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**Archaeological
Institute
of America**

**A PECULIAR IDOL FROM THE HIGHLANDS OF
COSTA RICA**

Not far from San José, the capital of the little Republic of Costa Rica, there is a small village named San Vicente. In one of the rooms of a dwelling house there, I saw a very fine piece of Indian sculpture with some peculiarities which I had never seen before. Happily it was not very hard to procure the carved stone, and it is now in the author's collection. The matter was indeed of such great interest to me that some days afterward I returned to the same locality to make careful inquiries regarding the place where this rare piece had been found.

At no great distance from the village, in a coffee plantation, some workmen had been digging a small pit in which they discovered several stone slabs arranged in such a way that they formed a box open on two sides. On removing the upper slab they saw that the box was filled with earth and having removed this they uncovered the stone statuette (Fig. 1), face upwards, near the bottom. Five pieces of pottery of hemispherical form were also found.

I myself went to the place and saw the slabs on the edge of the pit. I carefully examined the surrounding ground, but could find no vestige of graves or stones arranged by human hands, nor had the workers found in any part of the same plantation any evidence of a cemetery or sacred place. The pottery had been broken into several pieces and was absolutely spoiled. The stone figure had been kept by the owner of the plantation, who subsequently gave it to me.

American Journal of Archaeology, Vol. XXVIII (1924), No. 3.



FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

For the sake of convenience I shall call this strange figure an Idol. Indeed I do not know what it represents. It is carved in a kind of porous lava and it is 0.403 m. high and 0.093 m. wide at the head.

The Idol consists of four different parts: a human body, a snake, a jaguar or puma, and a small human head. The human body has a large abdomen. Near the bottom at the right is a symbolic representation of the male genital organs. The expression of the face looks like that of a crying person. The hair is cut and combed backwards. The arms are complete, but the right forearm is extremely long. One of the shoulders is higher than the other.

The head of the snake is represented on the back of the Idol (Fig. 2) a little to the left side. The head is very large and its

mouth open. The body is rather flat and suggests a poisonous snake. The snake extends halfway down the front of the statuette and then turns obliquely to the left. Where the right hand holds the tail of the snake it is separated slightly from the body.

The human body rests on the feet of a quadruped, a puma or a jaguar, which lies on its back. The position of this animal is not at right angles with the Idol, but is turned a little to the left so that the head is directly below the genital organs (Fig. 1). The tail is broken, but may be restored as curving around to the base of the



FIGURE 3

FIGURE 4

statuette (Fig. 3). The quadruped if inverted would appear in walking position and is represented with the mouth open as if panting. On its back is an incomplete disk the interpretation of which is difficult (Fig. 4). The legs of the right side are shorter than those of the left and the pair on either side is united by a protruding mass of stone, possibly representing the feet of the Idol. If such is the case, the four legs of the animal support the human figure.

Between the right hand and the chin there is a connecting shaft of stone which is thicker than the tail of the snake, and just above the middle of this shaft there is a round human face the eyes of which are represented by two holes. The neck (?) is very long and rests on the right hand which at the same time holds the tail of the snake.

It is impossible to give an accurate interpretation of this queer combination. In the National Museum of San José there is nothing similar, and I have never seen in any other collection in the country any sculpture which in any way resembles this figure.

Is it really an Idol? May it have a religious or cosmogonic significance? Nothing of the sort is mentioned in our ancient documents about the Indians, and no tradition survives to enlighten us. Was this extraordinary Idol hidden by the Indians in a lonely place to keep it from the Spanish conquerors? It was evidently carved by the Güetar Indians who once lived in the interior of the country and who have left us a great many graves, stone statues and pottery which have not been sufficiently studied as yet.

J. FID. TRISTÁN

LICEO DE C-R SAN JOSÉ

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LICEO DE C-R, SAN JOSÉ

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Tristán, para su mejor con-
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