CAHOKIAN IMPORTS OR LOCAL NEGOTIATIONS: RAMEY INCISED TECHNOLOGY IN THE CAIRO LOWLAND

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic studies have shown that certain ceramic traits are less likely to be negotiated during episodes of cultural contact including source clays (clay pastes) and their mineralogical traits, and aspects of adding to and forming ceramic bodies. This project utilizes a microscopic analysis of petrographic thin sections and the point counting method to analyze the ways in which ceramic bodies were constructed by prehistoric peoples and the clay pastes used to do so.

Specifically, this study compares hinterland paste values to those from Cahokia using metrics developed by Boszhardt and Stoltman. They showed that pastes from the American Bottom are 1) low in sand and silt, 2) shell temper composes around 21.3 ± 6.4%, 3) use finely crushed shell, and 4) are slipped and burnished.

Cahokian-like objects in the Cairo Lowland have garnered little inquiry from archaeologists as to what kind of connections they represent between regions.

Three Ramey Incised vessels (Figure 1) were thin-sectioned to determine if they represented imported objects from Cahokia or were local imitations of Cahokian objects.

The vessels are taken from features dating from AD 1175-1300 from the Crosno (23MI11) and Wickliffe Mounds (15BA4) sites.

Research Question: Did these vessels come from Cahokia or were they made using local production practices? And what might this tell us about connections local communities of practice had with the American Bottom?

BACKGROUND & METHODS

- Ramey Incised vessels have similar sand and silt content to local Mississippi Plain vessels (Figures 2 & 3).
- Crosno clays are similar to American Bottom clays when comparing silt and sand content but so are the Mississippi Plain (Figure 3).
- Wickliffe clays contain more silt than those from the American Bottom (Figure 2).
- The Wickliffe Ramey Incised vessel has similar shell grain size and amount added to the vessel body (Figure 6). When compared to local vessels, the shell grain size is significantly smaller.
- The Crosno Ramey Incised vessels have similar a larger shell grain size than those in the American Bottom and have more shell in the ceramic body (Figures 5 & 8).
- Shell preparation for both sites is very different for Ramey vs. Mississippi Plain vessels and Wickliffe vs. Crosno Ramey Incised (Figures 6, 7, and 8).

REFERENCES

- American Bottom clays when comparing silt and sand content but so are the Mississippi Plain (Figure 3).
- Wickliffe clays contain more silt than those from the American Bottom (Figure 2).
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- Shell preparation for both sites is very different for Ramey vs. Mississippi Plain vessels and Wickliffe vs. Crosno Ramey Incised (Figures 6, 7, and 8).

RESULTS

- Shell preparation for both sites is very different for Ramey vs. Mississippi Plain vessels and Wickliffe vs. Crosno Ramey Incised (Figures 6, 7, and 8).

CONCLUSION

- The vessel from Wickliffe heavily emulates production methods from the American Bottom but is formed with Wickliffe clays.
- Crosno vessels #1 & #2 look to be made with Cahokia clays but with non-local production of the ceramic body. Local clays near Crosno could be similar backwater clays as found at Cahokia. Future geochemical studies can confirm this. The Ramey clay bodies are similar in Plain samples.
- Both sites, especially Wickliffe, show emulation of highly visible and invisible production methods hinting at a connection between communities of practice surrounding the production of Ramey Incised.
- Boszhardt and Stoltman’s metrics could be improved with a larger sample to make it more robust for comparisons outside of the American Bottom.