



A TLALOC STELA FROM TIKAL

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Stela 32 was one of the outstanding finds of the 1961 field season at Tikal. The front of this broken and battered monument is remarkable for the carving of a full-face representation of Tlaloc—the Aztec name of an important rain deity who had a long history in Mesoamerica.

The stela had been intentionally broken, and a large fragment was included in a North Acropolis cache dating from the late Early Classic Period (about A.D. 400-600). The fragment is 70 cm. high, 70 cm. wide, and 21.5 cm. thick. The top, back, and one side are missing. The stone is a hard, white, somewhat laminated limestone which does not seem to be the type used for contemporary Tikal monuments.

The representation of Tlaloc on Stela 32 is also peculiar at Tikal. It is not Maya, but shows close resemblances in style and content to Tlaloc representations from the great site of Teotihuacan near Mexico City, about seven hundred airmiles from Tikal. When that city was at its cultural apogee during the Teotihuacan III Period, a time interval in part contemporaneous with the Early Classic Period in the Maya area, Tlaloc was often shown full-face in beautiful polychrome murals. He also appeared in pottery figurines, pottery vessels, and incorporated into architectural decoration.

In the Teotihuacan representations, Tlaloc is distinguished by rings around the eyes. Frequently he wears a horizontal, bar-like nose ornament. The figure on Stela 32 is also adorned with a wide, feathered headdress of Teotihuacan style, the headband ornamented with circles. The head-dress originally extended above and



to the sides of the four elements resembling fir trees. The upper part of a pectoral in the shape of a bird may be seen in the insert drawing. The multiple-strand necklace of round beads, and the earplugs with enormous flares were represented throughout Mesoamerica during that time period. Whether this Tikal Tlaloc ever had a complete body is uncertain. At Teotihuacan, some representations do show the whole figure; some show only the head, upper chest, and upraised arms.

We have remarked on the similarity between Stela 32 and the Teotihuacan Tlalocs. Then—was Stela 32 carved at Teotihuacan and transported hundreds of miles to Tikal? The style of the monument and the possibility that the stone may not be of local origin might suggest foreign derivation. However, the size of the fragment and the great distance involved make it appear unlikely that Stela 32 was carved at Teotihuacan and even a portion carried to Tikal. Furthermore, we do have a few other Tlaloc representations from Tikal: on pottery vessels from two Early Classic burials, and as minor decorative elements on two other Early Classic, and two Late Classic, monuments. We are certain that at least the latter monuments were carved at Tikal.

We suggest two other explanations for the presence of Stela 32 at Tikal: it may have been carved at Tikal by Mayas who wished to honor an admired foreign deity by imitating a foreign style; or, a Teotihuacan artisan may have made a prolonged visit to Tikal and while residing there, may have carved Stela 32 in his native style. **2**