

## BALAKBAL

LATITUDE 17° 52.7' N.

LONGITUDE 89° 35.2' W.

*Range of Dates: 8.18.10.0.0—*

While camped at the aguada of Marihuana, the expedition decided to visit some ruins reported east of Villahermosa and on March 25, 1934, moved to the aguada of Jerusalem. This should not be confused with the site of Jerusalem 118 km. north (lat. 18° 58' N., long. 89° 22' W. estimated) listed by Ricketson and Blom.

The ruins of Balakbal may be reached by trail, two and a half hours' travel from Villahermosa. It must be understood, however, that if trails are not used for a number of years they are soon overgrown and the distance covered per hour is consequently lessened. The Villahermosa-Alta Mira trail is more or less well defined; about an hour's journey from Villahermosa the trail forks, the branch to the right leading to the aguada of Jerusalem. This route is perhaps the more feasible as Villahermosa, although abandoned in 1934, is well known because of its long occupation and because of the altercation that occurred there in 1930 between Guatemaltecos and Mexicans. The ruins may also be reached via Alta Mira but this route is less known and the trail from Central Buenfil less apt to be open. Inquiries at Rio Desempeño will give the necessary information as to the areas being worked by the chicleiros and which trails are most likely to be in use.

The name Balakbal, a Maya word meaning "that which was hidden," was given to the site because of the 8th-cycle stela which was almost completely covered

with debris when discovered (March 26, 1934) but was subsequently exposed.

The country between Alta Mira and Balakbal is crossed by high ridges which gradually diminish towards Villahermosa. Around Balakbal are low hills with large ranges to the east and south. The aguada of Jerusalem is of fair size, covered with lechuga, and should furnish a sufficient supply of water, provided there has been a good rainfall during the previous season. The ruins, about 25 minutes' walk west by south of the aguada, have the principal structures confined in an area roughly 300 m. square. A heavy growth of ramon covers the site.

Balakbal (pl. 69) was carefully laid out and thus shows closer relationship to sites in the south than to those in the north. The first group (East Terrace) encountered as the city is approached from the northeast is composed of six structures arranged on a large terrace measuring approximately 150 by 175 m. The West Plaza is outlined on three sides by remains of buildings. An imposing high platform, supporting two large mounds and numerous small ones enclosing courts, lies directly south of the first group or East Terrace. This type of structure is often referred to as an "acropolis" and is associated with the Peten area rather than with the region to the north, but it has been noted at Nohoch Mul by Pollock and at Yaxuna by Morley. To the southwest and to the east of these main groups are small mounds.

## WEST PLAZA

The West Plaza is defined on the west by Structures I and II, on the north by Structures III and IV, on the east by the edge of the great East Terrace, and on the south by Structure XI, a ball court.

STRUCTURE I is a mound not over 2.70 m. high. The building (pl. 69), presumably consisting of a single series of three longitudinal rooms, is suggested only by the contour of the debris. The shape of the mound did not indicate a platform in front of the building, differing in this respect from Structures III and IV.

STRUCTURE II is a single series of longitudinal rooms.

Room 1, 4 m. long, shows the medial wall with a section of the vault and portions of both ends of the chamber. Only the upper portion of a doorway in the medial wall is exposed. It is vaulted with the final stones touching at the apex (pl. 25a). The spring line of the west vault soffit is 22 cm. above the apex of the doorway, or 2.40 m. above the floor of the room. Five courses of vault stones are in position, rising 85 cm. at an angle of 70°. They are crudely chipped and vary considerably in shape, but all have been beveled by working the lower

portion of the exposed face. Many small chips were used for filling between the stones (pl. 25a).

Room 2 (west of Room 1) has the same length as Room 1, but since the exterior walls of both have fallen, their widths are not known. These rooms apparently formed the first unit in the construction of the building as the exterior end walls are faced and other units are built against them. The north end wall of the first unit is 63 cm. thick. A podium supporting this building has a plain vertical zone finished with an overhanging band. The top of the latter marks the level of the floors of the rooms. The exterior wall of the building, as standing on the north, rises vertically to a height of 2.10 m., where a 15-cm. band overhangs 5 cm. Above the band only a single stone seems in position; it is set without a batter. The spring line of the vault is 15 cm. above the level of the top of the molding.

Room 3 lies north of Room 2. The exterior face (fig. 80) of its west wall is similar to the wall it abuts (the exterior north wall of Rooms 1 and 2) except that the upper molding of the former has a slight batter. This room was likewise built as a separate unit, for it has a faced wall on the north, 4.80 m. from Unit 1. A third unit, 6.20 m. long, has been built north of the second. Beyond this there was originally a 4.55-m. space followed by Unit 4, 4.65 m. long, but at some time a wall was raised between it and Unit 4, in line with the west side of the buildings. The construction south of the initial unit (Rooms 1 and 2) is less clearly defined, but is suggested on the plan.

STRUCTURE III. No walls of Structure III are visible, but the plan suggested by the contour of the debris is a single chamber set back 4 m. from the south edge of the low platform on which it rests.

STRUCTURE IV lies 23 m. to the east. The western half of the platform (south of the building) is 8 m. wide, the eastern half, 4.50 m. wide. The plan of the structure can not be determined; there may have been two longitudinal chambers or two separate buildings.

STRUCTURE VI is the largest and highest (28.50 m.) pyramid at the site. There seem to be definite indications of stairways on the east and west, each probably 11 m. wide. Although stairways may have existed on the north and south sides, the steep acclivity and nature of the debris argue against this hypothesis. The structure, rising in a number of terraces, was faced with extremely large, roughly worked stones set in mortar. The west elevation suggests four terraces, although there may be a fifth, at the base, now covered with debris.

A rather large section of the facing of the back (north) wall as well as a section of the front wall is *in situ*. The back wall (1.10 m. thick) rises from a podium (pl. 26a). A single stone 36 cm. high, set inward 2 cm. from the edge of a molding and rising with a batter of 80°, is all that remains of the upper part of the façade. This may indicate an upper zone rising at an angle but it can not certainly be so interpreted. A section and elevation of the wall, showing the size and shape of stones used, is given in figure 81. The masonry is generally laid in courses and for the most part the stones are squared on the face; those of the south wall are less veneer-like, having longer tenons than on the north. The latter wall still retains traces of a single layer of plaster.

STRUCTURE XI, a ball court, is on the south side of the plaza (pls. 69, 25b). The two parallel ranges, each 29 m. long, have their long axes east and west; the playing alley is 12 m. wide. The facing of the bench, rising vertically in four courses to a height of 1 m., is made up of large, rectangular blocks, averaging 18 by 47 cm. The stones of the final course have tenons 43 cm. long. The top of the bench, 6 m. wide, rises at an angle of 9.5°.

The back wall had a height of approximately 2 m. and rose vertically as indicated by the base stones still in position. There may possibly be a stairway on the north side of the north range, but, as the two ranges are now little more than mounds, final data must await excavation. A mound, 50 cm. in height, 6 m. in diameter, and probably associated with the ball court, has its medial axis in line with that of the playing area and is 7 m. beyond the west end of the parallel ranges. The west face of the terrace supporting Structures V, VI, VIII, IX, X, and XII is 15 m. beyond the east end of the parallel ranges of Structure XI and may have served as the low wall often noted defining the area at the end of a ball court. No stone rings, disks, or end-markers were found, although future excavations may reveal one or more of these elements.

### EAST TERRACE

One zone at the southeast corner, of which only a part is exposed, rises 1.48 m. at an angle of 83.5°. It is made of large stones averaging 29 cm. in vertical height and varying from 43 cm. to 1.35 m. in length. Above this a vertical section overhangs 24 cm. and rises 1.78 m. (pl. 25c); it is of five courses of stones, with the exposed faces of the basal corner one measuring 99 by 93 by 31 cm. (fig. 82). This vertical section extends from its southeast corner 5.30 m. along the east side of the pyramid, at which point an eastward projection is indi-

cated. Here the zone corresponding to the battered section of the corner rises vertically (fig. 82). The upper overhangs the lower by 13 cm. and begins 14 cm. below that of the corner section; it seems to be a separate unit of construction and not a continuation of the corner, which surmise is strengthened by the fact that the masonry is of smaller stones. As the eastward projection has now fallen, its length could not be determined, but it may have been 3.40 m. because at this distance east and 4.50 m. north is the beginning of a masonry block abutting the side of the stairway. The east face of the masonry block is 4 m. long, with a large stone at the southeast corner (pl. 25*d*) 1.60 m. long, 45 cm. high, and 35 cm. deep. Portions of other large blocks of masonry were noted on either side of each stairway. The platform on top of the pyramid measures about 13 by 20 m. and supports a mound rising in two knolls.

STRUCTURE V is at the west base of Structure VI. This unit is not clearly understood. It consists of a narrow passage with a doorway in its east wall and two small chambers, one at either end of the passageway, the north containing Stela 2 and the south, Stela 3. No exterior walls rise above the debris. The mound now appears to be a part of Structure VI, but this condition, of course, may be due to material fallen from the pyramid, and filling an original passage between the two structures. It is possible that the stelae were erected at the base of the pyramid, and at some later date, in order to protect them from further weathering, Structure V was built over them. Added proof of the secondary construction of the building lies in the fact that the stelae are sculptured on four sides and now two sides of each stela are within a few centimeters of the wall so that their glyphs were rendered invisible. The structure consists of a long, narrow passage with the small chambers at either end (fig. 83). The vault of the passage rises 57 cm. from the spring line to the capstones. The component stones are crudely worked slabs, some 54 cm. long; the capstones have a span of 19 cm. The passageway was so filled with debris that for its examination it was necessary to crawl through on hands and knees. Only the upper portion of the doorway in the east wall was exposed, but it was seen to be vaulted; two of the slab-like vault stones visible above the detritus support a capstone having a span of 35 cm. It was impossible to pass through this opening. The west wall of both small rooms is a prolongation of the wall of the passage. The vaults of the rooms spring from the same level as that of the passage but rise 50 cm. higher (pl. 26*c, d*). The floor is about 2 m. below the spring line.

STRUCTURE VII, now only a mound, supported a building, although no walls are now visible.

STRUCTURE VIII, defining the eastern side of the plaza, has as its primary construction a platform 120 m. long. Associated with it and rising as a projection on the west side in line with the east-west axis is a pyramidal mound 11.50 m. high (pl. 69, VIII*d*). Stela 1 stands at the northwest corner and a large, round altar lies 17 m. due east of the mound in line with its transverse axis. At the west base of the primary platform and on both the north and south sides of the pyramidal mound is a bench 35 m. long, 1 m. high, and 8 m. wide.

A second and larger pyramidal mound lying directly behind the first forms an eastern projection to the complex (VIII*b*). The west slope of the pyramid rises from the top of the long platform. Resting on it is the principal building (pl. 69, VIII*b*), which is now covered with debris except for a small section of the back wall. North and south of this building and rising from the top of the primary platform are single independent mounds (pl. 69, VIII*a* and *c*). They supported buildings, since the one to the south (*c*) shows walls rising above the debris but not sufficient to give details of architecture. At either end of the long mound are raised areas, perhaps fallen constructions. Structure VIII, essentially a long platform located on the east side of a plaza and supporting buildings, is suggestive of the east range of Group E at Uaxactun (Ricketson, 1928, p. 223).

STRUCTURE IX and Structure X are on the south side of the plaza. Neither shows any exposed wall surfaces.

STRUCTURE X is a platform 3 m. high supporting portions of a building. The facing of the platform is fallen or covered with debris. The terrace in front (east) is about 5 m. wide; the building itself had a length and width of approximately 13 m. and 3.60 m. respectively. In plan it seems to have been one chamber, 1.95 m. wide, with two doorways to the east, or two longitudinal chambers each with a doorway. The east wall is 85 cm. thick. The masonry of the east façade is of carefully dressed blocks with some spalls; where exposed they are now much weathered. The interior facing of the front wall is very rough, but that of the rear (west) wall is more like the east exterior. There is a terrace, 3 m. wide, west of the building.

STRUCTURE XII lies about 20 m. south of Structure X with its north-south axis in line with the passage between Structures IX and X. The pyramidal substructure measures 35 m. east and west and 18 m. high. On the north and west it rises from the plaza level; on the south there is a gradual descent from its base forming a ravine about 5 m. deep separating Structures XII and XIII.

A stairway is indicated on the north side although none of its component stones were found in position.

Plain Stela 4 and a round altar are at the base of the stairway. The building surmounting the pyramid is now in a poor state of repair. Originally it contained two parallel longitudinal rooms; later both ends of the rear one were filled in, forming a small chamber (1.56 by 3.55 m.) in line with the transverse axis of the doorway (fig. 84). The north wall of the building is 1.20 m. thick with block-type masonry on the façade. Roughly squared stones form the south face of the medial wall. The fill in the rear chamber abuts the plastered medial wall and is of unworked stones with a large quantity of mortar. The face of the fill is covered with plaster which is now very soft and readily breaks away; it was tinted buff. Stela 5, bearing the Initial Series date 8.18.10.0.0, is set in the floor against the back wall of this small room. When the mound was first examined only the top of the stela was exposed; the back wall of the building having fallen, the top of the monument appeared at the apex of the south talus.

STRUCTURE XIII, an independent platform, resembles Structure VI at Becan although the former is larger and supports more and bigger mounds. The north half of the platform is divided into two courts; irregular in shape, due to the size and form of the low mounds

and pyramidal structures outlining them, the one to the east is the larger. Dividing the two courts is a low mound, 10 by 15 m., which, to judge from the contour of the debris, represents a building with two parallel chambers, one opening to the east and the other to the west. The north and west sides of the west court are outlined by a continuous low mound representing no more than a single row of chambers.

STRUCTURE XIIIb, 15 m. square at the base and rising about 11 m. above the court level, is on the south. It now appears as a solid mass of masonry without definite form, with no indications of vaults or doorways (pl. 26b). On the south are sections of faced wall, but these areas are very small and all on different planes. The masonry is of large blocks retaining some plaster. On the east side two floor or construction levels, 2.50 m. apart, are exposed.

STRUCTURE XIIIa. The east court is outlined on the north and east by a low mound terminated by small pyramidal structures at either end. On the south side and rising 8 m. is XIIIa, a large pyramid, 24 m. square, supporting a long mound in which there are indications of rooms. Behind the building is a terrace with a small mound at the eastern end.