

Contents

Preface vii

1. The Olmecs Come to Light 1
2. The Tulane Expedition and the Olmec World (1925–1926) 5
3. The First Excavations: Tres Zapotes (1938–1940) 17
4. Stone Heads in the Jungle (1940) 31
5. Fortuitous Decisions at La Venta (1942–1943) 37
6. Monuments on the Río Chiquito (1945–1946) 50
7. The Return to La Venta (1955) 56
8. Of Monuments and Museums (1963, 1968) 69
9. Adding Antiquity to the Olmecs (1966–1968) 80
10. Research Headaches at La Venta (1967–1969) 90
11. Reclaiming La Venta (1984 to the Present) 99
12. San Lorenzo Yields New Secrets (1990–2012, Part 1) 104
13. El Manatí: “Like Digging in Warm Jell-O” (1987–1993) 116
14. “They’re Blowing Up the Site!” Tres Zapotes after Stirling (1950–2003) 126
15. An Olmec Stone Quarry and a Sugarcane Crisis (1991) 138
16. Discoveries Large and Small at San Lorenzo (1990–2012, Part 2) 151

vi Discovering the Olmecs

17. The Night the Lights Went Out (2001) 161

18. Some Thoughts on the Archaeology of the Olmecs 166

Bibliographic Essay 183

Index 195