

walls exposed on the river front, were incorporated in the structures to strengthen them and guard against landslides. It now seems certain, however, that these interior walls and terraces are the remains of older structures or the foundations of older buildings, and indicate either a destruction of the city at some earlier period of its history, or else a practice which prevailed among the builders of erecting their later and more pretentious works as it were on top of the earlier ones. Wherever excavations have been made at Copan in the foundations of structures and even below the level of the Great Plaza, the remains of older walls and terraces and pavements have been found, and certainly the whole of the Main Structure is built over the remains of older structures; and in some parts at least these older works occur not in one layer only, but in several distinct layers, corresponding to different building periods.

In line with the centre of the Hieroglyphic Stairway and at a distance of fifteen feet in front of it stood Stela M, one of the most elaborately and delicately carved of all the stelæ at Copan. This stela and its altar are so associated with the stairway that a description of them will be given in this connection. Stela M is now fallen and broken, and nearly all of its intricate sculpture has been destroyed, only a few fragments of its elaborate scrolls and of the little figures with which its edges were adorned remain to show the character of the sculpture; while a number of small fragments of beautiful carving lie scattered about, too minute to furnish material for the restoration of the design. On the front, the side farthest from the stairway, was the usual human figure now largely effaced, and on the opposite side facing the stairway was a hieroglyphic inscription, a drawing of which is given by Maudslay on Plate 74 of his series. The height of this monument is ten feet, and its width two feet six inches (Plate XVI).

The flat slab which served as a pedestal for the monument is still in place, as well as the oblong blocks which supported it at the four sides. The two pieces of the fallen stela were removed a short distance to the right, in 1900, while the stairway was being cleared and photographed; afterward I attempted, by means of pulleys and shear legs, to replace it on its pedestal standing in its original position, but much to my regret the blocks were not strong enough, and the tackle with which I was trying to hoist the upper portion into position collapsed, and I gave up the attempt.

At a distance of ten feet in front of Stela M is the altar corresponding to it and known as Altar M. Maudslay describes this altar as follows: "Within a few feet of Stela M is an altar which may be roughly described as a square-shaped block of stone fashioned into the form of a four-legged grotesque animal without a head. In the flat surface both on the front and back of the monument, there is a large hole and it seems probable that into these holes heads had formerly been fitted. The animal represented may have been the double-headed dragon. . . .

"Close to this altar a stone head was found with a tenon attached, which fitted fairly well into the hole in the front of the altar. The head is shown in this position in the photograph. There is a four-lobed mark on the forehead as well as the peculiar marks . . . usually found in connection with one of the heads of the two-headed dragon. The photograph is not sufficiently good to show the hole in the back of the altar into which, if the suggestion made be correct, the second head of the dragon would have been fitted."

The suggestion is undoubtedly correct. Not only would the head, which Maudslay mentions and of which he gives a photograph showing it in place on the southern end of the altar on Plate 75 of his series, seem beyond doubt to belong here, but the other head has been identified and replaced in its original position on the northern end of the altar. This head was mentioned by Stephens and a drawing of it is given on page 136 of Vol. I of his work. His description is as follows: "Among the fragments lying on the ground near this place is a remarkable portrait. It is probably the portrait of some king, chieftain, or sage. The mouth is injured, and part of the ornament over the wreath that crowns the head. The expression is noble and severe, and the whole character shows a close imitation of nature."

The "portrait" is held in the open jaws of the dragon.

This sculpture was found lying among a mass of fragments about a dozen yards from the altar in 1900. The tenon attached to the back had been broken off, but a portion remained, and a trial showed that it fitted fairly well into the hole in the altar; also the plain surface on that end of the altar corresponded, in dimensions, with the back of the head (see Plate XVII). The altar thus appears complete, and represents the double-headed dragon, the "long-nosed head" being on the northern end and the "short-nosed head" on the southern end.

Among the ornaments pertaining to the stairway one of the most remarkable is a pair of serpents with interlocking coils (Plate XIII, A and Fig. 8). This sculpture was found well underneath the landslip, and the inference would be that it had occupied a position on the stairway somewhere between the two sections shown on Plates V and VI. It is only a fragment found in three pieces, and although these are in an excellent state of preservation, large portions of the ornament seemed to have disappeared.

Two rattlesnakes are represented with their tails in opposite directions. The rear ends of the bodies form a pair of interlocking loops placed horizontally. After this the bodies turn downward, but here a portion is missing. The snakes are stretched upon a groundwork of plumes, doubtless those of the quetzal, and these feathers seem to spring from a common centre, a circumstance which suggests at once that the ornament formed part of a great headdress. Each of the seated figures would seem to have been provided with a great plume upon the headgear. These plumes took different shapes. Plate XIII, F is a side view of a curved plume measuring three feet across

from the spring of the feathers to the tips. Plate XIII, G is a top view of another great plume which forms a right angle sixteen inches above the point where it was attached to the headdress and extends backward a distance of three feet. On Plate XV is shown another plume in side view. It is somewhat smaller than those already mentioned, but the graceful sweep of the plumage is particularly well illustrated in this example. Beside it on Plate XV is shown a front view of another similar plume of more slender dimensions. The fragment, Fig. 8, measures seven feet horizontally.

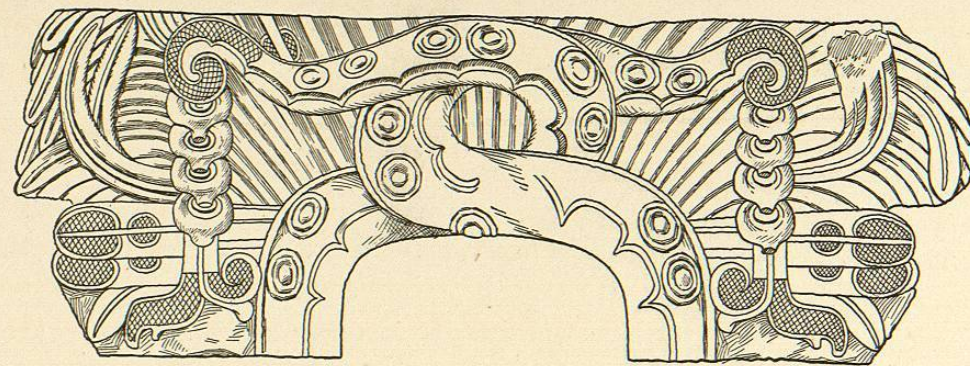


FIG. 8. — SERPENT ORNAMENT, PARTLY RESTORED.  
Compare Plate XIII, A.

There is no doubt that the rattlesnake plume rose above and completed the headdress on the figure seen in Plates VI and X. The serpent heads seen on either side of the monstrous jaws forming the headpiece of that figure are the heads of the rattlesnakes on the plume. A portion of the body of one of these snakes can be seen curved over the dragon's head on Plate X. It may be observed that the body of each serpent after forming the loop, seen in Fig. 8, is twisted in such a way that the back of the animal is always turned outward. If the bodies formed several consecutive loops after the manner of the Caducean serpents, and they apparently may have formed at least two complete loops in order to take the shape seen in Plate X, they would have to be twisted once in the formation of each loop, in order to make all the loops symmetrical.

Two pairs of serpent heads of the conventional type were found among the ruins of the stairway. The figure of the "long-nosed god" appears emerging from the open jaws of each of these heads (Fig. 9). The two pairs are similar in every respect.

Another notable ornament is the great head (Plate XIII, S). Two other heads similar in every respect were found near this one, not underneath the landslide, but on the level ground a few feet in front, where they were buried among other fallen stones and vegetable mould. The position in which they were found leads me to believe that their place was on the façade of the building above the stairway. In the same vicinity were

found fragments of several pairs of great claws — clearly representing those of some bird of the parrot family. The presence of these claws, which correspond very well with the heads in proportions, would seem to do away with any doubt that might exist respecting the identity of the heads themselves. Each head and each pair of claws belonged very likely to the same sculpture

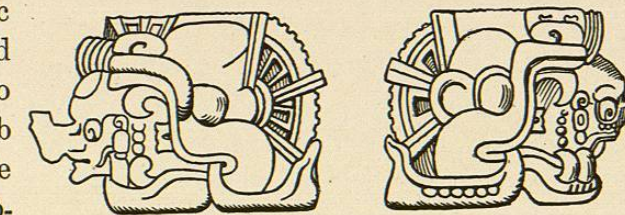


FIG. 9.

which represented a gigantic parrot or macaw. The head bears a striking resemblance to the sign for the month Kayab in the inscriptions. Compare especially back of Stela B, Copan, 1st glyph. The resemblance is so striking as to offer a very strong suggestion that the month Kayab in the inscriptions is represented by the head of a parrot or macaw and not the head of a turtle. Wherever the turtle is represented in the sculpture the head is not at all like this. Neither the west altar of Stela C at Copan nor the great turtle at Quirigua, to give two well-known examples, has a head with any resemblance to the symbol for Kayab. In the Ball Court Temple at Chichén Itzá forming part of the wall sculpture is a turtle, the head of which is altogether different from the symbol for Kayab (see Maudslay, Vol. IV, Plate 93, o). On the other hand, it is true that in the Codex Peres. is seen a turtle with a head quite similar to the sign for Kayab as drawn in the manuscripts.

The sculpture shown on Plate XIII, V has the same shape and dimensions as the bird symbol of the balustrades (one of which is shown in W, Plate XIII), and may have taken the place of one of these. The heads with which this stone is ornamented are similar to the head in the day sign on step L 1, Plate VI. Compare also Plate XIII, K and L. The animal represented by this head is not recognizable. It differs from the tiger's head which always shows spots as well as a tusk. See Plate VI, G 8, and Plate XIII, C, 1st glyph, and E, 3d glyph.

The sculpture shown on Plate XIII, U is the under side of the last block in step D, Plate V. The block is cut from an older monument of some sort containing an inscription. The sculpture resembles that on X and Y, two stones found in different parts of the ruins.

On Plate XIII, T is shown a fragment of sculpture found near the summit of the mound, and, as would seem probable, formed part of a hieroglyphic frieze running round the temple.