

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE SITE CORE OF QUIRIGUA

Epigraphic and archaeological data now provide evidence of an occupation history spanning half a millennium

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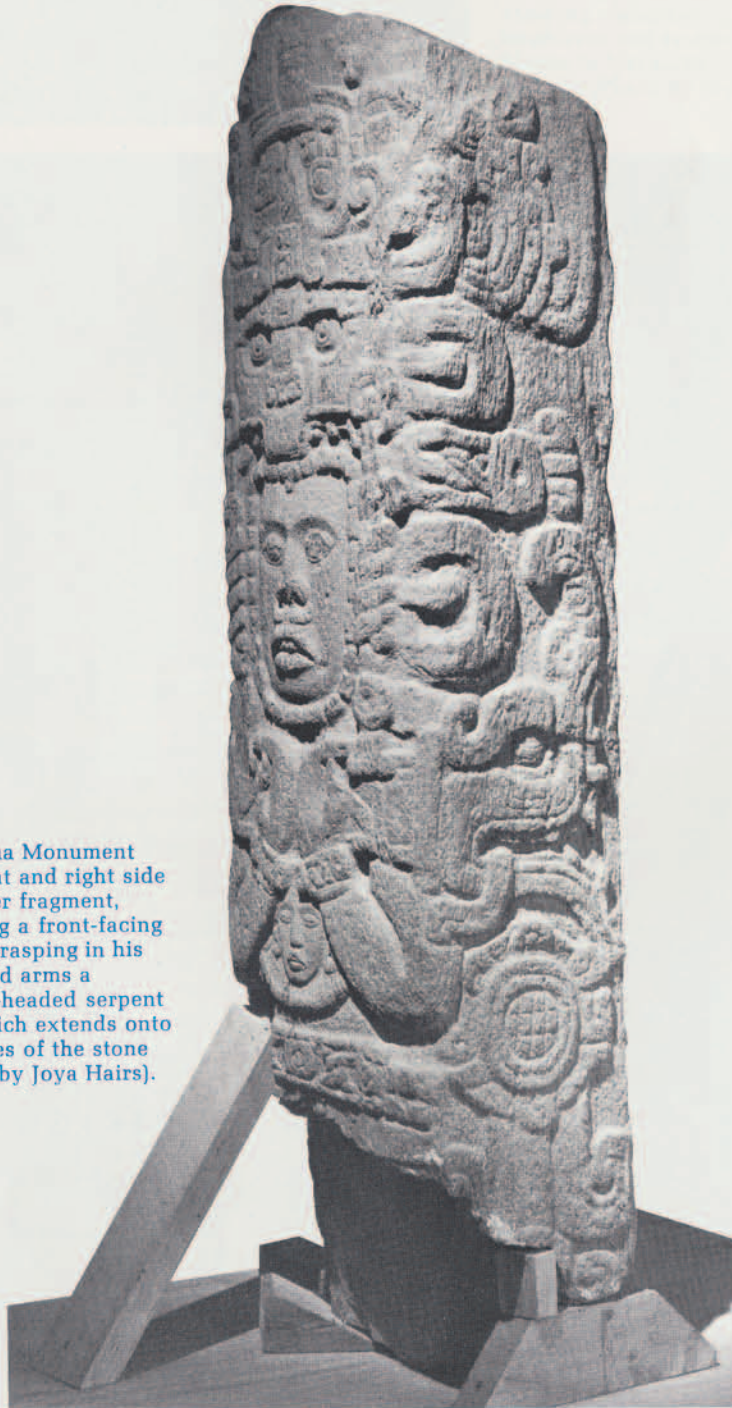
Quirigua's dynastic and constructional history was of central concern to the site-core excavations. Since we last considered these topics (Jones 1977; Sharer 1978) several new findings at Quirigua have provided information that considerably amplifies the history of the site. Thus, our purpose here is to integrate these new findings into our former reconstruction of Quirigua's development.

Our knowledge of the origins and early development of Quirigua was significantly increased by the discovery of Monument 26 in late 1978 and the 1979 excavations conducted as a consequence of this discovery. Details of the monument's recovery and the subsequent excavation of the associated Str 3C-14 are summarized by Ashmore, Schortman and Sharer in *Quirigua Reports II*, in press.

Monument 26 was discovered accidentally by a dragline excavating new drainage canals for the Del Monte banana plantation just north of the site core, reportedly from a depth of ca. 1.6 meters beneath the alluvium. Ashmore's excavations at this location indicate that Monument 26 probably rested on a low paved platform that was bisected by the dragline. This platform also supported a small plain circular "altar" (left *in situ* by the dragline) and a small rectangular structure. The excavations located an elaborate cache in the structure, containing six Early Classic vessels filled with burned jadeite artifacts, pyrite mirrors and cinnabar reduced to metallic mercury (see the final article of this issue).

Epigraphic and stylistic evidence provided by Monument 26 clarifies Quirigua's origins and early development. A fuller treatment may be found in Jones (in press). The Initial Series date is not only incomplete but actually displays incongruous information, and therefore cannot be read with certainty. Out of various possibilities we prefer the more straightforward reading of 9.2.18.0.0 at 10 Ahau 8 Pax (A.D. 493),

1
Quirigua Monument 26: front and right side of upper fragment, showing a front-facing figure grasping in his upraised arms a double-headed serpent bar which extends onto the sides of the stone (Photo by Joya Hairs).



even though the two dots of the katun coefficient are oddly connected by a bar, and thus could conceivably be read as 9.7.18.0.0 (one bar and two dots equal seven).

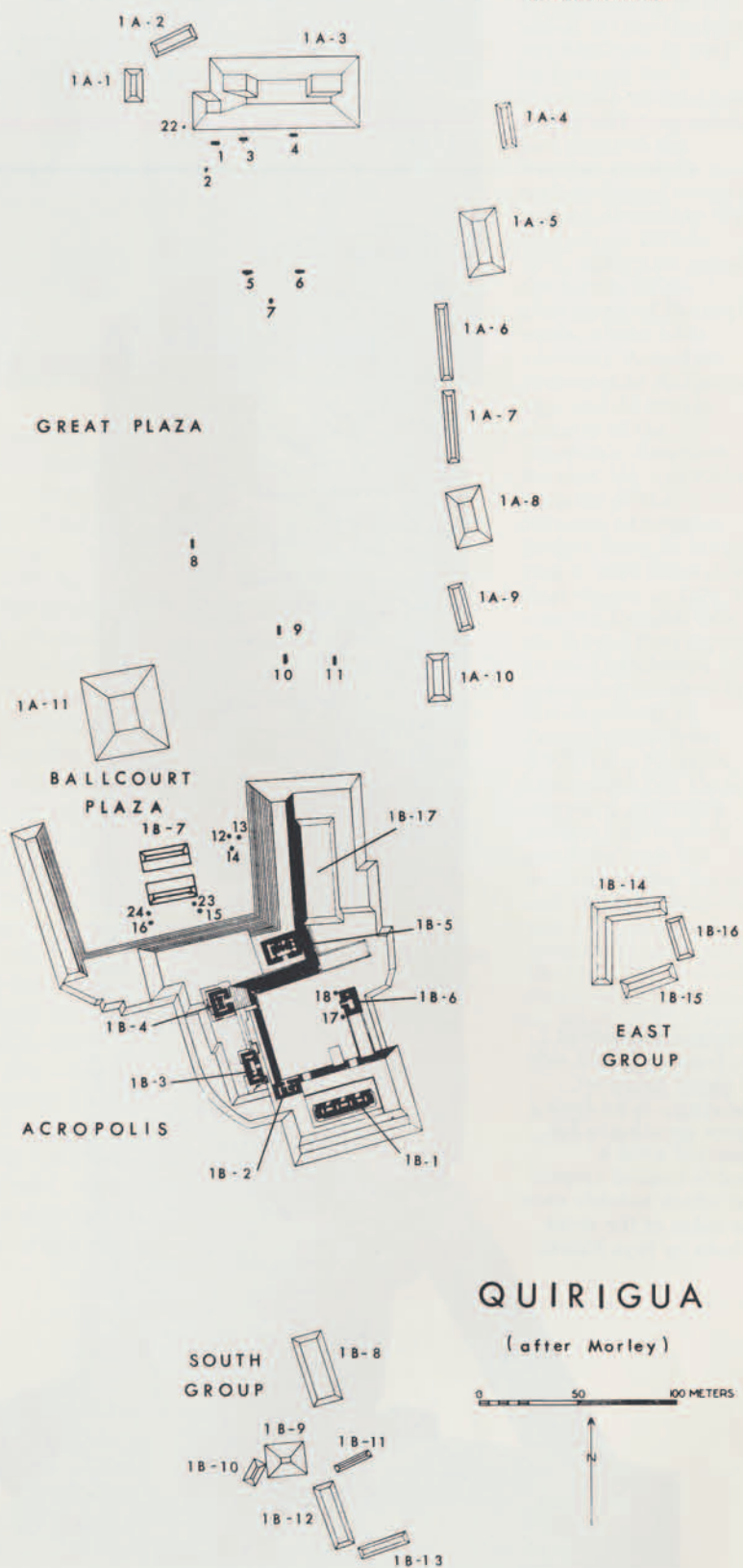
Our opinion is based first on comparison with the previously discovered Quirigua Monument 21 (Stela U: Morley 1937-38: IV, 89-92, V, Pl. 169b). In Morley's photographs and our own, Monument 21 clearly carries a Katun 2 Initial Series date. The two monuments are of a similar bluish schist stone, are of a similar size and shape, and feature a front-facing figure with a horizontally held bar. More specifically, on both monuments, the frontal design extends onto the stela sides. Also, an animal glyph with band headdress appearing on Monument 26 is carved in large size on Monument 21 as though it represented a ruler's name.

Second, certain features of style also support our Early Classic dating when compared to monuments outside Quirigua. The *tun* and *uinal* glyphs on Monument 26 carry distinctive tied headdresses with frontal tassels found only on early Maya monuments (Tikal Stelae 29 and 6, the Leyden Plate, Copan Stela 24, and Yaxchilan Lintel 48, all from 8.12.14.8.15 to 9.4.11.8.16). Other specific elements of style, such as the blunt-ended scroll work, the peculiar split ends of the serpent-head fangs, the lack of panelling on the belt, and the flared tassels on the collar ornament, are all early traits (Proskouriakoff 1950: 29-70). The wrap-around design and the costuming resemble most strongly those of Tikal Stela 2, style dated to 9.3.10.0.0 ± 2 katuns (Proskouriakoff 1950: 195). William Coe has pointed out that a similar full-front figure is found on Uaxactun Stela 20, probably dated to 9.3.0.0.0 (Morley 1937-38: I, 188-191, V, Pl. 61).

Altar de Sacrificios and Copan had carved monuments before 9.2.0.0.0, but Quirigua's Monuments 26 and 21 are the earliest known dated figural stelae outside of the core area. Although they retain the bas-relief carving tradition of the Peten, Monuments 21 and 26 were the first to pull together the wrap-around idea and the full-frontal pose which later became the hallmark of Quirigua and Copan stelae. This break from, or re-combination of, Peten modes established a new regional style of incipient three-dimensionality which progressed at Copan into the almost free-standing "statue" stelae.

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2 Quirigua site core, with the Acropolis to the south and the Great Plaza to the north.



3 Quirigua Monument 21: front and left side of upper fragment, showing wrap-around design similar to that of Monument 26.



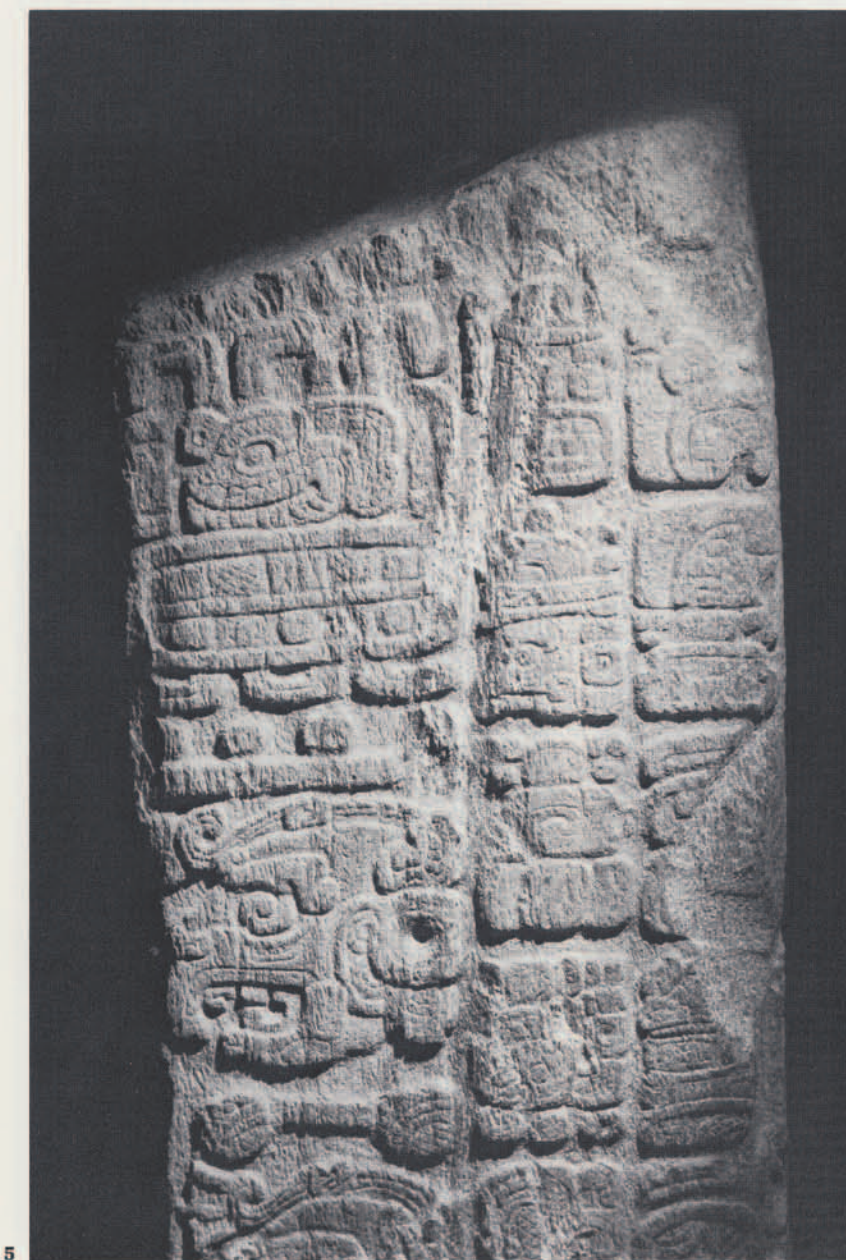
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4 Quirigua Monument 21: right side of upper fragment with wrap-around design.



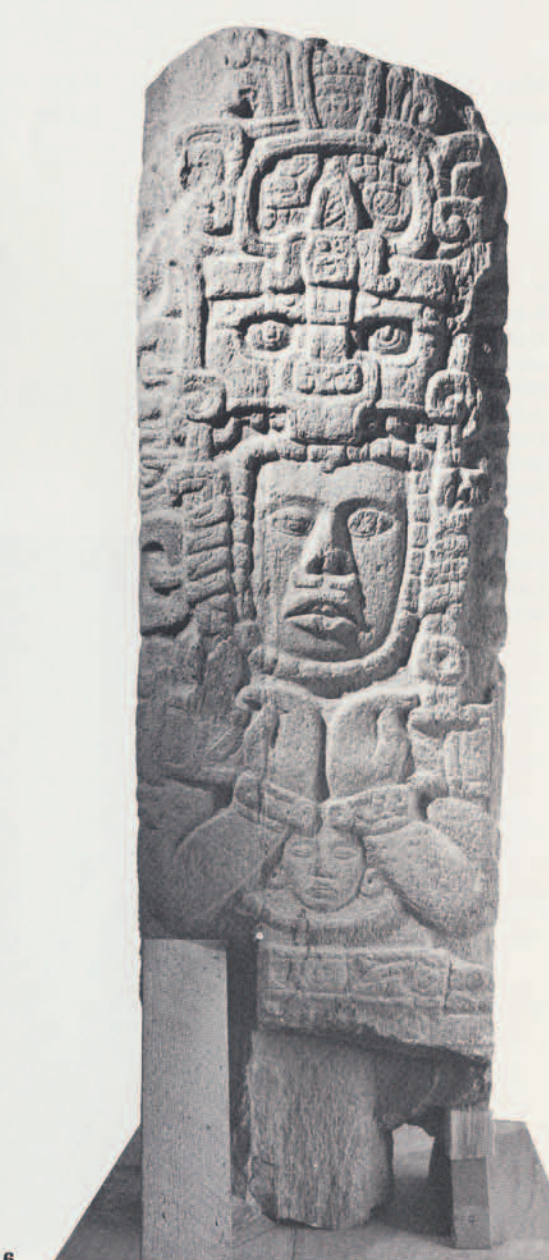
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5 Quirigua Monument 26: back of upper fragment, showing Initial Series date in the left column and dynastic information on the right (Photo by Joya Hairs).



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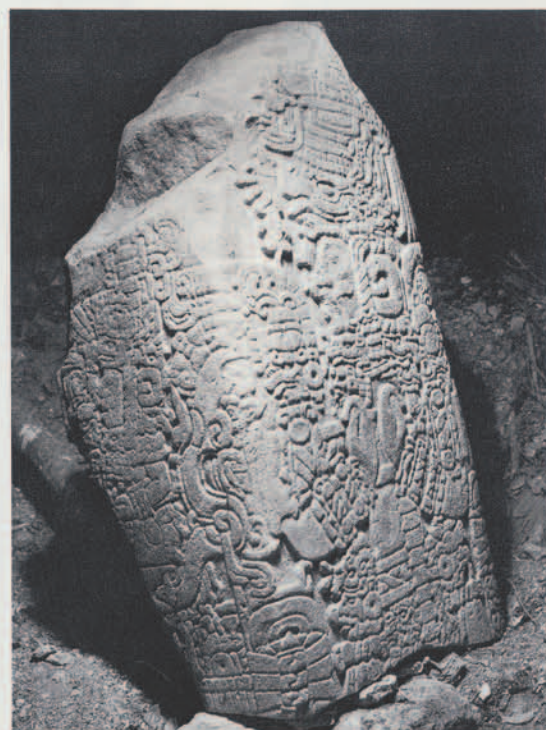
6 Quirigua Monument 26: front of upper fragment, showing elaborate headdress and resemblance to Uaxactun Stela 20 (Photo by Joya Hairs).



6

MONUMENT	RULER DESIGNATION	ASSOCIATED DATES AND EVENTS	
		(Maya Long Count)	(Gregorian)
Mon. 11 (Stela K)	Jade Sky	9.18.15.0.0	A.D. 805
Mon. 9 (Stela I)	Jade Sky? (16 <i>hel</i>)	9.18.10.0.0	A.D. 800
Mon. 16 (Zoomorph P)	Regent? ("Imix Dog")	9.18.5.0.0	A.D. 795
Mon. 7 (Zoomorph G)	Sky Xul	9.17.15.0.0	A.D. 785
		(Sky Xul inauguration at 9.17.14.16.18) (Cauac Sky death at 9.17.14.13.0)	
Mon. 5 (Stela 5)	Cauac Sky	9.17.0.0.0	A.D. 771
		(Cauac Sky captures 18 Rabbit, ruler of Copan at 9.15.6.14.6)	
Mon. 10 (Stela J)	Cauac Sky (14 <i>hel</i>)	9.16.5.0.0	A.D. 756
		(Cauac Sky inauguration at 9.14.13.4.17)	
Mon. 26	Ruler 3 or 4? (3 & 4 <i>hel</i>)	9.2.18.0.0?	A.D. 493
Mon. 3 (Stela C)	Ruler 1?	9.1.0.0.0	A.D. 455
		(Monument carved in 9.17.5.0.0)	

7 Summary of selected Quirigua monuments with hieroglyphic texts referring to probable rulers, dates, and associated events in the site's history. The three monuments with identified *hel* glyphs (seemingly referring to position in Quirigua's dynastic succession) are included.



8 Tikal Stela 2: A Peten monument of the late 5th century, probably a prototype for Quirigua Monuments 21 and 26.



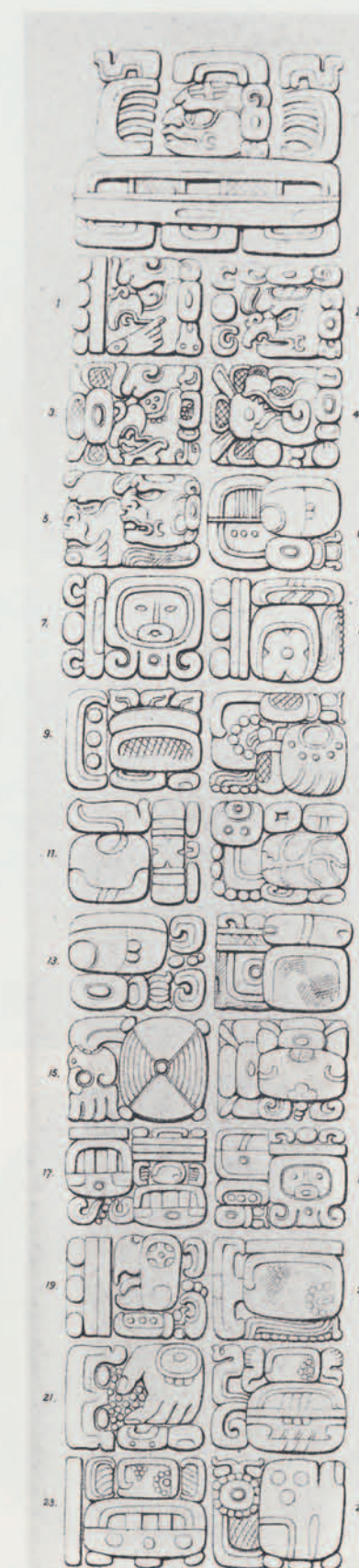
9 Uaxactun Stela 20: Front, 9.3.0.0.0? This Peten monument also bears a resemblance to the early Quirigua stelae (Photo, Peabody Museum, Harvard University).

Third, a very interesting set of glyphs on the back of Monument 26 shows a coefficient 3 with a *hel*-and-spiral glyph, followed by three undeciphered glyph blocks and then a coefficient 4 with an identical *hel*-and-spiral compound. According to Riese (1979), similar *hel*-with-coefficient notations are used with rulers' names to mark a count of succession at Copan and other sites. By this interpretation Quirigua's great ruler, Cauac Sky, inaugurated at 9.14.13.4.17, labeled himself the fourteenth ruler, and Jade Sky, who appears to come to power about seventy years later, was the sixteenth. Thus, these *hel* notations support the early date for the monument. However, it must be remembered that none of the above epigraphic and stylistic arguments constitute proof of a specific Katun 2 date and we must continue to allow for later possibilities, at least until Katun 7 (A.D. 573).

Peter Mathews has pointed out to us the relevance of a text carved on the west side of Quirigua Monument 3 (Stela C; dated at 9.17.5.0.0., A.D. 775; see Morley 1937-38: IV, 156-162). Although the stela was carved late, it carries an Initial Series date of 9.1.0.0.0 (A.D. 455) followed by a *mah-kin-a* title and the Quirigua Emblem Glyph, both indicators of rulers' name phrases. This text may be seen as an historical reference to an Early Classic Quirigua ruler, perhaps the local dynastic founder, made at or near the end of the reign of Quirigua's dominant Late Classic ruler, Cauac Sky (see below). The Initial Series date associated with the reference (9.1.0.0.0) falls nearly forty years earlier than the presumed third or fourth ruler associated with Monument 26.

After this apparent founding period in the Early Classic, the known historical record at Quirigua is mute for some two hundred years, or until the dedication of Monument 13 (Altar M) at 9.15.0.0.0 (A.D. 731) and Monument 19 (Stela S) at 9.15.15.0.0 (A.D. 746). The only exceptions are Monument 20 (Stela T) which Morley (1937-38: IV, 86-89) dated at 9.13.0.0.0, and Monument 12 (Altar L) that Satterthwaite (1979) placed at ca. 9.12.0.0.0 (A.D. 672).

The archaeological record indicates that it may have been during this intermediate period at Quirigua (ca. A.D. 550-720) that construction began in what was to become the Late Classic site core. Here the earliest buildings in the site's largest architectural



10 Quirigua Monument 3 (Stela C): west side, after Maudslay, showing Initial Series date 9.1.0.0.0 followed by a probable ruler's name, title, and emblem glyph (Glyph 12 on print).



11 Burial of a single adult male in a stone-lined crypt under an eastern "shrine" structure of Construction Stage 4. This may be an early Quirigua ruler, perhaps even one of those mentioned on Monument 3, 21, or 26.

12 Excavation through a thin wall of cobble masonry typical of Construction Stage 4, the earliest level in the Acropolis.



13 Quirigua Monument 18 (Altar R): This small rhyolite monument resembles Copan ballcourt markers and may have come from the buried Construction Stage 3 ballcourt under the Acropolis. (Diam. about 68 cm.)



complex, known as the Acropolis (Construction Stage 4; cf. Jones 1977), are dated to this era by associated ceramics and a single radiocarbon determination (A.D. 590 ± 50 , MASCA corrected). The origins of the Acropolis as an apparent elite residential complex are reflected in the recovery of a single dedicatory burial in a stone-lined crypt under the eastern "shrine" structure. This matches the pattern of residential settlement and associated dedicatory burials encountered at Tikal and designated as "Plaza Plan 2" at that site (Becker 1972).

During this early era Quirigua seems to have consisted of little more than a small elite residential compound and the platform of Monument 26 to the north, both constructed of masonry in contrast to the scattering of surrounding less substantial dwellings. The eastern "shrine" in the Acropolis began as an earthen mound over the burial and was then capped with cobble fill and roughly hewn masonry steps and terrace facings. The structure on the south side of the Acropolis rose only three steps above the plaza level. Its building floors were mostly mud, mixed with a little lime. Its walls, composed primarily of large cobblestones, were too thin to have supported a masonry roof. Opposite the shrine on the west was another low building erected on an earthen core. This structure has a relatively elaborate interior platform bench embellished with a red-painted cornice and trapezoidal legs in relief. What we have seen of the Acropolis at this early stage is not grand in its design. The cobble masonry rather resembles that found in other lower Motagua valley sites (see Schortman's article, pages 28-34) and in the Chamelecon drainage of Honduras (Urban 1980).

At this point we cannot determine whether Construction Stage 4 began as early as Katun 2 (A.D. 475) and Monuments 21 and 26, or signaled Quirigua's later resurgence. Likewise, we cannot be sure when Construction Stage 3 began. We have suggested (Jones 1977; Jones, Ashmore and Sharer, in *Quirigua Reports II*, in press; Sharer 1978) that the major constructions of this period, Str. 1B-2 and the buried ballcourt, Str. 1B-Sub. 4, built as they are of well cut rhyolite blocks, may correlate in time to such rhyolite monuments as Monument 13 (Altar M, at 9.15.0.0.0? or A.D. 731) and Monument 14 (Altar N) and therefore to the early part of Cauac Sky's rule, before 9.15.6.14.6. We also suggested that Quirigua's three small round flat monuments, Monuments 12, 17 and 18 (Altars



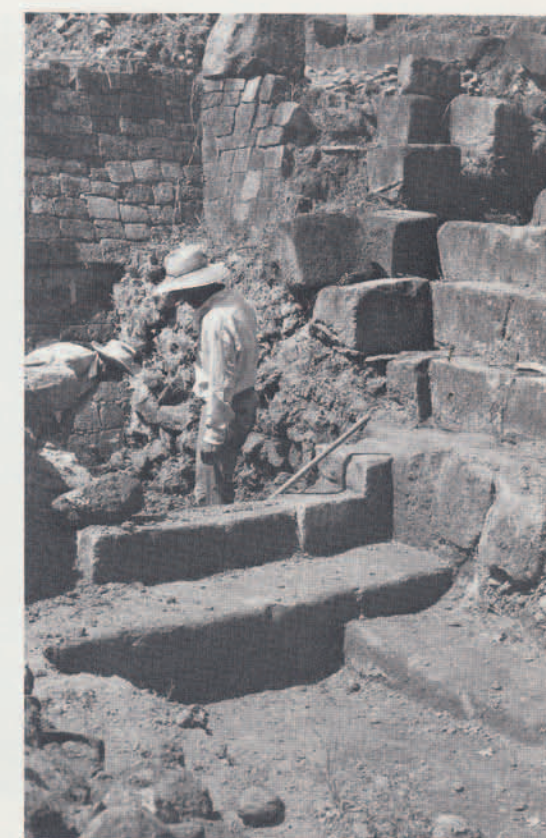
14 Excavation into the room of a structure completely filled and buried by Construction Stage 1.

15 Sandstone masonry of Construction Stage 2 buried by the massive later stairway of Construction Stage 1.

L, Q, and R), may have been markers for the ballcourt buried under later buildings on the west side of the Acropolis. If so, then Construction Stage 3 would have begun earlier than the 9.14.13.4.17 inaugural date of Cauac Sky. We can detect some time depth for Construction Stage 3, with Str. 1B-2 appearing to be later in masonry style than the ballcourt itself. Nevertheless, the cache vessels associated with the ballcourt are of a later ceramic type than those from the Monument 26 platform.

A clearer correlation can be made between the architecture and masonry of the succeeding Acropolis construction (Construction Stage 2) and the series of Cauac Sky's monuments from Monument 19 (Stela S at 9.15.15.0.0 or A.D. 746) to Monument 7 (Zoomorph G at 9.17.15.0.0 or A.D. 785). The most commonly used material of both is sandstone, the craftsmanship is superb, the design is grandiose. Furthermore, the mosaic masonry figure on Str. 1B-Sub. 1, the great western wall of the Construction Stage 2 Acropolis, matches the figures on the monuments in scroll work and in costume details.

Quirigua was fully transformed architecturally during Construction Stage 2 (ca. A.D. 740-810), when some seventy



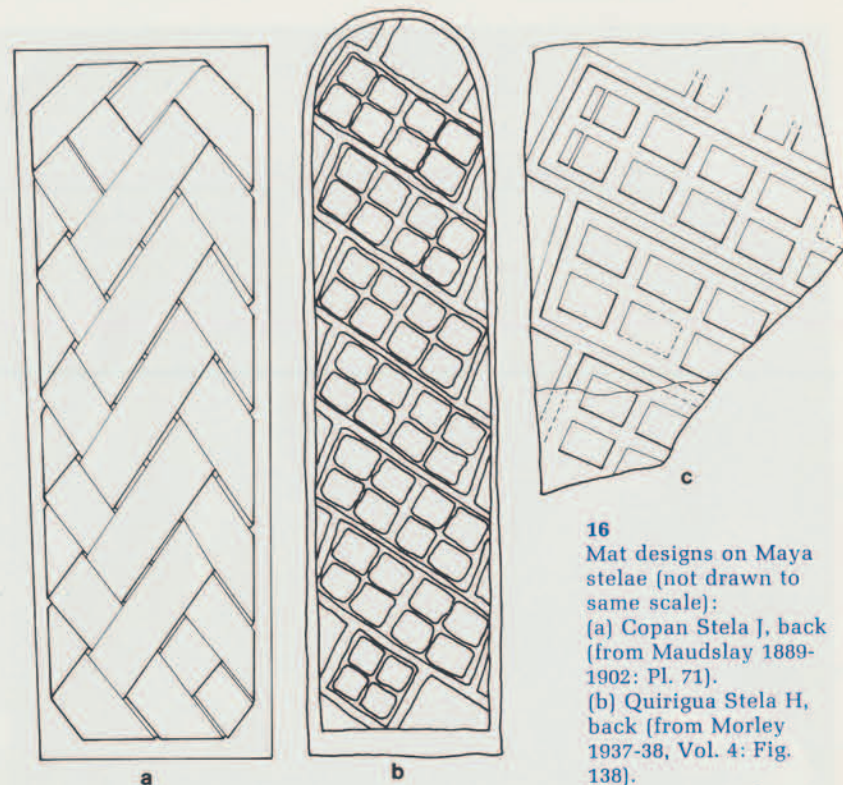
years of seemingly continuous building activity replaced the former small residential compound with the monumental architectural and sculptural remains we now recognize as an important Late Classic Maya center. The Acropolis was considerably enlarged and its structures rebuilt, burying all the previous constructions except Str. 1B-2. The Great Plaza was expanded to the north, ultimately, by the construction of a huge cobble-fill platform (100 x 85 m.) to support the latest and largest of Cauac Sky's monuments. All this rapid growth follows a single historical event, seemingly the capture of Copan's ruler, 18 Rabbit, by Cauac Sky in 9.15.6.14.6 (A.D. 737), that has been identified from multiple references in the Quirigua inscriptions (Proskouriakoff 1973: 165-178; Marcus 1976: 135). As we have suggested elsewhere (Jones 1977; Sharer 1978: 66-68), the architecturally visible transformation of Quirigua after this event reflects a new status as an independent political and mercantile power, commanding the Motagua valley jade and obsidian routes.

Significantly, there is little in Quirigua's Construction Stage 2 that can be considered of Copan derivation or inspiration. The exquisite sandstone masonry and

decoration of this period have their fore-runners in Construction Stage 3, specifically in Str. 1B-2, and as we have mentioned, models for the stelae of this time can be found in Monuments 26 and 21 at Quirigua itself. It is at a later stage (after A.D. 810; or Construction Stage 1) that the Quirigua Acropolis takes on a Copan appearance, due mostly to the building of the great stairways leading up to it from the new Ballcourt Plaza. Even the mat design inscription on Quirigua Monument 8 (Stela H), often mentioned as imitating Copan's sculptural style, seems more closely related to a monument located some 150 km. to the northwest, Cancuen Stela 3 (Tourtellot, Sabloff and Sharick 1978: 229-230), since both share an apparent simple unwoven diagonal text, unlike the interwoven pattern of Copan's Stela J (Miller 1980).

In sum, we can still see Quirigua's "great period" (ca. A.D. 740-810) as one of cultural independence from Copan. Its architecture and its monument style are both derivative from local Quirigua models, rather than from Copan. The size of Quirigua's monuments and its plaza are at a scale not found at Copan. In contrast, the earlier ballcourt markers of Construction Stage 3 and the later buildings of Construction Stage 1 may indeed have been designed with an eye on Copan. The data would suggest that for a while, Quirigua was able, perhaps through the well-advertised capture event, to gain sufficient political and economic independence, exploit its position between Copan and the Peten, and exert fuller control over the jade and obsidian sources and the rich bottom lands of the Motagua valley.

Quirigua's role as a commercial power is supported by several lines of archaeological evidence. Geomorphological investigations in 1978 and 1979 have revealed that the ancient course of the Motagua shifted continuously in the vicinity of Quirigua. It is likely that the course of the Motagua was much closer to the site core during its occupation, probably flowing adjacent to the western side of the Great Plaza (see Ashmore article, pp. 20-27). Excavation immediately west of Str. 1A-11 in 1979 discovered that the northwest edge of the Ballcourt Plaza consists of a precipitous embankment faced with cobbles. This embankment was apparently the edge of a large, anciently water-filled basin. The extent of this basin is unknown, but its proximity to the 8th century course of the Motagua suggests that it served as an

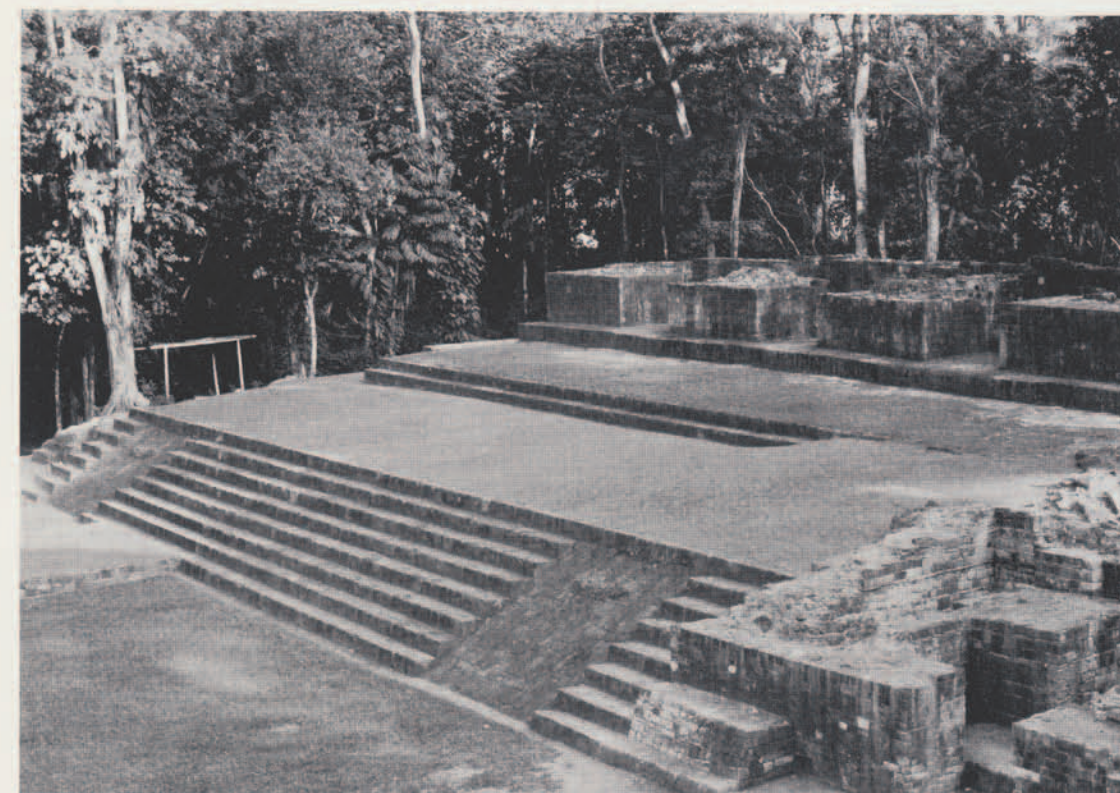


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Mat designs on Maya stelae (not drawn to same scale):
(a) Copan Stela J, back (from Maudslay 1889-1902: Pl. 71).
(b) Quirigua Stela H, back (from Morley 1937-38, Vol. 4: Fig. 138).
(c) Cancuen Stela 3, front (from Tourtellot, Sabloff, and Sharick 1978, Fig. 48).

embayment to provide shelter and docking facilities for river canoes.

Quirigua's prosperity and building activity continued in Construction Stage 1 through the reigns of Cauac Sky's successors. The largest two structures of the Acropolis, Str. 1B-1 with an associated Initial Series date of 9.19.0.0.0 (A.D. 810; Morley 1937-38: IV, 229-237), and Str. 1B-5 shortly thereafter, were apparently built during the reign of the last historically identified ruler, Jade Sky (Jones 1977; Sharer 1978).

Quirigua's two periods of monument carving activity and its long hiatus, at least as now known, correspond to the span of Tikal's apparent prosperity. Copan, in contrast, although it has an early stela of Southern Maya style and some Early Classic all-glyphic monuments, begins its great period of stela erection around Katun 9, half-way through the hiatus in stela activity at Tikal. This is roughly at the time when Piedras Negras, Naranjo, Coba, and Palenque, the newer centers of the Maya periphery, begin their spectacular and creative careers. Likewise, Quirigua and Tikal continue their monumental activity longer than these other sites. To us, the timing suggests that Quirigua's economic fortunes were more closely connected to Tikal's than to Copan's. In our view, Quirigua and Copan were rivals.



17
Str. 1B-1, a Construction Stage 1 building dated 9.19.0.0.0 (A.D. 810), restored by the Instituto de Antropología e Historia de Guatemala after excavation by the University Museum.



Christopher Jones excavated four years with the University Museum at Tikal, Guatemala, and obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1969. He taught anthropology in Buffalo for several years and currently is a Research Associate in the American Section of the Museum, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1976 and 1977 he directed the Acropolis excavations for the Museum and currently is preparing the Quirigua site-core report, to be published as Volume III in the *Quirigua Reports* series. In addition, he is co-author (with the late Linton Satterthwaite) of *Tikal Report 33: Part A: Monuments and Inscriptions of Tikal*, soon to be published as University Museum Monograph 44.

Quirigua's connections were with the Peten, either by way of the Caribbean coast and the Motagua and Belize rivers, or more directly by way of overland trails through the Lower Verapaz and the southern Peten. As Miller (1980) has pointed out, Copan's sculptural styles owe much to a non-Peten influence and are more free and creative than the stiff Tikal-like forms of Quirigua. We should point out that this conclusion was reached independently from, but is in agreement with similar findings based upon ceramic studies (Willey *et al.* 1980; also see Sharer 1980:2).

Our archaeological excavations indicate that while the site continued to be occupied into the Postclassic period, it may have come under the control of outsiders. For the first time, occupation debris from the latest levels of areas such as the Ballcourt Plaza contain sizeable proportions of "foreign" pottery. The closest affinities for these ceramics are from the north, along the east coast of Yucatan. Other new elements appear at this time, including chipped-stone projectile points. This suggests contacts with areas to the north, probably via the newly emerging seacoast long-distance trade networks (Sabloff and Rathje 1975). The Central Mexican flavor of such Postclassic contacts may explain the earlier reports of "non-Maya" artifacts found at Quirigua, including a "chacmool"

sculpture (Richardson 1940) and a carved metate of apparent Coastal Veracruz style (see Thompson 1970:131).

Despite these indications of lingering occupation, Quirigua was probably abandoned by the end of the Early Postclassic era (ca. A.D. 1250). When Cortes and his party marched through the Maya lowlands to Honduras (1524-1526) they visited the prosperous commercial center of Nito on the Rio Dulce 60 km. to the northeast of Quirigua. This location was significant, for Nito undoubtedly acted as Quirigua's replacement as a trade center serving the commerce between the Maya highlands and the Caribbean.

To summarize, then, although there certainly is a clear regional Southeastern Maya artistic and architectural style shared by Quirigua and Copan, the great period of Cauac Sky's rule at Quirigua cannot, in our view, be characterized simply as imitative of Copan. We think, rather, based on our excavations and on the newly discovered monument, that it derives from earlier local models and ultimately, perhaps, from the Central Peten. Quirigua's Postclassic occupation, with its suggested Yucatecan connections and the subsequent transfer of commercial power to Nito on the coast, can be viewed simply as a continuation of this association with the north that began in the Early Classic.