

## The Man with the V on his Headdress: A Figure in Moche III-IV Iconography\*

Quince vasijas estilo Mochica III y IV, tales como vasijas en forma de cabeza y figura entera, cancheros y de tipo globular con figuras sobrepuestas representan un hombre que ostenta una V en su tocado. Algunas de estas vasijas comparten también otros rasgos distintivos: notables son una soga entorno al cuello, una capa decorada con un par de líneas horizontales y un lazo asimétrico, una cinta con flecos en la parte superior o lateral del tocado y una cabeza de serpiente a un lado de aquel. Las figuras de las vasijas globulares decoran objetos que probablemente son ofrendas funerarias, y se supone que estas figuras tengan que ver con la preparación de accesorios sepulcrales y, posiblemente, con una atadura ritual.

The great corpus of archaeological pottery from the Mochica civilization, on the north coast of Peru in the early centuries after Christ, includes a large number of vessels, most frequently stirrup-spout pots, that portray human heads. Some of these, particularly in Period IV, are obviously portrait heads. In his "Kunstgeschichte des alten Peru", Walter Lehmann published a number of these (1924: Pls. 72-81); he also published several vessels in the form of

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modeled figures (1924: Pls. 68, 69, 71), another common Mochica pottery type. A number of portrait pots clearly represent the same individual – for example, Lehmann's Pls. 80 and 81. It is also possible to make correlations between the people depicted on the head pots and those represented by full-figure pots (Larco Hoyle 1938-39, II: 136, Figs. 192, 193; Sawyer 1966: 34-39; Hocquenghem 1977), and, possibly, even figures shown in fine-line scenes. The study of these correlations may give clues to the identification of the portrait heads, the activities of the person represented, and the reasons for the importance of this genre. In some instances, distinctive scars and facial characteristics form a link between head pots and full-figure pots. In other instances, since Mochica costume is surely a guide to the identification of status and activity (Benson 1975, 1979), costume traits suggest the identification of the same character in various depictions. A man who was, if not the same person, then, at least, someone who played the same role. In this study, a distinctive headdress is used as a cluster guide, along with peripheral costume motifs.

A number of Mochica pots, portraits and full-figures, show a man primarily typified by a headdress with a V design at the front. The depictions vary considerably; this survey of sixteen pots includes some marginal examples, as well as clear-cut ones.

There are six head vessels. Two of them, Vases 1 and 2 (Figs. 1 and 2), in the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, probably show the same man (1): he has a distinctive brow ridge; almond eyes; a long, flaring nose, with a slight bump in its profile; and a long, thin, compressed mouth that suggests that he may have lost some teeth. Both vessels have a headdress with a strap under the chin, a not-uncommon Mochica headdress trait that appears on all sixteen examples in the sample. Vase 2 has a long, fringed strap (not visible in the photograph here) that hangs over the headdress. This long strap is a trait of eight examples in the sample; perhaps there are more examples, for side and rear views of some pots were not available. These long, fringed straps may hang at the sides or near the top of the headdress (Figs. 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, and 14), or may be tied under the chin so that they hang down in front (Figs. 6 and 9). There may also be a short, fringed flap at the back of the headdress (Figs. 5, 8, 10, 12, and 13). Most of the headdresses in the sample are composed, in part at least, of a kind of kerchief, evidently placed over a frame, with a fold at either side of the brow. A sawtooth motif, which appears on many kinds of Mochica headdresses, is shown on ten of the examples, including Vases 1 and 2; it appears on the strap at the side of Vase 1, and on the front of the headdress on Vase 2, edging the inner V. Vase 2 is the only example with a bunch of feathers on the headdress. I read these as feathers on the basis of designs that are similarly placed on fine-line pots.

The V is part of a diamond pattern – often a sequence of two or more diamonds – that continues down the back of the headdress. There is usually at least one V, or diamond, pattern within the outer one. In this sample, there

are fifteen instances of the V; Vase 1 is the only one in which the whole (double) diamond is shown from the front view (Hocquenghem 1977: Fig. 12). It is the only open-spouted pot in a sample in which all the rest are stirrup-spouts, with the exception of Vases 8 and 9, which have a dipper form, hence, the space is necessarily differently handled. There are two more double diamonds on the back of the headdress (Fig. 1).

A third head vessel, Vase 3 (Figs. 3 and 4), in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, has a brow ridge similar to that of the first two pots, and it also seems to depict someone who has lost his teeth; but the eyes are exophthalmic, the nose is more aquiline, and the mouth is downturned. The triple V on the front of the headdress becomes part of a series of diamonds down the back of a kerchief; the sawtooth motif decorates the inner diamond. At the proper left side of the head, there is a snakehead in relief. One other figure in the sample has a relief snakehead on the side of the headdress, and another has a painted one. I know of no similar use of snakeheads elsewhere.

Vase 4 (Larco Hoyle 1938-39, II: Fig. 134; Lumbreras 1974: Fig. 119) is a pot in the Museo Rafael Larco Herrera, Lima, of which I have seen no views other than the published ones, and I do not know if the V continues into a diamond pattern, or if there is a special strap on the kerchief; there is a simplified sawtooth pattern on the chin strap. The face has "doll" eyebrows and painting around the mouth, traits that exist on other Mochica pots, but not on any other examples in this group. The lower face painting is possibly stylized facial hair, but the form is insect-like, and insects or crabs appear elsewhere in the sample. The face on this pot is not unlike those on Vases 1 and 2: the smallish eyes tilt downward at the outer corners, and the mouth is a fairly straight line, although it has a more protruding lip than the others; the nose has a slight bump in it, which is emphasized by the line painted down it.

Another head vessel, in the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima, Vase 5 (Muelle and Blas 1938: Fig. 2, Lám. 8), shows a man who also has the slight bump in the nose, and small tilted eyes; the mouth is fuller, however, and the cheek modeling different from that of the previous examples. He wears a peripheral version of the headdress: The V does not appear to turn into a diamond, at best, it is a truncated V, and the scattered triangle motif is unusual, as is the band around the head. It is the only headdress with the fret, or angular-S, motif, which appears elsewhere in the sample only on body garments, and it does not have the kerchief-like element. This pot is perhaps a questionable inclusion in the group.

Vase 6, published by Julio C. Tello (1938: Pl. 8, right), is the only V-kerchief-headdress pot that has a nose ornament. Moreover, it is the only one that is unequivocally a portrait head: it has a strongly and subtly modeled face, with distinctly fashioned eyes and brow ridge. There are other depictions of this same man. A pot published by Larco Hoyle (1938-39, II: Lám. XVII, upper center) shows him, with a nose ornament, wearing a kerchief with a diamond pattern; but the kerchief is tied over an under-headdress, which, as far as I

cantell from the photograph, has no V at the front, and is a somewhat different headdress form. Another pot (Tello 1938: Pl. 5, left; Arte/rama 1965: 126, lower left), in the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima, has the same type of headdress, without the V. Both of these pots have ear ornaments, whereas the V-headdress version does not; indeed, none of the V-head-dress figures has ear ornaments. Without the nose ornament, the Museo Nacional face shows the downturned mouth that suggests that this man shares with the previous examples in this group a possible loss of teeth.

In the Museum für Völkerkunde und Vorgeschichte, Hamburg, there is a head, Vase 7 (Danzel 1927: 99, right; photographs in the Archive of Moche Art), evidently broken from a full figure, that shows the V on a rather elaborately painted headdress. The V is part of a diamond in a series, and there is some sort of insect within the top diamond. At either side of the V, there is a bird. Snakes painted at the sides of the headdress are probably equivalents of the relief snakes on two other headdresses in the sample. The headdress seems to have been made over a frame. This face is older, more sunken-cheeked than the other examples, and there seems to be a tumor on the proper left cheek.

There are two dippers in the sample. One, Vase 8 (Donnan and Mackey 1978: 135, no. 6), excavated by Claude Chauchat and Christopher Donnan near the Pyramid of the Sun at Moche, has a handle that ends in a head with a double-V headdress with a long strap at the side. At the top of the headdress is a design that might be derived from an insect; on the bowl of the vessel there is a large head of a deity. I cannot read other details from the drawing, but the face appears to be similar to those described above.

Vase 9, a dipper or "cornpopper", of which there are photographs in the Archive of Moche Art, has a handle with a seated figure wearing the V headdress with fringed side straps with sawtooth design; the V seems to be part of a diamond. On the back of the vessel below, there is what appears to be a crab or insect, as well as a design with sun or octopus rays. A number of other dippers have a head of this general type at the end of the handle, usually with a kerchief headdress, and often with diamonds at the back of the kerchief (Tello 1938: LVI-LX, Figs. 41-45); but the full figure handle with V headdress is unusual.

Six full-figure vessels are included in the sample. Vase 10 (Figs. 5 and 6), a full-figure pot in the Trustees of the British Museum, London, is exophthalmic, like Vase 3, and it has a long nose and a small, straight mouth; there is a general resemblance to the head pots. The kerchief headdress, with four concentric diamonds, is tied under the chin by two longish, fringed straps, with pairs of horizontal lines. These straps are similar to those that, on other examples, appear on top of the headdress. At the back, a fringed flap overhangs a dark cape that is patterned with a repetition of pairs of thin, horizontal lines. This cape design is shown on three of the five full-figures in this group, and it is the only pattern that appears on any of the capes. The figure is seated and

wears a long, white shift with an angular design on the cuffs. The sense of triumph with which one finds full-figure representations of personages that appear in the portrait-head pots is quickly replaced by a sense of frustration when the full-figure is not doing anything. This figure sits quietly, with empty hands resting on the knees. There are, however, two particularly interesting details on this figure: an asymmetrical cape tie, which appears also on one other figure in the sample, and the depiction of a length of thin, free rope that is tied loosely around the neck, with one length hanging down the back. A similar rope appears on three other examples in the sample (Vases 14-16).

Vase 11 (Figs. 7 and 8), a full-figure pot in the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima, is the other figure with a relief snake at the side of the head. It also has two fringed headdress straps on the back side of the headdress, as well as the fringed flap overhanging the back of the cape. The kerchief headdress, with the sawtooth motif, is wrapped under the chin; the V, however, does not appear to be part of a diamond. Like the previous figure, this one wears a cape with pairs of thin, horizontal lines repeated on it and a long white shift; there are angular-S's on the cuffs of the shift. The face has a straight mouth, prominent nose, and exophthalmic eyes. Although the seated figure is empty-handed, the pose, with the right hand on the chest and the left one on the knee, is seen also on deck figures who are seated above fine-line scenes with other figures and presumed offerings (Benson 1975: Figs. 26, 27).

Vase 12 (Wassermann-San Blas 1938: Fig. 390; Sawyer 1954: 8, upper; Sawyer 1966: 16, left, Figs. 46, 53; Donnan 1978: Fig. 127; and photographs in the Archive of Moche Art) is in the Nathan Cummings Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Like the figure in Vase 10, it is seated with the hands resting on the knees. The headdress seems definitely to have been made over a frame. It has a single concentric diamond pattern, the sawtooth motif, a long strap at each side, and a flap at the back. The figure wears a plain cape over a long, dark shift with angular-S motifs on the cuffs and bertha. The eyes and nose are prominent, and the mouth droops.

The figure in Vase 13 (Figs. 9 and 10), in the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart, is seated on the end of a partially rolled mat. He wears the striped cape, noted above on Figures 10 and 11. Over the cape is a disk necklace, an accessory found on one other example in the sample; the undergarment is short and decorated with S's. The kerchief headdress, formed over a frame, has diamonds in which a spider is painted; there are long, decorated ties in front and long straps with sawteeth coming down from the headdress at the rear, these are not fringed. The cut-out eyes are large, the nose is prominent, and the mouth, also cut out, is straight and thin-lipped; there seem to be traces of paint around the mouth. The rolled mat may be a clue to status or occupation, but, otherwise, the posture of the figure, with hands on knees, is uncommunicative (2). There are other similar figures with the rolled mat that do not have the headdress V or the paired lines on the cape, although they do have the necklace and long headdress straps.

Vase 14 (Figs. 11 and 12), in the University Museum, Philadelphia, is unpainted, and, therefore, does not have the V, but I include it in this group because it has the kerchief headdress with the long, fringed straps and back flap, the cape with asymmetrical ties, and the rope around the neck. The face is within the variations allowable in this group.

The deck-figure pots are included in this sample. Vase 15 (Figs. 13 and 14), in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, has the kerchief with a diamond, in which there is a crab, and long, fringed straps with the sawtooth motif. A disk necklace is worn over a plain cape, and there is a rope around the neck, this time hanging down in front. The undergarment is short and has a triangular motif on the cuffs. The figure is in "prayer pose", which I have elsewhere (Benson 1975) associated, in at least some instances, with characters who seem to have to do with sacrifice and funerary ceremonies, and possibly with the preparation of grave offerings. The globular pot below the figure has two painted forms that look like rolling pins, and two gourds tied together, the lower of which seems to contain seeds. This figure, with its prominent eyes and nose, bears a resemblance to some of the previous representations.

Vase 16 (Benson 1975: Fig. 27) is another deck figure, in the Museo de América, Madrid, with the typical headdress and fringed straps, a plain cape, and the length of rope in front. He sits, with right hand on chest and left hand on knee, on top of a globular pot that has various representations of pottery, as well as a probable bunch of peppers, not visible in the published photograph; two objects like shishkebabs, which may be strung espingo seeds (Donnan and Mackey 1978: 127-130); and two pairs of bowls tied together, the lower two of which seem to have seeds in them. Painted in fine line at the bottom of the pot is a figure bundled in a mat wrapping, suggestive of mummy wrappings, and holding out a gourd or cup. The painting on the bowl of the pot seems further evidence that the V-headaddress figures have to do with the preparation or presentation of funerary offerings.

There is a large and various group of figures that appear to have to do with burial rituals (Benson 1975). In a society in which burials were rich, and death was a frequent theme in the art, such figures would have been prominent in the society, and their representation would have been important as grave goods. The V sample, if, indeed, it is a distinct cluster, is one of the more richly dressed sub-groups of these figures. Other figures in the broad group may wear only shifts and simple headdresses. Many broad-group figures have a thick scarf tied around the waist or shoulders, as if there were something contained in the scarf; the figures in the V-headaddress sample never have this attribute, and, so, presumably were not involved with the carrying of offerings. Nor do they have the "backwards apron" (Benson 1975: Figs. 13, 26, 28, 29) associated with some figures in the broad group. A diagonal line on the headdress, an important indicator for certain members of the broad group, seems to indicate something different from the V, and there is apparently a careful differentiation between the V and the upside-down V that appears on headdresses with birds - I believe that the upside-down V may be a stylization of bird legs - and the sidewise

chevron that is frequent on runner's headdresses. Other headdresses in the broad group may have diamonds or V's at the back of the kerchief, but they are concealed in front. Association with musical instruments, another sometime attribute of other figures in the broad group is also lacking here. I have not found the V-headress figure among representations of the dead, nor among erotic scenes. This figure is apparently not shown as a globular pot, as are some figures in the broad group, nor have I found him in a fine-line drawing or low-relief representation.

Of the attributes noted prominently here, the frame-based kerchief headdress with under-chintie, the sawtooth and angular-S motifs, the disk necklace, and the lack of ear ornaments are all traits that appear in other contexts in Mochica art. Costume traits that seem to be fairly specific to this cluster are the V or diamond pattern on the front of the headdress that has a fringed strap on the top or at the side and a short, fringed back flap; the snake on the side of the headdress; the cape with paired horizontal lines; the uneven cape tie; and probably the insect or crab and the rope around the neck.

It is possible that V-headress figures may have had as a duty the tying together of the two gourd bowls that appear as offerings. Although the rope does not appear on some of these representations, and two figures with the rope tie have no contextual associations, the two deck figures, both of which have the rope, are sitting directly above tied bowls. However, some of the V figures do not have the rope; there are also fine-line depictions of tied bowls with figures who do not have the rope or other specific attributes of this group of vases (Larco Hoyle 1938-39, II: Lám. XXI); and there is one instance, on a pot in the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart (Linden-Museum 1966: 20), of a fine-line figure, wearing a rope, who has attributes of broad-group figures, but no specific attributes of the V-headress sub-group. This figure, however, does not wear the rope tightly around the neck, but loosely around the shoulders. In front of him are two tied gourds, the lower one of which contains something like seeds.

It is also possible that the rope was worn in emulation of a prisoner or sacrificial victim, for there are depictions of a rope in scenes where what are presumed to be defeated warriors are being led by a length of rope around the neck, or with one end of the rope dangling (Kutscher 1954: Pls. 19 A, 23, 24). There are also a number of single-figure modeled pots of seated prisoners, with a rope hanging down the front or back of the body (Donnan 1978: Figs. 246, 247). The "prisoner" rope, however, is generally thicker than the cord worn by the V-headress figures. Other possible explanations for the use of the rope tie may be strangulation or the tying of cane coffins, for both of which there is evidence from the Virú Valley project (Strong and Evans 1952).

There must have been a number of different offices concerned with the funerary ritual and paraphernalia. Moreover, many of the problems of the interpretation of Mochica iconography may have to do with the time sequence in which the depicted events take place. There may have been a certain stage in a ritual in

which such a rope was worn, possibly a certain stage at which certain garments were worn.

The pots in the V sample are not, however, with one exception, in the great Moche IV tradition of realistic portraiture, and some of them predate this period. Not only is there a considerable range in the depiction of features, but there is something stylized and impersonal in most of them. It is possible that they represent one man, whose likeness was made, not from life, but from recollection. It is perhaps more likely that these pots depict not a specific person, but the holder of a specific high-status office.

#### NOTES

- (1) The front view of Vase 1 (Fig. 1) is published by Hocquenghem 1977: Fig. 12. The same face and headdress type as those on Vase 1 appear on another vase in Berlin that, as far as I can tell from the photograph (Hocquenghem 1977: Fig. 13), is unpainted.
- (2) A deck figure on an unpublished pot in the Museo de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima, has an X design on his headdress and is seated on an unrolled mat on a globular pot with varieties of pottery painted on it.

#### THE SAMPLE

- Vase 1 Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin; Fig. 1 (s. Hocquenghem 1977: Fig. 12).
- Vase 2 Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin; Fig. 2.
- Vase 3 Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna; Figs. 3 and 4.
- Vase 4 Museo Larco Herrera, Lima (s. Larco Hoyle 1938-39, II: Fig. 134; Lumbresas 1974: Fig. 119).
- Vase 5 Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima (s. Muelle and Blas 1938: Fig. 2, Lám. 8).
- Vase 6 Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima (s. Tello 1938: Pl. 8, right).
- Vase 7 Museum für Völkerkunde und Vorgeschichte, Hamburg (s. Danzel 1927: 99, right).
- Vase 8 Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Trujillo (s. Donnan and Mackey 1978: 135, no. 6).
- Vase 9 Private collection, photograph in Archive of Moche Art, University of California at Los Angeles.
- Vase 10 Trustees of the British Museum, London; Figs. 5 and 6.



- Vase 11 Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima; Figs. 7 and 8.
- Vase 12 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Nathan Cummings, 1963 (s. Wassermann-San Blas 1938; Fig. 390; Sawyer 1954: 8, upper; Sawyer 1966: 16, left, Figs. 46, 54; Donnan 1978: Fig. 127).
- Vase 13 Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Stuttgart; Figs. 9 and 10.
- Vase 14 University Museum, Philadelphia; Figs. 11 and 12.
- Vase 15 Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin; Figs. 13 and 14.
- Vase 16 Museo de América, Madrid (s. Benson 1975: Fig. 27).

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Fig. 1 - Vase 1



Fig. 2 - Vase 2



Fig. 3 - Vase 3

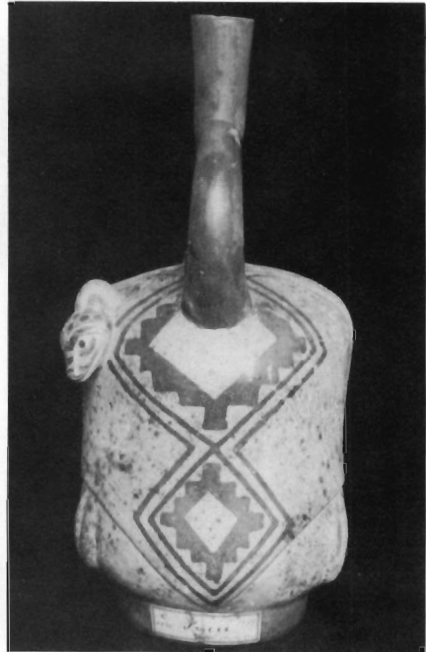


Fig. 4 - Vase 3



Fig. 5 - Vase 10



Fig. 6 - Vase 10



Fig. 7 - Vase 11



Fig. 8 - Vase 11



Fig. 9 - Vase 13



Fig. 10 - Vase 13



Fig. 11 - Vase 14



Fig. 12 - Vase 14

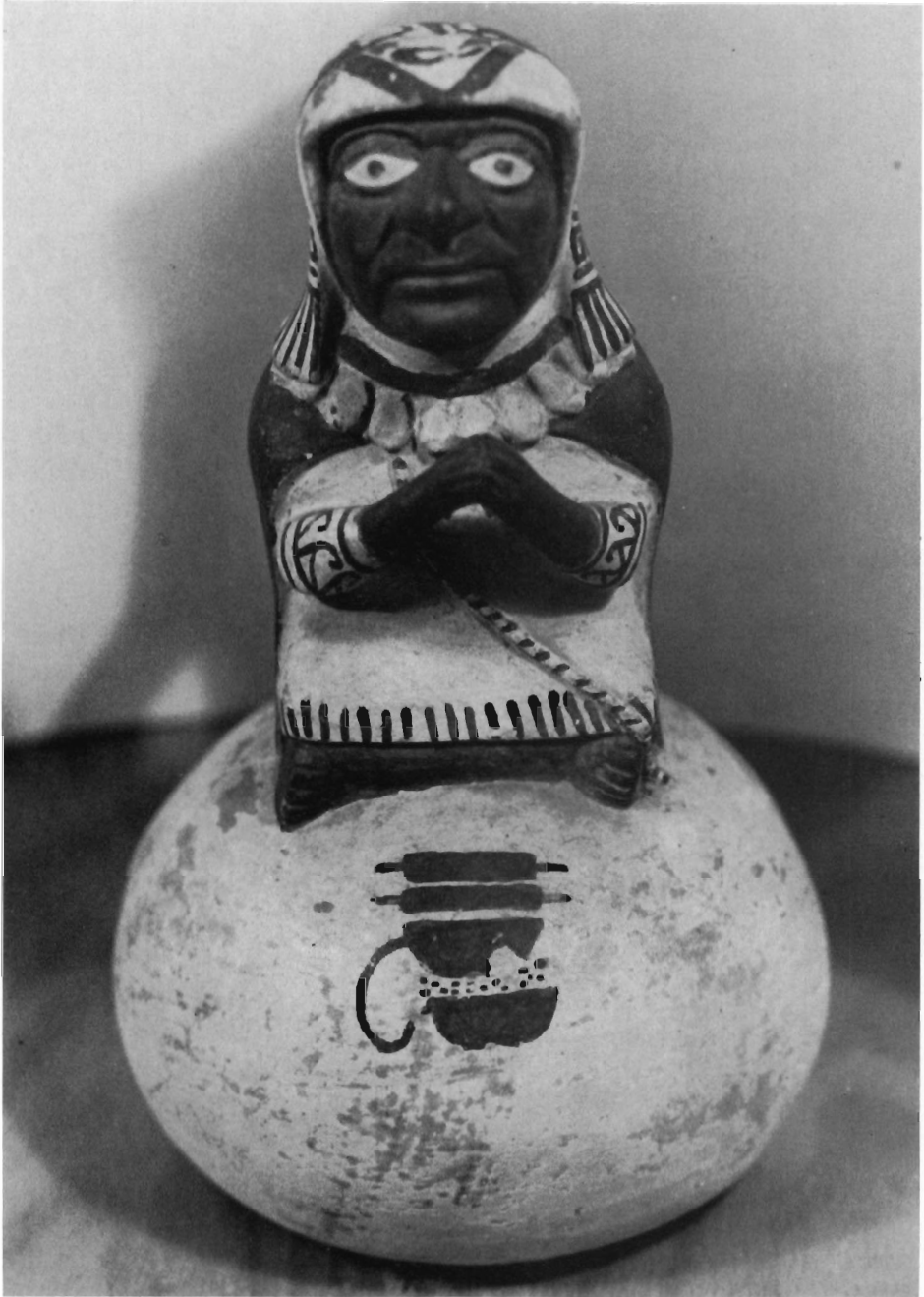


Fig. 13 - Vase 15



Fig. 14 - Vase 15

