

THE LATE POSTCLASSIC POTTERY OF SANTA RITA COROZAL, BELIZE: THE XABALXAB CERAMIC COMPLEX

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The site of Santa Rita Corozal is located in northern Belize within and around the limits of modern Corozal Town. Excavations at the site in 1979 and 1980 by the Corozal Postclassic Project have confirmed the long sequence of occupation at the site, beginning in the Early Preclassic Period and continuing through the Historic Period (D. Chase 1981, 1982a; A. Chase and D. Chase 1981). However, the site is best known for its heavy Postclassic occupation. Prior to the present project, several excavators have worked at the site, beginning with Thomas Gann (1918, 1900), and other regional projects (Hammond 1975; Greene 1973; Sidrys 1976) have been conducted. Previous ceramic analyses of the Santa Rita pottery (Pring 1975, 1976; Ball, in press) were based on only limited collections from the site and subsequently the Santa Rita pottery was categorized primarily in terms of ceramics from other known sites. The more recent Corozal Postclassic Project excavations at the site have yielded substantial deposits of ceramics and have allowed more in-depth pottery analysis.

The Xabalxab Ceramic Complex (Table 1) encompasses the Late Postclassic pottery of Santa Rita (D. Chase 1982a: 523-547). The pottery in this ceramic complex has close ties to Mayapan (Smith 1971), but exhibits significant differences from the majority of the pottery at Tulum (Sanders 1960) and the pottery from the recently excavated sites of Lamanai (Pendergast 1981), Colha (Adams and Valdez 1980), and Macal Tipu (personal observation), as well as from the central Peten sites of Tayasal (A. Chase 1979, 1983; this volume) and Topoxte (Bullard 1970; P. Rice 1979). Xabalxab Ceramic Complex pottery has been found at other sites in northern Belize, including sites in close proximity to Santa Rita such as Aventura (J. Ball, personal communication, and personal observation), as well as sites farther toward the eastern coast at Yakalche (D. Pendergast, personal communication, and personal observation). These pottery distributions suggest significant regional variation within the Late Postclassic Period and, in fact, may aid in defining the limits of the political territories just prior to Spanish contact (Roys 1957; D. Chase 1982a). Further seasons of excavation at Santa Rita are planned, and they should aid in determining the distribution of Xabalxab pottery in the vicinity of Santa Rita Corozal and may allow for further amplification of the ceramic types and varieties.

Xabalxab ceramics were encountered in widely distributed deposits at Santa Rita. This pottery is clearly subsequent to Terminal Classic-Early Postclassic pottery nearly identical to that contained in the Ikilik Ceramic Complex at Nohmul (D. Chase 1982a: 493-512, 1982b). Certain forms characteristic of Tulum Red Ware (Paybono Red; see Sanders 1960 and Adams and Valdez 1980), such as double-

Table 1

**CERAMIC UNITS OF THE XABALXAB CERAMIC COMPLEX,
SANTA RITA, BELIZE**
(Units with asterisk are new designations)

*XABALXAB CERAMIC COMPLEX

MAYAPAN RED WARE

*Oopchi Paste Ware

*Rita Ceramic Group

- *Rita Red: Rita Variety
- *Rita Red: Hucup Variety
- *Rita Red: Xocola Variety
- *Zanga Modeled: Zanga Variety
- *Kulel Modeled: Kulel Variety
- *Kisim Polychrome: Kisim Variety
- *Kakoch Polychrome: Kakoch Variety

*Sabal Paste Ware

*Nucil Ceramic Group

- *Nucil Modeled: Nucil Variety
- *Chontalli Red: Chontalli Variety
- *Arroba Modeled: Arroba Variety

SAN JOAQUIN BUFF WARE

*Sabal Paste Ware(?)

*Cimatl Ceramic Group

- *Cimatl Buff: Cimatl Variety

*Manta Ceramic Group

- *Manta Buff: Manta Variety
- *Saykum Incised: Saykum Variety

*XIKEK WARE

*Hachak Paste Ware

*Cohokum Ceramic Group

- *Kol Modeled: Kol Variety
- *Cohokum Modeled: Cohokum Variety
- *Pum Modeled: Pum Variety
- *Cao Modeled: Cao Variety
- *Santa Unslipped: Santa Variety
- *Santa Unslipped: Crude Variety
- *Ayal Unslipped: Ayal Variety

Specials

- Special: "Tulum Black Paste Censer"
- Palmul Incised: Variety Unspecified
- Special: Black-on-white
- Special: Black-modeled

vented supports, occur only in the earliest levels containing the Xabalxab complex, suggesting that the Xabalxab complex exists subsequent to the first appearance of Tulum Red pottery.

Although the Late Postclassic Xabalxab Ceramic Complex occurs in most excavated loci at Santa Rita Corozal, the ceramic descriptions have been based primarily on ceramics culled from two deposits at Santa Rita, one in Str. 81 and the other south of Platform 2. This sample consists of 12,103 sherds and 62 reconstructable vessels (for further information see D. Chase 1982a: 523-547, 617-639).

Xabalxab Ceramic Complex

The Xabalxab Ceramic Complex defined for Santa Rita contains three wares, three paste wares, and five ceramic groups. Paste wares largely correlate with wares determined on the basis of surface characteristics except for Sabal Paste Ware, which is found in both Mayapan Red Ware and San Joaquin Buff Ware. Oopchi Paste Ware is marked by a reddish yellow paste (5YR 6/6-2.5YR 6/8) with inclusions of crystalline and noncrystalline calcite less than 1 mm in diameter; there are also reddish particles that may be sherd temper. The Sabal Paste Ware has a paste color that is more variable than Oopchi Paste Ware; at times it is reddish yellow (5YR 6/6), but more often it is dark yellowish brown (2.5YR 4/0-3/0 to 10YR 4/1), light brown (7.5YR 6/4) or gray (7.5YR 4/0). Inclusions are equivalent to those in Oopchi Paste Ware. Hachak Paste Ware is generally reddish yellow to light brown in color (7.5YR 6/6-5/6 to 5YR 5/6-7/6 and 10YR 6/2), but there is frequently a difference in core coloration. Calcite inclusions may be up to 1 mm in size; there are also occasional hematite particles. The Xabalxab Complex consists of two red-slipped groups (Rita Ceramic Group and Nucil Ceramic Group), two buff-slipped groups (Cimatl Ceramic Group and Manta Ceramic Group), and one unslipped Group (Cohokum Ceramic Group). Decorative motifs include modeling, incising, and polychrome, as well as postfire painting on stucco. Most abundant in the collections and diagnostic of the Xabalxab Complex are the Rita Red, Santa Unslipped, and Kol Modeled types.

The Rita Ceramic Group contains six types. Rita Red: Rita Variety is characterized by a red slip and yellowish red to gray fire clouding; it is found in a number of forms: parenthesis-necked tinajas (Fig. 1a), tripod bowls (Fig. 1b), and large, strap-handled collared bowls. There are two other varieties of Rita Red, each correlated with variations in form. Rita Red: Hucup Variety has nearly hemispherical bowls with solid, but gouged, supports and interior grooves located high on the vessel wall. Rita Red: Xocola Variety has a slightly more orange-colored slip; the flanged plates and ollas within this variety differ from the Rita Variety as well. The difference in surface coloration and in forms, especially when combined with its stratigraphic priority as compared to the Rita Variety, indicates that the Xocola Variety is probably early within the Rita Group. Zanga Modeled is distinguished by thick vessel walls and modeled head attachments, usually applied to an olla. Kulel Modeled: Kulel Variety is distinguished by modeled and punctated decoration. The most usual form is the flanged tripod plate or large dish, although the type also includes a miniature jar with modeled face. Kak Polychrome: Kak Variety (Fig. 1c) is distinguished both by form and decoration. Decorated areas consist of geometric designs painted in black lines on paste; the rest of the vessel is usually covered with red slip. The vessel forms include tall-necked jars, tecomates, ollas with flaring necks but no supports, and tripod ollas with flaring

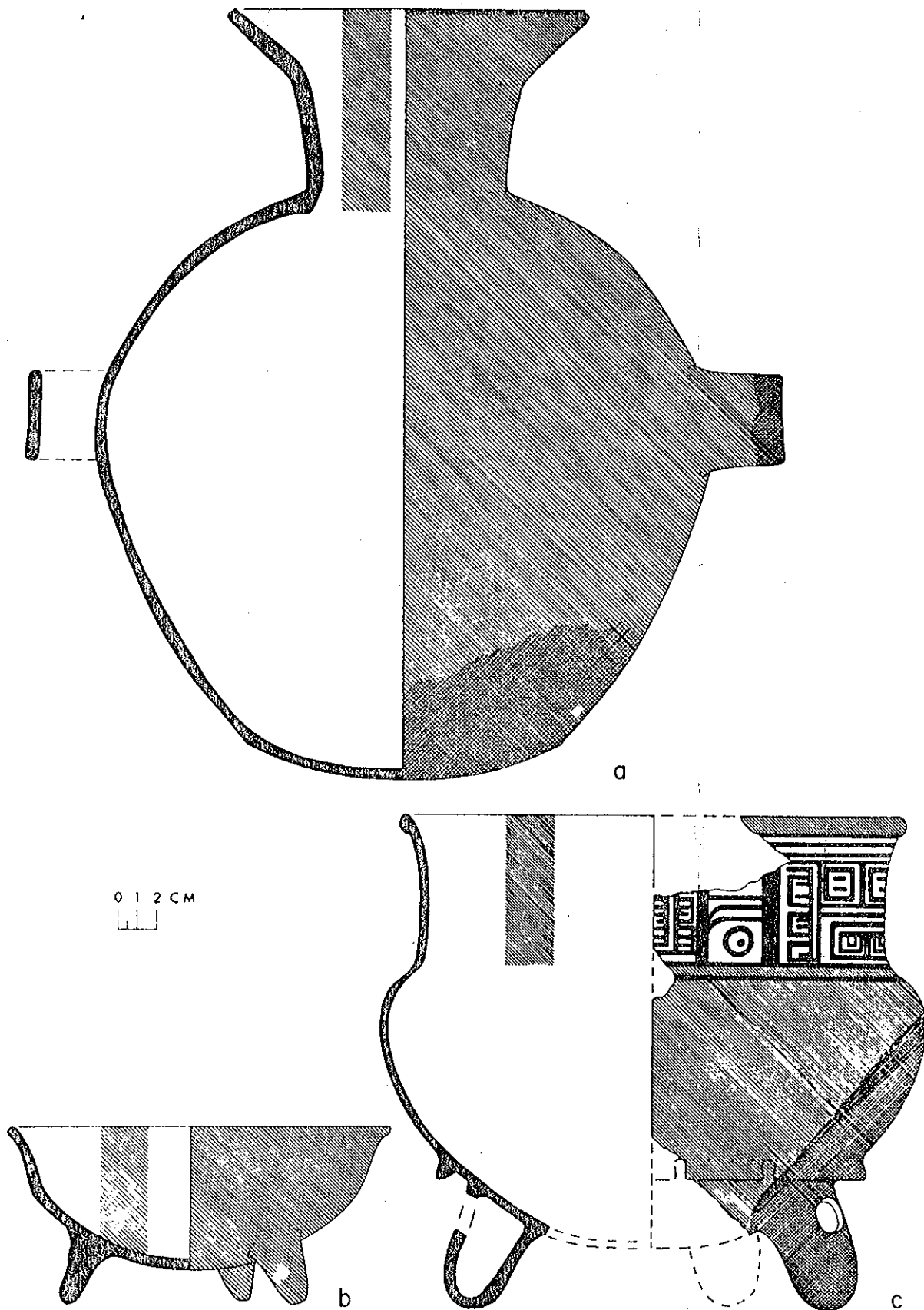


Figure 1. Pottery of the Rita Ceramic Group: a, b, Rita Red: Rita Variety; c, Kak Polychrome: Kak Variety. (1/3 scale.)

walls, basal flanges, and supports. Kisim Polychrome: Kisim Variety is distinguished from Kak Polychrome by its maroon linear design. Kakoch Polychrome: Kakoch Variety is marked by black painted lines on a white, rather than paste, background; it is presently only known in bowl form.

The Nucil Ceramic Group contains three types: Nucil Modeled: Nucil Variety, Chontalli Red: Chontalli Variety, and Arroba Modeled: Arroba Variety (Fig. 2). These types are characterized by a dark red slip and Sabal Paste Ware. All three types are uncommon. The Nucil Modeled form is an olla with appliquéd modeling. Chontalli Red has been found in a high-necked olla with tripod supports and slightly bolstered rim. Arroba Modeled: Arroba Variety is distinguished by modeling, relatively thick vessel walls, and form. It consists of a large collared bowl with bolstered rim, everted neck, and modeled and applied face.

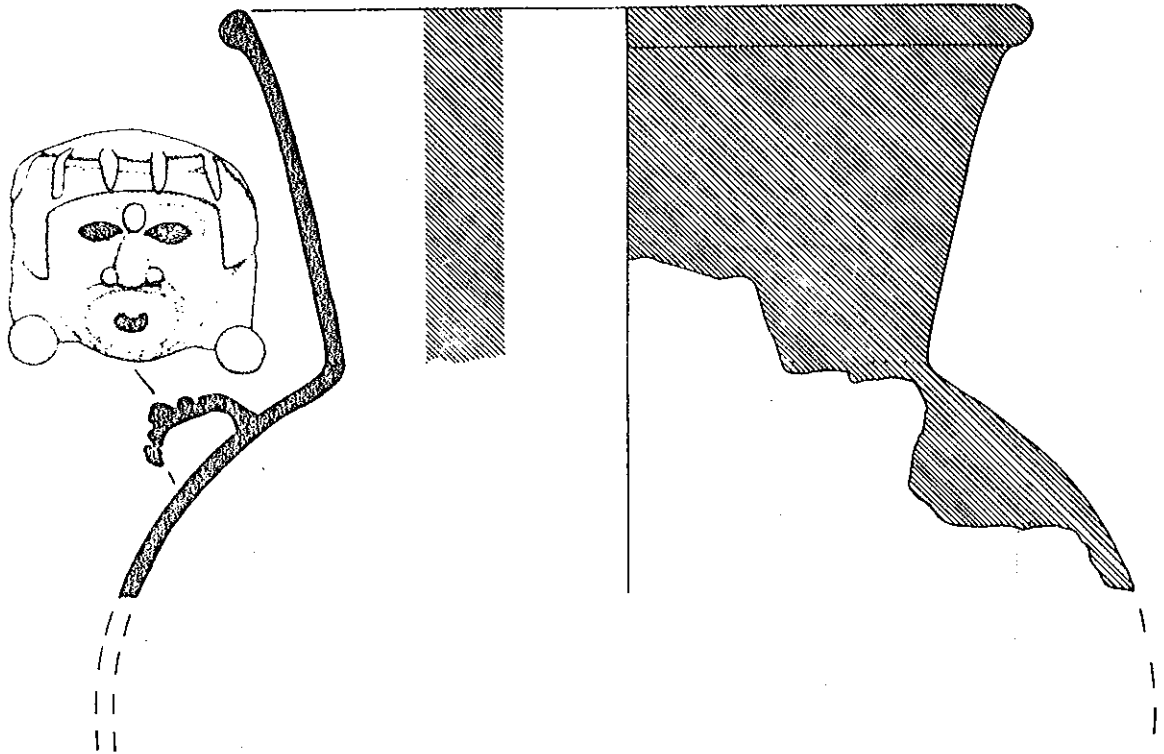


Figure 2. Pottery of the Nucil Ceramic Group, Arroba Modeled: Arroba Variety. (1/5 scale, exterior rim diameter is 52 cm.)

The Cimatl Ceramic Group contains only one type, Cimatl Buff: Cimatl Variety. This rare type has poorly preserved slip that ranges from reddish yellow to gray in color. The one reconstructable vessel, a plate, has a notched flange and

modeled feet; this vessel may be an imitation of a Matillas Fine Orange plate (see Smith 1971, Fig. 55b1, for a similar vessel form from Mayapan, but with additional decoration).

The Manta Ceramic Group contains two rare types; both types have slips that vary in color from gray to brown. Manta Buff: Manta Variety is found in flanged-plate form, while Saykum Incised: Saykum Variety was defined for tripod grater bowls (Fig. 3a).

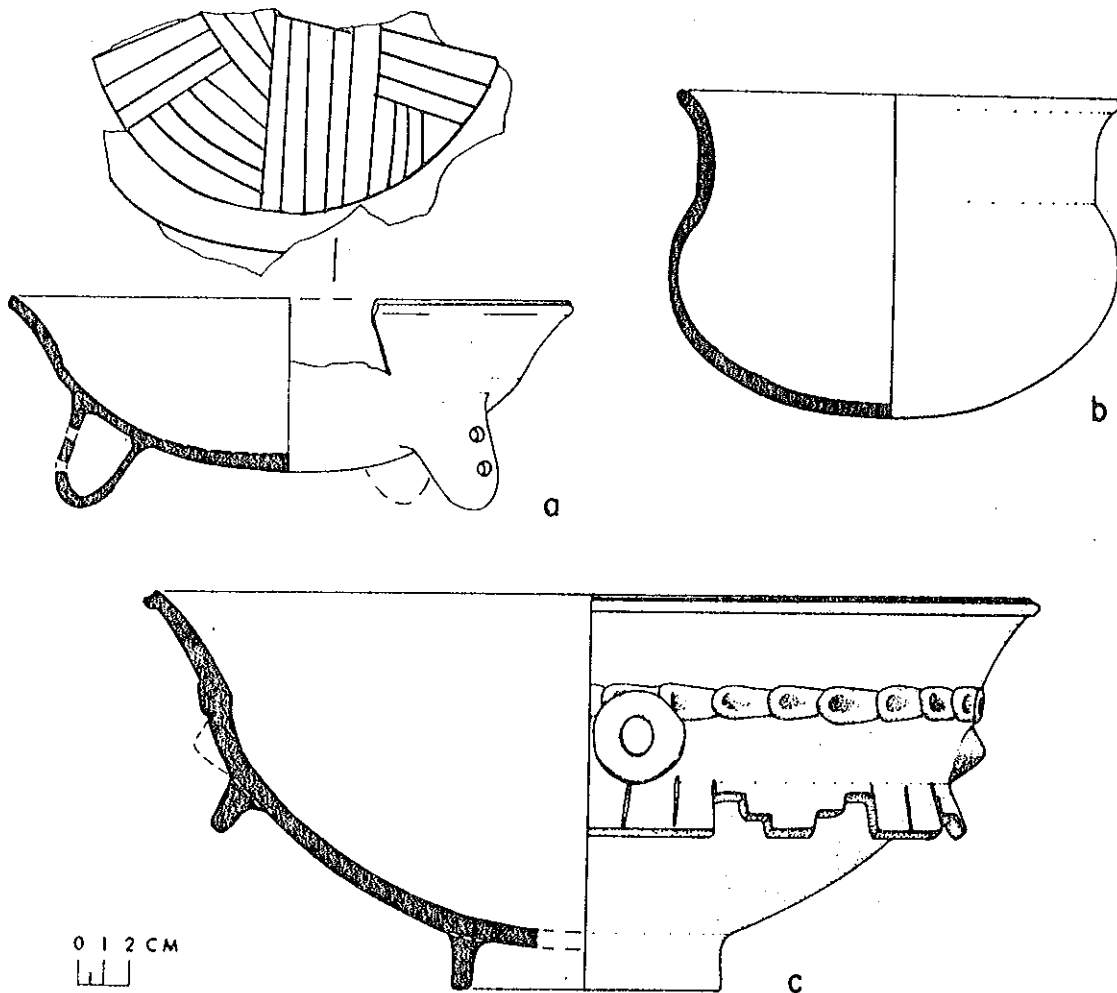


Figure 3. Pottery of the Manta (a) and Cohukum (b, c) ceramic groups: a, Saykum Incised: Saykum Variety; b, Santa Unslipped: Santa Variety; c, Pum Modeled: Pum Variety.

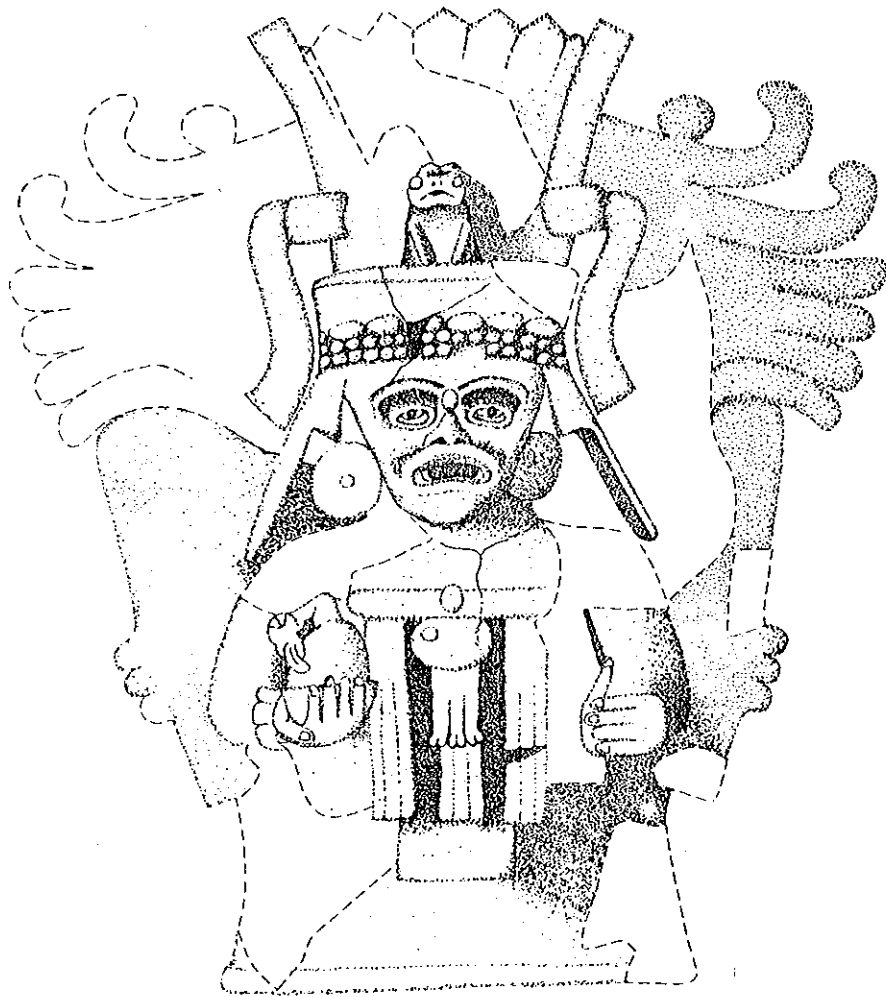


Figure 4. Pottery of the Cohokum Ceramic Group, Kol Modeled: Kol Variety. (Drawing by Christine Hide, 1/3 scale.) See also cover illustration.

The Cohokum Ceramic Group is generally well represented in deposits at Santa Rita. It consists of seven types, all of which are unslipped, but many of which retain traces of exterior stucco; some of this stucco still has remnants of paint, both blocks and line-work. Kol Modeled: Kol Variety is characterized by modeled effigy censers with urn backs (Fig. 4 and cover) and by small modeled cups. The censers retain traces of stucco and postfire polychrome. Kol Modeled is abundant in the Santa Rita deposits. Cohokum Modeled: Cohokum Variety is a modeled type marked by its large tripod olla form with appliqué and cut-away facial features. These pieces also retain traces of stucco and paint. Pum Modeled:

Pum Variety is yet another stucco and painted appliqué censer type; its form is a squat, ring-based dish with flaring rim (Fig. 3c). Cao Modeled: Cao Variety vessels are all modeled, stuccoed, and elaborately painted and modeled figure vessels with lids; usually they are found in caches. Santa Unslipped: Santa Variety vessels consist of ollas of varying sizes (Fig. 3b). These are abundant at Santa Rita and some retain traces of stucco. Santa Unslipped: Crude Variety overlaps with Santa Variety, but contains larger inclusions, less smooth surface treatment, and light brown, but not gray, surface colors. Vessel forms include small and medium sized ollas as well as lids or what appear to be deep comals. Ayal Unslipped: Ayal Variety is similar to Santa Unslipped in form, but generally has a brown or reddish brown smoothed surface; its known forms include ollas, lids, and possibly deep comals.

Concluding Remarks

Analysis of Postclassic pottery requires careful analysis to distinguish the operation of spatial versus temporal factors; this is particularly critical given the general paucity of stratified deposits during this period. Pottery of the Late Postclassic Xabalxab Ceramic Complex at Santa Rita (Table 1) exhibits significant variation from other ceramic traditions in northern Belize. Much of this variation appears to be the result of regional (spatial) rather than temporal phenomena. It seems likely that further archaeological investigation at Santa Rita and elsewhere in northern Belize will reveal significant information concerning the distribution of pottery types in this area and that these distributions will be useful in determining both the limits of Late Postclassic polities and, we hope, the degree and nature of interactions between communities.

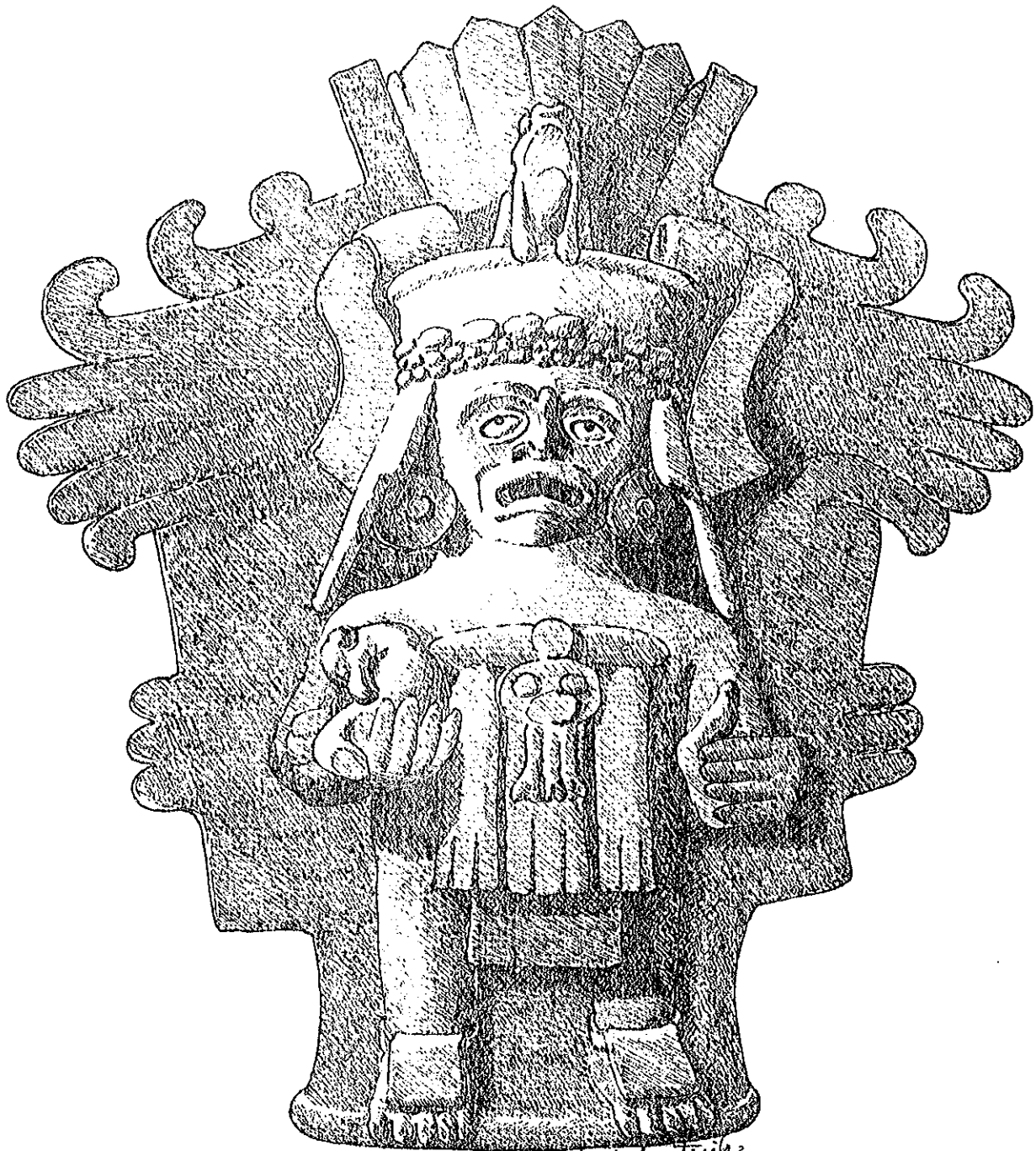
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