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Middle Caddoan Period Archaeology in the Upper Sulphur River Basin

Timothy K. Perttula

Middle Caddoan period archaeological sites in the upper Sulphur River basin are rare (see discussion in Fields et al. 1997), by contrast with the lower Sulphur River area (see Cliff 1997), and probably the best-known site of this age in the upper part of the basin is the Hurricane Hill site (41HP106). The site is located on a high upland landform, at the Cooper Lake dam, overlooking the wide valley of the South Sulphur River (Perttula 1998).

The Hurricane Hill Middle Caddoan component occurs mainly on the South Rise, a natural sand-covered rise on the crest of the uplands. However, at least one burial and several pit features associated with the component occur 20-50 meters away on the Southwest Rise. The component dates from ca. AD 1250-1375, based on one archeomagnetic date of A.D. 1300 ± 50 from a central hearth, and six calibrated radiocarbon dates from feature and structural contexts. The four Middle Caddoan period adult burials were in extended supine position, and did not contain associated grave goods.

Settlement data consists of two overlapping rectangular structures that were 7.1 x 7.6 m and 6.0 x 7.5 meters in size, and the earlier and larger structure had an extended entranceway facing towards the south. Numerous pit features and the central hearth were present inside the two houses, along with a wide variety of cultural remains. There was a third structure nearby that may be a possible associated ramada/arbor, based on the absence of interior features and associated artifacts (Perttula 1998). There were also four middens associated with the Middle Caddoan period component at the Hurricane Hill site, two outside entranceways, and larger trash deposits southwest and west of the houses (Fields et al. 1997:Figure 36).

Maize and squash cultigens are present in small amounts in +200 flotation samples from Middle Caddoan period features and middens. Stable carbon isotope data (collagen) from Burial 13 at Hurricane Hill indicate that domesticated C4 plants such as maize were a definite component of the diet, while the apatite and nitrogen isotope values "suggest that the Hurricane Hill population had a low protein diet, with protein input from animal sources, and a large portion of carbohydrates and/or fat from maize" (Wilson and Steele 1997:234). While animal remains were highly fragmented and poorly preserved in the Middle Caddoan period component, white-tailed deer, small mammals, birds, and fish were meat and protein sources.

The material culture of the Hurricane Hill Middle Caddoan population includes Hayes and Bonham points, as well as an assortment of flake cutting and scraping tools, made of local gravels and Red River cherts; white novaculite was particularly common in the lithic tools from the site. Groundstone celts manufactured of Ouachita Mountains greenstone are also present in the stone tool assemblage.

Several thousand sherds and a small number of clay pipe sherds dominate the Middle Caddoan artifact assemblage. The decorated sherds include Maxey Noded Redware (Figure 1a), including one sherd that came from the central hearth dated A.D. 1300 ± 50 in one of the rectangular structures, Sanders Engraved (see Figure 1d-e, g, i), engraved pendant triangles, and engraved ladders (see Figure 1b). Diagonal, cross-hatched, and zoned punctated-incised rim and body sherds belong primarily to Canton Incised jars and deep bowls (Figure 2a-b, d, g). Some of the incised and punctated sherds may be hybrids of Crockett Curvilinear Incised and Pennington Punctated-Incised (see Figure 2e-f), as noted in Early Caddoan contexts (i.e., as late as A.D. 1300) at Cooper Lake (Fields et al. 1997:Figure 29).

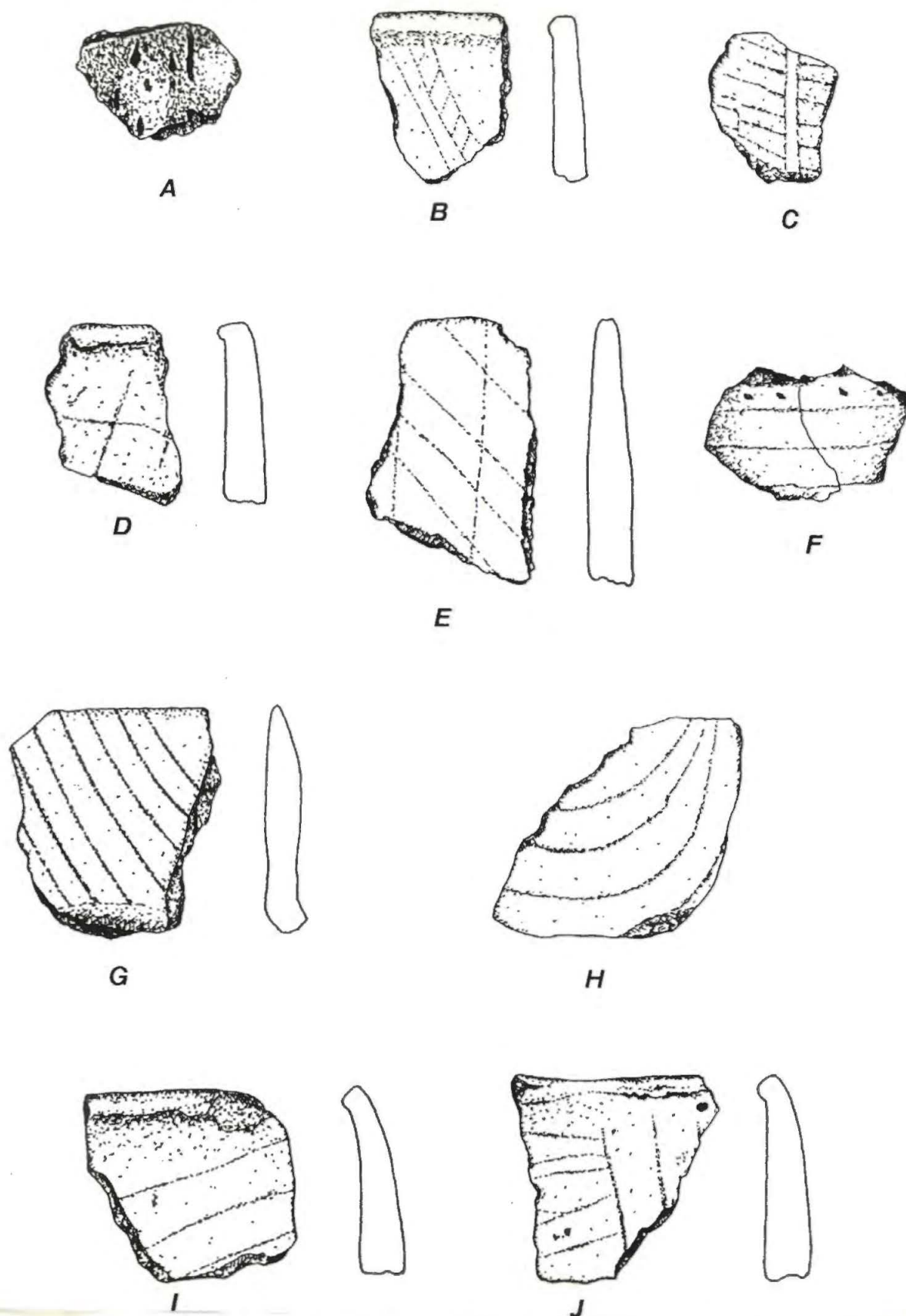


Figure 1. South Rise Middle Caddoan ceramics, Maxey Noded Redware, and engraved elements

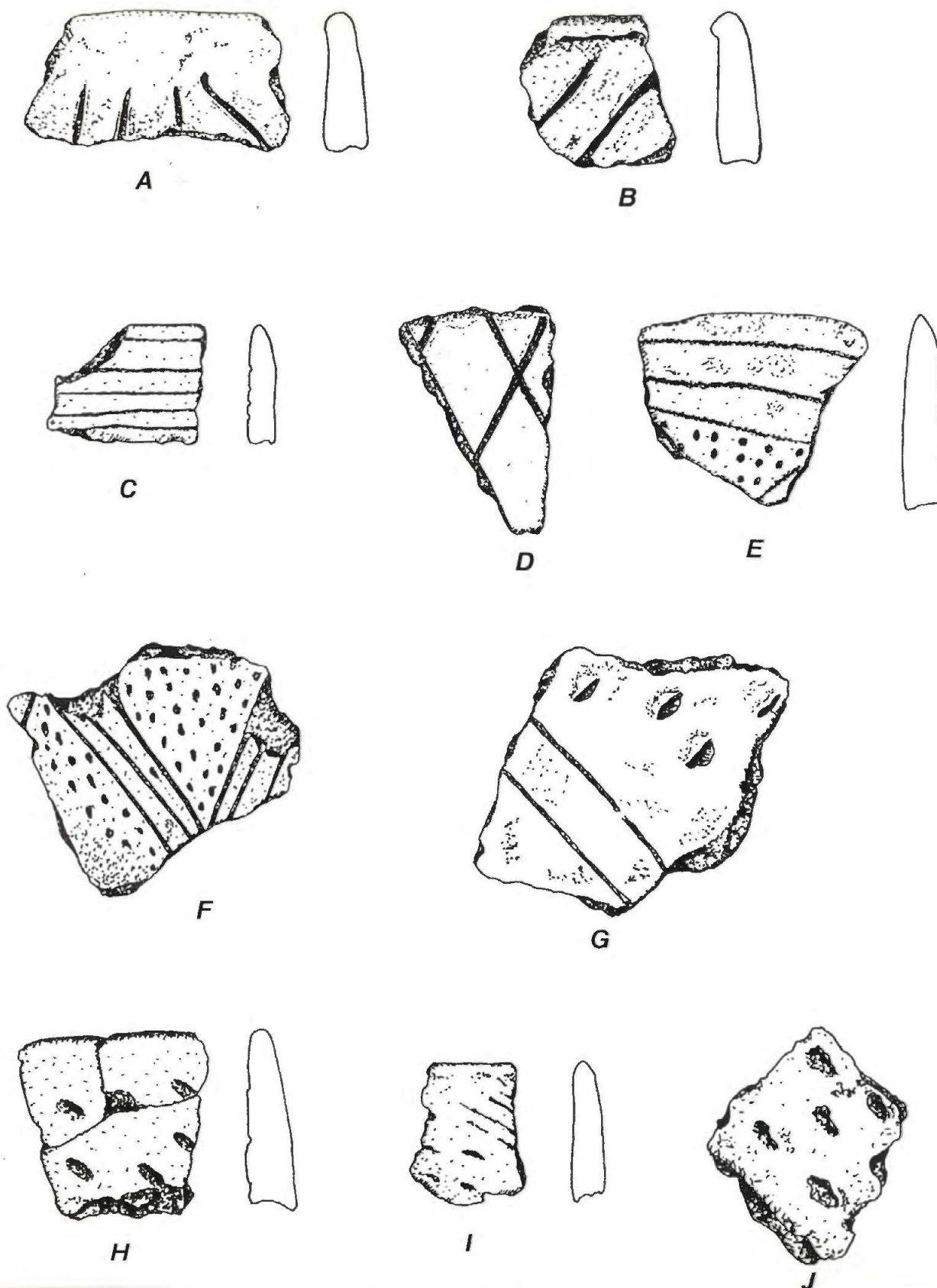


Figure 2. Incised, Incised/Punctated, and Punctated decorative elements from South Rise contexts.

Sanders Plain is uncommon in Middle Caddoan period contexts at Hurricane Hill, accounting for less than 1 percent of the sherds. One plain red-slipped rim was found in the fill of Burial 13, a Middle Caddoan burial on the Southwest Rise. Most of the plain vessel rims are from unburnished grog, grit, and grog-bone tempered bowls and jars (Figure 3). Other utility wares include jars with brushed bodies (3-4 percent of the sherds on the South Rise), and at least one vessel with corncob impressions on the body.

Instrumental neutron activation analyses (INAA) performed by the University of Missouri of 20 decorated and plain rim sherds from the South Rise indicate that most of the sherds were from vessels manufactured locally, but some have compositional profiles more indicative of links with the Red River valley (35 percent of the South Rise sherds) to the north (see Perttula 1998). There were no obvious decorative characteristics that consistently distinguished the local from non-local wares defined from the INAA analyses. Petrographic analyses of the pastes of 14 other sherds support the INAA findings, in that most have consistent proportions of inclusions to be expected in vessels made locally, although at least one sherd may be from a vessel of non-local Caddoan origin (to the south in the Big Cypress Creek drainage?)

Additional ceramic artifacts from the Middle Caddoan component at Hurricane Hill are the Haley variety of Red River long-stemmed pipes (Figure 4). An assortment of stems and bowls were found inside the two overlapping structures, and 95 percent of a pipe was lying flat, near the central hearth, on the apparent floor of the younger structure.

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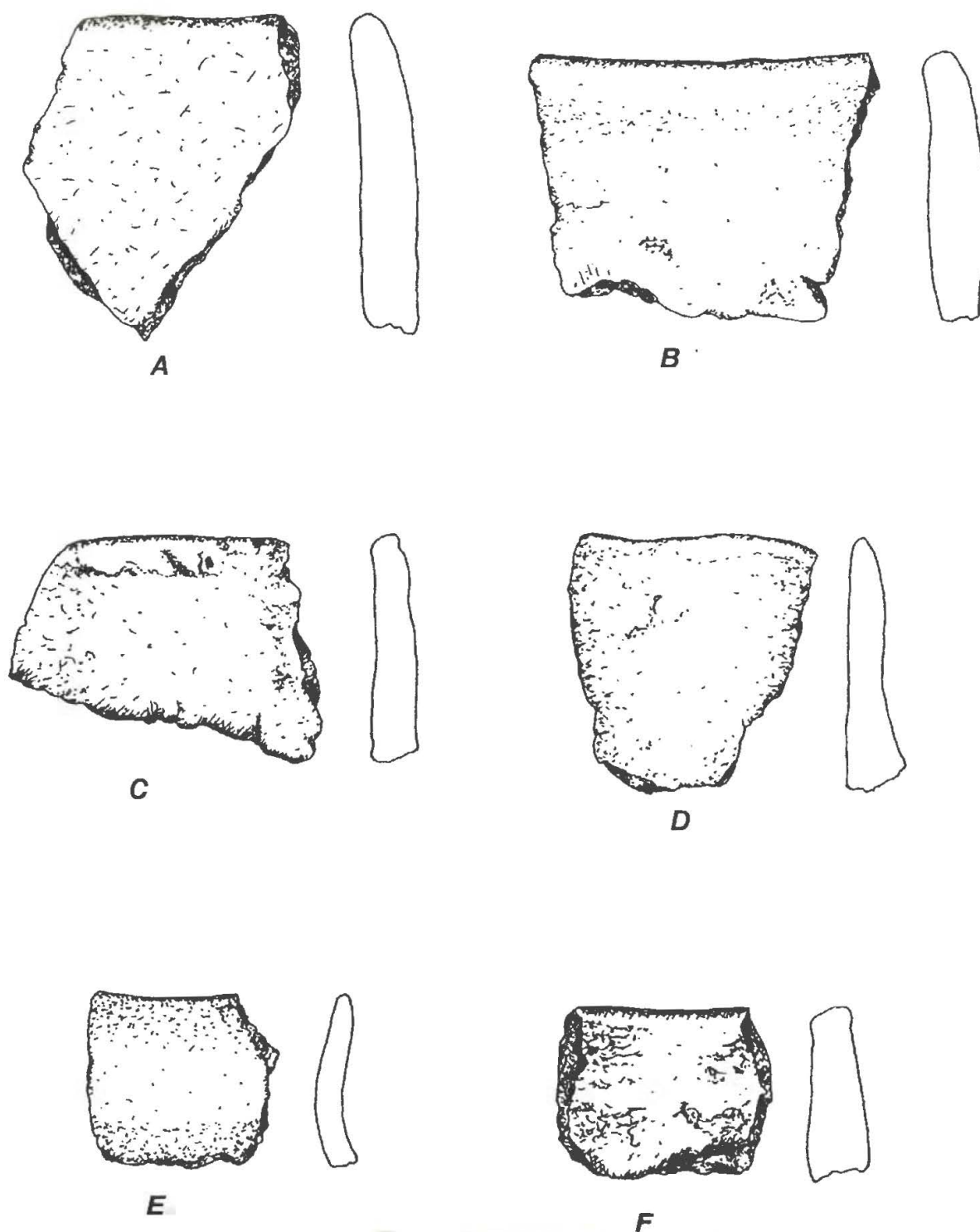


Figure 3. Plain rims

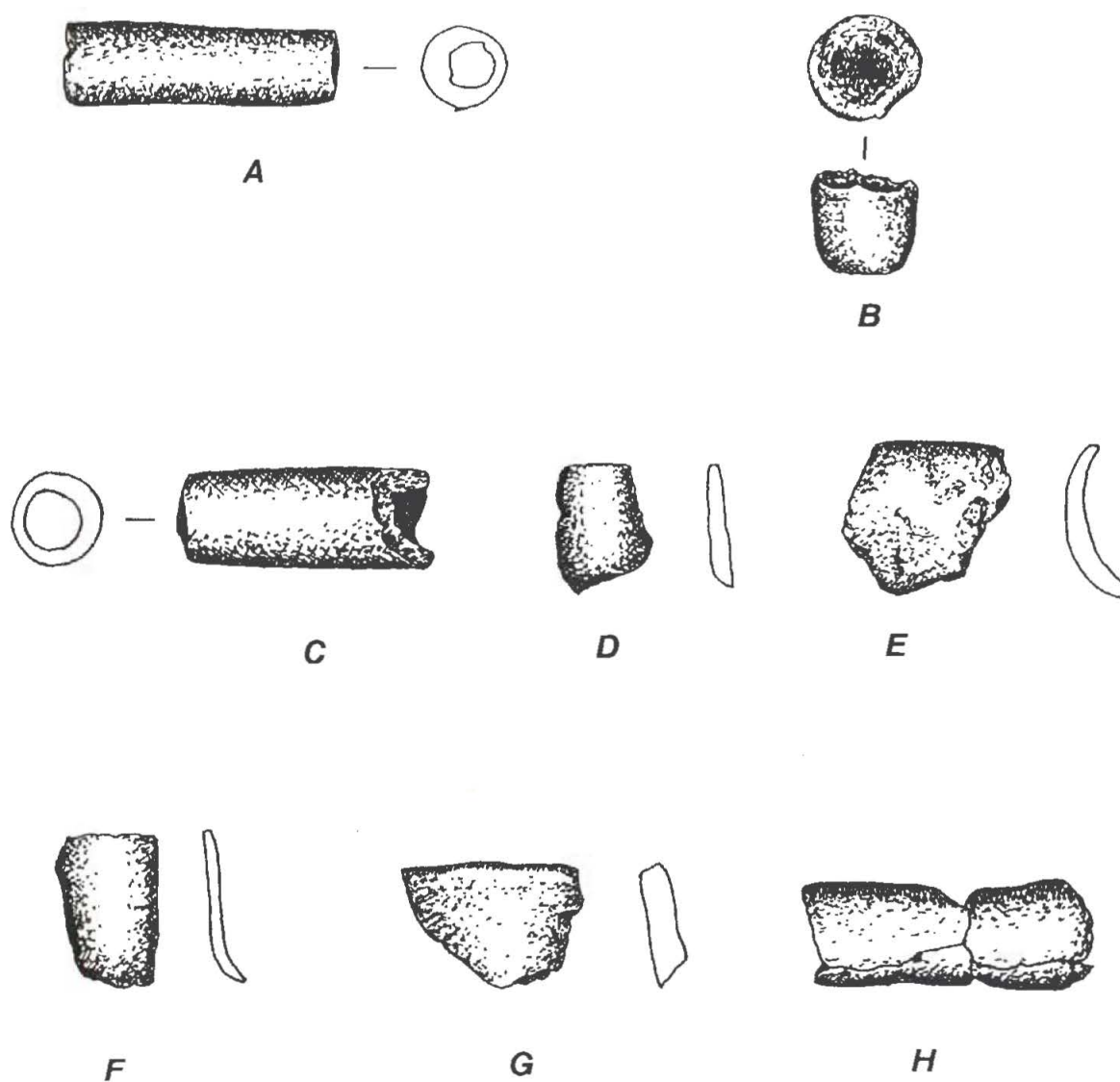


Figure 4. Red River pipe stems and bowls, South Rise: a, c, h, pipe stems; b, butt end of pipe; d-g, pipe bowls.