Chapter 11

LOWCOUNTRY PLANTATIONS, THE CATAWBA NATION, AND RIVER BURNISHED POTTERY

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INTRODUCTION

In the excavations of historic sites in the lowcountry of South Carolina, archaeologists have been identifying large collections of hand built, low fired, unglazed pottery generally termed Colonoware (Ferguson 1978). In 1978 I suggested that much of this ware which was then called "Colono-Indian Ware" was probably manufactured on plantations by Afro-American slaves, and this hypothesis has been supported by research at sites such as Spiers Landing (Drucker and Anthony 1979), Yaughan and Curriboo plantations (Wheaton, Friedlander and Garrow 1983), and Hampton plantation (Lewis and Haskell 1980).

Recently lowcountry archaeologists have been recognizing a minority of Colonoware that was probably manufactured by people living in free Indian villages rather than on plantations. The pottery has been isolated because there are easily observable similarities in surface finish, body, decoration, and shape that set this group of ceramics apart from other specimens of Colonoware. Often called "Catawba pottery" for reasons discussed below, these artifacts have been recovered from a variety of late 18th and early 19th century contexts in the coastal plain.

In this paper I would like to critically evaluate our conception of this pottery and offer a name, "River Burnished," as well as an explicit typological description. My goal is to construct an explicit ceramic type, free of ethnic interpretation in its name and description, that may be used to help interpret the complex social interaction in South Carolina during the colonial period.

BACKGROUND

In looking at the collections of Colonowares from lowcountry sites over the last eight years, I have noted ceramics in collections from Drayton Hall, Charleston, and the Cooper River which I believe may be connected with the people we now know as the Catawba Nation. Independently, archaeologists working for Soils Systems, Inc. (Wheaton, Friedlander, and Garrow 1983), based on artifacts excavated from slave quarters at Yaughan and Curriboo plantations, observed similar materials and, for reasons similar to my own, came to the same conclusion. Patrick Garrow and Thomas Wheaton (this volume) have pointed out that the minority collection from Yaughan and Curriboo was thought to be Catawba because,

1. The Catawba were known to have traveled to the coastal plain to sell pottery in the 19th century.

2. The pottery in question from excavations at Yaughan and Curriboo plantations has some similarity to modern Catawba vessels.

3. The pottery is similar to a single specimen in the Charleston Museum that was supposedly purchased at Yaughan Plantation from a Catawba woman in 1805.

I think other collections of ceramics from the coastal plain are related to the Catawba Nation for the same reasons. However, at this point, the connections of this pottery to the Catawba Nation are indirect. There has been no direct comparison of materials found in the lowcountry to those from contemporary sites in the Catawba River Valley—the home of the Catawba Nation—in the piedmont of South Carolina. In fact, there have been no sites identified as belonging to the Catawba Nation excavated by archaeologists.

Although the connection is quite indirect, the tendency of archaeologists, myself included, has been to call this "Catawba pottery." In the original report of excavations at Yaughan and Curriboo, Wheaton, Friedlander, and Garrow (1983: 229) established a "Catawba Type" and a "Colono Type," interpreting the Colono type to have been manufactured by local slaves and the Catawba type to have been manufactured by Catawba Indians. However, these types were defined from a narrow geographical area—two sites adjacent to one another along the Santee River in Berkeley County. Most typological descriptions are based on materials from wider geographical areas than represented by these two adjacent sites. In a later paper Garrow and

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Wheaton (this volume) deleted the typological classification and moved to fit the materials from excavations at Yaughan and Curriboo into the type-variety system. They established Yaughan and Catawba varieties of a generalized Colonoware "type" which has never been defined — Colonoware is a broadly based category, like "British ceramics," not an archaeological "type". Thus, the Yaughan and Catawba varieties of Colonoware were established without the existence of a type. In other words, Yaughan and Catawba are now varieties of a type that has not been defined. Such are the normal scientific problems of dealing with site specific collections of an entirely new category of data such as Colonoware.

We now have data from more sites than available to Garrow and his colleagues; and we are now at the point where we need, and can construct, an explicit type definition for some of these ceramics. Specifically, ceramics described as "Catawba variety" by Garrow and Wheaton have a distribution over three counties (Berkeley, Dorchester, and Charleston) in the lowcountry, and we have sufficient information to class them as a ceramic "type." However, I think we should look carefully at the nature of the Catawba Nation and the problems we want to solve before naming and describing these ceramics.

THE CATAWBA NATION

Historians and ethnohistorians have demonstrated that the Catawba people were changing during colonial times, and archaeological research is one of the most valuable means available for understanding those changes which included new patterns of interaction with other people in the colony.

In the 16th century Spanish explorers visited the powerful chiefdom of Cofitachequi, located in the Catawba–Wateree Valley (Baker 1974; DePratter, Hudson, and Smith 1983; Hudson, Smith, and DePratter 1984). References were made to Cofitachequi as late as the 1670s; however, when John Lawson wrote of his travel up the valley in 1701 (Lefler 1967) he did not mention this chiefdom. Rather he described a series of towns including those of the Wateree Chickanee (who did not speak the same language as the other towns), the Waxhaws, Wisacks, Esaws, Sugerees, and Kadapaus; those latter towns were likely closely related descendants of the Cofitacheque chiefdom. Through time "Kadapau" (Catawba), the name of the northernmost town mentioned by Lawson, became the name commonly used for all the people of the valley, and this core of people together with the dispossessed people of other tribes began to be known to the British colonies as the Catawba Nation. Thus, during the early 1700s the Catawba Nation became more than the descendants of the inhabitants of the Catawba River Valley and the older chiefdom of Cofitacheque; it became a nation comprised of a variety of aboriginal people from all over the southeastern portion of North America.

Historian James H. Merrell has recently discussed the "Catawba Experience" in the 18th century and has pointed out that (Merrell 1984a: 548),

> *No European observer recorded the means by which nations became mere names and a congeries of groups forged into one people (the Catawba Nation).*

He further states (1984a: 547) that the,

> *... Catawbas became a sanctuary for culturally related refugees from throughout the region (and) ... as late as 1743 a visitor could hear more than twenty different dialects spoken by peoples living there, and some bands continued to reside in separate towns under their own leaders.*

In addition to the core of people mentioned by Lawson — the Kadapaus, Wisacks, Sugerees, and Esaws — a list of peoples who came to reside in the Catawba Nation during the 18th century includes (Baker 1975; Merrell 1984a) the Waterees, Congarees, Santees, Saponis, Cussoes, Cheraws, Peedees, Yamassees, Coosas, Enos, Occaneeches, Keyauwees, Chowans, and Nachees! Moreover, in another paper entitled "The Racial Education of the Catawba Indians," Merrell (1984b) has demonstrated that relationships between blacks and the people who made up the Nation were more cordial in the early part of the 18th century than at any time thereafter. Some blacks lived within the Catawba Nation while the Catawbas interacted with slaves on the plantations in the lowcountry.

Society was complex and dynamic during colonial times, and I would like to emphasize Merrell's point that no European recorded the process by which people came into the Catawba Nation —better understanding should rely heavily on archaeological analyses.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND A TYPOLOGICAL NAME

Historical and archaeological studies allow us to see the political and quasi-political negotiations that

people in the multi-ethnic, class divided society of South Carolina made with one another as the social fabric of the state was created (see Wolf 1982 and Faris 1984 for discussions of the importance of such studies). Archaeological research can contribute to the understanding of the interaction of the people of free Indian villages with one another as well as with people of other colonial communities such as plantations. This contribution will be effected by establishing the nature of the material connections between the groups, and the study of ceramics which were frequently made and well preserved is an obvious place to start.

The process of ceramics analysis necessary for accomplishing these ends is beginning as we ask the gross question, "Is there pottery in collections from lowcountry plantation sites which is similar to that from the Catawba Nation?" However, as we ask this question we should be aware that our goal is not to classify ceramics but to understand the interaction of people in the past. As discussed earlier, the Catawba Nation took in numerous small Indian groups of the South, and one of the important roles of archaeology may be to shed light on that process of adoption as well as to shed light on the interaction of the Catawba Nation with the people of other communities.

Aspects of the pottery technology of the Catawba Nation as we know it from the 19th century could have been contributed by any of the Indian groups that comprised the Catawba Nation or by Afro-Americans who came to live in the Nation. Thus, we may find pottery similar to that from the Catawba Nation made by people other than members of the Catawba Nation. We may even find pottery like that from the Catawba Nation from sites on the coastal plain that date from early in the 18th century. If we automatically class artifacts that might help us understand this process of amalgamation as "Catawba," then I am afraid we may deal with the problem by assumption and taxonomic fiat rather than by careful analysis of the facts – without helping to learn about the social and political negotiations that created and operated this group. What if we discover that important, diagnostic traits of so-called Catawba pottery were actually taken to the "Nation" by Cheraws, or Santees, or Pedees? What if we discover a significant Afro-American contribution?

Selecting one of the groups that contributed to the formation of the Catawba, I would like to illustrate my point. The Saponis who Lawson visited in 1701 on the Yadkin River in North Carolina moved to Ft. Christanna in eastern Virginia in 1714. When their relationship with the Virginians deteriorated they moved to join the Catawbas in 1729 (Merrell 1984a: 545; Wesley White, personal communication 1985). Archaeologist Mary Beaudry, who excavated Ft. Christanna reported sherds similar to those of the modern Catawba (personal communication 1980), interpreting this as evidence of a relationship between some Indians, probably Saponis living at Ft. Christanna and the Catawbas. As in South Carolina, she had no pottery from the 18th century Catawba towns to compare with her excavated material.

However, we can easily look at this situation "upside down." Since we have no examples of the pottery being made along the Catawba River between 1714 and 1729, we cannot be sure that the pottery was the same as that found at Ft. Christanna. It is possible that the pottery Beaudry saw and has identified as Catawba pottery was being manufactured by Saponi Indians. Such a scenario would have the Saponis taking this style of pottery to the Catawba towns and the later Catawba pottery developing from this Saponi "influence." This is only speculation on a possibility, not an argument that the Saponi significantly influenced Catawba pottery. The point is that without archaeology in the Catawba region we cannot be sure of origins of the Catawba pottery of the late 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. However, a more important point is that through studies of the pottery we may be able to better understand the origins of the *people* who constituted the Catawba Nation.

Understanding the relationship of pottery to the people who made up the Catawba Nation is clearly an archaeological problem that will not be solved until we have excavated sites in the vicinity of the Catawba towns as well as other sites that were the homes of the people who became members of the Catawba Nation. Such an understanding may be used in various ways to help us monitor the movement and cultural interaction of the small groups of people who made up the Catawba Nation. However, if we begin this work by naming pottery "Catawba" from locations as far removed from the Catawba territory as the towns and plantations of the South Carolina coastal plain, we will be unnecessarily confusing the issue and limiting the potential of our research tools. Artifacts classified in non-ethnic categories may be assigned to anyone we find manufactured or used them, allowing us to follow research in whatever turns it may take.

RIVER BURNISHED POTTERY

Drawing on my observations from a variety of

other sites as well as the work of Wheaton, Friedlander, and Garrow (1983), and Garrow and Wheaton (this volume), I am proposing a general description of River Burnished pottery. This is a polythetic type meaning that all of the criteria do not have to be met for inclusion in the category. The traits are listed according to the frequency that they are usually used in assigning specimens to the type.

RIVER BURNISHED

Surface finish:

Burnished with a tool that leaves horizontal marks approximately 1-3 mm wide (Figure 11.1). The burnishing produces a non-uniform luster (see Rye 1981: 90). (The rounded shape of these marks suggests burnishing with a smooth stone).

Thickness:

Side walls are relatively thin ranging from 3-7 mm. The average thickness is approximately 5 mm. Basal sections may be more than 1 cm thick.

Color:

Many vessels appear to have been intentionally reduced during firing to produce an even, black finish. A variety of colors resulting from reduction (blacks and grays) and oxidation (buff through reddish brown) occur.

Body:

Fabric consists of fine-grained materials including mica. Major non-plastics are small particles of sand.

Decoration:

Lips of bowls are often decorated with small facets (Figure 11.2). (Replication experiments indicate that these facets may be produced by a burnishing stone when the vessel is leather hard).

A small number of the vessels are painted with black and red lines and dots. The red paint is sometimes a "day-glo" hue. Painting is usually on the interior rim of bowls and on the exterior shoulder and neck of jars and pitchers.

One vessel, a bowl from Cooper River, has a "J" incised into the fired body on the interior base.

Shape:

Straightsided, unrestricted bowls with flat bottoms (Figure 11.3a-b).

Globular jars with relatively straight necks (Figure 11.3c).

Pitchers with spouts and handles (Figure 11.3d).

Method of manufacture:

Modelling was used. (Small bowls show profiles that are thicker in the center of the base and thinner at the basal edges (Figure 11.3b). Replication experiments have shown that this effect is reproduced by modelling bowls on a flat surface. The length of the vessel walls is determined by the length of the fingers, and the interior is modelled with the thumbs. The thinner section at the extremities of the base is produced by the thumbs.)

The size of some vessels suggests that coiling was also used.

Handles were put on with plugs which were inserted into holes in the vessel walls and smoothed on the inside.

Vessels are well-fired.

Distribution:

River Burnished ceramics have been recovered from sites in Dorchester, Charleston, and Berkeley Counties in the lowcountry, with the largest extant collections coming from excavations at Drayton Hall in Dorchester County (Lewis 1978) and Yaughan and Curriboo Plantations in Berkeley County (Wheaton, Friedlander, and Garrow 1983). A small collection of this material was also recovered from excavations at the Brattonsville site in York County by Carolina Archaeological Services, Inc. (Ronald Anthony, personal communication 1985).

Date range:

Late 18th century to early 19th century.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that I am confident along with my colleagues that we have isolated a class of Colonoware that is related to the Catawba Nation. This pottery, which I have chosen to call River Burnished, should be a valuable tool for understanding the interaction of various cultural groups in colonial South Carolina, including the variety of

Figure 11.1: Fragment of a small (7 cm tall) jar showing burnishing facets and dots of painted decoration.

Figure 11.2: Fragment of a flat-bottomed unrestricted bowl (5.8 cm tall) showing decorative facets on interior lip.

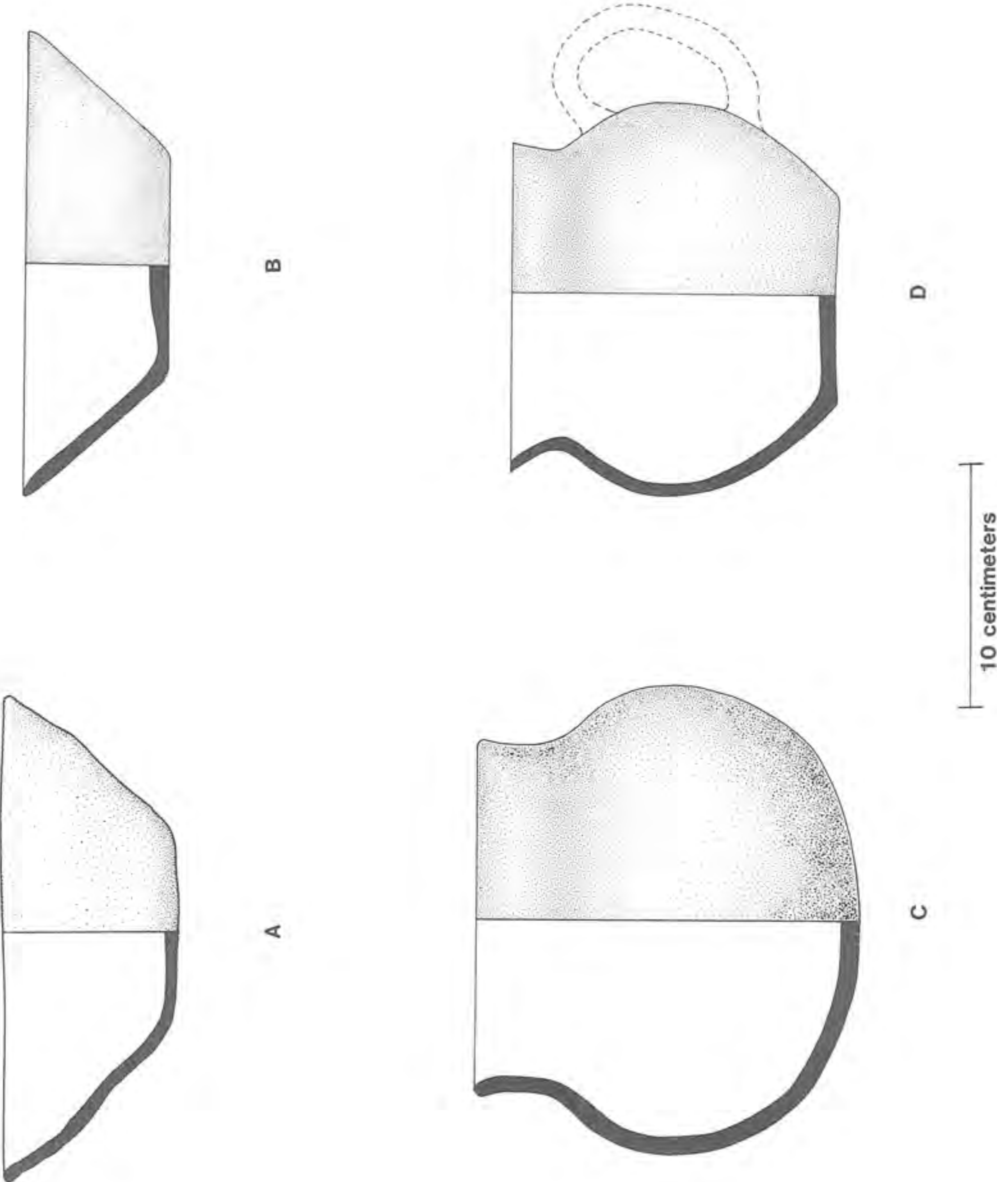

Figure 11.3: River Burnished vessel shapes.

people that lived in free Indian villages, on plantations, and in colonial towns. My admonition is methodological: If we are planning to use artifacts to help interpret political and ethnic negotiations, we should not begin by using the name of the group of people we want to study to define a poorly understood collection of artifacts.

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