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THREE MID-1800S CADDO VESSELS FROM THE BRAZOS RESERVE

Timothy K. Perttula

INTRODUCTION

Although a considerable body of historic archival and documentary information is available on the Caddo Indian peoples that lived in Texas between ca. 1836 and 1859--the removal period (see Carter 1995; La Vere 1998; Perttula and Bruseth 1998; Smith 1995, 1996; Swanton 1942)--not much archaeological evidence has been uncovered for their settlements (Early 2000; Parsons et al. 1999; Perttula 1992). By the late 1830s and early 1840s, most of the Caddo groups had been removed from Northeast Texas as their traditional homelands were taken and settled by Anglo-American farmers and planters. Instead, they took up residence in Oklahoma, or settled with other affiliated groups (such as the Delaware, Cherokee, and others) on the Brazos River in north central Texas. There they continued to farm and hunt bison, even after they had been placed on the Brazos Reserve (in present-day Young County, Texas) in 1854. The Caddo peoples on the Reserve, about 1050 in number, were removed in August 1859 to the Indian Territory and the Wichita agency in western Oklahoma.

In this paper, I discuss three ceramic vessels in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. They were apparently collected in the mid-1850s from the Caddo peoples living on the Brazos Reserve. As such, the vessels provide a unique record and look at the kinds of ceramic vessels being manufactured by the Caddo immediately before they were removed to Oklahoma, and has considerable cultural and archaeological significance.

VESSELS FROM THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Three decorated vessels in the Brooklyn Museum were apparently collected from the Brazos Reserve by a Dr. Nathan Sturges Jarvis in the 1850s. Jarvis was a medical doctor, and had served in Texas on the staff of General Zachary Taylor during the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War. How Dr. Sturges came by the vessels is not known, nor is it known what he was doing in the Brazos Reserve area in the 1850s.

All three vessels are globular jars or small-mouthed bottles, with squat and undecorated rims, and they are decorated with a variety of engraved elements. Their temper or paste are not known, nor is any information available on how they were fired. A somewhat similar vessel shape is reported the late 18th Indian Springs site (41BW512) on the Red River (Perttula n.d.), and from the Fish Hatchery site in Natchitoches, Louisiana (Walker 1935:Figure 2b).

The first vessel (Figure 1, Brooklyn Museum No. 50.67.105A) has three horizontal panels that extend from below the lip to near the base, and these panels are filled with cross-hatched elements. The upper and lower panels have rectangular cross-hatched elements, while the middle panel has an alternating series of cross-hatched pendant triangles (Figure 1).

The second vessel (Brooklyn Museum No. 50.67.105B) has a broad, diagonally-filled and undulating scroll on the lower body. Corresponding undulating engraved lines

Figure 1. Vessel 50.67.105A, Brooklyn Museum.

Figure 2. Vessel 50.67.105B, Brooklyn Museum.

Figure 3. Vessel 50.67.105C, Brooklyn Museum.

were placed above and below the scroll, and the uppermost line has a series of small but unfilled pendant triangles (Figure 2).

The last vessel (Brooklyn Museum No. 50.67.105C) has a very complicated engraved design on the vessel body; the rim is plain (Figure 3). The engraved design is characterized by a series of narrow scrolls, with several filled with diagonal lines, and another composed of three closely-spaced and undulating lines. Above one of the diagonal line-filled scrolls is a corresponding undulating engraved line with a series of unfilled pendant triangles.

CULTURAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VESSELS

To my knowledge, no other Caddo Indian vessels are currently known or documented that were made in the mid-1850s, or come from the Brazos Reserve area. The form and decorative style of the vessels are immediately recognizable as Caddo in origin, and the fact that they were made in the 1850s demonstrates that there were Caddo potters still producing traditional pottery at that time; the mid-19th century archaeological record is silent on the retention of this craft among the Caddo peoples. Furthermore, the manufacture and use of engraved finewares--with distinctive pendant triangular, scroll, and snake-like motifs--remained an important part of the material culture of the Caddo Indian groups living on the Brazos River, particularly the Kadohadacho groups.

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