

*Totonacan Stone
Mask and Head*

THE Mexican exhibits have been enriched by the addition of a superb jadite mask and a head carved from fine-grained sandstone, both graciously loaned by Mrs. Elsie McDougall.

The mask [Plate VIII], which comes from Papantla, famous for its ancient pyramided temple of Tajin, presents the features of the Jaguar God in the style characteristic of the votive axes of the region. In fact, the face upon those votive axes often appears as a mask, worn by the Axe-being.

The projecting snout, with its wide upper lip drawn back to show the cut incisors and the curved canines, overhangs the lower lip and chin, which are human. The heavy beetling brows resemble those of the axe-idol in the British Museum, but the comet form of the eye, the tri-lobed eye-brow and the two little feather tufts above it, differ from any known figure of this deity. The U-shaped brow-ornament, in high relief, apparently tied to a lock of hair, which shows below it, is unusual in images of the Jaguar God; a hole drilled vertically into its upper edge was doubtless intended to hold a plume.

Characteristic of this art in stone is the fine incising, super-imposed upon the bold reliefs. The delicate lines on the lip and cheek intrigue with their undeciphered significance. The upper element of the cheek ornament would suggest the missing lower jaw of the jaguar, with its prominent canine tooth, were it not for the absence of the rami.

At the upper and lateral edges, the mask is drilled for attachment. While too narrow to fit over the face, the carefully hollowed interior gives ample breathing space, and the pierced eyes, nostrils and open mouth would enable the wearer to see, breathe and speak without discomfort, save for the weight of the stone.

The other carving—also from the northern part of the State of Vera Cruz—is a head [Plate IX], bearing at the occiput a tenon by which it was mortised into a wall or other surface. The beauty of its finish would indicate that its place was within the sanctuary.

The face is very narrow, the two aspects being almost parallel. Deep lines on the prominent nose and around the mouth, the drooping eye-lid, the sunken cheek, the heavy projecting lower lip, all indicate the Old God, known to the various peoples of Mexico from before the dawn of the Toltec era. The strange angular eyebrows end in a volute above the nose, suggesting the brow insignia worn by this god as he appears in the Mexican codices. A much less ornate tenoned head of the Old God, preserved in the Museum at Oaxaca, shows the same eyebrow and volute, but lacks the striking feature of the Vera Cruz head—a serpent head, from the open jaws of which the Old God looks out. The reptile's head, in bold relief, covers the forehead of the god, while its rigid lower jaw reaches from below his projecting ear to his aged chin.

In the native religions of Middle America, the serpent was sometimes associated with this primordial



TOTONACAN MASK OF THE JAGUAR GOD FROM
PAPANTLA, MEXICO



TOTONACAN HEAD OF THE OLD GOD FROM
VERA CRUZ, MEXICO

deity. Believed to have been originally the god of fire of those dwellers in the midst of volcanos, he acquired, in course of time, many attributes and titles, not the least of which was 'Lord of our Subsistence.'

The Jaguar-being was an early cave god, later to become, among many aspects, ruler of the darkness; his voice, the sougning night-wind, his spotted coat, the starry sky.

The names by which their worshippers appealed to these deities, are unknown, for authorities differ as to the tongue they spoke. Both carvings were found in the heart of the northern Totonacan territory, but related objects occur over a wider area. Dr. Seler implies that the tenoned heads were the product of the Zapotecs or the older people of the Oaxaca district, while Professor Saville believes the jaguar-axe-idols were created by the Olmecas. Yet both are of one style of religious art—the same that marks the problematical U-shaped stones, generally mis-called 'yokes'; these latter are recognized as characteristic of the Totonacan culture.

The Totonacs were the first people with whom Cortez met upon landing on the Mexican coast. Highly cultured, living in garden-towns of permanent houses, with a developed social system and elaborate religious rites, they were well fitted to be the creators of these examples of ancient American art.

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