

# CERAMICS FROM THE DELMARVA ADENA RITUAL PITS AT PIG POINT

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## Abstract

This paper describes the ceramics recovered from five large ritual pits discovered at the Pig Point site (18AN50) on the Patuxent River in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. Radiocarbon dating indicates the pits were utilized from at least 230 B.C. to A.D. 305, and perhaps much longer. Each pit contained “killed” Adena-related artifacts including blades made from a variety of Midwestern lithic materials, tube pipes made of Ohio pipestone, and paint cups, as well as human bone fragments and copper beads. Unlike other known Delmarva Adena sites, the pits at Pig Point also contained a variety of ceramic sherds. The pottery recovered includes the well-known local types Marcey Creek, Accokeek, Popes Creek, and Mockley wares in varying proportions, along with a distinctive ceramic here given the provisional name Patuxent ware. The significance of this assemblage is examined in relation to our understanding of Delmarva Adena ritual mortuary behavior.

## Introduction

The discovery in 2012 of large mortuary pits related to the Delmarva Adena at the Pig Point site afforded an opportunity to examine “an enigma of the highest order” (Dent 1995:232), the presence of Adena artifacts made of exotic materials recovered from a few mortuary contexts in Maryland and Delaware. The existence of this cultural phenomenon, first recognized in the middle of the twentieth century, has been the subject of extensive speculation. These theories can in part be seen as reflective of the popularity of various archeological explanatory models. Migrationist models involving the direct movement of Adena populations from Ohio to the Chesapeake espoused by Ritchie and Dragoo (1959, 1960) gave way to economic explanations involving trade (Griffin 1961; Thomas 1976; Stewart 1970) and the cultural elaboration of local societies (Custer 1987, 1989). Unfortunately, all this speculation was based on a limited amount of data, usually derived from poor contexts.

The question of what pottery types should be associated with the “Delmarva Adena” complex has also been the subject of intense debate. In the Delaware region, a paradigm has developed that grog-tempered Coulbourn ceramics dating from the first two centuries A.D. are the likely candidates (see Custer 1989; Dent 1995; Petraglia et al., 2002). Custer (1987) concluded that this grog-tempered

Coulbourn ware could be used as indicators of Delmarva Adena habitation sites and thus allow the delineation of settlement and subsistence patterns. However, since this pottery type is not generally present on the Maryland side of the Delmarva, or on the Western Shore of the Chesapeake Bay (including Pig Point), there are obvious problems with this construct.

Solving this basic question has been greatly exacerbated by the fact that virtually no ceramics have been previously reported in direct association with the “Adena” mortuary sites. The sole exception is a ceramic paint pot from the Sandy Hill site (Thomas 1970:59) which is crushed quartz- and sand-tempered (Darrin Lowery, personal communication, 2012). At virtually every other known site, ceramics are not mentioned as having been recovered. Since ceramics were often not recovered from excavated Adena mounds in the Ohio Valley, this negative result was not necessarily considered unusual. It is particularly telling that not a single pottery sherd is reported at either West River (Ford 1976) or St. Jones (de Valinger 1970), since these sites (unlike the others) were actually subjected to systematic excavations.

The fact that ceramics have been recovered in fairly large amounts from the ritual pits at Pig Point allows us to examine this question with a whole new body of data derived from good, explicitly-defined contexts. Together with the radiocarbon dates obtained from the site, the ceramic assemblage from Pig Point will force a reevaluation of many current paradigms concerning the Delmarva Adena.

## Ceramic Types

A vast majority of the ceramics recovered from the ritual pits at Pig Point could readily be classified into four well-known types commonly recognized on the Chesapeake’s western shore (see Figure 1). These were all originally given type descriptions in Stephenson’s groundbreaking 1963 work at the Accokeek Creek Site in neighboring Prince Georges County, Maryland (Stephenson and Ferguson 1963). The most current and detailed descriptions of these types are available on an internet site designed and maintained by Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum and the Maryland Historical Trust <[www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/PrehistoricCeramics/index-prehistoric.html](http://www.jefpat.org/diagnostic/PrehistoricCeramics/index-prehistoric.html)>. This source also contains a compilation of currently available radiocarbon dates associated with these ceramics types, which will be used here as representing the current

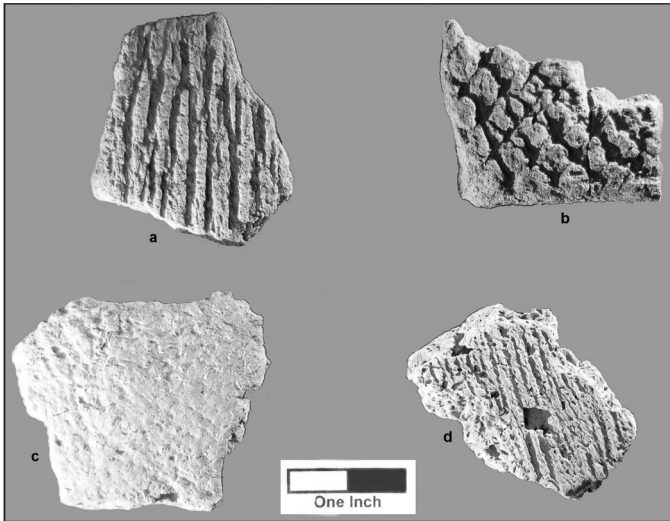


FIGURE 1. Primary ceramic types recovered from the Pig Point ritual area. *a*, Accokeek; *b*, Popes Creek; *c*, Marcey Creek; *d*, Mockley.

paradigm for temporal ranges. A brief description of these four ceramic wares follows, as well as a discussion of what is perhaps a distinctive new type.

#### *Marcey Creek Ware*

This ceramic type is most easily identified by its crushed steatite temper. Vessels have a flat bottom and are generally made by slab construction. The pottery usually displays a coarsely smooth exterior with net- or fabric-impressed bases. Marcey Creek ware is thought to date from between 1200 and 750 B.C.

#### *Accokeek Ware*

Accokeek ware is tempered with sand and minor amounts of crushed quartz. It is made by coil construction and fashioned with a cord-wrapped paddle. The resultant cord-marking is generally done in a diagonal fashion. Accokeek is believed to date from 900-300 B.C.

#### *Popes Creek Ware*

This ceramic is thick, sand-tempered, and noticeably friable. It is coil-constructed and usually displays a net-impressed exterior and marked interior scoring. Rare finger-impressed decorations occur. It is thought to date from between 500 B.C. and A.D. 300, although all the available radiocarbon dates from Maryland fall between 500 and 285 B.C.

#### *Mockley Ware*

Unlike the previously described types, Mockley ware is tempered with shell. Often this has leached away leaving voids. This coil-built ceramic can display net-impressed, cord-marked, or smooth surfaces. Rare incised or

punctate decorations occur. Mockley is considered to date from between A.D. 200 and 900, although the C-14 dates available from Maryland range from 80 B.C. to A.D. 700.

#### *Patuxent Ware (provisional type)*

Not yet mentioned in this discussion is the fact that a small number of sherds were encountered in the ritual pits which do not fit into the traditional local ceramic types. Perhaps the most unusual are three thin sherds of smooth, sand-tempered ceramic that bears a very distinctive incised decoration (Figure 2), and were recovered from Pit 1. The decorative scheme used on these sherds seems to violate normal iconographic standards in that the lines cross one another. Nicknamed “Angry Incised” or “Pig Point Incised” (see Luckenbach 2013:14), the decoration seems at least evocative of an incised Vinette 1 vessel recovered from the Boucher site in Vermont (Heckenberger et al. 1990). Its rarity might also suggest that it is exotic to Pig Point.

A more significant component of the ceramic assemblage is the presence of another thin, sand-tempered ware whose surface is impressed with what appears to be crushed net, or perhaps even fabric (Figure 3). It is significantly less sandy and friable than Popes Creek, notably thinner (averaging 5 mm as opposed to 10 mm), and never displayed the red/black oxidation colors commonly seen in Popes Creek. Unlike Popes Creek, interior scoring is uncommon and light. Rim sherds from the available vessels (minimum 9-10) can be undecorated, but about half display a simple notched decoration. Incised decoration is present on some sherds. A highly decorated example described earlier (Luckenbach 2009) and associated with a 2-sigma radiocarbon date of 385 B.C. may belong with this proposed type (Figure 4, left).

This pottery type constitutes a consistent minority of all four tested pits, ranging from 7% to 10% of all ceramics. Given its very distinctive nature, and to facilitate



FIGURE 2. Examples of sand-tempered “Patuxent” ware exhibiting distinctive incised decoration.

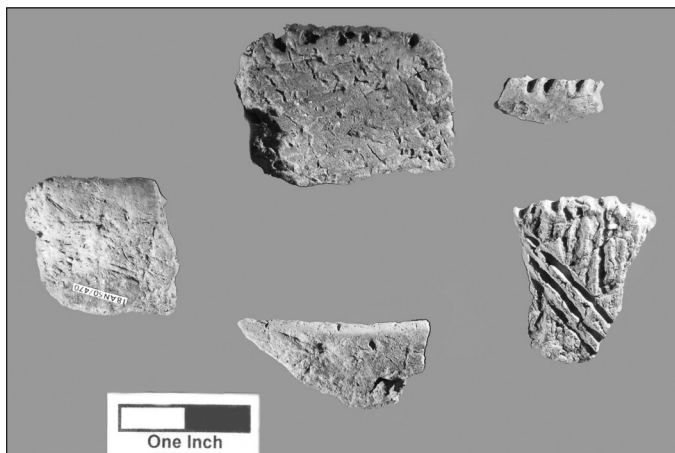


FIGURE 3. Examples of Patuxent ware exhibiting surfaces impressed by crushed net, or perhaps fabric.

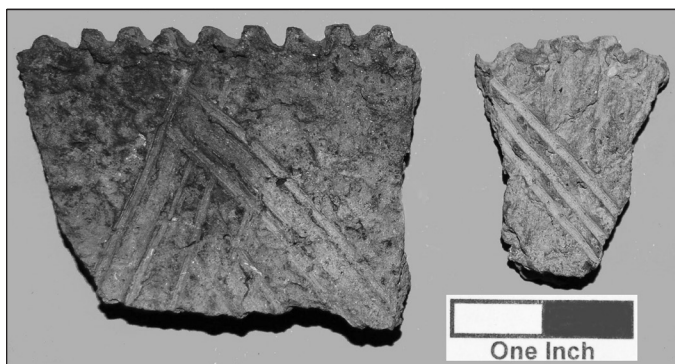


FIGURE 4. Highly decorated examples Patuxent ware.

discourse, it seems warranted to suggest the provisional type name “Patuxent” ware. Despite the notable differences, this ceramic does seem potentially related to Popes Creek ware. If this is true, it is suggested that it may represent a better-made, ritually-related, distinctive variation of the type. This kind of dichotomy between utilitarian and ritual ceramics has been noted elsewhere, such as the use of Montgomery Incised in the Adena heartland, Abbott Zoned incised at Abbott Farm, and the effigy pottery in use among later Mississippian cultures. Obviously, much more research is required to resolve this issue.

#### Pit Analysis

A total of five large Adena-related pits were discovered at Pig Point in the highly restricted area available for testing (see Figure 5). These were numbered Pits 1-5 in the order of their discovery. Given the constraints of existing asphalt driveways and modern structures only two pits received extensive sampling, two others were tested by single 5x5-foot test units, and one is only known from a shovel test pit. A total of five radiocarbon dates were obtained from four of the pits. The average 2-sigma dates for

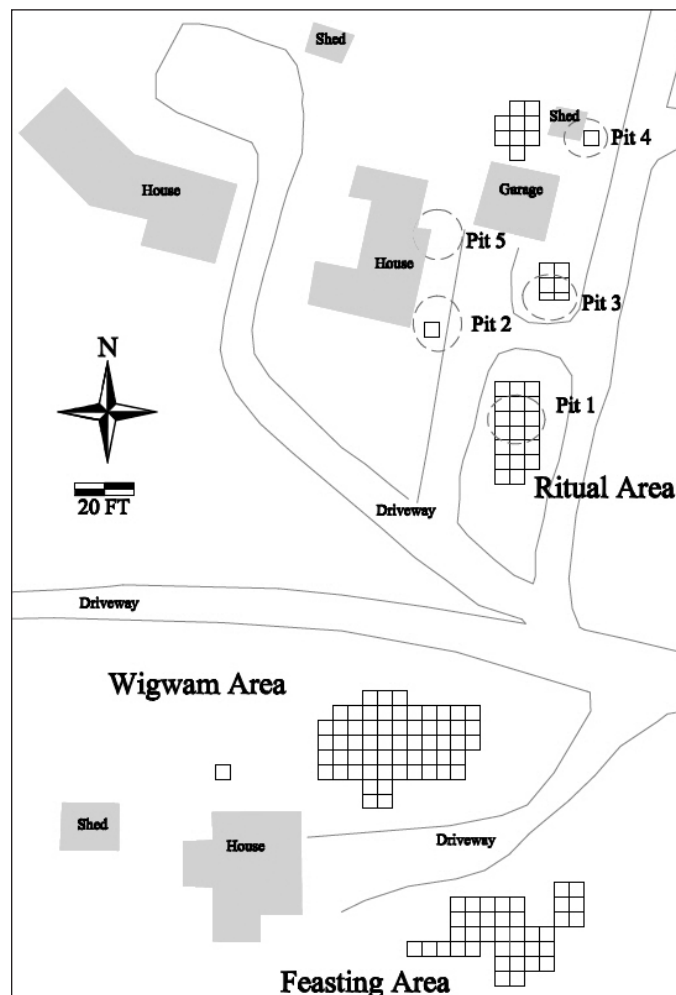


FIGURE 5. Site map of the Pig Point site showing the locations of Pits 1-5 in the ritual area.

these pits ranged from 240 B.C. to A.D. 305 (conventional 210 B.C. to A.D. 200) (see Table 1) and they are discussed here in chronological order.

Over 97% of the ceramics recovered from the pits (by weight) can be assigned to the five ware types described above. The results by weight are given in Table 2, and are displayed graphically in Figure 6.

#### *Pit 5 (no radiocarbon date)*

Pit 5 is essentially excluded from this analysis. This feature was encountered in a single STP in close proximity to a modern structure. This produced two copper beads, a pipestone tube pipe fragment, fragmentary human bone, and single sherds of Mockley and Patuxent ceramics. No charcoal was available for dating and no further testing could be conducted.

#### *Pit 2 (1 date – avg. 2-sigma 230 B.C.)*

Pit 2 has the oldest available radiocarbon date from



TABLE 1. Ritual pit area radiocarbon results.

<u>BETA #</u>	<u>CONTEXT</u>	<u>RCY</u>	<u>+/-</u>	<u>c13/12</u>	<u>CONV.</u>	<u>AVG. 2-SIG</u>
356552	Feat 307	2260	30	27.4	270 BC	290 BC
336994	Pit 2	2160	30	25.3	210 BC	230 BC
334761	Pit 4	2100	30	n/a	150 BC	120 BC
328505	Pit 1	1970	30	24.9	20 BC	20 AD
327617	Pit 1	1850	30	25.7	100 AD	160 AD
332406	Pit 3	1750	30	24.6	200 AD	305 AD
330133	Feat 246	1330	30	26.7	620 AD	680 AD

TABLE 2. Ritual pit ceramics (by weight, in ounces).

	<u>PIT 1</u>		<u>PIT 2</u>		<u>PIT 3</u>		<u>PIT 4</u>	
Marcey Creek	0.278	1%	1.197	28%	0.889	5%	0.077	1%
Accokeek	7.966	15%	2.55	59%	6.697	40%	1.02	15%
Popes Creek	6.49	12%	0.165	4%	2.01	12%	1.44	21%
Patuxent	5.472	10%	0.301	7%	1.478	9%	0.538	8%
Mockley	32.542	62%	0.115	3%	5.741	34%	3.754	55%

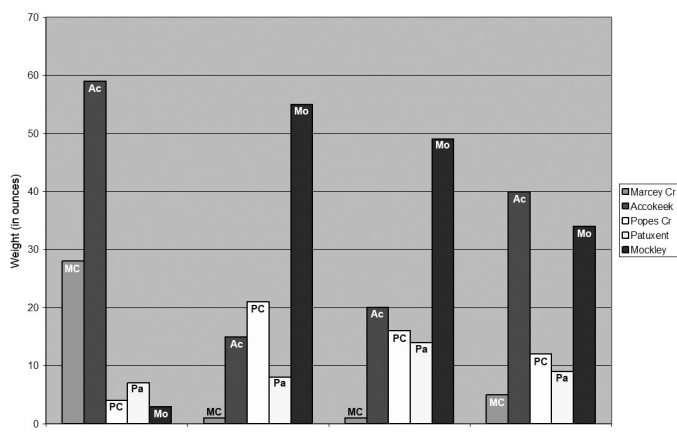


FIGURE 6. Ceramic distribution within the ritual pits (by weight).

the Pig Point ritual pits. Unfortunately, close proximity to a modern, occupied structure limited testing to a single 5x5-foot unit. For safety reasons, even this was not excavated to the pit floor, reaching a depth of three and a half feet.

The excavation unit in Pit 2 became further complicated by the presence of a number of large root stains and by the burial of a large dog directly in the top portion of the pit. The dog was of a size to raise suspicions that it may in fact have been a wolf, but ultimately it was shown to simply be a very large dog (Jeff Blick, personal communication, 2013). The dog was associated with “Patuxent” pottery.

The possibility that the presence of the pit was known to those conducting the dog burial raises interesting questions about the ritual significance of the hilltop. A second dog burial was previously encountered downhill in the Upper Block “structural area” at Pig Point.

Pit 2 contained the same mix of Delmarva Adena-related contents, including killed blades and tube pipes, beads, and smashed human bone—and ceramics. However, this earliest dated pit contained ceramics types in a notably different proportions than that seen in the other pits. As is the case with all of the Pig Point pits, Mockley ware represents the *terminus post quem*, but in Pit 2 it represents only a meager 3% of excavated sherds by weight. Since Mockley ceramics makes up a third of Pit 3 and roughly half of Pit 1 and Pit 4, this is an important distinction.

There are two possible explanations for this finding. One is that the current paradigm for the start of Mockley ware (A.D. 200) is in error. There are arguments currently being made that this start date is too late by a significant amount. Classic Mockley has been recently dated at Point Lookout, Maryland at 80 B.C. (Robinson and Bulhack 2006), while ceramics tempered with scallop shell have been dated at 1000 B.C. on the Delmarva Peninsula (Rick and Lowery 2013). Such a position definitely finds clear support in the results from Pit 4 at Pig Point, where a 150 B.C. date is associated with an assemblage where Mockley represents a full 55% of the ceramics by weight.

Given the presence of large root stains in the upper part of this single test square excavated in Pit 2, however, a

second possible explanation (and perhaps the more likely) simply involves some kind of contamination in the upper part of Pit 2 that resulted in the presence of minor amounts of Mockley ware.

In terms of other ceramic types, Pit 2 is predominately an Accokeek feature with that ware comprising 59% of sherds by weight. Since this ceramic is traditionally dated at 900-300 B.C., Pit 2 should slightly postdate its use. This is obviously the case with Marcey Creek ware (1200-750 B.C.) which still comprises a significant 28% of the assemblage. However, one indication that the ritual association of the hilltop might have begun during this time frame is the unusual recovery of a number of Accokeek sherds elsewhere on the site that seem to have been in contact with massive amounts of red ochre. An example is shown in Figure 7, where a sherd can be seen that acquired a thick internal red slip from this activity.

Although the 230 B.C. date from Pit 2 falls squarely within the assumed dates for Popes Creek (500 B.C. – A.D. 300), this ware comprises only 4% of the pit's sherds, while the potentially-related Patuxent ware comprises a slightly larger 7% of the assemblage by weight. A least-effort hypothesis then might hold that Popes Creek and Patuxent ware are, in fact, being utilized when Pit 2 is constructed, and that both Accokeek and, certainly, Marcey Creek wares are accidentally introduced when digging the pit. One might further surmise that the minor contributions of Popes Creek and Patuxent imply that they are not being deliberately introduced into the pit as part of the attendant ritual involved.

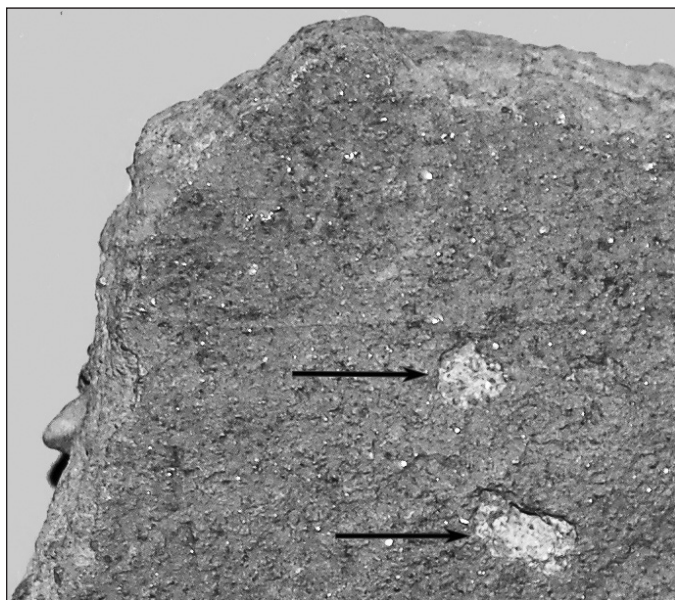


FIGURE 7. Interior of a red ochre-encrusted Accokeek sherd (arrows indicate areas where the red ochre has spalled off, revealing the original surface).

#### *Pit 4 (1 date – avg. 2-sigma 120 B.C.)*

Pit 4 was also subjected to only limited excavation due to the proximity of modern structures. It was encountered in three shovel test pits, and tested by a single 5x5-foot unit. Like Pit 2 this test unit did not ultimately reach the pit floor despite being excavated to a depth of 3.5 feet below the current ground surface.

As stated previously, despite the early radiocarbon date obtained from it, Pit 4 was a feature overwhelmingly associated with Mockley ceramics. Mockley ware comprised 55% of the sherds recovered (by weight), while the presumably contemporaneous Popes Creek ware comprised 21% and Patuxent 8%. Accokeek ceramics still constituted 15% and Marcey Creek a meager 1% of the assemblage. This early date for Mockley ware seems unequivocal, and would represent the earliest date directly associated with classic Mockley yet obtained from Maryland.

#### *Pit 1 (2 dates – avg. 2-sigma A.D. 90)*

Pit 1 was encountered early in the 2012 field season in one of the larger areas of the hilltop available for archeological testing. After two field seasons an excavation block measuring 15 by 35 feet was opened in an area bounded on all four sides by modern driveways. In the center of this block a large, oval pit feature measuring roughly 22 by 15 feet was discovered which reached a depth of approximately five feet below the current ground surface (Figure 8). The contents of Pit 1—the usual copper beads, “killed” blades, tube pipes, and human bone—have been previously described in detail (Luckenbach 2013).

The mix of ceramics seen in Pit 1 are quite similar to those encountered in Pit 4, with Mockley comprising



FIGURE 8. Pit 1 during excavation, showing the 5-foot depth of the feature.



over half (62%) of the pottery recovered by weight. Together, Accokeek (15%), Popes Creek (12%), and Patuxent (10%) comprise 37% of the assemblage compared to 44% in Pit 4. Pit 1 also contained 1% untyped ceramics including the incised sherds described earlier (see Figure 2).

As with Pit 4, the radiocarbon dates obtained from Pit 1 (average 2-sigmas of A.D. 20 and A.D. 160) are generally too early for Mockley ware according to the current paradigm, but are clearly associated with this ceramic type at Pig Point.

### *Pit 3 (1 date – avg. 2-sigma A.D. 305)*

Discovered first in two shovel test pits, a small unpaved area allowed the excavation of a 12.5x10-foot block over the location of Pit 3 (Figure 9). Only a small area of the block excavation proved to encompass an area outside of the pit to the northwest. These results clearly indicate that, like Pit 1, an extremely large feature was involved. Testing was able to demonstrate the original floor at a depth of 6.7 feet and an extent of at least 15 feet. Like Pit 1, there was clear evidence that the pit had been repeatedly utilized by prehistoric populations.

The single radiocarbon result of A.D. 200 (conventional) and A.D. 305 (avg. 2-sigma) suggests that Pit 3 may have been the latest of these large ritual features by as much as two centuries. The non-ceramic artifacts recovered from Pit 3 also provide definite support for a temporal shift. Uniquely, this pit was found to contain significant numbers

of flakes of green Normanskill (Coxsackie) flint as well as a very distinctive, but as of yet unidentified, speckled jasper. Pit 3 also contained a style of heavy donut-shaped copper beads that did not occur in the other pits (see Gollop and Luckenbach 2013). So although still containing the “killed” blades and tube pipes with Midwestern origins, and the same highly fragmentary human remains, Pit 3 seems to suggest a shift in exotics from more northern origins.

While Pit 3 still contained a significant amount of the (presumably contemporary) Mockley ceramics (34%), it surprisingly contained an even larger amount of Accokeek ware (40%). Unless one is willing to consider the introduction of heirloom ceramics, the likely explanation for this result is the unintended introduction of Accokeek during the original construction of the pit. It also serves as a cautionary tale about how significant such an introduction might be. Pit 3 also contained small amounts of Popes Creek (12%), Patuxent (9%), and Marcey Creek ceramics which may also be unintentional inclusions.

### *Features 307 and 323 (1 date – avg. 2-sigma 290 B.C.)*

In addition to the five large pits just described, three much smaller features found in close proximity to Pit 1 should be mentioned, as they have a direct bearing on issues such as chronology, ceramics, and the nature and duration of the ritual activities occurring on the hilltop.

Features 307 and 323 were located five and nine feet south of Pit 1. Both were roughly 2x3-foot oval-shaped features with rounded bottoms separated from each other by about a foot. Neither contained the killed blades or tube pipes characteristic of the large Adena pits, although Feature 323 did contain a fragmentary copper bead. Both small pits were practically devoid of ceramics but each produced small fragments of Popes Creek (or perhaps Patuxent) sherds. A single charcoal sample from Feature 307 produced an average 2-sigma date of 290 B.C., slightly earlier than any of the dates obtained from the large pits and consistent with the assumed chronological range for Popes Creek ceramics.

Features 307 and 323 contained the only instance of ritual mortuary behavior encountered outside of the five large Adena pit features. In Feature 307 a small pocket of disarticulated human teeth was encountered. A similar occurrence was encountered in Feature 323, where the teeth were accompanied by fragmentary jaw bone, and seemed to be contained in a bag or small basket (Figure 10). Three fragmentary long bones also lay at the bottom of the feature.

There are two possible explanations for these seemingly related small pits. One would suggest that they predate the large pit behavior associated with killed blades and tube pipes. A second would consider them related but ancillary expressions of the same ritual activity which carry its associated dating back another 60 years.



FIGURE 9. Pit 3 during excavation of the test block.



FIGURE 10. Cross-section of Feature 323, showing human teeth and jaw fragment (possibly originally contained in a bag or small basket).

#### *Feature 246 (1 date – avg. 2-sigma A.D. 680)*

Feature 246 was a small (roughly 3x2-foot, 8-inch deep), dark feature located within the oval outline of Pit 1. It contained broken tube pipes and bone fragments as well as Mockley ceramics and a rhyolite flake. Charcoal from this feature produced the surprisingly late radiocarbon date of A.D. 620 (conventional) or A.D. 680 (avg. 2-sigma). The location of Feature 246 appears to suggest that its placement was respecting the general oval outline of Pit 1 (Figure 11). Since both Pit 1 and Pit 3 clearly demonstrated that they had been dug into repeatedly, Feature 246 might simply be seen as a very late part of the continuum of this behavior that would advance its existence by over 300 years. Even if this is not the case, it would appear to indicate that the general location of Pit 1 had not been lost to local knowledge over the intervening centuries.

### **Discussion**

Prior to the discoveries made at the Pig Point site, only two Delmarva Adena sites had ever been subjected to formal excavations, the West River site in Maryland in 1955, and the St. Jones site in Delaware in 1960. Neither of these sites produced any reported pottery, and as far as can be seen (with the exception of a single paint cup from Sandy Hill) no ceramics have been associated with the other six known classic Delmarva Adena sites. The recovery of ceramics from all five Adena-related ritual pits at Pig Point, therefore, constitutes a highly significant result.

The question of why Pig Point appears to be unique in this regard is highly important to interpreting the ceramic results described here. Despite the early nature of the exca-

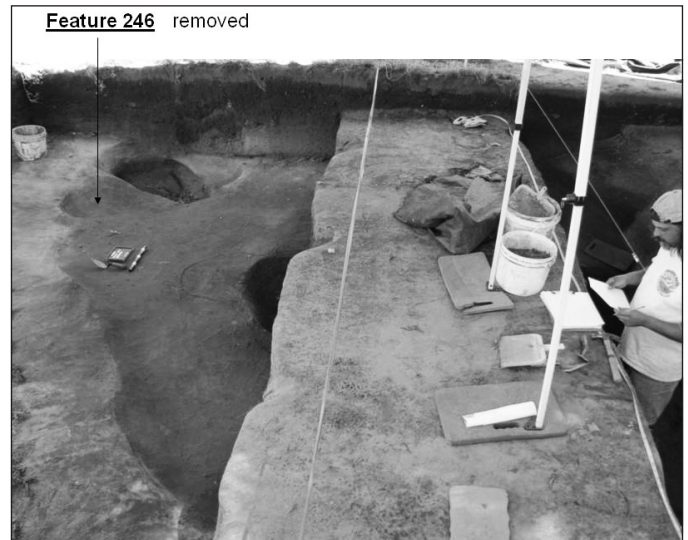


FIGURE 11. Pit 1 during excavation, showing the location of Feature 246 (removed).

vations at St. Jones and West River, both clearly contained a series of large ritual pits analogous to those found at Pig Point. Since the excavations at West River were also done to contemporary professional standards, there seems little likelihood that ceramics were present but not noticed or reported.

Given that a number of authors have suggested that the grouped multiple Delmarva Adena pits represent different steps in a staged mortuary ritual, it is possible that the Pig Point pits all represent a single stage not previously documented. The thorough nature of the artifact “killing” at Pig Point, as well as the ritual destruction of select human skeletal parts seen here, are clearly different than previously reported sites. Given the propensity for the intentional breakage of artifacts at this site, it is noteworthy that Burle Clay (1983) once proposed that the ritual killing of ceramics may have been a part of the Adena mortuary behavior in the Midwestern heartland. Such behavior might also be suggested from the results at Pig Point. The range of ceramics types encountered in these five pits, however, might also argue against such a conclusion. While the traditional date ranges for Accokeek, Popes Creek, and Mockley wares all overlap the radiocarbon dates obtained from the Pig Point features, the same is certainly not the case for Marcey Creek (c. 1200 – 750 B.C.). Given the amount of Accokeek encountered in Pit 3, it may be that all the ceramics from the pits are simply strays, both recent and old, which entered the pits by accident during their construction.

There seems little doubt that at Pig Point the Delmarva Adena ritual mortuary behavior can be directly associated with populations utilizing Mockley ceramics—as demonstrated by the contents of Pit 4, Pit 1, and Pit 3.



The fact that a radiocarbon date of 120 B.C. can be firmly associated with this pottery type is an important result in and of itself. However, both the date and ceramic assemblage recovered from Pit 2 raise the possibility that the use of very large ritual pits accompanied by the killing of Adena-related blades and tubular pipes may have begun during late Accokeek times and continued through what is normally thought of as a sequenced progression to Popes Creek and then Mockley ceramics. It seems definitely to have commenced by the time populations were utilizing Popes Creek ware and the provisionally named (and possibly ritual) Patuxent ware. Such a finding would echo the contention of Mel Thurman who asserted decades ago that the Delmarva Adena mortuary behavior (and the rise of incipient chiefdoms) could be associated with Accokeek, Popes Creek, and Mockley wares (Thurman 1985).

The deep stratigraphic deposits excavated further downhill from the ritual pits at Pig Point demonstrate a consistent human occupation of the bluff going back at least 10,000 years to the Early Archaic. However, it is not until the Late Archaic around 3,000 years ago that a more intensive midden is deposited in this lower area. At that time a distinction also becomes clear between the Upper Block area containing unheated wigwam structures and the Lower Block feasting area. The intensity of occupation in both areas is increased further when Accokeek ceramics (some clearly having contained red ochre) begin to be utilized. It appears that the large Delmarva Adena pits may have first begun around this time or soon thereafter. In any case, the fact that the locations for structures and hearths downhill were immovable over millennia clearly suggests that the hilltop may have had a ritual importance to local populations for thousands of years. Seen in this light, Pig Point was clearly a very sacred place.

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