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The Distribution of Negative Painted Pottery in the Caddo Area

Timothy K. Perttula

INTRODUCTION

Negative painted pottery (NPP) is one of the most distinctive kinds of pottery made by Mississippian peoples during the Middle Mississippian period (ca. A.D. 1200-1500) in eastern North America (Baumann et al. 2013; Hilgeman 2000; Morse and Morse 1983; Phillips 1970; Phillips et al. 1951). This pottery is decorated with a “resist painting technique, which creates a lighter-colored design outlined by a black pigment” (Baumann et al. 2013:221) over an underlying slip/wash.

Principal production areas for NPP include the lower Ohio River valley, the Nashville Basin, and the Bootheel of southeast Missouri (Figure 1), and there are four main types: Kincaid Negative Painted, Nashville Negative Painted, Sikeston Negative Painted, and Angel Negative Painted. This NPP has been found



Figure 1. Distribution of Negative Painted Pottery in eastern North America, including the Caddo Area.

in several sites in the southern and northern Caddo areas, and its occurrence in Caddo sites constitutes compelling evidence for some form of contact and interaction between Caddo peoples and peoples from various Mississippian polities, most particularly Mississippian polities in the Nashville basin (see Figure 1).

CADDO SITES WITH NEGATIVE PAINTED POTTERY

The first example of NPP on a Caddo site was recovered by Clarence B. Moore (1912:Plate XXXVII) in Burial 2 in a burial mound at the Haley site (3MI1) on the Red River in southwest Arkansas. It is a bottle of the type Nashville Negative Painted (Figure 2), with negative painted designs of circles, concentric circles, circle and cross central elements, as well as black vertical dividers and pendant triangles/scallops.



Figure 2. Nashville Negative Painted bottle from the Haley site. Redrawn from Moore (1912:Plate XXXVII).

Burial 2 at the Haley site had a number of associated funerary offerings (Moore 1912:530-533) from a Middle Caddo Haley phase (ca. A.D. 1200-1500) grave, including Haley arrow points, long-stemmed Red River style pipes, shell beads, a slate axe, pigments, sheet copper, and a large assemblage of crushed pottery vessels. These were of the types Haley Engraved, Handy Engraved, and Haley Complicated Incised (Moore 1912:Figures 40-41 and Plates XXXVIII-XXXIX).

Krieger (1946:191 and Plate 28c) reported the discovery of a negative painted bottle in Burial 15, on the eastern slopes of the burial mound at the Sanders site (41LR2) on the Red River. Burial 15 had six adults and six associated ceramic vessels (Hamilton 1997:Figure 4 and Table 2). The Sanders site has a Middle Caddo period occupation thought to date from ca. A.D. 1100-1300, but the age of the principal Caddo occupation of the site is not well known.

Krieger (1946:191) described the vessel as a:

bottle of peculiar shape, having a sort of platform around the base of the spout, and four very small loop handles attached to the outer edge of the platform... Painted "banners" occur in nine vertical bands on the body of the vessel, their peaks all pointing to the right. Around the platform are eight more triangular "banners," their bases against the base of the spout and their points toward the perimeter of the platform. The vessel is a light reddish tan, probably unfilmed, while the banners are painted in pale red ochre.

Krieger (1946:191) could not determine if this vessel was locally made or a trade piece, and he suggested that despite the negative painted design, "this bottle appears to agree with the type *Maxey Noded Redware*, but remains unique." In its decoration, however, it resembles Angel Negative Painted varieties because of the use of red paint in bounded triangular areas (see Baumann et al. 2013:Table 1); Brown (1996:395) suggests the vessel is a Dallas Negative Painted vessel, made in the Nashville basin.

The final known example of NPP in the Caddo Area are sherds from at least three vessels of Nashville Negative Painted from the early 15th century A.D. Great Mortuary in the Craig Mound at the Spiro site in the Arkansas River basin in eastern Oklahoma (Brown 1996:394-395); this includes burial features A26, B43, and B163. The sherds are from a modeled bird effigy, a bowl with a modeled human face, and a sherd from a third vessel with a cluster of three nodes on it.

CONCLUSIONS

Negative painted pottery (NPP) has been found in burials of elite Caddo peoples from three important Caddo mound centers in the Arkansas and Red River basins in the northern and southern Caddo areas. Chronologically, these burials and their associated funerary offerings likely date from ca. A.D. 1200-1500, based on the known ages of the sites and temporal cross-ties with Middle Mississippian period sites where NPP was produced. The NPP from Caddo sites appears to have originated in the Nashville basin in the larger Ohio-Mississippi River basin (see Figure 1). The occurrence of these vessels in the burials of Caddo elites mark instances of contact and interaction between different Caddo and Mississippian polities, as well as evidence of the development of a "sacred economy" (see Brown 2012:121-123) where such goods were "concentrated to fulfill the potential spiritual power resident in the monument," the monument being specific mounds at the Haley, Sanders, and Spiro sites.

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