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New Mexico
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THE

STONE IDOLS

OF

NEW MEXICO.

A DESCRIPTION OF THOSE BELONGING TO THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

SANTA FE, 1896.

SANTA FE, N. M. :
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PLATE NO. 1.

1



2

4

3

THE STONE IDOLS.

While images of stone, used in religious ceremonies or kept in the houses of the people as "household gods" were common in New Mexico, and were of great variety and elaborate workmanship yet they were not used by the nomadic aboriginal tribes inhabiting most of what is now the United States, and so far as known are found in no part of our country except New Mexico.

Here they seem to have been very numerous before the coming of the Spaniards. The first descriptions that we have of the people and their surroundings and customs, from any other than a military standpoint, are found in the narrative of the expedition of Antonio de Espejo, who set out from the valley of St. Bartholomew, in Mexico, on December 10, 1582, and entered New Mexico early in 1583. After traveling up the valley of the Rio Grande for a long distance they came to a district containing ten towns situated on both sides of the river and at a short distance from it. This was in the vicinity of the present pueblo of Isleta, possibly extending southward into what is now Socorro county. In the course of a very interesting description of the people, their modes of living, form of government, etc., we are told that "many idols, which the Indians worshiped, were found in this province; and in every house an oratory was erected for the devil, where he was said to preside, and to which food was carried for him to eat. In various places the Indians had erected chapels, dedicated to the devil, in which he was said to recreate and rest himself when he traveled through the country, from one town to another. These chapels were all handsomely trimmed and painted. They represented, by pictures, the sun, moon and stars as principal objects of their worship."

When Espejo, shortly afterwards, having learned of

the death of the friars, whom he had come to protect, determined to explore the country generally, he first proceeded toward the west, traveling for two days with only two companions. This brought him to the region of Laguna. Here he found a province containing eleven towns, which he tells us were very populous and estimated to contain 40,000 inhabitants. The people were well dressed in garments of skin and cotton, and had considerable ore from adjacent mines in their houses. Here again we are told "the inhabitants worshiped idols."

Returning from this province to Puara, a little below Bernalillo, Espejo proceeded up the Rio Grande twelve or fifteen miles, and there found a flourishing province of five towns and a population of about 15,000, who showed great hospitality to their strange visitors. Here we are told all the people "worshiped idols in the manner of their neighbors," and here also the representations of the sun, moon and stars were found.

In the general description of the country as obtained from Espejo and appearing in DeLarenaudiere's history, it is said "In the pueblos of all the Indians were seen a multitude of idols."

The question then naturally arises "What has become of these idols?" The answer is not difficult.

While the colonists who settled the country under Oñate near the end of the sixteenth century, were establishing themselves, building houses, cultivating the soil, and seeking for mineral wealth, the friars who accompanied them were preaching to the natives and converting them to christianity. At first this was a voluntary proceeding brought about by persuasion and argument. As early as 1608 no less than 8,000 Indians were reported to have been baptised. Geronimo de Zarate Salmaron, the most zealous of the Franciscans, who settled at Jemez and preached to the people there in their own language, baptised 6,566 Indians with his own hand. By the year 1629 we are told that no less than 34,650 natives had been baptised.

Wherever christianity was introduced, the idols of the old religion were destroyed, and all the old ceremonies prohibited.

In the course of a few years, force succeeded to persuasion. As the Indians from being friends and allies were reduced to a practical slavery and compelled to labor for their task masters, so in religious matters compulsion was resorted to and the natives were obliged to yield at least an outward obedience to the new faith.

To quote from one witness: "In a short time they saw all their ancient rites prohibited; their estufas were closed; their altars removed and their idols destroyed. Their favorite dance, the cachina, was interdicted, and in fine, they saw themselves compelled to kneel at the white man's shrine, and worship his God. This was a compliance cruel in the extreme, but the strong arm of Spanish power obliged them to submit and not unfrequently the lash was applied to make them more devout."

The first Indian attempt at revolution, during Gov. Arguello's administration, about 1640, was caused by the whipping, imprisonment and hanging of forty Indians, who refused to abandon their old religion. The Inquisition was in full power in New Mexico by the middle of the 17th century, and every Indian was forced to at least a pretended acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith. Anything that could be found, savoring in the slightest degree of the old religion, was instantly destroyed. Articles of wood were burned and those of stone broken and ground to powder.

It is undoubtedly true that the Pueblo Indians never really abandoned their old religion, and in but few cases, have done so to this day. But the ceremonial exercises of their religion had to be absolutely secret, and in the recesses of the "Estufa del Cacique," an inner chamber of the large communal building, having no window or direct communication with the outside world.

The idols, existing in every dwelling as household gods,

disappeared and were to a great extent destroyed, before the middle of the 17th century. Hence in the ruins of the numerous pueblos destroyed or deserted during the revolution of 1680, nothing of this kind has been found.

Those that have been excavated come from the ruins of towns destroyed or deserted before the arrival of the Spaniards, and while the old faith was publicly followed and the household gods, as well as the images used in the general public worship, were displayed rather than concealed.

These idols are almost always found on the floor of the lower rooms, covered by the ruins of the upper stories as well as the accumulated dust of ages. They are often accompanied by *metates*, entire or broken, the *mano* stones, and sometimes by stone mortars, with or without pestles, stone hammers, axes and other stone implements.

Usually the ruins in which they are found show evidences of destruction by fire, and this may account for the desertion being so sudden that even the household gods could not be carried away. Charred wood, and half burned corn are frequently found, and in some cases vitrified masses caused by the intense heat of the fire. In one instance one of these vitrifications shows plainly the impression of an ear of corn which was partially imbedded in it but has since been destroyed.

Our Society has been fortunate enough to obtain twenty of these rare objects of worship thus intimately connected with the history of our Territory and with the customs of the people in pre-historic times. *No other public institution in this country or Europe possesses even one.* So far as we have been able to ascertain, the total number that have been found, besides those in the large collection of Hon. L. Bradford Prince, and our own specimens, does not exceed ten.

One of these belongs to Thomas Lowthian, Esq., of Bland, who has kindly promised to donate it to our Society. One is in the possession of President Harri-

son at Indianapolis, one belongs to Hon. William M. Evarts in New York, one to Hon. John W. Noble in St. Louis, and five were in possession of H. A. Moutfort, Esq., of Albuquerque, but have since been distributed among eastern collectors.

The Prince collection, a considerable portion of which has been loaned to our Society and is thus available for public inspection, and other specimens from which are on exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, contains the great bulk of all the stone idols that has thus far been discovered. It embraces over a thousand figures, the result of twelve years of unremitting activity in exploration and excavation and lavish expenditure of time and money in all localities which gave promise of containing such historic treasures.

We present herewith four illustrations, representing the most important of the idols belonging to our Society, in order to give a more accurate idea of their character than could be conveyed by simple description.

The sizes of these figures are given on page 12; the last five not having been photographed. The dimensions are given in inches.

PLATE NO. 2.

5

6



7

8

PLATE NO. 3.

9

10



11

12

PLATE.	NO.	HEIGHT.	GREATEST WIDTH.
1	1	16 $\frac{3}{8}$	7 $\frac{1}{3}$
1	2	16 $\frac{3}{4}$	7 $\frac{3}{8}$
1	3	14 $\frac{1}{3}$	6 $\frac{3}{4}$
1	4	17 $\frac{1}{3}$	6 $\frac{1}{3}$
2	5	16 $\frac{1}{4}$	7 $\frac{1}{4}$
2	6	12 $\frac{3}{4}$	5 $\frac{3}{8}$
2	7	12 $\frac{1}{4}$	9 $\frac{1}{2}$
2	8	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	7 $\frac{1}{2}$
3	9	21	8 $\frac{1}{2}$
3	10	20 $\frac{3}{4}$	6
3	11	10 $\frac{1}{2}$	5 $\frac{1}{2}$
3	12	9 $\frac{1}{3}$	6 $\frac{1}{3}$
4	13	13 $\frac{3}{4}$	8 $\frac{3}{4}$
4	14	16	9 $\frac{1}{8}$
4	15	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	13 $\frac{1}{2}$
	16	10	5 $\frac{1}{2}$
	17	12	4 $\frac{1}{4}$
	18	8 $\frac{1}{4}$	3 $\frac{3}{8}$
	19	7	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
	20	13 $\frac{7}{8}$	9 $\frac{1}{4}$

Some are quite flat, numbers 13 and 14 being the most noticeable in this way; and others are nearly round, as numbers 1, 6, and 7. Number 21 is about 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in thickness from front to back. Number 20 is made from a flat slab of sand stone, and is entirely different in material and other respects from the others.

The largest, it will be seen from the above table, are numbers 9 and 10, each of which is about 21 inches high. Number 9 is a very massive image, weighing 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. Number 10 is peculiar in shape, the head running up about to a point, and the body having a flat back.

While these do not approach in size some of the great idols belonging to Gov. Prince—where a number are over 4 feet in height and one measures 5 feet 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches,—yet they are the largest known to exist outside of that collection.

All of these figures except No. 20 are of the same

material—a volcanic stone, of a light gray color, rough and porous, with holes of considerable size apparently caused by air bubbles when cooling. The stone resembles an artificial concrete, and is of a character quite common in parts of Mexico where there have been comparatively recent volcanic eruptions and lava flows. The walls of many of the ancient pueblo houses were built of similar material.

While the idols in the collection belonging to our Society are, with the one exception stated, all made from this stone, it must not be understood that all the idols that have been excavated are of similar character. In the collection belonging to Gov. Prince there is a considerable variety in this respect.

For instance, one type of idols, of the most crude character, is made from black or dark red lava, pieces being selected which naturally bore a resemblance to some object that it was desired to represent, and then by a few strokes of the hammer, and the rough carving of features, made to serve as the household god.

The idols of another type, of a much higher character, are made of a whitish, veined marble, quite unusual in this section.

One idol in his collection, is of a pumice stone so light that it will float in water.

Nineteen of the twenty images in our collection represent human figures, and one an animal. The latter is shown in plate 4, number 15, and will be referred to separately.

Eighteen of the human figures are of the same general type, the other, which is numbered "20" in the list, as before stated, is of different material, being a large oval flat sandstone, with round edges, and with eyes, nostrils and mouth to represent a human face at the upper end. The eyes and nostrils are round cavities and the mouth a straight incision about an inch and three-quarters long. The whole crudely represents a human figure, but has no neck or division between the head and body, and no representation of arm or legs.

The eighteen other human figures all have heads with eyes, nostrils and mouths. Some have well defined necks, as numbers 2 and 4 in plate 1, and numbers 9 and 10 in plate 3. Others simply have the heads smaller than the bodies, the shoulders widening out directly from the base of the head, as number 7 in plate 2, number 12 in plate 3, and numbers 13 and 14 in plate 4, and others have scarcely any line of demarcation between the head and the body, as seen in numbers 1 and 3 in plate 1, and notably in number 6 in plate 2, and number 19.

In most of them the eyes and nostrils are simply round holes punctured in the stone, and the mouth is a long, deep cavity below the nostrils. This class of mouth is seen very distinctly in numbers 1 and 4 in plate 1, and number 5 in plate 2. The mouth of number 9 (plate 3) is shorter but very deep. In others the mouth is represented by another circular cavity similar to those intended for the eyes and nostrils, but larger and deeper. Such mouths are seen in number 2 in plate 1, numbers 6, 7 and 8 in plate 2, numbers 10 and 12 in plate 3, and to a modified degree in number 13 in plate 4. Generally the holes representing the nostrils are cut directly into the stone, but in a few cases they have an upward inclination.

All of the human figures appearing in the plates have arms, but they are not all in the same position. The usual position—what may be called the normal type—is that with the forearm brought up over the breast, so that the hands (merely ends of the arms in these idols) touch the mouth. This position will be seen in all of the figures, 1 to 4 in plate 1, and in numbers 7, 8, 12, 13 and 14, being nine of the 14 represented in the plates.

Another position for the arms, is with the left arm bent and brought up to the mouth, as in the usual type, but the right arm is placed across the body, below it, and tending downward. This form is seen in numbers 5, 6, 10 and 11, with slight variations.

Some of the idols in Gov. Prince's collection have this position of the arms reversed; the left arm below bent upward to the mouth, and the right one crossed below it.

In number 9 the arms hang down straight from the shoulders, and are strongly defined—in high relief. Among the four lava idols which are not photographed, two, numbers 18 and 19, have no arms at all; they also have no necks or divisions between the head and the body, and are of the simplest possible form to represent a human being; one (No. 17) has two arms in the usual position, reaching to the mouth, and number 16 has a left arm only, bent at the elbow as in the normal type, so as to reach the mouth with the end of the arm, where a hand should be.

Two of the figures, numbers 2 and 3, have legs, in a form exactly similar to the arms of what we have called the "normal type." The legs in this form are almost in the exact position of the legs of the Pueblo Indians who sit on the ground, and usually lean back against the walls of their houses. This form of representing the legs seems to have become conventionalized, as they almost always appear in substantially the same position.

In fact there is but one known exception—that of a very large and perfect idol in Gov. Prince's collection, 42½ inches high, in which the legs appear carved at full length and with considerable regard to proportion, the knees, etc., being well represented.

Number 11 in plate 3, differs entirely from all the others in our collection, and so far as we know from all others that have been excavated, in the carving at the top of the head, which apparently represents a crown. A very intelligent Pueblo Indian, who was shown this idol, immediately pronounced this to be a crown, and said that the idol though small was probably the "Centro" or most powerful one of all, around which ordinary ones were grouped in the religious ceremonials. He said that undoubtedly it was the

PLATE NO. 4.

13

14



15

Captain or King, being the only one distinguished by any head covering, and certainly the only one with any head-dress similar to a crown.

The objection to this theory is that we have nothing to show that the ancestors of the Pueblo Indians knew anything whatever of crowns as insignia of royalty. There can be no doubt, however, that the ornamental head-dress represented some kind of dignity and authority, which may have been civil, military or ecclesiastical. A careful search through the vast collection of Gov. Prince, which contains every known type of New Mexico's stone idol, fails to show any figure thus decorated, and we therefore claim for this idol a unique distinction and special interest.

Number 15 is an animal, and the only one in our collection. They were not so uncommon, however, in some of the ancient towns as might be indicated by this fact, as the Prince collection contains nearly or quite a hundred specimens, representing a considerable variety of animals, as well as a number of crude birds.

The one which we possess, and which appears in plate 4, is solid and massive, with a large head projecting in front, eyes, nostrils and a long, partly opened mouth. The distinguishing characteristic is the tail, which is thrown over the body and appears there in high relief. The mouth is curved downward, and is 3 inches in length, measured directly from end to end. The tail is 7 inches long. All the stone images of animals are conventionalized, and no doubt the accepted form has been continued to the present time, as the well informed Pueblos of to-day will state, without hesitation, which animal is indicated by each figure. The one in question they pronounce to be a mountain lion, on account of its long tail, which they say does not appear on the image of any other animal; though they express surprise that the head is smooth and without representation of ears. This stone lion measures 23 inches around the body and is $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. It weighs 22 pounds.

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