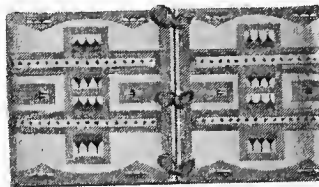


HUNTINGTON FREE LIBRARY

*Native American  
Collection*



CORNELL UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

CORNELL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



3 1924 104 089 481



# Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in  
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in  
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924104089481>

The Glazed Ware of Central America,  
with Special Reference to a Whistling  
Jar from Honduras

*By*

MARSHALL H. SAVILLE

!!!

(Extract from the HOLMES ANNIVERSARY VOLUME)

Washington

1916

WELL UNIVERSITY  
RMC  
LIBRARY

WELL UNIVERSITY  
RMC  
LIBRARY

# The Glazed Ware of Central America, with Special Reference to a Whistling Jar from Honduras

By MARSHALL H. SAVILLE



THE type of Central American pottery designated as glazed ware has long been known; indeed Professor Holmes made it a subject of study twenty-five years ago. The specimens of this peculiar class of American ceramics are easily recognized wherever found, being distinguished by a surface luster more nearly approaching a true glaze than that found on any pottery hitherto discovered in ancient America. The vessels are nearly all of a grayish-blue or greenish shade, mottled in places with spots or patches of darker hue; some are mottled with dull-red spots, while others are almost wholly of a brick-red color. Many of the vessels are decorated with the representation of a bird, an animal, or a human figure, modeled on the sides of the jar in relief; and these figures are hollow as a rule, being made separately and put on after the body of the vessel had been finished.

In January, 1892, while in charge of the scientific work of the first Honduras Expedition sent out by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, the writer explored an important tomb (No. 1) near the southern slope of the Main Structure of Copan. In the tomb were uncovered, besides the skeletons, two beautiful peccary skulls engraved with figures and hieroglyphs, and five pottery vessels, four of which bear the glaze-like luster. One was broken into many fragments and was of reddish color; the others are of a steel-blue shade. The three unbroken specimens are shown in our plate 1. Numbers 1 and 2 are now among the collections of the Peabody Museum; number 3 became the property of Honduras in the division of material under the terms of the concession, which granted to the Museum half of the objects found during the work of the expedition: it was placed in a small structure built by the expedition as a museum building, but it later disappeared with nearly all the collection retained by the representative of the Honduras government for the local museum. These vessels were the only ones found during the continued excavations made by the Peabody Museum in its several

## HOLMES ANNIVERSARY VOLUME

years of work; and among the many thousands of potsherds encountered, not a fragment of this ware was found, attesting to its rarity and pointing to the fact of its introduction into Copan by trade from some other district.

The discovery of these vessels aroused the interest of the writer, who forthwith made a study of the geographical distribution of the type represented by them, and a list of the examples to be found in different museums both in America and in Europe, but the results of this study were not published. Since that time, more than twenty years ago, knowledge of the number of specimens of this class of pottery has increased to a considerable extent, but the geographical range of the objects has not been extended. The writer at that time was of the opinion that this class of ceramics had originated in the region of Alta Vera Paz, Guatemala.

In 1895, Dr Eduard Seler, of the Ethnographical Museum of Berlin, published his essay on the Antiquities of Guatemala,<sup>1</sup> in which he described and illustrated several examples of this ware from the Department of Alta Vera Paz, which he calls enameled ware. Seler draws attention to a vessel of this class found near Progreso, Yucatan, which was first illustrated and described by the learned Archbishop of Yucatan, Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona,<sup>2</sup> in *Anales del Museo Nacional de México* in 1885, and it is the first specimen of this type to be brought to the attention of the student, so far as the writer is aware. Carrillo y Ancona recognized the peculiar character of the ware, describing it as a "fine enameled pottery".

In his study of the Guatemala examples in the Berlin Museum, Seler writes:

These vessels are distinguished from the well-known ancient American pottery by apparently having an actual glaze. . . . I have hitherto been unable to determine what kind of glaze is on these vessels, as rare and beautiful pieces were always concerned which could not be sacrificed to chemical investigation. However, there is hope that Mr Holmes, of Chicago,<sup>3</sup> who at present is making a special study of these vessels, will throw light on this question. The broad geographic area within which these pieces are found proves that in them we have to deal with ware which was distributed by trade.

About the same time Dr Carl Lumholtz obtained for the American Museum of Natural History one of the most remarkable speci-

<sup>1</sup> Alterthümer aus Guatemala, Veröffentlichungen aus dem Königlichen Museum für Völkerkunde, Band IV, Heft I; translation published in *Bulletin 28, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1904, pp. 106-109.

<sup>2</sup> Tomo III, entrega 7, "Los Cabezas-Chatas," p. 276, three views of vessel on the plate. The study was written in 1881.

<sup>3</sup> At that time Professor Holmes was Curator of Anthropology in the Field Museum of Natural History.





1

2

3

VESSELS FROM TOMB 1, COPAN, HONDURAS



## SAVILLE—GLAZED WARE

mens of ancient American ceramics thus far brought to light. It is of this same glazed ware, and was found in a tomb in the vicinity of Tepic in western Mexico, the northernmost limit of the area in which the ware has been found. This veritable treasure, which has been illustrated in colors by Lumholtz, is "designed and decorated in imitation of a turkey," and is further embellished by the addition of gold-leaf applied over a thin coating of white stucco. This sizing is placed on surfaces where the "glazed" surface has been ground off. This application of gold-leaf was probably accomplished after the vessel was brought to this part of ancient Mexico by trade; gilded beads and potsherds have been found in the region of the present state of Michoacan by Plancarte, and this type of decoration of pottery artifacts seems to be unique in this culture area.

Lumholtz had an analysis made of several small pieces of the base of this jar by Prof. Morris Loeb, of New York University, who found "that the smooth, glistening surface was not a glaze. . . . The analysis did not convince Professor Loeb that the 'glaze' and the body are of widely different material; nor that the glaze is more fusible than the body—rather the reverse. The body, although grey, contains very little carbon, whereas the glaze contains a large amount of it."<sup>1</sup>

In 1900 the writer obtained two magnificently mottled specimens from the ruins of Teotihuacan, in the valley of Mexico, and these are now in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History. Several years later a number were found in a tomb in the same ruins, and are figured by Batres in his report on Teotihuacan published in 1906.<sup>2</sup> He describes one specimen as having "reflections of bronzed metal, color of Barbedienne patina." In various other publications, which we need not cite here, vessels of this type have been illustrated and it is safe to say that more than a hundred vessels of this ware exist either in private hands or in public museums. They have been found in the region embraced between the republic of Salvador in Central America and the territory of Tepic in Mexico.

More recently, in 1915, Spinden published his "Notes on the Archeology of Salvador,"<sup>3</sup> in which he has attempted to classify the antiquities of that region by his system of art development, under "Archaic", "Transition between Archaic and Maya", "Maya", and "Post-Maya" periods. Dr Spinden assigns this "glazed-ware" pottery to the "Post-Maya" period, and illustrates several vessels of

<sup>1</sup> Unknown Mexico, vol. II, pp. 295-299, pl. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Plates I-VIII.

<sup>3</sup> *American Anthropologist*, N. S., vol. XVII, no. 3, pp. 446-491.

## HOLMES ANNIVERSARY VOLUME

this type in private collections in Salvador. His description of the character of this ware is interesting and suggestive:

Without regard to the character of the decoration it may be classified at once by a semi-vitreous glaze. The ware is hard, thin, and fine-grained. The surface has a slight but unmistakable gloss, varying in hue from dull green to dull orange. The greenish variety predominates and it is likely that the orange-colored specimens were subjected to a reducing flame. In no one of the many examples that have come to the attention of the writer does the surface appear to have become actually liquid. Instead a slight suffusion seems to have taken place when the pottery was being fired. This may have been due to the presence of lead in the clay. . . . The suffused surface of this ware would not carry sizing or painted designs and as a result we find the ware decorated, first, by incised designs, second, by plastic designs. (Pages 470-471.)

Regarding Spinden's system of classification of this "glazed ware" in Salvador as belonging to his "Post-Maya" period, we must differ. He states that "there is good evidence that the great Maya cities of the south were abandoned soon after 600 A.D. and that the Maya tribe proper moved northward toward central and northern Yucatan. This left Salvador free from the pressure of Maya culture. The rise of the Toltec civilization in Mexico gave a new source of inspiration and influence." He further remarks that "although the finest examples of this ware probably antedate the Spanish epoch by several centuries, still it is worthy of note that the same greenish and semi-vitreous surface is seen on post-Spanish products."

This late origin for the "glazed ware" in Copan is of course impossible if the generalization of Spinden regarding the abandonment of the Maya cities about 600 A.D. is correct. The pieces found by the writer in the Copan tomb, with the carved peccary skull and the painted vessels, must be attributed to the best period of Copan development. In this case, at least, the ware is of respectable antiquity, so far as remoteness from the Spanish period of occupancy is concerned. We have never seen any specimens that in any way are to be regarded as resembling a Spanish type of decoration.

The writer is of the opinion that the ware should be considered as the product of some local tribe or clan which developed this particular type of ceramic art. Whether the place of origin is Salvador or Guatemala is at present undetermined, but future research in this important part of Central America should elucidate the problem.

During the summer of 1915 the writer was engaged in an archaeological reconnoissance in the Department of Cortés, Honduras, for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, during which he was able to bring together an interesting collection from the region of the valleys of the Ulua and Chamelicon rivers, supplemented by



WHISTLING JAR FROM THE REGION OF RIO ULUA, HONDURAS



## SAVILLE—GLAZED WARE

an important collection gathered by the late Dr J. E. Austin, for many years a resident of Puerto Cortés. In the Austin collection was the glazed-ware whistling vessel that affords the special reason for the preparation of this paper.

The vessel (pl. II) is  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches high and has an extreme length of  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches from the back of the figure to the front of the bowl. It is of a dark steel-blue color, with but little mottling or change of shade as in many examples of this class of ancient American ceramics, an exception being a small section of light-orange tint on the bowl and faint traces of the same color on the back of the figure. In the modeling of the seated human figure which the vessel represents, slight attention has been paid to proportion, the lower part being almost without semblance to that of a human figure. The legs are represented only in the mass, and there is an incised oval where each knee should be. The head is upraised and hollow in front. The mouth is open and teeth are shown. Typical plugs are in the large ears. The forehead is low and is covered almost entirely by a band which winds backward down behind the ears. Extending from the base of the head downward well on the back is a flap like an elongated visor of a cap, which may be intended to represent a head covering. On the chest is an ornament like a long pendant bead with a longitudinally grooved cross-piece projecting through it; this pendant is attached to a band with diagonal lines evidently depicting a heavy cord, which is tied with a large knot on the back of the figure just below the flap-like head covering. The ends of the cord are fringed. A loin-cloth is shown tied with a large knot in the back.

On the lap is an olla-shaped vessel held in place by each crudely shaped hand. This olla is of the typical form that characterizes the majority of specimens of this "glazed-ware" class of pottery vessels. On the front of the bowl was formerly a projecting animal or bird head; in the hole is a hemispherical nodule of copal, probably placed there by the modern finder of the vase. The back of the head contains the vent of a whistle, the mouth or blowing end being concealed in the front of the human figure below the waist at a point slightly below the median line of and inside the body of the olla. The arms are hollow and there are openings on the shoulders and elbows undoubtedly to allow the insertion of cords for the suspension of the vessel. Thus suspended, and the bowl filled almost to the base of the neck with water, a slight swinging movement to and fro, even that caused by a gentle breeze, will result in forming a vacuum and the expulsion of air through the whistle, emitting a clear and sustained note. It was doubtless used in temple ceremonies, possibly either hung up at

## HOLMES ANNIVERSARY VOLUME

the entrance of a chamber or carried by a priest, and the whistling produced by the mere movement of the water in the vessel, while walking.

This specimen is unique in mechanism in ancient American ceramics, so far as the writer is aware. Moreover, whistling jars are practically unknown in Central America and Mexico. The principle of the whistling jar is relatively common in the ceramic art of the pre-Quichua inhabitants of the Peruvian coast, and the writer has described and figured<sup>1</sup> an example from the coast of Manabi, Ecuador, slightly different from the general specimens of this class from Peru. In this well-known type the note is given out only when the water is poured from the jar. Specimens have been described so often and are found in so many Peruvian collections that further description would be superfluous.

The specimen just brought to the attention of students is but another proof of the richness of the archeological field of Central America, where so little intensive exploration has been undertaken and indeed large portions of the country have as yet not even been visited by the explorer. The same is true of Mexico, and it cannot be too urgently insisted that our museums should consider coöperative plans for systematic and long-continued investigations in these important areas. The writer firmly believes, after considerable experience in Latin America, that the Middle American governments would be extremely favorable to concerted action by our scientific institutions if definite plans were formulated by them for the prosecution of such work.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
NEW YORK CITY

<sup>1</sup> Antiquities of Manabi—Final Report; *Contributions to South American Archeology*, vol. II, pp. 223-224, pl. c, 6, New York, 1910.

