



BEFORE AND AFTER

At right is a Mayan priest, in full regalia, standing before a row of cowering prisoners. The carving came from the ruined Mayan city, Yaxchilan, in southern Mexico, and illustrates conventional Mayan art, elaborate, detailed and stereotyped. The picture on the left is taken from a battle scene painted on the wall of the Temple of the Warriors. A Mayan fighter is on the roof of a temple helping defend his village from attacks by raiders below. This is some of the simple and lively art which followed a waning of religious domination in the city of Chichen Itza.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Life Injected Into Ancient Mayan Art—Politics the Cause

Study of Reconstructed Temple Shows That Real Heroes Replaced Stereotyped Portraits After Mass Revolt

CENTURIES ago in the city of Chichen Itza, in Yucatan, Mayan Indians who were the hard working masses of the city's population escaped from under the thumb of their powerful rulers. Somehow, no one knows how it happened, the common people grew strong enough to pit their will against the priest-kings who ruled them. They pushed, and authority gave way, a little at least. For the first time in their history, perhaps, the masses had a taste of political and religious liberty, after centuries of living, working and worshipping exactly in accordance with their overlords' commands.

Evidence of such a dramatic turn in prehistoric American politics is found in the paintings that adorn the great Warriors' Temple in Chichen Itza, according to latest archaeological interpretation. Not a bit of the struggle is actually told in any of the pictures. But the story of the rise of the masses in prehistoric Chichen Itza has been read "between the brush strokes" of the ancient paintings by Earl H. Morris, archaeologist, of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

The Temple of the Warriors is almost "home" to Mr. Morris. For four winters, he and Mrs. Morris and other members

of the Carnegie Institution expedition staff worked at the ruins of Chichen Itza to restore the Warriors' Temple to some of its oldtime grandeur. At first, the temple was a rocky tree-covered hill from which carved stones protruded, but now it is a building so beautiful that some critics call it the most magnificent example of Mayan architecture known.

As a final task, before the Temple of the Warriors could be considered a finished archaeological project, Mr. Morris and his associates have prepared a full report of their work. This report in two monumental volumes has been published by the Carnegie Institution.

In it, Mr. Morris draws for the first time his conclusions as to why Mayan paintings and bas reliefs in this temple are so different from the sort of art that has come to be famous as the conventional Mayan art style.

Little Chance to be Original

Conservative, old-fashioned Mayan art was as religious as European art of the Middle Ages. It depicted formal priests offering sacrifices at altars, Mayan deities in highly impersonal, artistic attitudes, and religious symbols conventionalized beyond recognition. It was very beautiful art, because of the skill of the stone carvers and stucco workers, who wrought the religious pictures in the form of bas reliefs against temple walls. It conformed so closely to the style established among the Mayas as good and correct, that an artist had little chance to try anything original.

But here in the Warriors' Temple are painted murals which show, not the orthodox priests posed by altars, but everyday Mayan people rowing canoes, carrying burdens, cooking, fighting off enemies in a raid. The people in these pictures are "doing," rather than merely "being." This is the distinction drawn between the new art and the old.

In the portraits of warriors which adorn the pillars of the temple, Mr. Morris sees real Mayan heroes, with personalities and individual character traits, in place of the old style stock portraits of gods and heroes with stereotyped Mayan features.

Science News Letter, September 19, 1931

SPENCER SCIENTIFIC AND EXPERIMENTAL WORKS
4503 Wolf Street, Denver, Colorado
Optical Engineering and Designing
Repairing and Special Work
Assistance in Experimental Work
Instruction in Technical and Scientific Subjects
Astronomical telescopes, reflectors, prisms, gratings, lenses, standard flats, gauges, optical instruments, supplies, patterns, castings, agate work, crystal specialties, testing, and used equipment.