Rose Red-Filmed by Any Other Name

A Genealogy of Pottery Typology in the Southeastern United States

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Working with legacy collections, it's common to come across labeled artifacts or reports listing now defunct artifact type names. Rather than treating them as a nuisance to be updated, what can we learn from these names as historical artifacts themselves? For us, this issue arose when we began rehabilitating a study collection of pottery from the southeastern United States. The sherds had been given to researchers at the Florida State Museum (now Florida Museum of Natural History, or FLMNH) at the University of Florida (UF) in the 1950s and 1960s from institutions such as Mound State Monument (now Moundville Archaeological Park), the University of Texas at Austin, and Louisiana State University (LSU). For the most part, sherds were labeled with type names with pen and ink.

For this project, the purpose was to ascertain the currently accepted type names, image the sherds for a digital type collection, and rehouse to modern standards. What ensued was a rabbit hole down to the early history of archaeology in the U.S. Southeast. It was evident from the labeling and age of the boxes containing the artifacts themselves that these assemblages had not been updated since their arrival at the FLMNH. In one case, they had never been removed from the shipping box (Figure 1). While these sherds were safely tucked away in their cabinet in the museum basement, decades of discovery and debate had changed the relevant type names and their significance. Each collection formed a time capsule, evidence of a typological moment in Southeastern archaeology. Here, we focus on a subset of this collection, 404 sherds from the Lower Mississippi Valley (LMV) that LSU sent to UF in 1956.

Archaeologists have a fraught relationship with typology. We create types as organizational tools in the present day, a lingua franca to translate the unique qualities of every archaeological assemblage or site to say something meaningful at a broader scale. At the same time, we recognize our inability to know what significance, if any, these categories had in the past (Ford and Steward 1954; Krieger 1944; Phillips and Willey 1953; Wylie 2002). Types are by definition shorthand, categories that downplay certain kinds of variation in favor of other attributes that are given primacy. This sets up inherent weaknesses since most attributes are not simply present or absent but exist on a spectrum. As synthetic products, pottery vessels bear the marks of human action and individual manufacture at every turn. It's difficult to create and maintain bounded categories in the face of nonstandard objects. With any typological scheme, we must reconcile our goals of objectivity with the subjective reality of the archaeological artifacts.

Figure 1. Box of Caddoan sherds from Texas that arrived to Dr. Charles Fairbanks at the University of Florida in 1966. Image courtesy of the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Background

In the 1930s, driven mainly by the rapid influx of archaeological materials from Works Progress Administration (WPA) excavations and other large Depression-era projects, archaeologists working in the Southeast became increasingly concerned with creating a system for describing and sharing regionally applicable ceramic types (Figure 2). In particular, researchers had the goal of developing a regional chronology, which would

rely heavily on ceramic change over time. Typing was essential for developing these seriations. Prior to this, vessels had been described individually, or sherds were identified in general terms, with few efforts at systematic quantification.

Archaeologists in the Southeast drew upon typological systems already implemented in places like the American Southwest. Recognizing the need to establish consensus among many different projects and personalities at work, in 1938, 15 men (yes, all men) convened the Conference on Southeastern Pottery Typology at the Ceramic Repository for the Eastern United States, in Ann Arbor, Michigan (Ford and Griffin 1937, 1938). The result was the development of a model for typological description, defining naming conventions and criteria. Names were to consist of two or three parts: a geographical name, an optional descriptive modifier, and a dominant attribute, or constant related to surface treatment; for example, a full three-part name is Deptford Check Stamped, and a more basic two-part name is Coles Creek Incised. On the heels of this decision, the newly formed Southeastern Archaeological Conference (SEAC) published type descriptions following the agreed-upon format in their newsletter (Haag 1939), and it was adopted in subsequent scholarly publications. This system of typological description quickly became standard in the Southeast, and it is found in the typological references that continue to be important today, forming the bases of our regional typologies (e.g., Phillips et al. 1951; Suhm and Jelks 1962; Willey 1949).

However, naming in the Southeast was not to be a simple process. At the turn of the century, scholars had bemoaned the lack of research in the U.S. Southeast (Lyon 1996:23). Earlier phases of excavation by C. B. Moore and others were more antiquarian in nature and focused on recovering whole vessels. The Great Depression changed that. Many large-scale public works projects were developed throughout the South to create employment opportunities. Though they moved quickly, excavations in the 1930s and 1940s were more scholarly and systematic, involving stratigraphic excavations and the recovery of many thousands of sherds and other artifacts. As results of excavations undertaken by different teams across the region were discussed and integrated, archaeologists sometimes had to reconcile the multiple provisional type names applied to the same wares found in different areas. Dispersed excavations and new eyes provided information that broadened the scope of a type geographically, shifted its chronological position, or challenged its "constant" attributes. In this dynamic atmosphere, types were in a state of flux, compared to one another, and debated between those in favor of lumping and those invested in splitting.

James Ford was one of the men at the forefront of this process, and he was responsible for many of the names developed for the particular sherds in our collection through his work in Louisiana between 1933 and 1940. While appreciating that many of Ford's names have stood the test of time, his splitting methods were not always widely adopted. As Philip Phillips (1970:47) wrote about Ford's method of sorting Marksville Plain, "[Ford] claims to be able to sort it by the sound it makes when dropped on the table, and I've seen him do it, but this is a special skill that cannot be transmitted through the printed page." Marksville Plain was later subsumed as Baytown Plain, so Ford lost that particular type. Overall, he was deeply invested in the development and refinement of Southeastern types, culminating in his monograph seriating pottery for a large swath of the southeastern United States (Ford 1952).

Figure 2. A WPA-era archaeology lab. University of Tennessee Archaeology Laboratory, analysis of site N-12, Norris Basin, Tennessee. Courtesy McClung Museum of Natural History & Culture, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville; WPA/TVA Archaeological Photograph Collection, Image # fhm01876; July 20, 1934.

In the 1938 methods paper arising from the typology conference, Ford and James Griffin provide eight examples of "names which are already in use and which promise to become standard." Of these, one was obsolete within 10 years (Deasonville Red on White, now known as Nodena Red and White, *var. Ellison*). One type was almost immediately subsumed within another type, as Vining Simple Stamped became Mossy Oak Simple Stamped. In an interesting twist, that decision was reversed 40 years later, and the original name was reinstated (Williams and Thompson 1999:129). Two other type names have been revised (Deptford Linear Stamped is now known as Deptford Linear Check Stamped, and Marksville Zoned Stamped is now known as Marksville Stamped). But if these were the names they were most confident about, where did that leave even more provisional types? This study collection offered an opportunity to trace the selection strategies for type names in Southeastern archaeology.

Changing Names

The sherds in this type collection had all been recovered from sites in Arkansas and Louisiana between 1933 and 1940 from large-scale projects, some of which have become type sites in Southeastern archaeology, such as Tchefuncte and Marksville. Others were similarly large projects but were never reported on, such as Martin Baptiste Place (16AV25), excavated in 1940. Another 62 sherds came from surface collections of multiple sites investigated by the Lower Mississippi Survey (LMS) in 1940. These were projects overseen at least in part by researchers at LSU, and artifacts were analyzed, curated, and named at LSU, where James Ford managed a laboratory.

In rehabbing this collection, along with deciphering provenience information, we went through the boxes and looked up each type name to determine if it was still in use, the first time it was referenced or described in print, and the last time it was referenced. If the name was not used anymore, we tried to figure out what had superseded it. The results were highly variable (Table 1). In the LMV collection, more than half of the names on the sherds were outdated. This was in part due to the widespread adoption of Philip Phillips's type-variety system (Phillips 1958, 1970).

A majority of the 42 types listed had already been formally described by 1940, mostly in the SEAC newsletter between 1939 and 1940, and in the report on investigations of the Woodland-period Crooks mound in Louisiana (Ford and Willey 1940). Eleven more were typed by the early 1950s (Ford 1952; Phillips et al. 1951; Quimby 1951). Most of the remaining types never had published type descriptions, though they may have been imaged or at least mentioned in texts, such as Anna Brush Roughened and Peterhill Incised. The only two to which we have found no reference are Catahoula Quadrated Plain, which

Table 1. Comparison of circa 1940 Type Names to Current Type Names.

Type Name on Sherd	Year Described	Current Name
Anna Brush Roughened	1940	Plaquemine Brushed
Anna Interior Engraved	1936	Anna Incised
Australia Interior Incised	1951	Anna Incised, *var. Australia*
Bayou L'Eau Noire Incised	1951	L'Eau Noire Incised
Catahoula Incised	1940	Plaquemine Brushed
Catahoula Quadrated Plain	N/A	French Fork Incised
Chase Incised	1939	Coles Creek Incised, *var. Chase*
Coles Creek Plain	1939	Baytown Plain
Jonesville Stamped	1957	Marksville Stamped, *var. Manny* (Manny Stamped)
Lulu Linear Punctated	1951	Chevalier Stamped, *var. Lulu*
Maddox Incised	1942	Maddox Engraved
Manchac Incised	1942	Mazique Incised, *var. Manchac*
Mandeville Plain	1945	Tchefuncte Plain, *var. Mandeville*
Marksville Rim Incised	1940	Marksville Incised
Peterhill Incised	N/A	Fatherland Incised
Rhinehardt Punctated	1939	Evansville Punctated, *var. Rhinehart*
Rose Red Filmed	N/A	Old Town Red
St. Francis Plain	N/A	Mississippi Plain
Troyville Plain	1939	Baytown Plain
Troyville Stamped	1939	Marksville Stamped, *var. Troyville*
Wilkinson Punctated	1936	Evansville Punctated, *var Wilkinson*
Yokena Incised	1939	Marksville Incised, *var. Yokena*

would now be identified as vessels with French Fork Incised rims, and Rose Red-Filmed, now known as Old Town Red.

A majority of the type names have changed to some extent, often more than once. Four types had small name adjustments, such as Bayou L'eau Noire Incised shortened to L'eau Noire Incised. Ten changed from standalone ware types to varieties, following Phillips's type-variety system. For example, Lulu Linear Punctated became Chevalier Stamped, *var. Lulu*. Nine types totally changed type name, which for the most part meant they were subsumed by a more successful type name: St. Francis Plain became Mississippi Plain. Jonesville Stamped became Manny Stamped, then Marksville Stamped, *var. Manny*. Of the original 42 types, modern naming conventions recognize at least 37 type-varieties.

A number of the type names were already obsolete when sherds were delivered to UF in 1956, having been used as provisional types in the late 1930s and early 1940s but never having achieved widespread acceptance. Fifteen years doesn't sound like a long time, but these were exceedingly productive years for Southeastern archaeology. The biggest mystery of this accession is why the donor, William Haag at LSU, would have sent these materials to his good colleague, William Sears, with obsolete names. Haag was a longtime editor of the SEAC newsletter, drafting and publishing type descriptions at the forefront of Southeastern typology. This is especially baffling for exceedingly obscure, apparently one-off names like Rose Red-Filmed (Figure 3).

For the past year, we have been bending the ear of any Southeastern archaeologist who will listen about Rose Red-Filmed. Who came up with it? When? To date, no one has heard of it, and the name has never, to anyone's knowledge, appeared in print. The examples in our collection, recovered by the LMS, would now be identified as Old Town Red. The name, Rose Red-Filmed, does seem to follow the established convention of geographic name + modifier + constant. If Rose does refer to geography, it is likely relating to Rose Mound (3CS27), a site in Mississippi investigated by the LMS. One of the "Rose Red" sherds in the type collection is from Rose Mound. Interestingly, the percentage of red-filmed ware is not actually very high at this site compared to other sites within the survey. However, it has a long history of excavation and pot hunting. Many unique vessels with zoned red filming were recovered within the mound by C. B. Moore and others in the early 1900s. So it could be that the name came from knowledge of those complete vessels rather than the artifacts recovered during surface surveys by the LMS.

Alternately, the name could be an example of someone going rogue (or *rouge*) and attempting to establish a competing evocative name à la Old Town Red, which Griffin had made around

Figure 3. Sherds identified as Rose Red-Filmed, also known as Old Town Red. Image courtesy of the Florida Museum of Natural History.

the same time as a play on words for "painting the old town red" (Phillips 1970:145). He was able to justify the name by the presence of the Old Town site, as recorded by the LMS. The name Old Town Red was in use as early as 1947 and was published four years later (Phillips et al. 1951). This leaves the name Rose Red-Filmed well out of play by the mid-1950s, when these sherds arrived in Florida.

Conclusion

What this study collection teaches us is that certain pottery type names have been more durable than others, but it's unpredictable. Those that have survived tend to be broad enough to be used comparatively, and specific enough to be useful. The gradual changes to these type names in the system over the intervening 80 years reflect the great complexity of pottery in LMV, the range of artifact and site-based variation, and the tremendous amount of research that has taken place. Subsequent generations of archaeologists have filled in geographic or chronological links between ware types once thought distinct, and recognized patterned variation in types once glossed identically.

One must resist the impulse to assume a natural or inherent categorization of pottery or other artifact classes. In many ways our typological shifts are analogous to those taking place in the

biological sciences. Increasingly, biologists determine "relatedness" via DNA (genotype) rather than appearance (phenotype). For archaeology, visual attributes have been critical in assessing relatedness, but now microscopic or elemental variability is also often being used to group pottery in new ways.

For expediency, we use and we teach types as fixed categories. But this study of naming in the LMV underscores that the types we use today are mutable and that naming is political. Who had the authority to name, and whose names had the most influence? This recognition is critical for contextualizing the basic classification scaffolds upon which we build our research. At the same time, it emphasizes that the discipline functions within a constant state of evolution. All is subject to revision, and more voices can be added to the conversation. We now recognize the hubris of labeling artifacts with permanent ink, but these old labels, boldly writ, maintain the material traces of key historical moments in our discipline, a record of revisions and legacies that deserve scholarly consideration in their own right.

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