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# Documentation of Caddo Ceramic Vessel Sherds from the Shelby Site (41CP71) in the Vernon Holcomb Collection, Camp County, Texas

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## INTRODUCTION

The Shelby site (41CP71) is an important Late Caddo period, Titus phase, religious and political center on Greasy Creek in the Northeast Texas Pineywoods. The site, occupied from the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. until at least the late 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D., is a large and well-preserved settlement with abundant habitation features as well as plant and animal remains, evidence of mound building activities in the form of a 1.5 m high structural mound, and a large community cemetery with at least 119 burial pits and perhaps as many as 200. The Shelby site is the nexus of one of a number of Titus phase political communities in the Big Cypress Creek stream basin (Perttula 2009; Perttula and Nelson 2004).

Nevertheless, very little is known archaeologically about the site—or the history of the Caddo's settlement there—since almost all the work done at the site since it was discovered in 1979 has been by looters. Perttula and Nelson (2004:21-44) completed a limited amount of work in the village area in 2003, and Bob Turner and others worked in the 1.5 m high structural mound between 1985-1988 (see Perttula and Nelson 2004:13-20), but an overall synthesis of the Caddo occupation at the Shelby site awaits more extensive professional archaeological investigations.

One key step in any professional archaeological work that may be forthcoming at the site includes the documentation of Caddo material culture remains, especially Caddo ceramics, that are known to have come from the site, as they provide a record of the temporal, functional, and stylistic range of the ceramic vessels used and discarded at the site, as well as evidence of interaction and contact between different but contemporaneous Caddo groups. In August 2009, I had an opportunity to document a collection of Caddo ceramic sherds held by Vernon Holcomb from the Shelby site. He collected these sherds from the surface of the site some 25-30 years ago where they had been eroded out of the banks of

a dry or intermittent stream branch that drains north to Greasy Creek.

## COLLECTIONS

The Caddo sherd collections in the Vernon Holcomb collection include 10 vessel sections (i.e., large sherds and/or sherd sections likely from recently broken whole vessels, probably from burials), 57 miscellaneous decorated rim and body sherds, and 56 plain rim, body, and base sherds. Based on the decorative motifs and elements on these vessel sections and other miscellaneous sherds, this collection has sherds from Titus phase fine wares (i.e., engraved and/or slipped vessels), utility wares (i.e., wet paste decorations on vessels), and plain wares.

### Sherd Vessel Sections

Vessel section 1 (grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, 8.2 mm thick at the rim, 9.4 mm thick at the body) is from a large jar (22.0 cm orifice diameter), possibly of the Pease Brushed-Incised type (Suhm and Jelks 1962), with a horizontal brushed rim and a vertical brushed body. There are also two rows of tool punctations on the rim (beneath the lip and at the rim-body juncture), and vertical applied fillets on the body, dividing it into panels filled with brushing. Each applied fillet ends with a small applied node at the top of the fillet.

Vessel section 2 (grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, 6.6 mm thick) includes two body sherds from a jar with straight applied ridges. These may be from a Cass Applied vessel.

Vessel section 3 is 50% of a plain bowl with an 18.0 cm orifice diameter, a direct rim, and a flat lip. The vessel is grog-tempered, smoothed on both vessel surfaces, has 6.8 mm thick vessel walls, and was fired and cooled in a reducing environment.

Vessel section 4 includes two body sherds from a Harleton Applied jar with curvilinear applied ridges on the lower part of the vessel. The vessel is grog-bone-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, and has 6.5 mm thick body walls.

Vessel section 5 is represented by two neck sherds and two body sherds from a flaring neck Wilder Engraved, *var. Wilder* bottle (Perttula et al. 2010). The design includes the hooked arms of scrolls that meet at a small cross-hatched circle

(Figure 1a); the hooked arms of the scroll begin at upper and lower triangles with hatched corners and a small vertical engraved dash along one side of the triangle. A red clay pigment has been rubbed in the engraved lines. The bottle is grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, burnished on the exterior surface, and ranges from 6.6-7.0 mm in body wall thickness.

Vessel section 6 is an everted rim (rounded lip) from a large (26.0 cm orifice diameter) McKinney

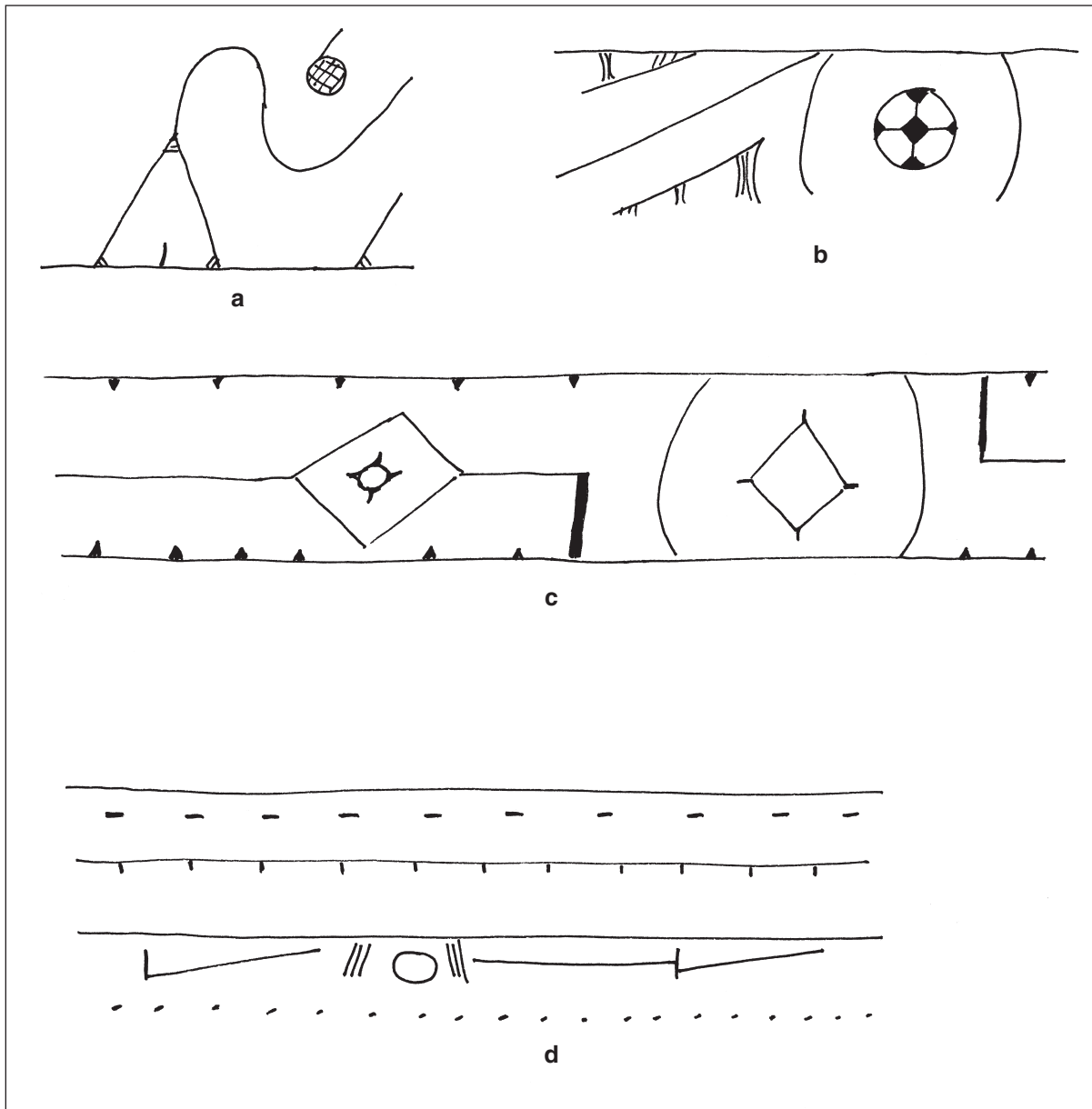


Figure 1. Engraved motifs on selected vessel sections from the Shelby site: a, Wilder Engraved, *var. Wilder* (Vessel section 5) ; b, Ripley Engraved, *var. Galt* (Vessel section 8); c, Ripley Engraved, *var. McKinney* (Vessel section 9); d, Belcher Engraved, *var. Belcher* (Vessel section 10).

Plain jar with a roughened vessel surface. The vessel is grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, smoothed on the vessel interior, and is 8.4 mm thick along the rim.

Vessel section 7 is from a large (31.0 cm orifice diameter) utility ware jar of unidentified type with rim peaks and an everted rim (rounded lip). The rim has a roughened surface, like Vessel section 6, but the body has vertical to diagonal brushing marks on it, along with vertical applied ridges and nodes, set under each rim peak. The vessel is tempered with grog, fired in a reducing environment, smoothed on its interior surface, and ranges from 6.4 mm (rim) to 6.7 mm (body) in vessel wall thickness.

Vessel section 8 is a section of a large (25.0 cm orifice diameter) Ripley Engraved, *var. Galt* (Perttula et al. 2010) carinated bowl with a direct rim, and a rounded, exterior folded lip. The rim has an engraved scroll and circle motif, and the central circle (probably repeated four times) has a smaller circle, cross, and diamond element within it (Figure 1b). The carinated bowl is grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, and burnished on the exterior vessel surface.

Vessel section 9 is another Ripley Engraved carinated bowl (23.0 cm orifice diameter) with a direct rim and a rounded, exterior folded lip. It is decorated with an engraved pendant triangle motif, and is classified as Ripley Engraved, *var. McKinney* (Perttula et al. 2010), that has either central engraved diamonds or circles repeated twice around the vessel (Figure 1c). The central diamond has within it a small circle with excised rays, while the central circle has within it a diamond-shaped element with four excised rays. A white kaolin clay pigment has been rubbed in the engraved lines. The vessel section is grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, and has been burnished on both interior and exterior vessel surfaces. The rim and body walls are both 6.7 mm in thickness.

Vessel section 10 is a trade vessel from a Belcher phase Caddo group that lived along the Red River in northwestern Louisiana and southwestern Arkansas (see Schambach and Miller 1984; Webb 1959). This vessel section is a Belcher Engraved, *var. Belcher* everted rim (rounded lip) compound bowl (see Schambach and Miller 1984:Figure 11-11), commonly made in the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The upper panel of the vessel has a line of excised punctates as well as a horizontal engraved line with

small tick marks. The lower panel has four small applied nodes with sets of three short diagonal engraved lines on either side of the nodes. The remainder of the lower panel is divided into short horizontal engraved scrolls, as well as a horizontal row of excised punctations at the rim-body juncture (Figure 1d). The vessel is grog-tempered, fired in a reducing environment, burnished on both vessel surfaces, and ranges from 7.0-7.2 mm in thickness on the rim and body walls.

### Decorated Sherds

The miscellaneous decorated rim (n=14) and body (n=43) sherds include both utility wares (66.7%) and fine wares (33.3%). Utility wares comprise 71% of the rim sherds in the collection (Table 1). Identified ceramic types in this small assemblage are consistent with a Titus phase assemblage from the Greasy Creek area in that they include jars of Bullard Brushed, Pease Brushed-Incised, Harleton Applied, La Rue Neck Banded, Mockingbird Punctated, and Maydelle Incised, along with Ripley Engraved and Taylor Engraved carinated bowls and bottles. One of the Ripley Engraved sherds is from a *var. McKinney* carinated bowl.

### Plain Sherds

The plain sherds include three rims (tempered with grog and grog-bone), 48 body sherds, and five base sherds. One of the rims is from a bottle neck, and the other two are from carinated bowls with direct rims and rounded, exterior folded lips. The base sherds (tempered with grog and grog-bone) range from 9.7-17.7 mm in thickness; one of the base sherds has a drilled hole, suggesting it was used as a spindle whorl.

### Analysis of Temper

As with other Titus phase ceramic assemblages in the Big Cypress Creek basin, both utility ware, plain ware, and fine wares are predominantly tempered with grog (or crushed fired clay). In the Holcomb collection, more than 96% of the analyzed sherds are tempered with grog, either as the sole temper (n=22, 76%), or as combinations of grog-bone (n=6, 20.7%). A single sherd (3.4%) has bone temper additives.

**Table 1. Miscellaneous decorated sherds in the Vernon Holcomb Collection from the Shelby site (41CP71).**

Decorative method, sherd type	No.	Comments
<b>Utility Ware</b>		
Horizontal and diagonal brushed, rim	1	Bullard Brushed jar
Parallel brushed, body	21	Utility ware jar sherds
Parallel brushed-tool punctated, body	1	Pease Brushed-Incised or Bullard Brushed jar
Curvilinear appliqued, body	1	Harleton Appliqued jar
Neck banded rows, rim	2	La Rue Neck Banded jar
Tool punctated rows, rim	1	Mockingbird Punctated jar
Tool punctated rows, body	1	Utility ware jar sherd
Linear punctated rows, rim	1	Mockingbird Punctated jar
Horizontal and curvilinear punctated rows, rim	1	Jar, also lip notched
Opposed incised triangles filled with tool punctates, rim	1	Maydelle Incised jar
Nested incised triangle, diagonal dashed lines, rim	1	Jar of unidentified type
Horizontal incised lines, appliqued lugs, rim	1	Jar with rim peaks
Parallel incised lines, body	4	Maydelle Incised jar
Cross-hatched incised lines, rim	1	Maydelle Incised jar
Subtotal	38	
<b>Fine Ware</b>		
straight engraved line, body	6	Fine ware sherds
Horizontal engraved lines, rim	1	Carinated bowl
parallel engraved lines, red- slipped, body	1	Carinated bowl
Concentric engraved circles, body	1	Bottle
Taylor Engraved, bottle	1	multiple curvilinear engraved lines
Ripley Engraved decorative elements, rim	2	Scroll motif; 1 rim is red-slipped
Ripley Engraved decorative element, rim	1	Pendant triangles ( <i>var. McKinney</i> )
Ripley Engraved decorative elements, body	6	Ripley Engraved, <i>var. unspecified</i>
Subtotal	19	

## CONCLUSIONS

The Vernon Holcomb collection from the Shelby site contains 113 miscellaneous decorated and plain sherds as well as vessel sections (associated rim and body sherds) from 10 distinctive vessels. These sherds pertain exclusively to a grog-tempered eastern Titus phase ceramic assemblage (cf. Perttula 2005:404-405) with Ripley Engraved and Taylor Engraved fine wares, Belcher phase engraved fine ware trade wares, and an assortment of brushed, appliqued, punctated, and incised utility wares. The occurrence of a Ripley Engraved, *var. McKinney* carinated bowl, a Taylor Engraved bottle, and a Belcher Engraved, *var. Belcher* compound bowl in the collection suggests that these vessel sections had been eroded or washed out of 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. burial features at the site.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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