

*A Stucco Head
from Guatemala*

THE pyramids, temples, and other structures of the so-called Old Maya Empire were completely covered with plaster and stucco. The walls and floors of the terraced pyramids and of the masonry structures surmounting them were faced with smooth plaster and decorated with stucco ornaments. Almost the entire region is underlain with limestone and the supply of lime for making plaster and stucco was inexhaustible. Stucco ornamentation is especially characteristic of the ancient cities of the Usumacinta Valley in which lies Piedras Negras, the site of excavations by the Museum's Eldridge R. Johnson Expeditions. The plaster and stucco were tinted with bright colors and must have presented a magnificent sight.

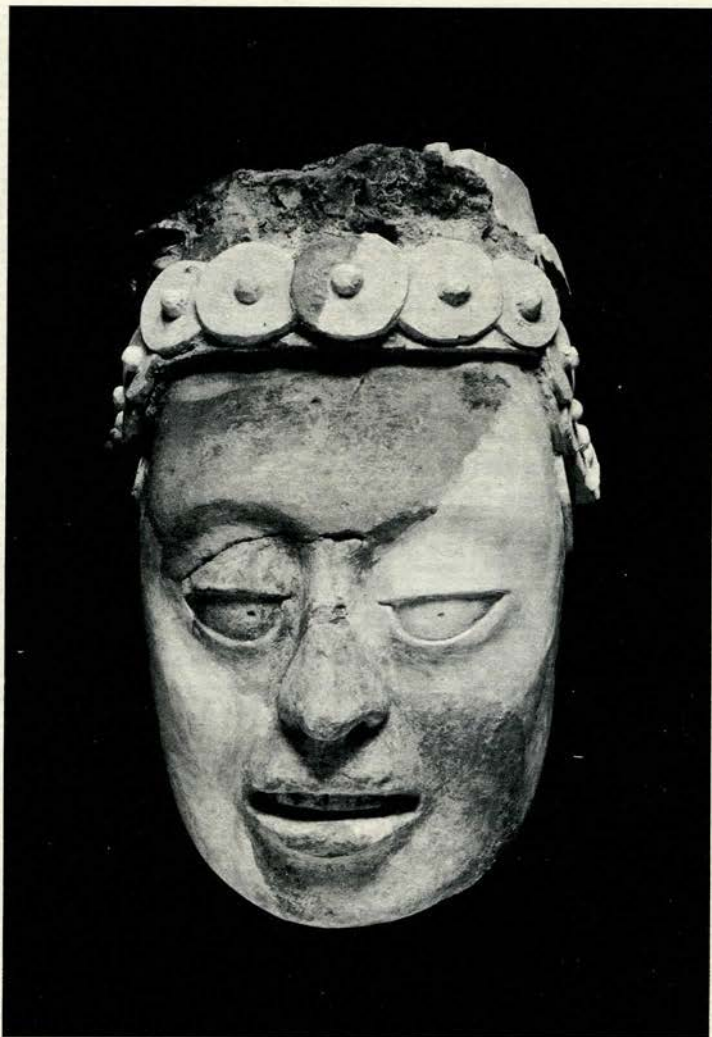
Stucco, however, is of a very perishable nature and quickly returns to the lime dust of which it was made, and stucco ornaments are preserved only when they were covered before disintegration, or when protected from the elements, as in the interior of buildings. At Palenque much interior stucco is preserved, but at Piedras Negras, where all of the buildings are fallen, none is obvious above ground. Occasionally excavation reveals a stucco ornament in position, as in the case of the great mask which was shown in Plate II of the October issue of the *Bulletin*. In the excavations, broken stucco ornaments, generally showing traces of color, are frequently turned up where they fell, or were thrown when the buildings were torn down to make superimposed structures. Generally these are small isolated fragments, but occasionally several pieces of one object are found which can be mended so as to restore the specimen in relatively original condition. An example of such a discovery and restoration is the stucco head from Pyramid-Temple R-5 which was illustrated in Plate I of the October issue of the *Bulletin*.

A somewhat similar and equally admirable stucco head was found under the floor of the uppermost temple on Pyramid K-5

under interesting conditions. Dr. S. G. Morley, of the Carnegie Institution, was visiting the excavations while the floor of the temple was being dug up. Being engaged in taking a photograph, he called for a piece of debris to make his tripod more firm. One of the workmen picked up a piece at random and this turned out to be the greater part of the face of the stucco head shown in Plate XI. Further search located another fragment, containing the eye. This was in 1931; the following year, in throwing out more debris, a large piece of the headdress was found. It is uncertain whether the head was a part of the relief decoration on a facade, or from a full round figure which stood, possibly as an idol, in a temple. It probably came from another and earlier temple than that on the summit of the pyramid, for it was almost certainly broken and the pieces used as a part of the filling under the plaster when the floor of this temple was laid.

The recovered parts of this head were put together and the missing parts restored in the University Museum by Mr. Paul Casci. The restored portions, being left in white plaster, can be easily distinguished from the original slightly darker stucco. Traces of red coloring may be seen on the chin and the headdress; probably the entire head and headdress were originally so tinted. Nothing has been restored unless clearly indicated by the remaining portions. For instance, it is almost certain that the head possessed large ear ornaments, which would have made it seem wider, of better esthetic proportions, and more like known Maya sculptured heads, but as no trace of these remained, they have been omitted. The head has been restored as a mask, but it may originally have been in full round. This is indicated by another portion of the decorative fillet which was found but could not be fitted to any preserved portion; it may have extended around the back of the head.

Regarding the face, little need be said except that it is of heroic size and very well modeled. As restored, it looks downwards, but



A STUCCO HEAD FROM PIEDRAS NEGRAS, GUATEMALA

if the face is viewed in its proper plane it will be seen that the forehead is very receding, showing the cranial deformation that was considered beautiful and proper by the Maya. Probably the headdress was originally much larger and more ornate. The nature of the original fillet which is represented by a row of disks with central knobs is uncertain, but it may have been of jade, pyrite or shell. The form of the headdress suggests that it may originally have represented, in conventionalized art, the upper jaw of a serpent. Possibly the lower jaw was also represented below the chin. This motive of a human head framed in the mouth of a monstrous serpent is a very common one in Middle American art.

J. A. M.

*Mesopotamian
Excavations*

THE twelfth season of our joint expedition, with the British Museum, to Ur has now begun. This will be a short campaign, principally devoted to completing certain unfinished tasks and to getting all in order, with the idea that with the close of the season, excavations at Ur will be brought to an end.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, it has been necessary to abandon for the present season our expedition to Tell Billa and Tepe Gawra. It is hoped that another year will see resumption of activities at these ancient north-Mesopotamian sites.

Publications

THIS, the first number of volume 5 of the *Bulletin*, is dated January instead of December, and the succeeding numbers will appear at two-month intervals, thus bringing all numbers of the volume within one calendar year and eliminating the long period from June to October, when, heretofore, no *Bulletin* has appeared.

The Museum has for free distribution to members only a few copies of the *Illustrated Souvenir* of the Exhibition of Persian Art which was held in London in 1931. This book contains a brief