

ON ZEMES FROM SANTO DOMINGO.

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There is a field for research in the ethnology and archæology of West Indian aborigines which up to the present time has been but imperfectly cultivated. From what little is known, however, of this subject enough can be gleaned to show that a rich harvest awaits research, and that, while many of the problems connected with the early history and the manner and customs of the former inhabitants of these islands are similar to those of the neighboring continent, there are others which are more local and special.

The following article is an attempt to add new information to what has already been published in regard to certain images called Zemi (Cemis, *Anglicè*)* by the aborigines. The notions which were entertained as to the meanings and uses of these idols may be gleaned from the writings of Charlevoix and others. The difficulties which encompass the study of the aboriginal manners and customs of the West Indians are somewhat increased by the introduction into the islands at an early period of an African race in the stage of savagery. The negroes brought from Africa a primitive worship and belief no higher in development than those of the natives whom they superseded. Practices of their ceremonies, more or less modified, became incorporated with those of the Indians and complicated the problem with which we now have to deal.†

* I have, with the exception of the last syllable, followed the spelling used by Charlevoix for these Antillean idols. The form "Cemi" is used by several well-known authors. My contribution to a knowledge of the Zemes relates almost wholly to the images and not to the "spirits" which they represent.

† Especially true of historians who wrote a century or more after the introduction of African slaves, although not so applicable to Herrera, who speaks of the religion of the Caribs, but does not describe the images. In Hayti, Santo Domingo and in the New Mexican pueblos old Indian rites are wonderfully mixed with Christian ceremonials. Hence we have on one and the same day mass and tablet dances—church services followed by dances in which old-time mythological personages appear. In Mexico the same thing occurs, and in villages not far from the City of Mexico, the former focus of Aztec culture, dances are still celebrated among christianized natives in which appear personages exactly comparable with certain priesthoods in Zúñi and the Moki pueblos.

It is well known that in the Bahama Islands fetishes are made use of at the present day. The same is also true of the other West Indian Islands. I am told, for instance, by Mr. C. J. Maynard that in the Bahamas fetishes are placed at the entrances of the fields to protect the products of the same, and that the superstitious will not steal whatever is protected in that way. The belief in the power of these fetishes may either be a lineal descendant of old Lucayan superstitions or introduced negro sorceries, in which case they may have no connection with aboriginal beliefs. The discrimination between the two is very difficult and the problem a most complicated one to solve.

There are, however, certain forms of idols, known as Zemes, which there is no doubt once belonged to the aboriginal races. Some of these, which are supposed to be ancient, are considered in the following pages.

In an article on "The Latimer Collection," published in the Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1876, Prof. O. T. Mason describes and figures a series of "stone implements" from Porto Rico, to which he has given the name "mammiform stones." The form of one of these, which he figures (Fig. 42), is said to be unique.

Through the kindness of Mr. Edward Hall, of Cambridge, I have obtained a second specimen closely similar to the unique form described by Professor Mason. In details of the carving my specimen varies very considerably from that of the drawing published by Professor Mason, as I try to show in what follows.

The rarity of this form of Zeme has encouraged me to prepare the accompanying description :

The curious object is made from a hard basaltic rock, smoothly polished, except on the rounded flat under surface and in the depressions of the eyes, mouth, and ears. Its surface is smooth, but in places somewhat roughened. Indications of ornamental scratchings are present at many points. In the rough places indicating the eyes, ears, and mouth, the depressions were apparently formed by pecking with a pointed instrument, but the other surface appears to be polished partly by frequent handling. The most marked differences between my specimen and Professor Mason's are in the nose, the ring-like cutting above the eyebrows, the form of the ear, and the elevated collar back of the same organs. The relative distance of the ears from the eyes and the outline of the eyes are also different in the two specimens.

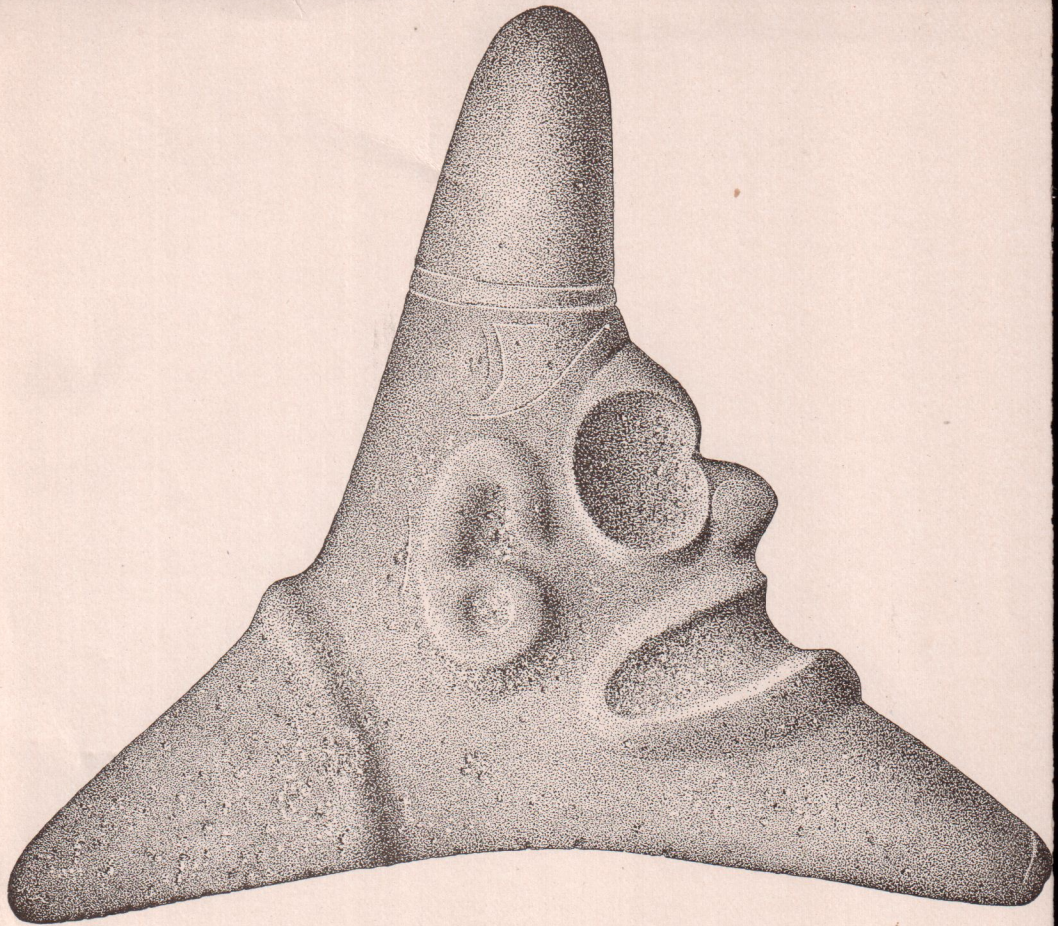


FIG. 1.—Stone Zeme with human face.

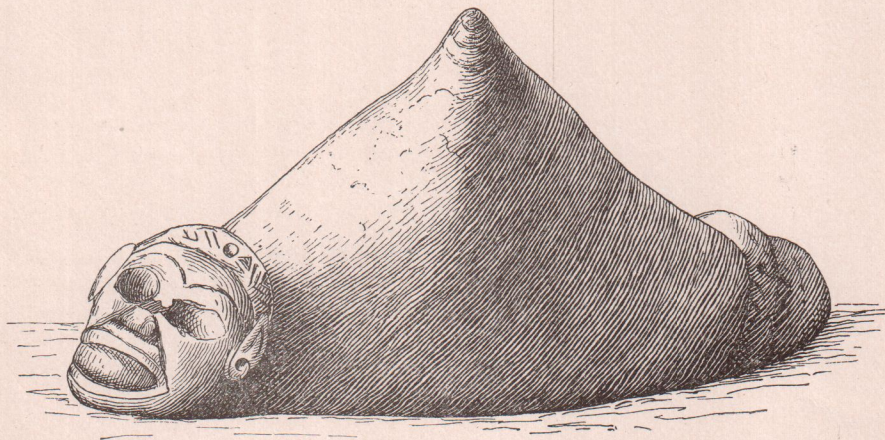
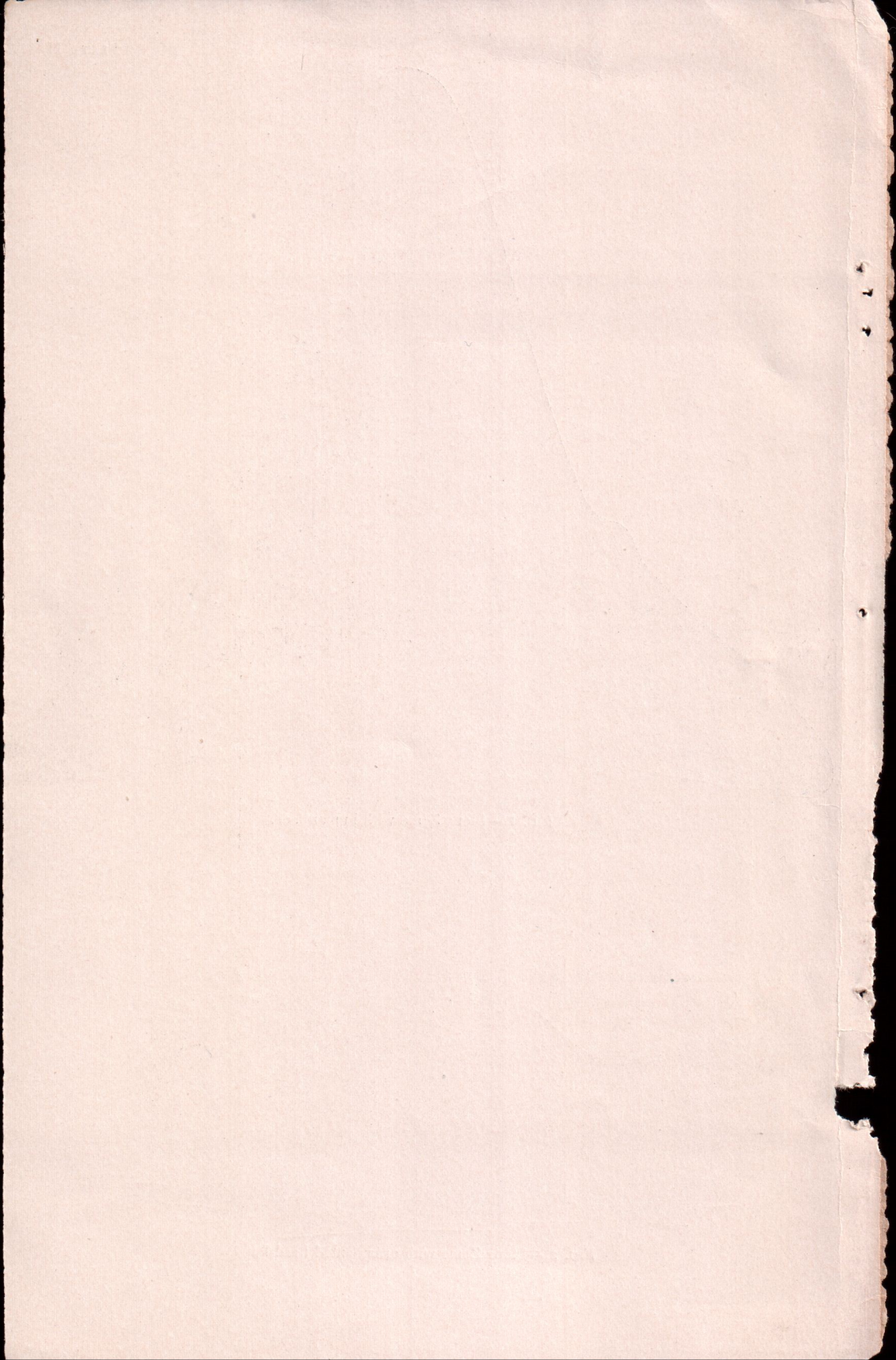


FIG. 2.—Stone Zeme with ornamented head-band.



The prominent lips show fine technique. The orifice of the mouth is broad, as if the tips of the lips were open. The nose is well formed, pointed, with curved lines or incisions on one side indicating the lobes. At the bridge of the nose, extending between the eyes, there is a straight shallow groove, which appears to be worn as if by filing. The eyes are bounded by a rim, the thin edges of which are slightly raised, while the surface of the depression is concave.

The mamma * above the face is rounded and pointed, smooth, and inclined slightly forward. It is girt at its base by two parallel grooves or shallow scratches, about an eighth of an inch apart. The region occupying the position of the temples is ornamented by a triangular figure, formed by double incised lines on the side above the ear, a straight line parallel with the two grooves above mentioned, and a curved line on the side towards the eye. The two latter markings almost meet above the middle of the concave depression of the eye. On the left-hand side of the Zeme this ornamentation is less plainly indicated than on the right. There is a slightly curved depression at the base of the forehead, extending in a crescentic form from one eye to the other. The ear has the form of a figure 6 and lies relatively nearer the eye than is represented in Mason's cut.

It is perhaps worthy of mention that we have something comparable to the lower half of the "ears" of the specimen which I have described represented on "masks" found in the Latimer collection. These are well shown in Fig. 48 in Professor Mason's paper, and a somewhat similar but more conventionalized appendage of the same nature is found in another specimen (Fig. 58) of the same paper.

Behind the ear a rounded collar† or elevated ridge girts the base of the rounded mamma. On the left side of the head near the lower half of the left ear this ridge is slightly broken or notched, but the remainder of it is well formed and in good proportions. The lower or so-called flat surface of the whole specimen is slightly

* Following Professor Mason's use of this term, I have designated the three projections *mammæ*, but in the case of two of these it is even less applicable than in that to which he applied it.

† What I take to be the same collar of which this is conventionalized appears in Fig. 2, in Fig. 3 as a raised ferrule above the flared base, and in Fig. 5.

rounded, very roughly cut, and slightly concave. The two projections, one forming the chin and the other the neck behind the collar, are pointed, smooth, and rounded above, with flat surface below. As the specimen rests upon them with the head uppermost the part of the flat base which is situated under the apical mamma is elevated from the table about a half inch. The tip of the chin is slightly chipped. Nostrils are not indicated, and the teeth are not represented.

I have not found the 6-like structure, which I have called the ear, so well brought out in the figures of mammilated stones by Professor Mason as in my specimen. One is at first tempted to look upon the circular lower portions of this part with its depression as representations of the ear ornaments such as one finds in the figures carved on the ruins of Yucatan or in the various Maya codices.* A more natural conclusion, however, would be that it is a rude carving representing the lower part of the ear without ornament.

As to the use of these mammiform and similar mask-like stones Professor Mason suggests at least three possibilities: †—that they were grinding stones, ensigns, or striking stones. If we accept the last two suggestions we may suppose the image to have been lashed to handles. None of these suggestions, however, are wholly satisfactory as an explanation of their use, and when tested by my specimen all seem extremely doubtful.

The carved image is not the least elaborately and carefully worked out of all the mammiform stones. Professor Mason says: "Their elegance of design and variety of execution in conformity with an ideal characterize these as the highest type of sculpture with stone implements in the world."

The mammiform stones described by Professor Mason are all from Porto Rico. The specimen which I have described was said to have been collected near the city of Santo Domingo, on the island of the same name; but as I am not able to ascertain definitely the locality

* With this thought in mind notice the form of the ear in Fig. 5; also observe the Aztec profile. See also Rosny's photographs of bas-reliefs from Copan. *Mem. de la Soc. d'Ethnologie*, No. 3, 1882.

* This product of Carib skill so closely resembles those figured by Charlevoix and Antonio del Monte y Tejada, and called by them *Zemes* that, as far as this image goes, one may very properly regard them the same. I have therefore accepted their identification. It must, however, be confessed that some of the others are more doubtful.

where it was found, and as communication between the two islands is easy, it may have been brought to Santo Domingo from Porto Rico.

The resemblance of the carved stone to a human head is too close to be denied. If we compare it with others found in the Latimer collection we can easily suppose that it is the conventionalized imitation of a human being lying on his stomach with a weight on the back. "The whole appearance of these stones," says Professor Mason, "cannot fail to remind the student of the legend of Typhœus killed by Jupiter with a flash of lightning, and buried beneath Mount *Ætna*."

The beauty and finish of this carved stone shows that it was of considerable value to the owners. We can hardly suppose that such a well-finished object was not something more than a stone for grinding meal or paint, or even a war implement. Possibly it is a fetish not unlike similar sacred stones well known among the Central American Indians.*

A beautiful specimen of what I consider a Passamaquoddy fetish is owned by Mrs. W. Wallace Brown, of Calais, Maine. Stone fetishes were very common among the Pueblo Indians. I have a small collection of these from a Zuñi pueblo which were used as "hunting stones." Something similar to the Zemes exists in the fetish of *A-hai-u-ta*, a mythical war-god of the Zuñis.

References to idols or Zemes made of stone, wood, or clay are to be found in the writings of those who have described the religions of the inhabitants of the West Indies. These Zemes have been found in caves, shrines, in shell heaps, and in the habitations of the natives. Some of these idols were appealed to for success in the hunt, others for propitious childbirth, and still others for rain and abundant harvests.†

* Stone fetishes were used by many tribes of North American Indians. On a visit to the Passamaquoddy tribe last year I was shown a curiously shaped stone which recalls in its shape the well-known "hunting stones" of less civilized tribes. I am told that the Passamaquoddies formerly carried these stones in hunting and fishing, evidently with the same intent as the western tribes.

† The son of Columbus, who quotes from the great admiral (Pinkerton, *Voyages and Travels*, etc., p. 79), says: "Most of the caciques have three great stones also, to which they and their people show great devotion. The one they say helps the corn and all sorts of grain; the second makes women be delivered without pain, and the third procures rain or fair weather, according as they stand in need of either. I sent your highness three of these stones by Antony de

It seems probable also, judging from early accounts of those whose information possibly came from the aborigines, that they were in some instances images of the animal which gave a name to the clan to which their possessor belonged. In one account I find a statement that the cacique is adorned with a figure of his Zeme painted on the body. In certain ceremonials among the aborigines of America the totem is painted on the body.

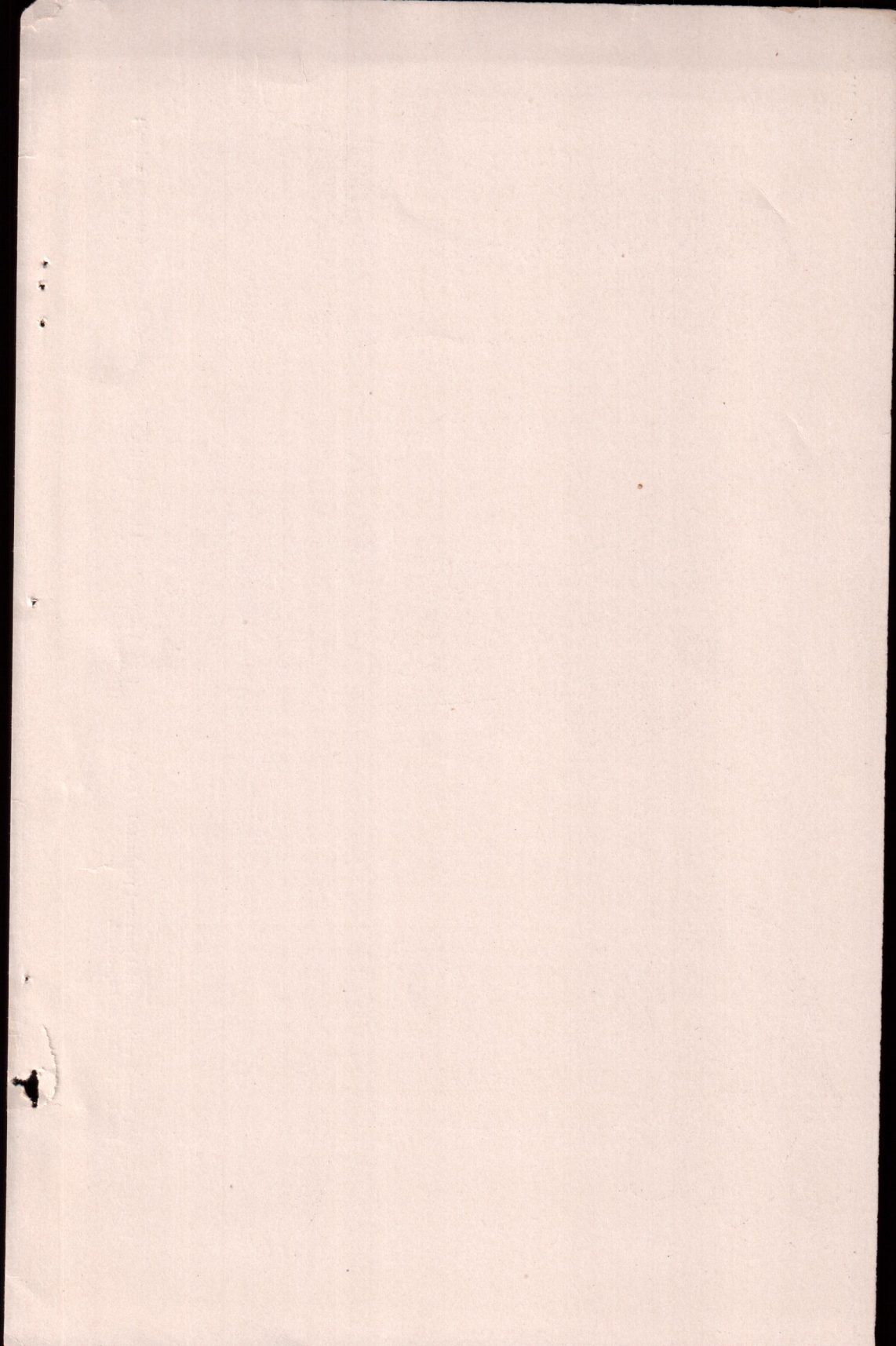
Two Zemes, identical in most particulars with the stone images which have been described, are figured by Charlevoix (*Histoire de l'isle Espagnole ou S. Dominique*, T. I., p. 80, 1733), by whom they are likewise called Mabouya. The same author also figures a Zeme from an Indian sepulture, which would indicate that they are sometimes buried with the dead. The rude figures of the Zemes given by this author strikingly recall some of those in the Latimer collection. Figures of similar Zemes are given by a later writer, Antonio del Monte y Tejada, in the first volume of his *Historia de Santo Domingo*. The last-mentioned author repeats many facts in regard to their use and character given by Charlevoix, and adds interesting data shedding light on the inner conception of the Caribs as to their notions of the Zemes and the veneration in which they were held.

It would seem from Charlevoix's account that the Zemes were very common among the ancient inhabitants of Santo Domingo, as he speaks of numbers of them being found in shell heaps and on the sites of old encampments; moreover, they were found in houses, where they served as penates. The term Zeme appears to be a general one, referring to a great variety of forms of animals used as fetishes. We also learn that certain of these Zemes had prophetic powers, and by a skillful arrangement a concealed person was able to utter responses through the medium of the Zeme.

Judging from the many references to the Zemes which can be found, one would not go far astray in considering similarly formed figures to those* of the Latimer collection as idols. To that conclusion also the locality where the image was said to have been found points. I was told that the specimen which I have described was

Torres and have three more to carry along with me." The short account of the religions of the natives by Columbus quoted by his son is of great value in a study of usages connected with the Zemes.

**i. e.*, the mammiform figures.



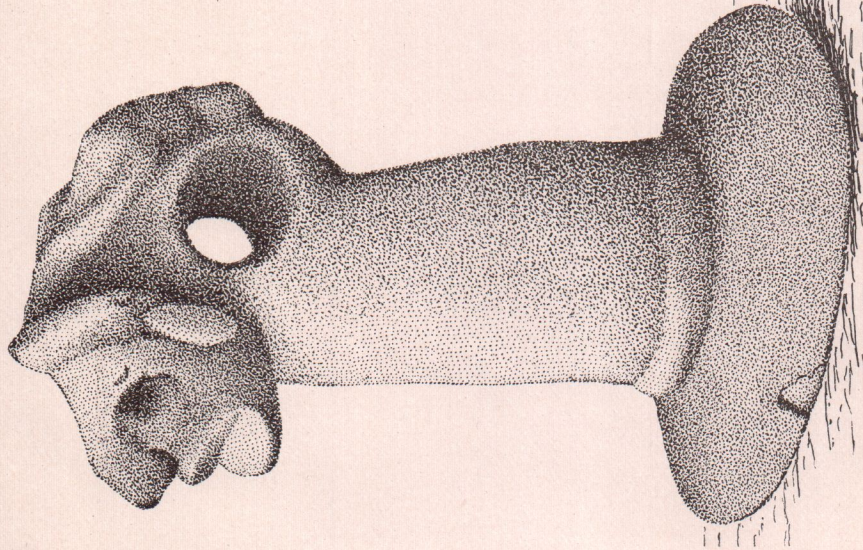


FIG. 3.—Upright Zeme? with discoidal base and perforated head. Possibly an implement.

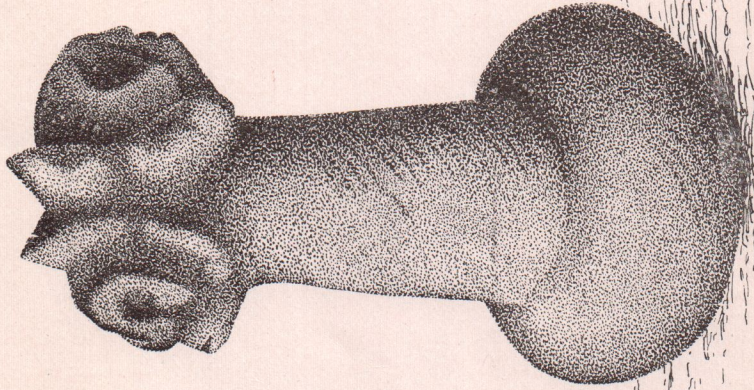


FIG. 4.—Janus-formed Zeme, shaped like a pestle. Possibly an implement.

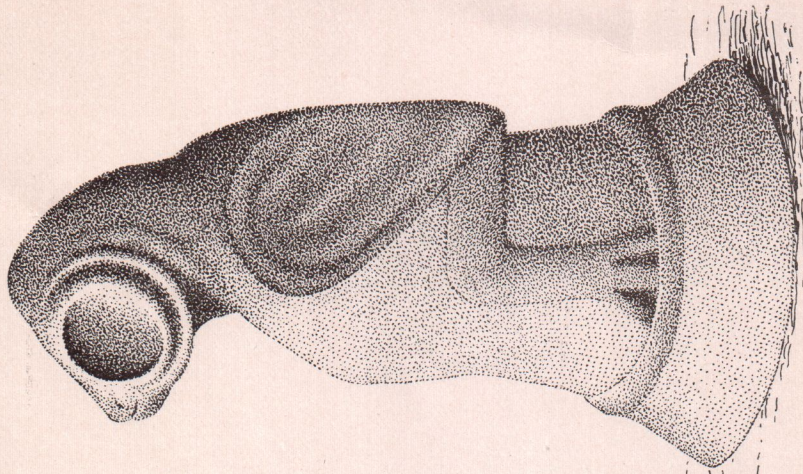


FIG. 5.—Zeme of unknown animal; Possibly of a bird.

taken from a cave, which accords with certain statements in Charlevoix in relation to the shrines of the Zemes.

In addition to the carved stone which I have described, my attention has been called by Capt. Nathan Appleton, of Boston, to figures of similar objects from the Island of Santo Domingo. Some of these are so exceptional in form that they merit description, but as I have not seen the specimens I have used in descriptions of these drawings made by Mr. A. Rodriguez of Santo Domingo City. The cuts which are given (Figs. 2-7) are accurate reproductions of his drawings. The shape of three Zemes, (Figs. 3, 4, 5) made of stone, is suggestive of pestles or mawls. One of these has the form of an animal's head and a body resembling that of a bird. The handle of another has two heads, each of which is more or less human in general appearance. One of these (Fig. 2) has the collar behind the mamma, as in my Fig. 1, and a somewhat diminutive head, upon the sides of which are well developed ears. The band about the forehead above the face appears in Zemes of widely different shape and in those made of very different materials. It is significant that this style of head ornamentation is so constant. Similar head-bands may be seen in several specimens, characteristically ornamented head-bands, to which I have referred.*

I have given also a figure of a wooden idol, which shows many characteristics of the stone Zemes and recalls several references which I have found in early histories of the island and its inhabitants. One of the most marked common features is the ornamental head-band. It is known that the Caribs had Zemes made of wood. Charlevoix speaks of them, and the same are mentioned by several early writers on the Caribs. Friar Roman Pane, for example, in his account of the religions of the Antilles, says certain trees were believed to send for sorcerers, to whom they gave orders how to shape their trunks into idols, and these "Cemi," being then installed in temple-huts, received and inspired their priests with oracles. (See Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, p. 216.)

Some of the Indians, says another writer, make Zemes of wood, as admonished by men in the woods. It is not unlikely that the two images of wood carved in imitation of serpents,† which are

* Compare with this the head-band of Mason's Fig. 45, *op. cit.*; also Rosny, *Doc. Ecrits de la Antiq., Amb.*, p. 73.

† "At the entrance of one of their houses they saw two images of woode like

stated to have been seen at the entrance to a dwelling in Guadeloupe, were images of Zemes, although it is said that they were not idols, but simply decorations.

It is recorded that a certain Carib chief ("king") had in his dwelling a Zeme made of wood which had the shape of a four-footed beast. In Hakluyt's "Historie of the West Indies," p. 53, it is recorded that the Zemes disappeared at the advent of the Spaniards.

A curious image, of which a drawing occurs in the collection submitted to me by Captain Appleton, differs so widely from the Zemes as to lead me to doubt its relationship to them.* Still it has many characteristics which recall the most primitive of the Zemes.

In this specimen (Fig. 7) there is a close similarity to the wooden Zeme in the form of the patterns on the hands and the fingers. The textile fabrics about the knees and shoulders are highly characteristic if not unique.

Somewhat interesting, as related to the bands about the knees and shoulders in this object, is the statement in Hakluyt that "their vergins also are present" (in certain drunken debauches), "who wrappe the partes of the calves of their legges and thyghes next the knee with bottoms of yarne and binde them harde to the end, that their calves and thyghes may swell bigger."

The position of the head-band is occupied by two raised elongated elevations, one of which is continued into a scroll to form the ear. The form of the ear itself strikingly recalls that of the stone Zemes, but is somewhat different.

It would seem, from the various historical accounts of the Zemes, that they had in the Carib mind somewhat the same significance as the fetishes in the conceptions of the inhabitants of the continent of America. The same word is used for both images and "spirits." They alike had powers of good or evil, and Boitii or sorcerers held conversations with both, being aided in various ways by these idols in imparting assistance to others. The spirits and the image seemed to be associated. "The spirit," says Tylor, "could be

unto serpents." [The Historie of the West Indies, Hakluyt, leaf 12, 2d page, First Decade (Lok, English translation)].

The same author (Fourth Decade, p. 165) says that Captain Valinia and his companions *were sacrificed* to the Zemes.

* Compare with the two raised lines on the forehead the ornamentation of the forehead of the second figure (from Copan, Rosny *teste*) in Winsor's "Narrative and Critical History," vol. I, p. 195.

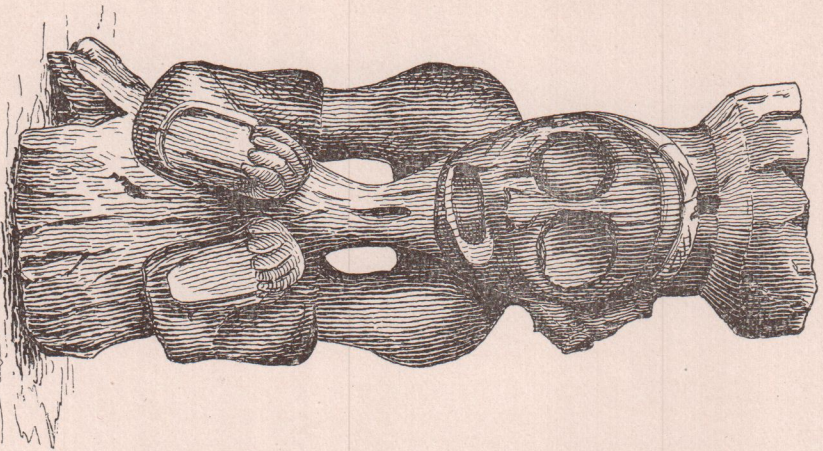


FIG. 6.—Wooden Zeme of human form.

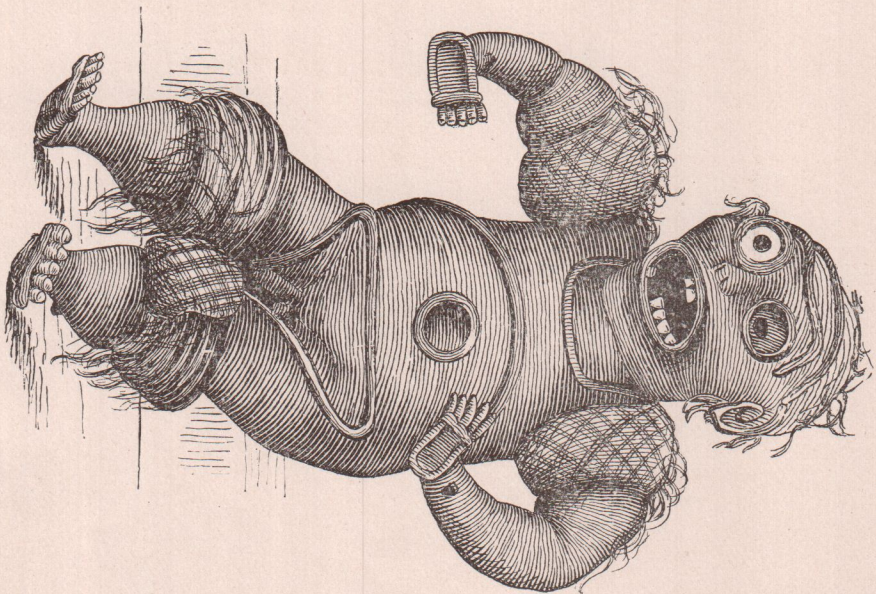
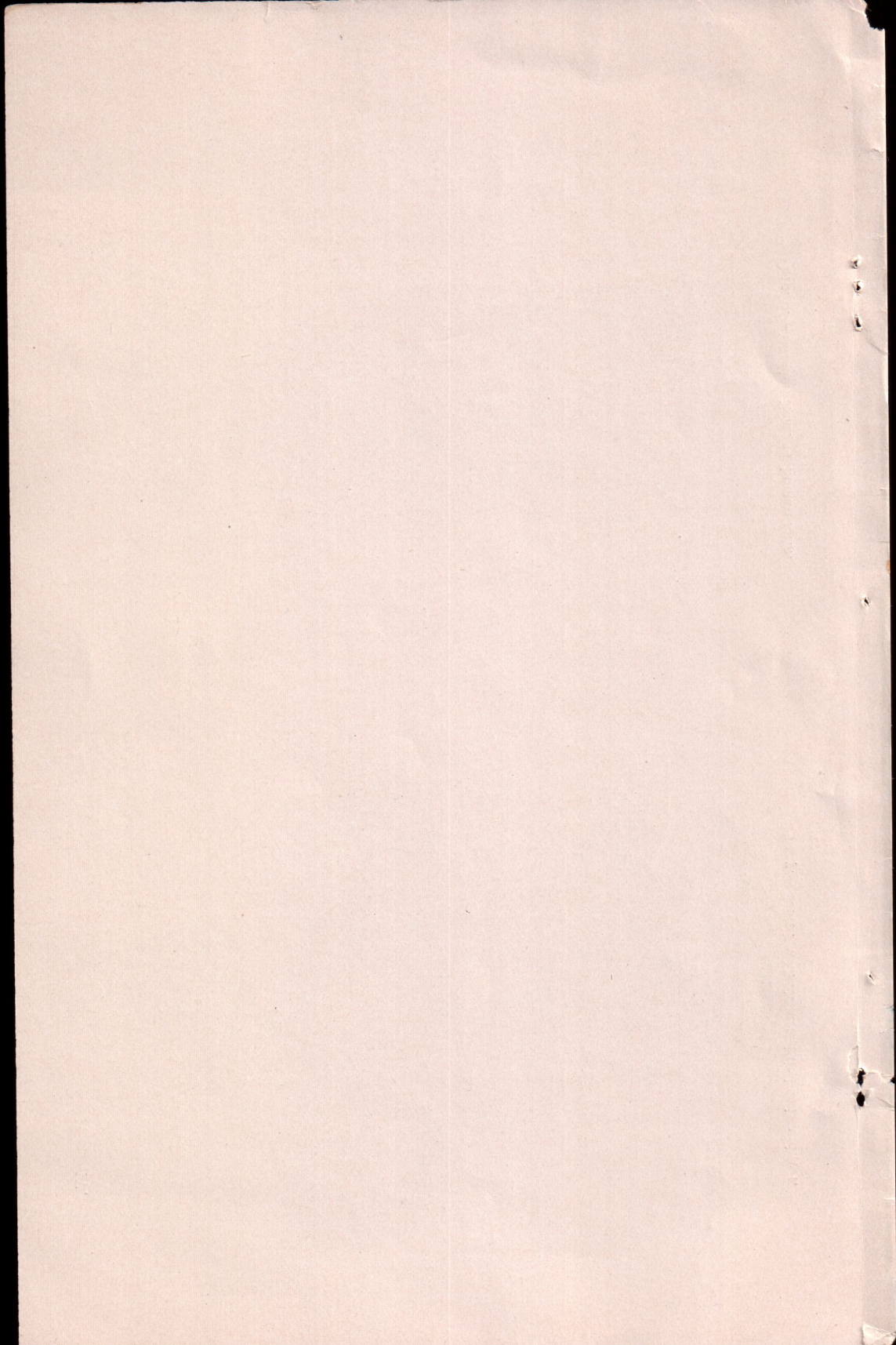


FIG. 7.—Zeme? with characteristic hands and feet.



conveyed with the image; both were called "cemi," and in the local accounts of sacrifices, oracles, and miracles the deity and the idol are mixed together in a way which at least shows the extreme closeness of their connection in the native mind. To this item also, if we trust the writings of contemporaries of Columbus, may be added the belief that all the people are descended from Zemes. "*Nemo ex corocotti stirpe ortos esse dubitabat*," says one of these authors.*

This fact is interesting, as it points towards a similar idea of clan origin which is found in many rude nations. The fact is particularly instructive, as it may afford data in determination of the number and names of the Carib clans.

The heads of these Zemes, according to the Spanish writers, were sprinkled with powder, evidently in a ceremonial manner. There can be recognized in this observance something similar to a practice of the Aztecs, who sprinkled meal on the horses of the conquerors, and of the Zuñians and Mokis of the Southwest, who use the same in many ceremonials. It is most interesting to learn that, according to a good observer, they gave the name of their grandfathers to these images. One is tempted to regard this fact as another indication of the belief of the Caribs of their clan descent. This attitude towards fetishes is not peculiar to the American races, but is a marked feature in the religious conceptions of many widely separated peoples.

Last of all, and perhaps most important, is the question whether the Zemes were products of Caribs or other American races. I have throughout this article considered them as the productions of the Caribs, but am not sure that another people may not have had a hand in their manufacture. That they belonged to an aboriginal American race seems evident, and I believe that race was the Carib, but demonstration of the fact is beyond my present powers.

* In this connection the variety of animals represented by the Zemes may have an important bearing. The "corocotti" are thought to be kinds of Zemes, but the latter term is, it must be confessed, somewhat indefinite.

