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## APACHE PLAIN AND OTHER PLAINWARES ON APACHE SITES IN THE EXTREME SOUTHERN SOUTHWEST

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### INTRODUCTION

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The ways mobile groups use and make ceramics varies substantially from sedentary groups. A growing literature on this topic (Simms et al. 1997; Eerkens 2003) is being supplemented by protohistoric plainware ceramic studies in the American Southwest (Hill 2002, 2006; Seymour 2002). At issue are the classificatory tools designed to aid in understanding how pottery interfaces with time-and-space systematics and the analytical procedures used to differentiate pottery of this period. As a prelude to more in-depth discussions of mobile group pottery manufacture and use (to be discussed in another forum), this present paper explores a subset of the topic.

Here five points are briefly discussed that relate to the problem of defining Apache pottery in archaeological contexts of the extreme southern Southwest.

- Discussion begins by pointing out that the classificatory system devised for Southwestern Athapaskan ceramics is obsolete because its structure parallels now-outdated assumptions about Athapaskan groups in the region.
- Second, the ceramic type “Apache Plain” is discussed, as is the issue of “micaceous” pottery with respect to how imprecisely this “Apache Plain” “type” is being used and how recklessly observations are being made regard-

ing pottery attributes, including the nature of the fabric and forming and finishing techniques. “Micaceous” grayware pottery of a variety of types is associated with the Jicarilla, and Apache Plain is a Western Apache grayware that is not specifically micaceous. This is an important point of clarification because in the extreme southern Southwest atypical or rogue plainwares are referred to as micaceous Apache Plain when they are neither micaceous or graywares.

- I then touch on the issue of how the type-variety system is inappropriate for mobile groups, such as the Apache, and discuss how it serves to mask variability, when in fact an important part of the protohistoric plainware message is encoded in the variability.
- This issue overlaps into the fourth topic which is that there is an expectation for material culture to occur on Apache sites that did not belong to them because they were raiders and traders. This, and the fact of multicomponentcy, makes it imprudent to consider all spatially associated artifacts on Apache sites indicative of the “Apache” tradition, but instead it tells us about interaction and related topics.

- Each of these problems is exacerbated by the low priority given plainwares or plain-surfaced utility wares<sup>1</sup> in ceramic studies and to the uncritical eagerness often practiced when encountering a suspected Apache site. There is now a complex of archaeologically observable traits that define this group based on the presence of indigenous material culture. Recognition of an Apache presence can be made in the absence of European-introduced materials (glass and metal) and in the absence of ceramics (Seymour 2002, 2003a, 2004a), and it is probably wise to rely heavily on these other indices.

The *sine qua non* is that pottery from ancestral Apachean contexts in the south is represented by paddle-and-anvil-made brownwares that are not specifically micaceous, and for which the mineralogical content of the clay is highly variable. Many other attributes are variable as well, but the working assumption is they are variable within a range that makes them distinguishable from regional prehistoric wares. These characteristics arise from the use of local self-tempered brown clays from a variety of sources by itinerant and occasional potters who seem to have learned the technique from their closest neighbors who were not coil-and-scrape potters.

## PLAINWARE: THE BANE OF SOUTHWESTERN POTTERY CLASSIFICATION

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The taxonomy for Quemado Grayware and Sangre de Cristo Micaceous devised at the 1985 Southern Athapaskan Ceramics Conference (Baugh and Eddy 1987:Figures 1 and 2; Ferg 2004:Figure 2) was designed to encompass the pottery made by Athapaskans in the American Southwest (Figure 1). Inherent in this classification are a series of

assumptions about lineal relationships between Athapaskan groups, sequence and timing of migration, and geographic and temporal coherency of technology. In this scheme ancestral Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache pottery was conceptualized relative to the better-known graywares of the Navajo and Western Apache (Cibecue, White Mountain, San Carlos) and in contrast to Jicarilla micaceous wares. The latter groups have been given primacy and greater attention, largely because they were relatively more sedentary and more greatly influenced by surrounding settled groups and so are more visible archaeologically. Moreover, the idea of a single route of entry into the Southwest via the Plains had dominated the literature for some time. As notions about multiple routes and times of entry have advanced, perceptions about pottery have lagged, perhaps because some of the earliest-known sites lack pottery, entreating the issue as to whether this technology was a late addition to the Athapaskan material culture repertoire.

Research in the extreme southern Southwest in the territory of the Chiricahua and Mescalero indicates that there is no unified or single tradition that includes the pottery of all of these Athapaskan groups. Several factors account for differences in the character of the pottery and degree of reliance on this technology among the various Athapaskan subgroups. Some of these factors include the position of each group along the continuum of mobility-to-sedentary lifeway, influence from neighboring tribes, lack of overarching tribal organization, geographic separation and occupation of different environmental zones, small group size, and differences in, effectiveness of, and focal points of recruitment practices.

Most of the intrinsic assumptions about the place of Chiricahua and Mescalero pottery in the Southern Athapaskan Ceramics Conference classification have been violated rendering this associa-

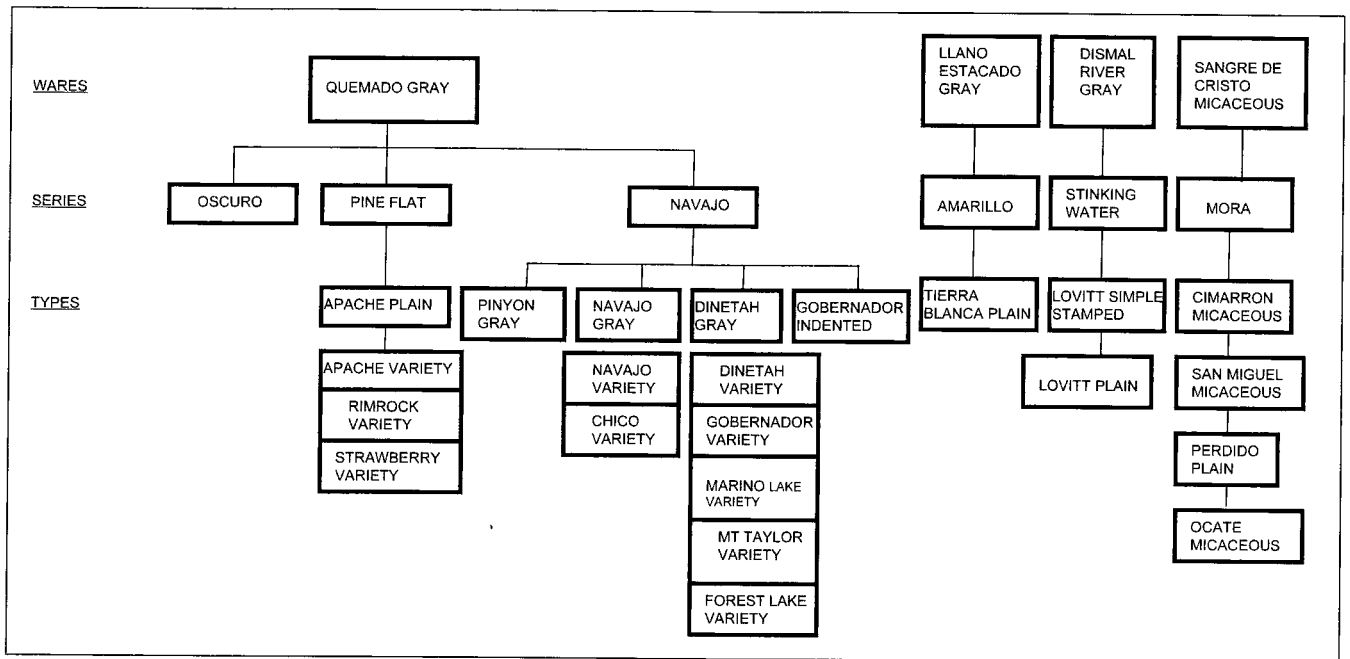


Figure 1.

Previous notions about (or taxonomy for) pottery made by Athapaskans in the American Southwest.

tion inappropriate. In this latter typology Chiricahua and Mescalero pottery is classed under the Oscuro Series with its types unspecified, but this placement follows the assumption that these types are graywares (Figure 1). But Chiricahua and Mescalero pottery is not gray-pasted. More specifically, southern specimens differ from Apache Plain and so the local Apache pottery should not be referred to as Apache Plain because its attributes do not match the most basic aspects of the type description. Nor was Chiricahua and Mescalero pottery formed by coil and scrape, but rather all evidence points to paddle-and-anvil forming techniques. Nor is pottery in the extreme southern Southwest "micaceous," as are those in the Moro Series of the Sangre de Cristo Micaceous Ware. Although pottery in the southern Southwest contains residual flecks of mica, like local prehistoric and historic plainwares of neighboring groups, this attribute does not overwhelmingly define its paste as it does for the Jicarilla and neighboring northern New Mexico Pueblos.

If typology is going to be used and existing names invoked as an indicator of cultural affiliation then it is wise to use the typology in an informed manner. In doing so pottery should be placed with care into the existing typology or a new or revised typology should be intentionally constructed that meets the needs of the analyst, conforms to observations, and incorporates new knowledge.

## BASIC ATTRIBUTES OF THE APACHE PLAIN TYPE

One use of typology is as a way to establish a uniform and consistent terminology to describe pottery that shares certain basic attributes (Sabloff 1975). The attributes selected for analysis and distinction can vary depending upon what the analyst wishes to achieve with the specific classification. Usually vessel forming techniques (paddle and anvil versus coil and scrape), paste and inclusion

characteristics (graywares, brownwares, whitewares), vessel form, and decoration (style) provide the basis for distinctions (Sabloff 1975; Shepard 1956). Given this, is it useful to examine the original and subsequently modified type descriptions for Apache Plain which can be found in Gifford (1980:163–164; also see Brugge 1982; Baugh and Eddy 1987). Apache Plain is the designated Apache pottery in east central Arizona and west central New Mexico; this and other types (and several varieties) in the Pine Flat Series have been inferred to be affiliated with the Western Apache (Baugh and Eddy 1987:797; Figure 1).

### **Brownwares versus Graywares**

Apache ceramics in the extreme southern Southwest are brownwares in that they are made of brown-firing clay, as apparently is the brown-paste “Apache Plain” of the Tonto National Forest described by Wood (1987). For this reason they do not fit into the taxonomies for Quemado Grayware or Sangre de Cristo Micaceous devised at the 1985 Southern Athapaskan Ceramics Conference (Baugh and Eddy 1987:Figure 2; Ferg 2004: Figure 2) where all of the other Southwestern Athapaskan pottery is situated. In this latter typology Chiricahua and Mescalero pottery is classed under the Oscuro Series with its types unspecified, but following the assumption that these types would be graywares. But Chiricahua and Mescalero pottery differs from Apache Plain because it is a brownware. Given this, local Apache pottery should not be referred to as Apache Plain because its attributes do not match the most basic aspects of the type description (including fabric).

More to the point, given that locally produced or used ceramics are not graywares they must be classed as a different ware than those for the Navajo, Western Apache, and Jicarilla that are.<sup>2</sup> This is only important if we wish to adhere to established classification standards. In ceramic

typology this brownware versus grayware distinction is fundamental and serves as the basis for establishing wares and the type-variety system. For this reason, it is useful to remove the Apachean brownwares in the extreme southern Southwest from the Quemado Grayware classification where the Apache Plain type resides. Southern brownwares would then be placed in a parallel but distinct ware.

If one wishes to use such classificatory schemes I suggest Peloncillo Brownware as a ware name because the Peloncillo Mountains overlap into both states and across the international border. I also propose the retention of Sierra Plain as a variety—the one clearly associated with the Apache (see Seymour 2002)—in the Malpais type within the Oscuro series, with a number of potential varieties (Figure 2). Avoidance of “Apache” in the type name is advocated because not all pottery found on Apache sites was made by the Apache and the Apache seem to have made other types of pottery. This allows types defined on Apache sites to be moved into other wares if needed and does not prematurely assume that a specimen was made by the Apache or that it was the only type made by them. There are a sufficient number of examples of brownware ceramics from ancestral Apache sites throughout Arizona and New Mexico to justify these distinctions (especially given that Gifford [1980:163] originally defined Apache Plain on 151 sherds, fewer sherds than are present at the Cerro Rojo Site in the Hueco Mountains alone). The sample from the south includes sherds and vessels from the Dragoon, Chiricahua, Peloncillo, Organ, Hueco, and Sacramento mountains, Otero Mesa, Tularosa Basin, and San Pedro River Valley, as well as a subset of the vessels pictured in Ferg (2004).

If practitioners feel the need to label the pottery for ease of reference then it is incumbent upon them to establish categories with some meaning and not

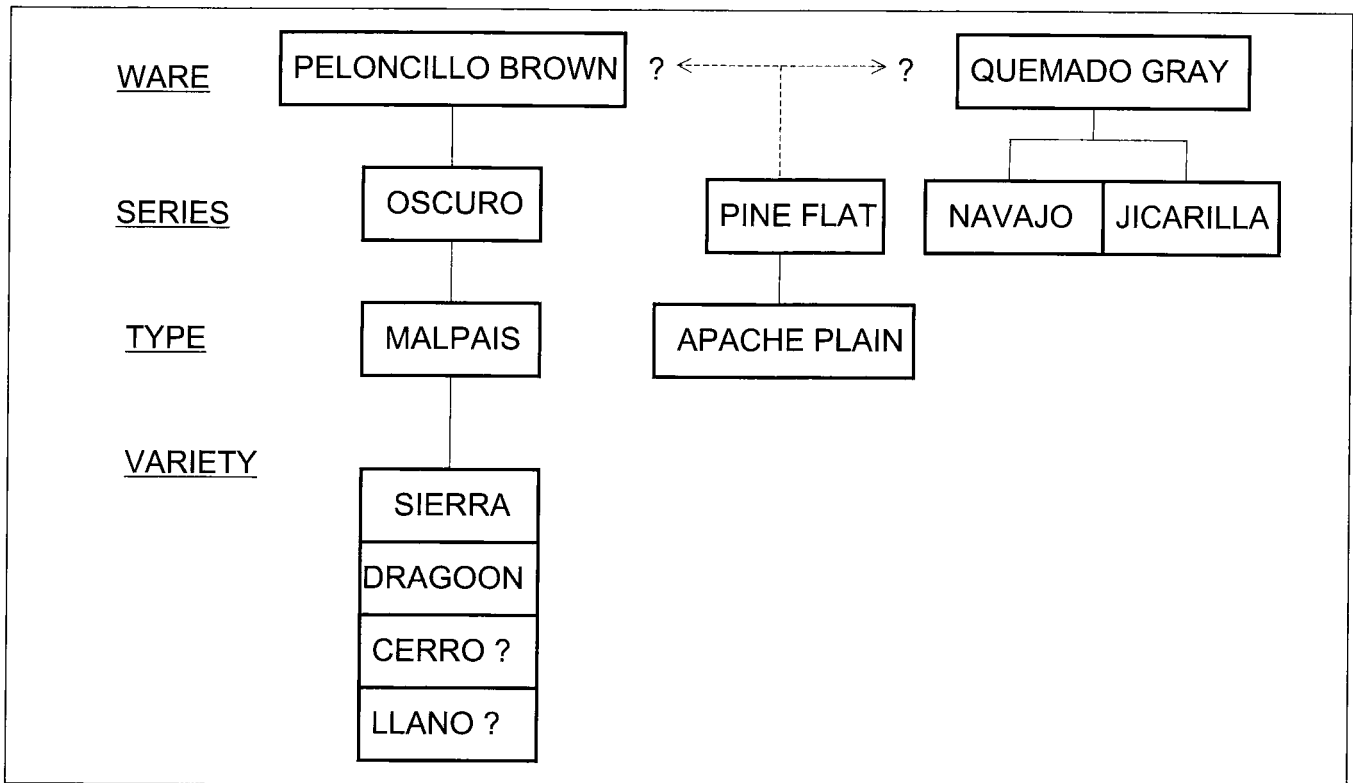


Figure 2.

Peloncillo Brownware and Quemado Grayware classification relative to Apache Plain.

violate existing classificatory boundaries. While classificatory schemes are tools to assist researchers in understanding and can be modified along with research questions, this should be done with an understanding of the structure and function of the classification system. I apply labels as temporary holding depositories for pottery specimens that share certain characteristics, as determined by visual inspection and petrographic analysis, and use these working categories in a way that is much like Mera's (1935) original intent for "sorting names." The names allow a short-hand summary of attributes that facilitates comparison and communication. This allows me to distinguish between examples that date to certain time periods and which share certain replicable and definable characteristics with the intention of investigating what those differences may mean.<sup>3</sup>

### Paddle and Anvil versus Coil and Scrape

Gosselain (2000) has pointed out that forming techniques are fundamental in the learning and production processes. Fashioning techniques are some of the aspects of pottery production most resistant to change and are therefore most closely linked to identity (Gosselain 2000:192–193). What this means is that this distinction between paddle and anvil and coil and scrape is fundamental and the observation that the pottery consistently found on Apache sites in the extreme southern Southwest is made by the paddle-and-anvil technique is important. This distinguishes the Chiricahua and Mescalero Apache groups from their northern neighbors. It probably tells us something about from whom they learned pottery-making techniques, and it likely informs us about the geo-

graphic focus of recruitment practices that may have brought potters into their group.

As noted, Quemado Graywares are characterized by a coil-and-scrape technology. Many of the northern settled groups made pottery by the coil-and-scrape technique and because many scholars believe that the more northern Apache learned to make pottery through their associations with the Pueblos (Brugge 1982) it is assumed that all Southwestern Apachean pottery was also made by this same technique (Baugh and Eddy 1987). Analysis of the northern graywares would seem to confirm this assessment, and manufacture by coil and scrape is an attribute of the Apache Plain type definition (Brugge 1982; Baugh and Eddy 1987).

While Southwestern Apachean ceramics are thought to be made by the coil-and-scrape technique, Gunnerson argued that Ocate Micaceous pottery was manufactured by paddle and anvil (Gunnerson 1969:36; Brugge 1982:286, 287; although see Eiselt 2006). Critics have by their arguments implied that all Southwestern Apache pottery should be made using the same vessel-forming techniques (Baugh and Eddy 1987), presumably because they assume there was a common ceramic-producing tradition among all Southwestern Athapaskans, as the typology implies. Again this basic assumption is faulty as it appears that pottery was made by small local groups who learned from their neighbors and recruited potters from neighboring tribes. "The Apache" encompass such a large geographic expanse that they overlapped the territories of many different contemporaneous groups from which they could have learned. Moreover individual Apache bands practiced different lifeways that were characterized by differing degrees of residential mobility, unequal reliance on raiding, and recruitment of members from different tribes. It is likely that individual local Apache groups learned from coil-and-scrape potters, while others learned

from paddle-and-anvil groups. This means that this one aspect of Apache pottery is loaded with an incredible amount of social information. Instead of focusing on the information value of this difference, practitioners tend to hem-and-haw over the inability to make it all fit or they simply avoid addressing the issue of variability.

Many of the clearly Apachean wares found in the southern Southwest show the diagnostic attributes indicative of paddle-and-anvil construction.<sup>4</sup> These attributes include the uneven interior surface often referred to as "dimpling." Some wares in central Arizona thought to be Apache and classed as Apache Plain are also paddle-and-anvil made. In a checklist of pottery types for the Tonto National Forest area Wood (1987:115) suggests that Apache Plain is a paddle-and-anvil-made pottery even though the Apache Plain type is specifically defined on the basis of a coil-and-scrape technology (Brugge 1982). If this description of the local Apachean pottery is accurate this would suggest that the Tonto-area Apache used a vessel-forming technique that differed from their San Carlos or White Mountain neighbors who produced coil-and-scrape Apache Plain. If so, this is an important distinction that is not aided by labeling the Tonto area pottery "Apache Plain." The addition of a new label in this case would serve in highlighting this distinction that may carry with it other socially relevant information.

#### **A Note about Micaceous Pottery**

Micaceous sherds have been identified as associated with the Jicarilla Apache in northeastern New Mexico by Gunnerson (1969) who defined Ocate Micaceous and related micaceous plainwares (see Brugge 1982; Baugh and Eddy 1987). As I have noted (Seymour 2002:255, Figure 7.6) mica is clearly visible in these northern sherds because the mica is relatively large, abundant, and silver. In this regard the paste composition is similar to Taos and Picuris pottery because all used the same clay