

ARCHAEOLOGY

Home of America's Vestal Virgins

By EMILY DAVIS

AMERICA had its Vestal Virgins, a thousand years ago.

Like the Vestal Virgins of ancient Rome, the Virgins of ancient America served the temple of a deity. Their chief duty, as the name implies, was to tend the sacred fire, and woe to the maiden who let the fire die out while she was its guardian. Death by arrows was the penalty.

These American Vestals were Indian girls of the Mayan race. They wore cotton robes and sandals, and ornaments of jade and gold and turquoise, and doubtless, also, garlands of gay, exotic flowers, for their home was in the tropics, in the Yucatan peninsula.

The Indian Vestals were people of importance. In the cities of the Maya, built by patient workmen who learned to pile up great stone edifices and to carve and paint them most elaborately, the temples were the chief of all buildings. The entire Mayan government was a theocracy, in which the priests held positions of great power. All the astronomy and the learned writings at which the priests labored were inextricably mixed up with the affairs of the gods and the gods' will for the people. In such cities, naturally, the temples were the most conspicuous and most important centers of activity. The stone temples, beautifully carved and brightly painted, were set high on pedestals shaped like pyramids, so that the temple

Indian Virgins of the Maya city Uxmal lived in the Nunnery Quadrangle in the foreground of the panorama of the city reproduced at the top of the page. The temple served by the Indian maidens is at the left.

might appear remote and lofty and a fitting resting place for the gods. It was in such temples as this that the Indian Vestals held their important posts.

In one city of the Maya, the Indian temple maidens seem particularly real. That city is Uxmal, pronounced Oosh-mahl. At Uxmal stands a Nunnery where a large community of temple maidens lived. The stone cells where they slept and worked at their tasks and the court where they walked are still to be entered and examined by the traveler who goes adventuring to the ruins of Yucatan.

The old Nunnery consists of four long buildings set around a large courtyard. The buildings contain 88 cells and rooms.

Close by the quadrangle of the nuns rises a tall pyramid base, and on this stands the temple where the maidens performed their duties. The pyramid is now a confused mass of stones, weeds, and trees. But in its day it was an impressive monument with a stone staircase no less than 70 feet wide leading to the temple perched on the top. Up ninety steps to the sanctuary we can imagine the maidens climbing with dignity, bearing garlands, or sacrifices, carrying the container of the sacred fire,

or escorting a procession of the priests.

The temple of the maidens is called nowadays the House of the Magician or the House of the Dwarf, not for any historic reason, but because of a long native legend which associates the ruins with a dwarf, an old woman, and much magic. All of the well-known ruins of Uxmal have such picturesque names, bestowed by modern explorers and natives. Uxmal has among its ruins a Governor's Palace, a House of the Old Woman, a House of the Pigeons, and a House of the Turtle. Of all the ruins of the city, only one building is labeled with historic certainty. That one is the Nunnery.

Revealed in Old Manuscript

An old Spanish manuscript, written with the aid of some ancient documents long since vanished, tells of the Nunnery and the maidens who lived there, who were like the Vestal Virgins of Rome. This Spanish historian, Father Diego Cogolludo, writing in the wondering style that characterized so much of the early Spanish writing about America, said:

"In Uxmal there is a large patio with many rooms separated in the form of a cloister where these virgins lived. It is a work worthy of admiration, because the exterior of the walls is all of worked stones, where there are brought out figures of armed men in bas-relief, a diversity of animals, birds, and other things, and it has not been made out who were the artificers, nor how they were worked in this land. All of the

four fronts of the buildings of that patio are encircled by a snake worked in the same stone as the walls, the tail terminating under the head, and being in all its circuit four hundred feet."

Today, even in its ruined state, the Nunnery is so beautiful an example of prehistoric American architecture and of such romantic interest besides that it has been selected to represent the Mayan age at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933. Several acres of land have been set aside for this purpose. On this land, archaeologists and architects are to build a copy of the Nunnery Quadrangle, with as much of the atmosphere of a Mayan city of a thousand years ago as they can capture and reproduce.

As a first step toward this project, a Tulane University expedition, led by Frans Blom, well known archaeologist and specialist in Mayan affairs, has spent some time at Uxmal studying the ruins.

Cells that were occupied by Indian nuns when the city was a living thing have again been occupied, this time by members of a twentieth century scientific expedition. The stone-walled rooms were cool and comfortable.

The staff set to work measuring and photographing all the buildings of the Nunnery Quadrangle. Casts of the sculptures were taken, and seventy architectural drawings were made to provide detailed plans of the entire structure.

While the architect of the expedition, Prof. J. Herndon Thomson of Tulane University, was studying the Nunnery

and examining other ruins about the city, he made some surprising new discoveries. These discoveries show that the builders of Uxmal had mastered some of the most subtle tricks of the architectural trade, so to speak. Tricks of perspective, applied in Uxmal's buildings, are as clever as those practiced by the temple designers of ancient Greece.

The city which built so magnificent a Nunnery for its temple maidens was one of the leading cities of the Mayan Empire in Yucatan. It is today a city that is well known and that is probably very little known. This paradox is explained by the fact that many of Uxmal's ruins stand well above ground and are so beautiful that they have become famous, yet at the same time comparatively little excavating has been done to find out what may lie hidden beneath the ruins or beyond them.

Types of People in Stone

When Mr. Bloom explored a single large terraced mound in the center of the city, he found in it no less than nineteen highly important monoliths, great tablets of stone with carvings on them. On the stone monuments are cut human figures showing the types of people who lived in Uxmal centuries ago, and on some of the tablets, too, are bands of hieroglyphics recording dates in the Mayan method of stringing together a series of picture symbols.

A dramatic incident had happened on this monument hill at some unknown time, Mr. Blom's researches showed. In the center of the terrace on which the monuments once stood was a deep hole,



MODERN MAYAN GIRLS

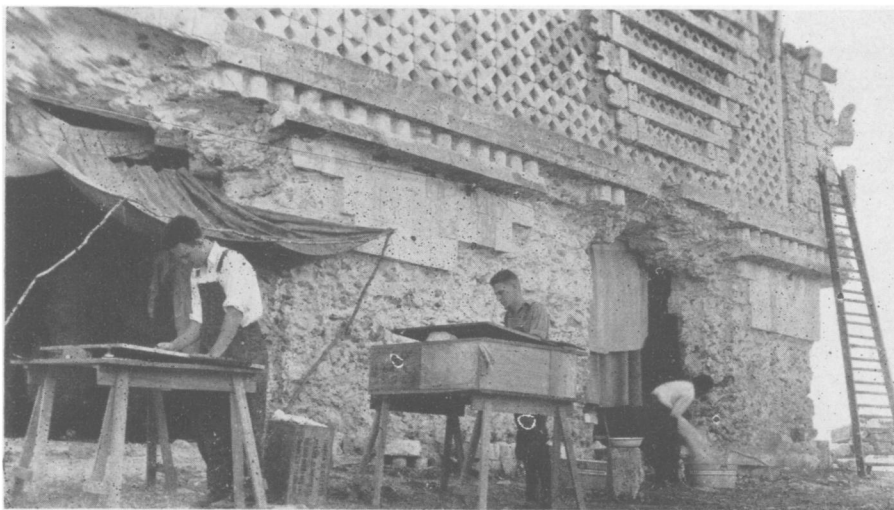
Of this type were the Vestals of prehistoric America.

like a shell hole. The monuments had been thrown out from this hole on all sides. From this it is inferred that a treasure hunter went hunting at this site with dynamite, at some time. If so, the vandal seeker of gold failed to realize that the carved stones all about him were a find of great interest, though not the financial haul he was seeking.

The monuments with their carved inscriptions prove that Uxmal was in existence in 500 A.D. Heretofore the city has been thought to date from the year 1007 A.D. Reading the new-found inscriptions, therefore, was like adding five centuries to the age of the city, all at one stroke.

Mr. Blom's explorations at Uxmal carried him off in some tours of scouting around the fringes of the known ruins. And there, too, he found the unexpected. Twenty-three groups of buildings not heretofore recognized were found off in the jungle growth away from the cleared section. All of which shows that Uxmal is not only an older city than anybody thought, but a much larger one.

By the time Father Cogolludo came to Uxmal and wrote his description of the Nunnery, the city was abandoned, though he was told a good deal about its grandeur and its history. The Spaniard climbed up the steep way to the



CHOSEN TO REPRESENT MAYAN AGE

Because of its beauty and romantic interest the Nunnery of the Virgins will be reproduced at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933 as representative of the Mayas. The photograph shows workers copying details of the original.

top of the temple by the Nunnery and found there some of the figures of the gods which the Indians had worshipped. Indians were still worshipping these idols, the priest feared, for he found offerings of copal incense and cacao which had been made there not long before his visit.

Even today, Uxmal is a place of religious reverence and fear to the modern natives of Yucatan. The ancient houses of Uxmal are invoked in a prayer of an Indian ceremony to the gods of the harvest. And at the Temple of the Magician and the Nunnery, rumor says, the carvings on the walls become animated at night and walk abroad. And that, like other paradoxes of Uxmal,

is said to be because Uxmal the religious was not religious enough. The old story goes that the god who reigned in the Temple of the Magician was long patient with his people when they neglected him. At length, however, his patience was outworn and he angrily turned the population of the city into stone, and waved them up to the walls to serve as decorations for the buildings. There they remain, except that at evening they are set free to wander about the ruins of their beautiful, lost city.

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This is done in various ways: by building up his physical health and strength so that he will have plenty of energy for meeting his standards; by correcting the standards themselves if they are impossible of achievement; by teaching him an improved technic for using what energy he has; by helping him to accomplishments in sports or work which he himself values; by encouraging him in personal cleanliness and neatness; and by giving him attractive surroundings and possessions in which he can take pride.

The attitude of others about him, nurses and attendants and relatives, should be sympathetic and respectful, Dr. Hoskins emphasized.

While many other factors enter into the cause and treatment of this deplorable condition, Dr. Hoskins' formulation of it is intended to give the general practitioner, nurses, attendants and relatives of the victim of dementia praecox a practical knowledge of the disease.

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PSYCHIATRY

New Self Respect Sought For Dementia Praecox Patients

A SIMPLIFIED method of handling patients suffering from the type of insanity known as dementia praecox has been reported to the American Medical Association by Dr. R. G. Hoskins of the Worcester State Hospital, Worcester, Mass. Dr. Hoskins has formulated the disease so that persons untrained in psychiatry can get a general understanding of what the disease is and how the patient should be treated.

About one-fifth of all the hospital beds in the United States are required for victims of this disorder. The economic loss in the United States alone is approximately a million dollars a day,

Dr. Hoskins estimated. The cost in human misery is incalculable.

Dementia praecox is a persistent dream state, Dr. Hoskins explained. It results from loss of self-respect due to failure to meet one's personal standards. It occurs in sensitive subjects as a defensive reaction. It is accompanied by a sense of isolation. Loss of self-respect makes existence intolerable in a world of reality and the sufferer escapes from it into the dream state as much as possible.

Methods to Follow

Treatment should be directed toward building up the patient's self-respect.

PHYSIOLOGY

Man Must Use Brains To Sleep Normally

NO BRAINS, no ordinary sleep. Dr. N. Kleitman of the University of Chicago came to this conclusion in experiments reported to the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology.

Use of the brain is necessary in order to sleep in one long stretch each 24 hours as human beings and most animals do in the more mature parts of their lives. This was shown by Dr. Kleitman's experiments on dogs. New-born puppies, little babies, and adult dogs completely deprived of the cortex of the brain through an operation sleep the same way. They eat and have a period of almost incessant activity and then the sleep, not just once in each rising and setting of the sun but several times.

People and dogs, Dr. Kleitman has concluded, must actually use their thinking mechanism, the cerebral cortex, and learn to sleep in the manner that most of us consider quite automatic and unconscious. Puppy or baby sleep or periodic napping does not need brain work, but keeping awake all day and sleeping all night soundly without waking is an acquired habit, in Dr. Kleitman's opinion, depending upon the brain's cortex for its establishment and maintenance.

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