialectic rhythm of nature transformed into a concept of life and death in an agricultural society.

#### Reliefs I-B-1, x-1, x-3 (Mons. 13, 16, 9)

There are two other monuments with the same motif and possible symbolism as "El Rey." One is relief I-B-1 (Mon. 13), called "The Governor," which was found during the 1972 field season. The other is composed of two sculptures, x-1 (Mon. 16) and x-3 (Mon. 9), at present exhibited in different museums but which might possibly have formed a unit when carved.

Relief x-3 is today in the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York; x-1 is in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

In both I-B-1 and the combination x-1 and x-3 one can find, as with "El Rey," a stylized jaguar-serpent with open jaws representing the earth-monster and a personage seated inside the mouth as in the entrance to the underworld. The reliefs "El Rey" and "The Governor" are two-dimensional, while sculptures x-1 and x-3 are three-dimensional. The reliefs in discussion show the earth monster motif full face while in "El Rey" it is seen in profile.

"The Governor" relief (I-B-1; Fig. 10.12), carved on a square slab, was found broken diagonally. Fortunately, the half recovered contains the major part of the central motif which depicts a person seated within the earth-monster's mouth. A bromeliad grows from the side of the mouth in the same manner as those on the "El Rey" relief. The mouth is formed by parallel bands modeled to give a feeling of depth to the carving.

The eroded nature of the carving has obscured the many rich details executed nearly three thousand years ago. The characteristic features of an Olmec face can still be recognized on the seated personage. The head is elongated upward and backward and cleft in a manner similar to some carvings and axes found at La Venta. The personage is kneeling or seated in a lotus position and is atop an element similar to the *icpalli*, a seat with a back of woven mats. The arms are extended toward the knees, manifesting certain tension and force in a position similar to sculptures of the Gulf Coast area, such as Monument 1 at Cruz de Milagro, Veracruz, Monument 1 of San Martín Pajapan, Veracruz, and Monuments 8, 10, and 73 of La Venta. Grove believes that this position in seated figures is a good chronological marker for Middle Formative carvings. By the position of the hands it appears that the figure may be holding a ceremonial bar (e.g., San Martín Pajapan Mon. 1; de la Fuente 1973:242-244), but since the rock is broken in this spot one can only be sure that it wears wrist bands.

The personage wears a garment or cape over the torso, and appears to be using a wide belt that could represent the bands that hold the *maxtlatl* (loincloth) or might be an item such as those worn by ballplayers (e.g., yokes).

Monument x-3 (Fig. 9.17) was found by



Figure 10.12. Monument I-B-1 (Mon. 13).

looters, apparently atop PC Structure 4. This sculpture repeats the earth-monster motif of "El Rey" and "The Governor," here manifested with a full-faced cruciform-shaped mouth. From the four clefts on the exterior of the mouth bromeliad-like plants again grow. In contrast to "The Governor," but similarly to "El Rey," x-3 has ovoid eyes that may have contained St. Andrew's crosses (symbol of sun or heavens of the Maya). The two wide eyebrow elements terminate in twin protuberances. There are similarities between these twin protuberances and the headdress motif of figure c in relief I-B-2 (Mon. 2; Fig. 10.13). The same form appears in the headdress of the lower jaguar in relief I-B-4 (Fig. 10.16) and the eyebrows on the earth-monster face on the T-25 altar (III-4 [Mon. 22]; Fig. 7.4). There is a small motif between the eyebrows, apparently a stylized jaguar face with two raindrop-like elements.

The large open mouth of this jaguar-monster is formed by a hollow cruciform that passes completely through the carving. The lower portion of this opening is worn and indicates not only that this sculpture was erected as a vertical panel but also that persons could have crawled through the mouth as a ritual passage through the earth-monster's mouth related to death and entrance into the underworld (Grove 1972a:161).

Monument x-1 (Fig. 9.18) was found by Guzmán (1934:248–250, Figs. 10, 12, 13) lying in El Paso Drainage between T-6 and T-15. It could be a component of Monument x-3. The figure depicts a seated person, arms held tightly to the body, but mutilated, lacking head and hands. The mutilation probably took place during the Formative period and was related to the same factors as the mutilation of Gulf Coast Olmec monuments (discussed later in this chapter). The figure wears a rectangular pectoral with a St. Andrew's cross motif (celestial glyph) and is quite similar to Monument 30 from La Venta.

The anthropomorphic statue of x-1 could have originally been seated inside a stone and mud construction (representing a natural cave) behind earth-monster relief x-3, the entrance to the underworld through its open cruciform mouth. The worn opening in relief x-3 may have been produced by offerings placed there for the deity behind. The dim light illuminating the seated sculpture placed inside the artificial cave would have completed the three-dimensional image of the message, that of the Lord of the Mountain, of wind, of heavens and earth, of life and death, sitting in the entrance to the underworld.

Together with "El Rey," "The Governor" (I-B-1), x-1, and x-3 depict this important deity who brings the clouds to produce rain that results in the fertility of the earth and the renovation of all living elements, the lord who lives atop and inside the mountains at the entrance of the underworld in the cave-mouth of the earth-monster, a life and death deity.

#### Relief I-B-2 (Mon. 2)

The relief I-B-2 is executed on a rock which not only has become tilted through time, but also has difficult access. Thus this analysis has been based on a *takuhón* made on the fiberglass copy of the relief on display in the National Museum of Anthropology. This copy (Fig. 10.13) places the figures and their proportions more accurately than previous illustrations, but much of the carving's detail has been lost. Therefore the analysis was supplemented with drawings and photos made at the site.

The scene depicted is popularly known as "The Processional" or "Marching Olmecs." It is made up of four anthropomorphic figures equally distributed across the lower surface of the large boulder.

The first figure on the left (*a*) seems to be moving away from the scene. On his large headdress there is a square form, crossed by two thin bands which might have tied the headdress together or could have been a vertical St. Andrew's cross, identifying his affiliation with a heavenly deity. Another wide, transverse band fastens the cylindrical form of the headdress to the head of the personage. These horizontal bands tie another element that protrudes in the front, from which two long forms emerge as feathers, a plant like teosinte or another type of wild maize. The element closest to the headdress is rigid, while the other is flowing. The personage wears a square mouth mask held together by a *chalchihuitl* in the same way as the masks of the Lords of the Night that surround the sarcophagus of the tomb in the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque and the mask of jadeite from La Venta (Covarrubias 1957: Fig. 33).

He is wearing a short cape that covers only the upper arm and a heavy *pañó de caderas*, possibly of leather, like a small skirt, which covers his waist and thighs. One can barely discern a light or translucent tunic that reaches the calf of the leg. The arms are extended forward, sustaining a multifoliated element that could represent a wreath of corn stalks and cobs.

The two central figures (*b*, *c*) are moving toward the fourth figure (*d*) on the extreme right. These two middle figures carry lances that are as long as their own height and are held by their forward-extended arms. Both wear high headdresses, although the symbols that adorn them are different. These symbols probably identified their clan, political, or religious affiliation.

The headdress of figure *b* has a band that fastens a round jade bead to it. Out of the bead comes a vertical element, opening in two directions, that probably represents a plant or a bunch of feathers. A mask with the beak of a bird completely covers the face of this personage. This mask has been represented in previous drawings as the beak of a bird on a human face and classified by David Joralemon (1971:9) as "Bird Beak." After careful in situ observation and study of the *takuhón*, the mask appears to represent the complete head of an eagle, identifiable by the strong curve of the beak and the presence of short sharp feathers spread over the face.

A cape worn on the shoulders undu-

lates backward, expressing a rhythm of movement. A bulky short skirt is held up by the loincloth or *maxtlatl*, whose extremes end in feathers. An object like a buckle on the front of the waist is adorned with circular forms, probably jade beads. It seems this second personage wears bands on the knees and the ankles. The ones on the ankles extend to the instep of the foot, possibly to tie the sandals that no longer appear in the relief.

The headdress of figure *c* is adorned with two symbols similar to those in the stylized jaguar face of the mosaic floors at La Venta and to other Olmec reliefs and carvings. The upper symbol, apparently corresponding to the eye, seems to relate to the rain clouds analyzed in Group I-A, while the lower symbol probably corresponds to the Olmec feline's thick lip with fangs at the end of the mouth (Fig. 10.14).

A band of laced ties (interpreted in other drawings as the St. Andrew's cross) sustains the headdress and another element to the front of it, out of which emerges an eagle's talon with three long nails. This same talon shape is found on a headdress of one of the jaguars of relief I-B-4 (Mon. 4). A jade bead emerges from the talon with a vertical element rising from it, similar to the ones identified on personage *a* as feathers.

The figure wears a mask which is apparently held in place by the same laced bands that tie the headdress and form the chin strap. It seems to be a mouth mask with a double line that represents the gums of the jaguar, the feared feline, with a curved fang at the end of the mouth. This type of mask represented Tlaloc in the Classic period. This personage, like the others, wears a short cape, skirt, and *maxtlatl* of an apparently heavy and rigid material.

In this relief is found one of the few cases of superimposed figures in Mesoamerican stone art. Figure *c*'s front leg crosses in front of person *d*'s outstretched leg.

Person *d* is in a seated position, either languishing or deceased. The figure is in left profile with the legs outstretched, while the arms extend along the body, resting freely on the leg. Grove notes that some small clay figurines from Chalcatzingo assume this same position (Fig. 27.4). These figurines are perforated, indicating that they were used as pectorals.

The facial features of figure *d* are typi-



Figure 10.13. Monument I-B-2 (Mon. 2).

cally Olmec, with wide nose and thick lips. He also has a sharp-pointed beard. A long element that curves up and behind the figure emerges from the top of his head. On the back of his head there is an anthropomorphic mask with the beak of a bird. Below the mask there is a square form with an eroded design which it has not been possible to identify and which serves as a support for the seated figure.

Peter Furst (1965:42–43) believes that the seated figure represents a shaman, identified by the horn-like headdress. The figure of the shaman or religious leader is in a position of total relaxation, in ecstasy, seeming exhaustion, defeat, or possibly death. The mask on the back of the head indicates that his function is finished (due to either termination of a ritual or his death).

A question has been raised (Grove 1968a:488) whether the seated figure had an erect penis in the original carving, or whether that was added more recently by someone wishing to accentuate an imprecise area of the carving. Grove suggests that the so-called penis is actually part of the right leg of the reclining figure. Aside from any mechanical analysis to define the original outline, it can be noted that none of the represen-

tations classified as Olmec (except the "Olmecoid" *danzantes* of Monte Albán) have been represented with sexual organs. The presence of a penis would make figure *d* an extraordinary case, especially since the position of the figure is of complete relaxation while the "phallus" is erect. If there actually is a phallus represented it might symbolize the readiness and ability to fertilize something which does not appear in the relief, as if it were relating to a myth of insemination by some legendary person during his trip through the underworld.

To understand the message in this relief, it is necessary to consider the figures as a unit. Figure *a*, on the extreme left, seems to be leaving the scene and appears to be separated from the action of figures *b* and *c*, while concentrating on the wreath of maize. His presence might relate to a fertility rite, as would that of figure *d* on the extreme right, especially if the representation of the penis is authentic. Legends compiled by chron-

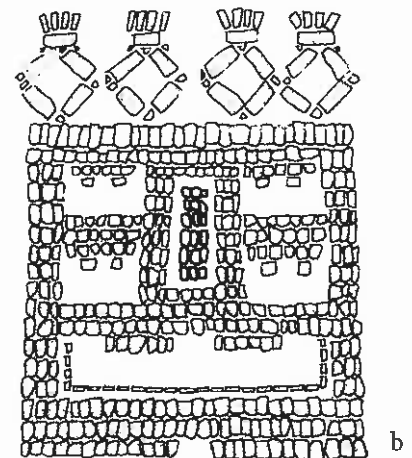


Figure 10.14. For comparison: *a*, masked figure on Chalcatzingo Monument I-B-2 (Mon. 2); *b*, La Venta massive mosaic mask.

iclers in the sixteenth century discuss the event of the semigod Quetzalcoatl bleeding his penis to give life to humanity, a legend that Mesoamerican cultures could have inherited from earlier groups.

The eagle and jaguar masks of the two central figures suggest that they are warriors whose personal, lineage, or clan identification was shown by the symbols on their headdresses. They could have been fulfilling a special function in this ceremonial scene as celestial or underworld warriors. The relief might then be a representation of an actual ritual related to fertility and warriors.

If Grove is correct that the phallus is a recent addition to figure *d*, the relief could be an early depiction of the sacrifice of captured warriors (in this case the "shaman") celebrating the ceremony of fertility, similar to the one described by Bernardino de Sahagún (1956:1:65) for Xipe-Totec of the Postclassic where "... they made a series of wreaths of maize ... one side was of the team of Xipe-Totec ... the other side was of valiant and brave warriors ... bellicose ... who were not afraid of death" (my translation).

#### **Relief I-B-3 (Mon. 3)**

The whole face of the rock upon which relief I-B-3 is carved has been worked to create a large, undulating, abstract surface with many concavities. It is evident that the form of the rock face was caused not by natural erosion but by human agency, possibly to complement the carved relief (Fig. 9.10). The interiors of several of the concavities appear to have been reworked to enlarge them with a tool which left long parallel scratches, similar to marks left by jaguar claws. The relief is carved to the right of the area of concavities.

The zoomorph featured in this carving seems to combine characteristics of diverse animals, as often found in other representations of Olmec art as well as in Mesoamerican iconography in general. The first visual impression that the figure transmits is that it is a feline, with its large tail raised. The animal's head is attached to an extremely long neck, almost suggesting a camellid, much like a llama. The body of the animal is divided from the neck to the tail by a longitudinal line indicating a separation that might imply a change of color or texture such as the bicoloration of a puma, which is tan on its side and back and has a white belly.

The crouching position of this creature is unusual, for its legs are bent in a way different than that natural for felines but similar to that of the felines depicted in Río Chiquito Monument 2 and San Lorenzo Monument 7 (Grove 1972a:155).

The animal's mouth is quite similar in form to that of the serpent shown in La Venta Monument 19 (P. Drucker, Heizer, and Squier 1959: Fig. 55). A long tongue-like form protrudes from the mouth, touching a long, thin, asymmetrical branching design which is nearly as tall as the rock upon which the relief is carved (Figs. 9.10, 10.15).

At least two types of felines can be found in the reliefs at Chalcatzingo and probably at other Olmec sites. One is the jaguar (*Felis onca*), for example in relief I-B-4, and the other is the puma (*Felis concolor*), which is probably represented in this relief.

All previous publications have illustrated the carving only down as far as the animal's paws, where it seemed to end. Our recent *takuhón* discovered another probable figure below the animal's front paws (Fig. 10.15). The newly discovered but obscure form seems to be the head, shoulders, and right arm of an anthropo-

morphic figure, rising from beneath the boulder. Previous descriptions of this relief have misidentified the arm as part of the branching linear motif.

The figure has an Olmec face and seems to wear a mask covering the area of the eyes, and also has an ear ornament. The nose area may have been erased by mutilation. On the top of the head there is a large oval element, either a headdress with the form of a jaguar's skull or a turban which is interwoven with the figure's long hair extending downward. Feathers emerge from the back of this turban or headdress and curl down in three different directions. The figure appears to wear a necklace of beads or knots connected to a cape or piece of cloth hanging down toward its back. The right arm of the figure is extended upward with the elbow almost touching the snout of the feline while the open hand almost reaches the linear branching object that extends toward the upper part of the rock. The arm is being licked by the tongue of the feline. The figure thus appears under the feline's paws and is apparently being devoured or held imprisoned by the animal, very much like the figures on relief I-B-4.



**Figure 10.15.** Portion of Monument I-B-3 (Mon. 3) showing feline's head and possible human below.

The *takuhón* revealed another surprise, an unidentified symbol in the puma's ear, which is probably a key to identifying the feline with its meaningful representation. One can possibly assume that it is meant to identify it with the earth's satellite, a star, a constellation, a planet, or a deity related to either cosmic or natural forces.

The intent of the elaborate and complete reworking of the boulder's face is unknown. It is possible that the concavities were enlarged to convert them into niches where ceremonial offerings related to a feline cult could be deposited, or for some other ritual purpose. The relief may represent a special ceremony practiced during the celebration of a calendric event, with the sacrifice of a deified person, identified by the elaborate headdress and the row of *chalchihuitl* beads, in honor of cosmic or natural forces that are represented by the feline. This mythic or real sacrifice could have been practiced to preserve the maintenance of the water sources expressed by the linear elements with *chalchihuitl* endings.

#### Relief I-B-4 (Mon. 4)

Monument I-B-4 is a relief made up of four forms equally distributed over the surface of the rock (Fig. 9.11). Although the theme of the relief constitutes a unit, it can be divided into two repeated scenes, each made up of a feline on top of a human. The lower feline (Fig. 10.16) is somewhat similar to the one in relief I-B-3, as it is also shown with a long neck and has a stripe dividing its body along the back. It is the puma type of feline found in Olmec art.

On top of the head there is a long double element, like the ears of a rabbit, stylized horns, or the typical cleft Olmec axe. In the center of this element are the barely visible features of a face that has a flaring upper lip with drooping lower corners, often represented as the symbol of royalty or priestly caste.

On the feline's face, above the nose, there is another element very similar to the eagle talon found on the headdress of personage c in relief I-B-2. In this instance, rather than representing the eagle talon, it looks like an upside-down axe or a sacrificial knife out of which emerge three long curved nails or fangs; it might symbolize sacrifice. A vertical form that could be considered as the handle of the sacrificial knife ends in another element that curves like a feather.



Figure 10.16. Lower feline, Monument I-B-4 (Mon. 4).

The eye of the zoomorphic figure is made up of two tangent circles, with an appendix that extends to the bottom and extreme left circle close to the occipital bone. This is the form that Joralemon (1971: 8) describes as "L shaped eye with a squared drooping corner, common for Gods I and V" (the jaguar god with flame eyebrows and the cleft-headed deity, respectively). From the tail of the feline, three cleft axes spread out like rays or sparks thrown out from the movement of a shaking tail.

On the upper part of the relief is a characteristic Olmec jaguar bearing two motifs that are symbols of astrology in the Classic Maya culture (Fig. 10.17). One is the cartouche over the eye of the jaguar, substituting for the eyebrow, that holds a St. Andrew's cross. In this case the cartouche has two double feather-like elements coming out, upward and forward.

The second symbol is in the ear of the jaguar and closely resembles the Maya Venus glyph. Venus is the Chac Ek (the

Large or Red Star) of the Maya, or the Huey Citlalli of the highland cultures of central Mexico. Venus is identified with the deity Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli.

The two anthropomorphic figures under the claws of the zoomorphic figures have similar characteristics. Their position is one of complete abandon or muscular relaxation, characteristic of someone without consciousness or life. Both figures have their heads turned backward, and the right arm of each figure is half bent, as if trying to protect the head. The left arm is extended toward the left leg, which is bent, as if the individual was trying to dive into an abyss. Both figures have a marked cranial deformation in the style of the ceramic Olmec hollow baby-face figurines. They wear a bunch of hair on their foreheads that could be a representation of *aztaxolli* (a tassel of heron feathers) used to adorn the sacrificed warriors during the Postclassic.

An interesting parallel to this Chalcatzingo scene occurs in Mochica art of Peru (AD 300–600). Elizabeth Benson



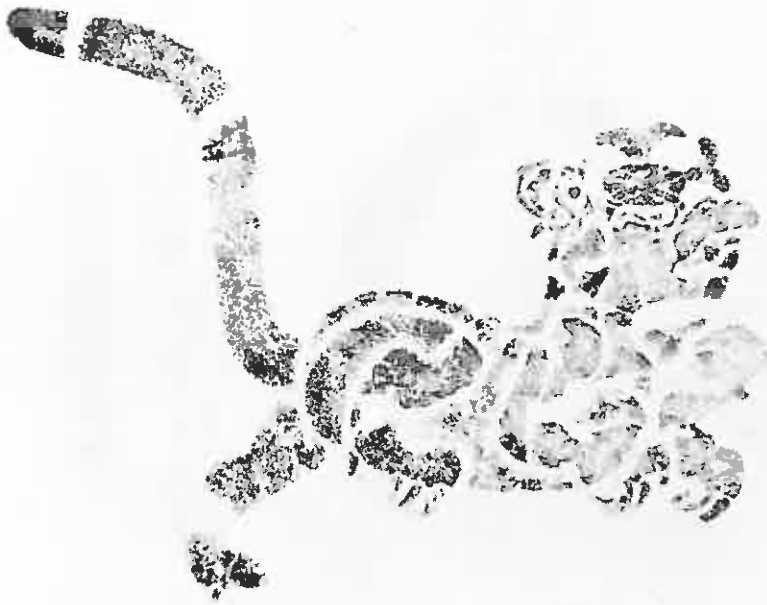


Figure 10.17. Upper feline, Monument I-B-4 (Mon. 4).

(1974) describes a number of Mochica ceramics which depict a man held under the claws of a jaguar. The majority of the men seem to represent warriors or prisoners-of-war as victims of the jaguar. In one typical description, Benson (1974: 16–19) states, "... the jaguar's forelegs go straight out so that only the claws of the uppermost paw threaten the neck of the man ... The man has a rope around his neck; his hands seem to be tied behind his back; and, again, his shirt is that of a warrior suggesting that perhaps he is a prisoner-of-war stripped of his head-dress and weapons."

In her analysis (1974:24), Benson suggests that the jaguar deity may have as its ancestor a Chavín period deity and that it probably had multiple attributes, including those of creator god, god of the sky, the sun, and the mountains. As she says (1974:24), "The Mochica presumably went into the mountains, where this deity dwelt, to make sacrifices ... These sacrifices undoubtedly propitiated the mountain deity, who must also have been the deity of fresh water, of the rivers that come down from the mountains to make agriculture possible ..."

In Mesoamerica a similar belief system may have been present. The offering of a prisoner-of-war or some other chosen

person as a sacrifice could have been initiated by the shamans of the Formative period to calm the voracity of this mysterious feline that abounded in the mountains and forests of tropical and subtropical Mesoamerica.

The offering of the life of the sacrificed one could have been dedicated to a mythical entity of whom the jaguar became a symbolic representation, such as the Bolon Ti Ku, the Lords of the Night. The first four Lords have diverse attributes of the solar deity (Seler 1963:1:171). The fifth is the god of the underworld and death (*miquiztli*). The last four are related to earth and water and are represented by the jaguar. These lords combined and controlled the elements that produce the fecundity of the earth at the indicated time because they ruled the calendric cycles manifested yearly in the change of foliage that covers the surface (skin) of the earth through its periods of rain and drought. The ritual sacrifices were probably made on specific dates to remind the deities representing planets to fulfill their appointed journey through the sky in order to conserve the earthly rhythm.

As previously stated, the jaguar carved on the upper part of the relief has a glyph of Venus in the place of its ear and the

glyph of the St. Andrew's cross over the eye. The glyph of Venus is similar in meaning to the glyph of the day Lamat among the Maya of the Classic period, especially in the version that is cut in half, which Thompson (1960:220) describes as "an inverted 'w' with a circle set in each loop" in which possibly each circle is related to the planet in its morning and evening cycle, the two aspects of the dual deity (the divine twins).

Many legends and traditions in diverse areas of Mesoamerica make reference to a set of twin brothers who participate in intricate stories related to the creation myth or cosmic deities, the formation of the word, and the origin of humanity. The sacred book of the Quiché focuses its stories on the experiences of various generations of twin brothers involved in the ordering of the heavens, the earth, and their regent deities. In the highlands, there are stories about Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, and other deities as multiple personalities. Among the avocations of Quetzalcoatl is Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli as the morning star and Xolotl as the evening star (two aspects of Venus). Although Xolotl can be one aspect of Venus, the personality of Xolotl is sometimes confused and overlapped with that of Nanahuatzin, a deity who became the sun. In some myths the protagonists transform themselves into the sun and the moon, while in others they become the sun and Venus.

Thompson (1960:218) discusses the importance of the sun and Venus in the *Popol Vuh* of the Quiché of highland Guatemala, where the sun and Venus are seen as brothers. He states that, "Hunahpu was the name of the brother we assume to have become the planet Venus but *Hunahpu* is the Quiché equivalent of the day 1 *Ahau*, which is precisely the day sacred to Venus ... *Nohoch ich* 'great eye', *Chac ek* 'red star' or 'giant star' and *Xex ek* 'wasp star' ..."

Herman Beyer (1965:276–279) mentions that Venus was known as Huei Citlalín (Large Star) and Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli among the Mexica. This deity "is painted with white skin and red stripes. It symbolizes, without a doubt, the pallid light of the dawn ... this same symbolic painting [is found] in the figure of the victim ... because of the parallel between the morning star and the human victim. When the sun rises the star is not visible, which makes it appear as if the death of the morning star gives life to the sun." Beyer continues, "The Mexica

sacrificed human beings to give food to the sun . . . in that fashion the victim played on earth the same role as the warrior-star, the morning star of the heavens" (my translations).

Sahagún, quoted by Aveni (1980:26), says of Venus, "Captives were slain when it emerged that it might be nourished. They sprinkled toward it, flipping the middle finger from the thumb, they cast the blood as an offering."

The two figures of relief I-B-4 have their faces turned behind them, precisely in the position that Seler (1963:1:143) describes a sacrifice which was consummated at sunset in the seventeenth festival of the year, in honor of the month Tititl, in which the priest danced stepping backward and waved his feet backward. That is to say, he made backward movements as if he wished to throw himself head downward in a dive. Later (1963:1:164–165) Seler adds that the turning of the head backward can be interpreted as a symbol of darkness, Tlil-lan, the dark house; of the earth; of the night in which the sun doesn't shine but only the fire, or rather a time before the sun was born, a remote time.

Thus, in view of the strong relationship of Venus to human sacrifice, it seems likely that this relief depicts a myth about the creation of heavenly twin gods, in which a human offering is portrayed as the sacrifice of deities (or their anthropomorphic representations) to assure the reinitiation of the harmonic rhythm of the stars, giving life to the people of the Preclassic world.

The basic elements to support this concept would be found in the following symbols: (1) the *aztaxolli* (an ornament of heron feathers) found on the head of the anthropomorphic figures (a symbol which represented sacrifice to the Mexica); (2) the journey to the underworld presented by the backward-looking head in a "diving" position; (3) the Lords of the Night, the darkness and the underworld, represented by the felines with their complementary attributes; (4) the symbol of the planet Venus in the ear of the upper feline, the jaguar, identifying it as a celestial representation; and (5) the second sacrifice, being consumed by the puma, who is decorated with axes and flint knives and who could be an earlier manifestation of the concept of the deity Iztli (one of the Lords of the Night), intimately related to the Tepeyollotl and the Tlaloc of the Mixtec and Mexica of the Postclassic.

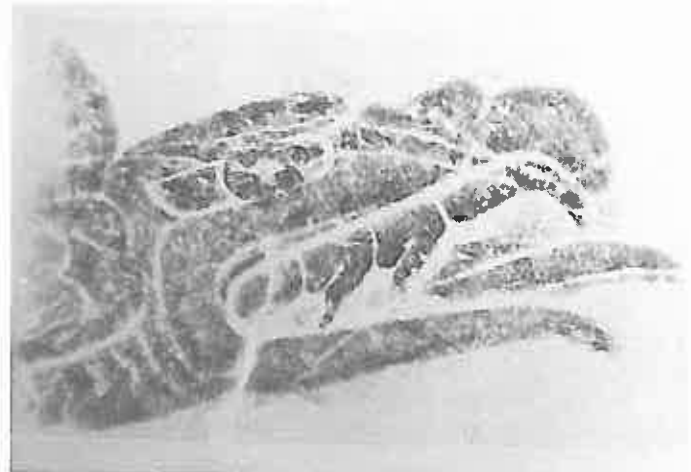
#### Relief I-B-5 (Mon. 5)

The main features in relief I-B-5 are a zoomorphic figure and a human form (Fig. 9.12). In the guide to the archaeological zone of Chalcatzingo (Angulo 1979), the zoomorph is classified as the *acipactli*, the *peje lagarto* (fish-gator or alligator gar) mentioned in the myths related to the formation of the earth.

The zoomorph here is represented with an open mouth, showing the characteristic folding fangs of the serpent and the tearing teeth of a shark. It has a clearly carved fish-like fin behind the head (Fig. 10.18a). The body is contorted in a form reminiscent of the movement of a worm traveling along the earth rather than the weaving of a serpent or the smooth sliding movement of a crocodile or large fish over the surface of a pond.

There are two elements in the middle section and at the end of the long body of this animal that are difficult to identify because of the advanced state of erosion (Fig. 10.18b). They seem to represent feathers, fish scales, or the rough skin of the crocodile. If feathers, the figure would acquire a divine status; if scales of fish, it might represent an iguana or the *acipactli*; but if the design represents the rough texture of the skin, it would perhaps identify the mythological *cipactli* (crocodile).

There is an element at the end of the sharp tail that has previously been drawn as the rattle of the rattlesnake. It is interesting to note that if it is a rattle, it is in an inverted position. This part of the relief is barely visible.



a



b

**Figure 10.18.** Saurian creature, Monument I-B-5 (Mon. 5): a, head; b, undulation showing pointed feather-like details.

The human figure is of the same size and position as those in relief I-B-4, with head thrown backward. The body is partly hidden from the thigh down by the snout of the aquatic animal. There is no way of knowing whether the animal is devouring or regurgitating the human figure, which seems to have lost consciousness or life as in the case of the I-B-4 figures (considered in this study as examples of human sacrifices).

There are three other elements, scrolls somewhat similar to those found at the base of the zoomorphic figures in the series of reliefs of Group I-A, although in this case the volutes are not open but united at the end. They are distributed below the *cipactli*. Their position around the animal suggests they represent water, although if so, such symbols did not continue into later cultures. The form also has a certain resemblance to an enclosed *xonecuilli*, a symbol that could be related to the sound of thunder and lightning when associated with water deities, the echo produced in caves and cliffs, or the sound of the ocean's waves.

Representations of *cipactli* or *acipactli* not only refer to the first day of the year in the calendar of the Mexica or the corresponding Cimi of the Maya, but also represent the region of the west. Seler (1963:2:52) states that the west is the region of Tamoanchan, the house of the birth of *atl ayahuican*, the land of water and fog. In the west is found the great sea, where the sun sets at day's end, and also the river which the souls of the dead must cross to arrive at their place of rest. In this manner the symbol of the west could only have been an aquatic animal. The reference was probably to the Pacific Ocean or to the swampy lands of the Pacific Coast where one would find the crocodile (*cipactli*) or alligator gar (*peje lagarto*, *acipactli*), the great fish that (the gods utilized) to make the earth (*Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* 1941:210–211).

In Mexica mythology these concepts relate perfectly to that of Tezcatlipoca, the god of only one leg who, as Seler (1963:1:114) says, "is a solar god . . . who in the afternoon is devoured by the earth and transformed into a god of night, continuing his trip through the underworld, and who, because of his magic ability, rises the next morning to the heavens once again, converted into a young god." Seler also mentions that Sahagún said of Tezcatlipoca, "he walks in the heavens, on earth, and in the under-

world" (my translation).

Seler (1963:2:52–55) also speaks of Xochipilli, "... the young god, the god of morning and of life, the sun that rises . . ." (my translation), who faces the sea monster *acipactli* and loses a foot in the encounter. Seler notes that this is shown in the *Codex Fejervary-Mayer* and the *Codex Borgia*, where the person is identified as Tlahuizcalpantecuhli (Venus), the morning star.

Mary Helms (1977:68) relates an indigenous Costa Rican myth in which the early ancestors were victims of an alligator that "lived in a large pool [and caught] whatever he wanted . . . When he saw people he would stick out his tongue and pull them in . . ." According to this myth, Sinu (a culture hero and deity) "was annoyed with this and sent a man to pull the tongue out . . . which he gave to the sun to make its rays." Although perhaps only coincidental, it is interesting to note that the face of Tonatiuh depicted in the center of the so-called Aztec Calendar Stone has a solar ray (flint knife) as a tongue.

This relief can be interpreted as representing the sacrifice of an actual or mythical hero who symbolized the setting sun. He was probably swallowed by the dual earth-aquatic monster *acipactli* who dwells in the swampy areas of the west and the great sea. As the nocturnal sun he would then have traveled through the interior of the earth to be reborn in the east the following day as a young god, full of life and vigor, to start his daily journey as the rising sun. The relief might also be a combination of the two aspects of the same solar deity, as sunset and sunrise (rebirth), that during the Postclassic became two gods, Tezcatlipoca and Xochipilli.

#### *Reliefs II-2, II-9, and III-9* (Mons. 12, 20, 18)

The style of relief II-2 can be considered as typical La Venta Olmec. It represents the extended figure of a person ("El Volador" or "Flying Olmec") wearing an elaborate loincloth, bracelets, arm and ankle bands, and sandals. The figure appears as if suspended in the air, in a dynamic position an athlete might assume in the middle of a vigorous jump (Fig. 10.19). The person carries an element like a torch or long stick in the right hand, while the left hand is touching an element that could be an elaborate pectoral made of jade laced together in a complicated design.

The *volador* is surrounded by various birds shown in flight. A parrot (*guacamaya* or *arara*) flies beneath the knees, and a long-tailed bird such as a quetzal is above the left leg. Three long tail feathers and part of the feet of another quetzal-like bird are above the person's back, remnants of the missing upper fragment of this carving. The *guacamaya* and the quetzal, both tropical birds, are related to the sun in the symbolism of various Classic and Postclassic Mesoamerican cultures.

Most of the person's headdress was in the missing fragment. The face occurs in the open mouth of an animal, part of the remaining headdress section. The animal is identifiable as an opossum through the form of its nose, jaw, slanted eye, and sharp ear. However, the nose and ear of the opossum can likewise be viewed as the lower beak of a huge bird head (the upper beak part of the missing section), in which case the feathers hanging over the back of the *volador* might be those of the headdress rather than a second quetzal.

From the elegant ornaments that the figure is wearing and the lighted torch held in its hand, it might be thought to represent a messenger of the gods sent to earth, possibly flying through the darkness of the underworld; however, figures wearing similar garments found in other examples of Olmec art have been identified as ball players (e.g., Coe and Diehl 1980:268). Some of the prehispanic ball games have been related to astral movements, such as the *citlaltlachtli* (ball game of the stars) to which early Spanish chroniclers made reference. The relation of the relief's birds as numina of the sun fits with both interpretations, but the person's garments correspond to those of ball players, with a thick loincloth as part of the skirt that covers the hips and a great portion of the legs. The loincloth is knotted in front, from which point a long band falls, ending in small pleats as a decorative design that has to date been associated with the ornaments of dancers in certain ceremonies.

The position of the figure has been compared with those carved on the upper portion of Stela 3 at La Venta (Grove et al. 1976:1207). From the position he seems ready to hit the ball in the middle of a spectacular jump, as has been represented engraved on Olmec jades from the Gulf Coast (Cervantes 1969: Figs. 7, 9–11). A similar position is found on the sculptures of the Maya area

such as the disc of Chinkultik and the monumental sculpture of Temple 11 at Copán, Honduras (Stromsvik 1947:25 left). This latter figure is shown kneeling on the earth and holding a bar in his left hand with a flaming ball carved with an *ik* (wind) glyph. The mask worn on the face identifies this figure as a messenger of the solar deity, although the position identifies him as a ball player in the middle of a jump. The personification of the sun would relate this to the celestial ball game, *citlaltlachtli*, in which the sun (rubber ball) was hit with lighted torches until the rubber caught on fire. It probably represented the movement of the king star through the heavens.

José Corona Núñez (1942) describes a game he observed in Michoacán in which the players used bats to hit and set on fire a ball made of the dried roots of cactus plants. He suggested that the sun represented by the ball on fire would be thrown from east to west as in its daily movement, to be sent back (in its nightly trip) through the underworld by the opposite team of players. There is a mural painting at Tepantitla, Teotihuacan, on the same wall as that of the famous Tlalocan mural, in which the main scene depicts a ball game played with bats (Angulo 1964:103–110). There are other clay sculptures clearly identified as ball players (such as certain Jaina figurines) modeled in the typical crouching position adopted by ball players at the moment of hitting the ball.

Before arriving at any conclusions about this relief, two other Chalcatzingo carvings, related in a way to the "Flying Olmec," must be considered. One, relief II-9 (Mon. 20; Fig. 10.20), was found fragmented and very eroded in the T-11 excavations (Chapter 4). Even though the relief is seriously damaged, it is possible to perceive part of the torso and the crossed legs of a figure seated in the lotus position. Although the head and shoulders are missing, one can see the arms at the center of the body holding a round object like the knuckle duster, similar to other examples depicting ball players in Olmec art. This relief is essentially a two-dimensional copy of three-dimensional Monuments 10 and 26 of San Lorenzo (de la Fuente 1973:190–191, 211), which can be considered ball players.

The second relief, III-9 (Mon. 18; Fig. 9.20), was found on PC Structure 4. It also seems to be related to the reliefs of the ball player and resembles the relief on the altar of Santiago Tuxtla and the



Figure 10.19. Monument II-2 (Mon. 12), "El Volador."

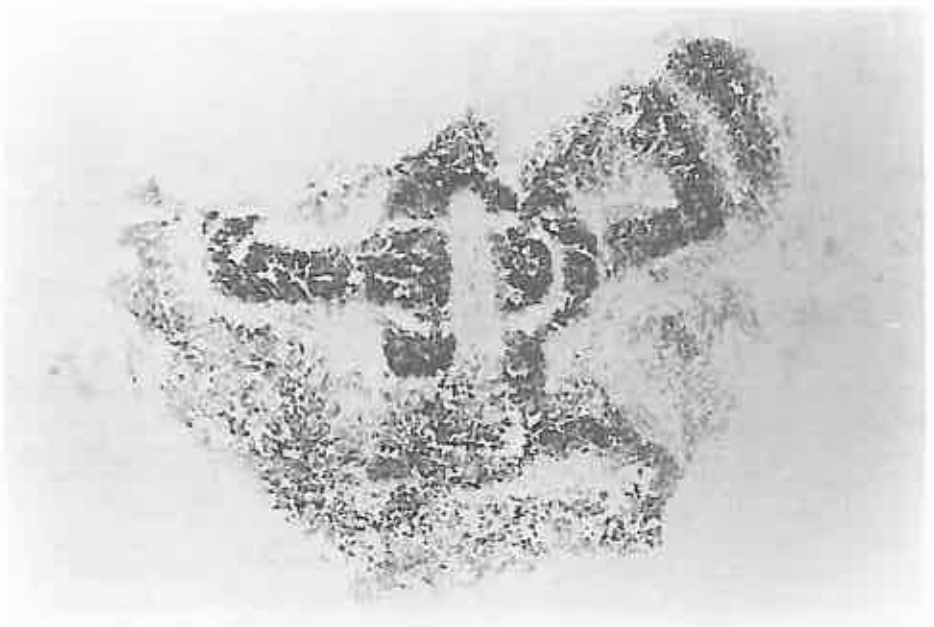


Figure 10.20. Monument II-9 (Mon. 20), arms holding "torch" and "knuckle duster."

disc from Laguna de los Cerros discussed by María Antonieta Cervantes (1969: Figs. 1, 2). I believe relief III-9 has a face enclosed in a rectangular form with round corners which can be seen only during a few months of the year and at certain hours of the day, when the sun's light hits the stone at the proper angle. This effect could have been calculated to be used in the ritual activities related to the ball game, although much remains to be known about these ceremonies and games. It may have coincided with the appearance of a star or a constellation similar to the one the Mexica called *citlaltlāchtli*.

Reliefs II-2, II-9, and III-9 I believe represent different aspects of the ball players depicted in Olmec art. All three figures have in their hands implements of this complicated game, such as the lighted torch and the knuckle duster. These objects probably correspond to the *arreos*, or garments referred to in the *Popol Vuh* (1947: 125) as used in the ball game.

#### **Relief III-4 (Mon. 22)**

Found on T-25, Monument III-4 consists of a group of rectangular rocks, each about 1 m long, that form a composite table-top altar (Chapter 7; Fig. 7.4). The front surface of the construction is carved to form a full-faced stylized earth-monster mask, very similar to that painted above Oxtotitlan cave (Grove 1970a: frontispiece). It was noted upon discovery of this altar that not all of the pieces of this three-dimensional "puzzle" were located in their original positions. An important stone containing the carving of part of the left eye and eyebrow was out of place and was eventually found installed in a different position on the eastern side of the altar. This suggests that the monument had been rebuilt and possibly moved from the place where it had originally been carved and erected. It may have been moved and reassembled either to preserve it from physical danger or for psychocultural reasons.

One such reason might relate to the custom of monument mutilation. This "mutilation" might explain the "mistake" in reassembling the altar. It is difficult to believe that such a mistake was unintentional. At the moment we have no data to indicate how long the altar stood in its original form prior to its possible removal and reassembly at a new location (on T-25). Associated artifacts and burials date the reassembled altar to the



Figure 10.21. Monument III-7 (Mon. 21).

Cantera phase. It can be assumed that the reassembly was done by the same group which created the original, if not by the same people.

#### **Relief III-7 (Mon. 21)**

Monument III-7 is a stela found close to the northern edge of T-15, apparently associated with T-15 Structure 5. The stela's style is different from that of the Group I-A and I-B carvings, suggesting that it was carved at another time. The carved area (Fig. 10.21) can be divided into three large elements, all described in Chapter 9: (1) the feminine personage, as the principal motif of the stela; (2) a long vertical bundle that covers the right section of the monument; and (3) a rectangular element on which the other two forms stand.

The feminine personage is shown in right profile with her arms extended forward. She is touching the vertical bundle in front of her with the palms of her hands. The position of her arms is not a common one, suggesting that it could have a specific meaning for the inhabitants. They would have understood the language of the gesture mimicked in the carving to emphasize the message. This posture also appears in the *Codex Cospi*, *Codex Vaticanus-Ríos* (3738), and others, where it is related to deities or important personages who are giving or receiving offerings and tributes.

The second element, a long bundle in vertical position, has diagonal bands with long designs which fill the surface of the bundle. The designs probably manifest the nature of the material of

which the bundle is made (such as the skin of an animal) or indicate what is packed in the solid bundle. The package is tied by two transverse bands that are equally distant from the extremes of the bundle. They are decorated with a trilobal motif similar to the one found on the headdress of the third figure in relief I-B-2. A rectangular element, like a buckle, sticks out from each band. Its shape seems to be like the stylized motif found on stone cleft axes. The simple design of these axes is also similar to attributes in the large buried "jaguar" masks found at La Venta.

The third element, below the previous ones, is a rectangular form bordered by a band that turns up in the middle to form a mouth. It resembles the symbol of the earth monster or "ground mask or ground panel" described by V. Garth Norman (1976) as related to the earth and underworld.

In the middle of the earth-monster mouth there is a hollow diamond motif. This symbol is found in the central highlands at Cuicuilco and subsequently at Teotihuacan, where the glyph appears related to the water and fire numina. It is invariably associated with the Old Fire God, better known in the Postclassic Valley of Mexico as *Hehuetateotl*.

The combination of the earth-monster face and diamond symbols might represent "earth of fire" or "*tierra caliente*." The term *tierra caliente* today refers to the region south of Chalcatzingo in the state of Guerrero, where the Ríos Amatzinac, Atoyac, and Amacuzac join to become Río Mezcala-Balsas.

T-15 Structure 5, with which this stela was associated, could have been the dwelling of a matrilineal group related to the ethnic groups of the Pacific Coast and lower Balsas area, the area known as *tierra caliente* by the Spanish conquerors who dared to go into Cihuatlan, the "land of the women," where they reported the existence of a matriarchal organization (Barlow 1948:181–190). It could be that stela III-7 indicates the presence of the matriarchy settled on T-15, whose members periodically collected tributes from the *tierra caliente*, as specified by the bundle shown on the stela which possibly symbolizes animal skins.

#### Reliefs IV-7 and IV-5 (Mons. 27, 25)

The human figure depicted in relief IV-7 (Mon. 27) is shown with legs spread, in a walking position (Fig. 10.22). He seems to be carrying the inert figure of a long-limbed animal on his back. The slender hind legs of the animal protrude past the front of the personage, and appear to end in hooves.

Both the head of the human and the head of the animal were executed on a section of the stela that is now missing. Thus no identifying characteristics of the personage or attributes of the animal are preserved. The animal's short curved tail, long neck, and slender legs suggest it is a deer. An oblong design, distributed between undulating diagonal bands, is carved along the animal's body. The same motif occurs on the vertical bundle of relief III-7, where it is hypothesized to symbolize animal skins. A somewhat similar motif occurs on a round altar (IV-5) discussed below.

Could this oblong glyph identify the deer? Although there are no data concerning the mythical importance of deer among Formative period groups, the deer is well identified with the sun and peyote among Postclassic Nahua groups, particularly among the Huichol and Cora (Furst and Anguiano 1976).

During the 1973 field season a stone in the form of a circular altar, Monument IV-5 (Mon. 25), was found on T-6 about 16 m north of stela IV-7. This stone is ca. 1.3 m diameter and 47 cm high. Its cylindrical body is divided by a sharply undulating line. The upper circumference is decorated with small vertical oval motifs, while large horizontal ovals are distributed along the base (Fig. 9.23).

If the identification of the oblong motif with the deer is correct, then the large ovals on the lower part of the circular altar may represent the skin of the deer, while the small oval shapes along the upper circumference could be drops

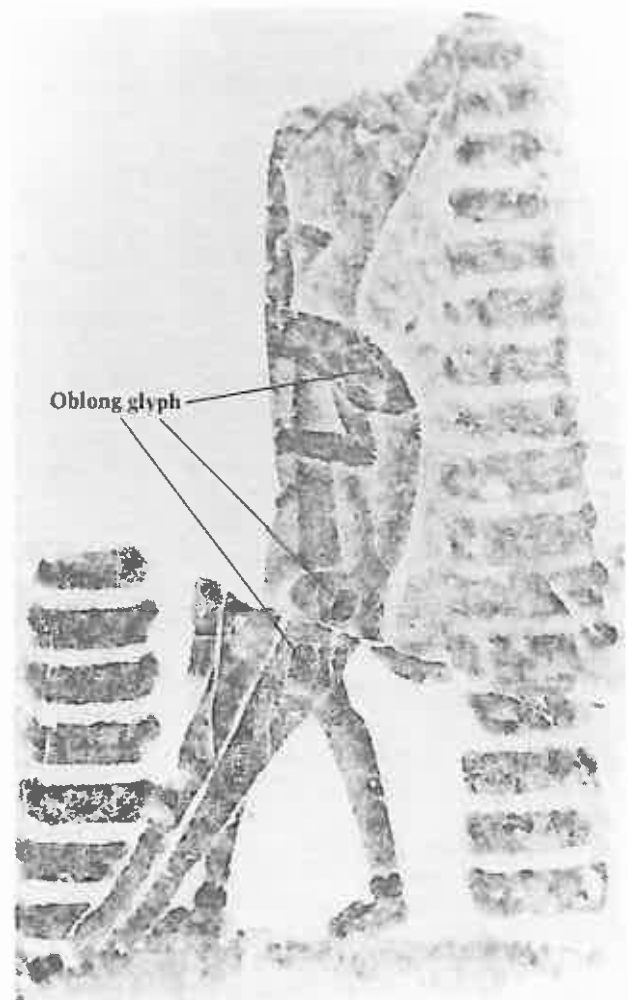


Figure 10.22. Monument IV-7 (Mon. 27).



of blood of the sacrificed animal. This could begin to explain why the human figure on stela IV-7 is represented as carrying an inert deer.

The deer has apparently been long associated with solar and hunting deities. This is true not only of hunting-gathering Indians in Mesoamerica, but among agricultural Indians as well. Many agriculturalists regard the deer as master and protector of crops and fertility, and they invoke its spirit at every turn of the agricultural cycle, from the clearing of the forest to the first fruits of harvest time. Among the Huichol every agricultural endeavor is preceded by a ceremonial deer hunt. Deer deities and their related ceremonies were of overriding importance to many ancient Mesoamerican groups, and this is reflected in the calendrical system (Furst and Anguiano 1976).

The stela and round altar on T-6 were probably utilized in a fertility cult in which the deer played an important role. Ceremonies were most likely celebrated on special dates, chosen by the position of the sun, defining the beginning and end of a given period of the agricultural cycle.

#### **Relief IV-8 (Mon. 28)**

The anthropomorphic figure on stela IV-8 is quite elegantly attired, seeming to wear a headdress with long feathers that extend in all directions with a soft waving movement (Figs. 10.23, 10.24). The central motif of the headdress is a confusing design that might be interpreted as a skull or the head of an animal.

The personage wears a long cape, open in the front, that falls almost to the knees. The state of damage to the relief is such that the background is unclear. It could be made up of undulating lines that unite several sections of the relief or could be representations of feathers that float freely, embellishing the cape of the personage.

The figure is in a sustained walking position. The left arm is bent to the waist and has something in the hand that is difficult to identify. The right arm is extended forward, the right hand holding a scepter-like object that could be a shaft ending in a flint point attached to a circular base. The personage seems to have a facial decoration of a dark horizontal band that covers the eyes and is parallel to another band that goes from mouth to ear. In Postclassic iconography, this type of facial decoration identifies Mixcoatl

as a warrior, as well as Tlahuizcalpantecutli, the morning star, in figures of the Borgia type codices from the Mixtec area.

The incomplete *takuhón* made of the side of the stela seems to reveal the continuation of the scene. There may be another person kneeling or sitting in front of the principal personage in a position of submission.

If the side of the stela does depict a kneeling figure, it would be closely similar to the scene depicted in the Olmec style painting in Juxtlahuaca cave, Guerrero (Gay 1967: Figs. A, B). Chalcatzingo stela IV-8 could have been a commemorative stela, related to the conquest of a town by a brave warrior or ruler invested with godly power, like scenes from the Bonampak lintels and stelae of the Classic Maya, in which the kneeling person represents the submission of a defeated chief.

However, if only the face of the stela is carved, it would relate more to other examples of well-ornamented warriors, such as those on the warrior columns of Chichen Itza and the one carved on the hill of La Malinche, near Tula, which shows a well-ornamented warrior-priest with the waving figure of a feathered serpent as background. This latter carving was identified by Pedro Armillas (1947: 161) as Ce Acatl Topiltzin. The freely floating feathers that embellish the cape of the personage of stela IV-8 might correspond to the same feathered serpent.

The personage of stela IV-8 could likewise be an elegant Tlahuizcalpantecutli, the morning star, that is always found related to one of the aspects of Ce Acatl Topiltzin, Quetzalcoatl, the culture hero of the Toltecs. Although both of these names were used by Nahuatl-speaking people of the Postclassic, during the Formative period those deities must have had other names and probably were conceived of as deities which interrelated cosmic and natural forces with humanized representations.

The stela might have been carved as an example of this concept to commemorate one of the many rituals and ceremonies dedicated to the cosmic deities who, like the morning star, reappeared in the expected place in the sky as an indication to the people that life would continue because the cosmic deities would allow them to begin a new calendric cycle.

The constant observation of the movement of the stars and planets, such as the

synodic cycle of Venus that shows intervals of appearance and disappearance, has been characteristic of most of the ancient agricultural societies, a reasonable practice considering that the stars probably indicated when to start burning the fields, when to plant, and when the rainy season would begin, as expressed in several of the names of the months of both the Maya and the Mexica calendars.

#### **Reliefs III-13 and III-14 (Mon. 24)**

The original position of stela III-13 is still uncertain, as is the identity of the symbols enclosed within the squares carved upon it. The appearance of the five glyphic areas (Fig. 10.25, nos. 1-5) suggests to me that this broken monument was meant to be oriented as discussed here. Each area is discussed below:

Glyph 1 is extremely eroded and hard to discern. It is formed by two elements. The main element (1a) seems to represent either a knuckle duster or two drops of water hanging from the remains of a quadrangular band that encloses the glyph. The second element (1b) looks like a vertical band divided by a central groove.

Glyph 2, directly below 1, is also made up of two elements. The main element (2a) is a square Maya-style frame enclosing two drops of rain similar to those depicted on the "El Rey" relief (Mon. I-A-1). The secondary element (2b) resembles the clouds on the "El Rey" relief. The 2b element extends downward to nearly touch the main glyph, 2a.

Glyph 3 is likewise composed of two elements. 3a is a square frame enclosing either another raindrop motif or a motif such as a bowl containing a plant with three leaves. There is space within the square frame for an additional motif which appears as a band or serpent coming from the upper middle portion of the square down toward the lower right corner and curving to end in a round form which is superimposed over the left corner of the frame. Two horizontal bars (3b) similar to Maya and Zapotec numerals complement glyph 3.

Glyph 4 is the best-preserved glyph and identical to 2a. The fifth area (5), separated from the other glyphs, can be partially seen in the lower corner of Fig. 10.25, where the stela is broken. The design might represent feathers, perhaps from a headdress or from the tail of a bird executed on the missing fragment of the stela.



Figure 10.23. Monument IV-8 (Mon. 28).

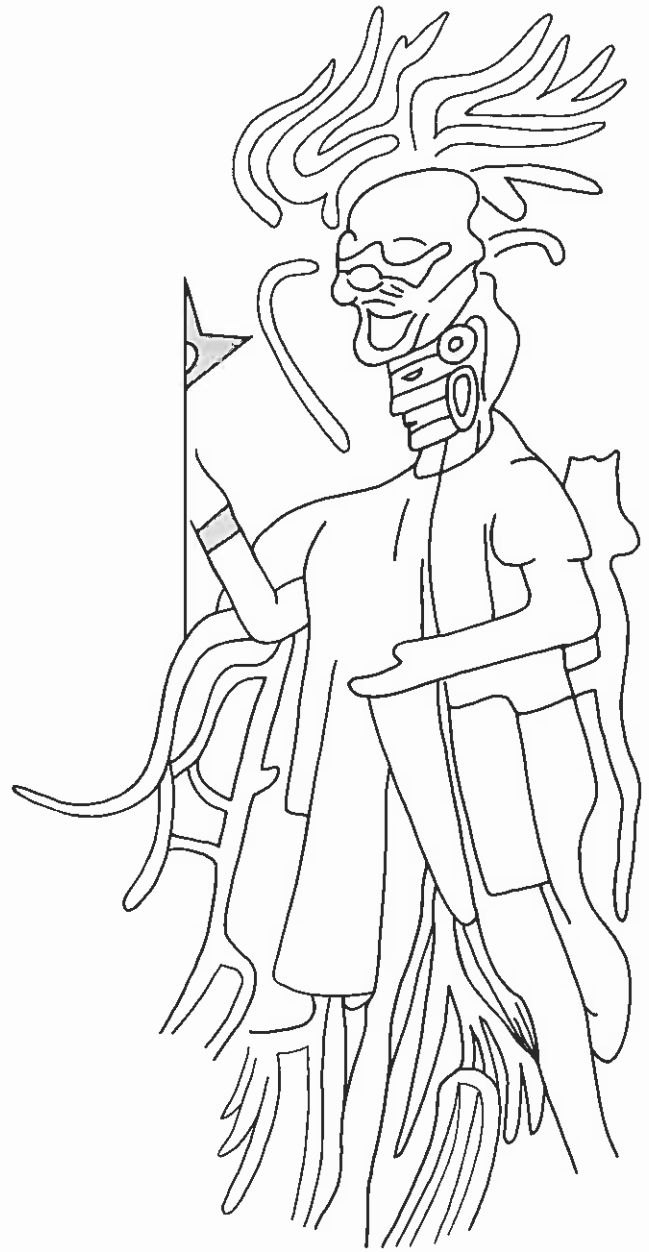


Figure 10.24. Reconstructed details on Monument IV-8 (Mon. 28).

A final carving, III-14 (unillustrated), on the back of the stela, is fragmentary. The motif could represent the claws of an animal or three feathers of a head-dress lost in the missing section.

The repetition of the glyphs with two drops of water enclosed in squares (2*a*, 4) could indicate the presence of calendric glyphs, especially when accompanied by numeral bars (3*b*) such as used in stela 1 of Tres Zapotes and in Zapotec and Maya writing of the Classic period. For example, the element "cloud with rain" (2*b*) over the enclosed square glyph could

be the symbol of a day or a year known as "Water Drops," or simply "rain," as in the style of the Mexica of the Post-classic. Glyph 3, with a possible serpent, together with the symbol of "rain" and two numeral bars in the square, might be a calendric date "10 Rain Serpent."

It is difficult to draw any definite conclusions about the meaning of this fragmented stone or to situate it chronologically in any good cultural context at Chalcatzingo. It is important that the carving is stylistically similar to Chalcatzingo's other Middle Formative period

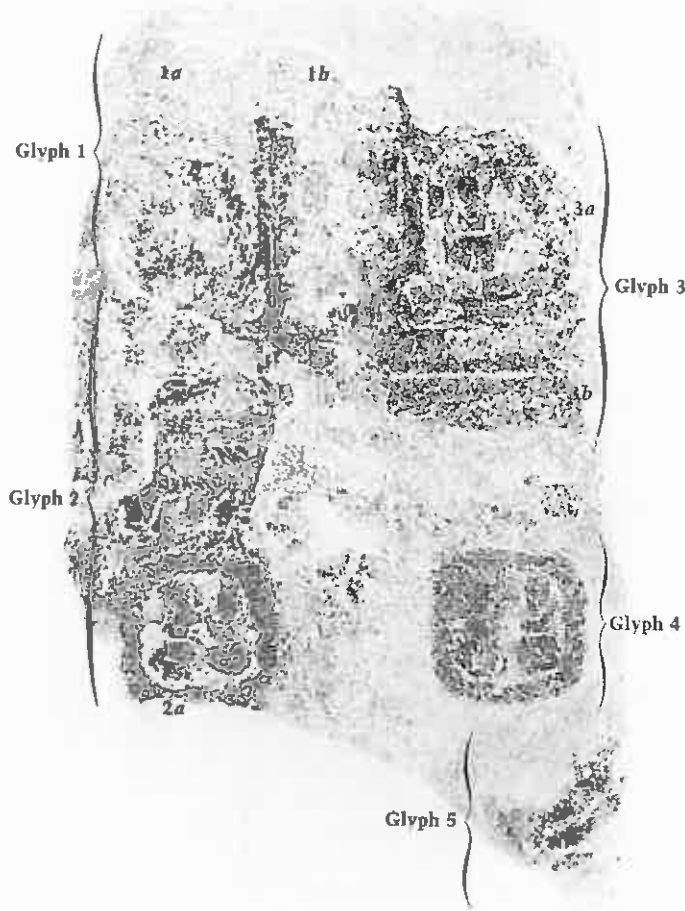


Figure 10.25. Monument III-13 (Mon. 24) [oriented according to Angulo].

carvings and this is significant because it appears to contain a bar-and-dot numeral system.

#### Relief VIII-1 (Mon. 10)

Relief VIII-1, at the top of the Cerro Chalcatzingo, was first reported by Carlo Gay (1972a). It is the only representation found of the head of a personage full face (Fig. 10.26). The personage is wearing a conical hat and two-piece earrings that hang down to the chin. The features are coarse and have the characteristic Olmec wide nose and heavy lips with the ends turned down, as on the colossal heads from the Gulf Coast. The eyes are carved in circular form on natural bumps in the rock, giving the impression at first glance of the goggle eyes of Tlaloc as represented in the Classic and Postclassic.

Above the head is a graphic representation of a left forearm, with hand open

and fingers extended upward. The distance between the head and the hand is correct anatomically, although there are no lines uniting these two elements.

The most outstanding aspect of the anthropomorphic head on this relief is that it is shown full face, as were the deities represented during the Classic period. The first impression of this carving as a representation of Tlaloc disappears with careful observation. Also, since the surface of the relief is considerably eroded, it is uncertain whether the headdress is really conical, or whether it could be a *xiuhtototl*, the small bird that the young deity of fire wears as an emblem on his headdress. If the hat ends in a point as originally described, it could be equivalent to the Mexica deity Itzli (the god of the flint knife), related to the mountains, thunder, lightning (the fire that comes from rain), and the numen of

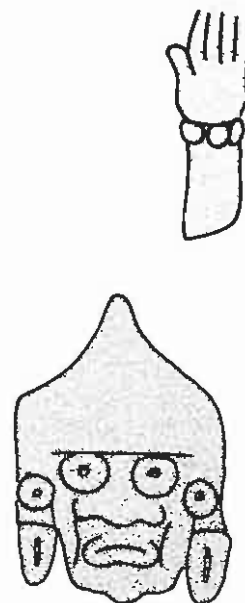


Figure 10.26. Monument VIII-1 (Mon. 10).

punishment. No written or graphic reference has been found that would identify the meaning of the body language of the raised hand of this figure.

This relief is very close to a modern metallic cross and a "box of offerings" (also of metal) located among the rocks at the top of the sacred mountain. Surely there must have been a sanctuary here (although now destroyed) similar to the small pyramidal structure at the top of the Cerro Delgado (still not dated).

These sanctuaries were probably dedicated to the deities of rain, wind, lightning, thunder, and fire, who dwelt in the mountain, deities that would have related to the total symbolism found in the figure of "El Rey" (Mon. I-A-1). Those deity attributes are also associated with Uo'tan, the angel Tohil according to modern Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya groups, a deity that rules above and below, that con-

trols the heavens as well as the natural elements, fertilizing the earth to assure human sustenance. This almighty deity is represented during the Classic period as Itzamna among the Maya and as the Dual Deity of the year and fertility in Teotihuacan.

## MONUMENT MUTILATION

Because many of the reliefs and carvings from Chalcatzingo and the Gulf Coast were found mutilated, it seems pertinent to review the present theories as to why mutilation happened.

The earliest theory was that the mutilation was done years or centuries later by different ethnic groups who considered the monuments as pagan art (Stirling 1940:334). A later alternative suggested that mutilation was a reaction against old deities by "disillusioned people imbued with iconoclastic fervor" (Heizer 1960:220). Michael Coe (1968b: 63-73) has suggested that mutilation was "the result of internal strife . . . more than a peasant revolt."

Grove (1981b) has recently reanalyzed monument mutilation and suggests other possible causes: that the mutilation occurred at the end of calendric periods or ritual cycles, similar to the fifty-two-year cycle of the Postclassic; or at the change of rulers or ruling dynasties; or at the death of a chief, when the monuments depicting him were destroyed to release their supernatural power. He believes that the last alternative is the most probable explanation.

With the exception of Grove (1981b), all the theories have considered mutilation as an act of hatred or violence. Instead, it could have been a philosophical and profoundly religious concept, an act of piety to protect and liberate the spirit of the dead personage and to eliminate any remnant breath in the representations that might impede the spiritual development in the journey undertaken through the underworld. It may relate to the same concepts employed in the practice of *curanderismo* (folk healing), still carried out by many Mesoamerican groups today, in which some sickness is attributed to *susto* (fright). In various cases of *susto* found in the literature on *curanderismo*, the spirit (*alma*, *ch'uel*, *nahual*, or some other name used to designate the intangible force which gives life energy, and knowledge to humans) has attributes similar to those of the air. It is believed that as some of the most

dangerous spirits are in the wind or air, they are introduced to a person through the nose or mouth (breathing) and thus have to be eliminated through *soplo* (blowing) by a shaman.

If we relate this concept to the partial destruction of the faces of the principal personages on Gulf Coast sculptures, the Chalcatzingo reliefs, and the paintings of the Juxtlahuaca cave, the mutilation might then be seen as an act of love, piety, protection from evil spirits, and respect for the soul of the person represented in the monuments instead of an act of violence or hatred against a deceased leader as was previously considered.

A good example of mutilation by decapitation was found during the 1972 field season in the offering of Burial 3 (Chapter 8). It consisted of a stone head with typical Olmec characteristics, obviously separated from the body of a statue at the neck by a strong blow that was delivered over the left eyebrow, destroying part of the forehead and eye (Chapter 9, Mon. 17).

Actual decapitation was apparently an act carried out with some frequency. At Chalcatzingo, Cantera phase Burials 37 and 111 are skull burials, possibly decapitations. Decapitation is depicted in Classic and Postclassic period art, particularly in association with ball courts.

Decapitation as a ritual act raises an interesting question. Does the decapitation of a stone monument, or the destruction of the faces of sculpted personages, correspond to the same symbolism as the breaking of the heads from clay figurines (an act common from the Formative period to the conquest)? If so, and if the monumental sculptures represent deities, rulers, warriors, and religious leaders, or elite personages, couldn't the great part of the figurines (which have defied explanation over the years) represent the common people?

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The basis of philosophic and religious concepts of the people who carved the reliefs at Chalcatzingo can best be understood when the reliefs are analyzed as a series of scenes reflecting the sociopolitical structure and mythic-religious concepts that gave a particular homogeneity to the Mesoamerican cultures of the Middle Formative. This structure was preserved both graphically and orally, through legends and traditions (such as

those found in the *Popol Vuh*) and other "chants" that described the myths of creation and cataclysms, which eventually were recorded by the chroniclers of the hispanic period. The differences between the legends among the present ethnic groups and the ones gathered in the first years of the colonization seem understandable. The fact that these legends managed to survive the four hundred years of transformation since the conquest in any form indicates how strongly they must have been embedded in the psychological structure of the prehispanic world.

The following pages present the conclusions drawn from this analysis.

## Basic Beliefs

Among the first agricultural groups, the fertility of the earth, as well as that of women, represented the security of sustenance and enrichment. It can be concluded that in all cultures whose fundamental base rests on agricultural production, the principal preoccupation is conserving and perpetuating the observed cycles of nature that produce the fertility of the earth. For this reason many rites and ceremonies are dedicated in petition to the rain to fertilize the cultivated fields. With this in mind, one can understand the basic Mesoamerican belief in a universe made up of the elements of nature, which are deified on various levels and have dual aspects.

The celestial deities were usually seen as self-created and creators. The earth deities were also creators and in charge of the maintenance of the earth. The deities who controlled the inside of the earth were related to maintenance, renovation, and life after death. These three groups collectively close a dynamic circle of creativity, sustenance, death, and renovation in a philosophy of constant cyclic evolution.

The three large groups of deities are related to the various elements of nature whose vital forces they personified as gods of constellations, stars, lightning or fire, thunder, wind, air, clouds, rain, and water in diverse forms and states. Each element that formed part of their active life was considered to be alive because it contained the vital spirit or essence of the deity with which it was identified. For this reason the stones, plants, and animals represented and shared the activities of daily life and the mythic-religious concept of the Mesoamerican world.

This explains how the socioeconomic system (control of production, storing, and distribution) was so intimately correlated with the politico-religious structure. With this philosophy, the social order would be integrated to a naturalistic rhythm such as utilizing cosmic and stellar movements that were controlled by the gods to direct the time to plant and to reap the harvest.

The concept of correlating abstract deities with elements of nature is fortified where one can find certain plants and animals that have attributes that identify the characteristics of the deity. This would be the case with the Lord of the Caves who lives in the heart of the mountain, a deity who controls the winds and moves the clouds to open the way to the celestial waters, a deity of the rain and thunder, a god of the flint knife, a deity of lightning that carries the hidden fire through the clouds that cover it, a dual deity who produces water and fire at the same time and is related to heaven and earth, day and night, life and death, and also evident in the fertility of the earth or a devastating drought.

This dual deity as masculine-feminine is self-fertilizing and later on is found subdivided into diverse deities with specific characteristics among the cultures of the Classic and particularly the Postclassic.

### **A System of Graphic Communication**

The Chalcatzingo reliefs were obviously carved to convey a message. They are not simply art for art's sake. They should be considered as a communication system in which the figures are expressing specific ideas.

Just as the Maya "upended frog" glyph has been recognized as the symbol of "birth," so too the Group I-A animals looking upward may symbolize the beginning of a great event. The pictograms in Group I-A portray part of a ceremonial act as a symbolic expression representing birth or renovation, and could be the origin of the Maya glyph that was part of a much more advanced writing system, where there were fewer pictograms and more ideograms with affixes, prefixes, and suffixes along with other elements of a phonetic character. The Group I-A pictograms would indicate the fertilization of mother earth once again, and possibly the birth of a new year or cycle of life.

### **Reliefs on the Talus Slope: Ritual Sacrifices as Myth or Parables?**

A subsequent aspect of the system of communication that transmitted more complicated messages is found in the series of reliefs of Group I-B, where it seems the pictographic scenes represent traditional legends or more complicated rituals that indicate the practice of human sacrifice, probably in honor of deities connected with principal stars of the calendric system or with the concept of fertility. They might likewise have depicted parables whose function was to communicate the ample knowledge of astronomy of the Olmec.

The reliefs on the cliff (Group I-A) and those of the talus slopes (I-B) can be divided into two separate groups in which slight stylistic variations of little transcendental value can be discerned, although a hidden psychic purpose is reflected in each group, still too subtle to define. They were probably carved within different periods of the same cultural phase, divided by the application of a different system of control of the group from new rulers.

An example of sacrifice or death ceremony is manifest in relief I-B-2, where a personage (*d*) is represented lying on an unidentified bundle with a mask on the back of his head, indicating that he is no longer functioning (either dead or dismissed). Two warriors armed with lances approach the personage while another with a crown of corn plants (symbol of transformation) moves away from the scene. The ritual or legend is probably related to fertility.

An even clearer example of sacrifice is found on relief I-B-3, where a richly adorned personage offers his life to produce the currents of bifurcating water that irrigate the surface of the earth. The sacrifice was probably in honor of the deity represented by the feline figure (puma) whose symbol in the ear is related either to fertility or to the stars in the night sky.

Both sacrifice and legend are found in relief I-B-4, where two felines are attacking two men. This could represent a parable of the sacred mythical twins who appear in many of the Postclassic stories related to the creation and destruction of the world. The relief is identified with the cosmic deity of Venus and of forces concentrated in mountain gods, such as Hurakan, Uo'tan, Itzamna, or Tepeyolotl of the Postclassic.

In relief I-B-5 a sacrifice related to a

legend or parable is found in an anthropomorphic figure who is semi-devoured by a sea monster identified as an *acipactli* or *peje-lagarto*. This legend could be the same one expressed later in a Mixtec codex depicting a god losing his foot in the mouth of a *cipactli*.

The relief "El Volador" (II-2) is related to myths and explicative concepts of the movement of the stars. The sun seems to be represented by the zoomorphic figures of the quetzal and *guacamaya* birds.

### **Reliefs on the Cultivated Terraces: A Socioreligious Function**

The group of reliefs found on the cultivated terraces of the site seem to correspond to a style more characteristic of the Late Formative Izapa reliefs than to those on the talus slopes or cliff. Along with the notable change of style there is also a change in the philosophical focus and ritual practices of the scenes and motifs. They were found next to stone-faced platform structures which could have been centers of reunion, administration, or some other activity required by the political-religious organization to which they belonged.

This group of stelae seems to reflect a message related to a more defined thought representing established activities of the social organization. They were probably used in relation to ritual practices that could have been held in front of structures whose open space would have been designed specifically for the performance of ceremonies.

The stela and round altar complex of T-6 occurs at Izapa beginning in the Late Formative and is repeated at numerous Classic Maya centers. This confirms the existence of an organized activity in which there must have been established systems of endoethnic and exoethnic participation in the complicated festivities held in front of these monuments.

A notable difference between the reliefs on the cliffs and talus slope and those of the cultivated terraces is that those on the mountain have little available space for ceremonies, limiting the number of people involved to a performer and a few observers, while those below had ample space for large groups of participants and more complex ceremonies.

The female stela (III-7) seems to indicate the presence of a distant group (from the *tierra caliente*) with an established relationship to the people of Chalcatzingo. They might have participated in an exchange system, accommodating

the merchants from that area and receiving the pilgrims attending the festivities and ceremonies periodically held in the religious center.

The reliefs associated with the structures on the cultivated terraces imply an efficient incipient organization whose economic and political control was based on a religious belief. They differ in this from the hillside reliefs, which seem to represent animistic-totemic beliefs manifest in a metaphoric language.

One could conclude that the sequence of representations of the various cultural periods through which this archaeological zone has passed contains scenes and motifs representing legends, historical traditions, parables, and mythical stories of philosophic concepts that probably survived until the Postclassic. These scenes would have been carved for all the ethnic groups living around Chalcatzingo to unify the clans and lineages by manifesting the accepted attitude about mythic origins, historical events, and rituals performed to preserve the economic and religious status attained through a sociopolitical structure, an incipient theocratic administration, that was based on myths and legends.

#### *The Sacred Mountain within the Socioeconomic System*

In this analysis one can visualize certain aspects of the socioeconomic organization at Chalcatzingo and possible political relationships with neighboring groups. These groups would have considered Chalcatzingo as a type of "sanctuary" and rector-administrative center, where there was intense regional commercial exchange at the time of the diverse religious festivals and ceremonies.

The information gleaned from the analysis of the graphic representations also reveals details about rituals, ceremonies, and deities that ruled and motivated the philosophic concepts and religious activities at the base of the "sacred mountain." This activity was possibly the reason why this area was converted into an important political-economic center that would have been on the route of merchants trading between the Gulf and Pacific coasts.

Chalcatzingo was on the obligated pathway, a settlement that became a port of exchange, trade, and distribution for serpentine stone (*chalchihuitl*), feathers, cacao, and other merchandise that came from the hot lands (*tierra caliente*) beyond the rugged Sierra Madre to the

south, to be distributed among cultural centers disseminated in the area of Mesoamerica during the Middle and Late Formative (Angulo 1979).

#### *The Sacred Mountain through Time*

Even from a great distance, and even among people accustomed to an urban scene and insensitive to natural landscapes, the Chalcatzingo mountain complex creates an impression of solemn monumentality. This might be why the area was considered a place of oracle and center or origin of mythic concepts that were concentrated on the sacred mountain for groups whose beliefs were of a naturalistic character.

From the first agricultural settlement (Early Formative), this region must have attracted pilgrims and merchants from populations near and far who shared the philosophic-religious concepts and participated in the periodically staged ceremonial events. The functions of sanctuary and ceremonial center were consolidated when the reliefs were carved on the cliffs. There are abundant examples of works from this period such as the reliefs from Groups I-A and I-B, relief II-2, and altar III-4 (composed of reassembled carved stones).

The subsequent carved stelae and architectural structures distributed over the cultivated terraces seem to be slightly later in time. They indicate a continuity of occupation, with implicit changes in the social, political, and economic order that affected the development and transformation of the artistic styles of each period. This new form of artistic expression, although identified with Chalcatzingo, has much more stylistic relation (in the distribution of spaces, the way of framing, and motivation) to other sculptured pieces found along the Pacific Coast—those of Izapa, Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa, El Meson, and El Baúl—than with the earlier reliefs carved on the talus slopes of the Cerro Chalcatzingo.

Following the Classic period establishment of principal centers in cultivated valleys, the main activity of Chalcatzingo was moved to the site of Las Pilas, 4 km to the west. Las Pilas was by a water source ample enough to provide for the whole agricultural population, even up to the present time.

However, the information gathered during the Chalcatzingo research indicates that Chalcatzingo continued to be a center of socioreligious power even during the height of the Classic, since a

ball court and various pyramidal structures occur there. The area called Tetla and the *adoratorio* below relief I-B-2 correspond to the Postclassic period. Considering that the *adoratorio* was found precisely at the foot of relief I-B-2, erected more than two thousand years earlier, it can be concluded that the construction was destined to perpetuate ritual and ceremonial practices that were related to the ancient monument. This association reveals the perseverance with which religious concepts were transmitted through the generations, perpetuating the memory, respect, and veneration of a symbol of a place destined to be permanently consecrated.

There is no doubt that Chalcatzingo's "sacred mountain" retained its importance through all the prehispanic culture periods. Even today it is revered and used for religious ceremonies (now Christian) by the people of the surrounding area.

Obviously the external form and type of ceremony has had to adapt to technical and social changes through the years. However, the basic motivation of these mythic and religious convictions apparently has been maintained in the adornment of the deities, the way of conducting the ceremony, and even the names and iconographic figures used in substitution for the ancient gods. In this same spirit, the "sacred mountain" has remained a place of reverence where the gods of fertility and maintenance dwell, the place where the celestial gods, those of the earth, and even those of the underworld meet. In this sanctuary rituals have been carried out without interruption for almost three thousand years, and for reasons probably similar to those described by Sahagún (1956:2:260–264) when he refers to the constellations of Mamalhuaztli and others, which the Mexica expected to appear over Citlal-tepetl (Cerro de la Estrella), where festivities were carried out in which "they made sacrifices and ceremonies when they reappeared in the east, after the celebration of the sun or when the Pleiades appeared in the night sky announcing the proximity of the rains" (in the first week of May) (my translation).

It is notable that the inhabitants of the town of Chalcatzingo annually take offerings of food and gifts to the cross and metallic box at the top of the "sacred mountain," still associated with rain, wind, earth, and, most of all, with fertility. This ceremony takes place on May 3, just before the rainy season. It is the day



when the Santa Cruz is celebrated in the Christian calendar. This cross could be considered a symbol of the sacrifice and death of Christ, substituting for the prehispanic sacrifice and ritual to bring rain. One could possibly argue that the appearance of the ritual does not correspond to a prehispanic ceremony as much as to rituals whose style is more in tune with the present era; however, there is an evident symbiosis in which the elements of nature, the gods of creation, fertility, and maintenance, and the cycle of the stars or constellations mingle with the sacrifice of the Messiah who gave his life on the cross. This rite surely interweaves characteristics of two belief systems of distinct origin into the resultant hybrid beliefs of the hispanic conquest over the Mesoamerican religious structure.

## RESUMEN DEL CAPÍTULO 10

En este capítulo se analiza la iconografía de los monumentos de Chalcatzingo, basándose en el principio de la continuidad de ciertos conceptos básicos, desde por lo menos el Formativo hasta el Postclásico. Así, estas tempranas obras de arte pueden ser interpretadas por analogía con los principios iconográficos y religiosos conocidos de pueblos mesoamericanos más tardíos.

Resulta claro que algunos relieves, que aparecen en grupos, están relacionados unos con otros. Los relieves del Area I-A forman una secuencia gráfica que principia con el relieve I-A-7 (Mon. 11) y que concluye con I-A-1 (Mon. 1), "El Rey." Esta secuencia empieza con cuatro representaciones de criaturas zoomorfas que miran hacia arriba y que están asociadas con calabazas y nubarrones. A la manera del glifo maya "rana descendiente," estas criaturas pueden significar el "nacimiento" o el inicio de la temporada de lluvias, la "nueva vida" de la tierra. Las volutas que emergen de sus bocas pueden representar oraciones para pedir la lluvia, y su semejanza con el glifo maya Ik conduce a pensar que también podrían representar la respiración, la germinación, y la vida.

Las criaturas zoomorfas están sentadas sobre volutas horizontales en forma de S, las cuales podrían simbolizar las eternas oposiciones: lluvia y sequía,

vida y muerte, etc. Los animales, identificados como jaguar, cipactli, canidae, e iguana, también pueden referirse a los clanes que formaban la sociedad local.

La secuencia del Area I-A muestra el crecimiento progresivo de las nubes, el incremento de lluvia, y el crecimiento y florecimiento de las calabazas que culmina en el relieve llamado "El Rey." Este último ha sido identificado como el Señor de la Montaña, debido a la presencia de características de la deidad del Postclásico Tepeyollotl. Está sentado en la boca de la cueva, la boca del monstruo de la Tierra, y bromeliáceas brotan de las esquinas de la cueva. El viento que de ahí sale lleva a las nubes cargadas de lluvia hacia la cima de la montaña, completando así el ciclo de renovación anual.

Tres relieves del Area I-B comparten rasgos estilísticos y parecen representar eventos míticos o rituales. El relieve I-B-2 (Mon. 2), "Los Olmecas Caminantes," representa a cuatro personajes, que bien podrían estar participando en un ritual de la fertilidad, similar al que se dedicaba a Xipe-Totec en la época Postclásica. El relieve I-B-3 (Mon. 3) muestra a un felino de cuello largo, echado. El felino aparentemente está sujetando y/o devorando a una figura antropomorfa que lleva un tocado de plumas. En un estilo semejante, el relieve I-B-4 (Mon. 4) muestra a dos felinos, un puma y un jaguar, atacando a dos seres humanos, los cuales pueden haber sido víctimas para el sacrificio, y que podrían estar relacionados con el concepto mesoamericano de los héroes gemelos, que representan al Sol y a Venus. El relieve I-B-5 (Mon. 5) muestra a una criatura que ha sido identificada como el acipactli o cipactli, el cual está devorando, o tal vez vomitando, a una figura humana cuya pierna podría estar dentro de la boca de la criatura. Esta figura puede estar relacionada con aquellas concepciones más tardías que rodean a Tezcatlipoca, el dios que perdió una pierna al enfrentarse con el monstruo terrestre-acuático, y que representa al Sol en su recorrido diurno. Entre otros monumentos importantes, que no aparecen en grupos, está el relieve II-2 (Mon. 12), "El Volador." Su postura, que sugiere movimiento, así como su atuendo, permiten pensar en un jugador de pelota. Hay, además, varias estelas que representan personajes individuales. El relieve III-7 (Mon. 21) muestra a una mujer tocando, con la palma de las manos, un bulto en posi-

ción vertical que se encuentra frente a ella.

Esta figura femenina se encuentra parada sobre una máscara del monstruo de la Tierra. El relieve IV-7 (Mon. 27) representa a un hombre que aparentemente lleva cargando a un venado sobre sus espaldas. En el relieve IV-8 (Mon. 28) aparece un personaje vestido con una larga capa hecha de plumas.

Los relieves de Chalcatzingo fueron creados para transmitir un mensaje y deben ser considerados como parte de un sistema de comunicación. Los relieves del piedemonte son, antes que nada, escenas pictográficas, y hasta narrativas. Estas representan leyendas tradicionales y rituales relacionados con el sacrificio humano dedicado a las deidades asociadas con el sistema calendrico y con la fertilidad. Los monumentos que se encuentran en las terrazas residenciales cumplen una función tanto sociopolítica como religiosa. Probablemente se llevaban a cabo prácticas rituales frente a las estructuras sobre las cuales se encontraban dichos monumentos. Por el contrario, los relieves de piedemonte son mucho menos accesibles al público, ya que no existe un espacio desde el cual los espectadores pudieran observar los rituales.