

INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS

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VOL. VI



No. 4

A SERIES OF PUBLICA-
TIONS RELATING TO THE
AMERICAN ABORIGINES

AN IMAGE AND AN AMULET OF NEPHRITE FROM COSTA RICA

BY
ALANSON SKINNER

NEW YORK
MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
HEYE FOUNDATION

1920

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THIS series of INDIAN NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS is devoted primarily to the publication of the results of studies by members of the staff of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, and is uniform with HISPANIC NOTES AND MONOGRAPHS, published by the Hispanic Society of America, with which organization this Museum is in cordial coöperation.

AN IMAGE AND AN AMU-
LET OF NEPHRITE
FROM
COSTA RICA

BY

ALANSON SKINNER



NEPHRITE IMAGE

AN IMAGE AND AN AMULET
OF NEPHRITE FROM
COSTA RICA

By ALANSON SKINNER



IN AN unmarked grave at Las Mercedes, Costa Rica, a nephrite image (pl. 1) was unearthed by the Costa Rican expedition of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in 1916-17. It is $3\frac{5}{8}$ inches in height, and represents a person with hands folded on the abdomen, a posture not uncommonly represented in the larger stone idols of the district.

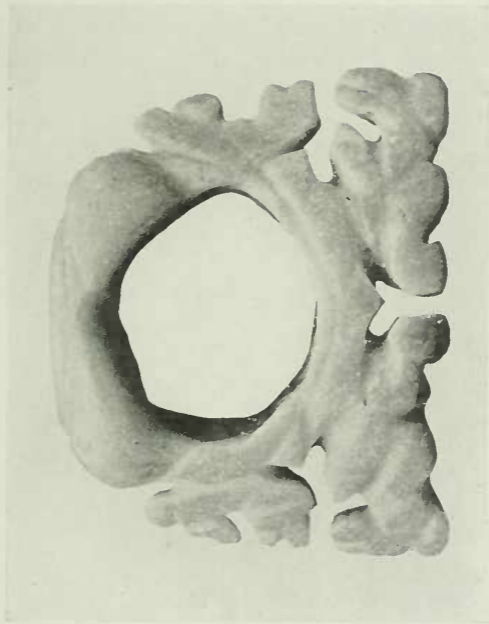
The figure wears a headdress which on close examination appears to be composed of two outward-facing jaguar heads. Facial painting or tattooing appears in conventional scroll designs on the cheeks, upper chest, and arms.

The figurine seems to have been intended

for use as an amulet or a pendant, as an attempt has been made to perforate it longitudinally, boring in from the head and feet. The maker failed in his effort, however, since the two holes have not been bored far enough to connect. The separation of the arms from the trunk, and the space between the legs, have also been effected by means of boring a series of parallel and connecting holes, which have been so run together as to make the cuttings still plainly show the borings, and the gap between the feet has cut into one side of the longitudinal tunnel meant to receive the suspending string. The figure is unique among Costa Rican nephrite objects, and no doubt was highly prized by its native owner. Ramón, the "king" of the Bribri of the Talamanca valley, once showed the writer some long cylindrical stone beads which he explained the natives valued at a cow apiece. Gold ornaments, he averred, were less costly, since they were relatively easy to make, but these stone beads were far more difficult to manufacture, especially to perforate.

SKINNER—NEPHRITE

PL. II



NEPHRITE AMULET

The nephrite amulet illustrated (pl. II) is one of thousands of specimens taken from the necropolis of Las Mercedes by the Museum's expedition of 1916-17. It is carved in a lacy pattern showing several highly conventionalized figures, some of which may possibly represent parrots. The specimen is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch high, by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad.

The work is unusually well done, even for Costa Rica, and the polished light sea-green of the nephrite lends a charming effect. The form seems to be unique, and the object surpasses in beauty any of the nephrite amulets in the collection of the National Museum at San José, Costa Rica.

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