TIKAL

THE NORTH ACROPOLIS
AND AN EARLY TOMB

By WILLIAM R. COE
and JOHN J. MCGINN

What is it that motivates anticipation of a rich tomb as the trench is cut further and deeper back in time? The excavator knows the lure and now and then stops to ask himself the values to be gotten from the elusive tomb, from the rotted bones, the things worn by and later deposited with someone of another people and world than ours. On the hunt struck North Acropolis of Tikal, Guatemala, we and our associates desperately wanted to find deep in our excavations a tomb that would give us a glimpse of what, at one point in time, was current, valued, and pertinent to one individual who once commanded and controlled the site which has so preoccupied us since 1936. In April of 1962, fifty-five feet down in our great trench through the temple-rich North Acropolis, we found what we term Burial 85, a rich interment and in fact the oldest of such sumptuousness yet recorded in the Maya lowlands. Its discovery came late in the season (as too often important things do).

To go back to the beginning, the North Acropolis work in a sense was begun in 1958 (see Shook, "The Temple of the Red Stela," Expedition Vol. 1, No. 1), but it was not until 1960 that important excavation was started on the Acropolis proper. This massive construction, really a great platform supporting eight temples and fronted directly by three more, was chosen for major work because it gave most promise of having been the end product, by around A.D. 600, of a long complex growth. By probing its levels of growth, we might encounter the very early beginnings of ceremonialism and architectural settings that emerged during Classic times.
In 1960, beneath the ninth floor back through time, what remained of the upper zone of an early building, Structure 3D-Sub.1, appeared. Edwin M. Shook, standing on a ladder, is clearing projecting wall masonry.

Looking south, with the platform on a pole-and-thatch building in the foreground. Underneath this platform was another which overlay the pit dug for the early burial.

EXpedition

The two platforms were largely removed, exposing the rock filled pit of Burial 85. The persons in the pit are standing at the level of the burial chamber roof.

(A.D. 300-900) as the outstanding features of lowland Maya life. A common and proper query has been, How old is Tikal? A deep cut into the high North Acropolis might reveal vestiges of earliest occupation, with the appearance on higher Acropolis levels of increasingly complex buildings, climaxing about A.D. 200-300 with the formally arranged, varied temples of Early Classic times. The archaeologically typical elements of such times were the massive, elaborately decorated buildings, the corbelled vault, the stela-altar cult, the cached offerings of exotically chipped stones, and, finally, polychrome pottery. But did these elements appear suddenly around A.D. 300 at Tikal? Or did they perhaps have earlier beginnings which could be exposed only by a long-term excavation? When and where did the elements commonly identifiable as lowland Classic Maya originate?

The problem of Tikal’s origins is really part of a much larger one. Was Maya lowland culture an exotic, tropically nurtured development with its own roots, non-expansive, remote, and resistant to outside influence? Did it, like other Mesoamerican cultures, grow independently as a shoot from some temporarily deep cultural stratum common to all? Or did the lowland Maya in their rain forests take this and that foreign strain, then combine and recombine them, here and there inventing something of their own, to produce the strange, extravagant world in which Tikal, we believe, so long dominated?

By the end of the 1962 winter season, the third one of work on the Acropolis, the 140-foot long central trench had already done much towards clarification of early details. The main trench and ancillary trenches have so far revealed twenty-three buildings underlying the final stage of the Acropolis (that is, the latest floor and the buildings directly associated with it). Thirteen Acropolis floors have been penetrated to date. As was expected, the Acropolis proved to be a highly complex product of many centuries of steady growth, of abandonment of an old floor and the buildings on it, the laying of a new plaster floor and the construction of new edifices and a great stairway down to the North Terrace below, and so on, until around A.D. 600, the Acropolis culminated in its final form. By the end of the 1962 season, it had become apparent that, in cutting down through the massive superimposed constructions, we were no longer encountering Classic polychrome potsherds in the construction fills. Nor were we still finding the cached offerings of eccentric flints and other materials so frequent in Classic contexts high up in the Acropolis. Nevertheless, as we cut farther down, the elaborateness and Classic appearance of the discovered structures were no less apparent. Things were not getting simpler, or cruder, or increasingly formative. Peculiar patterns of plan, evident in the Classic levels, were obviously present deep in the Acropolis. Similarly, the Classic trait of purposeful ceremonial (ceremonially?) razing and mutilating the old structure before building the new over it was found to go as far back in time as our excavations have carried us.

One of the two oldest structures yet found had been exposed in a large test pit in 1960 by Edwin M. Shook. Its central stairway was flanked by the mutilated remains of great masks. Whether this building was vaulched or not (the roof had been ripped off by the Maya prior to abandoning the building forever) was and still is a problem. The 1961 and 1962 seasons on the Acropolis have been devoted to trenching on an enormous scale to fill in the construction sequence between this stratigraphically early building (referred to as Str.3D-Sub.1) and the final, late Early Classic stage of the Acropolis. What faces us in 1963 is the carrying of the trench and the record of all that it intersects to bedrock. Once there, will we find the beginnings of the Acropolis and perhaps of formal, elaborate ceremonialism itself at Tikal and conceivably in the lowlands in general? Work during these past two seasons has been within what is usually referred to as the “late Pre-Classic.” Where we are in time is largely determined by the ceramics encountered. Late Pre-Classic pottery is quite like the general run of Early Classic pottery. Late Pre-Classic pottery is best known for its waxy or soupy feel, for
Plan of Burial 83 at a scale of 1:80, showing the arrangement of the objects and skeletal remains within the vaulted chamber.

its complex profiles, and frequently for close-set parallel wavy lines making its exterior or interior. There is an intermediate ceramic phase between the Pre-Classic and Early Classic called Proto-
Classic, in which one outstanding feature is the use of four symmetrically placed swollen mam-
miform feet. In the deeper levels of the Acrop-
olis, structure fills (earth, rubble, old trash, and so forth) consistently lack sherds identifiable as Early Classic. As we excavate, the sherd from the fill of one building platform or floor are segregated from those from the fill of the suc-
ceeding platform or floor. Relative dating comes about through the identification of the latest pot-
tery in each fill. The assumption is that, if the latest pottery in the fill of a building is Proto-
Classic, then the structure was built no earlier than the time of breakdown and discarding of such pottery and probably (if the fill sample is large enough) construction was contemporary with the use of such pottery. With our fairly specific knowledge of the developmental sequence of Lowland Maya pottery, it is possible to date ce-
ramically various points in the Acropolis con-
struction sequence. For instance, there is fairly good evidence from other sites that Proto-Classic tetrapod mammiform vessels were produced in the first few centuries A.D. and that Late Pre-
classic pottery was made prior to this.

However, we were still faced by the strong possibility that the fill used, say, in a building platform, had been brought to the North Acrop-
olis from very much older construction debris dumps or even occupation midden, and that pottery current at the time of building the plat-
form need not have entered into the fill itself. Bits of charcoal collected from this same fill could of course be run in our Carbon-14 labora-
tory for an absolute date. But what actually would the result "absolutely" date? First of all, it would provide an average date for cutting all the trees that produced the wood that was burnt and which somehow eventually entered the source or sources of the fill brought to the Acropolis and used in the particular platform. If our C-14 result was, say, 300 B.C., we could only con-
clude that the building was constructed no earlier than this and in fact at any time after it, but always keeping in mind what structures, what pottery, and what C-14 results were stratigraph-
ically above the platform. And could we pre-
clude the possibility that a C-14 date on fill charcoal from a building above and thus later than the platform would not be older than the hypothetical 300 B.C. date from the platform?

Where we were in absolute time at major levels in the excavation was becoming a very worrisome problem. The discovery of certain specific features however could solve the dilemma. We might with luck locate a platform whose pole-and-thatch building had been burnt and the remains left at the time of its abandon-
ment and the start of new construction. Radio-
carbon analysis of the charcoal would give us a good control on when the building was erected or when its thatch roof was last renovated. Similarly, the location of a pit cut into a floor of a building during its terminal days and con-
taining the charred remains from ceremonial fires could give us a date that would be about con-
temporary with the building activity that im-
mEDIATELY followed such ceremonies. One prob-
lem however would be to make sure that the wood burned in such a terminal ceremony or sacrifice was not a truly hard wood with cen-
turies of growth (the core wood from a log of such wood will give a very much earlier date than the wood close to the bark). Better yet for our purposes, would be a burnt and collapsed pit on a mass of contemporary pottery. If we could date such pottery "absolutely," the pottery when found elsewhere would have in a very real sense a built-in radiocarbon date for its manufacture and use.

But perhaps the most useful discovery would be a tomb in which a lot of truly or roughly con-
temporary pottery and other materials were set on the death of the buried individual. If we would have the grave traits to consider, along with pat-
tern of layout of offering, as well as the method of disposal of the body. If charcoal, by some man-
ner provable as contemporary with the burial, could be recovered from the grave, a lot more the tomb would be firmly dated. The tomb would either be found to have been cut into an old floor or structure just prior to building a new structure; or the tomb might have been cut into the structure during its use, the floor then patched, and the structure continued to be used. In either case, the structure and its various floors, and the ceramic presence on the Acropolis floors these could each be given an excellent "fix" in time and within the ceramic continuum of Tikal as a whole.

A few days before Easter, which incidentally is the local labor holiday, the first indications of the stratigraphically deep tomb appeared. It was late in the season. We were miserable in the annoying steady drizzle of that particular week. Our sections had been carried down to the thirteenth oldest Acropolis floor, which sup-
ported the early building found in the 1960 test pit. We had reached for this season a logical stopping point which happened to coincide stratigraph-
ically with what the clue pointed to, namely, the long awaited and, by that time, des-
perately needed tomb. Still, the prospect of having to dig down to it ourselves (the two of us and whomever of the Project staff were not to depart for a brief Easter vacation) was some-
thing to be considered.

By the time the holiday had begun, we had determined that the tomb had been cut through the tenth Acropolis floor back through time, and that the tomb and the floor cut had been obscured by a platform, nine feet square, which was covered by a later platform, necessarily some-
what larger but of essentially the same form. The apparent tomb cut was actually larger than the earlier platform and, where it was exposed in front of the platform, the cut had been neatly patched by a plaster surface. Both platforms had been painted red. Each had carried a pole-
and-thatch building. The remains of the latter were found buried in front of the platform in a curiously sealed pit (this was an additional dating dividend). Moreover, these superimposed platforms were cut directly in front of the 1960 early building, Str.5.D-Sub.1, but on the latest of three floors added about this important build-
ing during the time. The tomb (the apparent size of the cut in the floor argued that it could be nothing else) would therefore date from a time relatively late in the occupation of Str.5.D-Sub.1.

The tomb should then fall in time between the date of the construction of this important building and its eventual razing and burial. South of the two superimposed platforms was a long series of major building substrata that were built during the same time span as Str.5.D-Sub.1 and the small sequent red platforms directly fronting it. These building substrata were associated with polychromed stucco mask-flanked stairways that led down to the North Terrace and Great Plaza below.

The latest platform overlying the anticipated tomb was planned, sectioned, and photographed. The weather improved fortunately but the bodily shock of wielding picks and shovels dissipated less quickly. The excavation debris was piled as close as feasible with the expectation that the returning workmen on Monday would wheel it all away (with some amusement, they did). The earlier platform was soon fully exposed and it too was recorded in plan, then cut through to expose its sectional construction, then demol-
ished and dumped nearby. The rectangular cut into the tenth Acropolis floor had finally been exposed. Its long axis was north-south, meas-
ured about eleven feet, and occurred, as previ-
ously noted, at the base of the stairway leading up into Str.5.D-Sub.1. During the use of that most important building, someone of conse-
quence had died—presumably a ruling priest—
and had been buried at the foot of what may have long been his primary temple.

The tomb was then cut through and completely excavated. It was a very truncated structure, the floor being a platforms cut into the floor of an older building, probably Str.5.D-Sub.1. The individual in the tomb was clearly a man of some wealth and station, as evidenced by the large number of artifacts found with him. Among the most notable were a series of clay vessels, including a large storage jar, and a number of small bowls and cups. The tomb also contained a large number of small ceramic figurines, including a number of human forms, and a number of large stone sculptures, including a large serpentine headdress. The tomb was then carefully backfilled and the area was prepared for further excavation.
The head and thigh bones never did appear. The tomb yielded twenty-six vessels, some of magnificent size and proportion, as well as a jade mask of truly incomparable size and quality. Together with the Pre-Classic material, the stingray spine, jade bead, and Spondylus shell, we additionally had an incomplete skeleton. It was also quite clear that the tomb was in fact vaulted. This, it was realized, could well prove to be the earliest, yet detected use of the vault.

By the end of the summer of 1962, there was time to sit down and consider really what Burial 85 amounted to, both within itself and beyond. The carbonized wood slivers from the tomb vessels had been identified as pine, a relatively short-lived tree, the cutting of which could not have been very much earlier than the installation of the tomb. The burned pine was analyzed at the University's C-14 laboratory. The original determination allowed a third century B.C. date; this was subsequently raised in time by recalcula-

tion, with the result that Burial 85 appears to have been made about the time of Christ. The tomb pottery has been carefully studied by the Project's ceramicist, Dr. Patrick Colbert, who indi-
cates the whole lot to be clearly part of the local Late Pre-Classic ceramic complex. In overall study, we find no contradiction of what seems probable in the account. Between some of the male in this tomb was a "bundle burial" without his head or thigh bones. These parts could well have been retained by the survivors as relics. It is almost certain that this is a primary burial, that is, that the individual was interred in the flesh. Presumably the grizzly cler of severing the head and upper legs was conducted some-
where else than in the grave itself. The dark fluff so widespread over the tomb is the remains of the wrappings. The trunk appears to have been seated within a vessel and the whole wrapped, with the lower legs placed vertically against the stomach. This bundled, mutilated personage was set in the chamber facing south, the same direc-
tion as the small red-painted platform that was built over the tomb or cut into the mask, if attached to the bundle, must have broken off previously, for it lay south of the original siting position of the bundle. Its fall conceivably threw the bundle off balance, causing the latter to fall to the north.

The date obtained from this tomb has been substantiated by two others: one obtained on what are believed to be pole-and-thatch material from the latest of the two superimposed plat-
forms over the burial; the other, a pit dug into the room floor of 64 B. Wood burned within it, presumably just prior to the abandon-
ment and burial of this whole important early stage of the Acropolis fill. However, the heavy rubble and earth fill, at some points sixteen feet thick, which was placed over these structures to ballast a new floor and a new Acropolis produced a great deal of charcoal, some of which was ana-
edized in the C-14 laboratory. The result was, surprisingly, absolutely in accord with our dates given the tomb date and others noted (which we trust to be real). This terrific discrepancy (various others have appeared in the Acropolis fill series) illustrates how serious would be our error if we were unfortunate enough to have to depend en-
tirely on C-14 results obtained from such inher-
ently uncontrollable samples. Certainly not the case in Mesopotamian sites. Regrettably, the tendency has been to employ dates so derived in interpretation as current dates, that is, that they...
EXODUS NEWS

Three major problems occupied the attention of the Hassunites during the past summer. These were: (1) the clarification of the seventh-sixth century materials of Period III (the "Triangle Ware Phase") and Period IV (the "Early Qasr" or "Early Citadel") of the ninth century Citadel; and (3) a probe into the urban levels of the second millennium. The results of this work, now almost completed, and a preliminary appraisal suggests that the new information confirms that Hassuna is a far more important site than had been thought. This suggested conclusion stems from the discovery of a new stratum, dating to around 1500 B.C., below the grey pottery "Button-base Phase." It is characterized by buff ware painted with red bands and triangles—a pottery common in design and form to that of northern Mesopotamia of the same period. This pottery would appear to be the remnant of a "Hassunite" or elite culture of Hassuna in the thirteenth century B.C. The new excavations show, furthermore, that this north Mesopotamian occupation was abruptly terminated by the appearance of a grey ware culture characterized by distinctive tankards with buttons or disc bases, but otherwise sharing all of the main ceramic wares with the following period. We have, therefore, the sudden appearance of an alien culture around the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the twelfth century B.C. This Button-base Phase appears as the forerunner of the greatly expanded culture of the following Grey Ware Phase dating to the end of the thirteenth century. The ceramics of this later culture, as now visible in the accumulated results of this and previous summers' work, appear to be the result, not accidentally, of the Hattian Iron Age pottery of Central Europe and the Balkans.

A third major burned Building was uncovered, clearly set in the landscape yet preserving the essential features of the two larger burned Buildings already excavated. The building plan seems to combine North Syrian features with features customarily associated with the megaron type of house. To add to the general indication that we may be dealing here with an Indo-European intrusion into what is known historically as the Mannaean area, we have now discovered an elaborately decorated fragmentary wall running down the slope to protect the two approach buildings. The plan, only generally in place at present, stands in contrast to the more characteristic gates in Mesopotamia: which are set into the form of two tall walls themselves.

There are historical arguments for placing the Persians in this area upon their entry into Iran but the date suggested has usually been in the ninth to eighth centuries B.C. They controlled a substantial part of the Mannaean area and even had Assyrian governors. It might be useful to look at these three cultural groups are represented at Hassuna in our Period IV. Should this appearance be substantiated by clearer study, we should have, for the first time, one of the two possible indications of the arrival of the Persians in Iran, the other being the newly discovered Marlik Tepe farther to the east.

George Bass writes: "While visiting Bodrum to pick up supplies for our underwater excavation of the Byzantine shipping, I visited the coffee house to often used by Peter Throckmorton when he was questioning sponge divers about the locations of ancient wrecks. This time I did not find a hand full! One of the villagers brought a vase to me for identification, and at first I couldn't believe what I saw. It could not have been a late Roman. But I knew we had only two Mycenaeans sites are known in all of western Turkey. Later I visited the spot where the vase was found, accompanied by Machiel Mellink and Haluk Elke, our commissioner, and we saw at least six opened Mycenaean chamber tombs. Pottery and beads from the tombs indicate for the first time that Caria was inhabited in the Late Bronze Age, although this runs counter to the results of a number of thorough explorations of the area. A month later, I visited the same coffee shop and this time was shown a jet full of Late Protogeometric, or Iron Age, pottery—again a rather unusual find for Caria. This came from a stone-lined tomb not far away. We wonder what other wonderful finds will come out of this coffee house."

Leaving in December, 1961, G. R. Edwards embarked on activities in Corinth, at Gordium in Turkey, and at Cyzicus in Cyprus. The focus in Corinth was on the preparation of Corinthian pottery of the Helenistic Period primarily derived from a large private collection destroyed by the Roman general Mummius in 146 B.C. The chronology of the archaeological objects of this advanced period is almost as little understood by archaeologists as that of the palaeolithic times. Hence the publication of this pottery, connected with a fine nature yet preserving even the essential features of the two larger burned Buildings already excavated. The building plan seems to combine North Syrian features with features customarily associated with the megaron type of house. To add to the general indication that we may be dealing here with an Indo-European intrusion into what is known historically as the Mannaean area, we have now discovered an elaborately decorated fragmentary wall running down the slope to protect the two approach buildings. The plan, only generally in place at present, stands in contrast to the more characteristic gates in Mesopotamia: which are set into the form of two tall walls themselves.

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