



INDEX OF TEXAS ARCHAEOLOGY

Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State

Volume 2012

Article 31

2012

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Timothy K. Perttula

Heritage Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University

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Three Mounds Creek Site, Gregg County, Texas

Timothy K. Perttula

INTRODUCTION

One of the prehistoric Caddo sites represented in the Buddy Calvin Jones Collections at the Gregg County Historical Museum (GCHM) is the Three Mounds Creek site in Gregg County, in East Texas. The site is GC-68 in the Jones site numbering system (68th site he discovered in Gregg County).

The available information about the site in the GCHM records is sketchy at best. The site had three mounds along Spring Creek, near its confluence with the Sabine River, in the Longview area. A search of Gregg County 7.5' USGS topographic quadrangles failed to disclose a Spring Creek in the Sabine River basin, so it is likely that the Spring Creek appellation is an informal one used by Jones at the time. Jones' notes also fail to describe the mounds in any fashion, nor their relationship to each other or the landform they were built on, and no map is available that shows the location of the three mounds with respect to where he collected artifacts from the site.

RECOVERED ARTIFACTS

In April 1956, Jones excavated a 9.5 x 12 ft. (2.9 x 3.6 m) unit at the site, in an old cotton field. It is unknown if this unit was placed in one of the three mounds, or what the vertical, horizontal, or depositional context of the artifacts from the site in the GCHM collections was. In this work, he recovered 264 artifacts, predominantly ceramic sherds (Table 1), along with a few chipped lithic tools and debris, as well as animal bone and mussel shell fragments. The recovery of these food trash items, and the abundance of ceramic sherds, suggests that Jones' excavation may have been placed in a domestic habitation area at the site.

The decorated ceramic sherds from the site include 31 Caddo sherds and one Woodland period rocker stamped sherd. This particular sherd has rows of rocker stamping, but is not large enough to determine if the stamping is zoned by incised lines (cf. varieties of Marksville Stamped, including *var. Troyville*) or not (cf. Indian Bay Stamped, Tchefuncte Stamped, or Chevalier Stamped) (see Brown 1998:33-34). In any event, the rocker stamped sherd points to a pre-A.D. 850 Woodland period use of the Three Mounds Creek site.

The Caddo sherds from the Three Mounds Creek site are dominated by utility wares, likely cooking and storage jars, decorated with brushed marks on rim and body or incised, punctated, or incised-punctated vessel sherds (Table 2). The relatively high proportion of brushed sherds (58%) suggests the site was likely to have been occupied sometime after ca. A.D. 1300.

Brushed vessel sherds are a particularly notable feature of Late Caddo ceramic assemblages in the region, but are also a significant part of the ceramic assemblage at Middle Caddo period (ca. A.D. 1200-1425) mound sites in East Texas such as Washington Square (41NA49, occupied ca. A.D. 1250-1425) and Oak Hill Village (41RK214, especially in the Late Village, dating from ca. A.D. 1350-1450). Brushed sherds comprise 55% of the decorated sherds at Washington Square (Perttula 2009:Table 2) and 26.7% of the decorated sherds in the Late Village at Oak Hill Village (Rogers and Perttula 2004:Table 68).

Table 1. Artifacts recovered from the Three Mounds Creek site (GC-68).

Artifact category	No.	%
<u>Ceramic Artifacts</u>		
Plain rim and body sherds	210	79.6
Decorated body sherds	32	12.1
<u>Lithic Artifacts</u>		
Arrow point preform, quartzite	1	0.4
Biface fragment	1	0.4
Lithic debris	14	5.3
polishing stone, quartzite	1	0.4
<u>Food remains</u>		
Animal bones	2	0.8
Mussel shell fragments	3	1.1
Totals	264	100.0

Table 2. Decorated Caddo sherds from the Three Mounds Creek site.

Decorative Method	No.	%
Utility Wares		
Brushed	17	54.8
Brushed-Incised	1	3.2
Incised	6	19.4
Punctated	4	12.9
Incised-Punctated	2	6.4
Fine Wares		
Engraved, pendant triangles	1	3.2
Totals	31	100.0

The one fine ware sherd is notable in light of the possibility that the Three Mounds Creek site was occupied beginning in the Middle Caddo period. This is a bottle sherd with at least three horizontal engraved lines on the vessel body, two of which have hatched pendant triangles whose apexes point toward each other. This engraved decorative element on a bottle is one of the consistently occurring elements in a Middle Caddo style zone that has been recognized in Caddo communities in the Angelina, Sabine, and Big Cypress stream basins (Hart and Pertulla 2010:203-207).

TEMPORAL AND CULTURAL AFFILIATION

In the absence of radiocarbon dates, or a larger sample of decorated sherds, the temporal age of the Three Creeks Mound site—or at least the assemblage of Caddo sherds recovered by Buddy Calvin Jones in 1956—is likely to be from the late 13th or early 14th century to the mid-15th century A.D. This is based primarily on the relative proportions of brushed sherds and the one engraved bottle sherd with pendant triangles. Nevertheless, because brushed vessels continued to be made by Caddo groups living in the Sabine River basin into the 17th century, it could have been occupied that late. Most likely, but pure speculation, the Three Mounds Creek site may have been occupied at the same time (ca. A.D. 1300 to at least the mid-A.D. 1500s) as the premier Caddo mound center in this part of the Sabine River basin—the Pine Tree Mound site (41HS15, Fields and Gadus 2011; Maki and Fields 2010:293). It may have been a subsidiary mound in a larger political community in this locale.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the available notes are skimpy, and the information they provide is not particularly substantive, it appears that Buddy Calvin Jones identified and investigated a Caddo mound site in Gregg County, Texas, back in 1956. The location of the site—Three Mounds Creek—has not been established on the ground, and the only locational information is that it is situated along a Spring Creek near its confluence with the Sabine River in the Longview, Texas, area. The shape and sizes of the mounds are also unknown.

All that is known at the present time is that Jones excavated a unit (2.9 x 3.6 m in size) on the site and recovered a small sample of domestic Caddo artifacts, particularly ceramic sherds. The decorated sherds in the assemblage suggest that the Caddo occupation of the site—and probably the construction of the mounds there—likely took place in the Middle Caddo period (ca. A.D. 1200-1425), but it could have lasted into the 16th century and beyond, based on the popularity of brushed utility ware vessels in local ceramic assemblages.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Patti Haskins of the Gregg County Historical Museum for making these artifacts from the Three Mounds Creek site available for study. Mark Walters assisted with the analysis effort, which took place on December 17, 2010.

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