

MIDDLE MISSISSIPPIAN GRIT TEMPERED WARE

DONALD E. WRAY

Peoria, Illinois

I wish to draw attention to a peculiar type of pottery which occurs in certain Middle Mississippian sites in central and southern Illinois. This type differs from the ordinary Mississippi ware in a number of significant traits. The vessels are grit tempered, intensely fired and have rough undecorated or cord marked surfaces. They occur in the forms of shallow conical vases with two straight legs at the base, elongated cylinders and pedestal or boot shapes with flaring lips, mushroom bases and with narrow interiors and heavy walls. These vessels are quite rare but seem to have a wide distribution. The conical form is known to the writer by two specimens from the Kingston Lake site and one from the Crable site. The cylinder is represented at Kingston by the sherds of two vessels. The pedestal has been described by Titterington in his monograph on the Cahokia site.

The conical vessel from Kingston Lake is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches tall and has walls $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch thick. It is brick red and apparently cracked and

sagged before baking. The temper is of about medium coarseness compared to other grit tempered pottery in this area. Since the vessel has only two projections or legs it can not be stood up by itself. (Fig. A.) This type is not to be confused

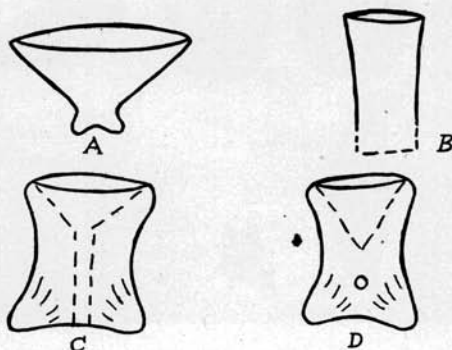


PLATE I.—DIAGRAM OF UNUSUAL MIDDLE MISSISSIPPIAN GRIT TEMPERED WARE. A. Conical vessel from Kingston Lake. B. Cylinder from Kingston Lake. C. "Boot" from Cahokia site, vertical perforation, after Titterington. D. "Boot" from Cahokia site, transverse perforation, after Titterington.

with the three- or four-legged pots which are fairly common in the Middle Mississippi culture and have shell tempering and generally are polished or smoke finished. The cylinder from Kingston, as projected from the sherds, is seven inches in diameter and at least 14 inches in length, (fig. B). The rim is square in cross section but no trace of the base is present. The surface has been carelessly finished and tempering is either absent or very fine grit.

Titterington has described the boot or "pedestal" in his monograph on the Cahokia Mound Group. Thirteen fragmentary pieces are known from the Cahokia site, all a well fired crumbly ware, with coarse grit temper. Seven show coarse cord marking, and two a rather fine cord marking. There are two types, both with a flaring top and two foot-like projections placed almost at right angles to each other so that about three-fourths of the base is roughly circular. Both types have a deep inverted conical cavity, the base of the cone being at the top and the apex extending one-half to two-thirds of the way down through the object. The difference in the types is in a hole in the base of the pieces. In the first type the hole is an extension of the conical cavity downward to emerge on the bottom of the object (fig. C). In the second type the hole goes through the base horizontally and has no connection with the cavity above (fig. D). This specimen is five and one-fourth inches high, and the rim diameter is three and three-fourths inches. The rim varies from five-eighths to three-fourths of an inch in thickness, and the hole is three-eighths of an inch in diameter.

In a letter Titterington adds that similar vessels were described in an old journal of a society in Kansas City. He says that all the specimens that he has found have been on village sites where a very high percentage of all other materials was Mississippian rather than Woodland. However he is not certain that the boots should be called Mississippian.

Griffin also hesitates about assigning this type to the Mississippian because of the presence of cord wrapped padding on the boots and the fact that the type has not been found on many of the sites related to Cahokia. He is also not convinced that the pottery from Kingston Lake and Crable is the same as Titterington's boots from Cahokia. I feel, however, that the basic pattern of the boots and the Kingston conical vessel is the same. Both have a conical interior or cup with two projections or legs at the base. The Kingston form might very well be a simplification of the Cahokia type.

The case for these objects may be summarized as follows: They are products of the Middle Mississippi culture because they are found only on Middle Mississippi sites and their form and decoration bear no resemblance to the pottery of other cultures so that they can not be explained as intrusions from a Woodland group; in tempering, shape, surface treatment and firing they are widely differentiated from the typical utilitarian pottery of the Middle Mississippi; their occurrence is too rare for them to have had any common function (it has been suggested that the cone might have been a cover for a pot); the unusual quality of the pottery argues against any common use; the careless execution of the vessels indicates that they were not intended for continuous use but for a temporary or occasional use. It is unlikely that it represents funerary pottery since all recorded specimens have come from village deposits and not from burials. All these considerations would seem to indicate that this peculiar pottery type may represent a ceremonial ware of the Middle Mississippian culture. No such ware has yet been recognized but we might suspect its existence from the presence of the "Pyramid complex" which indicates an elaborate ritual life.

LITERATURE

- Titterington, P. F.—"For Identification", *American Antiquity* Vol. 3, April, 1939, page 354.
The Cahokia Mound and Village Site, p. 13.