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## Cantón Corralito: Objects from a Possible Gulf Olmec Colony



Figure 1. Map of Mazatan and the Olmec Heartland (inset).

**Research Year:** 2005

**Culture:** Olmec

**Chronology:** Late Archaic to Early Formative

**Location:** México

**Site:** Cantón Corralito

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## Introduction

This illustrative project is one component of a larger study investigating the nature of social relations between the Gulf Coast and Pacific Coast regions during the early Olmec horizon (1150-1000 bc, uncalibrated). My overall interest lies in determining if Gulf Coast Olmec peoples established a colony along the Pacific Coast at the site of Cantón Corralito (Cheetham 2006a), which was about 25 hectares in size at the time and centrally located in the heart of the Mazatan zone about 400 km south of the Gulf Olmec heartland ([Figure 1](#)). The site has a long history of occupation beginning in the Late Archaic period (ca. 2500-2000 bc) and then the Early Formative Barra, Locona, Ocos, Cherla, and Cuadros phases (ca. 1600-1000 bc). Near the end of the Cuadros phase Cantón Corralito was completely destroyed by river floodwaters and covered by a thick (1.0-2.5 m) layer of sand and alluvium, making it a sort of aquatic version of Pompeii. With financial aid from the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAf) and the Reinhart Foundation, the site was excavated between April-July of 2004. The massive inventory of artifacts from large-scale excavations includes over 5,000 objects produced in the early Olmec style typical of the Gulf Coast and several other regions of Mesoamerica. Most Olmec style objects at Cantón Corralito are fragments of ceramic figurines and potsherds with carved-incised designs, although the inventory is not restricted to these two classes of objects.

I requested FAMSI funds to have some of the objects excavated at Cantón Corralito professionally illustrated and made available for both future publication and current viewing on the FAMSI website. Since the collections are very large, only a very small percentage of objects were drawn and some classes or types of items received more attention than others (most notably, carved potsherds). Still, the drawings contained in this report should prove useful to scholars wishing to compare materials from Cantón Corralito with those excavated elsewhere in Mesoamerica. The illustrations were done by the talented hand of Ajax Moreno; former staff artist at the NWAf (Brigham Young University) based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

With few exceptions all fully illustrated objects in this report were subjected to chemical compositional analysis (INAA) to determine origin of manufacture. The compositional work, now in preparation for publication, indicates that a significant number of Early Olmec horizon figurine and decorated pottery fragments (ca. 9-18%, depending on class/type) excavated at Cantón Corralito come from objects made in vicinity of San Lorenzo Veracruz, the largest and best documented Early Olmec horizon site in the Gulf

Coast region. I by no means had all imported objects illustrated, but those that were are included here and duly labelled. The same is true of the few objects imported from an unknown location. All other illustrated objects were made at Cantón Corralito or elsewhere in Mazatan.

The report begins with a brief regarding the nature of the early Olmec phenomenon in Mesoamerica, debate surrounding this issue, and related research questions behind the Cantón Corralito project. The research design is then introduced, with data summaries provided for each method used as far as current results permit. Illustrations made possible through the FAMSI grant are presented in the appropriate overview, and in two sections links are provided to a related study or work already completed or nearing completion. Note that my inability to fully disclose all research results is not due to any reluctance to do so, but rather the fact that the project forms the basis of my Ph.D. at Arizona State University, which was in the write-up stage at the time this report was prepared and submitted. All FAMSI sponsored illustrations are, however, included.

*Submitted 03/26/2007 by:*

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## **Background**

One of the most celebrated yet contentious examples of a widespread prehistoric art style in the New World is the Olmec style (Coe 1965), which debuted in many regions of Mesoamerica about 1150 bc in the form of distinctively decorated pottery and human effigy figurines. Because the formation of Mesoamerica as a culture area was in some ways predicated on the widespread artistic and presumably mythico-religious communion that the phenomenon speaks to, it is not surprising that archaeologists have debated the kinds of interaction underlying the distribution of Olmec style objects for decades without reaching consensus. Explanations include simple emulation of foreign styles by indigenous non-Olmec groups located in regions far from the so-called Olmec heartland, peaceful religious conversion of such groups by Gulf Olmec peoples, outright conquest and colonization by the Gulf Olmec, and mutualistic relations among peer polities (Bernal 1969; Caso 1965, Clark 1990; Coe 1968; Diehl and Coe 1995; Flannery and Marcus 2000; Grove 1989; Piña Chan 1989). Given the variable nature of the archaeological record from region to region with respect to both the quantity and quality of Olmec style objects, it is increasingly clear that Gulf Olmec interaction with distant societies varied according to local conditions and the desires of both groups (Clark 1997; B. Stark 2000). If, as seems likely, one model cannot explain the appearance of

the Olmec style in all regions, the nature of contact must be investigated case-by-case and interpreted through close examination of similarities and differences in archaeological materials. Despite decades of Olmec research, few detailed comparative studies of this sort have been attempted.

The Cantón Corralito project was designed to broach this largely untapped and potentially rewarding avenue of research by clarifying the nature of interregional interaction between the Olmec and one distant region of Mesoamerica—the southern Pacific Coast of Chiapas, home of the “Mokaya” (corn people) archaeological culture and some of the earliest complex chiefdom societies in Mesoamerica (Clark 1994). Since research at Cantón Corralito was tailored to address the nature of interaction between Gulf Olmec and Mokaya peoples it cannot clarify the social milieu created between the Gulf Olmec and cultures in other regions of Mesoamerica. I cannot emphasize this point strongly enough, especially given the current climate of Olmec studies. The Cantón case will, however, establish a rich material data base that will be a useful tool to assess other Early Olmec era cases of interregional interaction involving the Gulf Olmec.

The basic research question behind the Cantón Corralito project is: What was the nature of social relations between the Gulf Olmec of Veracruz and Mokaya peoples of coastal Chiapas immediately before (1250-1150 bc) and during (1150-1000 bc) the era in which the early Olmec style was dominant? The abandonment of the paramount Mokaya political center of Paso de la Amada by 1150 bc, near complete shift from local to Olmec stylistic cannons throughout the region, and founding of a possible Olmec colony at Cantón Corralito provide compelling evidence that interaction with the Gulf Olmec profoundly altered the social and political fabric of Mazatan (Clark 1997; Clark and Blake 1989; Clark and Pye 2000). The social relations underlying these events, however, remain somewhat speculative in the absence of detailed comparative research. Was this possible colony site comprised of immigrant Olmecs or well-connected Mokaya elite who had become—or were becoming—ethnically Olmec through the adoption of exotic objects and customs? Did both local Mokaya and foreign Olmec peoples reside at Cantón Corralito? And if Cantón Corralito is in fact a colony, can we understand its founding through hegemonic models predicated on European colonialism (see Dietler 2005) or other, less authoritative kinds of colonial encounters?

The Cantón Corralito project is addressing these and other less fundamental research questions. The first step is to determine whether the site was a colony by closely comparing the materials found there with objects found in the Gulf Coast region. The inventory of excavated objects at Cantón Corralito is eminently suited to this task. The over 5,000 Olmec style items recovered across the ancient settlement include items traditionally associated with the Olmec style like carved-incised vessels and anthropomorphic figurines, less common items in the Olmec style (e.g., roller stamps), objects of probable domestic use (e.g., ceramic spatulas/spoons) and personal adornment (earspools), and even spectacular features like a juvenile burial surrounded

by 15 jade and serpentine axes ([Figure 2](#)). Cantón Corralito is simply one of the best archaeological sites in Mesoamerica to understand the nature of the early Olmec style phenomenon beyond the Gulf Coast and is an ideal place to study the relationship between long-distant contact and social identity in general. That the site may be a Gulf Olmec colony is all the more remarkable considering it predates any documented colonies in Mesoamerica (e.g., Spence 2005) by more than a millennium.



Figure 2. Burial 2 (excavation T3-5), Canton Corralito.

## Methods and Preliminary Result

A comparative approach was applied to ceramic vessels and anthropomorphic figurines—the most numerous Olmec style objects—to determine the extent of similarity between collections from Cantón Corralito and San Lorenzo. The basic hypothesis is as follows: very close correspondence in these materials will indicate the presence of Gulf Olmec people at Cantón Corralito—a colony of some sort; weak correspondence will indicate copying or emulation of Olmec designs by indigenous people. Although the current research focus is pottery and figurines, I must repeat that Cantón excavations yielded additional classes of Olmec and non-Olmec style artifacts with counterparts at San Lorenzo. Archaeologists who study prehistoric colonial situations universally recognize that more classes of objects are better than less, since they speak to more shared traditions and practices between the suspected colony and the homeland or metropole, essentially strengthening the case for a colony (see Santley *et al.* 1987). In

keeping with this recognition, the Cantón Corralito project will incorporate more data as it becomes available through additional artifactual and non-artifactual (e.g., faunal and floral) studies, many of which are now underway.

The comparative approach necessitated two basic databases: (1) Local, consisting of vessels and figurines produced at or near the Cantón Corralito and (2) Gulf Olmec, consisting of imported vessels and figurines identified at Cantón Corralito and vessels and figurines excavated in the 1960s (Coe and Diehl 1980) at San Lorenzo. I was able to create the second database using the collection housed at the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, and humbly thank that institution and Dr. Michael Coe for permission to do so.

### **Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis**

Compositional analysis (INAA) was used to chemically fingerprint the fired clay of 675 objects from Cantón Corralito and San Lorenzo ([Table 1](#)) and determine their origin of manufacture (Local, Gulf Olmec, or Unidentified Import). Selection of Cuadros phase decorated pottery (Calzadas Carved and Limón Incised) at Cantón Corralito was made on the basis of sherd size and design type. Large sherds that retained significant portions of designs were given priority since it was necessary to determine their origin of manufacture for comparative stylistic and morphological analyses. Other Cuadros phase ceramic types at Cantón Corralito were selected randomly or on the basis of unique forms and large size, and all intact or near intact figurine heads were sampled. A few specimens of other artifact classes (masquettes, spatulas [elongated ceramic spoons]) were also sampled.

**Table 1. Quantity of objects (by class) submitted for INAA**

		San Lorenzo	Cantón Corralito	Totals
INITIAL OLMEC (1250-1150 bc)	ceramic vessels	18	46	64
	figurines	6	9	15
	earspools	–	6	6
	subtotal	24	61	85
EARLY OLMEC (1150-1000 bc)	carved pottery (Calzadas)	17	224	241
	incised pottery (Limón)	8	197	205
	pottery (other types)	16	19	35
	figurines	43	56	99
	masquettes	1	4	5
	spatulas	–	4	4
	raw clay	–	1	1
	subtotal	85	505	590
GRAN TOTAL		109	566	675

The INAA was conducted at the University of Missouri Research Reactor (MURR) under the direction of Dr. Michael Glascock and was funded jointly by that institution, the National Science Foundation, and the NAAF. The resulting data were sent to California State University–Long Beach, where they are now being analyzed by Dr. Hector Neff and David Cheetham.

Preliminary results are in keeping with a recent provenance study of Early Formative pottery from several regions of Mesoamerica, including the Gulf Coast and Pacific Coast (Blomster *et al.* 2005; Neff *et al.* 2006a, 2006b). In that study, not a single object sampled from San Lorenzo was identified as an import from any of the other regions considered. The current work is in complete agreement with those findings—no definite imports were detected in the sample of objects excavated at San Lorenzo.

The sample from Cantón Corralito, on the contrary, includes numerous imports from San Lorenzo. For the Cuadros phase (Early Olmec horizon), 15 percent of the carved pottery (Calzadas Carved) and nine percent of the incised pottery (Limón Incised) was imported. Considering that slightly less than 4,600 fragments of carved and incised potsherds were excavated from approximately 1/1000 of Cantón Corralito’s known extent, a conservative estimate would have approximately four million fragments for the whole site or about 26,000 potsherds for each year of its 150 year Early Olmec period

occupation. This means that several hundred (400-500+) carved and incised pots were arriving at Cantón Corralito annually. And this figure only represents two types of pottery; several other types of non-decorated fine-paste vessels were regularly imported as well. It seems certain that a very high volume of pottery was moving from the Gulf Coast to Mazatan throughout the Cuadros phase.

The chemical composition of Cuadros phase figurines reveals a similar pattern, with 13 to 18 percent of specimens imported from San Lorenzo, depending on the kind of fragment (solid vs. hollow). Based on head fragments alone, this translates to over 200 figurines imported from San Lorenzo each year of Cantón Corralito's 150 year Cuadros phase. Like pottery vessels, the movement of these items was very frequent and my estimate is conservative.

Although the INAA provides incontrovertible evidence of sustained, and quite likely direct long-distance interaction between San Lorenzo and Cantón Corralito, the nature of the human relations behind this contact cannot be deduced from the chemical data alone. The desire to address this largely untapped area of research is what spawned the entire Cantón Corralito project. From the beginning, the intent was to use INAA to securely establish objects as having been made at either San Lorenzo or Cantón Corralito and then methodically compare those objects to determine the degree of stylistic (designs properties) and morphological (metric and formal properties) similarity between collections.

### **Pottery Classification and Morphology**

In keeping with Coe and Diehl's (1980) classification of pottery from San Lorenzo (where slip preservation is very poor), a type-only scheme was applied to Cantón Corralito pottery. The data generated through typological analysis (specific types and frequencies) provide a general measure of the pottery preferences of the Cantón Corralito inhabitants in relation to those of San Lorenzo. The main ceramic types for the time frames 1250-1150 bc (Cherla phase) and 1150-1000 bc (Cuadros phase) have been established for the Mazatan area (Clark and Cheetham 2005) and the typology was completed using the Cantón Corralito collection from the 2004 excavations. All decorated sherds identified as imports were excluded from the Cantón Corralito classification, although the aggregate ceramic complexes from the site are, of course, comprised almost entirely of sherds not tested via INAA. That is to say, very few sherds of non-decorated types were subjected to INAA. Ceramic types for San Lorenzo consist of those established by Coe and Diehl (1980), with a form breakdown completed by D. Cheetham during two visits to Yale University in 2005.

There is considerable typological overlap between contemporaneous ceramic complexes of San Lorenzo and Cantón Corralito (i.e., between San Lorenzo and



Cuadros phase types for the Early Olmec horizon and Chicharras and Cherla phase types for the Initial Olmec era). In some cases (e.g., black and white types) different names are applied to what amounts to the same kind of pottery at both sites. Differing nomenclature of this sort is based on the retention of decades-old type names; it should not be understood or interpreted to mean that such types necessarily diverge in any significant classificatory way. The color (e.g., white) and decoration (e.g., incised) used to define the types are the variables of significance when considering overall typological similarity. And they match fairly well ([Table 2](#)).

**Table 2. Abridged typology and frequencies, Early Olmec horizon**

	San Lorenzo	Cantón Corralito
UTILITARIAN—UNSLIPPED	33.1	27.1
Limón Incised	9.1	8.4
Calzadas Carved	6.6	2.2
FINE PASTE (kaolin & orange)	4.0	0.9
RED	1.4	7.0
ORANGE	1.0	0.9
BLACK	5.1	14.8
WHITE	2.8	10.1
BLACK-AND-WHITE	8.5	26.4
Unclassified—ERODED	28.4	—
OTHER	—	2.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

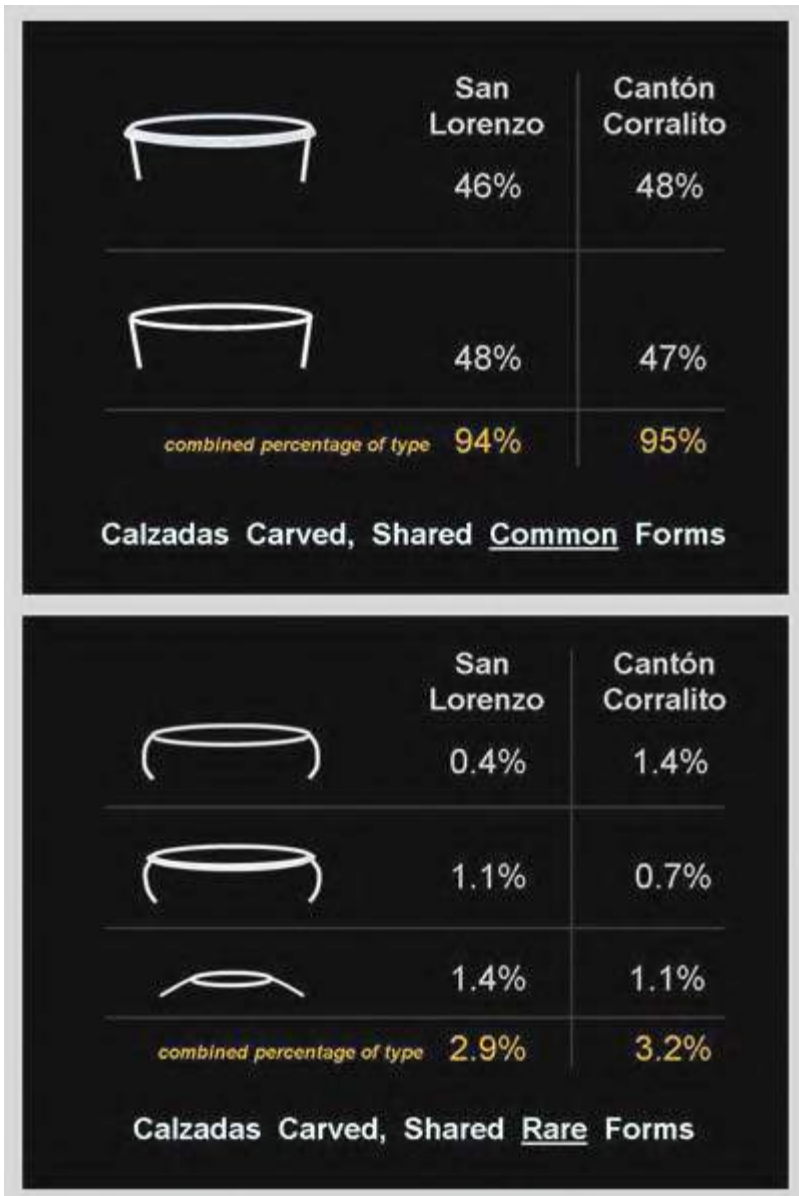


Figure 3. Form breakdown of Calzadas Carved pottery.

A detailed comparison of ceramic complexes is beyond the scope of this report, so I will simply summarize the current state of efforts in this area by noting that, in addition to considerable type correspondence, precise form correspondences are evident in most matching types. Form similarities range from very rare vessel shapes to common serving dishes and bowls. The extent of form correspondence is also being gauged at a more inclusive level of analysis between entire ceramic complexes. This involves extracting specific vessel forms (e.g., bolstered rim bowls) from all types within a ceramic complex and pooling the morphological parameters—measurable things such as rim diameter, vessel height, wall angle, and so on. These data are amenable to comparison with like data from another ceramic complex and can capture subtle and

salient aspects of finished products as well as the forming process itself. In short, the “technical style” of manufacture that is, at least in many cases, an important indicator of cultural affiliation since it can reveal rote learning behaviour and the residuals of practice (Lemonnier 1986, 1992; see also Hegmon 1998; M. Stark 1995). This aspect of the study is still in progress, but preliminary results from decorated pottery types (carved and incised) indicate uncanny technical style conformity between the potters of San Lorenzo and Cantón Corralito (see e.g., [Figure 3](#) and [Table 3](#)).

I have made the basic type and form breakdown (descriptions) of all ceramic complexes related to this research available here as pdf files for those interested in accessing the data in advance of full publication and Cheetham’s dissertation ([San Lorenzo ceramic complexes](#) & [Cantón Corralito ceramic complexes](#)). This should be useful to researchers wishing to conduct a detailed comparison of pottery from the Gulf Coast and a region other than the Pacific Coast/Mazatan.

**Table 3. Calzadas Carved, direct rim bowls, comparative statistics**

		rim diameter (cm)	base diameter (cm)	height (cm)	rim thickness (mm)	wall thickness (mm)	base thickness (mm)	wall angle (°)
<b>SAN LORENZO</b>								
n	=	16	12	16	16	16	14	16
mean	=	18.8	15.3	8.3	6.6	6.4	5.7	79
standard deviation	=	8.3	7.0	3.2	1.7	1.0	1.7	4.7
<b>CANTON CORRALITO</b>								
n	=	15	15	15	15	15	15	14
mean	=	20.0	17.7	9.3	8.1	7.9	7.5	78
standard deviation	=	7.6	6.6	3.5	1.8	1.2	1.5	4.9

## Style and Design Structure

The most challenging aspect this research involves the comparative analysis of style and design for both pottery (designs/motifs and their components) and anthropomorphic figurines (facial and other traits). This aspect of the research is underway. What follows is a summary of the methods used and an illustrative look at some of the objects involved.

Potsherds with carved and/or incised designs are being analyzed according to the hierarchical method of Friedrich (1970, 1984; see also Plog 1980). All Local and Gulf Olmec sherds that retain significant portions of designs are included. The method entails four levels of study, each responsive to metric and geometric measurement: (1) design fields, or how a vessel surface is partitioned for design; (2) design configurations/motifs, the arrangement of design elements into composite entities located within spatial fields; (3) design elements, the smallest self-contained units of design; and (4) design element properties, or the details of design elements (e.g., line width). Other variables include overall motif/design element size and vessel form-motif correlation. The design grammar (all motifs/designs) of each collection is being assembled for comparison. The hierarchical method will, I think, provide the most objective means of achieving reliable and replicable comparative data regarding pottery. For example, a preliminary look at carved pottery from the respective settlements (Cheetham 2006b) indicates a high level of correspondence for both designs and motifs (for example, see [Figure 4](#)).

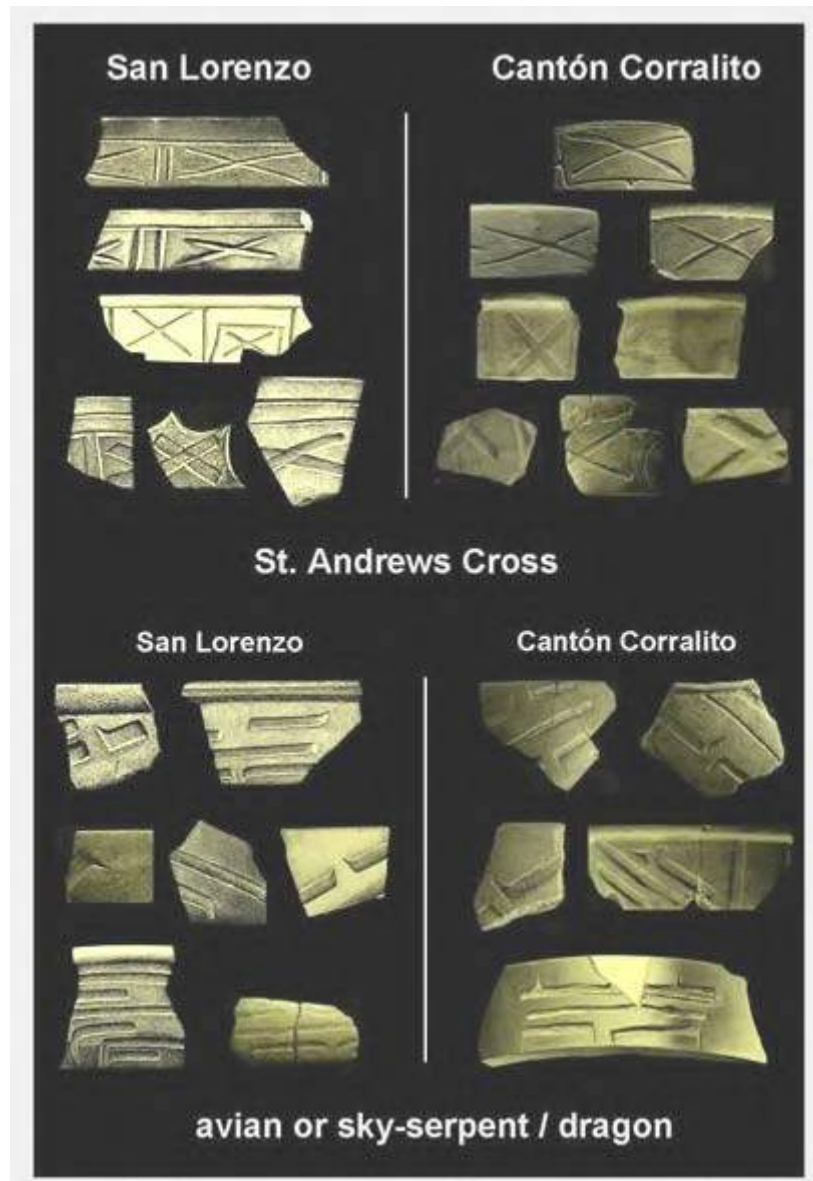


Figure 4. Corresponding motifs and design elements.

Most of the potsherds drawn for this report have carved exterior designs that were executed when the clay was in the leather hard stage of drying (before firing). This kind of pottery, defined as Calzadas Carved at San Lorenzo (Coe and Diehl 1980:162-170), exhibits a large number of motifs and designs (Figures 5 through 47, shown below). Most appear to be supernatural creatures or parts of creatures rendered in highly abstract form. A set of descriptive terms has been generated over the years to describe such entities: “St. Andrews Cross or crossed-bands” motif, “Sky Serpent/Dragon,” “flame eyebrows,” “clefts,” “gum brackets,” and so on. Based on the large collection of sherds from Cantón Corralito and intact vessels from elsewhere in Mesoamerica, most carved pots consist of design elements used to construct motifs which, in turn, form parts of compositional wholes. In many cases, the compositions are expansive,

covering but not cluttering much of (or all) the spatial field. Lower level design element and motif units of analysis do, however, occur on vessel fragments and are useful for comparative purposes. Many of the carved designs and motifs found on the locally produced Mazatan pots shown in [Figures 5-47](#) have similar or exact counterparts in the published collection from San Lorenzo (cf. Coe and Diehl 1980: Figs. 138-143) and the much larger sample of unpublished sherds from the 1960s Yale Project. Note that the specimens shown in Figures 5-47 do not cover the entire range of motifs and designs; this is but a tiny fraction of the complete corpus.

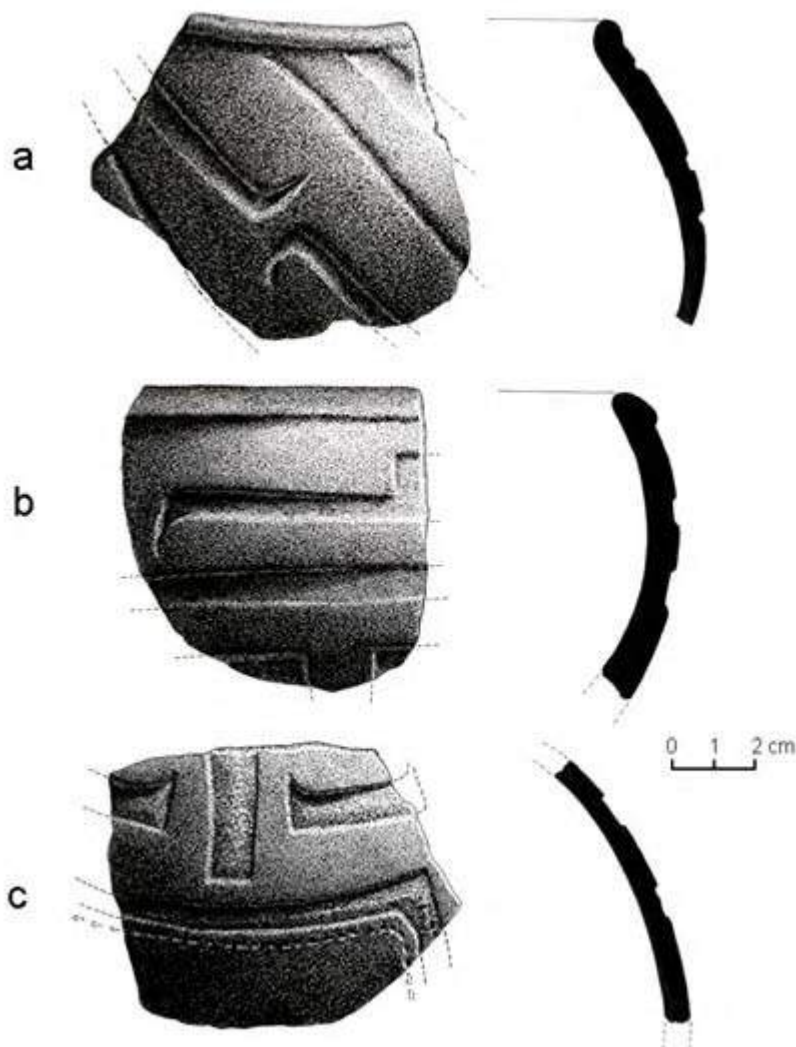


Figure 5. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

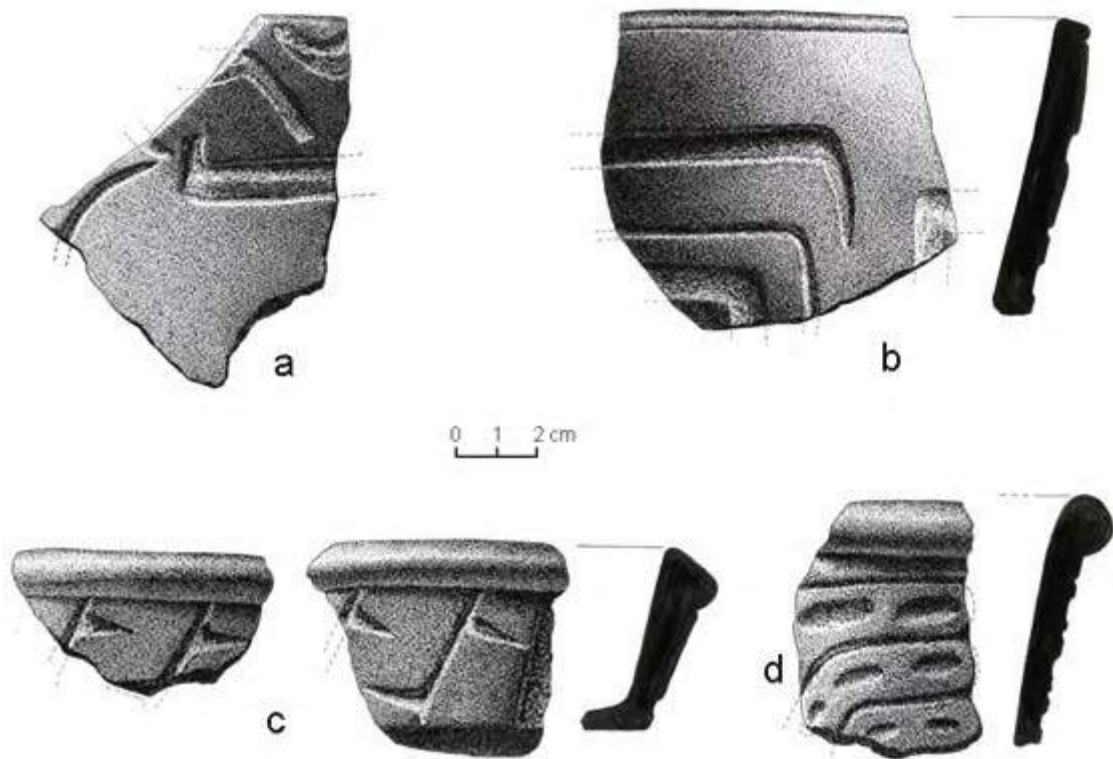


Figure 6. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

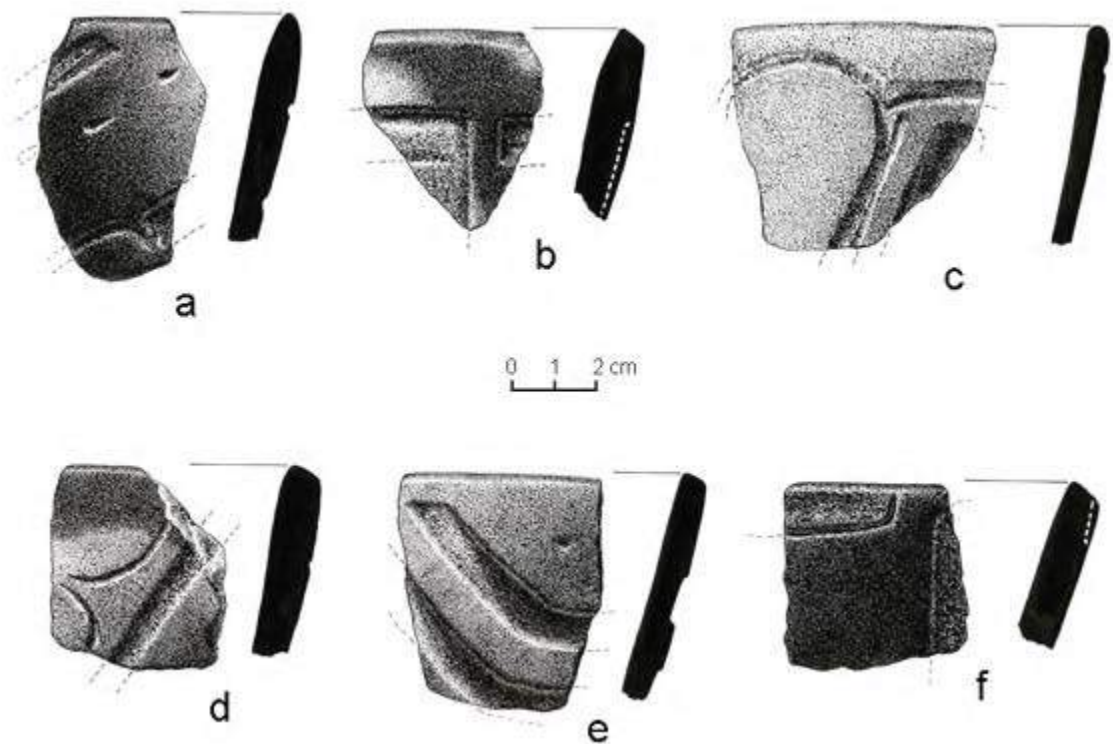


Figure 7. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen e is an import from San Lorenzo; specimen d is an unidentified import.

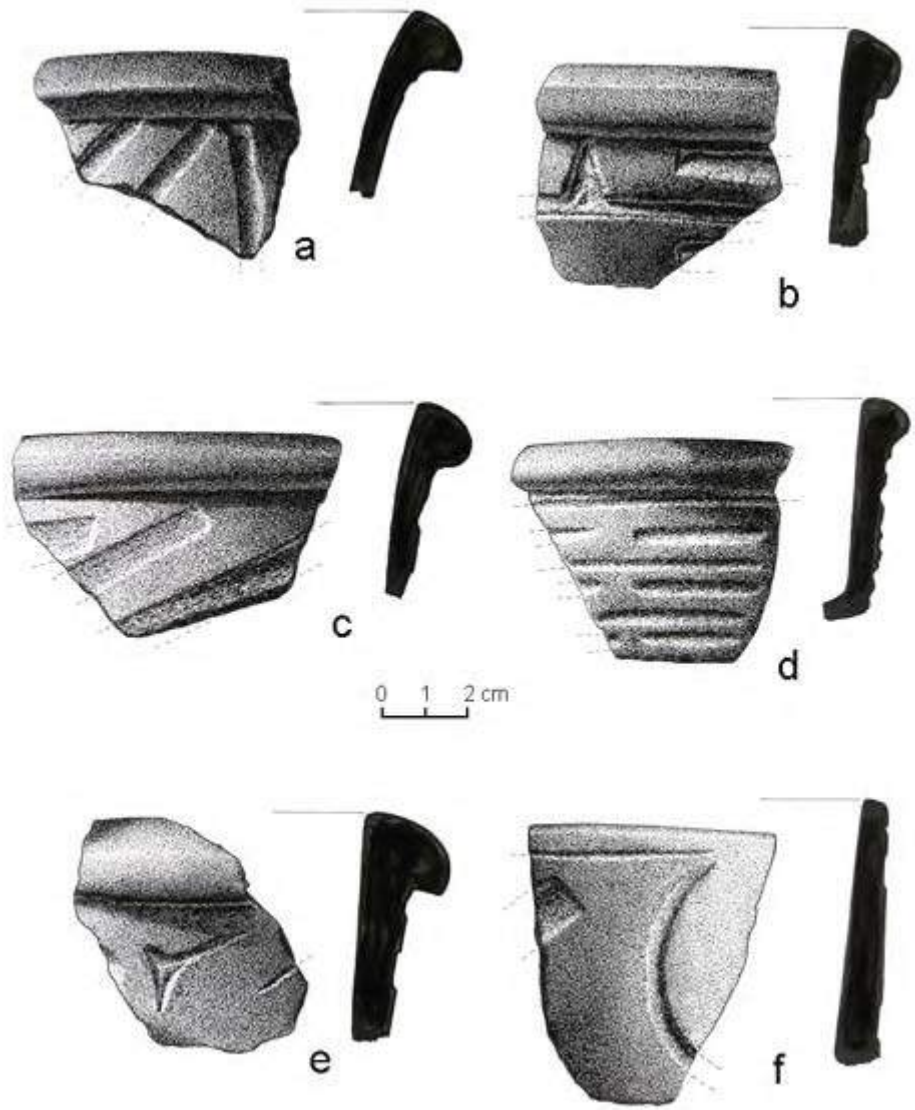


Figure 8. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen c is an import from San Lorenzo.



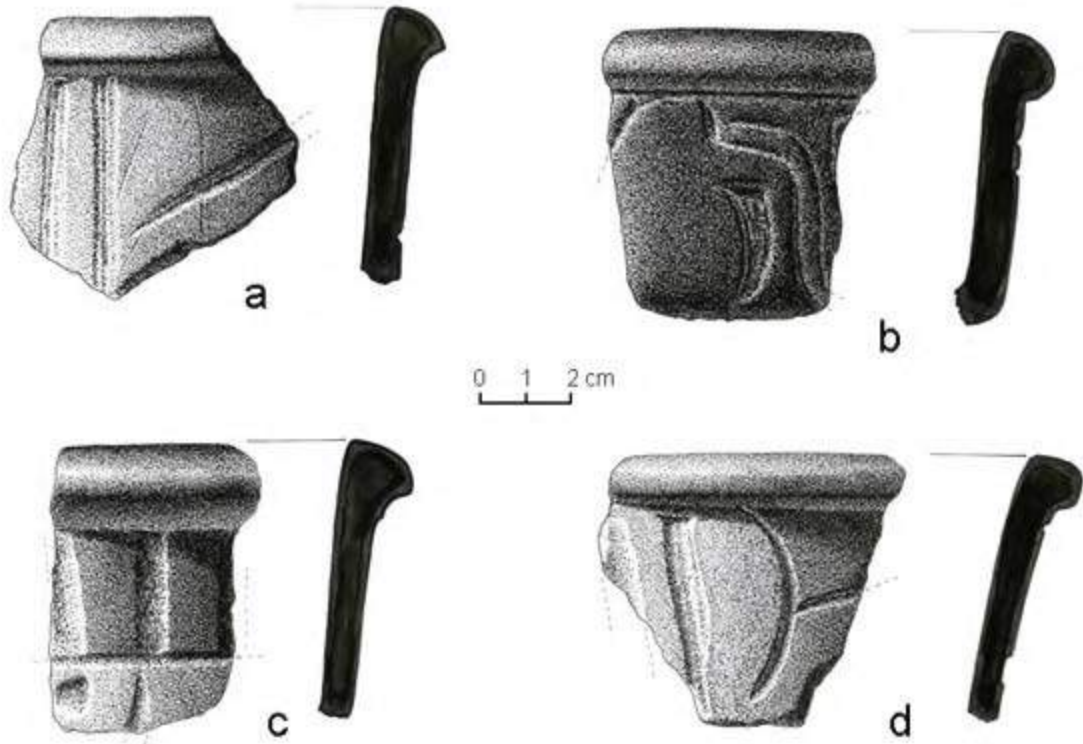


Figure 9. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

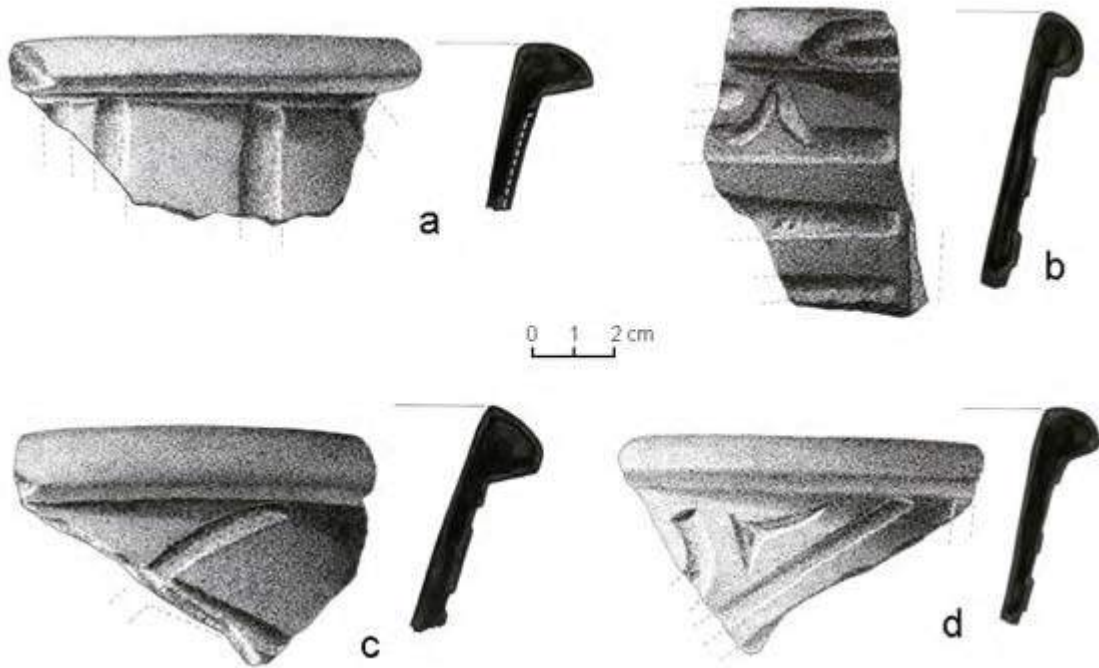


Figure 10. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

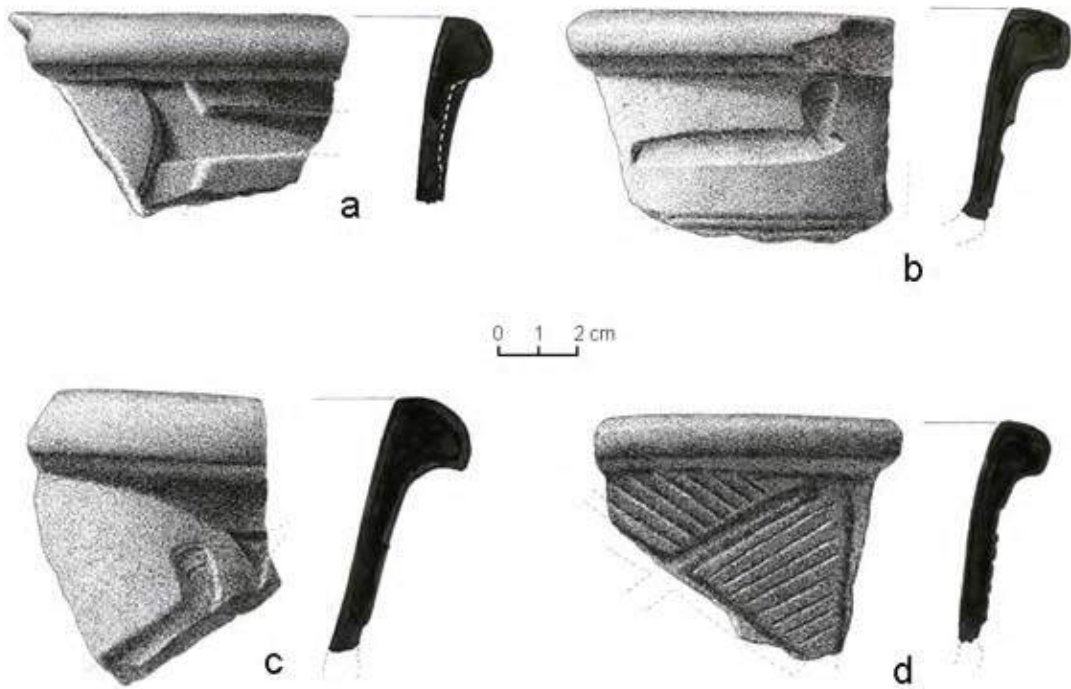


Figure 11. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

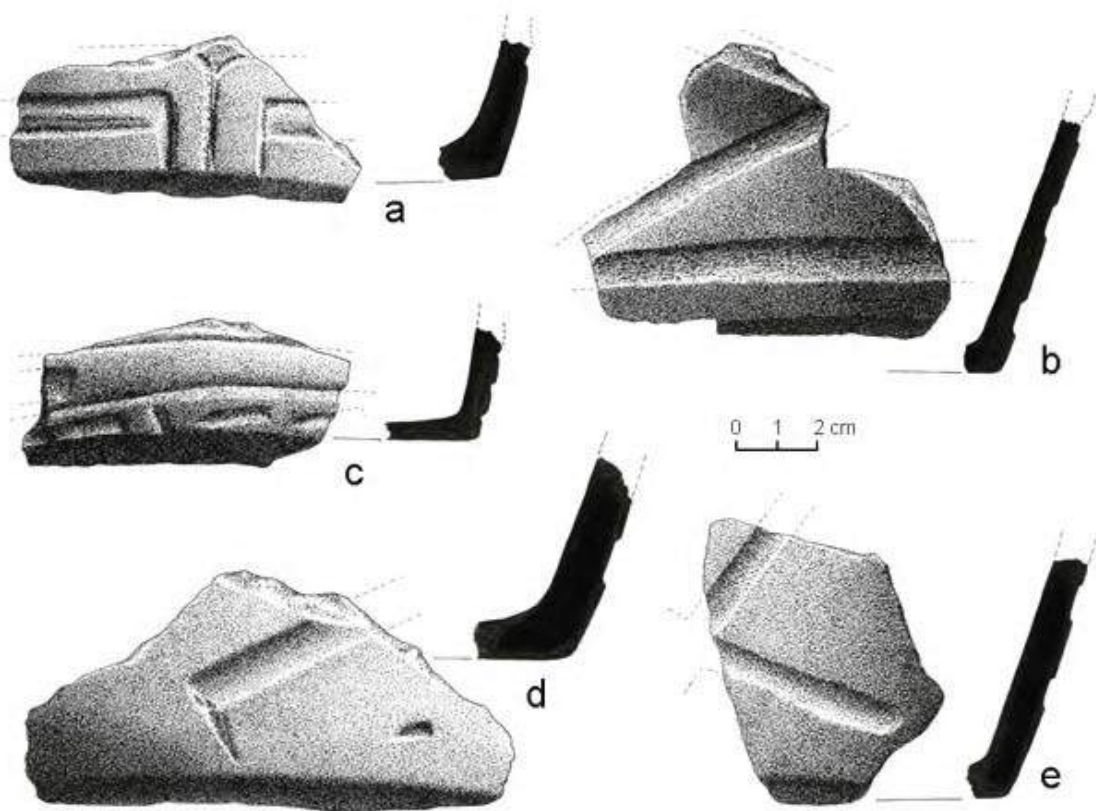


Figure 12. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

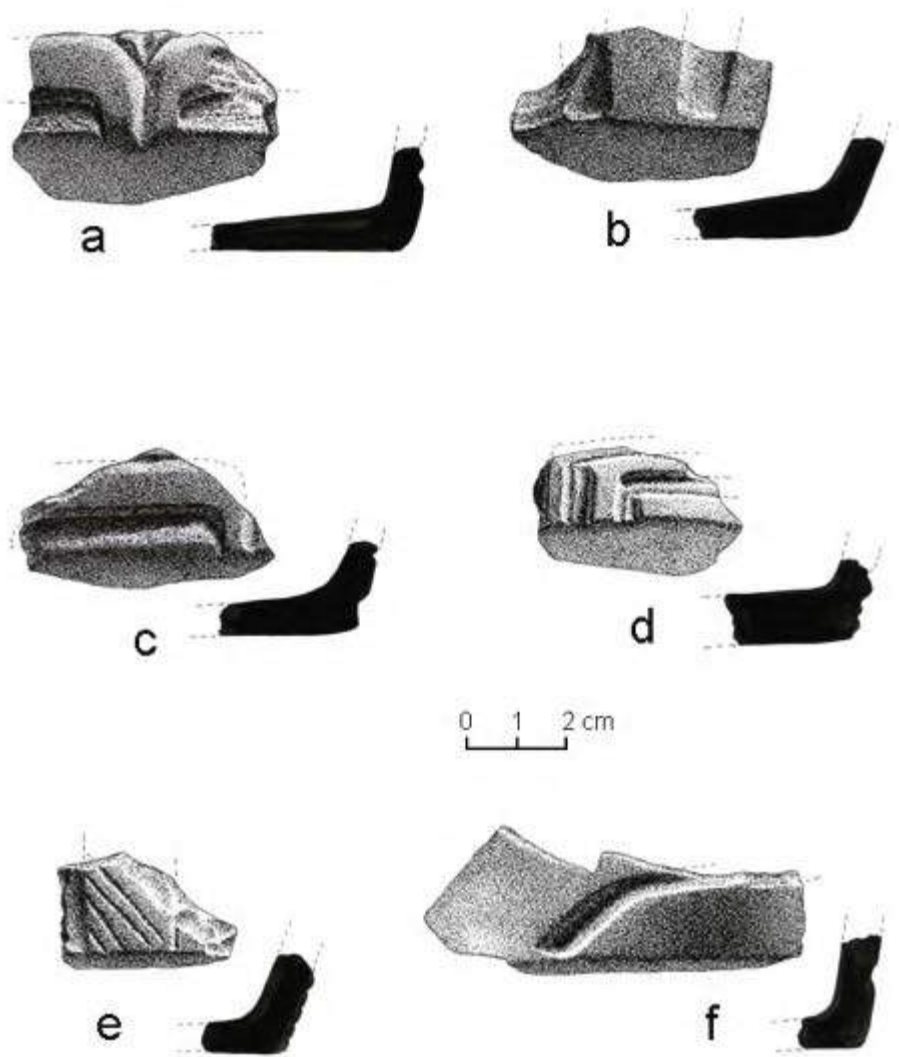


Figure 13. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

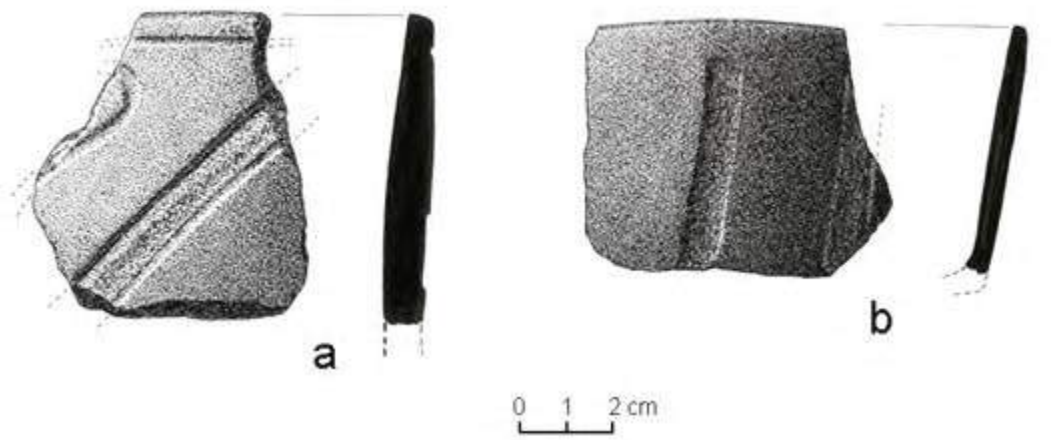


Figure 14. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen b is an import from San Lorenzo.

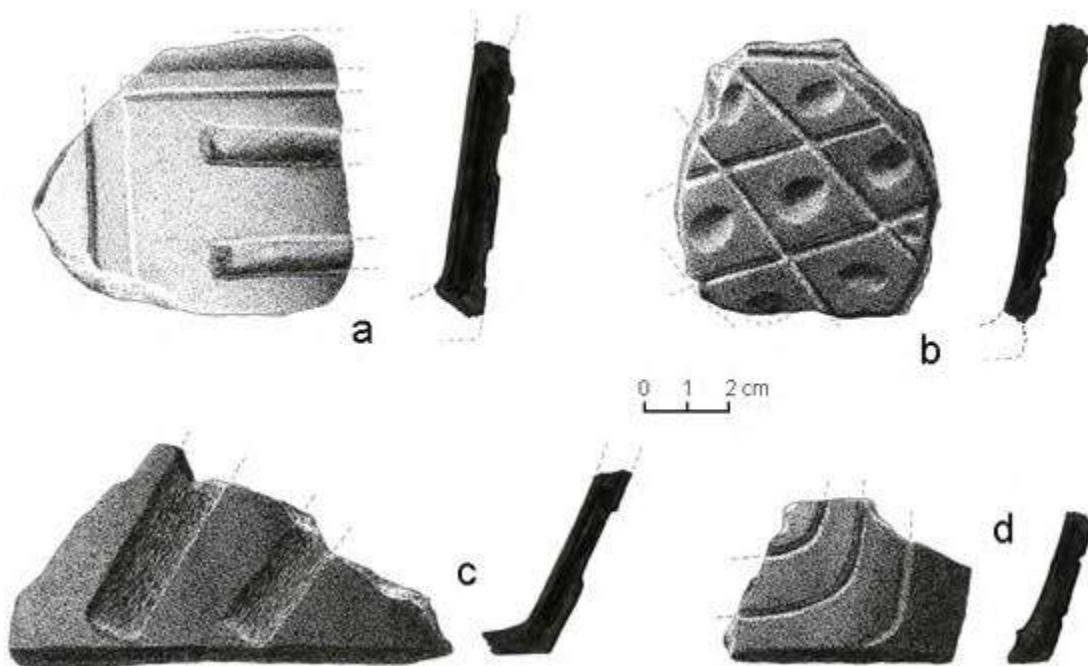


Figure 15. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen b is an import from San Lorenzo.

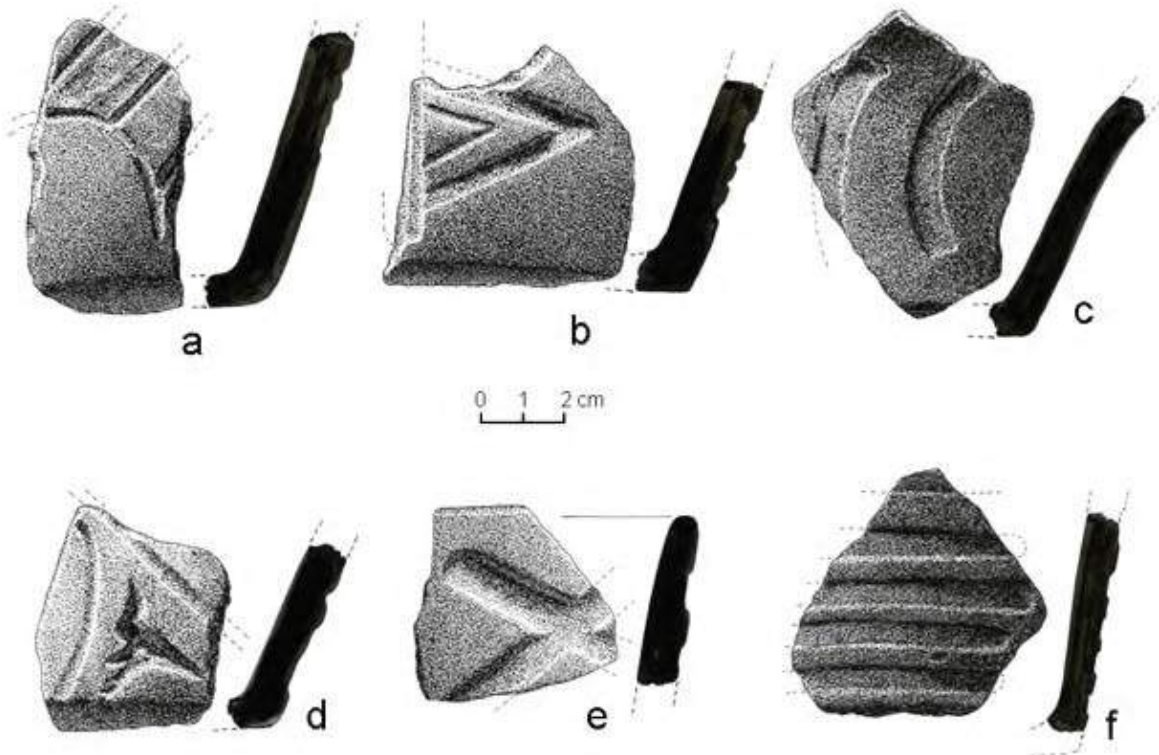


Figure 16. Calzadas Carved base and rim sherds. Specimen f is an import from San Lorenzo.

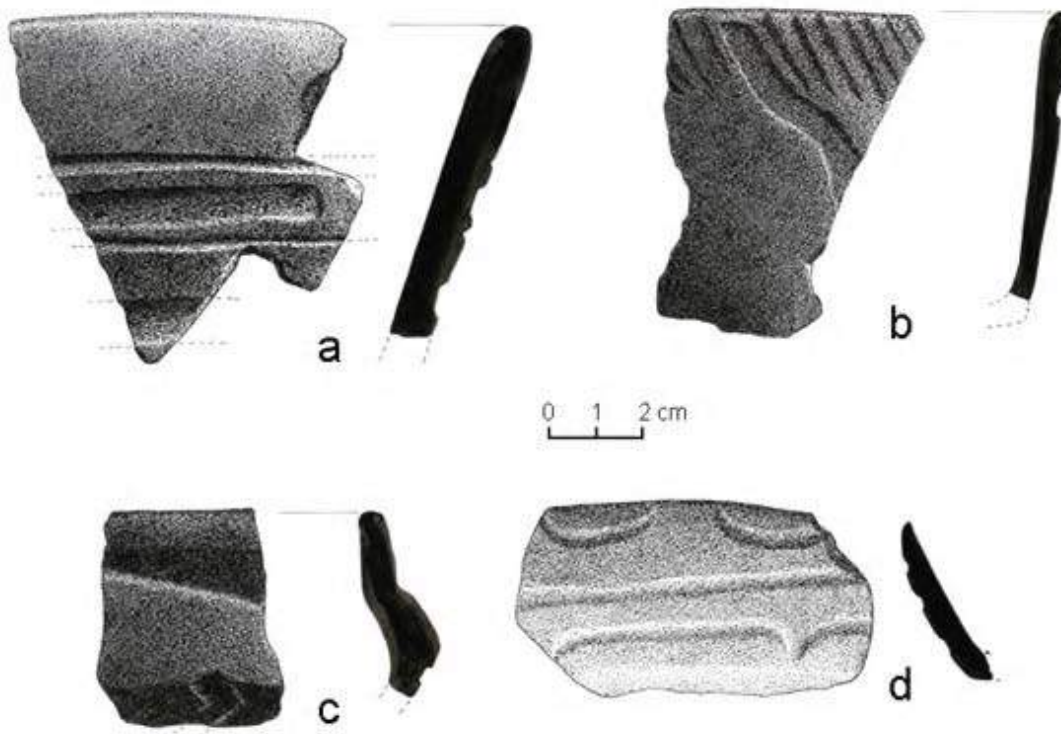


Figure 17. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimens b and d are imports from San Lorenzo.

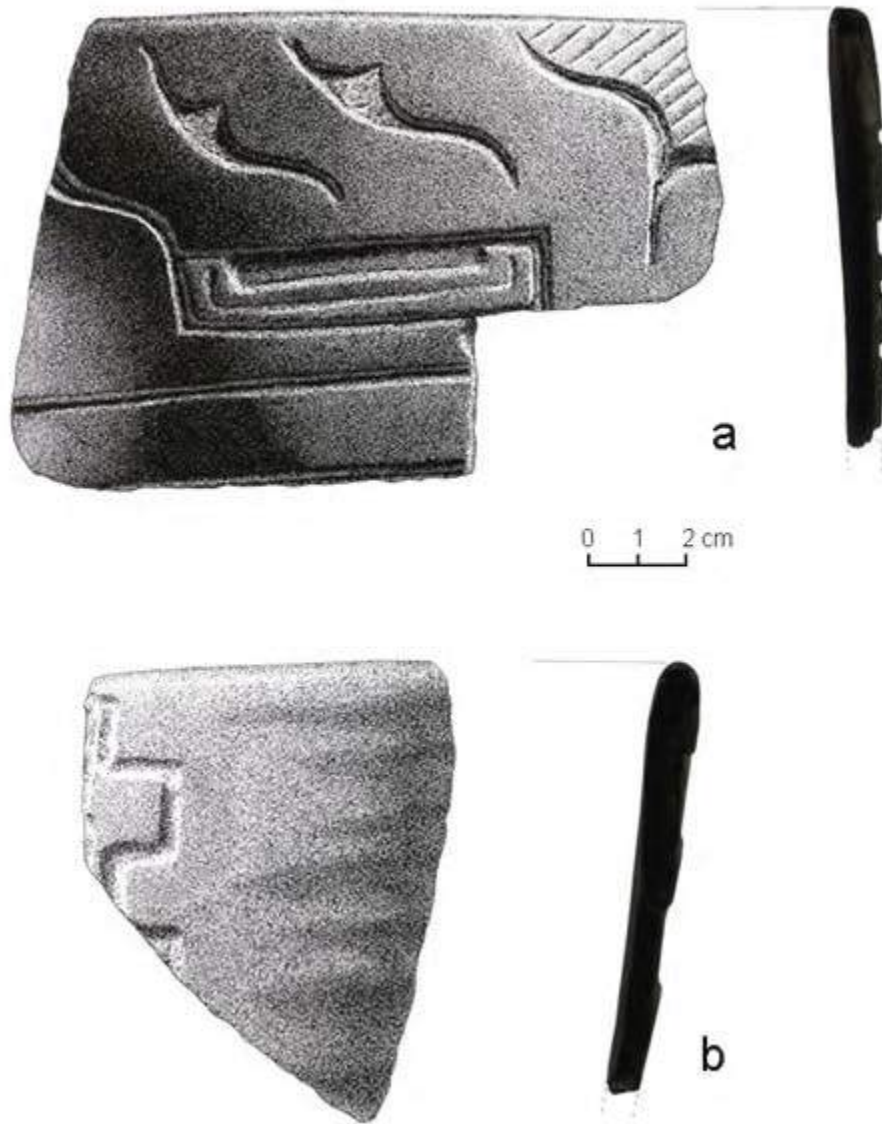


Figure 18. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

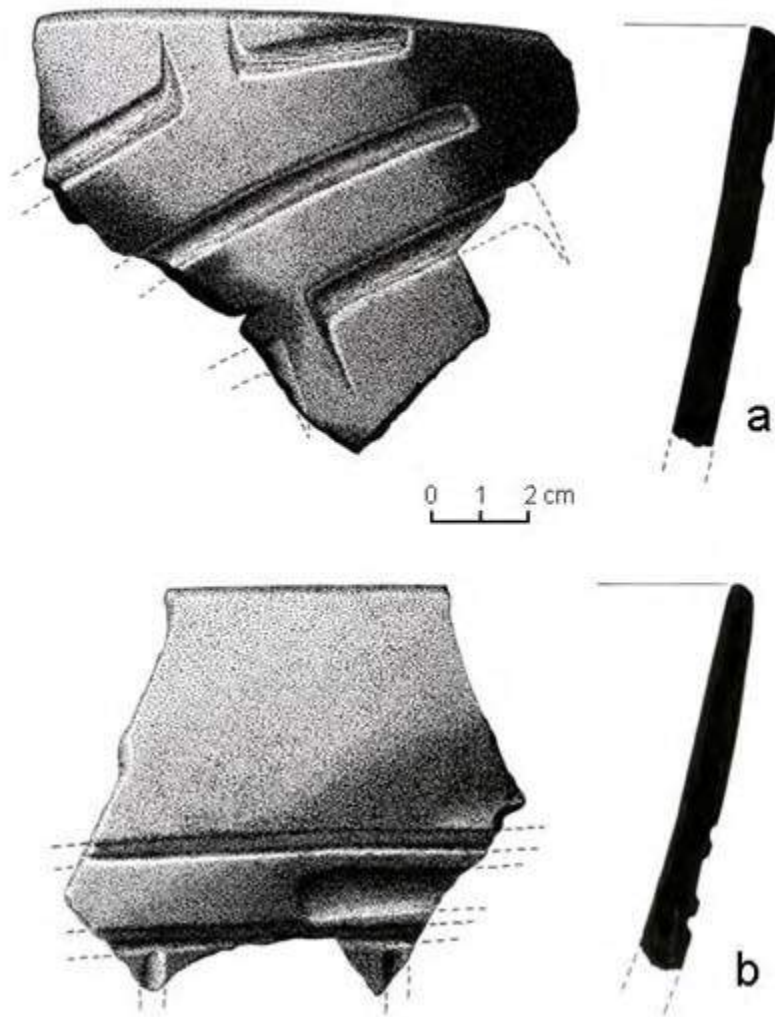


Figure 19. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

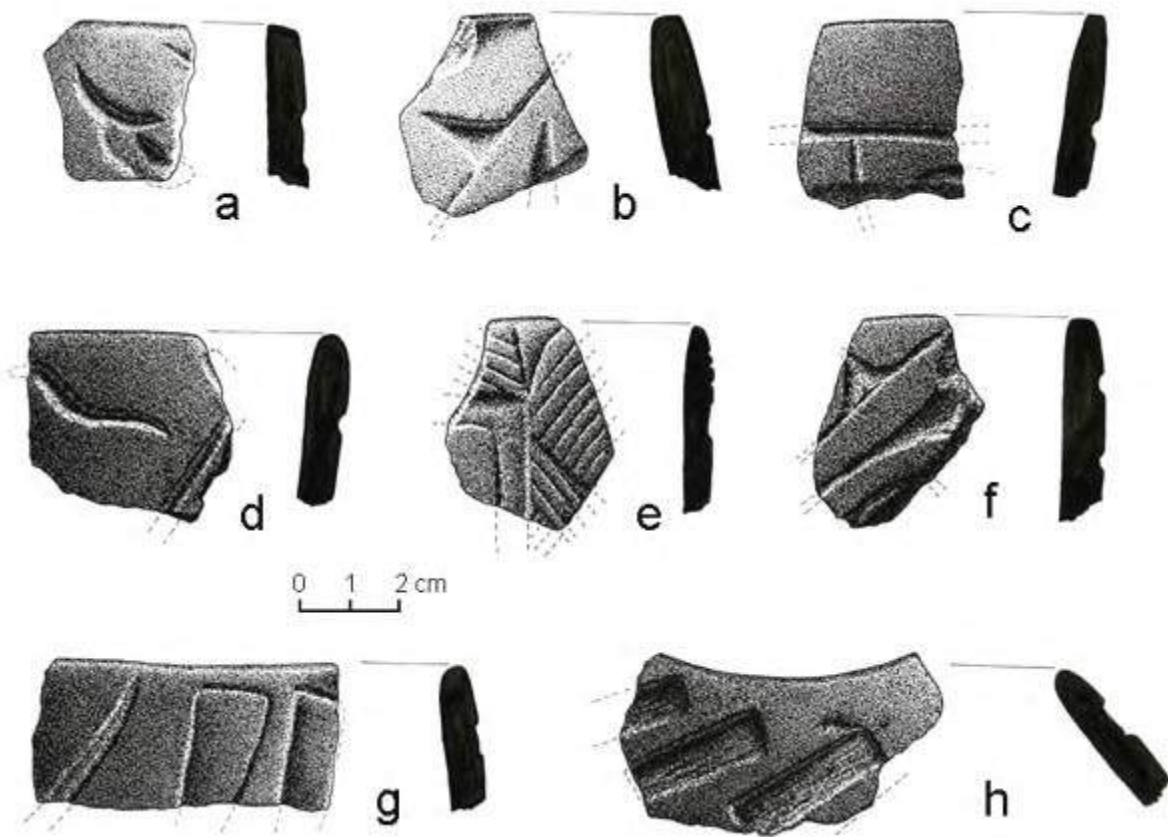


Figure 20. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimens a and e are imports from San Lorenzo.



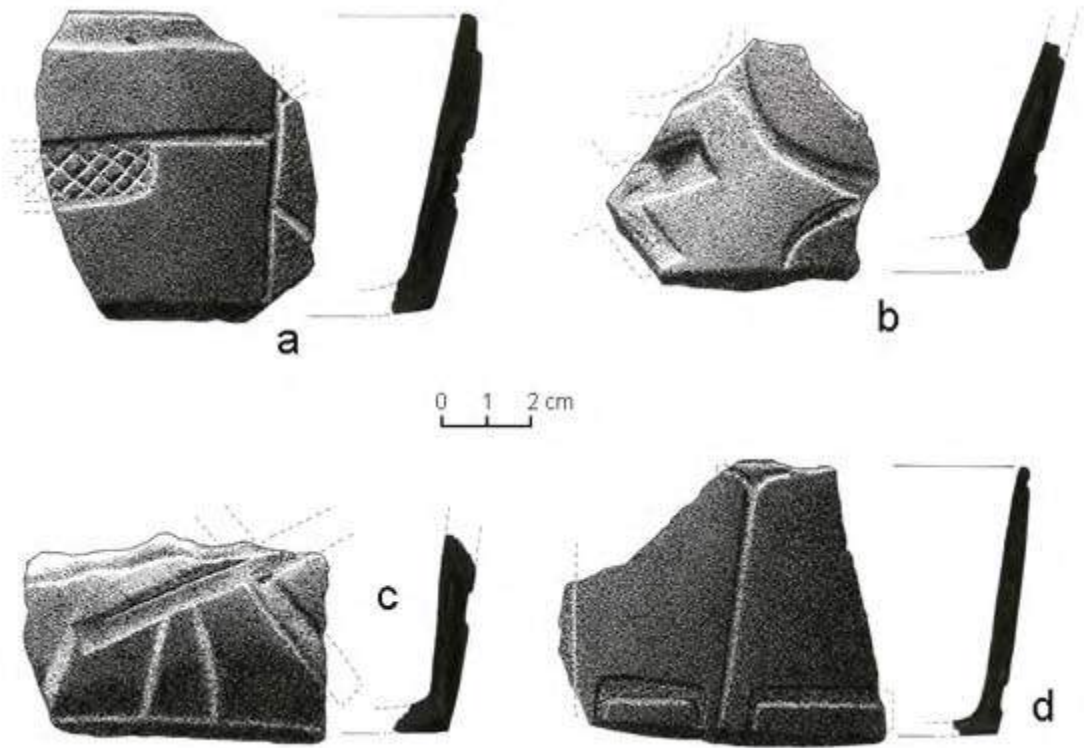


Figure 21. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen d is an import from San Lorenzo.

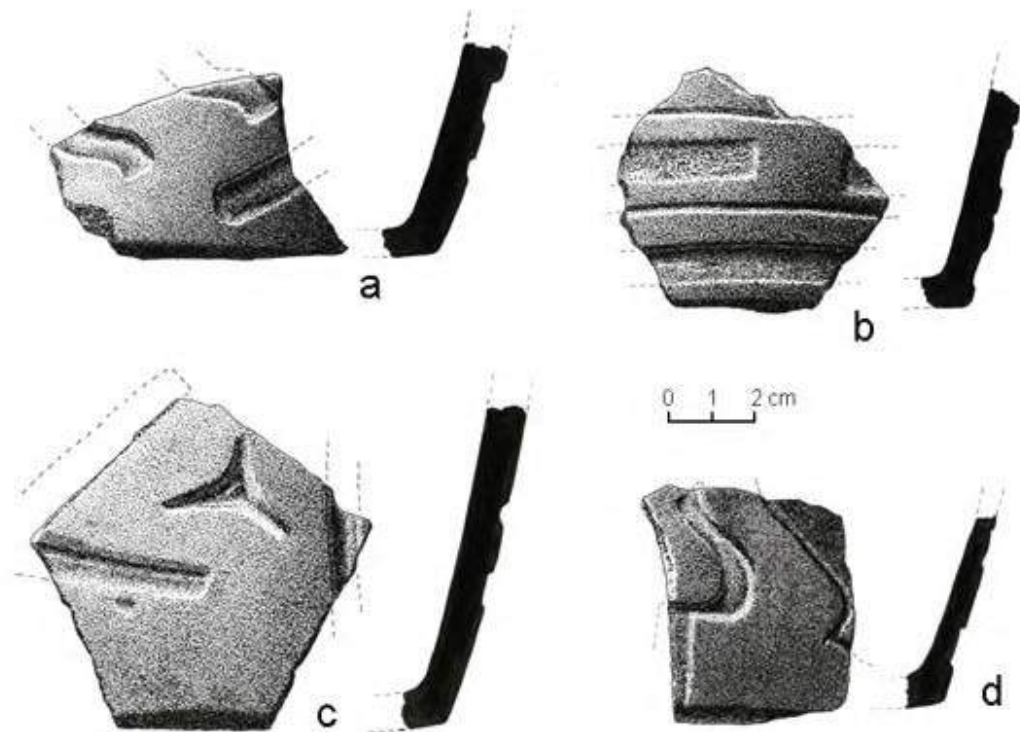


Figure 22. Calzadas Carved base sherds. Specimen b is an import from San Lorenzo.

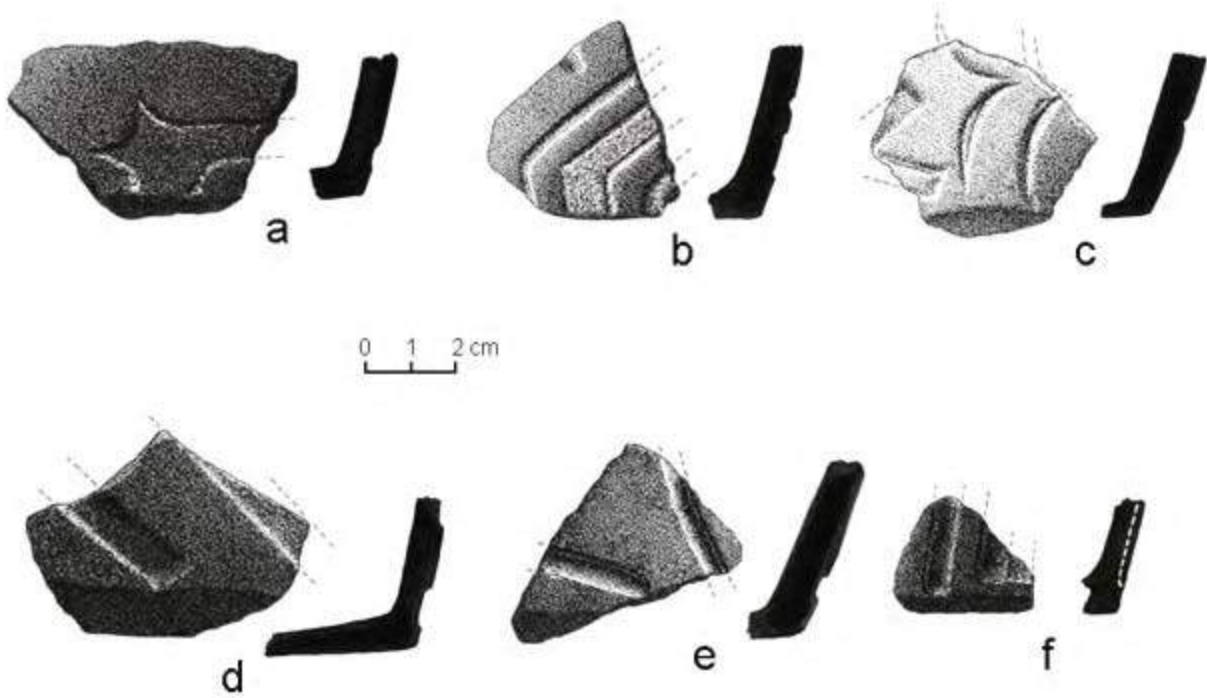


Figure 23. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

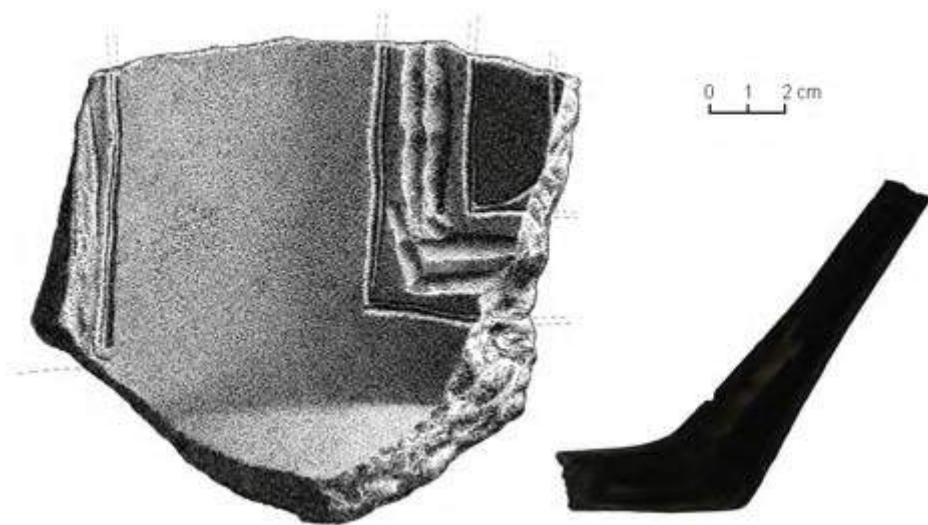


Figure 24. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

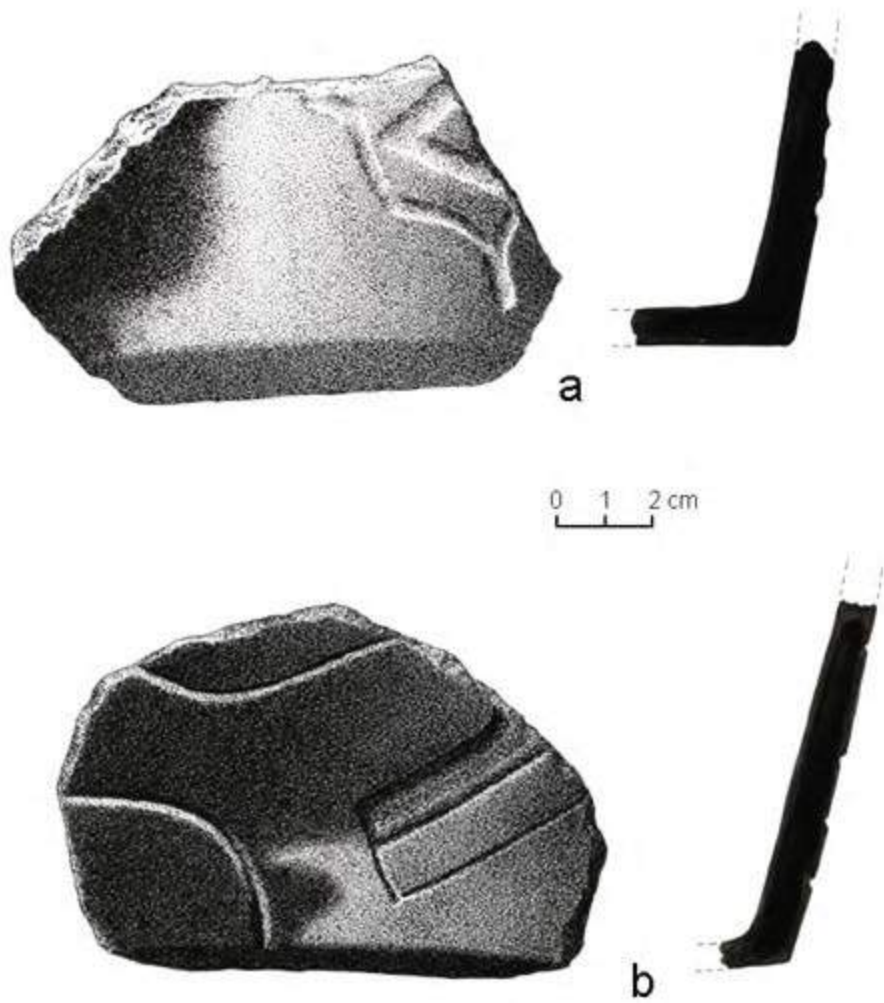


Figure 25. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

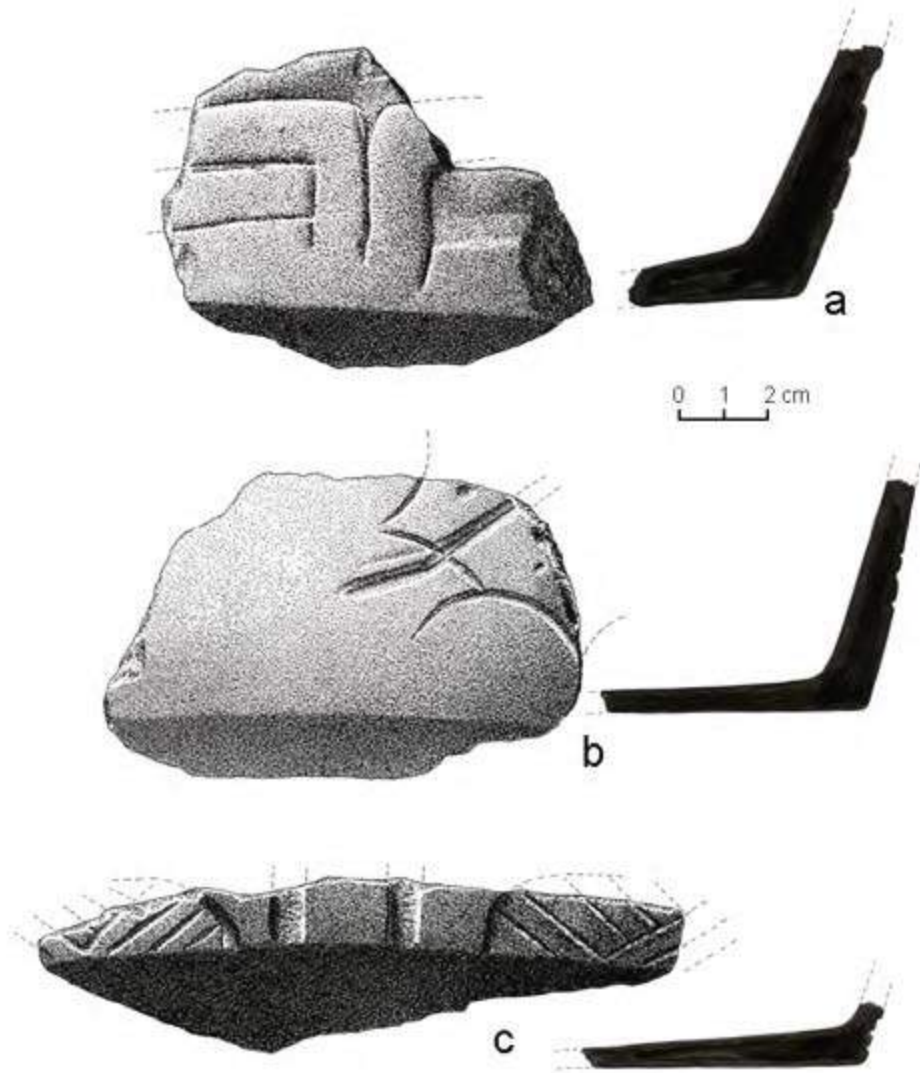


Figure 26. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

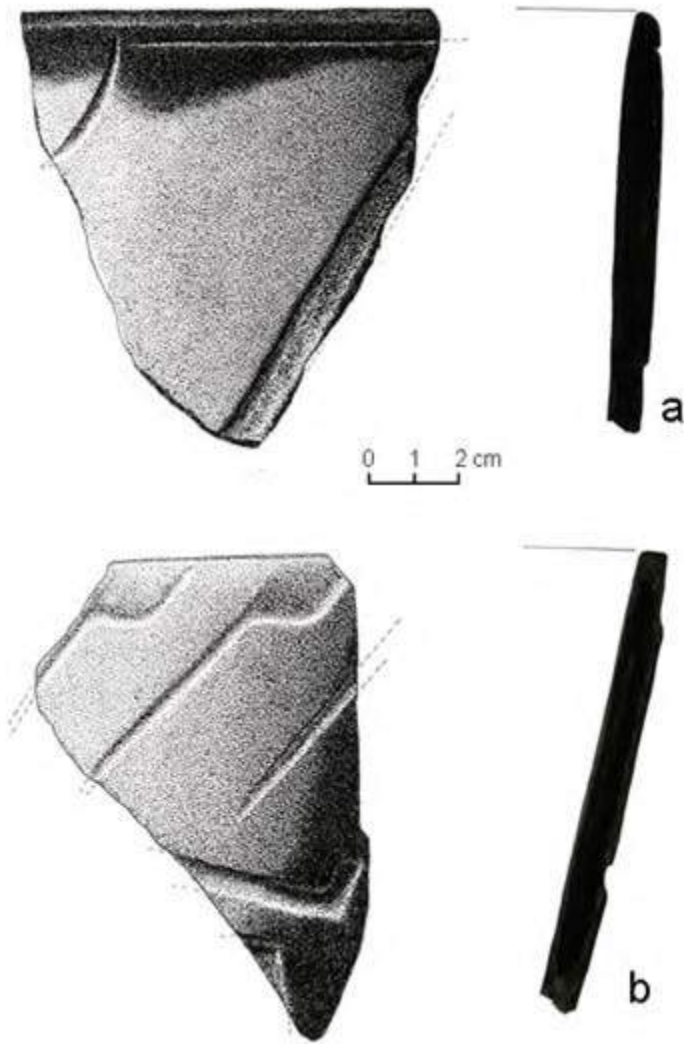


Figure 27. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

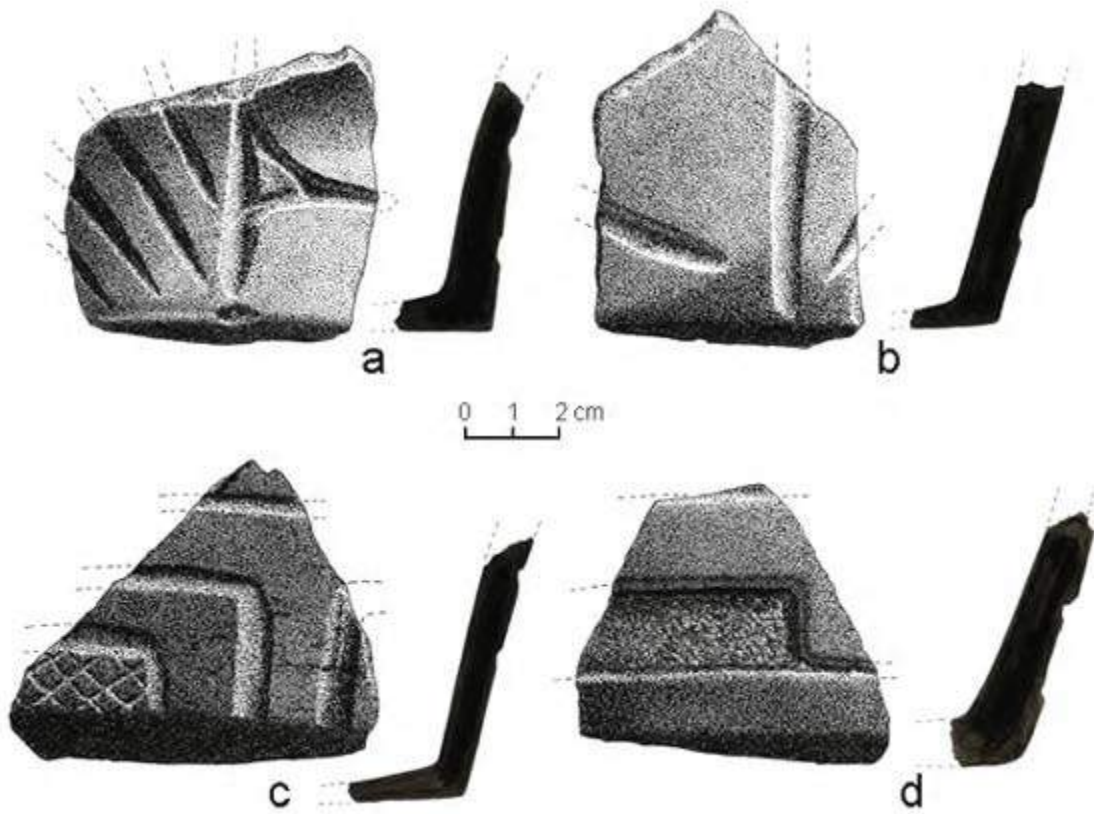


Figure 28. Calzadas Carved base sherds.



Figure 29. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

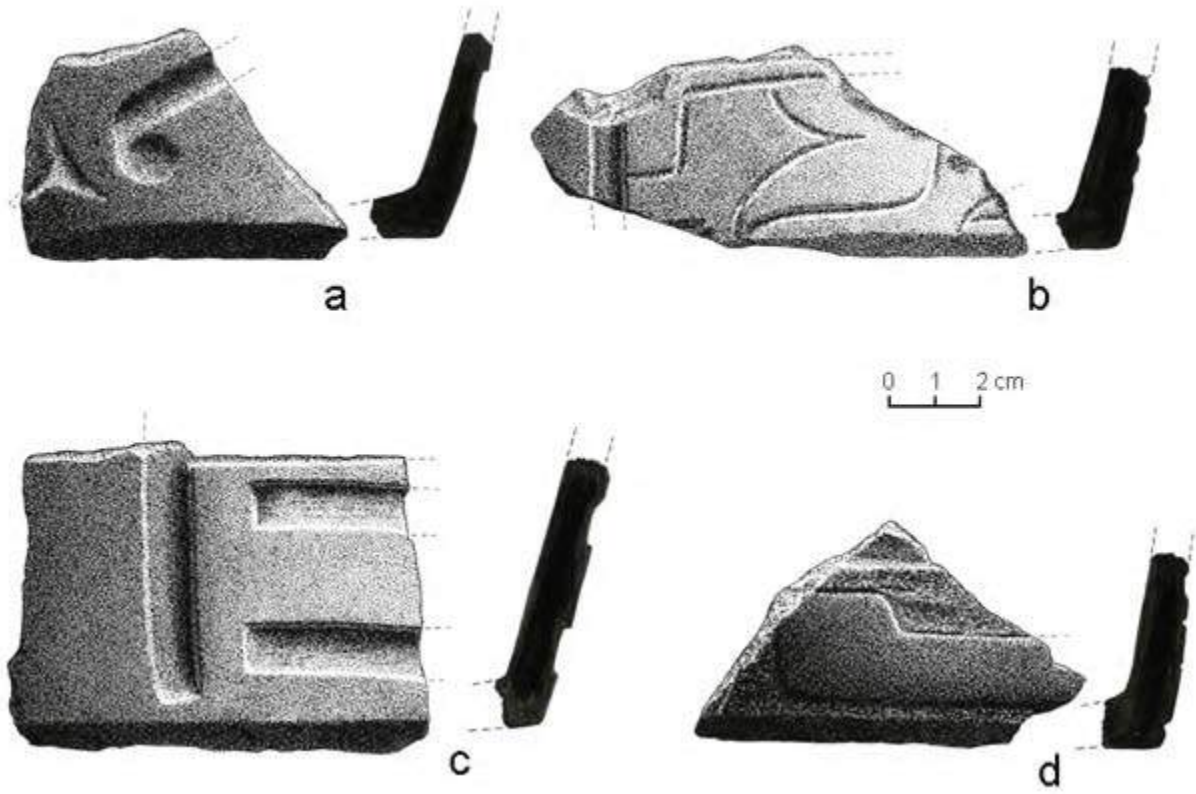


Figure 30. Calzadas Carved base sherds.

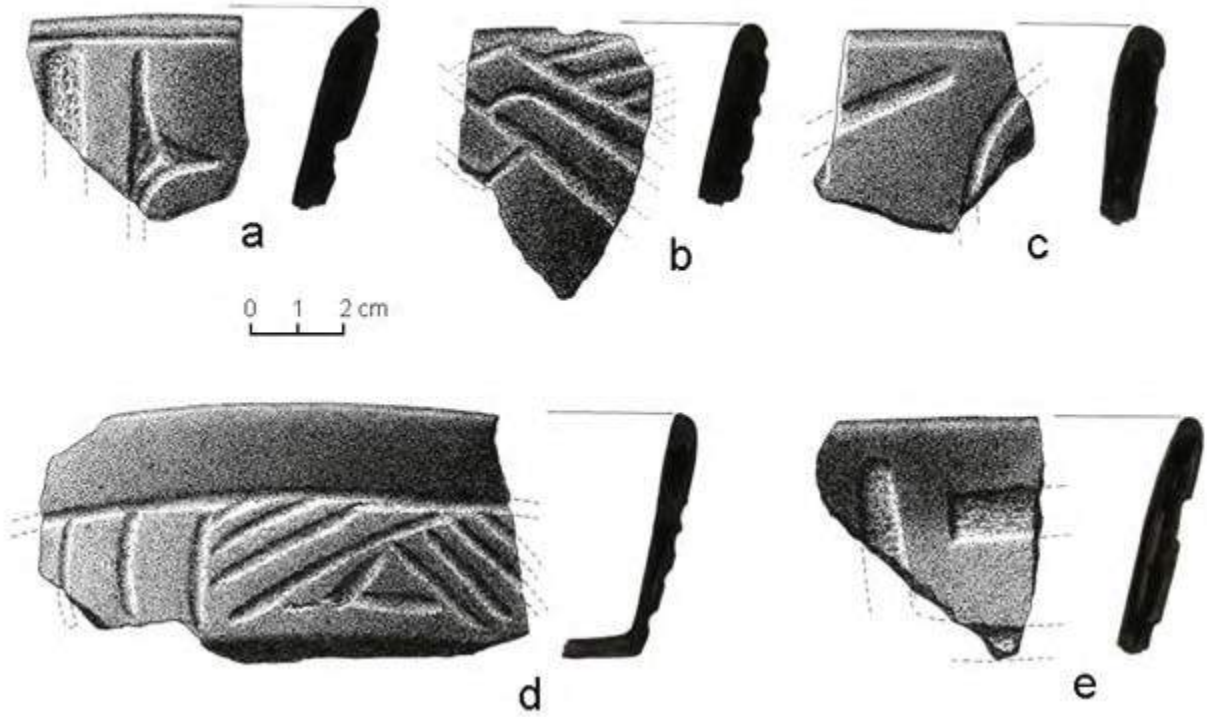


Figure 31. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

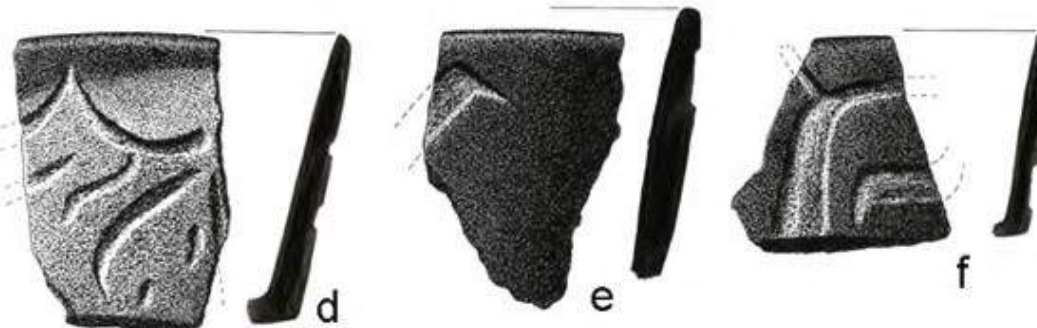
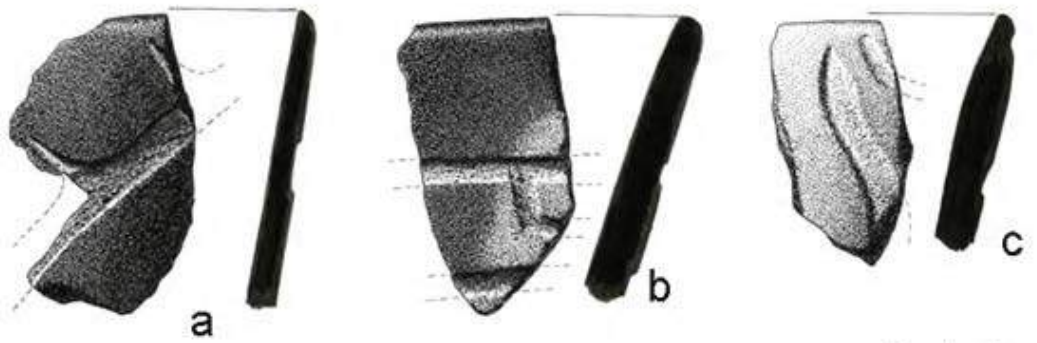


Figure 32. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimens c, e and f are imports from San Lorenzo.

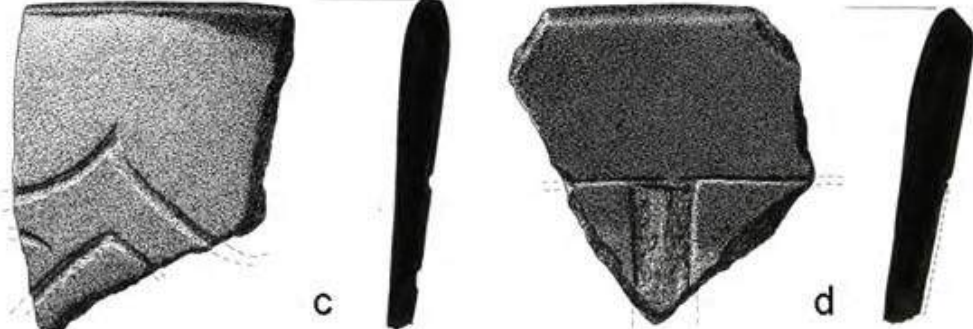
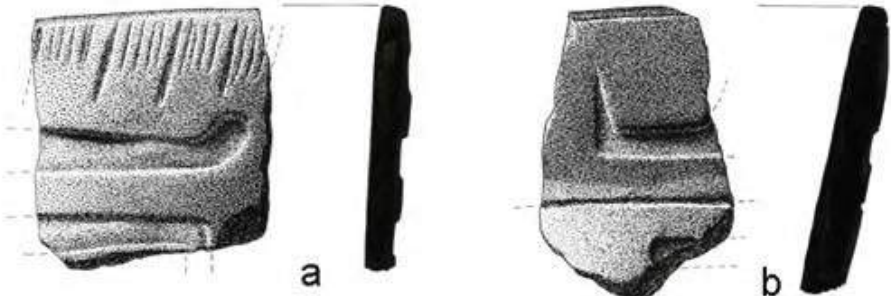


Figure 33. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.



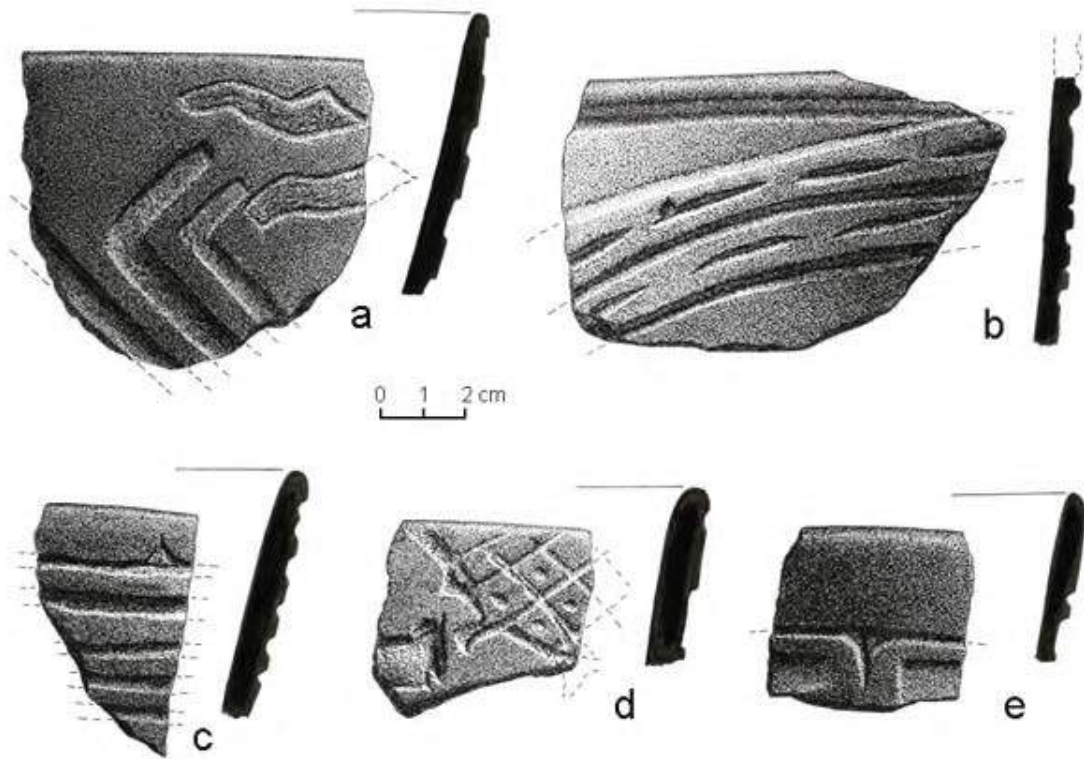


Figure 34. Calzadas Carved rim and body sherds.



Figure 35. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen a is an import from San Lorenzo.

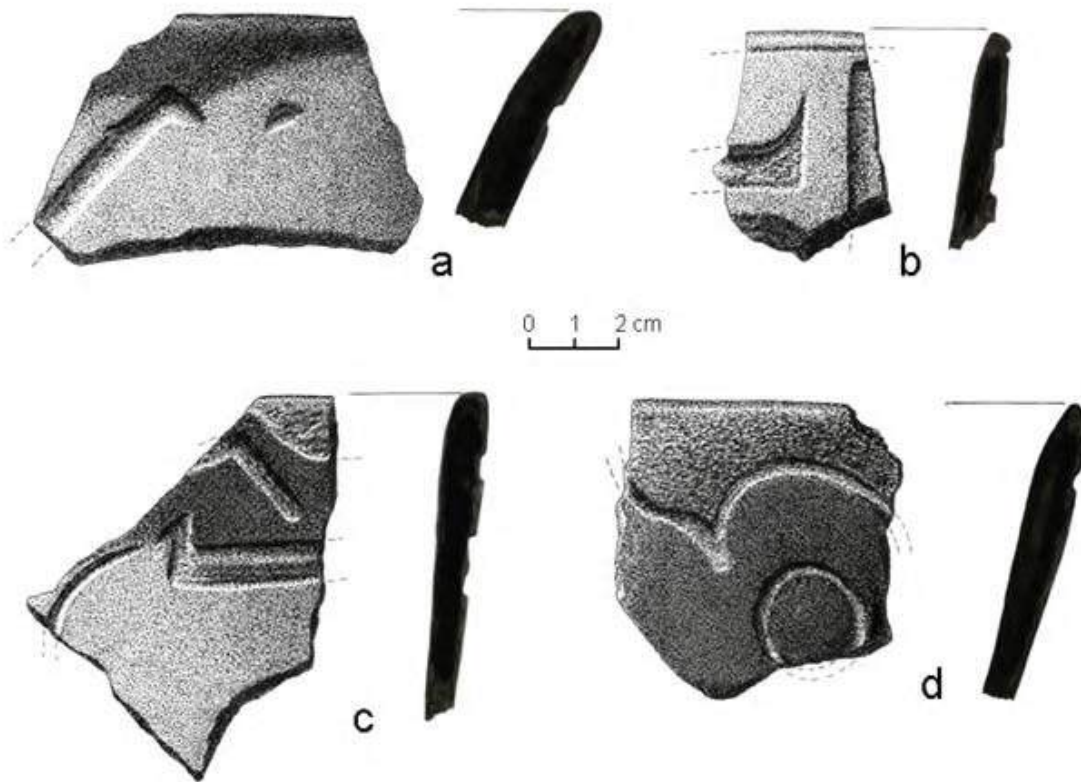


Figure 36. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

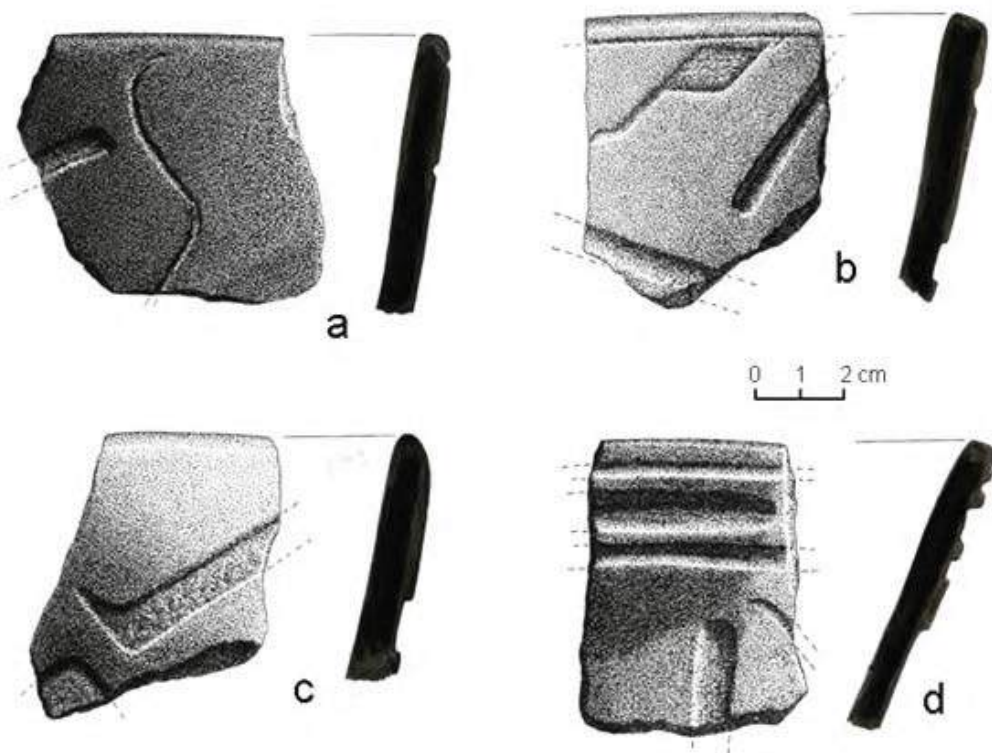


Figure 37. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

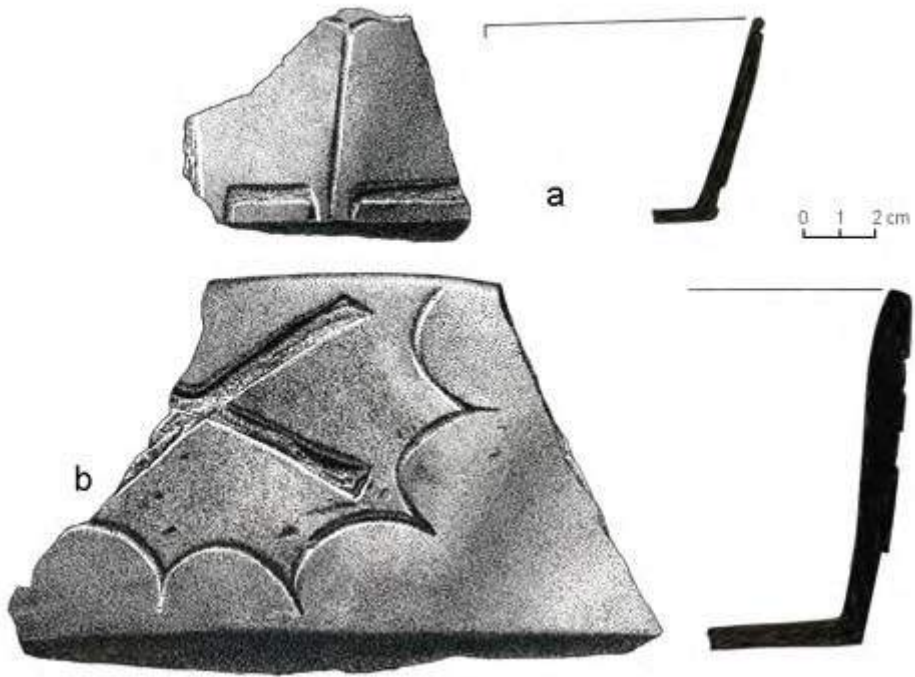


Figure 38. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimen a is an import from San Lorenzo.

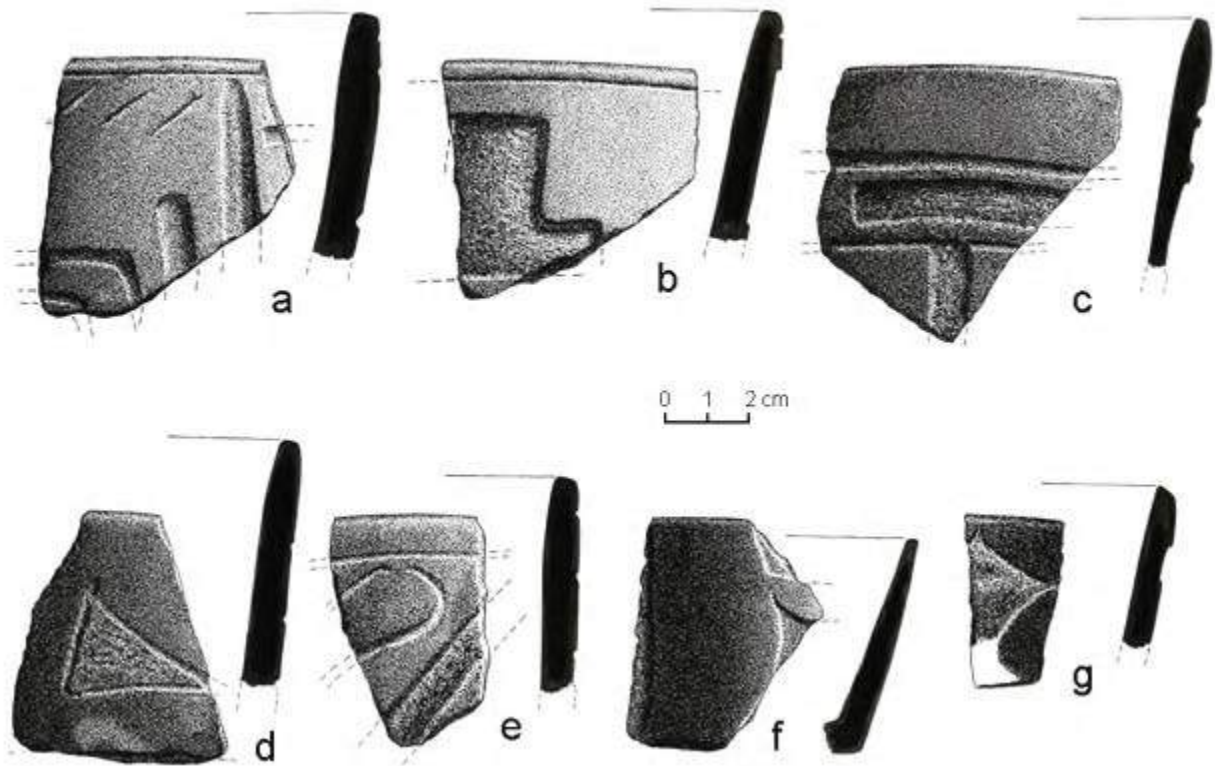


Figure 39. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

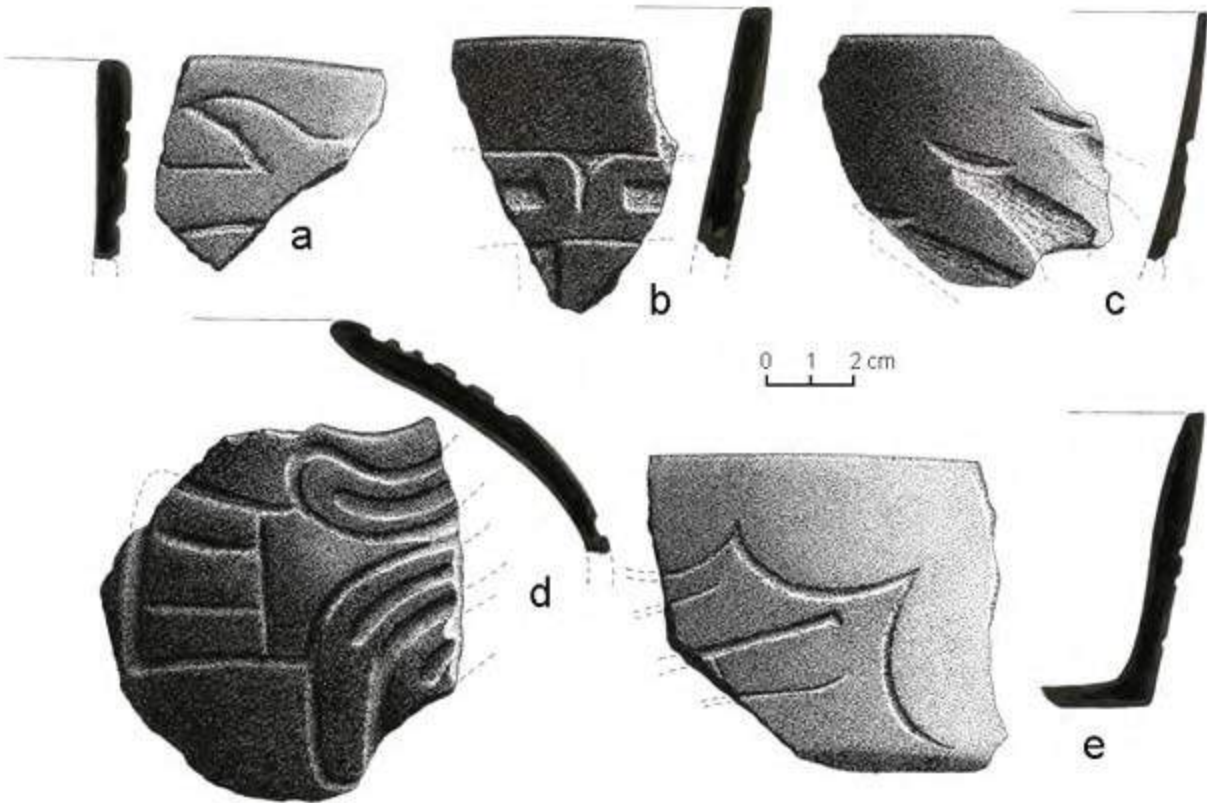


Figure 40. Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimens c and d are imports from San Lorenzo.

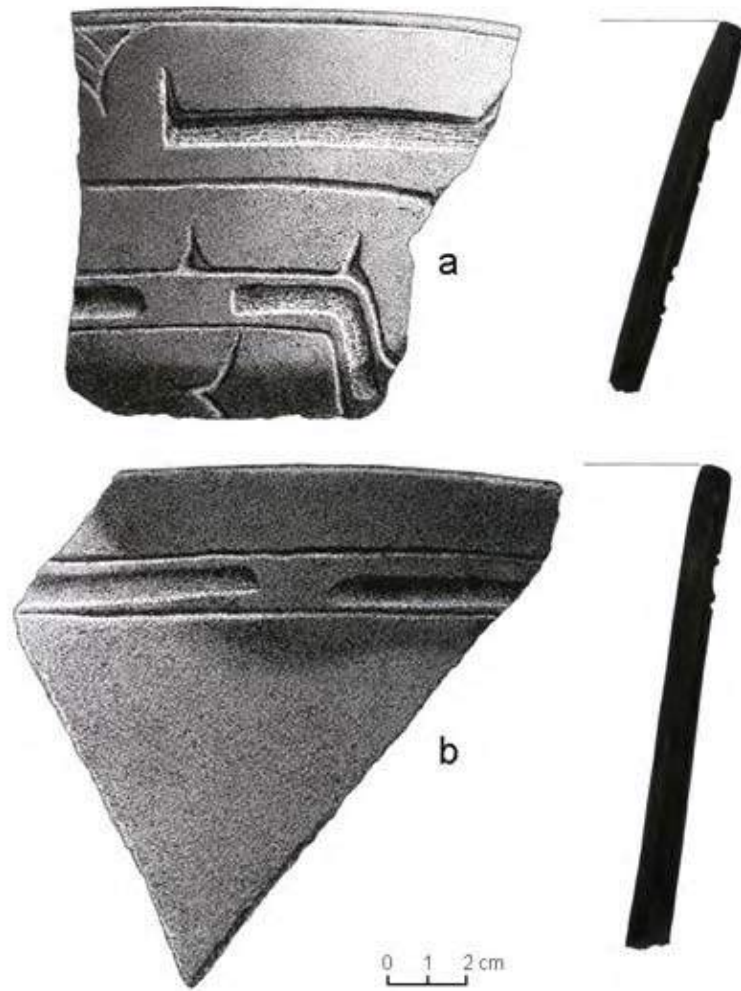


Figure 41. Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

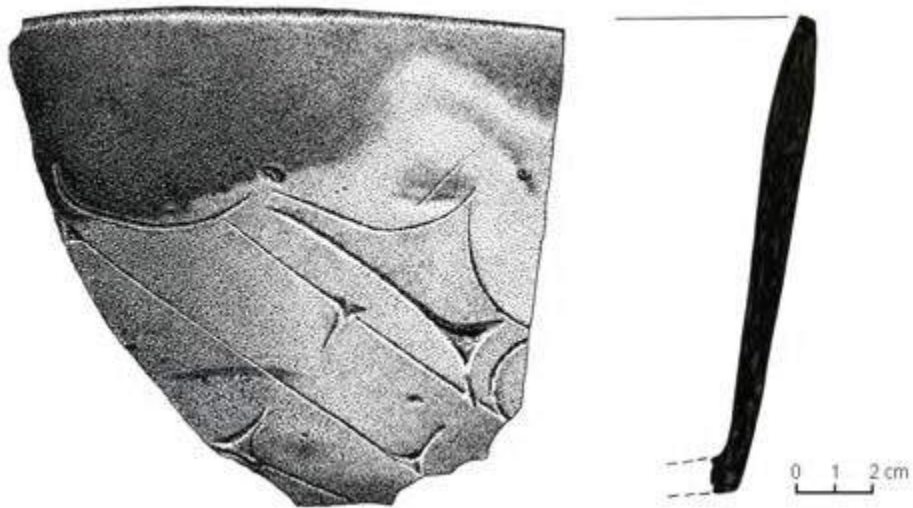


Figure 42. Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

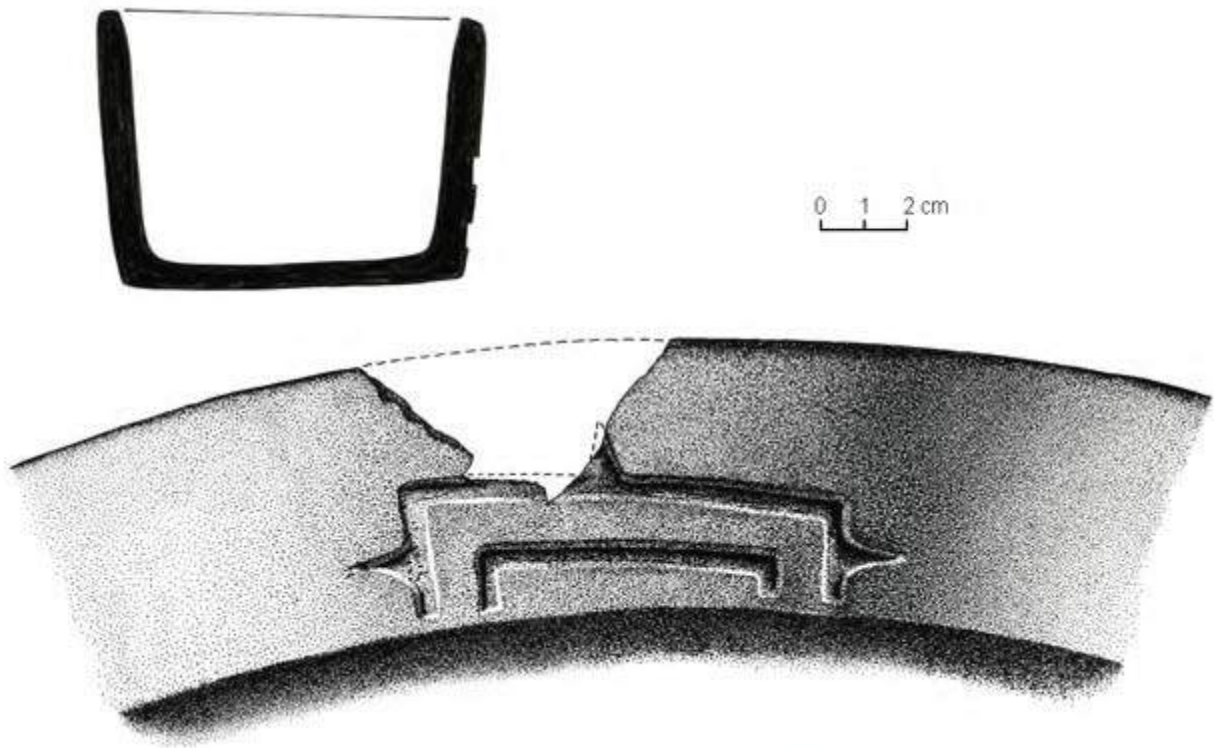


Figure 43. Calzadas Carved cup.

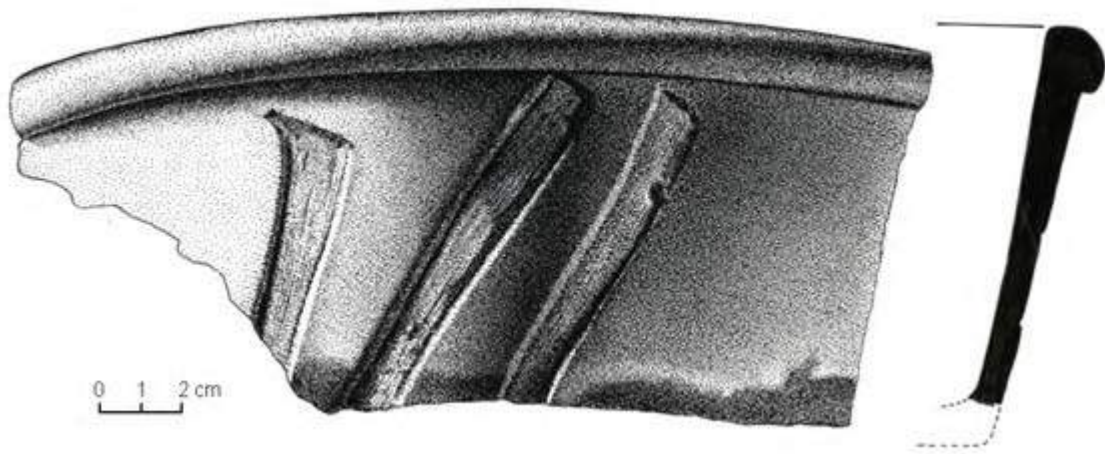


Figure 44. Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

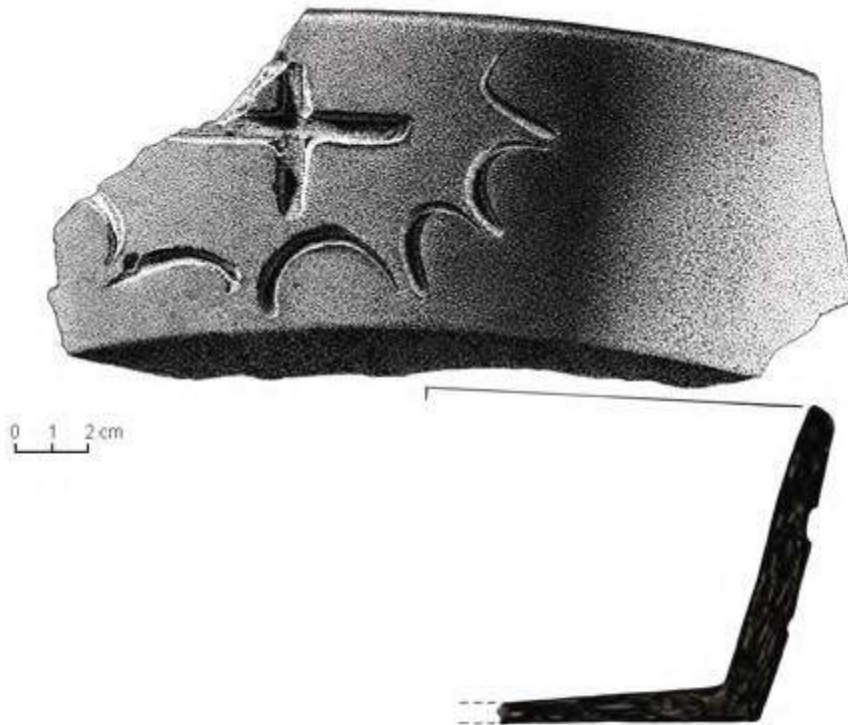


Figure 45. Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

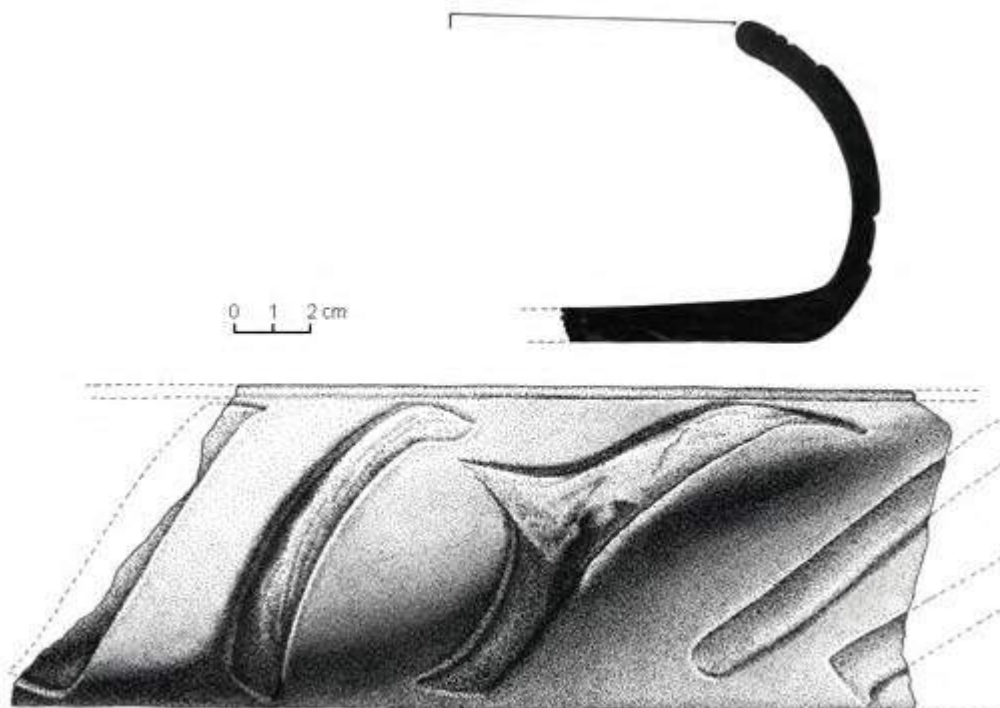
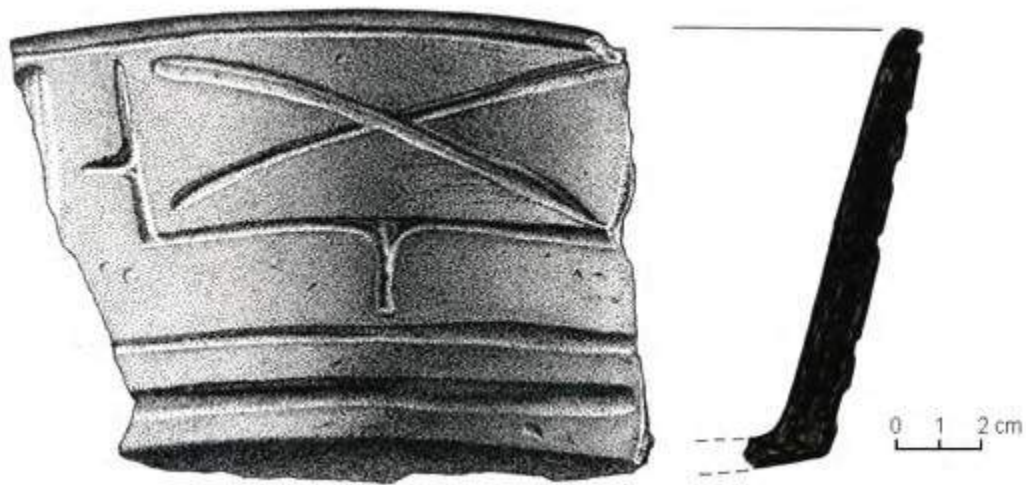


Figure 46. Calzadas Carved rim sherd.



**Figure 47. Calzadas Carved rim sherd.**

The other hallmark Olmec style ceramic type at San Lorenzo is Limón Incised (Coe and Diehl 1980:171-174). Curiously, this kind of pottery has a very restricted distribution in Mesoamerica compared to Calzadas Carved (Coe and Diehl 1980:171), with sporadic examples known for the central highlands of México and a few other regions. Limón Incised pottery is very frequent at Cantón Corralito, with approximately 3,500 specimens excavated (a frequency roughly three times that of Calzadas Carved). The most common depiction at both San Lorenzo and Cantón Corralito is the *ilhuitl* or opposed volutes motif, which is executed with simple incision or impressed lines (Figure 48; cf. Coe and Diehl 1980:Figs. 144-145), although rare modelled and incised versions also occur (Figure 49) along with other abstract designs, motifs, and compositions. The ratio of Limón Incised to Calzadas Carved pottery is roughly the same at both sites, a possible indicator of Gulf Olmec presence at Cantón Corralito. This ratio—indeed, the very presence of Limón Incised potsherds in large numbers—is not evident at any other contemporaneous site in Mesoamerica beyond the Gulf Coast.



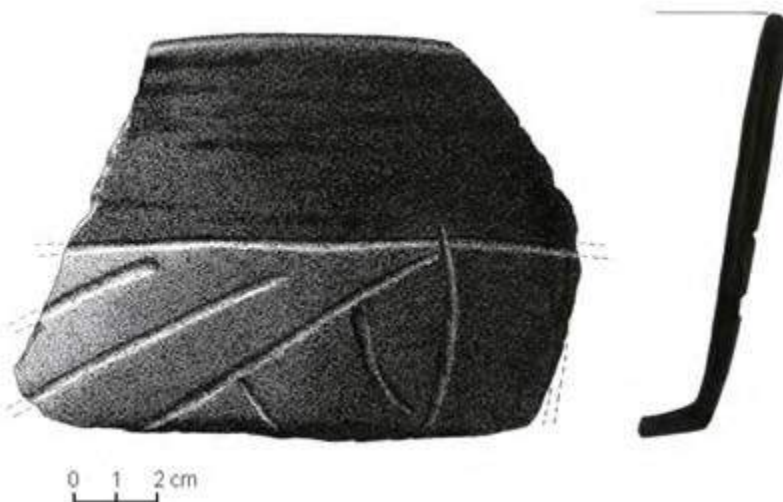


Figure 48. Limón incised rim sherd showing portion of Ilhuitl (opposed volutes) motif.



Figure 49. Limón incised body sherds showing portion of modeled Ilhuitl (opposed volutes) motif.

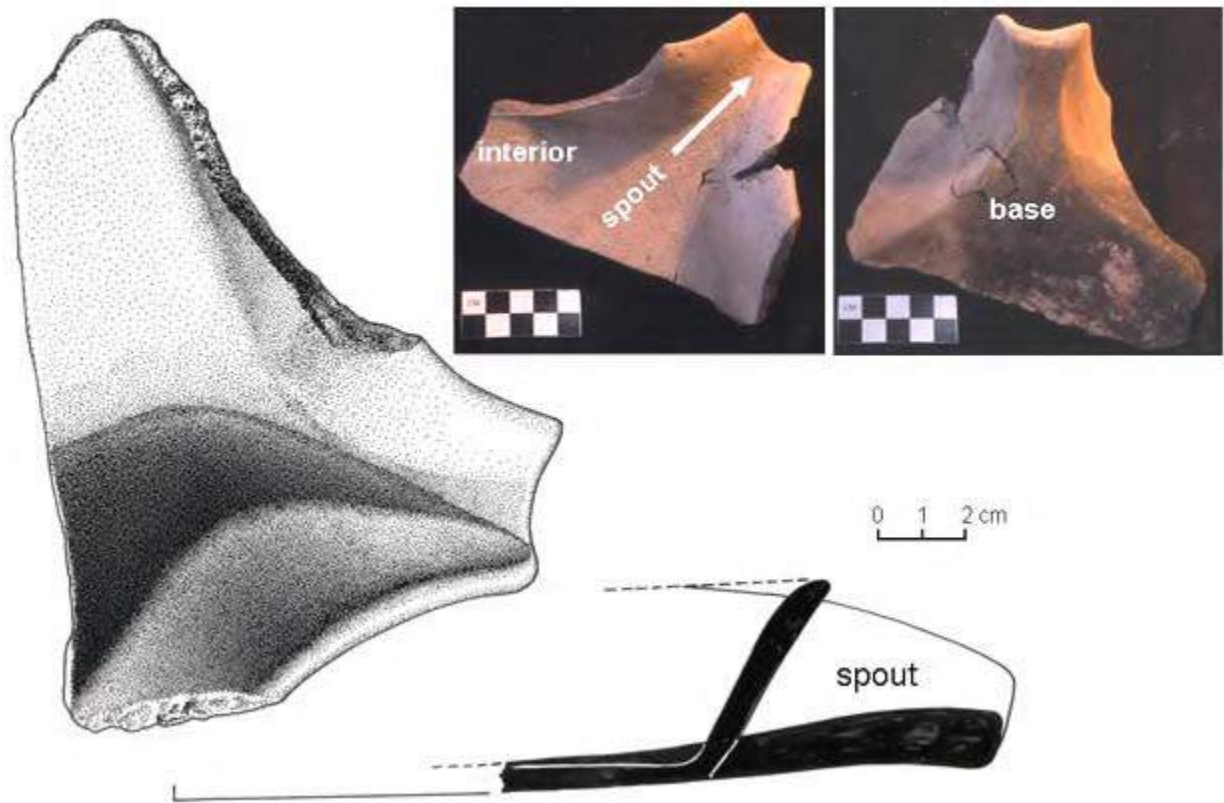


Figure 50. Bala White spouted tray, Cuadros phase. Note hematite pigment smear on base (photo).

Of course, other types of non-decorated (aside from slip) pottery occur at Cantón Corralito. Only one such sherd has been drawn for this report, a white-slipped spouted tray ([Figure 50](#)). These curious vessels also occur at San Lorenzo and at several sites in the central highlands of México.

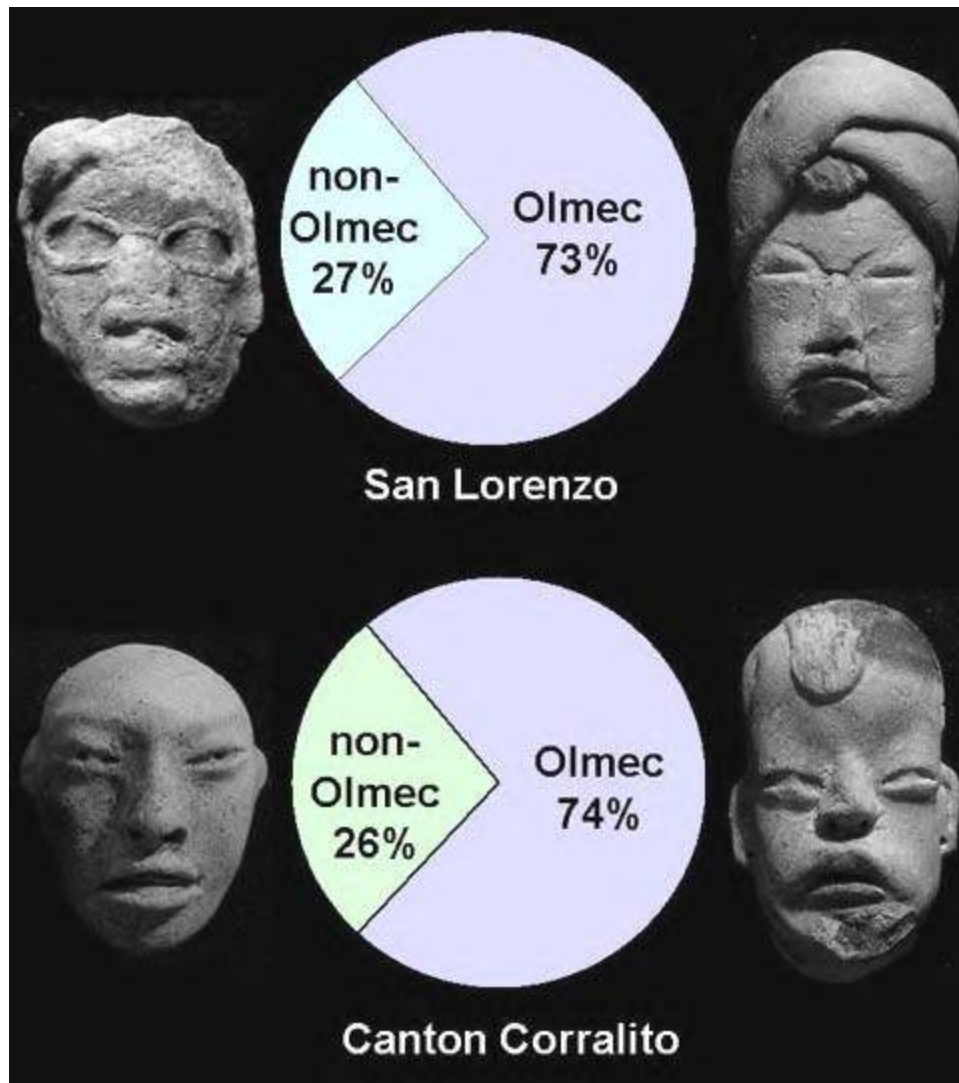


Figure 51. Early Olmec (1150-1000BC) figurine styles and corresponding frequencies.

All Early Olmec horizon fired clay anthropomorphic figurines from Cantón Corralito and San Lorenzo ([Table 4](#)) have been classified as Olmec style or non-Olmec style ([Figure 51](#)) according to the facial characteristics (e.g., eyes, mouth) of specimens found at San Lorenzo (see Coe and Diehl 1980:264) and imported examples excavated at Cantón Corralito. To get at the technical style of manufacture, a series of metric measurements and ratios were recorded for head and body fragments. General and subtle indicators of posture (e.g., standing, hand on hips, crouched) and other variables such as clothing were also noted. The preliminary results (e.g., [Table 5](#)) indicate a high level of correspondence between the Olmec style figurines of both collections. Some of these data have been presented in a separate paper (Cheetham 2006c), which I include here for those wishing a more detailed look at the results ([Early Olmec Figurines from Two Regions](#)).

**Table 4. Enumeration of figurine fragments (1150-1000 bc)**

	San Lorenzo	Cantón Corralito
head	122	91
torso	131	153
arm / hand	55	43
leg / foot	101	134
arm or leg	125	412
unidentified	44	7
TOTAL	578	840

**Table 5. Early horizon Olmec style heads, dimension ratios**

		average (mm)	st. dev. (mm)	range (mm)
HEIGHT/WIDTH	San	1.7	0.2	1.2-2.6
	Lorenzo	1.5	0.2	0.6-2.0
	Cantón Corralito			
HEIGHT/DEPTH	San	2.1	0.3	1.6-2.9
	Lorenzo	1.9	0.2	1.0-2.5
	Cantón Corralito			
WIDTH/DEPTH	<i>San</i>	1.2	0.2	0.9-1.7
	<i>Lorenzo</i>	1.3	0.1	0.9-1.8
	Cantón Corralito			

Illustrated figurines excavated at Cantón Corralito include specimens preceding the Initial Olmec era (Locona and Ocós phases; see [Figures 52](#), [53a-b](#), and [54a](#)) and the Cherla phase of the Initial Olmec era ([Figures 53c](#), [55](#), [56b](#), and [57a, d](#)). The Cherla phase sample includes a large, hollow figure that is infantile in appearance (e.g., [Figure 55](#)) and a few heads that approach the Olmec style. Most heads, however, are not Olmec in appearance.

Cuadros figurine heads ([Figures 53d](#), [54b-c](#), [56a, c-d](#), [57b-c](#), [58-66](#), [71c](#), [72b-c](#)) were made in both Olmec and non-Olmec style at Cantón Corralito and in the same proportion as at San Lorenzo (see [Figure 51](#)). The collection includes solid and hollow specimens of both styles, along with Olmec style torsos ([Figure 67](#), [68a](#)) positioned in a manner that recalls the figures seated in the front niche of colossal tabletop stone altars at San Lorenzo (cf. Coe and Diehl 1980:Figs. 439, 449, 451). Other kinds of fragments with counterparts at San Lorenzo include ballplayers ([Figure 68b-c](#)) performing athletic manoeuvres and with a rear prong support, dwarfs ([Figure 65a-b](#)), sleeping or dead figures with eyes closed ([Figures 58a](#), [60b](#)), and heads with one or more symbols deeply carved into the back (e.g., [Figure 64](#)). Zoomorphic figurines ([Figure 69](#)) were made during both Cherla and Cuadros times and a few Jocotal phase (ca. 1000-900 bc) anthropomorphic figurine heads ([Figures 70](#), [71a-b](#), [72a](#)) were found near the surface above the thick floodwater sand deposit that destroyed the site about 1000 bc.

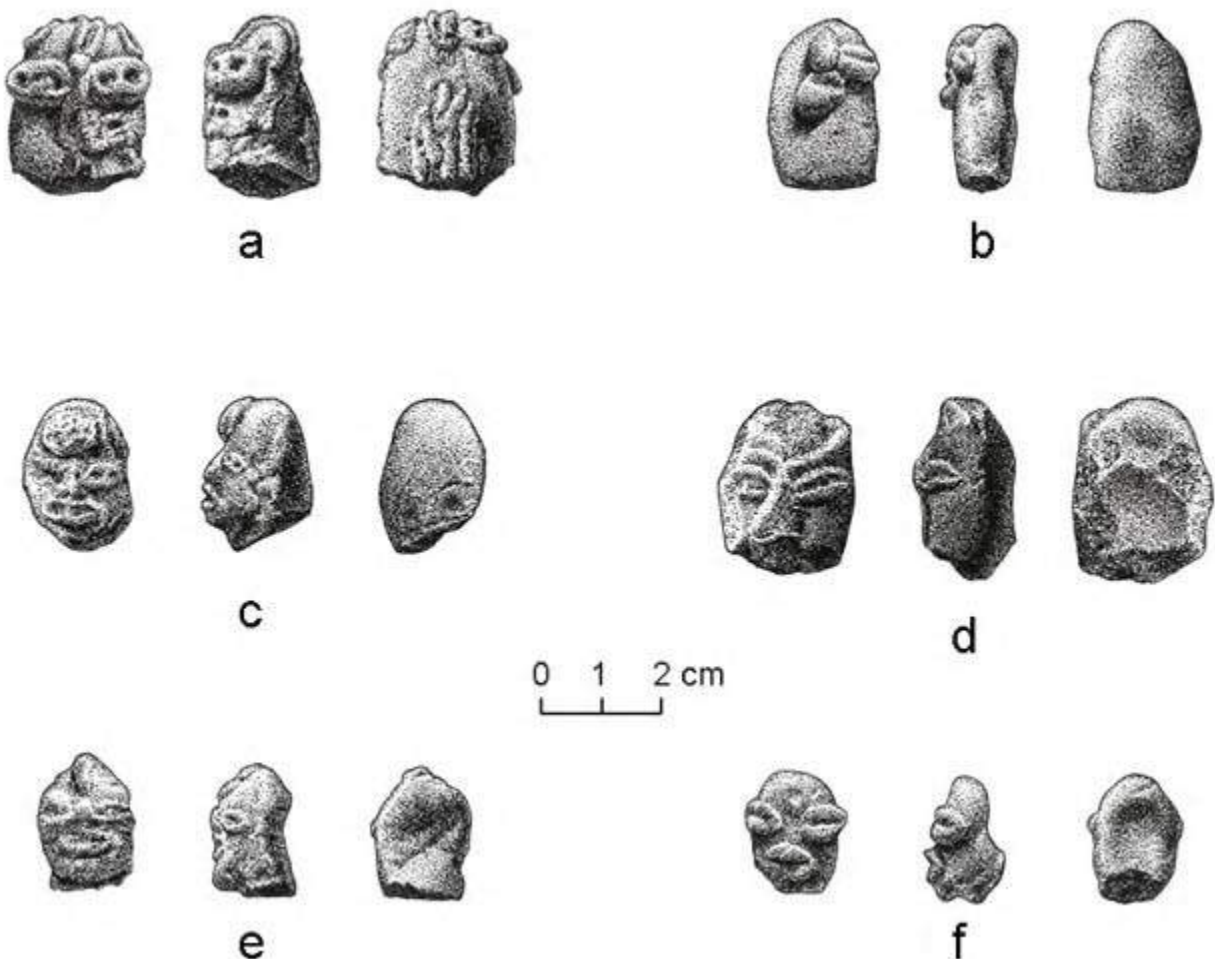


Figure 52. Pre-Cherla (Locona-Ocós phase) figurine heads.

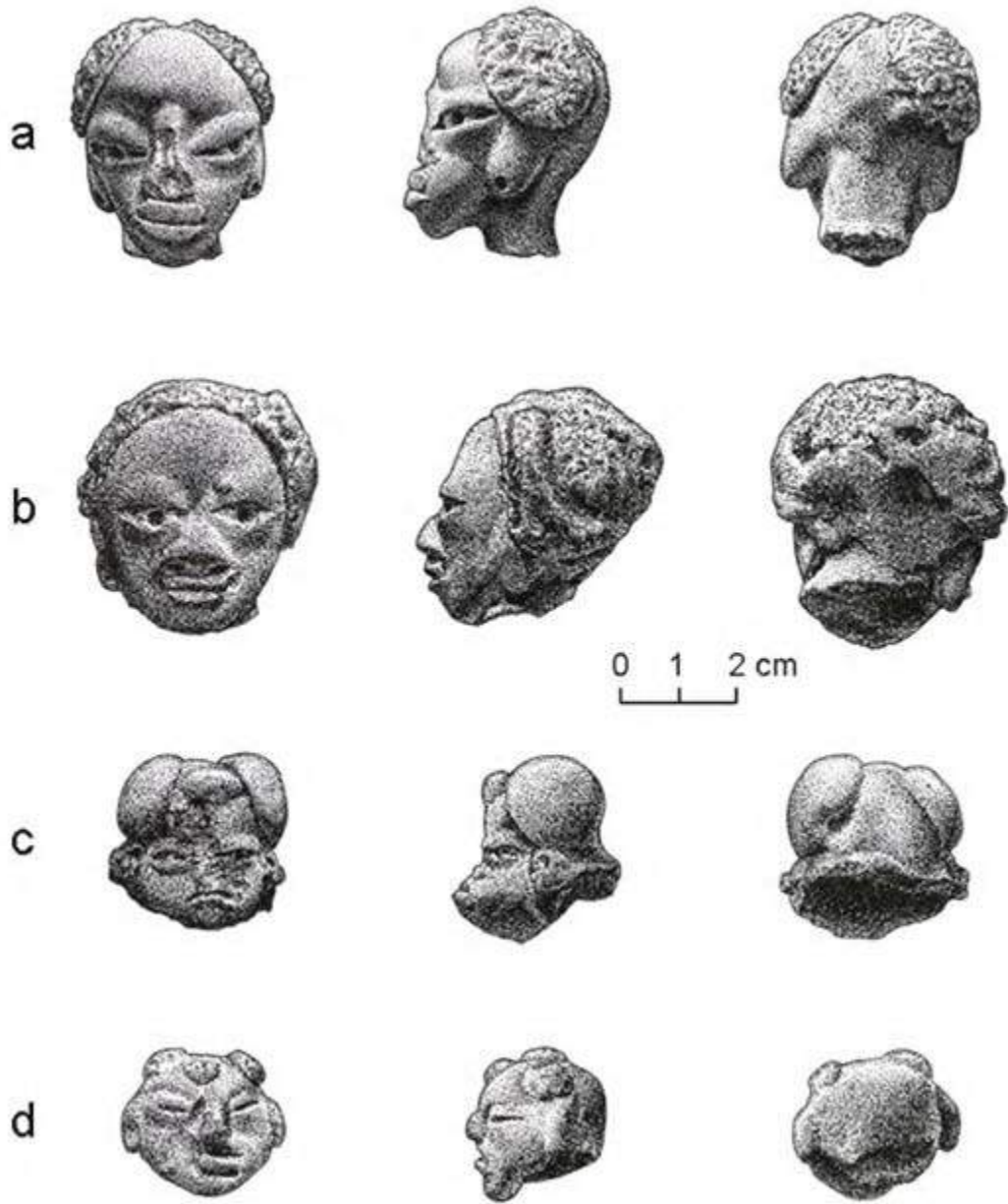


Figure 53. Figurines: (a-b) pre-Cherla; (c) Cherla; (d) Cuadros.

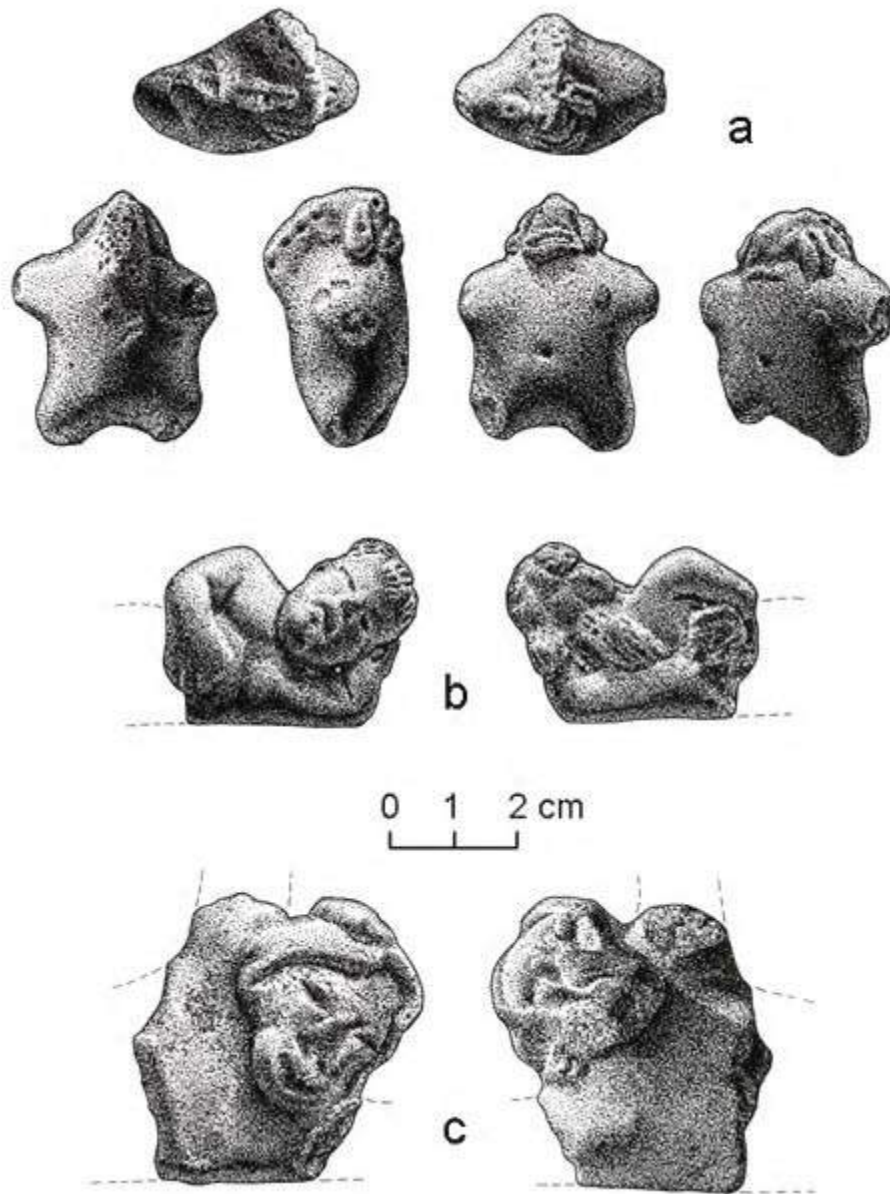


Figure 54. Figurines: (a) pre-Cherla; (b-c) Cuadros.

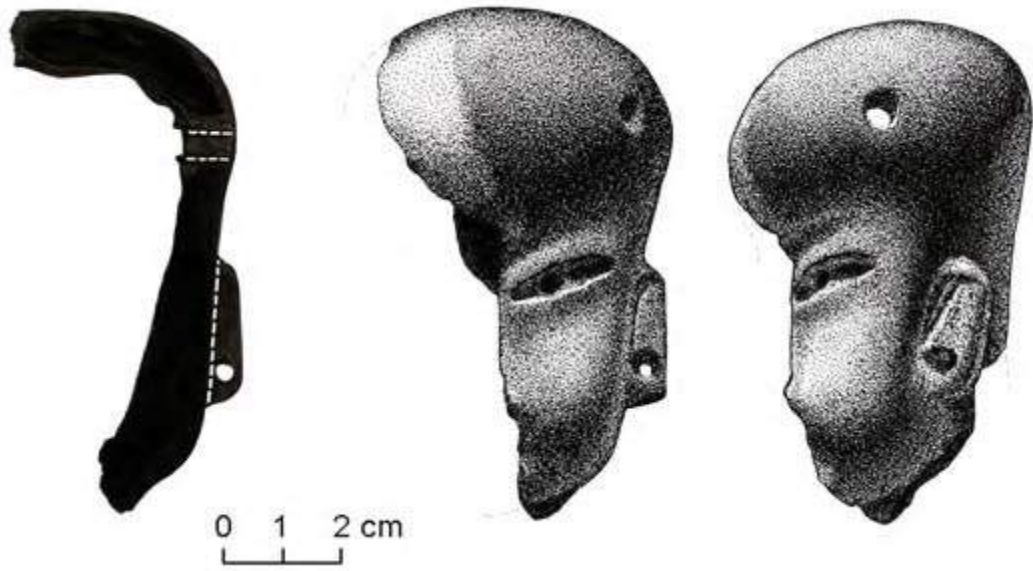


Figure 55. Cherla phase hollow figurine head.



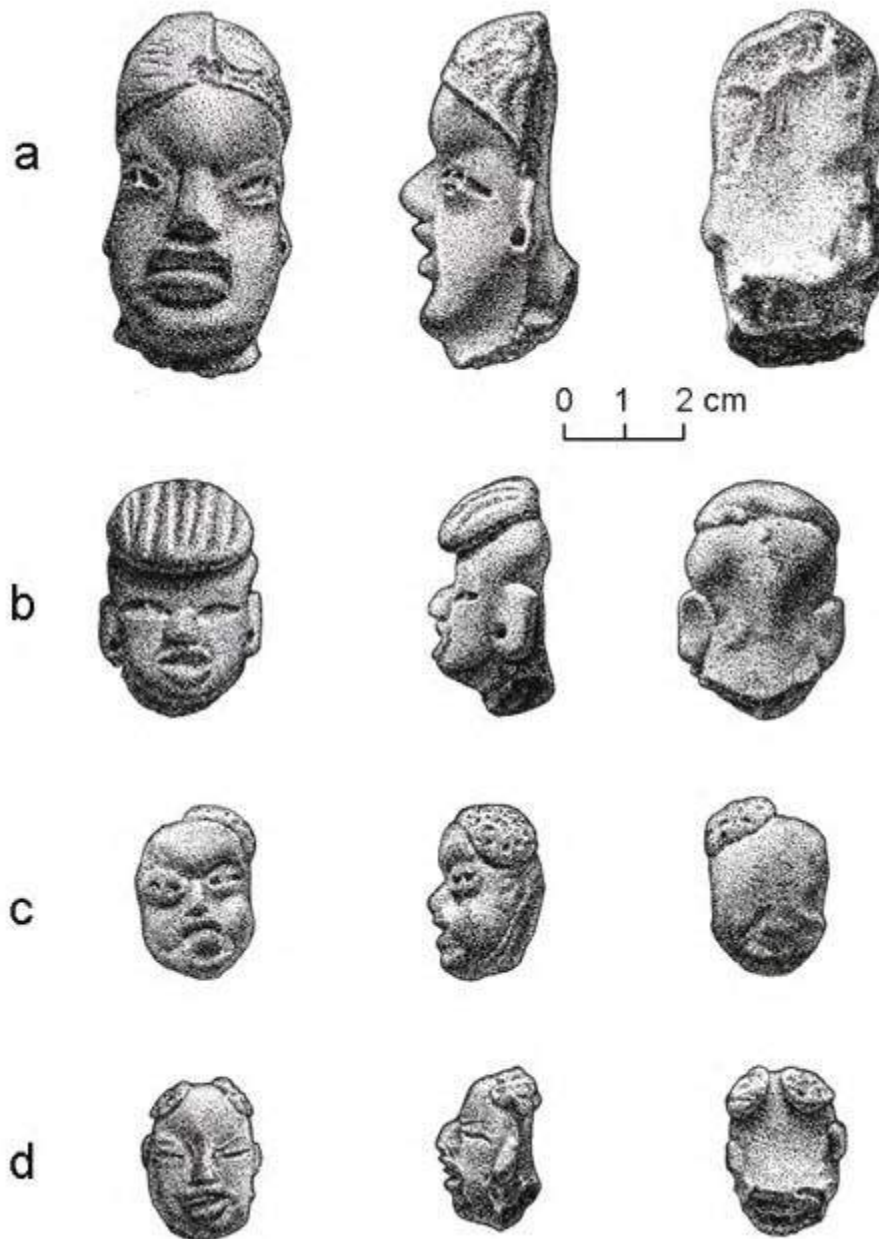


Figure 56. Figurines: (a,c-d) Cuadros; (b) Cherla.

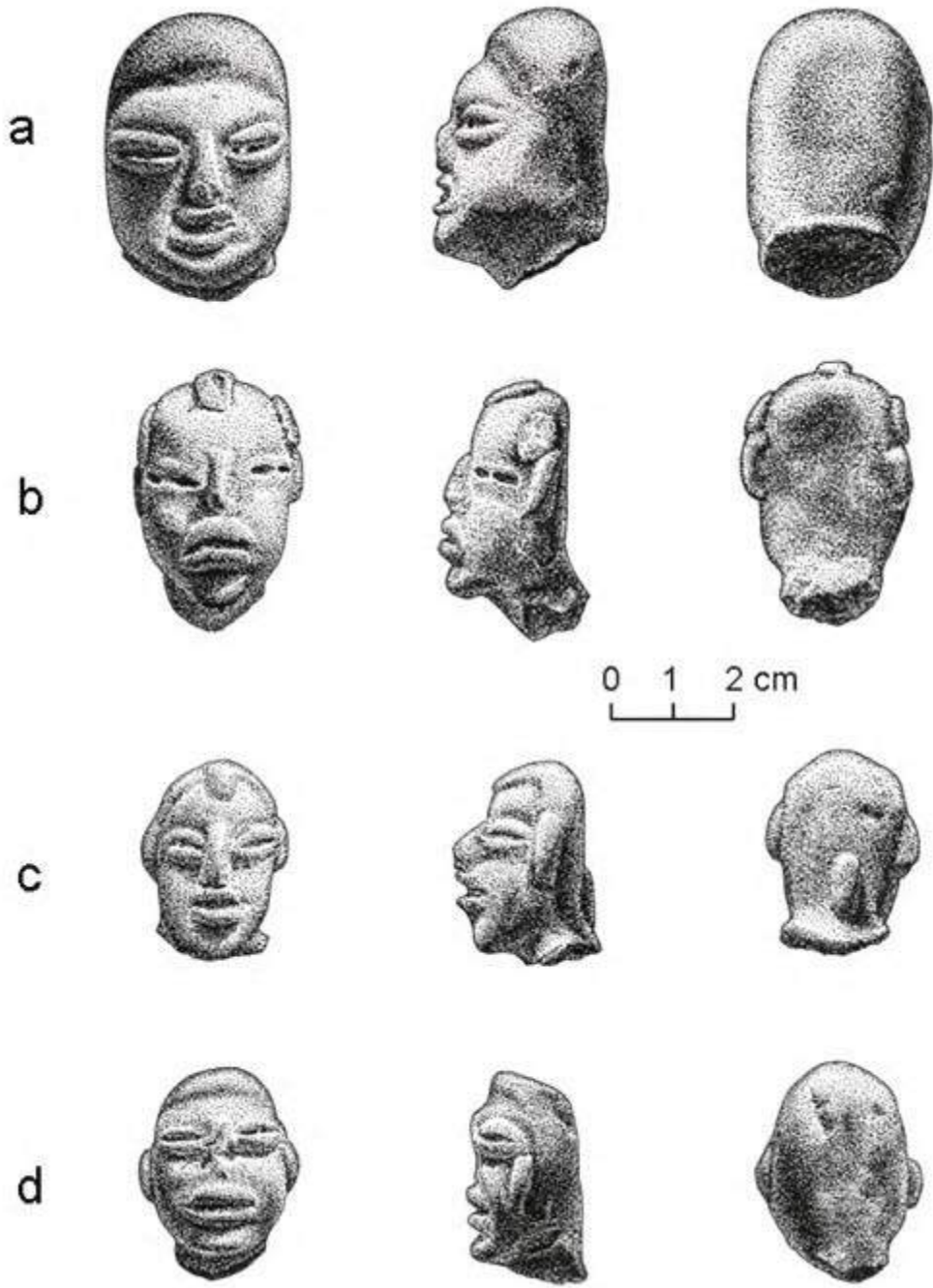


Figure 57. Figurines: (a,d) Cuadros; (b,c) Cherla.

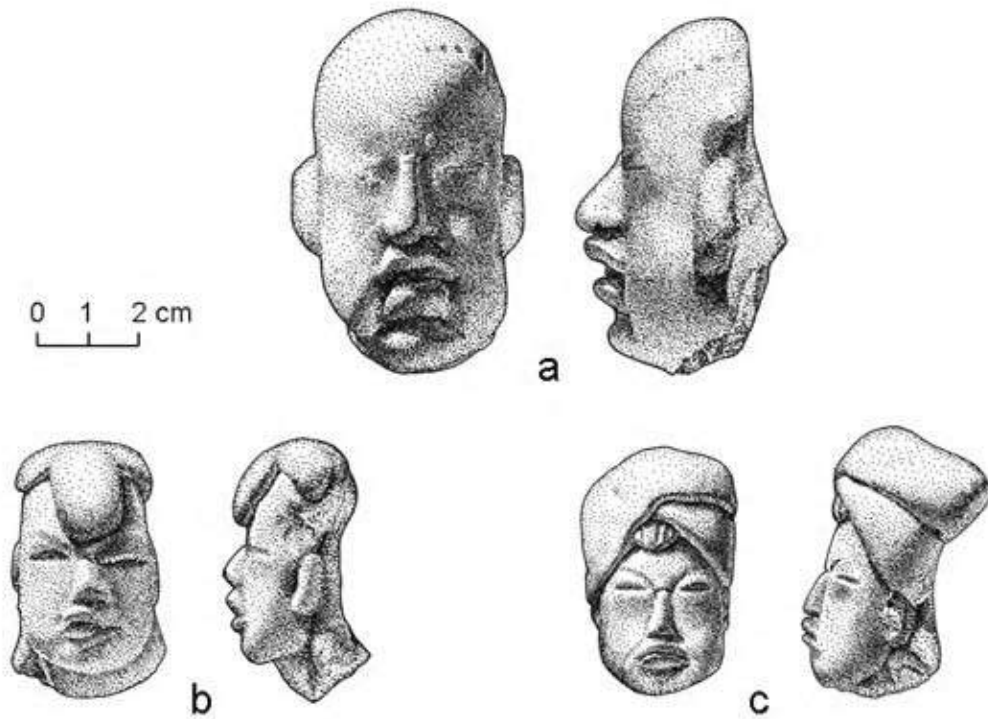


Figure 58. Cuadros phase figurine heads. specimen c is an import from San Lorenzo.

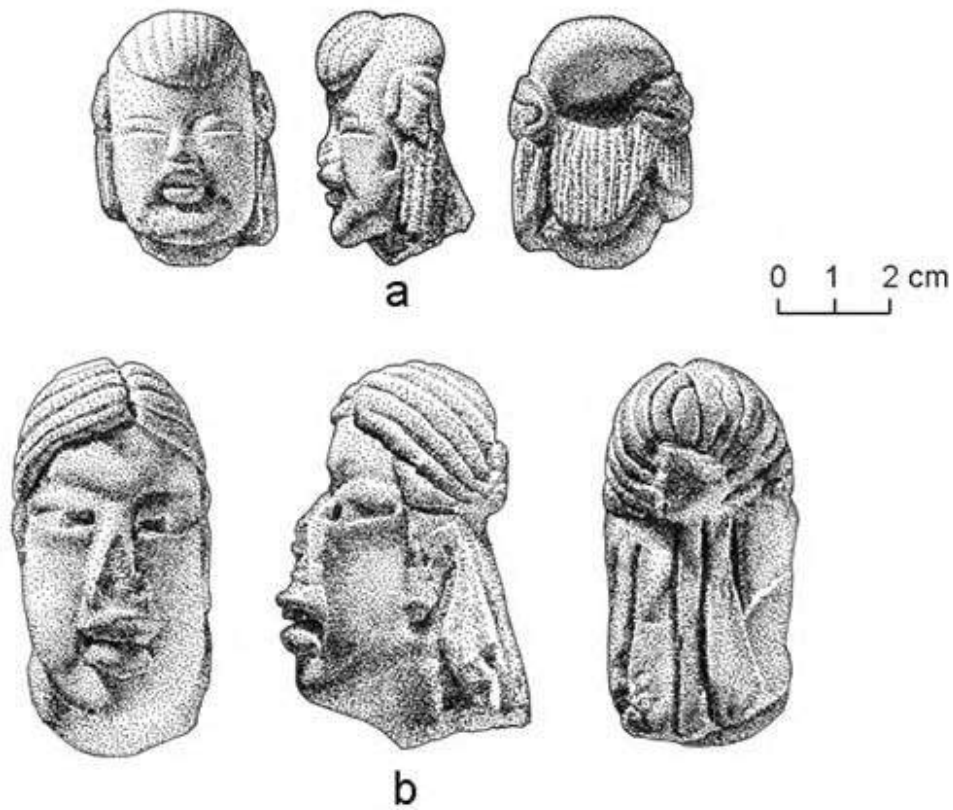


Figure 59. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

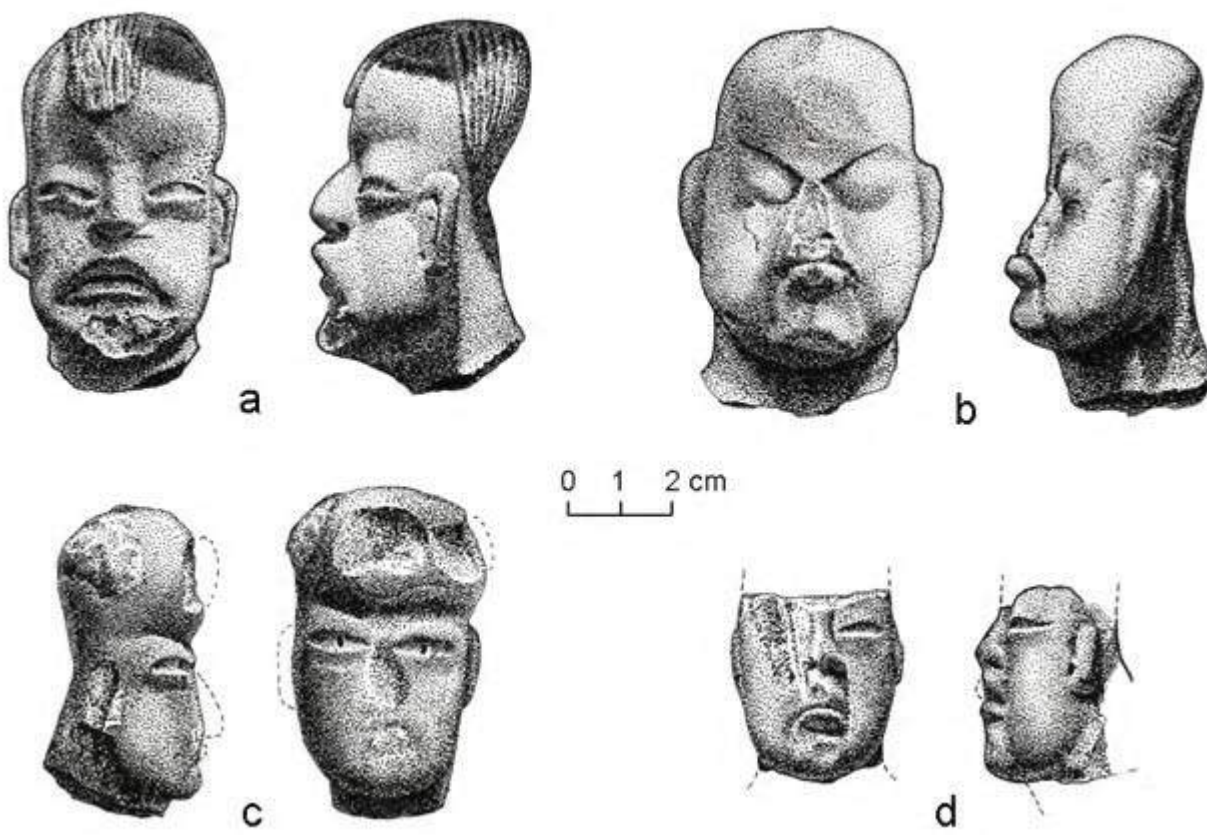


Figure 60. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

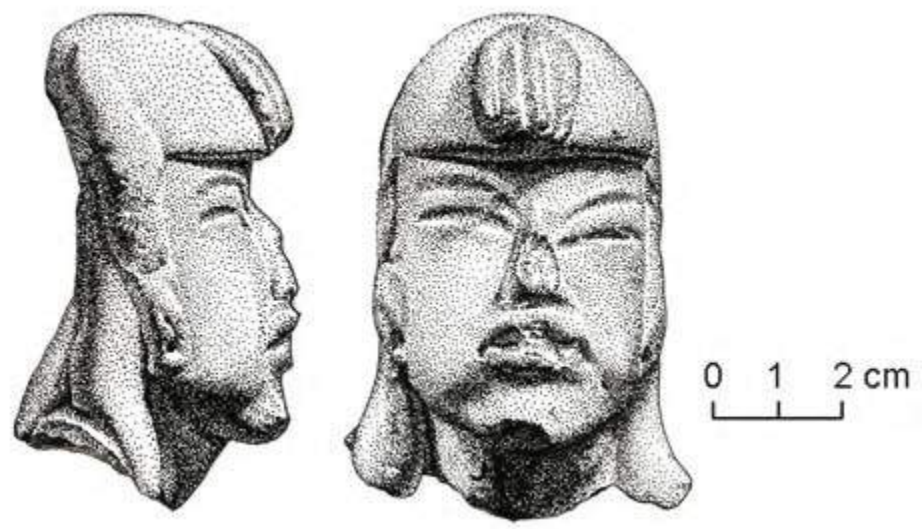


Figure 61. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

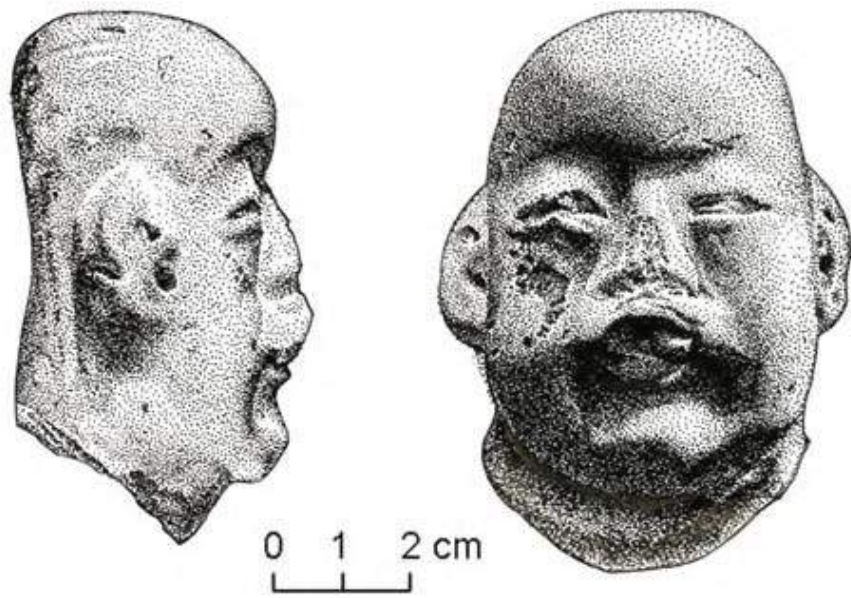


Figure 62. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

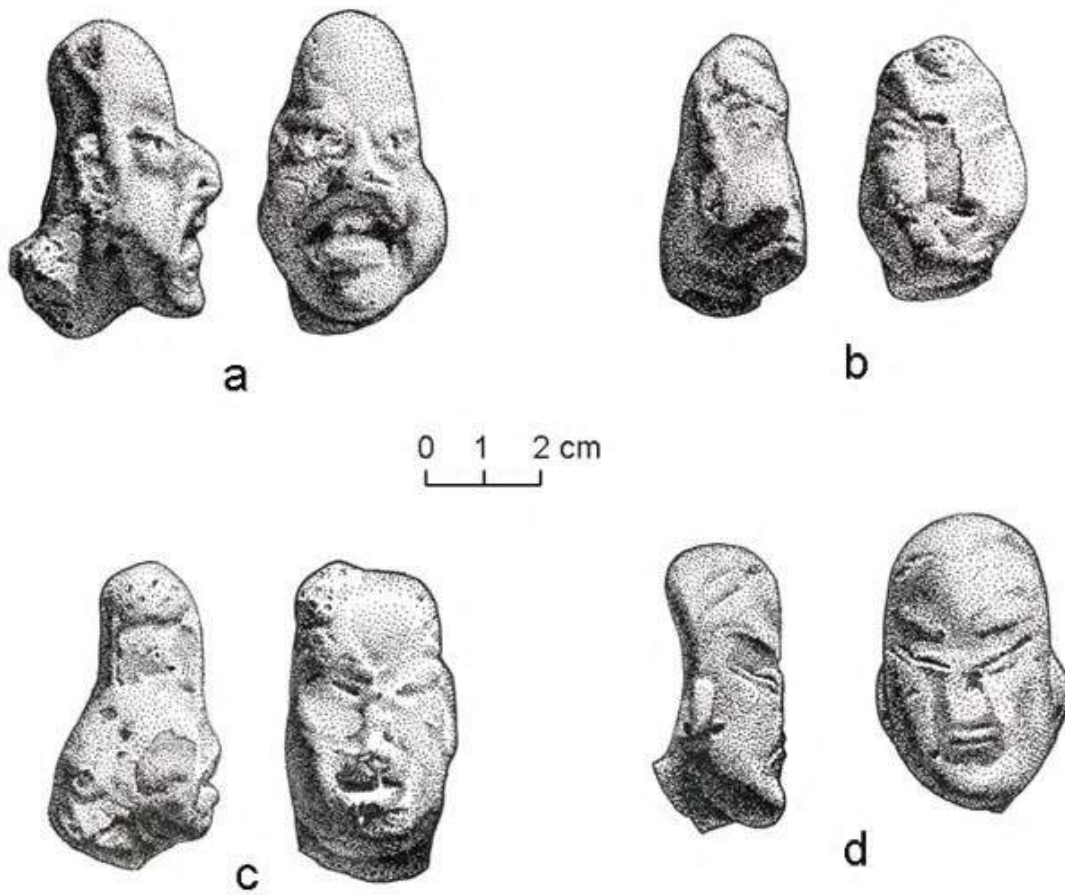


Figure 63. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

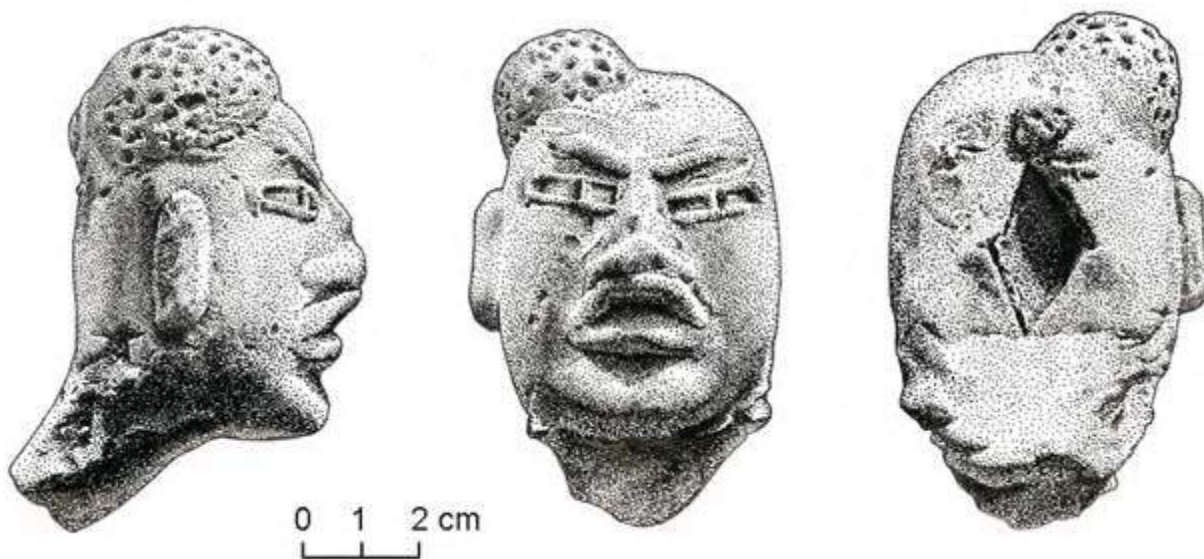


Figure 64. Cuadros phase figurine head. Note excised symbol on rear.

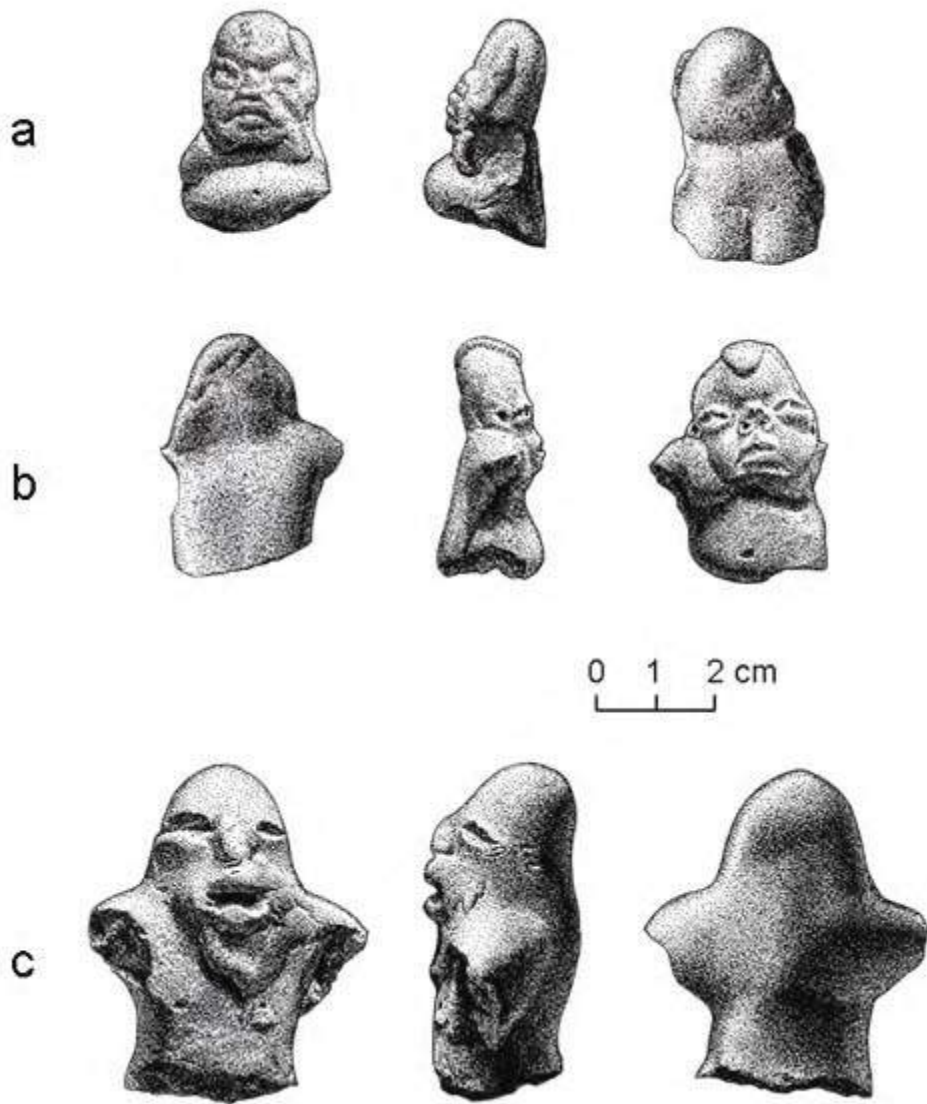


Figure 65. Cuadros phase figurines.

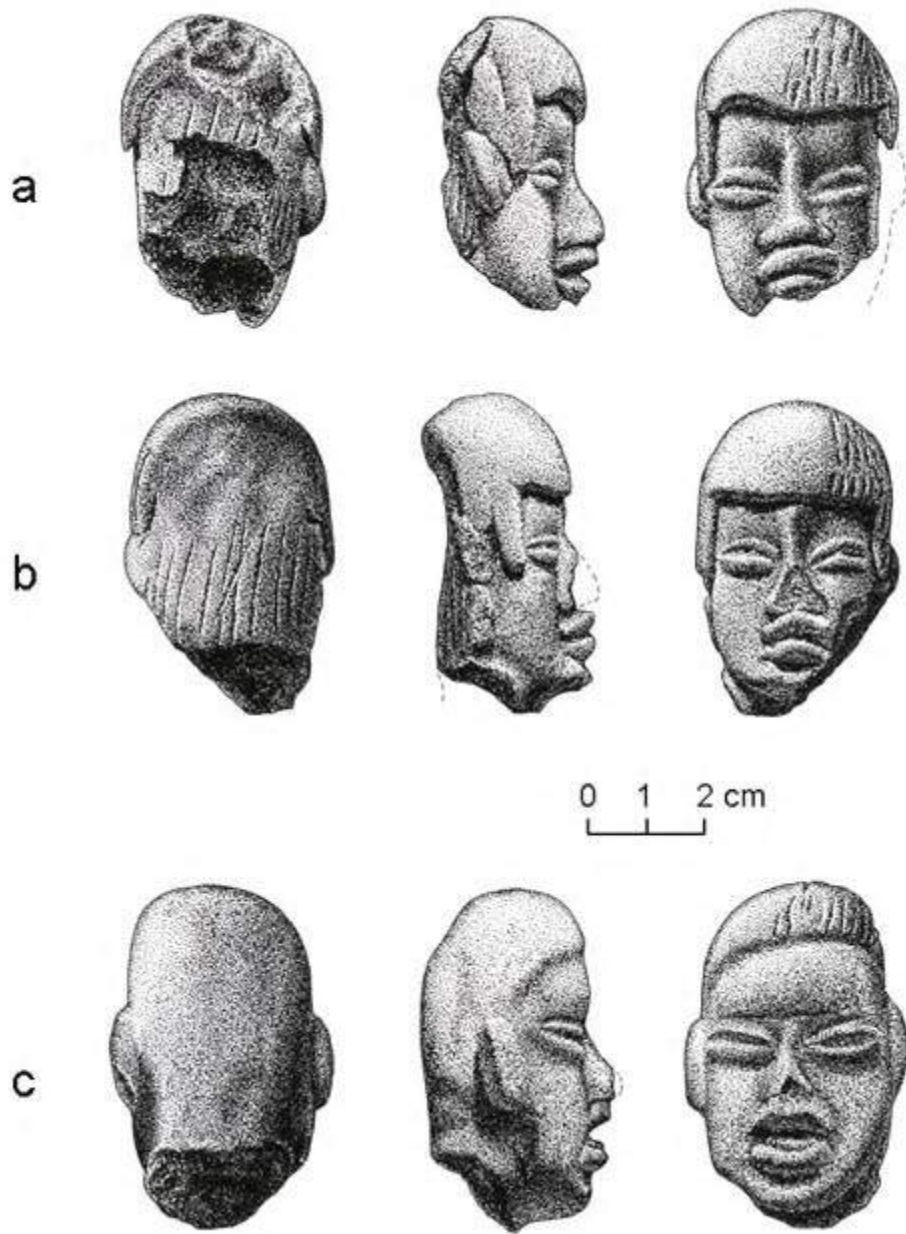


Figure 66. Cuadros phase figurines.



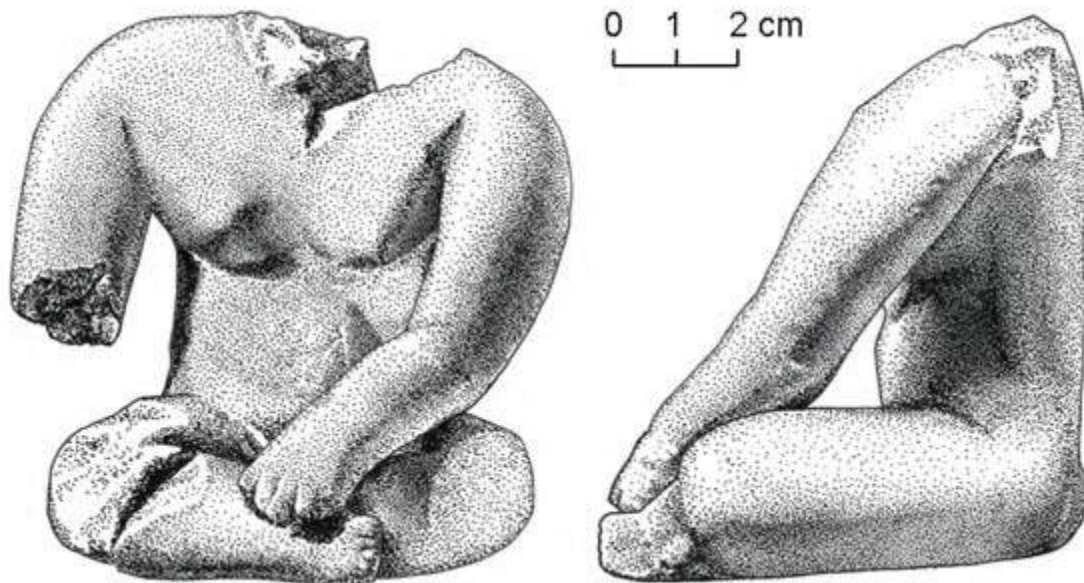


Figure 67. Cuadros phase figurine torso.

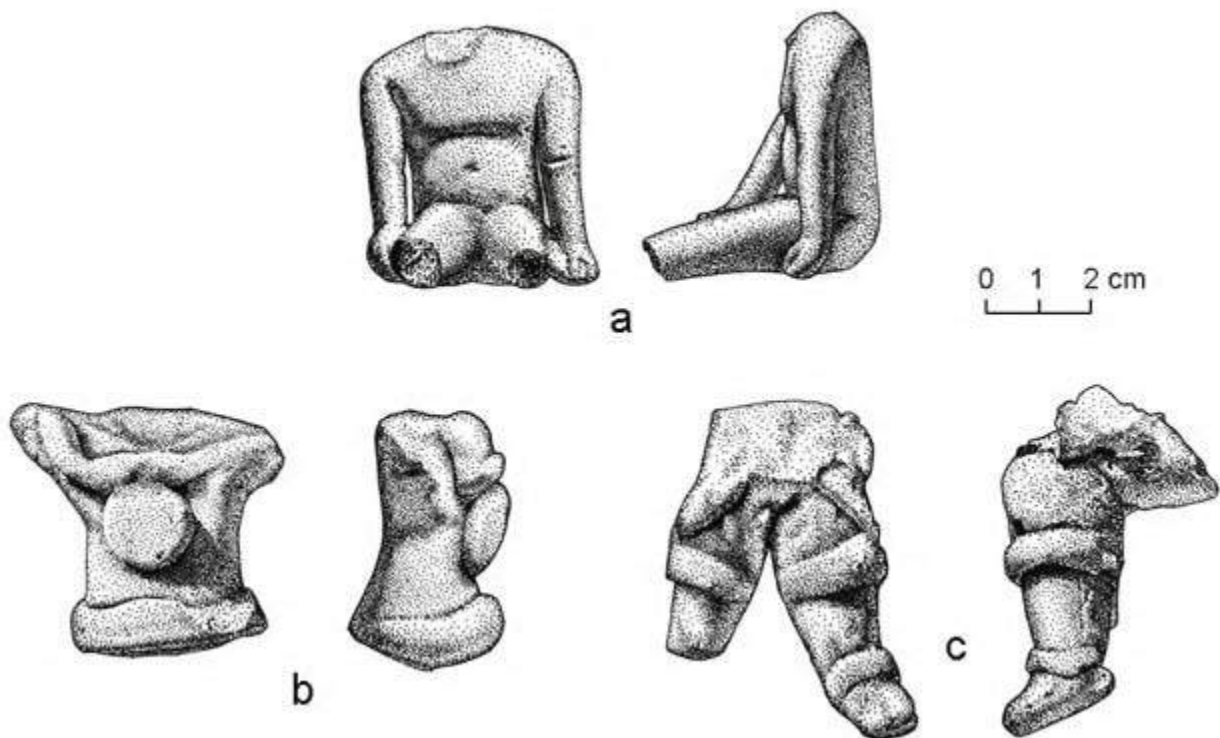


Figure 68. Cuadros phase figurine bodies: (a) seated torso; (b) ballplayer torso; (c) lower limbs of ballplayer.

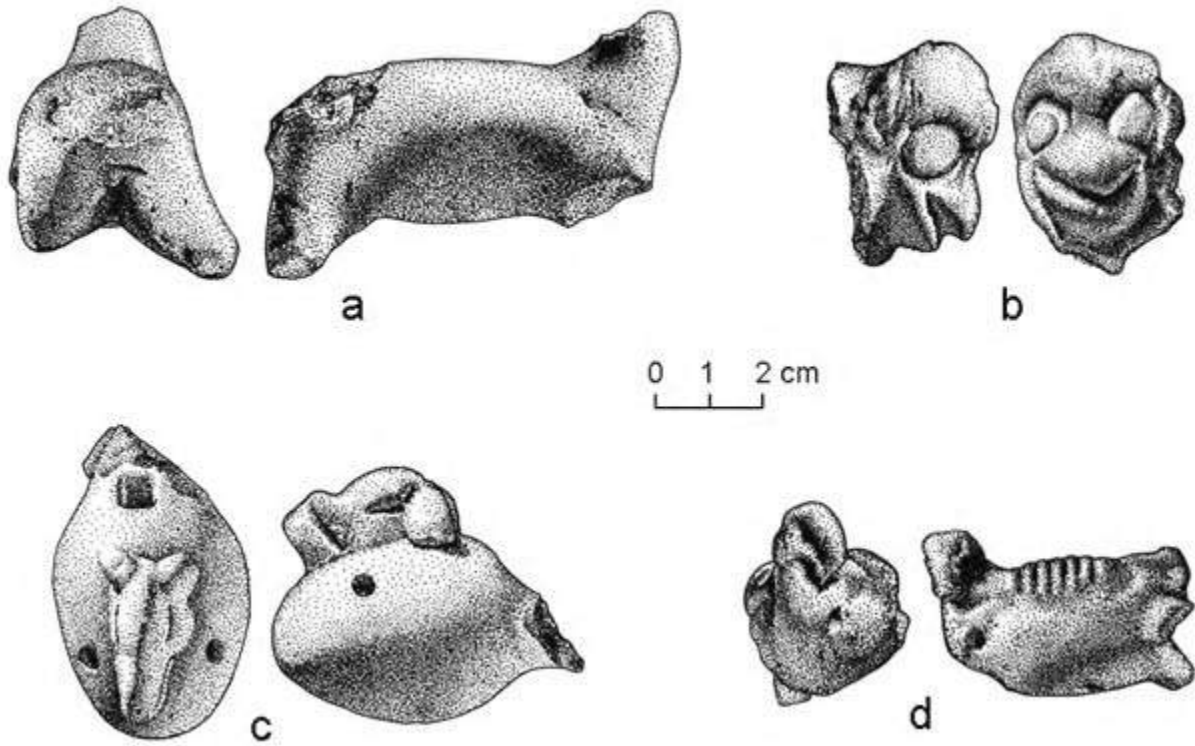


Figure 69. Cherla and Cuadros phase zoomorphic whistles/ocarinas.

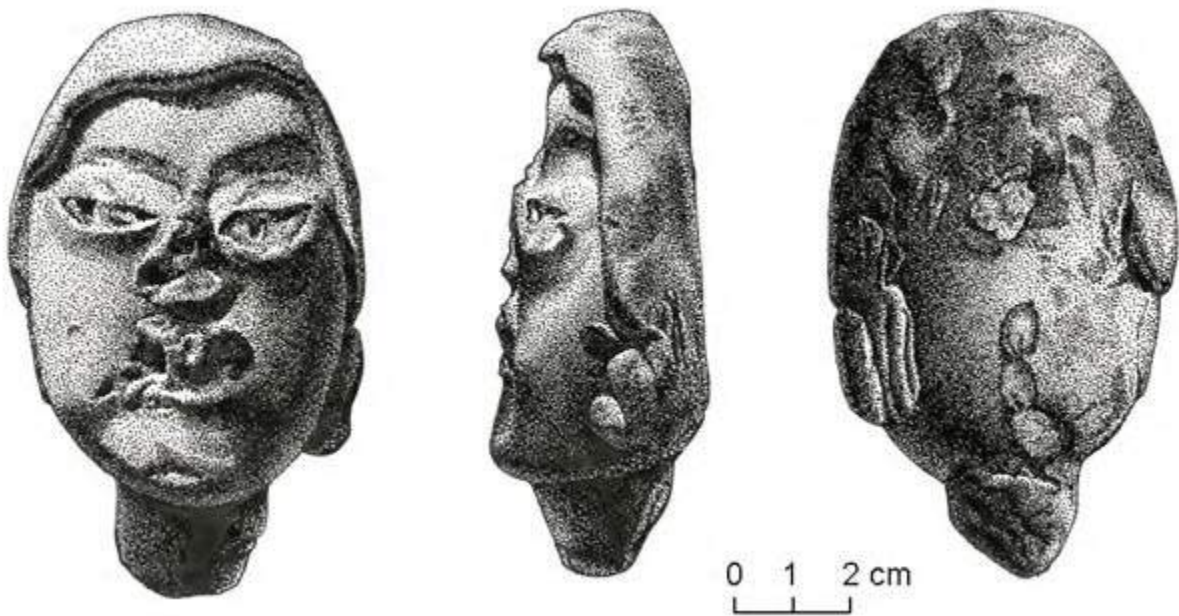


Figure 70. Jocotal phase figurine head.

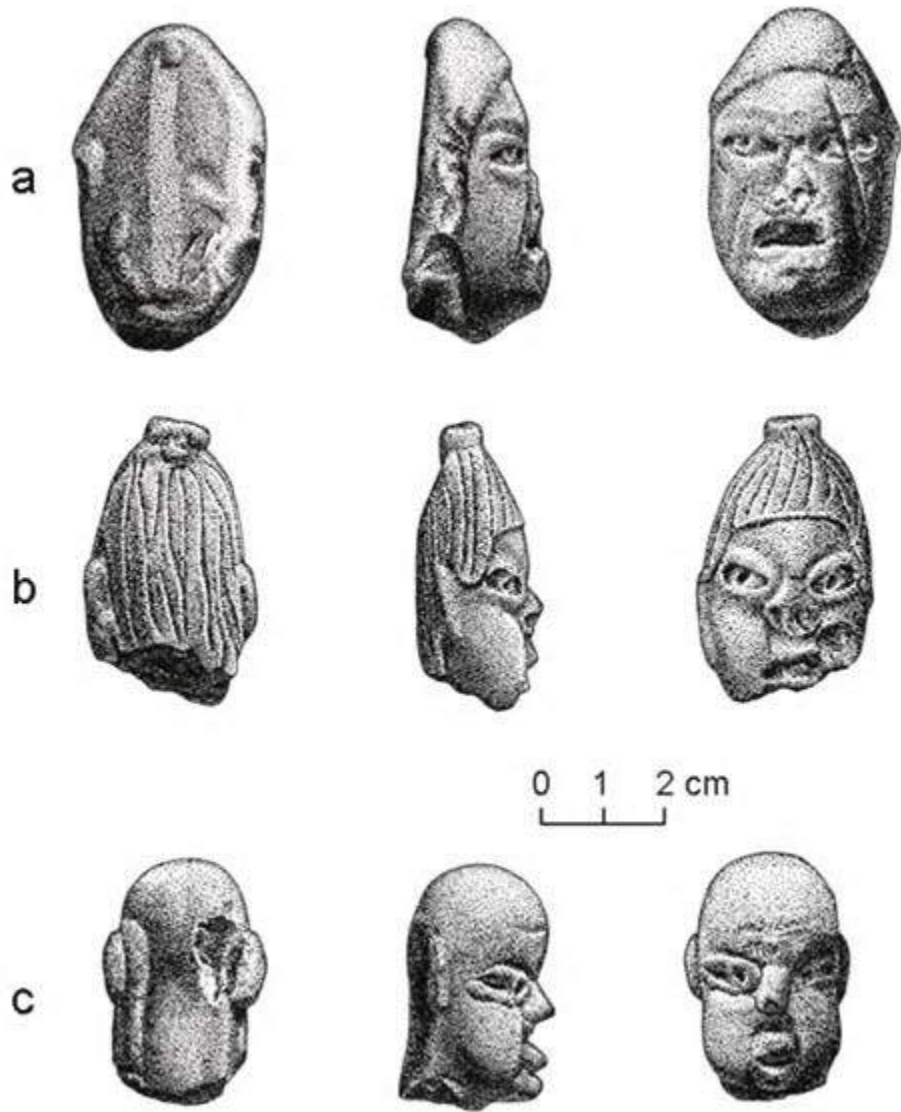


Figure 71. Figurines: (a-b) Jocotal; (c) Cuadros.

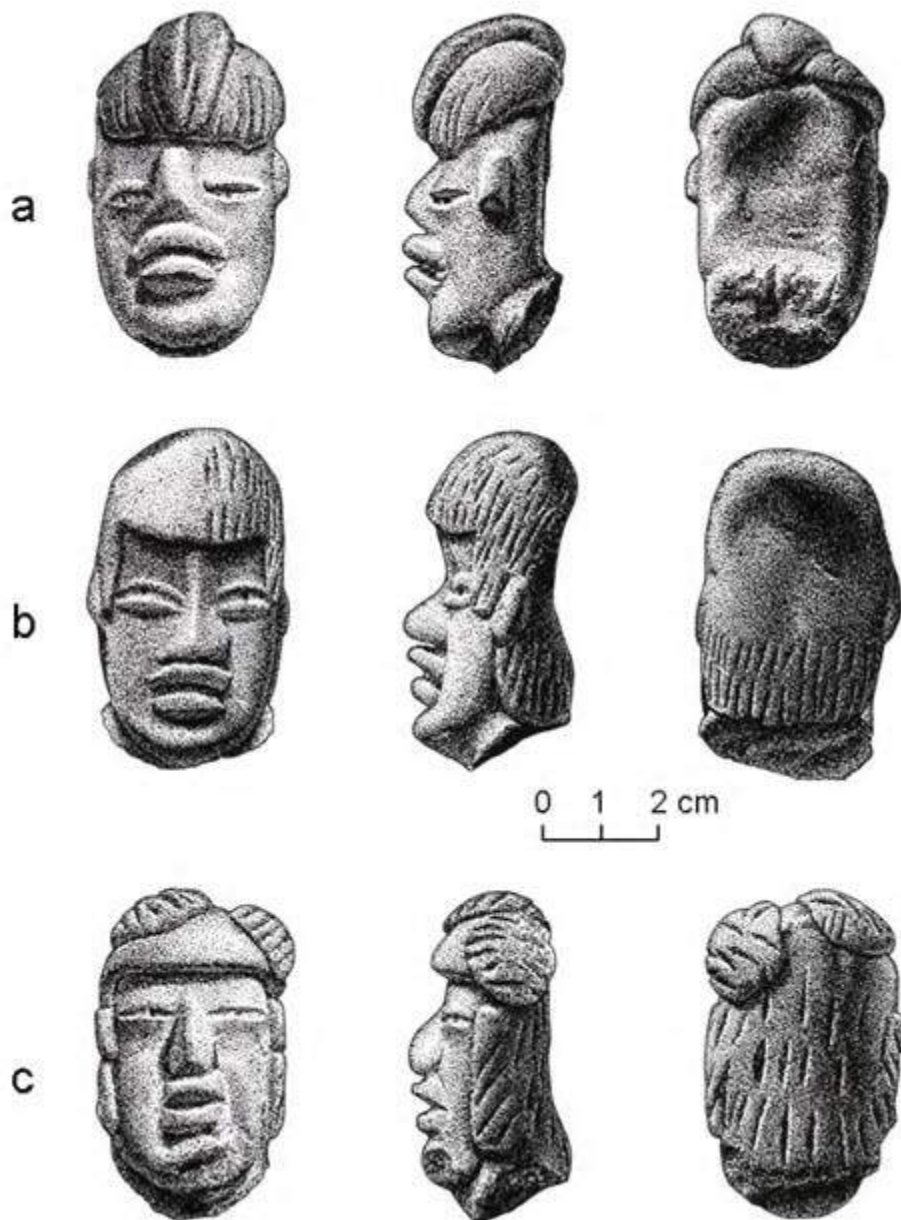


Figure 72. Figurines: (a) Jocotal; (b-c) Cuadros.

### Other Items

Several small ceramic masks (or masquettes) were found at Cantón Corralito ([Figures 73-74](#)). All appear to have been perforated along the edges in order to be strapped to a head, perhaps that of a large ceramic or wooden figurine or a living child or baby. Two themes are identifiable: aged individuals ([Figure 73](#)) and macabre defleshed skulls ([Figure 74](#)), one of which has a clamp holding the mandible to the maxilla by way of the nasal cavity.



Figure 73. Cuadros phase aged or "old hag" masquetter fragment. Note incised wrinkles and protruding lower lip.

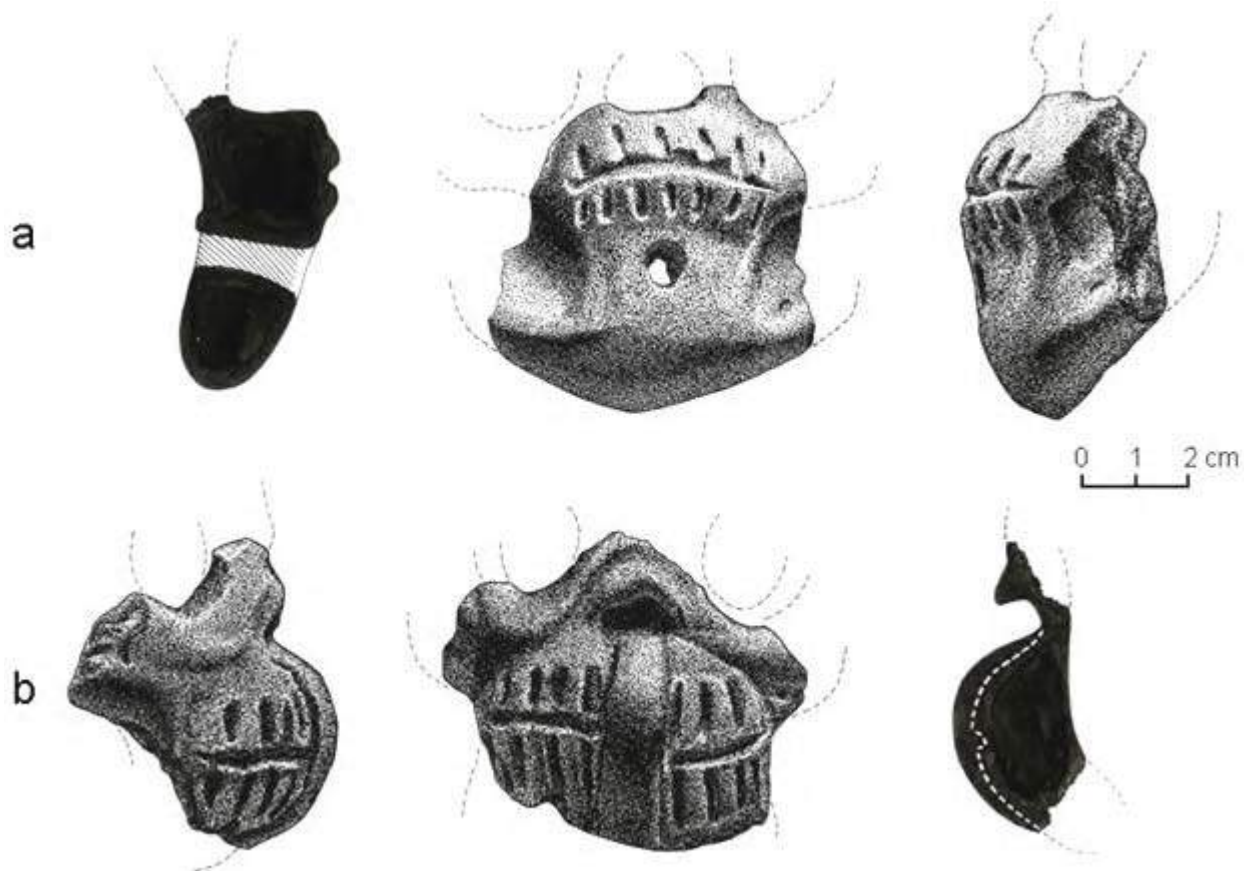


Figure 74. Cuadros phase ceramic "skull" masquette fragments. Note mandible clamp on lower specimen.

The Cantón Corralito assortment of Olmec style items also includes numerous hematite encrusted ceramic stamps. All are cylindrical in shape ([Figures 75-79](#)) except one,

which is flat and shaped like a human hand ([Figure 80](#)). These items may have been used to mark human skin or textiles. They are rare at San Lorenzo, with only one found during the Yale Project (Coe and Diehl 1980:Fig. 412), a few during the more recent UNAM project (Ann Cyphers, personal communication 2006), and a few from sites in the periphery of San Lorenzo near El Manatí (Ponciano Ortiz, personal communication 2005). It is possible that most stamps in the Gulf Coast region were made of wood (John Clark, personal communication 2005) thus accounting for their rarity.

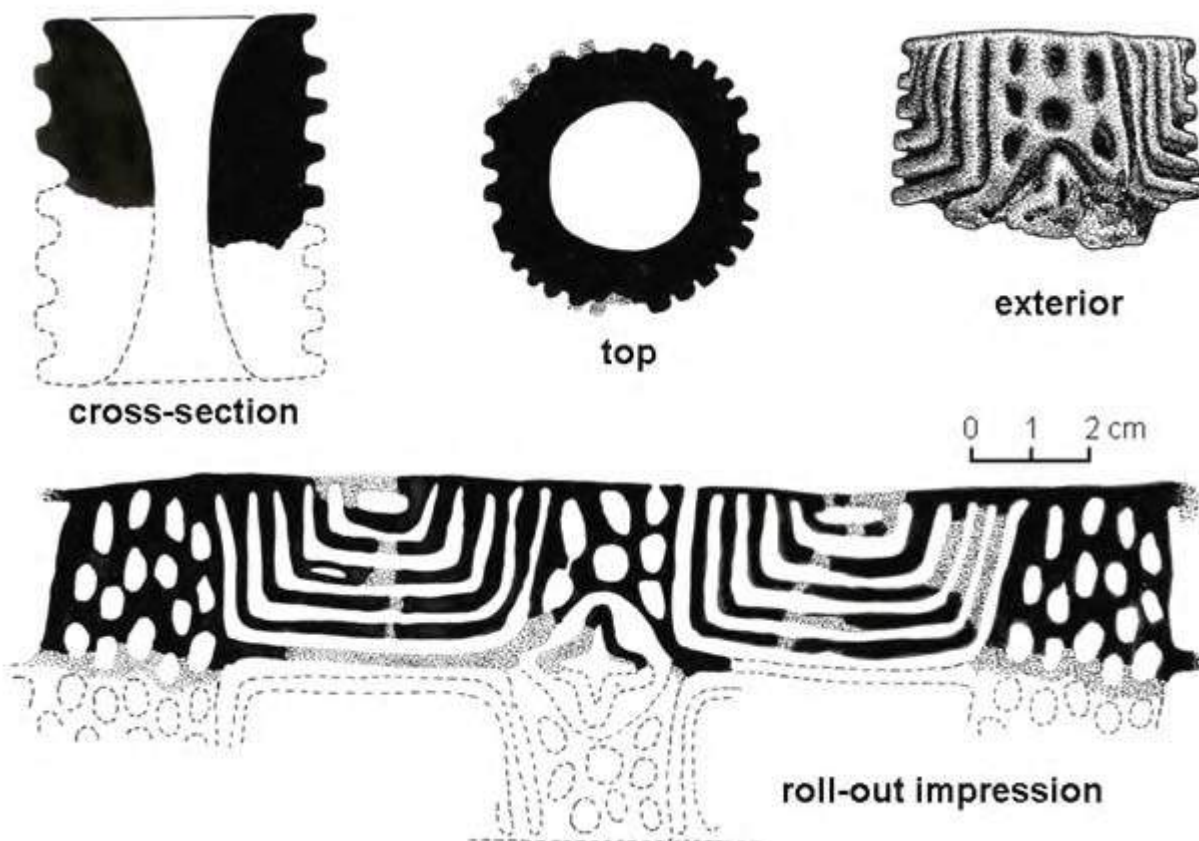


Figure 75. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

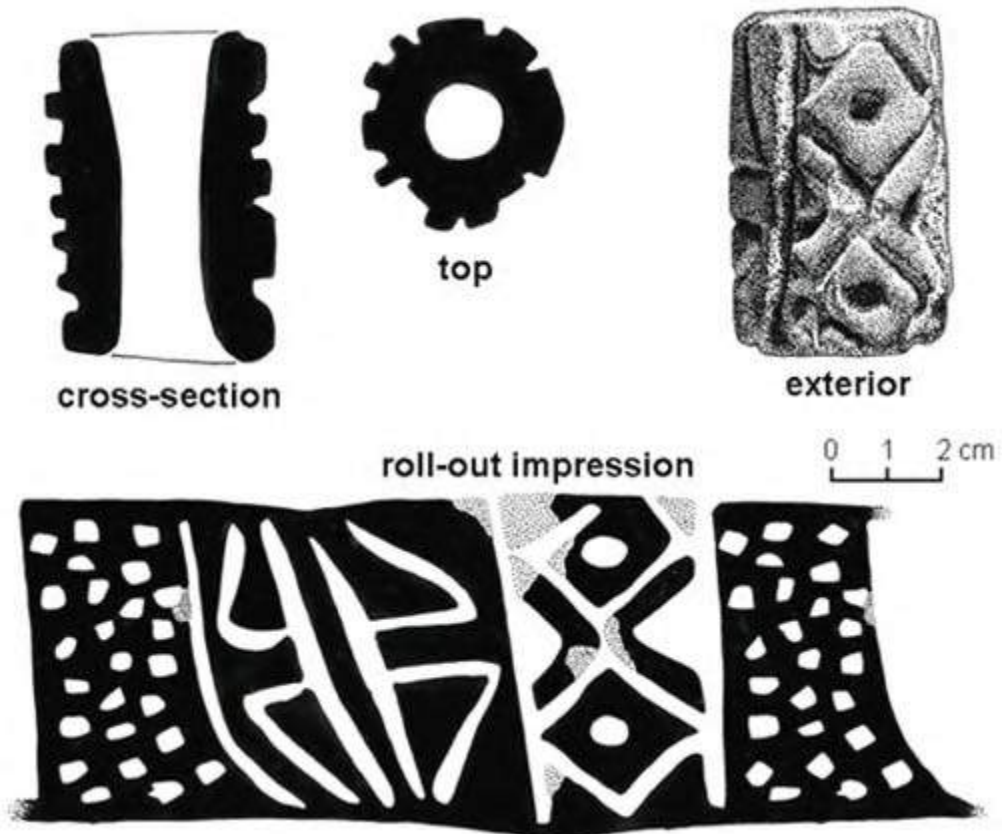


Figure 76. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

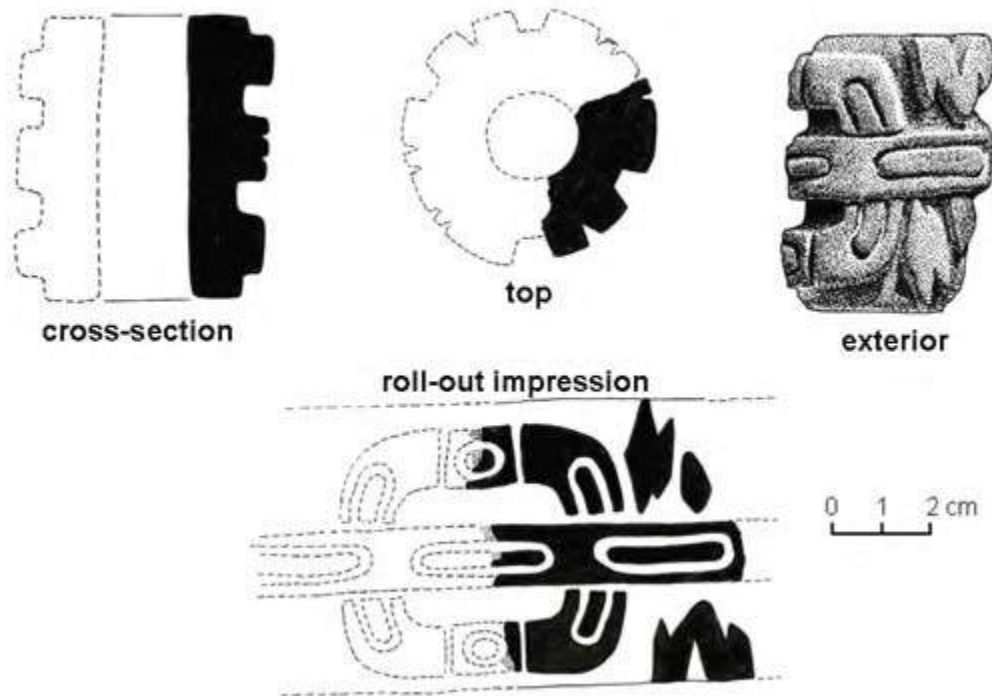


Figure 77. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

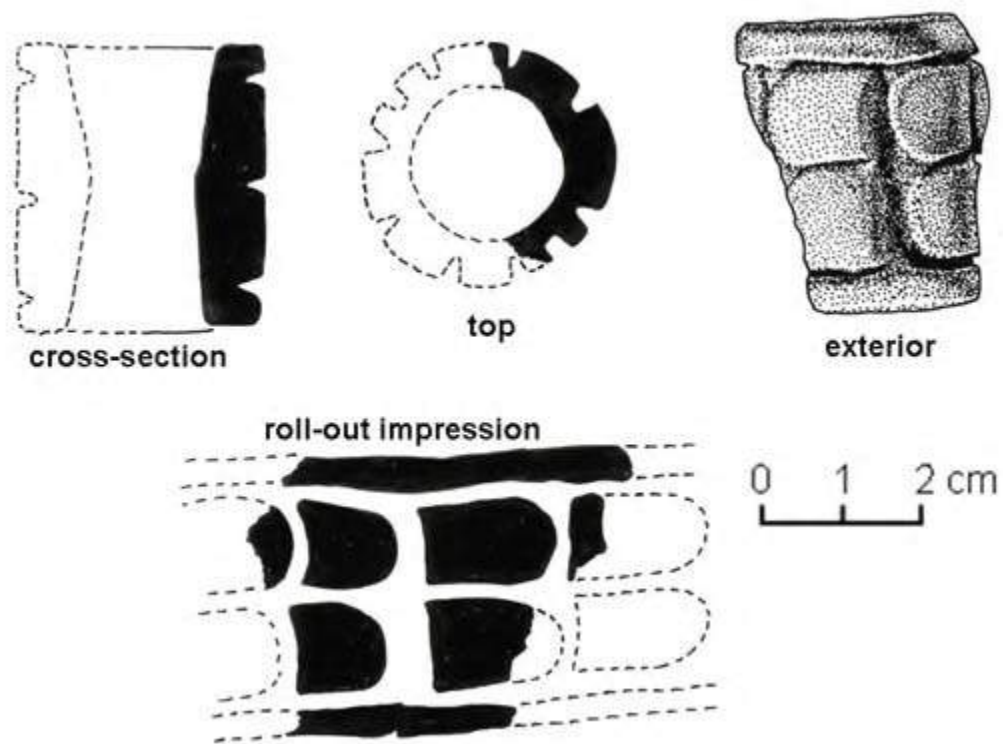


Figure 78. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.



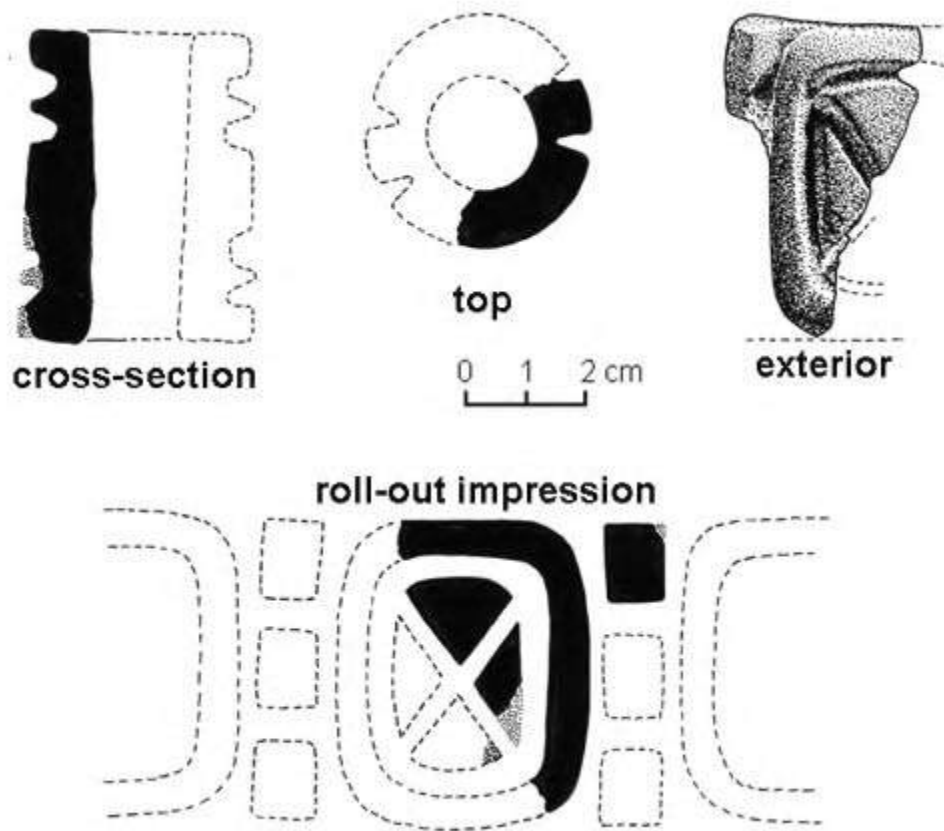
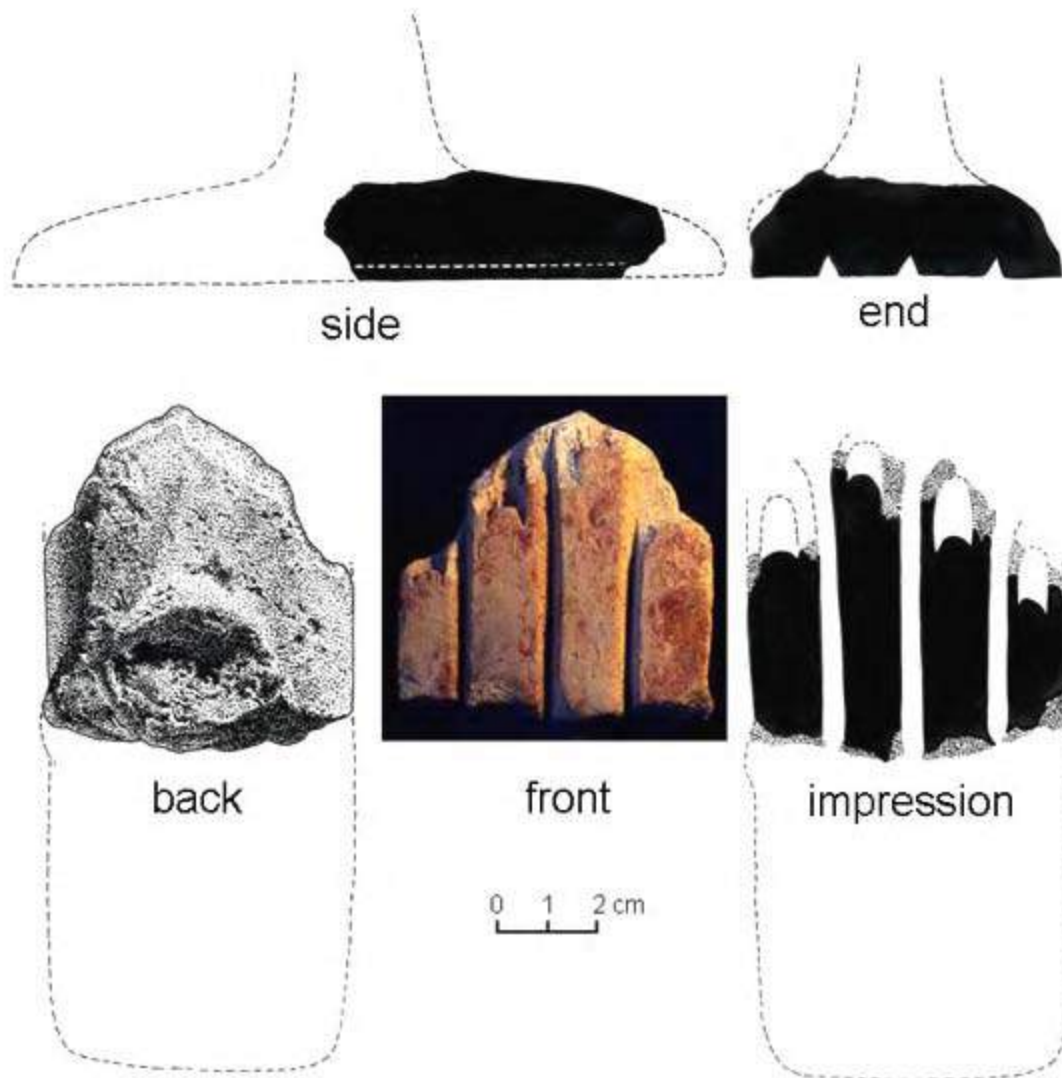


Figure 79. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.



**Figure 80. Flat stamp in the shape of human hand. Note fingernail excisions and extensive hematite staining.**

## Summary

The nature of Gulf Olmec interaction with distant societies during the Early Olmec horizon has polarized scholars and will continue to do so until rigorous comparative methodologies are devised and tested in individual cases. The ongoing comparative analysis of material culture from Cantón Corralito and San Lorenzo provides a small but important step in this direction. It will provide detailed databases for future scholars interested in investigating early Gulf Olmec interaction with Chiapas or other regions of Mesoamerica and will add to a growing body of “colonial archaeology” case studies (e.g., Stein [ed.] 2005) that highlight the incredibly diverse nature of colonies, colonization, and related social identity issues. The illustrations and associated data in

this report are but a tiny fraction of the data bearing on the question of possible Gulf Olmec occupation at Cantón Corralito. This project is in its infancy and it is my hope that as more visual data are generated and additional excavations are conducted more reports will be made available on the FAMSI website.

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[Figure 40](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherds. Specimens c and d are imports from San Lorenzo.

[Figure 41](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

[Figure 42](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherds.

[Figure 43](#). Calzadas Carved cup.

[Figure 44](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

[Figure 45](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

[Figure 46](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

[Figure 47](#). Calzadas Carved rim sherd.

[Figure 48](#). Limón incised rim sherd showing portion of Ilhuitl (opposed volutes) motif.

[Figure 49](#). Limón incised body sherds showing portion of modeled Ilhuitl (opposed volutes) motif.

[Figure 50](#). Bala White spouted tray, Cuadros phase. Note hematite pigment smear on base (photo).

[Figure 51](#). Early Olmec (1150-1000BC) figurine styles and corresponding frequencies.

[Figure 52](#). Pre-Cherla (Locona-Ocós phase) figurine heads.

[Figure 53](#). Figurines: (a-b) pre-Cherla; (c) Cherla; (d) Cuadros.

[Figure 54](#). Figurines: (a) pre-Cherla; (b) Cuadros.

[Figure 55](#). Cherla phase hollow figurine head.

[Figure 56](#). Figurines: (a,c-d) Cuadros; (b) Cherla.

[Figure 57](#). Figurines: (a,d) Cherla; (b-c) Cuadros.

[Figure 58](#). Cuadros phase figurine heads. specimen c is an import from San Lorenzo.

[Figure 59](#). Cuadros phase figurine heads.

[Figure 60](#). Cuadros phase figurine heads.

[Figure 61](#). Cuadros phase figurine heads.

[Figure 62](#). Cuadros phase figurine heads.

[Figure 63](#). Cuadros phase figurine heads.

[Figure 64](#). Cuadros phase figurine head. Note excised symbol on rear.

[Figure 65](#). Cuadros phase figurines.

[Figure 66](#). Cuadros phase figurines.

[Figure 67](#). Cuadros phase figurine torso.

[Figure 68](#). Cuadros phase figurine bodies: (a) seated torso; (b) ballplayer torso; (c) lower limbs of ballplayer.

[Figure 69](#). Cherla and Cuadros phase zoomorphic whistles/ocarinas.

[Figure 70](#). Jocotal phase figurine head.

[Figure 71](#). Figurines: (a-b) Jocotal; (c) Cuadros.

[Figure 72](#). Figurines: (a) Jocotal; (b-c) Cuadros.

[Figure 73](#). Cuadros phase aged or "old hag" masquetter fragment. Note incised wrinkles and protruding lower lip.

[Figure 74](#). Cuadros phase ceramic "skull" masquette fragments. Note mandible clamp on lower specimen.

[Figure 75](#). Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

[Figure 76](#). Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

[Figure 77](#). Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

[Figure 78](#). Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

[Figure 79](#). Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

[Figure 80](#). Flat stamp in the shape of human hand. Note fingernail excisions and extensive hematite staining.

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