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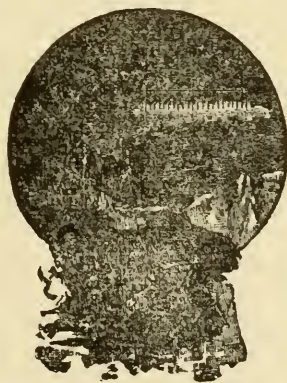
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OF
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

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The Archeology of Central America
THE ARCHEOLOGY OF CENTRAL AMERICA:
AN INTRODUCTION

By WM. DUNCAN STRONG

The geographic position of Central America, linking as it does the two great western continents (map 1), gives the area a great importance to the student of native peoples and cultural movements in pre-Columbian America. History and ethnology furnish much data on these later processes, but only archeology can reveal the earlier population and cultural interchanges that occurred during the as yet uncounted millennia from the first human occupation until the time of the Conquest. It is unfortunate, therefore, for present purposes that scientific archeology in the area has until now merely scratched the surface of what is obviously a rich and promising field.

Archeological materials from the various countries in Central America are abundant, but unfortunately the bulk of these are the result of treasure-hunting or chance discovery and lack scientific documentation. Nowhere in the isthmian region has archeological research uncovered cultural materials of demonstrable antiquity. When we consider the very limited amount of truly scientific exploration and stratigraphic excavation yet accomplished in the region this is hardly surprising. The occurrence of associated human and bison tracks in consolidated lava deposits in Nicaragua, however, strongly suggests that early cultural materials will be found here when more work is accomplished. At the other end of the time scale too little is yet known regarding the actual association of aboriginal cultural materials and documented historic or protohistoric sites. Lothrop has presented some evidence of this sort linking the historic and prehistoric in Panamá, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, and similar beginnings have been made in Honduras. However, the historic approach must be emphasized far more than it has before the findings of archeology can assume their full significance in association with the relatively rich record of history and ethnology.

There follow brief articles on the present status of archeology in the various provinces of Panamá by Lothrop, who has been closely associated

with recent work in this area. In regard to Costa Rica and Nicaragua very little has been published since the monumental summary, "Pottery of Costa Rica and Nicaragua," by Lothrop (1926 b), which appeared two decades ago. As a result, these two countries are here treated together by Strong in what is little more than a digest of Lothrop's two volumes with certain new findings added. Honduras has been the scene of certain stratigraphic excavations in recent years and is, therefore, summarized by Strong in a separate article. Finally, a general article on Central American archeology by Stone presents materials and an individual interpretation resulting from recent surveys in most of these countries.

It would be of great value to include a section concerning the archeology of the northern border of Central America as viewed from South America, notably including El Salvador and Guatemala, but this has not proved possible. There has been a great deal of recent exploration and excavation in these countries, particularly by the Carnegie Institution, but little of this material has yet appeared in print. The interpenetration of northern and southern cultural influences in Central America during the millennia of native occupation prior to the Conquest was naturally complex and variable in direction. From an archeological standpoint the territory included in the present Republic of Honduras seems today as logical a northern boundary for direct South American culture thrusts as any that might be chosen. However, the scientific findings and publications of tomorrow may well revise this judgment on numerous time levels.