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Caddo Ceramic Sherd Assemblage from a Hearth Feature at the Cherokee Lake Site (41RK132) in Rusk County, Texas

Timothy K. Perttula

INTRODUCTION AND SITE CONTEXT

There is a collection of plain and decorated ceramic sherds in the Gregg County Historical Museum from a feature, described as either a fire pit or a hearth, excavated by Buddy Calvin Jones in March 1956 at the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132) on Toawichi Creek in northern Rusk County, Texas. This assemblage is discussed in this article.

The Cherokee Lake site is best known for its early 18th century Nadaco Caddo component (Jones 1968; Perttula 2012; see also Perttula, this volume), but it also has a Middle Caddo period (ca. A.D. 1200–1400) component. In Jones' (1968:48) discussion of work he conducted at the Cherokee Lake site, he mentions the excavation of an Historic Caddo burial as well as a large “refuse pit” of prehistoric age, both in Area A of the site (see Jones 1968:Figure 4). The excavation of a fire pit or hearth in any area at the site is not mentioned by Jones, but it seems likely that the “fire pit/hearth” may be the same feature as the aforementioned refuse pit. In any case, this “fire pit/hearth” feature at the Cherokee Lake site contained a considerable number of plain and decorated ceramic sherds, as did the “refuse pit.” According to Jones (1968:56–57 and Plate 9a–c), the refuse pit had “Hickory Engraved, Dunkin Incised, variant types, unidentified types of punctated and incised wares,” as well as a small Bullard Brushed jar, a fragment of a second Bullard Brushed jar, both from the upper part of the pit, and fragments of a plain bowl from the floor of the pit.

Ceramic Sherd Assemblage

There are 201 plain and decorated ceramic vessel sherds from the fire pit/hearth feature at the Cherokee Lake site (Table 1). About 86 percent of the sherds are from grog-tempered vessels, and the remaining 14 percent are from burned bone-tempered vessels. About 73 percent of the decorated sherds are from utility ware jars, and the fine wares include both carinated bowls and bottles. The plain to decorated sherd ratio of this ceramic sherd assemblage is 1.39.

Table 1. Ceramic sherd assemblage from a hearth feature at the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132).

Ware	Grog-tempered	Bone-tempered	N
Plain	104	13	117
Utility	47	14	61
Fine	22	1	23
Totals	173	28	201

The utility ware sherds are from vessels with punctated (22.6 percent of the decorated sherds from the site), incised (19.0 percent, and 61.5 percent of the utility ware rims), brushed (16.7 percent), incised-punctated (11.9 percent, 30.8 percent of the utility ware rims), brushed-incised (1.2 percent), and brushed-punctated (1.2 percent, and 7.7 percent of the utility ware rims) (Table 2).

Table 2. Decorated methods and decorative elements in the utility ware sherds from a hearth feature in the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132) ceramic assemblage.

Decorative method/ Decorative element	Rim	Body	N
<i>Brushed</i>			
overlapping brushing marks	—	3	3
parallel brushing marks	—	8	8
vertical brushing marks	—	3	3
<i>Brushed–Incised</i>			
parallel brushed–incised	—	1	1
<i>Brushed–Punctated</i>			
tool punctated row under lip, horizontal brushed rim, with a row of tool punctations pushed through the brushing	1	—	1
<i>Incised</i>			
broad straight line	—	1	1
cross–hatched lines	1	—	1
diagonal lines	3	—	3
diagonal opposed lines	3	—	3
horizontal lines	1	—	1
opposed lines	—	3	3
parallel lines	—	3	3
straight line	—	1	1
<i>Incised–Punctated</i>			
curvilinear line and adjacent tool punctated zone	—	2	2
curvilinear incised zone filled with tool punctations	1	—	1
diagonal incised triangle el. filled with tool punctations	3	1	4
diagonal opposed lines and triangle el. filled with fingernail punctations [lower rim] and rows of fingernail punctations [upper body]	—	1	1
straight line and adjacent tool punctated zone	—	2	2
<i>Punctated</i>			
circular punctated rows	—	1	1
fingernail punctated rows	—	4	4
tool punctated rows	—	14	14
Totals	13	48	61

Rim sherds from utility ware vessels include a brushed–punctated Pease Brushed–Incised rim with a row of tool punctations under the vessel lip, horizontal brushing, and a row of tool punctations pushed through the brushing (Figure 1a), and a number of incised rims from Maydelle Incised vessels; one other rim has a horizontal incised line decoration. The Maydelle Incised rims have cross–hatched, diagonal, and diagonal incised lines (Figure 1b).

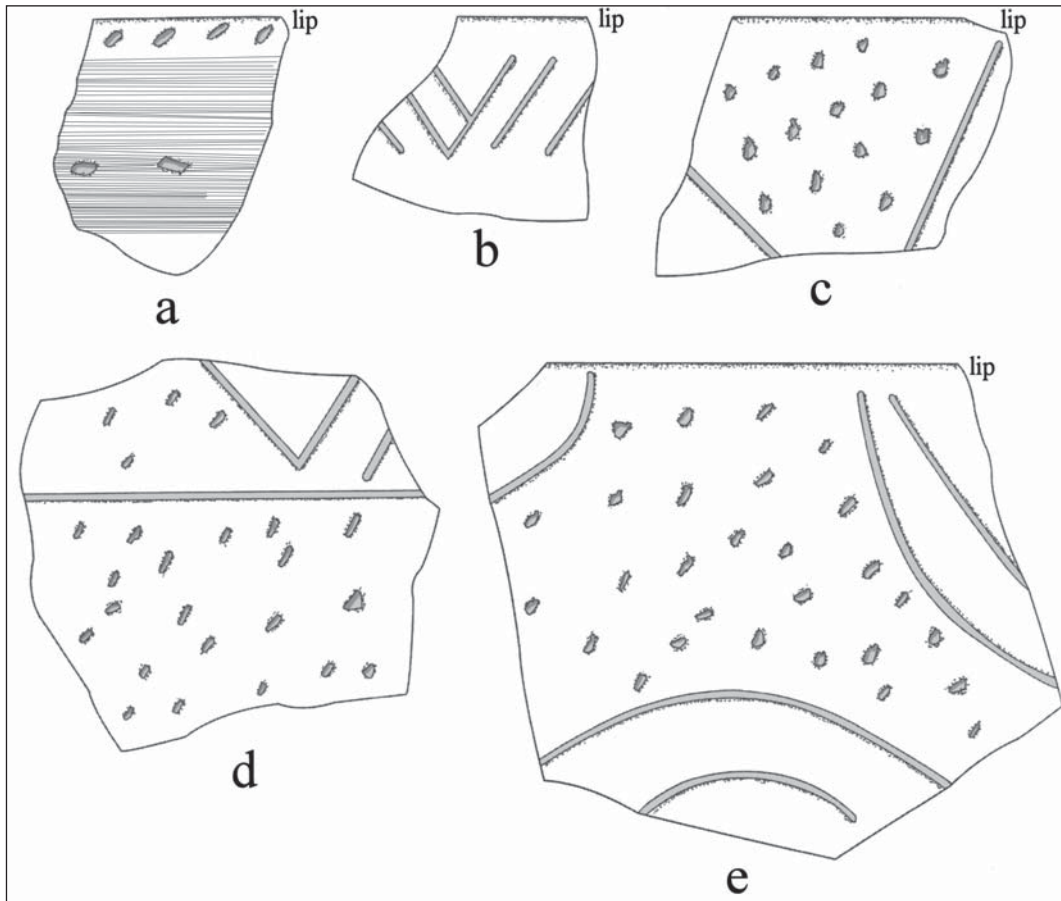


Figure 1. Selected decorative elements on utility ware sherds from a hearth feature at the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132): a, brushed-punctated rim; b, diagonal opposed incised rim; c–e, incised punctated rim or body sherds.

Three of the incised-punctated rim sherds have incised triangle elements around the vessel rim formed with diagonal opposed incised lines, and the triangles are filled with tool punctations (see Figure 1c). These are also from Maydelle Incised jars (see Suhm and Jelks 1962:Plate 52e). Another rim has a broad curvilinear incised zone filled with tool punctations (see Figure 1e), while a lower rim-upper body sherd, possibly from a Dunkin Incised jar, from the Cherokee Lake site has rows of tool punctations on the body and diagonal opposed incised triangles on the rim that are alternately filled with tool punctations (see Figure 1d).

Body sherds with rows of punctations are common in this ceramic assemblage from the Cherokee Lake site, with circular, fingernail, and tool punctated elements (see Table 2). About 74 percent of the punctated body sherds have tool punctations.

The engraved sherds from the site include both carinated bowl and bottle sherds (Table 3). The rim sherds from engraved fine wares at the site primarily have straight line or geometric elements featuring horizontal, diagonal, cross-hatched, and horizontal-diagonal lines (Figure 2a–b) on carinated bowls. One of the diagonal engraved rim sherds has a red pigment rubbed in the engraved lines. The horizontal engraved rim sherds are likely from Hickory Engraved vessels, but the other engraved motifs are not typologically identifiable; sherds with similar motifs are present in the large decorated sherd assemblage from the nearby Oak Hill Village (41RK214) (Rogers and Pertulla 2004:217–222 and Figures 90 and 91).

Table 3. Decorated methods and decorative elements in the fine ware sherds from a hearth feature in the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132) ceramic assemblage.

Decorative method/ Decorative element	Rim	Body	N
<i>Engraved</i>			
cross-hatched lines	1	—	1
curvilinear lines	—	3*	3
curvilinear lines and large excised triangle	—	1*	1
curvilinear hatched zone	1	—	1
diagonal lines	3	1	4
horizontal lines	2	5*	7
horizontal-diagonal lines	2	1*	3
semi-circle with central excised dot	1	—	1
straight line	—	2	2
Totals	10	13	23

*includes bottle sherds

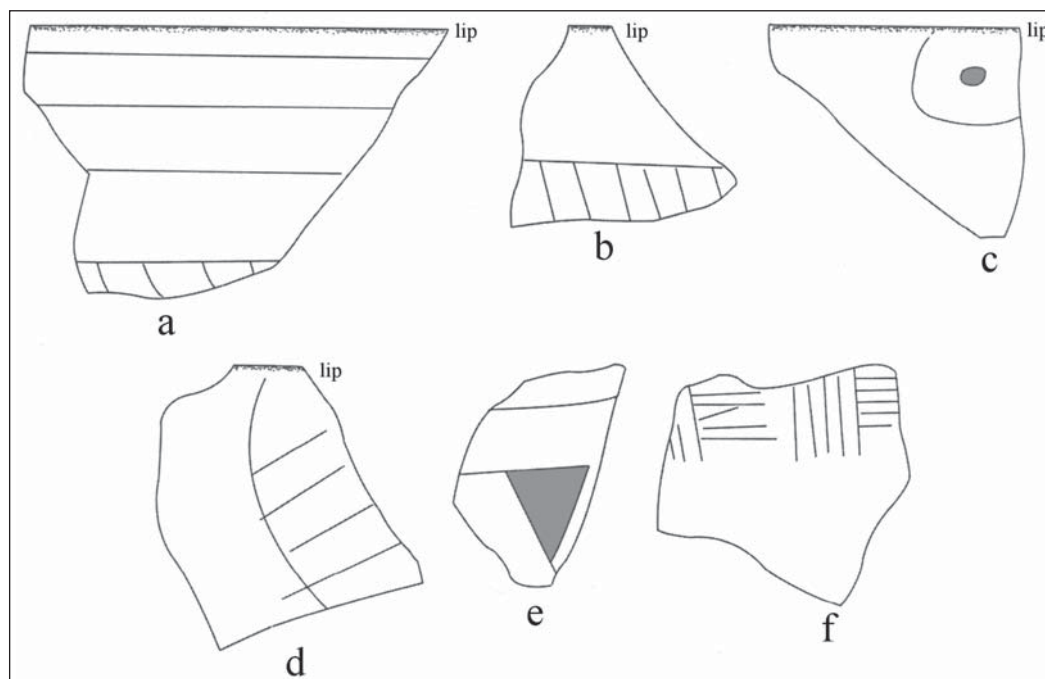


Figure 2. Selected decorative elements on fine ware sherds from a hearth feature at the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132): a–d, engraved rim sherds; e–f, engraved bottle body sherds.

There are also two rims in the engraved fine wares with curvilinear or semi-circular decorative elements. One has a large curvilinear zone filled with diagonal engraved lines (see Figure 2d), while the other had a small semi-circle at the top of the rim and a small excised dot at its center (see Figure 2c).

Five of the engraved sherds in this assemblage from the Cherokee Lake site are from bottles. This includes a Hickory Engraved bottle body sherd with horizontal engraved lines, two bottle body sherds with curvilinear engraved lines, a bottle sherd with sets of closely-spaced diagonal engraved lines between panels filled with closely-spaced horizontal lines (see Figure 2f), and a body sherd from a Holly Fine Engraved bottle with curvilinear lines and a large excised pendant triangle (see Figure 2e; see also Suhm and Jelks 1962:Plate 40e).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Buddy Calvin Jones excavated a fire pit/hearth at the Cherokee Lake site (41RK132) in March 1956, and obtained a sample of plain and decorated sherds (n=201) from the feature fill. This feature is likely in Area A of the site (Jones 1968:Figure 4), but its exact location is not stated in the available provenience information. Most of the sherds are from grog-tempered vessels.

While the Cherokee Lake site is best known as an early 18th century Nadaco Caddo site (Jones 1968), the site appears to have also been occupied in prehistoric times by Caddo peoples. The decorated sherds in the fire pit/hearth assemblage do not appear to be from vessels of known Historic Caddo age and Kinsloe phase contexts (Perttula 2007:Table 1, 2012), but instead appear to be from an early Middle Caddo period (ca. A.D. 1200–1300) component in the village area based on the relative frequency of brushed-incised sherds (19 percent), as well as sherds from Bullard Brushed, Pease Brushed–Incised, and Maydelle Incised utility ware jars in this assemblage compared to dated Caddo sites in the middle Sabine River basin (Perttula 2014:Table 13). Dunkin Incised, Hickory Engraved, and Holly Fine Engraved sherds in this Cherokee Lake ceramic assemblage may also be a part of this occupation—and thus its early Middle Caddo period attribution—but it is possible that they are from an older, pre–A.D. 1200 ancestral Caddo occupation.

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