



Notes on the archaeology of Santo Domingo.

Geografisk Tidsskrift, Bind 35 (1932)

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Notes on the archaeology of Santo Domingo.

By Gudmund Hatt.

In 1923 my wife and I spent a couple of months on archaeological fieldwork in the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for me to find time for the publishing of our results.

The localities where we have made investigations fall into two groups, an eastern and a central group. In the east we made excavations in a number of shell-heaps on the coast, at the mouth of Rio Nisibón, Rio Maimón, and Rio Chavón, and at La Caleta, a sandy beach west of La Romana. In the centre of the island, our activities were mainly concentrated in the Constanza Valley; however, we investigated also some localities north and south of that valley in the Cibao Mountains. West of Azua, near the south coast, at a place called La Barrera, we found remains of a culture very much like that of the Cibao Mountains. La Barrera was, however, the only locality where flint implements were found.

Among the sites in our eastern group, two proved especially interesting: Rio Chavón on the south-east coast, and Rio Nisibón on the north-east coast.

The ceramic art was highest developed at Rio Chavón. A large proportion of the pottery from that locality is decorated with incised geometric designs, sometimes covering the whole upper side of the vessel (Fig. 1). The lines are distinctly and forcefully drawn and very generally they are terminated with a pit, evidently made by means of the same implement with which the lines were incised. Relief-ornamentation is mostly found in connection with the handles. These are very often shaped like grotesque representations of the human body (Fig. 2). The head, being the most important part, has received most attention; the body itself and the four limbs are generally quite rudimentary. Very common in the Rio Chavón pottery is a broad loop handle with a face in relief, supported by two oblique bars, evidently meant as arms supporting the chin (Fig. 3). This

type of handle seems to be characteristic of southeastern Santo Domingo.¹⁾

The kitchen-midden at Rio Chavón is only about 1 m thick. Decorated potsherds were more plentiful in the upper than in the lower parts; but I could not find any difference in style between finds from the upper and lower layers. At a depth of 35 cm, in quite undisturbed shell-heap, I uncovered an old-fashioned iron horse-shoe. Probably, the Rio Chavón site was inhabited at the time of the Spanish conquest. There is no reason to suppose that it had been inhabited for a very great length of time. However, the ceramic art had reached a high degree of perfection and conventionalization at Rio Chavón.

At Rio Nisibón, on the north-east coast, the ceramic art was less uniform, more varied, but at the same time less highly developed than at Rio Chavón. Incised decoration played a lesser rôle, relief-ornamentation a greater rôle. Characteristic of the Rio Nisibón pottery are relief-faces, surrounded by representations of the limbs; sometimes the arms are combined with the nose or the eyebrows in a curious way (Fig. 4). Also frogs are represented in relief on Rio Nisibón pottery. Loop handles are comparatively rare. Flat handles with relief-faces are very common, also small knob-like handles, shaped like animal-heads or like birds. The incised lines which occur in combination with the relief-ornamentation are generally rather vague and indistinct. On the whole, the Rio Nisibón ceramics represent a less developed, less conventionalized, and therefore more varied facies of the Taino art than does the Rio Chavón ceramics. Rio Nisibón was evidently an out-of-the-way place, less influenced from Porto Rico than was the south coast of Santo Domingo. However, influence from the higher developed Taino art are not altogether lacking at Rio Nisibón. A small bowl (Fig. 5) with incised line and pit ornamentation and grotesque heads for handles was recovered in the middle of the Rio Nisibón shellheap at a depth of 1 m; it might have come from Rio Chavón or from another place on the south coast.

Before leaving the eastern part of the island, I would mention a rather remarkable vase (Fig. 6) which was found at La Vacama, near Rio Maimón. Unfortunately, I did not find this vessel; and the man from whom I bought it could not give me exact information about the circumstances of the find. It is in all probability a mortuary vessel. Different parts of a skeleton are represented in relief on the sides:

¹⁾ Cf. Theodor de Booy: *Santo Domingo Kitchen-midden and Burial Mound, Indian notes and monographs*, Vol. I. 2. 1919. Pl. IX.

on one side the cranium, the divided lower mandible, and three long bones; on the other side the spine and two long bones. The incised ornamentation is forceful and well done. I have not seen any other vessel of that type.

The Constanza Valley, 1200 m above the sea, in the Cibao Mountains, is a beautiful, flatbottomed mountain-valley with very steep sides. The name is—It think—of unknown origin. Schomburgk who visited the valley about 80 years ago²⁾ says that Constanza may have been the name of a christianized Indian chieftainess. He mentions an earth-work, consisting of two parallel earth walls, with the proud name „La casa de la reina Constanza.“ The two earth walls are about 1 m high and 4—7 m broad, running parallel east-west, and enclosing a rectangular level piece of ground, about 80 m long and nearly 60 m broad. This is not the remnants of a palace or castle. It is an Indian ball-court, a „batéy.“ We know from Las Casas and Oviedo that such enclosures were found within or in near connection with Taino villages.³⁾ Fewkes has described or mentioned a number of ball-courts, mostly in Porto Rico.⁴⁾ Alden Mason and Haerberlin and Aitken have investigated ball-courts in Porto Rico.⁵⁾ In most cases, the ball-courts are enclosed with big stones. In the Constanza Valley, however, the ball-courts are enclosed with earth walls, and on the long sides only. Harrington has investigated similar earthworks on Cuba, especially at Laguna Limones in eastern Cuba.⁶⁾ At Laguna Limones, the plaza is enclosed on all four sides with earth walls. In the Constanza Valley only the two long sides are

²⁾ Robert H. Schomburgk: Visit to the Valley of Constanza in the Cibao Mountains of the Island of Santo Domingo, and to an Indian burial-ground in its vicinity. *The Athanæum* Nr. 1291, July 24, 1852.

³⁾ Fr. Batolomé de las Casas: *Apologetica Historia de las Indias*. Ed. Serrano y Sanz, Madrid 1909, p. 121 and 538.

Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdés: *Historia general y natural de las Indias*: I. Madrid 1851. Lib. VI. Cap. I and II.

According to Las Casas, the Taino word batéy signified the ball and also the ball-game and the ball-court. Cf. Las Casas, *op. cit.* p. 538.

⁴⁾ J. W. Fewkes: The aborigines of Porto Rico and neighboring islands. *XXV ann. Rep. Bur. Am. Ethn.* p. 79—85.

⁵⁾ J. Alden Mason: Excavation of a new archeological site in Porto Rico. *Proceedings of the Nineteenth International Congress of Americanists, Washington 1915*, p. 220—223.

H. K. Haerberlin: Some archaeological work in Porto Rica. *Am. Anthr.* Vol. 19. 1917. p. 214—220.

R. T. Aitken: A Porto Rican burial cave. *Am. Anthr.* Vol. 20. 1918. p. 307—309.

⁶⁾ M. R. Harrington: *Cuba before Columbus*. New York 1921. Vol. II. P. 305.

enclosed. We found seven enclosures of that kind in the Constanza Valley. In all cases, the surrounding fields were very rich in potsherds and other Indian remains. Six of the enclosures were lying in pairs; three of the Indian settlements in the Constanza Valley were evidently provided with two batéys each.

The bottom of the Constanza Valley measures about 35 km². This area has contained at least four Indian settlements.

The least disturbed of the earth-works in the Constanza Valley was found at a place called El Palero; a plan is given in Fig. 16. Two parallel walls, a little over 1 m high, enclose a level area, 92 m long, 35 m broad. This batéy is lying on a river-flat, close to the creek El Palero. Potsherds and other remains of Indian artefacts lay spread over the whole area, most plentiful south of the batéy. We could not, however, find any kitchen-midden or any thick layer of cultural remains. West of the batéy, the field was studded with small artificial mounds $\frac{1}{4}$ — $\frac{3}{4}$ m high, $1\frac{1}{2}$ —4 m in diameter. Similar groups of small mounds are found in several parts of the Constanza Valley; I have seen them also in other parts of the Cibao Mountains. Schomburgk mentions them from the Constanza Valley and thinks that they are Indian graves.⁷⁾ We excavated several and found out that they are not graves. They consist of stones and gravel mixed with black soil. Evidently, they have been made by scraping the surface soil up into small mounds. The present population never makes such mounds and has no idea of what their purpose may have been. Without doubt, however, these mounds must have been made for some agricultural purpose. Oviedo describes the cultivation of cassava in Hispaniola, how the Indians made small mounds for the manioc plants.⁸⁾ Such agricultural mounds may persist through centuries; in Massachusetts, Indian corn-hills are still to be seen.⁹⁾

We made trenches through the earth walls at El Palero and found out that they were made of soil, taken from the area between the walls, to make that area as even and nearly horizontal as possible. Beneath the earth walls, we found the original surface with mould and with Indian potsherds.

Southwest of the Constanza Valley, near a place called Bui, we found a rectangular batéy much like those of the Constanza Valley, differing in one respect, however: the two parallel walls were made of big stones.

⁷⁾ Robert H. Schomburgk: *op. cit.* p. 799.

⁸⁾ Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdés: *Historia general y natural de las Indias*. I. Lib. VII, Cap. II.

⁹⁾ E. B. Delabarre and H. H. Wilder: *Indian corn-hills in Massachusetts*. *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 22, 1920, p. 203—225.

The best known of Santo Domingo's batéys is the famous Corral de los Indios, north of San Juan de la Maguana, first described by Schomburgk.¹⁰⁾ The corral has a diameter of about 225 m, and it is enclosed by a double row of stones. In the centre of the corral is a stone-pillar, about 1,70 m high, a natural stone with a roughly cut face near the upper end. When Schomburgk visited the place this stone was lying down, partly imbedded in the ground. It has been raised lately. Evidently, the Corral de los Indios is a much more magnificent establishment than the earthworks of the Constanza Valley. The Corral de los Indios probably belonged to the residence of the great chief of the country Maguana. The earthworks of the Constanza Valley were the ball-courts or dancing places of humble mountain villagers.—Stone pillars with faces are, however, also found in the Cibao Mountains. We recovered one near the Constanza Valley, which was used as a foundation stone in a modern chicken house. It is a natural piece of basalt, 64 cm high, with a roughly cut face (Fig. 7).

Petroglyphs seem to be quite numerous in Santo Domingo. We heard about several, but I had occasion to examine only two. On a big boulder, lying on the left side of the Rio Yaqué del Norte near Manabao, I found a large number of small pits cut into the surface of the stone. The pits are generally placed in pairs and evidently meant to represent eyes. In some cases, a pair of pits are encircled with a groove.—More interesting is the rock-engraving Fig. 17, found on a boulder near Bui. It seems to represent an anthropomorphic being in a squatting posture, elbows and knees close together, the hands raised, the legs spread. The body is represented by a single line only. From between the legs a double line runs downwards; and to the spot where the legs and the body meet a small face is joined with a single line. I would suggest that this picture may represent childbirth. Close to this figure an enigmatical (frog-like?) being is delineated; and further to the left another anthropomorphic figure is represented in the same squatting posture. This rock-engraving may perhaps be a representation of deities of fertility.

The three-pointed stones which Joyce has identified with Ramon Pane's three-pointed agricultural zemis or fetishes¹¹⁾ are not as common in Santo Domingo as in Porto Rico. I think they are more

¹⁰⁾ R. Schomburgk: *Ethnological researches in Santo Domingo*. Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1851. London 1852. P. 90—92.

¹¹⁾ T. A. Joyce: *Central American and West Indian Archaeology*. London 1926. p. 185—86.

common in Santa Cruz and Saint Thomas¹²⁾ than in Santo Domingo. We found a few of them in kitchen middens in eastern Santo Domingo, none in the Cibao Mountains. However, we collected in the Cibao Mountains three stone objects which probably should be interpreted as fertility fetishes of a phallic character.

I would mention also that we found fragments of stone collars, both of the massive and the slender variety, on Indian sites in the Constanza Valley. Stone collars are, however, very much less common in Santo Domingo than in Porto Rico.

The potter's art was highly developed in the Cibao Mountains. A typical vessel, from Manabao, is represented in Fig. 8. Its form produces the impression that one bowl is put inside another bowl. The rim is decorated with incised lines and pits. One handle only is left; it has the shape of a grotesque head with very big hollow eyes. We collected large numbers of pottery handles in the Constanza Valley and other parts of the Cibao Mountains. Large hollow eyes are a characteristic feature of many of these handles.

The potter's art seems to have had some influence upon stone sculpture. Fig. 9 shows a fragment of a stone idol, recovered near the Constanza Valley. The treatment of the face, especially the deep, hollow eyes, reminds strongly of the ceramic art of the region.

Cassava graters, made of stone, are often found in the Indian sites of the Cibao Mountains. Mostly a kind of porous lava is used. The specimen reproduced in Fig. 10 is 46 cm long. The form of the implement clearly imitates the well-known cassava grater of wood. Evidently, this is a case of „translation“ from wood into stone, parallel to the one which Joyce has made probable for the stone collars.¹³⁾

The beautiful stone bowl or—perhaps—stone mortar Fig. 11 may also be regarded as a sort of „translation“ into stone. It is a quite realistic imitation of a gourd-vessel.

On Indian sites in the Cibao Mountains we found many crushing or grinding stones of the type represented in Fig. 14. They are provided with two parallel grooves, evidently finger-rests for the thumbs. Between these two grooves is often cut a rude representation of a face. An extraordinary specimen is provided with a bird-like face at one end. That these stones have been used for crushing or grinding is amply proven by their worn under-surfaces. Probably they were used together with certain stone-slabs which are also

¹²⁾ Gudmund Hatt: *Archaeology of the Virgin Islands*. XXI. Congrès des Americanistes, La Haye 1924, p. 39.

¹³⁾ T. A. Joyce: *Central American and West Indian Archaeology*. p. 187—189.

found on the Indian sites and may have served as metates.—Possibly the grinding stone was provided with a face in order to turn it into a zemi, to help the woman in her tedious labour when she was grinding corn.

In a similar way I think we may interpret the pestles with human or animal heads which are so common in archaeological finds from Santo Domingo.

Celts of the well-known petaloid form are quite numerous in our collections from the Cibao Mountains. The edge is sometime a little oblique, which may perhaps have added to its efficiency. One of the petaloid celts has a ring-shaped ridge around the narrow end. Three stone implements are chisel-shaped, one of them double-edged. More interesting are two double-axes of a type unusual in the Larger Antilles. One of them is very heavy and shows marks of actual use. The other one—Fig. 12—can hardly have been meant for practical work, as the edge is serrated all round; both sides are covered with incised ornaments, double-spirals.

Among our specimens from the Cibao Mountains I want to mention yet a small bird's figure of stone (Fig. 13). It must have been used as part of a throwingboard; it reminds very much of throwingboard hooks from Colombia.

Flint artefacts we found in only one Indian site, at La Barrera near Azua on the south coast. The Danish National Museum possesses also a few flint implements from an Indian site north of Port-aux-Prince in Haiti. It is well known that flint implements of a crude kind occur also in Jamaican kitchen middens and in Cuba. The flint at La Barrera is of a very good kind; but the implements are miserably crude—a selection is represented in Fig. 15—and stand in a curious contrast to the excellent polished stone artefacts which were found at the same place. Most of the flint implements are simple flakes, some of which show marks of use along the long edges or along a short edge. A few simple flint knives were found. One flake has a concave scraper edge. A disc-shaped piece of flint has also been used as a scraper. A triangular piece of flint has been used for boring. A flint core has at one end a rough edge, made by flaking, and may have served as an axe. A flint nodule has undergone a crude flaking at one end, also a little grinding, as if it was meant for an axe.

Certain facts indicate that Porto Rico played a greater rôle in the Tainan culture area than did Santo Domingo. Threepointed stones and stone collars, two unique Tainan culture elements, are more prevalent in Porto Rico than in Santo Domingo. They are comparatively more numerous in finds from Santa Cruz than in finds

from Santo Domingo. Within Santo Domingo, threepointers are most numerous in the southeastern part of the island, which seems to indicate that Porto Rico was the centre for this culture element. The same is probably true of the stone collar, although we found fragments of stone collars in the Constanza Valley.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that the cultural level was lower in Santo Domingo than in Porto Rico. Adolfo de Hostos has pointed out that the highest development in stone sculpture within the Tainan area seems to have been reached in Santo Domingo.¹⁴⁾ Our finds prove a special development of stone artefacts in the Cibao Mountains: the use of cassava graters of stone, made in imitation of wooden graters, and elaborate grinding stones, provided with faces.

The roots of the Tainan culture are, without doubt, to be looked for in northern South America.¹⁵⁾ There must have been some connections with southeastern North America also; they have not, however played any rôle in the development of Tainan culture. Direct contact with the Central American region has not been proven, as far as I can see.

There is, however, another side to the problem: the growth and specialization of the Tainan culture in its adaptation to the natural conditions of the Antillean Islands. This requires a thorough knowledge of local styles, which can only be gained through systematic and careful fieldwork. What has been done so far in Santo Domingo is hardly more than archaeological pioneering. Our material indicates, however, that it should be possible to distinguish between different local styles in the ceramic art. Local specialization exists also in the types of stone implements and in the use or non-use of flint. The gaining of a complete knowledge of these local peculiarities would of course require a careful archaeological survey of the whole island.

¹⁴⁾ Adolfo de Hostos: Anthropomorphic carvings from the Greater Antilles. *Am. Anthr.* Vol. 25, 1923, p. 555—557.

¹⁵⁾ Cf. Charlotte D. Gower: The northern and southern affiliations of Antillean culture. *Mem. of the Am. Anthr. Ass.* Number 35, 1927.

Sven Lovén: *Über die Wurzeln der Tainischen Kultur.* Göteborg 1924. — Lovén reproduces in his Taf. VII, 3, and Taf. XI, 1—2 a flint spear head and an incense vessel of distinctly Mayan character, which he thinks are found in Jamaica. This supposition depends on an error in the inventory of the National-museum of Copenhagen.

Nordenskiöld has pointed out lately some interesting similarities between certain Tainan ceramics and the ceramic art of the Amazone Bassin. (Erland Nordenskiöld: *L'archéologie du Bassin de l'Amazone.* Paris 1930, p. 29—30).

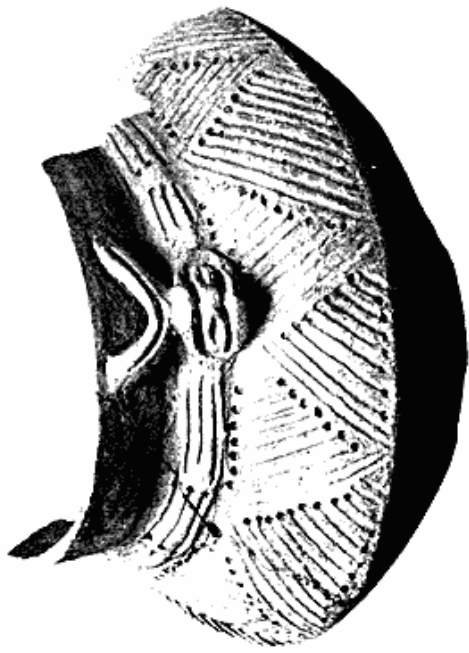


Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

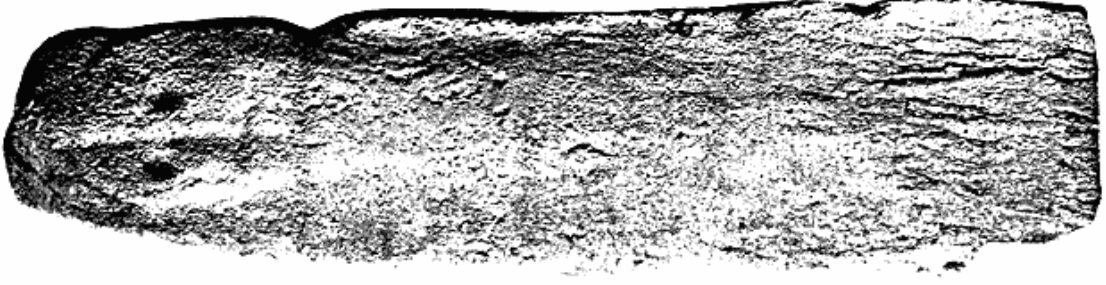


Fig. 7.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 9.

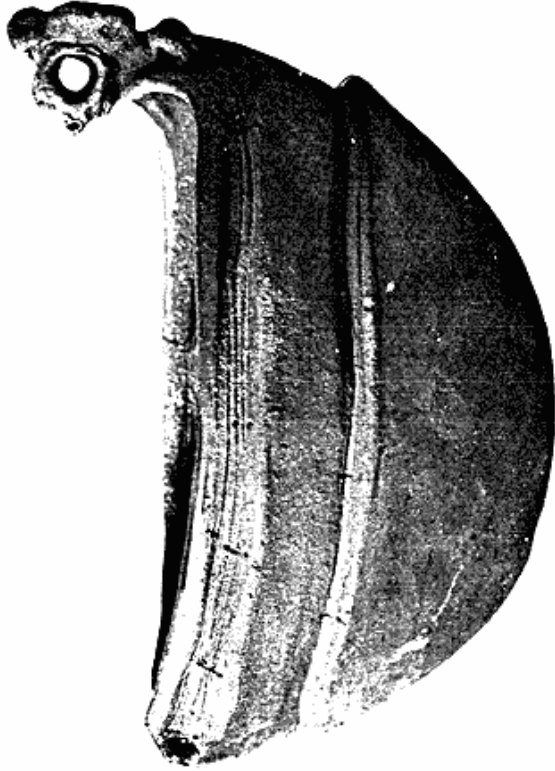


Fig. 8.



Fig. 12.

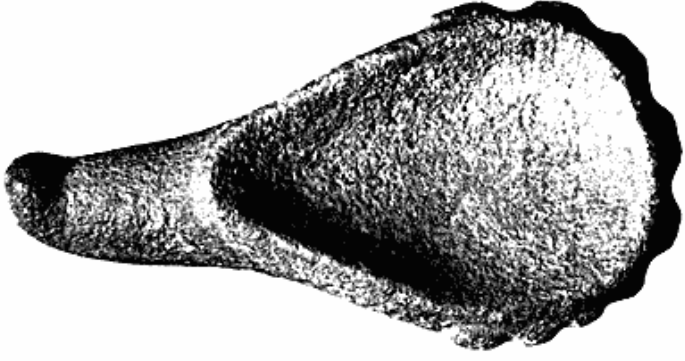


Fig. 11.

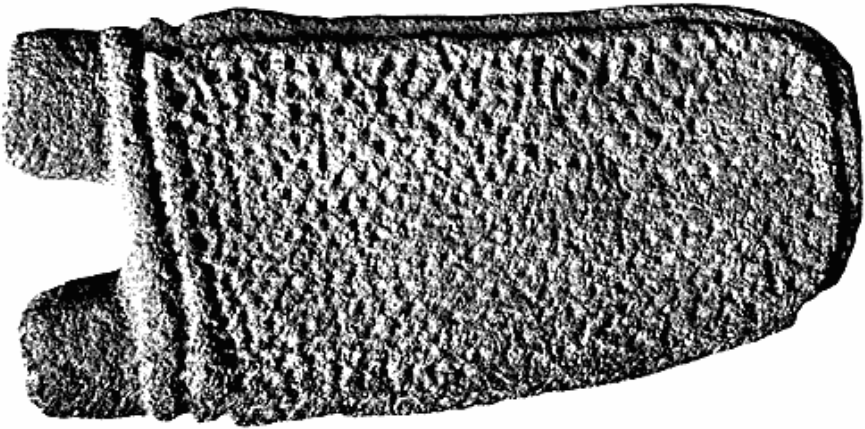


Fig. 10.



Fig. 13.

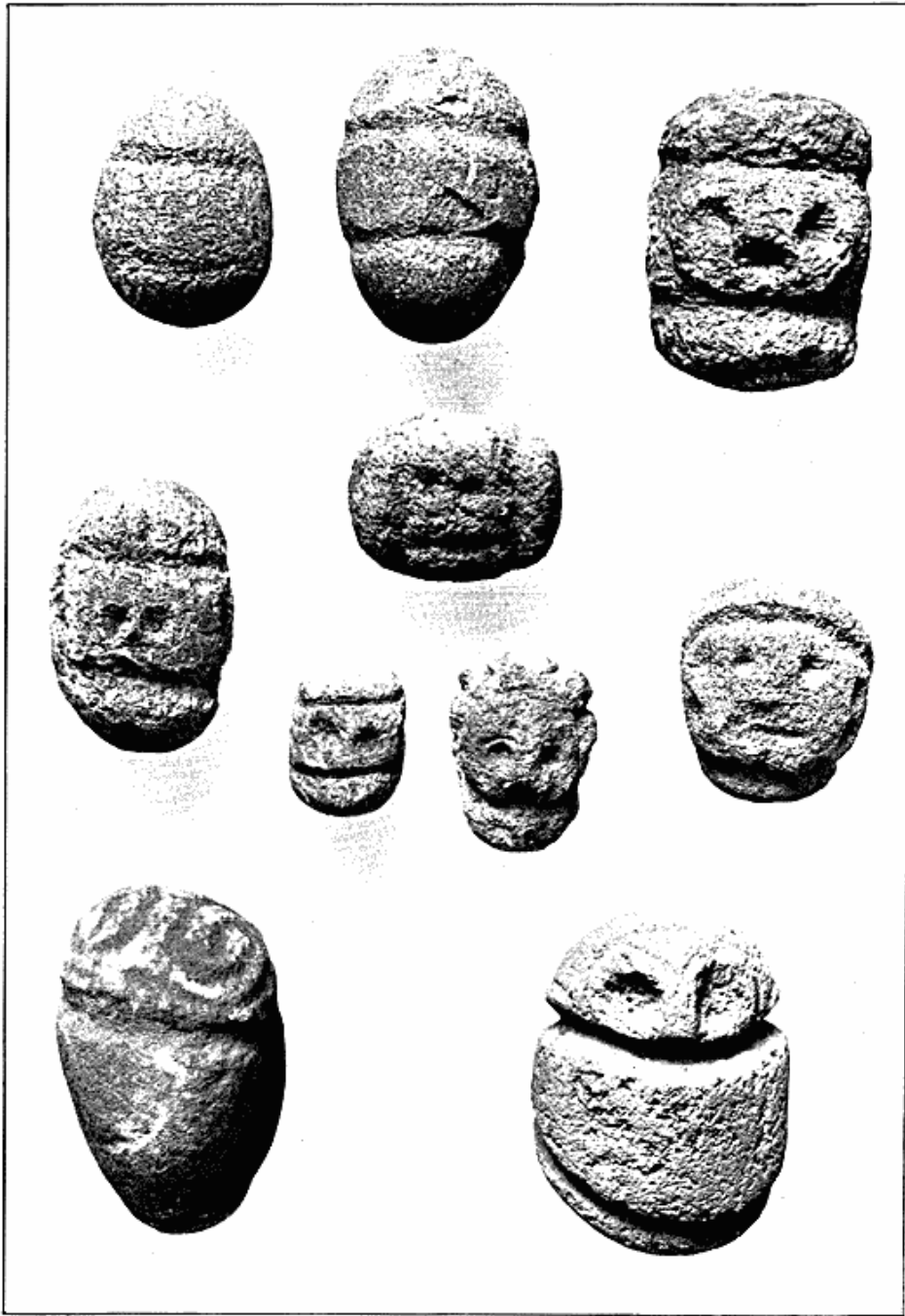


Fig. 14.

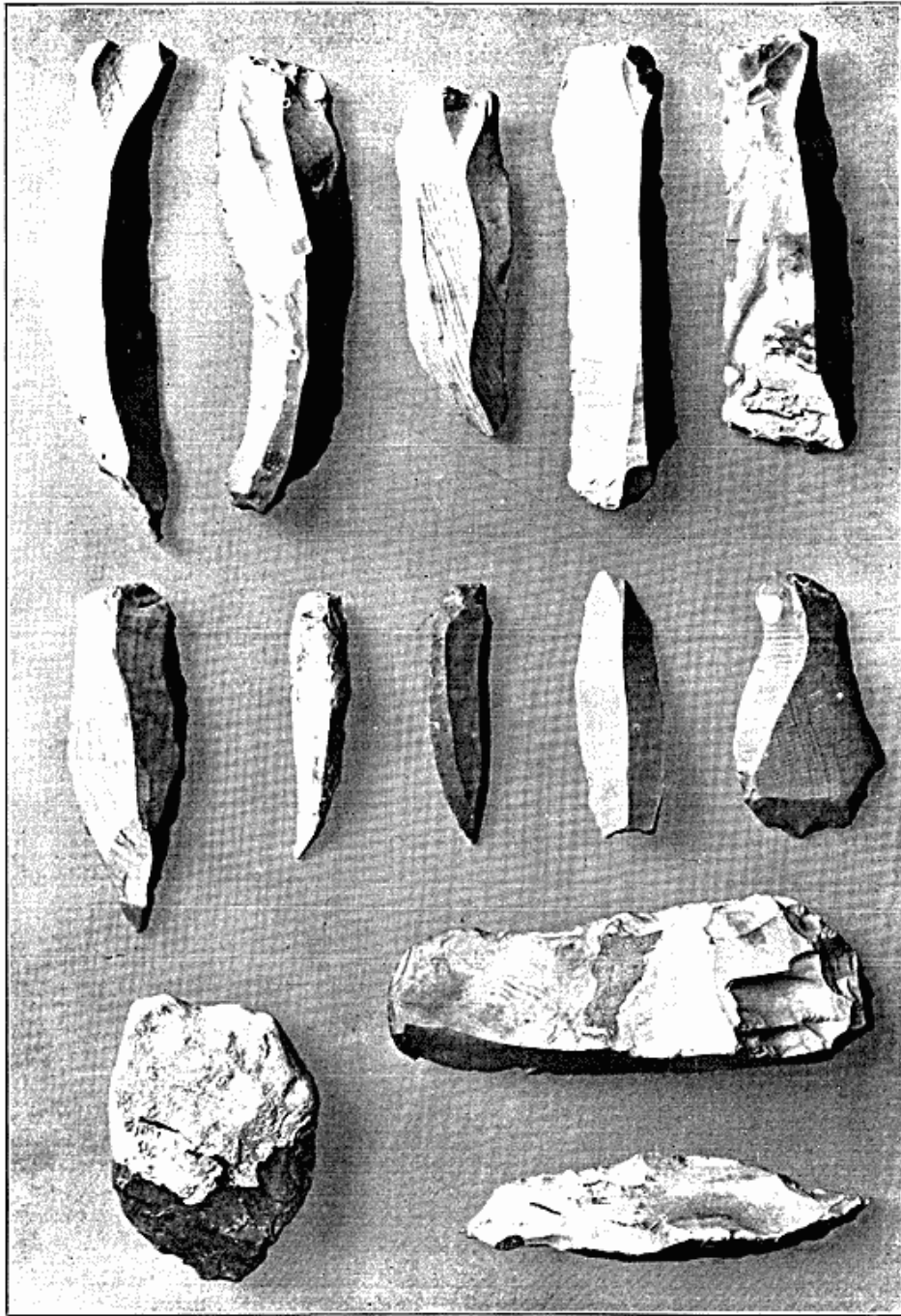


Fig. 15.

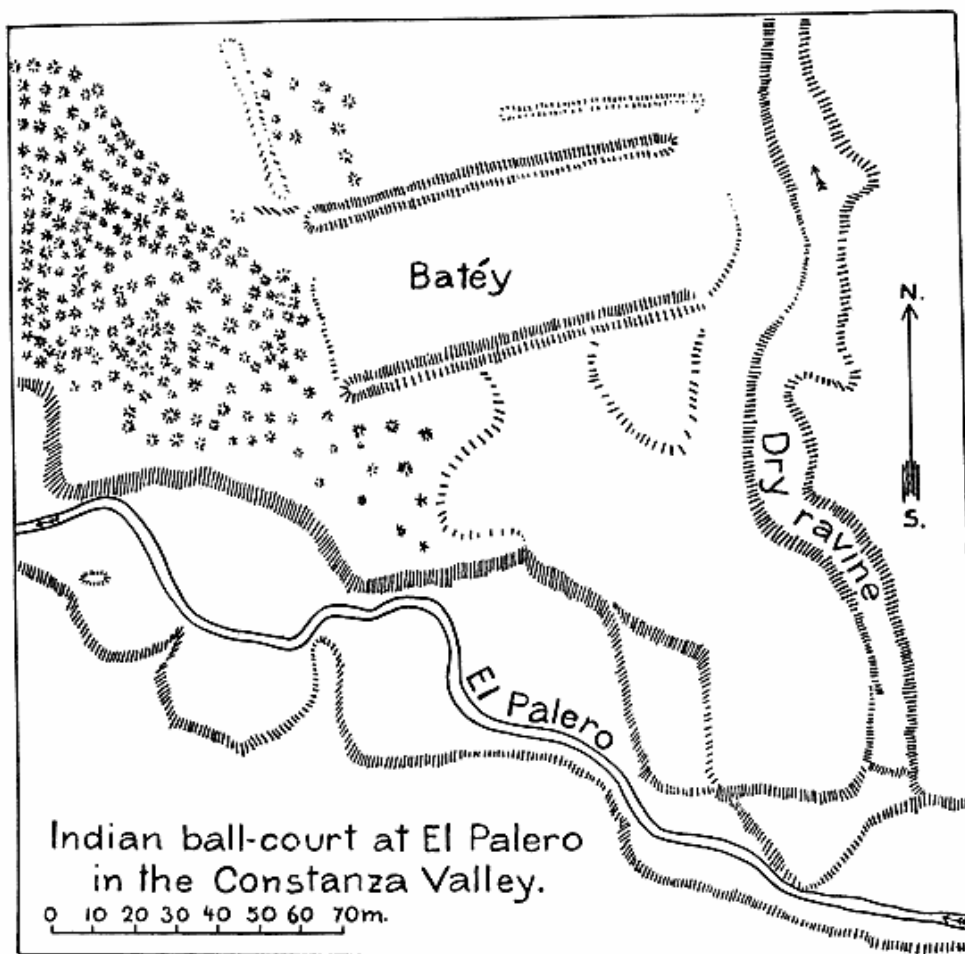


Fig. 16.

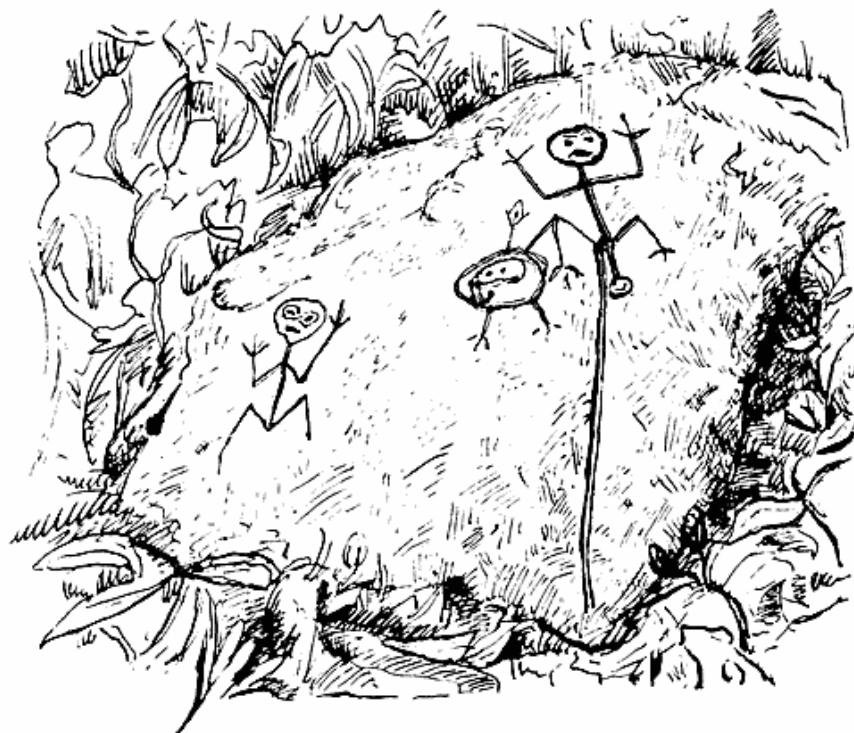


Fig. 17.

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- Fig. 1. Fragment of clay vessel from Rio Chavón. Height 13 cm.*
Fig. 2. Fragment of clay vessel from Rio Chavón. Height 15 cm.
Fig. 3. Fragment of clay vessel with loop handle from Rio Chavón. Height 12 cm.
Fig. 4. Pottery fragments from Rio Nisibón. Height 6 cm, 6 cm and 7 cm.
Fig. 5. Bowl from Rio Nisibón. Height 8 cm.
Fig. 6. Vase from La Vacama. Height 35 cm.
Fig. 7. Stone pillar with face. Near the Constanza Valley. Height 64 cm.
Fig. 8. Bowl from Manabao in the Cibao Mountains. Height 18 cm.
Fig. 9. Fragment of stone idol. Near the Constanza Valley. Height 10,5 cm.
Fig. 10. Cassava grater of porous lava. Constanza valley. Height 46 cm.
Fig. 11. Stone bowl or mortar. Near the Constanza Valley. Length 26 cm.
Fig. 12. Axe with incised ornamentes and serrated edge. Bui in the Cibao Mountains. Length 13,5 cm.
Fig. 13. Throwingboard hook of stone. Jarabacoa in the Cibao Mountains. Length 5,1 cm.
Fig. 14. Grinding stones from the Cibao Mountains. The smallest one is 8 cm, the largest one 18 cm long.
Fig. 15. Flint artefacts from La Barrera, near Azua. The largest flake is 17,7 cm long.
Fig. 16. Indian ball-court at El Palero in the Constanza Valley.
Fig. 17. Rock-engraving on a boulder near Bui in the Cibao Mountains.
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