ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM ACHUAL TIPISHCA, LOWER HUALLAGA RIVER, PERU

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In October, 1980, I spent several days in the Cocamilla village of Achual Tipishca in search of prehistoric occupations in the vicinity. Because of the terms of my contract with the Casa de la Cultura, I was not authorized to undertake excavations, so my ability to gather archaeological data was drastically curtailed. Nevertheless, it was possible to gather some archaeological data which are the basis for this paper. Perhaps more important is the fact that old pottery was given new importance to the people of Achual Tipishca. Our experience at Yarinacocha suggests that old pottery will now be remembered so that more sites will be identified in future visits.

The Setting

The lower Huallaga is a meandering river which leaves many oxbow lakes, including Achual Tipishca, in its wake. As measured from air photographs supplied by the Servicio Aerofotográfico Nacional, the floodplain of the Huallaga is about 10 km. across at Achual Tipishca. The low water season of the Huallaga runs from April to October, reaching its lowest level in August and September. The minimum water level is about 18 feet (5.5 m.) below its crest (Faura Gaig, 1964, p. 256).

From Yurimaguas[1] to Achual Tipishca (fig. 1), a distance of approximately 120 km. in a straight line, the river traveler is rarely out of sight of high ground which is well above the flood waters. At Achual Tipishca both sides of the river are low-lying and subject to inundation. The village itself is subject to inundation in some years.

Achual Tipishca is the name of both the Cocamilla village[2] and the ox-bow lake on which it stands (fig. 2). The lake itself is entirely surrounded by low-lying ground. High ground begins about a kilometer from the shore of the lake. According to testimony gathered there, the village was on the mainstream of the Huallaga "in the time of the grandfathers," perhaps 50 or 100 years ago.

Archaeological Sites

Three archaeological sites were identified during the brief period that I spent in Achual Tipishca.

HUA 80-1: The Achual Tipishca Site

Achual Tipishca itself may be considered an archaeological site not only because it is currently occupied, but also because subsurface remains have been reported. While in the village I was told that old bottles were found when the flag pole was erected. Further, potsherds were found when holes for the main posts of the municipal building were excavated. Blue beads, probably glass, were also reported. Unfortunately, a careful search of the village area did not produce any prehistoric pottery, though many fragments of modern Cocamilla pottery

were found. Excavation would be worthwhile to gather evidence on traditional Cocamilla pottery, especially since some of the vessel forms are no longer being made.

HUA 80-2: The Yarinal Site

The Yarinal site is located in the banana field of Wilson Manihuari. To reach the site one travels up the Caño Nehajal for about one-half hour, then walks across the low-lying flood plain (*bajal*) for another half-hour. In October, with the river beginning to rise, it is necessary to wade through a number of rivulets in the course of this journey. When the Huallaga is higher, a canoe can be taken directly to the site, though the occupation zone may be under water. According to the owner's estimate, the occupation zone lies from 3 to 20 cm. beneath the present surface. He also indicated that there are low rises (*lomas*), which are barely visible to my eye. These may have been house sites or refuse piles, but the point could not be investigated without an excavation permit. The owner also said that when he had grown rice in the field, no rice would grow in the areas where potsherds were found.

HUA 80-3

A third archaeological site was reported to me, but I was not able to visit it during my brief time in the field. According to my informant, the site is located on the high ground (*alturas*) south of the village. Its existence was demonstrated by a single potsherd that was brought to me. As luck would have it, it was a diagnostic sherd.

Ceramics

Including the modern Cocamilla ceramics, three distinct archaeological complexes seem to be present in the immedate vicinity of Achual Tipishca. Each of the complexes is found at a different site. The prehistoric collections were deposited at the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima.

Complex I

The first complex is tentatively identified on the basis of 35 body sherds and 2 rim sherds from the Yarinal site.

Color

Most surfaces had eroded away to a gray inner core. The few surfaces that remain are dark orange in color. The presence or absence of fire clouds could not be determined.

Surface texture

Remaining surfaces are soft and smooth to the touch.

Temper

Ground sherd temper was found in all sherds.

Hardness

Surfaces are readily scratched with the fingernail, indicating a hardness of approximately 2.0 on the Mohs scale (Dana, 1895, p. 76).

Manufacture

Fragments show some tendency to break in parallel lines, which indicates that vessels were probably manufactured by coiling.

Thickness

Body sherds range from 4-16 mm. in thickness. The thickness of some sherds suggests that large urns, not represented by rim sherds in the present collection, are part of the complex.

Vessel forms

Two vessel forms are represented by rim sherds:

A. A closed mouth bowl, jar, or olla is represented by one rim sherd (fig. 3). The arc of this rim is 7.5 cm. A mouth diameter of approximately 26 cm. is indicated.

B. An open-mouthed vessel with straight expanding side walls is represented by one sherd (fig. 4). The arc of the rim is 5 cm. A mouth diameter of approximately 30 cm. is indicated.

Decorative modes

Slight traces suggest that dark red paint, probably a slip, was sometimes applied to vessels with thin side walls.

Complex II

The single sherd from HUA 80-3 belongs to a different ceramic complex than the mateials from HUA 80-02.

Color

The surface color is tan, but the sherd has a gray core.

Surface texture

The surface is irregular and rough to the touch.

Temper

Ground sherd.

Hardness

The surface can be scratched easily with a knife, suggestive of a hardness of approximately 3.0 on the Mohs scale (Dana, 1895, p. 76).

Manufacture

No evidence.

Thickness

Body wall thickness ranges from 5-7 mm.

Vessel form

An open mouth bowl with straight outslanting side walls and a broad labial flange (fig. 5). It seems to have had a flat base. The arc of the rim suggests a rectangular bowl.

Decorative modes

The exterior surface bears indications of a white slip.

Complex III: Modern Cocamilla pottery

During the course of several days in Achual Tipisca, I was able to examine and photograph several Cocamilla jars. In addition, I was fortunate to take my meals in a house where a jar was being made. This happenstance facilitated inquiry into the sources of raw materials and methods of manufacture. I also collected four modern sherds that reveal several aspects of Cocamilla ceramics not obtained from other sources.

Color

Vessel surfaces are tan or black beneath the slip. If tan, the band of oxidation is very thin, and there is a thick dark core. Of the four sherds, two are unoxidized and two have a very thin band of oxidation adjacent to both surfaces.

Surface texture

In the course of manufacture surfaces are scraped with a piece of gourd and smoothed with the hand. Evidence of scraping, sometimes crosscut by widely spaced polishing marks, is visible on the unslipped interior surfaces of two sherds.

Temper

Caraipé. Siliceous bark is burned, then ground into the degree of fineness desired for temper. The ash seems to be more finely ground for bowls than for liquid storage vessels. The bark is acquired on the *alturas* (high ground at the edge of the flood plain) about one and a half hours walk from the village. I have no evidence that caraipé temper is mixed with potsherds as it often is in Shipibo pottery.

Hardness

The surfaces of Cocamilla pottery can be easily scratched with a knife, suggesting a hardness of 3.0 or 3.5 on the Mohs scale (Dana, 1895, p. 76).

Manufacture

Vessels are coiled. The water jar I saw being made was manufactured from coils about two and a half feet long by something less than an inch in diameter. Five or six of them are made up at a time. Finger impressions appear on the inside of the vessel during its manufacture. When in a leather hard state, the vessel is scraped with a gourd rind on both surfaces. The top of the uppermost coil is flattened at the same time.

Clay

The clay is obtained from nearby *quebradas*. It is light gray in color with some yellow ochre inclusions, before being mixed with caraipé which turns it black. So far as I could determine, there is no mixing of clays to attain the desired texture. According to my informant, a different kind of clay is used for cooking vessels than for bowls and liquid storage vessels.

Vessel forms

A. Three sizes of liquid holding jar (*tinaja*) are made. The largest is for holding manioc beer. The middle size, the only one that I saw, is for holding water. The purpose of the smallest jar was not specified.

There appear to be two varieties of middle-size liquid storage jars. The first (figs. 6, 7) has a narrow flat base. The nearly straight lower body walls expand to a gently rounded shoulder. The slightly concave upper body wall turns inward at an angle of about 60°. The juncture of the neck with the upper body wall is so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. In fact, were it not for the painted decoration, it would be difficult to identify the point at which the neck begins.

The second variety of middle-size liquid storage jar has a somewhat more rounded body and a low pedestal base (fig. 8). The vertical neck is easily distinguished from the upper body wall.

B. According to my informant, Cocamilla women no longer make decorated bowls. Though the surface collection contains several bowl sherds, none of them helps to identify the shape of the bowl, except that a red-slipped interior indicates that at least one of the bowls had a wide mouth.

C. Also according to my informant, cooking vessels are no longer made.

Slip

Two colors of slip are employed. A white slip is made from kaolin and the red slip is made from yellow ochre, both gathered in a *quebrada* about six hours walk to the interior.

Decorative zones

A. The first variety of middle-size liquid storage jar is given an overall white slip above the red-slipped base. The neck is separated from the body by horizontal lines at a point about two-fifths or one-half of the distance between the point of maximum diameter and the vessel mouth (figs. 6, 7). One or two

horizontal lines are also painted at the point of rim eversion (figs. 6, 7). The lip interiors are red-slipped.

B. The second variety of middle-size liquid storage jar is given a red slip on the lower body wall, terminating just above the point of maximum diameter. Above this point the vessel has a white slip (fig. 8). A red slip is applied to the rim interior.

C. I was told that the largest liquid storage vessels (*tinajones*) are slipped red and white, but that the floral designs are not added.

D. I was told that bowls were white-slipped on the exterior and were usually unslipped on the interior. Sometimes the interior has a red slip. One body fragment collected in the village is evidently from a bowl with a red-slipped interior (fig. 9). Two other fragments, probably from bowls (figs. 10, 11), are not slipped on the interior.

Design modes

A. Both middle-size liquid storage vessels of the first variety bear floral decoration. The first has floral decoration in both neck and body zones (fig. 6), the second only in the body zone (fig. 7). All three of these floral designs are based upon a line that undulates from the top to the bottom of the zone. Flowers come off of the "stem" to fill the zones created by the undulations. In one instance, however, the flower overlays the stem (fig. 7a).

B. The neck zone of one of the jars has only a circumferential zigzag line through the center of the zone (fig. 6).

C. One sherd exhibits narrow lines of red and black paint in a rectilinear design (fig. 9).

D. Another sherd (fig. 10) exhibits red fill between black lines. The fragment is not large enough to determine if the design is rectilinear or curvilinear.

Comparisons

Comparisons based upon small bodies of data are fraught with peril. Nevertheless, the effort, however tentative, is obligatory to put the material in perspective. For this purpose, the most useful comparative materials come from the Ucayali River, some 60 km. to the east.

Complex I

The striking characteristics of Complex I are the apparent absence of incised and corrugated decoration. Of all the complexes from the Ucayali River, only the Yarinacocha and Pacacocha complexes lack at least one of these forms of decoration (Lathrap, 1962; 1970; Myers, 1970; 1976). One important distinction between these two complexes is the fact that Yarinacocha includes many vessels with composite silhouettes, while such forms are rare in Pacacocha. On this basis, Complex I from Achual Tipishca seems more like the Pacacocha Complex than the Yarinacocha Complex.

Complex II

Complex II is represented by a single sherd. The white slip and the rectangular horizontal cross section are immediately reminiscent of the Polychrome Tradition (Lathrap, 1970), but the broad labial flange is not found in the Caimito (Weber, 1975), Napo (Evans and Meggers, 1968), Guarita, Tefé, or São Joaquim complexes (Hilbert, 1968). The single sherd from Complex II is even more unlike the Formative Period complexes, such as Tutishcainyo, with which it shares the labial flange. The sherd has a modern "feel" somewhat reminiscent of certain undecorated sherds from Sarayacu. This fact prompted me to ask the Cocamilla if they had made such pottery. They denied it.

Complex III

The ethnic origin of Complex III is not in question. It is Cocamilla. There are many similarities in vessel form and decoration with the painted pottery from the Sarayacu mission where a number of Cocama Indians lived during the first half of the nineteenth century (Myers, 1972).

A Tentative Sequence for the Huallaga River

There are now enough data from the Huallaga River to make a preliminary synthesis of chronology and cultural relationships. Three localities are represented: the Tingo María locality where two sites are known (Lathrap and Roys, 1963; Lathrap and Myers, 1964 field notes); the Hacienda Tarapoto (Myers, 1982): and Achual Tipishca. There are no absolute dates and little evidence for relative dating from any of these localities. Therefore we must rely upon archaeological comparisons at a distance, a risky business but the best we can do at this time. Pottery from the Ucayali River, a northward-flowing Amazon tributary that parallels the Huallaga, is the best available basis for comparison.

Lathrap and Roys have detailed the relationships of Cave of the Owls Fine Ware to Kotosh Waira-Jirca and to Late Tutishcainyo (1963, pp. 35-37). There is little reason to modify their interpretations at this time.

Lathrap and Roys also analyzed the relationships of Cave of the Owls Coarse Ware, which they characterized as a "loose ceramic aggregation" with crossties to the central Ucayali sequence from Yarinacocha times and later (1963, pp. 36-37). The Airport Site in Tingo María (Lathrap and Myers, 1964 field notes) is a multicomponent site that includes roughly the same range of materials as Cave of the Owls Coarse Ware with the same probable relationships to the Ucayali sequence.

Materials from the Hacienda Tarapoto (Myers, 1982) seem to have come from a single site. Though the range of materials is much more restricted, materials included could relate to several periods of the Ucayali sequence from Yarinacocha times on.

Given the fact that the Cave of the Owls, the Airport Site, and the Hacienda Tarapoto Site all include materials that do not go together on the Ucayali, we may hypothesize that the archaeological sequences on the two rivers are different in this regard. The vessel form tradition of which the Yarinacocha Complex is a part may have been longer lived on the Huallaga, where it hung on until corrugated decoration and narrow-mouthed vessels were introduced. Or, these

elements may have appeared earlier on the Huallaga than they did on the Ucayali. Of course, the available evidence does not exclude the possibility that all three sites are multicomponent sites with a similar mix of components.

Elsewhere in this paper, evidence was presented to suggest that both the Pacachocha Tradition (Complex I) and the Polychrome Tradition (Complexes II and III) are represented on the Huallaga. If this interpretation is correct, the culture history of the Huallaga seems to have been broadly similar to that of the Ucayali. The principal difference lies in the fact that the Yarinacocha Tradition had a longer life on the Huallaga than has yet been demonstrated on the Ucayali, where the sequence is much better known. However, the nature of the evidence is such that this conclusion is nothing more than a working hypothesis to be tested by additional field work.

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NOTES

[1] While in Yurimaguas, I surface surveyed the high ground between the mouths of the Paranapura and Shanusi rivers and for a short distance up those rivers on the side of the city but found no sites.

[2] Anthropologist Anthony Stocks has done extensive ethnographical research in Achual Tipishca (Stocks, 1981; 1983).

[3] The arc of the rim is the length of the rim segment that can be measured against a diameter board.

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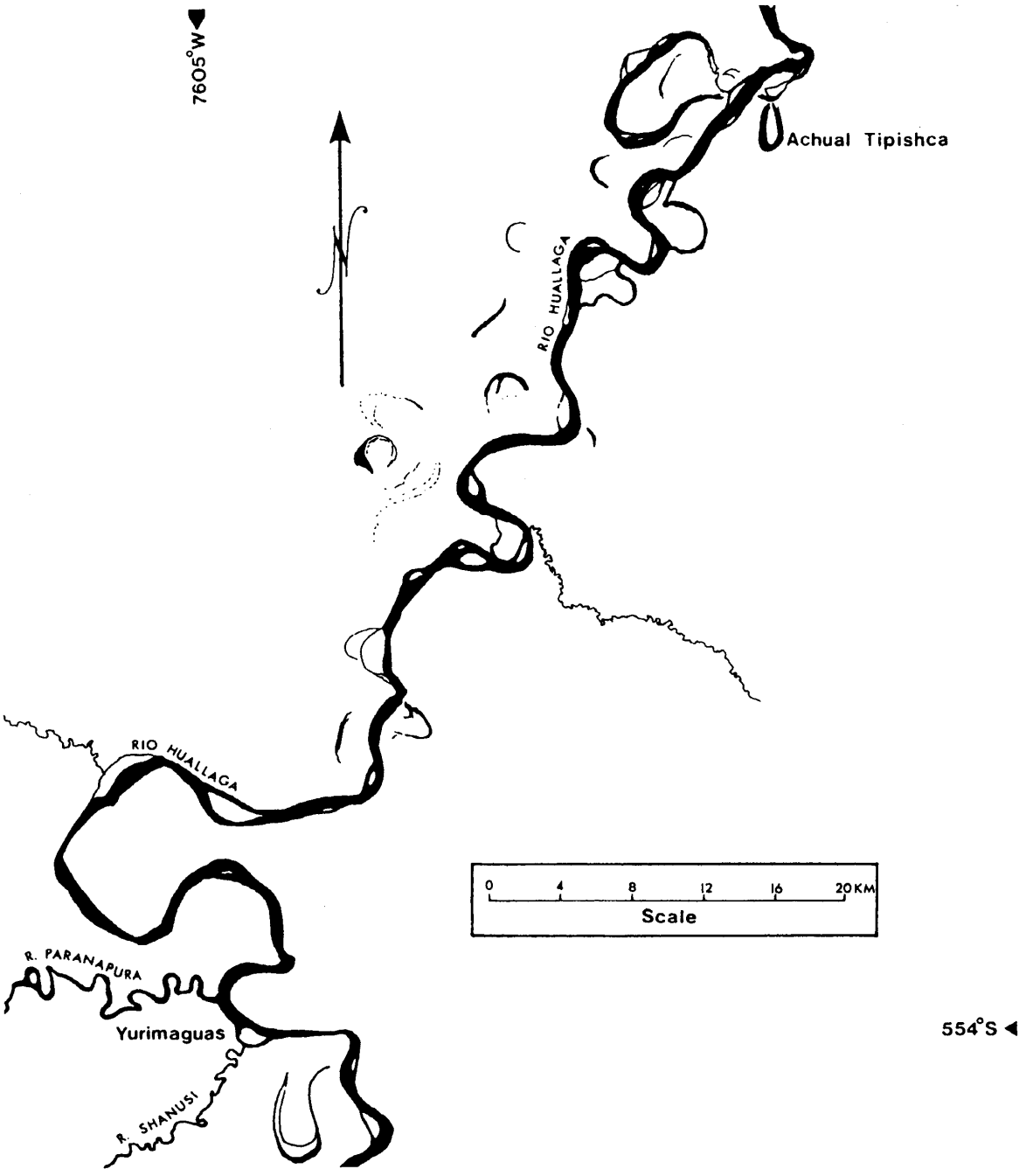


Fig. 1, the Huallaga River from Yurimaguas to Achual Tipishca. The map was drawn from a composite air photograph (Negative 7385-D-2) provided by the Servicio Aerofotográfico Nacional, Peru.

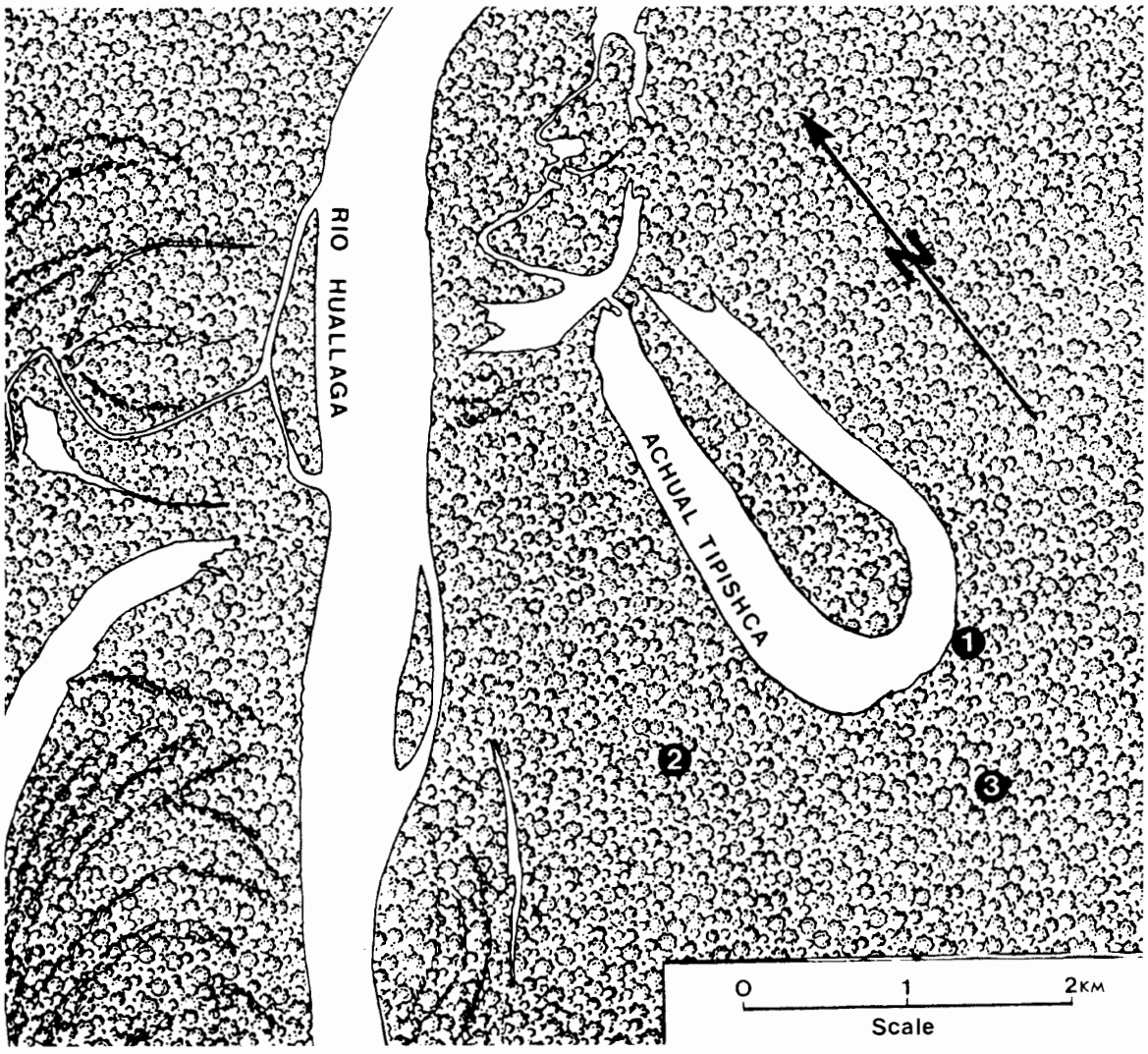
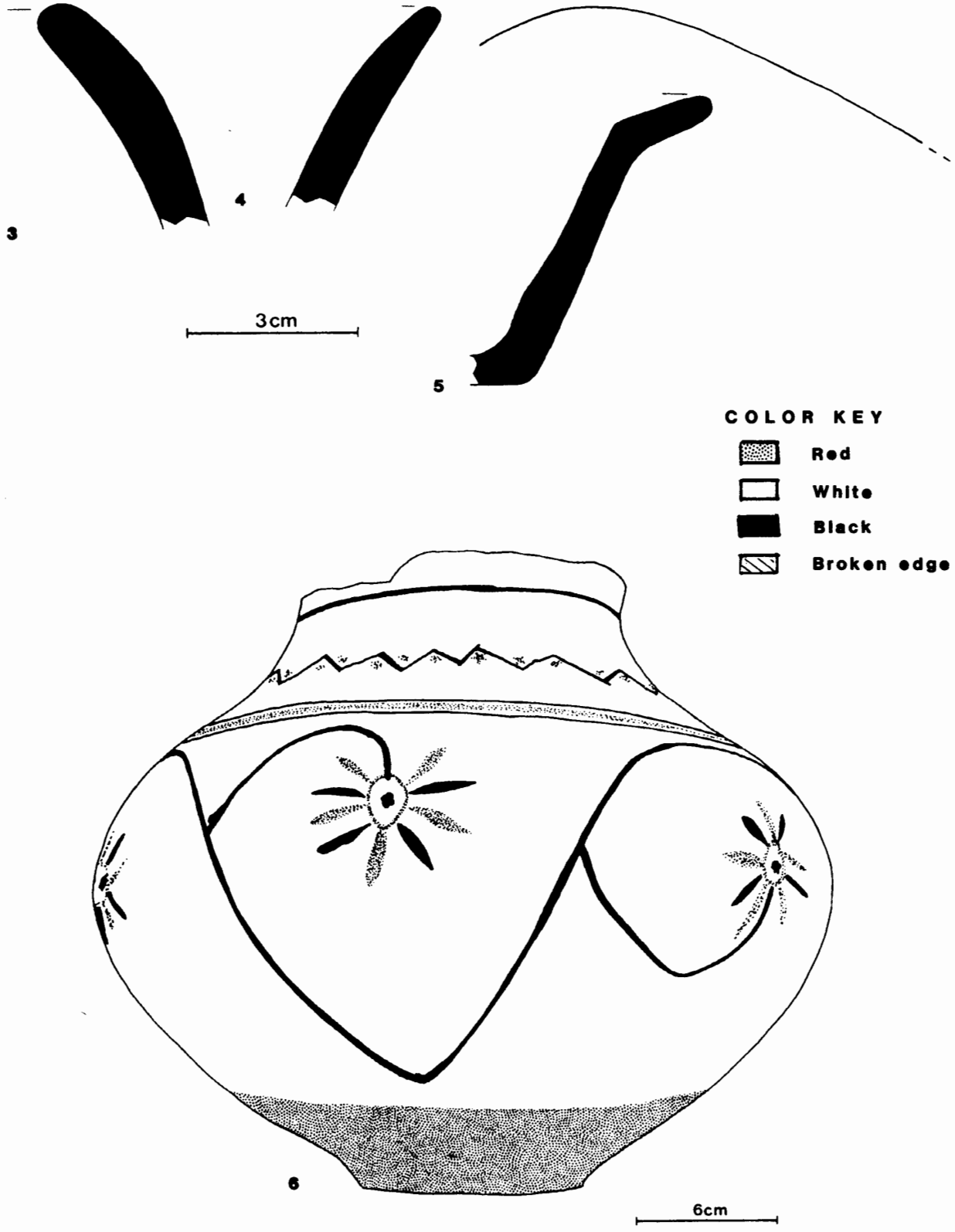


Fig. 2, location of archaeological sites in the vicinity of Achual Tipishca. The is based on an air photograph (no. 7385-2972) taken June 6, 1955, provided by the Aerofotográfico Nacional, Peru.



Figs. 3, 4, rim profiles of Complex I; **fig. 5,** rim profiles of Complex II; **fig. 6,** middle-size Cocamilla liquid storage jar; drawing made from photograph taken from slightly below the vessel.

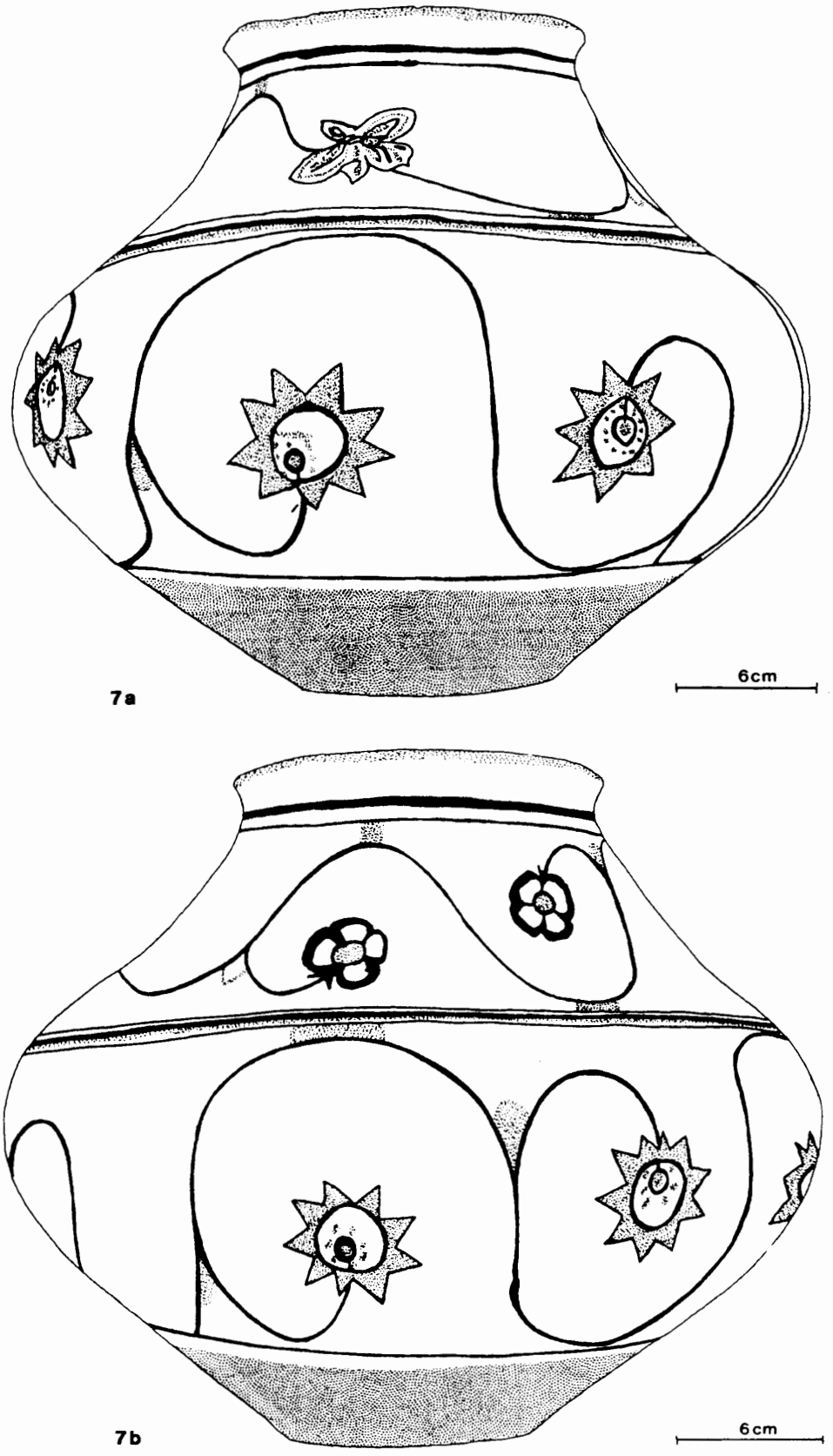
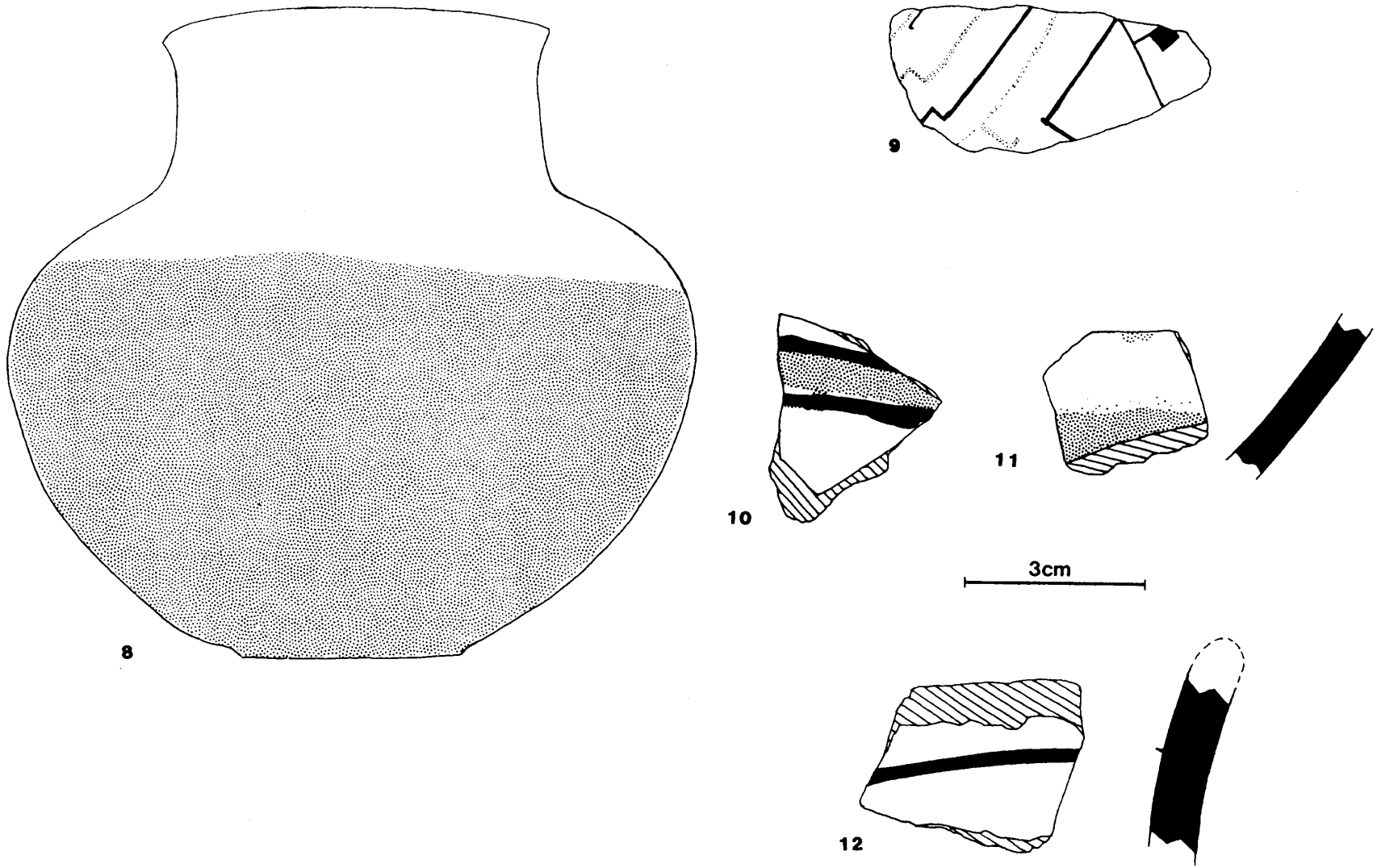


Fig. 7, middle-size Cocamilla liquid storage jar, drawn from photographs.



Modern Cocamilla ceramics. **Fig. 8,** middle-size liquid storage jar of the second variety drawn from a photograph that displayed no evidence of painted designs. The vessel was not measured in the field, but background objects in the photo and memory suggest it is slightly smaller than the other illustrated jars; **fig. 9,** bowl sherd with red-slipped interior; **figs. 10, 11,** bowl sherds with unslipped interiors; **fig. 12,** jar sherd from just below vessel rim.