

THE INCISED MASKS OF ARROYO PESQUERO: A STRUCTURAL
ANALYSIS AND POSSIBLE TRANSMISSION MODEL

THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

Masks play an integral role in the ritual action of many cultures from a wide variety of locations, temporal periods, and cultural heritage. In some culture groups (the Native North Americans, the Greeks, and the Japanese) the mask is performative in nature, and may commemorate the transformation of a ritual actor or dancer into a demon, an angel, or a god. However, the focus of this work is the examination of usage for the mask by the archaeological cultures of Mesoamerica as a funerary adornment, a portable billboard for supernatural kingship, and an oracle to be used by one's descendants.

This work hopes to trace the mask's role and function within the ritual life of the Mesoamerican elite, beginning with the progenitors of almost every other aspect of ritual action of Mesoamerica, the Olmec. Specifically, the incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero are the principal focus of this work.

The importance of this work may be readily apparent in terms of discovering the advent of several mortuary practices among Mesoamerican groups. The Olmec realized

this advent earlier than their contemporary neighbors, and contributed to the mortuary practices of other groups. Therefore, Olmec mortuary practices regarding masks and their use deserve an in-depth study.

In any serious discussion regarding Olmec art, it often becomes necessary to define and describe the term "Olmec". This descriptive term applies not only to an archaeological culture, but to an art style as well. In terms of archaeology, the Olmec have often been described as the "mother culture" of Mesoamerica due in most part to the fact that the Olmec people constructed the first state-level society in the region. The major Olmec sites of San Lorenzo and La Venta along the Gulf Coast, along with Chalcatzingo and Tres Zapotes further west, possess monumental architecture and an art indicative of a hierarchal society utilizing organized labor (Map 1). From 1400 to around 400 BC., the Olmec used their prestige and power to influence the ideology of their neighbors and later imitators through their characteristic art style. This style of art altered the human form into an anthropomorphic supernatural, often blending human elements with characteristics of surrounding top predators such as the caiman, harpy eagle, and jaguar (Joralemon 1976:33). The result was a style that featured human faces with the

downturned mouth of the jaguar, eyebrows resembling the crest of the harpy eagle, or reptilian gum brackets found in caimans. These elements reflected Olmec ideology regarding the surrounding world.



Figure 1: The Olmec Heartland: 1200-300BC

It was transitive and able to be traversed by those possessing the know-how to do so. Other hallmarks of Olmec art style are found in the almond shaped eyes and large puffy lips.

Additionally, the Olmec contributed heavily to iconographical depictions of their ideology in rendering monumental art *in tableau* (in which arranged sculptures carry a narrative), as the Olmec did not possess a written

language. This *in tableau* art sculptural arrangement contributed to the earliest monumental sculpture in Mesoamerica, from the colossal heads of San Lorenzo to the enormous cosmogram of La Venta (Reilly, personal correspondence, Fall 2003). This cosmogram is the replication of the world in its primordial state at the time of creation, a scale model of Genesis, Chapter 1 if you will. San Lorenzo as well as La Venta contains an artificial mountain upon which the creation of man by the gods was re-enacted and commemorated in order to continue that creation. In addition to the monumental works reflecting the ordering of the universe and its creation, the Olmec were masters at creating small, portable non-essentials of precious materials (Figure 2) to transmit their ideologies to outlying groups. These groups consolidated themselves into stratified systems under elite classes believed to be endorsed by the supernatural. As earthly wealth translated into spiritual wealth, the vast trade network of Mesoamerica became the information superhighway upon which the Olmec could trade not only in essential materials, but also in ideas.

The investigation begins with a background chapter explaining Mesoamerican masking traditions within ritual

life among the Olmec, Maya, and Mixtec cultural areas. Teotihuacán's masking tradition will likewise be investigated to elucidate to the reader the context of later chapters, with emphasis placed on overall trends and correlations of meaning. It should be noted, that within established literature, Arroyo Pesquero and Rio Pesquero have both been used to describe the same site. For the purpose of uniformity however, only the term Arroyo Pesquero will be utilized.

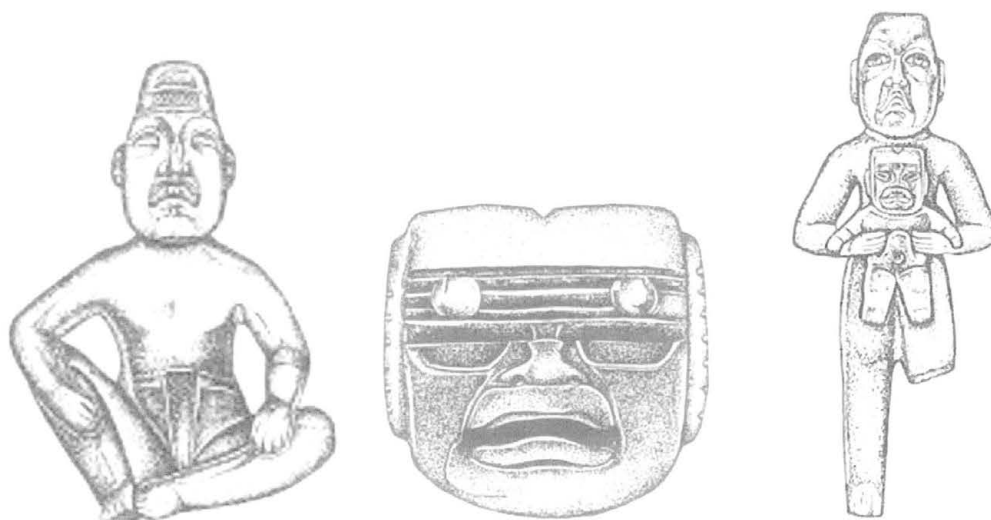


Figure 2: Olmec portable non-essentials. These show the hallmarks of Olmec art: downturned mouths, almond-shaped eyes, and maize symbolism (drawings courtesy of FAMSI)

The methodology chapter is meant to make the reader aware of the current viewpoint of Mesoamerican research regarding masking traditions. Additionally this chapter will introduce the framework of mask motif investigation.

Erwin Panofsky's Method of Structural Analysis will be used to decipher the motifs on incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero.

From the chapter on methodology, the investigation will shift to the aforementioned structural analysis on four incised Olmec masks; two from Arroyo Pesquero, one of unknown provenience, and one additional incised mask from Tenenexpan. The goal for this chapter is to transmit the same ideological message as the masks themselves:

Supernatural power, divine kingship, and transformation. These themes are pervasive in all Mesoamerican ritual action, and were originated by the Olmec before any others.

It is in this vein that the theoretical chapter is written. All of the cultural groups enumerated above possessed masking traditions, and this chapter is devoted to the construction of a transmission model to explain its dissemination from the Olmec to later groups. It will be noted (and should be noted here) that often masks recovered for study were not found in archaeological contexts, making a definite transmission model ambiguous until further research is completed. More is noted below about the difficulty encountered with a lack of context.

The conclusions of this paper will build on the abovementioned points in order that the reader may understand that masking traditions were diverse in

construction and use. However, the ideological themes transmitted from them are common to every culture area. The mask acted as a portal to the otherworld, gave life to the deceased ancestors, and acted as a method of permanent transformation.

Like so many other ideological and archaeological trends in Mesoamerica, masking traditions are found to be pervasive. From the state of Guerrero to the site of Playa de los Muertos of Honduras, masking traditions can be found in every major cultural tradition of the region. Even the Aztec, those comparatively late bloomers and newcomers to the region contained a masking tradition known to the Spanish conquistadors. And yet, an investigation into the variety and usage of the mask by various Mesoamerican groups has yet to receive any in-depth analysis, nor has the possible impetus and mechanism for its distribution. It is in the following pages that we hope to elucidate the reader into the function and the *raison d'être* of Mesoamerican masks.

Masks have been recovered from all over Mesoamerica, and the mediums used to make them as well as their uses and associated ideologies are as stylistically variable as every other art form of the region. Masks can be carved from a single piece or assembled as a mosaic; sizes range

from those that are so small as to be worn as gorgets or costume elements to the monumental facades on pyramids and temples. Mesoamerican masks have been rendered in various art styles and mediums, both as being reserved for the dead in mortuary bundles, and as taking active part in ritual life. However, an overlying thematic correlation can be traced for the entire region based on a few well-known precepts of the ideology and ritual life of Mesoamerica, and its associated iconography.

First, masks of all types in Mesoamerica were most certainly created and manipulated under the watchful auspices of the elites. Whether used for divinatory purposes as evidenced by the Mixtec and inhabitants of Teotihuacán or used in ritual costuming and burial (such as the Maya, and likely the Olmec before them), masks were used by the elite class to augment their messages of divine status through supernatural endorsement. This kind of theatrical supplement existed somewhat independently of actually *wearing* the mask by the living during ritual since the ruler was already seen as divine. The mask itself was a staid reminder of that divinity found within the costume, or shown in the context of a ruler's burial.

A second element found throughout Mesoamerican masking traditions is the theme of ancestral communication. Masks

among some societies provided a focal point to which elite descendants could maintain communication with the ancestors of their various lineages through means of the mortuary bundle, and could continue to be guided by them (an example is shown in Figure 3). This theme of communication with an ancestor who has been long dead but could still influence the present is especially true in the Mixtec region, and is reflected in their codices. Additionally, themes of ancestral communication and divination are found at Teotihuacán, and among the Maya. It should be kept in mind that mortuary bundles were not the limit of sacred bundling practices; many monuments and ritual objects were bundled as well, including masks. Ancestral communication could be achieved through autosacrifice, the famous bloodletting rituals found throughout Mesoamerica.

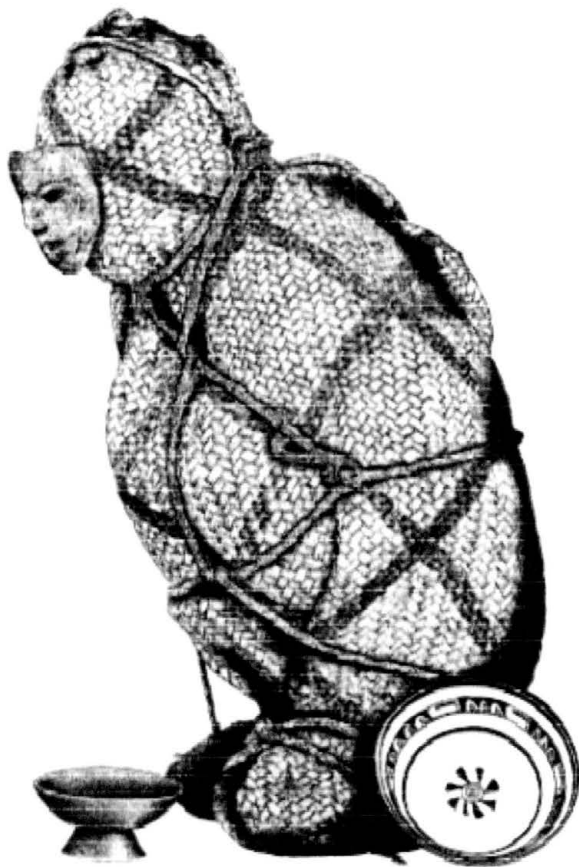


Figure 3: Recovered mortuary bundle from Coixtlahuaca. An example of Mesoamerican mortuary bundling complete with mask (after Headrick 1999:73, figure 5)

It has been long established in the ethnographic and archaeological record that the gods of Mesoamerica were ravenous for human blood; therefore it cannot be a far stretch to assume that the ancestors were as well. These two trends of bloodletting and ancestral communication through mortuary bundling converged as interdependent among the Mixtec, and evidence in the form of bloodletters found at Arroyo Pesquero (Figure 4) may indicate that the Olmec used both together as well.



Figure 4: Bloodletter handle, Arroyo Pesquero (photo by Gillete Griffin)

The final thematic element prolific in Mesoamerican masking is one of transformation and transcendence. This theme which renders the ruler as a living conduit of the supernatural able to travel between the cosmic planes is shown time and time again, not only in incised masks of the Olmec heartland, but is echoed in the monumental stelae and portable celts of the region. Often shown as the World Tree binding the cosmic planes together, the ruler was shown as the *axis mundi* (Figure 5). The Maya too constantly erected monuments and constructed portable precious objects with transformation in mind, with the subjects often engaged in ritual activity with mask augmentation. Again, the subjects may not have been wearing actual masks for performative purposes; these masks were implicating the transformative aspect of the ruler as

axis mundi while transformation was very plainly expressed in his actions.



Figure 5: Olmec Representation of ruler as world tree and *axis mundi*; celt from Arroyo Pesquero (drawing by Linda Schele)

Therefore, it can be observed that the idea that Mesoamerican art and iconography is stylistically variant but thematically conservative certainly applies to Mesoamerican masking traditions.

The immediate challenge facing the investigator in regards to the masks of Arroyo Pesquero and Mesoamerican masks in general is the aforementioned lack of archaeological context. Arroyo Pesquero was discovered accidentally by local fishermen in the 1960's, and was promptly subjected to looting by the Mexican army (Reilly,

personal communication, Fall 2003). Despite salvage attempts by the University of Veracruz's Institute of Anthropological Investigation, most pieces from Arroyo Pesquero have ended up on the international antiquities market (Diehl and Coe 1996:19). Uncertainty continues as to the nature of the site itself. Was Arroyo Pesquero tied to La Venta? The two sites were contemporaneous and close in proximity, which makes this hypothesis likely. The huge amount of jade found at both sites also supports this theory. It is also possible that Arroyo Pesquero was a water shrine like El Manati (Diehl and Coe 1996:19). This too is an interesting idea. It has been supposed that San Lorenzo was the mountain of creation, and El Manati the watery portal to the underworld (Garber, personal communication, Fall 2006). Arroyo Pesquero could likewise be the portal to La Venta's Yax-Hal-Huitz, or First True Mountain of maize from the Mesoamerican creation story.

The lack of context often encountered when dealing with masks engenders a second challenge to the researcher, and may have been responsible for the paucity in established literature as to the meaning of use or method of transmission for masking traditions in Mesoamerica. Miguel de Covarrubias hypothesized that the mask recovered in context at Ahuixotla as well as *incensarios* from

Teotihuacán found antecedents of Olmec origin. He continued exploring that relationship by noting the similarity of shape, back finishing, and method of carving of the two cultures. Going even further, Covarrubias theorized an evolution of style from "Olmecoid" masks to masks in the classic Teotihuacán style (Covarrubias 1966:134). Covarrubias even went so far as to suppose that the transitional style could be dated as before 500BC, well within the time frame of Olmec masking traditions at Arroyo Pesquero and elsewhere. This leads to a suggested interaction between Teotihuacán and an incipient elite represented by "Olmec" stone masks (Covarrubias 1966:136).

Another researcher who delved even more deeply into the Mesoamerican masking traditions was Donald Cordry. In reference to Olmec masks, he noted that many Olmec masks contained perforations for attachment to the living as well as eye and nostril holes for sight and ventilation (Cordry 1980:86). He noted also that not all masks contained these eye and nostril holes but did have perforations on the sides, which led Cordry to hypothesize three explanations for this type of mask construction: The first was for use by the living and were buried with their owners. The second use was for attaching to wooden idols that have not survived the ravages of time, and still a third was for

attachment to the dead for a comfortable re-awakening in the afterworld (Cordry 1980:86). In terms of a performative motivation for mask usage, this may be in error. Stone would not be a convenient (or comfortable) medium for masks used in ritual; wood or clay would be much easier to manufacture, lighter to wear, and easier to paint and attach other costuming elements. Cordry did strike a chord in his association of masks to mortuary practices as later discoveries and research have shown.

More recent authors have included descriptions and iconographic explanations of the incised Olmec masks individually, but remain somewhat reticent to offer an explanation of their role in Olmec ritual life. Peter Furst lists a mask used in this project as containing attributes of the harpy eagle, the winged counterpart of the jaguar in its role as interplanar mediator of the cosmos (Furst 1996:75). Furst does not offer a hypothesis as to the use or motivation for the mask in this work, however.

Peter Joralemon used masks in his articles regarding the Olmec pantheon in the 1970's. He likewise stated that there existed an inherent discontinuity between the identification and definition of Olmec deities due to the absence of Olmec inscriptions (Joralemon 1970:6).

Nevertheless, he ventured to place two out of four masks used in this investigation under the purview of God I, the Olmec Dragon. A third mask was placed into the category for God III, the Olmec Bird-Monster. Joralemon considered Gods I and III to be iconographical pairs, having many complementing motifs between the two deities (Joralemon 1976:33). The fourth mask in this investigation is associated with Joralemon's God II, the Maize God. Figure 6 summarizes these groupings. The intricacies of these associations will be given more thought in the chapter of structural analysis.

Therefore, it becomes placed on the shoulders of this investigation to explore the use of masks by the Olmec and their transmission in ideology if not in construction to later Mesoamerican groups. Before this can begin, however, it becomes necessary to explore the masking traditions of other Mesoamerican cultures as well as a methodology for studying their ideological message. This exploration is the focus of the next chapters.

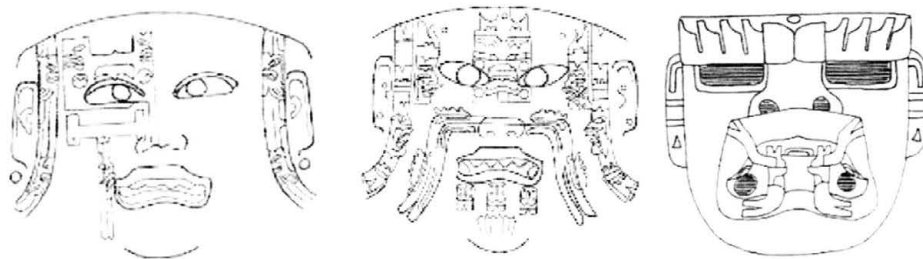


Figure 6a: The iconographic pair of Gods I and III, after Joralemon; The first two masks (from Arroyo Pesquero) are God I, The Olmec Dragon; the third (from Tenenexpan) is the Olmec Bird Monster.



Figure 6b: Greenstone mask from Veracruz (?), assigned by Joralemon as a depiction of God II, The Maize God.
Drawing by Joralemon

CHAPTER I

A BACKGROUND OF MESOAMERICAN MASKING TRADITIONS

Though now the investigation turns to explore the masking traditions of certain major culture groups in the region, the themes previously expressed in the introduction will all be readily seen. The use of the mask may vary slightly from group to group, but its function and basis found in ritual activity is virtually universal.

The Olmec

The Olmec masking tradition is the most widespread masking system in geographical terms in Mesoamerica, as well as being the most obscure in terms of provenience. Therefore, Olmec masks are kings without country, rendered in stone. However, those all too few masks with definable provenience, represent a wide spectrum of size, material, and possible usage (see Figure 7 for examples). A single piece of stone was the medium of choice and comes in a wide variety of colors from black, white, green, and red. It

would seem, however, that incising masks with iconographic information is unique to the Olmec heartland, as the masks recovered from outlying groups lack incising apart from that integral to construction. Additionally, the vast majority of Olmec masks contain drill holes in the earlobes and periphery for attachment. However, the hypothesis that the mask was used in a performative context is dubious. Most masks of Olmec make are lacking sufficient holes in the mouth area for a ritual actor to deliver addresses to a ritual audience.



a)

b)

c)

Figure 7: Three examples of Olmec masking a) Olmec mask recovered from the Templo Mayor, circa 1100-600 B.C. b) Olmec mask from La Blanca, Pacific Coast 900-600BC c) Olmec jadeite mask of unknown provenience 1000-600BC. Photos by Museo Del Templo Mayor, Mexico City, the Denver Art Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, respectively

As was expressed earlier, all cultures of Mesoamerica engaged in bloodletting rituals to communicate with the

ancestors, sometimes utilizing a shamanic bundle, and the mortuary bundle certainly qualified as both. Masks would accentuate the unity of ancestor worship and sacred bundling by putting a face on which to focus a bloodletting ceremony. When we discuss the ritual practice of bloodletting for deceased mortuary bundles among the Olmec at Arroyo Pesquero, it must be admitted that at this time the relationship is not explicit or clear. Perforators have been found at Arroyo Pesquero, but no mortuary bundles have been recovered (Gillete Griffin, personal correspondence, October 2006.). Explicit artistic representations of Olmec mortuary bundles supplicated by descendants is also lacking in Olmec art thus far, though ancestor worship is explicitly shown on La Venta Stela 2 (Figure 8). Here the ruler is surrounded by otherworldly attendants, which have been revealed to represent ancestors.

The Maya

Stela 40 from Piedras Negras shown in Figure 8 depicts a lord scattering an unknown substance into a tomb within which sits a half-bodied figure, and was identified by Headrick as a descendant consulting an ancestor (Headrick

1999:71). This ancestor is not an inhuman mass of cloth of the shamanic bundle, but is instead a shamanic bundle given the human visage of a mask.

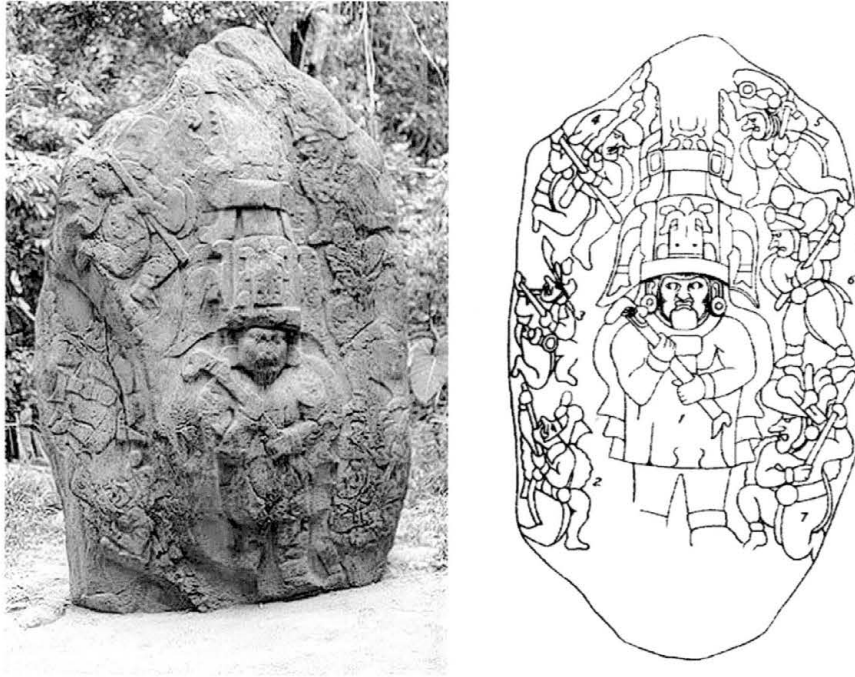


Figure 8: La Venta Stela 2. Photo by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; drawing after Joralemon 1976: fig.11a.)

In examining the stela, it became apparent through consulting Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller's *Blood of Kings* (1986) that the substance being scattered into the tomb was blood. Schele and Miller identified the triple knot element (shown in Figure 9a) as being the most important in showing bloodletting symbolism and this is repeated at least four times in Stela 40 from Piedras Negras (Schele and Miller 1986:176). Another set of

interesting elements shown in Stela 40 are shown on and around the deceased ancestor near the bottom of the consultation (Figure 9b). Not only is a quatrefoil (a symbol of emergence and cosmic portals in Mesoamerican art) shown on the altar of the deceased, but a rope connects the upper and lower registers of the stela. It is on this rope that the triple knot element is shown, and tells the viewer the blood of the suppliant gives life to the ancestors, who may then be consulted by the suppliant.

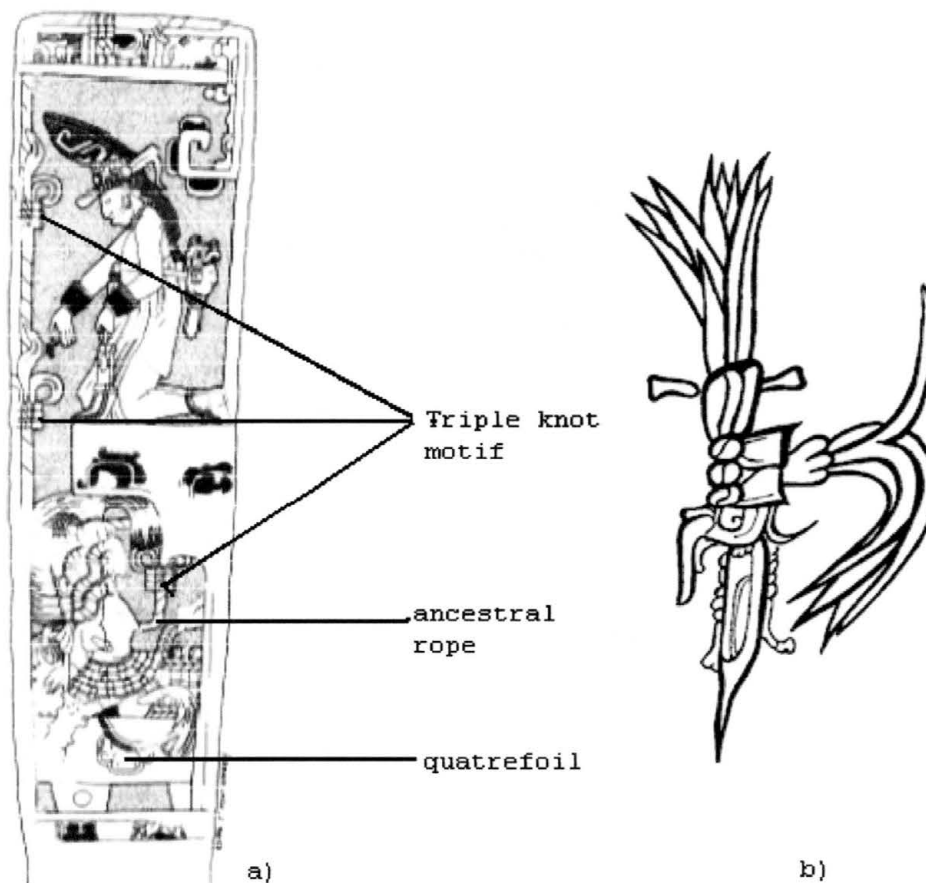


Figure 9: Stela 40, Piedras Negras a) the stela with triple knot motifs, ancestral rope and quatrefoil noted; drawing after Headrick 1999:Fig. 6 b) Schele's Perforator God

(triple knot motif); drawing after Schele and Miller 1986:
Fig.IV.1

Archaeological evidence supports the claim that the Maya conformed to the Mesoamerican sacred bundling practices, as well as mortuary masking as shown by Carrasco's discovery at Calakmul (Headrick 1999:72). Calakmul's burials as well as the burial of Pacal at Palenque contribute mosaic masks of Mayan craftsmanship. Additionally, Burial 85 from Tikal (Figure 10) revealed the body of an elite individual complete with mortuary bundling and greenstone mask adds to the number of Mayan masks associated with sacred mortuary bundling (Coe 2005:80). The trefoil motif found on the greenstone mask (Figure 10b) has long been known as a motif showing kingship and agricultural fertility among the Maya, and the Olmec before them (Reilly and Fields personal communication, 1989). Burial 85 also contained a sting-ray spine and spondylus shell, symbols of autosacrifice among the Maya. Directly appealing to the bundles of ancestors does not necessarily seem to be a face to face consultation as seen by the Mixtec and at Teotihuacán.

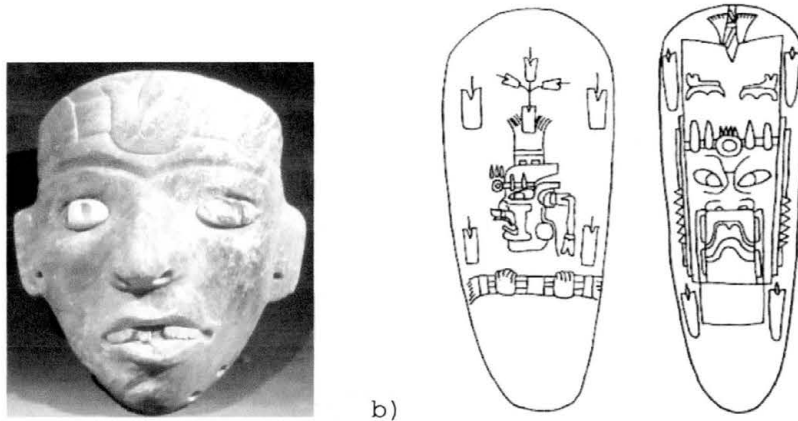


Figure 10: Trefoil kingship motifs in Olmec and Maya art: a) Burial 85 mask, Tikal. Photo after Coe 2005:79 b) celts from Arroyo Pesquero; drawing by Linda Schele.

The Maya burials were sealed in elaborate tombs, and ancestor consultation may have been more or less performed via psychoducts. Both Calakmul's Structure 3 and Palenque's Temple of the Inscriptions contain psychoducts (Evans 2004:330) (Fields & Reents-Budet 2005:252). Therefore, the Maya were continuing the trend begun by Olmec of ancestor worship through autosacrifice and sacred bundling. Masks were affixed to provide an enduring sense of life and vitality to the dead, through which the dead could remain in contact with the living. The trend of bloodletting for the mortuary bundles more than likely extends to Teotihuacán as well, though at present such an explicit example as Stela 40 for the Maya is lacking at Teotihuacán.

Teotihuacán

The long paved Avenue of the Dead traversing the length of Teotihuacán's ceremonial center is lined on both sides with elevated platforms which may have been lineage housing that served as afterlife homes for elites. The masks found at Teotihuacán most likely were sewn onto mummy bundles, and used for divinatory purposes (Headrick, 1999: 77). Annabeth Headrick's *The Street of the Dead...It Really Was* made a solid argument of Teotihuacán not only utilizing mortuary bundles for divinatory purposes, but additionally serving as a basic element for power based on a lineage system. This kinship system likely replaced the absolute monarchy represented earlier in the city's history. As is the case with so much of Mesoamerican archaeology in terms of masks, the masks of Teotihuacán come with little or no archaeological context. To date, only one archaeological excavation has yielded a mask *in situ* (Borbolla 1947), and even this mask gives us no explicit evidence of its usage in ritual practice. However, Headrick made a strong case through comparative analysis of ritual and iconography that mortuary bundles were being used by lineage groups at Teotihuacán. Teotihuacán's masks themselves show a striking similarity in construction and form to Olmec masks. Both cultures carved masks from single pieces,

though some masks done in the Teotihuacán style have mosaic overlays. As previously expressed, Covarrubias noted this similarity, and theorized a continuity of style from Olmec to Teotihuacán (Shown in Figure 11).



Figure 11: Covarrubias' Olmecoid forms: these influenced the more classic Teotihuacán mask forms (Covarrubias: 1966:Fig. 48)

The Mixtec

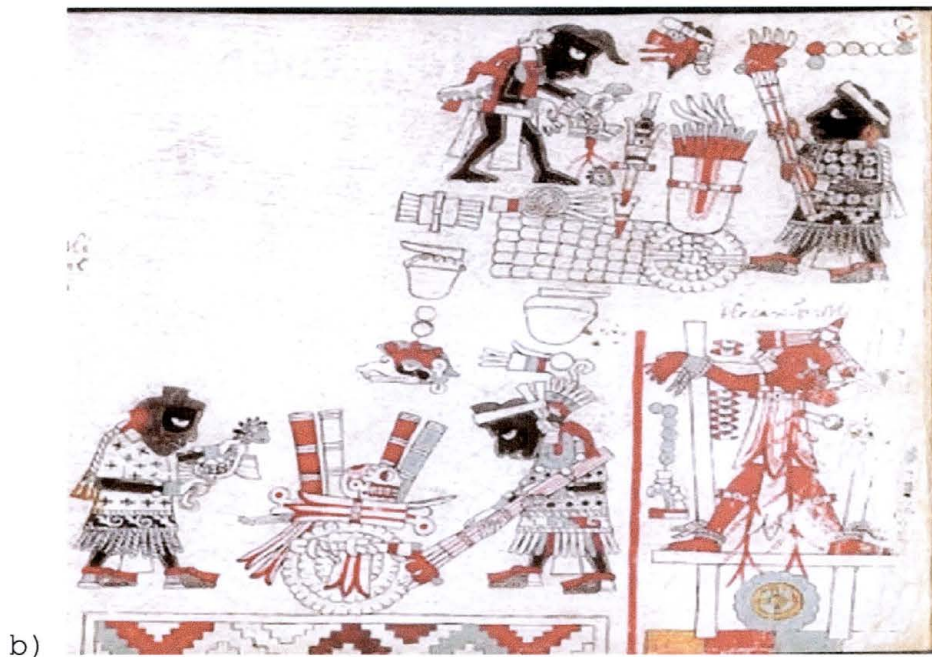
The codices of the Mixtec provide a clue for the modern researcher as to mask usage among the inhabitants of the *Mixteca Alta*. Codices Zouche-Nuttall, Selden, Alphonso Caso, and Bodley all provide instances in which individuals are portrayed seeking the guidance of their ancestors. These ancestors and lineage heads are wrapped tightly into mummy bundles, yet they retain a human countenance with which to greet their descendants. Affixing a mask onto the bundle not only allows the bundle to function as a window through which the supplicant may maintain a more intimate connection with a long dead ancestor; it also makes a more political statement in which the ancestor is still active in the affairs of the people. The implication of ancestors influencing the actions of living nobility is a concept repeated in the codices time and time again, as well as continuing an ideological precept of ancestor veneration reaching back into antiquity to the Olmec. Manipulation of the ancestors was necessary for the legitimacy to rule. Desecration of the mortuary bundles of competing lineages was a way of destroying the future of a competing lineage by destroying its past (Williams, personal communication, Spring 2007). Page 83-84 of Codex Zouche-Nuttall (Figure 12a) concludes Lord 8 Deer's siege of Huachino with the

torture and execution of its lords 11 Wind with his two sons 10 Dog and 6 House.



Figure 12a: Mixtec codex Zouche-Nuttall page 83: the execution of 10 Dog

The codex itself ends (Figure 12b) with a mummy bundle being burned, effectively telling the reader that 8 Deer has destroyed the ruling lineage of Huachino and its future generations' right to rule (Byland and Pohl 1994:164) (Robert Williams, personal communication, Spring 2007). Such an action would eliminate the competition of surrounding noble lineage to prosecute land rights and the rights of the landed gentry.



b) Figure 12b: The execution of 6 House and 11 Wind: the burning of the mummy bundle, and the end of the lineage of Red and White Bundle by Lord 8 Deer (pictures courtesy of FAMSI)

In addition to providing a lineage tradition that gave the impetus to acquire and protect land rights, the ancestors' mortuary bundles likewise functioned in an oracular capacity. Codex Selden additionally gives us a picture of how this impacted Mixtec history in the form of Lord 2 Rain's consultation with his great-great grandfather Lord 8 Wind's mummy, complete with mask (Byland and Pohl 1994:122). This consultation inspired 2 Rain to make war on the neighboring city of Jaltepec, which he ultimately lost (Robert Williams, personal communication, Spring 2007). Masks were not only affixed to the mortuary bundles

of ancestors among the Mixtec, but also served as a transformative method by religious oracles. Codex Zouche-Nuttall (Figure 13) gives us an example of this through the consultation of Lady 6 Monkey at the oracle of Lady 9 Grass of Chalcatongo.



Figure 13: Codex Zouche-Nuttall: the consultation of 6 Monkey and 8 Deer with Lady 9 Grass of Chalcatongo (Picture courtesy of FAMSI)

Lady 9 Grass apparently persuades 6 Monkey to form a marriage alliance with Lord 11 Wind of Red and White Bundle. 6 Monkey therefore enlists the aid of a "higher power" to avoid marrying Lord 8 Deer as was expected of her, and marries a lord from a competing city (and lineage) instead (Byland and Pohl 1994:197). An interesting feature

of Codex Zouche-Nuttall that is not reflected in a cognate scene in Codex Selden is the presence of Lord 8 Deer at this conference. It should also be noted that 8 Deer later enlisted another oracle of the solar deity 1 Death, and went on to have the last laugh against his enemies and scheming would-be betrothed Lady 6 Monkey (Williams, personal communication, Spring 2007).

Therefore, masks were not merely reminders of long dead ancestors. They were used by oracles in a theatrical and oracular manner through which the priesthood could not only work upon, but actively *change* the political climate around them, and therefore, the future. A continuing investigation into Mesoamerican masking can only be accomplished through the understanding of method of investigation, to which the following chapter is devoted.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

A systematic methodology is necessary to decipher the ideological meaning found in the incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero. Understanding this ideology is indispensable to the understanding of Mesoamerican masks and religious belief systems. To that end, this investigation will rely primarily on the Panofsky Method of Structural Analysis. Used by iconographers and art historians alike, the Panofsky Method is a viable system by which motifs and symbols can be decoded into a transmissible framework understood by the layperson.

Panofsky's Method is threefold, and consists of the identification of primary, secondary, and intrinsic meanings. Primary (or Natural) meaning is broken down further into two subdivisions of formal and expressional meaning. Formal or factual meaning is the identification of visible forms with known objects coupled with the change in their relations with actions or events (Panofsky

1955:3). Panofsky uses the example of a man tipping his hat to another on the street, and imbues this action with formal meaning by the recipient of the gesture through recognition of the event. It is, quite simply, the action of noticing the tangible characteristics of an action or work of art. The psychological nuances working on the mind of the recipient (or art viewer) is the next subdivision of primary meaning: expressional meaning. To continue Panofsky's example, the facial expression of the man tipping his cap in greeting invests the recipient with expressional meaning. Expressional meaning in art, unlike formal meaning, is dependant on a certain sensitivity by the art viewer. The identification of forms and their relations to expressional qualities may be called artistic motifs, and an enumeration of these is called a pre-iconographical description of art by Panofsky (Panofsky 1955:5).

The second level of meaning used by Panofsky is labeled Secondary or Conventional meaning. This enables the art viewer to understand the significance of a work of art, or the meaning of tipping the hat. This understanding of significance requires on the part of the art viewer an understanding of the cultural tradition of the artwork or the artist. Tipping a hat in polite greeting to an ancient

Greek or an Australian aborigine is a gesture lost on a culture with no such tradition. Familiarity with custom and cultural tradition is integral to understanding their art. Failing this (and in the spirit of this particular investigation) an understanding of the literary tradition of the artists' culture will suffice to a degree. In terms of art, motifs that are carriers of secondary or conventional meaning are labeled as images, combinations of which are called stories or allegories. This method of interpretation is the realm of iconographical analysis

Panofsky's third and final level of meaning is labeled Intrinsic Meaning or Content. Simply put, intrinsic meaning is derived from understanding the basic attitude of a culture, temporal period, or religion condensed into one work (Panofsky 1955:7). An analysis on Da Vinci's Last Supper may be thirteen men around a table in the primary sense, and the Last Supper recorded in the Gospels in the secondary sense. It is in the level of intrinsic meaning that we may gain insight into the personality of Leonardo and *his* interpretation of the Last Supper, as well as the religious attitude of the day regarding the Last Supper. Panofsky calls this interpretation in the deeper sense.

Simply put into layman's terms, when one looks at a piece of art using the Panofsky method, it may serve to see the method as answering the following questions:

- 1- Primary or natural meaning: "What is it?"
- 2- Secondary or conventional meaning: "What does it mean?"
- 3- Intrinsic meaning or content: "What does it say about its creator, and its creating culture?"

A Western example of art will be explored in order that the Panofsky Method may be employed and understood *before* attention is turned onto Mesoamerican art.

Figure 14 will be the example, an anonymous work of Christian art found in the wide selection of the canon of saints. Using Panofsky's step of primary meaning, the foreground contains an older man in green pointing at a knot of what appear to be serpents. The immediate background contains what appear to be the base of a rocky slope with two bushes, and in the distant background on the left appears a large house or manse. The sky above contains clouds with patches of blue sky breaking through. To the uninitiated, this is what one sees: Form, color, and the relationship of individual elements. To those who are familiar with the cultural and religious tradition of this work (Panofsky's secondary or conventional meaning),

the symbolism is readily seen and decipherable. The man is none other than St. Patrick, readily identified by the symbolism in the painting that corresponds to various legends and stories concerning him. He is clothed in the vestments of the Catholic clergy, colored green for use in Mass in Ordinary Time of the liturgical year (also the color of Irish Catholicism). His descending hand terminating in a pointed finger toward the snakes is his banishment of them from Ireland. The rocky slopes in the immediate background is the mountain Croagh Patrick, which he ascended to fast for forty days and nights that he may ask God to intercede for the Irish on the Day of Judgment. Finally, the large house or manse in the distance is Patrick's bishops' seat in County Armagh which served as a "base of operations" for his conversion of Ireland from paganism. Panofsky's third step of intrinsic meaning or content offers a unique glimpse into this piece of ideological art.

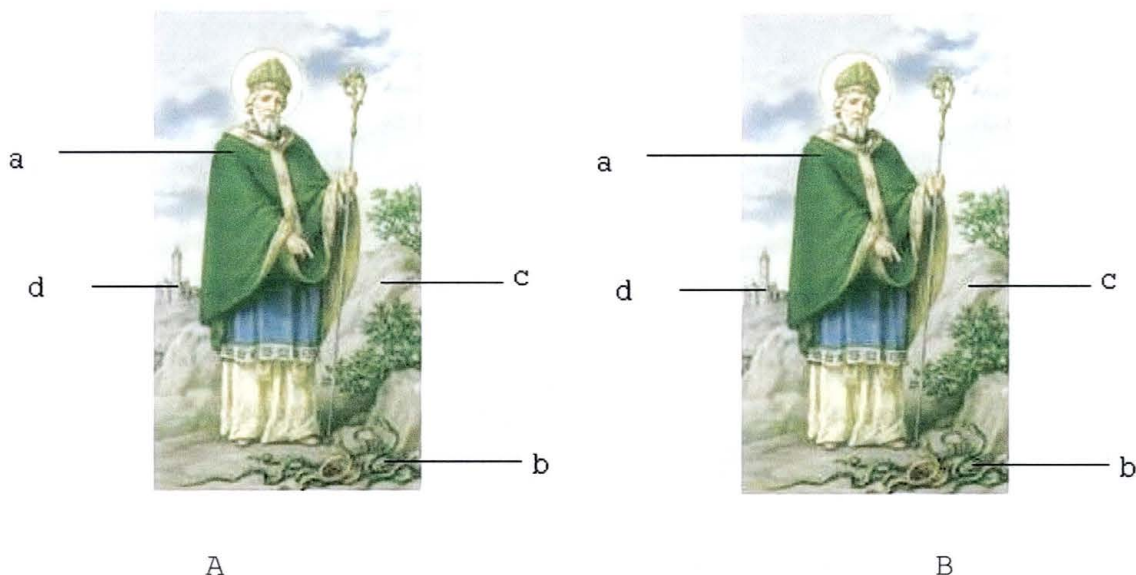


Figure 14: Panofsky's Method in practice:

- A) The identification of primary subject matter; a) elderly man in green; b) a knot of serpents; c) rocky slopes; d) large house in the distance
- B) The identification of secondary or conventional subject matter; a) St. Patrick; b) the banishment of serpents from Ireland; c) Croagh Patrick; d) the bishops' seat at Armagh.

Time and distance were of little or no importance to the artist for the following reasons. The mountain of Croagh Patrick and the bishopric of Armagh are on opposite sides of Ireland and were actions undertaken at different times of Patrick's life. So too was the expulsion of the serpents from Ireland by Patrick. There is no conceivable notion that the three major events of his life all took place in one locale and at the same time. This however is not the point, and it is the incongruity of the painting that illuminates the intrinsic meaning. The painting

itself is not designed to be plausible. It simply serves to remind the viewer of Patrick's contributions to the belief system of a people. It serves to show *why* Patrick is a saint, and reflects the attitude of early Irish Catholicism regarding his canonization. Since Patrick was a saint, he was more than a common man in Irish belief, and replaced Cuchulainn and Finn Mac Cool in the pantheon of Irish heroes believed to be larger than life.

Turning towards our main investigation, the incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero and their associated iconographical messages, the Panofsky method will enable one to piece together the ideology of a civilization long gone. Like the Western example, Mesoamerican art must be put through the steps of Primary, Secondary, and Intrinsic meaning.

Figure 15 shows the incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero that will be the focus of the structural analysis shown in the next chapter, hereafter known as Mask 1 and Mask 2. Additionally, two Olmec incised masks from sites outside Arroyo Pesquero will be analyzed as well (Figure 16), dubbed the Tenenexpan Mask and the Veracruz mask respectively.

It is curious to note that not does it appear that mask incising was uniquely Olmec, it is additionally a

phenomenon that seems restricted to the Olmec heartland along the Gulf Coast. The reason for this restriction is unclear given that Olmec masking reached as far as Honduras and Guerrero. It is also curious to note that all four masks are assigned the same temporal window of 900-400BC, when La Venta was at its greatest prominence.

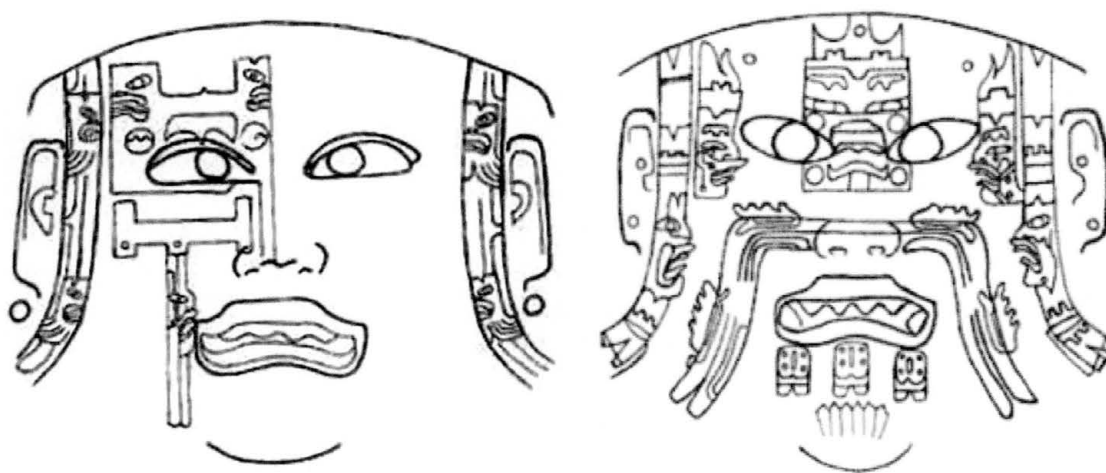


Figure 15: Mask 1 and Mask 2, Arroyo Pesquero, both 900-400BC (drawings by F. Kent Reilly III)

Applying Panofsky's method to all four masks begins with noting the formal meaning of the masks themselves. The size, shape, physical attributes, color, and utilized medium are all necessary in determining the overall expressional meaning. Do the masks display human countenances? What is the expression or emotional message transmitted by them, if any? Such information is the basis of Panofsky's first step, and is integral in providing the

structure of the next step, that of secondary or conventional subject matter.

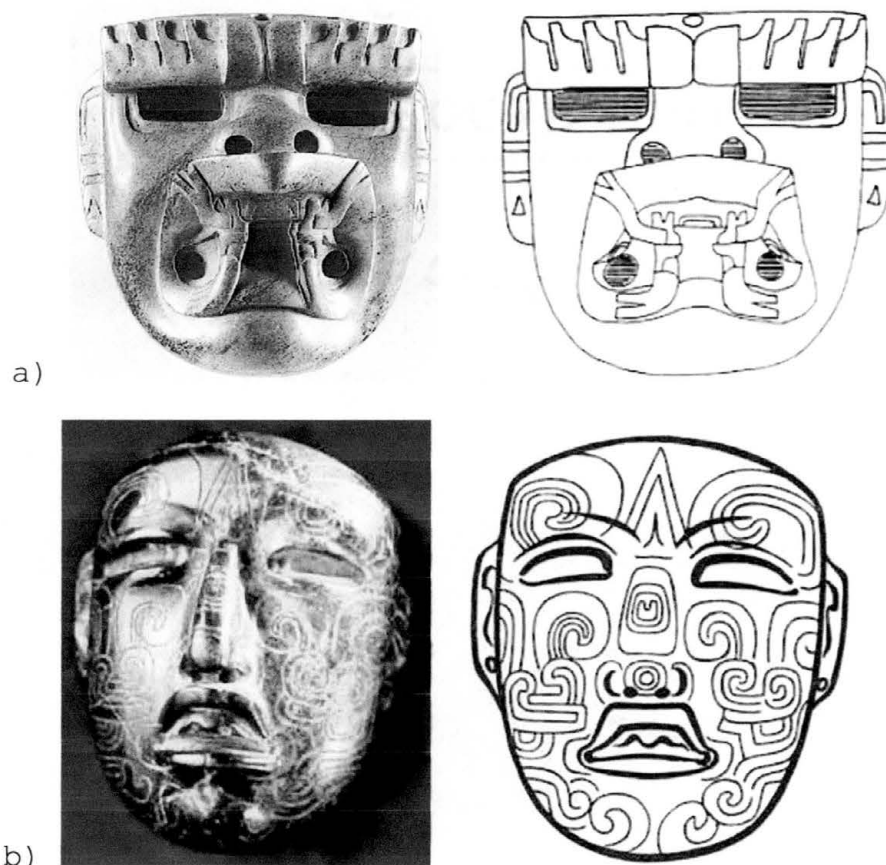


Figure 16: Two incised Olmec masks of outside provenience;
 a) Tenenexpan mask, Tenenexpan, Veracruz 900-400BC; Photo
 after Taube 1996: fig. 10, drawing after Joralemon 1976:
 Fig.10b b) Incised mask from Veracruz(?) 900-400BC; photo
 by Metropolitan Museum of art, drawing after Joralemon
 1976:Fig.187

Panofsky warns the art viewer (or in this case, the iconographer) that though one may have access to literary sources regarding the cultural traditions of the artist, it does not mean that the interpretation by the iconographer is correct (Panofsky 1955:11). Therefore, the iconographer

must use other sources to support his interpretation of secondary meaning. In the case of the incised masks, it behooves the investigator to utilize other Olmec artifacts from Arroyo Pesquero with which to cross-reference iconographic information. A group's ideology can be quizzical to an investigator examining it 2,400 years later. Therefore, the many celts and ceramics recovered both from Arroyo Pesquero and elsewhere in the Olmec heartland, coupled with the Maya creation story of the Popol Vuh will be invaluable. Through these sources, a comprehensive picture of the ideological message conveyed by the incised masks will become manifest.

The archaeological and ethnographic sources will also assist in understanding the intrinsic meaning of the mask to the Olmec. What do these masks tell about the Olmec themselves? What was their purpose? We have a clearer picture of their usage among the Mixtec and Maya, but what of the Olmec? Lack of archaeological context coupled with a relative silence by other researchers may cast the investigator into the murky waters of speculation. A structural analysis provides a compass towards factual hypotheses, and to that end the next chapter begins.

CHAPTER III

A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED OLMEC MASKS FROM ARROYO PESQUERO AND OUTSIDE PROVENIENCE

In comparison to the great Olmec centers in the Olmec heartland such as La Venta, San Lorenzo, and Tres Zapotes, Arroyo Pesquero is no more than a footnote in Mesoamerican archaeology. What has come out of Arroyo Pesquero however may be vital to our understanding of Olmec ritual. Two masks recovered from the site contain incisions that illustrate Olmec ideology focusing on the ruler's supernatural place in the world. The goal of this chapter will be to utilize Panofsky's Method of structural analysis from the preceding chapter to establish the identification of forms used by Olmec artisans with these masks in reference to ideological information.

Prior to an investigation into the symbols transmitted on the mask, Panofsky's first step, the identification of formal matter, must be given its due. Mask 1 of Arroyo Pesquero is made of white and gray jadeite, and measures a height of 17 centimeters by a width of 16 centimeters by 9

centimeters of depth. Examinations by some researchers find these measurements to suggest a symmetry approaching geometric perfection, and imply an idealistic imagery rather than an actual face (Tate 1996:58). The inclusion of cinnabar rubbed into the incisions gives them a ruddy hue, making their iconography readily visible. The pupils of the eye are large and drilled through, and holes are drilled in the periphery of the mask for attachment.

In studying the formal content of Mask 1, the expressional content becomes readily apparent. The eyes appear to be opened wide, as if taken in a great spectacle, while the curves of the mask's nasalabial folds and at the corners of the mouth indicate an expression of ecstasy or a trance-like state. Expressional description also allows the viewer to dwell on the eye holes themselves; if inlaid with obsidian or jade they would have had a dramatic effect. For instance, obsidian inlays may suggest to the viewer the dilated pupils associated with hallucinatory substances. Jade would have been a powerful message of the mask's ability to see into the watery underworld.

In order that the iconographic information transmitted on Mask 1's incisions be discerned successfully, it becomes necessary that the motifs found on the mask be isolated into three motif groups. These motif groups each

contribute to the mask's use as a small but powerful billboard for kingly and shamanic power.

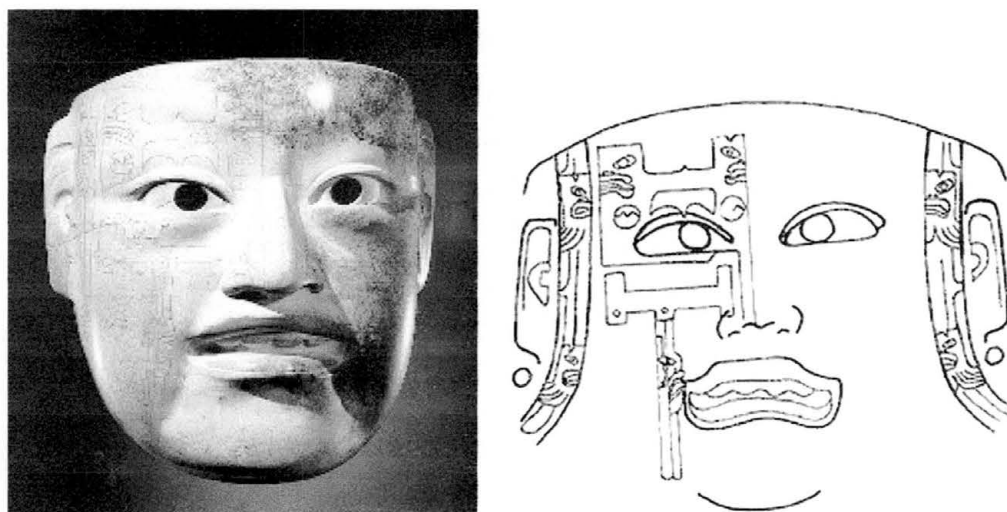


Figure 17: Mask 1, jadeite, Arroyo Pesquero, 900-400BC
(Drawing by F. Kent Reilly III)

The motif groups isolated for the investigation of Mask 1 can be defined as:

- 1) The vertical bands on the periphery of the mask (Figure 18),
- 2) The T-shaped motif group found on the right cheek (Figure 19), and
- 3) The enclosed motif group found above the right eye (Figure 20).

Motif group 1 consists of two vertical bands traversing the length of the mask interior to the ears, and collectively contains four anthropomorphic faces among several half ellipses. These faces terminate in a wing

like pattern common to such figures in Olmec art. Further examination of the individual motifs within the group combined with Panofsky's method of identifying secondary meaning reveal several pieces of information (Figure 18a).

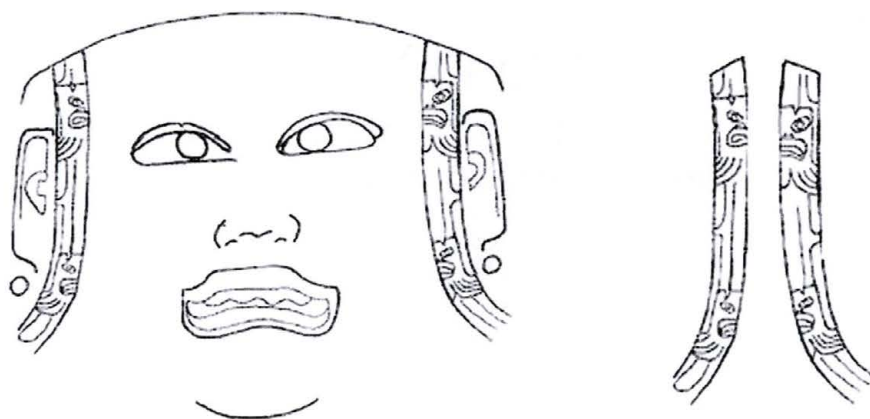


Figure 18: Motif group 1, the longitudinal bands on the periphery of Mask 1, Arroyo Pesquero



Figure 18a: Isolated motifs of motif group 1, Mask 1, Arroyo Pesquero

The first motif from the group is the anthropomorphic faces described above. This particular motif is ubiquitous throughout the Olmec heartland and beyond, and has been seen in slight variations from Arroyo Pesquero all the way to Teopantequanitlan. These faces are viewed as manifestations of an Olmec supernatural. This anthropomorphic figure is considered to be in control of maize growth and agriculture, and also possesses the downturned mouth and almond shaped eyes that are hallmarks of the Olmec artistic style. The wing-like terminations found at the bottom of the supernatural faces are representations of the hand-paw-wing motif, which is associated with the Olmec Dragon. The Dragon is shown to be a zoomorphic figure which transcends the levels of the cosmos, and its representation in this motif group is further reinforced in examining the second motif from the group, the aforementioned half ellipses within the vertical bands (Figure 18a, second illustration). These ellipses found within the context of the mask show them to be gum brackets of the Olmec Dragon, and can serve as either a locative of the earth realm or a representation of the Dragon itself (Reilly, personal communication, Fall 2003). Taken as a group, the vertical bands suggest that the wearer (and perhaps even the mask itself, since a ritual

object possesses its own qualifier of supernatural prestige) was capable of a supernatural journey made possible by elite status.

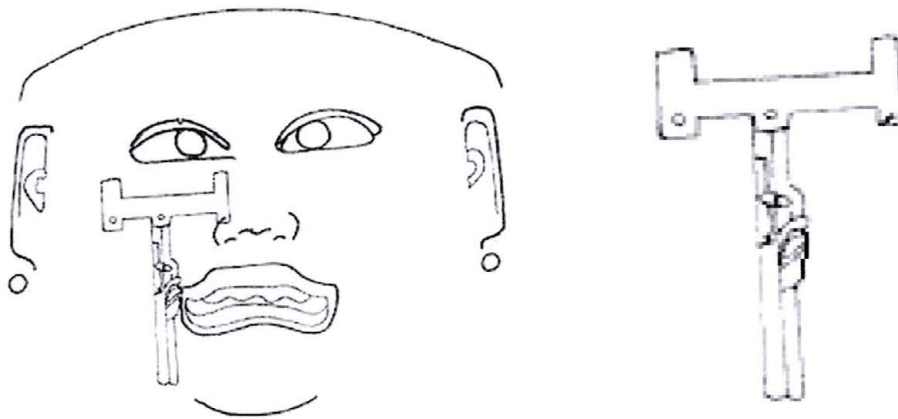


Figure 19: T-shaped motif group of Mask 1, Arroyo Pesquero

The second motif group that will be examined from Mask 1 is the T-shaped motif group located on the right cheek.

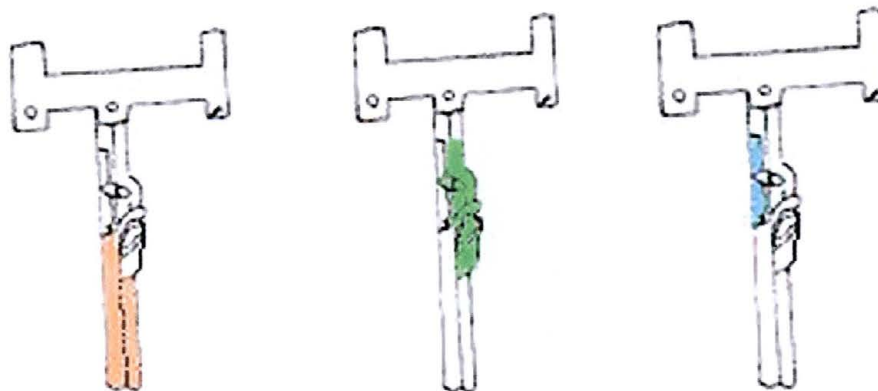


Figure 19a: individual motifs of the T-group, Mask 1, Arroyo Pesquero

Figure 19 shows this motif group in its relationship to the overall mask. The T-shaped group of Mask 1 consists of another anthropomorphic face shown in profile, and terminates with a cleft bottom. A half rounded rectangle is shown bisecting the eye of the face in profile, and the horizontal part of the T is shown with three dots as well as two vertical sections on the proximal ends, giving the overall shape of a football goal.

Again, if we break this motif set into individual elements and examine them one at a time, an overall picture as to the message of the mask becomes clear. Figure 19a gives a pictorial representation as to how these motif elements have been isolated for investigation.

The first individual motif of the group that will be examined will be the bottom of the T itself. When shown in comparison with a celt from the same site of Arroyo Pesquero it can be seen that the cloven bottom of the T represents the saurian bottom of the world tree (figure 20). Furthermore, the selfsame celt shown in 20 also shows a supernatural in profile, reinforcing the idea that the T-shape motif group is indeed a world tree. Additional gum brackets are also found on the T, and the overall shape itself found elsewhere in Olmec art lend additional support to this theory.

What remains slightly unclear is the element of three dots found on the horizontal part of the tree itself. These can represent the Three Stone Place of Creation as found in the Popol Vuh, and though the Popol Vuh was a Maya text, several examples of it are shown in Olmec tableau.

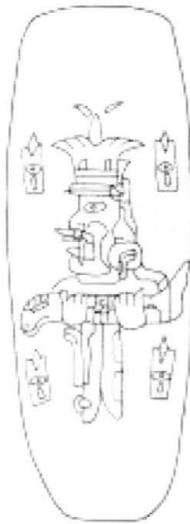


Figure 20: Celt from Arroyo Pesquero: Ruler with saurian base, gum brackets, and supernatural in profile as World Tree

An alternative hypothesis put forth by James Garber assigns the horizontal band of the T itself to be a *pars pro toto* representation of the open maw of the Earth Monster; more than likely this interpretation is also correct (Garber, personal communication, Fall 2007). Several elements of Mesoamerican belief can be assigned an

"all of the above" status, as motifs can symbolize more than one ideological meaning.

The final motif group found in Mask 1 is located above the right eye, and is the most complicated motif group found on the mask (Figure 21).

The eye motif set is located above the right eye of Mask 1 and consists of an enclosed space (or cartouche) with two anthropomorphic faces with a depressed space between them. In the center of the enclosure a motif resembling a downturned E is found just above the center of the eye. This motif is flanked on each side by a circle bisected with a design resembling castle merlons. The overall enclosure does not terminate in a square but instead extends downward to the tip of the nose. Once again, the motifs within the set must be isolated that it may be found what each motif is contributing individually before one examines what the motifs are transmitted in concert. Figure 21a shows the motifs that will be examined individually. The two anthropomorphic faces found at the top left and right of the cartouche around the right eye are easily identified as supernaturals based on previously expressed evidence.

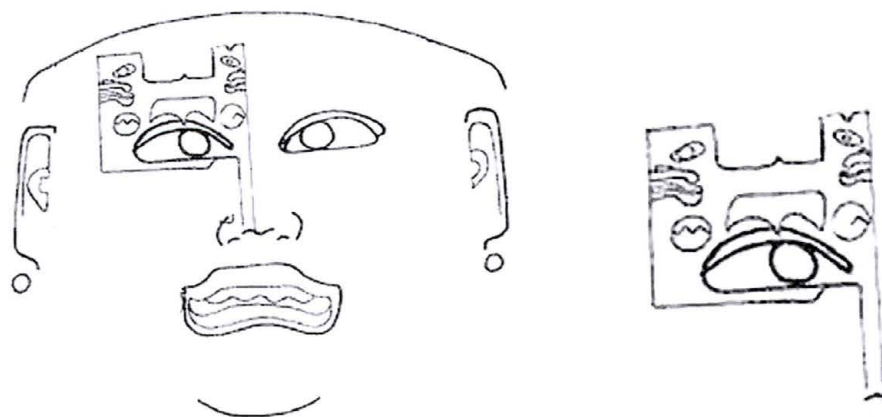


Figure 21: The eye motif set, Mask 1, Arroyo Pesquero

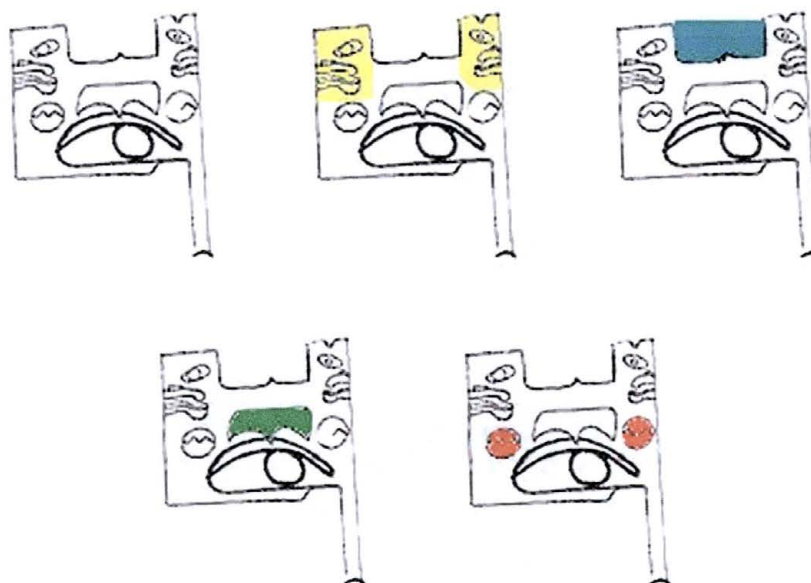


Figure 21a: The individual motifs of the eye motif set

Interesting to note however, is that when the negative space between them is filled in, an upside down indented square is seen (Figure 21a, third illustration). This shape is used by several other Olmec artists to show the indented head of the young maize god in early germination.

Additionally, the supernatural to the right of the negative space also shows an indentation indicative of the maize god.

Research by Karl Taube indicates that the downturned E motif is shown to signify rain or falling water (Taube 1996:87). However, it should be noted that this motif is found in variation all over the Olmec heartland, and may serve as a sky locative or euphemism for the Olmec Dragon. The circles flanking the downturned E motif have been revealed as double merlon motifs used to signify the terrestrial realm. This motif has been seen in La Venta Altar 4 as well as the mosaic masks found beneath La Venta Complex A (Figure 22).

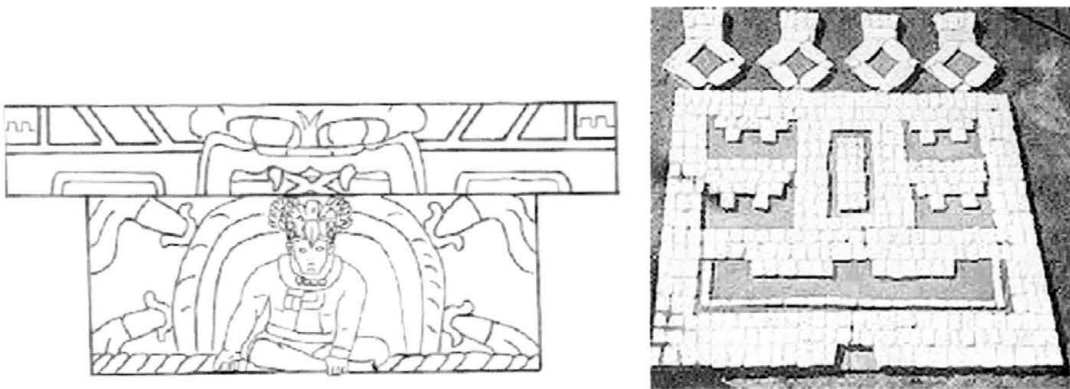


Figure 22: Use of double merlon motifs at La Venta: Altar 4 and underground mosaic mask from La Venta Complex A

The themes made concrete by the incisions found on mask 1 correlate strongly with pieces recovered from other Olmec sites within the Olmec heartland. However, the most

striking resemblances in motif usage in Mask 1 come from incised celts recovered from Arroyo Pesquero.

The first such resemblance is reflected in the T-shaped motif group. Figure 23 is a celt recovered from Arroyo Pesquero showing almost the same image. Likewise, the cleft headed supernatural shown in profile in the T-shaped motif group, as well as the supernaturals shown in the cartouche motif group near the right eye and the vertical bands on both sides of the face have been found on other celts from the same site.

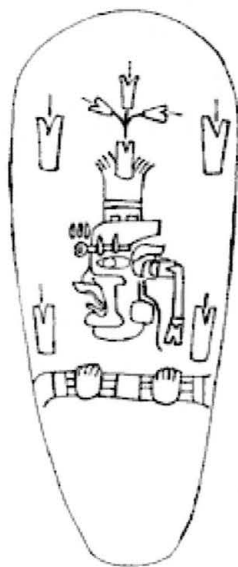


Figure 23: A Celt from Arroyo Pesquero showing several motifs shared with Mask 1 and 2. Drawing by Linda Schele

Interpretation of Mask 1 began by isolating motif sets, and should continue in examining the mask as a whole.

As previously stated, The T-shaped motif group has already been identified as a simplified world tree with a supernatural in profile and with a saurian base. This could be taken to mean that the wearer is in fact the *axis mundi* or world tree itself, and able to traverse the various levels of the cosmos (Reilly, personal communication, Fall 2003). The cartouche motif set around the right eye contains double merlon symbols, as well as two Olmec supernaturals. The merlons and the supernatural motifs suggest a portal of sorts, while the downturned E serves as a locative to the sky realm, though it should be noted that double merlons are usually associated with terrestrial imagery and suggest that the wearer can travel in the earth realm as well. Gum brackets and hand-paw-wing motifs were identified in the vertical band set, and are suggestive of the Olmec Dragon (sometimes referred to as the Avian Serpent). Taken as a whole, Mask 1 was a powerful and portable advocate of the mask's wearer to transcend the planes of the cosmos, which is a theme that is loudly echoed by the second incised mask from Arroyo Pesquero.

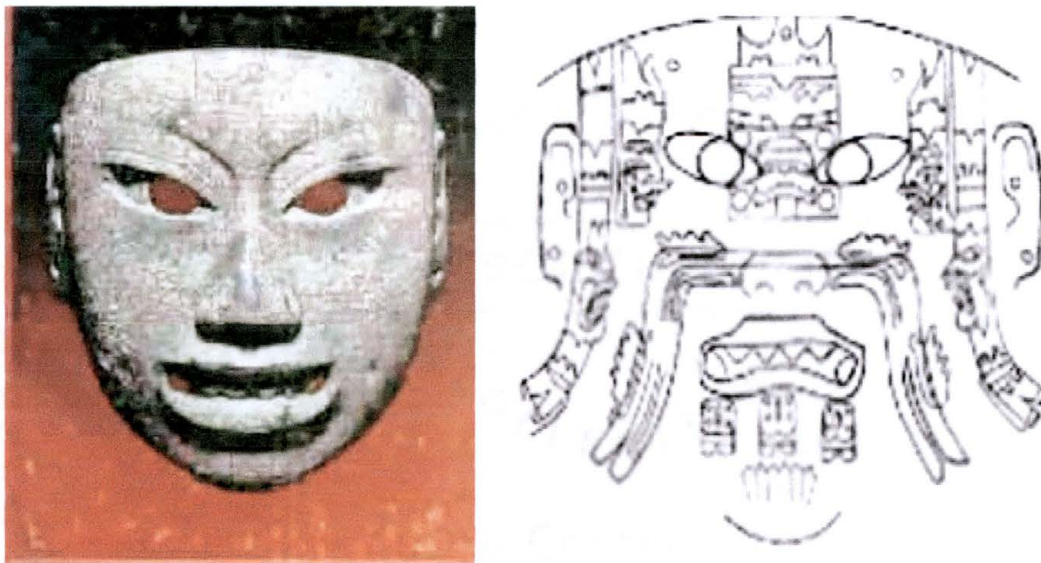


Figure 24: Mask 2, Olmec incised mask from Arroyo Pesquero: 900-400BC; Jadeite with cinnabar; private collection (photo by Coe 1971, drawing by F. Kent Reilly III and courtesy of FAMSI)

Beginning the investigation of Mask 2 will be done in the same manner as the investigation of Mask 1, with the identification of Panofsky's formal and expressional forms. Slightly more triangular in shape than Mask 1, Mask 2 shares many formal characteristics with Mask 1. Mask 2 is made of green jade with cinnabar rubbed into incisions, and contains a mouth like Mask 1 but is completely drilled through. Like Mask 1, Mask 2 contains drill holes on the periphery and drill holes for the pupils in the eyes. The transformative expression of Mask 2, if not relayed by the iconographic information of the incisions, is at least strongly hinted at by the filed teeth and wide open eyes. Mask 2, like Mask 1, serves to communicate the power and

status of the mask's wearer (as well as its own) by means of the artistic information found in motif sets. And like Mask 1, the motif sets will be analyzed one by one, and then synthesized to determine its overall message. Mask 2 has been divided into four motif groups: The two vertical bands on the masks periphery, the three motifs found below the mouth, the long bar on the nose and covering both cheeks, the two anthropomorphic figures interior to the vertical bands, and the motif group shown between the eyes of the mask.

The first motif set of Mask 2 consists, of two vertical bands with much of the same imagery of those found on Mask 1. These two bands are slightly worked more extensively than those found on Mask 1, and contain more motifs to be interpreted. It should be noted upon initial examination that the two bands are not symmetrical in nature, as the figures in profile do not match one another (Figure 25a). It should also be noted that one band contains a line partitioning not found on the other.

What is common to both bands however, is a barrage of imagery linked to maize, the terrestrial realm, and the Olmec Dragon.

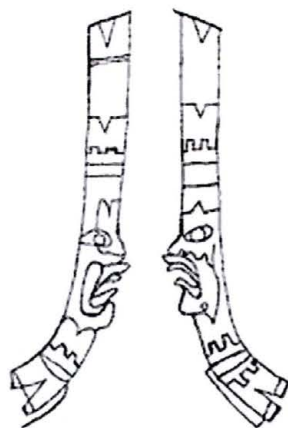


Figure 25a: The non-symmetric vertical bands of Mask 2

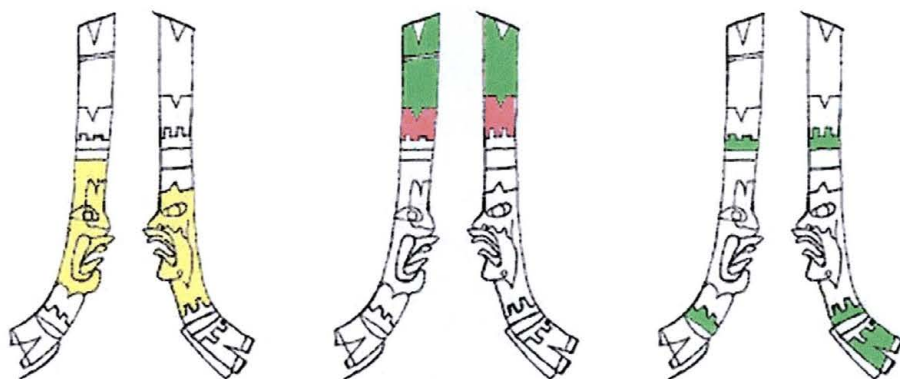


Figure 25b: The isolated motifs of Mask 2's vertical bands

Close inspection of the two supernaturals in profile in the vertical bands reveal that there are several elements that are mutually exclusive to one another: The face in profile on the left vertical band has an elongated crest-like element lacking in the vertical on the right. Conversely, the figure on the right band possesses a sort of "mustache" element on the upper lip and cheek that the figure on the left band possesses in a different form.

The vertical bands of Mask 2 also contain two maize seeds each, reiterating the importance of the maize life cycle and the special role reserved for the ruler within it. Not only were the rulers and elites responsible for ensuring that the gods maintained the status for which they had grown accustomed, they were also responsible for success in agriculture. When one refers to a well-paying yet highly stressful occupation, few examples fit the description better than the Mesoamerican elite. The motif known as a double merlon appears in both bands, again reinforcing the tie with the terrestrial realm. In short, the overall theme of the motif group points to an identification of the wearer as the maize god, or the Olmec Dragon.

Another motif set concerning itself with the terrestrial realm in Mask 2 can be found directly under the mouth, and consists of one motif repeated three times, which again correlates to the Three Stone Place where Creation began in the Popol Vuh (Figure 26).



Figure 26: The three stone motif group below the mouth of Mask 2

All three motifs appear to be topped with four dots arranged in quincunx patterning with a bar in the middle. Reference to Figure 23 actually answers this question, as the two figures are actually showing the same theme, namely the four corners of the earth with a world tree in the center. Mask 2 also speaks to the viewer through the next isolated motif, a long horizontal band moving from right cheek to left across the bridge of the nose. Shown in Figure 27, correlations at Izapa Stela 23 and La Venta Altar 8 show a strong motif relationship to the band shown on Mask 2.



Figure 27: The double-headed serpent bar; from left to right: Horizontal band on Mask 2, Arroyo Pesquero; La Venta Altar 8 (drawing after Schele 1996: 11, figure 16b); Izapa 23 (drawing after (Taube 1996: 93, figure 13c.)

The horizontal band from Mask 2 shows some of the attributes of the Olmec Earth Dragon: flaming eyebrows, a downward tilting eyelid, and gum brackets. As the Olmec

Dragon can travel the heavens and the underworld at will, putting it on a mask is a bold statement of power. What was set upon monumental sculpture elsewhere, Arroyo Pesquero was producing portable versions. Additionally, the horizontal band is indicative of a serpent bar, the zoomorphic embodiment of the Milky Way, and several examples of serpent bars are found in celt imagery from Arroyo Pesquero (Figures 20 and 23).

The incisions of Mask 2 overwhelmingly point to the elevated status of its Olmec possessor. The serpent bar over the mouth indicate that the wearer was in control of the movement of the heavens, while the indented maize seeds, double merlons, and Olmec supernaturals shown in profile proclaim that the earth realm was conquered as well. The bar and four dots motif represents the four corners of the earth with the center as a world tree (the wearer of the mask). The fact that there are three of them is likely a reference to the Three Stone Place of Creation recounted in the Popol Vuh. Two additional supernaturals shown in profile on the outside of each eye appear to have *pars pro toto* versions of flame eyebrows at the top of their heads, as well as having miniature downturned E motifs above their eyes. These motifs taken as a group

indicate an ability of shamanic flight and control of the heavens shown earlier in Mask 1.

As a pair, the two masks share several themes as well as an interesting similarity of style. Stylistically, both masks are similar in size, incised with similar motifs, and are temporally thought to be contemporaneous.

Thematically, both masks speak to the viewer of the power and status of the wearer, as well as the masks own power. An argument could be made that these masks, if not done by the same artist, could certainly have been created in the same workshop. However, this argument would almost be impossible to prove: The style and motif usage may simply be a regional preference. Indeed, the two masks contain so much similar information that Joralemon considered them both to be variations of God I, whose association is with earth, maize, fertility and religious ecstasy (Joralemon 1976:58).

In addition to their obvious artistic value, these masks served an ideological purpose that was of great importance to the Olmec. And yet, Arroyo Pesquero is not considered a site of wide renown in Mesoamerican archaeology to the point that an organized excavation has ever been conducted. Why would the Olmec deposit these masks in a place of unimportance? Why would objects that

were obviously created with great care and imbued with motifs of high status and ideological importance be relegated to an archaeological backwater?

It certainly takes no great scholar to posit the argument that Arroyo Pesquero is a site of great importance to the understanding of Olmec ritual ideology. Elsewhere in Mesoamerica, masks were ritually attached to mummy bundles, and served oracular purposes for the descendants of the deceased. It is possible that Arroyo Pesquero served as a ritual necropolis where the elite traveled on pilgrimage to ask their ancestors for guidance. The mortuary bundles with these masks as their human countenances would have been extremely powerful tokens of transformation and omnipresence. An analysis of incised Olmec masks from outside Arroyo Pesquero will illuminate further mask usage among the Olmec, and give a sense of perspective on these unique Olmec reminders of ancestry.

Tenenexpan has yielded an exquisite mask suffused with iconographic imagery that rivals if not surpasses the incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero in its craftsmanship. Carved from serpentine and dated around 900-600 B.C., the Tenenexpan mask is a transformative billboard of supernatural endorsement. The examination of form

immediately engages the viewer, from the thick eyebrows to the jutting septum just beneath the nose.

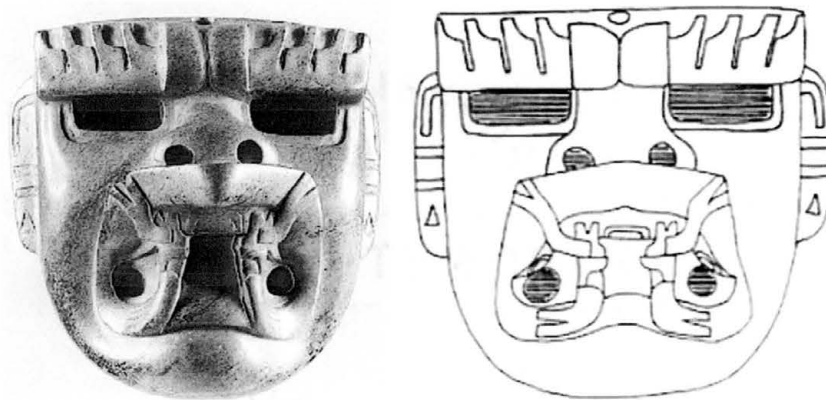


Figure 28: The Tenenexpan Mask, 900-600 BC, Tenenexpan, Veracruz. Photo after Furst 1996: Figure 10; drawing after Joralemon 1976: Figure 20b.

The red cinnabar rubbed into the incisions give a striking contrast to the green of the serpentine, and the ear incisions reveal a somewhat more abstract notion of ears than the masks of Arroyo Pesquero. The expressional forms which constitute the second step in Panofsky's identification of primary subject matter reveal to the viewer right away that this is no human face. Unlike the masks of Arroyo Pesquero, the Tenenexpan mask does not render the human form capable of transformation. The Tenenexpan mask shows the human form *in the midst* of transformation. The zoomorphic attributes of the mask are readily seen by the flame-like eyebrows and bifid fangs

over an open mouth, while an additional set of fangs ascend upward. On the maxillary gum ridge, a downturned U motif is seen, though slightly more difficult to see are the gum brackets incised on the inside of the fang sets. The ears of the mask are incised as well, and consist from top to bottom of half a downturned U motif, two horizontal bands, and an up-pointing triangle.

Iconographically speaking, the Tenenexpan mask offers a rich tableau of motifs in reference to transformation and shamanic flight. The ascending fangs and open mouth, coupled with the hard to see gum brackets are reminiscent of the open maw of Chalcatzingo Monument 9. Strong comparisons can also be made with the Kunz Axe as many of the same elements are shown, particularly in the ears and mouth (Figure 29).

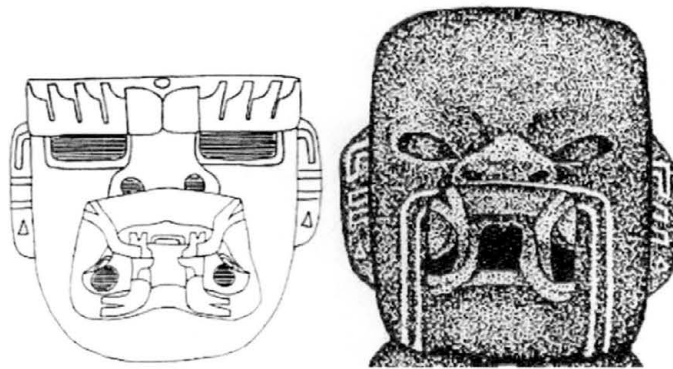


Figure 29: The Tenenexpan Mask and the Kunz Axe. This shows common motifs in the mouth, ears, and nose. Drawings after Joralemon 1976:fig.20b, and Jill Leslie Furst after Covarrubias 1957:Plate XVI, respectively.

To utilize Panofsky's method of determining secondary or conventional meaning, this mask is uniting sky, earth, and transitive imagery. The flame eyebrows, gum brackets, and descending bifid fangs evoke the power of the Olmec Dragon (or the Jaguar of the Sky, after Furst 1996:75). The downturned U found on the upper gum line (along with the half U's on the ear if united) shares with Chalcatzingo Monument 9 in Figure 30 the ideological belief in an open portal or maw to the various planes of the cosmos. The pointed ridge above the mouth and below the nose as well as the flame eyebrows has evoked a raptorial quality that serves to tell the viewer that the wearer may fly between the planes like the harpy eagle from which the flame eyebrows were derived (Furst 1996:75). This is another attribute which the Tenenexpan mask shares with Chalcatzingo Monument 9. While the masks of Arroyo Pesquero were labeled as manifestations of God I by Joralemon, the Tenenexpan Mask has been assigned as having imagery with God III, the Olmec Bird Monster (Joralemon 1976:52). The two Olmec deities share not only several motifs in common (such as flame eyebrows, eye shape, and reptilian dentition), but are considered to be iconographical mirrors. The three masks as a group share several motifs in common, which supports this theory.

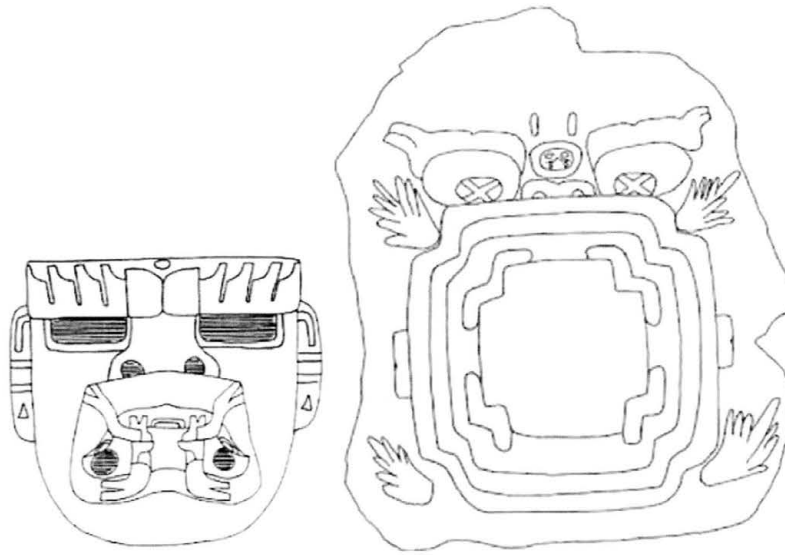


Figure 30: The Tenenexpan mask and Chalcatzingo Monument 9. Both show a ritual maw to the supernatural world. Both drawings by Joralemon 1976:Figures 20d and 1970:Figure 141, respectively.

Additionally, the three masks all promote a message of celestial transportation to the viewer. If placed on mortuary bundles, the supplicant would see these messages as a portal to the ancestors who may act on behalf of the supplicant. Shamanic journeys, oracular consultation, or a communion with ancestors could all be made possible by providing an iconographical focal point for the supplicant seeking guidance. The incised mask from Veracruz supports this belief by contributing iconographical information of a different stylistic variety while still contributing to the same themes. Measuring 12 centimeters by 9 centimeters, the Veracruz mask lacks drilled eyeholes and mouth. It could not have been worn for ritual usage as the ritual

actor could not have seen or spoken through it to an audience. Swirling incisions are seen on both cheeks, chin, nose and above both eyebrows, while the bridge of the nose contains an ovoid shape depressed in the middle, while another round dot motif is seen on the upper lip. An inverted heart shape pointing upward is found on between the eyes, and reptilian like dentition is seen from the parted, downturned lips. Figure 31 shows how the examination of motif sets will be separated, by examining:

- 1) The swirling motifs throughout the mask
- 2) The ovoid shape on the bridge of the nose and upper lip, and
- 3) The inverted heart shape between the eyes.

Examples of swirls are generally seen in Mesoamerica to be iconographic examples of smoke, rain, or mist. As Joralemon places this mask to be an example of God II, the Olmec Maize God, it may stand to reason that the swirls found on the Veracruz mask represent clouds linked to rain, the lifeblood of agriculture. Another possibility (operating again within Joralemon's system of the Veracruz mask as an example of God II) is that the swirling pattern represents the mist of the Underworld through which the Maize God travels to communicate with his living descendants.



Figure 31: Individual motif sets of the Veracruz Mask; a) The Veracruz Mask (drawing after Joralemon 1970:Figure 187) b) Swirling motifs only c) dot and depressed ovoid motifs only d) inverted heart shape motif only.

Scrolling or swirling motifs are found elsewhere in Olmec art in reference to rain or the swirling mists of clouds in Chalcatzingo Monument 1. Another interpretation of these motifs could be the smoke inhaled by the gods when blood soaked paper is burned in autosacrificial bloodletting ceremonies, or as the breath of the ancestor depicted by the mask. All of these interpretations fit well into the pre-established ideology of ancestor intercession on behalf of their descendants through ritual. After all, the Maize God himself regenerated and rewarded his descendants in the Popol Vuh; the king being the reincarnation of the Maize God makes *his* intercession for his descendants a matter of religious precedent.

The second motif set of the indented ovoid on the bridge of the nose and the circular motif on the upper lip likewise lend credence to Joralemon categorizing the

Veracruz mask as the Maize God. Both motifs resemble maize seeds in form, and other similar motifs have been found on Olmec art from other areas (Figure 32). The third motif set also supports this theory, as the inverted heart shaped motif between the eyes is described by Joralemon as a pointed vegetative motif (Joralemon 1970:Figure 187).

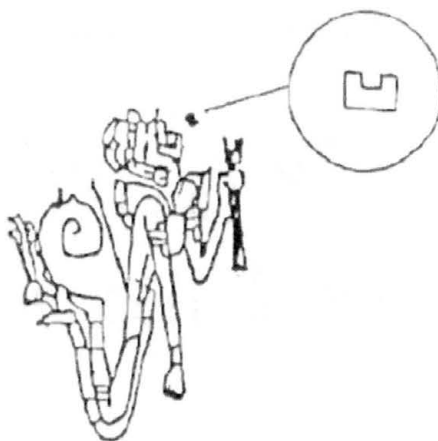


Figure 32: Detail of the "Slim" figurine showing indented maize seed motif. Drawing after Reilly: 1996 figure 8.

To expand the iconographic information of all four masks into a broad category of meaning is simplistic at best. Researchers who have delved into the matter of what the masks symbolize have made deep inroads as far as dividing the masks into an Olmec pantheon. The danger of this however, is that doing so may undermine the ideology that the rulers and elites of Olmec society, indeed their very deities were transformative and dynamic. Though artistic convention may follow certain guidelines in

regards to form and composition, religious art in particular more often than not refuses to be so neatly categorized. An example in the Western Christian tradition renders Christ through literary metaphor as a shepherd, a lamb, a gate, an intersection of two pieces of wood at a right angle, an empty tomb, a dove, etc. If the art viewer is looking at these separate scenes without having the Gospels handy, how is one to know that all of these manifestations are of the same being?

A definitive answer may forever elude the researcher of Olmec art being that the Olmec left behind no extensive literary record. The irony of this particular investigation is that the researcher must go forward in time for transmission models and cultural knowledge only to go backward in time for ideological beginnings.

CHAPTER IV

A POSSIBLE TRANSMISSION MODEL OF MESOAMERICAN MASKING TRADITIONS

Assuming that the Olmec originated the ritual practice of mortuary bundling and oracular function, what was the model by which other Mesoamerican cultures assumed its usage?

The initial challenges encountered when beginning this investigation (the lack of archaeological context and the relative dearth of research) become all the more egregiously manifest when a masking transmission model is considered. How is one to know how the masking practices of the Olmec (such as we can know them) became that of the Maya, Teotihuacán, and the Mixtec? One may argue that the speculative reconstruction of such a model is doomed to fail from the outset, as one may never know for sure.

However, a case can be made that a model can be reconstructed by considering a few key points: It has been well-known for quite some time that the trade routes of Mesoamerica were far reaching and sophisticated. Several models have been proposed to explain the advent of this

highway of trade, but it most likely model relevant to this investigation is the onset of trade in non-essentials. Conversely, these non-essentials were essential, not in the hunter-gatherer sense of the word in terms of survival, but necessary to ritual life (which was just as important) (Garber, personal communication, Fall 2006). As it stands that the Olmec were the first widespread hierarchal society that determined the whys and wherefores of Mesoamerican ritual, they likewise engendered this industry of trade in ritual implements. Masks would most certainly have been part of this ideological package at least in theory if not in methods of construction. The Maya were well known to the Olmec even in the Formative Period, and both the Maya and the Olmec had a common creation story in the Popol Vuh. This is proven in the layout of the La Venta cosmogram, in which major settings within episodes of the Popol Vuh are recreated as sacred space shown in Figure 33. The First True Mountain of Maize, upon which the gods created mankind with a mixture of their blood and maize dough, is recreated, as well as the Three Stone Place of Creation. The ritual space of such settings is repeated over and over in continually restricted areas for smaller and more special audiences.

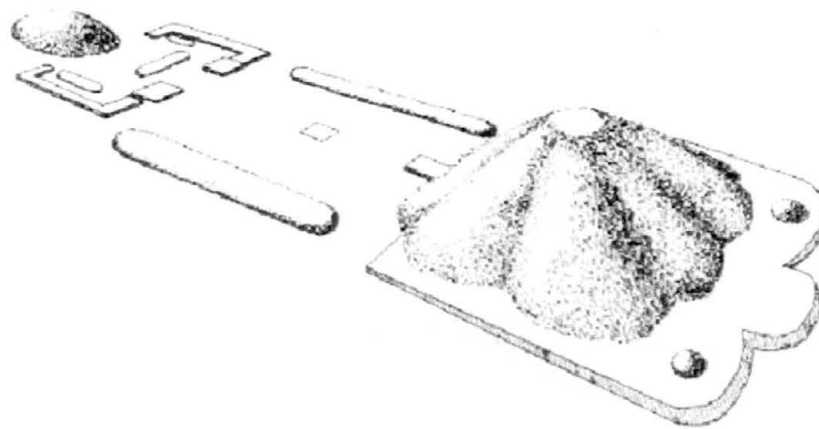


Figure 33: The Creational Cosmogram of La Venta. Drawing after Schele 1996:Figure 10

This sacred cosmology was likewise reflected on portable celts and tablets (Figure 34). The Maya too constructed their own sacred mountains in the form of their temple topped pyramids. Like the Olmec before them, the Hero Twins in the Popol Vuh were venerated along with their father One Hunaphu, decapitated in the Underworld. From the rescued and buried head of One Hunaphu sprang the World Tree, separating sky and earth. Both the Olmec and the Maya after them rendered this act in their art. At Palenque the sarcophagus of Pacal shows the ruler raising the World Tree, while within the sarcophagus itself Pacal is shown at oneness with the maize god through his jade mask.



Figure 34: Olmec cosmogram in portable form. Tablet from Dallas Museum of Art; Drawing after Schele 1996:Figure 11.

An earlier example of the Maya using Olmec ideas with concerns to masking in the monumental sense is found in the monumental mask facades at Cerros that correspond to Olmec facades in Tzutzuculi (Reilly 1991:151).

However, the style of Maya masks is somewhat unlike those of Olmec manufacture. Maya masks are generally mosaic in nature while Olmec masks are almost exclusively single carved pieces. Additionally, Maya masks for the most part lack the incisions on their masks. But it may be that the Olmec did not share the nuances and specificities of their masking tradition with the Maya. The Maya were, after all, foreigners. Perhaps the Olmec imparted the ideology of masking while the Maya themselves were left to sort out the specifics. As was stated in the Introduction and Background chapters, the theme was universal, but not

the stylistic choices that allow art viewers to distinguish a Picasso from a Monet. Though the Olmec started the tradition, the Maya put a fresh spin on it by altering method of construction. The same mediums (jade or serpentine) were still used owing to the preciousness of the material and its associated sacredness, but the Maya achieved a cultural identity through mask manufacture that distinguishes them from Olmec masks over time. It is more than likely that the Olmec brought the masking tradition to the Maya in addition to other ideological ideas, while the artistic muse worked upon Maya artisans in a different way. At first, the Maya continued using time-honored Olmec construction processes in masking as shown by Tikal Burial 85, dating to the first century AD (Coe 2005:80). Over time and the burials at Calakmul Structure II (5th century AD) as well as Pakal's death mask at Palenque (7th century AD) show the methods of mask creation had taken a decidedly Maya flavor.

However, what of Teotihuacán? The masks recovered from Teotihuacán are found as single pieces and mosaic work. Though Covarrubias proposed a continuity of style from the Olmec to Teotihuacán through small figurines, does his hypothesis hold weight when one begins to mention masks? Also, Covarrubias postulated that Teotihuacán was

engaged in cultural exchange with the Olmec before 500BC, well within the timeframe in which La Venta was a major player in the region (Covarrubias 1966:135). The figures Covarrubias gives, particularly a figurine that incorporates Olmec attributes, are quite convincing that this is the case (Figure 35). A voice of dissent may say that the lineage houses lining the Avenue of the Dead are attributed to the Early Classic Period, well after the timeframe that the Olmec in their heyday would have been able to influence the art style of Teotihuacán (Evans 2004:266).

Two arguments may be brought to bear against this pessimistic outcry: First, who is to say that Teotihuacán hadn't any masks before the lineage houses were constructed? It could be that mortuary bundles of the ancestors with masks were kept in a more perishable environment that was later swept aside for the more lasting housing of stone. It is a well known fact in Mesoamerican archaeology that societies seeking to justify their right to rule would reach into hallowed antiquity to establish themselves as the inheritors of former glory: The Aztecs used the Toltec, why not Teotihuacán to the Olmec?



Figure 35: Figurine from Teotihuacán showing "Olmec" features. Drawing after Covarrubias 1966: Figure 56.

Secondly, and interestingly enough, Teotihuacán shares with Arroyo Pesquero the tradition of constructing masks from a single piece, though mosaic pieces have been found as well.

It is in the mosaic tradition however, that Teotihuacán joins the Olmec in placing motifs on masks, which for the most part was not part of the masking tradition of the Maya. However, it is the assumption by this investigator that Teotihuacán took the mosaic tradition from the Maya. Maya mosaic masks predate Teotihuacán's; The Maya, who had an ethnic neighborhood in Teotihuacán for trade purposes (Evans 2004: 271) could have brought their mosaic tradition to an Olmec idea that was

already in the process of transformation at Teotihuacán. Olmec masks and masks from Teotihuacán show a similarity in shape, while Mayan mosaic masks from Calakmul and Palenque share an artistic medium and stylistic similarity with Teotihuacán in the form of mosaics. Teotihuacán's relationship with the Maya has been shown to exist as far back as the Late Pre-Classic, and Teotihuacán's interference in Tikal's political dealings was well known in the 4th century (Evans, 2004:270). The Maya could have sent mosaic work to Teotihuacán (among other materials) while Teotihuacán acted as a powerful patron to her allies among the Maya. The inhabitants of Teotihuacán would be inheriting a twist on a pre-existing art style to add to the prestige of the lineage heads, always beneficial in Mesoamerica.

Simply stated, the Olmec transmitted the concept of masking to both the Maya and Teotihuacán. Both recipients of this practice then added their own cultural variations while dealing with pervasive themes in a common ideology (ancestor veneration, themes of rebirth and reincarnation, endorsement of supernatural forces, etc). The Maya placed jade masks on a dead ruler to identify him with the tradition of a god known for reincarnation and kingship. Teotihuacán meanwhile, went a step further by using the

mosaic tradition given to them by the Maya (again, whose mosaic tradition pre-date Teotihuacán's) to add motifs such as butterflies (symbols of the soul) as well as vegetative motifs which hearken back to a belief system started by the Olmec. This model takes into account the similarity between Olmec and Teotihuacán masks, Covarrubias' transitional forms, and the Olmec impact on Mayan civilization.

The Olmec and Maya belief in divine kingship through supernatural endorsement may have shifted slightly into the belief in a divine founder of lineages perpetuated by lineage spirit houses along the Avenue of the Dead. This hereditary elitism would serve the dual purpose in creating easily recognizable kinship systems to an ancestor (contributing to class endogamy), as well as serving as a more inclusive (and outwardly visible) system of power sharing. Access to the supernatural that had once been the purview of one became the right of a few more. What remains unclear is the extent of cultural transmission from Teotihuacán directly to the Mixtec, though examination of the codices as an art style in comparison with the murals of Teotihuacán, coupled with a thematically conservative mortuary practice, and common lineage veneration of the two cultures may point to a more intimate relationship than has been previously believed. After all, there was a *barrio* at

Teotihuacán inhabited by Oaxacans known as Tlailotlacan used primarily for plaster working (Evans 2004:271). Utilizing Mesoamerican long distance trade networks (which attributed in no small measure to the influence and affluence of Teotihuacán), goods and ideas as well as people would have flowed both to and from Teotihuacán to the Valley of Oaxaca. Teotihuacán's fall may have encouraged the dispersing elites to carry their ideas of ancestor bundling to the Mixteca. The Mixtecs meanwhile, eager to justify their independence from Zapotec rule, may have adopted the mummy bundling practice as a way of establishing a precedent and new lineages. Additionally, the power base expanded further with the addition of a priestly class functioning as living oracles, perhaps for those that remained outside of the hereditary elite class (Pohl 1991:36). Therefore, it takes little imagination to envision Teotihuacán iconography and artistic styles to reach the Mixteca Alta, to be utilized by the indigenous population. The fall of Teotihuacán and its subsequent depopulation could have seen a substantial migration to the Mixteca Alta, a migration of artisans and oracular priests searching for greener pastures and new lineages to initiate. The creation of these lineages could have given rise to a new cultural identity. Not only could a

tradition of mortuary masking find its way from the Tehuacan Valley to the Mixteca Alta, but additionally the goggle eyes and sharp fangs of the Teotihuacán rain god Tlaloc finds itself in Mixtec art, functioning not only as a place name (Vindobonensis page 47b, shown below in Figure 36), but also as a patron and supernatural endorser of a ruling lineage. Indeed, Codex Bodley gives several examples of Lord 5 Alligator wearing a mask with Tlaloc attributes (Figure 37). As the father of Lord 8 Deer and eager to expunge his cousin Lord 2 Rain's fiasco from the family's good name, 5 Alligator wields his position as priest to maintain Tilantongo's lineage and serve as regent until his son assumes the mantle of power (Byland and Pohl 1994:134).

It can be seen how masks were used by later Mesoamerican group, but what can be said about the role of the mask among the Olmec? If it is true that one may track mask usage forward in time along trade routes and the flights of supposed refugees down through the ages, how is one to go backward to investigate mask usage in its *naissance*?

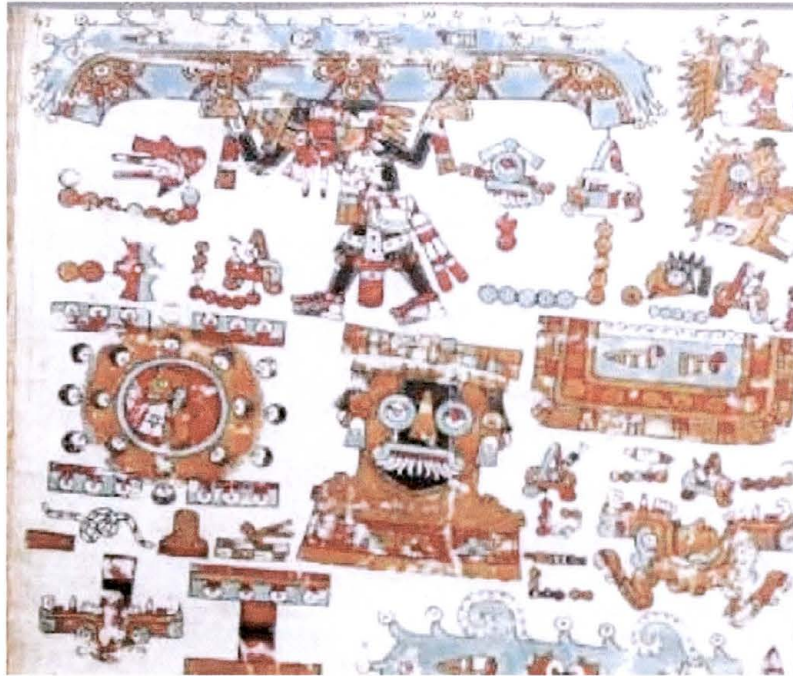


Figure 36: Teotihuacán's Tlaloc: The Mixtecs Dzahui is used as a place name; Page 47b, *Codex Vindobonensis*. Picture courtesy of FAMSI



Figure 37: Lord 5 Alligator in priestly vestments and mask of the Mixtec rain god Dzahui from Codex Bodley 7d. Codex picture courtesy of FAMSI

A definitive answer may elude research for the time being.

One may give an easy answer by saying that it was a case of

"everyone else is doing it", and through cultural upstreaming that the Olmec did in fact use masks in mortuary contexts. If mortuary bundles with masks are known among the Mixtec, Maya, and supposedly Teotihuacán, why not among the Olmec? Only time and archaeological discovery may answer this question, which at the present time can only remain precisely that, a question.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Certainly the future will be the greatest teacher in regards to the suppositions made in this investigation. It may very well be proven that the Olmec, in fact, did *not* use their masking tradition to augment a mortuary bundling ideology which was later dispersed to the various other peoples in Mesoamerica. Perhaps an excavation or research project will be undertaken which proves that the Olmec used the incised masks of Arroyo Pesquero and their unadorned cousins as simple costume ornamentation or for use in a performative context. If such an excavation or project is done, this author will be the first to admit to being in the wrong. Nothing may please one more to know that one's hypotheses were so egregiously wrong as to inspire another to show the truth and scope of his error (except of course, to have been right all along).

In any case, if this investigation has shown anything, it is that further investigation is crucial to understanding the ritual function of Mesoamerican masks in

any context. It is precisely this lack of context that may allow an investigator to go off into the realm of speculation. Archaeology may be certain that these masks were precious by virtue of their material and obvious care in their construction. Ethnography may be certain in knowing the Mayan creation story and Mixtec mortuary bundle veneration such as it was recorded by the Spanish. Iconography may be certain of the motifs and themes expressed in Olmec incised masks, as well as the prevailing ideology of their cousins created by the Maya and at Teotihuacán. What remains uncertain, however, is how these masks were used by the Olmec. One may guess, speculate, point out cases among surrounding descendants, and objectify artistic information, but to be certain would simply be premature. The evidence of this investigation (such as it is) points to cultural upstreaming of conservative themes and ideology in ancestor veneration and worship of supernatural beings. The dead, if of a certain spiritual and earthly wealth, could join these beings and influence the prosperity and status of their various lineages. Through their intercession and endorsement of the supernatural world around them, Maya, Mixtec, Teotihuacano, and presumably Olmec elites adorned their hallowed dead with masks on mortuary bundles to maintain a

sense of connection. Through them, connection to the past, present, future, and all the worlds together was possible.

This investigation began with the broad statement that masks play an integral role in the ritual life of many peoples. Certainly this was true of Mesoamerica. Through archaeological finds in context and further research into masks recovered already, the answer lies just beneath the surface with mouths frozen in telling the secrets of the universe and eyes forever fixed on eternity. The goal of this investigation was to structurally analyze the masks of Arroyo Pesquero to determine an ideological package. Moving forward in time to the recipients of such a package moves the investigation into cultural areas with a definable archaeological context. Like the inhabitants of Mesoamerica, such an investigation creates a temporal loop in linear time. The investigation goes forward in time for context, and backwards in time for ideological precedent. Additionally, the determination of Olmec ideology associated with masks was a goal that this author considers met. They were silent messages of life everlasting and of the ruler as axis mundi, yet still within earshot of his descendants. Finally, the investigation hoped to trace a possible model of transmission from Olmec progenitors to later groups, and only time will tell if model is correct.

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