

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

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PRESENTED TO THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

AT ITS FORTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 24, 1880.

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY
(INCLUDING THE ANNUAL REPORT XL),
1879—1880.

ALSO

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MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXII.

BEING THE FOURTH AND CONCLUDING NUMBER
OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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OF THE

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No. XXII.

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XXXI. ON SOME BURIAL URNS FOUND NEAR THE
MOUTH OF THE AMAZON RIVER. Communicated
by NEVILLE GOODMAN, Esq., M.A., Peterhouse.

[May 24th, 1880.]

THESE burial urns (now unfortunately in a fragmentary condition) were found in the Island of Marajou, which lies between the main mouth of the Amazon and that of the Tocantins river. This island is about the size of Ireland and is formed by a channel, lying behind it, which connects the two rivers, through which channel all the traffic of the Amazon now passes on its way to and from the interior to Pará, which is the sole port of that immense river.

This island, like the rest of the district (at least on the south of the Amazon), lies on a dead flat. One half of it is covered with water during the season of high water, and probably there is no point in the whole island which rises thirty feet above high water mark, and but few which attain an elevation of twenty feet above that level. Though a large

part of the island is covered with forest like the rest of the district, Marajou is peculiar in having large expanses of "campo" or plain unencumbered with trees and clothed with coarse grass, so that it is made use of to pasture large herds of semi-wild cattle whose culture and exportation constitute the chief wealth and commerce of this sparsely populated island.

The immediate locality in which I found the urns was a small island of two or three acres in extent, lying near the bank of a long narrow and shallow lake, which is almost at the centre of Marajou and is called Arary. This lake discharges its waters through a river of the same name into the Tocantins. The river is about eighty miles long.

The centre of the small island rises perhaps fifteen to twenty feet above the walls of the lake, and thus stands at a higher level than any land round the lake. Viewed from a distance its elevation is marked on the horizon in comparison with the rest of the land. The central part is clothed with trees, but this high part is but a small portion of the island. It is surrounded or bounded by a low cliff formed by the denudation of the island by the action of the waters of the lake. The remaining surrounding part consists of a talus sloping very gently to the water and covered with weeds and trailers. All round the island is a strand made up of worn and broken pieces of pottery, doubtless washed out from the denuded soil of the island during the very considerable period for which this denudation has been going on. The soil is fine vegetable mould, which, having been subjected to repeated tropical rains and bakings under an equatorial sun, had become very much endured.

The urns were found partially projecting from the low cliff. They were embedded, at no great depth, in the soil. The roots of the trees had in some instances permeated and passed through them. Probably the tops of the vessels were originally about two feet from the surface, and no pottery seemed to have

been buried more than five or six feet from the surface, that is, at least ten feet above the surface of the lake. These details seem necessary to shew the character of the vessels, &c.

We have then

(A) A highly ornamented and curiously shaped urn (see Figs. 1 and 2).



Fig. 1. Urn A restored.

This contained bones which crumbled into fragments and dust when disturbed. The bones were human. I could identify

the heads of two femora, one of the humerus, parts of the ulna, radius and fibula, and also parts of the ramus of the lower jaw. They were of small size. I am not able to determine whether they were of an adult or a child. If of an adult, the race (known to have been small) must have been even considerably smaller than the present aborigines. The urn has at least one, probably two, coatings of finer clay superimposed on the clay forming the main structure, and a pattern is engraved on it which cuts through the top white coating and reveals the salmon-coloured clay below. Inasmuch as the indenture, rather than that which is left, forms the pattern, perhaps it ought to be called an intaglio rather than a cameo. Bosses have also been added to complete the design.

(B) Rough globular vessel without pattern (see Fig. 3). This contained no bones and only some broken pottery which was not preserved.

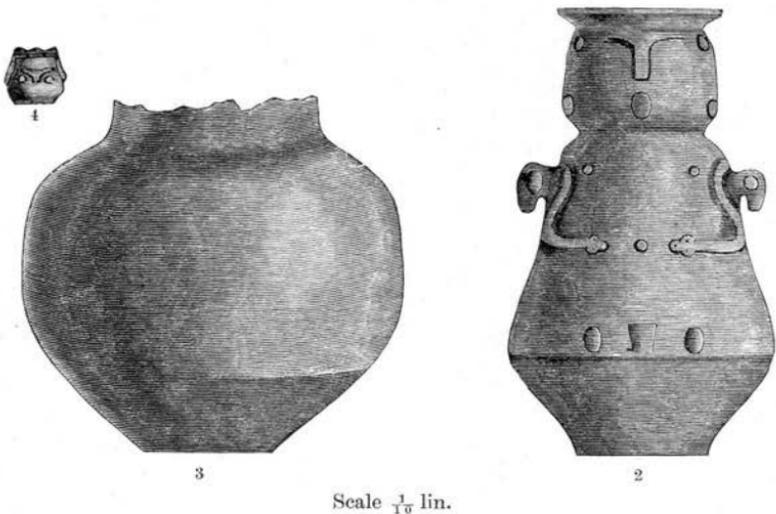


Fig. 2. Outline of A restored, omitting pattern. Fig. 3. Outline of B.
Fig. 4. Knob supposed to belong to the cover of B.

A rude conventionalized representation of a clothed human head (B') (Fig. 4), which I conjecture was the knob or handle of the cover of the vessel, was found in it. This knob or head is almost precisely similar to one in the British Museum which was brought from Parà.

(C) Urn (Fig. 9) with a rude pattern formed in the same way which contained some fragments of human bones.

Other vessels without pattern were dug out which were either broken in situ or in removing them, and one of them contained the singular triangular piece of porcelain exhibited.

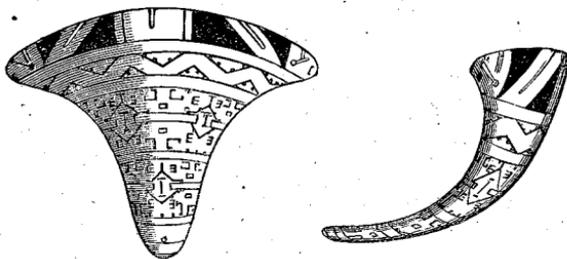
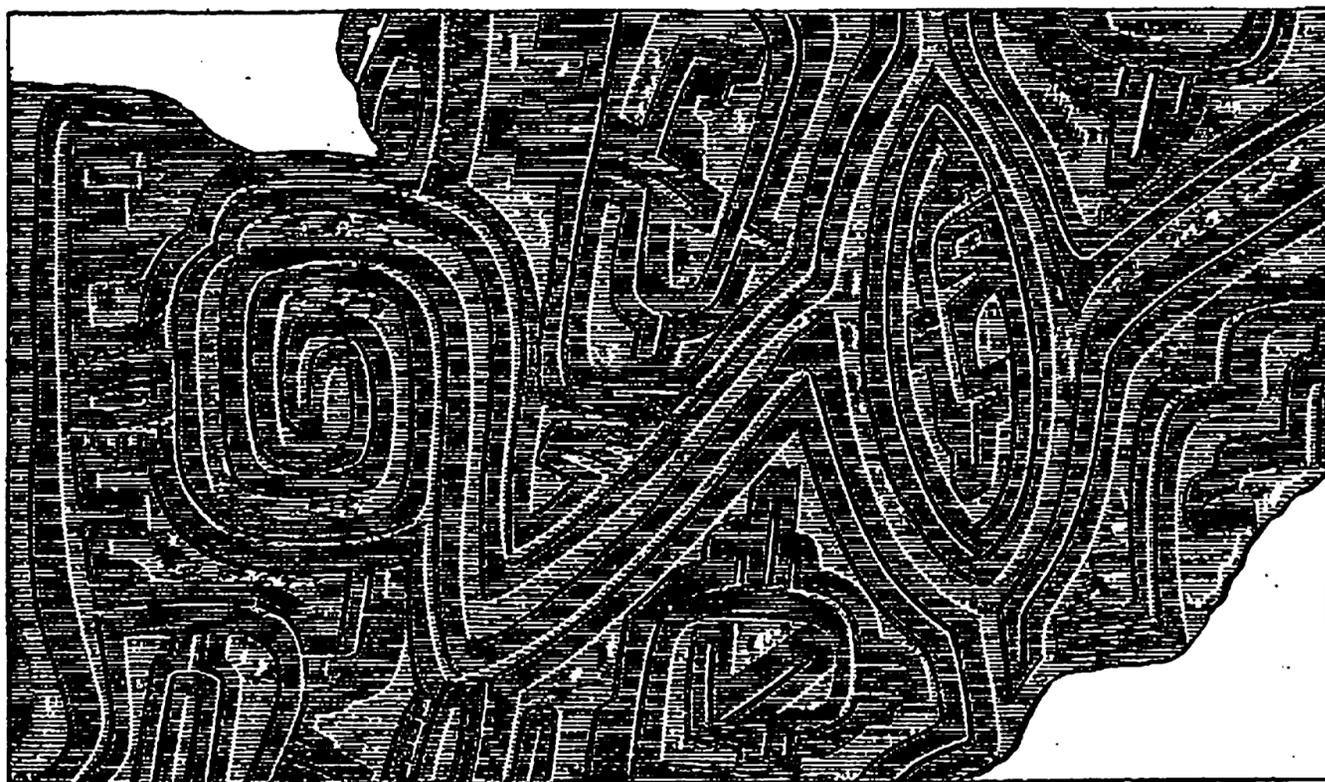


Fig. 5.

It was whole when we found it, but was broken by a careless servant, and one of the pieces lost. I have never seen anything like it, but its shape and the three holes by which it was suspended seem plainly to indicate that it was an article of female dress or adornment, used for purposes of decency, and perhaps its presence in a burial urn indicated the condition of the woman to whom it belonged.

(D) Besides these are some fragments of a large and

elaborately ornamented vessel, which must have been between five and six feet in circumference with a rounded base.



Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.

Fig. 6. Pattern on fragment of D.

The pattern in this case also is made by the aid of two layers of finer clay, and since the portion left constitutes the pattern it must be considered a kind of cameo. The pattern seems to have been made first by indented lines; then these lines had a border left on each side of them and the remaining surface was worked away with a tool after the clay had attained to some degree of hardness.

(E and F) Portions of two other vessels of similar shape and probably for the same use. They are hollow, short cylinders with horizontal shelves on the upper edges (see Fig. 7).

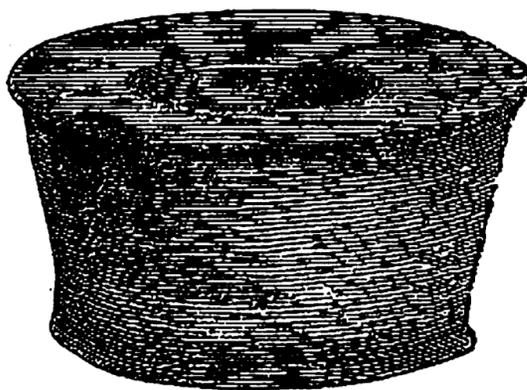
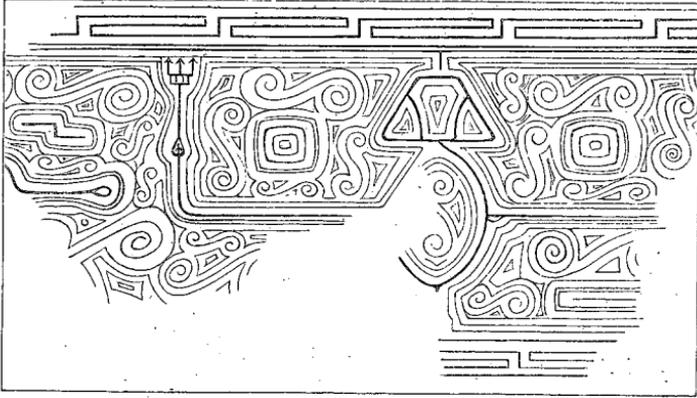


Fig. 7. Vessel E, omitting pattern.

(E) Presents perhaps the best specimen of workmanship.



Scale $\frac{1}{2}$ lin.

Fig. 8. Pattern on a fragment of vessel E.

In this case the chasing seems to have been done while the clay was yet soft; the tool squeezing it up in some places. It has on its upper and under borders well-defined and well-executed designs which have been misnamed the Greek, or key pattern.

(F) The other vessel is similarly formed, but has a rough sketch of eyes, eyebrows, and a ridiculously small nose, in rude imitation of the human head. The large boss was to lift it by, and probably was not intended to correspond to any feature of the face.

Portions of other vessels with painted patterns upon them. If I may offer a few remarks where others of so much more knowledge and experience are listening, I should like to call attention to the following points.

The facts adduced shew conclusively that these were the burial urns of an ancient people and the place from which I got them was an ancient cemetery. The elevation and the

insularity of the place of burial made it peculiarly suitable for interment; for the bodies could be readily brought there by water (the mode of carriage which from time immemorial has

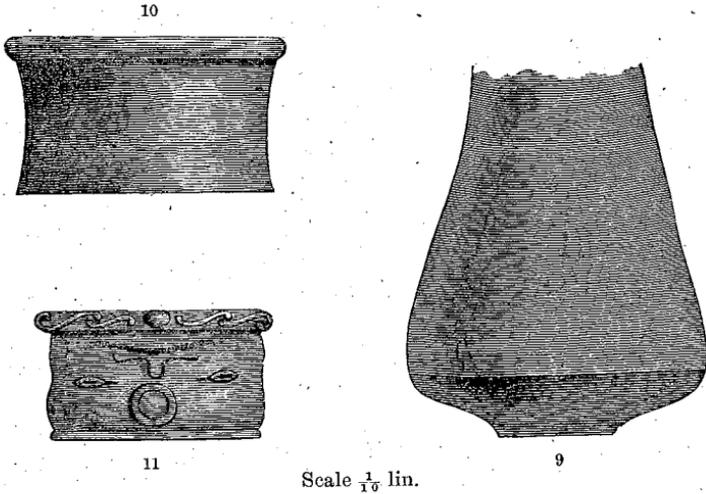


Fig. 9. Urn C, omitting pattern. Fig. 10. Vessel E, omitting pattern.
Fig. 11. Vessel F.

been practised by the Amazon Indians), and buried out of the reach of the water and protected in some degree from disturbance from wild beasts.

The aboriginal Indians have ceased to exist in Marajou with anything like tribal relations, or distinctive customs, for more than a century, and have become absorbed into that mixed population which forms the strange community of the Brazilian people.

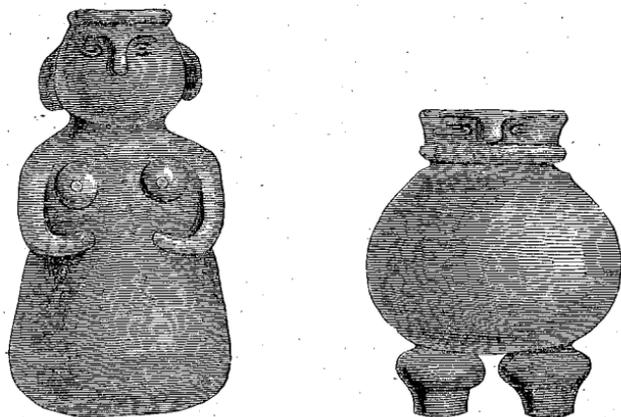
I am not aware that any customs of interment similar to those indicated by these urns exist among the tribes of Indians higher up the Amazon, and certainly I have never seen any pottery of theirs which evinces anything like so high a state of civilization and art as these do, or indeed anything which shows any similarity to them.

On the other hand, an examination of these vessels and their ornamentation proves that their manufacturers must have had some relations with the ancient peoples of Peru, Granada, Central America, and Mexico, so that I have no hesitation in saying that the art indicated by this pottery was a branch of that wide-spread civilization which extended from Central America through the lands of the Incas to the southern hemisphere along the Andes, and which seemed to shrivel and totally disappear at the rude touch of the fiercer and harsher civilization of the West, whose forces were wielded by the Spaniards under Cortez and Pizarro.

As an illustration of this and also as a means of conducting us to another point of interest, this urn (A) is doubtless a highly conventional representation of the human figure, with its head, trunk, arms, nose, breasts, feet, and other organs presented on each side in a bifacial arrangement. This is demonstrated by comparison with those burial jars roughly copied from some in the Christy collection from Peru and New Granada. The analogy is shewn not so much in the fact that the Peruvian and Granada ancient people interred their bones in jars roughly representing the human figure, as in the minor detail with which this representation was carried out; such for instance as the disposition of the arms, the tendency to make the eyebrows meet, to minimise the nose and to suppress the mouth. These and many more minute matters indicate an imitative connection.

The correspondence of this custom of fashioning the receptacle of the remains of the dead into something resembling the human living body, with the same custom among the ancient Egyptians, is remarkable. The difference however in the method of carrying this idea out in the wooden mummy cases of the one people and the pottery urns of the other may indicate that a distinction may be drawn between similar results produced by like tendencies of the human mind and the

same produced by community and actual imitation. There are, however, many other points of resemblance between the art of the Egyptians and the ancient South American races. We have here the so-called Greek pattern. Of course this is a misnomer. I have seen this same pattern on the roofs and walls of Egyptian temples which were excavated from the rocks before Greek art or the Greek nation had any existence. It is certainly remarkable that this pattern should be found so very generally adopted among races so different as the classical and neo-Indian races. The pattern in itself is not very elaborate. It might have arisen from a desire to break up the monotony of a fillet or border by cross lines coupled with the pleasure



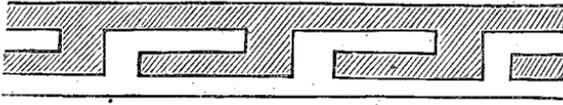
Scale $\frac{1}{10}$.

Fig. 12.

experienced by the human mind in discovering that a pattern is not only symmetrical but complementary. What I mean by complementary will be explained by the conjectural process.

Suppose a fillet thus represented be broken up by cross

lines thus. Then into these spaces the staircase pattern (a



pattern very prevalent in the Peruvian and Mexican ornamentation) is introduced thus, with a differentiation of colour or surface on each side, and a corresponding difference in the upper and under border, and we have the Greek or key pattern in its simplest form.

Now I conceive the charm of this pattern and that which has caused it to be preserved and elaborated by so many



different races to be this. Having made the keys 1, 3, 5, &c. without relation to anything else, the artist, or observer, dis-

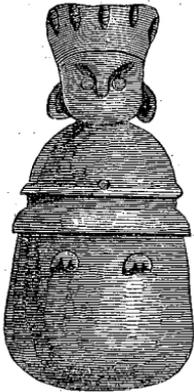


Fig. 13.

covers that he has also constructed the inverted and complementary keys 2, 4, 6, &c. This delight in complementary

patterns I could illustrate by many examples if I had time. The most striking of correspondences between Egyptian and American art is, however, the winged orb over the doorway in one of the Indian temples in Ocosingo, C. A. (given in Stephen's travels); and the well-known winged orb found so generally over the doors of Egyptian temples. In this case the shape and disposition of the wing feathers are remarkably like, but the edges of the wing are reversed, the front edge being directed upward in Egyptian and downward in American art.

The curious cylinders shewn I conjecture were to support the vessels which have tapering bases in the same manner as Roman amphoræ were supported by ring stands. That the burial urns when interred needed no such support seems by no means to invalidate the conjecture. It is the ideas of decorum and solicitude for the remains of the departed (which in all ages have characterized the rites of sepulture) that are satisfied by these elaborate stands.

It is curious that these urns seem to be too small and have too narrow mouths to admit of a human body being placed in them in whatever manner doubled up without mutilation. It would appear that the bodies were first dried in the sun and then broken up and introduced into these urns.

I think some if not all of these vessels must have been turned on the wheel.

I cannot find that there are any similar burial urns from the same neighbourhood or from within thousands of miles of it in England. Such urns, however, were known to exist in Marajou, as they were mentioned to me before I started from Pará under the Indian name of Igaçaba.