

All Eight Ballplayer Stelae of
BILBAO, COTZUMALHUAPA:



A Complete Iconography

we wish to thank

Dr Merle Greene Robertson

for all her labor and experience

which went into creating the beautiful rubbings

which help illustrate this report on Bilbao



ALL EIGHT BALLPLAYER STELAE
OF BILBAO, COTZUMALHUAPA

A Complete Iconography
of their Athletic, Religious, Political, and Artistic Importance

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first draft
plenty of corrections to come
for which your critique would be appreciated

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FOREWORD

It is gratifying to me when other scholars reinvestigate, and offer refined data, on the much-ignored field of Cotzumalhuapa art and iconography. Nicholas Hellmuth does us a service in providing the best photographic record, and reasonable interpretation, of an important specific group of eight large ballgame monuments from the “type site” of Bilbao, Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa. These “stelae” have been known, variously published, and publicly exhibited for over a century. The archaeological site of Bilbao alone produced, at last count, the astonishing total of ninety-one carved monumental stone sculptures. The thematic emphasis in the Guatemalan Pacific Coast Cotzumalhuapa style is ballgame iconography. Bilbao Monuments 1-8 are masterpieces of this generally unappreciated Mesoamerican tradition.

During 1962 and 1963 I was in charge of excavating Bilbao, and I published the results and interpretations in two volumes, 1967 and 1969. In volume 2, I offered detailed descriptions of these same eight relief sculptures, entirely depending upon the full-front photographs kindly supplied by Dieter Eisleb of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin where these monuments, and two dozen other Bilbao monuments, have been deposited since 1881. I welcome this opportunity to briefly summarize the original archaeological context of the sculpture.

Bilbao is a large site, with a dozen substantial mounds distributed over a four-terraced central acropolis, 600 meters long. Among our numerous archaeological sampling operations, it was most exciting to locate and excavate a sunken court appended to the eastern margin of the southern acropolis terrace. This zone was partially enclosed by low platforms and approached by six stone-block staircases. We labelled this complex the “Monument Plaza” owing to the quantity of sculptures formerly displayed there. Not only were many stone monuments located on the surrounding platforms, but in the middle of this

precinct we found the split-off plain bases, more or less in situ, of three of the eight “ballgame” monuments

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laboriously removed to Berlin by the early German investigators. Width measurements conformed to the surmounting carved monuments now in Berlin. Petrographic analysis of both showed the stone itself to be vesicular basalt porphyry (to facilitate transportation by ship to Germany, approximately three feet of the supporting bases and half of the back thicknesses had been trimmed from these rectangular monoliths that originally measured approximately three feet wide by two feet thick by twelve and a half feet in total height).

The extant lower portions at the site established that the eight stelae had been lined up about fifteen feet apart, four on each side, facing each other in the thirty-foot wide sunken court. Unfortunately, for any complete analysis of this narrative ballgame iconography, we cannot determine the original positional sequence of Monuments 1-8 within this east-west oriented court. Doubtless some scenes depict pre-game ceremonies, and others portray post- game sacrifices.

I should note here that underneath the principal western access staircase we discovered an extensive sculpture dump that included thirteen ballgame stone yoke fragments, along with eleven full-round carvings of amputated limbs, and five sculptures of severed human heads. Also, we found a cache, in the presumed location of one of the former stelae, consisting of a decorated stone yoke section together with a round slate mirror with many of its polygonal pyrite mosaic inlays still attached. All this reinforces the dedication of the zone to ballgame ceremonies.

Ceramic analysis determined that the Monument Plaza was constructed and utilized from Middle through Late Classic times (A.D. 400-950). On the basis of art style seriation of the entire Cotzumalhuapa corpus, I assigned Monuments 1-8 to the earlier half of this occupation. In retrospect. I would choose a central assignment for these particular carvings:

A.D. 550-750. The Classic Cotzumalhuapa art style is capable of three developmental phases, rather than the two I originally proposed.

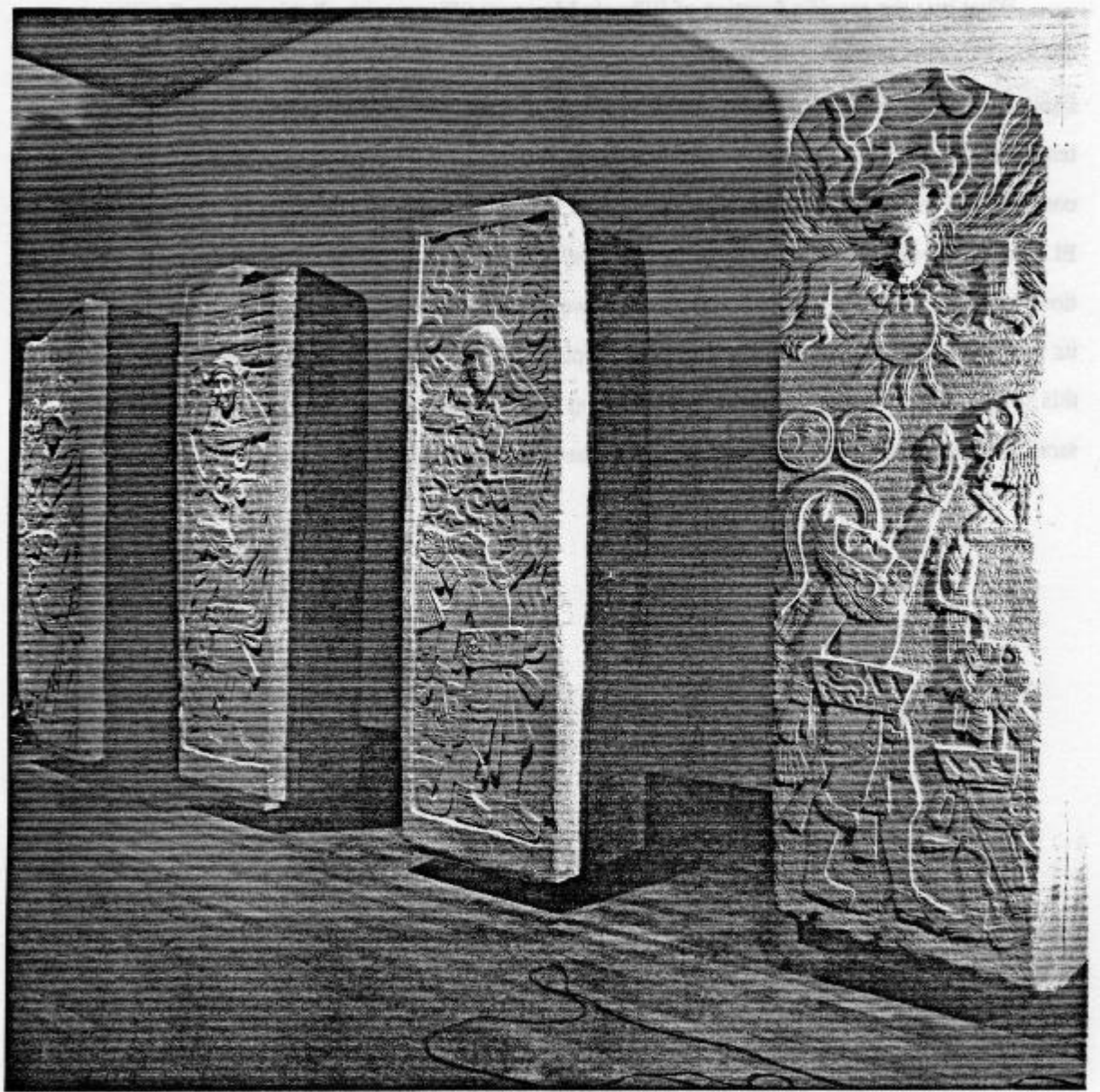
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What was the specific function of Bilbao's Monument Plaza, with all this extraordinarily explicit ballgame iconography? The structural layout of the plaza does not conform to any known actual ball court. However, the nearby site of El Baul does have a confirmed, and contemporary, sunken ball court in its acropolis, with conventional lateral ballgame benches. In conclusion, I have suggested that the ritual rubber ballgames in this district were enacted in the El Baul "sister-site". Pre- and post-game ceremonies and the brutal sacrifices (limb amputation, heart removal, and decapitation) probably were celebrated at neighboring Bilbao within its simulated ballcourt plaza, and its array of monuments dedicated to the cult. In support of this hypothesis, we now have strong evidence that in the Maya Lowland area ballgame sacrifices and rituals also took place outside of the playing court itself.

Lee Allen Parsons

February 2, 1991



INTRODUCTION TO BILBAO AND TO THE COTZUMALHUAPA CULTURE

Location

Eight large stone stelae in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, picturing thousand-year old ballplayers, come from a monument plaza at the pre-Columbian site of Bilbao outside the town of Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa (various spellings), in the Department of Escuintla, southwest of Guatemala City. This humid tropical piedmont area is bordered by a volcanic chain about 40 kilometers to one side. A plain extends about 50 kilometers to the Pacific Ocean from the other side.

The Cotzumalhuapa area is just one to two hours drive from Guatemala City. The major monuments are readily accessible if you have a street map (Hellmuth 1978b) of Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa to show you the way to El Baul (finca and separate site) and to Bilbao (Finca Las Ilusiones private museum and separate site), or a knowledgeable guide.

Introduction to Cotzumalhuapan Culture

The monumental stone sculpture on ancient sites near and around the modern town of Santa Lucia Cotzumalhuapa, Department of Escuintla, Guatemala, are the product of a little-known ancient people termed the Cotzumalhuapa culture. Several authors (itemized later) provided a review of major monuments but the first modern study is by Parsons (1967-69).

The dates of these scores of monuments have never been established to the satisfaction of all Mesoamericanists. The dates thus vary from about A.D. 400 to A.D. 950. Although initially considered Middle Classic, some scholars prefer to date them to the Late Classic.

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Until better photographs and line drawings are available of the quality as for Maya sculpture of Palenque or Chichen Itza the Cotzumalhuapa art style will remain poorly documented, and hence incompletely understood. The date adapted for Cotzumalhuapa ballplayer art for this monograph is Late Classic, estimated here as anywhere between A.D. 750 and 1000. Field work in this area will undoubtedly require this estimate to be challenged, and will require changes that I will gladly make. Presently we know too little about this entire portion of Mesoamerica.

In the overall archaeology of Mesoamerica the Cotzumalhuapa culture is treated as a minor curiosity. The art style has no completely understood cultural antecedent and seemingly no followers. The origin of a few motifs in the art of Teotihuacan is so diffuse that not even specialists in the art of Teotihuacan have bothered to include Cotzumalhuapa in their studies. The relationship of the Bilbao deities to Aztec and Mixtec gods removes this iconography from the capacity of most everyone studying Maya iconography, and Aztec/Mixtec specialists themselves tend to forget about Bilbao because it is far away in Guatemala.

Thus no coffee table book has ever been produced on the art of Cotzumalhuapa.¹ Books on Mexico exclude Bilbao because it is in Guatemala. Books on Guatemala give it only token mention because it is not Maya.

History of Exploration

Although "Count" Waldeck had evidently sketched one Bilbao monument in 1820,² the monumental sculpture of Bilbao was first publicly reported to the scientific world only by

1. FLAAR has gradually been photographing the art of the Cotzumalhuapa area in 6x6 cm format and now that we have both 4x5 in and 8x10 in format cameras we are keen on continuing our archival recording of the monuments of this energetic ancient culture.

2. It was not published until 1969 (Parsons, II: pl. 1, a).

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1861. This initial academic report was by an Austrian traveler and physician S. Habel, whose extensive analysis was published by the Smithsonian Institution of Washington in 1878. Lee Parsons provides a complete history of the discovery, excavation, and publications on these monuments (1969. II: 13-20). Since his work and that by Habel will be repeatedly cited it is best to abbreviate them, as "P" for Parsons (Vol. II, the volume featuring the sculpture), "H" for Habel.

Adolph Bastion, Royal Museum of Berlin, spent several years beginning in 1876 removing a selection of the monuments to Berlin.³ In the perspective of today such wholesale transfer of national cultural property is beyond the pale, but it should be pointed out that the removal was done under contract with the landowner and all together took five years, giving more than adequate time to be stopped if there had been a serious movement to do so. Actually, it was the realization of what Guatemala had allowed, indeed facilitated, to be permanently removed, that caused President Jose Maria Reyna Barrios subsequently to pass a presidential decree prohibiting removal of archaeological material.

Three additional Cotzumalhuapa style stelae with scenes similar to the eight Bilbao ballplayers come from the nearby site of Palo Verde (P, plate 35) and are still in Guatemala, handsomely displayed in the Museo de Arqueología y Etnografía.

Subsequent publications of note are by Eduard Seler (Seler 1892; Seler-Sachs 1900) and especially by J. Eric S. Thompson (1948), though none of these reports dwells particularly on the ballgame aspects. Lee Parsons initiated excavations at Bilbao in 1962 and 1963 for the Milwaukee Public Museum and published a thorough report on the monuments (Vol. II of his site report, 1969; Vol. I covers mainly pottery and general excavations). The better preserved of

3. This museum, the Museum für Völkerkunde division, situated in the suburb of Dahlem, is part of the overall Prussian cultural system. This museum was in West Berlin so has always had modern installations.

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the ballplayer stelae, 1, 3, 6 and 8, were recorded in handsome rubbings by Merle Greene (et al. 1972: pls. 188-191).

No major study has been undertaken on the iconography of the Bilbao stelae since Parsons, a two decade period of considerable advances in iconography in most of the related styles elsewhere in Mesoamerica. Thus the art of Cotzumalhuapa in general and of its ballgame in particular is long overdue for a fresh look.⁴

I first began photographing the art of Bilbao back in the 1970's and initiated this Bilbao ballplayer stelae iconography photography program in 1978 followed by another "season" in Berlin in 1988, assisted by Eldon Leiter, who has continued photographing with me in the Cotzumalhuapa area. This is not an area-wide survey but instead is specifically aimed at the Bilbao monuments in Berlin, Germany and the closely related Palo Verde set of stelae in Guatemala City.

Why this New Study of Bilbao?

First and foremost, a justification to return to these monuments is that they represent one of the three most complete series on the ballgame in all Mesoamerica. Only at Yaxchilan is another series of so many ballplayer monuments found as a group in situ. But the Yaxchilan ballplayer monuments were left totally abandoned to be defaced by rain and lichen, their flimsy "roof" a rather pathetic attempt to protect them and an indicator of how little their scientific value has been recognized. The five Site Q ballplayer series and associated

4. Hatch wrote a brief article for Mesoamerica and occasionally a Mesoamericanist wanders into the Cotzumalhuapa culture, but soon disappears to study some other style. Lic. Rolando Rubio, former curator, Museo Popol Vuh, Universidad Francisco Marroquin, informed

me that a multi-disciplinary Guatemalan project has been initiated in the late 1980's for the Cotzumalhuapa region, with him handling the iconography, Fred Bove field archaeology, and several Guatemalan scholars and students undertaking other aspects of ethnohistory, linguistics, etc. The drafts of this present report were finished before that project began. A set of F.L.A.A.R. photographs was made available to the university for their project since additional points of view always add up to a more thorough understanding of any complex art style.

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hieroglyphic panels (Franco 1966; Mayer various; Hellmuth 1995a) could represent an additional set but no one is really sure whether all came from El Peru and if so, whether they were all in a single row, though that is certainly probable based on what we know from Yaxchilan. The Site Q series are widely scattered and the Zurich Panel is lost and has never been seen by any archaeologist-it is known only from a single photograph, from which Scheie has made a drawing.

A second need calling for the republication of the Bilbao stelae is that the photographs in the reports to date are inadequate. Through no fault of the previous authors on Bilbao the multi-ton stelae were fixed at an awkward diagonal angle in the 1960's. Today each of the eight stelae is in a position for thorough photography. I felt that monuments this important deserved to be better photographed. The fate of the Cotzumalhuapa monuments in past publications is an example of typical field methods. Someone needs to make painfully clear the abominable level of art historical and archaeological photography in a discipline that claims it is a science. I selected the Bilbao ballplayer stelae since they have been published time and time again-but all it takes is better photographs and then all kinds of new information can be wrung from the same old monuments. The goal of F.L.A.A.R. is to suggest that all pre-Columbian monument sculptures (with the possible exception of the relatively well photographed Aztec ones) need to be re-photographed in a professional manner and adequately published.⁵

A third reason to select the Bilbao monuments was, as a continuation of the emphasis on a more rigorous field methods, the need to show what such monuments look like published at a large enough size, and on good paper.⁶

5. F.L.A.A.R. has an active program of re-photographing stone sculpture, most notably a recent 3-week session at Nimlipunit, Belize, and recent intensive sessions at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología (Guatemala City) and Museo Amparo (Puebla, Mexico). Previously we have photographed the three Copan ballgame monuments exhaustively with controlled night lighting.

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Artifacts which will be needed as reference material for the next generations of students and scholars should be published for them at an adequate standard. The cheap paper--often newsprint kind of paper in Latin America--is an insult to the national heritage of these lands. Lousy photography is by no means limited to third world countries--but the selection of paper and printing process are something that few archaeologists bother with, yet these factors bear on the quality of the work just as much as the author's academic abilities.

Fourth, the ballplayer stelae⁷ are readily available for scientific analysis. The Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin facilitates international research and provides immediate access to the sculptures for students and scholars. I can testify to this since I first photographed the sculptures around 1978 when there was no particular reason for the museum to pay any special attention to such a request. I was an unknown student at that time. I can further certify that working with the Bilbao monuments in Germany is one thousand times more easy than working with the Bilbao monuments elsewhere. At any museum in the developed world all that is required--presuming that the scholar is know from his publications--is a simple letter of request stating when and for what use the photographs will be used, period. In any event, it is easier to work on the Bilbao ballgame stelae in Berlin, so that I have done.

A fifth reason is that the Bilbao art is simply aesthetically beautiful in its own right.

A sixth reason is that Cotzumalhuapa art has been ignored and neglected. It is neither Maya, nor truly Teotihuacan, and not yet Aztec. So it does not get included in surveys of

6. This symposium workbook edition is an example of how not to publish. Since coated stock does not work well in xerox or simple offset machines and since no funds were available for metal plates, this is essentially, as self-evident, a xerox reproduction. As funds become available we would hope to do a formal publication, indeed the last time I photographed the stelae, several years ago, Dr. Helfrich indicated the museum itself might be interested.

7. Some writers prefer to term these sculptures "monuments". For monuments of stela shape I use the term interchangeably and probably selected "stela" designations because it was fewer letters than "monument".

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these larger cultures. A modern analysis of Ph.D. dissertation length is needed, using an entirely new perspective, since so much more is known about Mesoamerica today due to new archaeological finds and better documentation of the basic corpus than was the case when earlier monographs were written about Bilbao. It would be considerably easier to undertake such a dissertation if adequate photographs were available.

A seventh reason is that the style and content of Cotzumalhuapa art is still an enigma. We have no idea where it came from or what happened to it after the decline of Bilbao itself. By drawing attention to this corpus perhaps students and scholars might devote more research on these questions.

A final reason for the selection of Bilbao was that F.L.A.A.R.'s goals include support for the advancement of archaeological studies within Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, and Honduras. I must admit that my first love goes out to Guatemala because of the many friends that I have there as a result of living there ten years and visiting every year since then. The Foundation would like to offer Guatemala, to its students, to its scholars, and to its citizens, a basic corpus of an international quality of photographs of the national patrimony of this country. We have the special equipment, the interest and are willing to seek the funding for such a national photographic archive. This present volume is an expression of our interest and a demonstration of our technical and iconographic capabilities. Copies of this book are made available by F.L.A.A.R. to all pertinent university libraries, local scholars, and advanced students in Guatemala, at no cost in trade for their own articles and reports, or otherwise simply as donations.

But in the last three years we have received a considerable welcome in Mexico, especially in Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo, so we wished to do something

simultaneously for our many friends and supporters in Mexico. The subject of Cotzumaljuapa

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art includes, by historical necessity, ancient Mexico, so makes an ideal international present to the current and future generations of students, scholars, and interested lay public of this neighboring republic. Copies of this publication are made available to all INAH Centro Regional offices who request one, at no cost, and we have for years donated F.L.A.A.R. publications to the I.H.A.H. library at Copan Ruinas, Honduras, and to the Department of Archaeology, Belize. It is a pleasure to produce and provide basic reference works such as this Cotzumalhuapa corpus to the government archaeologists who assist in facilitating F.L.A.A.R. research in these countries.

Other reasons would be considered by other scholars, but a final basis of a personal interest is the degree of non-Maya influence in these sculptures. Guatemala was a melting pot for millennia, with the Olmecs being present at Abaj Takalik, the Teotihuacanos throughout Tiquisate and through Lake Amatitlan to Kaminaljuyu and on to influence the Peten, then the enigmatic Cotzumalhuapa culture during its time, and finally the Toltecs and various Aztec-related cultures. The role of El Tajin influence in Guatemala--most likely introduced through the intermediacy of Teotihuacan expansion--has consistently been underrated (Hellmuth 1982). Hybrid development is often more vigorous than age old single cultures. The national patrimony of Guatemala includes an input by all the high civilizations of greater Mesoamerica. Whereas it is understandable to make Tikal a national archaeological symbol, the over emphasis on a single site and one sole culture relegates the rest of the national patrimony to an ignoble omission. Bilbao deserves better.

One sometimes senses nationalistic rewriting of archaeological discoveries. That Columbus discovered America is such a bit of gringo historical fallacy drummed up with nationalistic fervor every year on Columbus Day, blissfully forgetting the Norsemen, not to mention the native Americans who crossed the Bering Straits even earlier. The presence in ancient Central America of diverse cultures other than simply the Classic Maya is sometimes equally over-

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looked, yet the internationalism of pre-Hispanic Guatemala could equally well be developed into local pride, especially for the South Coast, which was never fully Mayanized until the 19th and 20th centuries, by coffee pickers and sugar cane harvesters from the highlands. The South Coast was, for millennia earlier, part of the international trade routes towards lower Central America. The eclectic art style of the entire Cotzumalhuapa area is the best documentation of this internationalism just as Abaj Takalik is a comparable expression for widespread contacts and two-way influences for the Preclassic.

Cotzumalhuapa is readily accessible from Guatemala City. If all the monuments within the site zone were equally accessible this area could be developed into one of the great attractions of Central America, thus providing jobs for many of the people who are so willing to work if employment were just available.

The major monuments out in the fields of Bilbao and El Baul are totally abandoned. This should be a national scandal and I hope that this report will raise awareness and result in guards being posted. Merely keeping tourists from making rubbings⁸ and vandalizing the monuments would do much to save them for future generations of Guatemalans.

The Scope of this Report

This is an iconographic analysis of the eight ballgame monuments in the Museum für Völkerkunde. Comparisons will be made where necessary to the other monuments of Bilbao and to related Cotzumalhuapa art at other sites but a true and complete comparative iconography will have to wait until the other F.L.A.A.R. basic corpus volumes are in print.

8. All rubbings result in some bit of ink or paint soaking through the pores of the paper and thereby coloring ancient monument with modern pigment. Just look at the multi-colored daub marks all over the Bilbao and HI Baul monuments and you can understand how much damage is caused by tourists making rubbings. Rubbings in ancient monuments are strictly prohibited in Guatemala-but since there are no guards, no one pays any attention.

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Our present goal is deliberately limited to providing basic abundant photographic data and basic iconographic information since the comparison can always be written by anyone at any later time, but the labor of professional photography and compilation is what is most urgent at the present stage.

This work is also a report on one of the regionally distinctive ballgames of Mesoamerica, the Bilbao ballgame, but again, dedicated to the eight stelae. This means that the present volume does not seek to be a total coverage of the ballgame per se, not even the ballgame of Cotzumalhuapa, nor the final say on the iconography of Bilbao per se. A complete coverage of the ballgame of Cotzumalhuapa can only come when close-up photographs of Bilbao Monument 19 and the three Palo Verde ballplayer stelae⁹ are available in the same quality and quantity as for the eight Bilbao stelae. And it would sure help if Monument 10 (P, plate 41b) could be fished from the sea since it pictures the most remarkable ballgame-related scenes in all Cotzumalhuapa area.¹⁰ The final iconographic report on the overall style of the Cotzumalhuapa area is best left for a future Ph.D. dissertation, and that only once the rest of the monuments are available in as exhaustive a coverage as the eight stelae. In one sense, the present report is intended to encourage these further reports. We will learn far more about a culture if plenty of different points of view and backgrounds combine and cooperate.

I am sure that a scholar specialized in Aztec and Mixtec art would see aspects of Cotzumalhuapa that have not occurred to me. And although I have labored many years on the iconography of Teotihuacan and especially Teotihuacan influence outside its own

9. The F.L.A.A.R. archive has photographs of the three Palo Verde stelae but there was not enough time available to do an adequate job, so I consider them as only provisional snapshots.

10. One or more monuments accidentally fell into the ocean when being offloaded from lighters to the ships which would have transported them to Germany. No one has made an attempt to re-locate them. Considering all the sophisticated underwater equipment that is available today, and especially since the depth is less than 100 feet, and since a stone of their weight obviously did not drift anywhere no matter what currents were around, it would be a fantastic project for a German scientific institute to return these two monuments.

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valley, I would imagine that someone whose entire life was immersed in Teotihuacan itself would view Cotzumalhuapa art differently.

In addition to noting the parallels with these other Mexican art styles I also compare and contrast the Bilbao ballplayers with Maya art. Maya iconography per se is quite different than that of Bilbao, but the Maya ballplayer sculptures are contemporary in time and represent the largest single corpus of ballplayer sculpture outside that of Bilbao. Also, I am more familiar with Maya ballplayers and therefore tend to see similarities and differences there first. The very fact that the Bilbao ballplayers, even though they are a Guatemalan development, are so totally distinct from those in northern (Petén) Guatemala demonstrates the culture uniqueness of Bilbao. The Cotzumalhuapa culture is an excellent example of the internationalism, the cultural pluralism of Guatemala's glorious pre-Hispanic history. Indeed it is a Bilbao style motif, mixed with other pre-Columbian features, that graces the modern murals inside Guatemala City's Palacio Nacional.

Chapter 1

STELA 1

PARADE OF PLAYERS WITH DECAPITATED HEADS

Condition

Along with Stela 4, Stela 1 is among the better preserved monuments of the group. The main defect is at the knee of the principal ballplayer. This monument was split down the middle into several segments for shipment to Germany but was subsequently so well restored that these vertical breaks are only barely noticeable across the neck of the lower left personage and across the knees of the protagonist.

Stela 1 is part of the group of three of the series (out of a total of eight ballplayer stelae) that have no raised frame on the monument. Parsons cites Borhegyi: "(1961a), there is a functional correlation between the yokes, kneepads, gloves, and sandals a player wears. If the yoke on the waist is open to the left hip, he usually wears a sandal on the left foot only." (P, p. 104). It turns out that the unframed ballplayers have footgear only on one foot while the framed ballplayers have sandals on both feet (P, *¹).

Layout of the Scene

1. An "*" means that a reference is missing. In order to get all seven volumes to press in time to hand at least half of them out at the meetings there reached a point where the text simply had to go to the printer. As soon as we get critique back from readers we will re-edit, and re-issue, since many outsiders are already asking how they can obtain these volumes if they are unable to attend the symposium.

Bilbao Stela 1

There is no celestial deity at the top of this monument making it unique in the Bilbao ballplayer stelae series.² The scene is focused on the center with a balanced top and bottom. The middle is occupied by the dominating portrait of a ballplayer just having finished chopping off the head of a victim. The top third and again the bottom third include two additional attendants, each carrying the severed head of a victim. The scene is skillfully arranged in a manner that emphasizes busy action. The attendants run **off** the plane of the stelae, rather than leading the eye to the center. This tells us that what we see is part of a much larger enactment group.

Stela 1 presents the episode after the moment of decapitation, since blood-snakes are still flowing from the severed head held by the principal personage. This scene appears to be subsequent to the episode favored on Izapa Stela 21, the several Tiquisate cylindrical tripods (Hellmuth 1975b: pls. 8 and 9; 1987a: figs 1 through 11), the Chichen Itza reliefs, and the Las Higueras ballgame decapitation murals.³ The rest of the Bilbao severed heads have no dripping blood and thus likely have been cut off somewhat earlier. Five heads are presented, more than on any of the other ballplayer stelae of any culture in Mesoamerica. Five living people are also in the scene. Only Bilbao Monument 21 has more actively going on in a potentially ballgame

2. The three Palo Verde stelae do not have the hovering celestial deity physically present but the upraised offering gesture of the "players" is the same as on seven of the Bilbao stelae. Thus the viewer would have understood that such a deity was present spiritually. Palo Verde is another site in the greater Cotzumalhuapan culture area (Thompson 1948; P, pl. 35). These stelae, now in Guatemala City's Museo Nacional de Arqueología, have recently been professionally photographed in 2¹/₄x2¹/₄ Hasselblad format and are now included in the F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive.

3. All three early Post Classic murals of Las Higueras, Veracruz are in dead storage in the anthropology museum of Xalapa (Jalapa). I thank Juan Sanchez B. for making me aware of these murals since the full set has not yet been published. 6x6 cm and 6x12 cm format photographs are now in the F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive of all three murals, in their entirety and with close-up details as well.



Plate I

NO. 1



related scene.⁴ The Chichen Itza scenes are rather static in comparison with the style and content of certain of the monuments throughout the Cotzumalhuapa area.

Previous Discussion

In the Habel drawing (H, pl. *) the top two assistants are not included.

Merle Greene's rubbing illustrates the complete monument (including the top two assistants). She also provides her interpretation:

The Middle Classic period (A.D. 500-700) at Bilbao made extensive use of the probably Izapan-derived and Teotihuacan-influenced narrative themes—sacrifice, mythical beings, diving gods, and ball players. Bilbao, the center of the region known by its art style, as Cotzumalhuapa, shows much sculptural evidence of influence from central Mexico.

This is the only one of the series of seven ball-player monuments which does not portray a large figure with upraised arms, petitioning a celestial diety (sic). Nevertheless, the ball-player figures, identifiable by their waist yokes, are very similar. Portrayed here, is a player holding a ceremonial axe in his right hand, and in his left, the open-eyed, open-mouthed head of the just-decapitated body upon which he is standing. The victim's tied sash can be seen under his

4. Parsons has pointed out the bruised left knee of the protagonist of this immense sculpture. Thus what is going on in the Mon. 21 scene can be interpreted as events which are related to a ballplayer. This individual is, however, not wearing a yoke (or at least not a yoke the size and shape of those on seven of the ballplayer stelae), so this sculpture is not featured in this present monograph.



MON. 1

Bilbao Stela 1

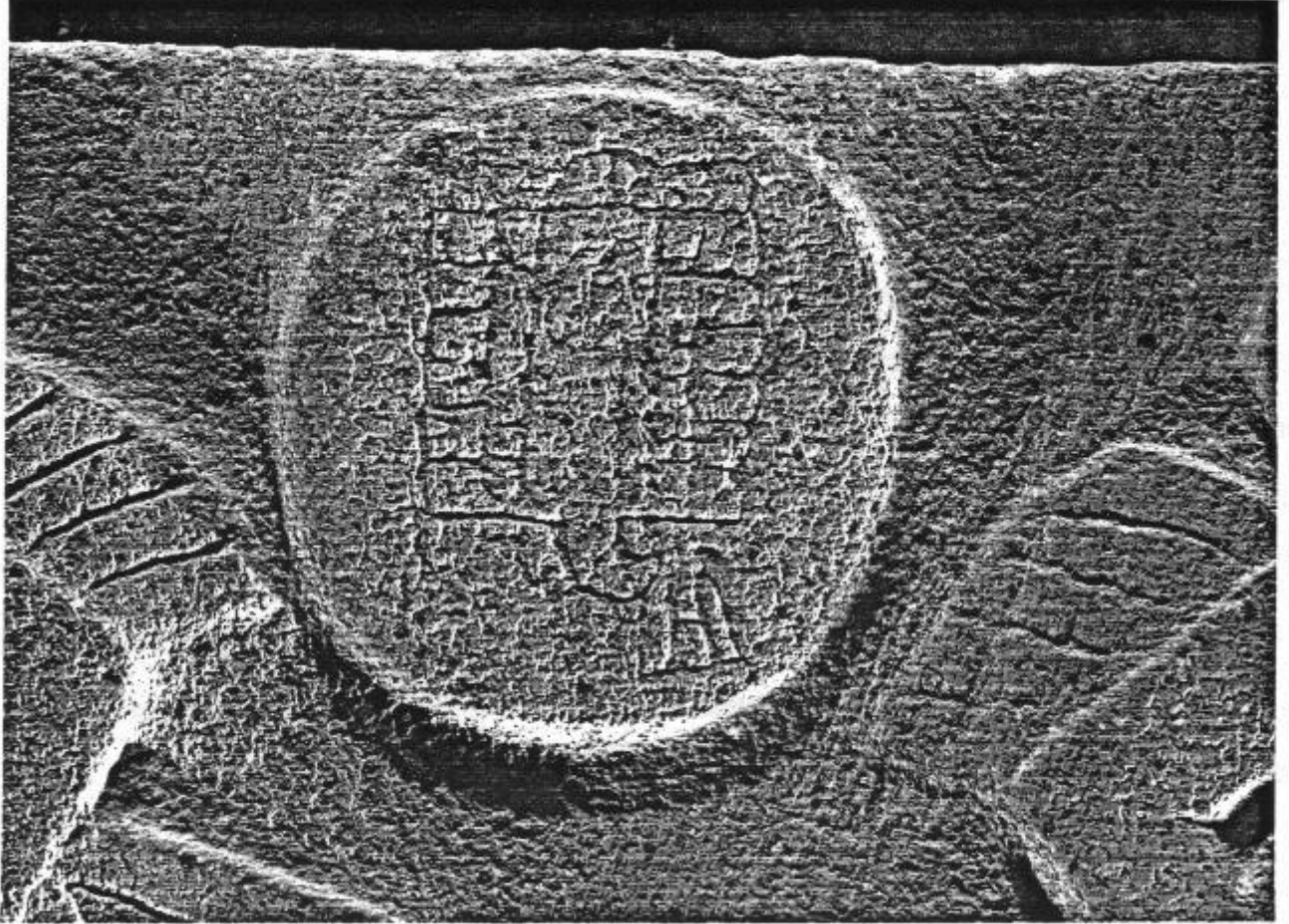
right foot. The four small manikins in the corner also carry decapitated heads with open mouths and eyes, and hair which is tastefully fashioned.

This ball player, whose yoke bears a serpent's head, wears a crab ornament on the crown of his head. Drawn tightly back from the forehead, his hair falls in a long pigtail into which floral disks are placed at equidistant intervals. Tied half-way down with a bow and an anthropomorphic cacao pod, his hair-do terminates in a streamer resembling a large boa tail.

The four guardians of the trophy heads, two of which wear death masks (upper left and lower right) appear in the corners of this tall monument. The upper two seem to wear wings or back feathers. All of these little men are barefooted, sporting bow-ties and tasseled loin cloths.

The disk at the top center resembles the back-feather border on the Monument 38 head (Pl. 197). " (et al 1972: Pl. 188).

Two decades later knowledge of overall Cotzumalhuapa style would not see Izapan influence, nor in this particular monument much that is specifically Teotihuacan. Otherwise Greene is certainly correct in the general assessment of Mexico being the ultimate source of inspiration for certain aspects of Cotzumalhuapa motifs. Later Aztec and Mixtec art share certain themes, but more to features on the top register of the other stelae. Stela 1 happens to be one with no such upper deity register. When more is known of pre-Cotzumalhuapa sculpture elsewhere in Guatemala, we can better assess which features of the art of Bilbao represent the local component to the eclectic mixture which carries the academic designation of Cotzumalhuapan.



The Ball?

The round object at the top of the monument is either the rubber game ball or a hieroglyph. If a ball, it is large and would need a ring the size of that at Chichen Itza to pass through. We do not know whether the Cotzumalhualpa ballcourts used rings as goals. I suspect tenoned stones were a more likely goal, since Parsons has shown they were a South Coast ballcourt tradition (P, p. 139). The Stela 1 ball or glyph is the size of the smallest Maya balls, such as on one Naj Tunich ballplayer paintings, or as on the Lubaantun, Belize, markers. Most Maya balls are considerably larger. This Bilbao disk has no skull symbolism, but I suspect that skull balls were known in Cotzumalhuapa and that Monument 20 may picture them, although presented as "glyphs."

This disk on Stela 1 has traditionally been considered to be a hieroglyph, suggested by the faint design which shows up in Greene's rubbing. Parsons compares this with the "bundle of sticks" of the Mixtec codices (P, p. 104) and points out the similarity with Bilbao Monument 38. But this sphere does not have a defined cartouche as most other Cotzumalhuapa glyphs do and thus could be a game ball, since it is perfectly allowed to have glyphs on the ball, as usual in the Maya situation. This particular glyphic design, though, has no known relationship with the ballgame but we must admit that other than a skull ball we have no idea what a Cotzumalhuapa ball glyph would look like. This glyphic/sphere enigma is a crucial question (which I leave open at this stage). The identity of this disk deserves the opinion of others since by no means is it absolutely certainly a ball.

The Severed Heads





Five severed heads are pictured. This suggests that an entire team has been sacrificed. But in all honesty, we ought not to say that these are decapitated players for sure, since the bodies are not shown. The limb-less torso of the more recently decapitated head is under the protagonist's feet but without the victim's legs we cannot determine whether he has the battered and swollen knee of a Bilbao athlete.

None of the Spanish comments on the Aztec ballgame speak of any sacrifice of actual players. Slaves and battle captives were the main victims elsewhere in Aztec religion. Thus the possibility exists that the sacrificial victims at Cotzumalhuapa were also captives or slaves, in other words, it should not be presumed that the victims were automatically ballplayers. This fact must be demonstrated by specific evidence, in this case by the association of snakes to represent blood. Of the five severed heads on Stela 1, two still have snakes issuing from their vicinity (Greene's rubbing shows the snakes before their bifurcated tongues were professionally restored).

The iconography elsewhere in Mesoamerica suggests that the snake-blood complex is related specifically (indeed evidently almost solely) to decapitated ballplayers.⁵ Seldom are other sacrificed victims shown with snake-blood. More than enough executions are pictured in Maya art—and rarely does a non-ballgame scene feature snake-blood. Bleeding heads are indeed known (F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive)—but no snake-blood is used in association with the normal sacrifice in non-ballgame instances. Heads sacrificed in other rituals tend to drip down rather than spurt up in the form of snakes.

5. Snake-blood is the blood shown as snakes which spurts out of the neck only of decapitated ballplayers. Such snake-blood is clearly depicted in the art of Veracruz, of Tiquisate, and of Chichen Itza. Izapa Stela 21 is a Preclassic prototype. Decapitated captives who are not ballplayers bleed in a normal manner.

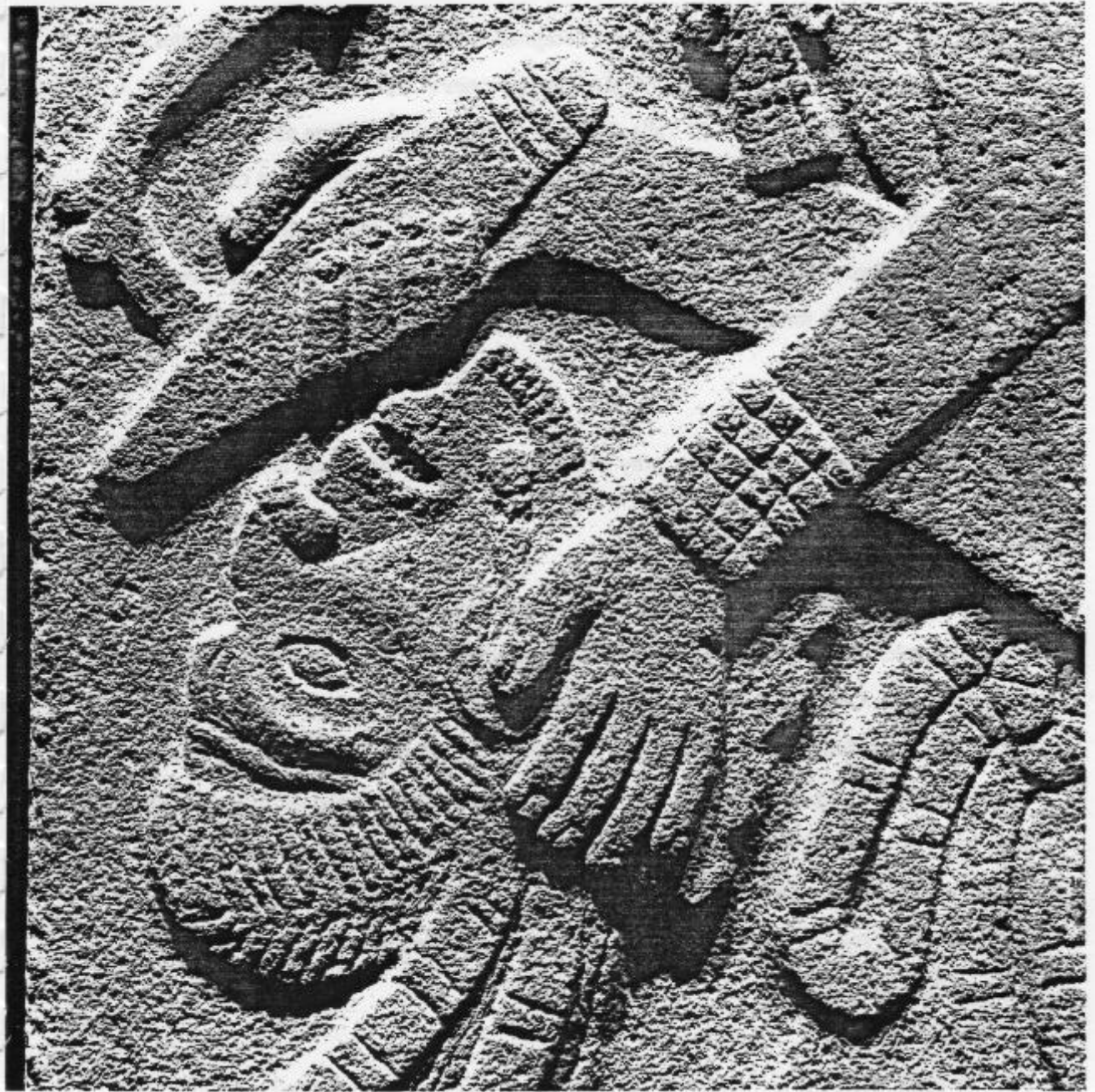












On the basis of analogy with ballplayer decapitation scenes from the non-Maya sites of Izapa (Norman 1973-1976; Hellmuth 1995d), Los Horcones (Cardos *), Tiquisate area (Hellmuth 1975b; 1987a; 1992), El Tajin (Kampen 1972), Aparicio, Vega de Alatorre (Vizcaino 1988:pl. 75; Leyenaar and Parsons 1988: fig. 1), and Mexican-influenced Chichen Itza (Tozzer 1957; Robertson 1990), the snake-blood suggests that it is ballplayers at Bilbao who are being sacrificed—at least the two with snakes issuing from their severed heads. Five people is a high count for a Maya team⁶ but could well be normal for the Cotzumalhuapa game.

People always ask the question, why would anyone play if they knew they would be killed?

What about Russian roulette? What about taking drugs, especially the kind used by pre-Columbian celebrants? What about volunteering for military service? If you die you go to patriotic heaven. Over 100,000 people a year joined the Iranian army for a religious war even though they knew full well that over 25 per cent would die, especially those used to sweep the mine fields by walking through them. And what about people who smoke themselves to death. They know smoking cigarettes will cause them to die, painfully, from cancer, but they continue to smoke heavily. Sex in an era with AIDS is hardly different than Russian Roulette, yet plenty of people still play athletic games in bed—and die a death worse than instant decapitation.

To begin with, life and death for Mesoamericans meant something totally different than for the modern Judeo-Christian western society. For the Aztec, death as a sacrificial

6. The players pictured at Chichen Itza are not a normal Maya team. Most Maya vases show at most three players per team, though five could have been allowed in some circumstances. In many cases the Maya game was probably one against one, such as when a ruler played a captive.

victim was evidently not as feared as by us. There is certainly no evidence that there was any lack of players in any of the Mesoamerican cultures.

The main severed head has a neatly trimmed beard. It would be worthwhile to study the particulars of each of the severed heads to see if rank and status can be ascertained. On the right side of the executioner's hand is the remains of the dead player's neck. The Bilbao sculptor shows the neck chop marks on all five severed heads. You can see the same hack marks on a decapitated head on El Baul Monument 4.

Aspects of the Ballgame Sacrifice

An unhafted flint or obsidian knife (not an axe) has just been used to hack off the head of a victim. It is specifically an unhafted knife which is also used in all the other Mesoamerican ballgame decapitation scenes where any weapon at all is included. Unhafted knives, though, were used in non-ballgame execution as well, such as on Tikal Altar 5, where there is no indication that a post-game sacrifice is commemorated, indeed it is debated whether the victim is a monkey or a human. On Bilbao Stela 1 the knife has three parallel incised lines at the back end.

The bearded victim is a member of the same Cotzumalhuapa people, that is, his face looks diagnostically Cotzumalhuapan. These piedmont people had either a quite distinctive facial type or else a peculiar artistic canon for facial representations.

A tabbed speech scroll curls up from under the knife, but since this is the same direction as the mouth of the victim it is uncertain who is speaking, the victim or the knife. Speech scrolls were most likely borrowed from Teotihuacan or one of its provinces.

Bilbao Stela 1

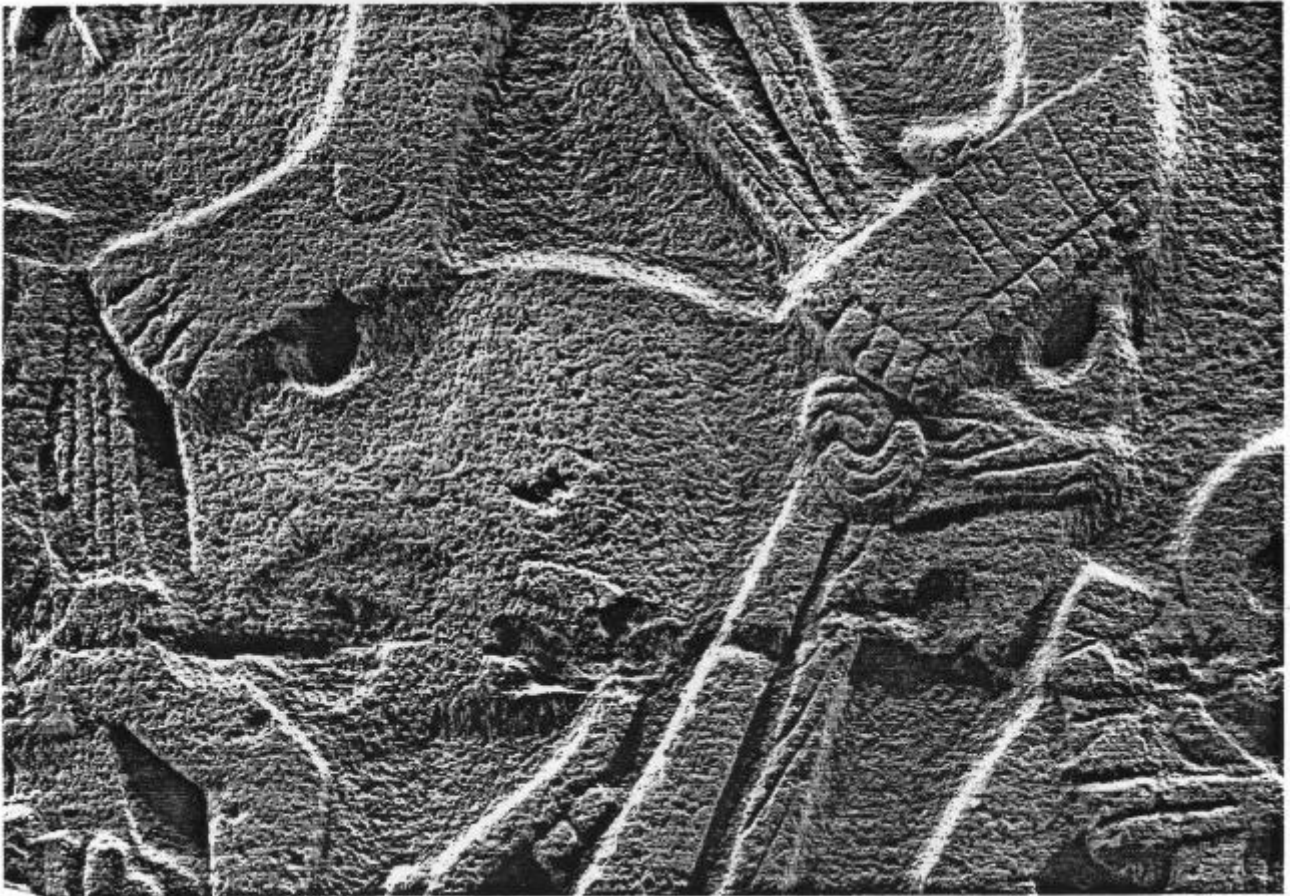
Snakes representing gushes of blood pour out from under the hand of the executioner. This symbolic blood seems to issue from the back of the head, not the stump of the neck. Actually on all the Veracruz style ballplayer decapitations the snakes spring up from the decapitated torso (Tiquisate, Chichen Itza, Los Horcones, etc.). Two snakes dominate the Bilbao picture (the third snake is actually the loincloth apron tie) but there are other snakes in a lower level. The neck blood-snakes seem to be the same kind as those which serve as the belt of the executioner.

Sticking out from the right side of the executioner's hand is what looks like the severed neck section. Unless the victim's jugular area were partially severed as well, it would be difficult for the head to be connected to this neck section, but I cannot think of what else the executioner would have in his hand, especially of this size and shape. And all the other severed heads have the same disarticulation, so perhaps once the neck muscles are loose from the shoulders then the head is no longer held erect. Who would know this better than the eyewitness artist of that time and place. We cannot duplicate this position with our own head since the muscles are not yet severed.

Bilbao art features a special zig zag convention for showing the severed neck, as though the neck was cut with repeated small hacking strokes. A comparable convention for a severed Mixtec neck may be noted on Codex Vindobonensis, page 20.

The Body of the Victim

At first you may not notice the body of the victim, since the arms and legs have been hacked off. This leaves only the trunk, which is being trod on by the executioner. This posture





brings to mind that of the Maya kings, especially on hieroglyphic steps such as at Tamarandito, Peten, which often feature prostrate captives depicted on the steps (Greene et al. 1972: front cover). This meant that the king would symbolically walk up on the bodies of captives. Cotzumalhuapa is more specific, the elite ballplayer specifically trods across the mangled trunk of the dead victim. This could be utilized as additional evidence to support a comparable observation by Miller and Houston for the prone captives depicted on hieroglyphic steps of the Lake Petex Batun area (1987).

In none of the other ballgame decapitation scenes elsewhere in Mesoamerica is there any evidence that the body is further dismembered. But dismemberment is not that uncommon around the world. In Cerro Sechin, north coastal Peru, dismemberment of victims reached an all time high, at least in terms of vivid display in public art. In the Moche culture ritualized executions were even more grisly. Actually, considering the atrocities of modern war, or what the Spanish did to the native Americans, and what happened to native Americans in the USA, etc. the Cotzumalhuapa culture is hardly much more barbaric. They are all human.

Since the process of dismemberment is not exactly a popular topic this aspect of Cotzumalhuapa culture has not often been discussed previously. Nonetheless, the art of the Bilbao area features such dismemberment in many separate sculptures.

First are the dismembered torsos, that is, bodies (in three-dimensional stone sculpture) which represent a victim whose head, arms, and legs have been hacked off. Such a sculpture is on the porch of one of the administration buildings of the finca. Such total dismemberment of the victim evidently had a wide popularity in Mesoamerica:

. . . five Indians sacrificed that night, they were open

in the chests and the arms and thighs cut off... (Diaz del Castillo 1964: 22, quoted by Wilkerson 1984:101).

Then there are the dismembered arms and legs elsewhere in the sculpture of Cotzumalhuapa, both three-dimensional (P, pl. 17, a, b, 44, h, p) and two-dimensional. Not even Count Dracula or the Catholic Inquisition could come up with as much grisly carnage as pictured on El Baul Monument 4, a bas-relief sculpture which is never pictured in general books on Mesoamerica. And the few visitors who do venture to the Cotzumalhuapa area seldom have a guide who knows where Monument 4 is.⁷ The torso on Stela 1 shows that the limb bones have been pulled out of their sockets. This would also require cutting the muscle attachments as well, somewhat like cutting up a chicken to cook.

In the Xalapa Museum of Anthropology there is a sculpture which also stresses gruesome death (though not specifically dismemberment). A ballgame palma in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, pictures a bird pecking at a deceased victim (F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive). The art of Moche, Peru, shows vultures picking over the remains of comparable victims.

Presuming that the knotted cloth around the Bilbao victim is his loincloth apron, this means that the executioner's forward foot is standing on the hollow where one arm was cut and yanked off. It is worth pointing out that the victim's private parts are kept private. That may not have been the case in some Maya sacrifices as suggested by Jaina figurines where it seems that the penis has been mutilated (in contexts other than ballgame decapitation).

7. And, once facing the sculpture, it is disappointing to see the vandalism to this incredible sculpture. Furthermore, the relief is so faint the design is difficult to make out unless you have a drawing as a guide. Curiously it is Gann who provides one of the best illustrations of this monument. Another good illustration is from the Carnegie files, Peabody Museum, Harvard University. The monument is in such low relief, and does not get raking light (or at least not in the months I have been in Escuintla), so virtually no good photographs exist. Only with night lighting can the detail be rescued.

Bilbao Stela 1

Mary Miller has documented from the Bonampak murals that the Maya routinely practiced a number of cruel and painful tortures before decapitating their victims (1986). Recently a mural was found at Teotihuacan which pictures heart sacrifice; the executioners are shown as animal actors (C. Millon 1988: fig. V. 11) but evidence from recent excavations at Teotihuacan documents that humans were sacrificed there as well. It is entirely a romantic notion that earlier cultures were peaceful and that human sacrifice in Mesoamerica was not practiced until introduced by the Toltecs and Aztecs.

The dismembered body on Stela 1 has a knotted tie with long lengths of cloth on both sides. Parsons interprets this as the loincloth (P, p. 104) but if so this means that the hole in the trunk to remove the heart went through above the rib cage.⁸ It is worth pointing out that some Maya victims in the Dance after Decapitation Sacrifice also had their heart removed (F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive).

A tabbed speech scroll issues from under the body, possibly his last scream as the executioner started to hack off his limbs. Losing the ballgame in ancient Cotzumalhuapa certainly had dire consequences.

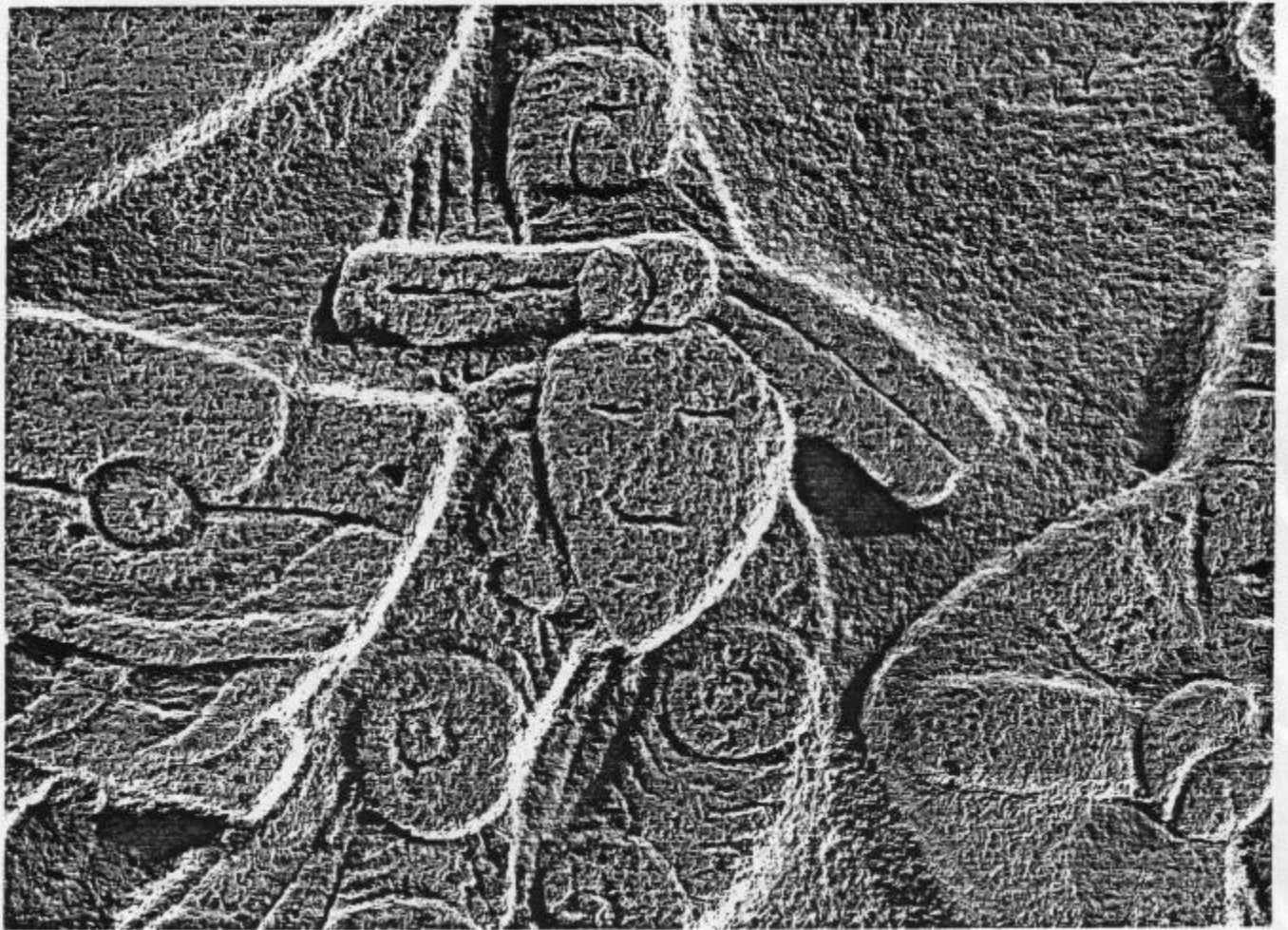
The Principal Player

The physique bears all the diagnostic characteristics of a Cotzumalhuapa person in general. The face is flat and unnaturally high in proportion to other parts of the same body. The rest of the body (mainly the knees) is typical of Cotzumalhuapa athletes in particular.

8. Robicsck has provided the best information on the surgical problems faced by the ancient Mesoamerican priest when he needed to get at the human heart (*).







Bilbao Stela 1

The crab headdress has been pointed out in all discussions of the Bilbao stelae. There was also a crab headdress on Stela 7 (P, pl. 58, b). This Bilbao crab is rather naturalistically rendered. Even details on its top are pictured so perhaps a crab specialist can someday correctly identify the species, and thus we can learn the creature's habitat. Zoologists will need to ascertain whether this species is from the beaches of the Pacific Ocean or the river shores of the local Escuintla area. Crabs, probably freshwater Chiapas species, are pictured in giant size in the murals of Bonampak (Ruppert, Thompson and Proskouriakoff 1955; Miller 1986a). Potential natural models for the crab in the Bilbao headdress include various species illustrated by Cendrero (1971:548, figures on pp. 549-550), freshwater as well as land crabs. Although Bilbao is well inland it is close enough to trade with the sea so that seashore species could be intended.

The simple necklace is a single (tasseled) puff attached to a simple strap around the neck. The earring is a basic round shape characteristic of all the Bilbao players.

As with other ballplayers this man has a long trailing headdress that falls all the way down to below the man's knees. Because no back mass is worn by this player and since nothing else in the scene impinges on this area of the scene, here is a unique opportunity to see the details of the curious Bilbao style headdress pendants. This assemblage is somewhat longer than that of Palo Verde Stela 3 and twice the length as that of Bilbao Stela 3. No good photographs of Palo Verde monuments are readily available and only two of them are presented as rubbings by Greene.

The pendant assemblage begins with a long serpentine form decorated by repeated circles the same width. Halfway down is a knot with wide side tassels, then a form which reminds me of the anthropomorphic "fruit" on Monument 21. This fruit-face has slit eyes and a thin



NO. 9.



mouth. The serpentine form divides itself under this tied face. One branch disappears, the other ends in a curved feather. This shape of a curved feather reminds me of a "Teotihuacan knife." There is no necessity that a knife is actually intended in the Bilbao instance but in the murals of Teotihuacan an approximately similar shape is a sacrificial obsidian knife. Here at Cotzumalhuapa it seems to be a plume. The personage on Palo Verde Stela 3 has the same accessory.

From under this issues a "crocodile tail" (it has a design of overlapping ovals that look like ventral scales). This is not intended as a zoological identification but rather as a generic reference. Palo Verde Stela 3 has a form of almost the same length but in the shape of a giant feather.

The sickle-shaped item in the middle is comparable to that of Bilbao Stela 3, but unidentifiable as of yet. The length of this headdress trailer is comparable to that of Palo Verde Stela 3. The curved feather is found also on Bilbao Monument 9, though the style (the proportion, the angle of curve) is slightly different.

No headdress unique for athletes has yet been identified for Cotzumalhuapa. In Maya sculpture four common headdresses have been recognized for ballplayers, the pseudo-God L type (also worn by warriors) and three different headdresses also worn by hunters.

Ballplayer Paraphernalia

A serpent head is at the end of the yoke. There would have been another serpent head at the other end. Parallel along the bottom of the yoke is a band which may be binding around the waist as seen on the La Amelia ballplayers. The yoke has diagonal grooves as do the ball



deflectors of Seibal Stelae 5 and 7, though the Peten examples have the grooves as individual designs.

A tight fitting girdle is worn that conforms so closely to the body that its outline does not disrupt the profile of his buttocks and thigh. This girdle has a broad single hem decorated with widely spaced arc lines. No girdle is visible on the forward leg at all but since all other ballplayers have shorts on both legs (even though they may be cut differently on the playing leg) we can presume the artist figured there was too much going on around the opposite leg to need a millimeter of girdle hem. With the sash occupying most of the forward leg there was not much room for a girdle outline. The players of Stelae 6 and 8 have a noticeable hem on both legs. On most of the other stelae, the waist sash gets in the way and covers most of the area where a hem across the other thigh would be seen.

A loincloth apron, belt, or sash is arranged to end in a snake's head. A comparable snake rope is used as a tie on the skeletal ballplayer of Stela 3, a non-ballplayer skeleton of Monument 13, and also a non-ballplayer of Bilbao Monument 19 (Greene et al. 1972:pl. 192, 193). The most dramatic example of simultaneously a belt snake and a loincloth apron set of snakes is on Seibal Stela 13, dated ca. A.D. 870, at the terminal end of classical lowland Maya culture when it was receiving foreign influence (Graham 1967: fig. 81; Greene et al. 1972:pl. 111; Parsons 1969, II: pl. 62, c; Hellmuth 1978b:69). The comparisons of this Seibal snake belt have tended to be with Veracruz, an area of vigorous art styles which have been underestimated as potential sources of inspiration for atypical features of art in Guatemala (Hellmuth 1992).⁹

9. A report prepared as a result of an invitation to attend an archaeology conference in Veracruz. This report discusses the dating of El Tajin scrolls in the pottery of greater Mesoamerica, and also enters the problem of the dating of Tiquisate cylindrical tripods, based on the huge corpus in the F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive.

Bilbao Stela 1

There is a large knot just under the edge of the yoke. It is hard to say whether this knot would have helped to hold the yoke onto the body or not, since if the player stood up straight the edge of the yoke might rise above the knot, as it does on Stela 2 and others. On Stelae 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 the sash knot is precisely at a position that would actually assist in holding the yoke around the waist at an optimum position. I suspect that the sash knot of Stela 2 serves the same purpose but that the upper portion of the knot is hidden under the overhanging yoke and thus not visibly directly against the bottom of the yoke.

A single cord holds a small knee decoration. The Habel drawing and Greene rubbing show that the bead was broken off by a break that ran horizontally across the monument at this point. The present bead is thus restoration, acceptable on the basis of the string band, and that all other such string bands on the Bilbao ballplayer series have a tear-shaped pendant. Such a bead could hardly provide significant protection to a player and ought not to be termed a kneepad.

This right knee is not bruised; the left knee is definitely not swollen. This could be the only definite Bilbao ballplayer whose forward knee was not swollen. But the records need to be checked to see if either of the knees is restoration cement instead of original sculpture. The Greene rubbing shows a break across the stela directly under the knee. The Habel drawing shows the entire knee area on the rear leg flaked off. In other words, the knee which should exhibit calluses has been restored, evidently overlooking the need for bruises; we would not expect a European restorer to be an iconographer. Based on analogy with all other Bilbao players, the knee on the same leg that has a special foot pad, the knee which is opposite to the string bead knee decoration, tends to be bruised and clearly swollen.

The left foot is bound around the middle. The binding seemingly consists of a wide strip starting at the knuckles of the toes, then five thinner wraps. You can tell that the wide band



exists because the unbound toes on the other foot establishes the length of an unshod toe. Due to the strange angle which is a hallmark of Bilbao sculptors the viewer is shown simultaneously the top of the foot, a pseudo profile of the foot and with that the sole of the foot. This offers a chance to estimate that the beaded band along the bottom of the foot is a sole of a special sandal. If it were a rough texture of the natural sole of the foot then the other foot would have the same rough texture. The single shod foot has a slight bow on top of the foot but hardly enough to represent significant protection with which to use this foot to kick the ball.

A recent suggestion that the Chichen Itza players used their special footgear to kick the ball (Robertson 1991) cannot in any way be documented, since the best known soccer-like game among the high cultures of Mesoamerica is pictured in the murals of Teotihuacan where no special footgear is used. Foot-ball is present in other Mesoamerican cultures, but these are unlikely to have had contact with Chichen Itza, or Bilbao. Plenty of Maya ballplayers have a foot superior pad, a fact not realized when the kick-ball theory for Chichen Itza was first presented. There is certainly more than adequate documentation that the Maya ballgames we see on monumental sculpture and polychrome vases did not involve any kicking of the ball whatsoever. Dictionary entries in Mayan vocabularies, however, may document the presence of a game where the ball was kicked. This would be reasonable, since we can expect that the Maya played many different sports, but such an enigmatic kick-ball game is not yet known from monumental art.

The left hand has a bracelet. Wrist or arm padding was not a norm for Bilbao players but perhaps this lack of arm and knee pads is because these are parading personages not athletes in actual play. The other arm (covered by ballgame handstones on other players) has no wristlet.



The Isolated Item behind the Executioner

Under the feet of Attendant 2 (the one at the top right) is an object with a triangular top. A knife-like form sticks out the left side. Parsons proposes this may be another trunk of a body which has had all the limbs cut off, with the knot representing the belt (P, p. 104). I see little evidence for this bundle being a human body since it does not have the correct shape. The item stuck into this bundle is, though, probably a sacrificial knife since it has the same parallel lines across the top as the knife the main player just used to chop off the head of a victim. The bundle knife also has a center line, not present (or covered over by a man's hand) on the knife in use.

This enigmatic bundle is the kind of item that one would expect to find on a page of a Mesoamerican codex, especially Mixtec codices or the Aztec Codex Borbonicus which picture the most accessories. Such bundles were used for displaying or during cult ceremonies.

The Four Attendants carrying the Severed Heads

General Observations

All the severed heads are pictured with a typical Cotzumalhuapa facial profile. One is older and bearded (top left). A comparable bearded face is on Monument 14, Berlin. The jugular portion of the neck was not severed but rather the whole base of the neck, at its widest point where it joins the chest. So in one sense it was not the head that was cut off, but the entire neck with the head at the end. This you can see best on the upper left, where the entire profile of the chin and neck is visible. Elsewhere this part of the victim is covered by the hand of the attendant. No blood in any form drips out, suggesting that the ceremonies go on long beyond the actual decapitation.

None of the attendants seem to be costumed as players themselves. None have knee decoration or swelling, none have wrapping around the instep. Although the victim's heads block out a view of the attendants' waists, I doubt if any of the attendants wears a yoke. On Stela 2, though, the skeletalized attendant does wear a yoke.

Each of the attendants wears the same necklace, a wide stiff knotted one. Each of the severed heads wears the same type of earring assemblage, a round disk with a diagonal tubular bead earring.

Wings on Two of the Attendants

The top two attendants have wing-like feather accessories on their upper arm and a mass of five plumes as sort of a tail. Winged figures in ballplayer scenes are known from Rio Blanco, Veracruz (von Winning 1971a: fig. 1; 1971b: fig. 1)—and in various contexts at El Tajin (Kampen 1972: fig. 21, 28, c). Two other Cotzumalhuapa style monuments, Palo Verde 2 and 3, picture accessory figures which may be winged, or at least have a mass of clipped plumes issuing from the back. Since the feathers on the Bilbao attendants issue from behind their arms this may also be a back ruff instead of actual wings. Winged characters also appear in the art of Tiquisate (Hellmuth 1975b: pl. 20). The skeleton of Mon. 13 has feathers (almost flame-shaped). These feathers are clearly attached to the back of the arms, not the backbone, thus suggesting definite wings. "Sun Vultures" appear in two ballgame related monuments from elsewhere at Bilbao. Unfortunately neither of the two Sun Vulture sculptures survived the 19th century. Since most books are content with certifying Cotzumalhuapa art as essentially derived from Teotihuacan art few monographers have searched elsewhere in the Mesoamerican literature for other potential sources. Actually, other than Parsons, and recently Rubio, hardly



anyone has discussed the art of Bilbao in the last five years except perhaps by Marion Poponoe Hatch.¹⁰

Top Left Attendant

The face mask is of a bird. Considering the nature of the art of Cotzumalhuapa I would guess a vulture, but the beak type would need to be checked against the actual profile of the several potential tropical vultures. The lower jaw is hardly of a vulture, or even a bird, since birds do not have molars. The length of the jaw and analogy with the animal which is pictured most often in the art of Cotzumalhuapa suggest a deer would be most likely, but a zoologist would need to have the final say. Although skeletalized, this character is not at all the same as the skeleton face down on the lower right, who is truly a skeleton even though otherwise fleshed on the rest of his body.

The victim is bearded. Alongside the tubular earring are several unexpected bands, either a tattoo or decorated facial hair or other enigmatic feature. Since no close-up photographs of these have previously been available no one has commented on these features earlier. It should be checked to make sure that there is not a restored break along this point.

Top Right Attendant

This attendant seems to be young. Whether he is a midget is not known, since there was not space in the composition to have four full sized adults. Dwarves appear in Maya ballgame scenes on the Heye Foundation Vase (Hellmuth 1987b: Fig. 91), on a Yaxchilan panel

¹⁰. This article is in an issue of Mesoamerica which is missing from the F.L.A.A.R. library. We would appreciate a xerox copy of the article along with the title page so we can cite the year, volume number, etc.

(Graham 1982,3,3:160), and on a Jaina temple scene with seated ballplayer (Goldstein 1980: fig. 5, a; Foncerreda and Cardos 1988; F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive). None of the Maya ballplayer midgets are carrying severed heads, indeed no ballgame scene on a Late Classic polychrome Maya vase pictures any sacrifice related to any ballgame.¹¹

The loincloth apron (or headdress of the victim) is wider and more decorated than that of Attendant 1 or 4 (the two with skeletal features).

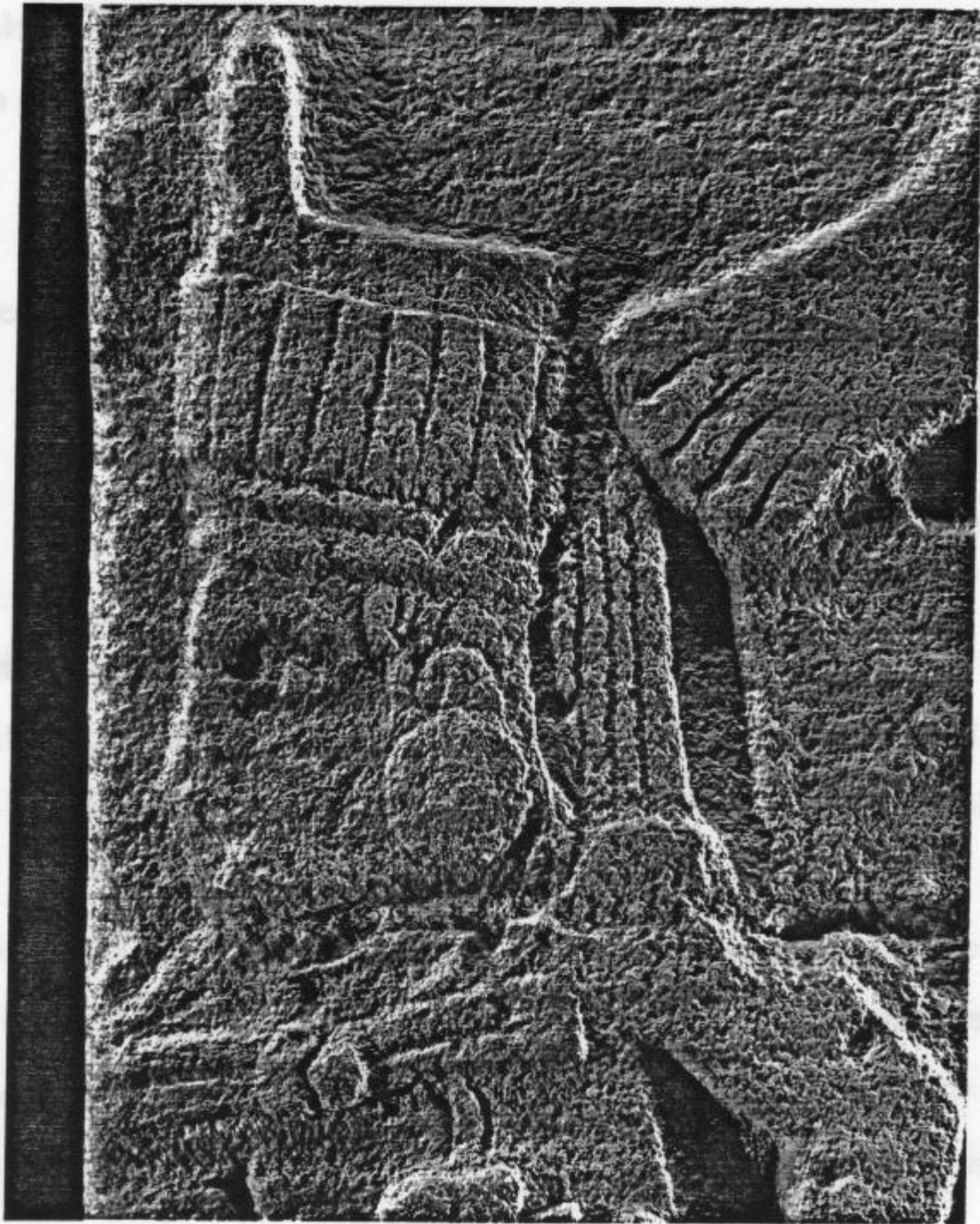
Bottom Left, Attendant 3

The loincloth apron (or headdress or hair of the victim) is as wide as that of Attendant 2 but is not bound in a bow. The attendant himself has a simple bow tie anklet on each leg and the same item (but a bit longer) as necklace decoration.

His earring is a simple disk, but has no round frame. The headdress starts with a binding around the forehead, then a wide band, topped by what looks something like the royal Aztec headdress (found also at Toltec Chichen Itza). But this would hardly be expected on a subsidiary figure.

The sacrificial head has a pronounced nose and some kind of scar, deformation, or addition to the forehead; the sacrificial head on the stand of Stela 3 may have had comparable facial work. The victim's head has been hacked off in the same zig-zag manner that seems characteristic of Bilbao ballgame sacrifice.

¹¹ Mary Miller has documented adequately that human sacrifice was indeed a regular part of the Maya ballgame (Scheie and Miller 1986). But so far this is shown only on sculpture, not yet on any of the dozen Maya polychrome vases which picture various aspects of the ballgames.



Bottom Right, Skeleton, Attendant 4

The posture is almost that of a deformed dwarf; the shoulders are atypical and the head is further down than would be on a person of normal posture. These clues suggest that a dwarf is intended. Thus the other attendants could also be midgets. As just mentioned, midgets are included in Maya ballgame scenes on one of the Yaxchilan panels, on a Jaina ballplayer scene, and on a polychrome Maya vase showing the ballgame (Hellmuth 1987b: fig. 91). Or they could be small to fit them into the scene.

The skull is in profile but the nose cavity is in three-quarters view. The skull is fleshless except for the "tongue." A horizontal isosceles triangular feature is where an earring would be expected. The unusual collar-necklace may have other triangular elements. This decoration is somewhat different than other skulls, but does share with them the horizontal bow tie and wide necklace.

Skeletal characters are common in the art of Cotzumalhuapa in general (Monuments 19, 48, 59) and in the ballgame in particular, such as on Stela 3 and Palo Verde Stela 3. It should be possible to catalog different varieties of representations, since the skull on Stela 1 is quite distinctive and by no means the same as that on Stela 3. A skull is an especially popular theme for ballgame hachas (P, pl. 21, d, f). A skull motif which is often overlooked is in profile on the chest of the protagonist of Monument 21.

The sacrificial head has a slight beard, so it is most likely male. Nowhere is any ballgame victim a female. From the hair issues a snake(s) but the hair itself is not arranged as a snake. It is surprising that a ballplayer would have such age lines. Some look almost as though they were scars. The "frame" above and below the eye are of particular interest. The

Maya art the victims on the Yaxchilan disks rolling down the steps are not attired as players, nor is the potential victim on one of the Seibal ballplayer panel-stelae—and no snake-blood is pictured there either. In fact, other than the Chichen Itza ballplayer (which is a non-classical Maya and Terminal Classic representation) no Maya ballplayer is yet shown as being executed. Battle captives are the most likely victims, though Miller proposes that some were forced to play, and predestined to lose the ballgame, before they were publicly sacrificed. I suspect the other four victims on the Bilbao scene were players as well though only the main victim has the snake-blood of a former athlete. The other heads had probably already lost their blood earlier in the ritual. A severed head will only bleed for a certain period. Eventually it runs out of blood.

The dismembered body reminds us that at least some of the ancient cultures of Mesoamerica engaged in this practice which is most repulsively depicted in the relief sculptures of Cerro Sechin on the north coast of Peru, though in the Andean area such dismemberment was not related to the ballgame, as the Mesoamerican game is not known for this portion of South America.

Not much in this particular scene is derived directly from Teotihuacan. After all, not a single ballplayer execution is ever pictured in the known corpus at Teotihuacan. No Teotihuacan player wears a decorated yoke—actually, many of the objects in the Tlalocan murals which are interpreted as players carrying yokes may be a misinterpretation of the modern repainter. These Teotihuacan mural characters may just be carrying a piece of cloth or other object, not necessarily a game yoke (and certainly not a decorated one). No crab headdress, no snake belts, and no complete anthropomorphic skeletons in scenes of figural interaction are characteristic of Teotihuacan scenes on pottery or on murals. Those features of Bilbao art which do share a heritage with Teotihuacan art, especially the speech scrolls and flowering

Bilbao Stela 1

vines, are not in a Teotihuacan context in Bilbao art (and are not on Bilbao Stela 1 in any event).

The painful aspects of this scene should not detract us from noticing its masterful conception under the canons of Cotzumalhuapa art. This is truly one of the great monumental carvings of ancient Mesoamerican art, a tribute to the dynamic hybrid Guatemalan culture which developed this enigmatic style. It has been tempting to interpret Cotzumalhuapa art as a local expression deriving its details from Teotihuacan and its narrative layout to Izapa. This scheme overlooks El Tajin and other potential Veracruz sources are overlooked, and-even when Teotihuacan motifs are present, we must remember that these were already implanted locally just a few kilometers away at Tiquisate, or nearby in the adjacent Kaminaljuyu highlands. The complexity and sophistication of the ballplayer stelae argue against them being the product of a local *sui generis* development. At the same time no single-source external inspiration is likely either—Cotzumalhuapa is as eclectic and enigmatic in its own manner as was Tiquisate before it. Thus the discussion of the remaining seven Bilbao ballplayer scenes will take us into an unknown realm over one thousand years ago in piedmont Guatemala.

Chapter 2

THE WINGED BALLPLAYER

OF BILBAO STELA 2

Condition

Stela 2 is not as well preserved as other monuments of Bilbao. A thick vertical crack runs from the celestial deity about a meter down to the arm of the ballplayer. It has been filled in with no attempt to restore the destroyed imagery. Nineteenth century chisel marks still run down the middle,¹² and in a sense fortunately have not been restored. By leaving the monument in its original condition you can at least know what parts are authentic. Once restored it is hard to tell whether some key feature is a guesstimate of a restorer or a cultural clue of the ancient sculptor.

Composition

12. The monuments still out in the field at El Baul and Bilbao are totally abandoned. Tourists have unwittingly defaced them by making rubbings, allowing the color to soak through to the monument. Others have sought to enhance the carving by scratching parallel to the original lines, in a frustrated attempt to make the design stand out (especially on El Baul Monument 4, which is such low relief it does not stand out in a photo). There are no guardians at either site (which are both on private property). The only monuments which are protected are those brought into the finca headquarters at El Baul and Las Ilusiones. These Cotzumalhuapa sculptures are the largest ancient sculpted monuments in the entire Americas. They deserve to be on the UNESCO list of world monuments. And they certainly deserve 24 hour a day guarding. In fact, there is not even an archive of photographs locally that shows their present condition. Considering the rate at which they are being vandalized and defaced it would be nice if at least a corpus were available to show them in their condition before local apathy continues to facilitate their destruction. Hopefully the project of Rubio and Bove will get a good photographic record; F.L.A.A.R. has loaned its 5000 watt generator to encourage their efforts.

Bilbao Stela 2

The standard parading ballplayer strides this time towards the left, as on Stela 4. On Stelae 3, 5, 6, and 8 they stride towards the right; on Stela 1 he strides towards the left but does not raise his arms up because there is no celestial deity; on Stela 7 only the speech scroll and crab headdress remains of the player, suggesting he strides towards the left—but there are no more preserved portions of him. Stela 2 has a raised border, as do also Stelae 5, 6, 7, and 8.

The celestial god is surrounded with fruiting vines, actually above him is the largest mass of such vines, even more than on the top of Stela 6. There seems to be more space to fill above the deity on Stela 2 both because the monument may be proportionally taller as well as the sky deity a few centimeters lower in the composition.

Comment on the Published Habel Drawing

The old-time drawing helps to facilitate seeing the overall arrangement; the diving deity sticks out dramatically, but for analysis of details this drawing is not adequate. Likewise to study Cotzumalhuapa style, the Habel drawing does not capture the nuances of the Bilbao faces. The wings are especially poorly rendered. The decoration on the yoke was not recognized and is pictured as a blob. For some reason this is the brightest drawing in the Habel series, though it is not clear whether this is a printing coincidence or a result of a better original drawing. Several details are present on the drawing which are no longer extant on the stone, the head hanging from the yoke, the (viewer's left) earring of the frontal deity, the right wristlet and hand of the deity.

Previous Comment

PLATE I

NC 2



Due to its poor condition Merle Greene did not publish a rubbing of Stela 2. Parsons of course completely describes the monument and his observations will be cited where appropriate.

The Main Figure

A fascinating feature of the ballplayer of Stela 2 is that he has large wings and these are adorned with what may be nicknamed "sun flames." Whereas many Maya characters are winged, especially a particular phase or episode of God D (Hellmuth 1987c: fig. 125, 150, a; 1987d: fig. 554-557, Tafel XLVI, XLVH, XLVUI) no Maya ballplayer that I know has wings.¹³ The closest winged men are on carved/mold made pottery of the Rio Blanco complex of Veracruz (Borhegyi *; von Winning 1971a: fig. 1; 1971b: fig. 1) as mentioned earlier with respect to the feathered arms of the top two attendants of Bilbao Stela 1. A number of these Rio Blanco scenes include ballplayers.

A character in Tiquisate mythology also has wings (Hellmuth 1975b: pl. 20; Berlo 1984, II: pl. 156 and 158) but no relationship with the ballgame has yet been determined. What is unusual about the wings on Bilbao Stela 2 are the zig-zag outline that makes the feathers mimic "sun flames."

Giant eagles or "sun vultures" (P, pl. 42, d, e) dominate Bilbao Monuments 16 and 17. The "sun" disk on the bird's chest has radiating feather-like "flames" which could be the origin for the three to five widely spaced supplementary feather-like forms on the Stela 2 ballplayer's

13. Most Maya wings, though, include a subtle, highly stylized serpent face (Hellmuth 1987*).



wings. The same sharp flames radiate from the disk under the sky god on Stela 3 and from the headdress of the enthroned deity on Monument 21. The Stela 2 ballplayer wears the disembodied head that seems to be similar to that on Monument 21. Does the ballplayer wear wings because he has killed the deity and taken over its characteristics?

Sun flames have not yet been recognized as a feature of the art of Teotihuacan. These Bilbao flames are so easy to recognize that their wavy outline should make it easier to spot them elsewhere in Mesoamerica. How can we be sure this design represents flames? First, they radiate from a potential sun image on Stela 3. But more helpful in their identification is that a single flame of this size and shape issues from an incensario-like item on Palo Verde Stela 1. Whatever its meaning for the Bilbao people (and I suspect that the flame interpretation is correct) they held this image as important enough to be included in the "fruiting preciousness" on the vine-speech scrolls that wind their way around the celestial deity.

The Headdress and other Adornment

The earring is a plain disk with a raised edge. The surface of the disk has tick marks which either indicate some kind of texture or result from the nature of the stone itself. The hair is long but the mass adjacent to the head does not have all the medallions as does the hair on Stela 1 or 3. The outline of the ear is stylized and an example of a diagnostic trait of Cotzumalhuapa art.

The hair streams out of the forehead medallion in thick strands which are almost thick enough to be braided, though the hair could equally well simply be matted. The headdress is simple. At the forehead is a rosette. I cannot detect any decoration other than pockmarks inside even in cross lighting. Do the pockmarks here result from the nature of the stone itself? On the





Bilbao Stela 2

better preserved Stela 6 the disk actually seems to be composed of a material whose surface texture is expressed in special pockmarks drilled by the sculptor.

Above is a complete Cotzumalhuapa face, with earring and earplug flare. Sticking out in front of this headdress face is a beaded design of unknown meaning. To some degree it looks like a Mesoamerican version of a long bone, but bones are not usually beaded, so the beads may be from the nose, and not actually related to the "bone." The "bone" appears to issue from a different plane, seemingly from the other side of the headdress head. Parsons says this is a beaked head and, on that basis, proposes an entire winged eagle-like bird behind his torso. Does he mean the feathered arms of the ballplayer as being the entire winged bird? If indeed a bird beak is intended by the diagonally extended item from the headdress face than Parsons has made a visually astute identification. I would add a comparison to the bird-man (or possibly bird-woman) on El Baul Monument 4, lower right.

The mass of hair behind the wings could be either from the headdress or from the ballplayer. The hair of the headdress head is the typical long and thick style of Bilbao. Its main decoration is a twisted serpent-like mat design whose lower end trails off down into the back decoration sticking off the main person's back. It ends as a snake. This type of a serpent headdress, and especially the stiff thick lips, the shape and countersinking of the eye, the angle of the forehead, the indentation at the bridge of the nose and the age lines on the cheek, all suggest this is the same face as the deity seated on a throne on the right of Bilbao Monument 21, a probable female. It is also possible that most of the floating deities in the upper register on the Bilbao monuments, the deities also with snakes tied through their hair, may be females as well. The similarities of shape also suggest that the two monuments were carved within the same generation. A difference is that the speech scroll on Monument 21 has three tabs in a row, while that of Stela 2 has two tabs.

In Maya clothing a headdress sometimes mimics the name of the individual, such as the headdresses of the kings and queen of Palenque in the crypt of the Temple of the Inscriptions. We do not yet understand the rules for headdresses in the Cotzumalhuapa culture.

Nothing is left of the necklace other than the single central tasseled disk. The bracelet consists of seven rows of rectangular beads and is more likely a normal item of Cotzumalhuapa jewelry than being any special padding for the ballgame. A short-tabbed speech scroll issues out of the player's mouth. The sets of double tabs are identical to those on the vine. The vine is the same width as the speech scroll. This similarity in size, shape, and accessories documents that the vines in Cotzumalhuapa art are to some degree elongated, complicated speech scrolls. They are a pictographic form of communication more direct than hieroglyphs since they illustrate the subject of discussion.

The Ballplayer Attire

This is the sole Bilbao yoke which has its decoration in the middle. Although battered down the middle and the remainder poorly preserved, what details can be seen appear to be of a frontal skull. The left earring and left eye are about all that are visible in any single lighting. With the help of sequentially different lighting, you can make out the triangular "horns" which stick out diagonally from above the skull's earring as on so many Cotzumalhuapa monuments, such as 13, 23, 55, and 59. I have illustrated many of these Bilbao style skulls in the comparative description of the skeletal player on Stela 3.

The yoke is trapezoidal in shape with prominent raised edges on all four sides. The yoke on the Itzan, Panel 1, Peten Maya ballplayer has a raised edge on all three visible edges; its



front is covered by the disk which facilitated attachment of the hacha to the yoke (Hellmuth 1987a: fig. 63; 1995b).

The glove/handstone is a skull. The mouth is wide open to show a bulbous tongue. What appears to be a semi-detached eyeball sticks out in a revolting manner.

The handstone sticks out just enough from the hand to suppose that the hand slips through some sort of handle and then the binding holds the whole thing on. Thus it is entirely possible that if you unwrapped the binding you would end up with a small hacha-like stone carried in the hand. One could suggest that a handstone would not be needed in games where the player wears an hacha but this is negated by the center marker of Copan where the Mexicanized player wears a yoke, with attached hacha, and clearly carries a handstone as well. There the handstone is a supplement to the outfit, not a replacement for the hacha. I conclude that the handstone is used to guide the ball to hit the yoke edge (or hacha edge when that is worn) at the proper angle. The handstone may do for Bilbao players what the clenched fist does for Site Q players (Hellmuth 1975a:9; 1987b:280)—guide the ball to be hit by the protective device (yoke for Bilbao, ball deflector for a Maya player). Other writers have proposed the ballgame handstones are to balance the ballplayer (de Borhegyi 1961a), which is certainly still a viable consideration. It would help if some actual Cotzumalhuapan handstones could be found, to see where their handle is situated (probably on the side, as at Chichen Itza).

The forward knee is decorated with a single cord from which hangs a tear-shaped decoration. No swelling or tissue damage is noticeable on this knee. The back knee seems to be the one which may be swollen though the poor degree of preservation has eliminated most of the marks which indicates swelling for sure on the knees of other Bilbao players.

The same general kind of shorts are worn by this player as by all his teammates at Bilbao. But this item of clothing seems to stay with an individual leg, that is, it could be made just for a single leg. If the same item of material in fact extends to cover the other leg as well it must be split down the middle. The other leg is either covered separately with a corresponding item of clothing or if joined, then at the back as a common piece of material perhaps but seemingly not joined across the groin in the front. A raised ridge crosses the thigh covering it diagonally. To the left are undulating lines decorating the material. About the middle a set of four tassels begins, but at precisely this point the shorts are damaged and unless we can find this detail elsewhere it will be hard to identify it. Ridged decoration of the ballplayer shorts are noticeable on Player 6 and 8 but no tassels are evident. There is no evidence of any girdle on the forward leg, but it is possible that is because we are given an inside view and that the girdle covered only the outside of each leg. Only on Stela 6 is there definitely a girdle on both legs.

Habel's drawing (1878:pl. 1) shows a human head on the thigh. Something was present since there are "whiskers" arching over the hem of the girdle, but I do not see how there could possibly have been the face that Habel pictures. First, he totally omits the hem of the player's girdle. Then he does not incorporate the thick "whiskers" into his imagined face. The profile of this face is shown by him to be along the edge of the thigh. The thigh is still in good enough condition to note that no such profile exists, despite the 19th century axe blow which destroyed the middle of this curious feature. Since no other Cotzumalhuapa player has major decoration on his shorts this feature on Stela 2 will remain enigmatic.

The Back Decoration

Bilbao Stela 2

At the level of the player's knees is a back decoration which is the mirror image of that on Stela 6. It is Stela 6 which also has a comparable vine. These features suggest that Stela 2 and 6 formed a pair. The decoration in question probably hangs from some item of attire fastened cleverly to the back. Parsons suggests there is a relationship with the assemblage pictured on Monument 38 (his pl. 29, b) but Mon. 38 is not adequately shown at an angle where its design can be intelligible. The decoration on Stelae 2 and 6 ends in a wide tail curving back upward. Above the tail on Stela 2 is a large rosette decorated by a single tubular bead pointing right. This item of decoration must be important to the Bilbao people but its meaning is transparent to us today. A frontal skull is in this comparable situation for the other stela. Both are flanked on each side by bands of repeated joined motifs.

Sandals

Both feet are shod, as on the players of Stelae 5, 6, and 8. Parsons has noticed that these are all stelae with raised borders. The players of stelae with no borders, 1, 3, and 4, have just one foot shod. The feet on Stela 7 are no longer extant. The back foot's toe area is destroyed. Otherwise, this is a good chance to recreate what Cotzumalhuapa ballplayer sandals looked like, since that would not be possible from Stelae 3, 5, or 6, where the players parade to the right so only one side of the sandals was visible. Part of the difference in sandal decorations could simply be the difference in the features on the inside versus those on the outside. The alternative is that one foot was specially shod for the ballgame, either to protect the foot or to allow the foot to kick the ball. But merely because one of their feet is padded is not adequate indication that such a player kicked the ball. Indeed, you cannot justify such a claim unless somewhere in the specific culture involved you can cite a depiction of a player actually kicking the ball. Just because some Teotihuacan players kicked their ball is no reason that Bilbao players kicked their ball.



Indeed there is considerable counter-evidence to disprove any suggestion that a swaddled foot has anything to do with kicking the ball. First, the player on Edzna Stela 6 has his foot scraping against the edge of the court. He would have needed his foot padding to keep from scuffing this foot. No Maya player is ever pictured kicking a ball, but plenty are in positions where a padded foot would protect them from being scraped. Indeed the Maya players on Yaxchilan Step VIII, the Chinkultic (La Esperanza) ballcourt marker, several Site Q Maya players and even one player on the Dallas Ballgame vase also have a padded foot and their accessory is almost certainly to protect the foot from being scraped along the hard playing floor. There is no evidence whatsoever that any of these players kicked the ball.

The forward (non-padded) Bilbao foot looks relatively similar to the corresponding nonpadded foot on the players striding to the right. The sandal appears to be bilaterally symmetrical. There is a strip on both sides but no back; these are not the Maya "high back" style.

The back foot has a wide rectangular pad. It appears almost like a high back feature but that is because Cotzumalhuapan perspective is totally different than that of the Maya. The artist of Bilbao feet may be showing us the top of the foot, not the side or back. This particular foot is especially distorted in that nothing of the profile view is given other than the top of the ankle. The entire pad is shown only from the top, an especially impossible perspective when combined with the profile of the overall body.

The Undulating Form

Together with Stelae 3, 5, 6, and 8, Stela 2 includes an undulating form which mysteriously issues from behind the yoke. Here it is the least well preserved, least well

Bilbao Stela 2

carved, and mostly hidden by the wings, so it is better to delay discussion until the section on Stelae 3 and 8 where a comparable feature is particularly well preserved.

The Vine

The vine of Stela 2 is in some ways almost a mirror image of that of Stela 6. These two stelae are also mirror images in the decoration behind the player's legs. Some form of relationship exists between the deity and the vine, but it is subtle to our modern eyes.

Whereas the vines of Stela 6 and Mon. 21 include seashells and the vine of Stela 7 includes a fish, the present vine sprouts mainly flowers—as do the vines of the ballgame reliefs and Lower Temple of the Jaguars of Chichen Itza. Mon. 11 had an extensive flowering vine but only a fragment was preserved in the 19th century and this has been lost. Several unnumbered carved slabs (P, pl. 44, e, g, u, and v) have flowering vines but the sole published photograph lacks proper cross-lighting so no detail is brought out.

The Bilbao Stela 2 vine has several sections—under the deity figure, around his arms, and above his head. The one on the left has only a jewelry bead sticking out. The vine segment on the lower right has two sets of double beads (generic "words" on the speech scrolls), a hook, and a decorated bead which is probably some sort of flower or jewel. The question mark would normally be interpreted as the cross section of a conch shell especially since there are shells on the vines of Stelae 5 and 6, but with all the other growths from the Stela 2 vine being plant parts—not shells—I hesitate to interpret this query mark as a lone shell motif. Such an isolated motif is not in keeping with what we know of Teotihuacan and Cotzumalhuapa imagery.



Bilbao Stela 2

The vines on top of the frontal deity include a curved feather motif, what is found on most of the ballplayer headdresses, the shape of a Teotihuacan sacrificial knife (though it is not sure whether this relationship is coincidental or actual). The curved feather motif is prominent on the headdress streamer of Palo Verde Stela 3, Bilbao Stelae 1, 4, and 6; it does not seem to be present on Stela 8. The presence of this headdress decoration as the "fruit" on the vine documents my assessment that the vine is fruiting emblematic clothing accessories (and jewelry) among other items.

The various fruits appear almost as though they are intended to be interpreted as "beaded" or bejeweled as are some of the features of the extraordinary vine of Monument 21, but the Stela 2 vine has no anthropomorphic fruit. No naturalistic seashells are obvious on these Stela 2 vines either. Everything is either a plant part or camouflaged as a plant part.

At least three possible fruits are visible, though it is sometimes hard to distinguish a stylized Bilbao fruit from a stylized Bilbao flower. These are, under the head of the headdress snake, a poorly preserved fruit that may have been anthropomorphic, with punctate eyes and a slit mouth. It has no husk. Elsewhere above are two slightly more pointed ovals that have a more clearcut stem directly from the vine and a possible husk. What is especially curious are the at least three instances of "sun flames" in one case complete with stem and husk. Together with the sprouting curved feather motif it is as though the jewelry and insignia of the gods were a gift of Mother Nature as the very fruit with which we sustain our life.

Clearly it is necessary to continue the research developed by Langley (1986) to understand the sign language of Teotihuacan speech scrolls and flows, and from that to reach an understanding of the flowering bejeweled vines of the Bilbao monuments. It is noteworthy that neither Toltec, Aztec, nor Mixtec art—all of which are successors to various degrees of



Teotihuacan inventiveness--carried on the tradition of elaborately decorated speech scrolls. It will be especially interesting to see what the Cacaxtla artists may have used as a substitute. The murals of Cacaxtla had not yet been discovered when Parsons wrote his iconography of Bilbao art. It is worth noting how differently the two cultures handled their assimilation of Teotihuacan motifs.

The Frontal Deity

The giant tear-shaped balloon out of which the deity emerges is unique in Mesoamerica art. The origin for this setting is totally unresearched at present. This "emergence" is so subtle that the viewer does not notice it at first. There is no maul (the slit is from the sledge hammer blows). Is this a cape blowing in the wind as the deity descends? Let us hope a visually astute individual can offer an explanation for this tear-shaped frame.

The sunken area around the mouth and eyes leads to the conclusion this deity is wearing a mask, very similar to the mask on the deity overlooking Stela 8. The thickness of the mask is especially apparent when lighting is arranged from below.

The headdress is pictured by Habel as a single cord or snake. If a snake, then part of the vine at the right end doubles as a bifurcated tongue. The headdress is not well enough preserved to ascertain whether this headdress rope is a snake or a vine. That on Stela 4 is definitely a snake, a tradition common in the Codex Vindobonensis. especially on female deities. Snake headdresses are standard in the art of Cotzumalhuapa, on Mon. 21 (the enthroned female), on Stela 1's headdress head, and on deities in the upper register of Stelae 4, 5, 6, and 8.



The earring and hair form a frame on each side of the face. These remind me of Huastec art, though entirely in the mind, since a direct comparison does not bear out much resemblance. Remains of a multi-strand necklace of closely packed square beads is visible. From the better-preserved side of the face hangs a band which may or may not be a pendant from the earring. This same earring also seems to have an oval decoration sticking up from its top. With all the entangled vines it is sometimes necessary to look twice to be sure that an item of jewelry is not actually one of the vine's fruits. The preserved wrist has a bracelet with spiral decoration.

This deity is more actively using its arm, though in the position of its "body" there is hardly much it can do other than the limited poses that we see.

Conclusions

Stela 2 offers the iconographer considerable visual information despite its eroded and mutilated condition. The levitating deity appears to wear a mask, as on Stela 8. The sickle-shaped "fruit" on the meandering vine-speech scroll is additional evidence that some of the "fruits" are items of clothing--other items look like adornments (jewelry). The player wears wings (or "sun flames").

Parsons suggests that all the Bilbao frontal deities "may be described as a diving god (with its head and arms lowermost and presumably its legs raised above)" (p. 105). The designation "diving god" has a meaning limited to the Post Classic Maya art of Coba (Thompson, Pollock, and Chariot 1932:84, fig. 46), Tulum (Lothrop 1924:95, pl. 3, 18, 23, fig. 22, 88) and its Classic predecessors at Labna and elsewhere. Until we see the legs actually raised above there is no way to know what position the full figure Bilbao gods really take.

Bilbao Stela 2

Maybe they are residing inside the mauls of a mythical reptile as on Bilbao Stela 7 or El Castillo Monument 1, upper side. Actually, there is no evidence that they are diving. Descending, perhaps, but not diving as in the Coba or Tulum sense. Two of the Bilbao gods are being transported in the mauls of reptilian monsters. That alone would rule out a role as diving god. The deity on Bilbao Stela 3 is descending but clearly from a giant dragon maul. I consider most of the other Bilbao stelae-top deities likewise to be issuing from monster mauls. And a comparable god on El Castillo Monument 1 is quite comfortably situated in a similar reptilian mouth, certainly not arranged as a diving situation. We ought to continue to seek wide and far before we can understand the nature of Bilbao mythology.

In many respects the Stela 2 ballplayer is the most special of all. He displays supernatural traits, not only the power to fly, but the signs of the sun disk itself.

Chapter 3

Stela 3

OFFERING A TROPHY HEAD TO A WINGED DEITY

Composition

A fully attired ballplayer strides purposefully towards the right. He raises up his gloved ballgame handstone in a ritualized parade gesture of offering. A skeletal ballplayer also points his hand upward, simultaneously towards a severed head on a stand and/or also towards a dominating frontal winged deity who emanates from the open maul of a reptilian monster. As with Stela 1 there is no raised border. The overall arrangement of the figures is as skilled as that of any Renaissance painter. The upward pointing gesture of the skeletalized player is especially effective.

Condition

Other than an almost horizontal break line, one third of the way down, all the way across the monument, the sculpture is in excellent condition. Only the forward foot is worn to the point that detail is hard to ascertain without the aid of several careful angles of lighting.

(Unreliability of Previous Drawings)

Plate II

NO. 3



The Habel drawing is good for the overall context but inaccurate in detail. His scale is totally off--too narrow. His yokes on both players do not have their details carefully rendered; his snake head is totally out of proportion, the other yoke is missing the diagonal indentations. The actual skeletal figure is wearing a glove/handstone but this feature is not adequately depicted in the drawing.

What is pictured as a circle in the drawing of the skeleton is more likely the depression where the heart was carved out. The drawing shows a strange nose on the trophy head, but since this is where the break in the stela is that nose is not reliable considering the number of errors made elsewhere. Nonetheless, Habel did see the stelae before they were cut into pieces to remove to Germany, so from time to time he did skillfully record a feature which got inadvertently chipped off during preparation for transport.

Previous Descriptions of the Iconography

Since Parsons' detailed analysis was available by 1969 we can presume this was the source for Greene's 1972 published description. His book is in her bibliography, though there is no citation to it anywhere in her long section on Cotzumalhuapa. In a way her commentary makes a nice precis of Parsons' longer commentary. Yet in fact this 1972 art book invents several features of the design, features which are not so described in Parsons, and which are doubtful in any event. The two items which need to be changed are the idea that the player is offering a human heart and the suggestion that the maul out of which the sun-disk deity appears is of a jaguar.

This ball-game player is making an offering of a human heart to the celestial diety (sic) emerging from the jaws of a stylized jaguar. The diety (sic) may



Bilbao Stela 3

be a sun god. The face, which is in high relief, is human, but flames act as a substitute for locks of hair and also radiate from both arms and around the sundisk pendant hanging from the god's neck.

The defeated player is portrayed as of smaller stature and already dead. His body takes on the form of a skeleton wearing ball-game paraphernalia-yoke, knee pad, and either serpent-effigy glove or handstone. He points with his forefinger at the heart offering, as if to bring attention to the glory of sacrifice. A typical Cotzumalhuapa "tabbed " speech scroll connects the two figures, the one living and the other dead. The decapitated head rests upon a skull rack.

The heart being offered in sacrifice is an anthropomorphic cacao pod. Note the closed eye, turned-down mouth, and the stem and casing of the pod which is held aloft by the ball game victor, over whose head are two Ocelotl glyphs, (et al. 1972: Pl. 189).

But Thompson only says they are just "perhaps Ocelot" (1948: caption to fig. 62, g). Stela 5 shows what an actual Cotzumalhuapa feline would look like. I suggest this Stela 3 glyph is not necessarily a feline, though Edmonson classifies a similar Rio Blanco Veracruz glyph as a feline (1988:255). A canine, fanged reptile (despite the ear), or a mythical composite should be considered. Whatever creature is intended it is abstracted and correspondingly difficult to relate to any actual real animal. Unfortunately Edmonson's otherwise complete survey of pre-Columbian calendar systems of Mesoamerica (1988) either overlooked Bilbao or

does not consider the glyphs calendric.¹⁴ Neither of the main works on Cotzumalhuapa culture, Thompson (1948) nor Parsons (1969), is in his bibliography (1988).

The skull is resting on a support, but by no means necessarily a skull rack. Traditional Aztec skull racks usually used poles to skewer the skulls and all Mesoamerican skull racks featured scores of skulls together, not a single head. Although the heads may have been added to such a rack with flesh, they are generally pictured as purely skulls. Thus it is premature to state that the fleshed single head is on a skull rack per se. Parsons' description, "on a rack or frame," (p. 106) is acceptable by its very informality, in this case preferable than to designate this concretely as a skull rack.

A tabbed speech scroll is angular instead of curved. The same speech scroll connects both ballplayers, a rather rare phenomenon.

Whether there is a "heart offering" will be discussed in the section on this portion of the scene.

The Skeletal Figure

Other than Monument 10 this is one of the few instances when a second ballplayer is present. On Stela 1 all the attendants lack ballgame attire so only a single ballplayer is in the overall group of five people. While it is fair to assume that the skeletal player represents the loser the relationship is a generic one, death per se as being part of the ballgame, in the sense

14. The hieroglyphs of the Tiquisate culture of the Escuintla area of Guatemala are likewise missing from the Edmonson survey, though there is good reason, there are only about four Tiquisate glyphs known (Hellmuth 1975*; 199*) and none are in a specifically calendrical arrangement.

of death walking among the players. If he were a specific loser his head would probably be missing. If he were destined to die this might be shown by some appropriate posture--the belittling nature of his smaller stature is such an indication. Other than his lack of a kneepad or swollen knee he is fully functional. Since he has normal human hands and feet he is not entirely fleshless though his legs and arms are evidently without flesh, which may explain why no swollen knee joint is pictured, though since he does wear the ballplayer glove-handstone I would expect his knee to be swollen as well. His skull has hair. He is truly the living dead, better than any modern Hollywood cemetery film.

Other features remind the viewer that this player is already dead--a hole under his rib cage suggests that his heart has already been extracted. Robicsek, a surgeon, has written about the pragmatic aspects of heart sacrifice (Robicsek and Hales 1984: fig. 27). He is clinically dead but still alive and walking among the living, as is the striding skeleton of Monument 13. Except for the gums on Stela 6, the skeleton on Monument 13 is quite close, especially in the manner of the joints. He also has the incision into the stomach, under the rib cage, in order to pull out the heart.

A skull ball is to some degree an abbreviation of the entire dead ballplayer. Two possible skull balls (or at least skull glyphs) are on Monument 20. Since the two visages in that scene are not shown in full figure, we do not know if they had ballplayer attire or not.

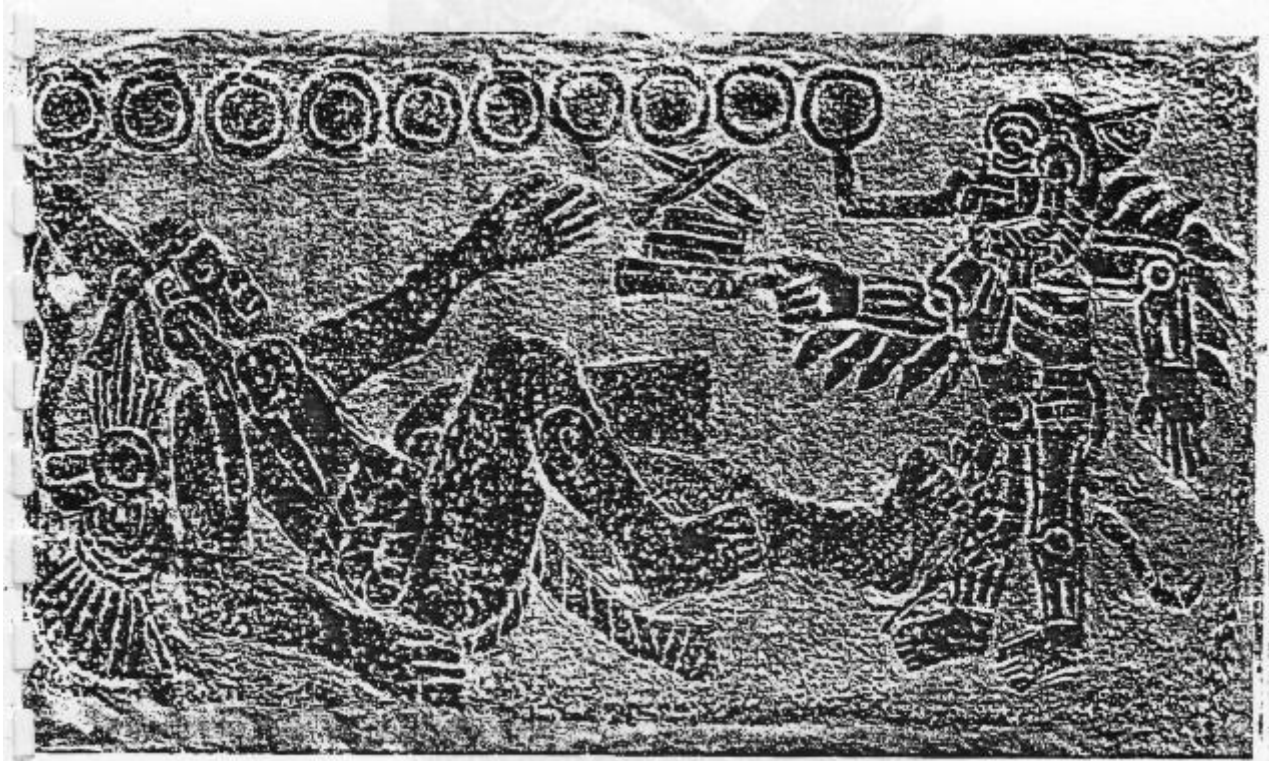
Full figure skeletons are on Bilbao Monuments 1, 13, 26, 48 and 59 and Palo Verde Stela 3. None are ballplayers though the figure on Palo Verde Stela 3 is held by a probable ballplayer. The skeleton on Monument 26 has a depression into the body which probably represents a heart having been cut out. Bilbao Monument 19 shows a person whose ribs are partially skeletalized but the face and lower body are fully fleshed. The only other





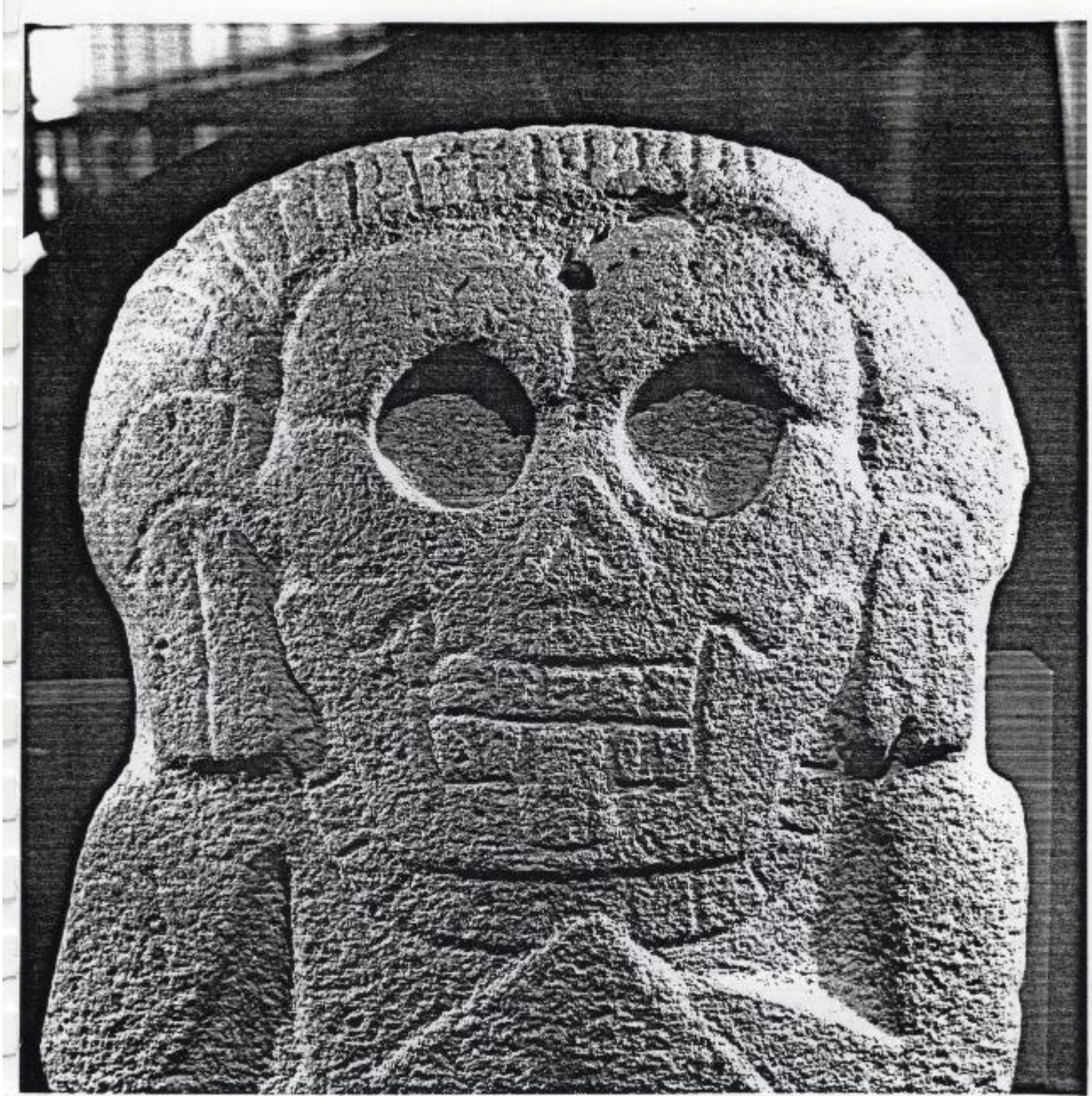




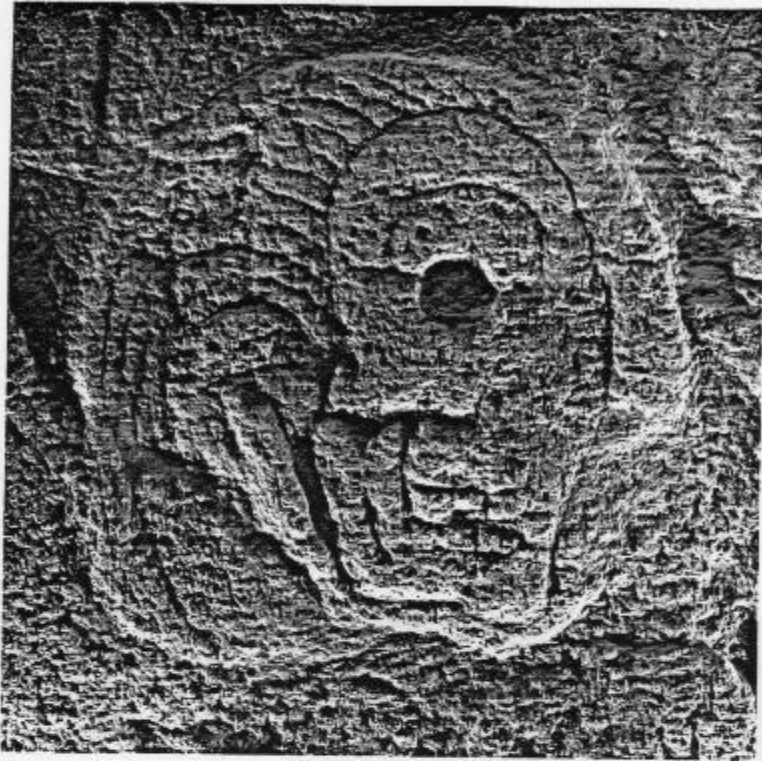


MONUMENT 13









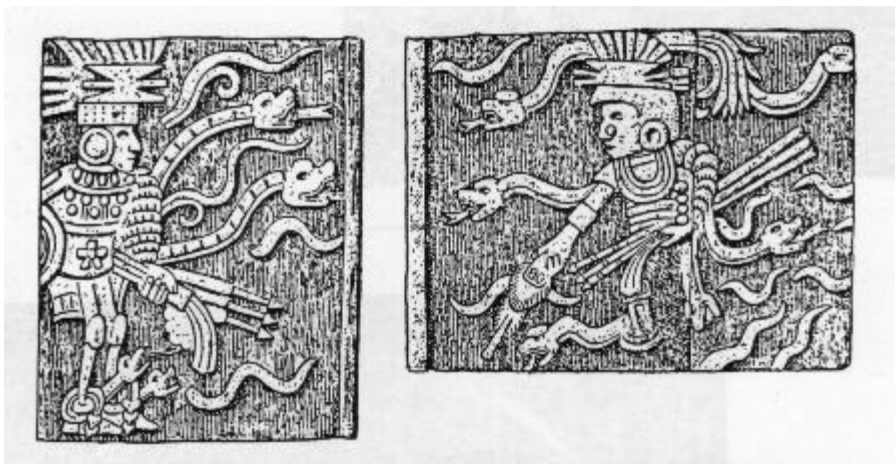
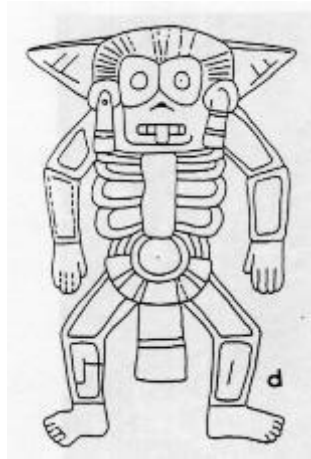


Abb. 237, 238. Mausoleum II. Skelettkrieger (Seelen von toten Kriegern),
Reliefe auf Steinplatten, die in der Höhe des zweiten und dritten Gliedes
des Gesimses die Treppenwangen einfassen.

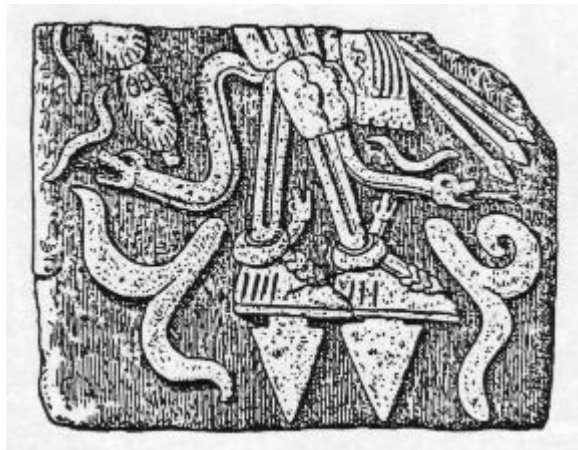


Abb. 239. Mausoleum II. Untere Hälfte eines Skelettkriegers (einer Seele
eines toten Kriegers), vor der Treppe an der Ostseite des Gebäudes.



Mesoamerican ballgame scene which pictures an actual complete skeleton is Codex Borgia p. 40, where a skeletal personage with animal claws (one claw is possibly bird-like) seems to rise out of a dead human in the center of the court.

A remarkable skeletal image is exhibited in Xalapa's Museo de Antropología. I am unsure whether this Veracruz skeletalized image has ever been published. The potential for influence of Veracruz in the art of the Cotzumalhuapa area has not been fully explored.

Skulls decorate the ballcourt in Codex Machliabechiano and its cognate Codex Tudela. These skulls are attached to architecture and are therefore possibly tenoned hachas.

The best known skeletal imagery in the ballgame are the skull balls of Tiquisate (Hellmuth 1975a: 21), of El Tajin (Kampen 1972: fig. 19, a), of Chichen Itza (Tozzer 1957, XII: fig. 474), of the Popol Vuh (Edmonson 1971: line 3981-82, 4060ff; Tedlock 1985:144, 146), or the skull ball recently discovered on a lowland Classic Maya stela during photography for the F.L.A.A.R. archives (Hellmuth 1995d). I found still another skull ball in concurrent research for monograph on other ballgame stelae, such as on a Las Mojarras monument (Hellmuth 1995d). Borhegyi claims a skull ball on a Rio Blanco, Veracruz bowl (1969:504, fig. 7) but this is an animal head not a human skull (Borhegyi 1980*). Skull balls are present in the little-known early Post Classic murals of Las Higueras, Veracruz,¹⁵ but the players there are wearing palmas, an item not present in the Cotzumalhuapa culture.

Skulls are a common motif for ballgame yokes, especially in Veracruz and the Escuintla area of piedmont Guatemala near the Cotzumalhuapa area. The yoke of Bilbao Stela 2 has a

15. I thank iconographer Juan Sanchez B. of the Xalapa museum, for facilitating my photographing these remarkable Las Higueras murals in 1993 (F.L.A.A.R. Photo Archive).

Bilbao Stela 3

frontal skull in the middle. Of the various other skeletons or skulls, this one on Bilbao Stela 3 has a wide necklace as on both Monuments 13, 26 and 48. The Mon. 13 and 26 skeleton's necklace even has the same knotted crosspiece as on Stela 3.

Sticking out the back of the Stela 3 skull is a rounded, triangular, almost Bilbao kind of knife-shaped "horn." In some instances it looks ear-like, in others it has veins as would a leaf. Whatever it is, this "horn" typifies Cotzumalhuapa skulls. I have never seen a comparable feature on any Maya skeleton. Teotihuacan skulls are rare and are different. The profile skeleton of Bilbao Monument 13 has a comparable triangle in this position. The frontal skeleton of Monument 59 and frontal skulls of Monuments 23 and 55 (P, pl. 44, g, b) have similar triangular features, here appearing ear-like. Sometimes the illustrations used by Thompson are much better (1948: fig. 4, g, 9). The skeletal attendant of Stela 1 and of Monument 48 have no such appendage, nor is one noticeable on Palo Verde Monument 3.

The skull cap has parallel lines which could represent hair, indeed it is the same double ruff of hair as seen on typical Cotzumalhuapa ballplayers, especially the decapitated head on Stela 1.

The eye area is formed by an enlarged supraorbital plate then a less prominent under-eye half ring. The eye underframe has a slight hint of a blip at the corner. A comparable blip is more fully developed on the frontal skull of Stela 6. The skull has a nose cavity. Cotzumalhuapa skulls do not often have a sacrificial knife sticking out as is a custom on many 14th-16th century representations, especially among the Aztec. A living shaman on Mon. 21 is the exception, but he is not a skull.

Frontal depictions of skulls in Cotzumalhuapa art tend to have a straight tongue hanging down to the chin (ballplayer Stela 3, Monuments 20 (skull at right), 26, 48, and 59). Profile depictions of Cotzumalhuapa skulls almost never attempt this, instead they show a bulbous tongue mostly still within the mouth area. An exception is the profile skeleton on Monument 13.

The circular rosette earring has a massive diagonal tassel of three parallel sets of segmented decoration. Together with the wide necklace these accessories hide much of the skeletal aspect of the head

The skeletons of Stela 3 and Monument 13 share the following features: prominent cavity where the heart was carved out, joints just like a mechanical robot, bones with longitudinal frame and groove down the middle stopping before the joint, and the overall "bone" being the same thickness as a fully fleshed limb. What at first seems to be a difference, a "horn" on Monument 13 is just a displacement of the triangular extra "ear" that is present on most Cotzumalhuapa skulls (discussed previously).

The joints of the robot-like limbs are closest to details of the skeleton of Monument 13 or El Baul Monument 4. Their lower leg bones have a groove down the center, stopping just before the joint (Stela 3, Mon. 13 and 59). This feature is so clearly defined, and so unusual, that it should aid in tracing the relationship of this character, however, by no means are all Cotzumalhuapa skeletons the same (that of Palo Verde Stela 3 has different details). The skeletons need to be classified into their respective families in order to detect the origin(s) of the Bilbao skeletal images.

Bones that have a central groove are on two Veracruz yokes (Strebel 1890,3: fig. 21, 26; Tozzer 1957, XII: fig. 463, 464). If the full corpus of the art of all Veracruz were readily available, I suspect that many features would be noticed to be shared with the eclectic art of the Cotzumalhuapa area. A slightly different arrangement is on the bones of a skeleton of the Codex Borbonicus. 10. The bones on Borgia Codex p. 56 also have a continuous groove but it does not stop at the elbow or knee. A potentially Cotzumalhuapa style hacha in the Museo Popol Vuh has a skeletal arm which is grooved. None of these bones have the zig-zag line of Maya skeletons. It is interesting how little Maya influence is present in Cotzumalhuapa art. What little they share is more due to pan-Mesoamerican traits than to any direct diffusion, yet the late Maya seem to have borrowed a few Cotzumalhuapa related traits at Seibal and a Cotzumalhuapa style jade was noted by Proskouriakoff as among the offerings in the sacred cenote of Chichen Itza (1974:78, b).¹⁶

The backbone is a simple column consisting of thick x-sections with "ball bearings" in between. This idiosyncratic form of depicting the backbone is so distinctive that it should be easy to find comparative specimens elsewhere. Unfortunately, frontal views of skeletons do not show the backbone and most skeletal representations are solely skulls, so it is not often that a Cotzumalhuapan backbone is available to study.

The cavity in the stomach of the skeleton is seldom found in the Maya area in this precise manner. The few skeletons that appear in Maya art tend to be in the Dance after Decapitation Sacrifice. In addition to decapitation the hearts are removed from the Maya skeletons but the incision is in a completely different style. There does not seem to be much association between skeletons in Maya art and those of Bilbao.

16. One Terminal Classic or Post Classic stela from the island of Flores, Peten, Guatemala, has possible Cotzumalhuapa ballplayer features (Hellmuth in press *).

The skeletons of El Tajin, Veracruz, the South Ball Court, deserve a closer look, as they also have a pronounced cavity in the stomach where the heart was cut out (Kampen 1972: fig. 20, 21, 22, 23). These skeletons are overlooking ballgame rituals. The style is different for sure, since El Tajin has a decidedly independent style and content. Over 2,000 kilometers separate the two cultures yet the El Tajin skeletons are a definite possibility as an ancestor of the Bilbao sculptures especially considering that several other attributes of El Tajin art are also potential origins for features of Bilbao ballplayer stelae. Curiously, no Bilbao player wears an hacha or palma, yet hundreds of hachas have been found throughout the Department of Escuintla. Many are considered a product of Cotzumalhuapan culture (P, pl. 21; Marquis and Shook in press).¹⁷

The Game Gear

The yoke has indented diagonal decoration as on the yokes of his companion player to the left, and as also the yoke of Stela 1. As already mentioned there, Seibal ballplayer Stelae 5 and 7 have a diagonal design also (though wider), which is otherwise unique in Peten style ballplayer deflectors.

The skeleton's yoke has no monster head at its end. Underneath, the length of the shorts, is some manner of underpadding.

17. A cache of 52 yokes was found sometime in the late 1970's when a bulldozer was leveling an ancient site in order to construct a sugar refinery. Elsewhere I have suggested that some of these yokes may be Early Classic (Hellmuth 1987a: *), since the Tiquisate ballplayer scenes all show yokes on the players. But so far no one has suggested a complete dating system for the hundreds of hachas known for the same area. Since Tiquisate ballplayers wore hacha- like faces on their yokes it seems likely that some hachas ought to be Early Classic.





The glove/handstone is an animal or reptile with a set of closely fitting dentition all one thick pointed size and fang-shaped. The bifurcating tongue which sticks out indicates the artist is suggesting a snake, though actual snakes have only one set of poison fangs. Dentition in other real snakes would not be as thick and fang-like as these.

The bifurcating tongue brings to mind the bizarre hand of Seibal Stela 13. At first it seems as though his actual hand has been cut off and the stump covered with a glove, but could this Seibal glove-wrapping cover a perfectly normal hand, as the gloves with facial decoration cover the hands of the Bilbao players? If so, that would make the snake around his waist an alternative to a combined yoke and hacha. Arguing against this suggestion is the lack of any kneepad on the Seibal lord. Parsons has already independently recognized a similarity between Seibal and Cotzumalhuapa (pl. 62, c). But since the extremely long hair of this Seibal Stela 13 character brings to mind the long hair of Cotzumalhuapa it is time to consider this possibility further and not look solely to the Putun Maya for inspiration.¹⁸ The similarities between Seibal and Cotzumalhuapa otherwise are not frequent or close enough to document direct contact or even direct influence—there was an intermediate evolution—but these features (snake belts, extremely long hair) are not known from the corpus of Pabellon Modeled Carved bowls and that includes the considerable archive of these Tepeu 3 vessels among F.L.A.A.R. photographs (of which Hellmuth 1978b:172-176 shows only about 20%). It will be interesting to see if John Graham includes mention of the Cotzumalhuapa connection in his analysis of the stelae of Seibal.

18. The entire concept of Putun Maya is an invention out of whole cloth by Thompson just as was his theory of a monotheistic Itzamna, vacant town ceremonial centers, and the Maya as originating *sui generis* in central Peten. Certainly the square cartouches, atlats and other features of the art of Seibal document Sabloff's suggestion of a relationship between certain Seibal stela traits and the designers of Pabellon Modeled Carved pottery, and this is hardly derived from Escuintla, but we ought to allow for an internationalism among the Terminal Classic marauders from Mexico.

Although the Bilbao player has no kneepad on the left leg, he does have his left foot sandaled. This emphasis of all gear on a single side is carried through with the padded arm being the left. The right foot is not shod. He wears an anklet on the right leg, comparable to the beaded knee decoration on other Bilbao ballplayers.

The shorts open in the front and have a curved hem just as on the main ballplayers, except here simpler. In other words, he is a fully equipped ballplayer.

The Main Ballplayer

What is pictured on Stela 3 is to some degree related to the scene of Stela 6, though there has been stylistic evolution between these two sculptures.

The facial profile is of a typical eternally youthful Cotzumalhuapa noble. If all the parallel lines represent hair then he has quite a mane, especially down the back. The overall hair-headdress arrangement is comparable to that of Stela 1. All evidence suggests these two monuments are approximately contemporary with one another.

The hair is tied with a knotted strip of cloth leaving a lock sticking up.

The ear has a simple disk earring. As on other stelae it is difficult to ascertain whether the surface texture is a result of drilling/pecking or a natural feature of this type of stone. The hair alongside and under the head seems to be covered with occasional circular designs, comparable though not identical to the hair adornments of Stela 1. Actually what has happened on Stela 3 is that one of the headdress masses goes over the shoulder and turns out in front of the chin. This path runs the trailer through the hair, making for confusion of what is hair,

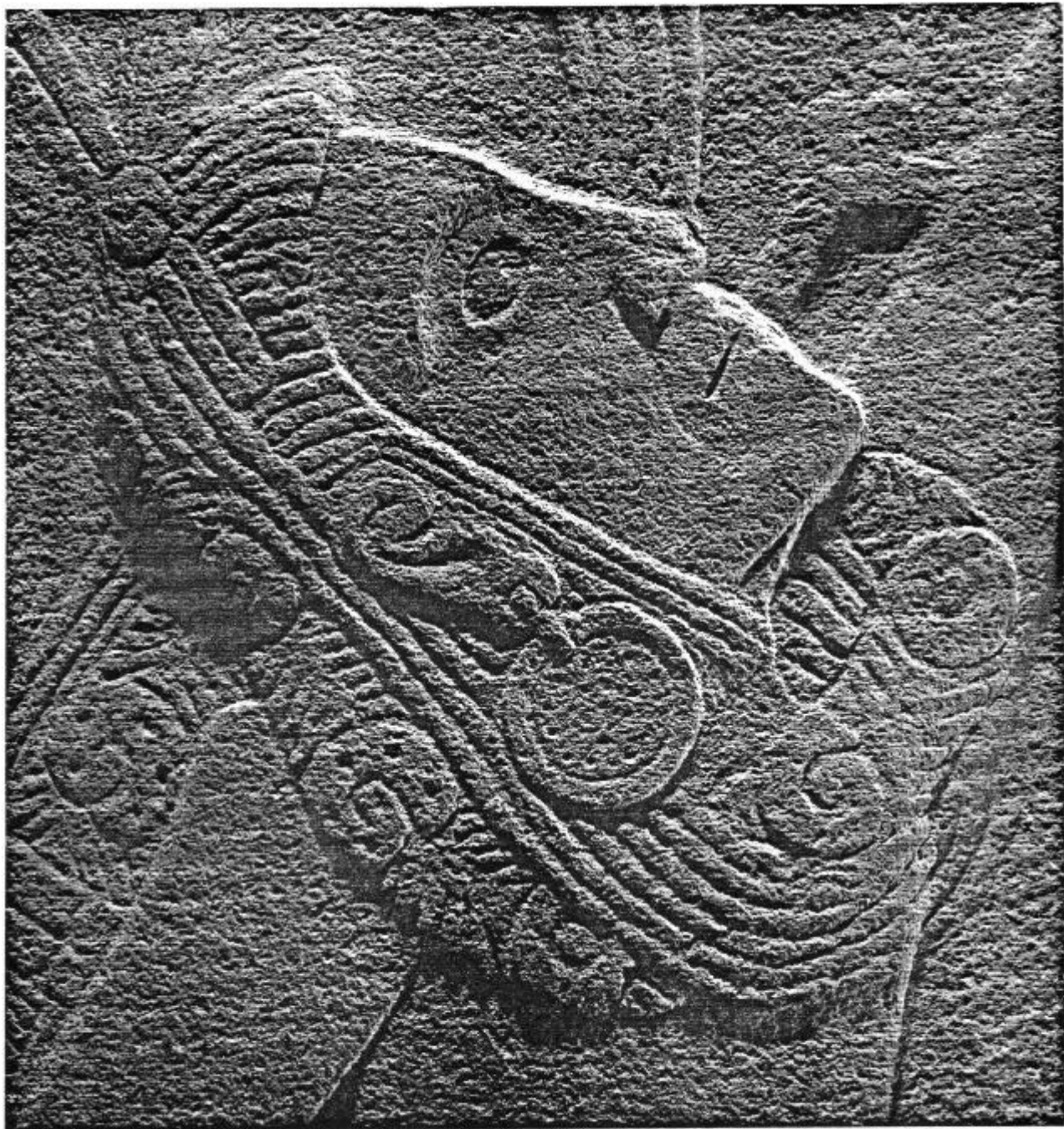






Abb. 69, 70a—d. *Mixcouatl*, der Sterngott, der Gott des Nordens, der Jagd und des Krieges. Castillo de Teayo.



Escudo de San Juan City
 Escudo de San Juan City



Escudo de San Juan City
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Escudo de San Juan City



Escudo de San Juan City
 Escudo de San Juan City

decorated hair, and trailer. On Stela 1 the same trailer stays behind the head and trails down the back. On Stela 3 the circular designs alternate between doughnuts and disks with a scroll, in one instance punctuated with dots (next to the earring).

Trailing down the back is the same curved sickle-shaped plume (comparable to that of Stela 1, Mon. 9, and Palo Verde Monument 3). What is depicted on Palo Verde Stela 3 and on other Bilbao stelae as being rather long (the form which ends in the curved feather) is here the shortest of the series. It also appears to be demonstrably pendant from the headdress, not from the back assemblage, but from looking at other stelae it seems that these features come from the backrack. Actually, at first it seems that this Stela 3 ballplayer has no back assemblage, it is all from the headdress.

Next in the back costume is a disembodied head. He has the typical Bilbao hair style with two adjacent rows of tics forming almost a thin chevron pattern. With no snakes and no indication of a severed neck stump (has a bow tie instead) it is not yet possible to recognize whether it is a decapitated ballplayer or not. The face is rather small to be an actual head of an adult. It has a bow tie under the chin. In Maya art a bow tie is a sign associated with blood sacrifice (Joralemon 1974; Hellmuth 1987c: fig. 26-35; 1987d: fig. 100-110, 124) but it is not known if this is a pan-Mesoamerican meaning applicable also to Bilbao.

Undulating Form

Together with Stelae 2, 5, 6 and 8, Stela 3 includes an undulating form which on the other monuments mysteriously issues from behind the yoke and writhes upward to the sky deity. But on Stela 3 the undulating form is not associated with the yoke at all but instead issues from behind the player's face.

Ballplayer Attire of Stela 3

The yoke has three widely separated fangs of a reptile. This is the same general dentition as the sky dragon in the panel above, which is definitely not a jaguar. The same general kind of dentition is on a snake head of Monument 21, though actual venomous snakes have only a single set of fangs. Sometimes it seems that the artist is thinking of the teeth of a boa or maybe even a crocodile. The ventral scales are pictured, intending to turn the entire yoke into a serpent body. The indented diagonal decorations have previously been discussed.

The double hem on the athlete's girdle is prominent, the same pattern as on Stela 6 but better preserved, a zig-zag on the bottom, chevron on top. The girdle itself seems thicker, not as form fitting as that of Stela 1 which looks like modern spandex material which is intended to mold itself to the curvaceous form of athletic thighs.

The loincloth apron and/or belt tie has three different sashes in front, none are snakes. The knot bend itself is not an end, as obviously the sash can have only two ends. That all three "ends" are part of the same material is documented by the surface texture pattern of whatever kind of material this was—all three segments have the same surface pattern.

The right knee has a puffy ruff which would seem to be an adequate kneepad. None of the other players have such a kneepad at all, instead they have a simple cord which would hardly provide any protection. But since that knee is not calloused, presumably it did not need padding. Curiously this pad is on the right leg (where most Maya have kneepads). But on this player it is the left knee which is swollen and the left hand which has the glove. The swelling and damage to the knee is perhaps 4 cm wide around the inside of the knee—presumably the same distance around the other side.

A medical doctor could most likely give a good medical description of this condition.

The forward (left) foot has a sandal as on Stela 4 but not as fancily decorated as on Stelae 6 or 8. The left foot of his opponent also has a sandal.

The Glove/Ballgame Handstone

Is the player offering a "heart" or are the objects in the hands handstones? That this mimics a heart is a different question, but that it is physically a heart is unlikely. The next problem is whether the object should be considered a glove or a handstone. Actually features of both are present so in the meantime they are termed a glove-handstone (that is held on by being bound around the hand) or simply handstone since it is possible that the face and handle are of stone. The glove is then more a result of the method of attachment rather than the wrapping itself intending to be the main feature.

Except for Stela 1, all the Bilbao ballplayer stelae athletes have a face on the wrapped hand. On Stelae 6 and 8 this face-glove is held up towards the god, as though an offering. The players on Stelae 2 and 4 cannot hold their handstone up because they are facing in the wrong direction. Thus I conclude that it is irrelevant whether the face or the bare hand is held up in homage to the sky deity. If it is purely coincidental whether the face-glove is held up or not, then it is unlikely an offering. The players must simply raise one arm up to the deity, whether that arm happens to have a handstone cannot yet be proven to be required. You can see this best on Stela 3 where the skeletal player has a handstone, raises his arm up to the god--but it is his far arm-gloveless--which is raised up.



Bilbao Stela 3

The face on Stela 3 is tighter to the hand than those of Stelae 6 or 8. This difference may reflect the fact that 6 and 8 are part of the stelae series framed rectangularly, while Stela 3 has no frame and may differ in date by a generation or so.

The stem and husk framing the face suggest that the Stela 3 glove face may show an anthropomorphic cacao pod or an anthropomorphic equivalent of the plant discussed in the Popol Vuh, which was not cacao but a gourd tree. Although the Popol Vuh is a highland Maya myth there is no reason that some aspects could not also be pan-Mesoamerican. Caution is needed, as the overuse and misuse of the Popol Vuh to conjure up quick explanations has led to many ridiculous misidentification of the Hero Twins in every imaginable situation.

The slit eyes (curving down) and the slit mouth (curving up) suggest that this handstone face is shown as being dead. What is debatable is whether the pod face is a separate item held in the hand (which would make it an exception to all the other Bilbao ballplayer stelae) or is the face part of the glove/handstone, as is the case with all the other ballplayer stelae which have gloves. The evidence supports the conclusion that this is a face glove/handstone.

Binding can be noted on Stelae 2, 4, and 5, especially on 6, and most obviously on 8. The individual binding is of indeterminate width, though it could be a rather wide piece of cloth or leather.

The question on Stela 3 is whether the player is offering a human heart in the form of an anthropomorphic cacao pod, rephrased by Greene (1972:398) from the original idea of Parsons that it is solely an anthropomorphic cacao pod (P, p. 106) or simply a glove/handstone in the shape of a personalized generic pod, which is my interpretation based on the recognition that it may be coincidental which hand is upraised. If the players are supposed to offer a heart to the



deity then why do so many other players raise an empty hand? And why is only this one particular handstone a heart offering when all the other handstones are part of the hand? This pod is bound to the hand just as all the others, so is unlikely to be an offering at this particular moment, heart or otherwise. A heart rendered in pre-Columbian Mexican manner looks rather different than a human face. That this handstone mimics a Bilbao fruit is clear from the several fruits with human faces on Mon. 21. That this particular shape of pod is potentially cacao-related comes from El Baul Mon. 4, where the grisly skeletalized executioner holds an item of comparable shape, with blood like flow from it. Nearby is a potential victim whose heart has been tom out. Thus Parsons, and Greene, are correct in identifying the form as most likely cacao, which seemingly is indeed a potential pun on a human heart in Cotzumalhuapan imagery. But, on Stela 3 this object is not an actual heart or actual cacao pod, but a handstone, physically bound to the player's hand.

Footgear

Stela 3 is a clearcut example where one foot is bare and the other is shod with a special protector. That the back foot is bare is clear even from a single photograph. That the forward foot is shod is likewise clear. We have already commented with respect to the similar situation on Stela 1 where Parsons noted single-shod feet on those stelae with no raised border. Stelae with raised borders (numbers 2, 5, 6, and 8) have both feet shod. There is a sole, but as typical of Bilbao artistic conventions, it is frustrating to figure out what the actual sandal looked like in real life. The "playing foot" (and by this I mean the foot that takes the most abuse in scraping, since there is no evidence that the ball was kicked), has material and cross-ties visible but preservation is not quite good enough to notice specific details in a single lighting. It is best to compare the details with the padded athletic forward foot of Stela 6.

The Trophy Head on a Stand

It does indeed seem that the principal ballplayer is raising his decorated hand up to the trophy head as much as to the flaming deity further above. This head is definitely severed from a victim because the entire neck is attached, as on all five severed heads of Stela 1. Is Stela 3 the next stage in the post ballgame ceremony, first a parade of severed heads, then the installation of heads up on a special podium?

The face is restored as having raised bumps along the facial profile between the nose and the forehead. Such raised skin is possible with clever scarification techniques, such as practiced by the Maya at Jaina Island and elsewhere. In the Maya area such raised welts were in part to create the ideal of classical beauty, a single continuous line from nose to forehead, with no dip between the eyes. But we have no information that the Cotzumalhuapa people aspired to such a facial profile. Worse, we do not know how much of this profile is pre-Columbian and how much is restoration. Even Habel had trouble understanding the intended profile of this decapitated head.

The chin seems to be decorated with a tattoo. No age crease down the cheek is indicated. Widely spaced teeth are carefully rendered, a rare feature since most Cotzumalhuapan mouths are closed. The hair is in thick locks, but whether they are braided or in cornrows is not clear. The hair is decorated with beads.

Anthony Aveni has documented that crossed sticks could have served the pre-Columbian peoples as sighting devices for astronomical observations (1980: fig. 5). The crossed sticks on this Bilbao monument, however, seem to be a regular stand and not related to such an observatory



accessory (nor has Aveni or others proposed an astronomical interpretation for this instance of the crossed sticks).

The Glyphs

Thompson has presented the best study of the glyphs of Cotzumalhuapa (1948: fig. 62, g). He identifies the glyphs of Stela 3 as perhaps an ocelot, or jaguar, yet the triangular teeth and long flat lips are not what would be expected for any actual feline. If this face is nonetheless a calendrical feline (a comparable head in a Totonac calendar is classified as a jaguar by Edmonson (1988:255)) then it is an unnaturalistic one.

Since there are two glyphs it is unlikely the cartouches represent a game ball. It is the tradition in the rudimentary Cotzumalhuapa writing system to repeat the entire glyph rather than to have the number in bar-and-dots. Thus, elsewhere in Mixtec culture, for example, the number is written once, the associated glyph once; in the Cotzumalhuapa system numbers are not common and the associated glyph is repeated as many times as it should have been numbered. This system you can best see on Bilbao Monuments 10, 11, 12, and especially El Castillo Monument 1 (where curiously the bar-and-dot number 8 is present while elsewhere on the same monument the hieroglyphs are repeated with no numerals).

On Rio Blanco mold-impressed ballgame scenes a glyph-like animal head seemingly may represent a game ball (von Winning 1971: fig. 1, 2a).

The Deity of the Upper Register







Bilbao Stela 3

The conceptualization of the sun as a flaming disk is somewhat western (in other words, ethnocentric) yet this Bilbao disk could possibly be a sign for the sun. Nonetheless it would be best for scholars to produce better evidence for this assertion, possibly from Nahua or Veracruz data. The same flaming disk is on the body of "Sun Vultures" of Bilbao Monuments 16 and 17 (Habel 1878: pl. VI and VII; P, pl. 42, d and e). The context on Stela 3 is also on the chest of a feathered creature, albeit a decidedly anthropomorphic composite. It is hard to tell whether his clawed fingers on Stela 3 are supposed to represent feline claws or raptor claws. Parsons points out that the position of the arms is reptilian. Parsons correctly notes that the disk is seemingly attached by a rope which stretches between the deity's wrists.

This deity, in deep rounded relief, issues from the open maul of a reptilian monster. There is no way this could be a jaguar, the mouth is not wide enough. Parsons correctly labels this a celestial serpent. A comparable maul is seen at Bilbao on Stela 7 and El Castillo Monument 1 (P, pl. 59, a), as well as in Aztec art.

The deity's hair is not visible and is one of the few Bilbao celestial manifestations not to include entangled serpents as a headdress. Instead of the usual snake hair or braids a batch of "flames" stick out. Here the head is covered by an unusual three-leafed form with woven frond material in the middle. A headdress shape this unusual should be easy enough to notice if it exists elsewhere, but no one has yet noticed a comparative example. The weave of the fronds is clearly presented. The three-leaf design appears to be braided or otherwise similarly arranged in thick but somewhat flat (rather than entirely round) form.

On both sides of the monster maul is a decorative pattern of unknown meaning which fills available space to the edge of the stela. On El Baul Monument 4 the same mass of dagger-



Abb. 27. Die Erdkröte. Steinbild von *Tepezintla*
im Kanton *Tuxpam*.



Abb. 28. Steinfigur
von *Tuxpam*.

like flames look like water. This jagged motif is similar to what we have elsewhere identified as "flames" except these are massed rather than individual and lack a central line.

The deity wears simple bracelets of tubular beads decorated every third bead with a round adornment, both top and bottom. The necklace is plain beads each with a giant tear-shaped pendant. The ears have simple disk earrings with a central plug. Thick hair is present but is neither long nor in snake arrangement.

The claws are a challenge to identify. The thumb appears to be opposable, which I am not sure is a trait of a bird. The size of the claws could be of a jaguar, but the arrangement of the hand is not that of a jaguar paw. The celestial evocation of the overall image naturally suggests that these are raptor talons, most likely of a harpy eagle. These Bilbao claws should be compared with the sole other clawed composite creature directly associated with a ballgame scene, namely the sacrificial victim on Codex Borgia page 40. Bilbao Monuments 16 and 17 picture fully avian birds, as opposed to the composite bird-human here.

Parsons suggests the deity on Stela 3 is the same as of El Castillo Monument 1 (p. 106 and pl. 59, a). The published photograph does not provide enough detail to see if that deity has claws. He certainly has no wings. The headdress is woven but the outline is a different size and shape than Stela 3. The photograph in Thompson is no better. No rubbing has been published. Otherwise the attribution by Parsons should be pursued--by taking detailed close-up photographs to document the comparison. In iconography, an attribution without adequate illustration is hard to accept because the grounds are not available for cross checking. A project similar to that of Ian Graham for Maya sculpture is needed for Cotzumalhuapa sculpture.

Summary and Conclusions

Bilbao Stela 3

The narrative style of this complex interaction scene links the style to Stela 1, though the levitating deity allies it to Stelae 2 through 8 (albeit minus any meandering vines). Along with Stela 7, the locus of the upper deity is pictured more clearly-descending from the gaping jaws of a mythical reptile. There is enough visual imagery on this monument alone to provide for an entire dissertation. As soon as complete drawings of all Cotzumalhuapa sculptures are available and as soon as all the rest of the sculpture from Guatemala's piedmont and adjacent highlands are photographed professionally such a dissertation will certainly result in an improved awareness of origins and relationships of the major features of this remarkable monument.

Chapter 4

Stela 4

BALLPLAYER ADORATION

OF A DEITY DESCENDING FROM A CELESTIAL FORM

State

The condition varies from average to good. The left top of the yoke has been restored. A complete horizontal break runs all the way across the stela just above the player's head. A major chunk is gone from the left middle, but the missing details are present on Habel's 19th century drawing, which was made before the monuments were chiseled into segments to ease their transportation to Germany.

Composition

Along with Stela 2, Stela 4 places the player striding towards the left. As with Stelae 1 and 3 there is no rectangular frame. Also shared in this set of monuments is the relatively ample space free from entangled vine filler decoration. The frontal deity is quite prominent and high up on the monument, though seemingly part of the top of the stelae is missing. The designs around the outstretched hands of the descending deity are unusual and interesting.

NO. 4.



As with Stelae 1 and 3 this monument has no border. Likewise, the players on all these borderless stelae have footwear (superior pad) covering only their left foot.

Acceptability of the Line Drawing

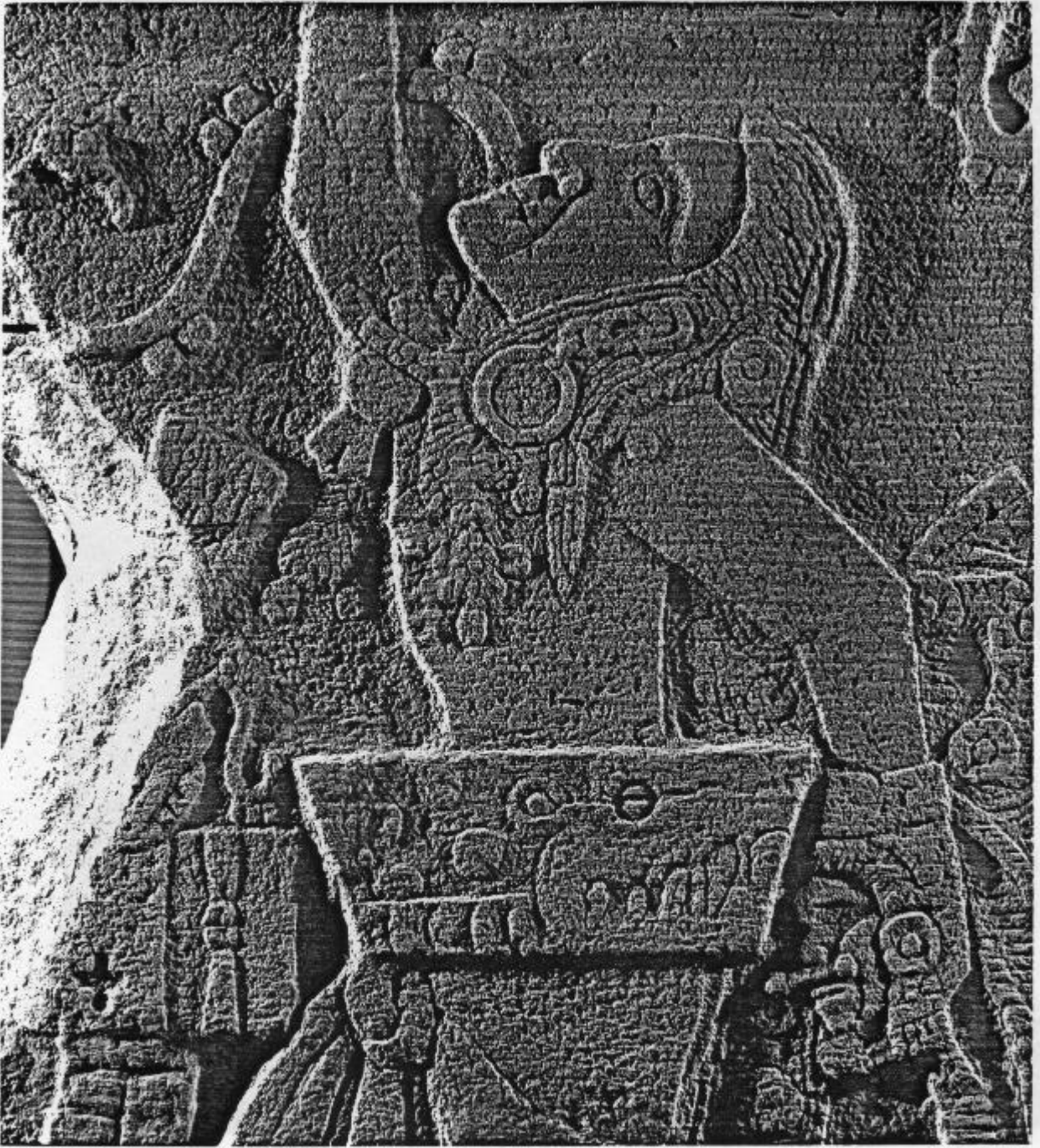
Habel's artist had an especially difficult time rendering the position and shape of serpent fangs adequately. Details do not stand out in Habel's manner of showing everything in grays. But the sketch may help because a large chunk of Stela 4 is missing, so this drawing may be the only existent record of that section. Habel was unable to understand the decorations on the left of the yoke-though I cannot do much better. Either the right side of the stelae was trimmed down three to five centimeters or else Habel's drawing shows too much space at the right, behind the back mass of the ballplayer.

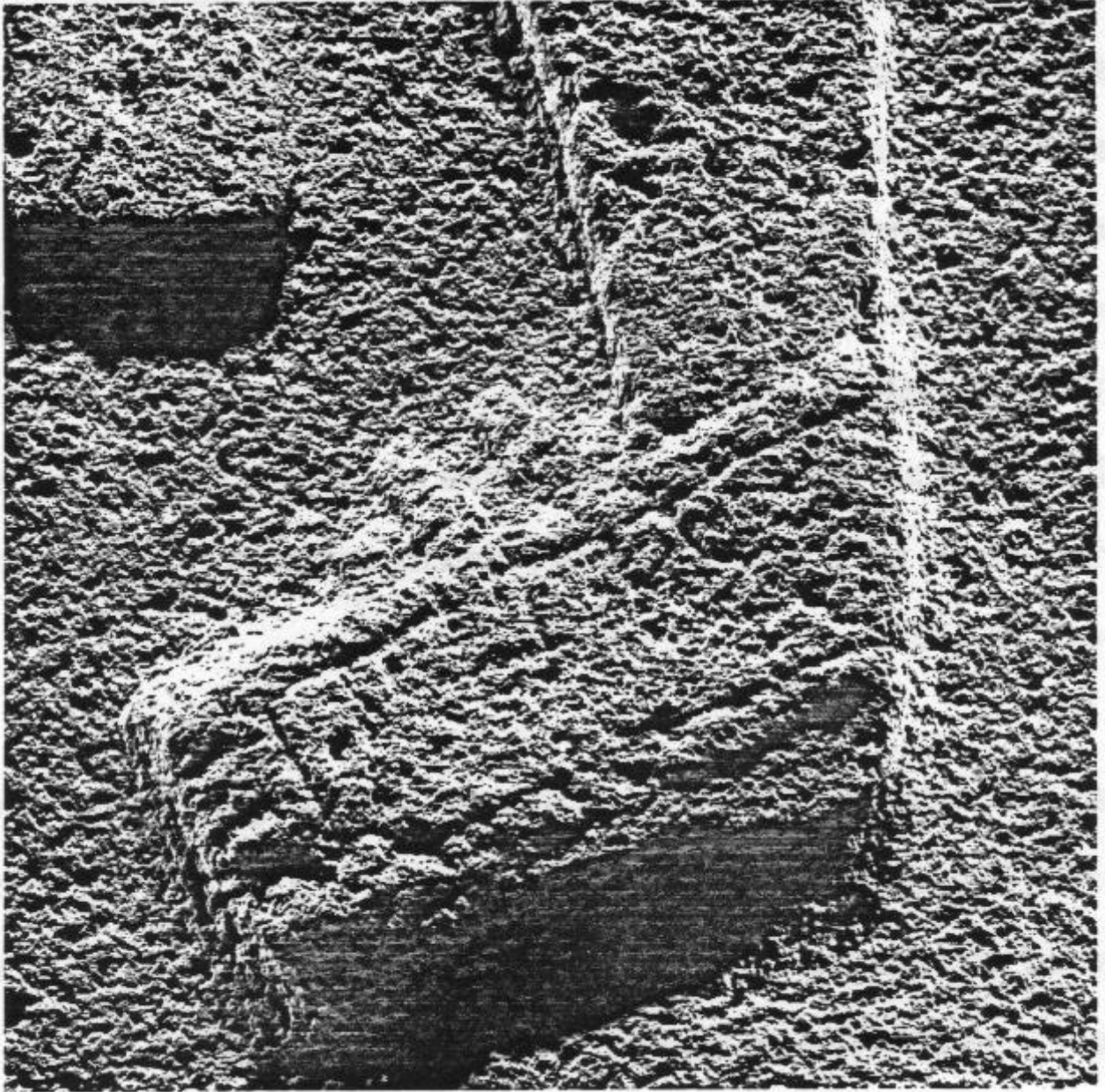
The Yoke

As just mentioned, unexplained are the several disks or bumps decorating the body of the yoke. Their pattern is not what one would expect for a jaguar. Most of the other Bilbao yokes have diagonal depression patterns that occupy all the yoke other than the reptilian face. This yoke has ventral scales just as the yoke of Stelae 3 and 8 but the creature at the end is different. It occupies half the yoke and the fangs are in a continuous row, instead of having molars separating them. The possible ear or end curl of the supraorbital plate is not in a standard Teotihuacan-derived manner. Overall this yoke decoration is rather weak, sloppy, and a challenge to identify icono-cosmologically zoologically.

Face Glove/Handstone







Fortunately, this part of the monument is in good condition. As with Stela 4 this is one of the few ballgame gloves which is not held up to the sky deity as on Stelae 3, 6, and 8. This shows that the overall accessory ought indeed to be classified as a glove, though the main face could well indeed be of stone, bound and wrapped in order to stay on during active play. The true handstones, which are physically (visibly) carried in the hand as on Chichen Itza, are a parade accessory. It is unlikely (though not impossible) that people played wearing a yoke together with palma and carrying a long stone in the hand. The palma especially seems to be an item worn principally during the ceremony specifically associated with decapitation of the player.¹⁹ The Bilbao individuals (and their Chichen Itza counterparts in Yucatan) are not playing the game either, they are parading in single frames of a longer movie. Only at Copan, on the central marker, do we see a handstone in use, directly on the ball. That unusually attired Maya player wears an hacha and yoke as well.

The Bilbao handstone face has a single horizontal bar through the nose. The forehead appears bulbous but is not well lit in most photographic lighting angles. The cheek area is prominently graced with age creases. This is clearly a sculpted stone and not an actual face. The earring is comparable to that on the face in the headdress of Stela 3.

The Back Decoration

19. The only Mesoamerican scene that I know of with a player actually in movement with a palma is Edzna Stela 6 (Hellmuth 1995d). But this monument is eroded and it is unclear whether this Haya athlete has an hacha, or a palma, or both, or an enigmatic intermediate form. He definitely wears a yoke and is clearly in active movement, seemingly against a ball, possibly a skull ball. Since it is not absolutely certain that Edzna Stela 6 includes a palma, the statistic still holds that no Mesoamerican personage who clearly wears a palma is pictured in active athletic movement while wearing this object. The statistics are different for hachas: the Chicago Site Q panel portrays a Maya ruler in play wearing both a yoke and an hacha. The middle Copan ballcourt marker shows another elite personage wearing an hacha and yoke while in the down-on-one-knee position. The Itzan (Petén) ballplayer with an hacha is parading (Hellmuth 1987b: fig. 63; 1995b).



Bilbao Stela 4

Although the headdress trailer and back decoration on this monument have all the basic parts of other Bilbao ballplayer parade outfits, this particular outfit is rather sparse when compared with the voluminous masses on other monuments which go all the way to the ground.

This player has the sickle-shaped feather, as on most of the stelae and even Mon. 9 and Palo Verde Stela 3 but here it does not stand out and is not really noticeable unless caught by certain angle of cross-lighting. As on other stelae the back mass includes a thick tail with a curled ball at the end, but here it is nowhere near as long as on other players.

The bloom-like circle in the back mass just adjacent to the back of the player's lower arm shows that this is continuous from his long hair, and is thus part of his "headdress" rather than a backrack. Habel's drawing makes the rest of the mass look like woven frond material but photographs do not reveal such a texture.

Headdress, Jewelry and Miscellaneous

The hair is arranged with several strands in front of the earring and a second typically Cotzumalhuapa batch of hair on the back side of the earring. The earring itself is the plain kind worn by all the other Bilbao ballplayers. The preservation is just good enough so that some of the drilled holes seem to stand out from the pockmarks of the natural stone.

The player has no headdress as such. There is nothing on his head but hair. A doughnut-like decoration behind the ear is on top of one of the trailers that is found on many of the other ballplayers. A chevroned hair mass goes over the shoulder but it is difficult to see where else it goes. At least one doughnut-decorated streamer trails down the back. It either splits into two or becomes wider on the right side of the arm.



There is complex decoration across his upper chest with additional pendant decorations. It will require careful angles of illumination to bring all the details out.

The Stand with Severed Head

The three stelae with no border all feature an offering of a severed human head. And all three of these particular ballplayers wear a sandal only on one foot. Otherwise, the outfits of the players do not look all that much different from those of the other Bilbao ballplayer stelae.

Most of the severed head got broken off, probably when Berendt was trimming down the monuments to transportable sized chunks. We have only Habel's 19th century drawing as a record for the missing details. The severed head utters a speech scroll, though of pathetic length when compared with that spoken by the victorious player. The neck stump does not exhibit the hack marks as on the other decapitated heads on Bilbao and El Baul monuments. It is unclear what is intended by the two parallel bars on the neck area, seen in Habel's drawing. The one remaining seems too low and at the wrong angle for an earring pendant.

The Habel drawing shows the stand as one piece with the cross, but cross-lighting reveals that the cross is on a separate feature, either a cloth that goes under the head across to hang over the edge, or a center piece of the horizontal object forming the plane on which the head rests. Since so few sacrificed display stands are known there is not much comparative data, none for the Maya, none recognized for Teotihuacan, and no one has yet searched the codices or the extensive corpus of Veracruz art for a potential model.

The three items sticking up in the Habel drawing are undoubtedly items of bark paper or stiffened cloth.

The Frontal Deity

The Habel drawing shows a practically completely raised circular disk enclosing the deity apparition. Actually, the drawing documents that it is not a disk but a doughnut shaped frame that is open at the top, a kind of open tube, an almost crescent moon-like design rather than a solar disk. The entire area is decorated by vines which are arranged in a bilaterally symmetrical arrangement, the most rigidly bilateral pattern of the whole Bilbao ballplayer series.

The frontal deity has the same oval face with soft features as do all the other faces. Like them it is "ageless" as opposed to the definitely aged face on the seated deity of Monument 21. These frontal deities are sexless but their soft features may intend to connote a female. In Mixtec codices it is mainly (but not exclusively) females who have intertwined snakes in their headdresses.

The headdress has snakes as do other Bilbao sky characters. But these specific Stela 4 headdress snakes include details not noticed at first on others. The tails end in wide, almost flower-like forms, presumably to indicate the rattles of a rattlesnake? The faces of these particular snakes have a mass of parallel fangs, somewhat similar to snakes as rendered during the later Aztec period. This is not to suggest a Post Classic date for Cotzumalhuapa art though I do favor a date a century or so later than that proposed by Parsons. Teotihuacan art itself lasted well into the Guatemalan Late Classic. This kind of snake is not what is expected for Teotihuacan or the Middle Classic in any event. They should be compared and contrasted with some Mixtec snake heads as well.





The Offering in the Hands of the Frontal Deity

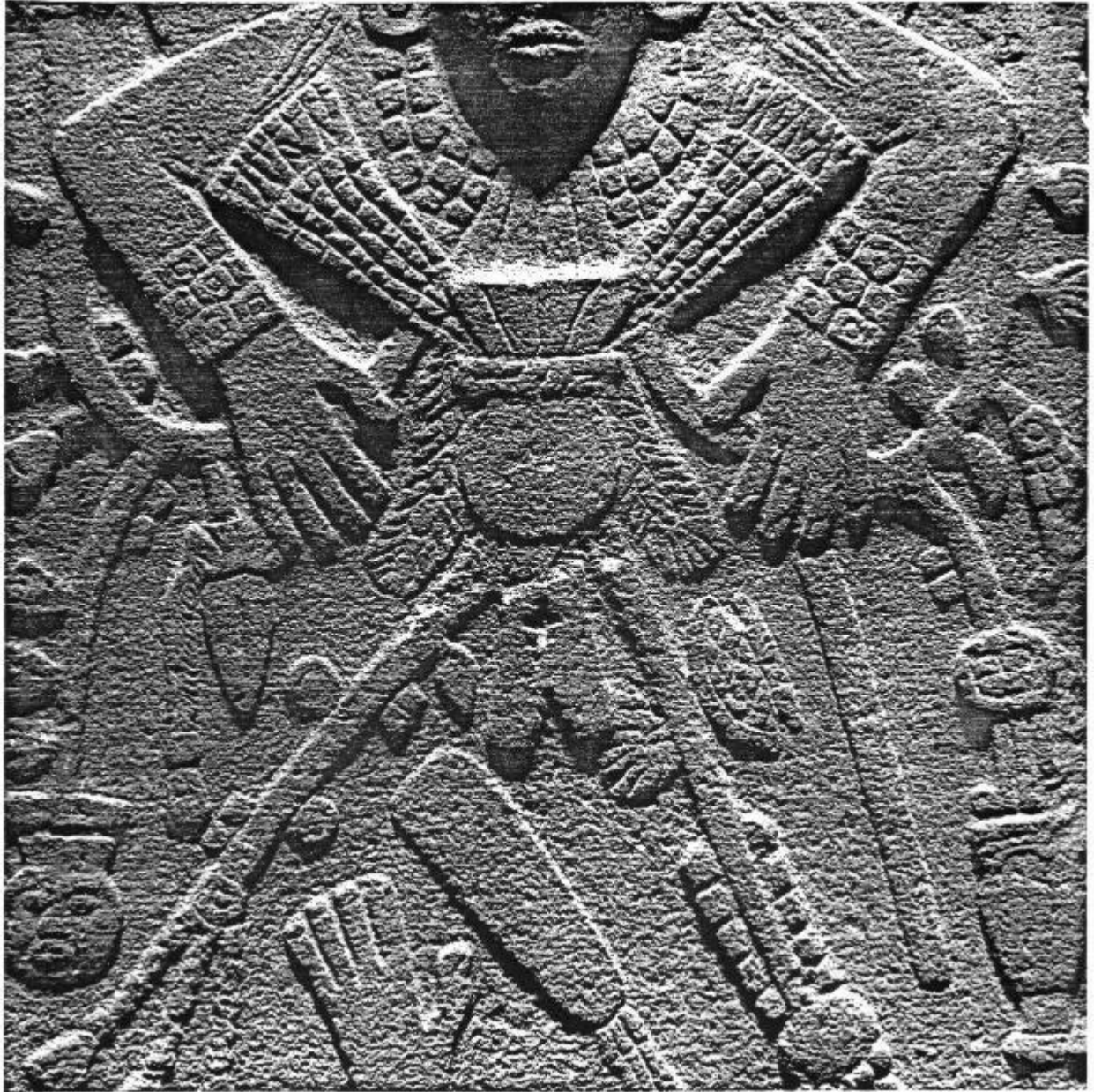
Between the widely outstretched hands of the deity is a small round disk, but with no flames or feathers. Two thick straight vines stream out of or from under this pouch. Then a textile-like form hangs down also from under or behind the disk, just as on Stela 6. An identical form hangs from under the disembodied head in front of the Stela 4 ballplayer (the fragment that is now missing but pictured in Habel's drawing). Is this round disk the game ball? If so then the larger disk of Stela 1 is truly a hieroglyph, not a ball. If the deity-disk is a game ball, then what about the smaller "ball" held in the claws of the two sun vultures on Monuments 16 and 17. The mystery deepens. We have no idea what size the Bilbao game ball should be. The ball of nearby but earlier Tiquisate games was as large as the Maya ball (Hellmuth 1975b:pl. 11; 1987b: fig. 67, 77, 80, 85, 91, 108). Since the ball has a knotted tie across the top perhaps it is a pouch, not a sphere. The two sets of woven material crossing behind the pouch are probably related to it, though their meaning is totally unknown.

On either side of the disk is a form that looks like some of the hair on Bilbao ballplayer sacrifices, or the puffy kneepad of Stela 3.

The item which hangs down from the small disk between the deity's hands may be a textile strip. A comparable textile strip (though naturally in a different style since it is in a different culture) is on an El Tajin ballplayer scene of the South Ball Court, Panel 1 (Kampen 1972: fig. 20). Sticking out diagonally from either side of the sack in the middle are two segmented items. Are these the same as the feather mass on one side of the sky deity of Stela 6?

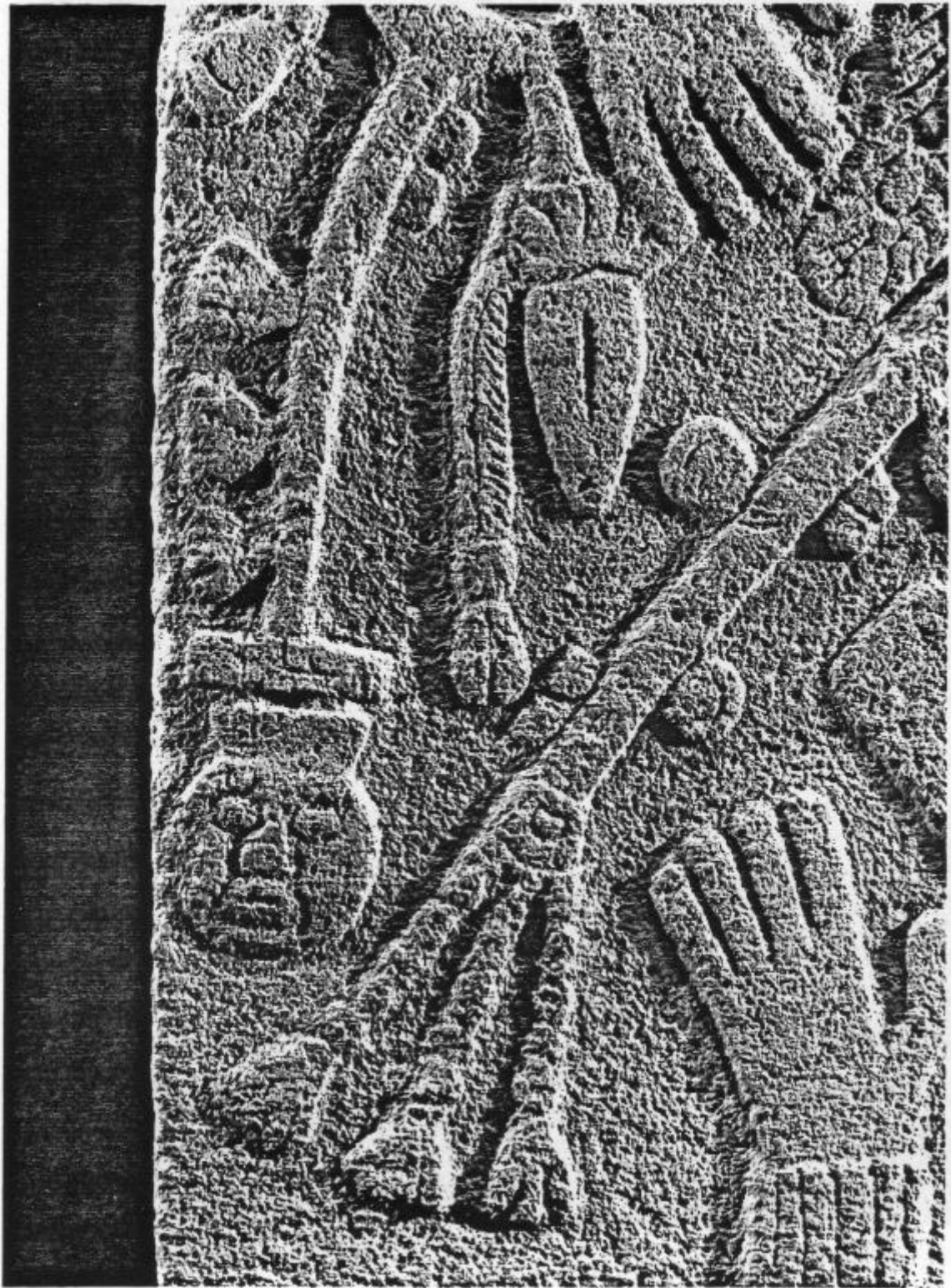
The Vines



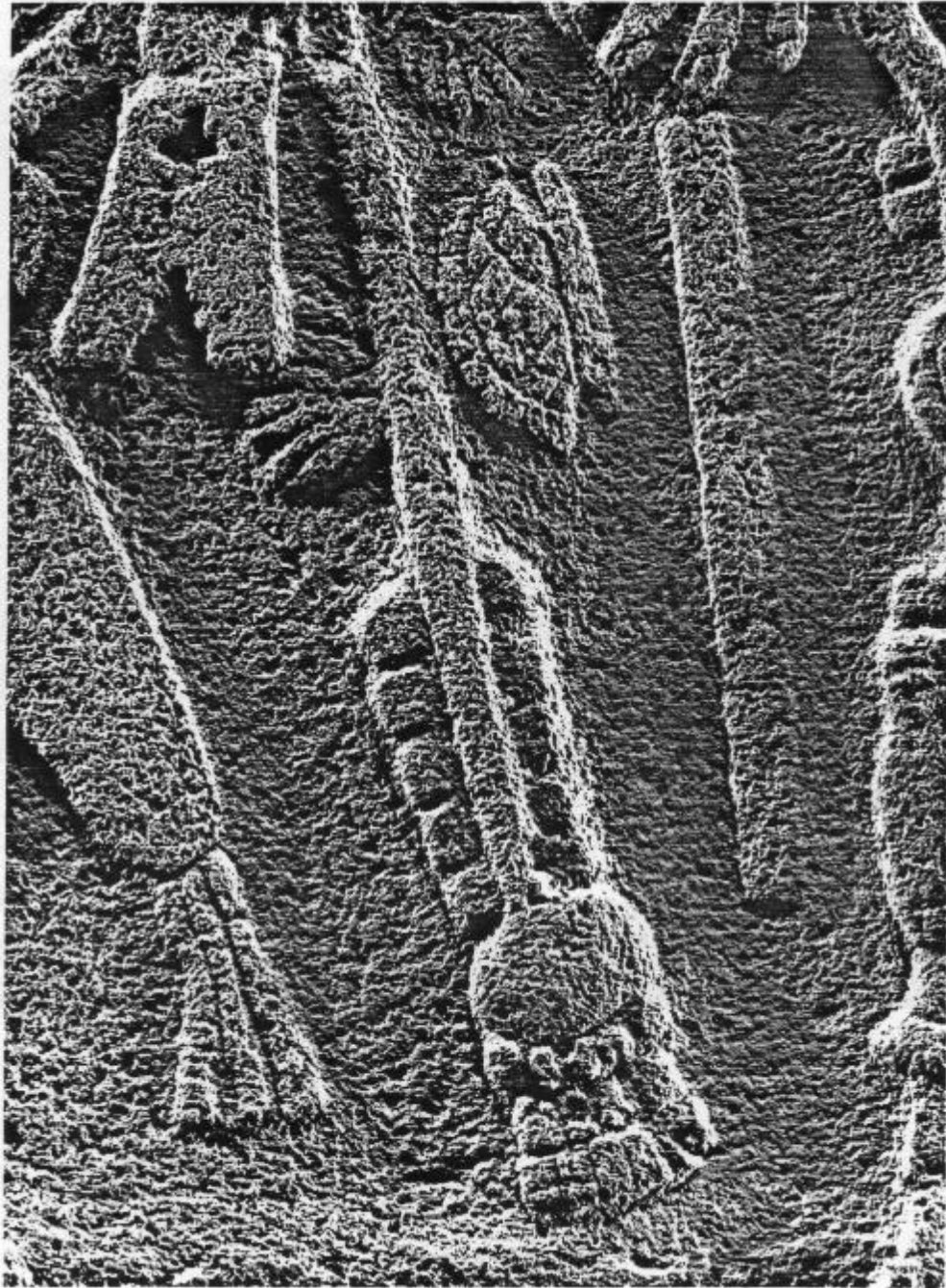


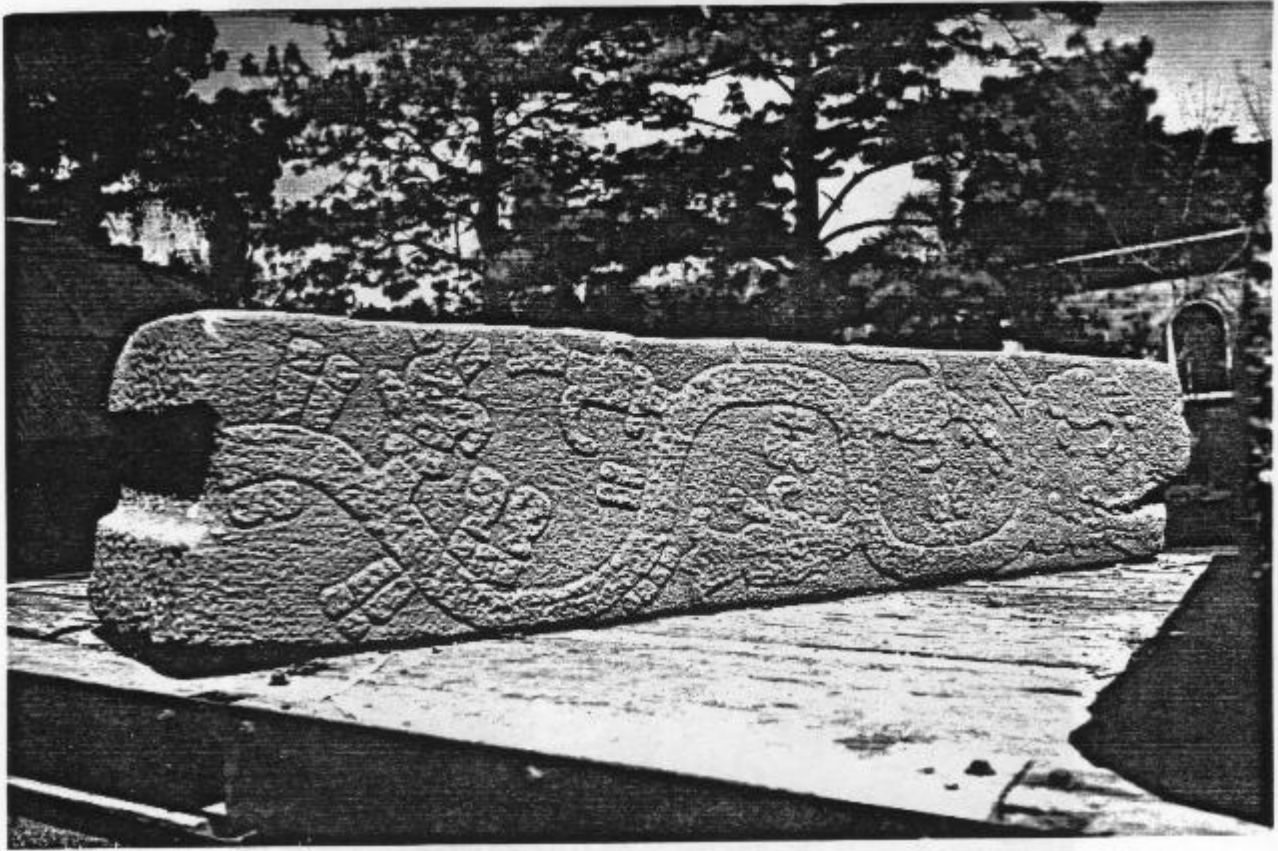












Bilbao Stela 4

This composition includes lots of vines but less fruit. What "fruit" there is, is long and unusual. The focus of this entire stela composition is held in the open hands of the frontal deity. I view this stela as potentially the key to the entire Bilbao series of post-sacrifice vine-filled offering scenes.

The vines include the same double tabs as do speech scrolls. These vines also are arranged in a comparable manner as speech scrolls, albeit longer.

One flower or fruit (under the deity's right, viewer's left hand) is somewhat similar to what I would expect of a banana plant, but the banana is not considered a pre-Columbian plant (it was evidently introduced by the Spaniards). Lower to the left is an anthropomorphic fruit with a complete frontal face. This fruit is jug-shaped and of an unknown species. An empty turtle carapace and a decoration in quincunx shape may be tabulated, among others.

Summary and Conclusions

Stela 4 has no raised borders. The athlete wears hardly any backrack at all. The handstone is down, and we see its "outside" whereas on other stelae we see the "other side" where the binding is visible. This awareness should help illustrators when they do three-dimensional recreation drawings.

The hovering deity bestows all kinds of objects from her meandering vines. It would be helpful to know where these vines start from--her neck? At Chichen Itza it is the middle of the neck of the sacrificed player.

Stela 5,

A BALLPLAYER ASSOCIATED WITH A SPEARED PUMA

Composition

A striding ballplayer cocks his head all the way back so that he looks directly up to a deity displaying itself above. The deity extends its arm straight down which does not allow room for the player to raise his arm. This is the only monument of the series of eight where the ballplayer does not raise his arm all the way up (on Stela 1 the player is occupying both hands having just severed the head of another player; there is no sky deity to render arm homage to in any event; Stela 7's ballplayer is destroyed but the few millimeters which remain suggest he also had his hand raised up to the sky). Behind the ballplayer is a puma who has just been killed with a spear.

Stela 5 has a raised border, as do Stelae 4, 6, 7, and 8.

Condition

The entire surface is eroded, especially the top half and right middle. A wide break split the monument just above the head of the ballplayer; another break went down across his face and shoulder. The yoke face is poorly preserved and handstone is barely visible. The bottom portion is in average condition.

Problems with the Published Drawing

The bottom 15% is acceptable. Considering how faint most of the outline is, the 19th century artist can perhaps be forgiven.

Previous Discussion

Due to the poor preservation between the ballplayer's face and the deity, Monument 5 was not included in the published rubbings of Greene. Pertinent remarks by Parsons are cited in my following analysis where appropriate.

The Man's Headdress and Accessories

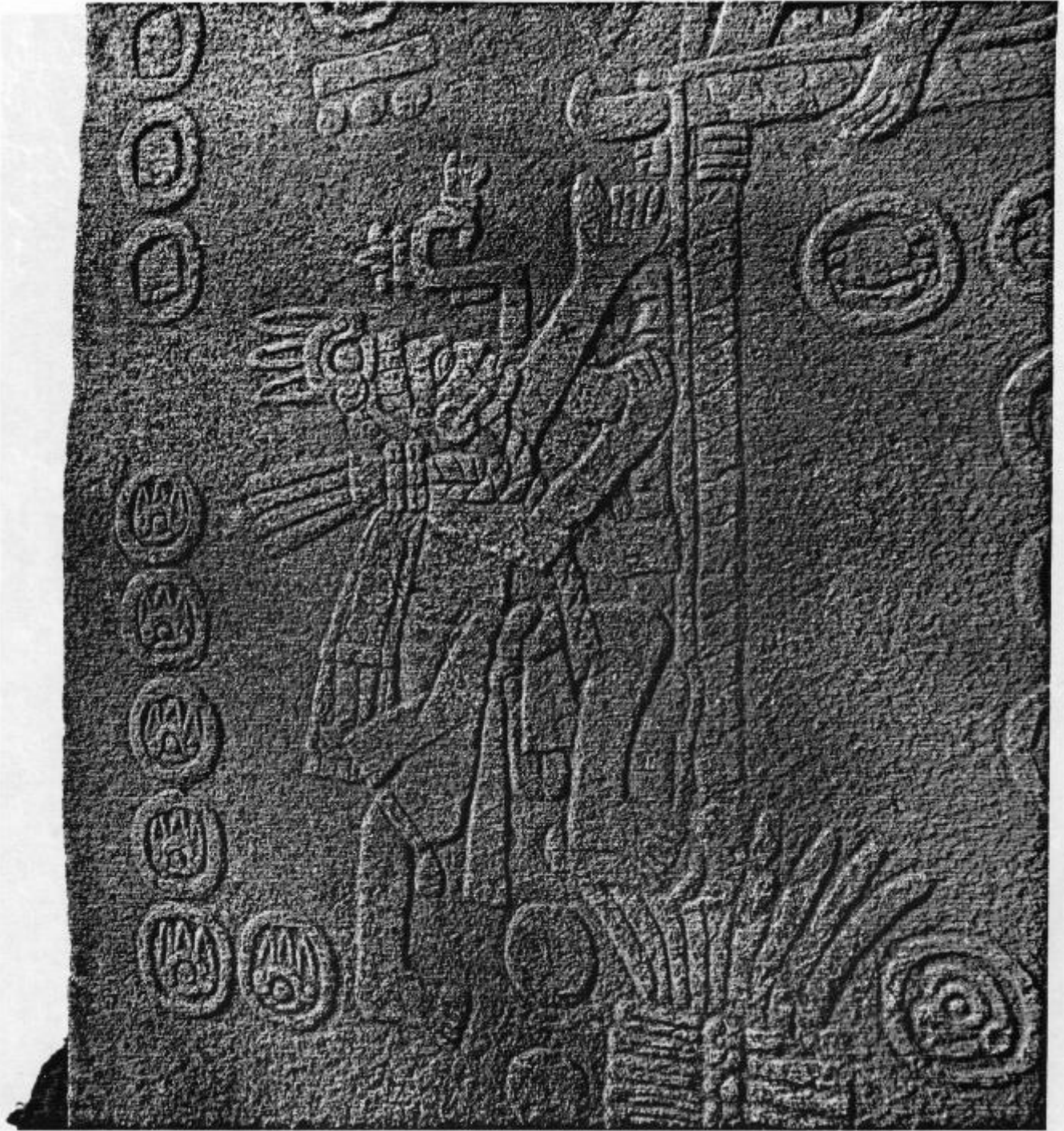
The headdress is a triple-triangle, the same design as found sprouting on the vine. I surmise that the deity has a larger version of the same headdress only with the oval medallion below shown rather subtly (its head replacing the medallion to some degree). A triple-triangle is found as a "fruit" on the speech-scroll vine as well as an independent glyph on El Castillo Monument 1.²⁰ On El Baul Mon. 27 all the little seated figures have a triple-triangle crown but no curl-framed oval underneath. A triple-triangle is also formed by some eccentric flints, including a set found in the Cotzumalhuapa area (Thompson 1948).

A plain disk earring has a raised frame but is otherwise poorly preserved. The necklace is a simple strand of round beads.

20. This immense and perfectly preserved monument is no longer at the site but is instead safely protected inside the headquarters of the Panteleon corporation in Zone 10, Guatemala City.







Bilbao Stela 5

Spilling out the top of the headdress are four short undulating flames. I call them that because they have the same center line and the same wavy form as the flames of the gods on Stelae 3 and 6, and standing out from the headdress of the god(dess) seated on Monument 21. The same flames issue from the sun disks of the giant birds on Monuments 16 and 17.

Behind the back arm of the player is material whose shape and details will have to be obtained through comparison with other ballplayers in the series because poor preservation and the obstruction of the arm render interpretation difficult.

Probably continuing from the headdress (as opposed to issuing from a back mass) is a tapering form decorated down both sides with diagonal ties and in the middle by a doughnut. Past two bars or bow tie knots the form changes into a sickle-shaped plume. This is the same enigmatic item of apparel as on Palo Verde Stela 3, Bilbao Stelae 3, 4, and 6. Nothing like this has yet been noticed in the clothing of any other Mesoamerican characters in the same context. It is features such as this that make the art of Cotzumalhuapa so distinctive.

The Feline

While the jaguar is well known in Mexico and Central America many foreigners believe that the puma (mountain lion, cougar, all the same creature, just different designations) lives mainly in the (North) American southwest. In fact the puma is present throughout Mesoamerica including the Peten and was evidently in pre-Columbian times present in the tropical forests of Escuintla. As this is piedmont topography there certainly were habitats available to the puma since the forest varies from tropical rain forest to pine forest within less than 50 kilometers. Since no spots whatsoever are on this Stela 5 feline it cannot be a jaguar. There





is no zoological or iconographical reason why these spot-less felines should not be more often recognized as a puma. Such Mesoamerican animal depictions are usually too large for a bobcat.

This puma has been killed with a spear, probably propelled with an atlatl (spear thrower). The front end of the spear is visible having penetrated the wound on the flank. The butt end is not visible. Most Teotihuacan atlatl darts would have some kind of end in order to balance or decorate it (Benin et al. 1988: fig. VI.12, pl. 17, 18). The Maya atlatl "dart" was at least one meter long and had no consistent decorations marking the end. As far as we know the bow and arrow had not reached Guatemala during the Classic period, a remarkable absence considering how widespread this weapon was elsewhere in the Americas. The "arrow heads" of the Maya area are either from spears or are atlatl darts--not arrows shot from a bow, or, if truly arrowheads, must be Post Classic in date.

Behind the player on Stela 6 is a bird in a corresponding position to the puma here. In this sense both Stelae 5 and 6 form a pair with imagery related to hunting. Although this animal and bird have been visible since the 19th century, the realization that they were specifically a game animal and a game bird did not register until it was recognized that one aspect of a Maya ballgame was related to hunting (Hellmuth 1987b:449, figs. 103, 104, 107, 108b, 109, 110; 1991).

The Ballgame Attire

The yoke has diagonal indentations, but thinner than on any other Bilbao yoke. The head decorating the back end of the yoke is not a skull and not a reptile, but probably a bird. This bird has a fat beak, eyebrow scroll, and seemingly a fleshy protuberance sticking out of the



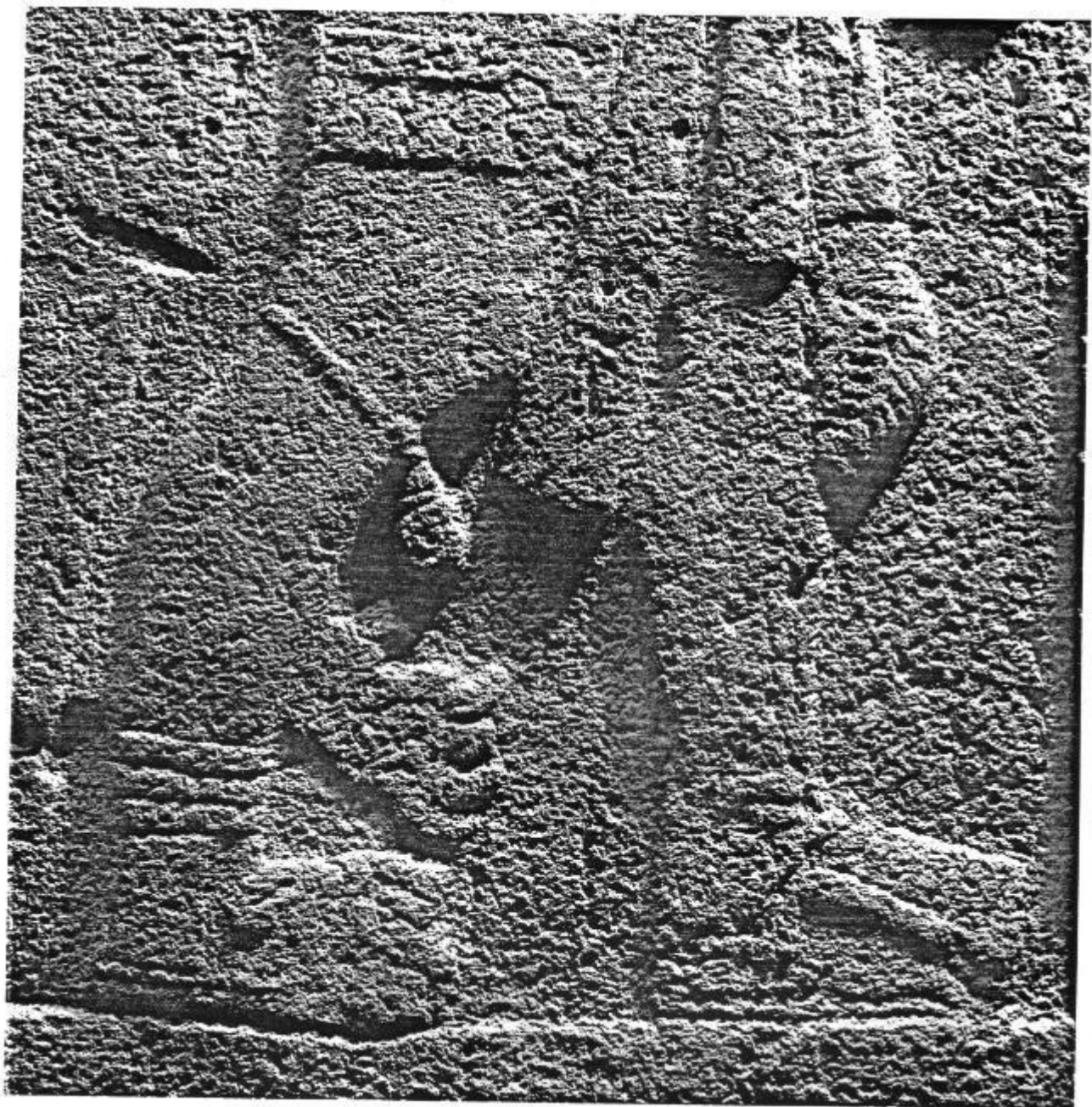
front of the face, which is a feature of turkeys and vultures. In this context a vulture is more likely. In some lighting angles it looks like an Ehecatl (the Aztec wind god, also common in Mixtec codices), but such an image is not yet known from the inventory of Cotzumalhuapa characters. This back end of the yoke is at a prominent angle; the front is straight, which makes it a different shape than the others at Bilbao.

The ballgame handstone is so eroded that you can only see that it is an animal face (not a reptile) and that it is angled out from the hand, just like the handstones that are raised up in the outstretched arms on Stelae 6 and 8.

There is no actual knee "pad" on most of the Bilbao players. The back leg has a special cord holding a bead-like decoration which can hardly provide any protection whatsoever. It is the forward leg, on the same side of the body as the glove/handstone, which needs the padding—but evidently this area did not get protected, as this is the side that exhibits the severe swelling and battered surface. Since this is a parade, perhaps the athlete has removed the pad to show the wounds he has suffered in honor of the gods? I mention this only as a possibility. Since by far the majority of Mesoamerican ballplayers have one knee still clearly padded it is statistically unlikely that the Bilbao players would not have a pad as well, when they were actually playing. The stelae picture the athletes in a post-game ceremony.

The shorts have a hem up the side of the thigh showing that the protective shorts are open in the middle. This hem is attractively adorned with a zig-zag decoration; the narrower band has almost a chevron pattern. This double hem pattern is identical to that on Stelae 3 and 8 and suggests that it is two decorations on a single hem. Stela 4 has a "single" hem but that is due to breakage and incomplete restoration. The 19th century drawing by Habel shows Stela 2's hem area as damaged and worn away. Despite the poor preservation careful cross lighting





brings out such detail. The middle, namely the most tender part of a male anatomy, is "covered" by the cloth strips associated with the fat knot of the loincloth wrapping, a kind of belt.

Ballplayer Sandal

It is often stated that only one foot of certain ballplayers is shod, such as at Chichen Itza, but in fact on Bilbao Stelae 5, 6 and 7 both feet are shod--not necessarily identically Shod--but both with some form of footgear. It was precisely to clarify such features that special close-up photography was required. Despite the many times that these monuments have been published there has built up enough erroneous interpretations that the best way to clear the air was to present the raw material, in photographs large enough and clear enough so that the details can be studied comfortably.

The sandal on the back foot (wearer's right) is the same as on the back foot of Stela 8. There are three bands around the leg and a vertical strip down the side. A bow tie is on top of the foot. The detail is not well enough preserved to see if a string goes between any of the ties, as must happen to hold the sandal on.

The sandal on the forward, playing foot is likewise comparable to that worn on Stela 8, with two bands around the leg, something down the side (surface is eroded), and the standard banded pad all the way down the top of the foot. This particular one has perpendicular banding. There are soles on both sandals.

The Undulating Form

Together with Stelae 2, 3, 6, and 8, Stela 5 includes an undulating form which mysteriously issues from behind the yoke. On this particular monument, since the stone is so narrow, the sculptor did not have enough space to develop this wavy motif very well. You would hardly notice it unless you looked for it knowing its position based on comparison with the other ballplayer stelae-the same place as on Stela 8. On Stela 6 this area is generally in shadow, hence not noticeable in photographs. There is no rubbing of Stela 6 available to study. It is the rubbing of Stela 8 which makes the enigmatic undulating form stand out so clearly.

The Vines

As on Stelae 2, 6, and to a lesser degree Stela 8, Stela 5 has vines meandering through the scene both below and above the frontal deity. Portions of the vines between the ballplayer and the deity were destroyed with the wide break across this section of the monument but several important motifs can be salvaged. An upside down talud-tablero may be compared to the same motif on Stela 6, approximately in the same part of the scene. The details suggest an item of jewelry (a nose/mouth plaque, for example) more than an actual building facade. The round item next to the talud-tablero is an earring.

Above the talud-tablero is the same feature as in the headdress of the ballplayer, Parsons labels it a Cotzumalhuapa reptile eye glyph (p. 107). The same triple-triangle motif is dominant on El Castillo Monument 1, El Baul Monument 33 as a hieroglyph, as well as on Monuments 10 and 11. Of these, Monument 10 pictures a ballgame. Von Winning has dedicated an entire monograph-depth article to the Reptile Eye glyph (1961). Subsequently he produced two whole volumes on the iconography of Teotihuacan, based on over half a century of working on the signs and symbols of this imperial style (1987). In his chapter on the Reptile



Eye glyph von Winning cites all known examples of the Reptile Eye glyph outside of Teotihuacan, such as at Xochicalco, etc. He does not include Cotzumalhuapa. I cannot speak for other Teotihuacan art specialists but the Cotzumalhuapa glyph lacks several diagnostic features of a Teotihuacan Reptile Eye glyph, and is associated with the triple triangle, an association not present at Teotihuacan. It would be best to offer a term that does not imply a connection with Teotihuacan and especially not to its Reptile Eye glyph. A neutral designation is often best in such a case, and I propose "triple-triangle."

Many eccentric flints, including ones found at El Baul (about 5 km from Bilbao) (Thompson 1948: fig. 25c, h), are in a comparable shape as this triple-triangle design. An executioner on Tikal Altar 5 brandishes a flint of this general shape, as do executioners on the lintel of Tikal Temple III. Both of these scenes are related to a specific jaguar sacrifice associated with a thin staff (Hellmuth 1987d: fig. 61, 62, 100-102). This association is not present at Bilbao and it is premature to label the triple-triangle an eccentric flint, but it is worth pointing out the potential similarity. Whatever this motif was it was demonstrably of supreme importance to the people of Cotzumalhuapa.

The lower part of the sign has a bilaterally symmetrical semi-frame around an oval form. A comparable frame serves as a deity "moustache" at Teotihuacan (von Winning 1987) and as a frame for an important motif in Teotihuacan art, and on the Teotihuacan inspired ballcourt marker of Tikal (Fialko 1987).

Much of the vine is above the frontal sky deity. The vine gets somewhat confused with the "oxen horns" motif which scrolls across the headdress area on either side of the sky deity. And the hair-headdress snakes of the sky deity, when eroded, look like speech-scroll vines as

well. Good line drawings are needed to sort all this out, with one drawing dedicated to isolating the vines (on each of the monuments so that they would be easier to draw).

On the triple triangles there are plenty of vine "fruits" but they are poorly preserved. Some are the beaded jewels seen elsewhere. Several are actually fruit-like though it is not easy to identify their species. On the top right the double form may be an open seashell as on the vine of Stela 6. All of these vines and fruit need to be carefully drawn so that an inventory of fruits can be initiated.

The Frontal Deity

This supernatural has simple round disk earrings, just as all the ballplayers. In this instance there is no tassel on the earring. The necklace is the thickness and texture of a rope. I see no snake imagery in this rope. One end is blunt, the other end seems to terminate in a batch of plumes in front of the deity's left shoulder. This batch of plumes needs to be further studied, to find out where else it occurs within the art of Cotzumalhuapa as well as its history elsewhere beforehand.

The face is poorly preserved so that it is hard to tell whether the nose jewelry is a single horizontal bead or two side beads, since on each side of the face they stick out at a slight angle. Although the eyes are slightly sunken within the face (as though under a mask) the lips stick out and look less likely to be a mask.

The hair hangs down on both shoulders in a neat triangular mass, rounded at the end. This is the same manner as the hair of the ballplayers, such as on Stela 6. On Stela 5 the hair falls in front of the earring; on this deity and on Stela 6, it is behind the earring. It is this type





Bilbao Stela 5

of hair that reminds me of certain Huastec sculptures, though a direct connection between these two cultures is unlikely, among other reasons due to the Post Classic date of the Huastec features in Veracruz. Cotzumalhuapa is centuries earlier.

Falling down the left shoulder is another mass of what may be hair. If all this is hair, does that mean that the snakes are a cap rather than braided hair or is some of the hair braided and other free falling?

Although not well preserved, this deity wears a woven snake pattern as on the deities of Stelae 2, 4, 6, 8 and Monument 21. The same headdress occurs in the Codex Vindobonensis and Codex Nuttall. usually on female goddesses and at least twice in association with a ballcourt in the former codex. Since these codices are Late Postclassic (just before the Spanish conquest) there can be no direct connection, but instead both may descend from a common heritage. Other than talud-tablero architecture and Tlaloc, it would be useful to find out how much in the art of Cotzumalhuapa also occurs in Mixtec art.

At the same height as the deity's snake cap, on both edges of the monument, is an open scroll (the "oxen horns"), probably with the same meaning as the less tightly curled scrolls of Stela 6. Are these scrolls a replacement for the monster maul or celestial disk of other ballplayer stelae? In other words, these scrolls may be an enigmatic abbreviation for whatever is framing and/or transporting this deity. Fortunately, our 20th century western eyes are given the rest of the motif, namely the scroll-frame which serves to cover the oval on the triple-triangle hieroglyph. The top of this monument is a giant version of this hieroglyph, found as a fruit on the vine and on the headdress of the player underneath, as well as a hieroglyph on several other Cotzumalhuapa period monuments in the El Baul area.

Bilbao Stela 5

The deity has simple wristlets of closely packed square beads. Vines meander across its arms but do not seem to sprout from any specific part of the body. It is not sowing these plants from its hands as do priests in Teotihuacan murals or Tiquisate incensarios (Hellmuth 1975b:Pl. 37).

What could be the hem of a shawl, an upper arm band, or a wandering vine runs across the deity's left (viewer's right) arm. The other possibility is that it grows or issues from its hand. Another bar is incised into the other arm, but is not raised as the presumed hem. If this supernatural is wearing a shawl it should have a hem of the same dimensions across both arms.

Summary and Conclusions

The triple-triangle motif dominates this composition, on the enlarged headdress of the deity as well as decorating the smaller headdress of the ballplayer.

The vine and its "fruit" are especially curious on this monument. The closest analogy is with the objects which Teotihuacan priests scatter, as pictured in the many murals at that site. The Bilbao artists would have had plenty of prototypes available locally from Teo-Tiquisate incense burners which had comparable objects as adomos. Elsewhere we have brought out that the "fruit" of the vines are often conceived of as jewels.

Cotzumalhuapa art still holds its many secrets. If we could understand the art of this unusual culture perhaps we could use analogy to learn more about other Nahua-related cultures of the Post Classic, since the Late Classic Bilbao compositions feature aspects of cosmology which are not as well-known from the Post Classic.

Chapter 6

EXOTIC FRUITING VINES;

BILBAO BALLPLAYER STELA 6

Composition

A single dominant player occupies the bottom half of the monument together with a tremendous back decoration featuring a frontal skull. The upper half is comparable to the rest of the Bilbao stelae featuring a flaming deity. As with Stelae 5 and 7 flowering speech scrolls occupy most of the empty space around the celestial deity.

Stela 6 has a raised border.

Condition

The Habel drawing shows a major section of the upper left as missing (1878:pl. III). This portion of the monument has been so professionally restored that you can hardly see the joint today until you check the Habel drawing to see where the break was. Elsewhere, one hand of the deity had to be restored, although seemingly this was present when Habel did his drawing (if we can document that he did no restoration in his renderings). The rubbing of Greene shows the remaining cracks in the monument before they were restored. The headdress of the ballplayer suffered somewhat in the restoration. This same break must have kept going

and destroyed the neck and necklace; actually the monument seems to have been broken all the way across at this level. The necklace was never adequately repaired.

Acceptability of the Line Drawing

The drawing is useful only for the overall composition and details that were subsequently lost, such as one hand of the deity. Otherwise, details do not stand out clearly and actually the carefully illuminated photographs show more than the line drawing in this case. The beautiful rubbing of Greene is also useful to enable understanding the various portions of the scene. Her rubbing was made before the diagonal crack across the hands of the sky deity was repaired. In her rubbing you can see the crack, and one hand of the deity is missing. Today the crack-and hand are nicely restored, probably using Habel's drawing as a model.

Previous Description

Greene provides a precis:

This ball player is also making supplications to a sky diety (sic), possibly the same one represented on the previous plate. There is an identical flame treatment of the arms of this celestial being, who here wears a turban held on by a serpent, the head of which can be seen on the diety's (sic) upper left arm.

The ball player wears a yoke with a monkey's head carved at the back. His cut-away player's skirt is held together with a typical Cotzumalhuapa belt tied with one huge knotted loop. He wears sandals on both feet, and, as is also typical of this art style, all five toes are carved on each profile foot.



Man. 6

His elaborate headdress consists of a crowning head wearing a bow-tie, a large neck ruff and long feathers billowing down the back. A death mask, very much like the El Baul carving (Pl. 185) hangs as some sort of bag directly behind his right hand.

Entwining flowering vines with many different little decorations-leaves, flowers', shells and birds-are one of the unique features of Cotzumaljuapa art. This sculpture and Monument 21 (Pl. 195) are probably the best examples of this type of symbolism, (et al. 1972: Pl. 190).

The death mask is unlikely a bag associated with the hand of the player but rather part of the back mass. The identification of the yoke head as that of a monkey is from Parsons (p. 108). It would require a zoologist to document this suggestion.

The Balleame Paraphernalia

The yoke has the same diagonal indentations as that of Stela 3, 5, 7 and 8. On this yoke there are two indentations and they are relatively wide. The Seibal "yokes" with wide diagonal indentations have no heads, because the Seibal players are actually not wearing yokes around their waist but rather ball deflectors around their chest.

The girdle on the non-playing leg is as massive as all the other Bilbao players. The girdle on the forward (playing) leg is seldom visible on the other players because this part of the body is usually covered by all the pendant cloth from the waist knot. Whereas the girdle on the back leg goes up to the belt that of the forward leg stays horizontal around the thigh. This arrangement suggests that the girdle is not bilaterally symmetrical.







The loincloth apron tie is as massive as worn by the other Bilbao athletes. The knee on the back, non-playing leg has a rope band and a simple bead-like decoration as on all the players. Both feet are shod, though not in the same way. In all respects this paraphernalia is of the same sort as on the rest of the Bilbao ballplayers, especially Player 5.

What individualizes this player is the decoration on the end of his yoke, here a skull. Most of the other Bilbao yokes end with a serpent face.

Although the skull on the yoke faces left, you can also read a second visage which faces right. But the skull is even more mysterious, it has a fleshed face around the front of the skull, complete with a forehead (with hair), a nose, skin on the lower jaw, and a complete ear. There are actually three profiles: a punned face looking to the right, the main skull facing left, the "monkey skull" suggested by Parsons and Greene, the overlay outline of a fleshed face out in front. Recognition of details such as this is aided considerably by sharp close-up photographs and a method of analysis that uses at least three different lighting angle views of every portion of a sculpture.²¹ This type of an x-ray view is rare for pre-Columbian art, known mainly from the Pink Hieroglyph style series of Peten ceramics (Hellmuth 1975: Rollout Fig. *). The ear may have an earring, but if so it is of cloth, not rigid.

Combinations of fleshed and fleshless faces are best known from Teotihuacan (*), Tiquisate (Hellmuth 1975b: pl. 1; **271014-8, 481649-17**), and Veracruz (*), but the Bilbao

21. All these views are available to the author in black-and-white enlargements (8x10 inches) of Hasselblad quality and in 35mm color slides with Leica sharpness. The slides are projected on the wall which I face as I type a description into the computer; the projected image is directly in front of me, all the B+W enlargements are adjacent to the keyboard. All this, plus a complete library ready at hand, help visual acuity and personal memory bank and together form an ideal system for iconographic advances. The Bilbao monuments have been studied and published for over 100 years but it is still possible to add to our knowledge when the method is rigorous and comprehensive.



example consists of two separate faces (though obviously intending to show a continuity which any single face will undergo).

The Sandals

The features of the footgear are nicely preserved except for surface details of the foot pad itself. As on about half of the Bilbao ballplayer stelae both feet are clearly shod, as opposed to Stelae 1, 3 and 4 where only the forward foot is shod. What is not shown on these ballplayers is how the sole is held to the top, but that problem is typical of sandals of other cultures in Mesoamerica. Part of the problem in interpreting the details at Bilbao results from the bizarre artist's perspective developed by Cotzumalhuapa sculptors, the side of the foot is in profile, the front of the foot is seen from above in three-quarter view. The other problem is that we are seeing only one side of each sandal, the outside of the back foot, the inside of the forward foot. The two half views do not add up to a complete view since each foot covering has different parts and a distinct arrangement of the sandal structure.

On the back foot there is a wide strip down the side but it is not clear how it attaches to the sole. Over the top of the foot is a knot with flaps. This must tie the sandal together but is not shown as actually going between the toes or going around to the side.

In order to see the features of the binding clearly it is necessary to use several different lighting angles. The forward foot has a sole but the heel seems to be bare. Instead, there is a wide strip going diagonally from the sole around the back of the foot. This is tied with a knot at the front corner to the side of the foot pad. The foot pad seems to cover all but the inside two toes, but that may result from an attempt to show these edge toes in side view (where they would be visible, since the pad is supposed to cover the top but not the edge. The pad surface

Bilbao Stela 6

was decorated but the details are not well preserved. What is important is that the preservation overall is good enough to know for sure that each foot has a different kind of footgear, for example, the back foot has three rings around the leg, the forward foot either one or two.

The Glove/Handstone

The wrapping which forms this Mesoamerican kind of glove is visible around the wrist and hand. This particular wrapping is narrower than others at Bilbao, and its textual details are perfectly preserved. The wrapping goes in two directions, around the hand and then at 90 degrees, in order to hold the wrapping to itself. The word "glove" in the Mesoamerican situation does not mean an item of attire that is tailored around each finger individually. A Mesoamerican ballgame "glove" was really a hand wrapping, both to protect and pad the hand and in certain cultures such as Cotzumalhuapa, simultaneously to hold on the handstone. In later Aztec times (and I suspect for the 16th century players in the Popol Vuh as well), their "glove" was simply a leather binding--no stone accessory at all.

On some Bilbao players the handstone is in the same plane as the hand. This happens generally when the arm is at rest. When the arm is upraised then the handstone sticks out appreciably as we see on Stelae 6 and 8. On Stela 3 the handstone is partially flush with the arm and sticks out only slightly, but this monument is of the series which has no rectangular frame.

If the handstone is more or less rigidly bound onto the hand it is unlikely that it can be flush with the arm in the down position and stick out in the upraised position. One possibility is that two different shapes of handstone exist, one shape that sticks out, another shape that is flush with the hand. The position relative to the arm would not significantly change when the





arm is moved. The other possibility is that the handstone can be shifted even within, or under, the binding-to stick out or retract when needed.

The handstone is the last item of ballgame attire which is still shrouded in mystery. We have plenty of yokes, plenty of hachas, plenty of palmas-but seldom find a handstone of the elongated variety, either the actual artifact or its picture in pre-Columbian art. Other than the Copan marker and possibly Seibal Stela 13 few elongated handstones are pictured in the Maya area other than at Chichen Itza, where every player of both team carries a long handstone, free in their hand with no binding. Binding is on the Seibal stela (13) and especially on the open hand of the noble player on a Tepatlaxco, Veracruz stela, the only one where no handstone covers the details of the binding, thus offering one of the few views of this binding.

One other instance of a forearm and hand all wrapped with binding is a fractured vessel once shown to Gordon Ekholm, from whom I have a photograph. This same photograph was published by Borhegyi (1980: fig. 8).²² Unfortunately we do not know whether this bowl is authentic. The vase above it in the Borhegyi article is now known to be a modern forgery.²³ The enigmatic bowl (Borhegyi fig. 8) is in Teotihuacan-El Tajin style, yet nothing like it is known from either site, neither in subject matter nor size and shape of the scene relative to the vessel. The fact that the vessel is so badly broken is by itself no guarantee it is authentic. Forgers occasionally smash their vessels to add an archaeological touch to their product. Since Ekholm is no longer alive only the owner knows where this vessel is today. If it were possible to study the actual pot it would be possible to ascertain whether it was authentic. If this is actually a 5th-7th century scene it would rank as of considerable importance since it is unique.

22. I do not know which photograph is reversed since I have never seen the original bowl.

23. I studied this "Teotihuacan" cylindrical tripod in the Milwaukee Public Museum. It is a modern fabrication based on analysis of the clay (the wrong firing temperature), the mistakes in style and content, and in overall appearance.

Of course it is this very uniqueness which makes it look like a forgery, but there is no need that it came from either Teotihuacan or El Tajin itself. The style of the incising on the face is not that much different from faces incised on Early Classic Maya vessels, except that this vessel is of the shape of a Tepeu 1 bowl, not anything Early Classic. But Tepeu 1 is "too late" for an El Tajin-Teotihuacan ballgame in Guatemala since by Tepeu 1 times the Mexican influence in the Maya ballgame had practically totally disappeared. By Tepeu 1 times the ball deflector was already at armpit height and the cut-away was already standard equipment. The Mexicanoid features of Itzan Panel 1, north stairway, and the Chicago Site Q Panel are of a completely different situation.

Why we go through all this discussion is because of the bound wrist on this enigmatic player. The question is whether the part of the arm parallel to the ground is the forearm with hand-or a wrapped glove as on Seibal Stela 13 and the Bilbao ballplayers. On the pottery scene is the elbow the bump just below where the arm wrapping starts-or is the elbow the joint at floor level? I believe he has a wrapped glove which forms the extension to his arm, that what rests on the floor is his hand (not his forearm) plus the "handstone" which in this area of Mesoamerica evidently consisted mainly of wrapping. But until we find the bowl and have it tested this scene is not acceptable.²⁴

The Stela 6 handstone consists of a simply stylized face with an La Venta Olmec-looking headdress decorated with circular motifs. This similarity is coincidental, as there is a closer

24. If authentic this vessel tells us that the non-Maya ball was as large as a typical Maya ball. Actually we should realize this already since the ball pictured for El Tajin is also large. We presume the ball used at Bilbao was at least the size of the large ball used at earlier Tiquisate (Hellmuth 1975a:21; 1987a: figs. 15, 17, 33). Secondly, this vessel shows that El Tajin was to some degree the origin of the ballgame that was introduced into Guatemala, a fact we already know from Tiquisate ballplayer scenes. Not the total origin of all features, but nonetheless party to some of the associated attributes. More likely there is a common source for both Tiquisate and El Tajin since the monuments we see today at El Tajin are traditionally considered later than the decapitation tripods at Tiquisate.

model from Teotihuacan. The side and bottom of the face are framed with what may be the rest of a helmet. The helmet is decorated with closely set doughnut shapes. The handstone face needs to be turned around (or viewed upside down) to appreciate the details. Parsons suggests the character is a Xipe effigy (p. 108). This attribution is acceptable based on local portraits of definite Xipes, such as Aguna Monument 2 (P, pi. 55, e or the far superior photographs in Thompson 1948: fig. 11,a-b). This Aguna Xipe is closer to Teotihuacan prototypes than that of Bilbao Stela 6. The diagnostic traits are the absolutely round eyes and mouth and the raised rounded band forming a frame clear around the head and chin. This kind of Xipe representation is well known from Teotihuacan figurines (Sejourné 1966c: fig. 186-188).

The Undulating Form

Together with Stelae 2, 3, 5, and 8, Stela 6 includes an undulating form which mysteriously issues from behind the yoke and writhes upward to the sky deity. It is almost as though this feature is the body of a serpent which ends in the yoke, here with a skull rather than a serpent head. Stela 3, one of the monuments with no rectangular frame, has no undulating form from the yoke-but has a smaller version of the form issuing from behind the player's face. This removes much possibility that the undulating form is directly associated with the yoke. Since no Maya ballgame stela has anything even remotely similar to this we must look elsewhere, in the art of Teotihuacan, Tiquisate or Veracruz. It is unknown whether this is truly a flame motif or not.

The Ballplayer's Headdress

The headdress consists of three rows of segmented decoration, a face (damaged by a break across the stone at this point), two sets of plumage from this head, and a final curved





feather, the "Teotihuacan knife" motif (Sejourné 1966a: fig. 59). The latter item appears to be part of the back mass, but, based on analogy with the costume of Stela 1, should be the final part of the headdress. The curved feather is found also on Palo Verde Stela 3 and Bilbao Monuments 1, 4, 5 and 9, though the style (the proportion, the angle of curve) is slightly different.

Parsons suggests the main headdress band is duplicated on El Baul Monument 2 and probably on Monument 19, "a symbol we would identify with the Mexican deity Xiuhcoatl" (p. 108). Unfortunately that particular illustration of the El Baul monument is totally illegible, it is too small to see any detail, and in shadow so none of the sculptured detail is visible in any event. Another photograph has only barely better lighting (the monument is under thick tropical jungle growth) but by coincidence one of the sunbeams falls on the pertinent portion of the headdress (Hellmuth 1978b:112), and it is indeed the same headdress feature, even to the extent of being two segments wide and three segments long. Otherwise the El Baul monument is hardly related, as the figure itself is wearing a long skirt. The Monument 19 headdress is not similar enough to warrant comparison. I would add a comparison to the forehead band of El Baul Monument 3, though the segments are one-wide, rather than two-wide their overlapping arrangement is comparable.

To accept a Xiuhcoatl attribution for the Bilbao headdress would require at least a thorough comparative analysis and illustrations-legible illustrations-to back up this statement, so for the time being it remains unproved. The Aztec deity Xiuhcoatl is illustrated by Pasztory (1983:pl. 41, 54, 86-89, 116, 117, 215-16, 273). Pasztory provides a précis: "'Fire serpent,' mythical beast that signified the dry season and was believed to carry the sun across the daytime sky. The fire serpent was also a weapon and symbol of office carried by deities, particularly Huitzilopochtli and Xiuhtecuhtli." (1983:311).

The hair and immediate headdress are quite simple in comparison to those of Stelae 1 and 3. The hair near the head is not as long as on other ballgame monuments and has no circular decorations. There is just a simple disk earring (with punctate holes) next to a relatively short section of hair. On top of the headdress is a rosette with human face. The rosette is presented in a typically Mesoamerican type of three-quarters view, that is, a profile view which is turned towards the viewer almost to the degree of presenting a front view. You get an opportunity to see details that would never be seen from the side alone.

The face in the medallion is not complete, the ears, earrings, and forehead are missing. One would need to go into old records and see whether the monument was broken or chiseled here to break it into transportable size segments. As presently preserved the face has a ball in front of the nose. The face is encased in concentric bands of square beads, as also is the face in the headdress of Stela 8.

The Back Decoration

Most of what is behind the player appears to issue from his back, rather than a trailer from the headdress. The back mass structure is formed out of plaited material. Three major features are evident: a sickle shaped feather, a frontal skull, and the feathered curled tail at the bottom, which is the same as that of Stela 2.

The sickle shaped item appears to be a curved feather. A clear specimen is on Bilbao Stelae 1, 3, Mon. 9, and Palo Verde Mon. 3. These monuments show that this decoration extends down from the headdress, and is therefore not physically part of the back mass. Stela 1 gives the best view of the complete beginning of what the curved feather stems from.



There you can see that it divides into two under the anthropomorphic fruit. On Stela 6 there is more than one flowing band, since between the player's back arm and the edge of the yoke you can see at least one more thickness of the same form that leads into the curved feather. Actually, if it were not for Stela 1, I would identify the curved feather as stemming from the back mass, and not the headdress. There is a continuation of the flowing band curving from behind the headdress to behind the arm--and on the other side of the arm are more of these forms. If these have to come from the headdress then the only explanation is that there is a split into two streams behind the headdress feathers. One stream ends in the curved feather, the other coils up around the player's back.

In front of the back leg, under the sub-knee bead, is a textured material, most likely part of the back assemblage, though this texture pattern does not continue on the other side of the leg.

The Skull in the back Decoration

Monuments 2, 5, 6, and 8 of the ballplayer series all include richly ornamented costume sections behind the ballplayer. The features of Stelae 2 and 6 appear to be parts of the headdress, but they may also issue from a decoration pendant from the back. Of these Stela 5 has a puma behind the player; Stela 8 has a large bird and in this respect a kind of mirror image of the game animal on Stela 5; Stela 6 has a frontal skull. Stela 2 is to some degree a mirror image of Stela 6 but has no specific medallion. The yoke of Stela 2 has a frontal skull but is so eroded that details are unavailable other than that it looked somewhat like that of Monument 23 and 55.



Bilbao Stela 6

This Stela 6 skull shares many features with the profile skull on Stela 3. They both have hair, triangular accessories over the ear area as on Monuments 13, 23, 55, and 59 (looking almost like a leaf on Stela 6). The earrings and its tassels are similar on Stelae 3 and 6. Both have a thin "rope" necklace then next a wide necklace with central bow and tassels. But they are not identical, especially in the gums and teeth and the shape of the facial bones. The Stela 6 skull is also similar to that of Bilbao Monument 29 and its almost twin El Baul Sculpture 18 (Thompson 1948: fig. 9,e and d). These published photographs are at an inappropriate angle, poorly lit, and the reprint edition renders them practically illegible. The only one which can be adequately studied is El Baul Monument 18 because Greene's rubbing shows pertinent details at a large enough scale to study it. Actually the Bilbao 29-El Baul 18 pair differ considerably (the crossed bands in the forehead band, the hooked ear pendants, the more anatomically accurate bone structure) but other details are typical of overall Cotzumalhuapa style (the rope under the chin, the rectangular tongue with flat end and the leaf-like "horn" sticking up from over the actual ear).

If one had to select a single symbol of Cotzumalhuapa culture in general three images would stand out to choose from, the ballplayer per se, the frontal heavenly deities and the skull/skeleton. The skull and skeleton are intimately related to the ballgame but many of the skeletons are beyond any association with the ballgame. Seemingly death-and especially the public display of death-was important to the Cotzumalhuapa culture. Therefore it would be worthwhile to ascertain whether this skeleton cult was a means of elite control over the masses of population, a form of terror far in excess even of Stalin, Hitler--though perhaps not the extent of Pol Pot of Cambodia. Was the average Cotzumalhuapa citizen ready to obey the elite in order to escape being sacrificed? Since the peasants believed they would go to a special heaven, that is hardly different than the Arab mulahs convincing their faithful masses that

Allah will welcome them in heaven with special honor when they die springing mine fields in a holy war against infidels.

Full figure skeletons are on Bilbao Monuments 1, 13, 26, 48 and 59 and Palo Verde Stela 3, among others. Humanoid skulls only are in profile on many hachas and Monument 20, El Baul Sculpture 10 (Thompson 1948: fig. 9, f) and in front view on the present Stela 6, Monument 20, 23, 29, 55, El Baul Sculptures 18 and 19 not to mention skull imagery at other sites with Cotzumalhuapa style art.

Miscellaneous

The earring is identical to all the others on the ballplayer series but is so well preserved that you can see the pockmarked design. On the others it is not possible to distinguish the natural pockmarked texture of the stone from an intended texture sculpted by the artist.

The left thigh is decorated with what looks like a garter but this is probably the double hem of the rest of the girdle. The girdle itself has seemingly no mass, as it does not protrude out of the plane of the leg, only the hem sticks out along the inside of the thigh.

The necklace was destroyed when the stone was broken across the neck. Only the center of the necklace remains but it is unclear what kind of medallion is represented. At this point a single undulating form meanders up the arm. It looks like one of the speech scroll-vines, but is decorated by single beads, not double tabs.

The Flowering Vine/Speech Scroll

Bilbao Stela 6

Ballplayer Stelae 2, 5, and 6 feature meandering vines. The most complex elaboration of these flowering, fruiting vines is on the enormous Monument 21 which although not one of the ballplayer stelae series actually shows an aspect of the pre- or post-ballgame ceremonialism. Speech scrolls are demonstrably a Teotihuacan feature. Flowering and fruiting speech scrolls are popular in the pottery and murals of Teotihuacan. Many of the same decorations of these speech scrolls are found as well in the flows from the hands of parading Teotihuacan and Tiquisate priests (Hellmuth 1975b: pl. 37; Langley 1986:108-113). The content there is a mixture of plants and marine seashells. These features were obviously of importance to the Bilbao folk and thus should be better understood by anthropologists. The reality of the situation is that the implications go far beyond Cotzumalhuapa itself, since fruiting and flowering vines are a dominant element of the Chichen Itza ballcourt reliefs, as Parsons noted two decades ago. This vegetating aspect of the Chichen Itza reliefs has not been adequately analyzed because all attention is devoted to the purely ballgame aspects of the cult, the outfits, and especially the decapitation of a ballplayer.

The Chichen Itza vine grows directly out of the body of the executed player. The vine springs out together with the six blood snakes. In effect the vine is the seventh serpent. A difference between the Yucatecan and Escuintla vines is that those of Bilbao include seashells and architectural features (as do those of Teotihuacan), whereas the Chichen Itza vines bear only flowers. No vines are present in the earlier Tiquisate ballplayer decapitation scenes, but the Tiquisate decapitation does share isolated Teotihuacan-related motifs with the Chichen Itza ballplayer decapitation scene, namely the two flower-like almost kin-like isolated forms along the bottom of the Chichen Itza sacrifice scene (not pictured in the standard illustration of Tozzer (1957, XII: fig. 474, middle). Comparable features are on the earlier Tiquisate ballplayer decapitation scenes (Hellmuth 1987a: figs. 7, 8, and 9).









In the vine segment between the Bilbao ballplayer and the descending deity are: i, a stylized tablero-talud architectural model; ii, an open bivalve shell (as possibly found on the top right of Stela 5, though it is not well preserved so not a positive identification there); iii, a snail or conch shell; iv, a flower; and v, nodules or beads.

I, the tablero-talud is the hallmark of Teotihuacan architecture throughout Mesoamerica. This design was also used as a nose/mouth plaque by the Teotihuacanos. Tablero-talud structures are known from virtually every place which had major contact with Teotihuacan, such as Cholula, Matcapan, Tiquisate, Kaminaljuyu, Tikal, Yaxha, among others. Tablero-talud architecture must have dominated the landscape throughout Tiquisate as well. The proportions of this particular Bilbao example have a higher talud than at Teotihuacan itself. Kubler, and more recently Gendrop, have produced thorough studies of the tablero-talud throughout Mesoamerica (1984). This Bilbao example is usually overlooked in pan-Mesoamerican surveys of the tablero-talud.

II, the bivalve shell can be so identified by the slight remains of the muscle attachment. That, plus the overall shape, tell us this is not a butterfly as suggested elsewhere (P, p. 108). Otherwise, with no color and no other diagnostic features, it is not possible to ascertain what species was intended. Based on analogy with shells in the art of Teotihuacan (von Winning 1949; Kolb 1987) we can presume that a marine species is intended. Three beads stick out of the shell; a single bead sticks out of the adjacent shell as well, as though these were precious, or jewelry (or precious jewelry). Spondylus shells were worn as jewelry but with no spines this shell cannot be so ascribed. III, the next shell is equally generic. It is not large enough to be the larger conch but there are more than enough pretty seashells found in caches at Teotihuacan (Sejourné 1966C: pl. 47, 48) which could be a model for this.

IV, this flower would be hard to identify as to species. It should be compared with the flowers on Chichen Itza ballplayer decapitation scene, though it should not be expected to be identical. The conventions of Yucatec art were different as are many of the flower species.

V, the simple round beads are jewelry and thus could represent generic preciousness. Beaded jewelry forms background motifs on the walls of Tikal Burial 48 (Hellmuth 1987c; 1987d: fig. 503), on the stucco facade of the El Placeres structure (on exhibit filling an entire end of the main room of the Sala Maya in the Museo Nacional de Antropología), on the sarcophagus lid of Pacal's tomb, etc.

The vine above the deity is as rich as that below. It consists of two bilaterally symmetrical branches plus a center branch. On no other Cotzumalhuapa monument is so strong a design formed by vines. In addition to the pattern created by the vine there is a semi-circular frame and then an incoming curl on each side of the monument (at the level of the hair of the deity). A different pattern, but still a pattern, is created by the vines on Stela 4.

The vines emerge from behind the head of the deity, just as from the deity on Stelae 2 and 5.

Only a few of the "fruits" of this vine can be recognized quickly, a Tlaloc-like face at the right, a possible open bivalve shell above in the top right corner, similar to the one on the vine below the deity. A few double beads are like those on speech scrolls. The rest of the decorations appear to be tropical fruits, but many are styled as beads, as jewelry, which we have just discussed as reminding the viewer of the decorations of the murals of Tikal Burial 48, which also are mostly items of jewelry.

The other place in Mesoamerican art where such fruit appears (other than on Monument 21) is in the crypt of the Temple of the Inscriptions (Ruz 1973: fig. 196; Robertson 1983:67-72, figs. 174-202). At Palenque it was possible to identify the fruit because the almost naturalistic details made the species easy to recognize. The fruits at Bilbao are turned into often bilaterally symmetrical geometric shapes. It is sometimes difficult to ascertain which are flowers as opposed to which are fruit. I will leave it to botanists to attempt to work out which is which. Even with a basic familiarity with Guatemalan plants (based on over a decade of eating them) and with the help of a good library of tropical botany including the rare *Fruticultura centroamericana* (of which only 150 copies were printed in the 1968 edition) I would still not hazard a guess--since I have seen all too often the wrong name given to such forms. Most archaeologists are either not familiar with the complexity of the iconography or the subtlety of the plants. Biologists need patient help from the iconographer to understand the abbreviations, puns, and abstractions inherent in pre-Columbian renderings of flora and fauna. Biologists are accustomed to making their identifications from scientific drawings or Audubon-accurate paintings.

The Deity

From the deity's hands issues a form with the same stepped indentation as on a pre-Columbian drum.²⁵ Whether the deity is patting on the object with his hands is unsure, as this section of the stela was broken. The deity on Stela 4 has the same stepped form in front of it. Parsons suggests it is a "tied incense bag" (p. 108). It indeed may be textile and is unlikely a drum, despite its basal decoration.

25. Both Maya and Aztec large stand-alone drums have the identical size and shape.





Bilbao Stela 6

The hair of this deity is somehow formed into a manner similar to the cornrolls which were popular first with Blacks in the 1970's and then Bo Derek in her movie "Ten." This rope-like arrangement of the hair is then slicked back flush with the head. One braid turns into a serpent. The snake head and bifurcating tongue is clearly visible on the right. This snake is not formed into a mat motif as on Stelae 4, 5, and 8 and as in Mixtec headdresses in the Codex Vindobonensis and Codex Nuttall. An additional snake issues from under the necklace medallion-though it may actually begin elsewhere. This snake's head is also on the right, but may be a different species than that of the headdress.

This long hair is no guarantee that the deity is female any more than the snake headdress is an absolute sign that the deity is a woman. But the face does look feminine, and I thus interpret the seated deity of Monument 21 as probably female. Actually I suspect that the entire series of sky deities on the Bilbao ballplayer monuments may be female.

Some form of necklace would be expected, and the rubbing shows what could be this item of normal Mesoamerican jewelry. But in the middle, directly under the chin, there is no necklace but a rather an ill-defined and unexpected mass with circlets and an inscribed scroll. The meaning of this enigmatic form needs to be worked out.

Behind the head stands out an almost halo-like form but it is not clear whether this is more hair (doubtful) or an abbreviated disk (a large disk is behind the deity on Stela 4). Actually, on Stela 6 there is a large backdrop for the deity, but it is subtle and overshadowed by the vines.

The deity has flames radiating from its arms almost as though they were wings. Monument 3 (with no border) has comparable flames around a deity with bird/animal claws

Bilbao Stela 6

but also a "sun" disk. The flaming sun disks on the giant vultures who carry away dead Bilbao sacrificial victims (Monuments 16 and 17) suggest that the flames are related to these disks, and are only secondarily transferred to winged characters.

The deity has a bracelet around the upper arm as well as the wrist. A decoration at the right inside elbow (viewer's left) has lost the rest of its form due to a break in the monument at this point.

A scroll hook frames the deity on both sides, at the level of its cap. The hook on the right even continues down the raised frame of the monument. Based on the flanking hooks on Stela 5, which are at the same level, I suspect the Stela 6 hooks are part of the rounded backdrop of the vines over the deity's head and that this backdrop is an elongated version of that of Stela 5. The difference is that on Stela 6 the triple-triangles are not present. There is a further reason for suggesting this parallel-most of the rest of Stela 6 is a mirror image of a corresponding feature of Stela 5. The relationship between the two scenes is self-evident and has been commented on before, but in passing, without reference to the total number of similar features.

The similarity does not mean necessarily that the monuments were contemporary. Stela 5 is more crowded due to the stone being narrower, and the headdresses are neither the same nor opposites as far as we know.

Summary and Conclusions

The sculptor of Stela 6 was a master of his art. The scene is astutely balanced in all portions of the field. In many ways this is one of the best of the series with a raised frame.

Bilbao Stela 6

The preservation is equally outstanding, providing a lively and informative set of "fruits" on the vine that meanders around the hovering deity. As soon as professional line drawings are available of all the details of these vines it will be easier to finish cataloging each motif, and comparing and contrasting the Bilbao inventory with that of Chichen Itza.

Chapter 7

Stela 7,

DEITY BUST WITHIN REPTILE JAWS

Condition

Only the top half of the monument remains, but this section is quite well preserved except for the nose and lips of the protruding deity. The bottom half of this stela was never found, probably smashed into building blocks for some local farmer's house. Indeed still today the Bilbao monuments (except for those moved to the finca headquarters) are totally abandoned to vandals and the elements. Why does no government official do something about this now, before there is a scandal after someone smashes off a figure or totally desecrates another portion of the sculptures? Out of sight, out of mind.

Reliability of the Published Drawing

The drawing used by Parsons (pl. 34, b) shows better detail than that of Habel (his Pl. IV) in part because the drawings of Habel are all gray; modern drawings are pure black and white so the details stand out better. Actually, the monument itself is so well preserved that it can be studied directly from the stone itself.

Previous Description



This stela is neither pictured in Greene et al. 1972. Parsons has thus the only complete description, readily available in his monograph (P, p. 108).

The Meandering Vine

As with Stelae 5 and 6, a meandering vine fills the space between the ballplayer (no longer preserved except for his crab headdress but presumed to have been the main feature of the monument) and the frontal sky deity. But there is no additional vine above the sky deity. The extant vine features a fish, which documents the water-related iconography of the vines of Stelae 6 which have seashells. It would take an authority on tropical fish to estimate whether this particular species is fresh water or marine. I would guess marine but do not know of any reefs off the coast of Escuintla where fish would be seen from the surface as off the coast of Quintana Roo, Yucatan, and Campeche. Of course fishermen would catch plenty of exotic fish in their nets and on hooks in the open sea off the Escuintla coast even without reefs.

Parsons suggests that the crab (bottom of the fragment) is part of a headdress of a ballplayer comparable to the player of Monument 1 (P, p. 108). This would mean the crab is not part of the vine, though the symbolism is continuous--creatures of the water. A comparable series of water creatures are in the frames to the doorjamb murals of Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala, central Mexico.

Overall Style

This monument is appreciably different in its emphasis on the monster maul. It so happens that such a monster maul is also popular in Maya art, but this is a result of sharing a common tradition rather than borrowing directly one from another.

NO 7.



NC. 6

The deity within the maul is not being eaten, or threatened, and appears very much alive and healthy. The best way to see this is on El Castillo Monument 1. The threatening gist of the giant fangs is aimed at the viewer, not the deity in the maul. The defensive fangs are not to hurt the deity but to protect it. The imagery is not of death, but of life, probably in the sense of regeneration. Elsewhere I have suggested that such monster mauls represent mystic transportation for deceased rulers (1987c and d). In some cases, the transportation was through stages of life after death. We do not yet know enough of the cosmology of the Cotzumalhuapa culture to know if they had similar beliefs.

The Frontal Monster Maul

For once the Cotzumalhuapa sculptor uses a pan-Mesoamerican motif, a motif that most any iconographer can recognize-though certain aspects of it remain incomprehensible to a modern viewer. The creature itself can hardly be a jaguar because the mouth is too narrow. The curl of the supraorbital plate and lower jaw are both in the tradition of Teotihuacan snake monsters.

A notable feature is the batch of scrolls that decorate the upper corners, but these are not quite El Tajin style. Despite the emphasis on the ballgame in Bilbao art, it is difficult to detect much El Tajin influence though I suspect that more ties will be detected with Veracruz art eventually. The Bilbao yokes have no hachas or palmas.

The rectangularly-cornered mouth with its triangular end looks more Post Classic than Early Classic. The date of Cotzumalhuapa is now entirely an open question since the whole Middle Classic concept was an academic model based on hypotheses. Several key

features of the Chichen Itza dating which bolstered the several proposals for earlier dates are no longer accepted by any of the art historians or archaeologists now working at Chichen Itza. The stratigraphic position of the ballcourt behind the Monjas is not accepted by Chichen Itza specialists at the early date as interpreted by those who use this court to bolster an early date for the Chichen Itza Great Ballcourt reliefs as earlier than Terminal or Post Classic. In fact, practically no archaeologist or art historian today will support a date for Chichen Itza before the 9th century, and I suspect most still support a 10th century date or later. I cannot solve the date of Cotzumalhuapa ballplayer stelae by myself, but it is difficult to document a date before the 8th or 9th century for them.

Whereas most monster maul headdresses (and this setting is simply the complete expansion of what is normally abbreviated as a headdress) display only the upper jaw, or at most additionally a toothless lower jaw, the Cotzumalhuapa content adds the lower jaw to form a veritable temple framing the deity bust. A comparable expansion of the lower jaw is dramatically displayed by El Castillo Monument 1. There the teeth row is also rendered in a 90-degree angle manner (which is not found in nature). A person climbs up using the fangs as handles and steps as a ladder. This El Castillo scene (El Castillo is just two or three kilometers from Bilbao and appears to be contemporary with the ballgame series) shows that these deities are indeed "above" people of the normal world. It seems reasonable to suspect that these deities are elevated or hovering personalities. At present I suggest solely that the serpent frame on Stela 7 is at least related to the serpent ladder/house of El Castillo Monument 1. It is probable that these snakes are the same mythical species, situated in the same part of the pre-Columbian cosmos, and that both express a comparable meaning.

Piedras Negras Stela 7 (Maler 1901:pl. XVI) has a raised maul as headdress. The ruler within the headdress has the same forehead band of overlapping disks as the Cotzumalhuapa deity.

This is a standard forehead band; that they actually existed is known from the Tomb of the Jade Jaguar, Tikal Burial 196 (Hellmuth 1967). Piedras Negras Stelae 11, 14, and 25 have headdresses of open mauls as well, but the monster there has shark-like triangular teeth, not the widely spaced fangs of the Cotzumalhuapa creature. Piedras Negras Stelae 26 and 31' (ibid.: pl. XXIII, XXV) displays a creature with scrolling eyebrow though the style is totally distinct. The upraised jaw shows off the inner structure of a monster mouth, rendered in pre-Columbian abstraction as a ripple-like motif.

The concept of a deity resting tranquilly in the maul of a ferocious monster is pan-Mesoamerican but it is worth pointing out a particular instance in relation to the ballgame, at El Tajin, South Ball Court Panel 1. That monster descends from the sky but reaches all the way to the ground. Since there are no immediate forebearers to most features of Cotzumalhuapa art we seek generic ancestors rather than specific ancestors. The Bilbao culture seemingly reorganized everything, reshuffled content and context, so the features we find at El Tajin (such as skeletons with the heart hole carved out) could still be potential ancestors to Cotzumalhuapa art.

All three Cotzumalhuapa style stelae of Palo Verde are framed in overlapping ovals, which Parsons terms a Xiuhcoatl headdress (P, p. 108).

The Cross-Armed Deity

This supernatural character is presented in front view and deep relief, practically three dimensional. The hair is quite long but that does not help identify the sex of the deity. The forehead band, already discussed, is generic. The necklace is simple and likewise generic. Both arms have vines growing over them though it is not blatantly obvious as to whether the vines actually originate from the body.

The crossed arms posture is typical for a variety of characters in the art of Cotzumalhuapa, such as on Monument 28. Parsons has already pointed out the similarity with the crossed arms on a relief from Rio Grande, Oaxaca (P, pl. 61, e).

Parsons suggests that "the deity figure is wearing a Xiuhcoatl headdress (cf Mon. 3, El Baul, pl. 65e)." (p. 108). But this is a headband, and generic, especially with anything derived from Teotihuacan, where this headband is ubiquitous. This headband was already introduced into Guatemala by Early Classic Teotihuacan influence (Hellmuth 1987a: fig. 14), and further search might even find it pan-Mesoamerican before Teotihuacan.

Conclusion

The crab headdress allies Stela 7 with Stela 1; the dangling vine with a fish allies Stela 7 with several of the Bilbao group. But otherwise, this monument stands apart because of its narrower size and the more complete framing for the upper deity. This reptilian frame is pan-Mesoamerican, "Mexican" without being specifically Teotihuacan at all. Xochicalco and Aztec parallels come to mind more than anything earlier. Thus the scene on Stela 7 may facilitate both dating (at least itself) and showing origins and relationships.

Chapter 8

THE BALLPLAYER OVERSHADOWED BY TLALOC ON STELA 8

Composition

A parading ballplayer raises his arm in homage to a descending sky deity. The upraised arm prominently displays a ballgame handstone held on by a carefully wrapped binding. The ballplayer wears a simpler headdress than his teammates on other Bilbao sculptures but a complex back assemblage. At the bottom of the back assemblage is a fallen game bird. At the top of the stela, a frontal deity entwined with speech scroll-like vines wears a wide collar and a cap of an entwined snake. Above is a dome headdress which mimics Tlaloc in an unusual arrangement.

Condition

Chisel marks still mar the entire upper corner. Probably local masons were beginning to knock off blocks to use in house construction. So much for local interest in preserving antiquities, especially in an area where countless tons of readily available volcanic basalt litter the landscape. Half way down the emerging frontal deity are the pick marks where the masons were marking where to begin smashing off the stone. It is not acceptable to condone removing monuments to "save" them, since today few monuments will be chopped up for building material.¹ But in the case of the Bilbao stelae, we have to ask what would have happened to these monuments if left abandoned?

1. 8th century Maya palaces in the Puuc area are still being dismantled by villagers to build local homes and schools. The main damage to stelae today is milpa fires which are allowed to burn uncontrolled over the fragile limestone surface. In this decade of the 1990's, with all the awareness of the destruction caused by such behavior, as well as knowledge of the value which such monuments can provide for learning more about the national patrimony of these countries, the excuses for why these stelae and structures are not better protected are rather feeble. The complaint by government bureaucrats that "there are so many sites and so little money..." merely means that perhaps the priority for the national patrimony is not as high in actual

The answer is rather easy for Stela 8--it would have ended up as fill for some modern building. Parsons suggests this is what actually happened to the bottom of Stela 7.

A number of natural breaks (from the fall of immense jungle trees over the centuries) can be seen still today. It would help to have a line drawing or a photographic overlay to show all the breaks on this and for all the Bilbao stelae. One vertical break goes right down the middle of the monument at least from the necklace to the feet.

(In)accuracy of the Available Drawings

The Habel drawing of the top half is the worst of his series (pl. VIII). It is barely recognizable as the top of Stela 8. Only the sunken eyes stand out, a result of there being a mask which is open at the eyes. The Habel drawing of the bottom (pl. IV) is usable until a better can be produced. It shows well the flap pad on top of the forward foot. Some of the woven pattern of the back mass (behind the bird) is not rendered at all.

Previous Description

To accompany a rubbing which provides an informative rendering of the entire scene, Greene et al. say:

Similar in style to the other ball-player monuments at this site, this sculpture features a celestial being emerging from a dome-shaped Tlaloc. The deity (sic) figure wears jade wristlets, a large collar made up of round disks, round earrings with center knobs, and a headdress composed of a writhing serpent.

fact as it is in rhetoric.



SCULPTURES OF SAINT.

HARCO



The ball player's yoke is carved with an eagle, and another eagle appears at the bottom left, at the end of his large back piece. Issuing from the yoke is an upward-flowing stream, possibly flames or water.

As usual, the hands of both deity (sic) and human personage are shown laid out flat, (et al. 1972:pl. 191).

The identification of animals, birds, and reptiles in Mesoamerican art is difficult for all of us who do not see these tropical creatures in our northern environment. We suffer from lack of intimate familiarity with the zoological details of the actual fauna. Normally the creature is simply named based on general characteristics. Seldom is a monograph on zoology of Mesoamerica consulted or listed in the bibliography. The result for Bilbao Stela 8 is almost predictable, the animal identifications need additional research before we can recognize the original species which were the model.

The face on the yoke has two fangs and the scrolled lower jaw of a Teotihuacan serpent. This Teotihuacan nature was also continued into Mixtec codex art, which is a follower of Teotihuacan style and content (Vindobonensis 65 (XIII)). Only its crest is bird-like, but with a reptilian mouth it can hardly be identified as an eagle. And the bird behind the player lacks both a raptor beak and raptor talons, especially that of an eagle. But with a head as pictured, I doubt it is even a hawk. Mythical creatures are indeed difficult to interpret, especially when the thing is a composite that does not exist in nature.

The Ballplayer

Clothing and Miscellaneous

The necklace differs from the others of Cotzumalhuapa in being of two different strands each a different surface texture. The top strand is plain, the bottom strand has overlay or plaiting design. In a kind of three-quarter view both strands of the necklace are visible on the other side of the center decoration, going over the shoulder to turn around the throat. The pendant decoration in the center is both eroded and was broken so it is difficult to work out what was once there. Sticking out from the back of the player are the two ends of a cloth. Whether these are a back tie for the necklace or the top tie for the back mass is unknown. This part of the back is not normally visible on the other ballplayer stelae.

The earring is the basic disk with raised edge, as worn by all the other Bilbao players.

Headdress

The side hair extends directly down from the main forehead hair. Here this side hair is in front of the ear and earring.

As with Stela 6 the main headdress is a simple face. Also as on Stela 6, the small naturalistic human face is framed rigidly on side and top then has three rows of closely packed beads. On the front, cross-lighting reveals an additional decoration, crossed bands of some form, but a break broke off the detail necessary to understand what was once intended.

Rather than the complicated pendant of other headdresses, such as on Stelae 5 and 6, here the band decorated with doughnuts appears only briefly behind the neck and then disappears. On the other stelae this item of the headdress trails down the back. Here the back is occupied by a single long feather. Only a quetzal feather could be this long, but I am not sure whether a quetzal feather is this rigid or tightly packed. I doubt a macaw feather would be this long. Otherwise, no tropical bird produces a single feather this size. Of course an





Estela 13 Santa Lucia Coty
Seccion Papal Reg. no. 1152



Estela 13 Santa Lucia Coty
Seccion Papal Reg. no. 1152

W. G. M. ...



Estela Santa Lucia Coty
Seccion Papal Reg. no. 1152

accomplished costume maker could easily have produced a composite feather of any reasonable length. The last quarter of the feather has an indented center, the first three quarters a raised center. This suggests an artificial feather though I must admit I have never studied an actual macaw tail feather.

Palo Verde Stela 2 includes an even longer and wider "feather" here definitely not possible to be from a real bird. Is this a palm frond? The center vein and parallel divisions are just what to expect from a palm frond. We are mesmerized with the concept that all pre-Columbian people wear quetzal feather headdresses. It is unlikely that there were enough quetzals to provide so many feather headdresses.

Back Mass

Clearly issuing from the back and not the pendant from the headdress, is an impressive mass of material. On other Bilbao ballplayer stelae it is not always clear how much outfit is pendant from the headdress and how much sticks out from a backrack. A wide band serves as a continuous frame down the left side of the stelae. Above the back foot you can see a corresponding band framing the right of this assemblage. In between the bands is woven or plaited material, probably plant strips (possibly palm fronds, for example).

In addition to the bird, described separately, is an undulating band (just above the bird) and a rectangular feature behind the player's hand. This rectangular feature behind the player's hand is the same as left of the arm of player 6 and the same as on Palo Verde Mon. 3, previously considered part of the headdress. On Stela 8 the sickle-shaped feather end lacks its end curl and thus does not immediately look like its counterparts just cited.



All this needs to be compared and contrasted with the back mass of Stelae 2, 6, and 8. Stela 5 has an animal behind the player which I suggest equates to the bird behind Stela 8, but on Stela 5 no wickerwork is evident, that is, no back mass.

The fallen Bird

Behind the left leg of the athlete is a fallen bird. The motif behind him is woven plant material, possibly a mat or shallow tray with a fringe on two sides. This bird is to some degree the counterpart of the puma on Stela 5; both Stelae 5 and 6 form a matched pair in the sense of having game animals behind the ballplayer. This relationship with hunting (even the spear or dart is shown on Stela 5) is borne out even more on Maya vases where ballplayers wear hats which are elsewhere hunter's hats (Hellmuth 1987b:449, figs. 103, 104, 107, 108b, 109, 110). No spear is expected with a bird because birds were usually stunned with a pellet from a blowgun (Hellmuth 1987c; 1987d: back cover).

The species of bird needs careful study by an ornithologist. The closest match I could find is a cormorant but this needs to be double checked by a biologist, keeping in mind artistic license, composite (mythical) species and the other pitfalls of trying to give a Western zoological tag to a pre-Columbian cosmological creature.

There is also a bird-person in the bloody enactment on El Baul Monument 4. The face in the headdress of Stela 2 seems to have a bird beak out in front of it. None appear to be eagles.

Game Paraphernalia or Outfit

The handstone stands out from the hand, seemingly held on by wrapping. You can see that the band was wrapped twice around the wrist, then the wrapping begins to turn as it had







the fingers available to wrap. There is a bar across the bottom; is this the bottom of the hand stone? If so that means that the face is the front of a horizontal handstone, with the handle behind the face as on the Chichen Itza examples, not the handstones with the handle on the top, the type usually pictured in exhibits (Leyenaar and Parsons 1988: figs. 43-50). The details of the lower face are missing, possibly lost in a break across this point and thus unable to be restored. All that remains is a goggled eye. The shape of the face does not speak for Tlaloc.

The yoke has an elongated reptile mouth and reptilian ventral scales. The fangs are separated from one another by molars. The yoke itself has diagonal indentations as do most other Bilbao yokes. It also has an upraised nose in front and two batches of possible feathers at the back. The curved supraorbital plate and lower jaw are traits inherited from Teotihuacan.

Both feet are shod in the sense that both have soles. The sandals are well preserved and show enough detail to offer a thorough analysis. The difference in sandals is somewhat easier to recognize than on other ballplayer scenes. The forward foot definitely has a protective pad across the entire top of the foot. This is decorated with small doughnut shapes. This pad is tied at the top corner and possibly fastened by two diagonal bands. The back ankle has three layers, the front ankle has two layers. The back foot has only a single diagonal band across the top surface of the foot, and a knot on the toe side. Thus, the main surface of this foot is not padded or otherwise protected. All the features are attributes of any standard sandal for its basic structure to hold it together and on the foot. Thus, as with Stela 6, it is the forward foot which is padded, the same foot as has knee damage. This documents that this entire leg was in action during the play.

Such a battered knee can only result from either hitting the ball with the knee or hitting the paved court floor. However large and hard the ball was, it would seem that the degree of swelling and bruises on the knee would more likely result from constant slamming onto the

paved floor than "kicking" the ball with the knee. And, if the player is dropping down on his knee to make the hit--which is the standard pan-Mesoamerican position--then he is unlikely at the same time going to be engaged in kicking the ball. The conclusion from the padded forward foot alone is that the padding is to protect the foot from the court floor, not from the ball (Hellmuth 1987b:279).

The final documentation comes from the Site Q panels that have padding on a single foot. The Perls Site Q Player probably has padding flopping over the superior portion of the foot (Hellmuth 1987b: fig. 66); the three other major Site Q players more clearly have some kind of a pad across the top center of the foot (ibid.: figs. 64 and 65) and the Zurich Site Q Panel. The down player on the Chicago Site Q Panel definitely wears a flat pad--and the player is using this pad to protect his foot--he is hardly about to kick the ball with this pad.

Ironically one of the best examples has escaped totally unnoticed, the foot pad worn on Yaxchilan Step VIII (Graham 1982,3:162). And from the standard position of being down on a knee we could hardly expect the Yaxchilan king to kick the ball, no matter how padded his foot was. All the players at Yaxchilan are down on their knee (but there is seemingly no necessity that all wear the foot pad; we do not yet know what situation called for the pad, but it was evidently not required for all players on the team, something not considered when the pads on Chichen Itza players have been discussed). Another example of the single-foot superior pad ding is on the Chinkultic ballplayer from La Esperanza, Chiapas.

The Undulating Form

Together with Stelae 2, 3, 5, and 6, Stela 8 includes an undulating form which mysteriously issues from behind the yoke. Unexplained is the bifurcating wiggle which bumps into the undulating form just above the yoke. Two more wiggles stick out of the undulating form, behind the upraised arm and over the upraised handstone.

The Emerging Deity

This frontal deity wears a mask as can be seen at the eyes and especially around the mouth, similar to the mask on the comparable deity of Stela 2. Otherwise, however, these two stelae are not precise mates, since Stela 2 has the same back mass as Stela 6; Stela 8 has the comparable back decoration (game bird) to Stela 5 (game animal, puma).

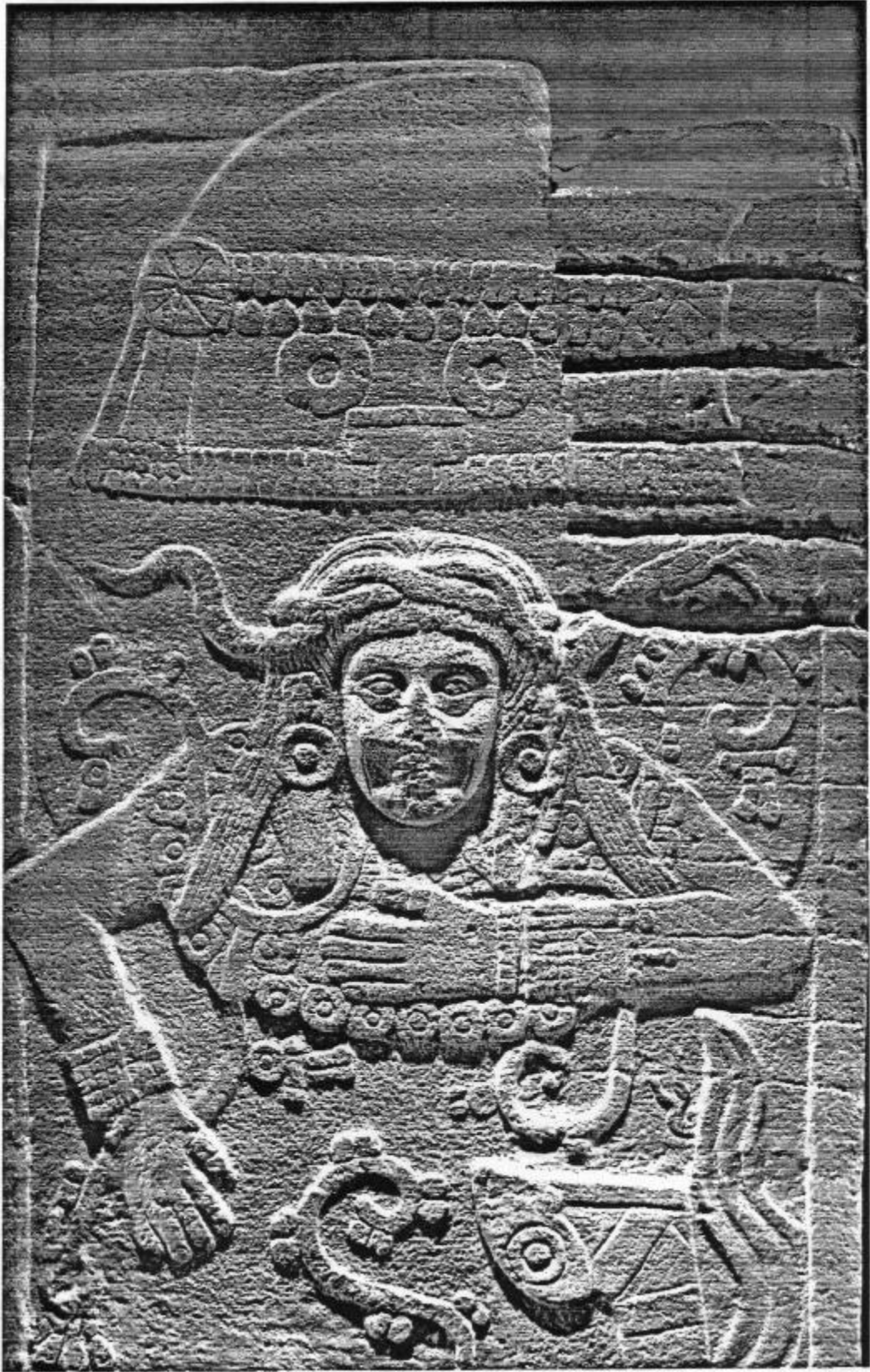
The headdress is a thick intertwined serpent, as on Bilbao Stelae 4, 5, 6 and Monument 21, Vindobonensis 3, 33, Borgia 62 lower right, and often in the Codex Nuttall. A minor difference is that on Stela 8 the serpent twists slowly, horizontally, not so tight as on Monument 21. The tail is at the left, the head is at the (viewer's) right. This snake is not part of the hair. No additional snake is around the neck or elsewhere in the scene. Only the player on Stela 1 wears a snake sash.

The hair is in thick tubes on top, but whether this is as cornrows or braids is hard to ascertain. The 10th century stylists could have had another manner of arranging the hair-- the Aztecs let blood which splashed up from sacrificial victims arrange their hair. As with most Cotzumalhuapa coiffures the face is framed with a slightly diagonal batch of hair. The round earrings have tassels which is in the same pattern as the hair.

Both hands have a bracelet of five bands of square beads. Close around the neck is a wide collar of rectangular segments, at least six bands wide. In a close-up photograph this appears like woven matting. Then comes an even wider collar of three large disks. Overall it looks almost like a shawl, but really is strands of beads. Speech scroll vines meander across this wide necklace.







The Meandering Speech Scroll Vine

The ballplayer utters a basic speech scroll, decorated with double tabs. From around the frontal deity sprout additional curving vines which share the same thickness and sometimes the same double tabs as the speech scroll. On these Stela 8 vines, though, there are no fruit, not even leaves, just beads, possibly representing precious jewelry. Indeed one of the vine "fruits" (lower left, halfway between the deity's two hands) is a bead of the same size and shape as those of the deity's necklace.

"Tlaloc"

The goggled eyes immediately evoke the reaction, Tlaloc, but it would be difficult to find an actual Tlaloc at either Teotihuacan or in Aztec art that looked like this. Pasztory long ago documented that what Mesoamericanists loosely call Tlaloc is actually several different, often complex mythical beings. Then just two years ago Pasztory modified her nomenclature with a new term, Storm God (1988). Nonetheless, most Mayanists continue to use the traditional designation Tlaloc for goggle eyed personages in Guatemala, Honduras, and southern Mexico. Taube has further revised the classification, suggesting that some goggle eyed characters are female, which he names the Spider Woman. In situations where the true identify is unsure there is good reason to keep with the traditional name Tlaloc until a complete inventory can be published with standardized names.

Several problems arise if we carry the confusion in Teotihuacan nomenclature over to the Maya or Cotzumalhuapa situation. First, the intermediate examples of Tlalocs throughout Tiquisate (Hellmuth 1975b: pl. 3, 40) have not adequately been taken into consideration when working on the taxonomy of deities at Teotihuacan other than Berio (1984), von Winning (1987) or Langley (1986). Normally anything outside central Mexico is handled separately as



provincial, simply forgotten, or ignored. The quantity and quality of some of the Tlaloc representations throughout Tiquisate has not generally been recognized. The traditionalist discussions have followed the standard misunderstanding that Teotihuacan influence arrived at Tikal from Teotihuacan solely via Kaminaljuyu (with perhaps a whistle stop at Maticapan, Veracruz). This woefully inadequate model both forgets or ignores the hoard of Teotihuacan influenced art throughout the Tiquisate region, where as many decorated cylindrical tripods and incense burners have been found than have been published for all Teotihuacan itself. I estimate over 1000 cylindrical tripods were ploughed, bulldozed, and looted from the score of Teotihuacan colonies throughout the Department of Escuintla between 1968 and 1978. Of these, not even a single example has been illustrated in any textbook on Mesoamerica in the past two decades; few have even been mentioned in monographs on Teotihuacan itself.²

Furthermore, the designation of Storm God clashes immediately with Adams' attempt to rename the Cauac Monster the "Lightening God" though that name is mistaken from the beginning if some Cauacs are the Witz Monster (sacred hill) and others are at least personified stone. For these reasons alone it is preferable to stick with the conventional designation of Tlaloc since under the rules of scientific nomenclature in biology the earliest name which is present in the literature is supposed to stay in order to save the literature from exactly what is happening, various cliques deciding to use, or not use, a particular designation. The student

2. Berrin and Pasztory 1994 make good use of Tiquisate pottery in their outstanding art exhibit on Teotihuacan but the chapter on Teotihuacan influence exists in a time warp and omits major portions of Mesoamerica, jumping from Teotihuacan to Tikal with neatly organized stops at Monte Alban and Kaminaljuyu--somehow missing the entire Escuintla plain and piedmont altogether. One reason for this continued omission may be that there has been little independent data gathering of Teotihuacan data from the Tiquisate area itself--the F.L.A.A.R. archive represents 90% of the data available to date. Of these data only 90% of the incensarios and just 25% of the cylindrical tripods have been published (Hellmuth 1975b; 1978a; Hellmuth photos in Berio 1984,11; von Winning 1987) until F.L.A.A.R. distributed a few unpublished manuscript copies in 1993 of a more complete photographic inventory of Tiquisate pottery. An estimated 100 decorated tripods have not been published, and an estimated 500 have not even been photographed. If Tlaloc is to be renamed, his entire corpus needs to be discussed, including all the examples in the various codices, in Tiquisate art, and in Late Classic Maya situations where any relationship to storms would be rather difficult to document. It is always chancy to pick just one aspect of a deity to employ as his actual name, since that leaves you out on the limb when a particular example lacks that feature. And whoever Tlaloc was, he was unlikely a Teotihuacan equivalent for Chac if Scheie is correct that Chac is depicted as Chac Xib Chac in Classic period Maya iconography. His cosmological niche has an imprecise relationship to Tlaloc no matter how he is defined.

and lay reader are left confused. Tlaloc needs to be redefined but this analysis of the headdress of Bilbao Stela 8 is not the appropriate place.

The Bilbao "Tlaloc" consists of goggles, bar-and-tau nose/mouth plaque, top and bottom frame of ticked bar, row of pendant pearls and medallion with tassels at both top corners. The goggles are straightforward. It is difficult to ascertain if any eye shape is visible underneath. The tau is not a common nose/mouth plaque for the Classic period, and certainly not for the Early Classic. The expected plaque would be a tablero-talud shape. A tau nose plaque is worn in the Codex Borbonicus p. 30. That same 16th century Aztec portrait includes two tasseled medallions just as on the Bilbao face. Actually the Borbonicus deity wears a female outfit, which would not be out of place in the upper register of the Bilbao ballplayer stelae, where it is possible that most of the deities are female. Normally it is presumed Tlaloc is male.

The arrangement of a puffy bar across the forehead with pendant tassels at each top corner is again found in the Codex Borbonicus. p. 13. There is no 1:1 correspondence since the deities are not the same-and centuries separate the portraits. Cotzumalhuapa is not consistently evolutionarily pre-Aztec art in content and the representations in Borbonicus that are closest are also to some degree similar to "temple"-like headdresses on deities (mostly female) at Castillo de Teayo, Veracruz.

The wavy band across the top is actually found on the Tikal Tlalocs (Hellmuth 1978b:52) and at nearby Yaxha (Hellmuth 1975b: pl. 44; 1978b; 19923). The ties which create the almost undulating appearance appear only in strong cross-light, or in the handsome rubbing of Merle Greene et al. (1972:342, pl. 163). A detailed rendition of such a ticked band at Teotihuacan itself is present in slightly different context on figurine headdresses (Sejourné 1966c:48, 98). In Tlaloc headdresses of the Peten region a comparable band occurs twice,

3. An unpublished Yaxha Project manuscript report on Yaxha Stela 11, distributed about 1992 to specialists.

both bands over the head. "Goggles" occur between the bands, but these are not eye goggles but headdress disks. And approximately tau-shaped forms occur as well, but these are either simplified spear points (an earlier idea of mine that may not hold up) or perforators (Pasztory). They are not always the correct shape to be shark's teeth (unless the Teotihuacan artist is turning the tooth into a rectangularized shape) since actual sharks' teeth are much more naturalistically shown in the same Early Classic period (Hellmuth 1987d: front cover).

What has happened is that the Bilbao "Tlaloc" is actually a discombobulated headdress. The two wavy bands are indeed the two Early Classic bands. However generic they may be in other situations, they still read as Tlaloc-related when they are used in a headdress. The origin of the "pearls" is not yet ascertained. They occur in no Peten, Kaminaljuyu, Tiquisate, or even Teotihuacan Tlaloc headdress that we have yet cataloged. The tau is possibly a squared blunt-ended version of the same item from the headdress of Tikal Stela 32, where the end is blunt, flat (Hellmuth 1978b:52), not pointed as a perforator. The "goggled eyes" could be an abbreviated row of headdress bar doughnuts, again as from Tikal Stela 32. A half-view headdress of a Teotihuacan Tlaloc may include two headdress bar doughnuts which are not all that much different than goggled eyes (C. Millon 1988: fig. V.5). The tasseled rosettes are definitely attributes of a headdress frame—but late in the Classic period. In short, this is not so much a separate deity as a headdress frame for the god (dess) below. It is as though a Late Classic sculptor has recreated a pseudo-Tlaloc image from Tikal Stela 32, adding a late style of frame.

Parsons points out the definite relationship between the goggled face on Stela 8 and the headdress of Monument 9, also in the *Museum für Volkerkunde* (P, p. 109) but unfortunately the published photograph of Monument 9 is no good for iconography because it is at an angle. The Habel drawing is woefully inaccurate in details of the headdress. The photograph in Thompson is so poorly reproduced that it is unusable; it is also poorly illuminated and too



small to see--other than to notice that it is useless. The quality of illustrations in archaeological publications is embarrassing.

Closer similarity between this image and the suggested prototypes would help document the origin of this aspect of Bilbao art. What little similarity can be mustered is with later manifestations which obviously cannot be ancestors for something in Late Classic Cotzumalhuapa. It would be difficult to document a 11th-12th century date for Cotzumalhuapa. The reality means that at best Cotzumalhuapa and the areas of similarity elsewhere had a common ancestor. The areas of similarity with the Bilbao "Tlaloc" are Post Classic central Veracruz and certain aspects of the Codex Borbonicus which themselves may be borrowed by the Aztecs (since by no means is all Aztec art actually Aztec. They borrowed from the Teotihuacanos, in addition to from Toltec art, also from the Huastec and from many other earlier civilizations).

The Tlaloc image is fit into a dome shape, a half-disk that is not elsewhere associated with Tlaloc. One other Tlaloc that should be mentioned in connection with this Bilbao example is one which serves as a "headdress" for a ballplayer in a Jaina style temple scene.

Summary and Conclusions

This Bilbao image is acceptably labeled in academic Mesoamerican English under the temporary tag of Tlaloc. This does not have to mean that we presume that Cotzumalhuapa theologians followed the same theology as Teotihuacan, Tiquisate, the Maya, or the obviously later Aztec. Tlaloc outside of Teotihuacan was seemingly simpler and more consistent than Tlaloc within Teotihuacan.

The bird in this scene has not been focused upon by previous analysis since it is rather hidden behind the player. But birds can be heraldic and emblematic of all kinds of cultural

affiliation so it will help to have a better biological as well as iconographical analysis and identification in the future. Since flora and fauna are common in the art throughout Mesoamerica it would help to have better standards for identification of these features in the ancient art. For iconography it is as essential to have the basic books on flora and fauna of Mesoamerica as it is to have the Carnegie Institution of Washington monographs. As professors we expect our students to do background research on what they write, yet when we write ourselves, we excuse the lack of citations by saying books are too expensive or unavailable. If archaeology is to deserve to be considered scientific, then it is necessary to utilize accepted scientific methods in preparing reports for publication, and that includes utilization of an adequate reference library.

Stela 8 is marred by saw marks so it does not win any beauty awards, but this is not the proper measure for art historical importance. The athlete is actually in excellent condition, especially his left side. The enigmatic footwear is likewise well preserved. The binding associated with the handstone is especially clearly rendered. The beads on the speech scroll and the similar beads on the "vine" that meanders around the upper deity demonstrate that the vine is a celestial or supernatural enhancement of a mortal speech scroll, possibly the answer that the athlete is seeking by his offering gesture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The list of references cited for all six concurrent 1995 F.L.A.A.R. volumes is in a separate seventh volume, a "dedicated ballgame bibliography."

This saves repeating the same ballgame titles for each monograph.

If you note any title cited in this report which is missing in the dedicated bibliography, please xerox the offending page of the text and we will add your comment to the list of changes needed for the next edition.

Appendix A

THE SPECIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN BERLIN FOR THIS REPORT

Four trips have been involved to produce the pictures used in preparing this report (of which only a fraction are included in this initial edition). My initial trip was sometime between 1974 and 1978 aided by Persis Clarkson. Rudimentary lighting was used with a Hasselblad 500C and Leica R3 and R4. A second trip was made with Eldon Leiter in 1988, after the Leiden ballgame conference and Amsterdam International Congress of Americanists. We spent two days with a better lighting system but were limited by it not being Monday. That meant the museum was full of visitors; the staff kindly allowed us to photograph nonetheless, but we could understandably not erect ladders and tables. These are required to get high enough to photograph the tops of the stelae. So for 1989 I arranged a return on a Monday, and specifically in the winter. On my previous trip, in July, the curator Dieter Eisleb had suggested that winter was better since the sun would be lower and would not come through the window and shine into the camera lens. I combined this trip with leading 25 of my Universität Graz art history students on a school excursion to the museums of Berlin.

On this week in November, however, the Berlin Wall was for the first time penetrated, and West Berlin was filled with so many million East Germans that it was impossible to move through the city. My schedule allowed only that single Monday, when, working with no assistant, I photographed as much as I could alone. Ideally two additional days--including one more Monday--would be needed to get total photographic coverage. As it is, so far these F.L.A.A.R. photographs are the most complete record of the Bilbao sculptures to date.

The fourth visit was the last week of August, when I was nearby, in Bonn as part of the "First Maler Symposium on The Archaeology of Northwest Yucatan (Puuc and Chenes



Photography

Regions)" organized by Hanns J. Prem and Berthold Riese. This time I had not only an entire Monday to set up ladders to reach the top of the stelae but also an assistant, Ursula Prutsch, of the Forschungszentrum für Kulturgeschichte und Umwelt Lateinamerikas (Graz) a Latin American historian from Graz who has helped with F.L.A.A.R. photography in Mexico and Guatemala. Additional help in setting up was provided by a local student interested in Maya pottery, Astrid Bode, and by Susann Knakowske.

On all four visits permission was facilitated by Dr. Dieter Eisleb, head of the section for Middle and South American Archaeology. The technical aspects of the photography setup were taken care of by Bruno Timm, restorer for this section of the museum. We also received hospitality at the museum from Dr. Manuela Fischer, then the Museum's Assistant for Middle and South America and Dr. Haas, of the museum's North American Indian section. During the final photography session three INAH archaeologists from Mexico, from the INAH Centro Regional de Campeche (Antonio Benevides) and from the INAH Centro Regional de Yucatan (its director, Alfredo Barrera and a ceramicist) were also visiting the museum after the Bonn conference. An acknowledgement is due Karl Friedrich von Flemming for taking us all to dinner and drinks after a particularly long day of photography.

Special appreciation is due to the museum director, Professor Klaus Helfrich. Dr. Helfrich himself is author of an important book on human sacrifice in Maya iconography. It is due to his initiative that this report was considered for publication by the museum. Since the Bilbao ballplayers are situated in this museum there is obviously the most logical place to make this report available.

All black and white photographs were taken with a Hasselblad 500 ELX camera. The 1990 photographs were taken with a 120 mm macro Zeiss lens using T- Max Film, ASA 100. A

Photography

50mm wide angle lens was used to capture entire monuments. To get slides for giving lectures I use a Leica camera, 65mm macro lens, and Kodachrome Type A Professional Film. Lamps were 3400 degrees Kelvin. Two were used, plus the strong overhead lights of the museum itself.

How would I do it differently if more time were available? It would have been ideal to utilize more lamps, and diffuse them, but that would have required another two assistants, plus of course complete diffusing setups for each lamp (which is both expensive to purchase and bulky to transport), and at least a full week of time. Nowadays I would also use a larger format camera, at least 4x5, and probably 8x10. Donations to F.L.A.A.R. in 1994 allowed us to obtain this huge camera.²⁹ The color photographs would have turned out better if I had worked only at night, since daylight does not mix well with tungsten illumination.

At least with our earlier equipment the Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research now has a good basic set of prints for publication and slides for teaching, since the ballgame of Mesoamerica is a much asked for lecture topic at museums, alumni associations, and schools around the world.

²⁹. Support to obtain this camera came from the main F.L.A.A.R. benefactors, listed earlier, as well as from Gordon Smith.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

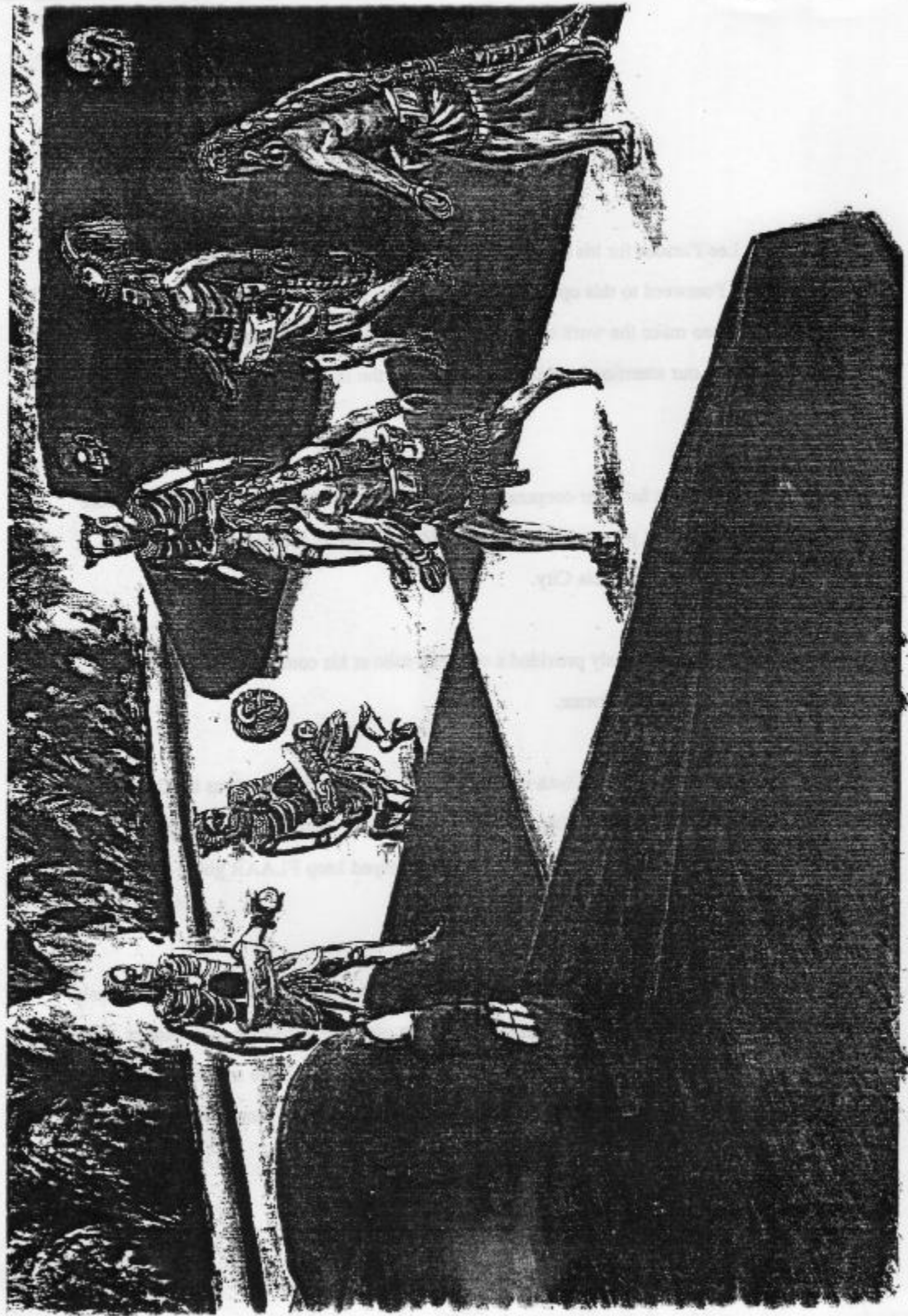
I wish to thank Lee Parsons for his editing of an earlier version of this paper, as well as his contribution of a Foreword to this opus. His many years of research on the iconography of the monuments of Bilbao make the work of all of us so much easier. He brought the art of this enigmatic culture to our attention by bringing together all the information in his two volumes, 1967 and 1969.

I thank all the landowners for their cooperation. José Ricardo Muñoz Gálvez and his son were most helpful during several photographic visits. Dr Herrera kindly received me at the headquarters of Panteleon in Guatemala City.

Karl Herrmannsdorfer generously provided a courtesy suite at his comfortable hotel in Guatemala City, the Cortijo Reforma.

Eldon Leiter provided financial aid both in Berlin and in Guatemala. Donations by Cathy Sells, Jack Sulak, Gerald and Mimi Benjamin, Alec and Gail Merriam, Vincent Philips, Manuel de Leon, Em Reynolds and John Conway have helped keep FLAAR going during the years it took to do this research and writing.

Since our expenses do not end when field work is over we especially appreciate the individuals who send checks on a regular periodic basis, such as has often been the case with patient benefactors in Delaware, as well as Leiter, Sulak, and Dr Conway, whose seasonal generosity has kept me at my desk writing after return from field photography for almost two decades.



GERD LANGERMAN

