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Interpretation Of The Aquatic Elements Associated With Monument 21 Of Chalchuapa And Their Relationship With The Deities *Chalchiuhtlicue* And *Tlaloc*

Diego F. González*

- Independent Researcher, Archaeologist, Master in Museology and Museum Management.
ORCID: [0009-0001-1801-8378](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1801-8378)

EN | Abstract:

The following paper tackles the significant interpretation of the aquatic elements in the context of monument 21 of Chalchuapa, a Mesoamerican archaeological site of great historical and cultural relevance. The central focus is targeted towards the veneration of the deities Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of running water, and Tlaloc, god of rain. Through an exhaustive documental exploration and a profound review of the decorations and artifacts related, this study looks to shed some light over the crucial role that these aquatic deities had in the worldview and the religious practices of the Mesoamerican civilization. Furthermore, the influence and management of water resources shall be analyzed as well as the comprehension between humanity and nature in an archaeological environment as unique as Chalchuapa.

Keywords: Post-processual Archaeology, Symbolic Archaeology, Ethnosphere, Mesoamerica, Water, SDG 4, SDG 10.

ES | Abstract:

El siguiente artículo de investigación aborda la significativa interpretación de los elementos acuáticos en el contexto del monumento 21 de Chalchuapa (El Salvador), un sitio arqueológico mesoamericano de gran relevancia histórica y cultural. El enfoque central se dirige hacia la veneración de las deidades Chalchiuhtlicue, la diosa del agua que corre, y Tlaloc, el dios de la lluvia. A través de una exhaustiva exploración documental y una profunda revisión de la iconografía y artefactos relacionados, este estudio busca arrojar luz sobre el papel crucial que estas deidades acuáticas desempeñaron en la cosmovisión y las prácticas religiosas de la civilización mesoamericana. Además, se analiza su influencia en la gestión de los recursos hídricos y la comprensión de la relación entre la humanidad y la naturaleza en un entorno arqueológico tan único como Chalchuapa.

Palabras Clave: Arqueología posprocesual, arqueología simbólica, Etnósfera, Mesoamérica, Agua, ODS 4, ODS 10.

I. INTRODUCTION

Salvadoran archaeology has been developing for almost 173 years (Cobos, 1995), from the first travelers and diplomats to the academic interventions by foreigners and the academic training of Salvadoran archaeologists within the national territory. Throughout this time, there have been milestones that have shaped Salvadoran archaeological identity, which concerns not only archaeologists but every citizen: from movable objects like the Jaguar Disk used by Banco Cuscatlán to immovable structures like Structure B1-1, also known as the Tazumal Pyramid, which appeared on the now-defunct one-hundred colones bill. One of the most significant references of national culture is the Dr. David J. Guzmán National Museum of Anthropology (hereafter, MUNA), which has housed within its collection various elements that have sparked interest and admiration for entire generations over its 140 years of existence. One of these elements, present since the museum's founding, is the monument known as the "Tazumal Stele." This name was given by Anderson in Robert Sharer's 1978 Chalchuapa investigation and will be used in this text. There have been other names, more aligned with a time when archaeology was heavily infused with romanticism, fiction, and fantasy, such as "The Queen or Virgin of Tazumal" (Lardé y Larín, 1959); however, today it is known as the "Tazumal Stele," but for the purposes of this text, it will be referred to as "Monument 21."

This study does not aim to be exhaustive or to present a definitive interpretation of what Monument 21 is. Instead, it seeks to disseminate elements that generate discussion about an important sculptural-lithic element that has not been analyzed in detail for over 64 years. Monument 21 is a clear example that Salvadoran archaeology can be developed from existing collections, conducting rigorous documentary studies, and drawing from other epistemological branches of archaeology beyond materialism and descriptivism.

Another aim of this text is to disseminate archaeological knowledge beyond the Salvadoran academic sphere and make it part of the collective imagination, contributing to the generation of identity and belonging in several dimensions: local in Chalchuapa, regional in the western part of the country, national in Salvadoran territory, and transnational to all Salvadorans and their descendants in various parts of the world.

Finally, it is the duty of any researcher to submit their findings to the public forum, to be subjected to discussion and, if necessary, to falsification; otherwise, it would fall into academic stasis. Currently, Monument 21 welcomes, as it has since 2001, all visitors to MUNA, stoic and with no greater story to tell despite having witnessed significant events such as the commercial networks of Chalchuapa, the architectural development of Tazumal, the Ilopango volcanic event, and the resilience of the pre-Hispanic settlement until its decline and abandonment. It also witnessed the founding of MUNA in 1883 by Dr. David J. Guzmán, the architect of that institution, and Dr. Santiago Barberena. It was part of the collection in the various incarnations of the museum, starting at the University of El Salvador in the city center in the early 20th century, until its current location in Colonia San Benito in 1962. It is essential to share part of these stories and, symbolically, to give a voice to a monolithic vestige to share some of its tales.

II. BACKGROUND

Monument 21 of Chalchuapa is a clear example of why scientific archaeology is essential when intervening at an archaeological site, given its destructive and irreversible nature. Without proper controls, all information will be irrevocably lost. Additionally, it is crucial to move away from the romantic perspective that considers artifact recovery the sole important aspect of archaeology, neglecting the context, which provides complementary elements for the subsequent desk-based study conducted after the fieldwork phase.

The earliest bibliographic mention of the monument was made by Dr. Santiago Barberena in his work "Monografías Departamentales," specifically in the Santa Ana Department section (Barberena, 1910, as cited in Lardé y Larín, 1959). He chronologically places it at the end of the 19th century, likely around 1892. Unfortunately, there is no greater precision in its context within the archaeological site beyond Barberena's statement (*ibid.*), which was confirmed by Anderson (1978), that the monument was "on the western slope of Structure B1-1."

Following Barberena's publication, there have been other mentions, but none with a more in-depth study of Monument 21. These include works by Boggs (1944), Lardé y Larín (1959), Anderson in Sharer (1978), Demarest (1988), and Fowler (1995).

Theoretical Foundations

Conceptual Theoretical Framework: Post-Processual Archaeology and Symbolic Archaeology

Archaeology is a constantly evolving discipline that aims to reconstruct the past through the material remains left by previous civilizations. Two prominent theoretical approaches that have influenced its development are post-processual archaeology and symbolic archaeology. These perspectives have enriched our understanding of interpreting and reconstructing the past from material remains. Below is a conceptual, theoretical framework that explores these approaches and their interconnections.

Post-Processual Archaeology

Post-processual archaeology emerged in opposition to earlier processual perspectives, in which material culture was considered passive (Renfrew & Bahn, 2008) and primarily focused archaeological research on the objective and descriptive reconstruction of past events. Post-processual archaeology is characterized by its emphasis on subjectivity, interpretation, and the consideration of cultural and social factors in interpreting the archaeological record. Post-processual archaeologists criticize the supposed objectivity of earlier interpretations and argue that subjectivity and individual perceptions are inherent in archaeological research.

The post-processual approach also highlights the importance of considering power, ideology, and gender relations in archaeological interpretation. Post-processual archaeologists seek to

understand how past societies constructed meanings through material culture and how these symbolic representations can influence our modern interpretations.

Symbolic Archaeology

Symbolic archaeology focuses on interpreting the symbolic and cultural aspects of archaeological remains. It posits that artifacts and landscapes carry profound meanings that reflect the beliefs, values, and systems of representation of past societies. This perspective considers that material culture is a language that can be deciphered to understand the abstract notions and symbolic expressions of ancient communities.

Symbolic archaeologists aim to unravel the cultural codes and messages transmitted through iconography, rituals, and other symbolic elements. This approach seeks to interpret the meaning of the symbols themselves and understand how these symbols were embedded in broader social, political, and economic contexts.

Interconnections and Final Reflections

Both post-processual archaeology and symbolic archaeology emphasize the importance of considering subjectivity and cultural aspects in archaeological interpretation. Both perspectives recognize the complexity of past societies and advocate for a more reflective and contextualized approach in archaeological research. By integrating these approaches, archaeologists can reveal both the symbolic dimensions and the underlying social relations in the archaeological record, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the human past.

Geographic Framework

The archaeological zone of Chalchuapa is located in the city and municipality of Chalchuapa, 16 kilometers west of the departmental capital, Santa Ana, and 73 kilometers west of the capital city, San Salvador (Centro Nacional de Registros & Instituto Geográfico Nacional "Ing. Pablo Arnoldo Guzmán," 1985). It is situated between 13°59'72" north latitude and 89°40'48" west longitude, at an elevation of 710 meters above sea level. It is framed within what is known as the southern frontier of Mesoamerica, within the triangle of political-economic relationships formed by Chalchuapa, Copán, and Kaminaljuyú.



Figure 1: Map of the Mesoamerican region and the location of Chalchuapa. Map without scale adapted by the author.

Historical Context

The Mesoamerican Classic Period (200-900 CE) is characterized by the zenith of civilizations, marked by the growth of cities and the sophistication of monumental architecture, as evidenced by the planned and oriented civic-religious complexes (Manzanilla, 1993). This period also saw the specialization of ceramics and lithics. Additionally, there were considerable advances in sciences and agriculture, fostering demographic growth, as shown by the archaeological record of urban-domestic areas. Trade also intensified, with numerous and varied trade routes, and the hegemony of Teotihuacan and the Maya city-states.

In the case of El Salvador, the Classic Period was affected by the eruption of the Ilopango volcano caldera around 539-540 CE (R. Dull, personal communication, February 7, 2024). Despite this catastrophe, the settlement of Chalchuapa persisted. The excavation of the main pyramid of Tazumal (B1-1) by Stanley Boggs in the 1940s uncovered a layer of white ash about 20 centimeters thick that had been rearranged to apply a new mud plaster, suggesting a continuity of occupation (Amaroli, 2015). The eruption may have led to a decline in population and monumental construction, as well as a decrease in close relations with Kaminaljuyú and other highland sites in Guatemala. However, the continuity of Late Preclassic and Early Classic ceramics indicates the resilience of Chalchuapa (Fowler, 1995).

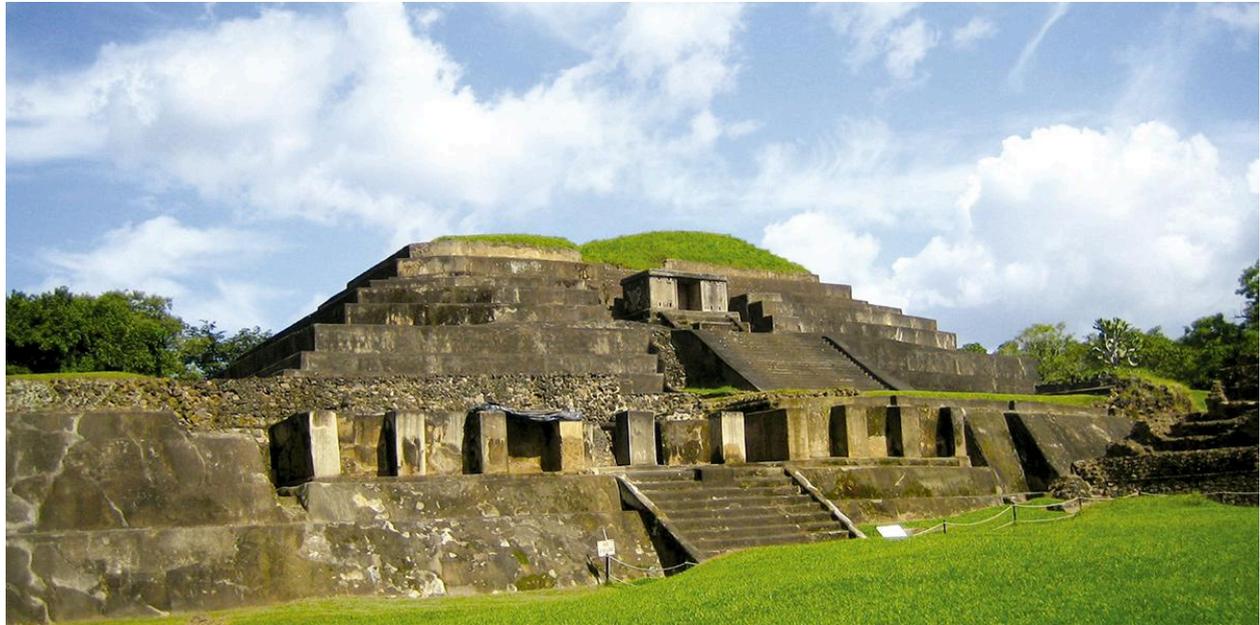


Figure 2: Structure B1-1 West view.

The Payu Phase

Robert Sharer proposed the Payu Phase in his study of Chalchuapa, which spans from 650-900 CE and represents the Late Classic ceramic complex in Chalchuapa (Amaroli, 2015). This phase includes ceramics from the Copador and Gualpopa groups, suggesting a connection with Copán (Amaroli, 2015; Fowler, 1995). Based on the aforementioned evidence, Monument 21 is suggested to belong to the Payu Phase.

Context of the Stele

The Tazumal archaeological site is one of the most important in the Chalchuapa archaeological zone and the western region of El Salvador. The site consists of six structures, but only four have remained standing after the urban changes in the city of Chalchuapa: the main pyramid (B1-1), a second pyramid attached to the southwest end of B1-1, and the two ball court markers. The main structure dates back to the Classic Period, with its construction beginning in the Early Classic and ending in the Late Classic. Regarding its political relations, Tazumal is believed to have maintained connections with other Maya political centers, such as Copán in Honduras and Kaminaljuyú in Guatemala, as well as with Teotihuacan in central Mexico (Fowler, 1995).

These relationships may have been manifested through marital alliances, diplomatic exchanges, and possibly military conflicts. Undoubtedly, Tazumal had political prominence, as more than 20 burials with offerings linking it to Teotihuacan have been found in investigations: incense burners, as well as Copador and Gualpopa ceramics (Ibid.).

Unfortunately, Monument 21 lacks a detailed archaeological context record from a systematic or academic excavation. Consequently, the records are based on speculations and oral accounts from local inhabitants documented by Santiago Barberena (Lardé y Larín, 1959). If these statements are taken as true, then the location detailed by Barberena indicates that it "was at the foot of the western flank" (Ibid.) and probably on the surface (Anderson, 1978), since that area was severely plundered by locals who used the remains of the structure as a quarry for stone and earth for adobe for the city's buildings.



Figure 3: View towards the southeast (left) and towards the south (right) of Structure B1-1 before the archaeological interventions by Stanley Boggs. Undated. The indentation at the top of the pyramid (left) and the trenches on the north slope (right) can be seen, resulting from the extraction of earth and stones for house construction in Chalchuapa.

Monument 21 may be a continuation of an architectural/ceremonial complex practiced in Chalchuapa since the Late Preclassic and is highly significant in the Maya area (Ichikawa et al., 2009). This is the stela-altar complex. The main difference between this complex in the Chalchuapa area and Monument 21 is that:

- **The stela-altar complex does not have carvings on its surface, being completely smooth**, which could indicate a stylistic evolution due to the weakening of ties with the Guatemalan highlands, particularly Kaminaljuyú (Ibid.), following the Ilopango volcanic event.
- **The absence of an altar for Monument 21 stands out**, either because it was not considered as part of a set when it was excavated, or because it simply never existed and the stela was a standalone element. It is also unknown if it was associated with offerings.

- **The width of the lithic elements**, since the stela at the Casa Blanca archaeological site, located approximately 80 meters from Tazumal, measures about 50 centimeters, while Monument 21 measures 104 centimeters at its widest point, which are the shoulders (Anderson, 1978).
- **The orientation of the structure of which they are part.** Although this is not an intrinsic element of the lithic components, it is part of the context that links them to the structures. In the case of Casa Blanca, the structure's orientation is the North-South axis, while in Tazumal it is the East-West axis.

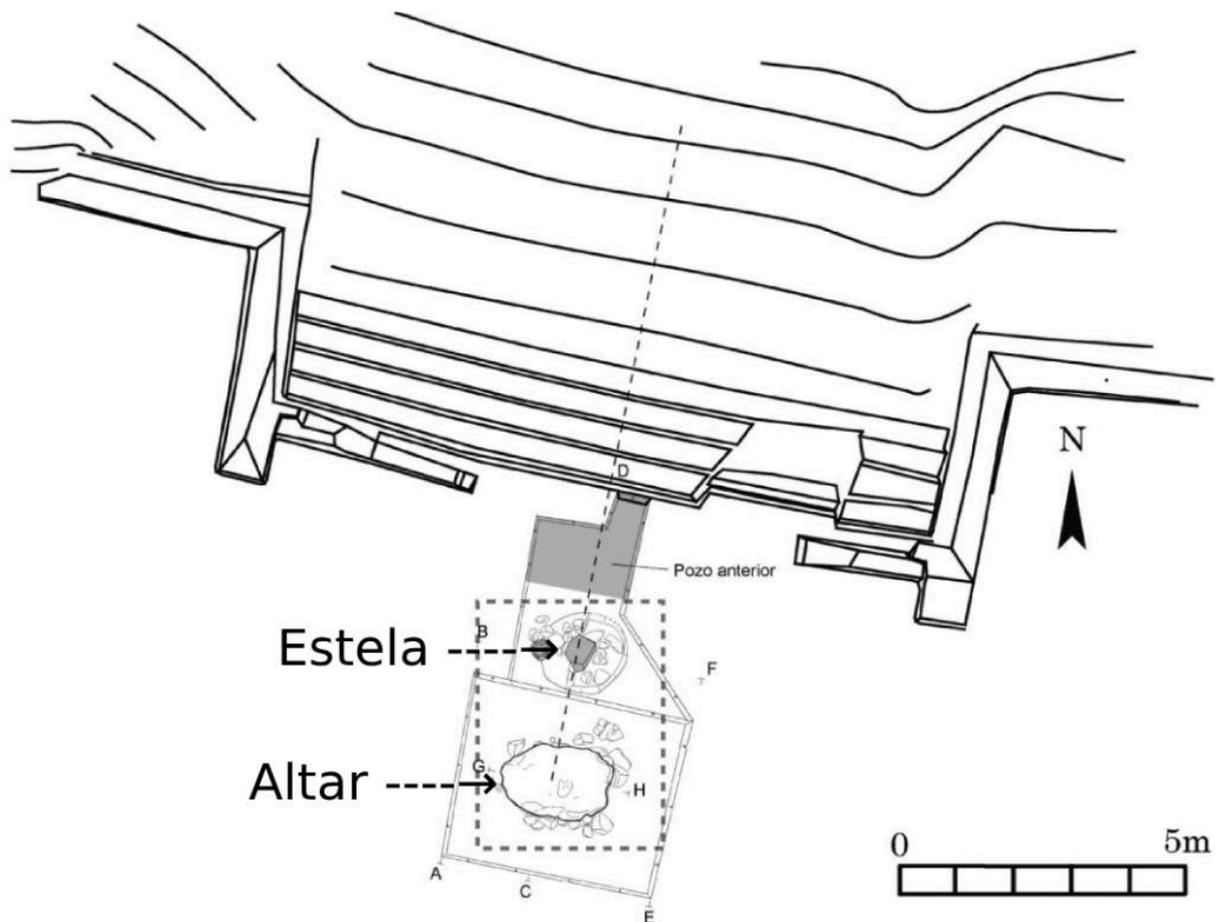


Figure 4: Location of the plain stela and altar in front of the stairway of Structure 5 of Casa Blanca. Taken from Ichikawa, adapted by the author.

Regarding its spatial arrangement, it is suggested that it was positioned in front of one of the two stairways of Structure B1-1, either the stairway leading to the large platform (marked as "2") or the stairway of the pyramid (marked as "1"). This location is inferred from the descriptions previously provided by Barberena and Anderson, as well as the stela-altar complex found right at the foot of the stairway of Structure 5 at Casa Blanca.

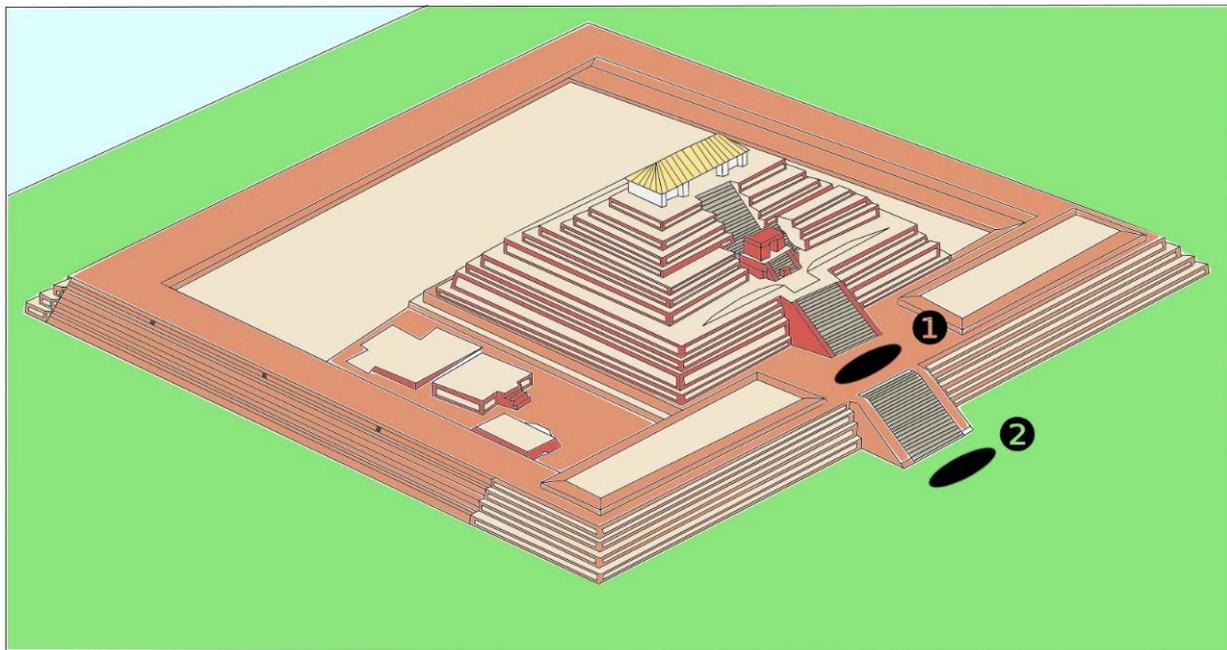


Figure 5: Proposed location for monument 21. Taken from: Juan Miguel - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=124253486> adapted by the author.

Stanley Boggs (1944) suggests that Monument 21 was at the base of the platform because, in the later construction phase, there was no space at the base of the stairway on the platform due to a block that protruded to the east. He also suggests that a figure of such dimensions and weight would be more logically placed at the base and not on the structure.

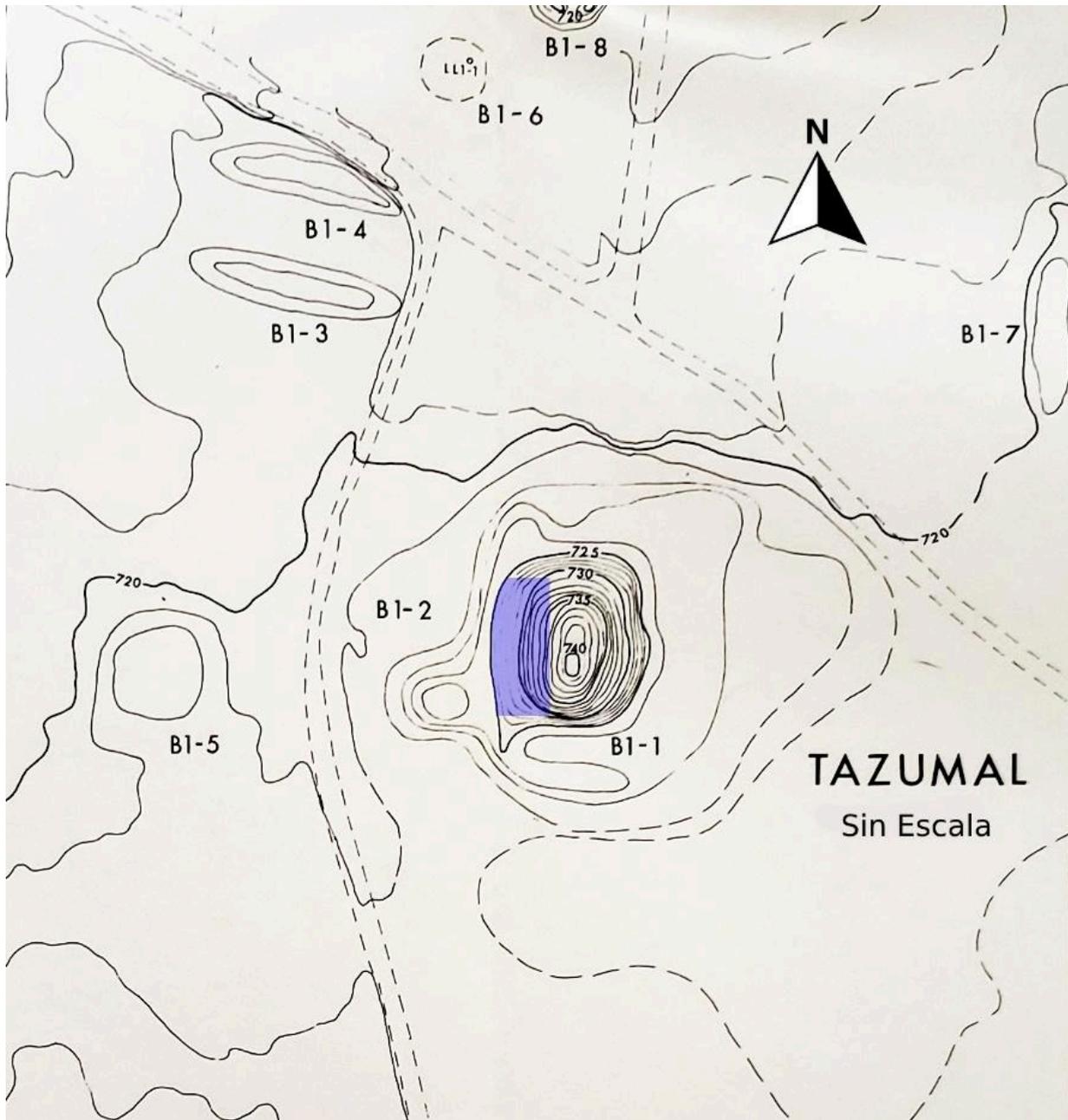


Figure 6: The approximate location of monument 21 is marked in blue. Taken from Sharer, 1978 adapted by the author.

III. METHODOLOGY

For the study of Monument 21, a documentary study was conducted, consisting of collecting the largest amount of printed and digital bibliography that included the following criteria:

- **Pertinence:** Refers to the appropriateness and applicability of a topic, approach, or information in the specific context of the study or research being carried out.
- **Relevance:** Refers to the importance and significance of the information, results, or findings in relation to the broader context of the research. Relevant research is that which provides valuable information and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field. Results or conclusions are relevant if they have significant implications or help address key research questions.
- **Timeliness:** Refers to the current relevance and ongoing applicability of the findings, theories, or concepts presented over time. A study with timeliness is one whose results and conclusions remain pertinent and applicable at the present moment and, in some cases, may have relevance over time. Timeliness is important to determine if the study's findings remain valid and useful in the current context, or if they require updating based on scientific advances or changes in the environment.

The material was read, systematized, and used as a reference to support the ideas presented in this document. Additionally, a visit to the MUNA facilities was conducted on August 2, 2023, during which a photographic session of Monument 21 was carried out under various types of natural and artificial light.

Analysis of Decorations and Symbols

Making a cephalocaudal (head to toe) sweep of monument 21, the first reference to water is found: a headdress with the effigy of the rain god, Tlaloc.



Figure 7: Detail of the headdress of monument 21 and an illustration of Tlaloc according to the Codex Magliabechiano.

The characterization is undeniable, as the circular eyes, mustaches ending in volutes, and protruding fangs stand out, although in the headdress, they are cut off or hidden by the character's hair. It is interesting to consider that it is at the highest point, crowning the monument, which would indicate the deity's proximity to the sky, clouds, and rain.

Continuing with the analysis, the second element related to water is found, consisting of a long decoration held by the character's right arm. This could be a *chichahuaztli*, a pre-Hispanic idiophone. Idiophones are instruments that produce sound through the vibration of their own body (Extrema Percusión ESPJ, 2023), and in the case of *chichahuaztli*, it consisted of a hollow wooden log filled with seeds that, when tilted, emulated the sound of rain. It is regularly associated with Xipe Totec, but also with other water deities, including the goddess of running waters and fertility (Gómez, 2008), Chalchiuhtlicue, who has a very close relationship with Tlaloc, as in some Mesoamerican accounts she is identified as his sister (De Sahagún, 2006) and in others as his wife (González Torres, 1995).



Figure 8: Chichahuaztli held by the right arm of the figure (left), chichahuaztli found in offering 141 of the main temple (center), musician playing the chichahuaztli according to the Codex Borbonicus in a context of worship to Tlaloc (right).

The relationship of the idiophone with fertility is highlighted by Gómez (2008), as seen in the Codex Borgia, where Xipe Totec is depicted holding a *chichahuaztli* in his right hand. Xipe Totec has a dual characterization: the more well-known as a war deity and the other as a fertility deity, as the deity's skin represents latent and exuberant nature, waiting for the flayed skin to slowly decompose and fall away, giving way to the greening of the fields with the first rains of the year. The other fertility relationship is shown when he appears between a pair, the first among humans (Ibid.). This first couple was called Huehue (FAMSI - John Pohl - Ancient Books - The Borgia Group - Codex Ríos, n.d.), which in Nahuatl means "old" (Huehue - Great Nahuatl Dictionary, n.d.).



Figure 9: Xipe Totec holding a chichahuaztli in his left hand. Detail from Codex Borgia, plate 61.



Figure 10: The first pair of humans covered with a blanket with an erect chichahuaztli between them. Detail from Codex Borgia, plate 9.

In Nahuatl, there are two words to refer to the idiophone: *chichahuaztli*, which is associated with Xipe Totec, and *ayahchichahuaztli* for deities related to the Tlalocan: Tlaloc, Chalchiuhtlicue, and the Tlaloques (Couvreur, 2011, as cited in Pugliese, 2021). Therefore, the latter will be used. The *ayahchichahuaztli* could be related to a phallic figure in its reproductive dimension: firstly, it is used as an instrument to call for rainwater (male fertilizing element - semen) to fall onto the earth (female fertilizing element - ovum); secondly, it is filled with seeds, which are reproductive elements and a guarantee of a new harvest, a new life; and thirdly, as the intermediary of the celestial waters belonging to Tlaloc and their impact on the earth, generating flows and runoff related to Chalchiuhtlicue.

Under the premise that the idiophone is an instrument related to water and fertility, a relationship between Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue is proposed in Monument 21. It is worth analyzing the description made by De Sahagún (2006) about Tlaloc's attire, in which he describes him carrying a shield with a water lily, an aquatic plant. He also describes Chalchiuhtlicue with a water lily shield and a rattle stick (Ibid.). Observing the upper end of the *ayahchichahuaztli* on Monument 21, certain features resemble a four-petaled flower. It is worth mentioning that to see this element, it is necessary to illuminate it at a certain angle to make it stand out. This flower could be the water lily Sahagún referred to, as it is an aquatic flower found in Mesoamerica, also associated with altered states of consciousness due to containing alkaloids such as apomorphine, nuciferine, and norcuciferine (Schultes et al., 2010). This element would further highlight the close connection between the two deities present on Monument 21. It could also be a quincunx, the axis mundi of many Mesoamerican civilizations like Teotihuacan.



Figure 11: Representation of Tlaloc (left) and Chalchiuhtlicue (right) in the Florentine Codex. The shield of Tlaloc and the rattle of Chalchiuhtlicue stand out.

This would link monument 21 and Chalchuapa with Teotihuacán, the great civilization of central Mexico during the Classic Period. Unfortunately, because of the state of preservation, many of the details have worn away, so it cannot be seen clearly, but it leaves a reasonable doubt.



Figure 12: Possible representation of the four-petaled flower of monument 21 (left); Teotihuacan 4-petaled flower (center); water lily [*Nymphaea mexicana*] (right).

The next symbolic element is in the lower part of the monument 21, specifically in the front cloth that falls from the costume of the personage represented. In this one a stepped pyramid can be seen that, in the Mesoamerican tradition, alludes to an "artificial" mountain made by the human being, but that does not lose the sacred attributions.



Figure 13: Detail of the step pyramid in monument 21.

The pyramids that had a temple at the top were designed to mimic the hills of the natural environment humanizing the sacred (Plunket & Uruñela, 2012). A clear example of a pyramid that emulates a mountain is in Teotihuacan, where the pyramid of the sun replicates the silhouette of the Patlachique hill.



Figure 14: Pyramid of the sun (foreground) and Patalachique hill (background). Note the similarity in the silhouette of both.

The pyramid-hill, in context with the other decorative elements present, can be related to the sacred hill where Tlaloc lives and rules: the Tlalocan. This place was located to the east and was the site where the souls of those who had drowned (González Torres, 1995) or died from any other form of submersion would go. This is evidenced in the Tepantitla mural at Teotihuacan, where the Tlalocan is depicted with water flowing from its interior, as well as a perpetual celebration, as all those present enjoyed abundance.



Figure 15: Tepantitla mural showing the Tlalocan and a series of individuals in a state of playfulness and perpetual happiness.

It is clear that Tlaloc is associated with mountain peaks because it was thought that this is where the rains originated, especially when clouds completely covered the summit, referring to the Ayauhcalli or house of mist.

Although it belongs to a different temporality and cultural affiliation, evidence of the hill-rain god relationship can be seen in the Puuc style of the Maya area, where his mask representations are visible both in his Maya incarnation (Chaac) and in his central Mexican incarnation (Tlaloc). This makes a lot of sense, since mountains and hills are centers for water collection and, although a pyramid is an artificial mountain, it does not lose the character of the dwelling place of the rain god, regardless of its cultural conception.



Figure 16: Representation of 4 Chacs and a Tlaloc in the Quadrangle of the Nuns photo by Isabel Mercado Archila (left) Drawing by Frederick Catherwood of the entrance or teocalli of the Pyramid of the Soothsayer at Uxmal flanked by representations of Chac (right).

The last decorative element associated with water is the presence of the necklace and bracelet on Monument 21. Although it is speculative, given the other aquatic characteristics present, it suggests that the beads of this jewelry are jade. Jade is closely related to water, as evidenced by the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, whose name in Nahuatl means "jade skirt" and is associated with the flowing waters of rivers.

Incidentally, Chalchuapa, the place from which Monument 21 originates, is a name in Nawat and can be broken down into "chalchu" from "chalchiwit" or jade and "apa" from "apan" or river (Hernández, 2016). Chalchuapa would translate to "river of jades," alluding to the large quantity of this product (Hernández, personal communication).



Figure 17: Monument 21 with jade necklace and bracelet highlighted by the author with green color.

Regarding Tlaloc, jade is associated with the waters that flow from the mountains: the rains. Evidence of this is suggested by López Austin and López Luján (2004) when they mention the offerings in Chamber 3 of the Templo Mayor, where pots containing jade stones were found. These pots were overturned, and the jade beads were placed over a shallow bowl, as if the water were pouring out and "spreading rain over the surface of the earth." López Luján (1997) further explains the relationship between the pots and green stones with Tlaloc by suggesting the intimate connection of the former with the collection and storage of water, as well as the horizontal placement of the offerings, from which the green stones/water emerge, emulating the Tlaloques. In Mexica mythology, the Tlaloques are Tlaloc's helpers responsible for distributing the rain stored in vessels.

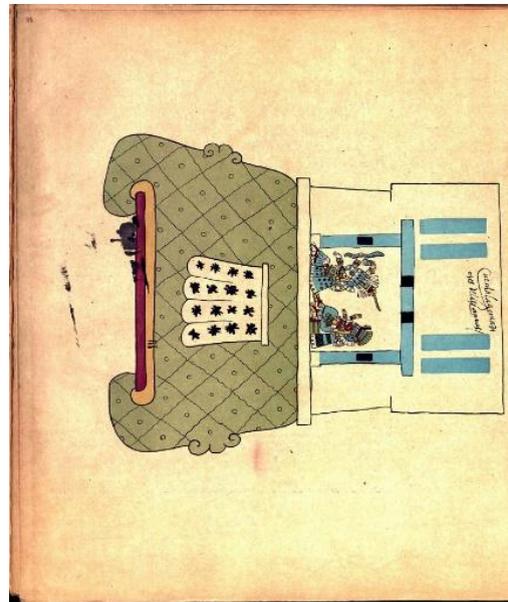


Figure 18: Offering 43 from chamber 3 of the Templo Mayor (left) with jade beads coming out of the mouth of the pot like water. Plate 35 of the Codex Borbonicus (right) in which Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue (?) can be seen in the Ayauhcalli. Note that the illustration is intentionally drawn horizontally.

This relationship of jade as water gushing from the pot is substantiated in the Codex Borbonicus. Precisely, it can be seen in plates 24, 25 and 35 how Tlaloc dwells in Ayauhcalli on the top of the mountain, but it stands out the fact that the illustrations were made horizontally, implying that the mountain is a hollow receptacle that collects and provides water, just like the pot of offering 43. In plate 35, Tlaloc is accompanied by another figure, possibly his wife Chalchiuhtlicue.

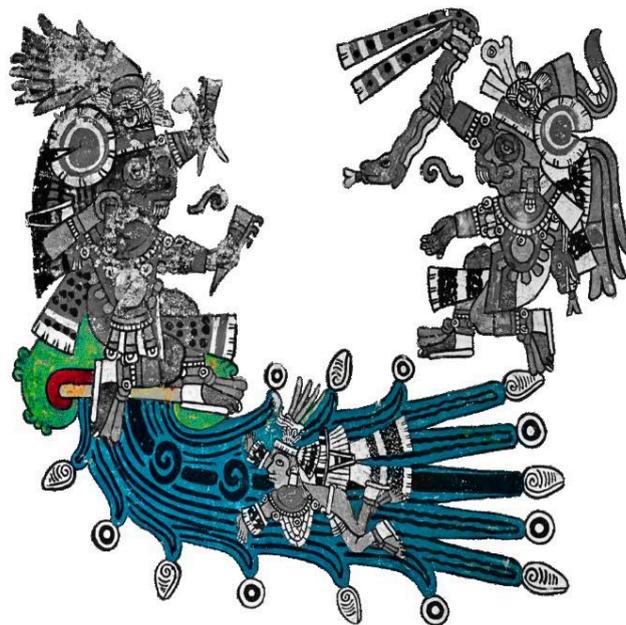


Figure 19: Detail of plate 5 of the Codex Borbonicus with the representation of two Tlaloc. The one on the left is seen seated on a mountain from which abundant water flows. Image modified by the author

IV. DISCUSSION

The proposed hypothesis is that Monument 21 is a symbolic receptacle for various allusions to water included within the pre-Hispanic Chalchuapan landscape in its divine dimension, meaning a fusion of the deities Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue. This idea has been suggested by Fiona Pugliese (2021), based on Alfredo López-Austin's proposition regarding the fusion of deities. Pugliese refers to the "Corn Stone" of Xalapa, Veracruz, where Tlaloc is depicted with a yet undetermined figure, which could be Chalchiuhtlicue according to García Payón and Westheim (Solís, 1981, as cited in Pugliese, 2021). This would place the two deities in proportional equality for the Late Postclassic period (1200-1521 CE).

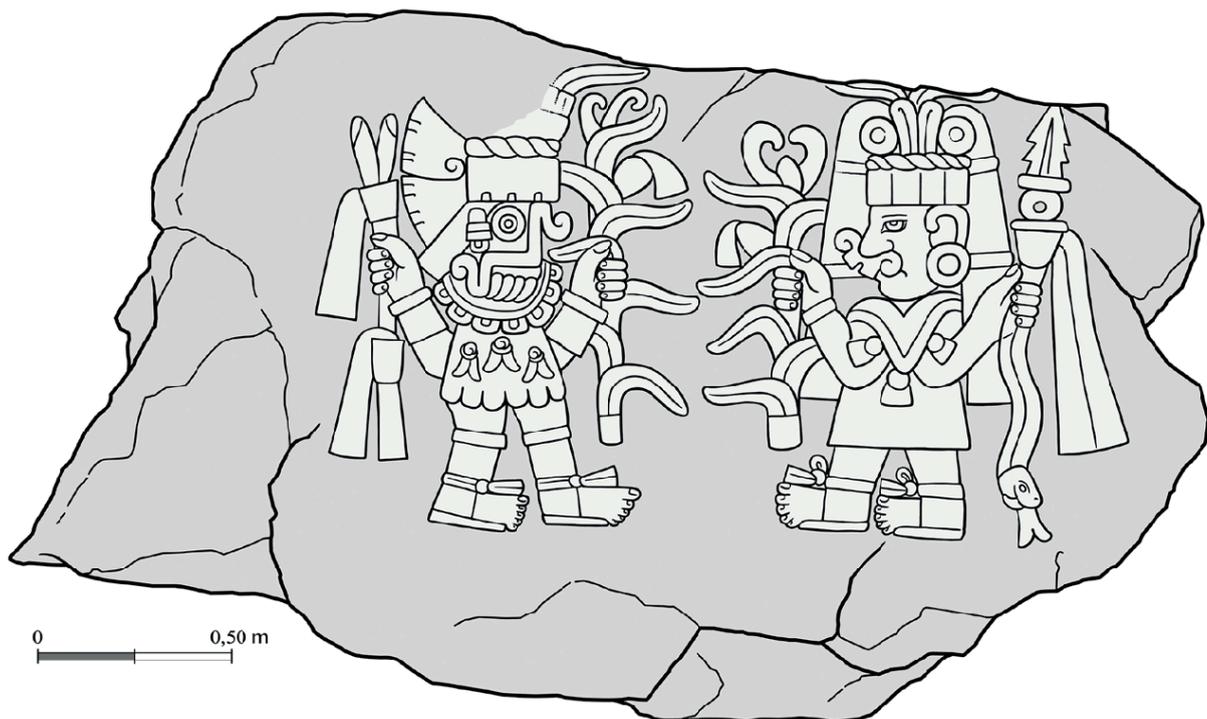


Figure 20: "Corn Stone" representing Tlaloc and possibly Chalchiuhtlicue. Source: Drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos.

In the case of monument 21, the headdress of Tlaloc and the jade beads can be rescued as symbolism of both deities, and the context because Chalchuapa has several water sources, some of which are in the vicinity of the archaeological site of Tazumal, where monument 21 was found.



Figure 21: Aerial map of Chalchuapa showing places of interest.

1. Tazumal archaeological site
2. Laguna Seca archaeological site
3. Cuscachapa Lagoon
4. Casa Blanca archaeological site

As shown on the map, the proximity of Tazumal (1) to Laguna Seca (2) and Laguna Cuscachapa (3) is evident. Both are of archaeological-hydrological importance as they served as water supply centers and depositories of offerings. Laguna Cuscachapa and Laguna Seca, based on the material remains found, have human occupation extending from the Late Preclassic to the Postclassic periods, although the highest density of occupation was during the Late Classic and Early Postclassic periods (B.A. Anderson, 1978), which aligns with the suggested time frame for Monument 21.

Unfortunately, due to the condition of Monument 21, many features are not entirely clear, especially the face. Therefore, some characteristic decorations of Chalchiuhtlicue, such as the serpentiform or turquoise nose ring, as noted by Pugliese (2021), cannot be defined. Neither can colors associated with the deity, such as yellow and red and the black and red bands on the cheeks, be observed at a glance (Ibid.). However, in a photograph from the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, the relief details of Monument 21 can be seen highlighted with white chalk (a common practice in the early 20th century), where the nose's broadening from its bridge to disproportionate proportions is visible.

Another notable detail of Monument 21 is what appears to be a skirt with diagonal lines and a fringe fillet that falls to the thighs. This pattern closely resembles that depicted in Codex Vaticanus B on page 53.

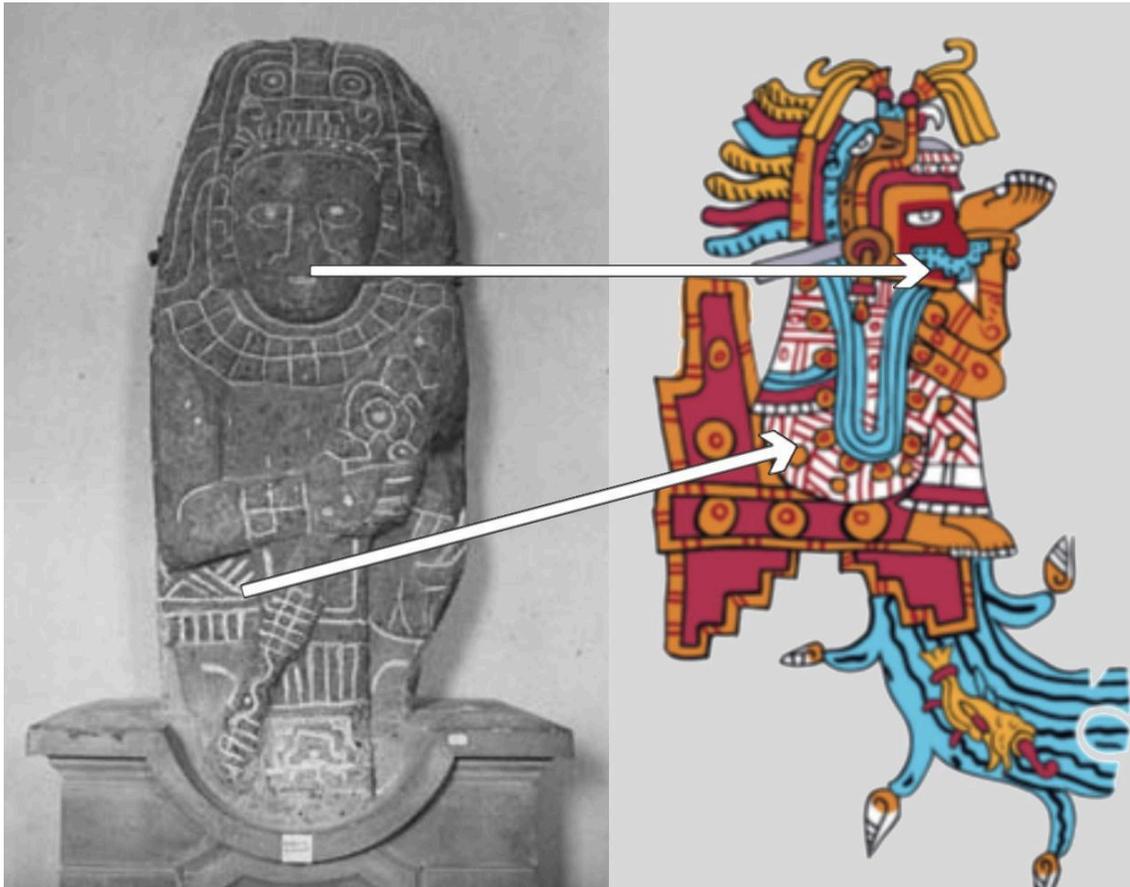


Figure 22: Monument 21 on display at the National Museum of Anthropology in the early twentieth century marked with paint or plaster to highlight details (left); representation of Chalchiuhtlicue in the Vatican Codex drawn by Nicolas Latsanopoulos (right), note the pattern of the dress and skirt worn by the figure of monument 21, also the presence of the nose ring.

Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue are associated with the east-west axis (Spranz, 2006; De Sahagún, 2006; López-Austin, 1999), the same axis where monument 21 was found within the archaeological site of Tazumal.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Monument 21 raises many questions, and the only way the theoretical body of archaeological work can advance, as other sciences do, is through research followed by discussion and the generation of a dialogical, almost Hegelian, critique. Otherwise, new lines of investigation and the application of archaeological theories to practice could not be opened.

Undoubtedly, there is a symbolic relationship between the aquatic elements and Monument 21, among which the following stand out: the presence of Tlaloc's headdress, the *ayauhchihuaztli* that sounds like falling rain, the inclusion of jade in the character's attire related to Chalchiuhtlicue and flowing waters, and lastly, the decorative mountain element as a place for water collection, as well as being the abode of the pair of gods: Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue in Tlalocan, specifically in their palace at the summit, *Ayauhcalli*, as well as the place where the rain is born. Its place of origin is also not coincidental, as its archaeological context places Monument 21 at the base of the main pyramid of Tazumal, which represents a human-made mountain.

There is also a relationship between the aquatic geographical features of Chalchuapa and the lithic figure, for example, the proximity of Laguna Cuscachapa and Laguna Seca to Tazumal. For now, this study has demonstrated that there is a symbolic relationship between water and the deities responsible for providing that vital liquid to the pre-Hispanic inhabitants of the Chalchuapa area during the Late Classic period, and they have been characterized in the stela.

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AUTHOR

Author –

* **Diego Fernando González Argumedo,**

Degree in Archaeology from the Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador and Master in Museology and Museum Management from the Iberoamerican Institute of Museology.
ORCID: [0009-0001-1801-8378](https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1801-8378)

Requests to authors – Diego Fernando González Argumedo, 000425e7@gmail.com.

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