

**CUPEÑO CERAMICS:  
A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS FROM LOST VALLEY, CA.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper through comparative analysis reports on the types of vessel shapes of Native American ceramics at CA-SDI-2508.

**INTRODUCTION**

Ceramics undoubtedly were an integral part of the lifeways of prehistoric cultures. The appearance of ceramic technology did not just provide a group with a valuable tool, but it created a vehicle for the expression and representation of cultural values. Ceramic technology was of course applied toward the construction of utilitarian or "everyday" objects such as vessels for cooking, eating and storing; however, it was also used to produce non-utilitarian items such as pipes, gaming pieces and items to accompany burial.

The advent of ceramics into prehistoric societies had major effects. Better storage capabilities meant that hunter/gatherer societies could live more sedentary lifestyles since they could now store greater quantities of food for longer periods. Furthermore, ceramic vessels provided a means by which to transport foodstuffs from region to region. Fortunately, ceramic technologies have tended to vary in some degree between groups and throughout time. As a result, archaeologists rely heavily on indigenous ceramics in their efforts to describe the ideology, movements, and subsistence strategies of groups.

The aim of this discussion is twofold. Presented first is a brief overview of the ceramics obtained from CA-SDI-2508 and the methods used in analysis. The second half deals with the issues of group ideology, movement(s) and subsistence strategies as they are represented by the collection.

Preliminary analysis involved the sorting of sherds into three categories as follows: material types, vessel forms and "exotics"-- fragments that were uncommon or merit greater attention. This method of analysis allowed us to gain some idea, in a relatively short amount of time, of what the collection from CA-SDI-2508 represents in terms of ceramics.

**MATERIAL TYPES**

Several types of pottery were recovered from CA-SDI-2508 including Tizon Brown, Tumco Buff, Salton Buff and Colorado Buff. Tizon Brown is easily recognizable through its dark brown color, irregular surface and inconsistent matrix. It is made from residual clays that are high in quartz and mica content. Temper is usually added to reduce shrinking and cracking. Tizon Brownware is common to the peninsular ranges which provide an abundance of decomposing granite for temper and low quality clays. The manufacture of Tizon Brownware was widespread in the mountain region by A.D. 1300 and had most likely diffused westward from the desert region. Rogers suggests that the Cupeño probably learned the skill from the neighboring Ipai-Tipai groups (Rogers 1936). The coiling method is used in the construction of Tizon vessels followed by smoothing using a paddle and anvil or cobbled stone.

Like Tizon, the buffwares were constructed using the coiling method followed by smoothing using a paddle and anvil. Unlike Tizon, however, the material used in the construction of buffwares is sedimentary and common to the lowland desert

and Colorado River region. Buffwares were manufactured primarily by the desert cultures, located east of the Cupeño. Three types of buffware were collected from the site including Tumco, Salton and Colorado.

Tumco Buffware may be characterized as having few rounded inclusions, no temper and a fairly uniform matrix. It is usually well oxidized and often exhibits stucco treatment or scumming. Its color may range from pink to light buff to gray. According to Waters' typology, Tumco Buff occurs during the Patayan II Period beginning in A.D. 1000 and continuing until A.D. 1500 (Waters 1982). Its place of manufacture is primarily along the western side of the Colorado River and west to the western Arizona Desert and northern Baja.

Salton Buffware is easily distinguished by its abundance of sand temper or inclusions that are well rounded. Fragments of freshwater shells or mollusks are often found in the fabric. Like Tumco Buff, Salton Buff is well oxidized with occasional scumcoat and walls that are medium to thin. Salton Buffware was manufactured in and around the shoreline of Lake Cahuilla at the same time as Tumco; however, suggestions have been made that its period of manufacture may actually stretch from the late Patayan I Period to early Patayan III, a period of roughly 1000 yrs. or more (Waters 1982). It was quite often traded east to the Colorado River region (Waters, 1982), but as its presence in our assemblage suggests, it occasionally made its way west. Salton Buff occurs in a variety of colors ranging from buff to red.

The final type of buffware collected from the site was Colorado Buff. Colorado Buff is fairly easy to distinguish primarily because of its superior quality compared to Tumco and Salton. Colorado Buff contains very small amounts of temper or inclusions and has a highly uniform matrix. Its thin walls and smooth surface and long breakage margins make it immediately recognizable. The manufacture of Colorado Buff occurred in the Colorado River region, during the Patayan III Period, beginning in A.D. 1500 and continuing until the early 1900s (Waters 1982). Most importantly, Colorado Buff represents not only the high point in Patayan ceramic technology but also

the greatest extent of Patayan diffusion, having reached all the way to the west coast.

## VESSEL FORMS

The next stage in analysis concerned determining the shapes of the vessels found in association with site SDI-2508. This involved mainly differentiating between jars (ollas) and bowls. Using the rim sherds collected from site SDI-2508, pieces representing bowls and those representing jars were determined using a diagram provided by Sutton and Arkush (Sutton and Arkush 1996). Vessel form was determined by viewing the side profile of a sherd; the presence of a rim, neck and shoulder indicating a jar, while pieces containing only a rim and neck were indicative of bowls. Out of a total of 54 rim sherds collected, 33% was attributed to jars while 67% was from bowls. It must be taken into account, however, that the higher percentage of bowl sherds does not necessarily imply a greater abundance of bowls since the wider diameter of bowls would naturally yield more rim sherds per vessel.

Using Malcolm Rogers' diagram for lip configurations (Rogers 1936), lip types were represented as follows: squared = 41%, round = 33%, projecting asymmetrical = 11%, and rounded in/ squared out = 11%.

## EXOTICS

The final stage of analysis involved the sorting out of special sherds or "exotics," meaning any sherd that showed unusual characteristics in relation to the collection if not to the group as well.

Of particular interest is a grooved piece. Ethnographic literature describing the pottery of the Cupeño states that the decoration of vessels was uncommon (Rogers 1936). While these grooves may be decorative, there is also the possibility that they had a functional role and were used to house cordage for carrying purposes. When decoration did occur, it was often in the form of rim notching. Although rim notching is rare, it does sometimes occur and may have been popular particularly during the Patayan Period,

post-A.D. 1500. One fragment containing rim notching was recovered from the site. Notches may have been applied using the fingernail or perhaps a sharpened tool such as a bone awl.

Occasionally, ceramic vessels required repair work. The repair of a vessel usually began by drilling a hole on each side of a break through which a cord could be tied, thus allowing an individual to pull the fracture tight. Pine pitch was often added as an adhesive. Several pieces were recovered that showed evidence of repair.

Ceramic fragments often filled secondary roles. Pieces of broken pottery were often reused as scrapers, gaming pieces, and pendants. Modified pottery is usually detected by the presence of unusual edge wear or uncharacteristic shapes. Several pieces showing signs of modification or secondary use were recovered from the site.

The sealing of jars was another technique applied by the Cupeño. Water and perishables were placed in large jars with narrow mouths and sealed by applying some type of adhesive, most likely pine pitch, to the rim. A stone lid was then placed on top, sealing the mouth of the vessel. Pine pitch was also applied to the outside walls of vessels to seal the entire jar.

Considerable attention has been given to a piece that was recovered showing an unusual shape. It was determined that the fragment came from a "globular" shaped vessel, the only one of its kind in the collection. Interestingly, the "globular" shape is listed as a Cupeño trait in Drucker's work from 1937; however, it is absent from Rogers' 1945 list for Cupeño vessel shapes.

The forces behind the coloration of pottery are often explainable. Several pieces from the same vessel, however, resisted easy explanation and thus have generated some discussion. These pieces contain a reddish-purple discoloration that occurs fairly uniformly along the surface of the vessel, having the appearance of an intentional decoration. The relationship between the final coloring of a vessel and the manufacturing process has been well studied (Sheperd 1980). According to Sheperd, an oxygen-rich atmosphere will produce pottery that is uniform in

color and often reddish. In contrast, a reducing atmosphere, characterized by a lack of oxygen during the firing process, will produce pottery less uniform in color as iron oxides and other minerals remain unburned. Pottery fired in a reducing atmosphere produces darker colors such as gray. The use of the open fire method for firing pottery by the Cupeño was recorded by Philip Drucker in 1937. In 1945, Malcolm Rogers also reported the use of the open pit method by neighboring Yuman groups.

## DISCUSSION

Surface collections and excavations at CA-SDI-2508 yielded pottery of two different ware-types. The bulk of the ceramic collection is comprised mainly of Tizon Brown, constituting 95% of the total ceramics collected. In contrast, the buffwares represented only 5% of the total collection. Similar percentages were found in D. L. True's excavations at CA-SDI-860 (True 1970) and Shackley's excavations at CA-SDI-161 (Shackley 1981), with an increase in the percentage of buffwares moving toward the desert. Within the collection, the presence of the buffware seems to be associated more with bowls than with large storage jars. This would seem logical given that when transporting a vessel between the desert and mountain region, preference would have probably been given to smaller vessels.

The variations in the sizes and shapes of the vessels, including the "globular" shape, suggest that the Cupeño relied on a variety of vessel shapes for different tasks. A variety of lip styles are also represented; however, there appears to be no immediate correlation between vessel form and lip style.

Several different pieces termed "exotics" are seen in the collection. Ethnographic literature predominately states that Cupeño pottery remained undecorated (Rogers 1936). Given this, the deep grooves found on one piece of pottery may well have played a functional vs. aesthetic role. In contrast, evidence of rim notching clearly indicates that at least some decoration was applied occasionally. The presence of bi-conical drill holes and pine pitch on several pieces informs us that

not only did the Cupeño possess skills in repairing pots, but also may have placed a high value on particular vessels. Potsherds were often put to secondary uses as evidenced by unusual modifications and use-wear patterns.

Based on previous studies, unusual coloring or smudging may be the result of poor firing conditions, resulting in discoloration. Conversely, there is also the possibility that the unusual reddish-purple coloration is the application of some type of decoration.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the range of ceramic wares and types suggests a relatively long history of occupation at site SDI-2508 beginning sometime around A.D. 1000 and continuing up to the early 1900s. The presence of desert buffware types suggests that contact between desert groups and those utilizing the mountain region did occur. Precisely under what circumstances such contact

occurred is speculative at this point. If exchange did occur between the two groups, the small percentage of buffware suggests that it may have been infrequent, perhaps limited to ceremonial exchanges. The variety of vessel forms and functions suggests that several vessel types were utilized by the Cupeño in a variety of subsistence activities. The rather poor construction and subsequent quality of Tizon Brownware and the general absence of decoration suggests that ceramic technology served a primarily utilitarian function.

Preliminary analysis on the ceramics has provided a clearer picture of the ideology, movements and subsistence strategies of Late Prehistoric Cupeño society. In turn, this has advanced attempts to accurately reconstruct the past lifeways of the Cupeño based on archaeological evidence. Possible inquiries in the future may include, but are not limited to, greater statistical analysis, residue and use-wear analysis, and clay sourcing as well as comparisons with other collections.

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