

Article X.—A SHELL GORGET FROM THE HUASTECA, MEXICO.

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In a recent paper Dr. Frederick Starr has described and figured an engraved shell gorget from the State of Michoacan, Mexico, the first specimen of this character which has heretofore come to our notice. It is from the region of Tarascan culture. The general resemblance of this object to specimens of a somewhat similar nature from Tennessee, Missouri, and Georgia is commented upon by Dr. Starr, to whose article the reader is referred.¹

In the collection of the American Museum of Natural History is another shell gorget, from the vicinity of Tuxpan, State of Vera Cruz, Mexico, in the region of the Huastecans, a branch of the Maya stock of Yucatan and Central America. This specimen was found during the winter of 1899-1900, and it is here figured and described on account of its resemblance to the representations of deities to be found in the Mayan codices.

Not much is known, archæologically, of that part of the State of Vera Cruz between Tuxpan on the south and Tampico at the mouth of the Rio Panuco on the north, which is still occupied by Huastecan Indians.² According to Orozco y Berra, Huastecapam formerly extended from what is now Vera Cruz to San Luis Potosi in the interior and northward along the coast probably well into the State of Tamaulipas, in places where at present no vestiges (linguistic) remain.³

The shell gorget now to be described (See Fig. 1) is cut from a *Busycón perversum* and is a thin, concavo-convex plate. About one quarter of the specimen is broken off and missing. The inner concave face is the one carved. The outer convex surface is smooth save for numerous small pits. It measures 68 mm. in height and 58 mm. in breadth and 1 to 2 mm. in thickness.

¹ 'A Shell Gorget from Mexico,' by Frederick Starr, Ph.D. Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Davenport Academy of Sciences, Davenport, 1896, pp. 173-178.

² Marcelo Alejandro in his 'Cartilla Huasteca,' published by the Mexican Government in 1880, under the head of antiquities states that nothing remains of the ancient Huastecan civilization except a few stone figures. Only the ruins of old cities exist.

³ 'Geografía de las Lenguas y Carta Etnográfica de Mexico,' Mexico, 1864, p. 206.

A narrow plain band around the edge of the disk surrounds the central carving which represents a seated human figure. It faces the left as in the Mayan codices, where glyphs, and human figures representing deities singly or in procession, are found facing the left. The only exception is where two deities face each other while engaged in some priestly function. This figure

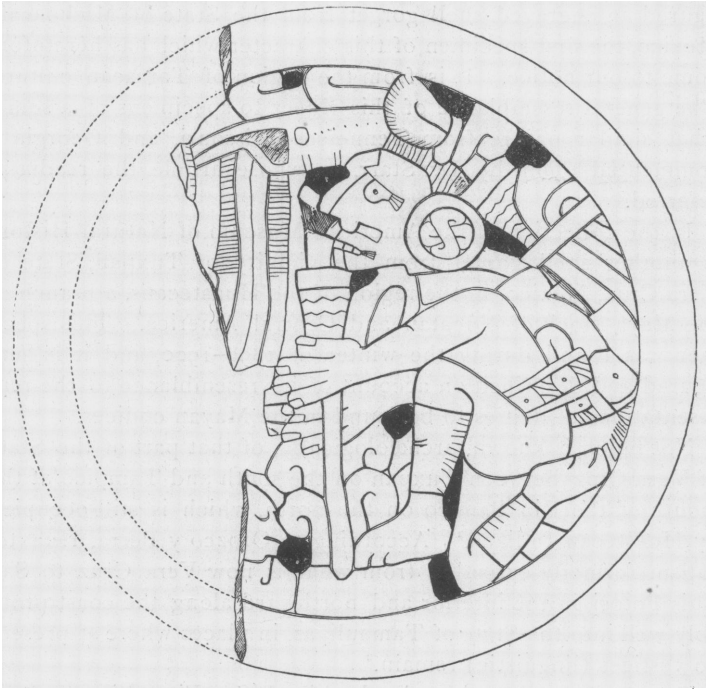


Fig. 1.

in the gorget is seated on the upturned foot of the right leg, which is bent under the body. The left leg is bent, the foot pressed on a rectangular piece of wood. The head is slightly raised; the expression of the face is serious. A complicated headdress surmounts the head, resting on the hair. This headdress somewhat resembles those seen on a certain deity of the Mayan codices. The eye is drawn in a conventional manner and is connected with a zigzag line which runs from the top of the forehead down

over the nose to the base. A line is also seen on the upper lip, and chin, and seems to be indicative of a mask. The upper lip projects outward over the lower, and teeth are only represented in the upper jaw. A few lines are connected with the back of the mouth, and this is also a feature of the eye.

The nose is decorated by a long squared stick placed through the septum at the base. Covering the ear is a large circular ornament on which is carved a Swastika cross surrounded by a plain band. Some indication of a neck decoration is seen on the chest, and on the back is a sort of garment hanging to the waist. Around the waist is a belt which appears to be knotted behind. This is the loin cloth or *maxtli*. It bears a decoration which will be referred to later. The legs are covered between the knees and ankles. The arms are stretched out in front of the body; the elbow of the left arm rests on the left knee. The right hand is lower than the left, and between the palms is a stick which is being twirled in a hole in the block of wood under the left foot. Rising from the hole is the representation of smoke. This stick is somewhat larger at the top than at the base, which is pointed, and the part above the hands bears parallel zigzag lines running transversely to the length of the stick. Opposite the block is what appears to be the head of a monkey, the body being in the part of the gorget which is missing. The black spots in the illustration are apertures (ten in number) cut through the shell from the outer convex side and appear to have been made by drilling.

We will now compare this specimen with representations of what seems to be an analogous deity in the codices of the Mayas of Yucatan and Central America. In figure 2 is reproduced a seated figure from page xix of the Codex Troano. The line on the face differs somewhat from that on our gorget. In the codices, in this deity it invariably extends from the top of the forehead to the base of the chin, interrupted by the eye. In some instances, as in the Codex Cortesianus, the face is painted



Fig. 2.

brown, blue, or black in front of the line ; again it is painted blue back of the line, while in the majority of cases the face is not painted. It is an ever present and characteristic feature of the Maize God of the Mayas, to which Brinton has given the name *Ghanan*, God of Growth and Fertility.¹ This line may be seen in the specimen described by Starr, but it is not noted by him. In figure 2 the Maize God is seated with the legs bent in front of the body, elbows resting on the knees. In the headdress a certain resemblance may be traced with that of our gorget. In the hand is held a stick, the lower end placed in a hole in a round object. Whether this is a fire stick it is impossible to affirm with

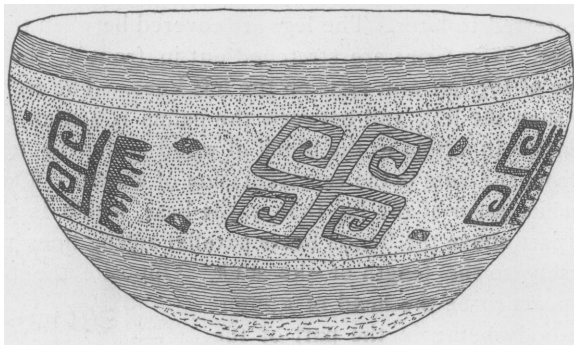


Fig. 3.

certainty, as no smoke is represented in the drawing. There is, however, a red spot near the hole which probably represents fire. Around the waist is a belt decorated in much the same manner as in the gorget. This belt decoration is nearly always seen in the Maize God figures, and rarely elsewhere in the Mayan codices. In the Nahuatl codices no deities of a like character are found.

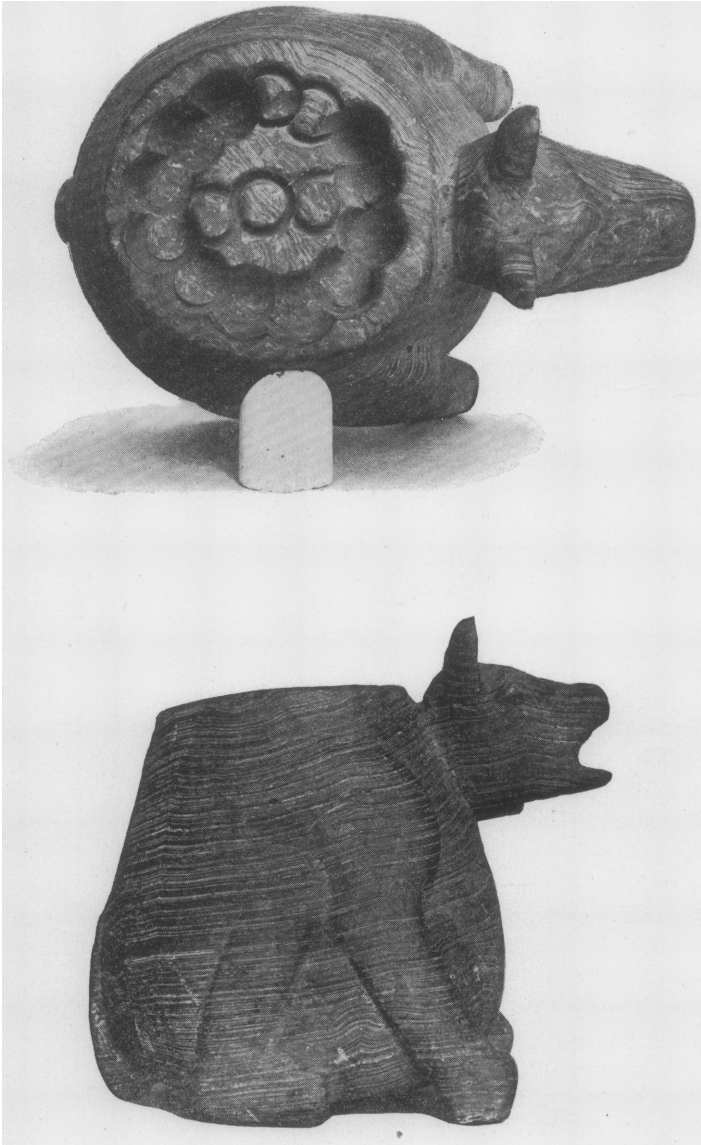
An exceedingly interesting feature is the Swastika on the ear ornament. This symbol is excessively rare in Mexico, but four other examples are known to the writer, one of which is in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History. As it has never been published it is now given in figure 3. It is a

¹ 'Primer of Mayan Hieroglyphics,' p. 62.

Dr. Schellhas in his 'Die Göttergestalten der Mayashandschriften,' 2d edition, pp. 19-20, calls the Maize God, or God E.

bowl of the Cholula type of pottery and comes from Tepeaca, State of Puebla, in the territory of Nahuatl culture. This bowl is 73 mm. high and 146 mm. in diameter at the rim. It is painted dark red, with an orange-colored band just below the rim, upon which is a series of Swastikas in red, alternating with a half Swastika and a comb-like ornament in black. In the private collection of Carlos Baur, Puebla, is a similar bowl with the Swastika decoration, from Cholula. Another Swastika is the calendar reproduced on Plate I, *Trat. 3*, atlas of 'History de la Nueva España,' by Fray Diego Duran. The original painting is in a codex of the Goupil collection in the National Library of Paris. Finally Dr. Le Plongeon figures a reversed Swastika found by him on a stone slab at Mayapan, Yucatan.

In conclusion, there seems to have been a high state of culture among the Huastecans, as seen in this beautiful carving, and a near relationship with the Mayan mythology, which is indicated by the close resemblances noted between this figure and those of the codices.



ONYX JAR FROM MEXICO. TOP AND SIDE VIEWS ($\frac{20}{7\frac{3}{8}8}$).
Three-eighths natural size.