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2004 *Análisis Preliminar de la Cerámica de El Perú-Waka' in Proyecto Arqueológico El Perú-Waka': Informe No. 1, Temporada 2003*, edited by Hector Escobedo and David Freidel, pp. 369-384. Informe Entregado a la Dirección General del Patrimonio Cultural y Natural de Guatemala, Guatemala.

## ESTUDIO CERAMICO

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### Introduction

In the course of the 2003 field season, researching archaeologists carried out thirteen simultaneous operations, which yielded a substantial quantity of artifacts. These artifacts consisted mostly of small, broken and fragmentary ceramic sherds from a wide variety of contexts. It is the preliminary analysis of these ceramics that is the focus of this section.

The 2003 field season recovered approximately 130,000 sherds, the vast majority of which came from a single operation, WK-01. It is estimated that the ceramics from operation WK-01 comprise about 60-70% of all the project's recovered ceramics, being around 80,000 sherds. The Terminal Classic material uncovered there, in all probability, represents an enormous ritual deposit. With such a single large deposit, the analysis of WK-01 necessitated a unique methodology that would overshadow the analysis of the remaining ceramics from Waka'. Instead of attempting to apply two different sets of procedures to a single collection, it was decided that whatever approach was developed for Operation WK-01 would be applied to all operations. This approach is covered in detail in the next section.

To date, only the ceramics from operations WK-04, WK-05, and the principal plaza test-pitting suboperations, ES-01-A and

ES-01-B, have been analyzed by the project ceramicist. The analyzed material comprised approximately 5000 sherds, about 3.8% of the total recovered material. This examined material was combined with field observations to form the basis of the ceramic sequence presented in section 3. The extremely small sample size should be taken into consideration when judging the conclusions and merits of this report. It is a safe assumption to make that as the project continues to process and analyze recovered materials, some of the complexes presented here may undergo substantial revision. Nevertheless, it is thought that the preliminary ceramic sequence uncovered to date is fairly secure, especially the Protoclassic and Terminal Classic aspects.

The Terminal Classic deposits from WK-04 and WK-05 show a large and varied sample of the ultimate occupation of the city. This final occupation, resting on a high and well-drained portion of the site, showed no evidence of having been mixed with older and deeper material. Thus, the Terminal Classic ceramics found in the upper levels of these two operations represent a pure sample of that period's ceramic tradition. This was confirmed by the highly uniform nature of the recovered material. The high-quality of the ceramics, as well (see Fig. 6), enabled the

rapid formulation and definition of the Terminal Classic ceramic complex.

The testpits excavated in the principal plaza revealed a series of sealed plaza floors. The examination of these units, ES-01B-3 to ES-01B-5, showed a long sequence of construction and renovation, the ceramic evolution securely sealed under thick plaza floors. The ceramics that emerged proved to contain an especially large sample of Protoclassic material. The ceramic types are so varied under these floors, that it was initially thought to be mixed construction fill. Upon further examination, these sealed deposits contain what is felt to be representative of the ancient city's Protoclassic potting tradition.

Classic period ceramics were observed at various locations across the site and especially thick concentrations were noted at operations WK-02, WK-06, and WK-07. It is hoped that the eventual analysis of these concentrations will allow the formulation of the site's ceramic sequence for the Classic period. This analysis will allow us to close the ceramic sequence at Waka' and allow for it to grow in accuracy and precision with each field season. Especially with the fine-grained single sherd methodology being applied across the site, the ceramic data from year to year will be improve geometrically.

## **Methodology**

The methodological approach for the ceramic analysis was dominated by the need to reconstruct the ritual deposit uncovered in WK-01. While large portions of the WK-01 deposit were disturbed by looting activity, other portions

of it remained untouched primary deposit. Field observations confirmed that the analysis of the recovered sherds included many refits, between sherds in both the disturbed and undisturbed portions. It is hoped that by tracing the movement of each sherd in the post-season, we can begin to reconstruct the original position of many of the shattered ceramic vessels. It is for this reason that it was decided to adopt a methodology designed to account for and track individual sherds. Each sherd would be assigned an individual and nonrepeating number for each lot. For example, if lot ES-01B-4-1-16 possessed fifteen sherds, each sherd would be numbered "ES-01B-4-1-16-1, ES-01B-4-1-16-2, ES-01B-4-1-16-3," and so on. By individually tracking sherds and assigning them a position in the project database, vessels could be reconstructed while still maintaining a record of both the excavated context and location. Since this approach was to be adopted for the approximately 80,000 sherds of operation WK-01, it was decided that it would be extended over the whole of the recovered ceramics from El Peru.

Additional research goals involved the understanding of the ritual deposits uncovered in the ballcourt in WK-07 and for the base construction of a preliminary outline of the ceramic sequence for the entire site. The single sherd methodology proved well-suited in moving the research towards these goals. The properties of each sherd were recorded, including individual weight, wall thickness, the presence or absence of slip or any other decorative technique. An effort was made to build as quantitative a system as possible. However, as a proper application of the type-

variety approach was not carried out, only those commonly known ceramic groups and types could be identified. To date, typological definitions for the ceramic groups, types and varieties at Waka' do not exist. The identification of ceramic types throughout the field season and post-season analysis was done so by comparing the sherds to the published record of the Maya region. As such, the ceramic types described in this section and in the informe in general should be treated with some degree of suspicion as their actual occurrence at El Peru has not been defined on the basis of a comparative type-variety system as outlined by Smith and Gifford (1966; see also Smith, Willey and Gifford 1960 and Gifford 1960, 1976). It is hoped that these typological definitions will be established in the near-future.

Proving especially useful in aiding the ceramic analysis were the published ceramic reports from Altar de Sacrificios (Adams 1971), Becan (Ball 1977), El Mirador (Forsyth 1983), Edzna (Forsyth 1989), La Joyanca (Arnauld and Morales 1999; Breuil-Martinez et al. 2002), Polol (August 1982), Seibal (Sabloff 1975), Tikal (Culbert 1993), Uaxactun (Smith 1955; Smith and Gifford 1966), and the Yucatan-Campeche Coast (Ball 1978).

### **The preliminary ceramic sequence of El Peru-Waka'**

The evidence recovered from the 2003 field operations shows a potting tradition at the ancient city of Waka' at least twelve centuries in length. The community itself was almost certainly occupied for this period, which spans the breadth of Maya history. In the principle

plaza testpits, ES-01B-3 to ES-01B-5, Late Preclassic ceramic types lay on top of bedrock and Terminal Classic sherds were surface-collected at every single operation. The calendar dates generally accepted for these periods bookend the site's occupation as 250 B.C. and lasting until A.D. 1000. Older deposits may yet be uncovered at the site, giving earlier Late Preclassic ceramic complexes or even extending into the Middle Preclassic, as at El Mirador (Forsyth 1989) and La Joyanca (Breuil-Martinez et al. 2002). Later deposits, moving the site's occupation into the Early Postclassic are possible, though considered highly unlikely.

The information from the ceramic analysis to date is summarized in figure 1. The limited number of ceramics analyzed has permitted the identification of only three complexes, the Kaq, Q'an and Rax complexes. These complexes cover the difficult to study and poorly understood Classic-era horizons, the ceramics produced, respectively, during the rise and collapse of Classic civilization. Their individual type components and the temporal position thereof are shown to the right. Because large sections of the ceramic sequence of the city have yet to be explored, many of these ceramics types have no known start- or end-point. This uncertainty is shown on the graph as a series of dashed lines. The broad periods of Maya history are displayed on the far right, functioning solely as a heuristic device. Until further evidence is uncovered, calendar dates for the definition of the ceramic complexes will not be assigned. A major factor that allowed the identification of the ceramic complexes were the sealed floors of the principle plaza. These have been added to the figure to show exactly what

lies beneath them. Eventually, with the single sherd approach, a volumetric measure may be applied to figure 1 and the relative frequency of the ceramic types through time made into a formal seriation chart.

To reiterate, the ceramic sequence at El Peru (Waka') is as follows:

- the *Rax Complex* corresponds to the Terminal Classic,
- the Classic-era complexes remain undefined,
- the *Q'an Complex* corresponds to the Protoclassic, and
- the *Kaq Complex* to the Late Preclassic.

#### *The Kaq Complex:*

While earlier ceramics are probably elsewhere in the site, the earliest component yet analyzed is the Late Preclassic material that forms the Kaq Complex. The Kaq Complex is defined as possessing a number of easily recognizable Late Preclassic ceramic types, most notably *Sierra Red* (Fig. 2A-D) and *Polvero Black* (Fig. 2F), although the Sierra sherds far outnumber the Polvero sherds. A representative sample of the Kaq Complex ceramics is provided in figure 2. Also co-occurring with the Sierra and Polvero types are a number of unslipped striated bodysherds (Fig. 2H), unslipped smoothed rim and bodysherds (Fig. 2I), a few mottled black-on-red possible bichromes (Fig. 2E) and a frequent number of waxy slipped brownish-red bodysherds (Fig. 2G). It should be noted, however, that the brownish-red ceramics are probably fire-clouded Sierra types and the mottled black-on-red may represent firing errors as well.

As shown in figure 1, the Kaq Complex is of considerable size and includes material from beneath the principal plaza floors #4 and #5. While the sherds both below the fourth floor and the fifth floor are very similar, it is felt that some small degree of internal differentiation can be discerned, even at this early stage of analysis. This differentiation takes the form of : a) the frequency of fire-clouding on the Sierra Red sherds and, b) the degree to which the slip has bonded to the underlying paste matrix. These two characteristics are directly related to quality of production, which seems to decrease in the older levels. Essentially, quality of production appears to improve over time as one moves through the Kaq Complex and beyond. This is made most readily apparent in the Sierra Red sherds that appear in the upper levels, those defined as belonging to the Q'an complex (Fig. 3F and Fig. 4A). Since the damage to the slips have been illustrated by the author, it is readily apparent that the older ceramics have deteriorated much more during their stay in the archaeological record. Of course, the obvious explanation is that the older Sierras are, simply, older, and therefore suffered more taphonomic damage. However, fire-clouding is not a feature of post-depositional processes and the dark brown-black bodysherds (Fig. 2G), which almost certainly are misfired red-slips, vanish entirely above Plaza Floor #4. It is felt that a future excavation between floors 4 and 5, dug in shallow and arbitrary levels may be able to more adequately define this very fine shift in production technology.

#### *The Q'an Complex*

Ceramically, the Protoclassic remains slippery and hard to define (Forsyth 1989; Brady et al. 1998). At Waka', it seems to consist of an overlap period between the older ceramic traditions of the Late Preclassic and technological / stylistic developments of the Classic era. The Q'an Complex is defined as being those collections which contain both the *Sierra Red* (Fig. 3F, 4A) Group, the *Polvero Black* Group (Fig. 4B) and the *Aguila Orange* group types. These types include *Aguila Orange* (Fig. 3E), *Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome* (Fig. 4C, D), *Sacluc Black-on-orange* (Fig. 3 A,C,D), and *Picoleros Red-on-orange* (Fig. 3B). A representative sample of the constituent elements of the Q'an Complex are provided in figures 3 and 4. The Protoclassic bichromes of Sacluc Black-on-orange (Fig. 3A, C, D) and Picoleros Red-on-orange (Fig. 3B) are considered virtual hallmarks of the Protoclassic period in and of themselves (Forsyth 1989). Also, unlike other sites (see Eppich 2000) where the monochrome red-slips of the Late Preclassic tend to grade into the monochrome orange-slips of the Early Classic, in the collections at El Peru, there appears to be no intermediate or transitory stage between the two. *Aguila Orange* appears in the same stratigraphic levels as *Sierra Red* and is very easily discernible. Indeed, if the word were not so terribly loaded, "intrusive" would adequately describe the appearance of the *Aguila* Group into the archaeological record. Another sherd which is very indicative of the Late Preclassic is *Flor Cream* (Fig. 3E), a single well-made example of which appears below Plaza Floor #3. Because it is the only sherd of this type to be recorded thus far at the site, its position in the sequence is not yet determined

and so it was not included in figure 1. Additional sherds include a large number of unslipped, striated rim and bodysherds (Fig. 3G), although their frequency appears to diminish somewhat from earlier complexes, and more examples of the mottled black-on-red bichrome (Fig. 3H) noted above. To date, however, it is unknown whether this "mottled" effect is intentional or not. Certainly the circumferential interior black band illustrated in figure 3H is intentional, while the black spots may or may not be. The intentionality and typological status of these sherds must wait to be determined when and if the formal typology is created.

There appears to be an early and a late facet to the Q'an complex. An examination of figure 1 will show that one of the Plaza floors, #3, luckily cuts right through the upper portion of the complex. Indeed, the relatively thin layer of material between floors 2 and 3 indicate a short time between their construction. The material both above and below Plaza Floor #3 is remarkably similar, being mostly composed of a mixture of *Sierra Red*, *Polvero Black*, *Aguila Orange*, and unslipped sherds of undefined type. For comparative purposes, all of the sherds illustrated in figure 3 and figure 4E come from below floor #3 and all the sherds illustrated in figure 3A, B, C, D were excavated from above it. Above floor #3, *Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome* (Fig. 3C, D) makes an appearance, albeit in very small numbers. The interesting correlation apparent in discerning the early and late facets of the Q'an Complex is that in all the plaza testpits, *Dos Arroyos Orange Polychrome* is not found below Plaza Floor #3 and the hallmark protoclassic bichromes, *Sacluc Black-on-orange* and *Picoleros Red-on-orange*, are not found

above it. In other words, the polychrome and the hallmark bichromes are appearing in exclusive contexts. Now, it could very well be a quirk of the area selected for excavation, but the pattern does hold through seven cubic meters of deposit and this relation needs to be explored in greater detail in future seasons. In the remainder of the post-season analysis, special attention must be paid to see if these ceramic types occur together in any other contexts.

The construction of Plaza Floor #2 seals the Q'an Complex deposits. The Late Preclassic forms do not occur above this floor, thus terminating the Protoclassic at Waka'.

#### Undefined Classic-era Complexes

The 2003 field season recovered a quantity of Classic-era ceramics, some of which are fragments of the highest quality Maya polychromes. Observations in the field confirmed that operations WK-02 and WK-07 possess a quantity of Early Classic ceramic types. WK-07, in particular, possesses a large sample of Early Classic monochromes, bichromes, and polychromes. The deposits in that operation, especially the dedicatory ballcourt cache, appear at this stage to be a fine and unmixed example of Early Classic types. The palace excavations at WK-06 appear to have a smaller, though also unmixed, collection of Late Classic ceramics. At the time of writing though, these materials have been neither analyzed nor recorded. Eventually, it will be possible to determine the chronological position of these types and the defining criteria behind what is expected to be several distinct Classic-era ceramic complexes. Until such time, however, it must remain adequate to simply note their

presence. The principle plaza testpits, unfortunately, show a long hiatus of renovation. Floor #2 seals the Protoclassic, while Floor #1 occurs in the midst of the Terminal Classic Rax Complex. Unhappily, the Classic-era ceramic complexes must remain, at this time, undefined.

#### *The Rax Complex*

The Terminal Classic Rax Complex represents the final occupation of the ancient city and probably dates to the ninth and tenth centuries. Even exempting the single enormous deposit at WK-01, Rax Complex ceramics dominate the recovered material to date. All operations recovered substantial quantities of Terminal Classic material and it was also found at surface excavations across the old city. At least in terms of ceramics, the Terminal Classic may actually represent the apogee of occupation at El Peru. The Rax Complex is defined as being those collections which contain Fine Orange ceramics types (*Altar* or *Balancan Orange* or *Paballon Modeled-carved*, Fig. 6), any of the Fine Grey types (*Chablekal* or *Tres Naciones Grey* or *Chicxulub Incised*), *Tinaja Red* (Fig. 5E), a preponderance of unslipped bolstered rimsherds (Fig. 5A, B, C), an undefined waxy monochrome red (Fig. 5F, G), an undefined waxy monochrome black, an undefined unslipped thin type (Fig. 5H), and a small number of Palmar Orange Polychromes. A representative sample of the Rax Complex sherds are provided in figures 5 and 6. By far the most commonly occurring sherds are the unslipped bolstered rims. It should be remembered, however, that bolstered rims do occur in other time periods and that their

appearance, like all formal elements, in a collection should be considered merely indicative, not definitive. The Fine Greys and Fine Oranges (Fig. 6) are considered virtual hallmarks of the Terminal Classic, a period usually regarded as the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. Their own appearance in a collection should be considered definitive. Like the undefined waxy wares also in this Complex, they indicate a realignment of the site away from the Classic traditions of the Petén and towards those of the Campeche and western Yucatan coasts (Ball 1978). The undefined waxy monochromes (Fig. 5F, G) in this level represent a poorly defined Terminal Classic potting tradition that has been noted in the past but never published on in any great detail (Ball, personal communication). The monochrome reds of Terminal Classic Waka' bear a striking resemblance to the Teabo Red tradition described at Terminal Classic Edzna (Forsyth 1983). The occurrence of Teabo Red at Edzna is almost certainly a far northern example of this same ceramic horizon. These sherds, despite having the same waxy feel as the Sierra Red types, can be differentiated by their generally much darker color and poorer slip bondedness. Occurring in much lower frequency are a series of waxy black monochromes as well. A more accurate description of these undefined monochromes must wait for the construction of the overall site typology. Another undefined Terminal Classic ceramic type are a substantial number of well-fired, thin-walled sherds (Fig. H). They are often covered in a series of fine-line incised geometric designs and their like does not appear to occur in the lower levels. As with the

waxy monochromes, these, too, await a formal definition.

Field observation and laboratory analysis, especially from operation WK-04, appear to indicate a degree of internal differentiation within the Rax Complex. In the second and third levels of WK-04A-19, WK-04A-20 and WK-01A-21, a number of Palmar Orange Polychromes co-occurred with other Rax Complex ceramic types. The appearance of the Palmar Polychromes was also noted to accompany a marked increase in the frequency of Tinaja Red sherds. However, because Fine Greys and Fine Orange still appeared in those levels, this probably does not indicate a Late Classic ceramic complex but instead an early facet of the Terminal Classic complex. However, the occurrence of polychrome sherds remains a factor more influenced by the status of the residence and, as such, is a poor temporal marker. Future analysis should focus on those units, however, to see what other changes are occurring between the earlier and later Rax Complex deposits. As such, the exact position of Principle Plaza Floor #1 within the Rax Complex remains uncertain.

## **Conclusions and perspectives for 2004 field season**

As the post-season analysis of the 2003 ceramic material has yet to be completed, it is currently much too early to begin to draw concrete conclusions from it. Instead, the following observations will be offered and many of them are presented as the preliminary ceramic sequence given in figure 1. This sequence functions here only as a beginning

outline and will be fleshed out in much greater detail at a later date. Much typological and volumetric data waits to be added to it. The potting tradition of Waka' stretched across at least 1.2 millenia and is large, varied and complex, echoing the many cultural, social, economic and political shifts of the Maya past. Of particular interest is the exceptionally large and distinct Classic horizon complexes. While a great deal of the work so far has been confined to the construction of a base ceramic chronology, Waka' is now firmly established as a major center during both the birth and dotage of Classic civilization. The origins as well as the fall of the Classic Maya remains, to this day, a poorly explained series of events and the ancient city of Waka' will add considerably to our understanding of them. The Q'an Complex is large and internally varied, lying, in the principle plaza, under several sealed plaza floors possibly giving a fine-grained resolution of the Protoclassic unknown in this area of the Maya Region. The Rax Complex is also large and internally varied, covering most of the site itself. The Rax Complex possesses high quality ceramics (Fig. 6), hinting at a substantial Terminal Classic importance and ties to the rising powers of the Gulf coast. It also possesses no successors and ends quite suddenly. Unlike other sites, there appears to be no lingering Postclassic presence, no continued veneration, no squatters living among ruins. At the end of the Terminal Classic, current evidence indicates that the abandonment appears total.

While the ceramic analysis is still at an early stage, it is still possible to make the following recommendations concerning the

upcoming 2004 field season. No doubt that as the post-season analysis of the ceramic material continues, these recommendations will be substantially added to as our knowledge of the recovered 2003 ceramics increases.

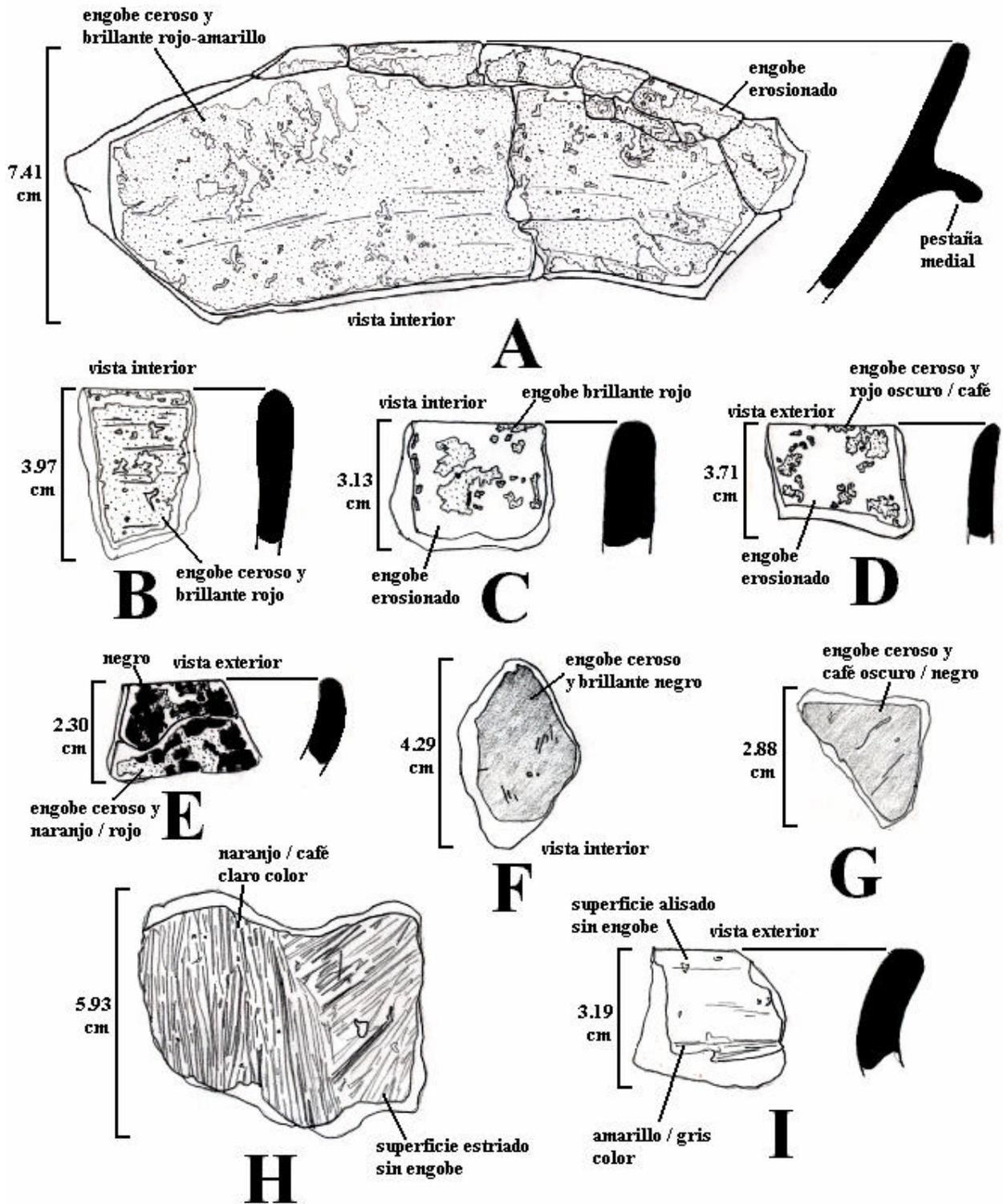
Additional test-pitting of the principle plaza should continue with particular attention being paid to the material located beneath Plaza Floor #4. In order to ascertain any possible internal variation of the Kaq Complex, this very early material could be excavated in shallow, arbitrary levels. The recovery of additional materials between Plaza Floors #2, #3, and #4 would serve to secure or disprove the existence of the early and late facets of the Q'an Complex as suggested above. A series of shallow testpits would easily serve to broaden our understanding of the Rax Complex as well as more accurately define its proposed early and late facets. Finally, of course, a detailed examination of the Classic-era ceramic complexes and the construction of a sorted site ceramic typology would provide valuable tools to any future archaeologists, tools that would prove to be useful to the 2004 field season and beyond.

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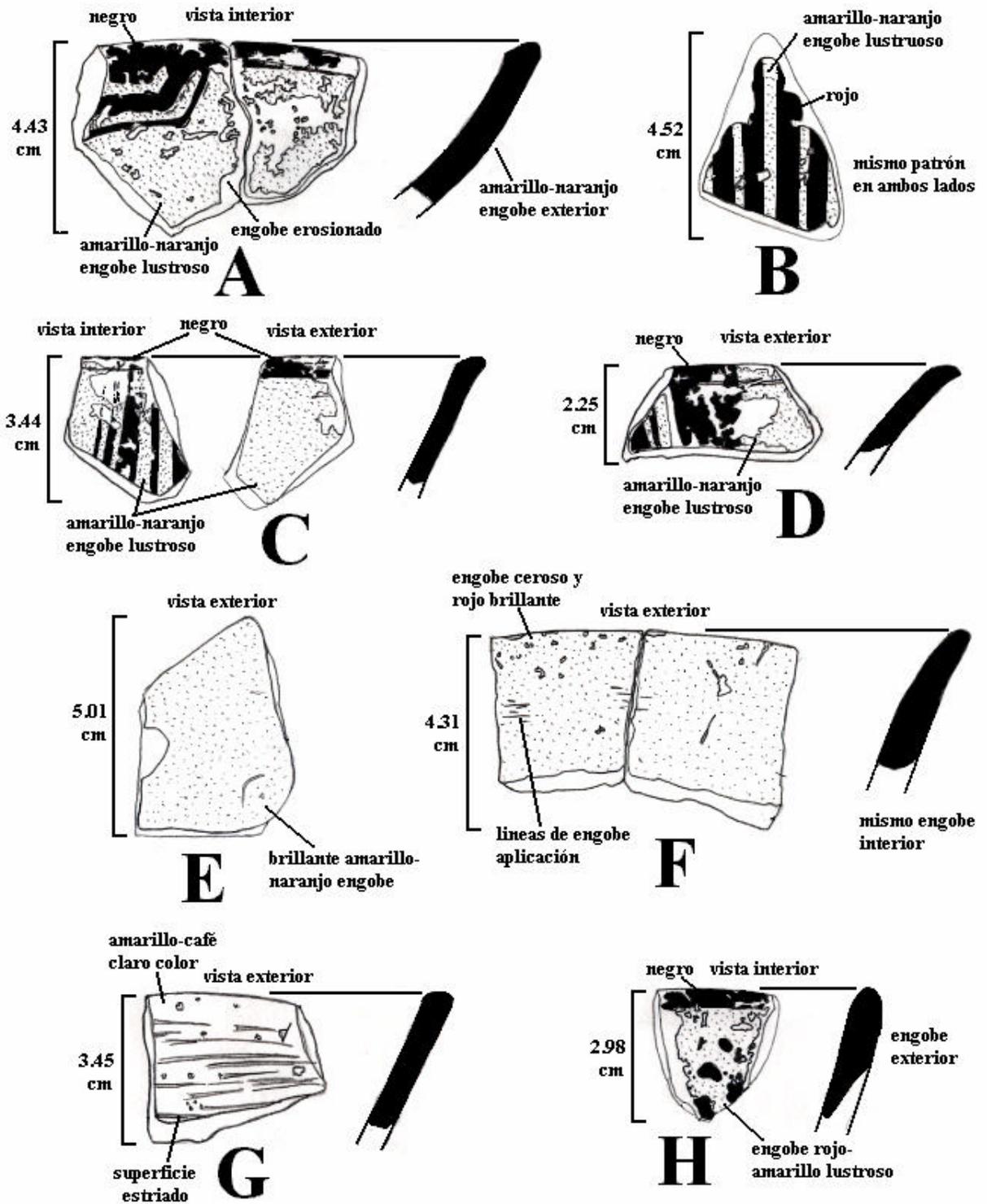
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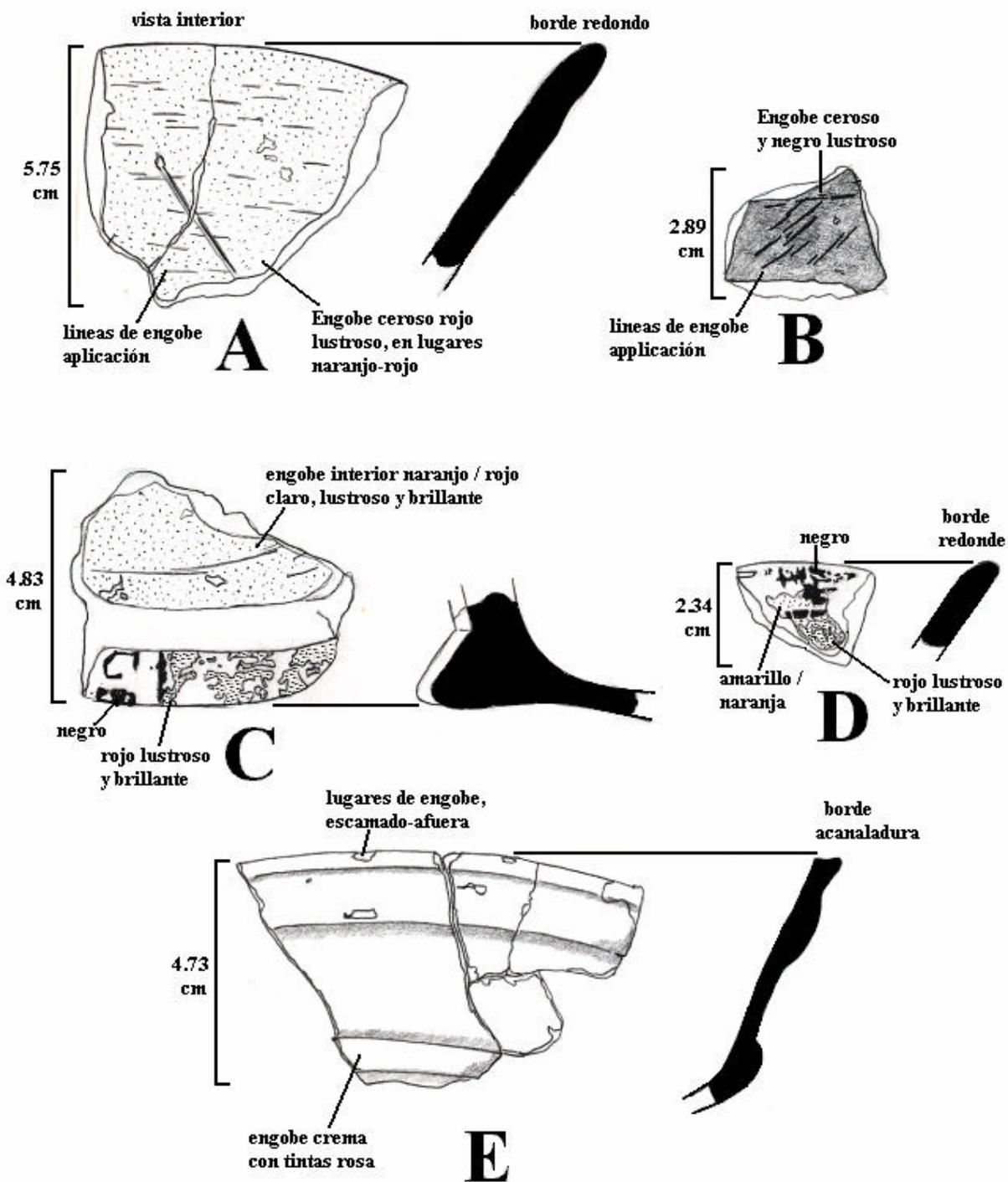
A, B, C, D. Sierra Rojo. E. Desconocido tipo jaspeado negro sobre naranja. F. Polvero Negro. G. Fuego-nenegrecido Sierra Rojo. H. Tiesto estraído sin engobe. I. Tiesto alisado sin engobe.

Figure 2- Kaq Complex ceramic types and modes



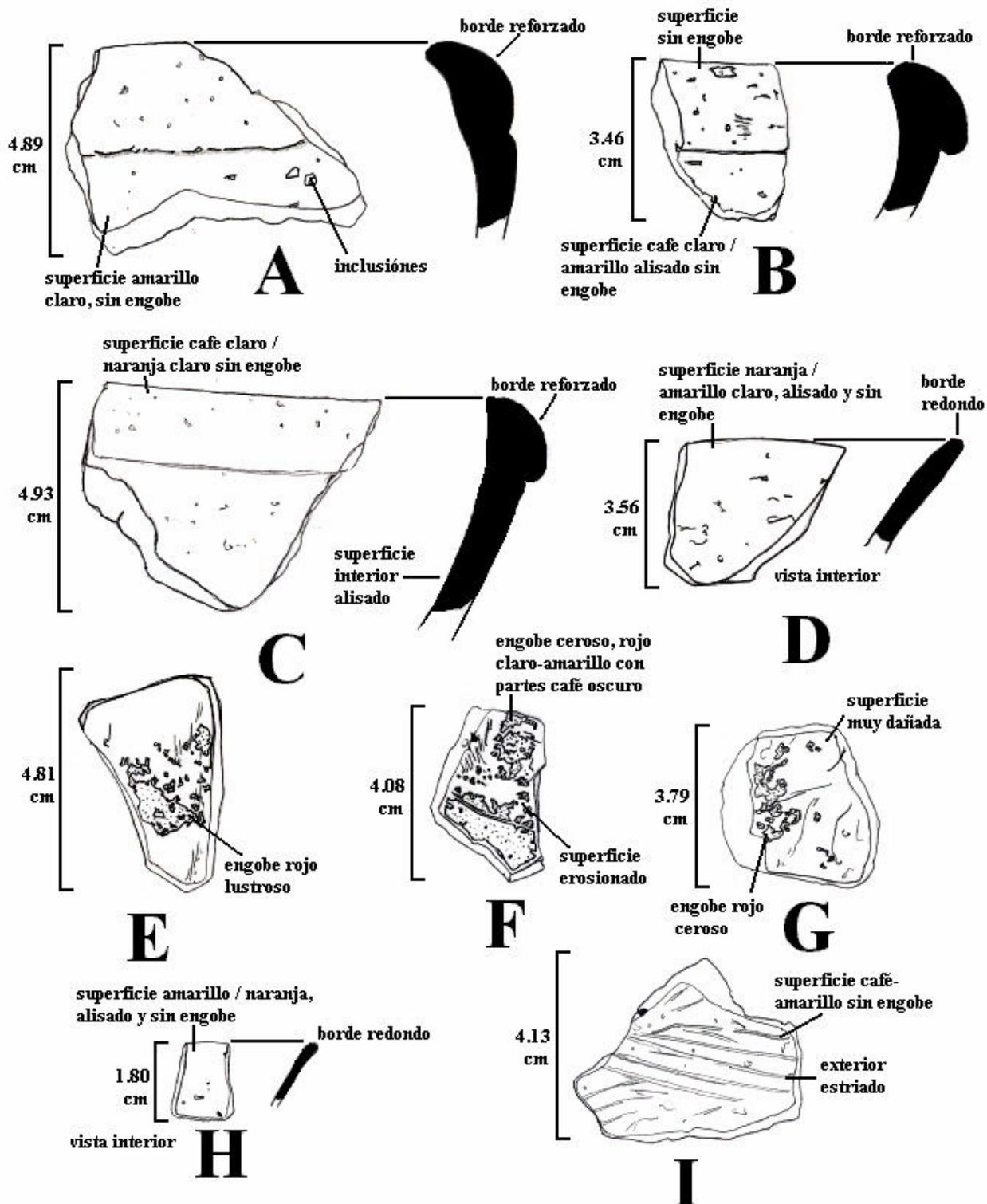
A, C, D. Sacluc Negro sobre naranja. B. Picoleros Rojo sobre naranja. E. Aguila Naranja. F. Sierra Rojo. G. Estriado tiesto sin engobe. H. Desconocido tipo jaspeado negro sobre naranja

Figure 3- Q'an Complex ceramic types and modes



A. Sierra Rojo. B. Polvero Negro. C, D. Dos Arroyos Naranja Policromo. E. Flor Crema.

Figure 4- Q'an Complex ceramic types and modes



**A, B, C. Tiestos con bordes reforzados sin engobe. D. Sin engobe borde tiesto. E. Tinaja Rojo. F,G. Desconocido rojo ceroso tipo de Clasico Terminal. H. Desconocido tipo flaco. I. Tiesto estriado sin engobe.**

Figure 5- Rax Complex ceramic types and modes

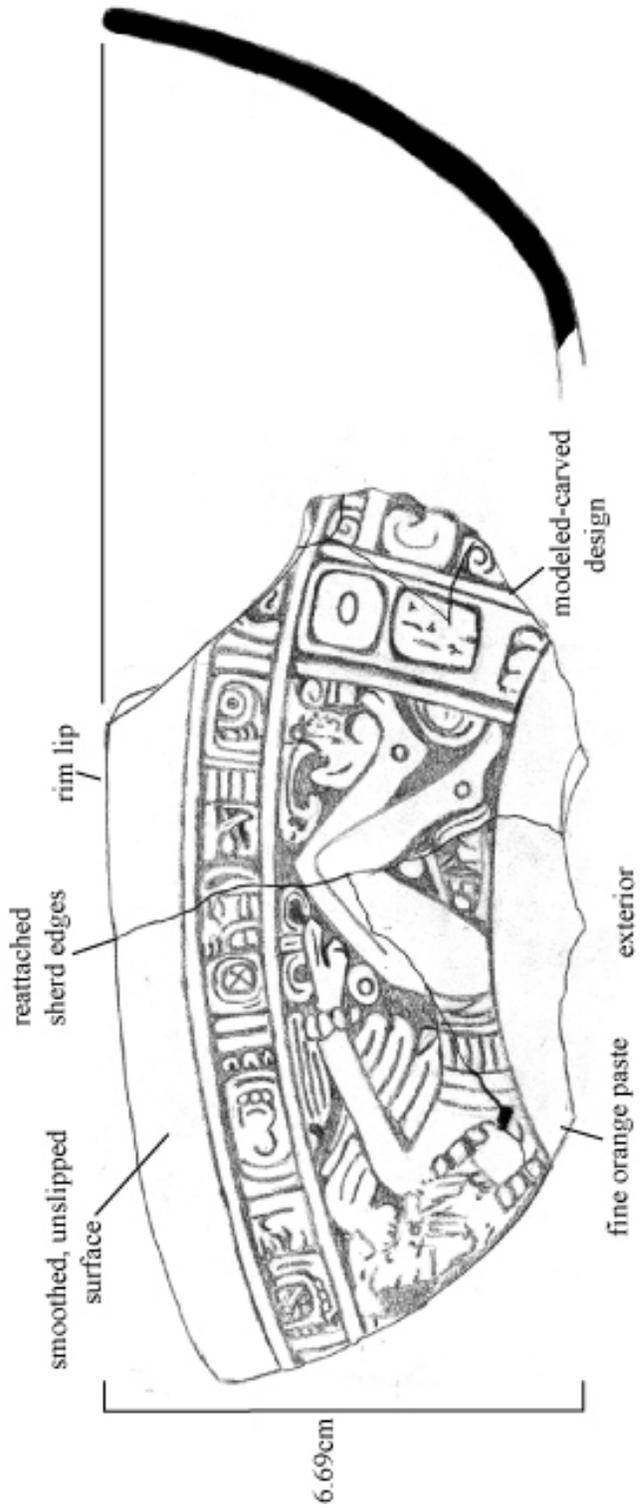


Figure 6- Pabellon Molded-Carved

Pabellon Modeled-Carved