

THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF MISSISSIPPIAN FINWARE IN THE AMERICAN BOTTOM

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This paper focuses on the issues of craft, style, and exchange as they relate to political-economic change in middle-range societies. Specifically, I offer a functional analysis of Mississippian fineware from the American Bottom. Archaeological evidence suggests that these eating and serving wares were used primarily within public ceremonies at regional political centers. In addition to other craft goods, fineware vessels were components of a structured ceremonial context in which ideas and relationships were negotiated and defined in the Mississippian world. Diachronic changes in the production, distribution, and use of these wares correspond with broader political-economic changes in the American Bottom.

The study of prestige goods has contributed much to archaeological knowledge about nonstate political dynamics (Brown et al. 1990; Dye 1995; Frankenstein and Rowlands 1978; Steponaitis 1991; Welch 1991). As referents of status and corporate group identity, prestige goods and other material symbols provide unique insight into the manner in which labor was appropriated and identities were constructed (Brown et al. 1990; Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Earle 1990; Hayden 1998; Rees 1997; Sackett 1990). Understanding the political and ideological dimensions of these elaborately crafted artifacts requires investigating the contexts of production and the processes of distribution (Helms 1979; Pauketat and Emerson 1991; Steponaitis 1991). Indeed, several scholars recently have questioned *a priori* assumptions that all craft items were prestige goods, the production and distribution of which were directly controlled by a political elite (Muller 1997; Saitta 1994). Archaeologists must discern from where or from whom such craft items originated, whose interests they served, and what kind of socioeconomic information they referenced.

In the case of the late prehistoric Southeast, it appears that success in chiefly political arenas was contingent upon the production, acquisition, and circulation of politically charged objects (Brown et al. 1990; Kelly 1980; Steponaitis 1991; Welch 1991). These items played an important role in the expression of chiefly sanctity and the legitimation of social inequality (Knight 1997; Welch 1991). The focus here is how changes in the production, distribution, and use of prestige goods relate to broader

political economic changes in Mississippian chiefdoms. Specifically, I examine Mississippian fineware ceramics from the American Bottom region of southwestern Illinois (Figure 1).

For the purpose of this study the term fineware is restricted to a suite of American Bottom vessels that share affinities with Caddoan and Coles Creek wares such as Carter Engraved, French Fork Incised, Crockett Curvilinear Incised, and Holly Fine Engraved (Bareis and

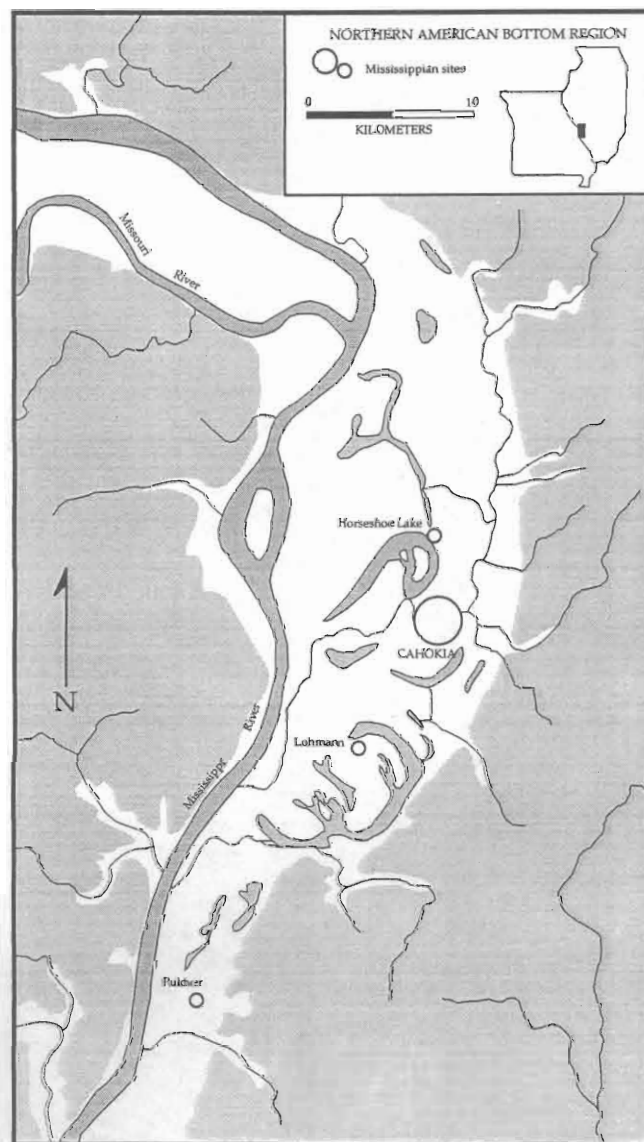


Figure 1. The northern American Bottom.

Porter 1965; Holley 1989; Kelly 1980; O'Brien 1972; Pauketat 1998)¹. These vessels have thin walls and compact pastes tempered with finely crushed grog and/or shell (Holley 1989). Vessel surfaces are slipped or burnished and often decorated with curvilinear, incised lines separated by zoned areas of excision (Figures 2, 3). In an additional production step, incised and excised areas sometimes are embellished with a red or white slip (Holley 1989; Kelly 1991a:80). Other decorated wares found in the American Bottom such as Ramey Incised, Mound Place Incised, Wells Engraved, Kersey

Incised, and Yankeetown Incised are excluded from this fineware classification.

Based on their quality of manufacture and elaborateness of decoration, fineware pots have been interpreted as prestige goods, the circulation of which was directly controlled by the Cahokian elite (Kelly 1991a; Pauketat 1994, 1998). There has been some debate regarding the local or nonlocal origin of fineware vessels recovered from the American Bottom (Bareis and Porter 1965; Emerson and Jackson 1984; Kelly 1980, 1991a; Pauketat 1990). Bareis and Porter's (1965) thin section analysis

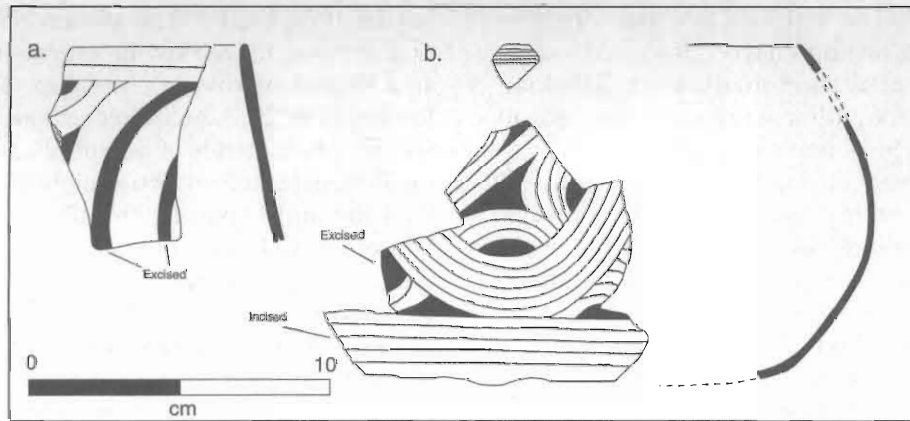


Figure 2. Cahokian fineware vessels with Caddoan-like incised and excised design fields. (a) incised and excised beaker (adapted from Pauketat 1998:Figure 7.29); (b) incised and excised constricted bowl (adapted from Holley 1989:Figure 24a).

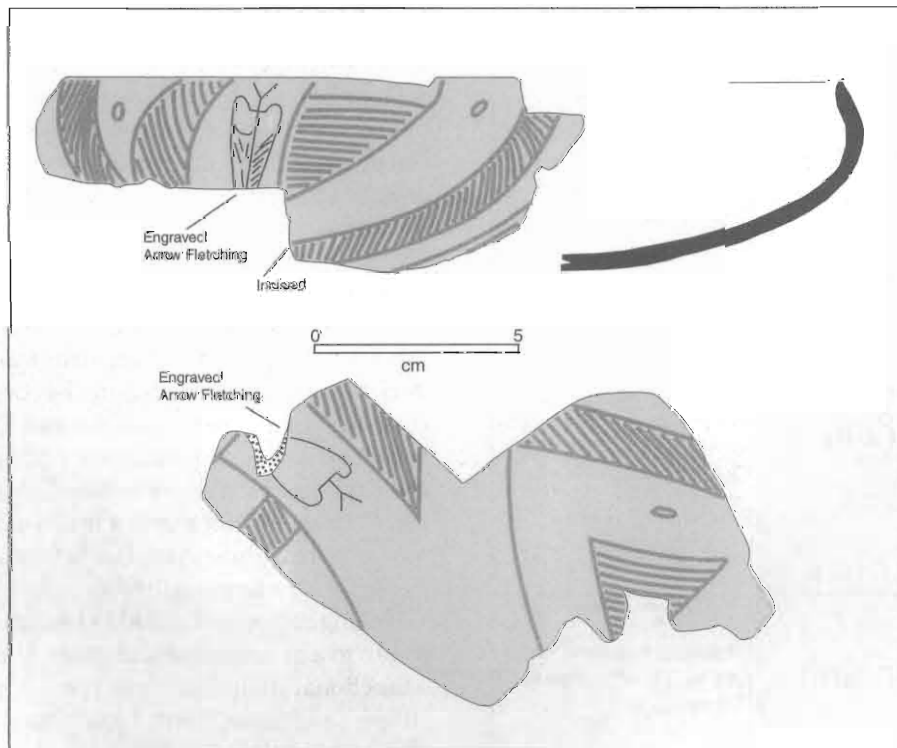


Figure 3. Coles Creek-like vessel from the High Prairie site in the immediate uplands of the American Bottom (adapted from Koldehoff 1982).

of an elaborately incised and excised beaker from the Cahokia site suggests that some fineware vessels were acquired from outside the American Bottom, and O'Brien (1972) classified examples of Cahokian fineware from the Powell tract as nonlocal trade wares. Later studies, however, have generated evidence for localized production of fineware in the American Bottom. Holley's (1989:424) study of fine grog-tempered wares from the Interpretive Center Tract II revealed that Cahokian fineware vessels have thinner walls and exhibit a greater use of slipping than stylistically similar vessels from the Lower Mississippi Valley and eastern Oklahoma. Based on this evidence, Holley (1989) and others (Pauketat 1998) have argued that most fineware vessels in the American Bottom were produced locally. Ongoing neutron activation analysis of Cahokian fineware vessels by the author may resolve this issue in the near future (see Steponaitis et al. 1996).

Archaeologists have yet to examine systematically the role of Cahokian fineware pots in ceremonial foodways. To understand better how Mississippian fineware was used within Cahokian society, I offer a functional analysis of vessel shapes and sizes and examine diachronic changes in the production and distribution of these wares for three periods of political-economic development in the American Bottom—the Lohmann phase (A.D. 1050-1100), the Stirling phase (A.D. 1100-1200), and the Moorehead phase (A.D. 1200-1275) (Figure 4)².

	Archaeological Phase	Developmental Characteristics
AD 1275	Moorehead	Intensified Regional Factionalism. Fortification of Mound Centers. Decrease in Long-Distance Exchange.
AD 1200		
AD 1150	Stirling	Development of Divine Chiefship. Wider Regional Circulation of Ceremonial Artifacts. Beginning Out-Migration of Population from Center.
AD 1100		
AD 1050	Lohmann	Regional Political Consolidation. In-Migration to Center.

Figure 4. Calibrated chronology of the American Bottom (sources: Hall 1991; Kelly 1990; Knight 1997; Pauketat and Emerson 1997a).

The Lohmann phase marks the establishment of the Cahokia chiefdom as a regionally-consolidated Mississippian polity (Pauketat 1994, 1997). This period was characterized by the appearance of a hierarchically organized political landscape centered on the site of Cahokia (Milner 1990; Pauketat 1994). Pauketat and Lopinot (1997) report well-demarcated patterns of demographic nucleation at the Cahokia site during this time. There is also evidence of increased craft production and the construction of monumental architecture at administrative centers (Dalan 1997; Pauketat 1997).

The subsequent Stirling phase represents Cahokia's peak of political-economic complexity (Emerson 1991; Fowler 1978; Kelly 1991a; Milner 1986, 1990). This period is characterized by the establishment of Cahokia as a sacred or divine chiefship (Knight 1997:238; Pauketat 1992:323). Archaeologists also have recognized Stirling-phase trends of decentralization in the American Bottom (Emerson 1991; Knight 1997; Pauketat 1992; Pauketat and Lopinot 1997). The increased sacralization of the Cahokian elite apparently involved a distancing of the elite from the everyday lives of commoners (Knight 1997:238; Pauketat 1992:40). Activities such as elaborate mortuary ritual and sweat lodge ceremonialism, previously restricted to Lohmann-phase political centers, began taking place in the rural countryside of the Stirling-phase American Bottom (Emerson 1997a, 1997b, 1997c; Emerson and Jackson 1984; Kelly 1990; Pauketat 1994). The Stirling phase also was marked by an outmigration of inhabitants from the Cahokia site into the rural countryside and perhaps also out of the American Bottom region entirely (Emerson 1991; Milner 1986; Pauketat and Lopinot 1997).

During the late Stirling phase to early Moorehead phase, these decentralizing trends began to be played out on a much broader scale. Fortifications were erected around the perimeters of regional political centers, and there was a decrease in long-distance exchange (Anderson 1997; Iseminger and Kelly 1995; Knight 1997; Milner 1990; Pauketat 1992, 1994). In political terms, the Moorehead phase is thought to represent a period of intensified regional factionalism leading to an overall decline in Cahokian political-economic complexity (Emerson et al. 1996; Pauketat and Emerson 1997a). In less than a century, factional politics resulted in the political decentralization of the Cahokia polity and the large-scale abandonment of much of the American Bottom region (Milner 1986; Pauketat and Emerson 1997b; Pauketat and Lopinot 1997).

Having reviewed Cahokia's historical trajectory, I now return to a discussion of Cahokian fineware. I begin with a functional analysis of vessel pastes, surface treatments, shapes, and sizes. Next, I examine diachronic changes in the regional distribution of fineware vessels from the Lohmann-phase to the Moorehead-phase occupation of the American Bottom.

Vessel Function

Paste composition and surface treatment are characteristics that can be related directly to vessel function (Shepard 1971:131). Technological studies of archaeological ceramics have demonstrated that fine paste vessels exhibit a higher resistance to mechanical stress, while exhibiting a lower resistance to thermal stress than coarser paste vessels (Rice 1987; Shepard 1971; Steponaitis 1984). Mississippian potters typically used fine clay pastes to manufacture serving vessels, such as bowls, bottles, and beakers, that were exposed repeatedly to mechanical stress (Million 1975; Steponaitis 1984). Coarser pastes typically were selected to manufacture cooking vessels such as jars and pans (Million 1975; Steponaitis 1984).

The compact pastes of Cahokian fineware vessels suggest a non-cooking function. There is little direct physical evidence (i.e., soot, oxidation, thermal spalling) of a cooking function for these vessels. Indeed, many thin-walled vessels were slipped and decorated with fine-line incised and engraved design fields that would not have stood up to a cooking fire (Holley 1989:411)³.

Shape and size are also important considerations in understanding vessel function. Archaeological and ethnographic studies have demonstrated that vessel morphology can be directly linked to primary use (Blitz 1993; Braun 1980; DeBoer and Lathrap 1979; Hally 1984, 1986; Pauketat 1987; Turner and Lofgren 1966; Welch and Scarry 1995). Table 1 presents fineware vessel rims by shape and orifice diameter from 15 Mississippian sites in the American Bottom. Six general morphological classes—constricted bowls, round-sided bowls, beakers, straight-walled bowls, jars, and bottles—are apparent (Figure 5). In addition, compound bowls and square-rimmed bowls are tentatively classified as fineware morphological classes based on minor similarities with other fineware forms.

I defined large and small size modes for constricted bowls, round-sided bowls, straight-walled bowls, beakers, and jars. In terms of constricted bowls, round-sided

bowls, and jars, the large size mode consists of the largest 16 percent of these vessel classes. The large size mode for beakers and straight-walled bowls, on the other hand, is made up of the largest 11 percent, which corresponds with a natural break in the distribution of orifice diameters for these vessel classes.

Constricted and Round-Sided Bowls

Constricted bowls and round-sided bowls have orifice diameters that range from 5 cm to 52 cm and 8 cm to 46 cm, respectively (Figures 6, 7). The largest examples of these two fineware bowl classes are represented by vessels that have broad bases relative to orifice diameters (Figure 5a, 5f, 5h). This wide, shallow shape would have maximized the visibility of a vessel's contents, and the iconographic designs often found on the upper portions of these vessels would have been visible at a distance (Welch and Scarry 1995:412)⁴. Given their general stability and overall suitability for comestible display, these vessels probably functioned as group-serving platters (Braun 1980:183; Hally 1986:278; Shepard 1971:238).

The low volume capacities of the smallest constricted and round-sided bowls suggest their use as individual-serving containers (Figure 5b, 5g, 5i; Braun 1980:172; Henrickson and McDonald 1983:632; Shepard 1971:238). There is, however, a distinct subclass of constricted bowls that approaches seed jars, or tecomates, in shape (Figure 5c; Griffin 1949; Taft 1996). The deep body and restricted orifice of this vessel type indicates that containment security was a priority (Braun 1980; Shepard 1971). The small size of this vessel class does not suggest a processing function, as small volume capacity would have limited the amount of food that could have been processed. Based on these characteristics, these taller constricted bowls may have been serving and eating containers for liquid foods.

Table 1. Sources of Data for Functional Analysis.

Site Name	Site Type	References
Cahokia	Regional Center	Holly 1989; O'Brien 1972; Pauketat 1987, 1993, 1998
Lohmann	Local Center	Esarey and Pauketat 1992
East St. Louis	Local Center	Kelly 1994
BBB Motor	Nodal	Emerson 1997c; Emerson and Jackson 1984
Sponemann	Nodal	Jackson et al. 1992
Julien	Nodal	Emerson 1997c; Milner 1984
Labras Lake	Nodal	Emerson 1997c; Yerkes 1980
Karol Rekas	Farmstead	Hanenberger 1990
Fingers	Farmstead	Kelly 1995
Sandy Ridge Farm	Farmstead	Jackson 1990a
Robert Schneider	Farmstead	Finney 1985
Lab Woofie	Farmstead	Prentice and Mehrer 1981
High Prairie	Upland Village	Koldehoff 1982
McCain	Unknown	Pauketat 1986
Rapps Lizard	Unknown	Pauketat 1984

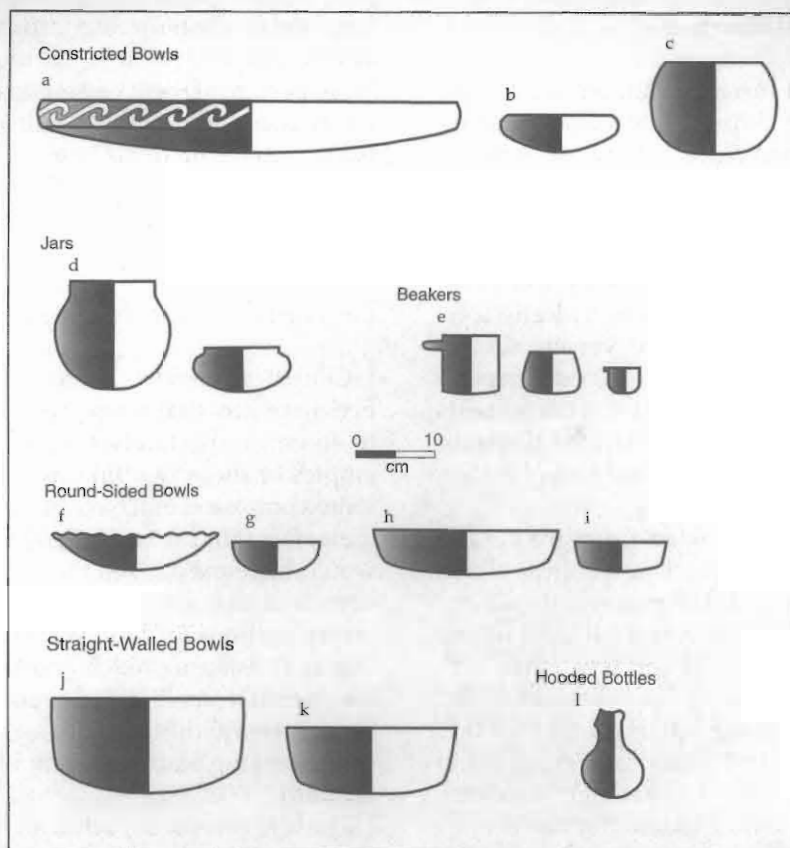


Figure 5. Major fineware vessel classes in the American Bottom (sources: Holley 1989; Koldehoff 1982; O'Brien 1972; Pauketat 1998).

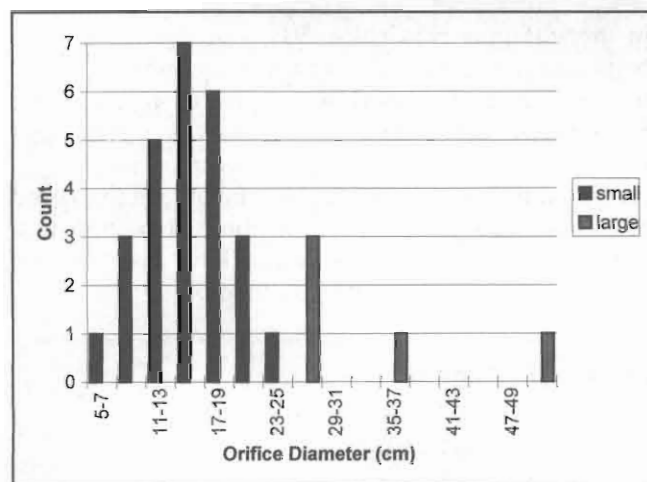


Figure 6. Fineware constricted bowls.

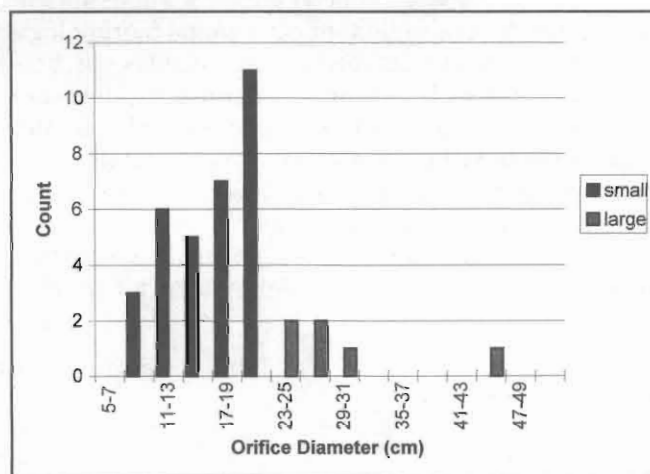


Figure 7. Fineware round-sided bowls.

Beakers and Straight-Walled Bowls

It is often difficult to differentiate between beakers and straight-walled bowls due to similarities in their upper rim shapes. Consequently, I combined these vessel classes for purposes of size comparison. Following Esarey and Pauketat (1992:23), beakers are "unrestricted or simple restricted vessels" with high height-to-orifice

diameter ratios. Beakers found in American Bottom assemblages, commonly referred to as Tippetts bean-pots (e.g., Griffin 1949), have thin, straight walls with flat or nearly flat bases (Figure 5e; Bareis and Porter 1965; Emerson 1984; Hall 1980; Jackson et al. 1992). Beakers often have lug handles, some in the form of human arms (Figure 5e; Griffin 1949:58). Given their high height-to-orifice-diameter ratios, beakers probably served as con-

tainers for liquid foods or medicines. Most beakers have relatively small volume capacities and would have been used as individual-serving vessels, but certain large or oversized beakers may have functioned as group-serving vessels for drinking (Figure 8).

As a vessel class, straight-walled bowls have composite contours with unrestricted orifices and relatively flat, rounded bases (Holley 1989; Shepard 1971:231). These vessels generally are deeper than other fineware bowl forms and may actually grade into beakers (Figure 5j, 5k). The high height-to-orifice diameter ratios of some straight-walled bowls suggests the need for containment security. Based on these characteristics, these vessels probably were serving and eating containers for liquid foods.

Jars

Fineware jars have orifice diameters that range from 3 cm to 24 cm (Figure 9). Many fineware jars are morphologically similar to tall and short constricted bowl forms, but have short, vertical necks that would have increased containment security (Figure 5d; Braun 1980:175; Holley 1989; O'Brien 1972; Shepard 1971:229-30)⁵. Based on these characteristics, these vessels, like the tall constricted bowl forms, may have been used as serving and eating containers for liquid foods.

Bottles

Fineware bottles are rare in American Bottom ceramic assemblages. Both hooded and long-necked bottle forms have been identified and probably served as liquid-serving containers (Figure 5l; Holley 1989; Milner 1984). The small size of many fineware bottles suggests they were for individual use, but the rarity of these vessels limits further functional inferences.

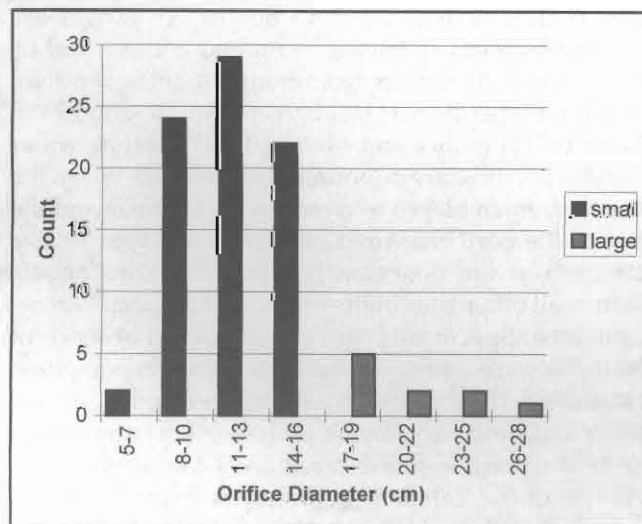


Figure 8. Fineware beakers and straight-walled bowls.

Other Vessel Shapes

Other Cahokian fineware shapes include square-rimmed bowls and compound bowls. Based on their rarity and unique style, these vessel types are classified only tentatively as fineware. O'Brien (1972:Figure 60a) noted the presence of a square-rimmed "peak bowl" in the Powell Tract assemblage. The rim of this vessel "is folded outward and has a groove down the lip" (O'Brien 1972:76). The interior surface has an elaborately incised and excised "Caddoan-like" design. Considering its large shallow shape, this vessel likely was a serving platter. A similar square-rimmed vessel from the Turner site is red slipped and tempered with crushed grog and shell (Milner 1983:135-36).

The compound bowl is another unique vessel class within Mississippian ceramic assemblages from the American Bottom (Finney 1985:225; Holley 1989:Figure 15A; Pauketat 1987:9). These vessels have flat bottoms with castellated rims that are sometimes scalloped (Holley 1989:Figure 15A; Pauketat 1987:Figure 11). Considering their small volume capacity (ca. 0.6-1.5 liters), these compound bowls probably functioned as individual and small-group serving containers (see Pauketat 1987).

The Regional Distribution of Fineware

I have identified diachronic changes in the regional distribution of fineware vessels through an examination of the ceramic assemblages from 16 sites in the American Bottom (Tables 2-5). These sites were selected based on the level of chronological control of the excavations, as well as the quality and availability of ceramic data from site reports and other publications. Note that the sites selected for regional spatial analysis differs from those used for the functional analysis presented earlier in the text.

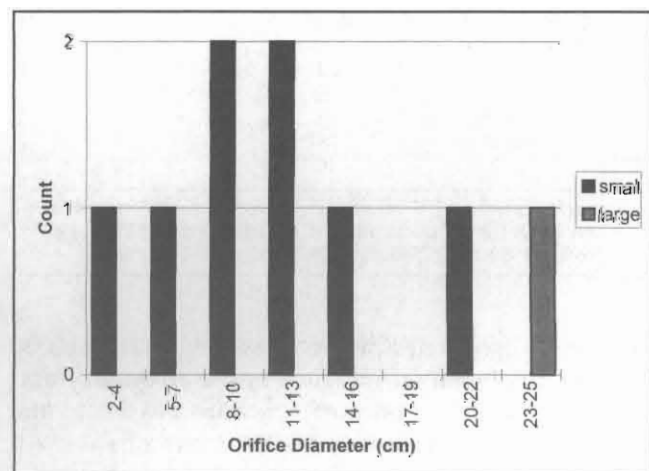


Figure 9. Fineware jars.

Clear-cut spatial differences are apparent in fineware vessel frequencies from Lohmann-phase (A.D. 1050-1100) sites in the American Bottom. Lohmann-phase fineware vessel classes include beakers, straight-walled bowls, constricted bowls, round-sided bowls, and compound bowls (Figure 10). Of the 8 Lohmann-phase sites examined, fineware vessels were present only at the paramount center of Cahokia and a secondary political center represented by the Lohmann site (Table 2). Further, while Lohmann-phase fineware assemblages from Cahokia include round-sided bowls, constricted bowls, and beakers, the only fineware vessel class recovered from the Lohmann site was beakers, which suggests a more specialized or restricted use of fineware at secondary political centers (Esarey and Pauketat 1992).

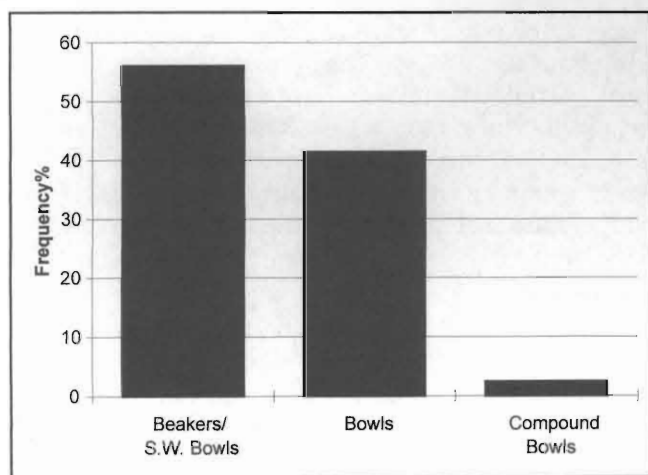


Figure 10. Lohmann-phase fineware vessel classes in the American Bottom.

Table 2. Ceramic Data from Lohmann-phase Sites in the American Bottom.

Site	Total Vessels	Total Fineware
Cahokia	1453	35
Lohmann	413	6
BBB Motor	100	0
Julien	24	0
Range	35	0
Carbon Dioxide	18	0
George Reeves	19	0
Hytla	10	0

Sources: Emerson 1997c: Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.4; Emerson and Jackson 1984; Esarey and Pauketat 1992:101; Finney 1985, 1987; Holley 1989:403-425; Kelly 1997; Pauketat 1993, 1998.

In the subsequent Stirling phase (A.D. 1100-1200), there is a substantial increase in the frequency and morphological diversity of fineware vessels at the Cahokia site (2.4 percent in the Lohmann phase to 6.6 percent in the Stirling phase) and throughout the American Bottom (Table 3; Figure 11). Stirling-phase

Table 3. Diachronic Changes in the Regional Distribution of Fineware^a.

	Lohmann%	Stirling%	Moorehead%
Regional Center ^b	2.4	6.6	4.3
Local Center ^c	1.0	2.0	No Data
Civic-Ceremonial Nodes ^d	0	10.2	4.2
Farmsteads ^e	0	6.0	No Data

^a Fineware values represent the percentage of all vessels.

^b Based on combined assemblages from the Cahokia site (Holly 1989; Pauketat 1987, 1993, 1998).

^c Based on assemblages from the Lohmann site (Esarey and Pauketat 1992).

^d Based on combined assemblages from the BBB Motor (Emerson 1997c; Emerson and Jackson 1984), Julien (Emerson 1997c; Milner 1984), Range (Emerson 1997c); Sponemann (Jackson et al. 1992), and Labras Lake (Emerson 1997c; Yerkes 1980) sites.

^e Based on combined assemblages from the Carbon Dioxide (Finney 1985), Esterlein (Jackson 1990b), Karol Rekas (Hananberger 1990), Hytla (Kelly 1997), Lab Woolfie (Prentice and Mehrer 1981), Lily Lake (Norris 1978), Sandy Ridge Farm (Jackson 1990a), Fingers (Kelly 1995), and Curtiss Steinberg Road (Kelly 1995) sites.

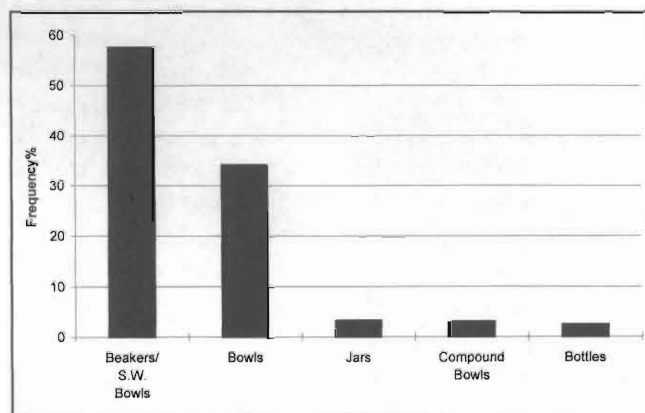


Figure 11. Stirling-phase fineware vessel classes in the American Bottom.

fineware forms include beakers, straight-walled bowls, jars, bottles, and compound bowls. No longer are fineware vessels restricted to mound centers; rather, they are widely distributed among the rural populace (Table 4; Fortier 1985; Hanenberger 1990; Jackson 1990b; Kelly 1995; Prentice and Mehrer 1981). Despite wider circulation, there are important differences between the fineware assemblages recovered from Cahokia and the rest of the northern American Bottom. A greater size range of fineware bowls and beakers is found at Cahokia than at all other sites in the northern American Bottom combined. Specifically, there is a marked absence of large fineware bowls and beakers in the Stirling-phase countryside of the American Bottom (Figure 12). Although sample size may be an issue, this pattern suggests that Stirling-phase ceremonial foodways in the vicinity of the Cahokia site involved larger groups of people than those in the rural countryside (Blitz 1993; Turner and Lofgren 1966).

Table 4. Ceramic Data from Stirling-phase Sites in the American Bottom.

Site	Total Vessels	Total Fineware
Cahokia	1506	99
Lohmann	155	3
BBB Motor	52	3
Julien	60	1
Sponemann	173	19
Labras Lake	28	6
Karol Rekas	5	1
Sandy Ridge Farm	5	1
Robert Schneider	13	2
Fingers	29	1
Esterlein	8	0
Curtiss Steinberg	1	0
Lily Lake	192	10

Sources: Emerson 1997c:Tables 5.5, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9; Emerson and Jackson 1984; Esarey and Pauketat 1992:101; Fortier 1985; Holley 1989:403-425; Jackson and Hanenberger 1990; Kelly 1995; Norris 1978; Pauketat 1993, 1998; Yerkes 1980.

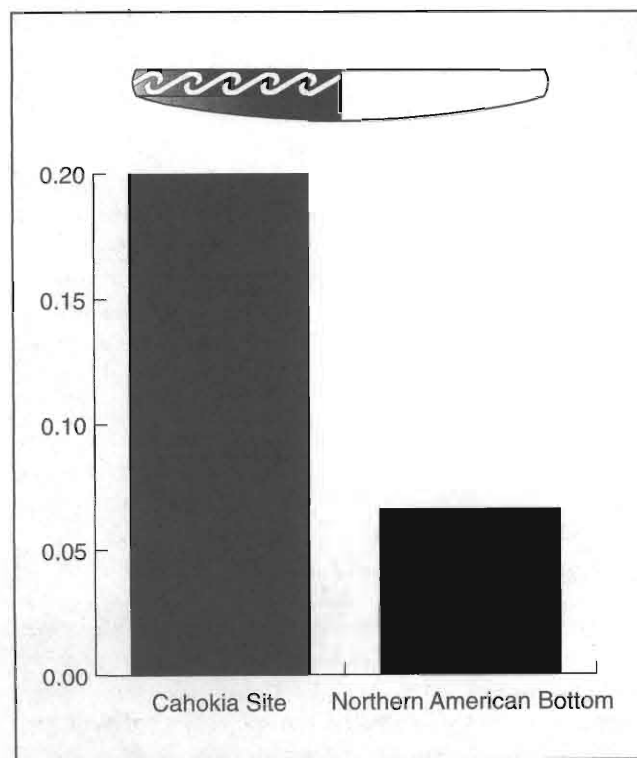


Figure 12. Large-to-small fineware vessel ratios for the Stirling-phase American Bottom.

With the Moorehead phase (A.D. 1200-1275), fineware frequencies decreased to 4.3 percent at the Cahokia site (Table 3). This regional decline in fineware frequencies may relate to the introduction and use of other varieties of serving ware such as Mound Place Incised and Wells Broad Trilled (Holley 1989:236-39; Kelly 1991b:7; Vogel 1975). Moorehead-phase fineware vessel classes include beakers, straight-walled bowls, jars, and bottles (Figure 13). A lack of excavated Moorehead-phase sites in the rural countryside limits attempts to identify patterns of regional distribution.

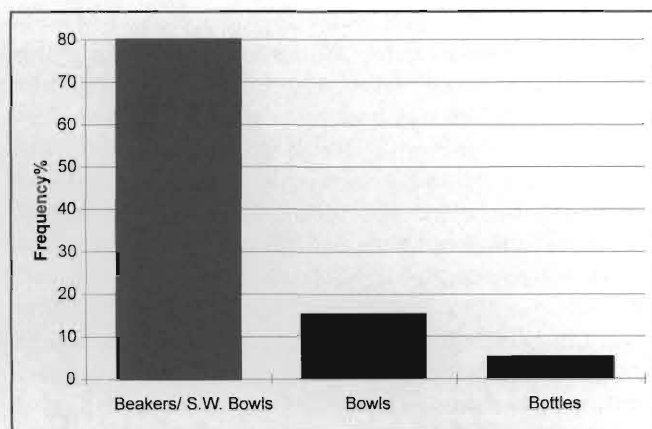


Figure 13. Moorehead-phase fineware vessel classes in the American Bottom.

Table 5. Ceramic Data from Moorehead-phase Sites in the American Bottom.

Site	Total Vessels	Total Fineware
Cahokia	444	19
Julien	24	1

Sources: Emerson 1997c:Table 5.10; Holley 1989:403-425; Milner 1984; Pauketat 1998.

Discussion

I have identified six fineware vessel classes in American Bottom ceramic assemblages—beakers, straight-walled bowls, constricted bowls, round-sided bowls, jars, and bottles. Based on their physical properties and morphological characteristics, these vessels were used primarily for food serving and eating. Both small group and individual serving vessels appear to be represented.

Diachronic changes in the regional distribution and ceremonial uses of fineware pots correspond to broader political economic changes in the Cahokia polity (Emerson 1997c; Kelly 1991b; Knight 1997; Milner 1986; Pauketat 1992, 1994). The Lohmann phase (A.D.1050-1100) was a time when fineware vessels and the ceremonial activities in which they were used were restricted primarily to American Bottom political centers (Table 3; Esarey and Pauketat 1992; Holley 1989; Kelly 1980; Pauketat 1994). Moreover, the use of fineware vessels appears to have been more restricted and/or specialized at political centers outside of Cahokia. This suggests that in the decades bracketing the regional consolidation of the Cahokia polity, it was necessary for the chiefly elite to regulate closely certain ritual activities to produce the new Mississippian political order and to integrate a greatly expanded Cahokian community (Pauketat 1994; Pauketat and Lopinot 1997).

It is worth noting that this centralized distribution of decorated serving wares parallels patterns of ceramic

production and consumption during the early Mississippian occupation of the Moundville chiefdom in the Black Warrior Valley (Blitz 1993; Knight 1997; Knight and Steponaitis 1998; Welch and Scarry 1995). This evidence for the elite control of ceremonial wares contrasts with trends in other portions of the early Mississippian Southeast. Blitz (1993:168) has identified a non-centralized distribution of Mississippian serving ware among the simple chiefdoms of the Tombigbee Valley of western Alabama. This interregional variation illustrates the differences in political complexity between simple and complex Mississippian chiefdoms (Steponaitis 1991).

Fineware vessels had a wider regional circulation in the subsequent Stirling phase (A.D. 1100-1200) (Table 3). Rural ceremonial nodes with ritual architecture and elaborate magico-ritual items also appear at this time, suggesting that Mississippian ceremonial activities were less centralized or restricted in the Stirling phase than in the preceding Lohmann phase (Emerson 1997b; Emerson and Jackson 1984; Knight 1997; Pauketat 1992). Emerson (1991) has argued that the Stirling phase represents both the peak of Cahokia's sociopolitical complexity, as well as the beginnings of its decline. He sees an outmigration of the region's inhabitants in reaction to political-economic domination by the Cahokian elite (Emerson 1991:235). Moreover, Pauketat (1992) argues that the increased sacralization of the Stirling-phase Cahokian elite, combined with the increased autonomy of rural districts, may have led to intensified factionalism in the American Bottom.

There are many possible explanations for the wide circulation of fineware vessels in the Stirling-phase countryside of the American Bottom. Considering the Stirling-phase trends of decentralization proposed by Emerson (1991) and Pauketat (1992), it is possible that lesser elites capitalized on the growing social gulf between elite and commoner classes (see also Knight 1997). By usurping various religious and ceremonial responsibilities, politically marginalized elites may have created new positions within the regional settlement hierarchy to better compete for social status. Accordingly, the rural circulation of fineware pots might represent attempts by these lesser elites to more directly engage the rural populace.

It is also possible that the regional circulation of Mississippian fineware was directly orchestrated by the Cahokian elite. To curb intensifying forces of decentralization, Cahokian administrators may have opted to circulate more widely ceremonial items like fineware pots (see Pauketat 1992). Pauketat and Emerson (1991) have noted a similarly dispersed regional distribution for Ramey Incised jars during the Stirling phase. They interpret Ramey Incised jars as containers for the centralized redistribution of "medicines, comestibles, and ideology" (Emerson 1989; Pauketat and Emerson 1997b:271). The redundant design fields on Ramey Incised vessel rims are thought to reference dominant elite

ideas about cosmological order and balance (Pauketat and Emerson 1991).

It is noteworthy that some of the more common iconographic designs on Ramey pots also are found on Cahokian fineware, including variants of the spiral and volute motif and other curvilinear designs (Emerson 1989; Pauketat and Emerson 1991). Like Ramey Incised pots, Stirling-phase fineware vessels may have served both as media to convey ideas about the sanctification of chiefly authority and as a means to counter "the increasing practical alienation of the commoners from their leaders" (Knight 1997:240). Considering the shallow shapes and low volume capacities of most fineware vessels, however, it is unlikely that they were containers for the centralized redistribution of comestibles. Rather, fineware pots may have been material symbols distributed out to loyal followers for use in rural ceremonialism. Such activities would have played an important role in integrating dispersed agricultural communities (Emerson 1997c; Mehrer 1988; Milner 1990).

During the Moorehead phase (A.D. 1200-1275), there is a decline in the frequency of fineware vessels throughout the American Bottom (Table 3). At this time, fineware serving vessels likely were replaced by Mound Place Incised and Wells Incised bowls and plates (Kelly 1991b). These Moorehead-phase patterns represent significant changes in the nature of Cahokian ceremonial practices, as well as broader changes in Cahokian political culture. Kelly (1991b) has noted the widespread distribution of Wells Incised-like plates throughout the Middle Mississippian Southeast. The appearance of these ceremonial wares suggests that Moorehead-phase changes in the American Bottom were related to panregional changes in Mississippian political symbolism and ceremonial practices (Anderson 1997).

The results of this study reveal that changes in the production, exchange, and use of prestige goods correspond with changes in the developmental trajectories of Mississippian chiefdoms like Cahokia (Pauketat 1992). To reproduce their political and religious authority, the Mississippian elite had to contend with dynamic, ever-changing cultural landscapes. The archaeological examination of prestige goods and other material symbols opens a window through which these changing landscapes and the actors that shaped them can be more closely examined.

Notes

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¹ This is a more restricted definition of Mississippian fineware than employed by Blitz (1993) in his analysis of Mississippian ceramics from the Tombigbee River Valley.

² Age ranges for phases are based on calibrated radiocarbon determinations as first set by Hall (1991).

³ Holley (1989:411) identified fine grog-tempered vessels from the Interpretive Center-II tract with walls that are "egg-shell thick (2mm)."

⁴ A total of eight of the eleven large bowls in this sample were decorated with incised and/or excised design fields.

⁵ In other portions of the Southeast this vessel shape has been classified as a short-neck bowl (Steponaitis 1983:68).

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