

ARCHÆOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN YUCATAN.

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As I look over the result of archæological work, this fact forces itself upon me: how hard it is for an investigator, with a pet theory, to avoid moulding the facts to suit his theory rather than to shape his theory to suit the facts. In my researches among these ruins, I shall try to make the discovery of the truth my only object, and if in this pursuit I am led into false premises, into ideas conflicting with facts, I shall most certainly endeavor to put such ideas aside.

In this paper I purpose to confine myself to observations upon the ruins in general, leaving descriptions of special objects of archæological interest for the future.

No one, however skeptical, can look upon these monuments of a lost race without amazement, not at their artistic character, although this is of no mean order, but because of their massiveness, and, as they tower above the forest, the grandeur of their appearance. These edifices are not generally constructed of large stones, like the ruins of the ancient East, but of a composition of lime and small fragments of rock called by the Mayas "sac-cab." Upon this composite backing, cubes of stone are then laid, thus giving the buildings the appearance of solid stone structures, when in reality they are in many cases simply stone-plated as it were. Upon the unornamented portions of these structures the stones are simply plain, smooth cubes. Plain walls, however, are rare. The edifices are all more or less adorned, and many of them are literally encrusted with ornaments, statues and strange symbols. I regard

the Temple of the Serpent at Uxmal as the best example of this that I have yet seen, while the House of the Governor is unquestionably the grandest edifice. This is fortunate, because Uxmal, of all the ruins still in a measure preserved, is the easiest of access.

When first viewing the terraced mounds upon which these ruined edifices were built, it seems almost incredible that man could in this climate have piled up such accumulations of material. From the narrow platform crowning the terraced mound upon which stands the House of the Diviner, I could over-look nearly a league of forest tree-tops; and away to the left the huge almost mountain-like pile supporting the House of the Governor rose above it, only to be in turn eclipsed by the Great Mound at Izamal. These mounds are generally spoken of as having been constructed of earth and rock. I believe them to have been constructed in most cases entirely of rock, some portions being faced with stucco, while the earth has naturally accumulated as *detritus* after their abandonment. My excavations among the mounds at Nolo and Quichen bear me out in this belief.

The duty of certain sacerdotal officials here, as well as in Mexico, at the time of the conquest, was to keep the sanctuaries and their approaches swept clean and free from unseemly things. May we not then believe, that in these ruined cities, this, a sacred duty, ended only with the abandonment of the city itself? Perhaps not always even then was the *detritus* allowed to accumulate. I have been told by the natives of the interior, of a certain ruined temple, whose floors of lime are still kept as clean and white as snow, by the natives of Tulum the aboriginal city.

I find it hard to concede to these ruins the great age assigned them by certain archæologists. Neither can I ascribe to them the modern origin as given by M. Charnay. I believe the truth to lie in a mean between the two views.

The ruined condition of a building or of a collection of

buildings, affords very uncertain evidences of age, either in cold or in tropical climates. In the one frost, and in the other rapid vegetable growth are potent factors of ruin. A perfectly constructed edifice of stone can long withstand these destructive agencies, but an inherent architectural defect, though apparently slight, will cause the ruin of a building, that would otherwise have lasted until time itself was wearied with the record. A builder when working with cubes or plates, whether of stone, brick or wood, should always see that the joints are broken or well protected. To neglect this gives weakness to a structure hard to over-estimate, and yet I find this defect common in Yucatan ruins. But for this, I believe that many a once magnificent structure, now an utter ruin, would still be left a grand object for study. It may perhaps be thought that I am giving undue prominence to this fault of construction; that, inasmuch as the whole edifice is built of solid masonry with only a comparatively thin plating of stone, the loss of a few plates, more or less, can have but little effect upon the permanency of the structure itself. This is not so. Were the joints of the stone cubes or plates well broken or protected, the growing rootlets or softening lime could displace a cube or two without more than local damage; but let a growing root or trickling stream of water find an open running joint, and a serious menace is at once developed, that sooner or later will inevitably cause the destruction of the whole façade, and it is in these façades, encrusted with statues, symbols and hieroglyphics, that the chief archæological value of the edifices consists. Intact and in their places, these stones may solve important problems. Displaced they become simply objects of curiosity, and of no more archæological value than the scattered ashes of Diego de Landa's manuscripts.

A large portion of the eastern front of the Governor's House, so called, at Uxmal is a fallen, shapeless mass, and that the ruin began with a defect of this kind can be plainly seen. At Zayi and Oebatche are similar cases of destruc-

tion, proceeding from similar causes. At Labna, the Portal, a most artistic structure, and one that would not suffer by comparison with the architectural works of any age or land, would, I believe, have been much more perfect to-day, but for the ruin that crept in through a defect of this nature. In many regions the *débris* that has accumulated in the progress of time serves as a base for calculations, more or less correct as to age or date of abandonment, but in the ruins of Yucatan that I have visited this factor does not exist. Instead of being almost overwhelmed and hidden beneath an earth deposit, I find rarely more than a scant six inches encumbering the floors of chamber and corridor, and in many cases they are entirely clear and exposed to view. Had this been the case at Uxmal only, it might, in part at least, be explained by the fact that when the Empress Carlotta visited Yucatan, Uxmal enjoyed the benefit of a general cleaning and clearing in anticipation of the visit that she soon after made. Not only was this accumulation noticeably absent at Uxmal, but also at Kabah, Labna, Oebatche and even at Zayi, whose ruins are rarely visited even by the natives themselves. As the ruined edifices are built upon mounds of greater or less altitude, *débris* could only accumulate from two sources: brought up from below by living agencies, bird, beast or reptile, or by the natural agencies of the elements, decay and the erosion of time upon the material of which the building itself is constructed. The tendency of matter is to seek a lower level, and the high winds sweeping through chamber and corridor would expel a great portion of the *débris*, force it down the pyramid and lodge it in the angles and at the terraced base, which theory is corroborated by the evidence. The *débris* that is found in the chambers of the ruins consists of substances conveyed there by living agencies, nut shells, well-gnawed bones and bat's *excreta*, combined with the fragments of the almost stonelike lime composite that once gave the chamber walls a hard, smooth finish. The elevations upon which they are built, their shapely terraces, now

destroyed by the fallen ruins, have often become shapeless mounds.

I believe that few, if any, of the structures now standing have been habitations of man, as constant abodes. The massive buildings, built upon still more massive mounds can only be those "buildings built upon high places," spoken of by the chronicler; not merely temples, but halls of justice and public business. In them were probably held councils and conferences on important affairs, while from the narrow stone platform in front, to the concourse of people below, were proclaimed the edicts of law and religion, of peace and war. Below were clustered the dwellings of the multitudes that made these edifices a necessity.

Concerning the houses of the people, of which I have found traces for leagues around Labna, I hope to know more later.

I believe that much useful knowledge can be gleaned from the sites of what were once the ancient Maya homes. In the search among the grander ruins, this fact has been overlooked; and yet some of the almost obliterated sites may yield more facts, and a clearer insight into Maya history and home life, than the massive piles that tower above them.

I am aware that a large number, and perhaps a majority, of archaeologists hold to the belief that the edifices, not devoted to religious purposes as temples, were simply communal dwellings, and within them dwelt all the people that composed the so called city. Those who hold to that belief will, I doubt not, strongly criticise my view. Nevertheless I thoroughly believe that I am correct in this opinion—that the dwellings of the people covered a large space of territory, but in most cases being built of perishable material they have disappeared. Eminent archaeologists have asserted that there were no such dwellings, because no traces of them exist in the explored ruins. I believe this to be an error. The whole region around Labna is dotted

with low mounds and small rectangular terraces. Some of these are but slightly raised above the surrounding level while others are of a greater altitude, though compared with the mounds that support the ruined edifices they are very low. Now if these do not mark the sites of what were once dwellings, to what purpose can we conceive that they were put? Those who are familiar with the habits engendered by a life in the tropics will be ready to affirm that they were not built simply for the pleasure of working. Their numbers, if not their situations, preclude any idea of their having once been the sites of additional temples, even in a land where it is popularly supposed strong religious zeal existed. Reason would tell us that each of these almost innumerable small mounds and terraces, that encompass the region of Labna, and many other ruins, marks the site of what was once a dwelling-place,—a home. As I purpose to make this the subject of a special paper I shall not now enlarge upon it.

I hope before many months to be able to submit some interesting results of my researches at Labna, to be able to tell you whether the long line of worked stones, that I found buried in the forest mould indicates a once paved roadway, or whether it will prove Labna to have been a walled city. I hope to tell you more about the inscription that I have discovered, graven upon a stone symbol, of which I send you photographs, and also that success has crowned my search for the missing portion of a most interesting statue. I have chosen this city of Labna as my special field of study, not only because it is a rich field for archæological research, but also because it has thus far escaped the hands of modern vandals. Too near the haunts of the dreaded *sublevados* to suit the taste of curiosity seekers, it has escaped their visitations, while no hacienda exists in its neighborhood to covet the worked stones that it contains. It thus realizes my ideal object of archæological study—an undisturbed ruined city.

Many archæologists seek to prove that the civilization of

the ancient Mayas was born in the East. Others go to the opposite extreme and assert that the civilization of the East was but the offspring, and this the mother. I believe the civilization of the Mayas to have been a distinct and an original one; and while at some period it may have had contact with that of the East, this contact was too slight to impress itself decidedly upon it. That there must have been some points of coincidence between the two civilizations is most natural. Man is a creature of very finite ideas and actions. In all ages and in all lands, he has had and can have, only the straight and curved lines with which to delineate, and a certain number of articulate sounds with which to form his words or to express his ideas. Hence it would be almost marvellous, if in some manner there did not appear certain apparently striking points of similarity between the civilization of the ancient East and that of the West. At this moment there occurs to my mind nearly a dozen words in the language of the Mayas, that not only closely approximate in sound to certain words in the Anglo-Saxon tongue, but stranger still, have a meaning almost identical; and yet who will affirm that this indicates any connection, linguistic or otherwise, between the Maya and the Anglo-Saxon? The thought is of course absurd. That these ruins indicate a considerable civilization, I cannot doubt. That it was a civilization of the highest order, I can find no proof. It may be true in regard to Yucatan ruins that as one enthusiastic archæologist affirms, "hidden from sight of man to-day, to-morrow to be discovered, lie abundant proofs that this is the oldest, if not the highest, civilization the world ever held"; but the light of to-day does not show it. These ruins tell of a civilization, of a state far above the nomads of the West and above the communal Pueblos of the South-west, but not of that advanced state of progress that sends forth a far-reaching influence.

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