Comment on the Inappropriateness of a Proposed Mean Ceramic Date (1780) for South Carolina Colonoware

Chris Espenshade
TRC Garrow Associates, Inc.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan

Recommended Citation
Espenshade, Chris (1998) "Comment on the Inappropriateness of a Proposed Mean Ceramic Date (1780) for South Carolina Colonoware," African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol5/iss1/3

This Articles, Essays, and Reports is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
Comment on the Inappropriateness of a Proposed Mean Ceramic Date (1780) for South Carolina Colonoware

Chris Espenshade, TRC Garrow Associates, Inc., Atlanta, GA

In a series of recent reports on plantation sites on the Wando Neck area of coastal South Carolina, Wayne and Dickinson (1990, 1996a, 1996b, and 1996c) have presented Mean Ceramic Date (MCD) calculations (after South 1972, 1977) that include a date of 1780 for Colonoware. This date is supported by a vague reference to Anthony (1986) that Wayne and Dickinson contend places the production span for South Carolina colonoware at 1730-1830. The midpoint of which, 1780, is being used as the mean date for this ware in calculating MCDs. Beyond possibly misrepresenting Anthony's comments, this approach would appear to be fatally flawed at several levels. It is argued here that there cannot be any meaningful mean date for Colonoware, and that the use of Colonoware in arriving at MCDs is potentially misleading.

The concept of an MCD, as applied to European ceramics, is based on the following premises (South 1977):

1. The wares were produced commercially as a for-profit, market-driven activity.
2. Being market-driven, the industry responded to changes in consumer demands.
3. Due to the general nature of consumer behavior, the frequency through time of specific wares/types generally followed a regular curve.
4. All producers of specific wares/types generally began and ended production of those wares/types at the same time.
5. Given 3 and 4, it is statistically valid to calculate an MCD that reflects the most likely date of production for a given ware/type.

An MCD approach should not be used for Colonoware because points 1-4 do not apply to this ware. The presence and frequency of Colonoware on a specific slave row, for example, will be dependent on a number of factors including presence of a potter, access to materials, implicit permission of the planter to produce or use Colonoware, availability of suitable substitutes, planter concern over slave hygiene, degree of acculturation, and degree to which African lifeways (subsistence, healing, religion) were followed. These factors did not change through time on a single schedule shared by all African Americans. Each individual community had its own production trajectory. For example, recent excavations at three slave rows in Beaufort County, South Carolina, shows Colonoware production continued after 1830 (and possibly until the Civil War), on some slave rows (Eubanks et al. 1994; Kennedy et al. 1994; Pietak et al. 1998). The mean date for Colonoware and its use in calculating MCDs, as proposed and applied by Wayne and Dickinson, should be abandoned as misleading and uninformative.

References Cited

Anthony, Ronald W.

Eubanks, Elsie I., Christopher T. Espenshade, Marian Roberts, and Linda Kennedy

Ferguson, Leland

Kennedy, Linda, Marian D. Roberts, and Christopher T. Espenshade

Pietak, Lynn, Christopher T. Espenshade, and Linda Kennedy

South, Stanley


Wayne, Lucy B., and Martin F. Dickinson

