

A Comparison of Iconography from Northwestern Costa Rica and Central Mexico

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ABSTRACT

There has been a consensus among researchers that the iconography on certain types of pottery from the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods (A.D. 800-1550) in the Greater Nicoya region of Costa Rica and Nicaragua shows a link to cultures in central Mexico. The Mixtec culture has been listed as one possible source. Several possible reasons have been given for this connection, including trade and migration. My project uses analyses of the iconography of both regions to investigate what the iconography from central Mexico looks like in Costa Rica, how this iconography in Costa Rica changes through time, and how it compares to the iconography seen in central Mexico. I also look at current theories on trade and migration from central Mexico to Greater Nicoya and how they account for this spread of iconography.

INTRODUCTION

While Costa Rica has previously been seen as a buffer zone between South America and Mesoamerica, archaeologists have since come to focus more on local developments (Lange 1992a; Healy 1988; Snarskis 1981a; Stone, 1972). Costa Rica is now seen as part of the Intermediate Area, an area encompassing the frontier areas between the Mesoamerican and South American cultural spheres (Lange and Stone 1984a; Lange 1992b). While local cultural development cannot be attributed solely to outside influences, because of its proximity to these two areas of complex cultures, influence from both Mesoamerica and South America did reach Costa Rica. Due to the high occurrence of looting and the subsequent loss of context, as well as the relatively new beginning of archaeology in Costa Rica, our knowledge of cultural contact between Costa Rica and the larger, more complex, cultural regions is still imprecise.

While it is incorrect to say that Mesoamerican cultures influenced the northern part of Costa Rica and South America influence the southern part, it is true that the area of Costa Rica that is most closely associated with Mesoamerican cultures is the northwest region. This region is the Guanacaste region and is part of the Greater Nicoya Archeological Sub-area encompassing both northwestern Costa Rica and southwestern Nicaragua. There is abundant evidence (see Day 1984, 1994; Ferrero 1987; Healy 1980; Snarskis 1981a; Stone 1977) that Mesoamerican cultural ideas spread to Costa Rica through trade and migration; however, despite a clear connection between the two regions, the exact nature and extent of Mesoamerican influence on local cultures is still unclear. Researchers continue to study how cultures in northwestern Costa Rica combined local cultural developments with foreign ideas. In researching the various connections between Mesoamerica and northwestern Costa Rica, I have found that iconography is one area of study showing links between Mesoamerica and Costa Rica. Several researchers (Day 1984; Stone 1977, 1982; Lange 1992a) have pointed out similarities between iconography of Greater Nicoya and iconography of the Mixteca-Puebla style from central Mexico, and the Mixtec culture has been listed as one possible source. My research compares the iconography of Greater Nicoya to iconography found in central Mexico in order to see what Mesoamerican influence in the northwestern Costa Rica looked like during the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods. Specifically, I describe which designs from Postclassic central Mexico appear in Costa Rica during the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods, I trace these images through time based on ceramic sequences, I give a general comparison of the iconography in Greater Nicoya and in central Mexico, and I look at current explanations for trade and migration from central Mexico to Costa Rica.

BACKGROUND

Costa Rican Prehistory

Archaeologically, Costa Rica has been divided into three geographical zones: the Guanacaste/Nicoya region in the Northwest (including the province of Guanacaste and the Nicoya Peninsula); the Atlantic watershed and central plateau region in the central and eastern area; and the Diquís region in the southwest. Since the Guanacaste/Nicoya region shows the closest affinities to Mesoamerica, I focus on the archaeology of that region. The Atlantic Watershed and the Central Plateau is considered one region archaeologically, located in the eastern and central areas of Costa Rica. This area was traditionally seen as having a mix of influence from the south and north, because it was inhabited by peoples with a language related to the Chibchan language of Colombia, but traded with both the north and south (Stone 1972). Objects associated with the Olmec, Maya, and other Mesoamerican groups have been found there, as well as objects associated with groups from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia of South America (Baudez and Coe 1966; Stone 1972: 26). The Central Plateau/Atlantic Watershed also contains architecture resembling that of South America and that of Mesoamerica (Snarskis 1981a). Yet despite this evidence for long-distant trade, it seems that the Central Plateau/Atlantic Watershed area traded the most extensively with the Guanacaste-Nicoya region, as seen by the presence of Nicoya polychrome pottery (Stone 1977). The Diquís region is in the south of Costa Rica. It is closely associated with the Chiriquí cultures of Panama, and has almost no influence from Mesoamerica (Snarskis 1981a; Stone 1977).

Prehistory in Central America has been divided into six periods by the American Research Advances Seminar on the Archaeology of Lower Central America (Lange and Stone 1984b): Period I from 12,000 (or earlier) -8,000 B.C.; Period II from 8,000-4,000 B.C.; Period III from 4,000-1,000 B.C.; Period IV from 1000 B.C.-A.D. 500; Period V from A.D. 500-1000; and Period VI from A.D. 1000-1550. However, the chronology is also divided by ceramic periods, which will be discussed later.

There is little archaeological evidence in Costa Rica or all of Central America regarding the earliest cultures. During Period I (1200-8000 B.C.), people lived in Central America, but there is little left for archaeologists to find. Populations were small and moved from place to place for various resources (Lange and Stone 1984a). Period II (8000-4000 B.C.) is called the Tropical Archaic. Archaic cultures here were similar to those in other parts of the Americas: subsistence was by gathering and collecting, but also by hunting and fishing, and there were some more sedentary populations where resources were abundant. Artifacts found include polished stone artifacts, bone awls, needles, projectile points, and grinding stones (Lange 1988a; Lange and Stone 1984a; Stone 1972). Period III (4000-1000 B.C.) saw the development of ceramics, rapid population growth, and increased sedentism. Some sites were occupied year-round, and status differentiation is seen by differing classes of cultural materials in mortuary settings. Period IV (1000B.C.-A.D. 500) has fully established Formative communities of small villages with ranked society. Subsistence was a mixed economy of agriculture and hunting and gathering (Lange 1988a). The later periods see greater differences by region; my research focuses on the Guanacaste/Nicoya region, discussed below, which has the closest affinities with Mesoamerican cultures.

The Guanacaste/Nicoya Region

The Guanacaste/Nicoya region includes the province of Guanacaste and the Nicoya peninsula in the northwest. The geography is tropical dry forests in the north, and tropical moist and pre-montane moist forests in the south. The Guanacaste/Nicoya region of Costa Rica is included in the Greater Nicoya region, which encompasses both the northwest of Costa Rica and the western edge of Nicaragua, as shown in Figure 1. Greater Nicoya is known for its fine pottery, carved jades, and elaborate grinding stones (Stone 1972). Because of its strong affinities to Mesoamerican cultures, some researchers include Greater Nicoya within the Mesoamerican cultural sphere (Ferrero 1987; Stone 1972). This is because the Greater Nicoya area shares many traits with Mesoamerica, including polychrome ceramics, certain forms of using maize, and construction patterns such as pyramidal forms that are not found further south (Creamer 1982). The question of whether to include the Greater Nicoya in the Mesoamerican cultural area or simply as a frontier or peripheral area has been dealt with by others (see Creamer 1987; Healy 1988) and will not be discussed here; for my purposes it is enough to know that northwestern Costa Rica and the Greater Nicoya area have certain ties to Mesoamerica.

Lange (1992b) has found that after 1000 B.C. (Period IV) populations began to increase, although change occurred more slowly than in Mesoamerica or South America. Small villages subsisted by gathering and collecting, as well as fishing and hunting, and possibly by some maize agriculture. Some social ranking is seen by differential distribution of grave goods, including items reflecting elite symbols such as mace heads as a symbol of rank, and goods from long-distance trade including such items as jadeite from the Motagua Valley in Guatemala, and jades with Maya glyphs (Lange 1992b). This period is known from ceramic chronology as the Zoned Bichrome Period, during which pottery was painted with red and black or red and buff color areas, and included zoned areas, bichrome painting, decoration by incising, shell-stamping, appliqué, punctuation, and zoomorphic effigies (Stone 1977).

Period V in Greater Nicoya (A.D. 500-1000) includes the Early Polychrome ceramic period and the first half of the Middle Polychrome. The Early Polychrome (A.D. 500-800) is marked by the transition from monochrome and bichrome ceramics and plastic decoration to painted polychrome ceramics, which flourished in the Middle Polychrome (Sweeney 1975). This period is not as well known archaeologically, but saw the beginning of the Nicoya Polychrome tradition of elaborate polychrome vessels, as well the introduction of metallurgy (Lange 1992b). Populations began to increase, and agriculture and marine resources became increasingly important. Stone (1977) suggests that the increased population may be in part from immigration. Also, pottery and other objects show contact with the Maya, Olmec, and Zapotec cultures (Stone 1977). By the beginning of the Middle Polychrome (A.D. 800-1000), populations had shifted to along the coast, especially in Guanacaste. Obsidian, which came from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, is also present in limited amounts, but jade is no longer part of the assemblages (Lange 1992b). The Middle Polychrome is equated with the Late Classic Period in Mexico. Trade increased, and traits from the north, including Nahuatl and Maya motifs from the north, point to possible evidence of an influx of new religious concepts (Stone 1977). During the Middle Polychrome, ceramics from Greater Nicoya are more frequently found in the Central Valley/Atlantic Watershed, pointing to increased regional trade, which Lange (1992b) suggests as exchange between elites or extended families or clans.

Period VI (A.D. 1000-1550) includes the latter half of the Middle Polychrome ceramic period (A.D. 1000-1350), as well as the Late Polychrome (A.D. 1350-1550). Toward the end of the Middle Polychrome, community patterns continued with subsistence by marine resources as well as agriculture, including maize and cacao (Stone 1977). Exploitation of the sea increased especially in the southern sector, while farming, orchards, and freshwater fishing were more important in the northern sector (Lange 1992b). During the Late Polychrome, population densities shifted from northern Costa Rica to the areas around the lakeshores of Pacific Nicaragua, possibly due to changes in the environment (Lange 1988a). It is unclear the exact nature of hierarchical organization, and the settlement system in Greater Nicoya during the Late Polychrome has been classified as either chiefdoms or tribal level organization (Stone 1977; Lange 1988a, 1992b). While some regions had larger populations, this was probably due to availability of fresh water and resources, and it does not seem as if any one site was dominant (Lange 1992b). Ethnohistoric data also suggests that there was no overarching authority, though communities continued to have some ranking in terms of access to available resources, seen in the different materials included as mortuary goods. However, the greater difference between various cemeteries than between individuals within one cemetery makes the issue unclear. Lange (1992b) concludes that ranking existed, but was passive and dependent on kinship, not on centralized ties.

Greater Nicoya

As mentioned above, Northwestern Costa Rica is part of the archaeological subarea called Greater Nicoya, encompassing both the Rivas region of southwestern Nicaragua and the Guanacaste region of Costa Rica. Guanacaste, Costa Rica is considered the southern sector, and the Rivas region of Nicaragua is considered the northern sector of Greater Nicoya, which is shown in Figure 1. The Rivas region has similar ceramic periods and phases to those of Guanacaste, Costa Rica, and so my research looking at Mesoamerican imagery in Guanacaste also includes ceramics from western Nicaragua. Healy (1980), in looking at excavations done in the entire region, considers that the Greater Nicoya Archaeological Subarea was a cultural entity by 350 B.C. Over time, the two regions show varying degrees of similarity. By the Early Polychrome, there are some differences, which may mean that regionalism was developing, as some types of ceramics from Guanacaste have not been found in Rivas (Healy 1980: 313). The Middle Polychrome had a widespread distribution of Papagayo Polychrome (also known as Nicoya Polychrome), along with a few lesser ceramic types; however, there were still local ceramic traditions (Healy 1980). The Late Polychrome is marked by new ceramics appearing in Rivas, which were found in much fewer quantities in Guanacaste, but included southern imitations of the northern varieties (Healy 1980: 315). It is during the Middle and Late Polychrome periods that we see the most influence from Mesoamerica in the iconography on ceramics, which will be discussed later.

Migrations from Mesoamerica

There is less historical documentation for Central America than for cultural centers such as those in Mexico. However, the limited sources available tell about the region at the time of contact, and give some clues to earlier prehistory (see Abel-Vidor 1980). At the time of contact, the two main groups of people living in Greater Nicoya region were the Chorotega-Mangue, and the Nicarao. Both of these groups had migrated from Mexico, the Chorotega-Mangue first and the Nicarao more recently (Stone 1977; Sweeney 1975). The Chorotega migrated first, and seem to have arrived after A.D. 800, corresponding to the beginning of the Middle Polychrome Period (Sweeney 1975). By about A.D. 1000, the Nicarao had begun to migrate to Nicoya from Mexico, displacing both the

Chorotega-Mangue and the Corobici, a Chibchan-speaking group that had settled there earlier, who were pushed further inland (Stone 1977). Little is known about any earlier peoples before the Corobici, because the Nicaraos and Chorotega displaced them. There were possibly other early Mexican groups or Nahuatl tribes, but there may have also been earlier people from the south (Stone 1977). Stone (1977: 90) lists that the Nicaraos possibly held connections to the Mixteca Alta in Mexico, and therefore a connection to the Mixtec culture. This possibility will be discussed later. At the time of the conquest, both the Nicaraos and the Chorotega had extensive trading networks reaching to Mesoamerica, including to the Mexica (Aztec) Empire, but the conquest ruptured these trading patterns (Abel-Vidor 1980). Cacao was an important trade item, as well as feathers, honey, beeswax, sea salt, pearl fisheries, indigo, purple shellfish dye, and textiles (Abel-Vidor 1980). Besides simply trading with Mesoamerica, the areas in Greater Nicoya also showed cultural affinities to Mesoamerican cultures (Abel-Vidor 1980). At the time of the Conquest, specific features such as maize farming, elaborate markets, padded cotton armor, clubs with small flint blades for fighting, the use of human sacrifice and self-mutilation, permanent temples were all features common to both Greater Nicoya and Mesoamerica (Healy 1988). As well, the Nicaraos used the Mesoamerican 260-day calendar and the volador ceremony, and worshiped Mexican gods, further evidence of a direct connection between Greater Nicoya and Mexico (Healy 1988).



Figure 1. Map of Greater Nicoya. *From Day 1994: Figure 1.*

It is known from documents at the time of the conquest that Mesoamerican peoples migrated south (see Abel-Vidor 1980; Day 1984; Stone 1972), but Spanish records of migrations legends were recorded after the conquest, and the sources we have today are re-told from earlier sources, so these accounts of migrations of displaced peoples from Mesoamerica to Nicaragua and Costa Rica are difficult to evaluate (Day 1984; Abel-Vidor 1980). For example, accounts about these pre-conquest migrations include post-Conquest political incorporations (Abel-Vidor 1980). So, the details such as how many migrations occurred, and the exact routes and the dates remain unknown.

Abel-Vidor (1980) suggested that the archaeological and historical evidence suggests a long-term overland migration along the Pacific, permitting a gradual permutation of the material culture with local styles, while maintaining a Mesoamerican pattern in language and behavior, though Day (1994) has proposed several distinct migrations.

The Mixtec Culture

As stated earlier, it has been said that the Mixtec culture in central Mexico is one possible source for the Mesoamerican images that appear in Costa Rica (Day 1984; Stone 1977, 1982). The people known as the Mixtec lived in three zones in the present day state of Oaxaca, in the south of Mexico: the Mixteca Baja in the north and northwest (of Oaxaca), the Mixteca Alta in the mountainous central area, and the Mixteca de la Costa in the south and southwest. The Mixteca Alta is mountainous with fragmented topography of valleys and cool, moist highlands; the Mixteca Baja is a hot and semiarid area, and the Mixteca de la Costa is a narrow coastal plain with hot and humid climate in the foothills (Spores 1984). Together the three areas are known as La Mixteca. The Mixtec language is part of the Otomanguean language family, (along with the Zapotec and a few others) which points to the Mixtec culture developing from a Proto-Otomanguean group (Marcus 1983). By 3000 B.C., Mixtec was developing as a unique language (Flannery and Marcus 1983).

Between 2000-1300 B.C. a pan-Mesoamerican Formative culture was developing (Spores 1984), and permanent villages with sedentary populations developed in the Mixteca Alta and Mixteca Baja between 1500-500 B.C. (Winter 1994). The period from 800B.C.-A.D. 500 is marked by regional variation in ceramics; according to Winter (1994), the differences in ceramics between areas in La Mixteca and the nearby Valley of Oaxaca may represent a developing difference between the Mixtec and Zaoptec cultures. During the Early Classic Period, from 200 B.C.-A.D. 300, urban life began, with a pattern of three or four small cities and many smaller villages, along with social class systems, formalized religion, and government (Spores 1984). The Zapotec capital in the Valley of Oaxaca began around 500 B.C., and this was followed by various other urban centers in the Mixteca Alta. The Mixtec shared features similar to the nearby Valley of Oaxaca and Monte Alban, but by 500 A.D., the Valley of Oaxaca connections faded, and the Mixtec became more connected to the rising influence of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico (Spores 1984). During the Late Classic Period from A.D. 300-900, the urban pattern of state and social diversification reached its climax (Spores 1984). By the Postclassic, from A.D. 900-1520, there began a de-emphasis on large complex centers and a trend towards less monumental elaboration, more uniform settlement patterns of small kingdoms. The connection to the Valley of Mexico and Teotihuacan gradually gave way to a new Mixtec style (Spores 1984). It was during the Postclassic that the Mixtec pictographic manuscripts, polychrome pottery, and lapidary and metal work were developed. The Mixtec also had a partial writing system, which used signs mainly for names of persons and places, and was used to make the painted manuscripts (Smith 1983).

The Postclassic and the Mixteca-Puebla Concept

During the Classic Period in Mexico, the great centers of Teotihuacan and Monte Albán dominated the scene, but as these declined, the smaller polities grew in power. The Epiclassic is the term sometimes used to describe the period after the decline of these large centers, from about A.D. 700-900. The following period, called the Postclassic in Mesoamerica was marked by “large-scale economic and social interactions that tied together independent polities” (Smith and Berdan 2003: 4). Many independent city-states formed the basis of political organization throughout the Postclassic period, and during this time, a common set of symbols used on ceramics appears, which has been variously called the Mixtec style, the Mixteca-Puebla style, or the Postclasssic International Style (Byland and Pohl, 1994; Nicholson 1960, 1982; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber, 1994; Smith and Berdan, 2003; Spores, 1984; Vaillant 1962 [1940]).

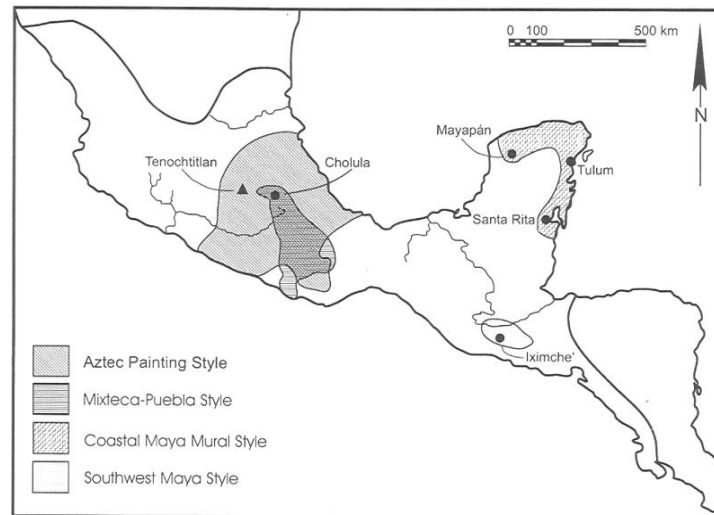


Figure 2. Map of the regional style variants of the Late Postclassic International Style. *From Smith 2003: Figure 23.*

The Mixtec culture cannot be equated with the Mixteca-Puebla style, although the Mixtec in the Postclassic certainly participated in this widely shared style. The term Mixteca-Puebla was first used by Vaillant (1962 [1940]) to refer to both a pictorial style used on codices and ceramics in the Mixteca-Puebla regions, but also to a culture, which he attributed to the Mixtec. Since this use, scholars have continued to redefine and describe the Mixteca-Puebla concept (Nicholson 1960, 1961, 1982; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994; Robertson 1994 [1959]; Smith 2003; Smith and Heath-Smith 1980). Now, it is known that the Mixteca-Puebla style did not arise solely from the Mixtec culture, though its cultural origins are still debated, and scholars use the term Mixteca-Puebla to refer to an art style and the geographical region where this style is widespread in the modern states of Puebla and Oaxaca, including the areas of Cholula, Puebla, Tlaxcala, Mixteca Baja Mixteca Alta, the Oaxaca coast, the Tehuacan Valley, and the Valley of Oaxaca (Nicholson 1982; Smith 2003). More recently the term Mixteca-Puebla is used to denote the style used in Mixteca-Puebla area, while the term Postclassic International Style is used to refer to a broader group of “regional painting styles that exhibit similar use of form, line, color, spatial arrangement, and human figural conventions” (Smith 2003: 182). Figure 2 shows the variants of the Postclassic International Style as proposed by Smith (2003). This concept recognizes that many different cultures, including the Aztec, Mixtec, Zapotec, Nahuatl, and Maya cultures in many different regions all had their own variants of a regionally shared style and shared iconographic symbols. It is not clear exactly when or where this style emerged; scholars have listed various hypotheses for the area of origin of the Mixteca-Puebla style, including the Mixtecs of Oaxaca, the Nahuatl of Cholula, or the Valley of Oaxaca (see Ramsey 1975).

METHODOLOGY

My research compares the iconography on pottery in Greater Nicoya to iconography from central Mexico during the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods. I had originally intended to compare the Nicoyan iconography specifically to Mixtec iconography, but because the Mixtec iconography is part of a larger iconographic style, I look at what has been called the Mixteca-Puebla style and the Postclassic International Style in order to evaluate a possible connection with the Mixtec culture, and to look at the connection to central Mexico as a whole.

After reviewing literature to investigate the archaeology of Costa Rica and the history of the Mixteca-Puebla concept in Mexico, I reviewed relevant literature to summarize current ideas on when and how Mesoamerican influence spread to Costa Rica. My research focuses on ceramics from the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods in Greater Nicoya, and the Postclassic Period in central Mexico. I look at which specific designs found on Costa Rican pottery are listed in the literature as having a central Mexican influence, as well as which types of ceramics show these designs. I also look at when the various central Mexican images likely appeared in Costa Rica and how they changed through time.

Iconographic studies have been used for a wide range of research questions. I have found that some studies focus on the meaning or interpretation of the iconography (i.e. Gallardo, Castro and Miranda 1999), on belief systems behind the iconography (i.e. Hooja 2004), on what can be learned about the political or social institutions

from the iconography (i.e. Marcus 1974) or on tracing changes through time or space (i.e. Rice 1983). I do not have the background to focus on what the iconography means; instead I will be focusing on the presence or absence of certain images, and tracing the images through time in order to evaluate a link between two geographic areas.

Since I do not have a background in iconography or art history, I am relying on the previously published works of others who have looked at the iconography of the two regions. I have found that Lothrop (1926) has some of the most detailed descriptions of iconography from Greater Nicoya. Lothrop's (1926) work was one of the first to describe ceramics in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, but his work was done prior to stratigraphic excavations that later established a chronology for Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Many others have since worked on developing ceramic sequences for Costa Rica and Greater Nicoya (see Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987; Day 1984; Healy 1980; Lange and Stone 1984b; Sweeney 1975). Since it is very difficult to find published site reports from Costa Rica and Nicaragua, even for the sites that have been systematically excavated, and because I want to look at the entire Greater Nicoya region, I will be using ceramic sequences compiled by others (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987; Day 1984; Healy 1980; Sweeney 1975). Since these ceramic sequences have already compiled temporal and spatial distribution of ceramics, including information on iconography, it makes sense to use these ceramic sequences created by those who have already compiled information from the many stratigraphic excavations, rather than looking at individual site reports myself. Using these ceramic sequences, I found publications that pictured various vessel types with specific Mesoamerican images, including information to match many of Lothrop's (1926) iconographic descriptions to their respective ceramic typologies and therefore I was able to place them chronologically. I was thus able to put the central Mexican designs in chronological order.

Systematic excavations only began in Costa Rica in the 1950s, so large numbers of ceramics from Costa Rica, which are currently in museums were collected by huaqueros, or looters. Consequently, there is no exact provenience known for many of the ceramics and they are only traced to the regional level. Since much of this data has no exact provenience, I have no measure for a frequency and thus no basis for a quantitative comparison of iconographic motifs of the entire region. This means that I cannot use the frequency with which a design element appears as a point of comparison, and limits the scope of my comparison.

Using sources on Costa Rican and Nicaraguan pottery, I look at the specific traits associated with these central Mexican images from the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods and trace the changes through time in Greater Nicoya. Then I compare these images to iconography of central Mexico during the Postclassic, using both descriptions and pictures from the sources I have available (Lind 1967; 1994; Nicholson 1960; 1982; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994; Pohl 2003; Ramsey 1975; 1982; Robertson 1994 [1959]; Smith 2003; Smith and Berdan 2003). As a student in the United States, I have limited availability of materials to use, and so I must rely on iconographic descriptions provided by others. Unfortunately, I did not find any iconographic studies on Postclassic Mexican iconography comparable to Lothrop's (1926) work in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Those stylistic analyses that have been done in Mexico do not describe in detail the same designs that are also found in Greater Nicoya, because these are not necessarily the most common designs in central Mexico. This is due in part to the large number of studies that have focused on just the Mixtec codices and writing systems or other codices, which do not always contain the same designs, which are found in Greater Nicoya. As well, catalogues available to me do not have clear enough pictures to do a detailed comparison myself. Thus, the scope of my comparisons is limited. Specifically, I have found that out of the large number of motifs widespread in Postclassic Mexico, only a few of them appear in Greater Nicoya. Since these specific designs are not always the most common ones in central Mexico, some of them are not described or pictured in the sources available to me. Nevertheless, my goal is to systematically illustrate the connection between Greater Nicoya and central Mexico as seen in the iconography on ceramics. I do this by looking at relevant literature on the iconography in Greater Nicoya and relevant literature on iconography in central Mexico during the Postclassic. Lastly, I summarize current theories on trade and migration between Mexico and Greater Nicoya to look at what this interaction might mean.

Some definitions are necessary to understand my analysis. As is apparent in the confusion over the Mixteca-Puebla style and its distribution there is a difference between iconography and style. Style is defined as the manner in which forms are rendered, and how they and larger compositions are structured, or in other words, the way the subjects are rendered, not the subjects themselves (Boone and Smith 2003: 186). Iconography, as defined by Boone and Smith (2003: 187) refers to the units that form the subject matter itself, including representational forms, abstractions, icons, and symbols. Thus I will be looking primarily at the iconography from central Mexico that appears in Greater Nicoya, and somewhat generally at the style in which these forms are rendered.

RESULTS

Mesoamerican Influence in Costa Rica

The distribution of Mesoamerican traits to Costa Rica in the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods comes as part of a longer history of Mesoamerican influence in Central America. Sharer (1984) views the overall interaction between Mesoamerica and Central America as one based on economic processes, through trading a variety of goods, with socio-political and religious functions playing a secondary role. The earliest evidence of interaction comes in Period III (4000-1000 B.C.), with the widespread distribution of jade and obsidian artifacts from the Maya highlands into Central America, though feathers, dyes, pigments, and less durable objects were probably traded as well (Sharer 1984: 64). As Mesoamerican complex societies emerged, long-distance trade probably went from having no centralized control to being under the control of elites. By Period IV (1000 B.C.- A.D. 500), there was an elaborate long-distance trade associated first with the Olmec and later with the Maya reaching south into Central America, though this trade may have gone both ways (Sharer 1984: 65-67). Some items found in Central America indicating this trade include jadeite, obsidian, ceramics, gold, copper, and pyrite mirrors, though perishable items were likely traded as well (Sharer 1984; Snarskis 1981a; Stone 1977). When the Olmec culture declined, the trade to Central America continued through the Maya, especially along the Pacific coast (Sharer 1984; Smith and Heath-Smith 1980). It seems that Mayan jadeite trade ceased by about A.D. 500, though it is difficult to document with sparse evidence, and because local production in Maya styles could have continued beyond this time (Healy 1988). Sharer (1984) correlates this lull in the Mesoamerican trade to the disruptions in the Maya lowlands during the Middle Classic Period in Mesoamerica.

A second wave of Mesoamerican influence spread into Central America as central Mexican power grew, and the Nahua-speaking peoples (the Pipil) moved south to El Salvador in A.D. 800-1000 (Sharer 1984). It was then during Periods V and VI (A.D. 500-1000 and 1000-1550) that the central Mexican peoples began to dominate the long distance trade with Central America along the Pacific coastal routes, though the Putun Maya merchants were also prominent later on (Day 1984; Sharer 1984). The most extensive trade came during Period VI from A.D. 1000-1550 (the Middle and Late Polychrome in Costa Rica or Postclassic in Mesoamerica) with the expanded migration of Nahua speaking peoples as far as Nicoya. By then, trade was going both ways, because ceramics similar to Papagayo pottery from Nicaragua and Costa Rica has been found in the Maya area, and ceramics similar to Plumbate pottery produced in the coastal Maya area has been found in lower Central America (Sharer 1984; Smith and Heath Smith 1980).

Pottery in Costa Rica shows some influence from Mexico, which came through the migrations southward and/or through trade. Day's (1984) study of iconography shows that earlier iconography was related first to South America and then to Mayan culture, but by A.D. 800, it was replaced by iconography related to central Mexico. Specific central Mexican deities including Tlaltecuitli, the earth monster; Tlaloc, the rain god; Ehecatl, the wind god; and the hummingbird associated with the god Huitzilopochtli first appear in the Late Polychrome, possibly from migrating peoples (Day 1984: 104). Also important to note is the vessel form; vessels in central Mexico and Greater Nicoya, and throughout Mesoamerica, have similar vessel forms of tall ovoid jars with pedestal based, jars with tripod legs, and composite shallow bowl forms, often with tripods (Day 1984: 146). Other similarities between the two regions include similar ceramic production techniques like multiple brush painted decoration and color zoning; however, as Healy (1988) points out, these traits are very widely distributed and are too general to point to a specific connection.

Jade and obsidian found in Costa Rica probably all came from Mesoamerica; some obsidian has been traced to Guatemala and other northern areas (Healy 1988), and no known sources of jade or obsidian have been found locally (Lange and Bishop 1988). However, even though these objects are definitely foreign imports, it seems that only the ceramic-making techniques and designs were being imported, not the ceramics themselves. Paste-composition analysis has shown that Mesoamerican-style ceramics found in Greater Nicoya are locally made, and also white-slipped ceramics found in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico, previously thought to be imported from further south, are not of the same paste composition as those from Greater Nicoya (Bishop, Lange, and Lange 1988 in Healy 1988). So although Mesoamerican objects were being traded into Greater Nicoya, ceramic techniques were being traded rather than ceramics themselves.

Early Middle Polychrome

The early Middle Polychrome is the period from A.D. 800-1000. During this time, the only central Mexican iconography seen in Greater Nicoya is the jaguar (Day 1994). While earlier artifacts show some connection to the Maya and Olmec cultures, and thus a connection to Mesoamerica (see above), the earliest presence of central Mexican traits in Costa Rica seems to come around A.D. 700-800, with the man/jaguar design (Day 1984, 1994). This is during the period known in Costa Rica as the Middle Polychrome Period, which is from A.D. 800-1250. Central Mexican iconography appears on white-slipped mortuary vessels found in both the northern and southern sectors of Greater Nicoya, and similar iconography also appears on salmon-slipped vessels from the southern sector of Greater Nicoya (Day 1984, 1994; Stone 1982). Based on results of paste-compositional analysis, it seems that the

white slipped vessels were made in the northern sector (the Rivas region of Nicaragua), while the salmon-slipped vessels were copies or analogs made in the southern sector (Guanacaste, Costa Rica) (Bishop, Lange, and Lange 1988). The man/jaguar theme seems to have first appeared in the Rivas region of Greater Nicoya, and then later appeared further south in Guanacaste (Day 1994). In her summary of central Mexican iconography found in Greater Nicoya, Day (1994) lists only the Culebra Variety of Papagayo Polychrome as having a Mesoamerican style jaguar. Yet, the jaguar had been found on earlier pottery such as Galo Polychrome, dated to A.D. 500-800 (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987). Galo vessels are listed as related to Mayan forms (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1981). Thus the jaguar may be an even earlier introduction from Mesoamerica.

The Culebra Variety of Papagayo Polychrome is dated to A.D. 800-1000, and includes those vessels containing the man and jaguar theme (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987). Some vessels contain just a jaguar and some the man and jaguar. According to Day (1994), the man/jaguar design is the only central Mexican design to appear for nearly 200 years. During this time, the form of the jaguar is sometimes very naturally depicted, and sometimes highly conventionalized, but still maintains distinct traits that point to its origins as a jaguar. In Figures 3-7 below, I have shown some illustrations of Culebra Variety of Papagayo Polychrome vessels. In general, the traits of the jaguar are an elongated upper jaw, a large canine tooth, a hunched body, and a re-curved tail tip (Lothrop 1926). The man, that is sometimes included in the design, usually has three long feathers in a headdress and a spear, but depictions vary greatly (Lothrop 1926). The man/jaguar image is often associated with red circles, possibly sun dots (Lothrop 1926).



Figure 3. Papagayo Polychrome, Culebra Variety. Man and Jaguar Theme. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXXIIa.*



Figure 4. Papagayo Polychrome, Culebra Variety. Man and Jaguar Theme. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXXIIb.*

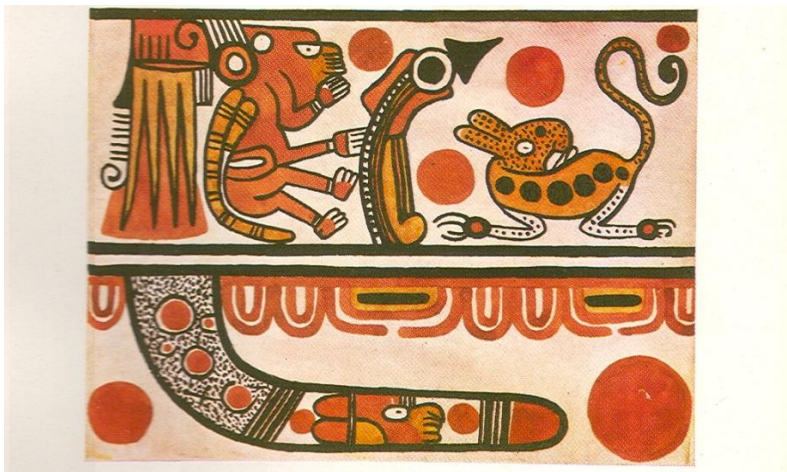


Figure 5. Papagayo Polychrome, Culebra Variety. Man and Jaguar Theme. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXXIIIb.*

Figures 3, 4, and 5 show examples of the man/jaguar theme on Culebra Variety polychrome. In Figure 3, the man is being attacked by the jaguar. The exaggerated features of the jaguar, such as the elongated upper jaw and the large canine tooth, are clear, and it has a hunched body with a re-curved tail. The man has a headdress with three long feathers which are joined by a red band forming an 'aura' around them (a shadow behind the feathers), and similar feathers on his spear. The image also has red circles and concentric rings, which may represent the sun. Figure 4 is more conventionalized, so that all the parts are not clear; however, the man still has long plumes, and the jaguar still has the elongated upper jaw and large tooth, which his legs drawn underneath and re-curved tail. In Figure 5, the jaguar's head is turned away, but the same features are present. The man has a headdress with three plumes and an aura, as well as a spear, and the jaguar is in a crouched position and has a re-curved tail, though the jaw and tooth are not visible. Other examples of this design vary somewhat and include more abstract forms of the man and jaguar. (Lothrop 1926).



Figure 6. Papagayo Polychrome, Culebra Variety. Jaguar Theme. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXXVa.*

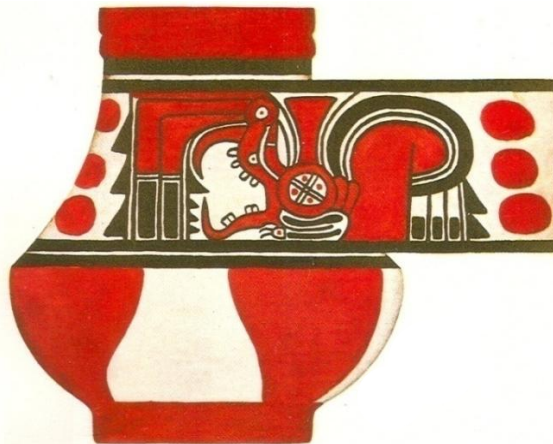


Figure 7. Papagayo Polychrome, Culebra Variety. Man and Jaguar Theme. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXXVb.*

Figures 6 and 7 show examples of Culebra Variety of Papagayo vessels with just the jaguar present. In Figure 6, the jaguar elements of an elongated upper jaw, a huge canine tooth, hunched shoulders, and re-curved tail are obvious. One change is that the hind leg is not pictured, and the foreleg is fused with the lower jaw, and a speech scroll (the curved element in front of the jaguar's head, which represents a Mesoamerican symbol for speech) is present. Also in Figure 6, the nostrils and ears are concentric circles, and the teeth are shown by parallel lines to the jaws; marked off in segments. In Figure 7, the jaws are almost equal in size, but the canine tooth is still large. Here, the foreleg is distinct from the jaw, but placed in front of it, the body has become very small, and the curved tail is enormous. The red sun dots are again present (Lothrop 1926).

Day (1984) lists the jaguar theme as beginning with the Culebra variety of Papagayo Polychrome, but then it continued into later types and varieties of polychrome. She found that as time went on, the image of the jaguar becomes more and more abstracted. She hypothesized that the abstraction is because the jaguar was an increasingly important symbol of a well-known story (Day 1984: 91). While it is not clear exactly what the jaguar symbolized, it seems to come from Mesoamerican myths of a deity, going as far back as the Olmec culture (Healy 1988). Snarskis (1981b) lists the jaguar as a sun-devouring Mesoamerican god.

Late Middle Polychrome

At around A.D. 1000, there is a change in the Mexican imagery found in Greater Nicoya. During the later half of the Middle Polychrome, from A.D. 1000-1250, the jaguar image is still seen, but there are many more types of white-slipped mortuary ceramics that have central Mexican iconography. These designs include plumed serpents, effigy faces, and rim bands with standardized motifs connected to the Mixteca-Puebla style, as well as the jaguars and warriors with plumed headdresses (Day 1994). The plumed, or feathered serpent, is one of the most important Mesoamerican symbols to reach Costa Rica. The plumed serpent, jaguar, effigy face, and geometric rim band designs are the central Mexican images that become the most long-lasting in Costa Rica, likely due to an important religious significance.

The feathered serpent first appears on a variety of Papagayo Polychrome called *Serpiente*, which is dated to about A.D. 1000-1350 (Abel-Vidor et al. 1987). These are painted in red and orange, sometimes with areas of gray, and outlined in black. The serpents frequently have cross-hatching in red or black, and the body of the serpent is often curved back on itself so that the tail is in front of or above the head. The feathered serpent design is often associated with a band of stepped frets, which is another Mesoamerican design common to the Mixteca-Puebla style. This type of vessel with feathered serpent designs has been found in both Rivas and Guanacaste (Abel-Vidor et al. 1987). Figures 8-12 below show some examples of *Serpiente* variety of Papagayo Polychrome, which show the important elements of the image. Lothrop (1926) lists the design found on *Serpiente* ceramics as the Feathered Serpent Type A, with the important elements being that the serpent has both head and tail plumes, it has an 'aura' surrounding the tail plumes (an outline or shadow behind the plumes), fangs, arms and/or hands or claws, body markings such as cross-hatching, and the image is in the shape where the serpent is curved back on itself.



Figure 8. Papagayo Polychrome, Serpiente Variety. Feathered Serpent. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XLIVa.*



Figure 9. Papagayo Polychrome, Serpiente Variety. Feathered Serpent. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XLIVb.*



Figure 10. Papagayo Polychrome, Serpiente Variety. Feathered Serpent. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XLVI a,b,c.*

In Figures 8, 9, and 10 above, the feathered serpent is fairly obvious, as are the mouth, fangs, and legs/arms, which have markings for claws. All the figures have large plumes on the head, and plumes on the tails, with some variations in the style of the plumes. The bodies in Figure 8, 10a and 10c, have cross-hatching to represent scales, whereas 10b has cross-hatching present in the mouth. Figure 9 depicts the eye in an eye-plate, a closed off space for the eye. Figure 9 also has a tongue. Lothrop (1926) describes these figures as having various degrees of conventionalization, listing Figure 10a and 10c as having very conventionalized legs and Figure 10c as having more standardized plumes. The feathered serpents on Serpiente polychrome are usually painted with one on each side of

the vessel, always an ovoid or pear-shaped vessel, but it is sometimes substituted for a monkey-like design, as in Figures 11 and 12, below (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987).



Figure 11. Papagayo Polychrome, Serpiente Variety. Monkey pattern. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXI.*



Figure 12. Papagayo Polychrome, Serpiente Variety. Monkey pattern. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXII.*

Figure 11 shows a monkey design replacing the serpent design on Serpiente Variety polychrome, and Figure 12 shows what Lothrop (1926) calls a monkey design, but with elements from the feathered serpent image, including the plumes on the head and the cross-hatching on the body. According to Lothrop (1926), it is common that elements from different images were combined. Figures 11 and 12 clearly depict the step fret design on the upper border of the pedestal base. The step-fret is a common Mesoamerican rim-band design that is seen in Greater Nicoya ceramics during the Middle Polychrome, and continues into the Late Polychrome.



Figure 13. Papagayo Polychrome, Cervantes Variety. Feather Serpent Design. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LVIIa.*



Figure 14. Papagayo Polychrome, Cervantes Variety. Feather Serpent Design. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LVIIb.*



Figure 15. Papagayo Polychrome, Cervantes Variety. Feather Serpent Design. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate Ld.*

Also from the late Middle Polychrome and dating to A.D. 1000-1350, the Cervantes Variety of Papagayo Polychrome often contains the feathered serpent design. Cervantes variety is found on both tripod dishes or pear-shaped jars, though dishes are more frequent (Abel-Vidor et. al. 1987). On Cervantes, the feathered serpent appears in the form described by Lothrop (1926) as Feathered Serpent Type F, which occurs on the interior of dishes, or Feathered Serpent Type C, which is found on the rim or neck of jars. Examples of these are illustrated below in Figures 13, 14, and 15 (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987).

These feathered serpents contain some of the same elements that are seen in the Serpiente Variety, but are much more conventionalized. Figures 13 and 14 show feathered serpent designs from the inside of dishes. In Figure 13, the serpent head retains the naturalistic form, which faces to the right, with open jaws and an eye crowned by plumes. The red panel next to the jaw is probably a fang, and the brown object and the scalloped red object

projecting from the jaw in the lower right corner probably form the tongue. The doubled up object in the lower left corner is probably an arm or a reduced body and tail (Lothrop 1926). Figure 14 is even more conventionalized. The lower jaw is completely eliminated, and the eye is in the center. The elaborate head and tail plume are still present, at the top and bottom of the circle. To the right of the tail plumes (in the lower right of the circle) is a panel representing the body (Lothrop 1926). Figure 15 shows the feathered serpent as seen in panels on the rim or neck on the outside of a vessel or along the inside walls. The fang is changed into an arm (near the left side of the panel), and the plumes are displaced so as to be in front of the jaw (on the far left). It is common on feathered serpents of this type to have the feathers in front and back be at the left and right of the design, forming a balanced pattern, as shown here. The claw or arm, fang, and an eye seen in profile are also common (Lothrop 1926).

Another type of vessel from the Late Middle Polychrome showing central Mexican traits is Pataky Polychrome, dated to A.D. 1000-1350. Pataky Polychrome commonly show the jaguar, the man/jaguar, and the feathered serpent. The jaguar is commonly painted in silhouette form in a frieze. The silhouettes have mouths and claws painted in dark red, possibly indicating blood (Day 1984). Below this band there is usually another band with elements of the man/jaguar theme, such as feathered darts, a squared human head with a feathered headdress and speech scroll, a crouching jaguar with a weeping eye, wounds with drops of blood, spears, jaguar pelt markings, ears, and claws (Day 1984). A modeled jaguar is also common on Pataky vessels, so that the jaguar has become the vessel itself, with the feet and tail forming tripod supports, and the paws resting on the knees (Day 1984).



Figure 16. Pataky Polychrome. Jaguar. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXIb.*



Figure 17. Pataky Polychrome. Jaguar and Feathered Serpent designs. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XLII b,c,d.*



Figure 18. Pataky Polychrome. Jaguar Effigy. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XLIII.*

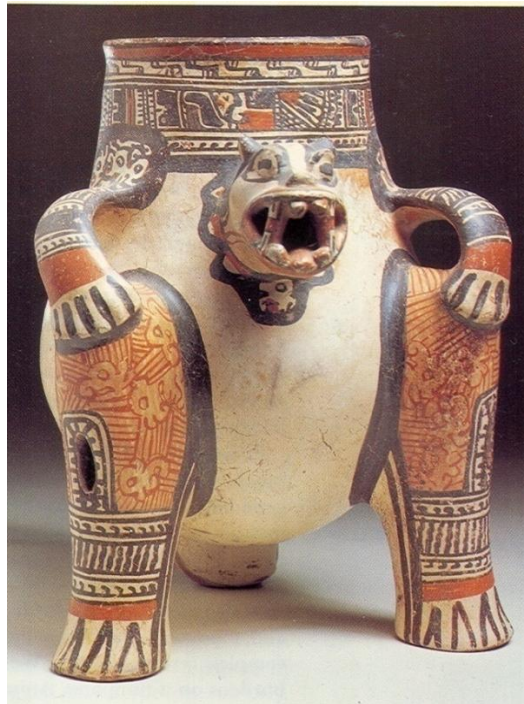


Figure 19. Pataky Polychrome. Feline Effigy. *From Snarskis 1981b: Catalogue 108.*

Figure 16 shows an example of what Lothrop (1926) calls the Silhouette Jaguar Type B, commonly found on Pataky Polychrome vessels. It does not contain all the same elements of the jaguar seen on Papagayo Polychrome, such as the elongated jaw and large tooth, or the jaguar spots, and Lothrop (1926: 143) notes that it has sometimes even been called a crocodile. Day (1984) notes that it is often associated with themes of war. It simulates negative

(or resist) painting, but does not use the same technique of covering areas with wax where paint was not wanted. These are painted only by positive painting in black (Snarskis 1981b). Lothrop (1926: 145) notes that this type of imitation negative painting is found more commonly in areas where actual negative painting was not used, including Nicoya, Nicaragua, and Honduras. In Figure 17, the vase on the bottom left shows both the jaguar frieze around the bottom, though it is upside down, and the feathered serpent design around the top (Lothrop 1926). These two designs are often combined on Pataky Polychrome (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987). The vessels at the top and right of Figure 17 show more examples of the jaguar silhouette used as a rim band. Figures 18 and 19 show the modeled effigy form common in Pataky vessels. Both contain a band with feathered serpent elements along the top, and silhouette jaguar designs on the supports/legs as well as around the head in Figure 18. Snarskis (1981b: 197) mentions that if the jaguar represents a sun-devouring Mesoamerican god, then the smaller silhouette jaguars could represent “stars revealed by approaching darkness.”

Another design sometimes found on Pataky vessels is the Tlaloc-like effigy jar. Tlaloc is a Mesoamerican rain god, but whether these vessels actually depict Tlaloc is still unknown. These have a painted or modeled face on the front of a large pedestal jar, with round ‘goggled’ eyes rimmed with ticked orange circles, a mouth mask with fangs, and a painted or gold nose or mouth ornament (Day 1984). Figure 20 below shows a Pataky Polychrome effigy vessel.

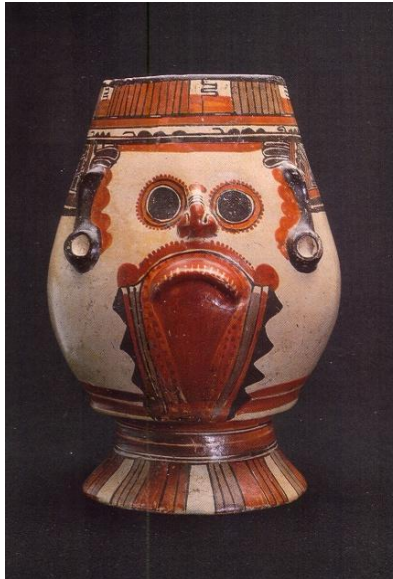


Figure 20. Tlaloc-Like Effigy vessel. *From Lange 1988b: Plate 17.*

In a study on effigy vessels in Costa Rica, Leibsohn (1988) found that effigy vessels show change through time. Effigy vessels in themselves have a long history in Costa Rica; however, the Middle Polychrome vessels differ from earlier vessels. There is some continuity of traits in the eyes circled in red and/or black, mouths outlined in red, but the earlier vessels were probably to make a portrait or death head for a funeral offering of the elite, and they had darkened eyes, with the mouth and teeth set in a grimace and were commonly associated with alligator designs. However in the Middle Polychrome, there is a change and the effigy vessels show similar attributes to Mesoamerican designs, including the goggle eyes of a black center with an orange ring around it, the elaborate mouths with fangs or chin ornaments, including painted jewelry or gold, ear plugs, and designs associated with the jaguar or feathered serpent (Day 1984; Leibsohn 1988). This forms a more generalized face, possibly representing a deity rather than an individual person. Leibsohn (1988) notes that these vessels are not, however, the same as Mesoamerican ones, and concludes that the people in Costa Rica adapted Mexican patterns to their own effigy head tradition.

Another interesting type of pottery from the period from A.D. 1000-1350 showing certain similarities to Mesoamerica is the Pataky Leyenda variety (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987). This type of pottery has very few examples in Costa Rica. It is decorated with abstract and standardized iconographic symbols that repeat, and it seems to tell a history or depict a religious event or ritual. According to Day (1984), the Leyenda variety could be related to lost

codices (pictorial histories) from the Nicoya region, and therefore may have served a similar purpose to vessels in the Mixteca-Puebla region in central Mexico which told histories in a similar form to the central Mexican codices. Because so few of these have been found in Greater Nicoya, not much more is known about Leyenda variety ceramics. Figure 21 shows an example of a Leyenda Variety vessel.



Figure 21. Leyenda Variety, Pataky Polychrome. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXXI.*

Late Polychrome Period: Vallejo

Beginning around A.D. 1200 (the end of the Middle Polychrome), designs more closely related to Mexican imagery appear in Greater Nicoya on a type of ceramic called Vallejo Polychrome, which are found mainly in elite graves throughout the Greater Nicoya region (Day 1994). While we continue to see the central Mexican iconography of the jaguar, plumed serpent, effigy face, and geometric designs, Vallejo also introduces some new central Mexican iconography, including specific deities and related symbols. Vallejo is one of the most characteristic types of ceramics in the Late Polychrome Period, but the type is found associated with Middle Polychrome ceramics from the late Middle Polychrome (A.D. 1000-1200), which Day (1984:52-53) views not as an earlier beginning for Vallejo ceramics, but as a lingering on of the Middle Polychrome types. This type has painted and incised images including the fire serpent, Ehecatl (a Mesoamerican wind god and a representation of the god Quetzalcoatl), sun symbols, Tlaltecutil (the earth monster, another Mesoamerican god), a “winged head” motif, hummingbirds, stylized serpents, as well as other Mixteca-Puebla geometric symbols such as stepped pyramids and stepped frets (Day 1994; Healy 1980). Stone (1977: 80) describes the iconography of Vallejo as “referring entirely to the Mexican pantheon,” and many have noticed the connection between Vallejo and the Mixteca-Puebla style (Day 1984; Healy 1980; Lothrop 1926). Vallejo dates to A.D. 1200-1520, which includes the end of the Middle Polychrome Period and the Late Polychrome Period (Abel-Vidor 1987; Healy 1980). Vallejo forms include bowls, pedestal jars, and shallow tripod bowls (Day 1984, 1994). In addition, Vallejo vessels contain blue paint, something not seen before in Costa Rica. Canouts and Guerrero (1988) make a strong case that Vallejo (white slipped) vessels were all made in the northern sector of Rivas, based on paste compositional analysis as well as stylistic analysis. They argue that only the Jicote type copies (discussed below) were made in the southern sector. However, Vallejo ceramics were found in both the northern and southern sectors.

Vallejo Polychrome is divided into varieties based on decoration. Most commonly, the motifs are framed in panels connected to the rim bands, usually one motif on each side of the vessel. The Lazo Variety is of a very stylized feathered serpent motif, which consists of a dropped half circle filled with a ray-like element surrounding a serpent mandible. Canouts and Guerrero (1988) describe three main features of the design as a scrolled jaw or mandible design, a face design positioned in the concavity formed by the scroll, and lines or rays that radiate from the convex side of the scroll. Black dots located in the concavity of the jaw are used either as space fillers or to represent eyes. Though the Lazo design, shown in Figure 22, varies somewhat, the radiating lines are always orange or black. Lothrop (1926) lists the rays as representational of the plumes on the serpent head. It is not clear whether the jaw is seen in profile or frontal view, as even a profile view might contain two eyes due to the Mesoamerican

tendency to portray more than one perspective of a figure (Canouts and Guerrero 1988). The whole design is framed by a semicircular band. It seems that the Lazo design is a feathered serpent symbol that has become vary standardized (Day 1984).

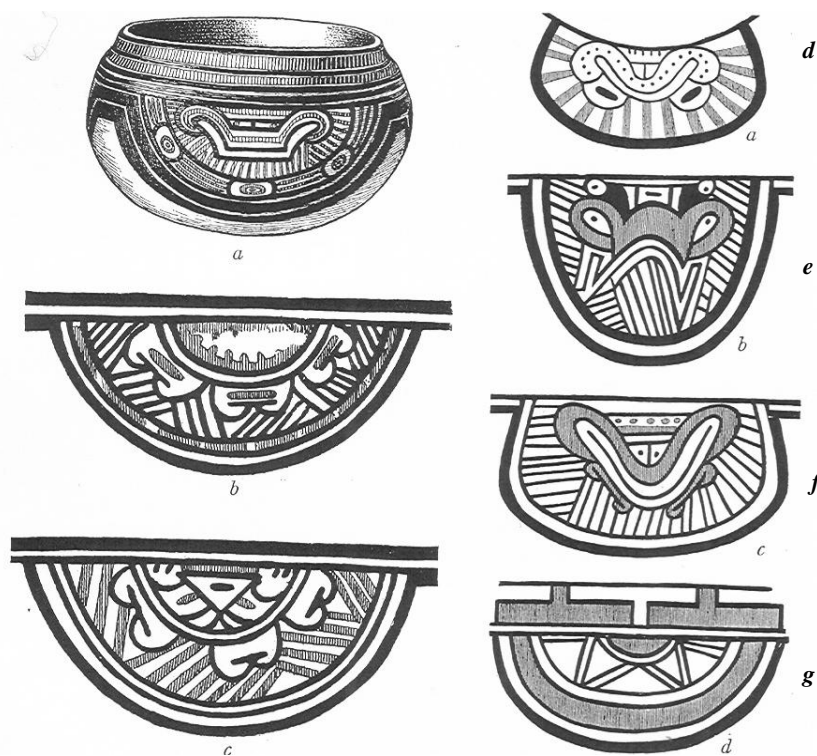


Figure 22. Lazo Variety from Vallejo bowls. From Lothrop 1926: Figure 54 and 55.

Lothrop gives some details on various representations of the Lazo design. In Figure 22d, the extra dots may be two nostrils or the eyes. Figure 21e has four dotted elements, probably two eyes and two nostrils. Figure 21f has two hook-like appendages, possibly arms, which may also be present in 22b and c. In Figure 22b the mouth is outlined in red scallops, possibly for gums. The eye in 22c is triangle shaped, which occurs in some of the other feathered serpent designs. Figure 22g is so simplified as to be geometric (Lothrop 1926: 157-58). These designs are often associated with rim band designs including step frets, pyramidal elements, or striped triangles, which may represent feathers (Canouts and Guerrero 1988). The striped triangle is a design, which Day (1984) has noted as also found in central Mexico.

The Cara Variety of Vallejo Polychrome also has a rim band design and a design pendant from the band on either side. The major design is two identical faces on each side, in a standardized form. The face consists of three circles for eyes and mouth with black painted arcs around the cheeks and chin (Canouts and Guerrero 1988), as shown in Figure 23 below. The round black eyes are circled with orange paint, black dots, and black outer circles. A 'y' or 't' shaped element rises from between the eyes and is outlined in black. Beneath the mouth there are several orange lines in a semi-circle, representing gold jewelry, from which hangs a bifurcated element which is similar to the Mixtec symbol for gold (Canouts and Guerrero 1988; Day 1984). This symbol resembles frog feet, and is probably associated with the gold frogs so common in Costa Rica. (The use of this symbol for gold in central Mexico may point to the movement northward of goldwork techniques, which came from South America through Central America). The body of the figure is suggested by an arm or wing element on each side of the face, which has either paws or hands. These faces resemble the 'goggle' eyed designs also associated with the Mesoamerican god Tlaloc; the faces could be a continuation from the Middle Polychrome effigy faces, or they could represent a separate instance of outside influence (Leibsohn 1988). Canouts and Guerrero (1988) point out that although other varieties of Vallejo do show a recognizable foreign influence, the step fret, the goggle-eyed effigy faces, and the lazo jaw do have stylistic antecedents in the Greater Nicoya area, and so it is unclear whether these designs are new introductions, a transformation of earlier designs, or a combination of both. The effigy faces in the Late Polychrome

are very generalized. Though they have some continuity from the Middle Polychrome, such as painting used for facial features, jewelry, ornaments, and bands with elite symbols and geometric patterns, there are new symbols such as dotted circles around the eyes, elaborate ear plugs, and down-turned arms with jaguar spots, and depictions of gold jewelry, which could point to a new influx (Leibsohn 1988). Interestingly, the Lazo and Cara varieties are the only two that have been copied in Jicote type ceramics which are copies of Rivas ceramics made in the southern sector, possibly due to the high importance of these images.

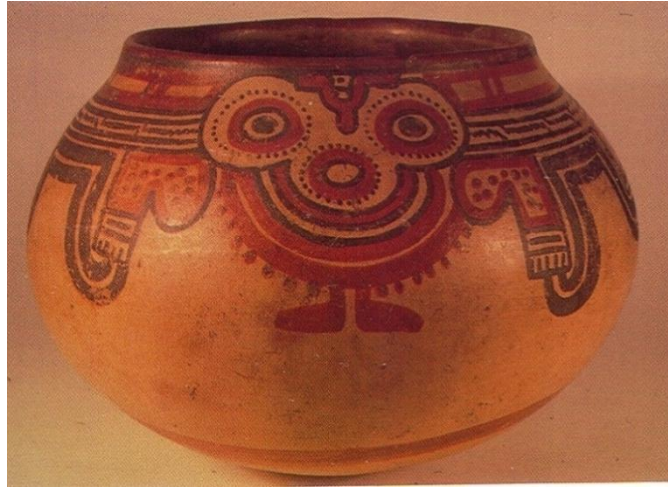


Figure 23. Vallejo Polychrome, Cara Variety. *From Lange, ed. 1988b: plate 18.*

Other designs besides the Cara and Lazo are frequent on the white-slipped Vallejo Polychrome. The Cara and Lazo designs are the only ones on Vallejo to have stylistic antecedents in Greater Nicoya; all the other designs are thought to derive from Mesoamerica (Canouts and Guerrero 1988). The Vallejo Variety of Vallejo Polychrome includes the designs of Ehecatl/Quetzlcoatl, the Earth Monster, anthropomorphic figures, hummingbirds, the feathered serpent, and astrological symbols (Canouts and Guerrero 1988; Day 1984). The hummingbird motif may be associated with the Mesoamerican deity, Huitzilopochtli (Day 1984). The plumed serpent was found by Day (1984) in the collection at Hacienda Tempisque to be the most common design on Vallejo variety vessels. Other elements on the vessels include bands of parallel vertical lines, panels filled with alternating lines of blue and orange paint, and step-fret and step-pyramid elements (Day 1984). Healy (1980) lists the stepped pyramid as the most common design, with other common patterns including a checkerboard pattern, cross-hatching, hanging loops, feather motifs, rectangular armed-cross designs, as well as other designs mentioned above.

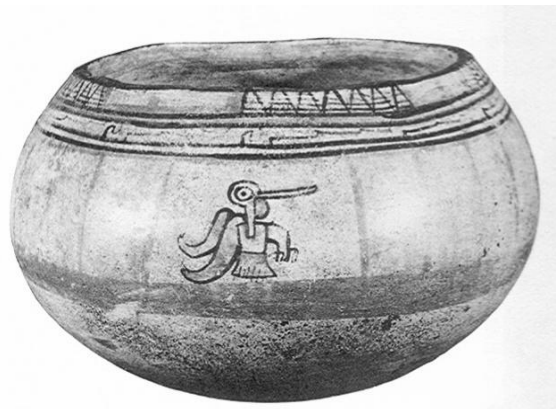


Figure 24. Vallejo Polychrome. Hummingbird. *From Stone 1982: Figure 33.*



Figure 25. Vallejo Polychrome. Plumed Serpent. *From Stone 1982: Figure 38.*

Figure 24 shows an example of a hummingbird on a Vallejo vessel, with striped triangles on the rim band, as well as step-frets. Figure 25 shows a feathered serpent on a tripod dish, with concentric circles with dots surrounding them. Figure 26 is an example of Ehecatl, the Mesoamerican wind god and a representation of Quetzalcoatl, the Mesoamerican deity associated with the feathered serpent.



Figure 26. Vallejo Polychrome. Ehecatl. *From Stone 1982: Figure 37.*

The Mombacho Variety was previously considered as a separate ceramic type, but has since been changed to a variety of Vallejo (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987; Day 1984). The principal difference between Mombacho and other Vallejo vessels is that Mombacho variety vessels contain under-slip incising. This means that the designs are not only painted, but also incised, and the incising was applied before the slip. Mombacho variety vessels date to A.D. 1350-1520, beginning later than the other varieties of Vallejo (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987). The Mombacho vessels do not have a counterpart in Jicote ceramics, which means that this design from the northern sector was not copied in vessels made in the southern sector (Canouts and Guerrero 1988). Mombacho variety of Vallejo ceramics are very similar to Vallejo variety, the main difference is an underslip incising instead of through-the-slip incising which occurs on some other Vallejo vessels. The decoration on Mombacho ceramics is also related to Mexican designs, including the fire serpent and the Earth monster, illustrated below, as well as the step/fret or a frieze of red feather designs outlined in black. The vessels frequently only have color paint on the rim band, in orange, brown, and black, with the incised design being covered only with the white slip. Lothrop (1926) saw a connection in the under-slip

incising to the region west of Vera Cruz (which is on the Gulf Coast of Mexico), and he also mentioned that region had patterns similar to those in Nicoya, but he did not specify which designs.

Day (1984: 104) noticed that specific Mexican deities are only found on Vallejo and Mombacho Variety of Vallejo Polychrome vessels, and that these two types did not have analogs in the Jicote ware made in the southern sector, though these varieties are found in the southern sector. Figure 27, 28, and 29 show Tlaltecuctli, the earth monster, a Mesoamerican deity. In Figure 27, it is shown with open arms and legs, with the body flanked by 'shields' with feathers attached. No lower jaw is shown, which is typical of depictions of the earth monster, but the upper jaw and eye are shown twice. This vessel contains blue paint. Lothrop (1926) does not discuss why the figure is shown with the face in an upside-down position, but it was common in Mesoamerican art that a figure was shown from various perspectives at the same time, and this principle seems to be seen here where the head and body are seen from two different angles. Figures 28 and 29 (the same vessel) show a similar design, but this one with a lower jaw. The step-fret rim design is clear in the drawing.



Figure 27. Mombacho Variety of Vallejo Polychrome. Earth Monster.
From Snarskis 1981: Plate 44, Catalogue # 112, same vessel as Lothrop 1926: Plate LXXXIIIa.



Figure 28. Mombacho Variety of Vallejo Polychrome. Earth Monster. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXXXIVa.*

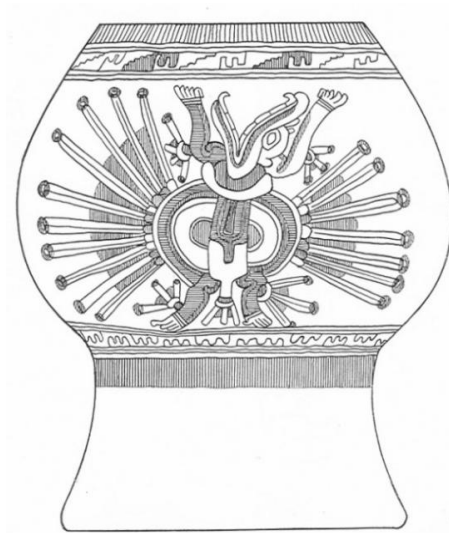


Figure 29. Mombacho Variety of Vallejo Polychrome. Earth Monster (Drawing of Figure 27).
From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXXXVb.



Figure 30. Mombacho Variety of Vallejo Polychrome. Plumed Serpent. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXXXIVb.*

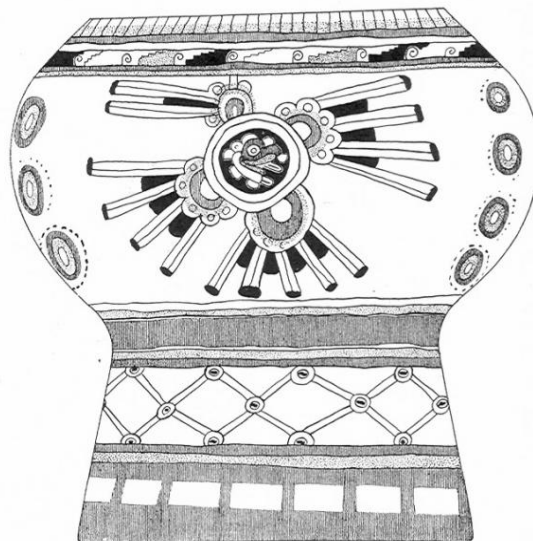


Figure 31. Mombacho Variety of Vallejo Polychrome. Plumed Serpent. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXXXVa.*

Figures 30 and 31 show two examples of the feathered or plumed serpent. According to Lothrop (1926), the design on Figure 30 has a Mexican treatment of the head and body, especially the scales, commonly associated with the alligator in Mexican codices, but he does not list any more specifics. Figure 31 is a conventional Mexican serpent head set in a circular panel, surrounded by the shield and plume motif, and with concentric circles with dots surrounding them on either side of the design. This vessel also has blue paint, something not seen in any previous types of ceramics (Lothrop 1926).

As mentioned above, another type of ceramic, which contains similar images to those listed above, is the Jicote Polychrome. All of the ceramic types discussed above are white-slipped ceramics, but similar designs also appear on salmon-slipped ceramics that are called Jicote Polychrome. While the white-slipped ceramics were manufactured in the northern sector, the salmon-slipped ceramics were manufactured in the southern sector, as determined by paste composition analysis (Bishop, Lange, and Lange 1988). The Jicote types are also dated to A.D. 1000-1350, and appear to be copies of the northern types, including Pataky, Vallejo, Luna, and other types not discussed in this paper (Canouts and Guerrero 1988; Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987). They similarly contain images of the jaguar, including abstract designs, the man/jaguar images, modeled effigy heads, the feathered serpent, including the Lazo motif, as well as the step-fret and other geometric designs. As mentioned earlier, only the Cara and Lazo varieties of Vallejo Polychrome have been copied in Jicote polychrome made in the southern sector. What this means is unclear, because the Cara and Lazo Varieties are those that do have stylistic antecedents in the Greater Nicoya area, while the other varieties not copied are those with more direct Mexican influence (i.e. Mesoamerican deities), possibly representing a new arrival of ceramic designs that did not have the same influence in the southern sector. It would seem that although the white-slipped vessels are found throughout the region, even those with the newer Mexican designs, only those with the motifs that have been important for a longer period of time are being made in the southern sector as Jicote Polychrome.

There are many varieties of Jicote Polychrome, because Jicote is defined as any tan- or salmon-slipped pottery. The Cara Variety is similar to the Cara Variety of Vallejo, with the standardized Cara motif that may be associated with Tlaloc. A similar form is seen in the Mascara Variety of Jicote Polychrome, which always has a face painted or modeled in frontal view, as seen in Figures 32, 33, 34, and 35. Some of these designs, however, have a whisker-like motif, which may suggest that the face is a feline (Snarskis 1981b). Figure 32 also shows stylized plumed-serpent motifs on the band. (Snarskis 1981b). Figure 34 shows the guilloche design on the rim band, composed of two intertwined bands. The guilloche is possibly a representation of the feathered serpent design, and is another design associated with Mesoamerica (Day 1984). Other varieties of Jicote include the Lazo Variety which is a copy of the Lazo Variety of Vallejo Polychrome; the Luna Variety, which is a copy of Luna and El Menco Varieties of Luna Polychrome; the Lunita Variety, which is derived from, but not copied from Luna vessels; the Felino Variety which has similarities to Casares Polychrome; the Tempisque Variety, with some elements from Papagayo Polychrome; the Pataky Variety, which copies Pataky Polychrome; the Bramadero and Madeira Varieties, copies of Bramadero and

Madeira Polychrome, respectively; and the Jicote Variety, which only has designs of a guilloche pattern, stepped frets, or abstract jaguar designs (Abel-Vidor et. al. 1987; Day 1984). While the nomenclature of Jicote Polychrome may be a bit tedious, it is clear that in the Guanacaste region, designs similar to those in Rivas were being painted. Canouts and Guerrero (1988) offer some evidence based on stylistic similarities and differences, primarily in the band configurations, that show that in the south, the designs were copied from northern designs, and the two regions were not simply part of the same stylistic tradition. There is a greater variety of designs in the north, but a greater regularity in the designs in the south, as if the images were deliberately being copied in a certain way.

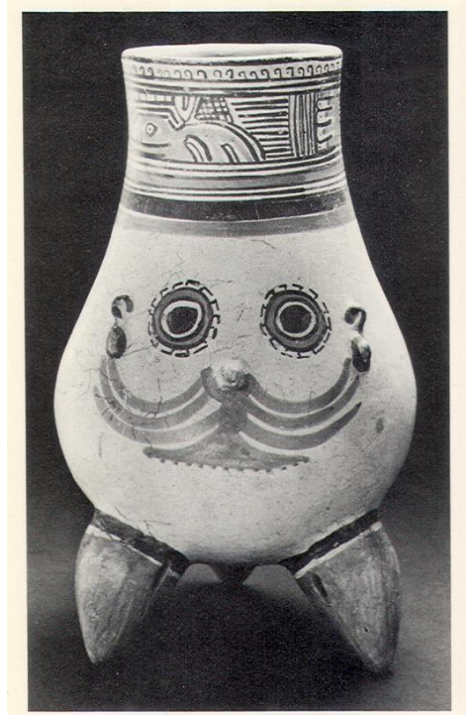


Figure 32. Jicote Polychrome. *From Snarskis 1981b: Catalogue #103.*



Figure 33. Jicote Polychrome. *From Lange, ed. 1988b: Plate 27b.*

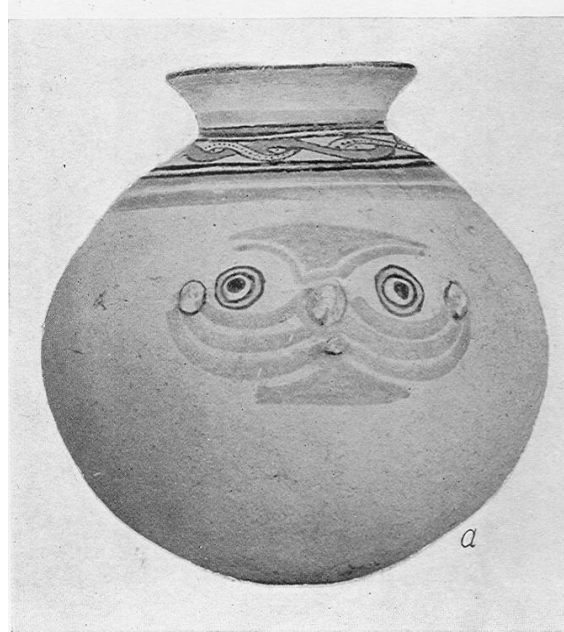


Figure 34. Mascara Variety of Jicote Polychrome. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXIIIa.*

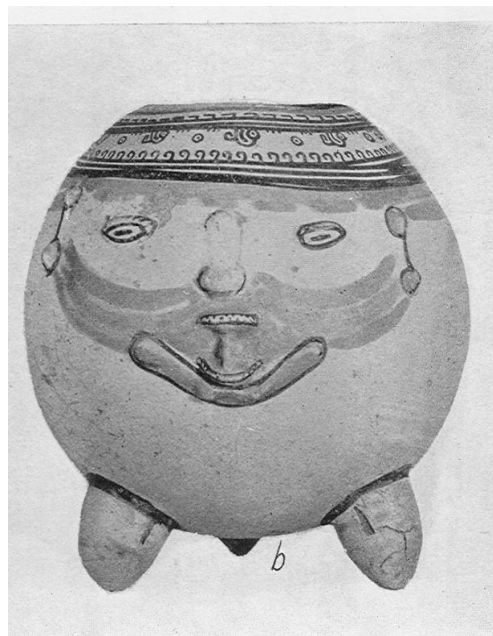


Figure 35. Mascara Variety of Jicote Polychrome. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XXIIIb.*

Late Polychrome Period: Luna

After A.D. 1350, the images become abstracted symbols including repetitive geometric rim bands, but the designs of serpents, jaguars, feathers, and effigy faces continue. Day (1994) views the reason for this abstraction as because the specific relationship with the Mixteca-Puebla area is lost. Though she does not specify which types of pottery she is referring to that have these abstracted symbols, it is well-known that Luna ware introduces a new style of depicting these symbols, it is probable that is the reference (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987; Healy 1980; Lothrop 1926).

Luna Ware, first described by Bransford (1881), dates to A.D. 1200-1550. Luna ware is a type of polychrome with a very different style of depicting images, as is evident from looking at it. Yet the Luna Ware still contains the

same iconography seen on earlier vessels, they are just depicted in a new way. The common images shown on Luna include the jaguar and feathered serpent elements, the winged head, the stepped frets and scrolls, scallops, meanders, loop lines, zigzags, interlocking L's, columns of circles, rosettes, and abstract animal forms such as monkeys and serpents. (Abel-Vidor et.al. 1987; Day 1984; Healy 1980; Lothrop 1926). The vessel forms are similar to earlier forms: composite bowls with tripod supports, hemispherical bowls, flat-bottomed plates, and cups with pedestal supports. The designs on Luna are depicted with very fine lines, as if copying incised vessels. Day (1984) views this "as if new people had entered the area and adopted the local iconography but painted it in their own style" (Day 1984: 95). Stone (1977: 80) views Luna ware as having a possible connection with the Mixteca Alta. Healy (1980) describes the style as stiff and abstract, but the execution was refined and delicate, and notes that the motifs tend to be small and thin, with frequent open blank white space, an unusual characteristic in Mesoamerican and Costa Rican pottery. Though these vessels are found in sites in both the northern and southern sectors, the abundance of vessels from Ometepe Island in Lake Nicaragua suggests that they were manufactured there (Abel-Vidor et. al. 1987; Healy 1980). Figures 36-41 below are examples of some of the common designs on Luna Ware.



Figure 36. Luna Ware. Plumed Serpent Design. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XCII.*

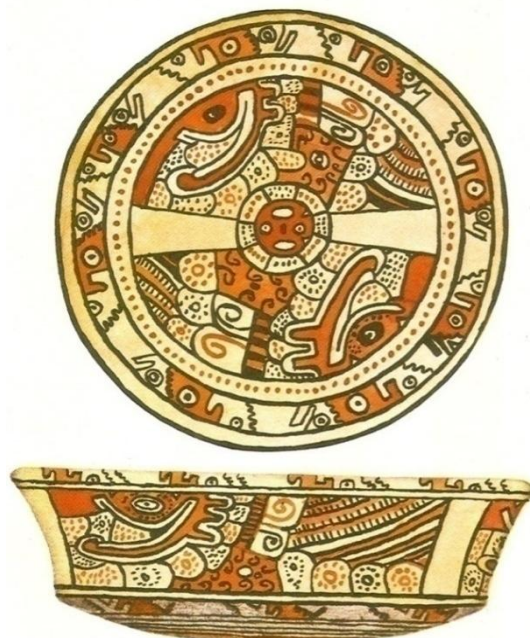


Figure 37. Luna Ware. Plumed Serpent. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate LXXXIX.*

Lothrop (1926) described the plumed serpent as one of the most important designs on Luna vessels. Figure 36 is a plumed serpent design named by Lothrop (1926) as the ‘simple’ design. The top part of the figure shows the inner rim of the vessel, while the middle part shows the inside bottom of the vessel. The design on the bottom of the vessel is the same as that on the inner rim, only in circular form. (I will describe the image based on the picture of the inner rim). The serpent jaw is the L-shaped design (in brown) at the top left. Above the jaw is an eye, enclosed in a circular eye-plate, and above the eye is a red panel, which ends in a claw- or hand-like image. According to Lothrop (1926), the claws also represent the plumes in this image. Below the jaw is a square, red panel, representing the tongue, and from the tongue, a hooked line comes down, representing the fang. Lothrop describes the form in the upper right as that of a conventionalized face, possibly a human, including eyes and plumes/claws. On other parts of the vessel, the same design elements (i.e. the tongue, the fang, the plumes, the eye plate) are drawn in similar abstract forms. Figure 37 is what Lothrop (1926) calls a ‘complex’ feathered serpent design. It consists of a pattern of a serpent head with open jaws facing the left. Above the jaws an eye is recognizable. Behind the jaws is a mass of feathers. Lothrop (1926) describes other variations of the plumed serpent on Luna ware, from naturalistic to abstract designs, but they often include the same elements of open jaws, an eye and eye-plate, a protruding fang, a tongue, and plumes, which have made up that design since it was first seen in Greater Nicoya. The plumed serpent does not have as many forms on Luna Polychrome as in earlier types of vessels; instead it is a very conventionalized image, but there is some unity with earlier plumed serpents because the same elements are depicted (Lothrop 1926).

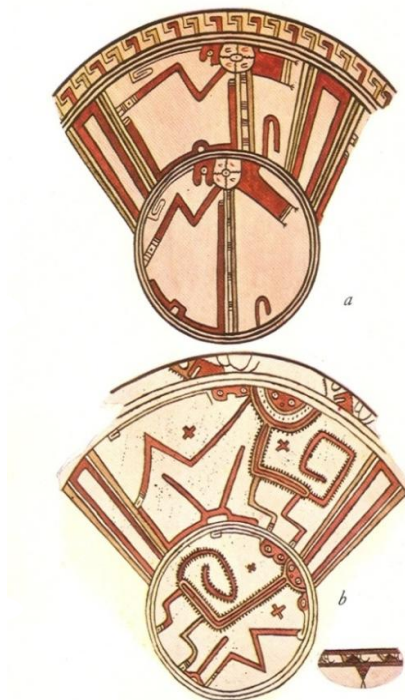


Figure 38. Luna Ware. Monkey Design. *From Lothrop 1926: Plate XCIV.*



Figure 39. Luna Ware. Jaguar Design and Winged Head Design. *From Lothrop 1926: Figure 105.*

Figure 38 shows an example of a monkey design. While the monkey is not typically viewed as an image related to central Mexico, and so has not been discussed in this paper, this example shows the abstractness of the designs on Luna Polychrome. Also, in comparing Figure 38 with Figures 11 and 12, it is again clear that even though the monkey is depicted, it is not in the same naturalistic style that earlier polychrome vessels depicted the monkey, but rather is a very abstract design.

Figure 39 is an example of the jaguar design as seen on Luna vessels. The picture is of the inside of a bowl, and in the center is a winged head design seen as four faces with lines coming out from them. Surrounding this in a

circular panel is the jaguar design, depicted in very conventionalized curved and hooked lines. According to Lothrop (1926) this is derived from the jaguar silhouette seen earlier.

Figures 40 and 41 show examples of the winged head design. According to Day (1994), this design was first seen in Costa Rica during the Middle Polychrome; however, I only found illustrated examples from the Late Polychrome. The winged head consists of a face, usually circular or squared, surrounded by lines of plumes in long narrow bands of alternating colors. This design varies as well. In the two examples here, there is a face framed by two sets of plumes. One thing that is unusual about the vessels in Figures 40 and 41 is that instead of dividing the inner rim and bottom of the vessel into separate panels, they are treated as a single field of decoration, which is not characteristic of decoration in Greater Nicoya or of American pottery as a whole (Lothrop 1926) and so is another aspect of a new style of painting. The winged head design is always accompanied by a design that consists of concentric circles with loops attached to it (Day 1984). An example of this is seen clearly in Figure 41 just to the left of the large plumes that surround the winged head. This design of a circle with four loops is similar to a design found on central Mexican codices called a *chalchihuitl*, which is a symbol for jade (Lind 1967). The winged head may also be associated with the west coast of Mexico (see Day 1984: 103).



a

Figure 40. Luna Ware, El Menco Variety. Winged Head Design. From Lothrop 1926: Plate XCIIIa.



b

Figure 41. Luna Ware. Winged Head Design. From Lothrop 1926: Plate XCIIIb.

Luna ware continues to have many of the same geometric forms that were found on earlier vessels, including the stepped-fret, as seen on the rim of Figure 37, steps, as seen on the rim of Figure 38, and circles with dots, as in

Figure 36. The stepped fret can vary from fine lines to wide painted bands, suggesting animal forms. (Day 1984). Luna ware vessels also continue the effigy face design seen in earlier vessels, (Day 1984), though not in the same style as earlier vessels.

Mixteca-Puebla Style

The link from Greater Nicoya to central Mexico has often been described as coming from the Mixteca-Puebla style, and it is generally agreed that ceramics in Greater Nicoya share similarities with the Mixteca-Puebla style (Boone and Smith 2003; Day 1984; 1994; Healy 1988; Lind 1994; Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994; Pohl 2003; Smith 2003; Smith and Berdan 2003; Smith and Heath-Smith 1980; Stone 1977, 1982). Nevertheless, due to the confusion over what is meant by the term Mixteca-Puebla, each researcher may have meant something different.

In researching the Mixteca-Puebla style, it is clear that some confusion over terms has existed in the past, as discussed above. This makes it difficult to correlate all the information, and what follows will be only a summary of what has been done on this topic. The Mixteca-Puebla style as defined by Nicholson (1960) includes a list of common iconographic symbols: the solar and lunar disks, celestial and terrestrial bands, the Venus or bright star symbol, skulls and skeletons, jade, water, fire and flame, hearts, war, shields, arrow and banners, mountain or place sign, the downy feather ball, the flower, stylized eyes as stars, stepped frets or spirals (called xicalcolihquis), sliced spiral shells, the tonalpohualli signs (the day signs from the calendar) zoomorphic forms including the feathered serpent, the sectioned serpent, jaguars, deer, rabbits, spiders, and deities. Ramsey (1975) and Lind (1967, 1994) give similar lists. As discussed above, part of the confusion was over the difference between style and iconography (Boone and Smith 2003); previously, the list of common iconographic elements was defined as part of a style. However, style refers only to the way forms are rendered, not the forms themselves. It would be more correct to say that the Mixteca-Puebla style commonly painted these images.

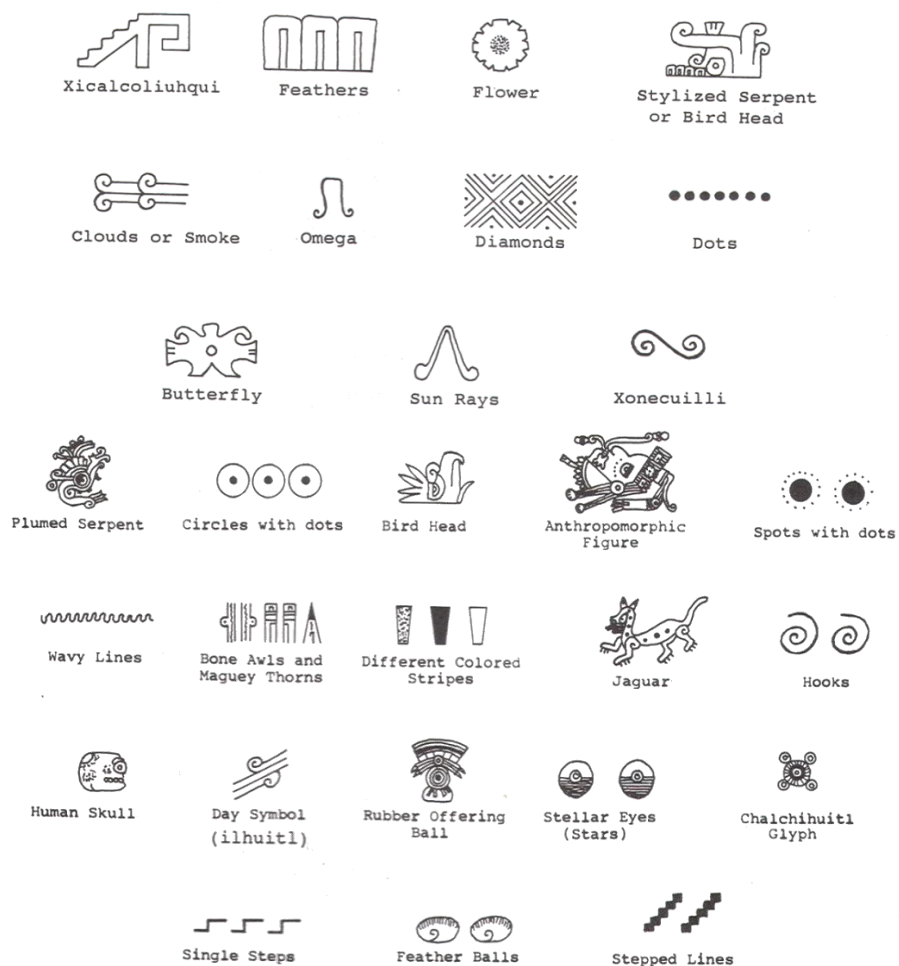


Figure 42. Iconography that is commonly depicted in the Mixteca-Puebla style in the Late Postclassic in Central Mexico. *From Lind 1994: Figures 23 and 24.*

Figure 42 shows some drawings of the iconography commonly depicted on Mixteca-Puebla style ceramics in the Late Postclassic. For the scope of this paper, it is not necessary to describe each of the iconographic elements appearing in Postclassic central Mexico in detail, because out of the many designs commonly listed as appearing in the Mixteca-Puebla style, only a few of them are seen in Costa Rica. Those that commonly are found on Costa Rican ceramics include the stepped fret, the jaguar, the plumed serpent, solar and lunar disks, concentric circles, circles with dots, feathers, and a few of the Mesoamerican deities: Ehecatl, Tlaltecutili, and possibly Tlaloc, as discussed above in detail. These are only the designs commonly listed as appearing in Costa Rica, and so this may not include all the designs from central Mexico ever found in Greater Nicoya. Other designs do also appear, such as the wavy lines, which are found in Figure 29, the hooks, which are seen in Figures 35 and 39, the chalchihuitl glyph, which is seen in Figure 41. Even though this list is not exhaustive, it is still clear that all of the designs that were extensive in central Mexico were not found in Greater Nicoya. Day (1994) specifically lists that the sky band, skull and crossed bones, severed human hands, human hearts, fire and flame motifs, and the tonalpohualli signs (day signs on the Mesoamerican calendar) do not appear in Costa Rica. These elements are very common in Postclassic ceramics, but they are not found in Greater Nicoya.

Although several researchers (see above) have suggested links from Costa Rica to the Mixteca Alta, the region inhabited by the Mixtec people, I have not found enough evidence to distinguish strongly between Mixtec style and the larger Mixteca-Puebla style. Pohl (2003, 2007) lists some differences between cultures that participated in the Mixteca-Puebla Style: Eastern Nahuas frequently used human skulls, hands, hearts, and shields, and had a preference for ornamenting pieces with precious jewels, butterflies, human skulls, and crossed bones, extruded eyeballs or stars, sacrificial bloodletting instruments, and eagle or jaguar motifs. The Mixtecs, on the other hand, preferred full-figure narrative scenes on polychrome ollas and pitchers, such as religious stories, and had a preference for plumed serpents, parrot heads, flowers, and shells. The Zapotecs had similar preference to the Mixtecs, including plumed serpents, parrot heads, flowers and shells, but also more frequently depicted crocodiles, geometric designs, and had unique three-dimensional representations (Pohl 2003). Pohl (2003) interprets these differences to be due to having different religious cults, but a similar iconographic style due to a shared international symbol set, a similar idea to that proposed by Boone and Smith (2003).

Lind (1994) also analyzed different regional manifestations of the Mixteca-Puebla style, looking for differences between elite polychrome vessels in Oaxaca and Cholula in the period from A.D. 1350-1550. He notes a difference in the iconography, which he interprets as the symbols that appear in Cholula are related to formalized ritual activities, but those that appear on polychrome in Oaxaca are related to Mixtec cosmology (Lind 1994). Figures 43 and 44 show his examples of images that appear in only one area and not another, comparing polychrome in Cholula and Oaxaca. When comparing these lists to the images that appear in Greater Nicoya, I found that some from each area in central Mexico are found in Greater Nicoya. For example, the earth monster only is found in Cholula, and not Oaxaca, and it is found in Greater Nicoya. Yet the cross hatching design which is only found in Oaxaca and not Cholula is present in Greater Nicoya. It seems that Greater Nicoya shares some similar iconography to both areas. While this comparison is limited because Lind (1994) only looked at iconography from the Late Postclassic, defined as A.D. 1300-1550, and not from any earlier times, it still seems to show that the images in Costa Rica did not come from just one specific area in Mexico. I am therefore unable to evaluate the specific connection to the Mixtec culture, and it seems as if that connection was only seen before more research on the Mixteca-Puebla style showed the widespread use of similar iconography and styles.



Figure 43. Iconography unique to the Cholula polychrome not found in Oaxaca polychrome in the Late Postclassic.
From Lind 1994: Figure 25.

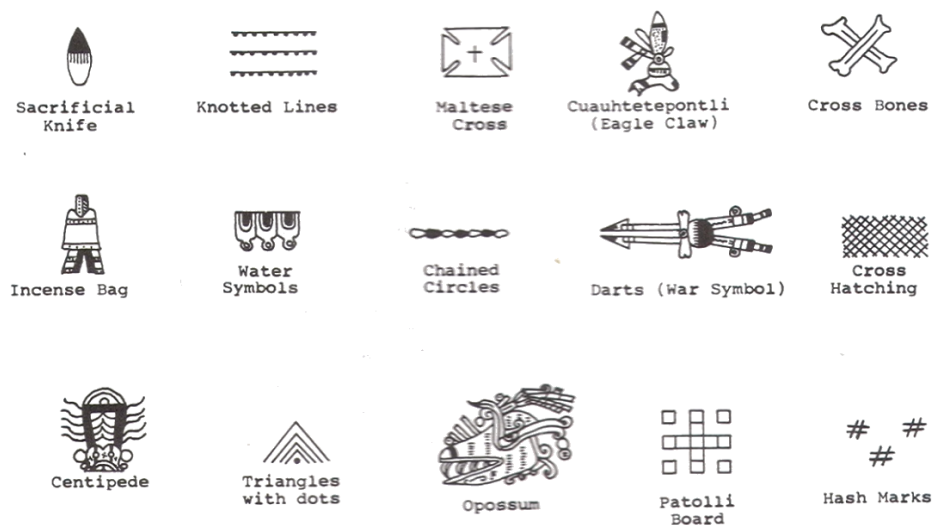


Figure 44. Iconography unique to the Oaxaca polychrome not found in Cholula polychrome in the Late Postclassic.
From Lind 1994: Figure 26.

While I was not able to do a very detailed stylistic analysis due to the difficulty on finding adequate information on the stylistic attributes of the iconography in Postclassic central Mexico, I did a more general comparison. Using the information available on the iconography in Costa Rica, I then looked at a few of those designs to see if they were depicted in a similar manner in central Mexico, using the images I had available from central Mexico. I found that some similarities did occur, but the images do not look exactly the same.

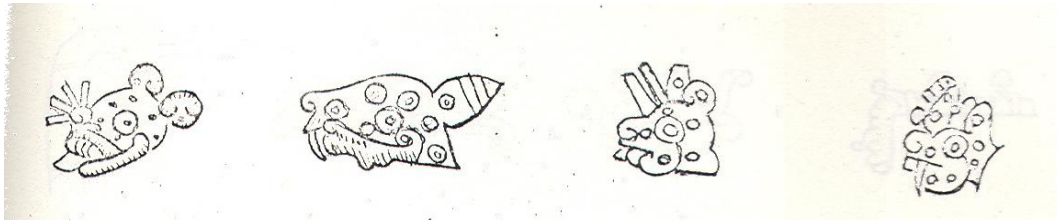


Figure 45. Examples of jaguar heads from the codices. *From Lind 1967: figure 5.*

The jaguar in Greater Nicoya included the elements listed above: the elongated jaw and large canine tooth, the crouched position, and the re-curved tail. I did not find any examples of jaguars on central Mexican ceramics, which were clear enough to look at, but Lind (1967) gave examples of jaguar from several Mixtec codices, which are shown in Figure 45. (The Mixtec codices are attributed specifically to the Mixtec culture in the Postclassic Period). Though this picture shows only jaguar heads, and so body position is not visible, it can be seen that they also have the large canine, but not an elongated upper jaw.



Figure 46. Plumed Serpent design on a tripod dish from the Mixteca Alta (Natividad phase, A.D. 1340-1550). *From Lind 1994: Figure 19d.*



Figure 47. Stylized serpent image from Oaxaca. *From Lind 1967: Plate 58.*

The feathered serpent is depicted both naturally and in a conventionalized way in both Greater Nicoya and Mexico. The conventionalized form of the feathered serpent in Greater Nicoya included the important elements of the open jaws, the eye, the plumes, and often the fang and tongue. In central Mexico, the conventionalized feathered serpent heads include some of the same elements. Figures 46 and 47 show two examples. Figure 46 is a tripod dish from the Mixteca Alta that Lind describes as being either a plumed serpent or a stylized bird. If it is a serpent, then it shows a serpent jaw open to the left, an eye above the jaw, and plumes above the head. A hook on the upper jaw might be a fang, and a curved line from the lower jaw may be a tongue, but that would only be clear with further comparison from iconography from the same area and time period. Figure 47 shows a dish from Oaxaca, which also has a feathered serpent consisting of open jaws, an eye and plumes, but it also has an additional element of a bird head attached to it, possibly coming out of its mouth (Lind 1967).

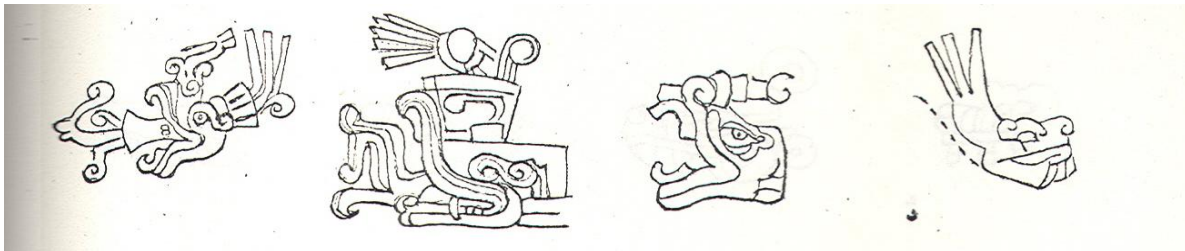


Figure 48. Examples of plumed serpent heads from the Mixtec codices. *From Lind 1967: Figure 6.*

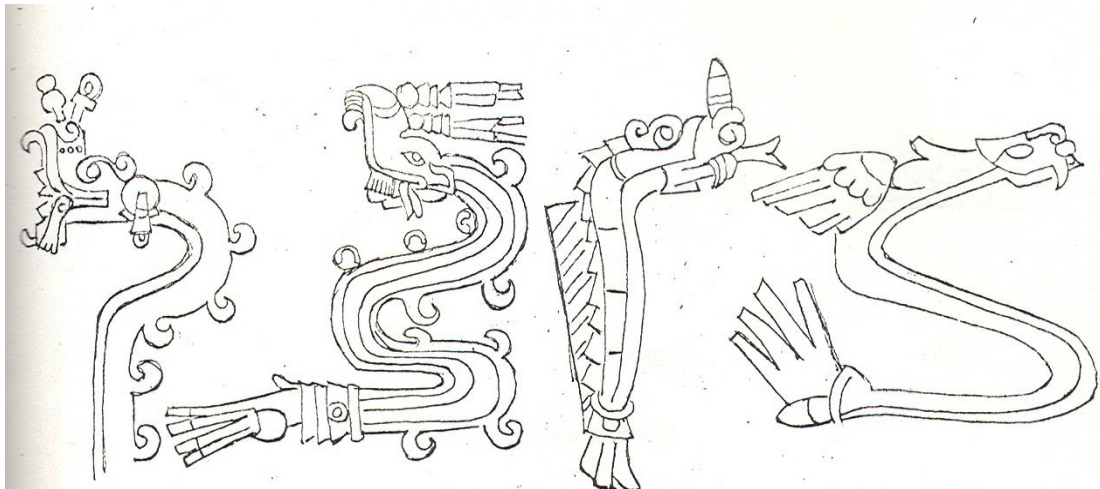


Figure 49. Examples of plumed serpents from the Mixtec codices. *From Lind 1967: Figure 21.*

Figure 48 shows examples of feathered serpent heads from the central Mexican codices, in which all the serpents have open jaws and an eye, but the third one does not have very discernable plumes, and the first two have an added element of something coming out of the serpent's mouth. The natural depictions in Greater Nicoya included the body of the serpent curved back on itself so that the tail was in front of the head. Lind's (1967) example of plumed serpents depicted in the codices, shown in Figure 49, has two examples of serpents in this shape, and two in a different shape. Ramsey (1975) mentions that serpents in Mixtec art are frequently in a figure 8 design, also different from what is seen in Greater Nicoya. The designs from central Mexico show some similarities to those in Greater Nicoya, and both are painted both in an abstract, conventional manner as well as a natural manner. While some similarities exist, more detailed analysis would be needed to show a link between the styles of painting in central Mexico and Greater Nicoya. It may be that iconography rather than style was copied, or that rather than one being a copy of another, the two areas were simply both drawing on the same inventory of iconography.

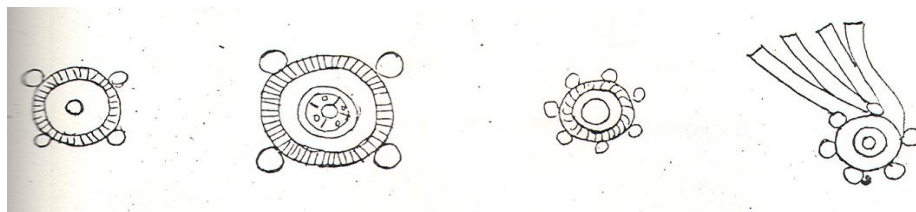


Figure 50. Examples of the chalchihuitl glyph (jade glyph) from the Mixtec codices. *From Lind 1967: Figure 18.*

Figure 50 shows the chalchihuitl glyph from central Mexico, as seen in the codices. This design of a circle with four loops on it is the same design that is shown on some Luna ware vessels. In central Mexico, it is a symbol for jade (Lind 1967). The design seen on the Luna ware bowl in Figure 41 does not look exactly the same as these central Mexico examples; it has a horizontal bar and additional designs, and lacks the band with lines around the inside, but it seems to be a related symbol due to the similar shape of a circle with four loops on it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Several proposed explanations have been given for how these images, clearly related to central Mexican images, appeared in Costa Rica, including trade or migration. Day (1994) proposed that the reason for the change through time of iconography in Costa Rica was due to separate migrations of people, each group bringing its own iconography, which was then added to the local designs. The most important central Mexican-related images, the jaguar, plumed or feathered serpent, and effigy face, continued to be important throughout the Middle and Late Polychrome, even though other central Mexican images appeared and then disappeared (Day 1994). While migration is one possible theory, and groups clearly did migrate from Mexico to Greater Nicoya in at least several different migrations, this is not the only explanation for how these images came from central Mexico to Costa Rica.

The similarities between iconography in Costa Rica and the iconography of the Mixteca-Puebla style has also led to theories on trade between the two regions during the Postclassic, but these theories have difficulties as well, partly due to the difficulty of the term Mixteca-Puebla. One difficulty that comes from simplifying the situation to a Mixteca-Puebla link to Costa Rica is that the Mixteca-Puebla style itself is usually dated to beginning in the Postclassic, around A.D. 1200, yet the designs attributed to central Mexico began to come to Greater Nicoya much earlier than this (Smith and Heath-Smith 1980). In fact, as Smith and Heath-Smith (1980) point out, these same designs or symbols also appear in many areas of Mexico before they became part of the Mixteca-Puebla style. As discussed above, Boone and Smith (2003) have re-evaluated the Mixteca-Puebla concept, and have proposed using alternate terms instead in order to separate the iconography from the style. They propose the term Postclassic International Style to refer to the way in which forms were painted. As defined, the Postclassic International Style refers to images painted with stiff lines and stocky proportions; forms are flat and almost geometric, with an even, controlled, black outline that gives a crisp edge, which is used to enclose colored areas. Colors are bright and without shading, proportions are squat, with the most important elements enlarged. Figures are posed to reveal the most of each feature; space is shallow, usually with no background, and figures fill out most of the space, either by floating in space or being tied to a ground line (Boone and Smith 2003). The Mixteca-Puebla style is one regional variant of the more widely spread Postclassic International Style.

This Postclassic International Style is separate from the iconography commonly depicted in Mesoamerica. Boone and Smith (2003) also define the Early and Late Postclassic International Symbol Sets to refer to the iconography that was commonly depicted throughout Mesoamerica. The Early Postclassic International Symbol Set was a group of iconographic elements depicted on local ceramics that became widespread during the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic Periods. This suggests a distribution of trade networks that emphasized coastal routes (Boone and Smith 2003). This idea is supported by earlier work done by Smith and Heath-Smith (1980: 15), in which they emphasized the use of coastal trade routes to spread what they termed the ‘Postclassic Religious Style,’ defined as a “collection of standardized religious symbols that were popular throughout Mesoamerica beginning in the Early Postclassic Period.”

After about A.D. 1200, the Late Postclassic International Symbol Set developed, along with the Postclassic International Style, out of the Early Postclassic International Symbol Set. Boone and Smith (2003) list the common imagery from the Late Postclassic International Symbol Set as largely including imagery from the calendar and religious life, as well as symbols that express the Mexican perspective on the world. These include the twenty day

signs, which are naturalistic images of animals, plants, or objects (jaguar, reed, flint) or symbols for concepts (i.e. wind), as well as including Mexican deities (Xipe Totec, Quetzalcoatl/Ehecatl, Tonatiuh, Cihuacoatl, and more), rayed sun disks, moon disks, fire serpents, flints with fanged faces, the symbol for gold, long-handled incense pans, and earth-monster mouths as openings into the earth. They also suggest that since so many of the elements in the symbol set are calendrical and religious, the widespread use may point to a pan-Mesoamerican religion which began in the Epiclassic (A.D. 700-900) and Early Postclassic (A.D. 900-1200) times with the spread of the Early Postclassic International Symbol set and the spread of the iconography and ritual paraphernalia of the feathered serpent cult. This idea is supported by Ringle et. al. (1998), who discuss a spread of a religious cult related to Quetzalcoatl all over Mesoamerica in the Early Postclassic, though they attribute the spread to militaristic means.

According to Smith and Berdan (2003), the spread of these symbols to Costa Rica was not a unique phenomenon; during the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic, these Mesoamerica symbols spread beyond the borders of Mesoamerica through coastal trade routes. This was just prior to the decline of Teotihuacan, the major regional center in Mesoamerica. Along with this decline, many regional centers rose to power, and the so trade between the many regional centers was prominent.

An abundance of trade, especially along the coast, spreading a common set of iconography lines up with what is seen in Greater Nicoya: the Mesoamerican symbols appear along the coast beginning around A.D. 800. It seems that these images first appeared in the Rivas region of Nicaragua, and the vessels made there were then traded south into the Guanacaste region of Costa Rica. In addition, the images were also copied on vessels made in Guanacaste. While it does seem clear that iconography on pottery in northwestern Costa Rica (and the Greater Nicoya region) are related to iconography from central Mexico, it does not seem as if this is a direct link to the Mixtec culture, nor even to the wider Mixteca-Puebla style. Greater Nicoya participated in the Early and Late Postclassic International Symbol Set, and thus shared several iconographic elements with other areas throughout Mesoamerica during the Middle and Late Polychrome Periods, including the jaguar, the plumed serpent, the effigy face, the stepped fret, and other images. These symbols were also used by cultures in central Mexico that used the Mixteca-Puebla style in their art. However, not all symbols that were common throughout Mesoamerica were adopted in Greater Nicoya. While several groups seem to have migrated south from Mexico to coastal Nicaragua and Costa Rica, perhaps bringing some of their iconography and painting styles with them, it seems that coastal trade likely played a large role in spreading central Mexican iconography.

FURTHER STUDY

While this study summarized much of the information currently available on this topic, there are many areas where further study is needed to reach definite conclusions. More archaeology will need to be done in order to determine the exact times of migration from Mexico to Greater Nicoya, as well as the role played by migration in bringing iconography to Greater Nicoya. A more detailed stylistic analysis of iconography from central Mexico that includes those images seen in Greater Nicoya would allow for a more detailed comparison between the two regions. This might reveal more specific geographic connections and would help to better understand which aspects of the images were taken from Mesoamerica, and which aspects were local developments. Also, although I have only discussed those images that have been noted to have a central Mexican influence, other images appearing in Greater Nicoya are also found in areas of Mesoamerica, such as the alligator, monkey, and scorpion, and further comparison of these images in both regions might show whether they were local designs or if they also had a connection to Mesoamerica. Lastly, I would like to point out that some of the connections from Greater Nicoya to Mesoamerica may be part of an even broader tradition, and so an even wider regional study of iconography, including areas to the North of Mexico and areas in South America would also help to trace the distribution of iconography.

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