

Sugar production was a major economic activity in the colonial Caribbean creating, along with domestic needs, a large demand for pottery vessels that ultimately could be met only by local production. The English colonists brought well-developed technology based on materials and methods used in the Old World. Enslaved peoples from West and Central Africa also contributed to the design and manufacture of local pottery industries in the early colonial era. Moreover, the Native Americans are known to have produced small-scale pottery before the arrival of Europeans in the region. Understanding the transition from English imports and original Native American products to a functioning local pottery industry holds significant interest for researchers studying the archeology of the colonial era.

The major commodity pottery from the colonial era is redware. Redwares were coarse wheel-made ceramics used largely for utilitarian purposes, such as water storage and cooking. Materials with known context available for study include a few intact pieces, fragments from sugar-producing and domestic settings, fragments and discarded product at production locations, product from presently active potters understood to be using traditional methods and source materials. To take advantage of resources available and to have a manageable scope, the present study is focused on Barbados. Important insights sought include: how did local pottery making evolve with time? Did local pottery making combine native, African, and English elements, or was it simply the adaptation of English technology to the local setting? Was pottery trade within the Caribbean significant?

We will report results of the first phase of study. We employed digital optical microscopy to view the fabric of materials too large to place within the SEM. We employed SEM of coated materials to view fabric to higher magnifications. We employed the energy dispersive elemental analysis (EDS) accessory to determine major and minor element composition. Variations in major element ratio (Si/Al) could indicate different ratios of clay to temper (e.g., sand), reflecting different potters. Variations in minor elements (Ti, Fe) could indicate different material sources. We used x-ray fluorescence (XRF) to determine composition for materials too large to place within the SEM and to determine trace element composition for all. Differences in trace elements could also indicate differences in sources. Our study suggests that it is possible to identify locally made redwares and trace their origins to particular potteries in Barbados. Such information will also provide insights in the aesthetic and functional uses of these vessels, as well as identify the Old World cultural influences that led to their shape and form.