

action of the weather and to the impact of loose stones falling down the slope before the landslide took place, is so worn that I am unable to make much out of it, but there seems to have been an elaborate grouping of human figures and other objects, as well as a number of hieroglyphs. The

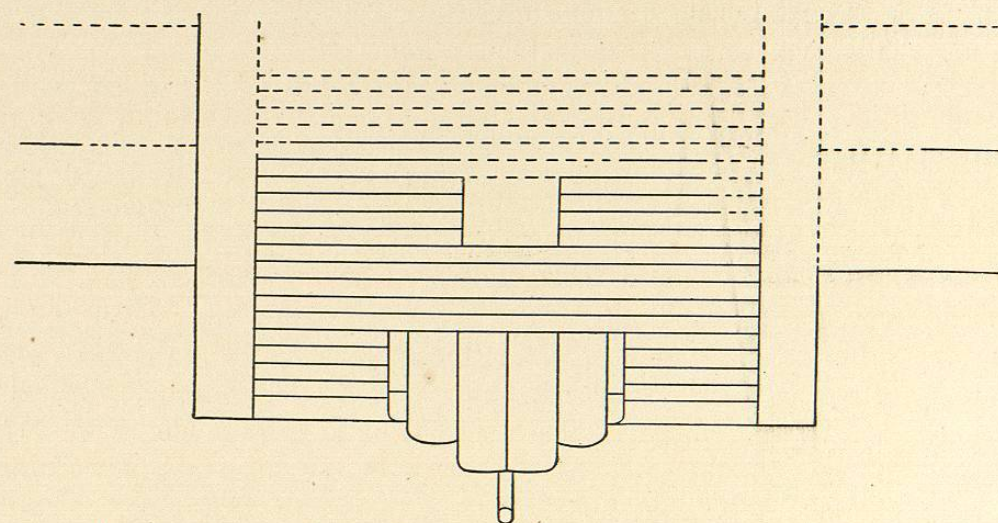


FIG. 3.—PLAN OF LOWER PORTION OF STAIRWAY WITH ALTAR AT BASE.

whole design of the altar seems to have been meant for a huge serpent's head, and it is probable that the stairway itself represented the body of a great serpent.

Immediately above the altar, at the height of five steps, is a large seated figure built of three pieces of stone and let into the centre of the stairway.

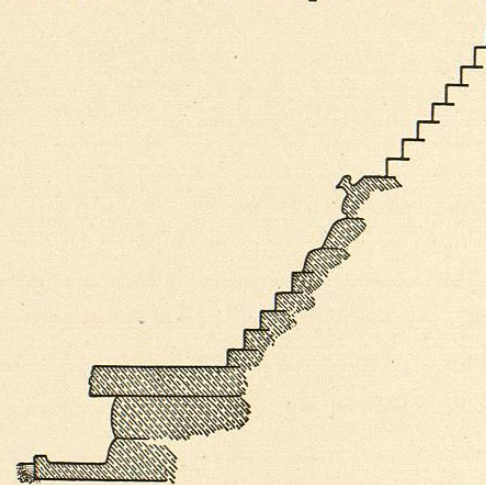


FIG. 4.—CROSS SECTION THROUGH LOWER PORTION OF STAIRWAY.

The figure is arrayed in the usual elaborate adornment. The enormous headdress represents the upper part of the head of some animal, the lower jaw of which extends across the breast in the form of a breastplate; a great shield rests on the left shoulder, hiding that arm and hand; the right arm is extended outward and forward, and the hand formerly held some object which has been broken away. The projecting snout of the animal in the headdress had been broken off and was found in 1900 among a heap of fragments on the plaza below. It had evidently been exposed to the

weather a long time, but apart from being stained nearly black it showed no more weathering than the remainder of the head.

In the centre of step M (Plate V) may be seen the lower portion of a similar figure, while the steps immediately above this are plain where the

figure had been built up against them or let in. Only a few small fragments of the upper portion of this figure were found among the débris.

During the excavation in 1893 another similar figure was removed from the débris buried beneath the landslide, near the median line of the stairway (Plate XIV and Fig. 5). Besides these three figures, portions of two other similar ones were found among the débris, showing that there were not less than five of these figures placed at intervals in the centre of the stairway. It is probable that the altar already mentioned bore the same relation to all these figures that the altars in front of the stelæ bore to the corresponding statues.

The stairway was guarded on either side by a sort of balustrade, now almost entirely destroyed, built on a line corresponding to the outer corners of the steps. The sloping surface of this structure was decorated by the serpent and bird symbols alternating in the ascent; the one in profile and the other in front view. The latter extended across the balustrade and projected one foot beyond the outer surface, the ends being rounded downward. All the stones in these side structures were cut with bevel faces. The portions farthest from the steps in the intervals between the bird ornaments were lower by about four inches than the rest, and were constructed of plain stones, but it is not unlikely that these stones were covered by stucco which may have been modelled (Fig. 6).

The whole stairway projects seven feet six inches in front of the terraces which form the casing of the mound on either side of it. The measurements made are as follows:—

Entire width of stairway not including the balustrades	26' 2"
Width of each balustrade	3' 6"
Width of altar across top	10' 6"
Width of altar, bottom	12' 2"
Altar top projects in front of step	7' 0"
Height of altar	5' 0"

The plaza in front of the stairway was paved with a thick layer of mortar cement laid over broken stone. This pavement remains entire for a distance of ten or fifteen feet in front of the stairway; beyond that it is broken up. There was a sort of turned up nose or tongue which projected from the centre of the altar on a level with the pavement for a distance of four feet; this upturned portion is broken off six inches above the pavement, leaving doubtful the manner in which it ended.

The entire slope from the base of the stairway to the top of the mound measures one hundred and twenty-five feet, while the portion remaining in position measures twenty-five feet, or one-fifth of the whole distance. Estimating in this way, the whole number of steps in the stairway when entire would be eighty (Plate XVIII). It is probable that the foundations of the edifice which we have inferred stood upon the summit were at a slightly

greater elevation than the present summit, the height having been reduced somewhat, it would appear, by gradual falling away as well as by the landslides. The steps average nearly one foot in height, and the present height of the mound (eighty-five feet) would require about eighty-five steps of the same average height to reach to the top. If we suppose the height of the mound to have

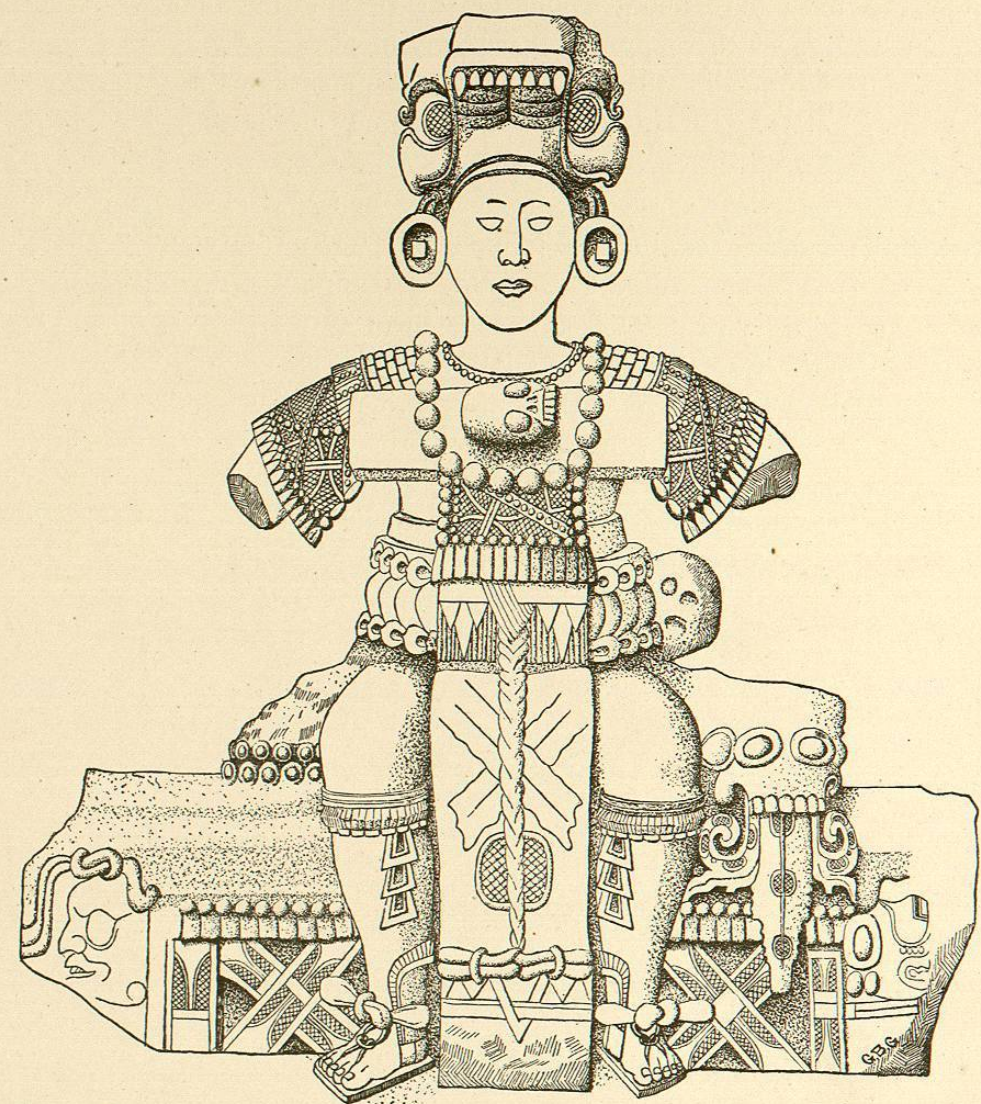


FIG. 5.—DRAWING OF ONE OF THE SEATED FIGURES, PARTLY RESTORED.
From the original sculpture.

been reduced five feet, which does not seem improbable, this would bring the number of steps up to ninety. The ornament on the balustrades which I have called a bird symbol, probably continued alternating with the serpent's jaws all the way up. This ornament was always carved on a single stone, unlike the serpent with which it is associated, which was always constructed of several stones fitted together, and for that reason was more easily lost or destroyed. Only one of these bird symbols remained in position. It was

on the left side of the stairway, and with it in position were portions of two serpent symbols, one above and one below. Among the débris removed during excavation were a great many portions of similar serpent ornaments, but most were badly broken. Of the bird ornaments, I counted thirty, many of which were entire. It is altogether probable that several of these were lost, one cannot tell how many, but the count of thirty would leave

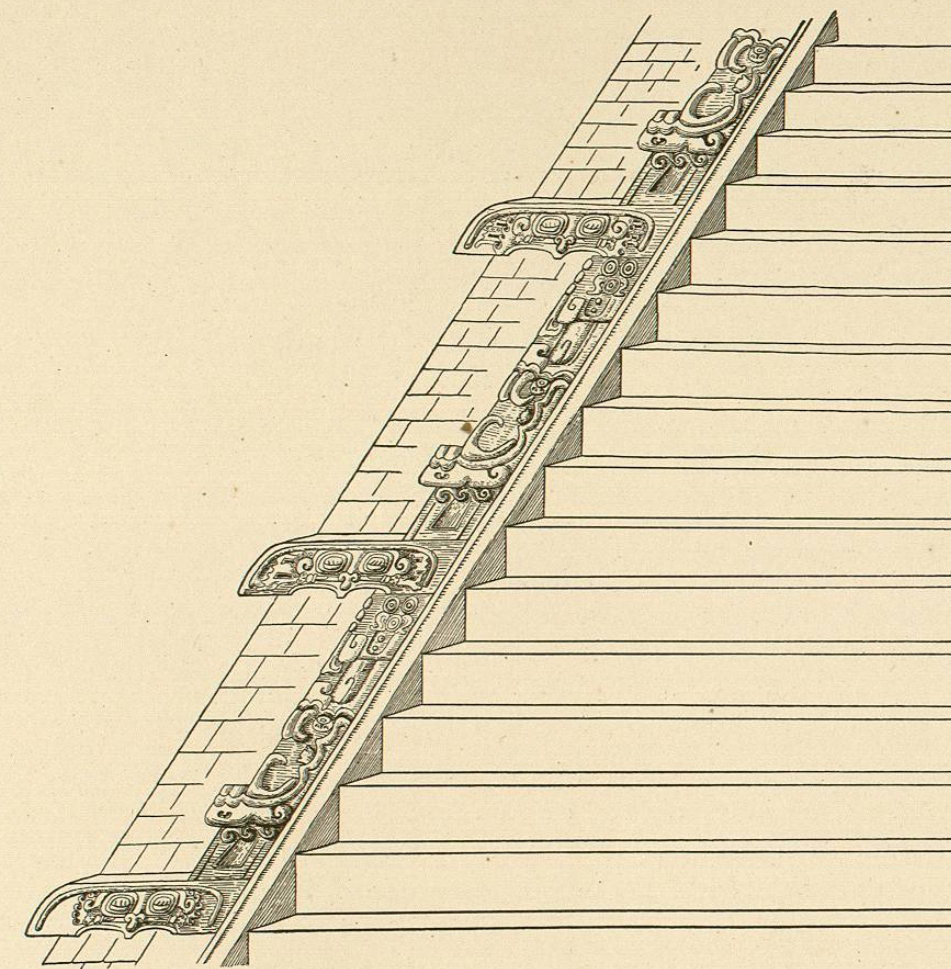


FIG. 6.—DETAILS OF BALUSTRADE. RESTORATION.

fifteen on a side, and as there are about five steps to each of these ornaments, according to the most careful measurements that could be obtained, this would bring the number of steps in the stairway up to seventy-five; but since we cannot tell how many of these ornaments were totally lost, this is as far as the estimate will take us. In any case the number of steps originally in the stairway was not less than eighty-five, and possibly amounted to upward of ninety, whereas the total number which we are able to reproduce is only twenty-seven, and many of these have large portions missing, and they are not continuous, but in two separate sets.

On all the lower steps that are complete and on which the glyphs are continuous from one end to the other, there are twenty squares or glyphs; but this system would not seem to have been adhered to throughout, and the squares do not fall in columns, and as will appear must be read in lines along the steps. The regular lines of squares are interrupted not only by the large seated figures in the centre but by reclining figures, which sometimes occupy the centre, but in other instances occupy different positions. The crouching figure in the centre of steps E and F (Plate V), of which a drawing is shown in Fig. 7, is the only one of the kind

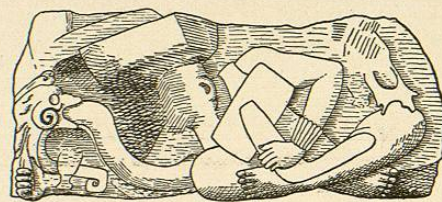


FIG. 7.—CROUCHING FIGURE IN CENTRE OF STEPS E AND F, PLATE V.

encountered. This curious sculpture is difficult to understand, and unfortunately it is rather badly worn. It represents a figure about life size, sitting cross-legged, with the body bent toward the right. The extended right hand grasps what seems to be the fish that is usually attached to what Maudslay calls the water-plant, on the flower of which the fish, wherever it occurs, seems to be feeding. The animal here shown very closely resembles this fish, as usually represented, as, for instance, on Stela N at Copan and on pottery figures found in Vera Paz.* If this be the right understanding of the sculpture, the fish has in this instance swallowed the flower of the water-plant, the stem of which protrudes from the open mouth and disappears behind the crouching figure. The object resting on the left knee of this figure is not unlike parts of the water plant.

Immediately below this on the next step is a reclining figure which occurs again on step H (Plate VI). Each of these figures occupies the central portion of a step, and on step D and on step J (Plate V) the squares are again interrupted by reclining figures. Other figures of this sort may be seen on Plate XII, where they appear on loose blocks which formed parts of steps. It is doubtful whether all or any of these figures are intended to represent persons in a reclining attitude. They rather create the impression of persons standing upright, and that the apparent attitude was adopted by the artists in order to conform to the face of the step. It may be stated that all the portions of steps on which the glyphs are at all distinct are reproduced in this memoir; there are many others on which the hieroglyphs are quite illegible and are indicated only by the outlines of the squares. The greater part of the missing steps and inscription is irretrievably lost. Altogether what remains of the Hieroglyphic Stairway is scarcely more than a fragment. Of the inscription with which it was decorated, the longest hieroglyphic inscription that has

* For illustrations of the various examples of the water plant, see Maudslay, Vol. IV, Plates 92 and 93.
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yet come to light among the Maya ruins, only broken fragments remain; the greater part is lost beyond hope of recovery.

Of the temple, or other edifice, to which this great stairway was the approach, next to nothing can be said. The fragments of sculpture overlying the slopes and mingled with the ruins of the stairway show that it possessed features of great artistic merit. Doubtless it was one of the most striking edifices at Copan, and at first thought it seems strange that nothing should have remained of it; but the height of the pyramidal foundation on which it stood and the steepness of the slopes made its position rather insecure, while the landslides must have contributed greatly to its ultimate destruction.

There was another approach to this building from the south by a flight of plain steps leading up from the level terrace just west of Temple 22 (see plan, Fig. 1). Seen from this elevation, the Hieroglyphic Stairway, with the temple above it, must have presented a most striking appearance. Certainly no more impressive spectacle was offered by the architecture of Copan, and probably nowhere in all ancient America could be found anything to compare with it. The stone from which it was built was the same as that from which the stelæ are carved (trachyte), and seems to have been carefully selected with regard to fineness and uniformity of color. Those parts that had been long exposed had become stained by the vegetation, but when the base of the stairway was uncovered and washed free of adhering clay, the stone presented a bright fresh surface, of uniform color, a light delicate shade of green, which was very effective.

In the plan of Mound 26, shown in Fig. 1, an attempt is made to restore its lines and show the platform on top which probably supported the temple. Most of the terraces here represented are destroyed. On the north side portions of three only remain, the lower ones, and in the restoration the measurements of these are adopted; on the east side a number of the terraces were found intact near the inner angle, and the measurements obtained of these have been used for the reconstruction of the terraces on that side. On the western slope at either side of the stairway, all the terraces are destroyed, with the exception of portions of the lowest, and a smaller fragment of the second, and it has been assumed that those above were uniform with these.

An excavation was made by Maudslay in the western side of the mound just above the flight of steps carried down by the landslide and at that time resting on the slope. In this excavation three terraces were brought to light, the lower one, seven feet high and six feet broad, the next seven feet high and twelve feet broad and the upper one ten feet high (see Fig. 2). There is no doubt other terraces exist, both above and below these. Maudslay expresses the opinion that these, as well as similar