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APPENDIX IV

Preliminary Ceramic Type Descriptions from the La Junta Archeological District

J. Charles Kelley
with a Foreword by William A. Cloud

Foreword

J. Charles Kelley spent much of his early archeological career working in the area known historically as La Junta de los Ríos (the area centered around the confluence of the Rio Grande and Río Conchos). From the mid-1930s through the early 1950s his efforts in Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric village sites led to recognition of a cultural construct known as the Bravo Valley aspect (Kelley et al. 1940), which consisted of three foci or phases representative of a relatively uninterrupted continuum of occupation: the La Junta phase (ca. A.D. 1200–1450), the Concepcion phase (ca. A.D. 1450–1684), and the Conchos phase (ca. A.D. 1684–1760). Kelley ultimately labeled the area containing these cultural manifestations the La Junta archeological district (Kelley 1952).

Kelley's excavations brought to light the occurrence of a variety of ceramics in association with the different phases of the Bravo Valley aspect. Southwestern wares such as El Paso Polychrome, Chihuahua Polychromes, Tusayan Polychrome, Playas Red, and Chupadero Black-on-White were dominant ceramics associated with the La Junta phase, whereas during the subsequent Concepcion and Conchos phases, wares thought to have been locally produced were much more prevalent (Kelley et al. 1940). Kelley proposed using nearby place names (i.e., Chinati and Capote) to label some of the distinctive wares and followed Sayles' (1936) use of "Conchos" as a moniker in recognizing others. Ultimately, seven separate type names came into use for the ceramics of the district associated with the Concepcion and Conchos phases: Chinati Plain, Chinati Filleted Rim, Chinati Scored, Capote Plain, Capote Red-on-Brown, Conchos Plain, and Conchos Red-on-Brown.

While the type names of these wares have appeared in publications for the last 50–60 years (e.g., Kelley et al. 1940; Kelley 1939, 1947, 1949, 1986, 1990; Shackelford 1951; Cloud et al. 1994), none have been formally described in print. Kelley did construct what he considered preliminary type descriptions for each of these wares while working with the collections. In the past, he shared these typewritten, one-to-two page descriptions with researchers of La Junta archeology. However, since his passing in December 1997, they have been relegated to his extensive personal files on the La Junta district. These descriptions are presented below, with the permission and encouragement of his widow, Ellen A. Kelley, so that current and future researchers of the district can retain and expand upon his typological work. Interestingly, his typology appears to have been recently validated through both instrumental neutron activation analysis and a petrographic (thin sectioning) analysis, which appear in this report as Appendices V and VI, respectively.

In sum, this researcher feels greatly indebted to J. Charles Kelley for his pioneering efforts in the archeology, cultural history, and history of La Junta and it is with the utmost respect and gratitude to him that these ceramic type descriptions are presented below exactly as he formulated them.

CHINATI PLAIN

Construction—Coiled

Wall Thickness—Average: 6 mm; range: 4–11 mm. There was a considerable increase in thickness near the apex of the conical bottom of the jars.

Paste—Crumbly and rather porous with frequent voids. The voids are of two sorts, those due to inadequate kneading and those due to the inclusion of small particles of vegetable matter in the paste.

Hardness—Paste hardness is about 3.5; surface hardness ranges from 3.5 to 4.

Temper—Usually fairly heavy, but may be medium to sparse. The tempering material is a medium to coarse river sand with considerable variety of minerals represented.

Finish—Secondary surfaces scraped and usually smoothed. Primary surfaces (bowl interiors and jar exteriors) were scraped and smoothed, and at least half of the pieces show a light to medium polish with distinct polishing streaks. The streaks were usually parallel to the rim on the neck, and at right angles to it on the body. The surface is sometimes smooth and even, but it more often has an irregular "dimpled" appearance. Both polished and unpolished surfaces have a tendency to crack, and a number of pieces have small flecks spalled off both primary and secondary surfaces due to expansion of limestone (?) particles in the temper during firing.

Color—Paste color is usually a dark orange-brown, but ranges through buff to gray. Carbon streaks at the core occur, but are not common. Surface color is sometimes the same as the paste color, but it is usually gray to black. This modification of the surface color due to the inclusion of carbon from use in a fire is one of the most characteristic features of the type.

Slip—None, but apparently the potter scraped or paddled the surface sufficiently while the clay was moist to bring a thin layer of "float" of finer particles to the surface.

Decoration—Normally none. One sherd recovered had a single broad red line pendant from a jar rim.

Form—Only one restorable piece was recovered, so the characteristic forms have been reconstructed from the evidence of the sherd material. A few bowl rims were present in the collection, and they seemed to come from deep, fairly straight-sided pieces. The majority of the sherds were from jars, and appear to represent variations on one basic shape. Lips were rounded or pinched, and usually somewhat uneven. The straight neck flared out, making a rather sharp angle with the vessel wall. Below, the neck flared out to form a distinctive rounded shoulder, normally the point of maximum diameter, below the vertical midline of the jar. There was a sharp contraction of the shoulder to form a rounded or pointed conical base, giving the jar the general form of many eastern Woodland pots.

CHINATI FILLETED RIM

Chinati Filleted Rim is identical with Chinati Plain in all respects except the treatment of the rim and neck zones.

Rim and Neck Treatment—A fillet effect was produced by leaving unsmoothed the last constructional coil or coils on the neck and at the rim. Rim and neck coils were left unsmoothed in both bowls and jars, but most commonly in the latter. In the majority of pieces only one coil was left unsmoothed. However, about a fourth of all sherds of this type had from two to five unsmoothed coils producing a banded rather than a filleted rim effect.

Coils—The coils were laid on as circlets, not spirals. The top of each coil was pinched to the one below in such a way as to give it a bevel toward the interior of the vessel. The next coil was then laid on in clapboard fashion and pinched into place. The ends of the circlets usually were brought together in about the same vertical line rather than being staggered around the circumference of the vessel wall. The ends of each coil were overlapped slightly and pinched together, leaving the overlap plainly visible.

CHINATI SCORED

Chinati Scored is identical with Chinati Plain in all respects except the surface finish.

Surface Finish—While the vessel was still in a plastic state, the surface apparently was brushed with the ends of a handful of coarse grass which produced a distinctive series of striations. The treatment was applied only to vessel exteriors and no sherds of the ware have been found that can definitely be identified as coming from bowls. Strokes were made away from the jar rim, usually at an angle with the rim. On the body of the vessel some strokes seem to have paralleled the rim to produce a crisscross effect. A few sherds which were partly scored and partly plain indicate that this treatment was not applied to the whole surface. In addition, a few scored sherds show punctate marks that were probably made by pressing the end of a hollow reed against the wet clay.

CAPOTE PLAIN

Construction—Coiled

Wall Thickness—Average: 5.5 mm; range: 4–8 mm.

Paste—Porous, but with a tendency to flake rather than to crumble. Capote paste has a higher breaking point than Chinati, and has the appearance of having been better fired.

Hardness—Paste hardness 3.5–4; surface hardness about 4.

Temper—Medium to sparse. The tempering material is a medium to fine river sand with a variety of minerals represented.

Finish—There is a considerable range in the surface treatment. Some pieces were only smoothed, others were slightly polished, and a few were quite well polished.

Color—Paste color ranges from an orange-brown through buff to light gray. Carbon staining at the core is rather uncommon. Surface color is usually a grayish brown, but it ranges from an orange-brown to buff. Firing clouds are common. Carbon staining from use in a fire occurs in about one piece in ten.

Slip—None

Decoration—None

Form—On the basis of sherds only, three common forms may be identified. Most of the pieces were bowls. Over half were deep with fairly straight sides; the others were "soup plate" forms, shallow with flaring sides. Jars made up about a quarter of the rim sherds studied. Nearly all of them were from a shouldered form with a short straight neck and a rounded or flattened lip. A "seed-jar" form without a neck was also made, and there was one sherd that may have come from a small dipper. Jar handles consisted of single vertical loops attached either at the lip or just below the neck. Two bowl rim sherds showed the base of a strap handle, and there was a single example of a flat lug handle which had been appliquéd to the exterior of a sherd which may have come from either a bowl or a jar.

Note—A number of Capote sherds had a rather unusual feature. Fragments of the surface had spalled off leaving a smooth finished surface exposed. Apparently this was due to the addition of a layer of clay which was smeared on stucco-fashion after the vessel had been made and at least sundried.

CAPOTE RED-ON-BROWN

Capote Red-on-Brown is identical with Capote Plain except for its decoration.

Decoration—The paint used gave a brownish red ranging to a light brown hue which is often difficult to see against the background color. Occasionally the painted lines are almost black, apparently the result of local underfiring. The paint was unevenly applied. Bowl interiors and exteriors were customarily decorated but decoration appears to have been quite rarely applied to jars. The lip was customarily painted red and a red band parallels the rim in almost every instance, often both inside and out. Below the rim straight and curving lines formed a geometric pattern on the vessel walls. The small size of sherds recovered prevented reconstruction of decorative patterns.

CONCHOS PLAIN

Construction—Coiled or wheel turned.

Wall Thickness—Average: 9 mm; range: 5–16 mm. The variation in thickness in a single sherd may be as great as 5 mm.

Paste—Fairly compact, but with a high percentage of very fine sand which seems to have been a natural inclusion in the clay.

Hardness—Paste hardness and surface hardness range from 3.5–4.

Temper—Medium to sparse. The tempering material is a medium to coarse river sand with a considerable variety of minerals represented. The size makes it quite distinct from the very fine sand which appears to have been a natural inclusion in the clay.

Finish—Smoothed, but never polished. The surfaces are uneven, and usually show the marks left by the smoothing tool on the plastic clay.

Color—The paste is usually a brownish orange, somewhat lighter than the Chinati, but it ranges to a light buff. There is usually a variation through the cross section of a single sherd.

Carbon-stained cores are present in about 25% of the sherds. Surface color is usually the same as, or slightly darker than, the paste. Firing clouds are quite common, but the carbon staining due to use in a fire is not present as a rule.

Slip—Conchos vessels were often slipped. Slip color ranged from buff to a greenish white. The slip was usually applied only to the primary surface, but in some cases bowl exteriors were slipped, or the slip was carried over the lip of a jar. As a rule, the slip had a matte surface, but in a few cases it had been fired so as to produce a definite glaze. There seems to have been some difficulty in getting the slip to hold when it reached the vitrification point and it tended to collect in bubbly masses in limited areas.

Decoration—None

Form—Unfortunately, no whole or restorable pieces of Conchos Plain are known. The sherds indicate that both bowls and jars were common. Most of the bowls seem to have been deep with rather straight sides and flat bottoms. The most common jar form appears to have had a rounded lip, low everted rim, a rather high shoulder, and a globular body below the shoulder. Jar bottoms were usually flat, but in one instance a circlet of clay had been pressed on to make a low pedestal. Single loop handles occur sporadically. One rather unusual form was also made. It was a flat-bottomed

"platter" with turned-up edges. The bottoms were quite thin and the texture of the underside indicated that the clay had been patted out on an irregular flat surface. The turned-up edges were considerably thicker and had been modeled. The various sherds of such vessels recovered were too small to allow determination of the size of these forms, but one set of four sherds fitted together to give what appeared to be the rounded corners of a rectangular form.

Note—Some form of the potter's wheel was introduced during the life of the Conchos types. Many of the Conchos sherds were obviously coiled and scraped. However, others show the characteristic horizontal working lines of the wheel-turned vessel. It is interesting that there seems to have been some difficulty in controlling the process. Coils were still used, but they were often not completely bonded. As a result many of the sherds show a characteristic diagonal fracture along the coil lines. Controlling the thickness of the vessel wall also seems to have presented some difficulty, as it is not unusual for the thickness to vary as much as 5 mm in a single wheel-turned sherd. Conchos Plain also shows another unusual feature. On a number of sherds the surface had spalled off leaving a smoothed, finished surface underneath. Apparently after the vessel was finished, and at least sun-dried, a layer of clay was smeared stucco-fashion over parts of the surface, smoothed down, and fired.

CONCHOS RED-ON-BROWN

Conchos Red-on-Brown is identical with Conchos Plain except for its decoration.

Decoration—The paint used is a brownish red. It was applied in broad sweeping lines to both slipped and unslipped surfaces. Brushwork is inferior. Both jars (exterior) and bowls (interiors and exteriors) were decorated. Lips were customarily painted red and a wide band was commonly applied to bowl exteriors below the lip although most bowl decoration was placed on the interior. A red band was frequently painted below and parallel to the lip on the interior. In most instances another red band was painted parallel to the lip on the exterior. Sometimes this band was made very broad so that it extended well down on the vessel neck and at other times the band was left fairly narrow and curving red lines were painted on the vessel neck and shoulder pendant from it. The small size of surviving sherds made it difficult to reconstruct the decorative pattern but design elements seem to have been curvilinear and geometric almost universally.

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