

Early 19th Century Ceramic Sherds from a Site in Zapata County, Texas

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During the summer of 2020, an archeological site was investigated by collectors near Falcon Reservoir in Zapata County (Figure 1), in the South Texas Brush Country, for the prehistoric artifacts it was known to contain. In the course of recovering prehistoric artifacts from subsurface deposits, it was noted that a number of historic 19th century ceramic sherds of Mexican manufacture were present on the site surface (Figures 2 and 3). Through the efforts of David L. Calame of Borderland Archaeology, a sample of these sherds were obtained from the collectors and made available for analysis and documentation. The sherds were returned to the collector at the conclusion of this study.

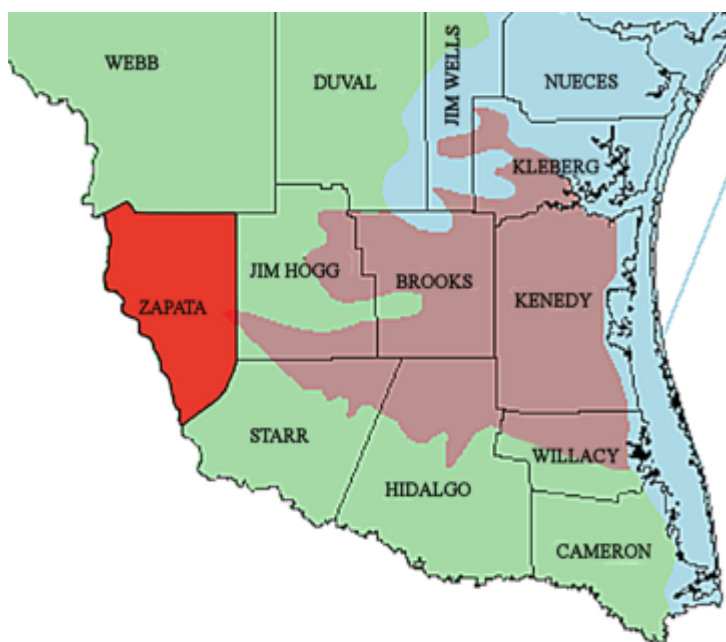


Figure 1. Zapata County in South Texas.

The remainder of this article discusses and illustrates the sherds from several historic ceramic wares found on the surface of the site. Based on Fox and Ulrich (2008), these ceramics most likely date from 1800-1850, and they are likely from a rancho or historic settlement on the north side of the Rio Grande in the Falcon Reservoir area (Perttula et al. 1999:Figure 1).



Figure 2. Galera ware sherds on the site surface.



Figure 3. Historic ceramic sherds on the surface of the site in Zapata County, Texas.

Sherd Assemblage

There are only 18 sherds in the assemblage from the site, but it is a diverse assemblage nonetheless. First, there are two majolica sherds, one a plain body sherd with a light orange brown or terracotta paste (Figure 4a), and an eroded body sherd from a Guanajuato Polychrome plate with a terracotta paste, a yellowish surface color, and remnants of yellow, brown, and green designs (Figure 4b) (see Fox and Ulrich 2008:108 and Figure 4-36). According to Fox and Ulrich (2008:Figure 4-1), this majolica was made in Mexico between 1800-1850.

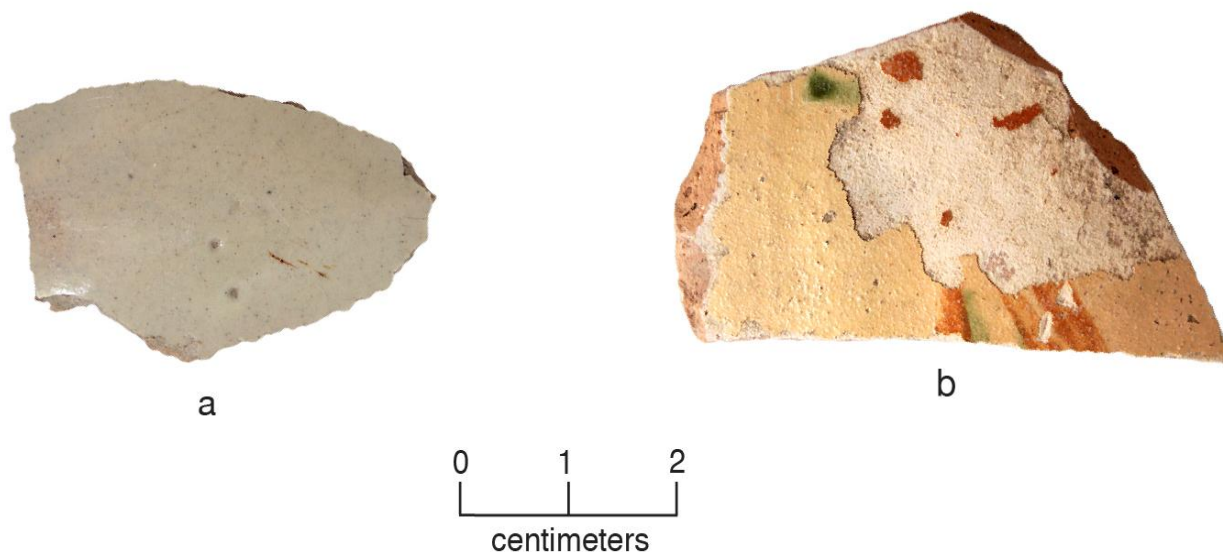


Figure 4. Majolica sherds: a, plain with a gray surface; b, Guanajuato Polychrome sherd.

Four sherds are from lead-glazed Galera ware vessels (see Fox and Ulrich 2008:50 and Figure 4-7b, g) with gray and yellow pastes and orange surface colors. Such ware is thought to have been made in Mexico between 1725-1850. Two sherds from *chocolateras* have black lines and/or swirls as well as small cream-colored dots (Figure 5a-b). The other two sherds may be from bean pots, and they have a dark brown painted band on the exterior surface at the rim (Figure 5c-d). Three other plain and orange lead-glazed sherds may also be from Galera vessels, or an undetermined lead-glazed ware; they have gray and yellow pastes.

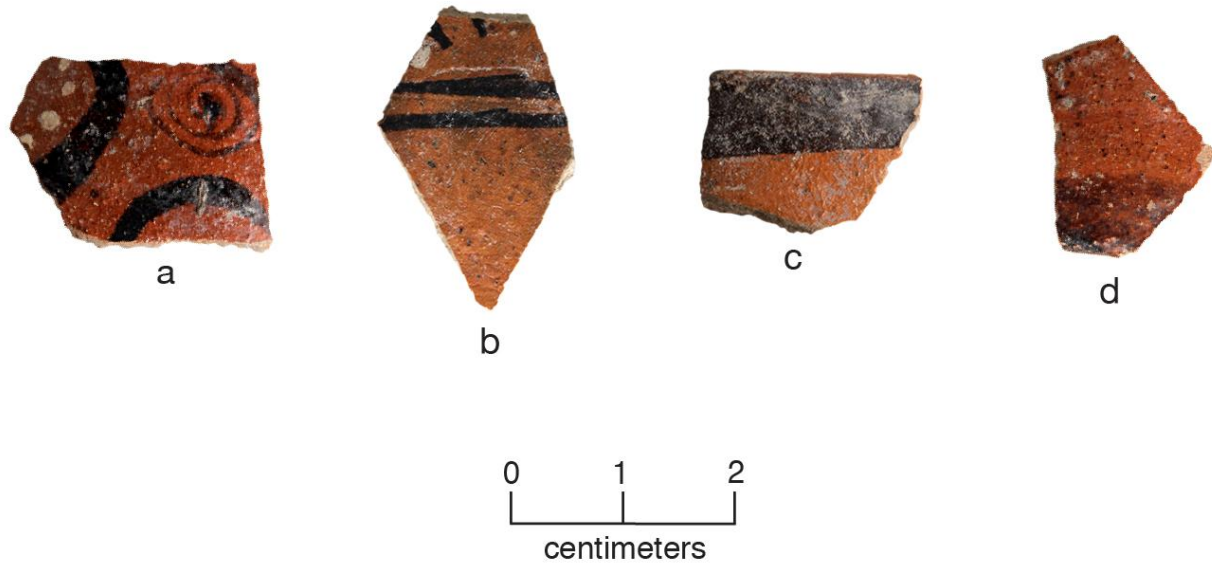


Figure 5. Galera ware sherds.

The assemblage also has five sherds of wheel-made coarse earthenware. The sherds have relatively thick bodies as well as a green lead glaze on interior or exterior surfaces (Figure 6a-b).

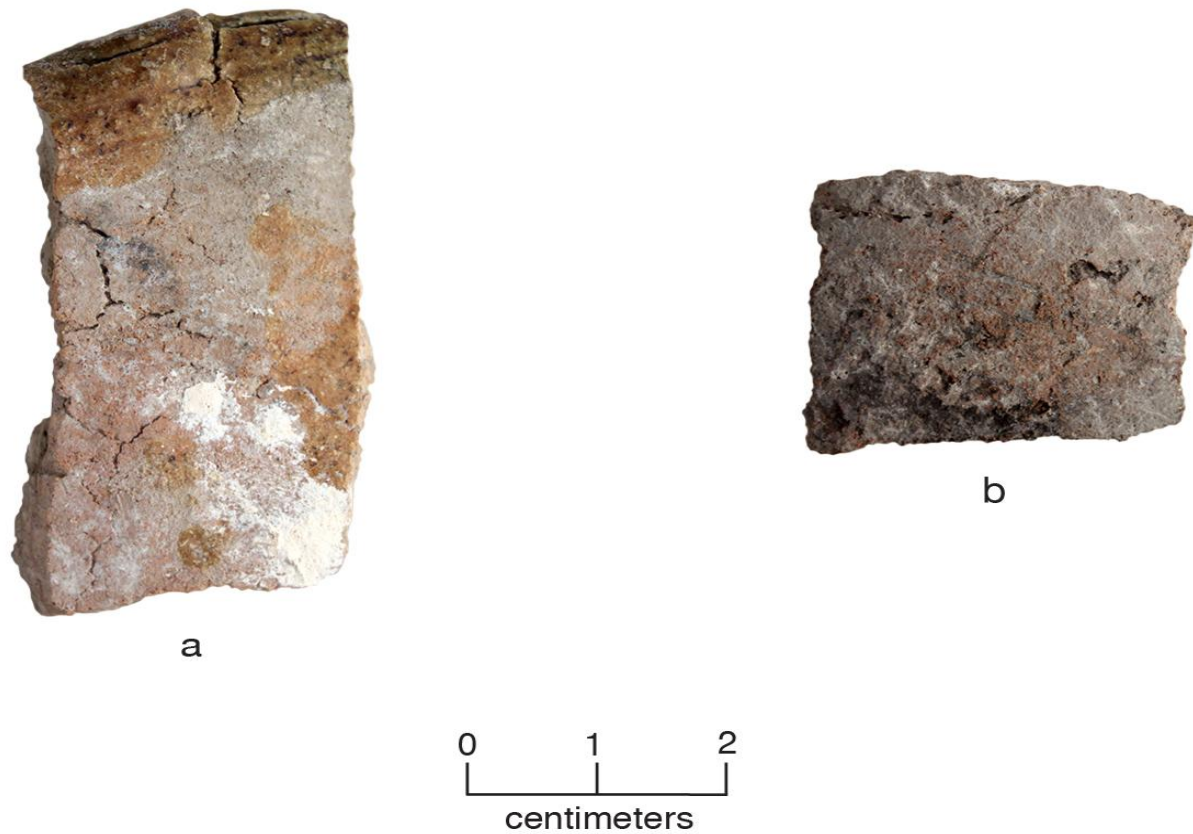


Figure 6. Wheel-made coarse earthenware sherds.

The remaining four sherds are from hand-made coarse earthenwares, dubbed Mier Plain by Perttula et al. (1999:335). This ware is common in late 18th to mid-19th century ceramic assemblages on the lower Rio Grande and other sites in South Texas, and “the hand-made coarse earthenwares were made locally by Hispanic and Tejano potters for local domestic consumption” (Perttula et al. 1999:335). None of the sherds have a glaze on either interior or exterior surfaces, but two of the sherds have brushing or wiping marks (Figure 7a-b).

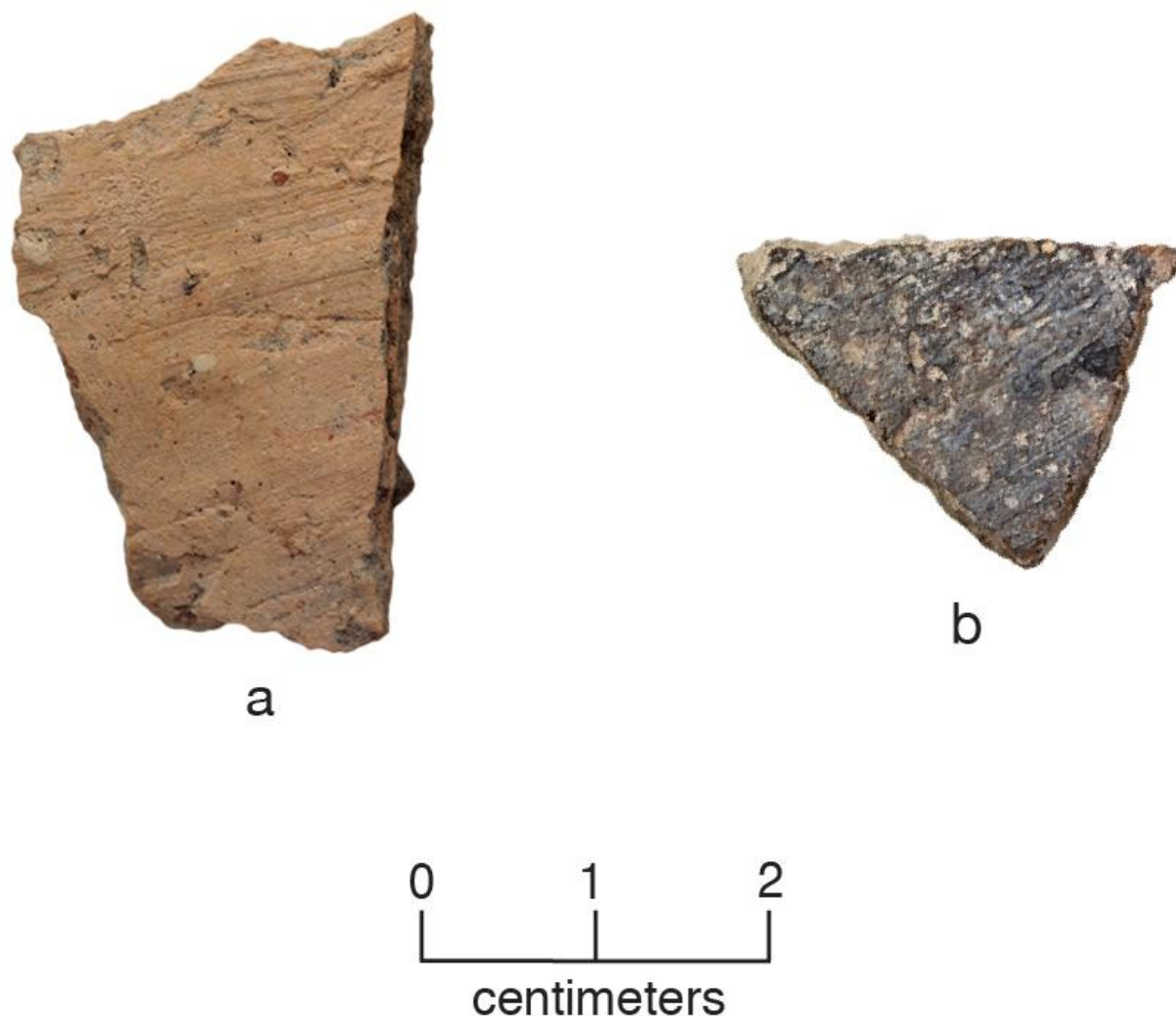


Figure 7. Hand-made coarse earthenware sherds with interior and/or exterior brushing or wiping marks.

In summary, recent work by collectors at an archeological site near Falcon Reservoir in Zapata County, Texas, recovered a small sample of majolica, lead-glazed sherds, and wheel-made and hand-made coarse earthenware sherds that have now been analyzed and documented. Recognized types in the assemblage include Guanajuato Polychrome, Galera ware, and Mier Plain, made either in Mexico, or in the case of the latter, likely manufactured locally by Hispanic and Tejano potters. Such ceramics types were common in the period between 1800-1850 on

numerous settlements and ranchos in the lower Rio Grande valley of South Texas and northeastern Mexico.

Acknowledgments

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