

## THE TOPARA TRADITION: AN OVERVIEW

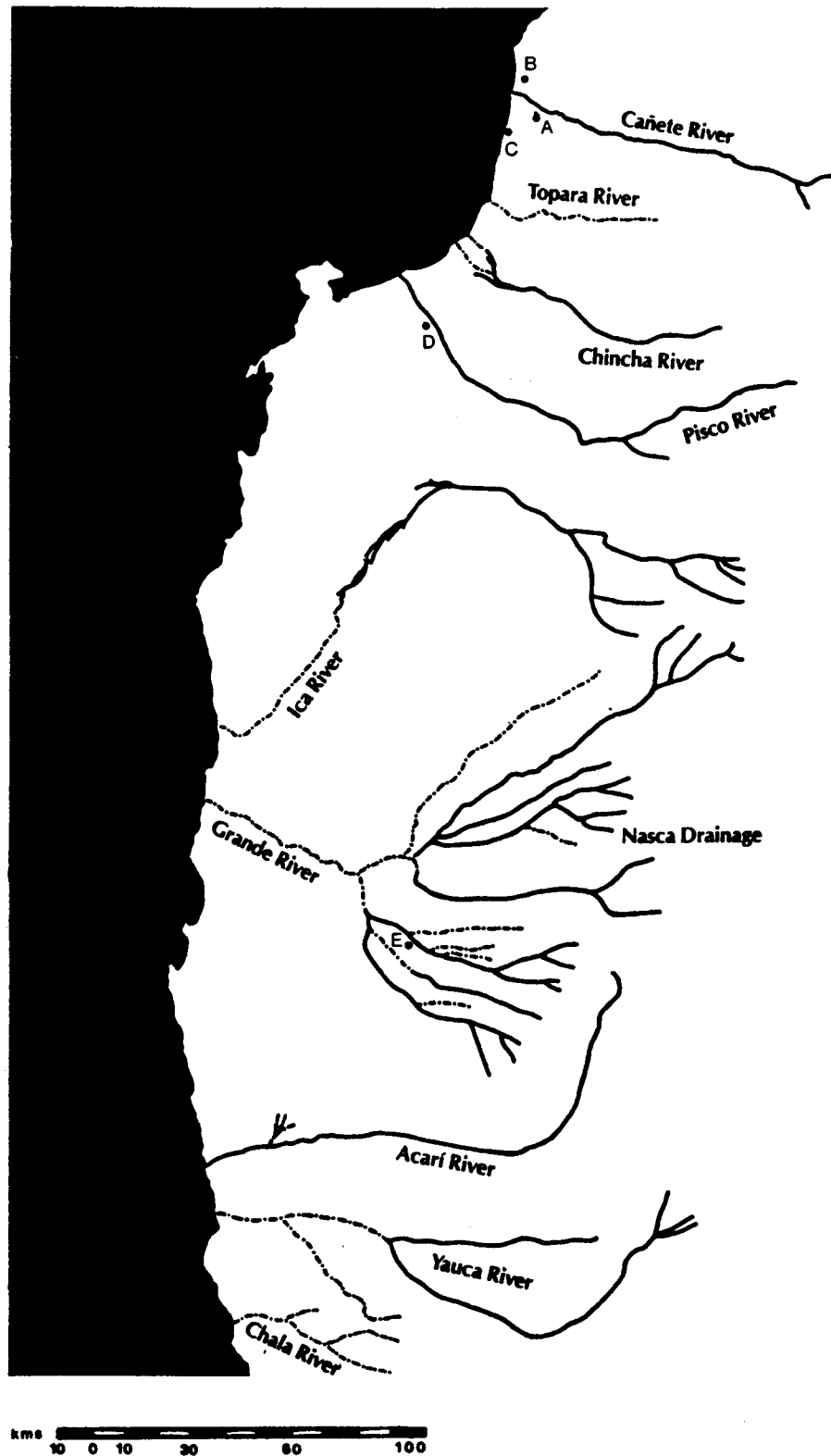
Dwight T. Wallace  
*Department of Anthropology, SUNY-Albany*

Among the "Paracas Necropolis" materials excavated by Tello (1959) in the 1920's were well-made ceramics with simple modeling but not the incised or painted decoration expected for ceramics of their apparent date. Sherds of the same style were subsequently found mixed with late Paracas and early Nasca style sherds in Strong's 1952 excavations at Cahuachi in the Nazca valley (Strong 1957), leaving this style without clear definition or affiliation.

In 1956, Lanning (1960) excavated in midden he had happened to note right above the beach at the small stopping place on the Panamerican Highway referred to as Jahuay, some 25 km. south of the Cañete valley (Figure 1). He found three distinguishable temporal phases (Jahuay 1-3) of the same well-made but simply decorated style as Tello and Strong had found, but here not mixed with any other style. Shortly after this, I started a survey in the next valleys to the south, Chíncha and Pisco (Wallace 1959, 1971). A number of sites were found with ceramics that were related to the Jahuay ceramics, including some isolated from other styles and also some in sub-types of the Jahuay-like types. Lanning and I termed the style the Topará Tradition, and the logical seriation by which we ordered the sub-units was confirmed by my excavation in an 8 m. strata cut at the Quebrada site in Cañete.

To abstract our results, the earliest known phase for the newly defined Topará Tradition has been extrapolated from a surface collection at the Los Patos site in Cañete (Wallace 1963). This is followed by the stratigraphically defined Jahuay 1 and 2 phases from the type site. The lowest levels of my Quebrada excavations would predate Jahuay 3, so I have renamed Lanning's phase as Jahuay 2A and my lowest levels at Quebrada as Jahuay 2B. This is followed by Jahuay 3, interpreted by Lanning as later, but not occurring in direct stratigraphic superposition to the levels containing the two earlier phases. The second earliest of my excavation units from Quebrada does correspond to Jahuay 3, confirming Lanning's temporal ordering.

The stratigraphy of the Quebrada site then continues with Chongos as the next phase, named from the type site in Pisco. The final phase in Cañete is termed Quebrada, with an areal variant in Chíncha and Pisco termed Campana. Both Chongos and Quebrada can be subdivided into A and B phases. The uppermost levels at Quebrada contain the distinct sherd decoration which defines the Carmen phase. Carmen dates well within the Early Intermediate Period and is outside the Topará Style Tradition, although clearly derived from its last phases. Therefore, we now have what appears to be a continuous sequence of at least 6 phases, lacking only those covering the first appearance of the distinctive features of the Topará Tradition (Figure 2). Cross-dating with the Paracas sequence to the south is clear for the final phases, in which Topará influence is very marked in phases 9 and 10 in Ica (Menzel, et al. 1964:261). The post-Topará Carmen phase, with its subdivisions, is firmly cross-dated with Nasca phases 3 and 4.



**Figure 1.** Map of the Peruvian South-Central Coast. The main area in which the Topará style ceramics occur includes the Cañete, Chíncha, and Pisco Valleys. The Central Coast Miramar style and the ceramics from Cahuachi on the South Coast are heavily influenced by the Topará style.

## Ceramic Sequence

Only an overview of the ceramic sequence can be presented here. The main defining feature is a well-oxidized fine ware, which begins in a reasonably well-made and well-fired form, most notable in contrast with the contemporary wares in adjacent areas, such as Paracas to the south. By the Chongos phase, dating to the late Early Horizon and the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period, this ware had developed into one which technologically equals the best of any period in Peru. Most vessel forms (Figure 3) were either unslipped or self-slipped; surfaces are very well smoothed, helped by the fineness of the clay, although heavy polishing is not overly common. A white (or cream) slip is fairly frequent only among grave wares. Black smudging is commonly accompanied by pattern burnished decoration, which represents the only graphic decoration found in the Topará Tradition, aside from rather crude white banding on Jahuay utilitarian jar neck bases.

Pattern burnished designs include fish as the only well-established representation; geometric designs, especially simple cross-hatching on interior bowl walls, are quite common. The only other relief from this notable lack of graphic decoration other than plain slipping is in the form of simple incised and punctate decoration near the rims of utilitarian ollas of the non-necked or direct rim type in the Patos and Jahuay phases. Shallow incision occurs on fineware, but very rarely.

Simple modeling does show up in grave ceramics that can be attributed without question to the Topará Tradition; the cases occur almost entirely on the double-spout bottle form and include bird, frog, and monkey representation, plus bottle bodies in the shape of squashes and gourds. Sherds showing modeling hardly ever show up in midden deposits.

The only remaining ceramic type of note is the grater bowl. The earliest forms have red slip bands inside the rim of a hemispherical bowl form. The interior base and side walls have linear and punctate incisions, commonly forming simple fish and starfish representations. This type of grater occurs in the Patos and Jahuay 2A and 2B phases in Cañete and at the Jahuay site; it then apparently disappears in this northern area, while there are a number of cases of association with Chongos phase ceramics in Chincha and Pisco. The decoration on these later graters is distinguishable by the common use of a diagonal jab type of short punctation that makes a wedge-shaped impression and turns up ridges of clay to form the grating surface.

The Quebrada and contemporaneous Campana phases are clearly distinguishable by the presence of zoned slipping in black, white, and red-purple pigments. These are applied mainly to the low gambreled bowl form, which has a flattened lip. In Chincha and Pisco, the top of the lip can be a solid black band, the interior a solid red-purple and sometimes the exterior wall a solid black zone. Variations in color placement do occur, but the pattern is distinguishable from the Quebrada phase of Cañete; here interiors can be solid white, with a dark red band in place of black on top of the rim.

Another difference in the apparently contemporaneous Quebrada and Campana phases is the presence in Quebrada of a unique plain ware form of a large jar with convex (or cupped) neck and simple white, washy painting on the neck

	Surface collection, Canete valley	Lanning, Jahuay, stratigraphy	Wallace, Canete, stratigraphy	Isolated in surface lots, Chincha	Isolated in surface lots, Pisco
Los Patos	X				
Jahuay 1		X			
Jahuay 2A		X			
Jahuay 2B			X		
Jahuay 3		X	X		
Chongos A			X		
Chongos B			X	X	X
Quebrada A			X		
				X	X
Quebrada B			X		
Campana					X
(Carmen)			(X)	(X)	(X)

Figure 2. Sources of data supporting the presently defined temporal phases of the Topará Style on the South-Central Coast. The Quebrada and Campana phases are contemporary, areal variants; Carmen is the first post-Topará style. The A and B sub-phases of Chongos and Quebrada were not apparent in surface lots.

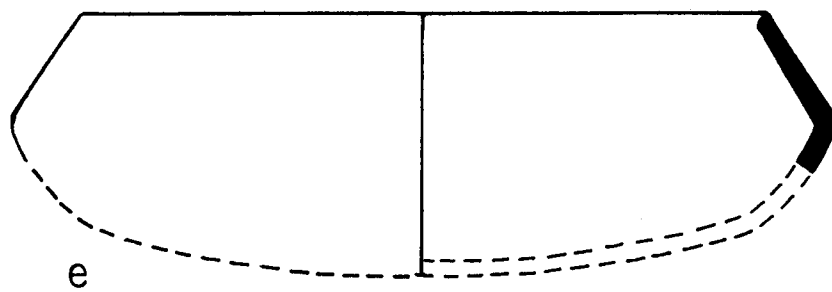
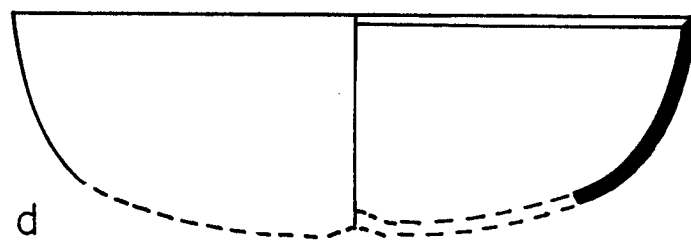
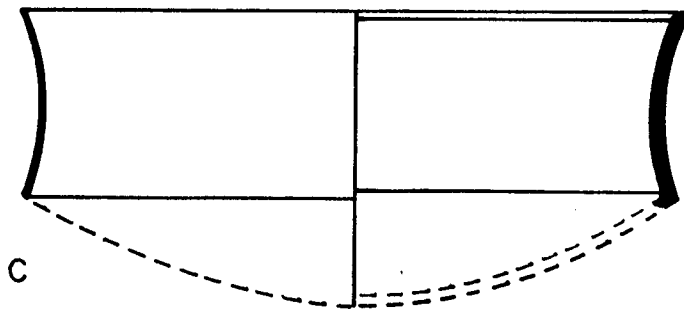
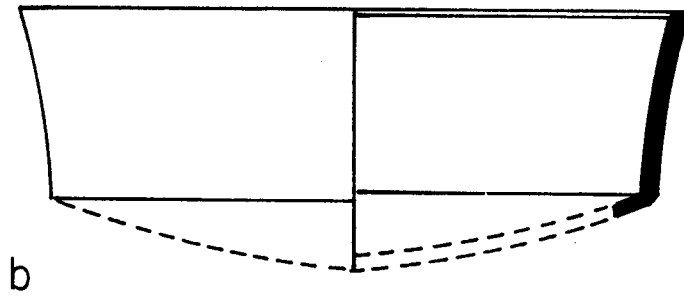
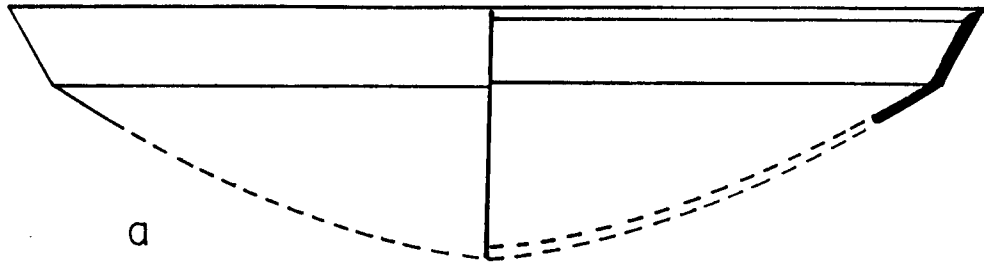
exterior. It seems possible that this form first appeared in the Chongos phase, but again only in Cañete.

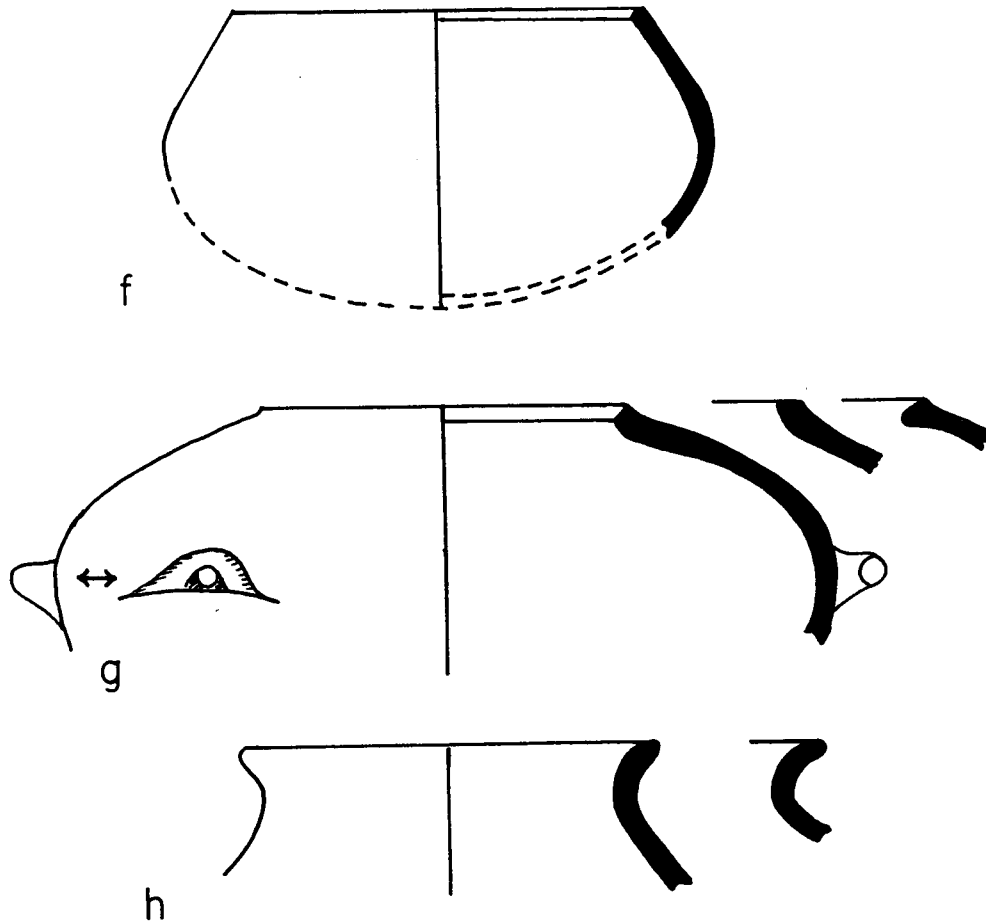
In terms of areal distribution, the earliest phases are known only for Cañete or the Jahuay site. Very probable Jahuay 3 ceramics have been found as far south as Paracas, but clearly isolated lots are as yet to be found. The main criterion for the distinction between Jahuay 3 and Chongos A is the lack in Jahuay 3 of a low open bowl or plate with a gambrel or carination between the base and short sides or walls; a very similar form, lacking the gambrel and having instead a sharply convex-curved rim, occurs in Jahuay 3 but apparently does not completely die out until some time during the Chongos phase. The original "Necropolis" ceramics seem to include only the smoothly curved plates of Jahuay 3, suggesting a somewhat early date for Topará occupation so far south.

Chongos and Campana phase sites are quite common in both Chinchá and Pisco, completely replacing a local ceramic style (Pinta) that belongs to the Paracas Style Tradition. Campana and also possible Chongos ceramics have been reported as common in the upper Ica valley, free of obvious Paracas influence or co-occupation (Alan Sawyer, personal communication). In the rest of Ica and to the south in Nazca, Topará style influence is quite marked (e.g. Strong 1957), but without close enough correspondence to securely cross-date with specific Topará phases, except for phases dating after Jahuay 2A-B; in most cases, this influence appears as a local adaptation of Topará traits.

In terms of the ceramics, only one quite unique lot remains to be mentioned. At the Chongos site in Pisco, which is quite large and has some distinct subareas, a series of fragments were collected from what obviously had been either a blown-out cemetery or one looted long ago. These consisted of large fragments, some nearly whole pots. The forms included double-spout-and-bridge bottles and the low gambreled bowl form, both corresponding to Chongos phase forms. However, most were well below standard size--about half size, but too large to be called miniatures. The bottle forms were clearly in the rather simple profiles known for "Necropolis" bottles and included the distinctive raised "cap" or lid on top. The workmanship on these bottles and bowls was, however, below par, and the thickness of the walls did not match that of most of the fineware bowls found in the midden. The situation suggests one of intentionally produced grave wares of passable, but still inferior quality. I know of no similar cases beyond this one, even for the graves later excavated by Pezzia near the Chongos site (Donnan, personal communication).

This same group of surface fragments turned up still another unusual feature: an associated form is a short-necked jar (or wide-mouthed globular bowl with low collar) that was quite thick walled, of a heavily tempered body, and quite crudely smoothed on the exterior body, to the point where the diagonal scraping marks could be interpreted as a variety of intentional surface decoration. A unique feature is a rim which varies from having a very thick, comma-shaped rim profile to one in which the rim had been everted out and completely turned back on itself. Still more unique is the fact that nothing even vaguely similar to any of these features is known from any other midden or surface collections, nor from any grave lots here or in Ica. About the only explanation for the unique form is that it might be a highly specialized form equivalent to the canopic jars of Egypt, or even one restricted to lower class burials in contrast to the few known graves from Pisco, Paracas, or further south.





**Figure 3.** Topará vessel shapes of the Chongos phase. Shapes A-F are orange fine ware, but may be smudged black, shapes A-B with pattern burnished interiors. The gambreled bowl, shape A, is diagnostic. Later vessels are similar, but can have white, red-purple, and/or black zoned slip painting. Shape A is replaced by a low recurved side wall in the earlier Jahuay phases.

I will note only in passing that the textiles from the Jahuay and Quebrada site excavations (Wallace 1979:45) include, as the only cases of decoration, a multi-lineal mode of representation identical in style and embroidery technique to the geometric sub-style noted among the famous textiles from the Paracas sites and also the Ocucaje graves of Ica. I have noted elsewhere (Ibid:48) that this link, along with a pyroengraved head of the Oculate Being on a gourd fragment from the Quebrada excavation (Sawyer 1966:72), suggests that this sub-type, along with the associated pottery, does represent a Topará art style, as opposed to the Paracas or Nasca styles. The Topará style may well have been quite frequently expressed in media other than ceramics. The plainness of the Topará ceramic decoration, combined with its technological excellence, is difficult enough to explain, without having to explain an archaeological culture in Peru and of this period that lacked any more complex decoration than simple modeling and the simple (and quite subtle) decoration of the pattern burnishing.

### Site Type and Construction Sequence

The data on architectural construction and site types includes some quite interesting features. The earliest construction in Chíncha and Pisco, most likely no earlier than the Jahuay 3 phase, uses adobes of a form that I have termed "corn kernel"; their roughly oval-shaped bases are fairly flat, the cross-section decreasing in size to a very blunt point at the upper end. Another description would be that form falls between a loaf shape and a conical shape. "Corn kernel" adobes approximate but are not completely identical to that termed "odontiform" or tooth-shaped by Tello (1959) at the Paracas sites. As of the present, no adobe types have been found associated with the few non-ceremonial sites located; the form is, however, associated with at least 9 temple mounds (Wallace 1971). In the earliest cases, the adobes are used flat side out for retaining walls, the interiors of which are filled with adobe lumps obviously formed simply by squeezing them between two hands. Somewhat later, both the fill and wall facings are the corn kernel form. The latest variety is slimmer and flatter, with an elongated oval base, looking like flattened mud pies slapped down on one edge to form the flattened base; they are used base down.

Construction methods and materials for buildings other than the temple mounds is still quite unclear. At the Chongos site, at least, stone was used for the walls of buildings to some degree; its use may not have been for more than wall foundations and may also be restricted to sites, like Chongos and also Los Patos, which are outside the valley floors, where stone is readily available and water for adobes is not.

### Settlement Patterns

In questions of site type, function, or settlement pattern, the data are greatly limited by the fact that most of the sites, especially in Chíncha, are on the valley floor and have been greatly disturbed by later activities, both pre- and post-Columbian. Of those sites which allow interpretation, the Los Patos site in Cañete, the earliest known Topará site, can be described as an agglutinated occupation site of rather large village size. Stone house foundations line the steep sides of an erosional niche in the side of the quite high bluffs that form part of the southern side of the valley. The more level area at the base



has less distinct construction, including one mound that could conceivably have been a temple mound.

The only other probable habitation site with original size and building pattern discernable is the Chongos site in Pisco, the type site for the Chongos phase. Chongos is located just outside the cultivated valley floor. Low outlines of walls formed by rocks and probably disintegrated adobe give some idea of construction. The site is an agglutinated habitation site of a size that would fall into the range of the "urban" centers noted by Rowe (1963) as occurring near the end of the Early Horizon and continuing into the Early Intermediate Period from Chincha south to Nazca. Unlike the other centers between Chincha and Ica, the Chongos site is not only well-agglutinated and at least 40 hectares in size, but also appears to have a nucleus of a central plaza with two neatly aligned structures on opposite sides.

The Quebrada site is also without question an occupation site, with up to 10 meters of superimposed floors, such as those I uncovered during the test excavations. The site consists of a string of closely connected mounds that run for about 1 km. along a very old beach, now well up and away from the shore. None seem to be temple mounds, the cores of which would be mainly fill, so the bulk of the total deposits is very impressive and the length of occupation must have been greater than any nearby site, except perhaps the later Cerro del Oro site just north of Quebrada. The total size of the site and the degree of compactness clearly rivals that of sites such as Chongos; however, the total form would have to be described as a linear village or town, an urban form that is well known elsewhere, but usually confined to associations with linear phenomena such as rivers and roads.

The final style of Topará site that merits description is also the first that occurs in sufficient number to term a pattern. This type includes 9 large temple mound sites in Chincha, with only one or two possible cases in Pisco. That they are mainly solid fill rather than the "tell" form of accreted occupation levels is very evident in most cases. All sites consist of structures aligned perpendicularly to the ocean shore and are higher on the west end. One, the Huaca de Soto site in Chincha, has best maintained the general form of the original. This site consists of three walled courtyards, stepped up from the lower, eastern terminus, and ending on the western extreme with a platform that undoubtedly contained a temple structure. As far as I know, this specific form is unique, although the linear pattern has been noted at such sites as Las Haldas in the Casma valley (Lumbreras 1974:43). I would hardly suggest any close ties between the Chincha cases and the somewhat earlier Las Haldas, but the linear layout may prove to be significant in the future.

It is worth noting that none of the many Topará mounds shows evidence of extensive occupation areas. They would then appear to fall in the ceremonial center type of pattern. But their location in the valley floor, in the center of intense utilization from then until the present, makes it difficult to rule out the original presence of habitations around or near the mounds. However, viewed from the other extreme, the Chongos site lacks any temple mound within or even near the occupation area. We would seem to be dealing with a pattern of separate agglutinated habitation and religious centers. The same holds true for cases of early towns in Ica, Pisco, and Chincha that are either contemporaneous or somewhat later in date.

## Cross-Dating

The cross-dating of the Topará sequence with the Paracas and Nasca sequences to the south is not easy, since neither style left much impression on the Topará style. Only a very few trade sherds from the south have been found associated with Topará remains and these were not datable to any one specific Paracas phase. The cross-dating done some time ago by Lanning (1960) was based on the comparison of a cigar-shaped design element found on a Jahuay sherd and used as a design filler on a few vessels dated to the Ocucaje 8 phase in Ica; in addition, an apparent Paracas trade sherd had some incised lines ending in dot finials, a practice now known to range from at least phases 5 through 8. I do not feel that this case is at all sufficient to secure accurate cross-dating. Menzel, Rowe, and Dawson (1964:155) treat pattern burnishing as a trait developed within the Paracas style, which does fit the earlier cross-dating. I, however, feel that it most likely originated in the Topará Tradition because of its salience among Topará decorative techniques and its long and fairly prominent occurrence in the Topará sequence.

The very heavy influence of Topará on the Ocucaje style phases 9 and 10, then continuing into Nasca 1, is well recognized by Menzel, Rowe, and Dawson (1964:259), including recognition that the technical advances of the Topará style undoubtedly led to the switch from post-fired to slip paint decoration. This lop-sided direction of influence is definitely an important point for interpreting the dynamics behind the diffusion of the Topará style.

More direct cross-dating is possible and actually much more reliable with the Central Coast sequence. Patterson (1966) has clearly defined the Miramar style, which has a number of near identities with the Topará style and could easily be considered as an areal variant of a Topará Style Tradition in the sharing of a number of technological similarities and such specific vessel shapes as the low gambreled or carinated bowl. Painted decoration is present, but consists only of very simple non-representational motifs. Patterson places Miramar in the earlier half of the Early Intermediate Period (Ibid:7). He sees the closest correspondence with Topará during the first Miramar phase, Base Aérea, which shares many features with Jahuay 2-3 and especially Chongos. Base Aérea is assigned to Early Intermediate Period Epoch 1 (Ibid:98-99).

## Overview

The quantity and scope of data on the Topará Tradition is limited, but some points could serve as the basis for the direction of future work:

1. The technological advances of Topará ceramic production are quite striking and are definitely based on some improvements in firing. These improvements include much greater control of oxidizing firing temperatures, so that smudging and fire clouding can usually be minimized (or applied under control to bowl interiors). Also, a rise occurs in firing temperatures of an average of at least 150° C. Such temperatures are not outside those reached by the best laid of pit firings, but their consistency in Topará ceramics suggests the presence of some feature such as draft channels or a true kiln.

2. A second observation is that the emphasis put on these technological advances is accompanied by an unusual simplicity of decoration, highly unusual

for the Central Andes. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Topará potters were proud of their technical prowess and did not want it upstaged.

3. A third observation is the widespread influence of the style on the Central and South-Central coasts. Even more, the complete and rather abrupt wiping out of earlier styles in an advancing southern front of Topará territory, from Cañete to Chincha and Pisco and finally upper Ica, with strong influences south to at least Nazca, is quite complex, with very little comparable influence from the styles that were replaced. Taking into account the technical and decorative distinctiveness between Topará and either Paracas or Nasca, this expansion of a ceramic style tradition is probably one of the most notable ones in Peruvian prehistory and obviously must have been accompanied by some major cultural influence.

4. The few possible Paracas-associated temple mounds, dating to the late phases of the Paracas sequence, contrast with the large number and size of Topará-associated temple mounds in Chincha and also Miramar-associated mounds on the Central Coast. It would seem likely that this form of religious structure, so strongly associated with Topará remains in Chincha, was introduced to the South Coast by bearers of the Topará style during the later part of the Early Horizon. In any case, the general scarcity of large, solid-fill mounds as the bases for religious structures should be noted for much of the South and South-Central Coasts; the numerous Topará-associated temple mounds in Chincha therefore take on special significance.

5. The presence of town-sized urban centers has already been noted. What should be pointed out is that it is precisely at the point of strong Topará influence when the first such centers, with defensive walls, occur in Ica (Rowe 1963:18). It would seem likely that the Paracas town settlement pattern appeared as a response to the physical threat of Topará advance into the area, as did occur in the upper Ica valley. This type of stress-related occurrence is quite significant in terms of the "now you see it, now you don't" history of urban or quasi-urban settlements in this region.

6. The nine temple mounds in Chincha with no evidence of any significant amount of associated habitation areas, along with the lack of a temple mound at the known urban center of Chongos in Pisco, is quite interesting. This locational separation sets the pattern for the settlement types of the Early Intermediate Period of all the South Coast, where the same kind of small urban settlements and any temple mounds are not in close proximity. This is a distinct pattern which deserves more attention than it has had. I refer to it as the town-ceremonial center pattern, with "town" recognized as a distinct, low-scale variety of urbanism, lacking a well-developed, physically impressive nucleus.

7. My last point, or more an area for discussion, concerns the interpretations of the level of political organization associated with Topará. The most common approach has recently been to base the presence of a state level of organization on the assumed presence of certain formal characteristics, such as the presence of a monopoly on force, hierarchical structure, and differential access to basic resources. My question is whether this approach is sufficient, or more to the point, whether it is really what we are looking for. There is a possible argument that the presence of results or actions fitting those which could normally be expected to be achieved only with a state level of organization is

as much evidence, and certainly more concrete, than inferences concerning formal political organization. In short, the nature of the southern expansion of the bearers of the Topará Tradition, with a well-marked advancing front, a one-sided direction of influence, and with influences penetrating well beyond this front of replacement, is a situation that could easily be argued to be the result of a state level type of organization, whether or not there is proof of the formal characteristics now required for acceptance of such an interpretation. In short, is it the formal, organizational characteristics of a society or the outcomes arrived at or the actions taken and results achieved by that society in which we are mainly interested? One obvious, and certainly safe, answer is that we can approach the problem from both ends. In any case, we can await some fascinating results when we have more data on the Topará Tradition.

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