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## June 2009 Newsletter

### Comparative Ceramic Study between Enslaved and Planter Contexts in Martinique

By Mary Ann Fanning\*

#### Introduction

Data recovered during archaeological research at the former sugar plantation Crève Cœur on Martinique (Figure 1) provides the opportunity to study the lives of the enslaved population and the planters in relation to one another. For the purpose of this study a portion of the ceramic assemblage from an area within the slave village (Locus A) and a portion of the assemblage recovered from the midden by the *Maison du Maitre* (Locus M) will be compared using a variety of techniques. This study provides us with information that can be applied and contrasted with other sites throughout the French West Indies and then within the wider scope of the New World.



Figure 1. Location of Martinique in French West Indies region.

By determining whether differences in the assemblages exist and then exploring potential reasons for these differences we can provide the foundation for further work exploring the economies of the enslaved population, acquisition patterns and other potential cultural forces at work. By solely focusing on plantations that emerged within one region we construct a one dimensional image of life for the enslaved workers, the planters and the surrounding communities. Studies in the Caribbean and South America can highlight unique aspects of a system functioning under various regimes, reveal more widespread or universal trends and provide us with a greater understanding about how various practices and economies emerged.

### **Martinique and its Role in the French Caribbean**

The Caribbean, like much of the rest of the Americas, was a region divided by the various colonial powers. Occupation of the islands changed and was disputed as Europeans struggled to establish their power and trade relationships within the region. The French in particular created ways in which to “bind” their holdings to the metropole and thus created a much more centralized system (Blackburn 1997: 279). The close ties between France and certain holdings throughout the world have continued into the present. Martinique, along with places such as nearby Guadeloupe, South American French Guiana, and the island Réunion (located off the coast of East Africa) continue to be considered a part of France, with citizenship, currency, government and a number of other cultural traits, such as language, reflecting this status.

Part of the reason for this political closeness may have been initially due to the tensions with both the Spanish and the native Carib which began to lessen as France established itself in the region and develop understandings with some of the other European powers such as England (Blackburn 1997: 280-281). Martinique itself was one of the earliest established French Caribbean colonies and benefited by developing infrastructure relatively early in its occupation. Additionally the island was able to successfully protest some of the trade restrictions placed by the metropole and force them to grow more relaxed (Blackburn 1997: 282). There is also documented evidence of piracy and smuggling, which was common throughout the Caribbean, but Martinique had certain “advantages” over other islands, including relative ease of locating when approaching from the Atlantic and the proximity of Saint Pierre to an important northwest/southeast trading route (Banks 2005: 230, 236). This proximity allowed for relative

ease of distribution of smuggled goods to the surrounding French colonies before they could be traced (Banks 2005: 236).

The Caribbean was a region that grew to heavily rely upon forced African labor, and Martinique was no exception to this. In Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*, Martinique is described as having been one of the first places to rely heavily upon enslaved African laborers (Mintz 1985: 53). While Martinique may have been one of the first areas to draw upon enslaved Africans on a wide-scale basis, there was still some reliance upon indentured labor early in the colony's history and there were fears about what would happen if the African population surpassed the white French population in size (Figueredo and Argote 2008: 64). Quite often enslaved and indentured laborers would work side by side (Blackburn 1997), but even in these early days an Afro-Caribbean culture was represented as the enslaved population achieved greater success in acquiring food and building houses than their indentured counterparts (Blackburn 1997: 286).

As indentured servitude was phased out, the island population grew increasingly African in nature particularly due to the size the African population achieved, and even today this culture is reflected in aspects such as the widespread use of a créole language (Blackburn 1997: 450). During the French revolution a movement towards emancipation emerged in the metropole, and led the planters to push for a transfer to British rule in order to avoid abolition (Constant 1998: 170). However when Napoleon gained power, the island returned to France as Josephine called for abolition to be limited to the metropole and not expanded to the islands (Constant 1998: 170). In later years many slaves would pass through the Caribbean prior to arriving in the United States (Joyner 1984: 13), bringing many cultural traditions from the Caribbean to North America, including religious traditions and technologies such as ceramic traditions (Joyner 1984: 160).

Slavery in the French West Indies differed from the British West Indies in a variety of ways. Previous work has discussed how the treatment of slaves varied under the two colonial regimes, claiming that the French planters tended to provide for their enslaved laborers whereas the British planters would more often expect slaves to fend for themselves (Blackburn 1997: 438). As in North America there were a number of restrictions placed upon slaves outlined specifically in the *code noir*, which not only laid out the rules governing slaves but also outlined rations and punishments if the rules were broken (Blackburn 1997: 290). The *code noir* was

drawn up by the French government and implemented throughout the French Colonies, not just Martinique, and was intended to protect and restrict the enslaved population (Figueredo and Argote 2008: 67) “Slave codes” existed elsewhere and served to emphasize racial divisions and even limit the social mobility of the free black community (Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005: 24).

In addition to the treatment of and restrictions placed upon slaves, there were a variety of features that distinguished the French West Indies from other areas in the New World. First and foremost the major crop in the region was sugar which was widely grown throughout the Caribbean and in South America with Brazil being one of the earliest major producers (Mintz 1985: 32-33). Martinique grew to be one of the largest sugar producers in the Americas and produced 6.5% of the total crop (Blackburn 1997: 485), which is especially interesting when taking into account the size of the island. French sugar was described as being cheaper than that produced within the British colonies, and French plantations (particularly on Saint Domingue) were viewed as being more efficient than their British counterparts (Figueredo and Argote 2008: 72).

One advantage that Martinique held over other sugar producing regions was that the sugar was not only grown on the island but it was also refined there (Blackburn 1997: 432). In contrast to many locations within British colonies, which regulated refinery locations, Martinique planters were able to ship the product for immediate consumption as opposed to sending raw sugar overseas for refining. This benefited Martinique in both the French colonial system and within the wider world system as it provided the planters direct access to the consumer market as opposed to selling to a processing “middle man” (Figueredo and Argote 2008). Ruins of sugar refineries are present at Crève Cœur as they are at other former plantations in Martinique.

### **Habitation Crève Cœur and the Two Assemblages**

Habitation Creve Coeur is located in the South Western portion of the French island of Martinique, near the town of St. Anne. Excavations at this site, a former sugar plantation, are being directed by Dr. Kenneth Kelly of the University of South Carolina. Data from shovel test pits placed during the 2005 and 2007 field seasons are drawn upon for the purpose of this study. Additional excavations were conducted in 2008 and further fieldwork is planned for the summer of 2010. Excavation has been focused upon a number of loci, including Locus A, B, C and D

(all areas within the slave village) and Locus M (midden on a slope by the *Maison du Maitre*) which will be explored in this article. Archaeological fieldwork involved survey of the entire site, and then more focused testing and excavation at the loci described below. As already noted, this study explores the ceramic information recovered from shovel tests at Locus A and Locus M (which will be described in detail below) from 2005 and 2007.

Locus A is an area of relatively high artifact density in the former slave village slightly uphill from the *Maison du Maitre*. Locus M is an area where refuse from the great house was deposited. Locus A represents a central portion of the slave village that is relatively removed from the *Maison du Maitre* and contains a high artifact density. Both central location and artifact density led to the selection of Locus A for this study. According to historic maps and diagrams representing artifact distributions, the slave village encompasses a much greater area ranging from closer to the great house (Locus C) to continuing up a slope past Locus A over 100m to the west (Loci B and D). Aside from the difference in the cultural contexts, it should also be noted that Locus A was likely an area where people lived, whereas Locus M is mainly deposited refuse from the adjacent *Maison du Maitre*.

Ceramics were used for this specific study as they are highly visible in the archaeological record and can provide relatively detailed information about socioeconomic status, access to markets and cultural preferences. Additionally, particularly in the case of the enslaved population, ceramics can indicate economic activities either through the manufacture of certain types (colonoware in the Southeastern United States and *coco neg* in Martinique) or other economic activities that provided the African heritage population with income with which they could purchase certain desired types. Due to both the functional and aesthetic nature of ceramics and their relatively visible presence in the record we can garner this information more easily than with other artifact classes.

### **Comparisons and Interpretations**

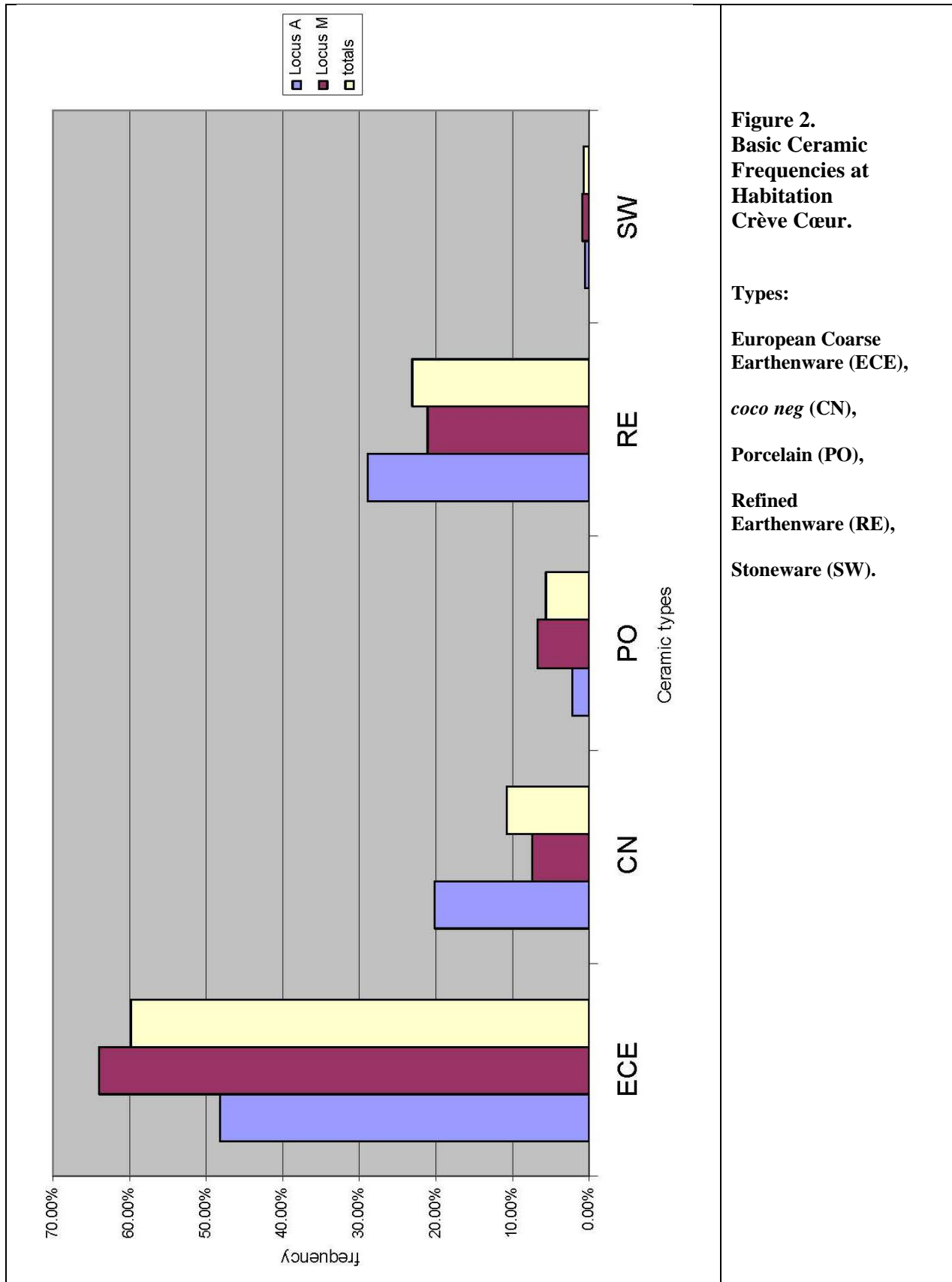
For this section I will be drawing upon information and results from my senior thesis at the University of South Carolina (Fanning 2009). A Mean Ceramic Date was calculated for both samples (dates for ceramics drawn from Gibson 2007), and dated Locus A (1787) approximately 30 years earlier than the Locus M midden (1815). This could be for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the slave village was abandoned while the *Maison du Maitre* remained in use for a

number of years for a variety of purposes. However, this does not necessarily imply the continued use of Locus M as a refuse area for the *Maison du Maitre*. The discrepancy in dates could reflect a longer use life of ceramics at Locus A, leading to fewer new ceramics being purchased. Conversely, it could also reflect differences in the availability of ceramics to both groups.

Creamware was present in slightly higher frequencies at Locus A, and Locus M had a much greater amount of whiteware present. The higher frequency of whiteware may once again reflect the continued use of the *Maison du Maitre*, but it also could reflect that the planters updated their ceramics with the emergence of whiteware, whereas the enslaved population continued to use creamwares or acquired creamwares later. However, one very important thing to note is that there was a very low frequency of pearlwares recorded in both loci, which chronologically fall between creamwares and whitewares. The date ranges for other ceramics overlap, which reflects that there was continued occupation (supported by data from other artifact groups) and there must be another reason for the lack of pearlware. Certain trade restrictions were placed upon Martinique and the other French Colonies and were successfully protested (Blackburn 1997). Since pearlware was a ceramic of British origin the absence of this type may reflect these trade restrictions (Kelly 2009 explores trade restrictions further) as well as the much wider availability and/or preference for certain French types on Martinique.

Graphs depicting the frequencies of the various ceramic categories were constructed including generally used European ceramic categories and *coco neg* listed as a separate category. *Coco neg* is a locally produced earthenware similar to colonoware in its manufacture and origin, although the techniques used are still in use today (Hauser 2008, Kelly et al. 2008).

Figure 2 reveals that European coarse earthenwares and porcelains occurred in higher frequencies at Locus M and refined earthenwares and *coco neg* occurred in higher frequencies at Locus A. European coarse earthenware included artifacts such as tiles and vessels used in sugar production. If all the coarse earthenwares were grouped together (European and *coco neg*) we see very similar frequencies occurring for both loci, which could indicate that *coco neg* was used in place of certain types of coarse earthenware more common at Locus M. A similar observation can be made about the frequency of porcelain and refined earthenwares. Porcelain was more common at Locus M and refined earthenwares at Locus A; when combined they create nearly the same frequency of more refined ceramics. Again, this likely represents a replacement in usage.



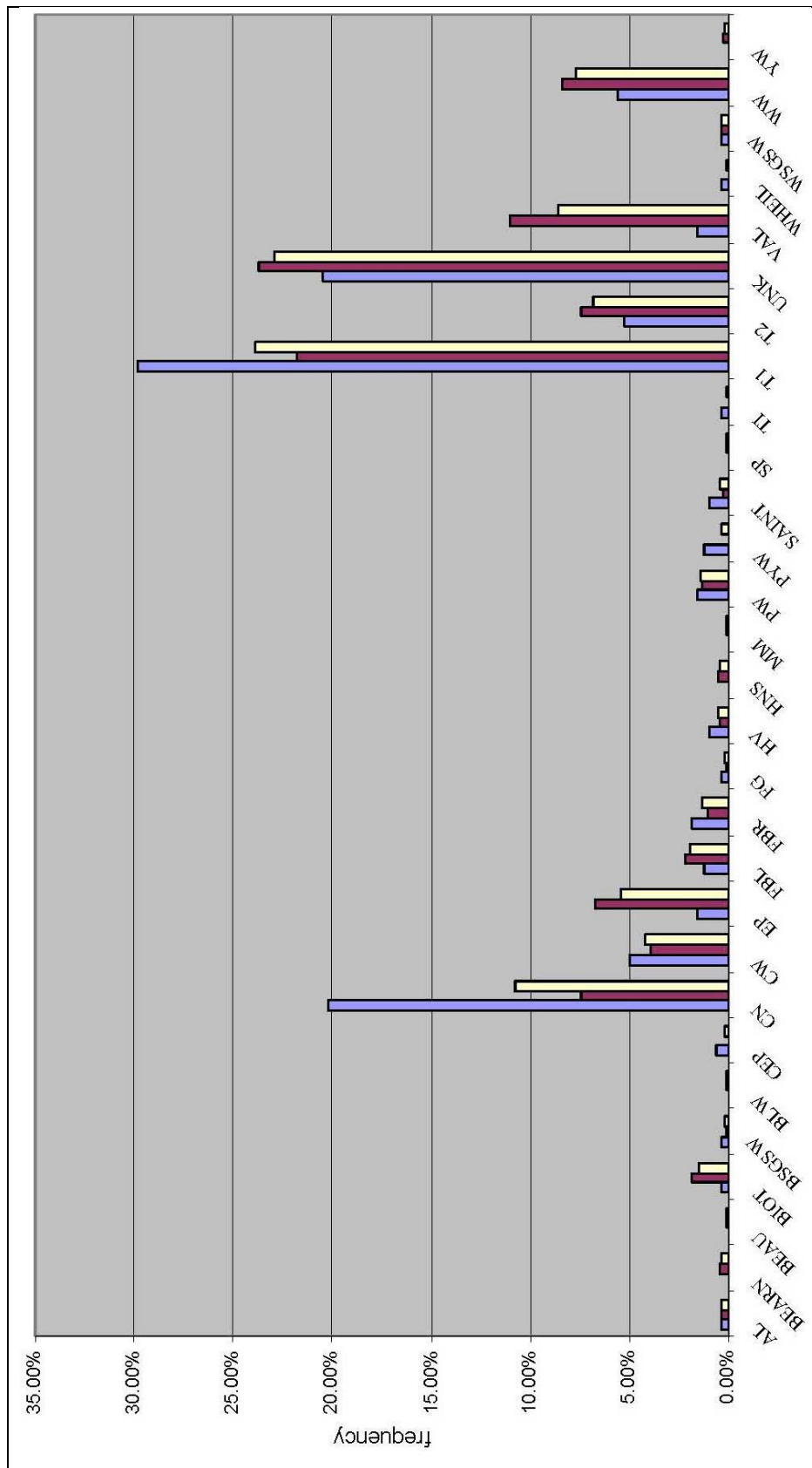


Since this site was occupied prior to the 19th century it can be surmised that porcelain assumed the role of being somewhat of a status marker (Deetz 1996: 72), although porcelain was not entirely absent from the assemblage at Locus A. Porcelains were rare and expensive prior to 1800 (Deetz 1996: 84), so the presence within an assemblage dating earlier than this date is a fairly strong indication of higher socio-economic standing and relatively greater wealth. It should be noted that stoneware was present at both loci but in very low frequencies.

Figure 3 depicts a graph based upon the breakdown of specific ceramic types. When we look at a breakdown of types, we see French types such as Biot, Vallauris, and some locally manufactured European style coarse earthenwares are present in much greater frequencies at Locus M (Florida Museum of Natural History, Hauser 2008). These types were used for food preparation and storage, which would have likely replaced the function of *coco neg* at this locus. Type I coarse earthenwares, which were used in the manufacture of sugar, occur in greater frequencies at Locus A which likely reflects acquisition of vessels no longer useful for industrial purposes being adopted for other uses by the enslaved population.

*Coco neg* may have been manufactured or acquired as a substitute for other refined earthenwares, and was present at both Locus A and Locus M. The *coco neg* at Locus M may have been deposited by the enslaved population from the nearby Locus C or may have been used, broken, and disposed of by people in the *Maison du Maitre* itself, particularly in the kitchen. This could point to a need to subsidize the ceramics being used in all areas of the site with locally manufactured wares or a preference for the locally manufactured wares in the kitchen of the *Maison du Maitre*. Conversely, if both the slave village and the *Maison du Maitre* were disposing of waste in Locus M this would mean that the assemblages would probably not show the same degree of difference than if they were two very distinct assemblages.

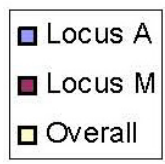
Certain types were only recorded at one Locus, which does indicate some difference. However these isolated types were often present in very small frequencies and while it may indicate that a type was used solely in one context it could also mean that the recovery methods employed for this study did not retrieve these low frequency types. As this study is based upon shovel test pit survey data from Locus A and Locus M, the sample sizes for both areas were relatively small and further investigation at both the loci (including the results from units that were not included in this study) may reveal these scarce types to be present at both loci or provide us with further



**Figure 3.**  
**Frequencies of**  
**Ceramic Types at**  
**Habitation Crève**  
**Cœur.**

**Types:**

- Albisola (AL),
- Bearn SW (Bearn),
- Beauvaisis (Beau),
- Biot (Biot),
- Brown Salt Glazed SW (BSGSW),
- Buckley (BLW),
- Chinese Export Porcelain (CEP),
- coco neg (CN),
- creamware (CW),
- European porcelain (EP),
- Faïence blanche (FBL),
- Faïence Brune (FBR),
- Faïence General (FG),
- Huveane (HV),
- Huveane no slip (HNS),
- Marseille monochrome (MM),
- pearlware (PW),
- Provence yellow on white (PYW),
- Saintonge (SAINT),
- Seine Polychrome (SP),
- Type I (T1), Type II (T2), unknown (UNK),
- Vallauris (VAL),
- Wheildon (WHEEL),
- white salt glazed stoneware (WSGSW),
- whiteware (WW),
- yellowware (YW).



information demonstrating that the type was only present in one context. Within these two data sets there are no types present in high frequencies at one locus and completely absent at another. It should also be noted that complete vessels were not retrieved from Locus M or Locus A, indicating that all artifacts recovered were discarded due to breakage as is expected in midden.

It has also been discussed in previous work that planters and the wealthy were likely to acquire ceramic sets (Otto 1975), whereas people of lower socio-economic standing may have acquired ceramics one by one, leading to a wider variety of ceramics employed by the population of lower socio-economic standing (Otto 1975). Additionally, when ceramics have to be purchased individually it is more likely that they will be repaired or continued to be used when broken due to the cost of replacing a piece, whereas the more wealthy will be able to replace more easily, or would potentially update their ceramics and sell the remaining pieces in the collection (Otto 1975). Therefore access to markets, types and fashions become a key issue when studying reasons as to why differences emerge. Some studies have demonstrated that planters may have facilitated access to some types and restricted access to others (Thomas 1998: 540). In other instances access may be determined by economic systems such as internal economies that are explored in more detail later in this article.

Coupled with issues of access also emerges the idea of differences in value assigned by the two cultures to various types, as it is not uncommon for artifacts to acquire new meanings, usage and value in different cultural contexts (Singleton 1995: 127). Socio-economic and cultural values both appear to play an important role in access. In some cases status divisions are obvious (planter versus enslaved), but can also be more subtle such as differences within the enslaved population. In *Sampling Many Pots*, Wilkie and Farnsworth determined that the degree of overlap between the various assemblages present among the enslaved population varied and possibly reflected certain social ties and differing degrees of social interaction within the enslaved population, which would impact the degree of access that individuals would have in addition to access for socio-economic reasons (Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005: 286-288). While these more subtle differences are not specifically explored in this study hopefully these results can be elaborated upon and more detailed analysis of the nuanced differences can be conducted in the future by examining in detail the variations in decorative preferences.

### ***Coco Neg*, Colonoware, and Informal Economies**

*Coco neg* is a ceramic type that emerged in a similar manner to colonoware in the United States and appears to share attributes such as paste color and vessel form. Colonoware and similar ceramics have been documented throughout North America and the Caribbean. Leland Ferguson describes similarities between colonoware and Ghanaian ceramic traditions and demonstrated that colonoware was a fusion of African, Native American, and European ceramic styles and techniques (Ferguson 1980: 18-19). Charles Joyner describes records showing that enslaved people who had ceramic knowledge were sought after by planters (Joyner 1984: 71). James Deetz mentions that in North America it was believed that planters avoided purchasing European ceramics for their slaves by encouraging the use of colonoware (Deetz 1993: 80-81).

The assemblages for both Locus A and Locus M contained sherds of *coco neg* indicating disposal of broken vessels. As is the question with all artifacts, the major questions surrounding the *coco neg* explore the means by which vessels were manufactured and how they became to be in use at the site. There are two possibilities as to how *coco neg* arrived at Crève Cœur; either through manufacture on site or through trade both with other plantations and in markets (Hauser 2008; Kelly et al. 2008). The data recovery methods used specifically for this study (shovel test pit surveys) were not designed to interpret whether ceramics were being manufactured on site, since this data is specifically drawn from simple artifact counts from shovel tests. If these ceramics were manufactured on site the question can become whether there was trade that occurred with other parts of the island or even with the wider French West Indies. Recent work has indicated that sherds of *coco neg* retrieved from Guadeloupe can be sourced to Martinique (Kelly et al. 2008), which indicates that there was more informal trade occurring between the French colonies as has been seen with the British colonies (Hauser 2008). If ceramics were purchased for use at Crève Cœur, the question becomes who was purchasing the ceramics, from whom and where were they purchased, and what was being used to exchange for these vessels.

These questions introduce the idea of internal economies. From this study it cannot be established what economic systems may have functioned outside of the official business of the plantation, but these questions have been explored in detail in the Southern United States and other parts of the Caribbean. On Guadeloupe, Heather Gibson suggested that these economic systems were encouraged in order to provide the enslaved with some attachment to land (in the case of cultivation) which in turn would discourage rebellion (Gibson 2009). In South Carolina,

a number of examples of enslaved people engaging in extra economic activities have been studied both by historians and by archaeologists. In his discussion of the task system, Charles Joyner explores how enslaved people could pursue individual economic activities after their tasks were complete (Joyner 1984) whether it was through manufacturing of items such as baskets, small-scale agriculture, or raising livestock. Nicole Isenbarger discusses how enslaved people in Charleston hired themselves out, and while they faced public resistance from the planters, they were often privately encouraged to do so (Isenbarger 2006: 25). There are also accounts of enslaved people producing goods that they would sell directly to their masters (Smith 2001: 166-167), which again reinforces the idea that the planters not only knew about these additional economic activities but actively encouraged them. The ability to enter markets became particularly important in places such as Jamaica where slaves were expected to produce their own food, gradually creating markets for certain crops that involved the entire island (Mintz 1974). Douglas Armstrong's work studying *yabbas* wares at Drax Hall explored localized trading systems on Jamaica (Armstrong 1990: 158) and Hauser mentions a wider network linking islands in the North Western Caribbean (Hauser 2008).

If enslaved laborers did pursue economic activities outside of the plantation, the next question becomes what goods were acquired through these systems. As has already been mentioned, markets to acquire certain crops emerged in Jamaica (Mintz 1974). More recent work by Nicole Isenbarger has explored colonoware being produced with the intention that it would be traded as opposed to being used on the plantation where it was manufactured (Isenbarger 2009). Leland Ferguson discusses how the quality of colonoware at various plantations varied greatly, with some sites containing colonoware that had been made by highly skilled potters whereas other sites yielded vessels that had been created crudely for very utilitarian purposes (Ferguson 2004). With this wide variety of abilities it would not be surprising if enslaved people traded for higher quality ceramics, be it of European origin or well-made colonowares. Additionally Theresa Singleton discusses how at many plantations there are sparse records on ceramic purchases specifically for use by the enslaved population, a strange omission if the planters were indeed supplying their enslaved populations with ceramics (Singleton 1995: 127).

## **Other Comparative Studies: The Caribbean and Beyond**

The results from this study can be placed in perspective through contrast with other comparative studies. While many of these previous studies are centered outside of the French West Indies they can provide a framework for these interpretations. One of the most well known comparative studies was conducted by John Solomon Otto at Cannon's Point Plantation in coastal Georgia. Cannon's Point was a cotton plantation in which the enslaved, overseer and planter contexts were studied. As at Crève Cœur, the Mean Ceramic Dates for the enslaved contexts at Cannon's Point were earlier than the dates of the planter contexts and Otto notes that this is likely because ceramics were used longer and were less likely to be replaced within the enslaved context (Otto 1975: 76). Observations such as the greater frequency of later ceramics and the greater likelihood of "sets" of ceramics were made about the planter contexts (Otto 1975: 76). Otto's study also included comparisons to the assemblage present in an overseer context as well as the planter and enslaved context, and this revealed that there were more similarities between the overseer and enslaved contexts than the overseer and planter contexts in that the assemblages both displayed a relatively high degree of heterogeneity and higher rate of older wares relative to the planter context (Otto 1975: 78). This implies that the differences were based more upon socio-economic status, rather than along racial lines described by Otto as "subordinate and elite differences" (Otto 1980: 9). Charles Orser explains this by noting that definitions of race and ethnicity are constantly changing, but class differences tend to continue to break along similar lines and continue to be manifested in a similar manner within the material record (Orser 1988: 739).

However when further investigation into surface treatment of types was conducted, it was revealed that the overseer and the enslaved contexts were different in the decorative techniques and motifs that were favored by the various populations (Otto 1975: 162-165). This difference not only demonstrates disparities in the preferences but also reflects that the items were likely purchased separately (Otto 1975: 162-165). While the value of the various types may have been similar between the overseers and the enslaved, the difference in decorative preferences indicates that there remained cultural preferences for aesthetics which allowed people in these two groups to distinguish themselves from one another.

Moving closer to Martinique, Drax Hall on Jamaica provides comparative information from Jamaica. Like at Cannon's Point, three contexts were studied; the enslaved population, free

laborers and the planter context. One of the most important findings of the study at Drax Hall was that there was a break from the Carolina Artifact Pattern in which one would predict that planter contexts will yield a greater number of artifacts than the enslaved contexts (South 1977); here the enslaved contexts yielded a greater amount of artifacts than the planter contexts (Armstrong 1990: 259). The artifacts in the enslaved context reflected a greater reliance upon local markets, which indicates that access to foreign markets was restricted (Armstrong 1990: 264). These economies grew to be extremely important in Jamaica and impacted everyone on the island (Hauser 2008: 41-42). The planters were apprehensive of these systems, but realized that they depended upon the systems and could not risk eliminating these markets (Hauser 2008: 195). However, these market situations served as more than just an arena for economic activities, bringing with them a social aspect beyond the control of the planters (Hauser 2008). As in the United States, ceramics were frequently exchanged in these interactions (Hauser 2008). *Yabbas* which exhibit similar characteristics to colonoware and *coco neg* were present in large numbers at the plantation and also reflected some of these localized trade networks (Armstrong 1990: 158) and trade networks that potentially extended beyond the island (Hauser 2008: 114).

## **Conclusion**

As can be seen in this study, a number of differences became evident even in these relatively basic analyses upon which future elaborations can be made. The Mean Ceramic Dates reflect trends reported by Otto where the enslaved context appears to “pre-date” the planter context. Additionally, looking at graphs that depict the frequencies of various types, we see evidence of reuse, substitution, and potentially trade. Some socio-economic differences are visible within the assemblage (such as the higher frequency of porcelain in the assemblage from Locus M) which reflects patterns previously described in the United States (Deetz 1993).

These results could be elaborated upon both through comparisons with the loci not included in this study (B, C and D) which may reveal further information about social dynamics within the enslaved population at Crève Cœur. Inclusion of these loci should also involve a discussion of the various decorations present on the sherds, and an attempt to discern whether we can identify and understand any subtle socio-economic differences between the enslaved contexts and potentially explore variations in the level of access to markets on the plantation, within Martinique and beyond.

## Acknowledgements

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## Note

\* The author completed her undergraduate studies at the University of South Carolina and plans to begin graduate studies in Fall 2009 at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

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