

of the tendencies and artistic emphases characterizing the works of these founders.

To give added strength to his interpretation, Schulman might have provided a more extensive analysis of Darío's works and thus clarified his role as synthesist and elaborator rather than founder. Such a procedure would have shown wherein Darío's poetry and other writings brought new emphases to Latin American literature and wherein he developed tendencies already present in the four mentioned writers. It would have provided, also, more adequate grounds for delineating the basic structures of modernist literature, which seems to be a recurring need.

Schulman's descriptive analysis gives primary attention to Martí and Gutiérrez Nájera. It is perceptive and thorough in working through matters of historical antecedence, relationships to European authors, the use of colors, metaphors, images, and contrasting comparisons. Nevertheless, one might have hoped for some comment on the literary effectiveness of the stylistic and conceptual innovations of these early modernist authors.

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BACKGROUND

The Olmec World. By IGNACIO BERNAL. Translated by DORIS HEYDEN and FERNANDO HORCASITAS. Berkeley, 1969. University of California Press. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xiv, 273. \$12.50.

This well-written, beautifully composed, and excellently illustrated book is the latest word on the prehistoric Olmec culture of Mesoamerica. It brings together the findings of many field archaeologists who have conducted excavations, made discoveries, and drawn conclusions about the Olmecs. More than this, it sparkles with some of Ignacio Bernal's hypotheses concerning the people who he believes not only engendered Mesoamerican civilization, but also brought forth the first empire in that area.

The author achieves balance between fact and inference by systematically describing the Olmec area, architecture, sculpture, and ceramics on the one hand and by reconstructing various aspects of Olmec society on the other. The Olmecs are traced from 1500 B.C., when cultural specialization began to take place along the Gulf coastal area of Veracruz and Tabasco, through the period from 1200 to 600

B.C., when they evolved a civilization that expanded well beyond its original territorial boundaries, and through succeeding decadence to about 100 B.C., when Olmec culture terminated and the area in which it flourished became a marginal zone. Most of the book deals with Olmec culture in its homeland, the metropolitan Olmec world as it is called, but the numerous monuments and works of art outside the metropolitan area that bear the Olmec stamp are also discussed.

Scientific exploration in the Olmec zone did not begin until 1938, although the term "Olmec" had long been in use, and many artifacts of "Olmec style" had been identified. At that time confusion reigned, since the term had been applied both to a historical group of people and to an archaeological culture. Sound archaeological research in the Olmec zone proper at Tres Zapotes, La Venta, and elsewhere disclosed not only interesting objects but an entire prehistoric civilization which had not been defined up to then. As the archaeological evidence began to turn up, two interpretations of its significance and position in Mesoamerican prehistory were proposed. One group of scientists believed that the Olmecs were only a branch of the Maya, while the other claimed that the Olmecs represented a very ancient independent civilization, in reality the most ancient in Mexico. Most archaeologists now favor the latter point of view.

Ignacio Bernal's careful review of the initial archaeological evidence and the more recent research conducted since World War II lends further credence to the belief that the Olmecs were the first to reach a level we can call civilized and that from them came many traits which were to become characteristic of Mesoamerica. The following generally accepted components of a civilization are attributed to the Olmecs: monumental sculpture, planned and oriented cities, complex social organization with priests, merchants, and specialized workers, an economic surplus, and perhaps an imperial power that imposed its style on other cities. The world of the Olmecs thus formed the first civilized Mesoamerica and set patterns which were to distinguish that area from all other parts of the Americas. It developed directly into the Classic world of Teotihuacán, Monte Albán, Tajín, and the Maya peoples who absorbed the Olmec inheritance and pushed civilization to far higher levels.

Ignacio Bernal states that his fundamental interest in this volume lies in the history of a civilization, not in its archaeology. Through the utilization and interpretation of all available archaeological evidence, he has accomplished his purpose in admirable fashion.

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