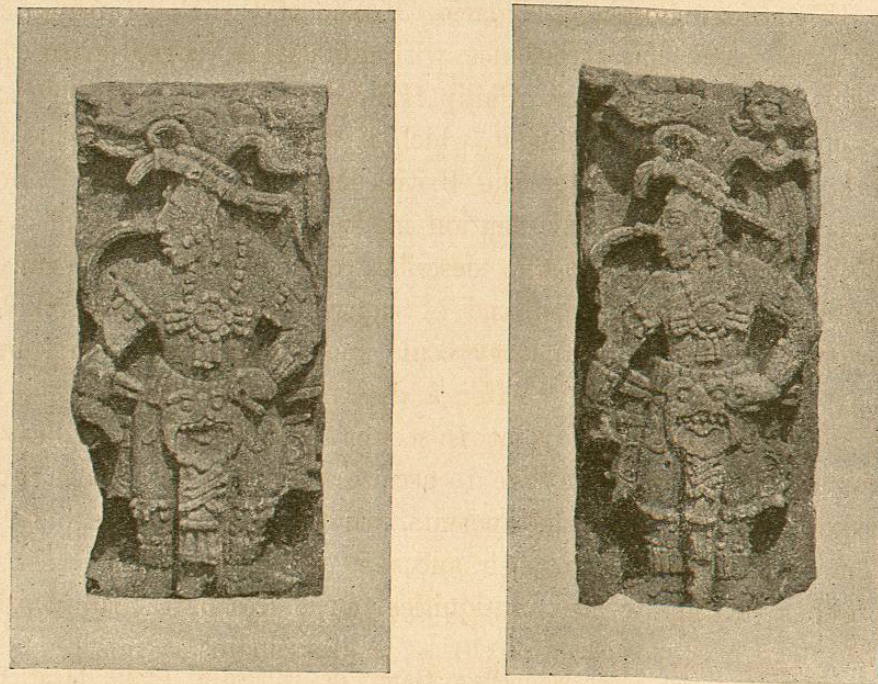


shrouding them in a sombre shade, and sending their huge roots into the crevices and unexplored chambers and vaults and galleries of the vast edifices.

The valley in which the ruins are situated has the form of a level plain, about one and a half miles wide and seven or eight miles long, enclosed on all sides by the mountains, which rise in gentle slopes in front, and farther back in more precipitous ridges terminating in rounded peaks and level table-tops. The river flows in a southwesterly direction. It emerges by a narrow passage from the mountains, flows with many windings through the plain, and disappears through a gorge to the west. The principal ruins are situated on the right bank near the centre of the valley, where the river runs close to the eastern foot-hills. Taking an abrupt bend to the west, the river flows directly against the ruins, by which its course is again turned abruptly to the south. As would be expected in a level valley like that of Copan, the river is constantly changing the position of its bed. For a long time it has been making encroachments on the ruins, and the entire eastern side of the great pile known as the Main Structure has been carried away by it, leaving the interior exposed in the form of a cliff one hundred and twenty feet high. The whole of this elevation is artificial; pieces of pottery and obsidian knives can be picked out of it even at the water's edge. The river is subject to annual freshets, during which an immense body of water is thrown with great force directly against the opposing cliff, from whose face a fresh portion falls in each succeeding year. So swift is the current that little of this fallen material is left when the water subsides.



SCULPTURES FROM TERRACE EAST OF THE GREAT PLAZA. (See page 24.)

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

COPAN has been visited in former times by several travellers and explorers who have given more or less accurate information respecting what they saw.

In 1530 Hernando de Chaves made an expedition into the neighborhood, from the capital city of Guatemala, and conquered an Indian stronghold called Copan; but neither he nor any of his associates on the expedition left any account, so far as is known, of the people or towns.

The later historians of the country have made an attempt to identify the place called Copan, conquered by Chaves, with the ruins which since their first mention have been known by that name; but there is nothing within the range of our present knowledge of the facts to justify such a conclusion. There are, on the contrary, historical evidences which seem to prove almost beyond a doubt that the place conquered by Chaves was very inferior to, and more modern than, the ruined city called Copan, to-day, concerning which history is silent. It is now the general opinion of students that this city of antiquity was a complete ruin long before the arrival of the Spaniards; all tradition concerning it was lost, and its name forgotten.

In 1576 Diego Garcia de Palacio, Justice of the Royal Audiencia of Guatemala, travelling in accordance with his duties, passed through the ruins, and in a letter to King Philip II. of Spain gives a description of what he observed. This document, which is preserved in the Muñoz collection of Spanish manuscripts in the British Museum, is of great value,—containing as it does the only mention made by the early Spanish writers concerning these ruins. Palacio describes what he saw as “ruins and vestiges of a great population and of superb edifices, of such skill and splendor that it appears that they could never have been built by the natives of that province.”* After a description that corresponds very well so far as it goes with what is seen to-day, he goes on to say: “I endeavoured with all possible care to ascertain from the Indians, through the traditions derived from the ancients, what people lived here, or what they knew or had heard from their ancestors concerning them. But they had no books relating to their antiquities, nor do I believe that in all this

* A letter from the Licenciado Diego Garcia de Palacio to Philip II. of Spain; dated Guatemala, 8th March, 1576. Maudslay's translation.

district there is more than one, which I possess. They say that in ancient times there came from Yucatan a great lord who built these edifices, but that at the end of some years he returned to his native country, leaving them entirely deserted."*

Here is an account written only forty-six years after the expedition of Chaves, and yet, from the words used, it is plain that the structures were in an advanced state of ruin. Palacio is known to have been an intelligent and faithful inquirer after historical facts, and yet the only story he was able to get from the natives was of the vaguest possible character, and sounds more like their own invention than a real tradition.

If the place had really been destroyed by Chaves, there must have been eyewitnesses of the event still living at the time of Palacio's visit. It is conceivable that the Indians might have invented the story they gave him in order to avoid telling the truth, but it is scarcely possible that Palacio could have been so deceived.

From the time of Palacio's visit until the year 1835, a lapse of more than two centuries and a half, the ruins remained in total darkness, buried in the depths of a tropical forest, and unknown except to the indifferent natives, — so that the historian Robertson, writing in 1777, quotes the statement made to him that in all New Spain there is not "any monument or vestige of any building more ancient than the Conquest."† The report of Colonel Juan Galindo, who was commissioned by the Government of Guatemala in 1834 to examine the ruins, has never been published in full; but a letter written by him to the editor of the "Literary Gazette" of London, is printed in that Journal for 1835, and a similar letter is printed in the "Transactions of the American Antiquarian Society," Vol. II. These letters, although they make the ruins known for the first time to the civilized world, add little to our knowledge of Copan.‡

It remained for Mr. John L. Stephens — who in 1839 was sent on a special commission to Central America by the President of the United States, and who, in his "chase after a government," improved his time by exploring

* See Appendix for Squier's reprint and translation of Palacio's letter.

† Robertson, History of America, vol. II., note lviii to p. 298. In the same note, however, he refers to information received of a temple near Cuernavaca, composed of large stones fitted nicely to each other.

‡ There is an account of the Ruins of Copan in a manuscript history of Guatemala written in the seventeenth century, and preserved in the City of Guatemala. It is entitled "Historia de Guatemala: Recordacion Florida, escrita el siglo xvii," by Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman. The account of Copan here given is quoted by Juarros in his history of Guatemala (Compendio de la Historia de la Ciudad de Guatemala, por El Señor Don Domingo Juarros. Guatemala, 1808); but from its erroneous and absurd character, and the fact that it is directly contradicted by what has been described by other writers and by what is seen to-day, it seems evident that it could never have been written from personal knowledge. The writings of Fuentes must be regarded as of little value.

the antiquities of the country, — to awaken the general interest of the scientific world concerning the ruins.

Stephens was so fortunate as to have with him an English artist, Fred. Catherwood, whose pencil drawings, executed with most admirable fidelity, add greatly to the archaeological value of Stephens' work.* Owing to the dense tropical forest that hid the ruins in his day, the plan as well as the description by Stephens is of necessity incomplete, and in many particulars erroneous; he fell into an error, that would seem to have been made by Palacio nearly three hundred years before, in mistaking fallen buildings for ruined city walls, and in denying the existence of interior chambers and stone-roofed structures.

The real character of the principal structures was first understood by Mr. Alfred P. Maudslay of England, who prepared the first map of the ruins having any claims to exactness.

In 1885 Maudslay visited the ruins and made the first attempt at an extensive and careful exploration. Having brought tools for excavating, and materials for taking impressions of the sculptured monuments, he made a number of excavations among the ruins, and took with him to England a set of moulds of the principal monuments from which casts have been made and exhibited in the South Kensington Museum and in the Archaeological Museum at Cambridge.

The result of Maudslay's work, so far as relates to Copan, has now been given to the world in a form which makes it at this date the most valuable contribution to the archaeology of Central America.†

In 1889 Mr. E. W. Perry obtained from the Government of Honduras a concession with the object of founding a National Museum of Antiquities at Copan, to be under the management of a Society of Antiquarians, of which Mr. Perry was to be permanent president. The scheme involved the exploration of the ruins of Honduras and the disposition of the collections thus obtained in a Museum at Copan. The plan was never realized; and in 1891 Mr. Charles P. Bowditch, of Boston, obtained from Mr. Perry all the rights pertaining to him through the above-mentioned concession, in the interest of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University. The scheme outlined in this concession proved unsatisfactory, and a plan of operations was proposed to General Luis Bogran, then President of Honduras, by which the interests of science would be better served, and which President Bogran, with a praiseworthy zeal for the promotion of scientific research, readily agreed to. The result was an edict of the Government of Honduras by which the Peabody Museum acquired the care of

* Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan. By John L. Stephens. 1841. 2 vols. 8vo.

† Biologia Centrali-Americana, edited by F. Ducane Godman and Osbert Salvin. Archaeology by A. P. Maudslay. Parts I to IV. London: R. H. Porter.

the antiquities of that country for a period of ten years, with the right of exploring the ruins and taking away one half of the objects found in the excavations. The Peabody Museum thus acquired an unprecedented opportunity for making the investigations, so long delayed but of such vast importance, that are needed to throw light on the early inhabitants of the American continent.

It was proposed to send an expedition to Copan each year to remain during the dry season; and for this purpose a committee was appointed, consisting of Mr. Charles P. Bowditch, Mr. Francis C. Lowell, and Professor F. W. Putnam. The committee is indebted to Mr. Maudslay for valuable suggestions, which from his experience in exploring Central American ruins he is in a position to give, and through him also were obtained the services of skilled workmen who had been his assistants in making copies of the monuments.

The first expedition left Cambridge in October, 1891, in charge of Mr. Marshall H. Saville and Mr. John G. Owens, who had been Professor Putnam's assistants in the Museum, and under him had acquired a training that made them well fitted for the work. Being prevented by his duties from leaving Cambridge himself, Professor Putnam directed the operations in the field by letters of instruction. The expedition was thoroughly equipped with tools for making excavations, and with materials for taking photographs and impressions of the monuments and other sculptures. Important results were obtained by the first season's work, which are referred to in the summary given further on.

The second expedition left in October, 1892, in charge of Mr. John G. Owens as director of the expedition and also as a special commissioner for the World's Columbian Exposition. Mr. Owens took with him Mr. G. Byron Gordon as surveyor, and Mr. Edmund Lincoln and Mr. George Shorkley as assistants. Seldom has an archaeological expedition gone to the field with such brilliant prospects or under so energetic and enthusiastic a leader.

The party arrived at the ruins on the 1st of December, and for the first two months the work went on very satisfactorily. The principal part of the ruins was cleared of brush; a survey was being made; moulds were made of all the monoliths that had not been moulded in the previous year; several excavations were begun which gave most important results, and arrangements were made for obtaining moulds of the great monoliths of Quirigua, in the coast region of Guatemala. It was to make these arrangements that Mr. Owens made a journey to the coast towards the end of January. Two days after his return he fell violently ill with a malignant fever of the country, and notwithstanding the efforts of a mind naturally cheerful, a constitution always robust, and a spirit never daunted, to cope with the violence of the disease, he grew steadily worse, and

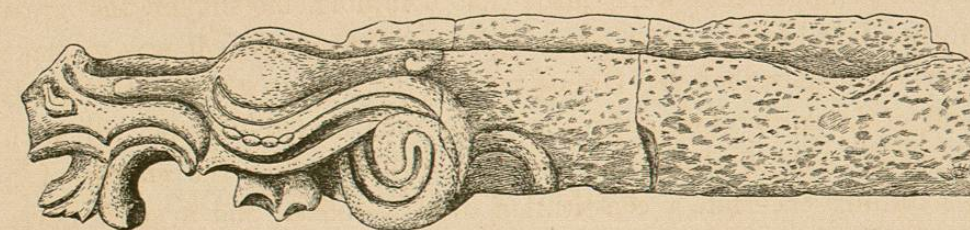
died on the 17th of February, after twenty-one days of suffering. He was buried at the ruins, beside one of the great monoliths in the plaza.

Mr. Gordon then took charge of the work and carried out, so far as possible, Mr. Owens' plans. Don Carlos Madrid, as representative of the Honduras government, was sent to Copan to take part in the division of the objects found; and those constituting the Museum's share were transported to the coast and shipped to Cambridge. The moulds of the Quirigua monoliths were completed, and from some of them casts have since been made.

In the winter of 1893-94 Mr. A. P. Maudslay went to Copan, as the representative of the Peabody Museum, and while there made several excavations, and brought back a number of moulds. In October, 1894, a fourth expedition was equipped, and Mr. George Byron Gordon was appointed director. He arrived at the ruins in December, and was joined in March by Mr. Robert Burkitt, who was sent out with supplies. The party remained in the field until the end of June, 1895.

The route taken by these expeditions has been as follows:— From New Orleans to Livingston in Guatemala, by the steamers of the Royal Mail line; from Livingston to Yzabal by the steamer of the Rio Dulce Navigation Company; and from Yzabal to Copan by mules over the same route as was followed by Stephens in 1839. At Yzabal the members of each expedition have been placed under deep obligation to Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Potts, the only American people living at that place. Mr. Potts, from his intimate knowledge of the country, acquired during a residence of over thirty years, and from his interest in its antiquities, as in all matters relative to scientific research, has been able to render most valuable services, and the Museum has been glad to avail itself of his kind co-operation. The members of these expeditions will always cherish the memory of those happy occasions at his hospitable board, when, after long and weary journeyings and months of hardship and exposure, they were made so welcome there, and so tenderly cared for by the kindest of hostesses, Mrs. Potts.

In Livingston valuable services were rendered to the first expeditions by Mr. John T. Anderson, who was then Consul of the United States at that port. The later expeditions are greatly indebted to Mr. William Owen, manager of the Northern Transportation Company at Livingston, and also to Mrs. Owen, who extended such kindly hospitalities to the members of the expeditions as to win their lasting gratitude.



GARGOYLE (SERPENT'S HEAD) FROM DÉBRIS OF TEMPLE. See page 19.