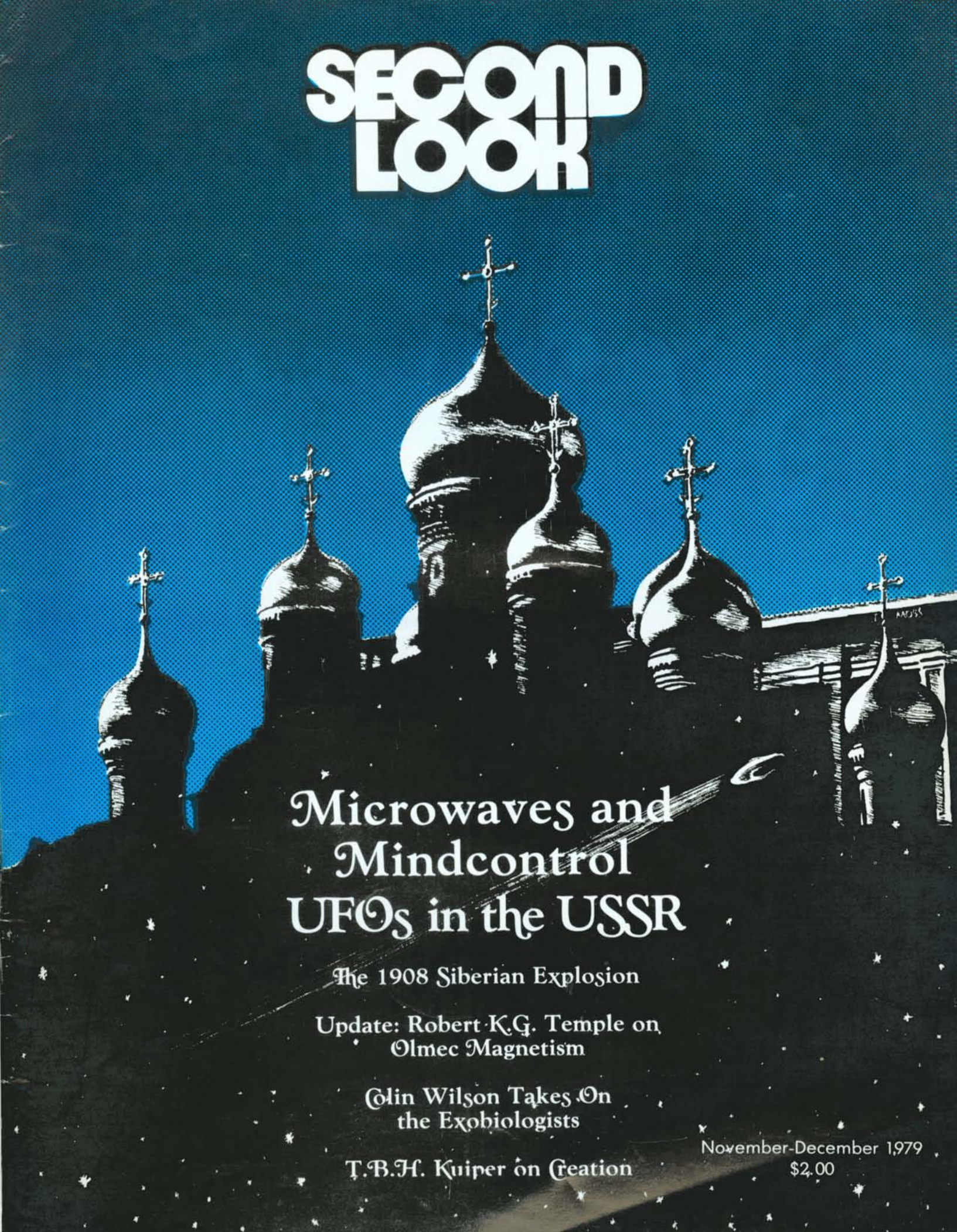


SECOND LOOK



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November-December 1979

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UPDATE

Olmec Magnetism and the Brain

by Robert K.G. Temple

The first week in September, 1979, saw a burst of synchronicity regarding magnetism in ancient America. In that week, we published an article by myself entitled "Coincidence or Contact: Magnetism in the New World" (*Second Look*, September 1979). In the same week, the matter was brought into the open also by *Time* magazine. In their issue for September 3, page 63, they ran a story entitled "The Fat Boys: A Pre-Columbian Mystery," which dealt with the same subject and the further discoveries of Professor Vincent H. Malmstrom of Dartmouth. The "fat boys" referred to are huge statues found near the ancient site of Izapa, which Professor Malmstrom has now discovered also have magnetic properties.

Malmstrom has found that these statues have magnetic poles either at their navels or at their right temples. There is a huge rotund torso the height of a man which has a magnetic navel, and *Time* also published a photo of a large round head with a magnetic pole at its right temple. The magnetism of the temple in the human head is a question which has only recently achieved scientific respectability. We reproduce here a schematic drawing of the magnetic field known to exist in the human head, whereby the lines of force go from the left hemisphere of the brain around the head and back in through the right hemisphere. This subject is discussed at length in my own forthcoming book, of which our previous article on Olmec magnetism was also an extract.

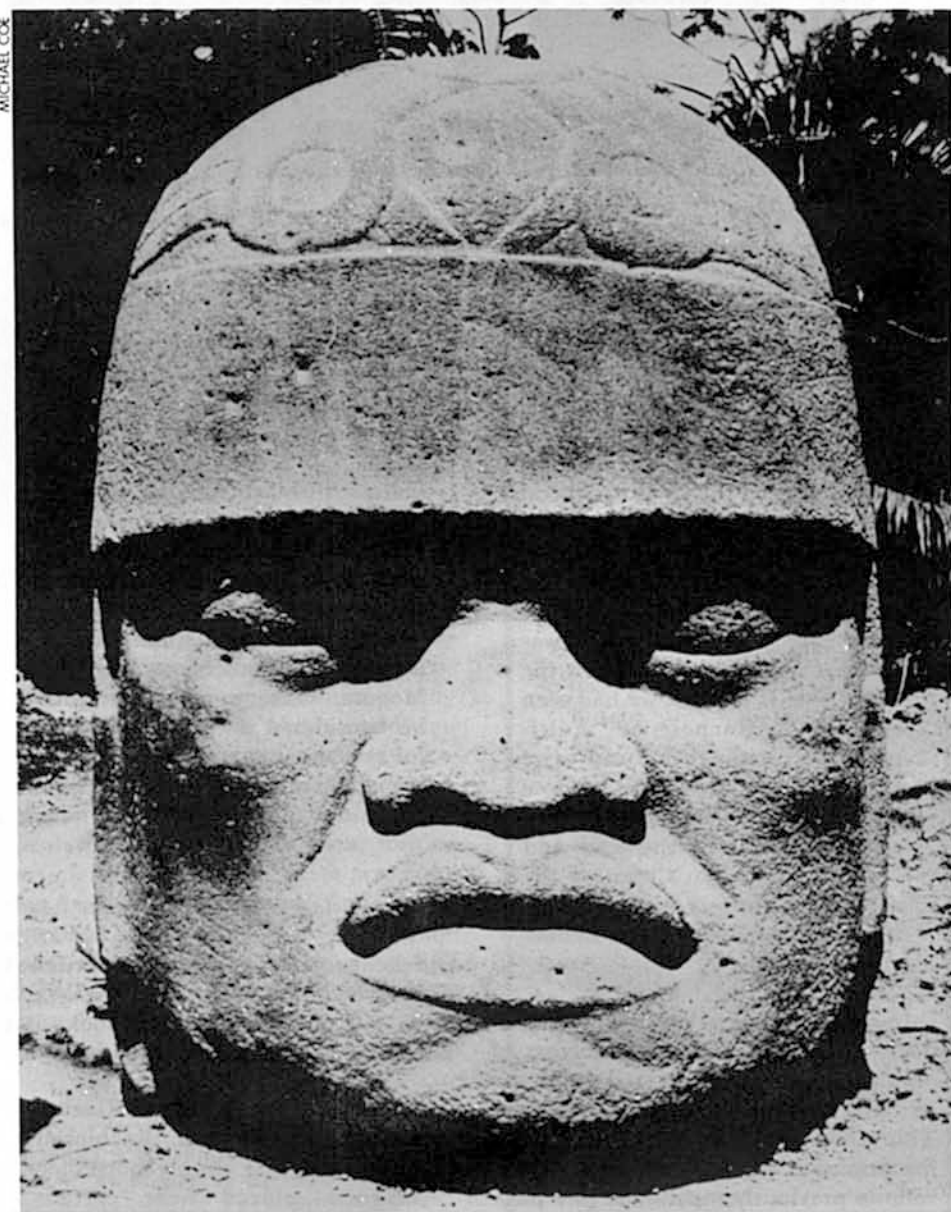
The question now arises: could the ancient Izapans/Olmecs possibly have known of the magnetism in the human temple? Here we come to another event of the first week in September. In that week I received from Dumbarton Oaks Center in Washington, D.C. a book reprinting the proceedings of their *Conference on the Olmec*, held in 1957. I had not previously seen the book and looked through it with great interest.

One of the first things I came across was an account in Yale Professor Michael Coe's paper "San Lorenzo and the Olmec Civilization."

San Lorenzo, as the reader of our previous article may remember, was the site where the ancient Olmec compass, pre-dating the earliest known Chinese compass by a thousand years at least,

was found. In the paper just referred to, Coe reproduced a photo of one of the gigantic Olmec stone heads known as Monument 17, calling attention to the curious designs on its "helmet." Here is what Coe says of this:

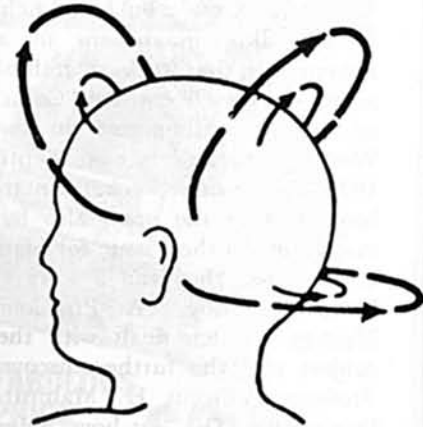
"A great many other Olmec monuments have been uncovered



Monument 17, an Olmec stone head once decorated with beads of magnetite.



LEFT: Two small mirrors of polished magnetite excavated at Oaxaca, the source of Olmec magnetite. RIGHT: A drawing of the magnetic field in the human head. The lines of force run from the left to the right hemisphere.



both in excavations and on the surface of San Lorenzo. The total figure for all now known is forty-eight, some of which are featureless basalt fragments. The most striking of the new monuments is Monument 17 on the edge of the South-Central ridge, a fine colossal head first described by Luis Avelleyra (1965). This had been partly disturbed by previous digging, but, after we had cleared a cut to raise it, it was obvious that it had rested in the same Zone C fill that we had seen elsewhere. Caches of multi-perforate, magnetite beads (we have also found fragments of these in San Lorenzo domestic rubbish) were recovered near the head, and it seems likely that these are the objects, connected by cords, which are depicted on the helmet of this head."

In another illustration here we reproduce a photo of two small mirrors of polished magnetite excavated at the site of San Jose, at Oaxaca, in Mexico. This photo was also first brought to my attention in the Dumbarton Oaks volume previously mentioned (see page 88). The author discussing it, Dr. Kent

V. Flannery, says:

"... access to magnetite was not universal... Clearly, social rather than geographic factors determined who got magnetite and how much... Although there are scattered finds of small magnetite mirrors throughout Formative Mesoamerica, I know of no site outside the Valley of Oaxaca that has shown evidence of the extensive magnetite *accumulation and working* that is seen at San Jose Mogote. Oaxaca must therefore be considered a tentative source for the Olmec magnetite, pending technical analyses." (*ibid.*, page 89).

Magnetite beads placed on the head: Here we have a truly strange phenomenon! In my previous article I did not include the following paragraph from my own forthcoming book, but now it clearly must be quoted:

"As long ago as 1962, a Russian scientist named B.B. Kazhinskii discovered that simple horseshoe magnets placed near certain regions of the human head altered

the hypnotic states of subjects in trance. Since states of trance seem to have played significant roles in ancient religions all over the world, it would not surprise me if ancient man had discovered something of this kind with lodestone, though that is of course pure speculation. But if phenomena of that kind had been noticed by ancient man, it would presumably have strongly influenced their views of things. Ancient awareness of fields of force in nature was far more advanced than is generally thought. As an example, let us take the case of the compass, which you may have thought held no surprises."

And then immediately followed that portion of the book which, with some small changes, constituted the text of my previous article. Little did I realize at the time I wrote the above paragraph that shortly evidence would be forthcoming of the actual ancient association of magnetic phenomena with the human head both in the form of magnetite beads featured on the Olmec head and buried beneath it and in the detection by Malmstrom of magnetic temples in ancient Izapan stone heads.

We must clearly consider the possibility that ancient awareness of the phenomena of magnetic influence on human consciousness, and the presence of a weak magnetic field in the human head—going out of one temple and into the other—may be a basic ingredient of the ancient Izapan/Olmec religion.

And now we turn to the last of the events of the first week in September. For in *Science* magazine for September 7, the scientific account was published upon which some slightly earlier popular newspaper reports had been based, of the new and exciting discoveries of *minute amounts of magnetite inside the heads of pigeons*. The reference is "Pigeons Have Magnets," by Charles Walcott, James L. Gould and J.L. Kirschvink (the latter two of Princeton, and the former of New York State University at Stony Brook). These scientists have accomplished a very difficult thing: they have proved the existence of magnetite in the form of crystals actually within pigeon tissues in a small structure between the brain and the skull. Their paper is prefaced by remarks on how homing pigeons are able to navigate, and their conclusions are couched in ultra-conservative scientific style:

"These results do not prove that pigeons actually use the innervated, magnetite-rich, naturally magnetic structure reported here as a magnetic field detector. Only behavioural and physiological experiments can actually determine whether or not pigeons use this presumptive detector in either their 'map' or compass systems, and if so, how. (*Science*, Vol. 205, No. 7, for September 7, 1979; pp. 1027-9.)

It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to realize that these scientists may have hit upon a fundamental explanation of the homing process in pigeons. But let us extend this to turtles and I shall venture a prediction: *I predict that magnetite will one day be discovered within the heads or noses of turtles*. My reasons for making this prediction are, first, that magnetic navigation has already been suggested for turtles and seems the most likely means of their navigating, and second, *because the ancient Izapans had a magnetic turtle statue with its nose forming a magnetic pole*. I believe they did this because they had discovered

that turtles had magnetite in them which was used for navigation. Photos of this turtle, with the compass pointing towards its nose, were reproduced in our September issue.

We see that the magnetic mysteries of the earliest American cultures are multiplying, not diminishing. In another study, Dr. Alexander Marshack has remarked in the scholarly book **Archaeoastronomy in Pre-Columbian America** (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975, pp. 372-3):

"A sequential, cognitive analysis of the earliest known Meso-American mosaic [an Olmec pendant which he analyzed in great detail] . . . documents the presence of prehistoric arithmetical, geometrical and technical skills of a surprisingly high order. There is a probability that the mosaic [the pendant in question] represents the symbolic lunar year, perhaps a particular lunar year in a solstitial or equinoctial and artificial year conjunction. The structure and patterning of the mosaic are similar to those found in later Meso-American glyph writing and it may therefore indicate such writing in the Olmec period.

The origins of the technology and lore supporting this highly complex artifact, circa 1000 B.C. [roughly contemporary with the Olmec compass], remain unknown."

Did the Olmecs use magnetic materials in association with the human head, in conjunction with trance-states in their religious rites? Did they somehow know of the brain's magnetic field which goes from one human temple to another? Was their world-view formed on the basis of profound sensitivity to and awareness of the invisible alignment-fields of magnetism, particularly of the earth? Ancient lore on magnets is very scarce, but is now coming to light—overcoming the preconceptions which blind us to it. Perhaps what the ancient Egyptians called RES MEHIT BA ("north-south iron") is the answer to many riddles which have plagued archaeologists for years. □

ROBERT K.G. TEMPLE, *Second Look* Senior Editor, is a Member of the Royal Astronomical Society and author of *The Sirius Mystery*.
