

THE IKILIK CERAMIC COMPLEX
AT NOHMUL, NORTHERN BELIZE

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The most comprehensive ceramic analysis thus far undertaken for the Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic Period in the northernmost portion of Belize has been based on ceramics collected in four seasons of work by the Corozal Project from 1973 to 1976 (Pring 1975, 1976, 1977). Pring (1976) used the ceramics from these investigations to tentatively establish a regional sequence for northern Belize. He defined the regional trends on a general level, but inappropriately used the term "complex" for the ceramic units that he was describing. His discussion of northern Belize ceramics, however, is more consistent with what has been described in the literature as a "ceramic sphere," defined as two or more sites that share "a majority of their most common types" (Willey and others 1967: 306), rather than a true ceramic complex, defined as "the full ceramic content of an archaeological unit" (Gifford, 1976: 11), usually from a single site. This is especially evident in Pring's (1976: 43) discussion of the "Santana Tepeu Complex," for which he mentions at least "two distinct ceramic traditions" that are spatially overlapping.

Pring (1976: 44) himself notes that "not enough analysis has been undertaken on this material to determine what became of it in the Terminal Classic" and that "the whole period, encompassed within the Rancho complex, is poorly defined." He further states that "at El Pozito the Terminal Classic complex ties in closely with San Jose V . . . while at other locations there is a basic similarity with Tepeu 3 material." Here Pring suggests the probable existence of more than one archaeological complex in northern Belize during the Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic era. Because the ceramic content of the "Rancho Complex" was described only in general and not specifically listed, it cannot be used for analysis and comparison.

The Nohmul pottery, recently excavated from Structures 9 and 20, provides a specific sample pertaining to the Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic Period at a single site in the northern Belize region (D. Z.

Chase n.d.; D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase 1982). This material may relate to Pring's sample from the outlying part of Nohmul and its "Terminal Classic" deposits as represented in "a number of graves" and in the "port mound" (Pring 1976: 44), but lacking ceramic unit designations and specific content descriptions, this remains uncertain. In the absence of a formal complex definition at the site by Pring, the ceramic material recovered from coeval Structures 9 and 20 is provisionally defined here as the Ikilik Ceramic Complex; it is more fully presented in D. Z. Chase, n.d. As the original definition of "Rancho" was more synonymous with a ceramic sphere, the term is used for the Rancho Ceramic Sphere, of which the Ikilik Ceramic Complex from epicentral Nohmul is a part. This terminology retains the flavor of Pring's original use and is proposed as a solution to the complicated problem outlined above.

IKILIK CERAMIC COMPLEX

The Ikilik Ceramic Complex, as defined for Nohmul, contains eight ceramic groups consisting of six different wares and three different paste wares (Table 1). Except for the Chambel Ceramic Group and the Ohel Ceramic Group, paste composition of types in the Ikilik Ceramic Complex is quite uniform and is designated Kayum Paste Ware, characterized by a hard, light buff colored paste with plentiful silt-sized calcite particles.

The defined complex consists of two striated groups, two slateware groups, three redware groups, and one blackware group. On a temporal horizon, the Ohel Ceramic Group and Taak Ceramic Group probably largely overlap an earlier unnamed ceramic complex, while the Kik, Achote, and Metzabok Slate ceramic groups have forms that only slightly overlap that complex.

Dating the Ikilik Ceramic Complex to the Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic has been extensively discussed (D. Z. Chase n.d.; D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase 1982; A. F. Chase and D. Z. Chase 1981). The Yucatec affinities of a large part of the collection are especially clear in the Savinal Ceramic Group and in the Kik Ceramic Group.

The double mouth water jar (Fig. 2c; Buyuk Ceramic Group) is common in the Ikilik Ceramic Complex and it may serve as a horizon marker for Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic northern Belize. Sidrys (1976:

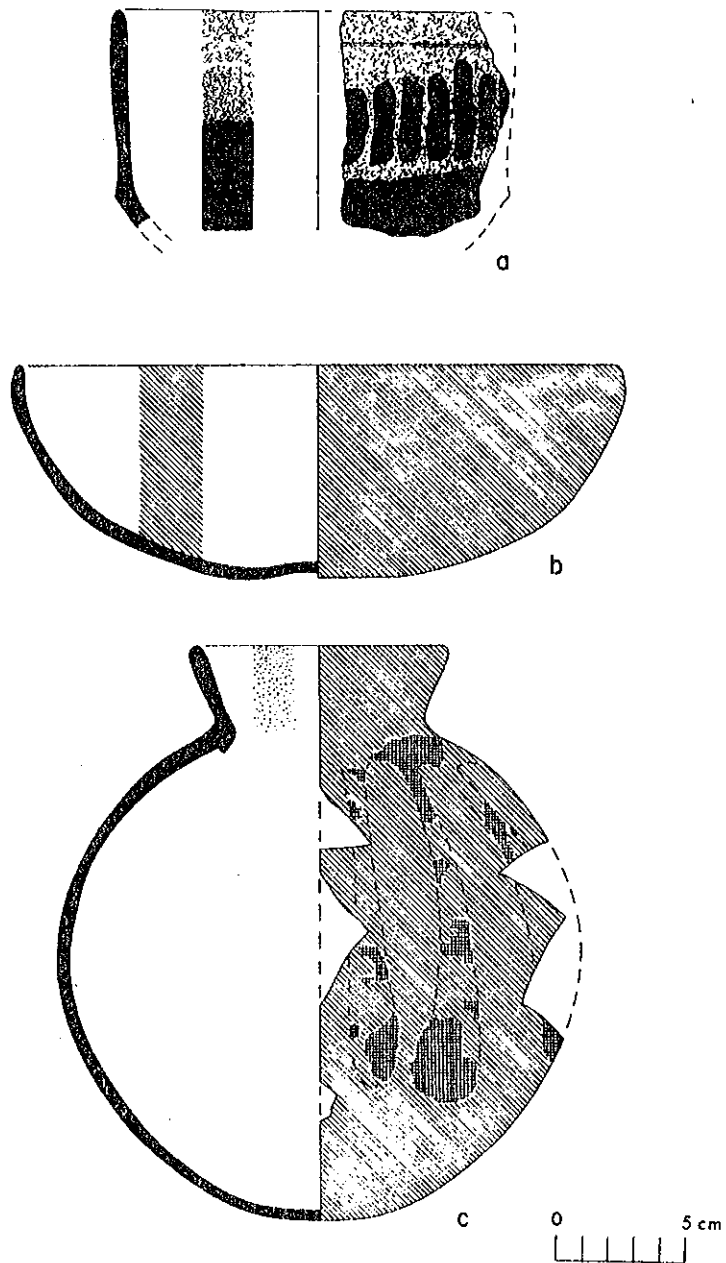


Figure 1. Achote and Kik Ceramic Group pottery. a, Cubeta Incised: Ekolen Variety; b, Kik Red: Kik Variety; c, Chacil Black on Red: Chacil Variety (1/3 scale).

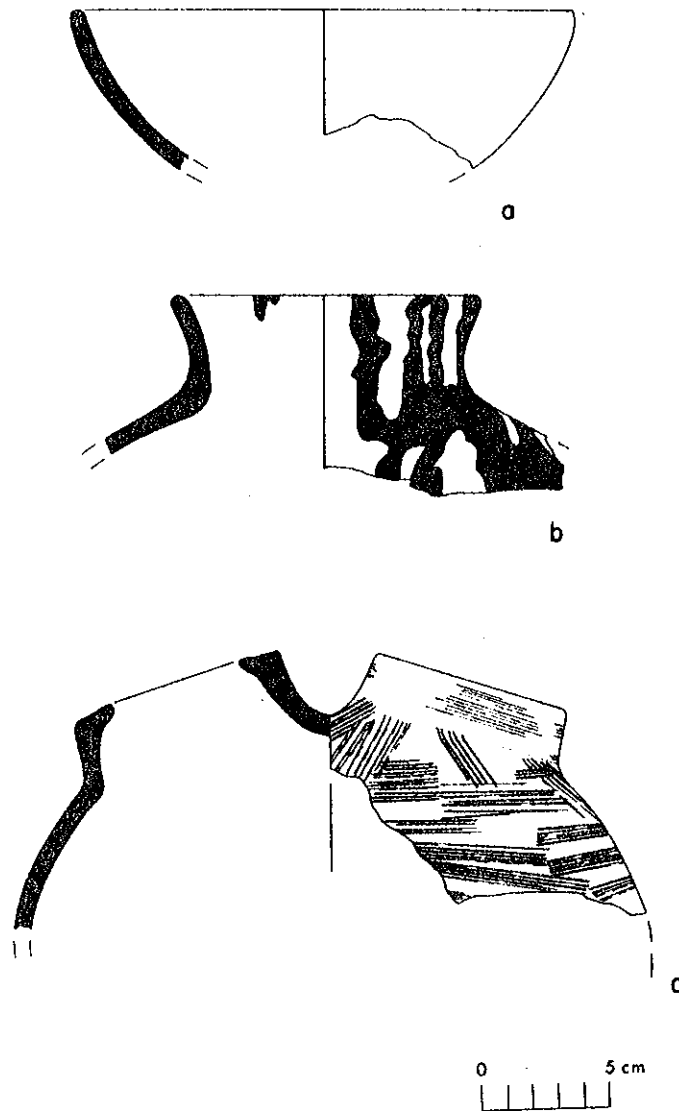


Figure 2. Savinal and Buyuk Ceramic Group pottery. a, Savinal Cream: Savinal Variety; b, Sansomal Black on Cream: Sansomal Variety; c, Buyuk Striated: Buyuk Striated: Buyuk Variety (1/3 scale).

287-290) dated this form between A.D. 650 and 1250, noting that the double mouth jar was probably actually used only over half of his defined time period. Double mouth jars are found in controlled stratigraphic contexts at both Nohmul and Santa Rita and are clearly Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic at both sites.

The Chambel Ceramic Group contains two specific types. Chambel Striated (Fig. 3b) designates large plainware ollas with bodies vertically (and heavily) striated below a tall unstriated neck that usually ends in a bolstered lip. Red Neck Mother Striated (Fig. 3a) refers to large, lightly striated, buff (unslipped, but probably "washed") ollas with short outflaring necks that are slipped deep red. Similar vessels have often been encountered in Belizean caves (Pendergast 1974, Fig. 4a) as well as at San Jose (Thompson 1939: 138-139, Plate 21c).

The Achote Ceramic Group (Fig. 1a) has long been noted from such sites as Uaxactun (Smith 1955: 185) and Becan (Ball 1977: 34). Based on recent studies, I believe this group should be removed from Peten Gloss Ware and placed into San Pablo Gloss Ware. Achote Black at Nohmul is typified by splotchy cream areas within the black background; earlier examples of Achote Black at Nohmul have red splotchy areas in the black background. Eroded Achote sherds are easily identified because of their almost polka dot paste patterns.

Both "Puuc" and "Thin" slates occur in the Ikilik Ceramic Complex. The "Puuc slate," Metzabok Slate, appears to be slightly earlier in date and may, in fact, be an imitation of its more northern neighbor, much like Tancachacal Slate at Becan (Ball 1977: 37); alternatively, based on its rather limited appearance Metzabok Slate may have been imported to the northern Belize area, but its nondistinctive paste argues against this possibility. Thin slate, Savinal Ceramic Group (Fig. 2a), is quite common at Nohmul; although some forms duplicate northern Yucatec forms, it is probably locally made. Sansomal Black-on-cream (Fig. 2b) clearly relates this slateware group to Peto Creamware, an observation first noted by Joseph Ball in 1980.

The Kik Ceramic Group contains perhaps the most variation of all groups. Its forms include grater bowls (Xixilic Incised), gouged and incised pyriform vases with beaded lips (Tzibana Gouged-incised), large bolstered rim cauldrons (Campbells Red) similar to Cameron Incised forms

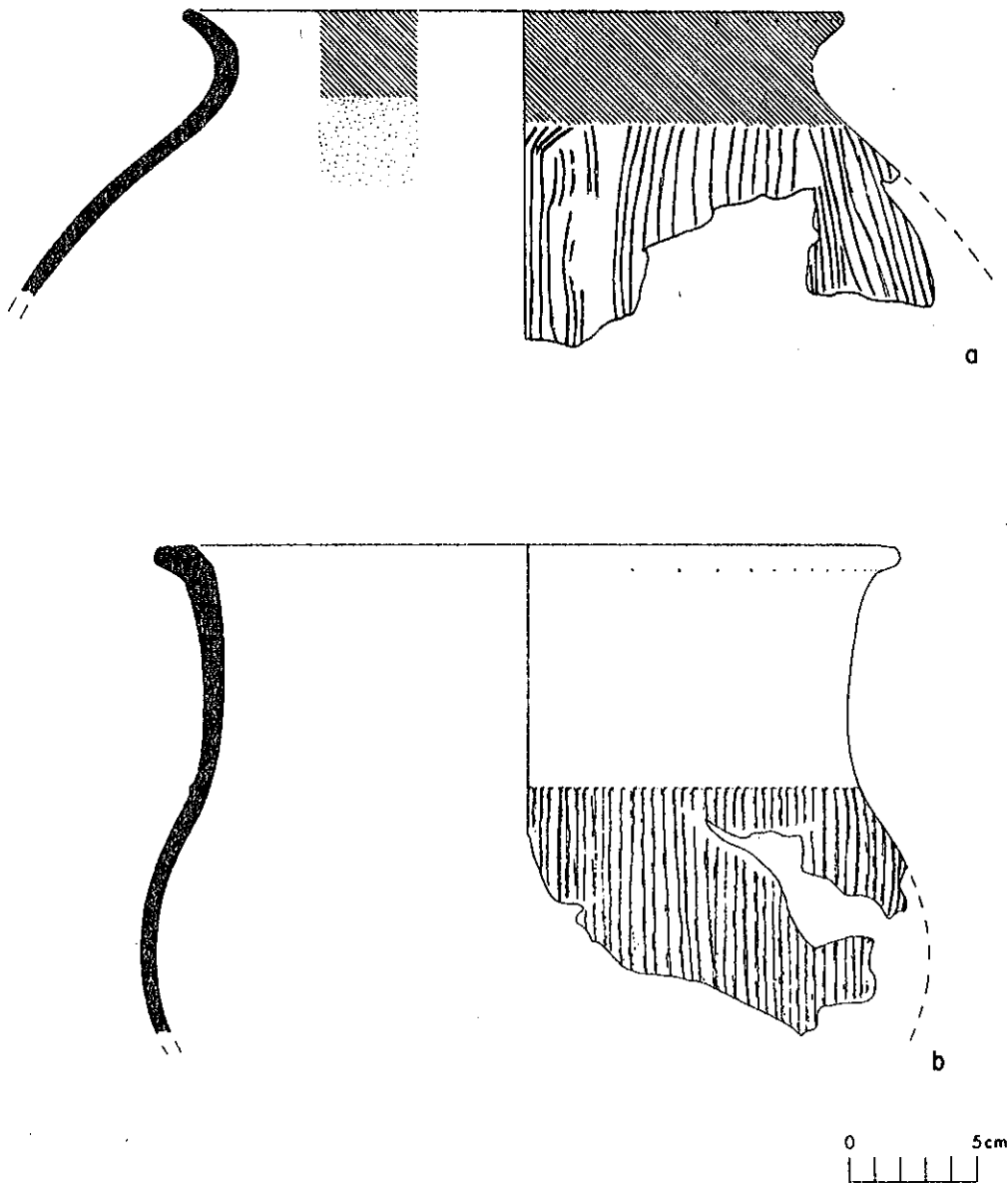


Figure 3. Chambel Ceramic Group pottery. a, Red Neck Mother Striated: Red Neck Mother Variety; b, Chambel Striated: Chambel Variety (1/3 scale).

of the central Peten (Sabloff 1975: 179-181) and possibly Calderitas Red in Quintana Roo (Sanders 1960: 256, Fig. 11d), trickleware jars (Chacil Black-on-red; Fig. 1c), as well as bowls and chalices (Kik Red; Fig. 1b) of San Jose IV-V form (Thompson 1939: 140-141).

The Ohel Ceramic Group is comprised of large dishes and some short-necked jars. In paste and surface treatment, the dishes are clearly derivative from Posito Polychrome (Pring 1976: 43) found at other sites in northern Belize and dated to the Late Classic; a few sherds of Posito Polychrome occur in the East Plazas area at Nohmul, but the type is clearly a member of an earlier complex. Ohel Red jars are similar in form to Roaring Creek Red jars at Barton Ramie (Gifford 1976: 240-243, Fig. 151).

The Taak Ceramic Group is also clearly derivative from earlier Late Classic Belizean wares, specifically Belize Red at Barton Ramie (Gifford 1976: 255-267). According to Arlen Chase, the surface treatment on some of the sherds is similar to that of Daylight Orange: Darknight Variety (Sharer and Chase 1976: 301-302) found at Barton Ramie. A whole burial vessel from Structure 139 at Nohmul (Heighway and Barry 1975, Fig. 2.19) also exhibits similarities to the Daylight Group and possibly may be assigned to it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The diversity within the Ikilik Ceramic Complex at Nohmul is consistent with what is known concerning the regionalization of the Lowland Maya area at the end of the Classic Period (see A. F. Chase 1979). The Ikilik Ceramic Complex contains elements that cross-reference it with the Cehpech Complex, the Sotuta Complex, the Tepeu Complex, the San Jose IV-V Complex, and probably the Hocaba Complex. The definition of this complex at Nohmul, northern Belize, complicates the present understanding of both the Maya Collapse and the correlation between sequences in the Northern and Southern Maya Lowlands (D. Z. Chase and A. F. Chase 1982). It also reinforces a suggestion made by Ball (1974) that northern Yucatan played a significant role in the Southern Lowlands at the end of the Classic Period.

Table 1

Ceramic Units of the Ikilik Ceramic Complex, Nohmul, Belize.
(Units with asterisk are new designations).

*Ikilik Ceramic Complex

*San Pablo Gloss Ware

*Kayum Paste Ware

Achote Ceramic Group

Achote Black: *Nicteel Variety
Cubeta Incised: *Ekolen Variety
Torro Gouged-incised: *Okha Variety

*Taak Ceramic Group

*Taak Orange-red: Taak Variety

Puuc or Chichen Red Ware

*Kayum Paste Ware

*Kik Ceramic Group

*Kik Red: Kik Variety
*Kik Red: Petic Variety
*Campbells Red: Campbells Variety
*Xixilic Incised: Xixilic Variety
*Chembeku Modeled: Chembeku Variety
*Tzibana Gouged-incised: Tzibana Variety
*Chacil Black-on-red: Chacil Variety

Peto Cream Ware

*Kayum Paste Ware

*Savinal Ceramic Group

*Savinal Cream: Savinal Variety
*Yantho Incised: Yantho Variety
*Usukum Gouged-incised: Usukum Variety
*Sansomal Black-on-cream: Sansomal Variety

Puuc Slate Ware

*Kayum Paste Ware

*Metzabok Ceramic Group

*Metzabok Slate: Metzabok Variety

*Dzul Striated Ware

*Kayum Paste Ware

*Buyuk Ceramic Group

*Buyuk Striated: Buyuk Variety

*Yaralum Paste Ware

*Chambel Ceramic Group

*Chambel Striated: Chambel Variety

*Red Neck Mother Striated: Red Neck Mother Variety

*Bor Orange Matte Ware

*Tacistal Coarse Paste Ware

*Ohel Ceramic Group

*Ohel Red: Ohel Variety

Note on nomenclature: Two complementary definitions of the ceramic unit "ware" are reflected in this classification. San Pablo Gloss, Puuc and Chichen Red, Peto Cream, Puuc Slate, Dzul Striated, and Bor Orange Matte wares have been established on the basis of their surface finish characteristics. Kayum, Yaralum, and Tacistal Coarse paste wares are recognized by the distinctive fabric composition of the vessels comprising these categories.

Paste wares reflect the clay resources and manufacturing technology in specific localities; vessels assigned to number of different ceramic groups may be produced on the same paste ware (see Prudence M. Rice, Rethinking the Ware Concept, American Antiquity, Vol. 41, Number 4, 1976). (M.K.).

Acknowledgements

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