

CEDI - P. I. B.
DATA 09 09, 86
COD WRD03

Sonderdruck:

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR ETHNOLOGIE, Band 108, Heft 2, Berlin 1983

Some Aspects of the Pottery of the Waurá Indians *

By

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This paper describes some of the results of my research undertaken at the village of the Waurá Indians in the Xingu National Park during the months of August and September of 1978.

On arriving at the village to undertake an investigation on pottery, my first intention was to learn the techniques by making a few pots, but, on being confronted with my lack of skill, my informants assigned to me only simple tasks, such as mixing clay with temper, smoothing pots or applying red paint. I did not acquire more specialized knowledge, such as that required to mold whole pieces or even zoomorphic appendages. (Of the latter, the few pieces I did make were undone by one of my teachers.)

Only a certain inclination towards music saved me from total discredit. In spite of my lack of knowledge of musical theory, and of being incapable of transcribing music in pentagrams, I managed to repeat the songs they taught me, thus affording my teachers a certain amount of satisfaction. I had already acquired a small repertory, when they decided to teach me a song which represented considerable innovation with regard to everything I had learned previously.

One of my informants, Kamaya, indicating the various pots of her home would say the words "*Kamalu hai*" (*Kamalu* in Waurá signifies clay) very loudly and in a bass tone, gradually reaching higher notes when pointing to pots of medium size. While indicating the smaller pots, the voice became softer to a point that the words were pronounced in a whisper which was barely intelligible. To make the lesson clearer, various circles were drawn on the floor and each, in accordance with its dimensions, would correspond to a *kamalu hai*, deeper and stronger or higher and softer according to a gradual musical scale.

The classification of pottery among the Waurá is as complex as any other primitive classification. I managed to compile long lists of names used to designate pieces of pottery, but I would not be capable of designating any pot by its correct name. I was able, however, to "sing" pottery series in a manner deemed fairly acceptable. As an archaeology student, I had the opportunity of examining more than one criterium for the classification of ceramics, but it was among the Waurá that I learned a "musical" division for the pieces used in a household, with which, I must say, it is much more fun to work than the phases, sub-phases, traditions and sub-traditions with which archeologists work the greater part of their time.

It was only after this preliminary lesson that I was told the myth of the origin of clay, which has a close relationship to music.

Before starting her narration, the informant drew various circles on the floor, beginning with a large one, followed by medium-sized ones until she arrived at a circle of quite reduced dimensions. The names were given in descending order:

"Nukain, kamalupe, nukaantsain, nukaantsain pupuko, makula, makula puko, makulatain, alua kana, yalatu kana, itchiu kana, mayuwá kana, akuma kana, wasaikiana, tsake tsake, kupá kana, yapy kana, muluta kana, talapi kana, araukuma kana, puitchiana,

* The original version of this article was written in Portuguese to be published in a Festschrift in honor to Professor Doctor Egon Schaden.

sulá kana, kuyuy kana, yutá kana, itsá kana ... (pause) ... everything pots (pause) yumu kana.”

(it is difficult to translate each of these names. The first four refer to the larger pots and are followed by the names of zoomorphic pots, as is explained further on).

Then she began to narrate:

“First *nukain* goes in front. *Kamalupe* comes after. *Nukaantsain* comes after. Everything small pot come after. Then sang Kamalupe:

— *Kamalu hai!* (in a deep and strong voice)

(The phrase *Kamalu hai* is repeated several times in a tone which becomes ever higher and less intense).

All little pots sang.

Then *Kamalu* sang.

Then grandpa (the word used to designate ancestor) of Waurá listened.

— Who sang?

— I don't know.

— Who sang?

— I don't know.

— Which “*bicho*”?

Then grandpa of Waurá fear. Climbed wood (wood is the word used to indicate tree in general).

Kamalu went up there (points to the south). Then shits.

Left shit. Left *akukutai* (a sponge used as temper in pottery). Left *ulutain* (fluvial bivalve used in the process of making pottery). Stone did not leave. Carried away. Left *mauatá* (tree from the trunk of which bark is extracted that is used in the blackening process of pottery). Left that other black to paint. Then goes up. Up there. There jumped Bakairi village. Bakairi village name: Tapakuia. Then stayed there. It is not shit. Only *Kamalupe*. Only comes here. River of Mehináku Kulisevu. Remained there behind Xingu. There left shit. The Morená left shit. Then big pot. Then *nukain* stayed there inside so. (Draws on the ground two concentric circles). Then stayed there bottom. *Nukain* stayed so (shows rim of a big pot nearby). Then sang:

— *Kamalu hai!*

(Repeats again the scale from the deepest to the highest).

Then grandpa Waurá saw. Then went away.

Then sang there (in) our village. Then Waurá come here.

— Where did you see Kamalupe?

— Here.

Then Waurá fell into water.

Then took out.

Then asked.

— How we make pot?

Then mixed *akukutai*.

Then picked up *teplate* (pebble used to smooth ceramics).

Then picked up wood bark.

Then burn pot.

Then pretty.

Then Waurá makes.

(At this moment the informant pauses for a long while then continues).

Then Yamurikumá began long ago paint pot. Every people went fishing. Then woman sang yesterday. Then woman sang yesterday. Then woman sang yesterday. Every people went fishing there mouth (1). Only make box (I presume that “box” in this context means “pot”), black monkey, large *tucunaré* fish, all making, people make box. Woman is expecting.

— Who taught your husband make there mouth?

Boy name.

— My son don't do.

Name boy Tamatapirá. Uleyawá. Same Apyká: confined (2).

Don't go also. All people go fishing there. Then woman sang.

Song of Yamarikumá. Fisherman don't come.

— What is our young man doing there mouth?

— Don't know.

There man is only making box, animal, all. Then at night sang, sang, sang, sang a lot. Then same as me look there at mouth. Then came near. Then making box. Then hides.

— Who is doing?

Then saw people. Then people saw. Then get box. Take there to woods. Took box there to woods.

— What are you doing here. Said to people.

— We search fish.

— Why don't you go away?

— Wait a little. We sleep five (meaning five nights) then we go away.

Then all people send fish to woman. Then woman also makes payment. Woman goes get wood fruit. Then makes cooking. Then puts in middle cooking wood fruit. Her name Kurati. Then woman eat. Then at night sang a lot. Then makes basket. Around puts *kuterre* (semi-lunar paddle (3) used to flip “*beiju*”(4)). Then makes armadillo (tatu). Armadillo large. Then makes path. Makes hole. Goes there deep. Path of Yamarikumá. Then nobody eat fish, eat no “*beiju*”, eat no “*mingau*” (5). Only sang. Then the confined one goes get husband.

— What day you all go away.

Then people came. Then woman sang.

— What are you all doing?

Woman don't speak. Woman don't speak to husband. Only sang. Then woman is looking at people. Then armadillo goes away, deep down. Then husband called:

— Come, come, come.

— Don't come. Called, called, called. Then all men only look. Then goes there deep down.

Went there village of Kuikuro. Went there to village of Kalapalo. Caught a woman. Caught a woman Matipu. Comes more. Went to his grandpa village. There husband stay-

¹⁾ Mouth (boca) refers to the mouth of the river.

²⁾ - Apyka - Apyka was one of my main informants who, at the time of my stay at the village, was going through the seclusion period which marks the initiation of adolescents. Examples of people who were close to me always came up to better illustrate the myths which were told to me.

- Confined (preso) refers to the period when an adolescent is kept in seclusion.

³⁾ Semi-lunar paddle used to flip “*beiju*” (*kuterre* in Waurá)

⁴⁾ “*Beiju*” Pancake made of roasted manioc flour, one of the principal components of the Waurá diet.

⁵⁾ “*Mingau*” - food made of manioc.

ed. Stayed alone. Boy. Woman his mother left there inside (...) (unintelligible word). Then his father looking. Then his father gets. Then all climbed wood like black monkey. Then his wife, all women go away. More went there to our grandpa village. Then went there Bakairi village. Then went there middle river. Up there. Then left *urucu* there middle river. Then has. Then has. Up there. Then is making pot. Then goes get. Then pretty. Has red. Started *urucu* (Red vegetable dye used in body painting). Name *tipepe*. (Red mineral dye used in ceramics). Then washes *urucu* of Yamurikumá. Then wash at waterfall. Then has. Then Capy goes get. (Myth narrated by Kamaya with simultaneous translation by her son Laptauana) (6).

The myth of the origin of clay has two very distinct parts which were emphasized in the narration through a pause of the informant: the first refers to the appropriation of the clay by the Waurá and the second to the transfer of clay, originally kept secret by the men, to the sphere of the women, connecting this passage to the Yamurikumá feast. This reversal of the male and female roles is closely related to the Yamurikumá feast, an occasion when the tasks pertaining to each of the sexes are inverted. It is interesting to compare this myth, in which the Indians take possession of the raw material, learning through experience how to use it, with another Waurá myth in which the Sun places at the disposal of the various tribes of the Xingu the goods which are the monopoly of each tribe in inter-tribal commerce. (Schultz, 1964:33) (Agostinho, 1974:19).

As can also be seen through the myth of origin, clay is an element which has strong mystical implications. It is therefore normal that precautions are taken with respect to it. Thus, both pregnant women and parents of very small children are forbidden from making pottery. A young woman, the mother of a child approximately three years old was strongly criticized for making pots: this would certainly cause the death of her child, it was said in the village. The same criticism was directed at the father of a small child who used to make pottery.

In view of this, most of the potters whom we saw working were older people: almost all young people (men and women), although familiar with the technique of making pottery, for magical reasons were barred from using it.

The other important point with respect to the making of pottery which must be stressed, is that both men and women dedicate themselves to this task. This represents a change from what was observed by anthropologists who had visited the Waurá on previous occasions. Lima (1950:10) indicates that pottery is an exclusively feminine task, and Schultz (Schultz and Chiara, 1968) - who visited the village in 1964 - records that the Chief Waurá and one of his brothers were potters. In 1978, I found that among the 93 inhabitants of the Waurá village, 14 were potters, of which 7 were men and 7 women. It is possible that the increased contact with whites (through the Posto Indígena Leonardo Villas Boas) and with other tribes of the Xingu has created the need for greater production of pottery (which is overly important in inter-tribal commerce) and that men have begun this activity a relatively short time ago.

The painting which decorates the pots also has its origin explained by a myth, the *Arakoni* myth, which is not new in Waurá literature, as Schultz (1964:76,80) had already collected and published it under the title of "Incest". The story of *Arakoni* was told more than once to me by my informant Wayerú. In comparison with the version collected by

⁶⁾ Capy - Capy was another informant of mine.

Schultz, there were several variations, among which the most important is the connection of this personage with the origin of painting. A connection which was textually mentioned to me. Let us allow our informant to speak:

“Arakoni was the first one to draw *Ualamá neptakô*, *Kulupeienê*, *Kupate nábe*, *Sapalakô*, *Kuarráta*, *Uêne Uêne Suco*, *KunhéKunhé Rute Kana*. (These are names of the patterns used in paintings: see explanations further on). It was him who drew. Arakoni had a sister, Kamayulalo. Arakoni had no woman. Still single. Sister was confined. Then mother went to field, came back, asked sister to help. (When they return from field carrying on their heads a basket of manioc, the women ask the girls to help unload). Then saw that young girl was with paint. It was Kamayulalo. It was *Kulupeienê*. Then mother went to bathe. Saw that all boys were without paint. So mother understood that Arakoni had made love to sister. Then mother beat sister, beat Arakoni. Did not give food anymore to sister. Did not give food anymore to Arakoni. Then Arakoni went to field with friend. Then monkey whistled:

— Arakoni made love to sister!

— What is monkey saying? friend spoke.

— He is saying Arakoni made love to sister!

Then Arakoni spoke:

— I go away.

When he go away spoke to his friend:

— I go away, then you make Kwarup, mother does not want to give food anymore, burnt my arrow, burnt my necklace. I go away.

Then Arakoni painted himself in order to become “*bicho*” (7). Then Arakoni become “*bicho*”. Went away there in Morená. This happened there old Waurá village [called] *Tsarwapûhe* (points to the South). Then mother cried a lot. Asked Arakoni to return.

— Come back Arakoni! You can make love to your sister. But Arakoni does not hear anymore [he] is there in Morená. He was the first who drew *Ualamá neptakô*, *Kulupeienê*, *Kupate nábe*, *Sapalakô*, *Kuarráta*, *Uêne Uêne Suco*, *KunhéKunhé*, *Rute Kana*. It was Arakoni who taught music of “*Kwarup*”.

On another occasion I asked to be told again the same myth. It was repeated to me in an almost identical manner, but the ending did vary:

“Then the Waurá knows how to draw. Other tribes do not know. Because Arakoni is Waurá. Others don’t know make “*mayako*” (basket). Only Waurá know make “*mayako*”.

My informant advised me to ask other Waurá to draw me Arakoni’s drawings; at that time I had already asked several people to draw mythological personages, and, according to Wayerú, the drawing would make me understand the story better. And this really did happen: thanks to the drawings of Arakoni I could distinguish the various motifs of Waurá painting. Two informants (Laptauana and Apýká) drew very enlightening figures (plates 1 and 2).

The relationship of the personage of Arakoni to the painting motifs becomes quite clear when the matter in which he is represented in drawings is analysed (plates 1 and 2). First of all, we find a repertoire of the painting motifs known to the Waurá, which reduces to the simplest expression the depiction of the body of the personage.

7) “*Bicho*” (Apapaatae in Waurá) - refers to both creatures of the animal and supernatural worlds. Sometimes also referred to as “*espírito*” (spirit).

Each of the different painting motifs is designated by a specific name, as is indicated next to the figures. Although I did not obtain a detailed explanation with respect to the question, and although the inventory of motifs which I have started to make is far from complete, I nevertheless do not believe it is possible to make a distinction between the geometric and representational patterns of painting among the Waurá. In my view, there is always a relationship between the series of figures (which to our eyes are only geometrical) which the Waurá draw and the forms of the natural world, such as: fish bones, “*sucuri*” snakes’ head, or with objects which are used, such as the *uluri*. (8)

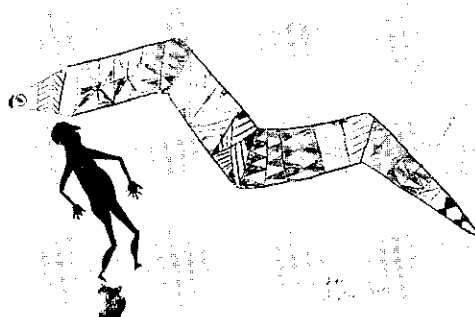


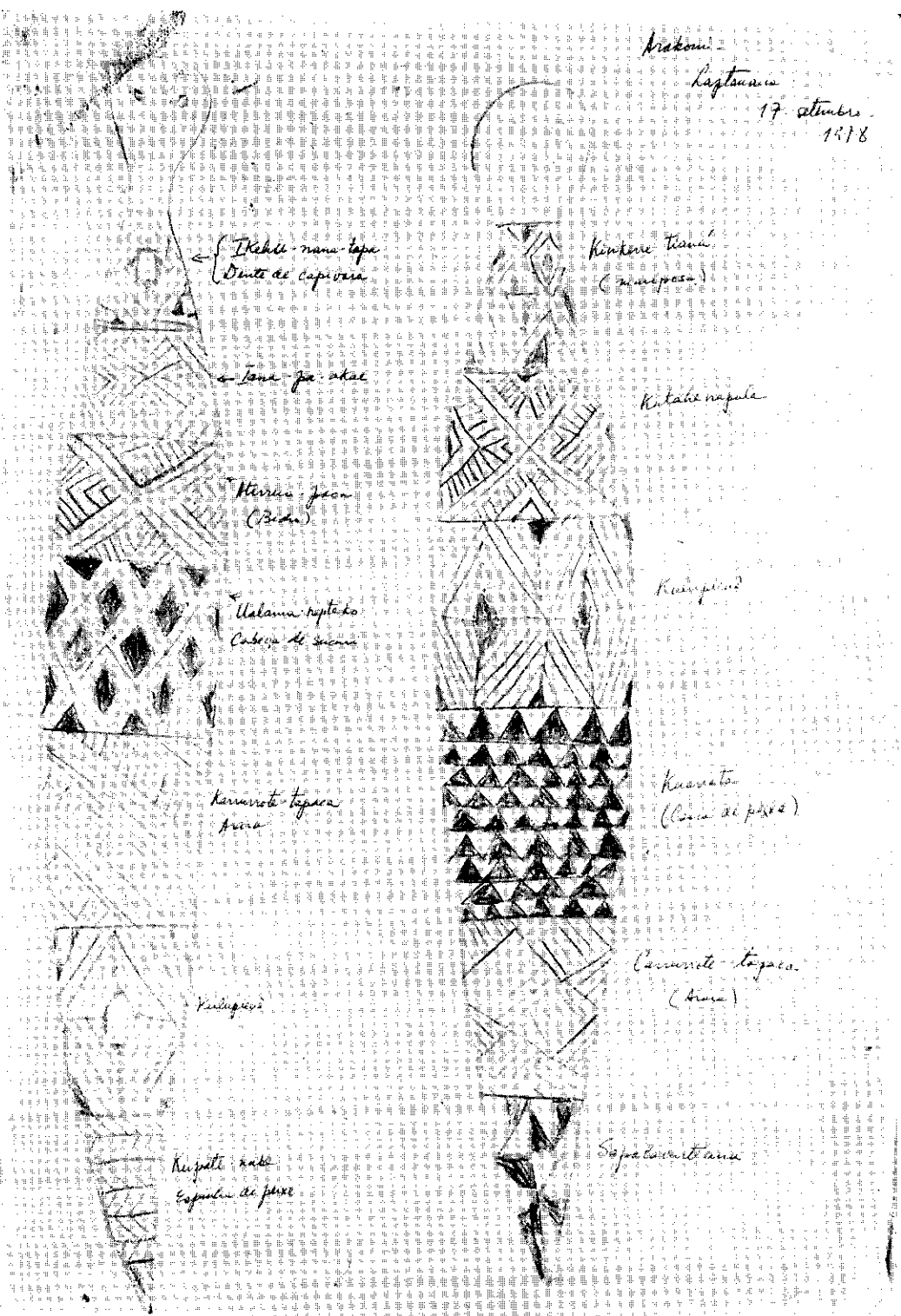
Plate 1 - The mythological personage of Arakoni, drawn by Apyká. In the lower plane can be seen an anthropomorphic figure and in the upper the personage after his transformation into a “*bicho*”. His body is covered by a part of the decorative motifs known to the Waurá. From left to right are depicted: *Kupáte-Nábe* (Fish Bones), *KunhéKunhé Rute* (Butterfly Wing), *Kupáte Ráta* (Curitamá Fish Scales), *Kulupeienê* (Translation Unknown), *Eptakui* (Translation Unknown), *Kupáte Ráta* (Fish Bones), *Eptakui* (Translation Unknown), *Sapalacurtana* (Uluri), *Karrurrote Tapaca* (Macaw’s Eye), and last, *Temepi-Aná* (Snake Motif).

Some of the motifs have names which could not be translated (*Kulupeienê*, for example), but before we classify them as geometrical it is useful to verify that if the Waurá do not see in them a correspondence with any of the forms of the objective world.

In analysing the paintings found in a small collection which I gathered, and in comparing them with the drawings, one may find under the same designation, indifferently, lines, triangles or diamonds. What distinguishes one motif from another is not the occurrence of one or another of these figures, but the rythm of their repetition and the manner in which they are placed within a previously circumscribed space. Thence stems the fact that in Arakoni’s drawings we find each of the motifs repeated once or more times: a single

⁸⁾ *Uluri* - Small triangular ornament used on their belts by the women of the Upper Xingu.

Plate 2 - The personage Arakoni drawn by Laptauana. The same figure is shown twice, each with different motifs. On the figure on the left side, from the bottom up, the following can be seen: *Ikehu-Nana-Tapa* (capybara’s tooth), *Iana Pa Akae* (Translation Unknown), *Atirrua Paca* (“*bicho*”), *Ualamá Neptakô* (*Sucuri* Snake’s Head), *Karrurrote TapaKa* (Macaw’s eye), *Kulepeienê* (Translation Unknown).
On the figure on the right can be seen:
Kupáte Nábe (Fish bones), *Kinkerre Tianá* (Butterfly), *Kutahe Napula* (path of the *saiúva* ant), *Kulupeienê* (Translation Unknown), *Kuarrata* (Curitamá Fish Scales), *Karrurrote Tapaca* (Macaw’s Eye) and *SapalaKurtana* (Uluri).



Kiakom -
 Kaptauara
 17 setembro
 1978

Itakhe nana tape
 Oute de capivara

Kentere tianá
 (mampasa)

— tone ja akal

Kitahé napala

Kerira jao
 (Bida)

Ualama reptako
 Cabeça de suana

Kuampira

Karavoti tapera
 Arina

Kuarata
 (Cabeça de porco)

Kulligera

Karavoti tapera
 (Arina)

Kupete kabi
 Espinha de porco

Sa ja karavoti taria

frieze would not be sufficient to name a specific painting pattern. As an example, in plates 1 and 2 can be seen different motifs constituted by a series of triangles: *Temepi-aná* (painting of snake (Figure 1) and *Kupáte ráta* (fish scales or *curimatá* fish scales - as translations vary), *Temepi-aná* is drawn twice and consists of friezes of triangles joined at their vertices (Fig. 1) whereas in *Kupáte ráta* (Fig. 2) the vertices of the triangles of the lower series touch the base of the triangles of the upper series. The principle which governs the *Kupáte ráta* pattern is that of suggesting the idea of imbrication, which characterizes the *curimatá* fish scales.



Fig. 1 - *Temepi-Aná* (Painting of Snake).



Fig. 2 - *Kupáte-Ráta* (*Curitamá* Fish Scales)

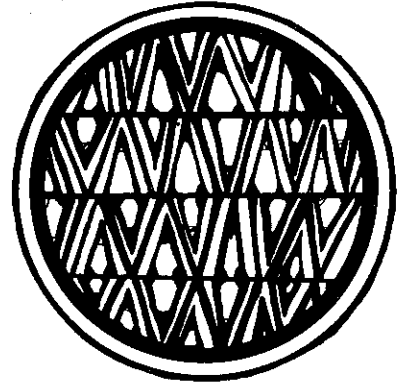
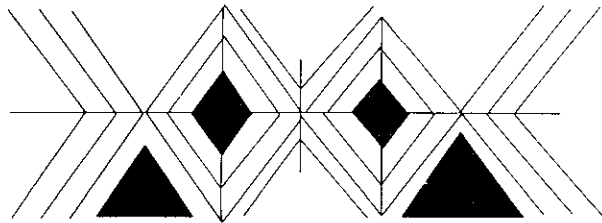


Fig. 3 - *Ualamá Neptakô* (*Sucuri* Snake's Head)



In the small sampling of painting motifs which I managed to gather, the *Ualamá neptakô* pattern (*sucuri* snake's head) (Fig. 3) is represented few times: it could be seen in two ceramics pots and in drawings. Thus the interpretation which I am suggesting is provisional and its confirmation will depend on light to be shed by new materials to be obtained in field work. It would seem that this motif is intimately related with *Temepi-aná*. As in the *Temepi-aná*, the triangles are adjacent to each other and we will find that in the intervals between four adjacent triangles the figure of a diamond will appear. The figure therefore consists of triangles, whereas the background is formed by a diamond. In *Ualamá neptakô* we have the same motif of the *Temepi-aná*, but, here background and figure are inverted: it is the diamonds which form the figure, while the triangles become the background. With the result that we have a motif composed by various diamonds joined by the vertices. This interpretation was suggested by Shepard "Ceramics for the Archeologist" who studied the visual effect of background and figure in the decoration of ceramics pots (Shepard, 1971:286,7).

There is still another couple of motifs which also are distinguished by the use of triangles: *Kinkerre tianá* (Fig. 4), also called *KunhéKunhé Rute kana*, (painting of the butterfly) and *Sapalacurtana*, also called *Sapalakô (uluri)* (Fig. 5). In these two patterns the triangles are not disposed in friezes, but constitute groups: in *Sapalacurtana* we have groups of triangles apposed by the base and in *Kinkerre tianá* the line of juncture is given starting at the right angle: in both motifs the triangles are apposed two by two, in such a manner that the line between them is that which forms the right angle.

In *Karrurrote tapaca* (painting of the macaw) the analogy to the real model is of great interest: this pattern of painting does not, in a general manner, reproduce the figure of the model which inspires it, but is limited to one of its characteristics which is, in this case, the reproduction of the parallel lines that macaws have around their eyes. This pattern can, therefore, be defined as “ a series of parallel lines going in different directions”.

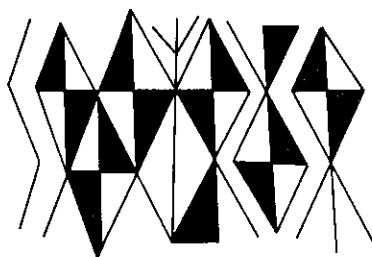


Fig. 4 - *Kinkerre Tianá* or *KunhéKunhé Rute Kana* (Painting of Butterfly)



Fig. 6 - *Kupáte-Nábe* (Fish Bones)

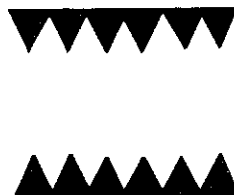


Fig. 5 - *Sapalacurtana* (Uluri Motif)

The translation of the expression *Kupáte nábe*, the name of a very frequently used painting pattern, is *fish bone*. Some examples of objects decorated with this motif appear, in fact, to reproduce this figure. In its simplest expression *Kupáte nábe* can be seen as a series of parallel lines forming obtuse angles in relation to a common bisector. (see Fig. 6). In other words, there is a straight line dividing the decorative area in two equal halves. In the upper half there is a series of parallel diagonal lines, directed towards the top, to the right of the decorative area; in the lower half there is another series of lines directed towards the bottom, also to the right of the decorative area. These are not, however, the only ways to paint the *Kupáte nábe*. In other figures we can see more clearly the principle which defines this pattern; in these we find a line which divides the decorative area in a horizontal direction, where the figures shown above this area are reproduced in the lower half in an inverted manner (Fig. no. 7). The definition of *Kupáte nábe* as a painting pattern

appears therefore to be the inversion of figures placed in adjacent decorative areas. None of my informants knew how to translate the expression *Kulupeienê*, the name of one of the motifs used most frequently among the Waurá. In the collection which I gathered, the decorative pieces showing this motif, happily, were very numerous, there being examples on pottery, as well as on wood (paddles to flip “*beijú*”, sticks to dig manioc), a basket and several drawings of baskets, as well as photographs of young men showing the pattern in body painting. The principle of this pattern appears to be that of symmetry between two equidistant figures in the decorative area. The figures which comprise it can either appear in horizontal friezes, within a quadrangle, or in radially symmetrical patterns (Figures 8, 9, 10).

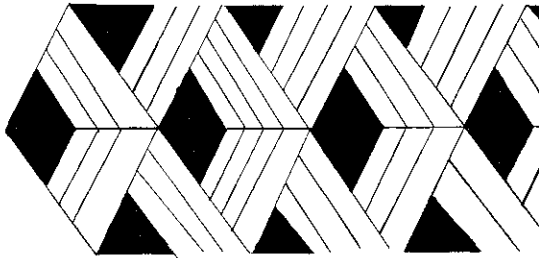


Fig. 7 - *Kupáte-Nábe* (Fish Bones)

Fig. 8 - *Kulupeienê* (Translation Unknown)

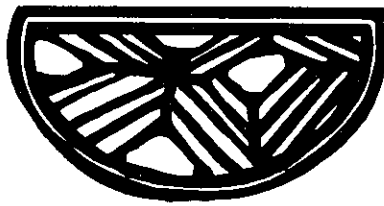


Fig. 9 - *Kulupeienê* (Translation Unknown)

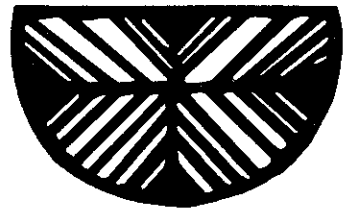


Fig.10 - *Kulupeienê* (Translation Unknown)

I will not attempt an exhaustive analysis of all the motifs collected on this field trip; however, it is possible to note through the above examples that in order to distinguish these, the rhythm with which they are ordered and the order in which they are placed within the space are more important than the figures themselves.

As can be seen through these examples, there is a certain relation, although very slight, among the patterns used in Waurá painting and nature. In the paintings with names related to the animal world, one of the characteristics of the model is chosen in order to represent it (in the majority of cases it is only a detail). A typical case is that of the macaw, represented by the black lines around its eyes. We did not find a single depiction of a zoomorphic figure showing an entire body and had we not had an explanation regarding

each of the painting motifs, we would have never been able to connect them with a being of the real world. One finds in painting several examples of the reformulation of parts of the figures of the real world by always geometrizing the body of animals or by focusing only on the geometrical portion of their body, and then repeating it at regular intervals within a circumscribed space. In light of more thorough studies of decoration motifs, it would be interesting to cast in a different frame the question of Waurá art in particular and Xingu art in general.

Up to now, the discussions around this theme have been permeated by one dominant question: whether or not one is dealing with figurative art and what is the meaning of the constituent elements. Special attention has been paid to the question of knowing whether the triangle or the diamond represents an *uluri* and/or a *pacu* fish.

Gerbrands (1957:32-35) summarizes the discussions and places them in a theoretical perspective within the history of anthropology.

In order to arrive at more conclusive results, it seems to me that one should turn to a deeper formal analysis of decorative patterns. Wölfflin has stated in connection with western art that "a picture owes much more to other pictures than to the observation of nature on the part of the artist" (cited by Hauser, 1978:412), and Malraux expands this line of thought by suggesting that "art is not merely a rival of nature, but the very source of artistic inspiration and the main content of the work to be created." According to Malraux, an artist is interested only in his work: a composer does not seek to reproduce the song of the nightingale, but bases himself on other songs; the poet does not concern himself so much with dusks as with the beauty of verses, and "he who paints is not a lover of landscapes but of pictures" (cited by Hauser, 1978:412).

Similar reflections are likewise applicable to the arts existing outside the western world. A treatise on Chinese painting sums up the teachings to the young by emphasizing the need to first study the works of the great masters and, afterwards, embark on an observation of nature, and only then depict what has been seen, transposing to the work of art the objective world *through the prism* of the tradition inherited from the art of predecessors.

The relationship between art and the objective world is too complex a problem to be dealt with in a brief paper such as this. The observation of the objective world does not always provide the key to understanding the artistic repertory of the Waurá. Finding inspiration in the figures of the real world, Waurá art represents them in a highly sophisticated and conventionalized manner, departing significantly from its models, with which it retains few similarities.

So far, I have concerned myself with the motifs used in Waurá painting. The same conventionalization is also found in the animal figures appearing on pottery: the tri-dimensional rendering of a certain animal and the adaptation of its figure to the shape of a pot requires, first of all, that it be reduced to a simpler expression - which means, in most cases, that the body will be omitted and that only the head, the tail and sometimes the legs will appear in the piece. The key to distinguish which animal is being represented will be (as is the case in painting) a small distinctive detail of its appearance. The representation of a *coati*, for instance, is characterized by a striped tail, that of the *acari* fish by a small circular depression beneath the head, that of a bull by horns, and so forth.

This type of convention can lead to numerous ambiguities and misinterpretations: the representation of an animal with a protruding snout may be interpreted either as an anteater or a tapir; it is difficult to tell for sure the representation of a water turtle from

that of a land turtle, just to give a few examples. When this happens (and ambiguities commonly occur in zoomorphic representations), the artist's opinion will provide the final verdict on the meaning of the representation. By the way, when I was observing the potters of the village modelling their pieces and other Waurá approached to watch and comment on the work, their first question was:

--Katsá kana katahã? (literal translation: What (suffix designating zoomorphic vessels) this?).

In other words: --Which animal are you depicting?

This question would not come up if the language of the shapes were absolutely clear. The need to seek clarification with the potter goes to prove that even to the Indians of the same tribe a given figure may cause doubt.

In order to clarify certain aspects of the question of the identification of zoomorphic figures, I asked several informants to draw animals which are depicted in pottery. Even when new and diverse resources were available--such as, for instance, several colors--the animal figures drawn by the Waurá were as difficult to identify as the ones molded in clay, and posed the same ambiguities I had noticed in ceramics. During my stay in the field, I used to keep the drawings in a folder which everyone liked to open and handle, and in this situation the question of what they represented inevitably was asked.

At one time, when I was visiting the house of one of my pottery teachers, Makitsapaielo, she asked me to see the drawings the others had made. She became enthusiastic over two representations of tapirs drawn by Atamãi (*plate 3*) and asked me what drawing was that. I answered and she then borrowed it as a model and copied it on a vessel (*plate 4*).

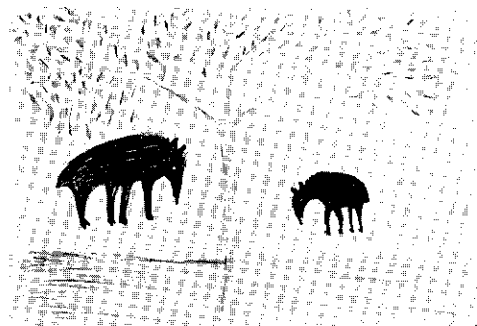


Plate 3 - Drawing of two tapirs made by Atamãi. When this drawing was shown to Makitsapaielo, one of the most experienced potters of the village, she used it as a model for one of her pots.

As occurs in ceramics, drawings do not constitute a self-sufficient language and always must be explained by the author in order to be identified.

At this point, a parenthetical remark would be in order, for some confusion exists among scholars regarding the graphic representations of primitive peoples, specially representations of the animal world. Undeniably, there exists among such peoples a very profound knowledge of nature and they have developed classification systems much more

refined than ours--a question brilliantly handled by Lévi-Strauss in the first chapter of the classic "La Pensée Sauvage". But confusion arises when one wants to see in Indian art a faithful reflection of the knowledge of nature, as if scientific knowledge entailed an accurate ability for graphic or plastic representation. Faithful representation of nature and scientific knowledge do not always go hand in hand. By way of illustration, one may consider the drawings made by adults with a scientific background reproduced by Herskovits (1963:208-209). The clearly primary character of the figures reveals that there is an enormous gap between the knowledge of an object and the ability to represent it in an acceptable manner.



Plate 4 - Ceramic pot representing a tapir (in Waurá *Teme-Kene*) executed by Makitsapaleio in accordance with the model shown on Plate 3.

And if the work of art is many times executed in the presence of a model, this does not substantially alter the conventional nature of representation. I was able to verify this fact in the field when one of the potters, Muri, made a pot with the figure of a *coati* (plate 5). As I had done before, I asked other informants to draw *coatis* so that I could compare the various representations. One afternoon when several Indians had gathered in the men's house, Ualamá offered to draw a *coati* (plate 6). As usual when this type of work was to be started, he sat on a trunk serving as a bench and drew on the ground with his finger the outline of the figure. He then picked two pencils from the set of colored pencils--for this project he selected two colors: pink for the body of the animal and black for the outline of the figure and details. After he had already begun his drawing, he remembered that there was a recently caught *coati* in his house; he interrupted his work which was half done to fetch the model. The animal had already been grilled (the Waurá like to eat their meat very well done) and, to a certain extent, had been twisted out of shape by the heat of the fire, with the surface totally blackened. This, however, did not alter the designer's original intention to use pink as the predominant color for the figure. As the drawing progressed, all men present helped themselves to bits of the model, so much so that when the drawing was completed there remained only some bones scattered here and there on the ground. The result was a zoomorphic figure with a protruding snout, four paws and a striped tail. If one were to ask me to identify the animal without knowing the intention of the artist, I certainly would say it was an alligator, due to the long projecting nose. But the striped tail and, above all, the intention of the designer determined a different interpretation of the figure.

This episode called to memory a plate from “Art and Illusion” by Gombrich (1956: 78-79) which shows the figure of a lion and a porcupine drawn by Villard de Honnecourt. The figure, which has little in the way of realism, was, according to the author himself, drawn using a live model, which did not add a trace of veracity to it.

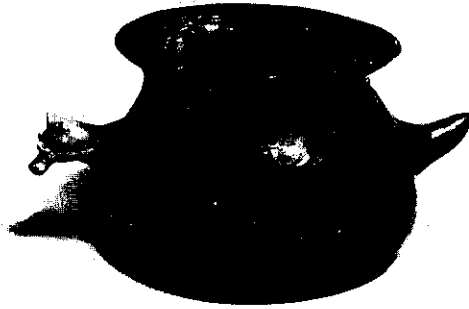


Plate 5 - Pot representing a *coati*, executed by Muri. Its most remarkable characteristics from the Waurá point of view, the elongated shape of the snout and the lines painted on the tail, should be noted. The shape of the pot is also of interest, as it is a native version of the aluminum pots used by whites.

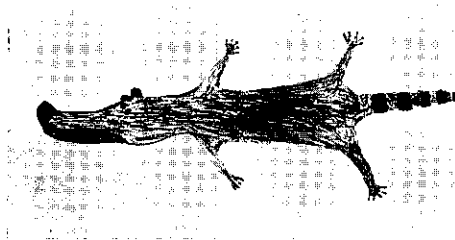


Plate 6 - Drawing of a *coati* made by Ualamá. The colors used were pink for the body and black for the details.

I do not mean to say that no comparison with the objective world should be made when one studies the zoomorphic repertory of Waurá pottery. But more than a model to be copied, the figures in the real world constitute a point of reference to be reinterpreted, abbreviated and, in many cases, presented in a way beyond the recognition of people who, like us, are used to dealing with a particular set of conventions.

Therefore, if it is necessary to make a comparison between the figures and their models, it is even more important to compare the figures depicted in several objects made out of different materials. It will then be noticed that the same principles of simplification and stylization of zoomorphic figures govern the different representations; they will be found in the paddles to flip *beiju*, in the sticks to unearth manioc and in the drawings made by the Waurá. In the artifacts made of wood (as for instance paddles and sticks), the repertory is different from that of pottery; here one also sees that the zoomorphic figures constitute only a small appendage which does not interfere with the shape of the instrument.

In the drawings, the bodies of the various animals are represented in very similar ways: the animals are represented in pairs and the colors follow, *mutatis mutandis*, the same recurring patterns prevailing in pottery painting.

The interpretation of the zoomorphic figures which appear in pottery is related to the repertory of animals that can be represented. When asking a potter which figure he is molding, a Waurá, even if he ignores the answer he will get, will know beforehand that it will be given from among a certain number of limited possibilities. In the first place, there are certain animals that play a major role in mythology and, for this reason, are never the object of representation in pottery. As interesting as the list of animals that can be represented is the list of animals whose representation is seen with repulsion. One afternoon I was talking with Atamãí, one of the few Waurá who could speak Portuguese very well and who, therefore, was in a position to provide information of great interest. I started to ask him why one could not make pots with the figures of certain animals of the local fauna, when he seemed to feel quite uncomfortable. Although he did not refuse to answer my questions, he became evasive and always dodged the real answers by skillfully changing the subject whenever the conversation took a turn he thought undesirable. Without ever ceasing to smile and maintaining his courteous manner, he gave answers which lacked the objectivity always present when less compelling subjects were being discussed.

Thus, for instance, when I asked why one could not represent a hummingbird on pottery, he answered that it was impossible because it is such a small animal; obviously, this is not a very plausible answer, since beetles are a rather frequent motif. (On a later occasion, another informant, Tauapã, told me that Captain Malakuyawá was once attacked by the spirit of a hummingbird, which made him ill for a very long time, and he only escaped death because he was such a great shaman and had powers to ward off the evil. According to FUNAI workers, Malakuyawá's illness was measles, which at the time had become epidemic in Xingu, causing serious trouble to everyone.)

When I asked why one could not represent the figure of a jaguar, Atamãí, instead of answering me, went on to list the animals which can be represented in pottery and right after that explained how dangerous tobacco is to women, with the clear intention of avoiding a subject which was becoming embarrassing to him.

I did not press the matter too hard so as not to gain a forced entrance into a domain in which my curiosity certainly was not welcome. Anyhow, it is possible to see clearly that there are reasons far more serious than mere technical requirements and aesthetic preferences to prevent certain representations.

I was able to put together a small list--certainly not comprehensive--of animals whose representation is forbidden in pottery. In addition to the hummingbird, one may not make pots depicting jaguars, snakes, wild pigs and dogs. According to Atamãí, these are the animals the Waurá do not find beautiful; as he put it, there are many ugly animals and only when the Waurá consider an animal beautiful do they reproduce its figure on pots.

The word for "beautiful" (*aurrepái* in Waurá) designates those objects which are technically well made and well finished. Krauere, one of the three best flutists in the village, only considered a flute (which I had received as a gift from a friend of mine) to be *aurrepái* after he had carefully remodelled it, widening the holes with a penknife and altering the "cerol"⁹⁾ that surrounded the mouthpiece. In other words, *aurrepái* is the quality of the

⁹⁾ "cerol" - wax paste used, among other things, to close the mouthpiece of flutes.

well-tuned flute which is ready to be played on. When used to designate a “quality of a person”, the word *aurrepái* indicates good-tempered, jolly individuals, particularly those who never become cross or angry--which for the Waurá is an ideal one must seek to attain. The opposite of *aurrepái* in this context is *nukapai* or *peyetepei* (angry)--a character type undesirable and detestable par excellence.

I have an incomplete list of animals deemed to be “beautiful” by the Waurá and which can be represented in pottery. In the words of Atamãi, the beautiful animals that can be modelled are the following: crab, *casculo* fish, deer, tapir, armadillo, dove, toad (*aiussi* in Waurá), anteater, “a fish with a long bill like duck’s bill” (sic), water turtle, land turtle, ray, rooster, *coati*, “a white bird like a hawk with a tail like this (forked) but is not a hawk” (*akuna* in Waurá), *pacu* fish, alligator, *paca*, capuchin monkey, lizzard (*mayuwá* in Waurá), bat.

As mentioned earlier, this is a partial list. The verbal information of the Waurá is not always very precise and, going over the museum collections or even the sets of works in progress in the village, one realizes that the repertory of the Waurá is much broader. There are a couple of important omissions in Atamãi’s roll: cattle (*plate 7*)--undeniably a recent innovation for it is neither mentioned in previous papers nor represented in any of the museum collections I examined--, beetle, curassow, owl, *cotia*, Brazilian otter, just to name a few examples.

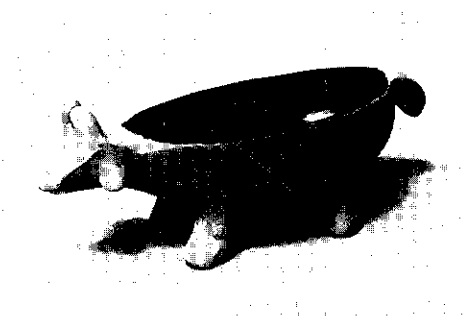


Plate 7 - Ceramics pot representing a bull. There is no Waurá word to designate it. This shape is an innovation in the Waurá repertoire of pottery and was introduced recently.

Curiously enough, Atamãi added to his list of animals the canoe--the sole inanimate object found in the pottery repertory. It is perhaps possible to relate this fact to the myth of origin of the Waurá (Schultz, 1964: 21-38), in which a bat engages in sexual intercourse with the daughter of a *jatobá* tree. The union gives rise to several events, the most significant being the origin of the Waurá. The importance of the *jatobá* tree must be great indeed for its trunk is used to make canoes, which, to all indication, are not included in the category of common objects.

The other important innovation which was introduced in Waurá pottery not long ago is called *makulatain yerepuekana* (*plate 8*), an expression that can be translated as “little pan from grandpa’s time.” This motif reproduces in a more or less accurate manner the pottery fragments which are being discovered at Ipavu lake, next to the village of the Kamayurá, in the Xingu National Park.

In a subsequent paper, I intend to compare the animal repertory of the various collections gathered among the Waurá at different points in time: it will then be possible to determine if certain animals--such as bats and alligators--are the object of constant preferences, whereas others--such as parakeets and parrots--constitute a momentary predilection and are forgotten later on. The taste for novelty among the Waurá is remarkable: the photographs of the pots collected by von den Steinen, Pedro Lima and Schultz (which had almost completely vanished from memory) aroused great interest; in fact, these pictures were the subject of long conversations and were many times reinterpreted by my informants.

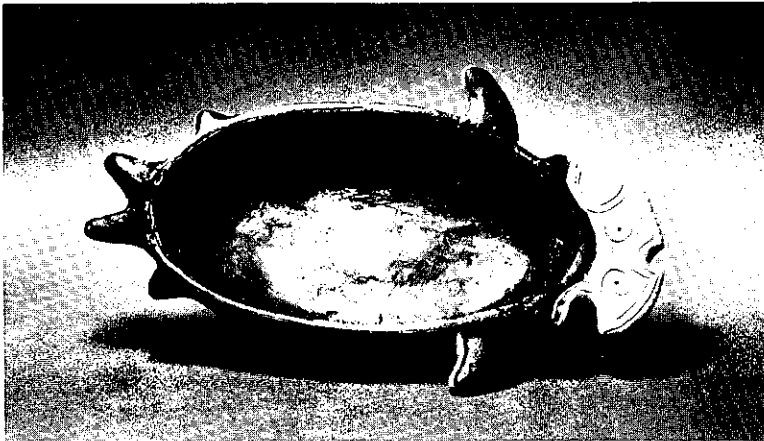


Plate 8 - Ceramics pot called *makulatain Yerepue-Kana* in Waurá. An expression which was translated as "pot of the time of grandpa" and which was visibly inspired in the archeological findings at the Ipavu lake, near the Kamayurá village.

By way of illustration, I have listed the animals which Tauapã, one of the experienced ceramists of the village, knew how to make, as well as the innovations he introduced after he saw the photographs of the Waurá pots with which I was working before my trip. Tauapã said he could model the following shapes: water turtle, tapir, bat, land turtle, dove, *akuna* (a bird similar to a hawk), *pacu* fish, alligator, ray, toad (*kartukalo* in Waurá), capibara, monkey (*pahu* in Waurá), jaguar, another monkey (*kapulo* in Waurá), anteater, fox (*awawulu* in Waurá), *yula* (translation not available), lizzard (*mayuwá* in Waurá), deer, horse, another animal that looks like a horse and which does not exist in Xingu (he saw it in São Paulo when he was there undergoing medical treatment--its name in Waurá is *yutakumakana*, which translates approximately as "pot in the shape of deer ancestor or deer spirit"), bird (*makana kana* in Waurá), curassow, hen, another bird (*malahû* in Waurá), another bird (*kuyuy* in Waurá), a fish that looks like a ray (*fupatu* in Waurá), *pirarara* fish, a fish like the *acari* fish (*waká* in Waurá), a bird that looks like a duck (*upi* in Waurá), another duck (*upikuma* in Waurá), cat, toad (*aiussã*), *macuco* bird, bird (*macucawa* in Waurá), another bird (*ulusã* in Waurá), another bird like *ulusã* (*unkarã* in Waurá), another bird like a duck (*kapu-kapu* in Waurá).

What draws one's immediate attention in this list is the fact that it includes an animal which Atamã said the Waurá do not like--the jaguar--as well as other animals which I never came across at the village or in the pottery collections in the museums, namely, cat,

horse and *yutakumá*. Perhaps, as is the case with the information given by Atamäi, there are small discrepancies between the verbal reports and the empirical reality. In addition to that, the taste for novelty is enormous and Tauapā always seemed to be very much interested in expanding the limits of his repertory. Therefore, at the time of my departure he asked me to give him as a gift some photographs of pots belonging to museum collections. I complied with his request but suggested that he pick the ones he liked best, as it was impossible to give him the entire collection. To my surprise, he chose five zoomorphic pots out of which only one was not in his repertory. I believe he was not so interested in repertory as in the manner in which the animals were represented. He chose the following pictures: von den Steinen collection VB 2974 (tick), VB 2999 (bat); Schultz collection RG 11608 (curassow), RG 11630 (curassow), RG 11600 (monkey).

The idea that it had once occurred to a Waurá to represent in a pot the figure of a tick seemed to Tauapā exceedingly ludicrous. However, instead of rejecting what to him was a considerable innovation, he preferred to adopt it and incorporate it to his repertory. On this and on several other occasions, Tauapā displayed in high degree what, among us, is known as “scientific mind”. This example clearly illustrates that there are variations in repertory in the course of time and that the memory of some zoomorphic pieces is lost after a few generations.

In this case as well as in others, I was able to observe that the identification of photographs of animals represented in pottery is quite variable. Since conventions are not clear-cut, the figures are reduced to their most distinctive features and there are numerous discrepancies between the identifications collected by anthropologists who worked among the Waurá on previous occasions and those I obtained for photographs of the same pieces. Here one must take into account a problem much too complex to be dealt with in this paper, but which cannot go unmentioned: the question of knowing to what extent the Waurá understand the reality that is distorted by the limitations of photography. This problem cannot be investigated in a brief work such as this, but it should be mentioned that, since a photograph cannot record the entire volume of a pottery piece, it omits the very detail which, for the Waurá, is fundamental to characterize the animal represented in the piece.

The flexibility with which zoomorphic figures and painting patterns are interpreted leads to a number of reflections on questions which go beyond the scope of the present paper; I have in mind, particularly, the question of archaeological materials. During my stay at the Waurá village, I was able to verify on a great many occasions that I should not attempt to interpret the representations of the figures I saw, because my standards of interpretation were totally different from those prevailing among the Indians. Fortunately, they corrected my mistakes and always explained what the true interpretation was. These ambiguities posed by representations should be taken into account by scholars who work with extinct cultures for it is often seen that one wants to apply to such cultures a code of interpretation that is only meaningful within the context of our culture.

Acknowledgements

Field work for this paper was made possible by the following: a grant from the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP), which contributed half of the cost of the expedition; the help of the then Commander of the Fourth Aerial Zone of São Paulo, Brigadeiro Clovis Pavan, the Brazilian Air Force which provided transportation to the Posto Indígena Leonardo Villas Boas and delivered packages and correspondence during the stay; the then Director of the National Park of the Xingu, Professor Olimpio Serra and his wife, Dr. Zelia Serra, whose hospitality and precious information regarding the Waurá were invaluable.

The drawings which illustrate the paper were made by Pedro Vaz de Arruda, a student at the Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, and were based on the decorative motifs of the ceramics pieces, wood and drawings made by the Indians, as well as on the field notes of the author.

The photographs were taken by Mr. Romulo Fialdini.

The necessary leave of absence to carry out the field work was granted by the Paulista Museum of the University of São Paulo.

Ms. Irene Feldman and Mr. Manoel Vidal are responsible for the English translation of the original version of this paper. Dr. Monte Kenaston, from Memphis State University made interesting suggestions about this paper. Dr Günther Hartmann provided me a complete set of copies of von den Steinen's drawings of Waurá pottery.

To these persons and institutions our sincere thanks are hereby extended.

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