

MIDDLE CHICHÉN ITZÁ

CASA DE LAS MONJAS (THE NUNNERY)

CARACOL (ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVATORY)

CASA COLORADA (RED HOUSE)

RECEIVED
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Chapman Bond

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CASA DE LAS MONJAS

Several of the buildings in Middle Chichen Itza were built in the Old Empire style, notably the Casa de las Monjas, or the Nunnery. The name has come down to us from times immediately following the Spanish Conquest and probably has little meaning. It is a massive structure with a wide, deep, and high foundation base, and a wide, steep stairway. There are three stories to the Monjas containing ten rooms in all. Three central rooms in the second story were completely filled in to make a foundation for the small third story which was added at a later time. In fact throughout the entire structure there is evidence of successive alteration and addition.

Legend tells that young girls who volunteered to tend the religious temples, lived here during their term of service. One from their number was chosen each year as a votive offering, and was thrown into the Well of Sacrifice. Some archaeologists, ^{however} on the other hand, believe that this building was simply the residence of the ruling Itza. Little seems to be known about the Monjas- it stands for what it is - a building of massive proportions with interesting and elaborate decorations, particularly on rooms annexed to the eastern side of the main building. Here again we find the same lovely lattice decoration so beautifully used in the Temple of the Two Lintels.

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MOHNhahs

CASA DE LAS MONJAS FROM THE IGLESIA

Looking at the Monjas from this point of view, the three stories are clearly visible, though the remnant of the third is small indeed.

One must bear constantly in mind, in looking at all the magnificent sculpture which adorns the Maya temples, that it has not only been made by hand, but with the use of stone tools only, for the Maya had no knowledge of metals. Using hard pieces of limestone for tools, the ~~Maya~~ Maya fashioned many great works of art, executed with skill, with boldness of design, and often with great delicacy and subtlety.

THE EAST ANNEX

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the East Annex which adjoins the Monjas, is the fact that the entire surfaces of the building, unlike most Maya facades in Yucatan, are covered with elaborate sculpture with no lower zone of plane masonry. It seems as though the Maya sculptors were given free rein to decorate, and on this building more than any other at Chichen Itza hardly an unornamented surface remains. The excessive use of the curled nose masks is only partially relieved by bands of varied design which the Maya used as freely in stone as did European artists in their murals and other forms of decorative art. The variety of motifs used on moldings is extraordinary, and in this instance some of the apron-like courses of the moldings, so typical of Maya architecture, bear decorations rather than smooth surfaces.

Almost touching the East Annex is a small building called the Iglesia* (Church), just why no one seems to know, though it must be remembered that nearly all Maya buildings served religious purpose. The people lived in sapling huts with thatched roofs in the area surrounding the temples. Chichen Itza was the religious center of the Maya in Yucatan, as its great temples testify.

All of the buildings are made of cut limestone, worked with stone tools, and were bonded together with a lime mortar. The Maya never solved the secret of the true arch with its

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ReGLAYzeeah.

keystone, and ^{led} their roofs were constructed with the high, vaulted corbel arches of cantilever design where each successive stone protrudes beyond the one below it until the arch narrows to the point where a single stone covers the remaining gap.

A MAYA BOY at the home of his ancestors

ANTHROPOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Thompson, Fred

DOORWAY OF THE EAST ANNEX

ALL CONTENT

Thywell Bond

VISTA BETWEEN THE EAST ANNEX AND IGLESIA

CARACOL FROM THE IGLESIA

To the north of the Casa de las Monjas is a building of great interest - the Caracol, or the Observatory. The Caracol (snail) is doubtless so called for the spiral stairway within the circular edifice. It is built upon two great platforms with a low, broad stairway approaching from the west. There is only ^{a couple} one other circular building in the northern Yucatan area - ~~which is~~ at Mayapan, and as the Toltecs of México built many of similar design, it is believed that the Caracol was built shortly after the Mexican influence began at Chichén Itzá. At intervals along the balustrade of the upper platform, incense burners were placed, which were used in connection with seasonal ceremonies. The five member cornice which encircles the Caracol is the only one of its kind in the Maya area. Its construction is unusual for the bottom ~~tenon~~, nearly five feet long, extends through the wall, the butt of the ~~tenon~~ becoming part of the facing of the inner circular wall.

The most remarkable feature of the Caracol is the narrow slit-like windows in the top looking to the east ^{from direction} and west for these were used as observatories. The sun is split in half on the days of the summer and winter solstices when one sights from an inner edge to an opposite outer edge of one ~~of~~ the orifices at sunrise and sunset.

The Maya had observed not only the revolutions of the sun and the moon, but also those of Venus and possibly other planets

as well. They foretold eclipses of the sun and moon with precision, many of ^{which} them checking accurately with our calculations of today. It must be remembered that this was many centuries before the perfection of our-own astronomical knowledge achieved through the use of fine instruments.

One of the most interesting books of all those available to us today was written by Bishop Diego de Landa in 1564. In 1941 The Peabody Museum of Boston published a fully annotated translation by Dr. Alfred M. Tozzer. In this book 'Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan' Bishop Landa states that the Maya knew that the astronomical year consisted of 365 days and 6 hours. As Bishop Landa returned to Spain less than twenty years before the formal correction of the Julian Calendar by Pope Gregory the XIII (when leap year was added,) is it not possible that Bishop Landa took this knowledge back to Europe and that the correct time count came from the New World?

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THE CARACOL THROUGH A CORBEL ARCH

THE CARACOL THROUGH A CORBEL ARCH

Chipmunk Island

THE CARACOL SHOWING INCENSE BURNERS (1932)

THE CARACOL SHOWING INCENSE BURNERS (1932)

Gypswell Ford

THE TEMPLE OF KUKULCÁN FROM THE CARACOL



THE CARACOL FROM THE CASA COLORADA (1932)

1932 NOV 9 3 55

Gysemell Boat

THE CASA COLORADA

Near the Caracol is the Casa Colorada (Red House) which may possibly have been the house of the High Priests. Flush with the face of the building is a flying façade of elaborate design rising above the beveled cornice. In the center is a roof comb, its elevation being about twice that of the façade in order that it may be seen above the other. These decorative additions to the roof greatly increase the beauty of the proportions of the building. As its name indicates, it once was painted red, though now the color has nearly all worn away.