

Revealing Ancestral Central America

Edited by
Rosemary A. Joyce

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Central
America



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The Smithsonian Latino Center
and the
National Museum of the American Indian
Smithsonian Institution

Printed in conjunction with the exhibition
Cerámica de los Ancestros: Central America's Past Revealed,
on view at the National Museum of the American Indian
in Washington, DC, March 29, 2013–February 1, 2015.



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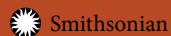
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Design: Studio A
Alexandria, Virginia
Typeset in Serifa and Locator
Printed in the USA by Four Colour Print Group

This publication received federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center, and additional support from the National Council of the National Museum of the American Indian.

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Foreword

Kevin Gover (Pawnee)

Director, National Museum of the American Indian

Eduardo Díaz

Executive Director, Smithsonian Latino Center

Centroamericanos—they are the backbone of the Latino communities surrounding Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian's own backyard. They hail from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize, Panama, and Costa Rica. They have a growing presence throughout the United States, yet representation of their cultural and social legacies in Latin American scholarship has remained largely marginalized by earlier focus on the political dominance, riches, and the epic drama of Mesoamerican and Andean empires. Through a partnership between the Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), we have seized this opportunity to connect with our local Latino communities, many of which remain rooted in their indigenous heritage and history. Herein we honor the enduring, economically and politically stable cultural traditions of pre-Hispanic Central America through their exceptional material culture. Sharing this cultural patrimony and acknowledging its value is both our challenge and our responsibility, and we gladly take up the charge.

The generation of this project occurred by accident, with a discovery at the NMAI of a vast collection of Central American archaeological objects by visiting staff researchers from the Smithsonian Latino Center. They

realized that the NMAI was quietly caring for one of the largest and most significant collections of Central American archaeology in existence, with approximately 17,000 objects from the region. Astoundingly, this includes more than 10,000 intact vessels, embodying countless untold stories.

The Central American Ceramics Research Project, or CACRP, is the Latino Center's initiative to learn more about these works. Launched in 2009, the CACRP supported the two-year study, documentation, and identification of items in the NMAI's Central American ceramics collections. This initiative has been the catalyst for other research and projects, such as an exhibition, based on a number of the objects that examine cultural diversity, complexity, and change across space and time; a series of public programs exploring cultural and scientific dimensions of the project; training opportunities for Central American museum staff; an interactive website; and this publication.

All of this work springs from unprecedented new scholarship related to these objects, few of which had been previously studied or publicly exhibited. The objects highlighted in this book, largely drawn from the NMAI's Central American archaeological collection, have much to say to us today. They testify to the complexity of long-lived

governments and social systems, and to the importance and sophistication of the art and science in the communities where they were made. They speak of the patience, sensitivity, and innovation of their makers.

The essays that follow reveal the lives of the ancestors of the indigenous, mestizo, and fromestizo peoples of Central America. Their histories have often been lost or obscured, but through archaeology, the available records, and understandings from contemporary indigenous peoples, we can partially reconstruct and begin to glimpse the organization of their daily lives and their ideas about nature, power, and the supernatural. From the figurines depicting powerful women in the Greater Nicoya region to the finely decorated vessels of the wealthy farming hamlets of the Ulúa Valley and the fantastical designs on Coclé pottery, we can see that the peoples of pre-Hispanic Central America developed uniquely local identities and cultural traditions while also engaging in vital exchanges of ideas, goods, and technologies with their neighbors in all directions. By emphasizing notions of heritage and connection to our pre-Hispanic collections, this project has the potential to engage surrounding Central American communities and introduce them to the Smithsonian's broader panoply of cultural resources. For the newly initiated or the most

devoted aficionado familiar with the history and cultures of the region, the experience of seeing our exhibition or reading this book is meant to engender new paradigms for understanding the pre-Hispanic past.

The effort to uncover this ancestral inheritance has been a multi-year labor of love. We would like to thank the brilliant and dedicated team of scholars, curators, editors, project managers, conservators, exhibition designers, web designers, educators, fundraisers, publicists, and other museum professionals who made all of this possible. We are particularly indebted to general editor Rosemary Joyce, whose exemplary efforts, coupled with the leading-edge scholarship of the contributing authors, shaped this publication. Joyce not only contributed her expertise and dedication to this project, but was an advocate for creating access to this new knowledge. We hope that you are moved by these groundbreaking explorations of the Central American past.

Ulúa River female figure, AD 250–900. Río Ulúa valley, Honduras. Pottery. Formerly in the collection of Marco Aurelio Soto; MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1917.





Acknowledgments

Ranald Woodaman

Exhibitions and Public Programs Director, Smithsonian Latino Center

Revealing Ancestral Central America is a collaboration between the Smithsonian Latino Center and the National Museum of the American Indian. It was made possible through federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center, with additional support from the National Council of the National Museum of the American Indian.

This publication accompanies the exhibition, *Cerámica de los Ancestros: Central America's Past Revealed*. The exhibition's curatorial team and network of scholars in the United States and Central America played an essential role in its development. I am especially grateful to lead curator Ann McMullen (NMAI) and guest curator Alexander Benítez (George Mason University), who have been involved in

Classic period Maya metate in the form of an animal and mano, AD 250–900. Chiltiupán, La Libertad Department, El Salvador. Stone. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1926.



this project since it began in 2009 as the Central American Ceramics Research Project. Special thanks are due to general editor Rosemary A. Joyce and contributing authors Payson Sheets, Christina Luke, John Hoopes, and Patricia Fernández, as well as the NMAI's associate director for museum scholarship, David Penney. *Revealing Ancestral Central America* could not have been possible without the support of the NMAI Publications Office, as well as the NMAI's team of talented photographers, conservators, and collections managers. The National Museum of Natural History also deserves thanks for generously sharing images from its anthropological collections. My sincerest thanks to all those inside and outside the Smithsonian Institution who have shared their time and vision with us in order to tell the story of Central America's ancestral peoples.



Ancestral Central America



Fig. 1





Surrounded by Beauty: Central America before 1500

Rosemary A. Joyce

The first impression for anyone conducting archaeological research in Central America (Figure 1), or seeing museum collections from previous work there, is of an astonishing and pervasive richness in even the everyday objects crafted by the region's ancestral peoples. Take as an example an assemblage recovered from a site in the Ulúa river valley in Honduras, called Farm Two by Gregory Mason, who collected the materials for the Heye Foundation. Among some 400 objects, the grouping includes jade and shell beads and an obsidian mirror, parts of distinctive costumes; spindle whorls for making thread and groundstone tools for making bark cloth; other stone tools for working wood and grinding plants, and obsidian blades and tools of the kind used to process plants and animals to prepare meals; locally made bowls with multicolored images of human figures in ceremonial costume wielding ritual implements (Figure 2), and jars with red geometric designs; ceramic vessels for burning resins during rituals; and a plethora of molded, fired-clay images of humans and animals, and many musical instruments, some small enough to hold in a hand (Figure 3), others large effigies half-life size (Figure 4), also used in ceremonies.

Obsidian, jade, and marine shell were imported from distances ranging from thirty

to more than 250 kilometers. While most of the painted and mold-made pottery was locally crafted (Figure 5), some dishes came from Belize or Guatemala, some jars from the Sulaco river valley to the east. And all of this from a rural village, whose modest houses were made of poles, covered with clay, topped with thatched roofs. The materials were indicated by burned clay with pole impressions collected during excavations I co-directed in the early 1990s at the same site, now called Campo Dos (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo, in press).

At scales ranging from larger-than-life stone sculptures depicting humans and supernatural beings to the intimacy of jewelry made to be worn in pierced ears, suspended from the neck, clasping the head, arms, or legs, or stitched to clothing, it is evident that people of pre-16th-century Central American societies lived in a visually rich, materially luxurious world. Nor was this visual and material richness limited to a small, privileged group. Even in the most stratified and unequal societies in the region, such as those of the Classic Maya (ca. AD 250–850), research in rural locations like the well-preserved village of Joya del Cerén, El Salvador, shows that farmers owned dozens of pottery vessels, many of them brightly painted or modeled

Fig. 1. Map of Central America showing its principal archeological regions.

Fig. 2. Ulúa River tripod vessel with design of masked figures, AD 850–950. Río Ulúa valley, Cortés Department, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from N. Hasbun, 1969.

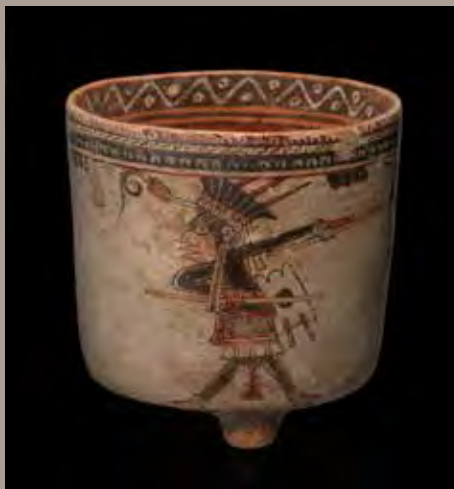


Fig. 2

Fig. 3. Ulúa River whistle representing a man and woman, AD 750–850. Campo Dos (United Fruit Company Farm 2), Cortés Department, Honduras. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Gregory Mason, acquired by MAI, 1932.



Fig. 3

Fig. 4. Ulúa River figure from an incensario lid representing a man holding an axe, AD 650–850. Naranjo Chino, Yoro Department, Honduras. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Gregory Mason, acquired by MAI, 1932.



Fig. 4

Fig. 5. Ulúa River Vessel depicting dancers, AD 750–850. Yuscarán, El Paraíso Department, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Formerly in the collection of Marco Aurelio Soto; MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1917.



Fig. 5

Fig. 6. Ulúa River Vessel with handles in the form of monkey's heads, AD 650–750. Río Ulúa valley, Honduras. Marble. Formerly in the collection of Marco Aurelio Soto; MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1917.



Fig. 6

Fig. 7. Selin Tradition vessel, AD 800–1000. Isla de Guanaja (Bonacca), Islas de la Bahía Department, Honduras. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Frederick A. Mitchell-Hedges, 1930–1931.



Fig. 7

into the shapes of fantastic animals (Sheets, this volume).

In societies characterized by less inequality, the products of skilled artisans were widely distributed. In the Ulúa Valley of Honduras, the wealthy families at Travesía who patronized multigenerational workshops of craftsmen producing marble vases (Figure 6), prized from Guatemala to Costa Rica, did not assert the kind of absolute authority claimed by Classic Maya rulers in their historical monuments (Luke, this volume). The wealthiest family at Travesía oriented its house compound to the sacred mountains and passes that established a ritual landscape, shared with the residents of all the villages in the valley. Here, we can speak of a society composed of “wealthy farmers” (Joyce, 2011), who cultivated cacao groves, hosted visitors at seasonal feasts (likely including some from distant lands who brought with them exotic objects; Figure 7), and supported the work of artisans—in shell, jade, textiles, fired clay, and marble—who furnished the objects of everyday life in the pole, clay, and thatch houses of even the humblest hamlets in the surrounding area. While the residents of Travesía may have had influence, prestige, and forms of authority in that area, we need to explore how that influence and authority was created from the ground up, without being blinded by preconceptions about what a society without a visible ruling class and marked inequities in wealth is like.

The challenge is to avoid framing history comparatively, with the societies of Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama seen as falling short of a standard set by the Maya of Guatemala. Many ways of

talking about the area embody an assumption that centralized, highly unequal state societies are normal or inevitable developments in human history. When we use these ways of talking, we put Central America in a framework that Payson Sheets (1992) called “the pervasive pejorative.” We ask why towns in Panama and Costa Rica were organized “only” as what we call chiefdoms—towns in which wealthy families claimed the right to pass down authority through lines of kinship—as if they *should have been* more highly stratified states, with greater economic inequality. We talk about societies in which stability in the maximum size of towns was maintained for hundreds of years as if they failed because they did not grow to the size of unsustainable cities.

The narrative of political hierarchy classifies all Central American societies except the Maya as “chiefdoms” or “tribes,” seen as steps on a never-completed trajectory to becoming “states.” This implies that political organization is always the main coordinating principle in human society. In Central America we need to examine how towns and villages were bound together by ties of kinship, shifting alliances, material exchanges, and participation in common practices mediating relations with the sacred and the supernatural through divination, ritual, and ceremony (Figure 8).

To avoid narratives that privilege the development of political stratification and economic inequality as normal and inevitable, we should think of pre-Hispanic Central America—including Guatemala—as a chain of societies connected through intentional human action leading to travel, exchange, and participation by visitors in social events

Fig. 8. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed incense burner with crocodile-efigy handle, AD 800–AD 1500. Eastern highlands, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip. Purchased for George Heye by Theodoor de Booy in Kingston, Jamaica, 1913.



Fig. 8

Fig. 9. Ulúa River jar with design of men seated on benches, AD 850–950. Copán, Copán Department, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1971.



Fig. 9

Fig. 10. Greater Coclé animal figure, AD 300–1000. Río de Jesús, Veraguas Province, Panama. Pottery, paint. Excavated by Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte; gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur M. Sackler, 1967.



Fig. 10

(Figure 9). When Maya nobles living at Uaxactún and San José used Ulúa marble vessels in their households, they treated them as prized luxuries, products of exclusive and competitive networks of relations with families in the towns in the Ulúa Valley where they were produced. They did not observe either a boundary that would have led them to reject such foreign goods, or an absolute distinction in status that would have made these products of less-centralized societies less prized. Indeed, there is evidence that in Central America, products of skilled artisans located at a distance metaphorically stood for claims of knowledge from the most distant realms—those of the ancestors and supernatural beings (Helms, 1998).

How can we talk about such a diverse network in a unified way, in terms that might be manifest in material remains? This book explores four crosscutting themes to understand Central America as a network of villages, towns, and cities: dwelling, connecting, authority, and spirituality.

Dwelling refers to the practices of everyday life, including the way people related to plants, animals, and landscape in their locality (Figure 10). Houses and towns, where archaeologists have recognized and explored the grain of everyday life, are the natural places for exploring dwelling. Dwelling also includes

those practices through which the living took care of the dead. These practices are responsible for a large part of the materiality of the past in Central America. Understanding dwelling depends on teasing out from artifacts the stories they can tell about how people got on day to day: how they produced the tools they used to work the land, to hunt and fish, and to create the objects used in ceremonies as well as in daily existence. In Central America, products and tools of dwelling often form a spectrum from skilled but plain (Figure 11) to the extraordinary intricacies of high capability. Dwelling allows us to see these things not through the art/artifact dichotomy, but beyond that: to understand that the lives of many people in Central America took place surrounded by objects of beauty.

Connecting is a way of thinking of networks as actively created by human action. Everywhere in the region there are things that originated elsewhere. We can talk of trade or exchange, as well as other scales of connecting, such as familial alliances, traveling artisans, religious pilgrims, and the like, where exotic objects are signs of the ways people moved across a very wide space, and gathered knowledge that was valued when they returned home. Connecting makes Central America active in its relations to societies in Mexico and northern South America, so



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Fig. 11. Central Caribbean/ Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed bowl, AD 800–AD 1500. Las Mercedes, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Alanson B. Skinner, 1916–1917.

Fig. 12. Plumbate jaguar-effigy tripod vessel, AD 900–1200. Suchitoto, Cuscatlán Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.

that when we look at plumbate pots from El Salvador and Honduras (Figure 12), we emphasize the unique forms and designs that show that makers (believed to be located in Soconusco) were catering to the taste of Central Americans, who were not passive consumers forced to take whatever came down the road (Joyce, 1986). Connecting also means we attend to the presence in distant places of items from Central America, like a cache of Honduran Las Vegas polychrome (Figure 13) pots (originally identified as Nicoya polychrome) found in a house at Tula, Hidalgo (Diehl, Lomas, and Wynn, 1974), or Panamanian gold objects recovered from the cenote at Chichén Itzá (Coggins, 1984). Connecting takes small Central American towns and makes them part of a large and extensive chain.

Authority gives us a way of talking about Central American social life that introduces differences recognizable in material ways without subsuming them under political hierarchies. It allows us to notice that in most of the region, some people have greater wealth, and may have objects of distinctive materials, quality, and even form. But it makes us ask what *kinds* of authority people had, which opens the door to including people whose authority was based on connections with the sacred, as well as those whose authority was

based on kinship, not just authority based on coercive or persuasive power. It is a way to ask the question whether, where, and when we see violence as a basis for claims of authority. It makes it possible to talk about the authority of women and men (Figures 14, 15), and the relative authority of elders and juniors. An Ulúa marble vase is an object of authority; so are the carved stone benches of Nicaragua and Costa Rica; so also are the polychrome cylinders of Maya noble houses. In each case, the nature of authority and the degree to which it is concentrated in a few hands needs to be established.

Spirituality captures the domain we normally talk about as “ritual.” Spirituality allows us to talk about the broader principles that in many parts of Central America probably organized dwelling, connecting, and authority: the role of landscape, distance, and certain materials as charged with un-ordinary power, the place in existence of ancestors and supernatural beings (Figure 16). It makes sense of the abundance of products of skilled craft production, such as ceramic figurines and musical instruments, that were primarily of use in ceremonies, including ceremonies of dwelling.

Fig. 13. Post-Classic period Maya tripod bowl, AD 900–1200. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 13

Fig. 14. Classic period Maya whistle representing a seated woman, AD 600–900. Quiché Department, Guatemala. Pottery, paint. MAI purchase from Julia M. Rodezno, 1923.



Fig. 14

Fig. 15. Ulúa River female figure, AD 250–900. Río Ulúa valley, Honduras. Pottery. Formerly in the collection of Marco Aurelio Soto; MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1917.



Fig. 15

Fig. 16. Greater Coclé (Macaracas style) footed plate with crocodile design, AD 950–1100. Río de Jesús, Veraguas Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Eva M. Harte, 1966.



Fig. 16

Fig. 17. Chiriquí vessel, 1000–500 BC. Guacamayo, Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip. Gift of Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1963.



Fig. 17

Fig. 18. Greater Chiriquí tripod bowl, AD 800–1500. Valle del Diquís, Puntarenas Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from William R. Hawker, 1961.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19. Central Caribbean/ Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed female figure, 300 BC–AD 300. Bolsón, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip. MAI purchase from Wanda B. Scheifele, 1964.

Fig. 19

When and Where Do We See Dwelling, Connecting, Authority, and Spirituality?

Space precludes providing an in-depth discussion of the historical development of pre-Hispanic Central America. The articles that follow instead look at specific locales where we are especially well-situated to see evidence of Central American social networks in the vivid and engaging objects left behind. Most of the examples date to what in Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras are called the Classic (AD 250–850/950) and Post-Classic (AD 850/950–1521) periods, and in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama either Periods V (AD 500–1000) and VI (AD 1000–1500), or the Early (AD 500–800), Middle (AD 800–1350), and Late (AD 1350–ca. 1530) Polychrome periods (Figure 17).

The actual evidence for human occupation of the landscape in Central America is much earlier (Neff et al., 2006). There are traces of some early mobile peoples in different sites dating by 9000 BC, and throughout the region, mobile foragers left their mark between 9000 and 2000 BC, altering the landscape by selectively encouraging plants they preferred, and altering the plants by their selection of variants for cultivation. These early people laid the groundwork for their descendants to congregate in the

first villages we can detect. Before 1500 BC, from Guatemala to Panama, at least some villages invested time, energy, and skill in making fired-clay containers, greatly increasing the visibility of sites for archaeologists. Nonetheless, such early sites remain underrepresented. Some are deeply buried by active tropical rivers. Others lie beneath later settlements, evidence of the ability of Central American peoples to maintain themselves in place over long periods of time. Many have probably been lost to alterations of the landscape, as rivers changed their courses, as settlements located on ridges and terraces erode downslope, and as modern occupants plow, bulldoze, and pave over the evidence of the lives of earlier residents.

The greater visibility of more recent periods also owes itself, at least in part, to the aesthetic preferences of Europeans who began collecting antiquities from Central America at least as early as the 18th century. Multicolored painted pottery, stone sculpture recognizably representing human and animal subjects, and human effigies in molded and painted clay attracted the attention of collectors and fueled site destruction in many Central American countries.

While the ancestral peoples of Central America prized many different materials, including jade, marble, and a variety of

Fig. 20. Greater Chiriquí vessel and cover, AD 800–1500. Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1961.



Fig. 20

Fig. 21. Selin Tradition female figure, AD 600–800. Isla Santa Elena (Helene), Islas de la Bahía Department, Honduras. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Frederick A. Mitchell-Hedges, 1930–1931.

metal alloys, for their rarest durable goods, recovery of gold-alloy objects, primarily from graves in Panama and Costa Rica, inspired particular enthusiasm among collectors. In early archaeological accounts, many sites are described simply as cemeteries, because graves were the contexts recognized by the collectors as sources for complete objects (Figure 18).

Except in the Maya zone extending from Guatemala to western Honduras and El Salvador, residential buildings were usually much less visible and more slowly recognized by early antiquarians and later archaeologists. When archaeologists turned to the new approach of settlement survey in the 1950s, they realized that the discarded trash of Central America settlements was often very visible, both around traditional sites of collecting from burials, and in other places on the landscape. Often the architecture of Central American villages employed clay and poles as the main construction materials. When stone was used, it might be carefully selected river cobbles with little or no modification.

The features created in the Central American architectural tradition could be impressive: massive pavements, roads and paths that extend for miles, and high platforms with ramps or stairs, at times clearly oriented to features on the landscape or

points seasonally marked by sunrise and sunset. While written texts are known only from sites in the Maya zone, the visual arts of other areas employ rich symbolic “languages” that link together humans, non-human animals, landscape features, and supernatural forces, including ancestors (Figure 19).

As research continues in each country, what becomes increasingly clear is how extensive Central American networks actually were. Outstanding works of art force us to acknowledge that links existed from the Nicoya peninsula of Costa Rica to the Ulúa Valley in Honduras, and from there to Belize and Guatemala (Figure 20). The dazzling objects in collections established by archaeologists and museums are making visible what we should have known all along: between the apparently small, apparently isolated villages of Central America there existed enduring ties composed of social relations, respect for beliefs about the place of humans in the cosmos, and shared appreciation for items of beauty and the materials from which they could be made (Figure 21).



Fig. 21

Joya de Cerén, El Salvador

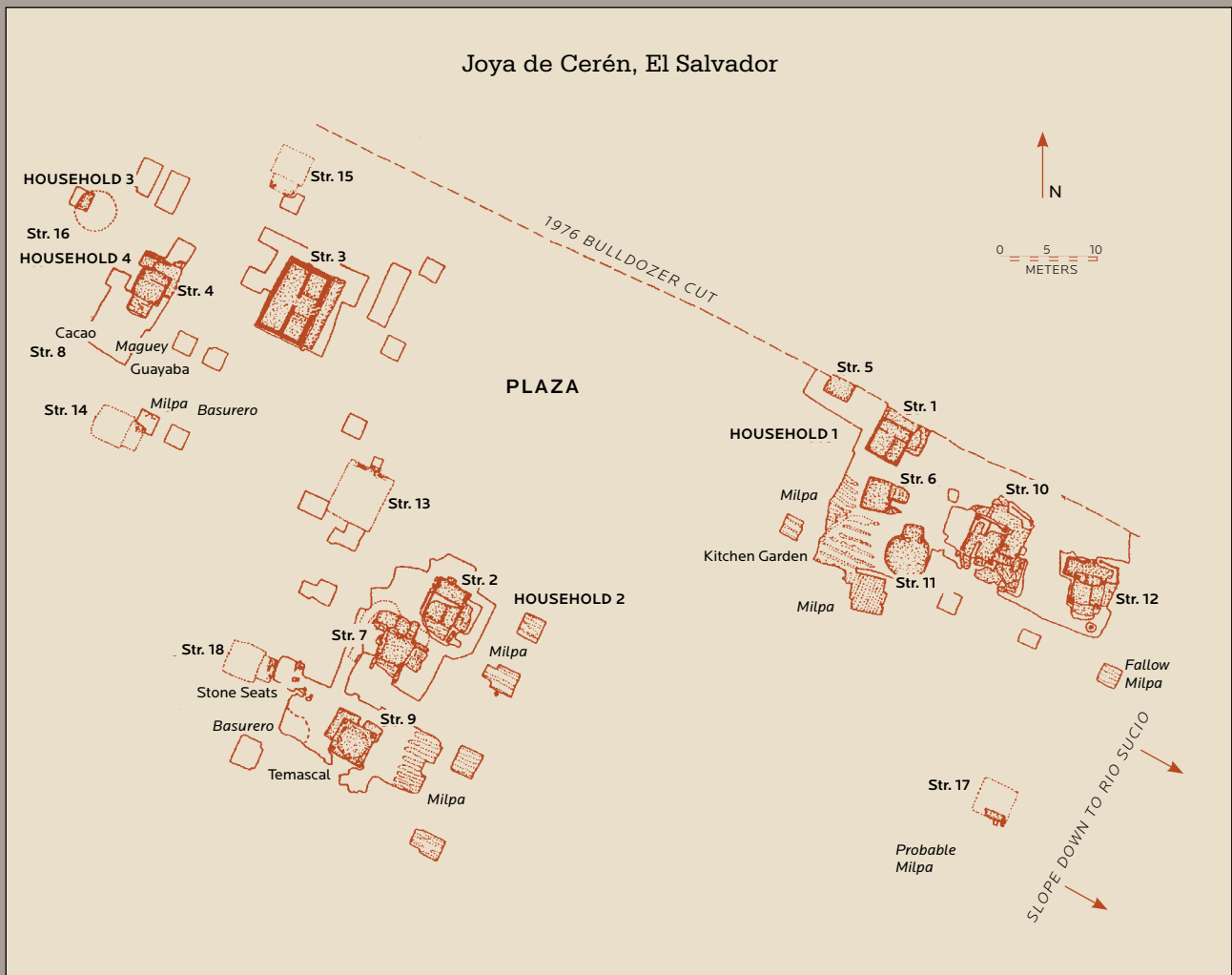


Fig. 22



Dwelling in the Ancestral Joya de Cerén Village

Payson Sheets

About 1,400 years ago a village of some 200 commoners lived along the banks of a large river in what is now El Salvador (Sheets, 2002). They were much like hundreds of other small villages dotting the landscape in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. When a village undergoes the usual form of abandonment, people remove all their usable artifacts and take them to their new location. Then the elements of rain, sun, vegetation growth, and other disturbances reduce the abandoned village to a faint echo of its former self. Archaeologists normally try to reconstruct ancient behavior and belief based on very fragmentary remains.

Only rarely do archaeologists discover a settlement that is unusually well-preserved, providing abundant evidence of dwelling that was not degraded by the passage of time. The Roman city of Pompeii is the best-known example. It was buried by volcanic ash from Vesuvius, thus preserving buildings and artifacts extraordinarily well. The Joya de Cerén village (Figure 22) was also buried by volcanic ash, and that is where our story begins.

Unknown to the villagers living there around AD 630, from deep underground a hot magma was gradually forcing its way upward only 600 meters north of the village (Sheets, 2002). When that magma finally broke loose right under the large river, it caused a violent

steam explosion. There was some warning, as a horrible shrieking noise was caused by the magma first contacting the water. Evidently the villagers headed south, away from that danger. A cloud of hot steam, fine-grained volcanic ash, and gases blasted into the village and coated the buildings, trees, and plants growing in their fields. That deposit was followed by many other layers until the village was entombed by four to seven meters of volcanic ash.

Although we regret the villagers' crisis, the remarkable preservation the volcanic ash produced allows us to understand the surprisingly high quality of life that they experienced before the eruption. Archaeologists knew that ancient nobles lived well in their palaces, but we did not know that commoners also lived as well as they did at Joya de Cerén. There, each household constructed and maintained three structures: a domicile for sleeping and living, a storehouse, and a kitchen. They had ample space inside the wattle-and-daub walls of these buildings, and abundant space outside the walls yet still under the roof, for comfortable work areas. These walls and thatch roofs were one of the most earthquake-resistant forms of architecture ever invented, as they were flexible, and if they failed in a super-earthquake only small pieces of daub would fall, causing minimal

Fig. 22. Plan of Joya de Cerén. Courtesy of Payson Sheets.

Fig. 23. Classic period Maya metate in the form of an animal and mano, AD 250–900. Chiltiupán, La Libertad Department, El Salvador. Stone. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1926.



Fig. 23

Fig. 24. Maya digging stick weight, 900 BC–AD 1500. El Salvador. Basalt. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 24

Fig. 25. Maya spindle whorls, 900 BC–AD 1500. Estanzuelas, El Salvador. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.



Fig. 25

Fig. 26. Salúa bowl with human design, AD 700–900. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 26

Fig. 27. Salúa bowl, AD 600–1000. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 27

Fig. 28. Salúa vessel with bird design, AD 400–900. Izalco, Sonsonate Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

problems. Each household produced more of some commodity than it needed for its own consumption and used the surplus to exchange for other households' production. For instance, Household 1 overproduced groundstone items such as metates (Figure 23) and "doughnut stones," which may have been used as digging stick weights (Figure 24), as well as cotton thread, evidenced by abundant spindle whorls (Figure 25).

The high quality of life is clear inside the buildings. Each household had about seventy complete pottery vessels. Some were used for food storage, processing, and cooking, while bowls and cylinder vases were used for serving foods and drinks (Figures 26–28). Utilitarian vessels were made in the village or nearby. Food and drink serving vessels that made up almost a quarter of their collection, beautifully painted in many colors, evidently were made in the Copán Valley, 120 km to the north (Figure 29). Villagers would take surplus foods or other items to the marketplaces in centers near the village to obtain these fancy vessels. Their abundance in the households is a clear indication that the people of Joya de Cerén were "wealthy villagers." Other items obtained in the marketplace included knives and scrapers made of obsidian (a volcanic glass), jade axes and beads, mineral pigments (reds made from iron ore

and mercuric oxide), and seashells (Figures 30, 31). Jade and obsidian also came from the north, and likely were transported by the same traders who brought the fancy pottery. Because villagers could choose which market to visit among many in the valley, nobles did not control everything and to some degree would have to compete for the labor or production of commoners.

Clear evidence of a well-developed religious life was found in the village. First we look at religious activity within each household. Then we explore the activities and beliefs that involved multiple households and those that involved the entire village. Not only each household, but each household building

Fig. 29. Classic period Maya bowl with design of a shaman in flight, AD 700–800. Chalchuapa, Santa Ana Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Gift of Dr. Benjamin Levine, 1974.

Fig. 30. Maya blade core, 900 BC–AD. 1500. El Salvador. Obsidian. Gift of Dr. Joseph S. Somer and Judith Somer, 1965.

Fig. 31. Maya celts, 900 BC–AD 1500. Estanzuelas, El Salvador. Stone. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

Fig. 32. Classic period Maya incense burner with ceiba-tree spikes, AD 250–900. Quelepa, San Miguel Department, El Salvador. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1926.



Fig. 32

Fig. 33. Classic period Maya female figure, AD 600–1000. Nekepia, Usulután Department, El Salvador. Pottery. Gift of Francis E. Ross, 1962.



Fig. 33

had an incense burner (Figure 32). These evidently were made within the household, and were used to burn copal incense, the quintessential method the ancient Maya used (and contemporary Maya use today) to connect with the supernatural world of spirits, deities, and ancestors. Figurines also probably played a role in household religious life (Figure 33).

Household 2 maintained a sauna (*temascal*) for multiple-household use (Figure 34). The contemporary Maya use saunas for physical as well as spiritual and occasionally medicinal cleansing, and it is probable that the ancient one in Joya de Cerén was used for those functions as well. The ample bench inside the walls, around the firebox, would seat ten to twelve people. It is likely that the composition of the sauna users changed as the principal objective changed from physical to spiritual cleansing, or medicinal use, helping resolve respiratory problems as the Maya do today. The Maya rinse off after leaving the sauna, and we found an unusual number of large *ollas* (ceramic pots) for water in the nearby storehouse that probably were used for that purpose. We also found evidence that water was poured over the dome-shaped firebox in the center of the space, so it was a steam rather than a dry sauna. Household 2 stored considerable firewood, including pine, presumably for the fire in the firebox.

The sauna had solid earthen walls and a dome of wattle and daub. Books on the history of architecture that claim domed architecture was introduced into the Americas by Europeans in the 16th century need to acknowledge that Maya commoners built domes centuries before.

A consistent Maya tradition, from the greatest cities to the smallest settlements such as Joya de Cerén, has been to locate the most spiritually powerful buildings at the highest elevation. The principal pyramids with temples on the top were in the highest location in cities, to better communicate with the supernatural domain. At Joya de Cerén two special religious buildings were at the highest point, the eastern end of the village, overlooking the river. Both shared the Maya characteristic of many different levels of floors, from the secular outside through successively higher floors to the innermost, highest room. Both had walls painted white with pigment made from fine-grained, white ash from the immense Ilopango volcanic eruption that occurred a few decades before the village was founded, with some red decorations.

One of these buildings, Structure 12, is a complex and delicate edifice where a ritual diviner practiced, but did not live (Figure 35). The evidence for divination is in three collections of items that could be cast onto



Fig. 34

Fig. 34. Sauna maintained by Household 2 at Joya de Cerén. Photo by Payson Sheets.



Fig. 35

Fig. 35. Structure 12, a special religious building where a female diviner/shaman practiced (tourist in the foreground). Photo by Payson Sheets.

Fig. 36. Classic period Maya blades, AD 250–900. San Miguel de Mercedes, Chalatenango Department, El Salvador. Obsidian. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1926.



Fig. 36

the floor in the innermost (highest) back room and “read,” then interpreted, for a person standing outside listening through a lattice window. Another lattice window is in the front of the building, where a villager could approach and discuss with the diviner what he or she needed. If an agreement was reached, the client would often leave an artifact for payment. While many of the artifacts left could be used by both genders, there were no predominantly male-use artifacts, and there were frequent female-use artifacts such as spindle whorls for making cotton thread for weaving, and grinding stones for food processing. Therefore it appears the diviner was a woman.

Structure 10, adjacent to the diviner’s building, was also clearly religious, with successively higher rooms, white-painted walls, and red decorations, but it functioned in a very different fashion. It hosted ceremonies for the village, with a focus on deer as symbolic of the fertility of nature and a successful harvest. The front and lowermost room is large and held more food than any other building in the site excavated so far. That room also processed food, with grinding stones and hand stones called metates and manos, like those found at other sites in El Salvador. A hearth here was used for cooking. The foods were dispensed to participants over a half-height wall. Outside the building the ground was

kept clear of artifacts, trash, and vegetation, and was very hard-packed by use.

The Maya have a deep belief in cyclicity, linking the rising and setting of the sun, planets, and stars with the cycle of maize. Maize for planting is stored dormant/dry during the half-year dry season, and then springs to life as it is planted and grows during the rainy season. It is a powerful metaphor for human reproduction. Mature maize drying in the field, mature guayaba fruits, and other seasonal indicators excavated at Joya de Cerén point toward August as the time of the volcanic eruption. Today the Maya village ceremony for fertility and harvest, called *cuch*, is celebrated in August.

The two uppermost and innermost rooms stored special artifacts, including a large pottery vessel, decorated with a caiman head and legs and loaded with achiote seeds. These seeds provided a bright red pigment that probably symbolized human blood, as it still does today. A typical obsidian knife (Figure 36) stored on the shelf above the seeds had human hemoglobin on it, and was surely used in bloodletting. The Maya still believe that human blood is the most religiously charged substance in the body, and when it is shed in ceremony it is the most effective way to communicate with the supernatural domain. Beside the knife was a deer skull headdress that retained white, red, and blue paint, and



Fig. 37

Fig. 37. Salúa bowl with monkey design, AD 400–900. La Asunción (Hacienda Asunción), Cuscatlán Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.

even some string that was used to tie it onto the head of a performer or religious specialist. Traditional Maya still use such headdresses in rituals as symbols of the fertility of nature when giving thanks for a successful harvest.

Authority within the village was dispensed from Structure 3, the largest and most imposing building of the settlement, facing the town plaza. It had two large benches in its front room, in contrast with the household domiciles, which had a bench in the innermost private room, for sleeping. When the Maya build a bench in a front room it is a symbol of authority. Town elders could sit on the bench and listen to disputes between families or individuals. In place on one bench was the largest pottery vessel ever found in the village. It likely contained a beverage, perhaps a beer now called *chicha* made from fermented maize or manioc (Sheets et al., 2012). Above the bench, on top of the wall, was a polychrome vessel that would serve very well to scoop a serving of drink to “seal the deal” and end the controversy. Befitting a public building, artifacts were scarce beyond the two ceramic vessels.

Household 1 supported the harvest rituals of Structure 10 by loaning special implements such as maize huskers made of deer antlers. Beyond the maize-grinding stone (metate) on the kitchen floor that the household used regularly, it maintained another four metates for

grinding during the harvest ceremony. Tracy Sweeley (1999) argues that different levels of authority within the household and village among the women using these metates can be detected based on the implements' placement and visibility.

Some people refer to Joya de Cerén as unique, but that can isolate it from being useful for comparison with other archaeological sites that are not as well preserved. When a village like Joya de Cerén is abandoned, the people usually leave carrying all their valuables, even making multiple trips. Once abandoned, others may take away artifacts, construction materials, or other items they find useful. Thatch roofs need to be replaced at least every two decades in the tropics, and once the thatch starts to fail, the rains “melt” the clay daubed onto the poles and vines that provide the walls' internal reinforcements. The elements, along with decay of organics, reduce the buildings to sad remnants of their former condition. Trees recolonize the environment, and their roots disturb subsurface remains, especially when wind blows them over and the root-ball rotates and scrambles large amounts of artifacts and fragmentary building materials. People and animals can dig below the surface for a variety of reasons. The net result is a greatly impoverished record of what people did when the community was thriving.

Fig. 38. Classic period Maya bowl with glyph design, AD 700–800. Tazumal, Santa Ana Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Gift of Francis E. Ross, 1962.



Fig. 38

Fig. 39. Salúa bowl, AD 450–850. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 39

Fig. 40. Salúa tripod vessel, AD 450–850. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 40

Fig. 41. Salúa bowl with Huehuetéotl (Old God/God of Fire) design, AD 450–850. Atiquizaya, Ahuachapán Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Gift of Theodore T. Foley, 1971.



Fig. 41

Fig. 42. Salúa jar, AD 450–850. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 42

Fig. 43. Salúa tripod bowl, AD 450–850. Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto, San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.



Fig. 43

Unfortunately, that impoverished record has unwittingly manifested itself in the minds of scholars as indicating that commoners lived impoverished lives. Joya de Cerén provides a compelling corrective to this mistaken vision of village life. Households had multiple buildings for particular uses, ample spaces inside the walls and under the eaves for a wide range of activities, and their architecture was highly earthquake-resistant. Each household had a wide range of vessels, including many gourds (most plain, some highly decorated) and about seventy pottery vessels typical of western El Salvador (Figure 37). Of those, almost a quarter were manufactured at a distance, imported into the area (Figure 38), and obtained by Cerenians at marketplaces by means of negotiated exchanges for goods they produced. Households also owned baskets. Every household had numerous cutting and scraping tools made of obsidian, and at least one jade ax. Those likewise were obtained by market exchanges, and commoners had choices in which market they would visit.

So how can Joya de Cerén be used to better understand the more commonly found ancient dwelling site? At the usual site the remnants of individual houses can be discovered and mapped as “housemounds” and some broken artifacts collected. The ratio of complete metates to whole vessels at Joya de Cerén could be used as a rough way to estimate the original number of vessels at less-well-preserved sites, since broken metates are not normally removed when villages are abandoned. The ratio of broken and discarded metates to pieces of broken pottery is known at Joya de Cerén, as well as the ratio of whole metates and complete ceramic vessels, and those ratios can be used as rough indicators at sites where only broken artifacts are found. The fragments of wattle-and-daub walls and

mounds of eroded architecture at the usual site can be reconstructed using the known and well-preserved architecture at Joya de Cerén as the model.

Thus a different picture of life is emerging. Commoners should not be assumed to be passive recipients of orders from the nobility, living in a hardscrabble world and barely getting by. The abundance and variety of foods found was impressive and the architecture sophisticated. Like other small villages across Central America, the spiritual life within the household and the community were highly developed, reflected in the images seen on serving vessels recovered at other places in El Salvador (Figures 39–43). Commoners exercised authority in the household, the village, and even in choosing the nobles for whom they would work and with whom they would trade. Looking through the first clear window—provided by Joya de Cerén—into Maya commoner life educates us to the fact that the quality of life was strikingly high.



Fig. 44



Artisanry in Motion

Christina Luke and Rosemary A. Joyce

The people of ancestral Central America were connected to each other through travel, trade, and indirect knowledge of distant peoples and lands. Honduras provides examples of a long history of material connections reaching as far north as central Mexico and south to Panama and Costa Rica. The Ulúa river valley on the Caribbean coast was a particular center of connections with distant places (Figure 1). Between AD 600 and 1000, people living here produced a group of objects that traveled long distances north, west, and south: Ulúa marble vases (Figure 6). Because these were entangled with other flows of objects and ideas, understanding the movement of Ulúa marble vases helps us gain a better sense of the many ways pre-Hispanic Central Americans were connected across the boundaries of the independent cities, towns, and villages in which they lived.

Things Assembled in Place

Because what survives from past societies are things, it is easy to focus on them in isolation: What are they made of? How were they made? How were they used, and by whom? What meanings did they carry? Yet each thing, each item, formed part of an assemblage, a

group of things in a particular place, at a particular time. Assemblages in place show us people connecting with other places as part of conducting their lives. Through using things in everyday life, people impart qualities to the places where they become entangled with things. These qualities trail along with things as they circulate from one place to another, or as they are kept and used over time. They may be seen as lodged in the material from which items were made—clay, stone, or bone—or in specific attributes, such as color, texture, or even the sounds things make. People put things in place, things link places and people, and places assemble people, things, and their associations.

Before 1100 BC, residents of the earliest villages known in the Ulúa Valley used obsidian that came from regions far south, near the present-day town of La Esperanza, for most everyday tools, preferring it even when other local stone would work. We do not know all the reasons for their preference. A form of glass, obsidian makes very sharp tools. It can be banded in white, gray, or brown, or be green in color, but most obsidian in Honduras is black. Its shiny black color and texture, and its ability to reflect a shadowy image, made obsidian a valued material for mirrors, used for divination in later Central American societies. Its black color was important: people in

Fig. 44. Pre-Classic period Maya jar in the form of an animal, 300 BC–AD 600. Ciudad Vieja, Sacatepéquez Department, Guatemala. Pottery, clay slip. MAI purchase from Julia M. Rodezno, 1923.

Fig. 45





Fig. 46

early villages of the Ulúa Valley paired it with white marine shell in buried offerings below house floors, deposited in rituals to give life to the buildings (Joyce, 2011).

After 1100 BC, at Ulúa Valley villages like Puerto Escondido and Playa de los Muertos, obsidian from highland Guatemala replaced some material from closer sources (Joyce and Henderson, 2010). Along the same routes, by 900 BC, people in these villages obtained jade, the hard green stone prized for millennia thereafter throughout Central America. Emerging from the mountains bordering the Motagua River in eastern Guatemala (Bishop, Sayre, and Mishara, 1993), jade offered a color that reflected the green of vegetation, the blue of water. Valued for its color, sheen, and hardness throughout Central America into the 16th century AD, jade did not dominate Honduran material culture as much as it did elsewhere.

At Puerto Escondido, before the first trace of jade was seen, villagers were already carving white stone: marble, from the nearby mountains (Luke et al., 2003). They worked stone into vessels sharing the shape of pottery bowls used to serve food both everyday and when feasts were held to mark particular events in the lives of people, buildings, and communities. At feasts they served drinks made from cacao pods, beverages whose

distinctive red-brown color and foamy surface appear, much later, in manuscripts painted in Mexico after AD 1000 showing men and women marking marital alliances (Figure 44).

The locally made bottles and bowls employed in feasts in early Ulúa villages incorporated signs of knowledge of distant places (Joyce and Henderson, 2010). Incised or deeply carved, and highlighted with red pigment to glow against the black, gray, or tan surfaces of vessels, were profile heads of sharks, crocodilians, or beings with human features, mixed with others showing they were more than everyday people and animals. Carved stamps were used to paint related signs on the body or clothing. The imagery recalls pottery made in distant places at the same time, from Tlatilco in central Mexico to San Lorenzo on the Mexican Gulf Coast, Paso de la Amada on the Pacific Coast, and Cahal Pech in the Belize river valley (Figure 45). Across a wide region, encompassing peoples with many different histories and cultures, the use of this imagery suggests common conceptions of the spiritual world and the place of humans in it. Locally made, vessels with such images testify to knowledge gained by participating in exchanges of materials (obsidian, jade, cacao, and shell) and social relations (marriages, trading partnerships, and religious practices).

Fig. 45. Map, circulation of materials and knowledge to and from Honduras, 1100–400 BC. Courtesy of Rosemary A. Joyce.

Fig. 46. Ulúa River female figure, 900–200 BC. Campo Dos (United Fruit Company Farm 2), Cortés Department, Honduras. Pottery. Collected or excavated by Gregory Mason, acquired by MAI, 1932.

Fig. 47. Maya stamp with monkey design, 900 BC–AD 400. Río Ulúa valley, Honduras. Pottery. MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1926.



Fig. 47

Fig. 48. Map, circulation of materials and objects to and from Honduras, 500–1500 AD. Courtesy of Rosemary A. Joyce.

From this shared legacy, residents of Ulúa Valley villages developed new forms of locally rooted visual culture after 900 BC. Hand-modeled figurines highlighting stages in the life course, from birth to old age (Figure 46), underline the importance of family connections in farming villages like these (Joyce, 2003). Stamps and cylindrical seals emphasize novel imagery, like monkeys (Figure 47), while continuing the practice of stamping clothing or the body.

The most striking indication of continued connections linking the Ulúa Valley to villages and towns to the west comes in the form of monumental stone sculpture and jade objects made after 900 BC, likely available to fewer members of these societies (Joyce and Henderson, 2010). At Los Naranjos at the southern end of the Ulúa Valley, the villagers constructed a twenty-meter-tall earthen platform flanked by stone sculptures showing the shark, the caiman, and a human being in a ritual transformation pose. One person wearing a jade belt and headdress with wide jade disk ornaments, a costume shared by a few people in villages from Chiapas to the Gulf Coast of Mexico, received a privileged burial in this platform.

Connections forged across Central America through social ties are visible in preferences these ties promoted for materials like

jade and for practices like the use of stamps. Some materials, such as obsidian, were widely used in everyday life. In other cases, rare materials, great artisanry, and meaningful imagery brought together in exemplary objects mark some places and social groups as different from others locally, and connected to distant peers.

Geographies of Color

Jade objects provide one example of connections. Between 900 and 400 BC, a few jade objects from Mexican workshops already moved through networks that brought them to Honduras and Costa Rica. After AD 250, jade plaques intended to hang from belts and carved with images and texts typical of the early Classic Maya culture, ended up in Costa Rica, often re-cut into new forms. In both cases, the jades were objects used by an exclusive social group. The traffic in these rare luxuries may have occurred when they no longer held their original importance for the source groups.

In contrast, the production and circulation of Ulúa marble vases is an example of a luxury craft product exchanged with communities from Guatemala to Costa Rica (Figure 48) while the workshops in the Ulúa river

Fig. 48



Fig. 49. Ulúa River bowl with animal-effigy handles, AD 600–900. Río Ulúa valley, Honduras. Marble. Gift of the Viking Fund, Inc. (Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research), 1949.



Fig. 49

Fig. 50. Ulúa River vessel, AD 600–900. Banks of the Ulúa River, Honduras. Marble. Formerly in the collection of the Governor of the Honduran Province of Cortes, purchased for George Heye by Marshall H. Saville, 1915.



Fig. 50

Fig. 51. Ulúa River vessel with feline-effigy handles, AD 600–900. Río Ulúa, Honduras. Marble. Purchased for George Heye by Marshall H. Saville from an unknown source, 1915.



Fig. 51

Fig. 52. Ulúa River tripod bowl with jaguar-paw design, AD 850–950. Río Ulúa valley, Cortés Department, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from N. Hasbun, 1969.



Fig. 52



Fig. 53



Fig. 54

valley were still in production (Luke, 2010). Classic Ulúa marble vases convey connections to a geographic feature of symbolic importance throughout Central America: the animate mountain (Luke, 2012). Ulúa marble vases were made in a small number of forms, most often tall or short cylinders, with highly consistent carved motifs, including fields of scrolls or volutes from which frontal faces emerge, and were usually provided with pairs of modeled lug handles in the form of fantastic animals (Figure 49). The volute or scroll invokes breath and water in various forms: mist, rain, rivers, lakes, symbolized by the color white.

The standardization and limited number of marble vases known (fewer than 200) suggest production in a multigenerational workshop, each generation training a handful of master artisans (Luke and Tykot, 2007). Marble workshops existed at Travesía, in the Ulúa Valley, a place that was deliberately related to sacred mountains. The main buildings at Travesía—plastered all over in thick white stucco—were oriented on axes pointing south to the great mountain of Santa Barbara, and intersecting the points on the eastern and western horizon where the sun rose and set on the winter solstice (Lopiparo, 2006; Joyce et al., 2009). The marble vases made in workshops at Travesía literally embodied

the sacred mountain, making it portable and subject to manipulation (Luke, 2012).

Stepped designs incised or carved on the base of Ulúa marble vases (Figure 50) evoke a mountainous place that supports a supernatural realm, portrayed on the body of the vase, covered in finely sculpted and incised volutes. Symbols of mist rising from waterfalls, rapids rushing, or the cool winds blowing from subterranean chambers, volutes evoke these places and the spiritual spheres to which they provide access. A full frontal face emerging from the volutes on many vases (Figure 6) may be a human being participating in ritual, an ancestor, or a spirit of place.

Ulúa marble vases feature lug handles in the form of monkeys, birds, iguana-like or crocodylian creatures, and large cats (Figure 51). These creatures also form part of the imagery of contemporary Ulúa polychrome pottery, where they may reference stories of supernatural beings, some specific to one family, others shared by communities, and still others widely known across the region (Figure 52).

Some Ulúa polychrome vases made starting around AD 600–650, early in the history of Ulúa marble vases, also have ring bases with carved or painted motifs that recall mountains and caves (Figure 53). Dual lug handles in the form of bird and monkey

Fig. 53. Ulúa River vessel with vulture-effigy handles, AD 550–650. Río Ulúa valley, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Gift of John S. Williams, 1955.

Fig. 54. Ulúa River monkey-effigy tripod vessel, AD 650–750. Comayagua, Comayagua Department, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Gift of Edgar O. Smith, 1972.

Fig. 55. Greater Nicoya jar, AD 500–800. Río Ulúa valley, Cortés Department, Honduras. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Enrique Vargas Alfaro, 1969.



Fig. 55

heads strengthen the parallel to marble vases (Figure 54). Human figures on pottery vases are normally shown in profile. Drawn inside rectangular or round panels, they may also refer to crossing between the everyday and supernatural realms.

The interplay of white marble and multicolored painted pottery produced a visual culture in places like Travesía and Cerro Palenque that was distinctively rooted in the Ulúa landscape, emphasizing the mountains and rivers, and selectively presenting mythologically important animals: monkeys, felines, and specific birds. Preferring colors not typically used by neighboring peoples, Ulúa artisans created works that could be valued in other areas for their difference, even as they served within the Ulúa to communicate locally resonant symbolic values suggested by their white color (Luke, 2010). Green jade was de-emphasized in Honduras in favor of whitish-colored albitic jade (Hirth and Grant Hirth, 1993).

Ulúa marble vases, the ultimate realization of the Honduran emphasis on white stone, moved from the Ulúa Valley to the Nicoya region of Costa Rica as early as the 8th century AD (Luke, 2010). At the same time, artisans in Costa Rica created local polychrome vases emulating specific examples of Ulúa polychrome vases (Joyce, 1993), including a cylinder with monkey-head lugs closely related to Ulúa marble vases and others depicting felines and cats (Figure 55). Ulúa marble vases appear in Belize and Guatemala somewhat later, in the 9th century AD. At Uaxactún, Altun Ha, and San José, Belize, they were used by residents of palaces, sometimes along with Classic Maya white stone vases carved with Maya inscriptions.

These were exchanges almost certainly taking place between specific families: nobles in Belize and Guatemala and the wealthy in the Ulúa and Nicoya regions. The exchanges that we see hint at others, of perishable goods: cacao, feathers, cotton, and bark paper. Objects of artisanry moved in all directions. Ulúa marble vases buried in sites near Travesía contained jades originating in Costa Rica and the Maya area (Figure 56), as well as others of Honduran style (Luke, 2010).



Fig. 56

Honduran jades associated with Ulúa marble vases were found in Costa Rica (Stone, 1977), and at Maya sites including Altun Ha and Chichén Itzá (Joyce, 1993; Hirth and Grant Hirth, 1993).

By cultivating a taste for objects from exotic places, and signaling difference through distinctions in color, a network of influential families propagated interest in yet another color and the material that embodied it: gold. A marble vase buried in the Ulúa Valley contained a Maya jade piece and a Costa Rican or Panamanian gold figure. Gold-alloy objects from these areas were conveyed as far as the Maya cities of Copán, Altun Ha, and Chichén Itzá, often in company with products of the Honduran white stonecraft in marble and albitic jade. Among participants in this 8th-to-9th-century network, a cosmopolitan set of aesthetic preferences was shaped that can only be appreciated from a regional perspective. Once formed, that cosmopolitan regional network endured, even if its later traces have been less recognized.

Fig. 56. Classic period Maya male figure, AD 250–900. Honduras. Jadeite. Purchased by George Heye from an unknown source, 1907.

Fig. 57. Pipil bell, AD 1200–1500. Quemistlan Bell Cave, Río Chamelecón valley, Honduras. Copper. Collected in 1910 by Andrew H. Blackiston; purchased by George Heye, 1914.



Fig. 57

Fig. 58. Pipil bell, AD 1200–1500. Quemistlan Bell Cave, Río Chamelecón valley, Honduras. Copper. Collected in 1910 by Andrew H. Blackiston; purchased by George Heye, 1914.



Fig. 58

Geographies of Sound

Metal objects introduced a further sensory dimension, one of sound (Hosler, 1994). As with color, metalworking shows local preferences amid patterns of regional exchange. The people of Caribbean-coast Honduras did not exploit locally abundant gold, but used copper metallurgy after AD 1000 to produce a wide range of bells (Figure 57), engaging craft skill to produce objects that traveled far from their origin in the upriver canyons of the Ulúa and Chamelecón rivers.

Individual copper bells made of Honduran ore (Figure 58) were brought to Chichén Itzá in Yucatán, where they were thrown into the sacred well from which the site gained its name (Coggins, 1984). Traces of Honduran ore have been detected in metal objects cast from melted pieces at Mayapán, Yucatán (Paris, 2008). The coastal Caribbean trade in Honduran bells brought to the Chamelecón river valley an extraordinary turquoise mosaic mask, the only example of this Mexican craft known from so far south. While fewer sites from this period have been identified by archaeologists, we know that in the 16th century northern Honduras continued to maintain coastal connections with the Maya of Yucatán, through which metal objects, cotton, feathers, and cacao flowed between

families from societies with different levels of inequality, among people of distinct cultural traditions and histories and speaking multiple languages. The sounds of the bells these people wore during ceremonies echoed with the long histories of conversations among their ancestors, who created a network of social ties that endured, while changing, over thousands of years.

While not everyone could physically travel from place to place, foreign places could be understood through the exchange of physical objects, the transfer of ideas, and adaptation in local traditions (Figure 59). Sharing of imagery reflects knowledge understood to varying degrees throughout Central America. The transfer of objects traces more concrete historical linkages of economic exchange, kinship, and ritual participation. Tight connections were formed by the circulation of marbles, jades, gold and copper objects, the products of skilled artisans working at their craft in societies both highly stratified, like the Classic Maya, and others, as in Honduras and Costa Rica, where differences in wealth and status may not have been as sharp.



Fig. 59. Greater Nicoya bowl, AD 800–1350. Filadelfia, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Jorge Castillo, 1965.

Fig. 59



Fig. 60



Authority

John W. Hoopes

Authority in ancestral Central America ranged from the absolute political power of Maya *ajawob* (kings) to the authority exercised by respected elder women or men in clans and other kinship groups. Although political, religious, and socioeconomic authority is the most apparent, authority also resided in the heads of individual households, local traditional keepers and healers, and even in farmers, fishers, and hunters who preserved specific lifeways and customs.

In highly stratified societies such as the Classic Maya, each major settlement (such as Tikal, Copán, Palenque) had a powerful, centralized ruler (Figure 60). However, they were never subject to a single emperor or unifying ideology, so each ruler had the ability to articulate authority in unique ways. Dominant lineages competed with each other for access to resources, trade routes, agricultural lands, and human labor, resulting in significant levels of warfare and achievements recorded in glyphs (Martin and Grube, 2008; Figure 61).

Given the absence of written records, we have much less information about individual rulers and their lineages in non-Maya parts of Central America. However, in the archaeological record we can see evidence of authority in residences, elaborate tombs, and special objects, such as the elaborately

carved grinding platforms (Figure 62). We can intuit the nature of authority from reports made at the time of Spanish contact and from the study of living descendant groups (e.g., Skinner, 1920).

Throughout the region, we see evidence that social and religious or spiritual authority were intimately related. The products of skilled artisans, with imagery reflecting religious and spiritual concepts, were used by people who established and exercised their

Fig. 61



Fig. 60. Classic period Maya vessel depicting a nobleman carried on a palanquin, AD 600–900. Nebaj, Quiché Department, Guatemala. Pottery, paint. MAI exchange with Robert L. Stolper, 1969.

Fig. 61. Classic period Maya vessel with glyph design, AD 600–900. Petén Department, Guatemala. Pottery, paint. MAI exchange with James Economos, 1973.



Fig. 62

Fig. 62. Greater Chiriquí jaguar-effigy seat-metate, AD 100–1500. Near Bugabita Arriba, Chiriquí Province, Panama. Stone. Purchased by Frank D. Utley for George Heye, 1905.

Fig. 63. Greater Nicoya female figure, AD 800–1350. Near Rivas, Rivas Department, Nicaragua. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Collected about 1920 by Raul R. Barrios, acquired by MAI in 1928.



Fig. 63

authority through the things they did with these objects (Figure 63). Today, we can use these things to help us understand the many forms of authority that existed in pre-Hispanic Central America.

Mimesis and Alterity in the Representation of Authority

Although authority often derived from kinship and references to ultimate origins, these required constant expression, explanation, and justification. Authority was therefore accompanied by the manipulation of symbols used to obtain, represent, and exercise power. Michael Taussig (1993) has used the terms *mimesis* and *alterity* to highlight the issues involved. Although his analysis focused on wooden sculptures used in contemporary religious rituals by the Kuna of northern Panama, and on decorations applied to their textile *molos*, the principles he articulated are also helpful for interpreting ancestral material culture.

Mimesis is imitation: to become and behave like something else (Benjamin, 1933). A person who is not a doctor but who dons a white coat and a stethoscope is miming a physician and might even be successful at persuading others that she or he actually has

knowledge and skills at healing. As Taussig writes: “The wonder of mimesis is in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power” (Figure 64).

Symbols of authority can often be interpreted as imitations of respected ancestors or forebears. The coronation of Napoléon Bonaparte, for example, featured the emperor wearing elements of ancient Greek dress, including a golden crown of laurel leaves. In so doing, he was imitating his hero, Alexander the Great. In a similar fashion, authorities in ancient Central America imitated their forebears, often dressing in archaic costumes or performing rituals that we can recognize as having been performed in much earlier times. In so doing, authorities become and behave like their ancestors, establishing continuities that justify and legitimize their power. Mimesis can be manifest in objects that are used to imitate and, in so doing, express and communicate authority. In Nicaragua, for example, a representation in stone of a hafted ax, which is not usable as a tool, mimics the form of an ax, and was probably made to be used as a symbol of authority (Figure 65).

Alterity is recognition of “the other” in contrast to the self. A person who uses objects

Fig. 64. Greater Coclé (Conté style) footed plate with human-crocodile design, AD 850–950. Veraguas, Veraguas Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1969.



Fig. 64

Fig. 65. Mainland Caribbean monolithic axe, AD 1000–1500. Near Bahía de Bluefields, Atlántico Sur Autonomous Region, Nicaragua. Stone. Collected or excavated by David E. Harrower, 1924.



Fig. 65

Fig. 66. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed trophy-head sculpture, AD 500–1000. Río Turrialba, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip. Gift of Patti McClain, 1968.



Fig. 66

that are recognized as being distinctly “not us” but “them” is drawing on the principle of alterity. Alterity confers authority when there is a perception that the “other” is a source of knowledge or power. Wearing materials or designs that come from another culture can imply knowledge of that “other,” without actually imitating or representing them. The Renaissance European passion for Chinese silk, for example, both made use of exotic materials and appropriated the power of distant imperial authority. Nineteenth-century Native North American warriors who wore medals, hats, or other elements of European dress were not so much imitating them as using objects that appropriated the power of the “other” in contrast to their own traditional regalia. The same occurs today in non-Native use of traditional Native jewelry. It is accompanied by a sense of the conferral of access to and use of a power that comes from alterity. The concept of alterity is relevant to understanding Mary Helms’s (1988) emphasis on geographic distance as a dimension affecting perceptions of valuable knowledge and power, which she developed in work on ancient Panama. We can see this in our own culture through the special qualities assigned to objects or knowledge that comes from what are perceived as remote and exotic places, such as Tibet, Amazonia, and Australia.

Classic Maya rulers may have derived some of their power from alterity in the form of references to distant and powerful locations such as Teotihuacán, Mexico, as well as to distant and quite different cultures such as those of southern Central America. The taking and display of trophy heads, for example, is a practice that may derive from South America via contacts with groups in Central America (Figure 66). Displaying the severed head of an enemy is a strong statement of domination and authority. The symbolism of decapitation became prominent at sites occupied by other peoples, such as Izapa in Guatemala before AD 250 (Guernsey, 2006). It was adopted by Mayas and continued at sites such as Chichén Itzá after AD 1000.

Many Central American practices were subject to mimesis, presumably associated with the development of prestige and assertion of authority. Circular gold disks with Maya designs, found in the Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá, were used as pectorals, and were an imitation of disk-wearing by individuals in Costa Rica, Panama (Figure 67), or Colombia, where this practice appears to have originated (Coggins, 1984; Quilter and Hoopes, 2003). Another form of mimesis, in imitation of ceramic designs from white-slipped Patavky polychromes from southwestern Nicaragua (Figure 68), are



Fig. 67



Fig. 68

Fig. 67. Greater Coclé Tradition ornament, AD 500–1500. Veraguas Province, Panama. Gold. MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1967.

Fig. 68. Greater Nicoya king vulture-effigy footed vessel, AD 1000–1350. Las Huacas (Las Guacas), Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from an unknown source in Paris, France, 1926.

salmon-slipped examples from northwestern Costa Rica (Figure 69).

Mary Helms (1998) applied the concept of alterity to connections with *affines*, the kin of one's spouse (also referred to as "in-laws"). There is a special privilege that a person enjoys by establishing a kinship relation with another group through marriage. This is usually accompanied by access to information and resources that are not available to other members of one's own family, conveying a sense of differential power. A man who marries a rich wife may enjoy access to her family's money that is not shared by his own brothers and sisters. Similarly, a woman who becomes the wife of a person of a different ethnic group or religion may gain access to that group, its knowledge, and its resources in ways that her own siblings cannot. Needless to say, such relationships can be extraordinarily complex. They are one example of how access to alterity may be parlayed into authority over other people, other resources, other lands, other traditions.

The use of personal relationships and formal marriages to gain access to knowledge, resources, and power is well-documented throughout human history, affecting people from many different socioeconomic circumstances. In Classic Maya culture, strategic royal marriages were used—as in historic

Europe—to forge and solidify alliances among different polities. Through marriage, a Maya *ajawob* gained access to the lineage of his spouse and their offspring would carry authority that derived from the families of both parents. In Chibchan societies, marriage with spouses in matrilocal clans, where men moved to the homes of their spouses, may have been used to gain strategic access to houses and ecological resources in different parts of the landscape, such as agricultural

Fig. 69. Greater Nicoya feline-effigy vessel, AD 1000–1350. Linea Vieja area, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Gift of Mary W. Williams, 1967.



Fig. 69

Fig. 70. Greater Nicoya incense burner with crocodile effigy, AD 400–1350. Isla de Ometepe, Lago de Nicaragua, Rivas Department, Nicaragua. Pottery. MAI purchase from Judy A. Small, 1964.



Fig. 70

lands, hunting grounds, or fishing areas. Access to and knowledge of different clans and their resources could have been parlayed into differential authority and power. In short, mimesis and alterity provide a language to think about how indigenous peoples in many different kinds of societies gained and expressed authority, from the highly stratified states of the Maya to the less-stratified “complex tribes” or segmented societies of Costa Rica and Panama (Figure 70).

Parlaying Distance into Authority

Helms (1988, 1993, 1998) has also presented models for how individuals could parlay distance into authority. She included geographic distance and cultural distance, as well as kinship distance, in all of which knowledge of or access to the distant or the “other” could be used to gain power. In particular, she suggested that knowledge of goldworking techniques, designs, and objects from Colombia was used by authorities in central Panama to bolster their local status as chiefs. By wearing objects from distant, “exotic” places that were associated with the sharing of esoteric knowledge, these individuals signaled their superior training or “education” in familiarity with other peoples. By commissioning

objects that represented familiarity with the “other,” they embodied special knowledge in material form.

Locally made gold objects in Panama embody and display knowledge of distant others (Figure 71). Helms’s model for Panama has been critiqued on the basis of archaeological evidence for local gold production that demonstrates that only some objects were being obtained from afar. Still, the presence of ancient goldwork from Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica in the Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá suggests that not only southern Central American authorities but Maya rulers sought to bolster their authority through the use and disposal of foreign goldwork (Coggins, 1984). Central American goldwork is extremely rare at Maya sites other than Chichén Itzá. Two exceptions would be a gold-alloy figurine fragment in a sub-stela cache at Copán, Honduras, and a gold-alloy jaguar claw from a cache at Altun Ha, Belize (Pendergast, 1970), both sites on the eastern edge of the Maya area. For some reason, perhaps even an active aversion to the material (perhaps associating it with dangerous magic), gold was hardly ever used by Classic Maya authorities, except those who set themselves up at Chichén Itzá, in part by using the alterity (otherness) of goldwork to distinguish themselves from Maya peers.



Fig. 71

Fig. 71. Greater Coclé (Parita style) pendant with warrior figures, AD 500–1200. Península de Azuero, Herrera Province, Panama. Gold. MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1968.

The opposite is true for jadeite, a precious material that was used extensively in both the Maya area and Costa Rica (Figure 72). The only known geological source for jadeite is in eastern Guatemala, but jadeite objects are well-known from archaeological contexts much farther to the south (see Fernández, this volume). Elizabeth Easby (1968) speculated that the difficulty of working jade inspired its being traded to Costa Rica for working into blanks—outsourcing time-consuming human labor—that were then imported back to the Maya city-states for finishing as beads, pendants, and belt plaques. This pattern precedes and anticipates the working of blank Chibchan-style gold disks into finished items with embossed Maya designs found in the Sacred Cenote.

Finished Maya items, especially royal belt plaques with finely incised illustrations and hieroglyphic inscriptions (the paraphernalia

of the highest-ranking Maya rulers), were traded back to Costa Rica, ostensibly for use by local leaders. All known examples of these have been abraded (often rubbing out portions of the incisions), split in half, re-drilled, or divided into small pieces, suggesting an intentional destruction—perhaps to destroy the information and the power represented by these objects even as the traces of their decorations conveyed evidence of contact with distant authority. These provide a glimpse of an appropriation of alterity without mimesis—the power of something coming from the “other,” but not as a direct imitation. They indicate the variety of ways contact with distant people could be parlayed into expressions of authority.



Fig. 72

Fig. 72. Greater Nicoya snake pendant, 300 BC–AD 500. Nicoya, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Jadeite. MAI purchase from Enrique Vargas Alfaro, 1966.

Fig. 73. Greater Coclé
(Conté style) bowl with
human design, AD
700–850. Temple site, Río
Caño, near Penomoné,
Coclé Province, Panama.
Pottery, clay slip, paint.
Collected or excavated by
A. Hyatt Verrill, 1926.



Fig. 73



Fig. 74. Lacandon Maya "god pot," circa 1930. Lower Río Jataté, Chiapas State, Mexico. Pottery. Collected by David W. Amram, Jr., 1934.

Fig. 74

Healing and Sorcery

Authority could also derive from the ability to diagnose and to heal illnesses, what is often identified as the domain of shamans (Figure 73). The power to diagnose and heal is just one side of the coin: those who know the sources of diseases may be suspected of being able to cause them. Modern medicine recognizes pathogens such as viruses and bacteria, or attributes diseases to invisible factors such as genetics. Before the advent of modern medicine in Europe, diseases were attributed to the effects of stars and planets, bad air, and imbalances of various "humors" in the body. In other cultures, such as those of pre-Hispanic Central America, the causes of diseases included breaches of the norms of moral behavior and the effects of maleficent magic, witchcraft, or sorcery. Authority in Central America included the knowledge and use of what Europeans would call magical powers. Magic was practiced by individuals at many different levels of society, from local healers to powerful rulers.

Diseases could be personal, affecting only one individual, or they could be community-wide, affecting an entire village, city, or even a whole landscape (a macro-illness). The wooden figures made by the Kuna of Panama that formed the focus of Michael Taussig's

elaboration of the concepts of mimesis and alterity are examples of objects used by ritual practitioners to protect the entire community from disease. So are the "god pots" of the Lacandon Maya (Figure 74). In ancient Central America, high-ranking authority could be based on the ability to address macro-illnesses, removing disease and ensuring the health of a whole community. It could also derive from the ability to cause macro-illnesses, a strategy used against enemies, either in lieu of or as an accompanying strategy in physical warfare. Warfare could be metaphysical—involving magic and supernatural elements—as well as physical.

Authority from Nature

The power of mimesis and connections through kinship are frequently evidenced in representations of the imaginary transformation of humans into animals: therianthropy (Figure 75). Humans could be thought to manifest the powers of those animals through "becoming" or imitating them. Expressions of this concept are varied and complex, from ideas of animal ancestors and clan founders to accessing animal co-essences or alternative identities (alter-egos) through trance or dreams. Animals frequently figure into

Fig. 75. Greater Coclé
funerary urn with human-
centipede design, AD
800–1200. Río Tabasará,
Chiriquí Province,
Panama. Pottery, paint.
MAI purchase from Philip
L. Dade, 1961.



Fig. 75



Fig. 76

Fig. 76. Central Caribbean/ Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tripod bowl in the form of a peccary, AD 800–1500. Linea Vieja area, Cartago Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Stanley Selengut, 1966.

Fig. 77. Greater Chiriquí seat model with human-feline figure, AD 800–1500. Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery. Purchased by George Heye from Joseph McMahan, 1915.

creation stories, which were used to provide justification for a specific social order (Figure 76).

Interpreting depictions of therianthropy is always difficult because it is often impossible to distinguish among animals being portrayed with human characteristics, humans being portrayed with animal characteristics, supernatural beings, or people wearing costumes (Figure 77). This is further complicated by differences between *etic* (outsider) and *emic* (insider) interpretations. While an outside observer may interpret someone in costume as *imitating* an animal, a member of the group might interpret them as actually *being* that animal (or a person-animal, since these separate identities are rarely clear). Whose perspective is correct becomes, ironically, a matter of authority. In therianthropy, manipulation of this ambiguity itself becomes a source of power. In Classic Maya culture, the concept of a *way*, a spiritual co-essence that is part of a person, represented in animal form, may be related to an alternative animal identity that a person such as a ruler can actually become. The power of alterity was manifest in appropriating aspects of this animal “other” through the use of things associated with it. Maya rulers, for example, would wear jaguar skins to represent their possession of jaguar-like strength, cunning, stealth, dominance,

and knowledge of the ecosystem (and of human society). Jaguar figures adorning incense burners used in ritual (Figure 78) made explicit the connection between the authority of association with this animal, and the authority based on ritual practice.

In Costa Rica, warriors portrayed in stone sculpture are shown wearing broad belts of what appears to be crocodile hide, which may have served both as practical protection and to indicate possession of a crocodile’s ferocity

Fig. 77



Fig. 78. Classic period
Maya jaguar-effigy
incense burner cover, AD
250–900. Nebaj, Quiché
Department, Guatemala.
Pottery. MAI purchase
from Robert L. Huber,
1967.



Fig. 79

Fig. 79. Greater Coclé
staff with crocodile effigy,
AD 550–700. Venado
Beach, Panamá Province,
Panama. Animal bone,
spondylius shell, gold. MAI
purchase from Neville A.
Harte and Eva M. Harte,
1967.



Fig. 78



Fig. 80

Fig. 80. Greater Coclé (Cubita style) crocodile-effigy pendant, AD 550–700. Venado Beach, Panamá Province, Panamá. Shell. MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1956.

Fig. 81. Greater Nicoya human figure, AD 300–500. Nicoya, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, paint. MAI purchase from Leticia Rodríguez, 1965.

and toughness. Skins, claws, feathers, bones, and many other animal parts were worn to represent appropriation of power from those beings. The ability to successfully appropriate these qualities could become a source of authority (Figure 79). Detailed, empirically based knowledge and understanding of predators in the ecosystem (jaguars, crocodiles, harpy eagles, king vultures, snakes, sharks, among others) provided inspiration for costumes and symbols of authority, like a shell pendant from Panamá depicting a crocodilian (Figure 80). It is difficult to know for sure, but these may have been as significant for the wearers as they were for their audiences, conferring an internal sense of confidence and power while at the same time communicating externally to others that same perception. We see the confidence of people of all kinds occupying positions of sufficient authority to have been memorialized in shell, jade, gold,

stone, and especially in the highly malleable clay that formed the most common medium for human representation (Figure 81). Through material culture, authority was made visible in ancestral Central America—even when its sources were invisible.



Fig. 81



Fig. 82



Between Beliefs and Rituals: Material Cultures of Ancestral Costa Rica

Patricia Fernández

Ancestral societies of Central America utilized their material culture as a medium to express their ideas and beliefs concerning spirituality. Although it is not possible to reconstruct the original significance completely, it is possible to study the recurrence of certain motifs in similar situations, such as funerary offerings, to be able to infer their possible uses and meanings (Figures 82, 83). Other lines of evidence also exist, such as texts left by the Spanish during the 16th and 17th centuries, as well as those of naturalists who traveled throughout the region during the 19th century, and, most importantly, the spiritual beliefs still maintained by the indigenous people in places like Costa Rica.

In Costa Rica, objects made in other places in Central America, such as jade pieces from the Maya region, are archaeologically present. These have been found as part of offerings in burials located both in the region of Nicoya and in the Caribbean from 500 BC to AD 800 (Salgado and Guerrero, 2005). These jade objects had a high symbolic and economic value and therefore were acquired only by certain individuals to demonstrate their prestige and power (Hoopes, this volume). Parallel to the acquisition of Maya jades, there was local manufacture of objects with other colored stones, fulfilling a function similar to the foreign pieces, since not all the

people could possess these (Figure 84).

Objects made in other materials, distinct from jade, were also employed as part of the ornaments and insignia of the people who held positions of religious and political importance within society. In some ceramic figurines, it is possible to identify the wearing of ear spools, necklaces, and headdresses of magnificent fabrication, as well as clothing and body painting (Figure 85). Examples of this are the figures made in the Nicoya region that represent richly adorned women (Figure 86). Like others from the Nicoya, this woman's status is reinforced as she is shown seated on a bench with the head of a small feline, the margay (*Leopardus wiedii*).

Representations of the margay on metates, which were used as seats and as covers for the burials of those of high social status, have been documented in the Nicoya region (Figure 1) during the period AD 300 to 800 (Snarskis, 1981). After AD 800, with the migration of Mesoamerican groups to this region, material culture was expanded, with the predominance of polychrome painting of ceramics. Also seen was the incorporation of other symbols, such as the ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*), the species of feline most represented between AD 800 and 1350 (Figure 87), absent in other regions of Costa Rica (Fernández, 2012).

Fig. 82. Greater Nicoya tripod bowl in the form of a bird, AD 800–1350. Lago de Nicaragua shore near Rivas, Rivas Department, Nicaragua. Pottery, pigment. MAI purchase from Raul R. Barrios, 1928.

Based on archaeological data, in the Central Caribbean region of Costa Rica (Figure 1) during the period 300 BC to AD 300, ritual activity was exceptionally important, as is evident, among other things, in the variety of objects produced, including implements such as small ceramic containers, rattles (that continued in use much later; Figure 88), whistles (Figure 89), maracas, and ceramic stamps (Figure 90). All of these kinds of objects have been encountered as part of funerary offerings for the burials of individuals considered possibly to have been shamans. This assumes that the stamps were used to decorate the bodies of the ritual specialists or of the participants in the rituals the specialists carried out (Fernández, 2004).

Another function of these objects, seen in the symbolic tradition of the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica, was their use as representations of clan patrons. According to the Bribri of southeast Costa Rica, each group or person within a clan had a figure, of bone or stone or gold, that symbolized the clan patron (Stone, 1993). These were animals, such as the howler monkey or jaguar, from which the maximum political and religious authority among the Bribri was derived (Bozzoli, 1979).

Other animals could be considered sacred, as was the case with the tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*), represented in ceramic form in the Caribbean region of Costa Rica between AD 500 and 1000 (Figure 91). It continues as a central being in the mythology of the Bribri and Cabécars as the sister of *Sibó*, the creator god. In myths the tapir is a feminine being associated with the preparation of chocolate (considered by the Bribri to be their blood) because the tapir can grasp its trunk with its front paws, as if it were beating chocolate with a *molinillo* (Guevara, 1988). The persistence of spiritual beliefs associated with certain animals, such as the tapir, that can be documented in the material culture of ancestral societies also is evident in the use of objects as indicators of political and ceremonial rank. This practice was maintained until the beginning of the 20th century, when Antonio Saldaña, the last chief of highest authority among the Bribri, used as part of his costume seven pendants of gold in the form of birds, like the pendants depicting animals found by archaeologists (Figure 92). Saldaña died in 1910 (Figure 93).

Fig. 83. Chiriquí metate with animal figures, AD 800–AD 1500. Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery. Acquired by Dr. J.W. Fisher in 1859 in Panama; gift of the Union Free School, 1961.



Fig. 83



Fig. 84



Fig. 85

Fig. 84. Guanacaste–Nicoya pendant, 300 BC–AD 500. Linea Vieja area, Costa Rica. Jadeite. MAI purchase from Wanda B. Scheifele, 1965.

Fig. 85. Central Caribbean/ Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed figure, AD 800–1500. Linea Vieja area, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip. MAI purchase from William R. Hawker, 1961.

Fig. 86. Greater Nicoya female figure on a feline-effigy bench, AD 800–1200. Linea Vieja area, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Formerly in the collection of Carlos S. Balsler; MAI exchange with William Hawker, 1959.



Fig. 86



Fig. 87

Fig. 87. Greater Nicoya ocelot-effigy vessel, AD 1000–1350. Filadelfia, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI exchange with Dr. Jorge A. Lines, 1934.

Fig. 88. Greater Chiriquí rattle, AD 800–1500. Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Purchased by George Heye from Joseph McMahan, 1915.



Fig. 88



Fig. 89

Fig. 89. Central Caribbean/ Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed whistle in the form of a snake, AD 800–AD 1500. Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, pigments. Excavated by Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte; gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur M. Sackler, 1967.

Fig. 90. Central Caribbean/
Costa Rican Atlantic
Watershed stamp, AD 300-
800. Costa Rica. Pottery.
MAI purchase from
Leonardo F. Patterson,
1965.



Fig. 90

Fig. 91. Central Caribbean/
Costa Rican Atlantic
Watershed tapir-effigy
vessel, AD 500–800. Las
Mercedes, Linea Vieja
area, Limón Province,
Costa Rica. Pottery, clay
slip, paint. Gift of Cristina
Castro Keith, 1917.



Fig. 91

Fig. 92. Greater Chiriquí
pendant in the form of a
harpy eagle, AD 500–1500.
Las Palmas, Veraguas
Province, Panama. Gold.
MAI purchase from Neville
A. Harte and Eva M.
Harte, 1967.



Fig. 92

Fig. 93. Bribri king's
house, Talamanca, Limón
Province, Costa Rica.
Photo by Alanson B.
Skinner, 1917; published
in "Notes on the Bribri of
Costa Rica," *Indian Notes
and Monographs* 6(3),
1920.



Fig. 93

Beliefs and Rituals

Today, a rich symbolic culture still exists among the indigenous peoples of the region, with shamanism a central element. Its structures came together in ancestral times, and constitute the base on which ritual practices are now carried out. Some of these can be described, to single out the presence of material objects associated with ritual practices such as those of the pre-Hispanic Central Americans.

CURING RITUALS

In Bribri-Cabécar cosmovision (concepts of the world), the first great ritual specialist or *uséköl* came as a jaguar-man who confronted all manner of powerful beings that lived in the world before the creation of humans (Figure 94). In this world there existed different planes of reality, in one of which humans would move. In the other planes that cannot be seen, live the beings that confront the *uséköl* and that are the spirits responsible for illnesses (Guevara, 2009–10). The shamans or curers, *awá* or *jawá* among the Bribri and

Cabécares, are specialists whose principal quality is rooted in their ability to see or understand the different planes of reality.

In the case of illnesses, the shaman knows which are the spirits causing the distinct physical forms of suffering, and knows how to speak to them by means of magical songs. As part of the curing ritual, objects of vegetal and animal origin are used. The animals are selected in relation to the suffering since the *awá* knows which are the aggressor spirits, and those are the spirits of animals.

In addition to the use of skins and other parts of these animals, they also draw them, as has been and still can be documented in the Bribri-Cabécar tradition. Using carbon, the *awá* draws on a piece of wood different little figures. He paints monkeys, squirrels, scorpions. He makes these little figures because the owner of the illnesses takes these forms. All of these are invisible things, but the *awá* knows that it is so (Palmer, Sanchez, and Mayorga, 1992).

The shamans and other spiritual leaders are the only ones who have the capacity to transcend the different planes of reality.



Fig. 94

Fig. 94. Central Caribbean/
Costa Rican Atlantic
Watershed jaguar-effigy
vessel, AD 800–1500.
Linea Vieja area, Limón
Province, Costa Rica.
Pottery, clay slip, paint.
MAI purchase from Wanda
B. Scheifele, 1964.

Fig. 95. Chiriquí jar with frog effigies, AD 800–1500. Baitún, Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery. MAI purchase from Curt Hemmerling, 1929.



Fig. 95

Fig. 96. Greater Chiriquí frog pendant, AD 900–1500. Bugaba, Chiriquí Province, Panama. Gold. Purchased by Frank D. Utley for George Heye, 1905.

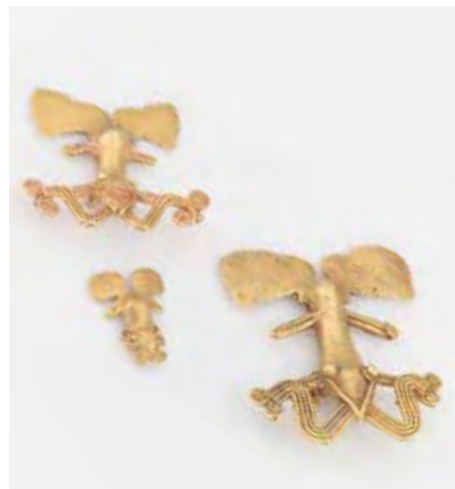


Fig. 96

This mediation is represented in the material culture by means of picking out characteristics of some animals, principally those that can move through distinct planes such as the earth, the water, and the air (Fernández, 1997). Also, the processes of metamorphosis of certain animals, such as reptiles and frogs and toads (Figure 95), must have played an important role to exemplify these concepts of mediation and the capacity to transcend different planes of reality, and such animals were used as symbols associated with these specialists.

In the Bribri oral tradition, reference is made to the necklace that the great ritual specialists, such as the *uséköl*, employed. Called *tauta*, it was very sacred. This necklace was formed of small figures, like those of a toad or frog (Figure 96). No one could touch it nor expose it to the sun, and no Bribri or Cabécar except the *uséköl* touches or eats these animals (Bozzoli, 2006).

FUNERARY RITUALS

All Central American indigenous peoples have beliefs about death. As part of the event, different ritual activities are carried out, executed by ritual specialists. The enormous quantity of objects that came from ancestral burials testify that similar ritual practices and the beliefs that sustained them, even though

they differed from one culture to another, have been a fundamental part of the relation between human beings and the ancestors in this region for a very long time.

The Bribri *jtsököl*, or funerary singer, had the role of directing burial, calling the different spirits (that disperse when the person dies) to reunite themselves with what remained of the body—the bones that were gathered together once the flesh disappeared, and were placed in the clan cemetery (Guevara 2009–10). The songs and dances in the funerary rituals were public celebrations carried out within the houses during a period of days, by day and by night (Cervantes, 1991). The instruments used, such as the drum and the maracas, were part of the ritual and treated as sacred objects that only those designated could take and handle (Figures 97, 98):

The priests use in their songs a rattle, made of a small pear-shaped tree calabash, lashed to a bone at the small end. This contains a few seeds of the 'shot plant,' or canna. It is held upright and solemnly shaken in time with the song until the end of the stanza, when, as a signal for the chorus to strike in, it is given a dexterous twirl, throwing the seeds rapidly around inside (Gabb, 1875).



Fig. 97



Fig. 98

Fig. 97. Bribri ceremonial rattle, circa 1870. Limón Province, Costa Rica. Gourd, *canna indica* seeds, agouti bone. Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Gift of William Moore Gabb, 1873.

Fig. 98. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tripod vessel with armadillo effigies, AD 300–800. Las Mercedes, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Collected or excavated by Alanson B. Skinner, 1916–1917.

The funerary ceremonies documented at the end of the 18th century in Talamanca point to the existence of variations in the rituals, in accordance with the social occupation of the deceased, such as in the description of the funerary dance for a warrior, which involved a dance costume like one collected by this observer (Figure 99):

At the death feast, a person entered, clad in a long gown, wig, and mask. The gown and wig were made of mastate, or bark cloth, covered with 'old man's beard moss' sewed all over it, making a shaggy and nearly shapeless mass. The mass was made of half a tree calabash properly fixed up with a wax nose.... The person thus accoutered, took part in the dance, made free with women and scared the children without let or hindrance (Gabb, 1875).

This masked person is a kind of demon, who represents fear among the living but also entertainment for the dead. In the words of an informant: "It isn't possible to laugh at him after he has put on the costume, because you can end up with your lips peeled. They do this so that the dead will be content" (Bozzoli, 1979).



Fig. 99

Fig. 99. Bribri ceremonial mask and costume, circa 1870. Limón Province, Costa Rica. Gourd, tree-pitch or wax, bark cloth, moss. Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Gift of William Moore Gabb, 1873.

Fig. 100. Jiménez River, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Vesicular andesite. Brooklyn Museum (Alfred W. Jenkins Fund, 34.5084). Drawing by J. Alden Mason, courtesy American Museum of Natural History



Fig. 100

Fig. 101. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed male figure holding trophy head, AD 300–800. Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, paint. Gift of Wanda B. Scheifele, 1964.



Fig. 101

THE RITUAL SPECIALIST'S POWER AND THE TROPHY HEAD

The *useköl*, or ritual specialist, possessed great magical-religious power and was much feared. He intervened in cases of calamities that affected the community, such as the presence of epidemics or drought, for which he ordered a fast:

In times of epidemics, the Usekra [useköl] usually ordered three days of fasting. Everyone enclosed themselves in their homesteads and compounds, whose entryways were closed with branches and leaves. The men separated themselves from the women, they remained enclosed ... on the dawn of the fourth day everyone went to bathe and washed their body with certain herbs (Segarra y Juliá, 1907).

The ritual specialists could also invoke the spirits or powerful supernatural beings to cause plagues, epidemics, floods, and other disasters to affect their enemies. The power of the *useköl* is documented in a war by the Cabécars and Bribris with the Teribe at the beginning of the 19th century (Bozzoli, 1977; Stone, 1993). In the Bribri and Cabécar accounts, the cause of the extermination of the Teribes is considered to be their capture and killing of a *useköl*, whose head converted itself into a fearsome

jaguar that finished off the Teribe population (Guevara, 2009–10).

Human heads made in both ceramic and stone form part of a series of material representations associated with the practice of decapitating captives, a motif represented predominantly in the central Caribbean region from 300 BC to the 16th century (Figure 100). The cycle was initiated by the presence of figures representing captives, and was completed by the representation of warriors (Figure 101) carrying axes and trophy heads or by the heads themselves (Figure 66). As part of the activities of war, the taking of captives, like ritual specialists, formed part of the strategies to make an impact on the enemy, but it also would provoke supernatural response. It would create a dynamic of attacks and counterattacks among powerful ritual specialists symbolized by animals like the jaguar and crocodile.

In a general way, after 500 BC the societies of Central America were distinguished by the existence of a greater concentration of people in villages, by the presence of social differentiation—observable in the inequality of funerary treatment—and by a ritual and religious organization represented in their material culture (Fernández, 1999). Around AD 500, and until the 16th century, social differentiation continued to be accentuated. The



Fig. 102

Fig. 102. Greater Nicoya vessel with human design, AD 500–AD 800. Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. Pottery. MAI purchase from Patti McClain, 1968.

spaces used as ceremonial areas were consolidated, and there was specialist production of different kinds of objects.

Parallel to the development of societies that can be distinguished from one another principally by the material culture, there also existed close interaction among societies in the different regions of Costa Rica, and from them to the rest of Central America. These contacts encouraged the existence of shared values and social practices that are manifest in material culture, and in the representation of themes like the cult of the ancestors and shamanic practices, among others—aspects of ancestral Central America that this essay has demonstrated in the material products of pre-Hispanic Costa Rica (Figure 102).



Collectors and Collecting



A New Dream Museum

Ann McMullen

The National Museum of the American Indian collections have their roots in those of the Museum of the American Indian (MAI)–Heye Foundation of New York City, assembled largely by George Gustav Heye (1874–1957). Long before founding the museum in 1916, Heye bought collections and photographs, sponsored expeditions, and traveled and collected himself. His collection's rapid growth—and the directions it took—were directly influenced by those who advised

him, including Marshall Saville at Columbia University and George Pepper of New York's American Museum of Natural History. Prompted by early advice from Saville, Heye began funding a long-term South American research plan in 1906 and supported research and expeditions in Central America after 1915.

Under Heye, the Museum of the American Indian emphasized systematic collecting and scholarly purpose, including excavations and publications. Purchase and



Fig. 103

Fig. 103. Usulután footed bowl, 400 BC–AD 250. Santa Elena, Usulután Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.



Fig. 104

donation of other groupings were justified as valuable to the scientific strengths of the collection, bringing them together with “specimens that have never been duplicated.” During the museum’s heyday, Heye’s desire to build a great museum and the resources he made available attracted some of the best-known anthropologists of the time. In Heye’s 1957 obituary in *American Antiquity*, Samuel K. Lothrop wrote: “We were all of us, I think, drawn towards Heye by the prospect of a new dream museum.”

Between its founding and 1920, the museum sponsored Saville’s work in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, although Saville appears to have concentrated on purchasing existing collections rather than conducting excavations. Capitalizing on connections with Minor Cooper Keith and the United Fruit Company, the MAI supported extensive excavations by museum staff member Alanson B. Skinner at Las Mercedes and Anita Grande in 1916 and 1917. In 1923, new Ph.D. Samuel K. Lothrop joined the museum, which financed his work in El Salvador (Figure 103) and Guatemala over the following two years. This appears to have included both preliminary excavations and the purchase of existing collections. Lothrop’s major excavations at Quelepa and other sites in El Salvador were also sponsored

by MAI, as were his landmark 1920s publications on pottery types in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

In addition to work undertaken by MAI staff, the museum sponsored fieldwork by people such as Gregory Mason, a journalist who developed an interest in anthropology while working in Mexico. His projects included 1928 cave excavations in Belize’s Cayo District (Figures 104, 105) and 1932 excavations in the Ulúa Valley.

Fig. 104. A workman poses with a vessel from the Río Frio Caves, Cayo District, Belize. Photo by Gregory Mason, 1928.

Fig. 105. Classic period Maya bowl with glyph design, AD 550–750. Cave 12 miles south of Benque Viejo, Cayo District, Belize. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Excavated by Gregory Mason, 1928; gift of Thomas H. Blodgett, 1928.



Fig. 105



Minor Keith and the United Fruit Company

Alexander Benítez

The multinational United Fruit Company is responsible for significant, if unplanned, contributions to our understanding of Central America's ancestral past. As perhaps the most powerful U.S. corporation in Latin America over the past century, it offered company owners, employees, and the occasional scholar vast access to rich agricultural lands that preserved some of the region's most impressive pre-Hispanic cities. Archaeological excavations undertaken at these sites would be considered unprofessional by today's standards, but the pottery, jade, gold, and stone objects collected by a few United Fruit Company-affiliated individuals were ultimately deposited in some of the most highly regarded museums in the United States, including the Museum of the American Indian-Heys Foundation in New York City.

The origins of the United Fruit Company and the Museum of the American Indian-Heys Foundation are intricately connected by one man, Minor Cooper Keith (Figure 106). Minor and his brother Henry accepted a contract to build a railroad from the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica to the country's central valley near the capital of San José, and in 1872 construction of the Linea Vieja commenced. Henry directed rail construction and Minor managed workers and the company's store. During the



Fig. 106

early stages a small hurricane uprooted a large tree in Las Mercedes. Minor or a worker discovered more than thirty gold objects embedded within the tree's roots. From that day, Minor maintained a steady crew of excavators at Las Mercedes and other ancient sites uncovered by construction (Figure 107). (Sadly, Henry Keith, two more brothers, and more than 4,000 workers would die of malaria or yellow fever during the first twenty-five kilometers of railroad building.)

Fig. 106. Minor C. Keith.
Photo by C. Smith
Gardner, 1922.



Fig. 107

While constructing Costa Rica's first railroad, Minor Keith introduced wildly popular bananas into the American diet. When his completed line lacked paying riders, Minor used it to export more and more bananas from his nearby fields (which helped feed his workers) until a new industry was born. Keith ultimately merged his successful banana importing business with Andrew Preston's Boston Fruit Company in 1899 to form the United Fruit Company. Along the way, Keith had married Cristina Castro, the daughter of a former Costa Rican president. At the time of his death in 1929, Keith was one of the most

influential U.S. citizens in the region, the "uncrowned king of Central America."

In 1916, Minor Keith served as a founding trustee of the Heye Foundation museum. His relationship to the museum may be attributed in part to the colossal 16,000-item private collection he amassed from ancestral cities like Las Mercedes (Figure 108), near Costa Rica's Caribbean coast, during the railroad construction. Approximately one-third of that collection now forms the nucleus of the Central American collections at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution.

Fig. 107. Jesús Alpizar worked for Minor Keith and excavated archaeological sites on United Fruit Company lands. He also assisted Museum of the American Indian staff member Alanson Skinner during excavations at Las Mercedes in Limón Province, Costa Rica. Photo by Alanson B. Skinner, 1917.

Fig. 108. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tripod vessel with jaguar-pelt design and effigy handles, AD 800–1500. Las Mercedes, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Pottery, clay slip, paint. Collected or excavated by Alanson B. Skinner, 1916–1917.



Fig. 108



Adventurers, Dilettantes, and Looters

Ann McMullen

While George Heye and the Museum of the American Indian sponsored important professional research and excavations in Central America, Heye also sought other opportunities to build the collections. Given his notoriety as a collector and the recognition of the museum, many individuals offered collections for sale or sought relationships with the museum. To say the least, the reputations of these individuals varied widely, and in considering items for purchase, Heye probably weighed their uniqueness and appeal against their price and the limited provenance information that often accompanied them. In some cases, specific site information might have been concealed to protect the seller or prevent others from capitalizing on the same resource. For instance, in 1914 Heye purchased a large collection of Mexican ceramics from amateur archaeologist Andrew Hooten Blackiston. The objects also included a set of copper bells and a turquoise mask from a cave in Honduras which has since been identified as the Quemistlan Bell Cave on the Chamelecón River. Occasionally, professional archaeologists, such as Thomas Gann (Figure 109), sold their sizable personal collections to the museum.

Through the well-known Explorers Club in New York City, Heye and members of

the museum board were also linked to an immense network of true explorers and adventurers, many of whom made collections during their travels. Having accumulated hundreds of archaeological objects from Honduras and Panama, Frederick A. Mitchell-Hedges and his companion Lady Lilian M. Richmond Brown donated their collections to the museum in the 1930s.

The lure of archaeological discovery combined with the spirit of adventure has led to innumerable destructive events, some of which are documented within the

Fig. 109. Pre-Classic period Maya footed bowl with glyph design, AD 100–250. Belize. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Dr. Thomas W. F. Gann, 1918.

Fig. 109





Fig. 110

NMAI collections. Although George Heye employed some of the best archaeologists of the early 20th century, the museum also maintained other individuals as “field agents” and paid their expenses in exchange for the collections they gathered. From 1916 to 1929, Alpheus Hyatt Verrill—perhaps best-known as a pulp and science fiction author—acted as an MAI field agent in Central and South America. While much of his work involved ethnographic collecting and research for his writings, his “excavations” at El Caño and other Coclé sites in 1925 and 1926 can only be characterized as looting and reckless destruction of the sites’ integrity (Figure 110).

Although amateur archaeology clearly endangers the archaeological record, its most destructive effects may result when it has been combined with the perception of archaeological items as art objects. Many parts of Central America have suffered these depredations, Panama possibly the most. During the 1960s and early 1970s, a number of Americans working in Panama conducted amateur archaeological investigations. As they began to find gold, fine ceramics, and other items, word spread and the art-market demand for these objects grew. Under the directorship of Frederick J. Dockstader, the Museum of the American Indian competed with art collectors to purchase artifacts



Fig. 111

excavated by weekend archaeologists such as Philip L. Dade (Figure 111) and Neville and Eva Harte (Figure 112), who looted Venado Beach and other sites over the course of years.



Fig. 112

Fig. 110. Stone columns in situ, probably at the El Caño site, Coclé Province, Panama. Photo by A. Hyatt Verrill, 1925.

Fig. 111. Greater Coclé (Tonosí style) vessel with design representing men carrying a large vessel, AD 250–550. Tonosí, Los Santos Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip, paint. MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1969.

Fig. 112. Greater Coclé (Conté style) footed plate with crocodile design, AD 850–950. Río de Jesús, Veraguas Province, Panama. Pottery, paint. MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1967.



Accidental Interests

Ann McMullen

nnumerable individuals whose work, family relationships, and business or personal travel took them to Central America developed interests in its past. Archaeological ceramics were often among the souvenirs they brought home, and some of these collections made their way to the Museum of the American Indian, either through donations or sales. For instance, William W. Andrew moved to Panama as the superintendent of

schools for the Panama Canal Zone in 1922; he returned to the United States around 1930 and sold his small group of Chiriqui ceramics and other items to the museum in 1938 (Figure 113). From about the 1930s on, commercial travelers, members of bird-watching trips, and tourists to Central America frequently acquired archaeological objects, although the means by which they did so was seldom recorded.



Fig. 113. Chiriquí tripod bowl, AD 800–1500. David, Chiriquí Province, Panama. Pottery. MAI purchase from William W. Andrew, 1938.

Fig. 113



Fig. 114

Others developed far more serious interests. British botanist and illustrator Dorothy Kate Hughes married fellow botanist F. Wilson Popenoe in 1923. In 1925 they moved to the United Fruit Company's Lancetilla Agricultural Experiment Station at Tela, Honduras. Over the next several years, Dorothy Popenoe made a name for herself through her excavations at Playa de los Muertos and other sites and through her related publications (Figure 114). In 1929 and 1931, she sold archaeological collections to the Museum of the American Indian. Her motivation was probably to raise funds for the restoration of the 17th-century house in Antigua, Guatemala, that she and Wilson Popenoe purchased in 1929, now known as Casa Popenoe.

Members of various branches of the Foreign Service stationed in Central America often had both the time and the means to assemble sizable archaeological collections. Theodore T. Foley, an economist who worked for the U.S. Agency for International Development for decades, had postings in several Latin American countries. He was known to local collectors and to professional archaeologists and may have participated in excavations or otherwise supported their work. In the early 1970s, he donated over 300 objects from El Salvador, Guatemala, and



Fig. 115

Nicaragua to the Museum of the American Indian (Figure 115). A native of Akron, Ohio, Foley later donated a much larger portion of his collection to the Miami University Art Museum in Oxford, Ohio.

Fig. 114. Excavations at Playa de los Muertos, Yoro Department, Honduras. Photo by Dorothy K. Popenoe, 1929.

Fig. 115. Plumbate vessel depicting the god of fire, AD 900–1200. San Salvador Department, El Salvador. Pottery, clay slip. Gift of Theodore T. Foley, 1972.



Promoting Heritage

Alexander Benítez

Central American archaeological collections found in many U.S. museums are the product of late 19th- and early 20th-century expeditions sponsored by museums, wealthy patrons, and individual explorers. While these expeditions produced significant collections and improved our knowledge of ancient civilizations, they are often criticized for having raided nations of their cultural patrimony long before antiquities laws could adequately protect them (Figure 116). These critiques have merit but they also overlook instances where scholars, politicians, and other citizens of these countries promoted their heritage through the gifting, exchange, and even sale of their national patrimony to foreign museums. The following are a few examples.

The distinguished Costa Rican scholar Juan Ferraz served as the second director of the National Museum of Costa Rica, from 1898 to 1904. In this capacity, he sought to build the reputation of the fledgling institution, and the nation's prominence, through associations with foreign institutions such as the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation. Established in 1887, the National Museum of Costa Rica had already participated in the celebrated 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. In 1902, Ferraz visited the United States, and on this occasion, sold Heye

Foundation founder George Heye the foundation's first fifteen archaeological objects from Costa Rica (Figure 117). Ferraz would go on to exchange and sell initial examples of Costa Rican antiquities to other U.S. museums, seeding scholarly interest in the region. At a time when most archaeological fieldwork in Central America was funded and carried out by foreign interests it seems reasonable to believe that Ferraz was using these interactions to attract research funding and projects to his country.

Fig. 116. Greater Coclé (Conté style) footed vessel with human-effigy handles, AD 700–950. Venado Beach, Panamá Province, Panama. Pottery, clay slip. MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1966.

Fig. 116



Dr. Jorge Lines followed in the footsteps of Juan Ferraz. A historian and anthropologist, Lines published numerous scholarly articles and books over a long and distinguished career. As a professor at Costa Rica's National University, he was dedicated to promoting an understanding of the ancestral and contemporary indigenous cultures of Costa Rica. Similar to Ferraz, he did so through the transfer of Costa Rican objects to foreign museums. Between 1932 and 1934, Dr. Lines exchanged eighty-two archaeological and ethnographic objects with the Museum of the American Indian-Heye Foundation (Figure 118). But Dr. Lines was also actively involved in promoting the development of a professionalized archaeology in Costa Rica. In 1962, he visited the campus of Kansas University to discuss a groundbreaking student-exchange program between the two universities. This program has awarded Ph.D.s to several Costa Rican scholars.

The private collections of noteworthy Central American politicians have also, often inadvertently, found their way into U.S. museums. The political instability of the region and continual overthrow of short-lived governments meant that former presidents often lived in exile, sometimes in the United States. Marco Aurelio Soto, president of Honduras from 1876 to 1883, lived his final years as a political exile in California and New York. After

Fig. 119



Fig. 117



Fig. 118

his death in 1908, his private collection of Honduran antiquities was sold to the Heye Foundation (Figure 119). Ada Montealegre, the daughter of former Costa Rican president José María Montealegre Fernández, grew up in Berkeley, California, where the family owned a winery. In 1920 she sold the Heye Foundation fifty-one objects presumably once owned by her father.

Still smaller groups of antiquities have arrived at U.S. museums through the efforts of Central American citizens who donated family collections. For example, twenty-one objects recovered from the Finca Miraflores owned by Guillermo Batres and his family in Guatemala were donated to the Heye Foundation in 1924. It is quite possible that the Batres family believed their collections would be better cared for outside of Guatemala, where few museum institutions existed at the time.

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15 × 15 × 8 cm (15/310). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 33. Classic period Maya female figure,
AD 600–1000
Nekepia, Usulután Department, El Salvador
Pottery
Gift of Francis E. Ross, 1962. 16 × 12 × 4 cm (23/2122).
Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 34. Sauna. Photo by Payson Sheets

Figure 35. Figure 35. Structure 12.
Photo by Payson Sheets

Figure 36. Classic period Maya blades, AD 250–900
San Miguel de Mercedes,
Chalatenango Department, El Salvador
Obsidian
Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1926.
17 × 3 × 1 cm (15/277). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 37. Salua bowl with monkey design,
AD 400–900
La Asunción (Hacienda Asunción), Cuscatlán
Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.
10 × 10 × 7 cm (13/659). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 38. Classic period Maya bowl with glyph
design, AD 700–800
Tazumal, Santa Ana Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Gift of Francis E. Ross, 1962. 21 × 21 × 9 cm (23/2121).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 39. Salua bowl, AD 450–850
Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto,
San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.
7 × 19.5 × 19.5 cm (9/9561). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 40. Salua tripod vessel, AD 450–850
Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto,
San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.
15 × 15 × 21 cm (9/9572). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 41. Salua bowl with Huehuetéotl
(Old God/God of Fire) design, AD 450–850
Atiquizaya, Ahuachapán Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Gift of Theodore T. Foley, 1971. 11 × 11 × 6 cm
(24/6101). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 42. Salua jar, AD 450–850
Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto,
San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.
12 × 13 × 11 cm (9/9551). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 43. Salua tripod bowl, AD 450–850
Hospicio excavation near church of San Jacinto,
San Salvador, San Salvador Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase by Marshall H. Saville, 1920.
15 × 15 × 12 cm (9/9560). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 44. Pre-Classic period Maya jar in the form
of an animal, 300 BC–AD 600
Ciudad Vieja, Sacatepéquez Department, Guatemala
Pottery, clay slip
MAI purchase from Julia M. Rodezno, 1923.
26 × 20 × 18 cm (12/3555). Photo by Alexander
Benítez

Figure 45. Map, circulation of materials and knowl-
edge to and from Honduras, 1100-400 BC. Courtesy
of Rosemary A. Joyce

Figure 46. Ulúa River female figure, 900–200 BC
Campo Dos (United Fruit Company Farm 2), Cortés
Department, Honduras
Pottery
Collected or excavated by Gregory Mason, acquired
by MAI, 1932. 7.2 × 5.5 × 11.25 cm (18/3091). Photo
by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 47. Maya stamp with monkey design,
900 BC–AD 400
Río Ulúa valley, Honduras
Pottery
MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1926.
6.25 × 4.5 × 3.5 cm (15/693). Photo by NMAI
Move Team

Figure 48. Map, circulation of materials and objects
to and from Honduras, 500-1500 AD. Courtesy of
Rosemary A. Joyce

Figure 49. Ulúa River bowl with animal-effigy
handles, AD 600–900
Río Ulúa valley, Honduras
Marble
Gift of the Viking Fund, Inc. (Wenner-Gren
Foundation for Anthropological Research), 1949.
16 × 16 × 6 cm (21/3783). Photo by R.A. Whiteside

Figure 50. Ulúa River vessel, AD 600–900
Banks of the Ulúa River, Honduras
Marble
Formerly in the collection of the Governor of the
Honduran Province of Cortes, purchased for George
Heye by Marshall H. Saville, 1915. 15.9 × 15.2 × 13.1 cm
(4/3956). Photo by David Heald

Figure 51. Ulúa River vessel with feline-effigy
handles, AD 600–900
Río Ulúa, Honduras
Marble
Purchased for George Heye by Marshall H. Saville
from an unknown source, 1915. 7.5 × 16.5 × 20 cm
(4/3955). Photo by Alexander Benítez

Figure 52. Ulúa River tripod bowl with jaguar-paw
design, AD 850–950
Río Ulúa valley, Cortés Department, Honduras
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from N. Hasbun, 1969. 21 × 21 × 18 cm
(24/3268). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 53. Ulúa River vessel with vulture-effigy
handles, AD 550–650
Río Ulúa valley, Honduras
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Gift of John S. Williams, 1955. 23 × 16 × 25 cm
(22/4870). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 54. Ulúa River monkey-effigy tripod vessel,
AD 650–750
Comayagua, Comayagua Department, Honduras
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Gift of Edgar O. Smith, 1972. 27 × 18 × 15 cm
(24/7041). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 55. Greater Nicoya jar, AD 500–AD 800
Río Ulúa valley, Cortés Department, Honduras
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Enrique Vargas Alfaro, 1969.
18 × 18 × 22 cm (24/3288). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 56. Classic period Maya male figure,
AD 250–AD 900
Honduras
Jadeite
Purchased by George Heye from an unknown
source, 1907. 3 × 5 × 12 cm (1/2570). Photo by Ernest
Amoroso

Figure 57. Pipil bell, AD 1200–1500
Quemistlan Bell Cave, Río Chamelecón valley,
Honduras
Copper
Collected in 1910 by Andrew H. Blackiston; purchased
by George Heye, 1914. 7 × 6 × 5 cm (4/354).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 58. Pipil bell, AD 1200–1500
Quemistlan Bell Cave, Río Chamelecón valley,
Honduras
Copper
Collected in 1910 by Andrew H. Blackiston;
purchased by George Heye, 1914. 8 × 5 cm (4/312).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 59. Greater Nicoya bowl, AD 800–1350
Filadelfia, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Jorge Castillo, 1965.
11 × 24 × 23 cm (23/5585). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 60. Classic period Maya vessel depicting a
nobleman carried on a palanquin, AD 600–900
Nebaj, Quiché Department, Guatemala
Pottery, paint
MAI exchange with Robert L. Stolper, 1969.
16.5 × 15.3 cm (23/3800). Photos by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 61. Classic period Maya vessel with glyph
design, AD 600–900
Petén Department, Guatemala
Pottery, paint
MAI exchange with James Economos, 1973.
7 × 5.5 × 10.5 cm (24/8347). Photo by Alexander
Benítez

Figure 62. Greater Chiriquí jaguar-effigy seat-metate,
AD 100–1500
Near Bugabita Arriba, Chiriquí Province, Panama
Stone
Purchased by Frank D. Utley for George Heye, 1905.
13.5 × 21.5 × 45 cm (8250). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 63. Greater Nicoya female figure,
AD 800–1350
Near Rivas, Rivas Department, Nicaragua
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Collected about 1920 by Raul R. Barrios, acquired by
MAI in 1928. 26 × 15 × 9 cm (15/9362).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 64. Greater Coclé (Conté style) footed plate
with human-crocodile design, AD 850–950
Veraguas, Veraguas Province, Panama
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1969.
32 × 32 × 8.5 cm (24/3274).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 65. Mainland Caribbean monolithic axe,
AD 1000–1500
Near Bahía de Bluefields, Atlántico Sur Autonomous
Region, Nicaragua
Stone
Collected or excavated by David E. Harrower, 1924.
30 × 15 × 3 cm (13/2997). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 66. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic
Watershed trophy-head sculpture, AD 500–1000
Río Turrialba, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip
Gift of Patti McClain, 1968. 22 × 25 × 18 cm (24/900).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 67. Greater Coclé Tradition ornament,
AD 500–1500
Veraguas Province, Panama
Gold
MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte,
1967. 15 × 15.2 × .2 cm (24/630). Photo by NMAI
Move Team

Figure 68. Greater Nicoya king vulture-effigy footed
vessel, AD 1000–1350
Las Huacas (Las Guacas), Guanacaste Province,
Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from an unknown source in Paris,
France, 1926. 17 × 22 × 26 cm (15/1680). Photo by
Ernest Amoroso

Figure 69. Greater Nicoya feline-effigy vessel,
AD 1000–1350
Linea Vieja area, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Gift of Mary W. Williams, 1967. 36 × 23 × 26 cm
(23/9581). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 70. Greater Nicoya incense burner
with crocodile effigy, AD 400–1350
Isla de Ometepe, Lago de Nicaragua, Rivas
Department, Nicaragua
Pottery
MAI purchase from Judy A. Small, 1964.
32 × 23 × 47 cm (23/4043). Photo by NMAI Move
Team

Figure 71. Greater Coclé (Parita style) pendant
with warrior figures, AD 500–1200
Península de Azuero, Herrera Province, Panama
Gold
MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1968.
9.75 × 4 × 3 cm (24/2460). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 72. Greater Nicoya snake pendant,
300 BC–AD 500
Nicoya, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Jadeite
MAI purchase from Enrique Vargas Alfaro, 1966.
12 × 3 × 1 cm (23/7284). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 73. Greater Coclé (Conté style) bowl with human design, AD 700–850
Temple site, Río Caño, near Penomoné, Coclé Province, Panama
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Collected or excavated by A. Hyatt Verrill, 1926.
9 × 28.5 × 26 cm (14/6066). Photo by Carmelo Guadagno

Figure 74. Lacandon Maya “god pot,” circa 1930
Lower Río Jataté, Chiapas State, Mexico
Pottery
Collected by David W. Amram, Jr., 1934.
17 × 17 × 19 cm (18/8087). Photo NMAI Move Team

Figure 75. Greater Coclé funerary urn with human-centipede design, AD 800–1200
Río Tabasará, Chiriquí Province, Panama
Pottery, paint
MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1961.
45 × 32 × 32 cm (22/9301). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 76. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tripod bowl in the form of an animal, AD 800–1500
Linea Vieja area, Cartago Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Stanley Selengut, 1966.
17 × 13 × 14 cm (23/8979). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 77. Greater Chiriquí seat model with human-feline figure, AD 800–1500
Chiriquí Province, Panama
Pottery
Purchased by George Heye from Joseph McMahon, 1915. 13.5 × 26 × 20.5 cm (4/1424) Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 78. Classic period Maya jaguar-effigy incense burner cover, AD 250–900
Nebaj, Quiché Department, Guatemala
Pottery
MAI purchase from Robert L. Huber, 1967.
22 × 28 × 28 cm (23/9535). Photo by Alexander Benitez

Figure 79. Greater Coclé staff with crocodile effigy, AD 550–700
Venado Beach, Panamá Province, Panama
Animal bone, spondylus shell, gold
MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1967. 33 × 1.4 × 2 cm (24/688). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 80. Greater Coclé (Cubita style) crocodile-effigy pendant, AD 550–700
Venado Beach, Panamá Province, Panama
Shell
MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1956.
2.5 × 7 × 7.5 cm (22/5270). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 81. Greater Nicoya human figure, AD 300–500
Nicoya, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, paint
MAI purchase from Leticia Rodriguez, 1965.
6.5 × 9 × 13.5 cm (23/5562). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 82. Greater Nicoya tripod bowl in the form of a bird, AD 800–1350
Lago de Nicaragua shore near Rivas, Rivas Department, Nicaragua
Pottery, pigment
MAI purchase from Raul R. Barrios, 1928.
22 × 14 × 9.5 cm (15/9329). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 83. Chiriquí metate with animal figures, AD 800–1500
Chiriquí Province, Panama
Pottery
Acquired by Dr. J.W. Fisher in 1859 in Panama; gift of the Union Free School, 1961. 20 × 20 × 12 cm (22/9767). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 84. Guanacaste–Nicoya pendant, 300 BC–AD 500
Linea Vieja area, Costa Rica
Jadeite
MAI purchase from Wanda B. Scheifele, 1965.
11 × 1 × 5 cm (23/5748). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 85. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed figure, AD 800–1500
Linea Vieja area, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip
MAI purchase from William R. Hawker, 1961.
7 × 9 × 10 cm (22/9219). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 86. Greater Nicoya female figure on a feline-effigy bench, AD 800–1200
Linea Vieja area, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Formerly in the collection of Carlos S. Balsler; MAI exchange with William Hawker, 1959.
24 × 19 × 12.5 cm (22/8837). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 87. Greater Nicoya ocelot-effigy vessel, AD 1000–1350
Filadelfia, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI exchange with Dr. Jorge A. Lines, 1934.
14 × 10 × 16 cm (18/6317). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 88. Greater Chiriquí rattle, AD 800–1500
Chiriquí Province, Panama
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Purchased by George Heye from Joseph McMahon, 1915. 8 × 14 × 7 cm (4/1300). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 89. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed whistle in the form of a snake, AD 800–1500
Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, pigments
Excavated by Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte; gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur M. Sackler, 1967.
8 × 6 × 4 cm (24/539). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 90. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed stamp, AD 300–800
Costa Rica
Pottery
MAI purchase from Leonardo F. Patterson, 1965.
7 × 7 × 5.5 cm (23/6316). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 91. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tapir-effigy vessel, AD 500–800
Las Mercedes, Linea Vieja area, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Gift of Cristina Castro Keith, 1917. 17 × 17 × 28 cm (7/1664). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 92. Greater Chiriquí pendant in the form of a harpy eagle, AD 500–1500
Las Palmas, Veraguas Province, Panama
Gold
MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1967. 6 × 6.5 × 2 cm (24/667). Photo by Walter Larrimore

Figure 93. Bribri king's house, Talamanca, Limón Province, Costa Rica. Photo by Alanson B. Skinner, 1917; published in "Notes on the Bribri of Costa Rica," *Indian Notes and Monographs* 6(3), 1920.

Figure 94. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed jaguar-effigy vessel, AD 800–1500
Linea Vieja area, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Wanda B. Scheifele, 1964.
24 × 20 × 18 cm (23/4169). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 95. Chiriquí jar with frog effigies, AD 800–1500
Baitún, Chiriquí Province, Panama
Pottery
MAI purchase from Curt Hemmerling, 1929.
13 × 13 × 12 cm (16/3696). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 96. Greater Chiriquí frog pendant, AD 900–1500
Bugaba, Chiriquí Province, Panama
Gold
Purchased by Frank D. Utley for George Heye, 1905.
6 × 5 × 1.25 cm (largest) (8264). Photo by Walter Larrimore

Figure 97. Bribri ceremonial rattle, circa 1870
Limón Province, Costa Rica
Gourd, canna indica seeds, agouti bone
Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Gift of William Moore Gabb, 1873.
19.3 × 6.4 cm (E12643 and E12644)

Figure 98. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tripod vessel with armadillo effigies, AD 300–800
Las Mercedes, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Collected or excavated by Alanson B. Skinner, 1916–1917 19 × 21 × 29 cm (7/5597). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 99. Bribri ceremonial mask and costume, circa 1870
Limón Province, Costa Rica
Gourd, tree-pitch or wax, bark cloth, moss
Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, Gift of William Moore Gabb, 1873.
Approx. 105 × 65 cm (E15387)

Figure 100. Central Caribbean figure of a warrior wearing a crocodile mask, AD 700–1000
Jiménez River, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Vesicular andesite
Brooklyn Museum (Alfred W. Jenkins Fund, 34.5084).
168 × 53 × 56 cm. Drawing by J. Alden Mason, courtesy American Museum of Natural History

Figure 101. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed male figure holding trophy head, AD 300–800
Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, paint
Gift of Wanda B. Scheifele, 1964. 8 × 7 × 14 cm (24/3343). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 102. Greater Nicoya vessel with human design, AD 500–AD 800
Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Pottery
MAI purchase from Patti McClain, 1968.
17 × 27 × 26 cm (24/805). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 103. Usulután footed bowl, 400 BC–AD 250
Santa Elena, Usulután Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Collected or excavated by Samuel K. Lothrop, 1924.
10.5 × 20 × 20 cm (13/361). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 104. A workman poses with a vessel from the Río Frio Caves, Cayo District, Belize. Photo by Gregory Mason, 1928 (N20517)

Figure 105. Classic period Maya bowl with glyph design, AD 550–750
Cave 12 miles south of Benque Viejo, Cayo District, Belize
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Excavated by Gregory Mason, 1928; gift of Thomas H. Blodgett, 1928. 15.5 × 13.5 × 13.5 cm (16/1881).
Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 106. Minor C. Keith. Photo by C. Smith Gardner, 1922 (P37580)

Figure 107. Jesus Alpizar worked for Minor Keith and excavated archaeological sites on United Fruit Company lands. He also assisted Museum of the American Indian staff member Alanson Skinner during excavations at Las Mercedes in Limón Province, Costa Rica. Photo by Alanson B. Skinner, 1917 (N01754).

Figure 108. Central Caribbean/Costa Rican Atlantic Watershed tripod vessel with jaguar-pelt design and effigy handles, AD 800–1500
Las Mercedes, Limón Province, Costa Rica
Pottery, clay slip, paint
Collected or excavated by Alanson B. Skinner, 1916–1917. 28 × 29 × 22 cm (7/4402). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 109. Pre-Classic period Maya footed bowl with glyph design, AD 100–250
Belize
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Dr. Thomas W. F. Gann, 1918. 13 × 28.5 × 28.5 cm (8/1958). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 110. Stone columns in situ, probably at the El Caño site, Coclé Province, Panama. Photo by A. Hyatt Verrill, 1925 (N10948)

Figure 111. Greater Coclé (Tonosí style) vessel with design representing men carrying a large vessel, AD 250–550
Tonosí, Los Santos Province, Panama
Pottery, clay slip, paint
MAI purchase from Philip L. Dade, 1969. 29 × 26 cm (24/3279). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 112. Greater Coclé (Conté style) footed plate with crocodile design, AD 850–950
Río de Jesús, Veraguas Province, Panama
Pottery, paint
MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1967. 33 × 33 × 10 cm (24/502). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 113. Chiriquí tripod bowl, AD 800–1500
David, Chiriquí Province, Panama
Pottery
MAI purchase from William W. Andrew, 1938. 11 × 11 × 7 cm (19/8368). Photo by NMAI Move Team

Figure 114. Excavations at Playa de los Muertos, Yoro Department, Honduras. Photo by Dorothy K. Popenoe, 1929 (L01701)

Figure 115. Plumbate vessel depicting the god of fire, AD 900–1200
San Salvador Department, El Salvador
Pottery, clay slip
Gift of Theodore T. Foley, 1972. 17 × 15 × 18.5 cm (24/7225). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 116. Greater Coclé (Conté style) footed vessel with human-effigy handles, AD 700–950
Venado Beach, Panamá Province, Panama
Pottery, clay slip
MAI purchase from Neville A. Harte and Eva M. Harte, 1966. 13 × 11 × 14 cm (23/6777). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 117. Chiriquí pendant in the form of a man, AD 900–1500
North of Cartago, Cartago Province, Costa Rica
Gold
Purchased by George Heye from Juan F. Ferraz, 1902. 4.5 × 2 cm (6499). Photo by Walter Larrimore

Figure 118. Greater Nicoya jaguar-effigy whistle, 300 BC–AD 500
Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica
Pottery
MAI purchase from Dr. Jorge A. Lines, 1962. 10.5 × 4 × 4.5 cm (23/2074). Photo by Ernest Amoroso

Figure 119. Ulúa River female figure, AD 250–900
Gracias, Lempira Department, Honduras
Pottery
Formerly in the collection of Marco Aurelio Soto; MAI purchase from an unknown source, 1917. 11 × 15 × 19 cm (6/1252). Photo by NMAI Move Team



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Fig. 87. See page 59.

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The pattern on the inside covers was inspired by the geometric designs on this Gran Coclé vessel (22/8375).
Photo by Alexander Benítez

