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A Ripley Engraved Vessel from the Sabine River Basin, Upshur County, Texas

Timothy K. Perttula and Jim Sides, Jr.

In this article we document an ancestral Caddo ceramic vessel that was accidentally discovered in the Sabine River basin on a camping trip, not far west-southwest of Gladewater, Texas, in Upshur County. Ripley Engraved was made by Caddo potters of the Late Caddo period (ca. A.D. 1430-1680) Titus phase (see Fields 2021:Figure 12-7; Perttula 2021:Figure 6-10). Sites of the Titus phase are known in East Texas from the Sulphur River basin on the north to the Sabine River basin on the south, but no core community of the phase is known or has been identified in this part of the Sabine River basin (Fields 2021:Figure 12-7); such communities tend to be downstream in Gregg and Harrison counties.

This Ripley Engraved, *var. Galt* carinated bowl stands approximately 13.4 cm in height and ca. 25.4 cm in orifice diameter (Figure 1), with an estimated volume of 3.0 liters. It likely was a



Figure 1. Ripley Engraved, *var. Galt* carinated bowl from a site near Gladewater and the Sabine River in Upshur County, Texas.

food serving vessel when it was in use, but may have served other purposes. It appears to be well smoothed or burnished, like almost all Titus phase fine ware carinated bowls.

Based on breakage along the exterior folded lip, the vessel had been manufactured with grog temper (or crushed pottery sherds) and fired in a reducing environment (note the dark core in Figure 1 at the break on the lip), but pulled from the fire to cool in the open air, leaving thin yellowish-tan exterior and interior surfaces. Half of the vessel interior has a large black fire-cloud (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Interior view of the Ripley Engraved, *var. Galt* carinated bowl, showing large black fire cloud on the base, body, and rim.

The *var. Galt* motif on this vessel, and as defined by Fields (2021:Table 12.2), has sets of slanted engraved scrolls with a circle as the primary element between the scrolls. The circle is almost complete, except along its lower boundary, and there is a small excised and central circle within the larger circle primary element. The primary element is likely repeated four times around the vessel. Underneath the lip is a single horizontal engraved line that marks the top of the rim panel, to which the upper parts of the larger circles meet, and running between them are upper and lower scroll fill zones with small excised brackets and excised triangle elements (see Figure 1).

A sample of over 2000 vessels from 17 Titus phase cemeteries in the Big Cypress Creek basin (Perttula 2021) indicate that Ripley Engraved vessels account for approximately 50 percent of the

entire vessel sample, especially carinated bowls, compound bowls, and bottles. A careful consideration of mortuary good associations in Titus phase cemetery contexts suggests that Ripley Engraved, *var. Galt* vessels were made between ca. A.D. 1430-1550 (Perttula 2021). In Field's (2021) analysis of Ripley Engraved carinated bowls from 30 East Texas Titus phase site collections, he notes that *var. Galt* is common in all but one of the sites, but is most common from sites in the Lake Fork Creek drainage of the upper Sabine River basin (what he terms the Dry Creek and Headwaters groups), but are also well represented in communities in the upper Big Cypress and Sulphur River basins.

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