Fremont Ceramics
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The purpose of this packet is threefold. The first objective is a brief overview of the Fremont with the crucial literature references. The second objective is an explanation of why you don't know anything about the Fremont, even though they were maize growers located primarily in Four-corners states. The final objective is a discussion of the Fremont ceramic complex, complete with type descriptions. I hesitate to toot my own horn, but these issues are discussed in much greater detail in my own M.A. thesis, which is available online from the BYU Library in pdf format (Watkins 2006). In addition to the references cited below, interested readers are referred there for a fairly comprehensive Fremont bibliography with particular emphasis on ceramics.

Fremont Archaeological Research

Much of the confusion surrounding the Fremont is a result of the two very different archaeological perspectives taken by researchers. The fundamental difference between the viewpoints is found at the scale of analysis. Individuals associated with the University of Utah are most interested in individual behavior (Madsen and Simms 1998; Simms 1986). A second group, consisting largely of Brigham Young University affiliates, espouses a macroscalar approach (Talbot 1996, Janetski et al. 2000). These researchers acknowledge that questions at various scales are worthy of consideration, but argue that an exclusive micro-perspective ignores large-scale regional patterning. In short, University of Utah researchers are hunter-gatherer Great Basin archaeologists casting the Fremont as highly mobile foragers who occasionally grew corn. Conversely, BYU researchers approach their research from the Southwest. They see the Fremont as farmers who were much more reliant on wild resources than their fellows elsewhere in the southwest.

Why don't you know anything about the Fremont?

In the beginning, the great Dons of Southwestern archaeology (Kidder et al.) cast their eyes toward Utah, and saw that it was good. The Fremont and Virgin Anasazi were lumped together and designated as the Northern Periphery of the Southwest. Fremont archaeology continued in a southwesterly course until Jesse D. Jennings (of Danger Cave fame) rejected the Northern Periphery concept (Jennings et al. 1956). Jennings influence is not to be underestimated, as he served as chair of many dissertation committees coming out of the University of Utah. One of his students, David Madsen, later became the Utah State Archaeologist. Madsen is a trained palynologist, and his emphasis on subsistence and wild resource procurement continues to guide conceptions of the Fremont (Madsen 1989; Madsen and Lindsay 1977). Finally, following the retirement of Jennings, the University of Utah became increasingly concerned with Human Behavioral Ecology and Great Basin archaeology. Although the Fremont were originally conceived of as a Southwestern phenomenon, the combination of the above factors (and others) have resulted in the current conception of the Fremont as a Great Basin affiliated hunter-gatherer phenomenon. Instead of reading about the Fremont in Kiva, you find the articles in the Journal of California and Great Basin studies.

Fremont Defined

At the microscale, the Fremont are considered impossible to define. Madsen (1989:2-3) argues that the Fremont are "characterized by variation and diversity and are neither readily defined nor easily encapsulated within a single description." On the *very next page*, however, he advises the public that if they "stumble on an archaeological site anywhere within the [the Fremont] region and find sherds of… distinctive gray pottery, [they] have found the remains of what we have come to call the Fremont." This and other similar contradictions have muddled Fremont studies for the last several decades. Despite definition problems, the Fremont can be defined as an archaeological culture based on distinctive material objects including one-rod-and-bundle basketry, the "Fremont" hock-style moccasin, trapezoidal anthropomorphs depicted in rock art and clay figurines, and distinctive grayware pottery. The "Utah Style" metate is considered an additional material culture marker of the Fremont culture.

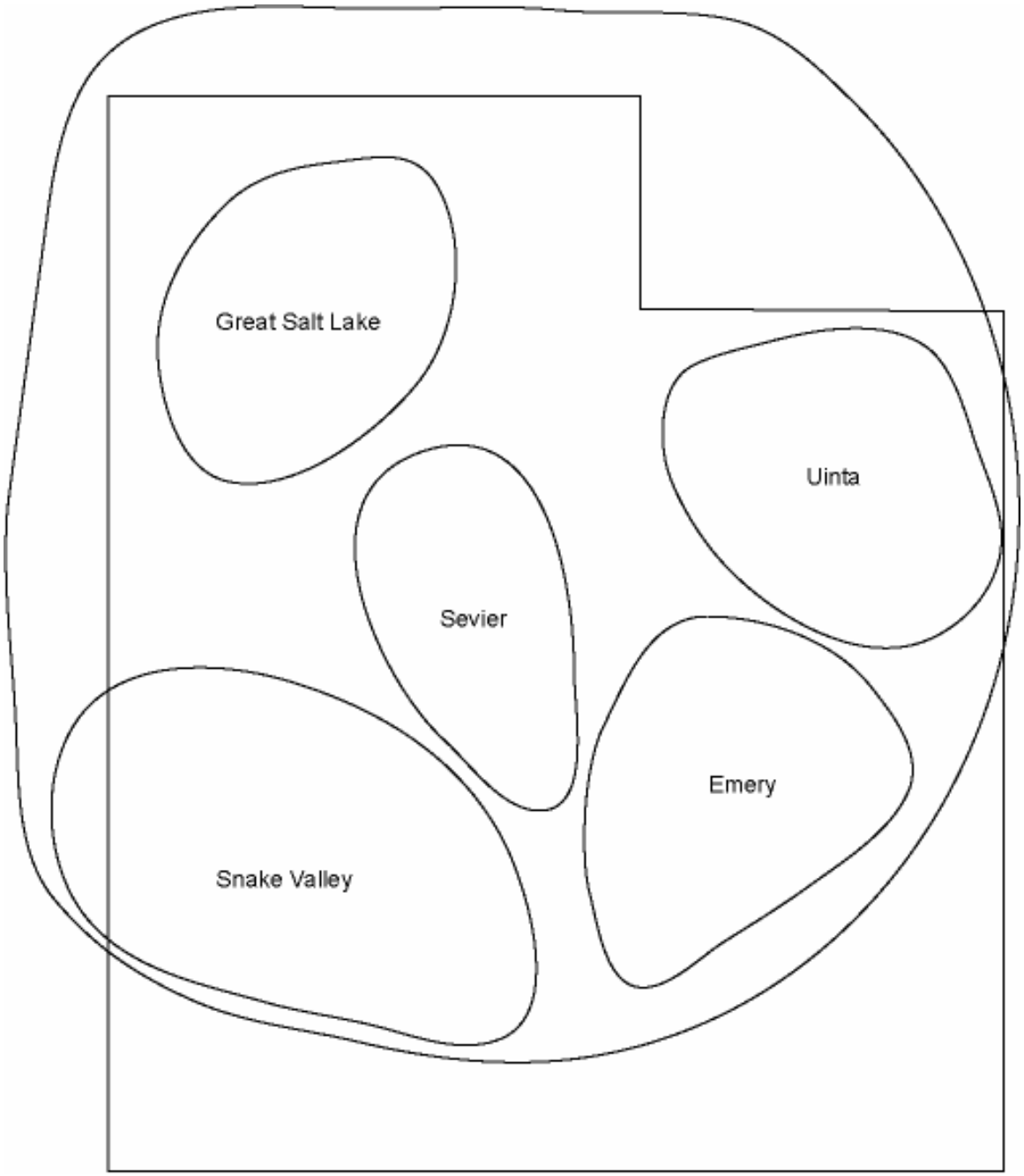
Macroscalar studies generally define the Fremont as farming north of the Colorado River (Talbot 1996). The Fremont are additionally considered fairly sedentary pithouse dwellers (Talbot 2000) for whom maize was a major food source, though an assortment of wild food resources were also exploited (for a summary of Fremont subsistence see Janetski and Newman 2000). These fairly egalitarian people, with four known exceptions, also buried their dead without preserved objects (Janetski et al. 2000).

Fremont Ceramics

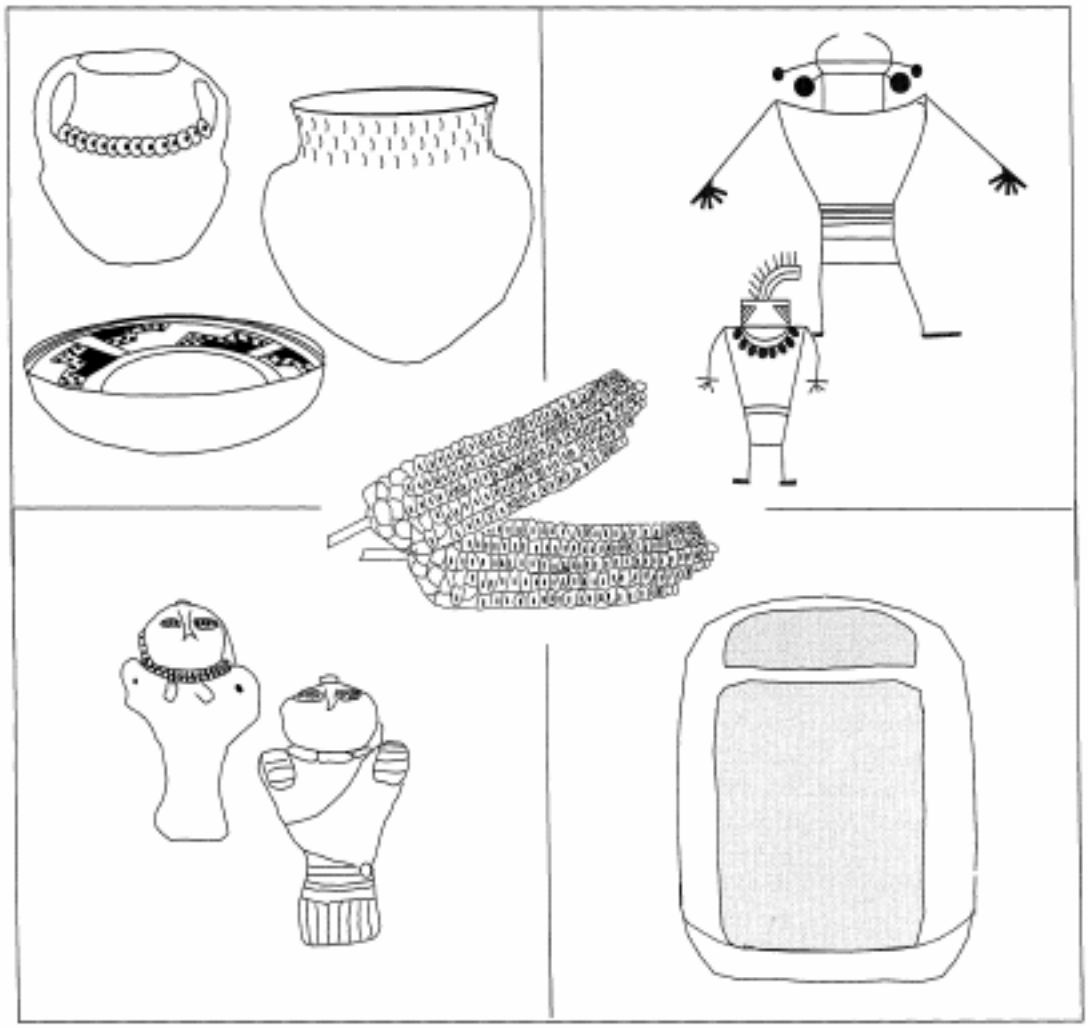
Fremont pottery is thin-walled gray ware made by the coil and scrape method. The pottery is often highly burnished, and a fugitive red hematite wash is common. Tempering material varies (see the table below), but igneous rock temper was most common. The pottery is usually smoothed and undecorated, though corrugation and painting is common in the south and incising and appliqué decorations are found in the north. Several forms have been identified; however, the jar, pitcher, and bowl are by far the most common. The painted pottery vessels are usually bowls in a banded layout. Design elements are most similar to Red Mesa pottery (specifically Cortez Black-on-white) (Thompson and Allison 1988). Fremont pottery is poorly dated, and the only real demonstrated temporal difference is the late occurrence of corrugated wares (ca. A.D. 1100-1300).

Modern Fremont ceramic studies rely on a single seminal work (Madsen 1977). Fremont pottery classification is based on a combination of temper and surface treatment. Madsen has classified Fremont pottery into nine types under the "Desert Gray Ware" designation. I have proposed a reclassification of Fremont pottery based on the Type-Series-Ware hierarchy commonly applied in the Southwest. In my classification, a series is designated by temper and a type by surface treatment.

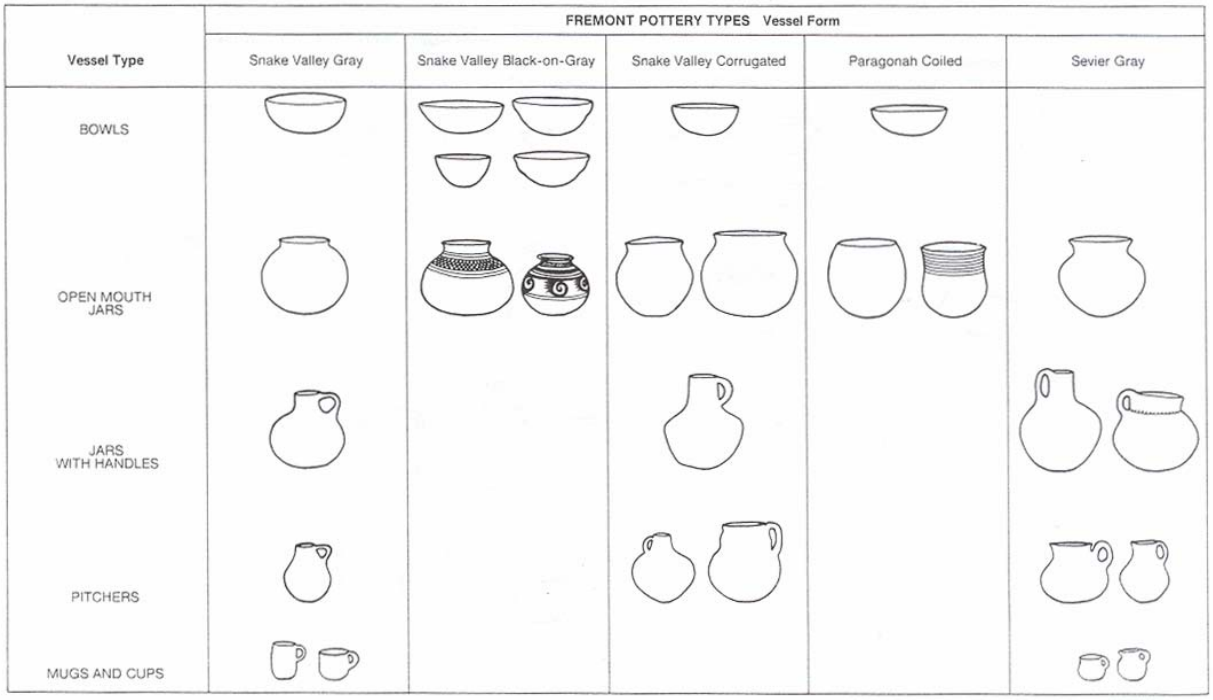
Rough Map of the Fremont Area showing Suspected Ceramic Production Zones.

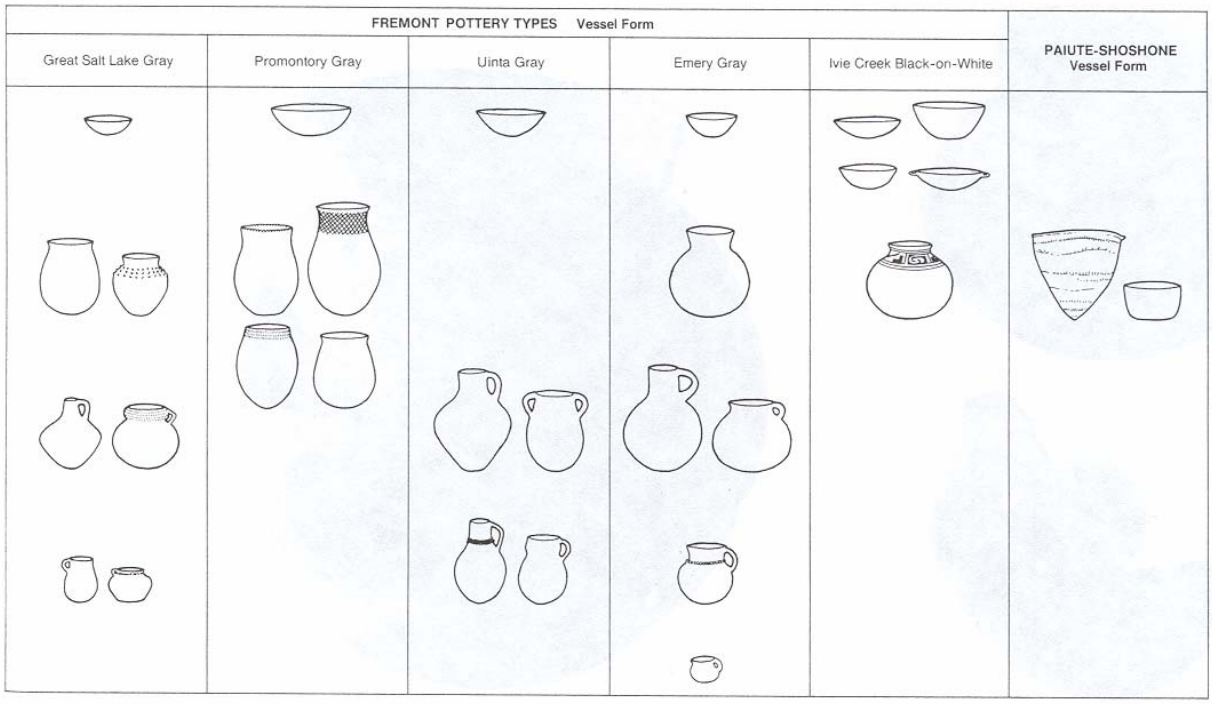


Some Distinctive Fremont Material Culture.



Fremont Vessel Forms (From Madsen 1986)





Examples of Fremont Impressed and Appliqué Pottery.

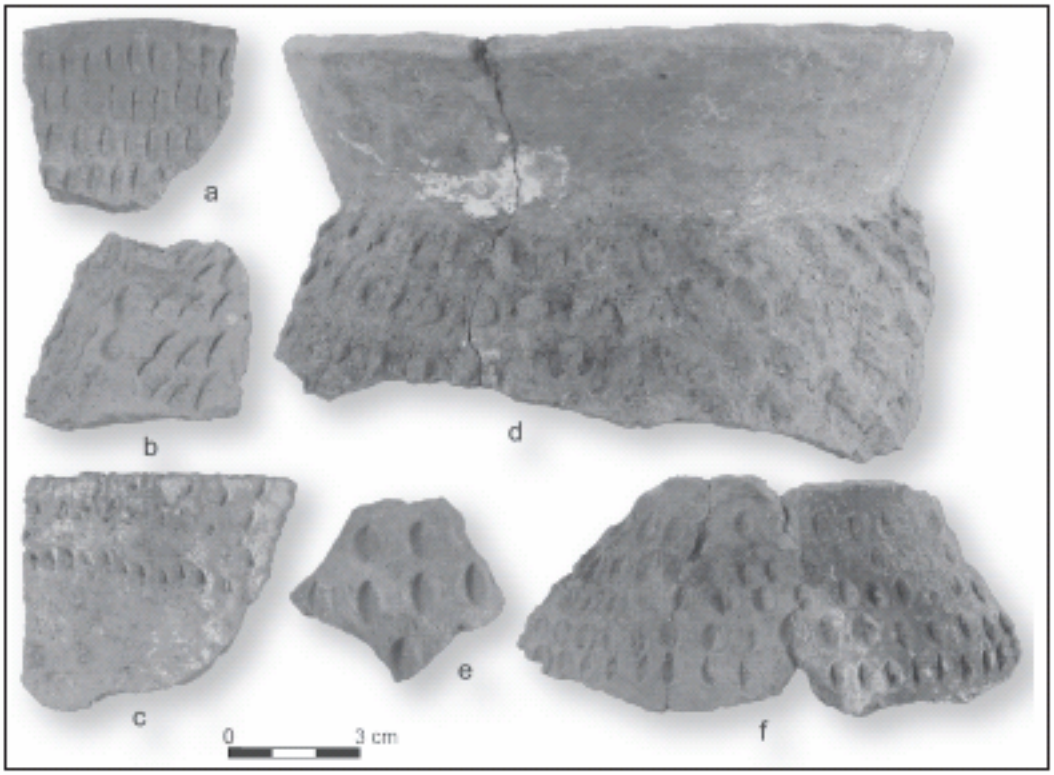


Figure 6.2. Great Salt Lake Gray punctate/impressed sherds from South Temple.

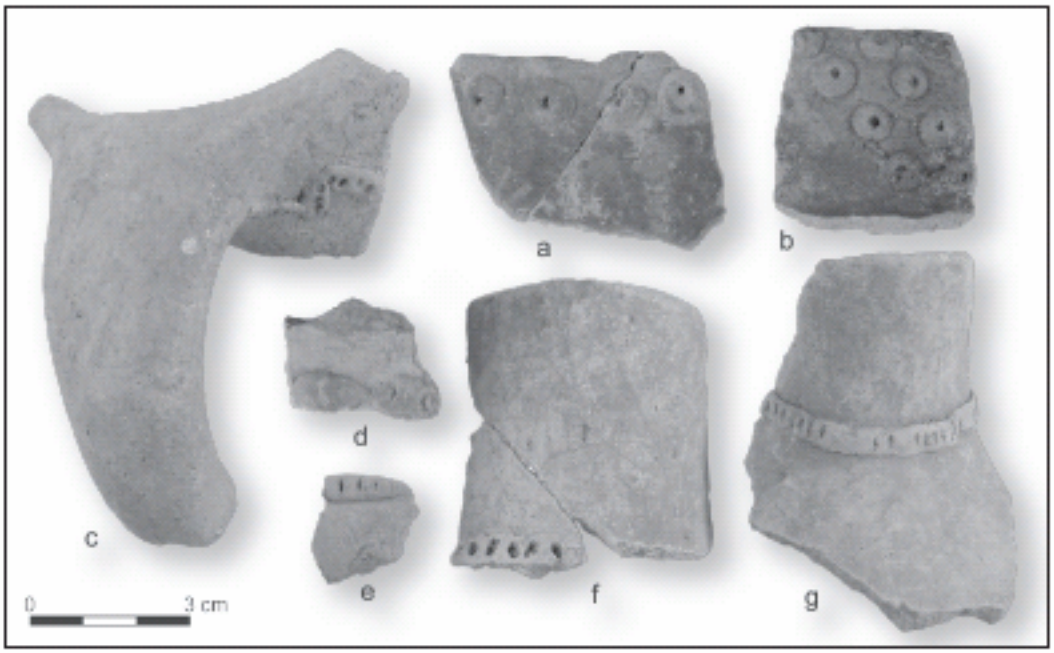
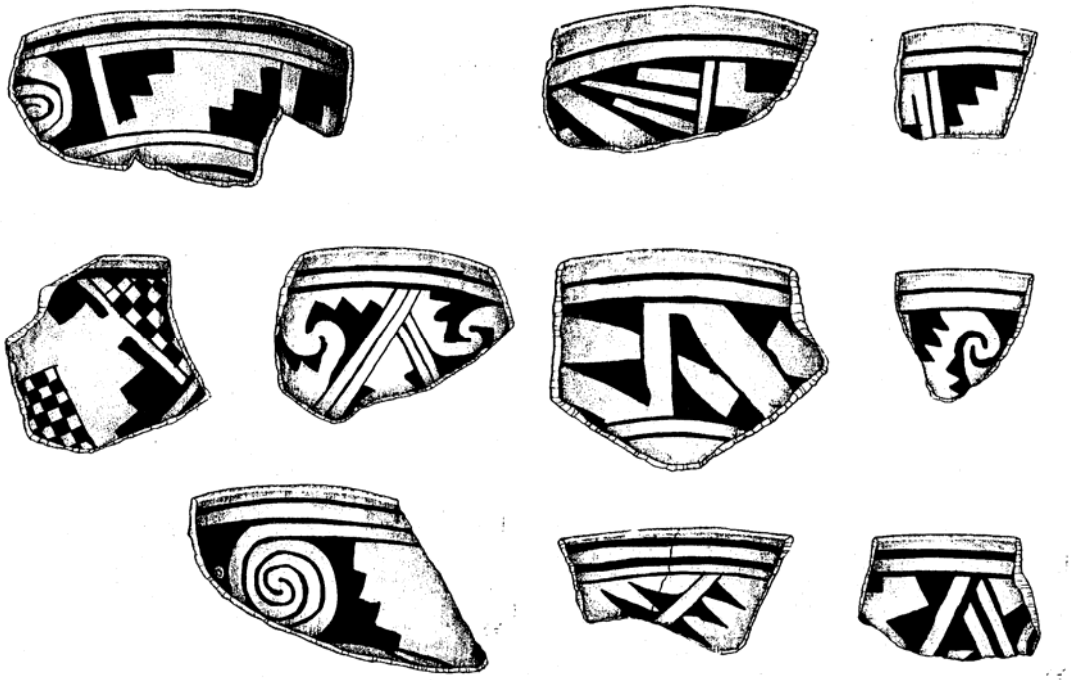
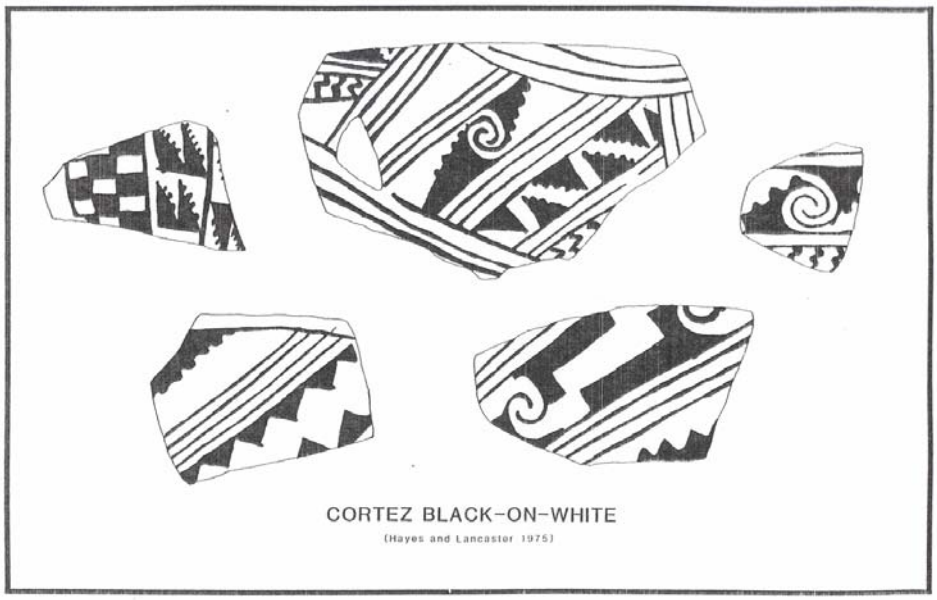


Figure 6.3. Great Salt Lake Gray applique sherds from South Temple.

Fremont Painted Pottery with Cortez B/W

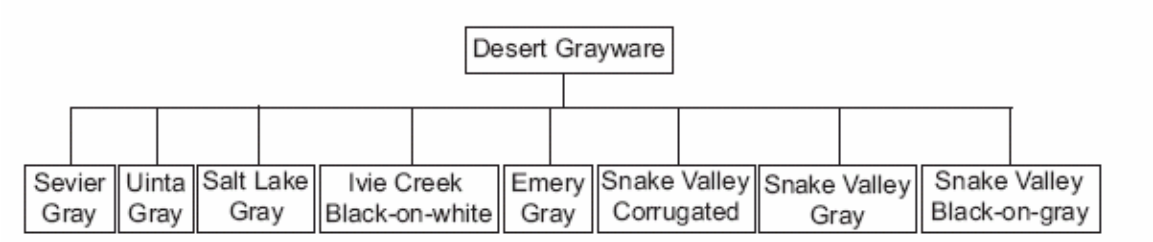




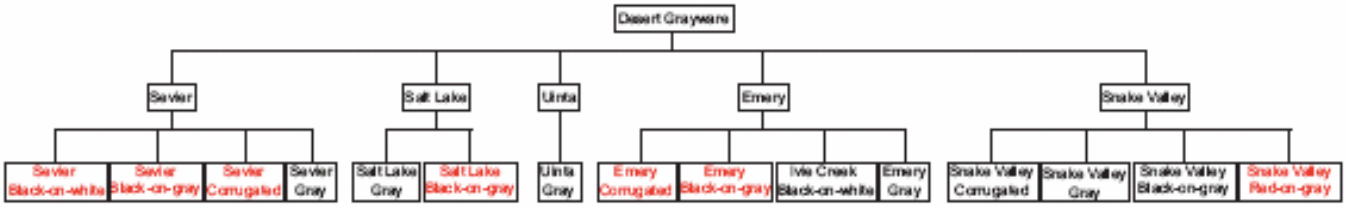
Fremont Ceramics, Temper Descriptions from Madsen 1977.

Type Name	Temper Description	Surface Treatment
Snake Valley Gray	Fine to medium angular particles of quartz (10-20%), feldspar (20%-30%), and biotite mica (5%-10%)	Plain
Snake Valley Black-on-gray	Fine to medium angular particles of quartz (10-20%), feldspar (20%-30%), and biotite mica (5%-10%)	Painted
Snake Valley Corrugated	Fine to medium angular particles of quartz (10-20%), feldspar (20%-30%), and biotite mica (5%-10%)	Corrugated
Paragonah Coiled	None	Unsmoothed
Sevier Gray	Medium (0.3-0.6 mm) to extremely coarse (larger than 1 mm) angular pieces of dark or gray basalt (15-40%) and quartz (0-15%) with occasional mica.	Plain
Great Salt Lake Gray	Mostly angular particles (0.1-1.0 mm) of quartz (10-30%), and mica - biotite and muscovite - (5%), with some rounded grains of sand	Plain
Unita Gray	Up to 40% angular crushed calcite (white and light pink) with occasional presence of quartz or crushed igneous rock	Plain
Emery Gray	Angular crushed fragments of gray basalt (20-40%) and quartz (10-25%) with occasional mica particle	Plain
Ivie Creek Black-on-white	Ranges from angular crushed fragments of gray basalt (20-40%) and quartz (10-25%) to dark crushed basalt particles	Black Paint on White Slip

Fremont pottery classification (Madsen 1977)



Proposed Re-classification of Fremont Pottery, Rare Types in Red (Watkins 2006)



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