



Aryballus

Medium

Ceramic and polychrome

Description

Inca aryballoid jar or "urpu" with geometric designs in polychrome; pointed base, large strap handles at sides of vessel body, small carrying loops at outflaring rim.

_____ This Inca aryballoid bottle or "urpu" has polychrome geometric designs; its pointed base, strap handles at the sides of the vessel body, and small carrying loops at the outflaring rim are typical of this most quintessentially Inca vessel form. This vessel shape is

found in varying sizes, but is a hallmark of the Inca period. Its form was often copied by people who had been conquered by the Incas, who employed their own local ceramic traditions during manufacturing and when applying surface decoration. As in this example, Cusco-Inca urpus are generally smooth-surfaced redwares with fine linear designs, while Provincial Inca vessels exhibit a wider range of surface texture and color treatments. What was this used for? The function of pre-Columbian ceramic vessels is not easy to ascertain. On the one hand, the vessels in the Johnson Museum's collection are lovely pieces of art, often with detailed imagery which makes their appearance of interest apart from any mundane functionality. On the other hand, these sculptural vessels were still created as vessels rather than as figures, so presumably their functional aspect was important to the maker. Because these pieces of pottery were deposited in graves, the question also arises as to whether or not similar items were used on a daily basis. Were these vessels made for the dead, fancy grave goods with specific religious or mythical imagery, or were they treasured possessions used in life? Many of the ceramics found in the Johnson Museum are highly decorated, but it should be remembered that in any archaeological site, these fancy vessels are only a small fraction of all the pottery found. Although the vast majority of pottery made in the past was functional ware used to cook, store, or serve foods, more elaborate (fancy) pieces served the additional purpose of conveying social information. Just as your grandmother might have kept her fancy china on display in a cabinet to show it off to friends and family, it appears that pre-Columbian people may have similarly had special items for display in their homes. According to the earliest chroniclers after the Spanish conquest, people put pottery on display in their homes which reflected what they did to make a living; for example, fishermen displayed pots with sharks in their homes, while hunters displayed pots with deer and other land animals. Perhaps the many pots made in the shape of common fruits and vegetables, such as squash and corn, were displayed in the homes of farmers. Recent analyses of residues from Peruvian bottles and jars suggest that these vessels were used to serve corn (maize) beer or chicha. Chicha was both an everyday beverage, made in households for family consumption, and an essential

element in ritual and social interactions. Bottles of either the stirrup-spout type, straight-spout type, or double-spout-and-bridge type may have been used to carry and serve liquids, since the narrow-necked bottle shape would have reduced losses from accidental spills and evaporation. Although water is vital in desert environments such as those found in many parts of the Andes, alcoholic beverages such as beer are universally popular. Pre-Columbian Drinks-Beer Alcoholic beverages may be made from a wide variety of starchy foods, but pre-Columbian beer was most frequently made from corn or maize (*Zea mays*). The traditional method of making beer involves spitting into a large vat or olla of starchy corn and water mixture, after which the enzyme amylase (found in human saliva) begins converting the starch in the corn into sugars, some of which subsequently ferment into alcohol. Beer was an important part of rituals in the Andes at European contact, and is still used by traditional people to make offerings to the mother earth spirit or Pachamama. Beer was undoubtedly served in wooden, ceramic, or gourd cups or beakers, but may also have been put into stirrup-spout (and other) bottles, especially when carried any distance, since the narrow-necked bottle shape would have reduced losses from accidental spills and evaporation. Inca (AD 1400 to 1532) The Incas (or Inkas) were a Quechua-speaking highland people whose capital was located at the city of Cusco, Peru. By the time of the Spanish Conquest in 1532, the Inca Empire, Tawantinsuyu, stretched from the border of Ecuador and Colombia to the Maule River in Chile. The Incas had an elaborate road system which enabled them to move people, goods, and information, and which extended throughout their empire. Conquered groups were often moved to minimize any possibility of uprisings against the Inca overlords; this also served to spread the Inca language and artistic styles throughout the region. The most characteristic Inca ceramic vessel shape is the aryballoid jar or urpu, a bottle with a pointed base, small lug handles, and an outflaring rim at the top of the spout. This vessel shape was adopted by subject peoples who often decorated this characteristically Inca form in their own local style. Such localized manifestations of Inca style are known as Provincial Inca. Other characteristic vessel shapes include bird plates with small protrusions for handles. Cusco-Inca ceramics were made without molds and typically have fine linear geometric motifs painted in black on a smooth red ground. Chimú-Inca ceramics exhibit a fusion of ceramic traditions, with Inca-shaped mold-made blackware vessels decorated with typically Chimú raised-relief design elements. Suggestions for Further Reading about the Inca (Inka): Bray, Tamara (2003): "Inka pottery as culinary equipment: food feasting, and gender in imperial state design," in *Latin American Antiquity* 14(1): 3-28. Morris, Craig, and Adriana von Hagen (1993): *The Inka Empire and its Andean Origins*. Abbeville Press: New York. Murra, John V. (1980): *The Economic Organization of the Inka State*. JAI Press: Greenwich, Conn.

Dimensions

8 1/4 x 7 inches (21 x 17.8 cm)