The Sculpture of San Martín Jilotepeque: Cotzumalguapan Influence in the Highlands or Highland Influence on the Pacific Coast?

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Since 1990, Ri Rusamäj Jilotepeque, or the Jilotepeque Project, has been studying ancient obsidian procurement, production, and exchange in San Martín Jilotepeque (Department of Chimaltenango, Guatemala), the location of an important obsidian source-area exploited from the Paleoindian Period to the present day (fig. 1). In 1992, test excavations were made at ten locations, including quarries, secondary workshops, and habitation sites. A field-by-field settlement survey was also conducted (Braswell 1992). During this phase of research, more than 160 sites were located in an area covering approximately 110 km2.

An unexpected result of both excavations and survey was the discovery of a remarkable corpus of stone monuments and portable stone carvings. In total, 41 monuments and fragments were found. The types of monuments discovered in San Martín include tenoned heads, free-standing sculptured figures, plain stelae, and altars.

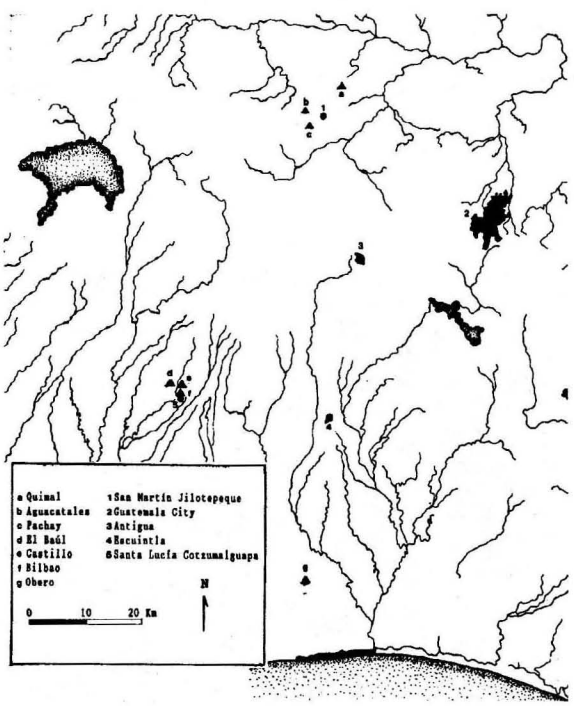

Fig. 1 The Southern Maya Area of Guatemala.

Most of monuments discovered were *in situ*. A few had been moved to public buildings and private houses, but all but seven of these could be traced to their original sites. Although it is particularly difficult to date monuments, the associated ceramics often allow sculpture to be assigned to broad temporal periods. Most monuments in the Jilotepeque corpus were found at single-component sites, ones that have substantial quantities of only Classic Period ceramics. It is reasonable to assume therefore, that the majority of the sculpture dates to this time period. However, one stela and sculptural fragment are probably more recent. These two exceptions were found at Chuisac, a large, Early Postclassic Kaqchikel site. I return to the chronology of the monuments below.

The Jilotepeque monuments, like many others found at sites in the central Maya Highlands, are clearly related to the Cotzumalguapan sculptural tradition found on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala (fig. 1).

Cotzumalguapan Sculpture

Although the Cotzumalguapan sculptural tradition has long been recognized (e.g., Habel 1878; Seler 1892; Strebel 1901), it is one of the least-studied major art styles of Mesoamerica, having received attention from only a few scholars (e.g., Braun 1979; Jiménez Moreno 1970; Miles 1965; Parsons 1967, 1969, 1978, 1986; Popenoe de Hatch 1987, 1989; Thompson 1948). It is often stated that the Cotzumalguapan style is the result of the fusion of Maya and non-Maya Mexican influences, although the latter has tended to be the focus of commentary. Parsons, in fact, believes that there is essentially no Early Classic sculptural style in the Southern Maya Area (with the possible exception of a regional style in Quiché [Ichon 1977]), and that Cotzumalguapan art is

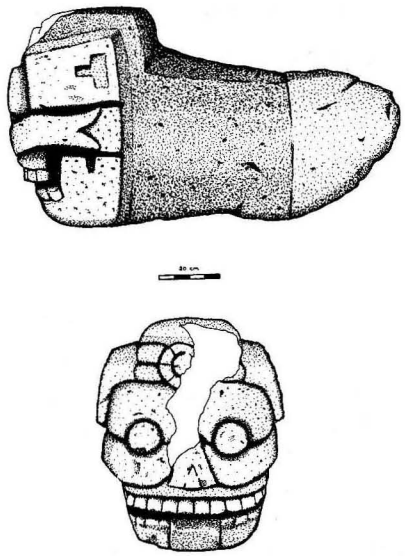

Fig. 2 Pachay Monument 1.

therefore totally non-Maya in origin (1986:79).

The origins of the Cotzumalguapan style, according to Parsons (1969:138), are in the early Middle Classic (c. A.D. 400-500), a period that he believes saw extensive Highland Mexican, probably from Teotihuacán, and Gulf Coast influences in the region. After this initial contact period, he defines two succeeding stages in the development of Cotzumalguapan art. The first of these, corresponding to the Laguneta Phase at Bilbao and lasting until the end of the Middle Classic around A.D. 700, he calls Narrative or Teotihuacanoid (1969:138, 1986:82). The final Late Classic stage corresponds with the Santa Lucía Phase at Bilbao (c. A.D. 700-900), and is characterized by the full development of what Parsons calls the Portrait style.

While much of Parsons' ground-breaking study has withstood a quarter century of scrutiny, Popenoe de Hatch (1987, 1989) successfully demonstrates that the notion of a Middle Classic Period in the Cotzumalguapan region is unfounded. She argues that no Teotihuacán or Teotihuacanoid ceramics have been found at Bilbao or El Baúl, and that the Laguneta Phase ceramic types of greatest frequency correspond with early Early Classic period material from Monte Alto and Kaminaljuyú (Popenoe de Hatch 1987:470-471, 1989:168). Agreeing with Popenoe de Hatch, Bove (1989:10) notes that ceramic artifact assemblages from Cristóbal, Los Cerritos-Norte, and the Balberta zone do not exhibit Teotihuacán influence.

Because excavations at El Baúl have produced only Late Classic ceramics, and because the Cotzumalguapan style exhibits many Postclassic Mexican traits, Popenoe de Hatch (1987, 1989) follows Thompson (1948) and Jiménez Moreno (1970), rather than Parsons (1967, 1969, 1986), and assigns a Late Classic date to the corpus of Cotzumalguapan sculpture.[1]

In order to demonstrate that the Jilotepeque monuments are related to Cotzumalguapan sculpture, it is necessary to review some of the diagnostic elements of this South Coast style. Parsons writes:

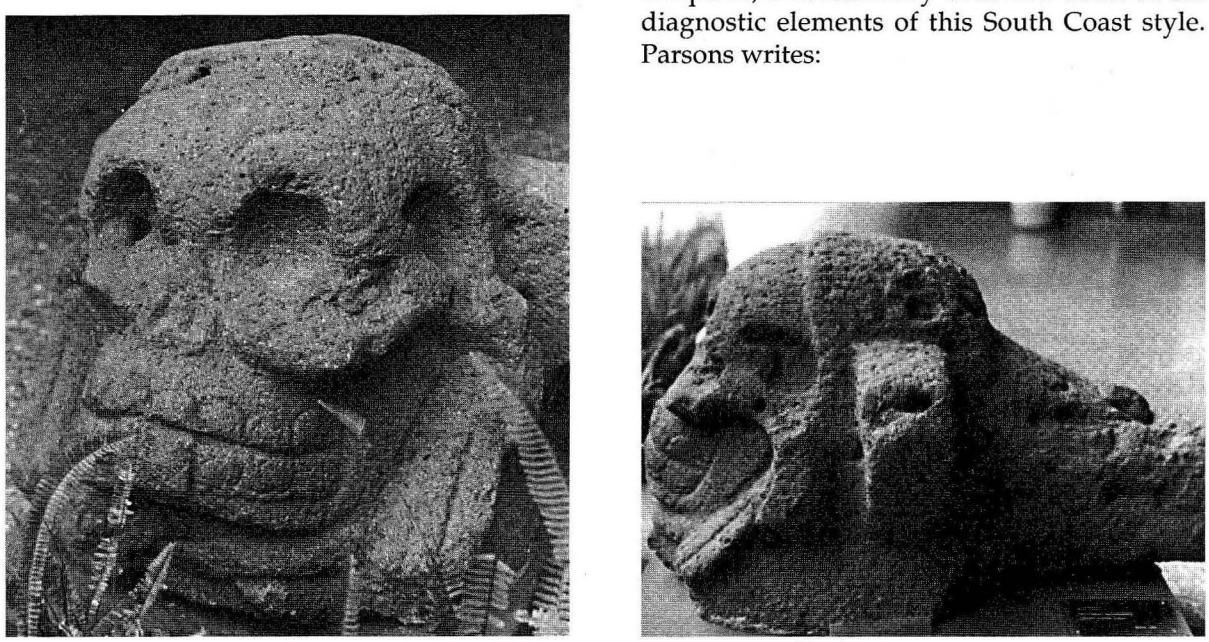

Fig. 3 MNAE 4456, Palo Gordo, Department of Suchitepéquez, Guatemala.

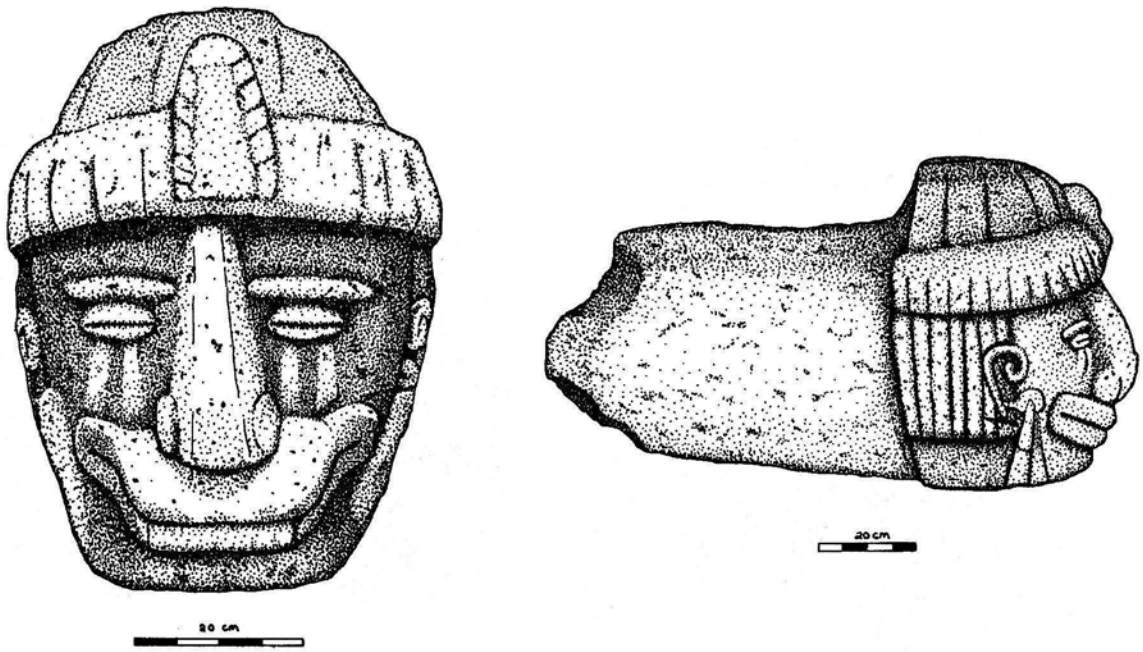

Fig. 4 Pachay Monument 2.

> Cotzumalhuapan treatment of the human figure is particularly diagnostic, such as the rendering of eyes which either have a double outline to represent the lids or the sharply outlined eyeball is set in a sunken, concave area. Hair is drawn as a series of parallel and concentric lines. Faces are angular with sharp, squared chins, straight noses, straight thin lips, and hard lines separating the cheeks from the mouth region... Ears have a question-mark shape... Frequently tied about the waist is an oversized looped and knotted belt... An unusual feature of Cotzumalhuapa sculpture is the great quantity of full-round examples, including human busts, [and] full seated human figures... Also frequent are horizontally tenoned human, divine, and animal heads—especially serpents, parrots, jaguars and monkeys... Characteristic of this region is the practice of carving monuments in matched pairs... There is, as a matter of fact, a definite preoccupation with death themes in Cotzumalhuapan art. In addition to various forms of human sacrifice..., stylized death's heads... are quite frequent... Some prevalent motifs include... human heads in serpent jaws (1969:143).

I would add the tubular ear ornament (although the circular earring is also common) and knotted headband to this list, and note that the tied and looped belts are often represented as ropes. In addition, noses are often prominent and have broad nostrils. Parsons also argues that horizontally tenoned heads are probably a Mexican invention, and usually served as ballcourt markers. The Teotihuacanoid style tenoned heads found at Kaminaljuyú are believed to be ballcourt markers, and in fact were actually discovered in ballcourts (Parsons 1986:84). Similar full-round, horizontally tenoned effigy heads are found on the Pacific Coast; some are ballcourt markers, and others were apparently set into staircases.

Fig. 5 MNAE 2000, unprovenienced South Coast monument, Guatemala.

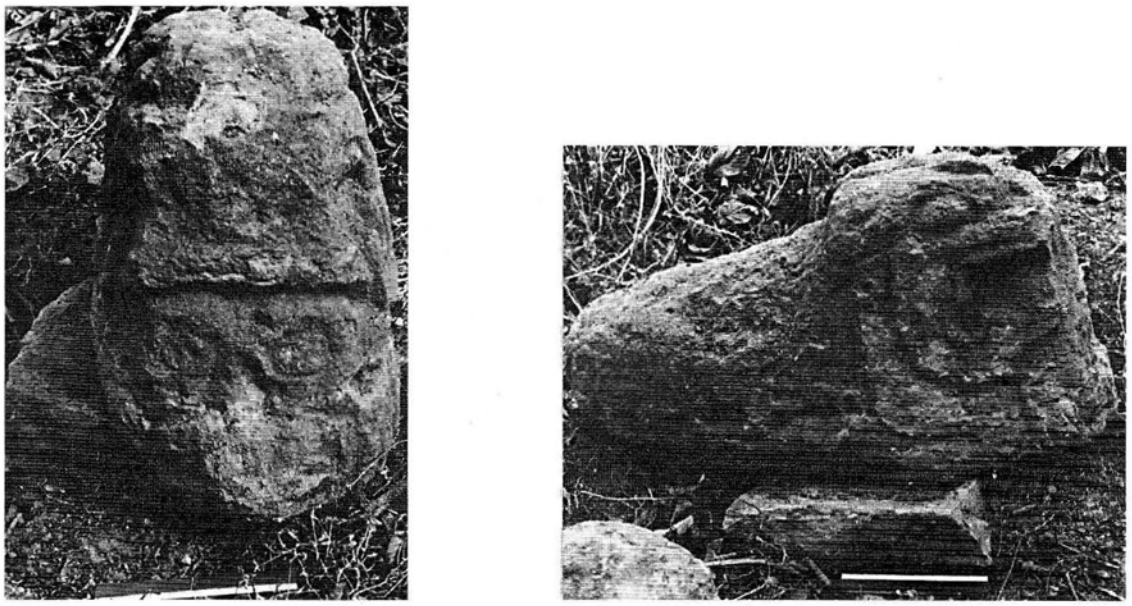

Fig. 6 Pachay Monument 3.

The Sculpture of San Martín Jilotepeque

Although the San Martín Jilotepeque monuments are more crudely executed than their coastal counterparts, they exhibit many of the same traits. Pachay Monument 1 (fig. 2) is a death's head, and resembles a tenoned skull from Palo Gordo, Suchitepéquez (fig. 3). Note the prominent cheek bones, triangular and slitted nasal apertures, and protruding tongues that are common to both sculptures. Pachay Monument 1 also wears what appears to be a knotted headband. Pachay Monument 2 (fig. 4), the twin of Monument 1, is a peculiar piece. The protruding tongue, as in Monument 1 and the Palo Gordo monument, may serve to indicate that the individual is dead, as may his grimacing smile. His eyelids are closed and do not resemble those of other Jilotepeque sculptures. The reason for this may be that his eyes have been removed, a hypothesis strengthened by the presence of two linear features on each cheek. These may represent blood or dangling optic nerves and blood vessels. Figure 5, a tenoned head of unknown South Coast provenience, is somewhat similar. It depicts an old man with a grimacing face and eyeballs hanging out of their sockets. Despite its odd appearance, Monument 2 does display several clear Cotzumalguapan features including question-mark shaped ears, tubular ear ornaments, parallel rope-like hair, and a prominent nose with wide nostrils.

Figures 6 and 7 show another pair of matched heads from Pachay. Monument 3, though damaged, clearly shows a human head with double-lidded eyes and tubular ear ornaments. The head is emerging from a serpent's mouth. Monument 4 is in even poorer condition, but also depicts a human head emerging from the jaws of some fantastic creature. The ear ornaments of Monument 4 resemble those of the unprovenienced head in figure 5.

Two matched sculptures from Quimal also show human heads emerging from the mouths of animals. Quimal Monument 1 (fig. 8) and Monument 2 (fig. 9) have eyes, eyebrows, ears, ear ornaments, and hair that are clearly diagnostic of the Cotzumalguapan style. The human head in Monument 1 emerges from the jaws of a serpent, while the animal depicted in Monument 2 is less clear. Quimal Monuments 3 and 4 (figs. 10a and 10b, respectively), have been moved to the Escuela Carlos Castillo Armas, a school on the road that leads north out of San Martín. Unfortunately, they have been cemented into stone gate-posts. The heads on the figures are not original; the one on Quimal Monument 3 is fashioned in concrete, and the one on Monument 4, though stone, does not come from Quimal and is probably of recent origin. Both pieces are sculptured in the round, and were originally free-standing. The looped belt is typically Cotzumalguapan (compare with Bilbao Monuments 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 19, and 21 and El Baúl Monuments 4 and 27).

Fig. 7 Pachay Monument 4.

Quimal Monument 5 (fig. 11) is a crudely carved canine or feline head. The sculpture is made of local *talpetate*, a very soft and porous material not well suited for permanent monuments. Although very little detail is present, the eye form is typically Cotzumalguapan. It is not known if a paired twin for Quimal Monument 5 exists.

Two sculptural fragments from Aguacatales are particularly intriguing, for reasons to be discussed below. The first, Aguacatales Monument 1 (not depicted) is the lower part of a seated figure, resembling the bases of Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología (MNAE) 2006, of unknown South Coast provenience (fig. 12a), and MNAE 2028, from Obero, Department of Escuintla (fig. 12b). Like these sculptures, Aguacatales Monument 1 was carved in the round, and wears a rope belt. Aguacatales Monument 3 (fig. 13) is another in-the-round free-standing figure, but portrays a fantastic animal, perhaps a jaguar, displaying some human characteristics; the paw, though equipped with claws, has a thumb, and the figure is wearing some kind of necklace.

It should be noted that the monuments described and depicted here are by no means an exhaustive inventory of the Jilotepeque sculpture. Rather, they have been discussed and displayed because they are reasonably preserved and come from particularly interesting contexts.

There is no reason to suppose that the Jilotepeque monuments represent an intrusion of coastal people into the region. While clearly related to Cotzumalguapan sculpture, the monuments are crude in comparison to coastal examples. Furthermore, not all aspects of the Cotzumalguapan style are present in the Jilotepeque corpus; as is discussed below, there is nothing particularly "Mexican" about the sculpture.

Hypothesis 1: Access to Obsidian

One functional interpretation of the monuments is that they represent an attempt by local elites to identify themselves with their more prestigious coastal counterparts, and thereby reinforce their own status. The function of the sculpture could be said to be vertical propaganda, designed to influence and sway the attitudes of nonelites (Ellul 1973; Lerner 1951; Marcus 1992). Thus it is not surprising that all monuments were found at sites with public buildings, where elites probably commissioned and erected these sculptures. But why were the coastal elites interested in forging ties with this hinterland region of the

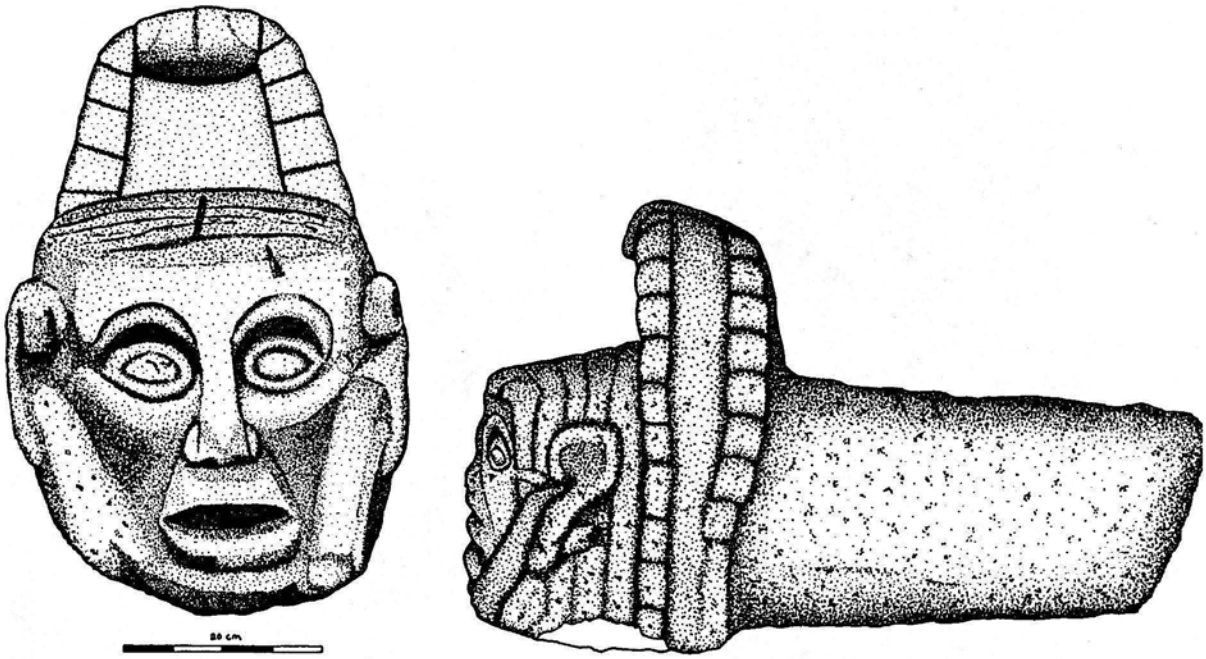

Fig. 8 Quimal Monument 1.

Maya Highlands? San Martín Jilotepeque represents the northernmost extension of the Cotzumalguapan style, suggesting that there was something in this highland area that coastal dwellers needed.

The highest concentration of monuments (including three plain stelae, four tenoned heads, and one plain altar) is found at Pachay, a small site consisting of a three-meter high earthen mound facing a low, terraced hill. The importance of Pachay and its investment in elite propaganda is not linked to the size of the site, but to its location; Pachay controls access to an immense obsidian outcrop and sits directly above a quarry.

Cotzumalguapan interest in the area, therefore, might have been economically motivated. The local elites of San Martín Jilotepeque partici-

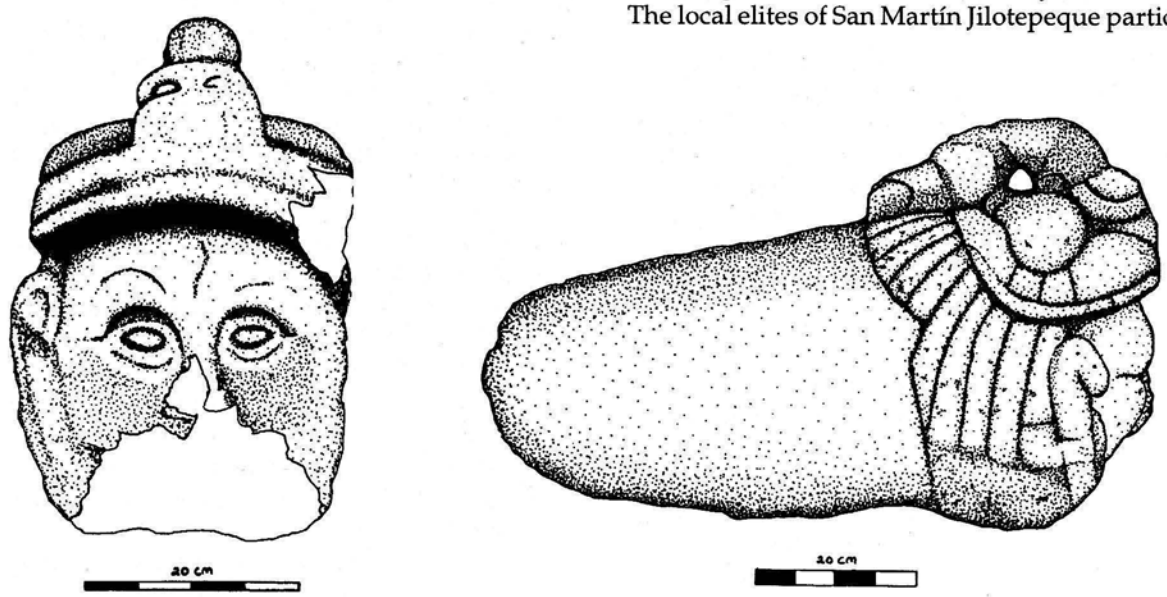

Fig. 9 Quimal Monument 2.

Fig. 10 a) Quimal Monument 3; (b) Quimal Monument 4.

pated in a prestige system by extracting, pooling, processing, and exporting obsidian to be used by coastal people. From this perspective, it is no surprise that Cotzumalguapan sculpture is found in Antigua, as the Antigua Valley provides the easiest route of access from the coast to San Martín Jilotepeque (fig. 1). Furthermore, it is significant that the northernmost examples of Cotzumalguapan-related sculpture are in San Martín Jilotepeque. This suggests that the coastal elites desired to forge political and economic ties with the Jilotepeque region, but had no important reason to look beyond it.

Hypothesis Two: The Jilotepeque Monuments Predate Coastal Manifestations of the Cotzumalguapan Style

The most troubling, and at the same time fascinating, aspect of the Jilotepeque corpus is that many sculptures appear to be Early Classic, rather than Late Classic in date. The monuments of Bilbao and El Baúl, in the Cotzumalguapa zone, are associated with Amatle Ware (referred to by Parsons [1967] as Pantaleón Hard Ware), a Late Classic diagnostic (Popenoe de Hatch 1987:467-468; 1989:167). In San Martín Jilotepeque, however, Esperanza Flesh, an Early Classic ware, is the temporally diagnostic ceramic group of greatest frequency at sites where monuments are found. At Pachay, 55.6% of all diagnostic sherds date to the Early Classic, while only 21.7% are Late Classic. A mere 8.1% of the temporally diagnostic sherds from Quimal are Late Classic, while 90.9% are Early Classic. Finally, Aguacatales is a pure Protoclassic to Early Classic site. Thus while some or all of the Pachay monuments may be Late Classic, it is highly likely that the Quimal monuments are Early Classic in date. And unless sculpture was transported to the already abandoned site of Aguacatales, a very improbable event, the monuments there cannot possibly date to any later than the Early Classic Period.

The ceramic assemblages of other sites with monuments in San Martín are still under study; nevertheless, it can be stated that they too are either single component sites or predominantly

Fig. 11 Quimal Monument 5.

Early Classic in date. While Parsons' observation that the Early Classic was an "interim period, if not hiatus, in monumental art" (1986:79) may be true for Kaminaljuyú and the Pacific Coast, the presence of sculpture at pure and essentially single-component Early Classic sites in San Martín demonstrates that it is not true for the entire Southern Maya Area.

The Jilotepeque monuments display some, but not all, of the characteristic elements of Cotzumalguapan sculpture. Most notably, there is nothing particularly Mexican about them. There are no narrative carvings with "Mixtec-looking" hieroglyphic captions, no speech scrolls, no greca symbols, no Tlaloc symbolism (except on one small, portable sculpture of unknown origin), no Xiucoatl headdresses, and no ball-game symbolism. In fact, none of the monuments from San Martín are associated with sites that have ball courts, though such courts are common at Late Classic and Postclassic sites in the area.

The only aspect of the Jilotepeque corpus that may indicate Mexican influence is the abundance of horizontally tenoned heads. While Parsons argues that horizontally tenoned heads are a sculptural form diagnostic of Mexican influence, this connection is unconvincing for several reasons. First, horizontally tenoned sculpture can be found in areas of the world that had no interaction with prehistoric Mexico. Second, vertically tenoned and so-called pedestal sculptures were relatively common in the Southern Maya Area during the Formative Period (Parsons 1986); it is not much of an innovation to rotate the axis of a tenon 90 degrees and plant a monument into the side of a mound. Third, sculptured façades were a common feature on Late Formative and Early Classic Period Maya platforms. The horizontal tenon is one solution to the problem of affixing sculptural decorations to earthen constructions (another is making mud-sculptured façades, as on Early Classic Mounds D-III-1 and D-III-13 at Kaminaljuyú). Finally, a horizontally tenoned serpent head (Monument G from Pasaco, Department of Jutiapa [MNAE 2026]) in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología is attributed to the Late Formative Period. For stylistic reasons, however, I find this assignment uncertain.

Mexican or Gulf Coast influences are also lacking in other aspects of Classic Period material culture. The ceramics of San Martín Jilotepeque, like those of Cotzumalguapa, include no Teotihuacán-style forms or modes, and architecture is typically Highland Maya in plan.

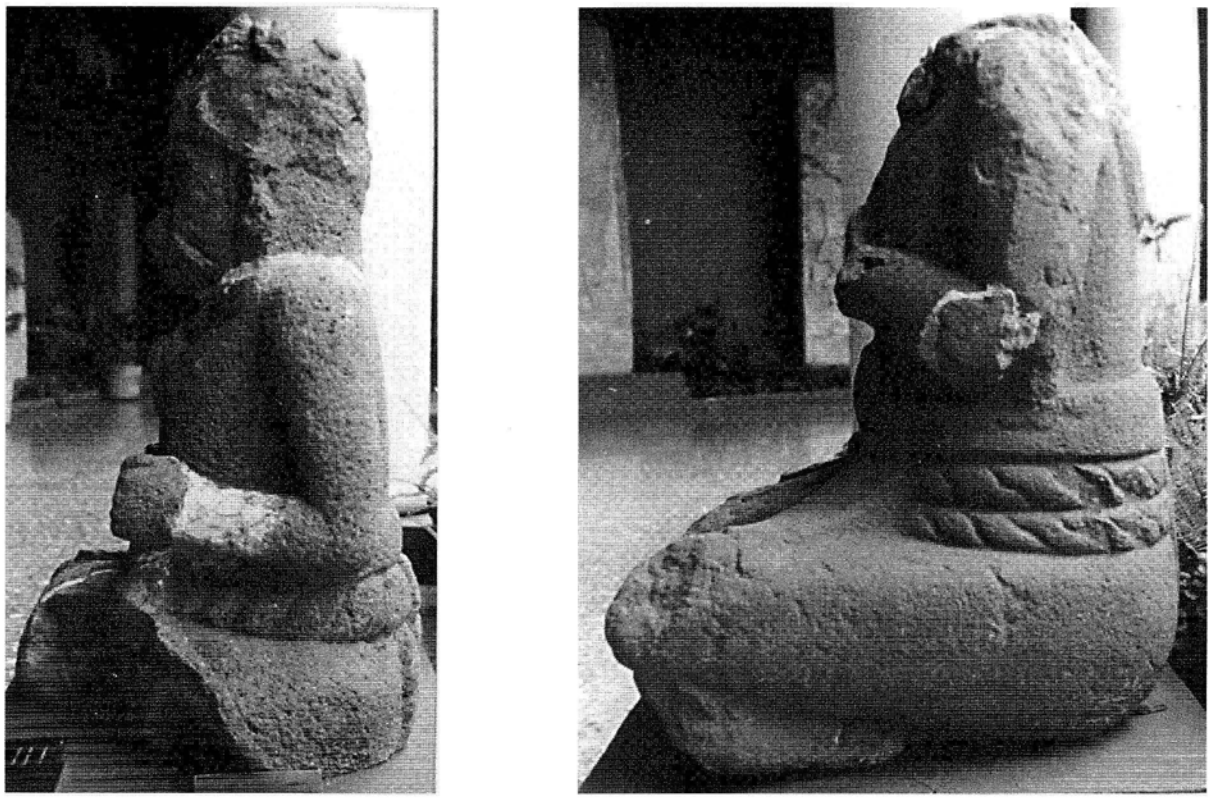

Fig. 12 a) MNAE 2006, unprovenienced South Coast monument, Guatemala; (b) MNAE 2028, Obero, Department of Escuintla, Guatemala

Since some monuments from San Martín predate all known coastal manifestations of the Cotzumalguapan style, but are clearly related to it, the hypothesis that a later coastal style was derived in part from an earlier highland style seems supported. Furthermore, there is nothing foreign about Early Classic material culture in San Martín Jilotepeque, suggesting that these early Cotzumalguapan-like monuments are Highland Maya in origin, style, and content.

Conclusion

The two hypotheses proposed above are not mutually exclusive. Although the non-Mexican aspects of the Cotzumalguapan style may have developed in the highlands, economic and political interaction between the two regions may have continued during the Late Classic, in part because of a growing demand for obsidian by the coastal state. Indeed, such long-term interaction is documented in the ceramic sequences of sites in both the Cotzumalguapan zone and the Department of Chimaltenango. Early Classic assemblages in both areas are characterized by Esperanza-Flesh Ware (called Esmeralda by Parsons [1969]), and Late Classic assemblages are characterized by Amatle Ware (Popenoe de Hatch 1987:467-472, 1989:167-169). Both wares are believed to have developed in Chimaltenango in the Maya Highlands.

Furthermore, Popenoe de Hatch notes continuity between El Baúl Monument 1, a Late Formative stela in an early Maya style, and Late Classic Cotzumalguapan sculpture. She writes:

> Of interest... is that the principle [sic] figure wears the outfit seen later on the Late Classic monuments: the loincloth, knee garters, and turban headdress. The down-gazing head is analogous to that which appears on Bilbao Monuments 2-6 and 8..., which similarly seems to impart power/prestige/rank to the standing figure below. The parallels in dress suggest that the population occupying El Baúl in Late Classic times is descended from one that has been in the area for a rather long time (1989:171).

Parsons cautions "that it is no longer advisable to lump the Guatemalan highlands and 'Pacific slopes' together under a Southern Maya Area designation" (1969:154). It is instructive to reconsider the antithetical position, realizing of course

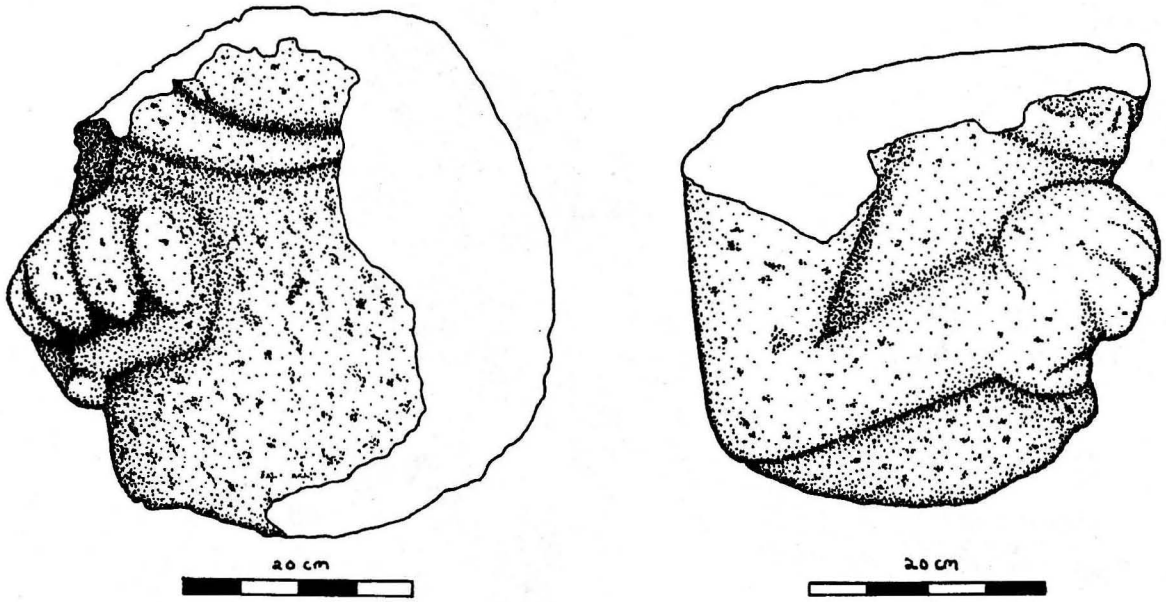

Fig. 13 Aguacatales Monument 3.

that the truth probably lies somewhere between these two extremes. Shared utilitarian ceramics, a common artistic style, and linkage through the transfer of obsidian all argue for unity rather than fragmentation. With the exception of foreign-elite intrusion into what now seems to be a pre-existing local art style, there is little to suggest that the ancient Cotzumalguapan zone was not economically, ideologically, and perhaps politically tied to the Maya Highlands of Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango. While previous scholars have tended to stress the "Mexican" or Gulf Coast aspects of Cotzumalguapan art, I believe that when material culture is considered as a whole, the similarities between the Cotzumalguapan zone and the central Maya Highlands outweigh the differences.

I do not deny that a strong, intrusive, non-Maya influence was manifest in the Cotzumalguapan region during the Late Classic Period, or that certain aspects of the Late Classic sculpture of Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa may be related to the Postclassic Mixteca-Puebla horizon (Popenoe de Hatch 1987, 1989). But I believe that foreign influence can only be seen in objects of elite culture, particularly sculpture. And if an Early Classic date for some of the Jilotepeque monuments continues to be supported, the degree to which Cotzumalguapan culture is seen to be "Mexican" or intrusive, rather than an essentially local phenomenon, must be reassessed.

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Notes

1 Parsons (1967:38,47; 1969:101) supports his earlier dating of some Cotzumalguapan monuments with an uncalibrated radiocarbon date of A.D. 527 ± 136. When calibrated, the one-sigma error margins associated with this date reach from the fourth to ninth centuries, making it of little chronological value (Klein et al. 1982:140).