COMMENTS

Dating Izapa Monuments: Comments on Rosenswig

Takeshi Inomata and Lucia Henderson

Rosenswig's discussion of the sculptural chronology of Izapa contains some inaccuracies that require correction. The dates of the monuments at Izapa also require further evaluation.

Keywords: Izapa, monuments, Maya iconography, chronology, Mesoamerica, Pacific Coast

La discusión de Rosenswig sobre la cronología de las esculturas de Izapa requiere correcciones ya que presenta algunas inexactitudes. Las fechas de los monumentos de Izapa necesitan una mayor evaluación.

Palabras clave: Izapa, monumentos, iconografía maya, cronología, Mesoamérica, Costa Pacífica

We agree with Rosenswig's (2019) argument that the Guillén phase at Izapa dates to circa 300–100 BC. We question, however, both the assumption that all bas-relief monuments at the site date to this time period and the conclusion that there was a centuries-long gap between bas-relief sculptural production at Izapa and that at nearby centers.

Although Inomata and colleagues (2014) suggested that the Guillén phase may begin after 100 BC, they also considered the possibility that it dates to circa 300–100 BC. After reviewing new ceramic data from Izapa shared by Mendelsohn in 2015, Inomata agreed that the 300–100 BC date is more likely. Inomata and Henderson (2016:Table 1) used the early Guillén date. Dating the Guillén phase to circa 300–100 BC, however, does not mean that all bas-relief monuments also date to this period. Rosenswig begins his article by citing Inomata and colleagues' (2014) consideration of the early Guillén date and its implications but disregards this important aspect of the discussion.

We firmly believe that a theoretical understanding of political processes must build on empirical data. The Guillén date of bas-relief sculptures at Izapa cannot simply be assumed. Instead, their chronology needs to be evaluated through multiple lines of evidence, including their archaeological context and stylistic correlations of sculptures across different regions.

As for archaeological context, Rosenswig's article argues that the southern part of Izapa, including the monumental center where bas-relief sculptures were found, was no longer occupied during the Hato phase (ca. 100 BC–AD 100), because his survey found no ceramic remains dating to this period. There is no mention of the numerous Hato-phase ritual deposits, including elite burials and caches, that the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAF) excavated in the monumental core. These deposits demonstrate that this area continued to be an important focus of elite and ritual activities during the Hato phase. It is thus possible that at least some monuments found in this area were erected during this time.

Takeshi Inomata ■ School of Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0030, USA (inomata@email.arizona.edu, corresponding author)
Lucia Henderson ■ independent scholar, Washington, DC 20016, USA

Latin American Antiquity 30(4), 2019, pp. 857–858
Copyright © 2019 by the Society for American Archaeology
doi:10.1017/laq.2019.64

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2019.64 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The article does not review the archaeological contexts of the bas-relief sculptures, simply stating, "Izapa's low-relief sculptures were erected in association with Guillén-phase ceramics that date them" (2019:102). Yet, according to Norman (1976:3), "Few of the Izapa monuments were excavated in direct association with datable Preclassic remains (Lowe, Lee, and Martínez 1976), but the discovery of the Izapan-style Stelae 10 and 11 at Kaminaljuyu below a floor of Miraflores-Arenal date fixes the bulk of Izapa monuments in the same or approximate period." In other words, the NWAF dated the Izapa monuments through the archaeological context of sculptures at Kaminaljuyu with which they share stylistic features. The Verbena phase context in which these Kaminaljuyu sculptures were found is now dated to ca. 100 BC–50 AD.

The revised dates of Kaminaljuyu monuments agree with the dates of the San Bartolo murals. Rosenswig's discussion on this point requires correction. Although some mural fragments from Las Pinturas Sub-VI were dated to 300–200 BC, the well-preserved murals of Room 1 that are so closely related to Kaminaljuyu Sculpture 10 (Inomata and Henderson 2016:Figure 10b) belong to the Sub-I construction phase, dated to about 100 BC. The lowland monuments, including those from El Mirador and Cival cited in the article, are from insecure stratigraphic contexts. As was the case at Izapa, many of these monuments were dated by stylistic comparison with Kaminaljuyu sculptures.

Rosenswig's article repeatedly claims that "Inomata and Henderson (2016) propose that all low-relief carved sculpture in southern Mesoamerica should be dated to 100 BC–AD 150" (105). This is incorrect. As our article describes, bas-relief sculpture in the Southern Region long preceded the Terminal Preclassic period (see Inomata and Henderson 2016:Figure 6). What appears to emerge around 100 BC is the Maya style, a specific type of bas-relief tied stylistically and iconographically to Lowland Maya imagery. Therefore, even if all bas-relief sculptures at Izapa are proven to date to the Guillén phase, no centuries-long gap would exist between their carving and the production of similar sculptures at nearby sites. Furthermore, a Guillén date still allows for the possibility that sculptures with closer ties to the Maya style appeared late in the sequence—that is, about 100 BC—as they do at nearby centers.

Finally, we wish to respond to the allegation in the supplemental material of the article that the inclusion of ceramic phases in the Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates by Inomata and colleagues (2014) conceals "professional judgments in the guise of statistical objectivity." The primary goal of that analysis was to date ceramic phases, so the incorporation of ceramic phases was essential. More importantly, literature on Bayesian analysis expressly states that this method incorporates researchers' subjective judgments regarding archaeological information. Far from claiming objectivity, it facilitates rigorous evaluation by explicitly recognizing the subjective nature of professional judgment.

In sum, we believe that the conclusion that all bas-relief sculpture at Izapa dates to the Guillén phase is premature. Although it is certainly possible that bas-relief monuments from Izapa date to circa 300–100 BC, it is also possible that some were carved about 100 BC or later. Before conclusions can be drawn about the sculptural chronology at Izapa, prior assumptions need to be reevaluated and all available data reassessed. The limitations of that data must also be explicitly addressed.

References Cited

Inomata, Takeshi, and Lucia Henderson
2016 Time Tested: Re-Thinking Chronology and Sculptural Traditions in Preclassic Southern Mesoamerica. *Antiquity* 90:456–471.

Inomata, Takeshi, Raúl Ortiz, Bárbara Arroyo, and Eugenia J. Robinson
2014 Chronological Revisions of Preclassic Kaminaljuyú, Guatemala: Implications for Social Processes in the Southern Maya Area. *Latin American Antiquity* 25:377–408.

Norman, V. Garth
1976 *Izapa Sculpture (Part 2: Text)*. Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation No. 30. New World Archaeological Foundation, Provo, Utah.

Rosenswig, Robert M.
2019 The Izapa Kingdom's Capital: Formative Period Settlement Patterns, Population, and Dating Low-Relief Stelae. *Latin American Antiquity* 30:91–108.

Submitted June 6, 2019; Accepted July 15, 2019

https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2019.64 Published online by Cambridge University Press