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Stone Monuments of the Río Chiquito, Veracruz, Mexico

By MATTHEW W. STIRLING

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# STONE MONUMENTS OF THE RÍO CHIQUITO, VERACRUZ, MEXICO

By MATTHEW W. STIRLING

## INTRODUCTION

Some 50 miles inland from its mouth in the Bay of Campeche, the Coatzacoalcos River forks into two branches which rejoin after flowing their separate ways for about 12 miles, forming the Island of Tacamichapa in southern Veracruz (fig. 1). This island, about 12 miles long and 8 miles across, is famous as the birthplace of Malinche, mistress of Cortez and interpreter for his expedition. The west arm of the river at this point, being the smaller, is known as the Río Chiquito. About 7 miles below the upper fork the Tatagapa River enters the Chiquito from the west. In the area between the Tatagapa and the Chiquito are a number of important archeological sites. In general the land here is low and level. The alluvial plains of the river are wide and the soil is deep and rich. The more elevated portions are covered with dense jungle, but there are wide stretches of savannah, covered with a heavy growth of tall zacate, and some areas of open swamp. The ground being level, the streams and sloughs which drain it are deep and sluggish.

Two or three miles above the mouth of the Tatagapa River, an isolated elevated ridge extends from the left bank of the Chiquito in a southwesterly direction. Although it is not continuous, this ridge terminates finally in the Cerro Encantado, the most conspicuous landmark in the region, some 10 miles distant. During the year 1936, a few natives built some houses at the east end of the ridge, on the banks of the Río Chiquito, and made clearings for their milpas in the virgin jungle which covered the elevated land. The community grew, and as the clearings exposed a number of large mounds on the site some historically minded settler named the new village Tenochtitlán.

Gradually the clearings extended southward along the ridge until in 1944, at a point about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south of Tenochtitlán, another archeological site was encountered in an unpopulated district known as the Terrenos de San Lorenzo.

Hearing a report of stone monuments at this place prompted me to

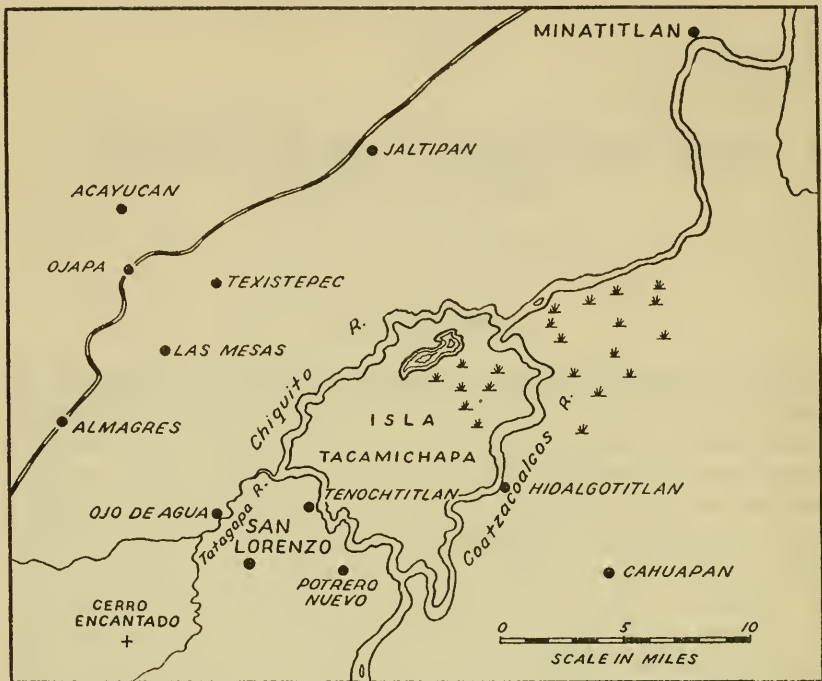


FIGURE 1.—Island of Tacamichapa and vicinity, southern Veracruz, Mexico.

visit the site in 1945, when preliminary investigations were made. When I returned in 1946 a full season of excavating was carried on, with supplementary work at the neighboring sites of Tenochtitlán and Potrero Nuevo. During both the 1945 and 1946 seasons I was aided in the field by my wife, Marion Stirling. In 1946 I was assisted by Philip Drucker who was concerned primarily with the stratigraphic work conducted at the three sites. Richard H. Stewart, of the National Geographic Society, also assisted in the work and was the official photographer of the expedition. I should like to also express my appreciation to Juan Del Alto and Marguerite Bravo, of Coatzacoalcos, who first brought to our attention the existence of the San Lorenzo site. The entire project was part of the National Geographic Society–Smithsonian Institution archeological program, the primary objective of which has been the study of the La Venta or Olmec culture. The work, as always, was made pleasant by the whole-hearted cooperation of the National Institute of Anthropology and History of the Mexican Government.

A brief account of this work has been published elsewhere (Stirling, 1947). The present report is to place on record the stone sculpture found during the work.

## RÍO CHIQUITO

The modern village of Tenochtitlán is situated on and between two parallel ridges running in a north-south direction, and terminating at the Río Chiquito. On the lower ridge nearest the river are a number of small mounds, but the principal earthworks are on the ridge 400 yards to the west. At the north end of this elevation there is a group of four big mounds, the largest being about 60 feet high. Its apparent height is much greater since the base merges into the slope of the natural elevation on which it is built. This mound forms the north end of a long rectangular court with parallel flanking mounds on the east and west sides and another mound at the south end. South of this group are more mounds, culminating in a large one at the south end of the elevation. On the floor of the court are two small low mounds, one at either end. From the high mounds a very fine view is had over the extensive plain below. Ten miles to the south the peak of the Cerro Encantado can be seen standing in isolated grandeur above the level plain. Two or three miles to the south are the heights of San Lorenzo, really a continuation of the same low ridge on which Tenochtitlán is situated. Although the village in part is built directly on a portion of the archeological site, I have called the latter Río Chiquito since to name it for the village would result in endless confusion because of the famous site of Tenochtitlán in the Valley of Mexico. Just below the mound group there are exposed in the river bank two sherd levels, separated by several feet of sterile alluvium. The lowermost of these is 20 feet below the present surface of the ground and about at the level of the river surface at low water. The character of the material in the two occupation levels is apparently different. It is probable that we will be able to assign the greater number of the stone monuments to the period represented by the lower level.

In the course of excavating a stratigraphic trench in the river bank at this place, we encountered in the lower level two large granite cylindrical columns. Each was 2 feet in diameter; one was 14 feet and the other 13 feet in length (pl. 4). These are similar both in material and dimensions to the stone column on the south end of the long mound at La Venta. It is probable that this area lying west of the river bank was the principal occupation site belonging to the mound group ceremonial center.

Stone monuments were neither of large size nor abundant at the Chiquito site, although it is not improbable that many may be deeply buried as were the stone columns. Being small, none were in situ at the time of our visit, but we were assured that those now in the village were all found in the immediate vicinity of the mound group.

## DESCRIPTION OF MONUMENTS

## MONUMENT 1

Monument 1 was lying in the village of Tenochtitlán when we first saw it. According to the natives it was found in the vicinity of the nearby group of large mounds. The sculpture apparently represents an anthropomorphic jaguar seated on a human figure lying on the back cross-legged. Presumably the lower figure is that of a woman, and the act of copulation is depicted. This identification would be much less certain were it not for the fact that we later found a much more realistically carved monument (Monument 3, Potrero Nuevo) representing the same subject. The upper figure of Monument 1 is carved in the full round and considerably more care is used in forming it than is the case with the lower figure, which is flattened and somewhat angular. The "jaguar" is shown with a long trailing ornament hanging down the lower part of the back, and what appears to be a headdress hanging over the back of the neck. On the chest is a circular gorget suspended from the neck. The heads of both figures are missing as are the forearms of the upper figure. The sculpture proper is mounted on a low flat base (pl. 2).

## MONUMENT 2

Monument 2 is a small figure about 3 feet in length of a snarling jaguar lying in a crouching position, with the head turned to the side and the left foreleg raised alongside the head. The treatment is realistic and the general effect rather pleasing.

This stone was found in clearing near the mound group, and it had been brought into the village at the time of our arrival (pl. 3, *a, c*).

## MISCELLANEOUS STONE

Among the items encountered in clearing for the village were two small tetrapod stone vessels. They are more or less rectangular in form and have shallow rectangular depressions on top. On the front of each is carved a human face, and the two front supports are in the form of bent elbows, with the forearms extending upward on each side of the face (pl. 3, *b*).

Lying by the trail crossing the dip in the ridge south of the Río Chiquito group is a human torso in stone. It appears to have been a rather slender statue of a standing figure. The two stone columns found in the river bank below the village have already been described.

## SAN LORENZO

Riding south along the ridge from Tenochtitlán, one notes that the trail dips low for more than a mile, when it again rises steeply to the



heights of San Lorenzo where the archeological site is located. The series of ridges comprising the heights is really a flat-topped mesa of gravelly soil, cut through here and there by steep ravines. Some of this erosion may have taken place since the aboriginal occupation.

The stone monuments are scattered widely over the site, which extends for approximately one-half mile. Unlike La Venta and Tres Zapotes where the majority of the monuments were standing in situ, the San Lorenzo monuments appear all to have been intentionally overthrown and many of them cast into the ravines. Paradoxically, however, most of them seem not to have been mutilated and are in better condition than the monuments at other Olmec sites. The displacing of the stones was apparently done by the later aboriginal occupants of the site, as represented by the upper occupation level. Since the two levels are separated by a considerable time interval, it does not seem likely that a conquest took place. The later inhabitants evidently moved into an abandoned site and for some reason felt called upon to dispose of the monuments.

The mound structures at San Lorenzo are quite unimpressive. The principal mound is conical in shape, although it may originally have been a pyramid. It is about 25 feet in height and stands at the south end of a rectangular plaza which is enclosed by earthen embankments. Trenches in the plaza revealed an occupational deposit of about 4 feet. Below this are three or four floor levels close together. Sherds were not very abundant although several caches of whole pots were found. Figurines of the solid variety were present, but rare. The pottery is buff, black, or gray, with occasional incised decoration. A few other small mounds are erected near this central plaza, but they are without apparent regularity or orientation. Northeast of the central plaza, toward the edge of the ridge, the cultural deposit is much thicker, reaching a depth of 15 feet or more. In this section sherds are much more abundant than in the plaza itself. Cross-section trenches were made in all the principal mounds and in the occupied area, and the site itself was mapped.

The widely scattered stone monuments are striking and fairly abundant, seemingly out of keeping with the general inconspicuous nature of the mounds.

#### DESCRIPTION OF MONUMENTS

##### MONUMENT 1

Monument 1 is a head, and, because of its large size, good state of preservation, and general artistic merit, is one of the most impressive of all of the San Lorenzo monuments. Over 9 feet in height, it is wide and thick and the heaviest of all the Colossal Heads. When discovered it was lying on its back, head down on the slope of a small

but steep arroyo about 300 yards southeast of the principal mound. The only damage it had suffered was the scaling off of a section above the right eye. The pieces were lying on the ground at the base of the head, and we later put them back in place with cement. The back is plain except for two pendent rectangles evidently representing the hair hanging down. The features are carved in a manner that gives the impression of full realism. The lips are outlined with a narrow raised ridge which gives the mouth a very lifelike appearance. The headdress is simple, consisting of a broad median crest with a circular element over the forehead which terminates in four semicircular scallops where it meets the groove which passes around the front of the head. This groove, which is very similar to the one on the Colossal Head of Tres Zapotes (Stirling, 1943), is cut deep with right-angled edges, and looks as though it were made for some sort of inset. Although the upper lip is short, it is longer than in the other Colossal Heads.

Another respect in which Monument 1 resembles the Tres Zapotes head is in the treatment of the ears and the style of ear ornament worn. This is a rectangular object placed horizontally through the pierced lobe of the ear.

The eyelids are shown as narrow curving bands, and the iris is indicated by a slightly raised circle on the eyeball.

The head is approximately 9 feet 4 inches high and it is 6 feet 6 inches wide. The mouth measures 37 inches across, the eye 21 inches, and the nose 25 inches (pls. 5, 6).

#### MONUMENT 2

Monument 2 was the first of the monuments at San Lorenzo to be found, and led to the discovery of the site. It lay completely buried under the trail which led southward along the heights from Tenochtitlán. The trail exposed part of the stone, and a curious native cleared away part of the mud covering it, exposing one eye. Upon arriving at the site, we excavated it, revealing a head almost 9 feet in height. The head has suffered very little damage, although erosion has slightly obscured the fine carving of the features. It is the only head which has considerable decoration on the back, most of the rear flat surface being covered with small-element designs which are perfectly preserved as a result of the head having lain on its back.

The headdress proper is rather plain, the principal decoration being three large ovals in low relief with incised designs over the forehead. The lips are somewhat less full than usual, and are parted, revealing a row of upper teeth. Although almost as high and as wide as Monument 1, the stone is not as thick, and so viewed in profile it is somewhat flattened.

Like Monument 3 it has had a number of hemispherical depressions ground into it. A curious depression is carved in the headband above each ear. A tassellike appendage hangs from each ear, and over this is carved a large circular ornament. Monument 2 is 8 feet 10 inches high and 5 feet 6 inches wide (pl. 7).

## MONUMENT 3

Monument 3 is a head lying on the bottom of a deep and wild ravine about a half-mile in a direct line southwest of the principal mound. To reach it one crosses two other deep ravines from the trail leading south along the main ridge. It is located not more than 50 yards above the point where the ravine terminates in the swampy plain. Excavation was tedious because the head lies in a spring, and it was difficult to keep the excavation free from water. When discovered, the monument lay upside down.

The head is strongly carved and has a certain portrait quality. A slight frown is indicated by a groove at the base of the nose. The irises are indicated by circles as in a number of the other heads. The only damage it has suffered is the loss of most of the lower lip, but it is obvious that no teeth were shown. Scattered over the forehead and the top of the head or headdress are a considerable number of rather deep circular depressions, each of which has another small depression at its bottom and center. These are uniform in size and typically occur in pairs. What their purpose might be it is difficult to conjecture unless they were used to attach some extraneous decoration. They appear to have been made after the headdress design was completed. Monuments 2 and 3 at La Venta (Stirling, 1943, pls. 42, *b*; 43) have a series of similar depressions on them, as does Monument 2 at San Lorenzo.

The design on the headdress is geometric in character and rather elaborate. It consists of a series of four horizontal bands across the forehead, embellished with diagonal grooved lines. These geometric designs are carried on to cover most of the headdress. The rectangular elements in front of the ears are prolonged by the addition of a square section slightly smaller in diameter, to which is added a wedge-shaped pendant which extends straight down to the chin level. The ears are not shown (pl. 8).

## MONUMENT 4

Monument 4 is a head found lying on its side almost completely buried in a section of dense jungle about 600 yards northwest of the main mound. It is in a perfect state of preservation, not a flaw marring it. In some ways it is the most individualistic in appearance of any of the heads.

The face is relatively narrow and the headgear high in proportion to the face. The eyes are done with fine realism, the lids being somewhat narrowed and slanting downward to the outer corners. The circles representing the irises are placed toward the inner part of the eyeballs, but this does not create a cross-eyed effect. The headdress is unusual, a series of seven vertical elements terminating in three circles, extends above the right eye, while four horizontal elements, each incised diagonally are placed above the left eye. The rectangular elements in front of the ears extend downward to the level of the base of the chin, and each has three evenly spaced ribbonlike elements extending backward along the side of the head.

Each ear lobe is decorated with a circular disk from which hangs a pendant which curves backward. The face is completely free from surface erosion and has a remarkable skinlike texture. The expression is stern but calm. In profile the features are rather flat.

Monument 4 is 5 feet 4 inches in height (pls. 9, 10, 11, *a*).

#### MONUMENT 5

In a ravine south of the main mound and close to the laguna was Monument 5, another buried head lying face down in the ravine bed. On turning it right side up it proved to be one of the finest of all the Colossal Heads. It is carved more nearly in true proportion than any of the other examples, the profile being in full relief instead of somewhat flattened. Viewed from any angle it is a splendid work of art. The majority of the heads were intended to be viewed full face, and suffer somewhat in effectiveness when seen from the side. Monument 5 is in a virtually perfect state of preservation, the only defect being a small chip in the upper lip.

The headdress is more elaborate than on any of the other heads. Two jaguar paws, each displaying three toes with claws, are draped over the headband, one above each eye. The spaces between are decorated with a series of small-element designs consisting of circles and parallel lines. The usual rectangular element hangs from the headband in front of each ear. The ears have a circular disk or ornament on each lobe from which hangs a comma-shaped pendant curving backward. The treatment of the ears and the ear ornaments is the same as on Monument 4 and on Monument 2 at La Venta (Stirling, 1943, pl. 43). The back has the usual flat surface down the center and is plain except for a single groove carved horizontally across it. The lips are full and give the appearance of being slightly parted but the teeth do not show. The nose is standard in treatment but as has been mentioned, stands out from the other features in full

relief. A notch in the headband over the bridge of the nose and modified supraorbital ridges give the impression of a slight frown.

Monument 5 is 6 feet 4 inches high (pls. 12, 13).

MONUMENT 6

We found Monument 6 about a mile south of the central mound on the flat land below the heights. This head had apparently been carried there in ancient times. It had been broken off in such a way as to suggest that the body may have been in a recumbent position or that the complete monument may have had the form of Monument G at Tres Zapotes (Stirling, 1943, pl. 8, *b*). The head in its present state is 3 feet 4 inches high. The carving is Olmec in character and the head is in good condition. It is represented as wearing a peculiar flat headdress which entirely surrounds the crown in the form of a wide band (pl. 14).

The treatment of the features is somewhat different from the Colossal Heads. The eyes have a puffy appearance and the lids are shown as half-closed. In this respect they resemble the eyes on the Atlantean figures of Monument 2, Potrero Nuevo (pl. 23).

MONUMENT 7

At the edge of a ravine west of the central mound was the figure of a crouching jaguar or mountain lion. It is a very nice carving, realistic in treatment but with the body strangely elongated. The long tail extends along the right side of the body, passing under the right hind leg.

Except for the missing head, the figure is complete and undamaged. Our workmen referred to this monument as "El Leon" and it does in fact resemble a mountain lion rather than a jaguar (pl. 17, *a*).

MONUMENT 8

Near "El Leon" at the edge of the ravine was a large rectangular stone, perfectly flat and well smoothed on the back. The flat surface of the face is decorated by six symmetrically placed celt-shaped depressions and a raised border around the edge. One end has been broken off. The stone in its present condition is 64 inches long, 47 inches wide, and 11 inches thick (pl. 15, *a*).

MONUMENT 9

This interesting object (Monument 9) was found on a narrow projecting point overlooking a steep ravine west of the central mound. It appears to have been a stone fount in the form of a swimming duck,

with the two webbed feet projecting in front under the breast. Wings are carved in high relief on the sides. On the center of the breast carved in relief is a quacking duck with open beak and flapping wings. On each side of this figure is a glyph which may represent rain or water. It consists of a wavy band from which hang three long and two short elements. A third glyph exactly similar but somewhat larger is shown on the rear. The top is hollowed into a basin but the upward projecting sides are broken off all around. On the right side a U-shaped opening has been cut through the wing, and a round hole in the bottom may have served as a water drain. The base is smooth and perfectly flat. The stone in its present condition is 37 inches in diameter and 16 inches high (pls. 17, *b*; 18).

#### MONUMENT 10

In the bottom of a small ravine, the figure of a jaguar (Monument 10) was found inverted and buried, only the base showing before we excavated it. Just above it, on the south side of the same ravine, were scattered the curious trough-shaped stones described later.

The figure represents the classical Olmec anthropomorphic jaguar, shown in a seated position. It is undamaged except for the lower extremities. The head is rectanguloid in shape with notched forehead, a horizontal "step" in the back of the head, reminiscent of the famous Kunz ax, a broad forehead band, narrow rectanguloid eyes with drooping outer corners, and the typical Olmec nose and "tiger mouth." The ears are long and narrow. The arms are held across the chest, each hand grasping a curious cestuslike object. This device is shown elsewhere in Olmec sculpture, one of the best examples being on a jade figurine in the collections of the Cleveland Museum of Art. In the area on the chest between these is a glyph terminating in three triangles on the upper part.

Monument 10 is 47 inches high and 33 inches across (pl. 15, *b*).

#### MONUMENT 11

In the bottom of one of the heavily wooded ravines west of the central mound, we excavated an inverted and almost completely buried seated figure, possibly representing a woman (Monument 11). A cylindrical bar is held across the lap. The right hand is shown supporting the bar from underneath, palm up, while the left hand grasps the bar from above, palm down. The right end of the bar has been broken off, so it is impossible to tell if it terminated plainly as does the left end. It does not appear to represent a grinding stone.

The figure is very nicely carved, but unfortunately the head is missing (pl. 16, *a*).

MONUMENT 12

Monument 12 is one of the two carved stones lying on the ground at the east base of the central mound. It represents a seated woman holding in her arms an infant which appears to have a human body and probably a jaguar head. The head is missing from the figure of the woman. It now stands 23 inches high and is 27 inches wide (pl. 16, *b*).

MONUMENT 13

Monument 13, the second monument at the east base of the central mound, is a basalt sphere 115 inches in circumference (pl. 11, *b*).

Two similar spheres were found at Cerro de las Mesas (Stirling, 1943, pl. 30, *d*), and one is reminded of the more spectacular examples from southwestern Costa Rica.

MONUMENT 14

Southwest of the central mound there is a circular laguna or pond about 30 yards in diameter. Only during unusually dry years does it become dry at the end of the dry season. At the eastern edge of this pond, and under water most of the year, is a large stone altar (Monument 14; pl. 21, *b*). This monument is remarkably similar to Altar 4, La Venta (Stirling, 1943, pl. 37), the dimensions of which it closely approximates, although the workmanship in general is inferior. Also, the basalt from which it is carved appears to be identical with that from which Altar 4 was made, and is probably from the same quarry. When found, Monument 14 was lying on its back, face up, and the front surface had suffered considerable erosion. What remains of the carvings on the ends is well preserved. In form it is the conventional La Venta table-top altar. The front projection of the table top is less than on Altar 4 of La Venta, and the arched niche in front is less deeply carved. The seated figure emerging from the niche is almost in the full round. This figure is represented as holding what may be the ends of ropes passing around the base of the altar. On the top is a raised rectangle as on Monument 2, Potrero Nuevo. On each end of Monument 14, under the projecting table top, is a carving in low relief (pl. 22). On the south end is a single seated figure, wearing a wide-brimmed headdress surmounted by the clutching talon of a bird of prey. A number of droplike ornaments are pendent from the brim of the headdress. From the ear lobe hangs a curved ornament. Around the neck is a double string of beads from which hangs a star-shaped gorget with a circle in the center. Each upper arm is encircled by an arm band, and a broad belt is worn about the waist. The features in profile are typically "Olmec" in character. The right arm is extended and is lightly

grasped by the left hand. The stone is broken away at the right hand, but I suspect that when complete it was shown with a rope attached to the wrist as in the case of the figure on the south end of Altar 4, La Venta. The carving is in good condition, and considerable skill was exhibited in its execution. An interesting effect of perspective is achieved in the handling of the shoulders. Directly in front of this figure are the remains of two deeply carved rectangular niches, no doubt carved subsequent to the original sculpture.

The north end, as with Altar 4 at La Venta, has only part of the decoration remaining, the major part of the surface having been carefully chipped away to create a new surface an inch deeper, in the form of an arch. In this surface, six deep rectangular niches of various size were carved. All that remains of the carving on the original surface is the upper part of the head of a man, including the eye and nose and a rather elaborate headdress with what appear to be curving feathers projecting from it. This carving had been executed with as much skill as the more complete figure remaining on the opposite end.

Monument 14 is 11 feet 4 inches long and 6 feet high. It is 5 feet wide under the table top.

It is worth calling attention again to the similarity of this monument to Altar 4 of La Venta which it resembles as to material, form, dimensions, and subject matter. In addition, both monuments have had the carvings at one end carefully defaced, and in the area thus produced, deep rectangular niches were excavated.

#### MONUMENT 15

Near the base of a small hill rising from the flat about one-half mile south of the heights of San Lorenzo, and just west of the trail, is a rectangular stone about 2 feet square, the upper part of which is broken off (Monument 15). It is carved as though it represented a chest elaborately bound in ropes. The ropes, which pass around the stone in pairs, enlace the corners and pass over and under each other as they cross on the sides and ends. On what appears to be the front surface, two elongated projecting pieces which passed over the ropes have been broken off. It is possible that a figure was seated on the upper surface and that these were the legs hanging down (pl. 20).

#### MISCELLANEOUS STONES

Some 400 yards southwest of the central mound is a steep ravine with a small stream of water. At one point, scattered from top to bottom on the south side of the ravine, were several dozen trough-shaped pieces of basalt, open at the ends, and in cross section having the form of a broad-based U. They were not quite uniform as to



size, but each unit averaged about 32 inches long, 15 inches wide, and 10 inches high. With them were a lesser number of rectangular flat slabs of the same material, perfectly flat on one surface and slightly curved on the other. These were of adequate size to have served as covers to the trough-shaped pieces. This fact led me to speculate that they may have been joined end to end to form a covered aqueduct. No pieces were found joined in this manner, however, and it is a little difficult to see why so much labor was used in carving stone when wooden conduits would have served as well even though they would not have been so permanent. The hollowed-out pieces also resemble the wooden seats still used by the Cuna Indians of Panama and certain tribes of South America, but if use as seats were their purpose, it is difficult to explain why so many pieces were clustered together. Likewise there would be no explanation for the flat rectangular slabs. Later we discovered a second locality almost a half-mile southeast of this point where we found another group of six of these peculiar stones (pl. 19).

In the bottom of a ravine near Monument 3 we found half of a rectangular plain stone box about 3 feet long. It had been broken in two longitudinally.

About 100 yards east of the central mound was found the torso of a seated figure. The head, arms, and legs are missing. The remaining portion is 2 feet high.

In the bottom of another ravine near Monument 3, and under the roots of a huge Ojote tree, we excavated a large worked oval piece of basalt that could have served as a blank for carving a Colossal Head (pl. 1). In excavating around it we unearthed what appeared to be a metate leg, and a polished ax of blue jade, which had been sawed in two lengthwise.

Various other worked stones of undetermined character, both large and small, were found scattered over the site.

#### POTRERO NUEVO

Riding south from San Lorenzo along the elevated ridge for three-quarters of an hour, and then turning east for another three-quarters of an hour, one reaches the low flat bottom land of the Coatzacoalcos River. At this point at the base of the ridge, a narrow peninsula of high ground projects for about a quarter of a mile into the swamp. On this peninsula is situated the little village of Potrero Nuevo. From the village one may go by canoe through a slough which winds its way through the potrero and eventually reaches the river. In time of high water the entire potrero is inundated. At extreme high water, only the mounds are above water. In the dry season cattle are pastured on the potrero.

The village is built on an archeological site consisting of a series of small rectangular mounds and squares or courts. Some of the modern houses are built on these mounds. The courts are formed by a fair-sized mound at one end, two parallel flanker mounds on the sides, and a smaller mound at the other end.

At the conclusion of our work at San Lorenzo, we conducted excavations at Potrero Nuevo for 7 days. The pottery encountered at Potrero Nuevo was in general in better condition than that at San Lorenzo and the sherd yield was very abundant. In general the ware types were similar to those at San Lorenzo but with a somewhat greater variety at Potrero Nuevo. Thin red ware with wedge-shaped tripod supports; gray ware with cascabel or cylindrical "can"-shaped supports; incised bowls and ollas and vessels with red paint were characteristic of the ceramics. We excavated a well-made stone figurine in the form of a grotesque crouching old man. There was also a stone ball with a "stem" attached, and a strange tangled snake of stone about 2 feet high (pl. 26, *b*).

Northwest of Potrero Nuevo in the low land on the route of a trail that was closed by fallen trees at the time of our visit is another mound group. This would be an interesting site to investigate, as we bought from a native who found them there three figurines of San Marcos type. One is a standing, skirted figure with upraised hands, another is a monkey head, and the third is an effigy vessel support. Time did not permit our working this site, which may differ from others in the region.

#### DESCRIPTION OF MONUMENTS

##### MONUMENT 1

Monument 1, which is badly broken, represents a human or anthropomorphic jaguar figure sitting with legs tucked under. Draped over the lap is a realistically carved serpent, apparently, from the shape of the head and body, representing a fer-de-lance. The body of the serpent is lightly held by the left hand or paw of the seated figure in a very natural pose. Along the back of the figure extends an appendage which tapers slightly from the base upward. This might be a back ornament or it might represent a tail. Unfortunately, the upper part of the figure, including the head, is missing. The part remaining is very well carved and it must have been one of the best in the region (pl. 24).

The representation of the serpent is of considerable interest since, so far as I am aware, it is unique in Olmec art. The only other example known to me is the curious stone snake also from Potrero Nuevo (pl. 26, *b*) which may or may not be Olmec.

## MONUMENT 2

About a mile south of the point where the trail to Potrero Nuevo joins the trail leading south along the heights from San Lorenzo is a high hill. From the top of this hill a fine view may be had in all directions. Six months before our arrival, the summit of the hill had been cleared of virgin jungle to make a new milpa. In the course of the clearing, the corner of what appeared to be a large rectangular stone was exposed. We excavated it and found it to be an exceptionally interesting carved altar, lying face down (Monument 2; pl. 21, *a*). Because of being almost completely buried, it is in a fine state of preservation. The front revealed two identical chubby Atlantean figures with arms upraised as though supporting the massive table top of the altar, which was carved on a rectangular base. The front of the altar is carved with two pairs of conventionalized jaguar eyes, while a similar pair is shown on each end. The back is plain. A raised rectangular surface of smaller diameter surmounts the table top. The two figures are nude except for a breech apron and supporting cord. The hair is represented by vertical striations and is cut in "bangs" over the forehead. The features are "Olmec" in character. This is the first representation of Atlantean figures in Olmec art and may be the earliest instance thus far known in the New World (pl. 23).

Like the other table-top altars at San Lorenzo and La Venta, the top projects in front and at the two ends, but not to the rear. Likewise, all of the altars of this type are flat and free from decoration on the back. Probably, like the Colossal Heads, they were meant to be set against a wall.

## MONUMENT 3

Monument 3 was found in the same vicinity as Monument 2 on the high elevation west of Potrero Nuevo. The subject, which is similar to Monument 1, Río Chiquito, apparently represented copulation between a jaguar and a woman. The figure of the woman is represented lying on the back with knees drawn upward along the abdomen and with bent elbows, the hands extending upward. The head, hands, and feet are missing. The body of the jaguar is missing except for the hind feet, the lower part of a double back ornament, and the tail. Ornaments in the form of bands with a decorative attachment in the rear are worn about both ankles. The portions of the jaguar which remain are much more animalistic than in Monument 1, Río Chiquito; the feet, claws, and tail definitely identifying the subject. As in the similar monument, this one is mounted on a low flat base. Although badly broken, enough remains to indicate that in its complete form Monument 3 must have been a strongly carved and striking piece of sculpture (pls. 25, 26, *a*). The episode

represented must have been an important feature of Olmec mythology. It is particularly interesting in view of the frequent representation of part human and part jaguar figures in Olmec art, these often having infantile characteristics. The infant shown in Monument 12, San Lorenzo, appears to have a human body and a jaguar head.

#### STONE SNAKE

A curiously convoluted snake, carved from basalt, was dug from one of the small mounds at Potrero Nuevo in the course of building a house, a few days previous to our first arrival there. It was complete when found except for the head. Children broke it in several pieces, but fortunately none were missing. The lower coils were so arranged as to make a firm, flat circular base. The concept is unique and has nothing in common with the manner of representing coiled snakes during the Aztec period in the Valley of Mexico (pl. 26, *b*).

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION

With the exception of the two large granite columns excavated near the river bank below the village of Tenochtitlán, all the stone monuments which we found were carved from basalt. The five Colossal Heads from San Lorenzo are remarkably similar in character to those from La Venta and Tres Zapotes. In some instances it does not seem improbable that the same artists operated in the three sites. While at first glance the various heads appear very similar, closer examination shows that this resemblance is probably due to the racial type represented, and each is actually quite individual in character. Close study of these heads leads me to the belief that they are actual portraits of prominent individuals. One characteristic that all the Colossal Heads share is a smooth, plane surface a foot or more in width that runs the full length of the back. With one exception (Monument 2 at San Lorenzo) these surfaces are practically devoid of decoration. It may be, therefore, that the heads were designed to be set up against a wall of some sort. This theory is strengthened by the fact that in general the sculptors designed the heads to be viewed from the front, or a three-quarters angle.

When Monument 4 at La Venta, the largest Colossal Head at that site, was excavated, a large chunk which had been broken from the lower jaw was found under the head. The outer surface of this was covered with a thin smooth white slip which had been painted a dark purplish red. This suggests the interesting possibility that originally the Colossal Heads had been painted.

The helmetlike headdresses that adorn all the Colossal Heads are probably an artistic conventionalization. In carving such large blocks of stone it would have been impractical to represent adorn-

ments such as feathers, sticking out as actually worn. The sculptors therefore showed them as lying flat against the head. This not only resulted in economy of material, but also prevented making what would have been a very fragile portion of the monument.

As of the present date, 10 typical Colossal Heads are known. Five from San Lorenzo, four from La Venta, and one from Tres Zapotes. Stylistically these heads are so similar, and parallels in detail are such as to force the conclusion that no very great time interval could have elapsed during which they were made.

The table-top altars also connect the Río Chiquito area with La Venta. The parallels between Monument 14 at San Lorenzo and Altar 4 at La Venta have already been pointed out.

Monument 2, Potrero Nuevo, is somewhat atypical with its Atlantean figures and lacking the arched niche in front and the end carvings. However, the general form, the raised rectangle on the top, and the jaguar motive are sufficient to class it with this group.

If the site at Potrero Nuevo proper is to be classed as Olmec, it is unique as regards the two serpent carvings. The draped serpent on Monument 1 is unusual because of the realistic manner of its portrayal. It is flat, with a ridge along the back exactly like a real snake instead of the cylindrical conventionalization one usually sees employed in pre-Columbian art. The blunt triangular head also is realistic enough to identify the species as a fer-de-lance.

The curious tangled serpent from Potrero Nuevo is also unique because of its unusual form.

The two jaguar and woman monuments (Monument 1, Río Chiquito, and Monument 3, Potrero Nuevo) are interesting as possibly casting light on the half-jaguar, half-human form so characteristic of Olmec art.

The Río Chiquito region, like the other Olmec-site areas of southern Veracruz and northern Tabasco, is far removed from the sources of basalt from which the great majority of the monuments are carved. The nearest source of basalt is in the region of San Martín Pajapan Volcano near the coast, or in the Tuxtla Mountains to the north. In the case of the Río Chiquito this would be an air-line distance of more than 50 miles. It seems probable therefore, that the heavy pieces of basalt must have been transported by water, probably along the coast to the Coatzacoalcos River and then along the river or its tributaries to the site.

It is interesting to note that the two large columns of granitic schist found in the deeply buried site at Río Chiquito seem to be made from the same material as the large column of the same dimensions on the south end of the long mound at La Venta, and therefore probably came from the same source.

The stone monuments from the region of the Río Chiquito present an interesting addition to our gallery of Olmec art. Here, particularly at the site of San Lorenzo, the Olmec art of sculpture of large monuments in stone may be said to have reached its climax.

The elevated strip of land on which the Río Chiquito sites are situated was in many ways ideal for the location of ceremonial centers. During the dry season the inhabitants could have extended their milpas over the broad alluvial plains and retreated to the high ground during the wet season. The navigable waters of the Coatzacoalcos River and its tributaries, as well as the network of interconnecting sloughs, gave easy access to a large territory. Since the Coatzacoalcos is the natural waterway across a large portion of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, access to the Pacific coast would have been easy. Archeological evidence, however, does not indicate that such contacts were strong. On the other hand, intercourse toward the north in the direction of the Gulf of Mexico was obviously carried on. It seems apparent that the Chiquito sites represent an upriver thrust stemming from locations nearer the coast, such as Tres Zapotes and La Venta. Whether or not a blending with centers of more southern origin took place awaits a detailed study of the ceramics of the Chiquito sites.

In every way the stone carving suggests direct communication between all of these classic Olmec sites. Not only are there close parallels in the art style, but the nearest source of the basalt used for the majority of the monuments is in the vicinity of the coast. The tedious operation of transporting these heavy stones, presumably by water, over such long distances suggests that peaceable relations were maintained over the region and quite probably there was intercommunity cooperation and trade. Whether each center was an independent political entity or whether the entire area was subject to central control is a matter for speculation.

Mound building was a feature of all of the classic Olmec sites, the structures reaching considerable proportions at La Venta, Tres Zapotes, and Río Chiquito. At San Lorenzo, despite the outstanding sculpture, the mounds were insignificant. It is possible that at San Lorenzo the site never reached its full development. At the present time the site is some distance from the river. It may be that at the time it was occupied, the channel touched the base of the high ground at the eastern edge of the site where the principal occupation debris exists. If a change in the course of the river was responsible for the abandonment of San Lorenzo, it seems strange that the monuments were not moved. Otherwise it would seem plausible to speculate that the inhabitants moved to nearby Río Chiquito, on the river, where the mound structures are impressive and the stone monuments few.

It is worth noting that if rich tomb burials such as exist at La Venta were present at San Lorenzo, we were unable to find them, although we conducted excavations of considerable extent in equivalent areas. The classic Olmec period at Tres Zapotes likewise lacked tombs and any evidence of lavish burials. There is more than a hint in this fact suggesting that La Venta was the regional center of the classic Olmec area and the place of residence of rich and probably powerful rulers. Not only was the central mound at La Venta 105 feet high, the largest of all, but the stone column enclosure containing the lush tombs is completely unique. The Río Chiquito region, it would appear, was a prosperous but subordinate area.

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Clearing a monument at San Lorenzo.  
Type of jungle growth that covered the site.



Río Chiquito. *a, b*, Monument 1.



Río Chiquito: *a, c*, Monument 2; *b*, stone vessels.



Río Chiquito: *a, b*, Granite columns.



San Lorenzo. Monument 1.



San Lorenzo. Monument 1.



San Lorenzo. *a, b*, Monument 2.

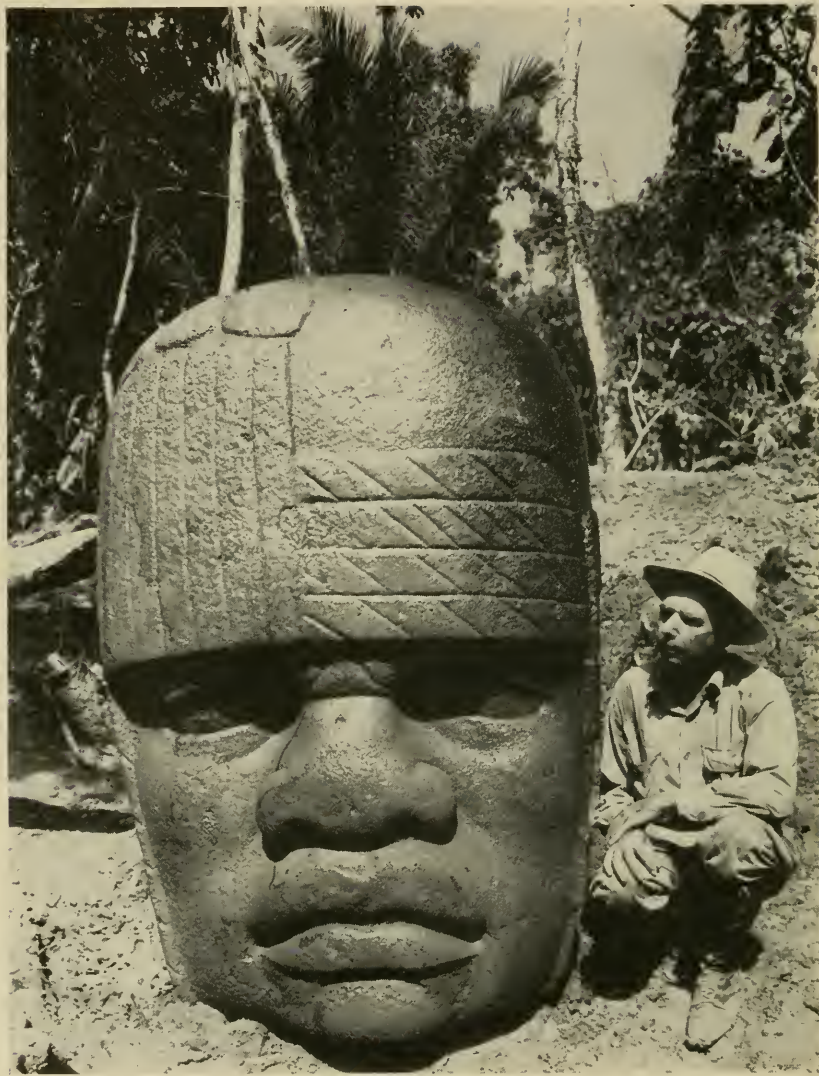


San Lorenzo. Monument 3.

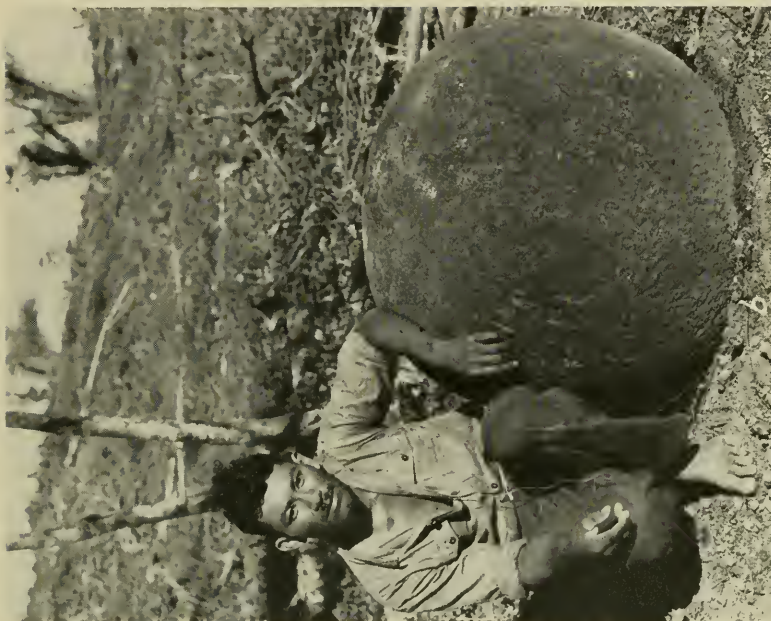




San Lorenzo, Monument 4.



San Lorenzo. Monument 4.



San Lorenzo: *a*, Monument 4; *b*, Monument 13.



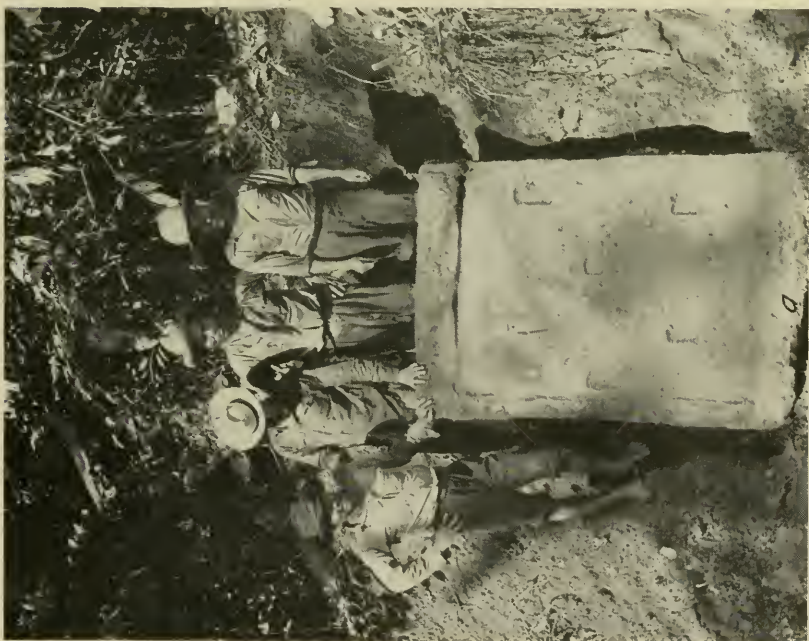
San Lorenzo. Monument 5.



San Lorenzo. *a, b*, Monument 5.



San Lorenzo. *a, b*, Monument 6.



San Lorenzo: *a*, Monument 8; *b*, Monument 10.



San Lorenzo: *a*, Monument 11; *b*, Monument 12.





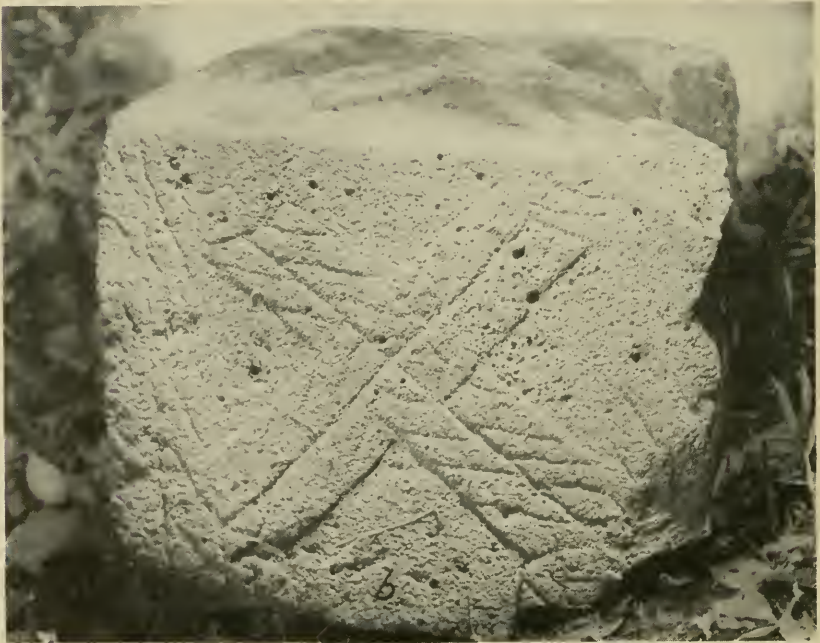
San Lorenzo. *a*, Monument 7; *b*, Monument 9, front view.



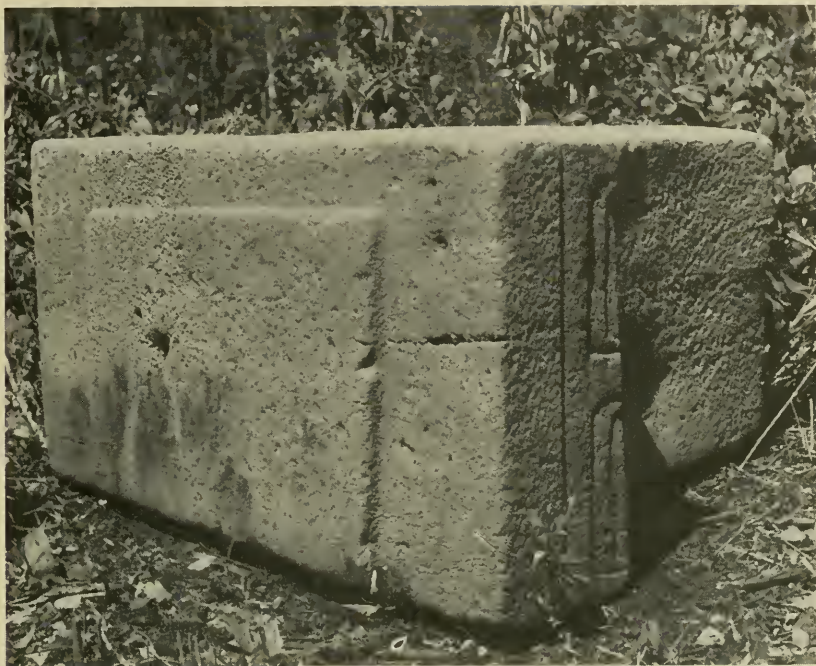
San Lorenzo. Monument 9: *a*, rear view; *b*, side view.



San Lorenzo. *a, b*, Trough-shaped stones.



San Lorenzo. *a, b*, Monument 15.



*a*, Potrero Nuevo, Monument 2. *b*, San Lorenzo, Monument 14.



*b*



*a*

San Lorenzo. Monument 14: *a*, south end; *b*, north end.



Potrero Nuevo. Monument 2.



Potrero Nuevo. Monument 1: *a*, front view; *b*, rear view.





Porrero Nuevo. Monument 3; *a*, rear view; *b*, side view.



Potrero Nuevo. *a*, Monument 3, side view; *b*, stone serpent.