



INDEX OF TEXAS ARCHAEOLOGY

Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State

Volume 2015

Article 25

2015

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Diversity in Ancestral Caddo Vessel Forms in East Texas Archaeological Sites

Timothy K. Perttula

INTRODUCTION

Ceramic vessels from ancestral Caddo sites in East Texas are diverse in form, size, manufacture, and decoration, both spatially and temporally. Variation in these attributes, including vessel form, also “is connected with particular local and regional traditions” (Brown 1996:335). In this study, I am concerned with defining the character and formal identification of Caddo vessel forms on sites in the region. To both appreciate and understand the meaning of vessel form diversity in Caddo vessel assemblages in East Texas—or any other part of the much larger southern Caddo area (Figure 1)—the consistent identification of different vessel forms and vessel shapes is crucial. The formal identification of the diverse vessel forms and vessel shapes, in conjunction with other vessel attributes, most notably decorative motifs and elements, present in Caddo vessel assemblages should contribute to delimiting the existence and spatial distribution of communities of Caddo potters that were sharing or not sharing ceramic practices and traditions in both short-term and long-term spatial scales, and illuminating small or expansive networks of social groups tied together through regional interaction.

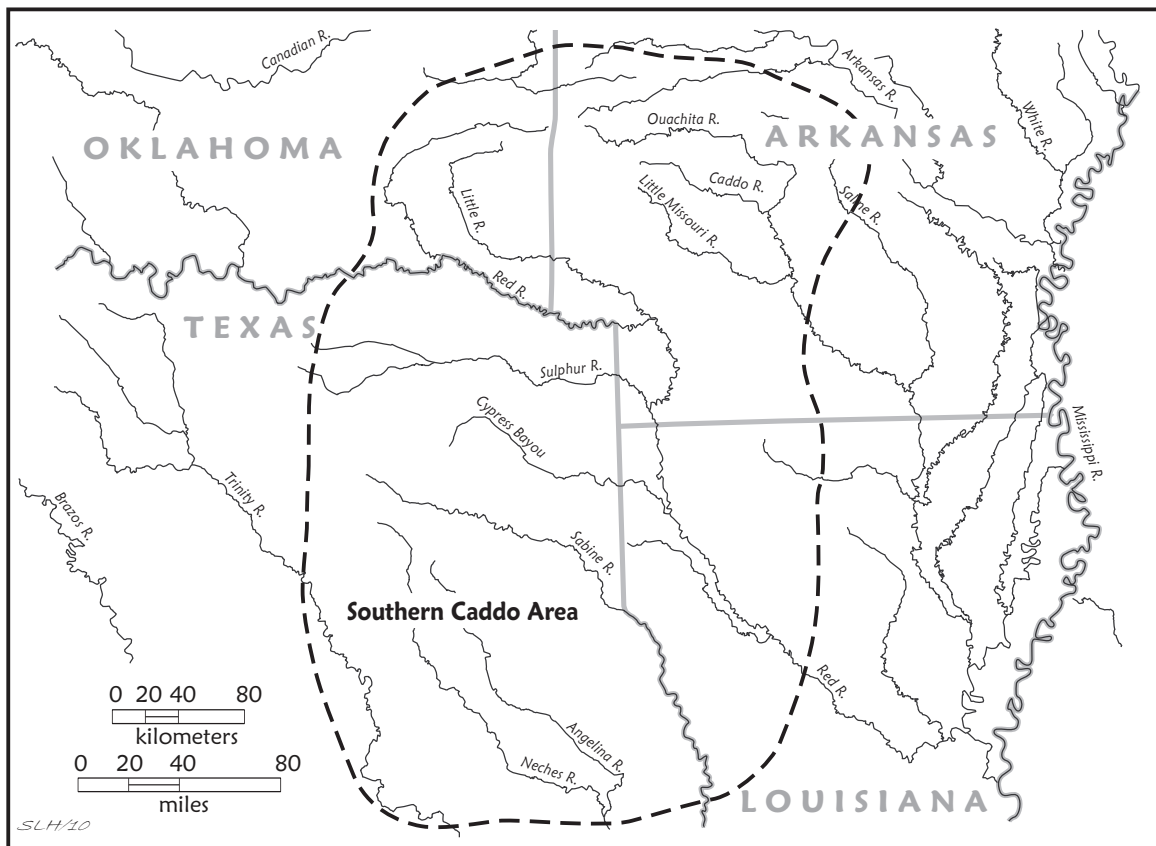


Figure 1. East Texas and the southern Caddo area.

VESSEL FORMS

For the purposes of this study of East Texas vessel forms, I have relied on an examination of photographic images from diverse sources. I began with the venerable handbook of ceramic types codified by Suhm and Jelks (1962) and continued through the latest findings from state-of-the-art Cultural Resource Management research efforts in East Texas (e.g., Fields and Gadus 2012; Fields et al. 2014), as well as including vessel documentation studies from East Texas museums done under the auspices of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (see Perttula et al. 2014).

I have recognized nine distinctive vessel forms, as well as 105 vessel shapes within the vessel form categories, from ancestral East Texas Caddo sites dating in general from ca. A.D. 900-1800, irrespective of the known or estimated age or cultural taxon of the sites from which the vessel forms and shapes were recognized. The first distinction is between open containers (bowls, deep bowls, carinated bowls, and compound bowls, etc.) and restricted containers, including jars, bottles, and ollas of several shapes and sizes; conjoined vessels can be both open and restricted containers. As restricted containers, jars allow access by hand but bottles and ollas do not (Brown 1996:335). Key attributes in distinguishing the many vessel shapes among the different vessel forms include such attributes as plan view or silhouette, vessel contour, the presence of appendages or pedestals, rim height, rim profile, and lip profile.

Bottles

Bottles have the most formal diversity of all the vessel forms in ancestral East Texas Caddo sites. Currently, there are 27 bottle shapes from these sites. The differences between them are primarily in the length of the bottle neck, rim and lip treatment, and body form. Most of the bottles have generally globular bodies and straight necks, although one form is a neckless bottle (BT 26), but several bottle forms, all from the upper Neches River basin, have cylindrical bodies (BT 15, BT 16, BT 19, BT 21-BT 22) with short necks or no necks at all.

Another distinctive bottle shape is a small narrow bottle with a short everted rim (see Figure 2aa). Examples of these bottles, which stand between 11-11.6 cm in height, have been found at only one Historic Caddo site in the Black Bayou basin in East Texas (Perttula et al. 2010:22 and Figure 17a-b).

Bowls

There are 13 bowl shapes defined at present from East Texas Caddo vessel assemblages (Figure 3). Most are simple bowls with rounded body wall contours, but one is square in shape (Figure 3b), and another has a pedestal base (Figure 3j). A very rare bowl form has a stemmed base (Figure 3m); this vessel shape—as well as similar stemmed carinated bowl and compound bowl shapes—is sometimes referred to as a chalice form (Turner 1978:Figure 34; Fields 2008:Figure 3).

Several bowl shapes have elaborate rim and lip treatments (see Figure 3a, h, j). These treatments include vessels with four rim peaks (see Figure 3a, j) and opposed lip tabs (see Figure 3h).

Carinated Bowls

The shapes of carinated bowls from ancestral East Texas Caddo sites are morphologically diverse. The 21 carinated bowl vessel shapes have different rim heights and profiles (i.e., inverted, vertical, or everted) (Figure 4). Probably among the most distinctive carinated bowl vessel shapes are the hubcap form (Figure 4s), a feature of Simms Engraved vessels in Late Caddo and Historic Caddo period vessel assemblages, and vessels with short vertical and nearly horizontal rim profiles (Figure 4t). CB 21 is a stemmed carinated bowl form (Figure 4u).

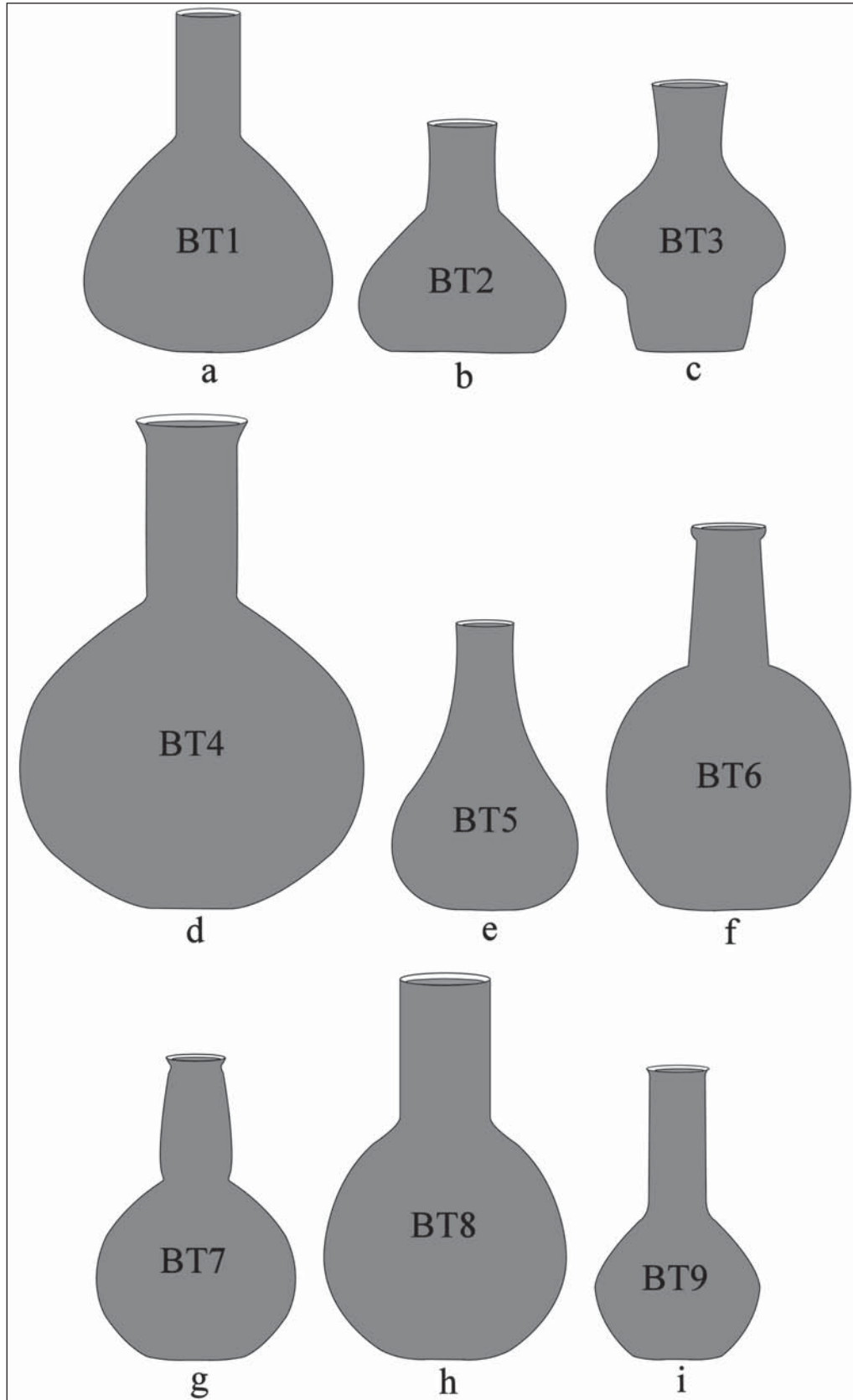


Figure 2. Bottle shapes a, BT 1-BT 9.

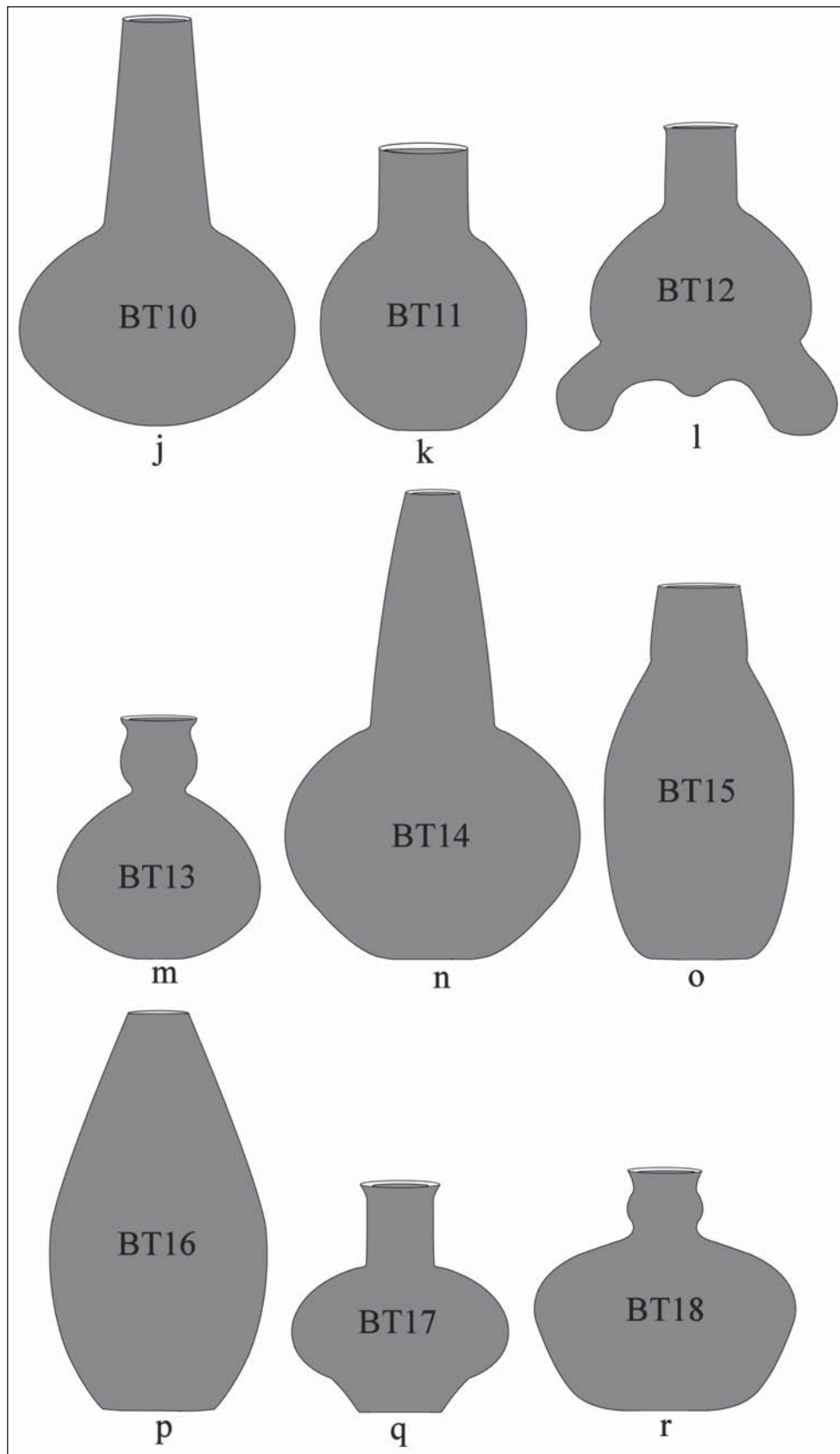


Figure 2, cont. Bottle shapes b, BT 10-BT 18.

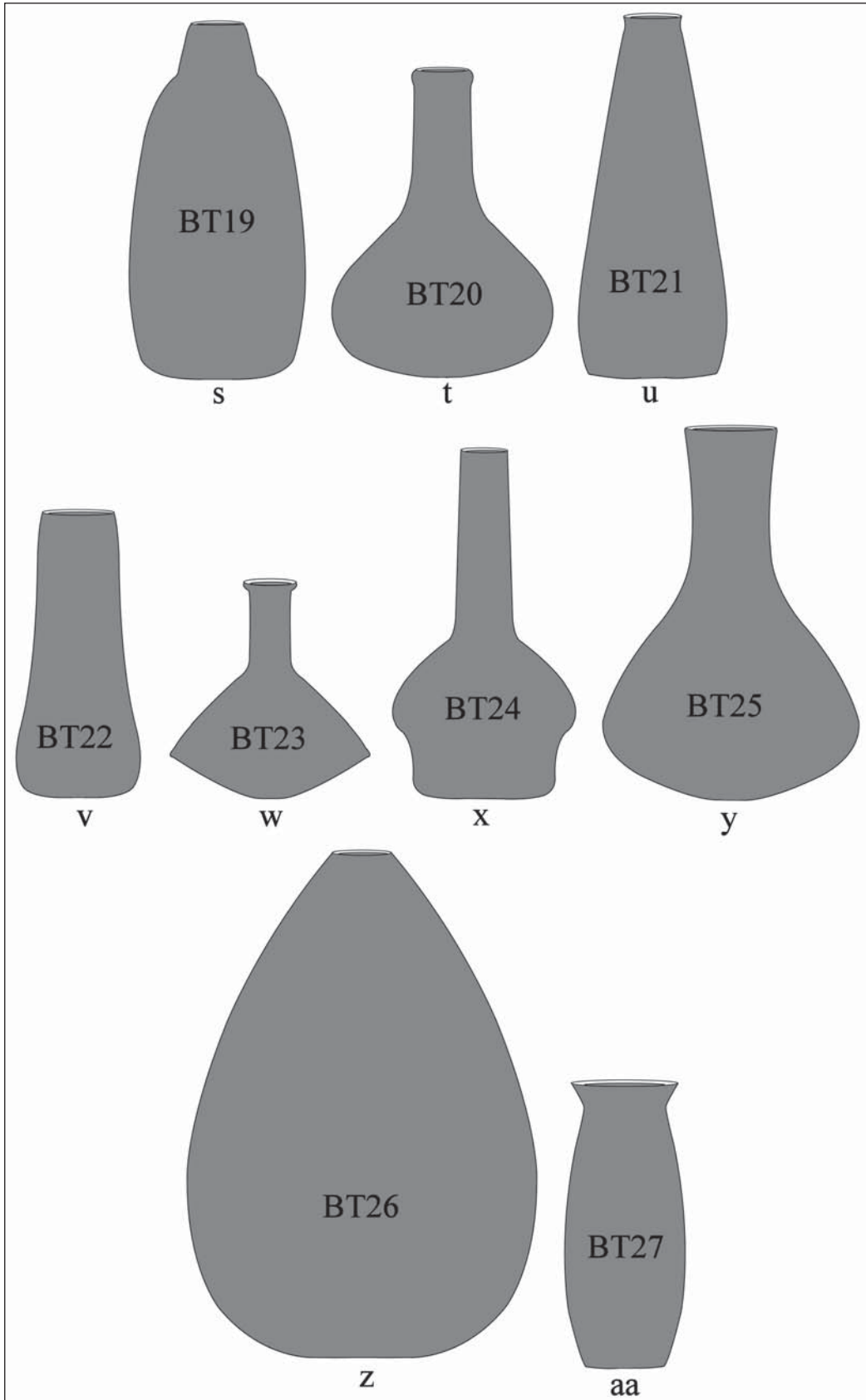


Figure 2, cont. Bottle shapes c, BT 19-BT 27.

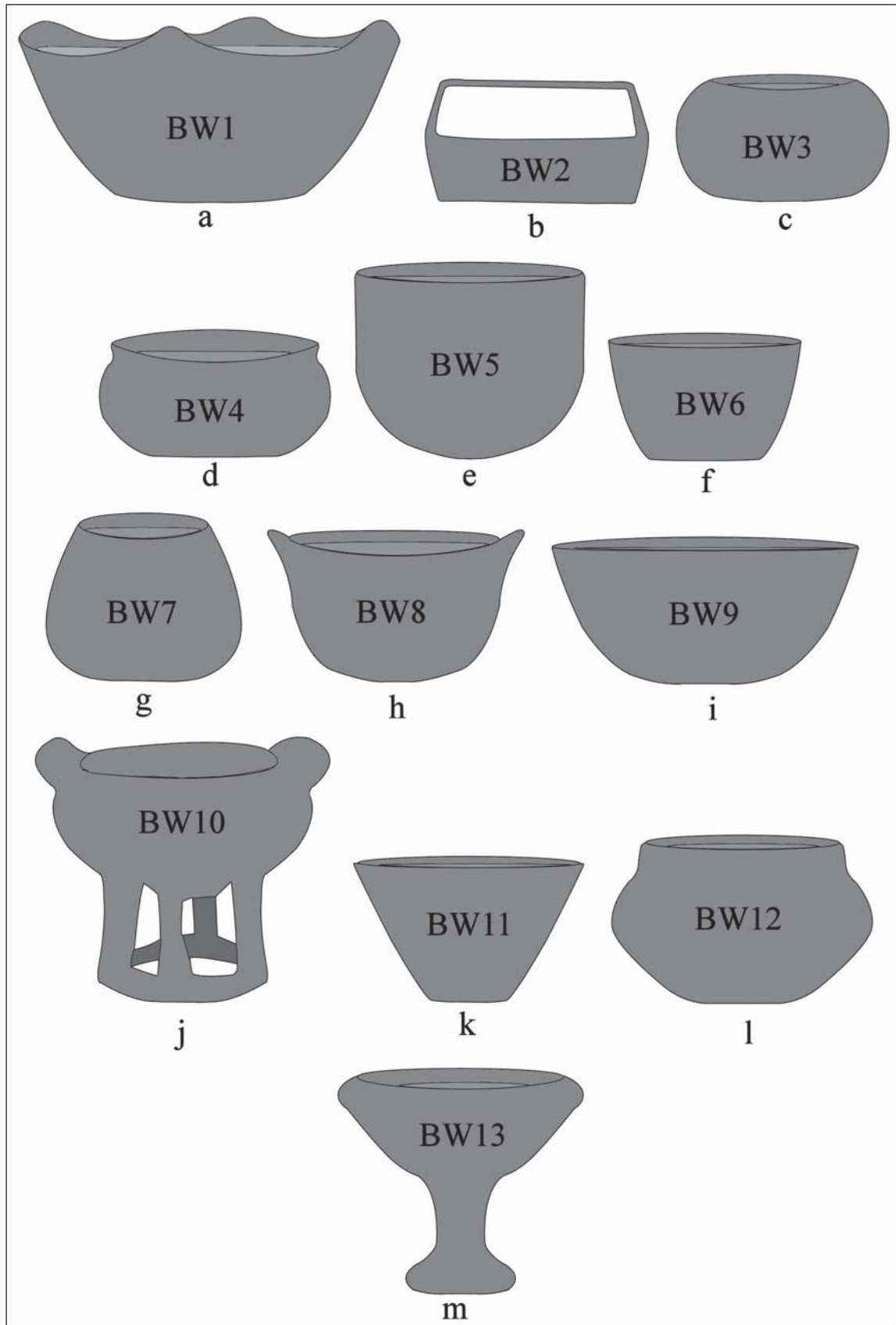


Figure 3. Bowl shapes (BW 1-BW 13).

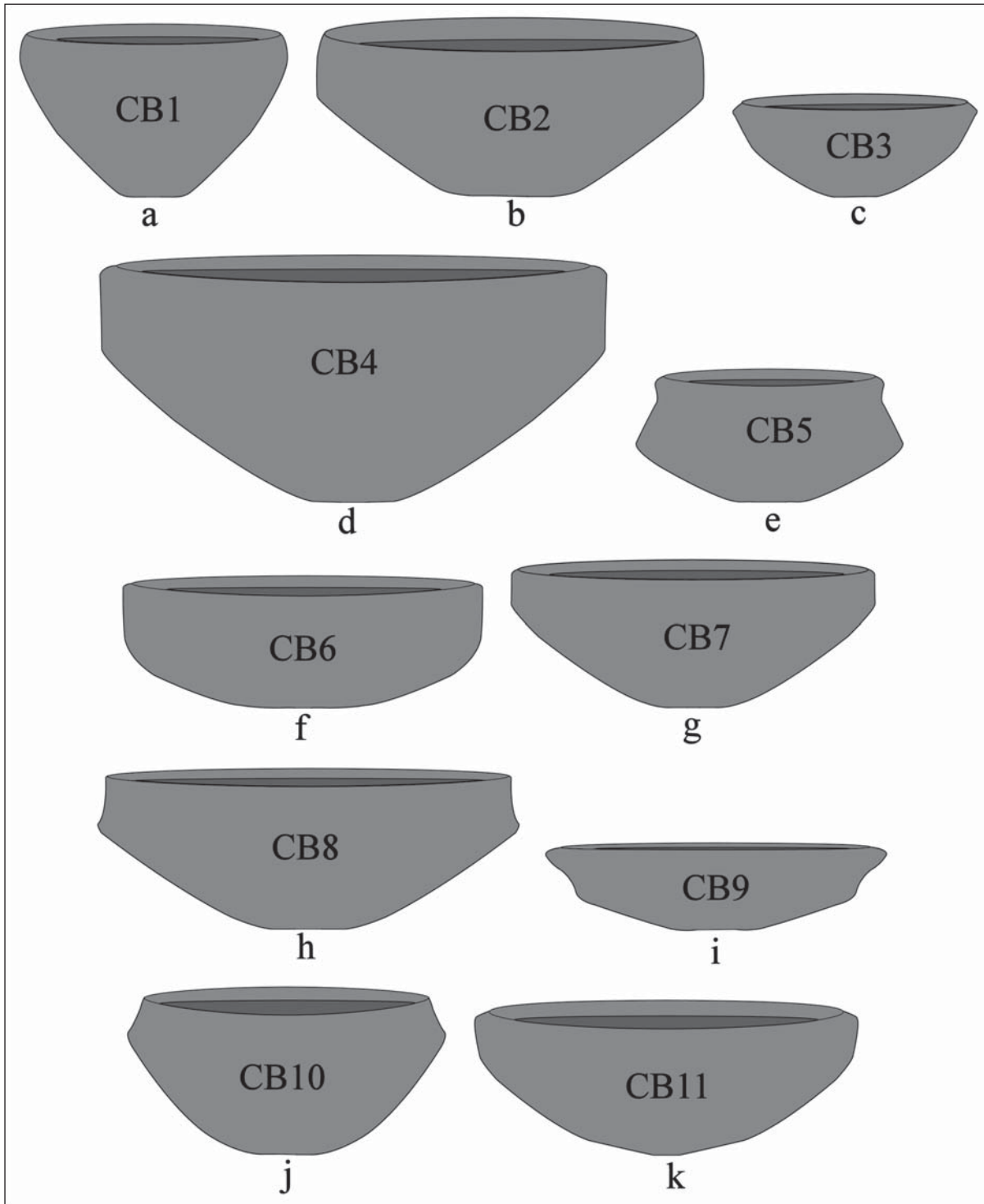


Figure 4. Carinated bowl shapes a, CB 1-CB 11.

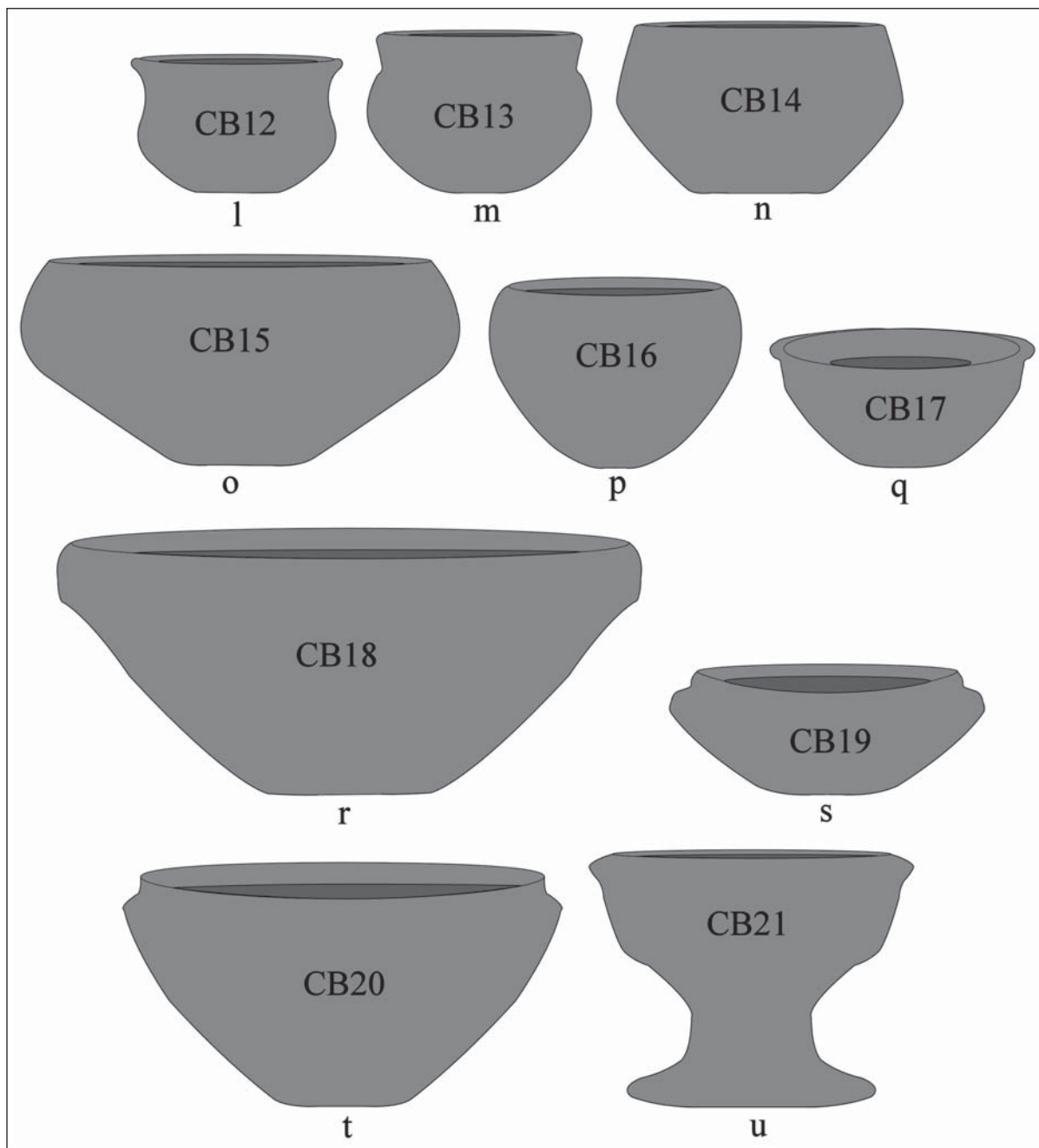


Figure 4, cont. Carinated bowl shapes b, CB 12-CB 21.

Compound Bowls

The compound vessel shapes in East Texas Caddo vessel assemblages have two rim panels (upper and lower rim panels) of varying heights and rim profiles (Figure 5a-c). One compound bowl shape has rim peaks (Figure 5d), and another has a stemmed base (Figure 5e).

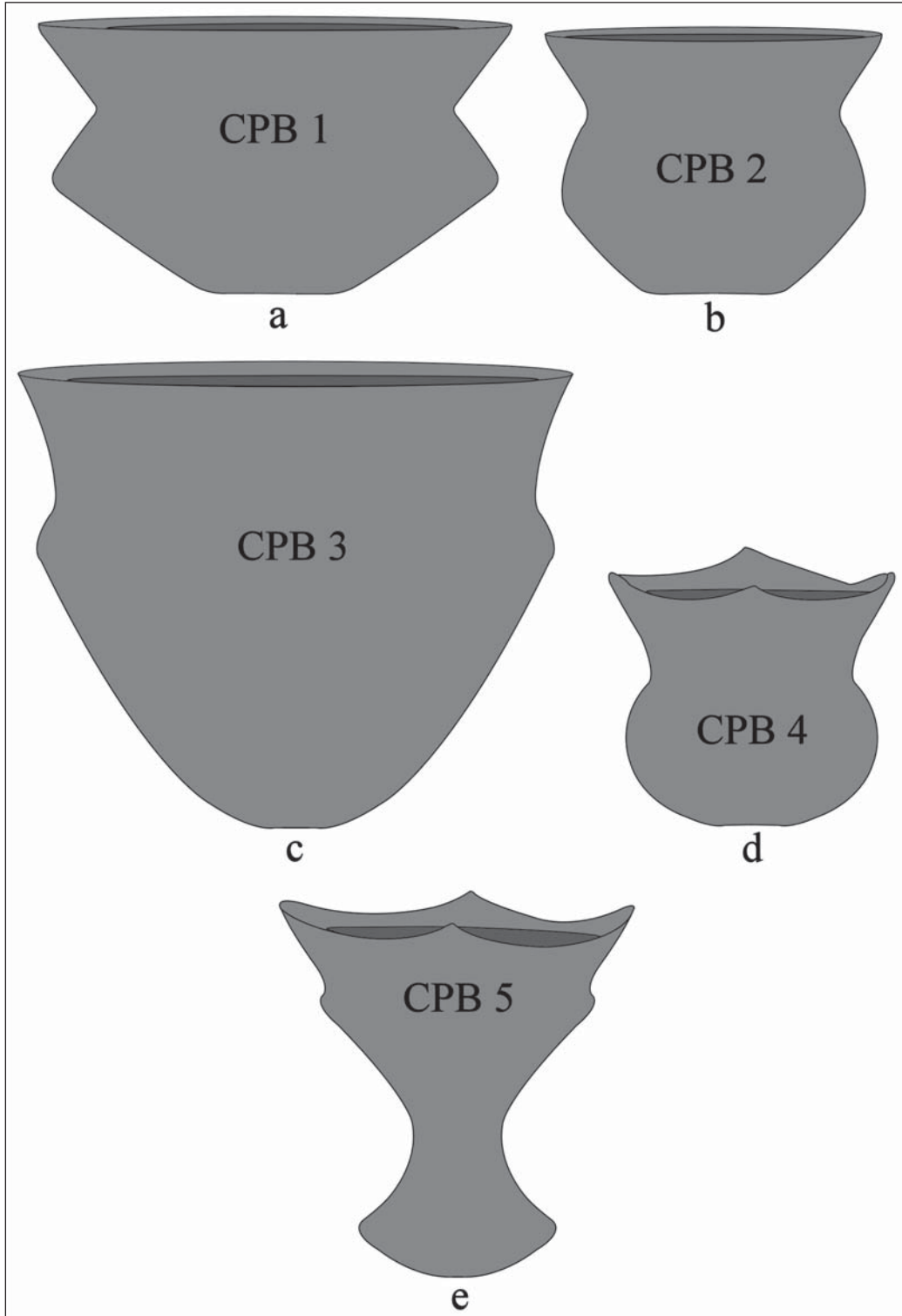


Figure 5. Compound bowl shapes (CPB 1-CPB 5).

Conjoined Vessels

The conjoined vessels are certainly the most unique vessel form in the East Texas ceramic vessel dataset. These vessels represent both the conjoining of bottle bodies atop one another (Figure 6a), and multiple bottle bodies and necks joined together with one common shared bottle neck opening (Figure 6b), as well as the conjoining of bowl and carinated bowl forms atop one another (Figures 6c-d) and the conjoining of a carinated bowl and a jar (Figure 6f). These latter forms, as well as the conjoined bottles form (Figure 6a) are from Late Caddo and Historic Caddo period contexts. CV 5 (Figure 6e) represents the side-by-side conjoining of two J 13 (see Figure 9m, below) jars.

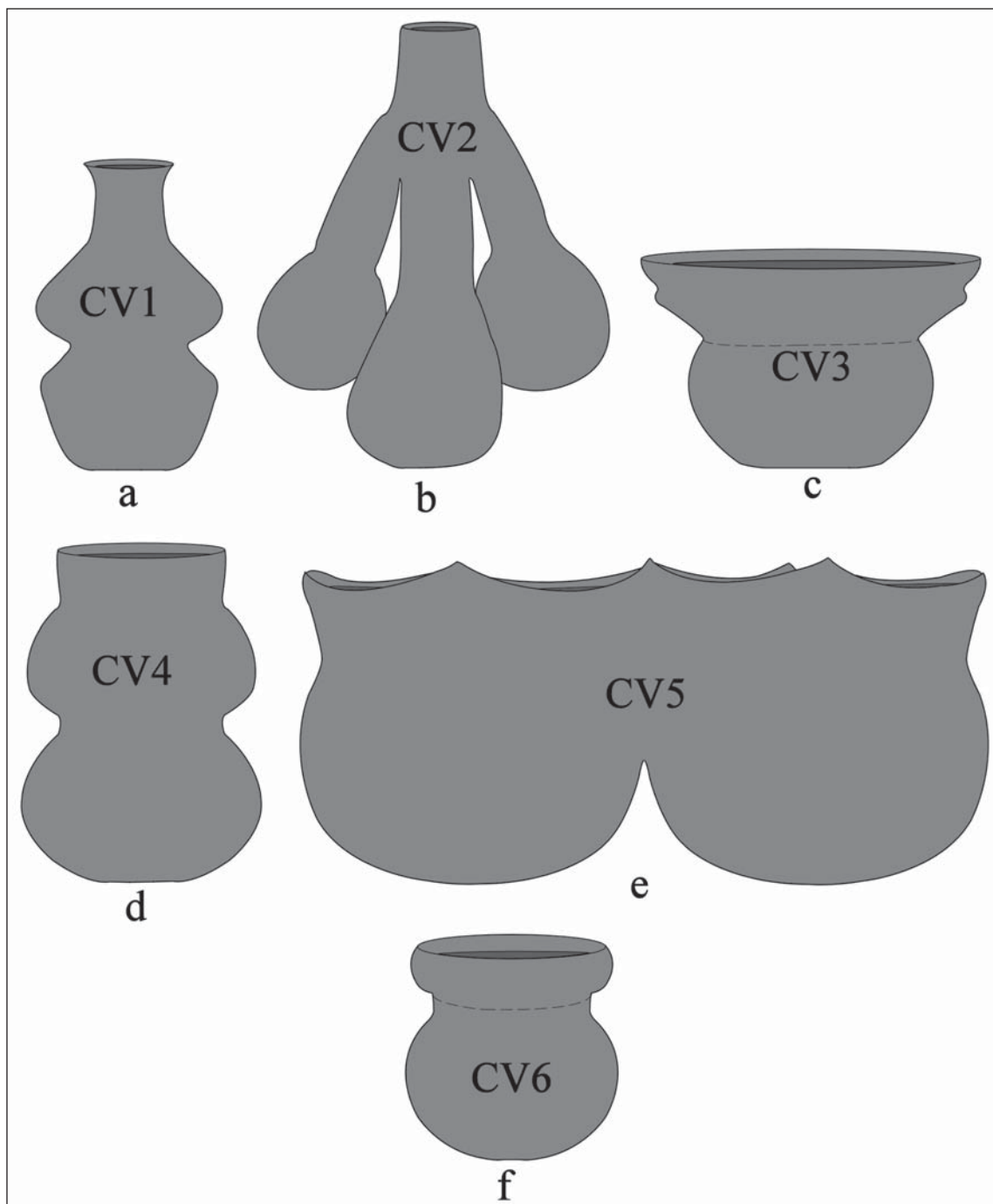


Figure 6. Conjoined vessel shapes (CV 1-CV6).

Deep Bowls

The deep bowl form includes vessel shapes that generally have barrel-shaped bodies with a range of profiles, mainly vertical in contour (Figure 7), and flat bases. They tend to have direct rims, but one deep bowl form has a slightly everted rim (Figure 7d). DB 5 has a bulging body and could be referred to “as a beaker or beaker bowl” (Brown 1996:339).

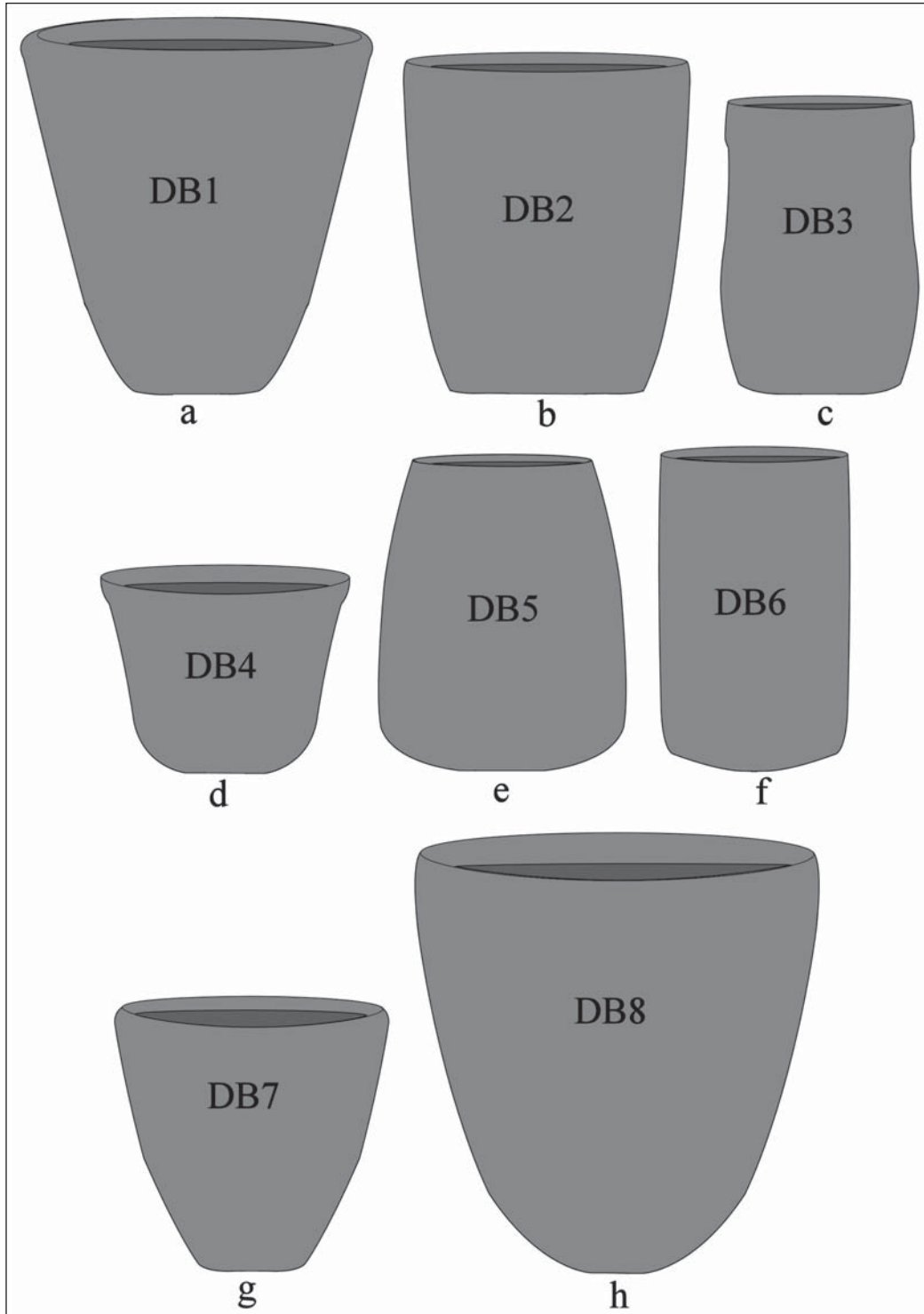


Figure 7. Deep bowl shapes (DB 1-DB 8).

Effigy Bowls

Three different effigy bowl shapes have been identified in East Texas Caddo vessel assemblages (Figure 8). The differences primarily revolve around the character of the effigy head (both bird and abstract forms) as well as the nature of any other appendages, such as tab tails (Figure 8b) and tail riders (Figure 8a). The effigy bowls themselves are simple in form, mainly Bw 9 and Bw 11 (see Figure 3i, k).

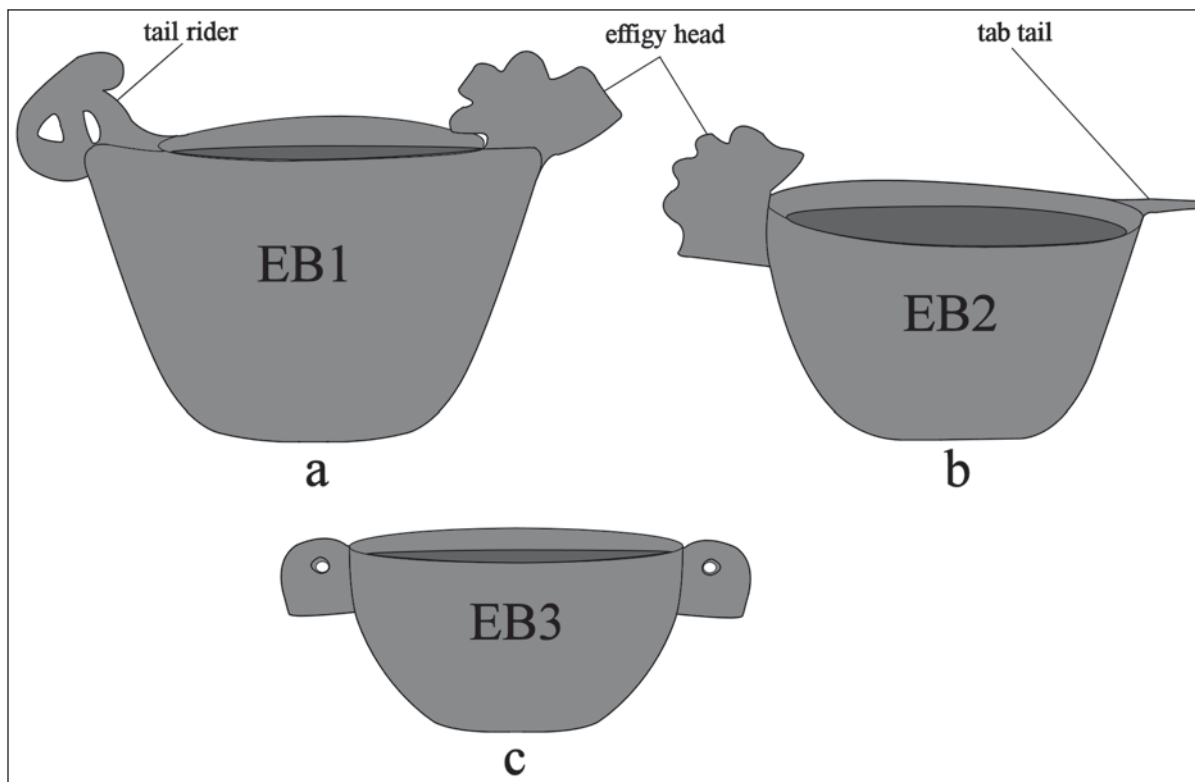


Figure 8. Effigy bowl shapes (EB 1-EB 3).

Jars

The range of jar vessel shapes in East Texas Caddo vessel assemblages is impressive (Figure 9a-r), and 18 jar vessel shapes have been recognized to date. The jars have both short and wide rims, everted or direct rims, globular bodies, but there are some jar forms where there is little difference between the rim and the body (Figure 9g, k-l). The jars have flat disk bases.

Several of the jar shapes have small or large strap handles—but different rim profiles—(see Figure 9b, m, o, q-r), and others have rim peaks (see Figure 9m, r). One distinctive Late Caddo period jar form has a pedestal base (see Figure 9o).

Ollas

Ollas in East Texas Caddo vessel assemblages have broad and tall globular bodies and short necks, the short necks being comparable to those on short-necked bottles in vessel assemblages (see Figure 2k, o, s). The short necks, however, have different rim profiles (Figure 10a-d) on the olla shapes. Ollas are present in Late Caddo and Historic Caddo period vessel assemblages in East Texas.

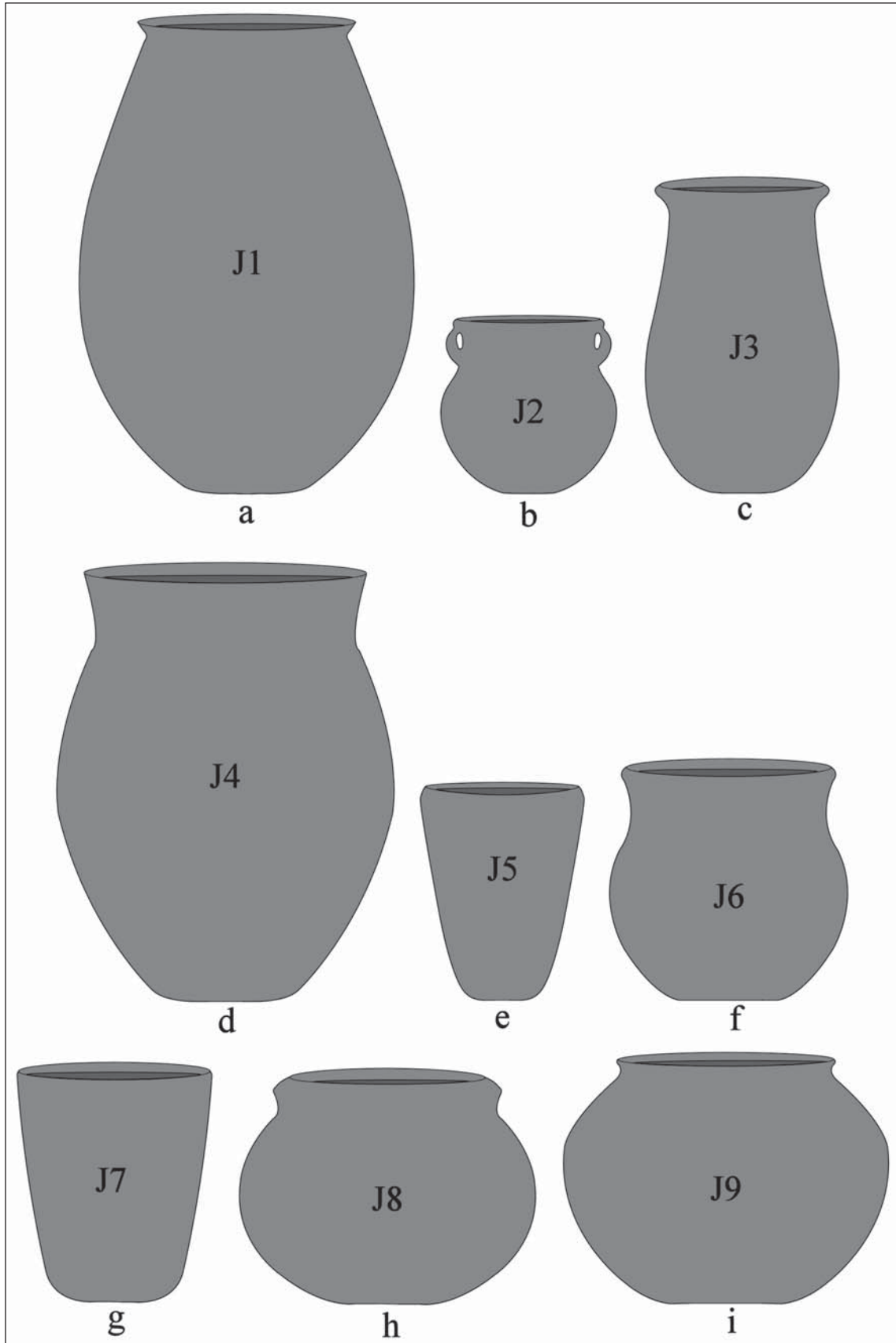


Figure 9. Jar shapes a, J1-9.

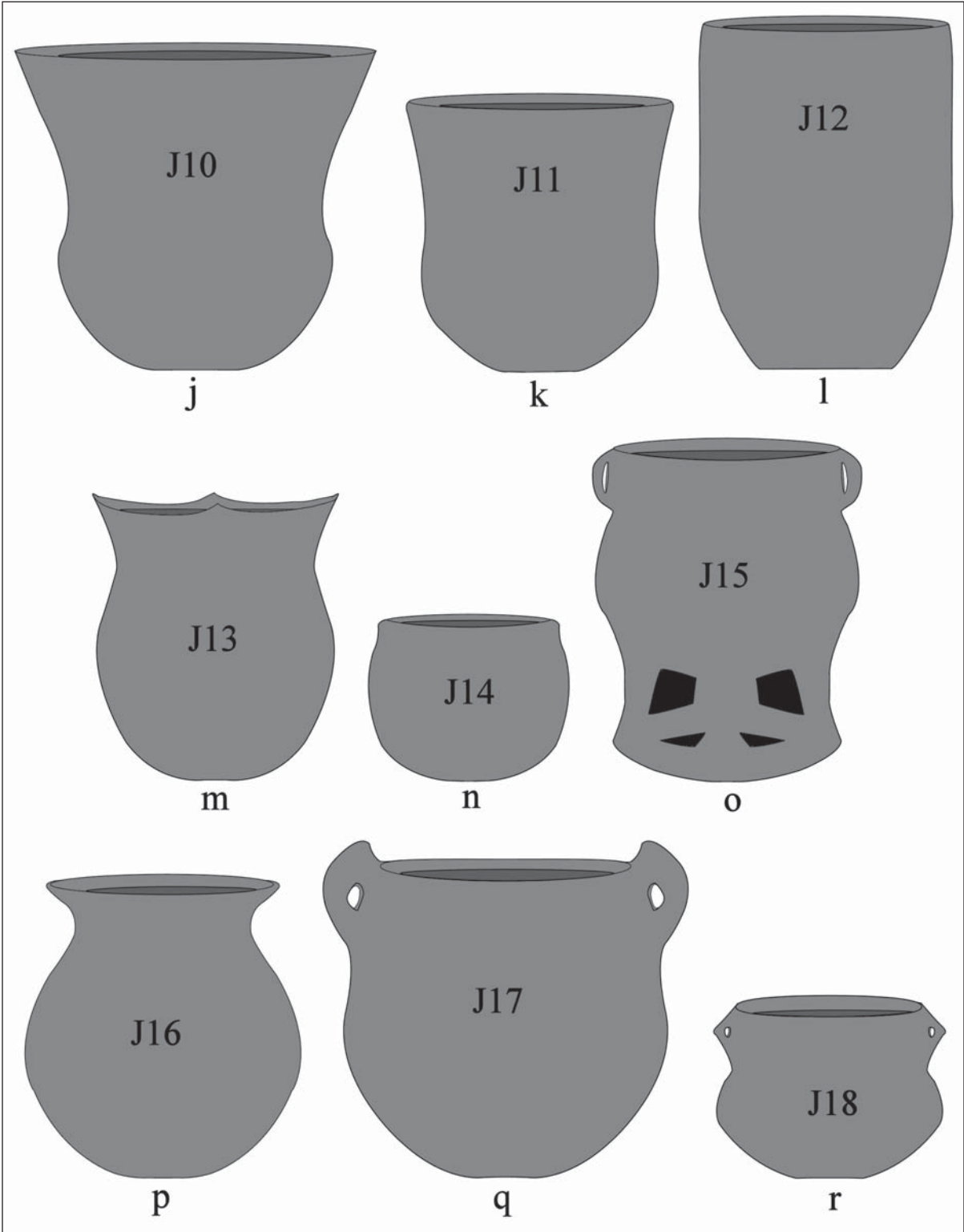


Figure 9, cont. Jar shapes J10-18.

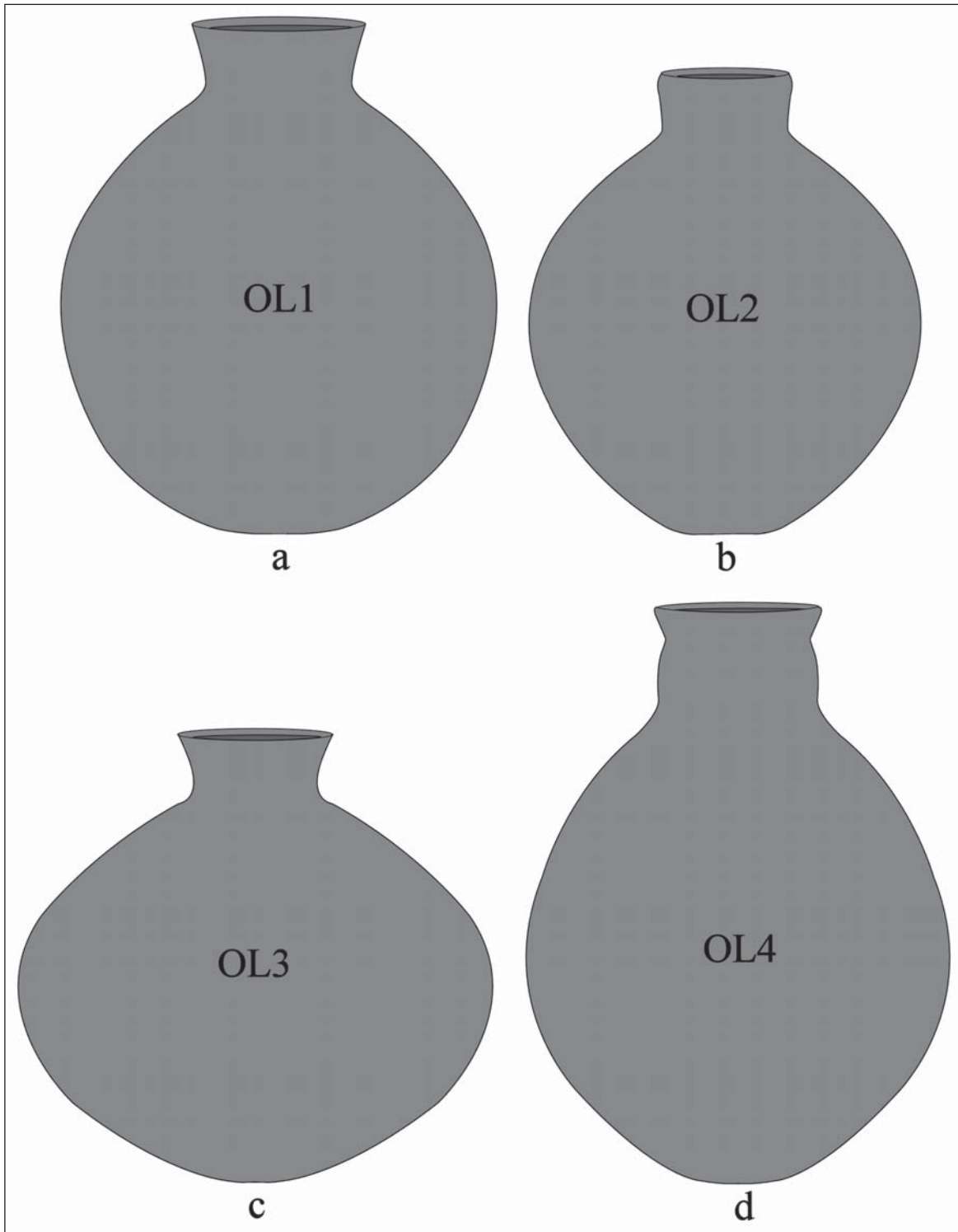


Figure 10. Olla shapes (OL 1-OL 4).

CONCLUSIONS

The examination of photographic images from a variety of published sources has been employed to define ancestral Caddo vessel forms and vessel shapes within those forms from sites in East Texas. This examination has led to the definition of nine different vessel forms—bottles, bowls, carinated bowls, compound bowls, conjoined vessels, deep bowls, effigy bowls, jars, and ollas—and 105 vessel shapes in East Texas Caddo vessel assemblages.

I assume that there will be additional vessel shapes, and perhaps vessel forms, to be added to those identified and illustrated herein as more vessel images are reviewed from new sources and collections studied in the region. I also suspect that 2D and 3D-scanned ceramic vessels will play a larger role in future analyses of vessel form from Caddo assemblages in East Texas, along with the use of mathematical representations of vessel profiles (cf. Smith et al. 2014) for the further construction and elaboration of vessel form categories.

With the vessel form and vessel shape categories and illustrations in hand (see Figures 2-10), vessel assemblages of known age and cultural taxon across East Texas can be more readily categorized by their form and shape in combination with other distinctive ceramic vessel attributes. Of particular interest will be the investigation in these assemblages of what styles of decoration and decorative elements occur and co-occur on these vessel forms and shapes, and how vessel form and decorative styles change or remain the same through time and across the East Texas Caddo landscape.

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