

THE WHOLE HOG (AS IT WERE)

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As studies of the iconography of prehispanic Andean cultures progress, it is becoming evident that the identification of animal species portrayed in these art styles can be used not only as one key to the reconstruction of ancient religious beliefs but may also serve as an indication of resources available from the natural environment. Such identifications may also point to contacts between different environmental zones and may well provide valuable clues to trade or other forms of interaction. Pioneering work in such faunal identification has been done for Chavín, Moche, and now (Raymond, 1980) for Huari. In this paper I want to point to the depiction of an animal which has not previously been reported as existing in the corpus of northern Peruvian art and which may likewise hold some keys to understanding either local resources or exterior contacts: the tapir (Tapirus spp.).

The Vicús culture of Piura is known almost entirely from looted materials. Although this culture can be dated with some certainty to the Early Intermediate Period (and perhaps to the first part of the Middle Horizon), there is virtually no scientific information available for it. Vicús style ceramics began to appear in large quantities on the illegal art market in the early 1960's. In 1963 Ramiro Matos Mendieta, accompanied by a group of archaeologists from Lima, visited Piura at the behest of the Patronato Nacional de Arqueología to determine the area in which remains of the Vicús style were found. Surveying both the upper Piura Valley and the adjacent sierra, Matos located and briefly described a number of sites, both habitational/ceremonial and mortuary, made sherd collections from these sites, and using this material, made some extremely perceptive comments on the Vicús culture and the "Vicús Complex" pottery associated with it (Matos Mendieta, 1969). Other archaeological information was provided by the limited tomb excavations undertaken by Carlos Guzmán Ladrón de Guevara (1976) and Hans Horkheimer (1968). These excavations succeeded in establishing that Moche style pottery and pottery pertaining to the Vicús Complex did not occur in the same tomb, a fact which had been suspected for some time. To infer cultural differences on the basis of this sample of a few tombs out of the thousands known to have been opened may seem premature, but aside from the observations of these two archaeologists, the only other data we have come from the vessels themselves. At present, in fact, any statements about the Vicús culture must be based almost entirely on inferences drawn from the ceramics. There is simply no other information.

The Vicús Complex has been widely illustrated and has been the subject of two major attempts to define and describe it (Larco Hoyle 1965; [1967]; Matos Mendieta, 1969). It appears from these and other, less thorough, published works that animals were extremely important subjects in Vicús ceramic art and that, as in the art of the roughly contemporary Moche culture, they appear in both natural and nonnatural forms. As yet no comprehensive study dealing with themes and motifs in

Vicús ceramics has been published and there is available no tabulation of species and the relative frequency of their appearance. Published illustrations suggest that many of the animals familiar from Moche contexts, such as felines, deer, foxes, sea birds, etc., were likewise common in Vicús. As Vicús Complex ceramics do not have painted scenes, there is no context for these animals nor do we have any idea which of them were important and which were simply casual subjects. To date, however, no piece has been published which can be identified as an animal not known to occur in the general Piura Valley or upper valley environment.

In 1969 Guillermo Ganoza of Trujillo, Perú, kindly gave me permission to photograph part of his extensive collection of ancient ceramics. The Vicús portion of that collection was then housed at his suburban estate, Primavera. In 1970 a serious earthquake occurred and Primavera and its collections were badly damaged. Because of this, my photographs have become a valuable record of material no longer available for study, especially interesting because many of the pieces in this Vicús collection were quite unusual.

Among the pieces photographed was a small red jar (fig. 1). The form is typical of Vicús ceramics although it is one seldom illustrated, perhaps because most such jars are quite simple in decoration. Not only the form, but also color, paste, and surface treatment are completely typical of the Vicús Complex as defined by Matos, specifically his Vicús Monochrome group (Matos Mendieta, 1969, pp. 104-105 and 108-109). There is a considerable overlap in form between the slipped monochrome ceramics of the Vicús Complex and the more elaborately painted vessels. It may be worth noting, however, that the majority of the jars I have seen, although all had modeled bodies since they were purchased pieces, have been monochrome with no evidence of ever having had either another color of slip or of organic resist painting. The black mark visible on the side of the jar shown in fig. 1 is a fire cloud, not paint. Fire clouds are common on Vicús ceramics but do not seem to have been produced for decorative purposes.

This jar represents an animal with a pronounced snout. The size of the snout, its contour and peculiar droop are typical of the facial configurations of an adult tapir, as are the erect rounded ears. The body is very rotund and a well-defined neck fold is shown. This neck fold is not particularly common on tapirs although it may occur on very fat individuals. No legs are shown so that the form of the feet cannot be used as an identifying mark. However, the careful delineation of the face makes it certain that a tapir and not a peccary is the subject of the vessel, since peccary profiles are straight to somewhat concave, and this one is markedly convex.

Tapirs are not found today in the Piura Valley, but Matos' survey located a number of sites with Vicús Complex pottery in the sierra around Frias, and the northern Peruvian sierra is part of the present range of the mountain, or woolly, tapir (Tapirus pinchaque). Walker says only that the range of T. pinchaque "possibly" extends into northern Peru (Walker, 1975, vol. II, p. 1347), but Raymond's references make this extension definite. Other tapir species occur near enough to the

area of Vicús Complex pottery so that they could have been seen by travelers from Piura. These species are T. terrestris, the Brazilian tapir of the Amazon Basin, and T. bairdi of Columbia and northern Ecuador. Of course, these species may have formerly had a wider distribution than they do now.

The apparent rarity of tapir depictions in Peruvian art may indicate that it was an exotic animal, but it is worth noting that the only culture with a depictive art style that has been extensively studied, Moche, did not represent the total animal population of the environment. Moche representations seem to be those which had mythic/ceremonial importance, although economic importance cannot be completely ruled out (Donnan, 1976, pp. 63 ff.).

Given the limited amount of excavation that has been carried out in living sites, and the lack of analysis of faunal remains from those sites, we have no way of knowing whether or not tapirs occasionally (or even commonly) formed a part of the diet of the ancient northern Peruvians. Until such information becomes available there is simply no evidence other than this one known vessel regarding the presence or non-presence of tapirs in ancient northern Peru. All we can say now, is that the unknown Vicús potter had a good idea of what a tapir looked like.

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Plate III. Fig. 1, Vicús style jar in the form of a tapir. Collection of Guillermo Ganoza, Trujillo, Peru. Photograph by Karen Olsen Bruhns.