

EVOLUTION OF A MAYA TEMPLE—Part II

IN the November issue of the *Bulletin* (Vol. 7, No. 4) we illustrated the changing forms of a Piedras Negras temple as it was twice greatly modified by succeeding architects. Still not satisfied to leave well enough alone, at least twice again the Maya architects made changes which the present article, Part II, endeavours to report. Figures D and E show the new features and comparing them with Figure A in Part I will show they were considerable.

FOR the most part the purpose of the additions of the two last phases, now reported upon, appears to have been primarily decorative. They gild the lily, without changing its fundamental form very much, and so did not involve so much common labor as the earlier changes. For the first time the art of sculpture is added to this structure, both in stone relief and in combinations of relief and full-round in stucco.

No less than twelve new items, counting the eight masks as one item, are scattered about the structure, without many clues as to the order in which they appeared. They can be crowded into two phases and this is what we have done arbitrarily in Figures E and D, illustrating Phase B as the middle and Phase A as the latest phase of the third or latest period. The earliest phase of this Period, Phase C, was shown as Figure A in Part I. Some of the items which we assign to the middle phase may represent successive episodes within it, or perhaps did not appear until the latest phase. What we are sure of is that all items of Phases B and A (Figures E and D) are later than Phase C (Figure A) with the single exception of the carved rectangular stone panel known as "Lintel" 7. This was once a very beautiful, now sadly destroyed, relief showing a priest on his throne. It had a long inscription, now hopelessly eroded. Possibly it should have been assigned to the earlier Phase C. Its fragments were found face down just in front of the location assigned to it in Figure E. For this reason we have there restored a masonry block to hold it in the center of the building platform stairway. This block must fill the space between the originally bifurcated stairway as restored in Figure A, and covers the supposed pyramid altar position of that time. This in turn accounts for the supposed removal of the altar to the ap-

S.T.C.
Str. K-5-1st Phase A (Latest Phase)
ISOMETRIC PROJECTION

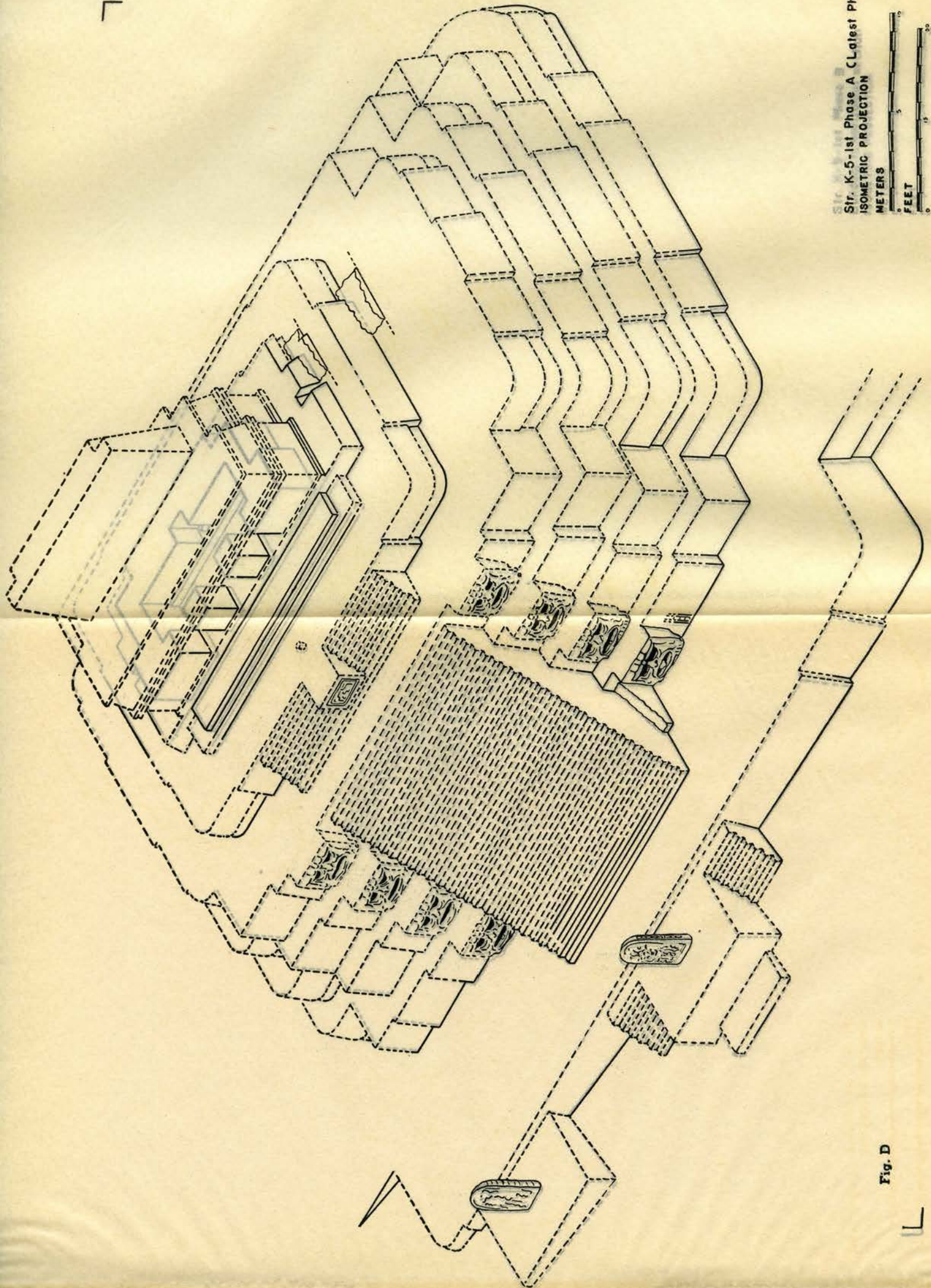
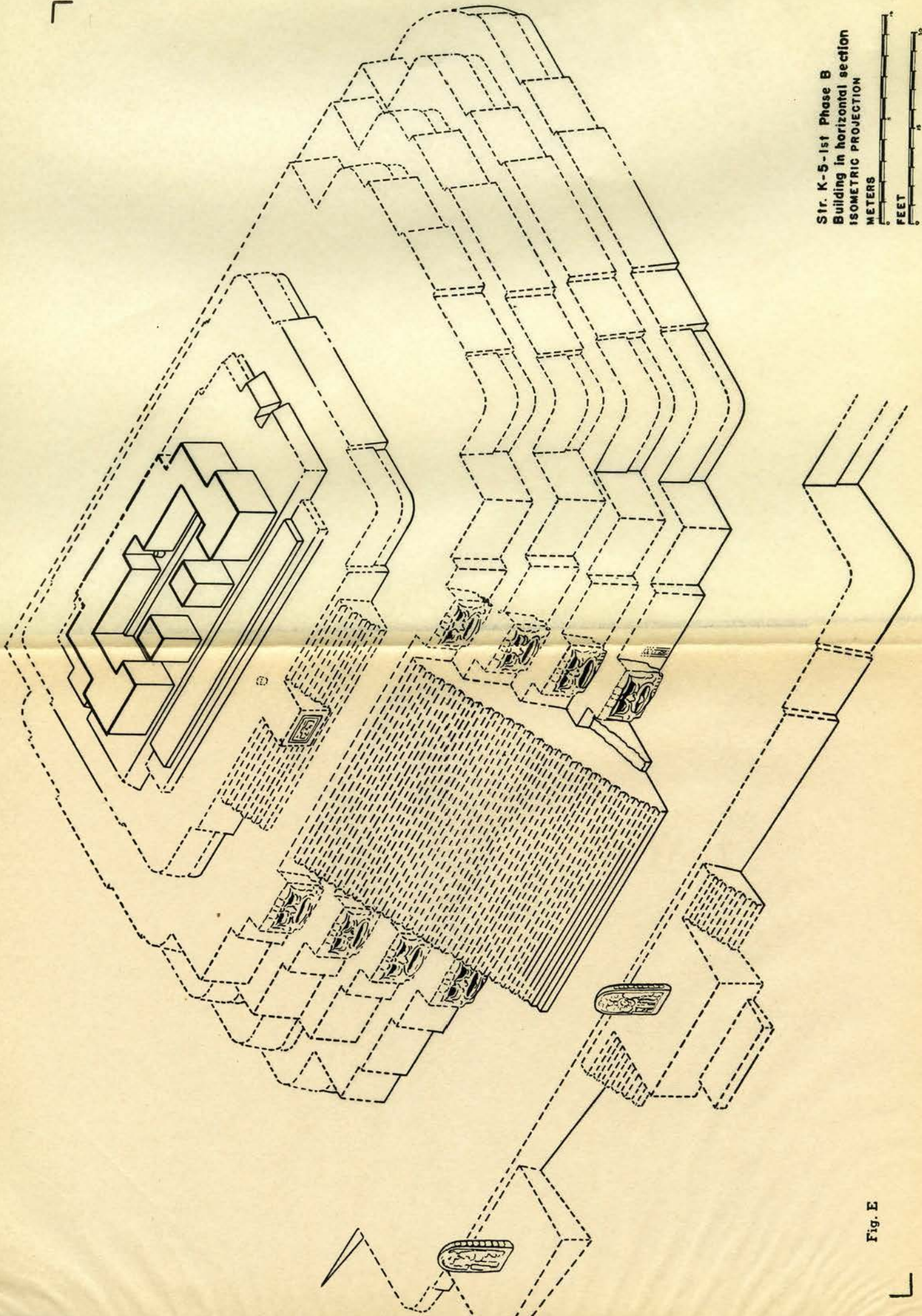


Fig. D



Str. K-5-1st Phase B
Building in horizontal section
ISOMETRIC PROJECTION

METERS
FEET

Fig. E

proximate position on the platform shown in Figure E. It was actually found in a disturbed position even higher than that level, in the doorway of the temple. The reader will realize that in this reconstruction, one supposition is made the basis for another, a dangerous procedure. It is possible that the lintel was placed on the rear wall of the niche-like opening in the platform stairway during Phase C (Figure A). However, if it remained there permanently, at the time of abandonment, its heavy fragments must have been thrown, with considerable trouble, about two meters forward of the position to which they would naturally fall of themselves. While no positive evidence of the block survived, it is a feature known at this and other Old Empire sites. This is the first evidence, such as it is, that these masonry blocks were embellished with the famous so-called lintels of Piedras Negras. We secured very definite evidence that they were not lintels—that is stones forming the tops of doorways—in 1934. Either of the possible positions suggested accounts for the small scale of the scenes and inscriptions carved on Piedras Negras so-called lintels. It was possible to approach and examine them closely.

The eight masks are restored in Figure E on the basis of the lowest pair, and of part of another on the second pyramid terrace. Large quantities of stucco fragments had fallen from higher up and lay on the basal terrace in front of the lowest masks. The one on the right with the bottom part of another on the second terrace is visible in the photographs illustrating Part I of this report. A close-up appeared in Vol. 4, No. 5, Plate II of the *Bulletin*. Excavated in 1933, it was found very well preserved. We were accordingly disappointed this year to find the corresponding one on the left almost completely collapsed. Traces of a single column of stucco glyphs remained at the right of each of the lowest masks. The masks are built against the previously plastered terrace faces. In the South group, 1937 excavations showed that there the stone and mortar frames for similar masks were keyed into the terraces themselves. These in the West Group are clearly secondary modernizing features.

Masonry platforms were built on the basal terrace stairway, and against the terrace far to the left. Two carved stelae, Numbers 39 and 38 respectively, lay on the debris of these platforms, tops to the rear and about at the edge of the terrace. The heights of the platforms as restored are surely approximately correct, and this is also true of the plan of the central one. The facing walls of the other were completely collapsed.

There is little doubt that this one obliterated one of the decorative outsets of the basal terrace, and the central one obliterated about half of the stairway, the steps of which run beneath it. Therefore these platforms, and the monuments they were obviously intended to support, are later than the terrace.

If one places Figure E over Figure A he will note two changes in the lowest pyramid terrace, not otherwise conspicuous. At the left front the deep final outset of Phase C has been carried nearer to the corner. The addition is not quite as deep so that there is now an extra outset on that side. We do not know if the higher terraces were treated in this manner, and so have left them as they were. No such extension was added on the right side. The corresponding deeply outset face at the right rear received a different secondary treatment. It was buried behind a new mass which eliminates the Phase C outset entirely and curves around gently to meet the sharper curve of the original corner. We do not know whether this treatment was carried higher, and have left the upper terraces as they were. The right rear corner was not examined. If these changes were repeated on the collapsed higher terraces, the appearance was changed considerably. A narrow block of masonry was placed against the right side of the pyramid stairway. As found, its top was ruined. Again we do not know whether it affected higher terraces; but we do know it was not repeated even at the lowest level on the other side of the stairway. It is possible that the changes at the front represent efforts to compensate for the off center positions of stairways and buildings, to which we will refer later on.

During this phase (of Figure E) the original temple building was largely removed and a new one built. Probably at the same time, the plinth platform was widened a little, without changing its peculiar Peten-style design. Comparing this building with that of the first period (Figure C) it will be seen that it has shrunk greatly in size. The bench against the rear wall, probably for the support of idols, has correspondingly shrunk to a low narrow sill, and the temple altar has been moved back into a niche in the rear wall. The building exhibits the sides and rear outsets of the Peten style. It had a vaulted roof and probably already the roof-comb indicated in Figure D.

In the final phase a masonry shell was added to the sides and front of this building, increasing the width and depth about 1.30 and .60 meters respectively. As we restore it in Figure D this addition is carried

to the full height of the roof. It had survived only to about half the height to the medial molding or cornice. This side and rear addition was supplied with a very low step-like plinth which probably was carried across the front, necessitating a new floor in the room. This plinth introduces for the first time a feature common in other Peten-style temples, but absent here until now. It causes the widest part of the building to appear to be based on a lower level than the rest, the rear part of the plinth being a little higher. We are clearly dealing with a non-structural imitation of the common Peten design in which the main plinth platform has a higher level at the rear.

Probably at the same time, both the plinth platform proper and the platform on which it rests were widened, and very likely they were also enclosed behind new walls at the rear and partly at the front. We merely indicate those remnants of these constructions which survived. There was insufficient evidence to permit restoration.

There were no ascertainable changes in the interior of the temple in this final phase of Figure D, and so we have roofed it over in our restoration. No part of the vault was in place. We have indicated one of the same height as occurs on a palace building of similar proportions. Possibly the resulting upper zone is too low. Fragments of stucco ornament on the platform suggest it was ornamented with plaster reliefs.

Indicated in bare outline is an ornamental tower or "roof comb". Such towers are common on Old Empire buildings and served primarily as fields for rich stucco decoration. We are not certain that the roof comb was used on this building, but its presence is more likely than not. We believe that its sculptural embellishments included a human figure of more than life size. The face of such a figure was found in debris over the floor of the room and now hangs in the Museum. A photograph of it appeared in Volume 5, No. 1, of the *Bulletin*, Plate XI.

It has probably escaped the reader's notice, but the temple building, plinth and platform are displaced about a meter to the left of the center of the pyramid, and the pyramid and basal terrace stairways are off center the same amount. As a result, the expanse of terracing to the right of the pyramid stairway is two meters greater than that to the left. This is too much to ascribe to carelessness. It has been true since the very first period, though it could easily have been remedied without extra labor in the second period. When, undoubtedly after the first period, a ball court was laid out on the plaza in front of this temple, its axis

was made to correspond to that of the pyramid as a whole, not to that of its stairway and of the structures on it. It is worth noting that here in the West Group it was evidently important to maintain a straight line of interest up the centers of the stairways to the center of the temple. If the temple was to be off center, so must be the stairways or vice versa.

The earliest of the two stelae, that at the center, is dated 9.12.5.00 in the Maya Calendar, at least one hundred and thirty-five years before erection of stelae ceased at the city. Unless it had been moved from some other earlier location, in this case extremely unlikely, the temple had evolved from the form of Figure C to that of Figure A before this time. Some of the modifications we have been discussing in this second part of our report may also have preceded the stela, but in general they are to be assigned to the last century and a quarter of hieroglyphically recorded Piedras Negras times. As to dating by ceramics, the many sherds encountered have not been studied, but one important fact was noted in the field. The earliest temple was not begun until painting pottery by the negative technique became known, since sherds so decorated, of the style known as "Polychrome A-1" were found in its hearting.

The recital of so many bare facts becomes wearisome to the writer as well as to the reader. It is well to recall that they are gathered and recorded not for themselves but as contributions to a growing common fund of authentic information. Eventually more general and significant accounts of the life and times of the Maya and their curious astronomer-priests will be possible. In the meantime we will close the account of this temple with a quotation from the "Relation of the Things of Yucatan", by Bishop Landa, the Spanish priest who burned the books of the New Empire Maya, but left the best sixteenth century account of them. The translation is by William Gates, and gives some idea of the importance of these buildings in Maya life:

"On the 16th of Xul all the chiefs and priests assembled at Mani, and with them a great multitude from the towns. On the evening of that day they set out in a great procession with many comedians from the house of the chief, where they had gathered, and marched slowly to the temple of Kukulcan, all duly decorated. On arriving and offering their prayers, they set the banners on the top of the temple, and below in the court set each of them his idols on leaves of trees brought for this purpose; then making the new fire ceremony they began to burn incense at many points, and to make offerings of viands cooked without salt or pepper,

and drinks from their beans and calabash seeds. There the chiefs and those who had fasted stayed for five days and nights, always burning copal and making their offerings without returning to their homes but continuing in prayers and certain sacred dances".

L. S. Jr.

ANOTHER PIEDRAS NEGRAS STELA

MAYA carved monuments fall into various categories, the most numerous being "stelae". These are long shafts set upright in the courts or plazas, or on the temple pyramids. Their chief function was to record in imperishable stone hieroglyphs the current astronomical observations and calculations of the astrologer priests. Also, by means of accompanying carved pictures of themselves at work apparently they sought to impress on posterity that if the stars boded ill for the community, they had not stood idly by. At any rate, the scenes depicted nearly always include a priest attired in elaborate symbolic regalia, and sometimes, especially at Piedras Negras, show him actually engaged in ceremonies.

Up to a year ago, forty-six monuments of this class had been found at Piedras Negras. Plate X shows two fragments of what is probably best considered the forty-seventh. The larger fragment was found by the Museum's 1936 expedition and was illustrated in the Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 5, Plate VII. It was only ten centimetres (about four inches) thick, about the same as most panels or so-called "lintels". Previously known stelae were much thicker, so we suspected this was part of a panel to be let into a wall, but to be safe gave it a number in the series of miscellaneous carved stones. During the 1939 season a second and smaller fragment was found. Brought back to the Museum it fitted the first, and the two are now set up together in the Middle American hall. With this