

# Cache Flow: An Analysis of Vessel Assemblages from the Elk Ridge Site

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## ABSTRACT

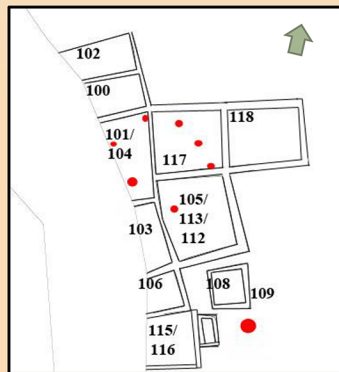
Designs on Mimbres pottery have long fascinated archaeologists. These complex geometric and figurative images can shed light on daily activities, household organization, and groups of potters. Excavations at the Elk Ridge Site, a large Classic Mimbres pueblo in the northern portion of the Mimbres River Valley, have yielded numerous complete or nearly complete vessels, many in caches. Vessel caches have been recovered from both household and extramural contexts. The room block under investigation is also of importance because it reveals a sequence of construction that extends from the pithouse-to-pueblo transition until site abandonment at the end of the Classic period. This poster analyzes whole and partial cache vessels recovered from the site to investigate ceramic type and use-wear, puts them in their larger context to determine if they were associated with domestic and/or ritual activities, and explore how this may have changed through time. Additionally, the designs are examined, both within and between the caches, in order to gain information on their similarities and differences and to ascertain data related to the presence of individual potters or shared learning frameworks.

## ELK RIDGE SITE (LA 78963)

The Elk Ridge Site is a large Classic period (AD 1000-1130) Mimbres pueblo located in the northern portion of the Mimbres River Valley in Grant County, New Mexico. The site is located on the north side of the Mimbres River near a spring. University of Nevada, Las Vegas excavations began in 2015 on the northern end of the site, located on US Forest Service Land. These efforts were focused on excavating rooms being eroded by an arroyo cut. After four seasons of excavation, a total of 19 rooms, including habitation and storage rooms, a turkey pen, and a ramada, were documented.

## VESSEL CACHES

A total of eight caches have been recovered: one located in the ramada, one in Room 112, three in Room 101, and three in Room 117. These caches often include both bowls and jars and consist of plain, decorated, and corrugated wares. The manner of deposition varies, but all caches appear to have been part of a ritual event. The two caches along the arroyo cut in Room 101 were heavily disturbed and are therefore only further discussed in regards to relationships with other caches.



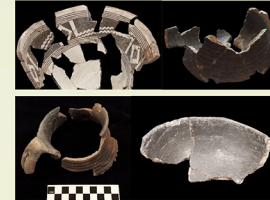
Cache distribution within room block

Two of the vessel caches appear to have been intentionally smashed. Both of these caches included plain, decorated, and corrugated ceramics.

The first was located in the NE corner of Room 101. The sherds belonged to nine small vessels. Sherds were found partially embedded in wall plaster from roof fall to floor. This cache may have been related to the closing of the structure and may have originally been on the roof of the house.



## SMASHED CACHES



The second cache of this type was located in the ramada, Room 109. This cache contained eight vessels that were noticeably larger than others recovered during these excavations. Vessel functions included food preparation and serving. These factors appear to suggest that this cache was associated with a feasting event. The three decorated wares were similar in technological and design styles indicating they were probably made by the same individual.

## LUMPING AND SPLITTING

The NW corner of Room 112 (located below Rooms 105 and 113) yielded a cache of four miniature vessels. These vessels represented a variety of potters or the learning process, as the technological skill exhibited in each vessel varied. A poorly made pinched vessel was not even fully fired and was likely made by a child. The burying of these vessels together may indicate that this is a lineage household that included numerous potters.



SE cache with base of jar containing pieces of other vessels



Central cache Style III bowl and the 1/2 of the jar it contained

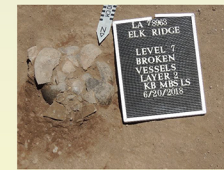
Room 117 yielded three vessel caches. Upon processing the sherds from the central and SE corner it was revealed that both caches contained pieces of the same vessel. The SE cache yielded portions of a smudged plainware bowl, the base of a probable polychrome jar, and 1/4 of a large polychrome jar placed in the base of the other jar. The central cache included a Style III-Late bowl and half of the same large polychrome jar from the SE cache placed within the bowl. Care was taken to split the large jar, but 1/4 of the vessel was still missing. An analysis of sherds previously excavated yielded a large piece of the jar from the northern cache in Room 101 indicating it was split between two rooms. The similar application of slip and manufacturing scraping on the jars from the two caches indicate that they were made by the same individual. These two caches could have been a part of the closing ritual associated with the house.



Polychrome jar with split indicated

## STACKED CACHE

The third cache in Room 117, located in the NW corner, consisted of three stacked vessels: one plainware bowl, a corrugated jar, and a Style III bowl. Although this cache does not share pieces of the polychrome jar, it fits with the stacked/nested pattern seen elsewhere in the house. This cache was also subfloor, while the other two were directly on the floor of Room 117.



## DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Elk Ridge excavations yielded numerous ceramic caches that appear have ties to ritual activities. Some patterns including smashing and the sharing of a split vessel are present and may be a shared practice between households. In addition to possibly sharing sherds from one vessel, Rooms 101 and 117 had similar artifacts further indicating that these households are linked.

Further research includes:

- Data from the other artifact caches at the site (mainly ground stone) and comparing the distributions.
- Additional research into the splitting of vessels. The burials from the site have also yielded a pattern of halved vessels.
- Further work on the caches from along the arroyo in Room 101 to investigate how they may have been deposited. Additional sherds from these caches have been previously recovered by the Forest Service some years before the UNLV excavations began. The sherds were found roughly 20 meters south in the arroyo.
- NAA samples to determine if the vessels were locally made or brought to the site.
- Compare with caches from other Mimbres Valley sites to investigate if there are wider patterns throughout the area. A similar feasting cache was found at the Harris site in the plaza outside of one of the kivas.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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