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A Vessel Typology for Early Chesapeake Ceramics: The Potomac Typological System

ABSTRACT

A tentative scheme for classifying vessel shapes excavated in the Chesapeake region of Maryland and Virginia is presented. The result, dubbed "The Potomac Typological System" (POTS), links gradations of forms of vessels commonly excavated on Tidewater sites to terms used in inventories and other documents of the period. Although many of the colonial terms also belong to the modern lexicon, their connotations and referents were not always identical in the past. The aim is not to produce a standardized, all-purpose typology but rather a preliminary foundation for comparisons enabling the exploration of what sorts of functional variability exist within and between assemblages. The important role of data from documentary sources in the interpretation of excavated ceramic material is also discussed.

Introduction

This paper is the result of a general dissatisfaction with the way in which archaeologists working on colonial Chesapeake sites (including the authors) have typically analyzed their excavated ceramics. Historical archaeologists spend considerable time excavating, sorting and gluing together pots. Yet there is very little to show for it, save the contents of exhibit cases. While architectural data from a number of sites excavated in the Chesapeake are beginning to increase the understanding of the effects in daily life of demographic and economic instability (Carson et al. 1981) and of changing social relations between planters, their laborers and their neighbors (Neiman 1980; Upton 1979), it is impossible to cite any similarly systematic contributions based on ceramic analysis.

The failure to impart much analytical utility to ceramics is the product of a number of factors. Some of these infect the discipline of archaeology as a whole. The lack of general archaeological theory and the failure to be imaginative make convincing attempts to connect the things dug up with other areas of past experience very rare (Leone 1978). Others are related to the often unhappy way ceramic data are cast once the pots are out of the ground. Categories are employed which, despite frequent assertions of an interest in past behavior, poorly reflect functional variation. The variety of such schemes in use makes comparisons between assemblages excavated by different archaeologists impossible. Finally, there is the failure to make good use of the documentary record with which we are blessed (or cursed).

Antidotes for the fear and trembling engendered by the call to make interesting connections and to manufacture fascinating hypotheses are hard to come by—so too are remedies for archaeology's theoretical deficiencies. However, it may be useful to offer some suggestions about the categories used in the interpretation of excavated ceramics in the light of documentary evidence and about the use of the documentary record in archaeological research focusing on ceramics.

The immediate goal is to begin to systematize the chaos in the categories used to describe excavated ceramic vessels and the assemblages they comprise, in a way that will make the cultural dynamics behind them more accessible. The Potomac Typological System (POTS) is the result. It is a first attempt whose ultimate purpose will have been served if it provokes historical archaeologists to begin to think seriously and critically about the analytical utility of the pottery typologies they currently employ.

Vessel Typologies in Historical Archaeology

Discussions of typology have long had a central place in the archaeological literature. The importance of the topic is understandable for archaeology pivots upon the initial ordering of data. The disagreement that runs through the literature concerns how one brings about order. Does it exist in recoverable form in the data, or is it imposed by the investigator (Brew 1946; Spaulding 1953; Hill and Evans 1972; Doran and Hodson 1975)? Since these stump–infested fields have been plowed before, an extended discussion of the issues will not be undertaken here. However, let the cards be laid on the table at the outset. The authors sympathize with the second position: that all classifications are arbitrary. People impose categories, and hence order, upon objects to facilitate communication; this is as true of the archaeologist as much as it is of the people he or she studies.

The theoretical underpinnings of this view, which has found acceptance in a host of fields from physics to literary criticism, runs something as follows. Despite our everyday notions, our world does not consist of independently existing objects whose nature is immediately known to the observer. In fact, this sort of immediate knowledge is impossible since any object, from a white saltglaze mug to a suspension bridge, presents the observer with a potentially infinite array of sensory data. If persons are to make sense of this bewildering variety of experience, they must pick and choose, recognizing certain features as significant and disregarding others. Perception is a creative process. People of different groups construct reality in characteristically different ways. Thus, the "true" nature of the world is not to be found in the world itself but in the relationships which one chooses to perceive among the objects in it. An object is a mug and not a cup only because the observer chooses to recognize a rather limited number of features which make it so.

Obviously, from the researcher's point of view, there is no single best or true classificatory scheme for ceramics or for anything else for that matter. It is equally obvious that different classifications can and must coexist peacefully if we are to make the most of our data. Any system will have limitations which can only be remedied by the complementary use of other systems. For example, there has long been a working recognition of the fact that technological and stylistic attributes are best suited to the definition of units of temporal significance. *Termini post quem,* marker types, and the Mean Ceramic Date are all dating tools whose efficacy turns on the chronological significance of ceramic technology and decorative style. But if pots are to be used for more than dating sites and the features on them, some attention needs to be paid to function. Given the primitive state of research in this area, what is needed is a scheme which will allow the systematic description and comparison of assemblages and which, by attending function in even a crude way, will allow a preliminary appreciation of just what sort of functional variation exists between assemblages in time and space. Since direct evidence for past use of ceramic vessels (e.g., knife marks on a plate) is spotty, the criteria used to assess functional variation must be indirect. They must trade on the physical and traditional cultural constraints on possible use. There are of course several ways in which such a measurement device might be constructed.

Archaeologists working on the colonial Chesapeake have long used shape to describe their ceramic finds. All of these workers have written about cups, mugs, pitchers, bowls and who knows what else. By giving these items names, some sense is made of them (Tyler 1969:6). The names are of course English, and, more important, the categories which

they represent are those unconsciously employed in our own day-to-day transactions, often supplemented by notions inherited from late 19th and 20th century antiquarians and collectors. By naming objects from the past, they are made comprehensible in behavioral terms. They silently slip into our own familiar world so subtly that one feels little need for theoretical or methodological reflection. Problems can be expected.

The most glaring problem is consistency. The pages of even scholarly works on the pottery of a particular period show vessels that are given the same name even though they have significantly different shapes. Even worse, two identical vessels illustrated on different pages may be given different names. If individual authors have a hard time being consistent, there would appear to be little hope for a group of feisty archaeologists. One person's plate is another's charger and another's dish. If nothing else, this situation is embarrassing.

Complacency in the face of this situation may be a product of the way in which most archaeologists have until recently reported excavated ceramics. Either a few particularly complete or spectacular pieces are chosen for illustration, in which case the names given the vessels are unimportant since the vessels themselves are there on the page for public inspection, or sherd counts by ware are presented for each excavated context, in which case the question of shape is otiose. Occasionally the two approaches are combined.

The interpretive possibilities of data cast in either of these two forms are rather limited. It is difficult to imagine why one vessel which has by chance survived the passage of time relatively intact should possess more behavioral significance than one represented by only a few sherds. The relevance of sherd counts to the explication of past behavior is equally obscure. One needs to remember the obvious: the people whom archaeologists study worked with, ate from and drank from whole vessels, not the sherds the vessels would eventually become. If archaeologists are interested, at the very least, in the systematic description of the way in which these folks lived, they need to consider every vessel represented in the archaeological record as well as some that are not.

When the desirability of a systematic morphological description of the entire ceramic assemblage from a given period at a given site is recognized, inconsistency in the classification and naming of vessels ceases to be simply embarrassing and becomes intolerable. On a practical level, since one cannot illustrate every vessel from a relatively complex site, some naming (and/or verbal description) becomes unavoidable. Under such circumstances, unless there is some standardization in vessel nomenclature, inter–assemblage comparison is impossible. The need for explicitness to facilitate functional interpretation is one of the primary motivations behind this paper.

The analytical morass attendant on such inconsistency has not gone unnoticed, and attempts have been made to rid the field of the problem. One solution has been to discard traditional names entirely in favor of two categories which at least have the virtue of being unambiguous: flatwares and hollowwares. This is the Stoke–on–Trent approach (Celoria and Kelly 1973). In justifying this solution, its authors plead ignorance and understandable dissatisfaction with the fact that in recent numbers of *Post Medieval Archaeology*, "a bewildering variety of vessels have been called dishes" (Celoria and Kelly 1973:16). The authors also suggest that the flat/hollow dichotomy is legitimate by virtue of its use by 17th century Staffordshire potters. Despite this historical validity, the wholesale acceptance of this two–term typology would send the baby out with the bath water. While the two terms may have served the potter's primarily technological concerns well, distinguishing those vessels which were usually press-molded from those which were thrown ("reckoned by their dif-

ferent breadths . . . or their contents [volume]") and stacked or nested for firing and storage, by themselves they scarcely can be considered useful tools in the functional explication of an assemblage. In a behavioral context, cups and butter pots, both hollowwares, have little in common.

A second sort of remedy is to attempt to give everyday and antiquarian terms, along with the fuzzy notions behind them, a degree of precision. Many people, for example, have called any two–handled vessel, roughly square in profile, with pint or more capacity, a posset pot. The name of course implies a very specific use, and the term was used in the 17th century. Unfortunately, it did not then apply to the wide class of vessels often described as such today (see below). Small mistakes of this sort will inevitably distort the reading of individual excavated vessels, not to mention the interpretation of entire ceramic assemblages, especially when comparisons with documentary evidence are made.

Both the above approaches meet one criterion for typological adequacy. They allow the unambiguous assignment of new objects to their categories. In addition, the Stoke–on–Trent solution is adequate insofar as it accounts for the entire range of variability in the objects under study, and the second approach could be elaborated without much difficulty to the same end (and in fact has been by many). However, adequacy is not the sole basis on which a typology should be evaluated (Binford 1972:247). While any adequate typology allows the systematic description of similarities and differences between assemblages, not all are equally well equipped to make possible insights into the significance of this variability in the context in which the objects themselves were used.

POTS is one attempt to circumvent these problems. The distinctions made by colonial Virginians and Marylanders who named and described their neighbor's possessions in probate inventories were used as clues to where breaks of possible functional significance occur along the continuum of formal variation. The characterizations of contemporary terms which POTS offers were arrived at by considering variation in adjectives applied to the terms in a sample of Virginia and Maryland inventories and descriptions (verbal and pictorial) of the terms' referents in other contemporary sources. The categories used by inventory takers appear to have been based largely on three dimensions of formal variation: shape, size and ware. Since the categories resulting from the intersection of these dimensions successfully mediated people's everyday interactions (behavior) with the objects denoted, they can serve as a reasonable basis for the construction of a functionally sensitive typology. Descriptions of the categories which comprise POTS provide a glossary for terms encountered in inventories, making more accurate comparisons between excavated and inventoried ceramic assemblages possible.

The Use of Documents in Ceramic Analysis

In putting POTS together, documentary sources have served as texts. In these sources, the manner in which their authors categorized a small part of the material world (which happens to be ubiquitous on archaeological sites) could be approximated. The application of POTS to an excavated assemblage, or any other sort of explication of archaeological material from an historic period site, should also proceed with the documents in mind. Here, however, the archaeologist will be on more familiar ground, using the historical record, initially at least, as a source of data about the artifactual contents of the past. Doing history with objects is considerably easier and the results certainly more complete if the historical record is used to fill in the holes in the archaeological records and *vice versa*. Of more far–reaching importance however is the fact that, by using documents, one can ask more interesting questions about the things one excavates. These objects, in

turn, can be expected to suggest more interesting questions about the documents. Documents do not provide archaeologists with a "telephone to Glory." However, ignoring the documents is at one's own peril. This point can be illustrated through several cautionary tales. Two widely held propositions, derived from archaeological sources, about the cultural significance of ceramics in 17th century Anglo–America suffer quite devastating defects which are the inevitable result of the failure to take full advantage of the historical record.

The attempt to define socioeconomic status through ceramic assemblages is a genre which has gained considerable popularity in recent years, as historical archaeologists have struggled with the challenge to impart some anthropological or social-historical significance to their work. While explicit written statements on this topic (and many others) are rare in the study area, the proposition that in the 17th century Chesapeake there was a strong correlation between the numbers and kinds of ceramics an individual possessed and his wealth appears to have some currency. Confronted with two ceramic assemblages from a pair of sites whose occupants are known through the historical record to have been of considerably different means, it is quite easy for one to attribute any quantitative or qualitative differences which he or she is able to define in the pottery to differences in the wealth of his owners, consider no other factors, and leave the matter at that.

This sort of analysis has been the bread and butter of prehistoric archaeologists for years. Whereas historical archaeologists are here treating assemblage variability as an index to wealth, prehistorians have traditionally treated it as an index to the presence of different tribes or cultural groups. In both cases percentage and/or empirical frequencies, calculated for a variety of artifact classes, are used as a measure of distance, cultural in one case and economic in the other, between the occupants of a number of sites. As Lewis Binford (1968, 1972), among others, has pointed out, this kind of approach severely limits the interpretive possibilities of the archaeological record and its potential to inform us about the past. The problem is that in both cases it is simply assumed that the contents of the archaeological record and its determinants are unidimensional. It would be surprising indeed to discover that any set of phenomena for which human beings were responsible was attributed to the operation of a single variable.

Theory aside, this particular projection of our own ethnocentric notion that the rich will invariably possess lots of pretty pots has another shortcoming. A cursory examination of the inventories indicates that it simply does not fit the 17th century Chesapeake. Ceramics were optional for many of the early Chesapeake's wealthiest men. A case in point is Capt. John Lee, a Westmoreland County, Virginia, gentleman whose estate was probated in 1674. Lee was a quorum justice, the brother of a member of the Governor's Council, and with an estate valuation in excess of 200,000 lbs of tobacco and 24 laborers, the wealthiest decedent appraised in the county during the 17th century. Yet Lee's collection of ceramics was exceedingly limited. The six quarts of oil and an equal amount of honey which the appraisers found "In Capt. Lee's Chamber" may have been kept in a couple of earthen jars. Lee's kitchen contained the three chamber pots, two old close stool pans, two porringers and a chafing dish. But all these items, save the chafing dish, may well have been pewter, given their relatively high valuations. The chamber pots were worth 15 lbs of tobacco each, and the two close stool pans and porringers were valued at 40 lbs for the lot, this at a time when butter pots, typically one of the most common ceramic forms, were worth only 7 lbs each (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 180). But even if one assumes in the face of this evidence that all these objects were ceramic,

Lee's assemblage was modest indeed in terms of quantity as well as quality. Lee's inventory is characteristically detailed, containing specific entries for items as trifling as "a small parcell of twine." In addition, there are no non-specific entries like "a parcell of lumber," or "small things forgotten" for that matter, which might conceal ceramics. Nor was Lee married, so there are no pots hiding in an uninventoried widow's portion.

In Westmoreland County, Virginia, Lee was by no means unique. Mr. Robert Jadwin, who died in the same year with a hefty estate valued at 46,749 lbs of tobacco, had no ceramics at all (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 188). In fact, of the 19 pre–1677 Westmoreland County, Virginia, inventories valued at over 20,000 lbs of tobacco, ceramics are not mentioned in seven. Of the remaining 12, seven contain only coarse earthen and/or dairy–related forms. Typical of these for example is the inventory of Mr. Richard Sturman (d.1669), valued at 55, 015 lbs. Sturman's only ceramic possessions were "milke trays potts & panns" (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 54). Another example, slightly lower down the economic scale, is Mr. Daniel Hutt (d.1674), worth 20,820 lbs. whose inventory contained the following uninspiring ceramic entries: "crakd earthenware & a prcell of nales in it" and "In the Milke-house . . . a prcell old lumber" (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 194).

What one might consider fine ceramics appear with certainty in only three of the remaining inventories: Robert Nurses's "prcell painted earthen ware" (1672), Nathaniel Pope's "2 juggs" (1660), and John Roasier's "earthen porringer" (1661) (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 198; *Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, and Wills 1660–1661*: 42; *Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Wills and Patents 1653–1659*: 8).

In Charles County, Maryland, settled like Westmoreland County, Virginia, in the 1650s, from 1658 to 1684 only 36% of the inventories of middling and wealthy planters list any ceramics (Walsh 1979: Table 2A).

On a practical level, these examples from the documents mean that a meager ceramic assemblage from a 17th century Chesapeake site does not guarantee that its occupants were of meager means. This is not meant to imply that the appearance of vast quantities of porcelain and delft, for example, on a site suggests nothing about the wealth of its occupants. Quite obviously it does. But once one realizes that ceramics were not *de rigeur* among the rich in the early Chesapeake, the interesting question is not whether rich people could afford more pottery than the poor, something anyone might have deduced without touching a trowel, but why some individuals chose to buy lots of fancy pots while many of their peers did not.

The second example is drawn from the work of James Deetz (1972, 1977). In attempting to develop a model for changing patterns of ceramic use in 17th and 18th century Anglo–America, Deetz noticed a dearth of nearly all but dairy–related wares on pre–1660 sites around Plymouth, Massachusetts. Drawing on Anderson's (1971) work on Tudor and Stuart English foodways he concluded, correctly, that eating and drinking vessels were generally not ceramic. Specifically, Deetz suggested that shared wooden trenchers and shared pewter and/or leather drinking vessels comprised the typical dining assemblage in early 17th century Anglo–America. Deetz outlined two phenomena visible in the archaeological data after ca. 1660. The first was a general scarcity of ceramic plates, the second a gradual increase in the absolute numbers of ceramic drinking vessels. He concluded that wooden trenchers continued to be the norm for food consumption, that ceramic plates served primarily as decorative items in lieu of costly pewter and that since trenchers do not survive in the ground, the increase in the

number of drinking vessels might be taken as indicative of a general trend toward more individualized consumption of both liquids and solids.

While much of Deetz's (1972) article relies on documentary evidence and the companion piece by Marley Brown (1972) is based solely on inventories, both suffer a preoccupation with excavated ceramics. Apparently when the inventory data were assembled for comparison with information from the ground, only entries for ceramics were systematically collected, a procedure not uncommon in the field. As one of the present authors (Stone 1977:57) has pointed out elsewhere, because archaeologists excavate ceramics they wish also to "excavate" them from inventories. In the process, they often ignore the other forms listed there which comprised the larger context in which the ceramics had meaning.

Deetz's model was of course designed specifically for early New England. It may not be appropriate to attack it with data from the Chesapeake. Nevertheless, its applicability to all of Anglo–America is at least implicit throughout Deetz (1977). The criticisms offered below, however, can be supported with data from New England as well.

The claim that trenchers were standard eating vessels is difficult to support, once one looks beyond the ceramic entries in the inventories. In the earliest Potomac inventories, those taken in frontier St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1638–1650, wooden trenchers and dishes (other than Indian bowls used as utility vessels) were important only in newly established households—the households of recent immigrants or recently freed servants. In well–established households, even of tenants, pewter predominated (*Archives of Maryland* 1887; Stone 1977: 60).

On the Virginia side of the river, the same pattern prevailed. In Westmoreland County, Virginia, in 14 extant inventories taken during the decade following the county's incorporation in 1653, four contained *only* wooden eating vessels. Dishes and trays are mentioned specifically. In the rest, eating vessels were of pewter: saucers, plates, dishes, among other forms. In 31 inventories taken between 1668 and 1677 in the county, again only four listed eating vessels of wood, to the exclusion of other materials. And again all the rest contained pewter saucers, plates, or dishes.

The number of eating vessels, either in pewter or wood, was considerable. In the earlier Westmoreland County, Virginia, sample, Nathaniel Pope, with an estate worth ca. £380, owned nine saucers, 12 plates, and 36 dishes, all of pewter. At the other end of the economic scale, George Poper, worth a paltry 1035 lbs of tobacco (ca. £5) had three pewter saucers and three pewter plates (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Wills and Patents 1653–1659*: 72). The pattern was the same in the later sample. Capt. John Ashton, with the second largest estate in the group, worth 94,000 lbs of tobacco (ca. £470) owned 51 pewter plates, two pewter dishes, and "40 pewter dishes basons and pye plates" (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 321–22). Francis Lewis, worth only 1,395 lbs of tobacco, the second poorest member of the sample, had three pewter plates and two pewter dishes. Men who owned smaller amounts of pewter typically supplemented their collection of eating vessels with wooden ones. Richard Sampson, a middling planter whose estate was not valued, had only three pewter dishes, but he also owned nine trenchers. Even the few planters who owned only wooden vessels owned them in quantities which suggest, given the small size of their households, that they were not shared. Henry Alday, for example, with an estate worth 5,840 lbs of tobacco (ca. £29), had seven wooden trays, and Thomas Baron, whose estate valued at 394 lbs of tobacco (ca. £2) made him the poorest individual in the sample, had four wooden dishes (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 72; *Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Wills and Patents 1653–1659*: 88). These

examples could be extended, *ad nauseam*, from the St. Mary's County, Maryland, inventories.

Clearly, then, the great majority of the 17th century Virginians and Marylanders were eating from pewter plates and not wooden trenchers, and eating vessels in either material were not being shared at the table in all save perhaps the poorest households.

This apparently had been the case in the most economically advanced areas of England since the late 16th century. In 1587, William Harrison, commenting on the effects of the price revolution, included in his famous three things "marvelously altered in England within . . . sound remembrance" the appearance of quantities of pewter in the households of "inferior artificers and many farmers." The ordinary farmer had recently changed his "treen platters into pewter," providing himself with a "fair garnish of pewter for his cupboard" (Harrison 1968:200–01). According to Harrison, a "garnish" was comprised of 12 platters, 12 dishes and 12 saucers (Harrison 1968:367). Without doubt, the pewter vessels which proliferated in the houses of English yeomen were flatwares. It should not be surprising then to find Chesapeake planters following a pattern set by their ancestors in the previous century. Obviously the quantities of pewter plates in Chesapeake households make Deetz's suggestion that ceramic plates were commonly displayed in lieu of pewter ones questionable.

If pewter eating vessels were numerous in the 17th century Chesapeake, pewter drinking vessels were not. While the number of pieces of pewter a planter possessed was to some extent correlated with the size of his estate and household, the number of drinking vessels remained consistently small across the economic continuum. In Westmoreland County, Virginia, Nathaniel Pope had only four pewter drinking pots, and John Hiller, a planter of far more modest means (9, 529 lbs of tobacco, ca. £48), owned two drinking pots and three cups (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds and Wills 1660–1661*: 16). Of the remaining six estates inventoried in the county between 1654 and 1661 in which pewter vessels were listed entirely by shape, none contained more than three pewter drinking vessels, although three of the individuals involved were more than twice as wealthy as Hiller. The pattern which emerges from the extant Westmoreland County, Virginia, inventories taken between 1668 and 1677 is similar. Capt. John Ashton, second wealthiest member of the group, had no pewter drinking vessels at all. Two middling planters had six each, and the remaining members of the sample owned three or less. Unless similar forms were present in ceramic or, in the wealthiest households, silver, the inevitable conclusion is that drinking vessels were being shared, if not with laborers, at least with neighbors when they came visiting.

It would seem that the increase in absolute numbers of ceramic drinking vessels noted by Deetz in the archaeological record toward the end of the 17th century might be taken to represent a trend toward more individualized consumption of beverages. But in social and religious ceremony, shared drinking vessels continued to be used as symbols of intimacy until the mid-19th century (Stone 1977:61–62).

Developing the Potomac Typological System

The method behind the construction of POTS was unabashedly democratic. The authors have attempted to assign excavated forms to common categories and names derived from a number of documentary sources, most importantly probate inventories taken in Maryland (St. Mary's County) and Virginia (Westmoreland and York counties) during the 17th and early 18th centuries. It appears that Englishmen in the Chesapeake took vessels from a wide variety of European potting traditions and applied relatively standardized uses and names to them. The functional significance of shape differences unique to a particular regional English folk

culture may not have survived long on the Chesapeake frontier, where consumers could be less discriminating and where their needs were considerably altered. Similarly, some taxonomic distinctions with only regional distribution at home proved of little relevance to life in the Chesapeake, where they were discarded in favor of those which did.

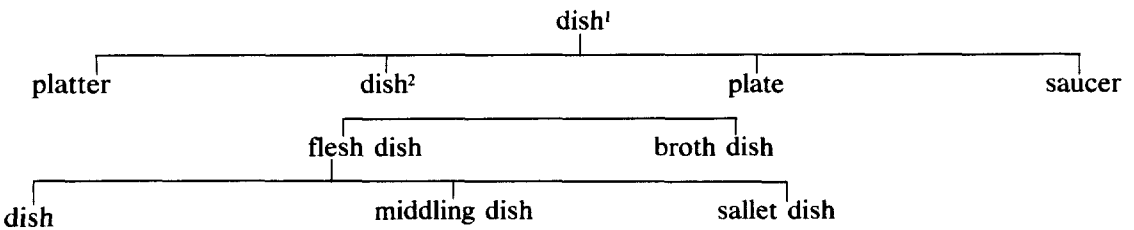
In general, the process was akin to that by which Virginians and Marylanders developed a distinctive vernacular architecture by drawing on a variety of English forms to combine and alter them according to local requirements. The general impression is that, as with architecture, the ways in which Chesapeake planters and New England farmers categorized their food vessels differed considerably in some domains. While there seems to have been significant variation between communities with different subsistence orientations in New England (Yentsch 1977), such regional differences do not seem to have been characteristic of the Chesapeake (Beaudry 1980).

While many of the categories derived from the documents are fairly straightforward, some do require discussion.

Dish appears to have been used both as a specific and a generic term. Randle Holme, an English artist who between 1640 and 1680 attempted to record and illustrate all of the symbols employed in English heraldry, provided a valuable source of information about 17th century objects and their uses. Holme (1905:4) listed the following terms under "the several names of a dish":

A platter if large.
A dish, which [is] of a lesser sort.
A midleing dish
A Broth dish, deeper bottomed than flesh dishes.
A Bason, is almost half round in the concave, . . .
A sallet dish
A trencher plate or plate
A saucer

Holme's specification that a basin is "almost half round in the concave" suggests that the term denoted a vessel different from the others. Elsewhere he pictures a vessel, round in plan, and labels it "a dish, a platter, a saucer, a trencher plate." Leaving basins aside then, one can map "the several names of a dish" in a tree diagram in which the lower levels are related to the higher levels by inclusion:



The arrangement of the terms in Holme's (1905) list is not accidental. They are given in order of decreasing size, a relation which obtains between the terms in the second row of the tree, from left to right. Depth was not a factor in distinguishing between terms at this level: *dish*² subsumes both *flesh dish* and *broth dish*. William Harrison looked at the matter in a similar fashion, noting in 1587 that "dishes and platters in my time begin to be made deep like basins" (Harrison 1968:367).

If the terms *platter, dish,*² *plate,* and *saucer* denote vessels differing primarily in size (diameter), where do the breaks come? The anonymous author of *The Complete Appraiser* (1770:42–43), published in the mid-18th century, provides a partial answer in a table detailing prescribed weights and diameters for pewter plates and dishes. Plates run from 7 ¾ in to 9 ¾ in. Dishes range from 10 ¾ in all the way up to 28 in (Montgomery 1973:135). Criteria similar to these were apparently in use

in the 17th century Chesapeake. Corduroy Ironmonger's 1675 inventory, taken in Westmoreland County, Virginia, listed dishes weighing 5.4 lbs each and plates weighing 1.5 lbs each (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: 243). The figures fit comfortably with *The Compleat Appraiser*'s listing of the smallest dish at 1 lb, 12 oz. One can infer that saucers, as the smallest members of the dish family, were of something less than ca. 7 in diameter and that platters were the largest members of the group. *Platter* may have had other referents as well. There is some evidence that it was on some occasions synonymous with *oval dish*. Holme makes the equation twice, noting that John the Baptist's head was served up to King Herod on an oval dish "although some call it a platter" (Carson 1970:44, 296; Holme 1905:4). It would seem then that platters were *dishes*[2] which were either very large, or oval, or both. As the distinction between *platter* and *dish* was even then unclear, *platter* has been excluded from the POTS typology. All flat vessels greater in diameter than 10 in are defined as *dishes*.

As indicated, Holme (1905) made a distinction, echoed by Harrison (1968), between *flesh dishes* and *broth dishes*. However, the distinction does not appear in the authors' inventory sample until the early 18th century when it applies to plates. In 1756, William Wallet advertised in the *Maryland Gazette* that he would recast "either flat or soup dishes or flat or soup plates" (Montgomery 1973:135). Surviving pewter pieces from the period suggest that soup dishes and plates ranged in height between 1 in and 2 in. Rather than offer absolute criteria for soup dishes and plates versus flat dishes and plates, it is suggested that the distinction in an excavated ceramic assemblage be based on the objects in it. If the excavated material exhibits a continuum of depths relative to diameters, the distinction might best be ignored. However, if the distribution of shapes exhibits a break, the distinction may reflect functional differences and therefore be of utility.

Holme gives two functions for basins. He implies a food function by classifying basins as members of the dish family, and in this he was paralleled by many estate appraisers who grouped or found pewter basins with pewter dishes and plates. Holme also illustrates a barber's basin and a "stand . . . used for to set a Bason on whilest washing . . ." (Holme 1688:432, 438; 1905:18, 18a). Both food basins and a great (wash) basin on a stand are listed in Robert Slye's inventory (see Appendix). While some basins may have been used for both dining and washing, archaeologists should try to determine the functions of the vessels that they recover from the find contexts of the sherds. At the Clifts site in Westmoreland County, Virginia, one of the authors excavated sherds of decorated basins matching plate fragments from early 18th century contexts (Neiman 1980). At Rosewell, Noël Hume found undecorated wash basin fragments in a ca. 1763–1762 pit (Noël Hume 1962:203–07). In the Rosewell report, Noël Hume rightly grouped the wash basins with the chamber pots, while in the author's report on the Clifts site, the basins will be counted as dining vessels.

Apart from the problems presented by *platter* and *basin*, the sources used above describe a relatively straightforward typology for categorizing flat dining vessels. It is a comfortable typology as much of it remains in use today. But readers of 17th century documents should be aware that alternate taxonomies were in use during that century. Some appraisers recorded many dishes and few plates. Others listed "platters great & small" to the exclusion of both dishes and plates (*Archives of Maryland* 1887:93).

Drinking vessels presented fewer problems. *Pot* is the most troublesome form as well as the most common. Fortunately Holme illustrates one pot shape—a pitcher-like form (Carson 1970:14, 68, 196; Holme 1688:167).

The name also seems to have been applied to bulbous and squat cylindrical drinking vessels as probate and potters' inventories do not provide alternate designations. "Drinking bowl" seems to have been applied to metal vessels only. Except in silver, *cup* was restricted to small containers. "Pint cup" appears rarely in Chesapeake inventories, while (in pewter) drinking pots routinely appear in pint, quart, and pottle (2 qt) sizes.

The procedure of naming by plebiscite bypassed most of the problems of describing food preparation vessels. Thus, all large pans are typed as *milk pans*, although some were used as wash basins and cooking pans. All dairy pots will be considered as *butter pots* until someone defines—in Chesapeake terms—the difference in form between a butter pot and a cream pot. While excavated dairy pots vary in shape, the most important variable seems to be place of manufacture. Thus, most North Devon pots have constricted shoulders (Watkins 1960:45), while Flintshire pots are generally more cylindrical (Noël Hume 1976:135). In a similar fashion, a 17th century definition of *pipkin* has evaded these authors; it is assumed that the term encompassed most of the cooking pots excavated on Chesapeake sites. No other term identifiable as an earthen cooking pot appears in the inventories, and most excavated specimens are of one general shape.

Commonly used categories for summarizing excavated vessels have been too general. More gradations are needed to distinguish between shared and individual drinking vessels, and dining vessel groups oriented toward hominy and pottage versus boiled, baked, or roasted foods. The recommended categories are illustrated below. These are simplified groupings. It is realized, for example, that bottles were storage as well as serving vessels and that jugs of less that a pottle could be used for serving. In English America as well as in England, some families undoubtedly used pitchers as jugs and drinking pots as well as utility vessels. However, without some simplification, summary would be impossible, and these categories represent the best fit achievable between the multifarious uses suggested by the documents and employable archaeological categories (Table 1).

The logical conclusion of an article such as this would witness the application of POTS to several excavated assemblages. Presumably, this would demonstrate the virtues of the typology by comparing ceramic assemblages from successive periods at the same site and from the same period at different sites. At the present time, however, such comparisons cannot be undertaken. Analyses of the excavated materials from St. John's and the Clifts Plantation sites are still underway, although they both will be used as test cases for POTS, along with materials from sites on the James River. This typology is presented in its tentative form as a means of informing colleagues in historical archaeology of the direction this research is taking and in hopes of eliciting comments, suggestions and shared information from others concerned with the problems of ceramic typologies and functional interpretations based on archaeological assemblages from historical sites.

Chesapeake Ceramic Forms and Definitions

Ceramic forms discussed previously and listed in Table 1 are illustrated and defined below. Groupings are determined primarily on the basis of vessel shape and only secondarily by vessel function. These groupings are not necessarily those used in the course of ceramic analysis, and infrequently excavated forms are neither illustrated nor defined. Some of these forms are mentioned in the accompanying probate inventories, however (Appendix).

TABLE 1
A SUGGESTED FUNCTIONAL DIVISION OF VESSEL FORMS FROM 17TH CENTURY SITES

FOOD PROCESSING
(Cooking and Darying)
- Pipkin
- Pudding Pan
- Bowl
- Milk Pan
- Collander

FOOD AND DRINK STORAGE
- Storage Pot
- Jar
- Bottle

BEVERAGE CONSUMPTION

Individual (1 pt or less)	Communal or Individual (More than 1 pt)	Serving
Cup	Mug	Pitcher
Mug	Jug	Ewer
Jug	Drinking Pot	Punch Bowl
Footed Bowls	Flask	Large Jug
		Sillabub Pot

FOOD CONSUMPTION

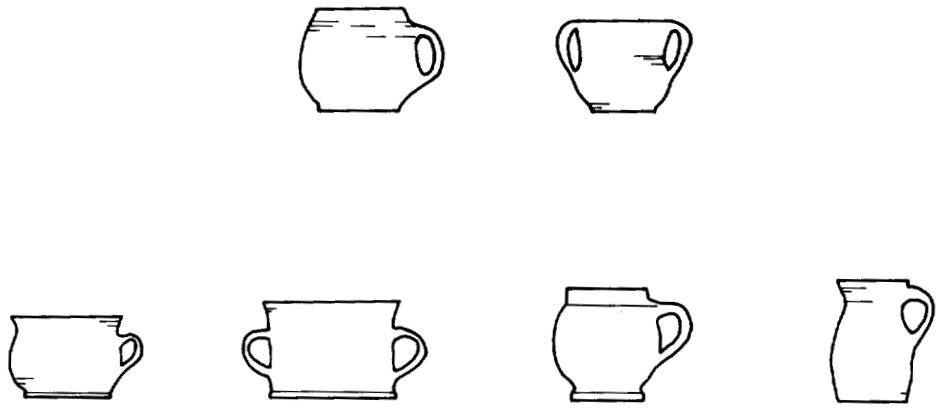
Stews/Pottages/Soups	Solid Food Consumption and Serving
Porringers	Caudle Pots
Soup Plates	Basins
Small Bowls	Plates
	Dishes
	Saucers
	Salts

HEALTH/HYGIENE
- Galley Pots- Large
- Galley Pots- Small
- Chamber Pots
- Basins- Plain
- Basins- Barber's

OTHER
- Chafing Dish
- Candlesticks
- Betty Lamp

Hollow Vessels for Liquids—1/8 size

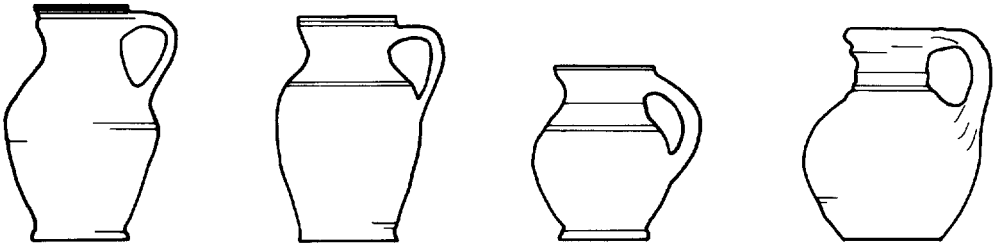
CUP. A small, handled drinking vessel of less than a pint in capacity. In form, cups are closely related to drinking pots.



DRINKING POT. A one or multi–handled vessel, usually bulbous, but sometimes cylindrical in form, ranging in capacity from 1 pt to 2 qts or more. Cylindrical drinking pots are distinguished from mugs by being wider than tall and/or having two or more handles.

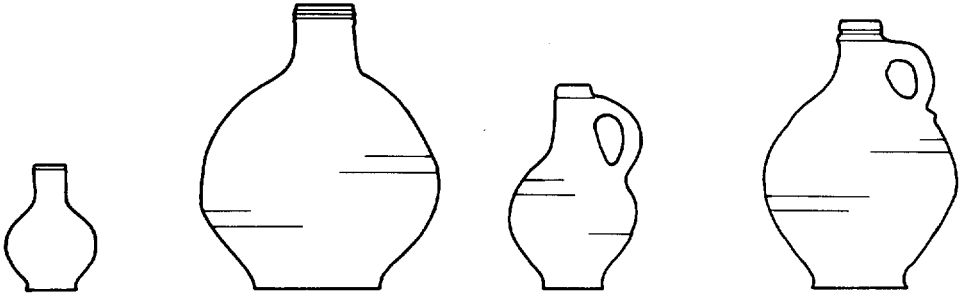
MUG. A single–handled, straight–sided drinking vessel, taller than wide, ranging from 1 gill (¼ pt) to 2 qts (or more).

JUG. A handled vessel of bulbous form with a cylindrical neck rising from a pronounced shoulder, with or without a gutter. In size, jugs range from small drinking vessels to large serving vessels. Jugs occur generally in refined earthenwares and stonewares.

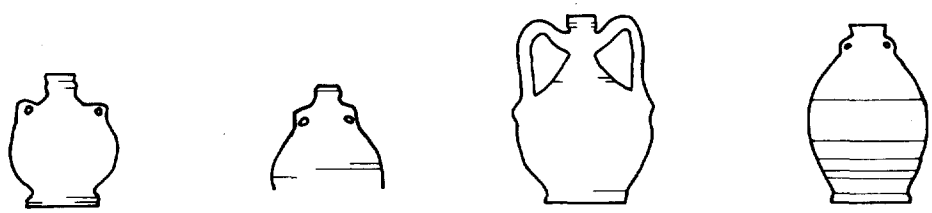


PITCHER. A handled vessel with bulbous body, having a flaring neck with a gutter. In America, used primarily in the kitchen and dairy. Pitchers occur in coarse earthenwares.

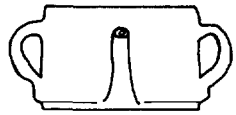
EWER. A handled, bulbous–bodied serving vessel, similar in shape to a jug, but with a narrower, elongated neck with a gutter or spout. Ewers occur in refined earthenwares or stonewares.



BOTTLE. A bulbous–bodied storage and serving vessel with a neck narrower than a jug or ewer, with or without a handle.



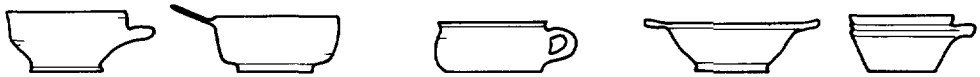
FLASK/COSTREL. A bulbous–bodied vessel with a very narrow neck, similar in form to a bottle, but having two ears or strap handles rising from the shoulder. A drink container carried by travelers and field workers.



SILLABUB POT. A pot with a spout, two handles, and sometimes a cover, for drinking and serving sillabub, posset, and wassail.

Hollow Vessels for Liquids and Semi-solid Foods—1/8 size

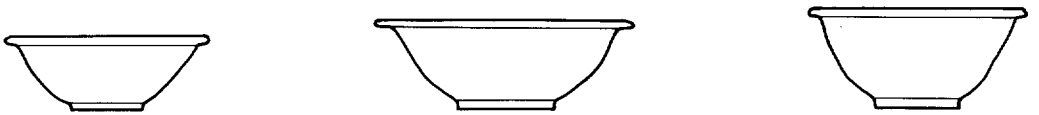
CAUDLE CUP/POT. A two–handled, covered cup, for making and serving fermented gruel. The appearance of the term caudle pot suggests that it occurs in sizes larger than that illustrated.



PORRINGER. A vessel usually hemispherical in shape and shallower in relation to its diameter than a cup or a pot. Porringers have at least one and sometimes two handles, either horizontal or vertical. Used for eating porridge, pottage (stew), soup, etc.

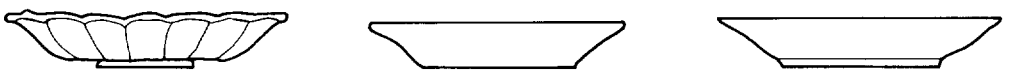
PUNCH BOWL. A hemispherical vessel with a plain rim. Punch bowls occur in refined earthenwares, stonewares, and porcelain. They range in capacity from ½ pt to several gallons. The smallest sizes were used by individuals for drinking punch and perhaps eating semi-solid foods. The larger sizes were used for making and serving punch.

BOWL. An open vessel with convex sides terminating in either a plain or everted rim or brim. Bowls have no footrings and occur only in coarse earthenwares. Bowls were used primarily in the kitchen and dairy.



BASIN. An open vessel with convex sides, of greater width than depth, having a brim or everted lip. Basins occur with or without footrings but only in refined earthenwares and porcelain. These forms were used for washing, shaving and for dining.

Flat Vessels for Food—1/8 size



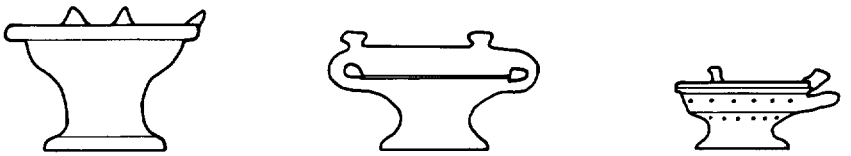
DISH. A serving vessel larger than 10 in either in diameter or in length, with or without a footring. Dishes were made in shallow and deep forms.

PLATE. An eating vessel from 7 in to 10 in in diameter, with or without a footring. Plates were made in shallow and deep (i.e., soup) forms.

SAUCER. A vessel less than 7 in in diameter, with or without a footring. Saucers were used for serving condiments (hence: sauce–r) and perhaps as small plates.

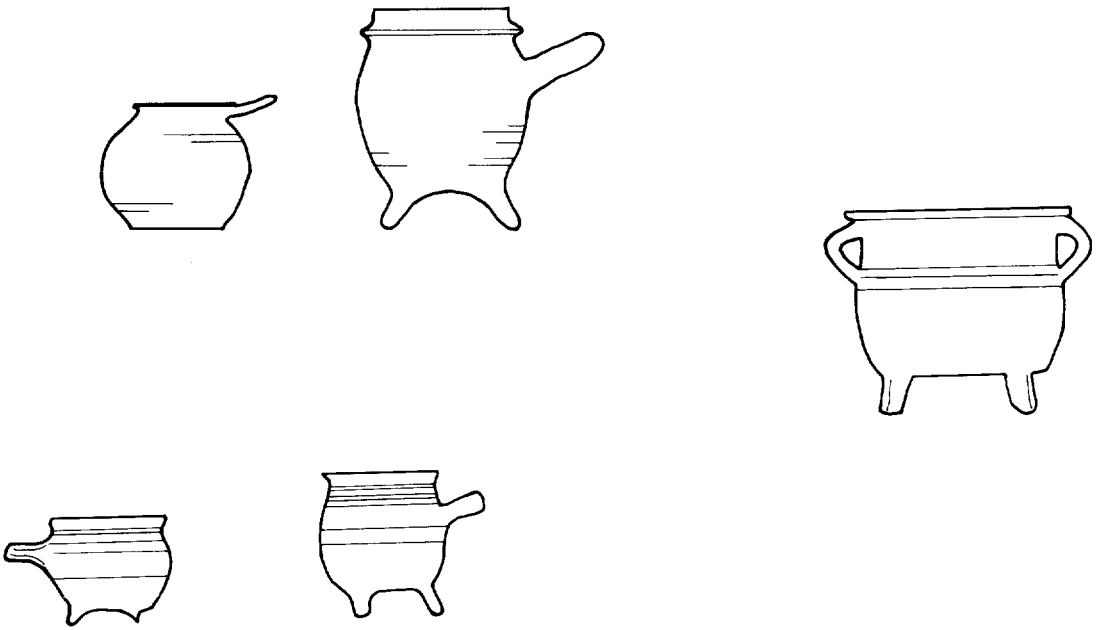
Miscellaneous Dining Forms—1/8 size

SALT. A pedestaled serving vessel in refined earthenware or stoneware with or without supports at the rim.

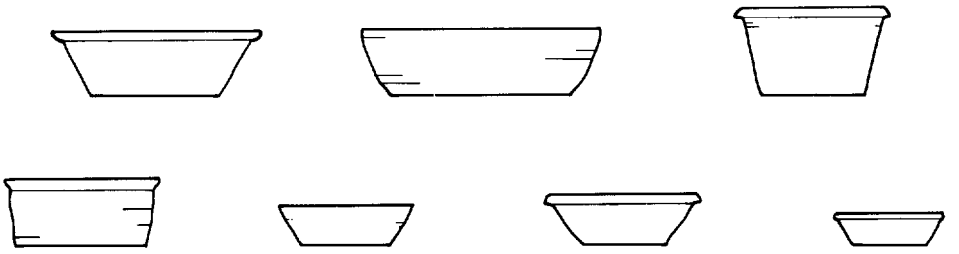


CHAFING DISH. A coarse earthenware vessel on a pedestal with supports around the rim. Chafing dishes held coals used to warm food at the table.

Cooking Vessels—1/8 size

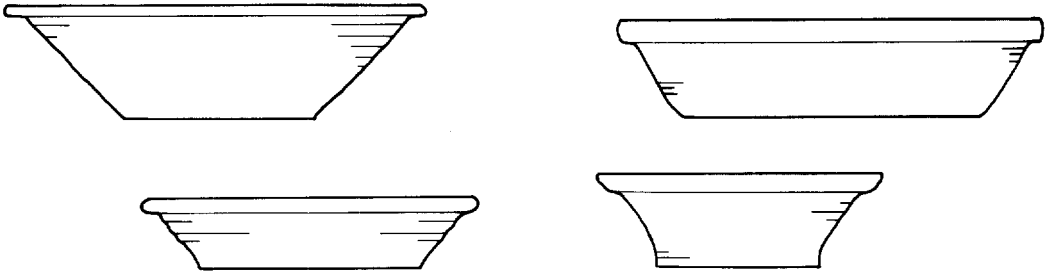


PIPKIN. An earthen cooking pot. Two varieties of pipkins have been excavated in the Chesapeake. The handled pipkin (above left) is a small, bulbous cooking pot, frequently with a rod handle. The pot/flesh pot (above right) is a cooking vessel with two ears and three legs. While the form is a metal one, it was occasionally copied in coarse earthenwares.



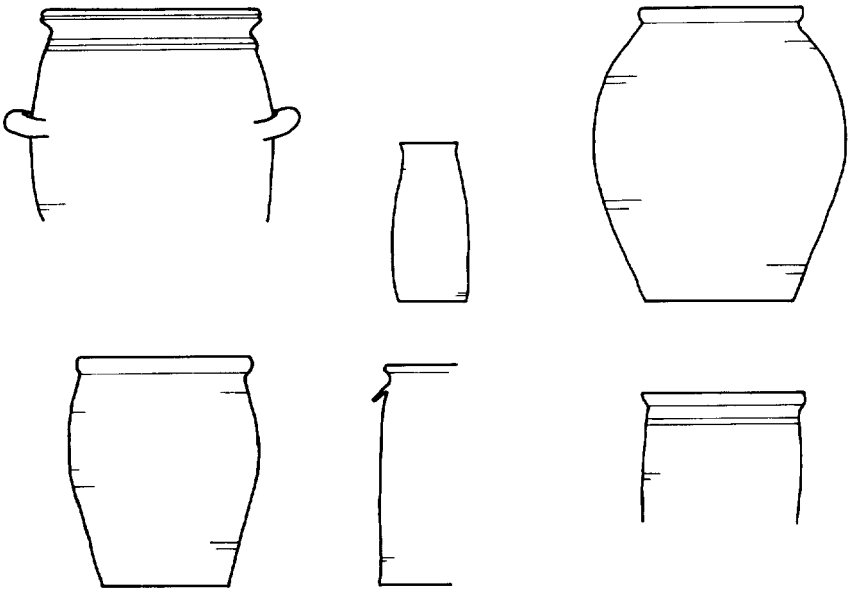
PAN/PUDDING, PASTRY, PATTY, ETC. A coarse earthenware cooking vessel, roughly in the shape of an inverted, truncated cone, less than 10 in in diameter.

Dairy and Kitchen Vessels—1/8 size

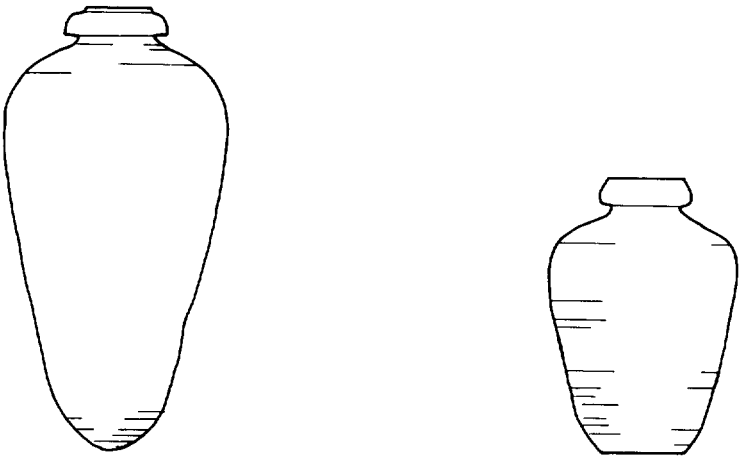


MILK PAN. A vessel roughly in the shape of an inverted, truncated cone, 10 in or more in diameter. Used for cooling milk, as a wash basin and probably for cooking.

COLANDER. A pan–like, handled utensil with a perforated bottom. Colanders were used for making cheese, washing vegetables, etc.

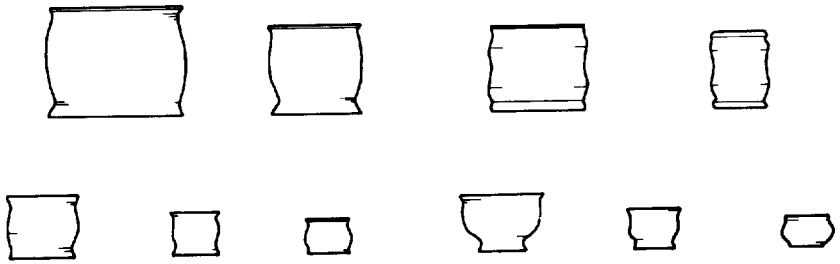


POT/BUTTER POT. A large, cylindrical or slightly convex-sided vessel, taller than wide, used for souring cream or storing butter, fat (lard), etc.

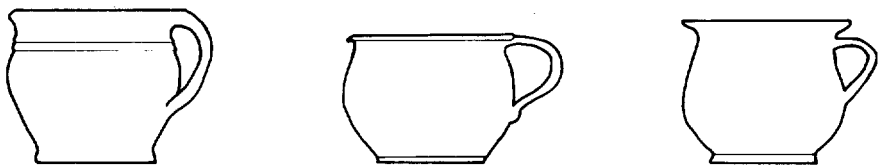


JAR. A large vessel, taller than wide, with pronounced shoulders and constricted neck, bearing a heavy, rounded lip. Jars were used for storing water, oil, beer, etc.

Hygiene-related Forms—1/8 size



GALLEY POT. A cylindrical tin–glazed vessel with slightly flared rim and base. Large and small sizes may be distinguished. Used for drugs, ointments, cosmetics and, occasionally, condiments.



CHAMBER POT. A handled vessel with convex sides and a sturdy flared rim or brim. The eventual repository of the contents of all of the above.

CANDLESTICK. A lighting device consisting of a hollow tube, a foot and/or a drip tray.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following people for taking time to comment on this manuscript: John Austin, Norman Barka, Barbara Carson, James Deetz, William Kelso, Ivor and Audrey Noël Hume, Alain and Merry Outlaw, and C. Malcolm Watkins. All of the drawings in the text are by Janet Long. An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the Jamestown Conference on Archaeology, Jamestown, Virginia, April 1979.

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Appendix: Probate Inventories

The following inventories were selected to provide a sample of the vessel types found in 17th century Chesapeake households. Examples have been taken from various wealth groups in the society including slave or servant quarters (in Slye and Lee inventories), poor and middling planters and extremely wealthly planter-merchants. Vessels and other food–related items have been extracted from the inventories, edited and the spelling modernized. Of particular interest in these examples in the variability in ceramic frequencies and the often minor portion of the total assemblage they comprise. Iron, pewter, tin, leather, and wooden wares are more common than ceramics. This low frequency of ceramic forms is apparently not related to their being overlooked because of low value, since many seemingly inconsequential items, such as remnant of cloth or a "staple for the spring lock," are noted.

The first inventory represents a small planter of limited means. When Francis Lewis died, he left his orphans five barrels of corn and eight cattle.

Inventory of the estate of Francis Lewis (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds and Wills 1665–1677*: f. 241, 1677):

2 pewter dishes, 3 plates, 2 porringers, 3 spoons
2 iron pots, 1 frying pan
1 candlestick
5 earthen pans, 2 trays, 3 earthen pots, 1 pan

Thomas Thomas was a planter of modest means with an estate valued at 7,140 lbs of tobacco. He owned no servants. He left his heirs 12 cattle and a simple collection of household possessions which included no ceramics.

An Inventory of the Chattles and Goods belonging to the estate of Thomas Thomas (*Maryland Provincial Records, Testamentary Proceedings* 5: f. 126–127, 12 August 1671):

4 iron pots, 1 iron kettle
4 new pewter dishes
Half a dozen of plates
10 pewter porringers
2 old pewter dishes, two old basins, 20 pewter spoons
1 pewter chamber pot
2 old frying pans
9 wooden trays, 2 platters

Robert Cole, a St. Mary's County planter, inventoried his own estate prior to his departure for England in 1662. He left his family with movable goods valued at over 28,887 lbs of tobacco. They included four indentured servants and numerous cattle and hogs. Cole was a successful planter of better than average wealth.

An Inventory of the estate of Robert Cole (*Maryland Provincial Records, Testamentary Proceedings* 6: f. 121–124, 25 April 1662):

5 iron pots, 2 small iron kettles, 2 skillets
1 copper kettle of 18 gallons, 2 frying pans
15 milk trays, 5 cedar tubs for the dairy, 1 cedar cheese tub, 1 oaken milk tub, 1 oaken milk tub
1 great round bowl, 5 pails
2 dozen trenchers, 18 spoons
1 collander of tin, 3 tin drip pans, 1 tin funnel, 5 tin candlesticks
2 wyar candlesticks, 1 pewter bottle, 1 pepper box of tin, 1 pepper grinder
1 straining dish, 1 chafing dish, 1 tin skimmer, 2 wooden platters
2 lifting trays, 1 gridiron, 1 iron ladle
5 pewter platters, 1 pewter basin, 4 pewter porringers, 2 small pewter dishes
5 wooden spoons, 3 wooden ladles
2 pewter pint pots, 1 pewter quart pot, 1 tin quart pot
1 salt box, 2 great butter pots, 5 smaller earthen;
1 earthen frying pan, 1 three legged cream pot of earthen
3 large stone jugs
1 iron bound case with six bottles with pewter screws
1 earthen pitcher, 1 earthen jug, 2 gallons of sweet oil
1 butter tub, 2 cases of quart bottles
5 speckled Dutch pots to drink in, 9 other like pieces but they are butter pots, dishes and porringers
Some gunpowder in a bottle left for use, 2 round glass bottles
10 quarts of rum in bottles
2 tin pudding pans

The inventory of Nathaniel Pope represents the estate of a wealthy Potomac planter with his total value approximately 76,000 lbs of tobacco. Pope owned 15 servants, 40 cattle, 40 swine and extensive lands.

A true and perfect inventory of the personal estate of Mr. Nathaniel Pope (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds and Wills 1660–1661*: f. 8, 14 May 1660):

3 dozen knives
1 silver bowl and 12 silver spoons
1 dram cup
1 two quart pot and 1 three pint pot
36 dishes and a basin of pewter
12 plates and 9 saucers
3 candlesticks, 12 spoons and 2 quart pots
1 knife and 2 frying pans
6 old chamber pots, 2 salts
4 iron pots, a skillet
3 great kettles and 2 small ones
2 jugs
6 porringers
2 wooden bowles
1 stew pan
1 frying pan
2 trays, a bowl and 1 iron pot

At his death, Captain John Lee was the richest man in Westmoreland County. His estate, appraised at more than 200,000 lbs of tobacco, included 13 indentured servants, 15 slaves, 88 cattle, 32 sheep, and eight horses. Lee was a merchant–planter with a well–stocked store. His servants and slaves grew tobacco on several plantations, tanned hides, and made shoes. He owned few or no ceramic vessels.

An Inventory of the estate of Captain John Lee (*Westmoreland County, Virginia, Deeds, Patents and Accounts 1665–1677*: f. 180, 2 March 1673/4):

In the Hall Chamber
2 frying pans

In the Parlor
Silver Plate valued at 4000 lbs. tobacco

In Capt. Lee's Chamber
6 qts honey
6 qts oil

In the Kitchen
1 frying pan
1 iron pot
115 lbs of pewter
1 gallon flagon
3 old chamber pots
2 close stool pans and 2 porringers
1 chafing dish and a skillet
2 brass kettles
4 brass candlesticks

In the loft over the store
Some empty bottles

In the English Quarter
2 pots

At the New Plantation
2 iron pots
1 frying pan

Robert Slye probably was even wealthier than Lee. (The goods listed in Slye's inventory were not appraised.) A merchant, Slye had extensive contacts in England, the West Indies, and New England. In addition to merchandise and several plantations, Slye owned 11 indentured servants, 14 slaves, 43 horses, 23 sheep, 83 cattle, 124 hogs, and three bee hives. Slye's inventory includes one of the largest and most detailed listings of vessels to survive from the 17th century Chesapeake.

An Inventory of the Goods, Chattles and Debts belonging to the Estate of Mr. Robert Slye of St. Mary's County, Merchant (*Maryland Provincial Records, Testamentary Proceedings* 5: f. 152–190, 19 December 1671):

In the Kitchen
3 great brass kettles
2 smaller kettles
4 iron pots
4 brass skillets
1 stew pan
1 frying pan
1 brass chafing dish
1 iron chafing dish
1 small brass skillet
1 iron kettle
4 pewter dishes
3 pewter basins
12 pewter plates
1 pewter porringer
12 alchemy spoons
3 iron bound pails
4 wooden trays
3 wooden bowls
5 old earthen pans
1 latten pudding pan

In the Dairy
12 great pewter dishes
7 small pewter dishes
2 pewter basins
1 pewter collander
12 pewter plates
9 pewter porringers

9 pewter saucers
2 small pewter salts
1 pewter flagon
1 pewter tankard
1 great pewter basin
2 latten collanders
1 latten watering pot for a garden
2 latten pudding pans
2 latten sauce pans
1 latten fish place
1 latten pie plate
1 latten covering plate
2 great milking pails
3 small milking pails
5 kimmels
13 milk trays
1 butter bowl
2 cheese tubs
1 wooden pail
16 earthen milk pans
4 large earthen dishes
4 small earthen dishes
6 white earthen porringers
8 large gallypots
1 earthen chamber pot
25 earthen butter pots
1 cream pot
5 small earthen jugs
4 small earthen flower pots
11 quart glass bottles
1 latten pepper box
2 earthen pitchers

In the Beer Room
4 empty jars
7 small earthen jugs
1 earthen chamber pot

In the Beer Room Loft
2 iron candlesticks
1 great copper kettle
1 frying pan
8 earthen butter pots
5 earthen honey pots
2 earthen drinking cups

In the Hall
1 iron bound case of bottles
1 pewter salt
1 white earthen salt
1 great earthen basin
1 basin stand
1 white earthen sillabub pot
1 case with 6 knives

In the Hall Chamber
2 pewter chamber pots

In the Parlor
1 silver flagon
1 silver bowl
1 silver caudle cup
1 large silver tumbler
1 silver salt
1 silver porringer
1 silver sack sup
2 silver dram cups
22 silver spoons
1 pewter flagon
1 pewter cup
1 pewter quart pot
1 pewter wine pot
1 latten broad candlestick
2 great stone jugs
2 small stone jugs

In the Parlor Closet
1 small box full of vials with chemical biles
13 small earthen painted dishes
1 earthen chamber pot
4 small earthen jugs
8 gallypots
6 beer glasses
6 wine glasses
2 great glass bottles
4 quart glass bottles
2 horn cups
4 vials with chemical biles
6 earthen pots

In the Parlor Chamber
1 pewter chamber pot

In the New House Hall Chamber
23 earthen butter pots
22 earthen milk pans
1 earthen pitcher

"In the Said Hall remaining of a Cargo received last voyage by the Constant Friendship, Captain Benjamin Cooper, Comander from London"
9 dozen and 4 alchemy spoons
3 latten stew pans
39 latten sauce pans
1 latten pail
17 latten funnels
3 latten collanders
10 latten pudding pans
8 latten pottle pots
9 latten quart pots
4 latten pint pots

In the Store
12 latten saucepans
2 iron bound cases and bottles
1 pewter gallon pot
1 latten pottle pot
1 latten quart pot
1 latten pint pot
1 latten funnel

30 gross of tobacco pipes
431 earthen porringers
10 butter pots
31 milk pans
3 small jugs
4 small painted dishes
3 iron chafing dishes

In the Tobacco House store
6 iron pots
9 stone jugs

In Clanse the Negro's Quarters
1 iron bottle
1 iron pot
1 frying pan

In Dockey the Negro's Quarter
1 old brass kettle
1 brass skillet

In Tony the Negro's Quarter
1 great iron pot
1 brass skillet

At Lapworth Plantation
3 iron pots
1 old brass kettle, 1 frying pan
4 latten pudding pans
1 latten pail
1 latten quart pot
1 latten sauce pan
1 milk pan
2 butter pots
8 alchemy spoons
a iron bound pail