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PRECLASSIC THROUGH POSTCLASSIC

Ceramics and chronology of the southeastern Pacific Coast of Guatemala

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Abstract

Ceramic and radiometric data from the three seasons of survey and excavations, 1995–1997, conducted in the coastal districts of Santa Rosa and Jutiapa in southeastern Guatemala are used to construct a chronological sequence for this previously little-known 1000-km^2 region. Patterns of local ceramic manufacture and interregional trade are identified through the use of type-variety classification methods coupled with neutron-activation analysis. The resulting 3000-year-long uninterrupted chronological sequence, beginning in the Early Preclassic, shows patterns of continuity in manufacturing techniques, as well as evolving styles and shifting networks of interregional interactions that span much of the Pacific Coast and the highlands and lowlands of southeastern Mesoamerica, from the Gulf of Mexico to Copan, Honduras. These interactions indicate the southeastern Pacific Coast participated in exchange systems that brought together different ethnic groups whose cultural manifestations included Maya ceramics in the Preclassic and Classic periods, and ceramic, architectural, and sculptural evidence suggesting the southeastern Pacific Coast was actively involved in the Cotzumalguapa Nuclear Zone that stretched to the west into Escuintla and to the east into Pacific El Salvador during the Classic period.

The ceramics from the Pacific Coast of Santa Rosa and Jutiapa have provided us with an opportunity to study a long sequence of production that begins in the Early Preclassic and continues until the Spanish Conquest. Our sample includes surface collections of pottery from 154 sites and excavated material from a total of 27 test pits at 8 different sites throughout the region (Figure 1) including Chiquiuitan, Ujuxte, Nueve Cerros, La Maquina, Bonete, Maneadero, La Nueva, and Atiquipaque (Estrada Belli 1998, 1999; Estrada Belli et al. 1996, 1997, 1998; Estrada Belli and Kosakowsky 1996, 1998). All surface-collected pottery was sorted and counted by period in an attempt to determine the relative frequency of occupation of mounds throughout the region, and all excavated material was similarly sorted, counted, and described, for a total sample size of 458,613 sherds.

The pottery is classified according to a modified type-variety system (Willey et al. 1967) placing major emphasis on observable ceramic attributes such as surface finish, decoration, and vessel form. Use of a typological approach facilitates detailed ceramic comparisons among sites and across wider regions, and the presence of shared ceramic traits allows the identification of ceramic spheres. Dates for the newly identified ceramic complexes (Figure 2) were selected based on only a limited number of radiometric dates and therefore relied heavily upon prior work from adjacent regions on the Pacific Coast (Bove 1996), El Salvador (Sharer 1978), and the central highlands of Guatemala (Shook and Hatch 1978). Thus, the ceramic typology allows us to identify the chronological placement of the southeastern coastal sites and the importance of these sites in interregional networks of trade and communication (Kosakowsky and Estrada Belli 1997). Additional evidence is drawn from a number of instrumental neutron-activation studies of the ceramics (Kosakowsky et al. 1999; Neff et al. 1999), as well as archaeological, architectural, and sculptural data (Estrada Belli 1998, 1999).

THE EARLY PRECLASSIC

Evidence for the earliest occupation on the southeastern coast is found along the coastal mangrove ecological zone. Surface collections produced a number of eroded tecomates at five sites along the coast, and one site in the piedmont. The best evidence for Early Preclassic occupation, however, which has been named locally the Huiscoyol Complex, comes from test-pit excavations at the site of Chiquiuitan in the coastal mangrove zone (see map, Figure 1), and the total sample size for the Huiscoyol Ceramic Complex is 22,706 sherds.

Pottery from the earliest levels is dominated by unslipped large, thick globular tecomates. The rims are often decorated with a specular hematite band, with secondary decoration of loofah (sponge) impressions, rocker stamping, irregular fingernail punctations, or coarse gouge incisions on the body of the tecomate (Figure 3). This pottery can best be described as combining ceramic attributes of both Ocos and Cuadros/Jocotal material from other areas along the coast of Chiapas (Blake et al. 1995; Clark et al. 1987; Lesure 1998; Voorhies 1989), Guatemala (Arroyo 1992, 1993, 1994;

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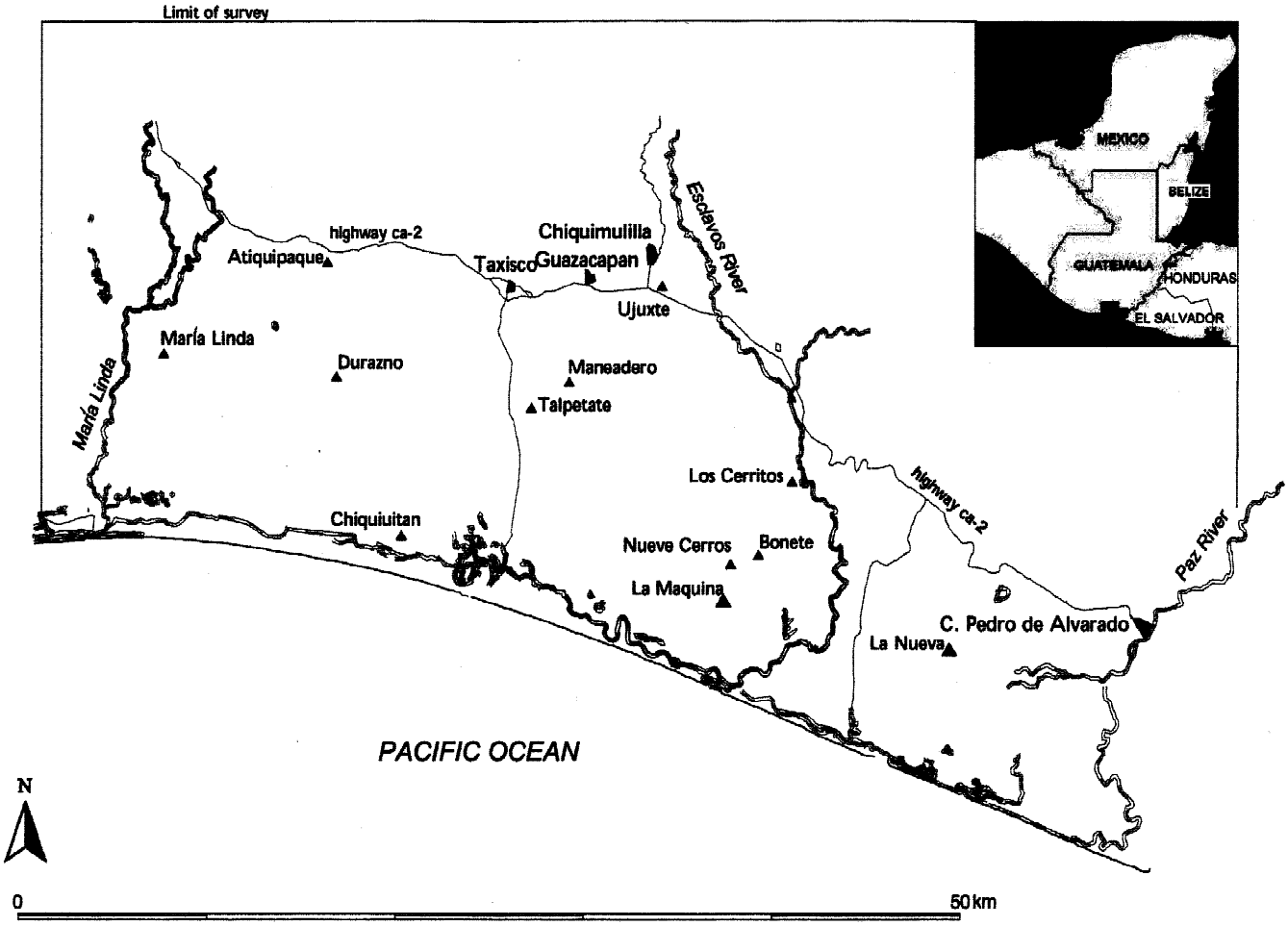


Figure 1. Map of the study area showing location of archaeological sites.

Beaudry 1989; Coe 1961; Pye and Demarest 1991), and El Salvador (Arroyo 1995). In form, the Chiquiuitan pottery most closely resembles Locona/ Ocos ceramics from the site of El Carmen in El Salvador (Arroyo 1995), which date there to between 1450 and 1200 B.C., the Chiquiuitan excavations, however, failed to produce evidence of any earlier occupation similar to the Barra phase pottery from coastal Chiapas (Blake et al. 1995). There are also some modal similarities to the Cuadros/Jocotal ceramics from the Tecojate region in Guatemala which date to between 1150 and 900 B.C. (Arroyo 1992, 1993, 1994). Radiocarbon dates on two samples of carbonized wood from two different test pits at Chiquiuitan place the end of the Huiscoyol Ceramic Complex at 2935 B.P., calibrated to 1122 B.C., and 2890 B.P., calibrated to 1034 B.C., respectively.[1]

Later levels from the excavations at Chiquiuitan continued to produce numerous tecomates, but there appears to be an increased emphasis on modeled and appliqued decorations. This pottery has been named the Cangrejo Complex. Sample size for this ceramic complex is 53,842 sherds. The ceramic decoration is generally zoomorphic with depictions of crabs, faces of other animals, or human-like faces (Figure 4). Interestingly, recovery of faunal material from these levels also produced large quantities of crab claws and legs. Modeling on jar shoulders is found in the Tok Phase ceramics at Chalchuapa (Sharer 1978), which date to between 1200 and 900 B.C., however, only in the form of appliqued/modeled fillets. The presence of white-rimmed black pottery, a good marker for Cuadros/ Jocotal, also helps to date this material tentatively to the end of the Early Preclassic, approximately 1150 to 850 B.C.

The Chiquiuitan pottery shows modal affinities with the ceramics from coastal Chiapas (Clark et al. 1987), the rest of the Pacific Coast of Guatemala (Arroyo 1992, 1993, 1994; Bove 1989a, 1989b), and coastal El Salvador (Arroyo 1995) during the end of the Early Preclassic, however, the stylistic variation among the coeval ceramic assemblages from these regions is great enough to allow visual separation on surface characteristics alone. This would seem to support regionalization in ceramic manufacture during this period, and a strong local style of ceramic decoration on the south-

[1] Radiocarbon samples were analyzed at the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit. The first sample on carbonized wood came from a fire pit in excavated level 11 of Test Pit 5 at Chiquiuitan. The uncalibrated date of 2935 B.P. correlates to 1122 B.C., calibrated, at the 1-sigma range of 1255–1014 B.C., and the 2-sigma range of 1312–928 B.C. The second sample from a fire pit in level 15 of Test Pit 7 is uncalibrated at 2890 B.P., and calibrates to 1034 B.C., at the 1-sigma range of 1183–942 B.C., and the 2-sigma range of 1260–905 B.C.

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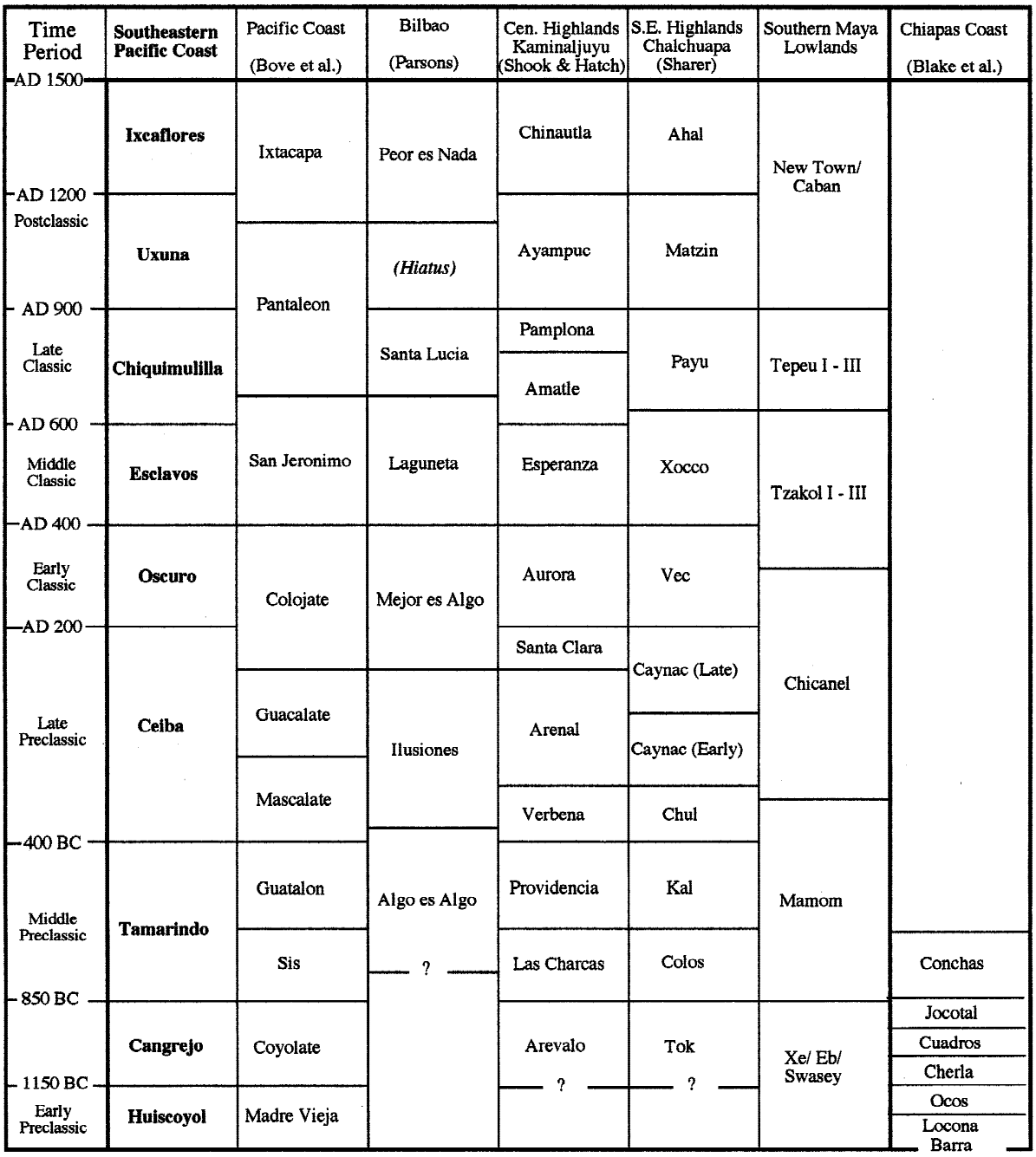


Figure 2. Chronological chart of the ceramic complexes from the southeastern Pacific Coast.

eastern coast. In fact, while ceramic modes such as modeling and white-rimmed black wares are shared across a vast geographic area during this period, there does not seem to be a "typical" Cuadros/ Jocotal, at least along the eastern Pacific Coast of Guatemala.

THE MIDDLE PRECLASSIC

Middle Preclassic ceramics from the Tamarindo Complex, dating between approximately 850 and 400 B.C., were recovered in surface collections from two sites in the coastal mangrove zone, including Chiquiuitan, two sites in the Los Esclavos River drainage, Nueve Cerros and Los Cerritos, and two sites in the piedmont zone, Ujuxte and Durazno; six of the 154 sites surface collected and excavated which produced a sample size of 70,000 sherds. Test-pit excavations at one mound at Chiquiuitan produced typical flat-bottomed bowls, with everted and bolstered or thickened rims, in dull monochrome browns and reds, all lacking vessel supports, and there are a number of examples of fine-line-incised, grooved-incised, and fluted sherds (Figure 5). It is probable the material from Chiquiuitan represents an early Middle Preclassic phase, sim-

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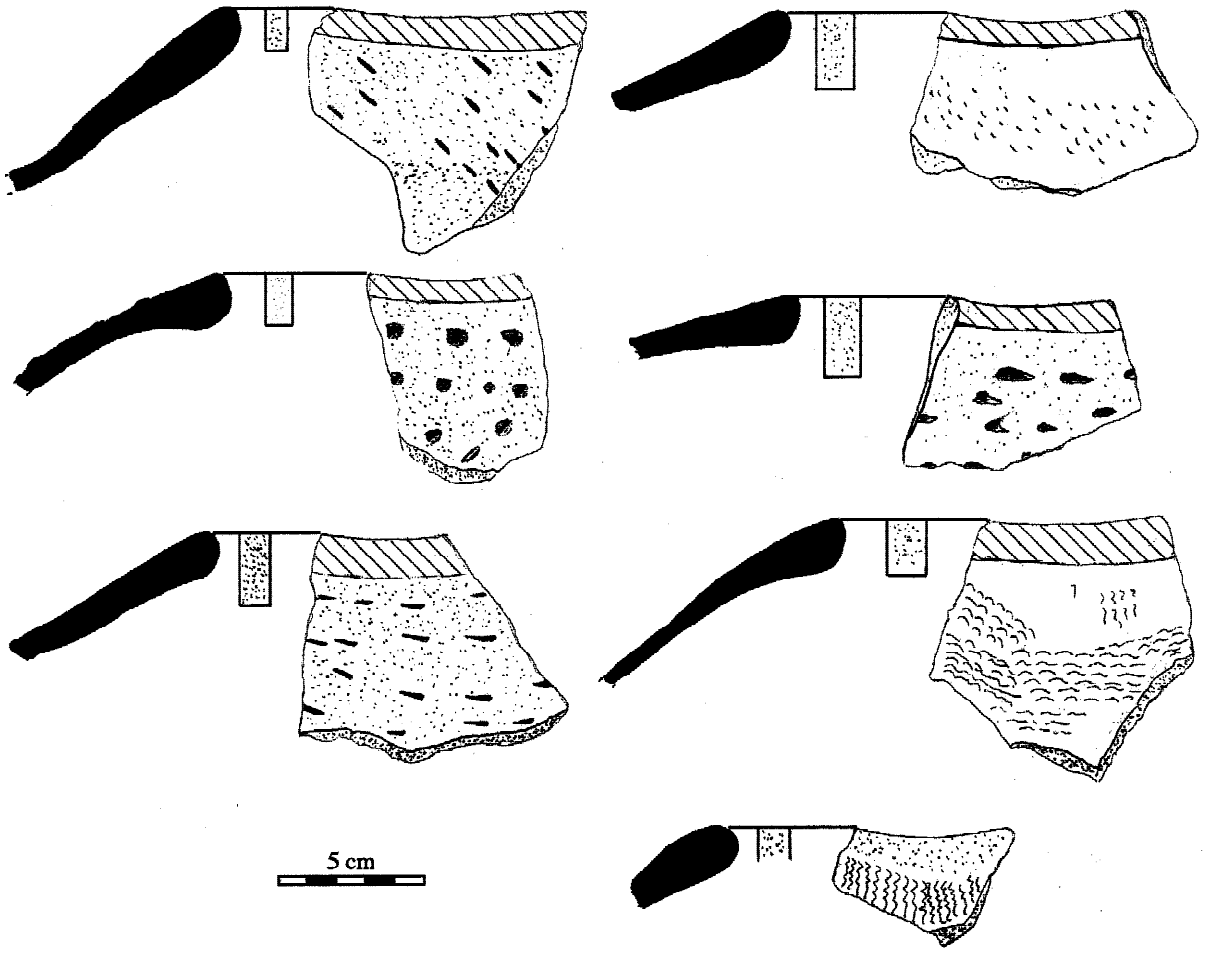


Figure 3. Typical tecomate forms of the Early Preclassic Huiscoyol Ceramic Complex, 1300–1150 B.C.

ilar to the Sis Complex reported in neighboring Escuintla (Bove 1996).

The surface ceramics from the Los Esclavos River drainage and piedmont sites all exhibit greater elaboration in vessel form and decoration, including the presence of the double-line break motif on everted-rim bowls or dishes, and may represent a Late Middle Preclassic, much like the Guatalon phase in Escuintla (Bove 1996). On the southeastern coast there does not appear to be a strong emphasis on white wares, or a continued use of red-painted rims, as found elsewhere in Middle Preclassic coastal sites, however, the sample size is quite small, and therefore, we know little at this point about the Middle Preclassic occupation.

On preliminary examination, the ceramics share modes with pottery of the same period reported from other coastal sites in Escuintla (Bove 1996), and with Bilbao (Parsons 1969), El Balsamo, and Monte Alto (Shook and Hatch 1978), as well as the highland site of Kaminaljuyu (Wetherington 1978). Macroscopic examination of the ceramic pastes and identification of many local clay sources in other ongoing instrumental neutron-activation analyses (Kosakowsky et al. 2000; Neff et al. 1999) support the concept of continuing local manufacture of ceramics on the southeastern Pacific Coast, while the appearance of a ceramic mode such as the double-line break motif, widespread throughout Mesoamerica, would seem to suggest that while people were in contact with one another, there was little actual movement of ceramics during the Middle Preclassic.

THE LATE PRECLASSIC

The Late Preclassic, 400 B.C.–A.D. 200, is well represented in southeastern coastal sites, and is known locally as the Ceiba Complex, with a sample size of 81,394 sherds. Of the 154 sites that have been surface collected, 45 have Late Preclassic ceramics. The sites of Nueve Cerros in the Río Esclavos River drainage, and Ujuxte in the piedmont zone appear to be major Late Preclassic centers, while there is evidence of prominent Late Preclassic occupation at Bonete, La Maquina, Los Cerritos, Durazno, Maneadero, and María Linda (see Figure 1). Ceramics from these sites include unslipped storage jars, often with pie-crust tool or fingertip-impressed rims, and large numbers of glossy monochrome orange-reds and monochrome blacks on small bowls and dishes with slightly everted rims, medial and labial ridges, flanges or breaks, and groove-incising as the predominate decoration (Figure 6). Many of the monochrome blacks exhibit deep gouge incising in geometric patterns and bands often with cross-hatching, similar to pottery from Kaminaljuyu (Wetherington 1978) and Bilbao (Parsons 1969).

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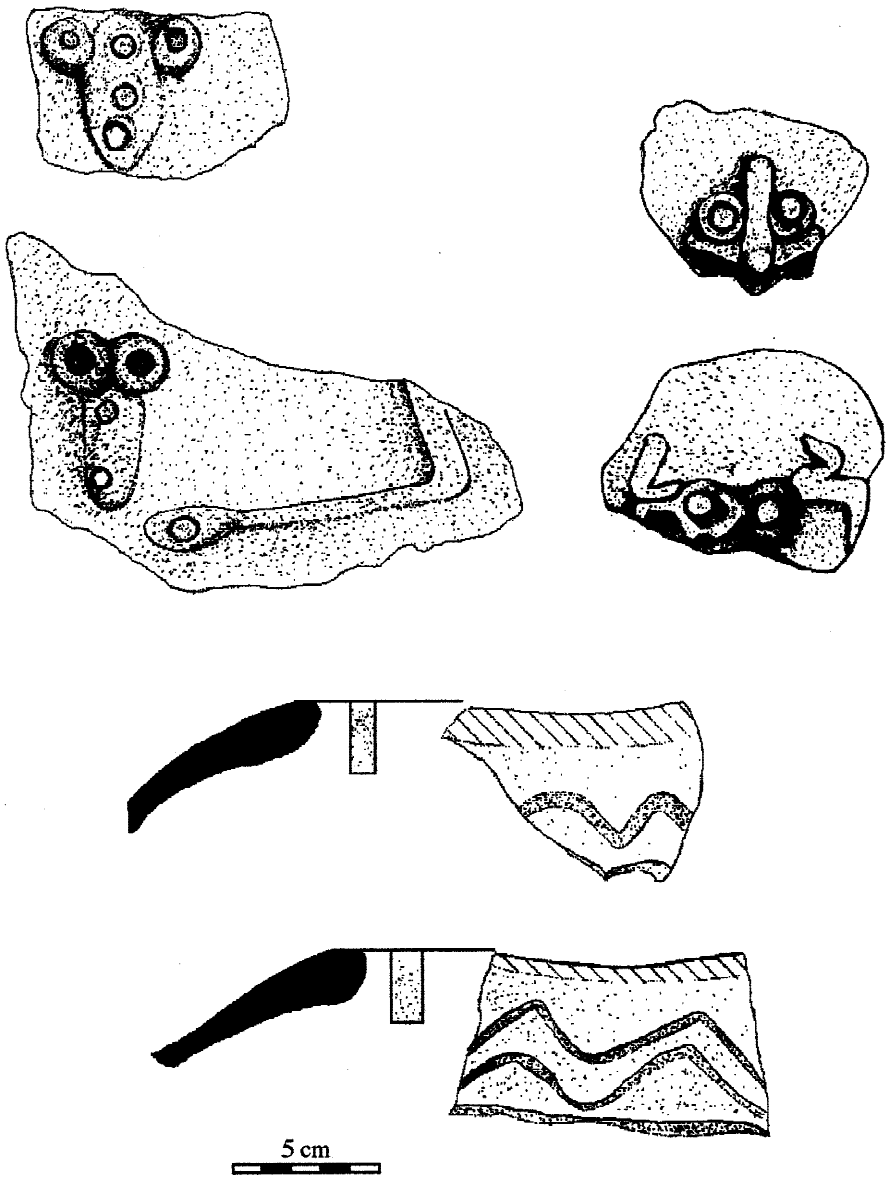


Figure 4. Modeled decoration and tecomates of the Early Preclassic Cangrejo Ceramic Complex, 1150–850 B.C.

It is in the manufacture and distribution of monochrome fine red pottery, however, that southeastern coastal sites distinguish themselves during the Late Preclassic. The Fine Red pottery of both Nueve Cerros and Ujuxte (Figure 6) include examples similar to Sacatepequez Fine Red and Sacatepequez Purple on Fine Red as identified at the highland site of Kaminaljuyu during the Providencia and Miraflores Spheres from 400 B.C.–A.D. 250 (Demarest and Sharer 1986; Wetherington 1978), Santa Tecla Red found at the sites of Chalchuapa (Sharer 1978) and Santa Leticia (Demarest 1986) across the border in El Salvador during the same period, and the newly named Melina Purple on Fine Red from neighboring Escuintla (Bove 1996). Results from an instrumental neutron-activation analysis (Kosakowsky et al. 1999) have indicated while there is some degree of compositional diversity in the Fine Red ceramics, much of the Fine Red pottery on the Escuintla piedmont, in El Salvador, and highland Guatemala originates on the coastal plain of the southeastern coast, not far from the site of Nueve Cerros, and confirms the importance of this region as a production zone in the center of the Late Preclassic Miraflores and Providencia ceramic spheres (Demarest and Sharer 1986) that extends from El Salvador across highland Guatemala and the Pacific Coast.

Another diagnostic ceramic type of this time period is Usulutan decorated pottery found in numerous quantities at all Late Preclassic southeastern coastal sites. This material is characterized by both wavy line and splotchy or cloudy patterns with a negative or resist appearance in an orange slip over cream, and vessel forms include the characteristic mammiform-tetrapod supports (Figure 7). The Santa Rosa Usulutans are similar to ceramics of the Olocuitla and Jicalapa Groups at Chalchuapa (Sharer 1978) and Santa Leticia (Demarest 1986) in El Salvador, and at Rancho Vista Hermosa in Jutiapa (Bond 1989), Verbena Red Orange: Usulutan at Kaminaljuyu (Hatch 1997; Wetherington 1978), and Río Santiago Usulutan identified at Bilbao (Parsons 1969), on the Pacific Coast of

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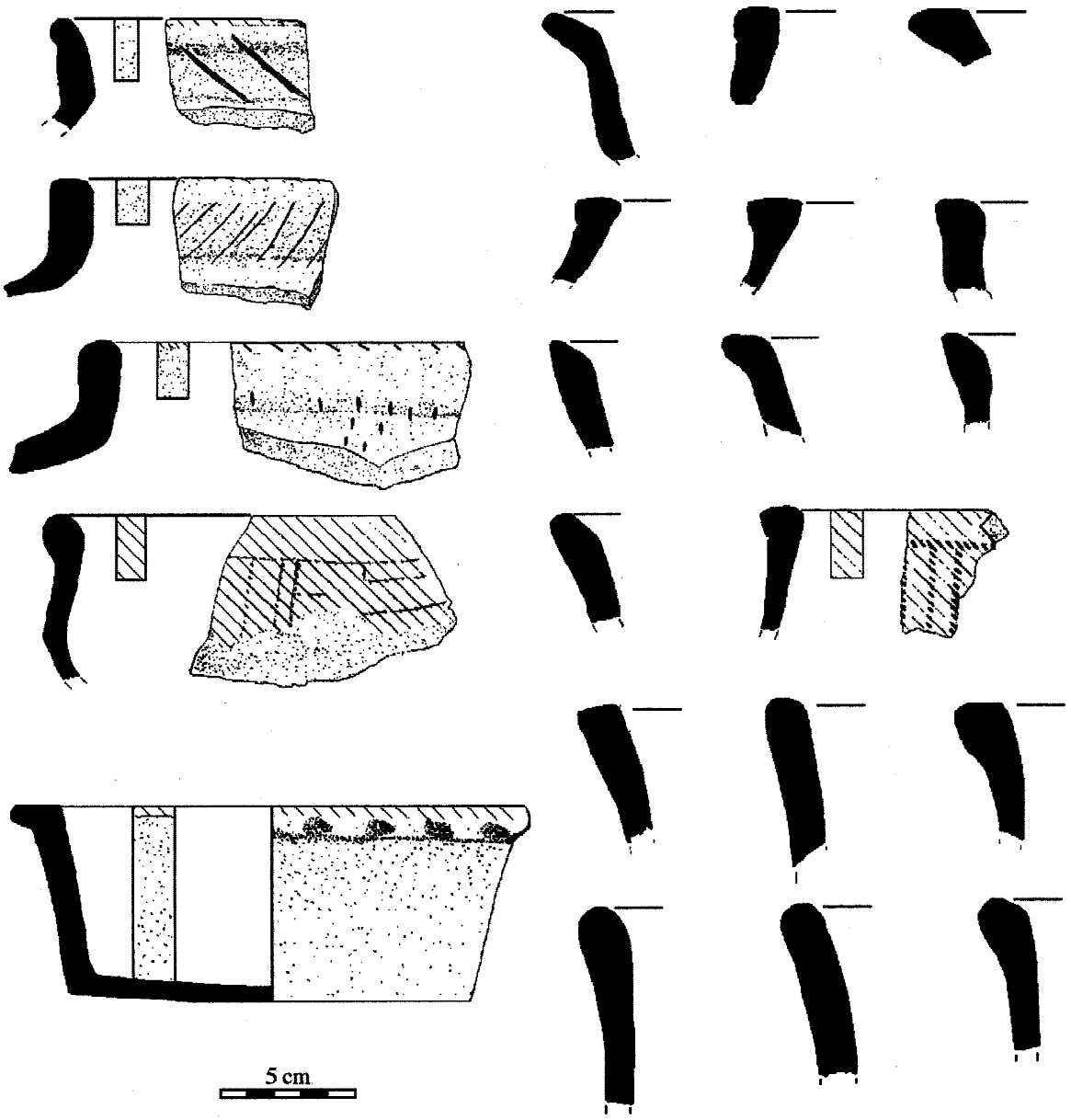


Figure 5. Typical vessel forms of the Middle Preclassic Tamarindo Ceramic Complex, 850–400 B.C.

Escuintla (Bove 1996), and at the sites of El Balsamo and Monte Alto (Shook and Hatch 1978).

Recent work (Kosakowsky et al. 1999) supports the assertion that not only was Fine Red pottery manufactured in the production zone centered on the site of Nueve Cerros (see Figure 1) and traded widely, but that the Ivory and Ivory Usulutan wares of Guatemala and Jicalapa Usulutan found in Guatemala and El Salvador, and as far away as northern Belize and the Peten, in small quantities, also were traded over vast distances (Neff et al. 1999). At no time, however, is the quantity of Fine Red or Usulutan cream-paste pottery found in the archaeological record large enough to suggest the kind of state-organized long-distance trade so evident in Classic-period Mesoamerica. We are only just beginning to identify the production zones for these ceramics, and the role the southeastern coast may have played across a wider region during the Late and Terminal Preclassic Providencia and Miraflores ceramic spheres, although whatever that role, it was a prominent one in the long distance movement of pottery.

THE EARLY CLASSIC

Preliminary analyses led us to the conclusion that Early Classic ceramics, A.D. 200–400, were neither abundant nor easy to identify since only 15 sites had identifiable Early Classic pottery, known as the Oscuro Complex (Figure 8). In part this may be due to the fact that formal ceramic "markers" for the Early Classic are highly variable across the Pacific Coast and neighboring highlands. The southeastern coastal pottery seems to lack the white-washed

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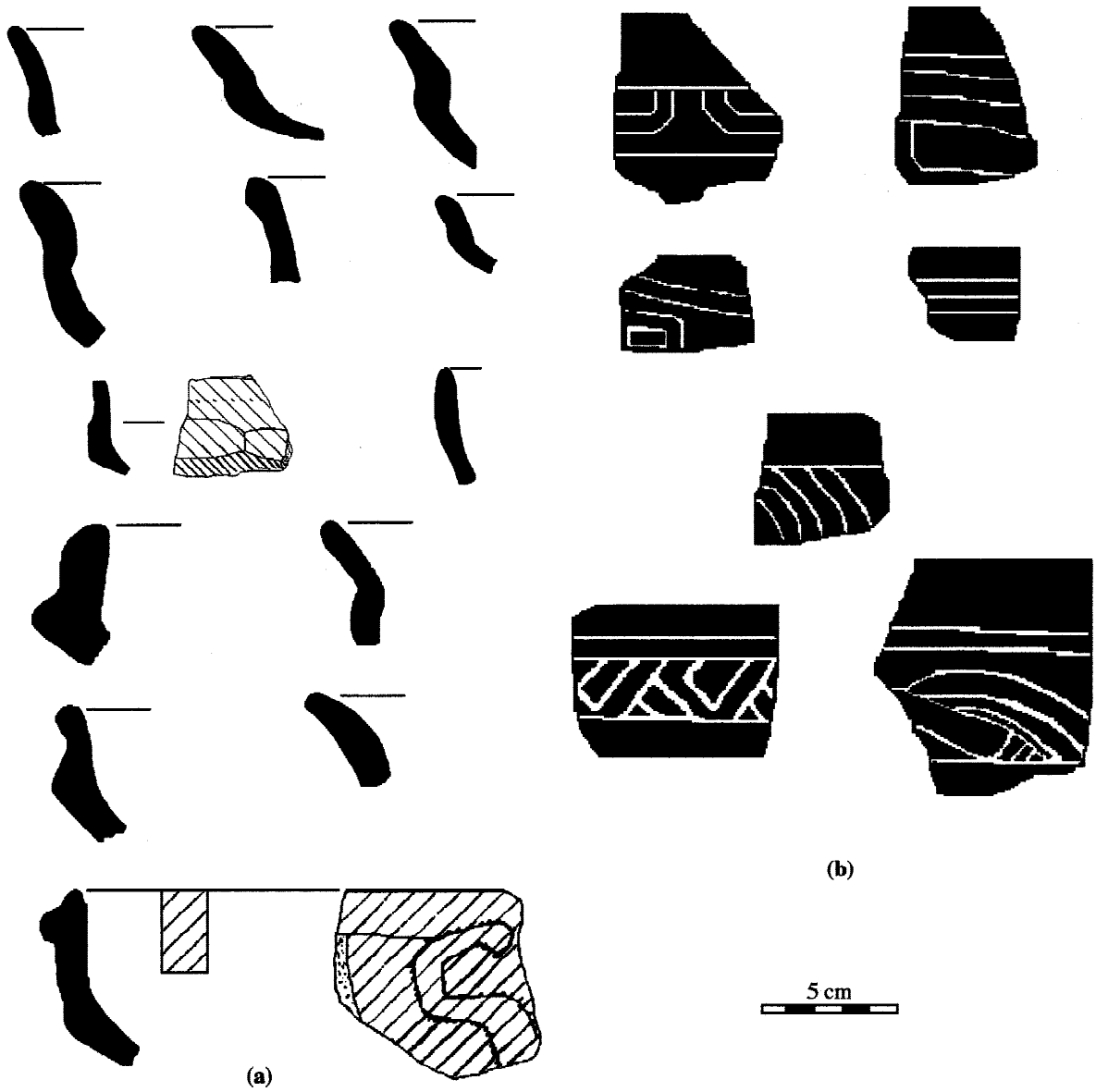


Figure 6. Examples of (a) Fine Red and (b) Verbena Black Brown pottery from the Late Preclassic Ceiba Ceramic Complex, 400 B.C.–A.D. 200.

Achiguate shallow bowls and groove-lipped jars that are found in the Early Classic in neighboring Escuintla (Bove 1993; Bove et al. 1992; Medrano 1992). The ceramic type Esperanza Flesh, which makes its appearance in the Early Classic (Bove 1996) but continues into the Middle Classic, is present in only very small numbers at southeastern coastal sites. Additionally, if Usulutan ceramics persisted in these sites until A.D. 400 as they did at Santa Leticia in El Salvador (Demarest 1986), then we may be under-representing the Early Classic population, or even misidentifying some Terminal Preclassic pottery that might have been manufactured well into the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Alternatively, there may in fact be a population decline in the Early Classic period, perhaps tied into volcanic episodes in nearby El Salvador at the beginning of the Early Classic period (Estrada Belli 1998, 1999).

At the large center of La Maquina, in the Río Esclavos drainage, test-pit excavations have produced mixed deposits that include unslipped or red slipped, everted wide-rim jars with fingertip impressions and monochrome black basal-flange bowls with ring bases, probably dating to the Early Classic. Similar vessel forms have been found in surface collections from Los Cerritos, Talpetate, and Durazno, and in mixed excavated deposits from Bonete and Maneadero (see Figure 1).

THE MIDDLE CLASSIC

The Middle Classic, A.D. 400–600, is a period of growth and dense population on the southeastern Pacific Coast. Of the 154 sites surface collected, 76 have pottery dating from this period, which is

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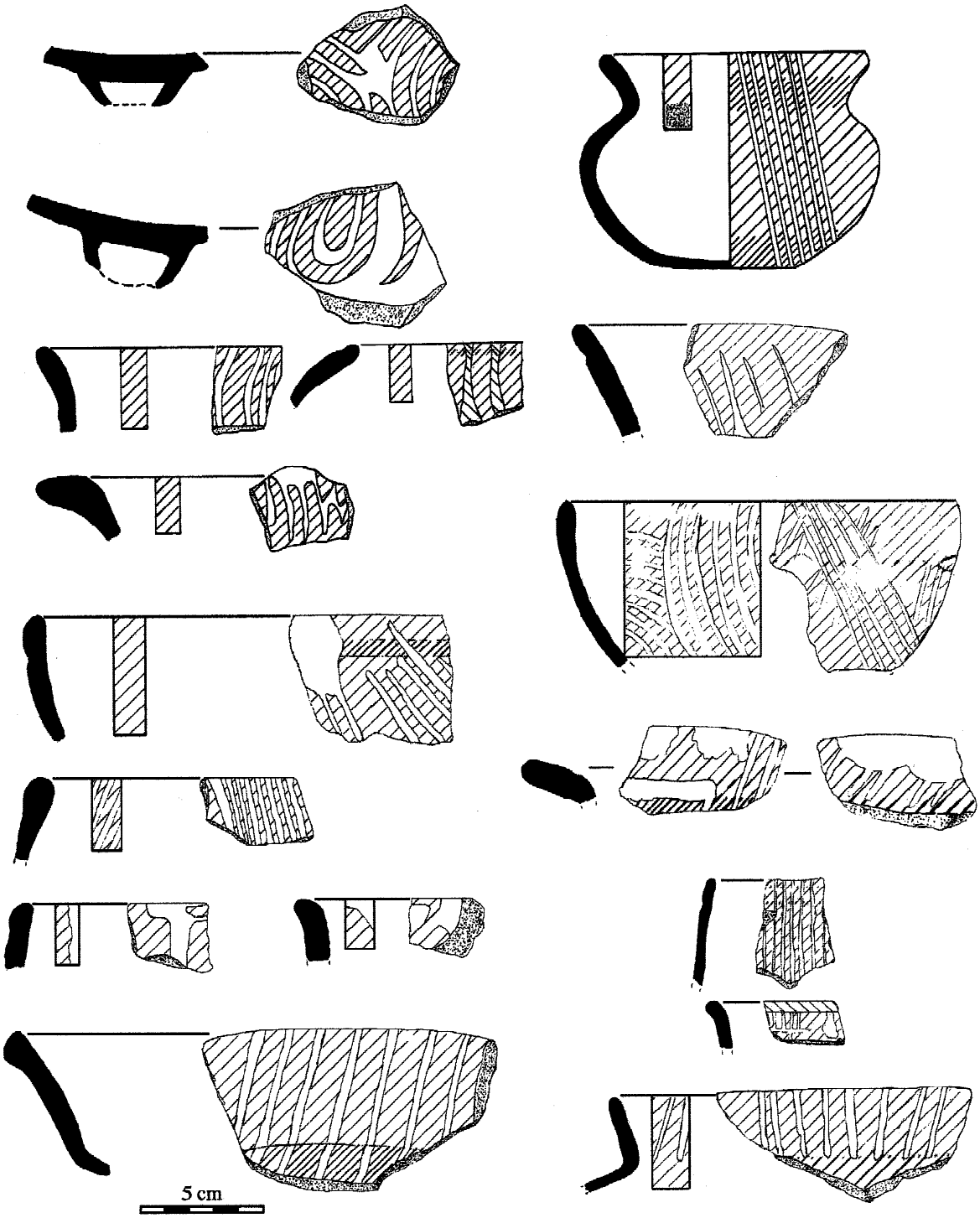


Figure 7. Usulutan decorated pottery from the Late Preclassic Ceiba Ceramic Complex, 400 B.C.–A.D. 200.

known as the Esclavos Complex. In particular, the two large centers of La Maquina and La Nueva have substantial architecture and produced large quantities of ceramics. Samples sizes for the Early Classic through the Late Classic were combined, due to the overlap of ceramic types throughout these periods, and totaled 211,576 sherds.

The greatest portion of the Middle Classic pottery assemblage includes types of a local style known as the Perdido Group; ceramics with zoned areas of a hematite red slip on white, orange or black (Figure 9b and d), and Tiquisate, red-rimmed Tiquisate, and Tiquisate Inciso (Figure 9c), all good ceramic markers for this period in neighboring Escuintla (Medrano 1992, 1995). There are

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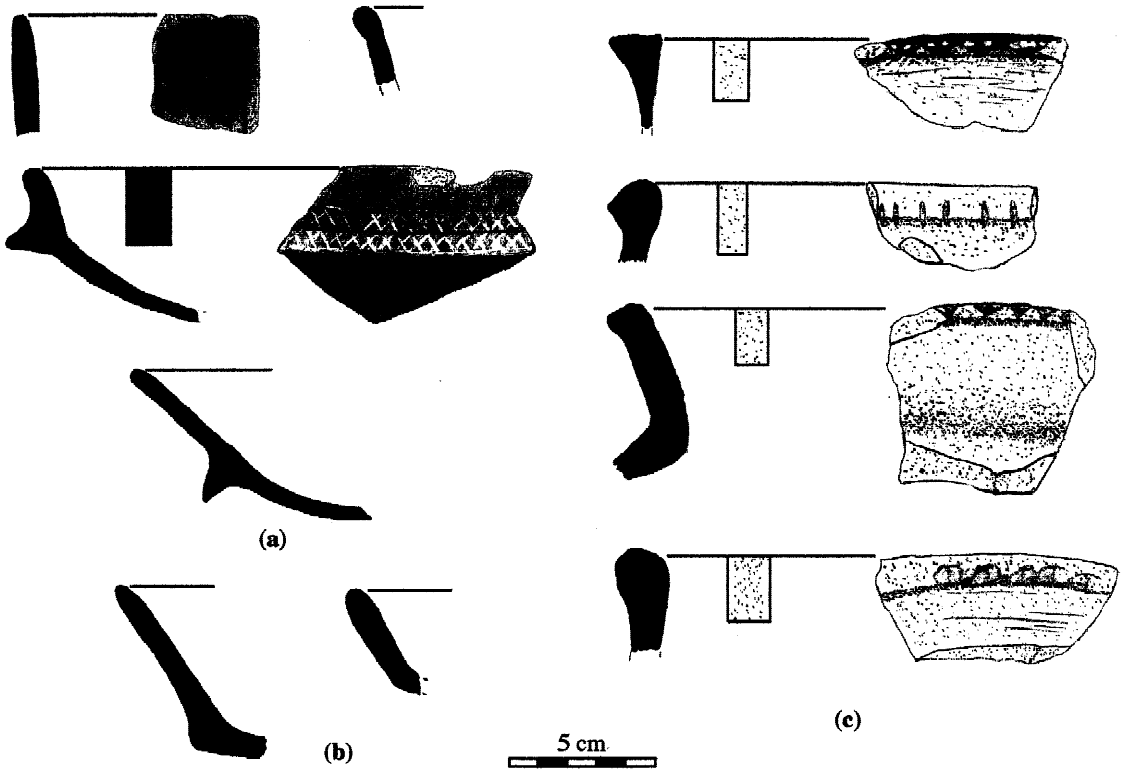


Figure 8. Pottery of the Early Classic Oscuro Ceramic Complex, A.D. 200–400: (a) typical bowl forms, (b) Esperanza Flesh bowls, and (c) typical jar forms.

large amounts of burnished orange pottery, perhaps the local equivalent of Tiquisate, monochrome blacks with crude incising, and burnished monochrome reds and oranges, occurring on vessel forms that include pedestal-base bowls with basal ridges or breaks, simple round-sided bowls, and cylinders (Figures 10 and 11). There are numerous filleted unslipped jars with everted rims, some of which have a thin red wash on the rim, and crude unslipped red rimmed bowls similar in form to coeval pottery from Kaminaljuyu (Wetherington 1978) and Bilbao (Parsons 1969). Excavations at La Maquina have produced a single radiocarbon date on carbonized wood of 1440 B.P., calibrated to A.D. 635.[2]

There are a few examples of Teotihuacan-style decoration (Figure 9a), and polychromes in Peten (not illustrated), Copador and Ulua styles (Figure 12), and their presence would suggest that during the Middle Classic southeastern coastal sites continued to operate within large interaction spheres that extended coast-to-coast throughout lowland and highland Mesoamerica. The vast majority of even the polychrome ceramics, however, are manufactured locally, based on an instrumental neutron-activation analysis that sampled 93 sherds. In fact, the polychrome data support the patterns previously identified in the Late Preclassic period.

Four polychrome ceramic groups that include Campana, Gualpopa, Copador, and Machacal ceramic types (Sharer 1978) were produced locally, given the compositional overlap with the Late Preclassic Fine Reds from this area (Kosakowsky et al. 1999). Another Copador-related group is similar in composition to the ivory/cream groups of the Late Preclassic (Neff et al. 1999), and to the Copan-focus Copador group of the Classic period (Bishop and Beaudry 1994) and suggests a source zone in western El Salvador that demonstrates continuity from the Late Preclassic through Late Classic times (Neff et al. 1999). It is important to note the low frequency of true ivory/cream-related Copador (only 5 of the total sample of 93 sherds) found in the southeastern Pacific Coast sites. It has been suggested elsewhere that interaction between this region and the source zone in western El Salvador may have been disrupted at the end of the Late Preclassic (Neff et al. 1999), and this low frequency of true cream-paste Copador polychromes in the Classic period further corroborates this hypothesis.

Finally, there are Ulua polychromes, related in chemical composition to the Campana, Gualpopa, Copador sherds, as well as chemically divergent sherds of the Arambala group (Sharer 1978), which highlight the need for further raw material sampling along the Pacific Coast and studies of this nature to understand more fully the geographic extent of both the production and source zones, as well as the sphere interactions for ceramics during the Classic period. The presence of Peten-style polychromes in these sites makes the southeastern Pacific Coast one of the southernmost regions with pottery of this type. Clearly, pottery was an important resource in Mesoamerican interaction spheres beginning as early as the Late Preclassic and perhaps surprisingly was moved over fairly large distances throughout the Classic period.

[2] The single radiocarbon sample from carbonized wood at La Maquina came from a fire pit in excavated level 22 of Test Pit 8, and was similarly processed at the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit. The uncalibrated date of 1440 B.P. correlates with a calibrated date of A.D. 635, A.D. 595–660 at the 1-sigma range, and A.D. 537–682 at the 2-sigma range.

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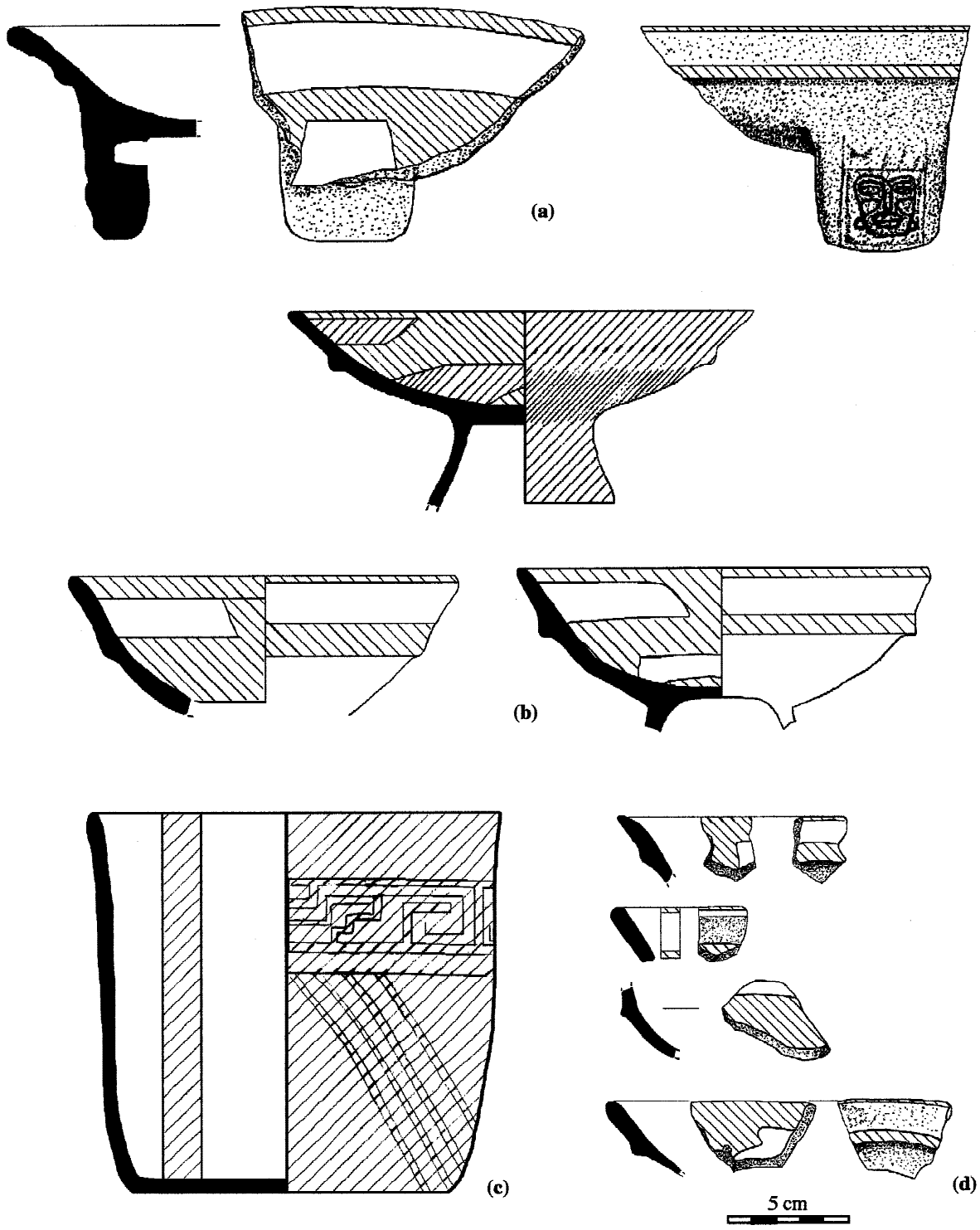


Figure 9. Pottery of the Middle Classic Esclavos Ceramic Complex, A.D. 400–600. (a) Modeled Teotihuacan-style foot, (b) and (d) Perdido Group Pottery, (c) Tiquisate Inciso.

THE LATE CLASSIC/ TERMINAL CLASSIC

Ceramic types and surface finishes identified as first appearing in the preceding Middle Classic may continue in use into the Late Classic, A.D. 600–900, making it difficult to recognize and separate the Late Classic ceramic complex from the Middle Classic, and thus we may have failed to identify correctly some Late Classic occupation. The Late Classic ceramic complex is known locally as the Chiquimulilla Complex. The appearance of very large, crude unslipped basins seems to be a good marker for the Late

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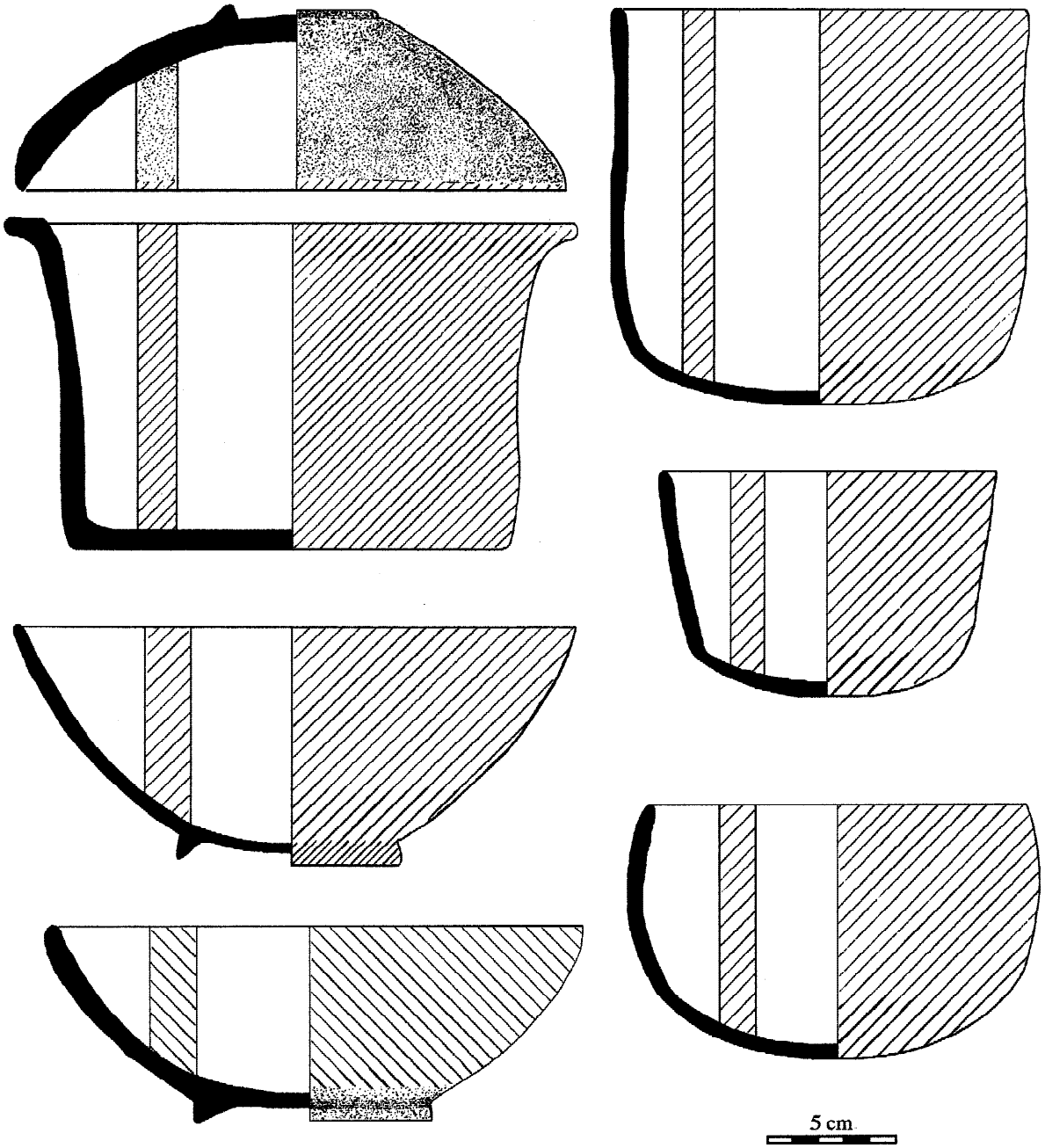


Figure 10. Typical monochrome orange and red bowl forms of the Middle Classic Esclavos Ceramic Complex, A.D. 400–600.

Classic as does the presence of plumbate, although it occurs only in small numbers in southeastern coastal sites; 16 sites exhibit these ceramic markers, including the large centers of La Maquina and La Nueva. Pedestal-based bowls on monochrome oranges and blacks virtually disappeared in favor of tall cylindrical vessels. Large everted-rim basins continue in use, and their average size increases greatly. There is also a greater frequency of tall-necked jars as well as crude handled shallow bowls that are unslipped or possess a thin red wash on the rim area (Figure 13). Polychrome pottery continued in use in relatively small numbers, and the sample includes sherds that are Copador-style and Ulua-style. As we lack radiometric dates for this period, it is unclear how late the Late Classic occupation continued on the Pacific Coast and it certainly may have continued well into the Terminal Classic, between A.D. 900 and 1000, as it does in adjacent regions (Bove 1996).

THE POSTCLASSIC

The Early Postclassic occupation on the southeastern coast cannot yet be differentiated from the Late Postclassic phase, largely due to our limited sample size of 19,095 sherds, and limited excavation data. Surface collections from six sites exhibited pottery from this time period and the Postclassic ceramic complexes are called

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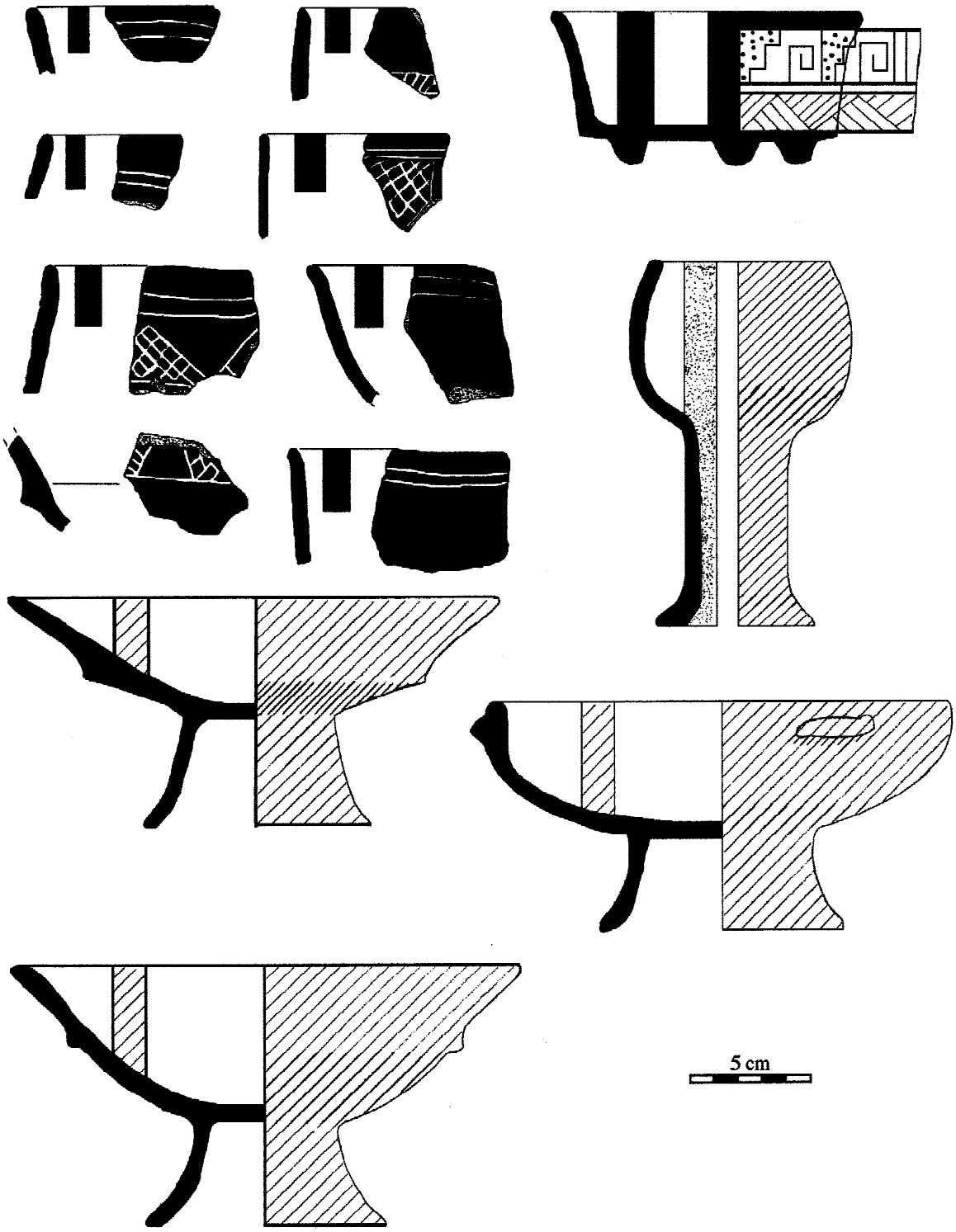


Figure 11. Incised monochrome black and monochrome orange bowl and drum forms of the Middle Classic Esclavos Ceramic Complex, A.D. 400–600.

Uxuna and Ixcaflores, respectively. Excavations at the site of Atiquipaque produced tall-necked jars (Figure 14a) similar to Postclassic pottery from Bilbao (Parsons 1969) and neighboring Escuintla (Medrano 1992), dating to between A.D. 1100 and 1500. The same deposits produced red-on-orange or buff-slipped small bowls with painted diagonal and horizontal lines (Figure 14b), and numerous shallow bowls probably dating to the earlier part of the Late Postclassic (Figure 14d). None of the pottery exhibited the typical elaboration of vessel form or design characteristic of Late Postclassic ceramics found in the Guatemalan highlands or elsewhere on the

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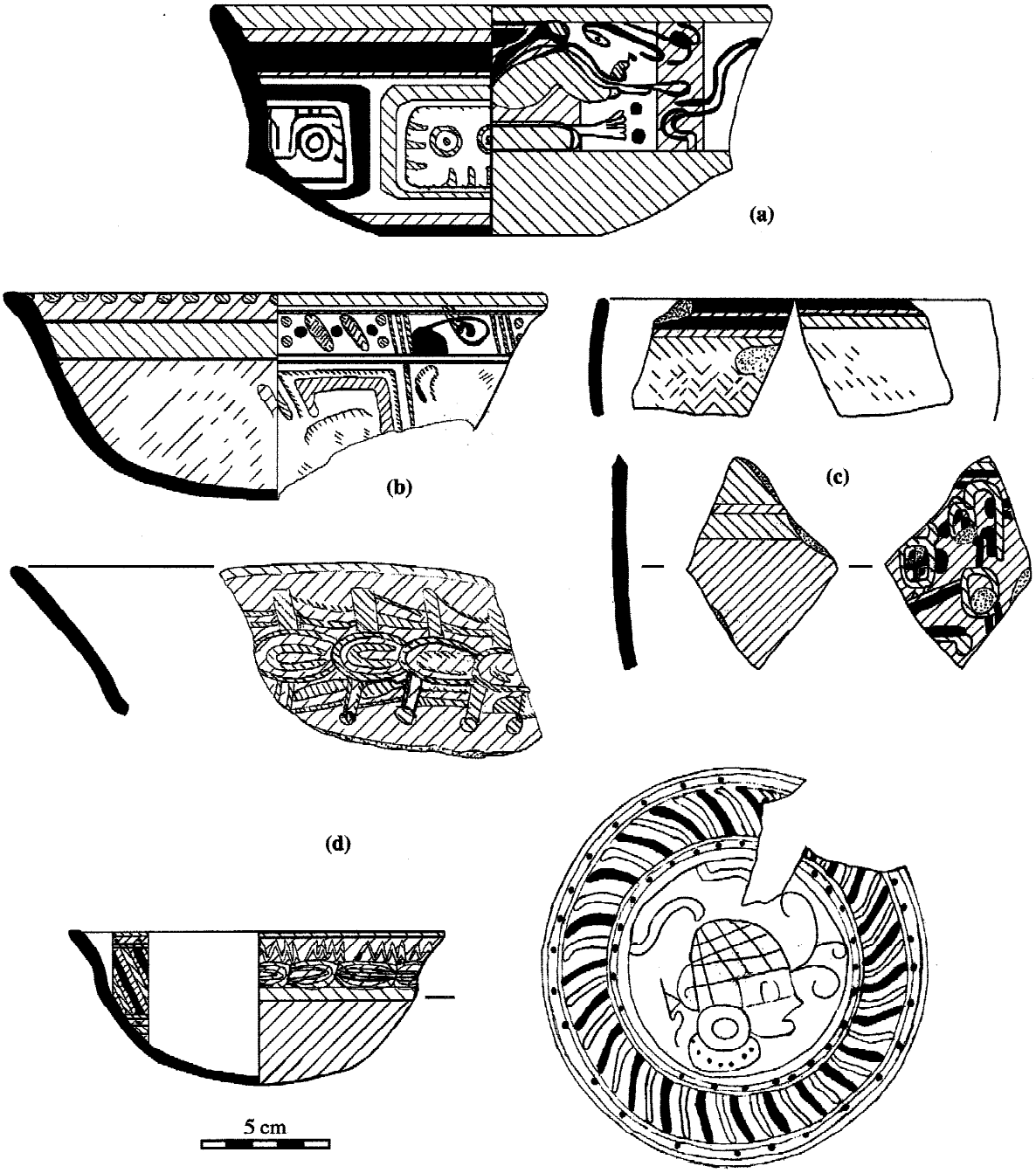


Figure 12. Examples of polychrome pottery from the Middle Classic Esclavos Ceramic Complex, A.D. 400–600, and the Late Classic Chiquimulilla Ceramic Complex, A.D. 600–900. (a) and (b) Copador style, (c) Ulua style, (d) Campana–Gualpopa–Copador ceramic group.

Pacific Coast, and there was little evidence of Late Postclassic white-on-red types in our excavations, although their possible presence has been noted in prior reports on sites in the region (Taylor 1980), and subsequent surface collections from the site of Atiquipaque produced minute quantities of Chinautla polychrome.

At the Late Preclassic piedmont site of Ujuxte, previously mentioned, a Postclassic crematory offering in a tall-necked jar was placed in front of a still-standing Late Preclassic stela (Figure 14c). Similar vessel forms have been reported from the Guatemalan highlands as crematory urns during the Postclassic, and were produced until recently at Guazacapan.

CONCLUSIONS

Prior to this current analysis of the long ceramic sequence of the southeastern coast of Guatemala little was known in detail about the pottery from this region. The ceramic evidence from the Early and Middle Preclassic periods suggests local production of ceram-

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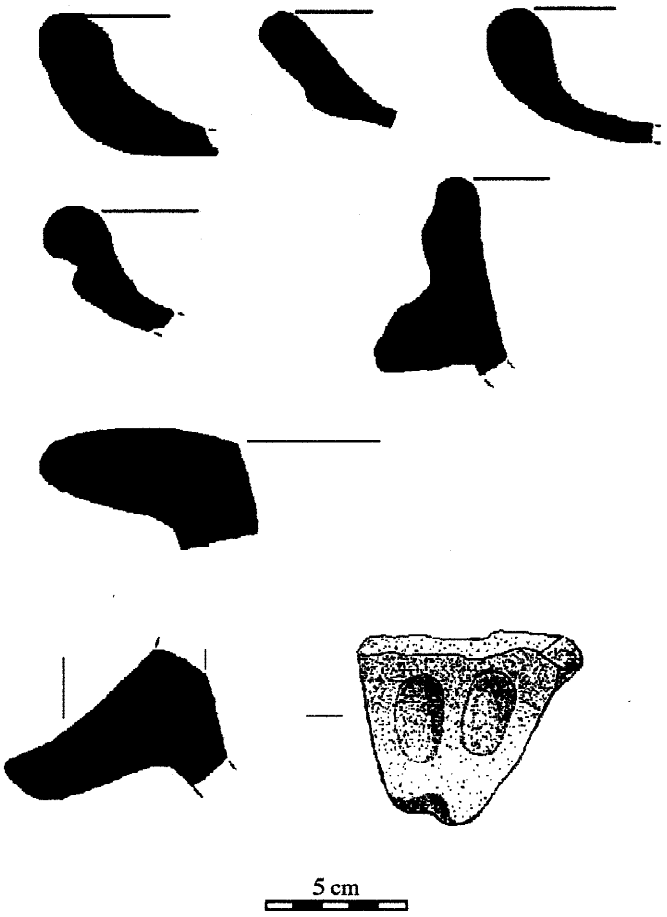


Figure 13. Typical vessel forms of the Late Classic Chiquimulilla Ceramic Complex, A.D. 600–900.

ics centered on relatively small sites in the mangrove and piedmont zones. The presence of shared ceramic modes among these early coastal ceramic complexes certainly supports the proposition for contact and interaction across a wide region, however, strong local styles are easy to identify, and thus support a concept of regionalization and localized ceramic production.

During the Late Preclassic, the southeastern coast was an important production center for Fine Red pottery which was traded widely throughout El Salvador, the Guatemalan highlands, and the Pacific Coast (Kosakowsky et al. 1999). Elite members of society may have circulated Fine Red and cream-paste Usulutan ceramics (Neff et al. 1999) through the interregional exchange and trade of prestige items for the purposes of status legitimization, through the public display of rare or elaborate goods, or alliance building between elites of different regions, thus reinforcing their position within society (Estrada Belli 1998, 1999). The settlement-pattern evidence from the southeastern coast is consistent with a system of hierarchically organized ceremonial centers of which the largest, Nueve Cerros, which sits at the center of the procurement zone for Fine Red clays, may have held primacy among its neighbors due to its size and function as a gateway community in long-distance exchange (Estrada Belli 1999).

The presence of a Lowland-style stela and altar complex at the site of Ujuxte (Estrada Belli 1998) further corroborates the prominence of long distance interactions during the Late Preclassic. We do not know yet, however, how late in time Usulutan and other Terminal Preclassic types, such as Fine Red, may have been used, or as a result, the extent of the elusive Early Classic population. Alternatively, the apparent hiatus in occupation during the Early Classic may be connected to the explosion of the Ilopango Volcano, about 80 km east. During the Classic period, the presence of Teotihuacan, Lowland Maya, Ulua, and Copador-style polychrome ceramics suggests networks of trade and communication formalized in the Late Preclassic, continued and became institutionalized in the Classic period, and spanned much of Mesoamerica in what is often referred to as the "Southern Maya Sphere" (Bishop et al. 1989; Demarest and Sharer 1986).

The apparent prominent role of the southeastern coast in ceramic production during the Late Preclassic certainly indicates the exchange of pottery and other goods by large and growing polities was an important and little understood part of the sociopolitical and economic interactions across vast regions of Mesoamerica (Kosakowsky et al. 1999; Neff et al. 1999). By the Classic period, the large center of Copan grew to dominate wide spheres of interaction in highland Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. It is an intriguing hypothesis that the cities of the southeastern coast were directly linked to their eastern neighbors, although more peripherally than to their western neighbors. The ceramic, civic/ceremonial architectural, and sculptural evidence from the southeastern Pacific Coast also indicates it was involved in the Cotzumalguapa Nuclear Zone (Chinchilla 1996; Estrada Belli 1998, 1999; Estrada Belli and Kosakowsky 1998) which stretched to the west into Escuintla (Bove 1995) and to the east into Pacific El Salvador (Amaroli 1984, 1987). These Classic-period interaction networks brought together different ethnic groups and societies from the lowlands and the highlands, and the southeastern coastal sites played an important role in bridging the geographical and cultural gap between them.

RESUMEN

Los resultados de las prospecciones y excavaciones de la Universidad de Boston desde 1995 a 1997 en la costa de los Departamentos de Santa Rosa y Jutiapa en el sureste de Guatemala se utilizaron para construir una primera secuencia cronológica para esta región anteriormente poco estudiada. Los datos incluyen cerámica de superficie de 154 sitios y de contextos excavados en 27 pozos de prueba en ocho sitios diferentes que ha sido analizada con el método de tipo-variedad. La comparación de tipos diagnósticos de cada época junto a tres fechas radiométricas de Carbono-14 ha permitido la construcción de una secuencia ininterrumpida de aproximadamente 3000 años de duración, desde 1300 a.C. hasta la conquista Española. El método utilizado permitió la identificación de cambios y continuidades en patrones de producción cerámica a través del tiempo así como la identificación de relaciones interregionales con áreas culturales vecinas en cada época.

La secuencia inicia en los asentamientos sedentarios del preclásico temprano de las lagunas costeras que demuestran fuertemente su pertenencia a una esfera cerámica y cultural que va de Chiapas, México hasta el Oeste de El Salvador y es contemporánea con las fases Ocos y Cuadros/Jocotal

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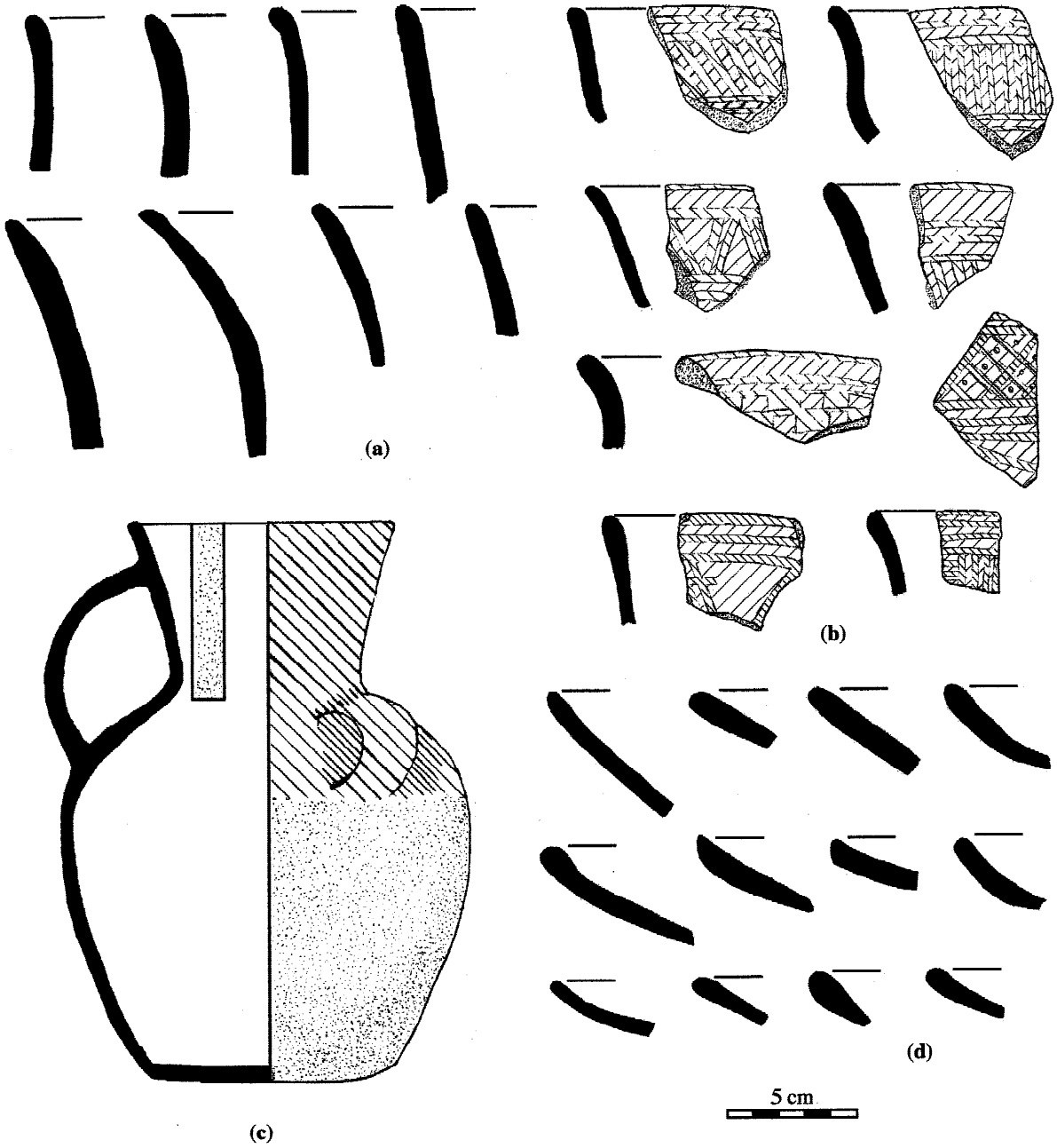


Figure 14. Pottery of the Early Postclassic Uxuna Ceramic Complex, A.D. 900–1200, and the Late Postclassic Ixcaflores Ceramic Complex, A.D. 1200–1500: (a) typical jar forms, (b) small orange and red bowls, (c) crematory cache vessel from the site of Ujuxte, and (d) typical *comale* forms.

del oeste de Guatemala y Chiapas. El desarrollo cultural y estilístico del preclásico Medio incluye la colonización del interior de la costa y la fundación de centros mayores con relaciones externas con los sitios de Monte Alto y Kaminaljuyu más marcadas.

El preclásico tardío es una época de gran desarrollo y complejidad social en esta región donde se construyen grandes sitio ceremoniales con estelas y altares en piedra. La cerámica demuestra la completa existencia de esta región como parte de la esfera cerámica y cultural denominada esfera Providencia/Miraflores que abarca los altiplanos y costa sur de Guatemala y el oeste del Salvador. Entre los tipos más diagnósticos en toda región de esta esfera cerámica se encuentra la cerámica Roja Fina que de acuerdo a un examen de activación de neutrones de las pastas fue producida en la costa Sureste y exportada a las áreas vecinas. También muy comunes en la costa sureste son tipos cerámicos con decoración Usulutan.

Después de un posible hiato en el clásico temprano la región surge a su máximo auge. La cerámica demuestra fuertes vínculos con el área de Escuintla y Cotzumalguapa con tipos de los grupos Tiquisate y Perdido, y algunos indicios de relaciones con las áreas de Copan y las Tierras Bajas Maya.

El período postclásico es de difícil definición debido a una muestra limitada. Sin embargo, la cerámica se relaciona con los tipos producidos en Escuintla y el Altiplano en la misma época, e incluye tipos precursores de la cerámica artesanal producida en la época histórica.

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