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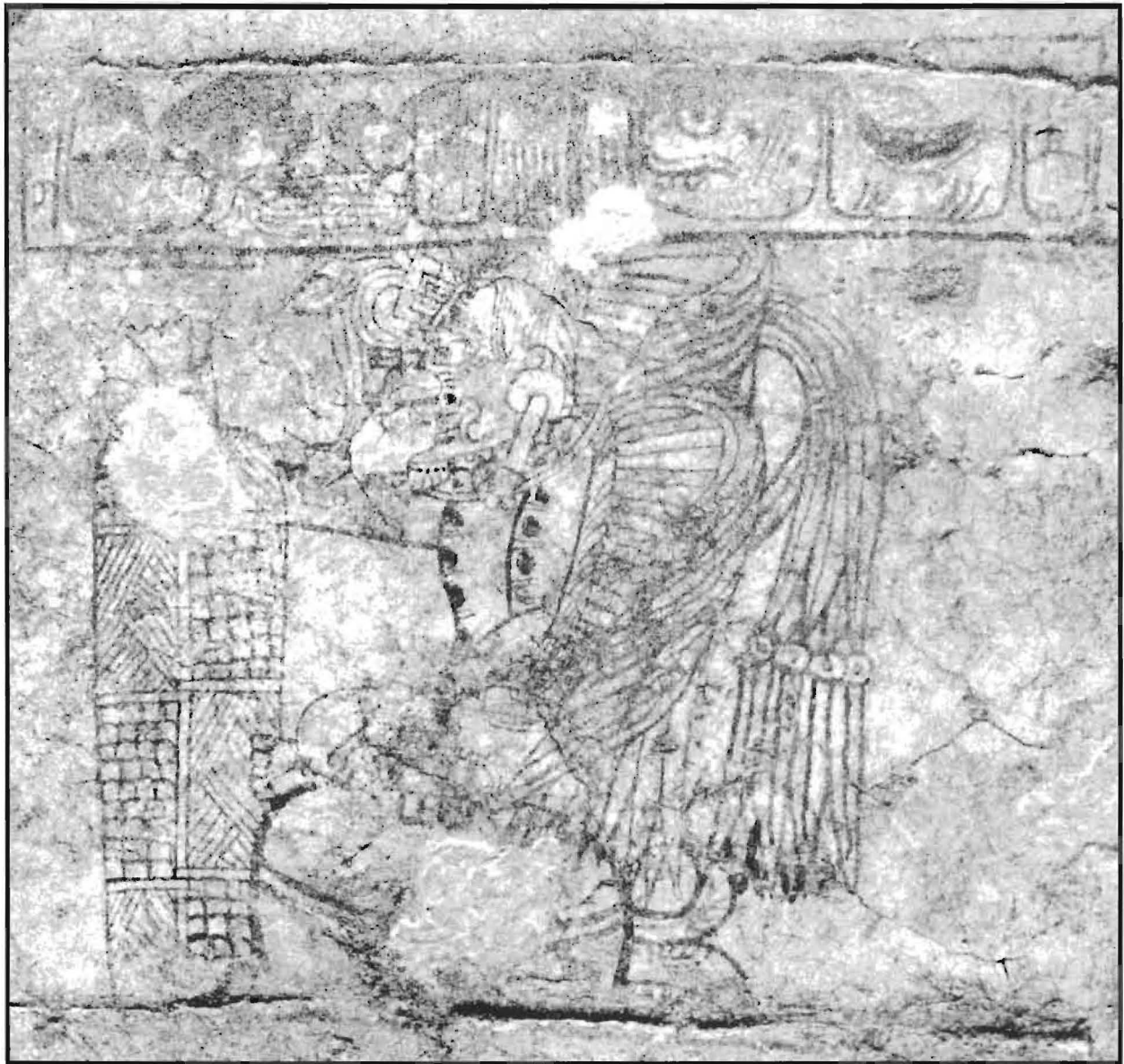
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## Yacatecuhtli in El Salvador

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The progressive Mexicanization of southeastern Mesoamerica in the Epiclassic onward is marked by the adoption of many aspects of material and ideological culture, especially those popular in southern Mexico and the Yucatan. Prominent among these are deities and, presumably, the rituals that went along with them. Tlaloc, the central Mexican rain god, made his appearance in the Yucatan and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec by the Late Classic as did Xipe Totec. These deities very soon became extremely popular in western El Salvador, where the dominant Maya cultures adopted them during the tumultuous years of the Classic Maya collapse and the accompanying regrouping and redistribution of power and influence. Other deities that make their appearance in El Salvador are Mictlantecuhtli and Quetzalcoatl-Ehécatl and, probably, Xochiquetzal and some of the other Mexican goddesses. Here we report on the first identified appearance of another Mexican deity, one who also rose to prominence in the Epiclassic southern Mexico, Yacatecuhtli (probably related to Ek Chuah of the Maya), the “Lord of the Vanguard” or “Nose Lord”, the best known of the various gods of long distance traders.

The origins of Yacatecuhtli are not known, although his prominence at Cholula (a guise of Quetzalcoatl) suggests that the cult was important in the Epiclassic and was, perhaps, related to the changes in scope and focus of long distance trade at that time. Yet identifiable depictions of this god are scarce indeed. In 1966, J. Eric S. Thompson attempted a synthesis of what was known of the various merchant deities. It is Thompson who delineated the characteristics of this deity, of which the most prominent is an elongated nose, sometimes slightly bulbous, a nose which Thompson identifies as a “Pinocchio” nose (from its length).

The Early Postclassic Cihuatán Phase cultural tradition of El Salvador is characterized by a sudden burst of elements copied or borrowed from Mexico. Among these elements is a locally produced version of Cholula or Mixteca-Puebla Polychrome, called Banderas Polychrome. Banderas Polychrome occurs in a limited number of shapes, all apparently individual eating or drinking vessels, and is characterized by a decidedly martial series of motifs painted in white, black, gray and yellow on a red to dark red background. The archaeological associations of Banderas are closely correlated with elite domestic and civic/religious (“ceremonial”) structures. Common motifs include flags (which is why its name), darts, shields, skulls, crossed bones, flying rib cages (all spotted with blood), and similar motifs associated (in the Late Postclassic) with warfare and sacrifice. Thus we were astonished to see, on a small piece of a Banderas Polychrome chalice, what is clearly the face of Yacatecuhtli, a god of merchants, not of warriors (Fig. 1). The nose is elongated in an exaggerated manner, somewhat bulbous, and droops a bit. The eye is slightly eroded, but seems to have an open, teardrop, shaped iris, rather in the Maya mode, as are the lips

and chin. The ear spool is simple and white and is remarkably like the earspools shown on the Aztec Yacatecuhtli while the chin has both a white object under it and then a spotted band, perhaps cat skin, perhaps rubber or blood spotted cloth. Unfortunately the sherd is small and the other signifiers of the deity: the staff, the *mecapal* headdress (a leather band with attached cords to carry a pack on the back, a specific form of tump line), and other pieces of equipment or costume are missing. What remains on the small sherd (5.3 cm at its widest point; 4 mm thick) is a round motif, usually identified as a ball of eagle down, in front of the nose, a striped flag below it, both common Banderas Polychrome motifs, and a white U-shaped motif and a dotted circle in white. Some forms of Banderas show *horror vacui*, and this would appear to be one, with simple, enigmatic motifs filling in space.

The appearance of Yacatecuhtli in the Acropolis Palace of Cihuatán should not be surprising. El Salvador had been a participant in the greater Mexican/Mayan world since the Middle Preclassic. El Salvador also produced items that were important to other Mesoamericans, although few would survive in the archaeological record: cacao (Yacatecuhtli was also the patron of cacao growers, a group with close ties to merchants), cotton, balsam, indigo, cochineal, *Arribidea chica* (a strong red dye), *Purpura pansa* (shellfish purple), and, of course, slaves. Banderas Polychrome, a local variant of Mixteca-Puebla Polychrome is, in itself, strong evidence of the closeness of ties between western El Salvador and southern Mexico.

Yacatecuhtli also has associations with warfare, specifically with fifth column activities and, of course, merchants did sacrifice slaves to him, bought in the market, because



Fig. 1. The Banderas Polychrome sherd with a long-nosed god, presumably Yacatecuhtli/Ek Chuah. Photograph by Paúl E. Amaroli B.

they did not take an active role in warfare themselves, or not usually. The association of most Banderas Polychrome with elite structures might suggest that the usual Maya practice of recruiting merchants from the younger members of the royal or of noble families pertained in at Cihuatán as well whereas the association of this sherd with an enormous hall on the Western Terraces of the Acropolis, may indicate that Yacatecutli was also, as he was half a millennium later, a deity of banqueting.

The chance finding of this image enriches our understanding of Early Postclassic society and pushes the occurrence of this merchant god back some 500 years before we have documentary evidence as to his importance. It also indicates something of the importance of both trade and militarism in the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic in southern Mesoamerica.

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#### Acknowledgements

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Resumen: La Fase Cihuatán en El Salvador Posclásica Temprana se caracteriza por la adopción de muchas ideas mexicanas, tanto de material cultural como ideológicas. Entre estos rasgos adoptados son los cultos de algunos deidades de origen mexicana. Entre ellos ya podemos reconocer Yacatecutli, el dios más importante de los mercaderes de larga distancia. Esta representación, que está bien fechada, indica que el culto de Yacatecutli tiene una antigüedad de más que 500 años antes de los aztecas en el sureste de Mesoamérica.

Zusammenfassung: Die früh-postklassische Cihuatán-Phase in El Salvador zeichnet sich durch die Übernahme verschiedener mexikanischer Kulturelemente aus. Dazu zählt auch die Verbreitung verschiedener mexikanischer Gottheiten. Yacatecutli, ein bedeutender Gott der Fernhändler konnte nun auf einer Gefäßmalerei identifiziert werden, so dass der Kult um diese Gottheit im südlichen Mesoamerika bis ins 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. zurückverfolgt werden kann.

## Arte rupestre y asentamientos: El caso de la Piedra Sellada en el Parque Nacional El Imposible (El Salvador)

Sébastien Perrot-Minnot y Philippe Costa

El Parque Nacional de El Imposible es un área protegida de 3800 hectáreas situada en la Sierra de Apaneca, justo al norte de la estrecha planicie litoral occidental de El Salvador, en el sur del departamento de Ahuachapán. Las imponentes montañas del parque dominan grandiosos valles encajonados en los cuales corren ríos y riachuelos (Fig. 1). Todo el parque está hoy cubierto con densos bosques secundarios que incluyen madrecazo, varillo y jocote.

El Parque El Imposible representa, según la entidad Salvanatura, que lo administra, "uno de los ecosistemas más amenazados en el mundo, el Bosque Tropical de Montaña de la vertiente pacífica mesoamericana, y el último refugio de muchas especies de animales y plantas" ([www.salvanatura.org.sv](http://www.salvanatura.org.sv)). No obstante, se sabe que hubo considerables cambios en el paisaje en las últimas décadas. Hasta los años 1970 existían milpas, y durante décadas, el parque fue atravesado por los cafetaleros que llevaban su producción al puerto de Acajutla (un viaje reputado "imposible" hasta la construcción de un puente, en 1968).

En la actualidad, la reserva ha sido habilitada para recibir la visita de turistas, los cuales vienen a descubrir el patrimonio natural, pero también, los vestigios prehispánicos. Un pequeño museo exhibe fragmentos de vasijas – cuya temporalidad abarca los períodos clásico tardío (600–900 d. C.) y postclásico (900–1524 d. C.) – artefactos de piedras y un molde de algunos petrograbados de La Piedra Sellada. Ubicada en el fondo del valle del río Guayapa, esta enorme roca es una de las atracciones del parque (el camino que llega allí es indicado por rótulos).

Nuestro interés por estas manifestaciones gráfico-rupestres deriva de las investigaciones que realizamos anteriormente en otros sitios con arte rupestre de El Salvador (ver bibliografía y Fig. 2) y de nuestras inquietudes con respecto al marco cronológico y cultural del arte rupestre. Queremos reflexionar, además, sobre la posible definición de estilos rupestres. Por otra parte, la Piedra Sellada se encuentra a apenas 13 km al noreste de Cara Sucia, donde realizamos reconocimientos y excavaciones (Perrot-Minnot et al. 2005; Perrot-Minnot 2006b, 2007a; Moraga et al. 2009).

Hicimos una visita al sitio de la Piedra Sellada en noviembre de 2007, examinando la roca grabada y sus afueras inmediatas (Perrot-Minnot 2007c). Philippe Costa emprendió, en base a un levantamiento fotográfico numérico, un dibujo de los petrograbados (Fig. 3). Pero no se realizaron reconocimientos, por el carácter puntual e informal de la visita.

En el presente artículo, tras presentar los antecedentes de la investigación arqueológica en el Parque Nacional El Imposible, ofreceremos una descripción del sitio de la Piedra Sellada, un análisis de los petrograbados y una reflexión (muy



Fig. 1. Vista al valle encajonado del río Guayapa (Parque Nacional El Imposible) donde se encuentra el sitio de La Piedra Sellada (Foto: Philippe Costa, 2007).