



Figure 1. Detail from Collot's "Town and Fort of Natchez," an engraving based on a 1796 sketch, made while the fort was under Spanish control (Collot 1826: plate 34). Note the embankment behind the palisade.



Figure 2. Detail from John James Audubon's "Natchez, Mississippi, in 1822," showing the fort's embankment, looking north (reproduced in Rathbone, 1950, pp. 121-122 [inset]).

Introduction

Fort Rosalie in present-day Natchez, Mississippi was a key outpost in France's colonization of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Built in the heart of the Natchez nation in 1716, the fort was destroyed during the Natchez uprising of 1729, then rebuilt and occupied by the French until 1763, when the territory was ceded to England. The fort was subsequently occupied by the English and renamed Fort Panmure. In 1779, during the American Revolution, it passed to Spanish control (Fig. 1). The fort was ceded to the United States in 1798 and abandoned in 1800 (Elliott 1990; Wilson 1982).

The fort's ruins, especially the pentagonal earthen embankment, remained a visible part of the Natchez landscape throughout the 19th century (Fig. 2). A series of landslides in the 1800s caused portions of the fort to cascade down the bluffs, and in 1869 the so-called "Great Landslide" (Claiborne 1880: 47; Shields 1969) took away most of what was left. Four of the five sides of the original pentagon are nowadays gone; only the southeastern embankment still remains (Fig. 3).

Between 2005 and 2011, the Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service, conducted excavations at Fort Rosalie. A total of 56 sq m were opened atop the remaining embankment, with the goal of gathering information and artifacts that could be used in public interpretation of the site.

Archaeological Contexts

The strata encountered in these excavations consisted of two major units: (1) the original ground surface associated with the 1716-1729 fort, and (2) the earthen embankment above this surface that was built in 1732 as part of the second French fort. Thus, most of the artifacts from the excavations, whether from the embankment fill or the surface beneath it, date to 1732 or earlier.

A detailed study of contemporary French maps sheds considerable light on the contexts found beneath the embankment. Figures 4-6 illustrate the process by which a map of the second fort (Broutin 1732) was overlaid on a map of the first fort (Broutin 1730), using the common topography shown on both maps as a guide. It is clear from this overlay that the southeastern embankment of the second fort was built directly on top of the site of the barracks in the first fort. Figures 7-8 illustrate how these maps were then correlated with the modern topography, based on the location of the pentagon's southernmost corner, which is still clearly visible. This overlay suggests that the NPS excavations were situated directly over the barracks in multiple places.

Figure 10 shows a photomosaic profile along the N 500 transect, in the vicinity of the barracks. The remains of a burned structure are clearly visible beneath the embankment's fill: probably the burned and collapsed chimney of either a post-in-ground or post-on-sill building. The abundance of fired daub is not surprising, as contemporary accounts say the fort was burned during the 1729 uprising (Swanton 1911).

Native Ceramic Assemblage

Our analysis is focused on the pot-breaks and colonoware vessels recovered from the layers associated with the 1716-1729 ground surfaces and barracks. These vessels were chosen because they provide us with valuable insight into the diversity of ceramics the Natchez traded to the French in the 1720s. We believe the pot breaks occurred during the 1729 uprising and represent vessels being used by the fort's garrison at that time.

Based on the map overlays, the distribution of nearby features, and the contexts in which the vessels were found, we believe that most of the pot breaks occurred in an outdoor area between the southern wall of the barracks and the palisade (Fig. 9). This was probably a cooking area for the soldiers who lived in the barracks, an interpretation consistent with the cooking-related hardware (andirons), animal bone, carbonized corn kernels, and vessel types found here.



Indian Pottery at Fort Rosalie in Natchez, a French Colonial Outpost in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1716-1763

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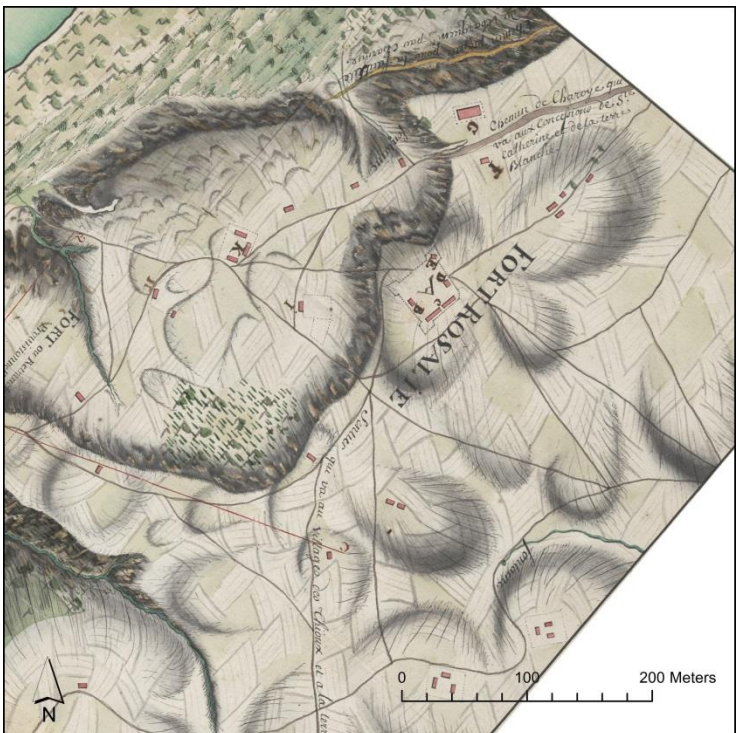


Figure 4. Detail from Broutin's 1730 map of Natchez, showing the 1716-1729 fort which had been destroyed the year before. Key: A, Fort Rosalie; B, officer's quarters; C, barracks; D, guardhouse; E, powder magazine.



Figure 5. Detail from Broutin's 1732 map of the new fort, correctly scaled and overlaid on the 1730 map using topography as a guide.

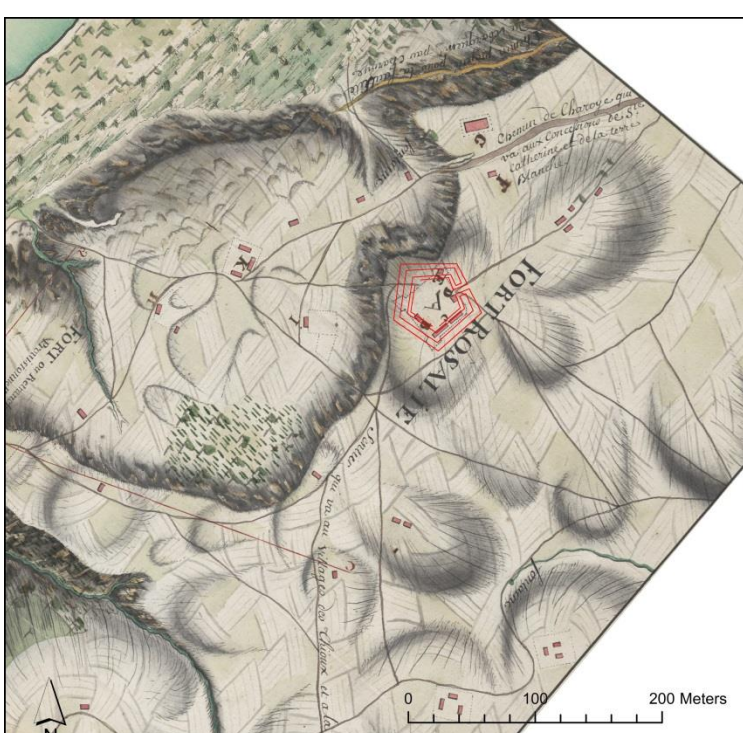


Figure 6. Outline of the 1732 embankment, shown in red, overlaid on the 1730 map showing the 1716 fort. The present bluff edge.

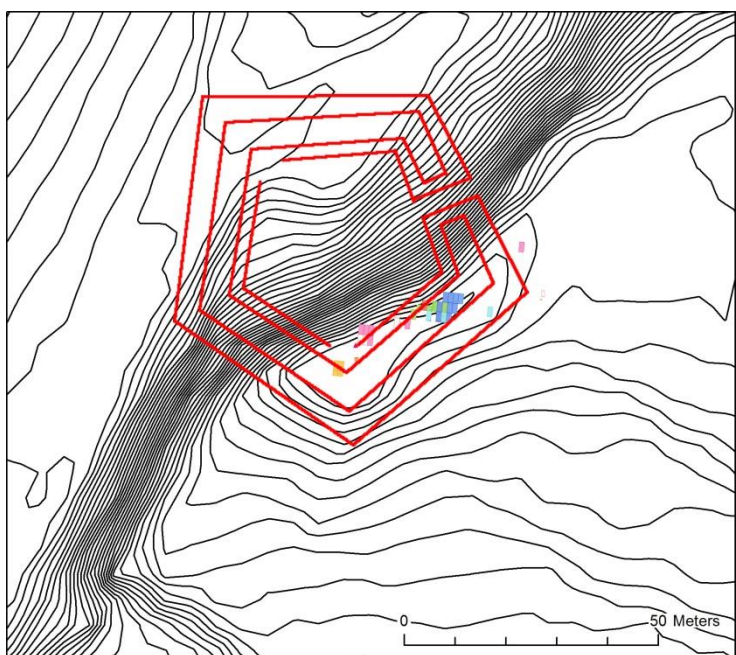


Figure 7. The modern topography at Fort Rosalie showing the location of the NPS excavations (contour interval, 60 cm). The outline of the 1732 embankment, shown in red, is overlaid using the southern corner of the surviving embankment as a guide (LiDAR from Atlas [http://atlas.lsu.edu/]).

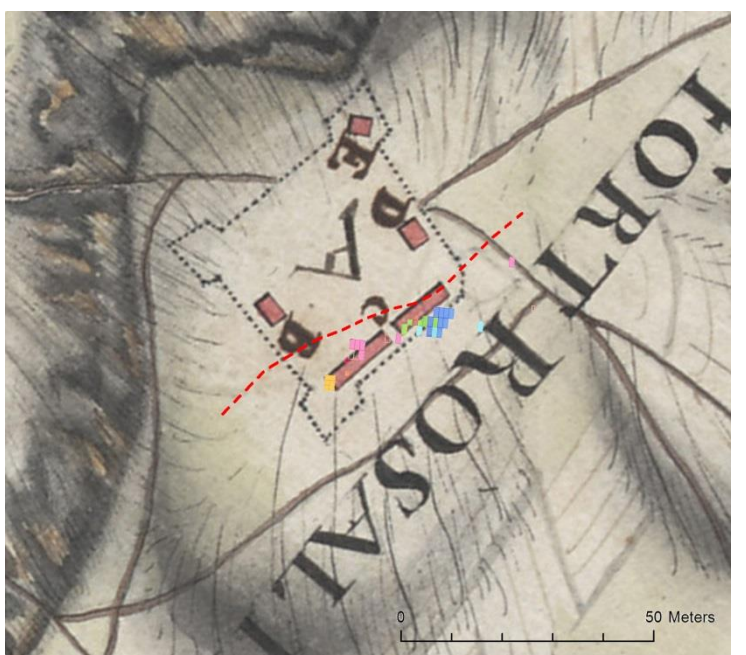


Figure 8. The NPS excavation units superimposed on Broutin's 1730 map. The alignment is based on Figures 4 and 7. The modern bluff edge is shown as a red dotted line.

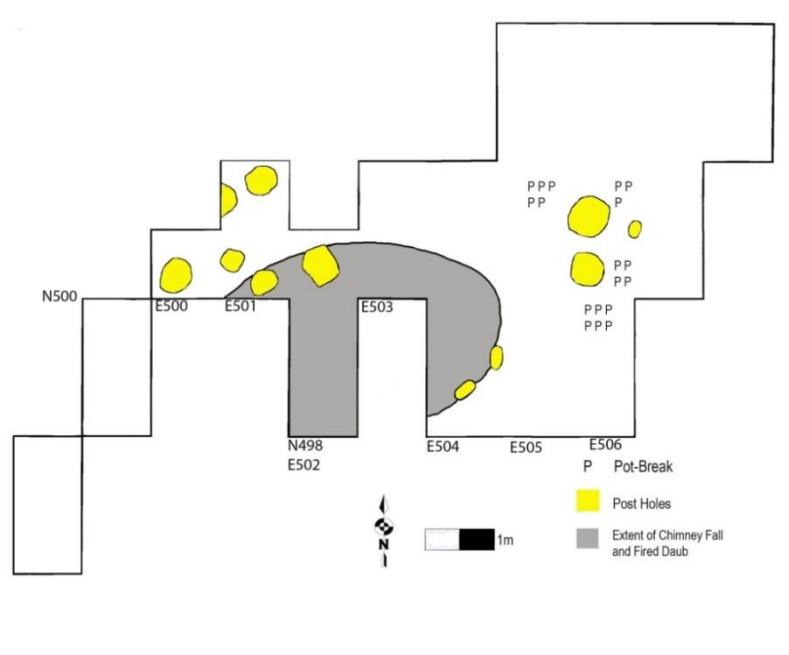


Figure 9. Plan of the NPS excavation units showing the location of post-hole features, the extent of the burned daub concentrations, and the location of pot-breaks.

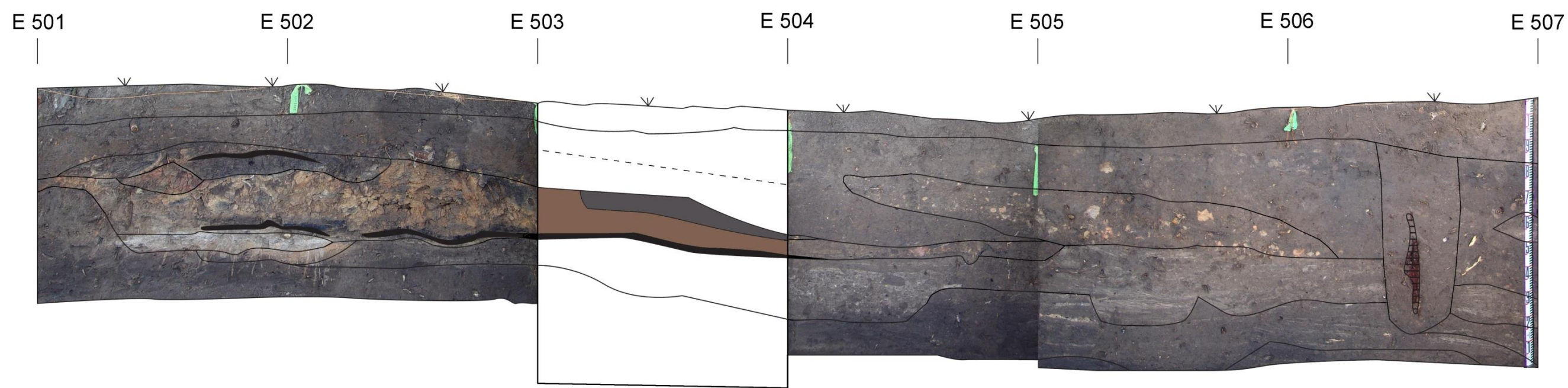


Figure 10. Photomosaic profile of excavations along N 500, between E 501 and E 507, looking north. Note the burned and collapsed chimney-fall between E 501 and E 503.



Figure 11. Constricted-neck jar.



Figure 12. Small restricted bowl.



Figure 13. Large restricted bowl.



Figure 14. Colonoware open bowl.

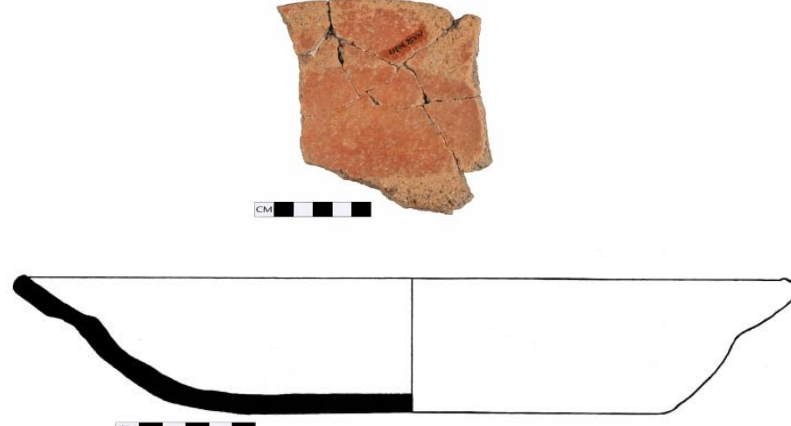


Figure 15. Colonoware deep plate.



Figure 16. Colonoware beveled-rim bowl.



Figure 17. Colonoware shallow plate.

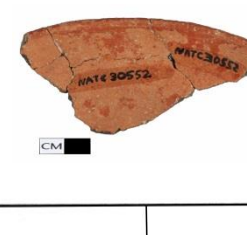


Figure 18. Colonoware mug handle.



Figure 19. Colonoware small jar.



Figure 20. Colonoware beveled-rim bowl.

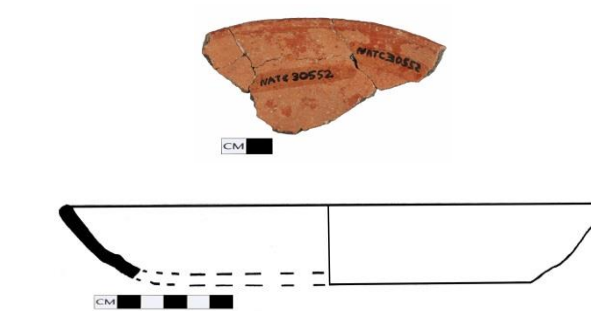


Figure 21. Colonoware deep plate.

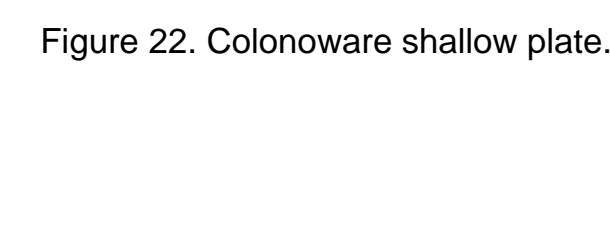


Figure 22. Colonoware shallow plate.

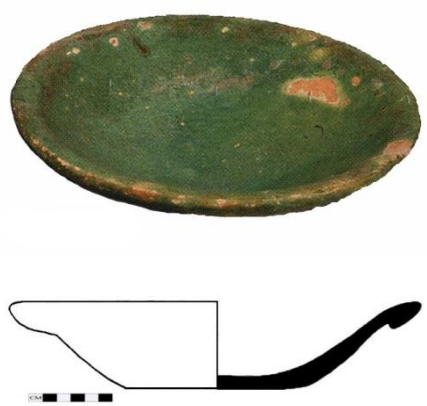


Figure 23. French lead-glazed plate (after Barbry 2007:39; Brain 1979:59).



Figure 24. Faience plate (after Barbry 2007:19; Brain 1979:42).



Figure 25. Faience plate (after Barbry 2007:10; Brain 1979:37).

Pot Breaks: Form and Function

"These women also make pots of an extraordinary size, jugs with a medium-sized opening, bowls, two-pint bottles with long necks, pots or jugs for bear's oil, which hold as many as 40 pints ..." – Antoine-Simone Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, 1758, vol. 2, pp. 178-179 (translation from Swanton 1911:62).

This quotation indicates types of vessels local Indian potters produced at Natchez. Within the pot-break assemblage we identified vessels that fall within three distinct vessel categories: constricted-neck jars (Fig. 11; n = 10), small restricted bowls (Fig. 12; n = 3), and a large restricted bowl (Fig. 13; n = 1). The pot-break assemblage vessel forms are similar to the types Le Page du Pratz mentions. Estimating the volume of one of the constricted-neck jars in the assemblage gave us a value of 17 liters. Using the 18th century French measurement of a *pinte* – equivalent to 0.95 liter – our constricted-neck jar would hold 18 French pints; just under half the volume reported by Le Page du Pratz for large jars that held bear oil. The Fort Rosalie pot-break assemblage suggests that food storage and serving were important in this area of the fort, and that these large, constricted-neck jars probably held either bear oil or water. This supports our inference that the area where these vessels were found was used for cooking activities.

Colonoware

"[They make] also dishes and plates like the French. I have had some made out of curiosity on the model of my earthenware. They were of a quite beautiful red." – Antoine-Simone Le Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, 1758, vol. 2, p. 179 (translation from Swanton 1911:62).

Plates and bowls consistent with this description were identified in the Fort Rosalie assemblage. These vessels stand out because they exhibit characteristics of both Native and European pottery traditions. Native-made colonowares are relatively common at colonial sites across the South (e.g., Cordell 2013; Morgan and MacDonald 2011; Waselkov and Gums 2000). Native potters modified their existing ceramic traditions to cater to French tastes in Louisiana (see Cordell 2013).

The colonoware from Fort Rosalie is red filmed, typically on interior surfaces only. The paste is grog tempered like the locally made Addis Plain type (Steponaitis 1974:116-119). Many of the forms look like those of European plates and shallow bowls. Vessel form categories among the colonoware assemblage were determined using the degree of rim slope and presence of European-like morphological characteristics. These categories include open bowls, beveled-rim bowls, deep plates (soup plates), and shallow plates (Figs. 14-17). A single mug or cup handle was also identified as well as a small jar of unknown function (Figs. 18-19). It appears that most of these colonowares were serving vessels. We then compared these vessels with French faience and earthenware from the Trudeau collection (Brain 1979); an assemblage that is roughly contemporaneous in time with Fort Rosalie. The plates and bowls from Trudeau indicate the kinds of forms available to the French in the Louisiana Colony in the first quarter of the 18th century. While the Fort Rosalie colonoware vessels share some similarities with European vessels from Trudeau, they are not exact copies (Figs. 20-25).

Conclusions

Our analysis of the Native ceramic assemblage from Fort Rosalie reveals much about the economic relationship between the French and Native populations at the Natchez Bluffs. Both the pot breaks and colonowares indicate that the French relied upon the local Native populations to supplement their own supplies from Europe in both provisions and utensils required to store, cook, and serve foods. While the Natchez colonowares are very similar to the European vessels, they are not direct translations. We can best explain them through the lens of hybridization. Natchez potters expanded the market of their cottage industries by translating their well-established traditions in a way that would appeal to French tastes. Using their considerable skills and knowledge, the Native potters created a product that reflects the persistence of their culture while simultaneously making accommodations for a new market in a period of change and uncertainty.

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