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Intercultural Influences in Early Peruvian Ceramic Design and Decoration

Clinton Pace

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INTERCULTURAL INFLUENCES
IN
EARLY PERUVIAN CERAMIC DESIGN AND DECORATION

A Thesis
Presented to
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by
Clinton R. Pace
August 3, 1973
INTERCULTURAL INFLUENCES
IN
EARLY PERUVIAN CERAMIC DESIGN AND DECORATION

Director of Thesis

Approved

Date

Dean of the College

Approved

Date
PREFACE

About eleven thousand years ago the earliest known human inhabitants of the Central Andean area began a lifestyle which developed into some of the richest cultures of the ancient American civilizations. The people living in this thirteen-hundred-mile arid mountain zone, which is now the nation of Peru, produced some of the most outstanding examples of ceramics in the world before the birth of Christ.

The purpose of this study was to examine representative examples from the various early Peruvian cultures in an attempt to identify their characteristics and to determine the extent to which the pottery forms of certain early cultures influenced the ceramics of other cultures.

The investigation examined and compared the figurative motifs, surface designs and contour spout shapes of early Peruvian ceramics.

It was hypothesized that some or all of the above characteristics evolved from one early Peruvian culture to another.

The research report is divided into the Introduction and four chapters. The Introduction to the paper points out the pertinence of the subject and provides a brief background of the cultures studied. Following the Introduction are three chapters which cover the Chavin, the Cupisnique and the
Paracas cultures. Each chapter reports information concerning the specific characteristics of the ceramic works and evidence of intercultural influence. The final chapter presents the general summary and the writer's major conclusions.

The appendix includes a glossary of terms used in this study, as well as maps and charts which clarify geographical location and cultural growth.

In pursuing the research problem several primary and secondary sources of data were employed. The author's own collection (which helped to inspire the investigation in the first place) provided the principal primary source, whereas the books listed in the Bibliography were the main secondary source materials.

In addition to the preceding materials, the author realized the advantage of various sources of information not commonly found elsewhere. Collectors, art dealers, and museum curators in the localities of Florida, North Carolina, Peru, Texas and Washington, D.C. enthusiastically contributed information and photographic subjects. With regard to such aid, the author wishes to express gratitude to the following people:

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INTRODUCTION

Among the characteristics which distinguish human beings from other creatures, two traits stand out prominently. The human being is a problem solver and he is creative. The solutions to his problems in the case of early cultures are generally evident in the remains which he has left in some form of earthly preservation. Clay products, because of their enduring physical properties, survive the erosion of time permitting them to be unearthed later and scrutinized through a system of intellectual analysis. Through the science of archeology we have known for some time that most Pre-Columbian cultures have been active in the art and craft of ceramics. Because of recent excavations in our present decade (1960-1970), new tombs and burial grounds are being investigated. The new findings are stimulating a resurgence of interest focusing on the areas in and around Peru. These artifacts recall attention to the early inhabitants of the Central Andean chain. Beginning approximately 900 B.C. three early Peruvian cultures flourished, producing some of the most superior ceramics of that period. The first of these cultures was the Chavin, located in central Peru. Following the Chavin was the Cupisnique culture, situated in the northern section of Peru. The third early culture, Paracas,
can be found on the south coast of Peru (see Appendix, Figs. 1 and 2).
CHAPTER I

THE CHAVIN CULTURE

Chavin, named after the temple Chavin de Huantar in central Peru, was the first of the great styles of ancient art which occurred approximately 900 B.C. According to Edward P. Lanning, this particular culture had widespread influence on other cultures.¹

Figurative Design and Surface Decoration

The Chavinoid motifs make use of intricately-interwoven mouths, eyes, serpentine and geometric figures in various relationships to human-animal or deity figures.² (Plate II). Lanning described a complex Chavin design as possessing dozens of partial or complete secondary faces at key points on the body of the main figure, together with serpents, eyes, extra-long mouths, double faces, and other parts (Plate I). Almost all of the mouths, even those of birds and men, are shown as fanged jaguar mouths. Eyes are typically eccentric with the pupil located at the top of the eye opening rather than in the center as in Plate II. Appearing most often in


²Ibid., p. 96.
the Chavin designs are such ferocious animals as hawks, eagles and the jaguar. Human figures are also shown. Occasionally lesser ceramic art works portray the same central figure, whether human or animal, but they usually feature a facial part instead.

Bushnell found that all of the animal designs have distinct feline features in some form—those being chiefly fangs and claws. These features, frequently employed, express the power of the jaguar god (Plate II). The full feline figure is represented in profile; however, the head may be presented in front, top, or profile view, the latter position having the widest distribution. In observing the profile head, Bennett noted a wide, U-shaped mouth curving outward at the corners. There are also two crossed fangs and squared teeth. Bennett described the nose as being circular with a scroll design. The eye is banded and oval in shape with a cut-out circle at the top. The appendages and details are so distinctively Chavin that even the claws, tail, and other parts are easily recognized, since the design is a carved curvilinear technique as illustrated by Plate II.

Chavin ware is monochrome, red, brown, or black in color. Decoration methods are various, including incisions,

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3 Ibid., p. 98.
5 Bennett, Andean Culture History, p. 188.
6 Ibid., p. 79.
fingernail impressions, repeated punctuations produced by rocker stamping, linear brushings, or applied clay strips.  

Most of the designs are geometric, according to Bushnell. Nature forms may often be a part of the designs, but they are not easily recognizable. Dot-and-circle designs made by emphasizing shading, cross-hatching or rocker stamping, were also used.  

Contour Spout Shapes

One of the rarest and most elaborate pieces of ceramics is the stirrup-spout bottle, one of the most popular vessel forms, as shown in Plates III and IV. This style was probably derived from the Machabilla style of southern Ecuador. It was the only prominent spout shape which emerged during the Chavin period that greatly influenced the ceramic contour spout shapes of later Peruvian cultures (Fig. 12).  

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8Lanning, Peru Before the Incas, p. 96.
9Bushnell, Peru, p. 48.
Plate I
Chavin black graphite standing monkey

Plate II
Chavin jaguar god

Chavin staff god with feline characteristics, Jaguar
Plate III
Chevin black graphite stirrup jar

Plate IV
Chevin stirrup-spout jars
CHAPTER II

THE CUPISNIQUE CULTURE

Related in resemblance to early Chavin ceramics is the Cupisnique culture in northern Peru (Fig. 5). It was discovered in 1939, much later than the other cultures, according to John Mason.\(^{10}\) The Cupisnique ware was well-made and polished, although it was somewhat thick-walled and heavy.

**Figurative Design and Surface Decoration**

Cupisnique ceramic decoration consists of bold, curvilinear human, feline, and bird-of-prey heads, eye patterns, pelt markings, and other brief symbols of the central motifs featured in the Chavin culture, together with simple geometric devices. All are executed in broad incised lines and are often set off by textured treatment of the background, as illustrated in a Cupisnique vase of an old woman's face (Plate IX).\(^{11}\)

Sawyer found that three distinct types of ceramic ornamentation began to emerge during the Middle Cupisnique period.

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These were to become the basic modes of a later style. The first type refined the incised lines and textural effects as a means of surface decoration (Plate V). The second type, evidently suggested by the repousse' effect of broad-line incising, became relief, and the third type, an outgrowth of relief, developed toward fully modeled three-dimensional forms. The subject matter in this Middle Period remained strongly Chavinoid.\textsuperscript{12}

The late Cupisnique ceramics manifest the strong influence exerted on the culture by other intrusive groups such as the Salinar which Sawyer later discussed. Pottery became much more varied in surface decoration and included a wide range of non-Chavinoid elements as shown in Plate VIII.\textsuperscript{13}

**Contour Spout Shapes**

The forms of decorative Cupisnique ceramics are few, consisting mostly of simple bowls and two distinctive bottle shapes. Sawyer described the first as being a flasklike vessel which closely resembled the form of the bottle gourd (Plate VI). Plate V illustrates the second vessel, the most common of the spout shapes—the stirrup-spout jar. Mason described this form as being characteristic of Peru and as one which retained its vogue in the northern coastal region throughout Peruvian history. The stirrup-spout is characterized by two curving tubes which rose from the quasi-spherical

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 18.
body of the vessel and coalesced into one vertical tubular
spout which served as a handle (Plate X). Cupisnique
stirrup-spouts are distinguished from those of later peri-
ods by their massive character.  

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14 Mason, The Ancient Civilizations of Peru, p. 56.
15 Bushnell, Peru, p. 50.
Plate V
Stirrup-spout jar with feline motifs, Cupianque culture

Plate VI
Cupianque jar with feline motifs
Plate VII
Cupisnique stirrup-spout

Plate VIII
Late Cupisnique stirrup-spout

Plate IX
Cupisnique vase of old woman

Plate X
Cupisnique stirrup-spout
CHAPTER III

THE PARACAS CULTURE

The Paracas culture began on the southern edge of the Pisco Valley. The source of this influence, suggests Sawyer, is still a matter of speculation. Regardless of the source, the south coastal valleys appear to have possessed a relatively Early Ceramic culture that was particularly receptive to Chavin influence. 16

Figurative Design and Surface Decoration

Certain common motifs of the Chavin proved to be among the most persistent of design elements in Paracas ceramics. (Plate XI, XII, XV, XX, XXI, XXIV, XXVII). One was the use of a band of figure eights with reed stamped sections of two different diameters. Painted human faces with the characteristic Chavinoid treatment of the eyes is another common motif, related Sawyer. 17 Plate XIV illustrates the Chavinoid feline motif. The body of the vessel, with its frontal feline mask, has conventionalized eyes and mouth with overlapping fangs. An earlier version of the fox motif, often miscalled the feline, appears on a lenticular bowl with

16 Sawyer, Ancient Peruvian Ceramics, p. 73.
17 Bushnell, Peru, p. 48.
incised and resin-painted designs over the entire top surface. Two panels contain abstract profile heads with a foreleg extended under and in front of the jaw. However, Sawyer observed that later renderings of this motif can readily be identified as a fox because of its elongated mouth as shown in Plates XIV and XIX. This distinction becomes clearer as the motifs are further traced through subsequent Paracas periods. The head of the fox usually has alternate diamond patterns enclosing an eye pattern. This is one of the most characteristic Chavin symbols that occurs frequently in the Early Paracas period. The feline figures are primarily the same; however, the difference was caused by the firing, application or non-application of design, decoration, or brightness of color. 18

Another noteworthy motif, reported Sawyer, is the double-headed serpent. It has a feline nose and pelt markings which are definitely Chavinoid. (Plate XX, XXV). 19

Early Paracas motifs are also found in the Middle Paracas culture, according to Sawyer. The dominant motifs of the Middle Paracas ceramics are elaborate human, monkey and feline deities with serpentine appendages, and carrying trophy heads and triangular knives, as illustrated in Plates XI, XIII, XIV, XXI, and XXII. In ceramics the precise geometrical drawing of the Early Paracas style gave way to a bolder more dynamic manner. Middle Paracas Ceramics are decorated with the same

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18 Sawyer, Ancient Peruvian Ceramics, pp. 76-77.
19 Ibid., p. 78.
type of incisions and resin-based paints used during the Formative and Early Paracas Periods. 20

A trophy-head deity motif which Sawyer said occurred in all Paracas periods (but not in Chavin) is the Vencejos, a whippoorwill-like bird, as shown in Plate XXII. Another bird design, the male condor seen in Paracas pottery (Plate XVIII), bears no resemblance to the Chavin bird motif. Plate XXVII shows a trophy-head deity in the form of a keg-shaped jar with painted, incised abstract faces. Besides having a tongue, protruding from a grinning mouth, the faces also have whiskers. The eyes are round and concave. They are framed by horseshoe-shaped bands and an outer border with projecting triangular serpentine heads. 21

Vessels are generally decorated with patches of vivid colors and outlined by incised lines. Sawyer related that as many as five colors may appear on one vessel, the most common being red and yellow. Other less common colors were pink, orange, dark blue, dark green, gray, black, white and brown.

In Late Paracas, the techniques of pottery decoration continued to develop. Sawyer reported that negative painting continued but was never found on the same vessel as incised and painted decoration. Resinous colors replaced pigments while incisions continued to outline the painted design. Simplified trophy-head-cult deities were still popular,

20 Ibid., pp. 83-84.
21 Ibid., pp. 85-87.
thus, the Chavin tradition of representing animals, birds, people, and gods was continued. However, the particular figures shown on late Paracas art owe very little to the influence of the Chavin culture.22

Contour Spout Shapes

Like Chavin, Paracas ceramics also utilized the double-spout bottle. Plate XIV illustrates this vessel with one spout capped with a bird head, painted red. Below the beak is a vented whistle. Another Chavinoid spout shape is an unusual small double-spout bottle pictured in Plate XVIII. Not all Paracas bottles have double spouts. Plate XXV gives special attention to a pitcherlike jar with a broad strap handle. However, double-spout bottles were more common, according to Sawyer. Some vessel spouts are ornamented with trophy-head deities as seen in Plates XIII, XIV, and XXVI. Middle Paracas spout shapes shifted abruptly. Illustrations of these shapes can be seen in Plate XXII, a ceramic drum, and in Plate XXVII, a keg-shaped vessel.23 Another Middle Paracas vessel which is similar to the Early Paracas feline motif bears a different spout (Plate XXIV). The early Paracas spout shapes adhered closely to those of Chavin, but new trends in contour spout shapes emerged during the Middle and Late Paracas periods. The blind spout, in the form of a human head, was produced in the Late Paracas period (Plate XXVI). Thus the whistle

22 Ibid., pp. 91-95.
23 Ibid., pp. 73-88.
spout of Chavin gradually disappeared by the end of the Late Paracas period and the blind spout vessel emerged. The declining Chavin influence can best be illustrated by the various examples in Plate XI. Examples B, F and I suggest strong Chavinoid influence; examples A, C and D show less pronounced Chavinoid influence; while the last examples, E, G and H, are typical Paracas types.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., pp. 91-95.
Plate XI

Vessels showing a gradual decline in Chavinoid Influence

Plate XII

Callango treatment of human head has Chavinoid features. Early Paracas Culture
Plate XIII
Paracas vessel, 200 B.C.
with hawk's head.

Plate XIV
Early Paracas bird head
whistle spout vessel with
feline mask, Chavínid
influence.

Fox Motif
Plate IV
Early Paracas vessels from simple to complex, with Chavinoid Characteristics

Plate XII
Early Paracas shapes and designs
Plate XVII
Early Paracas bottle with retejo panel on each side.

Plate XVIII
Early Paracas male condor, not influenced by Chavin.

Plate XIX
Example a. is of an Early Paracas vessel with fox motif.
Example b. is of a Late Paracas vessel, also with a fox motif.
Plate XX
Paracas vessel of snakes
with feline characteristics.
Chavinoid influence

Enlarged design of Plate XX

Plate XIII
Paracas feline motif
Plate XXII
Middle Paracas trophy-head colt figures (note enlarged design above).

Plate XXIII
Rare Paracas figurre with incised lines.

Vencejos (whippet/willie bird) from Plate XXII
Plate XXIV
Feline vessel from
Middle Paracas culture

Plate XXV
Double-headed serpent motif
Paracas Culture
Plate XXVI
Blind spouts in the form of a human head, Late Paracas

Plate XXVII
Dutty Vessel from Middle Paracas

Enlarged design of Plate XXVII
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The task of looking back two millennia to examine and compare representative examples of the various early Peruvian cultures in an attempt to identify the characteristics of the early pottery forms and their influence on the ceramics of other cultures is beset with problems. These problems are compounded by the fact that much of the archeological work in Peru is not complete and that the Andean people left no written language. Therefore, what is known of their activities has been gained from their art, especially their pottery.

The widespread influence of the Chavin culture and the advanced technology associated with it acted as a catalyst for the development of several distinctive regional cultures (see Appendix, Fig. 5). The most distinctive features representative of the Chavin style in figurative design and surface decoration made use of intricately-woven mouths, eyes, serpentine and geometric figures in various relationships to human-animals or deities (see Appendix, Definition of Terms). Further investigation of design revealed ferocious animals, such as hawks, eagles and jaguars. All of the animal designs noted had distinct feline features such as fangs and claws. The geometric designs were made by emphasized
shading, cross-hatching, rocker stamping and incised lines. Decoration consisted of bold curvilinear human and feline images, birds-of-prey heads, eye patterns and pelt markings often mixed with geometric designs.

These Chavinoid features, when compared to those of the Cupisnique period, appear to be an extension or an outgrowth of the Chavin culture. Not only are the uses of stamped incised line and bold curvilinear designs prevalent, but all of the aforementioned Chavin characteristics are inherent to various degrees in the Cupisnique period.

Just as certain Chavinoid figurative motifs and surface designs were observed in the Cupisnique culture, the Paracas period also showed a tendency to adopt such particular motifs and designs. Thus, the Chavin tradition of representing animals, birds, people and gods, were continued in the Cupisnique and Paracas cultures as well as the use of geometric, stamped, incised line and curvilinear designs.

Not only did some of the figurative motifs and surface designs evolve from the Chavin culture to those of Cupisnique and Paracas, but a comparison of contour spout shapes indicates yet another influential trend. One of the more unique and elaborate examples of ceramics was the Chavin stirrup-spout bottle. This was generally described as having a spheroidal body with a flattened base surmounted by a hollow archlike handle with a spout projecting from its center. This particular bottle is found not only in the Cupisnique culture but also in the Paracas culture.
Based upon the findings of this study, one may conclude that the periods discussed were closely interrelated and that the Chavin forms and motifs created the trends which persisted and united these cultural groups.
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Figure 1. - North coast of Peru, taken from *Ancient Peruvian Ceramics*, Alan R. Sawyer.
Figure 2. — Southern coast of Peru, taken from "Ancient Pre-Inca Ceramics," Alan R. Sawyer.
Figure 4. — Relative Chronology of the North and South Coast of Peru, taken from *Ancient Peruvian Ceramics*, Alan R. Sawyer.
Figure 5'. Archæological Sites of the Early Horizon, taken from \textit{Andean Culture History}, Woodell C. Bennett.
Figure 6. — Compilation of Archaeological and Cultural Phases.
Figure 7. — Chronological Development of Spout Shapes. (fold out)
DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are used throughout the thesis:

1. Blind spout - a double spouted-pouring arrangement with strategically placed vents and holes which caused the vessel to whistle whenever the liquid in the container was sloshed or air was forced through the other open spout.

2. Broad line incising - cutting wide lines into the clay body to form designs.

3. Culture - total way of life, in general, of a given people at a particular time or place. For example, the Chavin culture in northern Peru originated at the same time as the Paracas culture in southern Peru.

4. Embossing - technique of decorating in which the design is raised.

5. Figurative motif - bas relief figures carved or molded on pottery such as the feline image.

6. Polychrome - process of painting oxide colors on pottery.

7. Press molding - technique of making pottery by pressing plastic clay into partial molds made of fired clay.

8. Resist negative painting - technique of decorating pottery by covering the design area with liquid clay, applying an organic material to the background and scorching the vessel to blacken the background while leaving the design in the original light color of the fired vessel.

10. Stirrup-spout - pouring arrangement consisting of a hollow loop of clay, both ends of which are attached to a bottle, with an open spout protruding from the top of the loop.

11. Style - formal characteristics of art of a particular culture.

12. Surface design - negative or positive painted line and area design.

13. Trophy head - representation of decapitated head used in painted pottery designs.

14. Vecejos - whippoorwill-like bird motif found on Paracas pottery.

15. Whistle spout - a double spouted pouring arrangement with strategically placed vents and holes which caused the vessel to whistle when the liquid in the container was sloshed or air was forced through the other open spout.

16. White-on-Red-Horizon - a technique of positive brush painting of ceramics in white on a red clay base.