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G. B. Gordon*

MEMOIRS

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PEABODY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND
ETHNOLOGY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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THE HIEROGLYPHIC STAIRWAY

RUINS OF COPAN

REPORT ON EXPLORATIONS BY THE MUSEUM

BY

GEORGE BYRON GORDON

CAMBRIDGE

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EDITORIAL NOTE.

THE Hieroglyphic Stairway on the side of one of the great pyramidal structures of the ruins of Copan has excited special interest from the time of the first account of the ruins given by Palacio in 1570. When our second expedition, under the lamented Owens, began the work of clearing the débris from the steps, the importance of the stairway, particularly on account of the hieroglyphic inscription, was fully realized. From that time the successive expeditions have worked at the stairway until it has been the good fortune of Mr. Gordon to complete its examination and to make photographs and moulds of the sculptured faces of the steps.

It is greatly to be regretted that an earthquake, or possibly the gradual disintegration of the sustaining structure, had caused the upper part of this impressive stairway to slide down over the lower portion, thus displacing the upper steps and throwing them out of their original position. The sequence of the greater part of the inscription upon the front of the steps is thus lost. Mr. Gordon has done all that could be done to match the stones of this disturbed portion, as shown by the photographs and drawings accompanying this memoir. The inscription is made the subject of his researches in the second part of the memoir.

Moulds of all the hieroglyphs and sculptures on the stairway have been made during the several expeditions, and when room is provided in the Museum for the exhibition of the casts in their proper sequence, the wonderful Hieroglyphic Stairway will prove a most interesting object for study.

The antiquity of Copan becomes impressive in view of Mr. Gordon's deductions that this stairway bears an inscription over seven hundred years later than any other inscription, yet found on the monuments of this ancient city, the initial date of which has been determined.

This number completes the first volume of the Museum Memoirs. The expenses of publishing this memoir and of the last expedition have been defrayed by the annual subscriptions to the Central American Fund.

F. W. PUTNAM,
Curator of the Museum.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
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