

THE GORDON HILL SITE, CROOKED ISLAND, BAHAMAS

By Julian Granberry

Background

During February and March 1934 Froelich G. Rainey, then a graduate student at Yale University, conducted an archaeological site survey of the Bahamas on behalf of the Yale Peabody Museum. This expedition, part of Yale's ongoing Caribbean research program, was made possible by Mr. Allison V. Armour of New York, who invited Rainey to accompany him on his research yacht *Utowana* for a general survey of archaeological sites in the Bahamas and, particularly, Haiti (Rainey 1941: 3). A brief account of the survey is contained in part 1 of volume XVIII of the *Scientific Survey of Porto Rico and the Virgin Islands* (Rainey 1940) and detailed information is available in his field notes (Rainey 1934), which are on file in manuscript form at the Yale Peabody Museum in New Haven.

Dr. Rainey undertook investigation on eleven islands, including: Grand Bahama, Great Abaco, New Providence, Eleuthera, Cat Island, Conception Island, Rum Cay, San Salvador, Long Island, Crooked Island, and Great Inagua. Other islands, including Mira Por Vos and the Fish Cays, were visited briefly during the course of the voyage. A considerable amount of Dr. Rainey's material, particularly the stone celts, was purchased at various islands along the route. Fifteen productive sites, however, were also located.

Primarily because of time limitations—the goal of the expedition was Haiti, and the survey of the Bahamas was intended only as a reconnaissance—Rainey did not have the time to undertake a great deal of excavation. Only one site, the Gordon Hill site on Crooked Island, was completely excavated. This, however, remained the only methodical and professional excavation of a prehistoric site in the Bahamas until Charles Hoffman's excavation of the Palmetto Grove site on San Salvador in 1965 (Hoffman 1967, 1970). At the time—1934—the site and, indeed, the Bahamas themselves were not considered important enough to Caribbean culture history to merit a published excavation report. The data have consequently remained unpublished until now. A report, however, is needed, as is indicated by the increasing amount of professional interest and work in the archipelago during recent years (Hoffman 1967, 1970; MacLaury 1968, 1970; Sears and Sullivan 1978; Sullivan 1974, 1976; Winter 1974, 1978a, 1978b), including particularly Winter's work at the McKay site on Crooked Island (Winter 1978a, 1978b). Certain questions concerning ceramic typology, raised primarily by Sears and Sullivan's article in

American Antiquity in January 1978, are of crucial importance to Bahamian archaeology and need to be resolved as soon as possible. The Gordon Hill data have pertinence here.

Though Rainey's material has been referred to and used as example, apparently without review (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 6, 7, 11, 17), no one other than Dr. Rainey himself and the present writer seems to have been interested enough to actually examine it physically. The physical examination and accompanying notes taken, however—done by the writer in 1949 and again in 1954—paint a picture rather at odds with the more monolithic view of Bahamian ceramics given by Hoffman (1967, 1970), Sullivan (1974), and Sears and Sullivan (1978). Because it is important that alternate views become part of the published record, the writer has taken it upon himself, with Dr. Rainey's permission (Rainey 1978), to prepare the present report.

The Site and its Excavation

Rainey spent five days on Crooked Island. On the north end of the island, near Gordon Bluff, a series of caves in a limestone ledge about five hundred yards from the shore were located—they had been discovered the year before, 1933, by Dr. Thomas Barbour and Dr. James Greenway of the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoölogy. Between the caves and the shore crops had been planted at the time that Rainey was on the island.

Seven caves in this series were dug. Four of these had been partly dug out at an undetermined earlier date for cave-earth, which is locally used in the Bahamas as fertilizer, and it was therefore not possible to say whether or not they had contained any cultural deposit. In two other caves, however, burials were found, and in a third cave—the one of primary concern to us—there was an undisturbed culture deposit.

Two primary burials were found in the first, low and open, burial cave. Whether they represent multiple, successive, or just more than one burial, is unknown. The first skeleton, the upper part quite fragmentary, was lying on its left side with the legs partly flexed on a small rock shelf on the cave floor just beneath the earth. Its finger bones covered the pubic region. Only the lower part of the skeleton was complete; the torso bones and most of the cranium were missing, and the cranium fragments themselves were found eight inches below the surface, while the pelvis was fourteen inches below. Other parts of the torso and the cranium were recovered on digging around the skeleton. Part of the cranium and the jaw were found two and a half feet from the skeleton. These pieces fitted the cranium fragments *in situ* and were therefore assumed to belong to it. The earth around the skeleton contained bird, rat, and hutia (*Capromys ingrahami*).



FIGURE 1
Entrance to the Dwelling Cave

At the south side of the cave, where it sloped up to the entrance, a second burial was found. It, too, had been disturbed, although the pelvis and upper ends of the femurs were in place. The burial lay on the rock floor of the cave. A few stray bones belonging to this skeleton were found on the north side of the cave as well (Rainey 1934: 20-22; 1940: 152).

In another low cave immediately adjacent to the first, a pelvis, radius, ulna, and many other stray bones were found on the rock floor of the cave where it sloped up near the entrance. The radius and ulna seemed to be in original place of deposition. Most of the cave had been dug out for cave-earth, however, and it could not be determined whether there had originally been more than one burial or not (Rainey 1934: 22).

The single cave showing any sign of occupation was about 120 square meters in area and consisted of a central chamber about eight feet high and two smaller side chambers averaging four and five feet high respectively.

Forty-seven meter squares and a test pit were excavated.

The cave was laid out in meter squares and taken down by natural strata. All culture deposit was within the first thirteen inches, two or three inches of recent, sterile surface sand being immediately underlaid by three to four—never more than eight to ten—inches of blackened sand containing the culture deposit. Sub-sand of a whitish-yellow, varying from two to three feet in depth, lay between the culture deposit and bed rock.

The front and rear of the cave contained the greatest amount of cultural material. The richest deposits were up against the walls, while the low chambers at the sides were completely sterile. Fire-pits were numerous, though never more than nine to ten inches deep. Charcoal appeared all over the cave floor. *Hutia*, fish, and bird bones, and some clam and *Strombus* shells were found in the refuse deposit. Conch feet were very numerous. One cut and cracked human bone was found near the entrance of the cave, and fragments of human bone were found in the field in front of the cave. It is likely that some

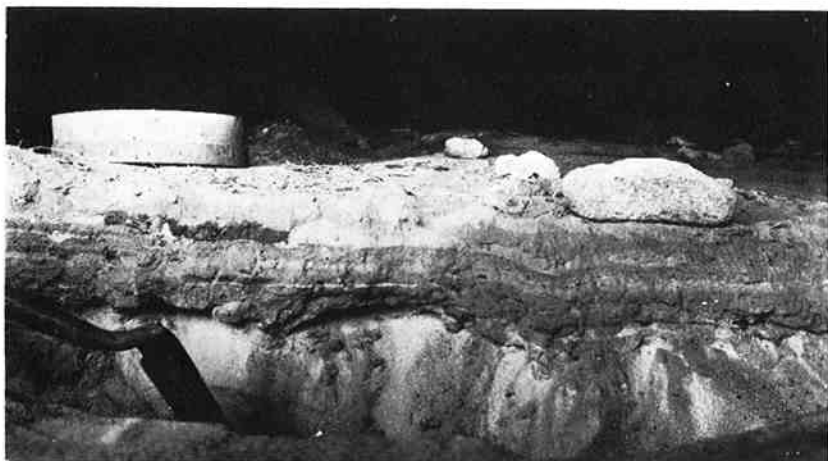


FIGURE 3
The Culture Strata

earth had been removed from the cave at some prior date and that the bone fragments were thrown out along with the cave-earth then.

The Artifacts

Specimens were found in the test pit and in 24 of the 47 sections excavated. The other sections contained refuse but no cultural material as such. Of the specimens 29 are non-ceramic, some fragmentary, while a total of 225 are ceramic sherds of various sizes, none large.

The non-ceramic artifacts, partly illustrated in Fig. 4, were: two bone points; one point made from the bone barb of a stingray; four bone awls, a bone gouge; six finely made, though small (averaging less than an inch from top to the bottom of the curve of the hook), wooden fishhooks; a fire-board, a *Strombus* cup; a fragmentary, pierced, *Strombus* pendant; an inlaid tortoise shell bracelet; four shell beads made from the Bleeding Tooth (*Nerita* sp.), and various probably worked, fragmentary pieces of bone representing unclassifiable artifact types if, indeed, they were artifacts.

The ceramic wares fall, descriptively, into five classes. I will at this stage avoid the terms *series*, *type*, *style*, etc., since these are part of the current problem in defining Bahamian ceramic wares. The descriptions are taken from my defini-

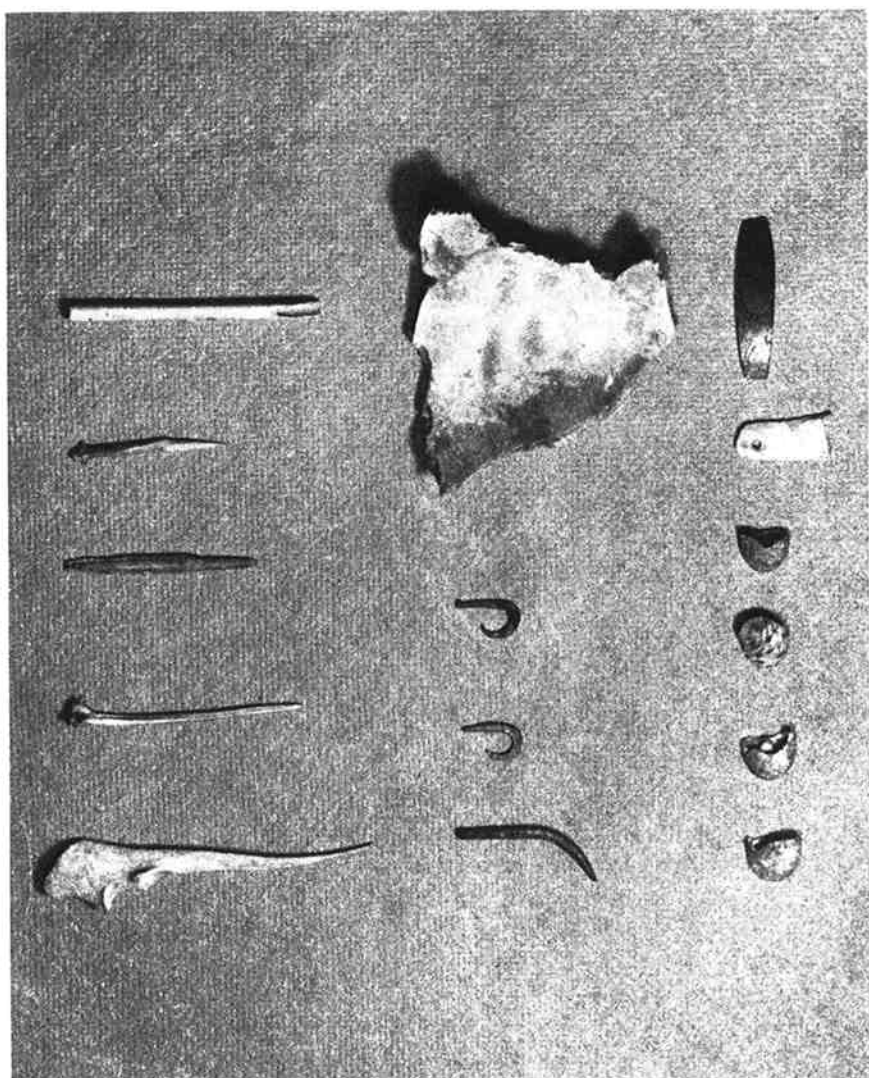


FIGURE 4.

Selected Non-ceramic Artifacts
 Top Row: Bone awl, bone awl,
 stingray barb point, bone awl,
 bone gouge

Center Row: Three wooden
 fishhooks, *Strombus* cup

Bottom Row: Four *Nerita* shell
 beads, fragment of a pierced shell
 pendant, turtle shell bracelet (in-
 laid)

tion of 1952, contained in a paper entitled *A Preliminary Ceramic Typology and Chronology for the Bahamas* (Granberry 1952), on file in manuscript form at the Yale Peabody Museum. Rather than use type and series designations, as I did then, I will simply number them and use gross descriptive labels for purposes of identification.

1. RED SLIPPED

Paste: Probably Bahamas Red Loam.

Method of Manufacture: Coiled and fired in an oxidizing atmosphere.

Temper: Sparsely tempered with shell particles of moderate size.

Texture: Moderately to finely granular. Relatively friable.

Hardness: 3.5 to 5.5 on Moh's scale. Average between 4 and 4.5

Color: Grey to light black. Core sometimes darker.

Surface texture, color, and finish: All specimens have a moderately thick to thin dark brick-red clay slip. It was applied before firing, for it is firmly united to the body paste from which it is, nevertheless, distinctly demarcated.

Form: Rims may be rounded or flat, rounded rims predominating and occasionally showing complex bevelling techniques. Thickness ranges from 6 to 14 mm, the average being 7-10 mm. There is insufficient data to postulate other statements on form other than to suggest that the curvature of body sherds would seem to indicate that the typical specimen was a bowl of moderate size.

Decoration: None.

2. PLAIN

Paste: Bahamas Red Loam, moderately to finely granular.

Method of Manufacture: Insufficient evidence; probably coiled

Temper: Moderately tempered with shell particles of medium size.

Texture: Fractured surfaces are earthen and friable.

Hardness: 2.5 to 5.5 on Moh's scale. Average between 3 and 3.5

Color: A uniform red, ranging from buff to brick-red, due probably both to firing variations and differences in the clay used for manufacture.

Surface texture, color, and finish: Both inside and outside surfaces are relatively smooth and moderately polished, occasionally reflecting light. Exterior surfaces are often coated with soot.

Form: A thick-walled vessel, probably a bowl, either round or boat-shaped. Rims are usually round, though flat rims occur. Round rims are bevelled, either on the exterior or interior. Interior-bevelled rims flare slightly on the exterior side, and rims tend to taper slightly. Shoulders are rare. Insufficient evidence for further description.

Decoration: None.

3. INCISED-PUNCTATE

Paste: Identical with PLAIN.

Method of Manufacture: Identical with PLAIN.

Temper: Identical with PLAIN.

Texture: Identical with PLAIN.

Hardness: Identical with PLAIN.

Color: Identical with PLAIN.

Surface texture, color, and finish: Identical with PLAIN.

Form: In general similar to PLAIN, though flat rims predominate. A few specimens have necks formed by a slight outturn of the shoulder. The outturn is abrupt and is highlighted by an incised line, encircling the vessel in all probability, and dividing the neck from the body proper. This *may* indicate jar forms, though there is not sufficient evidence to postulate this with any certainty.

Decoration: Cutting, engraving-incision, and modelling were the decorative techniques used, with engraving-incision predominating. Modelled zoomorphic lugs seem to have occurred, as do strips on outside rims. There is insufficient evidence to clearly define design distribution, but dominant designs are: oblique parallel lines, curved incised lines, line and dot incision, and curvilinear incision.

4. CHECK MARKED

Paste: Same as PLAIN

Method of Manufacture: Identical with PLAIN

Temper: Identical with PLAIN.

Texture: Identical with PLAIN.

Hardness: Identical with PLAIN.

Color: Identical with PLAIN.

Surface texture, color, and finish: Identical with PLAIN.

Form: The sherds of this variety of ware are too small to reconstruct vessel shape or size. They vary from 7 to 12 mm in thickness and show no wall curvature, though their thinness would seem to indicate that they were from vessels and not griddles.

Decoration: A mat pattern, the impressions consisting of square checks approximately 4 mm. across. All sherds found are completely covered with the impressed pattern. This *may* imply that the design covered the total vessel or, of course, because of the basic similarity of this ware, other than in decorative design, to PLAIN, it may have covered only a partial area.

5. WHITE ON RED

Paste: Identical with PLAIN.

Method of Manufacture: Identical with PLAIN.

Temper: Identical with PLAIN.

Texture: Identical with PLAIN.

Hardness: Identical with PLAIN.

Color: Identical with PLAIN.

Surface texture, color, and finish: Sherds of this ware have what seems to be a thin white limestone slip on both exterior and interior surfaces (but not on broken edges). The slip is chalky, rubs off easily, and is not united with the body paste.

Form: Identical with PLAIN.

Decoration: Identical with PLAIN.

In addition to these wares, all shell-tempered, two sherds of plain, unslipped ware with a yellow-brown paste and quartz temper were found in section J-3. Since quartz is not found in any part of the Bahamas, these are obviously trade ware from one of the neighboring quartz-bearing islands of the Greater Antilles.

Of the remaining 223 sherds recovered by Rainey, 102 are RED SLIPPED, 79 are WHITE ON RED, 8 are CHECK MARKED, 12 INCISED-PUNCTATE, and 22 are PLAIN. This, obviously, is too small a sample to postulate definite styles or types. However, those twenty-nine year old definitions show interesting relationships to more recent definitions of Bahamian wares, as will be seen.

It should be added that sherds of all five varieties are found at the same levels within the culture deposit. Though Rainey did not excavate by arbitrary depth levels, he specifically mentions the fact that no one kind or combination of kinds of wares came from a specific depth level. Nor is there a concentration of one or more varieties in any specific area section of the site. It can specifically be noted that PLAIN ware sherds and WHITE ON RED sherds often occurred in the same site sections. This is of interest inasmuch as it has been suggested, in a Haitian context, that such a slip is really a natural coating acquired from

the soil since sherd deposition (Rouse 1941: 114-115). This was initially the feeling of this writer until the above fact was noted in the progress of the analysis of the artifacts and their distribution. It is, certainly, nevertheless the case that WHITE ON RED as a ware may be a figment of the analyst's imagination. Its occurrence in other sites should be carefully checked before any final statement is made.

Discussion

It is of interest to note that Winter (1978b:237-238) in his excavations at the McKay site, also on the north coast of the island, describes precisely the same varieties of ceramic wares, with the exception of WHITE ON RED. Of the 608 sherds recovered, he reports five quartz-tempered sherds, including two with the light-brown paste also found at Gordon Hill. He also reports 17 RED SLIPPED sherds, while the remainder fit rather exactly into the category I have called simply PLAIN. His finds verify the postulated large circular vessel form and the boat-shaped vessel form, suggested by the Gordon Hill data (Winter 1978b: 238).

In my original analysis of Bahamian ceramic wares, including those from Gordon Hill (Granberry 1955: 202-222), I suggested a Haitian origin for Bahamian pottery-making techniques and designs, though I pointed out (Granberry 1956) that Ostionoid and Cuban Baní characteristics could also be seen. I made this suggestion largely on the presence of some gross near-identities between Haitian Meillac and what I have here called RED SLIPPED on the one hand and, on the other hand, Haitian Carrier and what I have called here PLAIN, INCISED-PUNCTATE, CHECK MARKED, and WHITE ON RED.

The primary linking characteristics between Haitian Meillac and RED SLIPPED were the red slip itself, the relative hardness of the pottery and, when present in decorated RED SLIPPED variants, not found at Gordon Hill, the type of decorative design and technique—primarily straight, cut-line incision with little curvilinear design, punctuation, or modeling. The main linking characteristics between Haitian Carrier and the series of wares called here PLAIN, INCISED-PUNCTATE, CHECK MARKED, and WHITE ON RED were the relative softness of the wares, the questionable white slip, and, most importantly, the presence of modelling, curvilinear designs, punctuation, and the total lack of red slip.

These are, of course, hardly sufficient similarities to say that the wares *are* Meillac and Carrier, as I have apparently been misunderstood as saying (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 6, 15; Sullivan 1974: 8). With other traditionally defined pottery types, which may or may not stand the light of further scrutiny now that more data is available, I called (Granberry 1952: 13) RED SLIPPED a type

in a *Bahamian Meillac Series*. I did not refer to the ware as Meillac. In the same manner, I included all of the remaining four wares (Granberry 1952: 15-20) as *Bahamian Carrier*, not as Carrier proper. It is unfortunate, in this later perspective, that I did not publish my 1952 paper at that time, for it would have obviated the need to clarify my ceramic statements at this late a date. Winter (1978b: 238) also notices the Meillacoid and Chicoid traits in the same kinds of pottery wares that I did from Rainey's Gordon Hill data.

It is, I think, of considerable importance to note that the ware definitions I have recapitulated in this paper from my 1949 analysis are almost identical to those for *Palmetto Plain* (my PLAIN) *Palmetto Mat Marked* (my CHECK MARKED), *Palmetto Molded Applique* and *Palmetto Punctate Incised* (my INCISED-PUNCTATE) as given very adequately, and with considerably more of a data-base than I had, by Sears and Sullivan (1978: 12-13). That is, what they are calling, after the initial use of the term by Hoffman (1967), the Palmetto Series is identical to what I had been calling the Bahamian Carrier Series. My choice of terms was, of course, framed within the data available in the late 1940's, while theirs is framed within a much wider picture. The term Carrier was used by me not in slavish imitation of Rouse (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 6-7), but simply because the Chicoid traits, specifically Haitian Carrier-like traits of the series seemed paramount then. In truth, they still do today, though there is certainly no objection to calling the series Palmetto, since Carrier may to some seem to restrict the probable or possible historical origins of the series to Haiti (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 15).

To limit the wares of the Bahamas, however, to the Palmetto Series, calling everything else 'trade ware', by implication, seems too simplistic to this writer. Sears and Sullivan (1978: 14) refer to the absence of a red slip in Palmetto wares, but they nowhere mention the fact that such slipped ware does occur. In fact, I found (Granberry 1952: 14) that it was the most frequently occurring ware in northern Bahamian sites, defined then as including the Exumas and Cat, but not San Salvador, Rum, Long Island, nor the Ragged Chain. This statement was based on the examination in 1949-55 of *all* then known Bahamian collections. Hoffman (1970: 7) refers to a 'red slipped, black core' sample of sherds, though admittedly only a total of six, at the Palmetto Grove site on San Salvador. They occurred at all levels of the site. Sullivan (1974: 30), in describing the color of Palmetto Plain ware, states that, though normally red, cores may be dark grey-brown. One wonders whether he may not actually be lumping red slipped ware with Palmetto Plain.

In any case, the red slipped ware that I have defined is *not* trade ware, since it seems to be made from local Bahamas Red Loam and is always shell-tempered. These are not the finely made, quartz-tempered true Meillac trade wares known from the Caicos (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 16). Furthermore, they coexist, at Gordon Hill and the McKay sites, and, to judge from Hoffman (1970: 7) at the

Palmetto Grove site as well, with Palmetto (as I will join Sears and Sullivan in calling those wares, though I will not go so far as to use the term series).

The crux of the problem lies in the determination for a certainty if, as Winter, Hoffman, and I have indicated, there actually *is* a red slipped ware, or, as Sullivan, in the previously cited instance, seems to imply, that it is, rather, a kind of pseudo-slip caused by firing variations.

If the RED SLIPPED ware is not spurious, but is, indeed, the representative in the Bahamas of something Meillacoid or Ostionoid-Meillacoid, then, from the Gordon Hill data, substantiated by the data from the McKay site (Winter 1978b), it coexisted with the more Chicoid Palmetto wares, the full panoply of which, as defined by Sears and Sullivan, is present at Gordon Hill. To judge from Winter's radiocarbon dates for the McKay site (1978b: 238-239), we are talking about the middle 1200's A.D.

If, in turn, this is so, it has far-reaching implications for the reconstruction of Bahamian culture history. It means that both Ostionoid-Meillacoid and Chicoid traditions reached the archipelago, whether through migration of peoples or trait movement, as separate movements. They probably stemmed from separate Haitian traditions, coming sequentially into the archipelago. Certainly what I have called Bahamian Meillac and what we all seem to agree now to call Palmetto wares are but areal variations on the Meillacoid and broad Chicoid themes further south. There seems no reason to assume that Palmetto ware is a *strictly* indigenous amalgam from almost simultaneous Ostionoid, Meillacoid, and Chicoid themes from—to avoid the question—unknown and undeterminable multiple places of origin (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 7, 9, 15-16). *Certainly* the bulk of the pottery itself is indigenous; *certainly* the Lucayans built their own ceramic traditions—but from a helter-skelter base? It seems unlikely, given the kind of data provided by Gordon Hill and the McKay sites, to name just two.

Of considerable interest, perhaps, is the dual use of the term *style* and the term *series* by Rouse, on the one hand, and Sears and Sullivan, on the other. It seems that Sears and Sullivan both equate *style* with the standard term *type*, or that, at least, they are implying that a style underlies a type. To them, quite clearly, a *series* consists of a number of historically related styles (or types, as you will). To Rouse, however, this is not at all the case. What is now called Palmetto would, including all the sub-categories of Plain, Mat Marked, Molded Applique, and Punctate Incised, constitute a single *style*, the Palmetto, *not* a *series*. That *style* could, then, be seen as an historical part of a larger series. My personal candidate for the series would be Chicoid, since Chicoid traits seem to me to dominate the Palmetto wares that I have examined over the past twenty-nine years. If Sears and Sullivan see equal elements of Ostionoid, Meillacoid, and Chicoid influence, which is difficult to rationalize historically, the burden of proof is certainly on them. So far it has not been provided.

It is almost trite to say that more excavation and analysis is needed, but it certainly is so. Until that time, there is the sticky problem of coexistence of Meillacoid wares and Chicoid wares of the Palmetto style within single sites in the Central Bahamas. There is also the more fundamental problem remaining: what theoretical framework shall we use to describe the Bahamian wares—the McKernian typological framework so usual in American anthropology, or Rouse's already widely used and very adequate framework? Perhaps—for it would easily work—we might consider using both, on different levels of analysis.

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