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HANDBOOK  
OF  
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS

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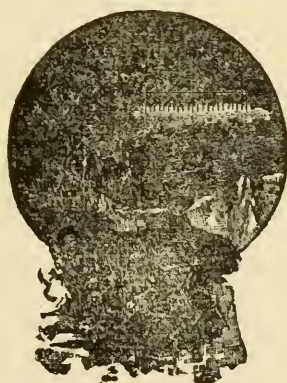
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Volume 4

THE CIRCUM-CARIBBEAN TRIBES

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# THE ARCHEOLOGY OF COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA

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By WM. DUNCAN STRONG

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## INTRODUCTION

As is true of most of Central America, only the most obvious or generalized archeological provinces have as yet been distinguished in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. (See map 3.) To date, demonstrated culture sequences are unknown; hence, it is impossible further to subdivide these larger areas into those which existed during successive periods prior to the Conquest. For present purposes we shall, therefore, take Lothrop's two main archeological areas (1926 b, vol. 1, fig. 1, p. xxv), the Pacific region and the Highland region, and add to these another region that is even less known, the Eastern Coastal Plain. In general, the Pacific region, as considered here, includes what Johnson (p. 44) has designated as the Pacific Borderlands. It includes also the Nicoya Peninsula, which, from a strictly geographic standpoint, can also be included with the Southern Highland area. Too little detailed information is available to tell whether the Boruca area belongs archeologically with the Highland or the Pacific region. For present purposes it is included with the latter. In regard to the Pacific region it is known to be archeologically rich, but, with one exception, it has as yet received little systematic excavation. The Highland region in Costa Rica is fairly well known, since it includes the thickly inhabited "Meseta central." However, as Lothrop pointed out in 1926, we have to thank Hartman for the only published scientific excavation work in either the Pacific or the Highland region. Unfortunately, in 1946, this strange state of affairs is still true. As regards the Eastern Coast Plain, which from the archeological standpoint apparently includes the Nicaraguan Lowland, this vast jungle area is still largely unexplored scientifically; hence, very little can be said about it.

The names and locations, as well as a brief sketch of the history of Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, and other Central American tribes, have already been presented (pp. 49-64). The distribution of native culture types in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, etc., at the time of the Conquest is discussed at considerable length in a subsequent section (pp. 185-193). Here we shall confine our treatment to a description of the archeological remains

themselves, making use of tribal names only in the few cases where the association between ethnological and archeological materials or horizons has been demonstrated on a sound historical basis. Such exact correlations are highly to be desired but are lamentably rare in Central America. On the other hand, numerous correlations between historic tribes and archeological remains have been suggested, and certain of these will be mentioned subsequently, taking care to distinguish the few proved ethnoarcheological associations from those that seem probable or merely possible. Since the admirable archeological summary of Costa Rica and Nicaragua by Lothrop (1926 b, vols. 1, 2) has not yet been superseded, this work forms the basis of much of the present outline and should be consulted for further details, particularly concerning ceramics, lists of sites, and general bibliography. The present account adds certain more recent findings and interpretations.

#### THE PACIFIC REGION

**Surface structures.**—The prehistoric structures of Costa Rica and Nicaragua are not particularly striking. In the Pacific region flat-topped mounds of earth and stone occur, often surmounted or surrounded by stone statues. There are no records or evidences of temples on such mounds. According to historic accounts, mounds stood in the temple courtyards. The irregular arrangement of mounds and statues in the Pacific region is indicated by an example from Zapatero Island, Nicaragua (fig. 16). Mounds of stone that are presumably domiciliary reach a size of 200 feet (60 m.) in length, 60 feet (18 m.) in width, and 10 feet (3 m.) in height. Small, low mounds of earth and stone are more common. Many of these are apparently raised house sites. Small circular mounds 20 to 40 feet (6 to 12 m.) in diameter were also used for burial and, in some cases, a short stone column with or without carving surmounted the mound. On Ometepe Island in Lake Nicaragua burial mounds are surrounded by a ring formed of stone slabs set on end. Refuse heaps, often of large size and considerable depth such as that at Filadelfia, are reported. A number of these appear to be rich in potsherds and should offer excellent stratigraphic possibilities. (See Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 2, List of sites, p. 421 et seq.). Shell mounds occur at several places on the coast of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Stone "dump heaps" or "quarries" marked by incomplete stone statues, seats, and metates are reported in the Terraba Plain, and an extensive flint quarry or workshop at Tablón, Nicaragua.

**Stone statues.**—The stone statues of the Pacific region are well known and occur both with mounds and in isolation. They range roughly from 4 to 12 feet (1.2 to 3.6 m.) in height and represent human beings, animals, or both (pl. 13 and fig. 17). Examples from the Nicaraguan lake region are among the most striking. Stone statues of the Pacific



FIGURE 16.—Mounds on Zapatero Island, Nicaragua. (After Bovallius, 1886.)





FIGURE 17.—Stone sculptures from Costa Rica and Nicaragua. *a*, Human figure, Copelito, Nicaragua (height approximately 5 ft. (1.50 m.)). *b*, Human figure with "alter ego" motif, Nacasola, Costa Rica (height approximately 8 ft. (2.40 m.)). *c*, Human figure, El Silencio, Nicaragua (height approximately 5 ft. (1.50 m.)). *d*, Human figure from Copelito (height approximately 4 ft. 6 in. (1.37 m.)). *e*, Human figure, La Libertad, Nicaragua (height approximately 5 ft. 4 in. (1.63 m.)). (After Richardson, 1940, figs. 39, 38; *b*, after Cabrera, 1924.)

region usually have a columnar base, often with a simple capital on which the figure rests. One common type, suggesting the "alter ego" or guardian-spirit motif, is a human figure seated or standing, carrying on the shoulders or over the head an alligator or other animal. Sometimes the head of the human figure is enclosed in the jaws of this animal. Characteristically, in the lake region this animal head is huge. Other types of human figures have gorgets on the breast or held in the hand, have tenons on top of the head, or have the lower part of the face covered by a mask suggesting the bill of a duck or other bird. Recently a unique type of columnar human statue with elaborate low relief carving has been reported from the western slopes of the Cordillera east of Lakes Managua and Nicaragua (Richardson, 1940). In a subsequent article (Stone, this volume, pp. 173-174) cruder human and animal statues (often with peg bases) and small groups of large stone balls from the Terraba Plain are described. In addition to the large statues and realistically carved human figures, a wide variety of elaborately carved jade and other stone celt-shaped pendants occurs. Large numbers of these have been recovered from graves on the Nicoya Peninsula (fig. 21). (See Hartman, 1901, 1907.)

Regarding the stylistic and temporal affiliations, particularly of the larger statues, there has been much discussion but as yet little agreement (compare Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 1, p. 93, with Richardson, 1940, pp. 412-416.) The styles are highly distinctive and seem of local or perhaps of more southerly origin, but whether certain types are ancient and underlie *Maya* horizons to the north, as Lothrop believes they do, or are late and possibly associated with post-Conquest materials, as Richardson believes possible, must await systematic excavation and correlation in the area. Certainly the majority of larger statues in the Pacific region seem very distinct from *Mayan*, *Nahuatl*, or other northern forms and suggest South American rather than northern relationships. The stylistic relationship of the numerous petroglyphs carved on boulders with designs ranging from simple and realistic to complex and highly conventionalized figures also remains to be determined by more comprehensive study.

**Burial.**—Burial methods in the Pacific region of Costa Rica and Nicaragua include the use of urns, cremation, and inhumation. Three types of urns were used: boot-shaped, circular, and boat-shaped. Both articulated and disarticulated bodies occur in urns as well as the ashes of cremated bodies. Urn burials are reported from many coastal sites (see Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 1, p. 97). Inhumation, often in mounds, was practiced in all parts of the Nicaragua region and was almost universal in Nicoya. Preservation of osseous material is very bad, but where determination is possible secondary or bundle burials seem most common. An example of unmarked grave arrangements at the well-known site of Las Guacas on the Nicoya Peninsula is characteristic (fig. 18). At

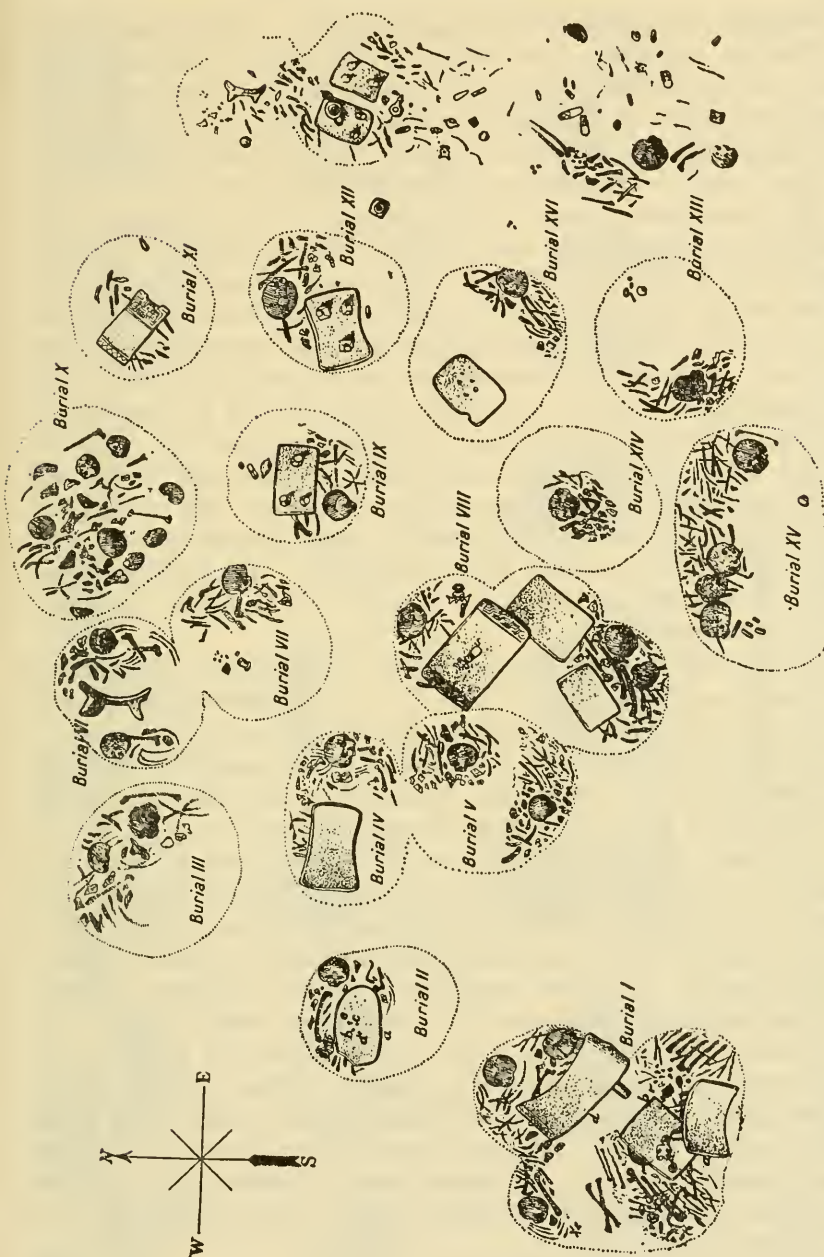


FIGURE 18.—Burials at Las Guacas, Costa Rica. (After Hartman, 1907.)

Bagaces in Costa Rica and other more northerly sites graves are marked by four stone columns at the corners. This corresponds to a grave type found in the Chiriquí<sup>1</sup> region.

<sup>1</sup> Chiriquí is used here as the designation of an archeological area and does not refer to the Chiriquí tribe, which may or may not have left the archeological remains in the region.

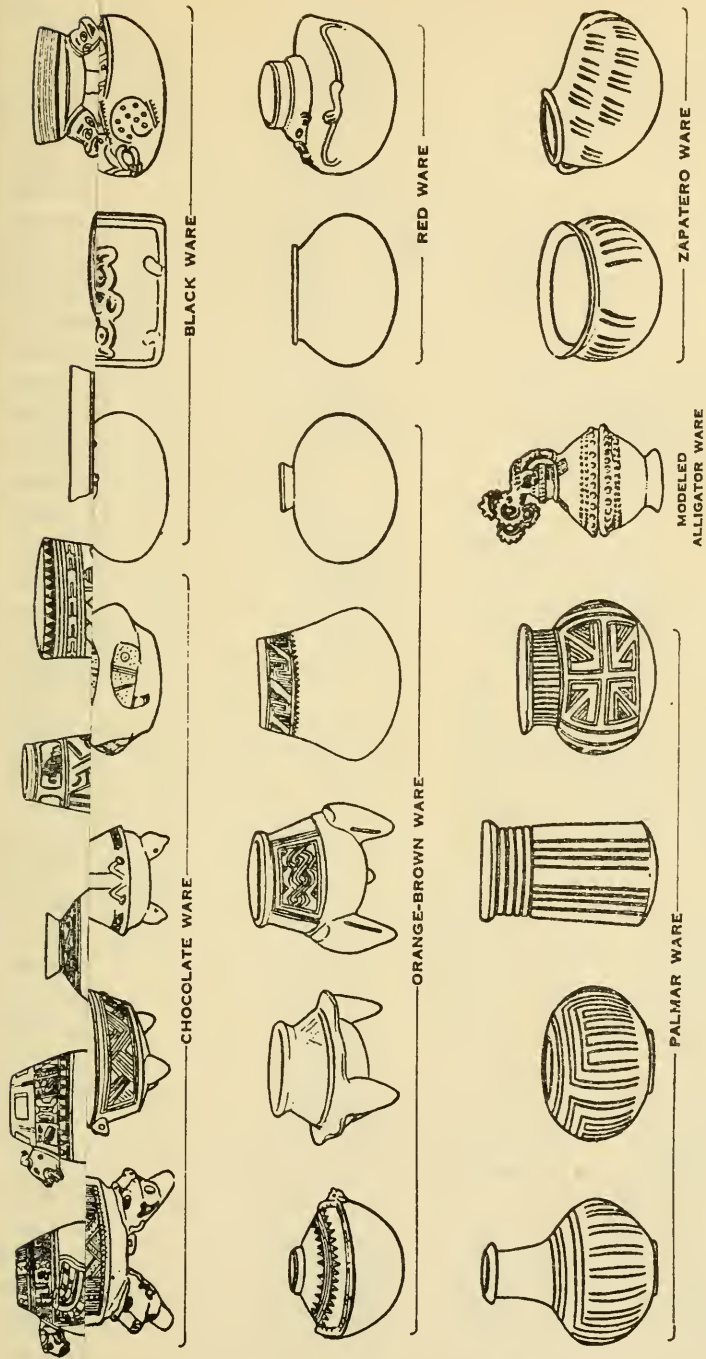


**Ceramics.**—According to Lothrop (1926 b, vol. 1, p. 105), the ceramics of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, despite borrowing and blending on the borders, form a unit when compared to pottery from the *Maya* and *Lenca* areas to the north or the Chiriquí region to the south. Certainly the finer, particularly the polychrome, vessels from this region are distinctive, but recent work in Honduras and in southwestern Costa Rica indicates that the monochrome wares of Chiriquí, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and northwestern Honduras have many characteristics in common. Lothrop's detailed study (1926 b, vols. 1, 2) is largely based on museum collections, and recent field work indicates that here selection of finer, showier pieces has led to undue emphasis on polychrome and elaborate pieces as opposed to the much more abundant monochrome and simpler vessel types. This is pointed out by Stone (this volume), but it must be remembered that Stone is particularly referring to southwestern Costa Rica, whereas the most abundant polychrome pottery seems to come from Nicoya and western Nicaragua. Lothrop's analysis of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan pottery is still the most complete available; hence, with the above warnings pointed out, it will be very briefly outlined here. For full description, analysis, and illustration, the reader is referred to Lothrop's beautifully illustrated volumes.

The two main ceramic divisions in the Pacific region comprise the Polychrome and Monochrome Wares. The most important Polychrome group has been designated Nicoya Polychrome. (For a synoptic presentation of ceramic groups, see fig. 19.) Nicoya Polychrome Ware has been found from the Nicoya Peninsula to Fonseca Bay but is especially typical of southwestern Nicaragua and northwestern Costa Rica. As is true of other groups, briefly mentioned here, it includes numerous styles and types which await more detailed classification. Common Nicoya Polychrome vessels are egg or pear-shaped jars, set on annular bases or tripod legs, and tripod bowls supported by animal-head legs. Animal effigy jars are also common. The finest vessels are elaborate and brightly painted.

Painted designs are of various colors outlined in black. It is the perhaps unwarranted impression of the present writer that the use of a white or light background color is particularly striking on many pieces. Designs appear to be geometric and when analyzed usually prove to be conventionalized animals. Modeled vessels represent the turkey, macaw, jaguar, monkey, armadillo, and human head. Painted animals include man, jaguar, plumed serpent, 2-headed dragon, monkey, crab scorpion, and alligator.

Under-slip Incised Ware is a second Polychrome group. The design here has been incised prior to application of the slip through which it is visible. In addition, this ware is decorated with painted designs in Nicoya Polychrome style. Motifs include the earth monster, feathered serpent and its derivatives, as well as simple geometric forms. In 1926 the known



MONOCHROME WARES

FIGURE 19.—Costa Rican and Nicaraguan pottery of the Pacific area. Forms and decorative motifs. (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pl. 193.)  
 (Face p. 126)







distribution of this ware extended from the Nicoya Peninsula to Lake Nicaragua, and similar types were reported from near Veracruz in México.

The third main Polychrome group is Luna Ware, reported from northern Guanacaste (Costa Rica) to north-central Nicaragua but appearing to center on the islands of Lake Nicaragua. A creamy-white slip on which patterns are painted in thin-line technique is its most striking characteristic. Bowls supported by annular bases or tripod legs are almost the only forms represented. Designs are almost entirely derived from those on Nicoya Polychrome Ware. Life motifs are more limited and until analyzed appear to be purely geometric.

Intermediate between the Polychrome and Monochrome groups are three wares which are decorated chiefly by incising. The first, Managua ware, is limited in distribution almost entirely to the district between the two great Nicaraguan lakes. Its characteristic shape is a flaring rimmed bowl supported by solid tripod legs. Painted designs are either plumed serpent or apparently allied bird designs. The incised designs, often found on bowl floors, suggest *Astec* "pepper grater" bowls. Nandaimé Ware has a distinct red slip but is allied with the Polychrome Wares by its modeled and painted decorations. One Nandaimé type has bulbous tripod legs and incised designs on the vessel floor. It is reported from central Guanacaste north along the Pacific probably to Fonseca Bay. Nicoya Black-line Ware seems to be found mainly in central Guanacaste. It may have a red or white slip, or no slip at all. Modeled forms are those of the Monochrome Ware series, and painted designs are either distinctive or are taken from the Polychrome group.

The Monochrome Wares are distinctive in regard to shape, color, and methods of decoration. Of the seven in this group the first four—Chocolate, Black, Orange-Brown, and Red Wares—are named from the color of their slips. Their decorations are modeled and incised. White paint is often rubbed into the incised design. Incised designs are usually geometric though some life forms occur. Motifs are built up through combinations of geometric units. Effigy vessels are very common, and modeled heads and other features are applied to the outer walls in the same fashion as in the Polychrome Wares. Life forms include the human figure, alligator (and alligator "god"), great horned owl, monkey, turtle, jaguar, armadillo, and snake (rare).

The other three Monochrome Wares are designated Palmar, Modeled Alligator, and Zapatero. Palmar Ware is a local ceramic group distinguished by simple patterns made with a broad incised line. This design is emphasized by touches of red paint. Modeled Alligator Ware is made of coarse unslipped clay. There is usually a cover on which is a modeled alligator. The sides of the cover and the base are adorned with lumps representing alligator scutes. Zapatero Ware includes large burial urns and smaller related forms. It, too, is composed of coarse clay, but the

outer surface is usually polished and often decorated with broad red lines and small modeled figures of distinctive types.

Most if not all of the Pacific region ceramic wares are represented by a variety of other pottery artifacts, of which figurines and whistles are most abundant. These in many cases are synonymous. Nicoya Polychrome figurines are particularly interesting, since they represent a seated spread-legged type with "coffee-bean eyes." Lothrop takes issue with Spinden on the grounds that this apparently late type could hardly be directly related to those of the Archaic or Middle Cultures of the Valley of México. Nicoya Polychrome figurines are mold-made. Those of other wares are apparently both of mold-made and hand-modeled types. Figurines seated on elaborate stools are an interesting form. Zapatero Ware figurine forms, notably a howling dog and an old person with a container on her back (Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 2, p. 273), are obviously related to Uluá River specimens in Honduras (compare Strong, Kidder, and Paul, 1938, fig. 7, *c, g, h, r*). Pottery drums, clay rattles, miniature vessels, painted and incised spindle whorls and cylindrical stamps all occur. Clay labrets are abundant. Similar forms of jade are found on the Nicoya Peninsula, but the Chiriquí gold type appears to be lacking. Two possible snuff tubes are on record, but tobacco pipes seem to be lacking. Since we lack temporal or other significant classifications for these interesting ceramic forms they need only be mentioned here. For further details the reader is referred to Lothrop (1926 b, vol. 2, pp. 258-282) and Hartman (1907).

In regard to the apparent great predominance of Monochrome Wares in the southern portion of the Pacific region, the reader is referred to a subsequent article (this volume, p. 187; also Stone, 1943, p. 80). As indicated previously, the center of distribution of most of the Polychrome Wares would seem to be the coastal and lake areas of Nicoya and western Nicaragua. Obviously, the decorative styles and techniques of many of these wares or types merge, but only many careful distributional and stratigraphic studies can hope to work out their exact spatial and temporal relationship one to another. Such studies still remain to be accomplished in the field.

**Metallurgy and jade work.**—Work in metal does not seem to be abundant in the Pacific region. Goldwork is rare and when found appears to be of the simpler Chiriquí forms. Jade, on the other hand, if we use the term in its broadest sense, seems to have been used extensively, as indicated by the findings of Hartman and others on the Nicoya Peninsula. Lehmann (1910) among others, has suggested that in certain areas of Middle America predominant interest in jade or greenstone seems to preclude an interest in the working of gold.

**Stonework.**—In regard to stonework, despite the account of flint quarries where the Indians of Subtiaba are said to have made arrowheads as

late as 1890 (Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 2, p. 435), very few chipped artifacts are recorded. Hartman (1907, pl. 32, No. 7) figures one large, stemmed point. The most elaborate of the ground-stone artifact types is the ceremonial metate from the Nicoya region (pl. 13, *f, g*). This is characterized by three legs in contrast to the 4-legged form of the Highland and Chiriquí regions. Hartman notes that the Nicoyan metates have either triangular or circular legs. Both types are elaborately decorated, the former with a projecting animal head and geometric patterns; the latter is usually larger and has animal decorative patterns. Manos, or grinding stones, are larger than the width of the metate. A stirrup-shaped grinding stone, with an ornamental handle, is an interesting form (fig. 20, *left*). The full function of these very elaborate metates is unknown.

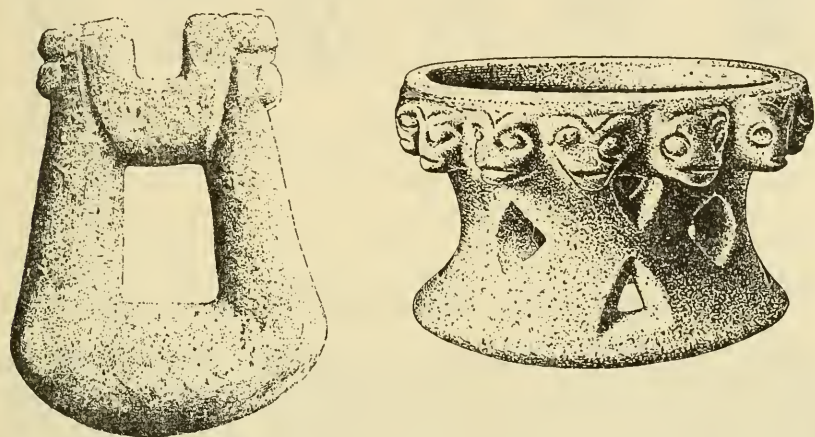


FIGURE 20.—Costa Rican stonework. *Left*: Stirrup pestle. *Right*: Stone stand, Las Mercedes (diameter of stand, 6 in. (15.2 cm.)). (After Lothrop, 1926 b, figs. 16 and 259.)

Quite possibly they were used as seats. Simple legless forms were probably used for ordinary household purposes on the Pacific, as seems to have been the case in the Highlands. The elaborate, legged metate type, representing a decorative peak for the Americas in this regard, occurs south in the Chiriquí region and north into central and eastern Honduras.

Maces or club heads of stone are very typical in Nicoya graves (pl. 14, *a, b*). Hartman classifies these as having human, mammal, and bird heads; as representing two-legged monsters or alligators; or as round or star-shaped. The latter forms, including mammiform heads, have a wide distribution both to the north and south.

Bark beaters of stone are of two types (pl. 14, *d, e*). One of these is a flat disk, grooved around the edges for attaching a handle, and ridged on the two flat surfaces. The other is cylindrical, with the enlarged end ridged and the smaller end serving as a handle. The disk type, as Lothrop



points out, is widely distributed, occurring in various parts of México, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Colombia. Both types occur in Honduras (Strong, 1935, pl. 16, *k-m*). In México and in Honduras certain primitive tribes now use a hardwood club similar to the cylindrical stone form. Polished celts of amygdaloid and oval shape occur, and chipped double-bladed as well as T-shaped chipped axes are common (pl. 14, *h*). Monolithic, ground-stone, double-bladed axes (pl. 14, *f, g*) occur in the Nicaraguan lake region but seem more abundant on the east coast of that country.

As previously mentioned, jade amulets, particularly celt-shaped pendants, are very characteristic of the Nicoya region. (See fig. 21; also

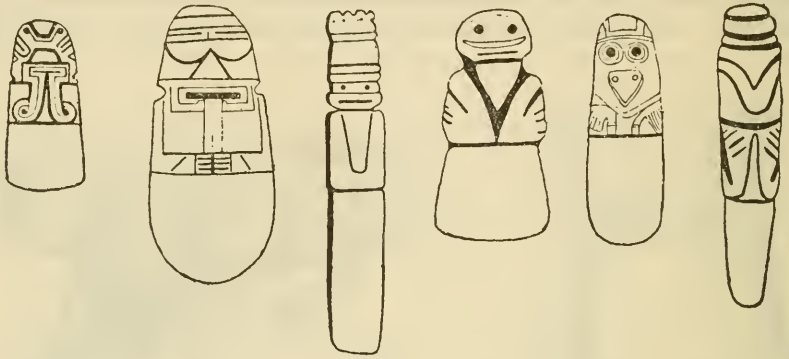


FIGURE 21.—Jade pendants, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica. (After Lothrop, 1921.)

Hartman, 1907.) Many of the smaller amulets have been sawed off from larger celts. Objects of true jadeite or nephrite are actually rare compared to those made of similar but softer minerals. Circular stone disks, possibly gorgets, are common grave finds (pl. 14, *c*). Identical objects of slate have been found in mounds in northeastern Honduras. Some stone atlatl pegs, similar to those from northwestern South America, are found in Nicoya (fig. 22). The elaboration and range of all these

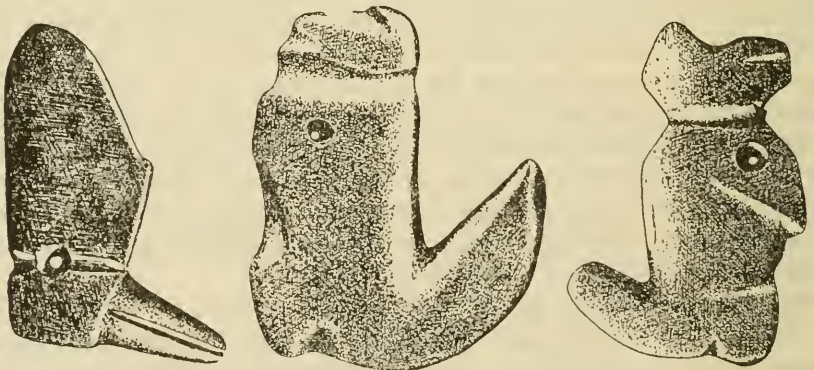


FIGURE 22.—Costa Rica stone spear-thrower pegs. (Length of center specimen,  $2\frac{1}{8}$  in. (5.4 cm.)). (After Hartman, 1907.)

various carved stone artifact types in the Pacific region are well shown by Hartman (1907). There is an obvious relationship between the designs on the smaller carved artifacts, on the larger stone statues, and on various pottery vessels, but, lacking true time perspective based on stratigraphy, the historic sequences remain to be worked out.

### THE HIGHLAND REGION

For present purposes the term Highland region is used geographically in a somewhat larger and looser sense than the same term is employed by Lothrop. This was also true in regard to the Pacific region. (See sketch map, Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 1, fig. 1, p. xxv). Lothrop distinguishes several subareas in the Highland region (1926 b, vol. 2, p. 285) and points out that the large area west of San José is still largely unknown. Logically, this would be the region archeologically transitional between the central and eastern Highlands and Nicoya. For the known Highland region he sees such a close relationship with prehistoric Chiriquí archeological materials as to suggest Chiriquí origins for the Highland culture later modified by northern influences. Since the *Guetar* peoples are historically the only known inhabitants of what Lothrop defines as the Highland region, he states that "the archeological remains must necessarily be attributed to them" (1926 b, vol. 2, p. 285). Such an inclusive statement is obviously open to criticism, since this could be true only if the *Guetar* had always been there or if no evidences of ancestral or earlier alien groups had ever been encountered. That no such temporal or ethnic distinctions have yet been made, in an area through which early migrations of necessity must have passed, clearly indicates how small our archeological knowledge of the region actually is. This being the case, we shall not attempt here to define either major or minor archeological area boundaries but shall limit the discussion to those major characteristics which at present seem to characterize the Highland region as a whole and tend to distinguish it from the Pacific region.

**Surface structures.**—As in the Pacific region, the most characteristic prehistoric structures of the Highlands are mounds. In the central valleys these are rubbish heaps of irregular shape, but on the Atlantic slope they are grouped so as to enclose courts or series of courts. An example of such aligned structures at Las Mercedes in Costa Rica is given here (fig. 26). The upper figure (fig. 26) shows smaller burial mounds (surface and cross section) located near the main group of structures. The latter (fig. 26, *lower*) center around a circular mound 100 feet (30 m.) in diameter and 20 feet (6.5 m.) in height. This mound consisted of a circular wall of river boulders filled in with earth. Hartman found evidence that large stone statues found nearby had once stood on the upper rim of the central mound. In western Nicaragua statues usually occur around the base of mounds. European articles were also found in typical

graves at this site, suggesting that at least part of it was late. In addition to Hartman, Alanson Skinner excavated at Las Mercedes (Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 2, pp. 451-467) and a large part of the Minor Keith collection was also secured here. (See Mason, 1946.) At several Highland sites occur circles of stones filled with debris ranging up to a diameter of 70 feet (21 m.). These are believed to be habitation mounds, although burials also occur in them (Lothrop, 1926 b, vol. 2, pl. ccii).

**Statues.**—Large stone statues of Lake Nicaragua type are reported from the eastern shore of that lake, extending southward into the Highland region across the Río San Juan as far as the vicinity of Puerto Limón. The "alter ego" motif, when it occurs in Costa Rica, is usually indicated by a small, complete animal or the head of the human figure (pl. 15, *b*), although large animal heads in this position do occur. (Compare fig. 17, *b*, example from Guanacaste.) The stone statuettes from the Chontales region east of Lake Nicaragua, previously mentioned, seem likewise to be characterized by small complete animal figures surmounting the human head. Chacmool type statues, characterized by a recumbent figure with a bowl inset in the stomach, occur rarely in western Nicaragua and across to the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica. México is believed to be the center of distribution of the Chacmool type (Richardson, 1940, p. 403).

Smaller, realistic human figures of stone appear to be the most abundant type of stone statuary (pl. 15, *a-c*). Available literature suggests that such figures are as characteristic of the Highland region as small, celt-shaped, human amulets are of certain parts of the Pacific region, but this may be illusory. If true it is of interest, since celt-shaped human amulets are rather common in northeast Honduras, whereas human figures of stone are not. This is curious, since in general the northern coastal cultures of Honduras seem to bear a closer resemblance to the Highland than to the Pacific cultures of Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Lothrop distinguishes three types of small human stone figures in the Highlands (pl. 15). The first consists of standing figures usually grasping an object in each hand. Often a human head is held, sometimes with a head in one hand and an ax in the other. This general style is repeated in the goldwork (pl. 17, *a*). A second consists of a human head, usually about half life size, cut squarely across the neck. These may be larger replicas of the decapitated heads held by standing figures. Similar heads occur in pottery. The third is a seated human figure with the arms resting on the knees and placed across the body. Often such figures are blowing a whistle or eating. These are usually only a few inches high, but specimens 2 feet (60 cm.) in height have been found. They resemble the Mexican seated stone figures known as "Indios tristes." Stone statuary of all sizes in Costa Rica and equally objects made of gold, deserve far more comprehensive study than they have yet received.

Mason's study of the stonework in the Minor Keith Collection improves our knowledge of stone sculpture in Costa Rica.

**Burial.**—Rectangular stone cists were commonly used for disposal of the dead in the Highland region. Hartman distinguishes four main types. Characteristic of the Cartago Valley is a cist built entirely of flat stone slabs. In the vicinity of San José cists are usually oval in form, built of river boulders, and have no roof. On the Atlantic slope large cists occur in which river boulders are used for walls and floors, but flat stone slabs form the roof. The fourth type, found on the western side of the Cartago Valley, consists of cists made of small, square-cut stone slabs used like bricks. Rectangular graves and globular stone cists are also reported by Hartman from the same mound at Santiago. These cist burials usually occur in mounds, or in stone circles apparently marking hut rings. Sometimes as many as three tiers of cists occur, with burials

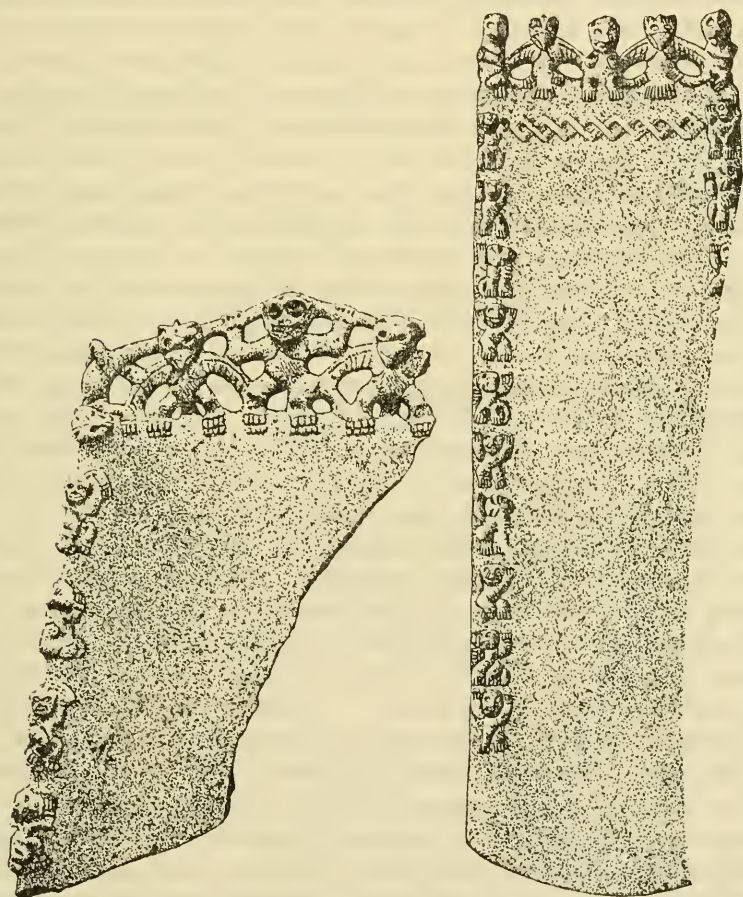


FIGURE 23.—Costa Rican carved stone slabs. (Specimen at left, 19 in. (48.4 cm.) wide.) (After Lothrop, 1926 b, fig. 179.)

touching. This crowding apparently leads occasionally to odd-shaped cists. Where burials are very crowded and cists small, as in the Cartago Valley, it is presumed that secondary burials occur. Elsewhere, as on the Atlantic slope, extended burials are said to be more common. As was true in the Pacific region, preservation of bones is very bad, and the proportion of direct inhumations to cist burials cannot be determined.

The majority of the objects described in sequel come from graves and cists or from their vicinity. This is also true of many of the small stone figures previously mentioned. Particularly characteristic of the Highland region are large, thin, elaborately carved stone slabs (fig. 23). Decorations on the sides of these are in low relief and often there are animals, such as monkeys or birds, carved in the round on the tops. Skinner found one of these in situ, standing erect in the middle of a cemetery at Anita Grande, and it is quite possible that these ornate slabs served as grave markers. Lothrop points out their stylistic similarity to decorated slabs from Manabí in Ecuador. The suggested resemblance to carved stonework from Chavín de Huantar in Perú does not seem to the present writer to be so close as in the case of the Manabí examples.

**Ceramics.**—In regard to ceramics from the Highland region, Lothrop states (1926 b, vol. 2, p. 293) that in almost every ware examined one finds strong traces of the virile art of Chiriquí to the south. Certain Highland ware designations, such as Red-line, Lost Color, Maroon, Tripod, and Handled, have previously been used to designate Chiriquí pottery groups. The Highland wares so designated pertain to the same class of pottery as in Chiriquí, modified but slightly by a different locale. Lothrop regrets the lack of data from the intervening provinces of Talamanca and Boruca in comparing the respective fictile and other arts of Highland Costa Rica and Chiriquí. However, this gap is here partly filled by Stone's paper (this volume, p. 170 f.), which in part deals with these areas. Stone corroborates the close relationship between Costa Rican and Chiriquí ceramics indicated by Lothrop.

In the territory lying east of Nicoya and extending to the Atlantic slope, northern and southern extensions not being indicated, which Lothrop (1926 b, vol. 2, pp. 295-389) terms the Highland region, four main ceramic groups are distinguished. These include (1) Polychrome Wares, (2) Simple Painted Wares, (3) Monochrome Wares, and (4) Appliqué Wares. (See fig. 24.) The Highland Polychrome Ware represents a relatively small group, not comparable in amount or importance with Nicoya and other Polychrome Wares from the Pacific region. Lothrop further points out that the majority of Highland Polychrome designs and shapes are borrowed from the Pacific region, although considerable local modification exists. Elsewhere in the present volume (p. 172) Stone states that many of the painted pottery pieces from Boruca and Talamanca have forms characteristic of the Monochrome Wares.

These observations again emphasize the fact that the elaborate Polychrome Wares seem to center not only in the Pacific region, but particularly in Nicoya and western Nicaragua.

The Simple Painted Wares include Red-line, Yellow-line, White-line, Black-line, and Lost Color Wares. The first four are characterized by designs painted in the respective color upon a red or, rarely, a cream slip. Geometric patterns are common, some of these being derived from the Chiriquí alligator motif. A tripod bowl supported by animal heads is the most distinctive form, but each ware contains various forms apparently taken over from the Appliqué Wares. Lost Color, or Negative Painted, Ware is decorated with light designs against a darker background. The usual wax process appears to have been employed on this type of vessel. Designs are geometric, curvilinear, and zoomorphic. Lost Color Ware is not abundant in the Highland region and appears to be little more than a specialized extension of a common Chiriquí technique. As is true of all Highland Wares, its relative age is undetermined, but its forms are generally those of the above.

There are five subdivisions of Highland Monochrome Wares according to Lothrop. These are: Maroon Incised (related to Lost Color Ware and marked by incised patterns on vessels with a maroon slip), Chocolate (apparently derived from its Pacific region prototype), Red-lip (lip red with unslipped band below on which painted, modeled, or incised decoration occurs; related to Nicoya Black-line group), and Red, characterized by a red slip, its forms falling into two divisions, one connected with the Pacific region, the other differing from Stone Cist Ware only in clay and slip.

The four Appliqué Wares are apparently the most typical and abundant of the Highland region. These are the Curridabat, Tripod, Stone Cist, and Handled Wares. As a rule, the Appliqué Ware vessels are of coarse, gritty paste, usually burnished rather than slipped. Decoration consists primarily of the application of buttons or ribbons of clay to the outside of the vessel, but this does not exclude painting, incising, and modeling. All four types of decoration sometimes occur on the same vessel and, in certain subtypes, appliqué decoration is absent. The dividing line between these wares is often obscure, and they blend into one another in no apparent succession. The dividing line between Stone Cist and Handled Wares is particularly obscure.

There are two groups of Curridabat Ware; one is distinguished by one or more small ridges encircling the neck or shoulder; the other consists of smaller vessels with painted instead of raised designs. Decoration is appliqué (most common; apparently representing alligator scutes), modeled, incised, and painted. All the forms are simple. In regard to subtypes, occasional provenience, and wider distributions the reader is referred to Lothrop (1926 b, vol. 2, pp. 332-355).

Tripod Ware consists of vessels which are set on tall tripod legs and either represent animals or have modeled animals upon them. The vessels are often elaborately decorated and tend toward the grotesque. Modeling is very common, but a few painted forms occur. At Curridabat, in Costa Rica, the type site for ware of that name, Hartman (1907) found broken Tripod Ware vessels at depths of 2 to 4 feet (0.6 to 1.2 m.) underground, and at 4 to 7 feet (1.2 to 2.1 m.) he encountered numerous upright Curridabat jars. He observes that these two wares formed 90 percent of the pottery at this site. Tripod Ware has a wide distribution marked by local variations. It is particularly characteristic of northeastern Honduras.

Stone Cist Ware is composed of globular jars, often set on short tripod legs and decorated with appliqué animal forms, ribbons (often punctured), or buttons. Modeled forms include the alligator, man, tree, frog, and snake. The paste is sandy; the color normally brick red; burnishing is more common than slipping; and specimens are very friable. This general type is also widely distributed. It is very characteristic of northeastern Honduras.

Handled Ware is similar in composition to the above but is less elaborately, one might say grotesquely, decorated. Handles are large and include single, paired vertical, and paired horizontal forms. This ware is closely related to its Chiriquí name-giver. As Lothrop indicates, the basis of classification of this ware, like many of the others, is not entirely satisfactory and awaits revision based on more extensive, as well as intensive stratigraphic, excavations.

Like the Pacific, the Highland region has various ceramic forms which do not fit into present pottery classifications. It also has a number of pottery objects other than vessels. Hollow cylindrical pot stands, sometimes with Atlantean supports, are common. Often the upper ring is surmounted by small faces (fig. 20, *right*). These objects of either pottery or stone were presumably used to support round-bottomed vessels which are the usual type. Incense burners of Red Ware with modeled handles are similar to Honduran and Mexican forms. The handles often represent an alligator or serpent. Large pottery heads of several types, similar to those in stone, also occur. Nearly all on record came from the Las Mercedes district. Figurines are much less common than in the Pacific region. Human figures are most common; standing figures in costume and pensive figures seated on stools occur. A common type with painted geometric designs belongs to the class of Chiriquí Alligator Ware. These are usually seated, sometimes on stools, and usually have spread legs. Canoe- or boat-shaped vessels containing human paddlers are a distinctive type. In addition, dogs, jaguars, birds, and composite or double animals are represented. Whistles, usually human or animalistic in form, pertain to various ceramic wares. Rattles occur in the form of tripod legs, incense-burner handles, or even sealed pots. Gourd-form rattles are represented. Pottery drums are less common than in the Pacific region but do occur. Some of these









FIGURE 24.—Costa Rican and Nicaraguan pottery of the Highland area. Forms and decorative motifs. (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pl. 194. (Face p. 136))



are of Highland Polychrome Ware. Cylindrical pottery stamps are also found in the Highlands.

**Metallurgy.**—Though excellent examples of jade or allied stone carving have been found in the Highland region graves, goldwork is apparently more common. Most of this exquisitely worked material has been dug up by treasure hunters, and much of it has been melted down. However, large collections are to be found in Costa Rican and other museums. Unfortunately, no comprehensive studies of Costa Rican goldwork are available and little can be said about it here. Many forms in goldwork are the same as those in Highland ceramics or in stonework. The techniques employed seem generally to be the same as those used in the Chiriquí area. Human figures holding trophy heads or other objects, mammals, birds, alligators, frogs, and bells are all represented. (See pl. 17, *a*.) The entire problem of metalwork in Costa Rica and the rest of Central America calls for much more study than it has yet received. On general grounds, however, we can state that the Highland region links up with the Chiriquí area in yielding considerable amounts of stylistically similar goldwork. The Pacific region, however, with the possible exception of the Boruca region, seems largely to lack metalwork, or to yield merely a few simple and presumably borrowed forms.

**Stonework.**—Considering work in stone, again we have no data on chipping techniques, but various ground-stone objects are excellently made. The Highland metate differs from the Nicoya form in being oblong instead of rectangular and having three legs instead of four. It also has a ridge around the edge of the grinding plate necessitating a short handstone or mano. Often the Highland metate is formed like an animal, particularly the jaguar, having the head at one end and the tail curled and attached to a leg to form a handle (fig. 25). It is so closely related in form and style to the metate of the Chiriquí area that there are no clear rules to distinguish between the two. As in Nicoya, very elaborate forms occur (pl. 15, *d*), complex in execution and rich in forgotten mythological sym-

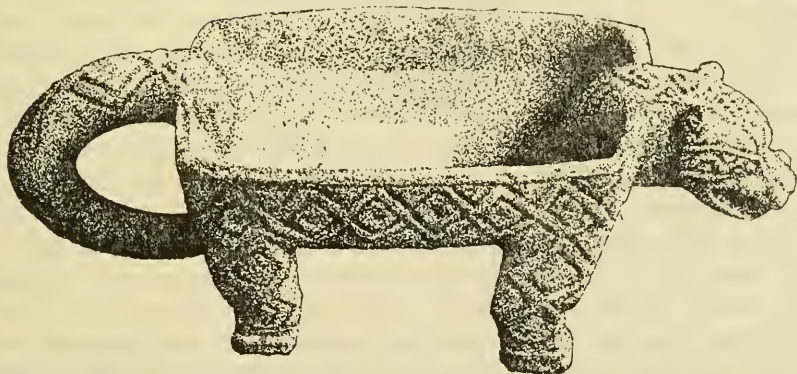


FIGURE 25.—Metate from Cartago, Costa Rica. (After Lothrop, 1926 b, fig. 181.)

bolism. The animal-form metate occurs as far south as Ecuador and is rather common in northeastern Honduras.

In the Highlands, as in the Pacific region, it is impossible to distinguish positively between certain elaborate mortuary metates and probable seats or stools. However, one Highland form definitely suggests a seat. This type consists of a round plate encircled by a ridge and supported on a tall, openwork pedestal. Decoration consists of pierced slits, triangles, diamonds, or Atlantean figures. Similar forms occur in pottery and wood which cannot be successfully used as a grinding surface; hence the use of such objects for seats seems probable. This pedestal-type seat, or stand, is distributed throughout the Highland and Chiriquí regions. A similar form without the plate is identical with the pot stands made of pottery and apparently performed the same function. Stone bowls, some of which resemble pottery forms and are elaborately carved, also occur in the Highland region. The polished ax of the Highland region is usually diamond-shaped in cross section, and this type is common also in the Chiriquí region. Another type is chipped and not polished. A double-bitted, chipped ax form occurs, but the monolithic ax is not reported.

#### THE EASTERN COASTAL PLAIN

This, the third region mentioned in the present brief archeological survey of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, contains topographic variations (see Introduction, p. 121) but may be considered as generally coterminous with part of the Atlantic Plain and all the Nicaraguan Lowland. It comprises a huge triangular area extending from the Talamanca Plain in Costa Rica north along the Caribbean into Honduras and, widening rapidly to the northwest, to the eastern base of the Cordillera in northern Costa Rica and central Nicaragua. This vast jungle-covered area, extending from rolling foothills eastward to the swampy Mosquito coast, is not very well known from the geographic and is almost unknown from the archeological standpoint. Despite the fact that the region includes over half of the combined area of Costa Rica and Nicaragua and forms an essential archeological link between Honduras and the Highland region on the south and the Pacific region on the west, very little can be said at present concerning its archeology. For this reason only a brief summary of previously published materials (Strong, 1935, pp. 166-167) is given here.

Le Baron gives a plan of a small ceremonial site on the Prinzapolca River consisting of three rude monoliths set up to form a triangle, which is paved with rocks. One monolith had a crude face incised at the top and others had simple circular or geometric petroglyphs. No artifacts were found. On the Rama River, which enters the Caribbean near Monkey Point, Spinden (1925) notes the occurrence of small mounds containing abundant pottery. Painted and modeled ware, including tripod bowls, figurines, whistles, etc., were found here. Cookra Hill, near the

south end of Pearl Lagoon, formerly had ancient graves from which gold amulets, a marble mace head of Nicoyan type, abundant pottery, and other artifacts have been removed. Near Bluefields occur large and interesting

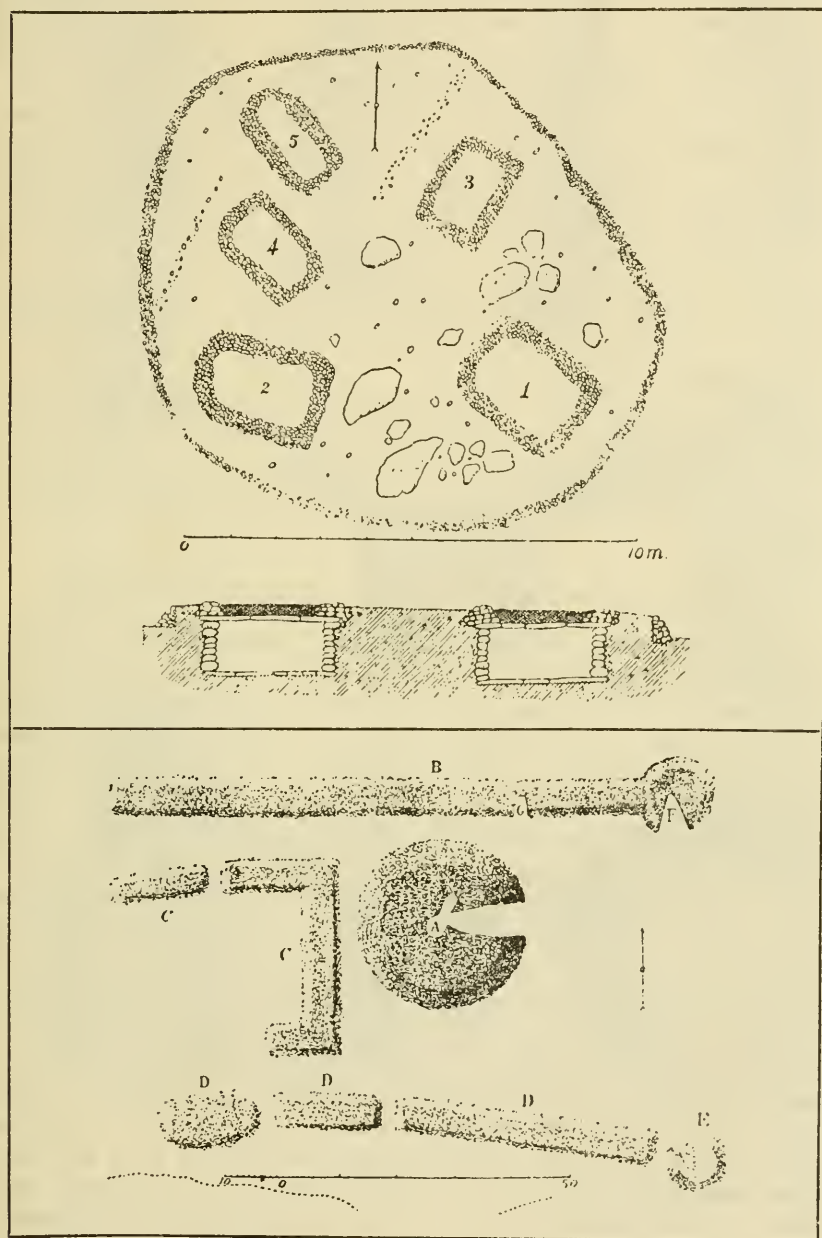


FIGURE 26.—Burial mound and general map of Las Mercedes, Costa Rica. (After Hartman, 1901.)

shell heaps. Pottery from these is usually unslipped but is elaborately modeled. One type, with tripod feet decorated with faces and containing rattles, suggests a local variant of Costa Rican pottery (Tripod Ware). A small stone figure of a man and two interesting types of monolithic axes, figured by Lothrop (see pl. 14, *f*, *g*), come from here. Spinden calls attention to stone bowls with projecting heads, tripod supports, and a band of interlaced decoration, which come from this area. (See Honduras, pl. 1, *top*.) The well-made metates with animal heads from eastern Nicaragua form a link between (Highland) Costa Rica and northern Honduras. Spinden also states that small pots with plastic decoration and gold figurines are said to have been found in the Pis Pis mining district. He observed many elaborate petroglyphs near falls and rapids on these eastern rivers. At the junction of the Yasica and Tuma Rivers, within the wet belt and in the vicinity of mounds, he found two carvings of the Lake Nicaragua type. One of these depicted a man with an alligator clinging to his back.

From the surveys made by Spinden it thus appears that eastern Nicaragua forms a cultural link between the Highland region of Costa Rica to the south, and the Bay Islands and the Honduran coast to the north. Too little is yet on record, however, to attempt a more detailed comparison of types.

#### ETHNIC CORRELATIONS IN COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA

Exact correlations between archeological manifestations and documented historic sites or ruins formerly occupied by specific tribes are as yet unknown in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Whether available documentation and adequate archeological remains at historic sites exist cannot be determined until more serious attempts in that direction have been made. However, western Nicaragua, particularly the lake region, as well as various parts of Costa Rica seems very promising in this regard. This is indicated by the fact that rather close territorial correlations have already been demonstrated, particularly by Lothrop, between certain ceramic wares and the historic territories of certain distinct linguistic and ethnic groups. Such generalized correlations should not be pushed too far, but when objectively arrived at they do have rather strong inferential value. Needless to say, these will be greatly strengthened when (1) specific historic sites have been carefully worked and (2) when demonstrable sequence or time order can be established. A simplistic "one to one" correlation between the ethnic group known to have occupied a specific region at the time of the Conquest and all, or a great majority, of the archeological remains in that region must always be subject to suspicion. This is particularly true in the more favorable parts of an isthmian area where both linguistic distributions and history indicate that numerous migrations have occurred. However, until painstaking excavation brings

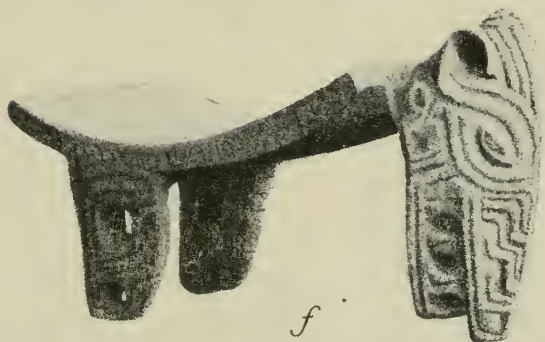


*a*

*b*

*c*

*d*



*f*



*e*



*g*

PLATE 13.—Stone statue and seats, Central America. *a, b, d, e*, From Zapatero Island, Nicaragua. (After Bovallius, 1886, and Squier, 1852.) *c*, Comitán, México. (After Seler, 1901.) *f, g*, From Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica. (After Holmes, 1908.)



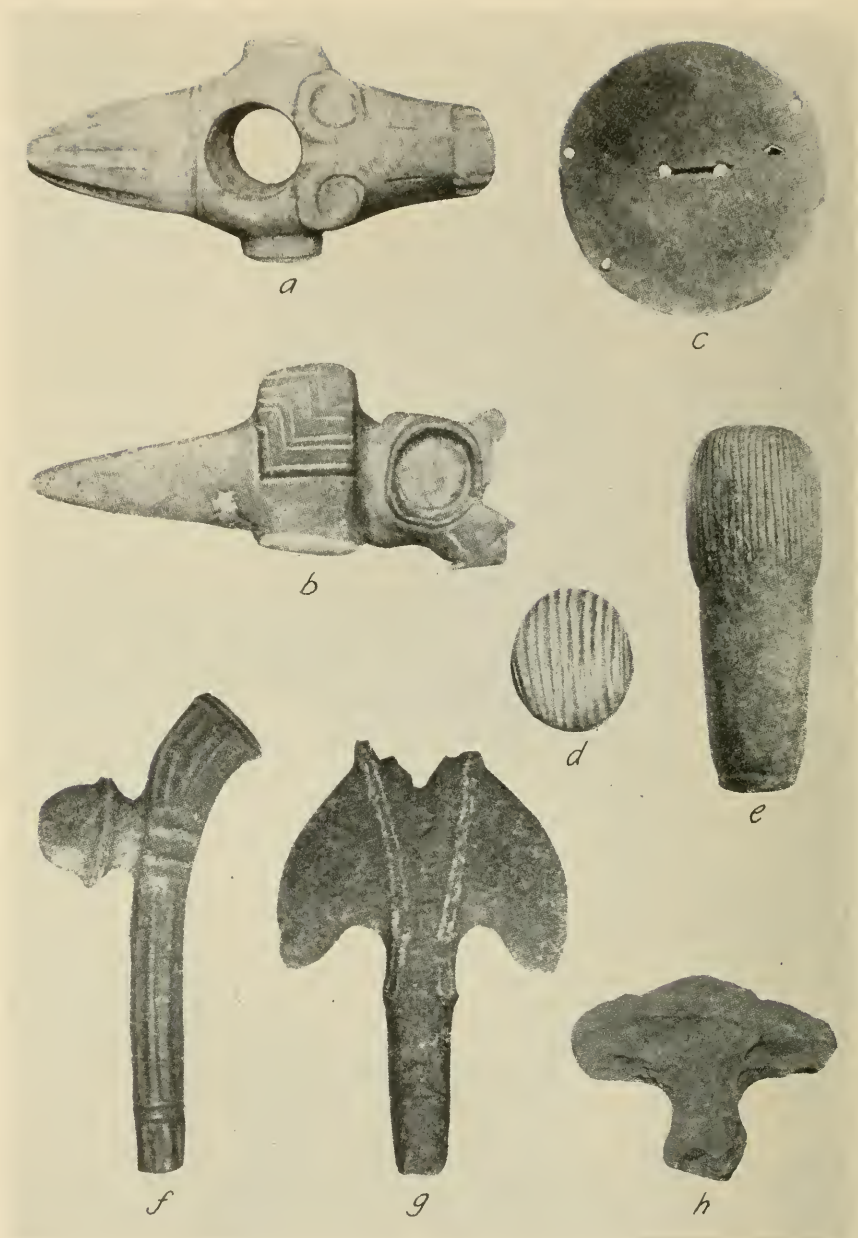
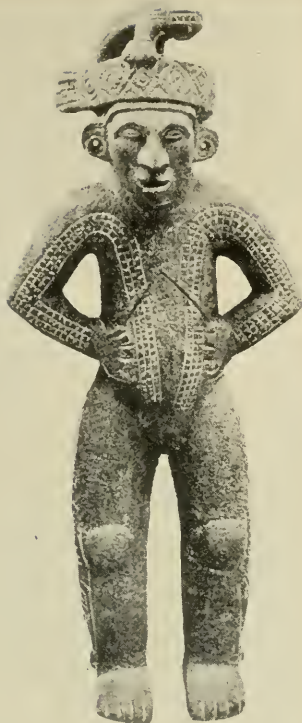


PLATE 14.—Stone artifacts from Costa Rica and Nicaragua. *a, b*, Club heads, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica; *c*, disk, Costa Rica; *d, e*, bark beaters, Filadelfia, Costa Rica; *f-h*, axes. (Length of *f*, 12.5 in. (31.5 cm.); length of *g*, 8 in. (20.2 cm.); height of *h*, 7 in. (17.8 cm.)) (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pls. 10-12.)



*a*



*b*



*c*

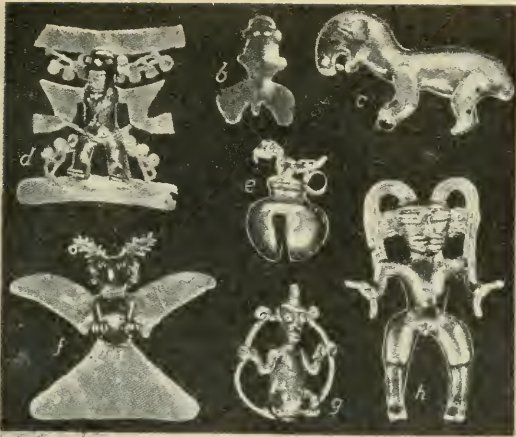


*d*

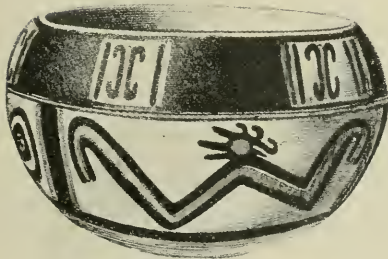
PLATE 15.—Stone carvings, Costa Rica. *a*, *c*, Figures from Las Mercedes. (Respective heights, 14 and 10.5 in. (35.5 and 26.5 cm.)) *b*, Statue. *d*, Ceremonial metate, San Isidro de Guadalupe. (Length of top 24.5 in. (62.5 cm.)) (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pls. 203, 138, and 140.)



PLATE 16.—Nicoya Polychrome, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. *a*, Macaw effigy jar, Bolson, Costa Rica. (Height, 11.5 in. (29.2 cm.)) *b*, From Filadelfia, Costa Rica. (Height, 9 in. (23 cm.)) *c*, From Ometepe Island, Nicaragua. (Diameter, 9 in. (23 cm.)) *d*, Bowl interior, crab motif in light red, dark red, orange, and black on white. (Diameter, 5.5 in. (14 cm.)) *e*, Plumed serpent motif jar, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica, in red and black on yellow. (Height, 10.5 in. (26.7 cm.)) *f*, Plumed serpent decoration from tripod interior, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica, in red and black on orange. (Diameter, 5.5 in. (14 cm.)) (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pls. 14, 23, 30, 71, 46 and 47.)



a



b



c



d



e

PLATE 17.—Central American goldwork and pottery. *a*, Gold figurines, Costa Rica; *b*, Nandaimé ware, Nicaragua; *c*, Nicoya Black-Line ware, Costa Rica; *d*, Under-Slip Incised ware, Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica. (Height, 9 in. (23 cm.)) *e*, Plumbate ware, Ulua Valley, Honduras. (Height 7 in. (18 cm.)) (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pls. 78, 97, 99, 84, and 20.)

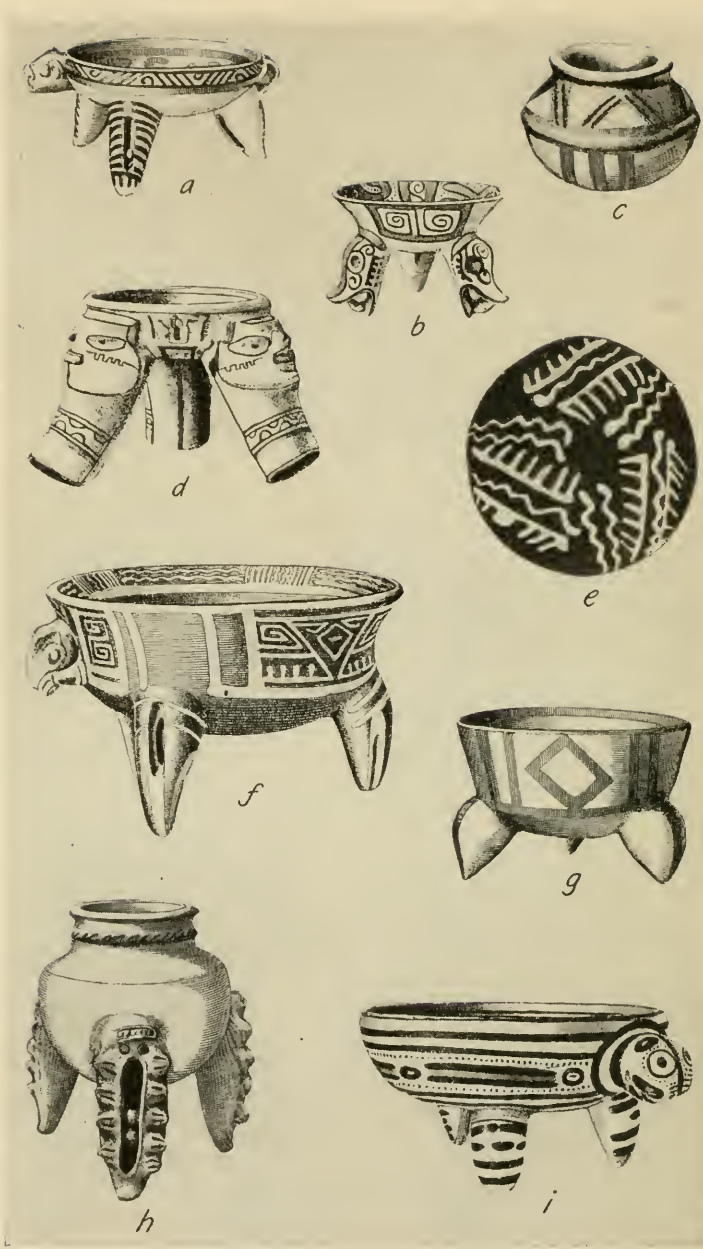


PLATE 18.—Central American pottery types. *a, b*, Black-Line ware, Las Mercedes and Anita Grande, Costa Rica. (Diameters, approximately 9 and 6 in. (23 and 15 cm.)) *c*, Curridabat ware, Costa Rica. (Diameter, approximately 4 in. (10 cm.)) *d*, Luna ware, Nicaragua. (Width, 4.5 in. (11.4 cm.)) *e*, Lost-Color pattern, Las Mercedes. *f*, Yellow-Line ware, Las Mercedes. *g*, Red-Line ware, Las Mercedes. (Diameter, 6.5 in. (16.5 cm.)) *h*, Tripod ware, Las Mercedes. (Height, approximately 6 in. (15.2 cm.)) *i*, Highland Polychrome ware, Costa Rica. (Height, 4.5 in. (11.4 cm.)) (After Lothrop, 1926 b, pls. 159, 171, fig. 93, pls. 161, 157, fig. 192, pls. 175, 143.)

true time perspective, the establishment of such gross correlations is at least a promising first step.

The most striking of these correlations is that existing between the distribution of Nicoya Polychrome Wares and peoples of *Chorotegan* (the *Chiapanecan* of Thomas and Swanton, 1911) and *Nahuatl* speech. Territorially this double distribution includes the Peninsula of Nicoya, the Isthmus of Rivas, the west coast of Nicaragua, the islands of Lake Nicaragua, and parts of southern Salvador. As Lothrop (1926 b, vols. 1, 2) demonstrates in considerable detail, Nicoya Polychrome pottery is not only the most elaborate painted ware in Costa Rica and Nicaragua but also is characterized by design and technical elements of older *Mayan* and later Mexican origin. The presence of what he considers to be older *Mayan* motifs in Nicoya Polychrome leads him to the belief that the *Chorotegan* groups, longer in residence, were responsible for the bulk of this ceramic ware, whereas the later *Nicarao* and other *Nahuatl* (Mexican) peoples adopted it and introduced later northern motifs into Nicoya Polychrome but did not develop a distinguishable subtype of their own. Since linguistic considerations indicate northern origins for both *Chorotegan* and *Nahuatl* peoples, while history and legend give the *Chorotegan* temporal priority in this region, Lothrop's correlation agrees with the available evidence.

On similar distributional and territorial grounds, Chocolate Ware, Black Ware, Orange-Brown Ware, perhaps Red Ware, and Alligator Ware may also be largely assigned to the *Chorotegan* peoples. Another ware, Managua, is limited in shape and design and has been found almost entirely within the boundaries of one *Chorotegan* tribe, the *Mangué*. Nandaime Ware has been found from Guanacaste in Costa Rica to Nandaime in Nicaragua and probably extends north to Fonseca Bay. Because this distribution includes the *Subtiaba* as well as the *Chorotegans*, Lothrop believes Nandaime Ware was made by people of both linguistic groups. Similar dual authorship is suggested by Lehmann (1910) and Lothrop in regard to Nicoya Blackline Ware, since it commonly occurs at sites in *Coribici* (*Chibchan*) territory and also in *Orotiña* (*Chorotegan*) territory as well. East of the Nicaraguan lakes the territory of the *Ulvan* tribes and the known distribution of Luna and Zapatero Wares more or less coincide. Luna Ware, through its association with large boot-shaped burial urns in which were found post-Caucasian objects, is apparently protohistoric. According to Lothrop, this coincidence between *Ulvan* occupation and the above wares is strong for Luna Ware, but he states that Zapatero Ware cannot be so definitely delimited.

All the foregoing ceramic and tribal correlations refer to the Pacific region. In regard to the Highland region we have previously (p. 131) quoted and criticized Lothrop's somewhat wholesale assignment of all the known archeological materials to the historic *Guetar* (*Chibchan*). Stone

(1943, p. 75) points out some of the difficulties encountered in assigning prehistoric remains to specific historic tribes in Costa Rica. However, the known historic occupation of the entire southern and eastern Highland region by tribes pertaining to the *Chibchan* linguistic stock does establish at least a priority in their favor. The marked concentration of large statues of so-called "*Chorotegan* type" within the area mainly occupied by *Chorotegan* peoples, particularly in the Nicaraguan lake region, offers some justification for this nominal linkage. As previously stressed, however, the styles of these large monuments are so variable and their present distribution and relative age are so uncertain that this problem must be left open. Certainly the concentration of jade (greenstone) work on amulets, etc., in Nicoya and adjacent areas historically occupied by the *Orotiña* and other *Chorotegan*, as well as Mexican, peoples suggests a partial correlation. Similarly, the fact that goldwork is equally characteristic in the Highland region and in Chiriquí, where only *Chibchan* tribes are known to have lived in historic times, tends to link goldworking with peoples of this linguistic stock, the major affiliations of which are with northern South America. All the above correlations have some degree of probability and indicate very important leads. However, the final assignment of technical trends, ceramic wares, monumental styles, and all other archeological complexes in Costa Rica and Nicaragua to historic tribes, prehistoric groups, and relative temporal position in both the Pacific and Highland regions must await far more careful and extensive excavation work than either of these areas has yet received. As for the Eastern Coastal Plain, it still remains an almost complete archeological terra incognita.

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