THE CERAMIC COMPLEXES OF THE
TAYASAL-PAXCAMAN ZONE, LAKE PETEN, GUATEMALA

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Central to the Peten region of Guatemala is the large bifurcated body of
water known as Lake Peten-Itza. The Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone is located on the
peninsula of land that divides the lake in half. Archaeological investigations were
undertaken in this area in 1971, 1977, and 1979, and resulted in the production of a
controlled body of excavated ceramics (A. Chase 1979, 1983). The sequence
provided by these ceramics extends from the middle part of the Maya Preclassic
Period to the Historic occupation of the region (Fig. 1).

*Chunzalam Ceramic Complex

The earliest recognized pottery from the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone is related
to the Mamom Ceramic Sphere (see Willey, Culbert, and Adams 1967 for a review
of sphere designations; see P. Rice 1979a for comparative data from Yaxha), and
its date may be projected back to approximately 900 B.C. In general, the ceramics
exhibit a harder paste and glossier slip than those of subsequent complexes.
Incision and fluting occur relatively frequently as decoration.

*Indicates ceramic complexes, wares, types, or varieties established on the basis of
materials in the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone.

UAXACTUN UNSLIPPED WARE

Achiotes Ceramic Group
Achiotes Unslipped: Achiotes Variety

Jocote Ceramic Group
Palma Daub: Variety Unspecified

*Temchay Ceramic Group
*Temchay Burnished: Temchay Variety
*Cantaral Grooved: Cantaral Variety

FLORES WAXY WARE

Chunhinta Ceramic Group
Chunhinta Black: Chunhinta Variety
Deprecio Incised: Deprecio Variety
Centenario Fluted: Centenario Variety
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**Figure 1.** Sequences of ceramic complexes at sites in the southern Maya Lowlands.
*Vecanxan Ceramic Group
  *Vecanxan Mottled: Vecanxan Variety
  *Cortales Fluted: Cortales Variety

Joventud Ceramic Group
  Joventud Red: Joventud Variety
  Guitara Incised: Guitara Variety

Pital Ceramic Group
  Pital Cream: Pital Variety
  Pital Cream: *Muxeusos Variety
  Muxanal Red-on-cream: Muxanal Variety

MARS ORANGE WARE

Savana Ceramic Group
  Savana Orange: Savana Variety

*Kax-Chicanel Ceramic Complex

The two facets of the Kax Ceramic Complex are characterized by monochrome slipping—primarily red, black, or cream. The complex may be dated from 200 B.C. to approximately A.D. 300, and it is a full member of the Chicanel Ceramic Sphere. Either intentionally or unintentionally, many slipped vessels within the complex exhibit a variety of the three base colors. Three kinds of paste may be distinguished. One is very hard and is derivative from the Chunzalam Ceramic Complex; it is characteristic of the early facet pottery of Kax. The second is quite brittle and usually occurs only with red-slipped ceramics; it spans both facets of Kax. The third is an ash-tempered paste that appears primarily during the late facet of the Kax Ceramic Complex.

UAXACTUN UNSLIPPED WARE

Paila Ceramic Group
  Paila Unslipped: Paila Variety

Sapote Ceramic Group
  Sapote Striated: Sapote Variety

PASO CABALLO WAXY WARE

Sierra Ceramic Group
  Sierra Red: Sierra Variety
  Sierra Red: Ahuacan Variety
  Sierra Red: *Ax Variety (late facet)
  Laguna Verde Incised: Laguna Verde Variety (early facet)
  Ahcab Red-on-buff: Ahcab Variety (early facet)
  Repasto Black-on-red: Repasto Variety
  *Xex Red: Xex Variety (late facet)
  Anil Orange: Anil Variety(?)

Flor Ceramic Group
  Flor Cream: Flor Variety
Iguana Creek White: Variety Unspecified (late facet)
Accordian Incised: Accordian Variety
Pochitocus Punctated: Pochitocus Variety
Mateo Red-on-cream: Mateo Variety
*Coxu Black-on-cream: Coxu Variety
*Bucut Multicolor: Bucut Variety

Polvero Ceramic Group
Polvero Black: Polvero Variety
Lechugal Incised: Lechugal Variety

Escobal Ceramic Group
Escobal Red-on-buff: Escobal Variety

*UNNAMED GLABROUS WARE

*Topol Ceramic Group
*Topol Orange: Variety Unspecified (late facet)

UNSPECIFIED WARE

Unspecified Ceramic Group
Sacluc Black-on-Orange: Variety Unspecified (late facet)

*Yaxcheel Ceramic Complex

Dating from approximately A.D. 300 to 400, the Yaxcheel Ceramic Complex links the Late Preclassic and Early Classic Periods in the Zone. The complex is a peripheral member of the Floral Park Ceramic Sphere. Unlike Floral Park complexes, however, polychrome decoration is extremely rare within the Zone. This decorative absence, in fact, characterizes the Early Classic Period in the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone; in contrast, this is a time that is architecturally well represented at Tayasal and especially at Cenote.

UAXACTUN UNSLIPPED WARE

Quintal Ceramic Group
Quintal Unslipped: Quintal Variety
Quintal Unslipped: Variety Unspecified

Triunfo Ceramic Group
Triunfo Striated: Variety Unspecified

PASO CABALLO WAXY WARE

Polvero Ceramic Group
Polvero Black: Variety Unspecified

PETEN GLOSS WARE

Aguila Ceramic Group
Aguila Orange: Aguila Variety
HOLMUL ORANGE WARE

Aguacate Ceramic Group
  Aguacate Orange: Variety Unspecified
  Guacamallo Red-on-orange: Variety Unspecified

*UNNAMED GLABROUS WARE

*Topol Ceramic Group
  *Topol Orange: Topol Variety
  *Topol Orange: Varieties Unspecified
  Metapa Trichrome: Variety Unspecified

*Paxbono Ceramic Group
  *Paxbono Black: Paxbono Variety

UNSPECIFIED WARE

Unspecified Ceramic Group
  Saeluc Black-on-orange: Variety Unspecified
  Caramba Red-on-red-orange: Variety Unspecified

*Hoxchunchan Ceramic Complex

Following a brief flirtation with the Floral Park Ceramic Sphere, the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone peripherally participated in the Tzakol Ceramic Sphere, well known from Uaxactun (Smith 1955) and Tikal (Culbert 1965-1975) to the north. The basal-flanged polychrome bowls found at these latter two sites, however, are not at all common in the Zone. With the significant exception of this lack of polychrome, the Hoxchunchan Ceramic Complex falls squarely within the Tzakol Ceramic Sphere. The complex may be dated from A.D. 400 to 600.

UAXACTUN UNSLIPPED WARE

Quintal Ceramic Group
  Quintal Unslipped: Quintal Variety
  Quintal Unslipped: Variety Unspecified
  Candelario Appliquéd: Candelario Variety
  *Yohchalek Modeled: Yohchalek Variety (Fig. 2b)

Triunfo Ceramic Group
  Triunfo Striated: Triunfo Variety

PETEN GLOSS WARE

Aguila Ceramic Group
  Aguila Orange: Aguila Variety
  Aguila Orange: Variety Unspecified
  Aguila Orange: *Oxpayac Variety

Dos Hermanos Ceramic Group
  Dos Hermanos Red: Dos Hermanos Variety (late)

Pucte Ceramic Group
  Pucate Brown: Pucate Variety
Balanza Ceramic Group
Balanza Black: Balanza Variety
Lucha Incised: Lucha Variety
Urita Gouged-Incised: Urita Variety (Fig. 2a)
Paradero Fluted: Paradero Variety
Maroma Impressed: Maroma Variety
Maroma Impressed: *Chachachurron Variety
Positas Modeled: Variety Unspecified

Dos Arroyos Ceramic Group
Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome: Dos Arroyos Variety
Caldero Buff-polychrome: Variety Unspecified

Discordia Ceramic Group
Discordia Black: Discordia Variety

*Pakoe-Tepeu Ceramic Complex

The advent of abundant polychromy in the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone co-occurs with the onset of the Late Classic Period. The Pakoe Ceramic Complex dates from A.D. 600 to 700 and is a full member of the Tepeu Ceramic Sphere. The types within this complex correspond to similar ones described for Uaxactun (Smith 1955) and Tikal (Culbert 1965-1975).
UAXACTUN UNSLIPPED WARE

Cambio Ceramic Group
Cambio Unslipped: Variety Unspecified
Ucum Unslipped: Variety Unspecified
*Chilonche Unslipped: Chilonche Variety

Encanto Ceramic Group
Encanto Striated: Encanto Variety

PETEN GLOSS WARE

Tasital Ceramic Group
Tasital Red: Tasital Variety

Molino Ceramic Group
Molino Black: Molino Variety

Tinaja Ceramic Group
Chequiiste Impressed: Variety Unspecified
Subin Red: Variety Unspecified

Figure 3. Classic Period pottery of Tayasal. Pakac-Tepeu Ceramic Complex: a, Saxche Orange-polychrome: Saxche Variety; b, Bejucal Brown-on-buff: Bejucal Variety. (Drawings by Sarah J. Ruch, a; Arlen F. Chase, b; 1/3 scale.)
Saxche Ceramic Group
   Saxche Orange-polychrome: Saxche Variety (Fig. 3a)
   Saxche Orange-polychrome: Variety Unspecified
   Uaecho Black-on-orange: Uaecho Variety
   Desquite Red-on-orange: Desquite Variety
   Bejucal Brown-on-buff: Bejucal Variety (Fig. 3b)
   Jama Red-polychrome: Jama Variety
   Juleki Cream-polychrome: Variety Unspecified
   Sibal Buff-polychrome: Variety Unspecified

*Hobo–Tepeu Ceramic Complex

The Hobo Ceramic Complex, dating from A.D. 700 to after A.D. 900, may be subdivided into two temporal facets; both facets are members of the Tepeu Ceramic Sphere. The early facet of Hobo is fully integrated with the ceramics from elsewhere in the Peten; the late facet is clearly derivative from the early facet. Unlike other known Peten ceramic complexes, however, the Tayasal-Paxcama Zone continues in the Tepeu Ceramic Sphere and rarely exhibits the relatively common model-carving found in the Eznab Ceramic Complex to the north (Culbert 1973) or the abundant fine paste wares found in the Boca-Jimba and Bayal Ceramic Complexes to the south (Sabloff 1973, 1975; Adams 1971, 1973). Unlike the pottery in these other complexes, the Hobo Ceramic Complex evinces ties to the central part of Belize during both facets, specifically to Kik Red (D. Chase 1982: 75-76) in the early facet (as witnessed in Bu. T108-1), and between the locally made Simaron Group (A. Chase 1979: 95-96, 1983: 1213) and Montejo Polychrome from Barton Ramie (Gifford 1976: 267) in the late facet.

UAXACTUN UNSLIPPED WARE

Cambio Ceramic Group
   Cambio Unslipped: Cambio Variety
   Cambio Unslipped: Xax Variety
   Maroma Impressed: Variety Unspecified
   Miseric Appliqué: Miseric Variety
   Pedregal Modeled: Pedregal Variety

Encanto Ceramic Group
   Encanto Striated: Encanto Variety

PETEN GLOSS WARE

Nanzal Ceramic Group
   Nanzal Red: Nanzal Variety

Achote Ceramic Group (late facet)
   Achote Black: Variety Unspecified

Meditation Ceramic Group (early and late facets)
   Meditation Black: Variety Unspecified

Palmar Ceramic Group (early)
   Palmar Orange-polychrome: Palmar Variety
   Yuhaectal Black-on-red: Yuhaectal Variety
Tayasal-Paxcama Zone

Zacaté Ceramic Group
  Zacaté Cream-polychrome: Zacaté Variety
  Paixban Buff-polychrome: Paixban Variety
  Mex Composite: Mex Variety

Tinaja Ceramic Group
  Tinaja Red: Tinaja Variety
  Tinaja Red: *Tanaha Variety
  Tinaja Red: Variety Unspecified
  Pantano Impress: Pantano Variety
  Chequiste Impress: Variety Unspecified
  Cameron Incised: Cameron Variety
  Cameron Incised: Variety Unspecified

Asote Ceramic Group
  Asote Orange: Variety Unspecified

Maquina Ceramic Group
  Maquina Brown: Maquina Variety
  Pepet Incised: Variety Unspecified

Danta Ceramic Group
  Danta Orange-polychrome: Variety Unspecified (Fig. 4)
  Saptan Buff-polychrome: Saptan Variety
  Lombriz Orange-polychrome: Variety Unspecified
  Joyac Cream-polychrome: Variety Unspecified
  Jato Black-on-gray: Variety Unspecified
  *Chumeru Polychrome: Chumeru Variety
  Leona Red-on-orange: Variety Unspecified

BRITISH HONDURAS VOLCANIC ASH WARE

*Simaron Ceramic Group
  *Simaron Red-on-orange: Simaron Variety
  *Tziche Polychrome: Tziche Variety

FINE ORANGE WARE

Altar Ceramic Group
  Tumba Black-on-orange: Tumba Variety

Group Unspecified
  Types and Varieties Unspecified

PUUC or CHICHEN RED WARE

Kik Ceramic Group
  Kik Red: Variety Unspecified
  Tzibana Gouged-incised: Variety Unspecified

THIN SLATE WARE

Ticul Ceramic Group
  Xul Incised: Variety Unspecified
Figure 4. Terminal Classic Period pottery of Tayasal. Hobo-Tepeu Ceramic Complex, Danta Polychrome; Variety Unspecified. (Drawing by Sarah J. Ruch; roll-out about 1/4 scale, vessel 1/3 scale.)

*Chilcoth-New Town Ceramic Complex*

The Chilcoth Ceramic Complex represents a break from the Central Peten ceramic tradition; it may be dated from approximately A.D. 900 to 1200. Two facets may be defined for the complex. While there is a temporal division between these two Chilcoth facets, the early facet of Chilcoth may be temporally equivalent to the late facet of Hobo. Thus, early Chilcoth and late Hobo may represent spatially (and culturally) separated ceramic complexes. As previously noted for the Hobo Ceramic Complex, some linkages may be seen in the Chilcoth Ceramic Complex to central Belize. The complex is a full member of the New Town Ceramic Sphere (Sharer and Chase 1976: 289-291). While the early facet exhibits greater standardization of types, the late facet of Chilcoth shows a proliferation of ceramic groups and variability, perhaps representing an era of experimentation and integration.

*PASAJA UNSLIPPED WARE*

*Nohpek Ceramic Group*
  *Nohpek Unslipped: Nohpek Variety*
  *Suetuk Incised: Suetuk Variety*

*CHAPEL UNSLIPPED WARE*

Maskall Ceramic Group (early facet)
  Maskall Unslipped: Variety Unspecified

*TOHIL PLUMBATE WARE*

Tohil Ceramic Group
  Malacatan Modeled: Malacatan Variety (early facet)
Probably SAN PABLO GLOSS WARE

Daylight Ceramic Group (early facet)
Daylight Orange: Daylight Variety

*VITZIL ORANGE-RED WARE

Augustine Ceramic Group
Augustine Red: Augustine Variety
Augustine Red: *Buete Variety
Pek Polychrome: Pek Variety (Fig. 5a)
*Chacocate Resist: Chacocate Variety
*Hobitzina Composite: Hobitzina Variety
*Hobonmo Incised: Hobonmo Variety

VOLADOR WARE

(Volador was initially established as a Red ware. At present there is no agreement on a single class term for this ware.)

Tanche Ceramic Group (late facet)
Tanche Red: Tanche Variety
*Jobompiche Red-on-paste: Jobompiche Variety
*Chachacate Polychrome: Chachacate Variety
*Purucila Incised: Purucila Variety

Trapeche Ceramic Group (late facet)
Trapeche Pink: Trapeche Variety
Xuluc Incised: Xuluc Variety
Xuluc Incised: Tan Variety
Mul Polychrome: Mul Variety
Dolorido Polychrome: Dolorido Variety
*Chuntuci Composite: Chuntuci Variety

Paxcaman Ceramic Group (late facet)
Ixpop Polychrome: Variety Unspecified

*Cocahmut Ceramic Complex

The Cocahmut Ceramic Complex may be dated from A.D. 1200 to 1450; it, too, is a full member of the New Town Ceramic Sphere. The diversity seen within the late facet of Chilco pottery is replaced by an emphasis on standardization of types in the Cocahmut Ceramic Complex. Incision forms the primary decorative mode during the earlier part of the complex, but is rarely used toward the end of the complex. This ceramic complex is well represented in the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone and population appears to peak during this time (A. Chase 1982, Table 43; see also P. Rice 1979d for comparative data from Topoxte).

*PASAJA UNSLIPPED WARE

*Nohpek Ceramic Group
*Nohpek Unslipped: Nohpek Variety
*Nohpek Unslipped: Variety Unspecified
Figure 5. Postclassic Period pottery of Tayasal. Chilcceb-New Town Ceramic Complex, a, Pek Polychrome; Pek Variety; Cocahmut-New Town Ceramic Complex, b, Piel Incised; Variety Unspecified. (Drawing by Sarah J. Ruch; 1/3 scale.)
Puxteal Modeled: Puxteal Variety
Special Unnamed

VOLADOR WARE

Paxcaman Ceramic Group
Paxcaman Red: Paxcaman Variety
Picu Incised: Picu Variety
Picu Incised: Variety Unspecified (Fig. 5b)
Picu Incised: *Thub Variety
Ixpop Polychrome: Ixpop Variety
Saca Polychrome: Saca Variety
*Chaman Modeled: Chaman Variety
*Juntecholol Composite: Juntecholol Variety

TOHIL PLUMBATE WARE

Tohil Ceramic Group
Tohil Plumbate: Tohil Variety (or Tejutla)

*Kauil Ceramic Complex

The Kauil Ceramic Complex appears to represent a population decline in the Lake Peten vicinity. This complex spans the time from the Late Postclassic through the Historic Period and is tentatively dated from A.D. 1450 to 1750. It has not been formally assigned to a ceramic sphere. Some of its unslipped ceramics are almost identical with those ethnographically recorded from the village of San Jose on the northwest side of Lake Peten (Reina and Hill 1978: 41).

*PASAJA UNSLIPPED WARE

*Nohpek Ceramic Group (early)
*Nohpek Unslipped: Variety Unspecified

MONTICULO UNSLIPPED WARE(?)

*Chilo Ceramic Group (late)
*Chilo Unslipped: Chilo Variety

*Xuxchichini Ceramic Group
Xuxchichini Unslipped: Xuxchichini Variety

VOLADOR WARE

Paxcaman Ceramic Group
Paxcaman Red: *Oppol Variety
Macanche Red-on-cream: Variety Unspecified

CLEMENCIA CREAM PASTE WARE

(This paste ware designation applies to the distinctive fabric composition of the vessels in this category. It is not directly comparable to the traditional wares,
such as Peten Gloss Ware, that are established on the basis of surface finish and technological method.)

Topoxte Ceramic Group
   Topoxte Red: Topoxte Variety
   Chompoxtle Red-on-cream: Chompoxtle Variety

WARE UNSPECIFIED

Tachis Ceramic Group
   Tachis Red-on-paste: Tachis Variety

Concluding Remarks

When compared to Tikal and Uaxactun to the north, or to Seibal and Altar de Sacrificios to the south, the pottery recovered from the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone indicates that this area cannot easily be placed into a superregional ceramic framework. The zone's individuality in ceramics is also replicated in the settlement data and other archaeological remains (A. Chase 1983). In spite of the regionalization evident in the Tayasal-Paxcaman Zone, its overall developmental sequence does conform to the general trajectory of the Southern Lowlands. The punctuated evolution of Maya civilization is especially pronounced in the ceramic sequence, however, in the innovation and experimentation present at both the upper and lower ends of the Classic Period.

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