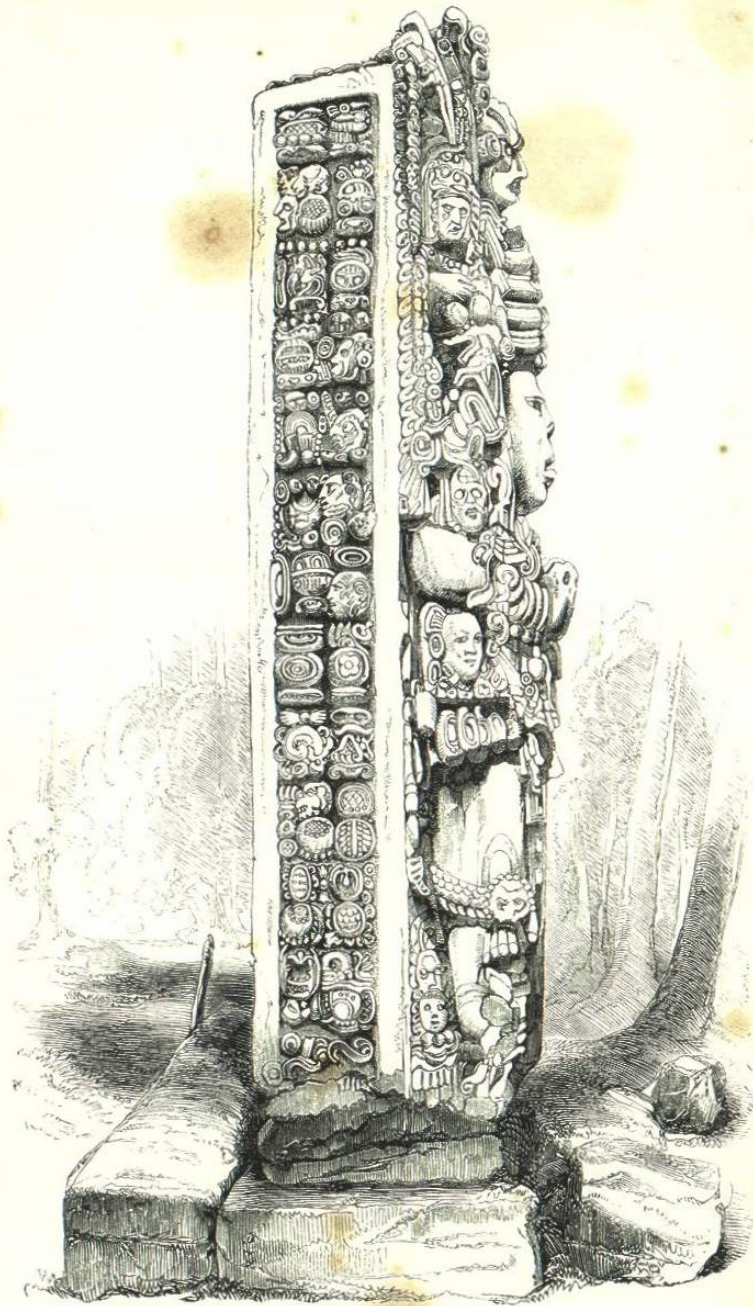


F. Catherwood.

31. STONE IDOL.—Back View.



F. Catherwood.

32. STONE IDOL.—Side View.

do in the depths of a tropical forest, silent and solemn, strange in design, excellent in sculpture, rich in ornament, different from the works of any other people; their uses and purposes, their whole history so entirely unknown, with hieroglyphics explaining all, but perfectly unintelligible, we do not pretend to convey any idea. Often the imagination was pained in gazing at them. The tone which pervades the ruins is that of deep solemnity. An imaginative mind might be infected with superstitious feelings. From constantly calling them by that name in our intercourse with the Indians, we regarded these solemn memorials as "idols"—deified kings and heroes—objects of adoration and ceremonial worship. We did not find on either of the monuments or sculptured fragments any delineations of human, or, in fact, any other kind of sacrifice, but had no doubt that the large sculptured stone invariably found before each "idol" was employed as a sacrificial altar. The form of sculpture most frequently met with was a Death's head,—sometimes the principal ornament, and sometimes only accessory; whole rows of them on the outer wall, adding gloom to the mystery of the place, keeping before the eyes of the living, death and the grave, presenting the idea of a holy city—the Mecca or Jerusalem of an unknown people.

In regard to the age of this desolate city we shall not at present offer any conjecture, although it can hardly be doubted that its history is graven on its monuments. No Champollion has yet brought to them the energies of his inquiring mind. Who shall read them?

"Chaos of ruins! who shall trace the void,  
O'er the dim fragments cast a lunar light,  
And say, 'Here was, or is,' where all was doubly night?"

In conclusion, it may be remarked, that if this be the place referred to by the Spanish historian as conquered by Hernandez de Chaves, at that time its broken monuments, terraces, pyramidal structures, portals, walls, and sculptured figures were entire, and all were painted; the Spanish soldiers must have gazed at them with astonishment and wonder; and it seems strange that a European army could have entered it without spreading its fame through official reports of generals and exaggerated stories of soldiers. At least no European army could enter such a city now without this result following; but the silence of the Spaniards may be accounted for by the fact, that these conquerors of America were illiterate and ignorant adventurers, eager in pursuit of gold, and blind to everything else: or, if reports were made, the Spanish government, with a jealous policy observed down to the last moment of her dominion, suppressed every thing that might attract the attention of rival nations to her American possessions.