

Introduction

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Dollarware refers to ceramic drinking vessels purchased from discount stores and that cost no more than \$1.00 Canadian before tax. Over the course of February 2008, I and twenty-seven student-scholars purchased 228 pieces of dollarware from 13 dollar stores throughout Montreal, as well as 61 second-hand drinking vessels from Village des Valeurs (Value Village), a well-established second-hand thrift store in the city.

The following reports represent important findings in ceramic analysis in archaeology and in the study of contemporary material culture in general. No published work exists describing the material culture of dollar stores in any detail. While these trivial, everyday objects are not masterpieces, and indeed are often rapidly discarded after purchase, their ubiquity underlies their importance for the study of the contemporary archaeological record. Historical and contemporary archaeology frequently deal with mundane materials that are not traditionally considered to be of central importance to understanding modern social life. Yet because such aspects of life are often unanalyzed or unconscious, textual evidence is rarely sufficient to fully explain material culture variability. In the case of dollarware, material culture produced, purchased and used largely by individuals of low social and economic status, this is doubly true.

The reports in Section 1 rely on intensive quantitative measurement of dollarware ceramics in an attempt to better understand the physical and metrical properties of the assemblages we collected. Because of the purchased and disposable nature of our collection, it was possible to undertake analytical procedures such as submersion, heating, and breakage that are not normally feasible with archaeological collections. Lars Anderson and Liz Penttila analyze the heat retention properties of a substantial percentage of our assemblage, and conclude that broad types of vessel morphology do differ substantially, but that more narrowly, one mug is as good as another despite differences in physical characteristics. Claudine Gravel Miguel and Dario Guiducci outline a powerful case for the utility of a Vessel Volume Index, the ratio of displacement to contents volume, as a rough measure of utility for dollarware and indeed for any other ceramic industry, including archaeological ones.

Despite considerable differences in shape, size, and design, all dollarware costs \$1.00 at most. The reports in Section 2 outline the processes of production, distribution, purchase and consumption underlying dollarware, and evaluate our collection on economic grounds. Andre Bourgoin-Horne analyzes dollarware in terms of the economic indicators of the various places of purchase, arguing that the absence of meaningful distinctions suggests a disjuncture between retailers and their potential market. David Groves addresses the question of iconography in terms of the processes of globalization and mass production and distribution that lead overwhelmingly Chinese-manufactured products to find their way to Montreal dollar stores and eventually to consumers. Emma Johnson compares dollarware both to souvenir stores and to high-end ceramic vendors, producing an insightful analysis of the relationship between status emulation and competing aesthetic traditions within Montreal's varied ceramic markets. Bridget Sandison addresses the question of import and distribution by examining vessel morphology in comparison to importers and distributors of dollarware, showing that different distributors select mugs of highly different shapes, thus strongly affecting the nature of our assemblages. Yuqing Wang approaches

the question of vessel morphology by focusing on the retailer, making a persuasive case that differences in assemblages can best be explained by decisions made at the retail level.

While not all ceramic vessels have handles, virtually all dollarware does (falling into two basic shapes, C-shaped and half-heart), and the papers in Section 3 exploit this characteristic. Sarah Bedard analyses similarities and differences among dollarware in terms of the transfer of heat both to the outer vessel wall and to the handle, showing that while there is a correlation between handle size and mug size, heat transfer cannot be predicted from vessel morphology. Gabriel Kravitz finds, strikingly, that there is a strong tendency for the handle of a mug to occupy one-third of the total horizontal dimension, and on this basis proposes a 'rule of thirds' that governs the aesthetic and functional decisions of dollarware manufacturers. Finally, Carly Rose investigates the width and thickness of handles in relation to the two basic handle shapes, allowing her to show that strong constraints exist on handle measurements throughout the dollarware assemblages.

The reports in Section 4 link vessel morphology to iconography in an attempt to see whether design characteristics are linked to the imagery printed on dollarware. Jessica Beck notes that despite a wide variety of male and female-gendered dollarware, gender is not, contrary to expectations, a good predictor of morphological characteristics such as vessel height, weight, and volume. Similarly, Sol Klein approaches the question of age, and shows that even mugs clearly intended for children through their iconography are not significantly smaller or lighter than adult-oriented vessels. In her report, however, Han Han Li notes that there are very strong yet unexpected correlations between certain iconographic categories and broad types of vessel morphology.

Section 5 includes papers whose subject is strictly iconographic, treating dollarware as a medium through which the interests and identities of users can be expressed. Emma Chait proposes a hierarchical taxonomy of animals based on her analysis of dollarware mugs bearing imagery of wild, domestic, and farm non-human animals. Valeria Rytova investigates the linkage between the decorative motifs and colours on dollarware and the thematic or intended function of vessels. Anna Titcomb discusses dollarware in a diachronic perspective, identifying assemblages as forward, present, or past-oriented on the basis of identifiable holiday imagery on significant sub-assemblages within our collection. Finally, Katherine Tong has undertaken a remarkable study of the content, palaeography, and size of written language on dollarware in an effort to understand the extent to which comprehensible communication within a multilingual population is the goal of these inscriptions.

Lisa Zimanyi's report in Section 6 wraps up our analysis in a fascinating meta-study, asking whether our sampling strategy was sufficiently random to allow us to draw conclusions about dollarware as a whole. In a series of revisit studies she has analyzed over 4000 pieces of dollarware actually present in the stores from which we collected, suggesting ways in which our sample could have been more representative but also showing that there are few extreme divergences from randomness.

The reports in the Dollarware Project aspire to the highest levels of scholarly rigour and reflect the authors' passion for the subject matter and for contemporary archaeology. Their findings go far beyond a limited sample of material collected one chilly February afternoon, bearing on the global and local economic and aesthetic processes governing contemporary material culture.