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Introduction

Theoretical Approaches to Problems is the fourth volume in the Carnegie Maya series, a publishing initiative by the University Press of Colorado to reissue the results of archaeological and anthropological investigations by the Division of Historical Research, Carnegie Institution of Washington, in southern Mesoamerica. Titles previously published in the series include excerpts summarizing the annual reports of the Division of Historical Research from 1913 through 1957 (*Carnegie Maya I*), the *Current Reports* that summarize the results originally published from 1952 to 1957 of the final CIW excavation program at Mayapan in northern Yucatan, Mexico (*Carnegie Maya II*), and *Notes on Middle American Anthropology and Anthropology*, a collection of various reports originally published from 1940 to 1957 (*Carnegie Maya III*). The fifth and final title in the series will republish the *Contributions to American Archaeology*.

The history and many accomplishments, and criticisms as well, of the Carnegie Maya program are presented elsewhere (Weeks and Hill 2006) and need not be repeated again. From 1914 to 1958 the Carnegie Institution of Washington sponsored archaeological and other investigations throughout the Maya region of southern Mexico and northern Central America. During these four decades the Carnegie Institution was the leader in the field, with monetary and human resources that no university or other research program could match, then or since. The more than 300 publications produced by Carnegie-supported researchers remain an important, indeed essential, resource for modern scholars. The Carnegie Institution of Washington program is no more, although its framework has been modified, expanded, and replaced by several generations of new scholars. Its legacy stands as a firm foundation on which an entire discipline has been constructed.

The goal of the *Theoretical Approaches to Problems* series was clearly not to present final papers approaching a complete synthesis of Mesoamerican archaeology and anthropology as a result of the Carnegie Institution program. Rather, as the editor J. Eric S. Thompson (1941:i) states in his General Preface, the purpose of the series was to "outline tentative solutions which conform to information now at hand, with the purpose not of supplying final answers but of stimulating interest in these problems," and to offer a "platform for such reconstructions and they are so clearly labeled as tentative that their authors will not be called on to stand by the ideas they advance." The intention was simply to publish preliminary conclusions that "may later be reissued in modified form as a result of the flow of information that will, it is hoped, be stimulated by their publication." Finally, Thompson makes clear that the series will serve to counterbalance the overspecialization that was replacing the broad comprehension of earlier generations.

By the 1930s, scholars generally recognized the Gulf Coast of southern Mexico as the heartland of the art style known as "Olmec" (Marcus 1976). Systematic excavation did not begin until 1939 when archaeologist Matthew Stirling conducted long-term

field investigations of Olmec sites with support from the Smithsonian Institution and the National Geographic Society. These included Tres Zapotes in 1939 and 1940, Cerro de las Mesas in 1940, La Venta in 1942 and 1943, and San Lorenzo in 1945 and 1946 (Stirling 1943).

The site of Tres Zapotes includes about fifty mounds and extends for three kilometers along the Arroyo Hueyapan near Chacalapa in the Mexican state of Veracruz. The mounds are separated into four plaza groups. Immediately in front of the principal mound of Group C, the easternmost cluster, was found Stela C, with a flat stone altar set in front of it. On the front of the monument was a "jaguar mask" panel, and on the back was a column of bars and dots placed horizontally. The numbers are not accompanied by period glyphs, but on the basis of position-value notation, Stirling reconstructed the Long Count date as [7].16.6.16.18. He predicted that the top half would include the Initial Series Introducing Glyph and the number 7, for Baktun 7, and the date would correlate to 32 BCE. He argued further that the Olmec was the mother culture for Mesoamerica, far earlier than the Maya civilization (Stirling 1939, 1940b).

There was great opposition to this position, especially by the Mayanists Sylvanus G. Morley and J. Eric S. Thompson, who regarded Olmec culture as a Classic period derivative of Maya civilization. The date was, however, accepted by the Mexican scholars Alfonso Caso, Miguel Covarrubias, and Roman Piña Chan, who argued that the Olmec represented the earliest civilization in Mesoamerica (Tellenbach 1978). In "Dating of Certain Inscriptions of Non-Maya Origin," the first essay in *Theoretical Approaches to Problems*, J. Eric S. Thompson takes up the issue of dating inscriptions of non-Maya origin. He argues that the early inscriptions from southern Veracruz and the Pacific coastal plain of Guatemala, characterized by bars and dots between glyphs with numerical coefficients, are not Maya Initial Series but rather belong to a secondary series founded on the 400-day year. In essence, Thompson was taking on Stirling's Stela C dating and detailed the evidence necessary to downgrade the dating of the Olmec (Tozzer 1942).

Stirling was proven correct in 1970, when the top half of Stela C was discovered by a local farmer, and the earlier date of 7.16.6.16.18, or 32 BCE, was confirmed. Another twenty to thirty years of dirt archaeology and radiocarbon samples collected at La Venta and San Lorenzo in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated an even earlier placement of Olmec culture, prior to 400 BCE (Coe 1981:xi; Drucker, Heizer, and Squier 1957; Coe and Diehl 1980). Since 1939 only one older Long Count date has been discovered, on Stela 2 from Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas, with a date of 7.16.3.2.13 (36 BCE). Stela C from Tres Zapotes remains one of the oldest dated monuments in the New World. More recent excavations have documented the development of the Olmec out of still earlier Formative cultures (Coe 1957).

In the second essay Thompson considers the fish as a Maya symbol for counting and explores directional glyphs. Thompson's demonstration that *xoc*, or "count," was represented in the inscriptions by the head of a large fish—the *xoc* or "shark"—was one of the discoveries that did the most to reopen some of the important questions about the fundamental nature of Maya script. Substituting for *xoc* in many inscriptions was the glyph T511, also found for the day Muluc. Since *xoc* shark is a patron deity of the day Muluc, Thompson assumed that the *xoc* head was the head form of the *muluc* glyph. This implied a straightforward rebus use for *xoc* and a symbolic secondary meaning for *muluc*, which he apparently thought should be read as *xoc* in this context.

Two "directional count glyphs" have long been recognized as the indicators of backward and forward chronological reckonings in Maya inscriptions. Their traditional decipherment, following Thompson, is based on reading *xoc*, "to count," for one of the frequent signs in these glyphs. Stuart (1990) questions this reading by suggesting that all "count" glyphs are read *u-ti*, spelling the verb *ut*, "to come to pass." This decipherment applies to all known contexts of the glyphs. Thompson's original *xok ti* reading, later expanded by others to account for some variant forms, has gained wide acceptance among epigraphers. Stuart (1990), however, finds evidence for the *ut*, "to happen, come to pass," decipherment more compelling.

The third essay, by John M. Longyear III, addresses the delineation of the limits of Maya civilization along the southern periphery of Mesoamerica. In the early 1940s, Longyear located and mapped many sites east of the Lempa River in El Salvador under the auspices of the Institute for Andean Research (Longyear 1944, 1951a, 1966). This was followed by several seasons working for the Carnegie Institution of Washington on the ceramic sequence at Copan in western Honduras (Longyear 1940a, 1940b, 1942, 1946, 1948, 1951b, 1952, 1957, 1969). His investigations identified the major local pottery types and determined the succession of the principal ceramic periods. He also identified numerous pieces of nonlocal or exotic manufacture, which stimulated questions about chronological relations and commercial contacts within and outside of the

Maya area. Longyear's study area was the frontier where Mesoamerican and non-Mesoamerican cultures met and presumably influenced each other. Scholars are still puzzling over the problem of just how far south the Maya expanded from their presumed homeland. Samuel K. Lothrop (1939) was the first to deal with the question of the southern frontier of the Maya, and his research was the foundation for a number of later studies, including Longyear's essay in *Theoretical Approaches to Problems*. Lothrop first placed the maximum limit of Maya penetration in Honduras east of Lake Yojoa and in El Salvador along the Lempa River. His approach was essentially ahistorical, linking sixteenth-century accounts of the Maya with what he considered to be Maya pottery. While taking Lothrop to task for making these connections, Longyear accepts the equally troublesome proposition that linguistic groups formed distinct archaeological cultures (Linares 1979). Arguing that there is very little that was Maya in the Ulua-Yojoa archaeological complex, he places the Maya frontier during Classic times further to the west in Honduras, roughly where the Maya meet the Lenca. Despite this important contribution by Longyear, this question has since been considered by Doris Z. Stone (1959), J. Eric S. Thompson (1970), E. Wyllys Andrews V (1977), and John S. Henderson (1978).

Only three titles were published in the series, presumably because of the disruption to the CIW research program caused by World War II. The number of each publication is unknown, although a search of *WorldCat*, an electronic bibliographic database, indicates that twenty-six copies are known to exist in libraries for no. 1, fourteen for no. 2, and eleven for no. 3. Complete sets are found in several major library collections, including the libraries at Bowdoin College, Harvard University, Newberry Library, University of Colorado, University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, and the University of Alberta in Canada.