

THE ANIMAL FORM IN POTTERY:  
SOME HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS

by

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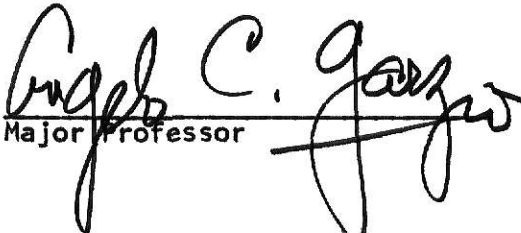
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## INTRODUCTION

The earliest artistic representations we know are of animals. Examples exist from Gravettian culture (30,000-20,000 B.C.). The basis of this culture is Aurignacian, which covered southern Russia, central Europe, Spain, France and Italy. The men of these paleolithic cultures were primarily mammoth hunters who depicted the animals essential to their lives in rock paintings, engravings, and carvings.

A Moravian site of Gravettian mammoth hunters, dated about 20,000 B.C., was excavated by Dr. Karel Absolon between 1924 and 1938. Along with large assemblages of flint and bone tools and weapons, many complete and fragmentary figures of animals such as bear, lion, rhinoceros, horse, mammoth, and fox were found. These men produced implements decorated with geometric and animal motifs associated with procreation and success in the hunt. Some of the animal carvings show magic signs for wounds.<sup>1</sup>

During the Solutrian (about 20,000-15,000 B.C.) and the Magdalenian periods (about 15,000-10,000 B.C.) refinements in rock paintings appear along with some animals modeled in clay relief, e.g., the mating bisons of the Magdalenian period in Le Tuc d'Audoubert, France.<sup>2</sup>

Andreas Lommel speculates that the hunter's entire mode of thought, as well as his art, was dominated by animals. He viewed them as equals, but as

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<sup>1</sup>W. and B. Forman, Prehistoric Art (London: Spring Books, ND), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>André Leroi-Gourhan, Treasures of Prehistoric Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., ND), plate 92. The splendid Magdalenian cave paintings from the Franco-Cantabrian region may be seen in this book.

he found it necessary to kill animals to live, he persuaded himself that he wasn't really killing the animals themselves, but only their bodies and that they could live again if their remains were treated with the correct magic. Lommel believes it was this sort of reasoning that led men to reproduce animals in art. With the image man created he hoped to control the spirit and the powers he attributed to the animal and thereby insure the game supply.<sup>3</sup>

As people developed mesolithic and later neolithic ways of life and began to make pottery, animal forms and designs continued to be used. Zoö-morphic effigy pots, used as votive objects and/or libation vessels associated with burials, have been excavated in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas.

The contents of graves of early farming communities indicate that the people believed in a life after death. The dead were buried on their side in a contracted position and along with them were buried pottery, marble beads, bracelets of Tertiary shells, implements and weapons of bone and stone. Some communities cremated the dead and placed the remains in urns which were buried with vessels holding food and drink. Figurines of bulls, goats and rams have been found and are believed to be symbols of fertility connected with religious beliefs. Feminine fertility figures modeled in clay were common at Moravian sites and are thought to express religious beliefs and social relations of the time. All these figurines appear to be a part of the cult of the Great Mother Earth, a fertility cult apparently common to all among the farming communities of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup>

A culture named "Danubian" in the Danube River Basin, dated about 5,000

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<sup>3</sup>Andreas Lommel, Prehistoric and Primitive Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Forman, Prehistoric Art, p. 20.



B.C., had a pottery tradition similar to that in the Near East. This pottery is known for its "spiral-meander" decoration, the symbol of the double-axe engraved inside the pots, and for the lugs or handles made to resemble human and animal heads added to the pots.<sup>5</sup>

Nomadic tribes of Asia and northern Europe of the first Millennium B.C. had a custom of burying a horse, as well as wives, servants, ornaments and weapons, with its master or sacrificing the animal on top of the grave. Later there developed the notion of making a clay image of the horse, sometimes in the form of a libation vessel, and placing it with the dead master instead of the real animal. Where horses were scarce, as in India, it was the custom to offer carved models of horses to the gods. In hard times, old horseshoes were "sacrificed."<sup>6</sup>

Wood was the principal material used by Africans for sculpture, but about 500 B.C.-200 A.D. the Nok culture of Nigeria made human and animal sculptures, especially heads, of terra cotta (a reddish earthenware clay). Animals were represented more realistically than people, although we don't know why.<sup>7</sup> The Ife culture, which existed several centuries (precise dates aren't established) after the Nok culture and may have descended from it, also made magnificent terra cotta heads, in addition to bronzes. Clay animal heads may have been intended to be permanent shrine offerings to take the place of live animals.<sup>8</sup> Some animal sculptures were used as gravestones.<sup>9</sup> It is generally

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<sup>5</sup>V. Gordon Childe, The Dawn of European Civilization (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 108.

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Boudet, Man and Beast (New York: Golden Press, 1964), pp. 136-137.

<sup>7</sup>Frank Willett, Ife (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp. 110-118.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., plate 86.

conceded that much archaeological work remains to be done in Africa and those of us who appreciate such efforts would like to believe that future excavations may show that clay animal forms were used more widely over the continent than present evidence allows us to believe.

Religion was a strong force upon all American Indian art and anthropomorphic and zoöomorphic clay pots were usually made for burial purposes.<sup>10</sup> Animal effigy forms were made in North, Middle, and South America following the Archaic periods of cultural development.

Much has been written about the ceramics of the Chinese, Persian, Egyptian, Mayan, Aztec, Nascan, Mochican, and Incan cultures, and I have deliberately avoided an account of them for that reason. I have chosen to write about the clay zoöomorphic forms of the Middle Jōmon period through the Protohistoric period in Japan, the periods in Crete designated by Sir Arthur Evans as Early Minoan I through Middle Minoan I, the Mississippian period in the southeastern United States, Colima in western Mexico, and Casas Grandes in northwestern Mexico. These places were selected not because they are representative of ceramic forms and styles found around the world, but because each made unusual zoöomorphic vessels. Each cultural area was influenced by cultures in other areas, but it was their particular adaptation and improvement which made their forms unique. Each of these cultures is different from the others and the study of them shows a rich variety of the ways animal forms were used in clay, especially functional pottery.

The ancient zoöomorphic effigy vessels from the five cultures are charming, each type in its own way. Each culture discussed made huge numbers of

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<sup>10</sup>Henry Lehmann, Pre-Columbian Ceramics (New York: Viking Press, 1962), p. 26.

effigy forms. One wonders if the potters ever did anything else. Although they were made to be symbolic burial objects, these pots were made with such spirit and care that one would like to believe the potters found much joy in making them.

Following a survey of the five cultures and their animal pottery there will be a discussion of the pottery which I have made with reference to the forms and influence of the cultures reviewed. I will attempt to contrast the purpose and importance of the ancients' pottery with the way we view their work today and to show that zoomorphic characteristics in contemporary pottery can have aesthetic interest and a place in our lives.

## CHAPTER I

JAPAN: MIDDLE JŌMON PERIOD THROUGH  
THE PROTOHISTORIC PERIOD

Jōmon, the mesolithic period of Japan, gets its name from a practice, popular during that time, of cord-marking pottery. While a pot was still moist, twisted fibers were rolled across the surface to make rows of indented decoration.<sup>11</sup> Some figurines are believed to have been made as early as 5,000 B.C., but it wasn't until the Middle Jōmon period (about 2,500 B.C.), that animal effigies were made. The temporal order for the old clay relics are Jōmon coiled earthenwares, Dogu and Doju (clay beasts, anthropomorphic and animal), Yayoi earthenwares, and the Haniwa (hollow clay rings). The Dogu are imaginary creatures. Some are definitely feminine and resemble European fertility figures. While the Doju are not realistic, the forms of bears, monkeys and occasionally dogs can be recognized (Fig. 1). The head and torso were emphasized and the backs of the clay beasts received detailed decoration. J. Edward Kidder, Jr., suggests that many of these may have been fitted onto the rims of large vessels.<sup>12</sup> Very little is known about these early figurines and there has been much speculation about them. Were they associated with the Mother Goddess? Were they fetish figures? Were they intended for burials only? Or were they bone containers?

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<sup>11</sup> J. Edward Kidder, Jr., Masterpieces of Japanese Sculpture (Tokyo, Japan and Rutland, Vermont: Bijutsu Shuppan-Sha and Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1961), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

About 300 B.C., the end of the Jōmon period, southern Japan saw the development of wet rice agriculture and the domestication of animals. The hunting and gathering people continued to live as they had been living in northern Japan, but in the south the fetish figures had no place in the new agricultural culture and other symbols of good luck, protection and the like, consistent with the new ways, replaced them.

Neolithic pottery, first found at a site in Yayoi street in Tokyo, was given the name Yayoi. At the beginning of the Yayoi period (about 300 B.C. to 300 A.D.) a bronze culture entered Japan from the south.<sup>13</sup> Pottery made after this time is smaller, thinner, wheel-made and fired at a higher temperature than was Jōmon. Whereas Jōmon ware was fired on the open ground, Yayoi pots were fired in pits.<sup>14</sup> Cord-marks had disappeared and "comb" lines decorated the pottery.

The Haniwa were made in the Protohistoric (Tumuli) period (about 300-600 A.D.) and are considered to be the first clay sculptures of the people we know as Japanese. They were clay tomb figures set up on artificial mounds built over burial chambers.<sup>15</sup> The idea of tomb figures came into Japan from Korea and China. The Chinese, from the Han to the T'ang Dynasties (206 B.C.-906 A.D.), put "spirit objects," that is, clay facsimiles of familiar everyday people, animals, especially horses, and furnishings, in tombs.

Some 10,000 mound tombs of different sizes have been found throughout Japan, many of them in the Kinki, Kanto, and Inland Sea regions. The largest

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<sup>13</sup> ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Noma Seiroku, The Art of Clay (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan-Sha, 1954), pp. 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Fumio Miki, Haniwa: the Clay Sculpture of Proto-Historic Japan, trans. by Roy Andrew Miller (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1960), p. 21.

and most typical were keyhole shaped, surrounded by moats, and had hundreds of figures on and around them. The principal divisions of Japanese social classes are thought to have been established then and these were the tombs of the wealthy.<sup>16</sup> The Haniwa, quite unlike Chinese or Korean burial objects, were made with tubular clay bases which could be set into the ground. The symbolic Haniwa, some parts wheel-thrown, were made in many forms, ships, houses, people (many in ceremonial dress), but the ones which are of interest here are the animals. The horse was the most important Haniwa animal figure, the most numerous, and was often shown with full riding regalia. Kidder sees the horse figure as playing two roles. It probably symbolized the aspirations of political conquest and at other times it represented the steed ridden by the Shaman as he accompanied the soul of the dead.<sup>17</sup> Other Haniwa animal forms are dogs, boars, monkeys, deer, chickens and water fowls. These clay figures appear to have been quickly made and are the simplest of forms, nevertheless they are sensitive, lively, and compelling.

A libation ware, made for use inside tombs and often decorated with human, animal, and bird figures on the shoulders of the pots, is Sue ware. It is a gray, wheel-made pottery introduced by Korean immigrants to Japan, derived from Silla and perhaps Chinese pottery.<sup>18</sup>

Prior to the introduction of the gray Sue pottery from Korea there was no ware which served almost exclusively the ritual needs, nor was tomb ritual so advanced as to demand such a ware. The domestic Haji acted in this capacity when called upon to do so. Haji was

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<sup>16</sup>Kidder, Jr., Masterpieces, pp. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup>J. Edward Kidder, Jr., The Birth of Japanese Art (London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1965), pp. 140-143.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

the font from which the cylinders sprang, leaving little doubt that the origins of the cylinders and possibly even broader concepts in the haniwa are rooted somewhere in Haji history. The connection need not be labored; the Haji-be made both the domestic ware and the haniwa.<sup>19</sup>

The Haji-be was the potters' guild, whose members were makers of most objects for funerary use.

When Buddhism was introduced into Japan from China in the 6th century, cremation became the practice and the tumuli and Haniwa were no longer made.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

## CHAPTER II

CRETE: EARLY MINOAN I PERIOD THROUGH  
MIDDLE MINOAN I PERIOD

Large amounts of archaeological material have been excavated in Crete, but there is considerable disagreement as to the purpose and function of the objects from the earlier periods.

Henri Frankfort says that Anatolian customs and religion, by way of Cyprus, influenced the foundation of Minoan civilization.<sup>20</sup> V. Gordon Childe, in The Dawn of European Civilization, suggests that there was a slow diffusion of these customs from the much earlier neolithic Danubian civilization in eastern Europe. Pottery forms in Crete, especially zoöomorphic ones, are similar to those in Anatolia. Stone vases carved into the shape of animals were made in Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Related shapes, mostly wheel-made, were made of clay by the Hittites. They made large beak-spouted jugs with three handles like a hydria. A new feature on the beaks was a sharply pointed "chin." From Kara Euyuk in Anatolia there are simpler hand-made examples which Frankfort believes are evidence for the Hittite vessels being genuine descendants of the old Anatolian type from which "Vassiliki" and "Urfinis" wares originated in Crete and Greece, but at an earlier time.<sup>21</sup>

One cannot discuss the zoöomorphic in Crete without mentioning seal engraving. A wide range of animal life is depicted on the seals which were

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<sup>20</sup> Henri Frankfort, "Occasional paper no. 8," Studies in Early Pottery of the Near East (Royal Anthropological Institute, 1927), p. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 156.



used for purposes of identification, security, magic, art, and sometimes lucky charms. Cretan women still wear ancient seal stones as milk charms.<sup>22</sup>

The pottery of Early Minoan I (about 2,500 B.C.) was made in a variety of well proportioned and simply decorated shapes in a style known as "Agios Onouphrios"; the name derived from the site at which Sir Arthur Evans discovered it. Typical of this style are round-bottomed jugs with upswept spouts, which remind one of birds stretching their necks to swallow, two-handled tankards, two-handled bowls, and one-handled cups. There are also zoomorphic vessels, "barrel" vessels, and cylindrical pyxides. Other wares, contemporary with Agios Onouphrios, are "Pyrgos" and "Lebena." Notable is a pot described by Keith Branigan.

In the EM I stratum at Lebena Alexiou found a series of oddly shaped vases which represented both animals and plants. Outstanding amongst this group of unique vessels was a small one in the shape of a pig. The rotund body, four stout but tiny legs, and the thrusting, blunt snout all contribute to produce a charming caricature of the animal.<sup>23</sup> (See Fig. 2.)

In Early Minoan II (about 2,300 to 2,100 B.C.) "Vassiliki" ware developed in the eastern part of the island. There potters produced "teapots" with spouts painted to resemble birds, spouted jars, and beakers. These pots are among those that bear a strong resemblance to the beak-spouted forms of Anatolia.

In Early Minoan III (approximately 2,100 B.C.) animal designs, based upon an adaptation of the old "double-axe" motif, appeared. By adding a head,

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<sup>22</sup>Reynold Higgins, Minoan and Mycenaean Art (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), p. 50.

<sup>23</sup>Keith Branigan, Foundations of Palatial Crete (New York: Praeger Books, 1970), p. 144.

legs, or tail, a naturalistic animal form evolved from a geometric motif.<sup>24</sup>

In this period the spiral, believed to have been introduced from the Cyclades (Greek islands in the Aegean Sea), appeared on pottery. Cycladic functional pottery forms, which suggest animal shapes and show the potters' wonderful sense of humor, were also introduced. There are "duck pots," "ring vases" like serpents, "sauceboats" which look like plump comical birds, made on the Greek mainland as well as in the Cyclades, and various animal rhyta (a type of sculptured goblet usually in the form of an animal, a woman, or a mythological creature). Again, the influence appears to be strongly Anatolian.

Zoöomorphic vessels, generally believed to have been ritual libation vessels, were made in the form of bulls, rams, pigs, and birds in Early Minoan III and Middle Minoan I (about 1,900 B.C.).

Religion is thought to have been a matter of personal rather than public practice until Middle Minoan I when mountain peak sanctuaries, of which about two dozen are known, appeared. Keith Branigan believes these are evidence of communal religion and suggests that each sanctuary may have been a shrine visited on specific occasions.<sup>25</sup> Paul Faure thinks that these sanctuaries may have been the places of worship of the lower classes and that the aristocrats chose the religious practices associated with the palaces that began to be erected in Middle Minoan I.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>A. D. Lacy, Greek Pottery in the Bronze Age (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1967), p. 46.

<sup>25</sup>Branigan, Foundations, pp. 103-107.

<sup>26</sup>Paul Faure, "Nouvelles Recherches Sur Trois Sortes De Sanctuaries Cretois," Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique, 91 (1967), pp. 148-149.

The identity of the deity or deities worshipped at these sanctuaries remains a mystery and causes a great deal of speculation. Some of the choices are "Earth Mother," "Snake Goddess," "Britomartis" (Mistress of the Animals), and Hermes (Master of the Animals). Bull vessels are found at the sanctuaries, but little is known about the bull in Early Minoan religion. Large numbers of votive figurines have been found at these shrines, some of humans, human limbs, and domestic animals, e.g., sheep, bulls, goats, dogs, pigs, oxen, and cows. Those who brought the figurines may have been seeking protection or cures for persons or animals. There are wild creature figurines such as weasels and beetles from which the people may have been seeking protection. The agrimi (Cretan ibex) and birds who were food animals may have been made into figurines to aid the people in hunting them. The strength and virility of the animals were qualities which the Early Minoans must have admired. Representations of the animals worn on the person or deposited at the shrines may have been intended to secure those desirable characteristics for the person who used them.<sup>27</sup>

During Middle Minoan I zoomorphic and anthropomorphic pottery designs were rejected and a trend toward controlled geometric and plant designs began.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Branigan, Foundations, p. 107.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

## CHAPTER III

THE MISSISSIPPIAN PERIOD IN THE  
SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES

When the Hopewell culture was declining in the north (about 500 A.D.), new groups of people were coming into the southeastern United States, some from Mexico by way of Texas, and possibly some from the southwest where the Pueblo Indians were in the period designated "Developmental." By the Mississippian period (900-1,700 A.D.) an agricultural culture, composed of the descendants of the natives and the newcomers, flourished. No single center for either of the two stages of this period, designated Temple Mound I and Temple Mound II, has been found. High levels of human development occurred simultaneously along the major waterways in the central and lower Mississippi Valley (Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana) and later in Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Ohio, and Illinois. These groups of people were mound builders, but unlike Hopewellians, who built their mounds for burials, the Mississippians chose sites to be religious centers and constructed platform mounds for temple foundations. Chiefs' houses were also built on the top of these temple mounds. In some cases, important dead and elaborate grave furnishings were buried in the mounds. The largest known temple mound is at Cahokia, Illinois. This mound is one hundred feet high and covers an area of sixteen acres.<sup>29</sup> All the centers reflect traits from Mexico. Following the Mexican pattern, fortified city-states were built with vassal villages usually

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<sup>29</sup>Jesse D. Jennings, Prehistory of North America (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968), p. 218.

close by. Each was built around a central plaza with truncated earth pyramids and stairways to reach the thatched temples and chiefs' houses at the top. The mounds were built in layers and a layer was added each fifty-two years or "century" as was the Mexican custom.<sup>30</sup>

A new religion, introduced about the middle of the period, based upon the Mexican "Cult of the Dead" brought new designs such as trophy heads, skulls, eagles, sun discs, crosses, the "weeping eye" in the palm of a hand, rattlesnakes, and swastikas to the arts.<sup>31</sup> Bottles, jars, and bowls were new forms developed in pottery. Outstanding pieces were made in the southern and lower Mississippi Valley. Good clays were plentiful and a number of tempering materials were used to open the clay body and prevent its cracking. Examples of such materials are crushed rock, powdered shell, crushed potsherds, ashes of bark, sponge, and raw vegetable fiber which was pulverized. Pots were formed by modelling or building wide bands of clay upon a clay pancake supported on a shallow vessel. The strips of clay were then smoothed over by means of paddle, anvil, and scrapers. Handles, legs, and the like were modeled and attached.<sup>32</sup> Some pieces were slip painted in red, white, and black or sepia on yellow clay.

There were thousands of human and animal effigy pots made in Temple Mound II. In The Mound Builders, H. C. Shetrone says that the effigy forms

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<sup>30</sup>Miguel Covarrubias, The Eagle, the Jaguar and the Serpent (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 259.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>32</sup>W. H. Holmes, "Aboriginal Pottery of the Eastern U. S.," 20th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1898-99, 1903, pp. 50-51.

were often symbolic rather than aesthetic. The majority were for ceremonial use and have been found in burials.<sup>33</sup>

Ford, Phillips, and Griffin list the fish as the most common effigy form and the frog second because these shapes resembled the standard Mississippian jar form and could be easily adapted without modification. These forms were widely used throughout the eastern United States. Strap handles, a northern trait, were attached to some jars. There are fish bottles in Middle America, e.g., Tlatilco, quite similar to the ones in the Mississippi Valley, the Memphis area in particular. Swan effigies were a feature of the Memphis area as well. Bird effigies have been found in large numbers at Moundville, Alabama. It was common to make bird forms incorporating different bird features, such as the neck of the heron and the tail of the woodpecker into a single bird shape.<sup>34</sup>

Some effigy pots are four-footed. There are some which resemble dogs, "serpent-cats," and duck pots. Many have "teapot-snout" tails.<sup>35</sup> A few are hooded effigy bottles which suggest animal forms. Both duck pots and hooded effigies have counterparts in pueblo pottery, especially that of Casas Grandes in northern Mexico.

The rim effigy bowl is probably the most important of the Mississippian effigies.

The rim effigy bowl is one of the most constant features of the Middle Mississippi vessel complex, as it is found throughout the

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<sup>33</sup>H. C. Shetrone, The Mound Builders (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1930), pp. 142-143.

<sup>34</sup>James A. Ford, Philip Phillips and James B. Griffin, "Distribution of Some Mississippi Period Vessel Shapes and Features," sec. IV, Archaeological Survey in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley, 1940-1947, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, vol. XXV, 1951, pp. 162-163.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 167-168.

Southeast and is found in both the early levels and the late. As a ceramic concept it is widely distributed throughout the New World but it is so relatively simple that it could easily have been developed independently many times, once the idea of presenting life forms in clay became a part of the ceramic tradition. The area within the eastern United States where this idea is present reaches from Aztalan on the north, to the northeastern Fort Ancient sites, to the Georgian and Florida coastal areas on the southeast, to Nebraska and Mill Creek sites on the northwest, and to "Caddo" sites on the southwest. Their relative scarcity around the periphery of this distribution makes it clear that the center for this idea, irrespective of its origin, is the Middle Mississippi area as originally defined by Holmes.<sup>36</sup>

The rim effigies are simple, symmetrical forms with a modeled animal head, tail, snout, or other appendages attached. These animal forms tend to be composite rather than specific animals.

The culture of the Mississippians had almost disappeared when the French came into the area in the eighteenth century. The exact reasons for the decline and disintegration of the Mississippians we do not know.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

## CHAPTER IV

## COLIMA, MEXICO

In western Mexico the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima developed a high ceramic art. Very little is known about the villages of the people living in those areas or of the deities they may have worshipped. The ceramics which we know were looted from tombs to be sold by local "pot hunters." These tombs were so thoroughly plundered that the task of reconstruction has been extremely difficult for the archaeologist.

Ceremonial ritual may have been based upon a cult of the dead, or ancestor worship, instead of the pantheon of independent gods common to Classic Mesoamerica.<sup>37</sup> Typical in this area of western Mexico were shaft-chamber tomb complexes, generally foreign to Mesoamerica, but very much like those in Colombia and Ecuador. The South American tombs contained large hollow figures, but these are different from those in the tombs in west Mexico.<sup>38</sup> As many individual graves in west Mexico are simple and shallow, it seems obvious that the large shaft-chamber tombs, which were elaborately furnished, were the tombs of the wealthy. Such tombs required great effort to build and were probably prepared before death. Some may have been used as family crypts.<sup>39</sup>

Isabel Kelly excavated several Colima tombs and developed a plan of four sequential phases for Colima: The Orties (Classic) (tomb period), the

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<sup>37</sup>Clement W. Meighan and H. B. Nicholson, "The Ceramic Mortuary Offerings of Prehistoric West Mexico," Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico, The Proctor Stafford Collection (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1970) p. 25.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 27.



Colima and Armeria phases (Early Postclassic) and the Periquillo phase (Late Postclassic). Later she added a fifth phase, Comala, after Ortices. Two hundred B.C. to 330 A.D. are the dates obtained by the Carbon 14 technique for the Ortices phase, the period in which the effigy pottery and hollow figures were made.<sup>40</sup>

The ceramics of the three states provide delightful genre scenes. Many of these pieces, both of men and animals, appear to be caricatures and the people represented seem cheerful and humorous. There is a concentration upon modelling the principal features of the subject with a minimum of detail.

Effigy vessels, excluding large hollow figurines, are not typical of all western Mexico. Only in Colima and at Chupicuaro, Guanajuato, have they been found in quantity.

The Chupicuaro effigies, although occasionally consisting of a vessel in full zoö-morphic form, are more apt to be produced by the addition of small animal heads or simply modeled human facial features to the rims or sides of ordinary vessels. In contrast, the Colima effigies show a preponderance of true anthropomorphic and zoö-morphic forms, as well as an occasional vessel with naturalistic figures appended. These Colima effigies are without doubt some of the finest modeled vessels in Mexico and are found associated with the famous hollow figurines from the province. . . . Normally they are made of polished redware.<sup>41</sup>

Colima made a wide range of zoö-morphic pots, the most famous of which are the edible dogs, thought to be associated with the God of Death, Xólotl, who led the dead on their journey to the underworld.<sup>42</sup> There are effigies of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> Robert H. Lister, "The Present Status of the Archaeology of Western Mexico: A Distributional Study," University of Colorado Studies, Series in Anthropology, No. 5 (May, 1955), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Kan, "The Pre-Columbian Art of Western Mexico," Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico, The Proctor Stafford Collection (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1970), p. 14.

gophers, crabs, horned toads, two-headed snakes, deer, jaguar, peccaries, monkeys, coatis, mice, armadillos, turtles, lizards, parrots, owls, and water birds. These were often large hollow clay pots with spouts, some of which could be adapted to be handles. As these were intended to be grave offerings, they were utilitarian and could have held food or drink. The pots range in size from a few inches to about twenty inches tall.

The pottery of the early Colima tomb period is probably the most uniform of western Mexican pottery styles. Most of the pottery, especially the large hollow figures, was coated with slip and burnished. The pots are colored light orange to deep red. Spots of black patina appear on many of the vessels and in some cases black becomes the dominant color. Black was also obtained by reduction firing.<sup>43</sup> As anyone can see by looking at this pottery in museums, the shades of warm colors are rich and the burnished pieces are so smooth and glossy that they appear glazed. These potters and/or sculptors were remarkably skilled craftsmen and the quality of their ceramics is excellent.

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<sup>43</sup>Hasso von Winning and Alfred Stendahl, Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico and Central America (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., ND), p. 67.

## CHAPTER V

## CASAS GRANDES, MEXICO

Casas Grandes culture was located in the states of northwest Chihuahua and southeast Sonora in northern Mexico. As in other cultural areas, sites have been looted for pottery which could be sold. Nevertheless, systematic archaeological work has been done since the early 1900's and many different accounts have been offered about the origins and extent of the culture of the people who lived there. Without reviewing the evidence and arguments, it can be said that the main question, at least in the early part of this century, was whether the principal influences upon the culture came from Mexico or the southwestern United States. As a result of excavations done in the 1950's by Robert Lister, as reported by Charles DiPeso, three primary occupational phases were proposed.

1. The earliest level of culture (about 900 A.D.). This was a pre-ceramic culture that knew corn and some stone core and flake tools. At this early time the entire Sierra Madre Occidental was a cultural passage which connected Mexico and the American Southwest.

2. The appearance of a group of Mogollon-like people (about 1,000 A.D.). (Mogollon culture developed from Cochise culture and was one of three major Indian cultures in the southwestern United States region.)

3. The multi-storied cliff-dwellings were built by the Mogollon-like people, influenced by southwest pueblo culture. A bit later (about 1,100 A.D.), these same people moved east to the Casas Grandes, Santa Maria, and

Carmen valleys and formed the dominant culture there.<sup>44</sup>

Undoubtedly the Mogollon people were influenced by Pueblo architecture. When they moved away from the mountains, perhaps to find better agricultural lands, they lost their cultural identity and became essentially Pueblo. The Casas Grandes culture is thus the result of the Mogollon people coming under Pueblo influence. A similar phenomenon occurred in New Mexico where the Mimbres people lost their identity when they became dominated by Pueblo culture. Lister believes that further archeological research will show that cultural elements from central Mexico also influenced the Casas Grandes people.<sup>45</sup>

As village-farming communities developed, well planned multi-storied pueblo house types with inside stairways were built around a central plaza. They had T-shaped windows, perfectly plumb clay walls, their thickness in proportion to their elevation, and extensive heating and drainage systems.<sup>46</sup>

Eventually the villages of the Casas Grandes culture developed into what DiPeso calls an urban civilization, although it lacked writing. The community, that could now be called a city, was based upon a master plan and may have had as many as five thousand people living there. There were ball courts and ceremonial mounds, and human sacrifice was practiced. There were guilds or artisan classes. It is these features that suggest that a strong

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<sup>44</sup>Charles DiPeso, "Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Northern Sierra," Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 4 (London: University of Texas Press, Ltd., 1966), pp. 14-16.

<sup>45</sup>Robert H. Lister, "Archaeological Excavations in the Northern Sierra Madre Occidental, Chihuahua and Sonora, Mexico," University of Colorado Studies, Series in Anthropology No. 7 (May, 1958), pp. 114-115.

<sup>46</sup>Alma Reed, The Ancient Past of Mexico (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp. 170-172.

religious group from central Mexico gained control of the area and imposed their culture upon the existing one.<sup>47</sup>

In the first ceramic period (about 1,100 A.D.) of Casas Grandes there was a plain, red-brown ware much like Mogollon. Later when the culture reached the village-farming stage, there was a red ware, a polished black ware similar to that of contemporary Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, and a polychrome ware, usually black and red on a light neutral background, in addition to the old brown ware. This pottery has been well preserved because it was carefully buried with the dead under the floors, often under the corner walls, of houses along with other funerary objects.<sup>48</sup>

The pottery pieces were coiled and were generally small. They were rarely more than ten inches tall and many pieces are less than three inches in height.<sup>49</sup> Jars were the most common form, the typical size being about seven and one-half inches high. Tempering materials were few, ground up sherds and pyrite being commonly used.

Effigy vases make up about ten percent of the polychrome ware. This is in marked contrast to the ceramics of southwestern United States cultures where effigy pots constitute a small proportion of the ceramic production. A. V. Kidder divides them into three groups:

1. Examples with modeled features added to the sides of jars.
2. Examples with the heads of animals, birds, or humans added to the rims of jars.

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<sup>47</sup> DiPeso, Handbook, pp. 21-23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth M. Chapman, "Casas Grandes Pottery," Art and Archaeology, vol. 16 (1923), p. 25.

3. True effigies--all these are of humans.<sup>50</sup>

The second group includes a hooded effigy. Hoods were modeled from strips of clay by repoussé technique into the likeness of humans or animals and attached to half the rim of the standard jar.<sup>51</sup>

Kidder divides the units of design into opposed stepped figures, single or double scrolls, and club shapes. Life forms were reduced to basic shapes and these elements appear in rectangles and triangles on most pottery vessels.<sup>52</sup> Birds were applied by negative drawing and often appear with serpents in the triangular or rectangular panels. A few "plumed serpents" were incorporated into designs.

The use of paneling and negative painting as factors of composition should be emphasized as the most prominent Casas Grandes contribution to art. The art style could not, however, have been so highly perfected without the artistic mastery of these two highly specialized and distinctive techniques.<sup>53</sup>

Internal strife probably accompanied by war with people from the west brought an end to the Casas Grandes civilization. Paquimé, the pueblo city in the Casas Grandes valley, was burned and looted and the people had vanished before the arrival of the Spaniards. In the sixteenth century the Spanish expedition of General Francisco Ibarra came upon the ruins of Paquimé.

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<sup>50</sup>A. V. Kidder, "The Pottery of the Casas Grandes District, Chihuahua," Holmes Anniversary Volume (Washington, D. C.: James William Bryan Press, 1916), p. 256.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>53</sup>Henry A. Carey, "An Analysis of the Northwestern Chihuahua Culture," American Anthropologist, New Series, vol. 33, 1931, p. 370.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONTEMPORARY ANIMAL FORMS

Some pottery forms lend themselves to certain animal shapes. The Mississippians could use fish and frog forms for their jars because their standard jar forms were already appropriate for these creatures without essential alteration. The Minoan (and earlier Anatolian) pouring forms are natural bird shapes. Vases with necks are easily adapted to appear bird-like. The feet of the duck, for example, are only appendages which do not disrupt that naturally pot-shaped body. A comparison might be made to the human body where the legs are an integral part of that body and require rather special treatment if the human form is to be translated into a pot. Sitting or kneeling positions, which keep the legs close to the trunk of the body, are often chosen. In this way the entire human body can be shown and the problem of extended long clay legs, which tend to break off, is eliminated. Obviously, the more compact the natural shape, the more suitable it is to be rendered in clay.

The pottery I have made falls into three general categories: (1) The entire pot is zoöomorphic; (2) some prominent feature of the pot, e.g., the rim, the spout or the handle, is an animal form; and (3) the animal form, in some cases rather abstract, is used as a decorative addition to a pot that, in its basic structure, is not at all zoöomorphic. At no time did I try to copy the old pottery, nor did I attempt to depict animals literally; instead, I wanted to suggest animal form, features, or posture in or on my pots, based

upon the survey of the ancient ceramics.

(1) The entire pot is zoömorphie. The largest number of pots made are in this group. The ones made first are small wheel-made globular forms which were paddled and/or pinched at the mouth to appear fish-like (Fig. 3). Some were pinched at the sides and mouth into non-specific animal shapes (Fig. 4). Others were paddled at the rear into duck-pots, a universal form. A variation upon the globular form was made from a clay sheet, which had been rolled out on a textured surface, wrapped around the top of a rounded pot and curved or patted into a "neck." The overall shape is that of a hen or squat bird. A coil of clay under the pot provides a base (Fig. 5).

Another type of duck-pot grew from the study of a series of Minoan bird-like pouring forms (Fig. 6). Several which I made are upright, have long necks, duck posture, and small cylindrical bases. On some, handles suggest wings (Fig. 7).

A bird form similar to the duck-pots, but one which is strictly decorative, may be seen in the pots with fret-work perforations on the sides where wings might otherwise be placed. One pot has a small pot inside which can be seen through the design openings (Fig. 8). A Jōmon Haniwa figure (Fig. 9) provided inspiration for these pots.

An experiment with a shape similar to the Mississippian "teapot-snout" tail pots (Fig. 10) resulted in a pot which is a pouring form made of two shallow bowls put together with two spouts and three cylindrical legs attached (Fig. 11).

(2) Some prominent feature of the pot, e.g., the rim, the spout, or the handle, is an animal form. A general study of the pottery of the five cultures led to the making of another series of pouring forms, some teapots, made



with features suggesting animal features on the spouts (Fig. 12). Other examples of pots which belong in this section are an olla which has handles on each side of the opening formed like a snake head on the one side and the tail on the other, a pot with a rounded base showing a creature peering over the rim into the void of the opening, and a compote with a double-walled perforated rim beginning with a hollow animal head (Fig. 13).

(3) The animal form, in some cases rather abstract, is used as a decorative addition to a pot that, in its basic structure is not at all zoomorphic. The potters of Crete, Colima, Casas Grandes, and the southeastern United States in the Middle Mississippian period, pinched clay heads and figures to add to their pots. The Mississippians and Casas Grandians applied their figures to the rims of vessels (Fig. 14). In Crete and Colima there was greater freedom in the placement of the pinched sculptures. Some were placed between groups of pots united by a base, ring, or handles into a single unit. In some cases, figures were added to the sides of pots. Colima potters, in particular, used animal appliqué decorations on their standard olla and vase pottery. Serpents and armadillos encircle some pots (Fig. 15). Among my pots is a group of ollas and compotes which have pinched clay figures added to the sides or rims. Some of the animal figures are more realistic than others (Fig. 16). Vases have designs painted in clay slips upon the pottery with a transparent glaze put over them. In this category there are two place settings of dishes which have an abstract animal motif repeated on the plates, cups, and bowls (Fig. 17).

The hooded effigies of the Mississippians and those of the Casas Grandes potters (Fig. 18) with their geometric slip designs influenced my containers made of two pots joined together at approximately right angles. These are

painted with slip decoration and transparent glaze, and have rattles inside them (Fig. 19).

For ancient and primitive peoples the animal form presumably had religious, magical, totemic, and ritual importance. We like their animal forms, not for the same reasons they did, but because these shapes are beautiful and sometimes humorous. We simply enjoy looking at them. Only a few primitive peoples now practice religion or magic associated with animals and religious ritual; it is certainly not a part of our way of life and such things play no role in our systems of belief. Although we no longer demand that effigy pots accompany the dead, and we do not make votive offerings to our gods, we, nevertheless, still feel a kinship with animals and we can and do appreciate animal shapes in pottery and sculpture. What, then, is the aesthetic appeal of the animal form?

Ludwig Wittgenstein, perhaps the most influential philosopher of the 20th Century, said that the human body is the best picture of the human soul.<sup>54</sup> By this he meant that it is in the face and in the postures and gestures of the body that a person's character, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and the like can be seen. It is useful to remind ourselves of the vast number of person-characterizing words that can be used to describe facial expressions and bodily movements: "happy," "sorrowful," "pensive," "hesitant," "determined," "languid," "puzzled," "intelligent," "stupid," "harsh," "gentle," and the like. These same expressive characteristics can be found in natural objects as well, in the bowing of the limbs of the willow, the dancing of the waves in the sunlit breeze, and even in such an unexpected place as the

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<sup>54</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 178e.

scowl of the automobile radiator grill. The same kind of character can be found in works of art, not only in the representation of the human figure, but also in the abstract curve and play of line and in color and color relations.

It may be that one reason we are so attracted to animals, as pets and human companions, is that so many human qualities, although simplified and frequently parodied, are to be found in the bodies and movements of beasts: the pitifully simple-minded joy manifested in the dog's tail wagging, the grand aloofness of the cat on its windowsill in the sun, and the fussiness of the mother hen herding her brood along. There is a comical as well as a beautiful quality about birds. Ducks and geese waddling along with their plump bodies and bobbing long necks are amusing to watch. Such comical postures are expressed in the duck-pots of Fig. 7. The pot with one handle has an expression of curiosity and there is a very human pompousness about the stance of the other pot. The two handles suggest wings or perhaps hands on hips. The maternal fretwork bird (Fig. 8) has a pensive expression and the two pouring forms (Fig. 20), which seem to be looking over their backs, are somewhat prissy and self-important. The group of five pots joined together into one unit I have titled "Hen Party" (Fig. 21). These humorous creatures appear animated and busy conversing with one another. By varying the tilt of a head and the twist of a mouth a different character was given to each form. Curiosity may be seen again in the animal looking into the open pot (Fig. 22), while the salt-glazed pinched pot (Fig. 4) has a joyous, laughing face.

I suggest, therefore, that one of the aesthetic appeals of the artistic use of the animal form lies in its humorous representation, its parody, of

human character. Whatever the use to which we put our pots, there is room in contemporary pottery, just as there was in ancient pottery, for appealing naturalistic and imaginary creatures.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

Photographs of museum pottery and the ceramics of Marilyn Tilghman were made by Ross Tilghman. Museum objects were photographed as exhibited without special lighting. Figures 1, 9, 10, 14, and 18 were photographed from books as specific examples of pottery were unavailable for personal photography.

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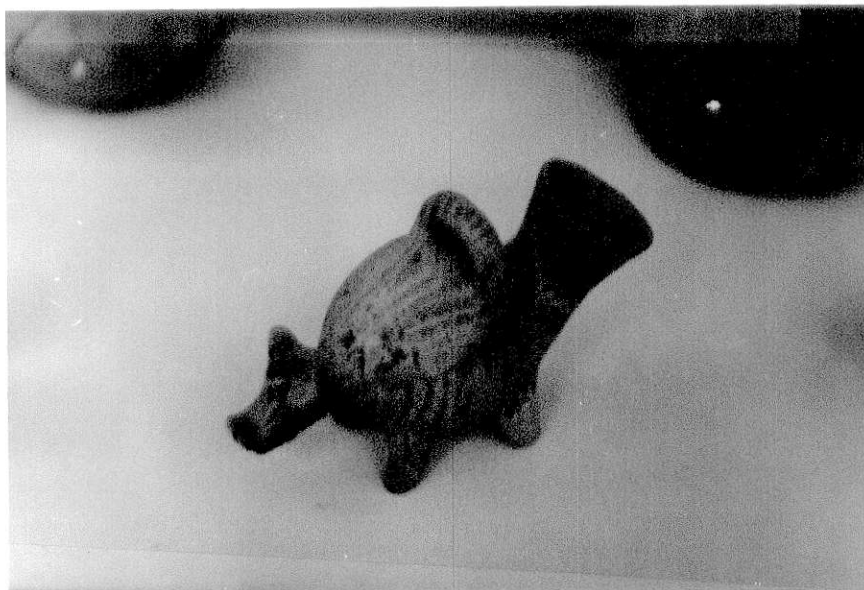


Fig. 2.--"Pig" found at Lebena, Crete. Heraklion Museum.



Fig. 3.--Marilyn Tilghman. Fish-like pots.



Fig. 4.--Marilyn Tilghman. Non-specific animal forms.

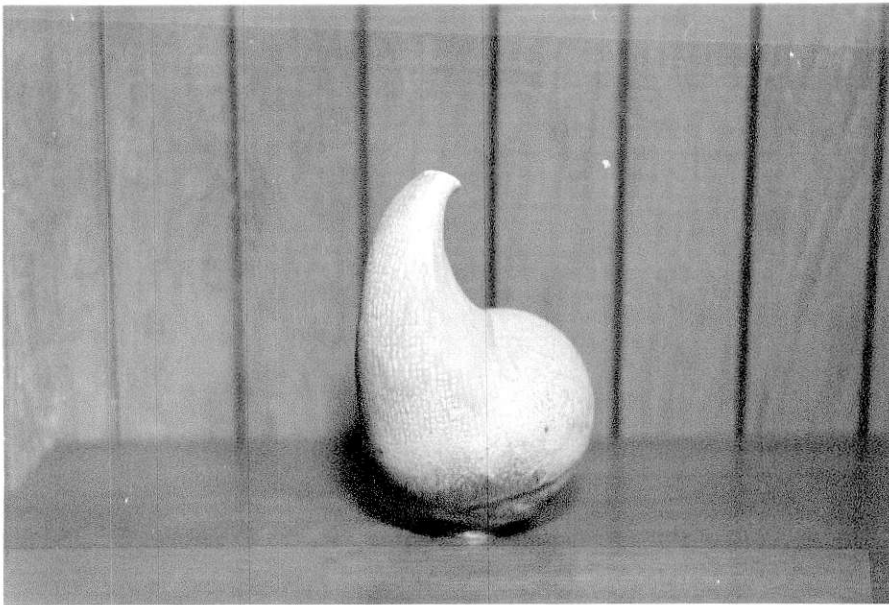


Fig. 5.--Marilyn Tilghman. Pot with clay sheet.



Fig. 6.--Minoan bird-like pouring forms. Heraklion Museum.



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Fig. 7.--Marilyn Tilghman. Two duck-pots.

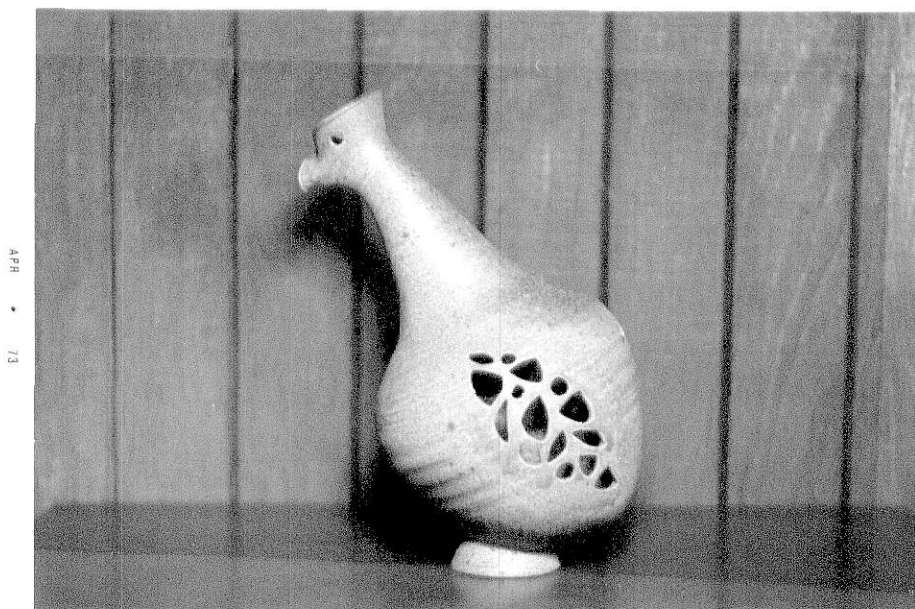


Fig. 8.-- Marilyn Tilghman. Maternal form, fretwork design.

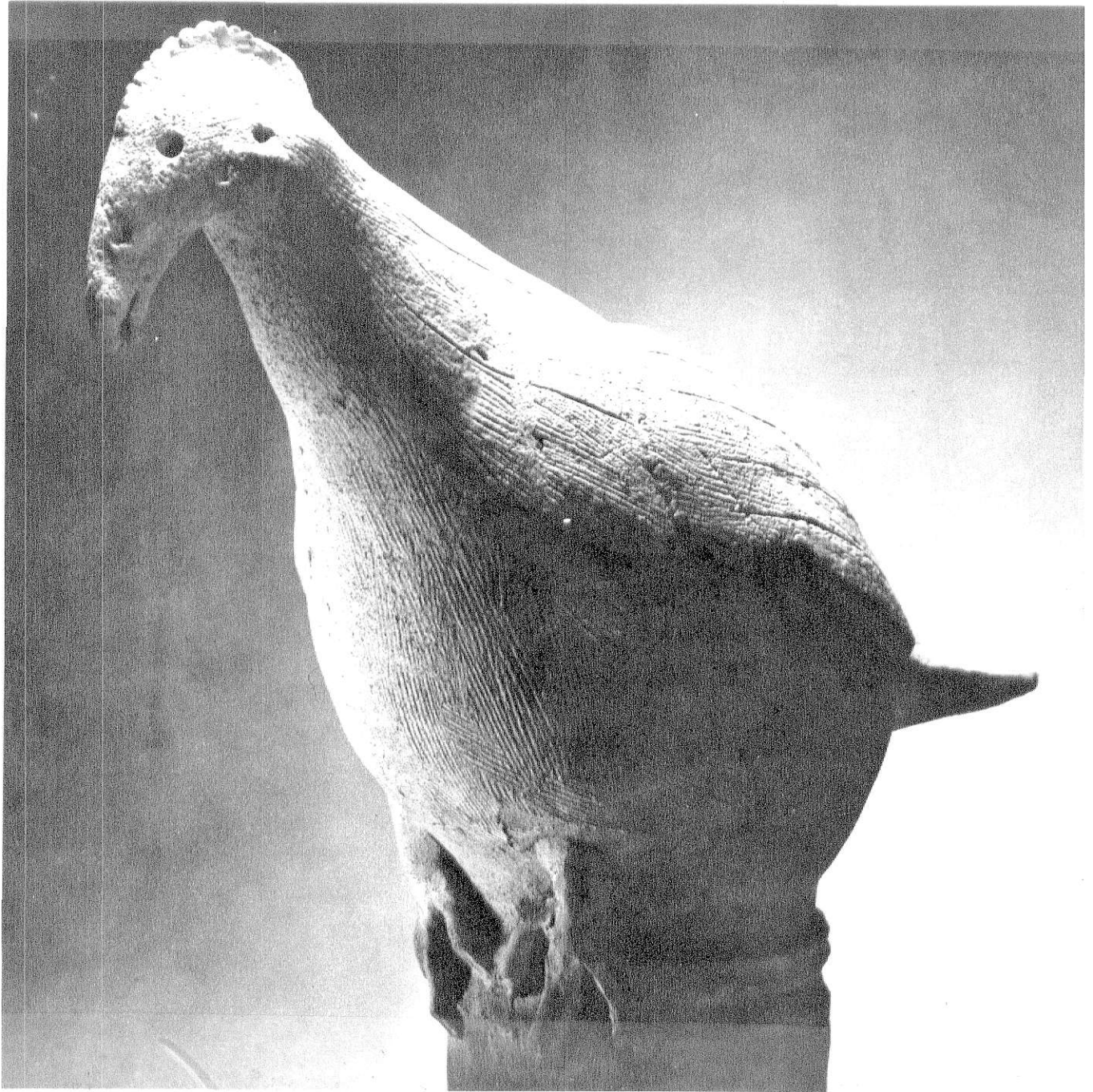


Fig. 9.--Jōmon Haniwa figure. The Art of Clay, Noma Seiroku, p. 61.





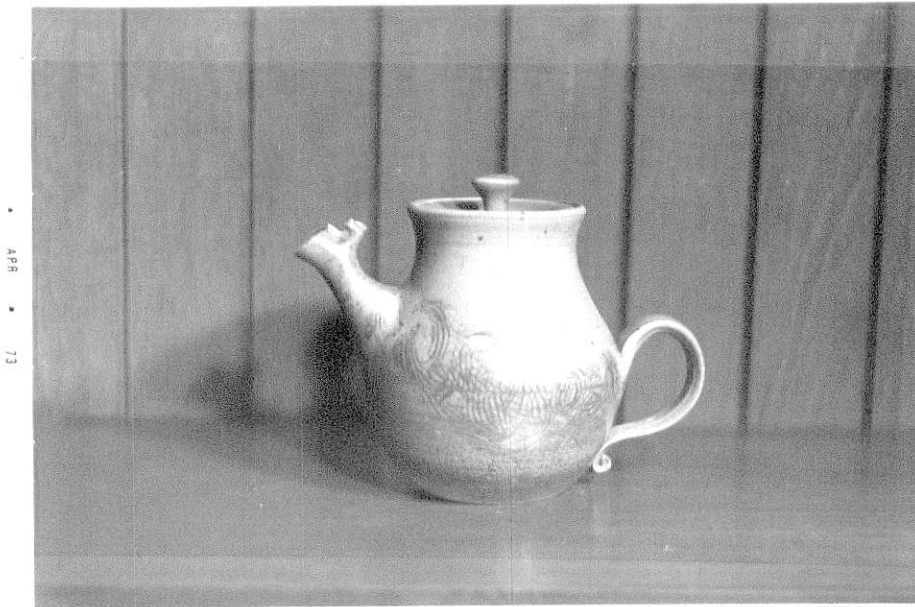
FIG. 31.—Vessel No. 115. Rose Mound. (Diam. of body 8.8 inches.)

Fig. 10.--Mississippian "teapot-snout" tail pot. "Antiquities of the St. Francis, White and Black Rivers, Arkansas," Clarence B. Moore, Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Vol. XIV, p. 302.



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Fig. 11.--Marilyn Tilghman. Pouring form based upon Fig. 10.



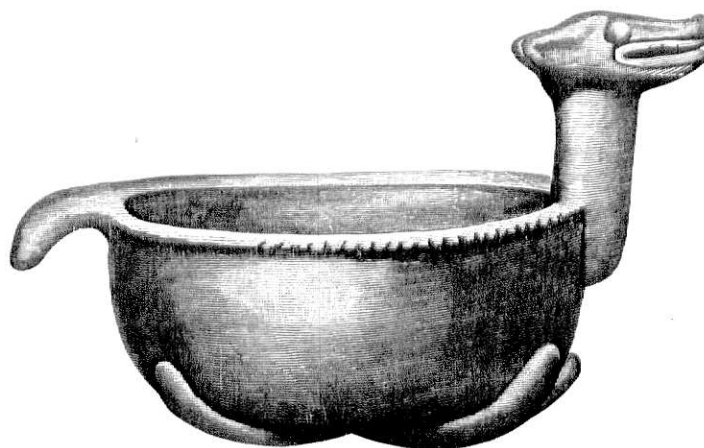
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Fig. 12.--Marilyn Tilghman. Teapot.

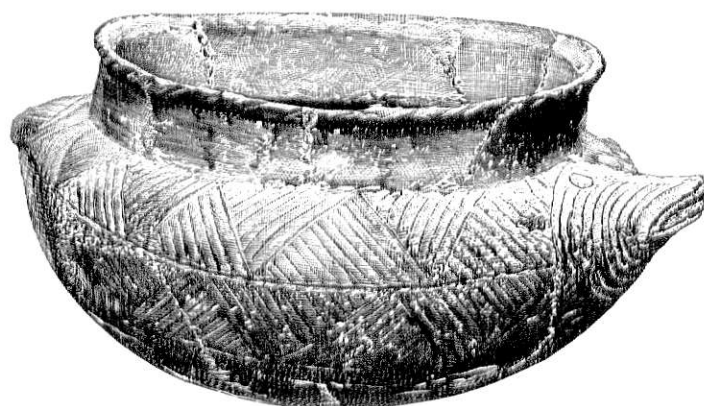


Fig. 13.--Marilyn Tilghman. Compote with animal head.





*a* (ARKANSAS, DAVENPORT ACADEMY COLLECTION, ONE-THIRD)



*b* (ARKANSAS, DAVENPORT ACADEMY COLLECTION, ONE-THIRD)

Fig. 14.--Mississippian pots with rim figures. "Aboriginal Pottery of the Eastern United States," W. H. Holmes, 20th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1898-99, Plate XXIV.



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Fig. 15.--Collima pot with armadillo. St. Louis Art Museum.



Fig. 16.--Marilyn Tilghman. Pots with decorative pinched figures.



Fig. 17.--Marilyn Tilghman. A place setting of dishes.



HUMAN EFFIGIES, PAINTED WARE

Fig. 18.--Casas Grandes effigy pots. Nos. 2, 3, 8, 9, and 11 are hooded effigy pots. "Pottery of the Casas Grandes District, Chihuahua", A. V. Kidder, Holmes Anniversary Volume, Plate III.



Fig. 19.--Marilyn Tilghman. Hooded pot and vase.

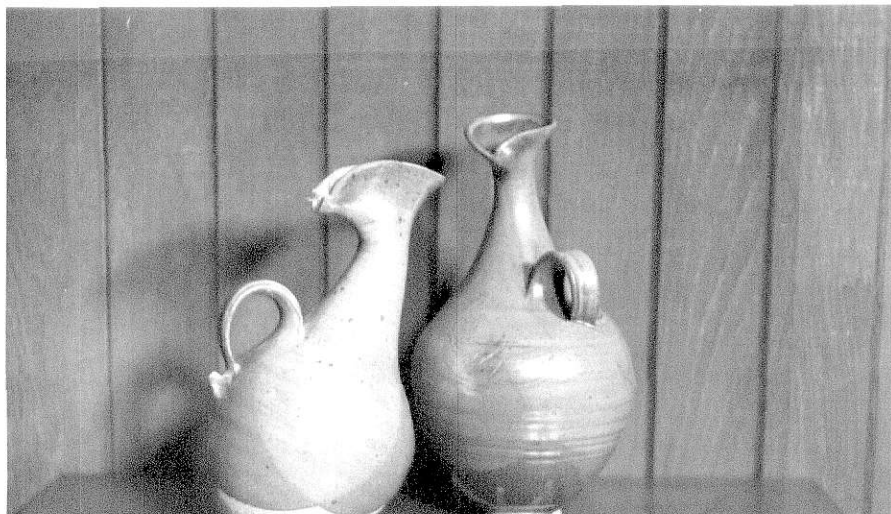




Fig. 21.--Marilyn Tilghman. "Hen party." Greenware.

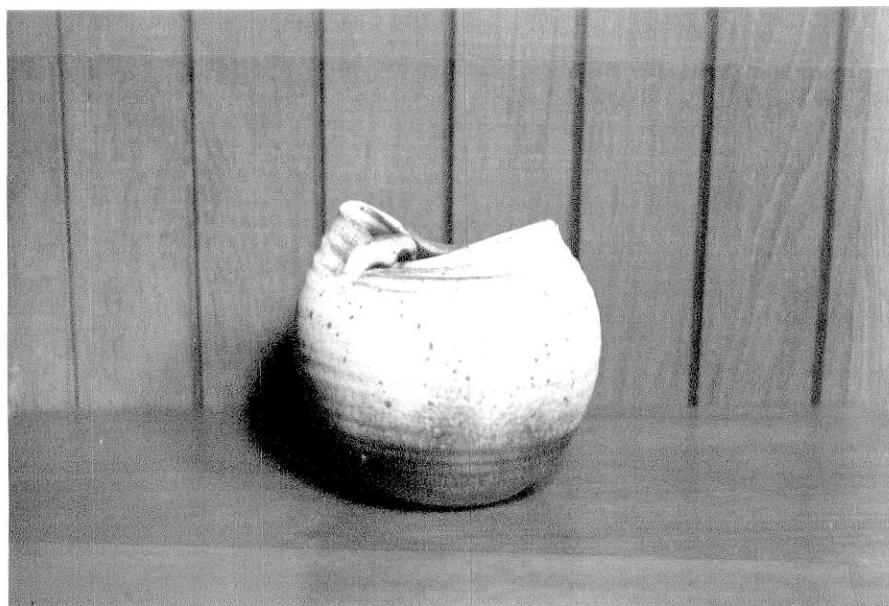


Fig. 22.--Marilyn Tilghman. Animal looking into vase.

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THE ANIMAL FORM IN POTTERY:  
SOME HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS

by

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The intention of this essay is to examine the use of the animal form in pottery in a selected group of ancient cultures and to show, through my own ceramic work, how zoöomorphic forms indigenous to the old cultures can be incorporated in contemporary pottery. The ancient cultures chosen for examination are the Jōmon period through the protohistoric period of Japan, the periods in Crete designated Early Minoan I through Middle Minoan I, the Middle Mississippian period of the eastern United States, the Colima culture in western Mexico, and the Casas Grandes culture in northern Mexico. Examples of my own work are then described and illustrated with relevant comparisons made to the animal forms of the five cultures. The zoöomorphic form had religious and ritual significance in the old cultures and despite the fact that we do not practice religion or magic associated with animals today, we nevertheless feel a kinship with animals. Since the animal form cannot, obviously, have the same importance for us that it had for the ancient cultures, the question is raised about what constitutes the contemporary appeal of the animal form. It is concluded that perhaps the appeal lies in the ability of the animal form to express, and even parody, characteristically human physiognomic features.