

Dating the Izapa Kingdom: Reply to Inomata and Henderson

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I thank my colleagues for their comments, but I disagree with their conclusions.

Keywords: Izapa, chronology, low-relief stelae

Agradezco a mis colegas por sus comentarios, aunque no coincido con sus conclusiones.

Palabras clave: Izapa, cronología, estelas de bajo relieve

One can never date the carving of a stone sculpture—only the final erection. The famous low-relief stelae of Izapa are clearly derived from the La Venta tradition, and some were moved around at the site until the Late Classic period, the discussion of which begins my recent article (Rosenswig 2019:92–94). Clark and Moreno (2018) convincingly argue that “Izapa-style” stelae were carved during a short period at the beginning of the Guillén phase, circa 300 BC. A host of radiocarbon dates fix the Izapa chronology in time, with the Guillén phase lasting from 100–300 BC (Rosenswig 2019:Table 1). In their comment, Inomata and Henderson accept this dating but postulate that the low-relief stelae at Izapa might have been carved centuries later. This later date can never be completely ruled out, but archaeological evidence of the Izapa kingdom makes it improbable. Dating these stelae to between 100 BC and AD 250 (to make them coeval with the authors’ redating of the Kaminaljuyu stelae) would require a three- to six-century hiatus after the collapse of La Venta (~400 BC), during which time stylistic conventions would have been preserved without being expressed in stone. I invoke Occam’s razor.

Equally convincing as the La Venta-Izapa connection of public art styles are multiple

lines of archaeological data for the 300–100 BC political apogee of the Izapa kingdom. Lidar and survey data document that the kingdom began as a regionally integrated political phenomenon by 700 BC, with more than 40 lower-order monumental centers, all of which were occupied continuously to 100 BC (Rosenswig and López-Torrijos 2018). Settlement data from the nearby estuary also indicate a population collapse after the Guillén phase. These patterns (and more), which are clearly laid out in Rosenswig (2019), indicate that a demographic and political collapse/reorganization occurred at Izapa during the Hato phase (100 BC–AD 100), after which time monumental construction at Izapa was built to the north at Group F.

Survey data document no domestic occupation in central Izapa (Groups A, B, G, and H) during the Hato phase (Rosenswig 2019:Figure 4). This does not mean that the area was not used, but simply that its function changed after 100 BC. Rosenswig and Mendelsohn (2016) argue, at some length, that the relationship of the inhabitants of Group F to “Old Izapa” was formalized with a newly discovered causeway, 270 m in length, that links the two areas of the site. Central Izapa was not abandoned after 100 BC but repurposed. Further, Rosenswig and colleagues

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(2018) document that the north half of the Mound 30 platform was built during the Itstapa phase (100 BC–100 AD). Uncarved Stela 40 was erected west of this platform extension (Clark and Moreno 2018:239), and others were moved to Mound 9. Stelae erection continued to be practiced at Izapa during the Terminal Formative period and on through the Late Classic period. Inomata and Henderson present nothing to counter any of the archaeological patterns enumerated in this response—only the hypothetical possibility that the low-relief stelae at Izapa date to centuries after the apogee of the kingdom.

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