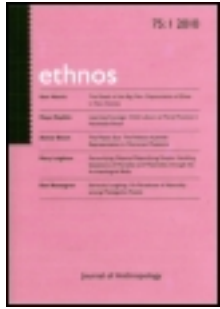


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Archaeology and Pre-Colombian Art in Panamá

PHILIP L. DADE

Panamá

For the most part, authorities agree with the three major premises proposed by Lothrop (1939, 1942, 1950, 1960) that Coclé polychromes are found throughout the Isthmus, from Coclé east to the Darien; the islands in the Bay of Panamá; south through the Azuero Peninsula at least beyond Macaracas; west into most of known Veraguas; and northwest into Chiriquí (1944, map fig. 486); second, that the Veraguas culture evolved only unpainted ware (conversely that all polychrome pottery found in Veraguas is Coclean in origin); and third, that there was an Early and Late Period in the development of the Coclé culture, followed by a period of decline.

I propose first, that Coclé, Veraguas, and Azuero-Parita are foci of original and highly sophisticated polychrome ceramics; second, that far from being limited to unpainted pottery, the Veraguas ceramic achievement includes four and five-color polychrome painted designs equal to any found in the Americas (Dade 1961—1970); and lastly that Sitio Conte had only an Early Period historically and culturally and there never was a Late Period; that both the population of Coclé, the followers of Penonomé and he himself were destroyed together, marking, not only the end of the Early Period, but the end of a culture.

Lothrop, discussing the discovery of the Late Period (1942: 194—start), said: “At any rate the Late Period *flowered so suddenly and with such vigor*, that the more ancient pottery types were completely excluded with a few exceptions in the first graves” (p. 252). He explained his “period of decline” saying, “The final phase at Sitio Conte is one of almost complete economic collapse . . . The pottery is of the simplest type . . . the jewelry . . . is almost completely ab-

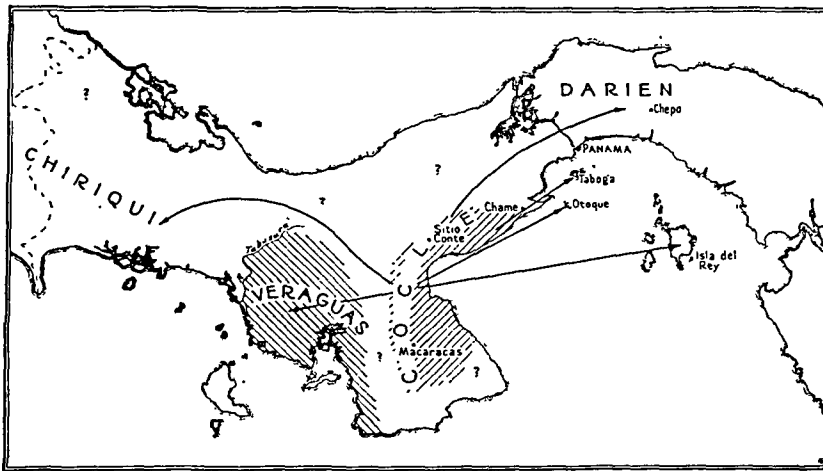


Fig. 1—Map. 1—The famous Lothrop map illustrating his theory of the spread of the Coclé culture practically throughout the Republic of Panamá. This is the generally accepted theory today.

sent. Such radical change in economic status suggests external pressure and *defeat in battle* . . . it seems reasonable to believe that an ancestor of Natá defeated the ruler of the Sitio Conte." (Author's italics). The conquerors, I think, came from Veraguas, not from Coclé. They left their own art behind in Coclé while, as Lothrop says, "... they . . . seized the wealth . . ." of the Coclesanos and carried it away with them. And this wealth, those beautiful artifacts, would later be interred in their own Veraguas tombs, as they interred their artifacts in their burials in Sitio Conte, a sacred burial ground they could not help but utilize.

I summarize briefly here, some of the current views on this subject and some of the ancient ones as well since they form the basis of those current, as published in the literature.

Holmes (1888) and MacCurdy (1911) were the first with their great original studies of the antiquities of Chiriquí based on museum collections, including the de Zeltner (Lampson-Yale) collection (1865). Their works, however, would not be discussed here at all, since this article is not concerned with the ceramics of Chiriquí, except that nine superb pieces of polychrome pottery they illustrate and describe are inextricably involved with the Coclé mystery. Os-

good (1935) discussed their findings and apparently was not completely happy with their conclusions. He said, "Polychrome ware—there are only seven pieces in the Yale collection (ca. 4,000 pieces). The form, technique of manufacture, and decoration link these specimens with the pottery commonly found in the provinces to the east, particularly Coclé. Archaeologically speaking they should not be considered as Chiriquí pottery. (Holmes: fig. 207, 209, 211, 213, 214) and MacCurdy Plate 1)." All but one of these, illustrate Azuero-Parita and Veraguas artifacts.

Lothrop, commenting on these artifacts which the authors writing over a quarter century previously had attributed to the Chiriquí culture, said, "Nine examples of Coclé pottery discovered in ancient burials have been published by Holmes and MacCurdy . . ." (1942: 244). He felt that the design on the artifacts had no counterpart at Sitio Conte, but were similar to artifacts from Partita in which he is absolutely correct, since they are Parita pieces. But he concludes saying that they correspond to the Late Coclé period (p. 245—248). Of the famous de Zeltner pedestal plate (fig. 223) MacCurdy (Plate I) he says that while it was unquestionably found in Chiriquí (p. 245) it was a Coclé artifact. MacCurdy does illustrate one Coclé artifact, an Early Period Y-C bowl, Plate XLIV.

This then was the first affirmation that the polychrome artifacts of Holmes and MacCurdy were Late Period Coclé. Unhappily they still are.

Ladd (1964) follows the Early-Late-Decline theory of Lothrop (pps. 21—23, 129, 223—225, other). He said: "At Sitio Conte a Late period has been established based primarily on changes in design motifs and vessel shapes in the polychrome . . . This is followed by what was presumably a brief period of decline . . ." The Early Coclé phase . . . extends as far as the Parita River and possibly into Veraguas . . . Late Coclé phase vessels occur sporadically as far as Chiriquí and its islands *and in quantity in Veraguas graves* . . . Late Coclé polychrome and Azuero styles are often difficult to distinguish between . . . (At the present time, however, I believe that Parita is best represented as part of the Coclé region). "No whole plates were recovered and plate sherds are very rare." (p. 53). (Author's italics).

As indeed they should be. Coclé plates are found only in the Early

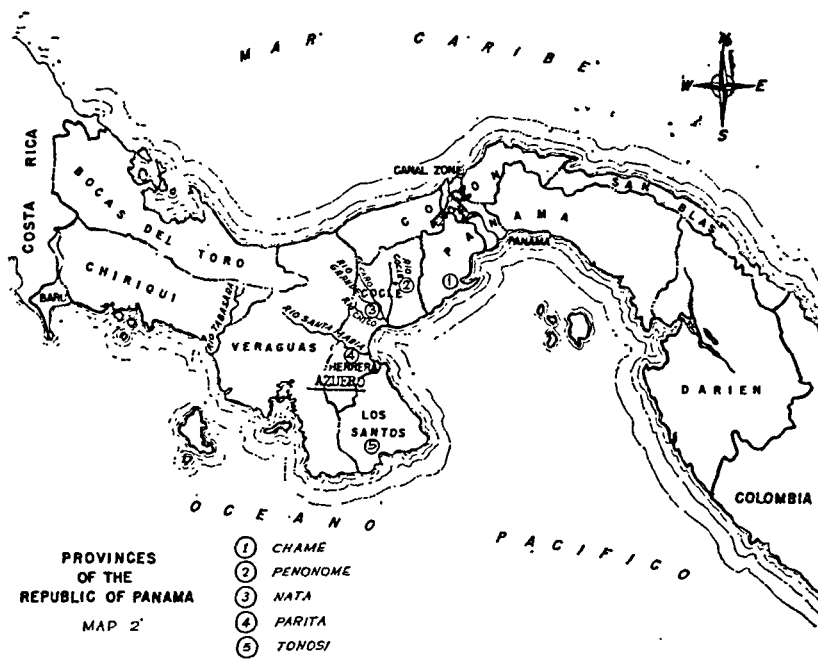


Fig. 2—Map 2 — This shows Penonome’s fief according to the Dade theory. The area is extremely well drained by five rivers: the Rio Coclé, Rio Grande, Rio Chico, Rio El Caño and the great boundary river to the west, the Santa Maria. There are many other rivers in the hills which drain into the rivers mentioned above. The temple site is off the Rio El Caño, and the Sitio Conte Burial site is on the Rio Grande. This map shows the present political and geographical relationship between the three great cultures discussed in this article: Coclé, Veraguas, and Azuero (Herrera and Los Santos Provinces).

Period Coclé and in Veraguas to which area they were traded or brought, rarely (or never) in Azuero to my knowledge.

Wassén (1960), discussing a Veraguas Province grave, and following sufficient precedence, classified the five painted pieces found as Coclean. The unpainted ware, also according to accepted formula, he says are Varaguan, as indubitably they are. He said, “Over 200 polychrome vessels from Coclé and the Azuero Peninsula have been found in Veraguas graves . . .” (p. 67). He adds, “As all Veraguas pottery is unpainted, the polychrome vessels found there must have been secured by trade and . . . trade pieces from Coclé range from the Earliest to the Latest Sitio Conte styles (Lothrop 1950:33).”

Baudez (1963) also follows the Early and Late periods established by Lothrop. Discussing (his own) Period V, he says that the Early Coclé Phase "... extends from A.D. 500 to 800..." Baudez includes the El Hatillo-Parita site (Stirling 1945) in this period. My own radio carbon dating of this site accomplished through the cooperation and courtesy of Dr. Stirling, places the time about the year 1480 for that particular burial which is typical of the area. Baudez says his period VI includes the "Late Coclé and La Mula phases... Parita Bay (Lothrop, 1937:42; Willey and McGimsey 1954)". He dates this period at 800 to the Spanish Conquest, and places the El Caño Temple site (Verrill 1927) in this period. I appreciate Baudez' statement (P.49) that "The growing importance of religion is attested by the spread of monumental sculpture. Tall columns with anthropomorphic figures carved in low relief were found by Verrill near Penonomé (1927)." According to my reasoning the El Caño Temple was destroyed about the year 1,200 which I make the end of the Early Period of Coclé.

Mahler (1961) speaking of finds in Veraguas, says, "... many polychrome vessels from other areas, chiefly Coclé and the Azuero Peninsula..." were found. (p. 218). She dates Early Coclé painted ware at 1750 ± 60 B.P. which could make it about the year 200—250 A.D. This is most interesting since it implies a highly developed artistic capability at that very early period in Coclé, though I think that some of the more sophisticated Early Coclé plates such as the birds-that-look-forward-and-back, probably date about the year 800 or even later.

Discussing typical Veraguas polychrome pedestal plates with coral snake rims, Mahler says, "... but there is no record of the local Veraguas pottery types (author's translation—"unpainted ware") found with these *trade pieces*. (author's italics). Not trade pieces at all, but local Veraguas manufacture. Interesting is her description of an Early period Coclé carafe in a Soná, Veraguas grave (fig. 4b) in association with a typical buff ware Veraguas loop leg vessel. The finding of Early Coclé in Veraguas graves is not at all uncommon. I stress the word "Early". I appreciate Mahler's identification of the de Zeltner crocodile pedestal plate as an "Azuero type" (p. 226) artifact. While actually the specimen is a Veraguas not an Azuero artifact, at least and at last it was not referred to as "Coclé style".

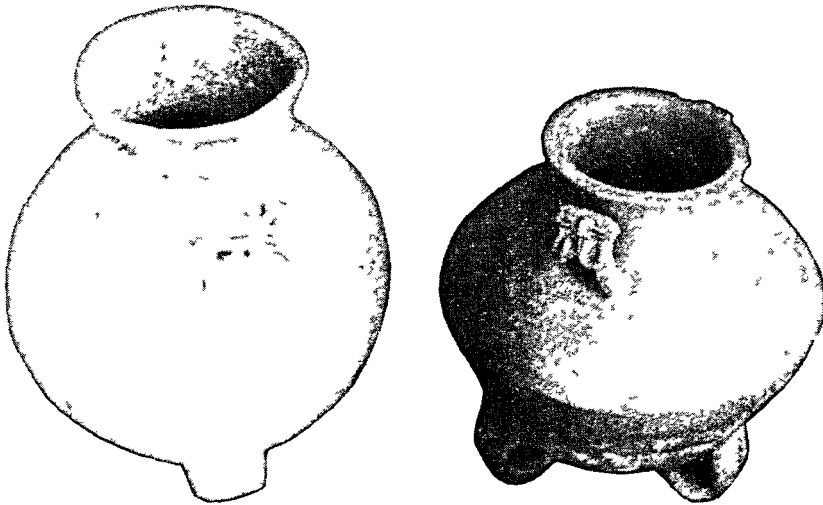


Fig. 3—Two typical Veraguas loop-leg jars with anthropomorphic figures. Specimen on right is rare "shouldered" type. Most are globular or sub-globular. Dimensions: left: H. 8"; W. 7", Mouth $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches; right: H. 7"; W. 7"; Mouth $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches.

Linares de Saphir also sees two periods at Sitio Conte, and places Early Coclé between 500 and 800 (1968:6) agreeing more or less with Baudez. The Late period she places between 800 and 1,200 (p. 7), and the "period of decline" between 1,200 and 1,500, just before the Spanish Conquest (1516—1530). This is almost exactly the way I date this period.

Biese, who was on the Isthmian scene, also supports the widely-distributed-Coclé culture theme (1964). He says: "Recent work has suggested Coclé polychrome might be much more widely distributed than was originally thought. It is present in other foci rather than being restricted to trade ware, throughout a portion of the Azuero Peninsula, and adjacent Southeastern Veraguas."

If Biese means the lovely polychrome recently recovered from southeastern Veraguas and the Azuero Peninsula, he is actually speaking about Azuero-Veraguas polychrome not Coclé; not foci of original Coclean polychrome. I agree there are foci of polychrome in the areas he indicates, but according to my theory (1961—1970) they are true foci of original polychrome indigenous to those areas, namely the Azuero and the Veraguas cultures.

In 1949 for the first time, a noted Americanist made the unequivocal statement that there is a type of polychrome on the Isthmus that is NOT Coclean. Said Stirling, "The pottery here was of a different type from the typical Coclé ware."

Dockstader (1961) in his chart showing the chronology of Middle America, places Coclé in the early post classic period, approximately at the year 1,200 which is where I put its terminal date. However, his most welcome contribution to my argument, is his comment on fig. 175 which illustrates a large shouldered flaring-rim bowl from Veraguas. He says, "This vessel shows the mastery of the ancient potters who made these polychrome bowls in such profusion. Although handicapped by *clay of poor quality*, they were able to achieve a finish and decoration which resulted in some of the finest ceramics in Central America." (Author's italics).

Dockstader here is speaking of the Veraguas artisans who painted their quite beautiful designs on pottery made of a coarse, grainy, reddish clay, typical of this province and of which they fabricated most of their pottery.

I mentioned some time ago the remarkable polychromes made of the extremely poor clays of Veraguas (Dade 1959:29, 34).

Other authorities, some of whom have worked more or less intensively in Panamá and who have written on the Isthmian puzzle could be quoted. The above, however, should be enough to show the almost total unanimity of opinion held and expressed by those who have specialized at all in this area.

There is no reason not to accept Lothrop's date for the start of the Early Coclé polychrome phase as the year 500 with the developmental-formative painted wares about 250 years earlier; nor is there any reason why the Early Coclé period cannot be extended beyond the Lothrop year 900—beyond the so-called transitional period, which is only conjectural anyway, to somewhere about the year 1,200, the end of his so-called "Late Period". The Late Period I feel, was born with the death of the Early Period, thus the same date will do for both—let us say the year 1,200, the year of the extermination of the Rio Grande—Coclé—Penonomé culture as such, and the imposition of the Veraguas culture, now known and accepted as the "Late period" Coclé. If we accept these prepositions, it removes the heretofore unaccountable gap in the two cultural se-

quences between the end of the Early Period and the beginning of the Late Period.

If what Lothrop says about an invasion is true, then according to him, the destruction of Penonomé's Coclé would have had to come about *after* the late Period. I claim Coclé was destroyed after the Early Period, thus logically there could not have been a Late Period. There was just the one (early) period, from the years 500 to 1,200 with formative polychrome period from about 200—300 to 500 and a "Conquest-Occupational" period after the year 1,200 of undeterminable time, but believed to be a relatively brief period.

Following the invasion and conquest, I believe one of two things could have happened: the occupation of Coclé for a brief period (of years?); or, general destruction and looting followed by the withdrawal of the Veraguans in a relatively short time. During this undetermined period of occupancy which could have lasted up to a generation or two, several Veraguans chiefs or leaders of importance, died, or had been killed in battle and been buried in the Rio Grande cemetery (Sitio Conte) in graves later to be designated as Late Period grave No. 5 and 26 (Lothrop 1939, 1942). In those graves were placed the exquisite artifacts of clay and bone and gold that the Veraguans had brought with them to Coclé. It should be kept in mind, that all of the Sitio Conte cemetery has still not been excavated and the possibility exists that other Veraguas graves may yet be found. Also, following the conquest, some of the Veraguan chiefs returned home, taking with them Coclé artifacts many of which are now being excavated in graves in the Province of Veraguas. One Veraguas grave has been found in another Coclé burial ground (Dade 1960) in a cemetery where both Early Coclé and period of decline pottery was also found.

Lothrop's "later phases", we repeat, are simply the imposition of western Veraguas over the Coclé culture. For this reason, there are no differences between Late Coclé and Veraguas artifacts, since both cultures are one and the same.

Following this invasion and eventual withdrawal, the art of Veraguas continued to develop for approximately 300 more years, reaching extraordinary heights of artistry before it too was destroyed. The Coclesanos met their end at the hands of their fellows. The Veraguans, in the pattern to be repeated viciously throughout the

Americas, met theirs at the hands of the Spanish Conquistadores (1516—1530).

Writers have claimed that *Peno Nome* are two words meaning, "Nome died here" or, "Nome rests here". Total nonsense. The individual's name, chief or high priest, was *Penonomé* and he was the religious leader and chief of an area in *Coclé*, extending between the modern towns of (perhaps) *Antón*, 85 miles from *Panamá* city, to at least about *Natá*, 120 miles from *Panamá*, or even what appears most likely as far west at the natural boundary of the great *Santa Maria* River, 135 miles from *Panamá*. All distances measured on the *Inter-American Highway*. I would judge about forty miles east and west in a straight line, from *Anton* to the *Santa Maria* River, from the *Pacific Ocean* to the *Central Cordillera*.

The inhabitants of *Coclé* were of a different fibre from those of *Veraguas* and *Azuero*, whose leaders, *Parita*, *Guararé*, *Esqueguá* and especially the great chief *Urracá* were fighting chiefs all, among the most fierce in the *New World*, as the Spaniards were to discover for themselves later, to their dismay.

If not fighting men, what were the people of *Coclé*? They were priests, *sacerdotes*, *religiosos*. The center of the evolving and rapidly developing religious structure on the *Isthmus* was at *El Caño* in the *Penonomé* fiefdom. Was *Penonomé* the High Priest? Did he try to extend his influence and religious authority from the *El Caño Temple* to the west? Did he thus overreach himself and bring down on his people and his own head the devastating wrath and power of the warrior tribes of *Veraguas*?

Well, that is what I believe happened and what *Lothrop* hinted was a possibility (1942:253). *Lothrop* thought the invasion came from a close-by ancestor of *Nata*, who "... defeated the ruler of the *Sitio Conte*, seized his political power and wealth and thereafter kept his vanquished foes in poverty." This is hardly likely for two reasons. First, I believe that the ancestors of *Natá* were also under the influence and leadership of *Penonomé*. The distance between the modern towns of *Natá* and *Penonomé* is only twenty miles. They were part of *Coclé* and *Penonomé*. Secondary is the finding of the *Late Period Coclé* graves. These graves are all about midway between *Nata* and *Penonomé* in the *Coclé River* and *Rio Grande River* areas with the *El Caño Temple* site close by.

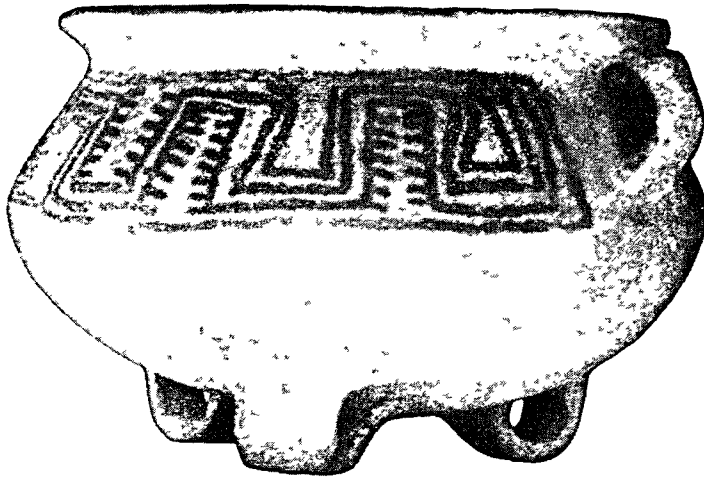


Fig. 4—Extremely rare Veraguas loop-leg with painted design on outside (only) and with figured handles. This is the highest type developed in the loopleg ceramic form in my judgment. A superb specimen. H. 4"; W. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; M. 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

Certainly the Conquistadores never heard about the rich (Sitio Conte) burial site on the Rio Grande or most assuredly they would have looted it. To quote Lothrop: "Espinosa gives the names of eleven chiefs who were vassals of Natá but the settlement we discovered was so unimportant in the Sixteenth Century that the Spaniards left no record of it (P. 252). Between 1516 and 1530 the Spaniards fought with both Natá and Chame several times, but apparently at that late date there was no personality, nor settlement of any note between the lands of those two chiefs.

The Veraguans were thorough. In their drive to the East, they eventually reached the great temple at El Caño and leveled it to the ground (Verrill 1927). They smashed and broke up the monolithic idols and pillars (carved mainly from basalt columns hauled in from a natural out-cropping near Divisa, about 25 miles west of the temple site on the Coclé side of the Santa Maria River). They swept through the tribes living between the river and the Rio Grande complex (Rio Grande, Rio Chico, Rio El Caño, and Rio Coclé which flow to the south and join to become a delta that empties into the Pacific ocean). And they eventually reached the homesite of

Penonomé and did away with him and his people. And that was the end of the Coclé Early Period.

The El Caño Temple is so important to this thesis, that a brief quotation from Verrill, its discoverer would not be amiss here. I do not intend to describe the Temple as such. It was too well done by Verrill and by Lothrop (1937:31). I am more interested in its destruction. Verrill found the monolithic statues with the heads knocked off and pottery smashed by stones still in situ (in 1925). He said, "There appears to be little doubt that the people who left these remains were either destroyed or driven off by violent eruptions and accompanying earthquakes" (p. 60). He indicated the stark profile of Cerro Guacamaya in the north which, it is undoubtedly true, is not only known as El Volcán de Guacamaya, but also looks like an extinct colcano, and probably is.

Verrill goes on to say, "Many of the largest columns have been broken squarely off and their parts tossed about, sometimes many yards from the bases, and up-ended . . . figures were found completely inverted, and the upper half of a large central column had been broken in three sections which had been thrown in different directions . . .".

This wanton, vicious, violent destruction points to nothing so much as the type of activity that an invading army bent on total war, would indulge itself in.

CONCLUSION

There is no reason to believe that the Azuero-Veraguan and the Coclean people could not have existed peacefully side-by-side for many centuries, especially since the Cocleans were a peaceful people content to remain within their own boundaries. Such contact would not necessarily entail any imposition, alteration, or even any dramatic influence of the arts and skills of one complex upon the other. Evidence seems to indicate that neither did do so.

It is true that their respective ceramic art forms and painted designs show some minor common thinking (see next below). The finding of Coclé artifacts especially ceramics, in tombs in the Province of Veraguas appears to show that while the Veraguans accept-

ed the art of their Coclé neighbors for its worth, and obviously appreciated it enough to want to take samples of it into the next life with them, they did not adopt the art forms for themselves. I know of only a few pieces of pottery among the many thousands I have seen where the art forms of both cultures are combined: a Coclé snake on a Veraguas pedestal plate; a Veraguas loop-leg bowl made in Coclé; a Coclé starfish on a Veraguas pedestal plate. These are minor and rare adaptations. *Never* does one find a Coclé ring-base plate or bowl or carafe made in Veraguas or a Veraguas pedestal plate or any artifact with the coral snake rim decoration, made in Coclé. Each is made in its own home site with its own distinctive clay, and both are found within the cultural boundaries of the other.

There are some combinations in design. The Coclé Y-C collar is found on Veraguas bowls; the Y-plus-the-claw and Y-multiple-claw designs is found on Azuero-Parita and Veraguas pottery (Lothrop Figs. 191c, 192, 194) the “Y” being the Coclé contribution.

In most instances it is difficult to confuse the two art forms. This was dramatically brought out by Lothrop’s exclamation when, while still digging in the field at Sitio Conte, he found the Veraguas artifacts in Graves 5 and 26: “But this is different. I’ve never seen anything like this before”. (Lothrop, E. 1948:207).

Lothrop immediately recognized the new style of pottery in Grave 26. He was the *first* to wade through a mass of never-seen-before ceramics, the magnificent primitive art of the Coclé Early period. He then and there demonstrated his genius by distinguishing and identifying at once, still another never-seen-before ceramic style and forms recognized as “exotic” and “foreign” when contrasted to the ceramics he had found there up to that time. What to call it? He had no way of knowing of the superb polychrome in the still undiscovered graves in Veraguas—artifacts which would not become known to the world for another two decades. Yet he had no trouble at all differentiating between the true Coclé black line wares from the exotic and/or strange black line wares (pps. 124—128) all now known to be Parita and Veraguas pottery (to me at least). And who can criticize if he became confused between red line bowls with exterior decorations (Coclé mainly) and red line bowls with interior decoration (Veraguas mainly). Exception—exterior red line decoration on *loop-leg* ceramics are also Veraguan.

By some individuality of reasoning, the Veraguan and Azuero-Parita Indians in their burial ceremonies, did *not* find it necessary to "kill" the tributary offerings as did the Coclesanos at *Sitio Conte* (mainly by trampling). This was not universally practiced even in Coclé, and the proximity of *Sitio Conte* to the El Caño Temple might have had something to do with this killing ceremony, which could have been part of a religious observance (Verrill 1927:56, 57). Gold artifacts from Veraguas are known which have been killed by hammering. I have seen several of these. But this is a comparatively rare practice and was *never* followed in Azuero-Parita graves to my knowledge. Ceramic offerings in *all* the Veraguas and Azuero-Parita graves were almost always carefully placed intact in the graves and the personal adornments were left undamaged on the bodies of the dead (Dade 1959: Fig. 5).

At *Sitio Conte* the practice of killing the artifacts was general in practically all graves with one outstanding exception, Burial No. 26 (the Veraguas burial) of which Lothrop says, "... and owing to the fact that the funeral offerings had *not* been trampled..." (1939: 274). As a result of this practice, intact and perfect Early period Coclé ceramics are extremely rare. Those now known in museums and in private collections come mostly from Veraguas, mainly from the wonderfully fruitful Rio de Jesús circle (Dade 1970) and from lesser (and less sacred?) burial sites in Coclé Province. Some lovely Early Period Coclé plates were found in a burial site called "Las Panamá" in the Rio de Jesús district of Veraguas Province (Dade 1970) (Abrams fig. 546, 9, 551, 3). These are the earliest Coclé polychromes.

Lothrop assigned loop-leg ceramics to the Late Period (p. 133). Loop-legs are almost exclusively a Veraguan idiosyncrasy and I know actually of only one specimen in the scores I have seen, where the artifact was actually made in Coclé. It was excavated in the Rio Coclé area (Dade 1960). The explanation is really simple. The piece is typical of the period "period of decline" and was made long after the termination of both the Early and "Late" Coclé periods when the surviving Coclesanos had had ample opportunity to copy Veraguas artifacts. Identical loop-leg forms are found throughout the vast Province of Veraguas turned out by the hundreds by hundreds of artisans. It is the exceptional Veraguas grave that does not have at

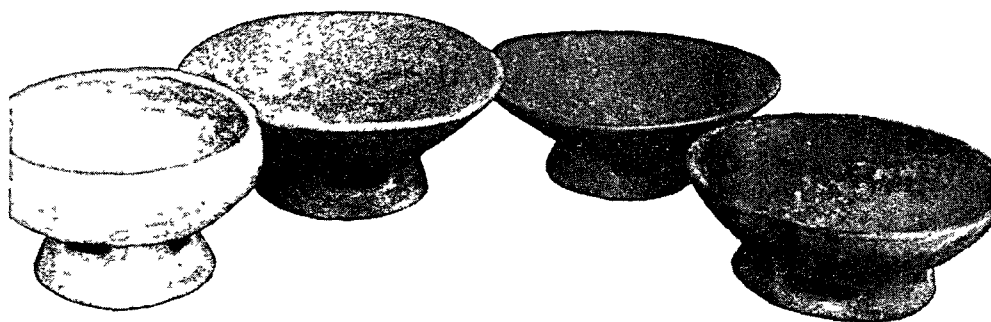


Fig. 5—Four examples of the Veraguas “crown base” (taxonomy—the author’s). In terms of frequency, Veraguas pottery is most common in the roundbottom form—without a base of any kind. Next in frequency comes the pedestal plate, both tall and short pedestals in both buff ware and polychrome. The pedestals may be completely unadorned; with incised or punctate designs or both; with cut-out triangles, or hollow rattle bases filled with clay pellets. Next most common are the loop-legs, then the crown base, the last exclusively in unpainted ware. Those illustrated here run from 9 inches wide to wider and average 5 inches high.

least one of these specimens which are outstanding examples of a pure Veraguan trait (Dade 1970).

One simply cannot avoid the conclusions that follow an analysis of the different art forms in the several clearly defined cultural areas. These are the Azuero-Parita-Veraguas trade marks: The pedestal plate with coral snake rim; the sting-ray mainly on pedestal plates of all sizes; the alligators and crocodiles in their many styles and forms and ultimately in stylized designs on pedestal plates and bowls of all sizes; bird effigy pottery; geometric patterns also on pedestal plates and bowls of all sizes. The predominance of these designs in certain areas and perhaps what is more important, the absence or scarcity of certain art forms in the several areas, is clearly indicative of local foci of artistic invention and development. (For further “trade marks” see Dade 1961).

It is necessary at this point to recall my own statements anent humpbacks in Coclé (Dade 1959, 1968). Humpbacks were found by Lothrop in Graves 5 and 26 *and he found humpbacks in no other graves.*

Also fabricated of the white clay of Coclé are the spectacular two piece turtle effigies found mainly in Graves 5 and 26 (fig. 208).

I have not seen anything exactly similar from Azuero-Parita although I have seen from that site dozens of one-piece turtle effigies in both polychrome and black-and-white, mostly in small to miniature size. This is true of head effigy covers in general (Lothrop 1942: fig. 206).

Several ceramic heads without bodies have been found in Veraguas from the Soná area. While two-piece ceramics are most uncommon anywhere in Panamá, they are found in Azuero more frequently than elsewhere (Mitchell-Acker 1961) Plate VIIa all of which jars take the polychrome covers illustrated in Plate VIII c, d, e, f. g). Other small effigy head covers were found in the Juan Calderón site. This form is known as far away as Chiriquí (Holmes fig. 221—223: MacCurdy fig. 247—249).

There can be only one logical conclusion for these unique artifacts and art forms in these two "Late Period" graves. They were made by Veraguan craftsmen in Coclé, specifically for those important interments. They are ceremonial and unused and were interred in these very important intrusive Veraguan graves by Veraguans and have no connection with the local Coclé culture and adjoining Coclé burials.

To summarize, let me propose the following, much of which is based on considerable visual evidence, a few carbon-14 dates, analysis of clays, pottery forms and painted designs; logic; personal observation and experience in the field; and, I confess a bit of speculation, conjecture, and fantasy.

1)—The one actually established cultural period in Coclé, is the Early Period which I estimate extended from the year 500 to 1,200 A.D. approximately 700 years, give or take a generation or two at either end but which, nevertheless is still admittedly a good, long span.

2)—The so-called "Late Period" in Coclé is a period of occupancy of unknown duration by conquering westerners, the Veraguans. This conquest and occupancy occurred about the year 1,200 and resulted in the almost complete eradication to all practical and artistic purposes of the Coclé culture (Sitio Conte-Rio Grande-Penonomé).

3)—The Veraguans left behind in the Sitio Conte graves on the Rio Grande, gold, carved bone and ceramic artifacts as evidence of their conquest and brief sojourn there. These graves are now errone-



Fig. 6—Two miniature pedestal plates and one small annular base from Azuero—Las Arenas. All show the simple Y-claw design and the coral snake rim, both unquestionably Azuero-Veraguas features in polychrome pottery. (These are four-color ware; white, black, red, and purple). The smallest is 2½ inches high and 3 inches in diameter, the others in scale.

ously called “Late Period” burials but are actually ceremonial interments by and for the Veraguans themselves and have nothing in common with the Coclesanos, except a shared cemetery.

4)—The “short period of decline” of the Coclé culture is in fact a resettlement and reoccupation of the Penonomé area by impoverished remainders and immediate descendants of the defeated Coclé Tribes. These people had few cultural accomplishments. They were neither warriors, nor craftsmen, but simple peasants with little artistic skill, always remembering that a scattered, disorganized remnant of a people such as they were, had little or no reason to fabricate, design, or paint fine funerary offerings for ceremonial burials. There were no more ceremonial burials—there were no more chiefs, high priests or great warriors. Their pottery consisted of simple buff ware, unpainted or two-color ware, red on white, or simple finger painting, red on white slip. They had no jewelry or personal decorations to bury, only their pottery, mainly miniatures, and these they did inter with their dead, in shallow bath-tub burials, cut into the hard, white sandy clay of Coclé, or in shallow secondary urn burials (Dade 1960).

5)—The so-called “Late Period Coclé” artifacts found in tombs in Veraguas Province are in reality Veraguas artifacts found in Veraguas

graves, which is fitting and proper. "Late Period Coclé" and Veraguas ceramics are one and the same, namely Veraguan. They did *not* exist side-by-side or one after the other, either temporarily or spatially. It is just the one Veraguas culture, unique, highly developed, broad in scope, easily identified. Conversely, true Coclé ceramics found in Veraguas graves are *all* from the Coclé Early Period, and are indeed uniquely Coclé. My opinion is that some of these artifacts actually were very early trade pieces and were buried as they were acquired during the preceding centuries. Others were booty taken from Coclé after the war and thus were interred between the years 1,200 and the Spanish Conquest.

6)—The Temple (Verrill) in El Caño, existed and functioned as a religious center in Coclé. However, it was not destroyed by a cataclysmic act of nature as Verrill thought, but by an equally cataclysmic act of ferocious mankind.

7)—Penonomé was the High Priest and spiritual leader (and probably temporal as well) over the Coclé tribes. He probably lost his fiefdom and his head at the same time, at the hands of the Veraguan warriors.

8)—The Azuero Peninsula and Veraguas are in fact great foci of Pre-Hispanic art, the latter at the end far surpassing in excellence either Coclé or Azuero. The Azuero Peninsula is most likely hiding in its obscure southern mountain slopes and almost inaccessible waterfront still one more splendid artistic focus—the Tonosí culture, only now (in 1969—1970) brought to light (Panamá Newspaper "The Panamá American issue of September 26, 1969").

9)—The political boundaries of today appear to approximate the cultural boundaries of yesteryear: the great Rio Santa Maria divides the Coclesanos from the Veraguans and the Azuero tribes; the Rio Parita divides the Azuero tribes from the Veraguans; and the Rio Tabasará separates the Veraguans from the Chiricanos.

10)—Lothrop fails to explain the missing *time* between the Early Period and the Late Period which latter simply could not have leaped full blown on the scene like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. There is no unaccountable time. The Early Period ended with the Veraguan conquest, about the year 1,200 and the Veraguan culture (Late Period) was simultaneously superimposed. No time gap. Thus, efforts to establish a time gap based on changes in style

and design are bound to be fallacious when the motifs are classical ones unquestionably related to individualistic and separate tribal cultures.

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SUMMARY

In this paper I will attempt to establish the relationship that existed between the major Pre-Colombian cultures of the Central Provinces of the Republic of Panamá, including Veraguas; and, to propose a new concept of the origins and influences of these cultures one on the other. My proof is based mainly on recent ceramic finds (from 1959 to 1969) in the Azuero Peninsula and Veraguas; and my analysis of art styles and painted design forms, pottery shapes and clays. In presenting my theory of the rise, fall, and disappearance of the Rio

Grande-Coclé culture, I am rewriting a sentence or two of local history, and give my opinion of what could have happened in this small corner of the Americas over a period included between the Fourth and Sixteenth Centuries.

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This article is the third and concluding study by the author in his attempt to propose a solution to some of the still uninvolved mysteries of Panamanian archaeology. The two preceding articles are: "The Provenience of Polychrome Pottery in Panamá", published in *ETHNOS*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1961; and, "Veraguas, Heartland of Panama's pre-Colombian Art", *ETHNOS*, Vol. 35, No. 1—4, 1970.