

## 32 Stelae from Structure A

### XOCHICALCO CULTURE

Epiclassic (650–900 AD), Xochicalco, Valley of Morelos

Region: Central Highlands

Basalt and cinnabar

1) 180 x 34 cm x 23 cm; 2) 180 x 36 x 22 cm; 3) 138 x 40 x 25 cm

Inventory: 1) 10-81748; 2) 10-81749; 3) 10-81750

In 1961, the archaeologist César A. Sáenz made a spectacular discovery at Xochicalco Structure A: a broad platform thirty meters south of the Temple of the Feathered Serpents. Here he found three rectangular stelae and indications that the Xochicalcas had covered them with cinnabar, “killed” them ritually and buried them in and around a stone-lined, box-shaped pit excavated in the vestibule, just before definitively dismantling the structure itself.

The stelae are famous not only for their unique aesthetics, but also because they bear the longest linear inscription from the pre-Mexica period in Central Mexico. Each stela has carvings on four of six sides, featuring sixteen or seventeen designs including human faces, numerical coefficients, calendrical signs and place names. The main face of Stela 1 displays the glyph 7-Reptile’s Eye, a human face emerging from the head of a feathered serpent and a celestial band with hands around a mouth. Stela 2 has the sequence 7-Rain, the face of Tlaloc with a headdress of the Year Glyph represented by a superimposed trapezoid and lightning bolt, and the mouth of Tlaloc. Stela 3 has the date 4-Movement, a human face—again emerging from a serpent’s mouth—and a celestial band framing the glyph 4-Blood.

Some experts believe this inscription to be associated with religion: it has been proposed, for example, that the stelae symbolize the deities of the earth (stela 1), rain (stela 2) and sun (stela 3). Other researchers have suggested that they are telling us that Quetzalcoatl—creator of the Fifth Sun and of humanity, and inventor of the calendar—was born and was first worshipped at Xochicalco. Still others believe the stelae commemorate historical events related to the lives of three of the city’s warrior-rulers: their ascent to the throne, their reign and their conquests.

LEONARDO LÓPEZ LUJÁN & MARCO ANTONIO SANTOS  
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