

# Artifacts

Artifacts are the things that people made and used. They give a view into the past and a glimpse of the ingenuity of the people who lived at a site. Artifacts from the Tchefuncte site give special insight into two kinds of native technology. First, the site has the largest collection of [Early Woodland period](#) pottery in Louisiana. This period was the time when pottery making became widespread. Second, the site produced 930 bone and shell artifacts, which is the largest sample from any site of the [Early Woodland period](#) in Louisiana. People made these tools from the bones of deer, alligators, raccoons, birds and other animals. However, nearly 90% of the bone artifacts were made of deer.



## Antler Tools

Forty-three deer antler artifacts came from the Tchefuncte site. Most of them were waste pieces left over from making tools. White-tailed deer antler tips, or tines, were well suited for pointed tools. People could make them sharper by grinding or whittling them. To attach the tines to a handle, they sometimes hollowed out the base of the tool, as in all of these artifacts.



Credit: R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates

## Bone Tools

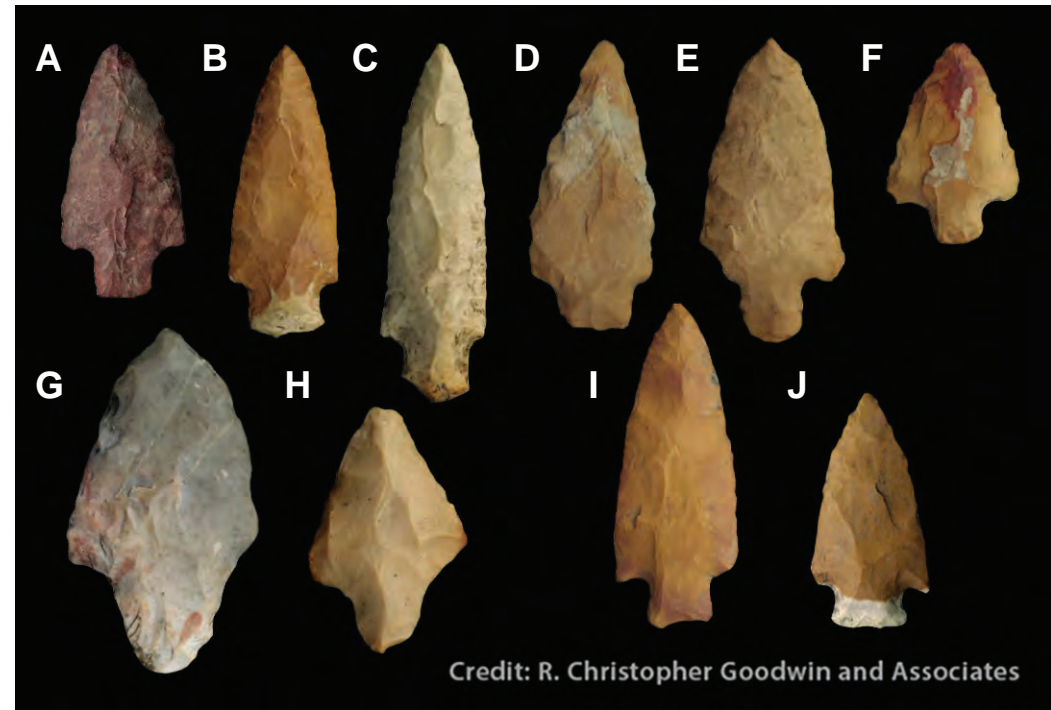
In areas where stone was scarce, bone often was used instead of stone for some tools, such as projectile points used on the ends of spears or darts. Deer was the preferred animal for many kinds of bone tools. Bones from the lower leg were especially popular for making bone projectile points (A, B, C) and pins (D) because these bones are long and straight.

Researchers can reconstruct the process of making a deer bone point from bone artifacts from the Tchefuncte site. Some of the bone artifacts recovered from the site represent leftover pieces that were discarded waste from making a tool, while others were pieces that broke while the tool was being made. This production process is illustrated in the bottom photo.



## Chipped Stone Tools

Projectile points were the sharp tips on the ends of spears, darts or possibly harpoons. Some of the stone used for projectile points came from other states. However, Citronelle chert from sources only one or two days walk from the site was the most common stone for points. Most of the points archaeologists found at the site were Pontchartrain types, which are long and well made, with short, square bases (A, B and C). They also found a number of Kent (D, E and F), Gary (G and H) and Delhi (I and J). Kent points are similar to Pontchartrain types, but are not as well made. Gary points have rounded bases, while Delhi points have short barbs at the lower corners of the blade. Sometimes a tool made for one purpose was recycled for a new use. This example began as a projectile point and was resharpened into a drill (K). Several adzes, used to work wood also were found at the site (L, M and N). These examples have a distinctive shape, and most are shiny on one end as a result of rubbing against the wood.





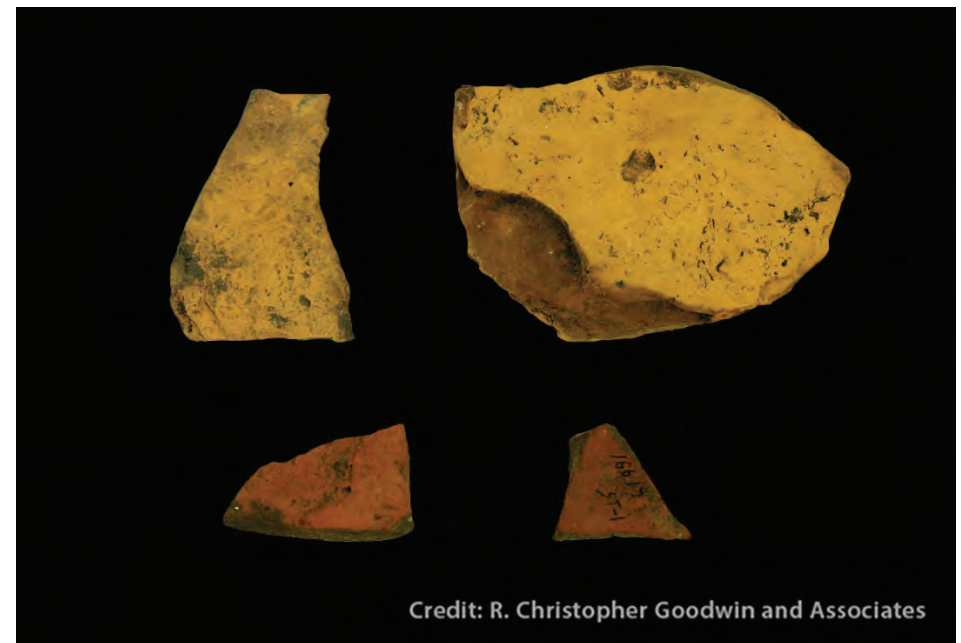
## Pigment Grinding Stones

Archaeologists found 87 sandstone slabs for grinding up pigments at the site. **Limonite** (yellow) and **hematite** (red) were minerals traded into the Tchefuncte site. When ground up, they made a yellow or red powder for use in decoration. Some of these slabs still show traces of the red and yellow powder on their surface. Another stone (seen on the right of the photo below), held in the hand to crush the mineral against the palette, is still covered in red pigment.



## Mineral Pigments

The site is unusual because of the number of pieces of mineral pigments. Excavations found 378 pieces of **limonite** (top row of photo below) that make a bright yellow color and 127 pieces of **hematite** (bottom row) that make a red color. People could grind up these soft stones and possibly mix the powder with animal oil. Then they could paint the pigment on people, on pots or on other artifacts.



## Pendants

Researchers found three pendants at the Tchefuncte site, one made of a black bear canine tooth (A), one of a drum fish bone (B) and one of shell (C). These pendants may have hung on string or on leather strips. They were suspended in different ways. The bear tooth and drum fish pendants had a hole drilled in the top of each. The shell pendant, on the other hand, had a groove cut along its top end.



## Pipes

Archaeologists found 67 pipe fragments at the Tchefuncte site. People made most of these pipes using clay from or near the site. Many have incised lines and other designs on them. The number of pipes found at the site suggests that smoking was an important activity there. It may have been part of ceremonial life at the site. Healers also could have used pipes in rituals to remove/cure illness or the effects of bad magic.



## Pottery

The pot makers at the Tchefuncte site used clays from around the site to make most of their pots. They may have traded for a few pots from other places.

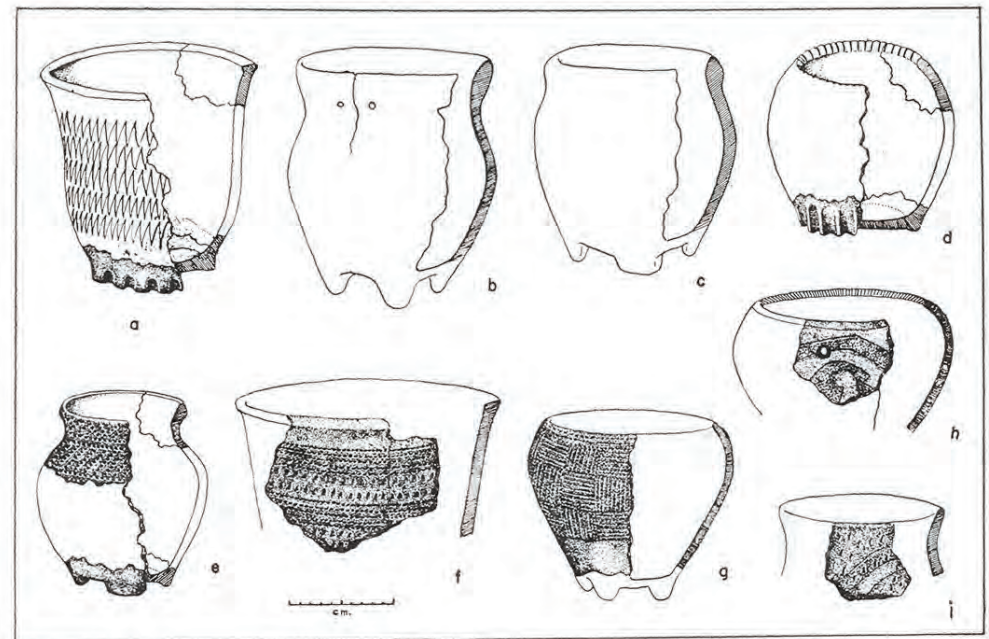
Although people in some other parts of the Americas were making pottery before 3000 B.C., the craft of making ceramic pots did not spread to Louisiana until about 2,000 years later. Tchefuncte potters made pots that were functional, and sometimes beautifully decorated. However, they had not yet learned how to make pots that were very strong. The clays found in Louisiana should be kneaded, like a baker kneads bread dough, in order to remove imperfections. If the clays are not kneaded well, pots made from those clays could have flaws that make the vessels easier to break. Each of these pieces of Tchefuncte pottery has flaws that look like thin lines, called laminations, which is where the clay is starting to separate, and may eventually form a large crack (top).

Usually, people did not throw away a pot unless it was broken. Because of this, archaeologists typically only find fragments of each pot, and determining the original shape and size can be difficult. However, sometimes they find enough pieces of one pot to put it back together (bottom).

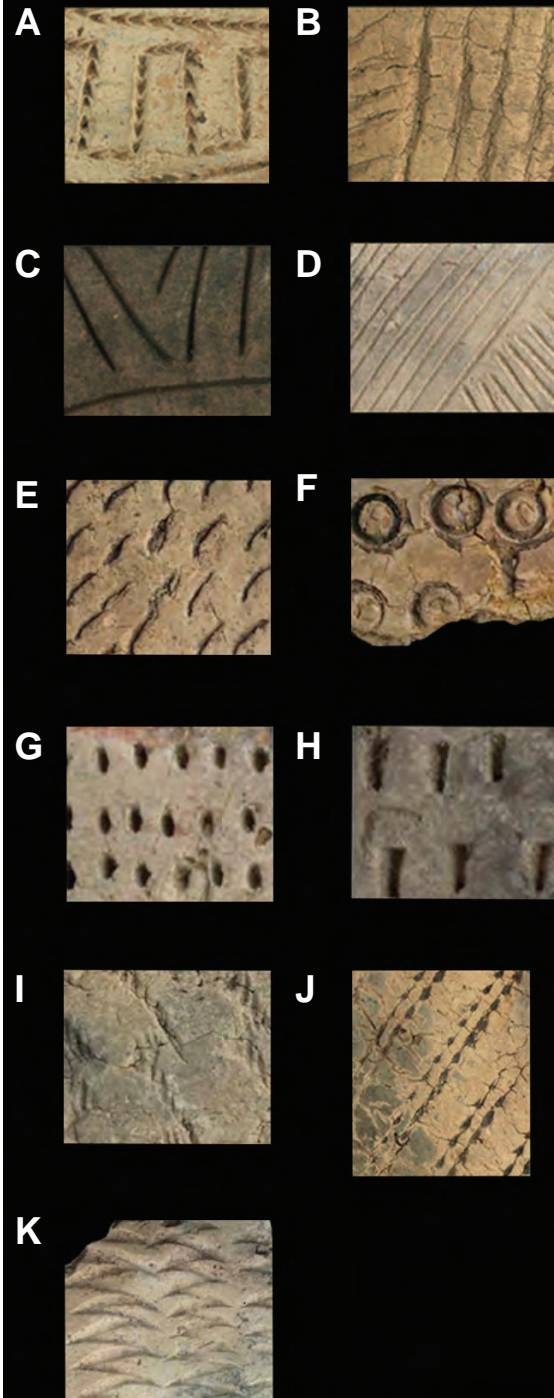
**(Bottom) Figure 17 from *The Tchefuncte Culture, an Early Occupation of the Lower Mississippi Valley* by James A. Ford and George I. Quimby, Jr., 1945; *Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology* No. 2, published jointly by the Society for American Archaeology and the Louisiana State University Press.**



Credit: R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates





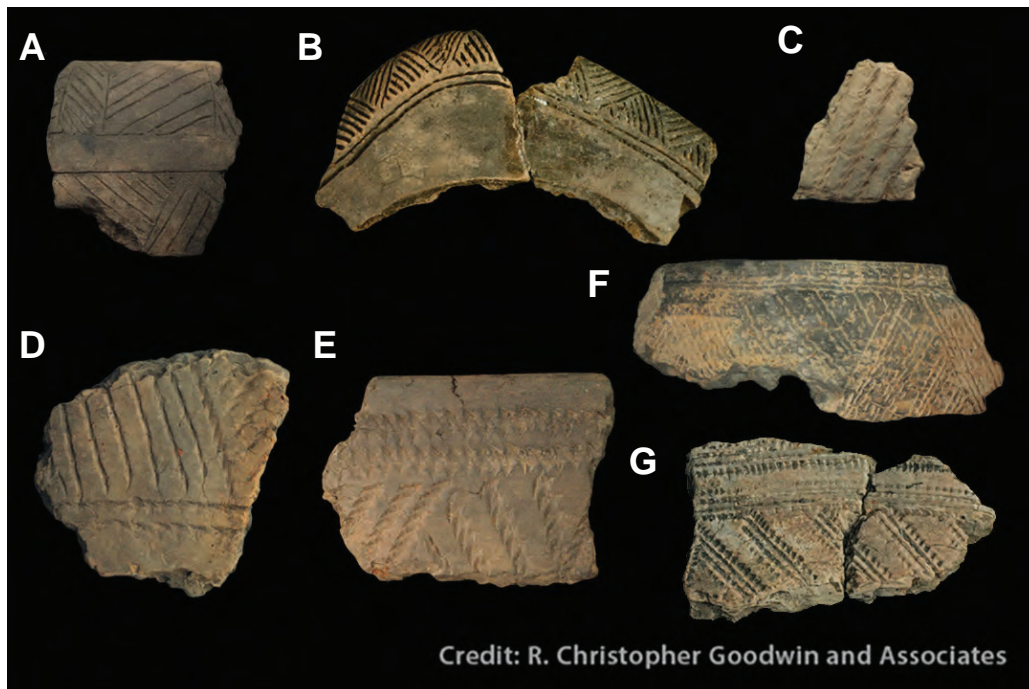


Credit: R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates

Most pots made during the Tchefuncte period were plain. In fact, about three-quarters of the fragments had no decoration. Some, however, had decorations on their surface. These include lines drawn on the wet clay (A-D), punctates pushed into the wet clay (E-H), and designs where a tool was rocked back and forth across the surface (I-K). A few vessels also had decorations on the lip of the pot (below).



Credit: R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates



The potters took these various methods of decorating pots and used them to create designs. One common design motif was triangles and nested triangles. People drew these with a pointed or rounded tool (A and B). In other instances, they used a piece of cord (C and D), or a rocker stamp (E) to press a design in the wet clay. The pot makers also sometimes combined these styles to create complex designs (F and G)

Curvilinear designs are less common but create beautiful patterns (H).

Some vessels had very complex designs that include rectangular, curvilinear and zoned elements (I and J).

The pots made in northern Mississippi and western Alabama show similar but clearly different designs (K, L and M). The picture below shows a piece of a pot made at the Tchefuncte site (right) and one from Mississippi or Alabama (left) that share an identical design.





## Turtle Shell Rectangles

Several small rectangular pieces of turtle shell were found at the site. They may have been decorations, or people may have used them in making fishing nets. The rectangles could have been measuring tools to make the openings in nets a standard size.



Credit: R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates