

STUCCO HEAD OF HEROIC SIZE FROM THE PYRAMID  
TEMPLE, R-5, PIEDRAS NEGRAS, GUATEMALA

## THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM BULLETIN

### *The Piedras Negras Expedition*

**T**HERE is a tradition among archæologists that something important is sure to turn up about the last week of the season. Such was the case with the Third Eldridge R. Johnson Expedition to the Old Empire Maya city, Piedras Negras, in Guatemala. The giant stucco mask shown in Plate II caused us to work ten days beyond our schedule, although the rainy season had begun.

The mask is almost certainly but one of many which decorated the terraces of the pyramid-temple, Structure K-5. This one is built against the wall of the second terrace, next to the great front stairway. The lower portion of another, on the third terrace, may be seen at the top of the picture. The face of the mask measures slightly under nine feet from side to side, and about four and one-half feet from top to bottom. The distance from the stump of the broken nose to the back of the eye-sockets is over two feet, but in spite of this deep relief, the face is in general flattened and subordinated to architectural effect.

The beard, the shape of the nose and the eyes, and the slab in the mouth, from which two great stucco teeth have doubtless fallen, lead one to suppose that the Sun God is represented. The scientific importance of finding this mask type of decoration here is great. Eventually we should be able to show its relationships to the very early and famous stucco masks of Uaxactun, also in Guatemala, and to the stone masks on the buildings of northern Yucatan and the highlands of Mexico.

The expedition program was aimed primarily at problems of architectural and ceramic development, but one never knows when he may come upon an object of great importance in its own right, by virtue of its artistic excellence and the light it sheds on the history of Maya Art. Such is the stucco head shown in Plate I,



which is of heroic size. Broken into fragments, it was buried under the floor of pyramid-temple R-5 in the early South Group. Restored in the field, it has been sent to Guatemala City under the terms of our contract with the Guatemalan government. It is a beautiful piece of modeling. The face is painted red. The border of the remaining remnant of the headdress is bright orange. Unfortunately here again the tip of the nose has been broken off. We feel very fortunate in recovering two outstanding examples of stucco modeling in one season. The art was a very important one at the cities of this region, but stucco is perishable, and few good examples have survived.

This excavation was one of a series undertaken this season to find out whether the so-called 'Maya arch'—the stone vault in the shape of an inverted V—was used to roof the buildings of the supposedly early South Group. We investigated all seven of the pyramids and three of the five low structures of this group. Only the temple of our stucco head had been roofed with the stone vault, and this has only the latest of the dated monuments of the group before it; the others depended on wood to support the roofs. This, with other corroboratory evidence, some of which is mentioned below, leads us to be very hopeful that we may eventually establish a proposition of major importance to the history of Maya architecture generally: that the Maya vault was introduced to Piedras Negras long after it had become a typical Old Empire city in other respects, with pyramids, carved stelæ and door lintels, and all the rest; and further, that this occurred at about the middle of the ninth Cycle, which, according to the Goodman-Thompson-Martinez correlation with Christian chronology, fell in A. D. 652.

In the June *Bulletin* some account was given of this season's clearing of the second of the two Ball Courts of the city. The text-figure drawing shows the two figures carved on a central stone panel from this court. The two men are with little doubt dressed

for the game. A knee-pad may be seen on the right knee of each. Probably they are dancing in a ceremony preceding the game, with feather-tasseled rattles in their hands. The draughtsmanship of this extremely flat low relief is excellent, and so successful a portrayal of action is rare in Maya sculpture. Rare also was the restraint necessary for a Maya artist to hold himself to a plain background. Only about half of the fragments of this stone escaped the elements, but apparently nothing whatever was carved but the two figures. The piece is now in the Museum.

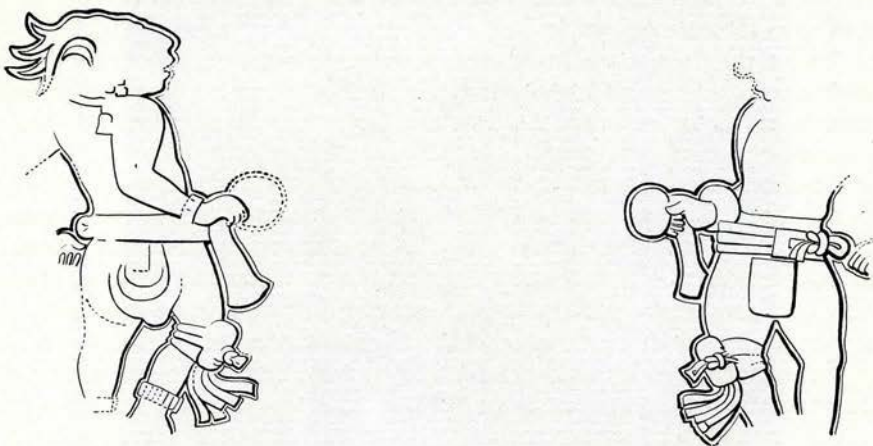
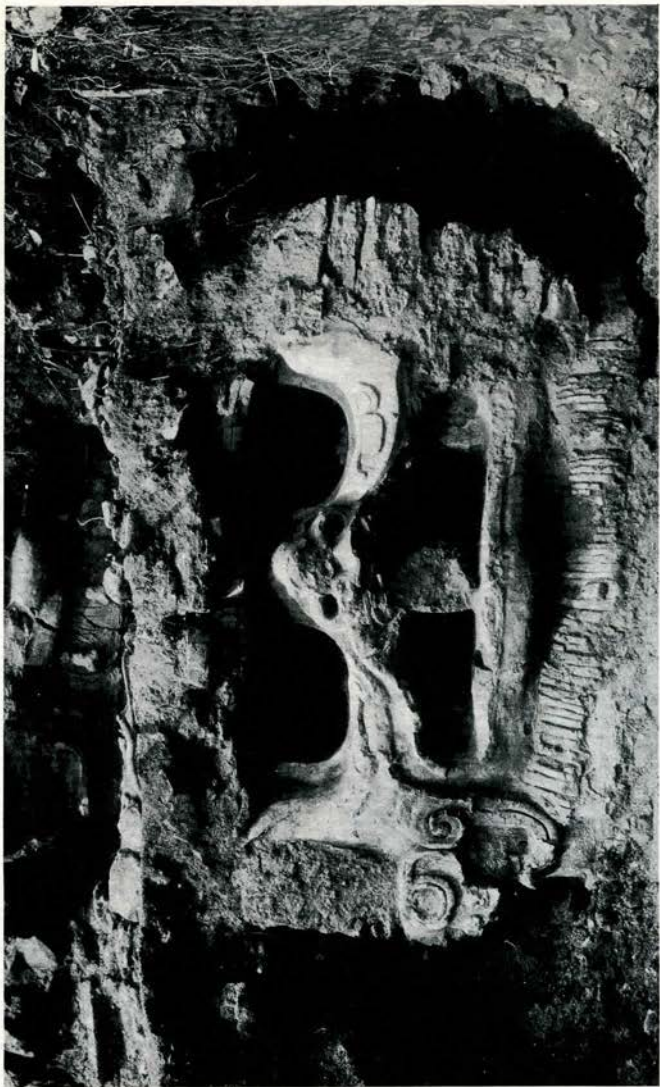
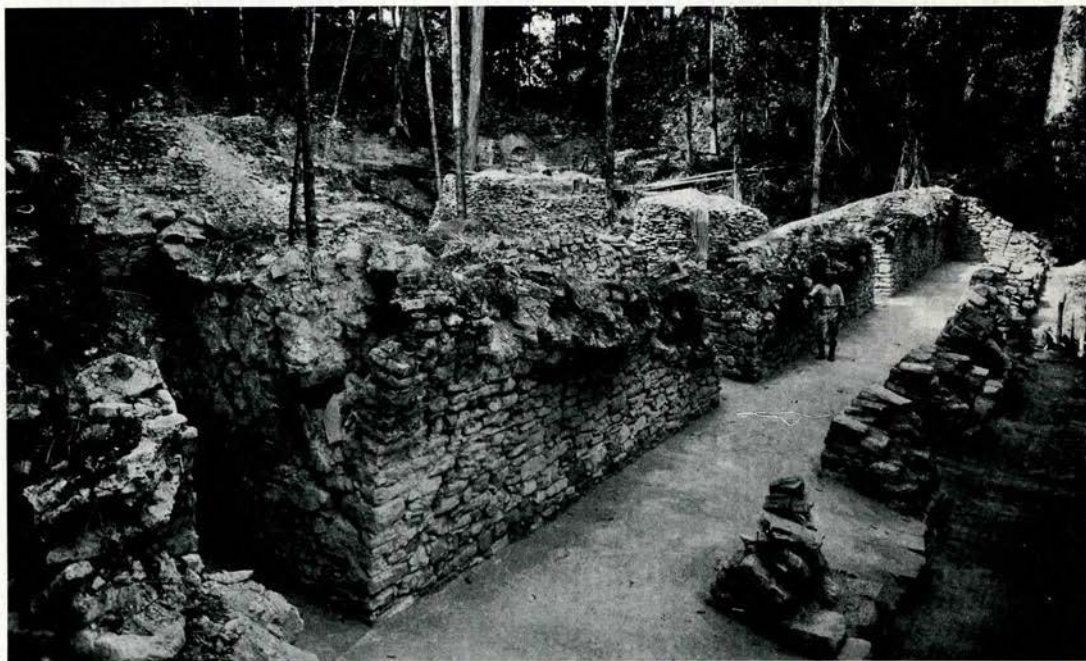


Plate III shows a view of the ruin of the lowest of the twelve so-called palaces on the Acropolis, after excavation. The season saw the completion of the excavation of this building, Structure J-2, as well as a palace of another type, Structure J-6. The workman stands beside the backbone of the building, a central wall separating two long open galleries. The remains of rectangular piers may be seen on the right. These formerly rose to doorway height and supported the outer base of the inverted V-shaped





STUCCO MASK FROM THE PYRAMID TEMPLE, K-5, PIEDRAS NEGRAS, GUATEMALA



REMAINS OF A 'PALACE' ON THE ACROPOLIS AT PIEDRAS NEGRAS, GUATEMALA



stone vault which ran the length of the gallery. The inner base of course rested on the central wall, and the whole construction was repeated for the rear gallery.

Trenching and tunnel operations under this building show another building level twelve feet below it. Similar work under Structure J-6 — the palace which contained a beautiful stone throne now in the Museum [*Bulletin*, June 1933] — showed no less than five super-imposed layers of buildings. A trench from top to bottom of the small pyramid, Structure R-3, in the early South Group, revealed four superimposed buildings. Excavations of this type have yielded pottery vessels and fragments dated with reference to one another, and are beginning to give us hints of the architectural sequences as well. For instance, in none of them have we found evidences of stone vaulting in the earlier periods. It may even turn out that there was an extensive city of buildings on low platforms before the first real pyramid was erected here.

Large areas surrounding the ceremonial heart of the city were cleared and mapped this season. They are filled with low platforms and terraces, almost certainly the foundations of wooden, or combination wooden and stone dwellings of the priests and nobility. An adequate investigation of these is still a task for the future.

L. S.

*Excavations in  
New Mexico*

**T**HE field-work for the University Museum in the Southwest has just been concluded for this year, and, though certain phases of the work point to fairly definite conclusions, it is unwise to assume that the book can be closed and nothing further done to prove the existence of man in this country at a period antedating our more or less sedentary Basket Maker culture. As a matter of fact, though much evidence has accumulated and a great deal been written upon the subject, only a start has been