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[1931]

Jayne

The Eldridge R. Johnson Middle American Expedition of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania excavated at the Maya Old Empire site of Piedras Negras in the far northwestern corner of Peten, Guatemala, from the middle of February until the end of May. The work was conducted under the direction of the Curator of the American Section, J. Alden Mason, assisted by Linton Satterthwaite, Jr., Mr. T. Egan Wyer, engineer; Mrs. Satterthwaite and Mrs. Wyer completed the personnel of the staff.

Much of the energies and funds were spent in the building of a road from the camp to San Jose in Mexico, a distance of about thirty-five miles, and in building the camp. The road was not finished until the end of the dry season, which made it impossible to export any of the large monuments this year; the feasibility of the road was demonstrated, however, by transporting to its end four large boxes containing the parts of broken stela 12, consigned to Philadelphia. These now have to be taken through a small rapid, at the base of which they may be loaded on a river boat. Stela 36, consigned to Guatemala, and the larger part of stela 14, consigned to Philadelphia, were bogged down half way over the road at the onset of the rainy season. Lintel 4, consigned to Guatemala, was boxed.

Six major excavations were made but none completely finished. In the West Group, excavations centered around the terrace containing stelae 1 to 8, altars 1 and 2, the terrace of stelae 9 to 11 and the stairway and pyramid behind it, and the slopes of the Acropolis. Some of the stelae were found to have been interred in cists, and ceremonial caches were found under stela 7 and altar 1. A reused stela, numbered stela 43, was found used as one of the great slabs flanking the principal stairway. Most of the fragments of lintel 5 were found, very much eroded. Mr. Satterthwaite made many detailed drawings of the many structures composing the Acropolis complex.

A few excavations were made in the floor of the northern ball-court at the northern end of the west plaza, but the expected "bases" were not found; a burial was encountered in the center, however.

The temple crowning pyramid 42 was completely excavated and on the slope was found a large broken lintel, number 7, which had evidently covered the central doorway. This is very large and of excellent artistic quality. Some fragments are entirely eroded, others excellently preserved, among them the fragment showing the beginning of the initial series which gives the date 9. 9. 8. 7. 7.

Between the East and the South Groups, the southern ball-court was partially excavated. In the medial line in the floor, three buried discoidal stone "bases" were found, similar to those discovered at Yaxhilan by Dr. Morley. The terminal ones, at least, had been carved, but this had been entirely eroded. The sides were in the form of sloping ramps, instead of the vertical walls found in New Empire ball-courts. These ramps were covered, at least in the center, with stone slabs. One of the slabs had been carved with glyphs, and another, on the opposite structure, had probably been carved.

The only standing building, structure 26, was almost entirely excavated, and was found to consist of four large rooms instead of eight as supposed by Maler. His mistake is understandable, however, inasmuch as these rooms are of unusual width, about 3.80 meters, and before excavation it was natural to assume that medial longitudinal walls had existed; no trace of these was found, however. It is extremely unlikely that this great width was bridged by a corbelled arch, inasmuch as the small amount of debris in the rooms, and the slight slant of the base of the springs of the arch afford contrary evidence, and the conclusion is unavoidable that the rooms were roofed with horizontal timbers, a construction very rare or unknown in the Old Maya region, though known in the New. In the center of this

building is a small roofed chamber which evidently contained a sanctuary, probably of Palenque type, and in the roof was a room of similar size, or possibly the base for a roof comb. ^PThe face of pyramid 27 was examined and the crowning temple partly excavated. The latter was found to consist of two long narrow rooms connected by a central passage. Beneath the floors of these were found a great number of ceremonial caches which had been interred in plain pottery vessels. These caches, like those found under stela 6, on pyramid 42 where stela 39 probably formally stood, and altars 1 and 5, consisted of chipped flints and obsidians, often asymmetrical but containing a larger proportion of symmetrical objects than usual, and small objects of shell and jade, some of these carved or incised, but generally of poor quality. On this temple in particular, and in lesser degree on the other temples, fragments of ornamental stucco indicated that they were elaborately decorated with this material.

Special search was made for lintel 3 and the missing part of lintel 1. The latter was not found, but the former was, broken in three pieces in addition to a small missing fragment. This was transported to Philadelphia. It is by far the finest known specimen of Maya carving in stone, sculptured in high relief with parts in full round. Much of the high relief is broken or eroded away, but the low relief is well preserved. The scene shows a central figure seated on a rectangular altar. To the right is a group of four standing figures, two adults and two children, and to the left a group of three standing adult figures. Seated beneath the altar are seven figures. The bodily proportions and the naturalistic postures are admirably shown, and the details of the textile garments, the objects held in the hands or around the figures, and the headdresses of some of the figures, as well as other details, will afford data of great importance on the ancient Mayan customs. The inscriptions comprise one hundred and fifty-eight glyphs.

excellently preserved, containing initial, secondary and supplementary series. Six dates, all within a period of about eight years, can be deciphered. The initial series is 9. 15. 18. 3. 13. 5 Ben 16 Chen.

In the southeastern portion of the city beyond the limits of the major ceremonial structures, excavations were made in mounds thought to be domiciliary in character. These revealed three superimposed periods of construction. Upon an original terrace which had been covered by artificial fill a walled room had been built, ^{This was later filled in, and a structure built,} above it of peculiar nature, the walls being only about 70 cm high and made of two masonry faces with rubble between. Under this was found a half-vault stone burial chamber which contained a disarticulated skeleton, probably that of a female. Another burial was found between the upper and middle floors, in a stone-lined and slab-covered grave, the skeleton in extended position, with a few mortuary objects. In another grave below the upper floor, of relatively similar construction, was found an extended adult burial and that of a child, without any funerary offerings. In both of the adult burials, incisor teeth inset with jade and pyrite disks were found.

Fragments of three other small lintels were discovered, numbered 8, 9, and 10, and lintel 6, which had been used as a table in a lumbering camp, was found. No complete polychrome vessels were excavated, but many polychrome potsherds were found, mainly in the lower strata, the sherds found in the upper layers being mainly large, coarse and plain. Altogether over fifteen hundred small specimens were brought to Philadelphia and an approximately equal number sent to Guatemala. About three hundred and fifty excellent photographs were made.

Funds have been given by Mr. Johnson to continue the work at Piedras Negras during the season of 1932.

By Sam.
[1931]

PROPOSALS FOR CONTINUATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK
AT PIEDRAS NEGRAS, GUATEMALA, DURING 1932.

The funds provided through the generosity of Mr. Eldridge R. Johnson which made possible the excavations this year at Piedras Negras, Guatemala, are practically exhausted and will hardly be sufficient to pay the remaining expenses of the Eldridge R. Johnson Expedition, such as freight charges and salaries of Mr. Satterthwaite and of the caretaker at the camp for the remainder of the year. Additional funds must be secured for the prosecution of this work in 1932.

It is unthinkable that this important work on which so much has been spent for preliminary work and overhead should be allowed to lapse for want of funds to continue it further. In support of a campaign for further funds allow me to call to your attention the following facts.

Very little work has ever been done in the Old Maya Empire and excavations in this region are of the utmost importance for our further enlightenment regarding this, the region of highest culture of aboriginal America. Except for the work of the Peabody Museum of Cambridge at Copan, Honduras, thirty years ago, and two seasons of work by Dr. E. B. Hewitt and the American School of Archaeology at Quirigua, Guatemala, the work at Piedras Negras and that of the Carnegie Institution at Uaxactun, Guatemala constitute the sole work of any importance that has ever been done in the Old Maya Empire.

The contract made between the Guatemalan Government and myself, on behalf of the University Museum, is a most favorable one in view of present tendencies in Latin American countries, and was secured at the cost of much time and expense. Latin American countries are becoming very chauvinistic, and especially anti-North-American, particularly Mexico and

the adjacent countries under its influence. It is almost impossible for institutions in this country to work in Mexico. The laws of Guatemala permit excavation by foreign institutions under the conditions that all finds except minor duplicates become the property of the Guatemalan Government, and our contract permitting us to retain half the specimens on ten year loan is an exception to this law which was secured only after insistent personal solicitation. The Carnegie Institution of Washington operates under this law, turning over everything to the Guatemalan Government, and yet considers its work of sufficient importance to continue it, although the work is done under much greater difficulties and greater expense than ours at Piedras Negras, their budget being, if I remember Dr. Morley's figures, about twenty thousand annually.

I have heard from two sources, Sr. Carlos Luna in Guatemala, and Dr. George Vaillant of the American Museum of New York, that the Mexican Government was very indignant against the Guatemalan Government for having granted us this contract which contravenes their own policy in archaeological matters, which policy they have been endeavoring to have accepted by other Latin-American countries, and their action in at first denying us the privilege of exportation through Mexican territory indicates clearly their reaction to this contract. It is probable that they will bring influence to bear to prevent an extension of the contract, or the agreement to another one. Furthermore a new Minister of Education has been appointed in Guatemala, who may not be so agreeable in this matter, a National Museum has been inaugurated and a director appointed, and it is extremely dubious if such a contract as we now possess could again be secured.

Our contract with the Guatemalan Government gives us permission to work at Piedras Negras "for the time that may be necessary in the opinion of the person whom the Government may nominate to control and

inspect the work, said time being not less than two years". This contract might be considered as equally binding upon us to continue work for two years as upon the Guatemalan Government to permit us to work for this period. At any rate, since there is no certainty that the work may be continued for more than two years, it would be most unfortunate if we were to have to forego the second year, after having expended so much for overhead and preliminary work, on account of lack of funds.

A very large part of the funds so far expended -- without accurate calculation I should estimate about half -- has been spent for preliminary work and need not be duplicated in the second year. Among these may be mentioned the preliminary trip to Guatemala to arrange the contract, the building of the road (which took a very large percentage of the total), the purchase of wagons, instruments and permanent equipment, and the building of the camp. This year we shall have to provide for only the repairs to the camp, repairs to the road and a little more equipment. Another very expensive item of the last year was for hire of mules to transport equipment and supplies from Tenosique to the camp. This will be greatly reduced this year as most of our supplies will be brought in on our wagons over our road on their return trip from transporting stelae and other monuments.

All plans and preparations were made with the expectation of spending at least two seasons in work at Piedras Negras. All the necessary houses have been built at the camp; these are of course very temporary but should last for several years with but slight expense for the repairing of the thatched roofs. Practically all the equipment necessary for the work is now at the camp with the exception of food supplies; this equipment was brought in last year at great expense and but little additional is needed this year except food. The equipment there also includes the wagons and a tractor for moving the stelae and other monuments.

The most important item of the work already accomplished, as well as probably the largest factor in the overhead cost, has been the construction of the road for the removal of the heavy monuments. This was under construction for practically a year. It is about 50 kilometers in length. This road was finished and its feasibility was proved by taking the wagons over it with a very heavy load consisting of the four parts of the finest stela, number 12. These traversed the road without great difficulty and are now in our storehouse by the river at the end of the road. Unfortunately the road was not finished until the end of the dry season and the river rose so high before these boxes arrived at the end of the road that it was impossible to get them down the river. The wagons were sent out with a second load but on account of the heavy rains never reached the end of the road. The greater part of the cost for the building of the road was caused by the felling of trees and necessary grading at certain places. During the present rainy season a number of large trees will fall in the road and some washouts will occur and a few bridges will have to be rebuilt, but the cost in time and expense will be slight to put it into condition. Estimates have been made that a gang of ten men working for a month will put the road into condition at a cost of about one thousand Mexican pesos or about four hundred dollars at present rates of exchange. Since cordial personal relations have now been established, it will be possible to have this work commenced a month before our arrival there and the road be in condition for work upon our arrival at the beginning of the dry season.

It should be possible to export next year every stela and other monument worth removing. An experienced American lumberman engineer, who is also a physician, temporarily out of work in Tenosique, is anxious to do the hauling. He examined our Fordson tractor and found it in good condition, also inspected the road, and is confident of getting everything

out in a few months. Oxen can also be utilized, as this year, in case of emergencies.

A good deal of lumber has already been sawn for the boxes and crates, and the carpenter can be instructed to proceed to the ruins early in the year to get more lumber ready and keep ahead of the demand.

The experience of the past year, and the personal contacts made, will enable the work to go ahead next year more efficiently and cheaply.

Only a very few of the many temples at the city have been excavated, and the prospects for valuable finds, both of scientific and of artistic importance, are great. There are almost certainly more lintels to be found, possibly no more quite up to the quality of the one now here, but all the art at Piedras Negras seems to have been of exceptional quality. Three other lintels were found this year, all demonstrating high art, but all were broken and eroded; it is extremely likely, however, that other intact ones will be found. Many potsherds of beautiful decorated polychrome vessels were found this year but no whole ones. The excavations this year were mainly in the later sections of the city, and stratigraphy seems to indicate that polychrome vessels belong to the older period. In the coming year excavations will probably center mainly in the older sections of the city where finds of fine pottery vessels may be made. Last year, after several seasons of work in which nothing of value was found, the Carnegie Institution Expedition working at Uaxactun found a cache of eleven beautiful polychrome vessels, and there are equal chances of finding a similar cache at Piedras Negras at any time.

After the very great expense and trouble of securing the contract, purchasing equipment, and building the road and the camp, it would be an unthinkable calamity if further work next year were to cease for lack of funds. While no budget has yet been prepared, it is estimated that not more than fifteen thousand dollars would be required to conduct the

season's work in a thorough and efficient manner. In this connection I would point out that the present time is the most favorable one in many years for working in Mexico or on the border of Mexico, on account of the high rate of exchange. Ordinarily the rate of exchange for the peso is about 2.02 to the dollar. When I left Mexico it was about 2.55 and has since gone even higher, due to the low value of silver. The rate will probably not change greatly within the next year. Also the lumbering business in that region, the sole business there, is at a standstill and labor is plentiful, rather cheap, and relatively efficient. While the present is a hard time to raise funds, it is for the same reason an excellent time to work because of low prices and the low value of the peso.

Postscript, October 13, 1931.

Since the above was written in early August, the exchange value of silver has fallen further until the Mexican peso is now worth about thirty five cents instead of the standard value of forty nine cents which was standard for many years. This low value of silver and consequent high exchange for the dollar makes work in and near Mexico at the present time unusually cheap.

From: The University of Pennsylvania,
Bureau of Publicity, Philadelphia.

For release:
Thursday, Nov. 19.

What is believed to be one of the finest pieces of Maya sculpture extant will feature a collection of Central American antiquities to be placed on exhibition at the University of Pennsylvania Museum today in conjunction with the opening of the museum's new North American Galleries, according to announcement by Horace H.F. Jayne, director.

The piece of sculpture to be exhibited is a magnificent carved stone lintel, highly ornamented with Maya hieroglyphs, which was recovered from the ruins of one of the principal temples at Piedras Negras in Guatemala, where the Eldridge R. Johnson Expedition has been conducting excavation work during the past season.

The lintel dates from about 750 A.D., generally recognized as the period when Maya art reached its highest point. It is four feet long and two feet high and on its surface are more than one hundred and fifty hieroglyphs, the greatest number so far known in any ~~one piece of~~ Maya ^{lintel} sculpture.

As in most long Maya inscriptions, the meaning of the majority of these is unknown, but six ^{dates} have been deciphered, and all of these refer to the Maya calendrical system. In addition to possessing an unusual number of hieroglyphs the lintel to be exhibited today is the sole known example of Maya relief carving done in full round. The figures displayed on it throw much light on the costumes and ceremonies of the period.

Little work had been done at Piedras Negras prior to last winter, when the University of Pennsylvania Museum, under the auspices of Eldridge R. Johnson, decided to send an expedition there with Dr. J. Alden Mason as field director. Before beginning actual excavation work

the whole territory was surveyed from the air on a trip sponsored by Percy C. Madeira, Jr., who, with Dr. Mason ^{then} went over the ground, ~~carefully~~.

Digging was begun in February of this year on the site of a temple which had collapsed completely on the pyramid which supported it. It was from the remains of this temple that the lintel, originally placed over one of the five main doorways of the building, was unearthed.

The discovery of any Maya hieroglyphs is of extreme importance archaeologically, according to museum authorities, for on almost all of the monuments dates are given with that accuracy so characteristic of the Maya. Thus much light may be cast on the history of a people who inhabited America fifteen hundred years ago.

In addition to the lintel many other objects excavated by the expedition will be placed on exhibition. Most of these are made of flint or obsidian and carved in curious, fancy shapes. They were found in pottery vessels buried under the altars and floors of the principal temple and in all probability were of a religious, ceremonial nature.
