

## *Public Monuments and Sacred Mountains: Observations on Three Formative Period Sacred Landscapes*

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The origins of Mesoamerica's monumental art lie in the Formative (Pre-Classic)<sup>1</sup> period and are clearly attributable to the Gulf Coast Olmec. The magnificence of Olmec monuments has attracted scholarly inquiry for more than fifty years, but during that period the monuments have been studied primarily as individual works of art. A purpose of the monumental art was presumably to communicate certain "messages" to its viewers, yet what those messages might be, and how the placement of the monuments within sites may have facilitated that communication, are issues that have received very little serious consideration.

I began to recognize the relevance of "message" and monument placement while directing the Chalcatzingo Archaeological Project in the 1970s. Chalcatzingo, in the highlands of Central Mexico, is one of several Formative period centers outside of the Gulf Coast whose citizens began to create and display Olmec-like monumental art after ca. 900 b.c. At the time we began our research, 12 such stone monuments were known at Chalcatzingo, and an additional 18 were discovered during our three years of fieldwork there (Grove and Angulo 1987). As each of these 18 carvings came to light, it became increasingly evident that their symbolic content was directly correlated with the area of the site at which they had been displayed. For example, monuments carrying the theme of rain and plant fertility are common to one particular site area, while those depicting rulership-related themes occur in a separate area (Grove

<sup>1</sup> The terms *Pre-Classic* and *Formative* are generally interchangeable. *Pre-Classic* is used primarily in the Maya area, while *Formative* is more commonly used by North American scholars dealing with Central Mexican archaeology.

1984: 449–468, 109–122; Grove 1987b: 431–432). The association of some of these monuments with mound architecture also indicated that the monuments were an integral part of the site's spatial organization. With the knowledge that the physical arrangements of many Mesoamerican sites may manifest some underlying cosmological template (see below), the spatial distribution of Chalcatzingo's monuments presented the opportunity to analyze the site in that regard, that is, to gain an understanding of Chalcatzingo's created "sacred landscape."

While many Mesoamerican scholars recognize that cosmological templates may have been a part of the spatial organization of Mesoamerican sites, the cosmological principles underlying the arrangement of any site are seldom self-evident, and relatively few scholars have therefore attempted to elucidate those templates or the sacred landscapes they created. The major exception is found in the work of researchers dealing with late Postclassic Central Mexico and in particular the city of Tenochtitlán. Those analyses, which draw upon both archaeological and ethnohistoric data, demonstrate that, in its major architecture, Tenochtitlán was laid out to conform to certain basic cosmological principles. The focus of Tenochtitlán's sacred landscape was its symbolic sacred mountain, the *coatepetl* (literally, "serpent-hill"), the Templo Mayor. That pyramid was a cosmological pivot, and by extension Tenochtitlán itself was also cognized by the Aztecs as the cosmological center of the universe (Broda, Carrasco, and Matos 1987: 56–58, 140–143; Elzey 1976: 319–320; Nicholson 1990; Townsend 1982).

Tenochtitlán is merely the best-documented example today of a Mesoamerican center laid out by its builders to manifest a sacred landscape (see also Sugiyama [1993] for Teotihuacan and Ashmore [1989, 1992] for Copan, Quirigua, and Tikal). While public architecture plays a significant role in most Mesoamerican sacred landscapes, such landscapes may also have been defined in more subtle ways, such as through the placement of shrines or monuments on the natural or built landscape. It is particularly through the latter manifestation that Chalcatzingo's sacred landscape can be investigated.

An understanding of Chalcatzingo's sacred landscape is relevant to several important and long-standing questions about the nature of that site and its occupants. It is clear that Chalcatzingo's monuments had been carved within the canons of Gulf Coast Olmec monumental art and that the sculptors at Chalcatzingo had utilized a technology that likewise must have originated with the Olmec. However, Chalcatzingo is located in Mexico's central highlands, more than 400 mountainous km northwest of the Gulf Coast, and, with the exception of its monumental art, archaeologically the site is Central Mexican

in almost all aspects of its material culture (Grove 1987a: 435). Its inhabitants were presumably linguistically<sup>2</sup> and ethnically quite different from the Gulf Coast Olmec. Therefore, in appraising the spatial distribution of Chalcatzingo's monuments and architecture, some obvious questions emerge. Does that distribution follow a Gulf Coast Olmec template that was adopted along with the monument technology and artistic canons? Or is Chalcatzingo's template different, such that any Olmec elements it might contain were merely added to a preexisting (Central Mexican) sacred landscape at the site? Those questions are particularly pertinent to understanding the nature of Chalcatzingo's interaction with Gulf Coast Olmec sites.

To make such a comparison of organizational templates, it is obviously also necessary to reconstruct the Gulf Coast Olmec templates. As at Chalcatzingo, this can be done through an analysis of monument placements and architectural associations at the two best-documented Gulf Coast Olmec centers—La Venta, Tabasco, and San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán, Veracruz. In carrying out those analyses it is recognized that there are some inherent problems, but no more so than with almost any other archaeological data. An initial concern in analyzing monument placement is that of monument chronology. The monuments at the sites under consideration were apparently created and erected at differing times during a period of up to seven hundred years. Furthermore, during that time many of those carvings were perhaps repositioned, mutilated, recycled (see Cyphers, this volume), or buried, and the sites themselves enlarged and modified. Moreover, there is the basic problem of sampling, for in no case has any center been completely excavated to reveal all possible monuments.

This analysis is carried out to ascertain if viable patterns *do* exist, problems notwithstanding. It is aided by the fact that because sacred landscapes follow fundamental cosmological templates, they tend to be conservative and maintained for centuries. Thus, even though a site may have been physically rebuilt and modified over time, its cosmological template could have remained substantially unaltered. In fact, several interesting co-occurring patterns are observable at the three sites under discussion. Those patterns suggest that a basic template—the result of adherence to certain structuring principles—was operable at those sites, that the template was long-lived (conservative), and that any site modifications and monument repositionings over time probably reproduced the long-established template.

<sup>2</sup> Although Nahuatl was the common language of Morelos in the sixteenth century, several linguists, including Hopkins (1984: 30–52) and Manrique Castañeda (1975: maps 5, 7), have suggested that during the Formative period the peoples of Morelos and adjacent areas of Guerrero spoke a language of the Otomanguean family, a family common across Central Mexico and the Oaxaca area.

The following analyses focus primarily upon large and relatively immobile stone monuments. At both La Venta and Chalcatzingo those have restricted distributions that form a zone of monumental art that I shall refer to in this chapter as the Major Monument Zone (MMZ). I do so to avoid using any term for that zone that might be misunderstood or give the appearance of being emic. Furthermore, this chapter deals only with monument placement and the reconstruction of the sacred landscape within that zone. What mundane uses the MMZ may also have had at the sites under analysis is not discussed, particularly because in most instances that use remains to be archaeologically ascertained.

For clarity and space considerations, bibliographic citations for the individual monuments mentioned in this chapter are presented in an Appendix.

#### CHALCATZINGO'S MONUMENTS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS

Chalcatzingo is one of only two pre-500 b.c. sites in Central Mexico with both stone monuments and public mound architecture (e.g., Grove 1984, 1987c); the other site is Teopantecuanitlán, Guerrero (Martínez Donjuan 1982, 1985, 1986; Grove 1989: 142–145).<sup>3</sup> The Formative period village at Chalcatzingo was situated on a terraced hillside extending northward from the base of the Cerro Chalcatzingo and the Cerro Delgado, two imposing mountains that rise abruptly from the floor of the Amatzinac Valley in eastern Morelos. Most of the site's 31 known monuments occur in three spatially distinct settings: two major groupings on the Cerro Chalcatzingo and a third major cluster on several lower terraces within the settlement area (Fig. 1). Those three groupings define the Major Monument Zone, and the few solitary monuments at the site will not be considered in this general analysis. All of Chalcatzingo's monuments for which stratigraphic context can be ascertained were erected during the late Middle Formative Cantera phase, ca. 700–500 b.c. Those carvings that cannot be dated archaeologically can also be assigned to the Cantera phase on stylistic grounds (Grove 1987b: 426–430; 1989: 132–142).

#### *The Cerro Chalcatzingo Carvings*

The Formative period occupants of Chalcatzingo, and indeed the Pre-Hispanic peoples of eastern Morelos in general, most probably considered the Cerro Chalcatzingo to be a sacred mountain (see, e.g., Cook de Leonard 1967; Angulo

<sup>3</sup> The Teopantecuanitlán data are still being prepared for publication by Guadalupe Martínez Donjuan, and Kent Reilly has been independently investigating that site's sacred landscape. I have therefore not attempted an analysis of Teopantecuanitlán for this chapter.

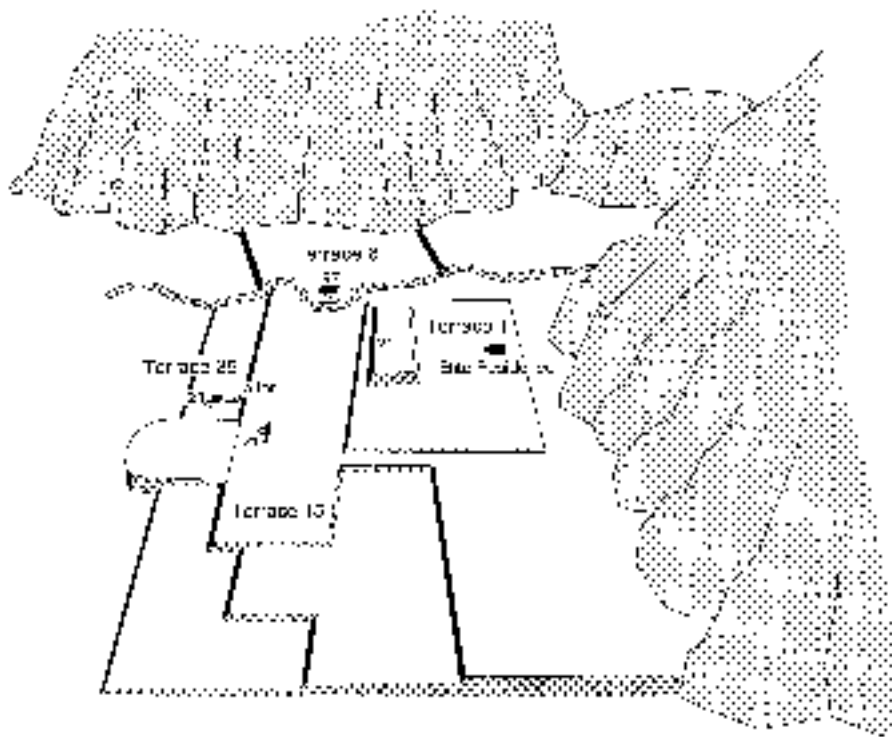


Fig. 1 Schematic view of Chalcatzingo, showing the platform mound (*center*) and monument distribution. North is to the left. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler and David Grove.

1987: 157; Grove 1972: 36; 1987b: 430–432). It is important to note in this regard that the two groups of carvings specifically associated with that mountain are thematically “mythico-supernatural” (Grove 1984: 109–122).

Chalcatzingo’s most famous bas-relief, “El Rey” (Monument 1; Fig. 2), is situated high on the mountainside, where it is the principal carving in a group of six bas-reliefs executed directly onto exposed rock faces there (Fig. 1). These reliefs occur adjacent to a natural watercourse for rainwater runoff, and rain is the major interrelating iconographic theme of these monuments. The “El Rey” carving depicts a personage seated within a large niche that is represented by a sectioned quatrefoil. That half-quatrefoil is marked with iconographic motifs that show it as the mouth of a supernatural creature and identify it as a “mountain cave.” Rain clouds with falling !-shaped raindrops hang over the cave, and similar raindrop motifs also decorate the



Fig. 2 Chalcatzingo Monument 1, “El Rey.”

costume of the personage. “Mist” scrolls are shown emanating from the mouth of the cave.

The other five small reliefs (Monuments 6/7, 8, 11, 14, and 15) occur as a linear series running eastward from Monument 1. While each of these carvings is slightly different in one or two minor details (Grove 1987b: table 27.1), they all depict the same basic scene: a small saurian creature crouched atop a scroll motif and peering upward at a rain cloud with falling !-shaped raindrops. In three of the five carvings a squash plant is depicted below the saurian and scroll. As Jorge Angulo (1987: 133) has noted, the linear arrangement of the bas-reliefs suggests that they may have composed a purposeful pictorial sequence. Because they are spaced several meters apart, it also means that they cannot be viewed simultaneously as a group. To see them, a viewer must walk from carving to carving, a positioning of monuments that I shall refer to throughout this chapter as a “processional arrangement.”

The cerro’s second cluster of carvings also consists of six bas-reliefs, but they are executed on boulders and stone slabs on the talus slope at the foot of the mountain (Fig. 1). Five of these carvings occur in a linear, spaced, processional arrangement. They are relatively large carvings and primarily depict supernatu-

ral zoomorphic creatures dominating generalized human figures: a large reptilianlike creature grasping a human figure in its mouth (Monument 5); two felines with supernatural features, pouncing with claws extended onto two prostrate humans (Monument 4); a recumbent feline beside a cactuslike plant (Monument 3; Angulo [1987: 144] has discovered a probable subordinate human figure in a damaged area of the carving); and a recently discovered carving showing a snarling feline atop a prone human figure (Monument 31; Fig. 3). These reliefs probably illustrate a sequence of mythical events important in the cosmogony of the peoples of Chalcatzingo.

The fifth relief (Monument 2), at the west end of the series, is best described as depicting a ritual involving four human actors. Three of them are standing and masked; the fourth is seated, and his mask has been turned to the back of his head. The headdress worn by one of the standing participants in the ritual replicates the motifs adorning the head of one of Monument 4's felines. This correspondence suggests that the ritual scene was related in some manner to the mythological events displayed by the other monuments in the sequence.



Fig. 3 Chalcatzingo Monument 31.



A sixth talus carving, Monument 13, was found downhill from the larger boulder reliefs. It portrays a supernatural anthropomorphic being with a cleft head, seated within the quatrefoil mouth of a supernatural creature. The carving is therefore iconographically similar to Monument 1, higher on the same hillside.

*Monuments within the Habitation Zone (Fig 1)*

The hillside terracing begins at the base of the cerro's talus slopes. The Formative period settlement is situated on these terraces, and the uppermost major terrace (Terrace 1) was apparently a principal precinct of the Formative period village. It was the location of Chalcatzingo's major elite residence (PC-Structure 1), at its southern edge. Its northern edge is dominated by the settlement's largest public architectural construction, a massive 70 m long, 7 m tall Formative period earthen platform mound (PC-Structure 4). The platform mound and the elite residence on Terrace 1 are separated by a 1 ha "plaza" area. It is notable that no monumental art has been discovered within that plaza area.

At least one carving, Monument 9 (Fig. 4), had apparently been erected atop the large platform mound (Grove and Angulo 1987: 124; Prindiville and Grove 1987: 63). This large stone slab is decorated with a supernatural's frontal face created by a quatrefoil mouth surmounted by eyes and eyebrow elements. The cruciform center of the quatrefoil is hollow, and wear along the lower edge of the gaping mouth might have been caused during the monument's ritual use as a passageway (Angulo 1987: 141; Grove 1984: 50).

The three terraces immediately downhill (north) from the imposing earthen platform mound constitute the third major monument locality (Fig. 1). Each of these terraces (Terraces 6, 15, 25) is the location of a low stone-faced Cantera phase platform structure. The platform dimensions range from 15 to 20 m in length and 0.5 to 1.3 m in height. A carved stela had been erected adjacent to each platform: Monument 21 (Terrace 15), Monument 23 (Terrace 25), and Monument 27 (Terrace 6). Two additional stelae (Monuments 26 and 28) and a round altar (Monument 25) were also uncovered on Terrace 6. Although most of the five stelae had been mutilated, several were sufficiently intact to determine that their bas-relief carvings depict individual personages. This emphasis on displaying specific individuals, and later "decapitating" these monuments, is a major feature of Gulf Coast Olmec monumental art (e.g., Angulo 1987: 155; Grove 1981, 1987b: 423). Because these carvings deal with specific personages, probably the rulers of the site, I have classified the general theme of the monuments as "political" and "rulership" (Grove 1984: 49–68). The decapitated statue of a seated personage (Monument 16), found 60 years ago by Eulalia Guzmán





Fig. 4 Chalcatzingo Monument 9.

in a small gully that separates Terrace 6 and Terrace 15 (Guzmán 1934: fig. 10, no. 6), is consistent with the rulership theme of that site area.

The rulership theme is further reiterated on Terrace 25 by the presence of a large tabletop altar, Monument 22 (Fash 1987). Such altars are an important monument type at Gulf Coast centers and appear to have functioned symbolically as a ruler's "throne" or seat of power (Coe and Diehl 1980: 294; Grove 1973: 135; 1981: 64). Chalcatzingo's Monument 22 is the only tabletop altar ever discovered outside of a Gulf Coast Olmec center and is of further interest because it is situated within an unusual architectural feature, a large rectangular, stone-walled sunken patio (Fash 1987: figs. 7.1, 7.4).

Such sunken patios constitute a sacred space that symbolically represents an entrance or interface to the infraworld, and thus the Monument 22 altar sits within that interface. Symbolic infraworld interfaces frequently occur in the architecture of Mesoamerican sites in forms such as sunken or enclosed plaza areas and ballcourts (e.g., Gillespie 1991: 339; Schele and Freidel 1991: 291). A large sunken walled patio contemporaneous with Chalcatzingo's occurs at Teopantecuanitlán, Guerrero (Martínez Donjuan 1982, 1985, 1986). That center seems to have had significant ties with Chalcatzingo (Grove 1987b: 429; 1989: 142–145) and may have been its closest regional peer during the Middle Formative period. The present archaeological data suggest that such sunken patios may be an architectural form distinctive of Formative period Central Mexico (i.e., Teopantecuanitlán and Chalcatzingo).<sup>4</sup>

### *Chalcatzingo's Sacred Landscape*

The sacred landscape at Chalcatzingo combines natural *sacred geography* (i.e., geographic features with sacred symbolism; e.g., Vogt 1981) with a constructed landscape. The Cerro Chalcatzingo, at the southern periphery of the settlement area, was clearly an integral part of the site's cosmological template, for it is the location of two groups of mythico-supernatural carvings. These two groups of carvings communicated different messages. Cloud and rain symbols predominate in the reliefs high on the hillside adjacent to a natural rainwater drainage channel. On the other hand, depictions of zoomorphic supernaturals dominating humans prevail in the reliefs on the talus at the base of the mountain.

The constructed landscape begins with Terrace 1 at the base of the talus slopes. This terrace was the location of an elite residence, and there is no evidence that monuments had ever been erected in this area. The site's massive earthen platform mound delimits the northern (downhill) edge of the terrace, and a large quatrefoil supernatural face (Monument 9), had apparently been erected atop the mound. The presence of two similar quatrefoil supernatural faces on the Cerro Chalcatzingo (Monuments 1 and 13), and the overall "mountain" symbolism of these quatrefoils (Angulo 1987: 140–142; Grove 1987b: 427), suggest that Monument 9's placement on the massive earthen platform may have identified that platform mound as a "sacred mountain" within the site's constructed landscape.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Cyphers (this volume) reports evidence of a wall behind San Lorenzo Monument 14, a large tabletop altar, and suggests the possibility that the wall is part of a sunken patio, a prospect that remains to be further tested archaeologically. Radiocarbon dates from the Teopantecuanitlán patio (Martínez Donjuan 1986: 77), suggest its earliest construction phase may date to ca. 1400 b.c.

To the north, on the three terraces immediately beyond the platform mound (Terraces 6, 15, 25), are low stone-faced platforms and monuments depicting personages. Terrace 25 is also the location of a sunken patio and tabletop altar. Rulership is the dominant theme in monuments in this site sector.

A definite north-south spatial dichotomy is manifested in the monument distribution and themes at Chalcatzingo, and the northern and southern sectors of the site's MMZ are physically separated by the great platform mound. Rulership monuments and stone-faced platforms occur in the sector north of that platform, and the mythico-supernatural carvings are in the sector to its south. In the far south, high on the natural sacred mountain, a "sky cave" entrance to the otherworld is depicted (Monument 1), while its complementary opposite, a sunken patio—an entrance to the earthly otherworld—is positioned in the far north. There is also a general symmetry to the north-south monument placements. In terms of actual measured linear distance, the earthen platform that separates the northern and southern sectors is positioned midway between the northernmost and southernmost carvings (Cerro Chalcatzingo Monuments 1 and 2–5, Terrace 25's Monument 23).

#### LA VENTA'S MONUMENTS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS

The easternmost Gulf Coast Olmec center, La Venta, situated on the humid, tropical coastal plains of Tabasco, is notable for its abundance of both stone monuments and earthen mound architecture. La Venta's complex of mounds extends for more than a kilometer and is dominated near its north end by one of Middle Formative Mesoamerica's largest pyramid structures, the 30 m tall Mound C-1 (see González 1988: fig. 1; Adams 1991: map 3-2). Robert Heizer (1968: 15–21) was one of the first scholars to suggest that Mound C-1, built atop a raised basal platform, symbolized a sacred mountain. Most of La Venta's 80 known monuments occur in and around the mound-plaza groups designated as Complexes A and B, immediately to the north and south of Mound C-1 (Fig. 5).

Complex A extends northward from the foot of Mound C-1's basal platform. The enclosed plaza area of this architectural complex is renowned in the history of Olmec archaeology, for it has been the focus of nearly all the significant archaeological research conducted at La Venta prior to 1985. The 1942–43 excavations of Stirling and Drucker (Drucker 1952) and the 1955 research of Drucker, Heizer, and Squier (1959), both within Complex A, uncovered some of the most spectacular Olmec creations ever found. These included great buried mosaic pavements, massive offerings of serpentine blocks, caches of jade celts, and major tombs. The latter may be the graves of several of La Venta's

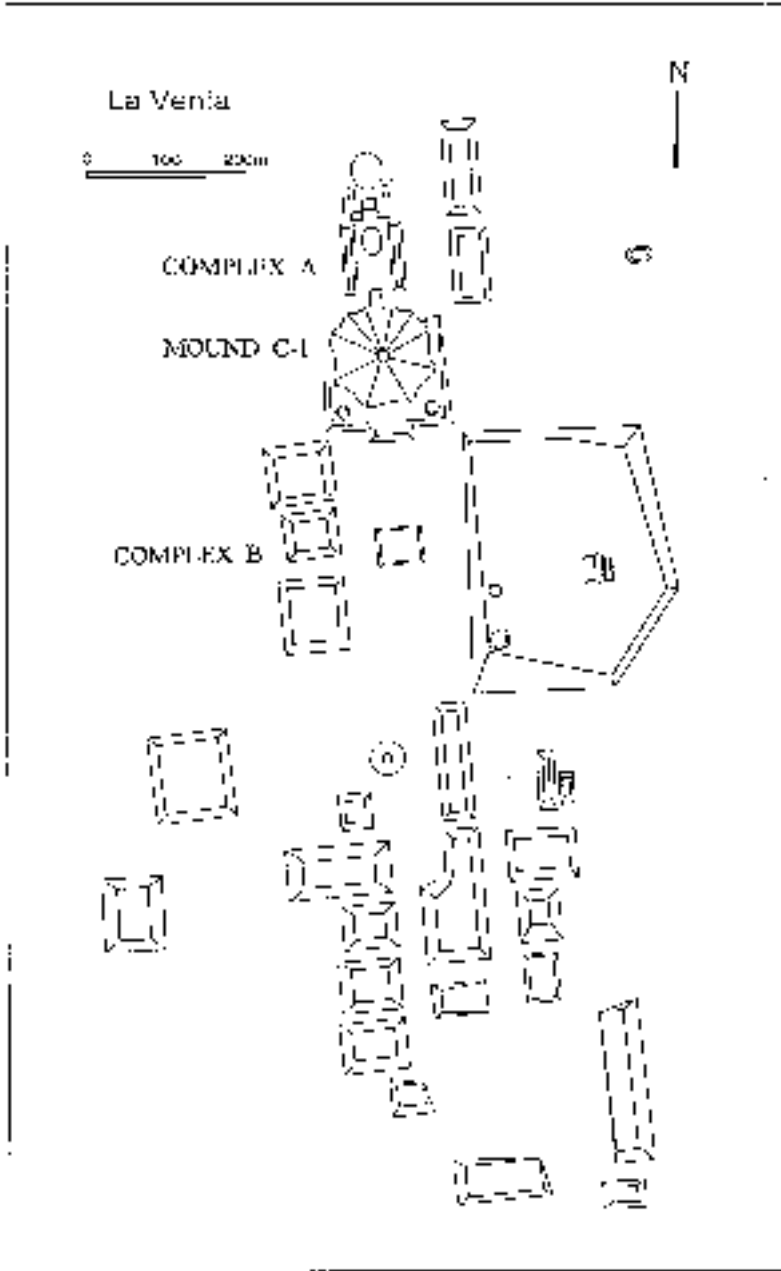


Fig. 5 La Venta, showing locations of Mound C-1 and Complexes A and B. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

rulers. Many of these discoveries occurred along a north-south axis bisecting the complex. This axis can also be extended further south to bisect Mound C-1 and Complex B as well. In some instances the extended axis is relevant to the monument placements described below.

Until recently (González 1988; Heizer, Graham, and Napton 1968), Complex B had received comparatively little archaeological attention. The complex extends southward from Mound C-1's basal platform and includes a 7 ha plaza area ("Plaza B") whose perimeter is well defined by platform mound architecture, including the large raised "Stirling Acropolis" along the plaza's east side. Although the architecture of Complex B is not well dated, the visible mounds of both Complexes B and A appear to be Middle Formative period constructions. The monument distributions in both of these areas are most easily discussed in terms of their form categories.

#### *Colossal Heads (Fig. 6)*

The Olmec are perhaps best known to the public as the creators of colossal stone heads. These heads are "personage" carvings and seem to be portraits of individual Olmec rulers (Coe 1977: 186; Grove 1981: 65–67), either as living ruler or revered ancestor. Their placement within a site's sacred landscape must therefore be considered from the perspectives of both rulership and ancestors. Only 4 of the 17 known Olmec colossal heads occur at La Venta. Heads 2, 3, and 4 were found ca. 110 m beyond Complex A (Drucker 1952: 9) and constitute the northernmost monument grouping at La Venta. They had been arranged "facing north, forming an irregular line approximately 100 m. east to west" (1952: 9). In contrast, the fourth, Head 1, had been positioned south of Mound C-1, in Plaza B.

#### *Altars (Fig. 7)*

Several different monument forms at La Venta have been classified as "altars," sculptures that, as noted earlier, seem associated with rulership. Five of La Venta's nine altars are of the tabletop variety, large rectangular monuments distinguished by their projecting upper ledge and large frontal niche with a seated personage. Two subtypes of tabletop altars can be distinguished: Type A, which depict only the seated personage within the niche (La Venta Altars 3, 4, 6), and Type B, in which the niched personage holds a "baby" (La Venta Altars 2, 5). Non-tabletop altars are Altars 1, 7, and 8, and possibly also Monument 59.

Although the nine monuments listed above include several very different forms of altars, eight of these carvings are located in Plaza B south of Mound

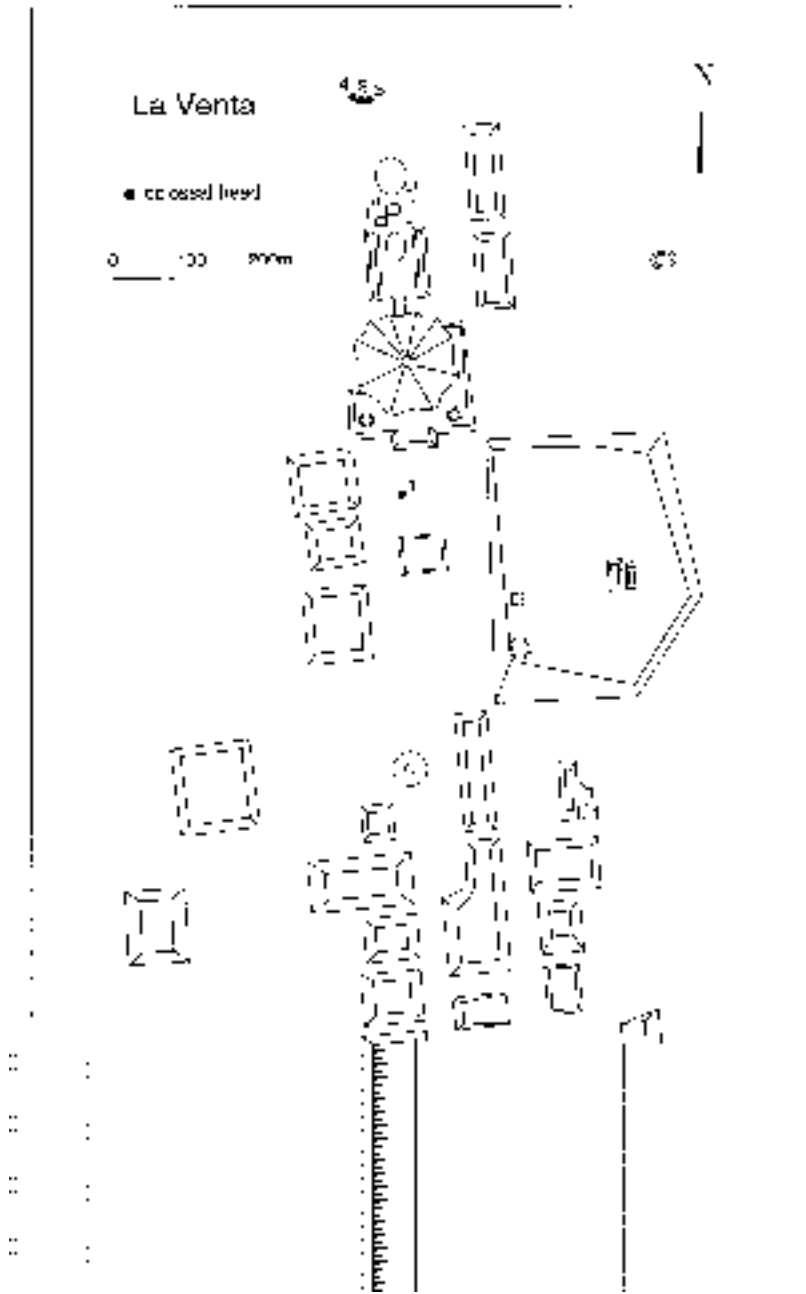


Fig. 6 La Venta, the distribution of colossal heads. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

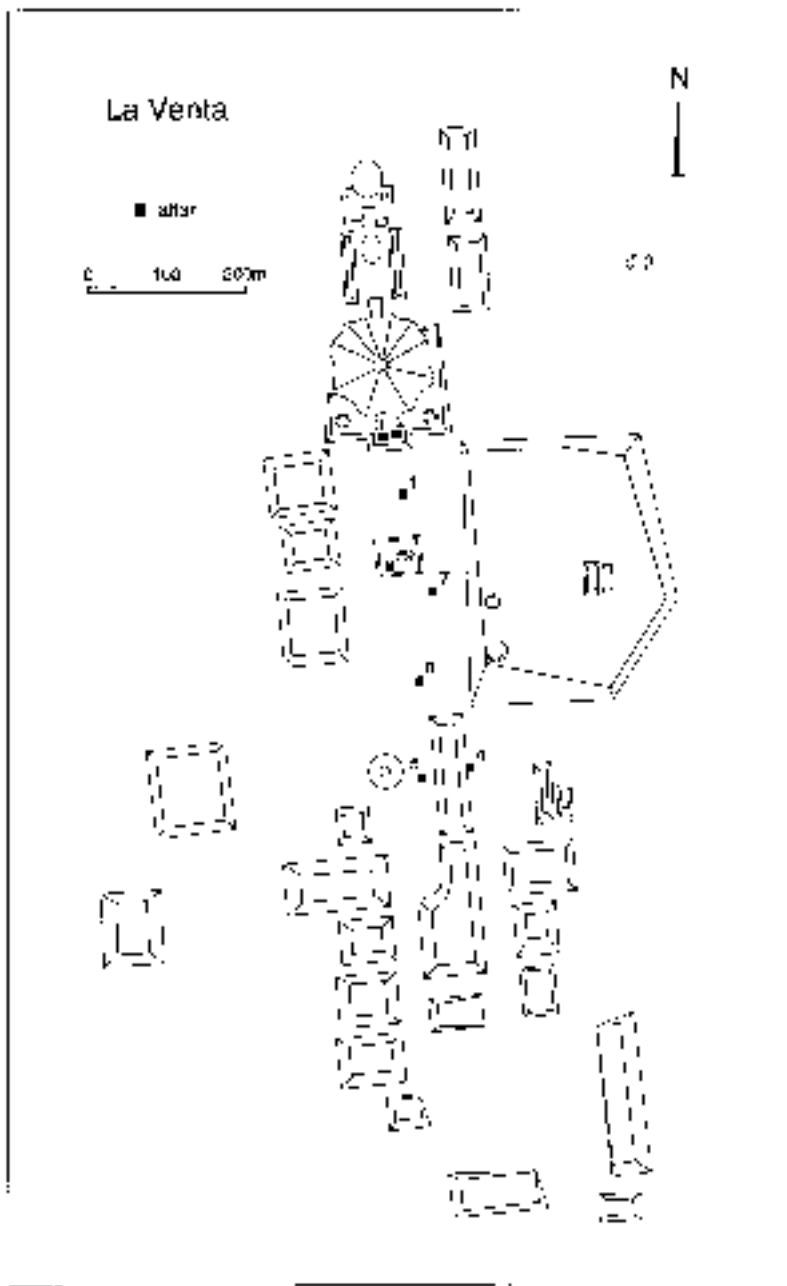


Fig. 7 La Venta, the distribution of altars. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.



C-1,<sup>5</sup> and they comprise the majority of the major monuments displayed in that large plaza area. Their distribution within the plaza is also informative. The tabletop altars occur only at the north and south extremities of Plaza B, and in both instances occur as Type A-and-B pairs. The southern pair, Altars 4 [Type A] and 5 [Type B], are arranged on opposite sides of a low range mound (Mound D-8), where they are positioned so that they create an east-west alignment with a conical mound, D-1, in the plaza. That alignment seems deliberate and may have demarcated the plaza's southern limit. More than 400 m north, at the upper edge of Mound C-1's basal platform, are Altars 2 [Type B] and 3 [Type A].

A special configuration also occurs in the altar pairs: the Type A and B altars were positioned to face in opposite directions. Although this might be considered as merely coincidental in the case of Altars 4 and 5, erected on opposite sides of Mound D-8, the same opposition occurs with Altars 2 and 3 on the basal platform below Mound C-1, and it is more convincing there. Altar 2 faces onto Plaza B, and thus its frontal scene would have been visible to viewers on the plaza. In contrast, Altar 3 was apparently positioned facing toward Mound C-1, and therefore its main imagery would not have been visible to those viewers. In both pairs, the Type B altars (personages holding babies) face toward the plaza, and Type A altars face away from that area.

Spaced nearly equidistantly across Plaza B, between altar pairs 2-3 and 4-5, are Altars 1, 7, and 8. All occur east of the site's north-south axis, except for smaller Monument 59 found on Mound B-4 (Clewlow and Corson 1968: end map). The wide (ca. 110 m) spacing between these various altars means that even if the plaza area was an entirely open vista, the monuments nevertheless could only have been viewed individually, suggesting that their positioning reflects a purposeful processional arrangement.

### *Stelae (Fig. 8)*

Stelae are a monument form that appears to have gained importance only late in Olmec prehistory, at which time they became the medium for displaying low-relief images of personages and supernaturals. La Venta's three most famous stelae—Stelae 1, 2, and 3—all depict particular personages. Stelae 1 and 3 were both found in Complex A north of Pyramid C-1. Stela 1, in relatively high relief, depicts a personage standing within a rectangular niche that is marked

<sup>5</sup> La Venta Altar 6 occurs outside the MMZ in Complex F (the "Cerro Encantada"), ca. 700 m northwest of Complex A (González 1988: fig. 1; Adams 1991: map 3-2). Stylistically, it is a very late carving.

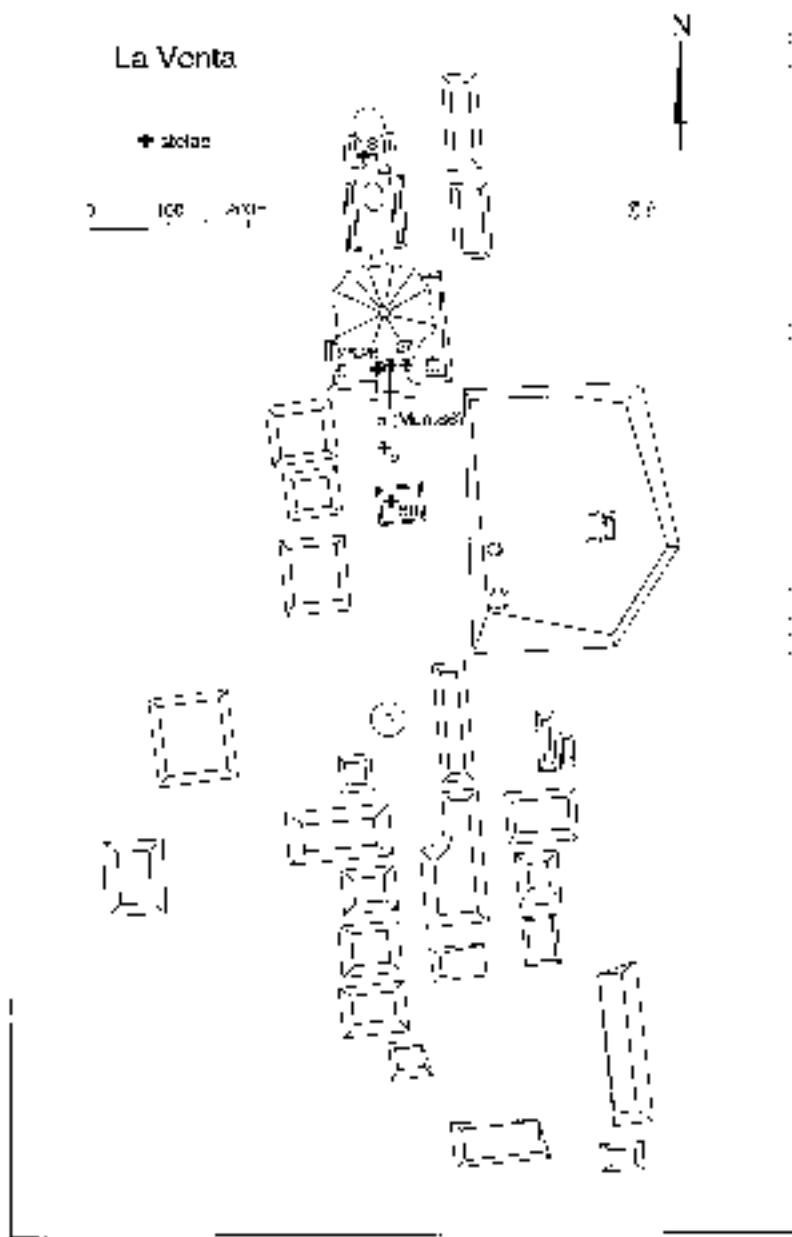


Fig. 8 La Venta, the distribution of stelae. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

iconographically as the mouth of a supernatural creature, that is, an otherworld entrance. It is notable that the stela had been erected a few meters west of Tomb C in alignment with that tomb's large stone crypt grave (Drucker 1952: fig. 14). Stela 3, with a "narrative" scene showing two personages, was positioned in the area of Complex A referred to as the "Ceremonial Court" and hidden behind the columnar basalt wall that enclosed that area. In contrast, Stela 2 was erected on Plaza B south of Mound C-1. There it was situated adjacent to Colossal Head 1, and both monuments were openly displayed. All three stelae occur west of the site's north-south axis.

Although Stelae 1, 2, and 3 are among the best known of La Venta's monuments, several large green schist stelae have been found at the site but have not received the attention they deserve. These green schist stelae all occur in the Plaza B area, and all are carved with great supernatural faces (Fig. 9). One of these, Monument 58, had stood on Mound B-4 in Plaza B (Clewlow and Corson 1968: end map). The more important pair, Monuments 25/26 and 27, were erected at the southern base of great pyramid Mound C-1, where they are positioned so that they flank the mound's north-south axis. Monument 86 (Stela 5), a recently discovered stela with a mythico-supernatural scene depicting four personages, one of whom is descending from the sky, stands between Monuments 25/26 and 27 (González 1988: fig. 1; 1994).

#### *Other Carvings (Fig. 10)*

Unlike the massive altars, stelae, and colossal heads, which are essentially immobile, smaller carvings such as anthropomorphic statues were more readily portable. Several of these could have been used in rituals or moved from place to place, therefore the locations at which they were discovered are relevant in only the most general terms. Those carvings for which provenience data are available primarily cluster around the periphery of Plaza B, including east of the plaza on the Stirling Acropolis. The virtual absence of small monuments in Plaza B itself suggests that none had been permanently displayed there.

A few smaller monuments were found in Complex A, primarily within the enclosed Ceremonial Court. Three additional carvings—Monuments 19, 20, and 21—had been positioned north of Complex A near Colossal Heads 2, 3, and 4.

#### *La Venta's Sacred Landscape*

The northern limit of the Major Monument Zone at La Venta is defined by Colossal Heads 2, 3, and 4, and is separated from the southernmost monuments, Altars 4 and 5, by a distance of ca. 840 m. Mound C-1 is situated near the midpoint of that distribution, effectively separating the zone into a northern

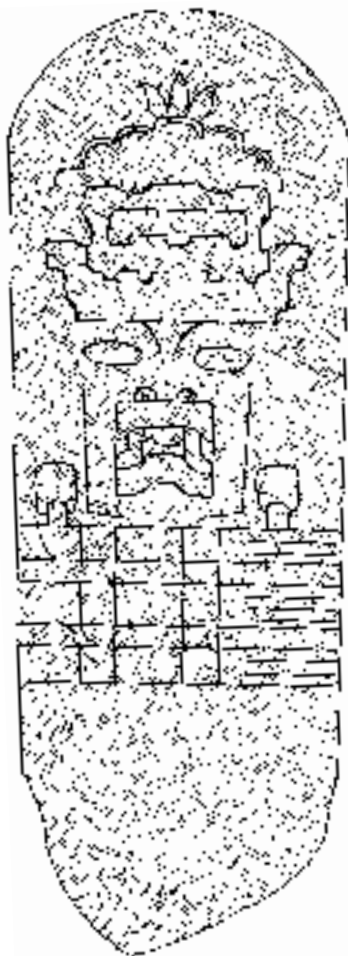


Fig. 9 La Venta stela Monument 25/26.

and a southern sector. The majority of the principal monuments at the site—seven altars, a stela, and a colossal head—were positioned in the southern sector within Plaza B. They are all monuments which by their very size, and by their placement in a processional arrangement in that large open area, could visually communicate their iconographic messages to many viewers at one time. The north end of Plaza B is dominated by the wide elevated apron of Mound C-1's basal platform, and it is therefore notable that the other architecture surrounding the plaza is likewise comprised of platform mounds, that is, mounds that in many instances could have functioned as

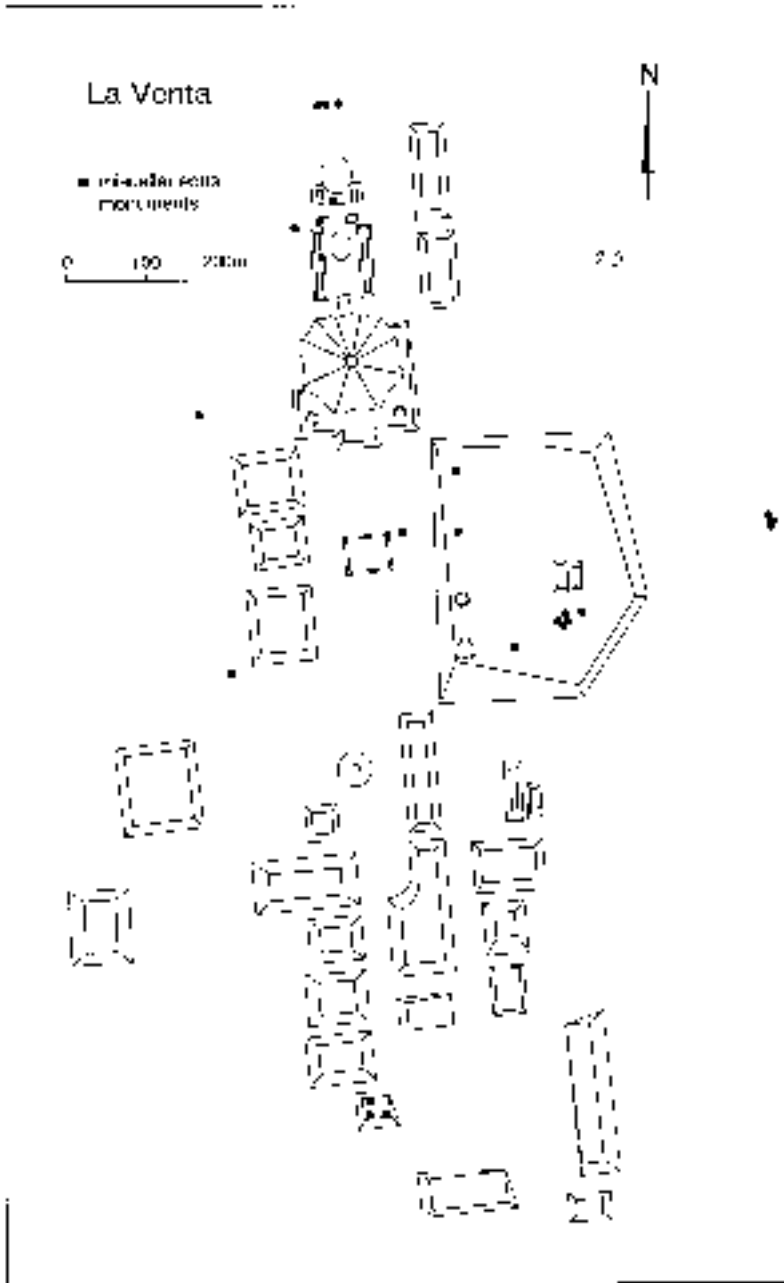


Fig. 10 La Venta, the distribution of miscellaneous monuments.  
Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

elevated “stages” for rituals meant to be viewed by people gathered within the plaza. The southern sector of La Venta’s MMZ seems to be accessible public space, an area in which rulership/personage monuments were displayed in a processional arrangement, and thus an area in which public ritual activities probably took place. Many of these rituals may have been related to the monuments. Even the vast majority of the site’s smaller monuments for which there are provenience data are found on the east and west fringes of Complex B.

In contrast, in the northern sector, the major objects and offerings in Complex A were not meant to be accessed or viewed. Complex A is a restricted precinct partially enclosed by long range mounds. It is an area of major tombs, and the elaborate offerings found there were *buried* and thus were not meant to be viewed or accessed. Even the few monuments situated within Complex A, such as Stela 3, were not openly displayed but were hidden behind the large wall of columnar basalt pillars of the complex’s Ceremonial Court.

The cosmological meaning of the sacred landscape represented in the northern sector can be inferred from the presence of major tombs there: north is the realm of the ancestors and the past and probably also a sky realm.<sup>6</sup> The placement of three colossal heads 110 m beyond Complex A, in the far north, is consistent with that cosmological referent, for in the Middle Formative sacred landscape represented at La Venta, these Early Formative period portrait carvings of Olmec rulers would indeed be the *ancestors*. The fact that these three heads were not buried, but visible and positioned to create “an irregular line approximately 100 m. east to west” (Drucker 1952: 9), implies that they too had been spaced in a processional arrangement and were meant to be viewed.

An interesting contrast is manifested in the positioning of the major monuments openly displayed within the northern and southern sectors. Those in the southern sector are spaced along the central area of the sector, while tombs and buried offerings occur in the central area of the northern sector and the displayed monuments occur at that sector’s perimeter. That basic north-south dichotomy, and the separation of those two sectors by Mound C-1, the constructed “sacred mountain,” was clearly a significant aspect of La Venta’s template. However, the MMZ’s center-line axis also

<sup>6</sup> A number of scholars have pointed out the association of north with the celestial/sky realm in Classic Maya cosmology, and Ashmore’s (1989, 1992) analyses of Classic Maya sacred landscapes discuss that correlation very well. For a variety of reasons, aspects of Complex A (and particularly the Ceremonial Court area) also seem to have associations with a celestial otherworld. Susan Gillespie has called my attention to the association between “north” and “the past” in some other Mesoamerican cosmologies.

created an east and west division that produces a lesser pattern: altars are positioned east of the axis and colossal heads and stelae west of it.

#### SAN LORENZO'S MONUMENTS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTIONS

San Lorenzo is situated 60 km inland from the Gulf of Mexico, atop a long plateau that rises ca. 50 m above the floodplains of the Coatzacoalcos and Chiquito Rivers. The plateau area had been artificially built up in Olmec and pre-Olmec times to create a space more than 1,100 m long and up to 700 m wide (Coe 1968: 44–46; 1981: 119; Coe and Diehl 1980: 27–28, map 2). That remodeling of the hilltop required organization and planning, and was certainly carried out for reasons that transcended the mundane: it arguably created the basic sacred landscape at San Lorenzo. More than sixty monuments have been found on the plateau, and several smaller sites situated several kilometers from the plateau—Tenochtitlán, Potrero Nuevo, Los Treinta, and El Azulul—also have a few monuments (see Fig. 14). The monuments of these peripheral sites are discussed in a separate section of this chapter.

The reconstructible pattern of monument distribution at San Lorenzo exhibits some distinct differences from that of La Venta. Some of the variation may be due to the fact that the sites are not completely contemporaneous. San Lorenzo has more Early Formative period monuments, such as colossal heads, while late Middle Formative period monuments, such as stelae, are rare there. Similarly, San Lorenzo lacks a major earthen mound comparable to La Venta's C-1, and mound-plaza groups dating to the site's Olmec occupation have not yet been distinguished there. Although the Group A mounds and the Mound C3-1 pyramid in the center of the San Lorenzo plateau have a layout reminiscent of La Venta's Complex A (see, e.g., Figs. 10–12), they seem to be Early Postclassic constructions (Coe and Diehl 1980: 29, 388, fig. 12). The possible exceptions are one or two small mounds, exposed in stratigraphic cuts, that may have been constructed in the late Middle Formative period Palangana phase (1980: 62–71, 200–201, figs. 44, 45). Finally, while the zones of monument distribution at La Venta and Chalcatzingo comprise one-third or less of the total site areas there, the major monuments at San Lorenzo occur across nearly the entire upper surface of the plateau, and the MMZ and main site area are essentially equivalent.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ann Cyphers' current research at San Lorenzo (e.g., Cyphers, this volume; personal communication) indicates that the total site area is even greater, also encompassing the terraces and hillslopes below and beyond the upper surface of the plateau.



*Colossal Heads (Fig. 11)*

In 1994 San Lorenzo's tenth colossal head was discovered. Only about half of these heads occur in good archaeological contexts, however, and the remainder have been found in the *barrancas* that have eroded into the plateau over the centuries. Therefore, only general observations can be inferred from the positioning of the heads.

Three of the heads (2, 4, and 7) occur in the northeastern quarter of the San Lorenzo plateau, and the other seven have been found along the sides of the South-Central Ridge (1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10). Colossal heads are absent in the north-central area of the plateau, creating an interval of separation between the northern and southern heads of more than 300 m. In both areas the individual heads are spaced more than 100 m from each other, perhaps again representing a processional arrangement, particularly in the cases of heads 2, 4, and 7 (north) and heads 1, 6, 9, and 10 (south).

*Altars (Fig. 12)*

Only two unequivocal tabletop altars have been found at San Lorenzo. Monument 20 (Type B) was found in the far northwest area of the plateau. Monument 14 (Type A) is positioned in the west-central sector of the site. Although separated by more than 400 m, these two altars are in a virtual north-south alignment.<sup>8</sup>

Evidence suggests that several other tabletop altars had also been displayed on the plateau at some time. Monument 18, in the southeastern corner of the South-Central Ridge, is apparently the basal fragment of a tabletop altar. The stone's low-relief carving depicts a pair of dwarfs, each with one upraised arm, as if to "support" the missing tabletop. Monument 60, on the east side of the plateau near head 1—and nearly due north of Monument 18—may likewise be a basal fragment. The most interesting evidence, however, is the astute observation by James Porter (1989) that oddly sculpted areas on two of the site's colossal heads (2 and 7) indicate that these monuments had been altars before being recarved into their present form.

Four other carvings have also been classified as altars at San Lorenzo: two large rectangular stone slabs, Monuments 8 and 51, and two "circular altars,"

<sup>8</sup> It is also notable that while separated by almost one km, the northernmost and southernmost colossal heads, 4 (north) and 3 (south), are in a virtual north-south alignment, and heads 5 and 8 are positioned close to that alignment line. However, because of *barranca* erosion, the discovery location of head 3 may be only approximate to its original position on the plateau.

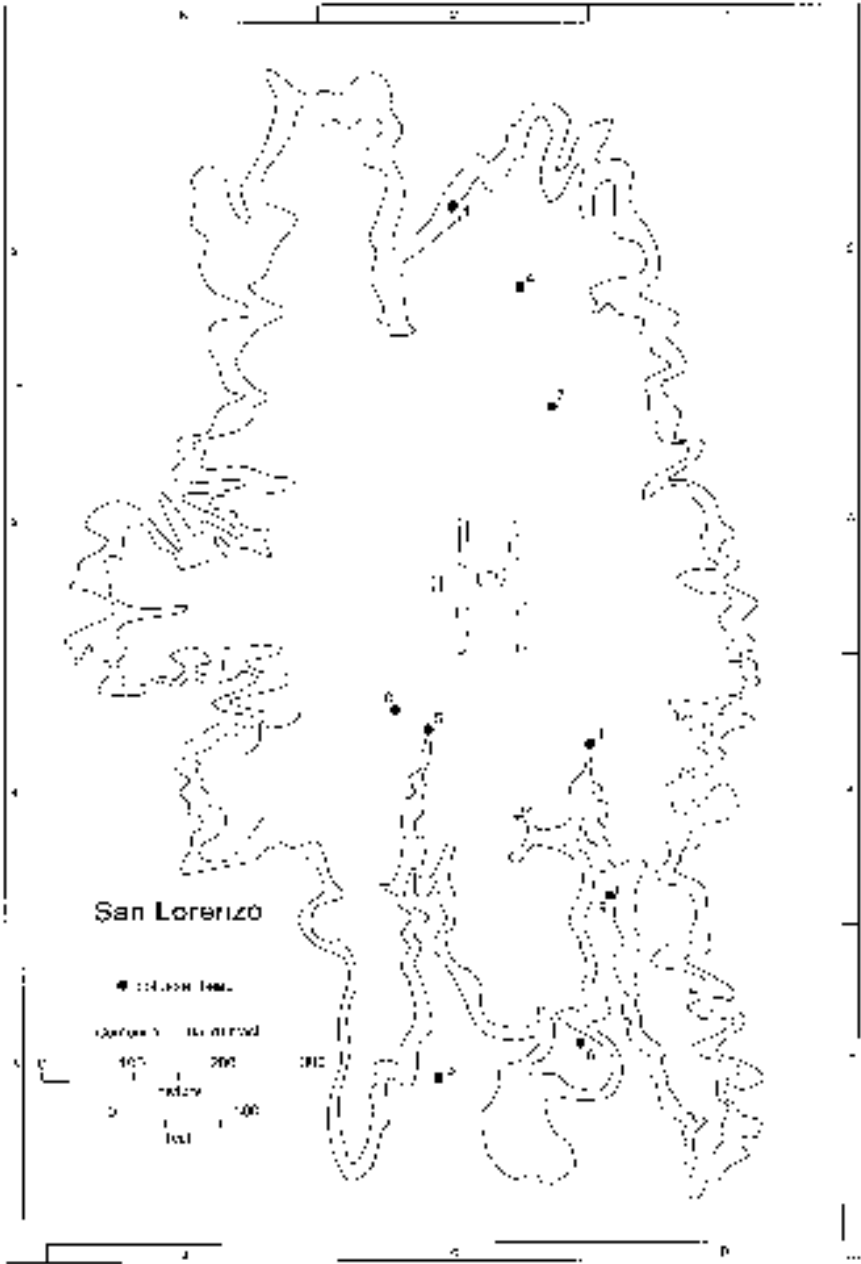


Fig. 11 San Lorenzo, the distribution of colossal heads. North is at top of map. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

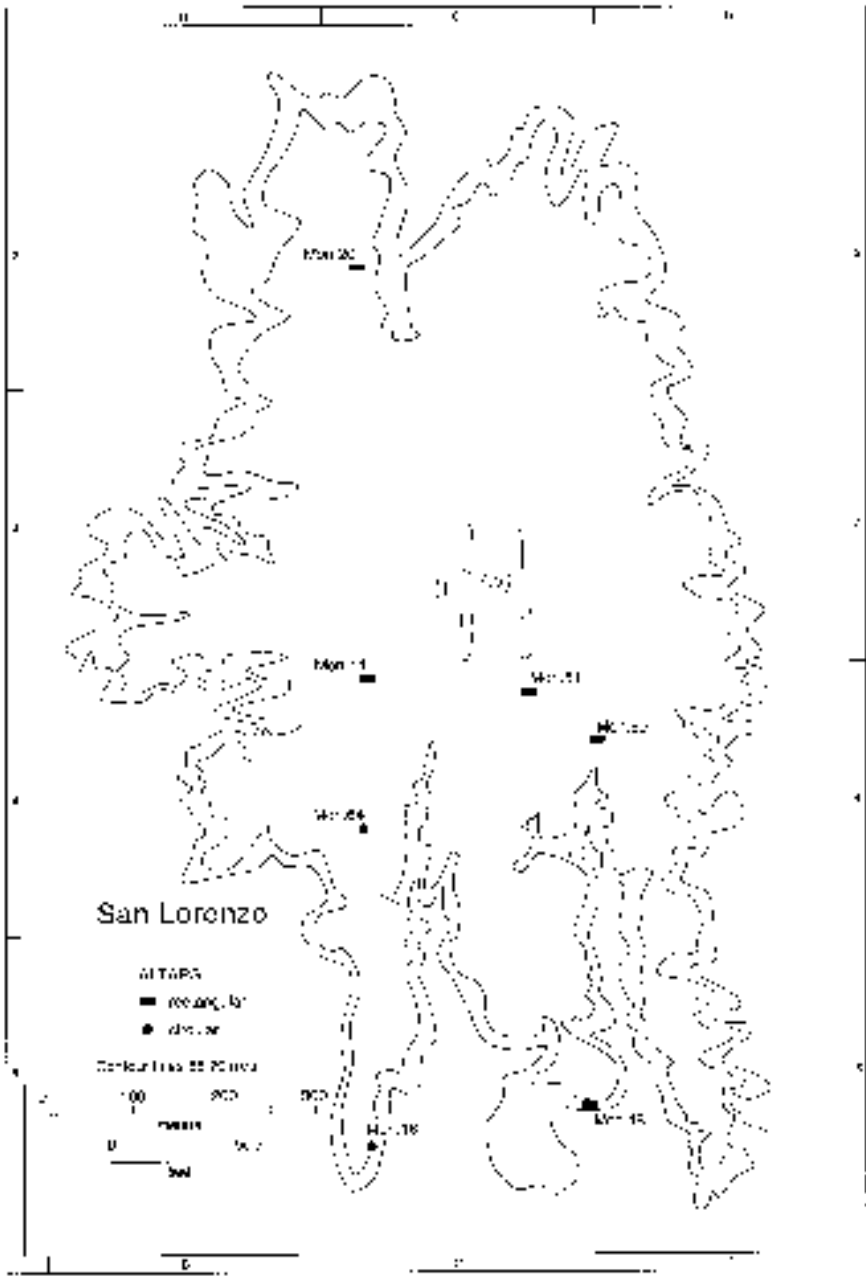


Fig. 12 San Lorenzo, the distribution of altars. North is at top of map. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

Monuments 16 and 64. Both rectangular slabs are positioned in the same general east-west “latitude” of the plateau as the Monument 14 and 60 altars. On the other hand, the “circular altars” are located on the plateau’s Southwest Ridge. There they appear to be positioned along an extension of the north-south alignment formed by Monuments 14 and 20.

*Other Carvings (Fig. 13)*

The majority of smaller monuments on the plateau occur along the Group C and D ridges, in the western-central sector of the site, away from most of the major monuments. These smaller carvings consist primarily of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statues. Based upon her recent excavations of the Group D Ridge, Ann Cyphers (this volume) suggests that monument recycling and recarving took place in that site area, a function that may partly explain the large number of fragmentary and smaller monuments found there.

San Lorenzo’s Sacred Landscape

Even though San Lorenzo lacks a major mound, the north-south dichotomy that is basic to the organizational template at Chalcatzingo and La Venta is nevertheless present. The majority of the large monuments occur in the southern half of the plateau. The southern sector begins with an east-to-west band of altars (Monuments 8, 14, 51, 60) located just below the site’s midline. Seven colossal heads occur to the south of these altars. There they are widely spaced and could have been viewed only one at a time. That fact, and the possible linear positioning of heads 1, 6, 9, implies that they are arranged processionally. As at La Venta, this southern sector was the area in which rulership/personage monuments were displayed.

Only four major monuments are presently known in the entire northern sector, an altar (Monument 20; Type B) and three colossal heads. All these monuments were positioned near the outer limits of the northern sector. Only a few traces of possible Olmec period architecture occur in the extensive north-central area of the plateau, that is, the zone equivalent to the location of Mound C-1 and Complex A at La Venta,<sup>9</sup> and these seem to date to the Late Middle Formative period (Palangana phase) after San Lorenzo’s “apogee.” Whereas at La Venta the elaborate tombs of Complex A helped identify north as symbolically the realm of “ancestors,” no such tombs have yet been discovered at San

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the site’s modest Early Postclassic period Group A Mounds are positioned at the same equivalent template location as La Venta’s Mound C-1 and Complex A. While perhaps coincidental, it is as if their placement was governed by a very long-lived template.

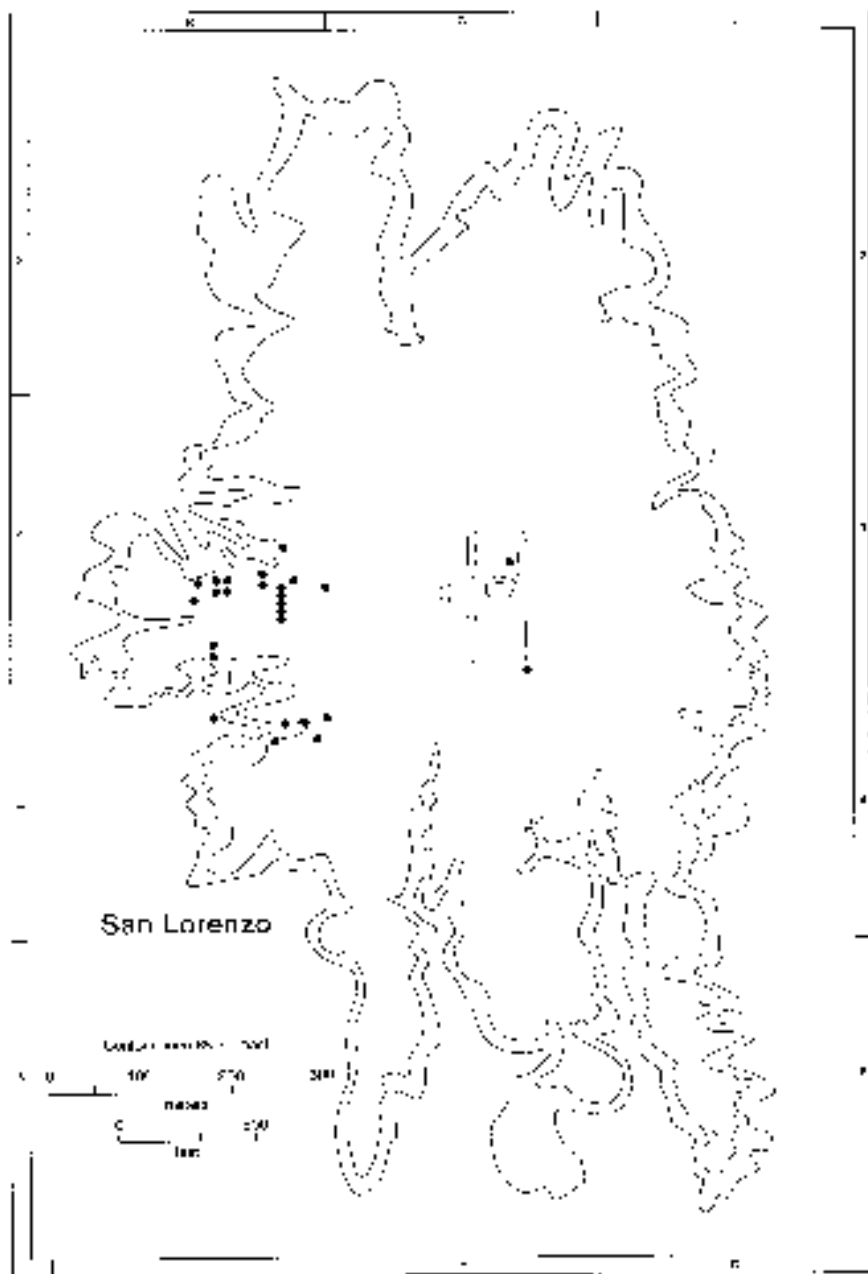


Fig. 13 San Lorenzo, the distribution of miscellaneous monuments. North is at top of map. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

Lorenzo. Therefore, attributing a similar cosmological significance to that site's northern sector is more problematical.

As noted above, James Porter (1989) has observed that two colossal heads at San Lorenzo had been recarved from their original monument form, altars. That physical transformation, from ruler's "thrones" to ruler's portrait heads, was a significant symbolic transformation as well. These conversions were presumably carried out following the death of the rulers, that is, when they themselves were transformed into ancestors. Therefore, it is perhaps meaningful that precisely these two heads, 2 and 7, were both positioned in the northern sector. Similarly, the heavily "mutilated" condition of the northern sector's tabletop altar (Monument 20) may perhaps reflect the initial stages of the recarving process intended to convert that altar into another ancestral colossal head for that sector.

Only generalized east-west differentiations appear in the monument patterns. In the western portion of the plateau a north-south line is created by the site's two tabletop altars, Monuments 14 and 20. If that line is used as a referent, almost all massive monuments—including all colossal heads—occur east of the line, while virtually all small monuments are found west of it.

#### THE SAN LORENZO PERIPHERY AND SACRED LANDSCAPE

The majority of the carvings at the sites peripheral to San Lorenzo—Tenochtitlán, Potrero Nuevo, El Azuzul, and Los Treinta (Fig. 14)—are thematically different from those on the plateau. The exact nature of these sites, and of the positioning of their monuments in relation to mound groups, plazas, or other features, remains to be determined. Nevertheless, even lacking such data, these monuments aid in understanding San Lorenzo's sacred landscape.

Seven of the twelve carvings at these sites depict felines, usually shown as snarling or in "dominating" positions over humans. For example, Matthew Stirling (1955: 8) described Tenochtitlán Monument 1 as "an anthropomorphic jaguar seated on a human figure" and Potrero Nuevo Monument 3 as possibly representing "copulation between a jaguar and a woman." However, as others have noted, these carvings more likely represent aggression and domination (Davis 1978: 454; Medellín 1960: 95). Furthermore, two of the four monuments recently discovered at El Azuzul are snarling felines. In contrast, the few feline carvings found at San Lorenzo (e.g., Monuments 7, 37, 77) do not display any aggressiveness.

Aggressive felines are clearly a major component of the peripheral monuments, but other carvings occur there as well. Potrero Nuevo Monument 2, one of the most frequently published of all Olmec monuments, is a tabletop

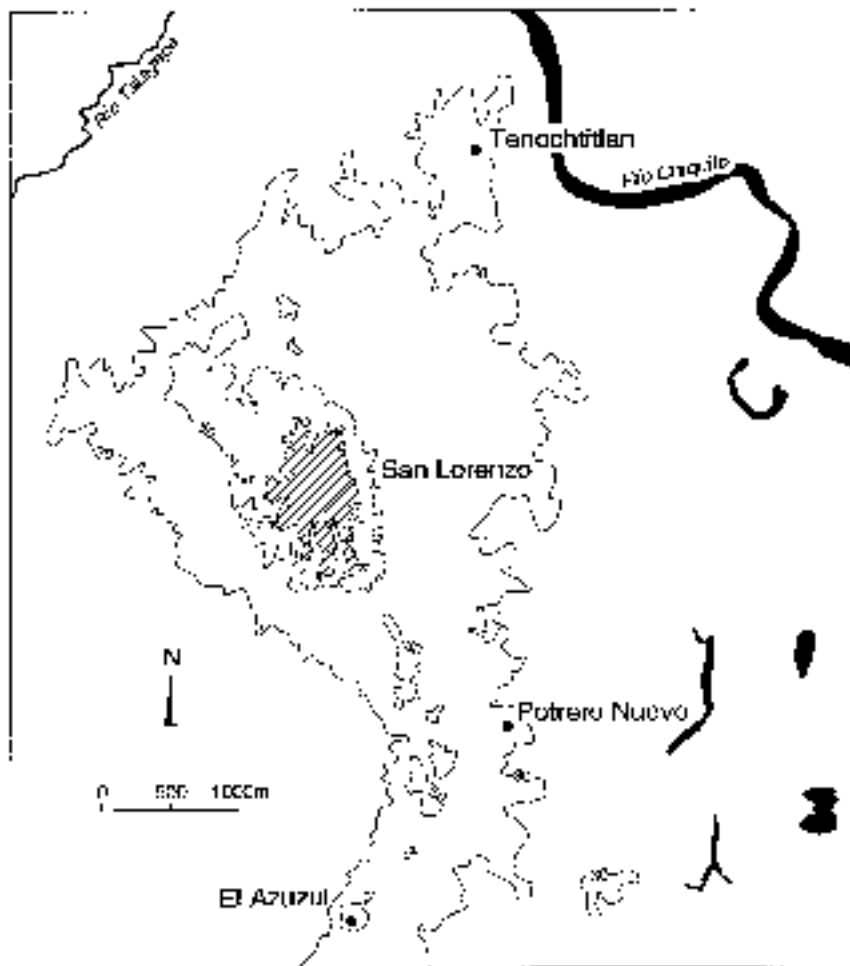


Fig. 14 San Lorenzo and its peripheral sites. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler.

altar carved with the images of two supernatural dwarfs, their arms raised above their heads as if supporting the tabletop. Furthermore, a few personage/rulership statues also occur at the peripheral sites (e.g., Los Treinta, Monument 5; Xochiltepec ejido monument).

The contrasts between the monuments at the actual site of San Lorenzo and those on its periphery seem explainable by the general cosmology of Mesoamerican peoples, where an important distinction is made between center and periphery (see e.g., Hanks 1990: 306–307; Taggart 1983: 55–56). The



center symbolizes inhabited space, the village, while the periphery is a place of the supernatural and of danger. As Taggart (1983: 55) explains: "The center is represented with words standing for the human community. . . . The center represents the moral order. . . . It is juxtaposed against the periphery." The latter is identified with the word "forest." Encounters with the personified forces of nature take place more often in the periphery. Within that paradigm, therefore, the carvings involving dwarfs, or jaguars dominating humans, pertain to the periphery. Their locations—Tenochtitlán, Potrero Nuevo, and El Azuzul—like-wise place them on the actual spatial periphery of the main center, San Lorenzo.

Taggart (1983: 56) also makes the important observation that "present is to the past as the center is to the periphery." Therefore, the center/town/inhabited space represent the present and socio-cosmic order, while the periphery/forest/mountains symbolize the mythological past and disorder, chaos. From that perspective, carvings depicting jaguars dominating humans—on both the Gulf Coast and at Chalcatzingo—are portraying events of the mythological past.

#### SUMMARIZING THE BASIC GULF COAST OLMEC TEMPLATE

This chapter has used a neutral etic category, the Major Monument Zone, to attempt to explore and elucidate the sacred landscapes at Chalcatzingo, La Venta, and San Lorenzo. The results suggest that the inhabitants of these three sites did position monuments purposely to segment space and that there is some emic reality to the MMZ and its component sectors.

At La Venta the MMZ is located at the north end of the site's extensive area of architecture, while at San Lorenzo the MMZ comprises almost the entire upper surface of the plateau. Mound C-1 stands near the midpoint of La Venta's zone, while at San Lorenzo there is no central pyramid mound.<sup>10</sup> Yet while the

<sup>10</sup> The north-south linear size of the MMZ (i.e., the distance from northernmost to southernmost monuments) is ca. 1,000 m at San Lorenzo, and ca. 840 m at La Venta. A mathematical "midpoint" of that linear distance can obviously be calculated. I discussed that mathematical midpoint in my presentation of this paper at Dumbarton Oaks, but to avoid overcomplicating the material I have not emphasized it in this chapter. Nevertheless, the results are intriguing, particularly for La Venta. Because the placement of La Venta's Heads 2, 3, and 4 was not precisely measured (see Drucker 1952: 9), the midpoint can only be approximated. Those calculations disclose that while Mound C-1 visually separates the northern and southern sectors, the mound is definitely not positioned at the linear midpoint. Instead, the midpoint (and the east-west midline it creates) more likely falls on the large basal platform at the southern foot of Mound C-1, where the midline may have been defined by the two small conical mounds that occur at the east and west corners of the basal platform or by the southern (upper) edge of the platform (Figs. 5-9; also González 1988:

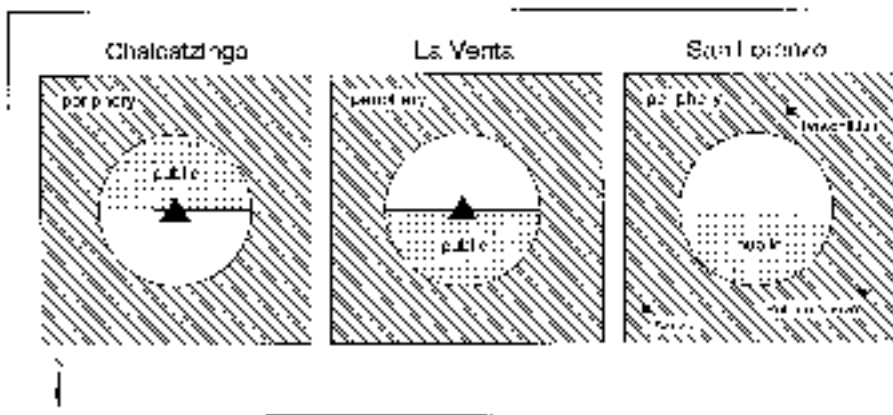


Fig. 15 The basic sacred landscape templates of Chalcatzingo, La Venta, and San Lorenzo. Drawing by Marie J. Zeidler and David Grove.

organization of La Venta and San Lorenzo may seem quite different, within the MMZ at both sites the patterns in the distribution of monument types, and in the iconographic themes those carvings display, indicate that these sites actually shared fundamental structural similarities in the placement of their monuments, that is, a similar template (Fig. 15).

The most evident structural principle is that the MMZ area has distinct northern and southern halves (sectors), and at both San Lorenzo and La Venta the majority of the monumental art was positioned in the southern sector. The images on these carvings relate to personages and rulership, and in the southern sectors they were openly displayed in processional arrangements in the sectors' central area. These carvings were unquestionably intended to be viewed. The predominance of displayed rulership monuments in this sector suggests that this site area was associated with public rituals related in some manner to that theme.

In contrast, the northern sectors at La Venta and San Lorenzo are nearly devoid of major displayed carvings; the few monuments erected in the north are positioned near those sectors' outer edges rather than their central areas. However, even these northern carvings are again laid out in a processional

fig. 1; Adams 1991: map 3-2). If the linear midpoint was at all culturally relevant to the north-south dichotomy expressed in the sacred landscape, then the constructed "sacred mountain" (Mound C-1) lies just within the "ancestral" (northern) sector. Similar measurements suggest that Chalcatzingo's main mound may also be positioned slightly asymmetrically and just within the "ancestral" sector.

arrangement. The presence of tombs and buried offerings and the restricted (nonpublic) nature of much of the northern sector of La Venta suggest that, in the Olmec template, north was cosmologically the region of the otherworld, ancestors, and the past.<sup>11</sup>

At present, an “ancestor” symbolism can be inferred only for San Lorenzo’s northern sector, and such an attribution is complicated by the fact that the three colossal heads displayed in the northern sector, together with the seven displayed in the south, may *all* have represented past rulers (ancestors). Nevertheless, a mitigating factor may be that the San Lorenzo pattern reflects the distribution of Early Formative monuments within the cosmological template, while the La Venta pattern represents the distribution of both Middle Formative carvings and Early Formative colossal heads. Furthermore, the problem noted above does not negate the template’s basic north-south dichotomy, nor the fact that within the template the principal display of monuments occurs in the southern sector.

At La Venta the primary mound, C-1, visually divides the northern and southern sectors. Large supernatural faces carved on stelae are displayed on the southern (public) side of the mound, where they are visible from Plaza B. These images may have visually designated that great mound as a symbolic “sacred mountain.” Although San Lorenzo lacks a comparable Formative period constructed sacred mountain anywhere on the plateau,<sup>12</sup> the site’s basic template—the sacred landscape—is nonetheless similar.

The La Venta data are valuable for revealing the fundamental structural template of the MMZ, while it is through the monuments at the small sites surrounding San Lorenzo that the nature of the periphery in the Olmec sacred

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that the main architectural components at La Venta extend beyond Complexes A and B to also include Complex D (see Adams 1991: map 3-2; González 1988: fig. 1). In fact, La Venta’s three enigmatic sandstone monuments (52, 53, 54) occur at the south end of Complex D in a possible east-west alignment with Mounds D-17 and D-19. In terms of linear measurements, the three complexes are essentially of equal size, and, although this study has focused on Complexes A and B, the entire grouping can also be perceived as a north-central-south triadic arrangement. The reader may be reminded, as I am, of the somewhat similar triadic organization of Tikal’s Great Plaza area a millennium later: the North Acropolis and the burials of ancestral rulers/the Great Plaza with publically displayed rulership monuments along its northern edge/the Central Acropolis elite residential-administrative complex of ruling dynasty (e.g., Ashmore 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Susan Gillespie has suggested to me that, in the sacred landscape of San Lorenzo, the entire plateau may have been regarded as a sacred mountain, thus perhaps obviating the need for a major mound. If that was the case, the supernatural and domination carvings found at peripheral sites below the plateau would have been positioned around the “base” of that sacred mountain, in the same relative position as the domination scenes on the talus slopes of the Cerro Chalcatzingo.

landscape becomes clear. The relatively benign monuments of the San Lorenzo plateau stand in contrast to the domination (and dwarf) carvings found at Tenochtitlán, Potrero Nuevo, and El Azuzul. These distributions seem to reflect the general Mesoamerican cosmological principle that the center symbolizes civilized space, whereas the periphery is the region of the supernatural, danger, and the mythological past.

CHALCATZINGO'S TEMPLATE: HOW OLMEC IS IT?

Beyond the obvious fact that Chalcatzingo's monuments are executed according to Gulf Coast canons, the site's organizational template also exhibits several strong correspondences with the basic templates of La Venta and San Lorenzo (Fig. 15). For example, Chalcatzingo's MMZ has distinct northern and southern sectors of approximately equal size. Also, as at La Venta, Chalcatzingo's sectors are physically separated by the site's major mound, and rulership monuments are displayed exclusively in one sector. Nevertheless, while Chalcatzingo follows many of the same structuring principles that operated at the Gulf Coast Olmec centers, it also executes those principles somewhat differently. The greatest and most explicit contrast is that directionality of the north-south dichotomy and the monument distribution pattern is reversed at Chalcatzingo. The site's rulership monuments are displayed in the northern sector, while it is the southern sector (Terrace 1 and others flanking the Cerro Chalcatzingo's talus slopes) that is nearly devoid of monuments.

The cosmological symbolism of the southern sector at Chalcatzingo is unclear. If it is "ancestral," then it is notable (yet perhaps coincidental) that the site's most richly endowed elite burials come from atop the massive platform mound and from the elite residence on Terrace 1 (Merry de Morales 1987a: 100–108; 1987b: 457–465). One such interment, Burial 3, found within a stone crypt beneath the latter structure, had been entombed with a stone head (Monument 17) severed from a "rulership" statue (1987a: 103–105), evidence suggesting that in life that person had served in a rulership capacity.

At La Venta and San Lorenzo, the few monuments in the "ancestral" sector occurred only along the margins of that sector. The talus carvings of the Cerro Chalcatzingo are situated in a somewhat analogous location, yet they are thematically different. They are not images of ancestral personages, but depict zoomorphic supernaturals dominating humans. As such, they are most comparable in both theme and positioning to the domination carvings that occur at Potrero Nuevo, El Azuzul, and Tenochtitlán on the periphery of San Lorenzo plateau. The domination carvings at Chalcatzingo are also situated on the periphery, at the base of the *cerro* (sacred mountain) and just beyond the constructed landscape (see note 10).

At the Gulf Coast Olmec centers there is no feature of sacred geography exactly equivalent to the Cerro Chalcatzingo, nor are there any carvings directly similar to “El Rey” (Monument 1) and the other rain-fertility carvings high on the hillside. Although the “El Rey” bas-relief shares important iconographic motifs with Altar 5 at La Venta (Grove 1989: 132–134), it exhibits an equally important dissimilarity. Monument 1 is characterized by a large quatrefoil supernatural face, as are Monuments 9 and 13. Significantly, such quatrefoils are *not* found in Gulf Coast Olmec monumental art. I have suggested above that the large supernatural faces of Chalcatzingo’s Monument 9 and La Venta’s Monuments 25/26 and 27 marked their respective massive central mounds as sacred mountains.<sup>13</sup> While these carvings are similar in where they were displayed and in their probable symbolic function, their supernatural images are completely different. The closest regional and temporal analogs to Chalcatzingo’s three quatrefoil faces are found in the sectioned-quatrefoil “hill glyph”/place glyph motifs that begin to be manifested in Late Formative period monumental art in Oaxaca (e.g., Caso 1965: fig. 15).

A further contrast occurs with Chalcatzingo’s tabletop altar, Monument 22. This Gulf Coast type monument is positioned near the far end of the rulership sector, just as are Altars 4 and 5 at La Venta. However, Monument 22 is situated within a sunken patio, an architectural form not yet shown to occur at Gulf Coast Olmec sites. In addition, unlike its monolithic Gulf Coast counterparts, the Chalcatzingo altar is constructed of 20 large stone blocks, even though suitable altar-sized boulders abound nearby (Fash 1987: 93). The altar’s iconography also diverges from Gulf Coast canons. Whereas the upper ledge of Gulf Coast altars is usually carved with an earth band composed of inverted U-elements, Monument 22’s upper ledge is decorated with a non-Olmec “elongated oblong” motif (Grove 1987b: 430, fig. 27.6).

The above examples help illustrate the eclectic nature of Chalcatzingo, its monumental art, and its sacred landscape. While the site’s carvings clearly have their roots and canons in Gulf Coast Olmec monumental art, and there is also a strong Gulf Coast component to the themes of some carvings, at Chalcatzingo those elements are united with motifs and traits that seem more common to Central Mexico (Morelos, Guerrero, and Oaxaca; Grove 1989: 142–145), and together they are manifested within a template that is an inversion of the Gulf Coast template.

<sup>13</sup> It seems possible that the concept of erecting large supernatural faces on the public side of a site’s main mound, as exemplified at La Venta and Chalcatzingo, may represent a Middle Formative period antecedent to the great supernatural masks that adorn Late Pre-Classic Maya pyramids, such as at Cerros and Uaxactun.

Does Chalcatzingo's template predate the appearance of the Gulf Coast elements? A point strongly favoring that possibility is that the earliest building stages of Chalcatzingo's massive platform mound—the construction separating the north and south sectors—date to the Early Formative period (Amate phase; Prindiville and Grove 1987: 63), centuries before the site's adoption of monumental art (ca. 700 b.c.) and/or other unequivocal evidence of interaction with the Gulf Coast Olmec sites. This implies that Chalcatzingo's basic organizational template (i.e., a northern and southern sector separated by a midpoint mound) was in place by ca. 1000 b.c. and that the Gulf Coast elements were later incorporated into that existing sacred landscape.

#### FORMATIVE PERIOD SACRED LANDSCAPES AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The analyses of monument distributions at Chalcatzingo, La Venta, and San Lorenzo demonstrate that, in spite of the great physical differences between these three centers, certain similar structuring principles nevertheless operated in the positioning of their monuments and major public architecture. Furthermore, the distinctive distribution of particular monument types and monument themes within these sites implies a cosmological foundation to those structuring principles. Thus, through their mounds and monuments, Chalcatzingo, La Venta, and San Lorenzo manifest sacred landscapes as an important component of their built environments. While this chapter has stressed the dichotomy present within the MMZ, nearly all the monuments of the MMZ deal in one way or another with rulership, past or present; they are thus essentially "historical." In contrast, the peripheral monuments are more related to cosmology and the mythological past, and the fact that such monuments *were* erected at sites on the periphery of San Lorenzo implies that a center's sacred landscapes extended out to the surrounding communities as well. That extension may also be reflected in the character of the monuments displayed at more distant secondary centers in the hinterlands of San Lorenzo, La Venta, and Laguna de los Cerros (for the latter, see Grove et al. 1993).

Because very little attention has been directed to the organizational principles of Formative period sites, it is presently difficult to ascertain which shared features of the three templates discussed above are perhaps pan-Mesoamerican or at least more common to a wide area of Mesoamerica and which might be inherently Gulf Coast Olmec. The dualistic organization of a site's Major Monument Zone area may be one of these more "pan-Mesoamerican" patterns.

Sacred landscapes seem to have been a significant characteristic of Mesoamerican sites from the Formative period on, although as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the principles underlying the organization of any

site are seldom self-evident. Elucidating the templates of the vast majority of Formative period sites will be difficult, particularly in the absence of monumental art or other features that carry some interpretable cosmological significance. Nevertheless, the knowledge that sacred landscapes and organizational templates may have been fundamental to the way Mesoamerican societies conceived of and arranged space has exciting potential as an analytical approach for understanding more about these societies, their sites, and the distribution of activities within those sites.

*Acknowledgments* Over several years this study has benefited from discussions with many people, including Wendy Ashmore, Rosemary Joyce, Joyce Marcus, and Kent Reilly. Susan Gillespie tirelessly read many drafts of this chapter and contributed extremely valuable comments and insights. The students in my 1993 graduate Olmec seminar, and particularly Anthony Vega, deserve credit for the insight that Chalcatzingo Monument 9 marked that site's major platform mound as a sacred mountain.



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# Appendix

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- Mon. 3 Cook de Leonard 1967: fig. 5, pl. 6; Gay 1972: pl. 9; Grove 1968: fig. 4; Grove 1984: fig. 31, pl. v; Grove and Angulo 1987: fig. 9.10.
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- Mon. 14 Angulo 1987: fig. 10.3; Grove 1984: pl. 15; Grove and Angulo 1987: fig. 9.7.
- Mon. 15 Angulo 1987: fig. 10.4; Grove and Angulo 1987: fig. 9.8.
- Mon. 16 Gay 1972: pl. 21; Grove 1984: pl. 19; Grove and Angulo 1987: fig. 9.18; Guzmán 1934: figs. 12, 13.
- Mon. 17 Grove 1984: pls. 25, 27; Grove and Angulo 1987: fig. 9.19.
- Mon. 21 Angulo 1987: fig. 10.21; Grove 1984: fig. 12; Grove and Angulo 1987: fig. 9.21.
- Mon. 22 Fash 1987: fig. 7.4; Grove 1984: fig. 15, pls. vii, 23; 1987b: fig. 27.6.

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