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THE BAS-RELIEFS FROM THE TEMPLE OF WARRIORS

By JEAN CHARLOT

Staff Artist, Chichen Itzá Project, Carnegie Institution of Washington

Such expressions of the art of the Maya as have survived are to be found chiefly in the more durable forms of architecture and of stone sculpture. Of wood carving, stucco modeling and painting, only a few fragments have been recovered, for in these arts more delicate and more easily disfigured materials were employed.

Originally the stone framework of the temples built by the Maya was covered with a wealth of decorative sculpture and stucco, delicately polished and treated with vivid and varied colors. The roof of the Temple of the Warriors, for example, was supported by columns of stone, each of which was made up of from eight to eleven blocks bedded, one upon the other, in lime mortar. All were sculptured on all four sides, the ornamentation being the same in its major aspects. Each base is graven to represent a composite, shieldlike device; each shaft portrays a warrior or priest, richly garbed and adorned; and upon each capital is an inverted arc from the nether side of which issues a human form in diving posture. In addition to being sculptured the columns were brilliantly painted.

THE bas-reliefs examined and illustrated in this study total 337 panels, each comprising a life-size human representation and two decorative *motifs*. Our first concern was the obtaining of a correct and complete reproduction of the originals.

It was therefore decided to draw to scale the material considered, and the first problem that presented itself was the projection on a flat surface of the four-sided, somewhat irregular, square columns.

A process similar to that used for reproducing pottery decoration was adopted, which has the advantage of giving simultaneously the four sides of each column, while still preserving their unity. One angle of each column was established as an axis of development and the four faces were spread out flat. Such a procedure presupposes geometrically straight and true vertical lines, and involved a theoretical correction of the somewhat ragged sloping edges of the blocks, thus distorting slightly the width of the band that frames each panel.

The best-preserved specimens are reproduced in full color with all the details of their actual appearance. A simpler schematic method was adopted for the other panels, by which the various accidental defects caused by decay are eliminated.

Nearly all the bas-reliefs to be described in connection with each architectural unit appear on the faces of columns. The same technique was probably followed in all of them, from their quarrying to the last coat of paint.

The columns were made of relatively soft limestone, as were the other architectural elements of the building, and consist of rectangular blocks varying greatly in height. Only four of the six faces of each block were carved. The other two were left unpolished, since the rough surface helped to catch the mortar with which the parts of a column were joined. The surfaces to be sculptured were smoothed, but were not polished. Probably because of the great number of stones required, blocks with serious defects and holes or depressions were not rejected, as it was

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apparently assumed that the stuccoing and painting to be applied later would obliterate these faults.

The blocks were probably sent from the quarry already trimmed, to avoid useless weight, and in groups, each of which constituted a single column. Irregularities in shaping the blocks and

before the stones had been thus sealed together, because of the delicate continuity that must exist between two segments of one line in passing from one block to the next. Various indications demonstrate that the sculptor did not begin his work until the room or gallery had been roofed and the columns



PLUMED SERPENT SHIELD AND SOUTH PANEL OF MASK, NORTH ANTA, TEMPLE OF THE WARRIORS.

the imperfect measurement of the squared stones, as they lay horizontally in the quarry, are sufficient to account for the slight differences that occur between the heights of the columns in place. Some correction of initial errors was possible by varying the spaces between blocks when these were filled with mortar.

The carving proper could not begin

were actually functioning as supports for the finished arches. It would seem logical that the artist could not work freely upon his composition *in situ*, before the roughest work was concluded and the masons' scaffolds had disappeared. The junctions between blocks, which broke the continuity of the surface and thus interfered with the preliminary sketch, were smoothed over



WATER COLOR BY ANN AXTELL MORRIS

LITH. A. HOEN & CO., INC.

A SCULPTURED AND PAINTED COLUMN FROM THE TEMPLE OF THE CHAC MOOL.

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with stucco before the artist set to work; while the delicate work of relating two segments of carving in stone by stucco modeling naturally would be done only after the carving was completed.

The artist began his work by dividing the column into three components—base, shaft and capital—and on each a general massing of the elements to be included in the picture was sketched with hard charcoal. Then followed delineation of details with more accurate depiction in view.

When one considers the enormous number and variety of ornaments portrayed in minute detail, and their fusion in human representations, nearly all with a strong individual stamp, some even with a name and obviously portraits, it seems impossible to suppose that the artist worked only from memory. Rather it is highly probable that work on the stone itself was preceded by preparatory sketching from living models on a more perishable material and on a smaller scale. The artist, working from such sketches, could amplify and modify as the permanent version might require.

After the subject was drawn on the stone, the carving followed. This was a process of cutting away the background from the outline, so as to silhouette the figure upon it in relief. Then the details were cut inside this silhouette. The most important lines were made by double diagonal incisions which met in the middle, like a furrow, the sloping edges thus formed giving to the plane a suggestion of spheric modeling. Minor lines were made by one vertical stroke, while the lightest were simply scratched on the surface.

Though the stone is soft, it would appear from the constant hesitations

in line and the irregularities of the surface, that a tool of but slightly harder material was used, probably a roughly chisel-shaped stone. A point was used to deepen the furrow and to trace small lines. Holes were prepared for incrustations, the hollow remaining unpolished in order to insure adherence. In the parts of the Temple of the Warriors where the light was bad, and especially in corners distant from the altar, the sculpture consisted of hardly more than a few scratches, partly on stone and partly on stucco, barely an indication for the painter to work upon.

On columns that stood in a particularly good light or in a prominent place, the carving was finished off by polishing, so as to prepare a finer ground for color. Attempts to round the surfaces more thoroughly are rare and occur mainly in portrayals of small objects. The incrustations were probably inlaid after carving and before painting. All of them were intended as eyes. The best incrustations are of white shell with a circular hole in the middle, which was filled with a kind of tar to serve as the pupil of the eye. It seems that in some cases a cheaper material, probably white lime, was substituted for the shell.

When the carving and inlay were entirely completed, the painter began his work. A fixed scheme was followed. The background was painted dark red, the frame blue, and the objects portrayed as near their natural colors as the limitations of the Maya palette permitted. The painter did not, however, adhere slavishly to the line made by the sculptor. It is interesting to note that he followed it freely, and often ignored it entirely. In some cases, he changed the proportions of the objects in the painted version, apparently for no other than an aesthetic



SCULPTURED COLUMNS IN THE TEMPLE OF THE WARRIORS. COLUMNS OF LIMESTONE, SCULPTURED IN LOW RELIEF ON ALL FOUR SIDES, SUPPORTED THE ROOF.

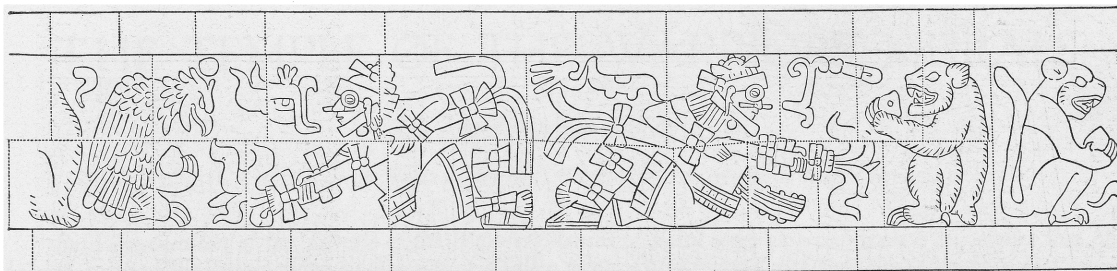
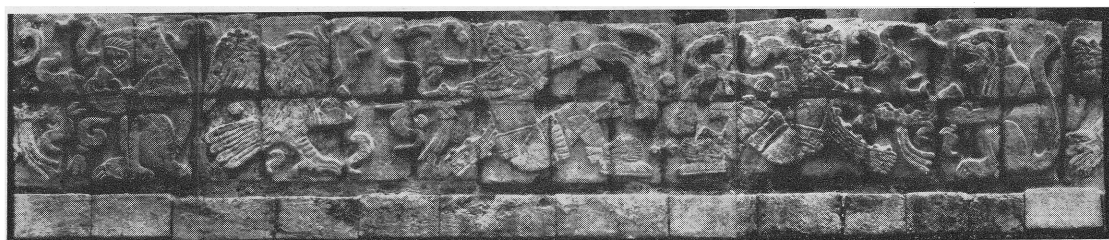


FIG. 25—PORTION OF FIRST SCULPTURED BAND, SOUTH SIDE OF PYRAMID, SHOWING BLOCK PATTERN



PORTION OF SECOND SCULPTURED BAND, SOUTH SIDE OF PYRAMID.

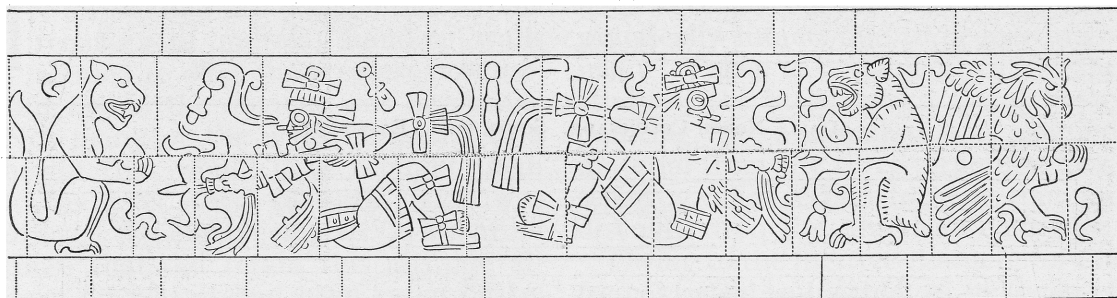
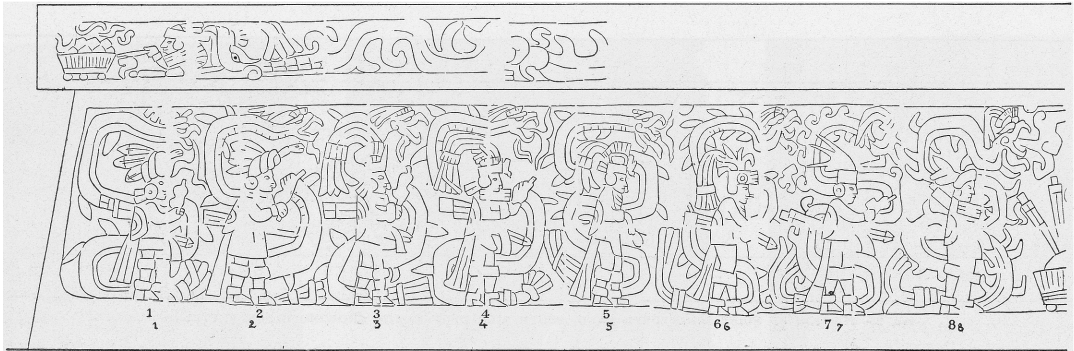


FIG. 26—PORTION OF SECOND SCULPTURED BAND, SOUTH SIDE OF PYRAMID, SHOWING BLOCK PATTERN

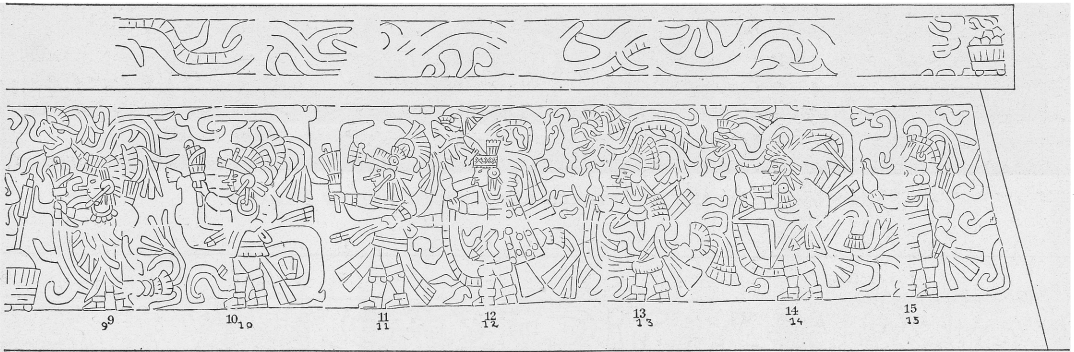
purpose; in others, he added objects or completed parts forgotten by the sculptor. These variations between carving and painting on the same surface are sometimes so marked as to point to a conflict, and would indicate that painter and sculptor were two separate individuals.

The entire work of painting, laborious as it seems, was re-attempted from time to time, though not so often as the exterior decoration of the temple. While in the Chac Mool Temple there is only one coat of paint, thus bearing testimony to the short use of the struc-

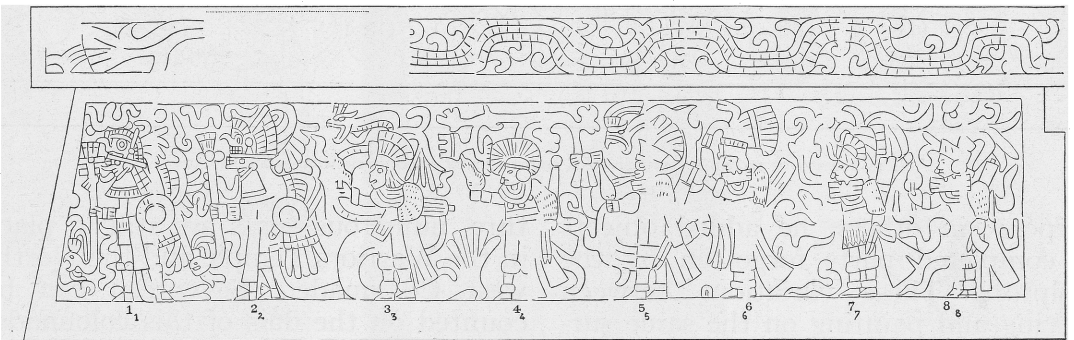
ture, numerous coats are still in place in the Warriors Temple and the Northwest Colonnade. Seventeen can be counted on the dais of this colonnade. Some incrustations were buried under this process of successive repaintings (dais, North Colonnade) and preserved until revealed by the disappearance of some of the coats of paint after exposure. Painted eyes were found in one such instance, concealing the original incrustated shell eyes, thus demonstrating that the existence of the latter had been forgotten by the time the last coats of paint were applied.



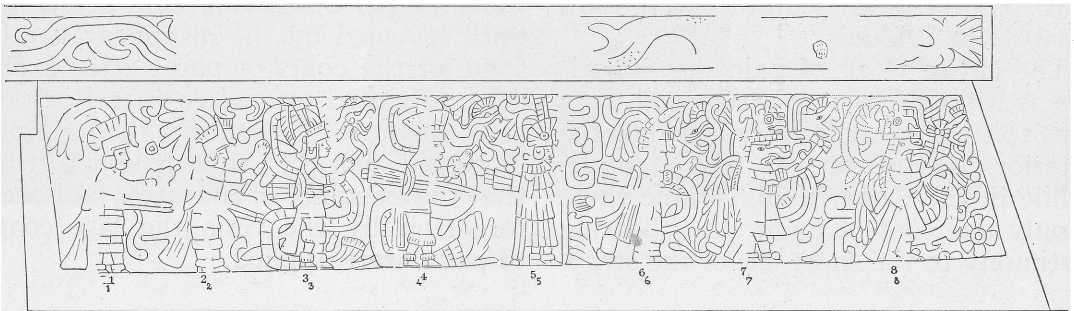
DAIS. NORTH COLONNADE. SOUTH SIDE. WEST PART.



DAIS. NORTH COLONNADE. SOUTH SIDE. EAST PART.



DAIS. NORTH COLONNADE. EAST SIDE.



DAIS. NORTH COLONNADE. WEST SIDE.