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Theodore R. Reinhart
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TEMPER, TEMPER:
RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON COLONOWARE
IN 18TH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

Barbara Heath
The Corporation for Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest

INTRODUCTION

While archaeologists working on historic sites frequently owe a great deal to their prehistorian colleagues, it is only rarely that the former can hope to contribute anything to the study of Indian archaeology and culture. The following paper is consequently put forward with respectful timidity coupled with the hope that it may serve as a bridge of gratitude between one field of archaeology and another (Noël Hume 1962:3).

With these opening words, Ivor Noël Hume, then chief archaeologist of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, introduced "Colono-Indian" ware to the archaeological community in 1962. The "bridge of gratitude" he sought to construct has disintegrated periodically over the intervening years, leaving a wide and sometimes acrimonious gulf between scholars. Nonetheless, the pottery he first described over 30 years ago continues to fascinate archaeologists attempting to disentangle the web of social interactions in colonial Virginia. Native Americans, African and European immigrants and their descendants, masters and slaves, rich and poor, urban mechanics and rural farmers manifested their interdependence through the objects they used and discarded.

Studying pottery in order to answer seemingly simple questions such as what people ate, how they prepared, served, and consumed their foods, and how they acquired the vessels that they needed for daily use leads archaeologists to such complex issues as determining preference, whether dictated by ethnicity or economics, tracing the process of creolization, or defining status or power relationships between groups about whose lives, it must be admitted, we can have only fragmentary knowledge. Yet objects, like written documents, can speak eloquently about the past, offering insights which are at once simple and profound.

The following paper details some of the insights which this pottery¹ provides, explores the questions it provokes, and suggests ways in which archaeologists can approach this ware type in order to better understand life in Virginia in the 18th century. In doing so, the discussion will touch upon research undertaken in South Carolina, the West Indies, and West Africa, and upon studies undertaken on colonoware assemblages found on 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century Virginia sites. Such a comparative approach challenges us to constantly reassess our assumptions and broaden our focus.

COLONO-INDIAN WARE, COLONOWARE, AND AFRO-CARIBBEAN WARE

Noël Hume described colonoware as coarse, unglazed, shell tempered, low fired earthenware recovered from late 17th- and 18th-century sites. The pots were built by hand, without the use of a potter's wheel, and fired without kiln technology, in environments which reached relatively low temperatures and allowed for fluctuations in heat and in oxygen supplies. These manufacturing clues indicated to Noël Hume that potters trained in the workshops and factories of Europe were not responsible for the production of this pottery. Technologically, manufacturing evidence preserved in the vessels was consistent with Native American potting techniques. In form, however, about 5% of the pottery resembled European vessels: coarse earthenware pipkins, porringers, and chamberpots had appeared on sites in and around Williamsburg. Yet the vast majority of colonoware vessels were simple bowls that could be used for cooking or eating, with only two features in common with any European ware, "a flat bottom and slightly everted rim that is more sophisticated than those that occurred on prehistoric forms" (Noël Hume 1962:7). Noël Hume suggested that potters living on the Pamunkey reservation manufactured these wares for the use of the slave population (Noël Hume 1962:12), and gave them the name "Colonoo-Indian" wares.

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Beyond describing technical attributes and forms to a wide audience of archaeologists and historians, Noël Hume's article was important because it recognized the ability of this pottery to reflect the social and economic interdependence of free Native Americans, masters and slaves, relationships which were often ill-defined in the historic record.

Even in 1962 this pottery was not a recent discovery, having been found on historic excavations in Williamsburg and Jamestown as early as the 1930s (Noël Hume 1962:3). By the 1960s, "Colono-Indian ware," or colonoware as it is known today, had been uncovered at several sites in and around Williamsburg, while archaeologists in North and South Carolina also reported finding low fired coarse earthenwares similar to the Virginia ware (Noël Hume 1962:4).

During the 1960s and 1970s, as archaeologists in the American South began to excavate greater numbers of plantation sites, and to include slave quarters and dependencies in their research, regional differences in this pottery's attributes and its distribution began to emerge. For example, while on sites in Virginia colonowares typically comprised less than 10% of total ceramic assemblages (Ferguson 1992:41), on rural sites in South Carolina they often comprised over 50%. At one such site, a slave quarter dating to the second half of the 18th century, fully 90% of ceramics were non-European, coarse earthenwares (Garrow and Wheaton 1989:177).

Since 1962, archaeologists have outlined three broad pottery types in Virginia. Although based primarily upon tempering agents, types have incorporated within them data concerning surface and firing attributes as well. Shell tempered ware, described by Noël Hume, is widely distributed along the York River and its tributaries, and along the James River from Hopewell to Virginia Beach (Hodges 1989:7). Numerous shell tempered, finely burnished sherds were recovered from a trash pit on the Pamunkey Indian Reservation, believed to date to the early 19th century. Recently uncovered shell tempered wares at Mount Vernon in Alexandria apparently extend the range of this type further into the Northern Neck. Coarser, less evenly fired shell tempered fragments from a mid-18th-century context at Shadwell, Thomas Jefferson's birthplace in Albemarle County, point to variability within this type. Nothing has been published on the distribution of colonowares in the Virginia piedmont, so it is unclear at present whether the Shadwell assemblage is typical for this region or is anomalous (Beaman 1995).

Courtland ware, defined by Lewis Binford as containing fine sand temper, is distributed along the Nottoway River (Hodges 1989:7). Colonoware uncovered at an 18th- and early 19th-century farmstead in Southampton County

appears similar to this type (Reinhart 1987:62-68). A third type, Camden ware, was defined by Howard MacCord for grit tempered earthenware recovered from a late 17th-century Native American village in Caroline County (Hodges 1989:8), and appears to have a limited distribution.

In 1980, Susan Henry examined an extensive collection of colonoware sherds and vessel forms curated by the former Virginia Research Center for Archaeology, the Department of Anthropology at the College of William and Mary, and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Her work strengthened and expanded upon the emerging typology by studying the correlation between a wide variety of attributes in order to construct statistically valid types. Focusing on sites within Virginia's coastal plain, Henry defined three broad types, two of which consist of two varieties. Her first type was characterized by coarsely made pottery, localized at two adjacent sites along the James River. This pottery was either untempered, or contained fossil shells, and was confined to the 17th century. It has no parallel in the typology defined above. Henry's second type was finely made, and based on her data, evenly distributed across the study region. Pottery of this type either contained a shell flake temper, or no visible tempering agent, and appears to correspond to the shell tempered wares defined above. Finally, her third type exhibited the same refinement and distribution pattern as these shell tempered wares, but was tempered with sand (Henry 1980:162-163). It appears to be more widely distributed than Lewis Binford's Courtland ware.

Beyond defining types, Henry attempted to trace their popularity through time and space, and to attribute them to Native American, African American, or European American potters. She concluded that the formative processes influencing the development of hand made coarse earthenwares occurred in the 17th century. By the 18th century, "opportunities for interaction between the influencers, the manufacturers, and the users of Colono Ware were relatively numerous and easy to effect" (Henry 1980:163). She also concluded that "the data suggest that at least some Native Americans manufactured some Colono Ware" (Henry 1980:165) hypothesizing that the Pamunkey Indian Reservation was a likely source.

Henry's study, though limited to wares found in the Virginia coastal plain, was the first serious attempt to place this pottery into a regional and chronological framework. It remains the most comprehensive study of Virginian pottery to date.

The same year as Henry completed her research, Leland Ferguson published an article based primarily upon his work in South Carolina, asserting that African American slaves "made much if not most of the Colono Ware we

see in the archaeological record" (Ferguson 1980:24)². He incorporated several lines of evidence to substantiate this hypothesis. While there is ample documentation for Native Americans producing wares in the 19th and 20th centuries, and at least one reference dating to the late 18th century (Simms 1841 in Ferguson 1980:16), Ferguson concluded that "in the middle Atlantic coastal area there are few traditional American Indian traits associated with Colono-Indian pottery, and the only archaeological association from the colonial period of Colono-Indian wares with Indians has come from the site of the Nottoway and Weanoc Indians of southeastern Virginia" (Ferguson 1980:16). Furthermore, he asserted that colonoware bore only a slight resemblance to prehistoric Indian pottery. The most common colonoware form, the flat-bottomed bowl, had historic precedents in West Africa and, less commonly, in southeastern North America. Finally, Ferguson argued that cob impressed surface treatments became extremely popular on colonial period West African pottery, as potters adopted corn cobs introduced from North America for use in rouletting. Alternately, he found the use of corn cob treatments on colonoware vessels were a relatively recent development in pottery from southeastern North America, most frequently appearing in regions that had been colonized by black slaves early in their histories (Ferguson 1980:19-20).

In order to reflect the input of black potters in this New World tradition, Ferguson suggested dropping the "Indian" from "Colono-Indian" ware, and simply calling this pottery Colono Ware (Ferguson 1980:24). In a later publication, he further modified the name to colonoware (Ferguson 1989).

Further excavations on South Carolina plantations uncovered evidence of on-site pottery production in the form of wasters, fired clay lumps, and numerous pits which excavators interpreted as holes dug by potters for clay extraction. Archaeologists began to recognize and distinguish between two broad and distinctive colonoware traditions. One group consisted of thin bodied, evenly fired, consistently polished, occasionally painted pottery. Some archaeologists have referred to this group as "Catawba," associating it directly with the local Catawba tradition (Wheaton et al. 1983:229-232; Garrow and Wheaton 1989:181), while others have adopted the term River Burnished, arguing that exclusive Catawba origins have not been established (Anthony in Zierdan et al. 1986:7-26; Ferguson 1989:185-187). Wares associated with a second tradition are characterized by a coarser body, uneven firing, and smoothed, roughly burnished or variably burnished surfaces. They are occasionally decorated with incised or impressed patterns and notched rims. This second group, archaeologists posit, represents vessels made for and used by African and African American slaves. Beyond South Carolina, Ferguson believes that colonowares

2 SC Colono traditions:

Catawba = thin bodied, evenly fired, consistently polished
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occasionally painted

excavated at the late 17th-century Pettus and Utopia sites, and the 18th-century Kingsmill Quarter on the Kingsmill tract in tidewater Virginia, exhibit similar evidence of on-site production, and are different enough from contemporary Native American pottery to suggest that they, too, were made by Africans (Ferguson 1992:48-49).

Other evidence of African participation in the development of a New World pottery tradition derives from data collected in the West Indies. On Jamaica, Antigua, Nevis, and St. Lucia, local potters continue to produce hand built, open-fired earthenware pots, or Afro-Caribbean ware³, in traditions which can be traced with certainty into the 19th century, and, based on archaeologically recovered sherds and surviving documentation, on some islands into the 18th and 17th centuries as well (Long 1774, 2:486; Mayes 1972:103). Various scholars have attempted to link contemporary and historic West Indian pottery production to specific African groups (Mathewson 1972:54-56; Ebanks n.d.), while others have seen the wares as a product of the mixing of African traditions in the New World (Armstrong 1985:271-273; Heath 1988:33-34; Crane 1993:91, 200-203).

Noticeably missing from the West Indian equation are Native American potters. While remnants of the Carib people survive into the 20th century, throughout much of the Caribbean, native peoples were decimated by disease, enslaved, or assimilated into a population largely dominated by the West African majority. While some cultural trading is documented between groups, it seems clear that blacks were the primary producers of hand-built pottery in the West Indies during the 18th and 19th centuries.

This brief overview of the development of research and the lines of evidence used to study historic period New World pottery is intended to lay the groundwork for discussing colonowares in Virginia within a broader framework. It should be noted that two very different research perspectives have shaped the questions asked of the data and the conclusions drawn from it. Scholars who have studied the impact of contact on Native American groups have looked to colonowares to provide answers to questions of economic and social pressures brought about by European expansionism, and of cultural survival in the face of colonization. Conversely, scholars focusing on plantation archaeology have embraced the West Indian and South Carolinian data, seeing in it the opportunity to directly study objects principally made and used by people of African descent, more commonly represented in the archaeological record by European goods.

Overall technological and formal similarities between vessels produced in Virginia, South Carolina, and the West Indies have sometimes blurred regional differences, and have led scholars to broad and as yet unanswerable questions. It seems unlikely, for example, that people of African descent would manufacture

and market pottery in the Caribbean and in South Carolina during the 18th century, and yet participate in a Virginia tradition only minimally, if at all. Archaeologist James Deetz has presented an argument based on his work at Flowerdew Hundred suggesting that colonoware assemblages recovered from a variety of 17th- and early 18th-century sites there represent changing master/slave relationships over time. He has claimed that "most scholars working with Colono ware now agree that it was made and used by slaves" (Deetz 1988:365, 1993:81-88).

Conversely, a strong case has been made for the continuation of a longstanding Native American potting tradition in colonial Virginia (Mouer et al. n.d.). Many archaeologists see colonoware arising out of fairly established prehistoric regional traditions which endured into the 18th century. Seventeenth- and 18th-century sources document the production and trade of "Indian pots" between Native Americans and other groups (Henry 1980:21, 22; Mouer et al. n.d.). As yet, no documentation for the production or sale of hand-built pottery by any Africans or their descendants living in Virginia has been found, although there is extensive documentation of black potters in the West Indies, and scattered references for the American South. Yet, if we accept that Indians were the sole producers of this pottery in the Old Dominion in the 17th and 18th centuries, then the question must be asked why weren't Africans or African-Americans producing pottery in colonial Virginia?

Until recently, colonoware has been perceived as a phenomenon of the late 17th and the 18th centuries. Data from the Limerick site in South Carolina, occupied from the first quarter of the 18th century through the mid-19th century, indicated declining frequencies of colonoware over time, and its diminishing importance when compared to European wares in the post-Revolutionary period (Lees and Kimery-Lees 1979:9-10). The authors found that of the entire colonoware assemblage from Limerick, 20% dated from the period 1700-1725, 28% from the period 1751-1775, and only 3% from 1826-1850. Archaeologists working in the coastal plain of Virginia discovered a similar decline in colonoware frequencies as the 18th century drew to a close.

Recently, however, archaeologists working in the Virginia piedmont have begun to uncover colonowares in 19th-century contexts, and are grappling with the problem of who produced these wares. Colonoware sherds are associated with early to mid-19th-century sites in Prince William County (Parker and Hernigle 1990:230-235; Galke 1992:69, 79; Mouer et al. n.d.). How do these recent discoveries fit with models of production and use?

Thus, after more than 30 years, the ethnic origins of this pottery remains unclear. Yet colonowares can be used effectively to address important questions

which go beyond who originally produced them. As Lawrence Levine said, when referring to black spirituals, "It is not necessary for a people to originate or invent all or even most of the elements of their culture. It is necessary only that these components become their own, embedded in their traditions, expressive of their world view and life style" (Levine 1978:24). Although 18th-century colonowares appear on sites inhabited by Native Americans (Binford 1965; Henry 1980:40-42; Mouer et al. n.d.), archaeologists have found that the majority of these wares are associated with the domestic dwellings and work spaces of European immigrants and Africans or their descendants (Noël Hume 1962:4-5; Hudgins 1982; Reinhart 1987:62-68; Brown et al. 1990:76, 82, 115, 120, 153, 235-239; Pogue and White 1991:43; Deetz 1993:86-90; Donald W. Linebaugh 1993, pers. comm.; White 1995).

What then do forms and physical evidence of use ware on individual pieces tell us about how pottery was used? Documentary references for South Carolina suggest that shallow bowls may have contained meals with a liquid base such as stews, while small jars or cup-forms may have held sauces used communally. Travellers to the West Indies describe slaves and freedmen using earthenware pots for food preparation, of course, but they also document the use of pots for drums, for shrines, for containers of medicines and as ritual objects involved in activities attributed to "witchcraft" (Heath 1988:198-202). Similarly, Leland Ferguson has hypothesized that certain marked vessels recovered in or near rivers on South Carolina plantations were used in religious contexts (Ferguson 1992:109-116). Is there any evidence of non-food related use of Virginia colonowares?

Beyond the quarters, how accepted were these wares in the houses of tenant or middling farmers, planters, or merchants? What role did they fulfill that European ceramics did not? Similarly, to what extent did Native Americans incorporate these vessels into their households? Did they, or the African American users of colonoware, prefer forms which reflected their historic traditions in pottery production, or did each group freely use colonowares made to suit European tastes? This latter question has begun to be answered, through the evidence of excavated colonoware plates on historic Native American sites, and their complete absence from town or plantation sites (Ferguson 1992:55).

An equally important issue which colonowares can address is the nature and extent of the internal marketing system in colonial Virginia. While studies are underway of local stores and their mediating roles between English merchants and colonial consumers, less attention has focused on the exchange of locally produced, non-edible goods and the extent of internal trade networks. Were colonowares and other goods traded at fairs, sold by itinerant peddlers,

exchanged between plantations in an informal bartering system, sold at local stores, or perhaps, distributed through all of these networks? Were there small scale Native American and/or African American entrepreneurs, or were pots sold piecemeal along with vegetables, hides, and other handicrafts by many individuals? Finally, archaeologists should attempt to place colonowares within a larger framework of pottery production. Throughout the historic period, craftsmen trained in the European tradition of wheel and kiln production have operated factories in Virginia (Barka 1973; Noël Hume 1980:99-100; Comstock 1994:396, 433; Mouer et al. n.d.). How did these traditions co-exist in Virginia? What were the relationships between the forms each produced, the consumers each attracted, and the regional distribution each achieved? Did one industry affect the growth or longevity of the other? While colonoware studies alone cannot answer all of these questions, they can contribute to the body of knowledge which will ultimately clarify these issues.

COLONOWARE IN VIRGINIA: RECENT EVIDENCE

While quantities of colonoware have been recovered from 18th-century sites across the state in recent years, few assemblages have been formally analyzed or reported. Two significant sites in which colonowares have received intensive study are the Pope Site in Southampton County and Mount Vernon, the plantation home of George Washington (Figure 1). The former represents a frontier farmstead belonging to a man of modest means. Data retrieved from the site were used to comment on the ability of material culture to elucidate master/slave relationships, the degree of cultural contact between Native Americans and settlers, and, in a related vein, the accessibility of regional or international trade networks to settlers on the fringes of expanding settlement. The latter site, home to the first president of the United States and member of the Virginia aristocracy, contains three "subsites" of approximately the same time range. Analysis of these subsites has allowed for comparisons of colonoware use between various members of that plantation community.

THE POPE SITE

The Pope Site, an 18th-century plantation in Southampton County, Virginia, was excavated in 1986 under the direction of Theodore Reinhart of the College of William and Mary. Archaeologists uncovered the remains of a main dwelling house, two post-in-ground structures interpreted as slave dwellings, a probable

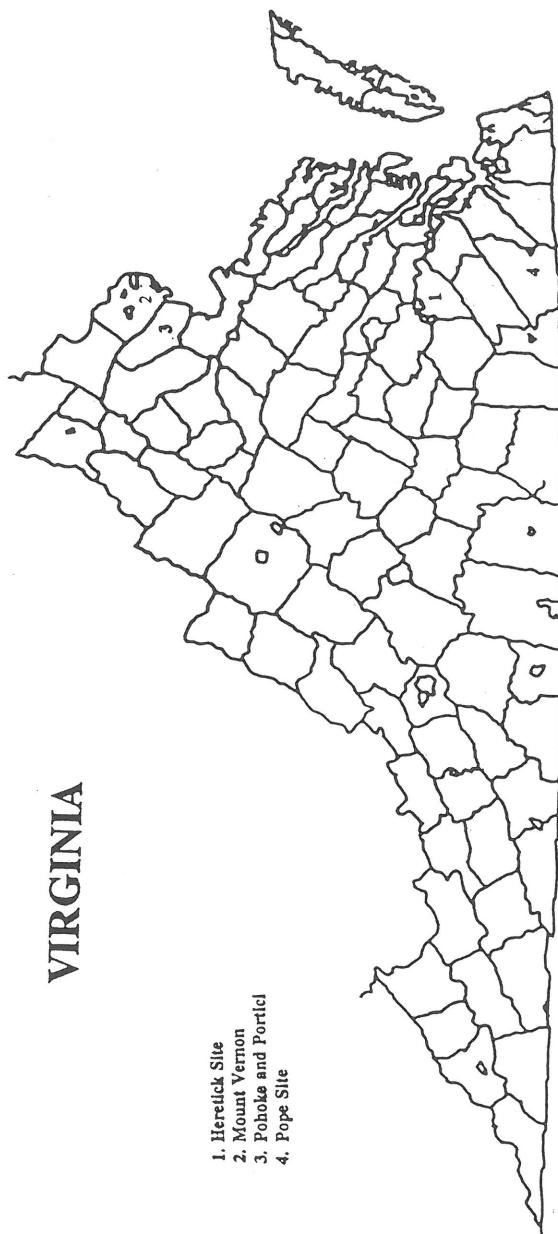


Figure 1. Location of Sites Containing Colonoware Discussed in Text

smokehouse, and various fence lines. The majority of artifacts were associated with the two slave houses (Reinhart 1987:110-111).

Excavators recovered 384 colonoware sherds, representing 28 vessels, or 43.5% of the total ceramic assemblage, on the site. Most of the assemblage was recovered from the fill of features associated with the slave quarters. The sherds were very finely tempered with small quartzite inclusions. Surface treatments ranged from unburnished (22.4%), to exterior burnishing (16.9%) to interior and exterior burnishing (8.3%) (Reinhart 1987:62, 66). The only identified vessel shape was the flat bottomed bowl (Figure 2).

Although few artifacts were associated with the main house, Reinhart concluded that status differences were reflected in the material culture of the master and slaves, commenting that "the major difference is in the amount of colonoware associated with the post houses and its near absence at the main house" (Reinhart 1987:111).

Perhaps more significantly, the author interpreted the quantity of colonoware sherds as evidence of a frontier culture, defined by self-sufficiency, reliance on local resources, and little variety in the artifact assemblage. While acknowledging some variation between the Pope site wares and those which Binford defined in his Courtland series, he concluded that "this pottery most probably was made by the Nottoway and Meherrin groups and was part of a long ceramic heritage in the area" (Reinhart 1987:114).

MOUNT VERNON SITES

Archaeologists at Mount Vernon have recovered colonoware sherds from three sites: the South Grove Kitchen Midden, the House for Families Slave Quarter, and the North Grove Blacksmith Shop. Each assemblage was recovered from a context with date ranges of 35 years or less falling in the last half of the 18th century. The South Grove assemblage is associated with activities carried out on the plantation prior to the American Revolution, while deposition at the House for Families and the Blacksmith Shop occurred after the Revolution. The latter sites were grouped for analysis, and formed an assemblage referred to as the "North Grove" (White 1995:6).

The largest collection of colonowares has come from the South Grove deposit, believed to contain within it trash generated by the residents of the mansion house and kitchen between the 1750s and the mid 1770s (Figure 3). While the deposit is certainly made up of objects associated with the Washington household, it may also represent trash generated by domestic slaves living above the kitchen. Currently, colonoware represents 9.5% of the ceramics from fully



Figure 2. Fragments of Colonoware Bowls Recovered at the Pope Site. Part of a handle is visible on the vessel located in the upper left (Photo courtesy of Theodore R. Reinhart, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg).

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Figure 3. View of the South Grove Kitchen Midden at Mount Vernon (Photo courtesy of Dennis J. Pogue, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Mount Vernon).

catalogued layers. Thirty percent of the colonoware sherds recovered contain sand temper, 12% contain a coarse quartz temper, and the remaining 58% exhibit no visible temper (White 1995:7). Of the 26 vessels recovered to date, all are identified as open bowls (Figure 4). Interestingly, they range in size from small vessels with rim diameters as small as 5 1/2 inches to large bowls with rim diameters of 11 1/2 inches, suggesting a range of functions. The larger were perhaps used for mixing or preparing food, while the smaller may have been used for serving or dining. Functional differences could further be explored through a study of sooting or other aspects of use wear.

The colonowares recovered in the fill of the cellar in the House for Families represents occupational debris which gradually accumulated on the cellar floor from 1760-1793 when the building was in use. Those found in association with the Blacksmith Shop were recovered from the fill of two pits.

In contrast to the South Grove assemblage, the colonowares recovered from the North Grove are much more variable in temper and in form. Sixty-four percent of these colonowares are tempered with oyster shell fragments, 29% contain no visible temper, and 7% are tempered with sand. No examples of coarse quartz tempered vessels were recovered in this area (White 1995:7).

Colonoware vessels recovered at the House for Families comprise 8% of the total ceramic assemblage, while those found at the Blacksmith Shop constitute 3% of the recovered ceramics. Of the 14 vessels recovered, 13 were bowls and one was a cup. Unlike the bowl assemblage from the South Grove, all of North Grove bowls are roughly the same size (6-8 inches in diameter), suggesting that they were used for the same purpose (White 1995:8-9).

Differences appear between the rim forms and the types and frequency of decoration between the assemblages from the South Grove and North Grove as well. One vessel from the kitchen midden, of unknown function, bears a crenelated rim with a hole punched through the body below the crenellations. Another has incised lines beneath the rim, while a third has an impressed, repetitive design on its body (White 1992:7) (Figure 5). In all, nine of the vessels from the kitchen midden are incised and punched, have a folded rim, an applied ridge of clay around the exterior, or indented lines. None of these decorative motifs are found on vessels from the North Grove (White 1995:8).

Although analysis of these wares is not yet complete, observed variations in temper and in decorative choices may reflect differential acquisition patterns between the colonoware buyers for the mansion house and the inhabitants of the House for Families and Blacksmith Shop area. Conversely, tempering variation may represent the producers' exploitation of differing clay sources. An analysis



Figure 4. In Situ Colonoware Bowl Found in the South Grove Kitchen Midden, Mount Vernon (Photo courtesy of Dennis J. Pogue, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Mount Vernon).

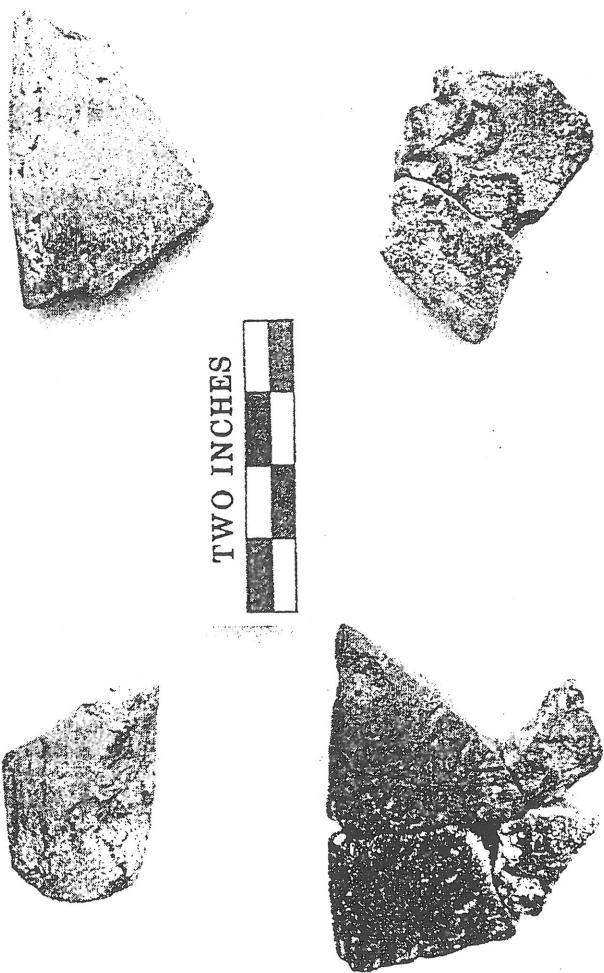


Figure 5. Colonoware Rim Fragments Recovered from the South Grove Kitchen Midden at Mount Vernon. Note the incised decoration beneath the rim in the sherd located in the lower left and the impressed decoration on the body of the sherd in the lower right (Photo courtesy of Dennis J. Pogue, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Mount Vernon).

of the clays, to determine if the shell occurs naturally, or has been intentionally added, could clarify this question.

Interestingly, the South Grove analysis carried out to date indicates that colonowares made up a greater proportion of the ceramic assemblage there than they did at the House for Families, raising questions as to its use, and users, in the Washington household.

Like the Pope assemblage, the colonowares from Mount Vernon exhibit no recognizably European forms, with the possible exception of an extremely thin bodied vessel found at the House for Families which may be a small cup or a tea bowl. Indeed, an informal survey of recently excavated colonowares from numerous sites across the state (L. Daniel Moyer 1992, pers. comm.; M. Drake Patten 1992, pers. comm.; Sanford 1992; Beverly Straube 1992, pers. comm.; Donald W. Linebaugh 1993, pers. comm.) conducted by the author suggests that, as Noël Hume pointed out some 30 years ago, the "European-ness" of Virginia colonoware should not be overstated. It is perhaps as useful to assess the meaning of the majority of vessel forms — shallow bowls, and lesser numbers of pans and cups — than to concentrate upon the much rarer porringers, bottles, or pipkins.

OTHER SITES

Another site in which colonowares have been discovered recently is the Heretick site outside of Hopewell, Virginia (see Figure 1). To date, sherds representing a minimum of 15 colonoware vessels have been recovered in the fill of a root cellar believed to be associated with a slave quarter dating from the period 1730-1740. These vessels represent 27% of the total ceramic assemblage from the feature. One of the two most intact vessels is a bowl, 7 inches in diameter, with a thick body made by coiling. The other has been described as an "upright pot" with an everted rim. In contrast to the bowl, this pot was very finely made of shell tempered clay (Donald W. Linebaugh 1993, pers. comm.).

Other recent studies of Virginia colonoware, though not confined to the 18th century, nonetheless are relevant to questions of production, acquisition, and use. In 1990, archaeologists working for the National Park Service at Manassas in Prince William County unearthed a large assemblage of 19th-century colonowares (see Figure 1). This discovery was particularly important because it necessitated the re-evaluation of commonly held beliefs concerning the decline of colonoware production at the close of the 18th century.

Archaeologists at Manassas explored an early 18th-century tenant farm which grew into a tobacco plantation centered around "Pohoke" at the close of

the century. That house was replaced in 1820 by the Ball family who built the Portici mansion. The latter house stood until 1863, serving both the Confederate and Federal armies before being destroyed by fire (Parker and Hernigle 1990:12-25). During the 19th century, the Ball family plantation consisted of 762 acres and an average of 20 slaves (Parker and Hernigle 1990: 15-16).

Colonowares associated with the occupation of the two houses came from surface collections and subsurface sampling, and from a probable slave quarter associated with both Pohoke and Portici. Colonowares represent 4% of the total ceramic assemblage recovered from Pohoke for a minimum of 24 vessels. A minimum of 8 vessels, or 1% of the total ceramic assemblage, was recovered from Portici.

The Manassas colonowares were constructed using coils, smoothed on the interior and exterior and often burnished. No tempering agents were visible in any of the fragments. Parker and Hernigle divided the total assemblage into three phases corresponding to occupational stages, with dates based on associated European ceramics. Phase one colonowares, recovered in the cellar fill at Pohoke, consisted of shallow bowls with flat bottoms, and dated between 1733 and 1772. Phase two colonowares included 2 small storage vessels, 6 shallow bowls, 2 serving bowls, and 2 shallow pans or dishes and a drinking container for a total of 13 vessels. These wares ranged in date from 1791 through 1841. Finally, 4 shallow bowls were associated with the third phase of colonoware at Portici, and dated from the period 1806-1863. Unlike some 18th-century vessels associated with urban contexts in and around Williamsburg, and found on the Pamunkey reservation, none of the colonowares recovered at Pohoke or Portici exhibit recognizably European rim or appendage forms.

Parker and Hernigle believe the vessels they have recovered at Pohoke and Portici were made by people of African descent, stating that the last Native Americans resided in the area some 60 years before the earliest deposition date for their assemblage (Parker and Hernigle 1990:232). Other scholars have taken exception with this conclusion, arguing that until more research on Native American populations in the 19th century is undertaken, "the assertion that Indians had 'disappeared' from the Northern Virginia Piedmont must be taken as an informed opinion, but not a studied conclusion" (Mouer et al. n.d.).

Since they reported on their findings, other archaeologists have found colonowares in 19th-century Piedmont Virginia contexts, suggesting that, at least in this region, the production and use of these wares continued long past the point where previous scholarly work had concluded that they had been replaced by the mass produced ceramic and ironwares of the Industrial Revolution. As

19th-century colonowares continue to be uncovered and analyzed, continuities or disruptions of form and temper can be traced through time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before new data can be effectively applied to the questions asked of colonoware here, we must re-double our efforts to consistently describe our pottery, and make these descriptions available through reports or, preferably, publications. Standardized descriptions similar to those used by archaeologists to record prehistoric ceramics would go a long way towards enabling researchers to make statements concerning the distribution of specific types of colonoware through space and time. Type descriptions must include standard references to relevant paste attributes (temper size and type), as well as surface treatments and decorative techniques⁴. A typology of forms must also be developed which is flexible enough to avoid detailing each form as unique, and rigid enough to prevent one person's bowl from becoming another person's jar. This lack of standardization between assemblages is the norm right now; as has been stressed by other archaeologists, data cannot be compared if scholars do not share the same "language."

One particular problem encountered in the course of this study has been that many archaeologists fail to carry out even the simplest quantitative analysis of their findings. Vague references to the presence of colonoware on a particular site are of little comparative value. What is needed is a minimum standard of analysis consisting of a minimum vessel count of all ceramics recovered from the site, broken down into the number of forms represented by each ceramic type, and the date range of the assemblage. With even this limited amount of data, important comparisons of types and frequencies can be made between sites.

As a plantation archaeologist, I acknowledge that this discussion has explored the relationship of colonoware to slavery more than it has focused on its use within households of free Virginians of whatever ethnic background. Before concluding, I would like to touch on additional sources of evidence which should enable us to better understand its meaning in plantation contexts.

Archaeological field work on historic sites in Africa in general, and West Africa in particular, is in its infancy. Comparisons between the Old World and the New are problematic, yet they need to be drawn. Although analogies between American colonoware and contemporary African material (in the form of ethnographically collected pottery) may prove useful, it is unclear to what extent modern African pottery reflects the upheaval of European colonization and the introduction of European goods. More useful in understanding the cultural

context of pottery in the New World will be the evidence of forms, decorations, and functional variability of pottery on late 17th-, 18th-, and early 19th-century West African archaeological sites. Studies of pottery on such sites may help in the question of who was producing the pots in Virginia. They will be far more helpful, however, in determining the context of pottery use in food and beverage preparation, serving and storage, in medicinal practices, and in social or religious situations that we do not yet understand.

Currently, our interpretation of the pottery forms slaves chose, and the uses to which they put them, has been based largely upon the assumption that vessels functioned in the slave quarters in much the same way that they functioned in the quarters of indentured servants or masters of European descent. The variations of bowl use versus plate use, outlined by John Otto (1984) in his work at Canon's Point Plantation has, on a simplistic level, started us down the path to recognizing that pottery can reflect cultural continuities within ethnic groups, and that the same object may carry different meanings in different cultures.

Similarly, comparative studies based on use patterns of Afro-Caribbean ware may prove useful in reflecting creolization that some slaves experienced before reaching Virginia. Unfortunately, data on West Indian sites dating before the third quarter of the 18th century are scarce.

By drawing on West African and Afro-Caribbean models of use, rather than European ones, we can broaden our understanding of how colonowares may have functioned within the slave quarters on the plantation, or within the households of free blacks. By exploring regional variability of forms and functions from a range of historic period West African and Afro-Caribbean sites, we will be better equipped to assess the variability observed within and between Virginian assemblages.

Just over 30 years ago, Ivor Noël Hume gave Virginian archaeologists a name, a description, and a hypothesis to apply to the unfamiliar, and, some would say, inconvenient, pottery they found mixed in with more standard historic fare. Today we have a better sense of where and in what context the pottery will appear, about the shapes that the sherds will assume when mended, and about some of the uses to which these vessels were put. I think we can ask broader questions than we have yet asked and look farther afield for our answers, so that 30 years hence, we will be able to comment more fully and more confidently upon the extent of cultural retentions, borrowings, and mergings experienced by the residents of 18th-century Virginia.

NOTES

¹Locally made clay tobacco pipes will not be discussed here. For two recent syntheses, see Emerson (1988) and Mouer et al. (n.d.).

²James Deetz (1993:84, 195) notes that Richard R. Polhemus was the first to link the production of locally made pottery to African Americans rather than Native Americans. In 1977, he published this hypothesis in a report on an early 19th-century site in Tennessee (Polhemus 1977:258).

³See Heath 1988:32-35 for a discussion of this term relative to "colonoware."

⁴For a detailed physical analysis of colonowares recovered from Fort Christiana and Corotoman, see Jones 1983.

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