

A Synthesis of Pre-Columbian Ceramics from Costa Rica

El resultado de un ensayo para definir los períodos mayores de la arqueología centroamericana por orden cronológico es una terminología nueva con fechas respectivas para las culturas precolombinas. Se divide el tiempo en seis períodos, empezando desde una fecha indeterminada cuando el hombre por primera vez cruzó el Estrecho de Bering para llegar a este continente, y terminan con el establecimiento definitivo del español en el territorio istmeño. El actual estudio comienza con el Período IV, 1000 a.C. - d.C. 500, cuando las series de cerámicas llegaron a un desarrollo suficiente para poder ser reconocidas, y sigue por los Períodos V, 500 d.C. - 1000, y VI, 1000 d.C. - 1500 ó 1600. A veces, sin embargo, la cronología nueva se extiende a la antigua. Así es que se encuentra tanto una taxonomía como la otra en el texto siguiente.

Existen tres zonas arqueológicas costarricenses. La cerámica data un poco antes del Período IV en la de Nicoya; en la Vertiente Atlántica/Altiplano desde 300 a.C. y en Diqúis desde 0. Aunque hubo intercambio comercial de alfarería, tanto con el norte como con el sur, el septentrión dominaba Nicoya; el sur las áreas restantes. Se reconocen Períodos Temprano, Medio y Tardío en todas las regiones, pero Períodos Polícromos sólo en Nicoya donde la influencia mexicana llegó a su apogeo.

Nicoya y la Vertiente Atlántica/Altiplano, entre 500 - 800 d.C., demuestran un artificio netamente de origen costarricense: una cabeza con fuste que gira.

THE WIDESPREAD EARLIEST PERIOD

Introduction

Around 3000 B.C., the spread of ceramics - in part sea-borne - from northern coastal Ecuador and Pacific Colombia over an extensive territory, which reached up into the eastern United States at least as far as Georgia and as far south as northern coastal Peru, created the cultural periods comprising what is known as the Formative Period in American archaeology (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1965; Ford 1969). Dates vary according to location.

Among Formative Period ceramic traits in Costa Rica are unpainted or monochrome wares decorated by rocker-stamping; finger-grooving; cross-hatching; punctation; drag and jab; zone scarifying; both thick- and fine-line incising; applied abstract and zoomorphic motifs, as well as rims or other salient features painted red; two colors separated by incised lines, a technique which gave rise to the term Zoned Bichrome; lines painted with a multiple brush; and sometimes a slipped interior with a polished exterior (Coe 1962; Coe and Baudez 1961; Baudez 1967; Lange 1978). Vessel forms include jars with thick and constricted necks; shallow or deep bowls with composite silhouettes; everted lips; slightly flaring tripods or loop legs; and a ring base. Other pottery items are ocarinas and roller or stemmed stamps (Coe 1962; Baudez 1967; Stone 1977). In the brief review which follows, it should be noted that only the outstanding traits or diagnostic ceramic classes are considered in each regional period. There is no attempt to cite every known pottery type.

The Formative Period has long been recognized in Central American archaeology but we have also been aware that the discrepancy between areas and time leaves much to be desired. In an attempt to define the major archaeological periods by chronological criteria (Willey 1981), a new terminology and respective dating have recently been employed for Central American cultures. These newer and broader time spans are given in this Introduction whereas throughout the text, the older and regional divisions and terminology which I have published in other studies are used. The taxonomic differences between authors can be noted by an examination and comparison of the references given in parenthesis.

The newer and broader time spans are divided into six periods ranging from an undetermined starting point when man first crossed the Bering Strait to reach this continent. The last period ends when the Spaniards established a definite footing in isthmian territory. The following study begins with the new Period IV, 1000 B.C. - A.D. 500, when ceramic sequences were well enough developed to be recognized and continues through Period V, A.D. 500 - 1000, ending with Period VI, 1000 - 1500 or 1600. Occasionally the new chronology overlaps or extends into an older division. This is further evidence for the need to fill the sequence and regional gaps which mar our knowledge of Central American pre-Columbian cultures. The recognition of such a need should serve as an incentive for future archaeological work.

Costa Rica has three archaeological regions, each with a different cultural chronology: the Nicoya; the Atlantic Watershed and Highland; and the Diquis. The Nicoya region seems to have been part of the Formative Period picture around 1000 B.C. when a period defined as Zoned Bichrome, lasting until A.D. 300, is recognized (Lange 1978:105). The Atlantic Watershed and Highland Region's Early Period extends from 300 B.C. to A.D. 300, a time when most of the above-mentioned ceramics were present (Kennedy 1968; Snarskis 1975; 1976; 1981). In the Diquis Region, the Early Period stretches from 0 to A.D. 800 (Stone 1977). Although many of the basic traits which delineate Formative Period culture appear along with local characteristics throughout Costa Rica, much of the painted decoration is absent. By A.D. 300, the Nicoya and Atlantic Watershed and Highland Regions had new elements, including human and zoomorphic effigy figurines; vessels with the form of an elongated gourd called *jicara* (*Crescentia cujete* L.); clay mushroom effigy vessels; Amazonian-style tapering pottery drums; rattles; and nasal snuffers with one or two tubes (Baudez 1967; Stirling 1969; Snarskis 1976; Stone 1977). These traits bespeak the fusion of cultures in Costa Rica, and bring to mind a fundamental theory of Dr. Walter Lehmann: the importance of Central America as a meeting-ground of southern and northern cultures (1913 and 1920).

THE NICOYA REGION - PERIOD IV

Zoned Bichrome Period

The Nicoya Region played a role not only during Zoned Bichrome times but also throughout the prehistory of Costa Rica as an introducer of cultural traits, probably in part the result of itinerant traders and in part migratory groups. Among non-local elements noted are sherds from the Maya site of Uxactun in the Guatemalan Peten; Usulután- and Palmar-style vessels also associated with Upper Central America (Lange and Scheidenhelm 1972; Stone 1972) and Bocana Incised Bichrome and Rosales Zoned Engraved Wares, which indicate southern contacts.

Rosales Zoned Engraved pottery is one of the most artistic styles within this time-span, and was traded to the Atlantic Watershed Region. It is a surprisingly sophisticated ware, with shapes that include plates; bowls with annular bases; bottle-shaped vessels; and whistling and spouted jars and hollow figurines portraying human beings or zoomorphic subjects, with an opening at the top of the head (Fig. 1). Designs are painted in black on a red background or red on buff, and are outlined by incising, which sometimes has a white fill. Although objects occasionally have bulbous legs and incised motifs recalling the Olmec tradition, the variety of form and the bold, vivid coloring suggests the Chorrera Phase of Ecuador, and open up the wide theme of water travel betwixt and between ports of call on the American continent.

Early Polychrome Period

This regional period spans A.D. 300 to 800, and is divided into two parts: A, from A.D. 300 to 500; and B, from A.D. 500 to 800, the latter within Period V. Diagnostic during the Early Polychrome A Period are monochrome red-orange, brown, and red pottery, tempered with sand or shell, and incised with motifs related to the crested alligator or serpent, the last a southern cultural trait; and Modeled Alligator Wares, so called because plastic bumps simulate the reptile's hide (Type A), or because alligator effigies form incense burners (Type B - Fig. 2; Lothrop 1926, v. II).

THE NICOYA REGION - PERIOD V

Early Polychrome B, 500- 800, is also characterized by the persistence of this mixture of northern and southern cultural elements. It is not known, however, whether this is wholly due to merchants, or in part to migrant artisan groups, or even to colonizers.

Among the wares of northern inspiration is Galo Polychrome, which was undoubtedly inspired by Ullua Polychrome pottery from western Honduras and decorated with Nahuatized Maya patterns. "Al fresco" painted vessels resplendent with Tlaloc heads or other Mexican symbols painted in blue, pale green, purple, red, or white on a black background and samples of Fine Orange Ware are likewise northern. Clay tumis similar to those of copper from Ecuador and Peru, as well as the red and beige patterns on the yellow slip of Alligator or Carrillo pottery, which emphasize the crested alligator and recall the Panamanian Alligator Ware, suggest cultural contacts with the south.

An unique invention during this time, but extending late into the Middle Polychrome Period, is a mobile effigy head of an animal, bird, or human being on a clay shaft contained in the vessel body or figurine (Figs. 3 and 4). This type of articulation also occurs in the Atlantic Watershed Region, with a few examples at Isla de Sacrificios in Veracruz, Mexico, where it was either brought by trades or pilgrims, or the idea was copied.

Middle Polychrome Period

During the Middle Polychrome Period, A.D. 800 to 1200, northern cultural intrusions continued spreading from the Nicoya Region to the Atlantic Watershed-Highland Region. Mora, Papagayo, and Birmania Polychrome Wares are diagnostic of this influence, despite their definite local character. Mora and Papagayo are both painted with sepia-red, black, and yellow-orange. Motifs such as the "kan" cross and feathered serpent symbols associate Mora Polychrome (Fig. 5) with the Maya, but the decorative patterns on Papagayo ceramics include very conventionalized concepts of the deities Ehecatl and Quetzalcoatl, which point to Mexican peoples. This ware was traded to all

Costa Rican regions, and also north to Guatemala, where it has been found associated in burials with Plumbate pottery, often thought indicative of the Toltec. Plumbate likewise appears in the Atlantic Watershed Region and Nicoya Region of Costa Rica. The other important polychrome ceramic style, Birmania or Plumed Serpent B, has a reddish-yellow slip containing hematite. This ware is distinguished by motifs symbolizing the northern Feathered Snake, stylized animals, birds, and two-headed monster figures, and frequently has a modeled head and painted designs on the exterior and interior. Such pottery was carried by trade beyond Costa Rica, and is known in Nicaragua and El Salvador, where it is also associated with Plumbate.

One of the typical Middle Polychrome Period styles likewise traded to the Atlantic Watershed Region is a jícara-shaped jar, either tripod or with a ring base, with a plastic bird, animal, Quetzalcoatl, or death head. Silhouette jaguar patterns frequently adorn the neck and tripod supports.

Underslipped Incised Ware, limited to the Nicoya Region, also has a jícara shape, and takes its name from the technique of incising the decoration on the dried clay before the white slip was applied. The Mexican Earth Monster, floral patterns, and the Feathered Serpent are dominating motifs, accompanied by stepped frets and striped bands in red-orange, black, and often blue - colors which recall the Mixteca-Alta of Mexico.

Shoe-shaped vessels, so popular in Nicaragua, also reached Costa Rica. Pottery incised with fine guilloche, hachure, and other reptilian motifs, often with modeled effigy decorations, including the mobile head on a shaft, appears as Chocolate, Black, Orange-Brown, and Red Wares, at times grouped under the general term "Castillo Engraved". Such ceramics, popular in the Nicoya and Atlantic Watershed-Highland Regions, indicate the south. There are some examples which depict a person balancing another, as if juggling; others are superimposed vessels or triple bowls supported by a zoomorphic effigy base. Many clay figurines likewise have a new aspect, with painted, not modeled, details reminiscent of northeastern South America.

THE NICOYA REGION - PERIOD VI

Late Polychrome Period

This time-span, A.D. 1200 to 1500, gives more evidence of Mexican influence. The richness of color, as well as the variety of motifs on the pottery, reflect what must have been an opulent, well-nourished society. Although many ceramic types continued in use, new vessels, resplendent with blue, dark olive green, red, red-orange, and black, often on a white slip, as well as feathered snakes, serpent symbols, and Mexican deities, are seen frequently alongside stylized motifs, which recall pottery associated with the Amazon. Diagnostic wares include Vallejo Polychrome, reminiscent of the Mixteca-Alta in color and design; Luna Ware (Fig. 6), likewise suggestive of the same region, but

painted with a technique in part typical of the Amazon; and a black pottery which is highly polished with fish bones.

THE DIQUIS REGION - PERIODS IV & V

Early Period

This period dates from 0 to A.D. 800, and is divided into two phases: the Early Phase, extending from 0 to A.D. 300; and the Late Early Phase, extending from A.D. 300 to 800. The culture of this area is closer to that of the adjoining territory of Pacific Panama than to the rest of Costa Rica, despite the persistence of much of the artistic tradition associated with the widespread Formative Period. Diagnostic of this earliest time-span are slab feet, broad strap handles, and large shallow plates. A new technique also appeared - negative or resist painting, which was known in southern coastal Peru as early as the Initial Period, between 1800 and 900 B.C. (Willey 1971).

The familiar monochrome wares - Red, Red Rimmed, and Brown - are known; however, due to local characteristics, the nomenclature differs, becoming Moravia Variety, Bambito Variety, and Parallel-Line Incised. Indicative of Panama are a new style, Fugitive Red Ware - so called because the colors tend to disappear easily; Scarified Ware; and some Zoned Incised ceramics. Human and animal effigy clay figurines (Fig. 7), the human representations with widespread legs and triangle-like pointed faces, seem to be prototypes of the later Red and Black Line Ware figures characteristic of the Diquis delta region. All have a suspension hole for a cord or thong, to permit use as a necklace. During the Late Early Period, Fugitive Red Ware disappeared. New types include Red Ware and Brown Ware bowls; a hard, thin, and polished Red Ware; Tall-Tripod Brown pottery; and varied colors on negative painted vessels.

Middle to Late Period

Diquis Region chronology spans a Middle to Late Period, from A.D. 800 to 1522, in part Period V and all of Period VI. The most popular and widespread pottery group is Red and Black Line Ware, which in Panama is called Alligator Ware (Holmes 1888). Red and black symbols associated with the alligator are the predominant decoration on a white or cream slip. Despite the conventionalization of design, the figurines belonging to this ceramic class are one of the few groups in Costa Rica to portray genre subjects. Traded to the Atlantic Watershed and Nicoya Regions, and beyond the northern political limits of the country, Red and Black Line Ware (Fig. 8) suggests an extension of Chiriquian culture with strong local characteristics.

Bisquit, Fish (Fig. 9) and Handled Wares, and Red-on-Orange Tripods are further Chiriqui types seen in the Diquis Region, but with local names. They may be the result of trade, but are more probably cultural extensions from the south. On the other hand, Panteon White Lined Ware (Haberland 1961: 36) appears to have entered from the Meseta Central, although the affiliation of the alligator motif is again characteristic of Panama and the south. Chocolate Incised Ware spread to the Diquis Region and Chiriqui, Panama, from the Nicoya Region.

The Diquis delta in particular had new varieties of Negative Painted pottery, such as Black-on-Beige and Red-on-Red; amphora-shaped vessels; and the continuation of Zoned Incised ceramics, which were distinct from those in the remainder of the Costa Rican territory, and had their closest connections southward.

THE ATLANTIC WATERSHED-HIGHLAND REGION - PERIOD IV

Early Period

The region of the Atlantic Watershed has its first phase divided into an Early Period A, from 300 B.C. to 0; and B, from 0 to A.D. 400. Individual sections - for example, the Meseta Central - have been further divided into sub-phases, but are not yet verified by radiocarbon dates.

As we have noted, the ceramics of Early Period A adhere closely to those of the Formative Period. Typical, however, are loop legs - plain, or with modeled rings - which appear either as tripods or as a single loop leg with two straight pointed ones. In Early Period B, Zoned Bichrome vessels and other wares mentioned earlier were traded from the Nicoya Region. Scarified Ware was brought or extended from Panama. Also appearing were animal effigy jars reminiscent of South America; effigy human heads (trophy heads) applied on the pottery (Fig. 10); and what seems to be a local invention, "chocolate pots" or *ifcara*-shaped vessels, supported by three tall and often slightly outcurved legs adorned with bold plastic figures.

THE ATLANTIC WATERSHED-HIGHLAND REGION - PERIODS IV - V

Middle Period A

A time-span from A.D. 400 to 850 brought new traits: vessels with hollow legs containing clay pellets, possibly of northern inspiration; and red, hollow female effigy figurine with elongated heads and full hips.

THE ATLANTIC WATERSHED-HIGHLAND
REGION - PERIODS V - VI

Middle Period B to Late Period

This last era, from A.D. 850 to 1502, was one of increased trade with Nicoyapolychrome styles and southern negative painted pottery, seemingly commercial favorites. Stone Cist Ware, unpainted or monochrome, with applied pellets, stripes, and at times anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figures (Figs. 11 and 12), gives evidence of an artistic tradition derived from the southern continent, along with Yellow, White, or Red Line Wares (Fig. 13). However, throughout the Atlantic Watershed Region during its diverse periods, the almost static quality of the ceramics is obvious, as is the close adherence to Formative Period styles. The strongest ties are with the south, although the latest periods shared many traits associated with the north through trade or migrations.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Map: Archaeological Sites of Costa Rica.

Fig. 1: Zoned Bichrome ocarina. From El Viejo, Huaca A, Guanacaste Province. Nicoya Region. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 44 939.

Fig. 2: Modeled Alligator Ware, type B. Length 44 cm, Height 12 cm. From Nicoya, Nicoya Region. Early Polychrome Period. Museo Nacional, San José de Costa Rica.

Fig. 3 Chocolate Ware vessel with articulated head. From vicinity of Nicoya, Nicoya Region. Middle Polychrome Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 41 307.

Fig. 5: Mora Polychrome vessel. Diameter 16,5 cm. From Santa Bárbara. Nicoya Region. Middle Polychrome Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 47 384.

Fig. 6: Luna Ware bowl. Width 17 cm. From Santa Bárbara. Nicoya Region. Late Polychrome Period. Museo Nacional, Velasco Coll., San José de Costa Rica. Drawing from Lehmann Coll. Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

Fig. 7: Animal effigy vessel. From El General. Diquis Region. Late Early Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 41 505.

Fig. 8: Red and Black Line figurine. From El General. Diquis Region. Middle Late Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 41 590.

Fig. 9: Fish Ware tripod. From El General. Diquis Region. Middle Late Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 44 831.

Fig. 10: Red rim vessel with trophy heads. From vicinity of Turrialba. Atlantic Watershed-Highland Region. Early Period B. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 45 062.

Fig. 11 Stone Cist vessel. From Escazú. Atlantic Watershed-Highland Region. Middle Period B - Late Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 41 554.

Fig. 13: Effigy face Red Line vessel. From Turrialba. Atlantic Watershed-Highland Region. Middle Period B - Late Period. Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin: IV Ca 44 886.

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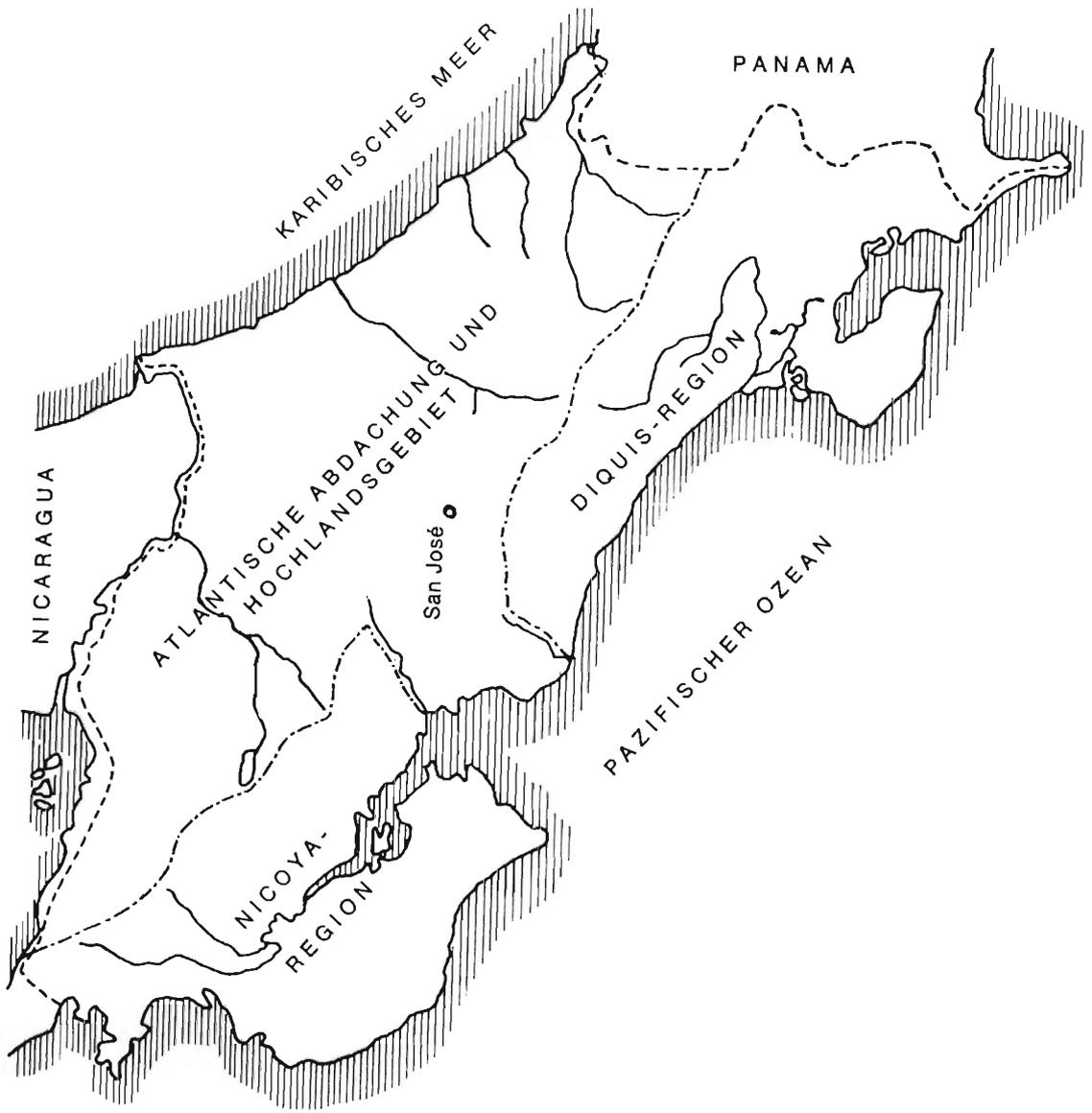




Fig. 1

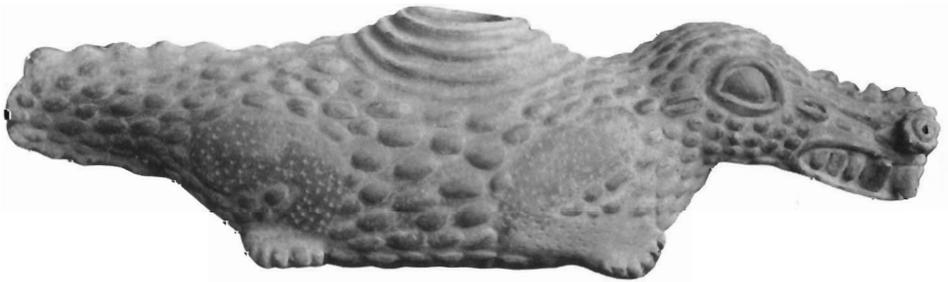


Fig. 2

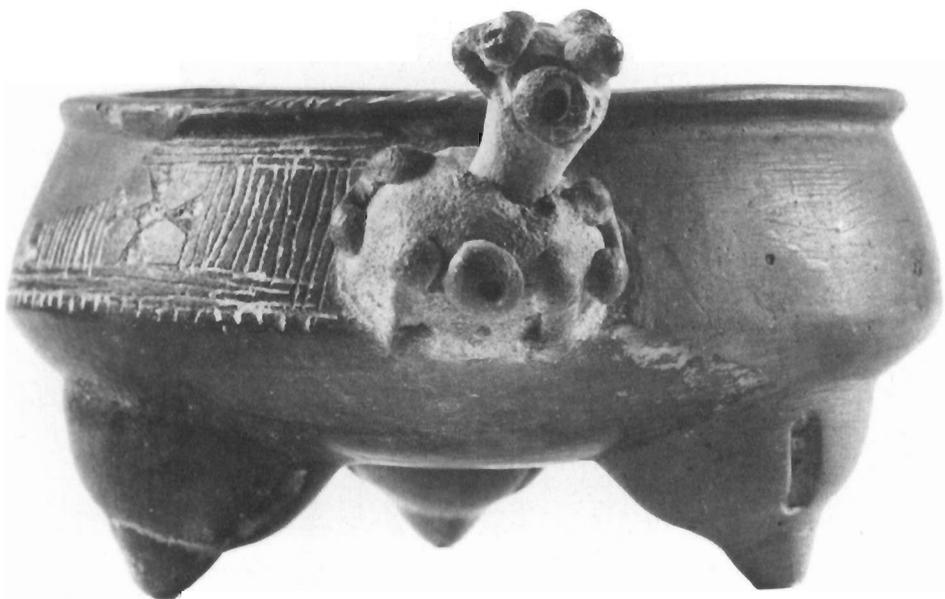


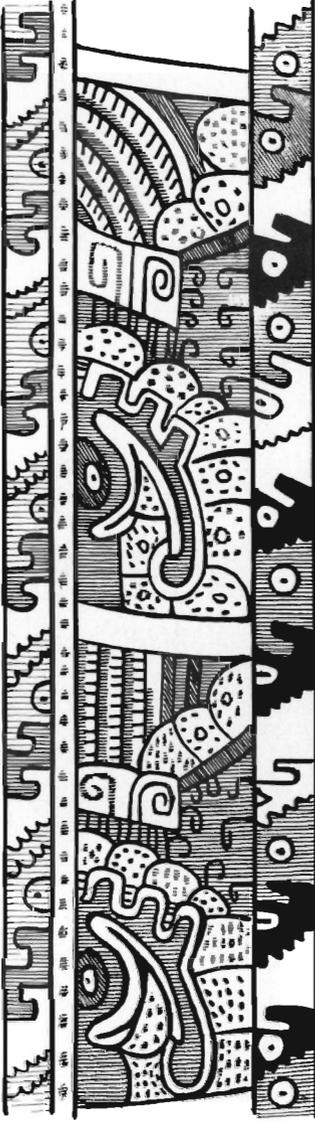
Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



*Sig. Velasco. Mus. Nac.
S^a Barbara*



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

