

THE MESOAMERICAN CONNECTION

While on vacation at our nation's capital in the summer of 1996, I visited the National Gallery of Art to view an exhibition entitled; "Olmec Art of Ancient Mexico." The exhibition was amazing. It featured over 100 works of art including a 13-ton colossal head from San Lorenzo, which was exhibited in the United States for the first time.¹ While at the museum I purchased a book-size magazine called the *Olmecs*, which was a special edition of *Arqueologia Magazine*.² It featured a selection of sculptural artifacts and photographs of all of the known Olmec Colossal Head. One of the artifacts that caught my attention was a strange Olmec sculpture that was described as being a "mutilated" head (Figure 1). It appeared to me that this split faces sculpture was completely overlooked by other researchers.

According to scholars at the museum in Veracruz, this sculpture is an intentionally mutilated head. They believe the left side of this strange sculpture is the remnants of an intact Olmec head, while the right side has

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*Portions of this report were published in *The Cydonia Codex: Reflections from Mars*, (Berkeley: Frog Lid, 2005), by George J. Haas and William R. Saunders.

been obliterated. The article contends that the facial features on the right were intentionally eliminated by drill holes and deep perforations, leaving a deformed and abstract morphology. Some scholars believe that this Olmec head was originally a dualistic representation of two faces, however for some unknown reason one half was removed.³



Figure 1 Olmec Mutilated Head (Stone sculpture) Drawing by the author. (Image source: Olmecs: Arqueologia Mexicana, "Cyphers," page 58.

Something didn't feel right about this explanation. In examining the overall shape of the sculpture, it became obvious that the "mutilated" side was not proportional to the side with the head. If this head had been a symmetrical face at one time, why was there a greater mass of stone on the left side, which was deformed? There had to be another answer.

Seeing that the two side of the sculpture are separated along a central demarcation line I duplicated each side of this anomalous Olmec sculpture. The right side resembled the typical colossal Olmec head that can be found throughout the plains of the Gulf of Mexico, only this one is on a smaller scale (Figure 2). The facial features of the face are very Negroid, with thick lips and a broad nose. We also noticed that this face has no eyes. Instead of eyes it has what appeared to be eye shields or eyeglasses. If you look closely, you

can see a line cut into the side of the face right where the frames would have been for the eyeglasses. In addition, on the side of the head (out of view) is a four fingered hand with long fingernails covering the ears.

The whole face, with the hands covering the ears, the pushed-back open mouth, and the eye shields gave the impression of someone facial squinting, while looking at the bright light of an explosion!

After duplicating the left side of this object, a stunning image of a complete open-winged bat was staring back at me (Figure 2). This side of the Olmec sculpture which was supposed to be a mutilated and drill out mess was actually the half image of an open winged bat!



Figure 2 Olmec Mutilated Head (Stone sculpture) Drawing by the author. (Image source: Olmecs: Arqueologia Mexicana, "Cyphers," page 58. Left side duplicated: Olme Head. Right side duplicated: Open Winged Bat.

The idea of duality is not unheard of among archeologists in studying the sculptural artifacts and glyphs of the Olmec and as I was soon to discover it was very common among many of the cultures on both North and South America. Here was a terrestrial link to the Cydonia Face! Finally I was on track and in hot pursuit of the origins of the Cydonia Face.

Once I got home I began re-evaluating the artwork of Mesoamerican cultures and scheduled a trip to my local Library and with the aid of Google, I found one split-faced image after another. I was convinced that I had found a groundbreaking connection between the Cydonia Face and the two-faced masks of Mesoamerican cultures! I snapped into action and gave Richard C, Hoagland a phone call. This was easier than one would think, for Hoagland conveniently provided his home phone number (and his home address) at the back of each issue of his journals.

At the time Hoagland lived in Weehawken, New Jersey, which was practically in my backyard. He answered the phone on the first ring and, as I recall, our conversation was short and right to the point. I informed Richard that I had found a comparative terrestrial culture that produced two-faced masks, including a complete system of hieroglyphics that also incorporated split faces. I convinced him that the "connection" was quite obvious and could help prove that the "Face" was not only a legitimate art form but also part of a geoglyphic writing system.

Richard was intrigued by my observations and politely thanked me for alerting him to my finds; he vowed to "keep in touch." I felt I had established a real rapport with him and anxiously awaited a follow-up report on Richard's research. The next time I called him he was gone. The current occupants told me that he had moved to New Mexico. It would be over five years before I would speak with him again.

DUALITY

Looking at the asymmetrical facial features of the Face on Mars its bifurcated design introduces us to a binary system of split faces and a theory of

transmutation or transformation. Biologically, transmutation is the change of one species into another, like a human into a feline. In geometry, it is the change of one figure into another of the same area, such as a circle into a square.

The Sphinx-like, human/feline, appearance of the Face on Mars holds the template of the opposing forces of nature, which is at the root of our existence. This ancient mystery of duality is manifest within its composite design. This idea of duality is as old as humankind and forms the lexicon of our common symbols. The archetypal pattern of the nature of duality encompasses all opposites such as man/woman, day/night, fire/water, round/square, and life/death.

This idea can be compressed into the basic makeup of a single seed that splits into two halves. The halves become the twins of the self, thereby giving birth to the third component. Simply put, when opposites are united their union produces a new hybrid offspring of both species. According to J. E. Cirlot, duality can be described as follows:

*Duality is a basic quality of all natural processes in so far
as they comprise two opposite phases or aspects . . .
[which] can be either symmetrical or asymmetrical.*⁴

The concept of duality is traditionally related to the ancient symbol of the Gemini, which is expressed in the twin Roman gods Castor and Pollux. Symbolically, the embodiment of the Gemini is often represented as two pillars. They can be seen as the Pillars of Hercules or as the columns of Solomon's Temple, called Jachin and Boaz. Basically, the two architectural pillars, like the Gemini, are symbols of the twin.⁵

JANUS HEAD

The familiar image of the Roman god Janus, the "Gatekeeper of Time" his portrait is presented in profile with two faces look in opposite directions (Figure 3). One face looks towards the past and the other to the future. This idea denotes man's awareness of both history and foreknowledge, this being an allusion to the dualism of time. Because of his association with doorways and passages Janus was seen as the "Gatekeeper of Time." His bifurcated face was placed at doorways, gates and at the threshold of temples.



Figure 3 Janus - Roman Coin. Drawing by the author.

(Image source; *The Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* Aldrington & Ames. p. 431)

Another example of "back to back" facial duality that may not be as familiar as the Roman god Janus is found in ancient Mesopotamia. The Sumerian god Isimud was also depicted with two faces, looking in opposite directions and is thought to be the forerunner to Janus. Isimud, known as the two faced gatekeeper of heaven, was also the personal minister of the Sumerian water god Enki (Ea). Here is an image of Isimud seen on a cylinder seal (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Sumarian God, Isimid. Drawing by the author. (Image source: *Mythology; An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Richard Cavendish, p. 87)

Moving on to some of the cultures of Mesoamerica, here is a small jade plaque with identical profiles of the Olmec "were-jaguars" looking in opposite directions (Figure 5). Notice the flaring upper lip, which is a typical snarling aspect of the Olmec "were-jaguar." A star-shaped glyph is carved above the central "void" area where the two snarling heads meet, giving the whole object a celestial connection. The glyph has been identified as Venus and the void as a "Cosmic Portal."⁶

A second example depicts two stylized Mayan profiles facing in opposite directions (Figure 6). Each face includes a firm chin and jaw line and a mouth with slightly parted lips. The eyes on each side of the pendant are heavily worn and its bold nose extends up through the forehead. Similar to the Olmec plaque the Maya pendant also has a central void.



Figure 5 Janus Head

Left: Jade plaque. Olmec (1150 B.C)

Right: Stone pendent. Maya.

LIFE & DEATH

The following set of artifacts reveals just a portion of a vast cache of split-faced masks and sculptures that were produced throughout the cultures of Mesoamerica that depict the duality of life and death. The first example is a fragmented head of a Zapotec child that was associated with Pitao Bezelao, the god of death (Figure 6). This split face is classified as a funerary head chronicling the eternal process of human destiny from the vitality of youth to the disintegration of death in one startling image.⁷ When the image is split and each side mirrored, the left side features a sullen-faced child wearing a frown. The right side has a skull-like face displaying a distinct grin.

A second example of the Mesoamerican perception of the duality of life and death is found in a striking pottery mask from a grave at Tlatilco, Mexico (Figure 6). One half of this bifurcated mask is a human face with an eye, nose and mouth with a protruding tongue. The companion side features the halved skull of a feline, possibly a jaguar. The feline skull has a prominent eye socket and nose cavity. It has a recessive set of teeth and displays a "knob" feature

on the side of the head that looks like the remnants of an ear. A third example of a split faced life and death head features one half of a young man's face on the left side and a skull on the right side (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Life and Death

Left: Child face and skull. Zapotec. Center: Human face and jaguar skull. Tlatilco. Right: Human face and jaguar skull. Veracruz.

HUMAN & FELINE

The next collection of split faced works of art features two pre-Columbian examples of conjoined human and jaguar faces (Figure 7). The first which is housed in the International Museum of the Ceramics in Faenza, Italy shows the faces of a jaguar on the left and a human face on the right. The feline face has a broad muzzle and a rounded ear. Notice the protruding tongue and what appear to be human teeth. The human face on the right side appears to depict a young man, with a broad nose, an almond-shaped eye, an upper row of filed jagged teeth and he wears a small ear spool.

A second example, on the right is a small mold-made pendant that features a split face combining a human female and jaguar head (Figure 7). The human visage on the left has been identified as a female because of the stepped

hairdo, which is normally worn by Mayan women.⁸ The right side of the head features a jaguar face with a large eye and sharp fangs. There is also a serpent-like ornament attached around the ear.

A third example features with a human, male head on the left side with a feathered headdress that flows to the left (Figure 7). The right side features a snarling feline head with a large fang.



Figure 7 Human and Feline.

Left: Jaguar and male human face. Maya.

Center: Female human and jaguar face. Maya.

Right: Male human and Jaguar face. Maya

Notice that all of these examples of half-faces are frontal views that are split directly down the middle.

Mesoamerican cultures also produced fully bifurcated figures. Here is an image carved by the Zapotec culture on Stela 1 at Cerro del Ray. It portrays a bifurcated representation of a half human and half feline figure that is cut in half (Figure 8). Notice the human face is portrayed in a frontal position, while the jaguar is overlaid across the human face in profile.

Located in the National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC is a small wooden sculpture produced by the Tlingit peoples, of the Pacific

Northwest Coast. The small sculpture depicts a full figured representation of a half man and half fish known as the Salmon Boy (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Bifurcated Figure

Left: Half Human Half Feline Figure. Stela 1 Cerro del Ray (Oaxaca). Drawing by the author. (Image source: Javier Urcid, ZAPOTEC WRITING Knowledge, Power, and Memory in Ancient Oaxaca, PDF, figure 2.9).

Right: Salmon Boy. Tlingit people, Pacific Northwest Coast. Wood (Circa 1890).

CUT IN HALF

Here are three great examples of half faces that are presented as one side of a face. The first is an Olmec pendant of a human head (Figure 9) Notice the face has been cut perfectly in half, from the forehead, down through the nose and mouth. A second example (Figure 9) was produced by the Maya, which shows the cut-in-half image of a human head with a banned headdress that is topped with the profiled head of a crocodile. The facial features include a

circular eye, an elongated, rectangular ear, a triangular nose and a pair of slightly parted lips. The third example is a half-faced mask (Figure 9) produced by the Heiltsuk Indians of British Columbia.⁹ The mask has a large stylized eye and linear facial tattoos. Notice the partial nose and mouth. The mask has a thick eyebrow and linear facial tattoos.



Figure 9 Cut-in-half face.

Left: Jade amulet. Olmec. Drawing by the author. Center: Jade amulet. Maya. Right: Wooden mask. Heiltsuk Indians

Here are two examples of figurines that have been sliced in half. The first is a jade axe from Guatemala that is cut-in-half¹⁰ (Figure 10). Notice the figure is sliced in half from the top of the head, right through its face and down to the bottom of its long gown. The partial face has a square eye form, a nose, and a large, open mouth with thick lips. The figure has an arm that folds across its chest and has an intertwining infinity emblem in its headdress. The second example is a

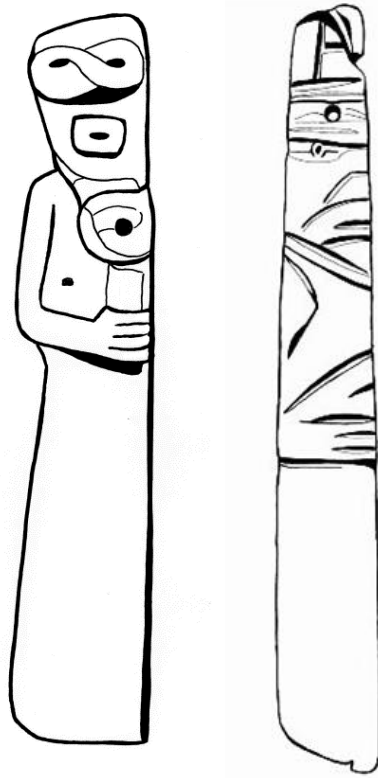


Figure 10. Cut-in-half figure.

Left: Guatemala (Jade Axe). Drawing by the author.

Right:

It is believed by archaeologists that these “cut in half” faces and figurative objects were originally produced as complete artworks that were ceremonially cut in half. After a king or member of the elite family died some of his personal objects were collected and cut in half and then placed in the grave as burial offerings. One half of the object was placed in the grave with the deceased, to accompany him in the Under World, and the other half was kept in the Upper World, and given to another member of the elite or family member.¹¹ With the separation of the these personal object’s the essence of the deceased would remain in both worlds.

Although being physically separated these individual halves were considered complete representations of the original whole object. Each piece of the object was seen as an individual element of a holographic whole that retains the entire object. This is a Mesoamerican concept known as "pars-pro-toto" which enables any part of an object to be used as a representation of the whole.¹² Therefore, this act of cutting the object in half embraces the duality of life and death. Each half creates two equal parts of the whole that represents mirrored reflections of two opposing worlds – one side embodies the living force of the upper world, while the other side represents the soul's descent into the realm of the underworld. Perhaps the half-faced portraits observed within the overall design of the Cydonia Face on Mars are another example of "pars-pro-toto", as above so below.

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Notes

1. The National Gallery of Art, Olmec Art of Ancient Mexico, June 30 - October 20, 1996.

2 Olmecs, (Arqueologia Magazine 1996).

3. Ann Cyphers, The Colossal Heads, *Olmecs*, (Arqueologia Magazine, 1996), 58-59.

4. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1995), 24.

5. Ibid., 116.

6. Michael D. Coe, *The Olmec World: Ritual & Rulership*, (Princeton: Princeton/Abrams, 1996), 268.
7. Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Licia Ragghianti Collobi, *Great Museums of the World: National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City* (New York: Newsweek Inc. and Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1970), 85. The Maya and Aztec produced a variety of bifurcated sculptures and masks depicting similar life and death motifs.
8. Dr. Marilyn M. Goldstein, *Ceremonial Sculpture of Ancient Veracruz*, (Long Island University/New York, 1987), p.66.
9. Cecile R. Ganteaume, *Infinity of Nations: Art and History in the Collections of the National Museum of the American Indian*, (Harper Collins/Smithsonian, 2010), Page 223.
10. Fredrick W. Lange, *Pre-Columbian Jade: New Geological and Cultural Interpolations*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 265.
11. Mark Miller Graham, *Jade In Ancient Costa Rica*, (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 53.
12. Marlin Calvo Mora, *Gold, Jade, Forests: Costa Rica*, (University of Washington Press, 1995), 51.