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

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**Style and Design Structure** (continued from Part 1)

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

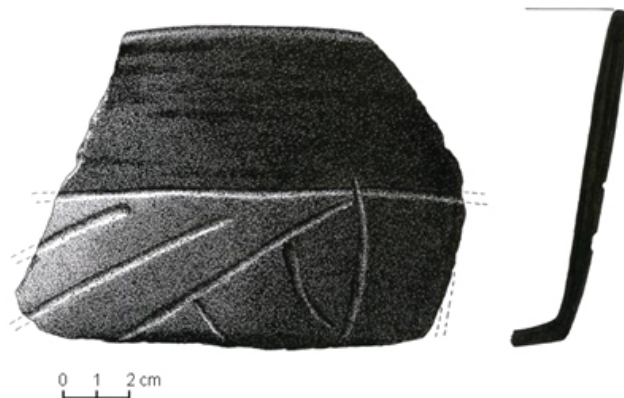


Figure 48. Limón Incised rim sherd showing portion of *ilhuitl* (opposed volutes) motif.

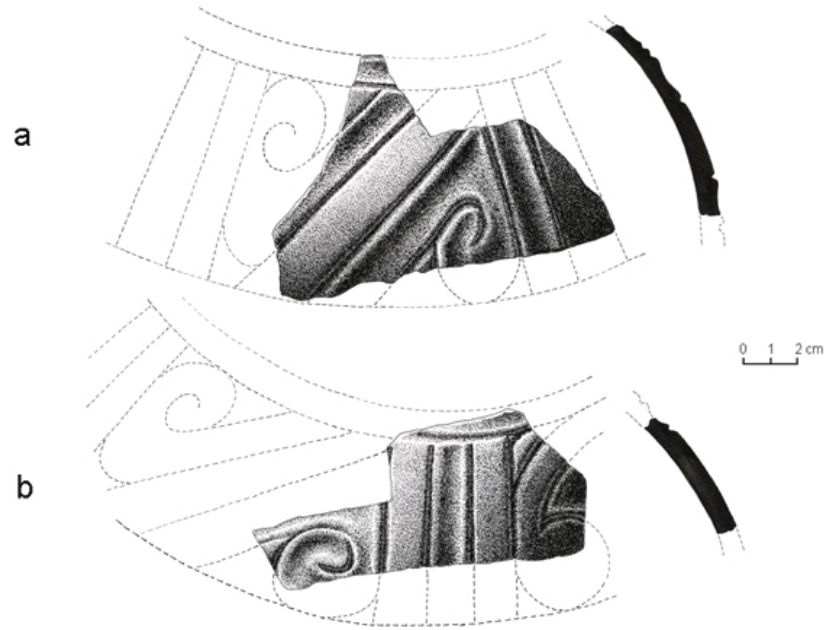


Figure 49. Limon Incised body sherds showing portion of modeled *ilhuitl* (opposed volutes) motifs.

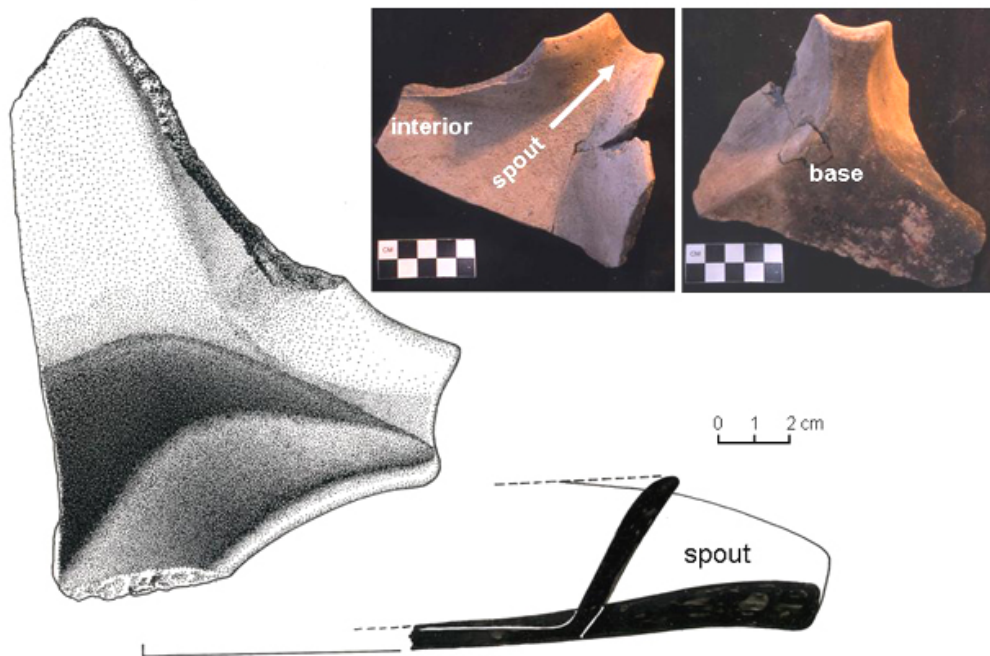
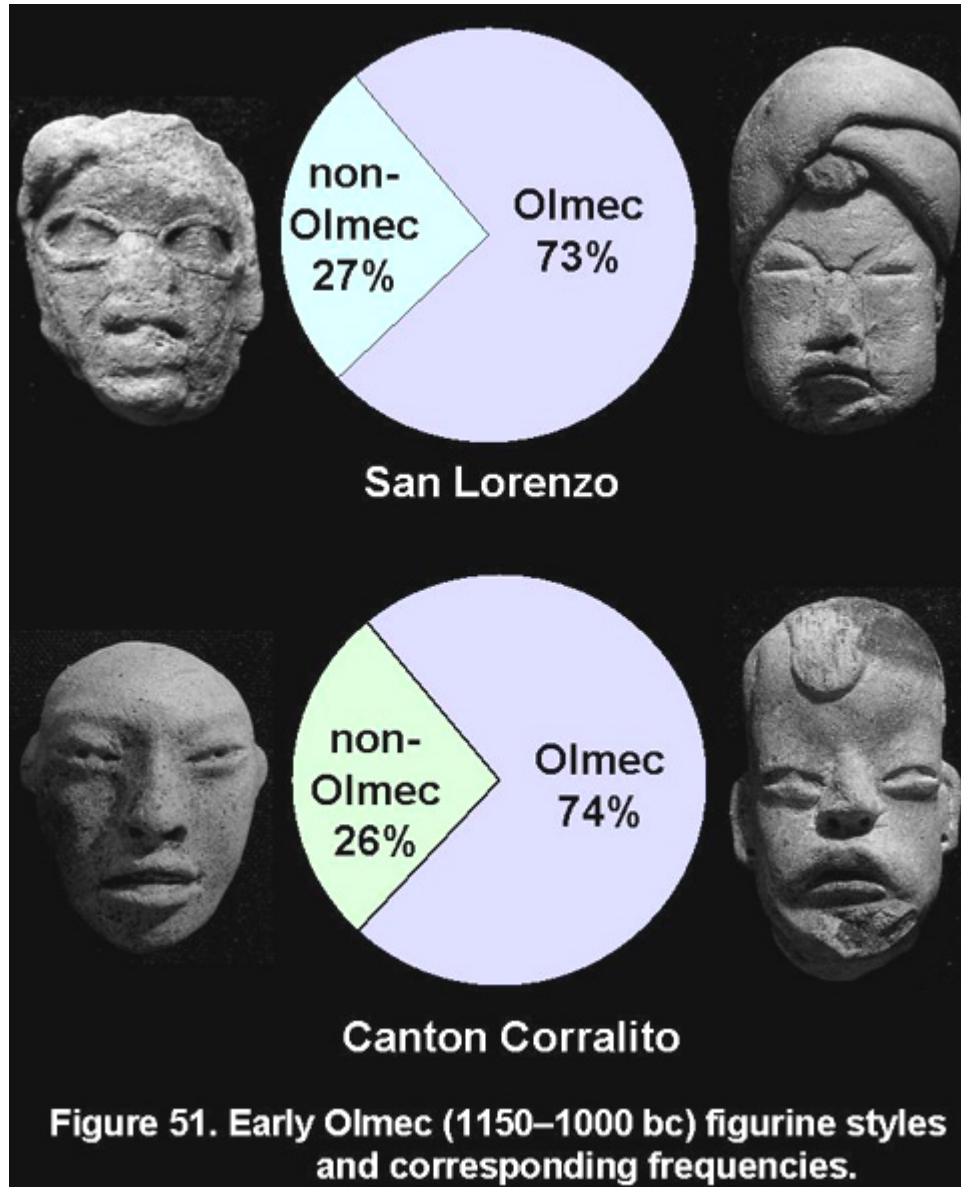


Figure 50. Bala White spouted tray, Cuadros phase. Note hematite pigment smear on base (photo)

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

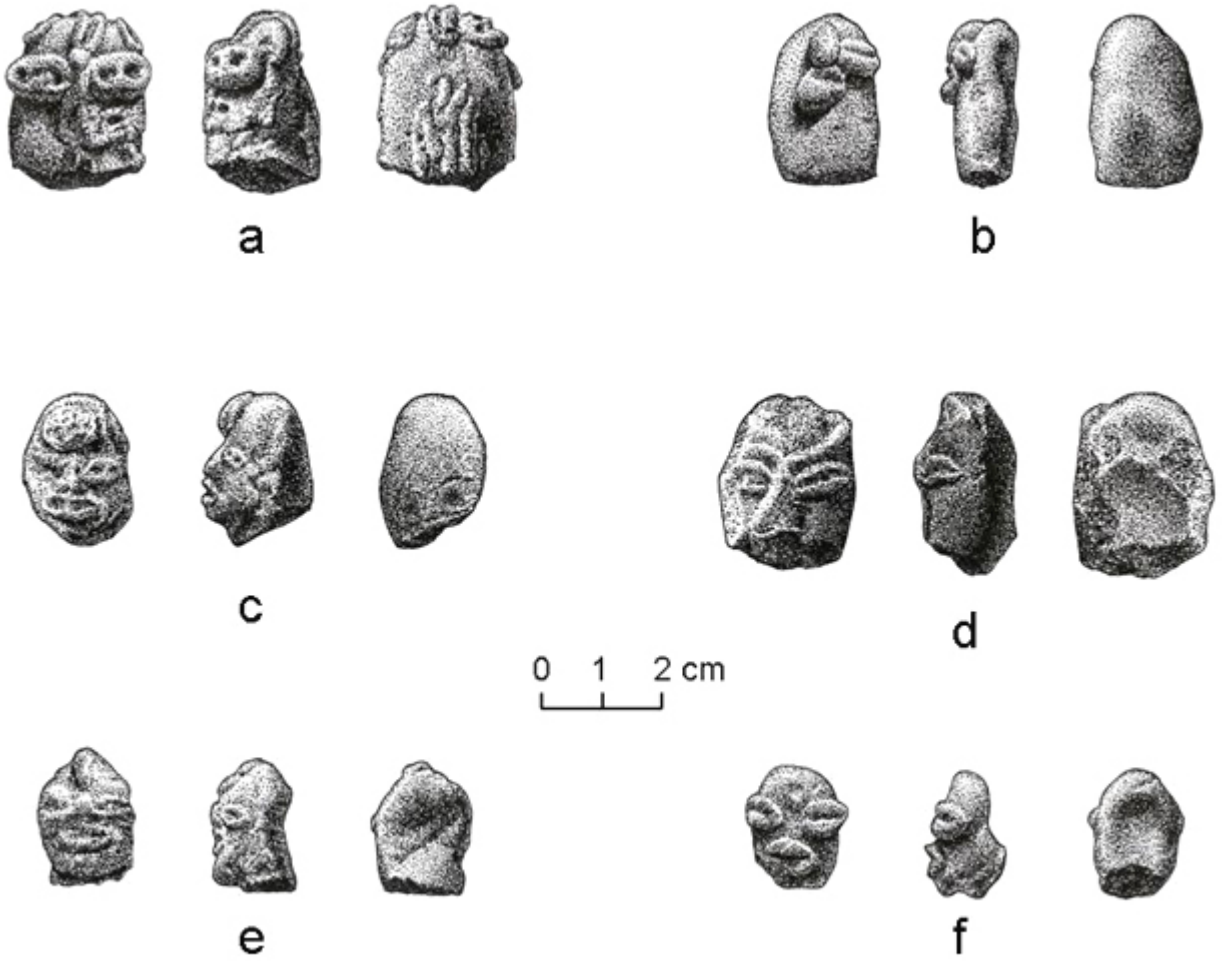


Figure 52. Pre-Cherla (Locona-Ocós phase) figurine heads.

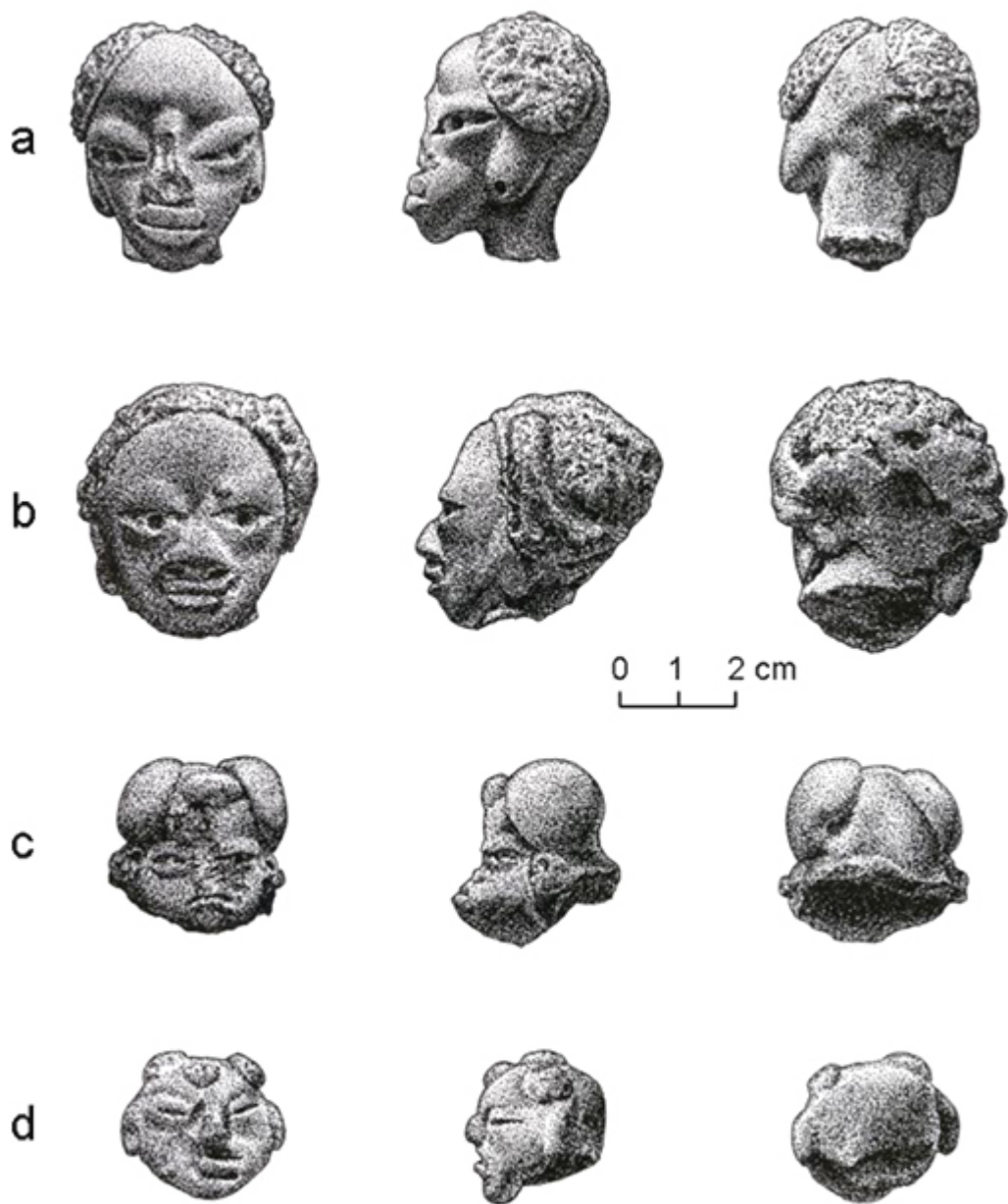


Figure 53. Figurines: (a-b) pre-Cherla; (c) Cherla; (d) Cuadros.

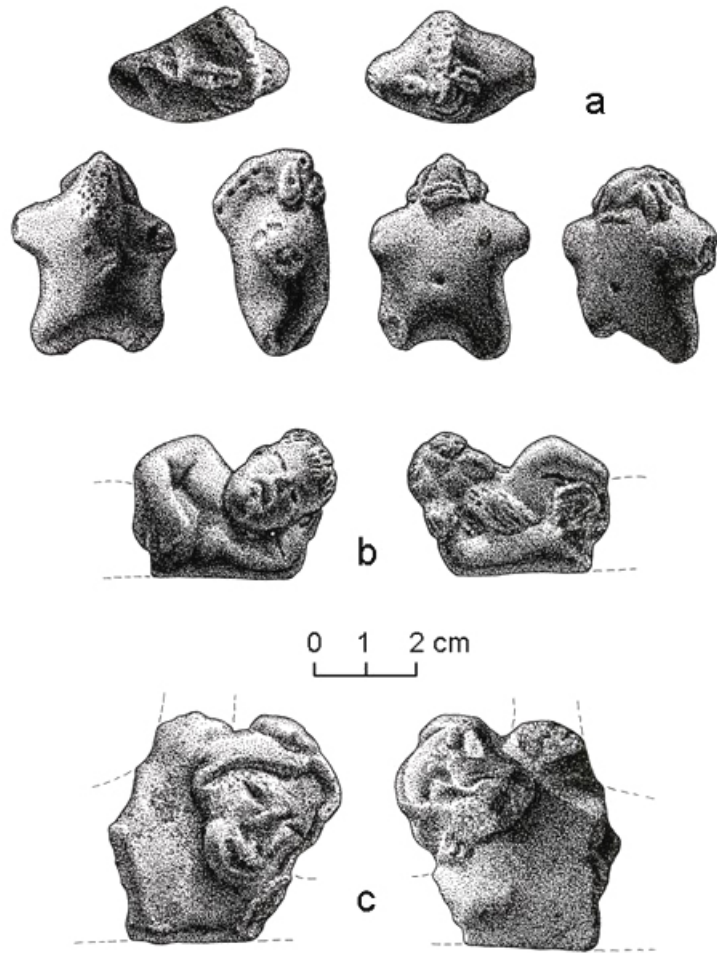


Figure 54. Figurines: (a) pre-Cherla; (b-c) Cuadros.

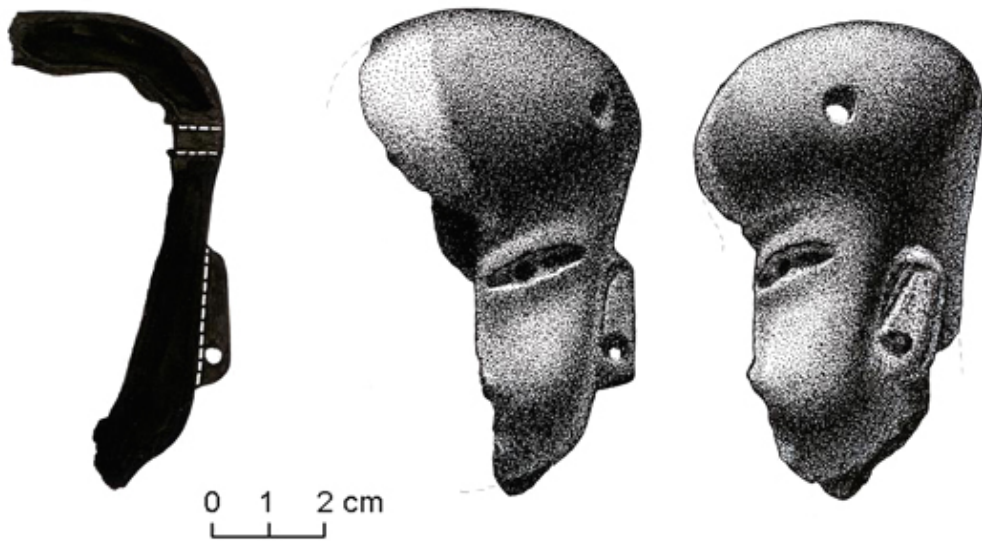


Figure 55. Cherla phase hollow figurine head.

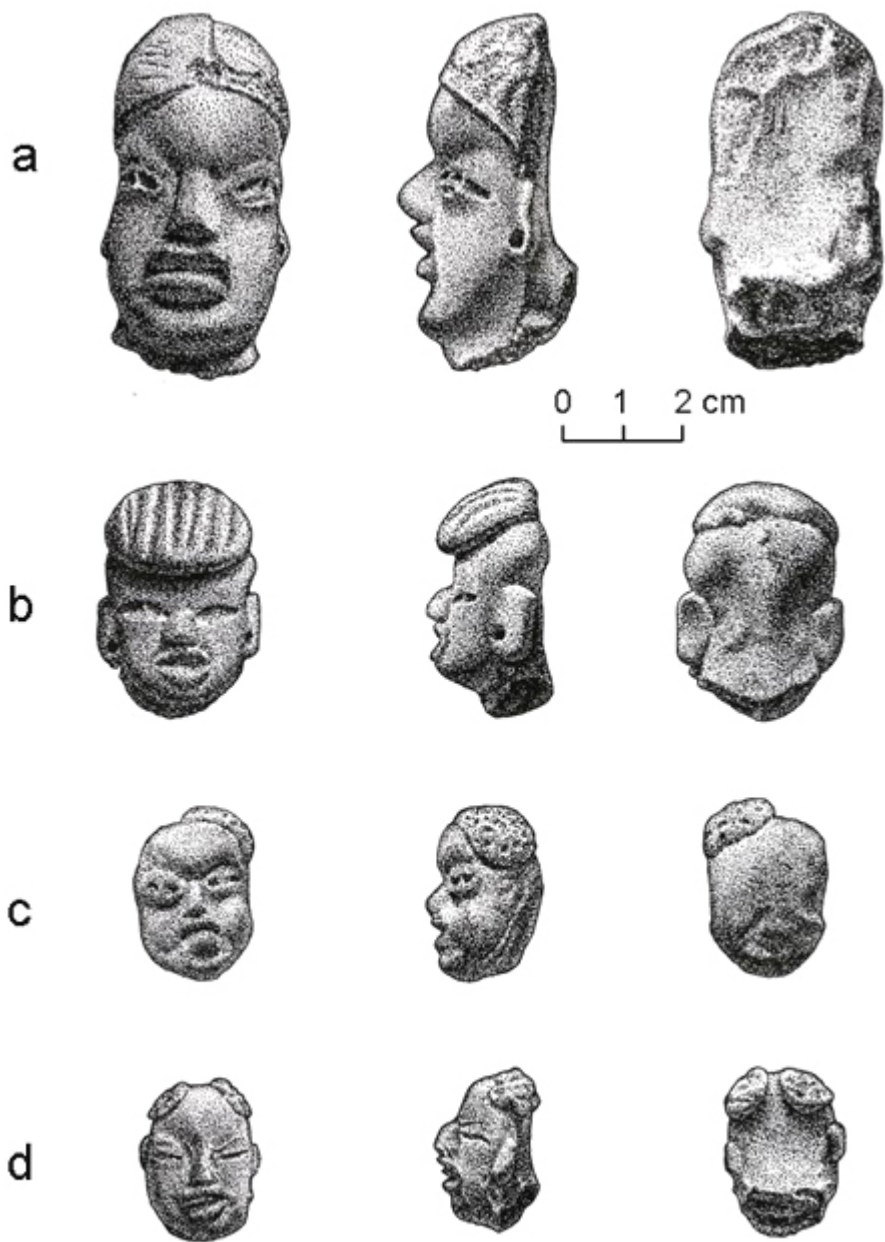


Figure 56. Figurines: (a, c-d) Cuadros; (b) Cherla.



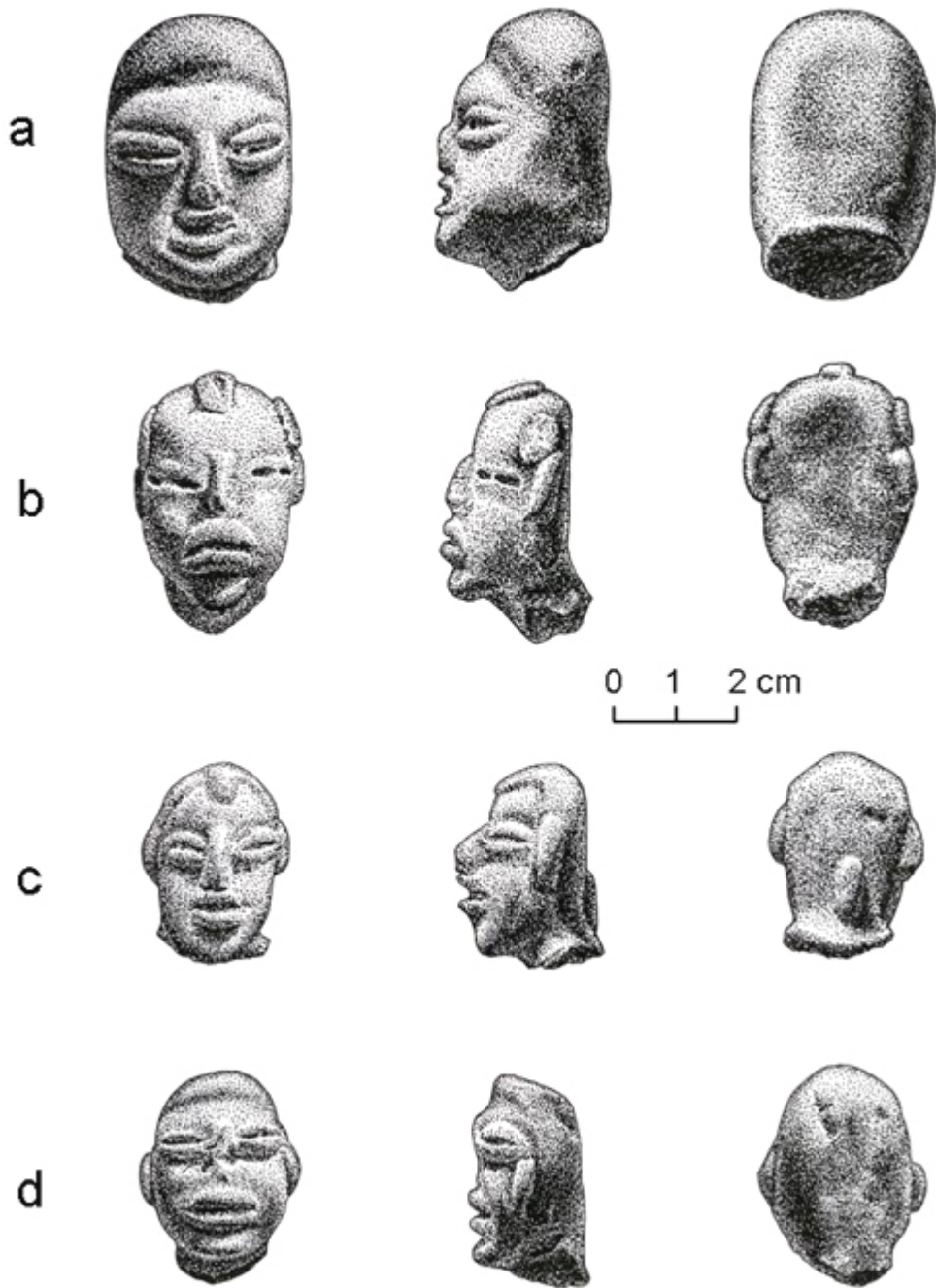


Figure 57. Figurines: (a, d) Cherla; (b-c) Cuadros.

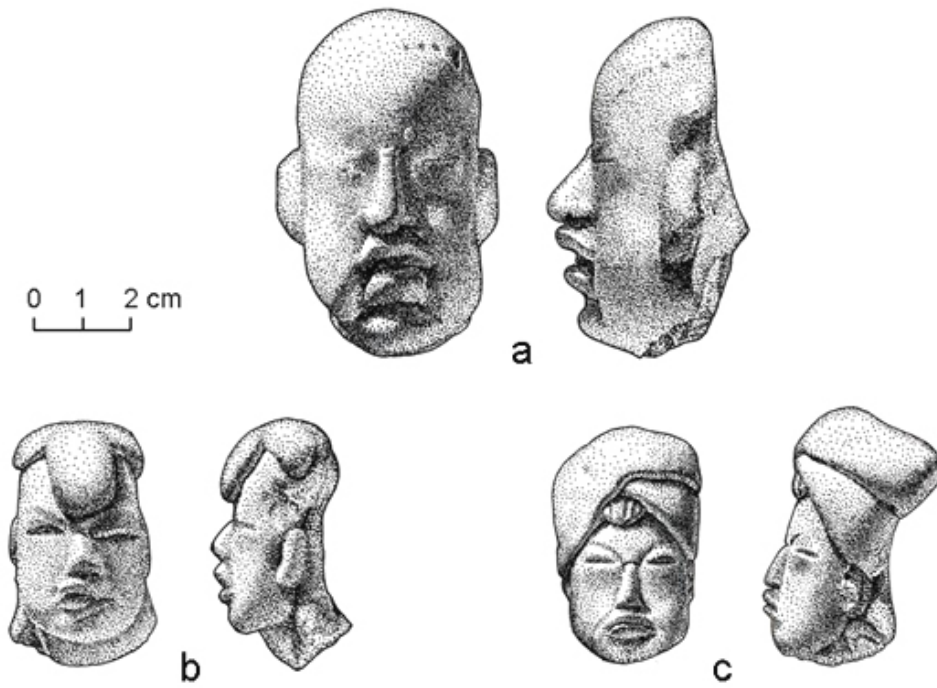


Figure 58. Cuadros phase figurine heads. (specimen c is an import from San Lorenzo)

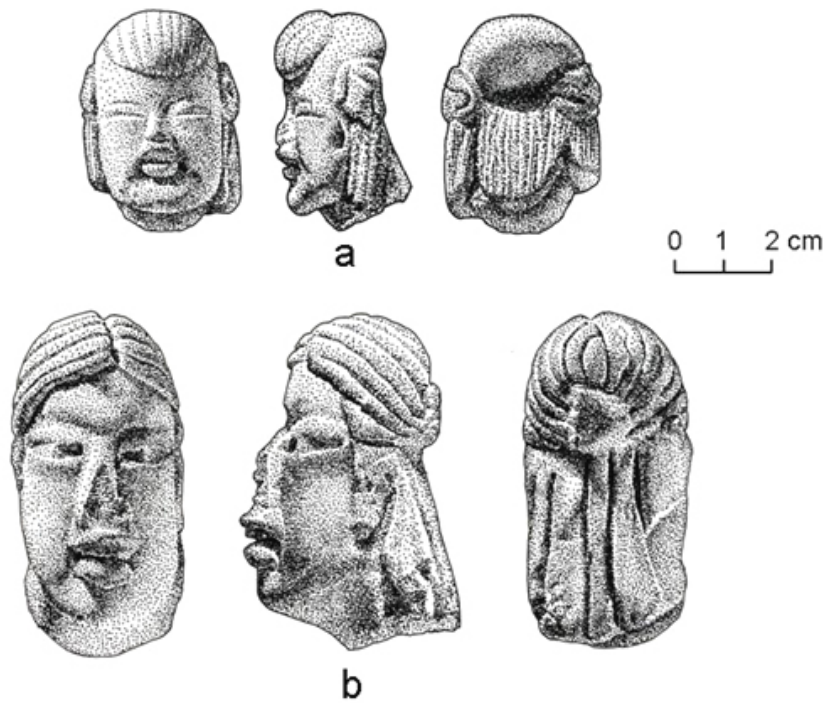


Figure 59. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

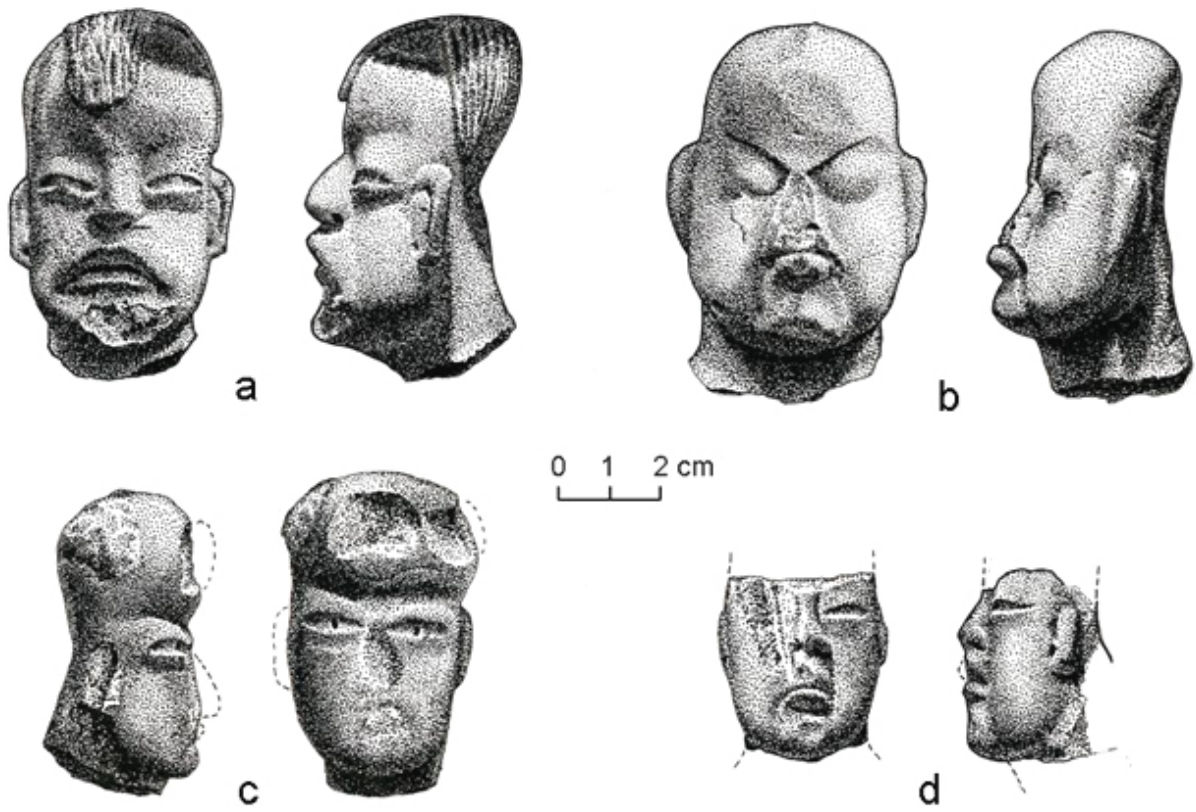


Figure 60. Cuadros phase figurine heads.



Figure 61. Cuadros phase figurine head.

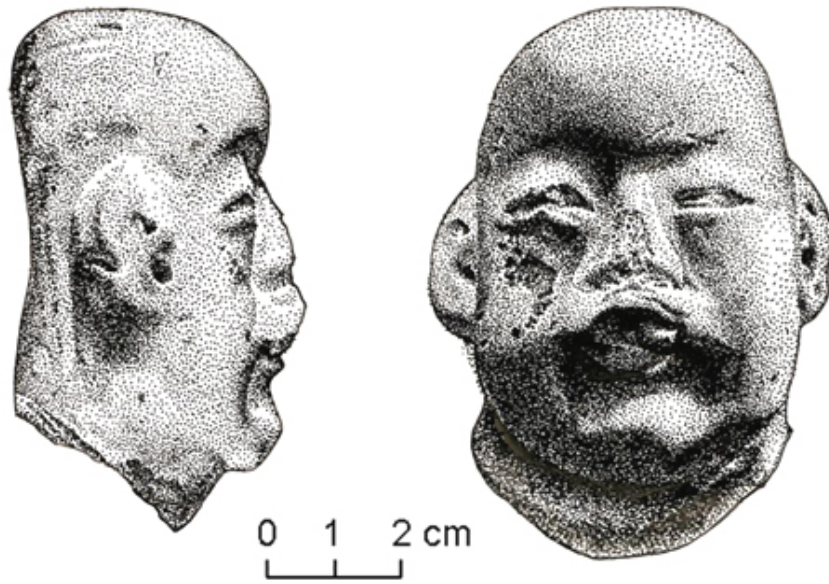


Figure 62. Cuadros phase figurine head.

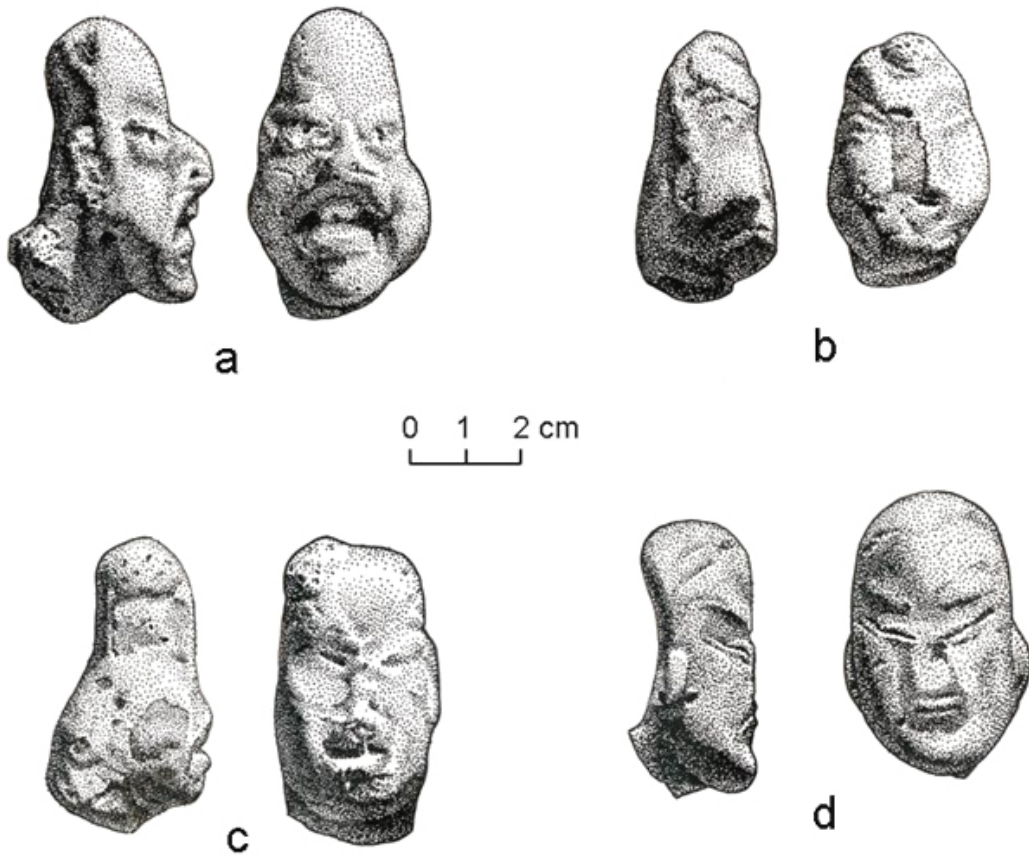


Figure 63. Cuadros phase figurine heads.

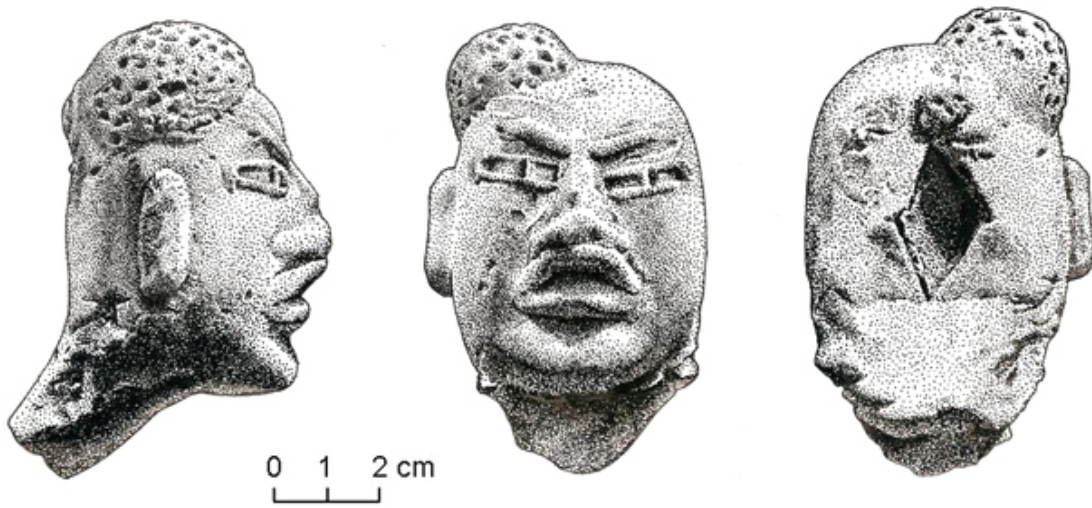


Figure 64. Cuadros phase figurine head. Note excised symbol on rear.

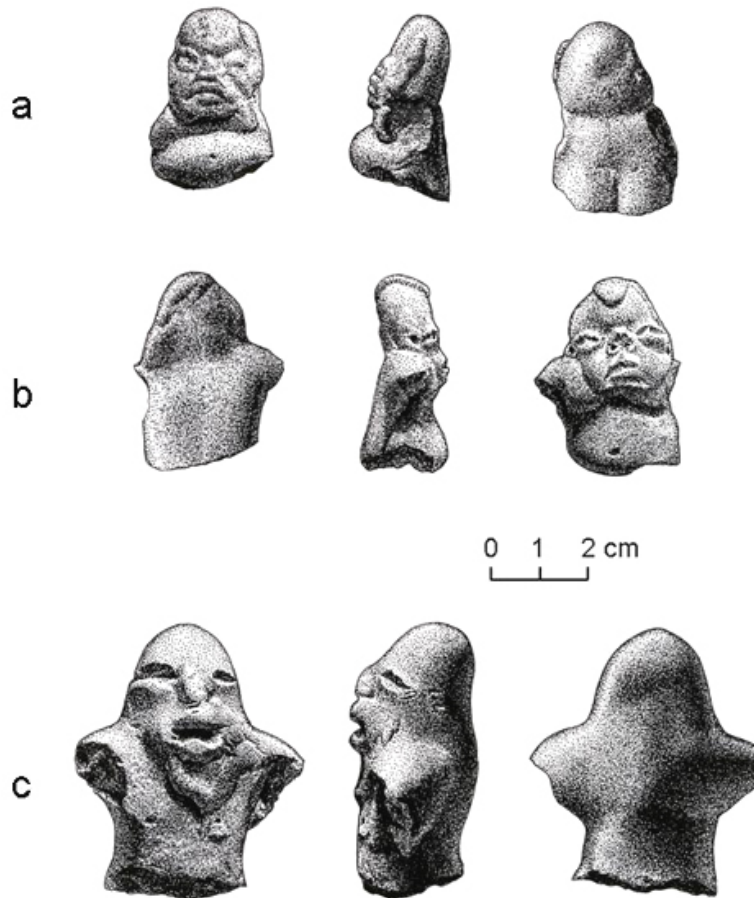


Figure 65. Cuadros phase figurines.

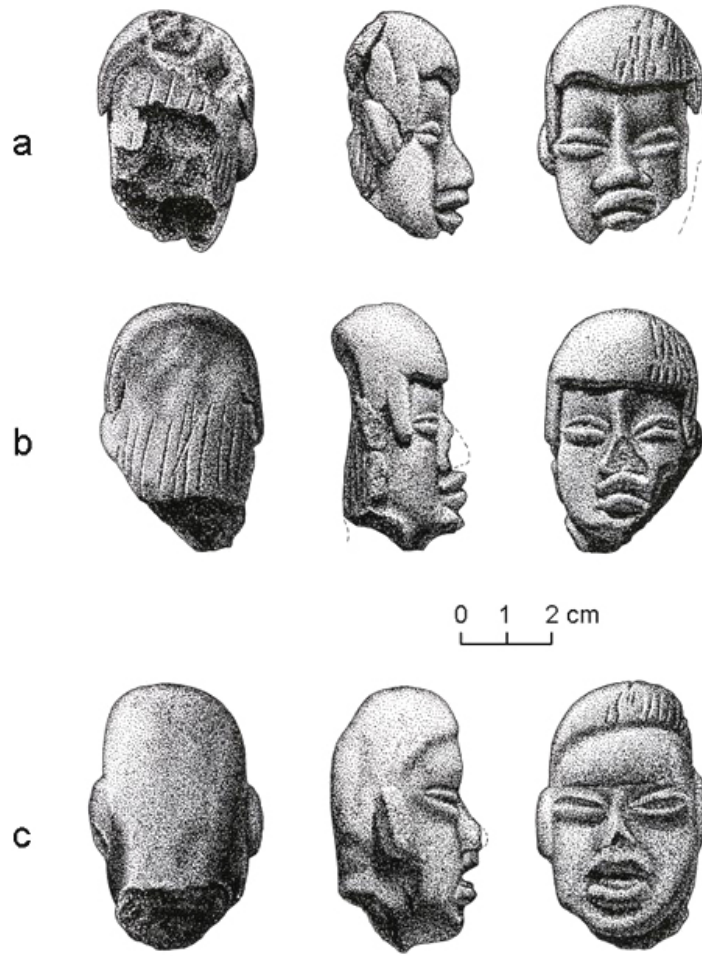


Figure 66. Cuadros phase figurines.

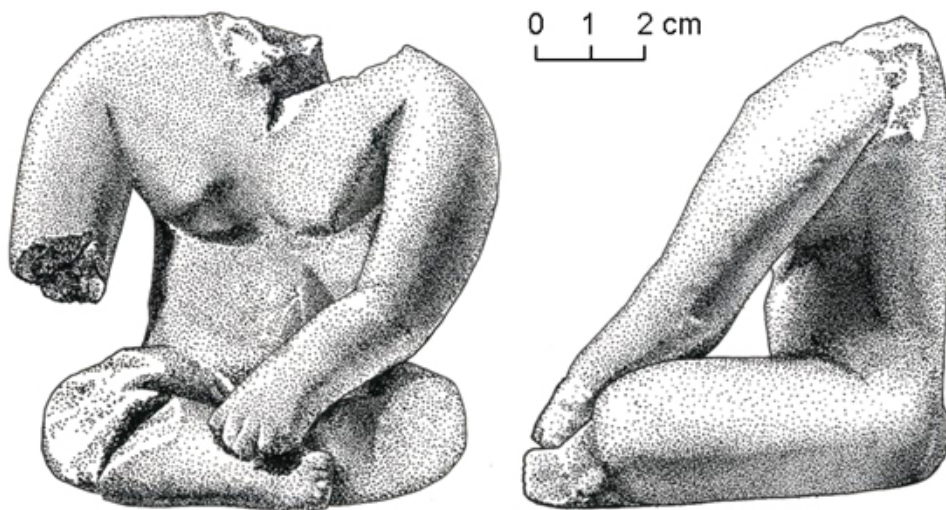


Figure 67. Cuadros phase figurine torso.

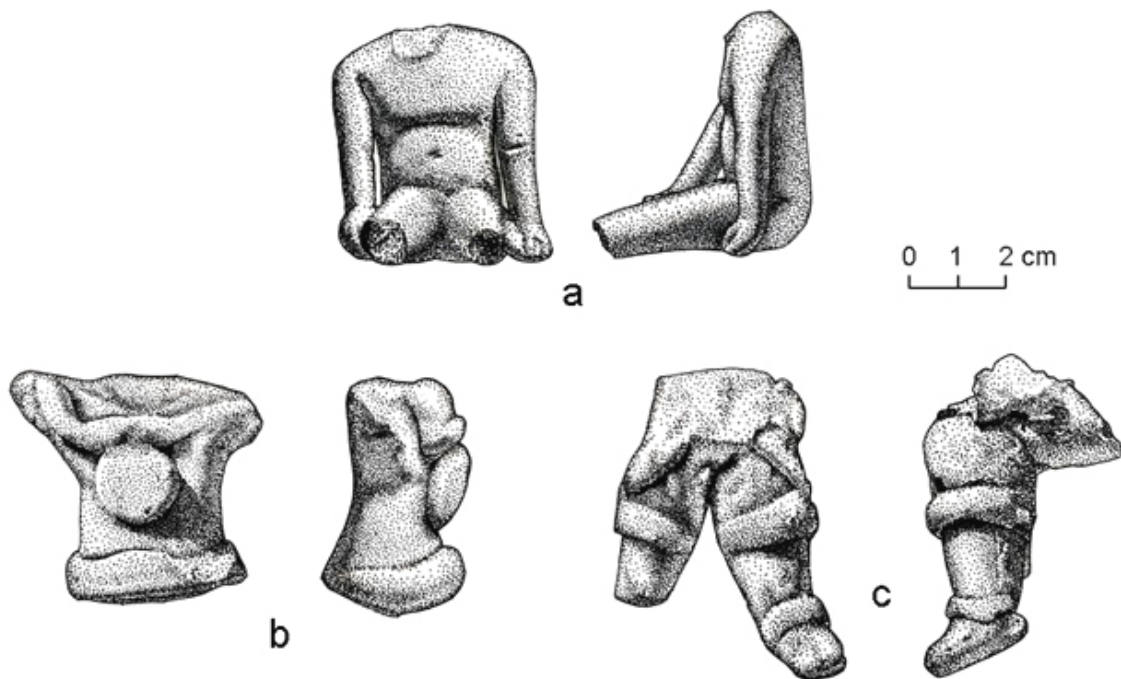


Figure 68. Cuadros phase figurine bodies: (a) seated torso; (b) ballplayer torso; (c) lower limbs of ballplayer.

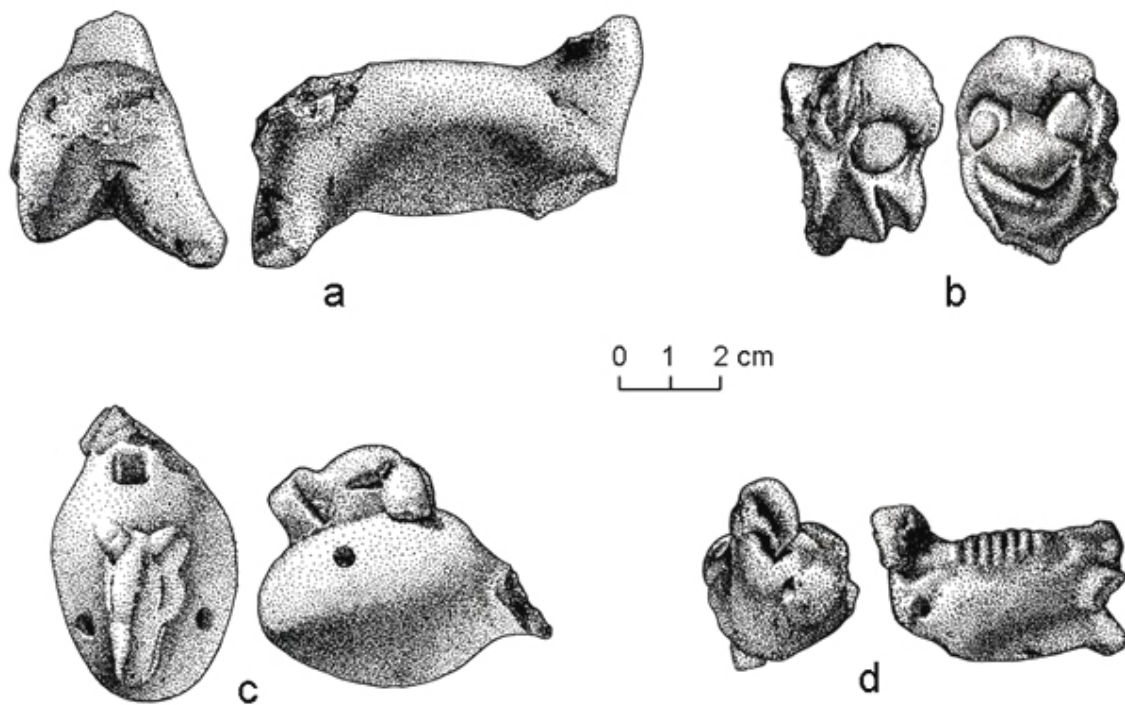


Figure 69. Cherla and Cuadros phase zoomorphic whistles/ocarinas.



Figure 70. Jocotal phase figurine head.

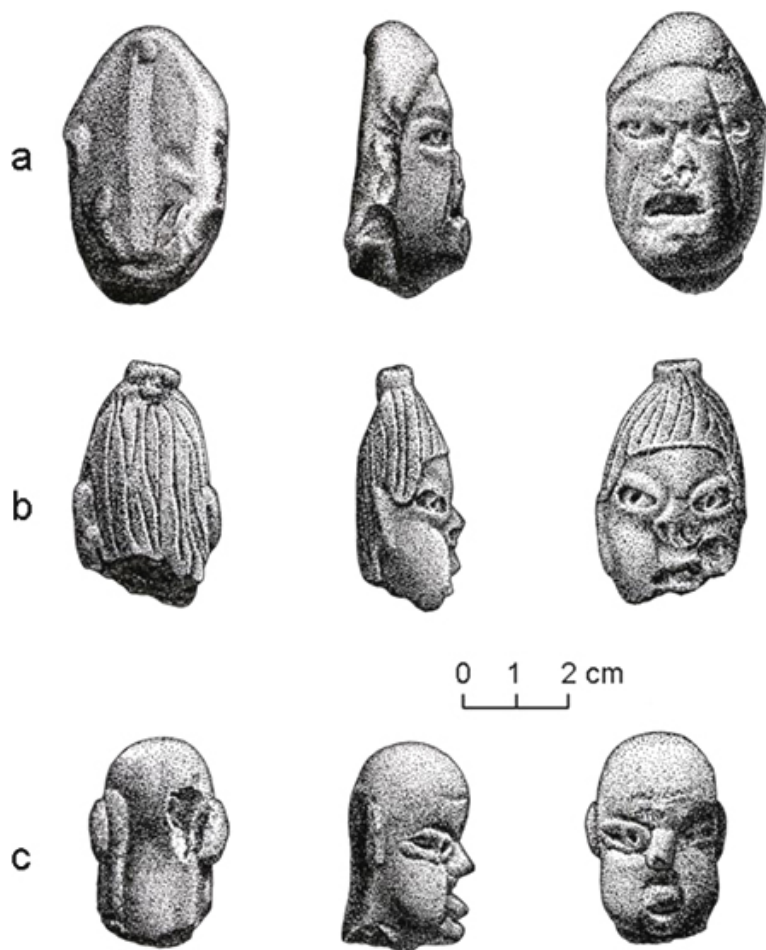


Figure 71. Figurines: (a-b) Jocotal; (c) Cuadros.



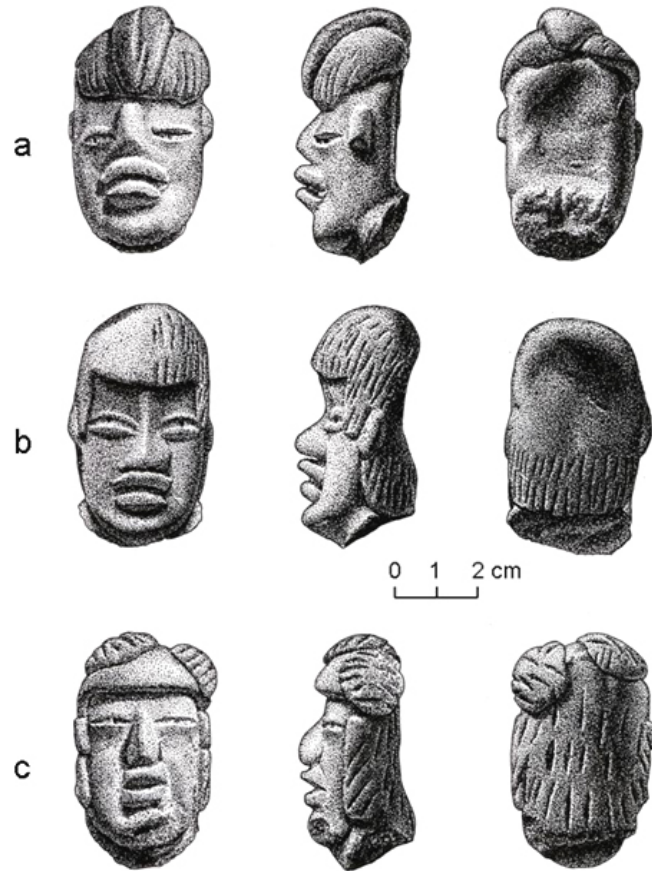


Figure 72. Figurines: (a) Jocotal; (b-c) Cuadros.

### Other Items

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



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

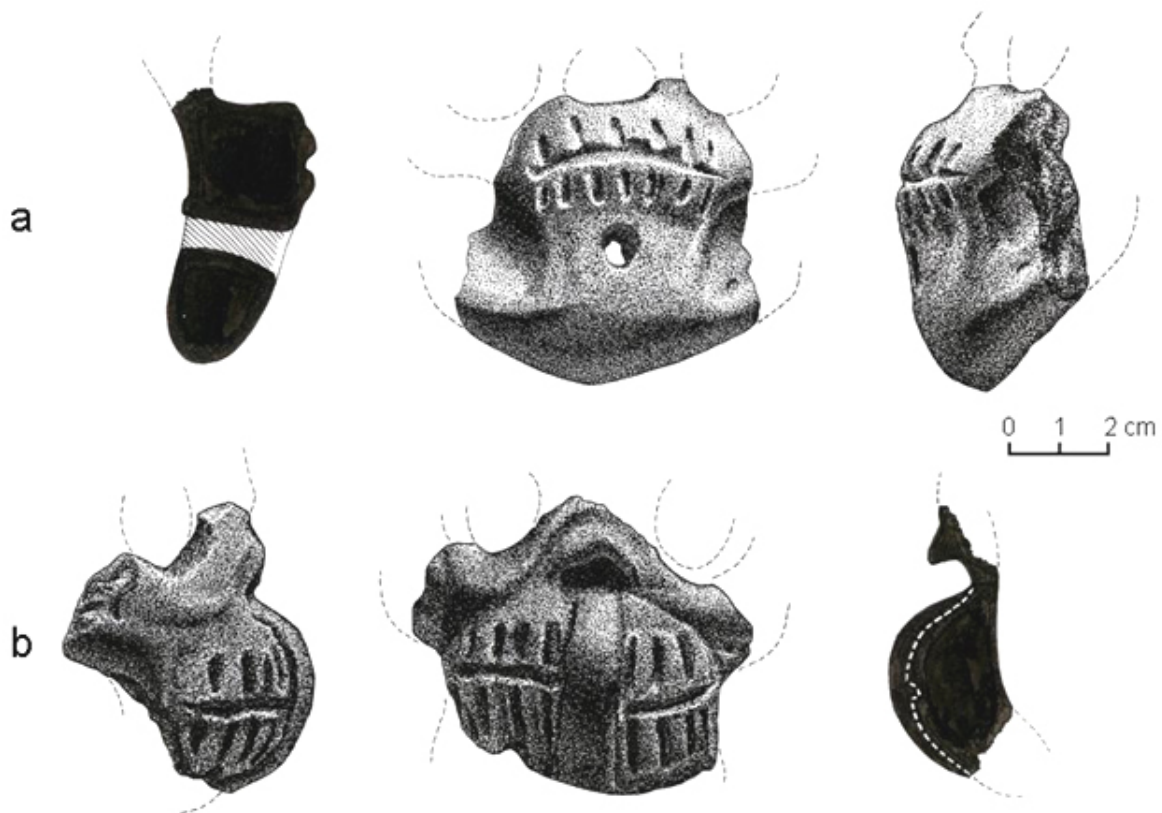


Figure 74. Cuadros phase ceramic "skull" masquette fragments. Note mandible clamp on lower specimen.

The Cantón Corralito assortment of Olmec style items also includes numerous hematite encrusted ceramic stamps. All are cylindrical in shape (Figures 75-79) except one, which is flat and shaped like a human hand (Figure 80). These items may have been used to mark human skin or textiles. They are rare at San Lorenzo, with only one found during the Yale Project (Coe and Diehl 1980:Fig. 412), a few during the more recent UNAM project (Ann Cyphers, personal communication 2006), and a few from sites in the periphery of San Lorenzo near El Manatí (Ponciano Ortiz, personal communication 2005). It is possible that most stamps in the Gulf Coast region were made of wood (John Clark, personal communication 2005) thus accounting for their rarity.

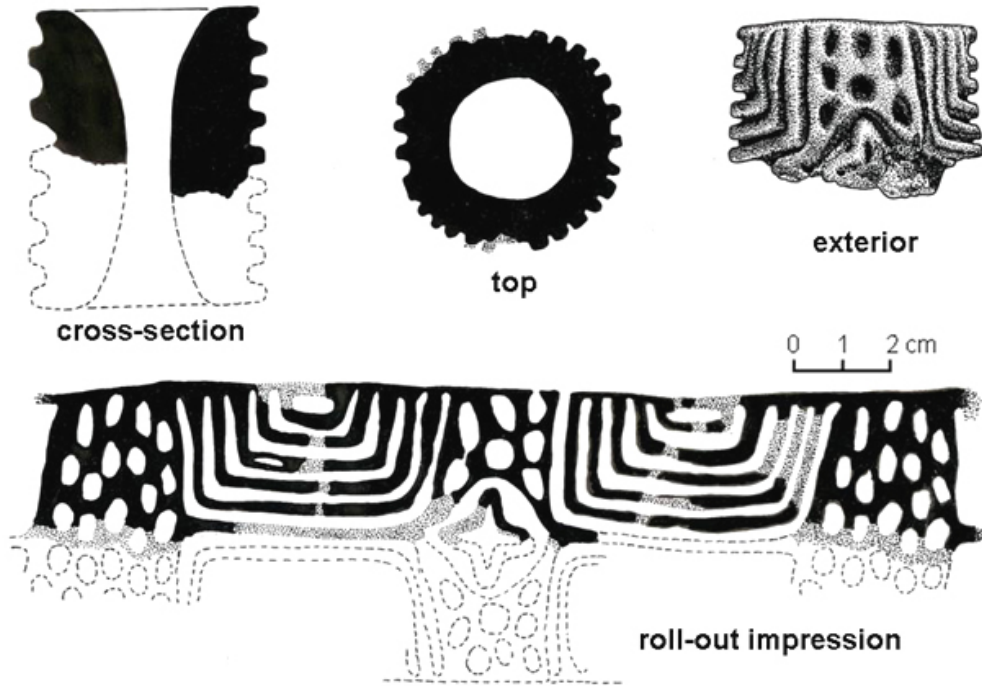


Figure 75. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

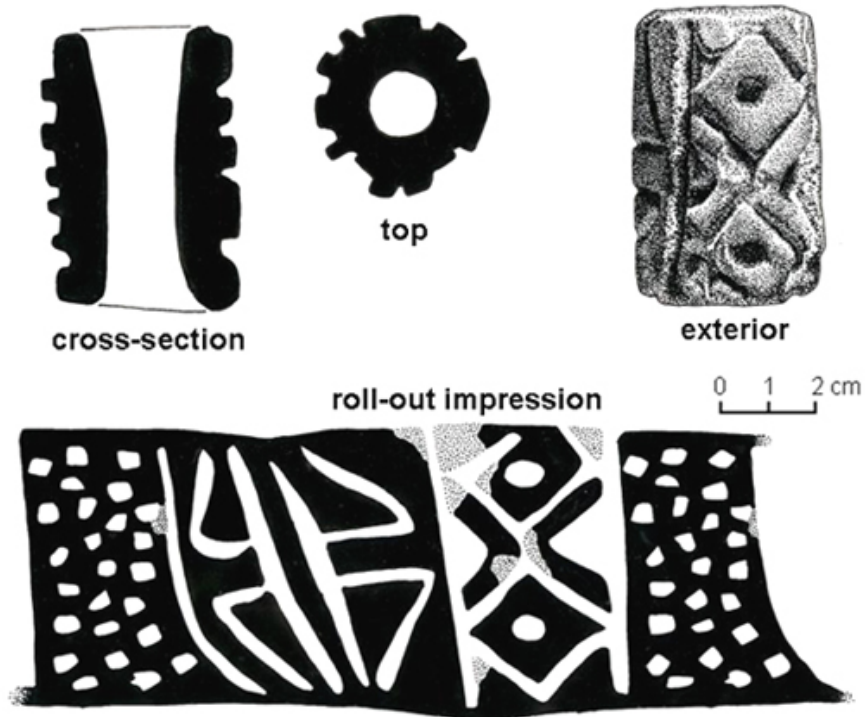


Figure 76. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

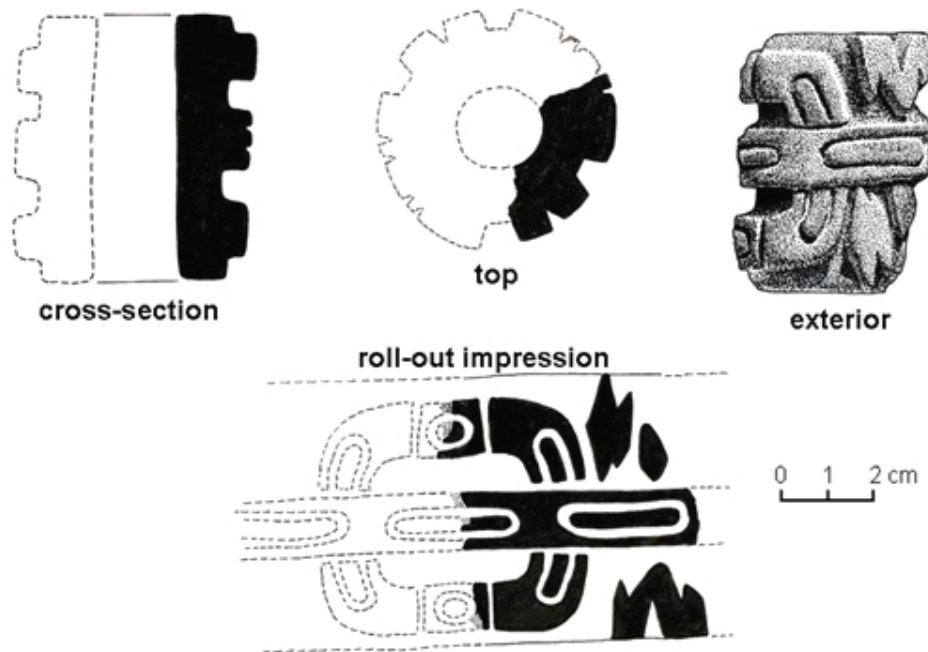


Figure 77. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

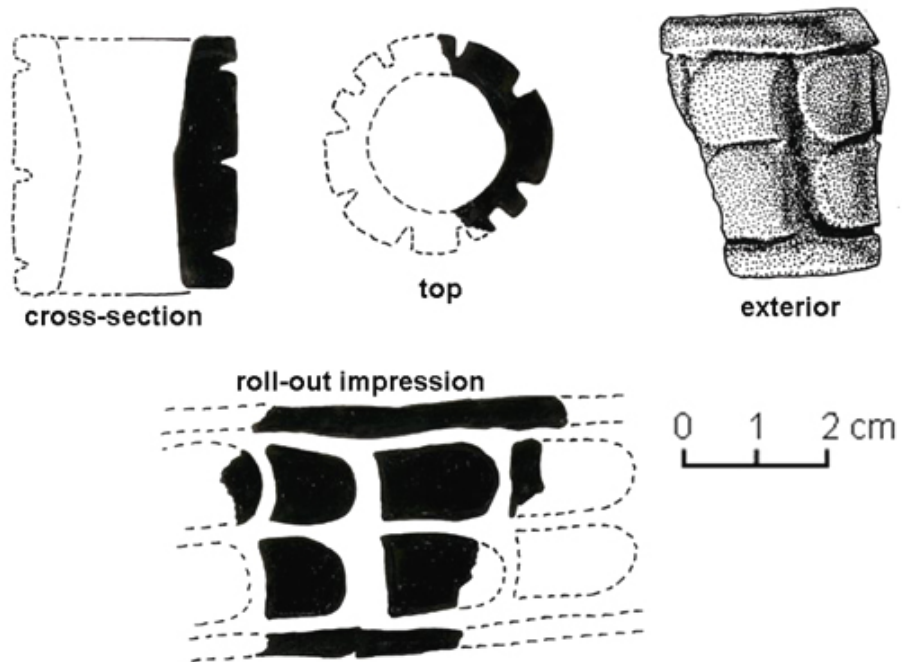


Figure 78. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

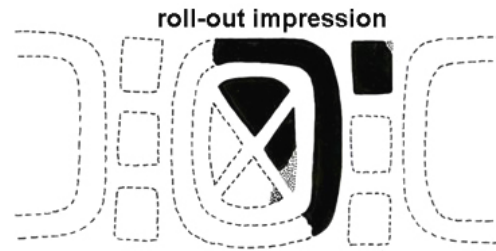
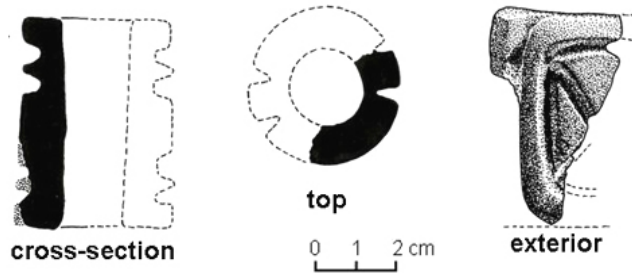


Figure 79. Cylindrical roller stamp, Cuadros phase.

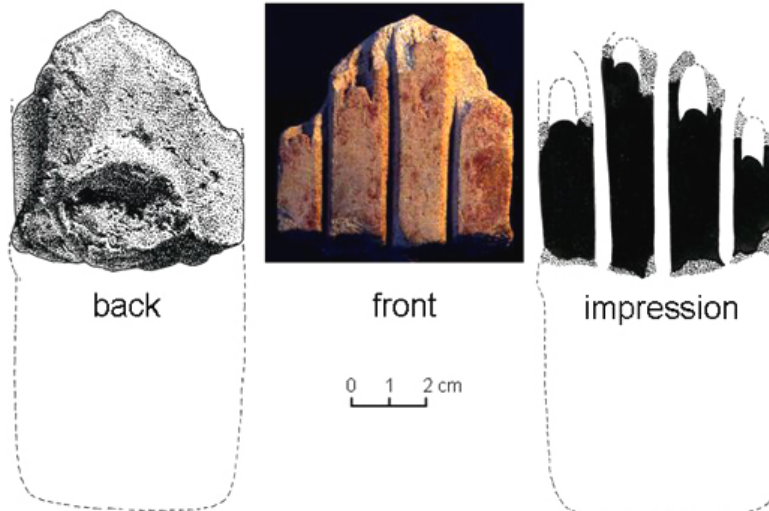
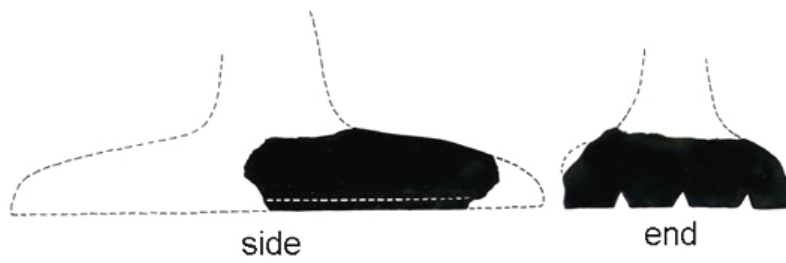


Figure 80. Flat stamp in the shape of human hand. Note fingernail excisions and extensive hematite staining.

## Summary

The nature of Gulf Olmec interaction with distant societies during the Early Olmec horizon has polarized scholars and will continue to do so until rigorous comparative methodologies are devised and tested in individual cases. The ongoing comparative analysis of material culture from Cantón Corralito and San Lorenzo provides a small but important step in this direction. It will provide detailed databases for future scholars interested in investigating early Gulf Olmec interaction with Chiapas or other regions of Mesoamerica and will add to a growing body of “colonial archaeology” case studies (e.g., Stein [ed.] 2005) that highlight the incredibly diverse nature of colonies, colonization, and related social identity issues. The illustrations and associated data in this report are but a tiny fraction of the data bearing on the question of possible Gulf Olmec occupation at Cantón Corralito. This project is in its infancy and it is my hope that as more visual data are generated and additional excavations are conducted more reports will be made available on the FAMSI website.

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