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SYMBOLISM IN CASAS GRANDES POTTERY

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BY

JUNE MANN

Norman, Oklahoma

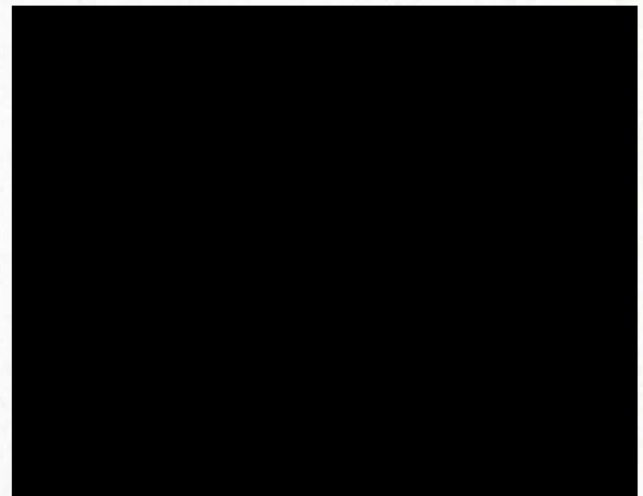
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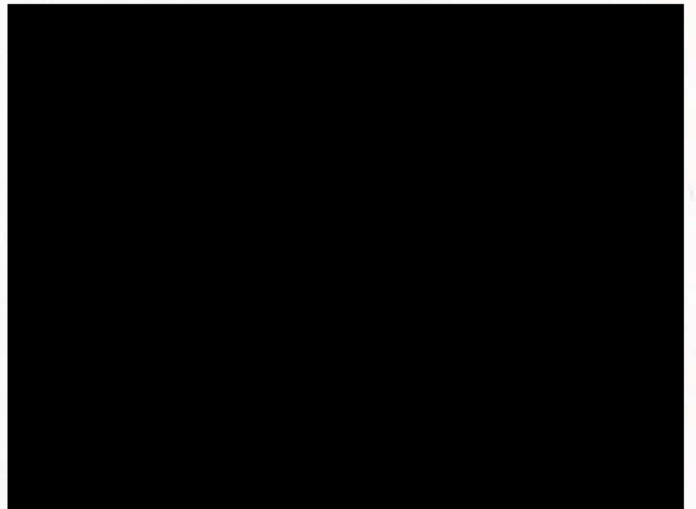
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INTRODUCTION

Casas Grandes pottery holds the interest of people living in the areas of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas in the United States adjacent to the Mexican border. The bold use of color, primarily, black and red on a tan or grey base gives the Casas ceramics a distinctive and appealing character. In addition, the great variety of motifs painted on the pots as well as the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic shapes of many of the vessels lend an intriguing air to wares which held great meaning for the people who produced and used them.

The peoples living in Pacquime and the surrounding area of what now constitutes northern Chihuahua State were residents of an important way station on the trade route for turquoise, shells, macaw parrots and pottery. This pottery, which has been widely collected by museums and individuals, has been little understood despite its accessibility to pot-hunters and archeologists alike because of the reluctance of archaeologists to assign meaning to motifs which seem to lack a definite significance.

Dr. Charles Di Peso, now deceased, led the most intensive and productive study of the Pacquime area in the 1960's and produced the eight volumes which are the most important sources for scholarly work on the culture. Dr. Di Peso gave only tentative ideas on the origins of the *puchteca* or merchant groups which moved into what had previously been a region inhabited by a people living a subsistence existence.

My interest in the pottery began in the 1980's when I began work at the Centennial Museum on the campus of the University of Texas at El Paso, Texas. The distinctive ceramics immediately caught my attention and coincided with my longtime interest in symbolism. These were pots with obvious symbolic

qualities, but everyone I asked about them failed to hazard an opinion on just what they stood for. Di Peso had discussed the possibility that the origin of the highly civilized rulers of the region could have been the western coast of Mexico, but few anthropologists would venture beyond that in their opinions.

Very little has been written about Casas Grandes symbolism due in no small part to the above mentioned uncertainty concerning the origin of the culture. Secondly, archaeologists have historically been reluctant to venture into territory that is so nebulous and difficult to prove. A third factor is the difficulty in studying the Pacquime area itself and the pottery which is held in Mexico. The Mexican government prefers to have its sites investigated by Mexican scientists and only gave the Di Peso team access to the pottery excavated for a short time. The bulk of the ceramics were returned to Mexico after being examined at the Amerind Institute in Dragoon, Arizona. These pottery pieces are essentially the only ones with provenance (historically proven origin) due to the widespread unauthorized retrieval of pots by amateurs under unscientific circumstances. Given the difficulty of working in another country and the reluctance of archaeologists to investigate a rather uncertain area, there are sufficient reasons for Americans involved in Mexican research to avoid the issue of symbolic meaning.

As I searched for clues to the meaning of the cryptic symbols on the ceramics, I began to connect first one then another motif to the creation stories as described in the "Popol Vuh" of the ancient Quiche Maya. The roles played by the plumed serpent, the turtle, the rabbit and corn as well as many other creatures and concepts began to slip into their place in the puzzle of Casas Grandes and its rich and sometimes frightening story.

Because of its' beauty and historical importance Casas Grandes pottery

is widely collected by individuals and museums along the Mexican and United States border. Before the border was drawn between Mexico and the U. S., the cultures of the region were seen as part of a whole. Now due to political demarcation, we often lose sight of the inter-dependence of what now constitutes the American Southwest, MesoAmerica and Central America. Without the aid of the horse or the wheel, pre-Columbian peoples carried on a far flung interchange from the Yucatan, the area that now is called Mexico City, the west coast of Mexico up through Pacquime into the Southwestern United States (map, fig. 28).

The site of Pacquime in northern Mexico, the center of Casas Grandes culture, was home to Chichimeca people long before the area became a trade center and the place of origin of the polychrome pottery known as Casas Grandes. During what is known as the Viejo (which in Spanish means old) period (A.D. 700 [+ - 50] to A. D. 1060 pottery was made; but it was simple ware for people living a simple existence (Di Peso 1974(1) : 250).

During the Viejo Period, the group recognized as the Toltec, were using their military might either through threat of invasion or actual conquest to impose their political system on the southern region. These changes set the stage for alliances which produced a merchant network and the priest-kings who began to extend their influence and commercial enterprises throughout the area. After A. D. 950, the Gran Chichimeca began to experience the results of the changes in the south. House and tool designs changed, pottery and copper bells from the south began to appear and the people "accepted strangers into their village who practiced frontal-occipital head deformation" (Di Peso (1) 251). These strangers must have brought with them many cultural traits which soon became apparent in pottery production through form and decora-

tion. Harbottle and Weigand in an article in the "Scientific American" demonstrated the trade connection between Mesoamerica and the Casas Grandes area for the movement of turquoise. Turquoise mined in what now constitutes New Mexico and Arizona passed through Pacquime during the classic (A. D. 100-900), early post-classic (A. D. 900-1325), and late post-classic (1325-1500's) periods. In return, the brightly colored macaw with its greatly prized feathers came north to Pacquime and then to other areas of the Southwest (Harbottle 1992: 78-85). If goods of these sorts were being exchanged, then it seems reasonable to conclude that symbolic material which came to be used on pottery would also follow these routes.

Casas Grandes pottery is decorated with a wealth of symbolic material. Some of the most frequently seen are the stepped design, the macaw, the spiral, and male and female effigies. All of these motifs are found in other areas of Mesoamerica especially in those places dominated by the Mayan culture, as well as the objects associated with native peoples of the Southwest.

The arrival of the Medio (middle in Spanish) Period entrepreneurs brought about a drastic change in pottery production. White kaolin paste and polychrome designs were linked to "a dramatic increase in both yield and consumption" (Di Peso II 531).

The photographs used in this paper are all from the collection of the Centennial Museum at the University of Texas at El Paso, Texas. They have not been photographed before for publication. The pieces in this collection are representative of most of the vessels seen in other collections and therefore present examples of types available elsewhere.

There are a variety of styles identified within what is described as Casas

Grandes. Most of what I have studied is a part of the style named Ramos Polychrome. But it is sometimes difficult to differentiate one style from another. Descriptions of the variety of styles follow based on Di Peso (V I 96 - 316) and per-contact with Thomas O'Laughlin, archaeologist and curator of the Wilderness Park Museum in El Paso, Texas.

CASAS GRANDES PLAIN
 This is a plain brown ware often seen used for effigies (fig. 22).

RAMOS BLACK

Ramos black is a burnished ware and is sometimes described as "smudged brown" and appears to be important as part of afterlife beliefs since it is frequently found in burial sites. The black color also reinforces its mortuary use (See "Black and Red" below).

DUBLAN POLYCHROME

VILLA AHUMADA POLYCHROME

Villa Ahumada is marked by white slip applied to light brown clay and tends to have macaw designs (See "Macaw" below).

ESCONDIDA POLYCHROME

CORRALITOS POLYCHROME

This polychrome has red and black designs on a brown clay body and is noted for the incising around the black portion.

MADERA POLYCHROME

MADERA BLACK ON RED

Madera has red slip with black paint, but there is no incising present. Symbols are on the vessels. Black on black and red on white are usually seen.

RAMOS POLYCHROME

Ramos frequently is in jar shape with macaw designs and a light gray or ivory body. These pots are not slipped but the red designs are outlined in black (See figures 8 and 9).

BABICORA POLYCHROME

Hooded effigy figures are principally painted in the Babicora style and the designs usually are more complicated than in other types. Generally, jars rather than bowls predominate.

CARRETAS POLYCHROME

Bowls more than jars appear in Carretas. The designs are bold or simple and lines tend to be narrow. Yellow and yellow orange colors are seen.

DUBLAN POLYCHROME

Corrugation, incising or texturing of some description is seen on the neck portion in Dublan. The body will be light brown to grey clay with a black or red band.

ESCONDIDA POLYCHROME

The inside of Escondida bowls are slipped white, the outside red. They are considered an imitation of Gila and Tonto polychrome, but were made in the Casas Grandes area.

HUERIGUS

The designs on Huerigus bowls are usually quartered and the principle symbols are on the inside. Black or black and red on white are usually seen.

Medio Period graves uncovered in Pacquime contained almost 200 pots and included Ramos Polychrome, Casas Grandes Plainware, and Ramos Black (Di Peso II 650).

PRODUCTION METHODS

It was believed by Di Peso that women were most likely the potters (Di Peso VIII 85). Essentially, all of the Medio Period pottery was manufactured in the same way. The pots were built using the coil method and then the walls of the vessel were smoothed thin using some implement (Di Peso VI 84).

Juan Quezada of Mata Ortiz, Chihuahua, Mexico has fathered the renaissance of a present day Casas Grandes ware named Nuevo Casas Grandes. Many of the villagers in Mata Ortiz, which is close by the site of the ancient city of Pacquime, produce exquisite pottery which is appreciated over much of the world. The method used by these potters give us some hints of the procedure likely employed by the Medio Period potters.

Mata Ortiz potters start out with round bottoms formed in a plaster of paris mold. If a flat bottom is desired, it is gently pressed on a flat surface while the clay is still maleable. The walls of the pot are then built up with a fat coil of clay until the desired height is reached. This pinch pot is then rotated and smoothed until it reaches the desired height and degree of thinness. Some Mata Ortiz potters use more than one coil but all use some variation of this general method. American Southwest Indians used much smaller coils (Parks 1993: 105). The potters of Casas Grandes may have used smaller coils as well, but the rounded bottoms could have been achieved in the above fashion.

Di Peso describes paired holes on opposite sides of vessels. Some of these were made while the pots were in a plastic state as displacement of the

clay is obvious. Others give no clue to the method used (VI 163) (Fig. 13).
 Funerary vessels often had these paired holes which were thought necessary to accommodate cordage for easy transport of goods by "the departed for journeying afoot to his or her particular heaven"(Di Peso II 650-51).

SYMBOLIC MOTIFS

My primary interest has been to achieve some understanding of the symbolic material on the pots from the Medio Period. I photographed approximately 400 pots from five different collections. The photographs here are only from the Centennial Museum at the University of Texas at El Paso, Texas.

STEPPED DESIGN

The ballgame as played in Mesoamerica is clearly a portal to the spirit world (Scarborough 1991:309). The sun was sacrificed during the ball game by an important personage in order to guarantee its trip through the Underworld and reappearance in the east. This symbolic act was necessarily important in an agricultural society to assure the growth of crops and the very life of the people. "Classic ballcourt layouts, often with I-shaped alleys, essentially represented the surface of the earth, the four cardinal directions, and the symbolic entrance to the Underworld within its center. Furthermore, a typical vertical cross section of a ballcourt graphically portrays the stepped 'jaws of the earth,' and again the entrance to the Underworld" (Scarborough 197). The majority of the pots of all types had some form of this design.

FEATHERS/BEAR PAW

At the time of the creation of the Mayan Forefathers they were "hidden under green and blue feathers, and were therefore called *Gucumatz*." The Mayan word *Gucumatz* is the bird called quetzal. (Goetz : 81-82). Later in the *Popol Vuh* when four Mayan princes appear before Lord Nacxit, Quetzalcoatl, they are given the insignia of royalty which includes parrot feathers and "standards of royal aigrette feathers." This points out the importance of feathers to the Mayans and by association for the Casas Grandes culture (fig.3).

Although, this motif may be seen as representing feathers, it may as well be the "bear paw" mentioned by Di Peso (VI 239, 281). The bear is a Gran Chichimecan native and its habitat reaches only as far south as the Tropic of Cancer. This would make the man-like beast of the north a possible Chichimecan stand-in for the jaguar present in the jungle areas of the Mayans (Di Peso II 579).

An additional factor in the presence of the bear in northern Mexico is the long-term importance of the bear in Siberian shamanism. Eliade mentions the link between the shamanic costume, which gives the shaman "a new magical body in animal form" and the three chief types of this form are the bird, the reindeer(stag), and the bear. But, the bird is dominante and "feathers are mentioned everywhere in the descriptions of shamanic costumes"(156). This prominence of the bear alongside the bird may be evidence of a dual use of the bear paw as feathers as well. In comparison to the stepped design and the macaw, this was a fairly rare symbol in this sample.

MALE AND FEMALE EFIGIES

Females as well as males were prominent in the creation stories of the *Popol Vuh* and were reflected in the playing of the ballgame (figures 23 and 7).

24). The ball, *quic* ("blood"), was the personification of blood. As it bounded underground, it represented Xbalanke, the moon, night, menstrual blood, and the female principle. As it sailed in the air, it represented Hunahpu, the sun, the light, sacrificial blood, and the male principle. It symbolically united day and night, the Underworld and earth's surface, male and female principles (Scarborough 232). Jung mentions "that the experience of union with God was understood in antiquity as a more or less concrete coitus..." (Jung 1956, p. 229) At least six of the effigies in this sample had both male and female characteristics. Male figures numbered twenty-five and there were eight female.

OWL

Owls as well as bats are nocturnal creatures which figure in the tales of the "Popol Vuh." Tucuru, the owl, was referred to as a messenger from Xibalba in the ballgame myth. "Relating to the region as Xibalba in general, owls and bats are nocturnal airborne animals. Bats return to their caves and owls roost with the dawn, apparently with political metaphor." (Scarborough, 1991: 236) (fig. 2). there were eight female.

SHOE

Pottery shoes are found along with pots (fig. 1). In the "Popol Vuh," Balam-Quitze and Balam-Acab asked Tohil for fire and he made it by "turning about in his shoe." In a note for this passage, it is mentioned that the primitive way of making fire involves twirling a stick in the hole of another stick. Further along in the note reference is made to the tribes of Vukamag who were only able to extract fire from the Quiche by giving them their daughters (Goetz 177).

"The foot, as the organ nearest the earth, represents in dreams the relation to earthly reality and often has a generative or phallic significance" (Jung P. 239). "Shoes are also a symbol of the female sex organ" (Cirlot 295). Shoes are a rare occurrence in this sample.

CORN

Corn, being a basis of the diet for the people of Casas Grandes, would be expected in the pottery symbols. In Patterson's "Rock Art Symbols of the Greater Southwest" he cites Lumholtz concerning some pictographs at the La Pena Pintada site, Tomatlan River, Jalisco, Mexico (near area of Cora and Hui-chol Indians). The cross-hatch design (see figure 3 for a similar design) may indicate maize stalks with ears, or heaps of maize at harvest time (Patterson 1992:69).

In the "Popol Vuh" when the gods decided to make man, they used the ears of yellow and white corn (Goetz 166). A design sometimes associated symbolically with maize is the spotted black fish. "Green corn is called "black fish" and "ears of corn are depicted. . . . by the painting of a fish, which is called by the Mexicans *bagre* " (Patterson 69).

First Father of the Quiche Maya is also the Maize God. A recently discovered Creation text depicts the Maize God being reborn from the cracked carapace of a turtle shell after his death and burial in the ballcourt by his two sons. (Freidel 1993: 65)(Mayer 1991). A turtle effigy shows the sun and then corn coming from the turtle as would excrement (fig. 7).

The corn symbol was very prevalent in this sample and appeared as frequently as the stepped design.

QUADRAFOIL

A small ceremonial ballcourt in Pacquime contained a center marker made of an unshaped stone which covered a "spirit hole," symbolizing entrance to the underworld. The hole led down to the skull of a male "who was seated upon a flexed male, after the fashion of the Veracruz palma design, wherein Death sits on his victim while cornstalks issue upward from the scene, supporting the theory that fertility was a considerable measure of the game's religious symbolism" (Di Peso II 414).

There is reason to believe that the ballcourt represented the Earth and the center hole covered by the stone was the source of eternal water as well as the entrance to the Underworld. This became clear whenever the priests played the symbolic ballgame while robed in elaborate garb (Di Peso (2) 415).

At the time of the Olmec a quadafoil or hole represented the portal into the underworld. A "watery place in the heart of the mountain referred to in "The MesoAmerican Ballgame" in describing painted scenes at Bonampak and Yazchilan concern the place of discovery of corn which was the very substance of man as well as the source of all agriculture. (Scarborough 308).

The universe is seen "as having three levels -sky, earth, underworld- connected by a central axis." This axis or pole "passes through an "opening" a "hole"; it is through this hole that the gods descend to earth and the dead to the sub terranean regions; it is through the same hole that the soul of the shaman in ecstasy can fly up or down in the course of his celestial or infernal journeys"(Eliade 1964: 259).

Evidence of the quadrafoil was most apparent in the supine effigies and these were relatively rare.

SPIRAL

The spiral form is found on Casas Grandes pottery as in (fig. 6). The spiral may be intended to symbolize an induced "state of ecstasy and to enable man to escape from the material world and to enter the beyond, through the 'hole' symbolized by the mystic Centre" (Cirlot 306).

The wheel was not known in the Pre-Columbian Americas and pottery was made by the coil method and in this may be seen "an imitation of the disposition of the intestines(which) makes an abstract picture of the immortal soul." It would seem "that artistic productivity, not only in the individual, but probably in the whole development of culture, begins with one's own human body and ascends to the creation and artistic formation of a soul-endowed personality" (Rank 355).

The spiral is associated with power as seen in the sceptre of the Egyptian pharaoh. It may also be connected with "dances of healing and incantation when the pattern of movement develops as a spiral curve" (Cirlot 306).

Spirals are frequently seen in rock art of the southwestern United States. A number of meanings are given to the spiral forms, ranging from the whirlwinds which precede rain to a means of describing the migrations of the pueblo people (Patterson 165, 211, 185).

"The spiral figure in particular has a number of related meanings, for both the Zuni and the Puebloans in general. The historic Puebloan peoples described spirals as representing wind, water, creatures associated with water such as serpents and snails, and the journey of the people in search of the Center. The most frequent interpretation of this figure I heard at Zuni was 'journey in search of the Center'" (Patterson 185).

The snake, although it is dangerous to man, "only kills and does not

BADGER

Among the Hopi the badger is highly regarded for his healing power. "Because he lives and digs in the ground he...knows roots and herbs which 'he is always scratching out.'" (Patterson 46). Due to its digging abilities, the badger finds the roots used in making fires therefore it is associated with fire.

Also, digging in graves and raising the dead would connect it to use in mortuary pottery (Carr 1979: 19). The badger was rarely found in this sample.

BODY MARKINGS

Body markings or tattoos of various kinds are seen on effigies in Casas Grandes ceramics (fig 8). It must be remembered that, "tattooing is a 'rite of entry' or of initiation which alluded to the turning-points in the span of a man's life and in the development of his personality" (Cirlot 331). The Fijians and the Eskimos believe that lack of tattooing endangers their happiness in the hereafter (Rank 31).

According to Cirlot, the "deepest significance (of marks or tattoos) is connected with the symbolism of scars as the marks 'of the teeth of the spirit'" (32). Body marking was found on all the effigy figures.

SERPENT

"Then they made the small wild animals, the guardians of the woods, the spirits of the mountains, the deer, the birds, pumas, jaguars, serpents, snakes, vipers, guardians of the thickets" (Goetz 84). "In Quichean mythology, the sun was carried by the two-headed serpent, K'ucumatz as a young traveler from the west across the daytime sky" (Scarborough 221).

The snake, although it is dangerous to man, "only kills and does not

destroy" leaving the body unconsumed. If it is deprived of its poison fangs, it then represents the ideal rebirth symbol (Rank 311 Cf.).

PHOSPHENES

Phosphenes appear in Casas Grandes pottery (fig. 8) on effigy figures as well as on pots with macaw figures. "The term "phosphene" refers to the images perceived by the human brain as visual images in the absence of visual stimuli...Phosphenes can result from a variety of causes, including gentle pressure on closed eyes, migraine headaches, . . . fasting, physical tests of endurance, meditation, or the ingestion of hallucinogenic substances (Patterson 155). Phosphenes were frequently seen in association with human and animal forms.

XIPE

Xipe, the flayed one and the God of Seedtime and Planting, is found frequently in effigy form in burial sites. (Vaillant 1962:236). Tenoned heads of Xipe appear on ballcourts in Cotzumalhuapan which point up the god's role in the underworld (Scarborough 203). Xipe was rarely seen in this sample (fig. 4).

SUN

The sun in its many symbolic shapes appears in Casas Grandes pottery and may reflect the Mexica influence as well as the Aztec and Mayan.

... in the Mexica religion the sacrifice of captive warriors ensured the continued rise of the sun; and arrival of a new calendar cycle, as well as heavenly reward for the victims. Most important of these Mexica rituals was the drilling of new fire upon the breast of a noble captive every fifty-two years. This midnight ceremony ensured the return of the sun for the next complete cycle of combined 260-day and 365-day rounds. Finally the heart of the captive was thrown into the new fire (Berrin 144).

The Hero Twins, Hunaphu and Xbalanque, honored their father, Vucub-Hunahpu, at the place of sacrifice of the ballcourt by promising, "You shall be the first to arise, and you shall be the first to be worshiped by the sons of the noblemen, by the civilized vassals. Your names shall not be lost. So it shall be!" This followed their defeat of the people of Xibalba. "Then they rose up in the midst of the light, and instantly they were lifted into the sky. One was given the sun, the other the moon. Then the arch of heaven and the face of the earth were lighted. And they dwelt in heaven" (Goetz 163). The Hero Twins after finishing their work on earth became the light by day and by night of the Mayas.

"In theogony, the Sun represents the moment (surpassing all others in the succession of celestial dynasties) when the heroic principle shines at its brightest." The Sun is associated with the hero rather than the father who denotes the heavens. The youthful and filial characteristics of the Sun relate to the hero. "The cult of the Sun reached an advanced stage of development only in the New World, and --- most advanced of all --- in Mexico and Peru. Eliade be-

believes that, since these were the only countries in pre-Columbian America to evolve a viable political system, it may be concluded that there is a parallel between predominantly solar cults and "historical" forms of human existence" (Cirlot 317). See figures (12 and 13) as a possible representation of the Hero twins. These are almost identical faces with definite youthful appearances. Unlike most effigies, these faces have no indication of facial hair. Instead, they have the fresh full faces of youth.

"Eliade reminds us --- the Sun is ambivalent on the one hand it is 'resplendent' and on the other it is 'black' or invisible, in which case it is associated with chthonian and funereal animals such as the horse and the serpent " (Cirlot 320). See figure (16) for a black rayed sun accompanied by black feathers near the face of the effigy. A beard marks this as a male. The sun is frequently seen in conjunction with corn, bean, and squash symbols.

BEANS, GOURD, AND SQUASH

An effigy in the collection of the Centennial Museum bears a striking resemblance to a Hopi kachina (fig. 17). Muzribi, the Bean kachina, has on each side of the mouth, the sprouting seed of a bean (Patterson 47).

Gourd and squash shaped vessels (see fig. 18) appear among Casas pots. In addition, the circle enclosing a dot may indicate squash or beans as well as maize (Patterson 84). Lumholtz described intertwined lines in pictograph designs " to signify the root of the squash vine, the criss-crossing water gourd vine, the bean plant, or the double gourd" (Patterson 83). Considering this interchangeability of plants growing on vines and stalks, it would be possible to expect that this same approach would be found in the symbolism on pottery. These three plant symbols were obvious on a majority of

the pots.

RABBIT

In a Tzeltal creation story, grandmother sought to capture small animals to keep as pets in her hut. Her grandson told her if she laughed the animals would escape, leaving their tails behind. She could not refrain from laughing. They ran away leaving their tails behind. As a result, deer, rabbit and peccary have no proper tails. "The only one she caught again was the rabbit. This our heavenly mother, the moon, still holds. It can be seen even today in the middle of the moon" (Thompson 362).

Rabbits have traditionally represented fecundity (Cirlot 104).

A rabbit played an important part in a ballgame between the Hero Twins and the Lords of Xibalba. Xbalanque told a rabbit, "Go and take your place over the ball-court; stay there within the oak grove," the rabbit was told by Xbalanque; "when the ball comes to you, run out immediately, and I shall do the rest..." The Twins sought to use the rabbit as a diversion when the ballgame began. The Lords of Xibalba put the ball into play and Xbalanque hit it into the oak grove. The rabbit ran in the same direction as the ball and the Lords of Xibalba followed. This gave the Twins the opportunity to replace the head of Hunahpu, their father, suspended over the ballcourt with a real turtle.

Xbalanque then threw a stone at the turtle and it broke into a thousand pieces. Through this ruse the Twins kept the Lords of Xibalba from discovering how they were reforming their father who eventually became the Maize God. This role played by the rabbit in addition to its fleetness of foot and its fecundity seems reason to place the rabbit figure on pottery used for mortuary purposes (fig. 9). The rabbit was only rarely seen in these pots.

TURTLE

When Hunahpu was being formed according to the "Popol Vuh," the turtle "assumed the form of the head of Hunahpu, and instantly the eyes were fashioned." A ballgame was begun with the head of Hunahpu suspended over the ball-court. Xbalanque, the other brother, tossed a stone at the turtle which represented his brother and the turtle broke "into a thousand pieces like seeds." (Goetz 151-2).

"The primordial turtle has a shell that is rounded on the top to represent heaven, and square underneath to represent the earth" (Cirlot 353). As if to point this up, some Casas Grandes turtle effigies have a square and a circle painted under the tail as if they were excrement (fig. 7). The circle would be the sun in this case and the square with the dot would be maize. This refers to the role the turtle played in the birth of the Maize God discussed in Maize. At least ten turtle effigies were in this sample.

MOUNTAIN SHEEP

The presence of sheep, the ram in particular, as Casas Grandes effigies would seem to connect with Siberian shamanism where sheep are sacrificed as part of shamanistic ceremonies (Eliade 1964: 118). Metraux describes a South American shamanic cure which included the sacrifice of a sheep during which the shaman tore out its palpitating heart (Eliade 1964: 330). Divination by the shoulder bone of a ram or sheep is extensively practiced by the Kalmyk, the Kirgiz and the Mongols (Eliade 1964: 164).

Ginsberg mentions scapulimancy which is "divination or soothsaying

based on the scapular bone of sacrificed animals (above all rams). It appears to be present in an area circumscribed by the Bering Strait to the east; by the British Isles to the west; and by North Africa to the south" (1991: 249). Sheep are not mentioned in the "Popol Vuh" perhaps because it is noted that all quadrupeds are described by the Quiche word *queh*. (191).

TURKEY

The Anasazi domesticated the turkey by 700 A. D. The feathers were used in the making of robes and for ritual purposes at least by that time and possibly even earlier. The modern Pueblo Indians associate the turkey with the earth, springs, streams, and mountains which are also the homes of the cloud spirits. "It follows that the turkey is viewed as an intermediary between these mountain water sources and the rain clouds that form on the peaks. He is also regarded as a teacher and helper, and he is associated with the dead, who must return to earth before rising as clouds to the spiritual realm (Patterson 200) (fig. 10).

Turkeys play a role in encouraging rain for modern day Chorti Maya located in eastern Guatemala and adjacent parts of Honduras and El Salvador. The Chorti prayer-maker leads a group from his village to a sacred hill where Chichans (modern equivalents of the ancient Chacs which brought rain to the Quiche Mayans) reside during the dry season. A jar of blood is poured into a hole two feet deep along with two turkeys and two domestic fowls from which the blood has been drawn. This offering along with the burning of copal to produce the black clouds which will induce the Chichans to permit the rain to fall are part of ceremonies calling for rain which demonstrate the role play by turkeys even in recent times (Thompson 264).

Di Peso points out that "the common turkey was featured as a Paquimian bird of sacrifice in both building dedication rites and death ceremonies, such as those that were carried on in the House of the Dead. Like many of the southern folk, the Casas Grandians beheaded these fowl and probably offered their blood and heads, along with sacred cornmeal, to their water deities (Di Peso II 567)(Di Peso VIII: 269-271, 273-276).

As part of the famed flying-pole dance of the Huastec, a post is set in place over the body of a live chicken and the red-and-blue-garbed dance chief climbs to its summit and plucks a live turkey and casts its feathers to the four sacred directions(Di Peso II 568) . The Western Puebloans demonstrate their belief in the sacredness of the turkey by using its feathers in their requests to their gods. To their minds, "the bird's speckled plumes glorify their prayer sticks and symbolize rain, while their tips signify the foaming waters of the deluge." These plumes are placed at sacred springs "as a petition for moisture and use as sacred decorations for their own ancestral messenger gods, the kachinas "(Di Peso (II 569). Turkeys are infrequently found in this sample especially in comparison to the macaw.

COLORS RED AND BLACK

In the "Popol Vuh," the Lords of Xibalba send for the twins, Hun-Hunahpu and Vucub-Hunahpu, in order to take their ball game equipment . At the cross-roads of four roads, they were overcome. "One of the four roads was red, another black, another white, and another yellow. And the black road said to them: I am the one you must take because I am the way of the Lord." This was the road to Xibalba, the underworld (Goetz 113-115).

While in actual play, the two teams of the ball game may have been diffe-

rentiated by red and black body paint. These pigments could have been used "to represent the western horizon at sunset without involving deity impersonations that depend upon the outcome of the game" (Scarborough 284 cf).

"In Late Postclassic art and thought, this juxtaposition of red and black represents the gateway in the western horizon through which the sun descends into the Underworld" (Scarborough 265). The paired Headband Twins are seen in Mayan vases differentiated by red and black color. These scenes may represent descent through the symbolism of the surface of the earth at the western horizon as seen at sunset with the red sky and black earth (Scarborough 265).

In terms of color perception, research indicates that in the cultural and biophysical context of color perception there are numerous perceptual categories. The discrimination of these can be traced in the development of most languages. "The earliest color terms identified in languages are the oppositions of black and white, with red appearing next, frequently as an opposition or contrast to black or to white or to black and white together" (Rice 1987: 332).

The preponderance of red and black pigment in Casas Grandes ceramics would place the pottery as an early manifestation of the culture which perhaps remained intact as the Mayans and Aztecs elaborated their cultures, due to the importance of the colors in the mythology. It must also be remembered that in unglazed pottery decoration, as much of the early pottery would have been, black, white, and red are easy to obtain from common minerals or firing procedures and afford pleasant contrasting and complementary effects (Rice 333).

An important part of the creation story of the Mayans revolves around the raising up of the sky by Hun-Nal-Ye, First Father, also known as the Maize

God. The dark void in the sky referred to as the heart of heaven is the North Star, Polaris, but in the time of the Mayans this part of the sky fell in a dark area. The *axis mundi* was raised up in this center area lifting up the sky from its lying-down position on the earth and beginning the movement of the stars.

“Under the aegis of First Father, One-Maize-Revealed, three stones were set up at a place called ‘Lying-Down-Sky,’ forming the image of the sky” (Schele 75).

Dennis Tedlock in his translation of the Popol Vuh, states “Today [Alnitak, Saiph, and Rigel in Orion] are said to be the three hearthstones of the typical Quiche kitchen fireplace, arranged to form a triangle, and the cloudy area they enclose (Great Nebula M42) is said to be the smoke from the fire” (Schele 79).

It is easy to conclude from this material about the creation story that the colors black could represent the heart of heaven prior to creation and red stands for the red of the fire from the hearth. The extensive use of red and black in the Casas Grandes ceramics could very well be a reflection of this portion of the creation story.

Just as there are four colors for the roads mentioned in the Popol Vuh, the same four colors are attached to the cardinal directions and to the Chacs with the red Chac of the east being the most important (Thompson 194). Red also being the color of blood led prehistoric man to stain with blood “any object which he wished to bring to life” (Cirlot 55). Red is symbolic of health and regeneration (Larsen 114). Red generally and almost intuitively has a positive and dramatic quality which would point up the importance of its use for religious and mortuary purposes.

In the Popol Vuh, man and woman are punished for not speaking with their Creator by a deluge of black rain which fell by day and night (Goetz 90).

The portal to the Otherworld is called the “black hole” which is sometimes

depicted as a Skeletal Maw. The action of the ballgame possibly took place within the "black hole" on the other side of the Skeletal Maw (Scarborough 291). These depictions of black as the color of punishment and trial would be consistent with Cirlot's thoughts that black seems to represent the initial stage of all processes (Cirlot 57). While black is the color of the Heart of Heaven from which all of Mayan creation proceeded, black for the Mayans themselves is penitential and indicative of growth and change.

In the story of the earthly Quetzalcoatl, he is removed from power in Tula by the warlike Tezcatlipoca. Realizing that death awaits him, he leaves his subjects and all he has given them. Just what occurred at the end of his mortal life varies. "He is said: to have journeyed eastwards overland to Xicalanco; have sailed over the sea on a raft of interwoven snakes; or to have burned himself and become the planet Venus." This story of self-immolation is found in Nahuatl, in the History of the Kingdoms of Colhuacan and Mexico. "After his defeat and humiliation at the hands of Tezcatlipoca, he again becomes a power through the act of self-immolation at the place of the 'Black and Red'. The riches he gave to Tula (jade, turquoise, gold, silver, red- and whiteshell, plumes of quetzal, cotinga, roseate spoonbill, oropendola, trogon and blue heron) reappear around him in the sky, embers that are scintillating bird plumage. His heart burns to incandescence and becomes the planet Venus" (Brotherston: 155). Here again we have the colors black and red playing an important part in a cosmogony. Considering that Quetzalcoatl becomes a part of the cosmogony, it is easy to see parallels with the Mayan stories of the birth of the Maize God in the constellation of Orion. We have already noted above the black and red at the time of sunset and now it is time to see the appearance of Venus soon after. This tale of Quetzalcoatl fits in well with Casas Grandes ceramics since

the sacred bird appears in the iconography with some frequency (fig. 11). Black and red are definitely the predominant colors in this group of pots.

A series of vertically connected pendant triangles was the ancient sign of BLACK AND WHITE

In the Popol Vuh, the people of Xibalba were the enemy, also called the owls. Hunahpu and Xbalanque wished to punish them since they had killed their fathers Hun-Hunahpu and Vucub-Hunahpu. The avenging boys described these people as "false in their hearts, black and white at the same time, envious and tyrannical." This double appearance was a symbol of their duplicity.

Eliade describes a "black" shaman in Siberia who begins his journey from his yurt taking the road to the south, crossing nearby regions, climbing the Altai mountains and describing the red sand of the Chinese desert. He makes his way over a yellow steppe of great size and finally reached the Mountain of Iron " whose peaks touch the sky." After reaching the peak of the mountain in an exhausted state, the shaman finds the mountain strewn with the whitened bones of other shamans and their horses. These shamans lacked the strength to reach the summit. Once across the mountain, the shaman rides to a hole that is the entrance to the other world (Eliade 1974:201-2). The colors white, red, yellow, and black as well as the hole to the other world are so reminiscent of Mayan mythology that it is difficult not to see the parallels between the two cultures. A significant number of these pots are black and white, although not as many as are red and black.

CLOUDS

Clouds have a family connection with fertility-symbolism and their analogous relationship with all that is destined to bring fecundity (Cirlot 50).

A series of vertically connected pendant triangles was the ancient sign of a dead warrior and was connected to the Lord of Fire (Xiuhtecutli). "At Paquime it was used as a headdress design on masked stone figures and today it is used in a similar fashion as well as in paho form by the Hopi, who call it a cloud ladder (*omausa'ka*)" (Di Peso II 557, VII 259-260, 293-97). The Hopi and possibly the Casas Grandians "place bolls of raw cotton as symbolic clouds over the faces of their departed to assure them of eternal existence as beneficial clouds" (Di Peso II 557).

Similar motifs are seen on effigy figures.

MACAW

"Bird symbolism is prevalent in shamanic symbolism throughout the world.... Shamans often claim to be able to engage in flights in which the soul, when it leaves the body, takes the form of a bird" (Patterson 49). "In Siberian folklore the hero is often carried by an eagle or some other bird from the depths of the underworld to the surface of the earth" (Eliade 1964: 204 cf).

The macaw motif was widely seen in Casas Grandes. It was present on all of the painted pottery types except for Dublan Polychrome. "The majority of examples and the greatest variety were found on Ramos Poly, and while it was not present on all of the whole vessels examined, it was noted often enough to be considered a hallmark of this type, and further, a special hallmark, as its occurrence in other areas of the American Southwest was limited" (Di Peso VI 99) (fig. 19).

The trade in the scarlet macaw introduced by the *puchteca* from southern Mexico, may have been one of the original reasons for the construction of Pacquime into the trading center that it became during the Medio Period. In all likelihood, the macaw came from the rain forest habitat in northern Veracruz which is the Huastecan homeland of Cuextlan and the location of Oxitipar, a pre-Iberian bird trading center. A large breeding center grew from this source and supplied the Anasazi, Mogollon, and Sinagua during the Medio Period.

Pacquime was the only center in this large area to demonstrate archaeological evidence of breeding great numbers of birds as may be seen by remains of breeding boxes, eggshells, and nestling and juvenile carcasses. The wares of these local breeders were very much represented in the intricate socio-religious macaw iconography of the town, and only on rare occasion did these specialists permit the sale of eggs, nestling, or breeders to outside markets" (Di Peso II 632).

The feathered serpent, Quetzalcoatl, which is also known as Venus, the morning star, rose even before the sun at the time of creation (Goetz 186).

This puts the macaw as seen on Casas Grandes vessels in a place of very great esteem (fig. 20). It should also be remembered that "the fundamental mystical experience --- that is, transcending the human condition is expressed in a twofold image, breaking the roof and flight" (Eliade 1987: 175). As mentioned before, the macaw is found almost universally on these pots in some form.

Refer to (fig. 25) for a variety of abstract macaw designs by Di Peso. See (fig. 27) for a pot illustrating two of these motifs.

These designs, according to Jim Moyle, "are a reminder of the time in the ancient past when the creator god *Hunabku* (Our True Lord) sacrificed

FLUTE PLAYER (KOKOPELLI)

The Humpback Flute Player also known as the *kachina* Kokopilau because he looked like wood (*koko*---wood; *pilau*---hump). He carried seeds of plants and flowers in the hump on his back symbolizing his role in fertility. Kokopelli is often shown with a prominent penis to indicate his link with human reproduction. Carved pictographs of Kokopelli are seen on rocks from the tip of South America all the way to Canada (Patterson 1992: 98) (fig. 21).

SUPINE BALLPLAYER FIGURE

This figure (fig. 14) is covered with a wealth of symbolism. The right foot is painted red as well as both ears. There is a red circle around the left knee and a red circle on the back of the head. Unlike most human effigy figures, there are no primary or secondary sexual characteristics. The left eye is encircled with black and has distinctive lashes, whereas the right eye is only circled in black. The buttocks are well defined but the arms are hardly indicated. There is a hole in the center of the body.

The right foot painted red, the red circle on the left knee and the well defined left eye lend a sense of asymmetry to this figure. "Anyone who goes to or returns from the nether world -- man, animal, or a mixture of the two -- is marked by an asymmetry (Ginsburg 247). The Lakandon Mayans make god pots in a special house called *yatoch k'uh*, "house of god," made in a traditional way. This special house is changed from a normal or profane space into a sacred area by the painting of circular designs on certain beams and posts with a red dye. "These designs, according to Jon McGee, "are a reminder of the time in the ancient past when the creator god Hachakyum ('Our True Lord') sacrificed

human beings, collected their blood in a gourd, and asked the god Tzibatnah ('Painter of Houses') to paint his dwelling red with human blood" (Schele 248-249).

In this case, the varied treatment of the eyes could stand for the sun when the lashes are prominent and the moon when the eye is only circled with black. This would fit with the potters interest in duality, whether male or female or day and night.

Victims sacrificed by the Mayas were first hit by the chief priest in their private parts in recognition of the sexual element in such sacrifices which could explain this apparent victim's lack of sexuality (Thompson 178). The well formed buttocks would be necessary for a ballplayer since the arms and feet could not have contact with the ball. This would also explain the lack of definition of the arms.

The red and black stepped designs are adjacent to the hole in the center of the body which would seem to be the steps to the underworld that this victim ballplayer would enter at his death after playing out the game. The hole then would be the entrance to the underworld.

Both ears of the figure are red and could very well relate to the belief in blood's connection to soul, known as *ch'ulel*.

This connection between blood and *ch'ulel* was also fundamental to the worldview of the Classic Maya and explains their devotion to pious bloodletting. In Classic Maya images, *ch'ulel* appears as stylized droplets of blood that fall from the hands of people letting blood and often stain their mouths, faces, and ears.

(Schele 204)

Stripes on the arms of the figure refer, no doubt, to the mark symbolism

referred to above under "Body Markings." Cirlot describes tattoos as connected to the symbolism of scars as the marks 'of the teeth of the spirit' which would certainly pertain to this sacrificial figure.

The spiral shapes above each knee are also mentioned above in "Spiral" and seem yet another reiteration of the underworld and the search for the center. Another supine figure, see (fig. 22) has none of the symbolism seen on this piece but does have a penis. Perhaps this is another sacrificial victim but one of lesser status and therefore not prized enough to be emasculated or covered with symbols.

CONCLUSIONS

The Casas Grandes pottery of the Medio Period, in particular the Ramos Polychrome studied here, appears to be derived in its symbolism from ancient Maya beliefs which had its roots in the Olmec culture. We know from Di Peso's research that the priests in Pacquime staged a ritual ballgame in which Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca (the God of the Smoking Mirror, symbolizing the sacred war between night and day) played out their ancient roles with Quetzalcoatl who was pre-ordained to be the victor. The center marker for this game field was an unshaped stone which covered a "spirit hole," representing a symbolic entrance to the underworld. This hole gave access to "the head of an adult male who was seated upon a flexed male, after the fashion of the Veracruz palma design, wherein Death sits on his victim while cornstalks issue upward from the scene, supporting the theory that fertility was a considerable measure of the game's religious symbolism" (Di Peso II 414). This archaeological evidence gives a basis for considering Maya texts as support for my thesis that the Casas symbolism has roots there.

Again and again, effigies and pots are found in burial sites bearing evidence of use in everyday life. Many other cultures buried their dead with the objects necessary for comfort in the afterlife. These folk were no different. The pots were used for food preparation and service and often then found their way into a burial. Some could have been made specifically for a particular burial and that would explain the sometime careless quality of the pieces as compared to pottery of very high craftsmanship in other burials.

In the "Popol Vuh," the holy book of the Quiche Maya, the Hero Twins and their journey are reflected in the presence of owls, the messengers from Xibalba; the turtle which represents the Maize God; the rabbit which acts as a decoy to fool the Lords of Xibalba; and the fish which was the form taken by the twins. All these creatures are found in Casas Grandes effigies as well as in painted forms on the ceramics.

Casas Grandes ceramics contain a myriad of clues to the world view of its people. The evidence is mysterious and cryptic, but the numerous instances of symbols indicating fertility and religious practices carried out by the Casas Grandians and the Mayans present a symbolic language decipherable to those with understanding of the cosmology of these peoples who once lived in Paquime of northern Mexico.

Much of the pottery remains in private hands or unseen and unstudied in museum storage. With time, research will reveal more completely the story of this culture and place.

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MUSEUM LOCATIONS OF CASAS GRANDES POTTERY

Amerind Institute, Dragoon, Arizona.

Centennial Museum, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, Texas.

Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas.

Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Museum of Anthropology at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Museum of the American Indian, New York, New York.

Wilderness Park Museum, El Paso, Texas.

These are only a few of the many museums in this country with Casas Grandes holdings. Most art and natural history museums along the Texas and Mexico border have at least a few pieces.

Figure 1

Collection of Centennial Museum
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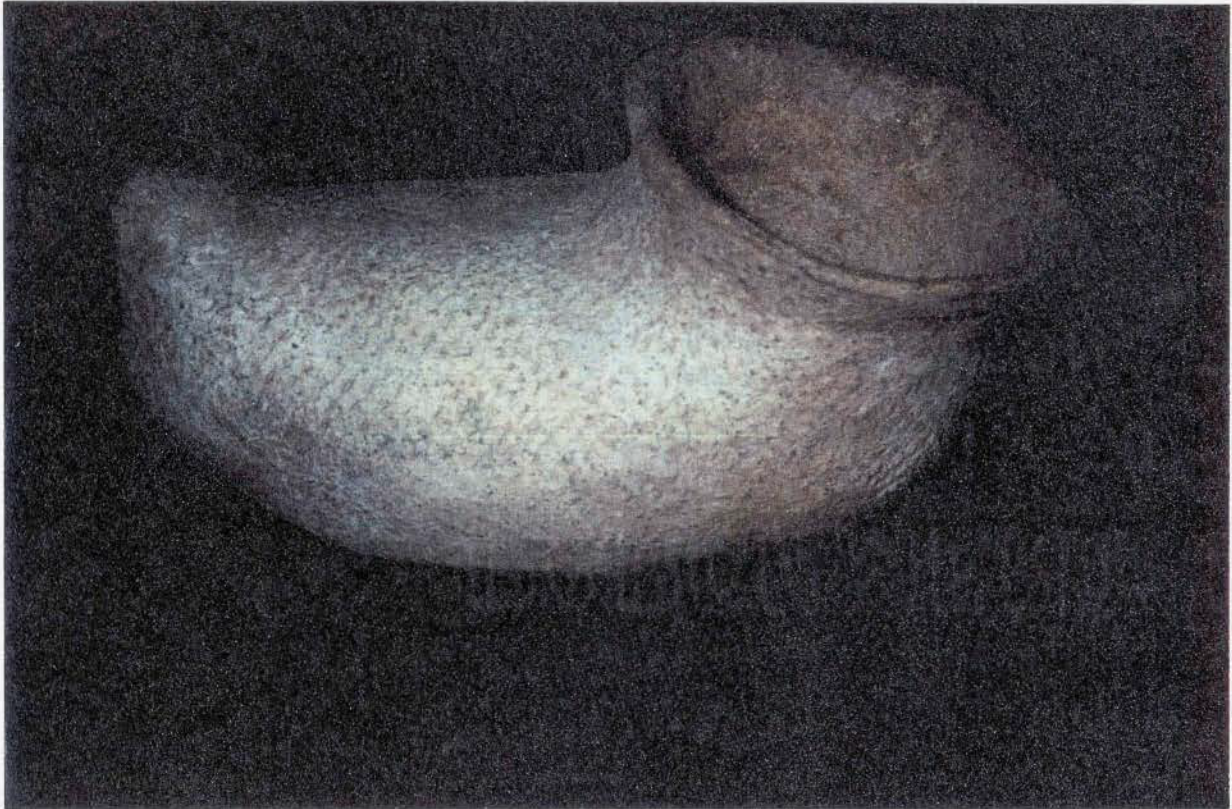


Figure 1

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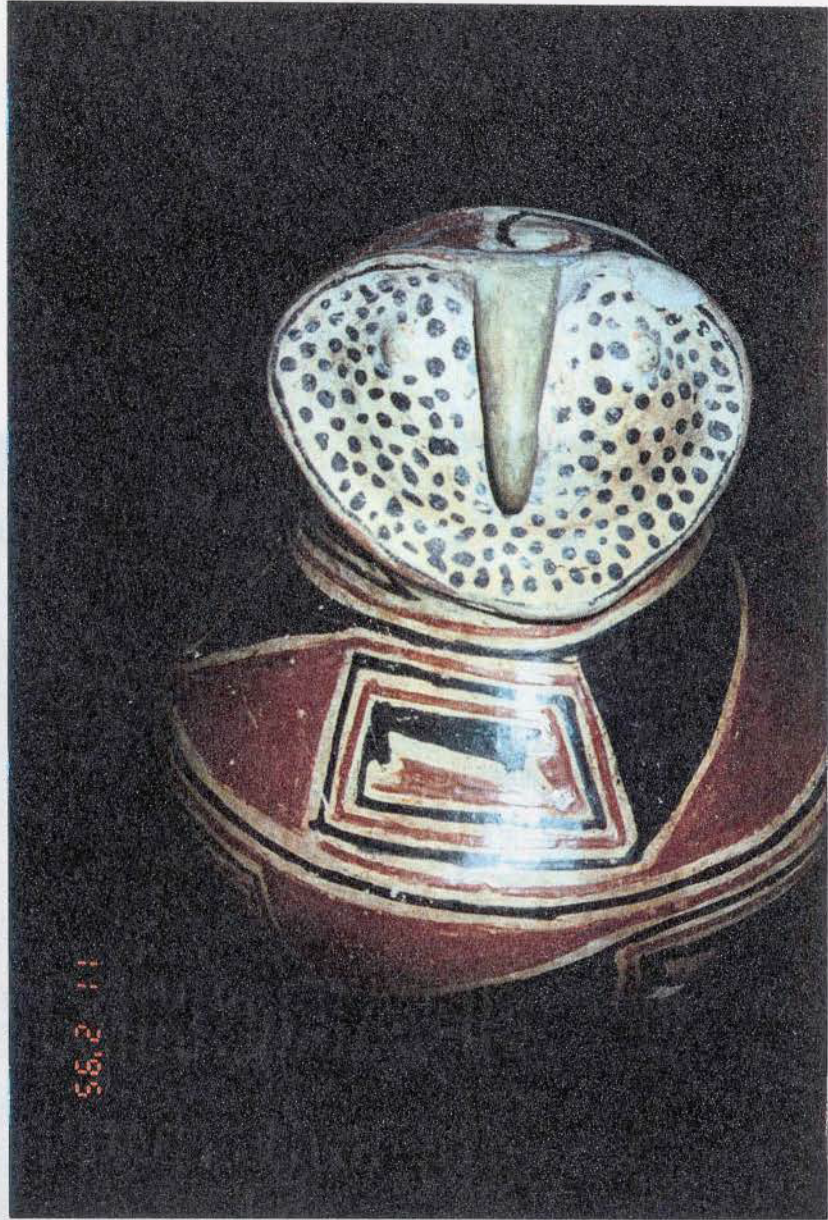


Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4
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Figure 5

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Figure 6

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Figure 7

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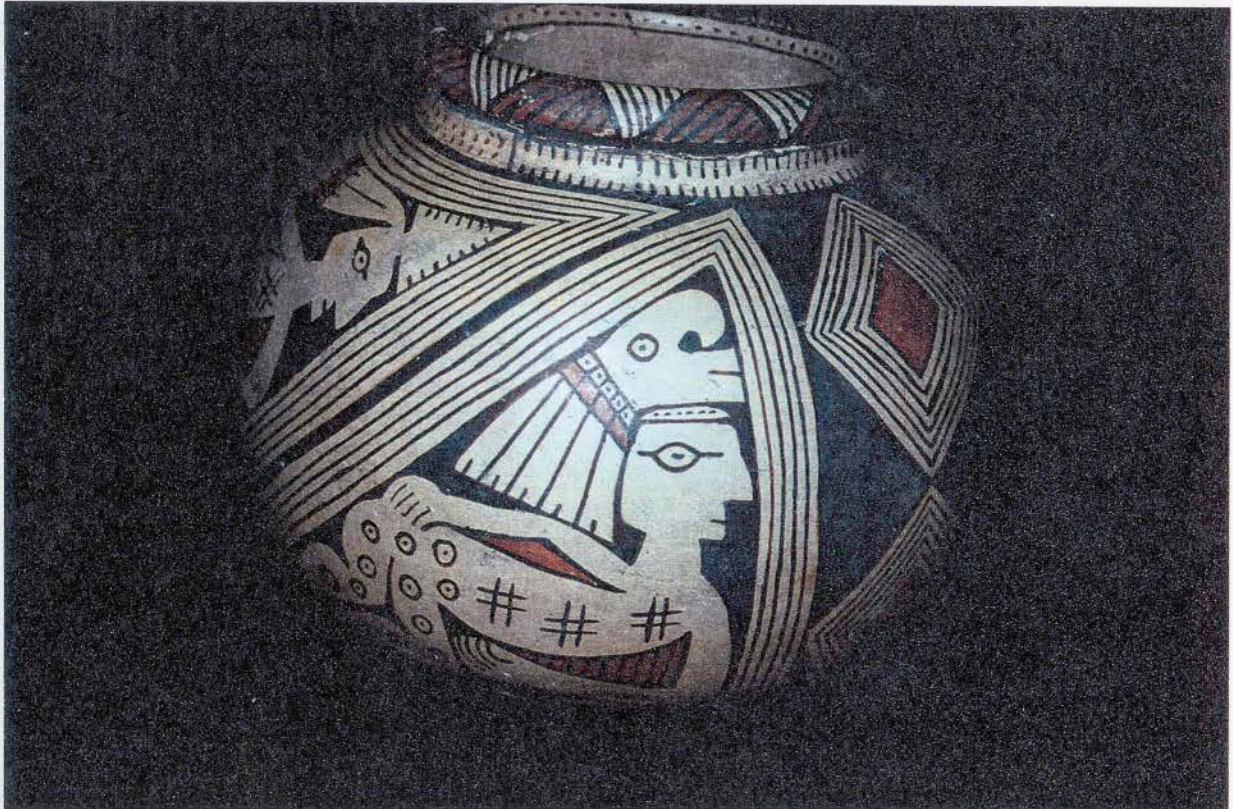


Figure 8

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Figure 9

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Figure 10

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Figure 11

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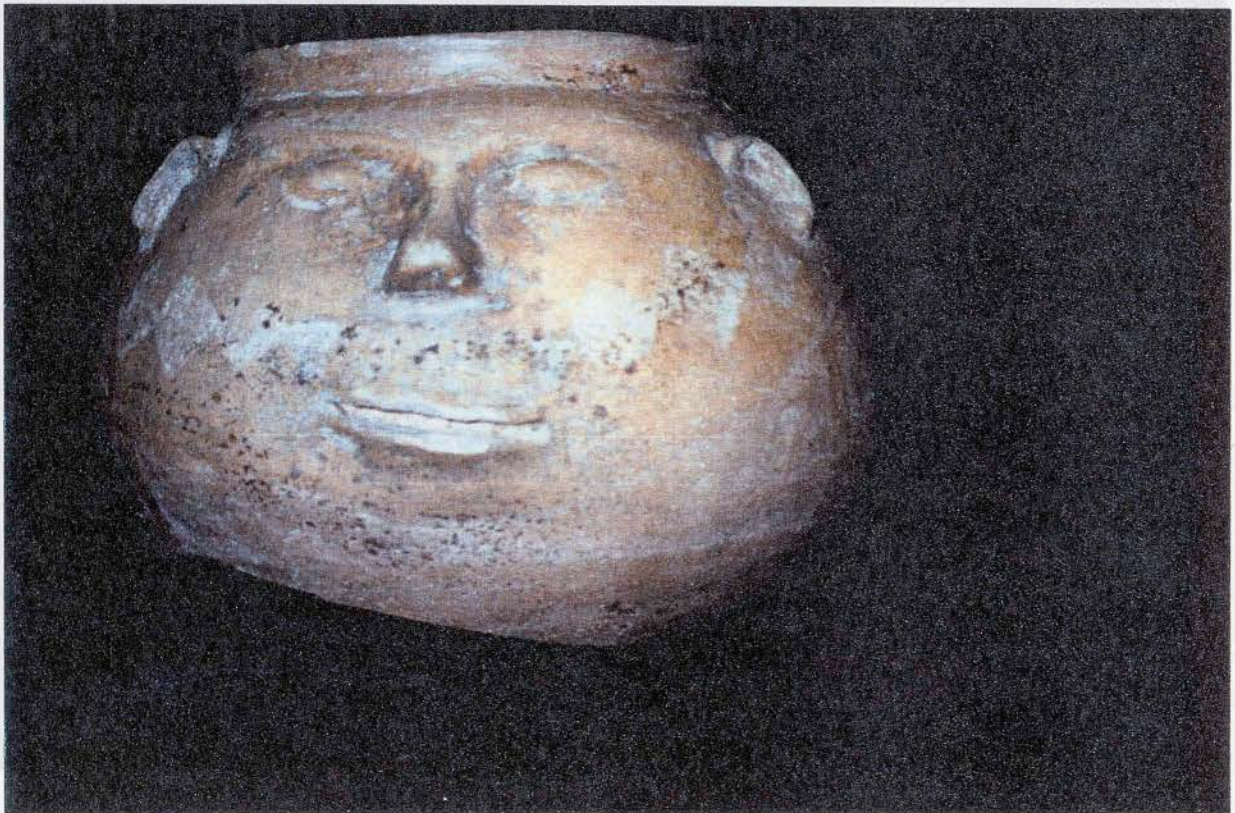


Figure 12

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Figure 13

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Figure 14

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Figure 15

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Figure 16

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Figure 17

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Figure 18

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Figure 19
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Figure 20

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Figure 21

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Figure 22

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Figure 23

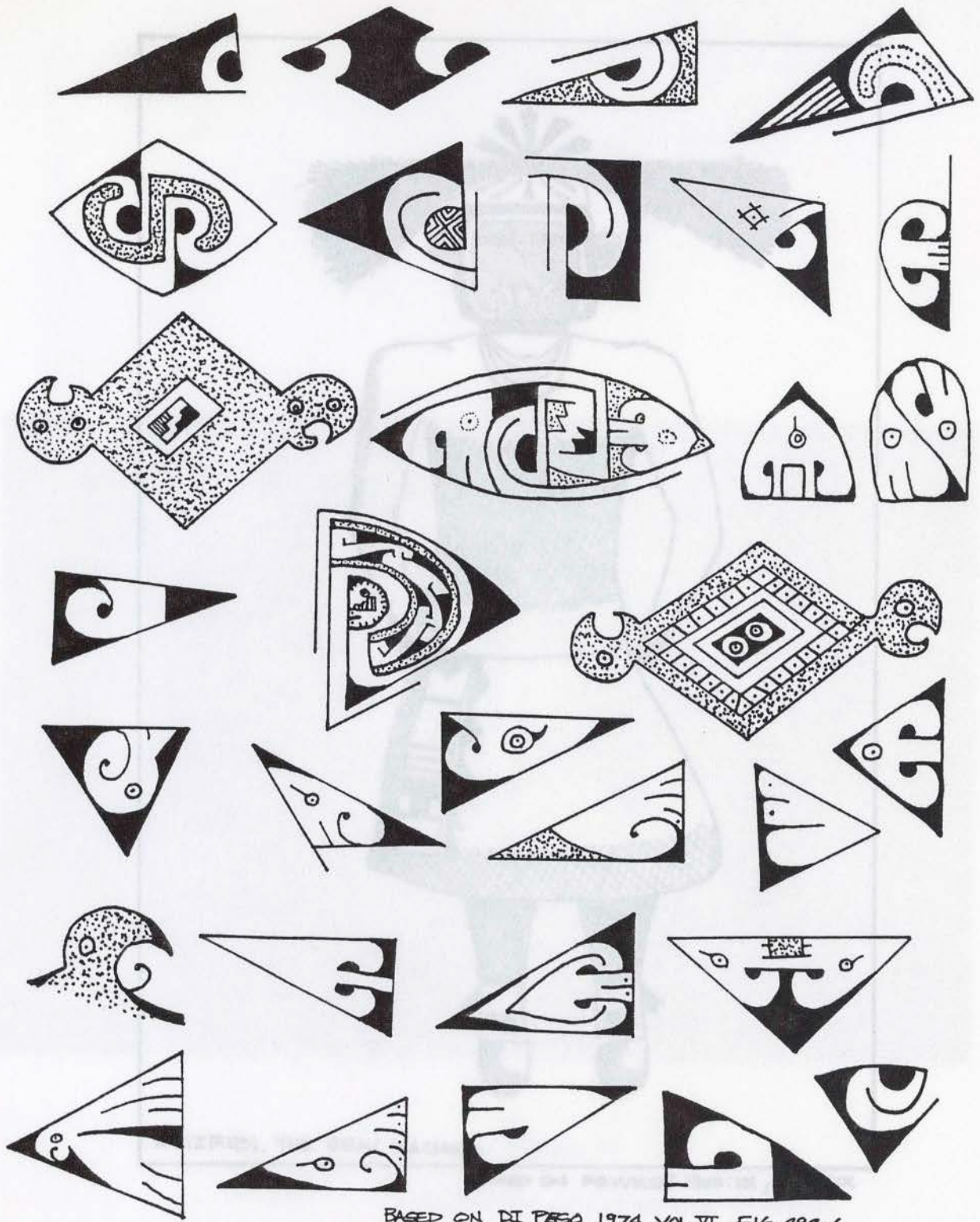
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Figure 24

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Figure 25



BASED ON DI PESSO 1974 VOL. VI, FIG. 292-6

Figure 25



MUZRIBI, THE BEAN KACHINA

BASED ON FEWKES 1903:101, PL XXXIX

Figure 26

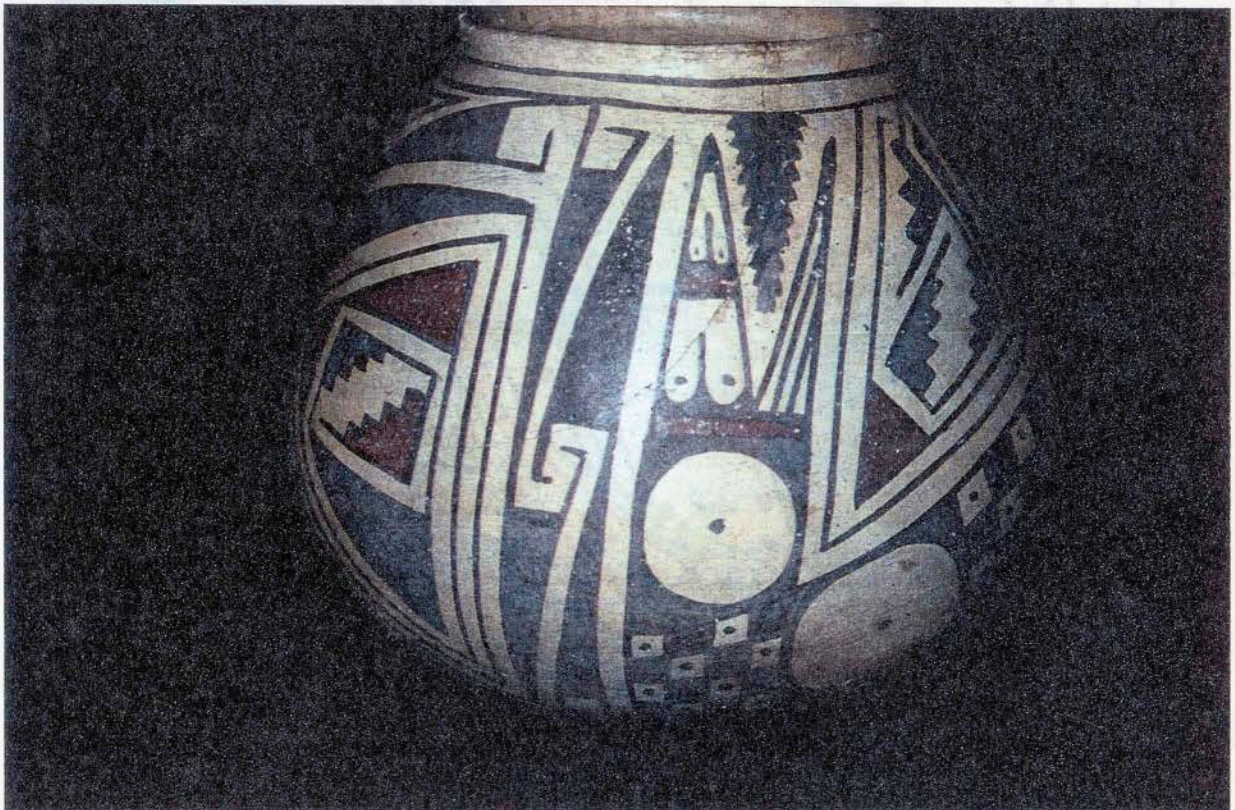
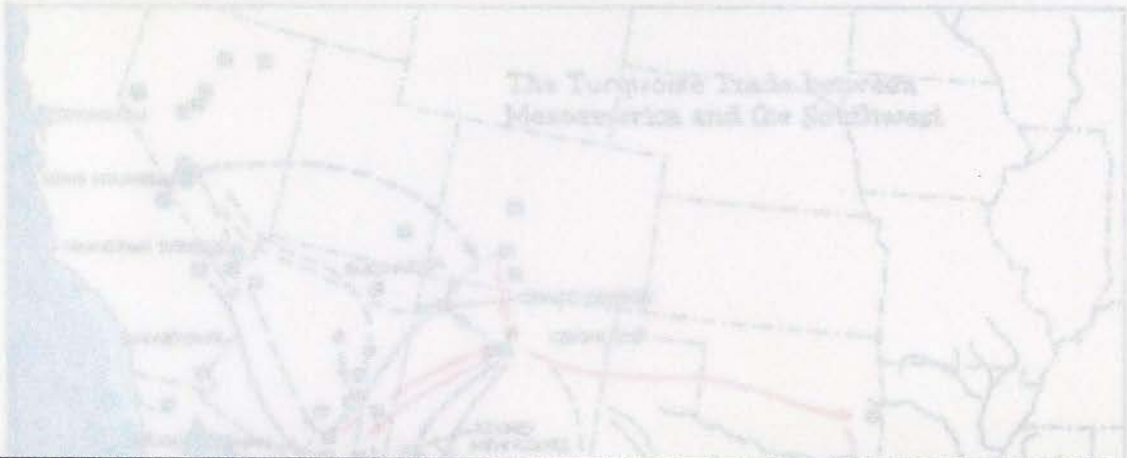
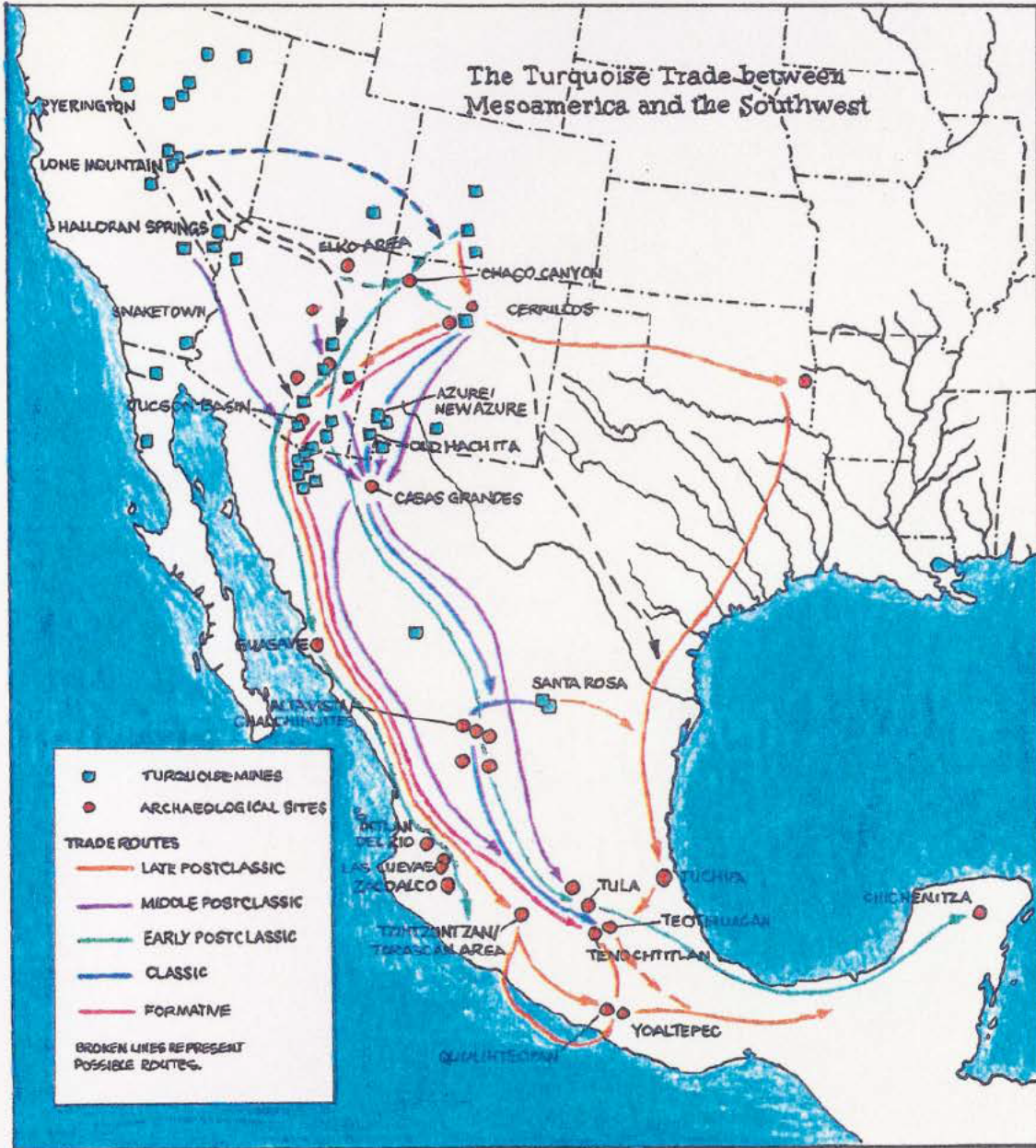


Figure 27

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BASED ON HARBOTTLE AND WEIGAND, "SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN" FEBRUARY 1992

Figure 28

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