

THE LOWLAND MAYA “PROTOCLASSIC”

A reconsideration of its nature and significance

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Abstract

The term “Protoclassic,” employed regularly but inexplicitly in the literature of lowland Maya archaeology, has become increasingly nebulous and ambiguous in both meaning and usage. This paper reviews the history and use of the term and presents a formal redefinition of the Protoclassic as a ceramic stage based explicitly and exclusively on ceramic criteria. Some suggestions regarding future use of the term also are offered. The paper further addresses and resolves a number of persisting questions regarding Protoclassic orange wares, including problems concerning the actual existence of the “Aguacate ceramic group,” and the relationships of Aguacate-group pottery to other emergent orange wares of the terminal Late Preclassic and initial Early Classic periods. The nature and significance of the “Holmul I Style,” the “Floral Park Ceramic Sphere,” and the relationships of the two to each other and the larger, redefined “protoclassic” ceramic stage also are examined. A spatial distribution for protoclassic ceramics considerably expanded over what has ever been reported previously is described, and chronometric data are presented to support a revised chronology for the protoclassic ceramic stage. Finally, ceramic data are offered that suggest a real subdivision of the protoclassic ceramic stage into an early, emergent facet originating entirely within Late Preclassic lowland traditions, and a later, fully “Classic” facet corresponding to the early Tzakol (Tzakol 1) ceramic horizon.

At the close of the Preclassic, a series of new pottery elements appears to have spread over much of the eastern Maya lowlands. This Protoclassic assemblage, probably originating in the southeastern periphery (eastern Guatemala and western El Salvador), includes the “mammiform tetrapod” bowl (bowls with four bulbous supports . . .) and painted Usulutans. In these areas the red finishes of the Chicanel pottery were replaced by orange slipped, red-on-orange bichrome decoration, and the first orange polychromes. (Sharer 1994:685)

Since their initial identification at Holmul, Guatemala (Merwin and Vaillant 1932), Protoclassic Maya ceramics have remained the object of considerable interest and controversy. A number of attribute-similarities to the “Q complex” of highland Central America—a group of co-occurring ceramic traits that included negative painting, tetrapod supports, “Usulután Ware,” and shoe-shaped vessels (Lothrop 1927; Stone 1948:169–170; Vaillant 1928, 1934:90)—were noted in the original description, and this early conflation with the Q complex has continued to influence the direction of inquiry for the last 60 years.

Additional finds of what came to be labeled “Holmul I pottery” were reported from Mountain Cow (Tzimin Kax; Thompson 1931) and Nohmul (“Douglas”; Anderson and Cook 1944) in British Honduras (Belize), and Uxactun, Guatemala (Smith 1955). Unfortunately, these early collections either were never described

adequately nor illustrated in a manner useful to other investigators, or involved such small quantities of material as to be of no meaningful assistance.¹

Interest in the Protoclassic intensified with the work of James C. Gifford on the ceramics of Barton Ramie, and the “Protoclassic problem” in its present form gradually emerged (see Gifford 1965:36, 1974:79–80, 1976; Willey and Gifford 1961). Largely because it was the first Protoclassic ceramic assemblage described using the type:variety method, the Barton Ramie collection has remained at the center of all discussions of the Protoclassic.

Gifford saw continuity in the local Preclassic redware tradition from the Late Preclassic Mount Hope phase into the Early Classic Hermitage phase, but argued for the existence of a new, intermediate ceramic complex and sphere—Floral Park—based on what he believed were radical departures from the existing local Preclassic ceramic tradition. In Willey and Gifford’s (1961:166–167) words:

The Floral Park complex pottery is entirely new and different from any that was in use during the earlier portion of Mount

¹ Duncan Pring (1996) currently is completing a descriptive monograph addressing this need. Pring’s study will provide full type:variety descriptions of each of the extant vessels from the Protoclassic Holmul, Mountain Cow, and Nohmul assemblages.

Hope times. It embodies new vessel forms, new rim forms and treatments, a new base color (orange), and a prominent new (mammiform) foot mode, and possibly the idea of painted polychrome decoration.

The differences noted were formalized as “Holmul Orange Ware”—although this ware was never defined—and isolated from earlier and later wares. The establishment of a new ware and sphere for Floral Park ceramics formed the typological basis for Gifford’s (1965:345, 1974:79–80, 1976:128) hypothesis that an invasion of peoples from the southeastern highlands was responsible for the presence of these ceramics in the lowlands and the evolution of Maya society from its Preclassic to Classic configuration. The connection with the southeastern highlands was drawn more explicitly when Gifford proposed that Aguacate Orange from Barton Ramie was closely linked to what was designated a local variety of the type at Chalchuapa, El Salvador (Aguacate Orange:Atcozal Variety) based on his own comparison of pottery from the two sites (Sharer and Gifford 1970).

Throughout this debate, a number of scholars maintained that they could perceive nothing in the ceramics, architecture, or any other material-cultural category of the era to indicate highland Salvadoran or any other “foreign” influences on the origin of Classic Maya civilization nor any evidence that suggested anything other than an indigenous, autochthonous development of Classic Maya culture (Andrews 1965; Coe 1965; Hammond 1974; Smith 1955; Smith in Smith and Gifford 1965:515).

Although originally accepting Gifford’s assessment, 15 years later—acting on suggestions by Arthur Demarest, and after comparing pottery samples from Chalchuapa, Kaminaljuyu, and Barton Ramie—Robert J. Sharer also became convinced that no real relationship existed between the Aguacate Orange of Barton Ramie and the correspondingly named Chalchuapa type (Demarest 1986: 153–155, 177; Demarest and Sharer 1986). For the last 30 years, however, the literature concerning the Protoclassic has grappled with this legacy and whether the ceramic evidence suggests an actual “invasion” of the lowlands by highland peoples, or merely reflects contact between the two areas—or does neither.

In the early 1970s, Duncan Pring (1977a) undertook a reexamination of the Protoclassic that was noteworthy for several reasons. First, he provided an expanded listing of the diagnostic modes of “Floral Park” ceramics (Figure 1). Second, he summarized the known distribution of Protoclassic ceramics in the lowlands as of 1975, noting that only five sites—Altar de Sacrificios, Barton Ramie, Holmul, Mountain Cow, and Nohmul—had produced large quantities of the material (Pring 1977a:138–140). Minimally, El Pozito (Case 1982) and Kichpanha (Meskill 1992) in northern Belize, Cahal Pech and Buenavista del Cayo in central western Belize (current study), Naj Tunich in southeastern Peten (Brady 1987), and La Lagunita (Ichon and Arnaud 1985) in western highland Guatemala now can be added to these.

“PROTOCLASSIC”: DEFINING THE CONCEPT AND THE TERM

What do Mayanists mean when they employ the term “Protoclassic”? As Willey (1977:391) noted, the term is used in three distinct ways. The oldest and most common usage is based on cultural content and alludes more or less specifically to the presence of “Floral Park” or “Holmul I”-like ceramics. In its original employment, the term referred to a regional ceramic horizon. A second and more

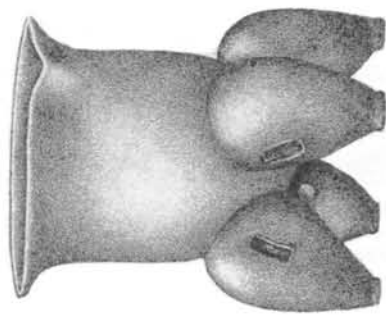
common use of the term is to describe a general developmental stage between the “Preclassic” and “Classic” eras. Finally, the third and most recent use of the term has been to delineate a chronological period extending from approximately 50 B.C. to A.D. 250 through which all sites obviously would have passed. In reality, however, all three uses have merged in common understanding to connote the appearance of a particular array of ceramic types, forms, and other attributes and the cultural-historical significance that has been assigned to them. Thus, for Mayanists, the term Protoclassic is not culturally neutral. Whereas Preclassic and Postclassic have come to describe periods of time before and after the Classic era and to possess only chronological significance, the term Protoclassic has increasingly come to be understood as a developmental stage portending and leading into the Classic era. The term also has come to imply the existence of a distinct block of time sandwiched between the end of the Preclassic period (variably dated from as early as ca. 50 B.C. to as late as A.D. 150, 200, or 250) and the beginning of the Early Classic (ca. A.D. 250–300) during which the salient features characterizing Classic-era civilization developed and coalesced. Both of these usages are insupportable and misleading.

What we propose instead is a content-defined unit—or ceramic stage—delimited by the appearance and disappearance of a broad series of ceramic attributes, including those locally definitive of a Holmul I Style (polychrome-decorated, orange-glossware, mammiform tetrapod dishes and bowls); a Floral Park sphere (the Holmul Orange Ware, Aguacate-group types, Aguacate Orange and Gavilan Black-on-orange); the broader orange-glossware tradition; and multicolor (polychrome), positive-painted decoration on orange, buff, and/or glossware pottery. We propose a dating for this protoclassic ceramic stage of circa 75 ± 25 B.C.–A.D. 400 ± 20 . It thus overlaps temporal segments of both the Late Preclassic and the Early Classic periods, as well as encompassing the ceramic content traditionally assigned to these. We believe this to be an important step forward in the systematics of Maya archaeology as it resolves a long-standing controversy involving the analysis and presentation of both ceramic and broader cultural data. It also crystallizes the fact that ceramic developments during this interval were both considerably different from and more complex than originally suggested.

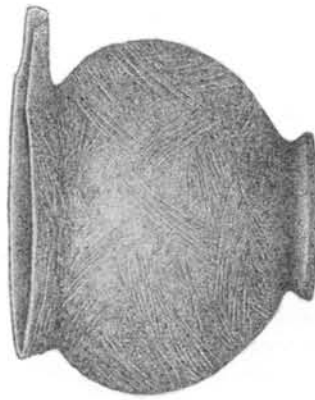
For the Maya lowlands, the concept of a protoclassic holds meaning and utility only if used explicitly and exclusively to describe a “ceramic stage,” and this, therefore, is the strict sense in which we here redefine and employ the term. By “ceramic stage,” we mean a conceptual unit characterized by the presence of a specific set or constellation of ceramic traits (specific forms, surface finishes, decorative treatments, designs, technologies, or other modes)—and nothing more. It is neither a period (i.e., a chronological division), nor is it a general developmental stage: it holds and conveys no broad evolutionary implications. It is a content-defined analytical unit only. This point is critical to using the term protoclassic correctly as a classificatory or descriptive tool.²

The establishment of a Floral Park ceramic sphere, identification of the proposed site unit intrusion, and even use of the term, Protoclassic, all are drawn from earlier formulations of the Q com-

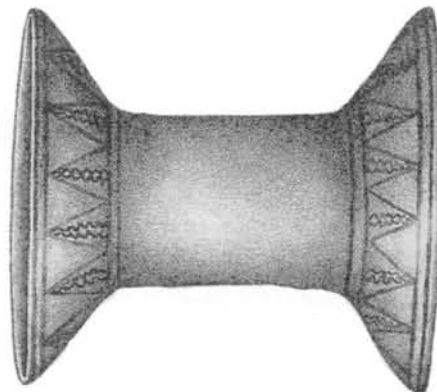
² Throughout this paper the term “Protoclassic” is capitalized when it is used in any of the traditional senses to refer to a ceramic horizon, developmental stage, or a chronological period. To distinguish our usage, “protoclassic” appears in lower case only when it refers to a ceramic stage as defined here.



a. Guacamallo Red-on-orange (Naj Tunich)



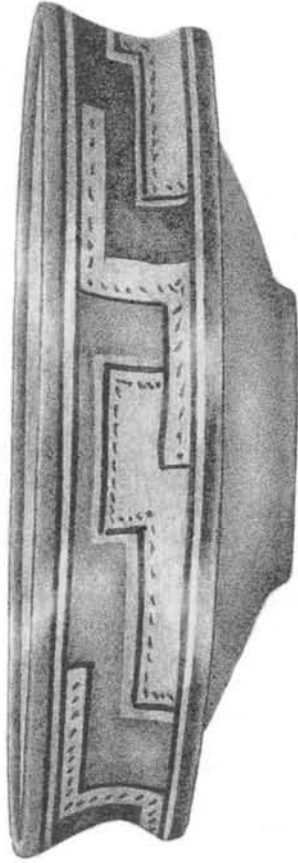
b. Discodia Black (Buenvista del Cayo)



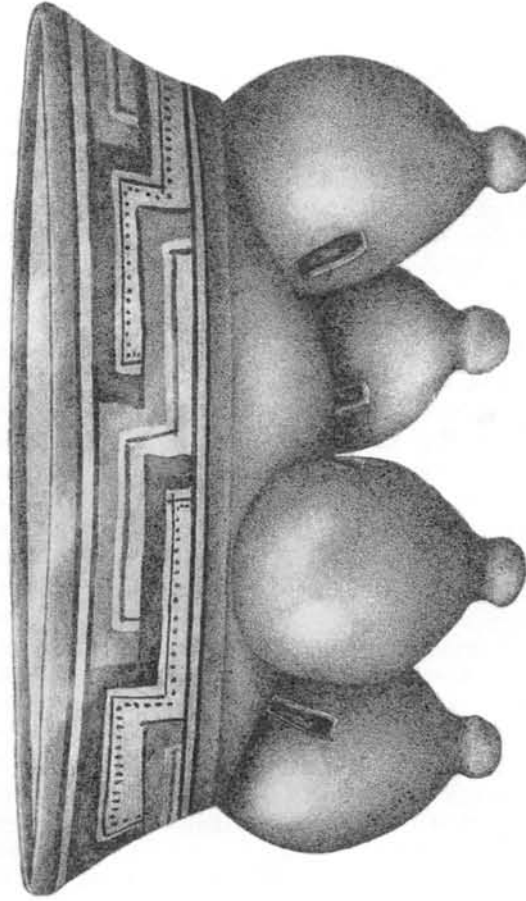
c. Guacamallo Red-on-orange (Naj Tunich)



d. Urita Gouged-incised (Cahal Pech)



e. Ixcario Orange-polychrome: Actuncan Variety (Barton Ramie)



f. Ixcario Orange-polychrome (Naj Tunich)

Figure 1. Representative "Protoclassic" forms, wares, and decorative modes: (a–b) "cream-pitchers"; (c–d) "potstands"; (e) basal-flanged bowl; (f) mammiform tetrapod bowl. Scale is in centimeters.

plex, and are based on the assumption that a definable complex of co-occurring and interrelated ceramic attributes appeared suddenly at the end of the Preclassic. This assumption needs to be examined more closely.

Few traits have been associated more closely with the Proto-classic than “Usulután Ware” and resist decoration (e.g., Morley et al. 1983:371–373; Sharer 1994:682–685). A major problem in assessing the significance of these modes as indicators of highland–lowland contact, however, derives from the fact that the terms are used differently in El Salvador, Honduras, and highland Guatemala than in the Maya lowlands (Figure 2). Demarest and Sharer (1982:810) define “Usulután decoration” in El Salvador as use of the resist technique regardless of design (see Figure 2a, f, h). In the Maya lowlands, however, “Usulután decoration” refers primarily to parallel wavy-line decoration whether or not produced by a resist technique (see Figure 2b–c, g).³

Long recognized in the lowlands as a Mamom horizon marker (Willey et al. 1967:294; see Figure 2i–j), resist decoration now seems to have first appeared late in the preceding Bladen phase (900–650 B.C.) at Cuello as an organic-resist technique (Kosakowsky 1987:33) producing a black-on-red or black-on-cream effect. A developmental trajectory from organic to negative/positive and finally imitation resist seems to have occurred, and to have done so independently of the wavy-line and other decorative motifs. Non-wavy-line resist decoration is present in the Mamom complex at Uaxactun (Smith 1955:60), and Tierra Mojada Resist, a non-wavy-line resist ceramic, appears in the Escoba complex at Seibal (Sabloff 1975:71) and the Colha Chiwa complex (Valdez 1987:87) among others. The mode is also important throughout northern Campeche and western Yucatán during the Middle Preclassic, as in the Nabanche complex of Dzibilchaltun (Ball 1977:152–153; see Figure 2i).

By the start of the Late Preclassic period (ca. 400 B.C.), non-wavy-line resist decoration was present as Repasto Black-on-red at Altar de Sacrificios, Tikal, Becan, and numerous other sites throughout the southern and northern lowlands (Ball 1977:50; see Figure 2j). The designs represented among these resist types include blotches, dots, and lines, which also occur in the highlands. In short, a resist technique analogous to that found in the highlands was in use throughout the lowlands during the Middle Preclassic period.

The positive-painted, parallel wavy-line decoration referred to as “Usulután” (or, more properly, “pseudo-Usulután”; see Figure 2b–c, g) in the lowlands commonly has been regarded as a member of the same complex as the mammiform tetrapod and the Proto-classic orange wares (Morley et al. 1983:371–373; Pring 1977a:143; Willey 1977:391). In point of fact, however, this decorative mode commonly appears in strata preceding the appear-

ance of true proto-classic orange wares (Rice 1983:11; Willey et al. 1967:296, 307), and seems to have been more strongly represented in the central southern lowlands, whereas Holmul I Style pottery is more common in the eastern Peten.

Pseudo-Usulután resist decoration is reported at Uaxactun in the Late Preclassic Chicanel phase (Smith 1955:124). At Barton Ramie, positive-painted wavy-line decoration appears on Savannah Bank Usulután, Sarteneja Usulután, and Escobal Red-on-buff, all of which occur in the Late Preclassic Mount Hope assemblage but are not associated with proto-classic Floral Park complex pottery (Gifford 1976:116–118). These types also occur at Colha (Valdez 1987:144–150). At Altar de Sacrificios, the positive-painted Sacluc Black-on-orange, Itzan Red-on-gray, Caramba Red-on-red-orange, and Metapa Trichrome occur during the Late Plancha phase (Adams 1971:28–29), but vanish by the appearance of Salinas-complex ceramics when mammiform tetrapods appear (Adams 1971:95).

Wavy-line decoration also appears in the Late Preclassic Cauac complex at Tikal, which precedes the appearance of mammiform tetrapods in the Cimi complex (Culbert 1963:36), and Sabloff (1975:88–99) reports a number of positive-painted types in the Late Preclassic assemblage at Seibal. The positive-painted Escobal Red-on-buff and Caramba Red-on-red-orange (Forsyth 1983:53–55) occur in the Baluartes complex at Edzna, which preceded the appearance of Proto-classic ceramics there. Pseudo-Usulután-style Escobal Red-on-buff and Caramba Red-on-red-orange also are present in the terminal facet of the Pakluum complex at Becan, a site from which the proto-classic orange wares and the Holmul I Style cluster of formal and decorative modes appear to have been completely absent (Ball 1977:129–130). Other types featuring multiple wavy-line resist decoration had appeared even earlier during the late facet of Pakluum.

At Naj Tunich, positive-painted wavy-line decoration co-occurs stratigraphically with proto-classic orange wares, but is rare and does not occur on the mammiform tetrapods of the Aguila-group La Compuerta series.⁴ At Dos Pilas, positive-painted parallel lines are found on Late Preclassic waxy redwares. Rice (1983:11–12) has noted that wavy-line decoration is rare in Proto-classic assemblages but often common at sites that have produced little or no proto-classic orange ware.

Demarest (1986; Demarest and Sharer 1982) has discussed Usulután decoration in southeastern Mesoamerica at some length. Treating it as a mode, he has shown that Usulután decoration is associated with a variety of different pottery types at Santa Leticia, and he argues that if this mode had appeared in the Maya lowlands as a result of intrusion from the highlands, it most likely would have been associated with a number of different ceramic types having direct Salvadoran counterparts. Not only is this not the case, but even the sole direct typological relationship between El Salvador and the lowlands proposed—the “Aguacate Orange Connection” (Sharer and Gifford 1970)—has now been dismissed (Demarest 1986:153; Forsyth 1989:52).

We have pointed out that the wavy-line design was used to decorate indigenous lowland Chicanel ceramic wares (Adams 1971:29; Ball 1977:48–52, 129–130; Forsyth 1983:41, 53, 55; Sabloff 1975:90; Valdez 1987:147–148) well before the appearance of pro-

³ By “resist painting” we mean the decorative technique sometimes also described in the archaeological literature as “negative painting,” “lost-color painting,” or “batik.” In the Maya lowlands, this technique involved the application to selected areas of a vessel’s surface of a temporary protective coating—usually of an organic nature—readily removed by heat. The surface then was coated with a medium that would darken or blacken during firing, the application serving to “resist” deposition of the pigment in the areas covered by it. The vessel was fired (or refired), the protective application melted away, and the intended design appeared in the lighter, “negative” color of the original surface. Decorations typically are relatively simple, such as dots, wavy lines, or irregular blobs. For additional discussion, see Rice (1987:149), Shepard (1976:206–212), and Smith (1955:59–61).

⁴ A ceramic series is a modally or typologically distinguishable subset of a ceramic group (see Ball 1993:245, Note 2) that may or may not possess chronological, spatial, or cultural significance, but which does have analytical utility.

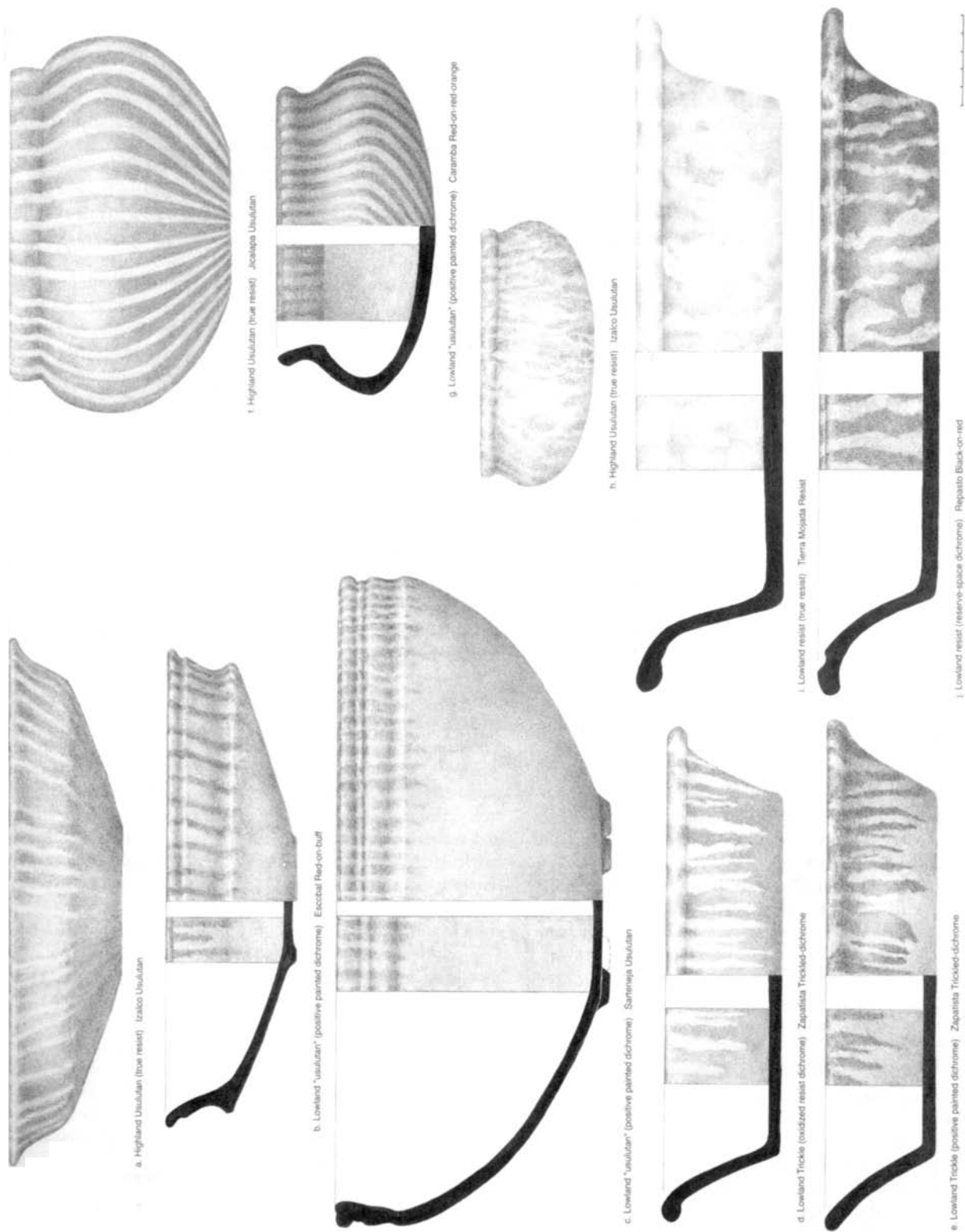


Figure 2. Usulután, “usulután,” and modally analogous wares from the Maya highlands, lowlands, and southeastern lowland zone: (a, f, h) highland-southeastern zone Usulután (blotchy, wavy-line, or patterned decoration; true resist technique); (b, c, g) Lowland “usulután” (positive-applied, multiple wavy-line decoration); (d–e) Lowland Trickle (positive-applied [and/or burned out to/or oxidized-negative] controlled “dribble” decoration); (f–j) Lowland resist (blotchy, controlled-dribble, or patterned decoration; true design-reserved techniques). Scale is in centimeters.

protoclassic orange wares. Had it been introduced by migrant highland populations, this decorative mode is more likely to have been rendered in its native true-resist form—one already present in the lowlands—rather than as a positive-painted imitation. If anything, the employment of positive painting to produce “pseudo-Usulután” ceramics in the Maya lowlands during the Late Preclassic argues against rather than for meaningful foreign influence on the indigenous ceramic industries.

We must also take issue with the assertion that the protoclassic “embodies . . . a prominent new (mammiform) foot mode” (Wiley and Gifford 1961:167). Tetrapod supports first appeared in the lowlands as small solid nubbins or conical supports and had a long history within the Late Preclassic (Figure 3). The hollow mammiform shape seems to have been an outgrowth of these and was also already present in the lowlands prior to the Terminal Preclassic era. The form persisted and evolved over several centuries culminating in the large bulbous mammiform and conventionalized “tapir-head” supports commonly identified with the Holmul I Style (see Figure 3g–i, j–k). Thus, there is nothing sudden about the appearance of the mammiform support, and it predates what is generally considered the Protoclassic period by centuries.

It is, therefore, not surprising that mammiform tetrapod supports, one of the modal hallmarks of the protoclassic, are not restricted to its traditionally equally definitive orange glosswares and polychromes, but occur as well on vessels of the Sierra Red, Quacco Creek Red, and San Felipe Brown ceramic groups (Pring 1977b: 243; 252; Sabloff 1975:78–96; Thompson 1931:Plate XLI; also, Ball ongoing analysis; see Figure 3d–f).

Given that both sides of the “influence/intrusion versus indigenous development” debate have regarded this particular form mode as a “foreign” trait originating in the southeastern periphery (e.g., Sharer 1994:685), spatio-temporal distribution of the hollow mammiform, tetrapod support decidedly requires more careful examination. At Chalchuapa, for example, solid nubbin and conical tetrapod supports appear in early facet Caynac (200 B.C.–0), but hollow mammiforms do not appear until after A.D. 1 (late-facet Caynac; Sharer 1978:3:99–100).

Arthur Demarest (1986:137) has redated the beginnings of Caynac to circa 100 B.C. with its late facet commencing at about A.D. 100. Demarest’s redating agrees well with Viel’s (1993:136) Copan sequence, where mammiform supports appear during the Bijac phase at around A.D. 100.

As yet, too few local sequences have been dated sufficiently well chronometrically to enable accurately fixing the appearance of tetrapod mammiform supports in the greater southern-northern lowland region. They are known to occur on Sierra Red, Polvero Black, Iberia Orange, and Sacluc Black-on-orange among other late-facet Cantutse types at Seibal, where Sabloff (1975:88–95) has placed the start of late-facet Caynac at about the beginning of the Christian era.

At Altar de Sacrificios, Sacluc Black-on-orange and Caramba Red-on-red-orange both occur in forms with mammiform tetrapod supports, and their late Plancha affiliation suggests that they date from around the first century A.D.

Mammiform supports are common in the Barton Ramie collections, but their chronology is unclear. Although most were assigned originally to the Floral Park Aguacate ceramic group, multiple reexaminations over the last 20 years have determined their occurrence in types and groups belonging to both the Mount Hope and Floral Park complexes for a total possible span of circa 100 B.C.–A.D. 400.

Taken in concert, present data suggest that tetrapod supports underwent a long evolution throughout the Maya lowlands, the southeastern periphery, and the southern (Central American) highlands, with mammiforms appearing as one of several end products of this development during the first century of the Christian era. Nonetheless, mammiform supports do seem to have been present in the Maya lowlands a century or more before their appearance in the southeastern periphery.

Major temporal discrepancies also exist with respect to the appearance of the protoclassic orange wares and several other modes traditionally assigned to the Protoclassic; for example, “mushroom stands,” identified by Pring (1977a:143) as members of this “assemblage,” actually appeared in the Middle Preclassic at Uaxactun (Forsyth 1983:61) and Altar de Sacrificios (Adams 1971:Figure 13), among others, and continued through the Late Preclassic (Ball 1977:114, 130; Sabloff 1975:92). On the other hand, “shoe-pots”—constituents of the original Q complex—are not known to occur in the lowlands until the Early Classic period, well after the appearance of the protoclassic orange wares (Brady 1992).

The hodgepodge of types, forms, and wares comprising several of the “original” Protoclassic assemblages emphatically document the absence of the internal consistency to be expected of any valid complex, facet, or sphere. For example, of 17 vessels described from Holmul Burials 8 and 9 (Merwin and Vaillant 1932), at least five belong to the Preclassic Paso Caballo-Flores “waxy” tradition, while one basal-flanged bowl with high-gloss slip and complex polychrome decoration seems closer to Uaxactun Tzakol 2 ceramics on stylistic grounds. As to forms, the “Holmul I” vessels include two vases and four dishes with mammiform tetrapod supports; one plate with four swollen cylindrical supports; three flat-base, flaring-side dishes (two of which formed a lip-to-lip pair); a spool-shape potstand; two “chocolate pots”; two vessels with pedestal bases; a rounded-side bowl; and a basal-flanged bowl.

Reexaminations of J. E. S. Thompson’s (1931) Mountain Cow material and the Anderson and Cook (1944) Nohmul collection reveal similar patterns: as at Holmul, good Late Preclassic and Early Classic vessels occur in sound contextual association along with typologically “transitional” material—including mammiform tetrapod supports and dichrome or polychrome decoration qualitatively crude in execution. Potstands, pedestal bases, chocolate pots, and stucco decoration are present, but as yet none of these is a particularly good temporal marker. Grooved-hooked lips—commonly associated with pseudo-Usulután types when they do occur—are not present. Pseudo-Usulután decoration has not been reported from Mountain Cow and occurs on only one Nohmul vessel.

Thus, both the Q complex and the Floral Park-Protoclassic sphere represent amalgamations of modes which, on inspection, clearly neither entered the Maya lowlands en masse nor were even largely contemporaneous in their occurrences. Accordingly, there exists no basis in fact for any model that presents the Protoclassic as a definable “complex” of “foreign” modes, types, styles, or wares. Even were some (or all) of the modes in question “foreign,” they had already begun to appear throughout the lowlands by early in the Middle Preclassic period (900–400 B.C.) and continued to do so and evolve through the Late Preclassic, thus providing no support for the assertion that they represented a collective, sudden appearance at the end of the Preclassic era.

The common non-association of “Usulután”-style decoration and protoclassic orange wares also indicates that two of the most-often-cited Protoclassic “diagnostics” were in fact not linked. Frequent—indeed, typical replacement of resist by positive-painted or pseudo-

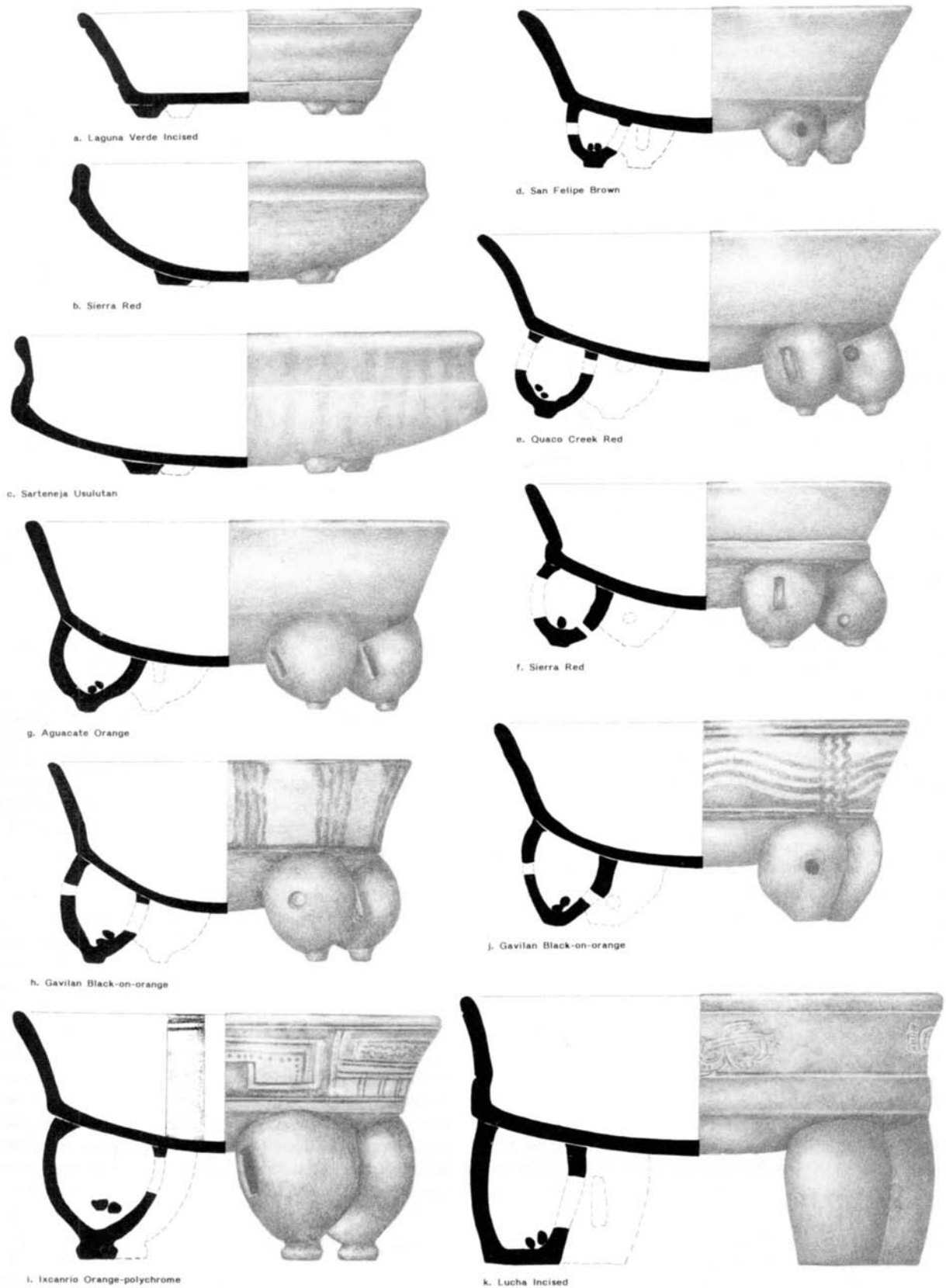


Figure 3. Late Preclassic into Early Classic tetrapod support variants: (a–c) solid nubbin or truncated conical mode; (d–f) nubbin-based, hollow, oven-shape (early mammiform) mode; (g–i) hollow, bulbous mammiform mode; (j–k) tapir-form mode. a–h and k are from Buenavista del Cayo; h is from Naj Tunich. Scale is in centimeters.

Usulután, “Usulután-style” (multiple wavy-line) decoration calls into question whether the wavy-line design or the resist technique provide any evidence of contact between the lowlands and the southeastern highlands beyond what might be expected within the very broad context of a southern Mesoamerican interaction sphere. Finally, had the Maya lowland protohistoric ceramic tradition had its origins or inspiration in the southeastern periphery, some clear evidence of its antecedents and/or contemporaries should exist at Copán or in its greater environs, and this is plainly not so (Henderson and Beaudry-Corbett 1993; Viel 1993).

NAJ TUNICH AND THE PROTOCLASSIC ORANGE WARES

In light of the foregoing discussion, what traits do constitute the protohistoric? Central to every discussion of the lowland Protohistoric are the ceramics commonly assigned to Holmul Orange Ware. In two previous publications, the senior author has suggested re-evaluations of the Protohistoric orange wares based on the exceptionally well-preserved Naj Tunich Cave ceramic assemblage (Brady 1987, 1989). The eroded condition of most Protohistoric collections may be explained by very low firing temperatures.⁵

The Orange Aguacate Group

The most important point raised in the earlier studies was the co-existence of two distinct protohistoric orange wares. In an attempt to categorize these, it was necessary to dismantle and reorganize the Aguacate ceramic group as originally defined (Gifford 1965, 1976). One of the orange wares at Naj Tunich consisted of a matte-finished monochrome orange and a black-on-orange dichrome. Initially these were thought to equate with Gifford’s Aguacate Orange and Gavilan Black-on-orange types, and those names were applied to the ceramics comprising the Naj Tunich matte-finish orange-slipped ware that was identified as Holmul Orange. Subsequent inspection of the Barton Ramie collections at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University revealed these to be so badly eroded that it is questionable whether the established Barton Ramie types should have been equated on a one-to-one basis with the ceramics from Naj Tunich or any other site, or even if they should have been used as a basis for valid typological definitions. Still, a number of individual specimens indistinguishable from Naj Tunich matte orange ware were present in the Peabody Museum sample. In addition; Ball has confirmed a type-level identity between the Naj Tunich material and well-preserved specimens identified as Aguacate Orange and Gavilan Black-on-orange from excavations at Cahal Pech and Buenavista del Cayo a little more than 10 km west of Barton Ramie in the upper Belize Valley. In a complementary assessment, Pring now believes he erred in identifying the Protohistoric horizon orange monochrome from Nohmul, Agua-

cate Orange: Felipe Variety, and would redesignate it Felipe Red: Felipe Red-orange Variety.

At Naj Tunich, Cahal Pech, Buenavista del Cayo, and Las Ruinas de Arenal, Aguacate Orange has a matte or dull to slightly lustrous slip ranging in color from orange (7.5YR 6/6) or red-orange (2.5YR 4/8, 2.5YR 3/6) to an orangish or reddish brown (5YR 3/4, 5YR 4/4). At both locations its forms include bowls with slightly incurved sides and vertical, thickened rims; bowls with outcurved sides; and jars with outcurved necks. At Naj Tunich, “cream-pitchers” (see Figure 1a) and potstands also are common, and individual mammiform supports have been found, although no monochrome mammiform tetrapod bowls appear to exist.

The dichrome type, Gavilan Black-on-orange (see Figure 3h, j), has the same slip characteristics as Aguacate Orange. At Naj Tunich, Cahal Pech, and Buenavista, it occurs as bowls with slightly incurving or flaring sides and vertical rims. The Naj Tunich collection also includes a single tall-necked jar or drum. Annular bases and hollow mammiform tetrapod supports also are present. Aguacate-group mammiform supports are smaller, thicker, less well smoothed, and cruder in shape than those of contemporary orange La Compuerta series types (Aguila group, see later). Venting holes, usually round, are placed irregularly in these supports (Gifford 1976:142, Figure 71m).

Gavilan Black-on-orange decorations consist of dull black lines applied to rims and shoulders; short, straight to wavy horizontal lines painted on shoulders; positive-painted wavy vertical lines; and geometric lines and triangles. The geometric design—found only on mammiform tetrapod bowls—uses the same motifs present on Ixcario Orange-polychrome bowls except that they are painted only in black and tend to be cruder in execution.

Excavations at Naj Tunich and sites in the Belize Valley confirm the existence of an Aguacate group, and recent finds of similar material from the Cave of Los Quetzales near Dos Pilas extend its distribution. Slip characteristics of Aguacate pottery at Naj Tunich strongly suggest it to have been a direct development from the Preclassic type/group, Ixobel Orange. The most common form of Ixobel Orange is an exterior-slipped, flat-bottomed dish with flaring sides and everted rim (Figure 4a). Similar vessels have been recovered from a cave at the site of Ixcun (Escobedo Ayala 1992), and a single example, classified as Sierra Red, was noted in the Barton Ramie type collection. The Cahal Pech and Buenavista material is similar to that found at Naj Tunich and bears a close relationship to San Antonio Golden-brown. Brady (1987) has suggested that the Gavilan type is related to Sacluc Black-on-orange (Adams 1971:28) and Savannah Bank Usulután (Gifford 1976:116–119), and Adams (1971:29) noted a relationship between the Sacluc and Gavilan types at Altar. The proximity of Barton Ramie to Buenavista and Cahal Pech allows a reasonable assumption that observations made involving materials from the latter two sites quite likely also apply to it. At the same time, the considerable geographic separation of the Belize Valley from Naj Tunich and Dos Pilas means it unlikely that the Aguacate group was strictly a local ware.

The Orange Aguila Group (La Compuerta Series)

Seventy percent by weight of the Naj Tunich protohistoric orange-slipped pottery has been placed in a second, distinct orange ceramic group belonging to Peten Gloss Ware. Excellent preservation makes it clear that this protohistoric slip differs in no way from that of the Early Classic Aguila group.

⁵ Two sherds of Ixcario Orange-polychrome from Naj Tunich proved unsuitable for thermoluminescence dating because of insufficient firing (<500°). Rice suggests that the test results are spurious and result from rehydration of the sherds in the damp cave-floor environment. This would have the effect of restoring the original clay mineral structure and so giving an appearance of firing to only around 360° or less. In fact, she suggests, the original firing probably was comparatively low, brief, or both, but still involved temperatures in the range of 500–700°C. Also see Rice (1987:81–86, 427–435).

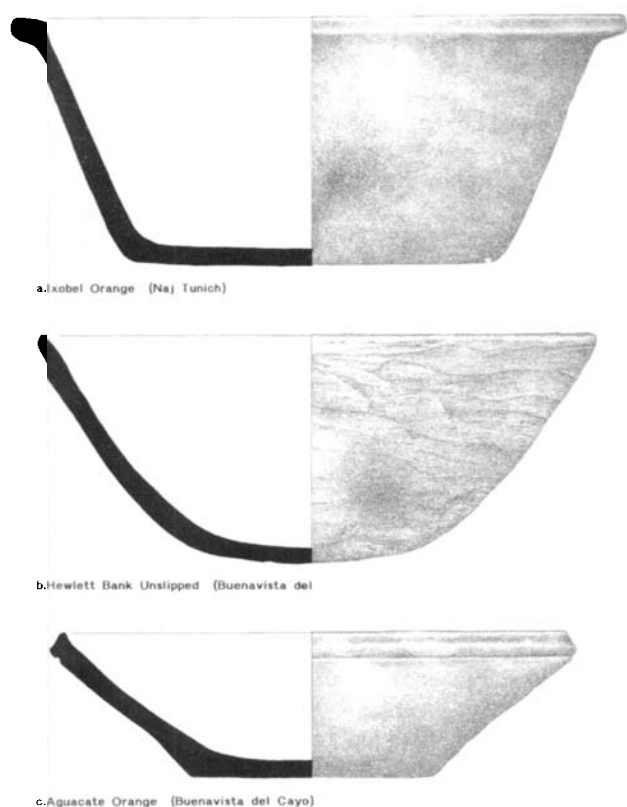


Figure 4. Late Preclassic–Early Classic (“Protoclassic”) ritual pottery from Naj Tunich Cave and the western Belize Valley. Scale is in centimeters.

Stratigraphic excavations were undertaken in the entrance chamber of Naj Tunich Cave. The major part of this chamber, which is approximately 150 m long, consists of a flat, alluvial floor. In its western third, an existing natural rise was modified with retaining walls to form a two-tiered platform 13 m in height. In one excavation on the balcony structure, Early Classic, Late Classic, and Protoclassic ceramics were found on the surface overlying pure Protoclassic levels. In another pit, seven levels were defined on the basis of thin white caliche layers that formed over use floors. The lowest two levels contained Late Preclassic red wares and lacked protoclassic ceramics. These were overlain by three levels of purely Protoclassic content. The uppermost two levels contained large amounts of Classic-period polychromes mixed with Protoclassic polychromes. In another excavation in the cave entrance, a few sherds of Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome were found on the surface overlying a meter and a half of pure Protoclassic deposits.

Because the Naj Tunich protoclassic ceramics could be separated stratigraphically from those of the Early Classic, type-variety systematics prescribed the establishment of two separate groups based on the formal and temporal differences between the two ceramic series. A new base monochrome corresponding to the Early Classic Aguila Orange was designated La Compuerta Orange (Brady 1989) and is defined as having a glossy orange slip (2.5YR 4/8, 2.5YR 5/8, 5YR 5/8, 7.5YR 6/8) over a polished white to buff undersurface. The white undersurface is a characteristic noted by Smith (1955:23, Figure 25b) in Early Classic polychromes at Uaxactun. The paste varies from gray (10YR 6/1, 7.5YR 4/0, 5YR 3/1) to light brown (7.5YR 6/4, 5YR 6/4).

Of the La Compuerta Orange material, 88% consisted either of fragments from the bases of mammiform tetrapod bowls (37%) or of broken mammiform supports (51%). Most of the remaining sherds derived from broken potstands. No vessel forms could be identified specifically with the La Compuerta type, however, as there was no evidence that any of the mammiform tetrapod bowls had been plain monochromes.

A new dichrome, Sabaneta Black-on-orange (Brady 1989), also was established. Its form repertoire is limited to rounded Z-angle basins, small bowls with slightly incurved sides, and one example of a small jar with a vertical neck. Unlike the Aguacate group, there is no evidence of a dichrome mammiform tetrapod bowl in the Aguila group La Compuerta series. Decoration includes black lines on rims and occasionally on shoulders. A frog motif also is common on exteriors and occasionally appears on vessel interiors.

No red-on-orange type occurred in the Aguacate group at Naj Tunich nor has one been identified among the extensive upper Belize Valley collections discussed below. We therefore have moved Guacamallo Red-on-orange (Gifford 1976; Willey and Gifford 1961) to the Aguila ceramic group. Observed decorations include red lines on rims and one example of a frog. The most common form is the potstand (see Figure 1c); however, rounded Z-angle basins and vessels with bridged spouts also occur. As with La Compuerta Orange, Guacamallo Red-on-orange is overrepresented in the ceramic inventory because support and base fragments from Ixcario Orange-polychrome mammiform tetrapod vessels that only bore a red line along the basal angle were assigned to this type.

We have also moved Ixcario Orange-polychrome (Gifford 1976; Smith and Gifford 1966) to the Aguila group. Its predominant form is the mammiform tetrapod bowl (see Figure 1f). Less common are mammiform tetrapod dishes, rounded Z-angle basins with ring bases or mammiform supports, potstands, small jars with vertical necks, small bowls with slightly incurving sides, and vases with outcurving sides and exterior thickened rims. Decorations include frog and fish motifs as well as geometric designs painted in red and black on an orange or white field.

“PROTOCLASSIC” ORANGE GLOSSWARES: OTHER APPROACHES

Reassignment of the Naj Tunich La Compuerta series pottery to the Aguila group of Peten Gloss Ware is in accord with its placement by numerous other ceramists who have worked with protoclassic materials. At Uaxactun, Smith (1955:22) found that, “Holmul I ware generally conforms to Tzakol glossware in surface finish, although there is an occasional hint of waxiness.” Even after the work at Barton Ramie, Smith (Smith and Gifford 1965:515) maintained that he saw nothing in the Protoclassic material that could not be accounted for by developments within the lowlands.

R. E. W. Adams (1971:26) appeared to be making the same point at Altar de Sacrificios by eschewing the use of Aguacate Orange and combining both protoclassic and Early Classic monochromes under the designation Aguila Orange within Peten Gloss Ware. He continued to use Gifford’s type designations for the dichromes and polychrome, placing them in Holmul Orange Ware. In analyzing the Nohmul ceramics, D. C. Pring (1977a:307) followed Gifford’s typological framework but noted that Aguacate Orange of the Freshwater Floral Park complex had a glossy slip similar to that of the Early Classic monochrome reds. Donald Forsyth (1983:63) differed more sharply with Gifford in his study of the Edzna Protoclassic material. Like Adams, Forsyth combined both protoclassic

and Early Classic monochrome orange sherds together as *Aguila Orange*, but used Barton Ramie Protoclassic type designations for the painted ceramics because of obvious form differences even though placing them within *Peten Gloss Ware*. Forsyth (1983:63) states that: "All of the Protoclassic dichromes and polychromes I have seen from both the peninsula and from Uaxactun and Altar de Sacrificios would be nearly impossible to separate from *Peten Gloss Ware* sherds were it not for vessel form and perhaps overall decorative pattern." He also believes that Protoclassic ceramics from *El Mirador* (Forsyth 1989:51–53) and *Nakbe* (Forsyth 1993) belong in *Peten Gloss Ware*.

In his study of the Stillwater Floral Park ceramic complex of *El Pozito*, northern Belize, Robert P. Case (1982) found that ware characteristics and slips of the Protoclassic orange ware were identical to those of the Early Classic *Aguila* group. On this basis, Case dispensed with *Holmul Orange Ware* entirely, instead treating the protoclassic material as form variants of Early Classic *Peten Gloss Ware* types. Laporte (Laporte et al. 1993:17) has taken a similar tack with the ceramics from southeastern Peten by placing *Ixcario Orange* polychrome in the *Dos Arroyos* Group and treating it as part of the Early Classic.

Finally, independent reexaminations of the Barton Ramie type collection at the Peabody Museum by several scholars have revealed that the original Floral Park assemblage is quite similar to the other Protoclassic collections discussed above (Brady et al. 1995). Prudence M. Rice (1983:10), Donald Forsyth (1989:52), J. E. Brady, and D. C. Pring each has found that the so-called *Aguacate* group from Barton Ramie in reality comprises an extremely diverse assortment of sherds. The painted pottery, in particular, differs from the monochromes with many of the black-on-orange dichromes, all of the red-on-orange dichromes, and all of the polychromes clearly belonging to *Peten Gloss Ware*. This is underscored by the large number of basal-flanged sherds classified as *Ixcario Orange*-polychrome that are indistinguishable from those classified as *Dos Arroyos Orange*-polychrome.

THE UPPER BELIZE VALLEY: NEW DATA FROM CAHAL PECH AND BUENAVISTA DEL CAYO

A series of recent investigations in the upper Belize Valley by archaeologists from San Diego State University (SDSU), Trent University, and Southwest Texas State University also have shed fresh light on the Floral Park/Protoclassic issue. In particular, excavations at Cahal Pech, Buenavista del Cayo, and Las Ruinas de Arenal by the SDSU Mopan-Macal Triangle Project (1984–1992) have isolated three full, discrete, and functionally complete ceramic assemblages with depositional integrity and a documented stratigraphic relationship to each other.

Xakal is a full Chicanel-sphere member complex of Late through Terminal Preclassic date. Typologically, the complex is dominated by the familiar Chicanel suite of slipped and highly polished, "waxy" reds and browns. An assortment of red Sierra group types—including *Society Hall Red*—are present from the initial appearance of the complex, but are joined during its late facet and eventually supplanted by the *Paso Caballo-Flores Polished Ware*, *Quacco Creek Red* group (see Gifford 1976:112–113). *San Felipe Brown*, *San Antonio Golden-brown*, and *Savannah Bank Usulután* are present as late-facet minority types, the first two not infrequently splotted with or clouded to orange. *Iberia Orange* and

Sacluc Black-on-orange are present but rare. The local varieties lack a distinct undersurface or other special surface preparation beyond smoothing. The multiple, parallel wavy-line decorative mode is present in both positive and classic resist forms on red, brown, tawny brown, and buff base slips (see Figures 2b–e, g and 3a–e).

Diagnostic late Xakal form modes include grooved-hooked lips; recessed annular bases (ring bases first appear in the subsequent *Madrugada* complex); solid, truncated conical tetrapod supports; and small, hollow, oven-shaped mammiform supports with solid, nubbin nipples. Striation is present on unslipped jars as a surface-texturing mode throughout Xakal, but always as a numerically insignificant minority type.

Toward the end of Xakal, true *Aguacate Orange* and *Gavilan Black-on-orange* appear in very low frequencies, but no bright, "glossy," orange, orange-dichrome, orange-polychrome, or other actual "glosswares" ever occur, even as traces. *Aguacate*-group pottery was quite uncommon, detectable only because of the massive volume of Middle and Late Preclassic excavated material from the combined programs at Cahal Pech, Buenavista, Nohoch Ek, Las Ruinas, and Baking Pot.

The succeeding, stratigraphically isolated *Madrugada* complex is demarcated by an increased occurrence of the *Aguacate Orange* and *Gavilan Black-on-orange* types, and by the appearance of several true glosswares in moderate but consistent frequencies. Among these are such well-known Early Classic horizon markers as *Dos Arroyos Orange*-polychrome, *Caldero Buff*-polychrome, *Balanza Black*, *Lucha Incised*, and *Urita Gouged-Incised*. *Fowler Orange-red*, the most common local monochrome glossware type of the subsequent *Ahcabnal* complex, makes its first appearance within the *Madrugada* assemblage as a discernible derivative from *Aguacate Orange*. *Aguila Orange* also appears, but only as a rare exotic (see Figures 1d–e and 3g–h, j–k).

Modal diagnostics of the *Madrugada* complex include basal-flanged bowls (see Figure 1e); scutate lids; potstands (see Figure 1d); bulbous, hollow mammiform tetrapod supports (see Figure 3g–h); and hollow tapir-form supports (see Figure 3j–k). An important new domestic ware is *Chan Pond Unslipped* (Gifford 1976:149–152), which appears and coexists with the long-lived local *Jocote-Achiotes/Paila* tradition until all are supplanted by a new series of locally manufactured unslipped jars, dishes, and braziers demarcating the *Ahcabnal* ceramic phase.

There is an ubiquitous, minor persistence of polished red, brown, and maroon Preclassic slipped types and forms well into if not entirely through the *Madrugada* phase (see Figure 3f). These occur in good, unmixed depositional associations with *Dos Arroyos* polychromes, ring-base basal-flanged bowls, scutate lids, and other typological and modal Early Classic diagnostics.

At Cahal Pech, deposits of pure *Madrugada*-complex refuse were sandwiched stratigraphically above uncontaminated Xakal and below uncontaminated *Ahcabnal* deposits. Unbroken plaster floors separated some of these stratigraphic units, which varied in depositional nature, although all represented in situ, non-redeposited, primary context refuse. Multiple elite and subelite burials from architectural monuments within the Cahal Pech center and from patio and *plazuela* groups dotting the surrounding landscape provided a good sampling of Xakal, *Madrugada*, and *Ahcabnal* burial assemblages. Both burials and refuse accumulations contained well-preserved examples of *Aguacate*-group types and glosswares documenting the composition and integrity of the *Madrugada* assemblage and its status as a full ceramic complex incorporating a

number of specialized subcomplexes rather than as solely a specialized burial or ceremonial subcomplex of the Terminal Preclassic–Early Classic horizon.

Madrugada is succeeded by Ahcabnal, a full Tzakol-sphere Early Classic assemblage. A number of Madrugada types and modes continue into Ahcabnal, among them black Balanza-group pottery, basal-flanged bowls, scutate lids, and "cream-pitchers" (see Figure 1b). These are joined and eventually replaced by others, including basal-flanged dishes, tripod cylinder-vases, apron lids, plano-relief decoration, and a local representation of the unslipped-striated Triunfo group, Mopan Striated. A local orange-red glossware group supplants both Aguacate Orange and the several Late Preclassic polished (waxy) redwares and brownwares that had continued into and through Madrugada.

The Fowler ceramic group (Gifford 1976:154–156) includes monochrome, dichrome (brownish black-on-orange red), and polychrome (Santa Elena Orange-polychrome) types in middle-to-late Tzakol horizon vessel forms. The group represents the local Belize Valley counterpart of Aguila/Dos Arroyos, Shangurro, Timucuy, Tituc, and other orange-slipped glosswares known from throughout the Maya lowlands in the Early Classic period. The group is well represented at Baking Pot and its satellite settlement, Barton Ramie, where a substantial proportion of the extremely poorly preserved Hermitage-complex sherds classified as "Minanha Red" (Gifford 1976:156–160), Dos Hermanos Red (Gifford 1976:160–161), and at least some Aguila Orange (Gifford 1976:160–161), should be reclassified as members of the Fowler group.⁶

Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome, Caldero Buff-polychrome, and other related types vanish from the Belize Valley at the start of Ahcabnal. A possible, minor occurrence as high-status burial accompaniments during this phase (Gyles Iannone, personal communication 1992) remains to be verified. Extensive data from Cahal Pech, Buenavista, Las Ruinas, Nohoch Ek, and Blackman Eddy suggest that monochrome Aguila Orange appeared in the area only as a rare exotic.

Aguacate Orange is absent from the general Ahcabnal assemblage. However, some true Aguacate Orange vessels were used as offering-receptacles in structural caches (e.g., at Las Ruinas, Str. 2-2nd [Ball and Taschek 1993]; Figure 4c). These vessels might have been curated "heirlooms," or might reflect limited persisting manufacture of a functionally specialized ceremonial ware. In either case, Aguacate Orange vessels and sherds are absent completely from all noncache contexts of Ahcabnal date.

At Buenavista and Las Ruinas, pure deposits of Xakal, Madrugada, and Ahcabnal also were encountered in sealed, stratigraphic relationships similar to those found at Cahal Pech.

THE BELIZE VALLEY PROTOCLASSIC: A REAPPRAISAL

A reappraisal of the Belize Valley ceramic picture between circa 100 B.C. and A.D. 500 is now possible based on larger, better preserved, more extensive, and more culturally representative collec-

tions than were available to the researchers who originally defined and described the Floral Park phenomenon (Ball 1976; Gifford 1976; Willey and Gifford 1961; Willey et al. 1965). Data from well-controlled excavations at a growing number of Belize Valley sites document the existence of pure, single-component deposits representing a full Late Preclassic complex (Xakal), a true Early Classic complex (Ahcabnal), and an unmixed, stand-on-its-own assemblage of "intermediate" Terminal Preclassic–Early Classic, or "proto-Classic" (Madrugada) date.

While the Madrugada assemblage could be regarded as "transitional" between Xakal and Ahcabnal, it is no more transitional than any other full complex sandwiched between two others. The western Belize Valley Madrugada-Floral Park assemblage does date to the "proto-Classic"—or Terminal Preclassic/Early Classic—time period, but nothing about it suggests that it in any way corresponded to a general developmental stage. Nor does its composition reflect the existence of an integrated, culturally meaningful protoclassic horizon. It was a thoroughly local, nonintrusive ceramic entity, other than to the extent that the polychrome glossware vessels (Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome series) may reflect a contemporary manifestation of the long-lived lowland Maya tradition of exchanging finely decorated ceramic vessels as a form of social currency (Ball and Taschek 1992; Houston et al. 1992; Taschek and Ball 1992). All that is documented is an indigenous, local continuum enlivened by a sprinkling of bright and colorfully painted glosswares from producer-communities located in the adjacent eastern and central Peten zones.

We have argued that Aguacate Orange and Gavilan Black-on-orange did exist as constituents of a definable Holmul Orange Ware native to and restricted to the central to southeastern Peten and adjacent central-western Belize. This Aguacate group was neither intrusive nor transitional: It was the autochthonous, regional outgrowth of an ancient lowland tradition. As local developments of Late Preclassic ceramic patterns, these types and wares had little to do with the newly emerging glosswares. Rather, they represented the tail end of an ancient but waning tradition.

PROTOCLASSIC CERAMICS: INNOVATIONS AND CONTINUITIES IN AN AREAL TRADITION

Orange-base glossware polychromes and dichromes appear virtually simultaneously from northwestern coastal Yucatan to coastal Belize, the eastern Peten, and the Pasion–Usumacinta drainage reflecting a rapid, area-wide technological departure from the surface and slip preparation and application procedures of the Preclassic era. Changes affecting the new glossware slips involved several innovations including use of more finely levigated slipping media (with colloidal-size particles probably of less than .001 mm in diameter) (Rice 1985:124; also see Graham 1986). Special clays and a chemical deflocculant may have been necessary for the preparation of this translucent slipping medium (Rice 1985:124–125).

Most discussions concerning the transition from Preclassic to Classic ceramics have focused on changes in slip texture and color; however, other significant technological changes were involved as well. At some sites, changes in the technology of surface finishing were accompanied at this time by a switch from sherd to carbonate tempering (Smith 1955:22) and the appearance of buff or light-colored pastes. One especially important innovation involved the preparation of a white or buff undersurface over which

⁶ The extremely poor preservation and mixed character of the redeposited fill at Barton Ramie resulted in typological assignments more complex and intuitive than now can be justified based on collections from better-preserved and stratigraphically isolated pure deposits, and many of these tentative classifications are being reassessed on the basis of new material. Ball now believes "Minanha Red" to be an invalid taxonomic unit having no demonstrable basis in reality.

to apply the orange ground slip. Smith (1955:23) noted this as characteristic of Early Classic polychromes at Uaxactun, and Robert Sonin of the American Museum of Natural History in the 1960s called attention to the presence of a distinct white underslip associated with Late Classic polychromes from Piedras Negras and Altar de Sacrificios (Sonin, personal communications to J. W. Ball and R. E. W. Adams 1966–1972). Unfortunately, to our knowledge, Sonin's experimental research and observations were never published.

It now appears that there were at least two distinct ways of producing the light-colored undersurface. Ronald Bishop has verified that there is a compositional difference between the white undersurface and the Late Classic Saxche-Palmar series Peten Gloss polychrome pastes bearing it indicating that the underslip represented a separate step in the production process. He and others have noted that the brilliance of Late Classic glosswares results in part from the light underslip showing through a thin orange secondary application.

Examination of polished thin sections from several Naj Tunich Ixcancario Orange-polychrome vessels at the Smithsonian Institution Conservation Analytical Laboratory, however, revealed no evidence of an actual underslip or any other separate surface application beneath the orange slip (Figure 5). The polished light undersurface evident on visual inspection of these and some other painted Classic wares instead appears to result from heavy burnishing prior to application of an orange or cream slip and painted decoration. From Uaxactun, Smith (1955:156) describes a number of Early Classic polychromes on which the "buff background is polished but not slipped." This technique continued through the Late Classic in the polychrome-painted, burnished-buff Paixban ceramic group as reported from Uaxactun and Cueva de los Quetzales (Forsyth, personal communication 1996; Smith 1955:27). That these two quite different approaches to surface preparation in producing Classic-era painted ceramics were coextensive is well evidenced in collections from El Pozito, northern Belize, and Becan, Campeche, where a single polychrome-decorated type, Azcorra Buff-polychrome (a.k.a. "Pozito Polychrome"), appears via two distinct ware modes, one slipped, the other unslipped burnished (Ball 1977:79; Fry 1983).

The light buff to white undersurface beneath the glossy, translucent orange surface-slip is a defining characteristic of the Aguila-group La Compuerta series at Naj Tunich (Brady 1985, 1987:473, 1989:178) and many other sites (e.g., Graham 1986, 1994). As suggested by Brady et al. (1995), identification of this distinct white-to-buff undersurface as a key diagnostic of the emergent Peten Gloss Ware tradition has the merit of its being readily discernible by every researcher. Its easily recognizable character thus eliminates the need for subjective evaluations of relative degrees of surface-slip "waxiness" or "glossiness" (cf. Pring 1977a, 1977b). Ball notes a contemporary, parallel appearance of the same innovation in conjunction with the emergence of the Usil Flaky and Yucatan Gloss Ware traditions on the northern coastal plain (see Ball 1978a:100–112, Table 1; Brainerd 1958; Smith 1971). Although unmistakably distinct, strong formal, decorative, typological, and other modal correspondences link the Usil Flaky Ware types, Shangurro Red-on-orange, Valladolid Incised-dichrome, and Timucuy Orange-polychrome to the pottery of the contemporary Aguila group.

The northwestern Yucatan orange-polychrome and glossware traditions emerged as part of yet another local sequence of development out of regional Late Preclassic brown-to-buff slipped types (see Ball 1978a:100–112, especially 102–106). Apparently originating with unintentional, then deliberate color alterations through

controlled firing, glossy red-on-orange and orange-polychrome pottery with a white undersurface was being produced in Yucatan before the end of the Preclassic era. This rapidly evolving Preclassic trichrome and true orange-polychrome glossware tradition was as rich as anything emerging in the southeastern hearth land of Floral Park and Holmul I ceramics (see Ball 1978a, 1978b). What is of greatest importance with respect to the several parallel, contemporaneous, developmental sequences highlighted, however, is not the cultural priority of any one region over others, but the long unrecognized fact that the protoclassic phenomenon was not restricted to the central and eastern Peten-Belize zone. In fact, it constituted an area-wide occurrence of the last century before Christ and the first few centuries of the Christian era (Figure 6).

Analogous sequences of local ceramic development have been described from as far apart as Chinkultic in the highlands of southwestern Chiapas (Ball 1980) and Kichpanha in northern Belize (Meskill 1992). The Chinkultic data again document a Late Preclassic evolution from polished brown to orange slips, whereas the Kichpanha study presents stratigraphic evidence for the sequence of changes and developments in types, slip textures, and form modes discussed throughout this paper.

The protoclassic ceramic stage represented an era of extensive experimentation by Maya potters in many realms, not the least of which was that of ceramic technology. The Belize Valley Aguacate series, the eastern Peten Aguila-La Compuerta series (including its Holmul I style expressions), the Comitán Valley Chabacano series, the northwestern Yucatan Shangurro-Timucuy series, and such specialized subcomplex assemblages as Holmul I among others, do not, however, represent geographically separated segments of a single, unified developmental continuum. Rather, these were parallel manifestations of multilineal regional trends involving the manufacturing technology and decorative finishing of ceramic production during this period. Ultimately, the white undersurface, colloidal glossware tradition attained preeminence in the realm of multicolored, "painted" finewares.

Extensive new data discussed at the 1994 "Maya Ceramic Workshop" held in Guatemala City reinforce the general picture presented above (Brady et al. 1995). Of particular interest is the presence in the Lake Peten Itza region of a low-luster, slipped orange group characterized by carbonate temper and a light paste without a distinct, light-colored undersurface. This group includes vessels with black, pseudo-Usulután decoration and small, crudely formed mammiform supports. It is closely related to Sacluc Black-on-orange from Altar de Sacrificios and is similar to some Cauac but not Cimi-complex materials from Tikal.

Considerable experimentation involving pottery manufacture plainly was occurring during this time and might be isolated by more finely discriminating chronologies. Its earliest indications are rooted in the long-lived traditions represented by such types as San Felipe Brown, San Antonio Golden-brown, Sacluc Black-on-orange, Iberia Orange, and Aguacate Orange. Pseudo-Usulután decoration, black-on-light brown to orange dichromes, and the tetrapod support all appeared during what we here define as facet 1 of the protoclassic ceramic stage.

Tetrapod supports initially appeared as small, solid, truncated conical nubbins (see Figure 3). Nubbin-based oven-shapes came next, quickly becoming progressively larger, more bulbous, and better executed. Hollow, tapering, "tapir-head" supports completed the sequence. Unfortunately, the precise appearance chronology, duration, and extent of temporal overlap of these distinctive modes remains undetermined.

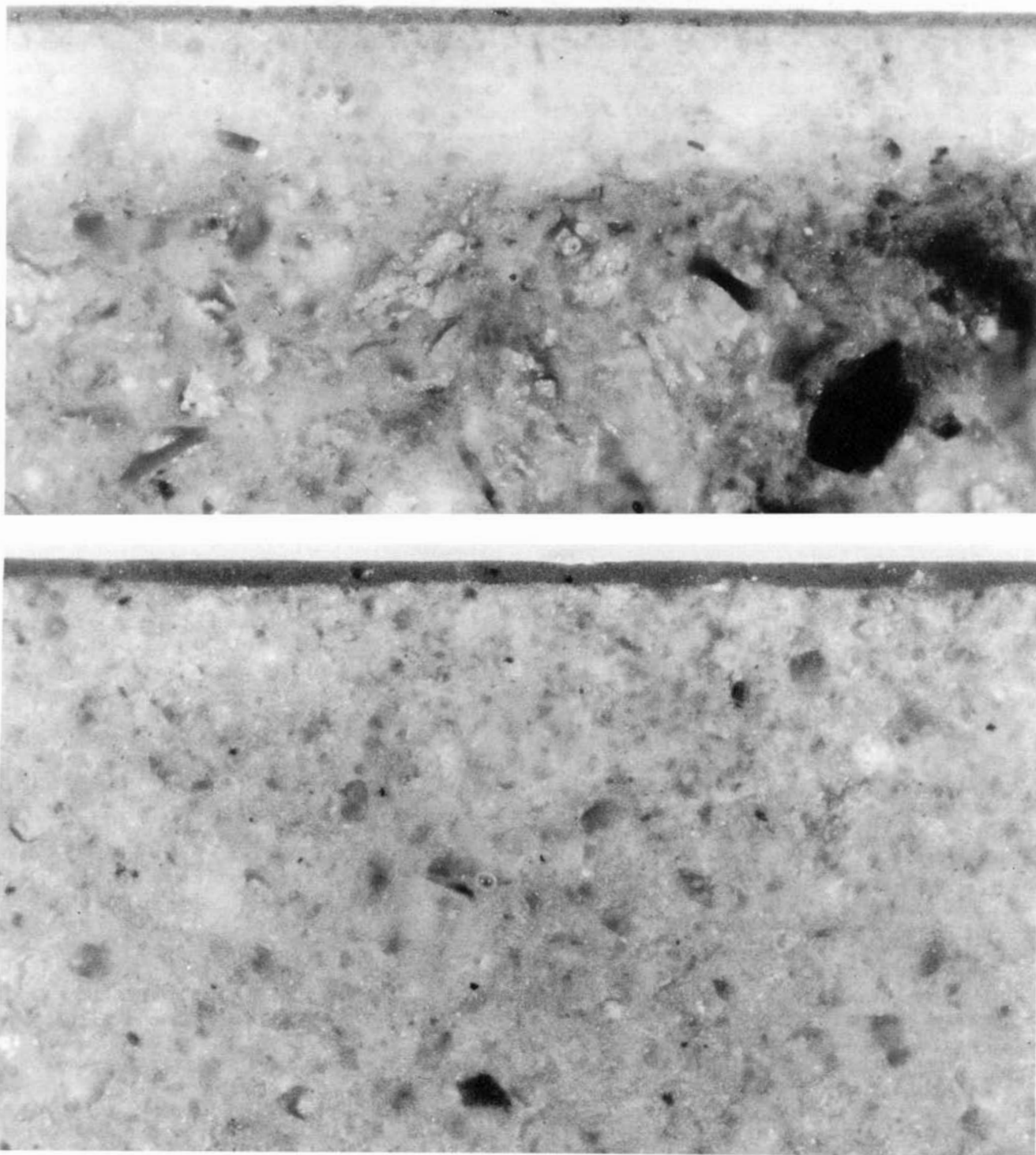


figure 5. finished cross sections showing surface-preparation techniques: top, orange-slipped layer applied above cream underslip typical of Late Classic finishing technique (sample from Tikal, Guatemala); bottom, orange-slipped layer applied directly on smoothed matrix of a Protoclassic sample from Naj Tunich, Guatemala. Samples under reflected light, magnification 60x.

Lighter-colored pastes appeared in most areas suggesting possible changes in clays and/or firing techniques. In some cases, such as the southern Peten, this occurred concurrently with the adoption of carbonate tempering.

Facet 2 of the protoclassic ceramic stage is defined by the appearance of true red-on-orange dichromes and polychromes executed in wares characterized by high-gloss, bright orange slips applied over a distinct white to buff undersurface (see Figures 1c,

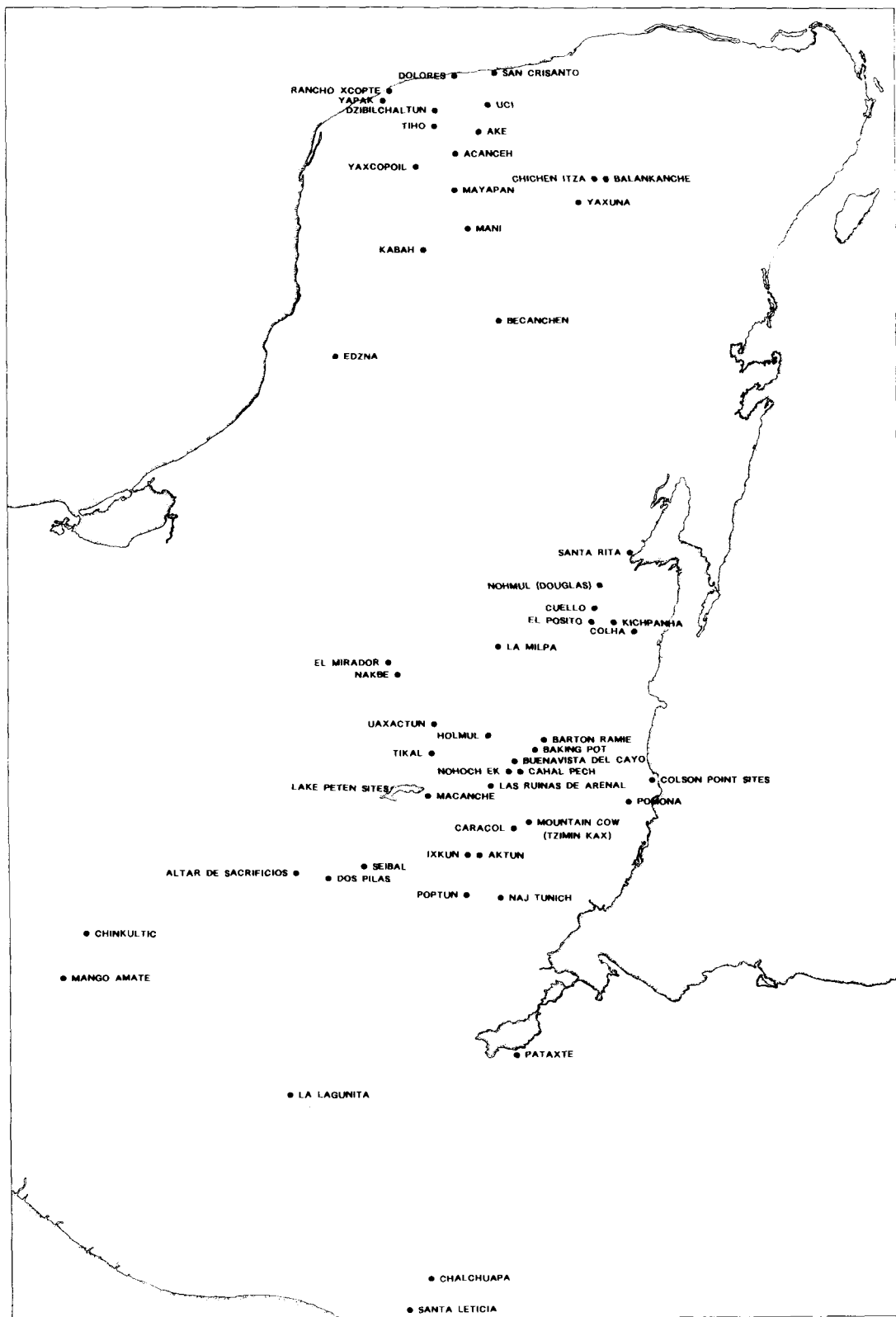


Figure 6. Map of the Maya area showing sites from which three or more distinct wares, types, forms, or other modes diagnostic of the protoclassic ceramic stage have been reported unambiguously and reliably. Note that no distinction is made between sites with facet 1 or facet 2 attributes, and no significant zonations or other patterning was detected in their distributions during the course of generating this map. The map is intended to document the occurrence of chronologically diagnostic ceramic attributes, and does not attempt to differentiate among the numerous functionally specialized and distinct subcomplexes often erroneously used to define the "Protoclassic" as a period, developmental stage, or horizon.

e-f and 3i). Large hollow, bulbous "mammiforms" and "tapir-heads" occur as supports on bowls and dishes, but whether as new introductions or persistencies of greatly increased popularity remains to be determined. It is these forms when combined with dichrome or polychrome painted geometric, abstract, or conventionalized naturalistic designs on a glossy orange ground that define the often seemingly nebulous Holmul I Style.

We would assign the Peten Gloss La Compuerta series, true bulbous mammiform supports, and tapir-head supports—and so the Holmul I Style—to our late, or second, early Tzakol horizon protoclassic facet. This decidedly regional ceramic style, the mammiform support mode, and pseudo-Usulután decoration all lost importance over the course of the subphase, but polychrome painting and glossware technology continued to be improved and refined, becoming two of the hallmarks of Classic Maya civilization.

The foregoing summary is not intended to oversimplify what was an extremely complex situation, and we stress that there are and always will be local variations in the chronologies, sequencing, and exact nature of the broad developments discussed. Nevertheless, we believe we have offered a more accurate and lucid delineation of the overall protoclassic picture than any with which Mayanists have worked heretofore.

Holmul I Style ceramics are among the earliest-known Classic-period glosswares, and they have never been considered to represent anything other than an indigenous lowland development. While one may choose to argue as to the origin of particular forms or decorative modes, the orange wares—which lie at the heart of the "Protoclassic problem"—now also have been shown to represent autochthonous developments. With the ceramics thus shorn of any association with foreign intrusion, there is no reason to hypothesize an intrusive Floral Park complex, sphere or horizon, nor any basis on which to define one. Indeed, there never was.

With respect to the never-defined Holmul Orange Ware (Gifford 1976; Willey and Gifford 1961), we suggest a definition that emphasizes the absence of any light-colored undersurface and reflects the consensus regarding emergent or "early facet" protoclassic ceramics reached at the 1994 Guatemala City workshop. Thus, Holmul Orange Ware is defined as a matte or dull to low-luster slipped ware ranging in color from a light reddish or orange brown to a pale orange or red-orange. Holmul Orange slips generally are thin and hard although occasionally ranging to moderately soft (i.e., scratchable by the fingernail). They never, however, manifest the soft, mushy thickness characteristic of Preclassic "waxy wares"; nor do they ever attain the lacquer-like glossiness of Peten Gloss Ware or the bright sheen of Yucatan Gloss and Usil Flaky Ware.

After numerous independent and joint examinations and extensive discussions of numerous samples and collections, we have concluded that *only* the Aguacate Orange and Gavilan Black-on-orange types should be assigned to Holmul Orange Ware. Although closely related to the Aguacate-group pottery, Iberia Orange and Sacluc Black-on-orange both have been identified in at least two distinct varieties. One—apparently the more common—possesses a clearly distinct, diagnostic white-to-cream undersurface and can properly be assigned to the Peten Gloss Ware tradition (cf. Forsyth 1989:52–57). The other, less frequently reported variety is distinguished by the absence of discernible preslip surface preparation of any kind.

Examples of each variety of each type are recorded in the existing literature, and more are likely to be recognized now that attention has been called to their varietal distinctions. Examples

of Iberia Orange: Iberia Variety and/or Sacluc Black-on-orange: Sacluc Variety exhibiting a light-colored underslip have been reported from Seibal (Sabloff 1975:90–94) and Mirador (Forsyth 1989:54–57). Contemporary specimens lacking a light underslip or primer are known from Mirador (Forsyth 1989:54–57), Altar de Sacrificios (Adams 1971:28), Seibal (Sabloff 1975:88–90), the Lake Peten Itza zone (Brady et al. 1995), and also occur in the collections from Cahal Pech and Buenavista del Cayo.

While these modal distinctions have been noted by others, they have never been accorded formal typological recognition. We recommend that this step be taken by future researchers and that the differences be recognized formally at the varietal level. Taxonomic systematics support designation of the first-established, light undersurface examples of the types as the established varieties. The alternative variants of these types that lack a light-colored undersurface should be redesignated as distinct varieties.

Both types appear initially during the first facet of the protoclassic stage, and continue through the second facet in either the light undersurface or both technological variations. The precise relative chronology of the two varietal sets remains unclear.

Hollow tetrapod supports follow a similar pattern (see Figure 3). They appear first toward the end of the Late Preclassic in protoclassic 1 as crude to nicely formed "oven-shapes" with solid nubbin "teats." These crosscut types and wares in ways indicating complete contemporaneity with a fully "Late Preclassic" ceramic industry. They are joined and eventually superseded by true, bulbous mammiform supports or, in some regions, by hollow tapir-head supports (e.g., Tikal, Calakmul, and Becan). The extent to which they persist into protoclassic 2 remains undetermined. Both support modes appear across a variety of wares ranging from brightly painted polychrome orange to buff glosswares and elaborately modeled and incised black Balanza-vessels to polished, slightly "waxy" redwares more suggestive of Preclassic technologies.

There is a plainly evident relationship between the Iberia Orange/Sacluc Black-on-orange types and the Floral Park complex-definitive Aguacate Orange/Gavilan Black-on-orange set. Considerable overlapping of the form inventories and general surface characteristics of well-preserved, stratigraphically related specimens from Cahal Pech and Buenavista support a direct developmental relationship between the Iberia and Aguacate groups. In addition, true Aguacate-group types are well represented in the western Belize Valley, first appearing late in the zonal Late Preclassic (Xakal/Mount Hope) assemblages rather than on the protoclassic 2 Floral Park complex horizon despite early assertions to the contrary (Gifford 1976:127–129; Sharer and Gifford 1970:454–460). In Ball's opinion, there is little question that the orange Iberia series was the direct developmental "ancestor" of both the Holmul Orange Ware Aguacate group—ultimately a regionally localized dead end—and the shiny orange Peten Gloss Ware Aguila group—including among its other content the stereotypical forms and modes of the Holmul I style, Dos Arroyos Orange-polychrome and its various permutations, and ultimately the entire true glossware ceramic tradition of Classic-period lowland Maya civilization.

Brady and Pring remain more conservative on this issue, arguing for a proliferation of "experimental" orange wares as part of the newly established early protoclassic or protoclassic 1 ceramic stage. Prominent among these was the Iberia group, but Brady would see others paralleling it including the Ixobel-Aguacate series at Naj Tunich and the Aguacate group in general as well as other more (e.g., the northwestern Yucatan Timucuy group) or less (e.g., the eastern Chiapas Chabacano group) successful efforts in

the direction of a bright, clear, light-colored field on which to execute designs in polychromy.

In sum, the origins of the Classic lowland Maya ceramic tradition are most likely to be found at sites that have yielded evidence of intragroup transitions from the simple slipping of paste surfaces unprepared other than by deliberate smoothing or roughening to ones involving slip application over a light-colored undersurface produced through either intense burnishing (confirmed by R. K. Bishop) or actual double-slipping (hypothesized; see Sabloff 1975).

If any “experimental” or “transitional” types/groups/wares do exist, Iberia Orange and its decorated variations clearly are among them. The Iberia series represents numerous local experiments in producing a clear, light red to orange field on which to execute the bright red-and-black painted decorations that are a ceramic hallmark of the Classic period.

While brilliant base slips and polychrome decoration characterize facet 2 of the protohistoric ceramic stage, these joined rather than replaced existing orange-ware traditions. Too often forgotten with respect to this fact is that the beginning of a new “phase,” “period,” or “stage” in archaeology is defined by the appearance of new modes, types, wares, or other attributes—not by the disappearance or replacement of existing ones which may continue well into or even through the new unit.

Although important developments involving vessel forms, supports, and painted decoration also were taking place, it was the widespread appearance of orange glosswares that most singularly and strikingly heralded the Classic-period ceramic tradition. The early protohistoric or protohistoric 1 ceramic stage of the terminal Late Preclassic period was an era of experimentation and variably successful “copycatting” toward this end during which these orange wares began to emerge. These trials culminated in the early to mid-second century A.D. emergence of the several distinct orange glossware traditions that define the late protohistoric or protohistoric 2 ceramic stage. Prominent among these were the Peten Gloss Ware tradition of the central through northeastern Peten and western Belize and the Yucatan Gloss Ware tradition of the northwestern lowlands. The possibility that other comparable traditions also existed is hinted at in the archaeological literature, but as yet these remain undefined and awaiting adequate documentation.

At some sites—for example, Coba and Dzibilchaltun—earlier Preclassic traditions maintained importance well into or even through the fourth century A.D. At others, such as Altar de Sacrificios and throughout the upper Belize Valley, available data suggest persistence with gradual displacement. At some, such as Becan, indications are of rather rapid transitions from one tradition to another.

PROTOCLASSIC ASSEMBLAGES AND CERAMIC SUBCOMPLEXES: A QUESTION OF FUNCTION

Reevaluation of the Belize Valley Floral Park assemblage has important implications for understanding the role played by Holmul I-style protohistoric ceramics in Maya society. The long-held view has been that advanced by the original Barton Ramie investigators (Gifford 1976; Willey and Gifford 1961; Willey et al. 1965). Extensive sampling of house mounds and analysis of the resulting sherd collections suggested that Holmul I-style ceramics were widely distributed at the site in high frequencies. Willey and Gifford (1961:165) remark:

From this stratigraphy it became plain that Holmul I-like pottery was not necessarily a specialized complex of mortuary vessels grafted onto Late Formative or Early Classic pottery traditions. It is, instead, very clearly a definable ceramic complex of both domestic and funerary (ceremonial) types, which, together with the other cultural remains that can be associated with it, appears as a substantial and viable entity in the mounds at Barton Ramie.

But “Holmul I-like” pottery is *not* equivalent to Floral Park complex pottery, nor does it encompass the Barton Ramie Floral Park diagnostics, Aguacate Orange and Gavilan Black-on-orange.

In reexamining the Barton Ramie collections, it is evident that most of the material referred to as Holmul I-like by Willey and Gifford (1961) is *not* related to the decorated glossware ceramics that we have assigned to Peten Gloss Ware. Of some 13,000 sherds classified as Holmul Orange Ware, only 350 are painted. A few of the monochromes might belong to a glossware tradition, but all who have examined the collection agree that their number is not large. Were the Holmul I-style content of the Floral Park complex reduced to a relatively small quantity, the Barton Ramie collection becomes more comparable to other Protohistoric assemblages. As Case (1982:196–197) points out, even at sites that have produced sizable Protohistoric collections, the actual deposits are limited and contexts differ in each instance. Thus, the cultural role and significance of protohistoric ceramics remains still an open issue.

Functionally complete, full complexes (see Adams [1973] on functional complementarity and functional completeness) exist at some sites such as Buenavista del Cayo, Cahal Pech, Las Ruinas de Arenal, and perhaps Altar de Sacrificios. In contrast, specialized mortuary sets such as the “Holmul I” and “Nohmul” (Douglas) assemblages do not represent full complexes and should not be accorded a status comparable to them. These assemblages are subcomplexes—functionally specialized and behaviorally selective subsets of larger production-distribution pools.

Conceptually established as functionally defined subsets of full complexes or spheres (Willey et al. 1967), pottery “subcomplexes” have largely been ignored for analytical purposes by Maya archaeologists. The few studies that have made use of the construct as intended, however, have demonstrated its potential analytical utility (Ball 1977; Chase 1994; Chase and Chase 1987). Prudence Rice (1983) in 1983 suggested that all then known Protohistoric assemblages be assigned to the subcomplex category. More recent data indicate this to be overly restrictive; however, the fact remains that pottery assemblages like those from Nohmul and Holmul and in particular the ceramics used to establish Holmul I and define the Holmul I style are burial subcomplexes—and no more. They are functionally specialized, selective subsets of the larger local and exotic ceramic traditions current at the times of their individual formations. As such, they reflect social norms and political-economic patterns rather than ceramic or “cultural” history. Rather than representing “transitional” stages, “intrusive” influences, or other “evolutionary” units, the Nohmul, Holmul I, and Tzimin Kax burial assemblages represent regional behavioral patterns involving mortuary practices and contemporary ceramic traditions.

The Naj Tunich assemblage, while also a subcomplex, differs from the foregoing burial subcomplexes in several respects. Pring (1977a:142) noted that the mammiform tetrapod bowl or dish is the most diagnostic protohistoric form, but never the dominant one. At Naj Tunich, however, it *is* the dominant form. In addition, polychrome wares and other painted pottery predominate throughout

the cave's deposits. Sixty-one percent by weight of the La Compuerta series sherds are painted—a figure artificially low in reality because most of the monochrome orange sherds represent broken supports or polychrome-vessel bottoms. The high percentage of mammiform tetrapod vessels and painted glossware pottery is related to the cave's "special" ceremonial function. In addition, the restriction of protoclassic orange wares to the cave entrance chamber and monumental balcony structure that served as the principal ceremonial stage at Naj Tunich and their absence from the dark inner zone of the tunnel system suggest that the mammiform tetrapod form and polychrome decoration were associated with public ritual display (Brady 1989:406–407; Brady et al. 1992:77). This may reflect an initial role for painted glossware ceramics as part of special-purpose subcomplexes and would explain why special-function contexts like Naj Tunich, caves in the Dolores Valley (Laporte et al. 1993:13–14), and the La Lagunita cave have large protoclassic assemblages fundamentally different from those recovered at other sites in being composed primarily of painted, mammiform tetrapod vessels. Perhaps only later in their history did such vessels come to have a more general distribution.

The relationship of La Compuerta series pottery to Aguacate-group ceramics is a matter of speculation. At Naj Tunich, Aguacate Orange is related to a Preclassic type, Ixobel Orange, which appears as flat-bottomed offering bowls and utilitarian forms (see Figure 4a; Brady 1987). Its slip lacks the bright luster of glossware types and is less well smoothed. While the (Gavilan) black-on-orange dichrome shares some design motifs with Ixcanrio Orange-polychrome, the decoration is more crudely executed and painted only in black. This may suggest that Aguacate-group pottery represented nonspecialist, local imitations of a specialized workshop product, Peten Gloss Ware. Slipping technologies and materials employed in the manufacture of Aguacate-group ceramics were essentially the same as those used for domestic ceramics during the terminal Late Preclassic or facet 1 of the protoclassic ceramic stage (see Ball [1993] on the coexistence of "village tradition" and "attached, palace school" pottery artisans within the same communities).

If the proposition is correct that Aguacate-group orange wares such as present at Naj Tunich represented nonelite copies of wares produced by specialist-artisans for elite consumers, we suggest that it is possible that one factor in the spread of the Peten Gloss Ware tradition might have been the reorganization of Maya society along increasingly stratified lines over the first two centuries of the Christian era. The new glosswares—distinctive products of specialized workshops—easily might have served as tangible status indicators for those in the process of establishing and demonstrating their elevated social rank.

The elaborate polychromes accompanying Protoclassic burials at Holmul, Tikal, Barton Ramie, Nohmul, Mountain Cow, and Cahal Pech among others are perhaps best understood through reference to Late Classic counterparts as lavish, expensive furnishings for the honored or revered departed. As among Late Classic burial assemblages, these furnishings included both locally manufactured and exotic vessels, thus explaining the hodgepodge of types, styles, and modes characterizing the earliest, primarily burial-based definitions of the Maya Protoclassic. What these assemblages actually represented, we propose, was the beginning of a centuries-long tradition of ceramic presentation and gift exchange as a means of greasing the wheels of social and political interaction.

PROTOCLASSIC CHRONOLOGY

Until very recently, protoclassic assemblages have not been well dated by chronometric means. The conventionally employed dates of 50 B.C.–A.D. 250 (Willey 1977) rely on assumptions derived from the original Barton Ramie data and require serious reevaluation. Newly available accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) determinations from the Barton Ramie Floral Park contexts in conjunction with new data from Naj Tunich Cave and the sites of Las Ruinas de Arenal and Buenavista del Cayo in the western Belize Valley currently provide our best fix on the actual span of the protoclassic ceramic stage. Norman Hammond and Rupert Housley have employed the AMS radiocarbon technique to date human skeletal samples associated with two of the original Barton Ramie Floral Park assemblages, Burials 30 and 31. Bone collagen from Burial 30 yielded an uncalibrated radiocarbon age of $2,040 \pm 70$ years: 90 B.C. (OxA-3666); and a calibrated date of 169 B.C. (91, 79, 71) A.D. 48 using the Stuiver and Becker (1986) calibration program and a one-sigma range.⁷ Burial 30 contained three mammiform tetrapod bowls including one each of the Aguacate Orange, Guacamallo Red-on-orange, and Chiquibul Composite types (Gifford 1976:316, Figure 213). Support forms suggest a protoclassic facet 1 age, although those of the extremely unusual Chiquibul composite vessel and the presence of Guacamallo Red-on-orange herald protoclassic facet 2. This date is somewhat earlier than that suggested for the inception of protoclassic facet 1 ceramics at Tikal in the Cauac complex, which has been dated as beginning at about the start of the Christian era (Coe 1990:Chart 1, 825–827). In attempting to correlate the meager available data concerning the chronology of protoclassic facet 1 and allowing a reasonable span for earlier experimentation and the development of its defining attributes (see Coe 1990:Chart 1, 825–827), we suggest 75 ± 25 B.C. to be a reasonable date for the beginning of the protoclassic ceramic stage.

A date for the inception of protoclassic facet 2 remains to be established with certainty. At Tikal, Protoclassic attributes such as tetrapod supports appear in the Cimi phase, which, according to Culbert (1993:4, Table 1) and Coe (1990:Chart 1, 825–827), begins around A.D. 150–170. This date agrees with Adams's (1971) dating for the beginning of Altar's Salinas phase at A.D. 150.

Housley and Hammond also dated four samples from Naj Tunich of which three bear on the beginnings of facet 2. Two of these samples were recovered during the excavation of a small platform on the balcony structure. Except for mixed Classic-period ceramics on the surface, the entire 82 cm of this deposit contained purely protoclassic pottery. The samples consisted of organic material burned onto the interior of Triunfo Striated sherds co-occurring with the protoclassic orange wares. A sample (OxA-5832) drawn from the upper 47 cm of the deposit yielded an age of $1,835 \pm 50$ years and a calibrated date of A.D. 80 (134, 160, 167, 202, 209)

⁷ Radiometric data compiled for this study include conventional and AMS determinations made by several different laboratories over more than 15 years. Several different standards were used in these analyses, and several different calibration methods were applied to the results. In an effort to achieve a useful consistency in presenting these statistics, the senior authors chose the Stuiver and Becker (1986) calibration program as that most readily applicable to the largest range of differing lab procedures and results. We note that the calibrated dates do not vary substantially from those obtained using any of the three other methods represented among our samples. Future studies by individual authors of this paper may, however, present alternative calibrations of these same determinations.

234. A sample (OxA-5833) from the lower level gave an age of $1,890 \pm 45$ years and a calibrated date of A.D. 34 (80, 114, 126) 207. These dates are in general agreement with the figures cited above for protoclassic ceramic stage facet 2.

Two samples were obtained from excavations into the floor of the entrance chamber. Early Classic sherds were present on the surface, but the 120 cm of subsurface cultural deposition contained protoclassic materials exclusively with protoclassic orange wares present throughout. The dates were obtained from carbonized organic matter scraped from the interior of Triunfo Striated sherds. A sample (OxA-5834) from an upper excavation level provided an age of $1,770 \pm 45$ years and a calibrated date of A.D. 177 (245) 336. The other sample (OxA-5835), recovered from about 80 cm below surface, yielded a radiocarbon age of $1,960 \pm 45$ years and a calibrated date of 87 B.C. (A.D. 29, 40, 50) A.D. 72. The reading suggests an earlier inception for protoclassic facet 2 than adopted herein; however, we would caution against placing too much reliance on any single date. In the opinion of the senior author, the most reasonable assessment of all available data would place the division between protoclassic 1 and protoclassic 2 at approximately A.D. 150.

Considerable data have accumulated suggesting that the termination of the protoclassic needs to be reevaluated. The most secure "hard date" available derives from a protoclassic deposit in a man-made cave at La Lagunita, Guatemala, and is based on six radiocarbon samples that average A.D. 350–400 (Ichon 1985:50). The La Lagunita chronology agrees with Adams's (1971) dating of the Salinas phase at Altar A.D. 150–450. Hermes Cifuentes (1993:250) dates the "Protoclassic II" deposit at Topoxte to between A.D. 200 and 300, consistent with the Tzakol affiliations suggested by numerous other investigators as discussed above. The Topoxte dating also is supported by a radiocarbon date from a storage pit containing protoclassic ceramics at nearby Muralla de Leon on Lake Macanche. The pit contained 14 reconstructable vessels and charred material that yielded an uncalibrated radiocarbon date of A.D. 215 ± 85 (Rice and Rice 1981:278).⁸

Culbert (1963:37) long ago noted an apparent absence of Ixcario Orange-polychrome vessels from Tikal, but the type subsequently has been recovered by the Mundo Perdido project (Laporte and Fialko 1990:40). The vessels were recovered from a Manik phase deposit, but Laporte and Fialko believe that they may have been redeposited from an earlier context.

Housley and Hammond's dating of Burial 31 at Barton Ramie yielded an uncalibrated radiocarbon age of $1,685 \pm 65$ years: A.D. 265 (OxA-3426), and a calibrated date of A.D. 257 (356, 370, 382) 425. The burial contained an Ixcario Orange-polychrome mammiform tetrapod bowl, an elaborately excised and incised unslipped potstand (Mollejon Plain), and a modeled-incised lid of Aguacate Orange in the form of a "whistling" or howling monkey (Gifford 1976:316, Figure 213). These vessels suggest a protoclassic facet 2 association.

Two complementary dates are available from the upper Belize Valley. One (Beta-94441) is a conventional radiocarbon determination on twig charcoal and resin-incense from a sealed foundation offering associated with the earliest detected construction phase (Str. 30-4th) of the principal funerary temple-pyramid at Las Ruinas

de Arenal. Associated ceramics included two true Aguacate Variety, Aguacate Orange dishes (see Figure 4c); two Hewlett Bank dishes (Figure 4b); and two miniature Jocote Orange-brown dishes.⁹ The sample yielded an uncalibrated radiocarbon age of $1,700 \pm 60$ years, and a calibrated one-sigma date range of A.D. 255 (264, 269, 342, 374, 376) 412 based on the Stuiver and Becker (1986) calibration program. The offering occurred within a structural matrix of uncontaminated Madrugada phase (protoclassic 2) date. A second standard radiometric determination is available for a Madrugada-phase structural offering from the "South Plaza Group" (Str. BvC21-3rd) at Buenavista del Cayo that included 14 Hewlett Bank Unslipped cache vessels (see Figure 4b; see Note 8). An associated sample of twig-charcoal yielded an uncalibrated radiocarbon age of $1,690 \pm 50$ years: A.D. 310 (Beta-38376), and a calibrated date of A.D. 258 (345; 371; 380) 412.

Extension of the protoclassic ceramic stage to A.D. 400 or later has other implications. Hammond (1984) has noted that earlier descriptions of the material from Holmul and Nohmul played down the association of orange glossware vessels and Late Preclassic waxy redware pottery. Waxy redwares have also been found with Protoclassic orange wares in sealed deposits at Nohmul (Hammond 1974). While such associations might be expected during the gradual replacement of one ware by another over time, the revised chronology suggests that waxy redwares persisted considerably longer than has generally been believed. Pring also has noted that the occasional reporting of Sierra Red sherds from basal-flanged vessels supports such an assertion, as do well-made Sierra Red mammiform tetrapod vessel from Tzimin Kax (Mountain Cow, Chultun B, Vessel 1 [Thompson 1931:Plate XI]) and Buenavista del Cayo.

The foregoing observations also accord well with recent suggestions by several scholars that Late Preclassic ceramic types and wares might have persisted until A.D. 400 or later at a number of sites, overlapping substantially with or even taking the place of Tzakol-sphere ceramics, and so possibly being responsible for the apparent Early Classic "hiatus" reported for some sites (see Kurjack 1974; Lincoln 1985; Robles Castellanos 1990).

We believe the newly accumulating chronometric data support a total span for the full protoclassic ceramic stage that extends from approximately 75 ± 25 B.C. (beginnings of facet 1) to circa A.D. 420 (finale of facet 2). We would place the division between protoclassic 1 and protoclassic 2 at about A.D. 150. Further verifications and refinements of these assignments are desirable, and we hope to see such in the near future.

CONCLUSION

What, then, was the Protoclassic, and what was it not? First, what it was *not* was a general evolutionary stage in the history of Maya civilization. Use of the term in this sense is no longer supportable and should be abandoned. Here again we stress that the term "protoclassic" meaningfully refers to and describes a ceramics-based construct *only*. At the same time, the temporal span in question was an era of technological and artistic experimentation and innovation that gave it a distinct identity. Although chronologically overlapping the Late Preclassic and Early Classic periods as tra-

⁸ The Stuiver and Becker (1986) calibrated date for this determination (radiocarbon age = 1735 ± 85) would be A.D. 173 (259, 282, 290, 299, 323) 408.

⁹ The Hewlett Bank Unslipped type originally was assigned to the Hermitage ceramic complex (Gifford 1976:190–191). Ball notes that it is, in fact, a ceramic diagnostic of the Floral Park complex horizon.

ditionally defined and forming an integral part of the cultural content of each, the protoclassic ceramic stage nonetheless possessed a vitality sufficient to distinguish it as a major ceramic unit in its own right rather than merely linking them transitionally.

Second, we have clarified the Protoclassic typological situation, integrating protoclassic ceramics into type:variety systematics in a manner that ties them to both Late Preclassic and Early Classic wares. Based on the large, well-preserved Naj Tunich collections, we have identified two protoclassic orange wares. The Aguacate ceramic group of Holmul Orange Ware is related to the Late Preclassic orange/brown traditions found throughout the lowlands. Mammiform tetrapod supports and pseudo-Usulután, dichrome decoration as commonly associated with these wares have been sources of confusion because some analysts have regarded them to be part of the Protoclassic configuration while others have not. The second orange ware is represented by the La Compuerta series of the Aguila group. This ceramic series, which includes Ixcánrio Orange-polychrome and is closely associated with the Holmul I Style, has been explicitly placed within Petén Gloss Ware emphasizing its relationship to Classic-period ceramics.

Third, we have shown that the accepted diagnostics of the protoclassic ceramic stage have a far wider distribution than has been recognized previously. Despite that, use of the term to describe a uniform ceramic horizon for the Maya area is questionable. No actual Q complex ever existed. The modes, types, attributes, and wares assigned to it or used to define it have little or no integrity as a set and seem to be distributed almost randomly in local sequences throughout both lowlands and highlands. Moreover, such constructs as "Holmul I" represent nothing other than functionally specialized local assemblages, or subcomplexes. The Holmul I "style" embraces nothing more than polychrome-decorated, orange-glossware, mammiform tetrapod bowls and dishes. There is no new, full assemblage here.

Fourth, existing and new data are offered to establish a tentative, working chronology for the protoclassic ceramic stage. An early phase of the protoclassic emerging around 75 ± 25 B.C. is signaled by the appearance of matte-finish orange-brown wares. A

second phase begins around A.D. 150 and is defined by the appearance of bright orange glosswares. This does not imply the necessary disappearance of facet I types. The protoclassic ceramic stage terminates with the disappearance of modes like the tetrapod mammiform and types such as Ixcánrio Orange polychrome. Reliable dates suggest that this did not occur earlier than A.D. 400.¹⁰

Finally, we have specified a set of ceramic attributes diagnostic of the protoclassic based on objective, technological, presence/absence criteria as opposed to the subjective evaluation of relative "waxiness" or "glossiness" relied on by many in the past. We strongly recommend that the term protoclassic henceforth be used only to describe the ceramic stage defined explicitly by these criteria, and we suggest that the term might then also be applied to the span of time between about the mid-first century before Christ and the early fifth century A.D. characterized by the presence of these attributes.

The protoclassic ceramic stage was no more "transitional" or "developmental" in character than was any other specific era in Maya cultural history, although important technological and artistic advances as well as historical events did transpire during its course. Understood and used explicitly in this way, the term has both utility and validity. Used in any other sense, it is a conceptual misconception now best dropped from the lexicon of Maya archaeology.

¹⁰ Our suggested dating for the protoclassic ceramic stage (75 ± 25 B.C.–A.D. 400) may present problems for those used to dating the beginning of the Classic period at circa A.D. 250–300. This will be so, of course, only for those who chose to view the Late Preclassic, Protoclassic, and Early Classic as three non-overlapping, sequential periods rather than as two sequential periods bridged by an overlapping ceramic stage. It is the second construction alone that is supported by the now considerable database concerning protoclassic ceramics, their distribution, evolution, and cultural contexts.

In fact, glossware ceramics were already being produced by at least as early as A.D. 150, and mammiform tetrapod vessels along with true orange Aguacate-group pottery were in production as late as A.D. 400 and later. The A.D. 200–300 appearance of such traditional hallmark attributes as basal-flanged bowls and Dos Arroyos/Actuncan polychrome types no more defined an Early Classic/protoclassic boundary than did any particular one of the oft-cited and nonceramic traits.

RESUMEN

El término "protoclásico" es empleado regular, pero inexplicitamente en la literatura de la arqueología de las tierras bajas mayas; se a tornado más nebuloso y ambiguo tanto en uso como en significada. Este artículo revisa la historia y uso del término y presenta una redefinición formal del protoclásico como una etapa cerámica, basándose explícita y exclusivamente en criterios cerámicos. Se ofrecen algunas sugerencias con respecto al uso futuro de este término. Además, el artículo aborda y resuelve varias preguntas persistentes con respecto a las vagillas ("wares") protoclásicas anaranjadas, incluyendo problemas acerca de la existencia real del "grupo cerámico Aguacate," y la relación entre el grupo cerámico Aguacate y otras vagillas anaranjadas emergentes del preclásico tardío términal y períodos iniciales del clásico temprano. Se examina la naturaleza y el significado

del "estilo Holmul I," de la "esfera cerámica Floral Park," y las relaciones entre el uno y la otra; también se discute una redefinición más amplia de la etapa cerámica protoclásica.

Se describen y presentan datos cronométricos que apoyan y revisan la distribución espacial de la cerámica protoclásica que se extendió considerablemente encima de lo que previamente se ha reportado sobre la cronología de la etapa cerámica protoclásica. Finalmen datos cerámicos que sugieren una subdivisión verdadera de la etapa cerámica protoclásica de la fase temprana emergente, originándose enteramente dentro de las tradiciones preclásicas tardías de las tierras bajas, y posteriormente de la fase totalmente "clásica" correspondiente al horizonte cerámico Tzakol temprano (Tzakol I).

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