

Palenque Cross Group Season Update

ANNIE SCHUBART and MAUREEN CARPENTER

Temple XIX

Restoration has been completed on Temple XIX. A lovely new roof was completed in May of last year, and protective wooden stairs were built up and over the original stone stairs. A wooden walkway was also created, thus keeping all foot traffic off the stone slab floor.

This season, workers have cleaned all the joints between the large stone slabs, and filled them with a mix of sand and lime to blend with the color of the floor. Also, Annie Schubart and Mo Carpenter have written a series of updates for the tourists, so as they walk through the structure, they can stop and read the information concerning the previous spectacular finds. We have found that since the text has been translated into Spanish, English, German and French large numbers of tourists have been actually reading and enjoying it!

A copy of the west panel of the throne is now in place, while the south panel is in the process of being carved. The colorful replica of the stucco panel seems to catch everyone's eye.

The newest development in the investigation of Structure XIX is the addition of Dr. Jose Ortega Ramirez from Mexico City. He will be coming at the end of April to investigate with both a ground penetrating radar and a magnetometer. He has plans to

carefully take measurements (every 20cm) looking for changes or anomalies below the floor.

In our attempt at 'eco-archaeology', we are adding to both east and west sides of the building a layer of topsoil which will be planted in grass, giving the whole structure a more natural look and at the same time protection against erosion.

All in all, XIX has proven to be not only beautiful and unique, but also a popular structure with both visiting archaeologists and tourists.

A Structure Made Of Bedrock

An international crew of archaeologists and restorers of the Palenque Cross Group Project - directed by Merle Greene Robertson and Alfonso Morales, Principle Investigator - is working on the excavation



Photo showing Structure XIX with a wooden ramp to remove rubble and excavation debris from the walls (on the southern side of the structure)

and conservation of what remains of the architectural features of Temple XX, located south of the Cross Group in Palenque.

This year excavations at Temple XX are being sponsored by CHAAAC (the Center for the History of Ancient American Art and Cultures), directed by Nikolai Grube at the University of Texas, Austin.

The goals of the excavation of Temple XX are to look for remaining final phase architecture above all on the southern and eastern slopes of the building.

While the crew is more than halfway through the season, some very interesting and unusual discoveries have been made. Temple XX sits on top of a 24-meter-tall pyramid that has long been thought to be one of the largest structures here at Palenque. The Maya are known to modify their surroundings, and are totally unafraid of their topography, with the ability to cut, level, and build up their natural terrains. Temple XX is proving to be an excellent exam-

ple of the major use of bedrock.

By the end of March four trenches have been excavated into what we thought was the substructure of Temple XX. In all four trenches we have encountered bedrock, and the picture that is beginning to form is a large mountain of bedrock where walls and stairs were constructed almost right on top of the rising mountain of bedrock. Our biggest trench (OP 6-4) on the south side of Temple XX actually found a jumble of three separate walls, two of which we think collapsed from the bedrock above and crashed down into the third lower one, thus causing the last one to collapse forward leaving a confusing mixture of three walls. Directly above this is pure bedrock which shows until almost the top where we actually have part of a wall remaining, mainly because it is located on a landing, giving stability to the architecture. Our other trenches on the east side of the pyramid (OP 6-5) show bedrock almost at the level of the plaza, and in some cases even rising above the plaza level. In all three test trenches



Photo showing a portion of the basal wall on the southeastern corner of Temple XX with the possible passageway in the foreground.

along this eastern edge a small simple wall appears, which sits on bedrock, and in some cases the bedrock is cut and even becomes part of the wall. This simple one-or-two-course wall continues all along a platform from Structure XIX across a connecting structure - which turns out to be a bedrock platform - and

across Temple XX to the beginning of the front staircase. Here, surprise, the staircase actually sits on sloping bedrock, the same angle as the stairs. It is no wonder that both walls and stairs have fallen down and collapsed into rubble after the centuries. This bedrock, which we are following so far over 2/3 of the way to the top of Temple XX has proven to be the most unusual example of architecture all of us have ever seen. Temple XX appears to be the biggest, tallest and most massive of bedrock foundations yet excavated. And because of the ability of bedrock to decompose, it has lost most of its architecture to tumble and collapse. It is proving to be not only a challenge to archaeologists, but also our restorer, Rudy Larios, who along with Alfonso Morales believes we can consolidate only a few remaining walls, and completely seal the upper landing of the temple.

Another interesting fact concerning Temple XX is the amount of figurine fragments and obsidian pieces that are being found in front of the base of the walls, and especially in what we think is a passageway. Yvonne Harralson in the lab has been cataloging a whole series of lovely heads, pieces of hats, arms, feet, even 'dancing feet', sherds with glyphs, plus an enormous amount of obsidian prismatic blades and fragments. We are sending obsidian samples back to California for XRF (X-ray Florescence) to discover exactly where our obsidian is coming from.

Right now the team is busy drawing the various walls of the superstructure, and excavations will continue for a few more weeks. While the building is proving itself to be mostly unrestorable, it instead is giving us a look at something we have never seen before.

Visitors at Palenque

This season – like all the other seasons at Proyecto Grupo de las Cruces – we have been visited by many people either touring the sites, or on their way to different projects. Karen

Bassie on her way to the cave of Joloniel stopped and regaled us with her stories. Michael Coe also stopped by with a small group and was guided around by Kirk Straight. Ian Graham said hello on his way to Tonina, and then back on his way to Yaxchilan. He always has such wonderful tales to tell, and is still busy working on his tome on Maudslay. Arlen and Diane Chase and family also are regular visitors, on their way to and from Caracol, Belize. Anabel Ford's students on their way to El Pilar were also showed the site. Claude Baudez stopped on his way to Yucatan, with a group of friends and relatives. Florian Hanig, a journalist from GEO magazine in Germany, was scouting information about Palenque and stopped by for updated information. Marco Polo TV visited last week from Italy, and filmed the Group at work. Some people from Discovery Channel visited us too, as they are doing a special on pyramids all over the world. And in the month of April, Princess Carolyn of Monaco is supposed to be guided around the site by our indomitable leader, Alfonso Morales.