

Morazán A Non-Ceramic Complex in Northeastern el Salvador

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During the years of 1953 and 1954 the author conducted an archaeological reconnaissance in the Central-American Republic of El Salvador. As mentioned in various other articles about this country, none of the material gathered could be exported and, therefore, all writings had and have to be done by using field notes, sketches, and photographs only. This was also the case here. In spite of these difficulties, the author considers the results important enough to publish them, especially to indicate to this colleagues the possibilities of this scarcely known part of El Salvador.

The north-eastern part of El Salvador, i.e. the part bounded by the northern branch of the Carretera Panamericana to the south, the Rio Lempa to the west and the Honduran frontier to the north and east is divided, politically, into three Departamentos: San Miguel, Morazán, and Unión, of which only the Departamento de Morazán belongs entirely to this part of the country, while the other two have also parts south of the above-mentioned boundary.

Going north from the Carretera Panamericana, which follows more or less the valley north of the active volcanic chain, one comes first across either the extinct volcano, Cacaguatique (1651 m), or the Sociedad Mountains (1188 m), both deeply dissected and today, or at least at that time, either under cultivation or otherwise deforested. These two features touch one another, so that even the road to the north, i.e. to San Francisco Gotera, capital of Morazán, has to cross some mountainous regions. North of these two high massifs, one has to cross the Rio Torola, flowing east to west and emptying into the Lempa, the main river of El Salvador, of which the Torola is the main tributary. There is a marked contrast north of this river, the country there being more plateau-like, sometimes dissected or transformed to well-rounded hills, which remind one of the landscapes of near-by Honduras, of which, geologically, it forms a part.

Most of the sites, mentioned in this report, are situated in the small part of El Salvador lying north of the Torola. They were all investigated during one single trip to this part of the Departamento de Morazán, which took place from June 29, 1954 to July 2, 1954. Besides the drivers of the two cars, a Jeep and a Landrover, the geologist Dr. Willi-Herbert Grebe, at that time Jefe de la Sección de Minería

of the Salvadorian Government accompanied the author. Main route of the trip was the road going more or less north from the capital of Morazán, San Francisco Gotera, to the small village of Perquín near the frontier to Honduras and the northernmost point to be reached.

The first site was encountered near the village of Jocoaitique, which is about 33 km north of San Francisco Gotera along the road. This village is situated in a high basin 785 m above sea level, surrounded on nearly all sides by high hills. The site itself, about 1 km south-west of the actual village, lies within the basin on an alluvial terrace at the margin of a small brook, locally called Pozo El Amate after the near-by spring from which it flows. The name was also adopted for the site. On this quite broad and level terrace, used today as a pasture and, therefore, covered with short grass and, owing to overgrazing, numerous cattle tracks, a number of obsidian chips were found all in the same general region at the foot of a small, wellrounded and probably natural hill. At that time, no special importance was attached to this find, especially since no recognizable instruments or parts of them were among them. Three very weathered sherds, found on the same terrace at some distance from the obsidian chips, are regarded as modern manufacture, made during the last century.

The next site, called Pueblo Viejo, was found on a high hill, 300 m north of the road to Perquín at a point 10,4 km from Jocoaitique and 2.1 km from Perquín. Here, at a height of 1250 m above sea level, we have already entered the pine zone, which actually in this part of the country begins at about 800 m above sea level. On the hill, some scattered pines are growing, interspersed with some small bushes, while the ground is covered by a thin blanket of short grass, much damaged by cattle. It was especially in these tracks, that a few obsidian chips were recovered, together with a fragment of a large point or knife (Fig. 2a). The fragment is roughly bifacially chipped. Its basis is probably broken off, leaving, however, enough to indicate an only slightly indented stem. The blade itself was broad, probably leaf-shaped. The tip is damaged and partly broken off. Both edges of the point as well as the probable stem are finely pressure-flaked, as indicated in the rough drawings from the field notes. The instrument was 9,2 cm long, 4,35 cm wide over the body, and 2,3 cm near the actual end of the stem. The thickness was not recorded in the field notes.

The third site was called Quebrada Las Marías, after a near-by brook, cut deeply into the otherwise nearly flat surface. It is situated just before the path (it could not even be called a dirt road at that time) leaving the main road 4,5 km. south of Perquín and running east to Arambala goes down into the gorge of the Quebrada Las Marías, about one kilometer from the road. The plain crossed before by the path consists of a reddish soil (laterite?) without any humus worth mentioning. Within some radius of the site it is thinly covered by grass, but here and there cut up by washes into several steps, exposing the soil and, at the same time, numerous obsidian chips. There were found washed out and also buried by



Fig. 1. a: Map of El Salvador, showing the position of the Departamento de Morazán.
 b: Map of the Departamento Morazán, showing the main road San Francisco Gotera to Perquín, the principal village and the sites. Site numbers as follows: 1 = Pozo El Amate; 2 = Pueblo Viejo; 3 = Quebrada Las Marías; 4 = El Rosario; 5 = Gualococti; 6 = Los Bonetes.

Fig. 2. Implements of the Morazán complex
 a, b, c: Bifacially worked leaf-shaped points or knives;
 c, d: Unifacially worked triangular points.
 a. Pueblo Viejo; b-d: El Rosario; e: Gualococti. All natural size.

the soil up to a depth of 10 cm. More than a hundred pieces of obsidian were recovered there, among them eight small points, some of them broken, and two small end scrapers. Unfortunately, neither descriptions nor drawings of these objects were included in the field notes, only their number as well as the fact that the points were similar to those recovered at El Rosario, the next site to be mentioned.

El Rosario is situated right on the plaza of the village of the same name. The village, on the lower slope of a steep hill at a height of 495 m above the sea level can be reached by following the main road Perquín—San Francisco Gotera 800 m south of Jocoaitique and then taking a small dirt road, scarcely negotiable for jeeps at that time, to the west, running more or less parallel to the Rio Torola to the south. The distance, measured by the road is 7,6 km. Again, the bulk of the recovered 63 obsidian pieces were simple chips, most of them extremely small, as was also the case at Quebrada Las Marias. Among them, three worked instruments were noticed. One seems to be a complete small point (Fig. 2c), triangular in outline, with a straight base and only unifacially worked. Fine pressure flaking is present on both edges as well as on the base. This point was 2,7 cm long and 1,15 cm wide at the base. Very similar to it is another object, which either can be interpreted as another point of the same type or the tip of a instrument, since the slightly convex base is damaged and shows no pressure flaking, which is present on the other two edges (Fig. 2d). This point too is only unifacially worked. It is 2,12 cm long and 1,12 cm wide at the base, but since one corner of the base is damaged, as can be seen by the drawing, the width at the base may actually be somewhat larger. While the author is convinced, that this object represents the same type as the complete point, he does not think that this is the case with the third instrument recovered at El Rosario. It does look quite similar, being more or less triangular in shape, with a slightly convex base and pressure flaking on both edges. The basic difference from the other two points, however, is that they were only unifacially worked, while this tip of a point or a knife had been chipped bifacially. It, therefore, seems to be more related to the instrument from Pueblo Viejo, mentioned above. The instrument (Fig. 2b) is 2,8 cm long and, at the base, 2,1 cm wide. Finally, it has to be mentioned, that a single chip of quartz was found at El Rosario together with the obsidian material.

While these four sites are all situated north of the Rio Torola, the last one lies south of this river. It is again named after a small village, Gualococti, where the material, about 40 stone pieces, was gathered on the banks of the main road. Like most of the other sites, the extremely scattered village is located in a small basin, this time at a height of 535 m above sea level. One reaches Gualococti by a small dirt road, at that time, June/July 1954, i. e. during the rainy season, in very bad condition, so that a Landrover could not get through and part of the way had to be traversed on foot. The dirt road branches off the main road San Francisco Gotera—Perquín in the village of Osicala and then runs roughly to the

west, following the northern foot of a steep escarpment. This is probably the line of a geological fault, which marks the southern boundary of the Torola valley, and may be connected with the activities of the long extinct volcano Cacaguatique, rising more or less south of Gualococti. Among the above-mentioned stone pieces two are chips from quartz-like material, differing in colour, while the rest consists of obsidian. Among these, only a single fragment of an instrument could be observed (Fig. 2e). It is obviously the tip of a knife or a leaf-shaped point, perhaps similar to the one found at Pueblo Viejo (Fig. 2a). Like that object, the tip from Gualococti is roughly bifacially chipped, with additional fine pressure flaking along the edges. The preserved length is 3.8 cm, its width slightly above the broken base is 2.9 cm. As with all other instruments, no thickness has been recorded in the field notes.

While each of the sites by itself would scarcely be worth mentioning, all five taken together indicate an interesting phenomenon. It is especially important, in the opinion of the author, that not a single ceramic site has been found in this region during the survey, which is the case to the south for instance on top and on the slopes of the Cacaguatique. The only other site visited north of the Rio Torola and not yet mentioned was the site of Los Bonetes, a hill with two mesa-like tops on the Honduran frontier, north of the village of Carolina and already in the Departamento de San Miguel. Field notes indicate, that in the 701 m high saddle between the two tops, "many obsidian chips, blades and a point from the same material and very few sherds" were found, while on the mesa-like northern top, 740 m above sea level, obsidian chips were again encountered. Unfortunately, no drawings or measurements have been made nor is any description of the sherds or their numbers given in the survey notes. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the objects sound very interesting and may be related to the above mentioned material, Los Bonetes cannot be included in this group of sites. However, one has to bear in mind that there may be another site which could be included. It is furthermore interesting, that questioning of the inhabitants of the different villages did not result in any further information about ceramic sites, while several sites with obsidian were mentioned in the general region north of the Torola. This, in the opinion of the author, indicates that ceramic sites are either completely absent or very rare in this part of the country.

Among the non-ceramic material mentioned above, only 15 instruments or parts of them were encountered (Pueblo Viejo: 1; Quebrada las Marías: 10; El Rosario: 3; Gualococti: 1), of which only five can be adequately described. More instruments may well have been there, but they passed unnoticed at the first glance, especially worked blades, which the author recalls to have seen among the obsidian pieces. So actually, the instrument counts should be higher. On the other hand, the instruments found can be placed into two groups: small triangular points, unifacially worked, and larger leaf-shaped points or knives, bifacially worked and probably with a slightly indented stem. The first group was found at

Quebrada Las Marias and El Rosario (Fig. 2c,d) while broken examples of the second group were met with at Pueblo Viejo (Fig. 2a), El Rosario (Fig. 2b) and Gualococti (Fig. 2e). Since examples of both groups have been found together at El Rosario, the author considers them both part of the same complex. To prove this will be difficult, since, with one exception (Quebrada Las Marias), all implements were found on the surface and a mixing of two different complexes is quite possible. Here, only further investigations and, preferably, excavations, can settle the question. It seems, however, reasonable, for the time being considering the very restricted material as well as the preliminary character of this report, to take them all together and to place them into one complex, here called Morazán, after the Departamento, where it was found. It should be understood, that this placing is provisional and dependent on further research.

The final two questions arising from the material are the connections with other non-ceramic groups in this general area and the question of its dating. As to the first, only two groups of this kind in northern Central America have been adequately described to date. One of them, from Honduras, was investigated and published by Ripley P. Bullen and William W. Plowden jr. (1963). These authors distinguish between a ceramic and a pre-ceramic complex, both containing a number of different obsidian implements. Among the material from their pre-ceramic complex none has any counterpart among the Morazán complex, while from those of the ceramic sites only one point can possibly be connected with our material. This is a leaf-shaped point with a slightly contracted stem and a broken-off tip (Bullen & Plowden, 1963, fig. 3, lower row, third point from the right), which obviously was bifacially chipped. It looks somewhat like our point or knife from Pueblo Viejo, the most complete specimen of its group. The Honduran point is, however, much smaller than the one from the Morazán complex. The authors also mention and illustrate several prismatic blades and believe that these also are instruments (*ibid.*, Fig. 3, left). As mentioned above, obsidian blades, some with worked edges were among the material of the Morazán complex, especially at the sites of El Rosario and Quebrada Las Marias, but again they were much smaller than those illustrated by Bullen and Plowden.

There is, however, another aspect in this complex or complexes from Honduras, which is much more intriguing than the simple similarities. It is the fact that these objects have been found in the Departamento de Intibuca, which lies to the north-west of Morazán and even has a common frontier with it. The investigations of Bullen and Plowden were made in the vicinity of Esperanza, well in the north-western part of Intibuca; however, not only is the southern part of that Departamento virtually unknown, but also the landscape, elevation, and ecological character are similar to one another. Finally, the so-called pre-ceramic sites are nearly all in the valley or basin bottom, something like the Morazán sites. Therefore, the author feels that some connection exists between the two complexes, in spite of the fact that he is unable at the moment to prove this. Whether the single

connection between the Morazán complex and the ceramic complex from Intibuca, mentioned above, is of any consequence or not cannot yet be decided.

The other group mentioned above is the so-called Chayal obsidian industry, investigated and published by Michael D. Coe and Kent V. Flannery (1964). The site of El Chayal is situated north-east of the capital of Guatemala right inside the major obsidian deposits in that republic. Among the numerous artifacts illustrated by Coe and Flannery, only one (Coe & Flannery 1964, Fig. 2e) seems to duplicate one of our specimens. It is called by the authors a "unifacial knife" and may be the tip of one, but could also be an unifacial point of the same kind as those encountered at El Rosario (Fig. 2c,d) and Quebrada Las Marias. It has to be noted, however, that the artifact from El Chayal is about double the size of those measured at El Rosario. As to the other objects, those called "stemmed projectile points" (Coe and Flannery, 1964, Fig. 2a-c) and "leaf-shaped bifacial projectile points or knives" (*ibid.*, Fig. 2f,g) evince some similarities to the second group of instruments of the Morazán complex, but since the latter are mostly broken, no definite statement can be made.

Taking these comparisons together, it seems that certain connections exist with Intibuca and also El Chayal, but these are still too vague to be of effective use. The ties are strengthened to the Intibuca material which was found in a similar environment and at a distance not too far from our sites. Should the material from Los Bonetes transpire to belong to the Morazán complex also, the distance would then be still smaller.

As to the dating, which is intimately connected with the question of similarities, no indications are present at the actual sites as to the age of the finds. Of the other two groups, Coe and Flannery believe that El Chayal belongs to a Middle or Late Archaic period and should be dated between 5000 and 1500 B.C. (Coe & Flannery, 1964, p. 48). Bullen and Plowden do not give any dating for the Intibuca complexes, but call them also Archaic (Bullen & Plowden, 1963, p. 384). This may be correct as a developmental label, but I doubt whether it would also indicate a high age. The region, in which the Morazán complex (and similarly the Intibuca complexes) are found was and is a difficult habitat for agriculturists, even today, when most of the people either depend on cattle or on coffee crops for any substantial subsistence and have only very small and poor garden plots to grow their maize, beans, etc. This may have been still more difficult in pre-Columbian times and the author would not be surprised, if northern Morazán, as well as the adjacent parts of Honduras, has been a region, into which primitive tribes retreated, using it as an excellent hunting ground. This may explain, for example, why most of the sites are situated in basins or on river terraces, mostly near small brooks, since here animals, especially deer and other larger mammals, could be easily hunted while drinking. At the moment, therefore, the author does not attribute any great age to the Morazán complex, but considers it a remnant of an older stratum, which remained active at a time when other parts of Central

America were already inhabited by agriculturists. This would also explain the absence of any ceramic sites in this region. Perhaps one day, a larger site will be excavated (Quebrada Las Marias seems very promising) and material for C¹⁴-dating be gathered in order to settle this question.

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