

NOTAS

N69 IV:3 — A WHITE-BLACK TRADITION IN MESO-AMERICAN CERAMICS

Work at Chiapa de Corzo and Mirador in Chiapas by the author, as well as recent excavations at Las Canoas, Coatepec and Quachilco in the Tehuacan valley, have led him to awareness of a "White-Black" pottery tradition, in several distinct horizon styles. This tradition has a widespread extension and long duration in Mesoamerica. Earlier work by Drucker, MacNeish and Weiant suggested that this might be a time-marker. It is hoped that this note will stimulate modern investigation of this pottery and that it prove to be as useful a diagnostic type as Fine Orange and Plumbate have been.

This pottery had previously been termed: oxidized white, smudged ware, white-rimmed black, smothered ware, white-to-buff monochrome and early white. It has a varied surface coloration: dirty-white, pearly-white, creamy-white, bluish white to off-white, light gray, ivory black to buff. The core may be light black with a white periphery, or have the coloration reversed, in the early periods. Or there may be a perfectly white rim area, which includes both the periphery and the core, with a completely black body. There may be either a unifacial or bifacial white area on a dark toned body. There may also be long diagonal areas or bands, or even blotchy patchwork areas of black and white. These areas may either blend smoothly together without any recognizable division, or there may be a very hard and sharp division between the two colorations. This would lead one to classify this pottery as either white ware or black ware.

The method which produced the white to black effect is obviously some type of differential firing, based on the effects of oxidizing and reduction atmospheres, using a carbonaceous clay that fires white under oxidation and black under reduction atmosphere. The exact technical method of achieving this effect is not known, but probably the vessels were nested upon one another, with or without layers of organic material surrounding them, or perhaps set in earth or ash. Some of these vessels were probably also smudged with carbon to produce the effect, or at the end of the firing cycle might be carbon impregnated and refired,

Dixon shows that this tradition at Chiapa de Corzo began in the Cotorra phase (Chiapa I) with a strong-white slip, that grades into gray or buff, is easily eroded, and can be removed with the fingernail. He mentions that, "many sherds have on one or both surfaces a medium to dark gray or often a deep black. This does not seem to have been a gray or black slip. Rather, spots and streaks, and especially lip edges, show a grading into the white slip." Later excavations brought to light a larger quantity of sherds than Dixon had available, showing a deliberate pattern of firing to obtain distinct sharply-divided patches of black-on-white. This is the earliest of the horizon styles, found on both *tecomate* and cylindrical bowls. This was probably an accidental product of firing, but later the effect was sought deliberately.

In the Middle Formative phase we find another horizon style. This consists of a unifacial or bifacial white rim on a black body, with a rather irregular undulating white band. This decoration is generally on flat bottom bowls with hemispherical, outslanted bodies. Overlapping decorative styles include: incising into which hematite is rubbed, incised parallel horizontal lines on the rim, in what Coe dubbed the "double line break" but which might actually be a triple or quadruple line break. Sometimes the vessel interior bottom has a hub-and-spoke or "sunburst" design in grater bowl fashion, or a series of parallel lines.

Warren mentions that in the Dili phase (Chiapa II) at Chiapa de Corzo, experimentation began with firing techniques that later developed into white-rimmed-black ware. Coe mentions that in the Conchas phase at La Victoria his "Conchas White-Buff" type has black firing clouds as a common feature, and on his "Ocos Black" dishes with outflaring sides there are examples with only a partially reduced surface with the unreduced areas a natural buff color, while the "Ocos Black" cylindrical jars, "15% are slipped black and burnished on the exterior rim band, while the body below this is fired white and burnished." He further comments that the black-rim forms with white bodies show that Ocos Black and Conchas White-to-Buff are similar in having "a differential in oxidizing or reducing environments, producing different colors". MacNeish states that his "Ponce Black" has, "On usually black exterior surfaces there are occasionally mottled fine cloudlike patches of grayish white", and mentions that the exterior portions of hemispherical and incurved rim bowls have white or gray areas. Peterson at Mirador found that Mirador II bowls were of dark gray paste with a thick white hard slip and that the

black-white firing was of the very sharply defined variety with blotches of black on white. Recent excavations at the site of Las Canoas (TS 367) in the Tehuacan Valley of Puebla by the author, with ceramic studies by Kent Flannery, have brought to light more of this Middle Formative pottery. A type called "Canoas White" showed about 25% of the rim sherds had intentional attempts at differential firing, usually unifacial. Flannery remarked that tecomates were invariably smothered in this manner, probably by rubbing charcoal over a sun-dried white slip prior to firing. Also at Las Canoas is a type called "Canoas White-rimmed Orange" consisting almost exclusively of hemispherical bowls, with a white slipped interior, and on the exterior there is a white rim band of 2 to 4 cm. thick, below which is the bare orange paste. This latter variety may represent an ancestor of an imitation painted-rim pottery.

Besides the Middle Formative sites mentioned, this pottery has also been found at La Venta, El Trapiche Mata Verde, in the Xe phase of Altar de Sacrificios, in eastern Oaxaca, parts of Veracruz and southern Tabasco. It is allied to central Mexico types at Tlatilco, Calixtlahuaca and El Arbolillo-Zacatenco. .

A third horizon style consists of a fired white-rimmed black pottery, generally on flat bottomed bowls with hemispherical or slightly in-curving sides. The white rim is usually bifacial, even though the white may not penetrate the core very far, while the body is a burnished dark gray to black. The white is usually a bluish-white. This is generally found in the Late Formative phase. Warren mentions that in the Chiapa V phase White-rimmed-Black first appeared. He also mentions that some vessels were being painted in imitation and not as the result of firing. At Mirador, Peterson mentions that the forms are limited to hemispherical bowls with flat bottoms, and that the bowl exterior has a white rim produced by three methods: (1) by firing, in which the body is black or smudged brown, and the rim is a wide band of dark creamy-white or dirty-white, (2) by painting a thick band of lime white or yellow white on a brown slip, with a narrow band on the interior and a wide band on the exterior, (3) by the results left by erosion of method 2, in which a light brown rim band is left on a dark brown body. The latter method, accidentally produced at first, seems to have been deliberately sought in the succeeding Protoclassic and Early Classic phases. Excavations at Coatepec in the Tehuacan Valley by MacNeish and Peterson have brought to

light appreciable numbers of white-rimmed black flat-bottom hemispherical bowls. Similar pottery can be seen in the works of Drucker and Weiant at Tres Zapotes.

A fourth horizon style is mainly a diffuse type of smudging or smothering, with ill-defined edges between white and black, and in which both white and black are degraded, becoming various tones of grey to brown, in the form of sporadic blotches or patchwork or very irregular diagonal areas. This is the style found in the Protoclassic phase generally. The darker tones predominate, and one is just as likely to find a black-rimmed dirty white or grey vessel as a black vessel with cream-colored patches scattered sporadically about. This pottery is well represented in the Tehuacan Valley by the site of Quachilco, where large numbers of grey sherds showed the diffuse type of smudging on hemispherical bowls. This is found in Chiapas in the VII phase at both Chiapa de Corzo and Mirador.

During the Late Protoclassic and Early Classic horizon, the style of vessel form changed to bowls with cylindrical or slightly outcurved walls, often with basal ridges, and nubbin or small slab supports, while decoration in the form of incised triangles, wavy lines and cross-hachure was abundant. The coloration differences between white and black are increasingly more vague. One finds diffuse clouds and blotches scattered around the vessel. There is hardly any white which deserved to be called by that name, but is usually a grey to tan or dull dirty cream on a greenish-tan, gray or bluish-brown body. Only rarely does one find a definite rim zone outlined. Warren mentions that in the Chiapa VIII phase the main addition to white-rimmed-black types are the use of interior incising, basal bevelling, basal bosses and vessel supports, and that the white rim-black type is dominant. Peterson at Mirador also found that in the VIII phase the vessel forms became more elaborated with many new types of cylindrical, slightly outcurved side or composite silhouette bowls, with basal ridges and intricate incised designs. This variety of pottery is found in tremendous quantities in caves in the Central Depression of Chiapas during the Jiquipilas (Chiapa VIII) and Laguna (Chiapa IX) or Early Classic phase. In one cave alone the author saw about 20,000 bowls of dirty-tan-rimmed black pottery, and slightly lesser amounts in several other caves. This pottery seems to die out after the early Classic phase. Warren mentions specifically that none was found in the Chiapa IX phase, despite the fact that it had been dominant in the VIII phase. Peterson found

the same situation at Mirador in Chiapas and in pottery from the Classic site of Cerro del Túnel (TS 73) in the Tehuacan valley.

What is the origin of this pottery? Most probably it is the Gulf Coast. The northern limit seems to be near Panuco, extending down all of Veracruz, with part of eastern Puebla and Oaxaca, much of Tabasco, with isolated finds in the Central Depression of Chiapas, the Maya Petén, and into the Soconusco area of Guatemala. Michael Coe and Kent Flannery (Personal communication) reported that in the Soconusco region they have two Formative phases "Cuadros" and "Jocotal" in which white-rimmed-black occurs on flat bottomed bowls with hemispherical or outflaring sides. The southern limits have not yet been discovered, and it would be interesting to see how far this pottery extends.

It would also be of interest to survey the geographic extensions of both the Macro-Otomangue and Maya linguistic groups to see how they correspond to known extensions of this pottery, prior to 1,500 B.C., because either one or the other had considerable to do with the spread of it. Maya-speaking people evidently blanketed the Gulf Coast before being split up by the Totonaca and Nahuatl groups, leaving the Huastec isolated. Also, probably with Maya linguistic affiliations were the famous "Olmec" from the La Venta region of Veracruz. It should be possible to determine if the geographical extensions of certain horizon styles of this white-black tradition corresponds in any way to borders between these two linguistic groups or if they mutually shared this trait.

The author does not wish to equate a linguistic shift on a one-to-one basis with a ceramic shift, but it would seem that the Protoclassic and Early Classic varieties of vaguely diffuse and degraded White-Black pottery might correlate with linguistic happenings or reflect other kinds of cultural occurrences. This is a theme for speculation which should be checked upon in the future, particularly by readers who have been angered by the foregoing statements.

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N70 IV: 3 — THE GOD MALTEUTL IN THE HISTOYRE DU MECHIQUE

The *Histoyre du Mechique* relates that "... in this province of Tetzcoco lived another type of people called Populoca from the area of the Mixteca. . . The Populoca have another idol about the size of a man, which they call Malteutl, which means "Paper God," dyed with human blood, because every time they won a battle they sacrificed the best slave they had captured to him as a sign of thanksgiving."¹

The god Malteutl of the *Histoyre du Mechique* can perhaps be equated with the god of the Mexican merchants, the *pochteca*, as Acosta Saignes has suggested previously.² According to Tezozomoc "Vinieron los tratantes, mercaderes y arrieros de las jurisdicciones de la corona e imperio mexicano, que son los primeros que son causa de las guerras por el trato y granjería que entre manos traen: y estos tienen su dios y templo de por sí, y es llamado su ídolo Meteutle. . ." ³

In connection with the god Malteutl of the Populucas of Tetzcoco

¹ Eduard de Jonghe "Histoyre du Mechique," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris* Nouvelle Série II, (1905), pp. 1-41. (Unpublished English translation by F. Horcasitas, 1950).

² Miguel Acosta S. "Los pochteca: ubicación de los mercaderes en la estructura social tenochca", *Acta Anthropologica*, I, No. 1, (1945), p. 40.

³ Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc *Crónica mexicana*. México, Editorial Leyenda, 1944. p. 272.