

Fragments and reconstruction drawing of a polychrome bowl from Piedras Negras, Guatemala, University Museum Middle American Expedition, 1935.

A monkey runs or kneels against a background of water-symbols, holding or offering something in his hand.



TWO MAYA BOWLS— A PROBLEM IN RECONSTRUCTION

ACTION such as we see in Plates II-III is rare in Maya art, probably because so little of Maya painting has survived. So when we find parts of realistic paintings of monkeys, the most active creature in the Maya habitat, we must make the most of what we have. The larger scale drawings are reconstructions based on the surviving fragments of a bowl and a plate. These fragments are shown at reduced scale, so that one may know how much modern imagination has been necessary to supply the missing parts of the designs.

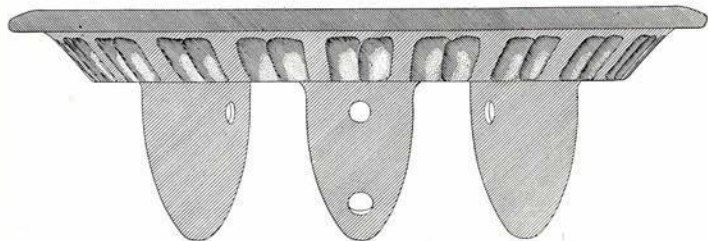
The reconstructions and drawings of the fragments are by Leon C. Logan, who has been working on material from Piedras Negras in connection with the Pennsylvania WPA Art Program. So far as the original sherds survive, the drawings are accurate copies. In each case it happens that enough of one leg is present to guarantee that the legs were flexed. Whether this most interesting of animals was running or kneeling is, perhaps, not certain.

The sherds from the large bowl were found, with many others from other vessels, in the fire-box of a steam bath or sweat-house building, known as Structure N-1. Those of the plate came from another steam bath, Structure J-17. Steam-bathing among the Middle Americans was as much to cleanse and cure the soul as the body, and one should not think of these once magnificent vessels as fancy soap-dishes, or something of the sort. The bowl measures $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches (41.5 centimeters) and the plate 16 inches (41 centimeters) in diameter.

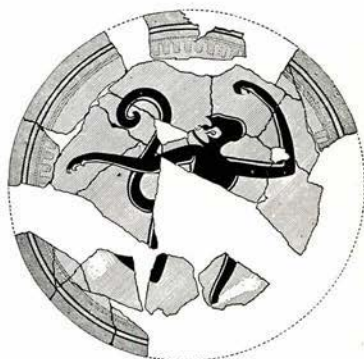
The colors, badly faded now, were black and two shades of orange. The darker, which is reddish, was painted over the lighter, which is more yellowish, and these tones are represented by the hatched lines in the drawings. The exterior decoration, consisting of pairs of thick overlapping bars, is a characteristic late feature of Piedras Negras pottery, as are the flat bottoms, down-turned "lipped" rims and large tripod feet.

The presence of monkeys on these bowls can scarcely be attributed merely to a desire to decorate the surfaces amusingly. The animals undoubtedly have a religious or mythological meaning, but this did not prevent the artist from being extremely realistic within the limits of his desired stylistic effect. Perhaps the best way to judge of the result would be to take these plates to the zoo and make direct comparisons. The models must have been either the American howler or spider monkey.

LINTON SATTERTHWAITE, Jr.



Reconstruction of a polychrome plate from Piedras Negras, Guatemala. Second Eldridge R. Johnson Expedition, 1932. Surviving fragments shown at small scale.



As reconstructed, the monkey is running, but the pose can be changed by shifting unconnected fragments.

