

Izapa Stela 5, Mexico: An Analysis Based on Gadamerian Aesthetics

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author AGR designed the study and visited Izapa. Authors AGR and BEMC wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors AGR, NHEE and OCL carried out the aesthetic analysis from the Gadamerian hermeneutics. Authors BEMC and IDM carried out the historical and moral analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: This study aims to analyze the scene represented in the Izapa Stela 5 from the Gadamer's aesthetic, to unveil the link between myth and logos in the horizon of understanding of the Mayan civilization.

Study Design: Philosophical research.

Place and Duration of Study: The fieldwork was carried out in Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico and the philosophical analysis in the Faculty of Medicine of the Autonomous University of the State of

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Mexico. The study was developed during the period of January-December 2016.

Methodology: A hermeneutic investigation was carried out in two stages (destructive and constructive) and four phases (analytical and comprehensive, reconstructive and critical). The following categories were analyzed: cosmovision, anamnestic content, aesthetic-moral meaning.

Results: Izapa Stela 5 narrates the life-death event linked to the Mayan cosmogony. Doing in the world is shaped by the anamnestic mythical truth giving meaning to the good and exposes the moral significance of Maya cultural coexistence and cultural coherence. The analysis revealed the following scales: word, dialogue, peace, solidarity; all of them articulated in a syncretic *praxis* that gives meaning to being and doing in the world of life of the Mayan population.

Conclusion: The beautiful nature of Izapa Stela 5 exposes the consciousness of the actual history of being and make of the Mayan culture communicating contents of life and death as axes of aesthetic experience.

Keywords: Gadamer's aesthetics; hermeneutical aesthetics; Izapa Stela 5; mayan cosmovision; pre-hispanic mayan; tree of life.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is recognized that at first, Mayan villagers roamed the territory in groups of hunters and gatherers of seeds and wild fruits; but as the research processes related to the Mayan civilization advance during pre-Hispanic period, more than 10,000 years of history are recovering; for example, the first evidence of Mayan settlers date from 7,000 BC., were found in Guatemala, Belize, and Mani. Besides, the evidence found in the cave of Loltúl supports the claim that the first settlers in the north of Yucatan peninsula date back to 9,000 BC [1].

From 2,500 BC, a different relationship with the natural environment is established, favoring the emergence of human settlements that gave rise to the Mayan civilization that prevailed over a period of 3,000 years. The Maya extended into Yucatan peninsula, the Mexican states of Tabasco and Chiapas; Belize, Guatemala, and part of Honduras and El Salvador, representing a territory of nearly 500,000 km² [2,3].

The first cities of Mayan civilization were founded in the pre-classic period (2,500 BC - 200 AD), maintaining its integration as demonstrated by the linguistic unity of the 31 languages currently recognized in the Maya area [4]. This integration contributed to the production of pottery vessels and figurines where the hieroglyphic writing was painted, which was also sculpted in multiple materials and objects; besides promoting the division of classes.

1.1 Archaeological site of Izapa, Mexico

The archaeological site of Izapa enabled the formation of the Mayan civilization; in a way that

recognizes its importance to understand the development of the Olmec civilization, the construction of the elements that characterize the classic period of the Maya as well as the coastal communities of Soconusco [5-7]. Located in late pre-classic, Izapa arises around 1,500 BC, having its apogee between 600 BC., and 100 AC; was abandoned for the year 1,200 AC. Representing an occupation for 2,700 years. It is located in the far east of the Soconusco, a few kilometers west of Mexican border with Guatemala, 40 km from the coast of Pacific Ocean, on the margin of Izapa River, and on the horizon is the Tacaná volcano. At the moment it belongs to the municipality of Tuxtla Chico, in the state of Chiapas, Mexico (See Fig. 1).

The first archaeological reports of Izapa were realized in the decade of 1930. Eulalia Guzmán visited it in 1935 and 1944; Karl Ruppert (1938) and A. V. Kidder (1939), of the Carnegie Institution. The reports of Matthew W. Stirling between 1941 and 1943, Philip Drucker of the Smithsonian Institute in 1947 and the 1960s were carried out by the New World Archaeological Foundation under the direction of Gareth W. Lowe [8].

8 groups of structures compose the present archaeological zone of Izapa (see fig. 2) consisting of basements for temples distributed in 13 large squares and containing 271 sculptures in which there are 21 stelae, 6 altars and two thrones. The sculptures present bas-reliefs that narrate scenes using shapes, motifs and themes distributed in sculpted designs on three levels: upper line, lower baseline and central area [9]. The elements, units, motifs and issues described in the stelae of Izapa have shaped the so-called "Izapa style", which is characterized by the emphasis that is assigned

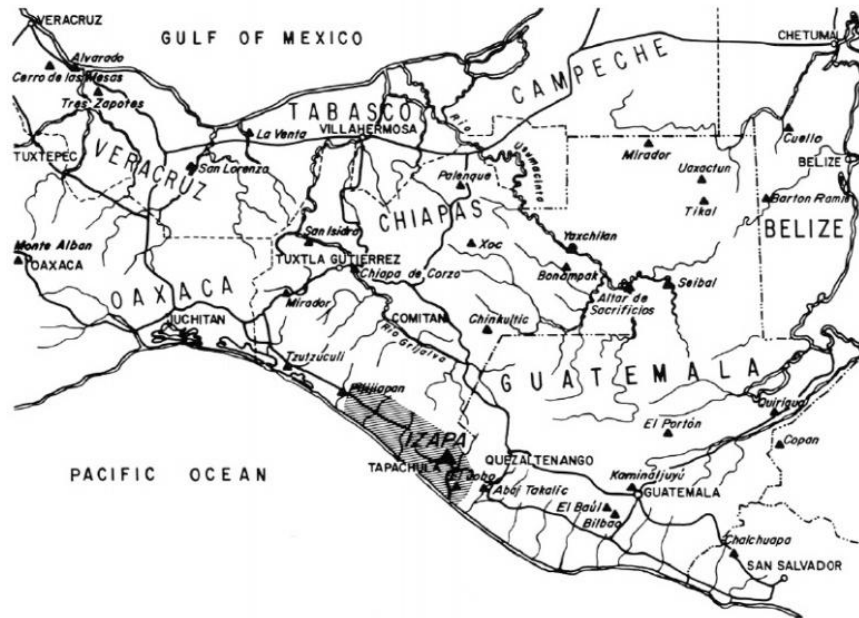


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the Archaeological Zone of Izapa, Mexico.
 Source: Reference 5

to the movement of the narrative described [10,11].

The efforts to interpret the scenes presented in the stelae of Izapa have been oriented in two fundamental ways: to identify the influence of the Izapa style in the Mayan culture and the analysis of the Izapan cosmivision and cosmogony in the Mayan world. From the point of view of the worldview, the possibility that the Mayan calendar originated in this area has been proposed [12]; even analogies have been made with descriptions of the *Popol Vuh* [13], the Books of the *Chilam Balam* [14] and the Book of Mormon [15]. The development of these topics in archaeological research shows the influence that Mayan civilization has on the need to open horizons that transcend the moment and the historical context to contribute to the understanding of the cultural structures of the Mexican southeast. In this line of reflection, the interpretation of pre-Hispanic Mayan art exhibited in the sculptural work of Izapa offers the possibility of exploring the aesthetic experience that underlies the historical consciousness of contemporary Mexico.

Among the stelae of Izapa, the number 5 (Fig. 3) stands out in which scenes and motifs that give meaning and integrity to the Mayan cosmivision

are mentioned in different artistic manifestations of the principal cities of the Mayan area [16-18].

1.2 Description of Stela 5

Izapa Stela 5 is of volcanic andresite; is 2.5 m tall, 1.5 m wide and 50 cm thick. Originally it was located in the structure 56 of group A, in front of the altar 36. Like other stelae of Izapa, the number 5 resorts to symbolic, geometric and zoomorphic motifs for the narration; which, in this case, is attributed to the description of the myth of creation and are compatible with the sculptural style designated as "Izapa style" [9,10].

Among the descriptions made by several archaeologists are those published by Stirling in 1943 [19] and Norman in 1976 [20]. Summing up the exposed thing by them, next a brief description is exposed emphasizing the basic elements of the iconography contained in the scene narrated in Stela 5 that they make possible to reveal the aesthetic conscience the pre-Hispanic Mayans.

In Stela 5 stylized symbolic narrative art is used to present a complex scene carved in bas-relief. The central feature is a tree that has eight branches that extend at the top, with roots extending at the base. It identifies 12 human



Fig. 2. On the left, the map of the main groups of the archaeological zone of Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico (taken from 16) is shown on the right: aerial photograph of Group F (taken from 17). To the right below: Reconstruction of the Izapa Central Temple (taken from 18)

figures, as well as birds and fish. Taking the tree as its center, the image can be divided into left and right; an upper panel and a lower panel.

In the lower panel, there is a rectangular panel in which a series of triangles are carved and, as the tree roots pass, they continue with a horizontal

line. Underneath the rectangular panel is a panel that is interpreted as moving water by connecting to the right with a falling water panel.

In the left panel, six human figures are identified. Three are seated; one on the outside of the panel; the other two face to face, with an



Fig. 3. Photograph of Stela 5 located at the archaeological site of Izapa, Mexico

incensory between them. A fourth human figure is located in front of the trunk of the tree. In the central and outer part of the panel, there are a grotesque mask and two hummingbirds; towards the center this one human figure and two fish, which is continued with another human figure, smaller and back to the trunk of the tree.

In the right panel, there are six human figures. At the bottom, there are two human figures sitting facing each other, with an incensory between them; and towards the outside, the third human figure, also seated, holds an object similar to a parasol. Above the seated figures, there is another one standing at the level of the trunk of the tree with its back. In the center of the panel, there is another human standing figure that seems to represent a fat individual and, behind him, another human figure is shown.

At the upper edge of the scene are the two upper elements of the two-headed U-shaped serpent. The upper panel presents various geometric designs representing the jaguar. The narrated scene includes various zoomorphic elements that will provide meaning to the narrative content. These include the following: jaguar, snake, fish (ring-tailed), dolphin, marmosa, shark, fin of fish, conch shell, shell necklace, pelican, heron, duck and hummingbird.

1.3 Interpretation of Stela 5

The narrative style employs a wealth of ideographic symbols in which complex relationships between symbols are woven together. This has led to various interpretations of the symbolism and the religious or cosmogonic significance of the scene narrated in the stela of Izapa (see Table 1).

Alberto C. Culebro in 1939 describes it as the scene in a market [8,21]. Matthew W. Stirling in 1943 publishes preliminary findings identifying one tree, two beings on each side of the tree, six people seated at ground level, groundwater flow

and many other features but did not present any interpretation [19].

In 1951, M. Wells Jakeman reports that the style scene is the representation of the tree of life, finding analogies with what is described in the Book of Mormon about Lehi's vision, giving rise to Jakeman's interpretive theory which lists 27 features distributed in fixed elements, characters and dynamic characteristics, linking their interpretation to the text of the Book of Mormon.

In 1957, Clyde Keeler interprets the scene of Stela 5 as a reflection of the human psychological tendencies, whereas Suzzane Miles, in 1965, offers an interpretation from a fantastic visual myth linked to the stelae 2, 7, 12, 18 and 22. Subsequently, V. Garth Norman [20,22] centers the interpretation in terms of the "path of life" representing birth, death and rebirth in different spheres of existence. Gareth W. Gareth W. Lowe and collaborators [5] note that Stela 5 represents a myth of the original creation similar to those later recorded in the *Popol Vuh*. Recently, attempts have been made to interpret the stela from other cultural imaginaries to understand the territory as a humanized space [23].

By confronting these interpretations, it is possible to integrate a horizon of understanding that is limited to the registration of a mythical event through cosmogonic and religious concepts [3,6,9]. In this sense, it is shared by Norman [20] that the fundamental concepts attributed to impersonal deities are: birth, fertility, rain, water, food, germination, justice, duality, moral direction, ceremonial burn, sacrifice, past mortality.

1.4 Delimitation of the Hermeneutical Situation

Attending to the archaeological interpretation, it is accepted that the scene narrated in Izapa Stela 5 corresponds to the cosmogonic vision of

Table 1. Interpretations made to the scene narrated in Izapa Stela 5

Year	Author	Interpretation
1939	Alberto C. Culebro	Scene in a market.
1943	Matthew W. Stirling	Does not express any interpretation
1951	M. Wells Jakeman	Tree of Life, linked with the Book of Mormon
1957	Clyde Keeler	Human psychological trends
1963	Suzzane Miles	Myth of creation
1976	V. Garth Norman	Path of life: birth, death and rebirth
1982	Gareth W. Lowe	Myth of the original creation

the creation of the world linked to the tree of life. The studies carried out from the field of archeology have contributed, firstly, to identify, situate and relate the elements, units, motives and themes exposed in the Stela 5 [20,22]; to later perform the iconographic analysis contributing to the analysis of the symbols used [5,6,9-11]. This analysis makes it possible to configure and contextualize the thinking and aesthetic awareness of the pre-Hispanic settlers of Izapa; that is, from the perspective of contemporary Mayan aesthetics, it would be pertinent to ask about the aesthetic value of the Stela 5.

However, it is now necessary to transcend the iconographic approach and establish a dialogue with the work of art to ask, what is Stela 5 telling me when I contemplate it? Observing a work of art is not limited to deliberating in relation to the beauty or not of the object, in this case of the scene represented in the Stela 5. On the contrary, she "speaks to you" and induces an experience that encourages the person to enter the narrative experience that Stela 5 transmits. In this context, stopping in the aesthetic and historical thinking of the pre-Hispanic Maya leads to the following questions: what are the possibilities of understanding in interpreting the tree of life represented on Izapa Stela 5? What are the elements that constitute the aesthetic experience that is transmitted through the scene narrated?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to open paths in the understanding of the sculptural heritage and to go through the Mayan pre-Hispanic aesthetic in a process of an encounter with ourselves. Encounter characterized by the dialogue with Stela 5 that recovers the hermeneutic experience that transmits as a work of art and makes it possible to reveal the truth, the vital situations and the awareness of the actual history contained in Izapa Stela 5. In this sense, the study was carried out with the purpose of analyzing, from the Gadamer's aesthetic, the scene represented in the Izapa Stela 5 to unveil the link between myth and logos in the horizon of understanding of the Mayan civilization.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is limited to the field of philosophical research from the perspective of hermeneutics developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer [24,25], who understands by hermeneutics the possibility that

the being-in-the-world has to understand in a different way the experience that stems from being-in-the world of life and belonging to a tradition. Its core is the mobility of the meaning and historicity of man expressed in tradition through the consciousness of effectual history.

In the concatenation of the elements of the hermeneutic circle (interpretation-understanding-application), the methodological approach in philosophical hermeneutics is guided by the search for the various modes of comprehension through the dialectic of question and answer in dialogue with tradition; so that the perspective of the sense of tradition and of the consciousness of the effectual history is adopted and modified, making possible to understand in a different way because of the belonging to a tradition [24,25]. The multiplicity of interpretations is an effect of the historicity of the human being; which, in the case of this research, allows us to understand the work of art in the process-result dialectic, which underlies the historical unity of human experiences that transcend the discontinuity of existence, attitudes and general predispositions. The historicity of the binomial work of art-interpreter, emphasizes the cognitive value of the work of art sustained in the recognition as a knowledge of the essence; that is, the truth of the work of art is shown in the way of knowing as recognition of something stripped of chance and contingency [26,27].

The relation between aesthetics and hermeneutics is delimited by Gadamer when considering that the encounter with the art is the central nucleus of the relation of the human life immersed in the tradition, from which the past work of art says something to each one of us [28]. In order to operate the process of understanding the hermeneutic circle when encountering Izapa Stela 5, the study was carried out in two stages: destructive and constructive [29].

The destructive stage, in which the historical horizon of Izapa Stela 5 was unveiled as a work of art, included two phases: analytical and comprehensive. In the analytical phase, the horizon of understanding was constructed for the analysis of the scene represented in Stela 5 of Izapa, integrating the structure of the composition, the arrangement of the elements and the treatment of the image [6,23]. Also, a file was elaborated and the following categories of analysis were defined: cosmovision as an aesthetic representation of the Mayan world, the

anamnesic content of the Maya sacred tree, the aesthetic-moral meaning of the historicity of the human experience in its transit through the world of life Maya. For Gadamer, the experience that is transmitted in the work of art is the anamnesis, so the hermeneutic truth of the work of art is based on the re-knowledge of the other that is generated in the dialogue [30].

In the comprehensive phase, schemas, retrieval matrices were constructed using the content analysis approach [31], relevant questions [32], alternative response options, and conceptual contents were identified in the various interpretations of Izapa Stela 5 that remain in the tradition [6,9,19,20]. The schemes delimited the categories of analysis for their application in the thematic axis of the investigation and orient them towards the recognition of the aesthetic experience. The recovery matrices served a dual purpose: to confront different interpretations of Izapa Stela 5 and to establish a dialogue through questions and answers with the Mayan civilization tradition. The relevance of the questions was determined by the possibility offered by each question to transcend latent responses [33,34]. For each question, we obtained different answers related to the conceptual contents that remain latent in the tradition in the form of pre-understanding.

During the construction phase, the categories were articulated, making it possible to reconstruct what the Izapa Stela 5 tells us through two phases: reconstructive and critical.

In the reconstructive phase, the conceptual elements were elaborated as scales to delimit the actuality of the stela; when finding that they underlie in the tradition were confronted with the analytical development of the categories under study. This confrontation made it possible to thematize the contents forgotten by the methodological abstractions of hermeneutic aesthetics to achieve the fusion of horizons and to fulfill the different stages of the Gadamerian

hermeneutics [24,25]. In the critical phase, the results of the reconstructive phase were integrated into an interpretative proposal that made it possible to expose the consequences of its application in the orientation of new areas of research in Maya aesthetics and hermeneutic aesthetics [26,28].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Considering the development of the hermeneutic circle and the horizon provided by Gadamerian aesthetics, Table 2 shows the comprehension possibilities that are presented when interpreting the scene narrated on Stela 5 of Izapa. The interpretative component refers to the content of the tradition in which we are located when we encounter the narrative of the tree of life. This narrative is shown as a meta-story in which the cosmos, gods and ancestors are integrated. The comprehensive component rehabilitates the vital situations of the human being such as birth and fertility; the life and the death represented by the happening of the rain and the becoming of the water, as well as the sacrifice and the finitude of the human life; and in everyday life, justice and the duality of the moral direction between good and evil circumscribed to a relationship of harmony with nature are recovered. Finally, the application component of the hermeneutic circle is limited to the fusion of horizons that underlie the myth of creation, the sacred tree and solidarity harmony.

To clarify the hermeneutical situation of the aesthetic experience of the components that derive from the narration expressed in Stela 5, the results obtained in relation to each of the categories of analysis are disaggregated below.

3.1 Cosmivision as Aesthetic Representation of the Mayan World

Art aspires to make an aesthetic representation of the world, but in Gadamerian thought, art is a *mimesis* as a cognitive process through which

Table 2. Hermeneutical circle, categories of analysis and elements of the aesthetic experience of Izapa Stela 5

Analysis category	Interpretation	Understanding	Application
Aesthetic representation	Cosmos	Birth, fertility	Myth of creation
Anamnesic content	Gods	Rain, water Sacrifice Human finitude	Sacred tree
Aesthetic-moral meaning	Ancestors	Justice Moral direction	Solidarity harmony

the world is experienced in ontological oblivion so that "the anamnestic function of art is to rediscover the world in itself" [30]. In this sense, the representation of the world is based on the remembrance that seeks identity with language. For this reason, the iconography of the narration of Stela 5 is shown as a worldview expressed in the historical character of language.

For the present case, Izapa Stela 5 represents the myth of creation; the conception that is based on interpretations constructed from the aesthetic experience of the archaeologists, in an effort to translate the sayings of the inhabitants of Izapa. This effort is concretized in enabling the text to speak; that is, it is necessary that the images carved on the surface of the stone are shown in two fundamental areas: ontic and ontological; so that by letting the text speak from its Otherness, a moving dialogue is established that initially goes from the image to the concept (ontic ambit), returning from the concept to the image (ontological ambit) to restart dialogue. At this point we remember that the ontic refers to what we are ourselves as existing, outside of that existence, there is no more [33]; while the ontological seeks to systematically explain the existence of objects by defining structures, categories, properties, events, processes and relationships in each area of reality. Next, in Table 3 shows the results obtained during the hermeneutical dialogue with Izapa Stela 5,

differentiating the key points of the question-answer dialectic in each of the areas of the aesthetic experience.

The coming and going of the dialogue between the text and the interpreter is linked to the dialectic of question and answer to give meaning to the image-concept dyad by circumscribing it in the historical context of the interpreter's experience. A clear example of the hermeneutic dialogue between the text and the interpreter is Norman's analysis of the upper panel of Stela 5 identified with the divine mask of the jaguar [20]. The history of the concept "jaguar" as Maya divinity makes it possible to interpret this panel as the supra-mundane, celestial portion of Maya cosmogony.

In this context, the efforts of archaeologists have not closed the horizon to the understanding of the scene narrated in Izapa Stela 5. On the contrary, it is an experience-in-reflection that leads to the reconstruction of truth from the historical experience of aesthetic consciousness; for the representation of the scene carved in the stela is not limited to the imitation of a story as an experience that happens, but implies the knowledge of the essence of the story, which makes possible its re-knowledge by the interpreter when coming in contact with the scene. In this sense, the point of convergence in the interpretation of the scene narrated

Table 3. Hermeneutical dialogue and aesthetic experience on Izapa Stela 5

Key points of the hermeneutical dialogue	Aesthetic experience	
	Ontic ambit	Ontological ambit
Dialog address Worldview	From the image to the concept Built to being-in-the-world. Recognition of the myth of creation	From the concept to the image Search for harmony with nature. Spiritual and moral vigilance: respect, gratitude and moderation
Top panel	Jaguar as Mayan divinity	Reference to the supra-world
Middle Panel	Sacred tree	Reference to the earthly
Bottom panel	River of life	Reference to the underworld
Unity of the story	Mythical conception of the world	Practical knowledge to live in the world
Existential experience	Situate yourself in the world	Live in the world that surrounds it
Aesthetic awareness	Cosmic consciousness	Axiological awareness
Dialectic of hear-silence	Story of the finitude of life	Experience of human finitude
Effective history	Place of man in the world	Relationship of man with the world of life
Symbolic unity of the aesthetic representation (fusion of horizons)	Authority of the word, dialogue and advice	Relationship cosmos-nature-man

mythically in the stela is limited to the experience of the Mayan culture that contributes to building the ontic range in the construction of the cosmogonic vision of the Mayans of their being-in-the-world.

In the worldview of the Maya, we recover a view in which the world is seen as an interrelated system of all that exists in harmonious conjunction of the four elements that have given rise to the universe and life: fire, earth, air and water. Human life in harmony with nature demands a spiritually and morally guarded order, demanding respect, gratitude and moderation. This would be the ontological level of the scene of Stela 5. Here the narrative is determined by the very existence; and "the proper content of the image is determined ontologically as the emanation of the original image" [24].

Gadamer indicates that the representation has a structural, universal and ontological moment while expressing the manifestation of something spiritual in something sensible; so that the representation is to have an object to represent [24]. In this sense, Heidegger points out that "the representation must be able to be represented for myself, this concretely in a continuous possibility, so that the given in the representations so represented is accessible to me" [34]. In relation to Stela 5, the cosmogonic structure of the Maya world is represented first: sky, earth and underworld; corresponding to the top panel, the middle panel and the bottom panel. The object of the analysis in this section corresponds to the top panel and the bottom panel in connection with the representation of the tree. By associating these three elements with the unity of the staged story, it transcends the mythic conception of the world and is directed to a practical knowledge that permeates the spiritual life of being-in-the-world.

The original Mayan myths are oriented to explain symbolically the universe to give meaning to the meaning of the gods, the world and man [35]. The sense that acquires the understanding of these iconographic themes, puts relevance in the understanding of the following cosmic opposites: life and death, darkness and light, good and evil, masculine and feminine. Hence, by understanding their origin through myth, the Izapa settlers would acquire the consciousness of a cosmic intelligence that would offer a horizon of understanding for being-in-the-world and orient their practical action in the subject's relations with the world of life. These

relationships would be of the type: with myself; you and me, among us; so that it would be showing the axiological sense of the daily life of the Mayan world in the search for harmony with the universe and its world of life.

For pre-Hispanic Mayan culture, the harmony of the human being with nature is expressed in terms of the co-belonging that is integrated into the totality of the cosmos. This totality implied the structure of the world, as expressed in the *Popol Vuh*: the sky with its 13 sub-levels, the terrestrial part and the underworld (*Xibalbá*) composed of 9 sub-levels. According to this narration, in the center will be located the tree of the world, which in addition to establishing the cosmic order, makes possible the origin of time and space, as well as the connection between the three levels of the Maya universe. In fig. 3, the representation of these elements in the scene of Izapa Stela 5 can be verified. In the same scene, the representation of the god of corn and people who establish a dialogue are identified. The iconographic representation of the word in this scene involves listening and keeping silent; exposing a dialogue that is established through the dialectic of hearing-silence. A dialogue that is narrated in terms of the limits of life in the earthly part of the Mayan world, where life is created and the finitude of the human being is conceived. But this saying is undoubtedly linked to limiting situations of life and death, which exposes the passing of the earthly life that transcends its finitude in the river of life, on the way to different sub-levels of existence.

In Stela 5, myth and history are mixed to narrate the mythical origin of the world, of man and of the relationships that show divine intervention, both in the work of the governing and in the daily life of the men. Carving the stone to express the world they looked at, shows the imaginative capacity and spiritual wealth of the Maya. Like the later texts of Mayan literature, Izapa Stela 5 possesses a wealth of mythical material used to narrate the great cosmogonic myth and thus, to transmit a general explanation of the universe highlighting the place of man in the world. The explanation that will answer the questions that lead Mayan thinking related to the origin of the world, the relationship of man with the gods and the relationship of man with nature.

Undoubtedly the narrative is complex to the contemporary Western thought, on the one hand because it has lost in history the saying of the oral tradition of the ancient Maya; and on the

other, by the mnemonic capacity of the narrative carved in the stone, for which they use a symbolic language and of multiple meaning using flowers, animals, plants and stones. Di Girolamo points to the possibility that spirit returns as nature so that "all human ideas, virtues and passions take the form of vegetables, animals and minerals that speak of the indissoluble unity that man has with his natural environment" [36].

In this context, the scene narrated in Izapa Stela 5, even though it has been divided into different sections and elements, has symbolic and conceptual unity, so that the life story of a family is indicated on their journey in the boat of life for the earthly world. Thus the duality of life between good and evil is transmitted in the capacity of choice having the option of a good life that is based on the recognition of the authority that derives from the word, the dialogue and the advice that it transmits from generation to generation emphasizing the relation cosmos-nature-man.

3.2 Anamnestic Content of the Mayan Sacred Tree

The entities that participate in the original creation of the Mayan world are created by the word. Here it is not a question of the everyday word, but of the condensation of the experiences of the world and of life, which closely resembles the Greek *logos*, that expression of thought

which must be understood from the meaning of each experience in its corresponding context. In this sense, Gadamer points out, "language is the product of a sedimentation of experience and wisdom, which already speaks to us in words" [37]. The search for the sense of the saying of the inhabitants of Izapa through their stelae leads to interrogate the word itself, so that the ontic valence of the word is sought, for which it reveals the anamnestic content of the representations carved in stone. To explore the saying that has happened and comes to meet us in Izapa Stela 5, we analyze the tree of life carved in the stela. In Table 4, the results obtained from the analysis are presented to reveal the anamnestic content contained in the tree represented in Stela 5 of Izapa. In this case, the relationship between the elements of the anamnestic function and the actual historical consciousness is established, which is explored through the mythical truth and the hermeneutical truth.

Tree in Izapa Stela 5 is the nodal point of the geometry and symbolism of the narration of scene. It is interpreted as a representation of Ramon Tree (*brosimum alicastrum*); although by the significance attributed to the Tree of the Ceiba (*yaxche*) like the sacred tree of the Mayas, it has not been possible to discard the botanical nature of the tree carved in the stela. Without going into this discussion, the tree has a strong symbolic meaning as a direct ancestor of man; so that he was credited with a rational soul of

Table 4. Relationship of the anamnestic function with the actual historical awareness related to the tree represented on Izapa Stela 5

Elements of the anamnestic function	Effective historical awareness	
	Mythical truth	Hermeneutic truth
Image-concept relationship	Sacred Tree	Cosmic axis Creation of man
Concept-image relationship	Divine creation of the universe and man	Ancestor of man with rational soul
Top panel	Connection with the sky	Resurrection and transcendence
Middle Panel	Travel the earthly world	Way that communicates with the supra-world
Bottom panel	Connection with the underworld	Communication with the dead
Worldview	Tree that nourishes Humanity	Sustenance and order of the world
Existential experience	Being in the cosmos	Dialectical unity of life
Historical awareness	Creation of man: corn	Power, lineage and inheritance
Aesthetic awareness	Awareness of the creation of time	Temporal awareness of human finitude
Remembrance of the symbolic unity of the story (fusion of horizons)	Being-in-harmony with the universe	Search for a good life

his own which he cared for, honored and venerated, whether with offerings, incense or human blood [38].

As an ancestor of humanity, the tree possesses a hermeneutic truth that is transmitted from the anamnestic function of rediscovering the world in itself. This process of searching will be for Gadamer the anamnesis that is concretely carried out through *diairesis* [39], a demonstrative force of the platonic dialectic, as a rememorative process that advances convincing the other because the other recalls [40]; recovering the universal knowledge transmitted from generation to generation and unveiling the hermeneutic content of truth that tradition has as an expression of the consciousness of effective history.

The hermeneutic truth that this tree transmits is complex, since it is a composite figure. In the upper part there are eight branches with foliage, fruits and birds, which extend towards the highest point of the firmament, touching the upper panel that corresponds with the sky. The trunk, sectioned, continues with roots that penetrate to the ninth level of the underworld, the *nadir*; for which is represented, in its upper part with the image of a leafy tree and in the lower one, by the earthly dragon.

Through the sacred tree circulates the sap (*itz*) flowing from the underworld to the sky and has been associated in Mayan cosmogony with fertile water, blood, breast milk and semen [23]. In this context, mythically, it is linked to the resurrection by concretizing the metaphor of life-death, in the yearning to transcend the finitude of human life in its chronological evolution; so that it is also associated with the emergence of the account of time, giving rise to the creation of the computation of time through the calendar as a succession of chronological events that take place in the consciousness of the human being.

Lopez Austin [41] attributes the following characteristics of the cosmic tree: identification with the crocodilian monster of the earth, path that communicates the dwelling of the gods with the world of men, related to the calendar, located at the beginning of time, relation of its form and function with the color of each of the five regions of the world, singular nature, quadruple and quintuple at once, linked to power, lineage and inheritance, linked with the four gods that hold the sky and maintain the order of the world, and its link with the world of the dead. In this sense,

the tree carved in Izapa Stela 5 has a strong anamnestic content that one wants to dialogue (see Table 4).

The anamnestic content, in this case, possesses the enigma that is proper to the language and resembles the Platonic anamnesis, which according to Gadamer, "has no beginning, and likewise, no words can be derived from a beginning" [42]. The anamnesis, as I recall, is heir of the Pythagorean conception related to the transmigration and immortality of the soul and is a form in which the experiences of the human being are articulated through the dialogue that explores, in this way, the tree of the Izapa Stela 5 is shown as the cosmic axis of the Maya universe, but also obliges to recall the creation of man: first of clay, then of wood and finally of corn. Man becomes aware of his place in the world by recognizing his divine creation and sustaining the recognition of his gods. Both elements will give content to the historical consciousness of the Mayan people; for memory is a way of dialogically articulating the experience of past lives with the present to find meaning in the future life.

The work of art, from the Gadamerian aesthetic, has truth content. The hermeneutic truth is what is unveiled, dis-hiding through the dialogue that explores the anamnestic content of the subject that moves in the dialectic of the triad interpretation-understanding-application. This implies that each act of interpretation is a process of rehabilitating dialogue with tradition, giving content to practical reason, which for Gadamer, will be the synthesis of Greek *praktike* and *phronesis*.

A dialogue in coexistence with the tradition that is associated with the logos, as it is a way of knowing, but also the search for mythical truth. Thus, the experience that is transmitted in Izapa Stela 5 lies in the understanding of the human being in the whole of the cosmos, in the dialectical unity of human life, standing between good and evil; hence it focuses on the individual's becoming to the moment of being-in-the-world of life, a doing that is configured in the rediscovery of the world itself, where knowledge is a memory of itself.

Knowledge of oneself through conversation with the work of art is made possible by anamnesis. This is part of the conversation. The subject in dialogue wants to talk about himself to remember his experiences and experiences. The goal of

this dialogue will be to re-establish the flow of communication that occurs in the life of experiences and re-start the memory. The memory "is a form of thought, of the logos, that is, of the search" [37]. In this context, the search for the symbolic meaning of the Izapa Stela 5 continues; because following Norman's interpretation that it is a Ramon Tree it would be placed on the scene as the first tree in the world, the tree from which humanity will be nurtured, if the correspondence is with the representation of the Ceiba, which, as stated by the *Popol Vuh*, is the sacred tree of the Maya and represents the center of the cosmos.

It is clear that this is not an interpretation of Izapa Stela 5 from the tradition of Western thought, retreating to Greek thought to look at Mayan culture. On the contrary, it seeks to unveil the effective historical consciousness that contains the Mayan myth of the creation of life. This search is carried out through dialogue with the narration enunciated in the wake; reason why, the anamnesis is directed towards the memory that arouses the form in which it is shown to the understanding, the story that is narrated. It is a fact that the narrative evokes the myth of creation, but as we approach its interpretation from the Gadamerian aesthetic, it is possible to understand it rationally through conversation. At this point, it is important to remember that the conversation is able to unite with the original thought of the Mayans. Being-in-conversation means leaving oneself, thinking with the other and coming back to oneself as another [25]. In this sense, being-in-conversation with the Mayan tradition implies the search for a good life that makes it possible to be in harmony with the universe, that is, with the life-world of each one of us.

3.3 Aesthetic-moral Significance of the Experience of the Mayan World of Life

For Gadamer, the work of art is a form of knowledge that is constituted, first, in the experience of the human being when he becomes aware of being-in-the-world. The content of this experience comes from the autonomous reality that art has in its representation; and it is transmitted to the person who observes it, at the moment of understanding. By understanding this knowledge, we acquire the awareness of a reality that surpasses us, but at the same time it shows us that we are always involved in the knowledge of the work of art [30]. In this line of reflection, the

story narrated on Stela 5 has a content that is not yet instrumental; that is, it will be up to understanding when the myth of creation is shown as a language that allows dialogue with the past and reveals the truth that it has. In the process of searching for truth, Stela 5 is the path that leads man to become aware of relationships with himself, with nature and with his historical tradition.

The consciousness that makes it possible to understand the truth that is transmitted during the experience of art exposes art as the "most immediate language of the expression of the moral" [24]; and adds Gadamer, "naturally the meaning of art also has to do with the fact that it speaks to us, that it puts man before himself in his morally determined existence" [24]. In this context, Gadamer's aesthetic has a moral sense that makes it possible to give meaning to the understanding of Izapa Stela 5 as the representation of the origins of the Mayan religious tradition. Tradition, that's shown as the way to travel through the experience of living a good life by re-creating the myth of creation.

The narrative carved in the left and right panels (Fig. 3), refers to the spiritual rebirth in the daily chore when the human being in coexistence, being-in-the-world. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis carried out considering Izapa Stela 5 as the space in which the thinking and spirit of the Pre-Classic Maya manifest. Space from which, the existence has projected the world of life, and offers the existential fundament to understand them as beings that were thrown into the world. But there are also elements to identify them as a community in solidarity that is expressed when they acquire the awareness that they are next to the other or the other.

The life of the inhabitants of Izapa, based on coexistence with the whole world, sought to be in harmony with the world of life, so that education, religion, health care, organization and dynamics social development propitiated the construction of the fundaments that would give meaning to the pre-Hispanic Maya of the classic period.

Both the right and left panels stand out human figures sitting facing each other. From its appearance, it has been proposed that it represents the start and end of different stages of the life cycle of the human being. The interpretation of the representations implies a concept that is not theoretical, but practical. When the human being changes his way of life,

Table 5. Aesthetic-moral analysis of Izapa Stela 5 linked to solidarity harmony

Elements of the aesthetic and moral sense	Solidarity harmony	
	Coexistence	Praxis Solidarity
Image-concept relationship	Daily life	Cultural values
Concept-image relationship	Fair living and doing the right thing	Virtue models differentiated by gender
Worldview	My world	World of life, shared
Historical tradition	The creator god (<i>Itzamnaaj</i>)	The corn god (<i>Nal</i> or God E)
Existential experience	Cosmogonic cohesion	Unity with the community
Education	Timeless self-consciousness of the human being	Solidarity with the Other
Religion	Transmission of knowledge of the deity to the sovereign	Transmission of knowledge of the sovereign to the people
Symbolic unity of the dialogical encounter in coexistence (fusion of horizons)	"You are this"	"You have to change your life"

he appropriates a practical concept that allows the entity to appear in the world, to show itself. This world is no longer any geographical region of the universe, it is "my world" and the entity that appears in the image is in my world, with me, sharing my environment. Thus, the consciousness of the effectual history represented in Izapa Stela 5 recovers the mythical participation of the *Itzamnaaj* (the creator god) that traditionally is represented with the image of an old man, in association with the creation of the man from the corn exposed to through the representation of the corn god (*Nal* or God E). This suggests that the aesthetic-moral content of life in Izapa was determined by the harmony with the Mayan cosmovision, being united in the search of a life in common that would provide them with security.

Solidarity with the world is reflected in the artistic representations of the classical period of daily life through agriculture, hunting, fishing, religious rituals, clothing and adornments; making reference to the just and correct to promote the cultural values that were their own as solidarity, piety, obedience and temperance for men; for women, values were associated with domestic work, worship of the gods and observance of rituals, which encouraged the moral behavior of women to foster attitudes such as sacrifice, prayer, modesty, dedication to work, discretion, a model of virtue [43,44].

In the side panels of Stela 5, two deities dominate the scenes: in the right, the deity A; in the left, the deity B. The deity A has been related to the death, but also with the fecundity and the germination. Deity B is related to water, rain and

storms. In addition, both deities establish links and relationships between the different components and characters that are presented in the scenes that surround them, providing dynamism to the narration so that knowledge is transmitted from the deity to the sovereigns and from these to their subjects. Transmission of the knowledge, that will be reflected in the daily life of the Mayan world, which will contribute to maintaining the unity of the community through solidarity *praxis* as a reflection of the prevailing order in the cohesion of the world's cosmogonic conception Maya.

For Gadamer, art makes possible to understand life, because "situated in the confines of knowledge and action", allows life to reveal itself in a depth where observation, reflection and theory have no access" [45]. This line of reflection, Izapa Stela 5 makes possible the self-knowledge of the being of the Mayan man in its timeless dimension, because when we encounter the scene carved in the stone it speaks to us immediately as if it were an encounter with ourselves. The dialogical encounter with the carved images transcends the saying "you are this", to orient the dialectic of the question-answer in the direction of the indication "you have to change your life" and with it, seek harmony with the universe.

4. CONCLUSION

The Izapa style has contributed to the architectural and artistic development of the Mayan culture, as well as to enable continuity or influence between the Olmecs and the Maya; besides exposing the fundamental elements that

were configuring the cultural traditions of the pre-Hispanic Maya. In this context, the stylistic patterns of Izapa Stela 5 acquire greater relevance in the historical horizon in which the life was constructed showing that the subjects had a clear conscience of their role in the concert of the world.

From the horizon of understanding that made it possible to reconstruct the historical development of Izapa Stela 5, the results of the analysis unveiled the Mayan cosmovision in its life-death dialectic that gives meaning to the birth-dying-rebirth triad assuming the existence and harmony of different levels of reality. Besides, it was shown that the anamnestic content of the tree of life rehabilitates the myth of creation and articulates it with the experience of the encounter with the work of art from the historicity of the human being in his transit through the world. It recovers the search for a mythical truth that is transmitted from the word in a constant dialogue through the evolution of time to give meaning to the aesthetic-moral sense of the coexistence of human beings to be doing their daily lives.

At first, he asked: what are the possibilities of understanding when interpreting the tree of life represented in the Izapa Stela 5 from the aesthetic Gadamer? Now it can be answered: the hermeneutic investigation from the Gadamerian aesthetic to perform the interpretation of Izapa Stela 5 offers the possibility of recovering the effective historical consciousness that gives meaning to the understanding of the cultural imaginaries of the Mexican population that inhabits the southeast of country; in addition to opening roads to the search for the meaning of the human being in his transit through the world of life by rehabilitating the common origins of human life in a praxis of solidarity and transformation.

In this sense, it is concluded that, given the aesthetic nature of Izapa Stela 5, it exposes the consciousness of the actual history of being and make the Mayan culture by communicating contents of life and death as axes of the aesthetic experience that delimit the following scales: word, dialogue, coexistence and solidarity; all of them articulated in a syncretic *praxis* that gives meaning to being and doing in the world of life of the Mayan population.

The importance of the analysis carried out from philosophical hermeneutics, specifically from the

premises of Gadamer's aesthetics, lies in showing the elements of historical consciousness, offering lines of reflection and analysis to understand the cultural and social life of the Mayan communities of the southeast from Mexico.

The study presents different limitations among which the following stand out: there are no studies related to the Mayan culture in which the approach of Gadamerian aesthetics is used; the rehabilitation of processes of interpretation of archaeological evidence and the narrative integration of messages transmitted by the pre-Hispanic Maya. Limitations are paths that open day by day to deepen the knowledge of the pre-Hispanic Maya and their world of life. This is the case of exposing, punctually, the narration of the scene represented in Izapa Stela 5, which opens a field of study and research that remains to be explored.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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