

DIOON MEJIAE, A NEW CYCAD FROM HONDURAS

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THE most surprising botanical discovery in Honduras this year is a cycad of the genus *Dioon*. The native cycads of continental tropical America are few, and the genus *Dioon* has been known previously only from Mexico, where three species are found, one of them of rather wide distribution, and much cultivated for ornament in Mexican gardens. The occurrence of a Central American species, in a restricted locality far removed from the southern border of Mexico, could not have been predicted. As so often is the case with plants possessing ornamental value, this one, although unknown to botanists, has been familiar to many Hondurans for more than forty years, as a source of food, a garden plant, or even an article of

local commerce. It was first observed by the authors in February, 1949, in the garden of Dr. Isidoro Mejía h., in the town of Danlí in central-southern Honduras.

Dioon Mejiae, Standl. & Williams, sp. nov.

Planta acaulis vel trunco usque ad 1 m. vel ultra erecto crasso stipata; folia numerosa rigide coriacea, adscendentia, in statu juvenili tomentosa, cito glabrata, laete viridia, 1-2 m. longa et ultra, rhachi supra plana, subtus convexa; folii segmenta utroque latere 100 et ultra ca. 17-nervia, mediis ca. 17 cm. longis et 1.5 cm. latis, oppositis, pungenti-attenuatis, integris, superioribus sensim decrescentibus, inferioribus longe sensimque decrescentibus pauci-pungenti-serratis, infimis dentiformibus 1-2 mm. tantum longis; strobili feminei erecti breviter crasse stipati, ovoidei, ca. 30 cm. longi atque 20 cm. lati, apice subabrupte acuminati, ubique tomento densissimo pallide brunneo molli obtecti; squamae stipitem obtegentes lineari-lanceolatae, usque ad 18 cm. longae, longe angustaeque attenuatae, extus dense lanosae; squamae strobili feminei deltoideo-ovatae ca. 8 cm. longae et 6 cm. latae, anguste obtusae, extus intusque dense lanosae; semina bene evoluta non visa.

Type in the Herbarium of Chicago Natural History Museum, cultivated in the garden of Dr. Isidoro Mejía h., Danlí, Dept. El Paraíso, HONDURAS, alt. 750 m., Feb. 17, 1949, Standley 16756; duplicate in the Herbarium of Escuela Agrícola Panamericana; accompanied by photographs of the type cone and of other plants in the garden of Doña María Luisa Gamero. The species is represented also by Standley 16522 from Danlí; and 18034, from Juticalpa, Dept. Olancho where planted in a garden; also by E. D. Merrill & Louis O. Williams 15716, from Danlí.

This new cycad is dedicated to Dr. Isidoro Mejía h., physician and surgeon of Danlí, who brought seed 40 years ago from a dry rocky canyon in the Department of Olancho, Honduras, on the road between Pueblo Nuevo and Olanchito, the only locality at which it has been found wild. From plants grown from these seeds, and propagated readily by "hijos" or suckers, the cycad has become common in gardens in various towns in the departments of El Paraíso and Olancho, and young sprouts have been planted recently at El Zamora-

no. Plants are in cultivation also in Tegucigalpa. Large individuals seen by the senior author in Managua, Nicaragua probably represent the same species, and small ones brought from Managua were observed in a garden of Condega, Nicaragua.

It is claimed that *Dioon Mejiae* is found wild in a single canyon of Olancho, near the border of the Department of Yoro, and the many plants there are protected by the government because of their value to the Indian inhabitants of that region. They boil and grind the large brown chestnut-like seeds and make of them a kind of tortilla of good flavor and agreeable to eat. In places where the *Dioon* is cultivated, the palm-like leaves are in demand for decorating altars and for funeral wreaths, and are sold locally at a relatively high price.

In Honduras this *Dioon* is known commonly by the strange name of "teosinte." This term belongs properly to a grass of the genus *Euchlaena*. This true "teosinte" has been found at various localities in Mexico and Guatemala, and is known also from western Honduras. How a name so well fixed came to be applied in Honduras to another plant so different as *Dioon* is a subject about which it is futile to speculate.

This new species of *Dioon*, isolated by hundreds of miles from the nearest occurrence of a Mexican species, is evidently related to *D. spinulosum* Dyer, which has been reported from Veracruz and Yucatán. We have seen no material from those states, but on a geographic basis alone, it is quite safe to assume that the Honduran cycad is distinct.