Ceramic Morphological Organization: Quiddity of Shape for Hickory Engraved Bottles

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This study expands upon a previous analysis of the Clarence H. Webb collection, which resulted in the identification of two Caddo bottle shapes used in the manufacture of Hickory Engraved (HE) bottles. The current sample of Caddo bottles adduces three-dimensional meshes from the HE specimens in the Webb collection, as well as 14 new meshes from six sites and one collection, all of which fall under the purview of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Results confirm that HE bottle shape differs significantly by site in some cases, that the two discrete shapes identified in the previous study persist in this larger sample, and that morphological integration is not significant, meaning that those traits used to characterize bottle shape (rim, neck, body, and base) were not found to vary in a coordinated manner. Thus, while results confirm site-specific differences in shape and the manufacture of two discrete bottle shapes, from two different (north-south) geographies, results do not support the hypothesis that Caddo potters adhered to a template of vessel shape associated with specific decorative motifs for this sample of HE bottles.

Results suggest that the shape of HE bottles may be protean, indicating that variability in Caddo bottle shape was not prescribed, but innate. Spatial differences apparent in HE bottle morphology indicate a possible cultural integration for which the etiology remains unclear. The extent to which this division in bottle shape may be supported by other types and categories of Caddo material culture is unknown, although, results from the previous study of the Webb Collection indicate that Smithport Plain bottle shapes articulate with a very similar shift in morphology across the same geographic area. The spatial division is associated with production differences in HE bottle shapes; however, the contribution of time remains undocumented and the putative origin and temporal range for the HE type is not well defined due to the lack of chronometric dates from residues in HE bottles or contexts from which they were recovered. It is possible that one of the north-south bottle shapes represents an earlier manifestation of the HE type and the other is subsequent; though it is also entirely possible that these two inclusions were in operation simultaneously.

Communities of practice differ from communities of identity in that they are social networks where members share a group identity (Eckert 2008:3), and unlike communities of practice, membership is often characterized by conscious decisions, membership in a community of identity articulates with conscious production decisions that emphasize (or deemphasize) group membership in specific social events (Eckert, 2012:55). It is argued here that even though the various shapes of Caddo ceramics are interpreted to be sorts of the deliberate, and thoughtful, decision of Caddo makers, these communities are more readily interpreted as communities of practice rather than communities of identity, since they are representative of an application of ceramic technology rather than a decorative attitude or motif (e.g., Souza Eckert et al., 2013:5).

Communities of Practice

North

South

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