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LAMANAI 1978, PART TWO: CROCODILES AND CRYPTS
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Been hanging on the edges of your seats since May, have you, waiting for the next thrilling chapter in the saga of Lamanai? Well, sit back (you must be a bit stiff by now, anyway) while we carry on with the story. When we drifted away from the shores of New River Lagoon earlier this year, work was in progress on a number of structures and there was promise of great discoveries yet to be made. Now that we are poised to begin the sixth season this coming January, I can look back to the events of May, June and July in a somewhat less weary, but no less bemused, state of mind than I could have managed this summer, and tell you how things went.

Before I start to recount the events of those halcyon days earlier this year, I wish to enter a plea regarding the names given to the various structures. I thought that the appearance of the names in the Newsletter would not enshrine them forever, but I now find that they are deeply embedded in people's minds. I ask, therefore, that all of you erase from your memory banks all names previously employed herein, and begin to think of Fut as N9-56 and Lag as N10-43. Please.

With Lip - pardon, N10-9 - completed, we spent the second half of the season on N10-43 and N9-56, and also expanded the testing of small buildings in outlying parts of the site. The first two operations are designed to give us information on large-scale architecture in Early Classic (about A.D. 250-550) and possibly earlier times. The small-mound testing should provide a good picture of settlement pattern changes over time, a matter of considerable interest because of the site's long, apparently unbroken, occupation span.

Testing residential structures does not usually yield striking objects, but does produce important data. The trick

*Excavation techniques
settlement pattern*

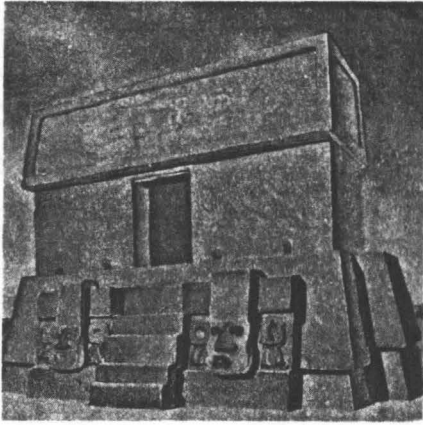


Fig. 1. N10-43, W. side temple; drawing by H.S. Loten.

is to discover one burial in each structure, with a vessel in association. Once that is done, the excavation can be abandoned, perhaps to be resumed later if the nature or date of the building warrants. We began this work in May, when we had every reason to expect at least six more weeks of dry weather. What we got, instead, was almost a month of downpours (shades of Fengate). So we searched for dating evidence in rain and mosquitoes, finding that most of the mounds had been built in the 8th and 9th centuries A.D. As in other small structures, there was no evidence of Post-Classic (10th Century and after) use save for a few surface sherds.

To jump from the smallest to the tallest, let us turn to N10-43, where Stan Loten has now done the architectural recording plus reconstruction drawings of elements at the top of the structure. None of this work provided any solid clues to the date of construction, but late in the season we removed a small addition over the centre stair which yielded sherds that appear to fix the date at about A.D. 100-200, close to the guess dating based on building features.

After spending some time clearing building corners, we started trenching at the structure's base. Almost at once we came upon sherds of probably middle Post-Classic (perhaps 13th Century) date, and an offering consisting of an effigy vessel and one jade bead, clearly placed in a pit dug into collapse debris. So once again, as with the figurine censers on N9-56, we have evidence for middle Post-Classic or later use of a building already in ruins. All data gathered thus far suggest, in fact, that the Post-Classic community was concentrated in the southern part of the site centre, with ruined buildings in the north serving only as backdrops for ceremonial activities.

And now to N9-56, the scene of the Masked Ball of my last report. We continued to unearth fragments of Mayapan style figurine censers wherever we trenched into the surface of the structure, so that by season's end we had an assemblage of spare parts sufficient to stagger even the most indefatigable ceramics restorer. Sadly, much of the collection is spare parts and nothing more; several figurines can be partially reconstructed, but none is complete. There must be arms, legs, and so forth from thirty or more that cannot be rebuilt at all, perhaps because the ceremonially broken censers were flung far and wide over the mound surface, with many parts coming to lie outside the area of our investigations.

But it is not the censers that are of greatest interest on N9-56. In the May Newsletter I mentioned rather casually that



Fig. 2. Mask panel, N9-56; note workman above.

is unusual in that it is composed of blocks of limestone in which all the features, plus ear ornaments and flanking panels, are carved. This contrasts sharply with "standard" Maya outset mask construction, which involved an armature of stone over which thick plaster was laid, to be modelled and carved with the features of a deity. Thus our mask is better preserved than most; even the eyelids can be seen, though much of the thin skin of unusual grey plaster which coated the carving has sloughed away.

At the same time that we were clearing the mask, we continued trenching into various additions made at the lower front and on the upper stair, recovering two offerings which date some of the construction later than the masks to about the 6th century A.D. As part of this excavation, we decided to begin a tunnel into the building's heart, very late in the season. When one starts a tunnel, or any other investigation, on the building midline late in the season, one must be aware of the risks. I was; I told various people that if we were to encounter anything by tunnelling, it would surely be far enough back in the core that we would not hit it until next year, so we could start the work quite safely. Wrong again. Hardly had the tunnel begun to take shape when, two weeks before the season's end, we struck a tomb. Everyone is tired by that time of the year, and as I walked down the tunnel, light in hand, I was something less than elated at the prospect of spending many days in the cramped quarters of a burial crypt. I shall not detail here how cramped those quarters really were, nor tell how the Crocodile God thwarted every photographic effort in the tomb. Suffice it to say that, in about the worst circumstances imaginable, the excavation was completed in just over a week.

From the crypt came a number of perishable objects, chief among them an entire section through a tree, still dense and hard, weighing about 24 kilos. There were impres-

we were just beginning to clear what looked as though it might be a mask outset. As the core of overlying construction came away, we could see well-preserved ornamentation on the earlier unit, and the more we cleared, the better the preservation looked. When we were done, we had a mask almost three metres high, with facial features suggesting Olmec influence (from the southeast Gulf Coast of Mexico), and a mask head-dress which is surely the same reptilian creature, probably a crocodile, which we have seen elsewhere at the site on a small pottery mask and a number of vessel ornaments. The N9-56 mask, which is one of four flanking the central stair,

sions of textiles, matting and cordage, a rotted wooden figure with jade earplugs, and numerous other things including 95 pieces of jade, mostly small beads and pendants. It is the construction of the tomb which is the greatest curiosity, though, and perhaps at some other time I shall have space to describe this unique effort, which involved creating a sort of cocoon of plaster-impregnated cloth on a wooden framework above the body and its associated artifacts. One thing is certain, though; the occupant of the crypt rested far more comfortably there than did his excavator.

By next April, when I am writing the first report on the 1979 season, I should have a great deal more to recount of the results of tunnelling in N9-56, as well as work elsewhere in structures large and small. For the moment, though, I must be content to sit in my unheated office and urge these chill days to fly by as quickly as possible, so that I can head southward once again.

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It is not the wonders that are of greatest interest in N9-56. In the May Newsletter, I mentioned rather casually that