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PAINTINGS OF MAYA POTTERY: The Art and Career of M. Louise Baker



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Abstract

During her lifetime, M. Louise Baker (1872-1962) was recognized as the preeminent artist for archaeological illustration. Her paintings of Maya pottery were featured in the folio volumes, *Examples of Maya pottery in the Museum and other collections*; edited by G. B. Gordon (volume I) and J. Alden Mason (volumes II and III), published by the University of Pennsylvania Museum between 1925 and 1943. That publication, which featured 36 of her paintings, has long been out of print, and many of her other paintings of Maya vessels have never been published. This project brings together for the first time, for the use of Mayanists, all 109 water colors and 45 ink drawings, in a manner that, it is hoped, will further the interpretation and understanding of Maya iconography as it is revealed in its ceramics.

Resumen

Durante su vida, M. Louise Baker (1872-1962) fue considerada la artista preeminente en la ilustración de objetos arqueológicos. Sus pinturas de cerámica maya fueron publicadas en *Examples of Maya pottery in the Museum and other collections*, redacción por G. B. Gordon, (volumen I) y J. Alden Mason (volumenes II y III), publicado por el Museo de la Universidad de Pennsylvania entre 1925 y 1943. Aquella publicación presentó solamente 36 de sus pinturas, y ya por muchos años ha sido agotada. Muchas de sus otras pinturas nunca han sido publicadas. Este proyecto, por primera vez, presenta todas sus 109 acuarelas y 45 tintas, en una manera que hará posible mejorar la interpretación y comprensión de la iconografía maya como revelada a través de su cerámica.

Preface

Much of the text that follows is based on, and quotes liberally from, the diaries, letters and unpublished memoir of M. Louise Baker. In the interest of a smoother flow for the story, I have broken with the scholarly dictum of following each quotation or incident with specific citations. The bibliography that follows the text lists the sources; specifics can be extrapolated from them. Letters, too, are simply identified in the text and the archival repository identified in the bibliography. I trust that readers will find their enjoyment enhanced by this stylistic decision.

For ease in referencing them, Baker's paintings have been grouped according to the institution or collector where they were housed when she painted them. Each Group is listed chronologically, with identifications A through R, according to the dates when she painted the collection. Within each Group, individual paintings are numbered. Thus, the published paintings from the University of Pennsylvania

are placed within Group A, and the individual paintings are listed within that Group as A-1 through A-21. When reference is made in the text to an entire collection, only the identifying Group letter will be given (e.g. Group A, Group G, etc.); if particular paintings are cited, the reference will include Group letter and number (e.g. A-3 indicates the third painting within Group A).

The details of M. Louise Baker's life and career contained in this report would never have come to my attention without the generosity of her family. Her great-grand nieces, Leslie Coke and Sally Noble; her grand-nephew (Sally's father) Alan Noble; her grand-niece (Leslie's mother) Jenny Johnson; made Louise's diaries available to me, and provided me with her unpublished memoir, family photographs and scrapbooks, all essential ingredients for the recovery of any life. Leslie first contacted me, and shared my enthusiasm for the project. Lynn and Roger Peterson, Sally's mother and stepfather, welcomed me into their home and made my stay in Cincinnati comfortable. Sally let me take over a room in her office for days while I combed through MLB's diaries. I am grateful to them all more than I can say for their unselfish sharing of their family's memorabilia.

The other important resource was the Archives of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Alessandro Pezzati, Senior Archivist, is an unflagging contributor and co-conspirator in any research quest, and most especially in this one. It was he who first called my attention to the M. Louise Baker trove of original water colors in the Archives; his encyclopedic knowledge of his domain recovered for me even the most obscure references, letters and administration memoranda. He read the text to halt any egregious errors. After all of my requests, questions, e-mails and phone calls, he remains an avid supporter of the project and I thank him for it. Kristine Paulus, Assistant Archivist, used her self-proclaimed obsessive/compulsive nature to sort out some confusing data and attributions; Archives Assistant Alison Miner gave me the gift of her superior computer skills. Their contribution to the whole—and to my sanity—is greatly appreciated.

The paintings were photographed and scanned in the Museum Photo Studio by Francine Sarin, Head Photographer, and Jennifer Chiappardi, Assistant Photographer, and I thank them for their professionalism, their ability to always come up with the needed results, and their friendship that somehow survives multiple crises.

A grant from the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. (FAMSI), made the photography possible, and I appreciate not only the funding, but FAMSI's patience and understanding as the research, writing, and the imperious and contrary nature of computers outran my initial optimistic completion date, and continued to confound my deadlines.

John Weeks, the Museum Librarian, and fellow rummager among the fragments of archaeological history, listened patiently to my kvetching (there is no other

word quite so apt) through the months of unfinished writing. I thank him for that, and for his unfailing encouragement and friendship.

To her role as friend, Lynn Grant added first-draft reader, hand holder and chocolate supplier — an essential part of this writer's tool kit! Lynn, Alex and John all read earlier drafts and made excellent suggestions. Any errors that remain are mine alone.

Above all, I thank my husband, who knows when I need ice cream, keeps me balanced, and makes me laugh — always.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the accurate and detailed reproduction of archaeological artifacts was entrusted to a small number of artists whose precise recording became an essential part of the archaeological record. Before the advent of easy and accurate color photography such reproductions illustrated aspects of the finds otherwise not easily conveyed. These drawings and paintings illuminated the books that fired public imagination and breathed life into the pages of academic site reports and monographs. Among this small group of artists one woman came to be recognized by archaeologists of both the Old World and the New as an outstanding practitioner of this unique art form.

M. Louise Baker's paintings of Maya pottery, already acclaimed by Mayanists, excited the notice of the broader archaeological community through the publication of three folio volumes, *Examples of Maya pottery in the Museum and other collections*; edited by G. B. Gordon (volume I) and J. Alden Mason (volumes II and III), published by The University of Pennsylvania Museum between 1925 and 1943. Of the sixty-six color plates in the folios, thirty-six were by Baker; the other paintings included the work of artists Annie Hunter, George Byron Gordon, and Wilhelm von den Steinen.

All of the artists represented in the folios are excellent. But the three-dimensional quality of Baker's paintings takes them a step beyond; one can almost feel the weight of the clay, the depth of the incising, or the curve of the neck. The folios have been out of print for decades and only a few of Baker's paintings of Maya pottery are easily accessible today (e.g., Figures A-1, 2, 10, 11, 14, 15, K-2, 3, 5), primarily because they continue to be reproduced in many publications. Those paintings are only a few of the holdings in the Archives of Penn Museum (called The University Museum during Baker's time), which house 109 of Baker's original water colors and 45 ink drawings, many of them of Maya vessels then in private collections. Only one of her original published paintings is not in the Archives; fortunately the extension painting of the vessel in that lost painting does survive (see [Figure A-5](#), below).



Plate VIII. Cylindrical vase; pale red clay; soft burned; polished without and within; a yellow slip, painted in red, white and black. Full size. Chamá, Guatemala.

Through the generous support of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., all of her paintings of Maya pottery, both published and unpublished, are presented here. This is the first time the complete corpus of her Maya paintings is available to public and scholar alike; the paintings substantiate the admiration and esteem with which M. Louise Baker was regarded by all archaeologists and by Mayanists in particular.

This report is the initial result of ongoing research whose ultimate goal is a portrait of Baker's professional life. The text provides context, and celebrates the achievements of a talented, brave, and independent woman. It bears witness to the courage and determination of a woman who, when well beyond the age of youthful vigor, dealing with the effects of lifelong health problems, set off to work and travel – often in less than comfortable conditions with few or no modern conveniences, surviving extreme heat and cold, fleas, bedbugs, earth tremors, illness and accidents, political upheavals and bureaucratic obstruction – and created a body of work that still elicits praise and wonder at its quality. And she did all this at a time when the idea of a single woman making her way alone in the world – and doing it successfully – was still shocking.

Beginnings

In the spring of 1902, Clarence B. Moore, a wealthy and respected amateur archaeologist, came to the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts with an urgent request. He crisscrossed the rivers of the Southeast each year in

his steam-powered paddleboat, the Gopher, excavating sites near the shores, and bringing his finds back to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. He needed someone to restore the pottery and create illustrations suitable for his many publications. Without hesitation, the dean recommended the school's outstanding student, M. Louise Baker.

And outstanding she was. Older than the majority of her classmates, she was then just shy of her thirtieth birthday, a very tall, rather plain looking woman, her bright eyes shaded by thick glasses. She had overcome much to reach this point. Recognizing that the educational opportunities in her Ohio home were limited, at the age of nineteen she traveled alone to Pennsylvania, earned a teacher's certificate and put in four years as a country schoolteacher before she felt ready to push further. She meant to support herself as a working artist and illustrator, and to do that she needed the broader cultural world of a city.

In 1900 she moved to Philadelphia and marked that change of place by changing the way she was known. She would never again use the ordinary "Mary," a name she disdained; henceforth she would respond to "Louise," and sign her name as the much more distinctive "M. Louise Baker." These were her first steps on the road she had mapped out for herself. As M. Louise Baker, she registered at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts (now the University of the Arts), where she rapidly impressed her teachers with her natural gifts, quick mind, tenacity, ability to work at least twice as hard as anyone else and achieve superior results. When Moore brought the school his request, she was completing only her second year. She had fought for and won the privilege of taking courses usually reserved for third year students, had garnered accolades from her professors, received numerous awards, and was in desperate need of money. The job was a windfall!

At the Academy of Natural Sciences, Louise was thrown into the deep end from the very beginning. The academic vocabulary had not prepared her for her first labors. "On that first morning I was presented with an Indian bowl with an incised design on the sides and rounded base which Dr. Miller [the curator] 'suggested' that I 'expand into a flat drawing.' I had never heard of such a thing. I studied it desperately then looked at the open window and wondered if it would not be the better part of valor to jump and run and never return. Not having the faintest idea how to begin I sat stupefied."

But "jump and run" was never her response. Within moments, she conquered her panic and figured out how to draw an extension, the 'flat drawing' requested by the curator. That first assignment was followed by many more. She moved on to create precise illustrations, both elevations and extensions, of dozens of pots and other artifacts. She enjoyed the work enormously, and Moore valued her contribution. The following year when she secured a teaching position at the George School, a Quaker preparatory school in the Philadelphia suburb of Newtown, she arranged her schedule so that she could continue working at the

Academy. Her week included two days of teaching art, a day or two at the Academy of Natural Sciences, continuing evening courses at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts, working on her growing business of writing and illustrating children's stories, and creating advertisements. When she found she had a few free hours, she enrolled in Girls' High School to study French, English and Mathematics!

In 1908, while on summer holiday visiting her family in Ohio, she received a letter from Moore that would change her life. Her diary entry notes merely: "Saturday July 11 – a letter from Mr. Moore. Gave me an offer to do a great deal of work in the University of Pennsylvania – with fare paid home – if I would come at once. I replied in terms that will hardly rob me of my vacation."

She may have thought her terms exorbitant, but they were met by the University without discussion. Clearly, Moore's recommendation had been accompanied by high praise. The next letter came from David Randall-Maclver, the director of the Museum's Nubian expedition, offering her \$80 a month and carfare if she would present herself at the Museum on August 3rd to begin work on his Nubian pottery.

She returned to Philadelphia on the morning of July 31st, stopped at her room at the YWCA only long enough to drop her bag and pick up her drawing board before going off to the Museum. Together with Randall-Maclver and his assistant, a young British archaeologist named Leonard Woolley, who would later gain fame as the discoverer of the Royal Tombs of Ur, she began to select the objects to be drawn.

Her first day of work, Monday, August 3rd, Louise noted in her diary with some asperity, "I out to University early. Dr. Maclver late... I began work at once – I worked til overtime." She began creating ink drawings and water colors of the artifacts brought back from the successful season in Nubia. Over the next several weeks other artists were brought in as well, to assist in turning out the numerous drawings, but she noted that "they came and went, as the work required special skill in making colored drawings of the pots for reproduction." None of the others seemed to combine the necessary patience, understanding and skill that she possessed.

The preparation of the plates for publication occupied her long into the fall. She had never before been involved in such a meticulous project, and her attention to detail and perfectionist's drive for accuracy meshed well with the needs of the archaeologists. The money she received for this work enabled her to fulfill another goal, that of studying with some of the finest artists of the day at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

As the Nubian project drew to a close, George Byron Gordon, at that time the curator of the Museum's American section and soon to be its director,

approached her about working with some of the Museum's Maya material. He warned her that drawing Maya pottery was very different from what she had done for Dr. MacIver.

"I therefore suggest that you take an example of the pottery which I have here and make a test drawing." Indeed! Louise leapt to meet the challenge. Her "test drawing" was beautifully executed. Once Gordon saw it, he immediately asked her to begin creating water colors of all of the Museum's Maya pottery, a project that would occupy her sporadically throughout her years at the Museum (Group A and Group B).

"That was a busy winter but I kept all three activities well in hand, George School, the University of Pennsylvania Museum, and the Academy, and was happy." She was forced to eliminate her commercial work, and spent every available moment at the Academy of Fine Arts, where once again her persistence and talent allowed her entry into an advanced class, this one in oils.

It did not take long for Gordon to recognize that in Louise Baker he had found the person he needed for a pioneering plan he had in mind. Up to that time, Maya ceramics had been viewed as primarily archaeological artifacts, but not as works of art. He intended to change that.

"One day while at the Museum Dr. Gordon asked me if I could be ready to go to Boston early in January to work on Mayan pottery. The University was publishing a volume on Mayan art, the vases to be painted and reproduced in color and would I do it? In reply to my query as to whether he thought I could do them he replied "Well if you can't I don't know who can." I took a day off to catch up with the excitement and to formulate plans. When I approached Dr. Walton [headmaster of The George School] to ask leave of absence for two months he understood the challenge and my request was granted."

Although the George School students were bright and eager, the teachers companionable, and the school set in a rural Eden, she had been frustrated by the administration's refusal to offer more than a single art course. For some time she had considered resigning her post and attempting to support herself as a freelance artist. Now the Maya pottery project would add to her income just enough to tip the balance. "So on my way to the early train, en route to Boston, I dropped my resignation in the P.O. All bridges went up in smoke with the gesture."

Boston

In Boston she followed her usual work habits of beginning early and ending late. The maid at Harvard University's Peabody Museum was quite annoyed by

Louise's dawn arrivals, and showed her irritation at such early morning activity by slopping her wet mop on the intruder's shoes, forcing her to take refuge on top of her drawing table, shoes and all. Despite such attempted disruptions, Louise focused intently on her work, shutting out everything but vessel, paper and paints, unaware that she aided her concentration with endless whistling. Finally, the curator, with whom she shared the studio, could stand it no longer and implored her to stop. From then on each day, just before settling down to work, she selected a clean brush and placed it firmly between her teeth; thus clenched, she was sure it would stop the issuance of any unwelcome tunes.

She worked more than eight hours a day at the Peabody and at the end of March, tired but well satisfied, she came back to Philadelphia. Except for the two days a week she taught at the George School to finish out the semester, all her time that spring was spent at the Museum completing the Peabody paintings (Group C). Her eyes, which had begun bothering her in Boston, worsened and by May they made work impossible. She described her painful symptoms with a painter's vocabulary as "blinding whirling clouds of blue lights, with green or black centers and crinkled edges." The diagnosis was an ulcerated right eye, and she was forced to spend the next few months in a darkened room.

For Louise, complete inactivity was impossible. Within her darkened room, she made notes for children's stories and composed jingles, all of which she later refined and illustrated for publication in the children's magazines of the day. The effort involved in writing and illustrating children's stories was minimal when compared to the painstaking accuracy required for archaeological illustrations. Her eyes did not fully recover for more than a year, and in all that time she was able to work only sporadically.



Figure A1: Plate I. Cylindrical vase of buff clay, soft burned and polished without and within; a cream colored slip; figures in red and black. Full size. Chamá, Guatemala.

She had recovered enough in the fall of 1910 for Gordon to send her to the home of Ebenezer Cary in a Philadelphia suburb. Cary was a retired coffee planter who had found on his plantation in Guatemala a beautiful Maya ceramic cylinder, now known as the "Chama Vase." She reproduced it in full color for the Maya pottery folio ([Figure A-1](#), above, and [Figure A-2](#), below). When work at the museum

became too exacting, and her eyes rebelled, she would go back to her room, rest, or write stories and verses.



Figure A2: Plate II. Surface of same. Seven figures, with fans, engaged in what appears to be a sacrificial scene. The figure on the right is identified as "Chak Ahaw", or young lord.

Over the next few years she divided her time primarily between the Penn Museum and the Academy of Natural Sciences. As her skill combined with increasing familiarity and experience, her knowledge came to rival that of the curators, and her reputation was unequalled in the museum community. Her varied experience with artifacts had given her a superb eye. When working on a Greek kylix at Johns Hopkins University, something about it aroused her suspicions. Having worked on much Greek pottery at Penn, she had acquired a certain depth in the field (she once disputed Gordon about the details of a painted Greek vase, and was proved right). She told the curator that his newly acquired bowl was a fake. This may have discomfited the curator, but when further examination confirmed her assessment, the incident only enhanced her reputation.

On another occasion, an archaeologist from the small museum in the Pennsylvania town of Wilkes Barre came to the Academy of Natural Sciences with the pieces of a large Iroquoian storage jar that had been found on the banks of the Susquehanna. After Louise had painstakingly put all 191 pieces together,

the pot was complete save for one section of the base. Without that triangular bit, the reconstructed pot was unstable. The archaeologist went through his museum's storerooms searching for the missing piece, to no avail. Finally Louise went to Wilkes Barre herself. After fruitlessly turning over all the sherds in storage she found it hiding in plain sight — in a small wall case, where it had been mounted with other sherds found years previously, down river from the storage jar find site. Triumphantly, she bore it back to her workroom at the Academy, where it slipped into its place like the final piece in a jigsaw puzzle.

During the dark years of World War I she did some volunteer work, but felt that it was inadequate. As the war came to a close, she hounded the newly formed American Friends Service Committee for the right to join their relief efforts in France. When they agreed, she tidied up her projects at Penn, and spent 1919 in France, where she helped the women of Clermont create an embroidery industry that brought them out of poverty and the chaos the war had wrought.

On her return to Philadelphia, her life took on a pleasant and creatively satisfying routine. She worked at the Penn Museum, returned to the George School as head of a newly expanded art department, and continued writing and illustrating children's stories. Her year in Europe, although filled with work, had also strengthened her resolve to expand her horizons. She used every leisure moment she could steal to visit museums large and small, and learn all she could about the art and architecture that surrounded her. The experience had increased her wanderlust and given her the inspiration for ways to satisfy her growing taste for travel. Beginning in 1922, each summer she led small groups of women on tours of European museums, even daring to venture as far as Russia.

The Museum director sent her to New York to add the Maya pottery in the Heye Collection of the Museum of the American Indian to the number of paintings he was amassing for the projected folio on Maya pottery. Unfortunately, she found most of the pottery embargoed because the curator in charge of it would not allow the collection to be published by anyone else before he published his work. "...which will not be soon according to someone's opinion who is within the circle." Since Heye was out of town, Louise sent a letter to the Penn Museum detailing this state of affairs, said she would paint the few vessels she was permitted (Group D), and return to Philadelphia within a week. She suggested that the Museum secretary, Jane McHugh, send a letter to Heye explaining the sparse results as tactfully as possible. "Prof. S. is not a bit cordial about the affair, but I attribute that to his personality and not to any 'feeling' in the matter. Only he is the one to whom I go for work and I am about at the end of my tether... personally, I am disappointed at the material given me."

M. Louise Baker had achieved recognition as the pre-eminent archaeological artist in the United States. Early in her career at the Museum, Gordon had insisted that she sign each of her drawings, and her name in the distinctive design she created came to be recognized as a guarantee of the accuracy and

authenticity of any archaeological painting. The close scrutiny required for her precise translation of artifacts onto the page wreaked havoc with her eyes. In 1925 she underwent dangerous, painful surgery to prevent further deterioration to her always precarious vision. Although it was successful, she was warned that the results might not be permanent, but for the present her eyesight was stable. Several times during the course of the decade the even pattern of her life was disturbed by other illnesses that required enforced vacations and threatened the career she had created and loved.

Gordon once again began to talk about sending her off to other countries to paint their collections of Maya pottery. His sudden death in 1927 dashed any expectation she had that such a journey would take place. Gordon had been the project's advocate before the Museum Board, and those in charge might now consider such an expedition to be out of the question. To her surprise, far from stopping the enterprise, the new director, Horace H. F. Jayne, was convinced that such an undertaking was important, and arranged with the George School to grant her a six month leave of absence.

This would be the start of a new and even more important chapter in her storied career. In the next few years she would call on all of her training, experience, and talent to reach the challenging goal before her, and her accomplishments would surpass everything she had yet achieved.

Central America

On February 10th, 1931, M. Louise Baker left Philadelphia on the night train for New Orleans, where she would paint the Maya pottery at Tulane University's Middle American Research Institute (MARI), before going further south. She arrived to find Mardi Gras in full swing and hotel rooms at a premium. Frans Blom, director of MARI, a wiry intense erect little man, used his legendary charm to find her a room at the Hotel Bienville. After the briefest of stops to check in and leave her luggage, she went to Tulane and promptly set to work. When she left the MARI quarters that evening, she succumbed to the infectious holiday atmosphere and sat on the library steps taking in the colorful pageants, the syncopated rhythms, the crowds, and the excitement before heading back to her hotel. She fell asleep to the sound of music and the voices of revelers through the night.

The next morning she began her routine of working from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. The news of her proposed journey and its purpose brought newspaper reporters flocking to her studio at Tulane University. "Everyone seems to think I am doing a big thing, except U of P!" She managed to avoid the reporters clamoring to interview her, save for one extremely persistent young man. He pulled a chair alongside and watched her as she worked, plying her with questions all the while. Finally he asked if she had ever considered specializing in this kind of work.

Tartly, she replied that as she had done this work for twenty five years she hoped to become a specialist before she was ninety!

Her days were spent at MARI, but she managed to fit in some sightseeing. And Blom, with long experience in Mexico and Guatemala, helped her plan her coming trip. One evening he invited her to his home along with Eric Thompson, a young Mayanist archaeologist from the Field Museum in Chicago, Herman Beyer, a linguist at Tulane, and several other scholars. Louise counted seven different nationalities and hugely enjoyed their company and conversation.

The central part of the evening was taken up with films of the ruins of Uxmal and the surrounding sites, with the guests interjecting comments, anecdotes and reminiscences. The talk was stimulating, and disconcerting, emphasizing the region's isolation and lack of modern living conditions. For the first time, she realized what lay ahead but despite a few twinges, she was determined to carry on.

Mexico

She spent a month in New Orleans, painting some of the MARI pottery (Group E), and then left for Progreso, the port for the Yucatan city of Mérida. Her lodging there, the Itza Hotel, had been the ancestral home of Sr. Rafael Rajíl, whose collection of Maya pottery she would paint. Sr. Rajíl drove her out to the ruins of Chichen Itza, where she had her first glimpse of the pyramid known as the Castillo, the huge ball court, and the dozens of looming stone structures; she was overwhelmed by the beauty and grandeur of the ruins. She met Sylvanus Morley, the archaeologist in charge of the Carnegie Institution multi-year excavations and reconstruction of the ruins and described the occasion with her customary insight.

"On Sunday afternoon Dr. and Mrs. Morley have a real American tea in their charming quarters on the edge of the bush to all the archaeologists at Chichen and to which I was invited. A most sumptuous tea, with a lot of parasites. Dr. Morley is an excitable, flighty fellow who pats you one moment and never sees you after. During our conversation I told him that Dr. Mason [curator of the Museum's American Section] was urging me to leave Mérida for the time being, visit his camp at Piedras Negras en route to Guatemala before the extremely hot weather and the rains began, returning to Mérida on my way home to complete the work. I mentioned my plan to go by boat to Piedras Negras from where Dr. Mason would arrange for my transportation by canoe up the Usumacinta River as far as possible, then by mule back across the mountains to Lake Peten, by boat to the flying field and from there by plane to Guatemala City. At once he voiced his disapproval; he was insistent in his objections, at the moment labor unrest in the chicle [chewing gum] industry made travel dangerous and besides women

never traveled alone in that country. My ardor was somewhat dampened but not extinguished!"

Immediately upon her return from Chichen Itza to Mérida she began work on the Rajíl collection (Group F), accumulated over the years from numerous mounds throughout Yucatan.

Mason had written that Morley was closing camp for the summer and that he and his wife were returning to the states by way of Piedras Negras, about the time that Louise was planning to take the same trip. At Mason's urging, she wrote and asked permission to accompany them. Morley's reply was prompt, sharp, and short. He refused to aid and abet her in any way. He was still opposed to the whole idea. Louise was disappointed, but typically determined that somehow she would get there. She threw herself into her work with renewed energy, venting her anger at Morley with each brushstroke. One pot she dubbed "the groaning pot" since with each breath she let out a loud, heartfelt groan. "Fortunately, I was working on the outside balcony at the time, and believe it or not, groaning does help!"

Unfortunately, the pleasure of her stay in Mérida twisted into a period of pure agony when the pains and twinges she had been trying to ignore developed into a terrible attack of shingles. When the pain and fever became unbearable, she arranged to be taken to the hospital, where the treatment was almost worse than the disease.

"The diabolos [sic - pustules] were waxing prolific and increasing crater within crater. Infection was rampant in that fervent heat and I realized something must be done. From the desk clerk I learned the whereabouts of the hospital whose head, Dr. Ruz, had been trained in New York. I locked my Piedras Negras bag convinced at last that that dream would never come true and, worse than that, I did not care. My chief concern was to get this thriving crop of pustules healed without infection."

She arrived at the hospital and was put to bed "with only a sheet between me and the unsympathetic wire springs. My nurse, an elderly Mexican woman, with a high cracked voice but with gentle fingers and sure, decapitated all the little diabolos with alcohol swabs. Just try it! When finished neither the sheet nor I was on the bed but when greased, swabbed in cotton properly anchored by linen strips, I was convinced that I had done the right thing for no infection could survive such treatment."



Figure G1: Plate LIV. Round-base cup-shaped vase with pictorial design in polychrome. Full size. Calcehtok, Yucatán. Collection of Robert Woods Bliss, Washington.

For two weeks, even after she was permitted to return to her hotel, the daily swabbing of alcohol continued. Louise was weak, and very thin, but she had survived the worst, and she immediately began painting again. Once she had finished the Rajíl collection, Don Rafael introduced her to Doña Julia Peon de Camara, widow of Rafael Rajíl's cousin, Oswaldo de Camara, and possessor of her late husband's pottery collection (Group G). "One of the Camara pots, polychrome and with a beautifully executed deer in color, required almost a fortnight to reproduce for, as in most cases, after painting the specimen in elevation ([Figure G-1](#), above) I did the same as an extension ([Figure G-2](#), below)

since the primary purpose of the drawing was for the future student in archaeology." She spent seven and a half days at the Camara plantation, ignoring the potential danger of infection from an unusual source. "3 of the kids have mumps. 5 more to go. And I have an even chance." She was lucky. The odds favored her and she completed the paintings without any additional health repercussions.



Figure G2: Plate LV. Extension of the surface of the same.

In 1931 the old families of Mérida all had collections of ancient Maya pottery. The newly enacted laws, designed to confiscate all such objects and place them in the State Museum, led to the secreting of these vessels in hidden rooms and country ranches. Because she was introduced by the Rajíl family, Louise was able to see some of these privately owned treasures and to paint the most important. Once satisfied that she had covered all available material, both in the Museum (Group H) and in the private collections (Group F, Group G, Figure I-1), she sent the finished work back to the University of Pennsylvania with returning archaeologists, breathed a sigh of relief at being free of the responsibility, and set off by boat from Progreso, en route to Guatemala.

Guatemala

By this time, Jayne's communiqués were insistent that she return to Philadelphia lest her health be permanently damaged. Unlike Gordon, whose letters reveal an emphasis on the successful conclusion of his projects and a disregard for the well being of those involved, Jayne showed a real concern for his artist. However, Louise was not to be stopped. Perhaps Morley (and a bout of shingles) had denied her a trip to Piedras Negras, but she was determined to get to Guatemala and complete the project she had undertaken.

Getting there would have given pause to anyone. First came a two day voyage by boat from Progreso to Veracruz, and then the train across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to Suchiate on the Pacific coast. At the end of the line, after dealing with the Mexican Customs agent, Louise managed with her minimal Spanish to negotiate the rental of an ancient automobile and driver to take her and her bags to the river that marked the frontier. Eventually, a boat arrived from the Guatemalan side, she and her baggage were loaded on board and the oarsmen began the return trip. It was a more eventful passage than expected. The boat ran aground, and through a tangle of language and gesture she understood that there was nothing for it but to wait until the tide turned. The Indians smoked, sang and chatted among themselves to while away the time and amuse this very strange American woman. Eventually, the boat lifted on the turning tide, and she and her baggage were deposited in the Guatemalan border town of Ayutla. She was helped in her negotiations with the Police and Customs inspections by a young United Fruit Company man who came to her rescue when her small store of Spanish failed her.

Her hotel room in Ayutla, at the far corner of the upper veranda, was small but clean. The door had no lock, so Louise barricaded it with a chair. She prepared for bed and was about to blow out the candle, when she heard a footfall on the outside stair. She knew there was no one else staying in her part of the hotel, and listened with growing unease as the sounds came up the stairs, around the veranda, paused at her door, and someone rapped several times. She grabbed her candle, held it high, and flung open the door, not sure of what she would see or how she would deal with it. Before her stood an unkempt and scantily clad native, who took one look at this tall, white-robed American woman glaring down at him through thick glasses, and fled. "Our terror had been mutual," she confided to her diary. "I often wondered what he wanted."

The rest of the night passed without incident, but without sleep, and Louise welcomed the morning and the train to Guatemala City. She registered at the Palace Hotel, headquarters for all the archaeologists who passed through the city. It had been built after the 1917 earthquake. "My room was on the third floor, for a week I was happy in its isolation until I learned that all floors above the second were unpopular because of the quakes. When the proprietor learned of [the length of] my intended stay he insisted upon my removal to a room on the

first floor. Here I was located in a veritable fire trap as all windows were heavily barred and my only exit would be through a wooden passage way leading to the front office and street. But I escaped with but one tremor and no damage."

She went to see Oliver Ricketson of the Carnegie Institution, who had been alerted to the reason for her presence, and would help her find her way. Since the rainy season had started, bringing an end to the field season, he invited her to use his soon-to-be-vacated office as her studio. As he was packing up to return home, he received notice that a consignment of eleven pots, including some of the oldest dated ware yet found, was on its way to him from the Carnegie dig at Uaxactun. Dr. Alfred V. Kidder, head of the Division of Historical Research of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, and director of the Uaxactun expedition, wrote to Ricketson that "The pots must be photographed and painted and although it would be frightfully expensive, we might be able to get Miss Baker from the University of Pennsylvania to come down and paint them for us." It gave Louise no small pleasure to read those words, and she noted them in her diary that night, and doodled a jaunty feather in the margin. An exchange of cables followed, and Jayne directed her to include this group in her assignment, even though Kidder insisted that the Carnegie was to publish the vessels first.



Figure K2: Uaxactun. Painting dated June 9, 1931. h. 9-3/8", rim diam. 6-1/2", base diam. 5-7/8".



Figure K3: Extension of vessel K-2. Painting dated June 15, 1931.

Her painting of one of the newly excavated vessels from Uaxactun ([Figures K-2](#), and [Figure K-3](#), above) was challenged by Morley who considered that she was in error in copying the glyphs. Since she had been meticulous in her rendering of the glyphs, as in every detail, this led to a heated dispute. When the paintings were sent back to the Museum, in a note attached to these two paintings she wrote, "Please include Miss Baker's name upon the two plates of this pot — **especially**. Both the elevation and extension — as it is a very important pot & will be reproduced extensively — Thank you — M.L.B." and then added "Do not omit artist's name from any of the plates." Photos of the pot and copies of her drawing were submitted to various scholars. Although some divergence of opinion followed, the majority of Mayanists agreed with Louise. Morley, whose work on Mayan calendrics was highly respected, took a while to come around. But "I held to my interpretation which in due time was accepted and I was complimented upon my refusal to budge from my original position." This was one of the very few challenges to her signature as proof of accuracy and authenticity. As she knew would happen, she was ultimately vindicated.

As usual, Louise spent long hours at her paints, hoping to complete everything in Guatemala City as quickly as possible and go on to Coban, to look at the large collection amassed by Erwin Dieseldorff, a German trader who had become an important antiquary and collector. The letters she received from the Museum helped keep her spirits high. "Received a most flattering letter from Jane

McHugh. She raved about my work I sent from Mérida, both quality and quantity and said if I did no more, my mission to Central America was accomplished successfully. Mr. Jayne was more enthusiastic over the work than she had ever seen him over anything and kept asking 'how does she do it?'" If Louise had any fears that her skill had been impaired by her illness, this reassured her.

The first private collection she painted was that of Carlos Luna (Group J). He had one vessel he wanted her to paint from photographs because of its fragility and great value. She insisted that he bring it in, and eventually he did (Figure J-5, Figure J-6).

Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions were a concern for everyone who lived in Guatemala, and Louise was not immune to the constant underlying worry. She was always prepared to stop her work and leave at a moment's notice, in correct attire (Figure S-1). One morning, while working on the Luna pot, she suddenly felt faint and grew nauseated. Remembering that these had been described to her as possible quake symptoms, for fear one was pending she seized the jar, put it into its box (visible in Figure S-1) under the flimsy table, assured that this had placed it out of danger. "Then I lay down on the top of the table til I felt better!"

Fortunately for the vessel, no quake ensued. "It is a beauty, and quite pepped me up. It is a lovely life I lead just now."

It was indeed a lovely life. Among her new friends in Guatemala City, in addition to the Ricketsons, she counted Eric Thompson, whom she had first met in New Orleans, Ledyard Smith, Henry Roberts, and the Penn Museum's Robert Burkitt. Thompson and Burkitt did not like each other and would visit her separately and keep her company while she worked on the Uaxactun vessels (Group K). Burkitt tended to stop in unannounced in mid afternoon, and always brought her chocolates. Thompson came around at the end of the day, and the two of them would adjourn to a bar where he would have a drink and she would eat his potato chips. Their conversation, interspersed with walks about town, were welcomed interruptions to her very long workdays. She was complimented on all sides, and an article in a Guatemalan publication described her as "the North American artist who does magnificent work." Robert Burkitt brought the German Consul to meet her and to see her work. She confided to her diary that if this kept up her head would surely expand. "Burkitt considers me THE recognized archaeological artist, and my signature carries confidence!"

Finally, she completed the Guatemala City pottery, and flew to Cobán, to paint Dieseldorff's extensive collection (Figures L1-12). She was delighted with her quarters at Dieseldorff's plantation: a large, airy bedroom and sitting room with views of the surrounding countryside. She spent three weeks in Coban, working on the pottery, helping Dieseldorff with the manuscript for his second volume of *Kunst und Religion der Mayavölker*, and visiting other coffee planters to inspect

their collections. The misty rain for which Coban is noted was an almost daily occurrence, fleas and gnats were constant unwelcomed visitors, and her long working hours wreaked havoc on her eyes. Despite these problems Louise fell in love with the region, and enjoyed her stay immensely.

From Cobán, she returned to Guatemala City and then to the coastal town of Puerto Barrios, by way of the Maya site of Quirigua to see its monumental stelae. Her plan to include a visit to Copan was cancelled because of heavy flooding and unceasing rain. In Puerto Barrios, as she left the hotel with her bags, whom should she meet but Robert Burkitt, who had come all the way from Guatemala City to be sure she got off safely. He insisted on seeing her to the boat, checking on her accommodations, and presenting her with a parting gift. Touched by his attention, and delighted with his gift of chocolate, she settled in happily on the United Fruit Company boat, the *S. S. Carrillo* for a pleasurable, restful voyage home. She had been given luxurious quarters on the top deck, sat at the Captain's table, and was feted at a special dinner in her honor.

She was elated, and convinced that all the tribulations had been worth it. Shingles, fleas, bad food, eye problems, rain, mud, earth tremors, stranded boats and bone-rattling roads — all faded into insignificance when weighed against her accomplishments on this journey. When she returned to Philadelphia the Museum director's constant refrain of "How did you do it! And in so short a time and with your handicaps!" made it all worth while. In her typical Quaker manner she noted, "Such appreciation I found most gratifying."

That fall the Museum exhibited her water colors to great acclaim. Among the events that surrounded the opening was a particularly pleasurable moment. One of the people at the reception was Sylvanus Morley. He had not once but several times denied her request to accompany him to Piedras Negras, in brusque and what she considered to be an unforgivably rude manner. In addition, he had been adamant that she miscopied the glyphs on the Uaxactun vessel, (the "Date Pot" as she referred to it) and only grudgingly gave way when she was proven correct. Small wonder that her diary entry for Saturday, October 21, 1931, carried more than a whiff of pride: "...[SG Morley] all but embraced me, terribly affable and complementary about my work." He even compared her favorably with Jean Charlot, staff artist for the Chichen Itza project. Her work, he said, "beat Jean Charlot's all to bits — no living artist could equal me, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera." That last "etcetera" was written with a triumphant flourish that healed whatever scars Morley's slights may have left.

Europe

Louise Baker had returned from Guatemala in July, 1931, prepared to settle back into her weekly routine of teaching two days at the George School and working

three days at the Museum. In November, that schedule was pleasantly disrupted by the arrival of Leonard Woolley, whom she had met when she first came to the Museum in 1908. He was then the assistant to David Randall-Maclver, and Louise was the artist hired to paint their Nubian finds.

Now, Woolley was the director of the joint British Museum/University of Pennsylvania Museum expedition to Ur, in Iraq, acclaimed in the world press for his recent discovery of the rich ancient royal tombs at the site. He had come to Philadelphia to arrange for publication of the finds, which were housed in London and in Baghdad. Nothing else would do but that the illustrations must be prepared by M. Louise Baker, the renowned archaeological illustrator. Proud and flattered, Louise once again was in a flurry of preparation, arranging for another leave of absence from the George School, putting the finishing touches to her Central American paintings, and tidying up all the loose ends at the Museum.

At the end of June, 1932 she sailed for England and Iraq where she spent the next six months engaged in painting the magnificent artifacts from the royal tombs of Ur. As she was finishing her work in Baghdad, a telegram came from the director of the Penn Museum, directing her to come home "by way of Europe-Berlin first stop. Search Europe for Mayan pottery remainder of summer." The significance of such a task was underscored by the fact that the Carnegie Institution had joined with Penn to underwrite her expenses, a matter of no small import during the darkest days of the Great Depression.

After a lengthy train trip across Europe she arrived in Berlin in February, 1933, and settled in at the Deutschland Hotel, opposite the Museum für Völkerkunde, where she found enough worthwhile pottery to keep her busy for the next three months (Group M). She was relieved to find that Dr. Theodor Preuss, the director of the Völkerkunde, and several of his staff spoke perfect English, since her German was nonexistent. Despite her lack of the language she eagerly explored the city, setting out each afternoon after leaving the museum to walk about the beautiful avenues, admire the architecture, and steep herself in the byways of a city she considered to be bewitching, even in the gray February days.

The politics of the country, however, caused a different reaction. Hitler had been sworn in as Chancellor on January 30, and each night in her room Louise was kept awake by the sound of marching men and boys as they tramped through the streets. Shortly after her arrival in the city, the Reichstag fire on February 27th set off a series of riots and vandalism. Restrictions were tightened throughout the city, fingerprints were taken and family histories checked in the obsessive search for traces of Jewish ancestry. On two occasions she received a summons to appear at the police department; she ignored them both.

Erwin Dieseldorff lived in Charlottenburg, outside Berlin, and one lovely April day Louise took a bus to visit and to discuss painting the pottery collection he had there. Because it would be difficult for Louise to come out to his home frequently,

they arranged that he would pack up the pots and bring them to the Berlin Museum, an arrangement that worked very well (Figures L-13 to L-20).

Opening and closing hours at the museum were arbitrary. "Last Saturday afternoon I was turned out because the government said we should help hate the Jews. I would rather have been quietly working than see and feel the hatred against their fellow countrymen. For the first time I wished I were out of Germany ...I don't like a nation who so enjoys persecuting their fellowman... They are now using bombs on Jewish restaurants. I don't know if my Beer Haus is Jewish or not. A friend told me last night to keep on my guard – in case a need for sudden departure should arise."

Fortunately, nothing happened before she left Berlin. Her health, always precarious, deteriorated under the daily stress that was life in Berlin; her eyes were giving her trouble, and Jayne cabled her to stop work and come home rather than jeopardize her sight. His assurance that she would be able to return to Europe the following year was the argument that convinced her. She had painted the important vessels and had taken photographs of 66 others, completing her work at the Berlin Museum; the rest of Europe could wait.

However, as long as she could pass through several cities with some Maya pottery collections, she decided to use her last weeks to good advantage and eliminate the need to include these stops next year. She went first to Biarritz, to meet the Minondo family, whom she had been told had a sizable collection of Maya pottery. She painted one vessel ([Figure N-1](#), shown below) which M. Minondo offered to sell to the Museum for \$20,000, and took photographs of seven others before leaving for Madrid, where she found nothing worth painting. Back in Paris, at the Trocadero Museum, she found the collections boxed up and packed away awaiting the completion of a new museum building. She was able to paint only the two pieces not yet encased (Group O).



Figure N1: Private Collection of Madame J. de Minondo, Biarritz, France. MLB: Purchased in Copan. Painting dated May 24, 1933. h. 6-1/4", rim diam. 5-1/2", base diam. 4-5/8".

On June 10, 1933, she embarked for home, tired, ill, but triumphant. The year had been well spent, and she was already laying plans for her return.

Chicago and the World's Fair

Once home and rested, she attended to her health concerns with a necessary round of doctor visits and treatments for her abused eyes. Then she was off with some Museum friends on an automobile trip to Chicago to visit the World's Fair, and had the satisfaction of seeing several of her paintings hanging in the Maya exhibit. "For me, one of the most enjoyable events during our stay in Chicago was the tea party at the home of Eric Thompson, who was at this time assistant

curator in the Field Museum. We recalled our days spent together in Guatemala City, especially the occasion when I made Eric, who had just returned from the dig, presentable by trimming the ravelings from the cuffs of his pants and coat prior to the dinner party at Dorothy Poponoe's."

In the fall, she took up her "same old groove" and divided her week between teaching duties at the George School and work at the Museum. The results of her European trip elicited constant praise from the director and curator, and she was assured that money would be found for her return trip the following summer. With spring came the confirmation of funds, and she made her travel arrangements. To simplify her personal needs, she had her luxuriant hair cut short, a cause for excited comment among her students. She secured a reservation on the *S. S. Kungsholm*, and sailed in June for Sweden.

Back to Europe

When she arrived at the Stockholm Museum, before she could properly introduce herself to Dr. Sigvald Linne, the director, he seized both her hands in his. "You need go no further Miss Baker. We all know you over here. You see, we take the Museum publications and your name upon any drawing or illustration as a seal of authenticity and accuracy in every detail." M. Louise was quite taken aback by his excited manner and heartfelt praise. Fortunately, there was a chair available, and she sank into it while the exuberant Dr. Linne continued to extol her virtues. Although she would have liked to repay this greeting with a painting, alas, the museum had only one piece of Maya pottery, and that hardly worth photographing.

In Denmark, she was more successful. Captain Bang, the harbor master of Aarhus, had a collection of 33 pieces of pottery, acquired over the years from sailors returning from Central America. She painted two vessels (Figure N-2, Figure N-3), and photographed another five. The Bangs took her picnicking, brought her to the shore to witness the bonfires of Midsummer Eve, and enveloped her in warmth and friendship.

Invigorated by this interlude, she hurried on to Hamburg, where she found a room near the Völkerkunde Museum and crossed into a surreal world. The director of the museum, Dr. Antze, spoke "a few words in English and volumes in German!" The former director, Dr. Danzel, who did speak English, had been reduced to janitor because his grandmother was Jewish. Some years previously he had visited the Penn Museum and met J. Alden Mason, the Mesoamerican Section curator, who had been very kind to him, and "to revenge himself" for this courtesy he could not do enough for Louise.

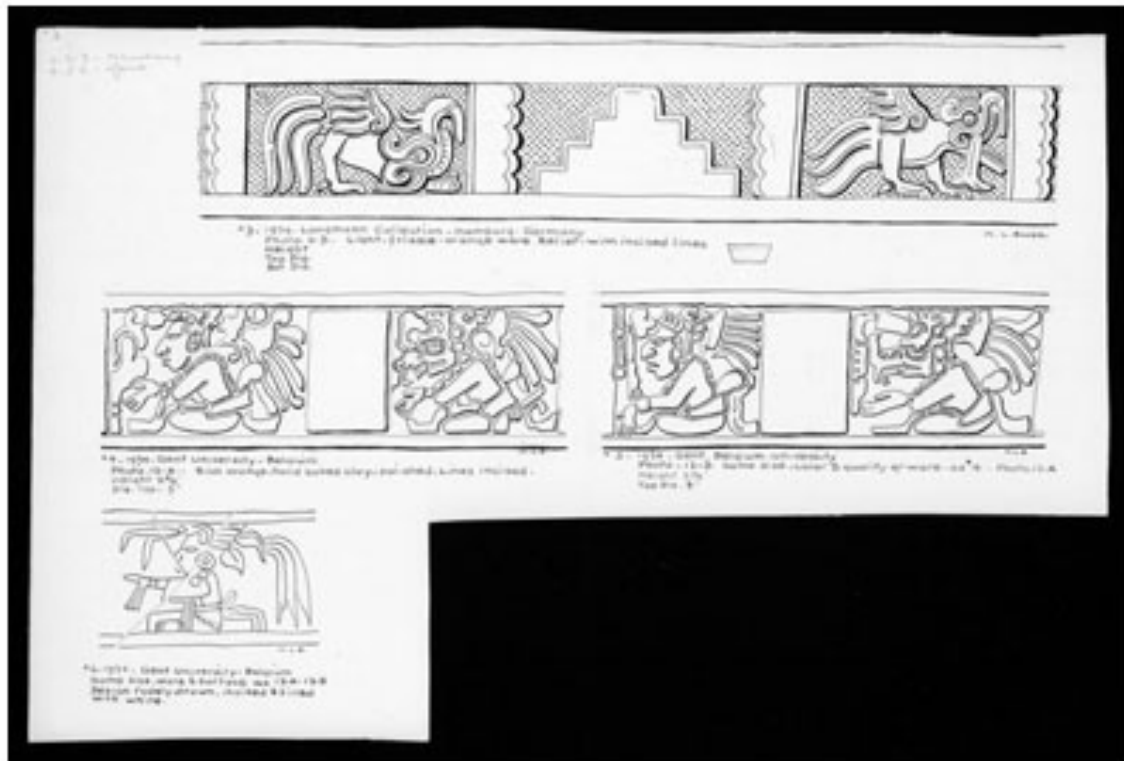


Figure Q3: University of Ghent Museum, Belgium, and Langmann Collection, Hamburg. Details of Four vessels. Painting dated 1934. Top: Langmann Collection, Hamburg, Germany. MLB: Light, friable orange ware. Relief with incised lines. Center Left: MLB: Rich orange. Hard baked clay and polished. Lines Incised. h. 2-5/8", rim diam. 3". Center Right: MLB: Same size and quality of ware as vessel on left. h. 2-5/8", rim diam. 3". Bottom: MLB: Same size, ware and surface as Center vessels. Design rudely drawn, incised and filled with white.

The current curator, like Dr. Antze, spoke no English, and so she had to depend on Dr. Danzel for everything. He arranged for workspace in the museum, where she could paint some vessels (Group P, and [Figure Q-3](#), above) and photograph those not worth painting. He directed her to a boarding house where she would be safer than in the hotel, where her movements were watched. He introduced her to the Langmanns whose private collection included a cylindrical polychrome from Chiquimula, which she painted ([Figure N-4](#), below).



Figure N4: Private Collection of Mr. Otto Langmann, Averhoffstrasse 10, Hamburg, Germany. MLB: Purchased by him in 1931. From Chiquimula, Guatemala. Painting dated July 1934. h. 11-3/4", rim diam. 5-7/8", base diam. 5-3/4".

The political stress on family life was brought home to Louise when she looked up the Dubbers, a family she had met in Coban. The family was clearly nervous, and the visit strained, since the maid reported to the authorities daily, and even the children were encouraged to spy on their parents. The family was under constant observation, and conversation was extremely guarded. "As they confided their troubles to me behind closed doors every so often Mr. Dubber would suddenly open the door into the hall to assure himself there was no one listening at the keyhole." The visit filled her with foreboding, and she left Hamburg with the conviction that she would not see her new found friends and

colleagues again. "I have every reason to believe that Dr. Danzel did not long survive."

It was with relief that she left Germany for the Netherlands. Although there was not much Maya pottery to be painted, she did find vessels worthy of painting at the University of Ghent. Their museum housed an unusual collection of little covered pots of Maya origin (Group Q). As she reported to Mason in a letter of July 30th, it was a group of vessels "with effigy heads upon the lids, a type unique in Mayan pottery. Many of the pots are not mated, as to lids and vase, but I made color drawings of five of the best, and have color photos of the others. We have nothing like them at the Museum."

On July 25th she packed up her paints and her paintings and left for England, where she expected to be able to access the collection at the British Museum. Alas, the International Congress of the Ethnographical and Ethnological Societies had chosen this moment to meet in London and most of the Museum's Maya ceramics had been installed as an exhibit in honor of the conference. She painted the one vessel available to her (Figure R-1), visited with some of her friends who were attending the Congress, went to a few of the lectures, and took off to Ireland to visit friends until the British Museum would return to its version of normality.

Time and money were running out. Given the precarious nature of the economy, she doubted the Museum would be able to send her to Europe again. By now she was constantly worried about her eyesight; her eyes were becoming less reliable each day and she needed to get home to see her doctor.

The bureaucracy at the British Museum only added to her sense of frustration. It had been a problem when she worked there on the Ur material two years earlier, and the same conditions prevailed in 1934. In 1932 she had confided to her diary: "The red tape is appalling and tradition is ingrown. They can do nothing but what their great-great-granddads did! They are all locked in their little dens and each fellow from top to bottom is a stickler for his own rights and dignity. There is no give and take — the bit of American grit [I exhibited] was rather annoying! The light is poor and nothing can be done about it. They show me out at 4 and out I go! So much time is wasted while waiting for something to be unlocked, according to the rule."

And on this trip she noted once again: "I never met as disagreeable, discourteous, raw lot of men as are in that museum. I 'boiled' all afternoon as I worked and was ready to chuck it all tomorrow."

She noted that the collection included about a dozen pots from Guatemala that should be painted and added to the Museum's publications when and if possible. "Everywhere I am most courteously received and assisted — except of course in the British Museum."

Then she went off to visit a new museum, the Wellcome Museum of the University of London, hoping to see their Maya material, and was told that the collection was in the throes of installation, and could not be seen. Her irritation is evident: "My stay too short and the tape too long. One must write long in advance to prepare them for the foreign insect which would invade their sacred silent precincts!"

She finished her work on the illustrations for the Ur publications, painted one more Maya vessel (Figure R-2, Figure R-3) and set sail for home.

During the five months of her two trips to Europe in 1933 and 1934 M. Louise Baker visited 15 museums (canvassed an additional 26) and 7 private collections, made 37 color plates, 14 ink drawings, and took 110 photographs. Reflecting on the results of her twelve-hour days, she considered that after all she had not done badly, and the Museum and the Carnegie Institution would find their money had been very well spent.

Piedras Negras Lintel 3

In the fall of 1934 Louise was as busy as ever. The art program at the George School had grown, and her classes on the history of art and architecture were full of enthusiastic students, very proud of their world-traveling teacher. The hobby group she had formed allowed her to indulge her passion for pottery and block printing; and the faculty drama group welcomed her back to their endeavors (she played the maid in Noel Coward's "Hay Fever" that year).

At the University Museum, however, the atmosphere was gloomy. The Great Depression had depleted the Museum's resources. Everyone had been forced to take several cuts in salary; one year the Museum closed for the month of August for a "Scotch holiday" in order to save the cost of everyone's salaries, even that of the director. It was forced to reduce the number of employees, including four heads of department. The director could sometimes be seen with a broom, sweeping the gallery floors.

Louise finished the report on her work in Europe and reduced all other work at the Museum to a minimum. Her eyesight was now a serious problem. Her doctor had warned that stronger lenses could no longer keep pace with her steadily deteriorating vision. She contemplated resigning from the Museum, both because of her health and because of the lack of regular work there, when in the spring of 1935 she was unexpectedly presented with a most interesting piece of work.

In 1931 the Museum had begun its first major expedition into the Peten, the rainforest that covers much of Guatemala and hides many of the Maya ruins. The site they had chosen was Piedras Negras, on the banks of the Usumacinta River,

a site known for its magnificent carved monuments. That first season they uncovered one of the most beautiful Maya carvings yet discovered. Even through the desecration of time and weathering, the work of the ancient artist still shone. Besides the fragmented figures in the scene, there were dozens of glyphs forming an inscription of significant length.

"I was asked to make a reconstructed drawing of a badly defaced stone lintel excavated at Piedras Negras and of rare value archaeologically. I accepted it as my 'Swan Song,' for I felt, if I were able to complete it, it would be a good place in which to end my thirty years of service as staff artist in the Museum."

"The original lintel was on loan from the Guatemalan government. It was about forty inches long and eighteen inches high and beautifully carved by obsidian tools which preceded the use of steel in Mayan Land. While the stone was badly defaced much of the beautiful carving was saved from further destruction by having fallen upon its face and so was protected through the ages. The scene depicted shows a monarch seated upon his throne, clad in gala attire including the royal feather headdress, in conference with fourteen of his subjects. The exquisite skill of the sculptor is evident even in the masterful carving of the finger nails and other minute details."

She barely had time to make a preliminary drawing of the lintel in its ravaged state before the start of summer and her long-planned vacation. For eleven weeks she and a small group of equally intrepid travelers made their way through South America by cruise ship, train, horse, and motor car. Her curiosity was unabated, her sense of adventure still strong; her health improved with the physical activity and her energy was renewed by the daily plunge into new sights and new cultures. She tramped the markets, sketched the landscapes, and asked a thousand questions. Whenever their journey took them to a city with an archaeological museum, Louise was welcomed with recognition and appreciation, which went far to dampen any feelings of having passed her prime.

She returned to Philadelphia rested and eager for the exciting project awaiting her. Perhaps the most important result of that summer was her doctor's report when she saw him in September: the long respite from work had been beneficial to her eyes, and she was able to resume work on the lintel.

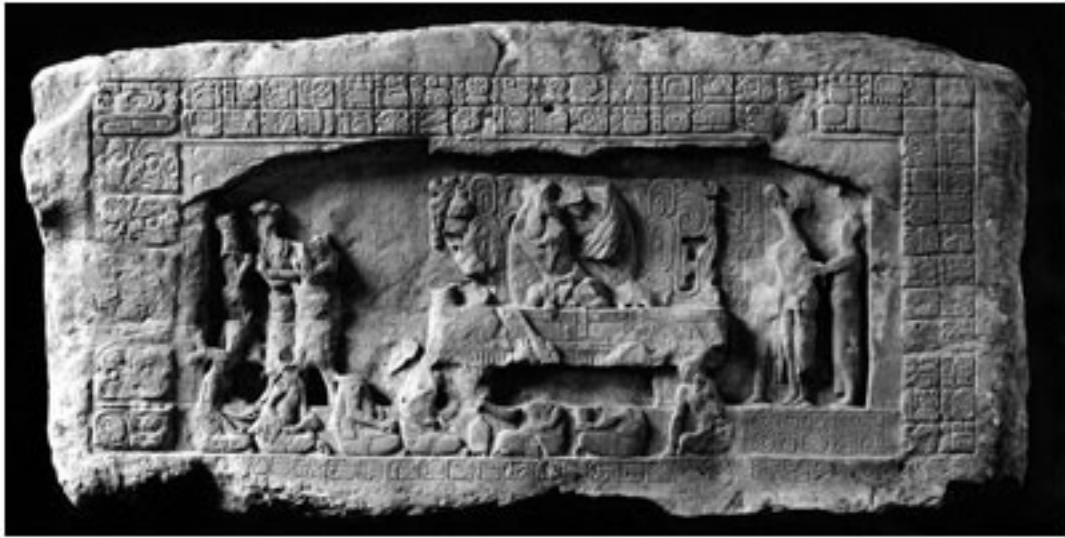


Figure S2: Photograph of Piedras Negras Lintel 3.

Louise began by making painstaking and accurate drawing of the lintel in its damaged but still beautiful state, and studying the photograph of the sculpture ([Figure S-2](#), above). Once the initial drawing was complete, she did much of the work at her studio at the George School, with only occasional visits to the Museum for consultations, thus eliminating the need for repetitive and tiring train rides to and from the city. The restoration called for a careful scrutiny of the details that remained, and an application of her long close knowledge of Maya art. Her studio was filled with sketches and enlarged photographs of the lintel. She used a magnifying glass to be sure she had accurately captured many of the details. She came to feel an intimate understanding of the scene and the artist who had carved it so many centuries before. On those occasions when she went to the Museum, she spent hours in the company of those ancient Maya, walking around the stone, examining it in different lights and from every angle, absorbed in the stance of each figure, until she knew each individual. Then, as the registrar Geraldine Bruckner recalled, came the re-enactment that was so frequently needed in attempting to recreate an ancient painting or piece of sculpture. "Much of the sculpture was missing, the number of figures uncertain, some connections between torsos and lower legs lost. To see just what was anatomically possible, she enlisted the help of her [Museum] friends, of whom there were many. We sat on the floor or on a low platform in various positions, so that she could match us up with the remaining parts of the lintel."

To the right of the ruler on the throne were several standing figures. Years later, Louise gleefully recounted to her nephew Alan Noble how she had known that there were four figures, and argued the case successfully with Dr. Mason, who at first saw only three. "The group on the right was the most difficult. An attachment for a foot was finally discovered, proving that four figures instead of three were

filling the niche. The comparative height of knees gave evidence that two boys, a youth and a grown attendant comprised the party. Anatomically, it is impossible to group them otherwise."(Baker 1936:121).

In January she reported to Dr. Jayne that she was now on the last stage, drawing the many glyphs that framed the scene; their shapes had survived relatively unscathed; only two were so badly eroded that they had to be reconstructed by Morley. On February 3rd, 1936, with a sigh of relief and satisfaction, she recorded, "Lintel finished. Doesn't seem possible! 365 hours!" For this superb recreation ([Figure S-3](#), below), she was paid \$730. Jayne congratulated her on the perfection of the work, which was "even better than he expected," but told her sadly that the Museum's coffers were so bare there would be very little money for further work in the near future.



Figure S3: Restoration Drawing of Piedras Negras Lintel 3 by M. Louise Baker.

Several months later, on her next visit to the Museum, Jayne assured her that although he could not afford her services at the moment, she would continue to be connected to the Museum, that the Depression was causing only a temporary hiatus. When she recorded this conversation in her diary, she added, "Piffle!"

The moment had come. Her retirement from the Museum had been thrust upon her.

Aftermath

Louise continued to teach at the George School for two more years. When she finally retired in 1938, she and her friend Constance Allen, dean of the George School, who retired in the same year, bought a home in Wallingford, Chester County, and Louise designed her ideal studio. She may have retired, her sight was problematic, but her days were busier than ever.

The studio allowed her to indulge her lifelong love of carpentry, learned as a child at her father's carpentry bench. The art hobby group that she had started in 1929 continued and expanded its scope. She developed and taught adult classes in writing and illustrating, as well as classes in carpentry, furniture making, metal working, and ceramics. She haunted country antique shops and auctions for furniture with potential, carted the pieces home, and carefully restored them. She researched and gave talks on the history of her family, the Society of Friends, and Chester County. She spoke at schools and clubs about her life in archaeology. For years she had designed the Christmas cards and note cards for the Museum; now she created them for herself. She continued to engage in amateur theatre productions; her theatrical skill undoubtedly contributed to her ability to thrill her audiences with tales of her travels in Mexican jungles and Iraqi deserts. Until the start of the Second World War, despite her failing sight, each summer she shepherded small groups of art lovers on strenuous jaunts to the museums and cultural centers of Europe (she totted up 20 Atlantic crossings, two of them by air).

In 1943 the last of the three folio volumes of Maya ceramics, featuring her paintings, was published. George G. Vaillant, then director of the Museum, sent her the full set, with an appreciative note, and she was finally able to see (albeit with magnifying glass and in strong light) the works for which she would be long remembered.

When Leonard Woolley visited Philadelphia in 1955 to receive the Museum's Lucy Wharton Drexel Award, the one person he said he would like to see was Louise. She had illustrated the publications of two of his major excavations: the Nubian work he did with David Randall-Maclver, with which she began her Museum association, and years later, the superb finds from Ur. She and Woolley had become friends and colleagues.

By this time Louise was living in a Quaker retirement home in West Chester, the Hickman House, and she invited him to come there for luncheon, an invitation he accepted with alacrity. He was expected at eleven, and she was a bit nervous that morning when the electricity failed for some forty minutes. She had ordered a special lunch, and was sure this outage would ruin it. She relaxed only when the electricity came back on in time for the meal to go forward as planned. Woolley arrived in the Museum car; they had a delightful visit over lunch, followed by a long and comfortable conversation, recalling the past. "I have

known and worked with him since [1908] at intervals. He retired when he was 70, lives in Dorset 3 miles from train and village. He is slightly deaf but nimble. I was glad to see him. Fine man." That diary entry (recorded by Constance Allen, since Louise's sight no longer served for such detail) ends with the sad reflection and prediction that "I let down after he left... It is the last time I will see Sir Leonard."

She saw another good friend, Eric Thompson, for the last time in January, 1962, when the Museum celebrated its 75th anniversary, and bestowed the Drexel Medal on him. She was invited to attend the ceremony but her failing health and total blindness seemed to make this impossible. One of her former students at the George School, William Hires, now an assistant in the office of the University president, solved the problem. With a devotion characteristic of her students, he drove to West Chester, brought her to the convocation, and took her home afterward. In his talk, Thompson made special mention of this friend and colleague of his youth. "Miss Baker made those magnificent water colors of Maya pottery published by the University Museum" (Thompson 1962). He went on to recall with affection her illusory earthquake protection for the vases in her care, and her complete confidence in her preparations.

Her views on earthquake protection may have been misguided, but about her artistry there is no doubt. She had accomplished much, and was proud that she had done her best work after the age of sixty, when many others would have succumbed to the inertia of age.

The Maya pottery volumes are out of print, but copies of them are coveted as collector's items. The Piedras Negras lintel restoration drawing was widely reproduced, along with the article the director had asked her to write about her work on it. The lintel itself was returned to Guatemala, where it sits in the national archaeological museum, and on the wall next to it, displayed with equal honor, is M. Louise Baker's interpretation of the original scene.

Scattered through old copies of the Museum Journal and Bulletin are drawings signed with either her distinctive "MLB" or "M. Louise Baker." She created the originals for many artifact models and reproductions that were sold in the shop, including a model of Piedras Negras Stela 12, which she particularly cherished ([Figure S-4](#), below). Her presence lives on in her many contributions to the galleries of the Penn Museum: In the Lower Egyptian Gallery is the scale model she built of the pharaoh Merenptah's palace throne room, and the reconstructed pillar whose top she painted while perched precariously atop a shaky ladder; in the Chinese Rotunda the large wall murals she repaired dominate the room; the magnificent finds from Ur still boast the results of her painstaking reconstruction; throughout the Museum are artifacts she repaired and whose forms she reproduced.

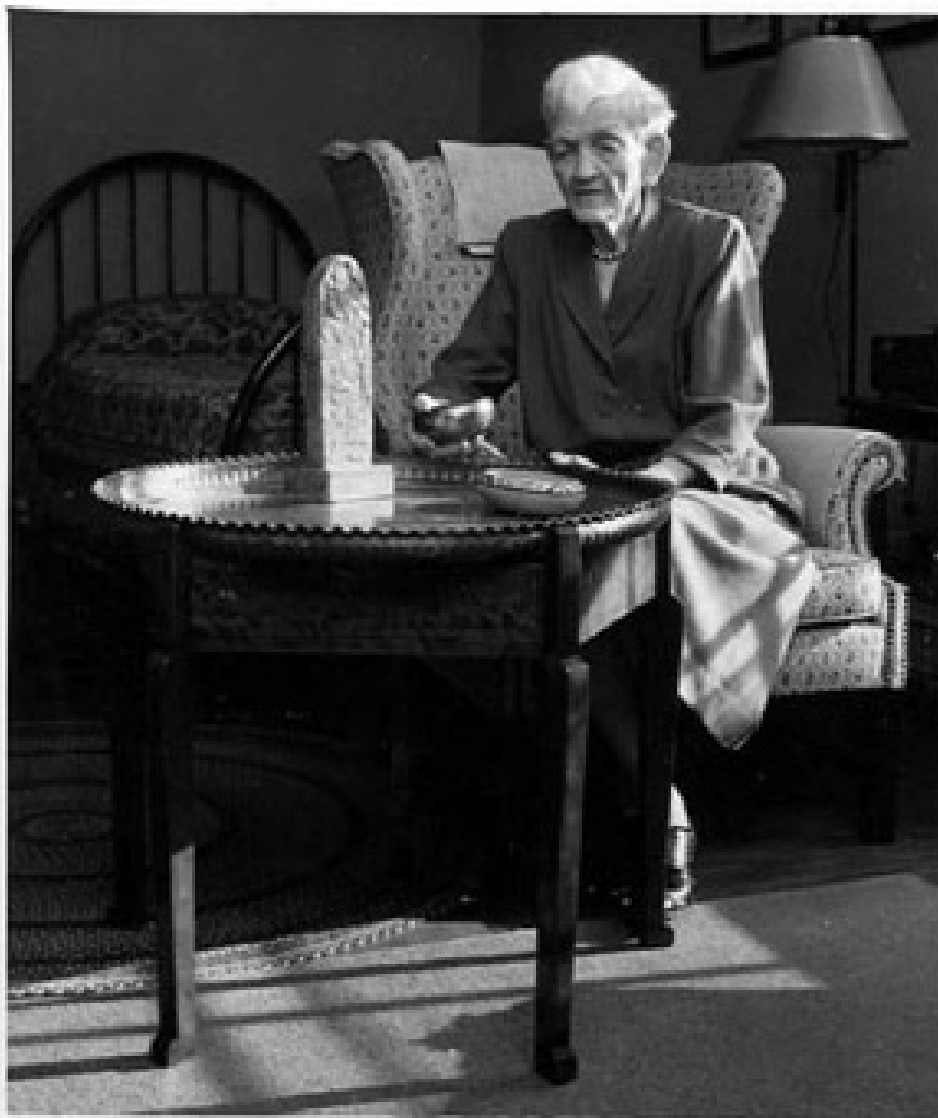


Figure S4: M. Louise Baker in 1959, with the model of Piedras Negras Stela 12, which she had created more than 25 years earlier.

She died in July, 1962, three weeks short of her ninetieth birthday. When she first left Ohio in 1891, at the age of 19, she had written, "I hitched my wagon to a star, my foot was on the step." For seventy years, she never stopped her ascent, meeting every challenge enthusiastically, achieving great recognition in her chosen field, and fulfilling all her expectations of herself. She had done much and traveled far; to parts of the world where women never ventured unattended. At the end, she summed up her life simply: it was "rich in experience and living and friends."

And the making of splendid art.

List of Figures

Plate numbers refer to position in the folio publication volumes (Gordon and Mason 1925-1943).

Folio captions as originally published are in **bold**.

Where pertinent, M. Louise Baker's comments written on the original paintings are included, in *italics*.

Paintings are water color unless otherwise noted.

Measurements for Penn Museum vessels are in centimeters. All other measurements are in inches, measured by MLB.

Final notation (smaller type size) in each caption is a number beginning #165...; these are photograph identification numbers in the University of Pennsylvania Museum Photo Archives. Other numbers refer to artifact numbers in their respective collections as recorded by MLB.

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