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Indigenous Medicine (1350-1550 A.D.)



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Indigenous Medicine (1350-1550 A.D.)



OSCAR PAVÓN SÁNCHEZ

Mi Museo Archaeologist

Before the Spanish "colonization", medical practice in Nicaragua depended heavily on knowledge of numerous medicinal plants and other healing elements of animal and mineral origin.

The native people of Nicaragua, like most other the original inhabitants of Meso-America, believed illness to be a form of divine punishment by their gods. Through prayer and sacrifice, they begged the gods to counteract these ills for them.

A description of the various forms of healing that our ancient physicians

followed can be found in "Pre-Columbian indigenous medicine of Nicaragua" by Dr. Alejandro Dávila Bolaño.

According to Davila, the art of medicine is called *ticiote*. The doctor, who was usually an elderly woman, was named *ticit*. If the doctor was a man, he was called *tepaniani* or *tepani*. Drugs derived from plants or animals were called *pate* or *patli*. There were no specialized centers for teaching the art of medicine. It's believed that priests who had made medicine their life work passed on their knowledge, oral and practical, to chosen apprentices in the temples. It's known that members of some families earned a living practicing medicine.

The application of medicines or remedies was usually done through herbal drinks, cooked mixtures, distillations, chopped or mashed materials, calmatives, applied externally, etc.

Knowledge of indigenous medicine was managed by different specialists. A good doctor was called *mimatini* or *ixpanc*.

Some specialties to note include the following: surgeons who used a knife or obsidian blade knife to carry out operations, *tetaqui*, and the surgery they performed, *tetequiliste*; the traumatologists who dealt with serious wounds or injuries were called *omiquesán* or *tésalo*; masseurs, *chacualiani*; opticians, *tispani*; otologists, *nacaspati*; dentists, *tan-topinqui*; those who healed ulcers, *techichinami*. A suggestion was called *teiscuepaliste*, and its practitioners, *tetacuiliquiques*. Midwives formed a special group and were called *ticit*. The healer who prescribed herbs was called *tepatini*; the false healers, *momitiani*; sorcerers, *taxoxes*; those who sold love potions, *tetatonochiliani*; etc.

Some indigenous medicinal plants to counter the effects of rheumatism were calancapate, casiguispate, ciguapate or sage -*Montanoa sp.*- for women's illnesses, cicipate; for children's, cipeado, mecapate or sarsaparilla -*Smilax sp.*- for purifying the blood.

Our Nicaraguan aboriginals used yaat, the herb known as coca in Peru and had in Venezuela, to quench thirst and to soothe fatigue and headache. There is also mention of the guayacán tree to cure an illness of búas, also called the French or Italian disease, scientifically known as syphilis.

There were many medicines of animal origin. These were mostly used as a fat or ointment and could be called *chihahuis*, *ojite*, *muscayo*, etc. Even today

our country people use the same medicines against various illnesses. Here are some that are used: the fat from a boa -*Boa sp.*- anti-inflammatory. The end of a rattlesnake's tail: sweat-producing, anti-inflammatory and to cure goiter. The bile of a snake, as an anti-toxin for the bite of the same snake. Armadillo fat -*dasybus sp.*- for respiratory illnesses, or as an aphrodisiac. Turkey fat (Figure 1) -*meleagris sp.*- antiophthalmic and antiaphrodisiac. The fat of a tapir -*tapyrus sp.*- for rheumatism. That of a caiman -*cayman sp.*- to counter rheumatism and spur growth of hair. The fat of an agouti -*collogenyss sp.*- serves as an anti-inflammatory. The fat of a monkey to fight off asthma. Iguana fat, a powerful tonic. Raccoon fat -*rocyon sp.*- as also that of the peccary for treating stomach disorders. The fox -*Mephitis sp.*- anti-inflammatory, for headache and colds. The toad, for cure of erysipelas, etc.

Of mineral-based medicines, the most commonly used was salt -*istat*- for fighting stomach troubles, mixed to make warm salt water, to reduce swelling and hemorrhage.

Another medication was the *tizate*, or chalk, for certain skin



Figure 1: Effigy vessel Papagayo Polychrome type with representation of a bird, perhaps a turkey. Mi Museo Collection.

diseases. Alum, *tecece* (stone-cold) as an antihemorrhagic and for conditions of a child's mouth; water with honey from a bee *-anelcute-* (pitarrilla) for internal pain and for insomnias, that is, water consumed in large quantities as medicine. Likewise the ancients of Nicaragua loved the baths *-nemaltia-* they used all the many reservoirs, rivers, fountains, springs, lakes and ponds of this country. Hot springs, called *atontonqui* or *tonala*, were employed to treat certain skin ailments.

According to their religious beliefs, some illnesses were caused by *Ehecatl*, the god of wind, for example, headaches, problems with the heart or ears, fevers, seizures, swellings with no apparent cause, paralysis, and sneezing.

The image of the god of the Wind, *Ehecatl*, is found as a symbol in some pots of the Papagayo Polychrome type, Cervantes Variety (Figure 2), of the Mi Museo collection as is the image of the rain god, *Tlaloc* (Figure 3), held responsible for such illnesses as hives (skin problems), and dropsy (fluid retention).

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Figure 2: *Ehecattl* representation. Papagayo Polychrome ceramic type, variety Cervantes. Mi Museo Collection.



Figure 3: *Tlaloc* representation. Papagayo Polychrome ceramic type. Mi Museo Collection.

From naturalistic to stylized: changing styles in Greater Nicoya figurines



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The ceramic figurines of Greater Nicoya come in many sizes and shapes. Most often they have been studied as objects associated with the ritual activities of shamanism (Day 1995; Day and Tillett 1996; Wingfield 2009). While many appear to be female, sex and gender are represented differently over time and between figurine types. These differences relate to broader patterns in figurine representation. By observing figurine specimens that span multiple periods and types, it is clear that the figurines and what they represent became increasingly stylized and less true to the

human form as time advanced. This can be seen through body poses, body types and representations of sex and gender. The information presented here is a brief summary of a portion of my master's thesis research (Leullier Snedeker 2013). Of course, the whole range of figurine types for Greater Nicoya is not covered here, and I do not claim that this trend affected all types equally. The important thing to keep in mind is that despite significant changes over time, there remained a measure of continuity within the broader evolution of styles.

For the Tempisque (500B.C.-A.D.300) period, Rosales Zoned Engraved is the best known type. This hand modeled ceramic is defined by its predominantly red slipped and burnished surface and the use of black paint to create designs often resembling clothing, head gear, jewelry and body paint. Fine incised lines form parts of the body and facial features.

Specimens vary in quality of manufacture, but are most often naturalistic with well-proportioned limbs, finely modeled features and musculature, and fine decorative details (Figure 1). Individuals are frequently portrayed seated with legs crossed or stretched out. Sex is often ambiguous, with small breasts being the most common sexual identifier. However, these could belong to males or females (Preston-Werner 2008).

By the early Bagaces period (circa A.D.200-500) figurines became much more stylized and body types altered significantly. The Red on Cream Transitional (a newly named type from Wingfield 2009:206) and Chavez White on Red varieties retain the color scheme and poses of Rosales Zoned Engraved, but represent full-bodied females, with large thighs, breasts and buttocks (Figure 2). Where the Tempisque period was marked by thin, muscular individuals that reflect youth and vitality, these later figurines are more stylized and represent different stages of life and health. Anatomical features became geometrical or exaggerated; eyes are bulging or cacao bean-shaped and are appliqué rather than modeled in relief. Craftsmanship is frequently crude and simple. Many figurine types are increasingly sexualized, as fertility either became a more prevalent focus or was represented in a more obvious way.

In the latter half of the Bagaces period (A.D. 500-800) a shift from monochrome and bichrome to polychrome painted decoration took place. Poses, body types

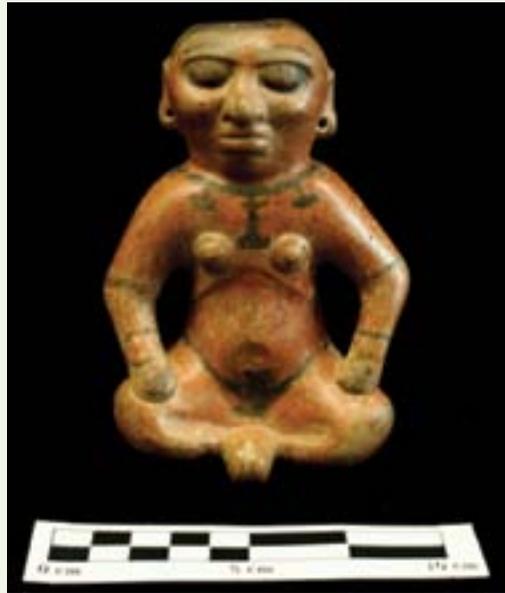


Figure 1: Rosales Zoned Engraved figurine. © 2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (catalogue no. 976-59-20/24941).



Figure 2: Bagaces period figurines and effigy vessel. © 2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (catalogue no. 78-42-20/16908, 976-33-20/24788, 78-42-20/16936).

and the kinds of individuals represented also increased in variability. This transition is easily seen in Galo Polychrome, which is characterized by its highly polished surface and the presence of three main colors: black, red and orange (or cream). These colors continued to be used in the Sapoá period (A.D.800-1350) and Ometepe period (A.D.1350-1522). The designs on these figurines are at times zoomorphic, but mostly rely on simple geometric patterns that cover the body and face of the individual represented (Zambrana Lacayo 2011:71). The significance of these patterns is uncertain; they could indicate kinship and group affiliations or depict elements related to shamanistic trances or visions (Carlsen 1988; Day and Tillett 1996). Figurines of this type come in varying sizes, but the smaller and more simply made specimens under 15cm are most common (Figure 3). These often portray large, soft-bodied females seated or kneeling, much like in the earlier half of the Bagaces period. This continuity is a sign of the importance of this figural tradition. Furthermore, these poses may be indicators of sex and gender as they represent birthing positions common in Central America (Wingfield 2009:105). In addition to representing females with large thighs and buttocks, many small Galo specimens display exaggerated and enlarged labia, which may represent the moment before or during birth.

On the other hand, less common versions of Galo Polychrome, often over



Figure 3: Small Galo Polychrome figurine. © 2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (catalogue no. 17-3-20/C8065.1).

15cm, were carefully crafted with complex painted patterns, well-defined musculature and detailed facial features. These versions frequently represent standing individuals with no obvious sex or gender and are represented wearing items of clothing. These have specifically been interpreted as warriors and shamans (Day and Tillett 1996; Wingfield 2009). This interpretation may, however, not apply to the smaller Galo specimens as their main emphasis appears to be female fertility. Because of the range of representations that exists for Galo Polychrome, it is possible that what archaeologists define as one single type may

have sub-varieties that should be given individual attention and different cultural significance (see Leullier Snedeker 2013 for further discussion).

By the Sapoá period, the differences between newer and older types increased. The sheer number of certain figurines also increased, with Papagayo Polychrome becoming one of the dominant types. This change can in part be explained by the shift from handmade to mold-made figurines, which made for fast production of standardized specimens. This new technology may have been introduced into Greater Nicoya when immigrants from Central Mexico, the Chorotegas, are thought to have entered the region (Dennett and McCafferty 2011; McCafferty 2011; McCafferty and Steinbrenner 2005).

Papagayo Polychrome is recognized by a white or cream slip with decorative painting in red, orange and black. The painted decoration became the main means of expression for the crafts-person since the use of molds limited the forms of the figurines. Papagayo human effigies characteristically depict thick or obese individuals, possibly females, with large bellies and thighs. They commonly stand with hands on hips and thin arms jutting out to the side, forming a “loop” shape (Figure 4). This body type is overall consistent with many Bagaces period figurines, but Papagayo figurines are even more stylized. Emulating true human anatomy does not appear to have been the goal. Their legs often resemble

large cones and the head, headdress, torso and abdomen form one nearly seamless whole because they were made from one continuous piece of clay. In earlier periods, the seated or kneeling pose was most common, but by the Sapoá period, figurines are mostly made to stand on their two legs. Papagayo faces are dominated by large, almond-shaped eyes tilted upwards, while the noses and mouths are diminutive. Details such as facial features are included in the mold and appear in low relief. They were then painted for added realism: eyes are outlined in black and the small mouths are red. While previous figurine types could potentially have been made to represent specific, real-life individuals, Papagayo Polychrome seems designed to reflect a broader, shared identity.

The Sapoá period stylistic ideals are very different than those that came before yet remain linked to previous Bagaces period themes and preferences. Large individuals -possibly females- with thick thighs, abdomens and buttocks are prevalent and the trend towards stylized and abstracted bodies continued. Another Sapoá period type, Mora Polychrome, possesses features that link it to Galo and Papagayo Polychrome and may represent a transitional type. The seated pose, so prevalent in the Bagaces period, continued to be used in the Mora Polychrome figurines, with figures either seated with legs stretched out or seated on a stool, bench or elaborate metate (Figure 5). Mora is very stylized, much like Papagayo Polychrome, and was



Figure 4: Papagayo Polychrome figurine. © 2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (catalogue no. 78-42-20/17129).



Figure 5: Mora Polychrome figurine seated on a metate. © 2013 President and Fellows of Harvard College. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (catalogue no. 48-61-20/18034.1).

probably contemporaneous. However, it was manufactured only in the Costa Rican sector of Greater Nicoya. While the use of slips and paints follows the same color scheme as Papagayo, the decorative motifs, often rectilinear and geometric, are similar to Galo Polychrome. Individuals seated on metates or benches are also more typical of the rarer and more complex Galo Polychrome specimens. Stools, benches and metates are thought to hold special significance in Greater Nicoya and are interpreted in relation to elite individuals and shamanism. In the 16th century, Oviedo mentioned that chiefs

and important women used stool and mats for seating (Lothrop 1926:75-76). They are often considered tools of the shaman for burials, sorcery and healing rituals (Stone 1975). Metates are also important tools for food preparation, and may refer to gendered household activities and rituals. This may be an indication

that Mora Polychrome, which sometimes appears better manufactured and more complex than other types for the Sapoa period, may have held special ritual significance, different from that of Papagayo Polychrome.

With the abstraction of the body during the Sapoa period, gender and sex also became less obvious. The details present on the earlier Red on Cream Transitional and the more common Galo specimens show not only obvious sexual features, such as genitalia and breasts, but also body types linked with fertility and child-bearing: wide hips, soft bellies and thighs, and large navels. In the Sapoa period, bodies continued to be represented as large and thick, but since much of the detail was lost with the use of molds, they look less characteristically female. Small round breasts, however, continue to be prevalent. Nonetheless, fertility no longer seemed to be the main concern. Sapoa figurines may have been meant to represent figures of spiritual or political authority that required gender ambiguity or flexibility and rather than immediately identify them as female, the possibility of alternate genders should be further investigated.

The figurine types discussed here demonstrate a transition in styles over time that led to the increased abstraction of the human form, and in the Sapoa period, to figurines with very standardized body shapes and poses. During the Sapoa period, figurines also represent a smaller variety of individuals, and while most

figurines are classically identified as female, they no longer display obvious sexual features as seen in the Bagaces period figurines. Rather than a major break separating the Bagaces and Sapoa periods, as might be expected from migration events, we see a mixture of change and continuity through the Galo, Mora and Papagayo specimens. Poses, color schemes and ways of representing sex and gender do not abruptly change. While some of the core differences in style and manufacture, such as the preference for mold-made figurines, may be connected to immigrants bringing new cultural preferences, Sapoa period figurines were obviously inspired by centuries of previous figurine manufacture in Greater Nicoya.

For the Tempisque and Bagaces period figurines the variability in style and quality indicate many craftspeople. Most figurines were made at the household level (Lange 1992) and reflected not only community values and ideals, but the personal taste and creativity of the craftsman. That is, they are not just elite products and archaeologists today frequently find them in domestic contexts. Generally, from the Sapoa onward, creativity and personal expression appeared to shift from the overall figurine form to the painted details adorning figurines, such as the patterns, clothing, jewelry and complex headdresses represented on Papagayo Polychrome. This appears to be a more subtle form of expression compatible with the overall societal

norms of the time. The Sapoa period is thought to have been a time of great social change. The size of settlements increased, with regional centers as large as 350 hectares and earthen mounds arranged around plazas. There was also apparent specialization of the economy, with sectors that indicated higher rates of production of lithics and ceramics (Salgado and Vazquez 2006), as seen with the production of Papagayo Polychrome. The latter is also commonly found in archaeological contexts and must have been widely used by the people of Greater Nicoya. The ceramic trends presented here are linked to the socio-political, economic and cultural changes that took place in Greater Nicoya society through the centuries and should be studied as complex reflections of these forces. The study of these figurines offers rich interpretive potential for the future, especially concerning cultural identity and gender.

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Mi Museo in teaching

JUANA SUNSÍN CASTRILLO

In February, 2011, Mi Museo established an agreement with Lic. Luisa Amanda Poveda, delegate of the Ministry of Education in Granada, which consists of an education plan for students in Granada's primary and secondary schools, designed to increase their knowledge of the pre-Columbian period of Nicaraguan history.

Thirty-five high schools were invited for the initial program; of these, twenty sent participants. The twenty schools are: Sagrado Corazón Teresiano, Mercedes Mondragón, Carlos A. Bravo, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Padre Missieri, Jardín Infantil Campanitas, Adventista Maranatha, Elsa Head, Dezandberg, Diocesano, Rubén Darío, Naciones Unidas, INTAE, Carmela Noguera, Gertrudis Bermúdez Gómez, José de la Cruz Mena, Margarita Urbina Ortiz, Instituto Nacional de Oriente, Salesiano Don Bosco and El Escudo.

On the day of the students' visit they were given a careful tour of the exhibition rooms, followed by presentation of a short documentary with different themes depending on the students' academic level.

Teachers and students were pleased with the information provided, and marvelled at the great work Peder Kolind is doing to make Nicaragua's native history better known.

Note that in the entire year of 2012 we were visited by 3,236 students. Most were in elementary school or their first year of high school.

This year, Mi Museo continues working closely with the Ministry of Education, to further strengthen our historical roots and local and regional cultural identity.

Past and present time

NORA ZAMBRANA LACAYO

In February of this year, Charles (Chuck) and Shirley Schmidt, from California, U.S., now residents of Granada, Nicaragua, bought the work entitled "Jornada del Tiempo" (Journey of Time) a painting on canvas by Granada artist Eduardo Jose Arias.

The painting "Jornada del Tiempo" was inspired by the wisdom of the indigenous ancestors of Central America. According to its maker, this work of art is a map of the solar system and the movement of planets, which demonstrates the elements, beliefs and teachings of Mayan culture and of native Nicaraguan cultures

decided to donate this work of art to the museum as part of the permanent collection on exhibit, so that everyone, from Nicaragua and other countries, could view and learn from it.

The Schmidts and Mr. Kolind did not know each other personally prior to this encounter.

Thank you very much, Mr and Mrs. Schmidt for your generous donation; Mi Museo welcomes the work "Jornada del Tiempo".

Having heard about Peder Kolind's work, the Schmidts thought him a great man for having created a museum of pre-Columbian pottery. They thought the museum would be the perfect place to exhibit the painting. After talking directly with Peder Kolind, on February 18, the Schmidts



*Jornada del Tiempo. 2012
35" x 62". Textured Acrylic.*

Visits to Mi Museo

In the first quarter of 2013, during the exhibition "Periodization of the cultural sequence of America and Nicaragua (10,000?-1550 AD)" Mi Museo recorded 3628 visitors, of whom 2557 are from other countries, 671 are Nicaraguan citizens and 400 students.

The countries of origin of foreign visitors are:

E.E.U.U. 855	Brazil 14	Austria 3
Canada 425	Panamá 13	Perú 2
Costa Rica 218	Chile 13	Slovakia 2
France 147	Honduras 11	Slovenia 2
England 106	El Salvador 12	Tunisia 2
Germany 117	Philippines 9	Palestine 2
Holland 65	Russia 9	Barbados 2
Denmark 57	Thailand 7	Scotland 2
Switzerland 55	Uruguay 6	Isle of Man 2
Argentina 52	Colombia 6	Turkey 1
Australia 46	Rep. Cheka 6	Japan 1
Spain 42	Portugal 5	Dominican Republic 1
Italy 39	Great Britain 5	Malaysia 1
Belgium 30	Taiwán 5	Croatia 1
Finland 30	Puerto Rico 5	Bulgaria 1
Hungary 20	Cyprus 4	
Guatemala 17	India 4	
Sweden 18	Iceland 4	
México 16	Venezuela 4	
Ireland 15	Latvia 3	
Poland 14	Andorra 3	

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