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The Politics of Pottery

Material Culture and Political Process among Algonquians of Seventeenth-Century Southern New England

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Native American communities of 17th-century southern New England were egalitarian societies characterized by open social networks among communities, with individuals able to change their community affiliation. Variation in form and decoration observed in pottery from that time is consistent with the political characteristics of these communities. Where political circumstances underwent unique changes, as they did among the Mohegan community of southern Connecticut, pottery changed in ways that reflected these new conditions. Specifically, the Mohegans responded to the social and political pressures they experienced after the Pequot War by intensified signaling of group identity.

In this chapter I explore the relationships between material culture (pots) and politics among the Native American communities of southern New England in the 17th century. The political landscape of the region was characterized by fluctuating patterns of alliance, confederation, and affiliation among communities (see Burton 1976; Burton and Lowenthal 1974; Johnson 1993, 1999; Robinson 1990; Salisbury 1982; Thomas 1979; cf. Bragdon 1996). As contact with Europeans intensified, epidemic diseases struck parts of the region, and Native communities shifted their political alliances and affiliations, sometimes rapidly. For at least one community—the Mohegans of eastern Connecticut—the changes were particularly rapid, dramatic, and unusual. Through timely alliances, military victories, and diplomatic successes, the Mohegan community's political status increased substantially. At the same time the community grew in

size and changed in composition as refugees from other communities joined the group, sometimes eagerly, sometimes reluctantly. The Mohegans also became isolated from at least some of their former allies as they experienced a prolonged conflict with the Narragansetts and other groups (Burton 1976; De Forest 1964; Johnson 1993; L. Williams 1972).

Within and between Native communities and confederations, political organization, alliance, allegiance, and identity could be varied and dynamic. New ties between communities were forged, and old ones were strengthened, weakened, or ruptured under the pressures, constraints, and opportunities that arose in the wake of epidemics as well as from the fur and wampum trade, from European settlement, and from conflicts. The basic geopolitical unit was the autonomous community—a group of people sharing a homeland or territory. Communities were never isolated; individuals and families sought to create alliances and kinship ties with members of other communities. A group of communities linked by such ties could form the nucleus of a larger political entity, which I call the confederation. Around a relatively stable nucleus of between one and a handful of closely linked communities was a less stable margin. Here weaker ties to the nuclear communities conferred greater autonomy, permitting allies to follow their own interests, sometimes to the point of leaving one confederation for another. This was a complex and dynamic political environment of confederates, allies, subordinates, superiors, and adversaries at many levels (confederations, communities, interest groups, families, and individuals) (see Bragdon 1996; Cave 1996; Johnson 1999; Robinson 1990).

The community affiliation and political identity of individuals appears to have been relatively fluid. There are numerous instances of individuals leaving one community for another. Some made this change upon marriage (local exogamy appears to have been common), others upon changes in their political fortunes. Some changes were precipitated by epidemics, when survivors of stricken groups joined other communities. Perhaps the best documented of many examples of this fluidity is the absorption of many Pequots into the Mohegan and Narragansett communities after the Pequot War in 1637. The key to fluidity of identity was the kinship ties among different communities. Every individual had extensive networks of kin or other allies along which he or she could move relatively freely across the boundaries of communities and confederations, except perhaps in times of conflict (Burton 1976; Johnson 1993, 1999; Robinson 1990).

Archaeological evidence in the form of patterns of variation in material culture—particularly ceramics—is consistent with these conditions: the

political primacy of the community, the ephemeral and highly variable nature of confederation, the fluidity of individual identity, and the general permeability of social boundaries. Although the ceramics of southern New England vary in form and decoration, there is little indication that these variations reflect social boundaries between either communities or confederations (Goodby 1992, 1994, 1998). However, there is an exception to this pattern—the pottery made and used at Fort Shantok, the fortified settlement on the Thames River in southern Connecticut that was the political core of the Mohegan community (fig. 4.1).

The Mohegan Community in the 17th Century

Before 1636 the Mohegans were close but subordinate allies of the communities that formed the nucleus of the Pequot confederation. Many kinship ties linked Mohegans and Pequots. For example, the Mohegan sachem Uncas was married to the sister of the Pequots' principal sachem, Sassacus. Although the Pequot confederation at one time included allied communities throughout the Long Island Sound region, the confederation began to disintegrate in the 1630s owing to epidemics, conflicts with other Native groups, and the death of their principal sachem (Sassacus's father) at the hands of the Dutch in 1634. Even Uncas, despite his kinship with Sassacus, had made several unsuccessful attempts to overturn his community's subordinate status. When the English attacked the weakened Pequots in 1636, Uncas and the Mohegans joined in eliminating their former allies as a regional power (Cave 1996; Johnson 1993, 1996; Salisbury 1982:208–10; Trumbull 1859:478–80).

After the war, Uncas and the Mohegans created a Mohegan confederation, centered around Fort Shantok, a fortified settlement on the Thames River in present-day Montville, Connecticut. The Mohegans attracted new members from other communities, especially Pequots, and before long were competing with the Narragansetts for the allegiance of former Pequot allies. The Mohegans soon found themselves at war with the Narragansetts and *their* Native allies. This conflict lasted more than twenty years and included several large battles, numerous raids, murders, assassination attempts, English intervention (always on the Mohegans' behalf), and incessant political maneuvering (Burton 1976; Burton and Lowenthal 1974; De Forest 1964; Johnson 1993, 1996).

This pattern of alliances and enmities constrained the fluidity of individual identity and created a social boundary between the Mohegans and many other Native groups. The Mohegans survived their partial isolation

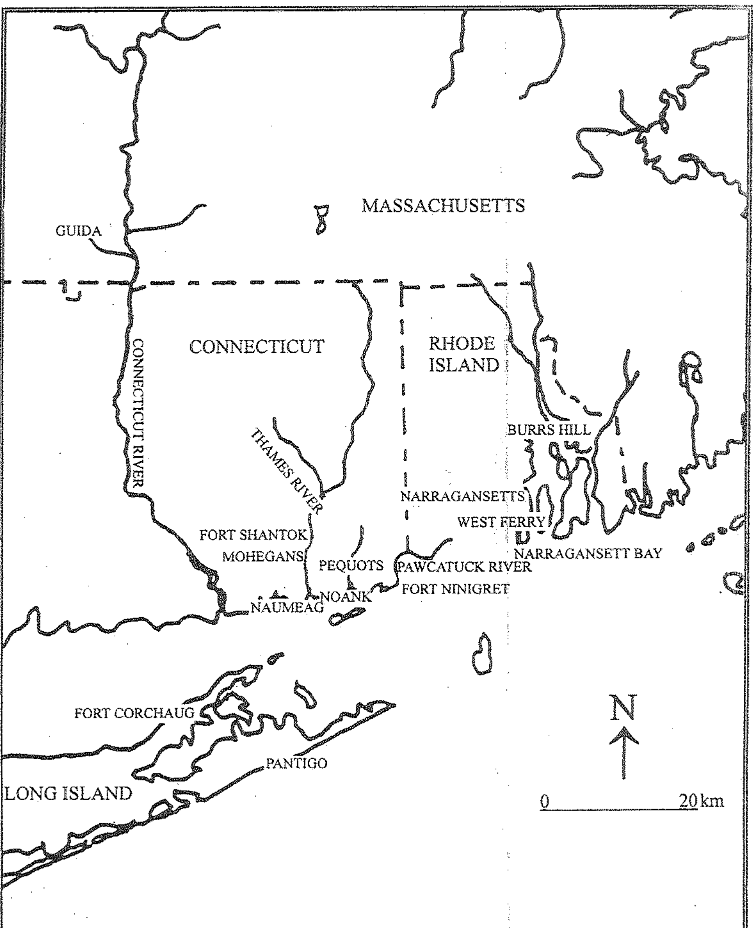

Fig. 4.1. Map of southern New England showing significant places mentioned in the chapter

through Uncas's deft manipulation of their English allies, alliance building with Native groups through marriages (he made at least seven marriages with women of influential families), and, on occasion, coercion (Burton 1976; Burton and Lowenthal 1974; Johnson 1993, 1996; R. Williams 1963:108, 109, 137).

The residents of Shantok were a diverse group. They faced unusually closed social boundaries because many of their Native neighbors were either committed enemies in a state of perpetual cold war (the Narragansetts and most of the Connecticut River communities) or reluctant

allies (for example, the Naumeag Pequots). Although the Mohegans had English allies, there was certainly a social boundary between them. Under these conditions, group cohesion must have been under stress. In 1649 the Narragansetts attempted to exploit the Mohegans' diversity in order to split the community. They arranged a marriage between an influential Pequot woman and one of their close allies. This was intended to draw Pequots away from the Mohegans to the Narragansett side of the ongoing conflict (De Forest 1964; Pulsifer 1859:145). One strategy at least some of the Mohegans used to counter this pressure was the production of material culture with new, distinct design elements that expressed messages of community solidarity.

Pottery, Identity, and Style

That material culture played a role in political processes in 17th-century Native southern New England is abundantly clear. There was also a relationship between formal style in material culture and political process in 17th-century southern New England. Specifically, the political and social strains experienced within the Mohegan community after the Pequot War were expressed and responded to through intensified signaling of group identity. This affirmation of Mohegan identity was reflected in the inception of a new and distinctive Mohegan ceramic style, characterized by relative internal homogeneity and external differentiation.

Archaeologists have examined cultural variation and change in time and space through the record of stylistic variation in material culture, including ceramic form and decoration. These variations have been studied as they relate to information exchange (Wobst 1977:321), social interaction, and the learning and communication of style (Deetz 1965; Engelbrecht 1974; Longacre 1970; Whallon 1968). Although social interaction can indeed influence the spatial distribution of styles, this alone is insufficient to explain all stylistic patterning (Conkey 1990; Hodder 1978, 1979; Weissner 1983). Other factors that may influence patterning and variation in ceramics include technological and environmental variables (Arnold 1985; Chilton 1996, 1998), social boundaries (Stark 1998), inter-group competition (Hodder 1979), or intergender tensions (Handsman 1988a, 1990; Wright 1991). Since many potential factors influence stylistic variability in complex ways, and none can be consistently applied cross-culturally, stylistic variability must, ultimately, be explained with reference to particular historical circumstances (Braun 1991). Recent studies of style and social boundaries in northeastern North America (e.g., Brumbach 1975; Chilton 1996, 1998; Goodby 1994, 1998) have emphasized this particularist approach (Stark 1998). These studies of ceramic style suggest that a diversity of factors contribute to ceramic design. The messages encoded in ceramics or any other item of material culture may include a wide variety of diverse statements. Rarely do they send an unambiguous signal of group identity.

Native material culture in southern New England contained many items whose form and decoration had meaning. Among these were wampum belts (R. Williams 1973:213–14); effigy pestles (Volmar 1992); baskets (McMullen and Handsman 1987; Wood 1977:114); wooden and bark bowls, utensils, and mortars (Speck 1915); and clothing and the embroidered mats that lined the inner walls of wigwams (Josselyn 1833: 295, 297, 307; R. Williams 1973:118). The human body itself was often decorated with paint or tattoos (Wood 1977:85). The designs of 19th-century baskets and other, older items contain recurring elements (Speck 1915) that have symbolic meanings relating to community, cosmology, spiritual force, and the journey through life (Tantaquidgeon and Fawcett 1987). Some 17th-century ceramic designs have also been interpreted as affirming women's traditional social roles in the face of social changes (Handsman 1988a, 1990).

Of the several types of information transmitted through material culture, one of the most important is personal and social identity, which, according to Weissner (1983:256–57), is expressed in two ways. One is distinction from others; the other is identification with a group. The former is expressed through what Weissner (1983:258) calls "assertive style." This is personally based and transmits a message of individual distinctiveness. The distributions of assertive styles may be sensitive to factors affecting social interaction such as interpersonal contact, trade, marriage and residency patterns, contact within or across boundaries, or individual participation in political struggles or social conflicts.

The expression of identity through association with a group is expressed through "emblemic style." Emblemic style, as defined by Weissner (1983:257), has a distinct referent, most commonly a social group and its norms, values, property, and other characteristics. It transmits a clear message to a defined target population about conscious affiliation or identity. It should be strikingly uniform and clear within the boundaries of the referent group. Emblemic style, argues Weissner (1983:272), is best suited for expressing group affiliation under stressful conditions because of its efficiency for transferring recurrent messages to a socially distant segment of a population (Wobst 1977).

Several factors suggest that such signaling of group affiliation is an important determinant of the form of the ceramics associated with the Mohegans of the mid to late 17th century. I argue that: (1) signaling through material culture would be expected under the social circumstances of the Mohegans of Shantok; (2) pottery would have been an effective vehicle for such messages; and (3) messages of group identity would have been a component of Fort Shantok ceramic style.

Wobst (1977:323–26) argues that material culture is most effective as a means of information exchange between groups of intermediate social distance. Family members and close friends can easily receive messages through other modes of communication, or already know the messages. Members of groups that are socially very distant will not encounter and cannot interpret the message. Members of intermediate groups, however, can interpret the message and are likely to encounter the object(s) on which it is encoded, which makes them the ideal "target group" for stylistic signaling. Most Native American communities would consist of relatives and close friends, although, since group affiliation was relatively fluid, there would always be some element of a target population within any given community. Target groups for Native stylistic signaling were other Native communities, especially those less closely tied through kinship and alliance. Members of other communities would be likely to encounter the message and be able to decode it.

When members of different, but not socially distant communities began to live together, such signaling increased, since interactions with members of target groups intensified. The kinds of artifacts that carry stylistic signals expanded to include items that may not previously have carried such information because they were less visible to members of the target group, but were becoming more frequently seen. Fort Shantok, with its large size and diverse population, represents just such a scenario. The pottery made by the people of Shantok began to carry an increased load of stylistic information.

Material objects that are efficient for transmitting messages, such as those that can be viewed from a distance, or are likely to be viewed by a target group, especially during significant events, are most likely to contain stylistic information. Those artifacts that undergo many transformational stages during which stylistic information can be added, and those that have a long use life and are thus seen by many, will also be ideal for transmitting stylistic information (Weissner 1983:259; Wobst 1977). The artifacts best suited for carrying information about groups and boundaries are those with widely shared social, economic, political, and symbolic importance (Weissner 1983:272). Although pots cannot be viewed from a great distance, they possess characteristics that suit them for a role as information media. They undergo enough transformational stages in their manufacture that they can be encoded with attributes of shape and decoration. Although the use life of southern New England Native ceramics has never been investigated, it seems likely that some pots might last for as long as several years. Finally, and most importantly, that stylistic attributes of pottery should communicate to an audience beyond the family domestic unit is suggested by the importance of feasting and visiting outside of the immediate domestic circle. It was in ceramic vessels that food was cooked and presented in meals associated with rituals, feasts, and political negotiations. The pots used in cooking would thus be seen by many members of the community, relatives living outside the settlement, other allies, and other individuals, at least occasionally in politically charged settings. The symbols encoded on or embodied in vessels interred with the dead may also be assumed to have meaning to the living during mortuary ritual.

There are some hints that the practice of using designs or symbols to signal group identity dates back to the 17th century. For example, during the Pequot War, Narragansetts used colored paint or cloth tied around the head to mark themselves as allies to the English (R. Williams 1963:30). This may have been an adaptation of a more subtle Native practice of symbolizing group identity. William Wood's description of tattoos suggests that symbols may have been used to signify ancestry—a form of group affiliation: "Others have certain round impressions down the outside of their arms and breasts in form of mullets or spur-rowels, which they imprint by searing irons. Whether these be foils to illustrate their unparalleled beauty (as they deem it) or arms to blazon their antique gentility, I cannot easily determine" (1977:85).

The residents of Shantok constituted a population of very diverse origins: Mohegans, Pequots, refugees from eastern Massachusetts, individuals from Long Island, and people from other southern New England Native communities. Under these conditions, if assertive style, expressing the potter's individual identity to the rest of the community, was predominant, we should expect a great variety and diversity of pottery styles, reflecting the great diversity of potters coming from different local traditions. However, although the ceramics at Shantok are certainly not homogeneous, they do show significant consistencies.

Out of a diversity of people, the Mohegans built a group identity. A pattern of alliances and enmities created a social boundary around the

Mohegans at this time. Like many other Native communities, they were engaged in intense competition with other Native communities for a dwindling land base, an unreliable fur trade, and increasingly belligerent and slippery English and other European allies. Many of the Mohegans, including the sachem Uncas and those who had an interest in maintaining his position, tried to encourage and affirm a unified community identity, and to practice or encourage any behavior that stressed unity within their diverse community. Such practices included pottery manufacture that incorporated new, distinct design elements in an emblemic style.

In a very different vein, Handsman (1988a, 1990) has argued that some of the designs on Mohegan ceramics reflect tensions between genders related to the stresses of European contact (see also Nassaney, chap. 15). That such tensions were real, and that their expression involved certain material items linked to women's work and women's power (e.g., mortars and pestles), are also suggested by oral tradition, specifically the story of Chahnameed (Simmons 1986:274–76; Speck 1903; cf. Handsman 1988b). Women potters' affirmation of traditional women's social roles and the power associated with those roles may indeed be expressed in a variety of material items. Such expression is not incompatible with my argument that Shantok pottery reflects emblemic style. In fact, potentially divisive social tensions may be denied or masked through emblemic style; alternatively, both group identity and factionalism may be expressed through the same object. Alongside the need for potters to express or comment on their identities as women was a need to express their identities as Mohegans. The former discourse was located within the community and was occurring within other contemporary Native communities; it should be evident in material culture (for example, effigy pestles [Volmar 1992]) distributed throughout southern New England. The latter discourse was located specifically within the Mohegan community, although it spoke to a wider social environment. Although both gender and community identity may have been expressed on the same pots, Mohegan identity should be expressed in ceramics distributed predominantly within the Mohegan homeland.

Pre- and Post-Contact Period Ceramics of Southern New England

Seventeenth-century documents tell us little about the production, use, or significance of indigenous ceramics. Pottery is rarely mentioned by English or other European chroniclers of early New England. Roger Williams (1973:215) observed that "the Women make all their earthen vessels." Since pottery was the purview of Native women, it should not be surprising that it, like other women's activities, was seldom reported by European men. From these few hints, it is generally assumed that pottery was produced by women for their households or other close kin, and that skill in ceramic production was widely distributed rather than restricted to a few specialists.

The ceramics from Fort Shantok are so distinct that they have defined one of the traditional archaeological pottery types of southern New England—Shantok ware. Shantok ware was originally defined by Rouse (1945, 1980) and Smith (1980). Salwen (1969:83–85) revised their descriptions on the basis of his analysis of a larger sample. Lorraine Williams (1972) contributed additional analysis of the Fort Shantok ceramics as well as a large assemblage from Fort Corchaug, Long Island, which she described as a local expression of Shantok ware. Taken together, these archaeologists describe Shantok pottery as consisting of large, globular pots with distinctive collars and neck treatments. Vessels are thin walled (average thickness 6 mm), and bodies are globular or elongate-globular in shape. There are round bottoms, pronounced shoulders, constricted necks, and thickened or applied high collars with up to four, often conspicuous, castellations (fig. 4.2), which occasionally terminate in modeled nodes. Collars (including lips, lobes, nodes, and castellations) are decorated with impressed, punctate, modeled, or extruded decoration. Bands or plats of horizontal, vertical, or diagonal impressed lines are common on collars. Williams (1972) notes that what appear to be incised lines are actually impressed and dragged lines. Bodies are plain, with smooth surfaces on both interior and exterior.

Salwen (1969:84–85) defined three subtypes of Shantok ware on the basis of decorative treatment of the vessel neck. Subtype A is characterized either by no decoration or by treatment limited to a single row of punctates or short impressed lines at the base of the neck. In pots of subtype B, the bases of the collars are marked with a series of prominent triangular lobes or "bosses," which are either carved out of the vessel wall or applied (fig. 4.3). These are decorated with a single vertical impressed line and crossed by horizontal impressed lines, a motif that is also frequently employed on castellations. Subtype C is characterized by extruded bands, usually four in number, encircling the neck of the vessel below the collar and decorated with diagonal impressed lines and notching at the base of each. Paste was characterized by Salwen (1969:84) as fairly hard (3–4 on the Mohs scale) and buff to black in color, with grays predominating. Temper is almost exclusively shell in large amounts.

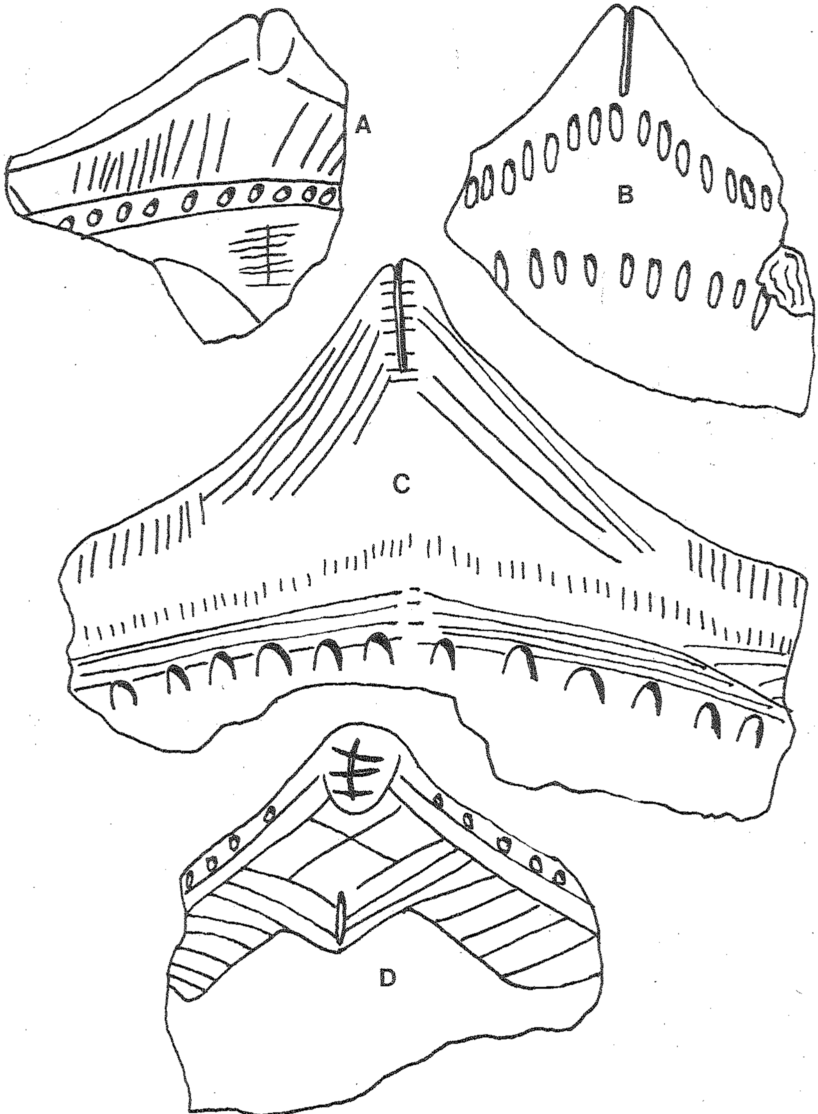

Fig. 4.2. Ceramic vessels from Fort Shantok showing castellations

Shantok pottery predominates at Fort Shantok and Noank in Connecticut, and at Fort Corchaug in eastern Long Island (Smith 1980:55; L. Williams 1972).

How does Shantok pottery compare with other contemporary ceramics from southern New England, specifically Niantic and Hackney Pond types? Descriptions of the latter two are necessary for such a comparison. Niantic pottery was, like Shantok, first defined by Rouse (1945). He characterized Niantic pottery as having thin and fine-grained paste with either shell or grit temper (the former predominating). Vessels have globular bodies, round bottoms, necks, and castellated collars. Interiors are entirely smooth and exteriors are decorated on the collars with impressed "Iroquois-like designs" (Rouse 1980:70). Incised and punctate designs are rare (Smith 1950:133). Decorative motifs include opposed diagonal, horizontal, or vertical lines bordered above and below by horizontal lines (Smith 1950; Lavin 1980), or a band of parallel horizontal lines bordered above and/or below by a row of short vertical or oblique lines (Lavin 1980:26).

Hackney Pond ceramics were defined by McBride (1984:154–65) as an identifiable pottery type within the Windsor ceramic tradition, associated with the Hackney Pond phase (A.D. 1600–1700) in the lower Connecticut Valley and contemporary with the Shantok tradition. Hackney Pond is an internally diverse type that includes both "Guida tradition" pottery, as defined by Byers and Rouse (1960) in their analysis of the Guida site in Westfield, Massachusetts, and elements (including Guida) ascribed to the Niantic phase of the Windsor tradition by Lavin (1980). Hackney Pond ceramics share many similarities with Shantok ware, but also differ in significant ways. The most important differences are in paste characteristics and decorative technique. Temper on Hackney Pond ceramics is fine mineral, described by Byers and Rouse (1960) at the Guida site as "fine micaceous." Paste is softer than that of Shantok ware and tends to flake. Decoration consists of incised lines, generally similar to those of Shantok ware but differing somewhat in arrangement and placement of design elements. In contrast to Shantok pottery, Hackney Pond does not exhibit nodes, bosses, or modeled figures. Although lobes are sometimes present, they are less prominent, never applied, and "consist of deep, wide incisions rather than distinct spaces" (McBride 1984:162–63).

In summary, although Shantok shares many decorative attributes with contemporary wares, such as the range of decorative motifs including opposed oblique lines, it can be distinguished by certain decorative characteristics. Specifically, the applied or extruded lobes or notched rings

along the base of the collars (Rouse 1980; L. Williams 1972:346–55) are considered to be almost entirely unique to Shantok ware. The prominent castellations and their occasional modeling are also most often associated with Shantok ware, although Niantic ware and other Northeastern pottery styles occasionally exhibit these attributes.

Archaeologists initially hypothesized that Shantok was an intrusive tradition, not rooted in the Late Woodland Windsor-tradition ceramics that preceded it, and that culminated in the 17th-century Niantic ceramics of eastern Connecticut and Long Island (Smith 1980:50). In part, this was the result of the persistence of explanatory mechanisms such as migration, invasion, and diffusion that dominated the discipline (e.g., Rouse 1980:73), as well as the distinctive formal characteristics of the pottery. More recently, the origin of Shantok and its relationship to contemporary southern New England ceramics has been reinterpreted and debated. Salwen (1969:83) writes that while Shantok pottery "does, indeed, have some striking characteristics of its own, it at the same time shares many others with pottery attributable to the historic groups that were neighbors of the Mohegan-Pequot." These shared characteristics include collars with occasional castellations, smooth surfaces, and globular to semi-globular bodies. Differences are confined to paste composition and decorative technique. Archaeologists continue to discuss the significance and meaning of Shantok ware. Lavin (1986) affords Shantok a separate status, outside of the Windsor tradition. McBride (1984:161–62) argues that although Shantok is distinct in some ways, it "may in fact be better defined as a [17th-century] horizon style with various local and regional expressions." He further notes that the Late Woodland–Contact period "traditions" share many characteristics and appear to be closely related. Lizee (1989a, 1989b) places Shantok within the Windsor tradition, contemporary with Hackney Pond and Niantic ceramics.

The distribution of the various pottery types within southern New England indicates that Shantok ware is associated with the 17th-century Mohegans and their allies. Shantok ware is largely restricted to southern Connecticut, west of the Thames River, within the historic Mohegan homeland, including Fort Shantok. A sizeable sample has been recovered from Fort Corchaug, Long Island (Smith 1980; Solecki 1950; L. Williams 1972). East of the Thames and west of the Pawcatuck River—within the Pequot homeland—Hackney Pond and Niantic wares predominate at 17th-century sites, including the Mystic Fort (McBride 1990:99). Beyond these areas isolated pieces of Shantok or Shantok-like pottery have been reported from Narragansett Bay (Mrozowski 1980:86–87; Simmons 1970:89–91), eastern Massachusetts (Salwen 1969:86), and Pantigo Cemetery (Saville 1920:87–88) in eastern Long Island.

Lizee (1989a) analyzed small samples of Niantic, Hackney Pond, and Shantok ceramics. At least some, if not all, of the examples of the latter were from Fort Shantok. His purpose was to characterize the degree of stylistic (i.e., two-dimensional decorative treatment such as lines) and morphological (i.e., three-dimensional decorative treatment such as lobes or castellations) similarity within and among the types. His results suggest that the types contained similar variation in terms of both two- and three-dimensional decorative treatment. For example, line orientation was no more diverse within Niantic than within Shantok ware. All types exhibited similarly low degrees of internal morphological similarity, and even less similarity with one another (Lizee 1989a:7–10).

Lizee's data also affirm that the presence of lobes and modeling are strongly associated with Shantok ware. In his study sample, which consisted of 29 rim sherds representing 20 Niantic vessels and 7 Shantock vessels, but only 2 Hackney Pond vessels, *only* Shantok pots exhibited these decorative treatments. More than half of the Shantok vessels sampled contained lobes (4 of 7, or 57 percent) and/or modeling (5 of 7, or 71 percent). Several other attributes were strongly, although not exclusively, associated with Shantok ware. For example, castellations were present on 5 of 7 (71 percent) Shantok vessels, on neither of the Hackney Pond sherds, and on only 6 of 20 (30 percent) of the Niantic examples. Everted rims were present on 3 of 7 (42 percent) Shantok pots, on neither of the Hackney Pond pots, and on only 2 of the 20 (10 percent) Niantic vessels, which tended to have inverted rims (11 of 20, or 55 percent). Notching was also most often associated with Shantok (4 of 7, or 57 percent), and less often associated with Niantic (1 of 20, or 5 percent), although it was present on 1 of the 2 Hackney Pond sherds (50 percent) (Lizee 1989a:Tables 2,3). The results of this study suggest that the ceramics made at Fort Shantok were distinct, in important and highly visible ways, from the pottery made at roughly contemporary sites in other parts of southern Connecticut. The Shantok pottery was characterized by highly visible lobes, castellations, and notches, which were rare or absent on the ceramics made at other sites.

Fort Shantok Ceramics

Comparing samples defined typologically can yield suggestive information, as Lizee's study shows, but it should not be the only analytical under-

taking. It is equally important to compare samples defined by provenience, in order to compare behaviors among different communities or even larger social units. In these cases, the significant unit is the site, representing the community, or the region, representing the confederation, rather than the type, which represents archaeologists' sometimes inchoate interpretations of a complex of technological, morphological, and stylistic variables. Of particular interest in this case is the ceramic assemblage from Fort Shantok, the primary settlement of the Mohegan community.

The assemblage from Fort Shantok is perhaps the largest and most thoroughly studied assemblage of Contact-period ceramics in southern New England (see, for example, Handsman 1989; Johnson 1993; Lizee 1989a, 1989b; Lizee et al. 1995; Salwen 1966, 1969; L. Williams 1972). The site's location and its association with the Mohegan community have been widely known since the 17th century. It has been subjected to looting and surface collecting for many years. Among the largest amateur collections from the site is that of Edward H. Rodgers. His collection is presently curated by the Institute for American Indian Studies in Washington, Connecticut. Professional archaeologists began excavating at Shantok in the 1960s. From 1962 to 1970 Bert Salwen directed excavations at the site. The results of these excavations are summarized in a doctoral dissertation by Williams (1972), who worked at the site along with Salwen. More recently, ceramic material from Shantok has been reanalyzed by Lizee (1989a, 1989b; Lizee et al. 1995) and the author (Johnson 1993). The following summary and discussion focuses on two questions. First, is the diversity of the Fort Shantok ceramics significantly greater or less than that from other contemporary sites? Second, are there recurring motifs associated with the Fort Shantok pottery that are rare or absent elsewhere? Such motifs may represent emblemic style.

Williams analyzed thirty-five vessels from Fort Shantok. Her analysis focused on attributes of vessel shape (especially profile) and decoration. She characterized the assemblage as exhibiting a "wide range of variation" (1972:347), and identified six separate subtypes or classes based on correlations of attributes (particularly profile shapes and decorative motifs). Williams's analysis does show that the Shantok assemblage contains considerable variation in such decorative elements as technique of decoration, the numbers of lobes or notched rings, and the presence or absence of applied collars. It thus demonstrates the value of going beyond a simple reliance on typological description, in which all the ceramics would be simply characterized as Shantok ware.

The significance of the various classes she defines is not readily explained. She suggests that some of the classes may have represented the pottery of "surrounding Indian groups" (L. Williams 1972:135). It is also possible that the classes represent variations on a single motif. The notched rings and lobes, while somewhat different, do share important similarities. Both produce the effect of protrusions of decorated surface around the upper portion of the vessel. In this respect they may be considered similar decorative motifs. Moreover, the two techniques are not always readily distinguishable. A notched ring can closely resemble a ring of lobes. My own analysis, which documents considerable variation in the size, shape, and technique of the lobes, further suggests that lobes and notched rings may simply represent a variety of techniques for producing a motif that encompasses considerable variation.

My analysis of a sample of sherds from twenty-five vessels from Fort Shantok (see Johnson 1993:289–94, 322–23) yielded results similar to those of Lizee in terms of recurrent decorative motifs. Because I did not select my sample based on types, but on site provenience, it may be expected that my sample might exhibit greater variation, since aberrant forms will not have been excluded through the classification process.

The ceramics I analyzed were from the Rodgers collection, curated at the Institute for American Indian Studies. This small sample was not included in Williams's analysis of the Fort Shantok ceramics. Since my goal in examining the Shantok pottery was to identify signaling, I analyzed only visible decorative attributes—design elements and motifs and their placement on the vessel. For each vessel, the motifs present and their arrangement on the vessel's collar and neck were recorded using a system similar in many respects to that used by Williams (1972:135–39, 345–63), although I did not use the six classes defined in her analysis. These data were then analyzed in order to identify recurring elements, as well as elements that were less pervasive within the site assemblage.

As was the case in Lizee's sample, castellations and lobes were common decorative elements. However, modeling beyond that employed in creating some of the castellations and lobes was not present on any of the sherds. Castellations (fig. 4.2) were present on at least nine of the twenty-five vessels (36 percent). Two others were probably castellated, judged on the basis of rim thickness and angle, and the others were too fragmentary to determine whether castellations were present or absent. All complete castellations were decorated with a single vertical line, which was sometimes accompanied by horizontal lines to form a design variously referred to as a "corncob," "caterpillar," or "skeleton." Lobes were also common. Of the twenty-one vessels for which the presence or absence of lobes could

be determined, fifteen (71 percent) exhibited lobes at the base of the collar. These lobes generally took the form of an inverted triangle, but varied considerably in the manner of their creation, their size, prominence, and decorative treatment. Some lobes were made by pushing clay out from inside the vessel (extrusion), leaving a hollow impression behind the lobe. Others were created by applying clay to the vessel's outer surface (application); others were fashioned by cutting or carving the vessel surface before firing, and some vessels showed evidence of two or more of these techniques. Lobe shape and size exhibited considerable variation (fig. 4.3). Some protruded more than 18 mm from the collar and even farther from the neck; others were almost even with the surrounding vessel surface. Maximum width of the lobes varied from 5 to 75 mm, and maximum height varied from 8 to 70 mm. Lobes were decorated with a variety of linear or notched designs; most common among these were oblique or horizontal lines cut by a single vertical line similar to the decoration on many of the castellations, but sometimes so short and deep as to resemble a punctate.

The variation in method of manufacture, size, and shape suggests that it is not any specific aspect of the lobes, but the lobes themselves, that are the common signal in these vessels. Of the many decorative treatments, the presence of inverted triangular lobes or notched rings around the base of the collar is one that appears to be common, if not pervasive, at Fort Shantok. Other decorative elements, including the treatment of the spaces created by the lobes or rings themselves, appear to be more variable. This pattern suggests that the various arrays of lines, punctates, notches, and impressions may reflect either assertive style, stylistic ideas common throughout the Northeast, or emblemic style representing a subgroup within the Mohegan community such as lineage, gender, or political faction. The highly visible lobes or rings themselves may represent emblemic style: a mark of Mohegan identity.

Contemporary Ceramics from Other Sites

How do contemporary assemblages from other sites compare to that of Fort Shantok? This question is difficult to answer conclusively because there are few contemporary assemblages that are comparable in size and context. Moreover, the use of typological analysis, which has predominated until very recently, makes it difficult to characterize assemblage variability. However, analysis of ceramic assemblages from eastern Long Is-

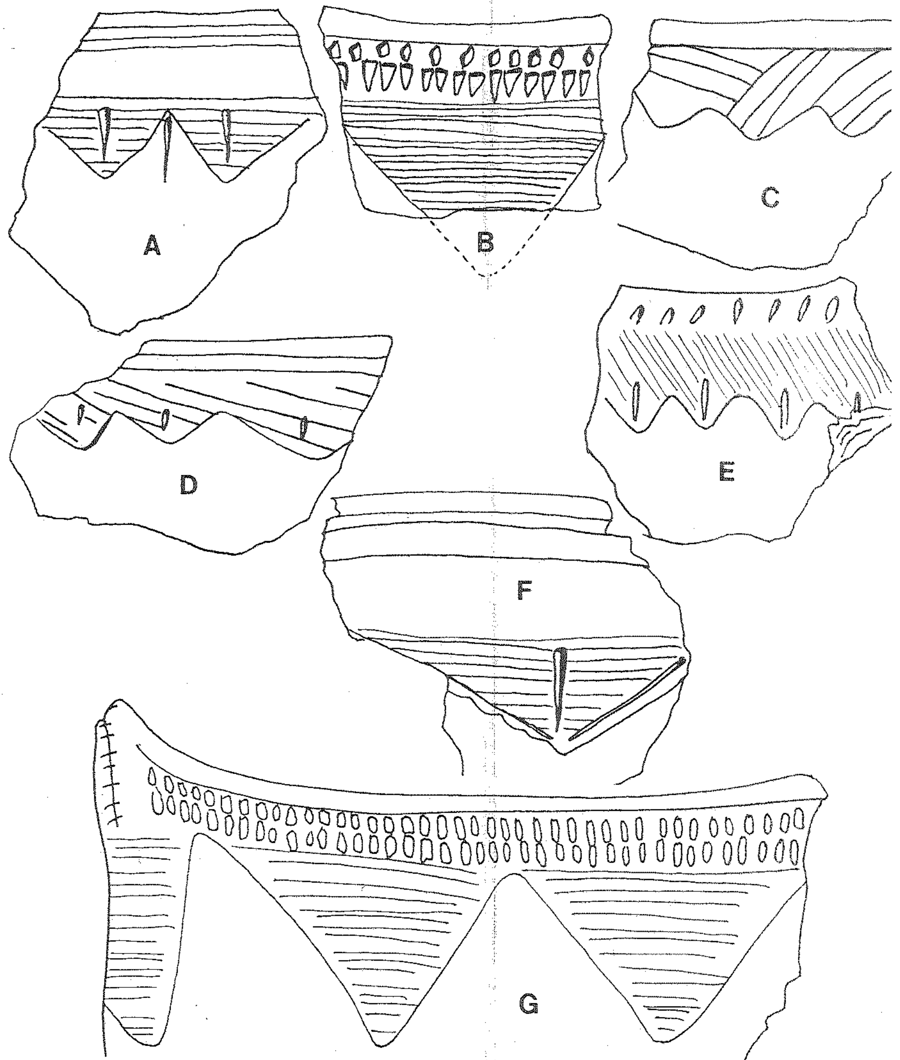

Fig. 4.3. Ceramic vessels from Fort Shantok showing lobes

land, the Narragansett Bay area, and the Fort Ninigret site, do provide some suggestive comparisons with Fort Shantok.

One 17th-century site on Long Island appears to share many ceramic attributes with Fort Shantok. This is Fort Corchaug, a fortified settlement, smaller than Shantok, which was associated with the Corchaug community of eastern Long Island. The site was excavated between 1936 and 1948 by Solecki (1950), and tested again in 1968 by Williams (1972). On the basis of the dates of European goods found at the site, the fort is thought to have been occupied during the first half of the 17th century (Solecki and Williams 1998).

From Solecki's and Williams's excavations, Williams analyzed a combined sample of 1,529 sherds of which 194 were decorated. All decorated sherds were similar to those from Fort Shantok; all of the decorative techniques and motifs encountered at Corchaug (including castellations, notched rings, and triangular nodes) were also represented at Shantok, although the reverse was not true (L. Williams 1972:370). An explanation for these similarities may be sought in the political environment of the inhabitants of Fort Corchaug.

The Corchaugs appear to have been part of a confederation of at least four eastern Long Island communities, sometimes called the Montauk Confederacy, whose sachems were referred to as brothers during at least part of the 17th century. Prior to the Pequot War, the Corchaugs and the other eastern Long Island communities were part of the Pequot Confederation. After the war, these groups became embroiled in the complex of alliances, land sales, tribute payments, threats, and acts of coercion among the Mohegans, Narragansetts, Niantics, English, and Dutch. Their uncertain status and their position as primary sources of wampum made them occasional targets of demands for and extortion of wampum on the part of both the Niantics and the Narragansetts (Ales 1979:49–61; L. Williams 1972:36; Winthrop 1944:43). At other times they were treated as allies, or at least potential allies, by, for example, Miantonomi in 1642 (Gardener 1897:142). Their relations with the Mohegans are even less well documented. However, at times both shared important English allies and Native enemies, both had been members of the Pequot Confederation, and both were apparently linked by kinship. Ales (1979:29) states that the two groups "were in close political, social and commercial contact." Fidelia Fielding, the renowned keeper of many Mohegan traditions, told Speck (1909:197) that "the old time Mohegans used to go down the Thames River and across Long Island Sound in dug out canoes. They were fond of visiting the Indians over there."

Simmons (1986:83) dates the events in Fielding's story to about 1740, but it likely reflects a relationship that predates the 18th century. In any case, it is certain that at least some of the inhabitants of Corchaug shared both kinship ties and political and economic interests with the inhabitants of Shantok. The ceramic evidence suggests that some of the Corchaugs attempted to signal an alliance or even identity with the Mohegans of Shantok through their material surroundings (e.g., ceramics).

Although the relationship between the Mohegans and the Corchaugs appears to have been generally close and cooperative, the opposite is certainly true for the Mohegans and the Narragansetts and Niantics. It should be unlikely that members of these communities would be signaling Mohegan identity. However, Shantok-tradition pottery, or at least pottery with some similarities to Shantok ware, has been recovered from several Contact-period sites within the historic territories of the Narragansett and Pokanoket-Wampanoag Confederations in what is now Rhode Island. A vessel from burial 6 at the West Ferry site in Jamestown contained a pot similar in decorative technique to those from Shantok; its short collar features a ring of inverted triangular lobes, each bisected by a vertical line. Unlike the pottery from Shantok, this vessel was not shell-tempered (Simmons 1970:89–93). Also from West Ferry, in the so-called "chief's" burial, was a shell-tempered pot with castellations and "vertically split [inverted triangular] nodes [lobes]" (Simmons 1970:156–58). The Burr's Hill cemetery in Warren contained an unusual double-collared pot that showed some similarities to Shantok pottery. It exhibited castellations with applied, deeply notched lobes, and coarse shell temper (Mrozowski 1980:86).

There are several possible explanations for the presence of these pots. They may have been acquired through exchange, discarded at the site by visiting Mohegans, or made at the site as local copies of Shantok pottery that borrow some of the motifs without the meanings. The latter is possible, especially if the target audience for Shantok pottery is the local community or immediate neighbors. Despite the frequent wars and tensions between the Mohegans and Narragansetts, there were undoubtedly genealogical ties between some members of the two groups, as Uncas himself claimed, and there must have been some contact, either directly or through intermediaries.

Is there any evidence for stylistic signaling of group identity through pottery among the Narragansetts, Pokanokets, or their member communities? At this point, it is unrecognized. Goodby's (1992, 1994, 1998) analysis of Late Woodland and Contact-period ceramics from the Narra-

gansett Bay area uncovered significant diversity in stylistic attributes both within and among sites, along with evidence of an apparent intensification of decorative treatment in the Late Woodland and Contact periods. Goodby lists a variety of factors that may have been related to both the increasing volume of ceramic stylistic content and the specific meanings of ceramic decoration. These include (1) an apparent decline in long-distance interaction, (2) increased sedentism, (3) increasing reliance on horticulture, and (4) elaboration and differentiation of mortuary practices. Reasoning from this historical context, he further suggests three possible, nonexclusive, interpretations of ceramic style. It may express: (1) local social affiliation, such as residence unit or descent group, (2) "tribal" affiliation, or (3) gender categories that reflect a struggle over changing relations in production inherent in horticultural intensification and the growth of the fur trade (Goodby 1992). However, within the Narragansett Bay region, Goodby is unable to differentiate local decorative styles among communities or even to distinguish between Narragansett and Pokanoket ceramic styles. This pattern suggests that "no single ceramic design was being used to mark what some anthropologists [e.g., Speck 1928] have regarded as 'tribal' territories" (Goodby 1992:14).

Evidence from the Niantic site of Fort Ninigret also suggests that some Shantok or Shantok-like pottery was making its way into southern Rhode Island. However, although the ceramics from this site resemble Shantok ware technologically, they lack the distinctive decorative treatments of the pottery from Fort Shantok, and therefore are significantly different from Shantok ware in the most important ways. Fort Ninigret is located in present-day Charlestown, Rhode Island. It was used in the 17th century as a small, seasonally occupied, fortified habitation, possibly a trading center, associated with the Niantic community and their sachem Ninigret. Excavations conducted by Salwen and Mayer in 1976 and 1977 uncovered a small palisaded area that contained sheet midden, discrete refuse deposits, a large storage pit, and evidence for both Late Woodland and 17th-century occupation (Mayer 1985). The sample of 931 ceramic sherds was considered to be small compared to other contemporary sites, perhaps reflecting a limited presence of women there (Mayer 1985:19–20). The ceramic assemblage was analyzed by Mayer using the standard southern New England classification system based on the definitions and subsequent refinements of Rouse (1945), Smith (1950), Solecki (1950), Salwen (1969), Williams (1972), and Lavin (1980, 1984). Using this approach, Mayer classified 206 sherds as Shantok-tradition pottery, primarily on the basis of temper (large amounts of fine shell), color (buff, gray, and black surfaces with black interiors), thickness (3–7.5 mm with an average of 5 mm), and smooth, wiped, or scraped surfaces (Mayer 1985:5–6). Other classes of pottery based on similar kinds of attributes include several Windsor-tradition varieties, probably from a Late Woodland component.

Interestingly, although Mayer classifies the pottery as belonging to the Shantok tradition, she notes that the vessels "do not have the castellations, applied bosses, fillets and lobes which are found at the contemporary Long Island Sound–southern New England sites of related groups" (Mayer 1985:12). Significantly, although the ceramic assemblage at Fort Ninigret is technologically similar to the Fort Shantok assemblage, it lacks the most distinctive decorative attributes of the pottery from Fort Shantok. This disparity suggests that Shantok-tradition ceramics, as a classificatory construct, may represent a mixture of stylistic and technological attributes having overlapping but discontinuous distributions. It also exemplifies the difficulty in representing such complex variation using a typological approach to ceramic analysis, which can overlook important information on the significance of Shantok ware. Most importantly, it suggests that some of the spatially restricted, more distinctive decorative features of Shantok pottery are emblemic style, representing Mohegan identity.

Summary and Conclusions

During the Late Woodland and Contact periods, the Native peoples of southern New England began to decorate their ceramics more intensively. More pots were decorated and these pots contained more decorative treatments. Furthermore, this decoration became increasingly diverse, and the many different decorative elements had varying distributions. Undoubtedly this variation arose from a wide variety of sources. Women, who created the ceramics and gave them their form and decorations, were concerned with creating functional cookware and containers that also carried social information. Among the social issues or messages that may have been expressed through pottery were those most closely associated with women's status in the family or in the community. The importance of agriculture and agricultural land, one of the sources of women's economic power, was doubtless an important aspect of gender politics, as were the maintenance and transformation of traditional gender roles (hunting, gathering, farming, trading, politics, and ritual), obligations, and privileges (see Handsman 1990; Nassaney, chap. 15). Women were also par-

ticipants in political struggles that crosscut gender lines—competition or cooperation among families, residential or descent groups, lineages, communities, or confederations.

One of these political processes was the development and elaboration of community or supra-community political identity. The nature of this identity appears to have been transformed at different times and places and in response to different pressures, constraints, and opportunities. I have argued that among the Mohegans and some of their allies on Long Island, the issue of group identity was of particular importance. In order to create a unified group comprising very disparate parts, and to maintain cohesion under a variety of pressures, the Mohegans developed a new kind of group identity, and both expressed and promoted this new ideal through material culture. The distinctive pottery of Fort Shantok was one expression of this new identity. Although the elaborately decorated vessels of Shantok, like most of the Native ceramics of 17th-century southern New England, certainly contained an abundance of messages, many of which are lost to us, one of the most important of these signals was Mohegan identity.

The distribution of Shantok ware suggests its association with the Mohegan people and their closest allies. It predominates at Fort Shantok and Fort Corchaug, is not uncommon in areas historically associated with Mohegan influence, and is not absent, but certainly much rarer, elsewhere in southern New England. The distinctive decorative treatments of the pottery from Forts Shantok and Corchaug further suggest that at least some decorative elements represent emblemic style: an assertion of group identity.

Assessing variation in ceramics, let alone its significance, is an uncertain and subjective task. This is especially true when one is confronted with typological studies that tend both to subsume the variation in ceramics and to ignore the importance of the people who made them. Future research should focus on attribute analysis, the comparison of site assemblages rather than typologically defined units, and consideration of the social context of the makers, users, and viewers of pottery, as well as other elements of material culture. Such research can give us a clearer picture of the patterns of variation in ceramics and may ultimately foster a greater understanding of the processes motivating the potters who were creating the ceramics.

In this study, a complex and dynamic picture of Native politics is complemented and enriched by a study of pottery, which is itself enriched by placing it in a social and political context. Pottery—and any form of material culture—is understood as the product of people with goals, concerns, identities, and histories. That understanding permits archaeologists to link the objects that we study with the objects of our study. The tie that binds pots and politics is people.

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