

Chapter 11

When the Foreign is not Exotic: Ceramics at Colorado's WWII Japanese Internment Camp

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11.1 Introduction

Today Amache is a quiet and somber place. Driving east on Highway 50 in southeastern Colorado, through farm fields and the occasional small cluster of homes, a dirt road suddenly leads off to the right just before entering the town of Granada, Colorado. A wooden sign with an arrow pointing down the road reads "Amache - Japanese American Relocation Center, 1942-1945." It doesn't look like much, but upon driving into the site, cement foundations of what used to be barracks where multiple families lived become visible. The landscape is drab; it is very flat, with little vegetation that reaches more than three feet in height comprising sagebrush, small shrubs, and occasional prickly pear cacti. Withered elm trees planted in lines throughout the site are the result of the internees' attempts for some shade and attractive greenery during hot, windy, and dusty summers at the site in the 1940s.

There are no buildings left except for one small cement shed that was part of the co-op store, and a structure that houses a monument inside of the cemetery. It is hard to believe that this place was home to over ten thousand people during the three-year period that it was an internment camp (Harvey 2004). The lives of the people who lived through the internment, and their descendants, were forever altered by the experience. The majority of adults who lived there remember it negatively, as they understood the unjust nature of their internment, while others remember it as the cause of their families' financial downfall. Yet, some remember it fondly because it was the place they met their spouse, made close friends, and for the first time in their lives found themselves among people of the same cultural background. No matter how it is remembered, Amache represents many things, both positive and negative, to many people. Today, it remains a place of great historical, cultural, and emotional signifi-

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Fig. 1 National Park Service map of the 10 WRA internment camps. Note that Amache is designated by its official name, Granada. Image courtesy of the National Park Service

cance, a fact underscored by its recent recognition as a National Historic Landmark. Busloads of people pilgrimage to the site yearly in May to pay respect to the deceased in the cemetery, meet up with fellow Amache internees, or see families and friends from the other nine internment camps throughout the country.

Officially known as the Granada Relocation Center, Amache is one of ten relocation centers (Fig. 1) built during World War II specifically for housing Japanese Americans and immigrants deemed to be possible enemy insurgents due to their ancestral and cultural ties to Japan (Daniels 1993). Prior to World War II, Japanese and other Asians had long been targets of ire, especially in areas where they lived in large numbers. Scholars and some politicians acknowledge that the removal of Japanese during World War II was largely driven by racism and ethnocentrism against those whose physical and cultural traits made them stand out (U.S. Commission 1982). They were, in terms of the context of this volume, undesirable exotics.

11.2 Archaeology at Amache

Scholars have studied the internment era (1942–1945) from several different angles. Examples of such studies include: the psychological effects the internment had upon Japanese Americans during World War II (Tong 2004); the Japanese American experience from the first arrival to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century to the present day (Hosokawa 1998, 2002, 2005); and the general injustices of the World War II internment (Daniels 1993). Most archaeological research at internment

camps has been led by the National Park Service, which maintains control over two camps (Burton et al. 2002). Other studies have been conducted as Cultural Resource Management projects (e.g., Tamir et al. 1993). A few academic studies involving archaeology have also been conducted as elements of graduate level work (e.g., Branton 2000; Skiles 2008; Slaughter 2006).

Archaeological research at the Japanese internment camps helps us understand the daily negotiations of internees. Patterns in the material record at Amache are more compelling when coupled with the justifications for removal of these individuals, the majority of whom were American citizens, from the United States west coast. The Department of the Interior cited the participation by people of Japanese ancestry in Japanese language schools and cultural societies as one justification for relocation, as the maintenance of Japanese traditions was interpreted as a sign of kinship with and sympathy for Japan (Glick and Ferguson 1946). Thus, if one of the reasons for incarceration is their way of life, one might surmise that the people being incarcerated might want to suppress that way of life. But what we see from each internment camp that has been subject to archaeological investigation is evidence of a wide range of practices that follow Japanese tradition, including building koi ponds, making *mochi* (cakes of pounded rice), and growing tea (Burton et al. 2002). One of the most immediately visible bodies of data about these practices is Japanese ceramics, which have been reported at every recorded internment site. They have even been recovered from more temporary internment-related sites, like Kooskia, a camp of workers from Minidoka, the internment camp in Idaho (Wegars 2002). This chapter focuses on these ceramics and how they might help us rethink the allure of the exotic and the importance of exchanged goods.

11.2.1 Brief Background of the Research

In 2005, the University of Denver began a long-term archaeology and museum project at the Granada Relocation Center. Originally named after the adjacent town of Granada, the camp quickly came to be known as Amache, to avoid confusion at the local post office. Internees arrived in the summer of 1942, and like at other camps, they came with only as much as they could carry. In the three years of its occupation, over ten thousand internees lived for a time at the camp, although the maximum population at any one time never topped eight thousand.

The population of the camp made Amache the tenth largest city in Colorado almost overnight. It had an urban character, with buildings laid out in a street grid of military precision. Most of the camp comprised blocks of barracks. Built quickly and covered in tarpaper, the barracks were divided into living units, the maximum size of which was 20 x 24 ft. As one former Amache internee recalled, "It was one room per family and the living was cramped at best. Everything was made of flimsy clapboard that looked like it would collapse at any moment" (Lurie 1982: 38). Each barrack block also contained a combined laundry and bath house, as well as a mess hall. Only one of the buildings of this instant city is left standing today, but building foundations, trees and other landscaping, and middens of trash make it an incredibly legible archaeological landscape.

In the summer of 2006, Skiles led a systematic survey of four different areas of Amache for items linked to culinary practices there (Skiles 2008). A 50 x 50 m grid was placed in each area, within which crews surveyed between nine and eleven 10 m² units, for a total of 3,900 m². One grid was positioned in the official camp dump, one in an informal dump that may date to the abandonment of the site, and two others in barrack blocks that appeared to have relatively high integrity. Research at other internment camps has consisted of general surface survey (e.g., Burton et al. 2002; Tamir et al. 1993), so although Japanese ceramics are known to be present at internment camps, there is no way to ascertain just how common they are. Skiles's survey at Amache involved counting each ceramic sherd present in the gridded areas. Her fieldwork revealed that Japanese ceramics accounted for over 8% of the total sherds at Amache (Table 1). Although sherd counts can be problematic, the data recovered do suggest that as many as one in twelve of the ceramic vessels at Amache were imported from Japan. That figure is particularly impressive considering the possible ways the ceramics made their way to the site.

11.3 “Foreign” Goods and Exchange at Amache

That people could only bring what they could carry when they were sent to the camps has often been seen as symbol of political disregard for this population. Undoubtedly, the decision of what to bring and what to leave behind was quite traumatic for many of the internees (Uchida 1982). Photographs that depict families with their few worldly goods as they left their homes or waited for transport to the assembly centers were among those censored by the U.S. government (Gordon and Okihiro 2006). Oral histories suggest the contents of those packages and suitcases were often very pragmatic, with an emphasis on clothes and shoes. Many of the former internees from the Gila River camp, interviewed in conjunction with archaeological investigations there, did make room for cooking equipment, including dishes (Tamir et al. 1993). When asked what people were allowed to bring to Amache, former internee Joy Takeyama Hashimoto recalled, “People were buying pie pans and tin cups, and cheap tin or aluminum silverware. But my mother said, ‘My family is not going to eat off this kind of a thing.’ And she took her china and her silverware” (Foxhoven 1998).¹

Table 1 Total ceramic counts from each surveyed area at Amache, 2006.

Grid Name	# Japanese Ceramics	# WRA Ceramics	# Other Ceramics	Total Ceramics
Main Dump	49	3	521	573
Block B9-G, Grid A	0	1	12	13
Block B9-G, Grid B	0	0	14	14
Block B9-L	0	0	0	0
Total	49	4	547	600
Percentage	~8%	~1%	~91%	~100%

¹ All quotations from Foxhoven were gathered from a series of videotaped oral histories.

Internees also had the option to have some of their goods shipped to them at the camps. Sometimes these shipments were made by friends, noninterned family members, or others in their communities. After an outcry about the loss of personal property suffered when internees were forced to leave their homes, the Federal government leased warehouses where internees could store their goods. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) paid for one shipment of goods per interned household, either to their internment camp or later to their post-war residence (War Relocation Authority 1946: 75). No agency kept track of exactly how many Amache internees received shipments of their household goods, but the *Granada Pioneer* (the Amache newspaper) noted that in November 1942, four railroad cars arrived with 50 tons of internee household goods. The article also provided information as to how other families could request their stored goods (*Granada Pioneer* 1942a).

An additional important source for goods for internees was cooperatives (co-ops), which were general stores at each camp that were owned, managed, and supported by internees. Yet another source was mail-order catalogs. Former internees recall that their parents ordered many items from Sears and Roebuck, including clothing allotments paid for by the WRA and shipped in the fall of their first year in camp (*Granada Pioneer* 1942b). Although many goods were available through these sources, it is very unlikely that any Japanese goods could be obtained through co-ops or catalogs. Moreover, the disruption of trade during the war made importation almost impossible. For example, soy sauce, often an imported item, was in short supply during the war. Indeed, the one known shipment of soy sauce to Amache, organized by the International Red Cross, was actually a gift from the Japanese emperor, an act that caused a tremendous amount of consternation. As Thomas Shigekuni, a former Amache internee, recalled, "It really bothered me at that moment when I saw the soy sauce; how President Roosevelt had treated us when [the] enemy, Emperor Hirohito, is sending us soy sauce" (Foxhoven 1998).

Bearing in mind the considerable difficulties surrounding the accessibility of Japanese goods during the war, it is likely that almost all the Japanese ceramics recovered from Amache were once part of the internees' household goods and were either brought with them or later shipped to the site. Maker's marks are also indicative of the journey these items made. Many of the surveyed sherds were marked in English, "Made in Japan," which indicates they were expressly manufactured for the American export market and were likely purchased in the U.S. after the year 1891 (White 2005: 6). Other makers' marks comprised Japanese characters, or *kanji*. These could not be commercially imported to the U.S., but likely were brought over at the time of immigration or were gifts from family or friends back in Japan. These items offer particular evidence of international webs of movement and social networks (Fig. 2). Due to the number of Japanese sherds present in the archaeological record at Amache, it is clear that the people there went to great lengths to possess Japanese ceramics. When the complexity of getting them to the camp is compounded with the fact that these items display an ancestry for which they were being actively persecuted, one is left with the obvious question, why? What was so important, so valuable, about these items?



Fig. 2 Maker's mark in kanji on porcelain vessel from Amache dump. Photographed by Stephanie Skiles



Fig. 3 Fragment of *tokkuri* or *sake* decanter from Amache dump. Photographed by Stephanie Skiles

At the most basic level, the vessel forms available in Japanese ceramics are not directly replicated in ceramics made by American and European manufacturers. The vessels recorded in the survey at Amache include tea bowls, rice bowls, and even two *tokkuri* (*sake* decanters; Fig. 3). Because of the abundance of American ceramic forms provided to the camps by the WRA, it seems very likely that they were sometimes pressed into service for Japanese foods. For example, there is a large pile of gravy boats on the surface of the camp dump, which we suspect may have been used to serve soy sauce in the mess halls and were discarded when the site was abandoned. Still, Japanese vessels would have been a critical element in the proper consumption of many foods, particularly those with ritual importance, such as tea and *sake*.

11.4 Consequences of the Mess Halls

A rather important and overlooked effect of the mess halls at Amache and elsewhere was the degradation of family bonds over meals. Quiet and intimate family dinners were replaced by cafeteria-style tables and benches, where children frequently chose to eat with their peers, and elderly family members were often isolated. According to Howard Ikimoto, “You lined up for your food and then sat down at these long tables. Everybody squeezed in where they could. It just broke apart the family because the kids were running around; there was no family dinner” (Silva and Nelson 2007).²

Adding to this loss of family intimacy was the fact that the food in the mess halls was prepared by strangers, who at Amache were internees hired as cooks (Foxhoven 1998; Silva and Nelson 2007). Rather than a close family member like a mother, a father, or a grandparent preparing the meals in their own private kitchen and serving it at a small table, the food was unceremoniously plopped onto dishes by a strange hand, while the recipient moved in a receiving line to the next server (Fig. 4). Jeanne Wukatsuke Houston, who was interned at Manzanar in California, remembered, “Somebody else was cooking your dinner. It wasn’t your mother. That part of family life was just *institutionalized*” (Silva and Nelson 2007). To maintain some semblance of their homes before the internment, families often cooked more food within their barracks.

“We were making rice in the rooms because we didn’t get enough rice. You know what they fed us in the mess halls? They fed us this strange looking white thing. Mountains and mountains of it. And we’re looking at it saying, ‘What is *that*?’ We’d never seen it before. It’s cottage cheese! I love it now, but growing up our parents never got us cottage cheese. We must have thrown away tons of it because none of us would eat it.”

-Grace Kimoto (Yamaguchi) (Foxhoven 1998)

The significance, not only of what was served in the mess halls, but also how, is further emphasized by former internees. Tami Tomoye Takahashi, interned at Topaz Relocation Center in Utah, recalled, “Each person was given a tin pie plate that held our meals. Even now, 70 years later, if I look at a tin pie plate, it brings back memories” (Silva and Nelson 2007). Thus, the delicate Japanese porcelains at Amache

²Radio broadcast, National Public Radio.



Fig. 4 Historic photograph of Amache mess hall, labeled “Dinner Time.” Namura Collection. Image courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society, Granada, Colorado

must have stood in stark contrast to the heavy and purely functional mess hall wares, providing a reassuring familiarity in a very unfamiliar place.

11.5 The Anthropological Significance of Cuisine

From a biological perspective, food is a necessary part of life for sustenance and nutrition, but from an anthropological perspective, it has deep social significance. Foods, their preparation methods, and their associated material objects, such as utensils and serving dishes, can represent and reflect elements of culture and thus can also represent group identity. Among groups of people, the act of eating is frequently a social event, as is the act of procuring the food and preparing it for consumption. Moreover, kitchens are often the center of the home; the atmosphere and aromas associated with kitchens and hearths where food is prepared are frequently regarded as soothing and comfortable (Whittier Treat 1995). In some cases, memorable aromas, flavors, and food practices can also *reinforce* a sense of home and self, when home is far away or inaccessible (Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Sutton 2001; White 1995).

Consequently, anthropological phenomena that food and culinary practices can represent, and which are relevant to this case study, include cultural traditions, expressions of identity, and a medium through which social bonds are formed (Beoku-Betts 2002; Counihan 2002; Ohnuki-Tierney 1994; Sutton 2001; Taggart

2002; White 1995). Such phenomena are especially important for groups of people in highly oppressive situations, as culture and camaraderie are ways that people survive through difficult periods, like the internment. The anthropological significance of tradition and identity in terms of food is very important, and the archaeology of food-related objects and culinary practices at Amache can aid the formation of a greater understanding of daily life for the internees at Amache.

11.5.1 Tradition and Identity

Just as corn has been a dietary staple of people in the Western hemisphere for centuries, rice has held a similar position in the diets of people with origins in the Eastern hemisphere (Imamura 1996). As a result, rice is often an important component of traditional Japanese foods and thus comprises a major portion of Japanese identity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994). For many groups of people, food is an implement that helps identify what is “self” and differentiate from what is “other.” As Ohnuki-Tierney suggests, there is a significant association between groups and their staple foods, in particular between bread-eating Europeans and Asians, who eat rice (1994: 4). This pattern holds for many Japanese Americans, for whom rice is a base for most meals (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994; Poe 2002; Silva and Nelson 2007). Howard Ikimoto made direct reference to this association in his discussion of food in the internment camps:

“We were very unused to eating potatoes. It was not something part of our regular diet. My father and mother ate rice every day of their lives. Rice is certainly a Soul Food for Japanese Americans” (Silva and Nelson 2007).

“Soul food” originated as a description for African-American traditional foods in the southern United States, but now the term is widely used to represent traditional meals from any culture or subculture (Poe 2002: 92). As the internees at Amache were a mix of Japanese immigrants (*Issei*) and American citizens born of Japanese immigrants (*Nisei*), Japanese foods played an important role in their daily lives (Hosokawa 2005). Since traditional ingredients were not easy to obtain in the camps, new Japanese-American “soul foods” were created inside internment camps which often incorporated widely available prepared ingredients such as hot dogs, catsup, and SPAM. According to Akemi Tamaribuchi, whose grandparents and great-grandparents lived at the Tule Lake internment camp in California, foods such as “Weenie Royale,” an entrée composed of stir-fried hot dogs, eggs, soy sauce, and onions, served over rice, became part of post-World War II Japanese-American cuisine for many families (Silva and Nelson 2007). SPAM *musubi* (a slice of SPAM atop salted rice, held together with a small strip of *nori*, or seaweed paper, that when assembled looks similar to sushi) also gained popularity over the course of the internment. Tayeko Namura, a former Amache internee who Skiles interviewed in 2007, remembered making many dishes that involved SPAM at Amache, and she still makes them today. In fact, she traditionally prepares SPAM *musubi* for the Amache pilgrimage held each year in Granada.

Although SPAM was eaten in America before WWII began, it became more widely consumed during the war because it was both inexpensive and could be stored without refrigeration. Already a popular food among Japanese and native Hawaiians before the war, it became a dietary staple inside internment camps. Using ingredients that were supplied inside the camps, internees like Joy Takeyama Hashimoto's mother (the woman who brought her china to camp), integrated foods like SPAM into traditional Japanese dishes. As they lived at the camps for an average of 2.5–3 years, these traditional foods made with nontraditional ingredients became regular fare in the barracks. As internees gained more control of the foods prepared in the mess halls, they also became common in the mess halls. SPAM, hot dogs, and rice are frequently mentioned by former internees and their descendants as dietary staples within internment camps. These foods ultimately became the foods of the internment, such that they were integrated into what some Japanese-Americans like Akemi Tamaribuchi today consider traditional family cooking. Howard Ikemoto, who was interned with his parents at Tule Lake, recalled eating "hot dogs for days" (Silva and Nelson 2007). Still other internees from Amache recall eating "lots of SPAM" while they lived there (Foxhoven 1998).

In addition to creating new dishes with the military diets that were provided by the WRA at Amache, teaching traditional cooking methods was important to some internees. Joy Takeyama Hashimoto's mother was known for teaching traditional Japanese cooking at the Amache high school. "My mother was unusual and innovative. She taught home [economics at the camp]... She thought they should learn a little bit about Japanese foods. And with what little material she could scrounge from the mess hall, she taught her girls how to make some of the Japanese foods and delicacies" (Foxhoven 1998). When a group of people are uprooted and placed in a foreign environment, they can maintain some traditional food practices with the right ingredients and dietary staples. These practices are a subtle form of resistance that provide a sense of comfort in an unknown place. "[Food] preparation, under pressure of dominant cultural practices... can promote resistance and strengthen cultural identity in marginalized cultural groups" (Beoku-Betts 2002: 277).

At Amache, it is clear that traditional food items and cooking methods helped the internees strengthen their identity while they were in a very restricted situation. In addition to preparing their own families' rice inside the barracks, *sake* brewing and drinking was another form of identity expression and tradition that was practiced at the camps (Slaughter 2006). According to Akemi Tamaribuchi, "They had dirt floors in the barracks [at Tule Lake]. My great grandmother would dig a hole and ferment her own rice wine, or *sake*, and store it buried in the dirt. That was a big secret; it was not allowed in the camps" (Silva and Nelson 2007).

Oral histories with Amache internees indicate that that *sake* was also brewed at Amache (see Slaughter 2006). Still, the situation was somewhat different for the internees at Amache, as the pharmacist in Granada helped smuggle *sake* into the camps. This fact is supported by myriad remains of *sake* jugs in the archaeological record (Skiles 2008; Slaughter 2006), and also verified by Bruce Newman, the son of the Granada pharmacist:

“Dad had connections. He learned of a shipment of *sake* in San Francisco. By whatever means, he had it shipped to Granada, and filled the warehouse behind his drugstore. Each bottle had to have a government stamp, ‘Department of the Treasury,’ manually date-stamped. My job was to manually date it. [There wasn’t] nearly enough. It sold rapidly” (Foxhoven 1998).

11.6 The Importance of Japanese Ceramics at Amache

Marcel Proust begins his *Remembrance of Things Past* with an elegiac description of the way a bite of pastry elicits vivid childhood memories. Many anthropologists have followed his lead by noting how culinary practices engage multiple senses in an evocation of past places, people, and events (Petridou 2001). Food is often used to recreate the sensory landscape of home, something both noted by ethnographers and inferred by archaeologists.

One can imagine that when those small barrack rooms at Amache were filled with the smell of rice, and a warm familiar bowl was in hand, the place would, for at least a time, feel more like home. In conjunction with Japanese culinary practices in the barracks, Japanese ceramics played a key role in making over, in the image of home, the dismal environment of the camp. The magnitude of this act is supported by the fact that such cooking in the barracks was exceptionally common despite it being against regulations. Indeed it appears that the regulation against cooking in the barracks may have been the camp’s most widely ignored rule, with the brewing and smuggling of *sake* coming in a close second.

But ethnographies of people living away from their homes and homeland, especially those who were forced to leave, suggest an even more powerful emotional role for these items. In periods of intense upset, familiar objects are psychologically comforting. This is particularly important for displaced peoples, as objects provide tangible evidence of where one came from, and who one used to be. They are also the raw materials for, as one ethnographer calls it, the refurbishment of memory (Marcoux 2001). Ethnographic research among populations displaced by the Greek-Turkish War of the early 1920s indicates objects from the homeland often serve as anchors for memories, stories, and family histories. If those memories are too painful or the identity for which they stand is repudiated, however, the objects are forgotten or discarded (Turan 2003). Such research suggests that those families at Amache who used Japanese ceramics were actively asserting their identity as Japanese.

11.7 Conclusions

The literature on trade and exchange in prehistoric archaeology has long been concerned with framing these practices within cultural formations (Earle and Ericson 1977; Ericson and Earle 1982). Historical archaeologists have also conceptualized

trade as an embedded social process (see for instance Adams 1976; Brooks 1997), but compared to prehistoric archaeology, the discussion has been less robust. This might be, ironically, because the wealth of mass-produced items found on many historic sites often includes items that are readily identified as imported goods. We can place site occupants within international trade networks without giving much thought to the social relationships involved.

There is no denying that the ceramics at Amache are evidence of the global trade networks of the first half of the twentieth century. But that focus obscures the more important social roles these objects played. These ceramics were certainly exotics, if the way we classify such goods is the great distances they have traveled from their place of origin. And it is certainly true that their presence on the site reflects a great deal of effort on the part of those who left them behind. However, at Amache these items were likely *not* considered exotic by the people who used them. The power of the Japanese ceramics was that they were familiar, even mundane. In fact, the imported Japanese goods at this site probably were some of the least “foreign” elements of the internee environment.

Amache is a place where the movement with which we should be most concerned as archaeologists is not that of objects but of people. The only reason why these “foreign” goods are here is because they were brought here by “foreign” people. The historic record makes that clear, as it also makes clear the extent to which Amache fits a pattern of massive population displacements over the last two centuries. Population displacement was not invented by historic peoples. As the studies in this volume highlight, in both prehistoric and historic contexts, when people move, they bring objects from home. In such a scenario, exotics are not so much evidence of trade relations, as stand-ins for the relations left behind, both to people and to places.

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