

# A Ruler in Triumph

## Chocolá Monument 1

**CHRISTOPHER JONES**

At times the lack of a published line drawing will prevent an exquisite piece of sculpture from receiving the attention that it deserves. Such is the case with Chocolá Monument 1 (also known as Stela 1), a large fragment of Maya bas-relief carving from Guatemala (Figs. 1-2). The piece has been on display at The University Museum since the 1920s and has been published several times in photographs and descriptions (Kidder and Samayoa 1959:fig. 91; Miles 1965:255-256, fig. 3d; Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer 1983:fig. 3.11; Parsons 1986:70-71, fig. 176). The high quality of relief carving and incision has long been recognized by these and other scholars, but the form and strength of the composition are not brought out adequately either in the published photographs or in the glass case in the Mesoamerican gallery of the Museum where the piece has been displayed for at least 30 years.

The drawing by Carl Beetz which accompanies this article (Fig. 1) is the first line rendering of the surviving carving. It should help to establish the Chocolá monument as one of the best examples of Maya fine-line relief known. A photograph is also included (Fig. 2), which differs from the drawing in showing questionable elements of plaster restoration done in the 1920s and still in place.

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*Studio photograph of Chocolá Monument 1, showing erroneous plaster restoration done in the 1920s. Collected by Robert Burkitt, and donated to The University Museum around 1922 by Mr. Henry Kummerfeldt representing the Chocolá Plantation Company of Hamburg, Germany. (UM no. NA 11005)*



1  
*Carving on the front surface of Chocolá Monument 1. (Drawing by Carl Beetz).*





3 Map of Mesoamerica showing localities mentioned in text.

Table I

Early Monuments of Guatemala

	Southern Guatemala	Northern Guatemala
Early Classic	Chocolá Monument 1 Kaminaljuyu Stela 10	Tikal Stela 31 (A.D. 446) Tikal Stela 29 (A.D. 292)
Late Preclassic	Abaj Takalik Stela 5 (A.D. 126) El Baúl Stela 1 (A.D. 36)	

## Discovery of the Chocolá Monuments

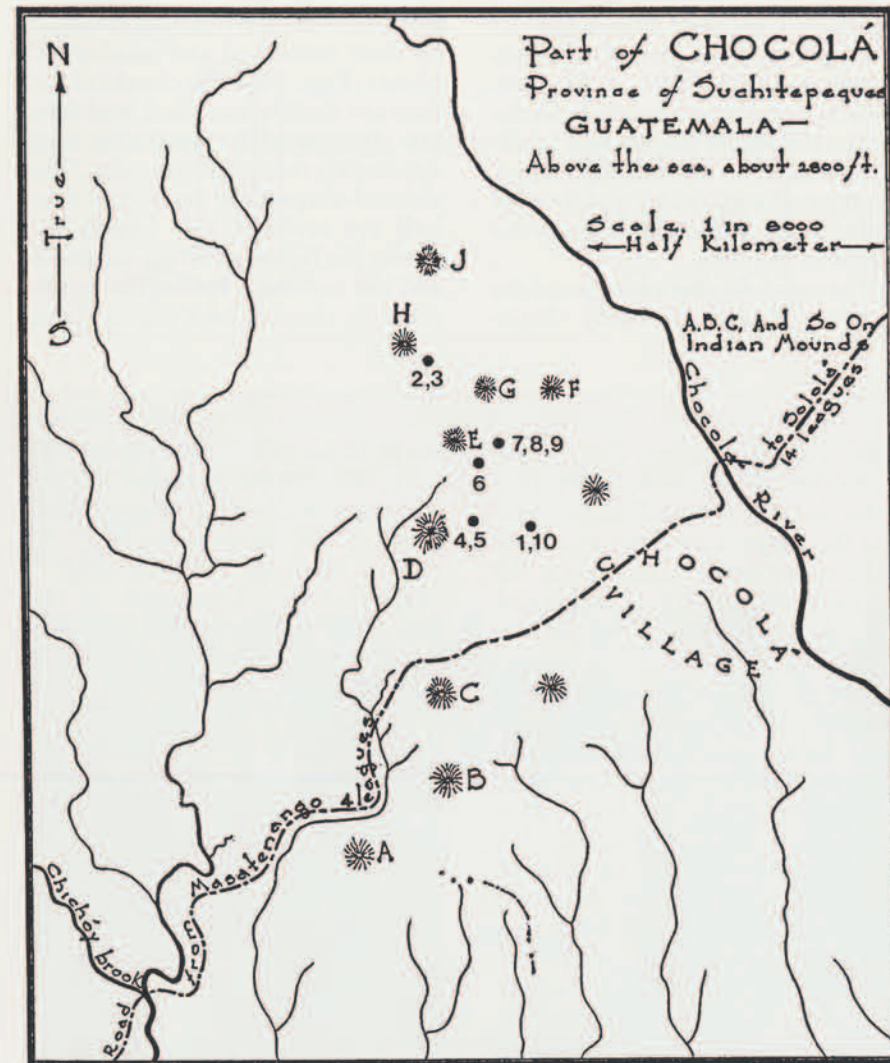
The Maya site at Chocolá consists of a series of earthen mounds lying on a flat, gently sloping piece of ground between the headwaters of two streams. It is one of several sites, including Izapa, Abaj Takalik, and El Baúl, which lie along the broad plains of southern Guatemala and Chiapas (Fig. 3), an area presently supporting coffee, sugar, and cattle plantations of great size and wealth.

Information on the discovery of the Chocolá stone monuments is available to us through a report and letters written by Robert Burkitt to George Byron Gordon, then director of The University Museum (University Museum Archives [hereafter UMA]: Burkitt Box 2, Folder 5). The two men were close friends, and Burkitt had worked with Gordon as archaeological supervisor at Copan, Honduras. Burkitt's description of Chocolá, his excavation of one of its mounds, and a sketch map of the site were published by the Museum directly from these letters (Burkitt 1930).

Writing sometime between 1920 and 1924, Burkitt relates (in his idiosyncratic orthography) that several large stone objects, including the finely sculptured one, were discovered by workmen on the Chocolá plantation while plowing between the earthen mounds before planting. Burkitt himself was not present, but gives a description obtained from the workmen:

The stones wer mostly under ground: but some ov them struck the plough, and wer a nuisance. And all the stones on the map, and several not on the map, wer lately dug up and dragd out ov the cane. Some ov the stones dragd out wer carried away and uzed in building: while others, which wer considered to be curiosities worth saving, wer dumpt at the sides ov the paths with which the cane field iz intersected. The places on the map ar merely the prezent places ov stones that remain on the cane paths. (UMA: Burkitt Box 2, Folder 5)

A description of the ten stone monuments described by Burkitt and a



4 Map of the mounds and monuments of Chocolá (after Burkitt 1930). Two mound designations have been corrected and the original locations of the stone monuments have been added according to Burkitt's notes in *The University Museum Archives*.

map of their find spots are provided (see box and Fig. 4).

## The Archaeological Context of Chocolá Monument 1

The sculptured stela had been destroyed in ancient times, broken into fragments. This must have involved some effort, since Burkitt describes Chocolá Monument 1 as a "dark grey porphyritic stone of extreme hardness." He describes it at the time of discovery as follows:

The three pieces ov the stone made a block, which waz, az you

see it, about eighty centimeters high, sixty wide, and from thirty to sixty thick: and weighed I supoze the better part ov a ton. . . . You see how the thickness ov the stone varied. The face ov the stone, excepting for the reliefs, waz a plane surface. The back waz curvd: but with a surface so smooth and even, that you might supoze the stone had been intended to be engraved on that side too. (UMA: Burkitt Box 2, Folder 5)

In an attempt to determine the nature of the site, Burkitt mapped its surface features without, however, placing the stone monuments in relationship to them. Mounds B, C, and D were all wider north-south

than east-west; Burkitt therefore suggested that they faced east. If this is the case, then Monuments 4 and 5 (two oblong stones) and 1 and 10 (the sculptured stela and an altar) would be approximately aligned on the front axis to Mound D—the highest at the site. This alignment is similar to one in front of the largest mound at the nearby and probably contemporary site of Izapa (Lowe, Lee, and Martinez 1982: end map, Mound 60). The other Chocolá monuments also appear to be related to the mounds in a formal way: Monuments 7, 8, and 9 (two round stones and an arch) were found east of Mound E, and Monuments 2, 3, and 6 (a plain slab, a slab with "cups," and a carved cylinder) were just off the southeast corners of Mounds E and H. All but one of the monuments lie within a central plaza at the site as defined by Mounds D, E, G, F, and an unnumbered mound to the east (Fig. 4).

Only Mounds A and B were excavated by Burkitt (1930). He did not find the expected burials, but discovered that Mound B was built in two stages. The inner mound stood about 6 meters high over a leveled and smoothed gravel layer. The outer mound tapers off to a plaza fill approximately 2 meters deep. This suggests that the earth which covered most of the stone monuments is of the same strata as that of the outer mound. Assuming that the other mounds of the site have two layers also, either the monuments were set up before the outer mounds were raised, or they were covered by earth eroding later from the outer mounds. In either case, Monument 1 itself was certainly not found in its original setting and thus cannot be chronologically tied either to the mounds or to the other stones.

## Design

Burkitt's notes make it clear that the Chocolá monument was originally found in three fragments that fit together. His description of a curved, smooth-surfaced back makes it almost certain that the surviving fragment is from a stela rather than from an altar, since the latter would have had a flat bottom surface. The surviving width of the front is 85.4

centimeters. Allowing space for the completion of the bird on the right edge of the fragment (represented now only by its head), the original stela would have to have been at least 1 meter wide. The height of the standing figure carved on this stela is similar to those on Early Classic Maya stelae: it measures 30 centimeters from its eye to the center of the belt; by comparison, the

figure on Tikal Stela 29 measures 37 centimeters, Tikal Stela 4, 38 centimeters, and Tikal Stela 3, 30 centimeters. Total figure height from the feet to the top of the serpent headdress would be around 1 meter. A basal panel and/or sky panel could add as much as 50 centimeters to the height of the stela.

The torso, thighs, and arms of the standing figure are easily distin-

## Archaeological Salvage at Chocolá

The Maya site at Chocolá consists of 11 or 12 earthen mounds, the largest of which (Mounds B, C, D, and J) are over 12 meters high and aligned north-south. The site map published by Burkitt (1930) has several inaccuracies. Mound D had inadvertently been left unlabeled, and Mound H was mislabeled as "Mound N." The location of the stone monuments was indicated by Burkitt as he found them—that is, after they had been moved by the plantation workmen. The map presented here (Fig. 4) has therefore been altered to reflect what was probably their original location as given in Burkitt's notes. The sculptured stone (Monument 1) and an altar (Monument 10) were found far to the east of Mound D. Burkitt writes:

When I first saw them, the pieces were lying along the cane path, not far from the round stone: and examination showing that the pieces fitted, I had them set up on the round stone to look at.

It now appears from my Indian informant, that the sculptured stone and the round stone, which I had accidentally put together, had actually been found together: and even some what in the position in which I had put them, that is to say, one above the other. The place they had come from was a little to the south west, where there is a slight height of ground.

The plough struck some stone, perhaps one of the sculptured pieces: and getting out one stone

led to find an other. One below an other, in the earth, they found the three sculptured pieces, and at the bottom, as deep as a man the round stone. Underneath the round stone, after they had dragged it out, were seen to be several broken pots.

Burkitt comments further that the sculptured stone is obviously a fragment from a larger monument and that other fragments might show up in further digging, but this apparently was never undertaken. He also points out that the sculptured stone was not of a proper shape to stand on Monument 10 with the figure upright and was furthermore too wide for the lower stone to serve as pedestal. This implies that the altar itself was under 1 meter in diameter, and that the discovered setting could not have been the original one for the sculpture. The ceramic vessels under the altar suggest a primary setting for Monument 10.

Not far from Mound H and about on a line between H and G were found two stones, one on top of the other. The lower one (Monument 3) was oblong, measuring about 100 by 120 by 50 centimeters, with cups or hollows in its flat top surface. Burkitt tells us that the larger of the two deep cups measures 25 centimeters in diameter and 12 centimeters deep, with straight sides. The shallow ones are around the edges. Perhaps all of the cups served as mortars for grinding, as suggested for similar ones secondarily placed on Izapa monument fragments (Norman 1976:251, 269). On top, "about half an arm's length projecting from the ground," was an upright stone (Monument 2), "a good deal taller than a man" and about a meter

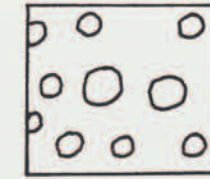
wide. Monument 2, "having nothing on it, went to the masons." Burkitt drew a sketch of the original positions of the monuments (Fig. 5), and of the cups on Monument 3 (Fig. 6). Two photographs of the cup stone survive in the Museum Archives, one of which is included here (Fig. 7).

Directly east of Mound D were found two large oblong stones, side-by-side and partially buried in the ground. One had cups on the upper surface (Monument 4) while the other did not (Monument 5). Southeast of Mound E was a single upright stone (Monument 6) about "a fathom and a half [3 meters] high" according to Burkitt's informant. Its lower part was cylindrically shaped and ornamented with vertical lines; the upper part was rough, and protruding from the ground. This stone was also taken and broken up by masons. In a little hollow south of Mound G and east of E, a round stone (Monument 7), apparently cylindrical like Monument 10 and Classic Maya altars, was found buried about 1 meter under the ground. A smaller shapeless conglomerate stone (Monument 8) lay on top, "which my man spoke of as eyes and ears" and which Burkitt concluded was a naturally formed stone of irregular shape. Over this stood another stone in the shape of an arch (Monument 9), which "might have been something less than breast high." Unfortunately this curious and unique monument had been struck by the plough and broken apart by the masons. Burkitt includes a sketch of this grouping as well (Fig. 8).

(From Burkitt's letters to George Byron Gordon, University Museum Archives: Burkitt Box 2, Folder 5)



5 Burkitt's sketch of the original positions of Monuments 2 and 3 according to his informant, with the cupped stone (Mon. 3) lying under the upright one. (University Museum Archives)



6 Burkitt's sketch of the deep and shallow cups on the top surface of Monument 3. (University Museum Archives; see also Fig. 7)

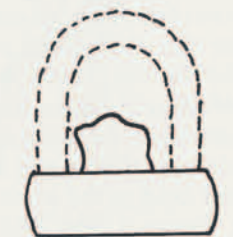


7 Chocolá Monument 3. The stone is shown where it was first seen by Burkitt, in a secondary position after having been excavated and moved by plantation workmen. The photograph shows the perfect roundness of the two deep cups and faintly reveals the shallow ones along the edge of the altar top.

serpent?) head, with cross-hatched spots on the upper lip and protruding upper canine tooth. The ear is a stylized fringed jaguar ear, the brow is the supra-orbital plate seen on most Mesoamerican reptilian supernaturals. The ear ornament is a unique six-pointed flower shape. The headdress is apparently a helmet, for a chin-strap can be seen enclosing the figure's lower jaw. Projecting from the ear ornament and covering the neck and chest is another element with indented cross-hatched spots. This might be the lower jaw of the jaguar headdress.

Flowing out from behind both shoulders is a short cape composed of feathers and/or cloth strips tied near their ends with beads or medallions. On both sides, the larger innermost medallions are fringed and decorated with crossed sticks. Beyond these are four smaller medallions or beads, some of which seem to be tied to individual strips or feathers. The inner strips are decorated with cross-hatching and are more certainly of cloth.

Under his left arm, the figure holds a human head with a goatee, a mustache on the corner of the upper lip, and an eye covered by three or four triangular elements (Fig. 10). The other arm is outstretched, holding up for view another human head with a similar pointed eye covering. This head wears a large ear ornament and an animal headdress with protruding upper teeth.



8 Burkitt's sketches of Monuments 7, 8, and 9 (the altar stone, unshaped stone, and arch stone). The arch, which "might have been something less than breast high" had been broken up by plantation workmen before Burkitt could see it (University Museum Archives).

A beard can also be seen, as well as possible incised tattooing marks on the forehead. Hanging down from the upraised head and hand is the three-part base normally seen on Maya day-signs. It is complete with three scrolls, three U-shaped elements above them, and liquid (blood?) dripping from the base of the scrolls, all of which appear with the day-signs of Stela 10 from the nearby site of Kaminaljuyu (Fig. 11).

A third head is tied to the front of the wide thick belt of the standing figure (Fig. 10). Although highly stylized in comparison to the other two heads, the major features of the individual on the belt can be distinguished. Its headdress is a peculiar lobed element, with knobs within each lobe. The eye is large and round, and the open fanged mouth is surrounded by a rounded cartouche. The petaled ear ornament is incised with a grimacing animal head; a long strip of decorated cloth hangs down from it. Two fringed ends of cloth, probably the loin-cloth, hang from the back of the belt. The forms of both head and belt are almost precisely duplicated on Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 (Fig. 11) on the kneeling figure at lower right, with the head attached at the back of the belt.

Everything described so far pertains clearly to the standing figure and his costume. On the right are several elements that are harder to interpret. A crested bird head, probably a quetzal, looks upward just off the figure's shoulder. A similar bird's head looks at the figure from the extreme right. Parsons correctly points out that the plaster restoration done in the 1920s by The University Museum misinterpreted the first bird head, connecting it to a tapered element that passes in front of the head held in the arms of the standing figure (1986:70). What looks like a fringed serpent head on the restoration (Fig. 2) is now recognized by Parsons as a typical stylized wing belonging to the bird itself. The bird head and wing might thus belong to the decapitated head held in the arm, perhaps as its headdress. The fringed end of cloth or feathers behind the bird head and wing either bends out from the



9a, b  
(a) A view of the mounds at Chocolá.  
(b) Burkitt's excavation of Mound B. (From Burkitt 1930:figs. 2, 36)

standing figure's headdress or pertains to a completely missing floating head like the "vision serpent" to the right of the standing figure on Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 (Fig. 11, upper right). The vision serpent was so named by Schele (1985) from scenes carved on the stone lintels of Yaxchilan. The serpents have two heads, one larger than another, and are interpreted as visions of supernatural or ancestral beings brought on by bloodletting. As in the Kaminaljuyu and perhaps the Chocolá representations, the Yaxchilan scenes show a standing male ruler and a kneeling woman who has just given blood and induced the vision.

The bird head to the extreme right, plus the two elements below, are isolated from the other elements and from each other by undecorated background space. At first glance, this suggests that they are hieroglyphs, as the bird head is correctly oriented to face left, and the lowermost element has a possible numeral one beside it. The quetzal birds could properly name the individual whose head is held in the arm, both as part of the glyphic text and as a headdress. On the other hand, all three elements could also work to-

The almond-shaped eye and round eyeball are stylized and oversized, giving the figure a certain calmness and the carving a focus.

gether as the face (with round nose-bead) and headdress of a subsidiary figure, identical to that on Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 (Fig. 11, kneeling female at lower right). This interpretation seems more likely.

In many ways, therefore, the Chocolá carving is most directly comparable to Kaminaljuyu Stela 10, an exquisite black stone monument which is probably an altar. Not only the intricate modeling and incision but even specific elements such as the belt-heads and the dripping day-sign scrolls are almost identical and not found on other items of southern Guatemala carving. The similarities lead one to wonder if the two stones were actu-

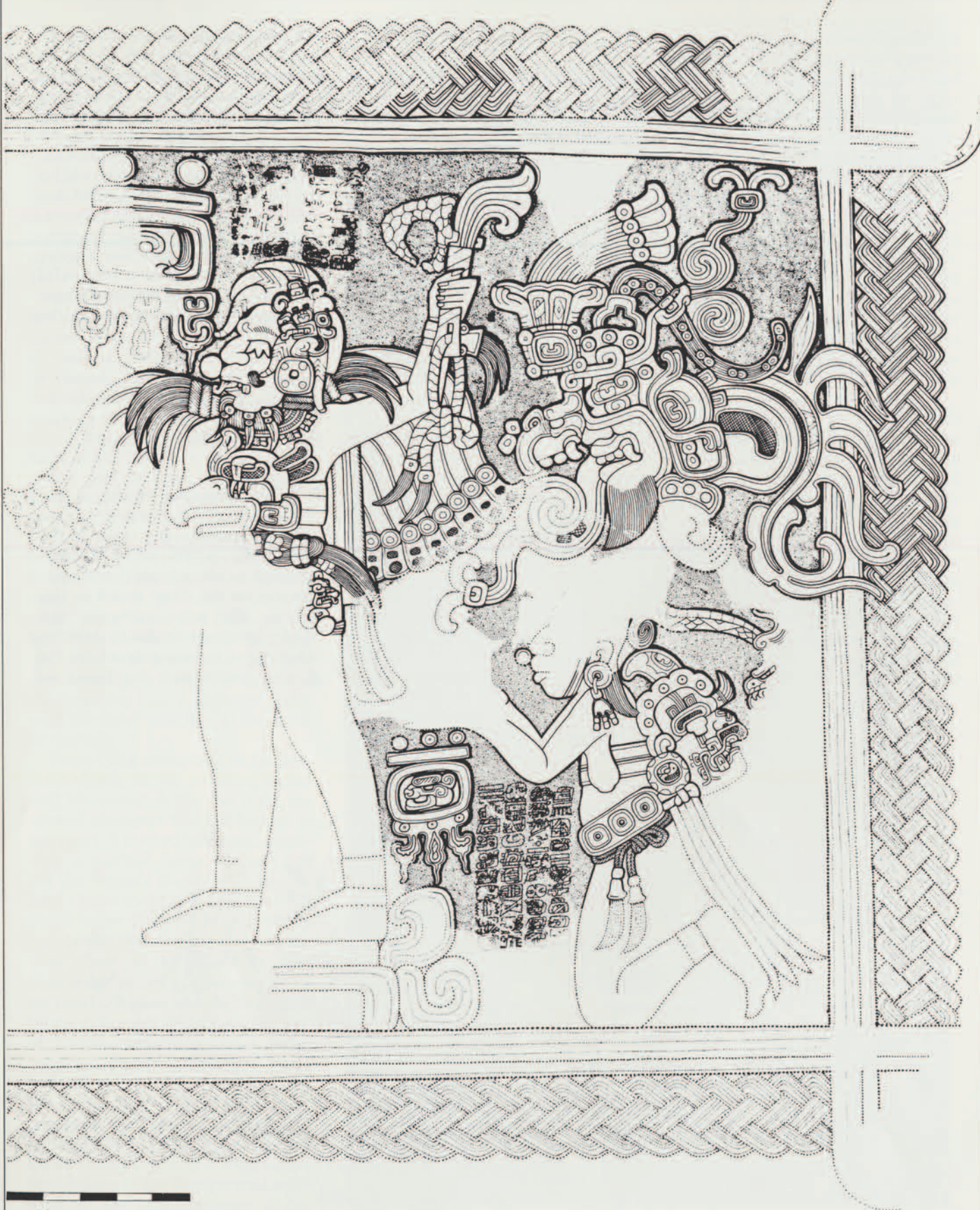
ally carved by the same artist, given the fact that only about 80 kilometers separate the sites. By way of further speculation, it can be noted that the trident-eyed, bearded, mustached face of the central figure on the Kaminaljuyu stone is strikingly similar to those of the two heads held by the Chocolá figure. Might the Chocolá stone, the only carved monument yet found at the site, be commemorating the victorious display of enemy heads after a successful raid or battle against the much larger community of Kaminaljuyu to the east?

### Comparisons and Dating

The standing figure of the Chocolá monument is undoubtedly the ruler of the community, portrayed in triumph. Although no hieroglyphic inscription survives on the stone to tell us this directly, the pose, costume, and trophy heads are similar to those on other Maya monuments where the glyphic text names the figure as



10  
Chocolá Monument 1 showing the position of three decapitated heads displayed by the main figure.



**11**  
A new drawing of Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 by James B. Porter of The Archaeological Research Facility, University of California, Berkeley. The pose of the main figure, costumes, and incised line details of this carving are strikingly similar to those of Chocolá Monument 1. (Stela is in the Museo Nacional, Guatemala)



**12**  
Tikal Stela 31, A.D. 446. An Early Classic Maya stela from northern Guatemala showing the triumphal ruler Stormy Sky.



**13**  
Tikal Stela 36, probably 4th century A.D. It shows a seated ruler displaying two trophy heads.

ruler. In many ways the closest parallel is to Tikal Stela 31 (Fig. 12), which is dated to A.D. 446 and is linked specifically to the Tikal ruler Stormy Sky by a long inscription on the stela back. Similarity to the Chocolá monument is particularly marked in such traits as the standing pose of the figure, with one arm outstretched in front and the other holding a masked head in the crook of the arm. Other comparable elements include the the cross-hatched and parallel-line incision to give texture to the bas-relief carving, and the use of U-shaped elements. Tikal Stela 36 (Fig. 13), of probable 4th-century date, shows a Tikal ruler also displaying two heads. The early Tikal stelae, starting at A.D. 292, are the first in the long Classic Maya tradition of ruler portrayal, which lasts until the 9th century.

The carved stone monuments of Preclassic southern Guatemala and Chiapas, including Chocolá Monument 1, have been thought of as forerunners of the Classic Maya monument carving style. This view, that the Maya of Tikal and Uaxactun and the other Early Classic communities of northern Guatemala derived their tradition from earlier precedents to the south, has been

challenged by Schele (1985), on the grounds that the Maya of northern Guatemala had apparently also developed a monument carving tradition during the Late Preclassic. Unfortunately, the most striking example of early carving from the northern area cited by Schele, the Hauberg Stela, is still of unknown provenience and uncertain date.

I would like to further Schele's challenge by pointing out that although there is no doubt that much southern sculpture portraying rulers is earlier than the dated Tikal stelae (those from El Baúl and Abaj Takalik having calendric dates in the first two centuries A.D.; Table I), Chocolá Monument 1 and Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 are not necessarily dated to the Late Preclassic. The Chocolá monument was apparently placed secondarily (see Box). The stratigraphic position of the Kaminaljuyu stela has recently been reviewed by Parsons (1986:65-66, 69).

Three fragments of Kaminaljuyu Stela 10 were excavated by Gustavo Espinosa in 1955. Two years later, the same sounding was continued by Edwin Shook, whose records of the stratigraphy and related pottery provide the most reliable information for the dating of this monument. The Stela 10 fragments were apparently embedded in a deposit consisting of thin adobe and sand floors, and pottery dating to the Late Preclassic period. Although Parsons concludes that the stela was associated with the floors, and is therefore Late Preclassic, his notes on an interview with Shook provide the basis for a somewhat different interpretation. The thick Stela 10 fragments could not have been "sealed" within the Preclassic floors, but clearly protruded *above* them; it is therefore likely that they were dug down into this context in later times. The stela, therefore, can be either Late Preclassic or Early Classic in date, and might even be contemporary with the Tikal stelae of the 4th and 5th centuries A.D.

In the posture of the figures and in details of carving such as the use of fine cross-hatching and parallel lines, the Chocolá and Kaminaljuyu monuments of southern Guatemala show a stronger link to early Tikal in the north than they do to any other

sculpture of their region. Without firmer dating of the two southern pieces, therefore, we should be cautious about proclaiming them as forerunners of the Tikal (northern) sculptural style. The observed simi-

larities might be due to contemporaneity rather than to chronological succession within an artistic tradition. Meanwhile, both of these stelae can be honored as masterpieces in the Maya art of bas-relief carving.

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Guatemala. He is the author (with Linton Satterthwaite) of *Tikal Report 33A: The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tikal*. He has also written *Deciphering Maya Hieroglyphs*, a workbook for the Maya Hieroglyphic Weekend held annually at The University Museum, and articles focusing on Tikal and Quirigua. He has led numerous tours of Yucatan and Guatemala for the Smithsonian Associates, as well as for The University Museum.

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