

## LA MURALLA

LATITUDE 17° 44.1' N.

LONGITUDE 89° 47.8' W.

The site was discovered by a chicle worker in 1925. When first described (Amsden, 1927, pp. 266, 267) the ruins were called La Muralla because of the most important feature, a decorative wall-like structure. In Ricketson's report on Uaxactun (1937, p. 293), however, the name of the site was changed to Ruina Alta on information from Don Fernando Cruz, who stated that he visited Ruina Alta shown on Claudio Urrutia's map of Guatemala (1923) and identified it as La Muralla. Urrutia may have been correct in placing a site, Ruina Alta, where he did on the border of Mexico and Guatemala (lat. 17° 49' N.), but the question is, did Don Fernando Cruz see Urrutia's Ruina Alta? Although he unquestionably visited La Muralla, since he identified Amsden's photographs as such, he can not be correct in stating that La Muralla and Ruina Alta are one and the same because the two sites are some 30 km. apart. Ricketson now agrees, in view of the confusion that might otherwise result, that the sites should be referred to as Ruina Alta and La Muralla, respectively, thus preserving the original name of the latter.

The best general accounts of La Muralla are those by Monroe Amsden (1927 and 1937). Part of the earlier report is quoted:

They [the ruins] were discovered by a negro chiclero during the rainy season of 1925, and were reported by him to Captain Vans Agnew of the P. W. Shufeldt Company, who, accompanied by Enrique Shufeldt, visited the ruin in the autumn of the following year. They remained only long enough to fell a section of the bush on the north side of the decorated wall, from which the site takes its name, and to make various sketches. With the exception of a few chicleros from a nearby camp, these were the only persons, so far as is known, who had seen the place previously or had even known of its existence.

Water in this region is quite scarce, and the presence of numerous *bajos* makes exploration an arduous task, even under the most favorable circumstances. The fact that, during the three and a half days' trip from Uaxactun to La Muralla, the Institution's Expedition met not a single person on the road, nor passed a single inhabited place, is significant of the uninhabited condition of this part of the Peten region. Indeed there are no permanent settlements, the temporary camps of the chicleros being the only communities of any kind, and during part of the year even these are abandoned. In view of such

conditions, unless systematic exploration is undertaken, discovery of other ruins may be delayed for years.

This group of ruins, of which the wall is the only feature of extraordinary interest, covers an area of perhaps half a square mile. On the south they extend to the edge of a natural terrace beyond which stretches an extensive *bajo*. This seems to run west for several miles, while east of the city it turns within a short distance and continues north. The sloping ground forms a large, rather low promontory, the city standing upon its highest point. . . .

The site consists of a series of long, low mounds, enclosing small plazas with here and there a solitary pyramid, of which the highest rises scarcely more than twenty feet above the ground level. All architectural details excepting the wall have disappeared. No stelae or carved stones were found. Like all untouched Old Empire cities, La Muralla lies buried in dense bush which has rendered it utterly devoid of any distinguishing features, except in contour.

The Third Campeche Expedition visited La Muralla April 10-12, 1934. The site was reached from La Fama where, as the point of departure, the trail lies on the west side of the aguada and bears almost due south. In 15 minutes' travel we reach a branch trail to the right leading to Chilar and Mirador. Some 6 km. generally south from the fork is Puerto Mexico, an abandoned camp with sizable water hole. About 9 km. farther along is Aguada Inez, which furnished a good and plentiful supply of water, where the expedition camped the first night out from La Fama. Trails were much overgrown so that progress was slow and difficult. Just 1.5 km. beyond Aguada Inez is Aguada Ilusion, a large body of water and a preferable camping site. On the right side of the trail, 2 km. beyond Aguada Ilusion, is Tepan, a group of small mounds. From one rises the back wall of a three-chambered building. The stones of the lower zone are veneer-like and carefully worked. The molding is composed of two apron members and a slight batter is indicated in the zone above (fig. 87a). The interior masonry is of roughly worked stones; some of the vault stones have a slight bevel on the exposed face.

A worked stone, 67 cm. long and 6-8 cm. thick, was found in the debris behind the building (fig. 87b). Its upper margin seems to be broken. The nature of the stone is not definitely known, although its appearance

is much like that of a roof adorno (A. L. Smith—1933, p. 94, and 1936, p. 116—reports roof adornos at Uaxactun).

A well-defined cross trail was encountered after 10 minutes' travel from this small group of ruins. The trail continuing onward leads to Fuentes, reported as three to five leagues away; the one to the right to Zacatal, over three leagues away; and that to the left to La Muralla, which was reached in 40 minutes.

While the expedition was examining the ruins of Pared de los Reyes, an attempt was made to locate the site of La Muralla. The workmen reported a good aguada, many mounds but no monuments, and the fact that there had been a small camp at the ruins, the name of which was unknown to them. They described the most important edifice, the only one standing, as a long wall pierced by small windows dividing it into a number of sections or panels, some, on either side of the wall, ornamented with stucco figures. The dress and accoutrements of the figures were described with enough detail to lead to the speculation that this site might be Amsden's La Muralla. It was decided to make the trip to the group even though it might be La Muralla, as observations for latitude and longitude had not been made, additional photographs could be taken (for good stucco decoration is not over-abundant in the area), and there was, of course, always the possibility of its being a new site.

As was stated by Amsden, all architectural details except the wall had disappeared, hence this unit only is here described. The wall or roof comb rises above a somewhat complex building in that it shows a number of stages of construction. Without excavation the plan and sequence are not clearly understood. The building in its final stage was slightly over 20 m. long and about 6.70 m. wide. In plan it contained two parallel ranges of one or more longitudinal chambers with a single transverse room at either end. The transverse room at the west is 1.78 m. wide, the south range 1.45 m. wide, and the wall between them 70 cm. thick. The vaults of the west, south, and east chambers rise from a point 1.65 m. below the roof of the building.

The north range seems to have been the first unit of the structure. This is deduced from the fact that here appear portions of a faced wall, which was probably the batter of an upper zone with its base 1.55 m. below the roof of the present structure. No vault stones of this unit were noted. The south range and the transverse rooms may then have been built and finally the roof comb added (fig. 88). The interior masonry of the chambers is of large blocks. Vault stones in the south range are crudely worked slabs with a rough bevel. There is an average offset of 13 cm. at the spring line.

The position of the roof comb in relation to the final building is given in figures 88 and 89. Rising to a height of 5 m., it has a width and length of 1.63 m. and 17.60 m. respectively. It is of solid masonry except for four horizontal rows of transverse openings, eight openings to a row, arranged one above the other in vertical tiers. The faces of the roof comb are divided horizontally by three bands which define the rows of openings. The panels in the first row rise vertically 1.62 m., vary in width from 1.62 m. to 1.83 m., and the openings between them have an average width of 22 cm. The latter extend from the base of the roof comb (except for the two in the center which began 40 cm. above the base) to the first horizontal band. This band, 22 cm. wide, overhangs 3 cm. The second row of panels rises 95 cm. with a slight batter. Its upper limits are defined by a 19-cm. band, from which the third tier of panels rises 1.22 m. The 22-cm. band at the top of this third row overhangs 3 cm. Above and set inward 5 cm. from its face is a zone 60 cm. high divided by transverse openings which extend to the upper margins. The masonry of the roof comb is of blocks covered with plaster which still retains traces of red paint. The transverse openings, for a distance of 17 cm. inward from the faces of the panels, were also plastered and painted.

Some of the decoration seen by Amsden has fallen; it is interesting to note that not all panels were decorated. Traces of a vertical plaster band (pl. 29*b*) appear near either end of the north and south faces of the roof comb.

Of the panels in the lowest row on the north side, nos. 1 (enumeration is from left to right when facing the roof comb), 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 were unquestionably plain (pl. 29*a*). Panel 2 now retains only fragments of plaster, probably of a conventionalized mask. Panel 5 (the central one) is now devoid of any decoration. Panel 8 was doubtlessly finished to balance Panel 2, but in this tier the masonry facing of the two lower panels has fallen and the upper one has entirely collapsed.

All panels, except nos. 5 and 8, in the first row have names or dates incised in the plaster. The lettering may have been done at the time of the La Fama incident, when there was a boundary dispute between Mexico and Guatemala, precipitated by trouble between chicle gatherers working in this area.

All the panels in the second row probably were finished with plaster or stone and stucco decoration. Panel 1, which is almost in the same condition as when seen by Amsden, still shows two human figures: one, extraordinarily thin, advancing on tiptoe and the other with an abnormally distended abdomen. The decoration of Panel 2 now consists of long plumes sweeping downward from the panel directly above. Panel 3, in a very poor

state of preservation, has two figures: one kneeling and perhaps bound, as suggested by Amsden, as a bit of rope is still visible; the other standing. Panel 4 also has two figures: one, seated and heroic in size, occupies the central position; the second stands to the left. It is possible that a third occupied a position to the right. All decoration has fallen from Panels 5 and 6. Panel 7 shows a seated figure (pl. 29a). The design of Panel 9 can not be made out although the panel still retains considerable stucco work.

The panels of the third row, like those of the second, were probably ornamented. On the west end of a bench depicted in Panel 1 are portions of a seated figure with feet touching the floor; on the east end, but less well defined, is a figure seated cross-legged. The other panels in the row now retain only the barest traces of decoration; none was seen on the fourth and it is doubtful if these bore any.

The lowest panel on the east end of the roof comb

was probably plain; the second retains portions of two human figures (pl. 28c) and the facing of the third has fallen.

Very little decoration remains on the south side (pl. 30a). In the first row, as on the north side, Panels 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 are plain. Where decoration existed it is now so fragmentary that it can not be analyzed. Only the framework of a human figure, perhaps seated, now remains in Panel 6 of the second row (pl. 30b). Panel 7 has two figures: one seated cross-legged, the other standing to the right (west). Panel 8, like no. 2 of the north side, has long plumes sweeping down from the panel above. Panel 9 was ornamented with human figures, of which only the lower legs of two are intact.

Photographs taken by Amsden in 1927 (Ricketson and Ricketson, 1937, pls. 87, 88) and those taken in 1934 show only a small amount of disintegration in the seven-year period.