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## The Consideration of the Caddo Area in “Food Production in Native North America: An Archaeological Perspective”

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## **The Consideration of the Caddo Area in “Food Production in Native North America: An Archaeological Perspective”**

*Timothy K. Perttula*

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Kristen J. Gremillion (2018:ix) has written “a highly selective survey of Native North American food production systems from an archaeological perspective,” with a particular focus on plant food production in the Eastern Woodlands and the Southwest. The time frame of the book spans the period from ca. 3000 B.C. to post-European contact, extending up to ca. A.D. 1800. The archaeological evidence for plant food production in the Caddo Archaeological Area of Southwest Arkansas, Northwest Louisiana, eastern Oklahoma, and East Texas is mentioned by Gremillion (2018:72), but only rather briefly in her chapter entitled “the Rise of the Three Sisters: Maize in the Eastern Woodlands.”

First, it should be mentioned that her map of the Eastern Woodlands that depicts the locations of sites and archaeological region does not accurately illustrate the extent of the Caddo Area (Gremillion 2018:Figure 4.1). Gremillion’s map extends the Caddo Area all the way to the Gulf of Mexico and well west into what would be prairie natural regions in North Central and Central Texas. Second, her discussion of food production in the Caddo Area is only a single paragraph, and relies on the results of stable isotope analyses of ancestral Caddo peoples (i.e., Rogers 2011; Wilson and Perttula 2013; Perttula et al. 2014) rather than a consideration of the macrobotanical remains recovered from flotation samples at ancestral Caddo sites. Even so, Gremillion (2018:72) concludes that in the Caddo area:

on the western edge of the Eastern Woodlands, maize agriculture was gradually incorporated into mixed economies that continued to make substantial use of hunted and gathered foods as well as EAS [Eastern Agricultural Complex] crops.

What is currently known concerning food production by ancestral Caddo peoples has been bolstered in recent years by several studies of recovered macrobotanical remains from excavated Woodland period and later Caddo settlements and mound centers (see Bush 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Bush et al. 2014; Dering and Perttula 2011; Trubitt et al. 2016), as well as the radiocarbon dating of maize samples from sites in the southern Caddo area (Perttula et al. 2014:Table 1). These studies indicate that while maize may have been grown and used by Woodland period groups prior to A.D. 800, the sustained consumption and importance of maize in the southern Caddo area was not until after ca. A.D. 1200/1300, and maize (of two kinds, a spring or little corn and summer or flower corn) continued in importance after ca. A.D. 1680, during the Historic Caddo period. The ubiquity of maize in flotation samples from selected samples top 40-50 percent only after ca. A.D. 1200 (in the Middle Caddo period), and especially after ca. A.D. 1400, during the Late Caddo period.

The Caddo peoples had other cultigens or domesticated plants, including beans, squash (beginning in use in the Woodland period, see Bush 2008, 2009; Trubitt et al. 2016), and bottle gourd. Charred beans from a burned structure at the Eli Moores site (41BW2) on the Red River have been directly dated to A.D. 1487-1651 (Perttula and Selden 2014:Table 16). Starchy and oily seeds from probable cultivated plants such as chenopod, knotweed, amaranth, maygrass, little barley, panic grass, sumpweed, and sunflower are also commonly represented in ancestral Caddo macrobotanical remains, but not to the level seen in other parts of the Eastern Woodlands. Such Eastern Agricultural Complex plants were

important parts of the food production economy elsewhere in the Eastern Woodlands after ca. A.D. 1000 (Gremillion 2018:73-74), and perhaps they became better represented around and after ca. A.D. 1200 in ancestral Caddo sites, although they also were likely used as wild plant foods in sites in the Red and Ouachita River basins dating to Woodland period times (Bush 2009; Trubitt et al. 2016).

Lastly, the macrobotanical remains from some ancestral Caddo sites have persimmon seeds (see Bush 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Fields et al. 2014). Bush (2014b:69) suggests that persimmon trees were cultivated in “orchards” by Caddo peoples.

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