

# **CERAMIC CHOICES WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI: CONSIDERING FACTORS OF SUPPLY AND ETHNICITY**

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*During the early and middle 19th century, the Trans-Mississippi West experienced a period of significant economic and social transformation. Economic expansion during this period was characterized by town building; commerce over the Santa Fe, Oregon, and other trails; railroad construction; mining; and the development of a significant river commerce. At the same time, Native Americans from the Great Lakes region and Southeast were resettled in portions of this area, in particular eastern Kansas and Oklahoma. Individual consumers in the early 19th-century West selected ceramics to use in their households, but data from this area have not figured into theory-building on ceramic and consumer choice. A preliminary survey of data, primarily from the Trans-Mississippi West, suggests that ceramic choice in this area was affected by at least two significant factors. First, supply-side decisions appear to have limited the range of ceramics coming into the area, and thereby limited the possible choices available to consumers. Second, ceramic choices made by Native American immigrants to the West appear to differ from those made by Euroamericans here and elsewhere during this period, but may not be explicable by reference to capitalistic models of choice. The potential importance of those two factors toward explaining consumer choice in the West is considerable, and is particularly important in tempering models of consumer behavior that assume equal market access and the primacy of a capitalistic frame of reference.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

For a variety of well-known reasons, ceramics have emerged as one of the major analytical tools in historical archaeology and also for the emerging study of consumer choice. Current models of consumer choice and in particular those based on ceramics have been developed in the research context of the northeastern United States, an area of traditionally high population and closely tied to manufacturing centers in North America and elsewhere.

Working west of the Mississippi, the authors have noted certain data that appear to challenge some of the status quo assumptions of current models. In the following paper we will explore evidence for choices in ceramic supply on both the supply side and the consumer side of the spectrum, speculate why these choices are being made, and examine the implications of these choices on current models.

Because our focus is on ceramics, the research of George Miller (especially his 1980 and 1991 papers in *Historical Archaeology*) is fundamental because he has presented the most lucid, easily applied models with which consumer choice can be evaluated. The following discussion is not intended to be critical of Miller's pioneering research, but simply seeks to address cultural factors that challenge the universality of assumptions that are inherent in his work or that are at least assumed to be inherent by those who apply his models.

Based on ceramic price information from the early 19th century, Miller has identified four "levels" of (primarily earthenware) ceramics that can be arranged hierarchically by cost. Embedded in this ranking are factors relating to cost of production (mainly decoration) and actual cost to the consumer. These levels include (1) undecorated/"CC"; (2) minimally decorated by minimally skilled operatives (shell edge, sponge decorated, "dipped"/mocha); (3) painted by painters with enough skill to duplicate simple patterns (flowers, leaves, stylized Chinese landscapes, geometric designs) [these should not be confused with overglaze painted (enameled) wares, which usually rank among the most expensive wares available]; and (4) transfer printed.

There are several ways Miller's ceramic classification can be used to examine ceramic choices by consumers, and more particularly, comparative ceramic choices. The first is to examine the importance of different ware groups in an assemblage, paying particular attention to wares that are present and wares that are absent. The approach devised by Miller is based on a set of "index values" that can be used to evaluate expenditure patterns for site assemblages. The

indexes track 19th-century costs of purchasing vessel forms (plates, cups, bowls) of specific decorative categories (within the levels discussed above) relative to the baseline costs of purchasing plain cream-colored vessels (referred to as "CC" ware in the potters' documents). When using these values to evaluate the social status of a site's inhabitants, the basic assumption is that individuals of higher socioeconomic rank usually invest more of their resources in expensive ceramics than do persons of lower rank, i.e., the occupants of sites with higher index values chose more expensive wares than did those of sites with lower values). This approach, of course, must be based on tightly controlled contexts, and general contemporaneity is a must. The attractiveness of this model is obvious due to its ease of application and apparent interpretive power. It ranks with the mean ceramic date formula in terms of its analytical clarity and potential for intra- and intersite comparative research. In order to use this model as an unfettered comparative tool, however, there are several implicit assumptions:

- (1) Consumers have access to the full range of ceramics being manufactured and imported into North America;
- (2) price is the primary factor affecting consumer choice; and
- (3) at any given point in time, ceramics had a constant functional and ideological role in North American households.

We will now examine these implicit assumptions by looking first at supply-side choices and then at consumer choices in certain areas of the Antebellum West. It is our contention that there is evidence of cultural and economic processes in action that seriously challenge these assumptions and that require a more careful application of models of consumer choice such as the one presented by Miller.

### SUPPLY-SIDE CHOICES

The first process that we would like to examine is on the supply side of consumer choice. Clearly, consumers can purchase or otherwise acquire only what is available to them. In the East it is easier to assume free market access to the full range of manufactured goods, but this assumption may be seriously at fault in the west. On the Great Plains and elsewhere, the 19th-century trade developed directly out of a very controlled, in some cases monopolistic fur trade which began in earnest in the 17th century. To what degree this pattern structured the 19th-century trade is uncertain but ceramic evidence does suggest a controlled market.

Our evidence here is very provisional and consists of two observations. First, Davenport-marked ceramics appear to be uncommonly important in certain contexts. Second, pipes manufactured at the Point Pleasant, Ohio, pottery works 33CT256 seem to be equally ubiquitous.

In Antebellum sites in eastern Oklahoma and Kansas, many associated with Native American groups resettled there starting in the 1820s, Davenport-marked wares are common (Table 1). The presence of these marks is striking in Native American burials in eastern Oklahoma, where they commonly occur on edge-decorated and hand-painted wares that are usually unmarked. Davenport was a quality manufacturer, and the presence of their marked wares indicates that they were not dumping second-rate ceramics on the primarily Native American market of the Indian Territory. The seeming preponderance of Davenport marks suggests that these wares had an advantage in this market over a large number of other manufacturers who were also exporting to North America at this time. We suggest that this advantage was a result of the relatively controlled nature of the western trade that allowed sole-source arrangements with manufacturers of items such as ceramics.

Marked Davenport wares also occur in other important contexts. Of note here is the presence of many marked Davenport wares, included marked edge-decorated and transfer-printed wares, on the Steamboat *Arabia*, which sank in 1856 near the community of Quindaro, not far from Kansas City (Anonymous 1993). Of 359 marked pieces, 157 or 44 percent were Davenport wares (J. Wedgwood [John Wedge Wood], not to be confused with the company founded by Josiah Wedgwood [see Godden 1964:655-658, 687-688] was the next most common but accounted for only 26 percent of marked pieces) (Anonymous 1993). This is tantalizing evidence for the importance of Davenport ceramics beyond the markets of the Antebellum Indian Territory. In her 1991 dissertation, Louise Jackson also notes the presence of Davenport-marked wares at various sites in southwestern Alaska and on the Pacific Coast.

A similar conclusion comes from ceramic tobacco pipes found on Antebellum sites in eastern Oklahoma and Kansas. Where stub-stemmed elbow pipes occur and can be identified, they are typically found to have been

manufactured by the Point Pleasant, Ohio, pottery works represented by site 33CT256 (e.g., Wilson 1968; Wyckoff and Barr 1968; Baugh 1970; Rohrbaugh et al. 1971; Lewis 1972; Gettys 1980; Reynolds 1987; Lees 1992, 1993) This pottery was in operation starting in the 1840s, and pipe manufacture there may date from ca. 1850 (Sudbury 1979; Thomas and Burnett 1972). Once again, this suggests that a limited range of materials was available in the Antebellum West, and, once again, we would suggest this is the result of supply-side market control.

Our observations are admittedly not based on a comprehensive review of all available information and are thus speculative. The questions that are raised are nonetheless important. First, do certain manufacturers dominate the market in the Trans-Mississippi West and, if so, does a similar pattern exist in other markets to the east and far west? If a distinct patterns of dominance does exist in the West, is it because of consumer demand for these particular manufacturers or because supply houses had established long-standing sole-source contracts with these manufacturers?

We believe such a pattern exists and that it resulted from supply-side practices. In support of this proposition, we note that Jackson's (1991) dissertation on 19th-century British ceramics in southwestern Alaska discusses the fact that Spode/Copeland was the sole supplier to the Hudson's Bay Company from 1839 to 1853.

Second, if there really is restricted availability in terms of manufacturer, were trading concerns also influencing consumer choice by selecting as well for vessel decoration and form? We do not have the data at hand to even speculate on this, but we would not be surprised to see supply-side control here as well.

Clearly much more information from the West is needed that will allow evaluation of temporal and spatial patterns in manufacturer, decoration, and vessel form. Based on our admittedly speculative findings, however, we argue that, holding culture and economic status as a constant, different consumer choices might be made in the east and west because of differing availability of goods.

### CONSUMER CHOICES

Having discussed the potential effects of supply side decisions on the ceramics available in much of the west during the Antebellum period we would like to move on to cross-cultural variables affecting ceramic choices. Most models of consumer choice are capitalistic and presume that choices reflect the ability to purchase in either a direct or indirect way and that ceramics share a relatively consistent function across cultures. We believe, however, that there are significant differences in ceramic choice among cultures that are related to the differing roles that ceramics play in those cultures.

Otto (e.g., 1975, 1977, 1984) and others have illustrated this by relating African American and Euroamerican culinary traditions to the differential importance of certain vessel forms in these cultures. Data from Oklahoma and Kansas build on this and indicate that Native American perceptions of ceramics may have differed in other ways that no less profoundly affected their choice of ceramics.

The data that we draw upon come from Antebellum sites in eastern Oklahoma associated with the Five Civilized Tribes and, to a lesser degree, from sites in eastern Kansas associated with Native American groups removed from the Great Lakes region. In both areas, this Native American settlement starts in the late 1820s.

The first observation we make concerns the function of ceramics within these Native American cultures. From artifacts found at habitation sites associated with the Shawnee and Pottawatomie in Kansas and with the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw in Oklahoma, it is clear that ceramics were important utilitarian items that *may* have had similar functions as ceramics on Euroamerican sites of this same period (Rohrbaugh et al. 1971; Gettys 1980; Lees 1993; cf. Baugh 1970; cf. Wyckoff and Barr 1968). At the same time, however, burials associated with the Creek, Chickasaw, and Pottawatomie clearly indicate a broader function for ceramics in these cultures (Bareis 1951; Wilson 1968; Reynolds 1987; Brooks 1992; Lees 1992).

Several examples of ceramics in burial contexts are informative here. Brooks has recently reviewed several sites along the Red River in extreme southeastern Oklahoma; included here is an apparent Chickasaw burial with numerous hand-painted cups and saucers stacked in the grave (Brooks 1992). An apparent Creek burial in east-central Oklahoma was found to contain a footed, "dipped"/mocha bowl, a shell-edge-decorated plate, and a small hand-painted saucer that had been placed at the feet (Wilson 1984). In northeastern Oklahoma, a possible Creek burial was accompanied by three edge-decorated plates, an undecorated white basin, a hand-painted covered tureen, two hand-painted saucers, four "dipped"/mocha footed bowls, and three hand-painted cups (Wilson 1968). These were arranged

around the body, and several pieces were nested. These are but a few examples but they illustrate a clear pattern of intentional placement of in some cases many ceramic items with burials (cf. Waselkov 1993:129). As an aside, it is interesting to note that one of the shell-edge-decorated plates was marked "Henderson Walton & Co. Importers, New Orleans, Davenport."

Thus, in addition to serving a domestic function, European ceramics in these Antebellum Native American cultures also functioned within a religious context. While the ceramics present in the burials may have symbolized domestic uses in an afterlife, their presence is nonetheless part of the religious content of the graves. Because grave goods focused on items of general utilitarian use, the importance of ceramics in these burials may in fact indicate the importance of ceramics in the daily lives of these people.

The preponderance of hand-painted and edge-decorated ceramics in these burial contexts is therefore of utmost interest. While transfer-printed wares are present, they are nowhere as common. Furthermore, hand-painted and edge-decorated wares are found so commonly on Antebellum Native American habitation sites in eastern Oklahoma and Kansas that they are regarded by many as general cultural hallmarks--a conclusion that is strengthened by the much higher frequency of transfer-printed wares found on Euroamerican sites of the period in this same region (cf. Perino and Caffey 1980). A capitalistic model of choice would explain this as a result of the differences between the economic status of the Native American and Euroamerican cultures.

Several factors argue against such an interpretation. First, the importance of ceramics in some burials suggest that these were prominent items in the culture and that they were available in sufficient quantity to allow placement with the dead. This however, does not by itself refute an economic explanation for the predominance of hand-painted and edge-decorated wares on these Native American sites.

Although speculative, we believe that the hand-painted and to a lesser degree the edge-decorated wares were purposefully selected because they are consistent with longstanding artistic traditions of the Native American groups in question. In terms of design and colors, the most striking comparison can be made between the hand-painted ceramics found in these sites and contemporary beadwork. Transfer-printed wares and undecorated wares of this period are seemingly inconsistent with this artistic tradition. We suggest that the Native American cultures represented by these sites established the value of ceramics in an entirely different fashion than did contemporary Euroamericans. Euroamerican cultures valued ceramics based on manufacturing cost as reflected by purchase price, which is the basis for Miller's model. Native American cultures may have instead valued ceramics based not on purchase price but rather on their consistency with an established artistic tradition. Jackson (1991:207-211) also notes that material syncretism was observed among Native American groups in southwestern Alaska in the late 19th century. Among other items, tea cups and saucers were incorporated both in Eskimo and Indian mortuary practices whereby "all things used daily" as well as prized possessions were placed above the grave for use by the deceased." This is a case where certain Euroamerican traits were adapted to conform to preexisting Native American practices in a manner not consistent with those of the disseminating culture.

If our interpretations are valid, and we are a long way from demonstrating this, we can only conclude that a capitalist model of ceramic choice has little value in interpreting Antebellum Native American sites in the Trans-Mississippi West and probably elsewhere as well. Ceramic ranking of the sort proposed by Miller might, in this context, comment more directly on acculturation or association of sites with traditional or progressive factions within the individual groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we note that models of ceramic choice embedded within a theory of a free, capitalistic market are insufficient to explain the economic and cultural setting of the Antebellum period in the West. First, it appears that the rank-and-file consumer did not have free access to the full range of ceramic wares available in North America during this period. It seems rather obvious in a region with limited access to major markets, and then only over rough roads and hazardous waterways, that the variables archaeologists often deal with--need, preference, availability, and function--begin to blur. Second, Native American cultures in this area used ceramics differently than did Euroamerican occupants of North America, and they may have selected ceramics based on how well they reflected Native American artistic traditions.

Existing models of ceramic choice may thus not adequately explain ceramic choice in the Antebellum West. Time and time again we have seen models fail because their use illuminates more variability than can be accounted for. We must not lose sight, however, of the fact that the recognition and explanation of variability in the archaeological record is instrumental for our growing anthropological understanding of the historic past. We are not and have never been one culture, and we cannot expect that one model will ever explain archaeological patterns in all cultural settings.

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Table 1. Marked ceramics from Antebellum sites in Kansas and Oklahoma.

Site	Site type	Ceramic type	Maker	Reference
Wealthy Indian, Oklahoma	1830-1840 Creek burial	shell edge Hand painted Hand painted	Davenport Davenport Clews	Wilson 1968
Pate-Roden, Oklahoma	1830-1850 Choctaw dwelling	Transfer-printed Unknown	Davenport (2) Davenport (6)	Rohrbaugh et al. 1971
<i>Arabia</i> Steamboat, Kansas	1856 steamboat wreck	Misc. Misc. Misc. Misc. Misc. Misc. Misc.	Davenport (157) Wedgwood [= J. Wedge Wood] (94) J. Heath (45) J. Edwards & Dale Hall (39) T. Goodfellow (12) W. Adams (2) J. & R. Boote (1)	Anonymous 1993
Eufaula (MI144), Oklahoma	ca. 1860 Creek burial	shell edge	Davenport	Lees 1992
Pittsburg County, Oklahoma	1830-1850 trading post and dwelling	Hand painted Unknown	Davenport Davenport	Bareis 1951
Vandever-Haworth Oklahoma	1840-1860 domestic refuse pit	shell edge Transfer Transfer Transfer	Davenport Davenport (2) Clews (2) Wm. Ridgway	Baugh 1970
PS212, Oklahoma		Misc. Misc. Hand painted Transfer	Davenport (3) James Edwards Davenport J. Clementson	Gettys 1980