

THE EARLY  
AMERICAS:  
HISTORY AND  
CULTURE



# PAINED POTTERY OF HONDURAS

*Object Lives and Itineraries*

ROSEMARY A. JOYCE

BRILL

## Painted Pottery of Honduras

# The Early Americas: History and Culture

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# Painted Pottery of Honduras

*Object Lives and Itineraries*

*By*

Rosemary A. Joyce



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Cover illustration: Uluva Polychrome vase excavated at La Ceiba Site 2, Lake Yojoa, in 1936. A procession of three musicians and two dancers is depicted around the vase. At the center of this side of the vase, a standing figure plays a pair of rattles or maracas. On the back of his belt is a profile animal skull painted with red dots. To his left the beginning of one of two flute players, who wear a different head on the back of their belts, is visible (see Figure 58). To the right can be glimpsed the back of one of two dancers who lead the procession, gesturing with an open hand, wearing a bird head at the back of his belt. Copyright President and Fellows of Harvard College, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, PM# 38-45-20/5330.

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# Contents

Acknowledgements VII

List of Illustrations X

Introduction 1

## PART 1

### *Using Pots*

1 Forming Intentions 15

2 Feasting Families 29

3 Telling Stories 47

4 Honoring Ancestors 61

5 Burying Pots 78

## PART 2

### *Understanding Fragments*

6 Collecting Pots 91

7 Making Time 118

8 Finding Places 170

9 Tracing Boundaries 221

10 Picturing Meaning 262

Epilogue 305

Afterword 312

Bibliography 321

Index 344



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# List of Illustrations

## Figures

- 1 Vase with red, black and orange painted designs on orange ground (Dedalos: Chac subclass Ulua Polychrome) 20
- 2 Vase with red painted designs on orange ground (Chasnigua Red-on-Orange type) 20
- 3 Vase with red and orange painted designs on orange ground (Dedalos: Labyrinth subclass Ulua Polychrome) 23
- 4 Basal flange polychrome bowl (Dos Arroyos Polychrome type) 23
- 5 Vase (Dedalos: Chac subclass Ulua Polychrome) 26
- 6 Map showing principal sites in Ulua Polychrome producing area 30
- 7 Dish (Dedalos: Bandeja subclass Ulua Polychrome) 31
- 8 Plate (Santa Rita: Bandeja subclass Ulua Polychrome) 32
- 9 Bowl (Santa Rita: Cyrano subclass Ulua Polychrome) 32
- 10 Vase (Santa Rita: Arrodiarse subclass Ulua Polychrome) 32
- 11 Vase (Santa Rita: Mellizo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 34
- 12 Vase (Santa Rita: Mellizo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 34
- 13 Vase (Santa Rita: Arrodiarse subclass Ulua Polychrome) 35
- 14 Vase (Santa Rita: Cyrano subclass Ulua Polychrome) 35
- 15 Vase (Santa Rita: Arrodiarse subclass Ulua Polychrome) 36
- 16a, b Two views of vase (Santa Rita: Paloma subclass Ulua Polychrome) 37, 49
- 17 Vase (Travesia: Bombero subclass Ulua Polychrome) 51
- 18 Vase (Yojoa: Tiotivo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 51
- 19 Jar (Yojoa: Singe Accroupi subclass Ulua Polychrome) 52
- 20 Bowl (Travesia: Rastrillo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 52
- 21 Dish (Selva: Concerto subclass Ulua Polychrome) 53
- 22 Bowl (Travesia: Pato subclass Ulua Polychrome) 53
- 23 Vase (Yojoa: Molinero subclass Ulua Polychrome) 54
- 24 Jar (Manzanillo: Armadillo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 54
- 25 Jar (Manzanillo: Armadillo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 55
- 26 Vase (Yojoa: Molinero subclass Ulua Polychrome) 59
- 27 Dish (Selva: Troubador subclass Ulua Polychrome) 62
- 28a, b Vase (Yojoa: Molinero subclass Ulua Polychrome) 63
- 29 Vase (Selva: Troubador subclass Ulua Polychrome) 63
- 30 Bowl (Selva: Concerto subclass Ulua Polychrome) 64
- 31 Vase (Santana: Salmo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 66
- 32 Vase (Santana: Salmo subclass Ulua Polychrome) 66

33	Vase (Santana: Bilbao subclass Ulua Polychrome)	67
34a, b	Vase (Tenampua: Cefiro subclass Ulua Polychrome)	68
35	Vase (Nebla: Picadilly subclass Ulua Polychrome)	73
36	Vase (Santana: Salmo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	74
37a, b	Vase (Nebla: Picadilly subclass Ulua Polychrome)	74
38a, b	Vase (Nebla: Tigrillo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	75
39	Vase with lid (Tenampua: Zarza subclass Ulua Polychrome)	76
40	Ladle censer (Tenampua class Ulua Polychrome?)	76
41	Vase (Tenampua: Cefiro subclass Ulua Polychrome)	79
42	Vase (Tenampua: Capitan subclass Ulua Polychrome)	82
43	Vase (Tenampua: Capitan subclass Ulua Polychrome)	83
44	Vase (Tenampua: Capitan subclass Ulua Polychrome)	83
45	Vase (Tenampua class Ulua Polychrome)	86
46	Bowl (Travesia: Euclid subclass Ulua Polychrome)	126
47	Jar (Yojoa: Singe Accroupi subclass Ulua Polychrome)	127
48	Bowl (Yojoa: Corral subclass Ulua Polychrome)	128
49	Bowl (Yojoa: Tiotivo A subclass Ulua Polychrome)	128
50	Jar (Santa Rita: Diamante subclass Ulua Polychrome)	129
51	Jar (Manzanillo class Ulua Polychrome)	130
52	Jar (Manzanillo class Armadillo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	130
53	Bowl (Nebla: Rodeo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	136
54	Bowl (Nebla: Rodeo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	136
55	Bowl (Nebla: Rodeo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	137
56	Dish (Nebla: Sphinx subclass Ulua Polychrome)	137
57	Dish (Nebla: Sphinx subclass Ulua Polychrome)	138
58	Vase (Nebla: Picadilly subclass Ulua Polychrome)	139
59	Bowl (Nebla: Rodeo subclass Ulua Polychrome)	140
60	Vase (Santana: Bilbao subclass Ulua Polychrome)	142
61	Vase (import from Motul de San Jose region?)	143
62	Dish (Tenampua: Pentagone subclass Ulua Polychrome)	143
63	Dish (Tenampua: Mariposa subclass Ulua Polychrome)	147
64	Vase (Las Vegas Polychrome)	147
65	Profile of area at Travesia excavated in 1983	152
66	Plan of Campo Dos site as it existed prior to 1993	180
67	Area of Campo Dos excavated in 1993 with evidence of ceramic production	182
68	Periform vase (Las Vegas Polychrome)	205
69	Composite silhouette vase (Las Vegas Polychrome)	206
70	Periform vase, serpent-bird image (Las Vegas Polychrome)	207
71	Vase, serpent-bird image (Bay Islands Polychrome)	207

72	Profile of Santa Rita excavations by Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938)	212
73	Jar (Sulaco Polychrome)	222
74	Dish (Sulaco Polychrome)	238
75	Incurved rim bowl (Cancique Polychrome)	248
76	Bowl cylinder (Gualpopa Polychrome)	251
77	Vase (Galo Polychrome)	257

### Tables

1	Events preceding the development of Ulua Polychrome pottery in the lower Ulua Valley	21
2	The development and chronology of Ulua Polychrome pottery	120
3a, b	Ulua Polychrome vessels excavated at Copan	131, 133
4	Stratigraphy and chronology of George Byron Gordon's excavated assemblages	150
5	Chronology for the development of Honduran painted pottery	166
6a, b	Pottery deposits excavated at Lake Yojoa by Strong, Kidder and Paul	187, 188
7a, b	Architectural caches with pottery vessels from sites in Ulua Polychrome zone	192, 194
8	Identifiable pottery from Lake Yojoa collected by Jens Yde	197
9	Additional pots from Lake Yojoa sites recorded by Strong, Kidder and Paul	199
10	Polychromes from Santa Rita excavated by Strong, Kidder and Paul	215
11	Foreign Polychromes from Travesia area excavated by Erich Wittkugel	223
12	Non-local pottery from the lower Ulua Valley in the Peabody Museum	224
13	Salua and Ulua Polychromes in the Museo David Guzman, El Salvador	240
14a, b	Ulua Polychrome vessels in <i>Vasijas Pintadas</i>	265, 266

# Introduction

This book is an experiment. Starting in the late 1970s, I began conducting archaeological research in the lower Ulua River valley, a 2400 square kilometer swathe of lowlands that stretches over 70 km inland from the Caribbean coast. One of my earliest and continuing interests has been the pottery of the region, particularly the vessels called Ulua Polychromes. Long collected by museums, Ulua Polychromes have nonetheless suffered from a history of being understood from the perspective of Maya societies to the west, rather than from the sites where they were made, used, and discarded. The main exceptions to this generalization have been undergraduate honors papers, masters' theses, and doctoral dissertations that are sometimes difficult to obtain. Even the authors of these works have had to contend with a history of inconsistent field projects that resulted only in preliminary reports without follow-up, severely limiting the available information for interpretation of complete objects in museum collections, and offering often unrepresentative representations of Ulua Polychromes recovered in excavations.

In the 1980s and 1990s, I began a series of publications attempting to convey what I had learned about these things from my work as an archaeologist in the field, and as a researcher working with major museum collections in the United States and Honduras. The challenge was that I could not assume readers knew anything about the archaeology of Honduras, except perhaps the great Classic Maya site, Copan, located far west of the lower Ulua Valley, and in my view having little consequential engagement with societies that I have studied. Unlike comparable efforts at presenting models for understanding polychrome pottery from sites in the lowlands of Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico, there are still almost no widely available publications providing context for Ulua pottery. This is a serious problem because, as I and other scholars working in Honduras have argued, the forms of social organization in place during the period of production of Ulua Polychromes were vastly different than the more familiar archaic states of the Guatemalan Peten and Yucatan peninsula. So every attempt I have made since 1985 to develop a book dedicated to Ulua Polychromes—and this is the third full draft of such a work I have produced—has ended up spending far more time on broader archaeology than on the specifics of the pottery itself.

I now think that the delay this created in my completing this book was a positive thing. In the interim, I have published overviews of the Ulua Polychrome tradition and specific critical works about them. But during the ensuing decades I have also learned a different way to think about materials like these, allowing me to reconceptualize this book fundamentally.

### How to Think about Painted Pottery—From Classic Honduras, for Example

It is strange how the archaeologist, if he plies his peculiar profession very long, is inclined to forget what pottery stands for. Pottery stands for the big bowl of *posol* they use at christenings when the baby is kicking and the women adoring it, while the old men with dirty beards are probably saying to themselves, “It will turn out no better than I have.” Pottery represents the five-year-old boy getting his first prize for shooting the bow and arrow, the little girl of eight getting her first prize for mixing a clever concoction of intoxicating *chicha*. Pottery represents the pompous old men who get together in the evening and admit their follies when they are out of sight of their youngers. Pottery represents the young bride, worrying about her prenuptial preparations, thrilling over her flowers and feathers, and wondering whether the maize beer has enough of a wallop or not. And it represents the bridegroom, conscious of the diagonal crease in his *mactli*, or apron, and the old aunts and uncles hanging in the background, pretending to be cheerful when they are really unhappy because they are not in the limelight. Finally, above all, pottery represents the earth. Pottery comes from the earth and is colored with the earth—directly when you use oxide of iron, indirectly when you use vegetable dye. Pottery, in the end, goes back to the earth in burials, being both clay and dust, life and death.

MASON 1940:129

Gregory Mason, a journalist and free agent working for museums as an archaeologist and ethnologist, was moved to write this passage by his experiences in the Ulua river valley. It has taken more than sixty years for the rest of us to begin to catch up to him.

What held those of us in the academy up so long were, I would argue, two things. First was a problematic notion of what the object of anthropology should be that glossed over individual motivation, intentions and experiences in favor of an abstract group identity. The second was, and remains, the tyranny of our disciplinary forms of writing, reinforced by academic reward systems and the conservative effects of peer review.

Traditionally, materials like the Ulua Polychromes have been treated as a kind of aggregate product of a relatively uniform group of people; they were bases for studies of social or cultural types. In contrast, we can adopt the view of many contemporary anthropologists, that the discipline should be engaged in understanding what it means to be human. This broader anthropological

claim resonates with what I (and others) would call contemporary social archaeology.

Contemporary social archaeology sets aside a long tradition whose goal was the definition of uniform cultural groups with identifiable bounded distributions in time and space. Archaeologists have criticized such culture-historical work for decades, but often without an explicit discussion of why the culture concept itself was inherently problematic. Based firmly in the German anthropological tradition of the nineteenth century that was successful in dominating the development of the first anthropology departments in the United States, culture history took a *kultur*—a shared set of distinctive traits—as the central sign of a people sharing a traditional, static identity (Kuper 1999). In culture historical models, change is problematic: the normative model of culture they embody is one in which shared beliefs and customs tend to constrain innovation or divergence from tradition. Change was most easily understood as coming from outside the group, either as a response to a catastrophic challenge or through the arrival from abroad of new ideas, things, or people, as culture-historical archaeologists recognized in landmark publications in the 1950s that defined the processes that might explain culture-historical patterns (for example, Willey and Phillips 1958).

In contrast, contemporary social archaeology sees both change and continuity as products of the ongoing flow of human activity, which always contains the potential for innovation because human actions never form a uniform social fabric as required by normative models of culture. Under the influence of a variety of theories of practice, contemporary social archaeologists locate social change and continuity not at the level of a uniform ethnic or cultural group, but as the product of the interplay among individuals and social groups, often shifting in their composition. Tim Pauketat (2001) described archaeological work based on these insights as creating a new historical processualism. At about the same time, in an editorial statement in the first issue of the *Journal of Social Archaeology*, the founding editors of the journal explained our reasons for opting to call this broadly shared project social archaeology (JSA Editors 2001).

Whatever it might be called, this approach entails a number of changes in the way we do archaeology. Unlike the New Archaeology of the 1960s, contemporary social archaeology cannot be traced to a single person or school, and so it forms quite a complex task to piece together a consistent theoretical perspective from what may best be seen as a series of reactions to what New Archaeology did, and did not, accomplish. But with enough distance from the first self-conscious pronouncements of oppositional archaeologies of the 1980s, it may now be possible to outline some of the common commitments that led such diverse participants as marxist, feminist, and historical-processual

archaeologists to comfortably exchange ideas today. It is this complex, heterogeneous and yet ultimately not incoherent terrain that underwrites this book and the format I have used here.

As I have written elsewhere, contemporary social archaeology must engage with issues of intentionality and decision-making even down to the level of the individual person (Joyce 2008b). These are topics that have dominated a recent literature on agency in archaeology. Unfortunately, while those contributing to this literature clearly understand that agency cannot be abstracted from a broader conceptual field, some readers of their work have not been so clear about what archaeologies of agency must require to be theoretically sound. It is for this reason, among others, that my own preference has been to approach the same issues of decision-making and intentionality from a broad theoretical perspective on practice, including the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (Joyce and Lopiparo 2005). Practice gives us a way of orienting archaeological work to the place where our kinds of materials meet the decisions and dispositions of living people. Instead of looking for evidence of agency, which requires us to make an assessment of the degree of intentionality and freedom of decision-making of the person whose actions produced a material trace, we can foreground the archaeological traces of action themselves and then seek to understand which actions are unique, which are repeated, and which led to consequences that might never have been intended (Joyce 2004).

Archaeological work underlines the critical role of repetition in the reproduction of practices, articulating with theories of subject formation in which materialities are given serious consideration. So explicit attention to the active roles of things is a second part of contemporary social archaeology, necessary for a full explication of possible pasts (Joyce and Gillespie 2015). Again, some readers of this literature have parodied it as treating objects as equivalent to human beings, suggesting that to say objects are agential is to say they are endowed with intentionality and thus with consciousness or even free will. This misreading is useful precisely because it allows us to clarify that what thinking about objects as form-shaping does is to show us that human beings do not shape the forms of their lives entirely on their own, entirely through conscious intention. Instead, they do so through entanglements with non-human animals and things, both of which have the capacity through action to influence the course of events. Things do not have agency in the manner of people, but in a manner appropriate to things.

The ethnographer Bruno Latour has made similar observations a central part of his work on histories of laboratory science, arguing that we should reject even the terms agency and agent because of their traditional limitation to human beings, in favor of new language such as his proposed term, actant,

to encompass the humans and non-humans that together, connected in networks, make it possible for things to happen (Latour 2005). In archaeology, at least two separate, serious engagements with Latour's work have developed, and to some extent the present book may be compared to these. But rather than explicitly construct a symmetric archaeology or merge archaeology into Actor-Network-Theory as such, I suggest what we might wish to do is acknowledge that there are a whole series of ways that researchers have pointed out that things are not the passive recipients of human attention that their denomination as objects might suggest. Things make things happen. Archaeologists, who are most often dealing directly with things and not directly with people, have for a very long time known this, and used it as a way to articulate connections with the long-vanished human actors in the networks we study.

Unfortunately, we have done so for about as long under the terms of epistemologies that we thought required us to maintain our objectivity, ensured by our dependence on objects that really exist in the here and now as products created in the past and thus support our promise of creating a materially grounded, believable account of a past we can never claim to have witnessed. In archaeology we routinely use the phrase "the archaeological record" to suggest a neutrality about things and their spatial relationships, from which we generate our ideas. We use metaphors of decoding, reading, or re-assembling the past, each of which is based on the idea that there is a singular past broken into pieces that we simply need to reconnect in the right order. To do that we have made use of a number of simplifying assumptions or short cuts that subsume what we really do understand was the actual complexity of every past human population, so that we can work with what at times seems a tenuous set of material links in order to create an image of human action. High on the list of such simplifications has been taking things as products of groups of humans, rather than as objects with specific irreducible links in action to particular human beings in particular, even if momentary, social positions.

So to concerns with practice and materiality that contemporary social archaeologies insist on, I argue we also need to add a strong and explicit understanding of how some of the actants in our past networks were distinguished from others by the development of subjectivities (Joyce 2015a, 2015c). It would be well at the outset to admit that I see subjectivity as a common but not automatic attribute of human beings and an occasional but not universal attribute of non-humans as well. So this is not re-introducing a subject-object division into analysis. Instead, it is taking seriously the fact that among the most significant effects of the networks of humans and non-humans, of which the only part archaeologists normally can still observe are non-human things, was their creation of the effect of subjectivity as part of past social life. Following

a number of scholars, particularly feminist scholars, I see subjectivity as relational, not something a person develops through some kind of disengaged self-reflection, but as a property of personhood that is rooted in relations among humans and non-humans (Van der Tuin 2011). It follows that for me, any discussion of things from the past is already a discussion of past subjectivities, whether this is a conscious topic placed in the foreground or not.

Hence the present book takes a radically different approach from the first drafts I set aside in the 1980s and 1990s. It attempts to foreground the way that things, human beings, and non-human animals, formed specific kinds of networks that changed in shape over time. It tries constantly to keep in play questions of materiality, practice, knowledge, and intentionality that are fundamental to contemporary social archaeology. And it does so through what I believe is a structure that works to communicate complex arguments with greater effect: narrative.

Narrative is a topic about which archaeologists have had a sustained conversation for at least twenty years, a conversation to which I have contributed (Joyce 2002). My own view of what narrative does for us is that it requires the writer to be responsible for his or her interpretations by putting those words in her or his own mouth. A narrative doesn't allow for the kind of passive-voice proclamations in which archaeology routinely indulges, in which archaeologically created data "indicate," "suggest," or otherwise appear to do the talking for us. So in a narrative, my voice is clearly present and my conclusions have to be acknowledged to be mine—inferences based more or less believably on the things I am describing.

The self-consciously scripted forms of historical narrative that we could call story telling go even further. They present us an image of events linked as causes and effects that cuts to the heart of what the writer thinks happened. In my view, historical narratives often lurk behind the more objective forms of textual representation we use in archaeology. Scholars often talk through their interpretations as narratives about what they think must have happened to account for the material traces they actually encountered, before writing their conclusions in a less obviously narrative way.

Banishing the expression of these kinds of narratives has not improved our texts. It has made it sometimes difficult to see the act of interpretation as it happens. It has made it harder to present complex explanations in which all sorts of factors, including a variety of human intentions, mistakes, oversights, and thoughtless action, articulated with specific things, led to the outcomes we come to understand through our analyses. Narrative, in other words, provides a structure for synthetic representations of complex models of the past.

Hence this book is presented in narrative voice, and incorporates historical narratives at a variety of time scales and from a variety of time frames. At some points, where the evidence I am providing is thinner or the argument I am making is indirect, the narrative will use more speculative terms. At others, the description of the things about which I am speaking will make clear that these are what we might consider largely factual statements, arguments few or none would contest.

In essence, this book is an attempt to write a series of biographies: biographies of place, object lives, and not least of all, human stories. The idea that we might create biographies of things and places is a final aspect of contemporary social archaeology with which I would align the present project (Gosden and Marshall 1999). The contrast between a biography and what archaeologists have traditionally done could not be starker. Biography, first and foremost, recognizes that the nature of a thing, place, or person is the effect of the experiences in which the person, place or thing has been engaged. A biography attempts to explain the particularity of its subject matter. A biographer, by taking up a particular story, in fact creates a subject out of that matter: of all the people, places, or things that existed, this one, and not any others, is given our attention.

The cost of such a focus has seemed to many archaeologists to be too high. We have been told that the best explanations are the ones that can be generalized the most: the simplest model that fits the largest number of cases. The philosopher Alison Wylie (2002) shows that parsimony is not the only virtue that a scientist can seek to maximize in a hypothetical explanation. Using her terms, biographical accounts instead seek to realize to a greater degree another epistemic virtue, empirical adequacy: to explain (or be consistent with) more information about a specific case. This does not mean that a biographical approach produces nothing that can be brought to bear in a different instance. But it probably does mean that, for example, the ways I understand the complex history of development of Uluá Polychrome pottery will generate fewer explanations applicable to another time and place. Instead, the necessary particularity of understanding will generate more questions to be asked about the materials from other *theres* and *thens*.

By adopting a biographical narrative approach, I necessarily must maintain a reflexive awareness of my own relationship to the story I am telling and its subjects. This again I think is not a loss, but a gain, for archaeology. I will return to this point in the Epilogue. First, though, having said something about what my intention is, I want to give an idea of what kind of story I am able to tell about the histories of painted pottery in Honduras.

## Understanding Ulua Polychromes: The Story This Book Tells

This book tells a modest tale, the best understanding I have developed by spending much of my life handling, drawing, and thinking about Honduran pottery, and imagining the lives of Ulua pots and the people they connected. I make no claim that understanding Ulua Polychromes will automatically provide us a way to understand every group of people that made pottery featuring representational imagery, or even all the people in Classic Period (ca. 250–1000 AD) Honduras. Instead, my narrative is carefully rooted in the specific places on the Honduran landscape from which sufficiently well-documented collections of whole pots and broken fragments of pottery identified as part of the Ulua Polychrome tradition have been recovered archaeologically for me to propose a narrative explanation.

There are still surprisingly few excavated sites to support this story. So while narrating time- and place-specific events that I can identify to shed light on Ulua Polychromes, their makers, and users prior to 1000 AD, I also draw on studies of Ulua Polychromes in a second set of places to which they are biographically attached: museums in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Honduras, collections I have been privileged to study.

This division of places allowed me to finally solve the structural problem that blocked me from long ago publishing a different, but probably perfectly adequate, study of these ceramics. That was the need I felt to begin the first two drafts of this book with descriptions of the history of archaeological research on Ulua Polychromes, a topic of such great complexity that it seemed a completely separate story of its own—after which there was little space left to come to grips with the things themselves.

This book addresses this problem by tracing the journeys of the pots that join together ancient villages in Honduras and museums today. I build here on an alternative to object biographies that maintains the narrative and particularistic historical focus, but recognizes how things are unlike people and thus how some aspects of presenting the histories of things as biographies forces things into a human mold (Joyce and Gillespie 2015b). The concept of object itineraries traces the stops along the way as things move through space over time, and the particular social relations they enter into at each place (Joyce 2013, 2015b). Itineraries, in particular, allow me to imagine the many centuries when pots rested below ground between the tenth and nineteenth centuries as a pause in transit, not as death and a kind of resurrected afterlife. Attending to itineraries also lets me link together partial stories of individual pots, potters, and the places they occupied into longer strands, which ultimately connect the very earliest experiments with clay in Honduras, prior to 1500 BC, to the 21st

century circulation of pots in museum exhibitions and international collecting of antiquities.

Hence the book is ordered chronologically so that the earliest places where Uluá Polychromes were meaningfully connected to humans are discussed first, and the most recent places where such active connections contributed to their understanding come last. In contrast to much archaeological writing, there is no arbitrary cutoff point for these histories, for example, when people in Honduras were no longer making and using Uluá Polychromes in everyday life. The itineraries of Uluá Polychromes continue through the present day, as they are subjects of active debate about contemporary global agreements concerning cultural heritage policy.

Part 1 of this book, then, considers the lives of Uluá Polychromes during the centuries when they were being made in Honduras and used in a variety of ways as part of the daily lives of people. I do not interrupt the narrative in this half of the book to cite published sources; much of what I am arguing here is based on my own original museum and fieldwork. A discussion of sources for each chapter is included as an Afterword to the book. My purpose is to give readers a sense of participation in the lives of Uluá Polychromes.

Readers requiring a more traditional text may prefer to read Part 2 first. This second section of the book takes the sites where Uluá Polychromes have been collected, analyzed, and appreciated for their aesthetic values as a focus. While many of these are museums in North America and Europe with which I am familiar from first-hand research (and in the case of Harvard's Peabody Museum, nine years as a curator of the precolumbian collections, including those from Honduras), these sites also include contemporary Honduran cultural institutions, governmental agencies, and the virtual sites on the internet where the traffic in antiquities continues. In this section of the book, I do include in-text citation of published works on which I am drawing. Discussion of the unpublished bases for my conclusions in these chapters, again, can be found in the Afterword.

Throughout the book, I juxtapose descriptions of specific archaeological deposits with photographic illustrations of complete vessels in public museum collections in the United States and Honduras. The common archaeological practice of illustrating excavated fragments, often using drawing conventions that are more like maps than pictures, can mislead us dramatically when we try to visualize what things under discussion really looked like. It has become routine for me to identify Uluá Polychromes in museum collections that museum curators and other scholars have not recognized, because they had to rely on confusing drawings of parts of whole vessels for comparison.

It is relatively easy to tack back and forth between the archaeological fragments—which I documented initially through standardized technical

drawings—and the complete vessels I illustrate because of the most remarkable feature of Ulua Polychromes: their formalized patterning. At any one time Ulua Polychromes being produced consisted of many copies of a few basic formats, painted designs applied to plates, bowls, vases, or jars, with shared motifs and color schemes. Even so, because of the centuries-long history of the tradition and its development across a territory stretching from the Caribbean to the Pacific, there are dozens of different vessel forms and designs, executed with greater or lesser degrees of skill, that make up this repetitive corpus.

The sheer abundance of these vessels makes selecting a small number for illustration a challenge. I recorded more than 1600 individual whole or partially reconstructed examples during research for this book. The first time I was given the opportunity to spend a considerable amount of time (45 minutes) presenting the Ulua Polychrome tradition to colleagues, I could not leave out any of the variability and ended up attempting to show 80 slides. “Wait, wait, slow down!” said one colleague—and she was right. In my most recent presentations of the sweep of their history, I have instead selected one vessel to stand in for each generation of potters. This book continues that strategy of selecting fewer vessels to illustrate, knowing that it will provide readers with a greater chance of being able to recognize an unlabeled or wrongly labeled Ulua Polychrome in a museum or at an archaeological site.

For those readers who want to see more, I can only recommend a trip to Honduras itself. Despite the great numbers of these vessels in museums across the United States, and in contradiction to claims made by supporters of free import of such objects for the art market here, there is a much greater proportion of Ulua Polychromes on public display in Honduras than in the United States, where to date, only two museum exhibits have actually focused on Ulua art, one incorporating Ulua Polychromes to enhance presentation of the rare but closely related carved Ulua Marble Vases, the other using the Ulua region as one case study for a project called *Revealing Ancestral Central America* (Joyce 2013). While an occasional Ulua Polychrome may be seen in museum cases in the United States, usually misleadingly labeled “Maya polychrome,” in Honduras the Museo de San Pedro Sula, Museo de Comayagua, and Museo de Bellas Artes in Tegucigalpa all present these treasured fragments of the Honduran past on permanent display.

My main goal is that readers put down this book knowing more about this beautiful pottery, which remains one of the most vivid traces of Honduras’ population during the sixth through tenth centuries. I also hope that along the way, readers will learn a bit more about the sociopolitics of archaeology in Central America, and about the way North American institutions have played and continue to play roles in shaping the conditions for other countries to even

have public culture. I hope this book illuminates contemporary approaches in social archaeology that have the potential to transform social analysis generally. Most of all, I hope that this book makes readers approach other archaeological studies differently, noticing the absent actors, the silent subjects, and the things that truly matter, whether these are remarked on by the writers of those books or not.



**PART 1**

*Using Pots*



Throughout the chapters in Part 1, no published sources are cited. This keeps the focus on the narrative offered. All the contributions to this account made by others are further discussed in the chapters in Part 2, and cited there. For those who are concerned about losing track of the sources of ideas, the Afterword discusses the primary sources, including the museum collections and excavations employed, for each chapter.

## Forming Intentions

One warm, sunny day around 500 AD, a potter was hard at work at the location known today as Travesia, on the west bank of the Ulua River. Living deep in the center of the vast alluvial plain created by the annual flooding of the river, this potter had access to well-sorted clay brought near the workshop by the river. A one-hour walk brought our Ulua potter to the foothills of the surrounding mountains, where there were minerals to be had for colorants. The mountains also yielded volcanic stone to be crushed to mix with the clays to counteract shrinkage. The river and its tributary streams provided abundant water to be combined with clays, and with mineral pigments. Throughout the nearby and distant landscape were plants that could be used for brushes, as additives to give luster to the surface of the vessel at the end of the firing, and to combine with oils from plant and animal sources to form painted resist designs.

The trees that grew thickly on the hills located at half the distance to the mountains provided a reliable source of wood for firing the small kiln that was located behind the potter's house. At the time our potter was working, people in the Ulua Valley already had more than 1500 years practice in building small clay enclosures, big enough to fire a few pots at a time while controlling the flow of oxygen, allowing them to prevent dark fire clouds from forming on vessel surfaces. Long ago, potters in the valley had manipulated this control of firing to deliberately produce darkened areas on the surface of pots, contrasting with a tan background. But by the time our potter was planning a new firing in the middle of the fifth century, the preferred appearance of vessel surfaces was a consistent, bright, well-oxidized yellow, red, or orange.

The Travesia community's preferences for color, form, and decoration were on the mind of the potter, who certainly needed to meet the expectations that others had. But also of concern to the potter was a desire to realize a personal vision, an idea for a way to make a more distinctive mark. Perhaps the idea had come from seeing the work of other potters; perhaps someone else in the community, who wanted new serving ware for an upcoming event, inspired it. The ideas could have come from dreams or from playing with clay, slip, and paint in the workshop. Whatever the reasons, we know that around this time, some potter in this area made a series of innovations in what had been the local way of making plates, bowls, and cups for serving food for several generations. These innovations were well received, emulated, and in turn, expanded on, beginning the history of what today we recognize as the Ulua Polychrome tradition.

## How to Think about Making Things

Most writing about the pots grouped by archaeologists as Uluá Polychromes has been motivated by basic culture-historical goals: to establish the time-space distributions of different cultural groups, and the cross-cutting social relations within these societies over time. But our potter wasn't interested in creating the raw material for generations of future archaeologists to use to try to sort out chronological phases, cultural identities, or social structures. Guided by almost unconscious, internalized aesthetic preferences formed by daily use of pottery for meals, and by periodic participation in special events where the products of virtuoso craft workers were displayed and celebrated, our potter drew on a lifetime of formal and informal learning and practice of the craft, to mindfully plan and execute the shaping, finishing, and firing of useful objects of great beauty that would be appreciated by those who handled them. The actual causes of the variability we see today in the pots we group together under the name Uluá Polychrome have to be pursued at this level: the face-to-face, small-scale social processes that motivated people in the towns of Honduras to make, use, and dispose of pottery vessels.

To attempt to remain close to this causal level, we need to consider the pragmatic choices made by potters and the users of pots, the people whose appreciation for certain aesthetic choices fostered the imaginations of some potters and left in relative obscurity the experiments of others. Much of my evidence is literally fragmentary: hundreds of thousands of broken pieces of pots, excavated by myself and others, beginning in the early nineteenth century. Excavated collections of fragments have facilitated an understanding of the timing of developments, of the spatial relationships among the makers and users of different pots, and of the places and events in which pots were used.

At the same time, because the innovations that took place before 500 AD at places like Travesía led to the creation of pots with complex shapes and intricate painted, carved, and modeled representational imagery, a full accounting of this history requires excavated sherds to be compared to complete vessels. All of the complete vessels that I illustrate are in public museum collections. Not all were recovered by excavations documented according to contemporary standards. The circumstances of formation of the collections I draw on are considered at length in the second part of this book.

Today, even contemplating writing about works of cultural heritage like the Uluá Polychromes raises concerns about the potential of contributing to a twenty-first century art market that provides incentives for undocumented excavations that compromise our ability to understand the lives of these things and their place in history. Part of the responsibility for the continuation of the

flow of illegally excavated works into the international art market, long after the United States agreed to recognize Honduran requests and help block illegal trade and importation of objects like Ulua Polychromes, must be placed with scholarship that pulls objects out of their local settings and makes it seem like those settings are relatively unimportant parts of the value things have. Nothing could be further from the truth. The distinctive historical position of Ulua Polychromes rests on their place within the societies that produced them. To the extent that they have been removed without adequate documentation from the places where they were deposited by their ancient users, we are left having to fill in the gaps with proposals about what might have been true; suggestions for which we might once have found evidence, before looting took its toll.

So the story I am telling is fragmented, and I invite readers to recognize the missing pieces, and where comparison to other times and places is used to project a vision into the gaps. I hope that readers will understand that this is not a unique defect of this work: all stories about the past are inherently provisional; new historical evidence is being created every day, and every past situation may be open to more than one kind of explanation. What satisfies any one of us as an interpretation of the past may rest as much on how we think people were likely to act, on what we think is plausible, and on how we think the past was like, before we ever come to engage with material traces of past actors and their deeds. Nonetheless, the things that survived from the past to play the role of evidence in our present-day explanations have the capacity to resist being forced to support our arguments. The loose ends, or poorly fitting explanations for things, will leave threads dangling that can unravel even the most convincing of stories.

This book partly stands as a challenge to a group of stories about the past in Central America that I find unconvincing. One treats objects like Ulua Polychrome pots primarily as tools used by a small group of patrons understood to have commissioned them for the purpose of creating political power through social alliances. The problems here are multiple: such explanations reserve the capacity to influence society to a few people, disenfranchising those who actually made the objects themselves entirely. These explanations propose a degree of willful manipulation of others that is the worst conceivable motivation for the creation of these objects that can be imagined. These stories leave unexplained how the use of things like polychrome pots would actually increase the power of the few, relying on concepts like charisma that imply that most people were easily duped and controlled. Interpretations like this are an especially poor fit for the lower Ulua Valley, where the objects in question were apparently used in everyday life by all people, rather than being limited goods that were distributed or used at selected events or monopolized only by a ruling class or dominant family.

As an alternative, taking into account the ubiquity of Uluá Polychromes in houses of farmers throughout the lower Uluá Valley, we might adopt a market-based approach to the production and circulation of these objects. Treating them like any modern commodity, we could investigate changes in their distribution over time as the result of market fluctuations, and differences in their distribution at any one time as evidence of different consumer choices, culturally rooted shared preferences. Economic models like this would ask us to assess the relative cost of these objects in relation to their use, and we would expect differences in use of the most expensive (measured in terms of resources used and skilled human labor required). We might even go so far as to suggest that pottery production should be a practice undertaken as an alternative by those with poor access to agricultural land, people requiring a valuable product to exchange in markets for basic subsistence goods. The evidence for the Uluá Valley doesn't support this model either.

What I will try to sketch out is a third possibility: a less global, more locally rooted, kind of explanation. This discussion will in the end bring us back to issues of larger-scale political and economic organization. But we will get there by asking a quite different set of questions, ones seeking to understand the choices ancient people made, the kinds of information on which they would have acted, the consequences of their actions, and the ways that these choices and their consequences promoted the repetition of some kinds of action while discouraging the reproduction of other actions.

To even begin to address these topics, we will have to make some guesses at how people made meaningful lives through the use of these objects. We will initially be less concerned with the kinds of detailed interpretations of imagery that are routinely part of the analysis of ancient figural representations from Central America, taking that subject up as a part of a discussion of the continuing circulation of these things in the twentieth century. Rooted in the practice of understanding images by reference to known texts, as in the description of medieval European paintings as Biblical scenes, iconographic studies have been the dominant mode of analysis in the study of prehispanic images throughout the second half of the twentieth century. But for the Uluá Polychrome potters of ancient Honduras, we entirely lack texts contemporary with the making of the vessels that would provide us a basis for exegesis comparable to that of art historians drawing on biblical texts to understand European paintings. In that absence, the temptation is to use texts from much later periods, including from other regions of Central America. While this may seem an easy way to provide detailed interpretations, it leads us into treating as homogeneous and static societies that were actually quite diverse, constantly changing, and engaged in significant ways with a variety of neighboring

peoples. Worse, the desire for iconographic interpretation may lead us to make claims that ignore details of the imagery reproduced on Uluá Polychromes, and in the face of the very patchy knowledge of Honduran archaeology, to make strong claims about time and place when more restraint may be in order.

Instead of beginning with any of the kinds of approaches that generalize across time and space, that assume simplifying regularities of action, and that allow modern observers to ignore cultural and historical difference, we will instead begin with a potter we know had to have existed, on what we can suggest was a sunny day at Travesia, thinking about what would become a momentous experiment in making new pots for serving food to family, neighbors, and visitors from distant places.

### **New Pottery at Travesia and Her Neighbors**

The fifth-century potter used a firing facility at Travesia that was later buried, and then partly exposed by looters in the early 1980s. When I conducted excavations adjacent to the looter's pits in 1983, the remains of this kiln were initially obscured by refilled soil. My own excavations eventually exposed a segment of plastered house floor, the cobble stone base on which a perishable house wall had stood, and, behind this fragmentary building, the clay-lined vent through which oxygen reached the small kiln I then cleared off and documented (see Chapter 7).

The fine layers of soil that had buried these features were the result of a series of episodes of remodeling of buildings, interspersed with flooding by the Uluá River, which took place over a period of five centuries. Such deep deposits are common in sites in the central Uluá valley, where the longest sequence of occupation of a site yet investigated dates from before 1600 BC to around 1000 AD. The traditional way to use such deep stratified deposits in archaeology has been to lump together adjacent layers and use them to define periods of time centuries in duration. In this book, because we are interested in thinking about change from the perspective of choices and their consequences over the span of human lives, what we need instead is a finer time scale consistent with events and generations (Tables 1 and 2). While the number of pieces of pottery collected from any single layer in deposits like those I excavated at Travesia is small, the materials in one layer generally represent the products of a short period of time. So it is possible to narrow down the range of likely products of features like the Travesia kiln to vessels made during a short period of time, in this case, representing some of the earliest examples known of Uluá Polychrome pottery.



FIGURE 1

*Vase with red, black and orange painted designs on orange ground (Dedalos: Chac subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

FROM THE ULUA RIVER VALLEY, COLLECTED BY J.E. AUSTIN IN 1915. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (43811). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 2

*Vase with red painted designs on orange ground (Chasnigua Red-on-Orange type).*

FROM THE ULUA RIVER VALLEY, COLLECTED BY J.E. AUSTIN IN 1915. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (43803). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Our potter contemplated and then executed something entirely original in the history of the valley (Figure 1). The shape he reproduced was already in use, essentially a tall vase or cup designed to contain liquids. At the time, vases like these were commonly covered in a bright orange slip and had additional geometric designs added in a darker red-orange clay slip, used discontinuously as a paint (Figure 2). Similar red-on-orange vases, decorated with horizontal red bands setting off zones of alternating motifs, continued to be produced throughout the region long after the innovations we are contemplating were made at sites like Travesia. But over the course of perhaps three generations, the new pottery came to predominate as people using bowls, cups, and plates to serve food every day and on special occasions expressed preferences for new motifs and colors.

The name given today to the new kind of pottery, Ulua Polychrome, emphasizes the most obvious difference from the earlier red-on-orange pottery. Through the use of a second color of clay-based slip-paint, the new vases combined red motifs with others in tones appearing as black or grey (Figure 1). Another color, light orange or yellow, was added to the palette on these

many-colored vessels, sometimes by leaving areas of the surface unslipped, and in other cases by changing the basic underlying slip color from darker orange.

Polychrome painting itself was not completely new in the region. Centuries earlier, some potters used pigments applied after vessels were completely fired to create multi-colored images, often enhancing carved and modeled animal images on the rims of pots with blue, white, yellow, and red pigments (Table 1).

TABLE 1 *Events preceding the development of Ulua Polychrome pottery in the lower Ulua Valley*

Approximate calendar date	Event and chronometric dates	Archaeological time period
1600 BC	Earliest pottery vessels produced at Puerto Escondido cal BC 1750–1310 cal BC 1700–1510	Barahona (1600–1400 BC)
1150 BC	Firing facilities to allow control of atmosphere built and used at Puerto Escondido cal BC 1290–1020 cal BC 1280–1010	Ocotillo (1400–1100 BC)
1100 BC	Representational images carved into vessels at Puerto Escondido cal BC 1110–900 cal BC 1190–930	Chotepe (1100–900 BC)
300 BC	Polychrome pigments applied to modeled animal image on rims of dishes at Puerto Escondido, Playa de los Muertos, and San Juan Camalote cal BC 390–180 cal BC 400–200 cal BC 370 (360, 290, 250) 200 cal BC 390 (200) 40 cal BC 370 (360, 290, 250) 200 cal BC 400–350 and 300–220 cal BC 380 (350, 320, 200) 170 cal BC 400 (200) cal AD 10 cal BC 350 (180) 60	Toyos (400–200 BC)

TABLE 1 *Events preceding the development of Uluá Polychrome pottery in the lower Uluá Valley (cont.)*

Approximate calendar date	Event and chronometric dates	Archaeological time period
200 BC	Resist on orange slip used to create geometric designs in three tones of orange at Guaruma Dos	Early Chamelecon (200 BC–200 AD)
200 AD	Red slip used as paint on orange and resist dishes at El Remolino	Late Chamelecon (200–450 AD)
250 AD	Ixcancario Polychrome dish with fish motif carried from Belize to El Remolino	Late Chamelecon (200–450 AD)
350 AD	Dos Arroyos polychrome dishes carried from Guatemala or Belize to Campo Dos, Puerto Escondido, and Playa de los Muertos cal AD 250–430 cal AD 240–420 cal AD 230–410	Late Chamelecon (200–450 AD)
400 AD	Red and orange on orange vase with complex designs painted at El Remolino	Late Chamelecon (200–450 AD)

Chronometric dates for Puerto Escondido from Joyce and Henderson (2007); for San Juan Camalote and Playa de los Muertos from Joyce, Hendon, and Sheptak (2008).

The red-on-orange vases in use when the first Uluá polychromes were made sometimes combined positive red slip-paint with painted lines of resistant materials that left background slip a light yellow, forming stripes against the darker orange background (Figure 2), producing a tricolor effect. Continuing this palette of red, yellow, and orange, at the same time as the introduction of red and black on orange polychromes, other Honduran potters experimented with making polychromes composed entirely in tones of red and orange (Figure 3).

While modern scholarship places great emphasis on the multi-color palette used, what made both the red and black on orange polychromes and the red and orange on orange polychromes most distinctive from the everyday pottery being produced all around was something else again: the use of representational imagery where designs previously had been geometric. The earliest



FIGURE 3

*Vase with red and orange painted designs on orange ground (Dedalos: Labyrinth subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

FROM THE ULUA RIVER VALLEY, COLLECTED BY GREGORY MASON IN 1932. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (183225). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

FIGURE 4 *Basal flange polychrome bowl (Dos Arroyos Polychrome type).*

UNITED FRUIT COMPANY FARM 2 (CAMPO DOS SITE), ULUA RIVER VALLEY, COLLECTED BY GREGORY MASON IN 1932. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (18369). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Ulua polychromes depicted human figures in elaborate feathered costumes, as well as profile heads that have consistently been compared to signs in Maya writing. Where did the inspiration for the new imagery come from? A common assumption has been that the earliest Ulua potters were merely copying pottery from Early Classic Maya sites in Belize and Guatemala, assumed to be inherently desirable.

Certainly, there is evidence that occasional polychrome plates were brought from the Maya lowlands to sites in the lower Ulua Valley between 250 AD and 400 AD. Excavations I supervised recovered sherds of such foreign vessels at El Remolino and Puerto Escondido. Archaeologists digging at Farm Two of the United Fruit Company (Figure 4), a location investigated in the 1990s as the Campo Dos archaeological site, and at Playa de los Muertos, previously

excavated examples. The dish recognized at El Remolino, with sharp ridges at the base of the outer wall, resting on four hollow supports, belongs to the type named Ixcanrio Orange Polychrome, made around 250 AD somewhere in Belize or neighboring Guatemala. New forms replaced such dishes in the century that followed. These later Dos Arroyos Polychromes, the type found at Puerto Escondido, Campo Dos, and Playa de los Muertos, have a more pronounced exterior flange and bases resting on a circular foot.

The known examples of Ixcanrio and Dos Arroyos polychrome dishes found in the Ulua Valley have very limited representational imagery, not including human figures. The earliest Ulua Polychromes do not include similar shallow dishes, and instead were executed on already familiar local vase and bowl forms. And of course, even though potters in the Ulua Valley clearly saw examples of lowland Maya vessels between 250 and 400 AD, exposure to this pottery alone does not explain how and why local potters began to make new vessels. Understanding these innovations has to begin with the local context and the motivations of local makers and users of pottery.

These actors include the potter we know was working at Travesia more than a generation after the last Dos Arroyos polychrome dishes would have been imported from the Maya lowlands. Equally important were the people who not only used the new pots made at Travesia, but created a continuing demand for pots like them. Our potter was working within existing social relations in which decorated serving vessels were produced in small quantities in firings located close to houses. That does not necessarily mean that potters were casual, part-time craft workers. The control of atmosphere, development of painting, and consistent production of a wide range of vessel forms, all are evidence of considerable knowledge and skill, the kind best maintained by regular practice. Still, if cross-cultural studies of potters in the twentieth century are any indication, pottery production in such a pre-industrial setting would likely have been a seasonal occupation. Humidity, like that of the extended rainy season that occurs in Honduras from May through November, makes it difficult to successfully shape, dry, and fire pots, so in many societies potters preferentially produce their products during the drier months.

So we should imagine our potter working on a sunny day, perhaps during the cooler dry season months. In the early dry season, work cultivating fields would have slowed, as the rainfall to come in May would foster the main crops. Major field clearing would not be necessary until later in the spring. Free from the need to contribute to agricultural work, anyone in the small villages and farmsteads that dotted the landscape could have dedicated themselves to the practice of a skilled craft, annually reviving abilities developed over a lifetime in a welcome change in routine.

Our potter might have been looking forward to a special event, a seasonal ritual, community ballgame, or family ceremony, at which new pots could be used, seen, and appreciated by those in attendance. Not far from where the kiln was located, a ballcourt stood at Travesia, oriented roughly toward the location of sunrise in late December. Other events could have been marked during the dry season, such as the last weeks before the rains were expected, when fields needed to be cleared, prepared, and seeds sown.

Other reasons for celebration might have been specific to one or another family group. At contemporary early Classic communities like Puerto Escondido, quantities of broken jars and bowls mixed with animal bones were thrown away in abandoned storage pits located in back of houses. Some of the events that called for such feasting marked deaths of individuals buried around the house itself, even in the former storage pits. Others likely marked events earlier in the lifetime of family members, from birth to maturation and entry into adult social relations. In the small-scale gatherings of people from the potter's own community that likely took place to commemorate such life or seasonal events, the chance to be personally recognized for an innovation that caught people's attention would have been real, and could have motivated potters to attempt new distinctive projects.

The representations that our potter painted on the new Uluá Polychromes he made should be considered in relation to the events for which these pots were intended. On these vessels we see animated figures, standing or moving one foot forward, or sitting, hands placed on an out-thrust hip, holding staffs, masks, or other objects. The figures themselves have no features that would allow us to distinguish them from one another, as we might expect if they marked individual social positions or mythical or historical subjects. Instead they present a generic costumed participant in ritual: a dancer with a feather ornament attached to the waist, hair pulled up and beaded, with paper tied around the ankles (Figure 1) or wearing a huge feathered head dress, belt ornament, and patterned kilt (Figure 5). Above these figures float a series of feathered masks identical to those worn by some of the humans (Figure 5).

In making these innovative new pots for upcoming events, the potter made ceremonies the subject of representation, rather than a specific person, a mythical event, or an historical episode. While from a modern perspective, the introduction of representational imagery, especially images of humans, seems like a great break with the previous tradition of geometric designs, the potter actually kept change to a minimum. Reproducing traditional vessel forms allowed the same practices of food serving and eating to continue. Distinctive new colors supplemented rather than replaced an existing emphasis on tones of orange. The most jarring innovations, the new motifs, were repeated



FIGURE 5 *Vase (Dedalos: Chac subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N.  
SHEPTAK.

in series in superimposed bands, just as the triangles, circles, and vertical bars on red-on-orange pottery had been. It is even possible that these traditional geometric devices already referenced similar subjects, in a non-iconic form intelligible to local users, allowing viewers of the new pots to shift from considering symbolic forms of reference to relying on iconic representation without changing their understanding of what designs meant.

What the use of iconic representation—symbolizing something by resemblance—does is allow even viewers with no cultural background, including those living 1600 years later, to recognize the new images as human beings and objects. But the new vessels still would have required substantial supplementary information to be understood fully by someone not of the community. They carry no indication of setting of events, whether in the form of architectural features, objects from nature, or even distinctive geometric framing bands that could stand for places. They make no site- or person-specific distinctions in costume of the human figures. Where they differ is in matters of execution: slight variations in the way that hair was indicated, in the representation of human profiles, and the shape of eyes, fingers, or toes (compare Figure 1 and Figure 5). Did the forehead slope steeply or was it a vertical plane above the eye? Were eyes oval or slanting? Did fingers require carefully delineated fingernails or could changes in shading suggest this contrast? Was a chin something to be emphasized or not?

These details are the traces of specific ways of painting that were developed by different potters and then emulated by others who learned from them. They are evidence of communities of practice, and they tell us that innovations begun at some sites like Travesia early in the history of the Ulua Polychrome tradition were successful enough to be emulated in different workshops. One way that such innovations could have spread was through the presence of visitors from other places at the kinds of rituals referenced by the new imagery, where new Ulua Polychromes would have been used to serve food and drink. Ballgames, one of the ceremonies that ballcourt orientations suggest were practiced at specific points in the year, required two teams, perhaps one composed of host community members and another of visitors. Rituals to mark events in the lives of villagers could have involved visits by kin from other places, coming to mark births, marriages, and deaths of relatives now living away from their home place. Seasonal celebrations of harvest, hunting, the coming of rain, and planting of new crops might have brought together people from neighboring villages who depended on each other's cooperation for the management of fields, forests, and water sources. Served food and drink in novel vessels, such visitors would have been among those whose reception of innovations spelled their success or failure.

With the advantage of 1600 years distance, we know that the experiments in pottery making carried out in the floodplain of the lower Uluva Valley at places like Travesia were successful. They ushered in a long period of innovation culminating in the development across a wide region of a shared set of expectations for Uluva Polychrome pottery, within three generations after our potter sat and pondered the next thing to do at Travesia on a sunny spring day.

## Feasting Families

On an evening near the beginning of the rainy season in a year around 600 AD, a prosperous family living in a small farming village located on the bank of the Comayagua River, near the site of the modern town of Santa Rita (Figure 6), fed a group of guests taking part in a ceremonial dance. Anticipating visitors from neighboring villages where they had relatives, the hosts had made all possible attempts to give an impressive celebration that would be memorable for years to come. To the existing bowls and plates that they planned to use to serve food and drink, they added a set of new vases that would hold the drink to be poured for the refreshment of guests. The potters in the village were encouraged to push their skills to new limits to impress the participants in the ceremony.

After the meal was done, the hosts helped ensure that the party would be remembered by giving away some of the finest of the new vases they had used. The rest of the serving vessels from the feast were gathered together, smashed, and thrown over the edge of the riverbank. It was a gesture that deeply impressed the singularity of the event on everyone: never again would these vases, bowls, and plates be brought out for use. Years later, people who were present at this smashing event would remember the noise, the color, the smells of food and the tastes of the last bits of chocolate, tamales stuffed with venison and peccary, and arrowroot and manioc stewed with fish, crab, and river clams.

Visitors who left carrying gifts of newly painted vases went home to their own villages, scattered across a landscape that extended southwest, following the Rio Blanco into the mountains along the shores of Lake Yojoa, and north along the banks of the Ulua river into which the Comayagua emptied. Downriver, potters working in the tradition established for the last three generations were, like the potters of Santa Rita, beginning to experiment with new vessel forms, colors, and imagery, transforming what had become a remarkably uniform set of vessels that emerged from the first experiments with making Ulua polychromes. What drove innovation was probably more than a desire on the part of potters or the people who used pots for novelty, new colors or designs. These pots were first and foremost useful objects, employed to serve foods that distinguished celebrations hosted by different families, and the imperatives of distinguishing oneself as a host provided a context in which innovation could be appreciated as a form of shared distinction.

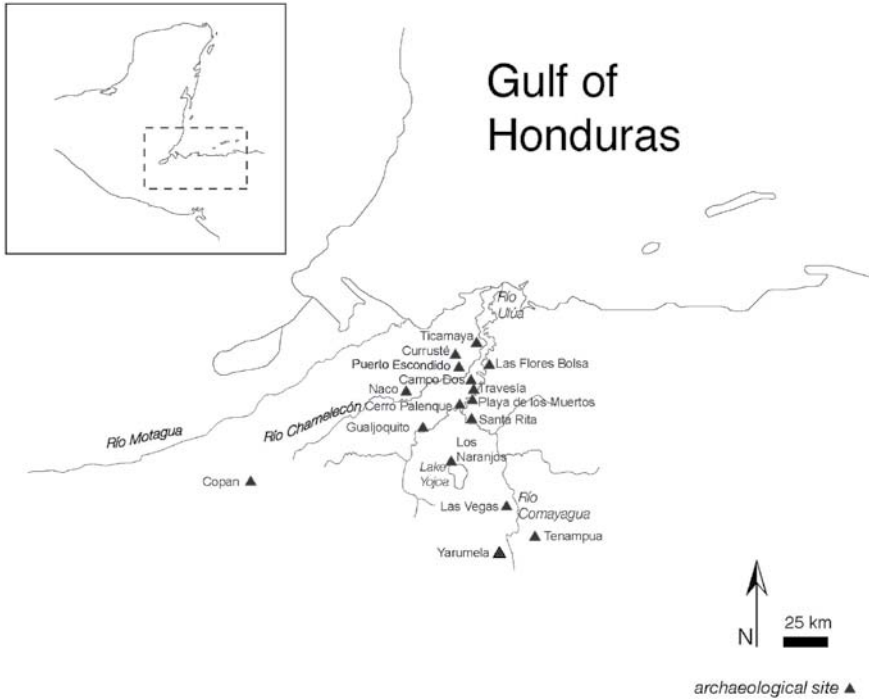


FIGURE 6 *Map showing principal sites in Uluá Polychrome producing area.*  
ILLUSTRATION BY ROSEMARY A. JOYCE.

### Serving Food and Making Pottery

The earliest Uluá Polychromes, like the red-on-orange ceramics on which they were based, came in three basic shapes. Most of the early Uluá Polychromes were small vases, often with a neck narrower than the widest part of the body (Figures 1 and 3). The restriction of vessel necks in these vases would have helped keep liquids from splashing out of the vase as it was moved around. Even when the tall vase wall was cylindrical (Figure 5), the height of the vase would have allowed liquid contents to slosh around without being spilled, until it came time to pour out servings. When potters made vessels in these shapes, they did so knowing at the very least that they would be used for holding liquids, and possibly, even what drinks were most likely contents for the finished vessels. Among the beverages that could have been served in these vases, cacao drinks have the longest confirmed history of use in the Uluá valley, with residues recovered on pots dating to 1150 BC. But other drinks, including those fermented from corn or manioc tubers, could have been served in these pitchers as well.



FIGURE 7 Dish (*Dedalos: Bandeja subclass Ulua Polychrome*). BOQUITA, CORTÉS, ULUA RIVER VALLEY, COLLECTED BY GREGORY MASON IN 1932. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (182335). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Dishes and plates were the least common vessel forms in the serving ware of the sixth century Ulua Valley. Some of the earliest Ulua Polychrome examples are dishes with low walls and four feet (Figure 7). While these vessels could have contained semi-liquid foods, like maize-based stews, by the time of the big meal at Santa Rita, flat plates had become the most common shape, usually with three feet (Figure 8). Scratches in the center could be the traces of people cutting meat against the base of these low-walled plates, or even simply using some tool to scoop out vegetable-based foods, like corn tamales. Because both plates and dishes are raised up on tall legs, it is possible that the foods they contained were placed near a hearth to keep warm.

Less common than vases in the Santa Rita feast trash were small round-sided bowls (Figure 9). Bowls like this are small enough to hold in the hands, and probably served as individual containers for food and drink distributed from other containers. The rarity of bowls in the Santa Rita trash deposit is remarkable, because in most archaeological assemblages with Ulua Polychromes, bowls are the most common form. The few complete or reconstructed bowls from the Santa Rita deposit are actually quite distinct from the vases in the same deposit. Motifs on the few bowls thrown out after this event are similar to bowls that had been in use for at least a generation throughout the region. In contrast, the vases disposed of in the same locations had novel imagery (Figure 10).

It isn't that bowls with these newer designs are unknown; in most assemblages from the early seventh century, sherds with the new imagery on the vases discarded at Santa Rita are more commonly seen on bowls (Figure 9) than on cylinder vases or dishes. It is as if some number of individual bowls—the



FIGURE 8

*Plate (Santa Rita: Banded subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (DFB 82). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

FIGURE 9 *Bowl (Santa Rita: Cyrano subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (DFB 77). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 10

*Vase (Santa Rita: Arrodillarse subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA. PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

serving vessels that would have been used by guests at the meal hosted at Santa Rita—are missing from the trash from this event. Perhaps, as I suggest above, they were carried away by each participant as a continued material connection to the memorable shared meal. Only older bowls, no longer in style, were thrown away, along with the vases and dishes, shared serving vessels whose vertical and horizontal walls best displayed the innovative imagery of Santa Rita's potters.

### Cosmography and Ceremony in Lower Ulua Valley Society

Based on the entire assemblage of ceramics from the trash disposed of all at once at Santa Rita, I have suggested that the event in which these pots were used took place sometime around 600 AD, long after the first steps were taken leading to the creation of Ulua Polychromes. A lot had happened during the succeeding generations. The potters who made new vessels for the Santa Rita feast were constructing their new formats against a background of widely accepted practices that had made Ulua Polychromes from different sites almost entirely indistinguishable from each other.

Within a century after the first Ulua polychromes depicted standing human figures engaged in ceremonial action, the main images on Ulua Polychromes were conventionalized as a series of schematic, identical vertical motifs that occupied the largest field on the outside of vases (Figure 11). While anthropomorphic in general form, none of these figures actually is shown in any specific action. None holds an object like the staffs and masks seen on earlier vessels, or takes a step forward, or holds a hand on a hip. The schematic figure is reproduced in an endless series around many vessels, colored alternately red or orange; many times, the red and orange sequence is achieved by coloring each leg of each figure a different shade (Figures 11 and 12).

The uniformity of the decoration of these second-generation Ulua Polychromes is reinforced by the use of the profile head of the same anthropomorphic figure everywhere that masks had been placed previously. Rows of these "bean heads" or "crew-cut heads" are repeated below the lip of the vase and above the base (Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12). Individual profile heads occupy large circular or square panels in the central part of the vase (Figure 11).

The representation of masks, staffs, and other ritual regalia, a hallmark of the earliest Ulua Polychromes, does continue, although sometimes the motifs are less detailed, more conventionalized, as if the viewers would need less detail to recognize what they were seeing. Schematic vertical or slanting linear motifs replace feathered staffs on the inside of the vessels (compare Figure 11



FIGURE 11  
*Vase (Santa Rita: Mellizo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (SPS 25). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 12  
*Vase (Santa Rita: Mellizo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 606). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

with Figure 1). A long-nosed mask represented as the main motif in panels (Figure 13) or replacing the bands of profile heads above and below main figures is clearly a headdress, sometimes worn by the main figures themselves (Figure 9).

The most common headdress worn by anthropomorphic figures on Ulua Polychromes at this time, which sweeps down the back like a long cape (Figures 10, 11, and 12), is the basis for two motifs. The first is a profile view of the cape occupying the main field of the vessel, showing it is an ornamented feline skin. More common is a band motif, a frontal view showing the feline head surmounted by feathers (Figure 14). Mat motifs are new images, also likely indexing regalia used in ceremony (Figure 13).

The subject matter of the vessels discarded at Santa Rita is demonstrably still ceremonial practice. What happened in the generations between the first Ulua Polychromes, with their images of ritual practitioners and their masks, staffs, and costume, and this later generation of pots was not a change in theme, but the emergence of a uniform graphic style as the preferred way to present this theme. This included a de-emphasis on more naturalistic human



FIGURE 13

*Vase (Santa Rita: Arrodillarse subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

ULUA RIVER VALLEY, BETWEEN PROGRESO AND RANCHERÍA; EXCAVATED BY DOROTHY H. POPENOE IN 1929. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (164553). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 14

*Vase (Santa Rita: Cyrano subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 452). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

bodies in active postures, in favor of geometric design formats in which anthropomorphic figures were distributed in balanced layouts and alternating colors. These recall the geometric rhythms of the red-on-orange pottery that preceded the first Ulua Polychromes.

The standardization of the new group of Ulua Polychromes has long been recognized. Explanations for how and why the initial burst of creativity turned into conformity have been less obvious. For scholars who examine Ulua Polychromes from the perspective of Maya Lowland vase painting, the answers have seemed to be that Ulua Polychromes are products of mass production, intended for a mass market lacking the knowledge to understand the kind of complex iconographic compositions of the earlier, less widely distributed, Ulua Polychromes. But in fact, there are very innovative aspects of these vessels whose imagery is so standardized. These argue against an explanation that rests on potters being less skilled, or less motivated to use their skills.

Many vessels have raised panels or bands (Figure 15). Some have carved bands or panels, slipped in black or red (Figure 13). Early examples of vessel feet are found on these vases, in a variety of shapes and sizes (Figures 14 and 15).



FIGURE 15

*Vase (Santa Rita: Arrodillarse subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 220). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

The uniformity of the design elements and design layouts created a framework within which individual potters could make distinctive marks through manipulation of shape and manner of execution of the vessel itself. Such innovations, probably highly localized, accompany other indications that within the conformity of design motifs and structure, Ulua Polychrome makers at this time were concerned with marking connections to place.

Even the most repetitive of these vases includes a series of motifs not previously used in Ulua Polychrome painting, some forming bands above the main field of design (Figures 10, 11, 12, and 15), others composing frames around motifs depicted in circular or square panels with black or red backgrounds (Figures 9, 11, and 15). Many scholars have suggested that these new motifs are symbolic references to places. The bands above the main design field recall representations of the sky in Mexican and Maya visual culture, with planets and stars, some illustrated as if they were eyes, hanging down (Figures 11 and 12). On a few vessels (Figure 11) a criss-crossed oval appears that has been equated with the Yucatec Maya sign for a specific month, *Lamat*, related to the planet Venus. Many vessels include a simple cross as a motif in a main panel or framing band (Figures 9, 10, 15, and 16a), recalling Mesoamerican icons for central places developed by 900 BC that continued in use through to the sixteenth century. Newly introduced mat motifs are another example of a graphic element widely used in Central America that provides specificity of place, in this case, marking the seating place from which someone exercised authority (Figures 13 and 16b).

Relatively unobtrusive stepped terraces that appear for the first time in upper bands on these polychromes may refer to stepped platforms like those that were public stages for performance within archaeological sites, or to mountains (Figures 10, 11, 12, and 15). Inverted terraces and a continuous scalloped edging are a common part of the “sky” band but also are often shown as the



FIGURE 16a

*Vase (Santa Rita: Paloma subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (AB 2). PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

ground on which figures stand (Figures 12 and 15). They have been identified with stalactites and stalagmites hanging inside caves (Figures 10, 12, and 15). Panels with dark backgrounds have been seen as marking dark places, including caves (Figure 15).

While the specific identifications of any of these motifs with particular geographic features or places may be subject to revision, the suggestion that this set of new geometric motifs give a spatial specificity to the theme of ceremonial practice represented on these polychromes is worth further consideration. If it is the case, then the newly standardized Ulua Polychromes are referring to the same place or places; not a unique location in the everyday world, but a cosmographic space within which ceremony was given the same meaning, even though actual ritual events took place in different locales. These Ulua Polychromes are creating a uniform cosmological frame of reference, one in which mountains, caves, and starry skies were significant shared features, and centering the cosmos was a critical ritual act.

This new thematic emphasis developed at the same time as innovations in settlement planning gave concrete form to the centering of rituals in the landscape. Studies of orientations of ballcourts, other large-scale buildings, and burials at sites throughout the lower Ulua valley show a shared spatial orientation toward the Montaña de Santa Barbara, the dominant mountain in the south end of the Ulua Valley. Complementary orientations at Travesia and sites in the Cataguana and Oloman valleys to the east of the lower Ulua Valley align with sunrise at particular times of the year. The emphasis on starry skies, perhaps understood to be open mouths because of the depiction of stars as eyes, and on dark caves, may have given Ulua Polychromes associations with the moments before the new sunrise to which ceremonial spaces were oriented and ritual events aligned.

The standardization of the anthropomorphic figures and the elimination of distinctive actions as objects of representation is another way these Ulua Polychromes promoted uniform, regional ceremonial action. People using one of these vases at Santa Rita could be assured that they were engaging in the same gestures practiced at all neighboring sites where Ulua Polychromes were used. Visitors from sites like Travesia who traveled to events at Santa Rita would find their own practices repeated in a visually identical fashion. Without the creation of an overarching political hierarchy, independent settlements in the lower Ulua Valley crafted their own form of ritual integration. The newly uniform Ulua Polychromes were a medium to create identification with ritual space and demarcate where it ended, in those places where people in neighboring regions produced distinctive kinds of painted pottery used in the practice of different ceremonies.

### People in the Ulua Valley Landscape

The lower Ulua Valley (Figure 6) is a vast region, almost 2400 square kilometers of lowlands drained by the Ulua, Chamelecon, and Comayagua rivers and a variety of tributary streams. To the north, the Ulua and Chamelecon rivers (for much of the Precolumbian period a single river) enter a very low-lying zone dominated today, and likely in the past, by swamps ending in mangrove at the Caribbean coast. Across the Bay of Honduras, the lowland coasts of Belize and eastern Yucatan were a short distance by boat. To the south, the valley walls rise rapidly to a volcanic escarpment, over which the Rio Lindo falls in an impressive cataract, before meandering towards its junction with the Ulua River at the base of the low Cerro Palenque hills. Beyond this highland valley edge were the mountains surrounding Lake Yojoa, with its focus of settlement on the northwest lakeshore known today to archaeologists as Los Naranjos.

East and west the valley edge is demarcated by steeply rising mountains that are geologically diverse, broken at regular intervals by passes occupied by rivers, some following major geologic faults. The main routes into the eastern mountains followed the Comayagua River out of the southeast edge of the valley. Flowing through mountains in a narrow set of canyons, the Comayagua ultimately came from the broad valley of the same name, an upland basin rivaling the lower Ulua valley in extent. Tributaries of the Comayagua led east to the canyon of the Sulaco River, and north and east into the small upland valleys of Oloman, Cataguana and more distant parts of the modern Department of Yoro along the Cuyumapa River.

The western edge of the lower Ulua Valley connected to neighboring regions along two major rivers. In the north-central valley, the Chamelecon River entered through a narrow canyon that divided the small upland Naco Valley from the vast plains of the lower Ulua Valley. Following the Chamelecon west beyond Naco led through a series of similar small upland valleys, Quimistan, Sula, and La Venta, that eventually reached the edge of the Copan polity.

From the southwest corner of the valley, the Ulua River itself came into the lower Ulua floodplains near the base of Cerro Palenque. All along the somewhat constricted course of the middle and upper Ulua, in the modern Department of Santa Barbara, were small segments of arable land. Tributary rivers led even further west, the Rio Jicatuyo verging on the La Venta region, and the Otoro Valley further south occupying a site close to the western edge of the Comayagua Valley.

Within this broader geography, the lower Ulua Valley, Lake Yojoa, and Comayagua valleys were the center of the zone where Ulua Polychromes were made and used. Neighboring regions to the east, the Department of Yoro and Sulaco Valley, and west, the Naco, Quimistan, Sula and La Venta valleys and much of central Santa Barbara, produced local painted pottery serving vessels distinct from the Ulua Polychrome tradition, even though they shared earlier roots in similar red-on-orange pottery.

When Ulua Polychrome ceramics were first manufactured in the fifth to sixth centuries AD, the inhabited places of the lower Ulua valley were distributed along rivers and streams, or at the points along the valley sides where streams entering the valley created raised terraces. Both were locations good for farming the mixed set of crops we know were in cultivation, including maize, beans, and probably a variety of tubers such as manioc, arrowroot, and sweet potatoes.

Settlements were made up of groups of farmsteads, clusters of small houses with their associated yards and storage pits, often reused as containers for refuse. Puerto Escondido is one example of this kind of settlement. Around 450 AD a group of houses was built on what was probably the highest point of the site, where a long history of earlier occupation had built up a low rise. Multiple buildings aligned at right angles surrounded a common central space, a house yard or patio. Next to the house walls were individual burials, placed without any goods in trenches that slanted slightly from a deeper end to a shallower one, evidence of the way hoes were used to dig out a simple pit. In the ground behind some houses there were small openings into expanding pits that reached their widest dimension underground. All of the mapped pits had been filled in during the time when people were living in this place, perhaps after periods of use for below-ground storage of goods in larger jars, or even

boxes and baskets of which we can find no trace today. Trash in one such pit contained discarded remains of corn, as well as tobacco seeds, and other, as yet unidentified, plant remains. Another pit had been used as a place for a unique burial, with more lavish treatment accorded one person in this group than any of those in the other simple burials, where people were laid to rest only with clay ear spoons in place.

Farmers in settlements along the valley edges lived not far from wooded foothills, sites for hunting larger game animals. Those in villages along the main rivers enjoyed access to fish, shellfish, and water birds found there. Along the southern end of the valley, the rivers on which sites including Santa Rita were located were adjacent to expanses of basalt lava, rock used for maize-grinding stones. Small nodules of obsidian were collected from rhyolite tuffs in the mountains on the southwest side of the valley, above a settlement near the modern town of Villanueva. Marble outcrops near Santa Rita were exploited for material for carved stone vases, the first of which had been produced before 1000 BC. Products made from each of these stones of restricted availability were found far from the sites nearest their sources, likely distributed through exchange between settlements near sources and those farther away.

By the time that someone hosted a feast at Santa Rita around 600 AD a small number of larger settlements had developed in the valley. Their densest distribution was in the area reaching from the floodplains of the Chamelecon River on the north, to the banks of the Comayagua River on the south. The tributary Choloma River, which created a side valley north of the Chamelecon, extended this zone of larger sites slightly northward. The site today known as Pulhapanzak, located at the point where the Rio Lindo falls over the volcanic escarpment on the southwest edge of the valley, may be an outlier of this central concentration of sites, if it is not better considered the northern edge of settlement around Lake Yojoa. Upriver on the middle Ulua River, sites located on small pockets of arable land may have been oriented at least in part to social networks in the lower Ulua Valley. But the main focus of settlement, and the core area of Ulua Polychrome development, was in the central floodplains watered by the Ulua, Comayagua, Chamelecon and their tributary streams. Here new centers of larger, more densely clustered buildings were constructed in the seventh to eighth century.

Each of these towns had at least one distinctive group of buildings, larger than most of the surrounding buildings, sometimes using different construction materials. At Travesia, this central group of buildings, and the patio on which they faced, were covered in a thick white plaster, providing a uniform surface color and texture. A similar construction plaster was used on some of the buildings at the contemporary settlement that crowned the Cerro Palenque

hilltop. While differing in architectural finishes, everything suggests that most of the buildings in such larger groups were used as residences in the same way the many small, contemporary perishable buildings at these sites were employed. Many of these larger settlements also included special architectural features, in particular, pairs of parallel buildings forming a ball court.

Such towns were spaced at fairly even intervals along the valley edges and central Ulua river course, leading researchers to conclude that each was the center for a small hinterland territory. Within those territories, individual farmsteads persisted along rivers and streams as they had for many generations. In most cases, there was also an area near the distinctive architecture occupied by a denser cloud of groups of buildings. Counts of the number of such buildings in settlement territories where preservation was good were fairly consistent, with totals between 100 and 250 buildings. These were small towns, likely with populations in the hundreds or at most one or two thousand. Within each, there are signs that people celebrated events in their lives, and likely in the agricultural seasons on which their livelihood depended, with social ceremonies. The pottery used by residents of these towns, in their daily lives and for these special events alike, includes locally distinctive wares and Ulua Polychromes made in widely shared formats.

Very few places within these settlements have been confirmed as sites of pottery production. This is likely not because such production happened in only a few places, but rather, because the technologies used were multipurpose, and left behind ambiguous traces recorded by archaeologists as signs of cooking, or else produced traces that were easily eradicated through erosion, like thin lenses of fine clay spreading around a workshop area. A study specifically aimed to identify pottery production in farming communities located between Mantecales and Currusté, two towns with monumental architecture (Figure 6), identified a series of features in two small villages as evidence of pottery production. Foremost among these were pits, including shallow pits containing traces of fine clay, and deeper pits filled with pieces of discarded pots and tools for forming them. Other pits served as below-ground kilns.

The diversity of firing facilities identified in the lower Ulua valley is notable. We can conclude that there was no single way that potters in this area fired their wares. Traditional techniques may have been closely held knowledge of the families of potters, as is the case with traditional craft knowledge today in many parts of the world.

None of the currently identified firing facilities of the Ulua Valley were located especially close to the groups of monumental architecture until around 800 AD. Instead, earlier identified firing facilities were in farming hamlets.

Even the example from Travesia was attached to a house located at a distance from the main architectural group. Unlike later periods in the Ulua Valley, and what seems to be true in the neighboring Naco Valley, initially, firing in Classic Ulua Valley sites was not something being centrally controlled by the people who were prominent in larger towns. Ulua Polychrome pottery was being made throughout the valley, at dispersed workshops, probably most providing pots to a hamlet or local area.

The same workshops, or others in similar locations, produced different wares for other purposes, often used in the same events as the Ulua Polychromes but with less widespread distributions. To understand these potters in their landscape we need to look at the entire suite of pottery they made and used and think about why some pots in even the most rural village conformed to widely shared patterns, while others were much more differentiated and local in character.

### **Pots and the People of the Ulua Valley**

Every site that dates to the seventh century that has been excavated in the lower Ulua valley has a similar set of vessel forms. This suggests that the activities people used pots for were similar from village to village. The largest part of the pottery assemblage is normally made up of jars, in a variety of sizes from small to large. Jars would have been useful to transport water (if they had handles), to store liquids and solid foods (especially if they could be covered), and to present large quantities of brewed liquids at meals. Most jars were made of a clay mixture with a large proportion of additions, crushed rock being most common, relatively uniform in size but with occasional larger pieces that did not bother the potters or endanger the utility of the jars they made with this mixture. The firing of common jars left a dark black core inside the walls of the pot, but otherwise, both exterior and interior surfaces were normally entirely converted to uniform shades of tan or grey. The implication is that these jars were fired in circumstances where the atmosphere was well controlled, but quickly enough that firing ceased before the carbon inside the clay had been entirely consumed.

While jars are uniformly the most common pots in excavated assemblages throughout the valley, and share similar paste composition and firing characteristics, they are extremely varied in details of shape and, especially, in the painted and incised decoration featured on a subset of jars at most sites. Such differences in form and decoration are spatially patterned, allowing definition of local areas in which norms of jar shape and decoration differed. Jars

recovered in sites from Cerro Palenque to Currusté, and west, most commonly have slightly squat bodies and a flaring neck with a sharp angle where neck and body join. Jars from sites along the eastern edge of the valley, including Santa Rita, have no sharp angle between neck and body, and lack the taller flaring necks seen in the west and central valley. The jars of the eastern valley sometimes have red bands around the rim, or vertical bars of red along the body, designs reminiscent of earlier red-on-orange vase forms. In contrast, the flaring necked jars of the western valley combine a variety of red painted designs with horizontal or vertical panels of incised lines. Some highly standardized designs on these jars are found only at a single site, such as unique animal designs on vessels excavated at Santana.

Wide shallow bowls and deeper basins made of the same kinds of clay mixtures as jars form a second large part of the pottery in the Ulua valley. The shallow bowls often have textured interior bases, red slip on interior walls, or both. Basins may have red bands on the top of the rim. Both vessel forms can have significant carbon build-up on the exterior, with the shallow bowls being almost completely blackened in the majority of cases. These open bowls and basins are thus likely candidates for forms used in cooking foods. Some researchers have suggested these simple bowls and basins, too, show regional differences between the eastern and western valleys.

A third likely cooking vessel form is a very shallow plate, made of a clay mixture that at times has much larger pieces of crushed rock. These shallow plates have deeply scored bases, in crosshatched or parallel patterns, in which thick layers of carbon are embedded. Sometimes called *comales*, after the tortilla pans of central Mexico, they could actually have been used for a variety of cooking tasks requiring a griddle.

Together, such jars, bowls, basins, and low plates make up 80% to 90% of most excavated pottery samples from the Ulua valley. The remainder of the pottery in these professionally documented assemblages is made up of small bowls, plates, and vases, usually slipped orange and often painted or incised with additional motifs. These forms are what we expect food to have been served in, and they include all the Ulua Polychromes, but also a number of other groups of pottery which may have been produced in more localized workshops.

At Currusté, near the northern edge of the distribution of major sites, Ulua Polychromes were actually less common than a group of small serving vessels with red-orange slip, polished and then incised on the outer wall or rim with geometric designs. Along the western edge of the valley, sites like Siboney (Calabazas) had significant proportions of small jars and dishes with three tall legs, with largely geometric red and black designs, finished in a matte surface,

on orange slip. Similar forms and designs occur at Santa Rita on a clay body that is very hard, bright orange, with no added tempering materials, vessels probably imported from the Sulaco river area located east along the Comayagua drainage. In sites near Travesia and Mantecales, simple orange-slipped bowls, orange bowls with a single red band, or others with white linear designs and some black details added, were made and used. People in this area also experimented with using molds to make small bowls with stamped designs, covered with a glossy orange or white slip depending on the motifs.

The boundaries of distribution of each of these more localized serving vessel styles fall inside one of the zones in which jar forms are uniform. In contrast, the distribution of Ulua Polychromes does not conform to boundaries of shared jar forms. Ulua Polychromes do not change where there is a break in standards for the more abundant jars. Some Ulua Polychromes are found everywhere in the lower Ulua valley, even where there is a more abundant local style, such as at Currusté.

While each site had a variety of vessel forms useful for different purposes, how the *group* of vessels used were formed and decorated varied almost from one settlement to another. The ways that pots, and standards for pots, moved around were complex, not simple, facilitated by multiple overlapping networks of connections between places forged through connections between people.

### People, Places, and Pots

To understand this point, we need to return to Santa Rita and the celebration we know happened there because archaeologists excavated the trash discarded after the event (Chapter 8). The reason pots of different shapes were discarded is because foods of different kinds were served at this event. The Ulua Polychromes used for this purpose were intermingled with examples of plain and red-painted jars, basins, and bowls of the kinds likely used to prepare these foods. So the pottery used at this single event included forms conforming to widespread preferences (the Ulua Polychromes), and others used primarily by people living on the east side of the Ulua Valley (the plain and red-painted jars, basins, and bowls). These same people also used a substantial number of serving vessels that were imported from even farther east, in the Sulaco River valley.

The way people attending this feast would have reacted to this heterogeneous pottery would have differed depending on where they were from. We can consider their experiences in terms of ethnoaesthetics—the reactions to

the appearance of things that are shaped by growing up within a specific community, internalizing the way that community does things as right, normal, even beautiful.

Santa Rita residents and their neighbors from the eastern valley would have taken for granted the shapes and decoration of the storage and cooking vessels they used, produced in workshops throughout the area following traditional practices of forming and finishing vessels. The same people would have recognized the bright orange polychrome pottery from the Sulaco river as novel but, apparently, well accepted. Possibly these foreign-manufacture pots were brought to Santa Rita on a regular basis by visitors coming for similar events, tied by intermarriage, related to the children born to in-marrying spouses resident in Santa Rita. Perhaps Sulaco visitors came to participate in rituals with which they identified, aimed at particular supernatural beings. Maybe they came to stay with hosts in the village while seeking to obtain marble in exchange for the whitish-green albitic jade of which they were expert carvers.

Other participants at ceremonies and the feasts that accompanied them at Santa Rita could have come from relatively nearby communities west of the Ulua River, like Travesia. These were likely places for residents of Santa Rita to have been tied by marriage and relationships to children. People in central and western Ulua Valley sites shared with the residents of Santa Rita a common cosmography, a traditional understanding of the geographic landscape in which they lived as demarcated by a sacred mountain on the south, and oriented to late December sunrise on the eastern horizon and its setting on the western valley edge. More pragmatically, these people were definitely interested in obtaining marble from the quarries near Santa Rita, which was carved into vases in workshops near Travesia, and basalt lava from the area south of the Comayagua river, the raw material for the grinding stones they used in their houses.

For visitors to Santa Rita from western valley villages, the cooking and serving vessels of eastern valley tradition and the bright orange Sulaco Polychromes in use at Santa Rita would both have looked very different from the wares they used at home. For these visitors, only the familiar presence of Ulua Polychromes would have provided a level of aesthetic comfort with the order of the meal, and the experience of the event. With their familiar imagery of ritual participants wearing the feline pelt cape, holding the bird-feather staff, standing or kneeling in places marked as part of the sacred landscape, with differentiation limited to the precise vessel shapes, the manner of painting the same design, or the way motifs were combined within common formats, Ulua Polychromes were both the products of and means through which a

constellation of practice was reproduced that spanned many independent towns (Chapter 9).

The work invested in keeping Uluā Polychromes, produced independently at multiple workshops, legible to visitors, served to link person to person through pottery. As potters continued to develop Uluā Polychromes in succeeding generations, this shared medium became an adjunct to differentiation within a constellation of practice and even a site for competition sanctioned by its integration in hosting of visitors.

## Telling Stories

Late one evening around 650 AD, one of elders living in the white-plastered courtyard of Travesia began to tell the stories of Monkey and Mosquito, and their adventures in the time before the sun rose. The people listening were comfortable after the rich meal they had eaten, and were tired from the dancing and singing in which they had taken part all evening. The storyteller's images were vivid, familiar to everyone and at the same time, full of incidents and dialogue that no one else used when recounting the tales. Some of the story was funny, and people laughed as they imagined the monkey outwitting the human boys who came from the underworld. Other parts were dramatic, like the race of the Mosquito to carry news of the Monkey's escapades back to the underworld lords. No one particularly noticed when the storyteller emphasized that parts of the tale had taken place right here, at Travesia, or over there, where the sun would rise to start the new year. Everyone knew that Monkey and Mosquito and all the rest had walked this land, long ago. That was why the people of Travesia could claim the right to host these dances and sing the songs that went with them. Monkey's agile body was painted everywhere on their bowls and plates, and they used roller stamps to cover themselves, their house walls, and even their feast foods with his image.

Meanwhile, less than a day's walk away, the people of one Santa Rita farmstead were also listening to the old stories. While their houses were simpler—pole covered by clay plaster, with carefully constructed roof thatching—they were no smaller than those occupied by the Monkey House of Travesia. And as their storyteller reminded them, they were the children of Mosquito, the people who had brought news to the lords of death and started life on the earth's surface. Right there, where the river came out of the mountains, was where Mosquito came to the surface. The crests he brought from the underworld were all over his body: the jewels and feathers that painters were careful to add to Mosquito's image when they painted him on the cacao serving vases.

### Mythologies and Local Meanings

The events where Ulua Polychrome pottery was used to serve foods in everyday meals and on special occasions at sites throughout the lower Ulua Valley took place in a landscape of many independent settlements connected by common

ritual practices, oriented toward a landscape with widely recognized sacred places. This does not mean we should assume the people of these settlements shared a uniform view of the world, its origins, and their own place in it. Indeed, the existence of social distinctions within and between these places suggest the opposite: that the people of independent villages in the lower Ulua Valley would have had different histories, different mythologies, different understandings of why their own places were important.

It is hard to see evidence of such differences in Ulua Polychromes until about 650–750 AD. Following an initial period of innovation in which a number of different Ulua Polychrome formats developed, the many independent potters and painters in the region took as their principal goal producing pottery with the same imagery. Signs of different workshop production were still there, especially for those with close contact with one site of production or another, in the ways that details of hair, eyes, and costume were executed. But the stories to which the images were related were of the same rituals, dances, and ceremonies practiced in every village. As they had from their beginning, the Ulua Polychromes presented human beings as ritual actors carrying or wearing masks, headdresses, and other items used in performance. As mnemonics, these vessels could well have sparked the stories of individual events and the people who made memorable contributions to them. But these more personal histories would be known only to a small number of people.

New Ulua Polychromes created after 650 AD did more: they depicted a wide range of characters, some found in many places, others perhaps depicted only at individual sites. As was the case with the development of Ulua Polychromes in the preceding century, innovations took place within the frameworks already established, and involved a minimum number of changes to what was widely accepted as ideal in design organization, themes, and initially, even colors and motifs. The key innovations were the depiction of images of anthropomorphic animals, inserted into existing Ulua Polychrome formats in place of earlier main designs of conventionalized humans dressed in standardized costumes.

### **Mosquito, Monkey, and Water Bird**

Animal imagery was not entirely new in the painted pottery of the region. Open dishes imported from sites in the lowlands of Belize during the initial period of development of Ulua Polychromes had occasional animal motifs, drawings of parrots and fish. Depictions of feline pelts worn as costume by some of the human figures on Ulua Polychromes from the early seventh century, and



FIGURE 16b

*Vase (Santa Rita: Paloma subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (AB 2). PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

bird or serpent heads as masks or headdresses, linked the graphic world to the living world of animals known to and used by the Ulua people. But imagery of animals as independent motifs really emerged with the depiction in some Ulua Polychromes, perhaps as early as 550 AD but certainly by 600 AD, of flying creatures at times resembling bats, birds, or even insects (Figures 16a, 16b).

The single characteristic that these flying creatures have in common is their pose, body full frontal. In this splayed pose, wings are unfurled to either side of a central body, with lower limbs at either side of the body. On some vessels, the head of the winged creature is drawn in profile, facing to one side. Often, the head is replaced by a red lug emerging from the body of the vase, with schematic indications of eyes but otherwise few or no features. Because this pose is familiar to specialists as typical of bats depicted in Highland Maya pottery, particularly from the Guatemalan Chama tradition, many scholars have identified these Ulua flying creatures as bats as well. But they actually have a variety of features that suggest different interpretations.

The Ulua winged creatures usually lack the diagnostic upturned nose of most Maya bat images, including the bat that forms part of the emblem glyph of Copan, Honduras. The Ulua winged creatures never have the diagnostic wing details of Highland Guatemalan bats, which are shown with continuous membranes extending from the tip of the wing to the body. Often these Chama bat wings have crossed bones or round motifs based on eyeballs with optic nerves attached. Commonly the Highland Maya bat wing membrane is outlined in a scalloped pattern, and it may be colored in black.

The Ulua winged creatures most commonly have a solid red head coming straight toward the viewer. When in profile, the head lacks pronounced bat ears or upturned snout. The wings of the Ulua creature are shown as overlapping horizontal bands of design in contrasting colors, using the conventions employed for feathers in costumes worn by human performers (compare the

feather back rack on Figure 1 and the feathered headdress on Figure 5 to the wings on Figure 16a). This has led most students of Honduran polychromes to describe this image as a bird.

But often this winged creature has details that do not fit that interpretation either. The body of the creature is quite often shown as a series of identical, superimposed oval elements creating a straight, segmented form (Figure 16a). The body often ends in a V-shaped bottom segment, which is hard to interpret as a bird's tail. Instead of either bat or bird, it seems possible that this image is in fact that of a winged insect, like the mosquitoes and fireflies that form part of the imagery of polychrome vases from the Peten lowlands of Guatemala. Like those insect-like figures, the winged creatures on Uluá Polychromes are not realistic depictions of animals, but representations of hybrids with some human features.

### *A World of Animals*

While the winged creature is the earliest such animal hybrid seen on Uluá Polychromes, beginning around 650 AD depictions of anthropomorphic animals become the main imagery of Uluá Polychromes, part of extensive innovations in design organization and motifs that within a generation transform these vessels almost entirely. By the end of this period of renewed innovation, monkeys, water birds, and a variety of less commonly depicted animals including deer, armadillos, iguanas, and bats became a defining part of the Uluá Polychrome tradition. By examining which animals were depicted, we can begin to see localized preferences for certain animal imagery emerge, against a background of more widely shared imagery.

The single most common animal image introduced during this period is that of a black monkey, closest in profile to the spider monkey. Monkey images occupy the same place as the winged creature on vases that share the format of a frontally posed animal whose head protrudes from the vessel as a lug (Figures 17 and 18). In the Uluá Valley, vases with this monkey image introduce a new shape, a tall pedestal base with a series of painted or carved and pierced terrace designs (Figure 17). This pedestal-base cylindrical vase form is also used by potters painting in the older tradition for the presentation of the frontal flying creature. But the innovations in form clearly are part of the development of the monkey vases, which also feature new profile heads in upper and lower bands and a bolder, more graphic style of depicting the main image using large areas of solid paint, sometimes with double outlines. Some pedestal bases were constructed to serve as rattles, adding a secondary aural effect to the visual impact already established for Uluá Polychromes.



FIGURE 17  
*Vase (Travesia: Bombero subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (SPS 109). PHOTO COURTESY OF  
 RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 18  
*Vase (Yojoa: Tiotivo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 DEPARTMENT OF COMAYAGUA, PRESENTED  
 IN 1972. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERI-  
 CAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
 (247041). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Sound production is also a feature of a second shape of monkey vase, supported by three hollow rectangular feet fired containing pellets of clay (Figure 18), more common in the Comayagua valley than the lower Ulua valley. Around Lake Yojoa, vessels with monkey images, many but not all with protruding lug heads, were commonly small jars (Figure 19). Like the monkey vases from the Ulua Valley and Comayagua, these jars showed the black monkey from the front.

Monkeys are by far the most common animals to be featured as the central image on the new versions of Ulua Polychromes that developed after 650 AD. Most were represented on bowls (Figure 20) or small jars (Figure 19), rather than vases. Different variants were made in the three main centers of Ulua Polychrome production, the lower Ulua Valley, Lake Yojoa, and Comayagua, with the largest concentrations known from the first two areas. The area around Travesia produced exceptional numbers of sherds from bowls of this kind, suggesting this was a theme of special importance to people of this area. Vases with monkeys with lug heads seem to rapidly replace those with the



FIGURE 19  
*Jar (Yojoa: Singe Accroupi subclass  
Ulua Polychrome).*

LAKE YOJOA, PURCHASED IN  
1934. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE  
AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN  
INSTITUTION (187476). PHOTO BY  
RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 20  
*Bowl (Travesia: Rastrillo subclass  
Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA  
(HF 850). PHOTO COURTESY OF  
RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

frontal flying creature that, while easy to recognize, is relatively rare even in the Ulua Valley and Lake Yojoa, the only areas from which it is reported.

Another flying creature, a bird associated with imagery of watery places, becomes as common as the monkey theme in the decades after 650 AD. Usually these birds, perhaps modeled on herons, are shown holding a fish in their beak, and they quite commonly have jeweled ornaments around their ankles. At its most schematic, the fish held in the mouth of the water bird is reduced to a kind of flaring ornament midway along the beak (Figure 21). Bowls, dishes, and vases with this water bird are common in the lower Ulua Valley and especially notable at Lake Yojoa. Ulua Polychrome bowls with water birds were imported to Copan, where the more common monkey jars, bowls, and cylinders appear to be absent.

The variety of bowls and vases made and used in the lower Ulua Valley also include much less common images, including pumas (Figure 22) and possibly frogs. An even greater diversity of animals is recorded from sites along the shore of Lake Yojoa. Here, armadillos (Figure 23), iguanas (Figure 24), bats (Figure 25), peccaries, crabs, turtles, frogs, and a bird with distinctive spotted



FIGURE 21 *Dish (Selva: Concerto subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
LAKE YOJOA, PURCHASED IN 1934. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN  
INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (187481). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N.  
SHEPTAK.

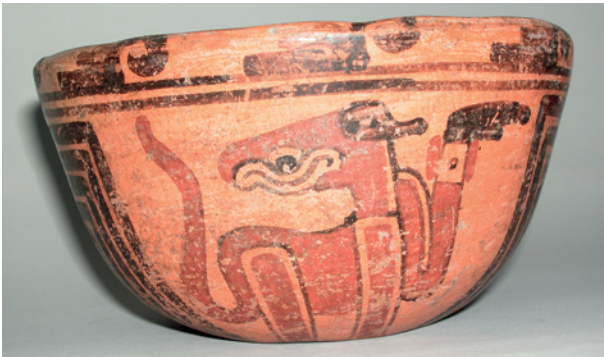


FIGURE 22 *Bowl (Travesia: Pato subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 911). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N.  
SHEPTAK.

plumage were the subjects of individual bowls and small jars made between 650 and 750 AD.

The selection is not representative of either the animals present in the wider environment, or those recovered in trash discarded at archaeological sites. Notably absent are the numerous small mammals, like opossums and agoutis, that were likely routinely used for food. Nor were any of the more showy birds whose feathers were in use, such as parrots, macaws, or quetzals, depicted.

The felines whose skins had long been part of ritual regalia depicted in earlier Ulua Polychromes continued to be represented, although in such a



FIGURE 23 *Vase (Yojoa: Molinero subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (AB 3). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N.  
SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 24  
*Jar (Manzanillo: Armadillo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (AB 88). PHOTO  
COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 25 *Jar (Manzanillo: Armadillo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (DFB 16). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N.  
SHEPTAK.

schematic form that earlier investigators identified these animals as reptiles. The new image shares with the earlier regalia the depiction of a line of dots along the spine of the profile quadruped. At times, the tail of this animal is shown ringed around in black, a detail also noted in felines carved as handles of Ulua Marble Vases. At Lake Yojoa, only monkeys and water birds surpassed felines of this schematic type as common images. Peccaries, which are the next most common animal at Lake Yojoa (rare or absent from the lower Ulua Valley), are also typical of bowls made in Comayagua in the eighth century. Pots with peccary imagery identifiable as produced in Comayagua were imported to Copan, as were examples depicting the crab, also found only in the Ulua Polychromes of Lake Yojoa and Comayagua.

The depiction of animals as principal characters created a sharp break with the preceding generations of Ulua Polychromes that were concerned with human actions. The diversity of animals represented splintered what had been a remarkable degree of uniformity across a wide area. The selectivity in animals that were represented cannot be accounted for by reference to the environment or the quotidian uses made of specific animals. The uneven numbers of different animal themes produced, with some animals known from dozens of vessels and others (such as armadillos, pumas, and iguanas) from only a few, requires an explanation that accounts for different degrees of popularity of animals from place and place and even within one area. One possible way to understand these animal images is to think about how they could have been consistent with the existing use of these vessels in rituals guided by traditional beliefs, uses and ideas that structured Ulua Polychrome decoration.

### Animals in Myth and Ceremony

The newly introduced animal images on Ulua Polychromes often have details that hint they should be seen as animal–human hybrids, for example anklets or bracelets (Figures 18 and 22). Anthropomorphic animals are well-known characters throughout the Americas, in oral traditions in which native peoples recounted the origins of the world and the place of humans in it. Innovative vessels with animal imagery were created at about the same time that groups of people at sites like Travesia in the lower Ulua Valley, and in the Los Naranjos archaeological zone on Lake Yojoa, began to distinguish their residential architecture through use of cut stone, sculpture, and plaster. The new imagery shifted the themes of the serving vessels used in meals throughout the region away from their former consistent portrayal of participants in common forms of ritual action. In their place, they offered images of mythological animals, and the number of animals portrayed grew rapidly even as their distribution in space began to be discontinuous.

Peccaries, for example, were apparently not of interest to the majority of those making polychromes in the lower Ulua Valley, but were pictured by potters near Lake Yojoa and especially in the Comayagua valley. While water birds were common in both the Ulua Valley and near Lake Yojoa, potters in the Comayagua valley commonly represented other distinctive birds, including one shown with its head turned backward that may be a nightjar or whippoorwill. Each of these species occurred throughout these areas, so their selection as subjects for portrayal has to be explained in terms of referents other than the biological community in which potters lived.

If at least some of these animals were being depicted as references to oral traditions told within the many independent towns that occupied the area of Ulua Polychrome production, then what we may be seeing is preferences for different mythical episodes and characters in a shared body of oral traditions. Precisely these kinds of differences exist in places like the Northwest Coast of the United States and the Central Amazon, where people living in close contact with each other negotiated their relative standing through strategies that included retelling distinctive historical accounts.

The scenario that I suggest could have happened as new Ulua Polychromes with localized animal motifs were being created is based on analogy with more distant locations in the Americas, but it is also consistent with the ways that ethnographically studied people in Honduras use origin stories. The Torupan or Tol, some of whose ancestors may have lived in settlements on the eastern side of the lower Ulua Valley, have a rich oral tradition full of animal myths. These stories are told today to exemplify the way people living in small

communities should treat each other, and as explanations for relationships among people, non-human animals, and other forces that continue to affect people's lives today.

Similar bodies of stories exist in fragmentary form in ethnographies of the Lenca of southern Honduras. Sixteenth century evidence suggests people who spoke languages in the Lenca family occupied much of the western valley. While we cannot take the Lenca of far southern Honduras as stand-ins for the traditions of the western Ulua Valley, we can note that their origin stories vary depending on who is telling them, with added incidents and different points of view on the same events.

Such differences are more than simply matters of performance style. In other areas of the Americas ethnographers have been able to observe myths being used in communities that did not experience the degree of disruption of storytelling that five centuries of Spanish colonization produced before Honduran societies became subjects of ethnographic inquiry. In these situations, telling an origin myth so that your view of history is favored may be part of the strategy of building up relative status, claiming land and other property, and tracing some kinship links while rejecting others. It is intensely political and matters deeply.

Where visual culture is part of these contests of history, the anthropomorphic beings who were actors at the time of origins often are graphically referenced as well, through visual motifs such as those called crests on the Northwest Coast. To display an animal crest is to affiliate with a version of history that favors one faction over another. As families that are more successful proliferate, the crests they use, and the stories attached to those crests, will grow more abundant. If families like these have home places, their crests may largely be concentrated there, showing up in other places more rarely but perhaps with even greater significance because they are material signs of histories of relationships. The patterns of distribution we would expect if people maintained their identification with each other over time at least in part through the recapitulation verbally and visually of distinctive origin stories might well look like the uneven distribution of monkey and water bird images that marked the second half of the seventh century in Honduras.

There are other lines of evidence that are consistent with this vision of the lower Ulua valley and its social relations at this time. Pottery vessels were not the only media for imagery being produced by the residents of these sites. After a period of many centuries without them, starting in the seventh century people in many Ulua valley towns began making human and animal images of fired clay, figural sculptures at varying scales whose manufacture was facilitated by the use of fired clay molds. Among the intricate details of the

human figurines, variation in headdresses has drawn the attention of multiple researchers. Detailed fine-grained studies have shown trends in neighboring hamlets in the central Ulua valley suggesting that each had a very common headdress form, with other headdresses present in smaller numbers being most common at nearby sites. While most figurine headdresses are geometric in pattern, some incorporate bird imagery, and all may have indexed more detailed crests through conventions understood at the time. For example, a diagonal pattern on one set of these headdresses is very similar to the way the skin of crocodilian animals was depicted in figurines. It may not be too far to suggest that the people wearing that pattern were displaying a crest related to tales in which crocodilians favored their ancestors.

Relations with different animal crests may also have been performed in rituals oriented towards the permanent buildings that literally housed the ancestral dead and figuratively held the history of the living people. Unlike other parts of the Maya world, it appears that the makers and users of Ulua Polychromes did not normally bury vases with the dead. Intact vessels recovered archaeologically in the Ulua Polychrome producing areas were more often buried in the core of architecture at moments of remodeling, stages in the reproduction not only of the buildings but also of the communities of practice connected to them. Animal imagery figures in such episodes, with selected animal figurines buried as part of remodeling as well.

Some polychrome vessels actually depict human engagement with animals in ritual practices. A group of cylinder vases attributed to the Lake Yojoa area depicts animals on top of rectangular or stacked objects. A unique image of an armadillo (Figure 23) on one such cylindrical vase places the animal on top of an abstract geometric motif of the kind that had been used as a spatial referent for multiple generations on Ulua Polychromes by the time this vessel was produced. The armadillo appears to be draped over a post of some kind, and rests under an overlapping shelter marked with a continuous mat motif. That this may be a reference to an elaborate thatched roof is suggested by other, similar images.

A second cylinder vase shows a standing human figure facing a much more elaborate stack of objects (Figure 26). At the top of this stack stands a bird with a long tail. It is perched with its red, clawed feet on top of a trapezoidal motif that comparison with other vessels suggests is an image of a roof over a small building. In this case, the “roof” shelters a tied bundle, imagery dramatically used in three dimensional clay sculptures in the Ulua valley to depict bundles of tied long bones, like real bundles of bones gathered from ancestral burials and kept as connections to the past of the group, documented through excavations at Cerro Palenque and Currusté.



FIGURE 26 *Vase (Yojoa: Molinero subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (AB 11). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N.  
SHEPTAK.

These vessels may be glimpses of the ceremonial use of animals as crests, placed atop ritual altars or enclosures as part of ceremonies during which different groups of people reconstituted themselves through ritual practices, at times related to ancestral dead. The dominance of monkey and water bird in

samples of animal crests on Uluva Polychromes would thus be the reflection of the successful histories of the House of the Monkey and the House of the Heron as they deployed their own strategies to accrue advantage in the early eighth century. These strategies were introduced within traditional settings for the use of painted pottery: at ceremonies practiced in hamlets, villages and towns, including those where social relations were being reformulated following the death of significant kinfolk.

## Honoring Ancestors

Around 700 AD, a potter was working at Aguacate, a short distance from Pulhapanzak on the Rio Lindo, making bowls and vases to serve guests expected to visit during the midsummer festival. Like the generations of potters who came before, the Aguacate potter was interested in making a distinctive mark that would be recognized by others in the village and appreciated by community members and visitors alike who would be coming to commemorate those who had died since the last festival.

As members of the House of the Heron, the potter's family routinely used Ulua Polychromes showing the water bird, the hero of the stories told in their house. Other Aguacate potters had distinguished their water bird containers by placing the heron against a black background, suggesting the darkness of the time before the sun rose (Figure 21). That version of the Heron crest was popular enough by now that a potter at distant Travesia had painted a version of it, although the Aguacate potter considered the barely legible image on the Travesia potter's work unacceptably rushed and poorly drawn—not to mention the affront of a peripheral House dependency daring to present such a central crest. That was something Travesia potters could only do at their own home. If they risked bringing such pots to events at Rio Lindo, they might find themselves very unwelcome.

Partly because others had borrowed this way of referencing Heron House mythology, the new Aguacate potter wanted to do something more to set the familiar theme apart. Ideally, it would be just enough so that others would appreciate the craft involved, and perhaps create an image more difficult for unauthorized painters to copy without being shamed.

Thinking about the bowls in which food was served at Travesia after the spring ballgame, the Aguacate potter remembered another pot, equally quickly painted—really, it was an insult to the visitors that the hosts had provided such badly made pottery—but interesting even so. In place of the familiar crest of Travesia's House of the Monkey, the potter had painted an image of a seated human being. Hard to tell just what the potter had been thinking—was this supposed to be an image of one of the human ancestors?—but still, the revival of imagery not seen since the days of the grandparents drew attention, even to a badly made pot.

Of course, to make a truly memorable pot, it would be better to make clearer how the human beings shown were related to the traditions of the House of



FIGURE 27 *Dish (Selva: Troubador subclass Ulua Polychrome)*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (CAG 23). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N.  
 SHEPTAK.

the Heron. The Aguacate potter thought of the commemorative ritual that would take place soon, when the image of the water bird would be placed on the top of the ancestral bundle (Figure 26). That design would be cramped on the individual bowls made for each person to drink, but it could be repeated on the vertical walls of the vase from which ritual drinks were poured. Everyone participating in the ritual and the feast that followed would recognize the central gesture that marked the day the sun reached its highest point in the sky, when the dead of the house joined the ancestors. Some of the bowls for individual servings could carry the Heron crest, as usual, while others could present the human ritual actor (Figure 27).

### Framing Human Action and Reading Polychrome Scenes

Innovations undertaken by potters in both the lower Ulua Valley and the area near Lake Yojoa in the late seventh century reintroduced human actors into the imagery of Ulua polychromes, after a period of one or two generations during which animal figures were the preferred subject matter. Like earlier human images, the newly developed depictions featured people engaged in ritual actions (Figure 27). But the graphic universe into which human images were re-introduced was richer in narrative elements, and these fostered the rapid development of radically different visual imagery.

Foremost among the features of seventh-century Ulua Polychromes that potters capitalized on in the early eighth century was the presentation of the wall of the vessel as a specific place for scenes from mythical narratives. At its



FIGURES 28a, b  
*Vase (Yojoa: Molinero subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA.  
 PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUSSELL  
 N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 29  
*Vase (Selva: Troubador subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 RIVER BANK TOMB, ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN,  
 PRESENTED IN 1971. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE  
 AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
 (244278). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

simplest, this takes the form of framing the scene with sets of lines, forming a ground surface on which figures stand or sit (Figures 28, 29). Early eighth-century Ulua potters continued to treat the visual images that they deployed as icons, laid out in balanced series, repeated multiple times in super-imposed registers organized in even patterns around central horizontal and vertical axes. But they introduced into the basic geometric structure of these designs indexical elements that related positions on the walls of pots to places in the three-dimensional world of living beings. No longer was it acceptable, as it had been in the earliest Ulua Polychromes, to rotate a human figure 90 degrees to fill in an awkward space in a row of repeated figures. With the innovation of framing bands referencing levels of the cosmos, the walls of Ulua Polychromes developed enduring spatial orientations.

Water birds surrounded by black or red fields (Figure 30) did more than simply symbolize the pre-dawn and post-sunrise times of origin traditions. They centered the water bird within the space defined by the rising sun. The depiction of alternating monkeys and red circles on other bowls (Figure 20)



FIGURE 30  
*Bowl (Selva: Concerto subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 LAKE YOJOA; PURCHASED BY WILSON  
 POPENOE. COPYRIGHT PRESIDENT AND  
 FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, PEABODY  
 MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOL-  
 OGY, PM# 39-8-20/6539.

placed the monkeys on the periphery of similar bounded spaces. We do not know in detail the traditions recounted while such bowls were being used, but the kinds of spatialized relations employed are typical of representations of creation and origin stories in Mesoamerican art, employing such indexical visual relations in lieu of the iconicity of post-renaissance European perspective, with its attempt to depict receding distance through differences in relative size of characters.

The potters who added human images to the repertoire of animals on pots produced near Travesia and Lake Yojoa around 700 AD took advantage of existing features through which spatial relations were indicated. Human images alternated with animals or substituted for them. The concepts to which these images could be related did not need to change, or not much, to accommodate the presence in the depicted places and times of human beings, who might have been conceived of as human ancestors or heroes, or as ritual actors engaging with supernatural beings.

The earliest vessels reintroducing human figures in the Ulua Valley added standing human figures, leaning on staffs, in between frontal facing monkeys with heads emerging from the vessel. These walking figures did not interact with the animal figures with which they alternated. At about the same time, some vases from near Lake Yojoa depicted animals placed atop vertical elements, their interiors marked with overlapping lines as if to suggest simple basketry (Figure 23). When human figures were added to similar vases, they faced animals perched on bundles, suggesting if not actually showing interaction between human actors and animals (Figure 26).

These early human actors wore simple turbans with a few feathers, loincloths tied with a knot at the back, and black or red body paint contrasting with their unpainted faces, and often contrasting hands and feet (Figure 26). Like the mythical animals that they joined, the human figures wore anklets and bracelets composed of sets of long beads (Figures 26 and 27). While shown

in relatively static poses, these early human figures held different kinds of objects in their hands, some recognizable as fans (Figure 27), others staffs.

Within two generations, potters built on the spatial framing already available in Ulua Polychromes featuring animal characters to create scenes of human actors engaged in complex ritual action, reviving the subject matter of the earliest Ulua Polychromes. The addition of narrative devices for the first time turned the entire wall of cylinder vessels into a single image wrapped around the vessel. This allowed the new Ulua Polychromes to relate different characters, and to fragment what had previously been a uniform viewing experience into different vistas accessible to different viewers (compare Figure 28a and 28b). As objects simultaneously used in ritual practices and depicting the practice of rituals, Ulua Polychromes fostered a kind of visual reflexivity that put pots and the pictures on them in the same contemporary space and time.

### Ritual, Knowledge, and Power

The House of the Monkey had prospered over the many generations since the first potters painted images of the grandfathers and their ritual regalia. The head of the House lived in comfort in the closely guarded courtyards at the center of a town of over fifty families, with dozens of other families in smaller villages nearby joined by bonds of marriage and kinship. Still, as the eighth century began to draw to its close, the House elders were troubled. Despite their building a great ballcourt oriented toward the sacred mountain, and despite aligning the main courts toward the rising of the winter sun, there were those who denied the primacy of the Monkey.

The best craft workers of the House, supported to labor on their difficult task year round, produced elegant marble vessels in small numbers. These allowed the House elders, living in their brilliantly plastered white houses, to continue to patronize those who attended the festivals at the center of the town. But too many of those visitors were returning to their own villages and producing false “marble” vases, using glossy white slip and molds to represent the clouds emerging from the sacred center place.

It was time to make clear the reasons that the House of the Monkey was senior to all the less ancient families living nearby. The House elders had urged the potters to paint in the new way they had seen on pots brought by their cousins from far away, who traveled to Travesia in search of cacao.

The new pots were exceptional, and visitors to the upcoming festival would undoubtedly be impressed. The House elders passed one of the vases from



FIGURE 31

*Vase (Santana: Salmo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

SANTANA EXCAVATION 1, 2 AND 3; EXCAVATED BY G.B. GORDON IN 1896. COPYRIGHT PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY, PM# 97-44-20/C1880.



FIGURE 32

*Vase (Santana: Salmo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

SANTANA EXCAVATION 3 "NEAR TRAVACILLO"; EXCAVATED BY G.B. GORDON IN 1896. COPYRIGHT PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY, PM# 97-44-20/C1855.

hand to hand. Beneath a band of starry night crests, the painter showed the dancers in a row (Figure 31). Each wore the bird head ornament on his belt. In one hand each dancer held a rattle, in the other, the bag for incense. Painted black, as was appropriate for the occasion, they recorded forever the dance that would allow everyone to participate at the festival.

The second vase was even better. Under the same starry sky, this pot showed the men holding incense bags, each facing a supernatural being he had invoked (Figure 32). Resplendent in feathers and the skins of wild cats, these serpents undulated along the face of the vessel. Everyone would be able to see the sequence as the pot turned, from the ritual action to its outcome, summoning the serpent to mediate between the living world and the otherworld.

The third vase was the best of all. As they turned it, the elders realized it concealed and revealed a secret. Here, the undulating serpent was visible along most of the vase, until it was turned to where the head showed its gaping mouth (Figure 33). There, coming from within, emerged the ritual actor. This would be the one to give to a select few guests, perhaps those from the city on the shore of Lake Yojoa, at the foot of the sacred mountain itself.



FIGURE 33

*Vase (Santana: Bilbao subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

LAKE YOJOA; PURCHASED BY WILSON POPENOE IN 1939.

COPYRIGHT PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY, PM# 39-8-20/6518.

### *Visual Distinctions*

Once the main field of Ulua Polychrome vases began to be treated as a continuous panel, a number of possibilities were opened up. Even processions of similar figures could have a beginning and end marked in some way, such as by aligning a beginning figure with an irregular point in the upper framing band (Figure 31, 32). As the central field began to be presented as a site of interaction among characters, the upper band began to truly frame a location where action took place. The former practice of repeating the same motifs above and below the main design field was abandoned. The new format—an upper band or bands, above a larger scene with multiple human characters—was a major contrast with contemporary pottery being produced in neighboring areas of Honduras, like the Naco valley to the west and the Sulaco valley to the east.

Within Ulua Polychrome producing communities, the new Ulua Polychromes created distinctions. Where before, everyone saw the same imagery, no matter where they sat or stood in relation to the vases, now different parts of the scene could be selectively revealed or concealed (Figure 34a, b). This could be particularly powerful when the image showed ritual actions and their outcomes. The playing of musical instruments and the burning of incense called forth ancestors and supernatural beings. The new Ulua Polychromes commemorated these actions but allowed them to stay private among a smaller group.

The painting of human figures and other elements differed between communities as well, even more than previously. The potters of the Ulua Valley chose to make taller, narrower vases, with figures depicted almost always against the black background of darkness, night or the time before the sun rose (Figures 32 and 33). Not so the painters of Lake Yojoa and Comayagua. There, a lighter background continued to be emphasized for processions and scenes with human figures (Figure 34). The actions portrayed in these areas

were much less concerned with the imagery of invoking supernatural beings or transformation. Like the earliest Ulua Polychromes with human figures, the focus of representation near Lake Yojoa and in the Comayagua valley was on the practice of ritual itself.

These differences in painting practice and themes represented in the lower Ulua Valley testify to different motivations on the part of potters and those who sought the products of their skill. In the lower Ulua Valley, potters drew on themes that can be traced across wide areas to the north and west. The image of a serpent opening its mouth to show a human figure inside is familiar in the carved lintels of the city of Yaxchilan far to the west. It was repeated on stylistically distinct polychrome pots created in the lowlands of Guatemala and Mexico. On the Yaxchilan lintels and on pots from the Guatemalan lowlands, texts written using the Maya writing system relate these serpents to rituals carried out by noble women, often on the occasion of births, in which spirits of ancestors or supernatural beings manifested.

It is tempting to simply extend this reading from the west into the Ulua Polychrome area, but doing so would ignore the local specificity of these images. The ritual participants shown facing these serpents are costumed males, rather than women. Jaguar-spotted serpents are sometimes shown on their own, without any figure emerging from the jaws. On some vessels, the jaws of a serpent are shown as the backing of a bench on which sits a figure dressed like the person shown emerging from the serpent mouth. In Ulua Polychromes the serpent distinguishes one figure as different from the others.

The visual image is so striking that it seems impossible the Ulua potters were unaware of the lowland Guatemalan pots. But the question raised is how Ulua potters and patrons understood such distant imagery in relation to the imagery on Ulua Polychromes they produced. As participants in social relations through which objects like marble vases made their way to distant cities like Altun Ha, San Jose, and Uaxactun, the patrons of Ulua Valley potters were peers of Maya nobility, sources of distinctive luxuries, not subordinates seeking objects of prestige or status from Maya lords. Those peer relations allowed them to claim distinctions in social rank within the Ulua valley, in situations where they were in contact with others not engaged in such long distance relations. The visual image framing some humans within the jaws of the serpent allowed select persons to commemorate participation in knowledge shared with distant connections. These individuals identified themselves as literally above other local participants in the rituals depicted on these vessels, through imagery showing them seated on raised benches.

Imagery of elevated seating for some participants in multi-figure scenes is a second theme that suggests to modern scholars links with the painted pottery and carved stone sculpture of western and northern neighbors of Ulua people.

Scenes showing frontally posed seated lords commanding the respect of visitors bearing tribute, or witnessing rituals, are staples of lowland Guatemalan painted pottery. Yet again, detailed consideration of the Honduran vessels in their own place and time suggests slightly different emphases. Ulua Polychromes more commonly show processions or standing figures facing seated figures, rather than scenes framed within the space of a palace or courtyard. Rather than representing status as derived from command over ranks of less powerful dependents, Ulua potters attested to the influence of the seated figures by showing others traveling to where they sat. Even the seats of power of Ulua Polychrome imagery could be exotic testimony to travel: benches with legs typical of carved stone seats made in Costa Rica and Nicaragua have been recovered in Honduras.

A common language of power may well lurk behind lowland Guatemalan and Ulua images, with access to distant places and experiential knowledge of the supernatural being grounds for claims of distinction. Yet the terms of actual power were quite different in the two areas. This is evident in a third area of thematic overlap, the use of signs from a writing system as part of the scenes on pots. In the lowlands of Guatemala, a repeated sequence of written signs is reproduced in a band above the main scene. This Primary Standard Sequence and its variants have been interpreted as a conventionalized text, minimally recording the dedication of the vessel for use, expanding at its longest form to specify the form of the pot, the material it was intended to contain, the titles of the painter, scribe, or patron, and the titles and parentage of the owner, usually a noble or member of a ruling family.

Late Ulua Polychromes adopted more than the spatial convention of using the entire diameter of the vessel as a single field showing figures in interaction. They also divided the exterior into a single band below the rim, and a larger main field in which are found the human figures. On lowland Guatemalan pottery, the upper band is where we find the inscribed dedicatory text. On Honduran Ulua Polychromes, a variety of designs occur there, most not suggesting any identification with the signs on lowland Guatemalan pots. The exceptions are highly conventionalized (Figure 29). They have long been called pseudoglyphs, treated as imitations of poorly understood texts presumably observed on Guatemalan Maya vessels during visits to these neighboring regions.

The main argument for rejecting any meaningful use of text-like signs on Ulua Polychromes is the tendency for a single sign to be repeated around the vessel rim. Yet the most common conventionalized glyph form on late Ulua Polychromes is arguably identical to a specific sign from the lowland Guatemalan Primary Standard Sequence that has meaning on its own. This motif, called Glyph H on Ulua Polychromes, is a profile anthropomorphic or zoomorphic

head distinguished by a scarf of netted material (Figure 34). In the Primary Standard Sequence, a profile head with netted scarf is one of the options for the first sign in the text. When the long Primary Standard Sequence is abbreviated to the minimum, this profile head can appear alone as a completely acceptable variant. It seems that potters in Honduras were not simply drawing imitation texts at random. They chose for reproduction a sign that could appear on its own, that seems to have indicated that the vessel was prepared for use, perhaps by ritual dedication.

For Ulua Polychrome potters and their patrons, knowledge of the visual culture of their neighbors to the west and north was a resource used creatively to enhance social distinctions. Serpents as signs of separate origin for nobles; elevated seats as emblematic of higher social rank; and knowledge of writing as a technology that ritually empowered the vessels it marked, are local understandings consistent with histories of distinction in Honduras. Within Honduras, the marking of pots with these images was consistent with the use of vessel walls to reference ritual actions. New ways of thinking about the pictorial space of vessel walls were actually more significant than new images in transforming how Ulua Polychromes were made and seen in the eighth century.

### **Ritual Actors and Ritual Action**

The people of Mantecales stood patiently waiting for their chance to burn copal and rubber to ashes, pour their offerings of cacao, and break the pots used for both acts into fragments to commemorate the ancestral dead. Some families went ahead and burned their offerings in separate places on the surface of the low platform. But the oldest families gathered around the central enclosure that surrounded the ancient axis where their grandparents and parents had burned their own offerings. Here, the living presence of those predecessors could most powerfully be invoked by repeating their gestures.

When they reached the side of the circular opening leading down into the earth, each group set up its own incense burner, kindling the coals and setting balls of copal or rubber on the fire before setting in place the sculpted ancestral image. They poured out cacao in front of the ready-made ritual axis, from vases showing the rituals enacted during life, dances, processions, music making, and the same work of providing drink and smoke that they were carrying out at this site. When all was done properly, the vases with their images, the sculptures of ritualists, ancestors, and supernatural patrons, all were gathered and broken up. Some of those present selected pieces to carry back to their homes: the faces of the human and animal figures. While this site united the

people of Mantecales in commemorating the dead of the village, the bodies of the ancestors stayed with their descendants, and these faces also served at home as reminders of the specific links to kin and family.

### *Making Ritual Work*

New cylinder vases created near Lake Yojoa in the eighth century framed human actors between simple black or red bands, repeated above and below a field of light orange background slip (Figures 26 and 28). On some vessels, a design is repeated two, or more often three, times, with vertical geometric elements separating each panel (Figure 26). By dispensing with geometric designs like these, that broke the main field into panels, Ulua potters created the possibility for a series of repeated or alternating figures to be read as a single continuous image. Initially, the repeated figures were spaced so that any vessel face showed at least a glimpse of both alternating figures. The objects they hold and the gestures they perform are what differentiate human figures in such series.

On a vase that is unusual for its representation of a series of female figures, one woman carries a bowl on her head, holding one hand in front of her, while the next figure in the series pours a stream of red-colored liquid on the ground from a similarly outstretched hand (Figure 28a, 28b). Each woman wears an identical skirt, bracelets with long streamers, and necklace of round beads. Each wears large ear flares that look like flowers from the front, and a string of small beads stretches above the ears of both. On each, a long trailing lock of hair falls down almost to the waist, and a set of three black circles from waist to upper back suggests some form of a back-rack. Only the specific gesture of alternating figures differentiates them.

The dotted circles depicting froth on the bowls carried on the head, and the red color on the liquid dripping from the hand of the alternating figures, suggest the drink being transported and dispensed was cacao, consumed in the Ulua Valley for centuries by this time. While the theme of women carrying liquid in vessels on their head is exceptionally rare on Ulua Polychromes, contemporary mold-made ceramic figurines represent females, wearing skirts but no blouse, with a lock of hair hanging down the side of the head, carrying pots on their heads in the same way. One intact figurine of this kind was excavated at Cerro Palenque, associated with higher than expected frequencies of large painted jars of the kind probably used for brewing or storing brewed drinks. Other Ulua vases showing female figures, while rare, also feature images of vases and ritual drinking, perhaps taking place in similar locations within settlements.

The much wider range of Ulua Polychromes in the eighth century featuring male figures shows them singly or in series, seated or standing, engaged in a variety of distinctive gestures. Male figures normally wear a cloth turban with



FIGURE 34a, b *Vase (Tenampua: Cefiro subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 RIVER BANK TOMB, ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN, PRESENTED IN 1971.  
 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN  
 INSTITUTION (244275). PHOTOS BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

feathers and some form of headband (Figure 29). A kilt and loincloth with a prominent knot on the back of the belt is a uniform feature. Sometimes an ornament is suspended at the back of the belt, such as the head of a bird with speckled feathers (Figure 31). Ear flares, bracelets, anklets, and necklaces of round beads are common as well.

Some of these male figures appear to hold almost unidentifiable objects like large plumes, possibly representing smoke (Figure 29). Others hold short straight objects, pointed at one end, with either a round circle or a more complex protrusion on the end, in a few cases, an object clearly shaped in animal form (Figure 34a). In some multi-figure scenes, these objects are clearly flutes, not unlike ceramic flutes recovered throughout the lower Ulua Valley. One vase, from the La Ceiba site on the northern shore of Lake Yojoa, shows a series of five male figures, each wearing a slightly different costume. Three are clearly musicians, a pair playing flutes, and a third holding a pair of rattles.

The increased prominence of ritual actions was evident not just in the painting on Ulua vessels, but also through the production of objects used in ritual. Contemporary with the late Ulua Polychromes, workshops located in different sites produced a wealth of fired clay whistles and flutes. Many of these wind instruments had sound chambers shaped as the bodies or heads of humans, animals, and animal-human hybrids. Such small clay objects were discarded in deposits resulting from ritual action.

The sounds made by these figurines would have been another kind of masquerade, including letting a human being participating in a ritual sound like one of the animals that populated traditional stories. Contemporary with the making and use of musical instruments in the form of animal figurines, some Ulua Polychromes present imagery of transformation of humans and animals, particularly felines (Figure 35). Like earlier imagery of human-animal hybrids, these transformation figures wear necklaces, anklets, and bracelets, even when apparently completely transformed (Figure 36).



FIGURE 35

*Vase (Nebla: Picccadilly subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 904). PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 36  
*Vase (Santana: Salmo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 657). PHOTO COURTESY  
 OF RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURES 37a, b  
*Vase (Nebla: Picadilly subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA (HF 657). PHOTOS COURTESY OF RUSSELL  
 N. SHEPTAK.

The newly prominent imagery of felines, unlike earlier animal imagery that I argue indexed mythological times and local traditions, seems to reference a uniform association with ritual authority. Anthropomorphic felines are repeatedly juxtaposed to imagery of mats, recognized from Mexico to Costa Rica as emblems of distinction, seats of power (Figures 36, 37a).

This composition of feline and mat characterized the contemporary Galo Polychrome of Costa Rica, where cylinder vessels so closely follow *Ulua Polychrome* formats that they can be recognized as likely emulating specific prototypes from Honduras. While monkey imagery continued to be produced (Figure 37b), felines became the most striking new animal imagery in *Ulua Polychromes* (Figure 38a, b).

Making music was not the only action represented that was also facilitated through production of ceramic objects used in ritual practice. Two figures on the vase from La Ceiba hold unique objects, one something that appears to be



FIGURES 38a, b *Vase (Nebla: Tigriillo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 COMAYAGUA, PRESENTED IN 1972. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE  
 AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (247038). PHOTO BY  
 RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

a torch, the second, a soft bag with a fringe, perhaps feathers, hanging down (Figure 31). Similar bags are identified throughout Mesoamerica as containers for solid resin burned to produce scented smoke, including white smoke generated by the resin of the copal tree and black smoke from the sap of the rubber tree. Contemporary with the painting of Ulua Polychromes showing figures carrying bags suspended from the wrist by soft handles, an extremely talented sculptor working near the site of Mantecales created a three dimensional statue of a standing male figure. As part of that sculpture, this artist modeled in fired clay an image of one of these bags, and pierced it for suspension from a perishable cord.

The resin carried in bags like these was burned in rituals using a variety of pottery vessels. One form was a simple, wide cylinder or bucket used to contain burning coals (Figure 34a). The wide flat rim could support lids ornamented with three-dimensional sculptures like the standing male from Mantecales. Smoke from resin set on the coals in these vessels would have traveled through interior openings and curled out the corners of the mouth, the pupils of the eyes, or the nostrils of the figures placed on top of these buckets. The subjects for incense-burner lids include human males and females, and felines. Other incense burner lids were covered with spiked crests. While most of the buckets were unslipped and simply smoothed, a group made in the Comayagua area was painted in Ulua Polychrome colors and motifs alternating with unslipped zones with modeled spikes. Lids recovered with some of these are covered with zones of spikes (Figure 39).

Other unique pottery forms were used for burning incense in rituals also involving the use of polychrome vessels. The polychrome cylinder from La Ceiba



FIGURE 39

*Vase with lid (Tenampua: Zarza subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 ULUA VALLEY, PRESENTED IN 1969. NATIONAL MUSEUM  
 OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
 (243265). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

FIGURE 40 *Ladle censer (Tenampua class Ulua Polychrome?).*

RIVER BANK TOMB, ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN, PRESENTED IN 1971. NATIONAL  
 MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (244302).  
 PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

showing ritual musicians and incense bags was one of four vessels buried in an area of less than a meter in extent, likely materials from a single ritual event. Another vessel here was a shallow bowl, pierced on the base, attached to a long tubular handle. Such vessels were used to burn incense, the handle separating the burning bowl from the hand of the person holding it. Again, while most are unslipped or have simple zones of red slip, a small number of these ladle incense burners were painted in Ulua Polychrome colors and motifs (Figure 40). It is quite possible that images of figures on Ulua Polychromes holding what appear to be curls of smoke are conventionalizations of these forms of hand-held incense burning vessels.

Bundles placed in front of human characters on other polychrome vases may directly reference yet another form of incense burning. In a carefully drawn vase from Lake Yojoa, the lower part of the stacked bundle is a rope-tied oval standing on at least two feet, with a third invisible implied in the background (Figure 26). A crest of feathers is attached to one side, and an orange, red, and white collar with rectangular tabs suggests the use of bark paper. What appears to be a bird with a long tail stands on top of this paper-topped, rope-tied pot. Modeled ceramic vessels long characterized as incense burners recovered in

ritual deposits at sites like Cerro Palenque reproduce similar imagery of rope-bound bundles, in three-dimensional form. Some of these pots depict ropes binding bundles of bones, relating the use of these censers to transformations of the dead.

People in the towns where Ulua Polychromes were made during the eighth century avoided including intact pots in burials. Neighboring people with whom they had social ties did use Ulua Polychromes for mortuary rituals. The connection between the imagery shown and rituals to honor the dead, through dancing, burning incense, and drinking cacao beverages, made them appropriate media to commemorate ancestral dead by incorporating them in graves. Eventually, this became part of the practice in the area where these pots originated as well.

## Burying Pots

The guests assembled at Cerro Palenque the day before the sun reached its southernmost point on the eastern horizon. Visitors from Los Naranjos on Lake Yojoa brought gifts of the newest painted vessels that their potters were making. While the feast at Cerro Palenque honored the collective ancestors, the bones of a recent father of the house were going to be placed in a new house entry. So the vases the Yojoans used at home to accompany the individual dead would serve well as gifts.

As the feast day began, the head of Cerro Palenque's noble house carried a bowl to the new platform being completed on the west side of the house compound. In it, the visitors knew, were precious things: thorny oyster shell from the ocean waters, and part of a green marble dish, displayed before being broken for inclusion in the offering. The bowl in which these objects rested was out of fashion for the Palencanos, but spoke of a long history living here that distinguished the noble family from the many others who had moved to live here, where the cacao traders now came from across the sea.

The Los Naranjos elders were a little concerned about being dependent on the Palencanos for cacao and cotton. But not too much so: after all, they had other relations at Tenampua and Copan. So they were willing to come and have their sons and daughters take part in the dancing and ballgames. In turn, the Palencanos would no doubt come to the lake to enjoy the refreshing breezes at the foot of the ancestral mountain. When they did, the Yojoans expected them to be astonished at the new ballcourt they were building. It irritated the Los Naranjos elders to have to sit and nod in appreciation when the new pots that the Palencanos had made for this feast in the kilns along the edge of the house compound were presented. As if these simple things were any match to the images of dancers and warriors their own potters were painting. When the Palencanos visited Los Naranjos next, the bright white surfaces of the new vases and dishes would be every bit their match.

### Matters of Life and Death

The incense-burning, offering of drinks, music-making, and dancing depicted on late Ulua Polychromes (Figure 41) closely parallel the range of ritual actions that are implied by other artifacts and by features documented by

archaeologists working in the areas where these pots were made. But the occasions for the practice of these ritual gestures are not so easily defined.

In the lower Uluva valley, the locations where Uluva Polychromes were used and discarded mainly can be described as house compounds, groups of buildings surrounding small open yards called patios by their excavators. Even locations that might seem at first glance to be more public, such as ballcourts, are closely connected to house compounds. This has encouraged archaeologists to identify the likely occasions when rituals like those represented on Uluva



FIGURE 41 *Vase (Tenampua: Cefiro subclass Uluva Polychrome). ULUA VALLEY, PRESENTED IN 1969. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (243267). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.*

Polychromes were practiced as events in the lives of family members, when vessels like these would have been used to serve food and drink to visitors. But which events?

Site, ballcourt, and burial alignments oriented toward winter sunrise suggest that some ritual events took place seasonally. Others marked episodes of rebuilding houses, some of which seem to have been triggered by the death of family members. But despite the presence of formal burials in and around houses in Uluva valley sites, it is unusual to find pots included with burials through the eighth century. Individual pots were incorporated in building fill when residences were remodeled. However, most were discarded as trash after the gatherings in which they circulated, were seen, and drew comments, appreciative or otherwise.

This picture began to change as the eighth century drew to an end. By the time the remodeling of a platform at Cerro Palenque in the house compound adjacent to its ballcourt incorporated an Uluva Polychrome bowl, the residents of the site no longer were making polychrome pottery. Instead, the pots they created, gave to their guests, smashed and threw away in a special dump emphasized highly glossy unslipped or orange-slipped surfaces. A few of the unslipped pots were incised or had impressed patterns in a restricted zone around the rim. But for the most part, the new pottery was all smooth polished surfaces. These pots continued to be used in traditional ways in house compounds throughout the town, with vases and their matching cups placed in new buildings as they were constructed.

Not far away at Los Naranjos, more traditional Uluva Polychromes continued to be produced. Yet not everything continued as before. In one house compound near the Los Naranjos ballcourt, the residents buried their recent dead in a small platform in the center of the patio, each with one or more polychrome pots, an innovative practice. These burials resembled those of distant connections of the Los Naranjos nobility, residents of the western highland site of Copan.

### Connecting the Living and the Dead

The families living near the royal precinct of Copan in the early tenth century were distinguished, with long histories in part written in the texts of the city. Throughout the courtyards of their house compounds they placed their tombs, carefully remembering where each ancestor was laid, commemorating the most outstanding men and women in each generation. Other members of each House were buried more simply, along the foot of the platforms that

supported the sleeping rooms, and the reception rooms where the elders sat when visitors arrived from near and far.

Today was one such occasion, and while there was sadness for the death of a House son, the assembly of kin from across the mountains and even the distant valley of Comayagua was a sign of the resilience of those survivors. Too many had sickened in recent years, especially the women and the young children. Without the support of the network of kin, the family might not be able to maintain itself. With any luck, the visitors would bring daughters and sons who might eventually return to join the Copan community.

The visitors also brought with them children of the daughters and sons of Copan who now lived far away. In token of respect for these gifts of the Copan House, the visitors had sent ahead beautiful gifts: dishes and vases painted with skill, in shapes seldom seen at Copan: rectangular boxes supported by four feet modeled and painted to resemble the peccary, who their cousins in Comayagua said had given them gifts at the beginning of time. The ritual masks depicted on the sides of these pots were foreign, but the elaborate feathers were unmistakable signs of value. The feathers offered in these unique painted pottery boxes, and the cacao beans contained in the jars, were actual objects of value, acknowledgement of the debt incurred by the distant kin. Accompanying a gift of bags of resin derived from lowland trees, a long-handled ladle censer was a work of the highest craft, unique in the experience of the House.

The feathers would serve to ornament the dancers at the graveside, and the cacao seeds to make the drink that the living would consume at the feast. The censer would be used to burn the resin sent for the funeral. Then the family would honor the gifts sent by their kin in the best way possible. They would be placed with the body of the dead, and remain with him in his tomb for all time.

### *Remaking Things*

One of the insights of contemporary archaeology is that objects do not have a stable, fixed significance. Whether we are concerned with them as things with pragmatic uses, or as media for the creation of new meanings, histories, or memories, things exceed our attempts to pin them down. This is not because we lack some key that will unlock their hidden essence. It is because things are always, actively, in the process of being remade by their movement between people and from place to place.

Even something that has many tangible indications of being made with intention for one purpose may be transformed by its network of associations. Consider the ladle censer that was part of a group of Uluá Polychromes recovered from a single tomb at Copan (Figure 40). The pierced base, burned on the interior, demonstrates a history of being used to contain something burning.

The holes would have allowed ash from the burning contents to fall through. While we do not see the gesture live, we know it had to have happened.

But the burial of the ladle censer changed it from a ritual tool into something quite different. To understand that difference, we need to go beyond the strict implications of the vessel form. Traditionally, archaeologists have named such things grave goods, and considered them a kind of personal property of the deceased. But the inclusion of objects does not represent the expression of the intentions of the deceased person (alone). It relies on the actions of those left alive after a death. Burial of objects with the dead is the product of activation of a network of human beings, both living and dead, who together determine what will compose the final burial.

Ulua Polychrome vessels became eligible for inclusion in burials in central Honduras during the eighth to ninth century, after a long period when this was not their normal or primary purpose. At Copan, a long history of incorporation of both local and imported polychrome vases in burials made it routine to treat exotic Ulua Polychromes as grave goods. Yet even so, the use of Ulua Polychromes for this purpose does not simply represent the imposition of a Maya practice on non-Maya things. The very fact that Ulua Polychromes were available at Copan is a material trace of a network linking Copan to some very specific central Honduran towns.

Ulua Polychromes reported from late Copan burials have forms, colors, and designs that are typical of pottery used at Tenampua, a fortified hilltop town in the Comayagua Valley. Tenampua's late polychromes initially shared new emphases on human figures and narrative scenes with sites like Los Naranjos and Travesia. Tenampua polychromes depict elegant dancers (Figure 41) and commanding personages seated on benches, holding square or round fans (Figures 34b, 42, 43).

Tenampua polychromes later introduced themes not seen on other Ulua Polychromes. Figures standing behind seated authorities hold clubs or spears



FIGURE 42

*Vase (Tenampua: Capitan subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

RIVER BANK TOMB, ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN, PRESENTED IN 1971. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (243273). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 43  
*Vase (Tenampua: Capitan subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN TOMB, PRESENTED IN 1971.  
 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN,  
 SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (244272). PHOTO BY  
 RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 44  
*Vase (Tenampua: Capitan subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN TOMB, PRESENTED IN 1970.  
 NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN,  
 SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (243691). PHOTO BY  
 RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

(Figures 42 and 44). Whether scenes of costumed drama, or of political power, Tenampua polychromes commemorate not only social distinctions between authorities and those they command, but control of force. It was vessels like these that made their way to Copan as gifts from Comayagua area relations.

### Displays of Power

The hosts from the House of the Peccary were impatient, waiting for the announcement that the sun had reached the top of the sky on the longest day of the year. The assembled guests sat more patiently, resting after their journeys from the distant Usumacinta and Nicoya regions. The elders of Tenampua were seated at the center of the honored guests, on carved stone seats in feline shape that combined the traditional shape preferred by the Nicoya visitors with the feline image painted on many of the polychrome dishes ready for the feast. But first, the dance, arranged specifically to engage the visitors from the Usumacinta from whom it had been adapted, was to take place.

At last the sun reached its noontime high, and dancers holding poles supporting pierced banners stepped elegantly to the music of flutes and other wind instruments. After they danced, other people used ladle censers to spread the scented smoke of burning resins around, setting the event off from everyday life. Not only was the sun about to start its journey back to winter; it was time to rededicate the central altar that occupied the walled enclosure where the leading family practiced rituals on behalf of the entire community.

In preparation, the walls of the perishable building on its raised cobble stone platform had been demolished, the clay floor hardened by burning the roofing and poles on its surface. Remains of the burning had been covered with a new clay surface, ready for the dedication rituals. As the dancers continued, elders laid a single thorny oyster shell down to signify the beginning, when all was water. Kin visiting from Copan would recognize this gesture.

Next a series of beautiful vases were placed at significant points, defining the four world directions and center. Two depicted the dance underway, commemorating for all time when the renewal of the sacred center took place, in the middle of summer. Other vases and dishes assembled on this surface recorded the leaders seated on their stone benches, and the animal persons whose deeds led to the rise of House of the Peccary. The past and present were united.

Then the area was filled in, with small vessels of resin and pigment, and broken fragments of incense burners of all kinds, smashed after they served to spread the scented smoke around the area. As the dancers concluded their performance, servers moved around the guests with bowls of food and offerings of cacao. Later, there would be another ball game at the court, its alley lined with stone slabs, which waited to the south, between the sacred center and the houses where the visitors would rest with kin this coming night. As long as the people of Tenampua could continue to send children to join the powerful families at Copan and elsewhere, they had nothing to fear from the people who lived in the small villages exposed to raids on the Comayagua floodplain.

### *Reconstructing Things*

Along with innovations in designs, late Tenampua polychromes also introduced new vessel forms and a new range of colors. The incurved rim vases resting on pedestals (Figures 42, 44) shared shapes with the new monochrome pottery at Cerro Palenque that replaced Ulua Polychromes in the lower Ulua Valley area, because both were changing in ways that conformed to broader preferences in an area stretching from Mexico to Costa Rica. Unique imagery on Tenampua polychromes reinforces the importance of these distant ties to the patrons of the new pottery vessels.

As Tenampua potters worked to produce vessels in new shapes, with new themes, they also began to shift their preferred color palette. The background color for the new polychromes produced at Tenampua was a very light orange, at times verging on white, against which designs were sketched out in shades of bright orange, black, and white. Whiteness of background was not a completely new innovation by Tenampua potters; that had already been the emphasis of the painters of the Comayagua region before Tenampua began to create its own distinctive pottery. The scarcity in the Comayagua region of white marble vases made in the Ulua valley enhanced their value as markers of distinction, and promoted the symbolic value of white or light colors, including a desire for whiter jade ornaments.

Framing bands of stepped terraces in white on black or orange on white place the scenes of human actors on Tenampua polychromes in a uniform location, perhaps indicating the actual location itself on a mesa with caves, protected with thick walls along its only points of approach. These defensive walls, unique among Honduran archaeological sites, reinforce the apparent emphasis on force in polychrome images showing men holding weapons.

The ruling family of fortified Tenampua did not apparently survive much longer than the noble families of Copan who so appreciated Tenampua Polychromes. Tenampua Polychromes represent the last examples of orange-slipped polychrome pottery in the Ulua tradition. But that tradition did not end abruptly with these last orange-slipped polychromes. Instead, in the Comayagua Valley, and at sites including Copan and Los Naranjos, innovations initiated with Tenampua polychromes were perpetuated in successor traditions.

### Repainting the Ulua World

The House of the Water Bird at Los Naranjos truly had no need to feel threatened by Cerro Palenque. While the latter controlled trade routes through the sea, Los Naranjos lay on ancient routes of traffic through the mountains, south to Comayagua and beyond to Costa Rica, and west to the highlands around Copan and beyond. While cacao and cotton were more abundant in the hot lowlands of the Ulua basin, the Yojoa mountains contained copper and gold, ores that were in demand both south and west. Los Naranjos' fame spread so far that gifts came from Mexico, polychrome painted incense burners of a curious shape, a vessel whose body was pierced in geometric shapes, resting on two feet and a long handle. Other gifted vessels were finished in gleaming grey or orange, not unlike the copper axes and bells that were newly available around Lake Yojoa.



FIGURE 45

*Vase (Tenampua class Ulua Polychrome).*

ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN TOMB, PRESENTED 1971. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (244271). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Potters at Los Naranjos and the towns occupied by kin on the floor of the Comayagua valley echoed the colors of the newly imported pottery in innovative polychrome vases. The white glossy background they had begun to use in their Tenampua Polychromes made the grey and orange designs of the new Las Vegas Polychrome stand out. As gifts given to now very distant allies in Mexico, it was only right that these new pots presented a common and easily understood image: the seated lords who engaged in exchanges, and the badge of the common rituals that bound them together, the feathered serpent. This new feathered serpent icon recalled one of the oldest objects of ritual regalia of the Ulua region, a serpent-bird mask (Figure 45).

Unlike older, traditional pots, these new vases and dishes were not available to everyone. Intended for burial, for rituals in the temple precincts and ballcourts, they no longer joined all Ulua people together. Instead, Ulua nobles—those old families with long histories and claims on the land—used these pots, along with the imported ones obtained from distant allies, in their own houses. Other people had to make do with the red slipped bowls they had always made. New potters worked to innovate decoration on these, to make their mark locally. But this crafting of red slipped incised bowls was distant from the lives of the nobles. They were more interested in monitoring progress on the new ballcourt. When it was finished, perhaps visitors from Tenampua and Copan would come for the inaugural games. Perhaps.

### *Transforming Things*

The new ballcourt at Los Naranjos was apparently never completed. The ballcourts at Tenampua and Cerro Palenque fell into disuse. And while the noble families of Copan did manage to complete construction of their new ballcourt, they did so by borrowing cut and carved stones from older buildings. Architectural disjunctions like these are commonly treated as signs of the failure

of these societies, of the collapse of the political authorities centered in each place, within the span of two or three generations.

But throughout the Ulua lowlands, after Ulua Polychromes and their direct successors, Las Vegas Polychrome, were no longer produced, potters continued to shape bowls and dishes to serve food and drink to visitors. Visitors continued to come to the villages for events in the life course of the people or in the seasonal round observed by farmers. Some came from as far away as Mayapan and northern Belize, seeking to engage in trade for cacao, cotton, copper ore, and feathers with distant peoples recognized as kin.

In the wake of the transformation of Ulua Polychromes into Las Vegas Polychromes, a medium that marked distinctions between authorities and those they commanded, individual village potters stopped trying to produce works that maintained the same canons of appearance in order to promote a sense of commonality. Instead, each town created its own version of the sturdy tripod dishes needed to serve the popular foods expected by visitors. Yet even as each village created its own way of ornamenting serving dishes, a preference for white slip to mark special vessels spread and continued. By the century before the arrival of Spanish invaders, there were four or more distinct red on white or red and black on white painted pottery styles, each produced in a different settlement, in the area that once was home to Ulua Polychrome potters.

### **Pots for the Living and the Dead**

Not long before the first Spanish sailors landed at Puerto Caballos, the people of El Remolino put one of their leading traders to rest. Wrapped in a bundle carefully tied to keep him in the seated position of authority, he was placed in his grave wearing a collar made of rows of thorny oyster shell beads. At his feet rested two dishes, each holding tamales stuffed with delicacies. On the sides of these dishes, red designs traced the bodies of interlocked feathered serpents on a white background. According to the elders of the House, the feathered serpent had come in the time of the ancestors, bringing prosperity to the land. And today, the cacao groves flourished along the Chamelecon and Ulua.

Among the visitors present for the burial were members of the family of the chief trader of Ticamaya, located where the Choloma River entered the Ulua, downstream from its union with the Chamelecon. The young Çocamba, son of the Ticamaya noble House, was said to be about to leave to journey by canoe along the coast, to Chetumal across the sea. His canoes would be full of Ulua cacao and fine woven cotton, both prized for their quality. He would also carry copper ingots and obsidian, since all of these were scarce in the Land of

the Turkey. The people of El Remolino were busy arranging to provide these highland products through exchanges with their kin upstream near La Majada. In return, the Ticamayan promised to bring back more of the prized red shell beads, so many of which were being consigned to the earth this day.

Back at Ticamaya shortly after, the Çocamba house elders performed the final rituals intended to guarantee a good result to the voyage, and the return of their sons and daughters. They brought out their censers from the main house, with its plastered walls gleaming in the sunlight. The white slip of the censers showed the same red tracery of the feathered serpent, patron of those traveling to trade as it was for those traveling on the ancestral road. Only a close examination would show the subtle differences between the vessels made at Ticamaya, and those used at El Remolino, obtained from the noble House at Brisas de Naco west along the Chamelecon canyon, people who El Remolino's nobles recognized as higher in rank.

The old gestures of burning resin reassured the people of Ticamaya that their long history would continue. Nothing could stand in the way of their power, as they cultivated their groves of cacao where the rivers came together, hosting the visitors from Pech and Poton, and presenting the fruits of the labor of the people in the products of the potters whose artistry was celebrated throughout the province of the Ulua river.

**PART 2**

*Understanding Fragments*



In Part 2, published sources are all cited in the text. Archival documents, museum records, and first hand examination of museum collections or participation in excavations are described in the Afterword.

## Collecting Pots

The Spanish invasion of Honduras in the early sixteenth century led to a radical reorganization of social life. Ended, or driven underground, were the social ceremonies that marked the seasonal round of the sun and events in the life course of the residents of Honduran towns and villages. Unlike in some other areas of Spanish America, the military struggle was prolonged for decades, and by the time the Spanish exercised control over the Ulua, Yojoa, and Comayagua regions, large numbers of people had died. The discovery of gold, and later silver, accelerated the death of indigenous people, as they were pressed into service in mining. It also fueled continued unrest among the Spanish colonists vying for economic and political advantage.

Yet a number of indigenous towns survived, and starting around 1600, populations began a centuries-long recovery from their lowest point (Sheptak 2013; Sheptak, Joyce, and Blaisdell-Sloan 2011). Indigenous people maintained identities rooted in their towns, now officially recognized as *pueblos de indios*. They rapidly adopted the Spanish language as first an additional tongue, and by the mid-eighteenth century, in many places the language of choice. They successfully pursued legal claims for land rights in the Spanish courts (Sheptak 2013). Along the north coast, such persistent places welcomed marriages with residents of neighboring towns, including descendants of enslaved and free Africans (Sheptak, Blaisdell-Sloan, and Joyce 2011).

Throughout the colonial period, the people of indigenous communities in Honduras continued to produce pottery using traditional resources and techniques of forming and firing (Blaisdell-Sloan 2006; Sheptak, Blaisdell-Sloan, and Joyce in press). The unslipped and red-slipped jars and bowls found in colonial sites served for the needs of making and serving food. But the impetus for producing painted dishes, bowls, and vases disappeared in the wake of incorporation in the colonial province of Guatemala. The small number of indigenous nobles recognized by the Spanish colonial authorities could seek exotic glazed pottery imported from industrial centers in Central America or beyond to distinguish themselves from others in their community. The rituals that had demanded censers and other vessels were no longer allowed, and the new Catholic church rewarded artisans who invested their efforts in producing wooden and metal images of saints, and objects for use in the churches that soon dotted the land.

The history of indigenous painted pottery production would never have been entirely forgotten. As colonial farmers cultivated the fields, like their counterparts today, they would regularly have turned up broken fragments and at times complete vessels made by people who lived in the same places before them. For these farmers, the evidence of past habitation would have reinforced what they knew from traditional narratives: that their parents and grandparents had lived in this land forever.

But the painted pottery from the Ulua tradition, along with that of its predecessors and successors, no longer had a living presence as objects used in everyday life or on special occasions. When the painted pottery of Honduras became an object of new practices in the nineteenth century, it was launched into new networks of relationships, literally moving to distant lands, and figuratively being transformed yet again. Now, in place of objects of daily life, ceremony, and exchange, these products of craft skill became tokens in academic arguments, mobilized as evidence for theories of progress and identity.

### **When Polychrome Pottery Stood for Civilization**

In 1896, an engineer named George Byron Gordon attempted to return to Copan to continue archaeological explorations he had taken over for the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Due to what museum director Frederick Ward Putnam characterized as “the unfortunate position taken by the present government of Honduras in relation to the edict granted to the Museum by the former government” (Gordon 1898b:3), he was unable to resume that work. Instead, he turned his attention to the lower Ulua Valley where, in the newly bustling city of San Pedro Sula, he found people eager to point him towards sites for his archaeological exploration.

Gordon is routinely credited with initiating systematic archaeological research in the Ulua region. Yet museum collections testify to a different story. Starting with independence from Spain in 1821, a stream of European and North American engineers and entrepreneurs had traveled through Honduras, most engaged in promoting ill-fated railroad and canal schemes. Many of these expeditions included trained scientists or engineers who considered themselves naturalists in the nineteenth century mold: cultivating knowledge through systematic collecting, circulating reports to scholarly societies, presenting lectures in which they sometimes displayed objects, and providing specimens to museums, whatever else they might do as a business or profession. The first knowledge of Honduran antiquities in academic circles in the

nineteenth century stems from these individuals, few of them acknowledged in modern histories of archaeology.

When Gordon arrived in San Pedro Sula, a German naturalist, Erich Wittkugel, was already resident there and active in collecting specimens. Wittkugel had, since at least 1889, professionally collected specimens of birds, animals, and insects for museums in Europe and the United States, and by the mid-1890s was listed as a professional dealer in natural specimens (Joyce 2012a). Wittkugel had amassed collections of antiquities from near San Pedro Sula that were ultimately deposited in Berlin's ethnological museum (Sapper 1898; von den Steinen 1900).

In his report, Gordon (1898b) credits his first awareness of antiquities in the Ulua Valley to an unnamed "resident" of San Pedro Sula. Unpublished records confirm this was Wittkugel, who showed him "a specimen of painted pottery which resembled specimens from Copan already familiar" to him (Gordon 1898b:5). It was this prior familiarity with Copan that structured how Gordon understood the material found in the lower Ulua valley. Unable to visit the site that had yielded the original specimen shown to him in 1894, due to flooding, his explorations in the Ulua valley waited until 1896 and 1897, during the dry season.

Despite spending only a few weeks at work, Gordon excavated areas 100 by 100 feet wide, up to 21 feet deep, along the banks of the Ulua River, in a zone extending from near the archaeological site called Travesia to a locality later excavated under the name of Playa de los Muertos (Figure 6). He confidently divided the pots he recovered into five groups (Gordon 1898b:18–21). The first of these he described as "pottery of a high artistic quality, corresponding to varieties common to all regions subject to the influence of the ancient Maya civilization, and chiefly represented by specimens from Copan and Northern Guatemala" (Gordon 1898b:19).

In contrast to this "Group A," Gordon's "Group B" was said to resemble the first, but was distinguished by "certain distinct and characteristic features," the one specified being handles shaped like the head of an animal. Pottery of his Group C was "distinct" but, with Group B, was said to be "confined to the region." All these three groups were described as "painted," in contrast with Groups D and E, "but little decorated" and "of a character common to every locality," respectively.

### *Making Sense of Variability: Nineteenth-century Models*

Putnam was gratified by what Gordon was able to accomplish in the Ulua. As he wrote in his editorial note to the publication that came out of this work,

the Uloa valley, as shown by Mr. Gordon's researches, was at one time well populated, but was not, at least for any length of time, occupied by the people whose ruined buildings of stone are found on various sites from the Copan valley and Guatemala to Yucatan and southern Mexico. *That the Uloa valley was a region visited by several distinct peoples in ancient times seems to be shown by the mixture of cultures, as represented by the pottery.*

GORDON 1898b:3; emphasis added

This summary not only served in 1898 to characterize how archaeologists should think about the Ulua valley; it remains at least a tacit part of archaeological thinking today. It treats pottery as primarily evidence for something called cultures, for which the biographies and itineraries of specific vessels, and the intentions of their makers and users, are irrelevant.

For nineteenth-century anthropologists in the United States, the dominant models well into the 1890s were those of social evolutionary thinkers like Lewis Henry Morgan and Herbert Spencer. While their ideas were based almost entirely on speculation, such writers drew on knowledge of American Indian societies to characterize what they thought were stages of human progress through which any "race" would pass (Stocking 1987). From savagery to barbarism; from barbarism to civilization: such was the social parallel to the biological evolution that Darwin had promulgated.

Trained under this philosophy, archaeologists in the nineteenth century were prepared to identify signs of these successive stages in the materials they recovered. Archaic civilizations, while not the equal of that of Europe, would nonetheless share with European societies such signs of progress as cities, monuments, more "advanced" technologies, and the like—the kinds of features later used by Marxist archaeologist V. Gordon Childe to much different effect in his critical historical materialist account of the development of societies with ever-increasing levels of inequality (Faulkner 2007).

But nineteenth-century ethnology had no such critical framework in hand, or in mind. For these scholars, each people produced arts that exemplified their level of advancement. These could be read out simply by comparison to what civilizations—notably those of historic Europe—had accomplished. The Maya of Copan and Guatemala excited the interest of these scholars precisely because they employed a complex script, calendar, and mathematical signs. As correspondence among patrons of Harvard's Peabody Museum from its founding in the late 1860s through its success in creating an academic department of anthropology shows, the Maya sites were quickly seen as the potential match to Classical antiquity: the "Greeks of the New World" (Hinsley 1984, 1985).

Coming as he did from prior exploration at Copan, Gordon was destined to compare everything he found in the Ulua to Copan materials, seeking signs of civilization or barbarity. Whether because they were the most common materials he encountered, or because of an unexamined assumption that they reflected technological expertise, it was the painted pots of the Ulua Valley that Gordon used to calibrate with Copan. Unfortunately for him, that comparison was much more complicated than he thought. Unfortunately for us, his pioneering conclusions have seldom been questioned and continue to reverberate in contemporary archaeological and art historical approaches.

### Civilization and Barbarism: Mixed Signals

Gordon (1898b:19) himself spoke of the “influence of the ancient Maya civilizations” as accounting for the presence of pottery he deemed of “high artistic quality”: “the greater part of this pottery is decorated in colors, which in many instances retain their brilliancy.” Because he does not cite any specific examples in this section of text, nor reproduce drawings there, it is easy for contemporary scholars to assume that Gordon’s Group A was, as he argued, imported from the more civilized Maya to the inferior Ulua Valley. But his report contradicts that conclusion.

Plate 1, a frontispiece reproduced in full color in the original edition of his report, illustrated examples of his Groups A and B. Putatively, these are respectively imported Maya polychrome and inferior local products imitating them. Gordon’s caption, though, is tentative in even this division: “Nos. 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16 present characteristics which belong to Group B; the others *seem* to represent vases belonging to Group A” (Gordon 1898b:42; emphasis added). In fact, every sherd illustrated is identifiably from an Ulua Polychrome vessel of Honduran manufacture.

Gordon (1898b:21) had tried to distinguish between imported “Maya” pottery and pottery “confined to the region” of the Ulua Valley in his original classification of painted pottery into three groups. But his Group B mainly was distinguished by having animal head lugs. He concluded that Group C, said to be composed of pots “much larger than those of groups A and B,” “decorated in colors, but less highly finished” than the others was entirely of local origin (Gordon 1898b:21).

The German scholar Karl Sapper (1898) registered his fundamental disagreement with Gordon’s analysis in unequivocal terms. Saying that he wanted “to draw the attention of the Americanists to this area,” Sapper (1898:133) says the objects recovered in the part of the Ulua valley where Gordon worked were

“obviously the remains of a past civilization,” but one “which differs in many respects with the culture of the Mayas” (my translation). While recognizing that proximity of Maya would have allowed for “influence” on the Ulua people, Sapper (1898:133) felt that “the very rich, often very tasteful ornamentation seemingly is quite different from that of the Maya peoples,” identifying stepped terraces and other motifs as “peculiar to the native tribes on the Ulua themselves, at least I do not recall the same to be met in the Maya antiquities themselves” (my translation).

Where Gordon sought evidence of identities with Maya culture, Sapper looked for elements specific to the local setting. The characteristics of the pottery mobilized by Gordon to define local types—specific appendages (or possibly, the depiction of animals that they embody); larger size; and “less highly finished” vessels—fail to distinguish Ulua painted pottery from supposed models in Guatemala or at Copan. Nor is that particularly surprising: among the large amounts of painted pottery from Gordon’s own excavations at Copan, particularly in what he called Mound 36, were many sherds recognizable today as Ulua Polychromes (Longyear 1952:30). Ulua Polychrome vessels were also included in multiple burials under the floors of Mound 36, the centrally located building that Gordon excavated at Copan. Grave 24 yielded a tripod dish described as having a design of “stylized crabs” along with the body of a child (Longyear 1952:36). Graves 25 and 26, two bodies found so closely together that their bones were mixed, were associated with a bowl depicting an animal identifiable today as a peccary (Longyear 1952:fig. 104g).

Nor was this the only location where Gordon recovered complete Ulua Polychrome vessels. A third came from his Tomb 11, located in what he called Mound 59, described as “northwest of the Main Group in foothills” by Longyear (1952:43). This vessel is a cylinder with tripod feet, depicting seated human figures wearing feathered headdresses (Longyear 1952:fig. 109h).

Consequently, when Gordon was imagining what Maya painted pottery looked like, as exemplified at Copan, he was drawing on an assemblage that included a selection of impressive late Ulua Polychrome vessels. This selected group of vessels had a higher proportion of dishes and cylinders than bowls, and a greater representation of human figures than was typical in the sites he sampled in the Ulua Valley itself.

My review of Ulua Polychrome vessels excavated at Copan agrees with the assessment offered by Rene Viel (1993:118–20) in his study of Copan pottery in assigning the likely origin of Ulua Polychromes present at Copan, including those recovered by Gordon, to the Comayagua valley (see Chapter 7). Here, the late Ulua Polychromes differed in many ways from those Gordon would have excavated at sites along the Ulua River. The distinctions Gordon drew in his

study of painted pottery from the Ulua valley consequently primarily reflected differences within this single, long-lived tradition, not between it and an idealized Maya source.

By treating the painted pottery at Copan and in the Ulua Valley as evidence of generalized cultures, Gordon de-emphasized the specific associations in each place that might have helped him to escape this circular logic. But the conceptual vocabulary he was working with did not emphasize putting things in place: rather, as a legacy of antiquarianism on the one hand, and in keeping with generalizing theories of cultural stages on the other, Gordon was encouraged to treat the objects he excavated individually and to assess each in terms of evidence it provided for progressive stages of culture.

*The Ulua Valley: Cultivated Barbarians*

Gordon (1898b:34) began the conclusion of his report with the statement that “questions relating to the origins of the remains in the Uloa valley and the manner of their occurrence are rather perplexing.” He reported that “the more artistic objects” were found only along the banks of the Ulua itself. He defined as his major challenge understanding “the historical significance of the art relics” (Gordon 1898b:38). While lamenting the lack of evidence of progressive change, Gordon saw the painted pottery as evidence of

an extended period of *constant culture* during which certain arts which flourished in this region manifest a development equal to that attained by the highest civilizations of Central America.

GORDON 1898b:38; emphasis added

Continuing, he expressed reservations about the “civilized” status of the region:

There is no evidence of the use of metals, and architectural remains are entirely wanting. So far as we are able to judge from their remains, it is in the potter’s art—the manipulation of clay—that the people of this region excelled and *it was this art that was most assiduously cultivated.*

GORDON 1898b:38; emphasis added

The concept of culture on which Gordon drew is not the familiar one that would be systematized by anthropologists in the first half of the twentieth century, even if his constant reiteration that the source of Ulua culture was to be found in the Maya civilization seems to foreshadow that. Instead, he drew on the nineteenth-century notion of culture that derives from individual enlightenment, from cultivation. A “constant culture” is one that has attained and

maintains a certain level of cultivation. The level seen in the Ulua valley, in Gordon's judgment, was below that of their neighbors, the Maya, whose architectural and stone sculptural works were unmatched in Gordon's surveys. But the people of the Ulua Valley were still of significance for their achievements within the Maya civilization, to which Gordon assigned the responsibility for the degree of cultivation seen in what otherwise appeared to him to be a much less advanced society.

### Disinterring Ulua Polychromes

Gordon's preliminary report was the last he had to say explicitly about his work in the Ulua Valley. He soon returned to Copan to continue the work of the Peabody Museum, and when the opportunity presented it, became director of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. But despite the fact that he never returned to excavate there again, Gordon continued to be fascinated by the artistry of the Ulua region. As director of the University Museum, he initiated a project, continued after his death, to publish folios of paintings of polychrome pottery from what he recognized as the Maya civilization (Gordon 1925; Mason 1928, 1943; see Danien 2006). Not for the last time, Ulua painted pottery was absorbed into the interpretive construct of the Maya.

The first volume of this series of folios contained works from both the Peabody Museum and the University of Pennsylvania's museum. From a 21st century perspective, what is striking is how few of the vessels illustrated came from the Guatemalan Department of El Petén and adjacent parts of Mexico, which today are treated as the core zone for the development of Maya polychrome painting (Reents-Budet 1994). Before 1930, more was known about the highlands of Guatemala, Belize, northern Honduras and northwestern Yucatan, areas that were all under active economic development by already-multinational companies, than was known about the remote lowland tropical forests. The result was a very limited representation of what might be considered core "Maya" pottery today in these early volumes.

The presentation of Ulua Polychromes in these folios encouraged comparison across regions, and simultaneously discouraged placing the vessels illustrated in local contexts. The original 1925 folio reproduced paintings of two partial vessels that Gordon had illustrated in his original report (Gordon 1898b: Plate IV, v). Each of these had been assembled from fragments collected during excavations along the banks of the Ulua River. One (Figure 31) entered the Peabody Museum with only a general provenience, attributed to the site Gordon called Santana. The second vessel (Figure 32) came from his third excavation,

in a place Gordon called Travacillo. Here he described visible cobble mounds (Gordon 1898b:10). While he rejected any connection between the mounds and the material he recovered from his excavations nearby, the site today known as Travesia (Figure 6) later was identified as one of the major towns occupied during the period when pots like those Gordon excavated were created. Travesia was one of several sites in Honduras where researchers preceding Gordon collected Ulua Polychromes in the nineteenth century.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the earliest collecting of Ulua Polychromes by museums and researchers in Europe, and by Honduran citizens in the newly independent republic. Little of this activity was reflected in formal publication, so it is only by examining collections in museums that we can gain even a hint of the existence of this pre-professional archaeological work (Joyce 2011a, 2012a).

Historians have noted that Britain took new interest in Latin America after the region achieved independence from Spain in 1821 (Brown 2008). Most of these discussions of the building of informal empire focus on British national interests in developing new markets for products of industry, or for obtaining raw materials, a motivation already evident in Honduras in the eighteenth century British trade for logwood with the independent Miskito of eastern Honduras (Mack 1998; Olien 1985). Extending these discussions, Robert Aguirre (2004) used a variety of archival and museum sources to demonstrate that British entrepreneurs and officials were also interested in control over historical objects from the region, and of their interpretation. These efforts included a failed attempt to appropriate the Maya sculptures of Copan that had been made known through the efforts of Stephens and Catherwood.

The earliest documented excavations in the lower Ulua Valley were a product of such British interests in independent Central America. In 1857, William Stevenson, then at the end of his term as Superintendent of the colony of British Honduras (today Belize), conveyed a group of objects to the British Museum. Aguirre (2004:97) describes this as the most immediate outcome of the attempt by the British Foreign Office to gain control over Maya ruins, citing an 1855 dispatch Stevenson wrote saying he would “do all he can to forward the aims of the British Museum.” While hardly a satisfactory demonstration of informal empire, the box received by the British Museum is of historical interest because it contained the first antiquities that can be directly attributed to a specific site in the Ulua valley. These ten items from the Birichiche site include fragments of figurines, clay stamps, and pottery vessels. Other objects attributed more generally to Honduras were included in the same shipment, one of them a complete Ulua Polychrome vase typical of the period between 600 and 650 AD.

Other British diplomats developed interests in collecting archaeological objects from Honduras in succeeding decades. Another Ulua Polychrome vase, reportedly found in a burial near Comayagua along with a chert blade, was given to the British Museum in 1868. The donor, recorded as B.G. Kirkpatrick, was most likely the British consul in Honduras from 1862 to 1863. Variouslly named in historical records as Edward Thomas or Thomas Sanden Kirkpatrick, and signing himself Edward C. Kirkpatrick, he had relocated to Honduras around 1860 to promote one of the many nineteenth century railroad schemes that drew European and North American investment, only to fail. Kirkpatrick lived in Comayagua, the capital of Honduras, with a French woman, Victoire Berlioz, with whom he had two children. She is described by Honduran historian Leticia Oyuela (2001:132–33) as a major entrepreneur who kept a hotel and owned a *finca* and a variety of agricultural businesses near the city of Comayagua. She and her children remained in Honduras after 1863, when Kirkpatrick left.

From the records of the British Museum, the Honduras Interoceanic Railway scheme in its various incarnations emerges as critical in bringing Honduran antiquities to notice outside the country. The role of its principal promoter, Ephraim G. Squier, has long been appreciated (Stansifer 1966). Squier, already a practiced excavator in the United States Midwest, came to Central America in 1849 as a diplomat. He conceived of a railway from the Gulf of Fonseca to the Caribbean coast as an investment that would produce rising land values and open Honduras to mining, even if the building of a railroad itself did not come to pass. In 1853, with the help of friendly members of the business community in Comayagua, Squier negotiated a charter for his railway company. After he had difficulty convincing United States investors to buy into the enterprise, in 1855 he expanded his solicitation to Great Britain and France. In 1856, as part of this effort, Great Britain agreed to relinquish its hold on the eastern Honduran Mosquitia, and reverse its recent declaration of the Bay Islands of Honduras as a British colony, moves that were finalized, after much controversy, in 1861. In 1857, the Honduras Interoceanic Railway was purchased by a set of British investors.

Ultimately, it was Hondurans who continued efforts to engage funding from Great Britain and France after the original investors lost interest, taking out loans between 1867 and 1870 that kept the project alive, without actually leading to successful construction. The British consul Kirkpatrick who acquired a burial cache in Comayagua during his residence there was part of a British-Honduran Inter-oceanic Railway Company delegation seeking funding in France in 1860.

As a byproduct of the railroad project, Squier published accounts of the geography of the region. These included reports of archaeological sites in

Honduras, particularly around Comayagua. The most important of these reports described the fortified hilltop site, Tenampua (Squier 1853). Here, he reported excavating one mound, finding in the fill “burnt matter, ashes, and fragments of pottery”:

Great quantities of these fragments were discovered, and I was able to recover enough of some vessels to make out their shape, and the paintings and ornaments upon them. Some were flat, like pans; others had been vases of various forms. All were elaborately painted with simple ornaments or mythological figures. One small, gourd-shaped vase, of rude workmanship, I recovered nearly entire.

SQUIER 1853:7

Squier’s use of words like “simple” and “rude workmanship” derives from specific progressivist concepts developed by some anthropologists in the mid-nineteenth century. As Michael Olien (1985) has shown, Squier was closely linked to a group of American scholars who promulgated scientific racism, based on polygenesis: the idea that different human populations were created independently of each other, unequal by origin, and destined to remain unequal permanently (Stocking 1968). Olien (1985:113–14) cites Squier characterizing indigenous people of Central America as existing in “relative barbarism” without “the capacity to comprehend the principles which enter into the higher order of civil and political organizations.”

Unlike the explicitly evolutionary models that would later be employed by Gordon to differentiate Honduran pottery makers from the Classic Maya, initially Squier did not distinguish between the Ulua Polychromes of Tenampua and the art of the Maya: “the paintings on the vases at Tenampua are identical with those of Palenque and Yucatan. Some of them are exact counterparts of figures found in the Dresden ms.” he wrote (Squier 1853:8). Later, he clarified his understanding of the “ancient aboriginal families” and “ancient monuments” of Honduras (Squier 1858:241–53). He equated the population of the western edge of Honduras, reaching as far as the Chamelecon River, with the Maya “civilized nations.” He contrasted these Maya-speaking people with the “relatively savage and barbarous” “Jicaque” (Tol or Torrupan) and the Paya (Pech) who he recognized still living in the area from east of the Ulua River towards Nicaragua, and inland into Olancho. Between the civilized and barbarous groups he identified the likely inhabitants as Lenca, who he described as “less advanced in civilization” than the Maya of western Honduras. He equivocated about the identity of the people of the northwest coast of Honduras, from the Bay Islands to the Golfo Dulce in

modern Guatemala, but was clear that they were “considerably advanced in civilization.”

A belief that geographical setting led to innate inferiority of peoples originating in certain kinds of climates was part of the theoretical framework of the polygeneticists with whom Squier associated. Throughout his description of the peoples of Honduras, Squier characterizes geographic settings that are low-lying and humid as resistant to civilization, occupied by people who were “completely savage”:

This coast...is for the most part low, hot, and unhealthy...affording conditions only favorable for tribes of hunters and fishers... The same causes which deterred the semi-civilized nations...from occupying this coast, operated to prevent its settlement by the Spaniards, and have retained it within the dominion of untamed nature.

SQUIER 1858:248

At the time, before the exploration of Tikal and other lowland sites, the main known centers of Classic Maya civilization were in the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala and the dry territory of Yucatan. Copan, with its upland valley setting, fit the models Squier accepted, which saw lowlands as holding back civilization. The models could be extended for the string of basins along the Chamelecon River, and also characterized the Comayagua valley, where Squier described the ruins of Tenampua. The tropical climate of the lower Ulua river valley, however, could not be ignored; for someone with Squier’s background, it would have been inconceivable for people there to be fully civilized.

### **Honduran Collectors in the Nineteenth Century**

The role of people like Squier and the Europeans who became interested in Central American antiquities in the nineteenth century is included in standard histories of archaeology, as part of a period of antiquarianism preceding the professionalization of archaeology. These collectors were always dependent on local people for their identification of archaeological sites and materials, implying pre-existing interests in the ancient past on the part of the populace in places like Honduras. Sometimes those dependencies are slightly more visible than in the typical account, from which they are entirely erased.

James Chatburn Madeley, an engineer who worked in Honduras between 1867 and the failure of the Inter-oceanic Railway Company in 1874, was another participant in British collecting of Honduran antiquities. He left to his heirs

a carved Ulua Marble vase now in the British Museum, the earliest collected example of this kind of object I have identified. According to museum records, this marble vase came from “a native house in Spanish Honduras” (T.A. Joyce 1931:36). While this conjures up images of indigenous people and rural farmers, like the other British collectors described above, Madeley, as a principal engineer for the Interoceanic Railway, would have spent considerable time among the political authorities and economic investors in Comayagua, the Honduran elite of the time, who kept the railroad scheme alive. The “native house” here could as easily have been a hacienda as a wattle and daub hut.

There is actually a reasonably rich record of collecting by wealthy Hondurans implicit in the records of museum acquisitions from the nineteenth century. The most visible Honduran collectors of the nineteenth century were politicians. Marco Aurelio Soto, who was president of Honduras from 1876 to 1883, and then lived in exile in the United States until moving to Paris where he died in 1908, is credited as the ultimate source of a collection acquired by the Heye Foundation in New York in 1917. The objects came from across the western Honduran territory, including the departments of Copan, Santa Barbara, and the Comayagua valley. The acquisition of the collection by the Heye Foundation was indirect, perhaps via family members still resident in New York, and much later than Soto could have been engaged in collecting, which presumably ended with his exile in 1883. Because the collection was transmitted with a clear provenance, it demonstrates that elite Hondurans were accumulating collections of antiquities at the same time that British and United States archaeologists were undertaking their first excavations in Honduras. Luis Bogran, a Honduran general who became president after Soto (from 1883 to 1891), presented Honduran antiquities to Augustus Le Plongeon in 1878 (Desmond and Messenger 1988: Chapter 7). These ultimately made their way into Harvard’s Peabody Museum. Bogran is credited with encouraging archaeological investigations at Copan, including those by the Peabody Museum.

While these prominent political figures are highly visible examples of Hondurans interested in and actively collecting material remains of the Honduran past, they were not alone. Unique insight into nineteenth century collecting of antiquities by Hondurans is provided by the records of a museum exhibition that opened in Genoa in 1892, to commemorate the anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ first voyage to the Americas (Missioni Cattoliche Americaine 1892). The exhibition included a wide range of materials gathered through the efforts of clergy in Honduras at the urging of the Bishop of Comayagua, Manuel Francisco Vélez. The local priest of Santa Rosa de Copán, Demetrio Hernández, was one source of archaeological materials featured in this exhibition, as was another parish priest, Joaquin Escoto, assigned to the city of Gracias.

The Genoa exhibition also included items from three lay people. One, Fernando Martinez, was the governor of the department of Colon on the Atlantic coast. He contributed a large collection of carved stone seats or metates, still the objects most commonly illustrated from the northeast coast. No other politicians appear to have contributed to the 1892 exhibition, so it is unclear whether Martinez provided these objects in his political role, or whether, like the presidents of the country who were collectors of antiquities at the same time, he had a personal collection made opportunistically where he was stationed.

The other two lay donors, Caterina Bulnes and Rita Aranda, were from Comayagua. The Bulnes and Aranda families were well established in Comayagua, where they had made their fortunes in cattle and indigo (Perez Brignoli 1973:73). Caterina Bulnes donated an Ulua Polychrome cylinder vase for the 1892 exhibition, while Rita Aranda provided an Ulua Marble Vase. While neither object has a precisely defined geographic origin, in 1854, a Honduran land title was granted to a Julian Aranda for an area in the Comayagua valley around Yarumela, today identified as one of the most important archaeological sites in Comayagua, and a site that produced evidence of marble vases in modern excavations (Luke et al. 2003).

The possession of antiquities by members of leading families of Comayagua that is demonstrated by the donations to the 1892 Genoa exhibition provides a context for the otherwise cryptic description of James Chatburn Madeley acquiring his Ulua Marble Vase “in a native house in Spanish Honduras.” Madeley, like other British commercial and diplomatic representatives, would have had reason to visit the houses of the wealthy and powerful, among other places, in the capital city, Comayagua. There, these Europeans mingled with Honduran elites who shared the emergent sensibility that made collecting antiquities a wider practice during the nineteenth century, including among the new middle class in Spain (Cruz 2011:202; Dilworth 2003; Vasquez 2001:57–64).

We do not know how Honduran collectors who contributed to the Genoa exhibition in 1892 understood the objects they gathered. Perhaps they viewed them as telling a tale of progress, with nineteenth-century Honduran society and the European industrial goods it consumed more advanced than the society of the people who made the stone axe blades, animal sculptures, benches, “idols,” and even the beautifully carved marble vase that was exhibited. However, based on the geographic distribution of the antiquities represented in the Genoa exhibition, we can say that Honduran collectors did not share a bias favoring the products of the Classic Maya sites of western Honduras. Objects included in the Genoa exhibit came from as far east as Honduran administration

spread, in the department of Colon, and represent multiple distinct traditions of manufacture and styles of production.

Europeans who viewed Honduran objects on display in Genoa in 1892 did not privilege the few objects from Copan over others included there either. In his definitive review of the exhibit, the French archaeologist E.T. Hamy (1896) singled out the materials from Honduras for extended discussion, writing

The archaeology of Honduras is at present very poorly represented in European collections. Apart from some small sculptures found at Copan by Galindo, we have in Paris not a single piece from this small State, and my memories do not recall anything that gives the least idea of the ancient art of the highlands of the Ulua or of the Choluteca in the museums of Europe that I have been given to visit.

HAMY 1896:7; my translation

Hamy noted that this lack of collections could not be attributed to a lack of sites, specifically mentioning the report by Squier of, among other things “vases of great beauty.” The exposition in Genoa, he wrote, provided access to “exceptional” examples of ceramic arts, “recovered in the vicinity of those forgotten old cities.”

The sole example that he described was the Ulua Polychrome vase from Comayagua donated by Caterina Bulnes. Hamy (1896:11) identified the image on this pot as that of a kneeling figure “in the attitude of offering, surmounted by a band of *catuns*,” and equated it with similar objects in Yucatan, as Squier had the materials he collected in Comayagua. The reference to “katuns” identified the motifs in secondary bands above and below this figure with the emerging understanding of the Maya writing system, and especially, of the calendar, although the specific motif would not be identified as a katun glyph today. Seated cross-legged, with one arm extended and the hand turned up in front of the face, this figure wears a red turban ornamented with black feathers, has rods through pierced ears, bracelets, and a necklace of round beads. A hip cloth with large ornaments is held in place by a belt of woven material, into which is tucked a loincloth with a front edge ending in a profile serpentine mask. Repeated twice, this figure alternates with black panels of scrolls suggestive of the carved scrolls on the Ulua Marble vase also included in this exhibition. The care in delineating details of the figure fully justified its equation with painted pottery then known from Yucatan.

What was at issue in the study of Honduran painted pottery, throughout the nineteenth century, was the delineation of civilization, an inherent capacity of some peoples, cultivated and maintained in some times and places.

This was not, yet, a systematic matter of sorting out different Honduran archaeological sites into stages of evolution. Rather, what we might in hindsight force into an evolutionary framework actually emerged from a pre-Darwinian form of geographic determinism, a theory of human being that absolutely divided peoples by race and national origin. Within this framework, for G.B. Gordon and his colleagues in the United States, Copan stood as an example of the most advanced civilization possible for indigenous Americans. The makers of Ulua Polychromes occupied a troubling position, without clear evidence of the use of writing, living in some cases in zones considered inimical to advanced societies. Differences in level of culture were pressed into service to explain the variability in the first excavated assemblages studied by the newly professionalized archaeologists of Harvard's Peabody Museum, and of the other museums that followed in its path.

### Ulua Polychromes Become Collectible

Gordon's work created an appreciation of Ulua Polychromes, and a demand for them as critical parts of museum collections in the United States. Christina Luke (2006) has shown that by 1914, excavation to create collections for sale to museums was well underway. Following Gordon's Peabody expedition, the Smithsonian Institution, the Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian, the University Museum of Pennsylvania, the Brooklyn Museum, and even the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto all assembled collections by purchase from agents in Honduras.

Erich Wittkugel can be identified as the first agent who assembled a collection of antiquities in Honduras that was acquired wholesale by a museum. Sapper (1898) notes that Wittkugel began his explorations of Travesia in 1888. This is shortly before Wittkugel began to be credited as a source of mammal, bird, and entomological specimens acquired by museums in the United States and Germany, his native country. Wittkugel's antiquarian interests may well have been influenced by the general practice of systematic natural history collecting, but in a series of directories of agents in which he appears throughout the 1890s, he is never described as a source of antiquities. This, along with Sapper's comments, implies that Wittkugel's antiquarian work was a personal interest. The deposit of his archaeological collection in Berlin coincides with the last references to his specialist collecting of Honduran lepidoptera, and appears to mark the end of his career.

Other individuals who supplied the turn of the twentieth-century demand for Honduran antiquities came from among the North American entrepreneurs

and diplomats newly settling in northern Honduras in the wake of development of banana companies. As reflected in the holdings of the British Museum, diplomatic service already had a long history of inspiring antiquities collecting when the Peabody Museum of Harvard and the Smithsonian Institution received donations that can be traced to a United States consul, William Alger. Stationed at Puerto Cortes, the port for San Pedro Sula, from 1891–1904, like many others serving as diplomats, Alger had other interests in the country where he served. In 1892 he was listed as a partner in Alger & De Leon, import and export agents at the port. In 1896, he married Mucia Paz Barahona, the sister of a former president of Honduras, Miguel Paz Barahona.

In 1909, when Alger was credited with support of archaeological research on a find of copper bells in a cave in the Naco valley (Blackiston 1910b:536), he was near the end of a term of service as consul in Tegucigalpa. One of the bells from this cache was registered in 1909 as transferred from the State Department, via Alger, to the Smithsonian Institution (U.S. National Museum 1909:28). A number of Honduran figurines made their way to the Peabody Museum via Alger's sister Abbey in 1901 and 1902, and others to the Heye Foundation in 1923 through Louisa Taylor Rounceville Alger, widow of Abbey and William's brother Phillip Alger.

Alger was not the only United States diplomat with antiquarian interests stationed in Honduras. In a second article reporting on his research in Honduras, Blackiston (1910a:195) described "excavating on the *fincas* of the American Consul, Dr. Mitchell" near San Pedro Sula. James M. Mitchell was a United States citizen, a pharmacist and physician who relocated to San Pedro Sula about 1887, when he would have been just 21 years old. Appointed consul in San Pedro Sula in 1891, he continued to practice as a physician, and held the post of consul until 1925. In addition to his credited assistance to Blackiston, he is likely the Dr. Mitchell from whom the Heye Foundation obtained objects in 1915.

Many medical doctors formed part of the community of expatriate professionals who engaged in antiquities collecting in San Pedro Sula around the turn of the century. George B. Abbott, acknowledged as an early donor by the Peabody Museum in 1897, after the Gordon expedition, had moved to San Pedro Sula in 1892 "for climatic and business reasons" before returning to Illinois in 1899 (Vetter, Heimsoth, and Russell 1899:15). Dr. J. Edward Austin arrived in Honduras in the 1890s as well, residing in Puerto Cortes until at least 1912, before returning to Massachusetts, where he died in 1916 (Boston Medical and Surgical Journal 1916). Blackiston (1910a:200) mentioned his "excellent" collection, saying it was "a most noteworthy one and contains many specimens of the finest type" from the Ulua Valley. The Heye Foundation acquired it in 1915 (Saville 1916:424–25).

Mitchell and Austin overlapped with yet another physician, Sydenham M. Waller, who reportedly moved to San Pedro Sula around 1900 (Euraque 1990; Luque 1979). Waller was the director of the Hospital del Norte established in San Pedro Sula, and was noted for his success in treating yellow fever during an outbreak in 1905. Waller's economic activities in Honduras were not limited to the practice of medicine. In addition to exploitation of lumber, from the 1930s to the 1950s he appears as co-owner of a number of mines. Waller's interests were broad, and included multiple branches of natural history. In the 1920s, Waller donated specimens of birds to Chicago's Field Museum, and directed visiting scientists from the same museum to Lake Ticamaya, east of San Pedro Sula. In 1939, he reportedly maintained a serpentarium in Honduras.

Waller's private collection of antiquities included an Ulua Polychrome vessel documented in 1917 by an artist whose watercolors became part of the collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, while the vessel itself was deposited at the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University (Pezzati 2003). Waller was also cited as the source of copper bells from near Naco, donated to the Peabody Museum in 1930 by the pioneering archaeologist Dorothy Popenoe. In 1944, her husband, Wilson Popenoe, wrote in a letter to A.V. Kidder at the Peabody Museum that the bells were given to Dorothy by Waller, who "used to buy up archaeological specimens which were brought into San Pedro Sula."

Some of the entrepreneurs supplying early twentieth century museums became well connected to Honduran elites, among whom collecting of antiquities had a long history. Norman Scholes, who donated a group of 43 vessels from Lake Yojoa to the Manchester Museum in England around 1925, is an extraordinary example. Scholes was a businessman living in northern Honduras in the 1920s, as a partner in transport companies beginning with Dean and Company (or Empresa Dean). After 1931, Scholes became the business partner of Honduran politician Julio Lozano Diaz, exiled in 1956 after seizing presidential power in the wake of an inconclusive election in 1954.

Lincoln Valentine, who Luke (2006:36–37) identifies as the source for the University of Pennsylvania's collection of antiquities from Honduras, was another whose presence in Honduras can be attributed to business interests. He also became deeply connected with the politically powerful and wealthy of the country. Lincoln was the grandson of the founding partner of the Rosario Mining Company, Julius Valentine. A major shareholder in the mining company at its beginning was then-president of Honduras, Marco Aurelio Soto, himself, as we have seen, a collector of antiquities. So close did the partners become that one of Soto's sons married the daughter of one of Julius Valentine's sons, Washington Valentine.

Washington's brother Lincoln W. Valentine was the founder of a Spanish language newspaper that began publishing in the United States in 1892, *El Americano*. At the time, he was described as an American businessman who owned the Valentine Brothers Produce Exchange in New York. It was his son, Lincoln G. Valentine, who engaged in collecting antiquities and sold them to the University of Pennsylvania.

His uncle Washington's obituary in the *New York Times* describes the younger Lincoln Valentine as coming to the United States in 1910 to raise funding for exploration of an oil concession in Honduras. His company issued stock in New York City in 1920, to explore concessions in Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. His dealings in Costa Rica were the focus of Senate hearings in 1925, and in 1934 he was cited as a source in a State Department report on conditions in Costa Rica.

Luke (2006:37) quotes a letter to Gordon in 1914 in which Valentine describes a "gang of men" he had hired to dig for antiquities in the San Pedro Sula area. She describes him as "a sort of middleman" competing with others she suggests were "most likely businessmen affiliated with the mining and/or fruit companies." She identifies J.B. Edwards as one of these middlemen, prominent in records from museums in the 1920s and 1930s.

Edwards bears more comparison with Wittkugel than with Valentine, however, as someone who attempted to make a living as an agent collecting natural history specimens, including antiquities. Correspondence between Wilson Popenoe and A.M. Tozzer of the Peabody Museum in the mid-1930s contains a brief biographical sketch of Edwards:

He is a Kansan... got interested in digging while working in the Ozarks some years ago; came down to Mexico where he puttered around for a while; thence to Honduras, where he tied up with Oakes Ames and collected plants for the Arnold Arboretum for some time.... He says he has located about 52 sites here in Honduras.... He now keeps a little curio shop in Puerto Cortes. I doubt that he is getting, or will get, much trade. He has on hand a few Yojoa pots, all repaired.

Oakes Ames was a professor of botany who supervised Harvard's Arboretum. He acknowledged Edwards as the collector of plants he described in print (Ames 1934). Edwards was also acknowledged by the Smithsonian as the source of a mammal specimen obtained in 1936 (U.S. National Museum 1937:26).

Popenoe need not have worried about Edwards' prospects for success in his "little curio shop" in Puerto Cortes, because Edwards' main approach, consistent with that he used for plant and animal specimens, was direct sale to

museums or their agents. Groups of vessels he excavated or bought from others excavating on the north shore of Lake Yojoa are found today in the Brooklyn Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum. In the case of the Brooklyn Museum, his contact appears to have been Herbert Joseph Spinden, the Harvard trained art historian who became curator there in 1929. The intermediary for the Royal Ontario Museum was Eric Moore, mentioned by Popenoe in his correspondence with Tozzer in 1935 and 1936.

Luke (2006) argues that the motivation of all the North American institutions was initially simply to have specimens of the distinctive Ulua polychromes and marble vases. Hence, it was unimportant for there to be much contextual information, or indeed, any contextual information at all. Most of the collections that made their way to foreign museums in the 1920s and 1930s came from quasi-professional excavators, especially those operating along the north shore of Lake Yojoa.

It is anachronistic to treat these excavators as violating modern archaeological expectations; the museums that acquired the objects they produced, and the archaeologists who began to return to conduct research in Honduras in the 1930s, viewed them as sources of desirable, and inherently valuable, objects. Pots were interpretable primarily as tokens of level of cultural development or of cultural identity, and they carried these identifications in their shape, surface treatment, and decoration.

The engagement in archaeological prospecting to provision museums should be seen as a continuation of the natural history collecting practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These general practices of natural history and antiquities collecting continued well into the 1930s, with both local professionals like S.M. Waller, and visiting specialists like Cecil Underwood, who served as Director of the Museo Nacional of Honduras while assembling specimens of mammals for foreign institutions, undertaking the same kind of mixed collecting as professional agents like Wittkugel had before them.

One major difference was that Edwards sought and obtained permission for his business under then-existing Honduran law. The report on the Smithsonian in 1936 that credits Edwards for a mammal skin describes him as affiliated with the Museo Nacional in Tegucigalpa (U.S. National Museum 1937:26). Edwards, Popenoe reported in correspondence to Tozzer in 1935, had reached a contractual agreement allowing him to exploit archaeological sites in the country as long as he turned over half of his finds to the then-nascent national museum.

This agreement was backed by Tiburcio Carías Andino, who held power in Honduras from his election as president in 1933 until 1949. Historian Darío Euraque (1994, 1998) has explored the role of archaeology in the regime of

Carías Andino, who promulgated a nationalist ideology to help maintain his hold on the presidency. The assistance of Carías Andino's wife, Elena, a collector of antiquities herself, was acknowledged by professional archaeologists visiting Honduras in the 1930s (Yde 1938:3).

Archaeologists leading new scientific expeditions in the 1930s saw no reason to limit their activities to collecting the fragments available through their own excavations. On behalf of the Middle American Research Institute of Tulane University, a Danish scholar, Jens Yde (1938), bought materials that enriched the collections of both the Middle American Research Institute and the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen. His example was followed by the archaeologists of the Harvard University-Smithsonian Expedition, who reported relying on the same agent, Martin Rittenhouse, for assistance in their excavations at Lake Yojoa (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938).

Wilson Popenoe described Rittenhouse in 1935 as "an old chap" living in Siguatepeque, a small city on the road from Lake Yojoa to Tegucigalpa. Rittenhouse was 66 at the time. Born in Ontario, he immigrated to Honduras in 1896 planning to establish a coffee plantation, and settled at Lake Yojoa. It was only economic necessity, according to Popenoe, that led him to propose selling the collection he had made through his own excavations at Lake Yojoa.

By the time museums sent their own expeditions to Honduras in the 1930s, discussed in more detail in the next chapters, they were interested in more than acquiring specimens: they wanted to find out where sites were located, and the nature of the buildings they contained. Yet these expeditions would have been counted unsuccessful if they had not also provided specimens for exhibition. So the Peabody Museum, Smithsonian, Middle American Research Institute, and Heye Foundation all engaged both in patronizing original excavations, and in acquiring objects through donation and purchase.

Nor was this pattern of acquisition of Honduran antiquities through a mixture of practices limited to North American museums. In 1936, a British peer with a history of geographic exploration, Walter Edward Guinness, Lord Moyne, undertook a cruise in his personal yacht that brought him to the Bay Islands of Honduras (Feacham and Brauholtz 1938). Here he stayed and excavated for three weeks, returning to England with more than 3000 objects that he exhibited at the British Museum, then split between the archaeology museum at Cambridge University and the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford.

While in retrospect we can artificially distinguish between those museums whose 1930s-era holdings from Honduras came solely through purchase, such as the Royal Ontario Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and Manchester Museum, and those that patronized expeditions, scholars at the time viewed the holdings of all of these institutions as equally valuable records of the unique

accomplishments of the people of ancient Honduras. That way of seeing the newly rediscovered painted pottery of Honduras was shared in Honduras itself, where the 1930s saw continued development of antiquities collecting.

### Hondurans Collecting Honduran Antiquities

While most archaeological expeditions in Honduras in the 1930s contributed pieces to the national museum in Tegucigalpa, Luke (2006:43–44) argues that the volume of antiquities leaving the country spurred the Honduran government to enact new legislation in 1936 that prohibited export of antiquities. Yet at the same time, appreciation for Honduran antiquities as items of cultural heritage continued to develop among members of Honduran elites, who often had complex ties to their North American counterparts, and who like them, both excavated and assembled collections through purchase.

Where in the nineteenth century we can document local clerics, politicians, and the wealthy of the capital city, Comayagua, engaged in collecting antiquities, the twentieth century record broadens to include more participation by businessmen and entrepreneurs. In 1915 Luis Caron, listed in 1911 as a retail grocer and general merchant in San Pedro Sula, was credited with donating objects from a mound near San Pedro Sula to the new Heye Foundation, during the visit to Honduras of its curator, Marshall Saville. In the 1950s, Marie Unsworth de Agurcia and Mercedes Agurcia, members of a family prominent in business in the modern capital city, Tegucigalpa, conducted excavations at Tenampua, on which they reportedly kept detailed notes (Stone 1957:50–53). The development of private collections was legal at the time, and when later legislation declared all antiquities national patrimony, existing collections only required to be registered, and not bought or sold thereafter.

The best-known private collection in Honduras today is maintained by the Banco Atlantida in Tegucigalpa. The Banco Atlantida was founded in 1913 in the coastal banana port of La Ceiba by the predecessor of the Standard Fruit Company (Euraque 1996:12–13). By the 1930s, through its business loans, the bank was connected to a network of Honduran businessmen that spanned San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa (Euraque 1996:82–83). This facilitated its move from being a subsidiary of a multinational company, Standard Fruit, to majority ownership by Honduran industrialists and businessmen, a shift that happened between the 1950s and 1980s (Bull, Castellacci and Kasahara 2014:151–52). By 1967, the Banco Atlantida had been acquired by Chase Manhattan.

The online website of the bank's "Museo Virtual" (<http://museobancoatlantida.com/acerca-del-museo>) attributes the creation of its collection of over

3000 artworks to the bank directors of the 1960s. It does not specify the proportion of the collection that is antiquities, but provides access to a gallery of 100 selected works of "Precolumbian art." Even before the development of the Internet allowed this form of dissemination of its collection, the Banco Atlantida produced a folio of photographic images of six polychrome pots, demonstrating a long-established interest in promoting public awareness of the collection (Aplíciano Mendieta 1975).

Most activity by Honduran collectors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, remains less visible. What can be more easily traced is the development of institutions in Honduras charged with managing cultural heritage and presenting antiquities to the public. The passage of the 1936 law restricting exportation of antiquities was followed in 1947 and 1952 by decrees calling for, and then establishing, a National Institute of Anthropology and History (Lara Pinto 2006; Tercero 2006; Veliz 1983). The national museum in Tegucigalpa, founded in 1932, continued to curate collections deposited by international excavators. In 1940, a former presidential residence in colonial Comayagua was dedicated as a history museum, and began its own history of collecting antiquities from that area. From 1976 to 1996 the Museo Nacional occupied a former presidential mansion in Tegucigalpa next to the Institute of Anthropology and History. When it closed, only to reopen as a Republican history museum, no plans were made to relocate the archaeological collections formerly exhibited there (Lara Pinto 2006:25).

After it was formally transformed into a quasi-autonomous government agency in the 1970s, the Institute of Anthropology and History was charged with registering privately held collections. National ownership, if not immediate custody, was enshrined in Honduran law in 1997 (Luke 2006:48). Objects from registered private collections in the San Pedro Sula area were incorporated in a new museum chartered by the Institute, the Museo de Antropología e Historia de San Pedro Sula, which opened in 1994. Nonetheless, as Luke (2006, 2007) and Lara Pinto (2006) each discuss, archaeological sites in Honduras continue to be disturbed by unauthorized excavations that often result in objects like Ulua Polychromes being illegally exported from Honduras.

### Honduran Antiquities as International Cultural Property

Despite the early history of universal and anthropological museums in Europe and North America collecting Ulua Polychromes, they have not been centrally featured in art museum collections or exhibitions in the 20th century. Their ambiguous interpretation as derivative from Classic Maya pottery of lowland

Guatemala gives them less prestige as objects for art collecting. Even today, when individual Ulua Polychromes are exhibited, they are often labeled “Classic Maya” or attributed to Belize, Guatemala, or even Mexico. While present in many art museums in the United States, Ulua Polychromes appear never to have been the sole focus of an art exhibit in North America.

Instead, the prized property for art collecting has, since at least the 1940s, been the Ulua Marble vases that developed within the lower Ulua valley (Luke 2002, 2006:46, 2007). The use of a material that was difficult to work, marble, required special expertise that was apparently developed in craft workshops centered around Travesia (Luke and Tykot 2007). Only a few quarries produced marble like that used to make known vessels, and one quarry was most likely used for the majority of the vases. The restricted production and high level of skill evident in Ulua Marble vases made them a major attraction for art museums and private collectors.

Ulua Marble vases have a complex relationship to Ulua Polychrome pottery, sharing characteristic shapes and some motifs with Ulua Polychromes that were in use when the marble vases were first created, between 650 and 750 AD. Their visual relationships to Ulua Polychromes inspired art museums to include polychrome vessels as comparative material when the marble vases were exhibited. Exhibition of Ulua Marble vases are correlated with increases in collecting not only of the marble vases themselves, but also of Ulua Polychromes (Luke and Henderson 2006).

The passage of the UNESCO Convention on the International Traffic in Antiquities in 1970 provided a framework for Honduras to begin to pursue international protection for its cultural heritage. The United States passed legislation implementing the UNESCO Convention in 1983. Honduras solicited protection under the legislation in 1999, finalizing a formal request in 2001 (Lara Pinto 2006:18; Luke 2006:47–48).

By then, online auction sites routinely featured Ulua Polychromes, usually described as Classic Maya, as properties for sale. While Ulua Polychromes with especially complicated scenes may be featured at high end auctions, more commonly, they seem to form a lower end market for collectors who want to have Maya pieces, but were not part of the market early enough, or do not have the means to enter the high end market for Maya pieces today. This makes the demand for Honduran polychromes potentially much greater than if they were subject to higher commercial valuation, as larger numbers of potential collectors will have the means to meet the relatively modest prices for which they are offered.

This continuing market has provided, and continues to provide, sufficient incentive for Hondurans with few viable economic opportunities to try their

hand at what David Matsuda (1998) called subsistence digging, using archaeological sites that remain for the most part unprotected as mines for resources that might bring a modest price from middlemen in the cities from which they will be exported (see also Hollowell 2006).

Excavations at sites in the lower Ulua Valley historically have produced both Ulua Marble vases and Ulua Polychromes. This made the area particularly vulnerable to illicit excavation. Beginning in the 1970s, a reorganized and revitalized Honduran Institute for Anthropology and History began to try to exercise control over undocumented excavations. My own first experience in the lower Ulua valley followed in 1979 with an Institute initiative, the Proyecto Arqueológico Sula, charged with creating an inventory of sites for protection and cultural resource management.

At the time, the rapid expansion of economic activities around San Pedro Sula promoted an urgent goal: the creation of a site registry. Land that had been grass-covered cattle ranches was being converted to sugar cane, introducing deep cultivation that was highly destructive to intact archaeological deposits. As the population of the city swelled, developers used machinery to initiate new housing developments, bulldozing buried deposits and sites with surface-visible features, low house mounds, alike. With development came discovery of archaeological remains, feeding the international market for antiquities.

I was given a particularly close look at how this process worked when, at the request of the Institute, I undertook excavations at the location of the Travesia archaeological site in 1983. Sometime in the early 1970s, most of the surface architecture of the site had been bulldozed as sugar cane plantations were established. In 1983, only a few buildings remained, covered by dense vegetation. The tall sugar cane provided ideal cover for those seeking to excavate objects for sale. I was hard-pressed to find a two-meter area where looter's trenches had not already dug deeply into the buried historical deposits. Eventually I settled on a partially disturbed location.

The Institute had received reports that Ulua marble vases had been excavated, sold, and smuggled out of the country, and hoped that a professional archaeologist might recover evidence of the same kind of objects from controlled excavations. As we carefully stripped away layers of deposits, we could hear others going about the process of excavation, invisible behind the cane.

One day, a young man working at the location of a second excavation I had established under the direction of a North American volunteer came running to tell me that they were being arrested. I hurried over, only to find a Honduran constable on mule-back arguing with the other local workers, as the North American volunteer looked on with little comprehension. I intervened, but the constable was firm: we would have to accompany him to his station house near

San Manuel and explain ourselves to his commanding officer. So off we set out in our vehicle, the constable now comfortably ensconced next to me in the front seat.

When we arrived at the station, and I showed our official identification, the *sargento* quickly turned on his constable, asking him in rapid Spanish how he couldn't have realized we worked for the government. With his apologies, we drove back to Travesia, and after seeing the second excavation back up and running, I walked toward my own unit where the workers had already preceded me. As I came close to the point where I would leave the road to walk into the cane, a casually dressed young man popped out of the field. "So," he said, "you had to pay." Confused, I repeated the word: "Pay?" "Yes, the *sargento*," he said, and gradually explained to me that everyone digging at Travesia had to pay the *sargento*. I assured him we had not, because I worked for the Institute of Anthropology and History. For him, excavating antiquities was an occupation, subject to licensing by the local police and thus not, it would seem, illegal.

As we talked, the young man began to accept that, absurd as it seemed, I was standing in the 100 degree heat every day simply to find things out, not to find things to sell. So he told me about his experience digging and finding Ulua marble vases, and how he and others would excavate sets of them, sometimes with jade nearby. Yes, he said when I asked, they sold these things, sometimes taking them into San Pedro, other times to a North American who would come out to their town. I don't remember the price he said they obtained for the pieces they found; just that it was a fraction of what they would bring on the art market—and yet the equivalent of many weeks of pay if he had been able to find work with someone hiring seasonal labor, like me.

Since 1983, many things have changed. The primary cause of site destruction is still likely to be economic development, while looting became more clearly identified as unacceptable. The Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History established a visible presence in the area, a regional center located in La Lima, where it maintains records of known sites in the lower Ulua valley. The opening in 1994 of the Museo de San Pedro Sula, featuring exhibits on archaeology and history of the region, raised local awareness of archaeology as a shared heritage. Both of these locations received reports of site disturbance from looting and from construction offered by members of the local communities. With the approval of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2001 between Honduras and the United States, Ulua Polychromes and other painted pottery of Honduras became subject to import restrictions, presumably putting some friction in the way of the exportation of newly excavated materials.

Reflecting the realities of impacts from continued economic development and population growth around San Pedro Sula, my own archaeological efforts

and those of colleagues working in the Ulua Valley have been addressed primarily to collecting information from archaeological sites under threat of destruction, work that in the United States would be called Cultural Resource Management. It is through excavations of sites under threat of destruction, often modest rural villages, usually in the form of limited excavations, that I have gradually come to visualize the circulation of Ulua Polychromes in the ways presented in the first five chapters.

My study of pottery from my own excavations, however fragmentary the samples, has also guided my understanding of the place of Ulua Polychromes in time and space. This was the principal focus of research in the first half of the twentieth century, but for many reasons, when I began my research in the Ulua Valley, we lacked even an adequate chronology of ceramic development. The projects of the early twentieth century and their legacy are the subject of the next two chapters. From a confused literature composed of preliminary reports, these chapters develop a framework that will serve to clarify how we might think about Ulua Polychrome pottery in the twenty-first century.

## Making Time

Despite his place as the first archaeologist credited with professional archaeological research in the Uluá valley, G.B. Gordon did not share a modern understanding of superposition as an index of the passage of time. He did employ a rough form of stratigraphic excavation, removing deposits in segments one foot in depth. He selected two areas a few kilometers apart for intensive excavation: a place he called Playa de los Muertos, later called Lagartijo in records of the Peabody Museum; and Santana, where he placed three different excavation areas, the third “near Travacillo.” He observed the layering of cultural remains: “They are most numerous in streaks or strata at various levels, with intervals of several feet between in which they are scarcely noticeable or entirely absent (Gordon 1898b:8).” What Gordon made of these discontinuous strata, however, was not what archaeologists today might expect. In his final discussion of his results, Gordon (1898b:36) defined as one of the questions that required understanding “the agencies responsible” for the distribution of remains, and the “changes they have undergone.”

Noting the occurrence of stratified layers, he goes on to say that “the first explanation that is suggested...is that the objects were transported by the current together with the clay, sand, and gravel, and laid down simultaneously with these at successive periods.” It is hard for archaeologists to remember that depositional processes taken for granted today had to be worked out by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century archaeologists. While it is clear that Gordon is going to reject this first hypothesis, unlike today, he felt he had to offer reasons for not accepting it.

In place of river transport and burial, Gordon proposed that the layers he observed corresponded to periods during which residents of riverbank settlements buried their dead, interspersed with episodes of flooding and abandonment. This gave him a discontinuous model of stratigraphic formation, one in which human intentionality played a great role.

Yet when Gordon turned to discussion of chronology, he reached what appears to be a contradictory conclusion:

There is no evidence here of different periods of culture or separate epochs marked by advancement of the arts or by radical changes of any description.

GORDON 1898b:38

Here, the succession in time that he directly observed in the layering of deposits is subordinated to a model of stages, periods or epochs “marked by advancement” that he expected to see. Gordon’s understanding of time was structural, or in Michael Herzfeld’s felicitous term, monumental (Herzfeld 1991). Gordon was unprepared to understand deposition as an index of the ongoing flow of human activity, what Herzfeld called social time.

### Social Time and Ulua Polychromes

The description of variation among Ulua Polychromes employed throughout this book captures change at the scale of social time. Gordon defined three divisions of painted pottery in the area (his groups A, B, and C), and later scholars recognized four or five groups (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938; Vaillant 1927). Instead, my analysis splits the universe of Ulua Polychromes alone into more than forty groups (Viel 1978). Stylistic seriation demonstrates relationships among these groups, stemming from production in particular times and places by people sharing understandings of how to proceed, communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). While initially offered with only a minimal division into early, middle, and late periods of development, the assignment of Ulua Polychromes into more than three dozen groups by Viel (1978) laid the ground for identification of associations of specific groups within this classification with stratigraphically analyzed sites, including some where radiocarbon dates anchor succession in real time.

Based on their occurrence in sites with clear radiocarbon records, Ulua Polychromes were being made and used for about five centuries, from around 450 AD to after 850 AD (Table 2). The last use of Ulua Polychromes overlapped with the development of Las Vegas Polychrome, which can actually be thought of as simply a more regionally restricted development in the Ulua tradition. Apparently dropping out of use after 1100 AD, many features of Las Vegas Polychrome continued in the later prehispanic painted pottery styles of northern Honduras, Vagando Polychrome, Forastero Polychrome, Nolasco Bichrome and Posas Polychrome, whose production began by 1200 AD and ended in the early sixteenth century (Blaisdell-Sloan 2006:156–60; Wonderley 1986).

The apparent break in continuity between the making of Las Vegas Polychrome and later painted pottery, which shares white slip, a preference for tripod dishes, and overlapping motifs, may be more an artifact of archaeological chronologies than a real gap in production of painted pottery. Site occupation was more discontinuous in these centuries, fewer sites have been investigated

TABLE 2 *The development and chronology of Ulua Polychrome pottery*

Approximate year	Site, feature, action (C14 dates where available)	Ulua Polychrome group and vessel forms	Archaeological time period
500 AD	Puerto Escondido house debris cal AD 350–530 (420) cal AD 400–560 (440) cal AD 420–610 (530) cal AD 430–620 (540) cal AD 430–630 (550)	Dedalos: Labyrinth vases	450–550 AD
500 AD	Travesia pottery workshop	Dedalos: Labyrinth and Chac vases	450–550 AD
600 AD	Santa Rita feasting trash	Santa Rita: Cyrano vases, Mellizo bowls, and Bandeja plates	550–650 AD
630 AD	Lake Yojoa	Santa Rita: Arrodillarse vase	550–650 AD
650 AD	Copan Grave 2–42	Santa Rita: Winged Figure	550–650 AD
650 AD	Travesia marble crafting house	Santa Rita: Paloma vases and Travesia: Bombero vases	550–650 AD
680 AD	Puerto Escondido house hearth cal AD 650–770 (680)	Travesia: Rastrillo bowls	650–750 AD
680 AD	Lake Yojoa building caches	Yojoa: Tiotivo bowls	650–750 AD
690 AD	Las Honduritas platform fill cal AD 650 (670) 770 cal AD 650 (690) 860	Yojoa: Tiotivo bowls	650–750 AD
700 AD	Travesia household trash	Travesia: Rastrillo and Batracien bowls	650–750 AD
700 AD	Lake Yojoa	Yojoa: Molinero vase	650–750 AD
700 AD	Lake Yojoa building caches	Selva: Concerto bowl	650–750 AD
720 AD	Copan Tomb 11	Selva: Troubador vase	650–750 AD
730 AD	Lake Yojoa building caches	Yojoa: Corral and Reptile W bowls and jars, Singe Accroupi jars	650–750 AD

Approximate year	Site, feature, action (C14 dates where available)	Ulua Polychrome group and vessel forms	Archaeological time period
750 AD	Lake Yojoa building caches	Nebla: Rodeo bowls	750–850 AD
770 AD	Los Naranjos building cache	Nebla: Tigrillo jars	750–850 AD
780 AD	Lake Yojoa building cache	Nebla: Picadilly vase	750–850 AD
780 AD	San Juan Camalote house debris cal AD 660 (780) 960	Santana vase	750–850 AD
790 AD	Las Honduritas platform activity cal AD 630 (720, 740, 770) 970 cal AD 710 (790) 890	Santana vase	750–850 AD
790 AD	Santana site (foreign imagery)	Santana vase	750–850 AD
810 AD	Cerro Palenque building cache cal AD 700–900	Santana bowl	750–850 AD
850 AD	Tenampua building caches	Tenampua: Zarza censers, Cefiro vases, and Pentagone bowl	750–850 AD
870 AD	Copan tomb	Tenampua: Capitan vases, Mariposa dishes	850–950 AD
890 AD	Los Naranjos burials	Tenampua vases	850–950 AD
920 AD	Los Naranjos burials	Las Vegas Polychrome vases	900–1200 AD
920 AD	Cerro Palenque feasting midden cal AD 710–910 or 920–960	Baracoa Fine Paste dishes Las Vegas Polychrome	900–1100 AD

Chronometric dates for Puerto Escondido from Joyce and Henderson (2007); for San Juan Camalote and Las Honduritas from Joyce, Hendon, and Sheptak (2008); for Cerro Palenque from Hendon (2010).

in depth, and the use of painted pottery seems to have become restricted to fewer users or certain occasions. On a regional scale, settlement continued, but buildings are more difficult to recognize, with houses on ground level instead of raised on low platforms, and some buildings made of clay instead of stone. Yet at least some people in these Postclassic settlements had access not only to painted pottery but also imported luxuries including obsidian from the Ixtepeque source, metal fish hooks in forms known to be made in northern Belize, pottery incense burners imported from highland Mexico, Plumbate pots from the Pacific coast near the Guatemalan-Mexican border, other pots made in El Salvador and Yucatan, and products of exchange that might normally be invisible, such as turkeys, present in a late burial at Las Flores Bolsa, likely introduced from the Yucatan peninsula (Baudez and Becquelin 1973; Blaisdell-Sloan 2006; Henderson and Joyce 2004; Joyce 1986; Manahan 2004).

Drawing on the work of Viel (1978), Wonderley (1986), and my own analyses, we can trace the largely continuous history of polychrome painting on ceramics from the emergence of the Uluva Polychrome tradition to the moment when Spanish troops defeated the last defenders of Ticamaya in the lower Uluva Valley. We can specify how to recognize changes over time, always with the understanding that as a continuous tradition, potters were always free to revive motifs, use of pigments, or vessel forms, making it impossible to define absolute endings of any feature.

Each new group of pots is recognizable as new because it was the product of innovations by potters, taking place at a scale of social time of the lifetime of a potter, and the work of a potter training the next generation. While archaeological time is made in periods of multiple centuries, and radiocarbon time is framed in terms of intervals within which the death of a plant most probably took place, potters' time takes place in days, weeks, months, seasons and years, lifetimes and generations. Table 2 provides an illustration of the challenge of thinking across these different measures of temporality; in order to understand the emergence of Uluva Polychromes, and of Las Vegas Polychrome and Nolasco Bichrome, we need to think in terms of the event. While the estimated year in Table 2 is entirely my construct, it is no more fictional than the archaeological time period. What discriminates these two temporalities is the grain of time; social time, the estimated year; or monumental time, the archaeological time period. The intentions, motivations, practices, and actions through which pots were produced, assessed, and circulated took place in social time. So it is social time that we need in order to understand the complexity of a tradition of painting that lasted for 1500 years.

### *Beginnings*

The earliest recovered examples of Ulua Polychromes (Figures 1, 3, 5 and 7) show close relationships in form and colors to pre-existing serving vessels (Figure 2), with the addition of black and white paint and the execution of new images of human and animal figures.

Some of these early vessels have striking resemblances in cylinder form (a barrel shape) and imagery to specific Early Classic (AD 500–600) lowland Maya polychromes, identified as the Naranjo Area Group through shared chemical composition (Reents-Budet 1994:203–07). Both Wittkugel and I have found sherds that likely were from imported Naranjo Area Group vessels at Travesia, in similar stratigraphic context as the first “Dedalos class” Ulua Polychrome vessels. Dedalos class vessels occur immediately after stratigraphic levels dating to 230–430 AD at Puerto Escondido, in levels with radiocarbon dates intercepting the calibration curve between 420 AD and 550 AD (Joyce and Henderson 2007). These comparisons lead me to place the development of these earliest Ulua Polychromes between roughly AD 450 and 550, possibly as products of a single generation of potters (Table 2).

A second group of Ulua Polychromes, the Santa Rita class (Figures 8 to 16), follows stratigraphically or overlaps with Dedalos class at sites throughout the Ulua Valley, including Santa Rita, for which the group was named. Development from Dedalos class is especially clear in the Santa Rita subclass Mellizo, which has much of the layout and design construction of Dedalos subclass Chac, but with anthropomorphic figures depicted in a distinct conventionalized way (Figures 11 and 12). Also bridging the two groups are tripod plates and dishes, the Bandeja subclass (Figures 7 and 8), with a repertoire of designs that includes some shared with Dedalos, and others with Santa Rita class.

### *Innovation*

A major distinction exists within the Santa Rita class between earlier subclasses (Mellizo and Bandeja) and three later ones, subclasses Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma (Figures 9, 10, 13 to 16). Where Santa Rita subclass Mellizo and Dedalos subclasses Chac and Bandeja vessels can occur together in stratigraphic levels, Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma classes do not occur with Dedalos class vessels. They represent a series of innovations in forms and design layouts, the adoption of some new pigments, and the reconceptualization of design elements building on the earlier Santa Rita subclasses.

In creating a model of chronological development based on social time, I use a concept of generations within a workshop tradition to suggest that the

Santa Rita class may represent two or three generations of artisans, working over a period of a century. This builds on the approach developed by George Kubler (1962) in *The Shape of Time* to advance his study of medieval cathedral construction in Europe. It rests on the idea that within a workshop tradition, there will be a period of consolidation before stylistic innovation develops again, as the original innovators pass on techniques to a second generation.

From this perspective, the original Santa Rita class polychromes were products of a first generation of innovators, emerging while Dedalos class polychromes were still being produced in some workshops. With the success of the initial Santa Rita innovations, a shift to production of Santa Rita subclass Mellizo was consolidated by teaching apprentices how to reproduce the same effects, now no longer innovative, but traditional. Santa Rita Mellizo vessels are remarkable for their extreme consistency in design structure and range of motifs over a very wide area, even when clearly being produced by different workshops. It took a new generation of artisans to begin to experiment with adding modeled details, supports, new colors, and new motifs, producing the Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma subclasses which are found together in stratigraphic superposition over levels containing Mellizo and Bandeja subclass vessels.

I suggest that the entire sequence of development of the Santa Rita class of Ulua Polychromes took place over about a century, from ca. 550 to 650 AD (Joyce 1993a). While a model of three workshop generations might suggest dividing this period into thirds, it is simpler archaeologically to treat this as a period marked by two episodes, an earlier one characterized by the dominance of Mellizo subclass, lasting about fifty years, and a later fifty year period during which Cyrano, Arrodillarse and Paloma class vessels rose to dominance. The trash from feasting at Santa Rita discussed in Chapter 2 would have accumulated at a point when the older vessels were being replaced by newer ones, around 600 AD (Table 2).

### *Novelty*

Some overlap between late Santa Rita subclasses (Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma) and the next classes of Ulua Polychromes would be expected if we take the social time of workshop production into consideration as part of an ongoing history of Ulua Polychrome innovation. The sharp boundaries of temporal periods that archaeology routinely imposes cannot easily be reconciled with overlapping temporalities at the scales of the individual life or generations in a family, workshop, or tradition (Tringham 2000). The definition of the groups of Ulua Polychromes that replaced Santa Rita class necessarily emphasizes what is innovative and thus creates an impression of sharp discontinuities.

These next classes, Travesia (Figure 17, 20 and 22), Yojoa (Figures 18, 19, 23, 26 and 28), and Selva (Figures 21, 27, 29 and 30), also diverge from one another, in regional developments that I suggest index the formation of self-conscious localized identities centered on specific villages or towns.

My own experience excavating sites in the lower Ulua valley and studying assemblages from earlier excavations most readily allows me to trace the succession from Santa Rita class to Travesia class. There is considerable continuity from Santa Rita subclass Paloma to Travesia subclass Bombero in vessel form and design structure (compare Figures 16 and 17). Both include cylindrical vases with two protruding animal head lugs. Paloma subclass vessel lugs are red bird heads, and they protrude from a painted zoomorphic creature that combines elements of birds, bats, and insects, shown in front view with wings spread to either side. Some of these vessels have flat bases, typical of Dedalos class and earlier Santa Rita subclasses. Others share with Santa Rita subclasses Cyrano and Arrodiarse experimentation with tripod supports in different sizes and shapes, or pedestal bases, which are virtually universal on the Travesia subclass Bombero vessels.

The same innovations in vessel support forms are seen in the earliest Ulua marble vases, which are contemporary with late Santa Rita Ulua Polychromes. Luke (2002) and I (Joyce 1993a) argue that experimentation in both media with tripod supports relates to as-yet poorly understood mechanisms of participation of the Ulua Valley in developments that reflect the importance of Teotihuacan during the Lowland Maya Early Classic period (ca. 250–600 AD). At Cerro Palenque (Joyce 1988:290) one residential group occupied during the seventh century included buildings with *talud-tablero* architectural details. Residents here used green obsidian imported from the Central Mexican Pachuca source (Hendon 2010). At the contemporary site of Salitron Viejo east of the Ulua valley, green obsidian and *talud-tablero* architectural details are also noted, along with locally produced jades in shapes identified as typical of Teotihuacan art (Hirth 1988:309). Copan's Early Classic Acbi ceramic complex (Viel 1993) was marked by the use of a wide range of vessels with tripod slab feet. Whole vessels similar to those from Copan are actually included in Wittkugel's collection from Travesia. The Acbi complex is generally agreed to begin ca. 400 AD and to end by 700 AD at the latest.

Small ring bases or large pedestal bases on many Paloma subclass vessels are a characteristic shared by the Travesia subclass Bombero that develops in the late seventh century. Bombero subclass vessels substitute protruding lugs depicting monkey faces for the frontal birds of Paloma subclass. Monkey imagery is novel in the Ulua Polychrome repertoire. It is distinctive of the most common Travesia subclass, Rastrillo, entirely made up of hemispherical

bowls (Figure 20). Their development out of bowls of the Santa Rita class is evident in their secondary designs: red bands on the interior, bars of varying colors on the lip, step frets and terraces in upper bands on the exterior, all also are found on late subclasses of Santa Rita, including Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma.

Where the late Santa Rita group would have had a band of profile schematic heads below these, Travesia subclass Rastrillo vessels carry a band of alternating squares in red, black, or orange. This band reproduces the background of profile anthropomorphic heads on the Santa Rita types, without containing the actual motif. The elimination of profile heads in these differently colored squares changes this upper band to a geometric design without iconic reference for viewers today. For someone living in the area at the time, however, this band could have retained its historical connection to what had come before, indexing a tradition rooted in Santa Rita class vessels.

In a related development, on Travesia Rastrillo subclass bowls monkeys often alternate with round red disks, recalling the red background panels that on earlier Santa Rita vessels carried additional imagery such as kneeling or crossed figures. On some Rastrillo bowls, the monkey itself is reduced to a simple black spiral, or is replaced by a set of three vertical lines. On many of these vessels, the upper band features glyphs, profile schematic heads, entirely absent when the monkey is the focus and upper bands are reduced to geometric bands.

The elimination of iconic motifs in favor of geometric patterning is a novelty in Travesia class Ulua Polychromes, carried to an extreme in the subclass Euclid (Figure 46). All the bowls that make up this subclass are covered in



FIGURE 46 *Bowl (Travesia: Euclid subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
TRAVESIA. COURTESY OF THE MIDDLE  
AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, TULANE  
UNIVERSITY (H.1.60.1). PHOTO BY RUSSELL  
N. SHEPTAK.

geometric patterns: a network of diagonal lines covering the vessel; a series of horizontal bands; or concentric semicircles of geometric motifs centered on a point along the rim. Euclid subclass bowls occur side by side with other Travesia subclasses, Batracien and Pato (Figure 22), where most of the bowl is given over to an animal image, and the upper band is entirely devoted to geometric motifs, including step frets and diagonal cross-hatching. The essence of these Travesia bowls is a focus on either an animal—most commonly, a monkey—or a glyph or a geometric pattern. Where Santa Rita class vessels combined their human subjects with geometric motifs and profile heads, Travesia vessels break these into different themes.

### *Distinction*

Sherds from Travesia class vessels are especially common in the lower Ulua Valley, including in my excavations at Travesia itself. In the parallel Yojoa class that develops around the same time near Lake Yojoa, monkeys also occur, some painted on Yojoa Tiotivo B bowls or vases (Figure 18), and others of the subclass Singe Accroupi (Squatting Monkey) on small jars with two handles, sometimes with protruding lug heads (Figures 19, 47). A wider range of animals are featured on Yojoa subclass Corral bowls (Figure 48), and on a distinctive group of tripod dishes, Yojoa subclass Pantano: water birds, crabs, peccaries, and other animals are depicted with a degree of detail that allows identification of a wide array of distinct animal subjects.

A second Yojoa subclass, Tiotivo A, is composed of bowls that show a particularly close identity with earlier Santa Rita vessels (Figure 49). A series of profile heads and a band of step frets take up at least a third of the exterior, above alternating red circles and black bars, reminiscent of the fields on which profile human figures would have been painted standing or kneeling on Santa Rita predecessors.



FIGURE 47  
*Jar (Yojoa: Singe Accroupi subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

LA CEIBA, LAKE YOJOA; STRONG,  
KIDDER AND PAUL EXPEDITION  
1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378558-0  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY,  
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.  
PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.



FIGURE 48

*Bowl (Yojoa: Corral subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

AGUACATE, LAKE YOJOA; STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL EXPEDITION 1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378571-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.



FIGURE 49

*Bowl (Yojoa: Tiotivo A subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

SANTA ANA OR PLAYA DE LOS MUERTOS. COURTESY OF THE MIDDLE AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, TULANE UNIVERSITY (H.1.29 31-2047). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Yojoa subclass Singe Accroupi jars (Figures 19, 47) also closely follow the shape and subsidiary designs of a Santa Rita subclass, Diamante. Santa Rita subclass Diamante jars feature a schematic frontal image of a four-limbed animal on the main design field on the body, with the neck occupied by fields of stepped terraces (Figure 50). Longyear (1952) identified similar diamond shapes as stylized monkeys in his studies of Copan's local polychrome tradition, Copador, dating to the seventh and eighth centuries. Viel (1978) described Santa Rita subclass Diamante as rare in the lower Ulua Valley. It is not particularly common in the collections I have recorded from the Ulua Valley, with a single example from Travesia and another from Campo Dos. It is most common near Lake Yojoa, with examples from Aguacate, Siguatepeque, Peña Blanca, Los Naranjos, and others attributed generally to Lake Yojoa in museum collections I have recorded. Two Santa Rita subclass Diamante jars were recovered in excavations in outlying sites in the Copan Valley as well (Whittington 1991). This is consistent with a tendency for Copan to have Ulua Polychromes that were more common in Comayagua or Lake Yojoa than in the Ulua Valley.



FIGURE 50

*Jar (Santa Rita: Diamante subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

ULUA VALLEY. COURTESY OF THE MIDDLE AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, TULANE UNIVERSITY (H.17.20 35–6563).

PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

While distinctions within the Ulua Polychrome producing area became most obvious when Travesia and Yojoa class vessels developed, subtle distinctions in vessel form preference were already in place in the last years of production of Santa Rita class vessels. Paloma subclass in the lower Ulua valley gave rise to Travesia subclass Bombero, and Diamante subclass was transformed into Yojoa subclass Singe Accroupi. The rarity of these subclasses is in part a reflection of their production in localized workshops, and possibly also, an indication that these were innovative products of potters whose impact was seen more in broader patterns of innovation they helped to initiate.

### *Animals and Humans*

While monkeys are especially prominent in the Ulua Polychromes that were executed after the mid-seventh century, in both Travesia class (subclasses Ba-tracien and Pato) and Yojoa class (subclasses Serpent Complex and Corral), other animals were painted on bowls or small two handled jars (Figures 24 and 25). These included water birds (Figure 51) and a spotted feline (Figure 52), often with spots shown only as a line along the spine (and thus, often misidentified as a reptile), and more rarely iguanas, bats, and armadillos.

Water birds are the only animal design executed on a third class of Ulua Polychromes, Selva, which is otherwise comparable to the Travesia and Yojoa classes. Selva consists of bowls and dishes (Concerto subclass; Figures 21 and 30) and cylinder vases, some short enough to be considered dishes (Troubador subclass; Figures 27 and 29). Viel (1978) described Selva class as distributed from Lake Yojoa to Comayagua. Selva vessels were used at Copan in the eighth century in a variety of burials (Table 3a).

Travesia subclass Bombero (Figure 17), Yojoa subclass Molinero (Figures 23, 26, and 28), and Selva subclass Troubador (Figures 27 and 29) are the only Ulua Polychromes of the late seventh and early eighth centuries on which



FIGURE 51  
*Jar (Manzanillo class Ulua Polychrome).*  
 ULUA VALLEY. COURTESY OF THE MIDDLE  
 AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, TULANE  
 UNIVERSITY (H.17.33 39–571).  
 PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 52  
*Jar (Manzanillo class Armadillo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 ULUA VALLEY. COURTESY OF THE MID-  
 DLE AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE,  
 TULANE UNIVERSITY (H.17.28 35–6547).  
 PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

anthropomorphic figures continued to be subjects. These are primarily cylinder vases, although Selva class includes dishes with a highly compressed version of the seated human figure.

The graphic style of these vessels involves a complete break from Santa Rita class in the way the human form is depicted. In Santa Rita class, the stereotypical anthropomorphic figure is stylized, sometimes to the point of being almost simply a geometric motif. Legs are suggested by pairs of parallel lines that begin at an unnaturally high level on the body. Figures may be bent forward at an awkward angle to cross with legs of facing figures, or even have one leg crossed over the other. Sometimes the entire figure is rotated 90 degrees to fill in the last space in a series around the vessel. The heads of these figures are drawn as an oval, with eyes, mouth, and nose indicated by simple strokes.

These “bean heads” are often abstracted and repeated in a series as bands above and below the main design panel on early Santa Rita subclass Mellizo cylinders (Figures 11 and 12). The later subclasses Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma

TABLE 3A *Contexts of Ulua Polychrome vessels excavated at Copan, classified*

Class/subclass	Source	Intra-site context (if noted)
Dedalos: Chac	Viel 1993: fig. 80a, b	
Dedalos: Chac	Viel and Cheek 1983: S-17:e Viel 1993: fig. 80c	Sep. IV-27
Santa Rita: Diamante	Whittington 1991: 12–15, fig. 24	Ostuman (10E-6) Burial 5
Santa Rita: Diamante	Whittington 1991: 20–21, fig. 41	Los Mangos (11E-2) Burial 1
Santa Rita: Mellizo	Longyear 1952: fig. 80a	
Santa Rita: Paloma	Viel and Cheek 1983: S-26:c Viel 1993: fig. 80d	Petapilla Sep. III-1
Santa Rita: Winged Figure	Longyear 1952: fig. 1010, fig. 117g	Tr 1–42 Grave 2–42
Yojoa: Corral	Longyear 1952: fig. 104g PM 92-49-20/C530	Mound 36 Graves 25 and 26
Yojoa: Pantano	PM 92-49-20/C526	Mound 36 Grave 24
Yojoa: Pantano	Viel and Cheek 1983: S-20:c Fash 1983: 363 [Viel 1993: fig. 80f]	Group 9N-8 Sep. IV-10
Yojoa: Singe Accroupi	Longyear 1952: fig. 80d	
Manzanillo: Farolillo?	Gerstle 1988: 144 Hendon et al. 1990: 187 Viel 1993: fig. 79h	Group 9N-8 Plaza B
Selva: Concerto	Longyear 1952: fig. 80b	
Selva: Troubador	Longyear 1952: fig. 109h PM 96-35-20/C1039	Mound 59 Tomb 11
Selva: Troubador	Viel 1993: fig. 79g	
Nebla: Picadilly	Gerstle 1988: 144 Hendon et al. 1990: 184 Viel 1993: fig. 80e	Group 9N-8 Plaza B
Nebla: Picadilly	Longyear 1952: fig. 101p, fig. 117c	Tomb 13–42
Nebla: Picadilly	Longyear 1952: fig. 101r, fig. 110c	Group 5 Tomb 3–38

TABLE 3A *Contexts of Ulua Polychrome vessels excavated at Copan, classified (cont.)*

Class/subclass	Source	Intra-site context (if noted)
Nebula: Picadilly	Longyear 1952: p. 36 (no illus.)	Mound 36 Grave 24
Nebula: Picadilly	Longyear 1952: fig. 80c	
Nebula: Sphinx B	Longyear 1952: fig. 101q, fig. 105a	Court 4 Grave 1–38

Identified by Rosemary A. Joyce from photographs or examination of original vessels.

sometimes substitute a head with a more pronounced nose, shown wearing a profile serpent headdress, in upper and lower bands or as a freestanding motif (Figures 15 and 16), but when they depict complete figures (usually shown kneeling), these have the same schematic body form as on Mellizo subclass (Figures 10 and 15).

It is thus especially striking that, at the same time that Ulua Polychrome workshops introduced novel animal themes, they changed the way anthropomorphic figures were depicted. Human figures are shown singly on Travesia Bombero subclass and Selva Troubador subclass vessels, usually repeated twice. On Bombero vessels, figures stand, leaning forward, and alternate with monkeys or water birds with the monkey reduced to protruding lug heads above. On Troubador vessels, human figures are shown seated with arms stretched forward, separated only by geometric designs. In both cases, the figures are rendered with more realism than previously, with details of the face, body, and even fingers carefully delineated. These human images wear costumes that have repeated novel features, such as animal heads at the rear of the belt and detailed turbans, loincloths, and hip cloths.

The same approach to delineating figures with details of costume, body painting, hair treatment and headdresses typifies Yojoa subclass Molinero. A few Molinero subclass vessels depict female figures, shown with marked breasts and wearing long skirts or more enveloping robes (Figure 28). In contrast to the single human figures on Travesia Bombero and Selva Troubador subclasses, on Yojoa Molinero vessels, multiple figures can be shown engaged in action together. Two standing figures may face each other, or a figure may

TABLE 3B *Contexts of Ulua Polychrome vessels excavated at Copan, unclassified*

<b>Class/subclass</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Intra-site context (if noted)</b>
Ulua Polychrome	Diamanti 2000:162	Group 9N-8 Patio E Burial xv-59
Ulua Polychrome	Diamanti 2000:162	Group 9N-8 Patio E Burial xv-60
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 131	Group 9M-22 Plaza A
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 131	Group 9N-8 Plaza B
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 133	Group 9N-8 Plaza D Str. 63 Burial
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 133	Group 9N-8 Plaza K Str 106 Burial
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 133	Group 9N-8 Plaza K Str 106 Burial
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 133, 145–46	Group 9N-8 Plaza D Str 63 Tomb
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 144 Hendon et al. 1990:187	Group 9N-8 Plaza B
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 144 Hendon et al. 1990:188	Group 9N-8 Plaza B
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 145	Group 9N-8 Plaza D
Ulua Polychrome	Gerstle 1988: 145	Group 9N-8 Plaza K

Identified as Ulua Polychrome by excavators. No photograph available or photograph details indistinguishable.

stand facing an object (Figure 26). These are examples of what becomes a general feature of the latest Ulua Polychromes in the eighth and ninth centuries: multi-figure compositions that can treat the entire vessel as a single surface.

### *Complex Compositions*

When compared to the highly conventionalized human figures on Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes that precede them, the figures on later Ulua Polychrome vessels appear realistic. The depiction of more naturally rendered anthropomorphic figures wearing more carefully delineated costumes has repeatedly been attributed to some kind of indefinite influence from Lowland Maya polychrome traditions of the seventh to eighth centuries. This fails to take into account the local precedents for more realistic human figures presented by the Dedalos class (Figures 1 and 5). The production of Dedalos class vessels with realistic human figures would have been part of the generational memory of potters in the late seventh century. The products of the earlier potters, separated by only a few generations, would have been visible even more easily than today as broken sherds encountered in excavations for construction of burials, storage pits, and house foundations. That such memory existed is not simply speculation. At least one potter produced a vessel whose form and color choice is consistent with the late eighth century, painted with a series of figures whose face, body shape, and costume echo those of the Santa Rita class (Peabody Museum 39-8-20/6524).

There was never any question of the ability of the people making Ulua Polychromes to execute more realistic images of human figures. At the same time that Ulua Polychromes were made and used, human figurines or figural sculptures crowning incense burner lids were modeled and molded in three dimensions (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013). Nor are the specific details of human representations that rapidly became as common as animal figures on Ulua Polychromes in the eighth century derived from foreign pots. The actions, costume, and objects human figures are shown using all reflect locally rooted practices and preferences of people in the Ulua Polychrome producing areas. Yet it is during this time period that we can identify some very specific imagery, and ways of conceptualizing painted compositions on vessels, that may be traces of ties between specific settlements in Honduras and others in the Maya Lowlands of Belize and Guatemala.

New Ulua Polychrome classes arising in the eighth century in the lower Ulua Valley, Lake Yojoa area, and Comayagua Valley, the Santana, Nebla, and

Tenampua classes, present the closest analogues for scenes familiar from Lowland Maya art of the eighth century in their imagery and composition. Multi-figure scenes found on at least some pots in each of these classes show human actors interacting with each other and with objects held in their hands, placed in front of them, or on which they sit. The human imagery found in all of these groups—Santana subclasses Salmo and Bilbao (Figures 31, 32, and 33), Nebla subclass Picadilly (Figures 35 and 37), and Tenampua subclasses Capitan and Cefiro (Figures 34, 41, 42, 43 and 44) in particular—exhibits an overlapping set of actions, costume elements, and non-human elements. Human actors and the objects with which they interact on these vessels are sometimes placed in traditional formats, framed above and below by geometric designs, in scenes repeated two or three times around a vessel, like the normal presentation on Yojoa subclass Molinero. In other cases, the human figures occupy a new pictorial space, conceptually treating the entire exterior surface as a single field for a unified scene. It is in vessels using such new approaches to pictorial space that we can see potential impacts on local potters of knowledge of specific Lowland Maya conventions of vase painting.

Yojoa subclass Molinero vessels in which figures face central icons are the simplest version of scenes of interaction, and likely were the earliest complex compositions in the Ulua Polychrome tradition, but they bear the least comparison with Lowland Maya imagery. In most cases, only a single human figure is shown (Figure 26), facing a central icon surmounted by an animal (discussed further in Chapter 10). These vessels begin a sequence in which multi-figure human compositions engage in ritual actions that correspond to the materials found in archaeological sites in the lower Ulua Valley, at Lake Yojoa, and in Comayagua.

### *New Pictorial Spaces*

Santana, Nebla, and Tenampua classes break sharply with their predecessors in a number of ways, with new emphases on multi-figure compositions featuring human actors, depictions of additional animals, and fundamental changes in the way that vessels are painted. Where previously, cylinder vases were laid out with secondary designs above and below a main field of design, now, cylinder vases have a single band of designs limited to close to the rim, framing scenes that use the vessel base as a baseline. Many of the new bowls, dishes, and vases use wide fields of black, either as the background for designs painted in tones of red, orange, and cream, or as a second continuous slip over a light yellow or cream background left visible in round panels filled with images. These new

practices of painting the vessel surface frame images that now more often can be read as continuous scenes.

Nebula class, developing in the Yojoa or Comayagua regions, includes bowls (Figures 53, 54 and 55) and dishes (Figures 56 and 57) as well as cylinders. There are close ties between Yojoa class and Nebula class, suggesting that Nebula vessels were developed in later generations by crafters who succeeded those who originally innovated Yojoa class vessels.

Subclass Rodeo bowls continue to feature animals, often in circular panels on reserve against a black background (Figures 53, 54 and 55). In addition to anthropomorphized monkeys, bowls commonly depict peccaries or crabs. Nebula subclass Sphinx dishes (Figures 56 and 57), successors to Yojoa subclass Pantano dishes, depict a wider range of animals. They add images of felines and of a bird with its head turned towards its tail that Viel (1978) identified as



FIGURE 53

*Bowl (Nebula: Rodeo subclass Uluu Polychrome).*

LOS NARANJOS, LAKE YOJOA; COLLECTED BY STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL, 1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378537-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.



FIGURE 54

*Bowl (Nebula: Rodeo subclass Uluu Polychrome).*

LA CEIBA, LAKE YOJOA; COLLECTED BY STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL, 1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378548-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.



FIGURE 55

*Bowl (Nebla: Rodeo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

TRAVESIA, ULUA VALLEY. COURTESY OF THE MIDDLE AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, TULANE UNIVERSITY (H.I.58 37-9352).

PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 56

*Dish (Nebla: Sphinx subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

LA CEIBA, LAKE YOJOA; COLLECTED BY STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL, 1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378563-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.

a nightjar (Figure 57) to the existing repertoire of water birds, crabs, and peccaries. A unique subclass of Nebla, Tigrillo, is made up of effigy jars modeled and painted as felines (Figure 38). Some of these include images of humans on the side, perhaps to be understood as people inside feline costumes.

The main medium for human figures within Nebla class is the subclass Picadilly, composed of cylinder vases with solid tripod lug supports (Figures 35 and 37). Many of these vessels show single costumed figures, repeated multiple times. Some Nebla subclass Picadilly vases feature multi-figure scenes (for example, Figure 58, discussed in more detail in Chapter 10). Individual elements in some multifigure scenes can be identified with items also seen in Lowland Maya art. The most common such element is a flexible cloth bag hung



FIGURE 57  
*Dish (Nebla: Sphinx subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 JARAL, LAKE YOJOA. COURTESY OF  
 THE MIDDLE AMERICAN RESEARCH  
 INSTITUTE, TULANE UNIVERSITY  
 (H.1.80 37-7143). PHOTO BY RUSSELL  
 N. SHEPTAK.

over the wrist, which in Maya art is interpreted as an incense bag. On some Picadilly subclass vases, a building is indicated in cross-section, with a back wall and full roof over a stepped platform (for example, Luke 2012:Figure 8.8). While not particularly common, similar depictions of cross-sectioned buildings are known from Lowland Maya Classic Polychromes (Reents-Budet 1994:319, No. 11, No. 89). Based on composition and painting style, Reents-Budet has identified the likely source for one such vessel as the Naranjo region, and a second, belonging to the Codex-style group, as from near Nakbe, both in the Guatemalan Department of Peten, dating them to AD 750–800 and AD 672–830, respectively (Reents-Budet 1994:181; Reents-Budet et al. 1997). This corresponds well to the late eighth century dates suggested for Nebla class.

Some Nebla class vessels can be compared closely to vessels made in the Altun Ha style (Pendergast 1979; Sheptak 1987). Altun Ha's local polychrome style, compositionally confirmed as manufactured in Belize, is represented in Honduras by the Quetzal vase recovered from a tomb at Copan (Reents-Budet 1994:198–203). Nebla subclass Rodeo bowls bear close resemblances to bowls from Altun Ha in the range of animals depicted, and the use of black backgrounds (Sheptak 1987). While both the bowls and cylinder vases from Altun Ha can be assigned to the Petkanche Orange Polychrome type, Reents-Budet (1994:229, n. 65) says that the bowls were probably products either of distinct workshops, or were intended for distinct audiences and functions in Belize.

Both bowls and vases made at Altun Ha share with Nebla subclass Rodeo the depiction of a specific frontal mask (Figure 59). Reents-Budet (1994:200)



FIGURE 58 *Vase (Nebla: Picadilly subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

LA CEIBA SITE 2, LAKE YOJOA; EXCAVATED 1936. COPYRIGHT PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY, PM# 38-45-20/5330.

describes the motif at Altun Ha as a Maya mountain mask combined with a “butterfly motif whose origins were in highland Mexico at Teotihuacan.” Butterfly motifs, also considered to be derived from Teotihuacan imagery, were carved as jade pendants made at Salitrón Viejo, in the Sulaco Valley of Honduras, around the same time that this image was added to the repertoire of Honduran pottery painting (Hirth and Grant Hirth 1993).

Additional overlap with specific elements of Lowland Maya art can be identified in the contemporary Santana class cylinders of the Lower Ulua Valley



FIGURE 59

*Bowl (Nebla: Rodeo subclass Ulua Polychrome).*

JARAL, LAKE YOJOA. COURTESY OF THE MIDDLE AMERICAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE, TULANE UNIVERSITY (H.I.74 35-7029). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

(Figures 31, 32, 33 and 36). Santana class is made up entirely of cylinders, and distinctions between the proposed subclasses (Salmo and Bilbao) are subtle, the most diagnostic depending on having intact vessel bases with supports showing the manner of attachment to the vessel body. Unfortunately, very few examples of complete Santana vessels have been reported, so in general, I identify vessels as Santana class, rather than specifying the subclass. Both subclasses, in any event, can be traced to the same area of production: the lower Ulua valley. Understanding their designs depends on relating sherds to the few reconstructed vessels known.

Three themes occur repeatedly. One shows a serpent, often with feline pelage markings, emerging from a univalve shell (Figure 32). A second depicts a human figure or bust emerging from a serpent (Figure 33). The third common depiction is one or more standing figures, often wearing feline costume (Figure 36). Such standing figures may be repeated two or three times around the vessel, and may be depicted as anthropomorphized felines or humans wearing feline skin capes, gauntlets, boots, or feline head helmets. Some vases show one human figure seated on a raised platform, facing a second figure or figures standing at ground level.

In a few cases, the main theme on Santana vessels is a single depiction of the mountain mask noted as a feature of the polychromes of Altun Ha, and also seen on Nebla subclass Rodeo bowls. Details on this mask may match those of some raised platforms on which a human figure sits. This platform or seat may have a back, sometimes marked as an open zoomorphic mouth.

Each of these designs has analogues in Lowland Maya art. These do not represent a generalized Maya influence, but rather correspond to motifs from

a series of specific sites. Altun Ha is one. Ornamented snail shells appear on Altun Ha area vessels as the main motif on polychromes with black backgrounds (Reents-Budet 1994:250–51), like those typical of most Santana class Ulua Polychromes. Four-petaled flower motifs occur on both Altun Ha polychrome cylinders and Santana class Ulua Polychromes (Figure 60).

Altun Ha is not the only Maya site to which specific Ulua Polychromes made at this time may be linked. The theme of a person emerging from a serpent is perhaps best known from the carved stone lintels of Yaxchilan, Guatemala, a comparison made by Robinson (1978). It also occurs on multiple Codex style vessels created in the Nakbe area (Reents-Budet 1994:328, no. 30). In these Codex-style vessels, the personage emerging from the serpent is normally the Maya God N, a supernatural being with signs of age, often shown wearing a netted turban.

The representation of a seated figure facing standing figures is a staple of lowland Maya polychrome painting. Vessels showing enthroned lords suggest this was primarily a theme of vessels from the Maya lowlands, especially the Peten (Reents-Budet 1994). It is uncommon or absent in the Highland Guatemalan Chama style, and also seems to be absent in the Altun Ha and Holmul stylistic and compositional groups common in sites in Belize.

The image of a person dressed in feline costume, at times including gloves and boots marked as feline skin, has no specific precedents in the part of the Maya lowlands closest to Honduras, but can be found farther inland. Similar costume is worn by a ruler shown dancing on a series of pots made in the eighth century at a site identified as Motul de San Jose, Peten, in what was originally called the Ik' style (Halperin and Foias 2010; Reents-Budet 1994:166; Reents-Budet et al. 2007). MatthewLooper (2009:132) has identified this feline dress as a costume employed at the site in historical rituals commemorated through dances by members of the ruling family.

While Motul de San Jose is relatively far from the lower Ulua Valley, the Museo de San Pedro Sula has in its collections a vessel reconstructed from sherds that portrays an elaborate scene with strong similarities in vessel form and design construction to the group of pots whose chemical composition links them to that site. The Museo de San Pedro Sula vessel (Figure 61) presents an enthroned person surrounded by standing figures shown at different levels, as if arrayed on stairs, something seen in vessels of the Motul de San Jose group. Like many of these, the pot in the Museo de San Pedro Sula is tall and narrow in diameter, slanting in slightly toward the top. Another vessel that is similar in shape, paste color, and motifs, although more badly eroded, was



FIGURE 60 *Vase (Santana: Bilbao subclass Ulua Polychrome),*  
ULUA VALLEY; EXCAVATED BY DOROTHY POPENOE, DONATED  
IN 1933. COPYRIGHT PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD  
COLLEGE, PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY,  
PM# 33-18-20/242.



FIGURE 61  
*Vase (import from Motul de San Jose region?).*  
MUSEO DE SAN PEDRO SULA. PHOTO COURTESY OF  
RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.



FIGURE 62 *Dish (Tenampua: Pentagone subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
MAIN MOUND, TENAMPUA; EXCAVATED BY DOROTHY  
POPENOE, 1927. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE  
AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
(161963). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

reconstructed from sherds recovered by G.B. Gordon at Santana, in a level with Travesia and Yojoa class Ulua Polychromes, which should date ca. 650–750 AD (Peabody Museum 97-22-20/C1732). Both of these vessels are likely imports from Maya sites (a topic I return to in Chapter 9).

A last notable theme found on a large number of Santana class Ulua Polychromes is the depiction of complex mat motifs covering all or large portions of the vessel, sometimes with round or rectangular panels filled with other motifs, including in some cases the four petaled flower (Figure 60). This kind of design was noted in the original ceramic report on Uaxactun, located in the central Peten (Smith 1955). Reents-Budet (1994:331, no. 37) illustrates a complete example from Uaxactun dating to the late seventh or eighth century. Uaxactun also happens to be the only site in the Peten where an Ulua marble vase has been recovered, in very late eighth or ninth century context (Joyce 1986; Luke 2010; Kidder 1947).

Typically, a solid black painted zone, reminiscent of Altun Ha area cylinders, surrounds images on Santana class Ulua Polychromes. Like these as well, Santana class vessels may have a band of glyphs above the main design field (for example, Peabody Museum 33-18-20/241). Rather than a full version of the multi-glyph inscription called the Primary Standard Series that is found on many lowland Maya vases, Honduran vessels normally repeat a single sign. The glyph selected is not, however, a random image or pseudoglyph: it is a very close rendition of the second glyph in the Primary Standard Sequence, in a graphic form typical of the Altun Ha region, a profile head of an aged person wearing a netted headdress (Reents-Budet 1994:199–201). On its own, this glyph can occur as a meaningful inscription on pottery, understood as implying the dedication of the vessel, perhaps by the infusion of sacred power (MacLeod and Reents-Budet 1994:124–25; Mora-Morin 2004; Stuart 1989). In addition to appearing on Santana class, this glyph is common on late Tenampua class vases (Figures 34 and 44).

Together, the reproduction of a specific glyph from the dedicatory text employed by painters of Maya polychrome vessels of the most restricted circulation, and the unusually close array of designs shared with similarly exclusive Lowland Maya pots, show that the makers of the Santana class of Ulua Polychromes were singularly close to users of lowland Maya pottery vessels. While the first impression given is of closest similarity to vessels from Altun Ha, based on the shared black background and variant glyph from the dedicatory inscription, Altun Ha does not provide a source for the specific imagery of enthroned figures, nor of figures emerging from serpents. As the fragmentary evidence of Lowland Maya vessels whose pieces were recovered in the lower Ulua Valley suggests, eighth century settlements in the central Ulua valley were

in direct or indirect contact with multiple Lowland Maya sites from Belize to the interior of the Peten, likely through specific alliances, social relationships, and intersite visits.

### *The Culmination of a Tradition*

Tenampua class is the final group of Ulua Polychromes that incorporated more realistic human imagery in the eighth century. Closely associated with, and probably originating at, the fortified hilltop settlement of the same name, the Tenampua class includes some subclasses that are likely contemporary with Santana and Nebla classes, and others that clearly are later.

Subclasses Congo and Cefiro (Figures 34 and 41) are composed of cylinder vases with tripod feet, while the subclass Pentagone is made up of a variety of low dishes with three supports (Figure 62, and Peabody Museum 57-34-20/20044, both excavated at Tenampua). A fourth subclass, Zarza, is composed of specialized pots, cylinders with lids and zones of spikes on the body, used as incense burners (Figure 39). Finally, some hemispherical bowls make up a low frequency subclass, Columpio. These four subclasses appear to be earliest, and examples are found together in deposits at Tenampua. In a second generation of production that persists later, potters of Tenampua workshops developed subclass Capitan (Figures 42, 43, and 44), incurved rim vases with ring bases. Subclass Mariposa, also developed later, added small jars, bowls with ring bases, and dishes, often rectangular, with four supports (Figure 63; Peabody Museum 57-34-20/20041, excavated at Tenampua, is an example of the jar form).

Both Cefiro and Capitan vases often have an upper band composed of repeated versions of the profile God N glyph with netted scarf found on Santana and Nebla Picadilly cylinder vases, sometimes with a vulture head replacing the human face (Figures 34 and 44). The same motif appears on less common vessel forms of Tenampua class, including ladle censers (Figure 40b) and lidded censers of the Zarza subclass (Figure 39). When this motif is not present, Tenampua class vessels typically display an upper band with a continuous terrace motif, executed in white paint on black (Figure 42 and 45). This Tenampua motif can appear on the interior wall of vessels (Figures 41, 43, and 62).

Animal themes on the earlier Tenampua class bowls and dishes are similar to those of Santana and Nebla subclass Picadilly: water birds, anthropomorphic monkeys, and felines. Human images on Cefiro subclass vases are similar to those on these other contemporary groups of Ulua Polychromes in costume, pose, and gesture. They may face centrally located icons (Figure 34a), as do the figures on Nebla subclass Picadilly and Yojoa subclass Molinero, and may share details of headdress and costume with these other Lake Yojoa to Comayagua classes (for example, compare Figures 34b and 35).

Cefiro and Capitan vases usually depict individual human figures or compositions of multiple figures, often with some figures standing and others seated (Figures 34, 42 and 43). The seated figures may be shown using distinctive benches with legs and even profile animal heads, clearly meant to represent the kind of stone benches made in Nicaragua and Costa Rica that are found at Tenampua and other neighboring sites (Figures 34b and 42).

Some Tenampua class vessels feature images that suggest specific Maya lowland connections distinct from those identified for Santana class. A repeated element held by standing or dancing figures on Tenampua vases is a straight staff supporting a banner of flexible material with flaps cut out, identical to the flapstaff of the lowland Maya (Figure 41). Looper (2003) argues that the flapstaff was used in dances in June, citing dated historical sculptures of Yaxchilan. A very specific identification between the western Maya lowlands and Tenampua might seem quite unlikely, but another new element on late Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes also can be related to images associated with astronomically-timed events in the Maya lowlands. Mariposa subclass dishes feature a frontal mask with goggle eyes and a trapezoidal framework (Figure 63). This is recognizable as an image called the War Serpent in studies of Classic Maya art, described as associated with warfare events related to the planet Venus (Carlson 1993:209).

The late Tenampua subclass Capitan is the only Ulua Polychrome group to feature images of individuals holding weapons (Figure 44). Both possible atlatls and more certainly identified spears and round shields are part of the costumes of figures on these vessels. Capitan subclass sometimes departs sharply from the manner of depicting human figures seen in Nebula Picadilly. Particularly striking are figures with long locks of hair, lacking any sign of the turbans or masks of earlier times (Figure 42). At times these figures are shown as entirely nude.

Las Vegas Polychrome, a white-slipped tradition which develops through innovations in the Comayagua region some time in the ninth or tenth century, continues the typical shapes of late Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes, incurved rim vases (Figure 64) and dishes with three or four supports (Musée Quai Branly 71.1998.3.6.1). Las Vegas Polychrome uses a new set of colors, favoring tones of orange and grey on white slip. Many of the motifs, from warriors holding spears or other weapons to a quincunx, are virtually interchangeable with Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes. The use of white slip, either as a second slip over orange, or as the first slip, actually was initiated in Comayagua with Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes. In some ways, Tenampua class is both the last development of the Ulua Polychrome tradition, and the first stage of the Las Vegas Polychrome tradition. One analyst recognized this by defining



FIGURE 63 *Dish (Tenampua: Mariposa subclass Ulua Polychrome).*  
 ATTRIBUTED TO COPAN TOMB, PRESENTED IN 1971. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF  
 THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (244300). PHOTO BY  
 NMAI PHOTO SERVICES.



FIGURE 64  
*Vase (Las Vegas Polychrome).*  
 COMAYAGUA. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE  
 AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
 (061231). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

Tenampua Polychrome as a type of its own, different from both Ulua Polychrome and Las Vegas Polychrome (Glass 1966).

Whether we treat Tenampua class as a ceramic group of its own (Glass 1966), or see it as the beginning of white slipped polychrome traditions, it stands apart as something more distinctive than any previous group of Ulua Polychromes. Yet it also is clearly part of that tradition: the final step in its development, the product of innovations within crafting traditions in the Comayagua Valley that had ceased to be shaped by a common history with the Ulua Valley, Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes were made and used by people whose international network of social relations extended both south and north, and engaged with particular intensity with the noble families of Copan (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013). In the Ulua Valley at the same time, polychromes were abandoned in favor of fine paste ceramics (Joyce 1993c; Lopiparo, Joyce, and Hendon 2005).

With an understanding of change and continuity at the scale of social time, over the many generations of production of Ulua Polychromes, we are able to see their development, similarities, and variation as reflections of decisions made by individual actors, reacting to events in their own lifetime, drawing on the generational memories and alliances that formed between families at different settlements. G.B. Gordon, in contrast, employed the scale of monumental time. He credited a collective Maya of Copan and Guatemala with originating the practices of painting naturalistic designs on pottery that he said the Ulua people “adopted,” implying a chronological priority that he never made explicit (Gordon 1898b:39). Gordon did not enjoy a concept of historical change that would have encouraged him to examine in detail his own excavated collections for evidence of transformation that was not “radical changes” or “advancement of the arts.” Coming to grips with how time and its passage could be understood in deposits from Honduras would be the work of those who came after Gordon, bringing us to the point where it is now possible to trace the development of Ulua Polychromes at specific sites in social time measured in generations. We can consider as a case in point Travesia, where Ulua Polychrome pottery was produced over a period of three hundred years, or translating into the temporal scale of the producers themselves, six or more generations.

### Excavating Travesia

Travesia is the main place where we know Erich Wittkugel conducted archaeological investigations. Wittkugel’s collection from Travesia, today curated in

Berlin, contains an exceptional range of pottery dating from at least 1000 BC to the sixteenth century AD, along with obsidian objects and other unusual materials. Unfortunately, no notes survive to tell us precisely where within the site Wittkugel excavated. However, there is indirect evidence that Wittkugel worked near the recognized zone of monumental architecture recorded by later scholars. Karl Sapper (1898), who relied on Wittkugel's information, characterized Travesia as a substantial site with stone architecture. In contrast, Gordon (1898b), while acknowledging the presence of stone mounds at Travesia, denied any connection between them and the buried deposits he excavated.

In 1936 and 1937, the major architecture at Travesia was subject to extensive excavations and a contour map of these structures was produced showing the locations explored at that time (Stone 1941:58–86). Six buildings were located around the perimeter of a shared platform, and a seventh subdivided the area into two enclosed spaces, together measuring 15 by 17 meters. A ball court oriented east of north was located off the southwest corner of this shared building platform. Two other large platforms ran parallel to the elevated group on the south, with a small platform located in the center of this more open space east of the ballcourt.

The buildings tested in the central group at Travesia were constructed of cut stone blocks, and at least one had the kinds of blocks used for vaulted roofing lying on the floor of the abandoned rooms (Stone 1941:66). Excavation photographs in the Peabody Museum archives show that the courtyard and walls of all the buildings were coated in thick white stucco. While Stone (1941:59) identified the materials used as limestone and sandstone, in the 1980s geoarchaeologist Kevin Pope (personal communication, 1983) identified cut stone blocks used in architecture at the site as rhyolite or volcanic tuff. The same material was used for a series of carved stones that would once have formed part of decorative facades on the building, likely ornaments on the roof. Sapper (1898:137, fig. 11) had illustrated a sculpture collected by Wittkugel, in the form of a bird head made of volcanic stone “of considerable size.” This quite possibly was a marker from the ball court later recognized at Travesia, or at the very least, a tenoned stone from the main group at the site.

At Travesia, below a deposit post-dating the use of Ulua Polychromes, Gordon encountered pieces of Ulua Polychrome vases with an array of other materials, at depths of five to twelve feet below the modern land surface (Table 4). Sherds came from Ulua Polychrome vases, bowls, and small jars that can be assigned to the period between 700 and 850 AD. Missing from this deposit are ceramics for storing or preparing food, although Gordon did gather such objects from other depths at Travesia, and from deposits of the same period at other

TABLE 4 *Stratigraphy and chronology of George Byron Gordon's excavated assemblages*

<b>Gordon excavation description</b>	<b>"Playa de los muertos"</b>	<b>"Playa de los muertos" pit 2</b>	<b>Exc. 1 Santana</b>	<b>Exc. 2 Santana</b>	<b>Exc. 3 Travacillo</b>
<b>Peabody Museum catalogue description</b>	Exc. 1	Exc. 1	Exc. 2	Exc. 3	Exc. 4
<b>Modern site name</b>	Lagartijo	Lagartijo	Santana	Santana	Travesia
<b>Terminal Classic 850–1000 AD</b>			6'–12' lens at 12'	6'–20' lens at 6' (1.5' thick) lens at 12' (3' thick) lens at 18' (1.5' thick)	2'–4'
<b>Late Classic 650–850 AD</b>	5'–20'	6'–18' lens at 8' (2' thick)			5'–12'
<b>late</b>					
<b>early</b>			14'–26' lens at 20'		14'–20'
<b>Early Classic 450–650 AD</b>	21'–24'	lens at 15' (2' thick) 20'–22'			
<b>Middle Formative 700–300 BC</b>	26'–30'	23'–25' lens at 25' (2' thick)	28'–32' lens at 25'	30'–32' lens at 26' (1.5' thick)	

Late Classic late deposits contained Santana or Selva class Ulua Polychromes.

Late Classic early deposits contained Travesia or Yojoa class Ulua Polychromes.

Early Classic deposits contained Santa Rita subclass Mellizo and Dedalos class Ulua Polychromes.

sites. Rather than being general domestic trash, this deposit likely represents debris from ritual activities. Figurines and figural whistles formed a large part of the collection recorded at this depth. One unique effigy figure of a dog, its body covered in panels ornamented with profile human heads, was included. A few objects testify to body ornamentation: ceramic stamps, a shell lip plug, ceramic beads and maskettes. Bark beaters index the production of bark cloth, material used for costume, regalia, and to ornament ancestral bone bundles.

The unusual nature of this deposit recalls the comments of von den Steinen (1898:569) contesting Gordon's description of Travesia, based on his independent review of Wittkugel's collection:

One thinks of the annual- and cyclic- festivals, in which all of the dishes were smashed and thrown away. The massiveness of the sherds of each type here on the river, the ordinary as well as the beautiful figurative vessels, would be understandable ethnologically; also understandable would be the whistles, the musical instrument of the priesthood. The layers would then correspond to the periods of feasts. They would, if the word is allowed, be viewed as a *Sacralmöddinger* ["Sacred midden"; my translation].

The material from this excavation by Gordon is the deposit that I drew on in sketching out the events I suggested took place at Travesia in Chapter 4. There I interpreted the deposit as the remains of a feast in which people from the leading family of Travesia distributed fine new polychrome vases to visitors from both distant sites and residents of neighboring house compounds. Where Gordon's imagination was tied to understanding whole sites and regions as evidence of peoples at different stages of development, today we can reimagine the materials he and other early archaeologists excavated as products of the actions of people concerned with negotiating their place in social relations from year to year, generation to generation, producing deposits that are continuous, marked by changes more subtle than those envisaged in Gordon's nineteenth-century models.

#### *Excavating Travesia Again*

My understanding of Travesia is shaped by my own excavations there, in a house compound at a distance from the main group, a century after Wittkugel and Gordon carried out their work. In spring of 1983, the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History received reports that subsistence excavators had recovered Uluá Marble vases in the cane fields that by then covered Travesia. I was asked to undertake excavations there (Joyce 1985:504–22; 1987). I began with a foot survey in 124 hectares of recently cleared cane fields that surrounded the 25 hectare core area of the site, which was signaled by a dense cluster of trees where the elevated platform with major architecture mapped by Doris Stone was still preserved, although plowed. Surface collected materials in my cane field survey included fragments of pottery from as early as 250 AD to as late as around 1000 AD, in clusters that represented all that remained of plowed house platforms.

Closer to the preserved architecture, I noted almost continuous placement of trenches from the informal excavations that in some cases were still ongoing, unchecked by authorities. The advantage of this situation was that I was able to identify two locations for our controlled excavations where the exposed stratigraphy showed well-defined deposits that I expected would help us understand the history of Travesia, something not completely clarified in previous excavations, including test excavations in the previous decade (Lincoln 1979; Robinson, Hasemann, and Veliz 1978; Sheehy 1978, 1982; Sheehy and Veliz 1977).

I started two excavations, one quite near the zone of monumental architecture, and a second more removed from the main architecture. In both areas, a continuous history of dwelling in place from before 450 AD to around 1000 AD was described (Joyce 1983, 1985, 1987). In the excavation more distant from the center, I reached a depth of 2.7 m below the surface, at the deepest part of the excavation removing 75 centimeters of river soils without artifacts, and then reaching a surface from an earlier, buried ground level predating the development of what in the twentieth century was visible as the settlement of Travesia. At this depth, no polychrome or other related painted pottery was noted, and due to other constraints, my excavations ended there.

The earliest evidence of built structures came from about 2 meters below the modern surface (Figure 65). These were already associated with polychrome painted pottery produced earlier than anything in Gordon's collection from Travesia, belonging to Dedalos class (Generation One). The narrow win-

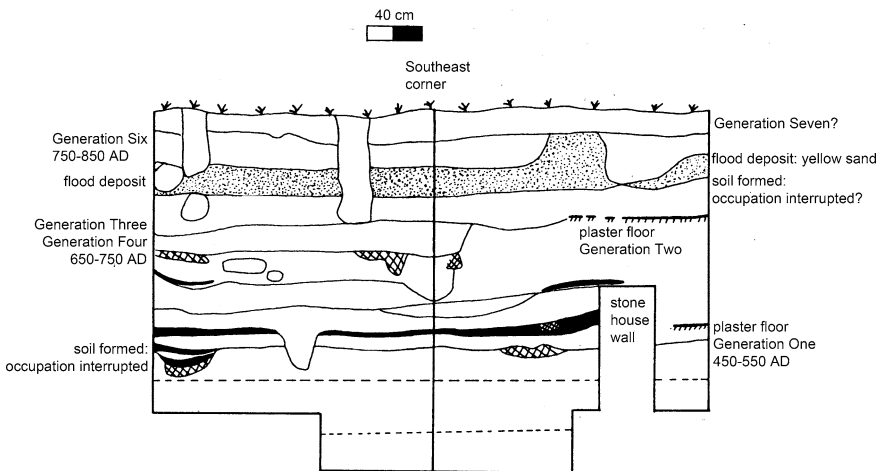


FIGURE 65 *Profile of area at Travesia excavated in 1983.*

DRAWING BY ROSEMARY A. JOYCE.

dow that we were able to open in the midst of looter's pits showed the edge of a deeply buried stone wall foundation for a room with a plastered floor, rebuilt at least twice. Outside this building were the remains of a moderately large oven, of which the circular walls, base, and flue were well preserved. Above ground during use, since there was no prehispanic tradition of baking food in Honduras this would most likely have served for firing pottery, like similar features reported by others (Stone and Turnbull 1941). Other firing facilities recognized more recently in excavations at Cerro Palenque, associated with disposal of molds for shaping ceramic vessels, are similar to this feature from Travesia (Joyce, Hendon and Lopiparo 2014). The interpretation of the oven at Travesia as a ceramic firing facility is reinforced by the recovery among the discarded potsherds here of over-fired sherds (sherds held too long at a high temperature, or reaching too high a temperature, resulting in distinctive colors, surface texture, and paste characteristics).

The sherds associated with this house and its oven include many that belong to the earliest group of Ulua Polychromes, Dedalos class, manufactured between 450 and 550 AD. This excavation provided the inspiration for the narrative in Chapter 1, presenting the residents of Travesia as among the early innovators in the valley making new polychrome ceramics. Other pieces came from red-on-orange vessels, the existing tradition of painted pottery established for centuries, from which Ulua Polychrome makers adopted slip, paint, and some vessel forms (compare Figure 2).

Flood deposits covered this early house and oven, and the next features we documented were remains of a new building, again with a plastered floor (Generation Two). Whether the possible kiln was rebuilt is impossible to say, because looters had removed the upper deposits immediately over it. What is clear is that potters supplying residents here continued to innovate new polychrome designs.

Ulua polychromes typical of the period from 650 to 750 AD recovered from pits postdating this plaster floored building (Generations Three and Four) show a prevalence of monkey designs (compare Figure 20), also featured on the red-on-orange vessels that make their last appearance in these deposits. This suggested the idea that the people of Travesia had a significant connection to this animal. Indirectly, the same deposits testify to the patronage at Travesia of marble vase carving (Luke and Tykot 2007), through the inclusion of fragments from small mold-made effigies of the larger marble vases.

A deposit of yellow sand on top of these features was identified by Kevin Pope (1985) as evidence of a major shift in the location of the main course of the Ulua River (Generation Five). Following this event, use of the area changed slightly; the sequence of plaster-floored houses was not renewed. Instead, the

area was employed as a site for disposal of waste from production of stone tools, including prepared cores and obsidian blades made from them, and small drills made from locally available chert and quartzite. These probably were tools used to work other materials in this area that did not leave traces, such as wood, shell, or bone. The trash included animal bones and river clam, crab, and snail shells, indicating that the stone tool production and use in this area was part of domestic life, along with food production and consumption. Ulua Polychrome sherds mixed with these lithics and faunal remains would have been made between 750 and 850 AD, and so were contemporary with the upper-most deposits where Gordon recovered Ulua Polychromes in his Travesia excavations (Generation Six).

After the period when they made and used these late Ulua Polychromes, across the site, the people of Travesia replaced locally produced polychrome serving vessels with unslipped, incised fine paste pottery (Sheehy 1982), the Baracoa Fine Paste group (Joyce 1993c; Lopiparo, Joyce and Hendon 2005). In the last level that I excavated at Travesia, sherds from Baracoa vessels were deposited along with sherds from Las Vegas Polychrome vessels, presumably imported from Yojoa or Comayagua (Generation Seven?).

The potters who provisioned the final residents living in this area of the site also adapted local pastes and mold technology to make new bowls with impressed masks on the exterior, white slipped and with red rim bands. Gordon recovered examples of these unusual mold-made vessels along with Baracoa Fine Paste pottery at Travesia, at depths of 2 to 4 feet. In the area where I excavated, cultivation of cane fields had moved around all but about ten centimeters of this level, which might once have been part of equally deep deposits.

Gordon was unprepared to interpret the stratigraphic situation presented by the Ulua valley, where the activity of tropical rivers rapidly buried traces of successive generations of residents living in the same places over periods of thousands of years. Yet even employing very thick excavation units of twelve inches, Gordon collected distinct assemblages that reflect particular spans of time in the experience of the families living in these places over many generations. With finer excavation methods, in the late twentieth century, it proved possible to dissect sites like Travesia and identify multiple surfaces superimposed over deposits produced during much briefer periods of time, and even recognize momentary events like a millennial flood or the discard of trash after a single event. The development of understanding of chronology, from Gordon's rudimentary notions of progressive stages of development to a modern archaeologist's ability to read decades, years, and events, began with the next archaeologists to seriously address understanding Ulua Polychromes, when field research in Honduras resumed in the 1920s.

### Rediscovering Time

In 1932, a promise to send a report on systematic archaeological work in northern Honduras was transmitted to the Peabody Museum, Harvard University by an independent researcher named Dorothy Popenoe. This was the culmination of years of communication by Popenoe seeking guidance for her foray into a scholarly field new to her from A.M. Tozzer, dean of Maya archaeology and curator at the Peabody Museum (Joyce 1994).

Popenoe had trained as a botanical illustrator and was a successful researcher at Kew Gardens and the United States National Herbarium. Her move into archaeology in Honduras started when she accompanied her husband, botanist Wilson Popenoe, assigned starting in 1925 to develop an experimental plant station near Tela on the north coast for the United Fruit Company (Rosengarten 1991). The construction of the Lancetilla facility near Tela disturbed an archaeological site, and the well-trained natural historian documented what was being uncovered and wrote an article on the excavations that was later published (Popenoe and Popenoe 1931). The discoveries at Lancetilla sparked her interest in Honduran antiquities, and she soon attempted studies of copper bells collected from caves in the area, beginning an intensive period of engagement with Honduran archaeology.

Starting in the late 1920s, Dorothy Popenoe initiated a correspondence with the leading archaeologist at Harvard in an effort to bring her work in the new field up to contemporary standards. Tozzer was encouraging but firm in his opinion that Popenoe needed to direct her attention to the most significant questions, as he defined them. Foremost among these was the question of the relationship in time between polychrome pottery and monochrome pottery of the Ulua region.

Popenoe's own early work was directed more at understanding individual sites. After her study of Lancetilla, in 1927 Popenoe had, on her own initiative, undertaken a second study of a Honduran archaeological site, Tenampua. She conducted excavations in the mounds that were all that remained of the cobble architecture of the site (Popenoe 1928). Among the objects she recovered was a complete Ulua Polychrome bowl, which she deposited in 1928 in the Heye Foundation in New York City (Figure 62).

Subsequently, she initiated work at Cerro Palenque, a hilltop site located in the lower Ulua Valley (Stone 1941). No notes or reports, and only a few photographs now in the Peabody Museum, have survived from this project. Coming after her work at Tenampua, it suggests that Popenoe's initial intention was to continue work in sites with visible architecture that dotted the Honduran landscape. Perhaps she was seeking to make a comparison between

Tenampua and Cerro Palenque, two of a small number of Honduran sites located on hilltops.

By her own account, in February 1928 she interrupted her work at Cerro Palenque (described as “some ruins on a hill near Pimienta”) to follow a guide to a place she identified as where Gordon had conducted his excavation 1 (Table 4) in the 1890s (Popenoe 1934:62). Starting with that visit, she undertook work at the location, which she called Playa de los Muertos following Gordon’s precedent. Popenoe’s work at Playa de los Muertos included excavations in 1928 and 1929 (Popenoe 1934). The collections she made were donated to the Peabody Museum in 1929.

In all, Popenoe excavated sixteen burials at Playa de los Muertos, ten with pottery vessels and other objects that Tozzer’s student George Vaillant (1934) would analyze after her unexpected death in 1932. But Playa de los Muertos was not the only work that occupied her over the intervening years, and for Popenoe it is clear that this project was part of a larger research design responding to Tozzer’s direction.

The manuscript that Popenoe promised would soon be ready to send to the Peabody Museum was to summarize a systematic and comparative project she had undertaken in 1930 and 1931, in direct response to Tozzer’s correspondence with her. Tozzer judged the burials Popenoe had excavated at Playa de los Muertos worthy of posthumous publication (Popenoe 1934) because of the light they shed on the definition of area-wide regularities in the earliest pottery then known. He did not feel the same need to publish her report on her polychrome project, perhaps because she had not found a burial with complete polychrome vessels, which he believed was necessary to place the pottery in context.

Yet it is in her unpublished report on the stratigraphic superposition of different pottery types, titled “Two Expeditions in Search of Polychrome Pottery,” that we see a shift from older explanations based on assumptions of cultural stages of development to an empirically grounded model of change over time. Popenoe (1932) self-consciously connected this work to the beginning made by Gordon, writing:

thirty-five years ago, when the Ulua Valley was still clothed in a tangle of dense jungle, an incident occurred which served to arouse the suspicion that beneath its tropical forests and within its stratified banks there lay hidden the story of a vanished race.

That “incident” was Gordon’s excavations. Reading Gordon’s report was what motivated Popenoe to write to the Peabody Museum originally.

Popenoe thought about the issue of stratification in a way different from both Gordon and Tozzer. She observed a regularity in the superposition of monochrome and polychrome pottery:

Perhaps one of the most striking problems is the riddle of the different types of pottery. At certain points in the river—for example, Playa de los Muertos... all the pottery found in both upper and lower strata is of the simple monochrome type...while at Rancheria, about eight kilometers upstream on the same side, a rich dump of polychrome ware yielded fragments as beautiful as some of the finest Central American examples.... It seems inconceivable that these two distinct types of ware could have been manufactured by the same people, and equally strange, that tribes differing widely in cultural traits could have been found living synchronously in such close proximity.

POPENOE 1932

The question was, were the different kinds of pottery really “synchronous”? Gordon’s original collections, languishing unstudied, already provided the answer, the same one Popenoe would reach through her own new fieldwork.

### *Returning to Gordon’s Excavations*

Gordon’s excavations at Santana and at Playa de los Muertos (which he called Lagartijo, and did not describe in detail in his publication) each produced deep stratigraphic deposits, reaching to 32 feet (almost 10 meters) in some places (Table 4). The deepest levels in his two excavations at Playa de los Muertos, and in the two he carried out at Santana, yielded many examples of spouted polished buff and red bottles, and other jars and bottles in the same surface finish. With Popenoe’s (1934) excavations these were recognized as products of an early period of occupation, today known to correspond to between 900 and 200 BC (Joyce, Hendon and Sheptak 2008).

Lenses of sediment that Gordon excavated at Playa de los Muertos, next in sequence above these early strata, were apparently deposited following a considerable break in time. From these slightly higher levels came examples of early Ulua Polychromes (Dedalos subclass Chac and Bandeja, and Santa Rita subclass Mellizo). These polychrome bowls, plates, and vases were deposited along with red slipped bowls and plain jars.

The latest ceramics Gordon collected at Playa de los Muertos were from concentrations of cultural materials separated by many feet of sediment from the earlier lenses. These more superficially buried deposits contained sherds of the latest group of Ulua Polychromes made in the lower Ulua Valley (Santana

class), and of polychromes from the Lake Yojoa area contemporary with them, as well as small, mold-made bowls with impressed designs of profile human heads, similar to profile heads painted on the Ulua Polychromes in the same strata. These are identifiable as part of what today is called the Tacamiche Group of ceramics (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993).

Gordon's excavations at Santana yielded fewer lenses with Ulua Polychromes than did his work at Playa de los Muertos. At both of his excavations at Santana, the latest deposits he excavated contained sherds of what today is called the Baracoa Fine Paste group typical of the final occupation at Cerro Palenque (Joyce 1993; Lopiparo, Joyce and Hendon 2005). These distinctive unpainted vessels were found along with painted pottery that made up Gordon's Group C, composed of what today are called Las Flores Polychrome and Sulaco Polychrome (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). There were no identifiable examples of Ulua Polychromes in these most superficial deposits at Santana.

Gordon's first excavation at Santana located a second lens of cultural material at around 20 feet deep (around six meters). Ulua Polychromes, many with monkey designs including monkey heads modeled as lugs (examples of both Yojoa subclass Tiotivo jars, and Travesia subclass Bombero cylinders) were part of this deposit. Modeled lugs like these were the features that Gordon used to define his ceramic Group B, which he felt were local in origin and without Maya influence.

At Travesia the materials Gordon collected came from three distinct strata: one from 2 to 4 feet deep; a second from 5 to 12 feet; and a third from 14 to 20 feet deep. The separation between these layers was not as extensive as at the other two locations, and chronologically, they represent a more continuous sequence of pottery. Ulua Polychromes were present in the lower and middle levels, while the upper level yielded polychromes of Gordon's Group C (Las Flores Polychrome and Sulaco Polychrome) and a variety of carved, fine unslipped, and incised bowls and vases. Abundant whistles, stamps, and figurines were present in the lower and middle levels, but only a few figurines came from the upper level. Looking at these collections from a modern perspective, it is clear that the upper levels in Gordon's excavations at Travesia correspond to what others would later find there as well: a final occupation at the end of the period of Ulua Polychrome production by people who had replaced Ulua polychrome pottery with a new style of fine, plain pottery, the Baracoa Fine Paste group (Joyce 1987; Sheehy 1982).

The lowest lens Gordon excavated at Travesia contained Ulua Polychromes identifiable with the early stages of development of the tradition (Dedalos subclass Bandeja and Santa Rita subclass Arrodiarse; see Figures 8 and 10).

Also found in this level were examples of a local painted jar with matte finish, Las Flores Polychrome, which Gordon included in his Group C. An equally important part of his group C present in these levels were red painted jars with panels left unslipped containing geometric and animal motifs, sherds Gordon described as red on polished yellow, today named the Marimba Red Painted type (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993).

In the middle deposits at Travesia, Gordon excavated materials that included sherds from Santana class Ulua Polychrome vases that developed in the eighth century AD, with black backgrounds and human figural scenes (Figures 31, 32 and 33). Assigned by him to his Group A, supposed to represent Maya influence, they are clearly of local manufacture, historically connected to the pottery that preceded them. But that did not stop these vases from being interpreted as evidence of the presence of a separate civilization, cultural group, or—in the new vocabulary of the 1920s and 1930s—tribe.

### Making Time for Ulua Polychromes

Popenoe did not, unfortunately, have detailed records from Gordon's excavations, nor the opportunity to study his collections. But what she did have was a sense of process and a dedication to empirical research that likely came from her training as a natural scientist. In the unpublished manuscript that has survived (Popenoe 1930), she defines her assumptions and methods clearly:

In 1930 we wished to direct our attention to the problem of the Ulua Polychrome pottery.... The uncovering of the burial ground at Playa de los Muertos in 1929 and the finding of much entire plain pottery together with the complete absence of polychrome fragments led us to suspect that the latter might lie in a different type of deposit. ... The horizontal or "onion-peel" method of digging disclosed in a number of cases that the pieces of a single vessel would be scattered over a large area.

What Popenoe described as the "onion-peel" method is an early, intentional application of stratigraphic excavation methods. The introduction of these methods in the Americas has been described as a major shift in both conceptualization of archaeological deposits and implementation of excavations. As Browman and Givens (1996:80) argue, it involved "the recognition that archaeological strata were present," composed of interpretable layers finer than geological strata. These authors argue that the shifts in conceptualization involved

took place in North American archaeology between 1910 and 1920, inspired in three parallel areas (the Southwest United States, California, and Mexico) by knowledge of European archaeological approaches.

Browman and Givens (1996:81) identify the American Museum of Natural History in New York as a center for encouragement of stratigraphic approaches. In contrast, they note that other United States museums, notably the Smithsonian Institution, were less likely to adopt the method. These museums continued to employ unilineal social evolutionary models of development from savagery through barbarism to civilization, models that clearly influenced G.B. Gordon profoundly. As Browman and Givens (1996:81) write,

within that evolutionary perspective, there was a general lack of a concept of microchange. Only major shifts in technology and subsistence, as defined by the evolutionary model, were recognized as significant.

This, they argue, led to a focus on geographical variation, rather than chronological change.

Browman and Givens (1996) demonstrate that among the pioneers in stratigraphic excavation methods in North America, two distinct approaches developed. One employed arbitrary excavation units, initially of one foot. This might lead us to consider Gordon's 1890s excavations as stratigraphic, but here, the reminder from Browman and Givens that stratigraphic method also required a new concept of change at the microscale is relevant. There is no evidence that Gordon had such a concept; Dorothy Popenoe, who ends her study of Playa de los Muertos with a discussion of the annual and even monthly fluctuations in the river that caused remodeling of the landscape at a scale perceptible to a modern human observer (Popenoe 1934:80–83), clearly did.

How Dorothy Popenoe was informed about stratigraphic approaches is unclear. Any archaeology she might have witnessed before immigrating to the United States from Britain could have already employed stratigraphic approaches and exemplified stratigraphic consciousness. Browman and Givens (1996:90–91) argue that the Peabody Museum's A.M. Tozzer, Dorothy Popenoe's principal guide to developing her archaeological expertise, was introduced to stratigraphic methods when his students participated in path-breaking work in central Mexico, through the International School developed by Franz Boas and Manuel Gamio after 1910. This may well be part of the reason for Tozzer's encouragement of Popenoe's work in the 1920s; but the method used by the International School archaeologists depended on artificial excavation units, unlike her "onion peel" approach.

While two of the three pioneering archaeologists credited with promoting stratigraphic method in American archaeology used such artificial stratigraphic units, the third, A.V. Kidder, instead excavated depositional units of varying thickness in his ideal stratigraphic approach. Browman and Givens (1996:87) cite Kidder's description of his method, published in 1916: "a new bag was started whenever there was encountered a zone of sand or ash, or when there appeared a sherd different in type from those of above." This is what Popenoe appears to have done in her work, barely a decade later.

Kidder went on from his work in the Southwest United States to become the key archaeologist in the Maya archaeology program of the Carnegie Institution of Washington (Black 1990). Gordon Willey (1967:300) credited him with introducing stratigraphic excavation methods to George C. Vaillant of Harvard University, who would posthumously interpret some of Popenoe's findings. Kidder became head of the Carnegie Institution of Washington's archaeology division in 1927, and promulgated a multidisciplinary approach to understanding Maya civilization that included studies of plant remains (Willey 1967:301-03).

Among the studies sponsored by the Carnegie Institution of Washington were some by Wilson Popenoe, Dorothy's husband, at the time working for the United Fruit Company (Wauchope 1965:158). In 1930, the Popenoes moved for two years to Antigua, Guatemala, where Dorothy reportedly visited the offices where Carnegie staff were working on excavated collections in Guatemala City (Schavelzon 1991). It is thus possible, although not established, that Dorothy Popenoe might have encountered the key proponent of stratigraphic excavation by depositional, rather than arbitrary, layers, just at the time when she began the exacting work of establishing stratigraphic relations in the lower Ulua valley.

To apply her stratigraphic excavation method, Popenoe selected sites along the course of the Ulua River between Ranchería, about eight kilometers upstream from Playa de los Muertos, and Santana, where Gordon had worked. Taking advantage of the canal excavations of the fruit company, she also located excavations on their Sapote and Guanchía farms, places where she had reason to believe she would find stratigraphic superposition of monochrome and polychrome ceramics. The bulk of her work constitutes a kind of south to north transect along the valley, from Guanchía, located north of Santa Rita, to Ranchería, Playa de los Muertos, and finally, to Santana.

Popenoe's excavation at a location she recorded as the Sapote pumping station is of particular interest in understanding how polychrome pottery shifted from being evidence of different levels of civilization, to being part of

a systematic framework for change through time. At Sapote, Popenoe identified pottery that could not be assigned to either of the two categories, monochrome or polychrome, that had framed exploration in the Ulua valley: while not true polychrome painted in red and black on orange, nor was the pottery monochrome. Instead, lighter orange lines appeared in groups standing out from a dark orange background slip. These sherds are recognized today as part of a tradition of resist-painted, orange-slipped pottery that developed in Honduras after 400 BC (Demarest and Sharer 1986; Goralski 2009). Popenoe understood that these pots should fit in between the monochrome pottery from Playa de los Muertos, and the Ulua Polychromes that she recovered in her excavations in architecture at Tenampua. In place of the earlier dichotomy of monochrome and polychrome, she identified a third category of pottery, bichrome, which provided a way to see development from the monochrome pottery to the later polychrome.

The banks of the Chamelecon River on the Guaruma Dos farm yielded similar pottery decades later, at a site called El Remolino (CR-260). The assemblage recovered there included orange pottery with resist lines like that collected by Popenoe, today called Muerdalo Orange (Baudez and Becquelin 1973). Sherds from a second group of painted pottery discarded here, Tepeaca Red (Joyce 1993d), resembled Muerdalo Orange bowls in shape, but had a darker red slip against which the resist lines did not stand out as well. Mixed in with sherds of these bichrome pots at El Remolino were a few fragments of polychrome painted bowls or dishes, none identifiable as Ulua Polychromes. One sherd was large enough to show a painted design of a fish. The unusual clay mixture used for this bowl, the motif, and the specific shape, allowed the identification of the vessel as Ixcario Orange Polychrome, made in the lowlands of Guatemala or Belize.

Popenoe herself recovered a fragment of another early polychrome dish imported from outside the Ulua Valley, at Playa de los Muertos (Epstein 1959:128–29). Two similar vessels were later excavated by an archaeologist working for the Heye Foundation, Gregory Mason, on United Fruit Company's Farm Two, east of the town of La Lima, a site known today as Campo Dos (Figure 4). The early polychrome dishes from Playa de los Muertos and Campo Dos can be identified as a second Lowland Maya type, Dos Arroyos Polychrome.

The vessels excavated by Mason and Popenoe, for many years the only examples known in northern Honduras of Early Classic period polychromes made in the lowlands of Guatemala and Belize, were proposed to represent a more widespread pattern of use of Dos Arroyos Polychromes contemporary with the Maya Early Classic Period in Honduras (Epstein 1959; Longyear 1952). This led to the interpretation of Ulua Polychromes as late successors to what

was assumed to have been regional consumption of Early Classic period polychromes, shared with the Maya lowlands.

Yet even today, despite intensive excavations throughout the lower Ulua Valley, similar vessels have rarely been reported. At the site of Puerto Escondido, additional examples of Dos Arroyos Polychrome pottery were recovered in deposits radiocarbon dated to between 230 and 430 AD (Joyce and Henderson 2007:Table 1). There they were mixed with sherds from jars, some polished brown with sets of grooved lines on the upper body or rim, others with red geometric designs on a polished brown background. These two types of vessels, Guamilito Unslipped and Bufalo Red on Natural, were also found at El Remolino, in the same levels as the imported Ixcancario Orange Polychrome (Joyce 1993d).

At Puerto Escondido, sherds from other decorated jars were discarded along with pieces from polished brown Guamilito Unslipped and Bufalo Red on Natural, the types directly associated with Dos Arroyos Polychrome sherds. These other jars belong to the types Marimba Red on Natural and Lupo Incised (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). Marimba Red on Natural and Lupo Incised sherds were absent in the deposit at El Remolino that yielded the fragment of an Ixcancario Orange Polychrome dish. Sherds of Marimba Red on Natural and Lupo Incised jars are common at other sites in the Ulua Valley, where they are found with examples of the earliest Ulua Polychromes (Joyce 1987). The mixture in deposits from Puerto Escondido of types that began to be used earlier, and others that would continue in use later, is consistent with the dating of Dos Arroyos Polychrome and Ixcancario Polychrome in the lowlands of Guatemala and Belize, where Ixcancario Polychrome has been associated with events taking place around 238 AD, and Dos Arroyos Polychrome persists until political changes at 378 AD (Reese Taylor and Walker 2002:106–08).

Rare imported lowland Maya polychromes were available to Ulua Valley people in multiple villages along the Ulua river (identified at El Remolino, Campo Dos, Puerto Escondido, Playa de los Muertos, and possibly Travesia) during a period when the first potters began to experiment with making their own polychrome painted ceramics. Yet the initial Ulua Polychromes owe less to these foreign imports than to local traditions, in vessel form, technology, and design organization.

The most common examples of bowls, vases, and plates in deposits dating between 230 and 430 AD at Puerto Escondido were orange slipped with red painted geometric designs, some also showing lighter yellow-orange resist lines in the background, labeled Chasnigua and Chilanga Red on Orange types (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). These have many of the technological characteristics of early Ulua Polychromes: the same clay mixture, orange slip, and red

paint and even share some of the same vessel forms. Also found in these deposits were occasional sherds of locally produced polychrome painted vessels, as at El Remolino not yet standardized into identifiable types.

At Puerto Escondido, the features that yielded an assemblage of imported and locally produced vessels, before Ulua Polychromes were produced, covered deposits with traces of a long period of occupation beginning before 1500 BC (Joyce and Henderson 2007; Joyce 2011). Between 400 and 200 BC, the residents of Puerto Escondido used the kinds of vessels and figurines that Popenoe excavated at Playa de los Muertos, the same monochrome pottery that Gordon recovered in the deepest levels of his excavations at Lagartijo and Santana.

In fact, everywhere that archaeologists have conducted deep excavations in the lower Ulua valley, they have found the same succession of locally made serving vessels: from the monochrome types first defined at Playa de los Muertos, to orange-slipped resist decorated types, followed by red-on-orange vessels with resist decoration, and finally, a long series of deposits within which are examples of a diverse array of Ulua Polychromes. A few vessels that arrived from partners in the Maya lowlands of Belize and Guatemala during the period when red on orange and resist vessels were locally preferred may have inspired local potters to experiment with black paint as an added color on serving vessels. The flourishing of Ulua Polychromes, though, came later, and owed more to local social factors than to chance contact with exotic vessels.

### Ulua Polychrome Chronology

By 1930, through the efforts of Popenoe, the pieces were in place for a basic chronological framework for the development of Ulua Polychromes (Table 5). The development of features later typical of Ulua Polychromes started with the monochrome pottery of Playa de los Muertos and its contemporary villages, including Puerto Escondido. Here, in the type Bodega Brown Burnished, tall cylindrical vases were already being created before 500 BC, and blue, red, white and orange pigments were applied to some Bancahsa Black bowls after firing, to bring life to engraved images of monkeys between 400 and 200 BC (Joyce and Henderson 2007; Joyce, Sheptak and Hendon 2008).

By 200 BC such early experiments in painting vases, bowls, and plates gave rise to bichrome pottery like the vessels Popenoe recovered at the Sapote site, where pre-firing resist techniques were used to create designs, sets of geometric lines showing as lighter colors on orange or red-slipped dishes and plates. An

early period of experimentation with use but not production of polychrome painted vessels, represented by fragments of Dos Arroyos and Ixcanrio Polychrome dishes from the Belize and Guatemala lowlands, followed between 200 and 450 AD. All of this preceded the development of the Ulua Polychrome tradition itself.

Dorothy Popenoe died without seeing her report on the stratigraphic superposition of polychrome pottery and monochrome pottery to completion. After her death, Wilson Popenoe wrote to Tozzer that he did not find a more polished version of the draft report, and thought she had only just begun the work involved. Tozzer, who enlisted his student George Vaillant to write an essay to accompany posthumous publication of her work on Playa de los Muertos (Vaillant 1934), may have been dissuaded from publishing this second report by the loss of her remaining notes.

It fell to Vaillant to make explicit connections between Popenoe's work and that of Gordon. He starts his commentary by saying that at Playa de los Muertos Popenoe laid "a firm basis for an orderly historical and ethnographical arrangement of Uloa Valley archaeology" (Vaillant 1934:87). He saw her main contribution as "separation of the monochrome from the polychrome wares of the Uloa Valley," setting the stage for the next question about the polychrome pottery to be addressed: "the establishment of a sequence of styles for this phase of Uloa ceramics" (Vaillant 1934:87). What he had in mind is what he himself had already accomplished in his doctoral dissertation on Maya polychromes, which included consideration of those collected by Gordon in the Ulua valley (Vaillant 1927).

Vaillant (1934:87) said, somewhat inaccurately, that Gordon was "unable to reduce to chronological sequence" the different polychromes he defined due to the "freakish changes of course" of the rivers that "redistributed the refuse lenses, so that Gordon found none fit for stratigraphical dissection." That is not actually the case: Gordon, operating before the emergence of stratigraphic method, was not trying to dissect the sites where he worked. He had a geological notion of superposition, on the basis of which he ensured that his excavated materials were recovered in defined one-foot-deep units. He also actually did observe, recognize, and even describe refuse lenses within the excavated profiles.

There is nothing in the assemblages preserved at the Peabody Museum to suggest that the Ulua River had in fact disturbed and redistributed them; their contents are consistent with the modern stratified sequences of ceramic types, and definition of complexes of associated materials. Gordon's problem was how he thought about the materials he was recovering and how he thought about change over time.

TABLE 5 *Chronology for the development of Honduran painted pottery*

Regional time period	Local phase	Dates	Relevant pottery types
Middle Formative	Playa	900–400 BC	Bodega Brown Burnished Piolin Cream Polished Mairena Red Bancahsa Black
Late Formative	Toyos	400–200 BC	Bancahsa Black: Polychrome Variety
	Early Chamelecon	200 BC–200 AD	Muerdalo Orange
	Late Chamelecon	200–450 AD	Muerdalo Orange Tepeaca Red Chasnigua Red on Orange Ixcarrío Orange Polychrome Dos Arroyos Polychrome
Early Classic	Ulúa 1	450–550 AD	Ulúa Polychrome: Dedalos Gualpopa Polychrome Chamelecon Trichrome Sulaco Red on Orange Cancique Bichrome
	Ulúa 2	550–650 AD	Ulúa Polychrome: Santa Rita Sulaco Polychrome Cancique Bichrome

Late Classic	Ulua 3	650–750 AD	Ulua Polychrome: Travesia Ulua Polychrome: Yojoa Ulua Polychrome: Selva Sulaco Polychrome Las Flores Polychrome Cancique Polychrome
	Ulua 4	750–850 AD	Ulua Polychrome: Santana Ulua Polychrome: Nebla Ulua Polychrome: Selva Ulua Polychrome: Tenampua Sulaco Polychrome Las Flores Polychrome
Terminal Classic	Ulua 5	850–950 AD	Ulua Polychrome: Tenampua Las Flores Polychrome Baracoa Fine Paste Las Vegas Polychrome
Early Postclassic	Rio Blanco	900–1200 AD	Las Vegas Polychrome Bay Islands Polychrome
Late Postclassic	Naco	1350–1536 AD	Nolasco Bichrome Forastero Polychrome Vagabundo Polychrome Agalteca Polychrome

Vaillant, in this passage, ignores Gordon's proposal that his A, B and C groups of pottery represented two distinct cultural groups, one foreign, and one local. In contrast, he says, in his own doctoral dissertation in 1927 he "made another classification, designed to express those elements of time and tribe which were not shown in Gordon's paper" (Vaillant 1934:88). "Tribe" here takes the place that "civilization" occupied for Gordon. To Vaillant, working under the influence of new culture historical models in the 1920s and 1930s, "tribes" were indicated by the localized commonality in pottery that he saw exhibited in samples from Copan, El Salvador, and the Ulua valley.

The polychrome pottery of Copan, Vaillant tells us, could be dated by its association with caches under stelae, graves, and in Mound 36, excavated by Gordon. He does not mean that these contexts provided the kind of precise calendrical dates we would expect today. Instead, Vaillant appears to mean simply that the pottery in all these kinds of contexts is similar, and since it is found in caches under stelae, must have been associated with the period when Copan flourished as a major settlement, when these monuments were created.

When he compares Copan's materials to examples from western El Salvador, he finds pottery similar to that of Copan, and also "a number of other techniques that might have been derived from these specifically Maya styles and would therefore be later" (Vaillant 1934:88). From a simple claim of contemporaneity of monuments, architecture, and pottery at Copan, he slips into a definition of Copan's materials as definitive of Maya style, and thus implicitly, of a Maya "tribe." Vaillant's use of stylistic seriation, like the stylistic analysis of Gordon before him, presumed that Maya style (defined at Copan) came first: "the trend of the [Ulua] pottery suggests the years after the fall of Copan" (Vaillant 1927:271).

The non-Maya styles of western El Salvador, "derived" from those typical of Classic Copan, were equated with what was found in the Ulua valley:

the polychrome phases of this development represent degenerations of late Old Empire Maya pottery (Uloa Polychrome I) and a varied and complicated series of forms and decorations like those in the early (?) Pipil horizon in El Salvador (Uloa Polychrome II-IV). Another style is like that made by the late (?) Pipil and the Lenca-Matagalpa in Salvador (Uloa Poly. v).

VAILLANT 1927:271

Resorting to labeling Ulua Polychromes "degenerations" of Maya pottery, Vaillant was led to impose a chronology that still assumed a model of inherent

development from barbarism to civilization. The only innovation is his imagination of a fall from civilized status (equated with Copan) that persuaded him to assign Uluá Polychromes to a time after Copan was abandoned.

Finding a way to think about variation within Uluá Polychromes that overcame the durable legacy of evolutionary models of more and less advanced cultures was the next challenge faced in understanding Honduran painted pottery. The solutions offered began with the exploration of a second dimension of variation: space.

## Finding Places

Through the end of the 1920s, despite a great level of interest in understanding how the pottery produced in the Maya and Ulua regions was related, there was almost no attention given to gaining a greater understanding of the distribution of Honduran archaeological materials in space. As long as the painted pottery of Honduras was understood as evidence for level of civilization (even if that concept had been relabeled using terms for peoples like tribe) the precise delineation of where these objects were found was unimportant.

Expeditions returned over and over to the same areas explored by Gordon. A decade after Gordon's work ended, A. Hooten Blackiston (1910a:197) traveled in the Chamelecon and Ulua valleys, reporting on finds illuminating what he called "past civilizations" from multiple "*playas de los muertos*" ("beaches of the dead," in reference to the exposure of burials) on the Ulua and Chamelecon rivers. He reported excavating in one of these sites on the Ulua River at a place he named San Miguel, most likely an error for San Manuel Tehuma, opposite Santana, as there is no known historic place called San Miguel along the Ulua river. Here he says he uncovered two burials 15–18 feet below the modern ground surface. His reports of whistles in animal and human form, and fine pottery vessels "covered with striking symbols and figures of Mayan type" (Blackiston 1910a:198), leave no doubt that his excavations sampled Ulua Polychrome-associated deposits. The location of his second excavation in river-cut deposits was also within the lower Ulua Valley, on the Chamelecon River six miles downstream from the town of Chamelecon. This would place these excavations in the vicinity of what would later be the town of La Lima, Cortés, headquarters of the United Fruit Company.

Following Gordon and Blackiston, Marshall Saville, appointed staff of the newly established Heye Foundation museum in New York City, returned in 1915 to the well worked over territory of the lower Ulua river valley. Saville was able to assemble a collection of what were described as "objects of several well-known and far-distant cultures" from "the restricted area of the broad valley in which flow both the Ulua and Chamelecon Rivers" for the new museum (Pepper 1916:409). Saville himself, interviewed in the *New York Times* (1915), was more expansive:

"The remarkable fact about the potteries and other objects," said Professor Saville yesterday, "is that they represent at least six kinds of civilization. We have not the facilities at present to dig down eighteen feet, which

seems to be necessary, but what has been found shows that there is an opportunity for vast research.”

Many of the objects which Professor Saville exhibited were of exquisite beauty, as for instance some perfect bowls of the Maya civilization... Other objects found originated, according to the archaeologist, in Vera Cruz, in Costa Rica, in Nicaragua, in Jalisco, in Oaxaca, in various provinces of Mexico, and in the Lesser Antilles....Professor Saville said that all the indications pointed to the existence of a great city where a culture had been reached which is a revelation to the explorer.... It is probable that to this ancient metropolis were drawn peoples from all Central and South America. It may have been like Tyre of old.

Saville's Honduran collections, now in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, were recorded as coming from specific points along the Chamelecon and Ulua rivers. These were already familiar as archaeological sites, not quite twenty years after the first formal published reports on the archaeology of the region: Chasnigua, Playa de los Muertos, Progreso, Ranchería, Santiago and Travesía (Figure 6). At these locations, as Saville noted, collectors recovered antiquities that were deeply buried, and thus (in these pre-stratigraphic investigations) without any defined context.

Despite a passing reference to mounds near the known sixteenth century town of Naco, Saville, like archaeologists before him, showed no interest in locating settlements, not even the fabled city whose presence he judged was indicated by the diversity of sources he identified for the objects he collected. For him, the spatial location of ceramic styles was to be found at the level of the region: Veracruz, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Jalisco, Oaxaca, the Lesser Antilles, and of course, the Ulua valley. A shift to describing spatial locations in ways more closely related to the lifetimes of actors would require decades of archaeological work and changes in archaeological thought.

### Recognizing Settlements

When Marshall Saville arrived in Honduras in 1915, he already would have known of the report by Blackiston (1910a) on sites with surface visible architecture in the Ulua valley. It appears that Blackiston may have been the first archaeologist to explicitly identify mounds representing the 16th century town of Naco, which Saville also mentioned in his *New York Times* interview (Blackiston 1910b). Blackiston does not appear to have excavated at Naco itself. Instead, he concentrated his efforts in the lower Ulua valley, becoming the first

archaeologist after Gordon to describe architectural remains in the heart of the Ulua Polychrome producing area.

Blackiston (1910a:196) described a site “about five miles from San Pedro Sula” in detail: composed of a group of eight mounds in what he saw as a circle 115 feet in diameter, with an inner diameter of 44 ft. Here he excavated a mound 40 ft long. He also reported “numbers of mounds of interesting construction, occurring in groups and even singly” around San Pedro Sula, where he excavated what he described as “mortuary mounds, usually rising about 7 to 10 feet above the plane of the surrounding valley...in most cases encircled by walls of stone” (Blackiston 1910:195). These were of considerable size. In one measuring 58 by 91 feet in length, his excavations reached a depth of 8 or 9 feet. Another was 55 ft in diameter. In a third, whose dimensions he does not give, he reported finding a vaulted stone chamber, with pottery jars containing carved stone objects, some of greenstone, and “a large bizarre stone figure in a sitting posture” (Blackiston 1910:196).

Gordon (1898b) had made similar observations, including describing a similar stone sculpture, in this case set upright in a plaza at a site on the far eastern edge of the valley. Called Quebrada Encantada by Gordon, this site today is identified as La Guacamaya (Robinson 1987). At Travesia, the other site where Gordon worked that is known to have surface architecture, he avoided excavating in these structures, preferring to dig deep trenches in river-laden deposits. At Quebrada Encantada, located on the valley edge, however, there were no deep sediments, so here he did briefly undertake excavations in architecture.

With their interests in recovery of objects, and a theoretical framework that allowed artifacts to stand in for entire civilizations, for early archaeologists sites were of interest primarily for their potential to produce things. These archaeologists judged excavation of collapsed buildings unproductive, as intact pottery vessels were recovered rarely or with great difficulty, whereas excavations along the riverbanks allowed collection of sufficient fragments to reconstruct individual pots and even allowed for the discovery of complete vessels.

Perhaps as a consequence, systematic site survey was not undertaken in Honduras until 1917—and then, it was interrupted by an external force: service in espionage. In 1917, Samuel K. Lothrop traveled from Guatemala into Honduras, making maps of archaeological sites for the Peabody Museum (Harris and Sadler 2003:60–63). Lothrop was among at least ten anthropologists, most of them archaeologists, who were recruited that year to serve as spies in Central America during World War I (Price 2008:9). Price (2008:10) notes that these archaeologist-spies were uncompensated by the government, and “primarily funded their espionage with salaries from the academic or research

organizations" for which they were working. Needless to say, this compromised the quality of the work they did for these scholarly institutions.

Lothrop's field notes from his work in Honduras prior to his recruitment contain detailed maps and sketches of stone sculpture along with clear directions to the locations of sites, a first in the history of Honduran archaeology. The Peabody Museum was interested in resuming work at Copan, and Lothrop began his reconnaissance there, clearing off monuments and photographing them. Making his way from Copan, he visited other sites in western Honduras with architecture, sculpture, and carved texts related to the style of Copan, mapping, sketching, and in a few cases even undertaking limited excavations.

Eventually he made his way overland to Tegucigalpa, the capital city, via the colonial city of Gracias and the Lenca town, La Esperanza, always noting the presence of sites. In Tegucigalpa, after delays, he met with President Francisco Barahona who, while declining to provide him any written authorization, reportedly agreed that Lothrop could excavate at any site he liked, except Copan, and that he would approve export of antiquities. The first stop on Lothrop's itinerary, once he had this approval for his work, was a site he had briefly visited on the way to the capital city: Tenampua, first reported in the mid-nineteenth century by Ephraim G. Squier (1853).

Lothrop returned to Tenampua on April 13, 1917, facing a deadline to go to Guatemala City for the May 3 meeting at which he would be recruited as a spy. His notes indicate he arranged his route to Guatemala City to continue his survey of sites along the way. First, though, he spent three days completing what he estimated was a map of 10% of the mounds at Tenampua.

This was to be the most significant work Lothrop accomplished in the area that produced Ulua Polychromes. After meeting with his espionage superiors in Guatemala City, he was directed to return to Tegucigalpa, where his behavior made authorities suspicious, and eventually he took up a position further south in Central America. A decade later, part of Lothrop's map of Tenampua was finally published (Lothrop 1927a:Plate 111). Dorothy Popenoe mentioned his map of Tenampua the same year, in an article documenting her own excavations at the site (Popenoe 1928, 1936).

### *Placing Ulua Polychromes at Tenampua*

Work at Tenampua was Dorothy Popenoe's second investigation of a Honduran archaeological site, following her initial work at Lancetilla. We do not know what inspired her trip inland to Tenampua, but by 1927, the site was already well known within and outside Honduras. Squier (1853:5) had described Tenampua as composed of three or four hundred buildings, and identified the central focus of the site as a large walled enclosure containing two terraced

platforms he identified as temples. He also provided the first description of Tenampua's ballcourt, 11 meters wide and 30 meters long, faced with stone slabs, located outside the central enclosure (Squier 1853:6–7).

Lothrop's map showed this central enclosure and ballcourt, as well as platforms in the southeast quadrant of the site, and it was in this area that Popenoe focused her investigations. In the largest building in the main enclosure, Popenoe excavated a broken but nearly complete Tenampua subclass Pentagon dish, showing a distinctive bird with its head turned, possibly a nightjar (Figure 62). Excavations in the same location decades later yielded additional Uluva Polychrome vessels that allow us to identify Popenoe's excavated dish as stemming from ritual activities associated with reconstruction of this central building.

By the 1950s, residents of Tegucigalpa were apparently regularly excavating at Tenampua (Stone 1957:50). As had Popenoe before them, they recovered near complete Uluva Polychrome vessels in architectural caches in the main platform of the central enclosure. Detailed descriptions of the architectural stratigraphy, including the placement of the vessels excavated and a description of the sherd materials included in the deposits, based on the notes kept by one such group confirm that these excavations were placed directly adjacent to Popenoe's excavation in the same structure (Stone 1957:51–53). Translating the published observations into modern terms, we can describe the context for the bowl that Popenoe excavated, and the associated materials recovered by later visitors who excavated in the same place.

Uluva Polychrome vessels were recovered from two successive building floors. The earliest floor was covered by about 5 cm of burned materials, including sherds, covering a clay surface on which was found a *Spondylus* oyster shell. This alone would suggest we are dealing with a deposit that was not the residue of everyday living, as similar architectural caches of *Spondylus* shells, some containing jade beads, were found in or near the contemporary ballcourts at Cerro Palenque and Copan, and in low central platforms that seem to have been places of ritual activity in house compounds at Travesia and Cerro Palenque at the same time (Joyce 1986, 1991; Hendon 2010). The shell at Tenampua was placed near a passageway in the eastern side of the largest building in the main enclosure.

Two Tenampua subclass Cefiro vases with tripod feet rested on the surface above the initial burned deposit. Both depict multiple figures engaged in flap-staff dances. The inclusion of two vessels showing dances involving flapstuffs might be an indication that the burning and rebuilding of this central structure was timed to coincide with late June, as Looper (2003) has shown this dance is associated with dates in June at Yaxchilan. Equally significant, however, is

the display of a possible censer carried by a participant on one of these vessels. Incense burning contributed significantly to the creation of the deposits excavated at this place.

On the northeast edge of this structure, a small room adjacent to a paved terrace reportedly had a clay floor and a thin layer of crushed material. Here again, a Tenampua subclass Cefiro cylinder rested on the floor (Stone 1957:fig. 55C, b). Also encountered in this room were a group of small bottle-shaped vessels, called *candeleros* in Honduran archaeology. Sherd disks with some of these may have been expedient lids to protect the contents, perhaps pigments or resins. A final complete vessel, a simple tripod bowl, was so eroded that it is hard to identify anything more than a light slip and traces of dark paint. This was found outside the walls of the same room.

The suspicion that these vessels, and the thorny oyster shell, were deliberately deposited in the course of ceremony is reinforced by the description of the broken sherds found in the same location. These were from vessels with zones of raised nubbins, other white slipped zones with black painted checkerboards, and twisted loops forming three supports. Today, we can recognize this as a description of the Tenampua subclass *Zarza* (Figure 39), vessels used to contain burning incense. Along with these, sherds of ladle censers (compare Figure 40), another vessel adapted to burn incense, were recovered. The assemblage of vessels, sherds, and architectural features is sufficient to clearly identify the activities taking place here as distinct from everyday food preparation or serving.

These vessels from Tenampua, described in 1928 and 1957, are the first published Uluá Polychromes with precise archaeological context. The imagery portrayed on two of the associated cylinders suggests both a time and occasion of their interment, as part of rituals marked by dances. The deposit of multiple kinds of incense burning vessels, the depiction of a possible ladle censer on one of the polychromes, and the burned layer all indicate that the events here included extensive burning of resins.

The nightjar on the open dish recovered here by Popenoe may indicate that birds of this group had particular significance in the oral traditions of people from this site. Like other Tenampua class Uluá Polychromes, the dish, and quite likely all three of the cylinders, also carried a distinctive white line design showing a series of terraces with a central round dot, which served as a local reference to Comayagua, and most likely, to Tenampua itself (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013:39–56).

The use of this distinctive motif on Tenampua class Uluá Polychromes allows them to be recognized as likely originating at Tenampua, or at the very least, in the Comayagua Valley, even when they are used at distant sites like

Copan. As research on specific sites proceeded in the 1930s, the potential was created to similarly localize distinct classes of Ulua Polychromes across the territory where they were made and used, stretching from Honduras south to El Salvador and east to Nicaragua.

### Surveying the Landscape

Popenoe (1936:572) concluded her report on Tenampua by writing:

there remain many ruined sites in Honduras that have not yet received adequate attention... It is only through comprehensive study of the entire field, and intelligent comparison and correlation of the material offered by individual sites, that the whole story of pre-Columbian Honduras will finally be reconstructed.

Popenoe's work revived the interest of the Peabody Museum in those areas of Honduras outside Copan that remained under-studied. After her death, the Peabody and the Smithsonian Institution planned a major new expedition that would carry through on her work in the Ulua Valley. Much to the irritation of these long-established institutions, a relative upstart, Tulane University's Middle American Research Institute, managed to get into the field before them, with a project headed by a Danish archaeologist, Jens Yde. A letter in the archives of the Peabody Museum, sent to Strong by Alfred Tozzer on June 3, 1935, makes clear that this was an unanticipated challenge that would not change the plans of the Peabody, even though the ground to be covered by both expeditions would be fundamentally the same.

The Middle American Research Institute (originally, Department of Middle American Research) was founded in 1924 through the patronage of the banana baron Samuel Zemurray (McVicker 2008). Yde had been funded by the Danish National Museum to travel to Latin America and conduct archaeological fieldwork. His collaboration with the Middle American Research Institute was brokered by Frans Blom, a Danish archaeologist who in 1926 became its second director. In 1931 Blom appointed Doris Zemurray Stone, Samuel Zemurray's daughter, then a recent graduate of Harvard's Radcliffe College, as a research associate.

The network of connections formed through Stone and Zemurray gave the Middle American Research Institute access to support from the United Fruit Company, cited as pivotal to the logistical success of the Tulane-Danish National Museum expedition of 1935 (Yde 1938:2). The same kind of support would be given by United Fruit when Harvard and the Smithsonian Institution

sent their expedition to the field the following year, through the intercession of Wilson Popenoe, surviving husband of Dorothy (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:1–2). As a direct consequence of their dependence on the United Fruit Company, these two independent surveys covered much of the same terrain, albeit with different orienting perspectives.

Yde (1938:4) frames his report on the survey he undertook in familiar terms: “northwestern Honduras was inhabited by some branch of the Mayan people” whose “cultural influence ... may be plainly observed in Ulua valley and far up through Comayagua valley.” Coming to Honduras without the strong structuring influence of previous research by North American scholars fostered up until then primarily by the Peabody Museum, he divided his survey of the country into sections based on a combination of observations about artifact types (including pottery styles) and settlement forms. He combined first-hand observations with compilation of previously published reports and information given him directly by Hondurans and others resident in Honduras. His aims, he admitted, were to locate sites for future research.

In contrast, the Harvard-Smithsonian expedition claimed a more focused research goal “based on numerous geographic, historic, ethnographic, and archaeological considerations” (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:2). These were laid out at length in the preliminary report, which emphasized that terrain “conditioned aboriginal human occupation,” suggesting that sites for excavation were chosen deliberately to sample different environments (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:2–8). These different environments constituted “a contact area between advanced Mayan and Nahuatl peoples to the west, and Lenca, Jicaque, and other less advanced groups to the east” (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:11). Historical sources from the early colonial period served to outline the “probable distribution of ethnic groups in the region” (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:27). The culture-historical grid was set well in place for the Harvard-Smithsonian team, and the excavations they undertook in the Naco and lower Ulua valleys, and on the shore of Lake Yojoa, were to be the basis for defining the content of distinct cultures that could then be linked to historically identified ethnic-linguistic groups.

#### *“Regions of the Greatest Archaeological Importance”*

Yde (1938:4) characterized the landscape that he surveyed, starting in the capital city of Tegucigalpa and ending near the United Fruit Company headquarters in the lower Ulua valley town of La Lima, as “regions of the greatest archaeological importance.” He proceeded from Tegucigalpa to the Comayagua valley, and described sites previously reported by Squier (1853) and others in this area, as well as sites in the neighboring Espino and Sulaco valleys and along routes out of the Comayagua basin.

The first detailed investigation that Yde (1938:19–23) reports carrying out was at Tenampua, where he mapped the central group and ballcourt in finer detail than previous investigators, and conducted limited test excavations in the alley, finding it paved with a clay stucco. His discussion of the site is framed entirely in terms of an attempt to define the base culture, which he concluded was Lenca or Chorotega, and the possible sources of influence to which he attributed the construction of the ballcourt, Maya or Mexican. Following Popenoe, he characterized the Tenampua class Ulua Polychrome dish she excavated as “not Maya in character,” leaving undefined what would have constituted Maya character.

From the Comayagua valley, Yde traveled north through Siguatepeque, to the town of Jaral on the northern edge of Lake Yojoa. By his own assessment, it was his work in this area that was most important (Yde 1938:82). From the Yojoa area, he traveled on to Copan, and from there, following in the footsteps of Lothrop before him, proceeded along the upper valley of the Chamelecon river to the Naco valley, just west of the vast floodplains of the lower Ulua valley. In the Chamelecon drainage, his main focus was on fragments of stone sculpture stylistically related to those of Copan.

On his arrival in the lower Ulua valley, where the Chamelecon River emerged from its canyon into the wide alluvial plains, Yde (1938:58) felt he had found “pure Maya objects,” along with “habitation of the valley by a tribe that had no connection with the Maya.” Travesia was among the sites he visited, where he mapped surface architecture and collected material washing out of river cuts. He also collected in the northern valley at a place called Baracoa, and at the fruit company’s Guaruma Tres farm on the Chamelecon river, later the location of excavations at the El Remolino site (Joyce 1993d; Wonderley 1984).

In the fields near La Lima, where the Ulua and Chamelecon rivers came close together, Yde (1938:61–65) reported that locations of buried materials were so numerous he could not visit them all. Here, he could not resist the temptation to excavate “a couple of mounds” himself. Based on his description of one location, we can identify the site with United Fruit Company Farm Two, today known by its Spanish name of Campo Dos.

### Campo Dos

Farm Two had been selected already in 1932 as a site of extensive collecting by Gregory Mason, a former journalist acting on behalf of the Heye Foundation’s Museum of the American Indian. He described United Fruit Company’s farms as “covered with mounds. Many are burial mounds and are generally small. Others are large, flat mounds which served to support buildings long since fallen” (Mason 1940:124). Mason’s collections, now at the National Museum of the

American Indian, show that the residents of Campo Dos were relatively well to do, using jade, obsidian and shell personal ornaments, and owning Ulua Marble vases. Imported painted ceramics indicate that they had social networks that extended south toward Comayagua, east to the Sulaco Valley, west to the Naco Valley, and out through the Gulf of Honduras to Belize (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013).

Yde (1938:62) described the site he excavated 300 meters east of La Lima as composed of three mounds in a rectangular arrangement. My mapping of settlement around La Lima in the 1980s found that the entire area was covered by low, wide rises, often only roughly aligned. On excavation, many such earthen platforms produced evidence of having supported multiple buildings. At Campo Dos, I mapped ten large, low earthen platforms, and two parallel mounds forming a ballcourt (Figure 66).

The group of three platforms that Yde excavated was composed of mounds up to 19 m long and 11 m wide, far larger than the size of single house platforms documented in more recent research. Yde reports placing a 2.9 m wide trench in the largest platform, along its east-west axis, continuing from the summit (1 meter above the surrounding floodplain) to a depth of 1.75 meters. Just 20 cm below the summit, he recognized two parallel rows of stones laid around the edges of the platform. Near ground level, he reported finding a feature consisting of rocks 20 by 35 cm large that ran through part of the mound. With these exceptions, the entire platform was composed of earth mixed with broken and discarded pottery and stone tools.

“Nothing was found which appeared to have been deliberately deposited; everything was broken, and monochrome, painted and true polychrome pottery was found indiscriminately mixed together” (Yde 1938:62–63). Yde (1938:63–64) estimated that 75% of the pottery he recovered was from coarse paste jars and bowls, some unslipped, some incised and painted. The descriptions he gives correspond to Ulua valley utilitarian types Marimba Red on Natural and Sabana Unslipped (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). Sherds of these types with a general Ulua valley provenience are the only examples of unslipped and red painted jars represented in Yde’s collection preserved at the Danish National Museum.

Yde described other pottery from his excavations near La Lima as having a “well-burnt yellow clay” and impressed designs. These can be identified as Baracoa Fine Paste, the type that replaced Ulua Polychromes in the lower Ulua valley in the ninth century (Lopiparo, Joyce, and Hendon 2005; Joyce 1993c). Yde also provides a clear description of thick-walled bowls, vases, and dishes, some with incised and red- orange slipped surfaces, recognizable as the Tacamiche group (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). No examples of these types are

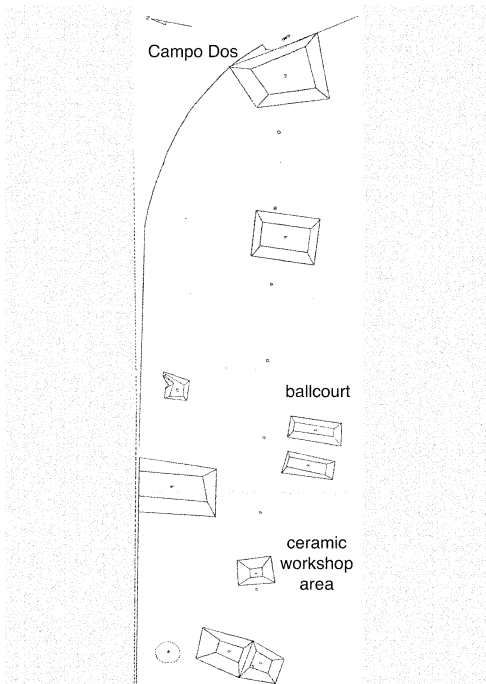


FIGURE 66  
*Plan of Campo Dos site as it existed  
 prior to 1993.*

ILLUSTRATION BY ROSEMARY A.  
 JOYCE.

represented today in the Danish National Museum collection. On the basis of the distinctive clay body of Baracoa and Tacamiche vessels, Yde suggested that “most probably this pottery was manufactured locally and not introduced from the outside world” (Yde 1938:64).

Yde could not have known just how local the manufacture of these types actually was. Excavations as Campo Dos was being destroyed by construction in the early 1990s documented evidence of a series of features used for production of Baracoa and Tacamiche ceramics (Lopiparo 1994). These excavations produced multiple lines of evidence for local ceramic production: large quantities of a single type of pottery disposed of in defined pits, molds used to form and decorate Tacamiche pots, fine clay lenses on the living surface, and remains of hearths suitable for firing these small vessels (Figure 67). Yde did not excavate in a manner that would have allowed him to see the ephemeral clay-on-clay features documented by Lopiparo (1994), but he did report finding molds, including (as in the later excavations) molds for figurines and stamps, along with the artifacts made in those molds.

While Yde was clearly correct in identifying the areas he excavated as locations of everyday life, based on the proportions of pottery, range of vessel forms, and the presence as well of grinding stones, his data also pointed to

what we now know to be distinctive of occupation of the Ulua valley at this time: households were the center of ritual, political, and economic life. Ceramic objects produced in multiple small hamlets were consumed in household-based ceremonies, along with whatever was the currently preferred decorated pottery (Hendon 2003, 2010; Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013; Lopiparo 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007; Lopiparo and Hendon 2009; Tercero 1996).

As at sites with monumental architecture, such as Travesia or Tenampua, households like those at Campo Dos used a wide range of incense burning vessels in ceremony, including a ladle censer with a handle in the form of a serpent head that Yde excavated. The collection in Denmark also preserves a fragment of the body of a censer depicting a tied bundle, an image seen at other sites as part of a tied bundle of bones (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013). At Campo Dos, the ritual life of the village even included the building of a ballcourt, where we presume games sponsored by local residents involved the participation of visiting teams (Swain 1995).

It was the use of pottery objects—including serving vessels—in ceremonies taking place within villages and towns alike, hosted by individual families, which provided the impetus for innovations that can be traced throughout the history of production of Ulua Polychromes. Given their production by household-based crafters (Joyce, Hendon and Lopiparo 2014), the variability of Ulua Polychromes across space is actually less than might be expected, even when variation reaches its greatest degree, near the end of the Ulua Polychrome tradition. While the location of pottery making was the individual settlement, the potters in those settlements were working as part of wider networks of communication through which pots and knowledge about them traveled.

#### *“An Amazing Emphasis on Pottery”*

The Harvard University-Smithsonian Institution expedition to Honduras arrived in 1936 armed with an established model of the cultural geography of Central America. Consequently, the purpose of the preliminary report on the expedition was to provide “a brief summary of significant excavations” in which “at least one stratigraphic or horizontal artifact record at each site” would be discussed “*in an effort to indicate the apparent trend of local cultural development*”:

in regard to ceramics, which greatly preponderate over any other artifact types throughout the entire Ulua drainage, we have here attempted to suggest the relative proportions of all wares at each site or in each stratigraphic section discussed.

STRONG, KIDDER and PAUL 1938:29; emphasis added

FIGURE 2.8: MAP OF AREA C

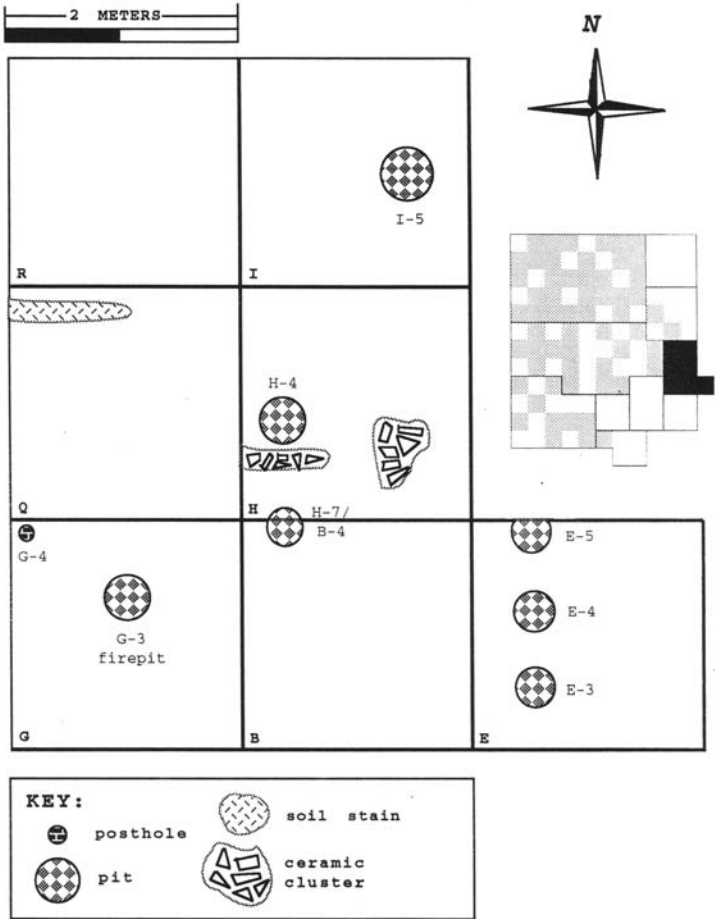


FIGURE 67 Area of Campo Dos excavated in 1993 with evidence of ceramic production. ILLUSTRATION BY ROSEMARY A. JOYCE, BASED ON DRAWINGS BY JEANNE LOPIPARO.

The “trend of local cultural development” would be defined by systematic excavations at sites in three areas: the lower Ulua valley; the northern end of Lake Yojoa; and the Naco valley, along the upper Chamelecon river west of the Ulua valley. While the first two had already been the focus of previous investigations, excavation in the Naco valley was novel. These three regions were understood by the project members as forming a unified cultural area,

expected to have relatively uniform ceramics. The emphasis on stratigraphic excavation was intended to allow better definition of change and continuity over time.

The preliminary expedition report begins with results of work carried out at Naco (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:27–34). This choice arguably was guided by Strong's developing model of the direct historical approach that became a core part of culture history systematics in archaeology. The direct historical approach was framed as an alternative to a taxonomic model, "working from the known to the unknown," providing the potential to explore more anthropological questions about cultural process, dynamics, and change over time (Steward 1942:337–39). Strong's 1935 *An Introduction to Nebraska Archaeology* is widely credited as an early and successful use of this approach. Julian Steward used an article by Strong published in 1940 as his example of how the direct historic approach should work, running "from history to prehistory," backwards from periods with clearer historical information to those known only through excavations.

The traces of this orientation are clear in the Harvard-Smithsonian Honduras expedition preliminary report. Lamenting the expedition's inability to conduct excavations in stone mound sites in the lower Ulua valley, it specifies that "until adequate work has been accomplished at such sites, the linkage between definitely historical sites, such as Naco, and the deeply buried, earlier polychrome periods will be obscure" (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:76). Starting the narrative with Naco began the attempt to construct a culture history with the only known dated sites in the region, those of the period of Spanish colonial expansion in the sixteenth century.

This interpretive move in the published report contrasted with the actual progress of the expedition, which built on the tradition initiated by Gordon and furthered by Popenoe. Field notes show that the team began work by returning to sites along the Ulua River where these pioneers had excavated. The first explorations of the new project, at the sites of Las Flores Bolsa and Naranjo Chino, were in new terrain, but simply moved further north along the Ulua River, to sites reported by local collectors. In his field notes from his initial visits here, Strong wrote, "stratification is more important than any amount of specimens in this stage of the game." Las Flores Bolsa promised stratification. It delivered on that promise.

#### Las Flores Bolsa

The description of work at Las Flores Bolsa in the preliminary report was brief; only six pages (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:39–45). Working from the original field notes and catalogue records, I was able to reconstruct a fuller description

of the excavated area of the site (Joyce 1987). Superimposition of burials visible from the riverbank had encouraged the excavators to hope for vertical relations between the early pottery of Playa de los Muertos and later polychrome pottery. In fact, the ten extended burials and associated occupation surfaces excavated in the lower levels all were from a period when Ulua Polychromes were already in use. Three bundle burials, with the individuals placed in the grave in a seated posture probably maintained by some sort of wrapping, were documented in the uppermost levels. These post-dated the use of Ulua Polychromes, and were most likely placed sometime between 900 and 1200 AD.

Las Flores Bolsa produced a wealth of pottery, including plain jars, cooking plates, and a variety of polychrome bowls and vases, almost all broken and discarded. Contrary to expectations, but consistent with excavations in the region ever since, the extended burials in the lower levels were entirely without associated pots. Complete objects were only found with the later bundle burials, including a complete, unslipped jar containing the bones of a turkey (Henderson and Joyce 2004). Fragments of grinding stones, stamps, figurines and figural whistles, and ladle incense burners, were also encountered. Obsidian blades accompanied the general trash, and a set of blades had been placed with one of the late bundle burials.

The burned hearths and buried clay floors at the site were the only occupation features, and gave an impression of a residential site of no particular wealth. Yet in summarizing the pottery found, Strong drew a distinction between what he called “domestic” pottery—the unslipped and red-on-natural vessels, mainly jars—and other pottery outside what he called “the strictly utilitarian class” (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:42). The pottery treated as not strictly utilitarian included three groups of polychrome painted vessels, and a fourth group of mold-made pots with orange slip that we can identify today as belonging to the Tacamiche group, including some examples of effigies of Ulua Marble Vases.

Coming as the first extended excavation of the expedition, Las Flores Bolsa shaped the expectations for the rest of their excavations, even though in the preliminary report it was not presented as the site framing interpretation. The puzzling absence of polychrome vessels from burials continued to nag at the expedition even when it moved to Lake Yojoa, where complete polychrome vessels were finally recovered, but never with the expected skeletal remains.

### Lake Yojoa

Both the Middle American Research Institute-Danish National Museum and Peabody-Smithsonian projects dedicated considerable effort to documenting Ulua Polychromes that were being found in a series of mound groups along the northern shore of Lake Yojoa. In describing how potters created new Ulua

Polychromes in the eighth century (Chapter 4), I drew on their descriptions of excavations in these Lake Yojoa sites.

Observing “domestic pottery” and grinding stones at these sites, the Harvard-Smithsonian team described these as suggesting “human habitation” but found that “the predominance of elaborately painted sherds and the reported occurrence of very numerous deposits of complete polychrome vessels suggests a burial ground wherein the human bones had vanished owing to the damp, very humous soil” (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:81). The archaeologists of both expeditions repeatedly stated that the whole vessels from Lake Yojoa must have been the only surviving vestiges of human burials, despite the general absence of human skeletal remains and, in the case of La Ceiba, the fact that vessels were wedged in the rock fill of mounds.

Both institutional expeditions remarked on the quantity of polychrome pots being found in clusters in these otherwise unimposing mounds, groups that Yde (1938:67–68) described as “nests.” Relying on reports from J.B. Edwards on his excavations at Jaral, one of the major localities with archaeological remains, Yde (1938:65–81) described pots being found at different depths in stratified deposits composed of layers of trash and geologic sediments. His idealized description of the stratigraphy alternated two sets of strata of “rich black soil” with “brown soil,” followed by water-saturated gravel, the underlying subsoil of the lakeside. Yde said that clusters of pots rested below the lower black soil, above the lowest brown layer, at about 80 cm below the surface of the low mounds. In some cases, he said, there was a second layer of pots in the wet gravel, 25 to 35 cm below the first buried pots (that is, at about 1.05 to 1.15 m below ground surface).

The Harvard-Smithsonian project attempted to obtain more precise detail about the contexts in which such pots were concentrated, following its commitment to provide a “horizontal artifact record” when vertical stratigraphy was not available (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:29). They began their work by inspecting the excavated areas at two sites, Aguacate and Aguatal, piecing together a series of more than a dozen complete pots from fragments discarded by previous excavators (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:80–90). Encouraged, they undertook their own excavations (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:90–111). They succeeded in locating six groups of pots at La Ceiba, a similar cluster of low stone mounds. Moving to Los Naranjos, the location of the largest architecture along the lake, they found it harder to precisely delimit groups of pots, but documented at least three groups, as well as another three isolated, complete vases, again in low mounds.

Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938:79–80) claimed their “primary aim was to determine the nature and association of the major ceramic wares present” at

Lake Yojoa, but concluded that “even a preliminary account of the manner in which the various types of vessels and artifacts occur *in situ*, should have value” because “complete or restorable pottery vessels were more abundant in Lake Yojoa” than elsewhere in Honduras. Some of the vessels they excavated apparently were too fragile to survive excavation. Combining information from field notebooks (now in the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution), published descriptions, and my first-hand examination of the Peabody Museum and National Museum of Natural History collections, I am able to provide relatively precise identification of the contents of almost all of the pottery caches (Table 6).

The five vessels making up the only deposit identified in the first mound excavated at La Ceiba consist of examples of three different painted pottery traditions. Three Ulua Polychromes were included: a small polychrome jar that is too eroded for more precise identification but is similar in shape and slip to late Ulua Polychromes, a Nebla subclass Picadilly cylinder vase, and a polychrome bowl modeled in the shape of a bird, with the rim forming head, tail, and wings that is part of an unnamed group in the Yojoa class. A large jar identifiable with the Las Flores Polychrome style, and a red-on-orange bowl in a distinct painted pottery tradition, Cancique Bichrome, were also present (see Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993 for these types). The latest of these vessels can be dated to the eighth century. The red on orange Cancique Bichrome bowl, which is very worn, has origins substantially earlier but is actually not well described (see Baudez and Becquelin 1973). The inclusion of an apparent older vessel either represents continuation of production of these vessels on Lake Yojoa, or use of an heirloom, an explanation supported by the wear on this vessel, noted by the excavators.

Excavations at a second part of the La Ceiba site produced five more groups of vessels. The first of these was made up of four pots: a small Manzanillo class jar (containing some charcoal and a stone); a Nebla subclass Picadilly cylinder vase; a Selva subclass Concerto bowl; and a red painted ladle censer. The cylinder vase and bowl were grouped together, the bowl pushed inside the vase. The jar was placed on one side, and the ladle censer on the other, of this pair. The polychromes in this set of vessels all were made during the eighth century.

The third pottery deposit at La Ceiba consisted of two vessels, both jars, each containing a single jade bead. The smaller jar is described as being bright red in color. The larger jar belongs to Manzanillo subclass Pagano, displaying a frontal monkey face, and can be dated to the eighth century.

The three vessels that made up the fourth of these clusters diverged from the pattern slightly, including two small vessels of a distinctive local clay mixture, carved and incised, and fired deep brown. One, described as a short

TABLE 6A *Pottery deposits excavated at La Ceiba, Lake Yojoa by Strong, Kidder and Paul*

Context	Depth	Object form	Object class	Catalogue number	Date span (AD)
exc 1	1.1 m	small jar	white slip, traces polychrome	PM 20/5326	
exc 1	1.3 m	bowl	Cancique Bichrome	PM 20/5339	400–650
exc 1	1.0 m	bowl, effigy	Yojoa bird effigy	SI A378555	650–750
exc 1	1.4 m	jar	Las Flores Polychrome	PM 20/5338	650–850
exc 1	1.65 m	cylinder vase	Nebla: Picadilly	SI A378563	750–850
exc 2 deposit 1	1.25 m	censer, ladle	Chinda red on buff	PM 20/5333	600–900
exc 2 deposit 1	1.05 m	small jar containing stone, charcoal	Manzanillo: Armadillo	PM 20/5332	700–800
exc 2 deposit 1	1.05 m	cylinder vase	Nebla: Picadilly	PM 20/5330	750–850
exc 2 deposit 1	1.05 m	bowl	Selva: Concerto	PM 20/5331	700–800
exc 2 deposit 2		small jar containing cylindrical jade bead	red slipped	SI A378550, SI A378569	
exc 2 deposit 2		jar containing jadeite bead	Manzanillo: Pagano	SI A378557, SI A378570	700–800
exc 2 deposit 3		bowl	carved brown	SI A378565	650–800
exc 2 deposit 3		cylinder vase	incised brown	SI A378566	650–800
exc 2 deposit 3	35 cm	jar	Yojoa: Singe Accroupi	PM 20/5327	650–750
exc 2 deposit 4	72 cm	shoe-shaped pot containing pottery bead	unslipped	PM 20/5329	
exc 2 deposit 4		jar	eroded	not located	
exc 2 deposit 4		bowl	eroded	not located	
exc 2 deposit 5		cylinder vase	unique polychrome	SI A378549	
exc 2 deposit 5	70 cm	cylinder vase	Nebla: Picadilly	PM 20/5328	750–850
exc 2 deposit 5		cylinder vase	Nebla: Picadilly	SI A378552	750–850
exc 2 deposit 5		bowl	Nebla: Rodeo	SI A378548	750–850
exc 2 deposit 5		bowl	Nebla: Rodeo	PM 20/5335	750–850
exc 2 deposit 5		bowl	Nebla: Rodeo A	PM 20/5334	750–850

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce, based on inspection of vessels and review of figures published in Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938) or in their unpublished field notebooks.

TABLE 6B *Pottery deposits excavated at Los Naranjos, Lake Yojoa by Strong, Kidder and Paul*

Context	Object form	Object class	Catalogue number	Date span (AD)
deposit 1 ("pot 1")	bowl	Yojoa: Tiotivo B	PM 20/5383	650–750
deposit 1 ("pot 2")	bowl	Santa Rita: Arrodillarse	PM 20/5384	600–700
deposit 1	bowl	Yojoa: Serpent Complex	SI A378539	650–750
deposit 1 ("pot 4")	jar, effigy	unslipped "frog" (actu- ally bird)	PM 20/5385	
deposit 2	bowl	red slipped	not located	
deposit 2 ("Exc B")	cylinder vase	Santa Rita: Cyrano	SI A378535	600–700
deposit 2	censer, ladle	red on cream slip	SI A378544	
deposit 2	bowl	Chasnigua Red on Orange	SI A378538	400–650
deposit 2	bowl	Cancique Polychrome	SI A378540	650–750
deposit 3	jar, large	unslipped?	not located	
deposit 3	bowl	Nebla: Rodeo A	SI A378537	750–850
deposit 3	stone bead		not located	
isolated, same area	bowl, ring base	Chasnigua Red on Orange	PM 20/5387	400–650
isolated, same area	cylinder vase	Yojoa: Molinero	SI A378536	650–750
isolated	bowl	unslipped	SI A378541	
isolated	jar	Sulaco Red on Orange	SI A378542	650–850

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce, based on inspection of vessels and review of figures published in Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938) or in their unpublished field notebooks.

cylindrical-walled vase with two vertical lugs like those on Ulua Marble vases, can be compared to the Tacamiche ceramic group from the lower Ulua Valley, sharing among other characteristics the application to the rim of post-fire blue pigment, and the depiction of a profile head similar to those on Ulua Polychromes. The second brown ware vessel from La Ceiba is a small cylinder with tripod supports, a form shared with the Tacamiche group, ornamented with a unique crossed lattice design. While this bowl and vase cannot be assigned to a defined type, the Tacamiche Group of the lower Ulua Valley was made and used starting between 650 and 750 AD (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). This is consistent with the date of the third vessel from this pottery deposit: a small Ulua Polychrome Yojoa subclass Singe Accroupi jar depicting a black monkey in frontal pose.

A fifth group of vessels excavated in this area of La Ceiba included a very eroded jar and bowl, and another locally-made vessel, a small unslipped pot described as shoe-shaped, which contained a single pottery bead. During my research this jar and bowl could not be relocated, but are consistent with Ulua Polychromes in the Manzanillo (jar) and Yojoa (bowl) class. The bowl was inverted over the small jar, whose designs, described by the excavators as alligators, would today be identifiable as felines.

La Ceiba site 2 deposit 5 included a total of six pots, encountered over an area two by three meters wide, perhaps calling into question their association as a single group. All date to the late eighth or the early ninth century. The deposit included three bowls identifiable as Nebla subclass Rodeo, and two cylinders belonging to Nebla subclass Picadilly. Only two vessels were directly associated, forming another bowl-and-vase pair, the cylinder covered by the bowl. Potentially the remaining two bowls and vases were also sets, each pair a large container and a small cup suitable for drinking.

The published description of pottery clusters from Los Naranjos is harder to reconcile with existing museum records. There were several vessels described as isolated in the excavated area at Los Naranjos. The first group described at Los Naranjos was made up of four pots. Two Ulua Polychrome bowls (Santa Rita subclass Arrodillarse, and Yojoa subclass Tiotivo) were found in a stack next to a small animal effigy jar. Described in the field as a turtle, as a frog in publication, this vessel resembles an unslipped and unpainted version of the Yojoa class bird effigy bowls in other contexts at Lake Yojoa. The main cluster of three vessels was described as being at the base of a refuse deposit. The last vessel, a bowl encountered at a slightly shallower depth, depicted feline imagery the excavators described as alligators, and is recognizable as belonging to the Yojoa class. These vessels overlap in dating in the second half of the seventh century.

A second cluster of five pots was excavated at Los Naranjos. According to field notes, this was the only place the project found any sign of human remains, highly eroded molars at one edge of the excavated area, in a deposit heavily disturbed by animal burrows. Preservation allowed the excavators to recognize that this deposit was placed at the edge of a house floor. The five pots included were similar to the first La Ceiba pottery deposit: a polychrome cylinder (of the Santa Rita: Cyrano class) containing a smaller bowl (reported to be red-slipped, and not relocated) formed a center point around which were laid three other vessels, a ladle censer to one side, a Chasnigua red on orange bowl to another, and at the opposite side from the censer, a second polychrome vase, this one belonging to the Cancique tradition. The censer in this deposit was encountered full of burned material (see Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993 for the Chasnigua type).

The most identifiable bowl in this deposit was a Cancique Polychrome, rather than an Ulua Polychrome. Cancique Polychrome was originally defined at Los Naranjos (Baudez and Becquelin 1973). It shows up in small amounts in the Ulua valley, in Santa Barbara, and at Lake Yojoa, but no one has established the actual location where it was manufactured. The highest reported frequencies of this style of pottery seem to be in the Comayagua valley (Stone 1957). Cancique potters did not use black paint in their designs. Instead, they formed a polychrome effect by using tones of red and orange, often leaving zones of the underlying body of the pot unslipped as a contrasting light zone, or adding glossy white bands. Many Cancique vessels share motifs with corresponding Ulua types, allowing rough estimated dates, under the assumption that they reflect a similar period of adoption of designs. The Cancique Polychrome bowl in the deposit at Los Naranjos depicts monkey motifs, which would be dated 650–750 AD if executed on an Ulua Polychrome. These dates are consistent with the two other painted types identified here, and suggest this deposit was created in the seventh century.

The third and final group of whole pots excavated at Los Naranjos consisted of an unslipped jar (not relocated, reported to have broken into pieces in the field), standing upright, with a Nebla class Rodeo subclass bowl inside. Near this pair of vessels a single stone bead was recovered. The Nebla class bowl suggests a date from the mid-eighth to early ninth century.

In addition to these groups of pots, the Harvard-Smithsonian expedition recorded four individual intact pots at Los Naranjos from similar contexts. One was an unslipped bowl, while the other three were painted and can be identified more precisely. A Sulaco Red on Orange jar carries distinctive imagery of felines (see Hirth, Kennedy, and Cliff 1993 for the Sulaco type). The two remaining isolated vessels, excavated at two different times, are described as located

close enough to each other to be associated. One is another Chasnigua red on orange bowl, with a distinctive ring base typical of the early seventh century or before. The Yojoa subclass Molinero polychrome cylinder found nearby is not consistent with this date, but would follow in the late seventh to early eighth century.

Because they understood burial and residence as activities that should have been separated, Strong, Kidder and Paul were led to characterize the sites where they recovered groups of pots at Lake Yojoa either as burial mounds, or as burial grounds replacing earlier residences. If instead we begin with what was present, it becomes clear that these pottery caches were buried in residential areas. They repeatedly incorporate a few elements, each an index of specific ceremonial practices carried out within these residential settings: rituals related to the histories of houses and the people who built and rebuilt them.

### Rituals of Houses and People

The excavated pottery clusters from Lake Yojoa normally included at least one small decorated bowl. The small size of these bowls is appropriate for serving individual portions of food or drink. When more than one vessel was present, the second vessel in the cache was either a small polychrome jar with two handles, or a polychrome cylinder vase. Both of these are forms appropriate to contain liquids, poured out in smaller bowls for individual consumption. Much rarer additions to these clusters of pots are vessels shaped to contain burning resin. Finally, a number of the deposits also included one bead, made of green stone or in one case, pottery.

Caches of pottery vessels buried in architecture are known from other Honduran sites across the area where Ulua Polychromes were made and used (Table 7). The practice began long before the first Ulua Polychromes were made; at Puerto Escondido in the Ulua valley, single jars, one covered with a base fragment from a bowl, another containing two jade pendants, were deposited in fill that converted a house into a monumental platform at the time of a burial around 900–700 BC (Joyce and Henderson 2001; Joyce 2011). The practice of placing jade objects in sealed vessels as part of renovating architecture continued into the early years of Ulua Polychrome production, with examples recovered from two different buildings at Los Naranjos, and from Travesia.

Burying pottery vessels in architecture was not a practice restricted to ritualized spaces, but occurred in house compounds from Comayagua to the lower Ulua Valley. The practice outlived Ulua Polychromes themselves: at

ninth-century Cerro Palenque, a Baracoa Fine Paste vase and small bowl-shaped cup were placed in wall fill as part of a construction event in a household group (Joyce 1985:215–16, 449; 1991:58–60, fig. 21g, h). At Los Naranjos, a Las Vegas polychrome vases were cached in a platform in the center of a house compound sometime in the tenth century or later (Baudez and Becquelin 1973). Multiple vessels cached below the floor of a building dating to the turn of the sixteenth century at Ticamaya indicate that the same practice continued, even during the later period when archaeological data are scarcer (Blaidell-Sloan 2006).

Where deposits of whole vessels have been found in architectural settings, direct associations with human skeletal remains during the period of manufacture and use of Uluá Polychromes are tenuous or non-existent. This suggests that Strong, Kidder, and Paul's attribution of lack of human remains with the vessels they excavated to decay of skeletal elements should be treated

TABLE 7A *Architectural caches with pottery vessels from sites in Uluá Polychrome zone (AD 200–1050)*

Chronology	Location	Contents
200–600 AD	Gualjoquito (Schortman et al. 1986)	bowl, <i>Spondylus</i> shell, 12 Oliva tinklers
500–900 AD (Yojoa phase)	Los Naranjos, Str IV-5 T 26, Cache 1	Chinda Red on Natural vase, cover Chinda Red on Natural vase, cover, fragment of green stone
500–900 AD (Yojoa phase)	Los Naranjos, Str IV-1 T 34, Cache 1	Chinda Red on Natural vase, cover, 1 Chinda Red on Natural vase, cover, 2
500–900 AD (Yojoa phase)	Los Naranjos, Str 26, Group 1 T 55, Cache 2	Chinda Red on Natural cover engraved jade plaque
400–650 AD	Travesia (Stone 1941: 63; fig. 53)	Chasnigua Red on Orange bowl, jade, feline tooth, clay beads
500–900 AD (Yojoa phase)	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Cache 1	Cancique Polychrome bowl
650–750 AD	Travesia “cache mound” (Peabody Mu- seum 39-59-20/7853, 7857, 7858)	Yojoa: Tiotivo A variant bowl Selva: Concerto variant bowl, 1 Selva: Concerto variant bowl, 2

Chronology	Location	Contents
650–750 AD	Santa Barbara Site 106-1 (Ashmore et al. 1987: 243)	Polychrome bowl Travesia: Bombero variant cylinder, <i>Spondylus</i> shell
700–750 AD	Yarumela (Joesink-Mandeville 1997: fig. 8–12)	Selva: Troubador variant cylinder Yojoa: Tiotivo A bowl Yojoa: Tiotivo B bowl Yojoa: Molinero variant cylinder? Yojoa: Pantano dish
750–850 AD	Tenampua main mound (NMAI 161963; Stone 1957: fig. 55A, B)	Tenampua: Pentagone dish Tenampua: Cefiro cylinder vase, 1 Tenampua: Cefiro cylinder vase, 2
750–850 AD (Yojoa phase)	Los Naranjos, Str 26, Group 1 T 55, Cache 1	Manzanillo jar, 2 jade beads Nebla: Tigrillo cylinder Nebla: Tigrillo cylinder, jade bead Nebla: Tigrillo jar, 2 jade beads
800–900 AD	Tenampua main mound (Stone 1957: fig. 55C b)	Tenampua: Capitan cylinder vase
850–1050 AD	Cerro Palenque, Group 6B, Op. 34-3 (Joyce 1991: fig. 21g, h)	Baracoa Fine Paste vase Baracoa Fine Paste cup
850–1050 AD	Cerro Palenque, Main Group (Hendon 2010)	Santana bowl, <i>Spondylus</i> shell, frag- ment of green marble vase

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce based on examination of vessels (Cerro Palenque, Travesia, Yarumela) or review of published illustrations.

cautiously. The contents and setting of the majority of these deposits suggest they are best understood as indexing ritual practices among household residents. This may include, but was not limited to, commemoration of the dead, buried below house floors or patios. More generally, caches of vessels seem to have been widely used in connection with remodeling of architecture, and perhaps should be considered first in relation to the groups of people who would have been joined in the use of such vessels in ceremonies, shared meals and rituals of incense burning.

TABLE 7B *Architectural caches with pottery vessels from sites in Uluá Polychrome zone: Rio Blanco phase Los Naranjos (AD 900–1200)*

Chronology	Location	Contents
Episode 1	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 49, Cache 1	Las Vegas Polychrome vase
Episode 2	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 9	worked bone
Episode 3	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 1	obsidian point
Episode 4	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 4	3 obsidian blades Las Vegas Polychrome tripod dish Las Vegas Polychrome tripod dish 2 greenstone beads greenstone mosaic fragments worked bone fragment
Episode 5	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 2	Las Vegas Polychrome jar Mirimpe Red ladle censer Mirimpe Red jar Tohil Plumbate vase Mixtec censer Custeca Plain jar
Episode 5	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 3	Las Vegas Polychrome jar Las Vegas Polychrome tripod dish 2 greenstone beads
Episode 6	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 8	Cebadia Incised bowl reworked disk of Mirimpe Red copper ornament
Episode 7	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 5	necklace of jade beads and pendant
Episode 7	Los Naranjos, Str 6, Group 5 T 51, Burial 6	2 greenstone beads

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce after Baudez and Becquelin (1973), confirmed by examination of vessels in on-site museum and review of published illustrations.

At their simplest, such architectural caches are composed of a single vessel. Single vessel caches are normally either a bowl (a drinking cup), as in the examples from Lake Yojoa, or a vase (a pitcher form). Single vessel caches often were accompanied by shell or green stone objects (Hendon 2010; Schortman and Urban 1995:495). In the shape of the vessels, these simplest and most common architectural pottery deposits index the serving and consumption of a beverage, contained in small jars or cylinder vases and served in small bowls. Many deposits simply multiply the numbers of each kind of vessel: at least five of the sets of pots from Lake Yojoa can be described as elaborations of drinking vessel caches.

More rarely, two other kinds of vessels were added. A cache from Yarumela, in the Comayagua valley, included four otherwise typical vessels appropriate for serving liquids, two cylinders and two bowls (Joessink-Mandeville 1997:11–12, figs. 8–12). The fifth vessel present in this location, a dish with three feet, is the rarest kind of vessel found in such deposits. One of the vessel caches excavated at Tenampua, described by Doris Stone (1957:51–55), also contained a dish, along with two cylinder vases.

Dishes have been identified as most likely used in formal settings to present solid foods, and are the rarest shape executed in Honduran polychrome traditions (Beaudry 1984, 1987; Hendon 1987; Joyce 1985, 1993a, 1993b; Longyear 1952; Viel 1978, 1993). The presence of dishes in the Yarumela and Tenampua caches, each of which comes from a possible non-residential setting, may indicate that these caches index a different kind of ceremony than those that simply present vessels for drinking, typical of residential caches. In statistical analyses of assemblages from house compounds at Copan, Hendon (1987) found that plates or dishes were most likely to be associated with shrines rather than dwellings, or to be found in burials. Dish and plate forms may thus have been particularly suitable for mortuary rituals or other specialized observances.

The serving of food and drink indexed by vessels in caches was sometimes complemented by evidence of burning of resin, by including a vessel appropriate for this purpose. Burning resin was a central part of rituals to commemorate deceased family members, celebrations of ancestors (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013; Joyce and Pollard 2010). Two of the sets of pots recorded at Lake Yojoa included a ladle censer. These two deposits, while resulting from the practices of a household, quite likely indexed ceremonies different from those that only included sharing of food or drink. Architectural deposits at Tenampua (Stone 1957:51–55) exemplify similar actions in more spectacular form, with at least two sets of pots placed on room floors covered with fill containing broken fragments of incense burning vessels of many kinds. Similar practices continued through to the sixteenth century, when residents at the

site of Ticamaya buried incense-burning vessels painted in Nolasco Bichrome style in the floor of one building (Blaisdell-Sloan 2006).

Architectural caches were the products of actions by people living in households occupying small clusters of buildings, marking a variety of events in the human life cycle, of which burial was one, but not the only or even most important event. Such caches may relate to events in the life cycles of other beings, beyond the human. Lopiparo (2006, 2007) has argued that houses themselves were understood as living beings, like their human residents in need of periodic renewal. At Cerro Palenque, a Santana class bowl, *Spondylus* shell, and fragment of green stone were placed as part of renovation of a principal residential building (Hendon 2010). This action occurred at the same time as rituals involving the display of effigies of bundles of long bones, and the interment of an actual set of human long bones in a secondary deposit in the renovated building. In practices like these, the dead were incorporated into a place through the ceremonies attested by these objects. This house-centered way of disposing of the dead contrasts with potentially more individualizing effects that including pottery vessels in well-defined burials might have had (Joyce 1999, 2001, 2011).

The pottery deposits excavated by the Harvard-Smithsonian expedition demonstrate repetition of similar ritual practices along the shore of Lake Yojoa over a period of at least two centuries. The same is true of the majority of the pots collected by Jens Yde (Table 8), although the span of time represented in his collection starts somewhat earlier. We cannot be certain that all of the pots Yde acquired, excavated by J.B. Edwards, were found in similar contexts. The associations between pots are not clear in the field notes, catalogue records, or the published report (Yde 1938). What we know is that some of them were described as forming clusters deposited at varying depths in similar contexts as those more precisely documented by Strong, Kidder and Paul.

The vessels excavated by Edwards, and collected by Yde, include the same range of forms as those excavated by the Harvard-Smithsonian researchers: small two-handled jars and (more rarely) cylinders, appropriate for containing liquids, and small bowls of the size for individual servings, with one example of a censer of the Tenampua subclass Zarza, a cylindrical vessel, normally with a lid, within which material was burned. The same forms dominate in pots that the Harvard-Smithsonian project collected from two other sites along Lake Yojoa, Aguacate and Aguatal, including a series of fourteen reconstructed from sherds discarded by other excavators (Table 9). Here, however, dishes were also present, in an assemblage otherwise composed of jars, cylinders, and bowls, possibly indicating the practice of different rituals in some households.

For a very long time, people in the Ulua Polychrome producing areas of Honduras buried pots appropriate for serving beverages in residential architectural caches. These clearly served as a way to ritually mark these places, sometimes by association with the symbolically significant addition of individual green stone beads and marine shells, more durable contents than the liquids that have perished, likely maize-, manioc-, and cacao-based alcoholic and non-alcoholic

TABLE 8 *Identifiable pottery from Lake Yojoa collected by Jens Yde*

Museum	Vessel no.	Fig.	Date span	Pottery class or type, form
MARI	7006	40a	200–450 AD	Muerdalo Orange? dish
MARI	7012	40b	450–650 AD	Chasnigua Red on Orange ring base bowl
DNM	7358	49a	500–600 AD	Dedalos: Labyrinth small jar
DNM	7357	57a	500–600 AD	Dedalos: Labyrinth small jar
DNM	7355	55	600–650 AD	Santa Rita: Arrodollarse cylinder vase
DNM	7355	56	600–650 AD	Santa Rita: Cyrano cylinder vase
MARI	6983	41b	600–700 AD	Dedalos: Chac bowl
MARI	7168	41c	600–700 AD	Dedalos: Chac bowl
MARI	7153	39b	600–700 AD	Dedalos: Chac cylinder vase
MARI	7015	47	600–700 AD	Santa Rita: Winged Figure cylinder vase
DNM	7346	51a	650–750 AD	Cancique Red on Orange dish
MARI	7024	39a	650–750 AD	Santa Rita: Mellizo cylinder vase
MARI?	6966	46b	650–750 AD	Travesia: Bombero ring base bowl
MARI	7018	46a	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Molinero cylinder vase
DNM	7349	49b	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Singe Accroupi small jar
DNM	7348	51b	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Singe Accroupi small jar

TABLE 8 *Identifiable pottery from Lake Yojoa collected by Jens Yde (cont.)*

Museum	Vessel no.	Fig.	Date span	Pottery class or type, form
DNM	7345	54b	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Tiotivo B bowl
MARI	7032	46c	700–750 AD	Santa Rita: Paloma cylinder vase
MARI	7027	44	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Armadillo small jar
DNM	7350	52c	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Armadillo small jar
MARI	8303	43	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Farolillo small jar
MARI	7129	45	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Farolillo small jar
DNM	7344	52d	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Farolillo var. Alcatraz small jar
DNM	7353	51c	700–800 AD	Selva: Concerto bowl
DNM	7352	54c	700–800 AD	Selva: Concerto bowl
DNM	7351	53b	700–800 AD	Selva: Concerto variant bowl
MARI	7021	42	700–800 AD	Selva: Troubador cylinder vase
MARI	6977	48	700–800 AD	Tenampua: Zarza? censer
DNM	7347	52b	700–800 AD	Tourmaline bowl
MARI	7016	38a	750–850 AD	incised bowl
MARI	7046	41a	750–850 AD	Nebla: Picadilly cylinder vase
DNM	7354	57b	750–850 AD	Nebla: Rodeo A bowl
MARI	6974	38b	750–850 AD	Nebla: Sphinx B bowl
MARI	7876	38c	750–850 AD	Tacamiche: Marmol type bowl

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce based on inspection of Danish National Museum (DNM) collection or figures published in Yde (1938). Vessel numbers from Yde (1938).

beverages. The same practices continued at Cerro Palenque even after the people there abandoned polychrome pottery in favor of unslipped fine paste vessels.

There is a discontinuity in historical evidence from the end of occupation of Cerro Palenque, sometime before 1100 AD, to the fifteenth century when

residents of Ticamaya buried censers below the floor of a building there. Yet the gap created by lack of archaeological investigation should not obscure the continuity of household and village practices that is evident across very long periods of time in Honduras. Vessels specifically created for burning of resin are part of household assemblages dating from as early as the second century AD to the period when Spanish administration was being established. The use of ladle censers persisted from their introduction in the sixth to seventh century until the early sixteenth century, a material index of the same ritual gestures undertaken in household and community settings for roughly a millennium. Sometimes unpainted and modeled, sometimes simply painted in

TABLE 9 *Additional pots from Lake Yojoa sites recorded by Strong, Kidder and Paul*

Figure or museum no.	Site	Dates	Pottery class or type and form
Pl. 14 f	Aguacate		carved brown bowl
PM 38-45-20/5354	Aguacate	550–650 AD	Dedalos: Labyrinth small jar
PM 38-45-20/5348;	Aguatal	600–650 AD	Santa Rita: Mellizo bowl
Pl. 12 c			
NMH; Figure 29	Aguacate	600–700 AD	Santa Rita: Cyrano cylinder vase
PM 38-45-20/5379	Aguacate	600–700 AD	Santa Rita: Cyrano dish
PM 38-45-20/5362	Aguacate	600–700 AD	Santa Rita: Diamante small jar
PM 38-45-20/5365	Aguacate	600–700 AD	Santa Rita: Winged Figure bowl
NMH; Figure 27	Aguatal	600–800 AD	Chinda Red on Natural small jar
NMH; Figure 21	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Tourmaline bowl
PM 38-45-20/5377	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Tiotivo B variant bowl
Pl. 14 b	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Corral bowl
Figure 30	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Molinero cylinder vase
PM 38-45-20/5374	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Molinero cylinder vase
Pl. 14 c	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Pantano dish
NMH; Figure 24	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Pantano dish
NMH; Figure 25	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Tiotivo A bowl
PM 38-45-20/5351	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Singe Accroupi small jar

TABLE 9 *Additional pots from Lake Yojoa sites recorded by Strong, Kidder and Paul (cont.)*

Figure or museum no.	Site	Dates	Pottery class or type and form
NMH; Figure 23	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Tiotivo bowl
PM 38-45-20/5353	Aguacate	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Tiotivo B bowl
Pl. 14 h	Aguatal	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Corral bird effigy bowl
NMH; Figure 22	Aguatal	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Singe Accoupi small jar
PM 38-45-20/5347; Pl. 13 c	Aguatal	650–750 AD	Yojoa: Singe Accroupi closed bowl
Pl. 14 e	Aguacate	650–850 AD	marble vase imitation bowl
PM 38-45-20/5376	Aguacate	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Armadillo small jar
PM 38-45-20/5375	Aguacate	700–800 AD	Manzanillo: Pagano small jar
Pl. 14 a	Aguacate	700–800 AD	Selva: Concerto bowl
PM 38-45-20/5364	Aguacate	700–800 AD	Selva: Concerto bowl
PM 38-45-20/5366	Aguacate	750–850 AD	Nebla: Picadilly cylinder vase
PM 38-45-20/5380; Pl. 13 f	Aguacate	750–850 AD	Nebla: Picadilly cylinder vase
PM 38-45-20/5373; Pl. 12 b	Aguacate	750–850 AD	Nebla: Picadilly cylinder vase
NMH; Figure 28	Aguacate	750–850 AD	Nebla: Rodeo A bowl
Pl. 12 e	Aguacate	750–850 AD	Nebla: Rodeo A bowl
PM 38-45-20/5340; Pl. 12 d	Aguatal	750–850 AD	Nebla: Rodeo A bowl
PM 38-45-20/5341	Aguatal	750–850 AD	Nebla: Rodeo A bowl
PM 38-45-20/5336	La Ceiba	600–700 AD	Santa Rita: Cyrano small jar

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce, based on inspection of vessels in Peabody Museum (PM), Smithsonian Institution (SI), or figures illustrating vessels in the National Museum of Honduras (NMH) published in Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938).

red on burnished unslipped clay surfaces, at other times these censers were produced by potters using the polychrome or bichrome techniques that distinguished specific localities in Honduras throughout this period.

Yet this does not mean that practices ending in burying whole painted vessels were immune to change throughout this long period. Results from later excavations at Los Naranjos demonstrate how ritual practices involving the

use of pottery vessels there changed over time, in a context within which production and use of polychrome-painted ceramics was taking on new, more restricted, roles.

*Los Naranjos: Painted Pottery in Burials at Lake Yojoa*

Seven deposits of ceramic vessels were identified in excavations at Los Naranjos that took place thirty years after the work of Jens Yde and Strong, Kidder, and Paul (Baudez and Becquelin 1973; see Table 7). Three of these caches were placed in a building that also incorporated a series of ten burials. Because of the excellent documentation of stratigraphic relations by this modern project, it is possible to demonstrate that the use of this building began near the end of the period of production of Ulua Polychromes, around the beginning of the ninth century, and continued into the initial period of production of the successor Las Vegas Polychrome group. Taken together, the three caches and ten burials show how rituals directed at a group identity lodged in residential buildings were transformed to mark a new kind of building, dedicated specifically to mortuary practices that celebrated individual differences among the residents of a house compound.

The earliest cache of pottery in a residential building documented by these archaeologists resembled others in a monumental platform at the site, Structure IV. A ceramic lid closed a cavity in a staircase in Structure 26 of this residential compound, called Group 1 (Table 7a). Inside was a carved jade object in a style indicating it was likely imported from Salitron Viejo, east along the Sulaco River, where a center of jade carving was located (Hirth and Grant Hirth 1993).

In the same residential structure, a later cache consisted of four polychrome vessels dating to the second half of the eighth century: a Manzanillo class jar and a Nebla subclass Tigrillo vase, each containing two green stone beads, and two Tigrillo subclass cylinder vases, the larger containing another greenstone bead. One of these vessels also yielded fish vertebrae and carbonized plant material, suggesting they were buried containing food. Notably missing in this deposit, in comparison to those excavated at Lake Yojoa by earlier investigators, are simple bowls. What was recovered in Structure 26 are the containers that would have held food or drink to be shared, not the individual serving vessels. While these four vessels belong to Ulua Polychrome classes common in the deposits along the lake shore excavated by earlier researchers, three incorporate an otherwise rare image of a frontal mask of a feline, molded and painted on the vessel, with the animal's body wrapped around the vase. Along with the difference in vessel forms, the use of these unusual effigy vessels probably indicates that the ritual in which they were used, although appropriate to a residential compound, was different than the rituals that resulted in sets of drinking vessels being buried at other locations along the shore of Lake Yojoa.

Four other caches were recorded in a second tested residential compound at Los Naranjos, Group 5. Stratigraphic relations establish that a single Cancique polychrome bowl was placed as a foundation cache for the low platform in the center of this residential group, near the time that one burial was interred there. Like the Cancique Polychrome recovered by the Harvard-Smithsonian project in their excavations at Los Naranjos, this vessel depicts a monkey theme, which should date this episode between 650 and 750 AD.

A second foundation cache in the same platform was quite unusual, consisting of a feline skull and two large blades, one black obsidian and one lighter colored quartzite. Other feline skeletal remains have been documented as foundation deposits in non-residential architectural platforms at Travesia and Copan (Stone 1941:73–75; Ballinger and Stomper 2000). The central platform of Los Naranjos Group 5 could thus be seen as a hybrid space, combining practices typical of residential compounds and distinct from them, potentially creating a place for ritual practices of different kinds.

The single burial in the early platform contained a typical pairing of vessels: a jar covered by an Ulua Polychrome bowl. The jar, a local incised type, contained shells of riverine snails, consumed for food even into the twentieth century. The Ulua Polychrome bowl was unfortunately fragmented and was not illustrated, and so cannot be identified more precisely. The original dating of the two foundation caches for this burial platform proposed by the excavators placed them in the Rio Blanco phase, starting at 900 AD, suggesting a late date for the burial, and for the conversion of what had been architecturally-oriented ritual practices into human-focused mortuary rites.

Stratigraphic evidence shows that the platform was then extended. A foundation cache associated with the expansion contained a single Las Vegas Polychrome vase, dating the use of the second version of the platform to the tenth century. Nine additional burials were then placed in the platform. Based on the superposition of burials documented in the drawings in the published report (Baudez and Becquelin 1973), the first burial added after this extension contained only a piece of worked bone. The second burial added yielded an obsidian point.

It was with the next set of three burials that a wealth of pottery vessels was deposited. One burial was accompanied by two Las Vegas polychrome vessels, a jar and a dish. Another yielded two Las Vegas dishes. The third contained six vessels: two jars, local unslipped and red-slipped types; two vases, one Las Vegas Polychrome and one Tohil Plumbate, imported from a center of manufacture on the Pacific Coast near the border of Mexico and Guatemala; and two incense burning vessels, one a local red-slipped ladle censer, the other an imported Mixteca Puebla style censer with a long handle and two supports for the globular body. The presence of dishes and censers is consistent with

ceremonies in earlier sites at Lake Yojoa, but now these vessels are placed with individual burials.

The last group of burials in this platform, all containing the remains of infants, departed almost completely from previous patterns. Two were accompanied by green stone jewelry. A third was buried with a copper piece, a sherd disk, and a simple Cebadia Incised bowl, a new red slipped incised type that became popular after 1000 AD and established a tradition that continued to the colonial period, when residents at Ticamaya used similar bowls for food serving (Blaisdell-Sloan 2006).

By the very late date when these burials took place at Los Naranjos, polychrome pottery production was no longer as widespread, but individual burials had become normal places to deposit vessels. Potters initiated new painted styles in northern Honduras after 1300 AD, including the new red on white Nolasco Bichrome (Wonderley 1985, 1986). Bowls in these new painted styles apparently were appropriate objects to place in burials. Museum collections contain many examples of complete Nolasco Bichrome bowls, or similar bowls in other late polychrome styles, from sites occupied earlier during the period of production of Ulua Polychromes, including Travesia and Campo Dos. These isolated complete vessels likely attest to placement of whole painted pots in burials, like a burial excavated at El Remolino, on the banks of the Chamelecon river, that yielded Nolasco Bichrome vessels in association with a bundled body wearing a Spondylus shell necklace (Wonderley 1984). Yet at the same time, vessels painted in these styles also were incorporated in caches in the floors of buildings, testimony to the continued importance of rituals of buildings in an age that also celebrated the distinction of individual people. With a stronger understanding of the development of the Ulua Polychrome tradition as background, it is now possible to begin to trace changing practices of use of polychrome pots that emerged in the centuries after the last Ulua Polychromes were produced. This begins with clarifying the nature of Las Vegas Polychrome, the innovation that followed Ulua Polychromes and replaced them in an area extending from Comayagua to Lake Yojoa.

### *The Transition from Ulua to Las Vegas Polychromes*

Meticulous excavations from Los Naranjos demonstrate changes in burial practices happening at the same time that Ulua Polychromes were being replaced by Las Vegas Polychrome. Las Vegas Polychrome clearly grew out of roots in the Tenampua class of Ulua Polychromes, sharing the ring-base incurved rim vase form with Tenampua subclass Capitan, and emphasizing dishes with tripod feet rather than bowls. Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes often have a white slip, either over an underlying orange slip, or as the sole background, making

them the earliest examples of white-slipped polychromes in a zone that extends from Costa Rica to El Salvador and Honduras.

Las Vegas Polychrome was named by Stone (1957), based on samples from the Comayagua valley, and further described by Baudez and Becquelin (1973), using vessels and sherds from Los Naranjos on Lake Yojoa. They are most commonly encountered in the form of incurved rim vases (Figure 68).

About half of the vases of this shape that I have recorded are animal effigies. Second in frequency are bowls or dishes with tripod supports. Often, the supports are modeled and painted to represent the head of a tapir. The rarest forms are cylinders and complex silhouette vases (Figure 69). All recorded examples of these forms have pedestal bases.

Up to four design fields may be present on the exterior of Las Vegas Polychrome vessels, a change in design construction when compared to Tenampua group Ulua Polychromes that precede them. Most common are three exterior design fields. Two design fields often repeat a motif, most often red bands, twisted braids, or step frets. All three of these common motifs were already part of the Ulua Polychrome repertoire, as are other typical motifs of Las Vegas Polychrome, in particular, kan cross motifs, a square with a central dot and four corner dots, also called a quincunx.

The animals featured on Las Vegas Polychrome overlap with those depicted on Ulua Polychromes as well. Monkey, feline, and armadillo images formed the main design of some Ulua Polychromes as early as the mid-seventh century. A particularly striking overlap between Tenampua group and Las Vegas Polychrome is the depiction of a long-beaked bird, painted in white on a black band, which is identical to Tenampua group imagery. While multi-figure interacting groups of anthropomorphic figures are absent from recorded Las Vegas Polychromes, individual seated or standing human figures are part of the inventory of motifs, and these resemble the seated and standing human figures of earlier Ulua Polychromes in pose, costume, and the manner in which the human body is represented.

The two most common forms of animal imagery on Las Vegas Polychrome are innovations without close parallels in Ulua Polychromes. Many Las Vegas Polychrome incurved rim vases are modeled as frog effigies (Figure 64). No frog images have been recorded on Ulua Polychromes. The Las Vegas Polychrome frog effigy vessels closely mimic Tohil Plumbate vases, and examples of Tohil Plumbate frog effigy vessels have been recovered from sites in Honduras.

The single most common zoomorphic image on Las Vegas Polychrome is a serpent-bird hybrid (Figures 69 and 70). This can be identified as a precursor of the serpent-bird image that is typical of the Late Postclassic Nolasco Bichrome type of Naco (Wonderley 1985, 1986). Similar serpent-bird images are the main



FIGURE 68

*Periform vase (Las Vegas Polychrome).*

RIO ULUA. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (044050). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

motif of Early Postclassic Bay Islands Polychrome (Figure 71). Also part of the core motifs of Nolasco Bichrome is the continuous twisted strand that continued from Ulua Polychrome into Las Vegas Polychrome (Wonderley 1986). The overlap in motifs and white slip strongly suggest the need to consider Nolasco Bichrome as a successor to Las Vegas Polychrome.

Las Vegas Polychrome was developed by potters who were thoroughly familiar with the repertoire of Tenampua group Ulua Polychrome, which alone among Ulua Polychrome groups used the same vessel forms (the incurved rim vase, pedestal cylinder, and tapir-foot bowl) and which shared some particular motifs (the kan cross, the white bird on black background). The two groups of potters shared an interest in lighter background colors, achieved through applying a white slip onto the orange background slip of Tenampua group, and by applying a white slip directly over the pink to red body of Las Vegas Polychrome. Yet in some very important ways, Las Vegas Polychrome potters rejected central aspects of the Tenampua group, and thus, of the Ulua Polychrome tradition. Where Tenampua potters excelled in depicting multiple human figures engaged in ritual and political action, Las Vegas Polychrome potters abandoned the design structure that designated a large part of the vessel as a field for a continuous scene, and do not depict interactive engagement of anthropomorphic figures. Human and animal figures are treated like geometric motifs, used as single, repeated, and alternating designs. Something new was going on, and not just in the painting of pottery: the prevalence of Las Vegas Polychrome vessels, and of vessels from its successor polychrome groups such as Nolasco Bichrome, is much lower than that of Ulua Polychromes.

### *Painted Pottery Becomes a Luxury*

Although there are not quantitative data from most sites that were occupied during the transition from use of Ulua Polychromes to use of Las Vegas Polychromes (notably, Las Vegas itself), the ceramic sequence from Los Naranjos



FIGURE 69 *Composite silhouette vase (Las Vegas Polychrome).*  
RIO FRIO, ALTA VERAPAZ, GUATEMALA. BROOKLYN MUSEUM,  
A. AUGUSTUS HEALY FUND, 35.1491. PHOTO BY RUSSELL SHEPTAK.

was based on a quantitative seriation of levels from excavations that cover this transition. Polychrome-painted pottery made up a smaller percentage of the assemblages in the later levels of this seriation than it had in the levels yielding Ulua Polychrome sherds (Baudez and Becquelin 1973).

There are several ways to interpret this pattern. It is possible that Las Vegas Polychromes were not primary food serving vessels for everyday meals. Their use in burials would then represent a disjunction with earlier ritual practices in which buried pots indexed the kinds of household-based ceremonies in which such vessels were used. Alternatively, Las Vegas Polychromes may have been less available to the population as a whole, marking a social group that was interested in differentiating itself from the rest of the people in the community.

We can support this second explanation with the co-occurrence of Las Vegas Polychrome with imported pottery of much more restricted distribution in Honduras, Tohil Plumbate and Mixteca-Puebla censers, imported from the Pacific Coast and highlands of Mexico. At Los Naranjos a single burial contained all three of these pottery types. Another imported material, Mexican green obsidian, has been found with Las Vegas Polychrome, and sometimes also



FIGURE 70

*Periform vase, serpent-bird image (Las Vegas Polychrome).*

WILD CANE CAY, BELIZE. PHOTO BY HEATHER MCKILLOP.



FIGURE 71

*Vase, serpent-bird image (Bay Islands Polychrome).*

DIXON SITE, ROATAN; SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION BAY ISLANDS EXPEDITION, 1934. CATALOGUE NO. A373235-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.

with Tohil Plumbate, in other sites in Honduras, including Gualjoquito and El Coyote in the Department of Santa Barbara, and Copan (Joyce 1986; Manahan 2004; Schortman et al. 1986; Sheptak 1985; Urban 2007).

These luxuries were used by people who produced their own products of restricted circulation, made of a newly exploited material: metal ore. Blackiston (1910b) reported on a cache of copper bells and spear points from a cave on the Chamelecon river, found along with “a number of pieces of native copper from three to seven inches in length out of which they were fashioned, also some strips of beaten copper not yet shaped into any form.” A copper bell of the same distinctive Honduran style was found at Gualjoquito, and at El Coyote, an apparent copper working area has been documented, both sites located along tributaries of the Chamelecon (Joyce 1986; Sheptak 1985; Urban 2007; Urban et al. 2013). In the Bay Islands of Honduras, bells of the same style were also found with Tohil Plumbate pottery, and with vessels of Bay Islands Polychrome style that developed at the same time as Las Vegas Polychrome (Strong 1935a).

Distribution of these new luxury ceramics and metal objects during the eleventh century has been described as evidence of the emergence of a social network linking a few families in each region across a landscape extending from Tula, in Hidalgo, Mexico, to the Nicoya region of Costa Rica (Smith 2003; Smith and Heath Smith 1980; Wonderley 1986). Import of goods from distant partners allowed the members of these families to differentiate themselves from the majority of the population in their community, and identify with their distant peers as a class with legitimate authority over others.

Honduran partners in these networks provided copper objects and Las Vegas Polychrome vessels prized by distant recipients. A Honduran copper bell identical to the one from Gualjoquito, a type local to Honduras, was recovered from the Cenote Sagrado of Chichen Itza (Bray 1977; Coggins 1984). Copper objects with Honduran metal composition were among those melted down and reused for new cast objects crafted primarily by elite residents of Mayapan, successor to Chichen Itza, used there by both the administrative elite and some commoners (Meanwell et al. 2013:4316; Paris 2008:48).

Reciprocal exchange of very rare goods to Honduras accompanies the movement of copper out from its Honduran source area. The identification of turkey bones in a jar in a burial at Las Flores Bolsa during the period when copper from Honduras made its way to Mayapan may be evidence of adoption of a new practice using a newly introduced domesticated animal (Henderson and Joyce 2004:234). The cache of copper bells recovered by Blackiston also included a wooden mask covered in turquoise mosaic, a kind of object otherwise known only from Mexican sites (Blackiston 1910b; Saville 1922). Turquoise mosaic work

was among the distinctive crafts of Chichen Itza where Honduran objects were deposited in the Cenote of Sacrifice (Coggins 1984; McEwan et al. 2006:18).

The use of Las Vegas Polychromes is also extensive in space, while restricted to a few people in each area where vessels were found (Joyce 2016). One house at Tula, Hidalgo, Mexico contained a subfloor cache of Las Vegas Polychrome and Tohil Plumbate vessels (Diehl, Lomas, and Wynn 1974). Caches at Cuscatlan, El Salvador, included Mixteca Puebla style censers, Tohil Plumbate, and probable Las Vegas Polychrome vessels, identified as Papagayo Polychrome (Velasquez and Hermes 1997). An early Las Vegas Polychrome vessel was used in a burial on Wild Cane Cay, Belize (Heim et al. 2011; McKillop 2005: Figure 6.9). Las Vegas Polychrome vessels were also incorporated in architectural caches and burials at Copan (Longyear 1952; Manahan 2004).

The inclusion of Las Vegas Polychromes in some burials in Honduras, at sites like Los Naranjos and Copan, is associated with substantial changes in social relations after 1000 AD. Unlike during the heyday of production of Ulua Polychromes, a smaller number of individuals had access to Las Vegas Polychrome vessels, and their placement in burials distinguished those individuals from the majority of the population. While less well documented, a few examples of isolated Las Vegas Polychromes recovered in the lower Ulua valley suggest the same pattern of limited access to these imports during the centuries after 1000 AD.

Similar use of specific styles of painted pottery to distinguish a small group within local social settings has been described for later centuries at Naco, occupied when the troops of Hernan Cortés arrived in Honduras in the 1520s. There, three different painted pottery styles were in use, with two limited to the residents of a central compound (Wonderley 1981, 1986). In the sixteenth century, these painted pottery styles were preferentially used to decorate two vessel forms: open dishes with three feet, appropriate for use in serving food; and ladle censers employed for burning resins in ceremonies. While no burials were located in research at Naco itself, at contemporary El Remolino, on the lower Chamelecon River, distinctive Nolasco Bichrome bowls were part of the burial of an individual who was placed in the ground in a seated position, wearing a massive *Spondylus* shell necklace, in an otherwise modest household setting (Wonderley 1984).

Along with the emergence of a restricted group using painted pottery to mark themselves out from others within their settlements, the inclusion of painted vessels in burials distinguished certain individuals. These aspects of the use of painted pottery after 1100 AD diverge from the practices associated with the Ulua Polychrome tradition. Yet painted pottery was employed for the same ceremonial practices, feasting and burning of resins. Houses continued

to be the primary site of these practices, until Spanish colonization more profoundly changed everyday life after the 1530s.

### Houses as Sites of Ritual Practice

At Los Naranjos, Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938) specifically identified evidence of house floors over some of the pottery deposits they excavated. Others they said were placed in refuse deposits, which they conceived of as the trash from everyday life. Their own excavations at Santa Rita, on the lower Ulua river, serve as a reminder that not all trash deposits accumulated through everyday action: houses were also the site of rituals marking the human life cycle, the renewal of the human group and the renovation of its architectural embodiment, and likely also sites of seasonal rituals important to these farming communities. The material excavated at Santa Rita demonstrates selective disposal of polychrome serving vessels made and used in what may well have been a single event, a feast sponsored by one such farming family.

#### *Santa Rita*

Despite the success Strong, Kidder and Paul had in collecting whole museum specimens on the shore of Lake Yojoa, the work there did not advance the stated goals of their project. The Ulua Polychromes found were relatively consistent in type, and there was no deep stratigraphy to be followed below the deposits of whole vessels. While Strong and Paul worked at Lake Yojoa, Kidder pursued the goal of finding a transition from monochrome to polychrome pottery in the lower Ulua Valley. The site selected for work, Farm 17 in the plantation system of the United Fruit Company, was not far from one of Popenoe's productive sites, Ranchería. On Farm 17, at a locale they called Santa Rita, the Peabody-Smithsonian expedition returned to stratigraphic excavations. When they finished, they had excavated over five meters of stratified deposits in their first excavation area.

The published profile of the west wall of their excavation (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:47) shows that they identified twelve excavation levels containing pottery, the first at a depth of two meters. After completing their excavation, they defined an overlapping series of strata, which they called levels (Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938:49). Their drawing shows evidence of lenses and variation that allowed them to define seven such levels above the area where they recovered ceramics. Two more are shown below the features that yielded Ulua Polychromes.

My assignment of excavated materials to depositional contexts differs from that of the excavators (Figure 72). Review of the excavated collections curated at the Peabody Museum led me to suggest that the Harvard-Smithsonian project actually excavated three stratigraphic deposits dating to the period when Uluá Polychromes were made and used (Joyce 1987).

A shallow pit that yielded pottery, without identifiable polychromes, was covered with sand that Strong, Kidder and Paul designated as stratigraphic level eight. The clay stratum into which the pit containing these early ceramics was dug, the project's stratigraphic level nine, sloped down towards the river on the south. On the sloping surface formed by the clay and sand strata was another stratigraphic deposit, relatively uniform in texture, excavated as pottery contexts P-4, P-5 and P-6. As mapped, these units lacked the abundant potsherds of the next depositional unit, labeled "polychrome horizon" in the report. Like the underlying strata, pottery contexts P-4, P-5 and P-6 also sloped toward the river. Because they were excavated in arbitrary levels, these contexts were mixed with some of the materials from the following depositional unit.

The depositional unit that followed accounts for more defined features than any other excavated at Santa Rita. A layer of rocks caps a surface that slopes down both south, toward the river, and north, toward another well-defined feature. This raised, stone-paved surface sloping down in two directions was very likely a buried platform, of the approximate size and similar character to house platforms that survive as visible features away from the river.

Eight burials within the potsherd-rich deposit capped by these stones support its identification as a house platform, as normally burials in contemporary sites in the lower Uluá valley are placed under house floors or patio surfaces adjacent to houses (Joyce 2011). Six of the individuals in burials at Santa Rita were identified as adults, two in extended positions, the rest flexed. One incomplete deposit was composed of the cranium, mandible, and humerus of an immature individual. The final burial was the body of a child, described as "new born," covered by a red painted basin with a pair of handles, a common cooking pot. This was the only burial associated with pottery. One of the flexed burials included an otherwise undescribed stone object. While the burials had no elaborate burial furnishings or grave markings, one of the extended individuals had notched corners on the upper incisors, a feature that is associated in contemporary sites in Honduras with distinctions among social groups (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013:73–75; Tiesler 2005).

On the north end of the excavation the most completely defined feature was described: a pit, lined with burned clay, filled with fragments of burned clay, and covered with stones. The original clay-lined pit was quite likely an oven;

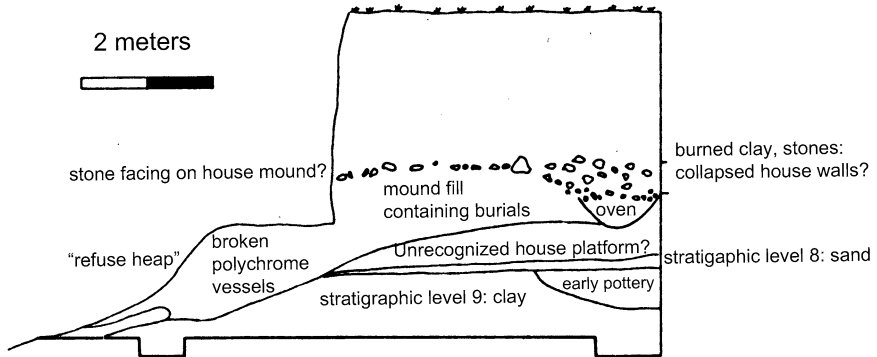


FIGURE 72 *Profile of Santa Rita excavations by Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938).*  
ILLUSTRATION BY ROSEMARY A. JOYCE.

the described dimensions (around 2 m in diameter) make it larger than most suspected ceramic firing features in the lower Ulua valley (Joyce, Hendon and Lopiparo 2014). The burned clay that filled it is consistent with the remains of wattle and daub houses. This material, called *bajareque* locally, would most likely have been derived from a house that was built on top of the stone capped mound itself.

The depositional unit created through the filling-in of the clay-lined oven would have post-dated the use of the platform as a house site. This was the most superficial layer in which the excavators identified pottery; everything more recent was geologically formed horizontally laid strata, with lenses of sand.

Analyzing the pottery recovered, I found that consistent kinds of pottery could be related to the last three depositional units (Joyce 1987). My analysis differed slightly from that in the preliminary report by Strong, Kidder, and Paul, who had defined four stratigraphic levels based on similarities they saw in pottery, without taking into account the complexity of deposits forming the features associated with the buried platform and its inhabitation, features that did not extend continuously throughout the excavated areas.

In my analysis Santa Rita pottery contexts P-1 and P-2 related to the last depositional events here, after the burned pit was filled in with debris from a perishable house that once stood on the adjoining stone faced platform. This agrees with Strong, Kidder, and Paul's definition of "stratigraphic level A" (P-1 to P-3), except that I see P-3 as crossing a depositional boundary, incorporating earlier material.

Pottery context P-4 can be securely associated with the use of the stone-faced house platform to support an occupied building. The excavators described their "stratigraphic level B" as composed of P-4 through P-6. I saw P-5 as

crossing another depositional boundary, and P-6 as belonging with the strata that predated the house built on the stone faced platform.

In my analysis, pottery contexts P-6 through P-11 represented the earliest depositional events in which Uluva Polychromes were present. The excavators divided this sequence into two units, P-7 to P-9, and P-10 to P-12. I did not separate these, in part because sherds from single vessels are distributed across levels P-9 to P-11, and P-8 to P-11. A small lens at the northern edge of excavation 1 contained pottery of earlier date that was incorporated in contexts P-7 to P-9 due to the excavation method employed, extending excavated levels across the whole area, consistent with the arbitrary approach to stratigraphic excavation practiced by the Harvard-Smithsonian Expedition. However, the primary source of pottery recovered from contexts P-6 through P-11 was a single deposit that the excavators called a “refuse heap,” located along the sloping riverbank on the south edge of the excavation. This feature did not extend the entire width of the excavation area, either.

East of excavation 1, in the area where Strong, Kidder and Paul placed their second excavation at Santa Rita, a second “refuse dump” was sampled along the riverbank. This suggests that there was a repeated practice of sweeping refuse off the edge of the bank as a means of disposal of trash from singular events. These riverside dumps were the deposits that produced the earliest examples of Uluva Polychromes recovered at Santa Rita (Table 10).

The most recent deposits with pottery—from the period when the clay-lined pit was filled in and covered—postdate the use of Uluva Polychromes. The majority of the pottery at this late period consisted of unslipped or red slipped cooking bowls and jars. Included were examples of serving vessels belong to the Baracoa Fine Paste group that replaced Uluva Polychromes as the preferred serving vessels in the lower Uluva valley in the late ninth century (Lopiparo, Joyce and Hendon 2005). Some locally made Las Flores Polychrome jars were present as well, as they are in other Uluva Valley sites occupied in the ninth century.

Santana class Uluva Polychromes found in pottery context P-3 may be traces of the activities of the occupants of the house that once stood on the stone platform, before it was demolished and its collapsed remains filled the clay lined pit. The stone platform itself was probably built sometime between 650 and 750 AD: pottery contexts P-3, P-4 and P-5, which came from the fill of this platform, produced examples of Travesia class Uluva Polychromes introduced at that time, as well as ladle censers used in household-based rituals.

The majority of the pottery collected at Santa Rita, including the deposit that I drew on in Chapter 2 for my description of the feast there, actually came from the “refuse heap” sloping down the riverbank. This resulted from the

actions of people whose houses left no trace in stone or daub in the excavations of Strong, Kidder, and Paul. These houses must once have stood on the surface we can identify at the interface between the pottery-rich fill of the stone faced platform, and an earlier clay fill with much less pottery, the possible remnant of an earlier house platform lacking stone facing. This boundary can be traced, unremarked upon, in the profile of the west face of the excavation (compare Figure 72 to Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938: Fig. 6).

Contained in pottery contexts P-6 through P-11, the vessels that were part of the refuse heap were broken but many were almost complete and reconstructable. Altogether, two bowls, five cylinder vases, and one small jar, all of the Santa Rita class of Ulua Polychromes, were reconstructed from the sherds recovered from this deposit (Table 10). Also reconstructed were examples of serving vessels of the Sulaco Red on Orange group, probably originating on a tributary of the Comayagua river (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993; Hirth, Kennedy, and Cliff 1993). Fragments of large red slipped jars, with incised, applique, and painted designs, were also abundant. These are examples of the Marimba Red on Natural type (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). Vessels like these would have been appropriate for presenting large quantities of beverages in feasts like those that likely preceded the smashing of the reconstructable pots that were swept away over the convenient bank at Santa Rita.

### Ritual Performance in Everyday Life

The ceremonial nature of the events at Santa Rita is supported by the presence of fragments of multiple censers, including painted ladle censers, incised and plain *candeleros* (small cylindrical vessels), and deeply scored brazier plates. The second refuse deposit along the bank sampled in Strong, Kidder and Paul's excavation 2 also included fragments from effigy figures: the sandaled foot of a standing or seated human figure, and a deer (Strong Kidder and Paul 1938: figure 7q, Plate 8c).

Large scale, sometimes close to life size human figures, like the one suggested by the sandal here, were made in the lower Ulua valley to adorn the lids of cylindrical censers. Each known example is unique. Fragments have been recovered at more than a dozen sites in the lower Ulua valley, including Campo Dos, Cerro Palenque, Currusté, Mantecales, Puerto Escondido, and Travesia (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013). At Cerro Palenque, Currusté, and Mantecales, these figures were broken and buried in specialized ritual deposits (Hendon 2010; Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013; Joyce 1991, 1993c; Joyce and Pollard 2010).

TABLE 10 *Polychromes from Santa Rita excavated by Strong, Kidder and Paul*

Catalogue or figure no.	Within site provenience	Ulua Polychrome class and form
Fig. 8	excavation 2	Sulaco Polychrome? tripod dish
Fig. 9	excavation 2	Sulaco Polychrome? tripod dish
Fig. 10	excavation 2	Sulaco Polychrome? bowl
Fig. 11	excavation 2	Dedalos class Ulua Polychrome jar
Fig. 12	excavation 2	Dedalos class Ulua Polychrome bowl
Fig. 13	excavation 2	Santa Rita: Arrodillarse vase
Pl. 8 a, b	excavation 1	Santa Rita: Mellizo vases
Fig. 15	excavation 2	Santa Rita: Paloma variant bowl
38-45-20/5305	excavation 1, level 9	Santa Rita: Mellizo bowl
38-45-20/5307	excavation 1, level 9, 10, 11	Santa Rita: Mellizo bowl
38-45-20/5309	excavation 1, level 11	Santa Rita: Mellizo cylinder
38-45-20/5308	excavation 1, level 11	Santa Rita: Mellizo cylinder
38-45-20/5301	excavation 1, level 8	Santa Rita: Arrodillarse cylinder
38-45-20/5311	excavation 2, level 8	Santa Rita: Arrodillarse cylinder
38-45-20/5312	excavation 2, level 8	Santa Rita: Cyrano cylinder
38-45-20/5314	excavation 2, level 8–11	Santa Rita: Diamante jar?

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce, based on inspection of vessels in Peabody Museum (PM), Smithsonian Institution (SI), and figures illustrating vessels in the National Museum of Honduras (NMH) published in Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938).

Even though excavators in the 1930s were fundamentally uninterested in defining activity at the scale of the human life, once they began to practice more careful stratigraphic excavation methods, they collected materials in ways that today allow the reconstruction of events at human scale, many involving the use of Ulua Polychrome vessels. At times, as is the case with vessels excavated at Tenampua, the association of events with larger scale occasions timed by seasonal cycles can be suggested, based on the nature of the ceremonies indexed in the imagery on Ulua Polychromes.

Once human figural scenes became common in the eighth century, Ulua Polychromes displayed scenes of dances, the playing of music, burning incense and drinking. These were all parts of marked events in people's lives that produced the refuse found in excavations near house foundations, as well as in special deposits placed in the buildings themselves during the renovation of houses. When we consider assemblages from different sites together, we can begin to fill in a broader landscape within which residents of villages and towns engaged in social relations, competing with each other and forming alliances. Painted pottery was one of a suite of things mobilized to make community and household events more memorable (Hendon 2000, 2010; Joyce 2008b; Lopiparo 2006). Returning to older materials, even assemblages like the materials that G.B. Gordon excavated at Travesia and Santana can offer more to our understanding when viewed from this perspective of social relations practiced in spatial settings at the scale of the household.

### *Travesia and Santana*

The ceremonies that produced the trash Gordon collected at Travesia were, by his own report, not associated with the major stone architecture at the site. More likely, they came from the kind of buried house yards that I later excavated at Travesia. Most house compounds at Travesia, built on the riverbank, would have been more vulnerable to flooding than the major architectural group, raised on a platform. Sometime in the late eighth or early ninth century, Travesia's neighborhoods experienced a major flood that buried older surfaces and buildings on them (Pope 1985). As a result, there is today, and was when Gordon excavated, little surface sign of the buried walls, floors, and other features that would show where people once lived outside the central group at Travesia. Yet even with the limited information Gordon's notes provide, we can tease out from the things he collected ways to understand the lives of those whose house sites he dug through.

The two polychrome vessels reconstructed from sherds Gordon collected at Travesia are extraordinary. They suggest the presence there of master artisans working in clay. In my interpretation in Chapter 4 of the possible circumstances leading to the creation of Ulua polychrome vases like these at Travesia in the eighth century, I suggested that the family living in the raised architectural platform hosted others for ballgames in the court that was attached to that main compound. Unlike most of the buildings that make up Travesia's central group, the ball court was not enclosed by surrounding buildings nor was it made less accessible by being raised on a terrace. Instead, it sits at a place where the exclusive precincts of the main residence touch the broader community.

Jeanne Lopiparo (2003, 2006, 2007) has shown that the Travesia ballcourt was oriented toward a mountain that was also used as a point of reference for burials in house compounds throughout the Ulua Valley. Unlike other Ulua valley sites she studied, the main courtyard of Travesia was also carefully aligned toward the point where the sun rose on the eastern horizon in December. This effect could only be achieved by constructing the buildings on this courtyard at the point of intersection of these two orientations.

This deliberate construction of the major architectural group to incorporate an orientation to the southern *Montaña de Santa Barbara* shared with other large settlements in the valley, and combine it with a unique alignment to a point on the eastern horizon where the sun rises in December, suggests that this was a time of year important to Travesia's people, quite likely a time for ceremony. Ball games at Travesia might have been seasonal, taking place during a major break in the agricultural year. Scheduling ballgames at this point in the growing season would have allowed more distant visitors from other agricultural villages to travel to the site without disruption of work in fields (Joyce, Hendon and Lopiparo 2009).

In my interpretation of the impetus for Travesia's leading families to support the development of new Ulua Polychrome vases in the eighth century, I proposed that they would have been concerned about the ongoing production of fired clay imitations of carved marble vases that was happening in local villages. Gordon's excavated collection from Travesia itself did not include any of these small, mold-made bowls, with impressed spirals and modeled lug heads. In contrast, his first excavation at Santana, in the local hinterland of farming hamlets and house compounds closest to Travesia, produced the largest selection of these mold-made miniature effigies of marble vases that I have recorded.

At Santana, Gordon recovered a complete range of pottery types, including plates, jars, and bowls of plain wares appropriate for food storage and preparation, as well as polychrome painted bowls, vases, and jars. Also part of this assemblage were large, red-painted jars of sizes and shapes appropriate for brewing. Most striking, and marking this assemblage off as quite different than others I have reviewed, was the quantity of small mold-made ceramic bowls with impressed scrolls, many covered in glossy white slip, and a considerable number showing blue paint applied to the rim after firing.

Dating to the period just before the mid-eighth century creation of Ulua Polychrome vases with new images of people engaged in ritual, this assemblage from Santana suggests that an outlying household was producing its own imitation marble vases, possibly challenging the prestige that the residents of central Travesia derived from monopolizing the distribution of the real stone

vases. Christina Luke has shown that Travesia was a center of production of the exquisitely crafted Ulua Marble Vases (Luke and Tykot 2007). Ulua Marble Vases moved long distances from Travesia (Luke 2010), quite likely as gifts to dignitaries visiting on the occasion of specific ceremonies. Ballgames would have been appropriate moments for display and distribution of Ulua Marble vases, which Luke (2012) demonstrates index access to spirits through caves in sacred mountains through their material, form, and iconography.

While some eighth century Ulua Marble Vases traveled long distances to Maya Lowland sites like Uaxactun, San Jose, and Altun Ha, others were distributed locally, to visitors from outlying villages and farmsteads. This includes residents of the Santana area, where Ulua Marble vases were recovered in caches (Stone 1936). One local hinterland cache included two marble vases, a jade carving of a human hand, and a gold alloy figural pendant stylistically inspired by metalwork from Costa Rica or Panama (Luke 2010).

Luke (2002) argued that patronage of marble vase production at Travesia persisted from the earliest phase of their development to the latest, spanning the late seventh to early tenth centuries (Luke and Tykot 2007). Their distribution to allies in the Travesia hinterland, including households in the Santana area, was equally early and long-lived. Gordon recovered ceramic effigies of marble vases in late seventh century deposits at Santana. Eight marble vases from Santana analyzed by Luke (2002) all belong to stylistic groups that were likely carved beginning in the late eighth century, when Ulua Marble vases made their way to the palaces of people in the Maya lowlands of Belize and Guatemala (Luke 2010). In his Santana excavations, Gordon also excavated sherds of marble vases and ceramic effigies dating to a slightly later period in the ninth century, after the peak of Travesia's influence.

The residents of the Main Group at Travesia, patrons of the ballcourt and of the artisans who made marble vases and fine Ulua Polychromes, attempted to exert influence over the people in neighboring villages in many ways: by siting their major architecture in a symbolically important locale, by hosting ball games and seasonal ceremonies, and by giving Ulua Marble Vases as gifts to some visitors from the local area. Yet their effectiveness in controlling these sources of prestige was limited. The families in outlying house compounds near Travesia used the objects they acquired in their own ceremonies, responding to local events, and developed their own manufactured versions in fired clay, the traditional medium they had been manipulating for generations, independent of the central family at Travesia.

The material Gordon excavated at Travesia, likely dumped after a ceremony, was separated from later overlying materials by a layer of soil containing human

skeletal remains, covered by what Gordon called an “ashy” deposit. While the residents of the Main Group at Travesia were encouraging ceremonies aligned with the shared experience of the seasonal round, and their exclusive sponsorship of ball games, the people of surrounding residences continued celebrating events in the lives of their own families, including the transition from life to ancestral status, as they had done for generations.

### **Ulúa Polychromes in Place**

By the end of the 1930s, archaeologists had documented groups of Ulúa Polychrome vessels in precise features within specific sites. Ulúa Polychromes were known to be present in both domestic refuse and in special caches. A beginning was there to recognize distinctive Ulúa Polychromes from the Comayagua valley, Lake Yojoa, and lower Ulúa valley regions. The differences between Ulúa Polychromes and other Honduran polychromes with which they were contemporary were also becoming clearer. Yet an obstacle still stood in the way of understanding Ulúa Polychrome history and development: the culture historical tradition that attributed the creation of classes of things to people conceived of at the level of an ethnic or cultural group.

Ulúa Polychrome pots, as tools used by people in everyday life and on special occasions, need instead to be examined as products of action by groups at the scale of the household, the kinship network, and the town. When G.B. Gordon recognized that the painted pottery he was shown by Erich Wittkugel was of potential interest to his sponsors at the Peabody Museum, he was bound by the nature of late nineteenth century anthropological and archaeological research to see them as markers of civilizations, indicators of greater or lesser levels of cultivation of an entire population. He inherited that way of thinking about people in the past and the products of their artistry from the century of research that preceded his work in the Honduras, a period that saw the rediscovery of Ulúa Polychromes by many independent antiquarians and naturalists in Honduras and Europe before North American researchers.

With the implementation of systematic site surveys in the 1930s, and dedicated excavations at selected sites continuing into the 1940s, what had previously been approached as a simple juxtaposition of Maya and non-Maya civilizations began finally to be described in more specific localized spatial terms. Yet much of this new research implemented an explicit culture-historical approach to archaeology, in which establishing the distributions of different

styles of artifacts was a first step in identifying centers of origin of large population groups with shared cultural values manifest in the things they made. The points to which things moved were viewed from the perspective of population-scale processes such as migration and diffusion. It would take another thirty years before Uluva Polychrome pots were seen as products of people, rather than as products of peoples.

## Tracing Boundaries

In 1898, the German cultural geographer Karl Sapper wrote a response to G.B. Gordon's publication of his findings along the Ulua River:

Last year Mr. G. Byron Gordon of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. opened a number of mounds and found a lot of nice things, and this year Mr. Wittkugel plans to continue his already begun excavations, so one can hope that in a short time a rich material for judging these unusual cultural remains will be possessed, material, which should suffice to solve the unresolved question about the correlation of this culture with those of the neighboring peoples and of the presumptive author of the constructions and pottery work from the Rio Ulua.

SAPPER 1898:137; my translation

When Sapper wrote these words, he fully expected that research in the immediate future would answer the question of who had been the “authors” of the painted pottery that so enchanted him. Yet a century later, the question of the identities of the potters and painters remains open for discussion.

Even the very question of which of the pots excavated were locally made in the lower Ulua valley seemed uncertain in the 1890s. Gordon (1898b:21) had attempted, without success, to distinguish between imported Maya painted pottery and local Ulua Valley polychromes. His Groups A and B, intended to distinguish these two sources of origin, actually correspond at best to differences in form, motif, and manner of painting of locally produced vessels within the centuries-long Ulua Polychrome tradition.

It is in the contrast with his Group C that we can recognize something more suggestive of localized cultural differences. Gordon (1898b:31–32) described the sherds in this group as sharing a “red porous ware” fired differently than the Ulua Polychromes. The matte surface finish and reliance on red and black paints that he describes is suggestive of the painted pottery made in the Sulaco River valley, and the drawing of a sherd that he published (Gordon 1898b:Plate IIIb) presents a typical Sulaco Polychrome motif.

Today, we can understand the characteristics Gordon used to define his Group C as indications of a technical style (Lechtman 1977, 1984) distinctive of Sulaco Polychromes (Figure 73). Because archaeologists have identified the place where this tradition of potting was developed, we can locate the potters who learned to make pottery in this distinctive community of practice (Lave



FIGURE 73 *Jar (Sulaco Polychrome).*

SANTA RITA, ULUA VALLEY; STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL EXPEDITION 1936.  
 CATALOGUE NO. A378519-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN  
 INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.

and Wenger 1991, 2005; Wenger 1998) within the landscape of Honduras, in the drainage of the Sulaco River Valley. We are still challenged to translate our understanding of the common features of traditions like those that produced Sulaco Polychrome and Ulua Polychromes into a model that takes action, not essence, as the cause of similarities and differences.

### **Making Ulua Polychromes Maya**

Some of the polychromes recovered in the sites where Gordon worked actually had been made in the lowlands of Belize and Guatemala, or in the Guatemalan highlands (see Chapter 7). Wittkugel's collection in Berlin preserves sherds from more than a dozen vessels in different technological styles, based

TABLE 11 *Foreign Polychromes from Travesia area excavated by Erich Wittkugel*

Catalogue number	Site	Description
IV Ca 22428	Travesia	Bowl, black lip, red band of chevrons or floral motifs, main motifs in diagonal panels with white fill. Compare Uuaxactun.
IV Ca 22429		
IV Ca 22608	Travesia	Plate, black lip, complex red and black motif on matte surface, brick red paste variant. Compare Tikal Dancer style?
IV Ca 22656	Travesia	Flaring wall bowl, tripod feet, red on light orange stepped terraces, interior division sign
IV Ca 22774	Rio Ulua	Cylinder wall and base sherds, interior orange, yellow exterior slip, white, red, black and brown paint, brick red paste variant, no firing core
IV Ca 23678		
IV Ca 22797	Travesia	Cylinder wall sherd, exterior white slip, orange, light orange, grey paint. Compare Altun Ha.
IV Ca 22798	Travesia	Cylinder wall and base, exterior white slip, orange, light orange, grey, black paint. Compare Altun Ha.
IV Ca 22802	Travesia	Cylinder wall sherd, white and red paint, paste light brown variant. Compare Motagua Valley.
IV Ca 22803	Travesia	Cylinder wall sherd, exterior white, black, brown paint, interior unslipped
IV Ca 22865	Travesia	Bowl, cream slip, exterior dense black and red paint
IV Ca 22971	Travesia	Cylinder, black lip, red band with black glyphs, pink/brown paste variant. Compare Saxche Orange Polychrome, Naranjo area group.
IV Ca 23888	Travesia	Cylinder wall sherd, exterior light orange slip, orange, grey paint, interior unslipped, paste tan, no firing core, fine nonplastics. Compare Altun Ha.
IV Ca 22979	Travesia	Cylinder, lip black, exterior matte, red band with black glyphs, red/brown paste variant. Compare Saxche Orange Polychrome, Naranjo area group.
IV Ca 23677	Travesia	Cylinder wall sherd, exterior white slip, black and orange paint
IV Ca 23691a, b, c, d, e	Travesia	Cylinder, lip black, interior cream slip, exterior black, orange, white paint, horizontal band of black glyphs, motifs on body in vertical bands, birds and glyphs light brown paste variant

All identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce, based on examination of collection curated in Berlin. Paste if not described was uniform light yellow or buff.

either on the paste and firing or the interior and exterior paints (Table 11). Some of these can be compared to polychrome pottery from Altun Ha, Belize (Pendegast 1979). Others are closely comparable to pottery from the Peten in Guatemala (Reents-Budet 1994).

Gordon's own excavations at Santana also produced sherds that were dissimilar from Uluva Polychromes in paste and surface colors (Table 12). This included enough sherds to reconstruct much of a vessel that resembles those of the Ik' style from Motul de San Jose (Halperin and Foias 2010). A second vessel with similar features was pieced together from sherds collected more recently in the same area, now curated by the Museo de San Pedro (see Chapter 7).

The largest number of sherds in the Gordon collections with distinct technological features was likely made in the Belize River valley (Sheptak 1987).

TABLE 12 *Non-local pottery from the lower Uluva Valley in the Peabody Museum*

Location and catalogue number	Type name	Center of manufacture	No.
Chasnigua Farm 48-11-20/17822 48-11-20/17823	Belize Red	Belize River Valley	2
Uluva Valley 33-57-20/2678	Benque Viejo Polychrome	Belize River Valley	1
Uluva Valley 33-57-20/2653	Belize Red	Belize River Valley	1
Santana 97-44-20/C1890	Belize Red	Belize River Valley	26
Santana 97-44-20/C1890	Chavez White on Red	Nicaragua	3
Santana 97-44-20/C1890	Capulin White Incised	Copan	4
Santana 97-44-20/C1890	Sovedeso	Copan	4
Santana 97-44-20/C1890	Surlo	Copan	3
Santana 97-44-20/C1890	Polychrome on stucco	Belize? Copan?	3
Santana 97-44-20/C1732	Polychrome (Ik' style?)	Motul de San Jose?	1

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce, based on examination of museum collection.

Dorothy Popenoe and Doris Stone recovered sherds from the same area in other sites in the lower Ulua Valley. Other sherds in the Gordon collections from Santana are examples of rare pottery types from Copan (Longyear 1952; Viel 1993). The presence of these rarer types from Copan contrasts notably with the absence of Copan's most common polychrome type, Copador, from this and other collections from the lower Ulua valley. It suggests that the main family at Travesia had established a relatively direct connection with high-ranking families at Copan, a relationship not shared with other settlements in the lower Ulua valley.

The kinds of characteristics that Gordon and his successors through the middle of the twentieth century tried to use to sort the Maya from the non-Maya, the themes depicted and the manner of graphic execution, are particularly misleading. Simply examining the motifs depicted, or tracking the use of fine lines to depict detail, would not be sufficient to discriminate between Ulua Polychromes made in the lower Ulua Valley and polychrome pottery from the Peten, Belize, or Copan. Attempting to organize locally recovered polychromes along these lines repeatedly failed.

In revising earlier divisions of Ulua Polychromes by Gordon and Vaillant, Strong (1935a:148–51; see also Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938) emphasized a distinction between Ulua Polychromes with animal themes and those with human images, cross-cutting another distinction between what he called “fine-line” and “thick-line” Ulua Polychromes. Those Ulua Polychromes with human images, and especially, those with “fine-line” graphic style, were judged to be closer to their presumed Maya sources. An emphasis on animal subjects, and use of “thick-line” execution, both features of later Ulua Polychromes, were thus seen as products of greater distance from the presumed Maya source material.

In reality, throughout the history of production of Ulua Polychromes potters participated to different degrees in depiction of animals, the human body, and other visual elements also seen on pottery made in some of these other areas. This was not due to inherent cultural identity, but came about as a result of changing patterns of communication, aesthetic preferences, and shared knowledge resulting from social relations between pottery producing communities.

Gordon's main concern was to establish the level of advancement of the Ulua potters. He did so using the art of the Maya of Copan, particularly stone sculpture, as his measuring stick. Acknowledging that Ulua potters excelled in the number of ceramic forms they produced, many of them quite original, Gordon nonetheless saw even that distinction as owing to a source in Maya civilization:

it is evident that the dominating influence was Maya. *If not a branch of the Mayas, the people, with whose remains on the Ulua River we are now*

*brought in contact, were in close relations with some portion of that race....*  
They were, in fact, subject to the Maya civilization.

GORDON 1898b:38–39; emphasis added

Here, the Maya slip from being a civilization—a people possessed of advanced practices—to being a race, which in nineteenth century thought meant any group of human beings distinct from other such groups.

Gordon concludes that the makers of Ulua pottery, while dominated by the Maya race and its civilization, were of heterogeneous racial composition themselves:

This great variety of character looks towards an admixture of races, or at least a diversity of external influence.... there is in the tendency toward diversity of type strong evidence of an admixture of races.

GORDON 1898b:38–39

Gordon argues that these other sources are both muted and of unknown origin. All he can be sure of is that the people who were living in the region when the Spanish arrived “did not possess the degree of culture that distinguished their predecessors in the same region” and presumably were not the same “race” (Gordon 1898b:41).

In her published report on her work at Tenampua, Popenoe (1936:572) used similar terminology, arguing that the Ulua Polychrome dish she found was “similar in style to pottery found throughout Central America. It has none of the features that distinguish Maya pottery from that of other races.” Like Gordon, Popenoe was drawing on a largely tacit model of what Maya meant. While it is unclear precisely what features she had in mind in making these judgments, we might consider that the bowl on which she was commenting depicted as its main subject a bird, perhaps a nightjar or whippoorwill, and (unlike some other Ulua Polychromes) did not include anything like signs from the Maya inscriptions.

Popenoe, however, went further, and actually made a slightly different kind of argument than Gordon. Reiterating Squier’s observation that the residents of Comayagua spoke the Lenca language, she argued that this language bore familial resemblance to Chibchan languages, especially those of Costa Rica (Popenoe 1936:571–72). In her paper, originally written in 1927 (and published in Spanish translation in 1928), Popenoe anticipated the main interpretive shift of the 1930s and 1940s, which would see emphasis placed on defining localized groups of speakers of specific languages as the likely makers of archaeologically recovered objects.

George Vaillant also adopted the approach of identifying specific pottery with speakers of different languages in his doctoral dissertation, associating five groups of Ulua Polychromes that he defined with the Maya (Group I), the Pipil of El Salvador (Groups II, III and IV), the “Lenca-Matagalpa,” and the “late Pipil” (Vaillant 1927:271). Vaillant (1934:88) admits that his model, based on working with museum collections (and in the case of the Gordon collections, without the benefit of the stratigraphic guidance they could have provided), is a “simple exposition”:

the characteristic Copan styles are conspicuously absent in Gordon's Uloa material. On this basis the writer assumed that Copan was a ceramic center radiating direct influence in Salvador, where local variations took place and were then transmitted into the Uloa country.

Vaillant (1934:89) adds a caveat:

besides Maya ceramics, the pottery of the Lenca, Chorotega, Pipil, and other tribes must be considered in evaluating the ceramics of that region.... it is becoming increasingly evident that the civilization of the Maya takes a relatively small part in the unfolding of Central American culture.... However as a point of contact and of fusion for Maya and non-Maya influences, Dr. Lothrop has amply demonstrated the importance of the Uloa-Salvador region.

Getting from Gordon's Maya civilization juxtaposed to local Ulua culture, to Vaillant's Maya, Lenca, Chorotega, Pipil and “other tribes,” was a major development. But for Vaillant as for Gordon three decades earlier, the central question of Ulua painted pottery remained the “fusion of Maya and non-Maya influences,” now given a different character: rather than simply being examples of the civilized and barbaric stages of human development, these were tribes or peoples. The lower Ulua valley, far from being a place with its own resident populace organized in communities, seemed to be nothing more than a patchwork produced by the “fusion” of “influences.”

### **Mayoid Polychromes on a Maya Frontier**

While confirming Squier's description of the main enclosure and ballcourt at Tenampua, Lothrop (1917:[44–46]) expressed doubts about the ballcourt belonging to what he called “the true type,” because the interior benches were only

three to four feet high. Lothrop's characterization of the Tenampua ballcourt as an "extension of the same idea" as Mexican ballcourts showed that already in 1917 he was treating Honduran archaeological traits as derivative of those further north and west. His assessment was that while Tenampua's architecture and plan generally resembled the Maya "it cannot be called 'Maya.'" He concluded that "I do not think it possible to assign this site to any definite people."

Twenty years later, anthropologists in North America had developed a formal framework that defined spatial distributions of traits (whether behavioral, like language, or material, like pottery styles) as evidence of bounded cultures, associated with very definite peoples, like Vaillant's Pipil, Lenca, and Matagalpa. In the summary of the Harvard-Smithsonian expedition to Honduras in 1936, the authors concluded that their work "demonstrates that the interplay of northern and southern cultural forces, so strongly suggested by linguistic, ethnographic, and historic sources, is very definitely reflected in the archaeological record" (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:118).

The culture area concept they used had been developed by anthropologists at the University of California, Berkeley, where in 1901 a student of Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, became an instructor in a new department of anthropology (Steward 1961). Boas had developed an approach to cultural anthropology in reaction to the social evolutionist anthropology embodied in the late nineteenth century United States by exhibitions and publications of dominant museums like the Smithsonian Institution (Boas 1887; Dall and Boas 1887; Powell and Boas 1887). Boas objected to the kind of comparative ethnology that encouraged assigning sites occupied at the same time, like Copan and Santana, to different evolutionary stages. In contrast, a culture area was to be an empirical entity, ideally defined without prejudgment about level of development (Kroeber 1931, 1939). Culture historians advocated for the need to gather data before coming to conclusions about stages of development, and advocated using historical research, including archaeology, to help confirm the histories of culture areas (Steward 1942; Strong 1940). Honduras was one of the first places outside the United States where this approach was employed deliberately.

William Duncan Strong was one of the culture historians who remade United States archaeology in the first half of the twentieth century. Strong studied with Kroeber, and received his doctorate at Berkeley in 1926 (Willey 1988). In the 1930s, while was employed by the Bureau of American Ethnology, a division of the Smithsonian Institution, he initiated systematic site survey in northeast Honduras, along the coast and in the Bay Islands. In his report on this, his first Honduran research, organized as a catalogue of individual sites, Strong used distinctive terms that stemmed from his training as a culture historian (Strong 1935a:141):

Although it is obviously premature to attempt a *detailed classification* of Bay Islands sites and cultures...this may be done in a very tentative manner *to facilitate comparison with adjacent regions.* (emphasis added)

The main tools Strong used for classificatory and comparative purposes were *archaeological types*, something he took so much for granted that he felt no need to define what he meant by a type or how they could be defined. Typological classification, while on the surface appearing similar to the definition of stylistic groups by previous archaeologists in the region, in theory was a more precise procedure, described retrospectively in the authoritative summary of culture historical methods eventually published by Strong's own student, Gordon Willey (Willey and Phillips 1958).

The types Strong defined for his initial classification and comparison of Bay Islands archaeology were named Plain Monochrome, Elaborate Monochrome, Polychrome I, Polychrome II, and Plumbate (Strong 1935a:142–43, 145). Plumbate had been recognized as of foreign origin in Honduras from as early as Saville's (1916) publication of a vessel he collected there for the Heye Foundation. The other pottery types, newly described by Strong, were of assumed local manufacture.

From the restricted range of pottery he recovered, Strong (1935a:146) concluded that "Bay Island culture can be regarded as a more or less homogeneous unit." Under the assumptions of culture historical research, homogeneous units like this were expected to correspond to specific cultures. Strong (1935a:146) argued that the homogeneity of the ceramics he recovered indicated that Bay Islands sites "were for the most part used by Bay Islands peoples over a considerable period of time, rather than by visitors." At the same time, in keeping with the approach of culture history, Strong was compelled to delineate the boundaries that separated this Bay Islands culture from cultures of neighboring areas. In order to accomplish this delimitation, Strong defined an additional series of culture areas: the Ulua River Region; Copan and other Maya sites; "the interior of Honduras," in which he included Comayagua, Olancho, and the western drainage of the Chamelecon river; western Nicaragua and northern Costa Rica; and eastern Nicaragua (Strong 1935a:147).

With no fanfare, in this way Strong marked out for the first time a division of the entire territory of Honduras into multiple culture areas, replacing earlier debates about the relationships between Maya and non-Maya civilizations. Only the Bay Islands, Copan, and the lower Ulua Valley had actually been studied systematically at the time. His "interior of Honduras" area lumped together all the less-studied areas in between. Yet despite the thinness of the data, in this work Strong, through his use of settlement survey and typology, initiated

culture historical systematics in Honduras. He would continue fleshing out a culture historical framework for the country three years later, through research on the mainland (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938). He and his colleagues would critically revise his preliminary chronological and stylistic equivalences based on this work, but those changes stand as minor revisions within what became a framework of analysis that persists even today.

Where in his Bay Islands report Strong was tentative, in the summary of the work in the lower Ulua valley and around Lake Yojoa, he and his co-authors confidently presented a historical interpretation of their findings that also factored in relationships with neighboring culture areas. The linch-pin of the argument was work the team had carried out at the archaeological remains of historic Naco, where "Naco Polychrome" (they wrote) "is definitely historic and represents, apparently, the late Nahuatl occupation of the region," characterized as "intrusive" (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:118).

Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938:119) recognized a series of painted polychrome types preceding the historic Naco Polychrome, which they attempted to relate to the earlier Gordon and Vaillant classifications. In the lower Ulua Valley, they proposed that a single Ulua Polychrome type should be defined, containing two variants, Mayoid and Bold Geometric. Their Bold Geometric was identical to Gordon's Group C, the only painted pottery Gordon had felt was truly local to the lower Ulua valley, but which Vaillant (1927) had defined as the latest in his seriation of Uloa Polychrome groups (Uloa V). Gordon's Groups A and B were now recognized as early and late variants of Mayoid Ulua Polychrome, essentially upholding Vaillant's (1927:271) seriation of Uloa Polychrome I and II as earlier than Uloa Polychrome III and IV. The parallel Yojoa Polychrome that Strong and his colleagues defined for the first time, based on the work they had done near Lake Yojoa, they described as having different external ties: "the Yojoa Mayoid type, as well as the Bold Animalistic type, finds many close parallels in polychrome vessels from eastern El Salvador" (Strong Kidder and Paul 1938:121).

All of the variability in pottery types was based on, and a basis for, correlations with cultures, explicitly understood as peoples speaking different languages who had moved through and occupied the territory at different times:

we have already verified the presence of a late Nahuatl migration from Mexico through the finds made at Naco. Similarly, in the Ulua Polychrome period we find two interlocked but distinct styles occurring in the same sites, the Mayoid and the Bold Geometric, which at Santa Rita persist and develop simultaneously over a considerable period. Lake Yojoa Polychrome is also composed of a Mayoid and a so-called Bold Animalistic tradition. *This original fission and subsequent parallelism of both Ulua and*

*Yojoa Polychrome ceramic development has obvious sociological as well as archaeological implications.*

STRONG, KIDDER and PAUL 1938:123; emphasis added

The Mayoid “styles” in both areas were contrasted with others “of southern origin,” Bold Geometric and Bold Animalistic. Bold Geometric was attributed to the Tol people (then called Jicaque), while the Bold Animalistic was understood as the product of Lenca people, echoing the identification Popenoe had made in her study of Tenampua ten years earlier.

The Ulua and Yojoa Mayoid pottery was taken as self-evidently made by Maya-speaking people. Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938:123) concluded that

since the Mayoid element comprises about one half of the Ulua and Yojoa Polychrome ceramic remains, it can hardly be explained as due solely to trade or indirect influence. It seems far more logical to assume that intermixed Maya, Jicaque, and Lenca peoples were living together at these sites and that perhaps the pottery-makers of each ethnic group clung to their own art styles over a considerable period.

Nor was this framework limited to Strong and his party, trained as he was in the Boasian approach. Jens Yde (1938:4–5) provided an expansion on the same inventory of ethnic-linguistic groups in his report on his virtually simultaneous survey. Yde saw these peoples as inhabiting clearly demarcated, non-overlapping territories, at least when the Spanish first invaded: Maya in the west, Tol (Jicaque) in the lower Ulua valley, Pech (Paya), Sumo, and Miskito (in that order) along the north coast, with the interior occupied by the Lenca and the Chorotega around the Pacific Coast Gulf of Fonseca. Interspersed with settlements occupied by speakers of these languages, which he saw as thoroughly indigenous in Honduras, were settlements of intrusive Mexicans.

Yet there was a difference between how Yde thought of these distributions and how the culture-historical archaeologists did. Where the latter spoke about “culture areas,” Yde used the term “province,” a territorial construct that is clearly tied to an idea of *political* control. In his descriptions of the Ulua Polychrome producing areas of Honduras, Yde used the term province to denote the extension of political control by the Maya over neighboring peoples.

Yde (1938:73) suggested that one polychrome feature was “characteristic of the province Ulua valley-Jaral-Siguatopeque”: polychrome jars with two loop handles, which he says constituted 25% of the complete pots he saw. He argued that

owing to the abundant occurrence of the two-handled globular pots at Jaral-Siguatopeque and the Ulua valley, and hardly anywhere else except some portions of northern Honduras in the direction of Olancho, it is possible to establish this pottery type as distinctive of the northern Honduran province of the Maya area. This province is not completely uniform in its ceramic specimens, however: a distinction can be made between Jaral-Siguatopeque on one side, and the Ulua valley on the other. The pottery of the former region exhibits a closer relation to Salvador and southern Central American regions in its decorative elements than does the pottery of the latter region.

YDE 1938:84

The ground was laid by the archaeologists of the 1930s to formalize distributions of people speaking different languages, who could be identified as the makers of all the diverse kinds of painted pottery recognized in Honduras, and thus to define boundaries between them. It is no coincidence that 1939 saw the publication of an article by S.K. Lothrop that did just that.

Lothrop was trained at Harvard University, and is described as having a focus on descriptive documentation, particularistic, with a diffusionist perspective on historical development that was not theorized but intuitive (Willey 1976). In his 1939 article, he retained his prior interest in determining where the Maya civilization ended. "Boundaries between peoples may be established by physical type, by language, by culture, or by political considerations," he begins (Lothrop 1939:32). At first glance, Lothrop's approach to the messiness that these different criteria introduced in the task he defined as establishing "the southeastern limits of the Maya" could be viewed as an untheorized version of the direct historic approach advocated in North American anthropology by Julian Steward (1942). Yet there are major differences between the approach defined by archaeologists steeped in culture historical methodology and the way Lothrop mobilized data for his purposes.

Steward (1942) attributed the earliest use of the direct historic approach to culture historians working in the Southwest "around 1915." He argued that its use was "almost inevitable" in Mesoamerica, with its early historical documentation from European colonization. As advocated by Steward, the direct historic approach would start with a known moment when identification of the people in an area could be established through historical documents, then by moving backward step by step through local archaeological sequences, would watch for discontinuities that might indicate the moment when a new people had arrived in the area. The identification of the original historically documented group could then be extended that far back, and no farther.

Lothrop's procedure was different, and the "history" he sketched was, to modern eyes, bizarre. He proposed that Guatemala was originally populated by an ancestral group that was invaded by the Maya, who he identified as South American in origin. Once settled in Guatemala as conquerors of the natives, Lothrop (1939:43–44) tells us, "they began to expand their territorial holdings" including in Honduras and El Salvador:

to the north of Copan, in the upper Chamelecon Valley, pottery has been found corresponding in style to that of the middle period in Old Empire cities of the Peten, such as Holmul. Near the Atlantic coast in the Uluva Valley, in the region of Lake Yojoa, and also on the Pacific coast in El Salvador no definitely Mayan remains have been discovered which are stylistically more ancient than the end of the Old Empire period.

In Honduras, Lothrop saw the Maya moving into already populated territory, pushing to the east previous residents he described as tribes, the Lenca, Chorotega, and Jicaque.

Lothrop turned to Honduras after detailing his model of the distribution of languages and archaeological cultures in El Salvador, which recapitulated his previous published arguments (Lothrop 1927b). He saw a clear boundary between Maya and Lenca in the south and west part of Honduras. Things were not so clear, linguistically, in the northern area:

in the upper Chamelecon Valley and the Department of Santa Barbara, we have no data on tribes or languages. Farther north, the Toquegua Indians lived in the territory between the Golfo Dulce and the Uluva River, but we do not know what tongue they spoke. Archaeology, however, has a story to tell in these two areas and indicates that they were once occupied by the Maya.

LOTHROP 1939:50

What follows relies primarily on Lothrop's unpublished survey for the Peabody Museum in 1917. He used rectangular organization of building groups and the presence of cut stone architecture as evidence of Maya people. Buildings that were made of earth or not laid out in rectangular plans signified non-Maya identity. In his zeal to identify the north end of Lake Yojoa as Maya, he identified sculptures reported from Los Naranjos on Lake Yojoa as "stelae." These sculptures in the round actually dated quite a bit earlier than the Classic Maya occupation he thought they represented: to the Middle Formative, ca. 900–400 BC (Joyce and Henderson 2002).

For Lothrop, confirmation of the Maya identity of Los Naranjos came from the presence of polychrome pottery with painted glyphs, Uluá Polychromes. Lothrop's field notes make clear that he himself did not visit the site on Lake Yojoa. Instead, his knowledge of the pottery found there came from a rapid visit to collectors in San Pedro Sula on his way out of the country to the meeting where he would be recruited as a spy (Lothrop 1917:[49]).

Lothrop's assessment of settlements in the lower Uluá valley was consequently mainly based on work published by others, and he limited his comments to sources publishing site plans (Gordon 1898b; Steinmayer 1932). His only personal knowledge of sites in this area came from passing through Potrerillos in the southwestern Uluá Valley, on his way to take ship from Puerto Cortes to Guatemala. Here he saw "several groups of small scattered mounds of non-Maya appearance" (Lothrop 1939:52). His field notes clarify that he saw, but did not survey or sketch map, three groups of mounds, each with eight to ten structures 20 feet long, and 2 feet high (Lothrop 1917:[40]).

Based on these limited observations, Lothrop ascribed archaeological sites in the Uluá valley to a mixture of Maya and non-Maya peoples, with rectilinear site plans assigned to the Maya, even when associated sculpture was "distinctly non-Mayan" (Lothrop 1939:51). Yet he characterized what he judged to be non-Maya site plans here as unlike those he recognized as Lenca in his survey of the Comayagua region. Unfortunately, he did not explain what precisely were the distinctive features of Lenca sites that were absent in the sites near Potrerillos.

Lothrop's argument that the lower Uluá valley was the limit of Maya culture, based on this cursory assessment of the few site plans he personally had seen, was reinforced by his characterization of the pottery there as Maya. He identified pottery of the same types as products of trade when they were found further east and south, at Lancetilla and Yarumela in Honduras, and in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Oddly, although he cited the report from Strong, Kidder, and Paul (1938) for historical information, he did not take into account their discussion of pottery.

Based on this very sketchy account, Lothrop (1939:52) concluded that "from Yojoa northward...we know that Maya culture extended to a line running from the lake to Potrerillos and thence down the Uluá Valley to the Bay of Honduras," where "Mayan and non-Mayan finds are intermingled over a strip of territory at least fifty miles wide."

Despite the flimsiness of this claim, it became the accepted basis for defining the lower Uluá valley as a boundary zone where Maya and non-Maya cultures met, reinforced by the culture historical arguments made by Strong and his colleagues. Culture historical archaeology was enlisted to reify the civilizational dichotomy between Maya and non-Maya. It fell to an academic outsider to begin to map variability within Honduras more empirically.

## Honduran Geographies

In 1941, the Peabody Museum published the first of two books in which Doris Z. Stone provided an overview of the distribution of archaeological sites across an extensive Honduran landscape reaching to the borders of Nicaragua in the east and El Salvador in the south (Stone 1941, 1957). In the introduction he wrote to the first of these works, Alfred Tozzer presented Stone as a kind of replacement for Dorothy Popenoe, a replacement of whom he did not seem to entirely approve. Despite having obtained her undergraduate degree at Harvard, Stone's work was not up to Tozzer's standards: "Her indefatigable energy, her enthusiasms and her intuitive impressions have, at times, been handicaps," he wrote (in Stone 1941:v).

Some of the reasons for Tozzer's reserve may be evident in Stone's descriptions of excavations, which are challenging to decipher, and in such things as a repeated insistence that there was no stratigraphy in sites. Denied the chance to pursue a graduate degree (Levine 1994:26–28), Doris Stone did not have the methodological or theoretical grounding of the archaeologists whose work Tozzer trusted, such as Lothrop and Strong. He had these more trusted scholars review Stone's 1941 manuscript before approving it for publication (letter from Tozzer to Wilson Popenoe, 13 March 1939).

Yet the two volumes Stone produced present the most complete and most lucidly organized summary of the distribution of sites in Honduras produced up to that point. By the time the second volume was published, Stone had developed what from a contemporary perspective stands as relatively complete and reliable description of prehispanic Honduran pottery as well (Stone 1957:19–44).

The main problem in using Stone's work as a basis for modern archaeology lies in the framework it shares with the work of Lothrop and Strong, rather than her differences from these authors: imposition of a logic of discrete ethnic-linguistic groups distributed in mutually exclusive territories exercising vaguely defined "influence" on each other, evident in such things as choice of motif or technique of surface treatment on pottery. Having previously written that "the Uluá culture... is more or less frontier territory with a great intermingling of cultures" (Stone 1941:93), Stone eventually (1957:126) put the problem more bluntly:

The question is, what do we consider as the Maya complex in Honduras? Why are certain elements definitely classifiable as Maya found in some few locations, but are not universal, while a single trait demonstrable in the ceramics extends throughout the Uluá drainage and southwestern Honduras into El Salvador?

The first of her two volumes set out to cover the archaeology of northern Honduras, while the second was concerned with sites in what Stone called central and southern Honduras (Stone 1941, 1957). That the two comprised a single argument extended over two volumes was made clear by the inclusion as the final part of the later work of a “general discussion” that incorporated the Ulua drainage in comparison with the regions of the southern and central part of the country newly presented in the second volume (Stone 1957:120–30).

Stone (1941:3–15) began by defining the “tribes” that occupied Honduras: Paya (today, Pech), Tol (who she called Jicaque), Lenca, Maya, and Nahua (her term for what others called Pipil). At the end of the second volume, she presented “tribal distributions” and discussed “problems resulting from attempted correlation of historical and archaeological fact” (Stone 1957:123–30). By this point, Stone was cautious in applying simple ethno-linguistic labels, dividing the country’s archaeological remains among three regional groups: an eastern group of tribes, speakers of Chibchan languages (in which she included the Paya, Sumo, Ulva, and Matagalpa) practicing a South American way of life; a southwestern and central group, multiple Lenca tribes with some affinities to the south and others to the north, whose territory she defined as the Honduran highlands; and a third “buffer group” in the lower Ulua valley and its tributaries.

Stone’s defined archaeological areas teetered uneasily between geographic, linguistic, and stylistic definitions. Under the assumptions of culture historical approaches, these different domains of culture should have produced similar boundaries, should have been open to resolution in terms of well-bounded cultural geographies. Yet in fact, these different criteria did not produce consistent boundaries around stable culture areas.

Stone (1941:19–53) started by defining the northeast coast as the “Paya region” including the Bay Islands, annexing to it adjacent parts of Olancho and Yoro as what she called “transitional” zones. West of this she defined the “Ulua region” (Stone 1941:55–87). While in the first instance she was confident in assigning the archaeological remains to the ancestors of the Pech people (who still occupy the area in the 21st century), the Ulua drainage drew her into the unfortunate definition of a proposed people with no historical or ethnographic existence, the “Sula-Jicaque” (Stone 1942). This was the population she would by her second volume define as a “buffer group.”

While the material culture of the Ulua river drainage was from all accounts closely related to that of Lake Yojoa, Stone (1941:89) differentiated between the two. She briefly discussed Yojoa as definitely Lenca, and argued that it was affiliated in truth with Comayagua, to the south. Similarly, she defined the Chamelecon river valley upstream from the lower Ulua valley as “preëminently Maya, with perhaps an early layer or touch of eastern Central America” (Stone

1941:78). Her conclusions to her first volume, on north coast Honduras, descend into an almost incomprehensible list of possible traits and influences of Lenca, Maya, "Sula-Jicaque," and Paya, all intermingled in the lower Ulua valley.

Her later approach to central and southern Honduras was, in contrast, more strictly geographic. Yet here still, interpretive issues plagued her attempt to be systematic, as she summarized archaeology at levels ranging from a "region" to river valleys, "provinces," specific states (departments), and even "the hill sites" forming a distinctive cluster around the Comayagua basin.

The "regions" or "areas" Stone employed with confidence were Comayagua, Siguatopeque, Yojoa, Olancho, and "the far eastern region," fundamentally, the tropical forest of the Mosquitia. Between many of these, or bounding them, were individual river valleys whose archaeological remains seemed to merit separate discussion: the Humuya (or Comayagua) river north of the Comayagua valley; the valley of Jesús de Otoro, on the upper reaches of the Ulua drainage; the Sulaco river valley; and the valley of the Rio Grande de Choluteca, with its southern extension and floodplain leading to the Gulf of Fonseca, the Nacaome and Goascorán valleys, and the islands in the gulf itself.

For southwestern Honduras, Stone adopted completely different organizational terms, describing the archaeology of the early colonial "province of Cerquin" as core Lenca territory, and appending remarks on archaeology in the modern governmental districts closest to Copan under the rubric of the "extreme southwestern frontier."

Within each of these geographic areas, of different scale and basis for definition, the material Stone reported was exceptionally heterogeneous, with sites, individual objects, and artifact types inconsistently registered. In a few cases, she reported on her own first-hand explorations; in most, she relied on materials reported to her, or previously published, or represented in private and public collections. Yet despite the heterogeneity this gave to her overall work, the broad geographic overview provided her the ability to describe the pottery of Comayagua, the one region where her work was most systematic, in global terms. With few differences, many of them due to better understanding of chronology, what Stone (1957:19–44) said in her descriptions of the pottery of Comayagua can be favorably compared to what we know about pottery in the country today.

### **From Boundaries to Constellations**

Looking in particular at painted pottery made and used between 500 and 1000 AD, today we can define three broad zones in the territory that makes up the modern country of Honduras, within which preferred vessel forms and designs

are shared even when execution of painting is more localized. The first of these three zones, on the western edge of the country, includes Copan and other sites sharing certain major styles of painting and preferences for vessel shapes and proportions, notably Copador Polychrome and related ceramics. This region extends south into western El Salvador.

A central zone in Honduras defined by the manufacture and use of Ulua Polychromes extends from the lower Ulua valley to Comayagua, and like the first, continues south into El Salvador. This zone can even be extended into western Nicaragua, where the canons of Ulua Polychrome were interpreted in local ways.

In the vast expanse of northeastern and east central Honduras, including the Mosquitia and Olancho, and extending west into the Department of Yoro, vessel form preferences contrast with those of the Ulua Polychrome and Copador traditions. These contrasts in vessel shape preferences are countered by connections in painted decoration, with many specific motifs used on both Ulua Polychrome and Sulaco Polychrome, for example, despite the emphasis in the former on bowls, small jars, and cylinders, and in the latter on large jars (Figure 73) and dishes (Figure 74). Because archaeological research in eastern Honduras has been more limited than in the other areas, the presently known variation could become greater with more extensive research.

Within each of these three broad zones, the distribution of painted pottery contrasts at scales smaller than the region, ranging from the individual river valley to a site and its hinterland. In order to understand pottery made and used across Honduras during these centuries, we need to try to explain this variability, which Stone described and to which modern research continues to



FIGURE 74 *Dish (Sulaco Polychrome).*  
NARANJO CHINO SITE, DEPARTMENT OF YORO; STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL  
EXPEDITION 1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378510-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY,  
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.

add, not ignore it in favor of the uniformity demanded by concepts of culture areas, ethnic territories, or linguistic zones. Within each area, unique painted pottery traditions developed, in part in distinction to more broadly distributed regionally dominant styles. Routine exchanges took place between sites in each of these regions, so that no site assemblage is without some mixture of painted pottery from somewhere else, standing out against a background of the locally favored style or styles.

Far from being mainly a product of passive and hegemonic historical identities, variation in pottery made and used in Honduras during these centuries reflects first, traditions and practices of production, including incentives for innovation, and second, the ways that pottery vessels were used, leading to production of different vessel forms within each tradition. These forces, which directly shaped ceramic development over many centuries, can be understood as emerging from multiple, overlapping communities of practice that formed around the production and use of painted pottery.

### *Communities of Practice*

The lower Uluá river valley, the Lake Yojoa basin and Siguatepeque valley, and Comayagua have long been considered the core zone of production of Uluá Polychromes. To this we can add an as-yet incompletely delimited area in west-central El Salvador where locally made Uluá Polychromes have been identified as Salua Polychrome (Table 13; Bello-Suazo 2009).

As René Viel (1978) suggested in his division of Uluá Polychromes into three main groups, the earliest Uluá Polychromes (his Dedalos and Santa Rita classes) are relatively standardized across this entire area. They consist of serving vessels. In the earliest examples, bowls and vases (a distinction that is somewhat less than precise at this time) were most common. These shapes are appropriate as vases and cups to serve and drink liquids, and their sizes suggest their use to serve individuals or small groups. The less common flat plates and low walled dishes that also are produced at this time are recognizably appropriate to serve foods like roasted meat or more solid forms of corn-based food, such as tamales. Alternatively, they could have been used to present other kinds of items, perhaps even ritual tools. Initially, the shapes of Uluá Polychrome vessels and their relative frequencies suggest no changes from preceding periods in practices of food and drink serving, when the same purposes were fulfilled by the use of orange slipped, red-painted vessels. Where the first Uluá Polychrome potters innovated was in the imagery and colors applied to traditional kinds of serving vessels.

By the time that Santa Rita class Uluá Polychromes developed, a clear distinction between cylindrical walled vases and bowls was concretized, with

TABLE 13 *Salua and Ulua Polychromes in the Museo David Guzman, El Salvador*

Source site	Catalogue designation	Ulua Polychrome identification or comparison	Figure page number
		Dedalos	p. 64
Tazumal	Salua	Dedalos: Labyrinth	p. 56
Tazumal		Dedalos: Labyrinth?	p. 45
Tazumal		Dedalos: Bandeja	p. 44
Tazumal		Dedalos: Bandeja	p. 44
Tazumal		Dedalos: Bandeja	p. 45
Madreselva		Santa Rita variant of Bandeja?	p. 47
Madreselva		Santa Rita variant?	p. 47
		Santa Rita: Arrodiarse	p. 64
	Salua	Santa Rita: Cyrano	p. 52
		Santa Rita: Cyrano	p. 65
	Salua	compare Santa Rita: Cyrano	p. 52
Nuevo Cuscatlan	Salua	compare Santa Rita: Cyrano	p. 67
Madreselva		Santa Rita: Cyrano or Arrodiarse	p. 46
	Salua	Travesia: Bombero	p. 69
Nuevo Cuscatlan		Travesia: Bombero	p. 69
Madreselva	Salua	compare Travesia	p. 46
[San Miguel Dept.; see Baudez 1970]	Salua	Yojoa	p. 52
Cerro El Zapote	Salua	Yojoa	p. 49
Cerro El Zapote	Salua	Yojoa	p. 71
	Salua	compare Yojoa	p. 53
[San Miguel Dept.; see Baudez 1970]	Salua	compare Yojoa	p. 53
Cerro El Zapote	Salua	compare Yojoa	p. 56
Madreselva	Salua	compare Yojoa	p. 65
Cuscatlan Dept.	Salua	Santana	p. 58
Nuevo Cuscatlan	Salua	Santana	p. 58
Tazumal	Salua	Santana	p. 56
Cuscatlan	Salua	compare Santana	p. 57
Nuevo Cuscatlan	Salua	compare Santana	p. 57
Cuscatlan	Salua	Nebla	p. 19, 57
Madreselva		Nebla?	p. 73
San Salvador	Salua	compare Nebla	p. 65
Loma China		Las Vegas	p. 20, 107

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce based on Bello-Suazo (2009).

cylinders larger than earlier vases, some approaching sizes that would have made their handling difficult. Many of these new vessels stand on supports, including some incorporating rattles. They may have served to hold liquid for larger groups, with individual bowls continuing to serve as drinking cups. Plates become rarer, and most of the examples known are better described as low walled dishes.

Where the successful innovations in the earliest Ulua Polychromes were emulated closely across a very wide geographic area, Santa Rita class Ulua Polychrome potters experimented with many different ways to interpret canonical imagery, and so they produced very distinctive vessels that can be unique or typical of highly local production. This is the moment when Salvadoran potters begin to produce variants of Ulua Polychromes that are distinctive enough to require separate identification (Table 13).

At this time as well, in the lower Ulua Valley some cylinder vases and low walled dish forms of Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes inspired the first Ulua Marble vases, produced near Travesia. This suggests that in some of the events where Ulua Polychromes were being used in this region, some participants wanted to create even greater distinction from others than was possible by simply manipulating the vessel form and painting of polychrome serving vessels.

With the Travesia, Yojoa, and Selva classes, regional variation is sharply marked between the lower Ulua valley on the north, and Lake Yojoa and points further south, including in the Salua Polychrome of El Salvador. Where data from excavations exist, the repertoire of vessel forms and even their relative frequencies seems unchanged from earlier times, suggesting that the practices of serving food and drink in which these vessels were used continued. Yet throughout the Ulua Polychrome producing area, regional preferences became more evident in the newly prominent animal themes that characterized most Ulua Polychromes. Many examples of pots made at this time were incorporated in residential buildings, possibly in rituals related to the identification of social groups with their houses.

The succeeding development of Santana class in the lower Ulua valley and Nebla and Tenampua classes in the Comayagua valley and Lake Yojoa area, and of Salua Polychrome pots that are similar in designs and form to Santana and Nebla class, show the intensification of regionalization. This is when some potters produced imagery on Santana and Nebla class cylinders that can be closely compared to contemporary lowland Maya pottery from specific sites in Belize and Guatemala (see Chapter 10). The Tenampua class also features scenes that can be compared to Classic Maya art, but the imagery is distinct from that on Nebla and Santana class vessels, suggesting independent ties between potters or their patrons and partners in specific Maya settlements.

Throughout the Ulua Polychrome producing area at this time, cylinder vases and low walled dishes are more numerous than bowls, suggesting shifts in practices in food serving. Toward the end of the period when Ulua Polychromes were in use, they were more often incorporated in burials, especially in the areas where Nebla and Tenampua classes developed, near Lake Yojoa and in the Comayagua valley, and in El Salvador. In the lower Ulua valley, Ulua Polychromes were abandoned in favor of well-finished, unpainted fine paste pottery. The Ulua Polychrome tradition gave rise to a new offshoot, the Las Vegas Polychromes. Probably originating in the Comayagua Valley, these were present in numbers from Yojoa to El Salvador. Like the latest Ulua Polychromes, these consist almost entirely of vases and tripod dishes, with changes in the shapes preferred for each vessel form.

The impetus to create Ulua Polychrome serving vessels in the sites where they were made and used came in the first place from participation in communities of practice related to presenting food, and possibly other objects, both in everyday meals and on occasions marked by larger gatherings and ceremonies. A community of practice can be conceived of as a group of people who share a particular way of doing something, learned action that the community supports and reproduces (Lave and Wenger 1991:98). It is the repeated practice of doing something in a way that a group endorses that produces the appearance of similarity that allows us to recognize Ulua Polychromes as a group. Identification among people viewed from the perspective of communities of practice is a product of making and using things in the same way, rather than a pre-existing identity being the basis for making similar things.

Much of the archaeological use of the concept of communities of practice to date has been concerned with craft production (e.g. Bowser and Patton 2008; Joyce 2012b; Minar 2001; Minar and Crown 2001; Sassaman and Rudolphi 2001). Roddick (2009:88–91) suggests we consider learned practices of consumption as the basis for communities of practice as well. From this perspective, the reproduction over generations of shared ideas about the right way to go about serving and eating food led to the production of similar Ulua Polychromes across this wide area. The selected forms of painting vessels, including the motifs used, were aspects of serving food in a way that the connected communities of practice saw as the right way to do things. Rather than locating the impetus for innovation in an attempt to communicate a message, this way of thinking about the re-creation of similar things only requires us to acknowledge that crafters were subject to evaluation by those who used their products, and that crafters responded to the reactions of those others. Those innovations that the community of food serving practices saw as good were reinforced and reproduced; other innovations were not.

Of course, the situation is more complicated: the craft producers themselves also constituted communities of practice. Ulua Polychromes thus need to be thought of as products of the intersection of at least two kinds of communities of practice: a commensal community, for whom serving food in vessels decorated the right way was important; and a community of crafters who provided the decorated vessels for serving food, products of workshops where they learned the right way to make pots, and where their works were evaluated by other knowledgeable craft participants. An individual person might participate in both communities of practice. His or her intentions would be shaped by attention to both: as a potter, to the traditional ways of making things that were learned from more skilled craft workers; and as a participant in meals, as a person whose works might be seen and appreciated by others, both local people and visitors.

Communities of practice form from shared experiences. The scale of the communities of practice that produced and used these pots thus was almost certainly smaller than the distribution of what archaeologists call Ulua Polychromes. Communities of practice linked by serving food would have been local to settlements or their hinterlands and close neighbors, composed of networks of kin and others who would be in a position on some occasions to share food. Studies of Ulua Polychrome composition suggest that they were produced in multiple locales (Fung 1992; see also Beaudry 1984, 1987). Archaeological evidence from the lower Ulua valley demonstrates that production of pottery, including polychromes, took place within multiple sites in areas we can think of as workshops, with practitioners in each using slightly different approaches towards crafting (Joyce, Hendon, and Lopiparo 2014).

Whether any network constituting a food serving community of practice also included the individuals who formed a pottery producing community of practice that provided the containers used in serving food is an open question that needs to be examined in each area. The presence of similar Ulua Polychromes in villages that are near each other, along with other pottery (plain, red-slipped, or red-painted jars and bowls) that could be radically different in details of shape, finish, and painted or incised designs, suggests we should think in terms of many localized workshops providing the more utilitarian pottery, and fewer Ulua Polychrome producing workshops, whose products were used outside the settlements where they were made. This would mean that we should imagine smaller and more localized communities of practices of production, with membership overlapping larger and more spatially extensive communities of practice of serving food, even within an area like the lower Ulua valley that has been seen as culturally unified.

Thinking about pottery production and use as products of communities of practice forces us to pay attention to how things are formed and used at the level of human action, unfolding in lived space and generational time. Communities of practice allow identity to be shaped and reshaped through the “long-term living relationship between persons and their place and participation in particular communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger 2005:152–53).

Shared practices of consumption of non-local materials can be just as much an indication of a community of practice, at a scale larger than the settlement or neighborhood. This is how we might begin to think about the presence at Santa Rita of substantial proportions of Sulaco Polychrome vessels, used and discarded in the same events as Ulua Polychromes, and of the use at Travesia and Santana of rare but distinctive imported Lowland Maya polychrome vessels. Some people in each of these places were part of a non-localized community of practice through which they created a level of distinction from others living locally with whom they otherwise shared everyday life.

At any single event involving the presentation of food in polychrome painted vessels at a site like Travesia or Santa Rita, at least four communities of practice were implied by the archaeological assemblages: one the extended community of local hosts and visitors sharing food served in polychrome vessels; a very extensive community of practice linking only a few of the local participants with people living at great distances who provided a few pots used by some participants in these events; a local community of craft production providing most of the food storage and cooking vessels; and a fourth community of practice producing Ulua Polychromes used in these events. The crafting community of practice making Ulua Polychromes could have been quite restricted in its composition, perhaps even occupying one residential compound at one of the local settlements. Yet the participants in these localized communities of Ulua Polychrome production coordinated their approaches to making pots and decorating them with other communities of production practices, across relatively broad areas. To understand this coordination in terms of models of communities of practice, it will be helpful to consider a second concept developed out of communities of practice research, the constellation of practice.

### *Constellations of Practice*

When Santana class Ulua Polychromes were painted with a new repertoire of designs in the eighth century, all of which also occurred on contemporary Maya Lowland polychromes, this was an outcome of the makers of Santana class vessels forming part of a community of practice in polychrome production that was connected to other, geographically distant Lowland Maya communities of pottery production practice. Networks of communities of practice like this

have been called constellations of practice. Constellations of practice are recognizable as regional-scale articulation of separate communities of practice (Roddick 2009:80; Wenger 1998:127–33, 168–69, 256–60). The articulation of a constellation of practice may start with geographic proximity, having members in common, sharing use of certain objects or participation in overlapping discourses (Wenger 1998:127).

As an example of the utility of this extension of thinking about communities of practice, all of these factors are probably relevant in understanding how eastern Honduran polychromes, geographically and functionally separated from Ulua Polychromes, were articulated with painted pottery of the lower Ulua valley. The Sulaco, San Marcos, and Chichicaste Polychrome groups of eastern Honduras are the most common painted pottery in sites east of the lower Ulua valley and for some distance inland, into Olancho (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1997; Hirth, Kennedy, and Cliff 1993; Strong 1948:80–90). These groups differ strikingly from Ulua Polychromes in preferred vessel forms: with almost no cylinder vases, these eastern Honduran polychrome traditions primarily are represented by large jars and footed dishes (Figures 73 and 74).

The communities of practice in food serving that required these pots were engaged in different food ways than Ulua Polychrome-using communities of practice of food serving. A greater emphasis on large jars may indicate that serving of brewed beverages was more central to shared meals and ceremonies in this area. The absence or rarity of polychrome bowls in conjunction with the prominence of jars lessens the prominence of individual consumption in favor of a larger group.

At the same time, many motifs seen on Ulua Polychromes are also found on polychromes made in areas farther to the east. The designation “Bold Geometric” given by Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938) to some pottery is based on some of these motifs, particularly large braids, mats, stepped frets and terraces. While typical of eastern Honduran polychromes, these are all used by Ulua Polychrome potters as well. Sulaco Polychromes, with a center of production on the Sulaco river, where Salitron Viejo was the largest settlement between 500 and 1000 AD, reciprocally incorporate some of the designs that early researchers relied on to define the Mayoid group of Ulua Polychromes, such as complex profile masks, carved or painted as single elements in large panels on the neck or body of jars (Hirth, Kennedy and Cliff 1993). The earliest published depiction of a Sulaco Polychrome, the drawing illustrating Gordon’s Group C pottery, shows one of several animals also depicted on some Ulua Polychromes, a leaf-nosed bat (Gordon 1898b:Figure 27). Yet the animals most commonly painted on eastern Honduran polychromes, such as the bat and a reptile, are rarer on Ulua Polychromes. Eastern Honduran polychromes also usually avoid

depiction of human figures. All these differences from Ulua Polychromes are traces of the preferences of different communities of practice of consumption and production that promoted the making of eastern Honduran polychromes.

Some communities in the lower Ulua Valley eventually produced a painted type of their own emphasizing jars, dishes, and bowls, Las Flores Polychrome (Beaudry-Corbett and Joyce 1993). The jars and dishes executed by Las Flores Polychrome crafters reproduce the range of imagery seen in imported Sulaco Polychrome. We could see the new Las Flores Polychrome as the westernmost expression of a constellation of practice that included the communities of practice responsible for the making of Sulaco Polychrome, San Marcos Polychrome, and Chichicaste Polychrome.

Taking this perspective, what we might otherwise see as simply exchange of pottery between regions indexes something more, socially: at a minimum, visitation between neighboring areas; quite possibly, the incorporation into local social relations of people from another region. Participants in communities of practice in the lower Ulua valley, the Sulaco valley, and even as far as the northeast coast, were also participating in a wider network, a non-local community of practice, that brought painted pottery produced in each area into settlements in the others. Eastern Honduran polychromes were present as products of exchange at sites including Travesia and Santa Rita from the time of the first Ulua Polychromes. Ulua Polychrome sherds, especially from cylinder vases, have been reported in sites to the east, although in lower frequencies than Sulaco Polychrome in the lower Ulua valley (Healy 1978, 1984; Martinez 2010:17). The use of serving vessels from the Sulaco community of practice at sites in the lower Ulua valley, like Santa Rita, implies not just adoption of a different color vessel, but a novel practice, perhaps the consumption of different beverages. Finally, the elements of design seen in both Sulaco and Ulua polychromes, even if we do not pretend to interpret their meaning, demonstrate participation in overlapping discourses.

Las Flores Polychrome appears to develop late in the history of Ulua Polychromes, contemporary with the Santana class in the late eighth century. For residents of some sites in the lower Ulua Valley at this time, such as Las Flores Bolsa (Joyce 1987; Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938), participation in a community of practice producing Las Flores Polychrome, part of a constellation of practice that linked them with other people to the east, distinguished them from their contemporaries close at hand, who preferred to produce and use Ulua Polychromes. Yet this is not simply to be explained as the expansion of a culture area from eastern Honduras. Many other contemporary settlements in the lower Ulua valley continued to employ pottery produced in the Ulua Polychrome tradition.

Throughout the region where Ulua Polychromes were produced and used, there always were places where different kinds of painted pottery were being produced and used, contesting any uniformity that the more numerous Ulua Polychromes might have imposed. Where a model of culture areas ends up suggesting that the lower Ulua valley was occupied by a fragmented or mixed population, the concept of communities of practice allows us to see these things as products of localized groups of people who were shaping distinctive identities at scales that might be as small as a kin group, a neighborhood, or a village.

### *Alternative Communities of Practice*

In her discussion of Comayagua's pottery, Stone (1957:34–35, 36) describes two groups of pottery she calls “White-Red-Orange” and “Fine-Line Red-on-orange.” They occur in the form of incurved rim bowls, small jars with two handles, ring-base bowls, and tripod dishes. The basic red on orange type makes distinctive use of red dots to outline motifs, among which Stone recognized birds and geometric designs. The tri-color type is described as having a cream slip, a light orange ground, and red motifs “accented in white,” with geometric and bird motifs noted. While illustration references for the tri-color type point confusingly to Stone’s drawings of the later Las Vegas Polychrome type (apparently for the motifs they shared), the one photographic illustration provided (Plate 50 A) shows four examples of what today are defined as Cancique Red on Orange and Cancique Polychrome (Baudez and Becquelin 1973).

Stone ascribes the tri-color type to a specific site in the Comayagua valley, Lo de Vaca (Stone 1957:18). Other pottery from this site is identifiably in the Ulua Polychrome tradition, including vessels belonging to the eighth-century Nebla class and the eighth to ninth century Tenampua class (Stone 1957:figure 6, figure 48). Lo de Vaca also produced what Stone said was “a greater percentage” than any other site in the region of distinctive sherds, similar to Ulua Polychromes in their forms, motifs, and slipped and painted zones, but with incising used to outline motifs that would otherwise have been painted (Stone 1957:figure 46). Both this unnamed incised pottery group, and the Cancique group, are thus products of localized communities of practice in the Comayagua valley, communities of practice that developed within the zone of Ulua Polychrome production making pots that were in use within a single settlement at the same time as Ulua Polychromes.

Cancique Bichrome and Polychrome (Figure 75) can be considered examples of craft innovation that did not have as wide acceptance as the products of Ulua Polychrome communities of practice with which they were contemporary. Like Ulua Polychromes, the Cancique types clearly developed out of



FIGURE 75

*Incurved rim bowl (Cancique Polychrome).*

LOS NARANJOS; STRONG, KIDDER AND PAUL EXPEDITION 1936. CATALOGUE NO. A378540-0 DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION. PHOTO BY JAMES DI LORETO.

earlier orange-slipped and red painted bowls and jars. Art historian George Kubler (1962) ascribed historical patterns of innovation, rise in popularity, and decline of new practices to periodic innovation within traditions of crafting. “Inventions,” Kubler (1962:63) wrote, “are actually one with the humble substance of everyday behavior, whereby we exercise the freedom to vary our actions a little.” Some small variations appear transformative from a historical perspective because they are taken up by others, and spread. Other small variations experience more modest popularity, or are ignored entirely.

Both Ulua Polychromes and Cancique Polychromes began with innovations in localized communities of practice that had previously made red on orange serving vessels; but while the making of Ulua Polychromes spread to form a constellation of practices, the manufacture of Cancique Polychromes did not. Like Ulua Polychrome potters, Cancique potters introduced new motifs in the serving vessels they created: birds, reptiles, and monkeys. Like Ulua Polychrome painters, Cancique painters added a third color to form multi-colored designs. But they chose white in place of black, using a cream slip as a background for fields of red and orange designs, or to highlight geometric designs.

Other potters, including artisans at settlements in the lower Ulua valley, produced even more radical alternatives to Ulua Polychromes at the same time that these were in their ascendancy across much of Honduras. Excavators at Currusté, a site in the northwest Ulua valley, recovered relatively few Ulua Polychromes there (Hasemann, van Gerpen, and Veliz 1977). Instead, the assemblages excavated at Currusté included notable numbers of polished red to orange bowls, with pre-slip incised designs on the exterior wall or post-slip designs on everted rims, defined as the Quitamay group (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). Some of these vessels recall bowls in use in the same area before red-on-orange vessels were developed, during the period from 400 to 200 BC, giving them the appearance of a revival of historical traditions. Close comparison can

also be made to monochrome polished bowls made in the Belize River valley, obtained through exchange by potters at Currusté and other sites in the lower Ulua valley (Sheptak 1987). Quitamay pottery, almost entirely composed of open flaring walled bowls, suggests a contrasting set of food serving practices at Currusté, different from those that involved the use of Ulua Polychromes: an emphasis on some food that was contained in shallow bowls, rather than on a beverage poured from vases into cups.

The alternative choices made by potters in communities of practice that overlap with those of Ulua Polychrome makers have to be seen within the context of exchanges with the makers and users of Ulua Polychromes. Cancique Red on Orange and Polychrome sherds are found in small numbers at sites like Los Naranjos, Travesia, and Santana, where vessels probably arrived through exchange with settlements in Comayagua, or visitation by people from that area. Quitamay sherds are not uncommon at Travesia. The kinds of identities these alternatives attest to operated not at the level of entire regions or ethnic-linguistic groups, but of individual towns or families supporting distinctive communities of practice in pottery production and use.

#### *Overlapping Constellations of Practice*

Ulua Polychromes are reported from sites along the middle Ulua River and the middle Chamelecon (Ashmore et al. 1987; Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Schortman et al. 1986). Yet descriptions of the typical pottery assemblages from this area, which includes the Naco valley, suggest that Ulua Polychromes are rare compared to other, more abundant local painted pottery. The more common local bichrome and trichrome pottery types are more closely comparable to the common painted pottery of Copan, Gualpopa Polychrome (Schortman, Urban and Ausec 2001).

Like Ulua Polychromes and Cancique Polychrome, western Honduran painted pottery developed by innovations in a previous, widely distributed constellation of production of red-on-orange painted serving vessels, the Chilanga and Chasnigua Red on Orange types (Beaudry-Corbett et al. 1993). In the Naco valley, the comparable red-on-orange type is called Conejo Bichrome (Schortman, Urban and Ausec 2001). With the addition of black painted motifs, in Naco this develops into Chamelecon Polychrome (Schortman, Urban and Ausec 2001).

Potters from the Naco valley to Copan, and south from Copan as far as western El Salvador, shared preferences for specific vessel forms, layouts of motifs, and use of color on serving vessels (Beaudry 1984). While some cylinder vases are known from the Copador, Gualpopa, and Chamelecon groups, they are unusual; in the well-studied materials from the Naco valley, where

cylinders form a distinct Fine-Line variety of Chamelecon Polychrome, their reported frequencies were 0.18% or less, while the other two painted types, Conejo and Chamelecon, were present in frequencies around 1% to less than 2% (Schortman, Urban and Ausec 2001). Instead, in all of these areas, bowls and small jars predominate in local painted pottery groups.

Marilyn Beaudry (1984, 1987) demonstrated that in the Copan Valley Copador and Gualpopa Polychrome were made in dispersed workshops whose potters shared a way of making pots despite working independently. This is the pattern expected from a regional community of practice or closely related communities of practice that have not separated so far as to develop into a constellation of practice. A separate community of practice or communities of practice is evident in the Naco valley, where archaeologists have documented evidence for multiple ceramic production areas, in both the main settlement and hinterland sites (Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001; Urban, Wells, and Ausec 1997). Potters in settlements in western El Salvador constituted a third community of practice, producing not just Copador and Gualpopa, but pots with similar shapes and designs made with distinctive materials, called Arambala Polychrome (Beaudry 1984, 1987; Alfaro Moisa 2011; Sharer 1978:111–17).

Each of these groups of painted pottery were produced by people forming a community of practice within what at a high level appears to be a region unified by style and practices of food serving and consumption. On that regional scale, the people participating in communities of practice at sites in western El Salvador, Copan, and the Naco valley formed a constellation of practice: a series of more localized communities of practice whose participants shared enough ideas about how an end product should look that they produced a wider impression of uniformity out of what in fact are individual, varied ways of doing things, learned at the scale of the household-based craft tradition.

Archaeologists working in the Naco valley have argued strongly that the leading families of settlements there actively sought to identify with the Maya polity at Copan, as one resource in local efforts to concentrate power (Schortman, Urban, and Ausec 2001). The similarities seen in ceramics in these areas might be an example of the formation of a constellation of practice through what Wenger (1998:127) describes as engaging in overlapping styles or related discourses. The effect of uniformity produced, far from being the outcome of language-based identity as conceived of by early twentieth-century culture historians, still less evidence of the kind of political domination by Maya over non-Maya proposed by nineteenth century archaeologists, can instead be seen as the active creation of a means to strengthen and maintain social ties which served local political ends in both areas.



FIGURE 76  
*Bowl cylinder (Gualpopa Polychrome).*  
 FROM THE RIO ULUA,  
 ACQUIRED IN 1915. NATIONAL  
 MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN  
 INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN  
 INSTITUTION (43810). PHOTO  
 BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

In the lower Ulua valley, examples of polychrome pottery from this western constellation of practice have been recorded as Gualpopa Polychrome, the type name used in Copan and western El Salvador (Figure 76). Comparison with sherds from the Naco valley suggests that the vessels in the lower Ulua valley may actually have originated in the neighboring Naco region, where they would be called Chamelecon Polychrome Fine-Line variety, rather than at more distant Copan. Examples found in the lower Ulua valley are usually vases, with rows of monkey images the most common representational motif. The vase shape is apparently not the most common in the Naco valley, where a wider range of animals is noted, including birds and crabs (Schortman, Urban and Ausec 2001).

The use of monkey images in both Ulua and Naco area painted pottery, including Naco-produced vessels that made their way into the lower Ulua valley, may be seen as evidence of participation in overlapping discourses. Chamelecon Fine-Line vases possibly were seen by people near Travesia, a site with the highest frequency of these vessels in the lower Ulua valley, as an indication of a shared cosmology or history. The production of cylinders with similar imagery attests to the existence of constellations of practice of the production of painted pottery and the use of similar vessels, especially cylindrical walled vases, in serving food and drink.

A small number of Chamelecon Polychrome vessels moved to sites like Travesia, while Ulua Polychrome vessels moved in the opposite direction, including a Nebla subclass Tigrillo vase recovered by archaeologists at La Sierra in the Naco valley (Henderson et al. 1979:figure 8). These movements cannot be accounted for simply through such mechanisms as geographic proximity, having members in common, sharing use of certain objects or participation in overlapping discourses, mechanisms that were suggested to account for

many constellations of practice. The movement of small numbers of vessels is evidence of another community of practice, one that linked a few people in widely dispersed settlements in practices that resulted in the exchange of vessels foreign to each area.

### Ulúa Polychromes Abroad

Attempts by archaeologists in the early twentieth century to capture the variation within Ulúa Polychromes, and between Ulúa Polychromes and other Honduran pottery traditions, usually ended with defining pots as if they were random collections of traits, different fragments pointing to speakers of different languages understood as different tribes or nations. My argument is that pottery production and use in Honduras cannot be explained at the level of a territorial group of speakers of a language. For day-to-day pragmatic action, it is likely that the relevant levels of identification for people in their everyday life were with kin and town.

While no simple culture-historical equation can be made between Ulúa Polychromes and any single ethnic-linguistic group, speakers of Lenca languages historically inhabited the main areas of production of these pots. The main distribution of Ulúa Polychrome production extends from Comayagua to the Caribbean, with southern extensions into El Salvador and Nicaragua. Speakers of Salvadoran Lenca occupied some of the territory where Salua Polychromes are found. Comayagua is considered to have historically been inhabited by the ancestors of Honduran Lenca, who are widely acknowledged to have lived at least as far north as Lake Yojoa in the sixteenth century (Chapman 1978).

The picture has been less clear for the lower Ulúa valley. European colonization led to a long and persistent tradition of attempting to map broad indigenous identities with fixed linguistic boundaries for the purposes of administration. Following Spanish campaigns to subdue indigenous resistance in the lower Ulúa valley in the 1530s, during which the region was referred to in strictly geographic terms as the “provincia del Río Ulúa,” Spanish missionaries defined a supposed cultural and linguistic group, Toquegua, extending west along the Caribbean coast from the mouth of the Ulúa river. Archaeologists in the twentieth century proposed that Toquegua was the label for a dialect of Chol, a Maya language (Thompson 1938).

Critical historical analysis, however, shows that Toquegua was actually the name of a town, and the name of the most prominent family in that town, surviving into the colonial period as the family name of community leaders

at some settlements in the lower Ulua valley (Sheptak 2007, 2013). Indigenous identity in sixteenth century Honduras was localized at the level of towns, and in the lower Ulua valley, residents of many towns were likely multilingual. The residents of late precolonial towns in the lower Ulua valley were linked to other towns both within Honduras and in the Yucatan peninsula by kinship, trade relations, and cooperation in military campaigns (Sheptak 2013). The language spoken from birth in the lower Ulua valley was most likely in the Lenca family, and Toquegua itself arguably is a Lenca word (Sheptak 2007). Yet identity was not a simple matter of the language or languages one spoke.

Historically attested towns like those in northern Honduras in the sixteenth century are the conceptual equivalents of the networks of producers and users of Ulua Polychrome pottery described above as communities of practice. Language was a tool used for communication, not the essence of identity. Identification among people was produced through participation in everyday actions, and in ceremonies on marked occasions. A sense of belonging was fostered by the use of things, including pottery vessels, produced within the social networks that emerged from communities of practice.

It is more productive to understand the patrons and crafters of Ulua Polychromes as members of communities and constellations of practice than as groups of people speaking a specific language. We can locate the variability in painted pottery from Honduras as the outcome of actions of makers and users at a variety of scales (the workshop, the family, the town and its neighbors). Their actions had effects that extended far beyond the local sphere, creating very long distance networks that we can trace through the itineraries of Ulua Polychromes abroad, beyond localized communities of practice or even regional-scale constellations of practice formed by a series of communities of practice, reaching places where Ulua Polychrome vessels could be entirely transformed in purpose and meaning.

The most obvious example of such transformation came when people living at Copan used Ulua Polychrome vessels in ceremonies, especially placing them in burials, which was not a normal part of their use in the area where these vessels were produced. At least 35 examples of complete Ulua Polychrome vessels have been recorded at Copan in excavations since the 1890s (Table 3). Ten were described as placed in architectural features, consistent with practices from the Ulua valley to Comayagua. At least eighteen others were recovered from graves, many of them formal cut stone tombs. The use of Ulua Polychromes in mortuary ceremonies at Copan began early in the history of their production, between 550–700 AD, and continued until the latest period of their production, when an outstanding group of Tenampua class Ulua polychromes, now in the National Museum of the American Indian, were

placed in a tomb that was unfortunately excavated without professional documentation (Dockstader 1972).

Why would Ulua Polychromes be used in this novel way at Copan? Of the 25 for which there is sufficient information for me to identify subclass and form, all but seven were cylinders; two others were dishes. These are normal local vessel forms used in ritual contexts at Copan, including burials (Hendon 1987, 1991). Ulua Polychrome bowls are very rare in Copan tombs, despite being the most common shape in which Ulua Polychrome vessels were made. This implies that Ulua Polychrome vessels were selectively acquired for use in particular ceremonies.

Based on distinctive features of their painted designs and shapes, Ulua Polychrome vessels primarily came to Copan from Lake Yojoa or Comayagua. These selected pots most likely arrived at Copan as products of social networks linking families there with families in these other areas of Honduras, through specific social ties such as marriage (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013). Individuals in burials at Copan with Ulua Polychromes include both children and adults, in two cases a pair of adults buried together. Burials took place within the residential compounds of families, as the dead were incorporated into the house permanently. Distant kin may have visited Copan to participate in mortuary ceremonies or other events in the life course, bringing vessels with them as gifts in shapes that were selected for the use to which they would be put.

In some cases, the date assigned to a burial at Copan is later than the dates of production of the subclass of Ulua Polychrome included in that grave. There is other evidence for placement of vessels in burials at Copan that had earlier use lives. One burial at Copan containing a Santa Rita subclass Paloma vase (which would have been made between 600–700 AD) is assigned dates of 725–800 AD based on a local vessel included, a Surlo Brown cylinder. Engraved with an image of a water bird, and a band of glyphs around the rim, this cylinder had its rim ground down before burial. Like this Surlo vessel, which clearly was held for some period before being buried, Ulua Polychrome vessels brought to Copan for earlier occasions, such as to commemorate marriage or birth, might have been retained as heirlooms for a generation or two, until selected for interment.

Burials that produced Ulua Polychromes at Copan were found everywhere from the main center of the site to outlying hamlets. They were not especially common in any one part of the site. Burials routinely included local pots along with imported ones. Some of the burials with Ulua Polychrome pots were among the richest documented non-royal burials at Copan, containing jade, marine shell, and even pearls. There is a slight tendency for Ulua Polychrome

vessels to be found in tombs that also contain pots with modeled cacao pods. This could suggest that visitors from the Uluá Polychrome producing areas brought cacao, a lowland product, with them as additional gifts.

Based on the kinds of Uluá Polychromes present at Copan, the social networks responsible for their transmission most likely linked the Maya city with settlements in the Comayagua valley, particularly Tenampua (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013). The frequency of Uluá Polychromes at Copan, and the contexts in which they were deposited, tells us that Copan families valued their ties to these Central Honduran settlements, and held the products of Uluá Polychrome artisans in high esteem. It does not mean that people in Uluá Polychrome producing settlements saw Copan as the only, or even the most important, foreign place in their social network. Social relations can also be traced between Uluá Polychrome producing settlements and regions as distant as Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Belize and Guatemala.

### *Looking South*

Dorothy Popenoe (1928) described the Uluá Polychrome bowl she excavated at Tenampua as Central American in inspiration. In part she was influenced by the recovery at the same site of a carved stone metate that she identified as likely from Nicaragua or Costa Rica (Popenoe 1928:572, fig. 4). This sculpted object has carved designs including a bird head on the plate or seat, and two small anthropomorphic skulls in the openwork beneath the plate. It was classified by Jones (1992:67) as an effigy bird head metate with open-fretwork trapezoidal legs, a type she dated to AD 500–1000 (class SPM2.L4.TRA/OFR(AV1)). Jones, calling attention to a number of unusual features of this metate, grouped it with others from Guanacaste in Costa Rica, and Moyogalpa, on Ometepe Island in Nicaragua. This is not the only indication that Tenampua was engaged in some relatively direct way with regions to the south.

In his definition of a frontier between Maya and non-Maya peoples in Honduras and El Salvador, Lothrop (1939:52) stated that vessels related to the Uluá Polychromes had been recovered in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. A sherd described as Uluá “Maya-style” painted pottery had been reported from a site on the Cúa River in Nicaragua in 1910 (Lehmann 1910:736). Lothrop also cited his own illustration of another vessel he described as “Mayan,” reportedly from the Nicoya peninsula, in his magisterial work, *Pottery of Costa Rica and Nicaragua* (Lothrop 1926:fig. 281). The vessel depicted there was subsequently identified by Viel (1978) as a Tenampua subclass Pentagone dish. Sherds from other Tenampua subclass Pentagone dishes have been reported from sites in eastern El Salvador, including Quelepa (Andrews 1976: figs. 151i, 152s).

In his study of pottery from Costa Rica and Nicaragua, Lothrop illustrated locally made polychrome vessels from the Nicoya region that we can identify as related to the Ulua Polychrome Nebla class, especially the subclass Tigrillo (Lothrop 1926: fig. 44, Plate XL). Later archaeologists argued that this group of Nicoya vessels, was “modeled on the styles of the Ulua-Yojoa region” and even went so far as to argue that resemblances “are so close that the Nicoya Peninsula at this time seems like a ceramic outpost of the eastern Maya frontier” (Coe 1962:177, comparing Lothrop 1926: Plate 40 and 69 to Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938: Plate 12b). Today such vessels are identified as the Galo: Jaguar variety (Abel-Vidor et al. 1987; Figure 77).

The close parallels between Nebla class Ulua Polychromes and Galo: Jaguar variety are striking (compare Figures 36 and 37a with Figure 77). They suggest relatively direct inspiration of Galo potters by Ulua artisans. What in the Ulua area is a consistent development from local roots, in the Nicoya region is entirely novel: cylinder vases with tripod lug supports, designs emerging in negative from a black slip covering a cream or orange base slip. As the name of the variety implies, the Costa Rican vessels depict a profile feline, combined with a mat motif, in the main panels on the body. Bands near the lip of the pot were painted with geometric designs identical to those on some Nebla class Ulua Polychromes.

The uniformity of Galo: Jaguar suggests that these vessels were produced over a short period of time by a closely related group of potters, a community of practice in Nicoya. I have argued that the analogues for these pots were most likely Nebla class Ulua Polychromes from the Comayagua valley (Joyce 1993a:90). There is evidence in Comayagua, in turn, for objects of Nicoya origin being prized by local leaders, with two sites, Las Vegas and Tenampua, producing a total of nine Nicoya-style metates, dated to between AD 500–1000, the period when Ulua Polychromes developed (Jones 1992:180–82). Some extraordinary Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes actually depict similar objects in use as seats (Figures 34a and 43; see Chapter 10 for further discussion).

Galo Polychrome vessels were reportedly found at the site of Nacascolo, in Costa Rica, along with Ulua Marble vases (Stone 1977:58–59). Luke (2010:46), noting that both Galo Polychromes and Ulua Marbles are appropriate forms for serving beverages, suggested Ulua Marble vases could have traveled along with cacao coming from Ulua valley settlements like Travesia. She suggests that Central American gold work and jade objects that were buried with marble vases at Santana and the nearby site of Peor es Nada would have been reciprocal gifts to visitors from the Ulua valley who participated in events at sites in Nicoya.



FIGURE 77 *Vase (Galo Polychrome).*

ATTRIBUTED TO THE ULUA VALLEY, ACQUIRED IN 1969. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION (243288). PHOTO BY RUSSELL N. SHEPTAK.

The proposed connections between Nicoya and Tenampua can be dated to the late eighth and early ninth century, when the Nebula class Ulua Polychromes that provided models for Galo: Jaguar were made. The relationship between Travesia and sites in the Nicoya region, attested by the gifting of Ulua Marble vases, apparently began earlier. Luke (2002, 2010; Luke and Tykot 2007:322) demonstrates that Ulua Marble vases that appear in Costa Rica are among the earliest examples to circulate outside of Honduras. Such early Ulua marble vases have lug handles in the form of bird, bat, or monkey heads, while later Ulua marble vases have feline lug handles, introduced along with mat motifs (Luke and Tykot 2007:319).

These changes in designs on the marble vases parallel developments in Ulua Polychromes. The later Ulua marble vases featuring feline handles and mat motifs were likely made at the same time as Nebula class Ulua Polychromes (ca. 750–850 AD). Earlier Ulua marble vases with bird and monkey head lugs mimic the shape of the Santa Rita subclass Paloma Ulua Polychromes (ca. AD 600–650), and their successors, Travesia subclass Bombero (ca. AD 650–750). Their dates closely agree with assignment of Costa Rican jade and gold objects buried with Ulua Marble vases at Santana and Peor es Nada to the period AD 650–750 (Mora-Marín 2005).

It thus seems likely that relations between Travesia and Nicoya started earlier than those between Tenampua and Costa Rican sites. The forging of ties from Comayagua to Nicoya might even have had the effect of diverting southern relations away from the lower Ulua valley. The exchanges most evident between Travesia and Nicoya sites are embodied in extremely rare luxuries: marble vases, jade, and gold. These were objects that would have allowed those who received them in both areas to distinguish themselves from their neighbors as much as signify connections to distant peers. The later relationship between Tenampua and Nicoya sites that developed in the eighth century is different: while a few Costa Rican-style carved benches made their way to Comayagua, it is not Ulua pots that are used in Costa Rica, but locally made analogues. Something had changed when relationships shifted from Travesia to Tenampua.

It is not simply that Costa Rican potters began to emulate Ulua Polychrome at this late period. The creation of local analogues to Ulua Polychromes in the Nicoya region has earlier roots. There are vessels recovered in Costa Rica that suggest inspiration of innovation in local ceramics through exposure to earlier Ulua Polychromes, contemporary with the introduction of Ulua Marble vases in Nicoya. Unlike Galo: Jaguar, Costa Rican vessels that resemble earlier Ulua Polychromes are highly diverse; no two vessels are exactly alike. They are precisely what we might expect if potters in Costa Rica experimented with new ideas, not all of which gained acceptance and encouragement for continued

development. The majority of these anomalous vessels from Costa Rica can be compared to relatively late Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes, drawing inspiration from Paloma, Cyrano, and Arrodillarse subclasses. A few recall the Travesia subclass Bombero. All of these precedents suggest we are dealing with a relationship that emerged in the seventh century, a relationship initially with settlements in the lower Ulua valley, with Travesia being the most likely candidate due to its role in the production of Ulua Marble vases (Luke 2010; Luke and Tykot 2007).

Lothrop (1926: Plate 69) illustrated one vessel made in the Nicoya region that precisely follows the shape and design layout of Travesia subclass Bombero, and compared it to a sherd from the Ulua valley (Lothrop 1926: fig. 66). Emulation of Travesia subclass Bombero was not limited to Nicoya. A stylistically distinct tripod cylinder, also with monkey head lugs, from Nandaime, Nicaragua (Lothrop 1926:112a) has as its main design a schematic anthropomorphic figure, a motif featured on some Bombero vessels. Two bowls from the same location can be compared to Travesia subclass Rastrillo, on which profile monkey bodies are painted (Lothrop 1926: Plate 98a, b).

Even earlier inspiration of Costa Rican potters by Ulua valley potters may be reflected by other vessels in museum collections. These commonly have only geometric designs, and may be made in unusual shapes, with raised panels and supports of various kinds. Some have single or double bird heads modeled as lugs on the wall or the lip. Their closest ties are to Santa Rita subclasses Cyrano and Paloma. Examples exist in the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University, where they are classified in the Galo: Galo variety and Rosales Zoned Engraved: Clarito Variety ceramic types. Other examples are in the Denver Art Museum and Wellesley College's Davis Museum and Cultural Center.

What differentiates these Nicaraguan and Costa Rican polychromes with links to earlier Ulua Polychrome classes from the Galo: Jaguar variety is that none of the early vessels appears to have inspired reproduction. We can see them as expressions of individual experimentation, but none gives rise to a community of practice. Why might the innovation of Galo: Jaguar, modeled on Nebula class Ulua Polychromes, have become sufficiently popular, standardized, and reproduced to become recognized by archaeologists as a named type and variety, products of a divergent community of practice in the Nicoya region? One possibility is that Galo: Jaguar vessels took the place of Ulua Marbles in the Nicoya region, as containers for beverages used in ceremonies. When Tenampua forged ties to the Nicoya region that replaced those previously existing with Travesia, it was unable to continue to provide marble vases, products of workshops in the lower Ulua valley.

Comayagua's ties to Nicaragua and Costa Rica were evidently strong, based on the presence in both areas of numbers of objects either imported from or

inspired by material from the other area. In Comayagua, the importance of carved metates continued even after Las Vegas, located on the valley floor, succeeded Tenampua as the local settlement center in the mid-tenth century (Dixon 1989:266–69). It is likely that one strategy the people of Las Vegas used in local struggles for autonomy with Tenampua was the co-opting of ties with people to the south, while Tenampua instead intensified its ties to Copan (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013).

Eventually, Las Vegas became the center of a new community of practice involving potters producing Las Vegas Polychrome, a locally made successor to Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes. The community of practice in the Comayagua valley that produced Las Vegas Polychrome is part of a constellation of practice with other communities of practice producing white-slipped polychromes, including those in the Greater Nicoya region responsible for the creation of the Pataky and Papagayo Polychrome types. Through the network of communities linked in this constellation of practice, a new set of luxuries moved: Tohil Plumbate, Mixteca-Puebla censers, green obsidian from Central Mexico, and copper alloy bells made in Honduras (Joyce 1986). Las Vegas Polychrome vessels ultimately arrived as far west as Tula, in central Mexico (Diehl, Lomas and Wynn 1974), and as far north as the coastal islands of Belize (Heim, McKillop, Morris and Joyce 2011; McKillop 2005).

Travesia clearly cultivated links to the Nicoya peninsula, but the traces of the relationship are disproportionately visible in Costa Rica, in the form of Ulua Marble vases. Only a single gold pendant and some Central American jades, cached with Ulua marble vases in the lower Ulua valley, suggest reciprocal movement of luxuries. The same caches also included examples of Maya jades from the lowlands of Belize or Guatemala (Luke 2010:43). Travesia's wealthy families maintained relations with Maya lords living not so far away as Nicoya, across the Gulf of Honduras, and those relationships continued even as Tenampua took the place of the Honduran partner in networks with Nicoya.

### *Maya Lords and Wealthy Farmers*

Ties between the lower Ulua valley and the lowlands of Belize are of great antiquity. Some pottery dating to around 1000 BC at the site of Cuello likely originated in Honduras, where similar paste composition and surface treatment was common at Puerto Escondido (Joyce and Henderson 2001). The El Remolino site on the south bank of the Chamelecon river was inhabited between 150 and 250 AD by a group of people who acquired imported pottery from Belize, including an Ixcantio Orange Polychrome dish and stuccoed and painted vessels, including a pot stand (Joyce 1993d). Emerging community leaders in specific sites in Belize and Guatemala used assemblages of pots like

these to impress others in their communities and consolidate power (Bonafoux 2008; Reese Taylor and Walker 2002:106–08). Early Classic Dos Arroyos Polychrome dishes found at Campo Dos, Puerto Escondido, and Playa de los Muertos may have been products of a separate network formed by the family that ruled Tikal, Guatemala, from about AD 280 to 380 (Reese Taylor and Walker 2002:106–08), traces of early alliances between families in the lower Ulua valley and the Peten.

At the end of the Maya Classic period, Ulua Marble vases featuring feline handles and mat motifs appeared in a few sites in Guatemala and Belize, as a result of exchanges between the patrons of Travesia's workshops and noble families at sites like Uaxactun, Altun Ha, San Jose, Marco Gonzalez Cay, and Chac Balam (Joyce 1986; Luke and Tykot 2007:322). Exchange of Ulua Marble vases with sites in this area was an innovation for Travesia's wealthy farming families. This late eighth century period may have been when some Lowland Maya polychrome vases arrived in the Travesia area from specific sites, including Altun Ha, Benque Viejo, Motul de San Jose and Uaxactun. Newly intensified relations with settlements in Belize and Guatemala at this time greatly affected the way that Ulua Polychrome makers executed their craft works.

In the eighth century, Ulua Polychrome potters shifted from their previous practice of framing the main designs on cylinders between upper and lower bands of smaller motifs, to painting the main design field on cylinders below a single band of profile heads or geometric motifs. This parallels the norms of design construction of the contemporary lowland Maya polychromes that visitors to Belize and Guatemala would have seen in use (Loughmiller-Newman 2008; Reents-Budet 1994). Lowland Maya polychrome cylinders from different areas of Belize and the Peten were brought back to the lower Ulua valley (Tables 11, 12). It is unlikely to be a coincidence that noble families at two sites that are possible sources for multiple foreign vessels brought to the lower Ulua valley, Altun Ha and Uaxactun, also owned Ulua Marble vases. The exchanges with Uaxactun and Altun Ha resulted from reciprocal relationships, between Maya lords and Travesia's wealthy farmers.

Resemblances between Ulua Polychromes and those of Uaxactun, Altun Ha, and the Codex Style group showing figures emerging from serpents are close enough in some cases to suggest we consider them products of a constellation of practices, the articulation of separate communities of practice in polychrome production in these areas. Understanding the motivation for potters in Honduras to produce pots with figures enthroned, emerging from serpents, or engaged in gestures comparable to Maya polychromes of Belize and Guatemala requires us to turn to the final stage in the modern journey of Ulua Polychromes: their conversion into interpreted texts by scholars who often lacked a way to place them in their precise spatial and chronological contexts.

## Picturing Meaning

In the conclusion to his report on his work in the Ulua Valley, Gordon (1898b:27–33) attempted to interpret the painted pottery he recovered in terms of the models he had. Groups A and B exhibited “the most elaborate color decorations,” yet “the conventional forms employed in the decoration on Group A are *more or less* familiar to students of the Maya codices” (Gordon 1898b:27; emphasis added). The description that follows, of two almost complete vases drawn in rollout in his Plates IV and v, is of late (Santana class) Ulua Polychromes (Figures 31 and 32). On one, he identified “the plumed serpent and a personage representing some divinity” (Gordon 1898b:29). On the second, he discerned “a procession of three figures each holding a sun shield” (Gordon 1898b:30).

Gordon, and most of the early twentieth-century scholars who followed, engaged in relatively restrained discussions of the meaning of the motifs and scenes on Ulua Polychromes that included human figures. These scholars were freer in their identifications of images as particular animals (e.g. Yde 1938:74–79). In technical terms, when they identified images as particular animals, they were relying on iconicity, the resemblance of one thing to another, a property of some kinds of symbols that can seem to be less arbitrary because it is motivated by what is perceived to be self-evident identity. The actual difficulty of even simple iconic identification is a subject worth discussion.

For example, throughout this book I have talked about certain images, whether in costumes on anthropomorphic figures or as apparent animals, as “felines.” These have been more specifically identified by different researchers as images of the jaguar (*Panthera onca*) or the marguay (*Leopardus wiedii*), wild cats of very different size and behavior. Art historian Louise Schaffer, in her exhibit of Ulua marble vases at the Houston Museum of Art (Schaffer 1992), noted that on Ulua Marbles with feline handles, there is a deliberate representation of fur on the spine pointing toward the animal’s head. This is a characteristic of the marguay, called caucel in Honduras (Gamero Idiaquez 1978:342–43). Schaffer’s identification of the smaller cat better matches the apparent size of the pelt used as a part of costume of anthropomorphic figures on Santa Rita class Ulua Polychrome vessels. The pattern of spots and ear shape is much closer to the appearance of Nebla subclass Tigrillo than the jaguar would be. Things get a little more ambiguous with some Santana class vessels that show anthropomorphic figures wearing feline skin or that depict

anthropomorphic felines. Since jaguars and marguays have very different habitats and behaviors, if the artists intended to depict a specific species, making the right identification could be critical. The marguay is described as the most arboreal feline in Central America, adept at climbing, uniquely able to rotate its paws to climb head first down trees (Reid 2009:277). An intention to depict the marguay, especially on the vertical walls of Ulua Marble vases, could invoke the image of this cat climbing the trunk of a tree, equating the carved marble vase with a tree.

Yet it is also possible that the Ulua Polychrome artists themselves only intended a generic category of their own, “spotted quadruped,” but drew on the cats that were most familiar from practical experience, such as hunting for their skins. The marguay has dark rosettes, not unlike the larger jaguar, but is described as having especially bushy fur and a very long tail (Reid 2009:277). These features of the pelt could have made the marguay a preferred species for use in costume. If artists were more familiar with marguays simply as a result of hunting preferences, identifying the cat depicted on pottery down to the species level could lead to over-interpretation of intended symbolism. The same risk exists in the case of every zoomorphic image: what we call a “water bird” on Ulua Polychromes always has a long bill, relatively long legs, and often holds a fish in its beak. Which water bird was the inspiration is more debatable; and may or may not have mattered to the artists themselves (even though we can be pretty sure they knew which animal inspired their drawing).

In a few instances, exemplified by Gordon’s (1898b:28–29) identification of a geometric design as “corresponding to the sign for *Lamat*, one of the days of the Maya month,” the use of conditional words like “corresponding to” indicates self-consciousness about carrying out acts of reading and interpreting what was visible as a sign for something else. In the initial decades of study of Ulua Polychromes, however, scholars expended very little effort discussing how they could know what the images on vessels meant. Complex symbolic constructs like “*Lamat*” and “the feathered serpent” were as much facilitated by iconicity, identity by resemblance, as the labeling of monkeys and water birds so easily recognized by researchers. There seemed to be no reason to explore whether the people who made these vessels used the same calendar as the Yucatec Maya for whom *Lamat* was a day sign, or had a concept of a bird/serpent hybrid of any kind. While the specific identity of “some divinity” on the Santana subclass cylinder Gordon described was uncertain, he saw no need to explain how he knew that figure was supernatural.

Through small acts of interpretation like these, Ulua Polychromes were incorporated wholesale into emerging canonical descriptions of Maya pottery. Gordon’s fascination with the most elaborate Ulua Polychrome vases led him

to include the same two vessels he had discussed in 1898 in a folio he published as Director of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania (Gordon 1925). This book effectively established what Maya polychromes should look like, and became the beginning corpus for their interpretation, along with successor volumes published after Gordon's early death (Mason 1928, 1943). Six Uluá Polychrome cylinders, five featuring scenes of human figures, were included in these three volumes.

The Uluá Polychromes Gordon published were not selected randomly, and today we can see that they are not typical in any sense. They conveyed an impression of Uluá Polychromes that de-emphasized some more common features in favor of traits that overlapped with polychrome production in the highlands and lowlands of Guatemala, and in Belize. Vessels with human figures, a minority of Uluá Polychromes, were over-represented, while animals were almost absent, with only a single Salvadoran Uluá vessel depicting an animal being included (Mason 1928:Plate xxxi).

Multi-figure human scenes, the rarest of all imagery in the broad scope of Uluá Polychromes, were the most likely to be included in these folios. Four of the five Uluá Polychromes from Honduras, all selected to highlight human figures, belonged to the Santana subclass (Gordon 1925:Plates xxii and xxv; Mason 1928: Plate xxviii; Mason 1943: Plate lix). Two depicted an image of a person emerging from a floating serpent (Gordon 1925: Plate xxii; Mason 1943: Plate lix). Far from being typical, we can now see these as innovative products of a historical moment of newly intense relations between certain towns in the lower Uluá valley and specific sites in Belize and Guatemala, decidedly not exhaustive of the Uluá Polychrome repertoire.

The inclusion in these important volumes of four vessels that marked the greatest conformity of Uluá Polychromes with those of Maya sites in Guatemala and Belize had a profound effect on the development of understanding of Uluá painted pottery. From Gordon's initial halting steps to reading Uluá Polychrome symbolism, Maya sources would provide the main points of reference for researchers attempting to interpret Honduran painted pottery, not just as signs of cultural groups and the boundaries between them, but as testaments to the ideas that were important to their makers and users.

### **From Description to Interpretation: Iconography and Iconology**

In 1979, the National University of Mexico published a major work of scholarship, a catalogue of Maya painted vessels in archaeological context (Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz 1979). At the time, there was little

identifiable Ulua Polychrome material for these authors to incorporate in this survey. The only vessels they illustrated under the provenience Ulua Valley were drawings of two bowls published by Gordon (1898b:figs. 28, 30). The other 41 vessels in their catalogue that can be identified as Ulua Polychromes (Table 14) either had been excavated at Copan (21 examples) or were from El Salvador (20 vessels). In only one case, a vessel from Copan, did these authors identify any of these vessels as likely made in the Ulua valley (Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz 1979:97).

TABLE 14A *Ulua Polychrome vessels in Vasijas Pintadas attributed to Copan*

Intrasite location	Source	Class: subclass	Number
Burial 2-42	Longyear 117g	Santa Rita: Winged Figure	55
Tomb	NMAI 24/4276	Tenampua	10
Tomb	NMAI 24/4278	Selva: Concerto	66
Tomb	NMAI 24/4277	Tenampua	16
Tomb	NMAI 24/4279	Tenampua	25
Tomb	NMAI 24/4305	Tenampua: Mariposa	27
Tomb	NMAI 24/4301	Tenampua: Mariposa	29
Tomb	NMAI 24/4271	Tenampua	30
Tomb	NMAI 24/4281	Tenampua	31
Tomb	NMAI 24/4306	Tenampua	33
Tomb	NMAI 24/4307	Tenampua	44
Tomb	NMAI 24/4300	Tenampua: Mariposa	45
Tomb	NMAI 24/4275	Tenampua: Cefiro	64
Tomb	NMAI 24/4273	Tenampua: Capitan	69
Tomb	NMAI 24/4303	Tenampua: Mariposa	72
Tomb	NMAI 24/4272	Tenampua: Capitan	73
Tomb	NMAI 24/4274	Tenampua: Capitan	74
Tomb	NMAI 24/4280	Tenampua	63
Tomb 11	Longyear 109h	Selva: Troubador	65
Tomb 13-42	Longyear 117c	Nebula: Picadilly	62
Tomb 3-38	Longyear 110c	Nebula: Picadilly	9

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce based on Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz (1979).

TABLE 14B *Ulúa Polychrome vessels in Vasijas Pintadas attributed to El Salvador*

Site	Source	Tradition: class	Number
	Spinden 1915 fig 70	Las Vegas	9
	Spinden 1915 fig 64	Ulúa: Nebla?	46
	Spinden 1915 fig 71	Ulúa: Yojoa?	7
Hacienda Malpilapa	Spinden 1915 fig 69	Ulúa: Nebla?	17
La Libertad	Longyear 1944 X:28	Ulúa: Santa Rita?	2
La Libertad	Longyear 1944 X:25	Ulúa: Yojoa?	15
La Libertad	Longyear 1944: XIII:11	Ulúa: Yojoa?	47
Quelepa	Longyear 1944 IX:7	Ulúa: Nebla	58
San Jacinto	AMNH Lothrop 1927 fig 12c	Ulúa: Nebla?	45
San Jacinto	AMNH Lothrop 1927 p, 189 fig 12a	Ulúa: Selva	59
San Jacinto	AMNH Lothrop 1927 fig 12d	Ulúa: Selva	44
San Salvador	Longyear 1944 X:30	Ulúa: Nebla?	42
San Salvador	Longyear 1944 X:32	Ulúa: Yojoa?	10
San Salvador	Longyear 1944 XI:9	Ulúa: Yojoa?	43
Santa Tecla	Longyear 1944 XI:1	Ulúa: Yojoa?	18
Soyapango	Longyear 1944 X:36	Ulúa: Yojoa?	14
Tazumal	Museo David Guzman	Ulúa: Dedalos	18
Tazumal	Longyear 1944 IX:13, 14	Ulúa: Dedalos	25
Tazumal	Museo David Guzman	Ulúa: Yojoa?	11
Tazumal	Museo Nacional	Ulúa: Yojoa?	12
Tazumel	Spinden 1915 fig 65	Ulúa? Copador?	48

Identifications by Rosemary A. Joyce based on Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz (1979).

At the time this catalogue was published, almost no new Honduran archaeology had been undertaken since Doris Stone's (1941, 1957) survey volumes had been published. The latest professional excavations Stone described actually took place before the end of World War II. One factor in the discontinuity of international archaeological research in Honduras was undoubtedly the passage of new legislation in 1946, leading to the establishment of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History in 1952, imposing expectations that

effectively ended the previous practice of enriching North American museum collections through research projects (Joyce 2008a:59–60; Luke 2006, 2007).

The lone exception in this long period of international archaeological inattention to Honduras would be critical to the study of Ulua Polychromes and the problems of understanding that they raised. This was research initiated in 1964 by Claude Baudez, a French archaeologist who had previously conducted studies of chronology of pottery in Costa Rica for his doctorate, received in 1964 (Stresser-Péan 1967:606). He then turned his attention to clarifying the ceramic sequence in the northern end of the Central American isthmus.

Baudez initially characterized Ulua Polychromes as giving Honduran archaeology its “unity,” while noting that the group was essentially still only known from the work of the Harvard-Smithsonian Expedition of 1936 (Baudez 1966:299). His own research, designed to address unsettled issues and fill in identified gaps, began with excavations near the Gulf of Fonseca, on the Pacific coast of Honduras, and continued with testing at a site called *Lo de Vaca* in the Comayagua valley (Baudez 1965, 1966).

While Baudez was content to discuss the polychrome ceramics he encountered in the Comayagua valley under the general term *Ulua-Yojoa*, in his work in Choluteca, he gave very similar ceramics novel type names. He recognized local analogues of “the style ‘Bold Geometric’ of the Ulua Polychrome” (*Chiri Polychrome*), which developed earlier in Choluteca than the types *Guatales* and *Langues*, “which are Mayoid in style, very close to identical with the type *Santa Rita* of the Ulua” (Baudez 1966:319; my translation). The sherds illustrated for *Chiri Polychrome* are indeed very different from anything today identified as Ulua Polychrome (Baudez 1966: fig. 9). The photographs of his *Guatales* and *Langues* types, however, could easily be assigned to specific Ulua Polychrome types today. *Langues* (Baudez 1966: fig. 10 A-C) closely resembles *Santa Rita*, subclasses *Mellizo* (A and C) and *Cyrano*. *Guatales* (Baudez 1966: fig. 10 D, E) can be equated to *Nebula* class. By taking the step of defining separate, named groups for painted pottery in the same style, Baudez initiated a process that finally would lead to the abandonment of the unwieldy analytic structure that had been reworked and renamed without real change from the time of Gordon to that of the Harvard-Smithsonian project.

Baudez followed up his first work in Honduras with investigation of archaeological sites on the north shore of Lake Yojoa, in the same area where Jens Yde and the Harvard-Smithsonian Expedition had reported abundant evidence of Ulua Polychrome pottery. The expedition to Lake Yojoa was co-directed with Pierre Becquelin “in his capacity as specialist in the Maya world,” and Baudez, “in his capacity as specialist in the ancient civilizations of Central America,” “in a zone where the cultural radiation of the Mayas has been particularly

noticeable" (Stresser-Peán 1967:606; my translation). Their work, centered at the locality called Los Naranjos, resulted in the first book devoted to the archaeology of a single Honduran archaeological site, other than Copan (Baudez and Becquelin 1973).

As part of that publication, Baudez tackled the definition of named polychrome types that would encompass the canonical Ulua Polychrome corpus. His own excavations allowed him to seriate excavated levels to understand in depth the introduction, increase in popularity, and decline of specific styles of pottery. His excavations allowed even rarer varieties to be recognized in sufficiently large numbers to define their differences from other pottery.

Material that would once have been included in a Bold Geometric style within Ulua painted pottery was now defined as Chichipate Polychrome, recognized as developing alongside the main branch of Ulua Polychromes (Baudez and Becquelin 1973:248–55). A new named type, Babilonia Polychrome, was defined for the remainder of what would previously have been called Ulua-Yojoa Polychrome (Baudez and Becquelin 1973:256–82).

These two types were rare, making up less than 3% and just over 5%, respectively, of the seriated sample of sherds from Los Naranjos. The newly defined Babilonia Polychrome, Baudez noted, merged most of what had previously been distinguished by Strong, Kidder and Paul (1936) as Fine-Line Mayoid, Bold Geometric, and Bold Animalistic. He argued that the divisions they had made

are very vague in their definition; certain pieces attributed to "Bold Geometric"... are entirely decorated with animals; and within the pottery brought together under the title "Mayoid" there reigns the greatest diversity, which could be a matter of the technique of execution, of style, of motifs, or of forms.

BAUDEZ and BECQUELIN 1973:274; my translation

After a brief discussion of other attempts at subdivision of this highly variable material, he concluded "the only method that could be followed to subdivide Babilonia in a coherent fashion would have to be systematic and statistical" (Baudez and Becquelin 1973:275).

That systematic task was accomplished by René Viel, a doctoral student working under the direction of Baudez (Viel 1978). As his reversion in his doctoral dissertation to the original name for these ceramics, Ulua Polychrome, suggests, Viel found that even the definition of Babilonia Polychrome at Los Naranjos had not entirely nor with full accuracy mapped out the variability in this long-lived, geographically dispersed tradition.

Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz did not apparently have access to the critical works of Baudez and Viel when they undertook their catalogue of Maya painted pottery in archaeological context. Nevertheless, their work shared a similar impulse: to present “a significant and representative sample” of Maya painted pottery (Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz 1979:5; my translation). The similarity in language used is not coincidental. The 1960s saw an international turn in archaeology toward concerns with validity of results that could only be addressed systematically, and where possible, quantitatively.

In this, these archaeologists also participated in the beginning of the opening of a divide that would set the study of Maya polychrome pottery on two very different, and at times antagonistic, tracks: one pursued by archaeologists concerned with excavation context as the key to understanding the significance of these things; the other by other archaeologists and art historians who saw in vessels themselves all the information needed to interpret their meaning. Significance, the archaeological consensus had begun to emphasize, was an understanding of the way objects worked within their social and cultural circumstances. This required knowledge of associated materials that might shed light on whether something was discarded after daily use or incorporated in ceremony, whether by residents of house compounds or palaces, or specialists tending to temples.

In contrast, some archaeologists who were engaged in study of Maya polychromes, along with art historians, while appreciating the additional information that context could provide, found abundant evidence for interpretation in the designs painted on vessels especially when combined with chemical compositions that allowed their identification as products of specific workshops (Miller 1989; Reents-Budet 1994). Not only could they make reasonable arguments for the ownership and use of vessels by nobles or simply wealthy middle rank individuals; they could, through the interpretation of the texts and images that the vessels carried, speak to their meanings, the cosmological and historical narratives that their makers had inscribed on them, even if the vessels were out of depositional context.

The work of Michael Coe, who in 1973 published *The Maya Scribe and His World* (available to, and cited by, Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz), would sharpen the emerging distinction between archaeologists concerned with quantitative study of materials *in situ*, and other scholars who took vessels in their own right as objects of study. In a series of lavishly illustrated books, Coe (1973, 1978, 1982) provided an argument that many Maya polychrome vases had texts that were legible, standardized, and thus likely to represent a repeated cultural practice, a ritual of some kind. Based on the repeated presence of Maya polychrome vases in tombs, he proposed this legible text was likely

related to mortuary rites. His proposal (although today superseded by reading of the historical and particular content of vessel inscriptions) led him to seek cosmological and mythological themes on Maya polychromes. These he identified by adopting an iconographic approach, a formal method for understanding unknown symbolic representations that had been developed in the study of European art by Erwin Panofsky (1939, 1955, 2012 [1932]).

Panofsky defined iconography as one step in a three-part progression in analysis of meaning, from pre-iconographical, to iconographic, to iconological, “requiring the historian to identify forms, motifs, and cultural meaning, respectively” (Davis 2004:10). The pre-iconographical procedure examines “what we see”:

simply a “change of details within a configuration in our world of vision”... We automatically recognize objects and events; visual intuition gives us the “primary expressional meaning”...Such realizations need not be conscious and intentional...they are constituted in visual perception.

DAVIS 2004:18

This is approximately what Gordon, Yde, and Strong were doing in their studies: describing what they perceived visually, without reflection—monkeys, birds, unknown divinities, and feathered serpents alike.

Davis (2004:18) notes, however, that pure visual perception is not actually what happens; what is seen is always seen “as *representations*,” as motifs. This is Panofsky’s iconographic level. Recognizing a form is also always seeing it as representing something else.

So for Gordon, there were animals on Ulua pottery, and hanging devices he described scrupulously, as well as serpents and anthropomorphic figures—but the latter two he instantly saw as a cultural icon, a motif (the “feathered serpent”) and an actor (an unknown divinity). Nothing inherent in visual recognition required those identifications. They were already, in the midst of description, interpretations. So, in fact, were his identifications of animals: to even be able to suggest an animal that might correspond to the marks seen, so that the marks were the representation of the animal, required a knowledge of the animals the ancient painter could have known, and a judgment about which animals the painter might have considered worth depicting. As Davis (2004:19) argues,

the study of the secondary conventional meaning of motifs explicitly needs a cultural history; it considers both traditional types and their historically specific thematization.

Only such a “cultural history” would allow the “transfer from the recognitions that support the picture to the recognitions that the picture supports” (Davis 2004:19).

To achieve an understanding of this circuit, Panofsky advocated development of a history of style, a history of “types,” and a history of “cultural or spiritual significance” (Davis 2004:20). Panofsky singled out common cultural background using shared texts in the European tradition, such as the Bible, as the basis for his explorations of cultural significance. The lack of legible texts from the Classic period (or before) had led George Kubler, perhaps the leading Precolumbian art historian at the time, to express reservations about the feasibility of accomplishing true iconographic analyses for Maya or other Mesoamerican art, emphasizing the need to acknowledge historical change in the links between form and meaning, what Panofsky (1960) had labeled “the principle of disjunction” (Kubler 1967:11–12; 1975:761–62; 1970:143–44).

To address this problem, Coe (1973) advocated the use of the *Popol Vuh*, a text assembled after the Spanish invasion of Guatemala, written in the K'iche Maya language of western Highland Guatemala, as a source for the kind of a history of “cultural or spiritual significance” required by Panofsky. While this allowed analysis to proceed to the iconographic level, it was a methodological short cut, because the one thing that is clear is that vases painted before the Spanish invasion were not inspired by a text created centuries later (Knight 2012:141–42). As analyses of Maya painted pottery continued, an argument was developed that the late K'iche text had incorporated, relatively unchanged, an earlier creation myth that was in broad outlines universal among speakers of different Maya languages, residents of different Classic Maya settlements, and Maya-related people throughout their prehispanic histories. This postulated early mythology was also understood to be reflected in Classic Maya painted pottery and inscriptions.

Panofsky actually pursued an alternative way to approach the problem of meaning, one that is closely related to the model of communities of practice employed here, through his reliance on the concept of *habitus*, which Pierre Bourdieu (1977:78) later defined as the “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations” (Hanks 2005; Joyce 2012b). Panofsky developed this concept to explain connections between medieval thought and the production of Gothic architecture (Holsinger 2005:96–102), identifying specific times and places as having a character or sensibility that was the product of a shared way of doing things and thinking about things. Kubler (1962) drew on this analysis in his study of long-term historical patterns of innovation, rise in popularity, and decline of new practices, *The Shape of Time*, where he attributed these repeated patterns to generational succession of apprentices

learning in workshops and subsequently becoming masters of their own workshops.

In the study of Ulua Polychromes, we can see most of the 20th century as consumed by creating a history of styles and types. Work on histories of cultural or spiritual significance emerged in the 1970s and are still, today, in their infancy in some very important ways. In order to include Ulua Polychromes in newly resurgent studies of Maya polychromes from Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize, analysts in the 1970s had to embrace, tacitly or explicitly, the idea that the people of sites in Honduras and El Salvador, where Ulua Polychromes were made, shared either an explicit understanding of meaning derived from shared cosmological narratives (an iconological approach), or orientations to how some things should be done that produced similar *habitus* in crafters at widely dispersed workshops. The success of the first, iconological, approach in discussions of Lowland Maya polychrome studies relying on the *Popol Vuh* made iconology the attractive way to proceed for the first modern studies of Ulua Polychrome representation and meaning.

Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz expressed no universalizing intention in assembling their catalogue. Instead, they described being motivated by a return to the University Museum's *Album of Maya Pottery*, and realizing a desire to

know with more breadth, the formal elements and the iconographic motifs that characterized the pictorial decoration of Maya ceramics during the Classic period... to seek data that in an objective form would shine light on the problem and permit a better understanding of the artistic phenomenon.

FONCERRADA DE MOLINA and LOMBARDO DE RUIZ 1979:5; my translation

Their purpose, in Panofsky's terms, was to deal with the first two levels of analysis: pre-iconographic and iconographic, leaving iconological aside.

Yet as Davis (2004) has shown, the divisions between these supposedly sequential steps are impossible to maintain, as even the pre-iconographic identification of forms brings with it the identification of at least some forms as motifs. This becomes clear as Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz (1979:6) further describe their approach: their interest, they write "is concentrated on the human figure as the basic and preponderant motif" of Classic Maya painted pottery.

For Ulua Polychromes, this commitment, like the implicit preference for anthropomorphic subjects evident in the University Museum volumes, guaranteed that Honduran pottery would be presented in the form of vessels that

are not in fact representative of the breadth of the pottery made in Ulua workshops, or even representative of the most common products of the tradition. By definition, the sample of Ulua Polychromes singled out in these surveys, and others than followed, could not be representative of the cultural concerns of the makers and users of these pots. In order to begin to reach a more complex level of understanding of Ulua Polychromes, researchers had to return to the corpus and identify what overall patterns were before beginning to account for them in locally meaningful terms.

### Ulua Polychrome Iconography: Beginning Steps

In 1978, Eugenia Robinson became the first modern scholar to attempt a study formally comparing Ulua Polychromes to normal characteristics of lowland Maya polychromes found in Guatemala and Belize (Robinson 1978). Robinson had available for study the collection of the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane University, and was also in conversation with René Viel, and so was able to use his schematic division of Ulua Polychromes into multiple groups (Viel 1978). In terms of Panofsky's definition of stages of analysis of meaning, her work primarily remained on the iconographic level. In line with the archaeological emphasis on quantification at the time, she began by assembling an inventory of motifs that she characterized statistically. Robinson (1978:82) identified 33% of the motifs in bands painted immediately below the lip of Ulua Polychrome vessels as also present on Maya lowland vessels. The proportion of motifs in the main design field that she could identify with Maya lowland analogues dropped to 29%. The surprisingly low proportion of overlapping motifs between the known Maya lowland and Ulua Polychrome pots underlines how critical study of Ulua Polychromes themselves is to any attempt at interpretation.

In fact, Robinson ventured only tentatively into iconology. One cylinder, today identifiable as a Santana class Ulua Polychrome, was specifically compared to the Classic Maya Bonampak murals (Robinson 1978:79). Robinson (1978:76) identified the theme on a second Santana class cylinder, showing a human bust emerging from a serpent, with a vessel from the Peten. She did not draw out the implications of these identifications, which would be either that the Ulua Polychrome vessels were commemorating similar events, or that generalized practices or beliefs might be common to both locations. Shared cultural history is implied, but not discussed in detail.

The tentative nature of Robinson's discussion of more iconological meaning was appropriate, given the poor state of knowledge of Ulua Polychrome cultural

context at the time. The understood chronology of production of Ulua Polychromes depended on what would prove to be a flawed interpretation of their dating. In this chronology, the presence of Ulua Polychromes in tombs at Copan had been taken as evidence of the beginning of their production (Epstein 1959), rather than as dating the beginning of Copanec noble families' broader use of imported luxuries from central Honduras, long after Ulua Polychrome potters had begun to make pots. Reliance on Copan chronology led analysts to conclude that motifs seen in the Maya Lowlands during the Tzakol 2 and 3 phases (about 450–650 AD) that were also present on Ulua Polychromes were survivals from earlier stages of development, rather than being in use when early Ulua Polychrome potters began a tradition of production contemporary with Tzakol 2 and 3 phases. The entire development of Ulua Polychromes was assigned to the equivalent of the Maya Lowland Tepeu 1 and 2 phases because this is when they became visible in contexts at Copan (ca. 650–800 AD).

With the low frequencies of overlapping motifs between Ulua and lowland Maya polychromes that Robinson (1978) documented, her analysis might have stopped at the iconographic level entirely, if it were not at the time taken for granted that the inspiration for Ulua Polychromes, and thus the key to their understanding, must have been the Lowland Maya centers of pottery production. As Baudez (1970:102) wrote,

Polychrome decoration in particular appears in fully mature form from its very first occurrence. It does not appear to be preceded by any of the fumbleings, the first uncertain efforts, of an art developing on its own. As soon as it appears it is fully adult; and this implies that it had been brought in from elsewhere. This does not mean that the polychrome pottery of Honduras and El Salvador is Maya, or a poor copy of Maya work: it suggests merely that these very individual styles, sometimes producing work of high quality, which occur alongside the others found in the northern sector [of Central America] were developed mainly on the basis of elements borrowed from the Maya.

Once chronological priority for Lowland Maya polychromes was accepted, the interpretation of Ulua Polychromes as based on Maya iconography and iconology was inevitable, even though systematic quantitative study showed that the “elements borrowed from the Maya” (assuming the direction of spread was from north to south, which had not been demonstrated) were less than one-third of the visual repertoire.

Robinson (1978) related her work to research leading to the definition of a modern canon of Maya Polychrome vessels, interpreted based on the *Popol Vuh*,

with compositional analysis of paste in conjunction with style allowing the definition of localized workshops. Yet this modern research on Classic Maya pottery did not initially include Ulua Polychrome vessels. By the 1970s, it was clear that the Ulua Polychrome producing region was inhabited by people with much less social stratification than in the lowlands of Guatemala and Belize, where polychrome pots were viewed as products of palace workshops, consumed in rituals by a nobility. In the absence of palaces, the Ulua Polychrome producing region was atypical, and so in a break with earlier analyses, Ulua Polychromes no longer formed part of the core of Maya lowland painted pottery.

Research untangling the geographic and chronological development of Ulua Polychromes, underway by the late 1970s and early 1980s, stressed differences in context from the Maya Lowlands that would need to be taken into account in studying Ulua Polychromes (Joyce 1993a, 1993b). Where Coe (1973, 1978, 1982) drew on a corpus derived from noble and royal tombs, modern excavations in the Ulua Polychrome producing area recovered whole vessels in architectural caches, or else as reconstructable objects broken and discarded in refuse near even modest residential structures. Moreover, to the extent that emerging understandings of vessels from the lowlands of Guatemala and Belize rested on incorporating study of legible texts, Ulua Polychromes did not provide the necessary requisites. The glyph-like designs appearing in bands below the lip of some Ulua Polychrome cylinders were series of repeated single motifs, not forming grammatical expressions even if some signs overlapped with the Maya writing system. Ulua Polychromes did not form part of the authoritative scholarly work on lowland Maya polychrome ceramics, *Painting the Maya Universe* (Reents-Budet 1994), which drew together compositional, stylistic, iconographic, and epigraphic information. No Ulua Polychrome vessels appear to have been included in Loughmiller-Newman's (2008) unique spatial study of canons of Maya painting.

Yet based on long-standing curation practices, when Ulua Polychromes were present in museum collections, they were usually grouped with polychromes from Guatemala and Belize. Ulua Polychromes routinely appeared in museum exhibitions, classified and interpreted as Maya. For example, the University of Miami's Lowe Museum attributed two vessels to the Ulua Valley, described them as Maya, and identified a motif on one of them as a Classic Maya motif, the Moan Bird (Galbraith 1990: Appendix 26, Appendix 29). Based on comparison to other Yojoa class Ulua Polychromes, the motif on this bowl (A-26) can be identified as an example of the water bird, quite distinct from the owl-like moan bird of Maya art.

The practice of including Ulua Polychromes in studies of a broader Maya universe of polychrome vases was encouraged by the inclusion of many examples

of Ulua Polychrome vessels in the photographic database made available to researchers through the efforts of Justin and Barbara Kerr. Through rollout photographs recorded with a uniform numbering system, the Kerr database has proved central to study of lowland Maya polychromes. Approximately sixty vessels in recognizable Honduran or Salvadoran styles are included in the Kerr database curated on the website of the Foundation for Ancient Mesoamerican Study (<http://research.mayavase.com/kerrmaya.html>).

At the time of publication of the first volume in a series based on this collection, *The Maya Vase Book* (Kerr 1989), only one identifiable Ulua Polychrome formed part of the corpus: K695, a Tenampua subclass Capitan vase. As of 2016, the Kerr database included thirty vessels identifiable as Ulua Polychromes. Through her dissertation research Inga Calvin added another thirty-one to an extended version of the database (Calvin 2001, 2006). Comments on imagery made as Ulua Polychrome vessels were added to the Kerr database are illustrative of the way that emerging understanding of lowland Guatemalan polychromes influenced the iconographic study of Ulua Polychromes.

### Reading Ulua Polychromes in Maya Idioms

Following K695, the next Ulua Polychrome listed in the database is K4577, a Nebla subclass Picadilly cylinder vase. This subclass would become the best-represented Ulua Polychrome group in the database, with nine examples, including four that repeat a particularly complex scene. These four have varied upper bands, but always feature a figure seated on an elevated platform, with a complete roof and back wall showing that the seat is inside a building on a platform. The seated figures on these vessels are repeated twice, and face another figure or figures standing at ground level, holding diverse objects in their hands. The seated figure also holds an object in the hand.

On K4577, I identify the objects held by the standing figures as a bag and a hand-held incense burning vessel, a ladle censer. The seated figure in this case holds a round fan. The caption in the Kerr database describes the building as a temple; the seated person as a “ruler”; the object in the seated figure’s hand as a “banner (war?)”; and the scene the seated figure faces as “burnt offering.”

Given the Honduran origin of this vessel, this person should not be called a “ruler,” with all that conveys in the Guatemalan Peten. The figure may represent a ritual authority, but authority appears to have been shared and heterarchical in the Ulua Polychrome producing area, and ritual authority did not necessary produce secular authority, wealth, or power to command implicit in the term “ruler” (Joyce and Hendon 2000; Lopiparo 2007; Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo

2013). Given the rarity of evidence in the Ulua Polychrome producing area for platforms supporting specialized ritual buildings, the building in which this person sits is as likely to indicate a house as a temple. On the roof of the building is a painted image of a feline, possibly indicating this particular house and the social group associated with it claimed an affiliation with the feline.

The identification of the action of the standing figures as making a burnt offering, while consistent with my identification of the incense bag and incense burner, may mask other differences in understanding, as discussed in more detail below. The most telling example of the problem with reading Ulua Polychromes through Lowland Maya iconography comes, however, from the identification of the round object in the seated figure's hand as a war banner. Unlike in the Maya Lowlands, there is no iconography of war in the Ulua Polychrome source area at the time this pot was made that would support this interpretation.

Other examples of the same image of a seated figure inside a raised building watching standing figures carry out actions occur on vessels photographed as K4628, K4629, and K4968. In these instances, the standing figures are equipped with maracas and flutes, and in K4629, the flutes are held in front of the face as if being played. The standing figures on K4628 and K4629, and the seated figure on K4968, wear feline helmets, identifying the people with the feline. None of the buildings has a complete feline as seen on K4577, but two have pelage markings, one on the roof, and the other on the pier of the building. All three pots have a continuous band showing a twisted mat design on the upper portion of the vessel. Throughout Mexico and Central America, mats are commonly used to demarcate social distinction created through seating, possibly re-emphasizing the most significant aspect of the overall imagery on these pots: the distinction accorded the seated figure.

The object held by the seated figure inside the building in each case is identical: a short rigid handle supporting a round object with flexible ornaments above and dangling down from the middle. In one case, the round object clearly has feline skin markings. In the other examples, the overlap of black markings on the orange is less clear, but probably the same feline skin is implied. Rather than a banner of war, this may be an example of a crest, an object that reinforces the identification of the seated figures with the feline house.

Standing figures like those featured in these complex scenes occur in other examples of Nebla subclass Picadilly. On K6621 a series of figures hold flexible incense bags and a round object emitting a scroll that I suggest indexes hand-held incense burners. These figures wear a headdress featuring a bird with a long beak. At the back of their belt they wear a feline head with a pendant feline tail. On K6065, the standing ritualists offer the open mouth of a

feline-spotted serpent in one hand, with its body in a flexed U supported by the other hand. Here, the feline costume is more extensive, with a full feline helmet masking the face, in addition to the feline head at the back of the belt. The caption in the Kerr database identifies these figures with the Maya God A. In K6989, another example of the same subclass, the two standing ritualists wear a headdress with a bird with a long beak. Each figure has a bird head on the back of the belt, each slightly different. Their hands are empty, but raised in front of the end of a complex plant motif shown emerging from the open mouth of the bird head on their belts. The Kerr caption identifies this scene as probably related to the Lowland Maya Maize God.

What underlies both of these commentaries is the assumption that the anthropomorphic subjects on Ulua Polychromes are supernatural beings—the same assumption made by Gordon when he labeled one of the figures on the Ulua Polychrome vase he was describing as a divinity. Yet there is nothing about the anthropomorphic figures on Ulua Polychrome vessels that is inconsistent with the known actions of people in the sites where these pots were made and used, no specific features to indicate the figures are not referencing human actions.

Assimilating Ulua Polychromes into a framework of understanding developed for Lowland Maya polychromes is not limited to the kind of iconographic identification of elements that these examples from the Kerr database demonstrate. Two studies published in recent decades present extended iconological readings of Ulua Polychrome vessels. One examines a single vessel from the Jens Yde collection in the National Museum of Denmark (Nielsen and Brady 2006). The second examines the series of Ulua Polychrome vessels held by the museum of the University of Manchester (Brotherston 2009). Each is, in its own way, an exemplar of how far application of Mesoamerican iconographic and iconological readings can reach in dealing with Ulua Polychromes. My purpose in presenting a review of these two articles is not to criticize the authors for their attempt to deal with unfamiliar materials in a familiar frame, but to use these as examples of the best outcomes that could be expected from this method, showing why even the best case will suffer from not placing these vessels in their own local contexts, which are radically different than those of the Lowland Maya polychromes to which they are equated.

### *Universal Mesoamerican Origin Myths or Local Cosmological Histories*

Nielsen and Brady (2006) examine an unusually large tripod cylinder vase collected in the Lake Yojoa area. They explicitly argue that the scene on that vase relates “to a well-documented corpus of Mesoamerican origin mythology.”

They suggest that a cave located on the southern end of Lake Yojoa “may been considered the place of human creation or human emergence” by the makers and users of this pot.

The vessel in question can be identified as an example of the Santa Rita subclass *Arrodillarse*, which would have been made in the early seventh century. Like many late Santa Rita class vessels, this example has a modeled exterior surface, with ridges parallel to the lip, and a series of raised panels in the main scene on the body. At a pre-iconographic level, the images that occur in seven superimposed bands of varying width on the vessel exterior can be described from top to bottom as a series of continuous stepped terraces; a series of frontal masks showing two eyes and a panache of feathers; a simple band of alternating blocks of color; single kneeling figures on the light orange slip background; a geometric design that runs under these kneeling figures and up to form an upper boundary on the raised panels on the body; paired facing figures on a black ground in each raised panel alternating with the kneeling figures; and a repeat of the frontal mask.

Nielsen and Brady (2006:210) identify the kneeling figures as “portraits of a crocodylian earth monster,” an iconological interpretation offered as an iconographic identification. They do the same in their identification of the facing pair of figures in the raised, black background panels, who they equate with Mexican mythologies of male–female creator couples. They go on to discuss in great detail aspects of Postclassic Central Mexican mythology that rest on these identifications:

the vessel as a whole represents the mountain of creation in which the two creator gods dwell. They are shown in the cave from whose opening the couple’s offspring, the first humans, will emerge. This is being overseen by the god of fertility, beginnings, and caves.

NIELSEN and BRADY 2006:211

To strengthen their argument, these authors propose that the location where this vessel was found, at Lake Yojoa, was likely considered a sacred origin place. They note the presence at the opposite end of the lake of a cave, called *Taulebe* in the Lenca language, meaning Jaguar House. This cave was reportedly a pilgrimage site. The authors conclude that the cave they see represented on the vessel from the north end of Lake Yojoa referenced this specific cave at the opposite end of the lake.

Thus, their argument rests on a connection between the site where this vessel was in use and the location of a notable cave. What this argument cannot account for is the fact that in the early seventh century, numerous Santa

Rita class vessels made and used across Honduran and Salvadoran territory depicted the paired facing figures, some on black backgrounds, some not. If the vase under discussion has imagery that is uniquely motivated by the local geography, then it must either precede and inspire these other vessels, or they must in some way represent different versions of the same cosmology that did not need to be motivated by proximity to such landscape features. As part of their argument these authors assume that Lake Yojoa itself was identified as Taulebe, or Jaguar House. This is unlikely. The only maps that label the lake Taulebe date to the nineteenth century, and were made by visitors from outside the country, notably E.G. Squier (Davidson 2006:220). No Spanish colonial geographic source makes this identification; when the lake is named or shown, it is called Yojoa or Yohoa.

The argument that Lenca people shared a concept of a creator couple with Mexican peoples is based on an interpretation of colonial Honduran sources. The same sources allow an alternative reading of the paired figures, as sons of a personage the Lenca called Comicagual, “Flying Jaguar Woman” (Chapman 1978:33–34). According to Lenca oral tradition, this personage created cultural practices, entrusted them to her two sons, and then disappeared. If we want to equate the figures on this vessel with Honduran mythology, the sons of Flying Jaguar Woman are a better choice than a Mexican creator couple. The paired figures are in fact identical to each other in appearance and costume. There is nothing in the depiction of these figures that suggests they represent a pair of beings of different sex or gender.

Paired figures are not unusual on Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes. The last volume in the University Museum folio series included a Santa Rita subclass Mellizo cylinder with such figures (Mason 1943: Plate LVI). The only Ulua Polychrome in the series not from Gordon’s work for the Peabody Museum, the image on this vessel consisted of pairs of identical figures, crossed in an X shape, alternating with lines of similar individual figures. While absent from the pottery illustrated by Gordon (1898b), such images had been singled out by his contemporaries as evidence of relationships between the people of the Ulua valley and those of El Salvador (Sapper 1898:fig. 7). Debate about their interpretation has a long history.

In 1910, Walter Lehmann (1910:740) declared that crossed figures on a series of sherds from Santa Rita subclass Mellizo vessels from Honduras and El Salvador represented “copulating human couples,” explicitly rejecting an alternative proposal that they portrayed pairs of dancers. Lehmann provided no extended argument for his interpretation. The preliminary report of the Harvard Peabody-Smithsonian Expedition stops in the midst of simply enumerating excavated materials to take issue with this interpretive move:

Lehmann...believes that copulation, not dancing, is indicated...and supports his view by a drawing of a Salvadorean example. To us, the latter seems no more definite than do the Ulua examples here illustrated... In the light of Palacio's information regarding the importance of the mutilation of male genitalia among Pipil and Lenca, we rather incline to connect this widespread design with phallic rather than procreative rites.

STRONG, KIDDER and PAUL 1938:51

How did these early scholars move from these designs, actually sometimes difficult to even recognize as iconic of the human figure, to a debate about whether they were dancers or copulating couples, imagery of "procreative" or "phallic" rituals?

Strong, Kidder and Paul proposed very few interpretations of the images on the pottery they recovered. Nonetheless, it is clear that they applied to these vessels understandings of form and motif continuous with those of Gordon before them. Within the space of two pages, they move from identification of "squat, elaborated human or deity figures" to characterizing the same forms as "conventionalized deity or priest figures" (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:50–51). Anthropomorphic figures repeated in series are consistently described as "processional," shifting from identification of form to motif (e.g., p. 53). These scholars brought to bear assumptions about who was depicted (deities and priests) and what kinds of actions were being shown (ritual processions, phallic rites), as in their comments on a vessel they illustrate and describe as "showing ceremonial drinking among the Maya" (Strong, Kidder and Paul 1938:76; fig. 19). The source of their assumptions was occasionally made exceptionally explicit:

The broken vase... depicted a processional group of priests calling to mind the description of Palacio... The first figure... is the high priest with the ceremonial staff; behind him is an assistant. The latter either holds a copal container or has removed the high priests' bustle with one hand and is reaching back with the other for one of the two objects carried by the third priest. These are probably incensarios, but they could possibly be obsidian mirrors or some other ceremonial objects. The three priests are followed by two musicians playing on wind instruments of an unusual type. From the attitudes of the figures, it would seem that the procession had just come to a halt prior to the performance of some rite.

STRONG, KIDDER, and PAUL 1938:95; commenting on Plate I; see Figure 58

This is precisely the kind of blurring between pre-iconographic identification, iconography, and iconological interpretation explored by Davis (2004).

The challenge is to undertake a more detailed engagement with what is being depicted as a prelude to, rather than as simultaneous with, identification and interpretation.

All examples of anthropomorphic figures on Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes, where they appear with legs crossed, in a series, and individually kneeling, and many on the earlier Dedalos class, show precisely the same costume: a schematic image of a feline pelt over the head and extending down the back, and a belt around the waist (Figure 11). Hip cloths are common on some of the earliest examples (Dedalos subclass Chac vessels and Santa Rita subclass Mellizo vessels) but are absent on the majority of Santa Rita class examples. The upper body, arms, and legs are uncovered, and normally in paired figures, painted in contrasting colors. On some examples of Santa Rita subclass Arrodillarse, on which the figure is shown in a kneeling position, it wears a profile mask either as part of the headdress, or (as in the vessel Nielsen and Brady discuss) covering the face of the figure. This mask is the profile view of the image shown in frontal view in upper and lower bands on the Lake Yojoa vessel.

Placed in the chronology of development of the Ulua Polychrome tradition, the precedent for the images on the vessel Nielsen and Brady discuss, and other Santa Rita class vessels like it, are anthropomorphic figures depicted seated or standing in series on Dedalos subclass Chac vessels, holding a profile reptilian mask in the hand or gesturing towards such a mask (Figures 1 and 5). These figures never occur as facing pairs. As Santa Rita subclass Mellizo develops and replaces Dedalos subclass Chac, anthropomorphic figures are drawn with less detail, and are routinely shown wearing a feline cape. Sometimes the feline skin is displayed on Santa Rita vessels as a freestanding element of the composition (Figure 14). It is with Santa Rita subclass Mellizo that paired figures first appear, facing each other, their bodies (or sometimes, simply their two legs) painted in contrasting colors, their legs crossed, without being placed on a separate dark background (Figure 12).

One of the stylistic innovations leading to the development of later Santa Rita subclasses Cyrano and Arrodillarse, along with modeling of the vessel surface, is the painting of some motifs on round or rectangular panels with dark backgrounds (Figure 10). Some panels are slipped and carved or incised (Figure 13), often with profile reptilian masks as main motifs. Some panels are set off from the rest of the vessel wall by modeling (Figure 15). When anthropomorphic figures occur in these panels, they normally are either a facing pair, often without contrasting colors, or a kneeling version of the figure, with or without the reptilian headdress or mask.

It would be possible to argue that my demonstration that the imagery on the Lake Yojoa vessel developed out of earlier precedents that are neither

associated with black background panels representing caves, nor uniformly feature paired figures, simply shows the development over time of a more explicit interest in the episode of creation. What cannot be sustained is that Lake Yojoa or Taulebe Cave had chronological priority, either with the general development of scenes with these figures, or even with the specific deployment of black ground fields, nor that these places had a special relationship with such scenes once they became common. It does not seem reasonable to ignore the identical costumes and details of the figures, whether shown singly, in facing pairs, or kneeling, in order to associate the paired figures with creator gods. If they are to be understood as supernatural beings, their visual identity has to be acknowledged.

Nielsen and Brady (2006:211) equate the raised black panels on the Lake Yojoa vessel they discuss with caves. They identify the frontal masks forming bands on this vessel as variants of wide-spread earth monster imagery referring to caves in mountains by personifying the mountain as a face with a cleft in the head (compare Figure 14). These identifications of subsidiary bands as localizing action are consistent with my own analyses of Ulua Polychrome visuality. I would add to their observations that the continuous stepped terrace at the top of the exterior wall of the vase they discuss could be read as indexing mountains as well (compare Figure 15). Christina Luke and I (Luke 2012; Luke and Joyce 2013) have demonstrated that similar use of locational markers on the carved Ulua marble vases, contemporary with the Lake Yojoa polychrome vase, can be read as placing the main images in a cave in the mountains, making these stone objects a kind of portable ancestral mountain. The same might be true of the category of pottery vessels to which the example from Lake Yojoa now in the Danish National Museum belongs.

The minor geometric band that runs above the raised panels interpreted as caves on the vessel from Lake Yojoa could be understood as indexing the earth's surface, as it forms the ground line for kneeling figures that alternate with the dark background panels, and thus creates two levels in a single horizontal field, one within the cave located below the motif, the other outside the cave located above the motif. Nielsen and Brady (2006:206) suggest this motif is vegetation, based on seeing it as a series of parallel lines. More commonly on other Santa Rita class vessels, it is shown as a series of curved and interlocking lines, not quite a textile or rope motif but perhaps closest to that (Figure 15). On many Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes this motif runs above the main design field showing anthropomorphic figures, which could imply that even these apparent processions were understood as taking place under the earth's surface.

The identification of subsidiary motifs as localizing action is a significant contribution to understanding how Ulua Polychromes made meaning, even

if we are not able to identify a category of places or a specific place that is indexed. When placed in the history of development of Ulua Polychromes, the use of such motifs is a marked new feature associated with Santa Rita class, and particularly with the later subclasses Cyrano, Arrodillarse, and Paloma that were produced in the seventh century. This is the time when Ulua Polychrome production began a transition from uniform representations produced independently across a wide region, to localized production and use of differentiated classes of Ulua Polychromes. Rather than a scene from a generalized creation myth, the Lake Yojoa vessel may be better seen as one example of how Ulua potters took steps toward framing specific localities as significant to local populations.

The succeeding period of Ulua Polychrome development, beginning with late seventh century production of localized Travesia and Yojoa class Ulua Polychromes in the lower Ulua valley and Lake Yojoa areas, is the chronological and developmental context for a collection of vessels in the University of Manchester Museum. These were the focus of a second serious analysis of Ulua Polychrome iconography.

#### *Creating a Narrative from Fragments of a Tradition*

The museum at the University of Manchester holds a large group of whole pots excavated during the 1920s or 1930s on the shores of Lake Yojoa. Donated by Norman Scholes, a businessman in Honduras with interests in transport across the lake during the 1920s, the forty vessels come from the north shore of Lake Yojoa, the same area where Jens Yde and Strong, Kidder, and Paul would collect a decade later. Subtitled “The Ceramic Codex of Yojoa, Honduras,” the modern iconographic study by Gordon Brotherston treats these vessels as a group that “succinctly represents the tradition as a whole” (Brotherston 2009:3).

Brotherston organizes his discussion of the vessels in terms of a broader framework that unites South American and Mesoamerican cosmological visions. This includes iconographic identification of specific animals that he views as having significance across that region, such as the jaguar (Brotherston 2009:11–14). Iconological readings of human images holding a round fan as *pochteca*, the traveling merchants known from Mexica descriptions in the sixteenth century period of colonization, are also part of this framework of analysis (Brotherston 2009:7–9). This identification is extended to some of the monkey figures on pots in this collection. It is instructive to consider that the round fan Brotherston identifies as insignia of a merchant is the same motif identified in the Kerr archive as an icon of war, based on comparison to a different iconographic source.

Reflecting the same orientation that led Foncerrada de Molina and Lombardo de Ruiz to view the human figure as central to Maya polychromes, Brotherston (2006:5–6) begins his discussion of the Manchester pots with those depicting human figures. The pot he selected to illustrate, a Nebla subclass Picadilly cylinder vase, has painted panels framed by a continuous mat motif. Standing human figures in the panels wear a schematic bird headdress and hold a flexible object, arguably made of cloth. Brotherston identified this object as a loincloth. Based on comparison to other examples of similar figures painted on Nebla class Ulua Polychromes, I suggest it is more likely a cloth bag, the kind paired with incense burners. The second vessel Brotherston (2006:7) discusses, another Nebla cylinder, shows a seated anthropomorphic figure wearing a turban, holding a round fan in one hand. At the back of the belt worn by this figure is an element that I can identify by comparison with other Nebla vessels as the head of a bird with red spotted feathers. This is one of the figures interpreted through descriptions of the Mexica *pochteca*, who reportedly carried round fans.

Brotherston (2009:7–8) also describes as *pochteca*-related the main figure on a bowl that I identify as Yojoa subclass Tiotivo. Here, he sees the main figure as a monkey. Because the hands and feet are clearly human, and contrast in color with the bounded black monkey skin, I argue that this is a person dressed in a monkey costume. Brotherston interpreted one of the hands as a feather-covered baton held by the figure, another element he associated with the Mexica *pochteca*.

The less anthropomorphic monkey images found on the majority of the Manchester Museum vessels led Brotherston (2009:9–10) to comparisons with the monkey twins of the *Popol Vuh*, tricked by their brothers into transforming into dancing animals. Building on this apparent tie to Maya highland tradition, Brotherston (2009:10–11) then identifies a bird image on a bowl as a turkey, one of the domesticated animals that rose up in rebellion against humans in an episode from the *Popol Vuh*. Based on comparison to Selva class Ulua Polychromes not present in the Manchester Museum, this image is more likely that of a water bird, like the monkey anthropomorphized by being provided with jewelry. Archaeological evidence indicates that turkeys do not become part of the local animal community in Honduras until after Ulua Polychromes are no longer made (Henderson and Joyce 2004).

Brotherston (2009:11–13) relies on the *Popol Vuh* for guidance in comments on two vessels with feline iconography. He notes that the first four humans in the K'iche historical narrative had names compounded of the word for jaguar. The first vessel he discusses from this perspective is a Nebla subclass Sphinx

dish with images of a seated feline with head turned to look over its shoulder. The second is also a Nebla class vessel, a short cylinder, where he cites my identification of the main motif as a feline paw painted as if holding the vessel itself.

The *Popol Vuh* also informs Brotherston's (2009:15) identification of the main design on a Santa Rita subclass Arrodillarse vessel as Cipacna—a version of the same frontal earth monster with which Nielsen and Brady (2006) identified this motif, although they used the spelling Cipactli, based on Nahuatl sources. Brotherston's next identification of an Ulua Polychrome theme, pots he sees as depictions of armadillos, while explicitly projected as linking these vessels to South America, draws its most concrete comparison, again, from the *Popol Vuh* (Brotherston 2006:15). The vessel he illustrates actually is better identified as a feline, drawn using a convention of placing black dots along the spine that was developed as part of the drawing of the feline pelt cape worn by anthropomorphic figures on Santa Rita class vessels.

The final vessel Brotherston (2009:17) discusses is a Nebla subclass Sphinx dish showing a seated human figure wearing an elaborate hip cloth, belt, and turban. On the back of the belt there is an animal head facing backwards, a common feature in Ulua Polychromes of this time. Brotherston identifies the animal as a fish, perhaps based on a set of three diagonal elements at the top. On other Ulua Polychrome vessels, this element is part of the crest of an iguana, shown with the same details and skin marking as on this vessel (Figure 24).

### *Discussion*

Both Nielsen and Brady (2006) and Brotherston (2009) produced rich readings of Ulua Polychromes by enlisting literary texts from further west and south in their interpretation. However, to do so they used these texts in fragments. There are no sustained narratives from the Mexican *Historia de los Mexicanos de sus Pinturas* or *Leyenda de los soles*, no episodes from the Guatemalan *Popol Vuh* or Amazonian *Lenda de Jurupary*, that can be read out from the Honduran vessels. In all of the modern iconographic analyses relying on insights from neighboring areas, scenes on Ulua Polychrome vessels are interpreted by finding the closest analogue in a different cultural history. This has the unintended effect of abstracting individual Ulua Polychrome vessels out of their broader historical and cultural context. In order to reinstate that cultural and historical context, we need to consider the links among Ulua Polychromes and their sequence in time. In the absence of recorded versions of extensive oral narratives, we can use the objects and deposits from archaeological sites as a context to inform our understanding of what we might be seeing.

### Ulua Polychromes in Honduran Contexts

Ulua Polychromes included in the Kerr photographic collection depict actions we can broadly describe as playing music and burning incense, sometimes undertaken while facing a basket or other container (as in K4629). If we try to understand these actions without recourse to texts from neighboring areas, we have to begin with the local contextual information provided, much of it from pots themselves.

Ulua Polychromes are ubiquitous as serving vessels, but not all forms are equally likely to be disposed of as outcomes of everyday meals. In particular, plates, dishes, and cylinder vases and small two-handled jars occur in lower frequencies, in different distributions, and probably were employed in specific ways in more marked meals, feasts. The extended imagery found especially on cylinder vases would consequently have been deployed less commonly, on occasions when feasts were offered.

Archaeologically, we know that at sites like Mantecales, Cerro Palenque, Campo Dos, and Currusté, feast refuse was discarded along with materials from ceremonies, some perhaps associated with seasonal ball-game playing, others with the display and interment of bone bundles (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013; Joyce and Pollard 2010). Refuse from events like these routinely also includes broken and discarded hand-held incense burners, larger figural censers, and musical instruments with molded animal images. The range of animals depicted on the Ulua Polychrome serving vessels and on these other artifacts overlaps substantially (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013).

The participants in actions depicted on Ulua Polychromes, in scenes that I identify with the kinds of rituals in which these vessels were actually used, are distinguished by costumes displaying animal heads on the back of the belt (Figure 31), and sometimes also in distinctive headdresses. In the small group of Nebla subclass Picadilly vessels included in the Kerr collection two costumes are repeated, one with feline elements (Figure 35), the other avian. Some Nebla vessels in the Manchester Museum also feature humans who wear avian elements, while one has a possible iguana head displayed at the back of the belt.

Nebla class Ulua Polychromes are successors to cylinder vases in the Yojoa subclass Molinero that developed in the same area, especially around Lake Yojoa. One Molinero subclass cylinder in the Kerr database, K8415, shows a series of four figures in different poses, described as a “dancer with baton,” facing a large open jar. One of the four figures holds an identifiable maraca, and I suggest that all the hand-held objects in this scene are musical instruments, some less clearly drawn. All four figures have legs covered in a pattern that marks

animals that are neither feline nor monkey on other Ulua Polychromes. Three show a head at the back of the belt that is painted white, with the articulation of the lower jaw indicated, demonstrating that it is a skull. An upturned nose on each skull suggests the diagnostic feature of the leaf-nosed bat.

Figures like these, interpretable as costumed ritual performers or dancers, are among the most enduring human images on Ulua Polychromes, found from the earliest Dedalos class (Figures 1 and 5) and continuing into the succeeding Las Vegas Polychrome tradition. The costumes they wear, the objects they hold, and thus likely the ritual performances in which they are engaged, change over these four centuries.

### *Initiating a Tradition of Representation: Ritual Dancers*

Raised hands and bent legs indicate motion on K8742, a Dedalos subclass Labyrinth vessel that probably dates to the fifth century. The captions in the Kerr database subsume this unique Ulua Polychrome image under a broader Lowland Maya theme, describing it as “a version of the Hero Twins.” The description for another Labyrinth subclass vase, K9207, goes further, captioning the scene “supernaturals dance with severed hands as offerings. Abstract images of Principal Bird and quadripartite opening to the Otherworld.” I interpret the images labeled severed hands (probably intended to read heads?) as masks. Similar masks are shown in the headdress of figures on other Dedalos class polychromes, and commonly appear in a band just below the lip of these vases (Figures 1 and 5). The display of masks is the principal gesture of most human figures on Dedalos class vases. Unlike the Nebula and Yojoa class vessels, these human figures wear a kilt with no belt ornament. This kilt, and the reptilian or serpentine mask, are shared images seen from one end of the distribution of Ulua Polychromes to the other in this early point in their development, suggesting a uniform ritual performance that was highlighted at the time.

In the succeeding Santa Rita class we see the first indications of localization of action, primarily through geometric motifs indexing mountains and caves. The use of caves for ritual was already an ancient practice in Honduras long before these polychromes were developed in the seventh century. Across the country, beginning before 1000 BC caves were used as ossuaries for secondary burial of human remains (Brady et al. 2001; Gordon 1898a; Healy 1974; Rue, Freter, and Ballinger 1989). Near Copan and in the Aguan Valley of the north coast, between 1100 and 900 BC these rituals included depositing complete vessels with elaborate carved designs. After 900 BC, in caves in eastern Honduras, carved marble vases were left as part of such deposits. While we cannot be certain how late these practices continued, Brady (1995) argued for continued use of caves as ossuaries well into the period when Ulua Polychromes were being

produced, although Ulua Polychrome vessels themselves are not reported as offerings in cave settings.

The anthropomorphic figures on Santa Rita class vessels can arguably be seen as continuing the tradition of depiction of figures engaged in ritual action that began with Dedalos class. On the earliest Mellizo subclass, anthropomorphic figures occur in a series (long described as processional), or as facing pairs with crossed legs, the so-called dancing or copulating figures. Based on the identity in costume and appearance of the paired figures, it seems unlikely that they represent cross-sex couples engaged in sexual activity. Instead, like the Dedalos subclass Chac figures that they replace, I suggest these are repeated images of individual ritual performers, foregrounding the costume they share more than anything else.

This costume is distinguished by a feline pelt draped from the head halfway down the back, an object so significant that it is painted as an element in its own right on some Santa Rita vases. The use of feline costume either replaces the reptilian mask that was central earlier, or is a second performance in a larger repertory of ritual action now being represented.

The latter interpretation is strengthened by the depiction on Santa Rita subclass Winged Figure of human figures wearing bird feather costumes. The examples in the Kerr database, K5915 and K8824, are consistent in showing the bird wing extending backward at the level of the belt. The arms of the human figure are unornamented. These vessels may be the earliest clear instances of what becomes the standardized presentation of animal heads at the back of the belt on ritual participants. Slightly later, some kneeling figures on Santa Rita subclass Arrodillarse, and busts that form both secondary panels and main themes on Santa Rita subclass Cyrano, are shown wearing a profile reptilian mask or headdress (Figure 9), which might be a graphically distinctive version of the serpentine or reptilian mask seen in the Dedalos subclass Chac a century earlier. Altogether, then, the later Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes suggest the existence of a diverse set of ritual performances, one associated with displaying a feline skin cape, one involving display of a bird head icon on the back of the belt or as a back rack, and a third involving the display of a reptilian headdress which had been the primary focus of the earliest Ulua Polychrome imagery.

#### *A Focus on Performance in Place*

In the eighth century feline and avian costumes predominate in the complex, multi-person scenes featured on Santana class, Nebla class, and Yojoa subclass Molinero, as well as on the isolated anthropomorphic figures on some Selva class vessels. Whatever significance the reptilian or serpentine costume had

previously, whether as a marker of a shared ritual, or of a seasonal ritual, it was no longer important to depict it on Ulua Polychromes. Instead, ritual performers, the bundles they carried or towards which they directed their attention (Figure 26), and the buildings from which seated figures watched their performances, were marked with varied animal imagery suggesting the display of crests. While feline and avian images dominated, some belt heads, head-dresses, and leggings index other animals: iguanas, bats, and monkeys.

A cylinder vase excavated by Strong, Kidder, and Paul (1938:Plate 1) at La Ceiba, on Lake Yojoa, is an extraordinary example of one of the Ulua Polychromes of the eighth century, depicting a procession of five human figures. Three are clearly musicians, one playing rattles, two blowing on the mouth-pieces of flutes (Figure 58). The figure playing the rattles occupies the most space, and has an especially ornate belt with a large spotted animal head on the back, scrolls emerging from the mouth. Two flute players stand behind this primary figure, each wearing a belt with an anthropomorphic head on the back that resembles humanoid monkeys also depicted on Ulua Polychromes.

The next figure holds a curving black object with a light end marked by red curving lines, perhaps representing flames at the end of a wooden torch. This torchbearer displays an awkwardly turned arm, perhaps suggesting a dance motion. The final figure in the series is distinguished by a unique turban, contrasting with the turban shared by the other figures, tied in place with a twisted rope. This unique figure holds in his left hand the looped rope handle of a flexible object ornamented with feather streamers, identifiable as the kind of bag used to contain resin for burning. From the rear of his belt hangs a head, this one apparently a black bird, with large scrolls emerging from its mouth.

Between the earliest Ulua Polychromes of Dedalos and Santa Rita class, with their emphasis on human actors, and the eighth century vessels of Santana class, Nebla class, and Yojoa class Molinero subclass that foreground scenes of multiple figures, the Travesia, Yojoa, and Selva classes appear to constitute a sharp break in continuity of imagery and thus potentially meaning. On these Ulua Polychromes of the late seventh century, anthropomorphic animals are depicted as the central subjects. In the collections I have recorded, the most common zoomorphic characters were monkeys (Figures 17, 18, 19 and 20), water birds (Figures 21 and 30), and felines (Figure 22) followed by an array of rarer animals including peccaries, crabs, bats (Figure 25), iguanas (Figure 24), armadillos (Figure 23), and a variety of birds. Monkeys, while most common in all areas, dominate the imagery of the lower Ulua valley Travesia class. Water birds are especially common in the Selva class produced near Lake Yojoa.

Some animals have very localized distributions. For example, Strong, Kidder, and Paul (1938) excavated two bowls shaped as bird effigies at Lake Yojoa.

A third example of this otherwise unusual form, also from the north shore of Lake Yojoa, forms part of the collection of the Manchester Museum (0.5209/13). All of the known bird effigy vessels have distinctive plumage markings suggestive of the whippoorwill or another member of the nightjar family. Related bird imagery is noted on Nebla class dishes from Comayagua.

Deer, not uncommon motifs in lowland Maya polychromes, are almost entirely absent from the Ulua Polychrome corpus. One example from the lower Ulua Valley replaces the expected monkey on a Travesia class Bombero subclass cylinder with figures of deer. Peccaries are an important motif in Nebla class, which was used from Lake Yojoa to Comayagua. The later Tenampua class in the same area features supports in the form of tapir heads on tripod dishes. This Comayagua-centered emphasis on supports in the form of animal heads persists in the succeeding Las Vegas Polychrome tradition.

The inventory of animal characters on Ulua Polychromes does not conform well to that on lowland Maya polychromes of the same period. There, the zoomorphic characters dancing, often in groups, have been shown to be cosmological doubles for supernatural beings. While monkeys and felines are found in both kinds of polychromes, the cast of characters known as *wayeb* on lowland Maya polychromes features deer, dogs, peccaries, tapirs, coatimundis, gophers, bats, turkeys, owls, toads, centipedes and snakes (Grube and Nahm 1994). Most of these are animals rare or absent on the Ulua Polychromes that feature anthropomorphized animals as primary characters.

Animal motifs on Ulua Polychromes may share a similar inspiration as those on lowland Maya pottery, as a display of imagery that linked living people using these vessels with cosmological narratives. However, the narratives indexed would have been rooted in indigenous Honduran social and cultural realities, not part of a generalized Mesoamerican or Maya cosmology. Alternative resources for thinking about the representation of animals on the Ulua Polychromes are offered by indigenous traditions of the peoples who historically occupied Honduras.

While twentieth-century ethnography of the Lenca produced little oral tradition about animals, ethnography of the indigenous Tol is particularly rich in accounts of the actions of anthropomorphized animals (Chapman 1982). Tol accounts of cosmology feature stories of primordial “masters of animals,” immortal human-like beings (Chapman 1982:59–60). Nine of these supernatural beings, called *jamayon*, were masters of most terrestrial animals (Chapman 1982:298). They were aided by *mayordomos* in the form of felines and raptorial birds (Chapman 1982:295–301). The structure of the world, from its beginnings, was based on the association of animals in orderly society, providing a model for human society in which a few people were of particular power. In Tol

communities, ritual specialists uniquely possessed the power to communicate with the masters of animals (Chapman 1982:246).

The historic Tol people whose narratives Chapman recorded lived in the region east of the Ulua valley, a place where Sulaco Polychrome ceramics were produced at the same time as Ulua Polychromes. If the ancestors of the historic Tol people occupied the same place on the landscape as their descendants, even if the exact distribution of their towns is uncertain, then ancestral Tol were not only the eastern neighbors of the makers of Ulua Polychromes; they were engaged in social relations with them. The presence of imported Sulaco Polychrome in sites like Santa Rita and Travesia are the enduring traces of such social relations. Sulaco Polychromes present few anthropomorphic images; instead, single large animal motifs are common. The Sulaco Polychromes in the collections I have recorded predominantly depict felines and avians (bats and vultures in particular). This is a striking correspondence to the known animal mayordomos who, in contemporary Tol belief, serve to oversee the living species of animals owned by their supernatural masters.

Where lowland Maya polychromes can be explained in terms of cosmologies in which deities had animal doubles whose actions were a subject of interest, Honduran Ulua Polychromes may better conform to wider tropical lowland mythologies like that of the Tol, in which the world before humans was inhabited by animal beings who acted in human-like ways (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013:121–23). Claude Lévi-Strauss (1975:177) explicitly distinguished between the widely distributed mythologies of the tropical forest, in which beings who appear like animals but act like people created precedents for human social relations, and those of literate societies in Mexico and Guatemala, where he said myths were “reformulated by educated speakers” for new purposes. Such a distinction existed at the time that Ulua Polychromes developed in parallel to those of the more hierarchical Classic Maya city-states.

If we approach the interpretation of Ulua Polychromes in which animals are central characters with these tropical lowland traditions in mind, we might propose that the most common animals depicted, such as monkeys, water birds, and felines, occupied places of importance in the cosmology of the Ulua Polychrome makers. Anthropomorphized by wearing jewelry (Figure 22, 30) and at times adopting human postures, animals on seventh and eighth century Ulua Polychromes were shown singly, not in groups. Each has a specific set of features that are faithfully reproduced that allows identification with living animals. But the inclusion of anthropomorphic features signals that these are primordial versions, more like the mayordomos of Tol cosmology than the living animals exploited by the people of these sites. This is underlined by the fact that there is only partial overlap between animals depicted on pottery and

animals whose bones have been recovered and analyzed in the sites where Uluu Polychromes were used (Henderson and Joyce 2004).

As characters from primordial belief, the animals featured on Uluu Polychromes of Travesia, Selva, and Yojoa classes can be thought of as demonstrating the structure of the cosmology of their makers and users. Animals were framed by geometric motifs placing them in general locations. In many cases, geometric motifs formed bands above, and sometimes also below, animal images. Most common were step frets (Figure 20) and continuous terraces (Figure 24), often provided with central marked points. Step frets and terraces, which could substitute for each other, both indexed mountains and caves within them, from which mist came. In other cases the geometric bands featured variations on mats (Figure 23) like those that marked seats occupied by powerful or respected community leaders in many tropical forest societies, sometimes abbreviated as twisted strands of fiber.

As an alternative or additional way of placing action by anthropomorphic animals in significant places, animals could be flanked by pairs of geometric elements, oriented vertically instead of horizontally. Step frets and terraces and twisted strands again are common flanking motifs, but also included in this way of centering animals on vessels are circles of solid red or black, and I-shapes that have been compared to ballcourts (Figure 20). In some cases, the animal image itself is painted within the circle or inside a surrounding circular band (Figure 30). These common ways of framing and presenting animals in Uluu Polychromes place them in central locations, locations of power, and primordial places of origin.

In one very unusual Nebla vase, animal images on a solid black background alternate with a four-petal flower recognizable as an analogue for the lowland Maya K'in glyph, a symbol of the world as composed of four quarters and a center (Figure 37). While the syntax of the vessel continues the local approach of placing actors in cosmological space, the appearance of such a recognizable lowland Maya image is part of a late eighth century set of developments that bring Uluu Polychromes closest in their history in appearance and perhaps in meanings to polychromes from the Maya lowlands.

### *Acting Maya*

Comparisons between images of ritual dancing on Uluu Polychromes and Lowland Maya polychromes are closest at the very end of the development of Uluu Polychromes, towards the end of the eighth century and into the early ninth century, with the development of Tenampua class Uluu Polychromes in the Comayagua valley. Tenampua, the type-site for these objects, was a fortified hilltop settlement that had strong ties to Copan (Dixon 1989, 1992; Hendon,

Joyce and Lopiparo 2013:39–56). Tenampua briefly grew to be the only sizable town in the Comayagua valley, before giving way to its rival, Las Vegas, where Las Vegas Polychromes developed (Dixon 1989, 1992).

A history of conflict is evident in the fortification of Tenampua, and implied by the resurgence of Las Vegas as Tenampua went into decline. It is thus likely no accident that Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes are unique in Honduras for their themes of explicit interpersonal conflict (for example, Figure 44). However, these images on close examination appear to represent not conflict itself, but the stylized performance of conflict in rituals involving dances recognizably related to known practices of Maya lowland sites.

Excavations at Tenampua described by Stone (1957:50–56) recovered two vases showing multiple figures in what appears to be a dance involving handling plain staffs, with some figures holding rattles and fans, and others with staffs ornamented with flaps of cut paper (compare Figure 41). In her image of the first vessel, Stone (1957:fig. 55A) shows a figure wearing a turban, belt, and loincloth holding an upright flapstaff resting on the ground facing a second figure. This male actor is shown in motion, as indicated by bent knees, wearing an enormous feather back rack, with arms bent as he wields two plain poles in dance. Otherwise (and unusually) nude, he wears a unique white headband, and has the head and tail of a small feline suspended around his neck. Additional figures on other sides of the vessel are neither illustrated nor described.

The second, smaller vessel, found inside the first, depicts four visible figures on the illustrated face (Stone 1957:fig. 55B). Two figures holding flapstaves face each other on the presented side. Both wear white headdresses, distinct from each other and from the headdress on the first vessel. Each of the two figures has distinct face painting, and both are shown with bent legs, indicating they are in motion. Most visible is the figure on the left, who holds a flapstaff at an angle over his shoulder with his right hand, while brandishing a maraca in his left. Behind him stands a simply dressed figure with a turban, who has an object tucked under his arm that might be seen as a ladle censer. Just visible next to this secondary figure, facing away from him, is a musician with a feathered headdress, holding a flute to his mouth.

These two examples of Tenampua subclass Cefiro present features present on other vases with images of the flapstaff dance. The costume worn by the three dancers on a vase in the National Museum of the American Indian differs (Figure 41). These dancers have a loincloth, hip cloth depicted with internal cross-hatching, and a feathered headdress held in place by two superimposed head bands made of white and orange plaques. Yet as in the other examples, the bent knees and position of the feet indicate movement.

A Tenampua subclass Capitan vessel included in the Kerr database (K695) is described as showing a “war party of 4 warriors, 3 carrying flapstaves and all holding two fingered atl-atl.” What this vessel shows is perhaps also better described as a dance in which participants hold flapstaves with cut paper ornaments in one hand, and atlats in the other, while engaged in movement that has brought each figure to the ground on one knee. A Tenampua Capitan subclass vase in the National Museum of the American Indian (Figure 44) depicts two figures with one knee on the ground in the same posture. In this case, the figure holds a spear with a prominent point upright.

Another Tenampua Capitan subclass vessel in the Kerr photographic corpus (K6990) shows two pairs of figures facing each other. Again, two of the figures kneel on one knee. Each wears a short jacket with a pattern perhaps intended to suggest quilted cotton, and holds a round shield, both aspects of warrior costume in Mesoamerica (Anawalt 1988). A human head hangs upside down from a cord around the neck of each of these figures. Two feathers are tied at the top of their loose hair. In their right hands, each raises a hafted weapon, one showing a black leaf-shaped blade, possibly indicating it was made of obsidian. One of the figures facing one of these warriors stands holding a flapstaff, again suggesting this is a ritual dance rather than a scene of battle.

As noted in Chapter 7, lowland Maya pottery represented the flap-staff in the context of a dance associated with midsummer and war events. The Tenampua class vessels that depict figures in motion, some holding flapstaves, others holding spears, reinforce this set of associations. No localized crests mark the figures on the Tenampua vessels. They are part of a new visual culture that is less concerned with locating ritual actions in place than with indexing the actions of a distant but highly valued group of allies.

The same ambiguous combination of figures wielding obsidian objects and possible dancing is seen on K8267, a vase in the Las Vegas Polychrome tradition that developed out of, and replaced, Tenampua class Ulua Polychromes. Two standing figures alternate with smaller ones rotated 90 degrees, as if they were lying on the ground. The standing figures wear long plumed headdresses and simple loincloths. Each holds a small three-pointed black object in the left hand. The depiction of obsidian weapons on these vases is new in the Ulua Polychrome tradition, pointing toward lowland Maya ritual and symbolic values placed on this volcanic glass that, if present in Honduras previously, had not been important enough to be commemorated in imagery.

Ritualized practices, including masking, playing music, incense burning, dance, and formalized displays of violence account for a majority of the human imagery on Ulua Polychromes, varying over time, with regional distinctions foregrounded in the display of animal crests during the height of

depiction of human imagery in the eighth century. This was also the period when for the first time systematic displays of hierarchy, denoted by the distinction between seated figures and standing ritual participants, is seen in the Ulua Polychromes. While the Nebla subclass Picadilly examples that dominate the Kerr archive are the most striking, because they display multiple figures at different levels, the contemporary Santana class of the lower Ulua Valley also includes cylinders showing individuals seated on benches. This way of marking hierarchy continues in the Tenampua class that replaces Nebla class in the Comayagua valley. Several Tenampua subclass Cefiro and Capitan vessels depict figures seated on what in this case are clearly carved zoomorphic benches like those traded to Comayagua from Costa Rica or Nicaragua. On a Tenampua Cefiro subclass cylinder, a figure is positioned above two black diagonal elements that support the narrow black element on which the figure is seated (Figure 34a). A Tenampua Capitan subclass vessel depicts the bench as a black horizontal plane with a rounded bottom, supported by diagonal legs, and with an appended animal head (Figure 43) corresponding to actual benches recovered in Comayagua.

In addition to the array of themes already noted, eighth century Nebla subclass Picadilly, Yojoa subclass Molinero, Travesia subclass Bombero, and Santana class Ulua Polychromes add one other theme: human figures holding staffs and in some cases carrying laden packs. Drawing on arguments similar to the analogy with *pochteca* proposed by Brotherston (2009), Sheila Findley (1990) identified some of these figures as likely merchants or visitors traveling to visit other town leaders. While I originally agreed with Findley's analysis, a closer examination of these vessels in comparison to those discussed above suggests that these scenes also relate to ritual practice.

A Nebla subclass Picadilly vessel in the Kerr photographic collection, K6992, is captioned "carriers with incensarios and birds as their cargo." The vessel shows five figures, four standing, and the last kneeling on one knee. The two central standing figures wear tumplines supporting complete birds with long tails. The burden supported on the back of the other two standing figures is harder to read, but is identical to the top element on the very elaborate bundle being supported by the tumpline and hand of the kneeling figure. This is a bound object that expands toward the top, and has two round appendages at the bottom, with an attached ornament that seems to have internal pelage markings and feathers.

While the identification of the figures on this vessel as "carriers" suggests they are merchants or travelers, the imagery closely matches that of a three dimensional, almost life-size ceramic statue of a woman recovered at Currusté in the lower Ulua valley (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013:77–98). This figure

stood atop an incense-burning vessel. Wearing a mask on a cord around her neck, she is shown supporting a pack held on her back with ropes. The similar series of figures on K6992 is almost certainly a group of ritual participants as well. The large object that the kneeling figure is lifting closely resembles depictions of tall vessels that stand in the midst of ritual scenes on other contemporary Ulua Polychromes, with the round elements at the base forming feet.

In some cases, particularly on Yojoa subclass Molinero vessels, such central bound bundles are depicted surmounted by birds or other animals (Figure 26). The persons on the Yojoa subclass Molinero vessel published as K4932 can be recognized as depictions of the same theme, as their packs carry the same element borne by the kneeling figure and two of the standing figures on K6992. The staffs they hold are marked with feline skin patterns. These could be simpler versions of the feline-spotted serpent held by ritual participants on Nebla subclass Picadilly vessel K6065. A Tenampua subclass Capitan vessel (K9161) shows three standing figures, each holding a staff in one hand, with a similar curved end.

While it is tempting to assimilate such scenes of rituals around large vessels to lowland Maya themes of ritual drinking, the specific Honduran emphasis is on the presentation of the bound vessel as part of a complex offering. In related deposits in archaeological sites, the bound elements include long bones, perhaps linking the living to deceased ancestors. In the scenes on Ulua Polychromes, the bound elements are vessels whose contents we do not know, but that are often the base for an animal crest. In archaeological sites, ceramic incense burning vessels were actually placed in plazas near residential structures and covered with lids ornamented with human or animal images. It is this complex of mortuary commemoration, place-making, and community unification in which Ulua Polychromes literally served as vessels for shared substances that is the primary subject of the imagery painted on these vessels.

### **Making Meaning in Ulua Polychromes**

Where the captions in the Kerr photographic database enlist understandings of Lowland Maya cosmology to identify specific deities and infer representation of warfare, travel, and even ballgames, my approach has been to situate the same Ulua Polychrome vessels in their spatial and chronological contexts, and to compare them to archaeological assemblages including musical instruments, hand-held incense burners, and images of bundles suspended on the back of participants in ritual, used and discarded at the time the scenes on

Ulua Polychromes were painted. The small set of animal images featured in the regalia of the figures depicted creates identities among and differences between participants, echoed in the inventory of animal images on other painted serving vessels used to present food, as well as in the abundant modeled ceramic figurines, often musical instruments, from the same area (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2013).

The contextual links between objects that were used pragmatically in rituals within archaeological sites, and scenes on some of those objects that depict anthropomorphic figures engaged in similar actions, provide a beginning for the kind of “history of cultural significance” that Panofsky called for. It was in their use within towns and villages that the Ulua Polychromes were made meaningful, as visual instantiations of the kinds of actions taking place around these vessels—incense burning, costumed performances accompanied by music, and the display of bound bundles.

An important aspect of Ulua Polychromes that emerges when their manner of creating meaning is viewed in local terms is the continuity that is provided by the motifs that are used as frames for human and animal figures. Most attention has focused on the bands that display profile heads, commonly viewed as pseudoglyphs, imitations of Maya inscriptions. In sites where Maya hieroglyphic writing that is legible is used on some vessels, and not on others, the question of the meaning of non-grammatical inscriptions can be usefully explored (Calvin 2006). In sites where Ulua Polychromes were produced and used, however, there is no evidence of legible texts; the impulse to create bands with signs visually similar to Maya inscriptions has to be explained in other ways.

My approach departs from the iconographic tradition typical in Maya studies. Instead, I build on an understanding of semiotic analysis developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (Joyce 2007; see Keane 2003, 2005; Parmentier 1997; Preucel and Bauer 2001). For Peirce, in place of meaning being created by associating a concept with a symbolic vehicle (such as a word or an image), meanings were made dynamically through a three-way relationship in which signs “represent an aspect of the object to another sign/mind/interpretant” (Lele 2006:51). There is always an interpretant for which the association of an object and a sign is an occasion for creating new signs. Because Peirce recognized that signifying was active, he also insisted on the importance of the continual production of signs over time. Peircean signs have histories, and that helps archaeologists develop arguments about the possible ways that things in the past could have been understood as meaningful.

It is common to emphasize that Peirce defined three kinds of signs: iconic; indexical; and symbolic. In fact, for Peirce, these are better thought of as ways

signs work; in action, meanings are made through a mixture of representation by resemblance, or iconicity, representation by connection, or indexicality, and conventionalization within a chain of signification (see Peirce 1998). Lele (2006:50) gives Peirce's example of a weathervane: because the wind moves it into a specific direction, it is iconic of the wind, resembling the direction of the wind; but it is also indexical, pointing to the direction of the wind.

My approach to Ulua Polychromes begins with the identification of the iconicity of elements. By attention to the details of the felines drawn on their surfaces, I map a series of features on to a specific species, the marguay. This is my meaning making, in the present. As noted above, my iconic meaning making may not be identical to the meaning-making of the ancient artist, even though it was that artist who recorded the direction of fur on the spine of the feline that is distinctive of the marguay. I am led to see the feline image as also indexical, pointing toward specific experiences of the animal and of the people who related to it and drew on it for inspiration.

Thus, the image of the marguay points to nocturnal times and arboreal spaces, on the one hand; and through its normal representation in many Ulua Polychromes as an item of costume for anthropomorphic figures, it also or alternatively points to the wearing of feline pelts in events. Here, the fact that marguays have especially long tails and thick fur may have been pragmatic features that led to the use of these pelts (and not others) for costume, without any necessary intent to index the highly arboreal and nocturnal habits of the animal. By adding to consideration another medium in which the feline is represented—as modeled lugs on the body of Ulua Marble vases—I am led to somewhat more security that the tree-climbing habit of the marguay was part of what made this animal, and not another feline, the choice of these artists.

Because meaning-making itself takes place in time, with each production of meaning leading to another, these multiple potential implications of the single image are not alternatives from which I must choose. Instead, they are implications about the cultural life of this image that might have unfolded over the history of its use, and even led ultimately to a conventionalization of the marguay as a symbol whose meaning seemed arbitrary. Arranging the versions I can document in chronological chains within a single set of connected producers and users, I can make the following argument that illustrates how meanings were made through the interplay of practices, representation, and practice with representational things.

Feline skins were used as costume for some human actors during the period when Santa Rita class Ulua Polychromes were being produced (ca. 550–650 AD), and were significant enough to be featured as motifs on their own in some cases. The actual use of small felines is indicated by skeletal remains recovered

archaeologically, for example, in deposits at Puerto Escondido dating to the same period, specifically, a calcaneus, part of the paw (Henderson and Joyce 229–32). Paws are shown still attached to feline pelts displayed as costume elements on Santa Rita class Uluva Polychrome vessels (Figure 14).

Here, the image painted on the pot iconically represents the meaning of feline pelt by resemblance, a meaning created through the third part of the sign, an interpretant, present or past. Each interpretant creates the meaning in its own context. The selection of marguay as the iconic model may have followed actual preference for the thick fur and long tail of this feline, or simply practical access by hunters to more abundant smaller felines. Once selected, distinctive features of marguays are emphasized in slightly later images such as the Uluva Marble vases showing the fur on the spine facing toward the animal's head, and the pelts shown with very long tails worn by human figures on Santana and Nebula polychromes (Figure 36).

These marble and pottery vases are later, dating to the eighth century. By that point, the feline pelt had been conventionalized to show features distinctive of the marguay. On the Uluva Marble vases, the arrangement of the modeled felines along a cylindrical form iconically mimics marguays climbing trees, allowing for the creation of a new meaning of these felines that draws on another aspect of the marguay's behavior, arboreality. This expansion of meaning making builds on what Webb Keane (2003:414) calls "bundling": the fact that things used as signs always have features beyond those that conditioned their original selection, allowing for new meanings to emerge by emphasizing different or additional qualities.

The bundling of meaning does not need to come solely from some natural quality of the marguay. If the iconic use of felines in Santa Rita class polychromes points to (indexes) the wearing of feline skins during ritual performances, then from that time on, feline skins also bundled the performance of ritual and associations of those specific rituals in which they were employed. The depiction of human figures in Santana and Nebula class Uluva Polychromes of the eighth century wearing feline skins draped in the same fashion as those on Santa Rita class polychromes (Figure 35) associate the later figures with ritual actions. At the same time that these later polychromes were made and used, three dimensional feline sculptures were produced to mark the top of lids placed over vessels containing burning materials in the same region, often the same sites, where we find sherds of these polychromes (Hendon, Joyce and Lopiparo 2013). With strategically placed tubes conducting smoke up to exit via pierced eyes, mouths, and ears, these feline sculptures were used in rituals where human long bones were gathered in bundles and deposited in secondary mortuary rites.

By the end of the eighth century, in the Uluva Polychrome using area, felines were associated in practice with rituals commemorating the dead, with access to the upper world gained by climbing trees. More than this, I suggest that the ceremonies for which feline skin was worn most probably also were conventionally associated with the darkness of the world before the first sunrise. Rather than treating the use of black or light backgrounds for main scenes on the latest Uluva Polychromes as purely stylistic, this last step in proposing how meaning was made draws on the bundling of nocturnal habits with marguays specifically, and the chain of meaning that would connect commemoration of death, marguay skins and feline effigy censers, upper levels of the cosmos, and night or darkness. My tentative understanding of these possible meanings emerges from tracing a chain of meanings produced over time across a variety of media, including performance.

Thinking of meaning-making this way allows me to propose a stronger understanding of the effects that Uluva Polychrome makers achieved by their repeated decisions to combine plastic manipulation of vessels with painting. Modeling of lugs in the forms of heads of animals increased the iconicity of the images (Figures 16, 17 and 18). When present, modeling may well be a signal to us that it is the iconic identification of the animal referent that is being foregrounded, rather than a more conventional or symbolic understanding. Such iconic modeling of vessels reaches its ultimate expression in the Nebla subclass *Tigrillo*, where the entire vessel is converted into a modeled feline, again most likely indexing (pointing to) the marguay (Figure 38).

Modeling of vessel walls, especially evident in late Santa Rita class, also was at times clearly iconic, as when U-shaped fields were recessed or pushed out from the vessel, provided with dark backgrounds (Figure 15), identified by Nielsen and Brady (2006) as icons of caves. These modeled images convey the ability of caves to break the plane of existence, implying movement between planes. If we consider the equally or even more common treatment of upper and lower bands in a similar fashion, set out from the body of the pot through modeling, then we might equate these panels as well with breaks in the physical environment within which the actions shown on Uluva Polychromes took place.

It is with the late Santa Rita class that upper and lower bands begin to display stepped terrace designs, often with internal dots or circles (Figures 10, 12, 15 and 16). Later Uluva Polychromes sometimes substitute series of step fret designs for terraces (Figures 19, 20, 22, 27, 30, 37 and 58), a motif that continues in the Las Vegas Polychrome tradition (Figures 68 and 69). Serving as a conventionalization of the locational icon created by modeling panels on Santa Rita vessels, stepped terraces and step frets became part of the production of

symbolic meaning, placing the vessel and its other imagery in a location centered in space and likely in cosmology.

A distinct late shift away from a local tradition of meaning making comes when terrace motifs are replaced by a profile head on Santana, Nebla, and Travesia class Ulua Polychromes (Figures 34, 44, 53, and 54). Rene Viel (1978) called this motif Glyph H. We can identify Glyph H with the lowland Maya God N glyph that is one of the options for the first sign in the conventional sequence of signs forming a legible text around the rim of lowland Maya polychromes in the eighth century. Glyph H makes this connection for us today as an iconic sign, that resembles the God N glyph. It may have made the same connection the same way for some viewers in Honduras at the time these pots were created, particularly viewers with first-hand knowledge of lowland Maya palace culture, gained through the same relations that left behind Ulua Marble vases at sites in Belize and the Peten.

For others in the Honduran towns and villages where Glyph H was displayed, lacking such an iconic referent for this sign, the image could have indexed social relations of certain families with distant communities, an image created after visits to these distant allies. At times, Glyph H is drawn with feline or avian (perhaps vulture) features, which may indicate places where even such an indexical connection to lowland Maya practices was tenuous, and the image was being reinterpreted historically in locally meaningful terms (Figures 34, 44 and 54).

These variants of Glyph H hark back to earlier Ulua Polychromes in which, in addition to terraces or step frets, an upper band might feature profile or frontal heads corresponding to the anthropomorphic characters shown in action on the vessels with the largest figural space, cylinder vases. The very earliest Ulua Polychromes in Dedalos and early Santa Rita class presented bands with series of profile masks or heads echoing the larger-scale figures on cylinders (Figures 1, 5, and 9 to 12). Each such image works as a potential indexical sign, pointing to the larger image on the same vessel, and beyond to the enactment of ceremony that the larger images portray iconically. The display of masks or indexes of costumed performers was reiterated on these first Ulua Polychromes, emphasizing the importance of costumed performances and the regalia used in them. Calling such rows of masks pseudoglyphs makes them meaningful only as a sign of longing for a foreign culture and knowledge. Asking how they signified locally draws our attention to the socially significant performances in which these vessels were used, displayed, and consumed.

My arguments about the meanings of Ulua Polychromes are thus rooted in the local and its historical unfolding. They are not more certain or less speculative than the accounts others offer by equating Ulua Polychromes with

contemporary products of lowland Maya workshops of Belize and the Peten. I do not ignore the interplay between these distant workshops and places in Honduras, between which some patrons or even potters may have traveled, or between which some products of lowland Maya workshops made their way as gifts between families of high status in each area.

What I insist on is that Uluá Polychrome potters cannot be understood without being placed in their own historical and social context. By using the archaeology of the sites where these vessels were made, used, and deposited, I have tried to demonstrate that polychrome pottery was an important medium of communal and familial pride and identification, whether used in feasts on the occasions of important events, or employed everyday in household meals. In this context, potters operated with intention to produce vessels that conformed to themes recognized as important over wide areas. At specific moments, individual potters produced innovative vessels. Sometimes those vessels were positively received and gained wider regard, shifting the way that a network of potters intended vessels to look.

Over time, such innovations produced a sequence of themes that moved from the initial subject of humans in ritual performances, to cosmological scenes featuring anthropomorphic animals that may have been significant in localized origin stories. The return to the subject of human actors engaged in ritual came at a time, in the eighth century, that some families were drawing on relations with distant allies to obtain rare goods and assert distinctive status. The practice of rituals as documented in these new narrative scenes on pots shows a combination of actions that compare well with the material record of ritual performance in archaeological sites (playing music, burning incense), and others that conform to specific rituals of certain areas in the Maya lowlands.

In the lower Uluá Valley, potters produced some Santana class pots on which human actors supported serpents from whose mouths emerged anthropomorphic beings (Figure 33). The theme is identical to one found in central Peten pottery at the time, and featured at sites like Yaxchilan in monumental sculpture. We might identify a specific ideological claim being made by the owners of these Santana class Uluá Polychromes through the display of these new visual things. We should consider whether in practice, these families or individuals performed new rituals.

In the Comayagua valley, potters produced some Tenampua class pots showing ritual dancers holding flapstaves, regalia previously unknown in the Uluá Polychrome repertoire that is associated with midsummer dances depicted in lowland Maya sites, again including in monumental stone sculpture seen at Yaxchilan. The local context for these dances is made undeniable by

their association with scenes in which some individuals sit on animal effigy benches, objects actually recovered in the late Comayagua valley which have their origin in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, not the Maya lowlands.

In both the lower Ulua Valley and Comayagua, what the end of the eighth century brought was a time in which leading families at some sites pushed to distinguish themselves from the broader population, claiming higher standing and consuming more resources. External ties were both pragmatic and symbolic resources in these processes of attempted deepening of hierarchy. Ulua Polychromes used in communal rituals could carry the new claims out to the broader population in a traditional form.

In Comayagua, the people of Tenampua did not ultimately maintain their grip on the population they drew into their palisaded settlement. The people of the Las Vegas site located on the valley floor surpassed those of Tenampua, and did so while creating the greatest innovations in the history of the Ulua Polychrome tradition. At sites where Las Vegas Polychrome is found in Honduras, vessels are not as widely available as previously, and are more likely than in previous generations to be used as individual burial goods by an internationalized elite who also had access to products of metal-working and luxury goods imported from Mexico.

In the lower Ulua Valley, the people of Travesia also failed to maintain domination of the broader population, and were overshadowed by the rapid growth of a settlement around a previously modest hilltop settlement, Cerro Palenque (Joyce 1991, Hendon 2010). The potters of Cerro Palenque also chose to innovate in production of serving vessels, but their choice was to abandon polychrome painting entirely, in favor of new, thin-walled, fine paste ceramics ornamented with modest incised and molded designs. As in the Comayagua valley, the new Baracoa Fine Paste ceramics were less available than Ulua Polychromes had been.

While neither Las Vegas nor Cerro Palenque endured as major centers after 1100–1200 AD, they left a legacy that changed the social production, circulation and use of Honduran pottery forever. When new painted pottery was developed in places like Naco, it was a product used by a smaller number of families, and did not receive regional endorsement through adoption at other towns. Still, even in this latest painted pottery, some of the conventions of earlier Honduran painted pottery persisted, as motifs whose histories may have been part of their power, even though those histories were of very different social realities.

# Epilogue

The Ulua Polychrome pots whose itineraries I have followed in the preceding pages began their lives as mixtures of clay, crushed rock, and mineral pigments, recalling the words of Gregory Mason (1940:129) with which I began this book:

Finally, above all, pottery represents the earth. Pottery comes from the earth and is colored with the earth—directly when you use oxide of iron, indirectly when you use vegetable dye. Pottery, in the end, goes back to the earth in burials, being both clay and dust, life and death.

The crafters who shaped these pots mixed these materials in workshops in or adjacent to house compounds in villages and small towns across much of the territory of Honduras, some recognized in sites like Travesia, Cerro Palenque, Campo Dos and Campo Pineda (Joyce, Hendon, and Lopiparo 2014). Others left such subtle traces that we have not yet seen that they were part of the histories of families and settlements.

## “What Pottery Stands For”

Mason (1940:129) describes pottery primarily as “standing for” people in their participation in social life, enabled by pots: “the five-year-old boy” and “little girl of eight,” the “old men who get together in the evening,” “the young bride” and “bridegroom,” “the old aunts and uncles hanging in the background.” I have tried to emphasize the active role of crafters in the history of making Ulua Polychromes as an antidote to the temptation to ignore the contribution made by artisans innovating within a tradition, hoping for approval by the audience for their craft products.

At the same time, I situate these artisans within networks of social relations and pragmatic needs for which the pots they made were critical, aspects Mason (1940:129) captured by saying “pottery stands for the big bowl of posol.” Whether we consider the demands of a family using specific kinds of pots to serve meals every day and provide feast foods to visitors on special occasions, or the reciprocal regard of other craft workers forming the communities of practice in which pottery producers were embedded, crafters were not simply free to do anything they imagined, or motivated to do so. For long periods in the history of Ulua Polychrome pottery, in between bursts of innovation, the practice of potters consisted of perfecting the ability to make pots so similar to

each other that modern viewers may find it difficult to see differences among them.

I have also tried to locate these pots as they circulated over long distances as products of constellations of practice, networks of people motivated by shared histories or discourses to reshape Ulua Polychromes to resemble polychrome pottery made elsewhere, or to reshape pots made elsewhere to resemble Ulua Polychromes. While archaeologists often imagine the participants in such wider networks as rulers and social leaders, more salient for understanding how they influenced the development of pottery may have been their roles as participants in constellations of practices related to kinship, trade, and religious rituals that created demands for visually distinctive pots. As patrons of crafters, people who had the chance to visit towns in Belize or Nicoya, or entertain visitors from the Peten and El Salvador, served to connect local communities of practice in far dispersed areas in constellations of practice.

While exploring the ways that the mobility of Ulua Polychromes allowed them to move from workshop to kitchen, and from reception space to trash heaps, I have tried to consider how their recovery in these settings allows us to imagine them in action, as tools for ceremony that simultaneously recorded the kinds of ceremonies they accompanied.

It is in this final aspect of my examination of Ulua Polychromes, suggesting how we might understand their imagery over multiple centuries, that I make the most localized arguments about them. These arguments are rooted in modern, excavated assemblages, where Ulua Polychromes are found in association with other ceramics and ceramic artifacts employed in rituals at the scale of the household and the town. From these assemblages we know that rituals in the Ulua Polychrome producing area involved burning of resins, the playing of musical instruments, and masked and costumed dancing. They involved the consumption of food and especially of drinks brewed in large vessels and shared by groups. Some of these ceremonies may have been timed by the seasonal round of the agricultural year, especially the movement of the sun. Others likely were tied to events in the lives of individual people, including commemoration of deaths and quite possibly births. Still other Ulua Polychromes may have served drink while teams from the home town and visiting guests played ball games, perhaps on occasions linked to the calendar or even to the individual lives of notable members of the social group.

The fundamental focus of Ulua Polychrome imagery throughout the history of their production, I have argued, is these experiences of ritual life, and the relationship of human users of these pots to these rituals and the myths associated with them. In the earliest Ulua Polychromes single human characters are already engaged in presenting ritual regalia; in the latest, groups of human

actors are shown using objects in ritual performances. In between, Ulua Polychromes are localized by the depiction of motifs that define the spaces of ritual in universalized terms, while the actors involved are historically specified by costumes indexing animals who likely served as links to mythologies of place and identity.

The images of ritual practice on Ulua Polychromes are almost entirely populated by male ritual participants, complemented by ceramic figurines and large sculptures in which females are the majority. This apparent gendering undoubtedly has less to do with a restriction on social power and action by sex than on the existence of complementarity in ritual actions, where males appear to have played primary roles in masked dances, while women controlled the distribution of brewed drinks.

### **“Pottery Comes from the Earth”**

Mason (1940:129) balances his account of pottery “standing for” people with his acknowledgement that it “represents” geological materials. The only way for me to connect and delimit a group of pottery for analysis is by combining things made of local clay and pigment used to create similar objects and separating them from other things where difference was introduced in the way materials combined.

While not a wholesale adoption of craft practices developed in Guatemala and Belize, the evidence from site assemblages shows that people of the Ulua Valley had a multi-generation familiarity with lowland Maya polychromes before they began experimenting with changing the pigments on their own local serving vessels. During the long history of Ulua Polychrome production, in some times and places, innovations in themes depicted suggest or reinforce other evidence for strong ties between particular Ulua Polychrome using communities, and specific partners in Guatemala or Belize.

These novelties have to be understood in terms of the local intentions of Ulua patrons, hoping to strengthen claims to greater prestige or authority, rather than as a systemic shift toward Maya practices. Yet in places like Tenampua, they may have resulted in the practice of specific rituals understood as foreign, like the flap staff dance, on the part of families who identified more with Maya peers at Copan and beyond than with local farmers they were seeking to surpass. At the same time, even at a place with such marked participation in specific practices associated with cities of the Peten as this, other visual imagery suggests a similarly distinctive enlistment of a foreign practice—sitting on carved stone effigy benches—as part of a local visual

culture of power that saw resources to create power as coming from south as much as from north.

It seems unlikely that it is a mere coincidence that it is at Tenampua, where Ulua Polychromes foreground such very specific external ties, that imagery celebrating warfare enters the vocabulary of Ulua Polychromes. There, in a site located for defense, surrounded by fortifications, the last innovators of the tradition of Ulua Polychromes ultimately lost their bid to remain in power to others who promoted the development and spread of a different material culture, including white-slipped Las Vegas Polychromes. Oriented toward an international style that was fostered by the long distance exchange of Tohil Plumbate from Mexico to Central America, Las Vegas Polychromes also reproduced the last innovations of Tenampua Polychromes, and in this sense, could be seen as yet another stage in the history of that ongoing tradition.

Used by a select few as serving ware and burial goods, Las Vegas Polychromes formed part of assemblages in which other internationally valued goods—copper bells, Mixteca-Puebla style censers, and turquoise mosaic masks—circulated. The feathered serpent that became a dominant image on ceramics in this international style was fixed in the local lexicon of Honduras, and persisted in new forms in the Bay Islands Polychrome and Nolasco Bichrome that came into use in northern Honduras in the last few centuries before Spanish colonization.

### **“Pottery Goes Back to the Earth”**

It would be easy to end an account of the itineraries of Ulua Polychromes with European colonization and missionization, which ended the production of pottery with explicit visual images of humans and animals related to indigenous religious practices. But the itineraries of these pots did not stop with their long period of burial in abandoned Honduran settlements. We cannot know what local farmers made of the sherds that turned up in their fields, or what local fishers made of the sherds and vessels that eroded out of the banks of the rivers, in the centuries from 1500 to 1800 AD. What we do know is that when Europeans developed newfound interests in the antiquities of Central America, Hondurans already had ancient objects in their possession, and knew how to direct the new antiquarians and naturalists to locations where more could be found.

Initially a byproduct of commercialization of the former colonies of Spain, nineteenth century collecting launched Honduran objects, including Ulua Polychromes, into motion again, introducing them into museums throughout

North America and in Europe. As they assembled in these new spaces, they were re-located by scholars as part of different geographies, part of the definition of the newly emergent subject of study, the Classic Maya. Initially included firmly within this construct, through the course of the early twentieth century Ulua Polychromes were shifted gradually into objects of a cultural frontier, backward in their subscription to regional currents of change, believed to have been made and used within a few short generations.

This book is part of a movement that began in the second half of the twentieth century to re-place Ulua Polychromes in museums and archaeological repositories on the Honduran landscape, not with respect to a frontier or core-periphery geography, but as part of extensive networks of communication and social relations that helped to shape the tradition of their production over a history lasting for half a millennium.

### What Remains Unsaid

I have shown that Ulua Polychromes were and continue to be active participants in events and histories, working along with humans. In reflecting on this book, the main limitation I regret is my lack of engagement with indigenous experts who might have helped me move beyond critique in discussion of possible meanings of these vessels. In part this is a failure rooted in my specific history, my grounding in the area where I conducted most of my own fieldwork, the lower Ulua valley, where today, local people do not identify with the indigenous builders of archaeological sites (Maldonado 2011). My critical stance toward the hasty ethnic identifications made by earlier archaeologists led me to be extremely cautious about identifying the sites I was studying with indigenous groups elsewhere in the country that might have led me to explore connections with those descendant communities directly, rather than through published ethnographies whose limitations I have acknowledged.

The lower Ulua valley was densely populated at the time of the first colonial intrusions into the Honduran mainland. After more than a decade of strong resistance to incorporation into colonial rule, in 1536 the province of the Río Ulúa was brought under colonial administration from a newly founded Spanish city, San Pedro Sula (Sheptak 2013). A dramatic decrease in the number of identified indigenous towns took place over the following decades, so that by the beginning of the seventeenth century, only a handful of towns survived as officially recognized *pueblos de indios*. However, those towns that weathered the extreme exploitation of the sixteenth century persisted well into the early nineteenth century as recognized indigenous places with legal rights

(Sheptak 2013). In the upheaval initiated with independence from Spain, followed by civil war, this area of northern Honduras experienced epidemics, military attacks, and shifts in population location. Along with these relatively recent displacements of long-enduring towns, decisions of republican governments to cease using indigenous identity as a census category obscured the presence and identity of descendants of the indigenous people who formed the majority of the population in this region throughout the colonial period.

Increasingly, including in other parts of Latin America, archaeologists have begun to confront similar histories by employing decolonial approaches (Jansen and Perez 2010; see Tuhiwai Smith 2012). In an ideal world, I would have had the means to engage with indigenous scholars who recognize Ulua Polychromes as products of their ancestors. As it stands, when I was undertaking my archaeological fieldwork, no one in the valley that surrounds San Pedro Sula chose to identify as indigenous. Anthropological scholarship in the twentieth century proposed that the precolonial population of the lower Ulua valley was aligned with Maya-speaking groups, alienating sites in the region and the objects made and used in them from other areas of Honduras, including the heartland still occupied today by Honduran Lenca people that encompasses Comayagua and southwest Honduras. Rather than mayanizing the cultural identity of the lower Ulua valley, I built on research that sees the sixteenth-century people of the Ulua as speakers of Lenca languages as well (Euraque 1998; Sheptak 2007, 2013).

Some of the Ulua Polychrome pottery that this study explores was made in regions where Lenca people continue to live. Yet I hesitated to seek meaning for the lives of the residents of northern settlements in the very different histories of the Lenca from further south. I was and remain wary of the archaeological tendency to homogenize significant differences among people speaking the same or related languages. I give more weight to shared and distinct experiences of place, which led me to make some modest points of connection with the ethnography of the neighboring Tol who lived in a very similar landscape. I did not seek indigenous Tol experts to work with to try to unpack the meanings of the abundant animal images that clearly require a history of dwelling in this landscape, relying on published ethnography with clear limitations.

And so this book ultimately does not meet the challenge recently issued by Jansen (2015) to include living indigenous experts when undertaking interpretation of cultural heritage and its meanings. That task will have to be taken up by the next generation of scholars. My hope is that such decolonial work on Ulua Polychromes will be carried out by the new generation of Honduran archaeologists, whose numbers have long been far lower than would be expected given the enthusiasm of students in the country for these topics. My

optimism in this regard is fueled by the knowledge that the national university of Honduras has, after long struggles, succeeded in forming an anthropology program. There are, as I write these words in January of 2017, students in that program carrying out work on topics, including studies of polychrome pottery, under the guidance of the growing number of Honduran scholars who have completed or are completing doctoral degrees outside the country. As I did in my work with the writing of earlier scholars, I expect they will find points to contest, and to correct, in this study. I hope they will also find some that they may affirm, strengthen, and extend in order to deepen understanding of the histories specific to the indigenous peoples of Honduras.

# Afterword

In Part 1 of this book, in order to keep a flowing narrative, I chose not to cite published sources in the text. In both Part 1 and Part 2, I also minimized references to specific unpublished sources, either as in-text remarks or footnotes. This Afterword is intended to allow interested readers to identify the specific sources on which I drew, whether these are museum collections, archival documents, unpublished archaeological reports, or, for the chapters that made up Part 1, published sources whose arguments I use as bases for the narrative.

## Chapter 1

The archaeological excavations at Travesia that form the basis for this chapter are reported in Joyce (1983, 1985, 1987). Reports have been published of imported Maya polychromes recovered at El Remolino (Joyce 1993) and Campo Dos and Playa de los Muertos (Epstein 1959). All discussion of activities at Puerto Escondido, including the identification of specific ceramic types, are based on my co-direction of the excavations there, which are pending full publication of that site's Classic Period record (see Joyce 2011; Joyce and Henderson 2007).

Lopiparo (2003, 2007; see also Joyce, Hendon and Lopiparo 2009) was the first to identify the orientation of the Travesia ballcourt toward the point of late December sunrise. The generalizations about pre-industrial pottery production and seasonality are based on Arnold (1985). For a general overview of evidence for ceramic production in the lower Ulua Valley, including Travesia, see Joyce, Hendon, and Lopiparo (2014). For the philosophy of archaeology, including the resistance things show to being forced into explanations that are inconsistent with the evidence, see Wylie (2002). The study of meanings in Precolumbian art history relies on concepts of iconographic interpretation developed by Erwin Panofsky, discussed by Whitney Davis (2004), Vernon Knight (2012), and George Kubler (1969). Chapter 10 returns to this model of interpretation. Also considered in Chapter 10 is the use of the terms iconic, indexical, and symbolic, extending my discussions of using Peircean semiotics to understand Honduran figurines (Joyce 2007). Communities of practice were first defined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1993) and have been widely explored in archaeology (Crown 2007; Minar 2001; Minar and Crown 2001; Roddick 2009; Sassaman and Rudolphi 2001).

## Chapter 2

The archaeological excavations at Santa Rita discussed in this chapter were reported by Strong, Kidder, and Paul (1938). I studied the collections at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, and published my analysis in Joyce (1985, 1987). The patterns discussed for Puerto Escondido are based on analysis of burials (Joyce 2011) and features associated with palaeoethnobotanical samples (Morell-Hart 2011). Research on pottery production between Mantecales and Currusté was conducted by Lopiparo (1994, 2003, 2004, 2006). The quantitative estimates of utilitarian pottery in valley assemblages are based on my own research, presented in part in Joyce (1985).

The discussion of historical development of Ulua Polychromes is based on my publications of overviews of the tradition (Joyce 1993a, 1993b). Orientations of sites in the Ulua and Cuyumapa valleys to specific points on the landscape are discussed by Joyce, Hendon and Lopiparo 2009 (see also Joyce and Hendon 2000; Lopiparo 2003, 2007). Information about use of animals at Santa Rita is based on analysis of faunal remains at the Peabody Museum (Henderson and Joyce 2004). Comments on plant use in the valley reflect research at Puerto Escondido (Morell-Hart 2011). For the history of use of marble from quarries in the Ulua Valley see Luke et al. (2003). For the comparison of Travesia's architecture with that of early Cerro Palenque, see Joyce (1988). For an overview of ceramic production evidence in the valley, see Joyce, Hendon, and Lopiparo (2014). The discussion of ceramics from the lower Ulua valley summarizes material presented by Beaudry-Corbett et al. (1993). The concept of ethnoaesthetics is based on pioneering work by Lila O'Neale with northern California basket-weavers, who she invited to assess and comment on photos of baskets collected a generation earlier, deriving from their responses indigenous concepts of goodness of craft work (Schevill 1992). This work provided a model for numerous other studies of the kind, many dealing with pottery.

## Chapter 3

The discussion of Travesia is based on materials excavated by G.B. Gordon (1898), curated in the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, where I studied the assemblage. I have not previously published these data. The discussion of Santa Rita is based on my re-analysis of collections made by Strong, Kidder, and Paul (1938), also curated at the Peabody Museum, and was published

in Joyce (1985, 1987). The description of animal imagery on vessels from Lake Yojoa is also based on my research on the Strong, Kidder, and Paul collection at the Peabody Museum, augmented by review of the field notebooks in the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution.

Chama Polychromes have been thoroughly discussed by Danien (1998). Anne Chapman has published traditional narratives from the Tol (Chapman 1978) and Lenca (Chapman 1985, 1986) of Honduras. Remains of animals present in archaeological sites of the lower Ulua Valley are summarized by Henderson and Joyce (2004). Crests and their use in Northwest Coast societies are described by Jacknis (2002), Kan (1989), and Suttles (1991). The analysis of figurines from the Ulua Valley is discussed at length in Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo (2013). This includes discussion of excavated examples of long bone bundles and long bone bundle effigies from Cerro Palenque (Hendon 2010) and Currusté.

#### Chapter 4

I recorded pots from Aguacate included in the Strong, Kidder, and Paul collection at Harvard's Peabody Museum (see Strong, Kidder, and Paul 1938). The Peabody Museum also houses the vessels I analyzed from Travesia that are mentioned in this chapter, which were excavated and published by Doris Stone (1941). In addition to the complete vessels in these collections, I also draw in this chapter on my own excavations at Travesia (Joyce 1983, 1985, 1987) and those of G.B. Gordon (1898), whose collections are also at the Peabody Museum. The description of incense burning rituals at Mantecales is based on excavations I co-directed there with John S. Henderson, published in part as a case study in Joyce and Pollard (2010). The description of the Ulua Polychrome with women carrying vessels is based on my documentation of a pot in the Museo de San Pedro Sula. The second vessel described as having female figures was illustrated by Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938: Figure 19) and is currently in the collection of the Middle American Research Institute, where I recorded it. The vase from the La Ceiba site illustrated by Strong, Kidder and Paul (1938: Plate 1) was excavated by them (Strong Kidder and Paul 1938:95–96); I have not personally seen and recorded it.

Robinson (1978) first observed the relations of some Ulua Polychromes to the Yaxchilan lintels. Macri (2001) identifies the texts on vessels from the Peten showing a figure emerging from a serpent as having the verb for birth. For Ulua style marble vases at Altun Ha, San Jose, and Uaxactun, see Joyce (1986) and

Luke (2010). Mora-Marín (2004) reviews the literature on the Primary Standard Sequence. For the figurines recovered intact at Cerro Palenque, see Joyce (1991) and Hendon (2010). For the production and use of figurines generally, see Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo (2013) and Lopiparo (2003, 2004, 2006).

## Chapter 5

The vessels described as gifts from Comayagua interred in a tomb at Copan are currently in the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, where I recorded them. The circumstances of their acquisition by the Heye Foundation are discussed by Dockstader (1972).

The description of events at Cerro Palenque follows Hendon (2010). The description of burials with pottery vessels at Los Naranjos, and the incomplete construction of a final ballcourt, is based on Baudez and Becquelin (1973). Copper metal objects are known from Los Naranjos at the same time, and also from the site of El Coyote just to the west (Urban, Shugar, Richardson and Schortman 2013). Las Vegas Polychromes, while misidentified as Costa Rican, are present in Mexico at the site of Tula (Diehl, Lomas and Wynn 1974). The reference to carved stone seats is based on the inventory of those from the Comayagua valley in Jones (1992). The identification of the flap-staff dance draws on the work of Matthew Looper (2003). The excavations providing evidence of the ritual burning and rebuilding at Tenampua are discussed further in Chapter 8. The argument that a general symbolic value for whiteness is evident in the marble and jade carving of Honduras was made by Hirth and Grant Hirth (1993). Luke (2002, 2012) provides data on the scarcity of Ulua Marble vases in Comayagua, and extends the arguments for the symbolic importance of whiteness. The description of the construction of the late ballcourt at Copan, partly with reused stones, is based on Fash and Lane (1983). The argument that visitors from Mayapan came to the Ulua Valley is based on the reuse of Honduran metal ore at Mayapan (Paris 2008). The possibility that other visitors came from northern Belize is supported by the find at Wild Cane Cay of a Las Vegas Polychrome in a burial of a person whose dental traits suggest non-local origin (Heim, McKillop, Morris and Joyce 2011; McKillop 2005). The description of the El Remolino burial builds on Wonderley's (1984) publication of his excavations there. The burial of bichrome censers at Ticamaya was documented by Blaisdell-Sloan (2006). Sheptak (2013) discusses the relationships between these Late Postclassic sites, and the role of Çocamba in the region.

## Chapter 6

My discussion of G.B. Gordon's work in the Ulua Valley draws on unpublished documents in the archives of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, specifically Gordon's travel log for Nov. 5, 1894, which is part of the C.P. Bowditch papers; and letters from Wilson Popenoe to A.M. Tozzer dated July 2, 1933, October 9, 1935, November 23, 1935, and February 18, 1936; and to A.V. Kidder dated June 2, 1944.

Danien (2006) reproduces the full corpus of illustrations included in the three volumes of the *Examples of Maya Pottery in the Museum and Other Collections* (Gordon 1925, Mason 1928, 1943).

My discussion of collections from Honduras in the British Museum, the Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, the Brooklyn Museum, the Heye Foundation (now the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution), the Smithsonian Institution's Natural History Museum, and the Royal Ontario Museum, is based on my own research in these collections. Identification of collections made for the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania is based on my research on documents related to this museum. With the exception of published works cited in the text, all historical details about these collections and collectors come from a manuscript in preparation on collecting of Central American antiquities before the professionalization of archaeology.

## Chapter 7

My discussion of G.B. Gordon's excavations is based on my research on his original collections, field notes, and correspondence at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Comments on museum collections are, unless otherwise cited, based on my first hand observations.

The Santa Rita subclass Diamante vessels cited are from the following museum collections: Berlin (Travesia), NMAI (Campo Dos and Peña Blanca), Danish National Museum (Siguatepeque), Manchester (Los Naranjos), and the Peabody Museum (Lake Yojoa, Los Naranjos, and Aguacate). Two examples, without site provenience, are part of the collection of the Museo de San Pedro Sula.

The complex Santana class cylinder with three feline impersonators and a human ritual participant is described based on a drawing by M. Louise Baker, the artist who prepared reproductions for the University of Pennsylvania's series *Examples of Maya Pottery in the Museum and Other Collections*. This

painting, of a pot then in the collection of the Middle American Research Institute, appears as figure E4 in Danien (2006).

My discussion of the work of Dorothy Popenoe is based on research on archival collections at the Peabody Museum partly documented in Joyce (1994). Specific sources for points made in this chapter include correspondence starting in 1929, in particular letters on December 8, 1932 from Dorothy Popenoe to A.M. Tozzer; December 22, 1932 from Tozzer to Dorothy Popenoe; July 2, 1933 from Wilson Popenoe to Tozzer; and from Tozzer to Wilson Popenoe on January 22, 1932, and March 23, 1934. The complete Ulua Polychrome recovered by Dorothy Popenoe at Tenampua is now part of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (161963.000).

My discussion of pottery from Puerto Escondido is based on analyses in progress, in collaboration with John S. Henderson, of the Classic Period materials from the site. Publications of radiocarbon dates (Joyce and Henderson 2007), burial practices (Joyce 2011), obsidian sources (Joyce, Shackley, McCandless and Sheptak 2004), faunal remains (Henderson and Joyce 2004), and plant remains (Morell-Hart 2011) include data from Ulua Polychrome era deposits at Puerto Escondido.

## Chapter 8

My discussion of the work of Lothrop in 1917 is based on his unpublished notebook, preserved in the archives of the Peabody Museum. A small collection of materials from his work in Honduras was deposited at the Peabody Museum, and includes material attributed to Tenampua.

Description of the collections excavated at Las Flores Bolsa is based on my own analysis of the materials curated at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. All correspondence described related to the Peabody-Smithsonian Expedition to Honduras is in the archives of the Peabody Museum. I also draw on the notebooks from the expedition that are part of the National Anthropological Archives. Direct quotes come from the notebooks there written by Strong (1936 Vol. 1, p. 15).

My discussion of Gregory Mason's and Jens Yde's work at Farm Two (Campo Dos) is based on my recording of the collections housed at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (Mason) and the Danish National Museum (Yde).

The definition of Las Vegas Polychrome provided here is a shortened version of a paper presented at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Society for American

Archaeology in Orlando, FL, based on 54 complete vessels in museum collections for which I was able to record form and in most cases basic design features. I personally recorded vessels in the Museo de Comayagua, the Museo de San Pedro Sula, and the visitor's center of Los Naranjos in Honduras, and at the Brooklyn Museum, the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian, and the Peabody Museum of Harvard University in the United States, as well as at the Quai Branly museum in Paris. I added vessels from the University of Pennsylvania University Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Michael Carlos Museum at Emory University, and the Banco Atlantida in Tegucigalpa and United States State Department website for Honduras, all published online, and others from the print catalogue of Museo Nacional de Antropología in El Salvador. I was provided information about some vessels in the Denver Art Museum collection by Carrie Dennett. Six of the vessels included have features that are unusual and more closely related to other white slipped polychrome types of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. They help the process of defining the boundary between white slipped polychrome groups of Honduras and those originating in other areas of Central America.

The discussion of copper and other associated luxuries is part of a work in progress on the Early Postclassic Ulua valley. This includes interpretations based on my review of museum collections. Copper bells from Honduras in collections in the United States and Honduras are often ascribed to a cave in either Quimistan, or La Majada. Both are locations in the mountains along the middle course of the Chamelecon River, in the Department of Santa Barbara. Blackiston did not give a specific provenience in his publication. A contemporary note describing the transfer of one bell collected by the United States consul, William Alger, who was Blackiston's guide, from the State Department to the Smithsonian Institution gives the location of the cave as the Naco valley (U.S. National Museum 1909). While objects from Blackiston's collection in the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, do not have a specific provenience beyond Chamelecon River, objects donated by Wilson Popenoe to the Peabody Museum after the death of Dorothy Popenoe are ascribed to Quimistan. Her own donation eight years earlier, however, gives the provenance of the bells as La Majada, which is located in the Naco valley. Whether there are two different locations involved, or one with two names, is unclear. In a letter dated June 2, 1944, Wilson Popenoe told A.V. Kidder that Dorothy Popenoe received the bells from Dr. S. Waller, who he says purchased them in San Pedro Sula. Wilson Popenoe consistently, in this and a letter dated July 2, 1933, refers to all the bells donated by his wife as from Quimistan, never using the place name La Majada. He extends this identification to the

Blackiston collection as well. Strong, Kidder and Paul revert to the name La Majada, and identify this as Blackiston's site. La Majada and Quimistan are not particularly close to each other, so I use the more general Chamelecon location that is part of the 1915 accession record of the Heye Foundation here. No bells have been reported from sites in the lower Ulua Valley.

## Chapter 9

My discussion of collections from Honduras in the Peabody Museum, Harvard University (collected by G.B. Gordon, Doris Stone, and Dorothy Popenoe), the Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin (collected by Erich Wittkugel), and the Museo de San Pedro Sula, Honduras is based on my own research in these collections.

My discussions of Lothrop's 1917 Central American Expedition in Honduras quotes from his field notes in the Peabody Museum Archives. The photocopy I have is unpaginated; I assigned page numbers, indicated by square brackets. Also from the same archive is the letter I cite to Wilson Popenoe from A.M. Tozzer dated March 13, 1939.

The metate from Tenampua described by Ursula Jones (1992) is now in the collection of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University (catalogue number 29-54-20/C10987) where it was donated by Dorothy Popenoe in 1929. Based on her identification of the source of this metate as the Smithsonian Institution, where the object itself was never deposited, Jones apparently relied on the original published drawing from the publication of Popenoe's report on her work at Tenampua in English in 1936 (a translation of Popenoe 1928). Examination of Peabody Museum photographs of the object confirms Jones' classification of this metate as having four legs. Jones identified the zoomorphic head as a depiction of a boat billed heron, otherwise not found in the corpus she studied, and noted that two frontal faces on the fretwork panel were also unique. Herons are part of the iconography of Ulua Polychromes, as are frontal monkey heads.

My discussion of the rare and unique vessels made in Costa Rica that are suggestive of early knowledge of Ulua Polychromes is based in part on Lothrop (1926), but also builds on my own review of vessels in the collections of Wellesley College's Davis Museum and Cultural Center, the Michael Carlos Museum of Emory University, and the former Meyer collection, now in the Denver Art Museum, including consultation with Carrie Dennett of the Denver Art Museum and Rebecca Stone Miller of the Michael Carlos Museum, and review of online catalogues.

## Chapter 10

My identification of vessels illustrated in the online Kerr photographic archive as likely Ulua Polychromes is based on review of photographs, except in those cases where the vessels documented are in one of the museums where I also carried out primary research.

My discussion of iconography of vessels in the National Museum of Denmark and Manchester Museum is informed by my study of the collections of these institutions. The discussion of animal figures includes examples from these collections along with vessels from Berlin, the Peabody Museum, the National Museum of the American Indian, and the National Museum of Natural History.

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# Index

- aesthetics 16, 225  
*See also* ethnoaesthetics
- Aguacate 61–62, 128, 185, 196
- Aguatal 185, 196
- Altun Ha 69, 138, 139, 140, 141, 144, 218, 224, 261
- animals  
faunal remains 53, 122, 154, 184, 201, 208, 299–300  
in oral tradition 56–60, 175, 291–293  
as motifs 49–55, 58–59, 125–129, 132, 135–138, 204–205, 245, 251, 262–264, 285–293
- antiquities trade 9, 112–115
- ballcourts 37, 41, 80, 86  
at Campo Dos 179, 181  
at Cerro Palenque 78–80, 86, 174  
at Copan 86, 174  
at Los Naranjos 86  
at Tenampua 86, 174, 178, 227–228  
at Travesia 25, 65, 149, 218–219
- Baracoa 178
- barbarism 94–95, 101, 160, 169, 227
- Baudez, Claude 204, 267–268, 274
- Bay Islands 100, 101, 111, 208, 228–230, 236
- Belize 87, 99, 179, 241, 260–261, 264, 272–275, 306–307  
Las Vegas Polychrome in 209, 260  
marble vases in 69, 218, 261, 302  
pottery from 23–24, 48, 138–141, 162–165, 222–224, 249
- belt 105, 282, 294  
ornament, bird head 73, 278, 285, 287, 290  
ornament, feline head 277–278  
ornament, head 25, 66, 132, 287, 289–290  
ornament, iguana head 286  
ornament, skull 288
- benches  
carved stone 104, 255–260  
in images 69–70, 82, 83, 146, 296, 304  
*See also* grinding stones
- Birichiche 99
- Blackiston, A. Hooton 107, 170, 171–172, 208
- Blom, Frans 176
- Boas, Franz 160, 228
- Bonampak 273
- Bourdieu, Pierre 271
- Brotherston, Gordon 284–286, 296
- Browman, David L. 159–161
- bundle 58, 62, 64, 76–77, 87, 150, 181, 196, 203, 287, 290, 296–298, 300
- bundling of meaning 300–301
- burials 37, 80, 207, 209, 217, 242, 288, 304, 308  
at Cerro Palenque 196  
at Copan 82, 96, 129, 195, 209, 253–255  
at El Remolino 203, 209  
at Las Flores Bolsa 122, 184, 208  
at Los Naranjos 80, 201–203, 207  
at Playa de los Muertos 156  
at Puerto Escondido 39–40, 191  
at San Manuel 170  
at Santa Rita 211  
at Wild Cane Cay 209  
of children 96, 211, 254
- cacao 30, 71–72, 87–88, 197, 255, 256
- caches 100, 107, 168, 174–175, 186–200, 201–203, 208, 209, 218, 260
- Calvin, Inga 276
- Campo Dos 23, 24, 128, 162, 163, 178–181, 203, 214, 261, 287, 305
- candeleros 175, 214
- caves 37, 218, 283, 288–289, 293, 301  
at Tenampua 85  
La Majada 107, 155, 208  
Taulebe 279, 283
- censer, *see* incense burner
- ceramics  
as luxuries 208–210, 260, 274  
domestic 184–185  
marble effigies 65, 153, 184, 217–218  
molds 44, 57, 65, 153, 154, 158, 180, 184, 217, 287  
red-on-orange 20, 22, 39, 43, 153, 164, 248–249

- resist painted 22, 162–163, 164  
 forms 30–31, 42–44, 238, 239–242,  
 245–246, 249, 254, 287  
*See also* craft; ceramic styles; ceramic  
 types; Uluá Polychrome
- ceramic styles  
 Bold Animalistic 230–231, 268  
 Bold Geometric 230–231, 245,  
 267–268  
 Cancique 186, 190, 202, 247–249  
 Chama 49, 141  
 Codex 138, 141, 261  
 Holmul 141, 233  
 Ik' 141, 224  
 Mayoid 230–231, 245, 267–268  
 Naranjo Area Group 123, 138  
 Mixteca-Puebla 202, 207, 209,  
 260, 308  
 Plumbate 122, 202, 204, 207–209, 229,  
 260, 308  
 Quitamay 248–249  
 Sulaco 45, 158, 190, 214, 221–222, 238,  
 244–246, 292  
 Tacamiche 158, 179, 180, 184, 189
- ceramic types  
 Babilonia Polychrome 267  
 Bancahsa Black 164  
 Baracoa Fine Paste 154, 158, 179, 192,  
 213, 304  
 Bay Islands Polychrome 205, 208, 308  
 Bodega Brown Burnished 164  
 Bufalo Red on Natural 163  
 Cebadia Incised 203  
 Chasnigua Red on Orange 163, 190, 191  
 Chichicaste Polychrome 245–246  
 Chichipate Polychrome 268  
 Chilanga Red on Orange 163, 249  
 Chiri Polychrome 267  
 Conejo Bichrome 249–250  
 Copador Polychrome 128, 225, 238,  
 249–250  
 Dos Arroyos Polychrome 24, 162–163,  
 165, 261  
 Forastero Polychrome 119  
 Galo Polychrome 74, 256–259  
 Gualpopa Polychrome 249–251  
 Guamilito Unslipped 163  
 Guatales Polychrome 267
- Ixcancario Orange Polychrome 24, 162–163,  
 165, 260  
 Langues Polychrome 267  
 Las Flores Polychrome 158, 159, 186,  
 213, 246  
 Las Vegas Polychrome 86–87, 119, 122,  
 146–148, 154, 192, 201, 202, 203–209,  
 242, 247, 260, 288, 291, 294–295, 301,  
 304, 308  
 Lupo Incised 163  
 Marimba Red on Natural 159, 163,  
 179, 214  
 Muerdalo Orange 162  
 Nolasco Bichrome 119, 122, 196, 203–205,  
 209, 308  
 Papagayo Polychrome 209, 260  
 Pataky Polychrome 260  
 Petkanche Orange Polychrome 138  
 Posas Polychrome 119  
 Rosales Zoned Engraved 259  
 Sabana Unslipped 179  
 Salua Polychrome 239–241, 252  
 San Marcos Polychrome 245–246  
 Tepeaca Red 162  
 Vagando Polychrome 119
- Cerro Palenque 58, 78–80, 84, 125, 153,  
 155–156, 158, 287, 304  
 ballcourt 86  
 caches 174, 191–192, 196, 198  
 figural censer 77, 214  
 figurines 72  
 Chac Balam 261  
 Chamelecon River 38–40, 101–102, 162, 170,  
 178, 182, 203, 208, 209, 229, 233, 236,  
 249–252  
 Chasnigua (site) 171  
 Chibchan 226, 236  
 Chichen Itza 208–209  
 Childe, V. Gordon 94  
 Chol 252  
 Choluteca 105, 237, 267  
 Chorotega 178, 227, 231, 233
- chronology  
 generational 148, 152–154  
 radiocarbon 119–123, 163  
 related to Maya lowlands 273–274  
 seriation 157–159, 164–169, 207,  
 229–231

- civilization  
 as level of achievement 95–98, 105–106, 170–172, 219, 225–227, 229–234  
 as stage 94–95, 101–102, 160, 161, 168–169
- Coe, Michael 269, 271, 275
- collecting practices 9, 16–17, 92–93, 99, 102–114
- Comayagua  
 collectors 100–104, 112–113  
 Ulua Polychromes 51–75, 82–83, 85, 96, 128–129, 134–139, 145–148, 175, 203–205, 241–242, 291  
 valley 175, 177–179, 190, 195, 229, 234–238, 247, 252, 254–260, 267, 293–296, 303–304  
*See also* Las Vegas; Lo de Vaca; Yarumela; Tenampua
- communities of practice 27, 58, 119, 221, 239–244, 247–248, 256, 260–261, 271, 305–306  
 defined 242
- constellation of practice 46, 244–247, 249–252, 260–261, 306  
 defined 245
- Copan 92–97, 102, 105, 106, 128, 168–169, 173, 178, 195, 227, 229, 233, 237–238, 288  
 Acbi complex 125  
 and Tenampua 78, 84–85, 148, 176, 255, 260, 293, 307  
 and Travesia 225  
 caches at 174, 202  
 emblem glyph 49  
 Las Vegas Polychrome at 208, 209  
 pottery production 249–251  
 Quetzal Vase 138  
 Ulua Polychromes at 52, 55, 80–83, 129, 253–255, 265, 274
- copper 85, 107, 108, 155, 203, 208, 260, 308  
*See also* gold; metal
- cosmology 33–38, 45, 62–64, 251, 269, 278–293, 301–303
- Costa Rica 70, 74, 84, 85, 146, 204, 208, 218, 226, 229, 234, 255–260, 296, 304
- costume 48, 73, 132, 140–141, 150, 262–263, 278, 282, 285, 289, 294, 295, 299–300  
*See also* belt; headdress; hip cloth; loin-cloth; masks; turban
- cotton 85–87, 295
- craft 114, 248, 272, 305–307  
 production 24–25, 242–244, 271–272  
 workshops 41–46, 48, 73, 123–127, 138, 180–181, 243, 250, 269, 275
- crests 57–60, 277, 290, 295–297
- crocodilian 58, 279
- Cuello 260
- cultural heritage 9, 16, 112–116, 310
- culture 94, 96–97, 170, 177, 228  
 area 228, 231, 232–234, 236, 239, 246–247  
 as cultivation 97–98, 106, 118, 226  
 definition 3  
 culture history 168, 177, 183, 228–234  
 critique 3  
 goals 16  
 method 228–229
- Currusté 41, 43, 44, 58, 214, 248–249, 287, 296
- Cuscatlan 209
- dance 25, 29, 66, 82–84, 141, 216, 280–281, 287, 288–290, 307  
 flapstaff 84, 146, 174–175, 294–295, 303–304
- direct historic approach 183, 232
- distinction 67–69, 74, 87, 205–210, 211, 241, 244, 276–277, 296–297
- Edwards, J.B. 109–110, 185, 196
- El Coyote 208
- El Remolino 23–24, 87–88, 162–164, 180, 205, 211, 260
- El Salvador 227, 232–233, 238  
 ceramics from 122, 168, 209, 230, 249–251  
 Ulua Polychromes in 239–242, 252, 255, 264–266, 276, 280–281
- Espino valley 177
- ethnic groups 3, 177, 219, 231, 235, 239, 249, 252, 309
- ethnoaesthetics 44–45
- Farm 17, *see* Santa Rita
- Farm Two, *see* Campo Dos
- feasting 30–33, 44–45, 124, 151, 210, 213–214, 287, 303, 305
- feline 53–55, 129, 136–137, 140, 262–263, 285, 291–292, 299–302  
 bench 83  
 costume 140–141, 277–278, 282, 287, 289–290, 294

- crest 273, 277, 297  
 faunal remains 202, 299–300  
 incense burner 75  
 on Galo Polychrome 256–259  
 on marble vases 258, 261, 300  
 pelt 34, 45, 48, 262–263, 282, 286, 289,  
 299–300  
 transformation 73–74  
*See also* motifs
- figurines 57–58, 72–73, 99, 107, 134, 150, 158,  
 164, 180, 184, 298, 307
- flutes, ceramic 73  
 in images 277, 290, 294
- Gamio, Manuel 160
- geographic determinism 102, 106
- Givens, Douglas R. 159, 160, 161
- Goascorán 237
- God N 141, 145, 302
- gold 85, 91, 218, 256, 258, 260  
*See also* copper; metal
- Gordon, George Byron 144, 154, 165  
 concept of civilization 97–98, 106,  
 160, 168  
 excavations 92–97, 118–119, 148–151,  
 157–159, 172, 216–219
- Gracias 103, 173
- greenstone, *see* jade
- grinding stones 40, 45, 180, 184–186  
*See also* benches
- Gualjoquito 208
- Guanacaste 255
- Guanchia Farm 161
- Guaruma Dos Farm 162
- Guaruma Tres Farm 178
- Guatemala 93, 94, 96, 98, 102, 161,  
 260–261, 292  
 iconography 69–70, 134, 141, 241, 271–275  
 marble vases in 69, 144, 218, 261, 302  
 polychrome pottery 24, 162–164,  
 222–224, 264
- Gulf of Fonseca 100, 231, 237, 267
- habitus 271–272
- Hamy, E.-T. 105
- Harvard-Smithsonian Expedition 111, 177,  
 181–191, 196, 202, 210–214, 267
- headdress 34, 48–50, 58, 96, 132, 144, 145,  
 277–278, 282, 285, 287–290, 294–295
- Hendon, Julia 195
- Herzfeld, Michael 119
- hip cloth 25, 73, 105, 132, 282, 286, 288, 294
- hosting 27, 29, 33, 40, 45–47, 181, 216–218
- house compound 39–40, 80, 151, 178–181,  
 183–184, 185, 190, 191, 211–214  
 rituals in 174, 191–200, 201–203,  
 210–219, 241
- human figure  
 isolated 25–27, 62–65, 72–73, 96, 123,  
 129–130, 132, 204, 285–286  
 in series 33–36, 58, 130, 289  
 in scenes 67–70, 73, 82–83, 132–135,  
 145–146, 264, 290, 294–297
- iconicity 27, 63–64, 126, 262, 298–299
- iconography 18–19, 35–26, 273–274, 276–278,  
 279–284, 284–286, 287–291, 294–297  
 as method of analysis 270–272
- incense burners 202  
 figural 75, 77, 134, 181, 214, 287,  
 296–297, 301  
 ladle 76, 81–82, 145, 175, 181, 184, 186, 190,  
 195, 199, 202, 209, 213, 214, 276, 294  
 Mixteca Puebla 202, 207, 209, 260, 308  
 spiked 145, 175, 196
- indexicality 34, 64, 193–195, 199, 207, 215,  
 298–299
- informal empire 99–100
- Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e  
 Historia 113, 115, 116, 151, 266
- jade 116, 179, 258  
 in burials 203, 254  
 in caches 174, 186, 191, 195, 201, 218,  
 256, 260  
 Maya style 260  
 Salitron Viejo style 45, 85, 125, 139, 201
- jaguar 262–263, 284–285
- Jaral 178, 185, 231–232
- Jicaque, *see* Tol
- Kerr database 276–278, 287–289, 295–297
- Kidder, A.V. 108, 161, 210
- kilns 41–42  
 at Campo Dos 180  
 at Cerro Palenque 153  
 at Travesia 19, 42, 153  
 in the Naco Valley 42

- kilt, *see* hip cloth
- kinship 25–27, 57, 60, 80, 82, 87–88, 195, 217, 243, 247, 252–254, 306  
*See also* marriage
- Kroeber, Alfred 228
- Kubler, George 124, 248, 271
- La Ceiba (site) 73, 74–76, 185–189, 290
- La Esperanza 174
- Lagartijo, *see* Playa de los Muertos
- La Guacamaya 172
- Lake Yojoa 177–178, 182, 196, 230, 233–234, 236–239, 252, 278–280, 283–284  
caches 195–196, 201–203  
excavations 108–111, 184–191, 267, 290  
Ulua Polychromes 51–58, 62–64, 67–69, 72–76, 127–134, 145, 158, 241–242, 290–291  
*See also* Aguacate; Aguatal; Jaral; La Ceiba; Los Naranjos
- La Lima 116, 162, 170, 177, 178, 179
- La Majada 88
- Lancetilla 155, 173, 234
- language, and identity 226–227, 230–231, 233, 235–236, 252–253, 310
- Lara Pinto, Gloria 113
- Las Flores Bolsa 122, 183–184, 208, 246
- La Sierra 251
- Las Vegas 205, 256, 260, 294, 304
- Latour, Bruno 4–5
- Lehmann, Walter 280–281
- Le Plongeon, Augustus 103
- Lenca 57, 101, 177–178, 227–228, 281  
and Ulua Polychromes 252  
as Chibchan 226  
as non-Mesoamerican 233–234  
geographic location 231, 236–237, 253, 279, 310  
oral tradition 280
- Lenca-Matagalpa 168, 227, 236
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude 292
- Lo de Vaca 247, 267
- loincloth 64, 73, 105, 132, 285, 294, 295
- Looper, Matthew 141, 146, 174
- looting 16–19, 113, 115–116, 152–153, 254
- Lopiparo, Jeanne 180, 196, 217
- Los Naranjos 38, 56, 80, 85–86, 128, 185, 189–192, 201–203, 205–207, 233–234, 249, 268
- Lothrop, Samuel K. 172–173, 227–228, 232–234, 255–256, 259
- Luke, Christina 106, 108, 109, 110, 112, 113, 125, 218, 256, 258, 283
- maize 30, 31, 40, 197, 239
- Mantecales 41, 44, 71–72, 75, 214, 287
- maracas, *see* rattles
- marble vases 10, 125, 241  
at Campo Dos 179  
at Santana 218  
at Travesia 65, 151, 153, 218  
collecting 110, 114–116  
from Comayagua 85, 103–105  
green 78, 196  
iconography 55, 262–263, 283, 299–300  
in caves 288  
in Maya lowlands 69, 144, 218, 261, 302  
in Nicoya 256–258  
quarries 40, 45, 114
- Marco Gonzalez Cay 261
- marguay 262–263, 299–301
- marriage 45, 91, 254  
*See also* kinship
- masks  
ceramic 150  
turquoise mosaic 208, 308  
use in ritual 295, 306–307  
*See also* motifs
- Mason, Gregory 2, 162, 178, 305, 307
- Matsuda, David 115
- Maya 69, 148, 158, 177–178, 218, 228, 230–231, 235–237  
civilization 93–94, 96–99, 101, 225–226  
Early Classic 23–24  
frontier 231–235  
iconography 134–135, 137–141, 146, 241, 274–278, 281, 285, 291–297  
jade 260  
polychrome pottery 23–24, 123, 141–144, 163, 165–169, 227, 244, 260–261, 269–273
- Mayapan 87, 208
- metal 97, 122, 208, 218, 304  
*See also* copper; gold
- metates, *see* benches
- Mexico 69, 74, 84–86, 98, 122, 139, 160, 202, 207, 208–209, 260, 292, 304, 308
- Miskito 99, 231

- monkey 50–52, 63–64, 74, 125–128, 129, 132,  
     136, 145, 284–285, 290, 291, 292  
   as crest 59–60  
   at Lake Yojoa 186, 189, 190, 202  
   at Puerto Escondido 164  
   at Santana 158  
   at Travesia 153  
   in Nicaragua 259  
   on Cancique Polychrome 248  
   on Chamelecon Polychrome 251  
   on Las Vegas Polychrome 204  
   on marble vases 258  
 Montaña de Santa Barbara 37, 217  
 Morgan, Lewis Henry 94  
 Mosquitia 100, 237, 238  
 motifs  
   alligator, *see* feline  
   armadillo 52, 55, 58, 129, 204, 286, 290  
   ballcourt 293  
   bark paper 76  
   bat 49, 50, 52, 125, 129, 290–292  
   benches 69–70, 82, 83, 146, 296, 304  
   bird 49–50, 58, 76, 125, 186, 189, 204, 205,  
     226, 247–248, 251, 258–259, 277–278,  
     296–297  
   buildings 138, 276–277, 290  
   bundles 58, 62, 64, 76–77, 181, 196, 290,  
     296–298  
   butterfly 139  
   caves 37, 220, 279, 283, 288, 293, 301  
   crabs 52, 55, 96, 127, 136–137, 251, 290  
   deer 50, 52, 55, 214, 291  
   dog 150, 291  
   fans 65, 82, 285, 294  
   feathered serpent, *see* serpent-bird  
   fish 48, 52, 162, 263  
   flapstaff 84, 146, 174, 294–295, 303–304  
   flowers 72, 141, 144, 293  
   flutes 73, 277, 290, 294  
   frog 52, 189, 204  
   Glyph H 70–71, 302  
   heron 52  
   iguana 50, 52, 55, 129, 286, 287, 290  
   incense bag 66, 75–76, 137–138, 276–277,  
     285, 290  
   incense burners 74–76, 175, 276–277, 294  
   insect 47, 49–50, 125  
   kan cross 206, 208  
   masks 33–34, 245, 279, 302  
   mask, feline 203, 278  
   mask, mountain 139, 140, 282–283  
   mask, serpent-bird 25, 49, 86, 105, 282,  
     288–289  
   mask, War Serpent 146  
   mats 34, 36, 58, 74, 144, 245, 256, 258, 261,  
     277, 285, 293  
   Moan Bird 275  
   nightjar 53, 56, 136–137, 174, 175, 226, 291  
   parrot 48  
   peccary 52, 55, 56, 96, 127, 136–137,  
     290–291  
   procession 67, 70, 262, 281, 283, 289, 290  
   quincunx 146, 204  
   rattle 66, 73, 277, 287, 294  
   reptile 55, 129, 245, 248  
   roof 58, 138, 276–277  
   serpent 69, 140–141, 144, 181, 261, 262,  
     264, 273, 277–278, 297, 303  
   serpent-bird 49, 86–88, 204, 262–263,  
     270, 308  
   shell 140–141  
   staff 25, 33–34, 45, 64–65, 146, 174, 281,  
     294–297, 303, 307  
   step fret 126–127, 204, 293, 301–302  
   tapir 204, 205, 291  
   terraces 36, 50, 85, 96, 126, 128, 145, 175,  
     245, 279, 283, 293, 301–302  
   torch 75, 290  
   turkey 285, 291  
   turtle 52, 189  
   water bird 52, 55–57, 59–60, 63, 127, 129,  
     132, 137, 145, 254, 263, 275, 285, 290  
   weapons 82–83, 85, 146, 295, 308  
   *See also* feline; monkey  
 Motul de San Jose 141, 224, 261  
 Moyogalpa 255  
 museums 8–10  
   American Museum of Natural  
     History 160  
   Berlin Ethnologisches Museum 93, 106,  
     149, 222  
   British Museum 99–100, 103, 107, 111  
   Brooklyn Museum 106, 110, 111  
   Danish National Museum 111, 176, 179,  
     180, 184, 278, 283  
   Davis Museum and Cultural Center  
     (Wellesley College) 259  
   Denver Art Museum 259

- museums (cont.)  
   Heye Foundation (Museum of the American Indian) 103, 106–107, 111–112, 155, 162, 170, 178, 229  
   Houston Museum of Art 262  
   Lowe Museum (University of Miami) 275  
   Manchester Museum 108, 111, 278–286, 287, 291  
   Michael C. Carlos Museum (Emory University) 259  
   Middle American Research Institute (Tulane University) 108, 111, 176–181, 184, 273  
   Museo de Comayagua 10, 113  
   Museo Nacional (Honduras) 110, 113  
   Museo de San Pedro Sula 10, 113, 116, 141  
   Museo Virtual (Banco Atlantida) 112–113  
   National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian Institution) 171, 178–179, 253, 294, 295  
   National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution) 186  
   Peabody Museum (Harvard University) 92–94, 103, 106–109, 111, 118, 149, 155–156, 160, 165, 172–173, 176–177, 184, 186, 210, 211, 223–224, 233, 235, 280  
   Pitt Rivers Museum 111  
   Royal Ontario Museum 106, 110, 111  
   Smithsonian Institution 106, 107, 110, 111, 160, 176–177, 186, 228  
   University Museum (University of Pennsylvania) 98, 106, 108, 109, 264, 272, 280  
 music 67, 73–74, 76, 217, 281, 287, 290, 294, 303, 306  
 musical instruments 50–51, 73, 151, 158, 170, 184, 241, 277, 290, 294, 298  
  
 Nacaome 237  
 Nacascolo 256  
 Naco 171, 183, 204, 209, 230, 304  
   bell cave 107, 108  
   valley 39, 42, 67, 177–179, 182, 249–251  
 Nahua, *see* Pipil  
 Nahuatl 177, 230, 286  
 Nakbe 138, 141  
 Nandaime 259  
 Naranjo Chino 183  
  
 narrative 6–9  
 Nicaragua 70, 146, 229, 234, 238, 252, 255–256, 259, 296, 304  
 Nicoya 208, 255–256, 258–260, 306  
  
 objects  
   agency 4, 5  
   biography 7–8, 94  
   itinerary 8, 81–82, 94, 253, 308  
 obsidian 40, 281, 295  
   at Las Flores Bolsa 184  
   at Los Naranjos 202  
   at Campo Dos 179  
   at Travesia 149, 154  
   green obsidian 125, 207, 260  
   Ixtepeque source 122  
   Pachuca source 125  
 Olancho 101, 229, 232, 236–238, 245  
 Olien, Michael 101  
 Ometepe 255  
 oyster, thorny, *see* Spondylus  
  
 Panama 218  
 Panofsky, Erwin 270–272, 298  
 patrons, role of 17, 69–71, 153, 218, 241, 253, 261, 303, 306–307  
 Pech (Paya) 88, 101, 231, 236, 237  
 Peirce, Charles Sanders 298–299  
 Peña Blanca 128  
 Peor es Nada 256, 258  
 Peten 50, 98, 138, 141, 144–145, 224–225, 233, 261, 273, 276, 302–303, 306–307  
 Pipil 168, 227–228, 236, 281  
 plaster, *see* stucco  
 Playa de los Muertos 93, 118, 156–161, 164, 165, 171, 184  
   Maya polychrome at 23–24, 162–163, 261  
 polygenesis 101–102  
 Pope, Kevin O. 149, 153  
 Popenoe, Dorothy 108, 155–157, 164, 165, 210, 225, 235  
   excavation at Tenampua 173–176, 178, 226, 231, 255  
   stratigraphic methods 159–162  
 Popenoe, Wilson 108, 109–111, 155, 161, 165, 177  
 Portrerillos 234  
 potters 15–16, 19–20, 24–25, 61–63, 69–72, 134–135, 145, 184, 221–225, 284, 303–305

- as communities of practice 239–241,  
248–250, 256–261
- innovations by 85–87, 122–124, 129,  
153–154, 163–164, 180–181, 190,  
203–205, 274
- See also* ceramics
- power 17, 70, 74, 83, 144, 250, 261, 276,  
291–293, 304, 307–308
- Price, David 172
- Primary Standard Sequence 70–71, 144
- Progreso 171
- pseudoglyphs, *see* writing
- Puerto Cortes (Puerto Caballos) 87, 107,  
109, 234
- Puerto Escondido 23–25, 39, 123, 163–164,  
191, 214, 260–261, 300
- Putnam, Frederick Ward 92, 93
- Quebrada Encantada 172
- Quelepa 255
- race 94, 106, 157, 226
- Rancheria 157, 161, 171, 210
- rattles 50–51, 241
- See also* motifs
- Reents-Budet, Dorie 138, 144
- regalia 33–34, 150, 298, 302–303, 306
- feline skin 53–55, 262–263, 299–300
- See also* costume
- rhyolite 40, 149
- Rio Blanco
- phase 202
- river 29
- ritual 25–27, 45, 65, 181, 254, 275
- ancestral 58, 78, 195
- birth 69
- burning incense 67, 71–88, 174–175, 193,  
195–196, 214
- dances 174–175
- drinking 72, 195
- in house compounds 78–80, 149–151,  
191–201, 202–203, 210–219, 241
- masking 295, 306–307
- mortuary 25, 40, 77, 80, 82, 86, 195,  
201–203, 254
- on polychrome vessels 34, 72, 105, 269,  
276–278, 281, 288–290, 293–297
- seasonal 152, 218–219
- Tol 292
- See also* burials
- Robinson, Eugenia 141, 273–274
- Salitron Viejo 125, 139, 201, 245
- San Jesús de Otoro valley 39, 237
- San Jose, Belize 69, 218, 261
- San Manuel Tehuma 116, 170
- San Pedro Sula 92, 93, 115, 116, 309, 310
- collectors in 107–109, 112–113, 172, 234
- Santa Rita 29–33, 38, 40, 43, 44–45, 47, 123,  
124, 161, 230, 244–246
- excavations at 210–214
- Santana 43, 98, 118, 144, 164, 170, 228, 249
- excavations at 157–159, 216–219
- marble vases at 256–258
- Maya pottery at 224–225, 244
- Santiago 171
- Sapote Farm 161–162, 164
- Sapper, Karl 95–96, 106, 149, 221
- savagery 94, 101–102, 160
- Saville, Marshall 112, 170–171, 229
- Schaffer, Anne-Louise 262
- Scholes, Norman 108, 284
- sculpture, stone 56, 98–99, 104, 173, 178,  
225, 234
- at Los Naranjos 233
- at Quebrada Encantada 172
- at Tenampua 255
- at Travesia 149
- at Yaxchilan 146, 303
- seats, *see* benches
- semiotics 27, 262–263, 298–301
- See also* iconicity, indexicality
- settlement
- pattern 37–41, 119, 173–175, 178, 233–234,  
245, 250, 260
- survey 171–173, 177–178, 228–229, 231,  
233–234
- shell 150, 154, 179, 195, 197, 202, 254
- See also* Spondylus
- Siboney (Calabazas) 43
- Siguatepeque 111, 128, 178, 231–232, 237, 239
- social archaeology 3–11
- Spencer, Herbert 94
- Spondylus* 78, 84, 87, 174–175, 196, 203, 209
- Squier, Ephraim G. 100–102, 105, 173, 177,  
226–227, 280
- stamps, ceramic 99, 150, 158, 180, 184
- Steward, Julian 183, 232

- Stone, Doris Z. 149, 151, 176, 195, 204, 224,  
235–237, 266, 294
- stratigraphic method 159–161, 182–183, 185,  
210–214  
of G.B. Gordon 118, 119, 154, 157–159, 165  
of Dorothy Popenoe 157, 159–162, 165
- Strong, William Duncan 183, 225, 228–231
- stucco 19, 40, 56, 149, 153–155, 178, 260
- subjectivity 5–6
- subsistence digging 115
- Sulaco valley 39, 44–45, 67, 139, 177, 179, 201,  
221–222, 237, 245–246
- talud-tablero 125
- technological style 221–222
- Tegucigalpa 10, 107, 111, 112, 113, 173, 174, 177
- Tela 155
- temporality 19–22
- Tenampua 82, 102, 145–146, 162, 178, 181,  
195, 215, 226, 227–228, 255–260,  
293–294  
excavations at 101, 112, 155–156, 173–176
- Teotihuacan 125, 139
- text, *see* writing
- Ticamaya  
lake 108  
site 87–88, 122, 192, 196, 199, 203
- Tikal 102, 261
- time  
social 119–120, 122–124, 148  
monumental 122, 148
- Tol 56, 101, 177, 231, 233, 236, 237,  
291–292, 310
- Toquegua 233, 252–253
- Tozzer, A.M. 109, 110, 155–157, 160, 165,  
176, 235
- Travesia 93, 106, 148–154, 171, 172,  
216–219, 304  
architecture 40, 56, 99, 149, 178, 181  
ballcourt at 25, 65, 149, 217–218  
caches at 174, 191, 202  
ceramics, imported 44, 163, 246,  
249–251, 292  
ceramics, local 51, 61, 98–99, 125, 127, 128,  
149, 203, 214  
excavations at 115–116, 118, 148–154,  
158–159, 172  
pottery production at 15, 19–20, 24–28,  
42, 65–66, 153, 305  
marble vase production at 114, 217–218,  
241  
relationship with Copan 224–225  
relationship with Nicoya 256–260  
relationship with Maya Lowlands 123,  
163, 222–225, 244, 260–261  
site orientation 25, 37, 149, 217–219  
tribe 96, 102, 157, 159, 168, 170, 178, 227,  
233, 236  
critique of concept 252
- Tula (Hidalgo) 208–209, 260
- turban 64, 72–73, 105, 132, 285, 286, 290, 294  
netted 141
- turkey 122, 184, 208, 285
- turquoise 208, 308
- Uaxactun 69, 144, 218, 261
- Ulua marble vase, *see* marble
- Ulua Polychrome  
Arrodillarse subclass 123–126, 130, 158,  
189, 259, 279, 282, 284, 286, 289  
Bandeja subclass 123–124, 157–158  
Batracien subclass 127, 129  
Bilbao subclass 135, 140  
Bombero subclass 125, 129, 132, 158,  
258–259, 291, 296  
Capitan subclass 135, 145–146, 203, 276,  
295–297  
Cefiro subclass 135, 145–146, 174, 294, 296  
Chac subclass 123, 157, 282, 289  
Columpio subclass 145  
Concerto subclass 129, 186  
Congo subclass 145  
Corral subclass 127, 129  
Cyrano subclass 123–126, 130, 190, 259,  
267, 282, 284, 289  
Dedalos class 123–125, 134, 152, 153,  
157–158, 239, 282, 288–289  
Diamante subclass 128–129  
Euclid subclass 126–127  
in burials 80, 82, 96, 202, 207, 209, 242,  
253–255  
Labyrinth subclass 288  
Manzanillo class 186, 189, 201  
Mariposa subclass 145–147  
Mellizo subclass 123–124, 130–132, 157,  
267, 280, 282, 289  
Molinerio subclass 129–130, 132–134, 135,  
145, 192, 287, 289–290, 296–297

- Nebula class 134–140, 145–146, 186,  
 189–190, 201, 241–242, 256–259, 267,  
 285–293, 300–302  
 Pagano subclass 186  
 Paloma subclass 123–126, 129–130, 254,  
 258–259, 284  
 Pantano subclass 127, 136  
 Pato subclass 127, 129  
 Pentagone subclass 145, 174, 255  
 Picadilly subclass 135, 137–138, 145–146,  
 186, 189, 276–277, 285, 287, 296–297  
 Rastrillo subclass 125–126, 259  
 Rodeo subclass 136–140, 189, 190  
 Salmo subclass 135, 140  
 Salua Polychrome as 239, 241, 254  
 Santa Rita class 123–130, 134, 214,  
 239–241, 259, 262, 279–290, 299–302  
 Santana class 135, 139–141, 144, 145, 157,  
 159, 196, 213, 241, 262–264, 273, 289–290,  
 296, 300, 302–303  
 Selva class 125, 129–132, 186, 241, 285,  
 289–290, 293  
 Serpent Complex subclass 129  
 Singe Accroupi subclass 127–129, 189  
 Sphinx subclass 136, 285–286  
 Tenampua class 135, 144–148, 174–175,  
 178, 241–242, 247, 253, 256, 291,  
 293–296, 303  
 Tigrillo subclass 137, 201, 251, 256,  
 262, 301  
 Tiotivo subclass 127, 158, 189, 285  
 Travesia class 125–127, 129, 213, 241,  
 290–291, 302  
 Troubador subclass 129, 132  
 Winged Figure subclass 289  
 Yojoa class 125, 127–135, 144–145, 158, 186,  
 189, 241, 275, 284–288, 289–291  
 Zarza subclass 145, 175, 196  
 Ulua (region) 38–46, 101–102, 227, 229–237,  
 292, 309–310  
 archaeological research in 92–99,  
 107–109, 148–164, 170–172, 179–184,  
 209–214  
 cacao in 30  
 caches 191–192  
 figurines 56–58  
 looting in 115–117  
 marble carving in 114, 219–220, 241,  
 256–258  
 pottery 42–44, 50–52, 64, 67–69, 124–127,  
 139–145, 148, 190, 209, 217, 221–225, 265,  
 290–291, 296  
 relations with Maya Lowlands 23–24,  
 222–225, 258–261, 303  
 settlement pattern 19, 37, 39–42, 56,  
 79–80, 217–218, 243  
 social relations 17–18, 97–98, 239–251,  
 252–253, 264, 280, 304–305  
 sculpture, ceramic 75, 77, 134, 181, 214,  
 287, 296–297, 301  
 sculpture, stone 149, 172  
*See also* Campo Dos; Cerro Palenque;  
 Curruté; El Remolino; Las Flores Bol-  
 sa; Mantecales; Playa de los Muertos;  
 Puerto Escondido; Quebrada Encan-  
 tada; Rancheria; Santa Rita; Santana;  
 Ticamaya; Travesia  
 United Fruit Company 23, 155, 161, 162, 170,  
 176, 177, 178, 210  
 Vaillant, George C. 156, 161, 165–168, 225,  
 227–228, 230  
 Viel, Rene 96, 119, 122, 128, 129, 136, 239, 255,  
 268, 273, 302  
 visiting 27, 38, 45–46, 70, 87, 145, 151, 181, 217,  
 218, 243–246, 254–255, 256, 261, 296,  
 305–306  
 von den Steinen, Karl 151  
 whistles, ceramic 73, 150, 151, 158, 170, 184  
 Wild Cane Cay 209  
 Willey, Gordon 162, 229  
 Wittkugel, Erich 93, 106, 148–149, 219, 221  
 collection by 123, 125, 151, 222–223  
 women 69, 72, 75, 132, 279, 280, 296, 307  
 Wonderley, Anthony 122  
 writing 23, 36, 49, 69–71, 105, 144, 226, 234,  
 254, 275, 293, 298, 302  
 Wylie, Alison 7  
 Yarumela 104, 195, 234  
 Yaxchilan 69, 141, 146, 174, 303  
 Yde, Jens 111, 176–181, 185, 196, 201, 231–232,  
 270, 278  
 Yoro 38, 39, 236, 238  
 Yucatan 98, 101, 102, 105, 122, 253  
 Zemurray, Samuel 176