



# ANCIENT SKIES

*"Come Search With Us!"*

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### QUIRIGUÁ

BY GENE M. PHILLIPS, Founder of the Society

One of the most mysterious of all the Mayan sites is Quiriguá (pronounced "key-ree-wah"), because of its many elaborately-carved stone objects which defy explanation.

Located in southern Guatemala, Central America near the Honduras border, Quiriguá is seldom visited by tourists, probably because of its out-of-the way location, and possibly because few people can pronounce its name. Nestled in the midst of a sprawling banana plantation about one mile from the Motagua River, Quiriguá is just off the Atlantic Highway about halfway between Rio Hondo and Puerto Barrios on the Gulf of Honduras.

Quiriguá was completely unknown to the outside world until 1841, when John Lloyd Stevens reported on his expedition to Central America in 1840 with his artist-companion Frederick Catherwood. (1) While the pair had spent a night within a mile of the ruins, it was not until they arrived in Copan, Honduras that they began to hear rumors of a site near the Motagua River with fantastic carved stones. Being somewhat skeptical, Stevens sent Catherwood to explore the Quiriguá region while he remained at Copan. Thus, Stevens's account of the ruins of Quiriguá is somewhat sketchy and lacks his usual colorful detailed descriptions because he did not view the site firsthand, but rather he recounted Catherwood's story.

Unlike other Mayan sites such as Copan and Tikal, very little structural restoration has been done at Quiriguá, and its enigmatic stone objects are displayed in outdoor museum fashion in a tropical, verdant, park-like setting amid towering ceiba trees and lush grass and foliage which are luxuriant in the perpetual warm, humid climate. Quiriguá boasts the tallest stela in Mayaland - over 33 feet (10 meters) and many other stelae over 10 feet high. All of the stelae are intricately carved to depict a personage with a face of unmistakable oriental features and usually with a tall, multi-tiered, elaborate headdress.

Quiriguá is unique with its collection of zoomorphic objects. Carved in stone, such objects depict a huge monster of unknown animal origin, with enormous sharp claws, and always with the head or torso of a human being in its mouth, not as though it were devouring the person, but rather it appears that the person is riding in the monster - even guiding or steering it! Each such zoomorphic object is adorned with a series of panels carved in low relief with picture glyphs. Obviously the entire story of each object is depicted in the glyphs, if only we could read them. (See Figure 1)

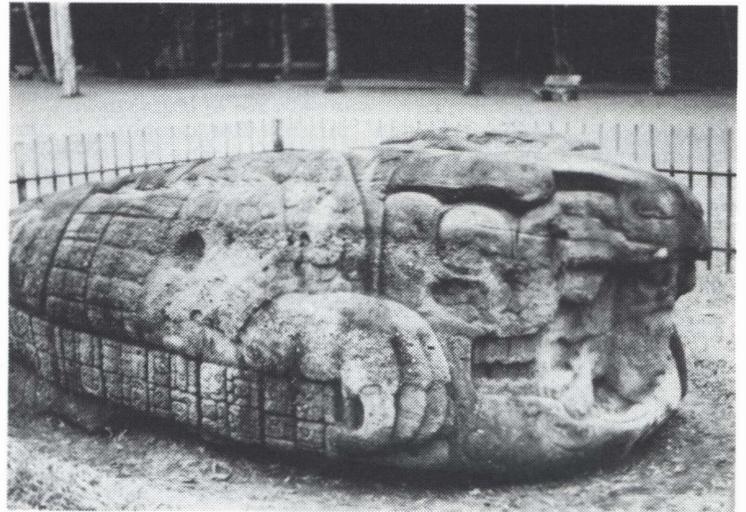


Figure 1 above. Zoomorphic object at Quiriguá.  
Figure 2 below. Detail of portion of intricately-carved stela at Quiriguá.



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Figure 2 shows a close-up of the lower portion of one of the stela at Quiriguá. Note the intricate carving of what appears to be something mechanical which enshrouds the person who seems to be operating it. The "X's" indicate power, and are prevalent in many Mayan drawings and carvings where it seems that power is being used. In fact, one Society Member has developed a working model of a "Mayan Motor" which is based upon the "X" design as a cross section of a cylinder. At first glance one is reminded of a pneumatic jack-hammer, used to break up concrete, but then we see that the person is barefooted, so that might not be a good idea. It is interesting that the person's right foot is raised so that only the big toe is touching the base. Could it represent a platform type, one man flying machine?

Figures 3 and 4 below show two views of Monument 15 (Zoomorph 0) at Quiriguá, which archaeologist William R. Coe of the University of Pennsylvania has described as "one of the most complicated sculptures in the Mayan world." (2) National Geographic rather glibly states that "an abstract dancer holds writhing serpents" in Monument 15! Complicated? Yes. Extremely so. But "writhing serpents"? No. The writhing is on the face of the person who is being strapped into a confined space. Note the straps around the ankles and the thighs. The contorted face is shown in the lower left of the stone with one hand nearby showing that the arm is also restrained. The panels of glyphs tell us what this object is all about, but again, we cannot read them.



Figure 5 above. Figure 6 below.

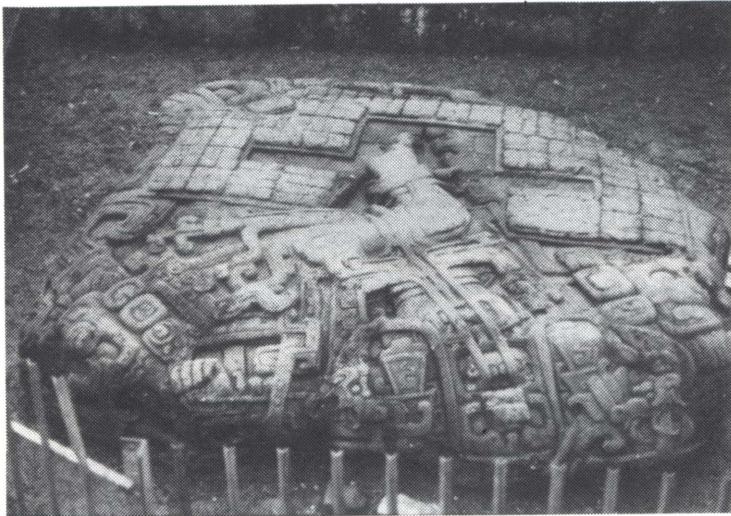
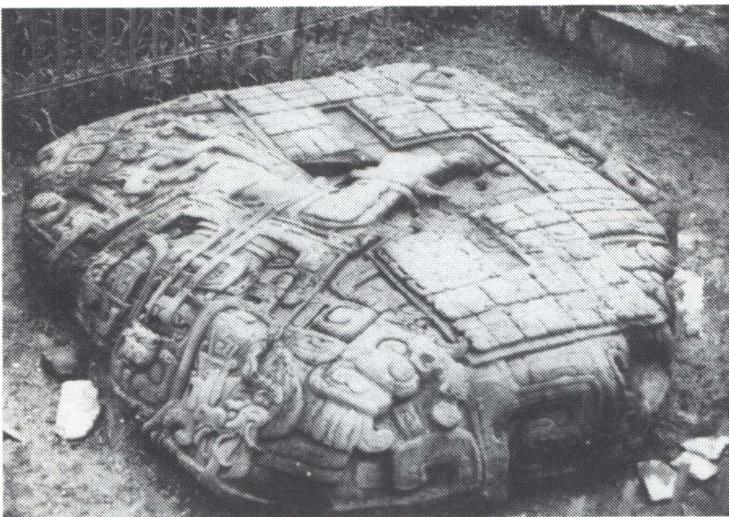


Figure 3 above. Figure 4 below. Both of Monument 15.



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Figures 5 and 6 at left show elaborate picture glyphs on each side of one of the 10 foot high stelae at Quiriguá. Not unlike today's comic strips, the picture panels show a progression of activity. While it is impossible to determine what is going on in the strips, our attention is immediately drawn to the bottom panel shown in Figure 5. A person who appears to be in pain is being examined by a "doctor" using some sort of sophisticated apparatus with a TV or computer screen with a device which attaches to the patient's upper arm and forearm with three sensors, or suction cups. It seems apparent that a medical diagnosis or treatment is in progress.

Figure 6 shows in the top panel what appears to be an old person with a grotesque face who has been shackled around the ankle. Perhaps a prisoner, or someone who needs to be restrained. The center panel shows this person being pacified by being stroked on the chin. In the lower panel, again we see the sophisticated medical diagnostic or treatment apparatus, although this time there is only one probe, or suction cup, being applied to the patient's arm. It is interesting that in both "TV" screens the personage depicted is obviously Mayan, while the "patient" appears to be of a different race.

Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 show Monument 16 (Zoomorph P) at Quiriguá, which the archaeologists have dubbed the "Great Turtle Altar." What else? Nine feet long and seven feet high, this huge boulder has been elaborately carved in a "florescent baroque manner" and is "considered one of the most magnificent carvings in the Americas."<sup>(3)</sup> This carving is truly enigmatic, because other than for the person who is depicted on the front face of the boulder (Figure 7), there is nothing human or animal anywhere else on the object, although many aspects do suggest animal features, such as the mask at the rear and the top carving which evokes frog legs spread apart (Figure 9), and the overall aspect of the right side of the object makes one think of an elephant. If anyone has any idea of what this carving represents, your thoughts are welcome.



Figure 8. Left side of Monument 16.



Figure 9. Rear view of Monument 16.



Figure 10. Right side of Monument 16.



Figure 7. Front view of Monument 16.

#### References:

1. Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan, Vol. II, by John Lloyd Stephens. Originally published in 1841. (Dover Books, New York). See pages 118 to 124.
2. National Geographic Magazine, December 1975, page 757.
3. A Guide to Ancient Maya Ruins, Second Edition, by C. Bruce Hunter, page 121. (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 1977).

NOTE: All photographs used in this article were taken by Gene M. Phillips.

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## THE AIUD OBJECT

BY FLORIN GHEORGHITA\*

Translated from the German by George T. Sassoon\*\*

In early 1974 a group of workers in a sand quarry on the bank of the river Mures found three small objects embedded in the fine sand of the river sediment. The location is about 2 kilometers east of the town of Aiud, Rumania, on the eastern edge of the Siebenburger mountain range and 50 kilometers north of Cluj-Napoca. The objects were at a depth of about 10 meters (33 feet) below the present surface and were overlaid by a hard sandy crust.

A local researcher identified two of the finds as bones, or as parts of bones, and the third appeared, from its shape and weight, to be a stone axe. He sent the objects for further examination to the Archaeological Institute of Cluj-Napoca. Here, the sandy crust was removed. The fossils were identified as limb bones and molar teeth of a young mastodon. Mastodons were the ancestors of today's elephants and lived from the Miocene age of 23 million years ago until the middle Pleistocene of about 1 million years ago.

The third object was rapidly found to be something other than a stone axe, for it was made of metal. With a length of 20.2 centimeters, the object had two holes bored in it of different diameters, at right angles to each other. An oval deformation was noticeable in the lower part of the larger hole, probably as the result of having a shaft fitted into it with a rounded end. The upper and side surfaces showed traces of having been hit repeatedly with heavy blows. The details taken together led to the supposition that the object was part of a functional machine.

Repeated metallurgical tests served only to increase the mystery surrounding the object. Analyses were carried out by Dr. I. Niederkorn at the Institute for the Research and Projection of Non-Ferrous Ores and Metals in Magurele, Rumania. These showed that the object consisted of, or was made from a complex metal alloy of twelve different elements, in addition to aluminium of which it contained 89%.

Other metals present were, with their percentages:

Copper	6.2%	Silicon	2.84%	Zinc	1.81%
Lead	0.41%	Tin	0.33%	Zirconium	0.2%
Cadmium	0.11%	Nickel	0.0024%	Cobalt	0.00023%
Bismuth	0.0003%	Silver	0.0002%	Gallium	traces

Although aluminum is one of the commonest elements in the Earth's crust, it occurs in nature only in the form of compounds. It was discovered in 1825 by H.C. Oersted, and may be obtained as an industrially useful metal only by electrolysis of ores in the molten state at temperatures between 950 and 970 degrees Celsius (1742-1778 Fahrenheit). It was only produced in industrial quantities at the end of the last century. For example, production of aluminum began in 1883 in America at the ALCOA works.

A most unusual aspect of the object is the presence of a relatively thick film of aluminum oxide on its surface. (Oxidation is the absorption of oxygen, or the removal of electrons). Normally, aluminum exposed to air covers itself with a very thin, resistive oxide layer, making the metal more resistant to corrosion than, for example, iron. Through this action, any further oxidation is stopped. However, the oxide film on the object in question had a thickness of more than a millimeter, which has never been observed anywhere before. Such a thickness is only thinkable if the object has an age of several hundred thousand years. (Understandably, no other examples are available for comparison). One of the metallurgists working on the investigation wrote: "It is unbelievable, but this appears to be an aluminum with an altered structure, as if the other elements of the alloy had returned to their own crystalline form."

No one of the investigating specialists - archaeologists, palaeontologists, engineers - could identify the object, or even show any similarity with today's machines or machine parts. But finally an aircraft engineer suggested an interesting hypothesis: the object resembled a landing-plate of a not-too-large aircraft, which, like the lunar landing module or the Viking probes, was intended to land lightly on the ground. Evidence to support this hypothesis is not only the shape of the object, but also the two holes - probably attachment points for the lander's legs - the traces of scratching on the underside and the edges, and the material itself - light aluminum, which is also used today in aircraft and spacecraft because of its weight.

Did "something" - perhaps a relatively light, remote-controlled probe - fly over what is now Rumania a million or more years ago? Did it land in the prehistoric valley of the Mures and suffer some accident? Were the other remains of the object washed away leaving only the broken-off landing plate, together with some parts of bones of an ancestor of the elephants, since extinct, in the shallows of the river, to be covered with sediment and thus to survive?

We do not know, but one thing is certain: this object, of which I myself was in possession of some fragments for electrotechnical analysis in 1974, was not made in the Pleistocene era, nor by our human forebears, and therefore with high probability not on our planet. Where it is today, I do not know. But it is to be hoped that, through articles such as this, it will not fall into oblivion, and that the remaining pieces of it will soon be placed in the hands of an international team of scientists for further analysis.

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## MEMBER EXPEDITION TO VISIT QUIRIGUÁ IN 1993

Arrangements are complete for the Ancient Astronaut Society's Member Expedition to Guatemala and Honduras departing Chicago on May 6, 1993. Two weeks of action-packed adventure are planned beginning with an intensive tour of museums, churches and other places of interest in Guatemala City; the ruins at Kaminaljuyu; Palin to view the world's largest ceiba tree; interesting sites of Monte Alto, Los Cerritos, Pantaleon, Las Ilusiones, El Baul and La Democracia; the old city of Ciudad Vieja and Antigua Guatemala; Lake Atitlan; Utatlan ruins; the famous market at Chichicastenango; Ixmiche ruins; a flight to Flores, the unique island city in Lake Peten-Itza; Tikal, one of the largest of all Mayan ruins; Tikal's archaeological museum; Uaxatun; Yaxha; and Quirigua. Then to Honduras to visit the fabulous ruins of Copan and on to Roatan Island in the Caribbean off the northern coast of Honduras for two days of relaxation at Anthony's Key Resort. The Expedition will return to Chicago on May 19.

The price for the tour is US\$1,964 per person, which includes all hotels for 13 nights, all ground transportation, all admissions to museums and sites, one-half of all meals, and air fare from Guatemala City to Flores and return, and from Guatemala City to Roatan Island and return to San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Single occupancy is US\$396 extra.

The current air fare via American Airlines from Chicago to Miami to Guatemala City and the return from San Pedro Sula to Miami to Chicago is US\$619 per person. Members may join the Expedition in Chicago, in Miami, or in Guatemala City. Reservations are being accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. If you wish to participate in this exciting adventure, write to the Society Headquarters now for a complete itinerary and detailed information.