

## APPENDIX I

### LA VENTA CERAMICS, 1968

P. S. Hallinan, R. D. Ambro and J. F. O'Connell

During the 1968 season at La Venta eight test pits were dug in various areas to the south of the great pyramid. The purpose of this excavation was to sample the ceramics of the area under controlled conditions and to cross-check the results with the available data as to the nature of ceramics found at the site, and the possible presence of an earlier phase at La Venta in light of recent discoveries at San Lorenzo which establish a "pre-La Venta" ceramic complex called "San Lorenzo" (Coe 1967).

To this end six test pits (Nos. 1,2,3,4,5,7) were laid out south of the pyramid on what appeared to be two long ridges running on a north-south axis on either side of the centerline. The designations for these pits are prefixed by "1968" (e.g. 1968-1, 1968-2) to indicate the year in which they were excavated (see map 1). For convenience the prefixed year has been omitted in the following discussion.

The pits measured 3.0 by 1.2 meters and were dug in arbitrary levels of 20 cm. Due to the clayey nature of the soil encountered, screening for sherds was impossible, and they were gathered by carefully sorting through the back dirt as each shovelfull was removed from the excavation. This fact is mentioned because of the ever-present possibility of selective collecting, although there was a conscious attempt to avoid this. In all the pits the sherds found were in a poor state of preservation, and their poor condition increased as deeper levels were reached. Sherds were generally found to be small in size and badly eroded, to the point that any slip or paint that might have been on them would have long since disappeared. In fact, it was a frequent experience to remove a sherd from the matrix and observe a color (usually a bright red) remaining affixed to the enclosing clay, with little or no color left on the sherd itself.

Both of the ridges chosen for location of the test pits were heavily overgrown and were only brushed in the immediate area of excavation. This proved to be the undoing of the primary purpose of the test pits. They were excavated down to what appeared to be a sterile red-yellow mottled clay encountered at depths varying between 185 to 210 cm. This clay had an uneven surface in pits 1, 5, and 7 on the ridge west of the centerline. This ridge, as was true of the entire site, was covered by a blanket of drift sand, dark for the first 30 to 40 cm. and lightening until a clay level, usually between 80 and 100 cm., was reached. Sherds were encountered in the sand but became far more frequent as the clay was reached, with what appeared to be a definite level-heavy in

sherds and carbon—encountered at approximately 130 cm. There was evidence of disturbance throughout, pits with charcoal being common and extending from the sand into the clay, and from clay level to clay level. The levels themselves were extremely uneven within the individual test pits.

On the next to last day of the field season, Petroleos Mexicanos afforded us the use of a helicopter for aerial reconnaissance and photography. For the first time we were able to view the sites of the six pits from the air and immediately realized that what we had felt were natural ridges were in reality enormous rectangular earthen platforms. The test pits had barely penetrated the surface of these structures. What we had assumed to be naturally deposited clay was probably clay construction fill similar to that found during the excavation of Complex A in 1955 (Drucker, Heizer and Squier 1959).

The ceramics encountered in these pits fall well within the range of "La Venta" wares described by Drucker (1952). There appear to be no differences in the wares themselves, although a few wares of paste or decoration distinct from that described by Drucker were encountered. These, however, were small in number and insignificant in the total ceramic picture. They are indicated by starred entries in the tables below.

Test pit 1 produced 213 flat-based, flaring-sided dishes, simple direct rims being most common in the upper levels with an increase in wide everted and thick beveled rims at greater depths. Only 18 tecomate fragments were identified in the entire pit; they were slightly more common in the lower levels. Jars and bowls were present in all levels, increasing in proportion to dishes with depth. Of the sherds recovered, approximately 30 per cent were fine paste, higher in frequency in the upper levels and decreasing in the lower levels.

Two ceramic pieces from the 120-140 cm. level in pit 1 merit discussion. The first is a squat, shouldered bowl with a flat bottom and straight, vertical neck (pl. 8d). It is 10 cm. high and 13 cm. in diameter. The paste is finely tempered, and the vessel is gray on the outside and orange in the interior, due to firing technique. No signs of slip are present. The most significant feature of the vessel is the head of a monkey projecting from the upper part of the shoulder. The head has the typical swollen conical forehead seen frequently in Mesoamerican representations of monkeys. The ears, eyes, and nose are softly modeled, with a minimum of incision used in the ears and mouth. The head is solid, with no perforation for a spout; the tenon of the head is still visible on the vessel's interior.

The second piece from the 120-140 cm. level is a coarse orange figurine of a seated old woman (pl. 8a,b,). The figure is 9 cm. high and 9 cm. long

from the buttocks to the ankle of the left foot. The right arm and leg, as well as the left foot of the figurine, are missing. It has been classed as Type II (Drucker 1952). All details are delineated by incision, no punctuation being used. The sunken cheeks and flaccid, empty breasts clearly portray old age. The woman is seated with her left leg extended. The torso is rotated almost 45 degrees, and is bent forward to allow the left hand to rest on the calf of the extended leg. The head is turned slightly to the right. As the missing arm and leg are broken off at the torso, their positions can not be reconstructed.

## Test Pit 1: Wares

Depth (cm.)	0-	20-	40-	60-	80-	100-	120-	140-	160-
	20	40	60	80	100	120	140	160	180
Coarse buff	12	29	24	11	9	207	154	78	48
Coarse brown	56	82	91	145	105	143	260	368	177
Coarse black	3	9	9	12	15	49	89	63	42
Coarse white							1	24	6
Coarse red	17	7	2	6	2	14	41	5	5
Brown lacquer	4	7	1			27	14	3	1
Fine buff-orange	35	60	46	22	17	7	21	81	32
Fine gray-black	21	50	51	40	28	39	98	98	22
Painted		2		5			5		
Fine brown*			1						
Red slipped fine orange*				5	1				
Fine pink-red slip on white slip*								1	1
Fine white*								7	
Black rimmed buff ware*									1

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)



Test pit 5 was dug one meter to the west of pit 1. The top meter of drift sand was removed and sherds were collected beginning at 100 cm. As in pit 1 and the other pits, the sherds were in poor condition and very small. What was found approximated that of pit 1. There were 139 flat-based, flaring sided dishes, all but 39 with simple, direct rims. Only 18 tecomate fragments were discovered, distributed randomly throughout the trench. Bowls and jars are also present, more frequent in the upper levels. Sherds of fine paste, which make up about 25 per cent of the total collected, decreased percentagewise at lower levels. This may have been due in part to the state of preservation and tendency for the fine paste sherds to virtually disintegrate in the clayey soil.

Test Pit 5: Wares

Depth (cm.)	100- 120	120- 140	140- 160	160- 180
Coarse buff	58	146	189	41
Coarse brown	299	129	120	88
Coarse black	72	60	22	25
Coarse white	7	3	2	4
Coarse red	1		10	
Brown lacquer		2	9	4
Fine red*	1			
Fine brown*	2			
Hard coarse brown*			5	1
Fine buff-orange	109	31	13	12
Fine gray-black	56	13	12	7
White rimmed blackware*			8	
Painted				

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)

## Test Pit 5: Vessel Shapes

Depth (cm.)	100- 120	120- 140	140- 160	160- 180
Dishes (untypable)	7			1
Flat base, flaring sides, simple direct rim	16	26	43	8
Flat base, flaring sides, thick beveled rim	9	9	15	2
Flat base, flaring side, wide everted rim		2	1	1
Open curved side, thick rim			1	
Straight side, simple rim		1		
Bowls				
Incurved, returned sides	2			
Small, rounded	12		1	
Jars				
Neckless, thick direct rim	1			
Upleaned necks				1
Concave (returned) necks	12		1	1
Cylindrical				
Tecomates	4	8	2	2
Miscellaneous				
Pot rests		2		
Comales			1	

Test pit 7 was located some 15 meters east of pit 1, on what appeared at the time to be the highest point on the ridge. The first 80 cm., consisting of drift sand, were removed and a lens of mixed asphalt and burned yellow clay covering the north edge of the trench was noted. This may have been a floor of some sort. This lens was also underlain by more of the same drift sand. Unusual concentrations of sterile yellow and orange clay were encountered before we reached sterile red-yellow mottled clay at 220 cm. In light of later information on the nature of these ridges, these concentrations were probably fills used in construction.

There were few diagnostic sherds, all of those found being in poor condition. There were 49 flat-based, flaring-sided dishes, 25 of these having wide or thickened rims. Only 2 tecomate fragments were discovered, and about 25 per cent of the paste was fine. At a depth of 200 cm. three sherds of a coarse paste red ware were discovered. M. Coe (personal communication) has identified these as very similar to sherds found at San Lorenzo.

## Test Pit 7: Wares

Depth (cm.)	80- 100	100- 120	120- 140	140- 160	160- 180	180- 200
Coarse buff	16	5	45	77	27	1
Coarse brown	167	56	116	72	36	52
Coarse black	66	20	43	22	15	4
Coarse white	3	2	1		2	5
Coarse red		1	8		1	3
Brown lacquer	1			6		
Fine buff-orange	61	13	15	2	11	1
Fine gray-black	66	7	20	9	40	
Painted						1
Orange rimmed black ware*	1					
Coarse orange*					1	
White rimmed black ware*					1	

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)

## Test Pit 7: Vessel Shapes

Depth (cm.)	80-	100-	120-	140-	160-	180-
	100	120	140	160	180	200
Dishes (untypable)			2			1
Flat, flaring sides, simple direct rim	5	3	1	9	3	
Flat, flaring sides, thick beveled rim	1		3	14	1	
Flat, flaring sides, wide everted rim			4	2		
Bowls						
Heavy everted rim	1					
Rounded (small)	2	1				
Jars						
Concave (returned) neck	4					
Cylindrical			1			
Tecomates				2		
Miscellaneous						
Pot rests	1					

Test pit 2 was located on the rise to the east of the centerline. This pit was dug one meter square. Here the drift sand was 160 cm. deep, at which point the walls of the pit collapsed and it was abandoned. The sherds collected include 63 flat bottomed, flaring-sided dishes, all but 7 having simple direct rims. There were 8 tecomate fragments, and 22 per cent of the paste of the sherds was fine.

Test pit 8 was located in the depression along which passes the trail from the airstrip to the southern face of the pyramid. Along the trail was a small drainage ditch, cut to a depth of 70 cm. from the surface. A carbon sample collected from pit 8 in February, 1967, produced a radiocarbon date of 1110 B.C. (UCLA-1253). A test pit one meter square was sunk and 20 cm. of backdirt from the ditch and 110 cm. of drift sand were removed without recovering any sherds. At 130 cm. a charcoal-and-sand level was encountered. Sand mixed with clay continued down to 150 cm. where a dark gray clay containing sherds and carbon was encountered. This layer was 50 cm. thick. Undisturbed clay base was at 200 cm. Carbon was collected at the 130, 150, and 200 cm. levels.



## Test Pit 2: Wares

Depth (cm.)	0-40	40-60	60-80	80-100	100-120	120-140	140-160
Coarse buff	10	19	47	116	31	15	38
Coarse brown	17	66	71	86	30	63	45
Coarse black			16	6	8	2	3
Coarse white			1				
Coarse red			3				5
Brown lacquer							1
Fine buff-orange	1	21	9	6	21	30	12
Fine gray-black	3	16	10	5	1	23	7
Painted		3		7			
Red slipped, fine orange (sl)*				2			
Red slipped, hard coarse brown (sl)*				2		3	1
Fine brown						1	
Fine gray							1

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)

## Test Pit 2: Vessel Shapes

Dishes							
Flat, flaring sides, simple direct rim		5	10	14	5	12	13
Flat, flaring sides, thick beveled rim	1		2		2		2
Flat, flaring sides, wide everted rim				1			
Small, shallow, direct rim						2	
Bowls							
Incurved, returned sides							1
Small rounded			2	1		2	2
Effigy							1
Jars							
Concave (returned) necks						1	1
Tecomates		2	2	1		3	

## Test Pit 8: Wares

Depth (cm.)	130- 140	140- 150	150- 160	160- 180	180- 200
Coarse buff	21	23	41	38	107
Coarse brown	29	33	41	21	29
Coarse black	7	2	8	4	21
Coarse white		2	2		
Coarse red (with red slip)					8
Fine buff-orange	3				2
Fine gray-black	1				2
Hard coarse brown*		12			6
Coarse gray*		1			
Red slipped coarse paste*		1			

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)

## Test Pit 8: Vessel Shapes

Dishes					
Flat base, flaring sides, simple direct rim	4	4	4	1	4
Flat base, flaring sides, thick beveled rim			1		
Flat base, flaring sides, wide everted rim			1	1	3
Jars					
Upleaned necks					2
Tecomates	2	5	5		2

Some of the ceramics encountered in test pit 8 do not fit into Drucker's classification. Fine paste ware makes up only one to two per cent of all sherds encountered, the remainder being of coarse paste. In the lower part of the pit fine paste sherds are almost absent. The most striking feature of the ceramics encountered is the sharp increase in tecomates. Twenty-one flat-bottomed, flaring-sided dishes, all but three with simple direct rims, were found; 14 tecomate sherds were encountered, two of which were of coarse red paste with a bright red slip said to be characteristic of the San Lorenzo

phase (M. Coe, personal communication). The tecomate fragments were found at a depth of 190-200 cm. A dish with a flaring, very thick rim was noted by M. Coe as typical of the San Lorenzo phase (personal communication).

The sherds from test pit 8 were in a very poor state of preservation, making it extremely difficult to classify them as to ware. However, they came from a level considerably below the point from which the carbon that produced the date of 1110 B.C. (UCLA-1253) was collected. This, coupled with what appears to be a definite change in the frequency of wares and paste, indicates a strong possibility that an earlier ceramic complex underlies that encountered by Drucker in 1943, one that is probably identifiable with the San Lorenzo phase.

Test pit 6 was located about one kilometer south of the pyramid and several hundred meters west of the centerline, in an area which had recently been cleared by a bulldozer that removed some 150 cm. of overburden. Two sculptured monuments (Nos. 28, 29) had been uncovered during this work and sherds could be seen in the bank of the bulldozer cut.

A one meter square pit was excavated to a depth of 60 cm. where sterile clayey construction fill was encountered. Due to the press of time and difficulties encountered with the local authorities, the test pit was not excavated to a greater depth. Eighteen flat-bottomed, flaring-sided dishes were found; 7 had thick or wide rims. Only a single tecomate fragment was encountered, but six sherds of a fine paste ware with red slip on both sides were recovered; these approximate those of similar nature found at San Lorenzo (M. Coe, personal communication). About one-half of the sherds from this pit were of fine paste.

It is possible that the conditions for preservation were better in test pit 6 than in the previously reported pits, for there is a high frequency of red and white slips on bowls, dishes, and non-diagnostic sherds. One sherd of fine black paste with an orange rim, probably produced by the same method as white rimmed black ware, was found.

The other focus of attention during the 1968 field season was the Stirling Group, a newly recognized complex southeast of the pyramid. During the course of excavation of several drains and sculptures, a small number of ceramics were recovered. One ceramic test pit was begun, but we were unable to complete it due to interruption of our work by the local authorities.

The ceramic samples recovered may be divided into two lots. The first consists of a series of samples from four levels from the small ceramic test pit in the corner of test pit 9, in the immediate vicinity of Monuments 39-41,

## Test Pit 6: Wares

Depth (cm.)	0-20	20-40	40-60
Coarse buff	13	5	25
Coarse brown	68	17	40
Coarse black	17		11
Coarse white	1		
Fine buff-orange	66	5	6
Fine gray-black	22	15	10
Painted		1	
Red over white slip on coarse brown*	10		
Buff-orange rim on fine black ware*	1		
Red slipped fine orange*	1		
Hard coarse brown*			1
"S.L." red slipped coarse brown*			6

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)

## Test Pit 6: Vessel Shapes

Dishes			
Flat dish, flaring sides, simple direct rim	3	9	2
Flat dish, flaring sides, thick beveled rim		1	2
Open curved, thick rim	1	3	
Bowls			
Incurved, angular shoulders		1	
Heavy everted rim		1	
Jars			
Concave (returned) necks			2
Tecomates			
		1	
Miscellaneous			
Leg of vessel		1	
Pot rest			1
Effigy			1

and 44. Test pit 9 was begun at the approximate base level of the sculpture. The sequence begins with the 120-140 cm. level and terminates with a sample recovered 180-225 cm. from the surface.

The second lot of ceramic samples recovered at the Stirling Group is, in reality, a random lot of sherds collected at different levels and at scattered points in the test pits excavated to expose the sculpture and drain systems. The scanty and scattered nature of the samples allows only the most general and tentative statements concerning the pottery of the Stirling Group.

The small sample of sherds from test pit 9 fits the categories of shapes and wares recognized by Drucker (1952) and ourselves in sherds from the other portions of the La Venta site. Of the 207 sherds recovered, 75 per cent were coarse wares. Coarse brown is predominant, representing a full 50 per cent of the total sample, coarse buff around 25 per cent, and coarse black less than one per cent. It is possible that coarse red and white sherds were present, but poor preservation of their surfaces would have resulted in their being placed in the unslipped categories. Approximately 25 per cent of the sherds recovered from test pit 9 were fine paste with fine buff-orange and gray-black representing 13 and 12 per cent, respectively. It appears that the fine paste sherds diminish in number in the lower levels. Miscellaneous sherds accounted for less than one per cent of the sample.

The majority of the sherds analyzed were body sherds and vessel shapes which cannot be reconstructed. Eight flat-based dishes with flaring sides, of which three had direct rims, four had thick beveled rims, and one had a wide everted rim, were identified. Sherds from two small rounded bowls were recovered, as were one cylindrical jar and one tecomate.

The second lot of samples is even more random and scanty. On the chart below (p. 170) the sherd samples have been arranged in an attempt to relate them stratigraphically.

A total of 124 sherds were recovered from construction fills at various locations at the Stirling Group. Coarse wares appear to have predominated in all samples except the group collected from the pit at the east end of Drain No. 1 which was recovered at a depth of 180-250 cm. Fine paste wares predominated at that point. Of interest are six coarse red sherds from the deep sounding 30 feet west of the west end of Drain No. 1, from a depth of 360-420 cm. These are the only such sherds encountered in the Stirling Group.

The number of diagnostic sherds is quite small, permitting only the observation that dishes again appear to be the most common. Eight flat-based dishes with flaring sides and direct rims were recovered, as were five with a thick beveled rim. One bowl with returned sides and angular

## Test Pit 9: Wares

Depth (cm.)	120-140	140-160	160-180	180-225
Coarse buff	8		7	34
Coarse brown	23	36	12	34
Coarse black	1	1	1	
Fine buff-orange	14	8	3	
Fine gray-black	15	3	1	2
Red slip on white on fine buff-orange*	1			
Angular coarse brown*	1			
Red slip on fine orange*	1		1	

\*Ceramic types not noted by Drucker (1952)

## Test Pit 9: Vessel Shapes

Depth (cm.)	120-140	140-160	160-180	287-325
Dishes				
Flat base, flared side, direct rim				3
Flat base, flared side, thick beveled rim	1			3
Flat base, flaring side, wide everted rim	1			
Bowls				
Rounded (small)	1	1		
Jars				
Cylindrical	1			
Tecomates				1

## Miscellaneous Samples from the Stirling Group

## Wares

Depth (cm.)	Upper drift sands	Near Mon. 45 (d. 50)	Mottled clay covering Drain #1	Excav. for Drain #2 (d. 80)	Pit E. end Drain 1 180-250	Pit 30' W. end of Drain 1 360-420
Coarse paste						
Coarse buff			13		1	7
Coarse brown	1	2	40		3	11
Coarse black			1		1	
Totals	1	2	54		5	18
Fine paste						
Fine buff-orange	3	3	10	1	2	
Fine gray-black		5	7		15	
Totals	3	8	17	1	17	
Polychrome	1					

shoulder, as well as two small rounded bowls, was found. Also present were two ring stand fragments, one tecomate, and two fragments of an effigy vessel preserving portions of an eye and a nose.

In the drift sands overlying the clay construction and presumably post-dating the construction period of the site, five pieces of ceramics were recovered. Significant was a large coarse brown jar that stands 36 cm. high and is 25 cm. in diameter at its widest point (pl. 8c). It has a tall, upleaned neck, marked rounded shoulder, and a small flat base with the lower portion of the vessel being slightly concave in profile. It was found at a depth of 67 cm. in the upper drift sands in association with mano and metate fragments, and possibly constitutes a post-Olmec cache or offering like those encountered in earlier excavations (Heizer, Drucker and Squier 1959). One small sherd of fine paste was recovered from the drift sands. It had dark orange, red, and black linear polychrome decoration, with a background of orange paste. The sherd was a portion of a dish, with a thick beveled rim. Also recovered from the drift sands were a fragment of a dish with a wide

## Miscellaneous Samples from the Stirling Group

## Vessel Shapes

Depth (cm.)	Upper drift sands	Near Mon. 45 (d. 50)	Mottled clay covering Drain #1	Pit for Drain #2 (d. 80)	Pit E. end of Drain #1 180-250
<b>Dishes</b>					
Flat, flaring sides, simple direct rim		1	5		2
Flat, flaring sides, thick beveled rim	1		4		1
Flat, flaring sides, wide everted rim	1				
<b>Bowls</b>					
Returned sides, angular shoulder		1			
Small rounded bowl			1		1
<b>Tecomate</b>					
			1		1
<b>Miscellaneous</b>					
Ring stands			1		
Hollow vessel support	1				
Effigy vessel				1	

everted rim and a hollow support for a bowl or dish. With the exception of the jar, the sherds encountered in the drift sands at the Stirling Group were of fine buff-orange paste.

The abandonment of the site, the polychrome sherd, and the hollow leg support, suggest that the drift sands and the occasional visits to the site represented by these sherds date to post-La Venta phase times. Radiocarbon samples UCLA-1350 and Y-2378 indicate some occupation of the La Venta area in Late Classic times.