

IN THE OLMEC WORLD OF LA VENTA: THE ANALYSIS OF LA VENTA  
STELA 3 AND THE ARCHETYPES OF LATER MESOAMERICAN GODS,  
DUALISTIC HEROES, SUPERNATURALS, AND CREATION STORIES

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
with a Major in Anthropology  
May 2021

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my committee members Dr. Carolyn Boyd and Dr. James Garber for all their help and feedback that influenced this thesis; your work has inspired and influenced me tremendously. I would also like to thank Dr. David Freidel whose help and feedback early on during my thesis helped me to rethink my arguments and find valuable sources that led to the formation of new ideas during my writing process. Your work and Linda Schele's work has had a great influence on me. A very special thank you to my committee chair Dr. F. Kent Reilly; this thesis would not have been possible without your guidance. Thank you, Dr. Reilly, for sparking my interest in Mesoamerican and Native American iconography and providing me with the foundation and tools to become a better student of archaeology. I could not have asked for a better mentor and friend throughout my academic endeavors. I am forever grateful to you, and you inspired me as a professor and as an academic more than you will ever know.

I would like to especially thank my brother Trenton, my mother Connie, and my father Ted for supporting my academic endeavors and supporting me in general throughout my life. I love you and I am forever grateful for you.

I would like to especially thank my friend Zach Lindsey and his wife Erica for all their feedback and help during the writing process of this thesis, it was invaluable. To Zach Jamieson and the rest of our year's archaeological cohort—Rob, Joy, Ashley, Nora, and James—as well as all of the other graduate students, thank you for all your friendship, help, and feedback during our studies.

Lastly, I would like to thank earlier educators in my life whose advice and teaching qualities I will always remember. Jody Marver-Fuller, Joe Dawidziak, and Bernadette Elverman, I was lucky to have you all as teachers, even if I did not show as much appreciation at that time.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Art is a formal expression of beliefs that functions as and relates to a culture's view of beauty and ideology (Layton 1991). In the case of the Olmec culture, stone stelae were important ways of communicating the ideology that was a part of their everyday life. In this thesis, I intend to provide data that the Mesoamerican Hero Twin myth and other Mesoamerican creation myths were important aspects of the Olmec Stela cult that may have originated at La Venta (900-400 BC). A stela is a carved or inscribed stone slab or pillar used to commemorate historical or mythological events. I intend to show that La Venta Stela 3 (Figure 1), in particular, uses a specific iconographic program to commemorate the creation of the world. I will argue that these are earlier versions of elements that appear in multiple Mesoamerican creation myths, on later Maya monuments and in the Post-Classic Maya Popol Vuh, which is the sacred book of the Maya. To do this, I will use Erwin Panofsky's method of structural analysis from 1973 on La Venta Stela 3. I will compare my iconographic findings from La Venta Stela 3 to previously researched Mesoamerican monumental art in an attempt to show that these myths spread from Formative Period Mesoamerican cultural areas to later Maya cultural areas.

Twins are an integral part of creation myths and legends throughout the world. Often, twins are presented as equals or bilateral oppositions, depending on the cultural tradition (Levi-Strauss 1963). In Mesoamerica, twins form a duality within the cultural ideology and cosmology that has produced them (Christenson 2007). The Popol Vuh uses two sets of twins as the mechanism for telling its story. The first set of twins loses the ball game to the gods of the underworld and the second set of twins, the Hero Twins, then beats the

gods of the underworld in a new ballgame to overcome death (Christenson 2007). The Hero Twins' mythic adventures and the actions of the Mesoamerican pantheon of gods helped to create the world of the Maya. Ultimately, the purpose of this thesis will be to show that this specific Maya ideology is rooted in the Olmec culture.

Through these analyses, I intend to lay out the structure of the monuments to demonstrate that the Olmec influenced later Maya religious systems. I intend to present data that the Olmec share many of the same gods and myths as the Maya. Although the gods may vary regionally, these Olmec gods were precursors or archetypes of the later pantheon of gods found throughout Mesoamerica. Through the spread of the La Venta stela cult, divine kings or ruling clans across Mesoamerica would derive their power from the supernatural creators shown on the stelae (Reilly 1994). This imagery would be a visualization of the right to rule by the lineages that erected them.

Chapter 2 will focus on the history, archaeology, and geography of Olman as well as its relations with the Epi-Olmec and Maya cultures. The Maya mythology involving the creation of the world and the Maya Hero Twins will be presented in two sections of this chapter. The importance of the Olmec cosmology and ideology found within artistic corpuses will be reviewed in this chapter to lay down the foundation for concepts discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 will focus on the theories and methods used in this thesis. The San Marcos four-field approach to iconographic interpretation, also known as the San Marcos School, will be applied in the thesis (Reilly and Garber 2007:6). The first component of this approach is the Panofskyian Method, which provides a three-point system for iconological analyses of art works. The second component identifies art corpuses and the

style regions. The third component of this approach utilizes archaeological history, which allows us to use the archaeological record to put these Mesoamerican artistic corpuses in their proper temporal and spatial context. From this information we can get a better idea of how styles changed and moved throughout Mesoamerica. The final component of this approach is ethnographic analogy, which uses ethnographic or historical sources of cultures to inform analyses of the archeological record. The ethnographic literature that is most important for this analysis is the Maya Popol Vuh, which recorded the creation stories of the Maya people. It is important to note that the four components mentioned above are not used in any specific order in this thesis, but rather, they are used at different times for different arguments.

Chapter 4 will focus on the iconographic analysis of La Venta Stela 3 and the Maya Hero Twin myths from the Popol Vuh. I will use the first two steps of Panofsky's three levels of interpretation to argue that the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3 contains a narrative similar to that of the Maya Hero Twin Myth from the Popul Vuh. Panofsky's system for iconological analyses of art works is composed of three levels or steps. The first step is pre-iconographic identification of primary and natural subject matter. This step consists of finding the elements and motifs within the art piece. The second step is identifying secondary, or conventional, subject matter. This conventional subject matter consists of symbols identified in step one, individual motifs, or a combination of motifs that can carry a specific ideological concepts or themes through iconography. The third step is identifying intrinsic meaning or content within the work of art. This final step is known as iconology. Iconology is an attempt to discover the meaning and principles behind the art of past cultures. The artwork of Pre-Classic Maya sites, Izapa, and the

Classic Maya periods will guide my interpretations. Previous analyses by other scholars give a deeper perspective into the Maya Hero Twin stories and will aid in my own iconographic interpretation of the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3.

Chapter 5 will focus on the iconographic analysis of La Venta Stela 3, the Mesoamerican story of the three stones of creation, and the cosmic umbilicus. I will use the first two steps of Panofsky's three levels of interpretation that were outlined in the paragraph above to argue that the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 relates to the Mesoamerican story of the three hearth stones of creation. I will build upon my own arguments from the previous chapter of the thesis. Previous scholars' analyses of artwork featuring the three stones of creation and the cosmic umbilicus will be presented this chapter. The artwork of Izapa, the Pre-Classic Maya, and the Classic Maya periods will guide my interpretations of La Venta Stela 3.

Chapter 6 will focus on the archaeological context of La Venta Stela 3. I will build upon my own arguments from the previous chapters of this thesis to show that the archaeological context of the placement of monuments in La Venta Complex A coincide with the ideological iconographic program found on La Venta Stela 3. Previous scholars' analyses of Mesoamerican monuments, the ceremonial layout of La Venta Complex A, and Maya cosmological events will be presented. Previous scholar's analyses will aid my hypotheses that the iconographic narrative on La Venta Stela 3 and the monumental layout of La Venta Complex A are presenting a similar mythological narrative of the creation of the world found throughout later Mesoamerican cultures.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I will make my concluding statements and attempt to apply Panofsky's final step of iconographic analysis, which is termed "iconology," to all

portions of La Venta Stela 3. I hypothesize that the data I provided in this thesis will show that the artistic iconographic narrative found on La Venta Stela 3 presents the intrinsic worldview or reality of the Olmec people, which may be the foundation of later Mesoamerican creation myths and the origin of the pantheon of gods which are found in subsequent Mesoamerican cultures.

## **II. HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF MESOAMERICAN ICONOGRAPHY**

The history of the Olmec civilization is intriguing and problematic. This history contains opposing views on the influence and beginnings of the Olmec culture. Famed for their monumental art, such as colossal stone heads and monumental stelae, the Olmec culture is the earliest-known civilization in Mesoamerica (Diehl 2004). The term “Olmec” is used to define an archaeological culture of limited geographical extent, as well as a widely distributed art style and symbol system. The geographical area of the Olmec heartland is referred to as Olman, which is located on the Mexican Gulf Coast (Figure 2) (Reilly 1994). Scholars dated the beginnings of the Olmec culture to the Early Formative period of Mesoamerican (1800-1000 BC) from the archaeological evidence found near the Olmec site of San Lorenzo (Coe and Koontz 2013: 60). Linguistic evidence shows that the people of Olman spoke a variant of the Mixe-Zoquean language family. The Maya and other Mesoamerican cultures used Mixe-Zoquean loan words that have been linked to ritual activities and kingship. Evidence shows that these loan words likely originated in Olman (Reilly 1994).

In 1925, a Tulane expedition led by Franz Blom and Oliver La Farge explored the region of southern Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico. This Tulane expedition is credited with finding the archaeological site of La Venta (Blom and LaFarge 1927, Reilly 1987). Archaeologists and scholars credit the development of the concept of the archaeological Olmec culture to Matthew Sterling. Sterling excavated at the sites of San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Tres Zapotes throughout the 1930s and early 1940s (Sterling 1940). Matthew Sterling proposed that the newly discovered “Olmec” civilization predated the Maya

civilization. This hypothesis was controversial in the eyes of fellow archaeologists and scholars of the time. For example, Sterling's discovery was not accepted by Mayanists Sir Eric Thompson and Sylvanus Morley, who believed the Classic Maya predated the Olmec culture. On the other hand, the Mexican scholars Miguel Covarubbias and Alfonso Caso accepted Sterling's idea (Coe and Koontz 2013:60). These scholars believed that the Olmec culture was part of the Formative Period of Mesoamerica because of the Olmec influence found in archaeological sites in the state of Morelos. In 1942, the Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología hosted a round table to hash out this argument (Reilly 1987:16).

Later, radiocarbon dates supported Sterling and the scholars of Mexico who believed the Olmec culture predated the Maya civilization. The importance of the radiocarbon dates from San Lorenzo (1800 BC-1000 BC) was that these dates put the Olmec in the Early Formative Period of Mesoamerica (Coe and Koontz 2013).

Archaeological evidence revealed that the Olmec culture's roots were in the Gulf Coast Region of Mexico (Deihl 1989). Cultural influence from the Olmecs have been found throughout all the civilizations in the Mexican highlands and also in southern Mexico, which made the Olmecs an important foundational support for late Mesoamerican cultures.

Arguments on the nature of the Olmec cultural influence on later Mesoamerican cultures have been ongoing for the last 75 years. The Olmec discoverer, Matthew Sterling, believed the Olmec culture was the "Mother Culture" of Mesoamerica (Coe and Koontz 2013). According to the "Mother Culture" theory, the Olmecs were the primary cultural influence of all later Mesoamerican cultures. The theory of the "Mother Culture"

is backed by many other Mesoamerican scholars (Blomster 2005; Clark 1997; Diehl and Coe 1995; Grove 1997; Hammond 1989; Smith 2017).

Some Mesoamerican scholars instead argue that the Olmec were a “Sister Culture” to the later Mesoamerican cultures (Demarest 1989; Flannery and Marcus 2000; Graham 1989; Grove 1997; Smith 2017). According to the “Sister Culture” theory, the Olmec only partially influenced other Mesoamerican cultures, and they were influenced by different cultures of their time as well.

Finally, there are scholars who argue the Olmec culture lies somewhere in the middle of the two theories (Lesure 2004:79, Pool 2007:17, Smith 2017:3). F. Kent Reilly (1995) proposed that a Middle Formative Period Ceremonial Complex with strong roots in Olman unified Mesoamerica from 900 to 500 BC. In Reilly’s Middle Formative Period Ceremonial Complex model, shared artistic styles, symbology, and ritual activities were brought together from regional and local variations into a single complex. In this theory, different cultures from areas of Mesoamerica acquired Olmec symbolism and art styles from material culture produced in Olman, and through other Mesoamerican cultures located in the western regions of Mesoamerica. Trade routes helped to carry the small ritual items made of jade, clay, and shell from their points of origin to Olman and other geographic areas of Formative Period Mesoamerica (Reilly 1995).

The Olmec culture traded with other civilizations, and along with this trade came the exchange of ideology and, almost certainly, economic material. This means the ideology of the Olmec and other contemporary cultures originated from a Pan-Mesoamerican network of trade that likely predated the rise of these civilizations. It is important to note that Olmec ideology would go on to be found in different symbolic



variants in later Mesoamerican civilizations. The arguments of the exact influence of the Olmecs that has been presented by different scholars carry valid and intriguing points, though the true origin of Mesoamerican ideology may lie much further back in time.

### **Olmec Cosmology**

The Olmec cosmology consisted of three realms, the Underworld, the Terrestrial or Earth Realm, and the Sky Realm. The Underworld was a primordial sea, which the Olmec dragon or supernatural caiman floated upon (Figure 3). The early Olmec sacrificial bog site of El Manatí can be seen as a possible underworld portal with its connection to the Mesoamerican ballgame and watery archaeological context. Olmec Middle Formative burials had ceramic and stone objects in the shape of Olmec dragons and fish. These objects would act as locatives or location markers to show that person found in the burials were in the watery Underworld, which is the realm of the dead (Reilly 1995).

The Terrestrial or Earth Realm is the surface of the Earth represented by the back of the great supernatural Olmec dragon, which can have both caiman-like and shark-like features. The bone plates on the back of the Olmec Dragon represent the mountains and earth where humans dwelled. In Olmec iconography, identifiers of the Terrestrial Realm are the Olmec dragon's gum brackets and the famous Olmec cleft, which represents the emergence of maize (Figure 4). The Olmec cleft can be associated with the Maize God and other Olmec supernaturals. The double-merlon motif is another important Olmec symbol or motif that is hypothesized to be a portal between the realms (Reilly 1995:120).

The Sky Realm is represented by the Olmec crossed-band motif that resembles St. Andrew's Cross. The crossed band motif acts as a locative on symbolic objects or

supernaturals, which locates them in the sky or cosmos (Figure 5). Additionally, talons and wings are used as symbols of the Sky Realm. The Sky Realm is a place where only gods, ancestors, and shamans in shamanic flight have access to. There are motifs that can represent an action or weather phenomenon in the Sky Realm. The upside-down exclamation point motifs in Olmec iconography represents rain and the lazy-S motif represents water or clouds (Reilly 1995:121).

The axis mundi is a location found at the center of these three realms. The axis mundi is an important concept in Mesoamerican cultures since it represents the center of the cosmos. The concept of the axis mundi is not linked only to Mesoamerica, it's linked to many cultures found throughout the world. The concept of the axis mundi used by the Olmec can be represented by a stylized maize plant or other vegetation, which coincide with the world tree or a mountain. The axis mundi can be linked to the Olmec Maize God, and when the Maize God is represented as the axis mundi, four-clefted, sprouting maize plants are seen in the cardinal or intercardinal directions. These four-clefted, sprouting maize plants are argued to be the four corners of the earth or the four cardinal directions. The Olmec rulers would wear the Maize God regalia, thus claiming power as the axis mundi or world tree, which gave the rulers dominion over the cosmos and earth (Reilly 1995:122). The trefoil, which is a three-pronged maize motif, is found sprouting from the cleft on the Maize God's or ruler's headdress (Fields 1986, 1989). Olmec cosmology shares many similarities with the cosmology of later Mesoamerican cultures and iconographic data shows that the Olmec influenced these later cultures. These similarities will be further examined in the later portion of this thesis.

## **Mythology of the Maya and Previous Analyses of Mesoamerican Art**

### *The Popul Vuh*

Michael D. Coe (2012) considered the Popol Vuh to be one of the greatest achievements of indigenous American literature. The sacred text begins with the creation of the world out of the chaos of the cosmos, and it ends with European contact. The second part of the Popol Vuh consists of the mythological stories of two sets of godly twins. One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are the first set of twins; they are earthy ballplayers that are summoned by the gods of Xibalba (Underworld) to compete in a competitive underworld ballgame. The first set of twins go through many trials and tribulations in the underworld at the hands of the Xibalban gods. The twins and underworld gods then play a life-or-death ballgame, which results in the twins' defeat and beheading. The head of One Hunahpu (the Maize God) is then hung in a calabash tree as a trophy to celebrate the Xibalaban victory. The head of One Hunahpu gets revenge and sets up the events that followed by spitting in the hand of a young daughter (Xquic) of one of the Underworld gods. One Hunanphu's saliva impregnates Xquic, which causes her to be cast out of the Underworld to the surface world. Xquic goes on to birth the second set of twins, the Hero Twins, Xbalanque and Hunanhpu. The Hero Twins have mythical battles with fabulous beasts, and, like their father, face trials and tribulations in the Underworld. One of the most important of these battles is against the bird monster Seven Macaw (Vucub Caquix) and the bird's spawn, Cabrakan and Zipacna (Coe 2012).

One day, the Hero Twins are doing chores at their grandmother's house, an interaction with a rat leads to the discovery of hidden ballgame equipment that belonged to their father and uncle. The Hero Twins start to become great ballplayers, like their

father and uncle before them. They are soon summoned to the ballcourt in Xibalba by the Underworld Gods, who are resentful for the noise the twins were making, to the ballcourt in Xibalba. The Hero Twin go through the trials of the five or six houses of the Underworld. Hunanphu and Xbalanque pass each of these tests with trickery and wit, which angers the Xibalban lords. The Hero Twins' divine wit allows them to trick and finally defeat the gods of the Underworld through a false promise of resurrection after the gods are decapitated. The Hero Twins bring the head of their father One Hunahpu, the Maize God, back from the Underworld to the terrestrial plane. Hunahpu and Xbalanque would later rise to the above world to become the Sun and the Moon (or Venus) (Coe 2012:219).

*The Maya Hero Twins and the Paddler Twins*

The Hero Twins are opposites with varied attributes. Hunahpu was the older twin associated with the sun or day. Xbalanque has jaguar traits and is attributed to the moon or night (Bassie and Hopkins 2018:78). The Hero Twins are known to wear regalia such as yokes (ballgame belts) to show that they were ballplayers. Hunahpu and Xbalanque shared each other's characteristics on occasions. One twin could represent both twins by the symbolism on his regalia or by the markings on his flesh (Danien and Sharer 1992:109). The Hero Twins and the Paddler Gods carry many similar attributes, and both sets of twins are hypothesized to be related to the sun, moon, and Venus (Foster 2004, Coe 2012). It is important to note that Maya gods can be hybrids of each other and are intentionally merged together. This action overlaps the meanings of the gods into one entity, for example the rain god Chaak is sometimes merged with his lighting axe K'awiil (Evans and Webster 2013:432).

I chose to mention the Paddler Twins with the Maya Hero Twins in this section to show their similarities. The Paddler Twins are underworld gods that transport the Maize God on their canoe. Lynn Foster (2005) proposed that their canoe is a metaphor for the Milky Way that they travel on. The Paddler Gods are found on opposite sides of the canoe, with Old Jaguar Paddler on the front, and Old Stingray Paddler on the back. They represent the oppositions of night (Jaguar Paddler) and day (Old Stingray Paddler). Old Jaguar Paddler has jaguar qualities such as black spots and he wears a jaguar headdress (Foster 2005:170). Old Stingray Paddler has a stingray spine that pierces his nose and is additionally shown with a shark tooth or shark monster in his headdress. Shark teeth and the stingray spines were both used as bloodletters by the Maya elite to give back blood to the gods (Bassie-Sweet 2008:162).

The Hero Twin theme is found throughout many Native American cultures. The twin sons of Redhorn and the Navajo Hero Twins show that these myths are widespread with regional variants (F. Kent Reilly, personal communication 2019). The theme of mythical heroes going to the underworld to complete trials and tasks is also found throughout the Americas. These heroic myths and figures likely coincide with one another and are pieces of a mythology that split and spread in antiquity. Discovering, recording, and acknowledging these similarities could lead to a creation point of these ancient themes. Additionally, researching past trade routes and movement of peoples throughout the Americas can aid in narrowing down these themes and motifs.

#### *The Story of The Maya Hero Twins and Seven Macaw*

Currently, the earliest known stelae that is thought to portray the Hero Twins and the bird demon Seven Macaw occur at the Pre-Classic Mesoamerican site of Izapa around

400-100 BC (Chinchilla 2017). Izapa Stela 25 (Figure 6) and Izapa Stela 2 (Figure 7) show scenes similar to the Popol Vuh stories of the interaction between the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, and Seven Macaw (Chinchilla 2017:131,155). Mesoamerican scholars have concluded that there was a connection between Stela 25 and the Popol Vuh's telling of the Seven Macaw myth (Freidel et al. 1993:88, Guernsey 2006:111-112). According to the story in the Popol Vuh, Seven Macaw was proud of his eyes that gleamed like metal and his glamorous teeth that were like jewels, the preternatural bird declared he was the sun and moon. Angered by the prideful false sun, the Hero Twins decided to end his reign over the wooden people. To surprise the bird, the twins hid under Seven Macaw's tree to wait for him to return. When Seven Macaw returned and began eating, Hunahpu used his blowgun to shoot him in the face, which injured the demon severely. But, angered, Seven Macaw attacked. He ripped off Hunahpu's arm, then flew off. The Hero Twins convinced an old couple to offer to heal Seven Macaw's teeth and eyes. But the old couple tricked Seven Macaw; they switched out his eye and teeth with pieces of corn. This action led to Seven Macaw's death and the end of his cycle of time; Hunahpu also gained his arm back (Recinos 1950:93-99). The death of Seven Macaw, in turn, set up the cycle for the next creation, the creation of people from maize. Michael Coe saw Seven Macaw, also known as the Principal Bird Deity, as a trouble-making demon from an ungodly, earlier world that had the opposite morals of the Maya people. The Hero Twins had to dispatch the "mistake" in order for a new period to begin (Coe 1989).

### *The San Bartolo Murals*

Found in 2001 by William Saturno, the San Bartolo Murals are examples of early Maya creation narratives. These murals date to 100 BC and, like at Izapa, they likely correlate to stories of the Popol Vuh, depicting figures like the Hero Twins, the Maize God, and the Principal Bird Deity (Mazariegos 2017). On the western wall of the San Bartolo murals, the Principal Bird Deity sits atop four different world trees. These four world trees are thought to be related to the four directions, where blood sacrifices took place to appease the Principal Bird Deity. These graphic scenes additionally depict the Principal Bird Deity with bleeding snakes in its mouth (Figure 8). In the southwest corner of the mural room at San Bartolo, a badly damaged image shows a young lord holding a tree branch and carrying the dead Principal Bird Deity on his back. It has been hypothesized that this might mark the death of the Principal Bird Deity and may be the end of a more complicated narrative on the collapsed south wall (Mazariegos 2017). These scenes are similar to Izapa Stela 25, in which a double headed serpent wraps around Seven Macaw and the crocodile world tree (Fash and López 2009:122-124). The young lord's sacrifice of blood to the Principal Bird Deity corresponds to Hunahpu losing his arm to Seven Macaw; both must sacrifice something in order for the antagonist to die.

There are many different arguments over the Principal Bird Deity and its relationship to Seven Macaw and the god Itzamna. Some scholars argue that Seven Macaw of the Popol Vuh is derived from or similar to the Late-Preclassic Principal Bird Deity (Lowe et al. 1982; Cortez 1986; Coe 1989; Taube 1987). Other scholars argue that the Principal Bird Deity is an aspect of the creator god Itzamna after the Pre-Classic Period (Bardiwil 1976, Miller and Taube 1993:100). It seems that the Principal Bird

Deity was originally related to the sun or solar deities, and later became associated with the creator god Itzamna (Mazariegos 2017:157). The distinctions between the Principal Bird Deity and Seven Macaw observed by earlier scholars will help me identify the avian beings represented on different monuments in the thesis.

*El Mirador, Uaxactun, and Nakbe*

In 2009, Richard Hansen and authorities from Guatemala found a monumental stucco frieze at the archaeological site of El Mirador that is thought to date to around 300 BC (Arguetta 2015). Hansen believes the frieze depicts a narrative from the Popol Vuh in which the Hero Twins travel through the underworld with the head of the Maize God. In a presentation at the Library of Congress in 2014, Hansen claimed that the El Mirador frieze also depicts Itzamna, the rain god Chaac, the severed head of the Maize God One Hunahpu, and the Feathered Serpent (Figure 9). Stephen Houston and James Doyle (2012) argue that Hansen's interpretation was incorrect, and that the scene depicts a watery narrative that correlates to the rain god Chaak.

Hansen (Library of Congress 2014) also compared the Uaxactun Grupo H, Str. Sub-2 found by Juan Antonio Valdes to the El Mirador frieze (Figure 10). The Uaxactun artwork may also show the forward-facing Hero Twins with the detached head of the Maize God, according to Hansen. The El Mirador frieze continued below the floor and includes depictions of a snake head with fangs and a *k'an* symbol. Additionally, archaeologists found a mask related to the psychoduct that goes down six more meters to the bottom of the pyramid (Library of Congress 2014).



El Mirador Structure 34, also known as the Jaguar Paw Temple, has stucco reliefs with a jaguar paw and two jaguar masks on the temple's facade (Figure 11). Hansen (Library of Congress 2014) stated that the masks represent the Hero Twins, who may personify the sun and moon. The eastern mask seems to show a jaguar that is half fleshed and half skeletonized; this may represent the sun rising according to Hansen.

The western mask is argued by Hansen to show the sun setting, which Hansen related to the jaguar of night (Library of Congress 2014). At the Maya site of Nakbe, a large stela known as Nakbe Stela 1 was found and dated to 400-300 BC. Hansen argues that Nakbe Stela 1 portrays Hunahpu and Xbalanque facing each other, and that the three dots on the cheek of the left figure found on Nakbe Stela 1 named the figure as Xbalanque. Xbalanque typically has three dots on his cheek and is linked to the young Jaguar Lord, a god associated with the number nine (Parson 1988:129). If that is the case, then the right figure is likely Hunahpu, since there is a severed head located above him, which Hansen argues is the head of the Maize God (Library of Congress 2014).

#### *The Maya Story of the Three Stones of Creation and Quirigua*

At the Maya site of Quirigua, there are three monuments Quirigua Stela A, Quirigua Stela C, and Quirigua Zoomorph B that form an A-B-C program that tells the Maya creation story of the planting of the three hearth stones. The three monuments are stelae A and C, from 775 AD, and Zoomorph B, from 780 AD. According to the translation by Matthew Looper (2003:159) of the east side of Stela C, the text begins with the date of creation at Quirigua and proceeds relate how four different gods planted the three stones of creation (Figure 12). Mark Van Stone (2011) proposes a similar, but slightly different reading. First, the Paddler Gods, Jaguar Paddler and Stingray Paddler,

plant the Jaguar Throne Stone at the House of Five Sky. Second, an unknown god (“Black House Great/Red Chaak”) plants the Snake Throne stone at the Earth Place or the Place of Flags. Finally, the water throne stone, which also can be called the shark throne stone, is planted by Itzamna, a creator god who can transform into a human or a bird, at the Edge of the Sky. Itzamna ties the three stones together at the Edge of the Sky; this event is overseen by Six Sky Lord. The importance of Quirigua Stela C is that it is the most complete story of creation in a Maya stone monument text. It is likely no accident that Stela 3 is one of three stones; the action of the Maya elites planting stelae into the earth was mimicking the planting of the three stones of creation by the gods (Van Stone 2011).

#### *Quirigua Stela A, Stela C*

The south face of Quirigua Stela C shows the ruler holding a double-headed jaguar bar, which is thought to be the first stone of creation. Additionally, on the south face of Stela A, the ruler is holding a double-headed serpent bar, which is thought to represent the snake throne stone (Looper 2003:158). Looper (2003) compares the Quirigua stelae A and C to the Palenque Palace Tablet; on the Palenque Palace Tablet, the father of the king sits on the jaguar throne stone on the left, the king is on the double-headed shark-like throne in the middle, and the king’s mother sits upon the snake throne stone on the right.

#### *Quirigua Zoomorph B*

Quirigua Zoomorph B, concludes the A-B-C presentation started by Quirigua stelae A and C. It was dedicated December 2, 780 AD, Zoomorph B has been identified as

the crocodilian Cosmic Monster, and also the third stone of creation (Figure 13) (Looper 2013). The attributes of Zoomorph B are clawed forelegs on the east and west sides of the monument, along with water scroll symbols and flower iconography. These symbols show that this supernatural is linked to the underworld and the primordial ocean that the earth and cosmic creature rests on. The portion of the zoomorph that is located on its back may be the “witz” (mountain) mask, which represents the earth floating on the primordial ocean (Looper 2003). The frontal head of the supernatural has crossed bands in the eyes and an open maw. From the maw of the monster emerges a bearded ruler wearing a bird headdress and additional regalia. There are footprints leading into the maw of the monster. The north side of the zoomorph features a quadripartite badge, showing a stingray spine pointing to the west, a flower thought to be related to the cosmic umbilicus, and crossed bands. The monster’s tail is on the west side of the monument. It is decorated with oval dots, and on the end of the tail, there is a head identified as that of the Principal Bird Deity (Looper 2013:173).

Zoomorph B also functions as a cosmological symbol; it is the Cosmic Monster in the form of the Milky Way. The Cosmic Monster is the Milky Way that is laying east to west, with the cosmic rift in the far west, which also functions as the creature’s mouth (Freidel et al. 1993:85-87). Looper (2013:174-176) proposed that, on the night of December 2, 780 AD, when Zoomorph B was dedicated, the Milky Way was visible in this Maya cosmological program. Looper argued that the monument represents the sky as it was viewed on the date that it was dedicated and that the cosmic crocodilian is resting on the ocean of the underworld. The theme of death and rebirth would be found in the emergence of the ruler from the maw of the monster on Zoomorph B and the mouth of

the monster would also function as a portal to the world of the living and the dead.

Itzamna, the shamanistic creator god, would be the god that Zoomorph B, the third stone of creation, represented by the telling of the story planting of the three stones found on Quirigua Stela C.Looper (2013) proposed that the Zoomorph B was the intersection of death and rebirth in the form of the Cosmic Monster and that the ruler was the Maize God emerging from the cleft of the earth turtle shell.

### **III. THEORIES AND METHODS**

The primary method used in this thesis is the San Marcos four-field approach to iconographic interpretation, also known as the San Marcos School (Reilly and Garber 2007:6). The four-field approach was partially adapted from Panofsky's method of iconographic analysis. Erwin Panofsky created the interpretational methods of iconography and iconology. These methods have been developed into their own fields of research. The most important method applied in this thesis and the first component of the San Marcos School is Panofsky's (1972) iconographic exercise, which is based on the structural analysis method that was developed from the earlier work of Franz Boas and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Erwin Panofsky's threefold analyses is often used to identify style and the geographic origins of styles. The most important aspect of this method is its use in finding meaning and unlocking information from past artistic corpuses before the use of written language. Panofsky's method is used by archaeologists and art scholars to better understand symbolic information that is carried in the artistic production of these past cultures.

The first step in Panofsky's three levels of interpretation is the pre-iconographic identification of primary and natural subject matter. This step consists of finding the elements and motifs within the art piece. Elements in artwork can include lines, colors, shapes, and dots. When elements are combined in different ways, they form symbols. In this step, scholars identify and describe recognizable objects, such as human figures and plants, which can be associated with the actions around them (Panofsky 1972:26).

The second step in Panofsky's three levels of interpretation is identifying secondary, or conventional, subject matter. This conventional subject matter consists of symbols identified in step one, individual motifs, or a combination of motifs that can

carry a specific ideological concepts or themes through iconography. These themes and concepts can tell a story through the iconographic presentation found within a work of art. To understand this story, it is important for an observer to have strong cultural knowledge or access to ethnographic literature to properly interpret the themes and ideas found in the artwork.

The third step in Panofsky's three levels of interpretation, often the most difficult, is identifying intrinsic meaning or content within the work of art. This final step is known as iconology. Iconology is an attempt to discover the meaning and principles behind the stories found within the art of past cultures. This step can be problematic and lead to errors since the observer is offering his or her own subjective iconographic interpretation of a past culture. Cultural context is imperative at this level (Panofsky 1972). It is important that the iconographer uses comparative analyses from multiple iconographic researchers and additional lines of research to form hypotheses while using this final level of analysis. The context of a culture's symbology must be kept intact by the researcher to successfully apply iconology to a culture's art.

Synthetic intuition was an important concept created originally by Erwin Panofsky in 1939. Panofsky (1972:41) hypothesized that certain cognitive abilities permit an iconographer to understand fundamental principles, which are found in presentations of motifs and in the interpretations of a culture's visual stories and mythology. Panofsky's method of iconographic interpretation is crucial when attempting to analyze different levels of meaning found in visual art compositions. This method allows anthropologists and artistic scholars to grasp meaning and create new understandings of past cultural ideology through visual analyses using historical context. The visual

analyses that are known as structural analyses, were additionally developed by, and influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) and Franz Boas.

The second component of the San Marcos School is the review of ethnographic and historical literature. Ethnographic evidence of Mesoamerican cultures is found in sacred texts and codices (screen-fold style books) as well as in European accounts of the post-contact Americas. These post-contact interactions with Europeans led to the recording of Mesoamerican oral histories and mythology, which gives a linear time frame of references when performing iconographic interpretations.

The decipherment of the Maya hieroglyphs is one of the most important achievements in anthropology. This massive effort undertaken by several scholars has led to the understanding of the ideology and history of the ancient Maya culture. This achievement allows researchers to translate Mayan writing on smaller material objects, along with their monumental art. The decipherment of Mayan glyphs will aid in my arguments as I analyze and compare the monuments from several Maya sites.

In 1550, an unknown K'iche' Maya scribe wrote down the mythology of the K'iche' Maya people living in the highlands of Guatemala (Christenson 2007). The Maya scribe wrote down his people's mythology in the K'iche' language using the Spanish alphabet. This description of mythology was said to be a version of a hieroglyphic codex that was hidden from the Spanish and revered in the K'iche' town of Chichicastenango. As important as this work is for understanding Maya culture, the Maya people had a writing system long before the Europeans arrived in the New World. This writing was found on Maya monumental art and in Maya codices, which consisted of images and glyphs that recorded their mythologies, important dates, and the history of rulers.

When the Europeans arrived in the Americas, so did Christianity. European priests such as Fray Diego de Landa feared that the Devil was at work in the Maya culture and the Europeans faith led them to eradicate 99 percent of the Maya codices (Christenson 2007). The Maya codices that once numbered in the thousands were soon limited to a few.

But the relationship between the Church and indigenous Maya knowledge was a complex one, and in some cases, priests are the only reason we have knowledge of indigenous beliefs. For example, a Spanish priest named Francisco Ximénez befriended and lived with the K'iche' Maya people. The K'iche' people later shared a book that contained their mythologies with Ximénez, and he transcribed this sacred text in the early 1700s (Christenson 2007). Today, Father Ximénez's original copy of this sacred book is housed in the Newberry Library of Chicago (Christenson 2007:31). The original codex upon which it is based is likely lost to time, although there are rumors that it is still in the possession of K'iche elders or in the secret archives of Chichicastenango (Christenson 2007:29). This sacred Maya book is known as the Popol Vuh, or "Book of Counsel" (Christenson 2007).

The third component of the San Marcos School considers or engages the archaeological context. The archaeological record of Mesoamerica provides iconographic data along with the chronology needed to build my arguments in this thesis. Archaeological context also falls into the second and third steps of Panofsky's iconographic analysis. To analyze the art of ancient Mesoamerican cultures, it is important to have knowledge of the cultural context surrounding the use of specific iconographic elements. The placement and visual presentations of monumental art and



burial materials, along with Maya hieroglyphic writing found at different Mesoamerican archaeological sites, will be compared to better understand relationships found in the art. Archaeological context will be especially important when analyzing the sites and monuments of La Venta and Quirigua. The San Marcos Method provides users with an approach to properly analyze the iconographic content of Mesoamerican cultures by the archaeological context that is available.

The fourth component of the San Marcos Method is conducting a stylistic analysis and the acknowledgement of geographic distribution of styles; this relies on a large extant corpus of art. Miguel Covarrubias was a Mexican artist and student of pre-Columbian art who is credited as being one of the first researchers to systematically study and analyze Olmec art and iconography in the 1940s (Diehl 2004). Covarrubias was greatly influenced by the Olmec art objects found in the Valley of Mexico, Guerrero, and other areas of Highland Mexico.

Covarrubias saw that other early Mexican cultures used religious symbolism that functioned in a ceremonial context without using the realism of human forms (Reilly 1995:32). He saw the beauty of Olmec art in its visualization of various human forms. The simplicity and realism found in the craftsmanship demonstrated in the products of Olmec art caught his eye and led to Covarrubias's lifelong fascination with the Olmec art style (Deihl 2004).

Style in art can be defined as "formal qualities of a work of art that links that work of art to other works of art" (Reilly 1995:31). Styles are important since they limit the number of symbols and motifs that can portray a culture's ideology in art. But cultural styles can also change as cultures change throughout time (Layton 1991). The importance

of styles for archaeologists and scholars is that styles can be analyzed to better understand the ideological systems of cultures from the past.

The four formal qualities of Olmec art are: 1) Representations appear to be self-contained and emblematic; 2) Artists favored three-dimensional forms rendered in the round and finished on all sides; 3) The human form is the focus of Olmec art; and 4) Olmec art is monumental, even in its smaller forms, like their ceramic figurines (F. Kent Reilly III personal communication 2020). When analyzing Olmec art styles, Olmec art should be perceived as a communication tool that contains symbolic data that carries ideological meaning of the root culture (Reilly 1995).

The two major Olmec art styles found within Olman are the San Lorenzo style (1200-900 BC) and the La Venta style (900-400 BC). The San Lorenzo style included figurines and monumental, three-dimensional sculptures. The famous Olmec heads were first produced during the florescence of the site of San Lorenzo. Mythical themes, supernatural beings, human, and anthropomorphic figures were produced during the peak of the San Lorenzo style (de La Fuente 2000). The Olmecs believed the supernaturals portrayed in Olmec art were real beings, and their monstrous animalistic and human features were a mix of the natural and supernatural worlds (Coe 1965).

David Joralemon (1976:33) saw these supernaturals in the same light as Coe. To Joralemon, these creatures were not of our natural world, they were chimerical beings found in the minds of the Olmec people. Joralemon looked to the natural world of Olman to find the creation of these supernatural beings. There is strong data that supports the hypothesis that the animal species that the Olmec people encountered in their everyday lives were intertwined in their imaginations to create fantastic mythological beasts and

deities. The species found within Olmec iconography are the harpy eagle, the osprey, the caiman, the jaguar, the puma, the tropical green rattlesnake, the bullshark, the toad, the macaw, and certainly many more (Smith 2017). Characteristics of these animals can be combined with each other and with human features, evolving into distinct categories within the broader categories of Olmec supernaturals.

In many ways, the monumental art discovered at San Lorenzo portrayed Olmec mythology and cosmology. The San Lorenzo style itself was the foundation of the later art that was produced in La Venta, where we find the full development of Olmec symbolism and the introduction of the stela cult in its monumental form (Reilly 1994).

At La Venta, the stelae associated with the stela cult and other monumental sculptures had an abundance of mythological narratives in the context of monumental art. The La Venta style supernaturals carried both human and animal attributes that had previously been found in San Lorenzo's art corpuses (de La Fuente 2000). However, the La Venta style's supernaturals were more stylized than the earlier style and the versatility in themes increased heavily during the La Venta art phase. These mythic supernaturals are shown interacting throughout the creation scenes depicted in La Venta stelae 2 and 3. The stelae carved in the La Venta style would go on to influence the way the Maya and Izapan cultures recorded their own historical and mythological accounts of creation (de La Fuente 2000). The chronology of Olmec art styles that were incorporated into the La Venta stela cult is a main focus of this thesis. This information, along with the interpretations of other scholars, will lay out the framework for my own arguments of the importance of the iconography found on La Venta Stela 3.

The concept of the “continuity hypothesis,” also known as “upstreaming,” is a hypothesis that the religion and symbology of the Olmec influenced all the following Mesoamerican cultures. This hypothesis was proposed by David Joralemon (1976:58-59), who believed that it helped to link Olmec cultures to later culture through ideological concepts that are not documented in historical records. An example of this hypothesis in practice was when Miguel Covarrubias (1945) used illustrations to show the influence of the Olmec rain god on all of the later Mesoamerican rain gods. F. Kent Reilly, Virginia Fields, Linda Schele, Karl Taube, Michael Coe, and many more scholars back Joralemon’s hypothesis (Diehl 2004).

Many scholars consider the Epi-Olmec site of Izapa (400-100 BC) as the meeting place and location of blending between the Olmec and Maya cultures (Reilly 1994: 68, Coe 1977, Schele and Miller 1986). Additionally, the Middle Formative Complex of Mesoamerica, including Izapa, shares many of the same iconographic presentations of symbols and themes as the Classic Maya Period that started around 250 AD (Reilly 1994). As mentioned in Chapter 2, we know that the Maya shared loan words from the Olmec Mixe-Zoquean speakers, which show that these cultures were loaning words and likely ideology with each other. I will use the “continuity hypothesis” in this thesis to attempt to gain new insights and connects between the Olmec and Maya through my analyses. Past researchers’ use of the “continuity hypothesis” provide me with ideas I can build upon when performing my own iconographic analyses. My goal is to use and build upon this hypothesis to help clarify the relationship between Olmec and Maya mythology. Additionally, I believe that using all four parts of San Marcos Method’s

systematic approach will help to reveal never before-seen aspects of the Olmec and Maya culture's monumental artworks.

#### **IV. ANALYSIS OF LV STELA 3 AND THE MAYA HERO TWIN MYTH**

In this chapter, I will first perform an iconographic analysis on the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3. I will use the first two steps of Panofsky's three levels of interpretation to argue that the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3 contains a narrative similar to that of the Maya Hero Twin Myth from the Popul Vuh. Using previous scholars' analyses of artwork of the Olmec, the Izapa, the Pre-Classic Maya, and the Classic Maya periods, I will discuss my own interpretations. Previous analyses give a deep perspective into the Maya Hero Twin stories of the Popol Vuh's interpretation by Allen Christensen (2007) and will aid in my own iconographic interpretation of La Venta Stela 3. The original photo of Stela 3 from 1955 is found in the Heizer's Papers: NAA, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute; this and the original drawing of Stela 3 from the Smithsonian Institutes excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, in 1955, by Phillip Drucker, Robert F. Heizer, and Robert J. Squier will be used at different times for my own interpretations. I will use the drawing and the photo of La Venta Stela 3 accordingly in my arguments in this thesis.

##### **Pre-Iconographic Identification of La Venta Stela 3**

I will apply Panofsky's first step of iconographic analysis, the pre-iconographic identification of primary and natural subject matter, to bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3(Figure 14).

The bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3 shows three figures on both sides of the stela, one to the far left, and two facing each other; they both are wearing headdresses. These two figures seem to be meeting with each other and possibly talking. The figure on the left is wearing a belt with a face on it and is holding a stick or axe. This left figure

wears armbands with additional cylindrical objects in the armband. The left figure has a human-looking head located in his headdress and symbols that resemble Latin exclamation points, as well as circles that look like corn kernels and some type of containers that are also associated with the human-like head.

The bearded figure on the right is holding an axe and wearing a belt with a face. This right figure has a severed head located on his chest and there is a symbol that look like an L on the face of the severed head. The right figure shows a bird or fish located on his headdress with an open mouth.

On the far left there is a third figure with a hand on his or her stomach and one foot off the ground. This figure looks to be feminine by the shape of the figures body and facial features when compared to the other two forward-facing figures, and this figure may possibly be dancing.

### **Iconographic Analysis of La Venta Stela 3**

To delve deeper into the artwork, I will now use the second step of Panofsky's iconographic analysis method on La Venta Stela 3. This involves identifying secondary, or conventional, subject matter. In this step, conventional subject matter consists of symbols, individual motifs, or a combination of motifs that can carry a specific ideological concept or theme through the iconography that is presented on works of art. A strong cultural knowledge is needed by the observer to be able to understand the themes and ideas found in the artwork (Panofsky 1972). Additionally, I will use The Hero Twin myth found in the Popul Vuh and prior scholar's analyses presented in Chapter 2 of the thesis to aid in my iconographic interpretations of La Venta Stela 3. I will focus on the

different elements and themes found on the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3, which are the regalia of the figures, the severed head theme, and mirrors. I will discuss these different elements and themes and present how they correlate to later Mesoamerican cultures.

### *Regalia-Yokes and Hachas*

When analyzing the regalia of the two main figures on the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3, it appears that the figures are wearing elaborate belts with side profile heads on the front of the belts (see Figure 14). These belts share similar attributes with Mesoamerican ballplayer belts (and yokes) and the hachas worn on the front of these yokes. The side-profiled heads on the front of the belts are difficult to identify, though they appear to have animal attributes. These animalistic attributes are similar to other examples of Mesoamerican hachas. F. Kent Reilly, III noted that the figure on the left was wearing celts (stone axes) in his armband and both figures may be holding ballgame sticks or war axes (personal correspondence 2019). I believe that the regalia that these figures wear correspond to the ritual Mesoamerican Ballgame that was recorded in the Popol Vuh. As the only two figures to wear the belts, they are the ones with the strongest connection to the ballgame.

Monuments at the Olmec site of San Lorenzo have been identified as portraying ballplayers by the regalia that the figures wore (Coe and Koontz 2013). These Olmec ballplayers wore pectoral mirrors and thick belts that were used to protect their vital organs when they hit the ball off their hips. The Olmecs played the Mesoamerican ballgame as part of a ritual, and many of these ballplayers are shown wearing Olmec deity masks (Taube 2004; Coe and Koontz 2013). Similar ballgame belts were popular



with the later Veracruz culture that occupied the area that was once around the area of Olmec culture. The Veracruz culture would use ceremonial stone yokes in place of the leather ballgame belts in their ceremonial recreations of the ballgame. The stone yokes are U-shaped and have human and animal faces carved into them (Figure 15). The stone hachas relate to ballgame markers and may have been worn on the yokes (Figure 16). Yokes and hachas are also worn by Veracruz figurines and people on carved monuments in connection with the Mesoamerican ballgame (Coe and Koontz 2013:92). Stone yokes and hachas from the Olmec period have been found in Veracruz, though they were less elaborate than during the time of the later Veracruz culture (Coe and Koontz 2013).

#### *Regalia-Headdresses*

When I analyzed the head on the left figure's headdress on La Venta Stela 3, I found a correlation with the Olmec Rio Pesquero Celt. I discovered that the iconography on La Venta Stela 3 shows the side profile of the baby Maize God with two of the four intercardinal directions (Figure 17). When comparing these findings to the Rio Pesquero celt, I found that the head is not a masked impersonator, it appears to be the actual head of Olmec baby Maize God in the flesh. The features of the baby Maize God were present: the downturned jaguar snarl and the maize headdress features. Above the head of the baby Maize Gods, there are two 'exclamation points' that are generally thought to be the Olmec symbol for rain (Reilly 1995). The rain symbolism and the head of the baby Maize God on La Venta Stela 3 likely shows the mythic theme of the rebirth of the Maize God, which is related to agriculture.

The iconographic theme of the Maize God has been found throughout the Olmec art styles. This important finding by scholars has linked together the Olmec and the Maya

Maize Gods, though to each culture they served slightly different functions. The Olmec Maize God was an infant who was nurtured by the elites, while the Maya Maize God was the ruler in the flesh, blood, and maize regalia (Reilly 1994). The Maize God or ruler in the Middle Formative Period was usually shown as a five-point cosmogram, with the Maize God located in the center. This cosmogram shows that the world tree is the axis mundi, which functions to link the sky, the earth, and the underworld realms together. The Olmec ruler or world tree was the center, and the four cardinal directions were sprouting maize seeds surrounding the ruler (Reilly 1995). This five-sided cosmogram can be found in the incised imagery of the Olmec Rio Pesquero celt (Figure 18). The Rio Pesquero celt features a human figure wearing a Maize God mask, which shows unfurled vegetation in the shape of a trefoil. The world tree symbolism was not only related to rulers, but it was also related to the Olmec Dragon. The Olmec Dragon had flame eyebrows and crocodilian aspects and is often shown merged with the body of the Olmec ruler. The cross or t-shaped vegetation that functioned as the world tree also emerges from the heads of human-like beings on celts throughout the Middle Formative Period (Reilly 1995: 38-39).

Virginia Fields (1986, 1989) realized this trefoil was linked to the Classic Maya elite headdress and that it coincided with maize. David Freidel and Linda Schele (1993) proposed that this sprouting maize was also an important shamanistic aspect, even prior to the Olmec. Shamans were not only protectors of sacred information, but they also took on the responsibility of plant domestication and the gathering of plants for rituals. These shamanistic activities likely led to the birth of the elite symbolism found in Olman (Freidel et al. 1993).

### *Severed Heads*

When analyzing the head on the bearded right figure's chest on La Venta Stela 3, I observed similarities with the theme of two forward-facing figures with severed heads that are also found in the art of the Pre-Classic Maya sites of Nakbe, El Mirador, and Uaxactun. All these artistic creations have been argued by Richard Hansen to be some form of the Hero Twins myth and/or the rebirth of the Maize God from the Popol Vuh (Library of Congress 2014). Another important note is that the severed head found on Nakbe Stela 1 is wearing an Olmec mask and the Maize God in the San Bartolo Murals is also wearing an Olmec mask (Correspondence with F. Kent Reilly). I propose that there is a correlation between these masks and the Maize God. It is important to note that these Olmec masks are still shown being worn by the Maya version of the Maize deity in the Preclassic Maya times. This helps lend to the hypothesis that at least one god from the Olmec pantheon of Gods were the archetypes of the later Maya gods.

### *Mirrors and Bird Deities*

When I analyzed the bird supernatural on the headdress of the bearded figure on the right of La Venta Stela 3 (Figure 19), I found that it had strong correlations with the Principal Bird Deity or Seven Macaw. The bird supernatural on La Venta Stela 3 and the Seven Macaw imagery on Izapa Monument 25 both have important similarities, such as flowing wings and tails, and Izapa Stela 2 shows two forward facing figures and a bird creature, which is also found on La Venta Stela 3.

The eye of the bird found on La Venta Stela 3 is square, with a circle in the middle, likely representing its pupil. On closer inspection, the circle in the middle of the

square eye on La Venta Stela 3 seems to show four, or possible more, prong-like appendages emerging from it. This square eye with a circle in the middle and prong like appendages seems to correlate with the square mirror with a circle and symbolic appendages found on the chest of the ballplayer on San Lorenzo Monument 34 (Figure 20). The eye on the Stela 3 bird figure is also similar to rounded-square eye of the bird found on the obsidian core in La Venta Tomb C (Figure 21). The obsidian core of Tomb C shows that the eye of the bird is a k'an cross; I propose that it is likely that the eye of the bird supernatural on La Venta Stela 3 has a similar meaning.

Mirrors had an important function in the symbolism and rituals of Mesoamerican cultures. The Olmecs made stone mirrors out hematite, pyrite, magnetite, and obsidian. The Olmec polished mirrors were concave with strong reflective properties that could reverse or invert the image being reflected. These concave pectoral mirrors are found on many Olmec ballplayer figures and in burials (Evan and Webster 2001:473). The first and most important symbolic function of mirrors in Mesoamerica was to imitate the sun (Sterling et al. 1981:125). The Olmec elites wore mirrors on their chests or head and would be seen as the personification of the sun to the worshippers around them (Sterling et al. 1981). This same theme was used by the Maya kings to show their connections with the Upper World, and square reflective eyes were also linked to Maya sun deities. These Olmec concave mirrors can be found on figures at the sites of San Lorenzo and La Venta. San Lorenzo Monument 34 shows a ballplayer with a concave mirror with unknown symbolism on his upper chest. The La Venta Monument 23 figure is shown wearing a ballplayer belt and a concave mirror. Additionally, the figure carved on the side of La

Venta Altar 5 is also shown wearing a pectoral concave mirror (Sterling et al 1981:142-143).

One tomb I want to focus on in the section is Tomb C, also known as the “cyst tomb,” found in Complex A at La Venta was an important elite burial found. F. Kent Reilly (2002:62-65) found strong correlations between the layout of Tomb C’s burial objects and the entire iconographic presentation on Pakal’s sarcophagus lid at the Maya site of Palenque. Reilly found that the burial objects at Tomb C and Pakal’s sarcophagus are both related to the rebirth of the Maize God; thus, they portray the resurrection of the ruler as the Maize God. Several objects found in La Venta Tomb C will be used in my arguments in this thesis. The first objects are two carved earspools that Reilly (2002) identified by the iconography as a metaphorical double-headed serpent bar with a jaguar face in the middle, which Reilly believed represented the ecliptic (Figure 22). The other object found in Tomb C is an obsidian core incised with a bird deity that I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Additionally, a jade bloodletter was also found in this burial in the same context as the incised bird obsidian core (Reilly 2002). The incised obsidian core features a bird-being with a k’an cross located in its square or round eye.” *K’an* means “precious stone” or “precious yellow” in Yucatec Maya and other contemporary Mayan languages, and the k’an cross symbol can mean square or golden pyrite mirror in Classic Mayan (Danien and Sharer 1992:103). The k’an cross can also be a locative that tells the viewer where the event is taking place. Additionally, the k’an cross could be seen as a function of the act of centering the universe to show the point where authority and power sit in the cosmos, which is at the core of the cosmos (Freidel et al. 1993). All the cultures in Mesoamerica saw that the universe had multiple parts and was quadripartite. The k’an

cross embodies the concepts of different cycles of creation, the directions, colors, and supernatural beings (Garber and Awe 2009:155-157).

The murals of San Bartolo depict the Principal Bird Deity on top of all four worlds trees, which are the four cardinal directions, with a double headed serpent in its mouth representing the ecliptic. The Principal Bird Deity would be the center of the universe, the k'an cross, of the time period before he met his demise at the hands of the young lord or the Hero Twins. The last scene of the world tree narrative depicts the young lord positioned by a fifth world tree. In this scene, the Principal Bird Deity is lying deceased at the base of the new world tree, which represents the establishing of the new center of the universe and the ending of a cycle and the beginning of a new cycle of time (Christenson 2016:41-42). There is a strong correlation between the narratives of the layout of La Venta Tomb C and the San Bartolo narrative scenes. The iconography in the San Bartolo mural and the items found in La Venta Tomb C both depict the Maize God as the world tree, the Principal Bird Deity or Seven Macaw, and double-headed serpents. There is similar imagery found on Izapa Monument 25, which shows world tree imagery, Seven Macaw, and a double headed serpent. Additionally, I propose that the archaeological context of the jade bloodletter and the engraved obsidian core with the Principal Bird Deity found in Tomb C likely correlates with the San Bartolo narrative scene when the young lord is shown bloodletting for the Principal Bird Deity, who is shown sitting in the center of the world tree.

The Yucatec Maya's version of Seven Macaw is called k'inich k'ak'mo', which translates to "Sun-eyed Fire-macaw" (Tedlock 1987:73). As mention earlier in this chapter, the Maya gods that were related to the sun were also known to have square

shaped eyes. The k'an cross symbol can also mean square or golden pyrite mirror in the Yucatec Mayan language (Danien and Sharer 1992:103). It is possible that the bird figure's eye on La Venta Stela 3 and the k'an cross in the bird's eye on the obsidian core found in Tomb C both represent golden pyrite mirrors.

This same concept was found at the Olmec site of Oxtotitlan on Mural 1. David Grove (1970) proposed that the yellow eye of the bird mask on Oxtotitlan Mural 1 was a golden pyrite mirror. The eyes are possibly used in the same function at both sites, but the bird deity at Oxtotitlan could possibly be a different bird deity than the one found at La Venta or they can be related; future studies on this argument should be performed to see if there is a correlation or if there is none. These mirror eyes found on the bird supernaturals at La Venta would correspond with Seven Macaw's gleaming and metallic eyes. Since the most important symbolic function of mirrors in Mesoamerican cultures was to imitate the sun, I argue that the eyes on bird supernatural on Stela 3 and the bird engraved on the obsidian core of Tomb C shows that these beings were solar supernaturals with mirrors for eyes. Additionally, the open mouth of the bird supernatural on La Venta Stela 3 has three nubbed or broken teeth (Figure 23). Another important detail of the bird supernatural on La Venta Stela 3 is that the bottom jaw of the bird seems to be swollen. When teeth are irritated or are pulled out, the jaw becomes inflamed or swollen. In the Popol Vuh, Seven Macaw was known as the false sun by his shining eyes and his glamorous jewel like teeth. The Hero Twins shoot Seven Macaw in the face, knocking out his teeth and injuring his eye to set in motion the next creation period.

#### **Chapter IV Implications**

I hypothesize that the iconographic presentation of La Venta Stela 3 depicts the forward-facing Hero Twins in their ballgame regalia with one twin carrying the Maize God's severed head. The theme of the forward-facing twins and the severed head of the Maize God is found in the monumental art of several other Pre-Classic Maya sites discussed in this Chapter and Chapter 2. Furthermore, in this chapter I argued that the iconography of the bottom portion of Stela 3 tells two early versions of stories found in the Popol Vuh when compared to other analyses of Mesoamerican artworks. These two stories are: the retrieving of the Maize God's head from the underworld, after the Hero Twin's ballgame victory over the lords Xibalba, and the defeat of Seven Macaw. I propose that the bird monster imagery on La Venta Stela 3 can possibly be an early form of the later Popol Vuh story of Seven Macaw or the Principal Bird Deity. The bird deity on La Venta Stela 3 has bird-like features, a mirror-sun eye, and three broken teeth. I suggest that the bird demon on La Venta Stela 3 is presented dead and bloated, showing the Hero Twins' defeat of Seven Macaw, which can also correlate with the dead Principal Bird Deity mural scene at San Bartolo and the burial objects found in La Venta Tomb C. Directly across from the dead bird demon on La Venta Stela 3, the head of the baby Maize God is shown emerging. These two facing deities shown in side profile could signify the end of one period and the beginning of the next period of cyclical time.

The next chapters of this thesis will expand upon the arguments of this chapter. The focus of the following chapter will be the analysis of La Venta Stela 3 and the creation story of the planting of the three hearth stones.



## **V. ANALYSIS OF LV STELA 3 AND THE MAYA STORY OF CREATION**

In this chapter, I will first perform an iconographic analysis of the top portion of La Venta Stela 3. I will use the first two steps of Panofsky's three levels of interpretation to argue that the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 relates to the Mesoamerican story of the three hearth stones of creation and the cosmic umbilicus. I will build upon my own arguments from the previous chapter of the thesis as well as previous scholars' analyses of artwork featuring the three stones of creation and the cosmic umbilicus. The artwork of the Olmec, Izapa, Pre-Classic Maya, and Classic Maya periods will be used as a guide. Earlier scholars have provided rich analyses of Mesoamerican creation stories, these will aid in my iconographic interpretation of La Venta Stela 3. I will use the original photo of Stela 3 and the original drawing of La Venta Stela 3 as outlined in the previous chapter.

### **Pre-Iconographic Identification of La Venta Stela 3**

This section will focus on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 (Figure 24). First, I will apply Panofsky's first step of iconographic analysis to La Venta Stela 3. This is the pre-iconographic identification of primary and natural subject matter.

The left side of the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 shows what appears to be a rope with a stylized tree or pole extending from the top of it. On the right side of the stela, four floating figures are found in variety of poses. The central figure has a bird of prey on its back. This figure is pointing to three circular objects with rectangular projections beneath them, his fingertip stretched out just enough to touch the rope that holds them. The figure to the far right has a snake-like face, with a snake-like tongue, and is holding an axe or ballplayer stick, possibly in a threatening or striking manner. Above the right figure sits a figure with a jaguar-like being on its back with additional

unrecognizable features, due to natural weathering, that is pointing towards the same objects as the figure with bird on his back. Finally, across from the top figure on the right with the jaguar on his back, a figure on the left is pointing downward and this person has a thin object protruding from its nose. All the figures on the top portion seem to have their attention towards the left side of La Venta Stela 3.

### **Revisting Zoomorph B, La Venta Altar 4, and the El Mirador Freize.**

Before I apply the second step of Panofsky's method of iconographic analysis on La Venta Stela 3, I must present additional details of past artworks that I found by applying the San Marcos Method, along with the original scholar's analyses of the iconographic presentations on the north face of Zoomorph B, La Venta Altar 4, and the El Mirador frieze. These re-analyses are of the upmost importance to the arguments in this thesis and must be presented before I can perform the second step of Panosky's iconographic method of analysis on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3. My interpretations are meant to give a different perspective and to compliment past scholars' analyses to uncover iconographic details of the past artworks.

#### *Revisting Quirigua Zoomorph B*

These new analyses presented help to add to Looper's interpretation of the iconographic story presented on Quirigua Zoomorph B that correlate to it being the third stone of creation, the crocodilian water throne stone (Figure 25). While Robin Heyworth, who is the author of the website [www.uncoveredhistory.com](http://www.uncoveredhistory.com) which focuses on the history of Mesoamerican archaeological sites, was researching the frontal iconography of Zoomorph B, he found a stylized jaguar face in the monument (Figure 26) (personal

communication with Robin Heyworth). Heyworth found the jaguar eyes on top of the monument, two spiral ears on the separate sides of the protruding muzzle, and the open mouth of the figure, which all represent a forward-facing jaguar's head.

I also observed that the head of the ruler on Zoomorph B can possibly coincide with the form of a single shark's tooth in the mouth of the jaguar, along with the human teeth on the top portion of the jaguar's mouth. The single shark tooth can be found in relation to the Stingray Paddler, who in some iconography, wears a shark tooth in his headdress. I believe that the protruding muzzle of the jaguar that Heyworth found could also be a protruding nose of a shark. During my correspondence with Heyworth, we also each found a snake's face on the south side of Zoomorph B (Figure 27), though our interpretations slightly differ. In my interpretation, the king's head coincides with the middle scale on the upper mouth of the snake. Additionally, the eagle wings on the ruler's headdress correspond to the scales that extend off the nose of Middle American rattlesnake (Figure 28). The king's upper body is the cleft of the snake's mouth, at the place where the snake's fangs hang from the mouth. The jaguar's ears would be the eyes of the snake, and right under the snake's eyes, would be the nostrils of the snake. We both agree that the whole outside of the frontal area of Zoomorph B is likely a diamond-shaped rattlesnake's head.

In Heyworth's interpretation of the snake's face, the jaguar's ears would be the snake's furloughed eyebrows and the nostrils would be the eyes of the snake. Heyworth hypothesizes that the presentation on Zoomorph B would coincide with the three stones of creation being tied together by Itzamna. Rather than symbolizing the water throne

stone, it is the divine throne of creation in one, but it could also represent the third stone of creation asLooper (2003) hypothesized.

Since the gods in Mesoamerica can be merged together (Evans and Webster 2013:432), I argue that not only does the iconographic presentation on Zoomorph B show you the three stones of creation, but it also shows the gods that laid them. I propose that the jaguar head with the single shark tooth and human teeth may represent Jaguar Paddler, Stingray Paddler, and the Maize God merged into one supernatural entity since they all travel together on the canoe from the underworld.

Though previously the identity of this god has been unknown, I hypothesize that the snake's head represents the god that laid the snake throne stone, Chaak. The name of the god that laid the snake throne stone is Ek' Na Chaak, which means Black-First-Red (Freidel et al. 1993:67). In the Dresden Codex, Ek' Chaak'—Black and Red or East Chaak—are said to stop together at a point in the middle of their travels (Dresden 1998:70). The glyphs from the Dresden Codex (Figure 29) and the glyphs naming the unknown god who planted the second stone of creation on Quirigua Stela C east are very similar to each other, though a more in-depth analysis is needed from another scholar familiar with glyphs.

In correspondence with Heyworth, I mentioned my hypothesis of the unknown god being Chaak and the snake face on Zoomorph B representing the rain deity. He presented me with the picture of the Chaak Mask from Mayapan to show the similarities between the two artistic creations (Figure 30). The similarities of the iconography were undeniable. The snake face found on Zoomorph B and the Chaak face at Mayapan have the same long, hanging eyelids, and they both have the same three dots under their eyes,

likely symbolizing rain, which could further Looper's hypothesis of Zoomorph B being the water throne stone.

Given this data, I would agree with Heyworth's hypothesis about the location of the eyes of the snake on Zoomorph B and the eyes found on the Chaak mask at Mayapan. Chaak was the god that cracked open the turtle shell where the Maize God was reborn (Freidel et al. 1993). This event coincides with the arrival of the second stone on earth, where the cosmic turtle shell was broken open. There is an iconographic example found on Maya pottery of two Chaaks cracking open the turtle shell so that the Maize God can be reborn (Freidel et al. 1993:94). Additionally, there is another Zoomorph found at Quirigua I want to mention—Zoomorph P. There are two Chaak figures found on the front of Zoomorph P to the east and west side of the monument. Zoomorph P is also thought to represent the cosmic turtle (Looper 2013:176).

Furthermore, the glyphs on Quirigua Stela C state that the unknown god lays the second stone of creation at the Earth Place after the Paddler Gods lay the first stone of creation at the House of Five Sky, at the crossroads where the Milky Way meets the ecliptic (Freidel et al. 1993:94). With the data from the Dresden Codex and the other data presented, I propose that the unknown god is related to the East and West Chaak, who possibly stop in their travels to meet to plant the second stone of creation, the earth throne stone that becomes the back of the turtle, which one or both Chaaks will crack open, and finally where the Maize God will be resurrected from.

The ruler found in the jaws of the Cosmic Monster on Zoomorph B was proposed to be impersonating the Maize God by Looper, but I hypothesize that the ruler is impersonating the shamanistic creator god Itzamna. Earlier this chapter, I mentioned that

Looper (2003) proposed that Zoomorph B was linked to the god Itzamna, since it may be the third stone of creation. Looper found that the Principal Bird Deity was located on the tail of the Cosmic Monster on Zoomorph B, which I believe is the bird form of the god Itzamna. The headdress of the ruler on Zoomorph B is a bird of prey, which I believe is a harpy eagle (Figure 31).

#### *La Venta Altar 4*

F. Kent Reilly (1995:41) argued that the headdress of the ruler found on La Venta Altar 4 (Figure 32) was a bird of prey species, the harpy eagle (*Harpia harpyja*). An important note is that the name for Itzamna has been translated by during the colonial period in the Yucatan as *Hun Itzam Na Yax Kokaj Mut*, or “One/Unique? Itzam Na(h) First Harpy Eagle” (Bocabulario de Mayathan 1972 [ca. 1670]: MS 129r, line 5). Reilly found that the ruler with the harpy eagle regalia on La Venta Altar 4 was holding a rope; there were also five symbols on Altar 4 which Reilly identified. These motifs were: double-merlon motifs on the east and west corners of the altar, an earth band, sky bands, and the face of a jaguar, which also had crossed bands located in its open mouth. The double merlon motif can relate to the Olmec sacred mountain or a portal to the otherworld, leading Reilly (1995) to hypothesize that La Venta Altar 4 was a cosmological model.

Using the iconographic analysis of La Venta Altar 4 by Reilly and the analyses of Looper, Heyword , and I on Quirigua Zoomorph B, it is possible to compare the similarities of the monuments to better understand the connections between Maya and Olmec creation myths. La Venta Altar 4 has a jaguar face and jaguar ears with snake-like fangs protruding from its mouth like the one found on Zoomorph B. La Venta Altar 4

also shows the crossed-band motifs in the mouth of the jaguar, which we find in the eyes of the snake located on the sides of the jaguar's mouth on Zoomorph B. As Reilly (1995) has previously stated, there are two double-merlon brackets on La Venta Altar 4 along with earth symbols.

Additionally, there are two single gum brackets on the left and right side of the altar indicating that this portion the altar is the Olmec Dragon with its maw open. There is also a crocodilian Cosmic Monster with its mouth open on Zoomorph B; in this case, it disgorges the face of a ruler wearing a harpy eagle headdress. These elements taken together provide a strong iconographic argument that La Venta Altar 4 and Zoomorph B are telling the same story, the story of Itzamna bundling the three stones of creation together in the maw of the Cosmic Monster. The three stones of creation and the gods that planted them are present in the iconography of both Zoomorph B and La Venta Altar 4, and the rulers that are impersonating Itzamna are both located in the maws of the monster. Altar 4 also shows the tying of the three stones of creation together with the cosmic umbilicus. The ecliptic functions as a cosmic umbilicus, connecting the three realms together (Freidel et al. 1993). A third example for comparison that has similar iconography to La Venta Altar 4, and Zoomorph B is Oxtotitlan Mural 1, which I will save for future research.

I propose that Itzamna's name may be related to the name of the Cosmic Monster (or Earth Monster) by his action of tying the three stones together in its mouth, instead of Itzamna turning into the Cosmic Monster. According toLooper (2003) the back of Zoomorph B shows the Principal Bird Deity, who I argue is Itzamna, riding the tail of the Cosmic Monster. This presentation on Zoomorph B of Itzamna riding on the tail of the

Cosmic Monster could relate to a moment in mythology when the Cosmic Monster turns into the cosmic canoe and when the Cosmic Monster turns into the world tree. The Cosmic Monster becomes the canoe, which is also the Milky Way, rotates and falls towards the underworld, thus raising the world tree that Itzamna perches upon as the new Principal Bird Deity after the death of Seven Macaw. These analyses strengthen Reilly's hypothesis that La Venta Altar 4 was a throne and a cosmological model, and it also to the hypothesis that these myths stretch back to the time of the Olmec.

Furthermore, I propose that the rulers found on Zoomorph B and La Venta Altar 4 are impersonating Itzamna by wearing the harpy eagle headdress that relates to the shamanistic creator god. This fits with Reilly's (1995) hypothesis that the rulers would wear the regalia of different gods during ceremonies to perform shamanic flight while traveling the three realms in their trance journeys. Additionally, The Olmec and the Maya both seem to differentiate when the gods are in the flesh or the gods are impersonated by the rulers in their monumental art. With the iconographic data presented in the past sections of this chapter, a re-visitation of the El Mirador frieze is needed to compare Zoomorph B and La Venta Altar 4 to the frieze.

#### *Revisiting the El Mirador Frieze*

After Heyword and I observed the snake face with Chaak features on Zoomorph B, I reexamined the El Mirador frieze and found that it also has a snake face with Chaak features (Figure 33). The forward-facing left and right eyes on the El Mirador frieze have Chaak features in the middle of the eyes, something first noted by Richard Hansen (Library of Congress 2014). There are also three teardrop symbols above the left eye, which likely symbolize rain. The location of these teardrops differs slightly from the



symbols found on the snake face on Zoomorph B, which has three teardrops located under the eye, but correspond with the placement of the 3 teardrops on the Chaak figure at Mayapan. The diamond-shaped head of the snake on the El Mirador frieze also corresponds with the diamond-headed snake on Zoomorph B. When exploring below the snake's eyes on the El Mirador frieze, I observed a snake's mouth with fangs just like those in the snake's mouth on Zoomorph B. Here, the deity that Hansen (Library of Congress 2014) believed represented the Hero Twin Hunahpu is located in the mouth of the snake, and Hunahpu is carrying the severed head of the Maize God on his back.

This figure of Hunahpu has what looks to be a single shark tooth, which I believe may tie Hunahpu to the Stingray Paddler. Hansen argued that the other figure across from Hunahpu was the other Hero Twin Xbalanque, from the jaguar headdress that the deity is wearing. If Hunahpu is serving as the Stingray Paddler in this scene, Xbalanque here may serve as his companion, the Jaguar Paddler. I will return to the comparison between the Hero Twins and the Paddler Gods in my conclusion.

Additionally, Hansen (Library of Congress 2014) hypothesized that the god Itzamna is also present, who is found in the middle of the El Mirador frieze above the eyes of the snake's head. In the frieze, Hansen found that Itzamna has a face of an old man on a bird's body, similar to a Maya glyph that names Itzamna in the Plaza of the Dead Sun in Tonina (Figure 34). Hansen (Library of Congress 2014) also argued that the frieze shows an undulating feathered serpent on the top portion of the frieze. I propose at the supernatural to the far right is the Cosmic Monster or Earth Monster with water or wind coming from its mouth. The supernatural monster has an open maw and the same L-shaped eye that Reilly (1995) attributes to the Olmec Dragon. Therefore,

Quirigua Zoomorph B, La Venta Altar 4, and the El Mirador frieze have almost all the same creator gods gathered together that were found in the account of the planting of the three stones of creation on the inscriptions of Quirigua Stela C east, and this theme on the monuments may additionally represent the gods readying the Maize God for his final trip of resurrection on the cosmic canoe.

### **Iconographic Analysis of La Venta Stela 3**

I will now use the second step of Panofsky's iconographic analysis method on La Venta Stela 3, which is identifying secondary, or conventional, subject matter. In this step, conventional subject matter consists of symbols or motifs; when combined, motifs can carry a specific ideological concept or theme that is embedded within a work of art. A strong cultural knowledge is needed by the observer to be able to understand the themes and ideas found in artwork. Additionally, I will use the Maya creation myths and prior scholar's analyses presented in Chapter 2 and the prior analyses in this chapter to aid in my iconographic interpretations of La Venta Stela 3.

#### *The World Tree, the Sky Umbilicus, and the Cosmic Monster*

The left side of the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 shows a rope with a stylized tree or pole extending from the top of it and additional details such as maize seeds, that helps to give the identity of the image. I hypothesize that the iconography presents the side profile of the Cosmic Monster and/or the world tree that are merged into one being (Figure 35). F. Kent Reilly (personal communication 2019) noted an eye on this Cosmic Monster and connected that eye to the eye on the side profile of the Earth Monster found on Chalcatzingo Monument 1.

Additionally, the world tree motif on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 shows a stylized maize tree expanding from the Cosmic Monster's head with an umbilicus in its mouth. This is similar to the iconography found on Izapa Stela 25, which shows the side profile of the Cosmic Monster with its body as the world tree, and the cosmic snake-headed umbilicus wrapping around its body (Freidel et al. 1993:88-89). The crocodilian world tree found on La Venta Stela 3 is also connected to the baby Maize God's head by the umbilicus and maize seeds.

An important symbol that correlates to the Cosmic Monster on the top portion of Stela 3 is the snake-headed umbilicus. The double-headed serpent bar symbolizes the sky umbilicus as previously mention in this thesis. This umbilicus connects the kings to their sources of heavenly power and the ecliptic path of the planets through the cosmos. The sky umbilicus featured snakes with square noses that occasionally have flowers located at their ends, which, for the Maya at least, represent a life force similar to the Western conception of a soul (Schele and Matthews 2018:416).

Another important detail is that at the location of the Maya House of Five Sky is where the Paddler Gods laid the first stone of creation, the Jaguar Throne Stone, an umbilicus emerged in the form of twisted snakes (Schele and Matthews 1998:45). The side profile of the Cosmic Monster's head on La Venta Stela 3 shows that there is a square-headed snake umbilicus that is touching the first stone in the mouth of the monster. The umbilicus also seems to form a stylized jaguar ear to the left of the eye of the monster. This same theme of the jaguar supernatural with an open mouth and the double-headed snake or rope as the ecliptic was found in the incising on the earspools in La Venta Tomb C and in the iconography on La Venta Altar 4.

Therefore, I suggest that the function of the Cosmic Monster's head on La Venta Stela 3 functions in the same way as the examples I provided. It is the crossroads where the Milky Way meets the ecliptic at the House of Five Sky, where the three stones were placed by the gods, which together form the Cosmic Monster. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the side profile of the head of the Maize God corresponded to the Rio Pesquero Celt. Therefore, on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3, the side profile of the Cosmic Monster would correspond to the frontal profile of the Cosmic Monster found on La Venta Altar 4, which both have jaguar features and an open maw.

The next portion of the Cosmic Monster on La Venta Stela 3 I will focus on is the jaw, which I propose functions as the cosmic canoe. An important part of the Maya creation story is when the Paddler Gods take the Maize God to his place of resurrection in the center of the universe on the cosmic canoe (Schele and Vilella 1993). The Paddlers Gods took the Maize God in their canoe to the center of the universe before the sky was lifted from the primordial waters of underworld and before the creation of the earth (Schele and Vilella 1993; Freidel et. al. 1993). The canoe has also been hypothesized to be a sacrificial blood bowl (Freidel et. al. 1993). This is more apparent when seen in profile, as it forms a u-shape with flares on both ends.

I compared the jaw of the Cosmic Monster on La Venta Stela 3 to the crocodile canoe carved into bones from Tikal (Figure 36). The front of the crocodile canoe on the Tikal bones is the head and jaws of the Cosmic Monster, just like on the side profile of the head and jaw of the supernatural found on La Venta Stela 3. Another example is one side of the canoe that is shown sinking on the Tikal bones has a U-shape with the ends turning upward, just like the shape on the canoe or jaw of the Cosmic Monster on La

Venta Stela 3. One final example for comparison can be found in Book 2 of the Aztec Florentine Codex, which shows the similar U-shape of earlier Mesoamerican canoes. In one drawing of the codex (Figure 37), the shape of the canoe resembles the shape of the Cosmic Monster's jaw on La Venta Stela 3.

The jaw of the Cosmic Monster on La Venta Stela 3 also has possible human teeth with a cleft in the middle, and three round or square objects located on top of the cleft. There is at least one similar Olmec Cosmic Monster figurine that also has human teeth in its jaws (Figure 38). Another example of the Cosmic Monster with human teeth is found in the iconography of Quirigua Zoomorph B, which also has the three stones of creation in its jaws.

Since the Cosmic Monster on La Venta Stela 3 has human teeth and three objects above the teeth in its bottom jaw, these three objects may be the three stones of creation, just like the iconography found on the south face of Quirigua Zoomorph B. Another example of this theme is found on the south side of Quirigua Zoomorph P (Figure 39), which Andrea Stone (1983:123) argues was likely the Principal Bird Deity that is associated with the Cosmic Monster. She also considers the possibility that it is the Cosmic Monster itself. I believe that it may correlate with the Cosmic Monster, since it has the canoe or sacrificial bowl as its bottom jaw and the three stones of creation in the jaw. It also lacks the bird-like features of deities found on the other monuments at Quirigua.

#### *The Middle Figure and the Creator God Itzamna*

The middle figure on the upper portion of La Venta Stela 3 points to or touches the end of the Cosmic Monster's jaw, or possibly the last circle in the jaw (Figure 40).

This figure also has a bird of prey on its back. This bird has a feathered crest on top of its head, which resembles a harpy eagle.

As previously mentioned, I hypothesized that ruler impersonating Itzamna on Quirigua Zoomorph B has a harpy eagle headdress on and he is shown in the middle of the Cosmic Monster's maw interacting with all three stones. The ruler impersonating Itzamna on La Venta Altar 4 is also wearing a harpy eagle headdress and is located in the mouth of the Cosmic Monster, binding together the three stones of creation. I propose that this portion of La Venta Stela 3 describes the same story as both Quirigua Zoomorph B and La Venta Altar 4, where Itzamna is laying the final stone of creation in the Cosmic Monster's maw and getting ready to bundle together the stones with the cosmic umbilicus.

#### *The Far-Right Figure and the Rain God Chaak*

The figure to the far right of the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 has snake-like attributes on its face with a snake-like tongue; it holds an axe which is pulled back, possibly in striking position (Figure 41). This snake-like figure has attributes similar to the figure on Izapa Stela 1 (100 BC-100 AD) (Figure 42). Karl Taube (1992:22) argues this figure is Chaak, especially because of a down-turning snout and a large top-knot of hair, which are attributes of Chaak figures found during the Classic Maya Period. The snake-faced figure on La Venta Stela 3 has a down-turned, protruding snout, a similar curl in the figure's headdress, and also a false beard, all of which are found on the Chaak figure on Izapa Stela 1.

I proposed earlier in this chapter that the second god that laid the snake throne of creation at the Earth Place was the god Chaak from the iconographic program found on

Quirigua Zoomorph B and additional analyses to support my hypotheses. I argue that the right figure on La Venta Stela 3 is Chaak with his lightning axe pulled back, ready to crack open the turtle shell to resurrect the Maize God. Furthermore, this theme is found on two Maya pots that show Chaak cracking open the turtle shell to resurrect the Maize God (Freidel et al. 1993:93-94).

#### *The Top Right Figure and the Jaguar Paddler*

The top right figure on La Venta Stela 3 (Figure 43) is a figure with a jaguar-like being on located on its back. This jaguar being has arms and legs and an unknown feature protruding from its tail. I hypothesize that this figure is Jaguar Paddler since it appears to be a jaguar with arms and legs that look like they could be mixed with finlike features, thus showing its relation to the underworld.

I propose that the Jaguar Paddler on the top right side of La Venta Stela 3 is twinned with the Hero Twin Xbalanque on the bottom right portion of La Venta Stela 3. There, he wears his ball game regalia with the severed head of the Maize God around his neck, and he stands on the bottom right side of the stela, directly below the Jaguar Paddler.

#### *The Top Left Figure and the Stingray Paddler*

The figure on the top left side of La Venta Stela 3 is missing a large portion of its body, so a full analysis cannot be done, but the figure has a thin object protruding from its nose (Figure 44). When compared to the other figures on the stela, this figure is the only figure that does not have a circular object coming out of its nose.

The Stingray Paddler may be the figure on the top left side of La Venta Stela 3. If this is the case, the object in his nose may be a stingray spine. This pairs him with Hero

Twin Hunahpu in his ball game regalia, who is wearing the emerging head of the Maize God in his headdress, on the bottom left side of La Venta Stela 3.

### **Chapter V Implications**

If the gods on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 are placed in order, they correspond with the account of the planting of the three stones of creation found in Quirigua Stela C east. First, the Paddler Gods on the top portion of LV Stela 3 are the farthest away since they planted the first stone, the jaguar throne stone, which is I propose is the first stone that is touching the snake umbilicus in the maw of the Cosmic Monster. They are also pointing to the mouth of the Cosmic Monster, which shares attributes of a canoe. Second, Chaak is found on La Venta Stela 3 after planting the second stone, the snake throne stone, with his axe reared back ready to crack open the turtle shell at the Earth Place or having already done so. Third, the god Itzamna plants the third and last stone of creation, the water or shark throne stone, in the mouth of the Cosmic Monster, which parallels the iconography found on La Venta Altar 4.

The order of the gods found on La Venta Stela 3 also corresponds with the order of iconography found on Quirigua Zoomorph B. First, there is the head of a jaguar with a single shark tooth and human teeth, which is hypothesized to represent the jaguar throne stone and the Paddler Twins. Second, there is the snake face, with water features, representing the rain god Chaak and the second stone of creation. Finally, there is the ruler wearing a harpy eagle headdress impersonating Itzamna in the mouth of the Cosmic Monster who has human teeth, which I believe represents Itzamna planting the third stone of creation and getting ready to bundle all of the stones together. La Venta Altar 4 also follows the same pattern of iconography mentioned above.



The importance of the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3 is that it tells the story of the Hero Twins and the Maize God in a way that foreshadows the creation accounts found in the Popol Vuh, while the importance of the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 is that it tells the same account of the planting of the three stones of creation found on Quirigua Stela C east and Quirigua Zoomorph B. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will focus on the archaeological context of La Venta Stela 3 and the ceremonial layout of La Venta.

## **VI. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF LV STELA 3**

In this chapter, I will focus on the archaeological context of La Venta Stela 3 and its relationship with the iconographic presentation found on La Venta Stela 3. I chose to analyze La Venta Stela 3 first and then present the archaeological context. Previous scholars' analyses of the layout of La Venta and previous analyses of Maya cosmological events such as the planting of the three stones of creation and the movement of the Milky Way will be explored in this chapter.

### **La Venta Complex A**

Complex A at the Olmec site of La Venta was an enclosed ritual space that only the Olmec ruling elite had access to. There were four phases of construction at Complex A, each marked by large offerings of serpentine stone blocks; the carbon samples taken date the ceremonial use of the area to 1000-600 BC (Heizer et. al. 1968:14). Complex A also features three mosaic masks, two of which are placed at the entrance to the primordial underwater court (Reilly 1994). F. Kent Reilly (2010:50) argued that these masks are related to the Maya story of the three stones of creation, indicating that this concept existed during Olmec times. The northern part of the enclosed court features Tomb A, which is a basalt column tomb; this may have housed the remains of an elite Olmec ancestor at one time (Reilly 2010). Inside this basalt tomb, archaeologists found a sandstone sarcophagus which may represent the Olmec Earth Dragon floating on the primordial waters of the underworld (Reilly 1994). This is where the elites performed ceremonial rituals that reenacted the creation stories, and, to those elites, the whole complex embodied the layout of the universe (Reilly 2010:52).

F. Kent Reilly is credited with discovering that the Olmec Dallas Plaque (Figure 45), 900-500 BC) reflects the same cosmological layout as La Venta Complex A when reading the plaque and Complex A facing north (Schele 1995:108-109). The Dallas Plaque presents the three-tiered cosmos: the above world, the earth world, and the underworld. The axis mundi, which is also the world tree or maize tree, sits at the center of the cosmological model which also includes the cardinal and intercardinal directions (Reilly 1994). The bottom of the plaque shows the three stones of creation with a crescent shape that likely represents the earth or the cosmic canoe. On top of the earth (or canoe) sits the mountain of creation (Smith 2017). Above and below this mountain, there are two portals in the shape of doors. The trefoil-form world tree is above the mountain, with four maize seeds surrounding it representing the intercardinal directions (Freidel and Reilly 2009). On the very top of the image sits the house of First Father, the Maize God. This is marked with crossed bands signifying its location in the sky, this symbology is also related to the basalt tomb found in the enclosed court of La Venta Complex A (Freidel and Reilly 2009, Reilly 1994).

Another well-known celt, the Humboldt Celt (Figure 46, ~400 BC), presents many of the same concepts and a similar layout of the Dallas Plaque. The Humboldt Celt includes the cosmic canoe, the three stones of creation, and the world tree with the four directions. However, the main focus of the top portion of the celt seems to be on the regalia of the Maize God and his resurrection (Kent Reilly personal communication 2019). The iconography on both pieces of art corresponds with the layout of La Venta Complex A.

La Venta Stela 3 was found in Complex A, in the enclosed court on the western edge of the South-Central Platform, with its narrative scene facing north (Figure 47). Some scholars argue that the faces of the stela might have been intentionally defaced, though others believe it to be due to natural weathering (Heizer 1967:28). La Venta Stela 3 is one of the latest extant monuments in the La Venta Style, all of which bridge historical and mythical narratives (de la Fuente 2000).

Many have argued that La Venta Stela 3 represents a meeting between the Olmec and a possible foreign group (Heizer 1967). However, Arlene Colman (2010) asked why a strictly historical narrative would be located in such a prominent position in an elite ceremonial space. Colman argued that Complex A is considered to be an area that only the elite could access and view the monuments located within the area. Thus, La Venta Stela 3 would not have been for general public viewing. The public would only have had viewing access to the stelae on the south portion of Mound C-1 that overlooked the main plaza area of La Venta; these stelae probably also represent supernatural events (Colman 2010).

Since Complex A was the main elite ritual space of La Venta, it seems strange that this would be the place for a historical narrative (Colman 2010). I will use the layout of additional monuments in La Venta Complex A to further support Colman's views.

Ann Cyphers Guillen (1992, 1997) provided archaeological data that the Olmec laid out their monuments in a ritual alignment that told the creation stories through the placement of monuments at San Lorenzo and likely other Olmec sites. Dr. F. Kent Reilly (2002) built on the research by Cyphers Guillen to argue that the placement of monuments at San Lorenzo was deliberate and ordered various narratives of creation

myths. At the site of La Venta, Reilly argued, the Olmec also achieved a method of retelling creation stories through the ritual action of the placing or grouping of monuments throughout the site. This act of laying out monuments to tell stories is known as “tableau.” While the Olmecs did not have a fully-developed writing system like later Mesoamerican cultures, the layout of monuments in tableau at these sites served as mnemonic devices for recalling complex ritual information (Reilly 2002).

In La Venta Complex A, Monument 14, Monument 15, Monument 12, Monument 13, Monument 6, and Monument 7 all sit in an almost exact line through the center of the complex (see Figure 47). These monuments are all related to the Phase IV construction of Complex A (Colman 2010). One additional monument that sits outside this center line that I will also use in my argument is Monument 80.

#### *La Venta Monument 14*

The cylindrical stone monument known as Monument 14 (Figure 48), was found 7 meters south of the cist tomb, but at the same level as the top of the tomb. Monument 14 was found upright in clay directly on the centerline of Complex A. A circular hole in the middle of the cylinder ran the length of the cylinder; this was 9 cm in diameter. The hole in the cylinder had a stone disk plug on the end of it, which was 5 cm thick (Figure 49) (Wedel 1952:71).

There were other small offerings in Mound A-3 that may be positioned in reference to Monument 14 and the cist tomb (Colman 2010). A similar stone cylinder was found at San Lorenzo (Monument 39)—it was also cylindrical, though it lacked a plug like La Venta Monument 14. Additionally, similar cylinders were found at Tres

Zapotes, which they may have formed some kind of base, though its exact use is unknown (Follensbee 2012:121). As I mentioned in Chapter 4, F. Kent Reilly found that the burial objects at Tomb C and the layout of Pakal's Sarcophagus at Palenque both related to the rebirth of the Maize God; thus, they represent the resurrection of the ruler as the Maize God.

Monument 14 is thought to be in relation to the cist tomb and they are all in the same archeological context of Mound A-3 in Complex A. I propose that Monument 14 is a cylinder base that the elite would use when erecting a symbolic world tree, which could coincide with the Maize God regalia found in the cist tomb and Reilly's hypothesis about the meaning of the cist tomb. Since the cist tomb and Monument 14 are in the same archeological context and area, the cist would represent where the body of the elite member would become the ritualized Maize God, thus representing the death of Maize God. Then, during certain ritual ceremonies during the year, Monument 14 would be where the elites and shamans would raise the world tree, so the act of raising the world tree is symbolic to the resurrection of the Maize God, or the elite member buried in the cist tomb. Another interesting piece of data to show that the cist tomb and Monument 14 correlate to each other is that they both sit at the same level, with the apex of the tomb even with Monument 14, 7 meters apart (Colman 2010:220).

There have been many Mesoamerican tree-raising rituals found in ethnographic resources of Mexico, and some still exist to this day. The tree raising ritual known as *palo volador*, or the flying pole dance, is found in the Veracruz and Puebla regions of Mexico (Figure 50). Five men climb the pole and then four men jump from the pole with ropes attached to their feet; they then rotate around the central pole. The *voladores* may be

reenacting an ancient Mesoamerican tradition that has to do with a fifty-two-year cycle of time. The central pole in the dance, then, function as the centralized world tree (Headdrick 2002).

The Aztec ceremony called the Feast of Waters also included a tree-raising ceremony, according to Dominican friar Diego Duran in the sixteenth century. In this tree-raising ceremony, the Aztecs would not climb the symbolic world tree; rather, the pole acted as a visual representation of the world tree (Headdrick 2002:89). Though the exact method of the reenactment of the raising of the World Tree performed by the Olmecs will likely never be known, I propose that the archaeological data suggests a similar ritual took place at Mound A-3 in Complex A.

#### *La Venta Monument 80*

Monument 80 (Figure 51) is the only monument that does not sit on the center-line of Complex A, though it is possible that it was moved from its original position. I believe it is linked to the other monuments in Complex A. This monument, which shows a feline with a single shark tooth and a double-headed, square snake in its jaws, was found on the west side of mound A-15 (Colman 2010). This is similar to the previously-mentioned theme of the jaguar with an the double-headed snake as the ecliptic found on the earpools from La Venta Tomb C and also La Venta Altar 4.

On La Venta Altar 4, where I hypothesized the Cosmic Monster with jaguar, crocodilian, and snake-like features held Itzamna in its mouth while the creator deity was holding the sky umbilicus. Therefore, I argue Monument 80 functions in the same way as the examples I provided: It is the crossroads where the Milky Way meets the ecliptic at the House of Five Sky, where the three stones were placed by the gods.

### *La Venta Monument 15*

Monument 15 (Figure 52) was found in two fragments on the column steps leading to the front of the ceremonial enclosed court; the monument may have been a footed throne (Wedel 1952:60). Matthew Sterling noted that the monument was a four-legged stone altar with a tiger mask panel located on the top of it (Colman 2010).

There is also a trefoil element on the underside of the larger piece of the monument (Drucker et al. 1959). This trefoil resembles the three-toed jaguar paws on the Jaguar Paw Temple at El Mirador (Figure 53). I propose that the trefoil in this case can also represent the three-clawed-toes of a jaguar, which relates to the first stone of creation.

One more connection to the first stone of creation is a shark tooth in the middle of the feline-like head on Monument 15. Quirigua Zoomorph B featured the jaguar face with a possible shark tooth that Heyworth and I proposed was the first stone of creation that the Paddler Gods planted. Another example of this theme that may be related is found on the Palenque Temple of the Sun tablet, where the jaguar shield has a single tooth that resembles a shark tooth. It sits upon an open-mouthed jaguar throne with double-headed snakes emerging from both sides of its mouth; two deities resembling the Paddler Gods or possibly another set of gods appear to be setting it in place (Figure 54).

Earlier, I proposed La Venta Monument 80 represents the crossroads of the Milky Way and the ecliptic, where the jaguar meets the double-headed snake. If that is the case, La Venta Monument 15 would represent the jaguar throne stone, which was laid at the House of Five Sky. Monument 15 would then be the jaguar throne stone, and it would be laid at the crossroads where the Milky Way meets the double-headed snake ecliptic. The



jaguar iconography presented on Monument 15, and the fact it is a throne or altar located on the centerline of Complex A under the Monument 14, which I argued is where the world tree would be ritually raised. This would put Monument 15's placement in the metaphorical sky and as the first stone of creation in layout of the centerline monument in Complex A; I will build upon this argument in the following paragraphs.

#### *La Venta Monument 12*

La Venta Monument 12 (Figure 55) shows a monkey figure with bird iconography on its belt. It was located just west of the centerline in the ceremonial court. La Venta Monument 12 may be an early representation of God C, the Maya howler monkey god, which represents the world tree, the North Celestial Pole, and royal lineage (Coggins 2015). Clemency Coggins (2015) argued that God C is also related to the Principal Bird Deity, since the Principal Bird Deity circles the pole as the Big Dipper. The bird supernatural was thought to encircle God C the same way the raptorial bird belt circles the waist of the monkey on La Venta Monument 12. The Principal Bird Deity is most likely an evolution or outgrowth of the northern bird, which was a harpy eagle. However, though the Principal Bird Deity has more macaw features than eagle features, it is still intertwined with the function of God C (Coggins 2015:116-120).

#### *La Venta Monument 13*

La Venta Monument 13 (Figure 56) was located at the middle southern edge of Mound A-2 in the ceremonial court and was associated with Ritual Event 13 during Phase IV times. Heizer (1971:52) proposed that Monument 13 originated in Phase III and was later repositioned during the Phase IV constructions of Complex A. La Venta Monument 13 shows a narrative scene of a bearded male walking while placing a flag or

banner on top of a stone (Colman 2011). There are three vertical glyph-like symbols located below the banner and a glyph-like foot behind the figure, which could correspond to footprints symbolizing travel in other examples of Mesoamerica iconography.

Earlier in this thesis, I proposed that the god that planted the second stone is likely Chaak from the iconographic program found at Quirigua and in the text in the Dresden Codex that states two Chaaks stop in their travels for an unknown reason. In the text at Quirigua, the Snake Throne stone is set at the Earth Place or the Place of Flags, which represents the earth (Van Stone 2011). I hypothesize that La Venta Monument 13 represents the second stone of creation, the snake throne stone. If this is the case, the figure is possibly the bearded rain god in a humanlike form traveling and planting the second stone of creation at the Place of Flags, which represents the earth where the Maize God will be resurrected. Therefore, the three glyph-like symbols would be representations of all of the three stones of creation.

#### *La Venta Monument 6*

La Venta Monument 6 (Figure 57) was found on the centerline in the Ceremonial Court in Mound A-2. The monument is known as the “sandstone sarcophagus.” It represents the Olmec Dragon or the crocodilian earth monster floating upon the primordial waters of creation (Reilly 1994). The iconography on the sarcophagus shows that the monster has forelimbs with three claws and bands with vegetation emerging from them. It may have functioned as a table-top throne and a place where elites were buried and ceremonially resurrected in creation reenactments (Reilly 2010:52).

I propose that La Venta Monument 6 functions as the third stone of creation, the water throne stone or shark throne stone. The third stone of creation has also been called

the crocodile throne stone (Schele and Matthews 1998), so the three different names—water, shark, and crocodile—can substitute for one another since they all have similar iconographic meanings. Additionally, Matthew Looper (2003) proposed that Zoomorph B functioned as the crocodilian cosmic monster and the third stone of creation, the water throne stone, which I propose corresponds with La Venta Monument 6.

#### *La Venta Monument 7*

La Venta Monument 7, also known as the basalt tomb, was made of thirty-seven full and six smaller basalt columns. Nine columns made up the east and west walls and the top of the tomb. Five columns made up the south wall and five angled columns made up the northern opening. Additionally, three smaller columns were placed under the slanted columns on the east and west walls of the tomb. (Drucker 1952). F. Kent Reilly (1994) proposed that La Venta Monument 7 could function as the house of First Father, the Maize God, and be a portal between the worlds. Reilly also proposed that the nine columns could represent the nine levels of the underworld. Finally, he proposed that the house of First Father could function in the above world and the underworld, which corresponds with the movement of the Milky Way (F. Kent Reilly personal communication 2019).

#### **Comparisons between La Venta Stela 3 and the layout of monuments in Complex A**

Reilly suggested the Dallas Plaque coincides with the north-south layout of Complex A at La Venta when facing north and that the layout of monuments in tableau at La Venta retell the creation narratives of the Olmec people. I will apply Reilly's arguments to La Venta Stela 3 and the layout of the monuments along the centerline of Complex A.

La Venta Stela 3 was found in situ with the narrative scene facing north, which means an Olmec reader would have read the scene while facing south. I hypothesize that Complex A can be read both north and south; the Dallas Plaque would be read facing north, while La Venta Stela 3 would read while facing south, the opposite of the Dallas Plaque.

When comparing the iconography of La Venta Stela 3 to the monuments and their placement on the centerline of Complex A, there is a correlation when reading the monuments facing south (Figure 58). The world tree functioning as the Milky Way found on La Venta Stela 3 would correlate to the cylindrical Monument 14, which I proposed was where the Olmecs reenacted the raising of the world tree. I proposed that under the world tree on La Venta Stela 3, there is a side profile of the head of the cosmic monster with an umbilicus and three stones located in its mouth. This would correspond with the place where the first stone of creation, the jaguar throne stone, was laid by the Paddler Gods at the House of Five Sky.

Monument 80, though not located on the site's centerline, would function in the same way as the crossroads of where the Milky Way meets the ecliptic, where the first stone of creation was laid. Monument 15 would then be the jaguar throne stone, with a shark tooth and jaguar features, representing the sky realm. Under the Cosmic Monster's side profile head on La Venta Stela 3 is the side profile head of the emerging baby Maize God, which represents the earth and the second stone of creation, the snake throne stone. This would correspond with La Venta Monument 13, which I propose represents the second stone of creation, the snake throne stone. The figure on the monument is the

bearded rain god in a humanlike form traveling and planting the stone at the Place of Flags, which represents the earth where the Maize God will be resurrected from.

On La Venta Stela 3, directly under the head of the baby Maize God, the Hero Twins appear in their ballgame regalia, with the severed head of the Maize God around Xbalanque's neck, which I propose represents the underworld. La Venta Monument 13 was found directly in front of mound A-2 in the ceremonial court, which I believe connects the monument to the contents of the mound. I propose that Monument 6 functions as the third stone of creation, the crocodile throne stone or water throne stone, which would represent the Olmec Dragon sitting upon the waters of the underworld.

Reilly (1994) proposed that La Venta Monument 7 could function as the house of first father in the above world and the underworld, which corresponds with the movement of the Milky Way. Since La Venta monuments 6 and 7 both are found in mound A-2 and Monument 13 sits right in front of the mound, the mound itself could represent the place where the underworld meets the earth. In this scenario, Monument 7 would represent the underworld from which the Maize God rises up through the back of the crocodilian, Monument 6. Finally, the Maize God is reborn and raises the world tree at the Place of Flags, Monument 13. This also corresponds with the iconographic presentation found on La Venta Stela 3, where all three levels of the cosmos are stacked on top of each other and connected by the cosmic umbilicus.

Additionally, there are two bird-like figures found on La Venta Stela 3. One is a harpy eagle, which I propose is Itzamna, located on the top portion of the stela. On the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3, there is a bird-like monster, which I propose is the Principal Bird Deity or Seven Macaw. Clemency Coggins (2015) suggested La Venta

Monument 12 was related to the monkey god, God C, from the iconography on the belt it wears, which represents the North Central Pole that the Principal Bird Deity circles as the Big Dipper. The iconography on La Venta Stela 3 corresponds with the ideology of southern Mesoamerica, where the harpy eagle of the north is transformed into the Principal Bird Deity, which has more eaglelike features, while the Principal Bird Deity of the south has more macaw features (Coggins 2015:116-120).

### **The Maya Creation Story and August 13th**

The Maya at Palenque observed an important astrological occurrence on the night of August 13, 690 AD, which was also possibly observed during the time of the Olmec occupation of La Venta(Figure 59) (Freidel et al. 1993). On this night, the Milky Way was in a vertical position, known as the Wakan Chan, and as the night continued, the Milky Way kept turning. The Milky Way then started to change into the crocodile tree with Seven Macaw atop it, just as he did on the eve of the creation of this world.

As the cosmos kept rotating, the Milky Way crossed the ecliptic and formed the crossroads, and the Milky Way then turned into the Cosmic Monster with its mouth open to the east. Then, the Milky Way lay horizontal touching the horizon and the Cosmic Monster changed into the cosmic canoe. Next, the Paddler Gods readied the cosmic canoe to take the Maize God to his place of resurrection. Finally, the Cosmic Monster/canoe started to sink as the Milky Way turned and brought the three hearth stones of Orion to zenith before the sunrise.

The importance of the Paddler Gods in this creation story is that they rode the Milky Way to the place of creation and helped to set the first stone of creation. Also, the Paddler Gods brought the Maize God to the place of the three stones of creation and to

the turtle carapace, where he would be resurrected to start the next creation (Freidel et al. 1993).

There are many correlations between the events which replayed in the sky over Palenque on August 13 690 AD and the iconographic presentation found on La Venta Stela 3. The Cosmic Monster found on Stela 3 has a maize plant growing from its head; I propose this represents the same crocodile tree(Cosmic Monster) as Stela 25 from Izapa. Also, the Cosmic Monster's mouth on La Venta Stela 3 is the cosmic canoe, which is carrying the three stones of creation. Seven Macaw appears on Xbalanque's headdress, likely after the bird deity has been knocked down from the world tree. The Paddler Gods are also found on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 pointing to where they laid the first stone of creation in the Cosmic Monster's mouth. I propose that the iconographic presentation on La Venta Stela 3 also shows the event of the Cosmic Monster sinking, since the baby Maize God is being reborn under the place where the three stones were set in the sky.

The whole left side of La Venta Stela 3 may correlate with the cosmic canoe sinking. As the canoe sinks, it establishes the three levels of the cosmos and brings the Maize God to his place of resurrection. The rotation of the Milky Way in the night sky would correlate to raising the world tree and the vertical three-tiered cosmos being laid in place as the Cosmic Monster as the canoe dives downward towards the underworld.

## **Chapter VI Implications**

The Maya creation event replicated at Palenque on the night of August 13, 690 AD and the iconographic presentation on La Venta Stela 3 express similar organizational strategies as the placement of monuments along the centerline of La Venta Complex A.

If, as I proposed, one was meant to read La Venta Stela 3 facing south, this aligns with the monuments on the centerline of Complex A. The center line, then, would be the Milky Way and possibly the cosmic umbilicus merged together with the Milky Way, though invisible, in its upright position, diving downwards toward the underworld or back in its true upright position.

If this is correct, it would align with the idea that Monument 14 represents the raising of the world tree, Monument 15 represents the jaguar throne stone of creation (the Sky), Monument 13 represents the snake throne stone of creation (the Earth), and Monument 6, the sandstone sarcophagus, represents the water throne stone (the Underworld), which mirrors the iconography found on the left portion of La Venta Stela 3. It is important to note that the water throne stone of creation has also been called the crocodile throne stone (Schele and Matthews 1998), so the three different names, water, shark, and crocodile, can be substituted for one another.



## VII. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I hypothesized that the Mesoamerican Hero Twin myth and other Mesoamerican creation myths were important aspects of the early Olmec Stela Cult that quite possibly originated at La Venta. I provided data through analyses of multiple artworks, especially La Venta Stela 3, using the San Marcos School of iconographic interpretation that La Venta Stela 3 commemorates the creation of the world through its iconographic program. Through these analyses, I laid out the structure of the monuments to provide data that the Olmecs influenced later Maya religious systems. Although the gods may vary regionally, the Olmec gods on La Venta Stela 3 were precursors or archetypes of the later pantheon of gods found throughout Mesoamerica including the ones found in the Popol Vuh. There are similar themes that are recorded in earlier artwork, such as the Earth Goddess Motif found on the White Shaman Panel, which Lower Pecos artwork dates to around 4000 BC (Boyd and Cox 2016). The concept of the three stones of creation and the ecliptic, which is in the form of a cord in the mouth of a cosmic or earth supernatural in an upright or diving position, are also found on the White Shaman Panel (Boyd and Cox 2016:134-138). These themes predate the themes found during the time of the Olmec people and I believe that it is possible that they may represent variations of the same supernatural and possibly carry the same ideological meanings in the later Olmec culture.

On the other hand, the different regions of the Americas vary from one another, and have produced unique, innovative takes on these themes. From the data gathered in this thesis, La Venta Stela 3 may show the earliest version of the Hero Twin myths from the Popol Vuh that is recorded on a monumental stela in Mesoamerica to date. Though a

portion of the core ideals relate to other American creation stories, it was in Olman that the regionally-specific versions that relate to several stories found in the Maya Popol Vuh were possibly first recorded in Olmec monumental art. Additionally and just as important, La Venta Stela 3 is possibly the oldest monumental stela in Mesoamerica that shows multiple stories from the Popol Vuh, and it also tells the story of the three stones of creation along with all the gods and supernaturals that played a role in those events.

In Chapter 4, I applied Panofsky's first and second steps of iconographic analysis to La Venta Stela 3 to gain data for my hypotheses in the thesis. I used the artwork of Olmec, Izapa, the Pre-Classic Maya, and the Classic Maya periods as a guide for my own interpretations. Previous scholars' analyses gave a deeper perspective into the Maya Hero Twin stories and aided in my own iconographic interpretation of La Venta Stela 3. I proposed the iconographic presentation of La Venta Stela 3 likely depicts the forward-facing Hero Twins in their ballgame regalia with one twin carrying the Maize God's severed head. The theme of the forward-facing twins and the severed head of the Maize God head is found in the monumental art of several other Pre-Classic discussed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, in Chapter 4, I argued that the iconography of the bottom portion of Stela 3 tells early versions of stories found in the Popol Vuh when compared to other Mesoamerican artworks. The first of these stories is the defeat of Seven Macaw (as the bird demon on Stela 3 is presented dead) and the rebirth of the Maize God, here as an infant.

The dead bird demon on Stela 3 parallels iconography of the Principal Bird Deity at San Bartolo. Directly across from the dead bird demon on La Venta Stela 3, the head of the baby Maize God emerges with the intercardinal directions around the Maize God's

head. These two facing deities could signify the end of one period and the beginning of the next period of cyclical time. The right side of La Venta Stela 3 deals with death, from the severed head of the Maize God and the deceased bird deity to the use of Xbalanque as a representation of the night.

The left side of La Venta Stela 3, then, represents life and rebirth. This is especially apparent with the emergence of the head of the baby Maize God, which is connected to the world tree by maize and the cosmic umbilicus, along with Hunahpu representing the day. Above the Hero twins on La Venta Stela 3 are the Paddler Gods, which are twinned with each of their Hero Twins counterparts.

The other story found on the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3 shows the Hero Twins retrieving of the Maize God's head from the underworld, after the Hero Twin's ballgame victory over the lords Xibalba. The Hero Twins are facing each other on the bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3 in their ballgame regalia (yokes and hachas), possibly holding their ballgame sticks. The severed head of the Maize God sit on the necklace of Xblanque as they ready for their journey out of Xibalaba to resurrect their father, the Maize God, and they also ready themselves to ascend as the sun and the moon (or Venus).

In Chapter 5, I applied Panofsky's first and second steps of iconographic analysis to La Venta Stela 3 to gain data for my hypotheses in the thesis. In this chapter, I also found that the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 has Mesoamerican creation themes. The gods in order of distance on the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 correspond with the gods found in the Maya glyphs found on Quirigua Stela C east and the order of the iconography found on Zoomorph B. The Paddler Gods on the top portion of Stela 3 are

the farthest away since they planted the first stone, the jaguar throne stone. This stone touches the snake umbilicus in the mouth of the Cosmic Monster. The Paddler Gods on La Venta Stela 3 point to the mouth of the Cosmic Monster, which may be a reference to its dual function as the cosmic canoe. Second, Chaak appears on the right, below the Paddler Gods, after planting the second stone, the snake throne stone, with his axe reared back ready to crack open the turtle shell at the Earth Place (or having already done so). Third, there is Itzamna in the middle of the top portion of La Venta Stela 3 planting the third and last stone of creation, the water or shark throne stone, in the mouth of the Cosmic Monster.

I suggested that this parallels to iconography found on La Venta Altar 4, where we find the ruler with a harpy eagle headdress impersonating Itzamna while holding the umbilicus, and Itzamna is in the mouth (or portal) of the cosmic monster that has jaguar, snake, and symbolic crocodilian features, which all these animals I hypothesized represent the three different stones of creation. The symbolic crocodilian features found on Altar 4 that represent the Olmec Dragon are gum brackets, double-merlons, and stylized eyebrows (Reilly 1995). Additionally, as F. Kent Reilly (1995) proposed, the ruler on La Venta Altar 4 is likely performing a shamanistic ritual, therefore he is in shamanistic flight. Adding to Reilly's (1995) argument, I propose the ruler would be taking on the role of Itzamna, the first shaman-bird god, in a ritual reenactment of Itzamna's part in creation, where he ties the three creation stones together and then travels to his new perch on top of the world tree of the current creation cycle. La Venta Altar 4 also parallels almost exactly the iconography found on Quirigua Zoomorph B, which I will touch on in the following paragraph.

The order of the gods on La Venta Stela 3 matches the order found on Quirigua Zoomorph B. First, there is the previously mentioned jaguar with a possible single shark tooth. This represents the jaguar throne stone, and likely shows the Paddler Gods and the Maize God merged together. Second, there is a forward-facing snake face, with water features, representing the rain god Chaak and the second stone of creation. Finally, there is also the ruler wearing a harpy eagle headdress who impersonates Itzamna in the mouth of cosmic crocodile, which the crocodile has human teeth. This represents Itzamna planting the third stone of creation and getting ready to bundle all of the stones together. Additionally, on La Venta Altar 4 and Quirigua Zoomorph B, the jaguar with snake fangs and is located inside the open mouth of the crocodilian supernatural. The order of the creation stones—1. jaguar, 2. snake, 3. water-shark-crocodilian—and the gods who laid them are reflected on La Venta Stela 3, La Venta Altar 4, and Quirigua Zoomorph B.

Another line of data of the Paddler Gods on monumental artwork came from a conversation with Zach Lindsey. Lindsey noted the iconography on Ixlu Stela 2 (Figure 60) (personal communication with Zach Lindsey 2020), where the Paddler Gods appear in the sky. David Stuart (2016) found that the Paddler Gods were important in period-ending ceremonies. Examples of these gods in the sky appear on late Maya stelae in Tikal and environs (Stuart 2016). In these cases, the Paddler Gods appear in the clouds with other gods or ancestors above kings performing blood or incense rituals.

The figures I hypothesize are the Paddler Gods on La Venta Stela 3 also sit on the top portion of the stela with Chaak below the Jaguar Paddler. On Ixlu Stela 2, under the Paddler God on the right side, there is a deity wearing a snake-like headdress with a snake fang, a curled back headdress, and a hinged bottom jaw. This may be Chaak in the

same position as he appears on La Venta Stela 3, though it could be another Maya deity with snakelike features.

On the left side of Ixlu Stela 2, under the other Paddler Gods, there is a god with a large, feathered headdress on, but no other noticeable identifying factors. I speculate that this could be related to Itzamna, like on La Venta Stela 3, Quirigua Zoomorph B and La Venta Altar 4, but more research would be needed to make such an argument. It should be noted that the Paddler gods appear together in multiple monuments across Mesoamerica, and the Paddler deities have to do with period ending and beginning events.

There are many mysteries associated with the identity of the Paddler Gods (Stuart 2016). However, there are a lot of similarities between the Paddler Gods and the Hero Twins. It is quite possible that they are aspects of the same gods. Though a deeper analysis of this point is out of the scope of this thesis, I do want to mention some similarities. The story of the Hero Twins in the Popol Vuh ends with the Hero Twins retrieving the Maize God's head; then, the twins rise up as the sun and the moon (or Venus), but no additional details are given. Where is the rest of the story and why would the Hero Twins give the task to the Paddler Gods to bring back their father from the underworld to be resurrected instead of finishing the task themselves? The Paddler Gods are found on opposite sides of the canoe, with Old Jaguar Paddler on the front, and Old Stingray Paddler on the back. They represent the oppositions of night (Jaguar Paddler) and day (Stingray Paddler) (Foster 2005:170). The Hero Twins also mirror the same concept, Hunahpu was the older twin associated with the sun or day. Xbalanque has jaguar traits and is attributed to the moon or night (Bassie and Hopkins 2018:78). The

Paddler Gods could be the aged Hero Twins as they travel on their canoe from the underworld with the head of the Maize God; if this is the case, it is possible that their solar and lunar youthfulness is revived as the Maize God is resurrected.

In Chapter 6, I focused on the archaeological context of La Venta Stela 3. I discussed and contextualized previous scholars' analyses of the layout and function of La Venta Complex A, and previous analyses of Maya cosmological events. The artwork of the Olmec, Izapa, the Pre-Classic Maya, and the Classic Maya periods were used as a guide for my own interpretations. Previous analyses helped me to give a deeper perspective into Mesoamerican creation stories, and they aided in my own iconographic interpretation of Stela 3. The Maya three stones of creation story and the iconographic presentation on La Venta Stela 3 correlate to the movement of the Milky Way. This concept also influences the placement of monuments on the centerline of Complex A, which reflects the result of the upright position or sinking position of the Cosmic Monster as the Milky Way that I discussed in Chapter 6.

I proposed that La Venta Stela 3 was to be read while facing south on La Venta Complex A, which aligns with the monuments on centerline of Complex A. The center line, then, would be the Milky Way and possibly the umbilicus merged together with the Milky Way, though invisible, in its upright position, diving downwards toward the underworld or its possibly back in its true upright position. The order of monuments in Complex A follows the order that the three stones of creation were laid, and it also reflects the same iconographic pattern found on La Venta Stela 3. The order of monuments in Complex A goes as follows: First, Monument 14 represents the raising of the world tree, Monument 15 represents the jaguar throne stone of creation (the Sky),

Monument 13 represents the snake throne stone of creation laid at the Place of Flags (the Earth), and Monument 6, the sandstone sarcophagus, which would represent the water throne stone (the Underworld). One other monument that I discussed was La Venta Monument 12, which shows a monkey god figure with bird iconography on its belt, and it was located just west of the centerline in the ceremonial court.

Seven Macaw gets knocked off his perch by the Hero Twins to ready the world for the next creation. While, as Coggins (2015) stated, the harpy eagle of the north is transformed into the macaw featured Principal Bird Deity of the south, it is possible the relationship between the Principal Bird Deity and Itzamna is more complicated. As Seven Macaw is knocked off of his perch, Itzamna rises to the top of the world tree to tie the three stones of creation together and kickstart a new creation. The concept can be found in the iconography of La Venta Stela 3, where the bird demon is possibly found deceased on the right side of La Venta Stela 3. Itzamna, with the harpy eagle on his back, is planting the third stone of creation in the mouth of the Cosmic Monster or cosmic canoe. On La Venta Stela 3, Itzamna would be in the north position representing the next creation cycle which involves the rebirth of the Maize God, and the dead bird deity would be in the south position representing the old creation cycle coming to an end. I hypothesize that the Olmec Bird Monster God would likely be related to Itzamna and Seven Macaw, and their roles in creation.

Earlier in this thesis, I used the first and second stages of Erwin Panofsky's threefold iconographic analysis to describe La Venta Stela 3. To finish this thesis off, I will attempt to use the third step of Panofsky's method. This step is often the most difficult, which it implies identifying intrinsic meaning or content within the work of art.

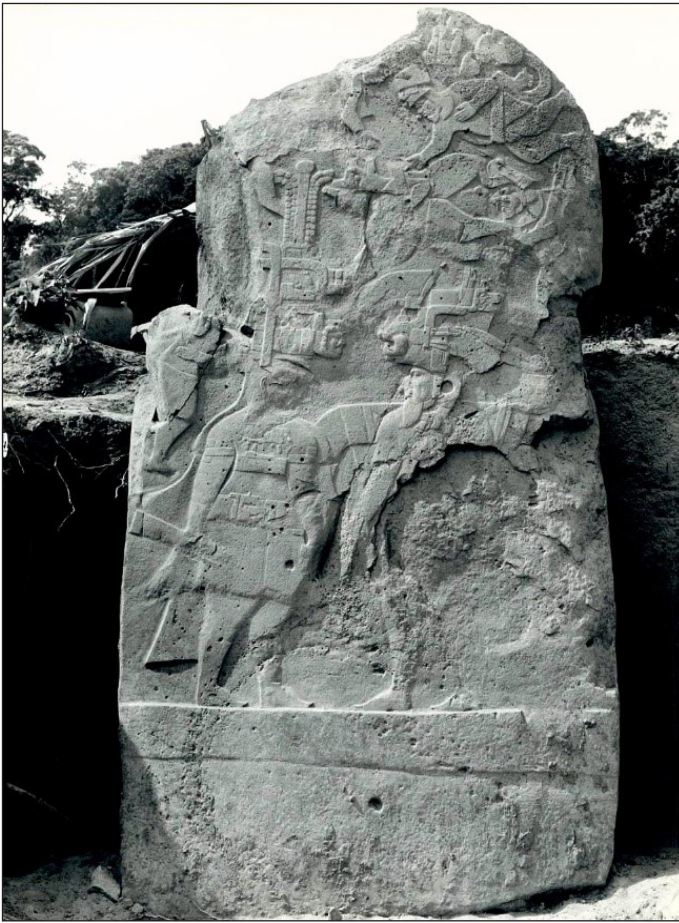


This final step is known as iconology. Iconology is an attempt to discover the meaning and principles behind the art of past cultures. A vast knowledge of the culture is needed in this final step; this step is problematic since the observer is offering his or her own subjective iconographic interpretation of a past culture. Cultural context is of extreme importance at this level.

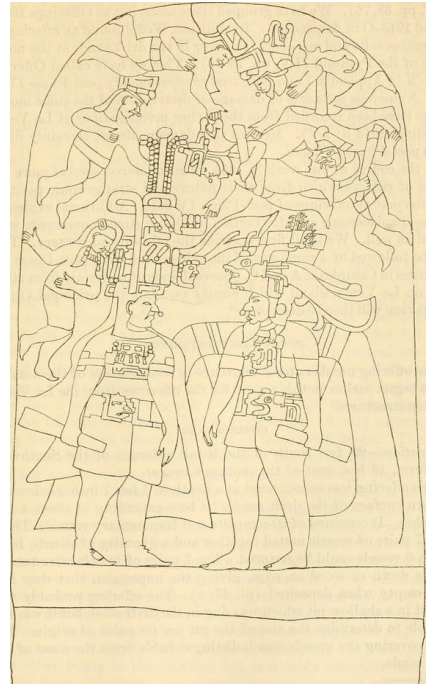
It is possible that the ruling elite derived their power from the supernatural creators shown on the stela by performing rituals involving the multiple monuments and burials found in Complex A at La Venta, though this argument will be saved for future research. I propose that La Venta Stela 3 deals with the dualities of death and rebirth, and the beginning of a linear timeline that is also cyclical, a contradiction in itself. La Venta Stela 3 lays the foundational concepts that connects the three-tiered realms of reality through a cord that connects us all, from our watery creation, to our first breath and last, when we are sent back into a cycle ordered by the gods, unlike the prior, more chaotic world's cycle. For now, we are present in a moment of time that will soon pass, yet we are still connected with that umbilicus, a reflection in the eyes of the Olmec people.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### FIGURES



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. La Venta Stela 3. (a.) Original Photo of La Venta Stela 3(Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute), (b.) Original Drawing of La Venta Stela 3 (Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 2. Geographical Map of the Olmec Heartland. (From Wikipedia, accessed at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olmec\\_heartland#/media/File:Olmec\\_Heartland\\_Overview\\_4.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olmec_heartland#/media/File:Olmec_Heartland_Overview_4.svg)).

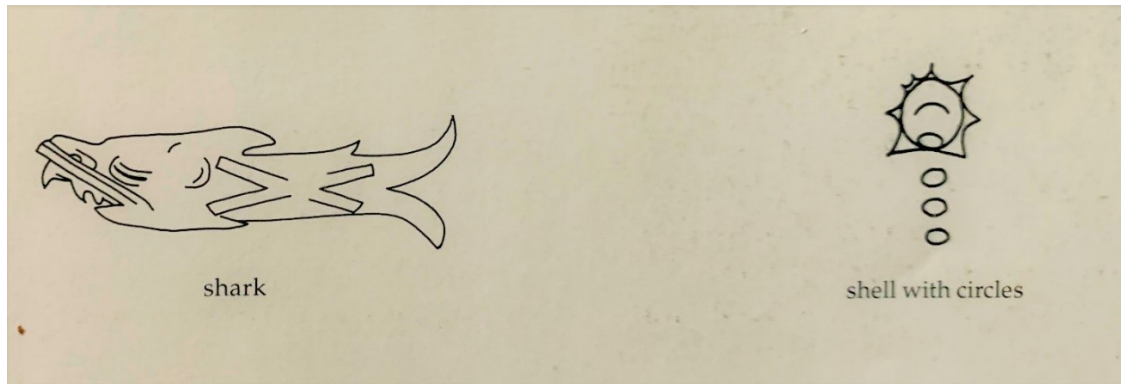


Figure 3. Underworld Realm Olmec Iconography (Reilly 1995:121, Drawings by F. Kent Reilly).

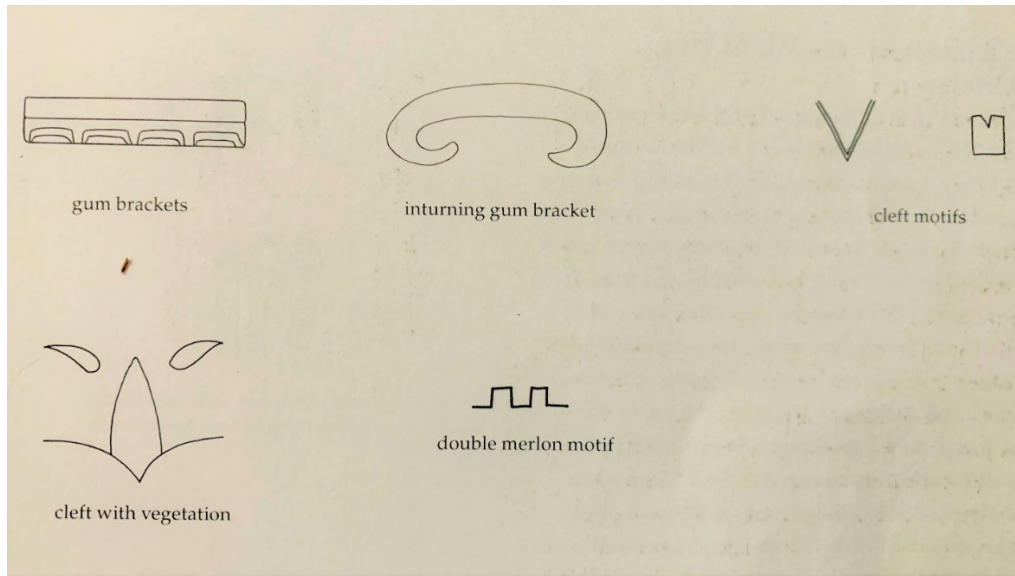


Figure 4. Earth Realm Olmec Iconography (Reilly 1995:121, Drawings by F. Kent Reilly).

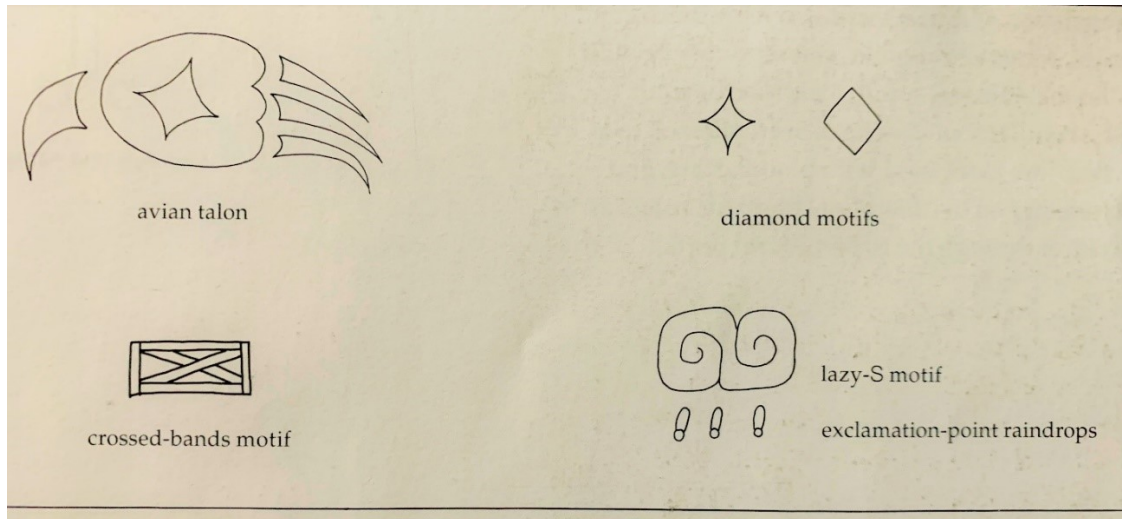


Figure 5. Sky Realm Olmec Iconography (Reilly 1995:121, Drawings by F. Kent Reilly).



Figure 6. Izapa Stela 25. Hero Twins Shooting the Demon Bird and the Cosmic Monster.(Drawing by Ajax Moreno, Courtesy of the New World Archaeological Foundation (NAAF)).



Figure 7. Izapa Stela 2. Hero Twins and the Descending Bird Deity (Drawing by Ajax Moreno, Courtesy of NWAF).





Figure 8. San Bartolo Western Wall Mural. Principal Bird Deity Blood Sacrifice Theme (Drawing by Heather Hurst).



Figure 9. El Mirador Frieze (Photo by Lola Reid Allin).

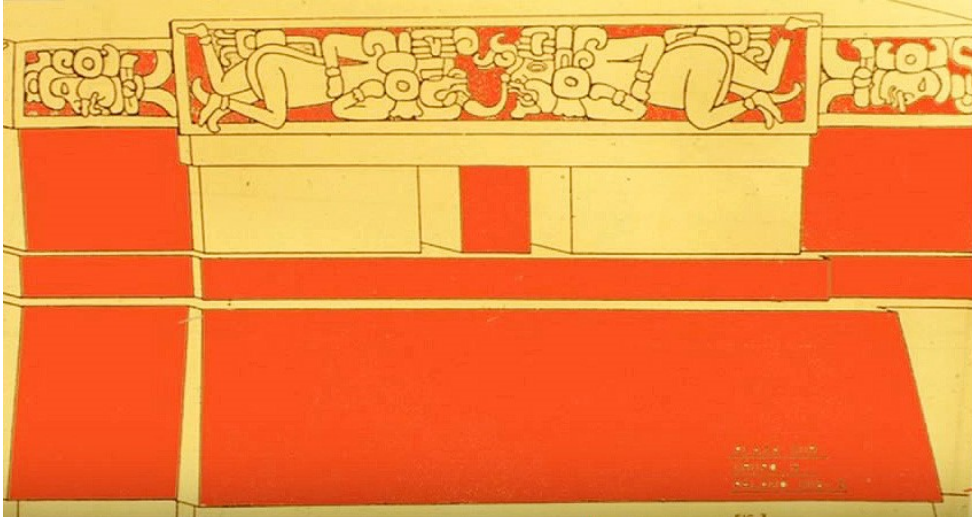


Figure 10. Uaxactun; Grupo H, Str. Sub-2. Floating Deities (Drawing by P. Morales).



Figure 11. El Mirador Structure 34. Jaguar Paw Temple (Photo by Greg Willis).



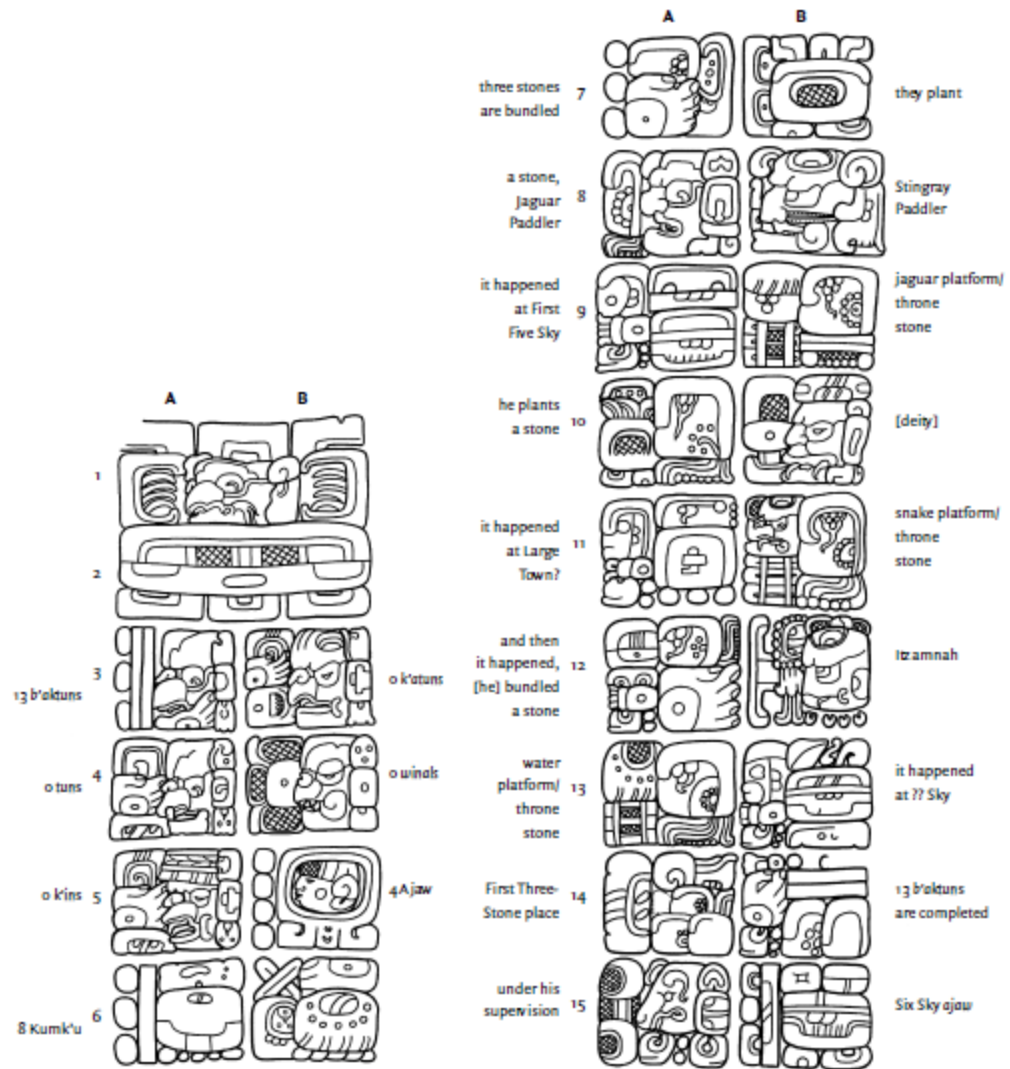


Figure 12. Quirigua Stela C East Glyphs (Looper 2003: 159; fig. 5.1).

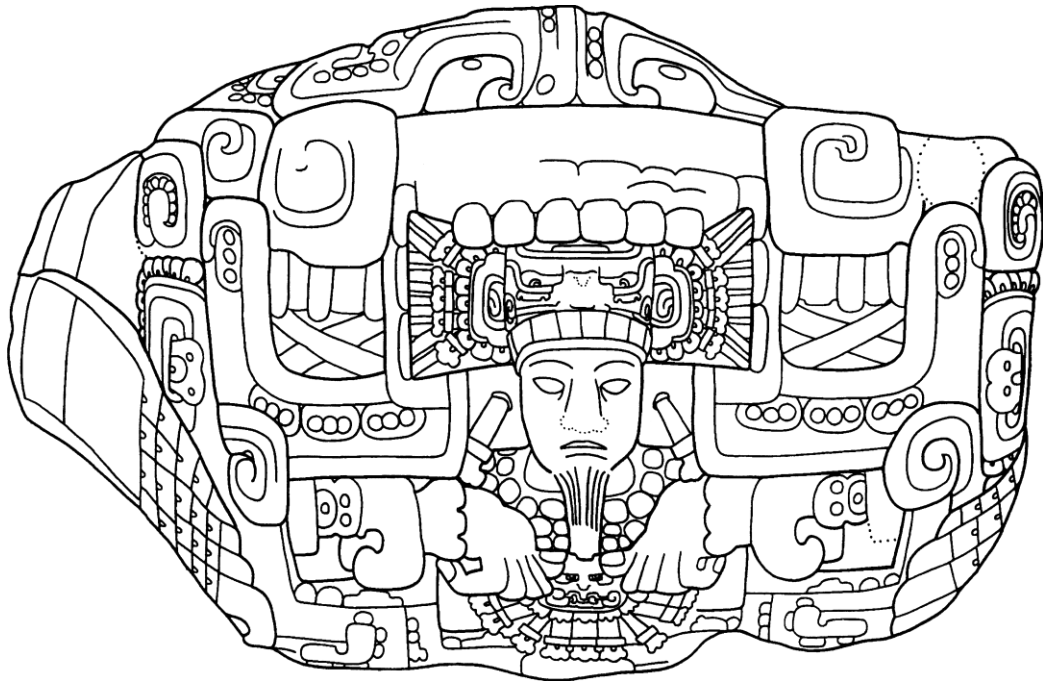
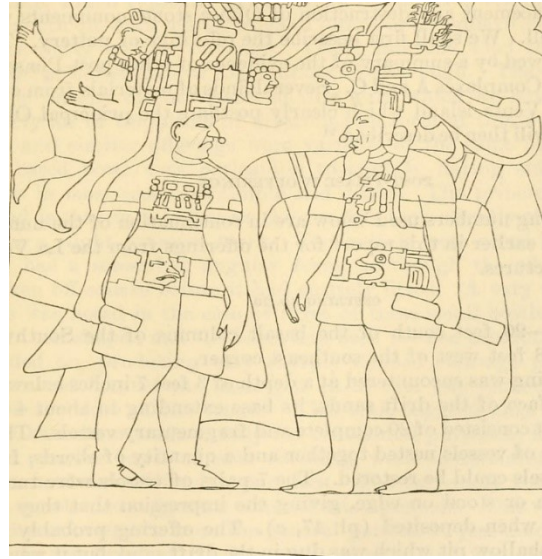


Figure 13. Quirigua Zoomorph B South Face (Looper 2003: 173; fig. 5.25).



(a)



(b)

Figure 14. Bottom Portion of La Venta Stela 3. (a) Photo of bottom portion of La Venta Stela 3(Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute); (b.) Drawing of the Bottom Portion of Stela 3(Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 15. Olmec Stone Ballgame Yoke. Gulf Coast, 1000-500 BC (Photo courtesy of the Art Museum, Princeton University).





Figure 16. Stone Hacha from Veracruz. Classic Gulf Coast, 550-750 AD. (Photo courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art).

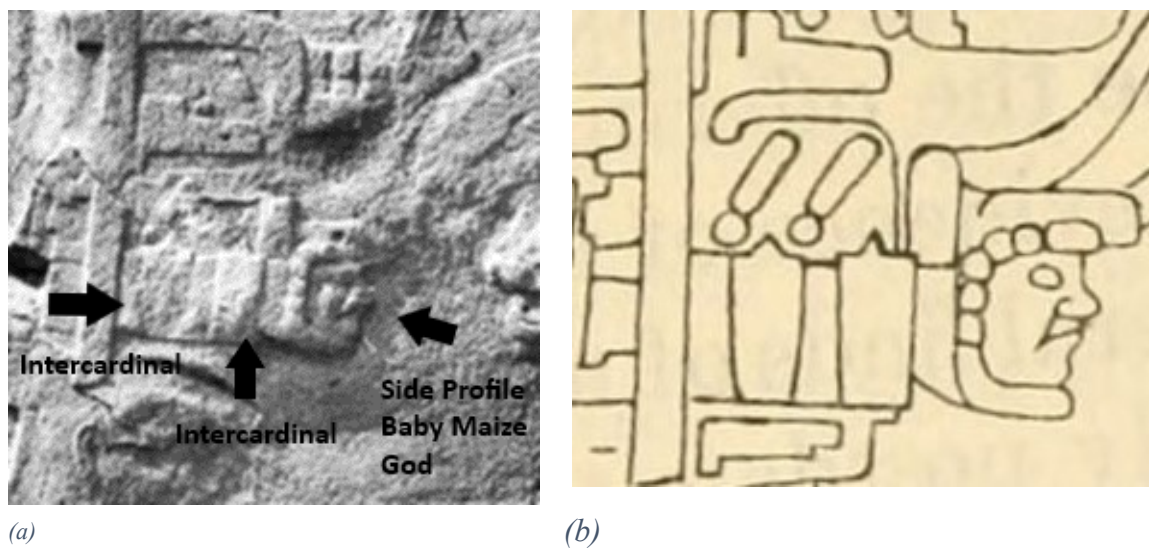


Figure 17. La Venta Stela 3 Baby Maize God Motif. (a) Photo of baby Maize God on La Venta Stela 3(Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute, Photo edit by Author); (b) Drawing of baby Maize God on La Venta Stela 3(Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 18. Olmec Rio Pesquero Celt (Reilly 1995: 38; fig. 83).



Figure 19. La Venta Stela 3 Bird Supernatural Headdress (Photo from the Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute; Photo edit by Author).



Figure 20. San Lorenzo Monument 34. Ballplayer with Mirror Pendant (Photo by Michael Coe).



Figure 21. La Venta Tomb C Incised Core. Bird Diety with Kan Cross Eye (NWAF drawing of Drucker et al. 1959: fig. 48).



Figure 22. La Venta Tomb C Incised Earspools (Benson and de la Fuente 1996: 244).

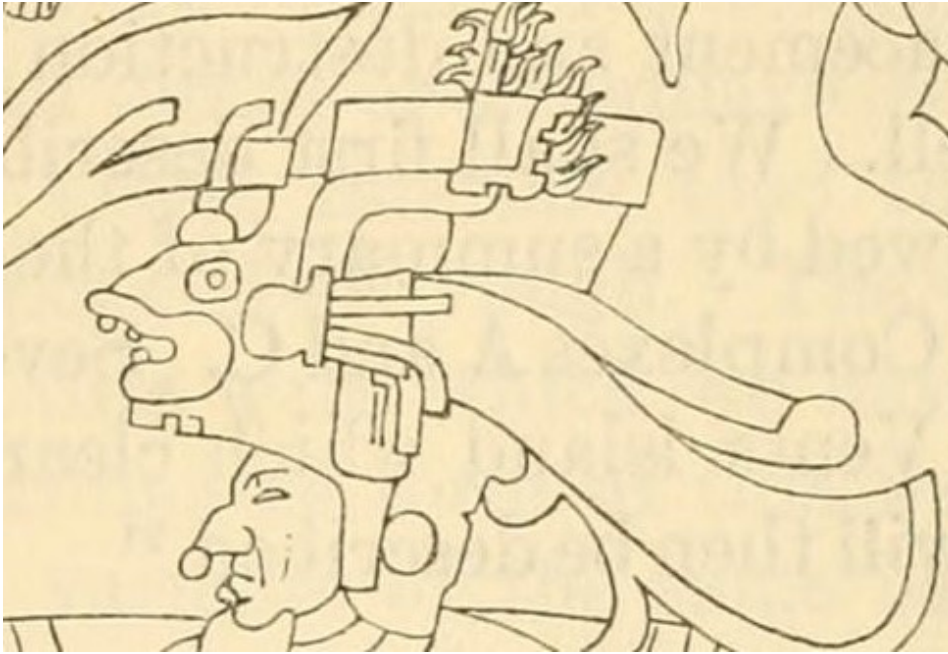


Figure 23. La Venta Stela 3 Drawing of Bird Supernatural Headdress (Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).





Figure 24. Top Portion Photo of La Venta Stela 3 (Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 25. Quirigua Zoomorph B Crocodilian Cosmic Monster (Photo and edit by Robin Heyworth).



Figure 26. Quirigua Zoomorph B South Jaguar Face (Photo and edit by Robin Heyworth).



Figure 27. Quirigua Zoomorph B South Rattle Snake Face (Photo and edit by Robin Heyworth).





Figure 28. *Crotalus simus*; Middle American Rattlesnake (Photo by Eric Centenero-Alcalá, Photo edit by Author).

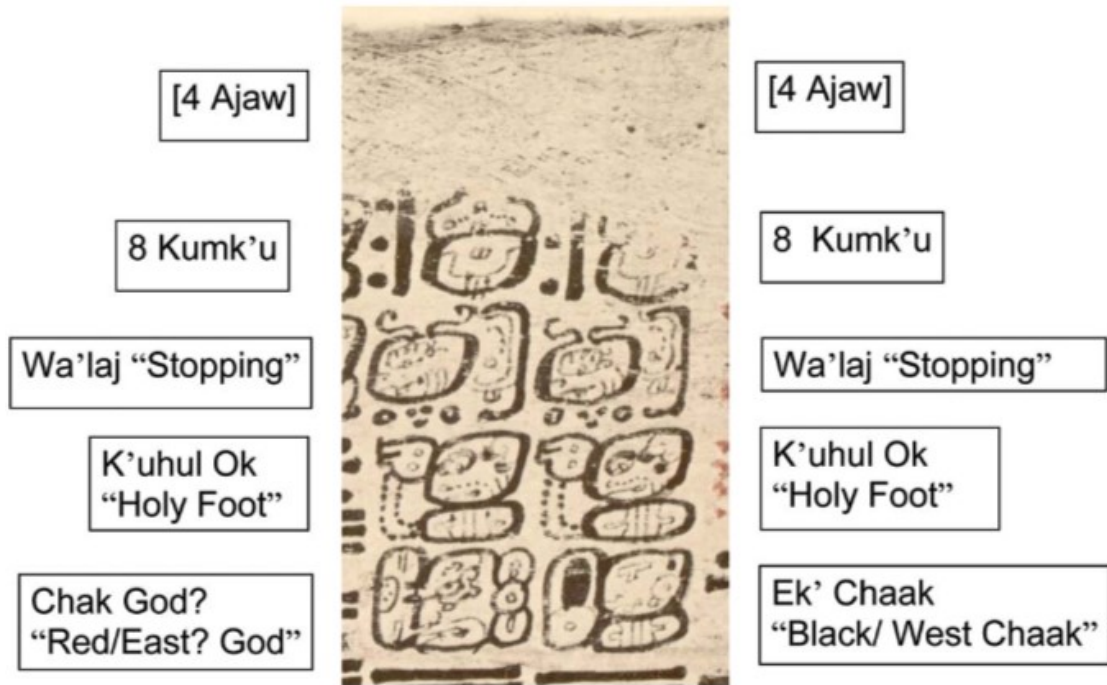


Figure 29. Dresden Codex Page 70 Columns C and D (Dresden 1998:70; Photo and text by Mark Van Stone).



Figure 30. Chaac Mask from Mayapan (Photo by Lauree Feldman).



Figure 31. *Harpia harpyja*; Harpy Eagle (Photo by the San Diego Zoo).





Figure 32. La Venta Atlar Throne 4 (Reilly 1995: 40; fig. 30).

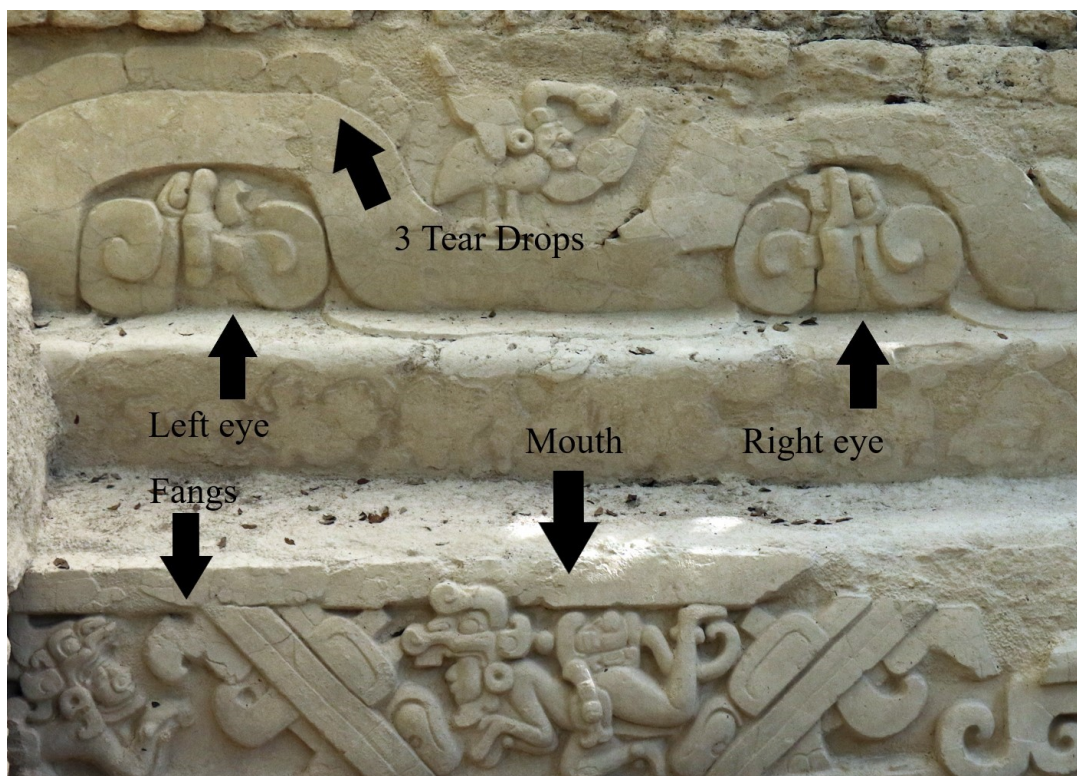


Figure 33. El Mirador Frieze's Snake Face with Chaac Features (Photo by Lola Reid Allin; edit by Author).

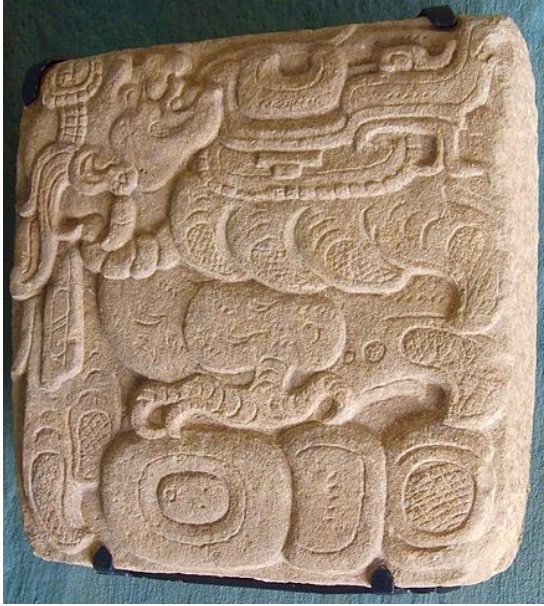


Figure 34. Maya Classic Period Itzamna Glyph (From Wikipedia, accessed at: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/56/Tonin%C3%A1\\_2.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/56/Tonin%C3%A1_2.jpg)).

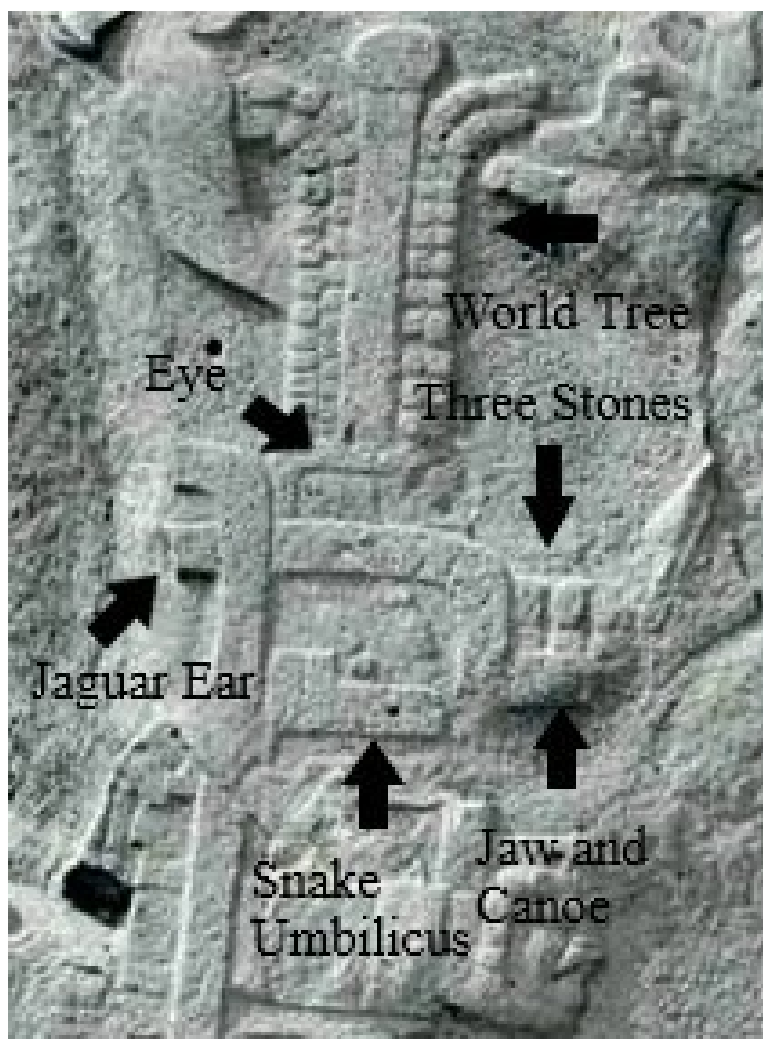


Figure 35. Labeled Top Left Portion of La Venta Stela 3 (Photo from the Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute, Photo edit by Author).

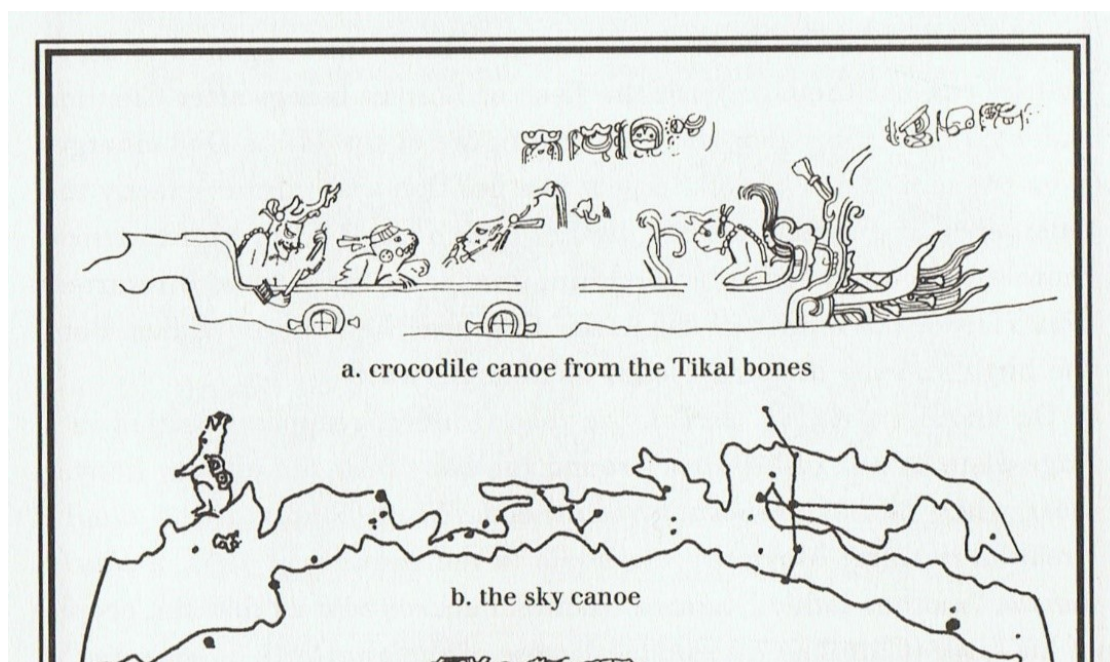


Figure 36. Crocodile Canoe from the Tikal Bones (Freidel et al. 1993: 91; fig. 2:26).



Figure 37: Florentine Codex, Book 2. Drawing of Aztec Canoeists.



Figure 38. Olmec Dragon with Human Teeth (Photo by F. Kent Reilly).





Figure 39. Zoomorph P South Face (Photo by Robin Heyworth).



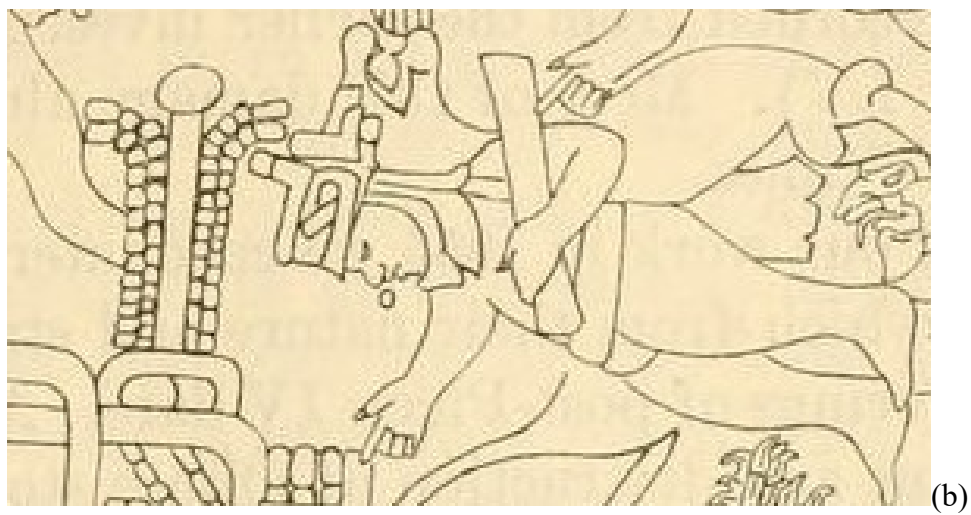


Figure 40. Middle Figure on Top Portion of La Venta Stela 3. (a.) Photo of Middle Figure with a Bird on its Back Pointing (Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute, Photo edit by Author); (b.) Drawing of Middle Figure with a Bird on its Back Pointing (Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 41. Far-right figure on Top Portion of La Venta Stela 3 (Photo from the Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 42. Izapa Stela 1 (Drawing by John Montgomery).



Figure 43. Top Right Figure on La Venta Stela 3. Jaguar Supernatural on its Back (Photo from the Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).

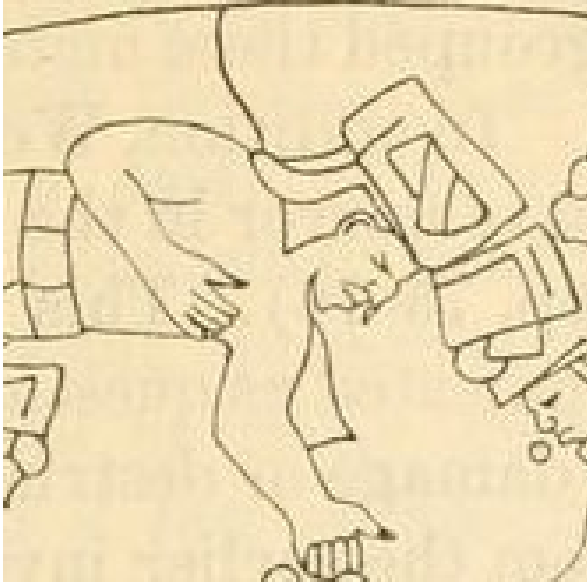


Figure 44. Top Left Figure on La Venta Stela 3 (Drawing from the Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).

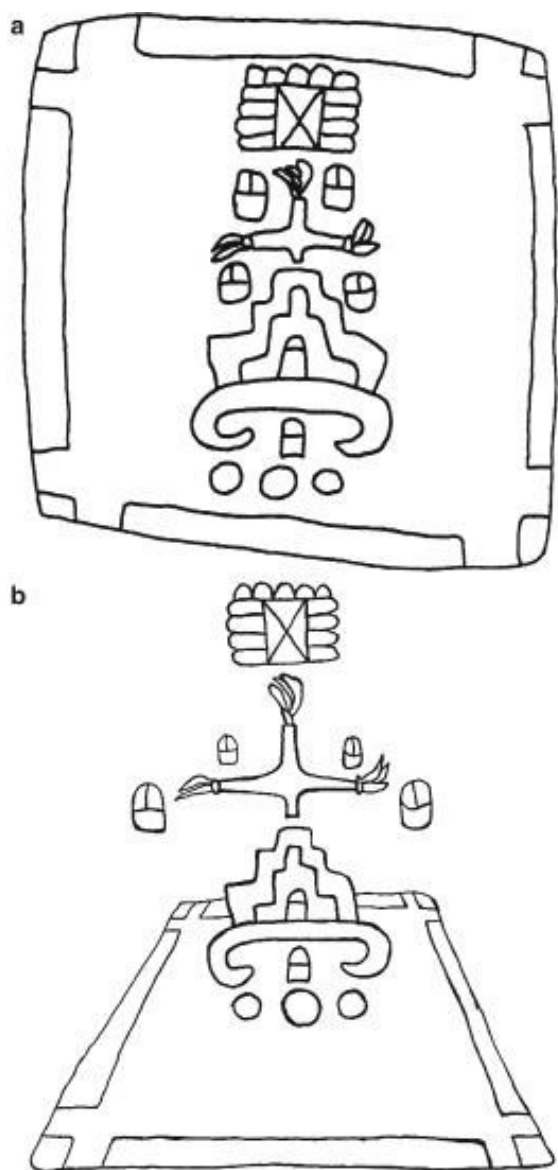


Figure 45. Drawings of the Dallas Plaque (Freidel and Reilly 2009: Fig 14). (a.) The Dallas Tablet (Drawing by F. Kent Reilly III), (b.) The Dallas Plaque in Cut Up and Fold Out Technique (Drawing by F. Kent Reilly III).



Figure 46. The Humboldt Celt (Freidel and Reilly 2004: Drawing by F. Kent Reilly III).

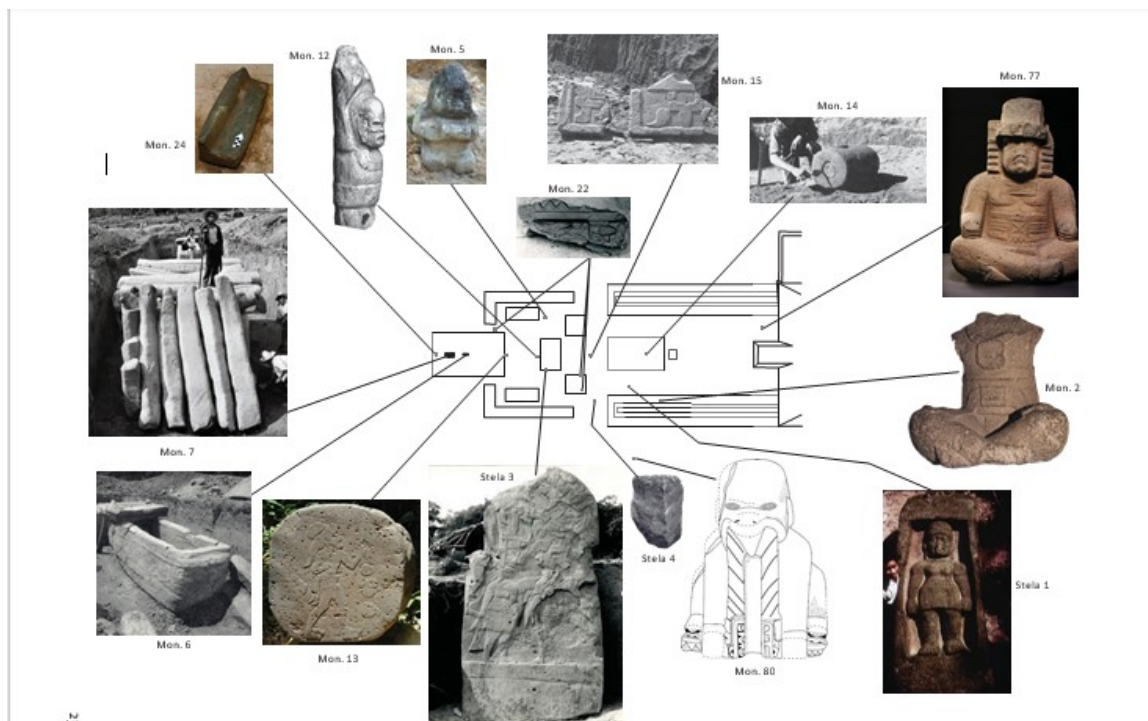


Figure 47. Location of Monuments found in La Venta Complex A (Benson and de la Fuente 1996; Drucker 1952; Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute; NWAFF photographs; Stirling 1940, 1943b, Colman 2010: Photo edit compiled by Arlene Colman).





Figure 48. La Venta Monument 14. In Situ within Mound A-3 (the cist tomb in background) (Heizer's Papers: NAA, Smithsonian Institute).

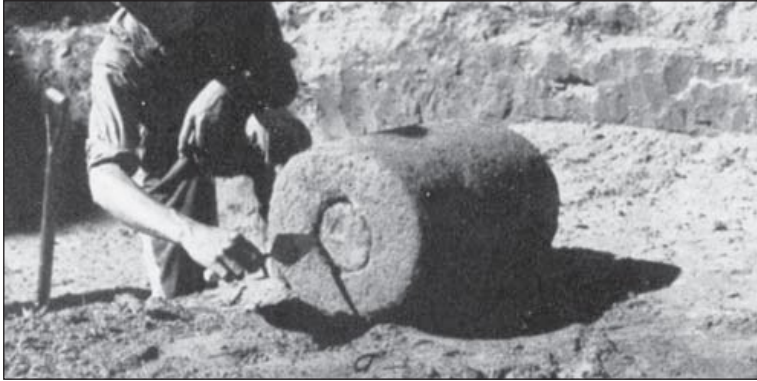


Figure 49. La Venta Monument 14 Stone Disk Plug (Drucker 1952: pl. 15a).



Figure 50. Palo Volador Los Voladores (Photo by B. Navez).

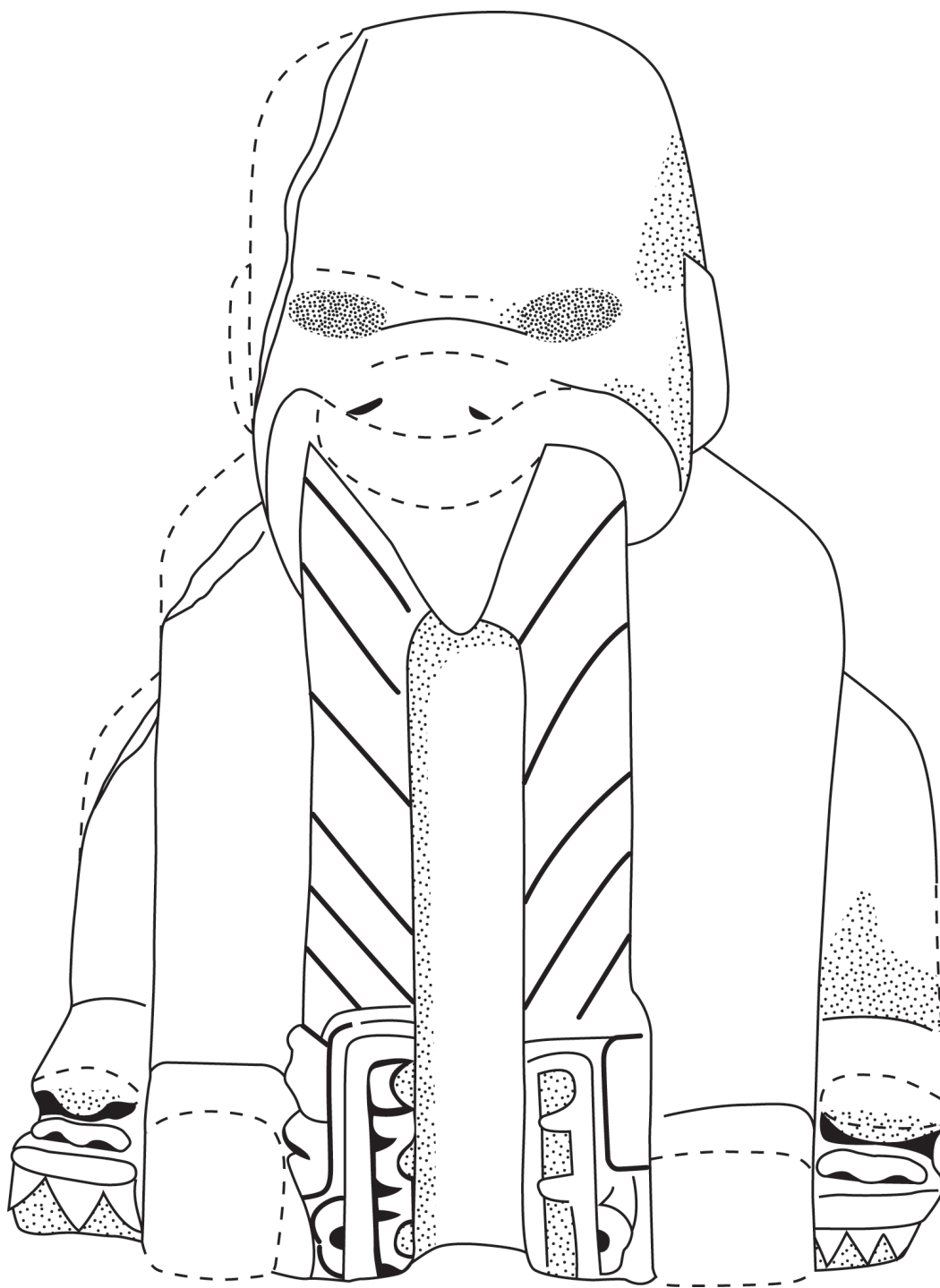


Figure 51. La Venta Monument 80 (Drawing Courtesy of the NWAF).

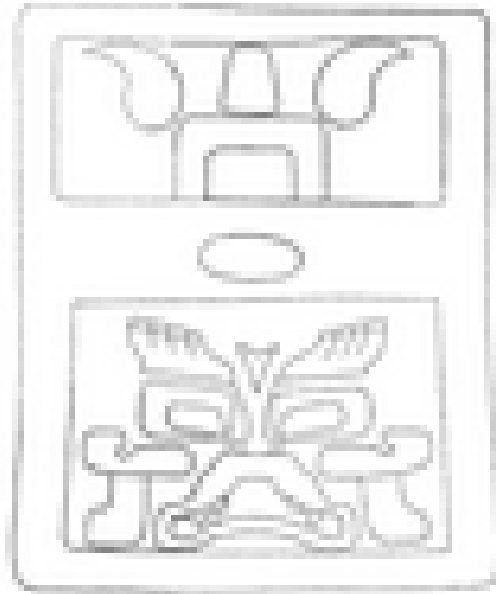


Figure 52. La Venta Monument 15 (Drawing from Drucker 1952: fig. 54).



Figure 53. Jaguar Paw Temple at El Mirador (Photo by Greg Willis, Photo edit by Author).



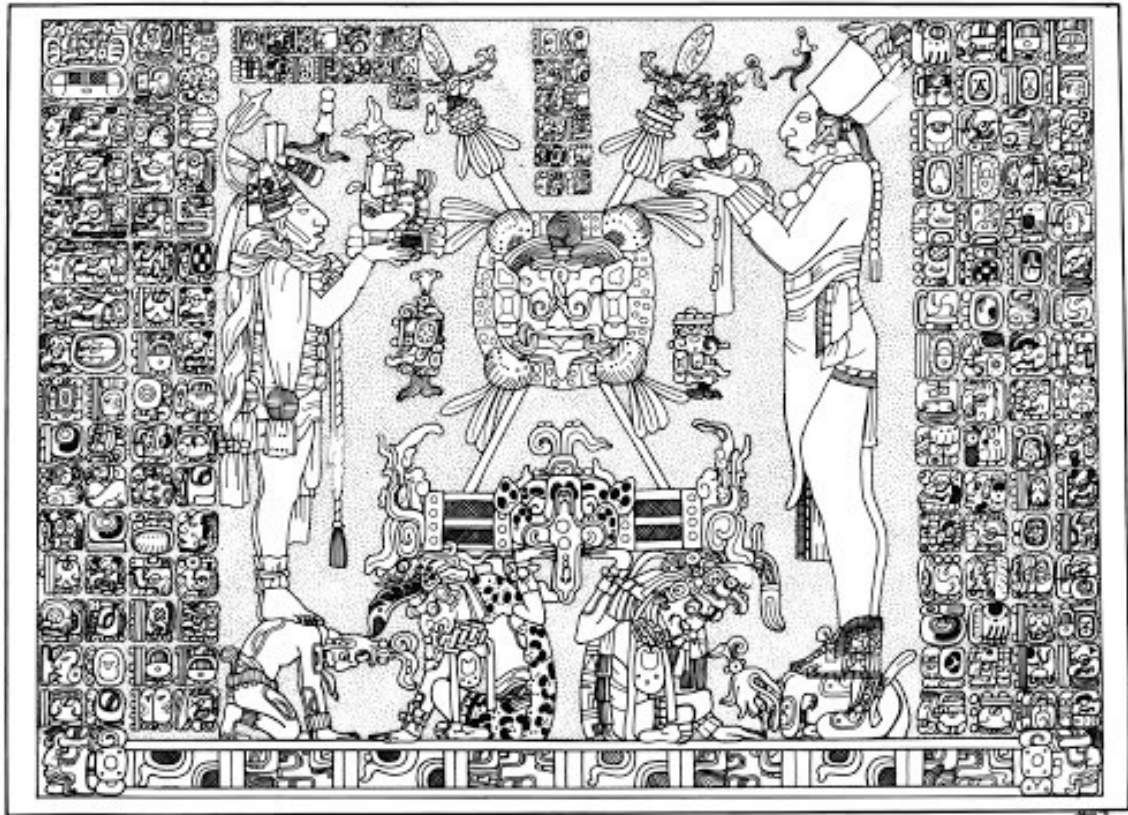


Figure 54. Palenque Temple of the Sun Tablet (Drawing by Linda Schele).

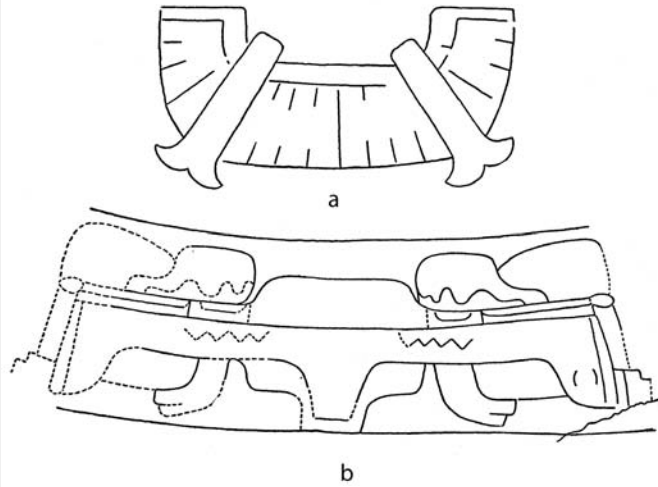


Figure 55. La Venta Monument 12 (Stirling 1943a: 327). Drawing of the incised necklace and belt with bird iconography (Drawing courtesy of NWAf, based on Drucker 1952: 53).





Figure 56. La Venta Monument 13 (Photograph courtesy of the NWAf).

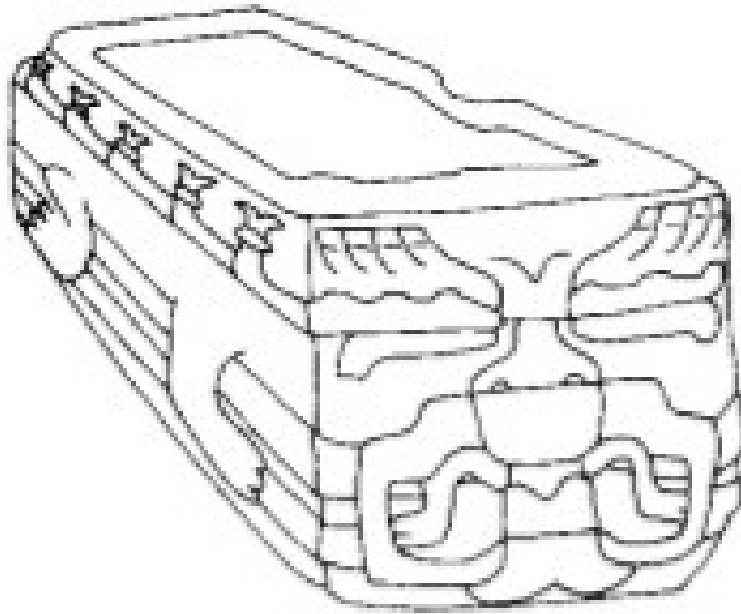


Figure 57. La Venta Monument 6. Sandstone Sarcophagus (Joralemon 1976 Fig. 9c, Drawing by Peter D. Joralemon from Covarrubias 1957: Fig. 30).

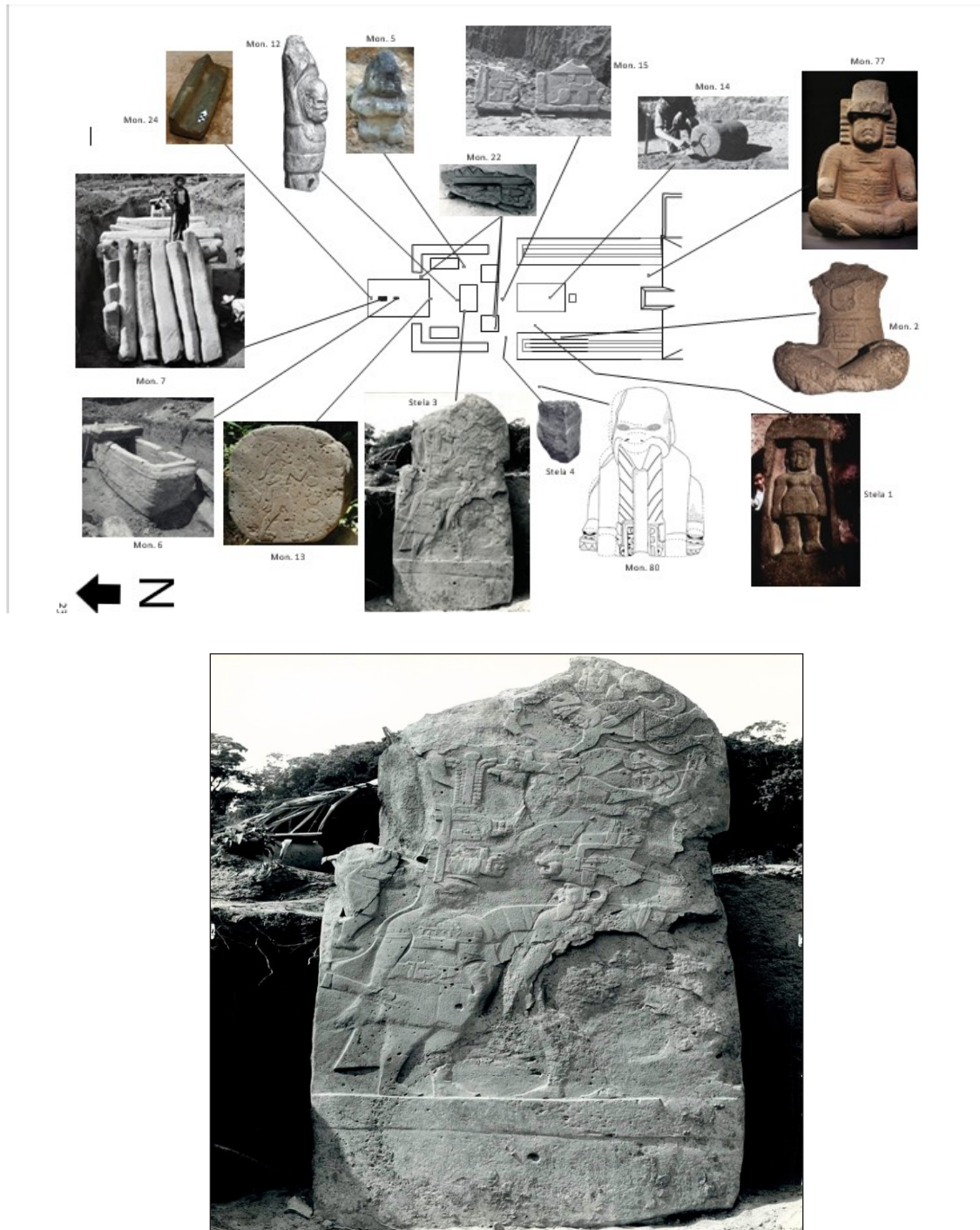


Figure 58. Comparison of La Venta Stela 3 and the Monuments in La Venta Complex A (Photo edit by Arlene Colman).

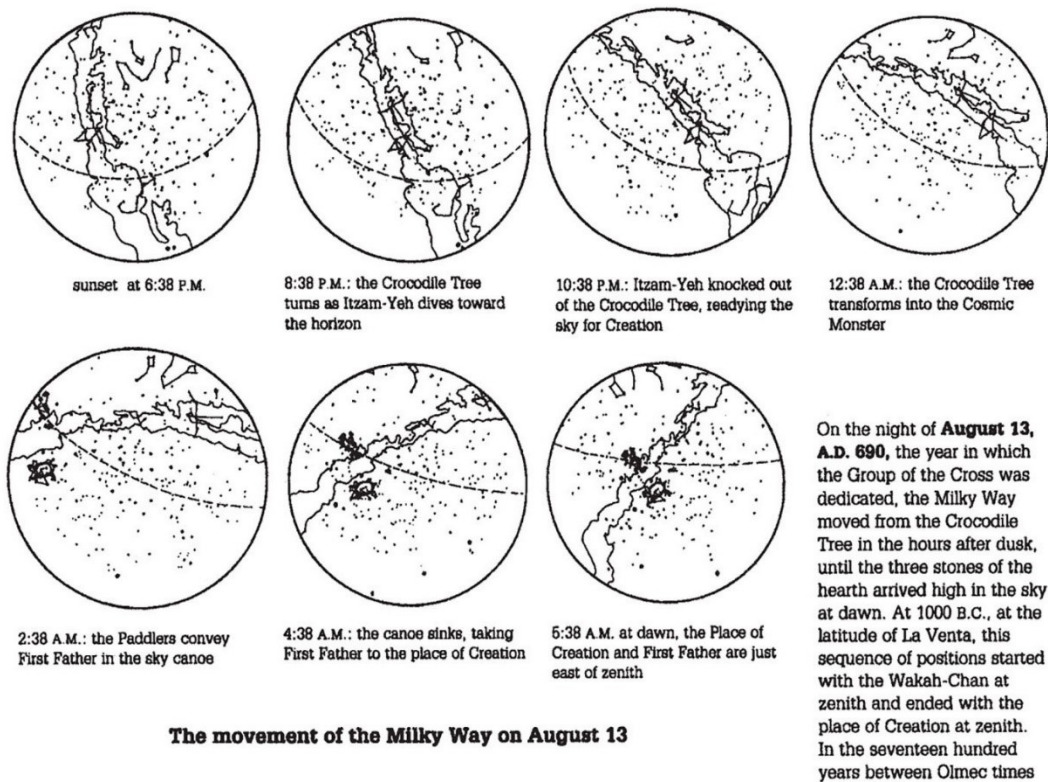


Figure 59. Movement of the Milky Way. August 13, 690 AD. (Freidel et al. 1993: 97; fig. 2:29).

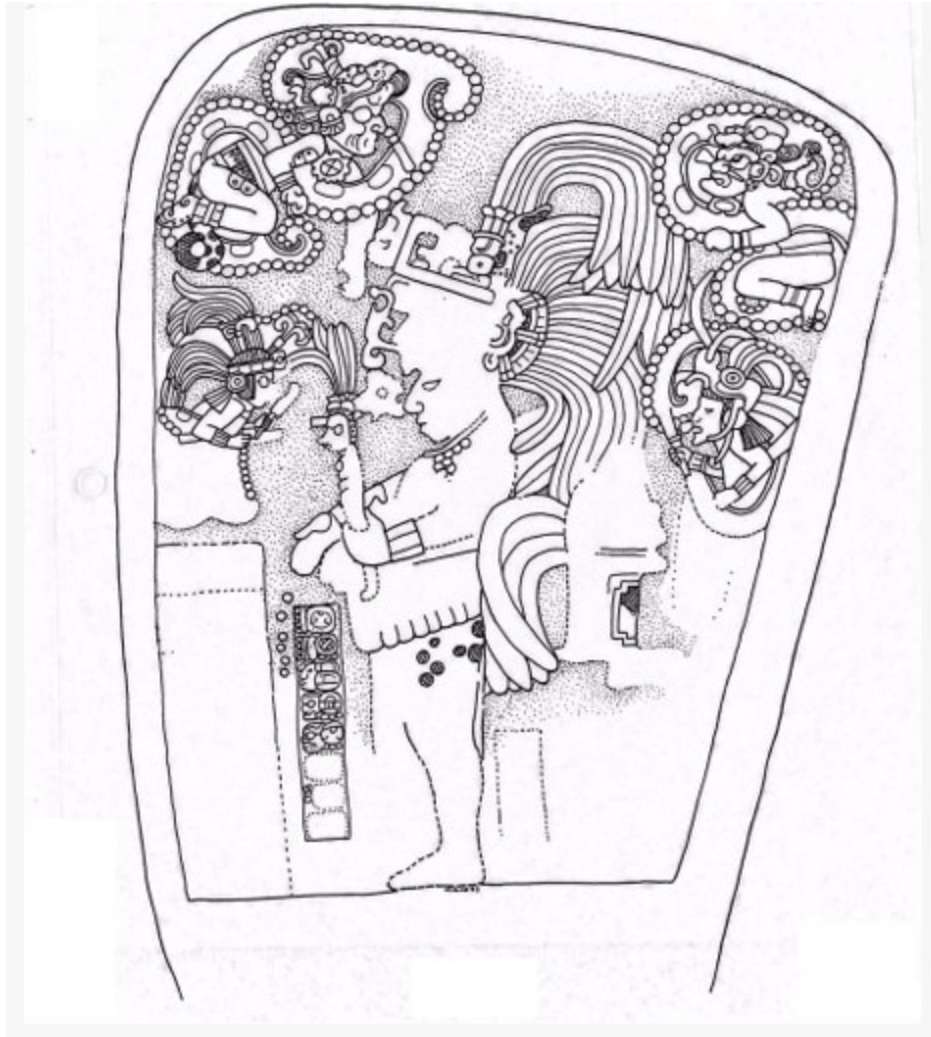


Figure 60. Ixlu Stela 2. The Paddler Gods (Drawing by Linda Schele).



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