

Lowland Patayan Phases in the Lower Colorado River
Valley and Colorado Desert

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The Lower Colorado River valley (Mohave valley to the delta, the Colorado Desert, and the Lower Gila River valley (below Gila Bend) appear to have been occupied mainly by a single culture in pottery-making times. This culture manufactured one basic ceramic product, Lower Colorado Buff Ware,¹ from the earliest known phase up to and including historic times.

In the Colorado Desert the distribution of Lower Colorado Buff Ware overlaps that of another ceramic product, Tizon Brown Ware² (Johnston and Johnston, 1957). The Diegueño and other southern California upland tribes manufactured variants of Tizon Brown Ware in historic times. The chronological sequence for Tizon Brown Ware, however, remains to be worked out. Therefore only the phases of the culture manufacturing Lower Colorado Buff Ware can be dealt with here.

The culture that made Lower Colorado Buff Ware has at various times been referred to as "Yuman," "Patayan," or "Laquish." Objections have been made to all these names and an able summary of the history of these problems has recently been made by Euler (1956). At least for present research purposes, I am finding it useful to refer to the makers of Lower Colorado Buff Ware as the "Lowland Patayan." "Upland Patayan" is being used to designate the manufacturers of Tizon Brown Ware in southern California, Lower California, and northwestern Arizona. This dual concept of "Patayan" is simple, explicit, and emphasizes the apparently close cultural interrelationships of the populations manufacturing these two ceramic wares.

Examination of ethnographic specimens shows that both Yuman and Shoshonean tribes manufactured these wares in historic times. Lower Colorado Buff Ware was manufactured by the River Yuman tribes and by the Shoshonean Chemehuevi. Tizon Brown Ware was made by the Shoshonean Cahuilla, Cupeño, and Luiseño, as well as by upland Yuman tribes. Clearly the term "Yuman" is not suited to the manufacturers of either of these wares. The recently proposed "Hakataya" concept (Schroeder, 1957) is more general in scope, not being limited to the makers of these two pottery wares.

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1. See Schroeder, 1952, pp. 16-17, for ware description.
 2. See Colton, 1939, p. 8, for ware description.

The preceramic situation is so unclear that consideration of it is excluded here. The sequential summary which follows will outline only the known ceramic phases. The two major attempts to work out the ceramic chronology in this region by Rogers (1945) and Schroeder (1952) are based on surface surveys. The following outline also utilizes surface survey information but is primarily drawn from the results of the excavation of a stratified site (Harner, ms.).

The relative abundance of potsherds and the paucity of other non-perishable artifacts necessitates an unusual emphasis upon ceramic traits as chronological and spatial diagnostics. Even these ceramic traits changed slowly and it appears that Lowland Patayan material culture as a whole underwent only minor changes throughout the sequence.

Component: Bouse Phase 1

Type site: A walk-in well site at Bouse, Arizona.

Settlements: Sand dunes on the river bottom lands or in the vicinity of water sources in the desert. Occupation of the Colorado Desert during this phase appears to have been relatively slight.

Houses: Of perishable materials with little or no use of stone.

Livelihood: Presumably horticultural with considerable gathering and fishing. Very little hunting.

Burial customs: No information. Cremation seems probable.

Ceramic traits: Polished red-slipped pottery. Unpolished thinly white-slipped pottery. Red-over-white pottery (a red slip laid over a white slip). Unslipped buff pottery. Absence of painted designs. Absence of stucco surface treatment. Vessel shapes are deep globular bowls and jars. On the jars necks are absent or slight.

Artifacts of chipped stone: Scrapers, choppers, and small projectile points (rare).

Artifacts of ground stone: One and two hand manos. Metates range from flat slab to oval basin. Polished green stone ornaments (rare).

Artifacts of bone, shell, wood: Whole Olivella shell beads.

Textiles: No information.

Other traits: Certain traits, such as bedrock mortars, gravel pictography, polished 3/4 groove axes (Colonial Hohokam style), pottery pipes and abalone shell were in surface association at the type site. It is not known whether these traits are assignable to either or both of the phases.

Relationships: At the type site the Bouse Phase 1 materials are in contemporary association with Hohokam Buff Ware sherds and stratigraphically below a layer containing Santa Cruz Red-on-buff of the Hohokam culture. The presence of polished red-slipped Lower Colorado Buff Ware pottery below Santa Cruz Red-on-buff suggests that the trait of red-slipping may have been introduced from Papagueria or from the Hohokam or Mogollon cultures which were manufacturing polished red-slipped pottery at an early date. The thin white slip (which looks buff when the paste beneath it is oxidized to a pink) appears to be the same treatment as the "buff wash" applied to some Hohokam pottery types beginning with Gila Butte Red-on-buff. The presence at the site of polished 3/4 groove axes also suggests Hohokam contacts.

Estimated age: Santa Cruz Red-on-buff, now dated at approximately 800-1000 A.D. (Raymond H. Thompson, personal communication) overlies the Bouse Phase 1 materials. One sherd of Gila Butte Red-on-buff occurred elsewhere in the well deposit. This Hohokam type dates either between ca. 600-800 A.D. or ca. 700-800 A.D. (Thompson, personal communication). A tentative dating of ca. 800-1000 A.D. is suggested for Bouse Phase 1.³

Component: Bouse Phase 2

This phase has the same characteristics as Phase 1, except for differences noted below.

Settlements: Similar to Phase 1 sites, but a greater number in the Colorado Desert. The fresh-water Lake LeConte in the Salton Sink possibly may have been created during this phase by the diversion of the Colorado River due to deltaic silting.

Ceramic traits: Same as before, plus the addition of designs in red paint (on unslipped buff or on a thin white slip). Some of these red paint designs closely resemble designs illustrated for Gila Butte Red-on-buff of the Hohokam. To the Bouse Phase 1 vessel shapes are added jars with vertical or recurved necks, shallow and deep bowls both with slightly flaring lips, and trays. The new shallow bowl and tray shapes have their prototypes in the Hohokam vessel shapes of the Santa Cruz phase.

Relationships: Acculturative influences from the Hohokam seem to be indicated by the similarities to painted designs and vessel shapes which are chronologically earlier in the Hohokam culture.

3. The dating of the Lowland Patayan phases presented here represents a slight revision made advisable by new information on the time-spans of the intrusive types used for cross-dating.

Estimated age: At the type site the materials of this phase are stratigraphically above the Santa Cruz Red-on-buff layer and in direct association with sherds of Verde Black-on-gray of the Prescott culture of northwestern Arizona and with Hohokam sherds of Gila Red. Verde Black-on-gray is now being dated "at least as early as sometime in the 1000's to about 1300" (Schroeder, personal communication). Gila Red is considered to date from about 1200-1400 A.D. (Thompson, personal communication). A tentative dating of approximately 1000-1300 A.D. is suggested for Bouse Phase 2.

Component: Moon Mountain Phase⁴

The information regarding this phase is largely derived from surface surveys and is offered on a tentative basis. Except for differences noted below, the traits of Bouse Phase 2 appear to continue in existence. Type site: UCAS Yuma 9.

Settlements: The same as for the preceding phase, with large scale occupation along the shores of the fresh-water Lake LeConte in the Colorado Desert. Water-worn sherds and quantities of fish bone are reported at these sites. Radiocarbon dates for three such lakeside sites are 450 + 200 B.P., 130 + 200 B.P., and 120 + 200 B.P. (Hubbs, personal communication). The latter two dates probably should be pushed back the 200 years allowable, since they otherwise would conflict with historic information attesting to the absence of the lake 120 years ago (B. E. McCown, personal communication). The disappearance of the lake is believed to have occurred as the result of another change in course of the Colorado River cutting off the supply of fresh water to Lake LeConte.

Ceramic traits: The addition of stucco surface treatment (always restricted to plain buff vessels) and the absence of neckless globular jars. Molded-base jars appear. Changes in vessel shapes during this phase represent the gradual differentiation of the Bouse Phase 2 vessel shapes into those of the tribes manufacturing Lower Colorado Buff Ware in historic times. A decline in the frequency of slipping, an increase in the quantity of red painted designs, and the development of scoop shapes are characteristic of the Moon Mountain Phase.

Textiles: Coiled basketry.

Relationships: Temporally and culturally transitional to the historic culture of the tribes of the Lower Colorado River and the Kamia of the Colorado Desert.

Estimated age: From the end of Bouse Phase 2 until the introduction of Hispanic artifacts in fair numbers. In other words, from approximately 1300-1700 A.D.

4. This is a new name for the phase previously referred to in Breternitz (1957, p.13) as "Protohistoric."

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