

Iroquois Ceramic Iconography: New Evidence from the Oneida Vaillancourt Site

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This paper is an inquiry into the possible meaning of human-like imagery found on certain Iroquois pottery from the late 1400s to the mid 1600s. In the case of one Iroquois ceramic tradition examined in detail, that of the Oneidas in present upstate New York, an anthropomorphic subject received increasing elaboration over time, most obviously by adding bodies to faces. Post-cranial body parts were represented by indented clay ribbons, limb-like elements resembling two other forms of plastic decoration in the Northeast. Both of those designs, the ladder effigy and the corn-ear motif, recently were identified at the Oneida Vaillancourt site (circa A.D. 1525-1555). Since the effigy face developed into a complete figure at precisely the same archaeological moment, it appears likely the corn-ear and ladder contributed to the symbolic synthesis. I propose the same conceptual process was occurring in the pottery of St. Lawrence Iroquoians some distance to the north. Applying the direct historical method, I also suggest the Iroquois effigy imagery connoted corn and, possibly, made reference to mythological cornhusk people associated with bountiful crops.

Introduction

The highest achievement in Iroquois ceramic art, according to William Beauchamp (1898:92), was the creation of distinctive human-like depictions on pottery. Such imagery was especially characteristic of the central Iroquois, the Onondagas and Oneidas, from late in the pre-European era until well into the seventeenth century. Of obvious symbolic import, these consciously fashioned, naturalistic images constitute the largest surviving database of material symbols significant to Iroquois or Haudenosaunee people of long ago. Confronted by such representational art, one cannot avoid the issue of content. What did they *mean*?

I shall outline archaeological and documentary lines of inquiry converging to the same conclusion: the effigies probably made reference to corn, the primary Iroquois food. The archeological section opens with a summary of effigy distribution in the Northeast, then focuses on the Iroquois and the best documented sequence within the Iroquois region. Among the Oneidas, effigies first appeared as faces which, over time, acquired bodies. The torsos and limbs were made from appliquéd ribbons of clay decorated with parallel indentations or hash marks.

Since anthropomorphic effigies were only one aspect of a larger world of plastic decoration, I next sketch the regional distributions of two other forms of applied decoration: the ladder effigy, found in highest frequencies in western New York, and the corn-ear motif, diagnostic of the St. Lawrence Iroquoian area. Essentially the same design, they could well have conveyed similar meanings. Further, both resemble the appliquéd bands comprising the body of the fully developed effigy figure.

Recently, all three additive decorations—ladder, corn-ear, and face—have been identified at Vaillancourt, an Oneida archaeological site containing the first evidence for limbs attached to effigy faces. Now, it appears the anthropomorphic figure came into being when the ladder/corn-ear was added to the face at the vessel location dedicated to effigy presentation. The corn-ear motif, so called because it looks like an ear of corn, implies this symbolic coalescence may have connoted maize. The corn-ear also testifies to previously unknown links between Vaillancourt and the St. Lawrence Iroquoian region where a similar process of symbolic synthesis may have been taking place.

Turning from archaeological to documentary evidence, I summarize what is known and what

seems reasonable to infer about the social context of effigies. I conclude effigy pottery probably was made by women and mostly used for boiling the household's corn-based meals. If material symbols are in any way appropriate to the social settings in which they are employed (can one assume otherwise?), these effigies probably had something to do with corn, with femaleness, and with the hearth.

To investigate what that might mean in terms of Iroquois culture becomes a question of interpreting the archaeological record in the light of later, culturally appropriate evidence. The direct historical approach is justified in this case by Haudenosaunee continuity in the region and by the massive amount of documentation available on Iroquois culture and belief. I identify the subject most likely referenced by Iroquois effigies as a mythological race of cornhusk people who symbolize horticultural abundance.

Anthropomorphic Effigies Among the Iroquois

Human-like faces adorned pottery in several parts of the Northeast during the last several centuries of indigenous pottery-making (Figure 1). In present Canada, such faces are reported east of the Georgian Bay (Curtis and Latta 2000), at the southwestern tip of Ontario (Murphy and Ferris 1990:Figure 7-19), in the Toronto region (Ronald F. Williamson, personal communication 2005), and along the St. Lawrence River (e.g., Wintemberg 1936:Plates 5, 8-9). In the U.S., they occur in upstate New York, in the Susquehanna River Valley of southern Pennsylvania (Kent 1984), in the upper Delaware River region of Pennsylvania and New York (Kraft 1975), in southeastern New York (Funk 1978:Plate 22; Lopez and Wisniewski 1972:Plate 2), and in southern New England (Fowler 1959; Grumet 1995:143; Snow 1978:Figure 7; Willoughby 1935:197). Stylistically diverse, they range in depiction from geometric to realistic, from conventionalized to naturalistic. But, nearly everywhere across this apparent horizon, the effigy faces occurred at or directly underneath a castellation—the upward flaring point at the top of a vessel's collar. Agreement on this point was

nearly universal: additive imagery belonged only at this location.

The latest of these regional effigy traditions developed during the mid 1600s in southern New England (Goodby 1998:172-174). The earliest may be that of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians whose distinctive tri-punctate faces are dated to the 1300s (Figure 2b).

Sporadic occurrences of faces on non-castellated pottery, earlier in time, are reported from coastal New York to southern Ontario (Lopez and Latham 1960; Wright 1972: Plates 16a and 17a). The most evocative of these possible antecedents is a vessel with appliquéd face and body from the thirteenth-century Castle Creek site, approximately 100 km south of present Oneida, New York (Figure 2a).

Speakers of several languages made effigy pottery although the more elaborate developments seem to have been associated with Iroquoians. Among the Iroquois proper—that is, the Confederacy or Five Nations Iroquois (east to west in present upstate New York: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations or tribes), the face developed over time into a complete humanoid figure.

Yet, effigy distribution across Iroquois territory was not uniform. For example, in a sequence of Mohawk sites spanning the years 1520-1580, only three effigies are present within an assemblage of over 7,000 rim sherds (Funk and Kuhn 2003:34, 73; Ritchie and Funk 1973:327). Among the Cayugas, effigies are virtually nonexistent (DeOrio 1980:65). Among the Senecas, the humanoid depiction may be relatively late and did not become the preferred effigy form until after 1600 (Hayes 1980; Sempowski and Saunders 2001:159, 430, 718; Wray 1973:12; Wray et al. 1991:100, 274, 508).

The Iroquois effigy tradition centered among the Onondagas and the Oneidas (Bradley 1987:38, 55, 122; Gibson 1963; MacNeish 1952:68-69; Tuck 1971:155, 164, 173). In the better known Oneida sequence (Wonderley 2002), an effigy art of anthropomorphic faces (Figure 3) and zoomorphic depictions (Figure 4a) first appeared late in the fifteenth century (Pratt 1976:100).

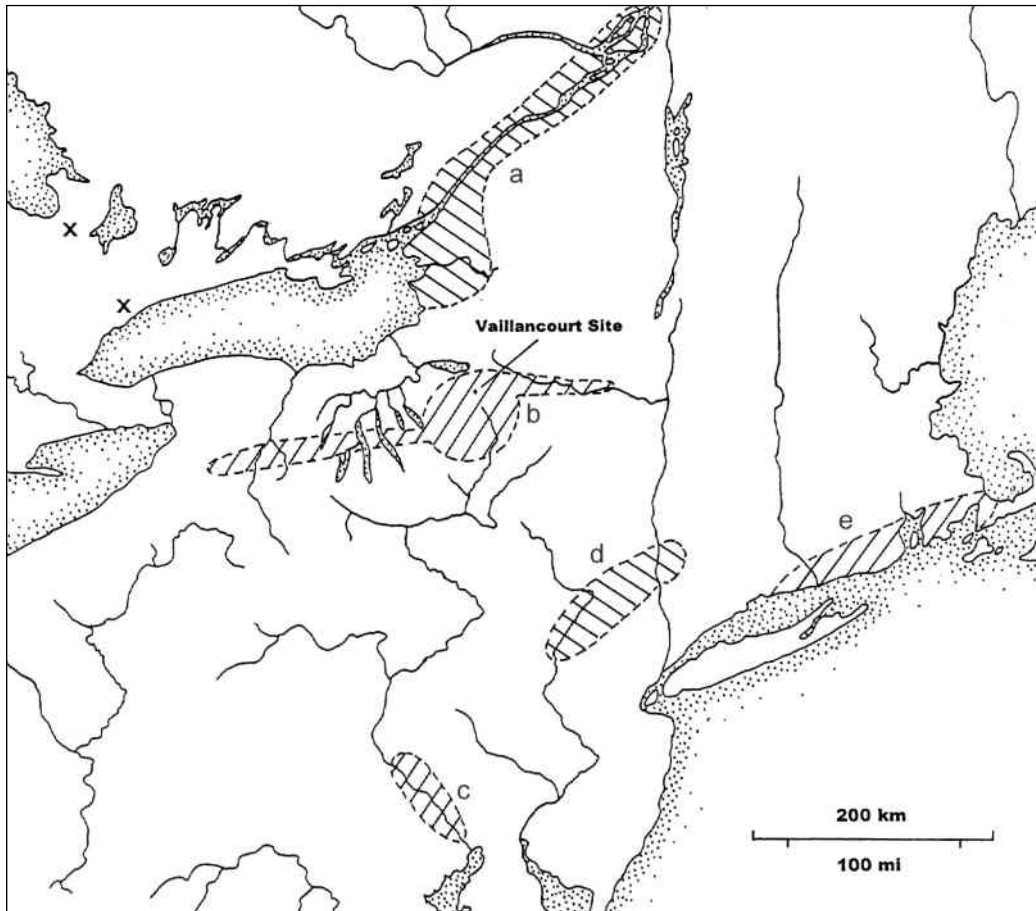


Figure 1. Distribution of anthropomorphic effigy faces in the Northeast. "X" marks places at which effigy faces are reported. Regional effigy traditions are St. Lawrence Iroquoian (a); Iroquois (b); Susquehannock (c); Proto-Lenape (d); and southern New England (e).

Most early faces are realistic in appearance with well defined facial features. Eyes tend to be indicated by two horizontally parallel incisions. Although some faces were modeled out of the vessel's fabric, most were separately sculpted on a piece of clay subsequently applied to the pot. Faces range in length from about 1.5 to 5 cm.

At the turn of the sixteenth century, non-human depictions drop out of the archaeological record as limb-like elements appear. These possible arms and legs are appliquéd clay ribbons bearing hash-mark decoration. At least one applied band clearly was attached to a face to represent a body at the Vaillancourt site occupied during the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

Never entirely out of style, isolated heads continued to occur from the mid sixteenth century

on. However, at sites later than Vaillancourt, the developmental emphasis in effigies was in the direction of clarifying the anthropomorphic figure and homogenizing its depiction. The figure effigies became more standardized in posture (Figure 5a), eventually achieving a full-frontal stance with arms outspread at a 45 degree angle. Technical realization of the figure also moved toward uniformity. By 1630, the torso area of most effigy figures was indicated by means of two vertically parallel and hash-marked appliquéd bands (Figure 5b-e). Often, an open space was left between them. Below the torso area, the ribbons resolved into the figure's legs. In addition, many figures have what look like wavy or possibly spike-like protuberances projecting outward from the exterior borders of the image.

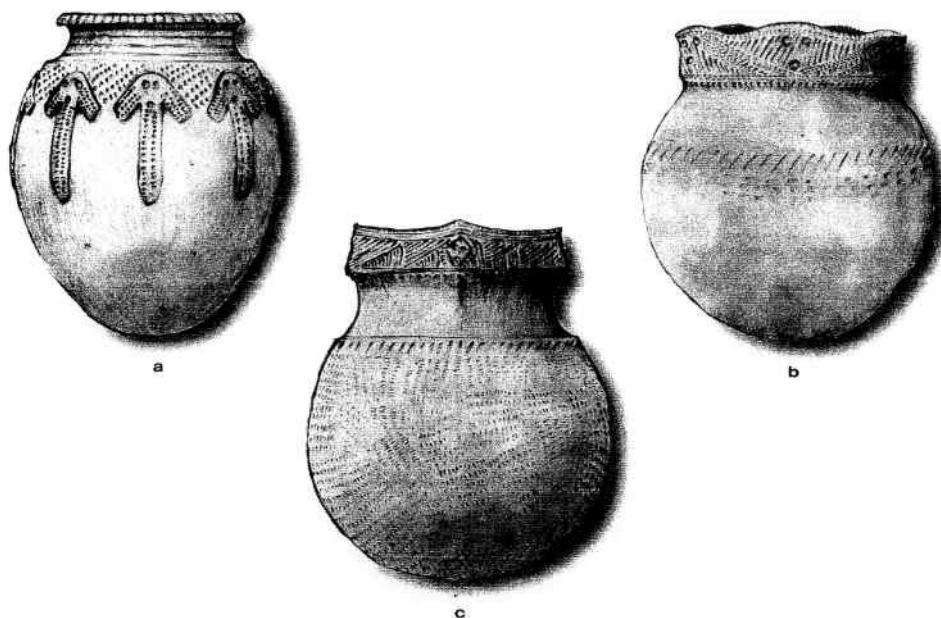


Figure 2. Effigy vessels from the Castle Creek site (a) and the St. Lawrence Iroquoian region (b-c). Castle Creek specimen after Ritchie (1944:Plate 15). St. Lawrence specimens after Clermont et al. (1983:109) and McHargue (1998:Figure 11).

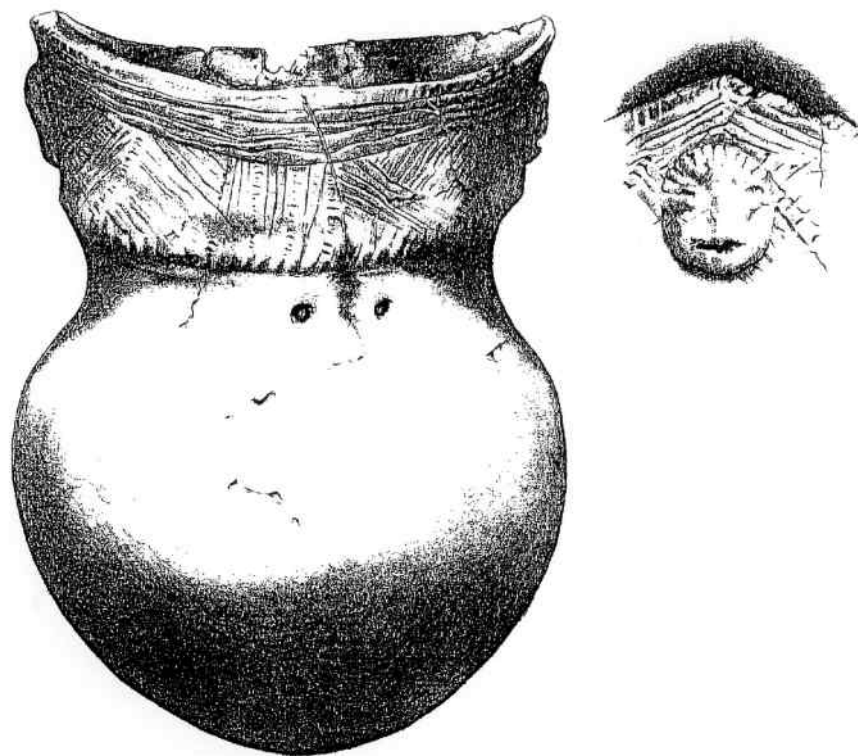


Figure 3. Effigy vessel from the Oneida Vaillancourt site, 1525-1555.



Figure 4. Early Oneida effigies: (a) possible frog, circa 1490-1515; (b) apparent corn cob, circa 1520.

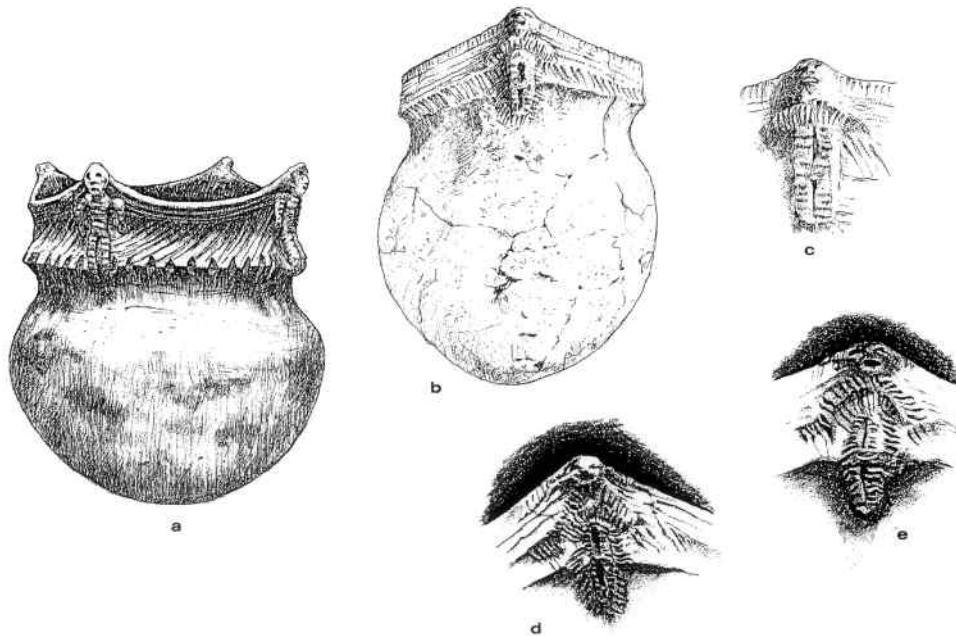


Figure 5. Oneida full-figure effigy figures: circa 1620-1635 (a); circa 1635-1655 (b-e).

Sexual characteristics are not emphasized although femaleness is implied by the occasional depiction of what looks like a cleft crotch.

Throughout the Oneida sequence, effigy pottery derives from the debris of living village life—from habitation areas and middens. It seems to have belonged to the basic domestic ceramic complex that primarily—in our terms and so far as we can tell—was utilitarian in character.

Impressionistically, humanoid effigies occur frequently in the Oneida archaeological record. At a late fifteenth-century site, perhaps two percent of rim sherds bear effigy faces. At Vaillancourt, the figure may be six percent (2 of 34 classifiable rim sherds). Percentages range from 5 to 14 at two sites of the early seventeenth century.

Effigies disappear with the demise of the native-made ceramic industry about 1660. The

effigy tradition, therefore, lasted for about 175 years as a coherent representational theme. Its development followed an internal logic progressively clarifying a humanoid subject. The tradition was realistic in essence, although verisimilitude, in the sense of photo-realism, was never its point.

What does the full-figure effigy depict? Are we looking at an example of split representation, or an x-ray perspective meant to emphasize the being's innards? Is the humanoid meant to be understood as skeletal or winged? Might the hash marks represent the wounds of a torture victim in the process of being flayed alive (Weiskotten 1993:40)?

Perhaps. A reservation I have with such purely formal interpretations is that most ignore the evidence of developmental sequence to focus on the stylized end-product. If the referent remained much the same throughout (as seems probable to me), a reading of the figure should accord with earlier treatments of the figure. Thus, if upper limbs are depicted as arms (Figure 5a), then, later in time, they are more likely to be conventionalized arms than wings.

More importantly, any interpretation of the figure effigy should be consistent with the meaning of

its primary decorative constituent: the hash marks. How likely is it that these denoted bones or wounds?

Regional Iconography

The anthropomorphic effigy figure was not the only form of plastic decoration applied to pottery across the greater Northeast. Archaeologists recognize at least two other forms of design in relief contemporaneous with humanoid effigies: the ladder effigy and the corn-ear motif.

The ladder effigy¹ consists of a vertically oriented ridge with ladder-like markings at or below a castellation (Figure 6a-b). The raised ridge results from pinching the clay together or from application of a clay strip to the vessel's surface. The ladder's rungs are created by "several short horizontal markings which are cut, stamped or gouged into the thickened area, and are lined up vertically one above the other from the top to the bottom of the effigy" (Wray et al. 1987:79). While the ladder effigy occurs sporadically over an enormous area, it seems to be most characteristic of the Seneca area and the northern zone of the Niagara Frontier in western New York, and possibly the Neutral region in southwestern

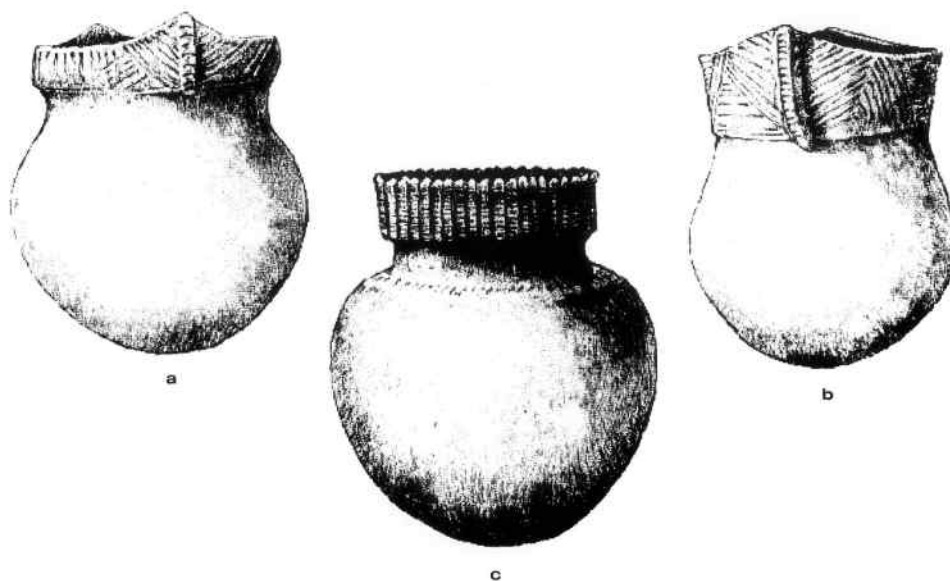


Figure 6. The ladder effigy (a-b) and the corn-ear motif (c). Ladder effigies after Niemczycki (1984:138). and Wray et al. (1987:Figure 3-41f), Corn ear motif after Chapdelaine (2004:Figure 4.2).

Ontario (Fitzgerald 2001:43; White 1961:89; Wray et al. 1991:273-274, 499, 508).

Among the Susquehannocks, Iroquoian-speakers of south-central Pennsylvania, the ladder effigy came into widespread use (on a type of pottery called Strickler Cord-marked) during the seventeenth century. Because this was after the heyday of anthropomorphic effigies (on Washington Boro Incised), Kent (1984:144) reasoned the hash-marked ladders were “very stylized representations” of earlier full-figure effigies decorated in the same hash-marked fashion. The same resemblance was noted in the context of Seneca pottery by Cervone (1991:274), who added that the ladder effigy also resembles an ear of corn removed from the corn-ear type of pottery.

The corn-ear is a distinctive kind of ceramic vessel (a type) characterized by a series of raised, vertically oriented ridges applied around a vessel’s exterior rim (Figure 6c). Each ridge is indented with stamped horizontal lines, incised slashes, or punctates most frequently lined up in a single column resembling the rungs of a ladder. Each vertical ridge is one corn-ear motif. Obviously, the name derives from a perceived resemblance to “ears of corn, the rows of transverse linear impressions being intended to represent the kernels” (Wintemberg 1936:113). This design (type and motif), in other words, is widely, though informally, regarded as naturalistic. It is diagnostic of the late-period St. Lawrence Iroquoian region, especially the clusters of sites around Prescott, Summerstown, and Montreal—Claude Chapdelaine’s (1990, 2004:65, 68-70) Hochelaga province.

The ladder and the corn-ear look the same because, physically, they usually are identical, both being a strip of clay with parallel indentations. The difference between them is partly a matter of emphasis—the corn-ear is presented repeatedly around the rim, the ladder effigy only once at a castellation—that is, at a vessel’s effigy position. The ladder and corn-ear, in turn, look like the body of the full-figure humanoid effigy in that all bear identical hash-mark decoration. This resemblance is especially strong in the fully evolved Oneida figure whose body literally consists of what could be called two ladders or corn-ears (Figure 5b-e).

If they all look the same, they could have been related in meaning and the meaning of one, if known, might reasonably attach to the others. Corn-ears look like corn and sometimes ladder effigies do too. Or, perhaps more accurately, one occasionally sees an apparent representation of corn placed at a castellation where a ladder effigy would be expected. A good example of this is known from an Oneida site (Figure 4b) adjacent to and immediately preceding Vaillancourt in the Oneida sequence.

Vaillancourt to Hochelaga

The Oneida Indian Nation of upstate New York is preserving its own past by acquiring ancestral locations and collections of objects taken from those archaeological sites. Recently, the Oneida Nation purchased one of the larger Oneida villages, a site called Vaillancourt, and, soon after, obtained two artifact collections from avocationals who had been digging at the site. The remarks that follow are based on study of these newly available materials.

We already suspected that Vaillancourt produced the first evidence for limbs being attached to an effigy face. Now, with two more examples, we can report with greater confidence that the full-figure effigy depiction in Oneida art was being developed here (Figure 7i-j).

A new discovery is that the applied, hash-marked strip of clay is linked to the effigy in a second way. In two instances, the ribbon forms an arch-like framing device for the face (Figure 7h). This more purely decorative application of ribbon to face implies that the hash-marked strip was meaningful in its own right, that it was regarded as something more than a representation of a humanoid limb.

At Vaillancourt and at precisely the same time the hash-marked appliquéd band was being combined with the effigy face, the other two plastic designs of the Northeast were also present. Although the ladder effigy occurs very infrequently in the eastern Iroquois area and is rare in Oneida country, two examples are now known from Vaillancourt (Figure 7e)—both very possibly from the same primary deposit.

That same context yielded an example of a classic corn-ear rim sherd. The corn-ear, it turns

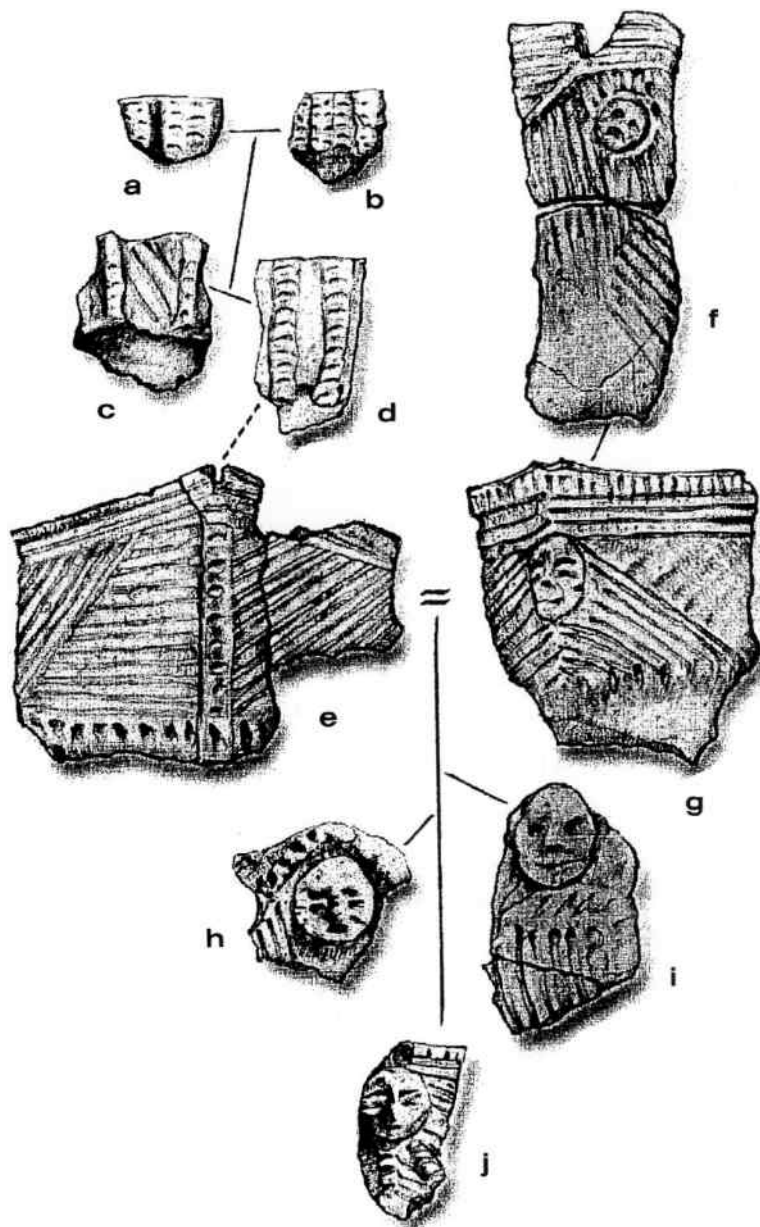


Figure 7. *Suggested ceramic iconography at Vaillancourt.*

out, probably is characteristic of the Vaillancourt ceramic assemblage. It looms large in our small sample (4 of 34 classifiable rim sherds and 6 rims overall [Figure 7a-d]) and is composed of fabric macroscopically indistinguishable from other pottery presumed to be local.

I suggest above that these three contemporaneous traditions of plastic decoration in the Northeast have much in common. Now we have

evidence that all three were present in the same place, all apparently involved in the synthesis that gave rise to the full-figure humanoid image. Temporally associated, they almost certainly are linked symbolically in a possible evocation of corn as well.

Lest I be accused of promoting a brand of Oneida Exceptionalism, let me emphasize that what I think I see at Vaillancourt may well have

been occurring also in the Onondaga area. Thus, Tuck (1971:164) mentioned something called a “vertical clay ridge” (presumably the ladder effigy) present at two Onondaga sites probably contemporaneous with Vaillancourt. Similarly, “corn-ear type pottery” shows up on Onondaga sites of about 1500-1550—a northern trait, according to Bradley (1987:215-216, note 15), that did not survive in the Onondaga ceramic tradition.

Further, something similar to Vaillancourt’s conceptual synthesis may be visible on pottery of the St. Lawrence Iroquoian Hochelaga province around or just after 1550 (Abel 2001:129; Pendegast 1980). There, the corn-ear motif (Figure 8a-e) was, apparently, moved to the castellated position of a vessel (Figure 8f-l). Instead of encircling the rim repetitively, in other words, the motif was now featured at the effigy position as a ladder-like effigy. Some of these new effigy corn-ears look suggestively naturalistic (Figure 8k-l). And, even as the corn-ear motif became an effigy, it also became part of the effigy face. Here, the hash-marked linear element was not limb-like, but fused into the visage itself (Figure 8m-o).²

What I am suggesting is that, at both Vaillancourt and among the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, a corn-ear/ladder design with effigy associations was joined to an anthropomorphic face. In both the Iroquois and St. Lawrence Iroquoian areas, the same decorative elements were being synthesized in the same or homologous fashion. In both, the apparently naturalistic corn-ear provides the most likely entrée into an otherwise closed system of cultural meaning.

Contextual Clues and Suggested Historical Identification

So, again, what did these effigies show and mean? Kraft (1972, 1996) argued that pottery faces, along with depictions of faces on pendants and pipes in the upper Delaware region, represented cornhusk masks such as those employed by the Lenape or Delaware in a corn-harvest ceremony later in time (Speck 1937:79).

Similarly, interpretations in the Iroquois area lumped ceramic effigies together with anthropomorphic representations in other media (pipes,

combs, etc.). Like Kraft, Iroquois researchers identified archaeological faces as masks although the objects they had in mind were wooden masks of the *Haduwi* (False Face) medicine society. The appearance of archaeological faces, therefore, signaled the existence of a group-integrating sodality among the Iroquois (Ritchie and Funk 1973:367; Tuck 1971:213).

At a higher level of abstraction, it has been observed that effigies on Iroquois pottery are merely one aspect of a general florescence in representational art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The imagery of that time is interpreted as the material correlate of increased ceremonial-ritual activity caused either by the European encounter (Hamell 1987, 1998) or by a reformation of the Iroquois Confederacy caused, in turn, by the appearance of Europeans (Bradley 1987:110, 217 note 24).

To be sure, representational art on pots was only one facies of a larger phenomenon: the development of naturalistic imagery. Yet, it is also true that effigies in different media—on pipes and on pottery vessels, for example—are likely to have been used in very different ways (Wonderly 2002, 2005). It makes better methodological sense, therefore, to determine what occurs in specific media before asserting, a priori, what the phenomenon means in all of them.

Hence, my attempt to understand what Oneida effigies might have to say begins with disentangling ceramic evidence from other forms of material culture. But then what? In the absence of any over-arching theory of reification explaining why and when specific things came into being, one can only assume that the meaning(s) of material symbols had to have been consistent with the contexts in which they were employed. How meaning was constituted therefore requires looking at how the objects were situated in social practice (Hodder 1986, 1987). Who made effigy pottery? How and where were such pots used?

In the Iroquois context, the answer, almost certainly, is that the vessels were made by women who employed them as cooking pots on their home hearths. The mainstay of the Iroquois diet was maize, possibly accounting for as much as



Figure 8. Corn-ear motifs, corn-ear effigies, and effigy faces from the St. Lawrence Iroquoian sites of Roebuck (a-f, k-v) and Glenbrook (g, j). After Pendergast (1980: Plates 3-3, 3-8); Wintenberg (1936: Plates 4-22; 5-5, 5-18, 5-23, 5-25-27; 7-6; 9-1, 9-15-21, and 9-24-25).

three quarters of what Iroquois people consumed (Schwarcz et al. 1985). Far more than anything else, pots with effigies were used for boiling corn gruels, mushes, and soups (*sagamité*). The most likely connotations of effigy vessels, therefore, were maize, femaleness, and the domestic setting (Wonderly 2002:37-39).

No extant writing and no recorded tradition makes explicit reference to ceramic effigies. One can, however, survey the substantial corpus of Iroquois ethnography, folklore, and myth hoping to find some indication of a being or belief related to corn, but also in conformity with commensality, femaleness, and perhaps even full-figure imagery (Trigger 2001).

The subject most clearly satisfying those criteria is a race of beings responsible for the present-day Husk Face medicine society among the Iroquois—mythological cornhusk people for whom great antiquity is suspected (Tooker 1970:152). Diminutive beings personifying plant fertility, cornhusk people are an industrious agricultural folk “associated with planting and cultivating of prodigious food crops” (Fenton 1987:490). They are especially concerned with growing corn and it is cooked corn food that they crave. Today, cornhusk people are regarded as messengers of the Three Sisters who prophesize—quickly because they must return home to tend crying babies—bountiful crops and many children (Fenton 1987:383-404, 444; Shimony 1994:142-156; Speck 1995:88-96). Cornhusk folk are imbued with feminine associations (Fenton 1987:105, 408; Fogelson and Bell 1983; Kurath 1968:49, 182; Tooker 1970:63, 72).

Stories about cornhusk people specify an appearance completely covered over by corn tassels or husks: these beings “dress in cornhusks” (Fenton 1987:399). This characteristic still came through in the origin myths for the Husk Face Society collected at the turn of the twentieth century. Husk face knowledge in such tales derived from a hunter’s encounter with a cornhusk person dressed up in corn tassels (Speck 1995:96). The hunter was informed, “you must tell your people that you and they must prepare something with cornhusks which shall resemble the form of my body” (Fenton 1987:387).

Identifying archaeological effigies with cornhusk people has the obvious virtue of clarifying the logic behind effigy development. Over time, ceramic imagery increasingly defined the anatomical details of the complete figure—an evolution that accomplished exactly what the hunter was told to do. If mythical cornhusk people were covered by husk material and humans were supposed to imitate that look, why would their depictions resemble *ears* of corn? Ethnographically, people impersonating the cornhusk folk wear (in addition to masks fashioned from braided corn husks) normal clothing although it is often old and assembled in odd-looking combinations (Fenton 1987:404-405). In the recent past, human masqueraders may have dressed in fawn-skin mantles and garters. While this (also) does not clarify why the actual appearance of husks was ignored, it does direct us toward metaphorical thinking. The point of the deerskin was “to make the impersonator a swift runner” (Fenton 1987:390).

Such logic is key to understanding the stylized effigies placed on pottery vessels. Corn husks would have been relatively difficult to depict naturalistically. On the other hand, the potters had available, in the corn-ear motif, a symbolic element that was easily fashioned in clay, recognizable to all, and capable of standing for a larger whole—a visual *synecdoche*.

Summary

Iroquois effigy vessels, including those of the Oneidas, probably were made by women who employed them in the home, mostly for cooking maize. Assuming meaning was appropriate to contexts in which material symbols were created and used, the most likely connotations of effigy vessels would have been corn, domesticity, and femaleness. Within the corpus of historically attested ethnology and oral narrative, the subject most obviously answering to those criteria is a mythological race of cornhusk people associated with agricultural bounty. As an application of the direct historical method, this interpretation accords logically with the available and culturally appropriate information.

After surveying the distribution of effigies throughout the Northeast, I focused on a distinctive tradition of humanoid effigies among the central Iroquois of upstate New York. Effigies in the Oneida sequence developed from faces into full-figure representation between the late 1400s and the mid 1600s. This naturalistic art seemed to concentrate on one humanoid figure to which, over time, detail was added that enhanced the recognizability of the image.

Switching gears to a different level of analysis, I discussed two other kinds of plastic decoration present in the Northeast at the time of the Iroquois effigies. One is called the ladder, a raised ridge with horizontal ladder-like incisions applied vertically at a castellation (i.e., at a vessel's designated effigy position). Though very widely distributed, the highest frequencies of the ladder effigy occurred among the Seneca Iroquois of western New York. The other plastic decoration is known as the corn-ear design, a series of circumferential vertical ridges—each with ladder-like indentations. The corn-ear was diagnostic of the St. Lawrence Iroquoian area. Though the two were presented on vessels in different ways, their main elements—one an effigy and the other a motif—were identical. Both also were the same thing as the hash-marked appliquéd band comprising the body of the full-figure humanoid effigy. To judge by the corn-ear, these contemporaneous plastic elements could well have connoted maize.

New evidence from the Oneida archaeological record indicates effigy faces, ladder effigies, and corn-ear motifs also existed at the same place. All were clearly in the working vocabulary of people who made pottery at the Vaillancourt site during the second quarter of the sixteenth century when the full-figure effigy depiction evidently came into being. In effect, Vaillancourt potters combined the ladder and corn-ear designs with the humanoid face to create a new representation, the humanoid figure, at the vessel space reserved for effigy imagery. This seems to me strong circumstantial evidence that whatever meaning was connoted by the elements separately must have contributed to the synthesized depiction.

Further, much the same iconographic process may be visible in St. Lawrence Iroquoian ceramics

of about 1550. Those potters, evidently working from the conceptual baseline of their own corn-ear decoration, promoted their corn-ear to effigy status while, at the same time, adding it to their effigy faces. This remarkable parallel development implies the emergence, among both central Iroquois and Hochelagans, of similar beliefs, very possibly pertaining to corn and, conceivably, cornhusk people.

Notes

¹ My concern here is with decoration in relief applied at or beneath a vessel's castellation ("ladder effigy"). When the decoration occurs elsewhere on a vessel, I call it the hash-marked appliquéd band or ribbon. Both forms of additive decoration are distinct from incised ladder-like motifs which also have been called "ladders" or "ladder-plaits" (e.g., Chapdelaine 2004:68; Pendergast 1980:37). The applied and impressed forms of decoration could well have been closely related (perhaps even synonymous) but that point is not essential to arguments developed here.

² James Pendergast (1980) believed traits diagnostic of three ceramic traditions (St. Lawrence Iroquoian, Huron, Iroquoian) were present at the late St. Lawrence Iroquoian Glenbrook site, but were getting all mixed up, a process Pendergast described as ceramic mutation and miscegenation. The phenomenon of symbolic crystallization I hypothesize may account for part of the mixture that researcher perceived. However, Pendergast never identified the promotion of corn-ear from circumferential motif to featured effigy as one of his mutations.

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Iconographie céramique iroquoise : nouvelles preuves du site oneida Vaillancourt

Cet article est une enquête dans la signification possible d'imagerie humanoïde retrouvé sur certaine poterie iroquoise qui date de la fin du XIV^e siècle au milieu du XVI^e siècle. La tradition céramique du peuple oneida du nord de l'État actuel de New York est examiné en détail. Cette tradition a vu une élaboration croissante d'un sujet anthropomorphique avec le temps, ce qui évident par l'addition de corps aux faces. Façonné de rubans de terre cuite dentelés, la représentation des membres est semblable à deux autres formes de décoration plastique dans le nord-est. Ces deux motifs décoratifs, en échelle et en épi de maïs, ont récemment été identifié au site oneida Vaillancourt (ca. 1525-1555). Puisque la face effigie c'est développé dans une figure complète au même moment archéologique, il serait probable que l'épi de maïs et l'échelle ont contribué à cette synthèse symbolique. Je propose que ce même processus conceptuel était en marche dans la poterie des Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent plus au nord. En appliquant la méthode historique directe, je suggère aussi que les images utilisés en effigie par les Iroquois connotaient le maïs et faisait possiblement référence au peuple mythologique associé aux spathes de maïs et aux corvées abondantes.

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