The Tale of the Kettle: Odyssey of an Intercultural Object

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Abstract. This article seeks to explain why the European-made kettle became invested with cultural identity for Quebecers after having made a detour among Amerindian groups. The uses to which the object was put in the culture of origin are reviewed; its transcultural pathway is retraced; and, finally, its new functions in the culture of reception are identified. The approach is modeled on the so-called historical-geographic method developed in the study of folktales. It is assumed that the material object, no less than the orally transmitted tale, bears the mark of the use made of it, and situating a single object in the context of its production and reception seems to be the most reliable way to understand the role of objects in the construction of cultural identity. Two principal sources are used to illustrate the material aspects of this process: the travel accounts from New France and the museum collections derived primarily from archaeological excavations over the past hundred years or so of Amerindian contact sites in northeastern America.

The idea for this study goes back to a visit to the Musée de la Civilisation in Quebec City on the occasion of an exhibition devoted to cultural contact between the French and the Amerindians in New France. Presented in 1992 as the "Rencontre de deux mondes" (Meeting of two worlds), the exhibition was designed to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America and to contribute to the reconciliation of Quebecers and Amerindians after the tragic, searing events caused by the Mohawk resistance at Oka, Quebec, in 1990.[1] This confrontation had attracted the attention of journalists all over the world, and accounts of it had appeared regularly in North American and European newspapers. By highlighting the theme of cultural exchange and transfer, the exhibition's organizers undoubtedly sought to stress the harmonious relations

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that had once existed between the French and the Amerindians in the St. Lawrence valley (under the French colonial regime) and, in so doing, hoped to negotiate—outside official channels—new alliances with contemporary Amerindian groups in Quebec. While at the outset the project elicited protests from the Amerindians, their subsequent participation in the working out of its basic concept and scenario made consensus possible and led to an exhibition acceptable to both parties.

One object displayed in the initial part of the exhibition, a copper kettle, quite naturally attracted one's gaze, not only because of its impressive dimensions (it was about 60 cm in diameter) but also because of the shining curve of its midsection turned outward toward the beholder. It beckoned to me because, in looking straight at it, I could see the outline of my own image, as in a mirror. Below, on the left-hand side, a label explained that the kettle was among the first objects exchanged by the French in North America.[2] This object might serve then as a point of entry into the study of relations between Quebecers and Amerindians and, more generally, of the mediating function that objects perform in intercultural contact. It might also shed light on the process by which historical objects become part of our museum heritage and thus enter into modernity.

The Cultural History of Objects

The study of material objects of European origin among Amerindian groups has for a long time been dependent on the utilitarian concept of technological acculturation. The claim is that European objects completely transformed Amerindians' way of life, making them rely on Europeans, who possessed the techniques for manufacturing and repairing such objects. Having lost their mastery of traditional technology, Amerindians could do nothing but adapt to the European way of life. For instance, Calvin Martin (1975), in his study of copper kettles among the Micmacs, stresses the thesis of "technological determinism." He maintains that European copper kettles replaced the natives' large wooden kettles because they were lighter, stronger, and more practical for cooking. Easier to transport as well, the European kettles supposedly provided the stimulus for the Micmacs to divide into small, highly mobile groups and to become specialized hunters of fur-bearing animals. This "capitalist" behavior is said to have supplanted traditional settlement patterns and ways of life (ibid.: 128). Although there is certainly a basis for Martin's argument, I believe that the motivating factors and the mechanisms in question were altogether different. The phenomenon of appropriation, not acculturation, was involved.

My approach is based on the proposition that objects, no less than

people, possess a cultural life. Instead of dwelling on the techniques of their production or on their exchange value, I prefer to reconstruct the trajectories of objects to find out how they are used in the shaping of group identities (see Appadurai 1986: 3–5; Segalen and Le Wita 1993: 17–22; Weiner 1992). The study of objects avoids, to some degree, the confines of the classical monograph, which tends to limit the field of observation to a single group, obscuring its competitive relations with other groups. After all, intercultural tension explains why the members of a given group feel the need to define and identify themselves as a group.[3] Following the pathways of objects through time and space, from one group to another, permits us to demarcate the space within which contact has occurred and to better understand gradations of meaning as we resituate things in their cultural contexts (Stocking 1985: 3–14; Thomas 1991: 28–30). The study of objects allows us access to the nonverbal expression of intercultural relations, to the concrete actions of daily life that at times remain unencumbered by words (Glassie 1991: 253–56). Words, as we know, do not say everything; they frequently deceive, or conceal more than they show, or even deflect or alter meaning.

Recourse to material culture seems all the more justified in this study because the Amerindians, in the absence of writing, left no verbal testimony to their experience, apart from oral history. Although the written records of the French, particularly in the form of travel writing and histories of New France, describe the behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of the Amerindians, they systematically filter information in ways that rhetorical, narratological, or thematic analysis can lay bare but rarely correct. What is more, the travel accounts themselves unveil the significance of material objects in intercultural communication. In his *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* Marc Lescarbot (1609), a lawyer for the parliament of Paris who accompanied Champlain on his first journeys to Canada, gives a detailed description of the lingua franca or pidgin that the Basques and Micmacs had hammered out to do business together. The few extant words designate objects and groups that played a part in commercial exchange, or they evoke the relations between trading partners.[4] More than a mere palliative for a language gap or even a total language barrier, the material object became the preferred means of exchange and communication. The *récollet* missionary Gabriel Sagard (1990: 266), who spent the winter of 1623–24 among the Hurons, notes that the latter acknowledge the "great mind" of the French, who "alone are able to make the most difficult things, such as axes, knives, kettles"[5] (my translation). Despite the ethnocentricity of this remark, we see that the object was the means by which the Amerindian conceived and assessed the other, at least in initial contacts with the European.

In this article I seek to identify the uses made of an object in the cul-

ture of origin, to reconstruct its transcultural pathway, and to uncover the new uses to which it was put by the receiving culture. My approach is inspired by the "historical-geographic" method developed for the study of folktales, in which all the known versions of a given tale are gathered, their movement through time and space is reconstructed, and textual variations are explained through the contexts of reproduction and reception.[6] The basic principle is that the material object, like the orally transmitted tale, bears the mark of its use. I study a single object in order to see it in its particularity, to demarcate the contexts of its production and reception, and, finally, to illuminate the mechanism of intercultural exchange.

To grasp this process in its material aspect, I use two main sources: travel accounts from New France and the museum collections that, for the most part, derive from archaeological excavations over the past century or so at Amerindian contact sites in northeastern America. These sources are abundant and complementary. The corpus of travel accounts from New France is one of the richest from North America, in terms of the number of published accounts and the quality of ethnographic description in them (Atkinson 1920). The material culture of the Amerindians of northeastern America is doubtless the best-known and most studied from the two Americas, at least for the period of recent prehistory (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) and of the first contacts (sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries). The sites excavated and artifacts cataloged for the Iroquoian groups from the Great Lakes region alone are more numerous than for the Aztecs of the valley of Mexico City (Ramsdan 1993). Thanks to reliable dating methods for the sites, we now have a detailed chronology of the collections and can reconstruct the cultural sequences. The archaeological collections allow us to confirm the uses made of objects described in the travel accounts and to follow the evolution of Amerindian material culture from the end of the prehistoric period. Thus we can examine, with reasonable reliability, the repercussions of the introduction of European objects for the Amerindian way of life.

Copper in Europe

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe copper was primarily employed to make objects for everyday use. Although it was used more than ever in coinage as a response to strong inflationary pressures and the demand for "hard" currency (Spooner 1956: 30–32), red copper—its natural color is actually pinkish—continued to lose ground to silver and especially gold. The growth in the circulation of copper coinage, often called "black money" on account of the fear inspired by its successive devaluations (Vilar

1974: 212), was a sign of its "vulgarization." The fact that this metal, when alloyed with zinc, produces "yellow copper" or brass, which was increasingly used as imitation gold, suggests why copper in its natural form was becoming debased.

Less suited, therefore, to distinctive and symbolic purposes, copper came to be favored in the manufacture of industrial products and domestic objects (Westermann 1981). It was no doubt the rapid expansion of the military industry that most contributed to the development of the European copper market in the sixteenth century. More resistant to corrosion than iron, copper was introduced into the manufacture of cannons and muskets, for which there was an ever-growing demand in war-torn Europe. It was also used to reinforce the hulls of ships and to trim the roofs and fountains of public buildings and private dwellings (Jeannin 1977: 72–77). It was likewise used in the fabrication of the large cauldrons needed for brewing beer or rendering whale blubber, as well as for a widening range of domestic articles: kettles, urinals, basins, trays, serving dishes, and candlesticks (Poncelet 1936: 17; Douxchamps-Lefèvre 1977: 40).

Copper production increased in response not only to stepped-up demand in the European market but also to the growing potential for export to American and African markets. Indeed, copper was one of the first European products to be exported to North America in significant quantities. For example, Micheau de Hoyarsabal, a Basque ship captain from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, borrowed funds in 1584 for the purchase of approximately 100 kettles of "red copper," according to a notarized contract from Bordeaux.[7] In 1586 Hoyarsabal procured 209 "new red copper kettles trimmed in iron"—presumably the handles and support bands were of iron—and 200 more the following year for trade with "the savages of Canada."[8] Shipments destined for the eastern coast of America—known as the "Florida coast"[9]—appear to have been more varied. The ship *L'Aigle de La Rochelle*, outfitted in 1565, included a cargo of kettles, bracelets, harness bells, earrings, awls, and needles, all of copper, for trade with "the inhabitants of the country."[10] The amounts of copper sent to Africa were greater still. In a typical contract, notarized in Antwerp in 1548, the powerful Fugger family promised to deliver to the king of Portugal, for trade with the "Negroes of the Guinea coast," 750 quintals of rings, 24,000 urinals, 5,300 barber's basins, and 10,500 kettles, all of brass (Herbert 1984: 127). The main European export to Africa, copper was exchanged for slaves, pepper, ivory, and even gold (Herbert 1981: 125).[11]

The copper shipped from La Rochelle and Bordeaux came from the Germanic and Scandinavian countries. La Rochelle notaries made mention of "kettles from Namur" purchased in large quantities through Antwerp

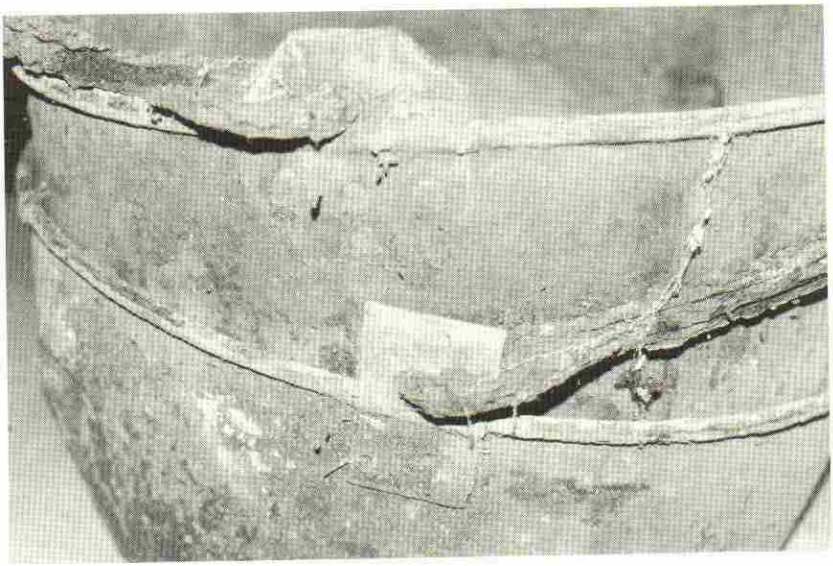


Figure 1. Two brass kettles, typical of those found in northern France and Flanders. The bail attachments are simple rectangular pieces of brass attached to the lip with two or three brass rivets. George MacDonald Collection, Bartibogue, New Brunswick, Canada.

middlemen (Trocmé and Delafosse 1952: 75). Specialists in kettle making, ironmongering, and sheet-metal craft, Flemish coppersmiths worked especially in brass, produced with locally mined zinc and copper imported in sheets from central Europe (Douxchamps-Lefèvre 1977: 45). Copper arrived in Bordeaux via the same route and from Sweden as well. In 1583 the Bordeaux merchant Jehan de Pinssun became partners with a Hamburg merchant so as to purchase several shipments of Swedish copper, no doubt to meet the demand created by the development of the North American fur trade. Lacking the means of production to fill all these orders, merchants in Bordeaux often had to call on coppersmiths in outlying areas, in the Garonne and even the Dordogne, during the 1580s.[12]

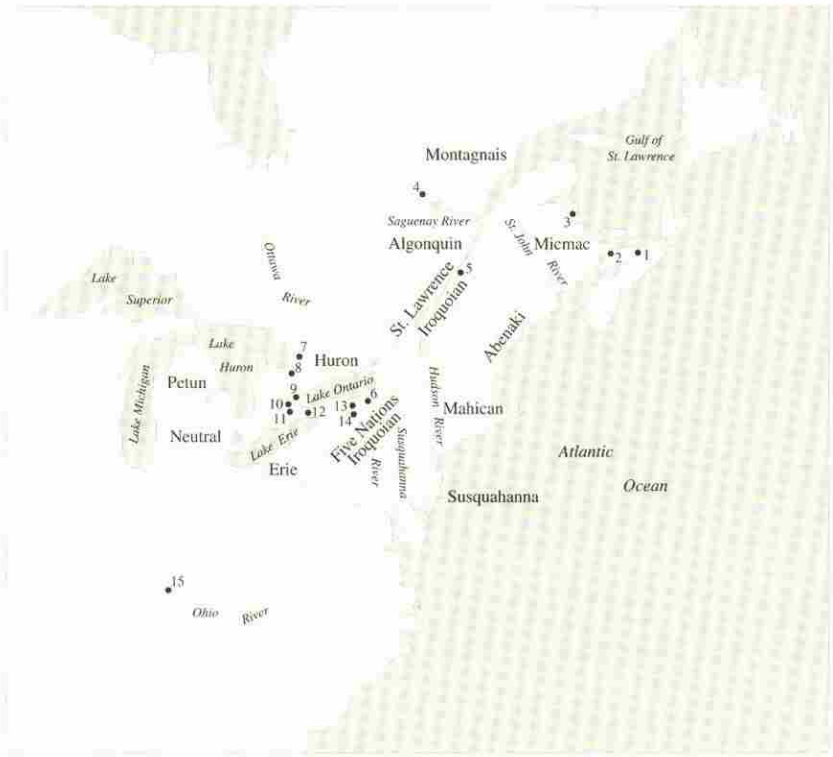
Kettle typology allows us to identify the production sites. The kettles from Flanders and northern France are often made of brass and reveal a peculiar manufacturing technique: the rim is folded over an iron ring to form the lip, and the two bail attachments—simple rectangular pieces of brass attached to the lip with brass rivets—hold up a rolled handle of wrought iron (Fitzgerald et al. 1993: 48). The kettles from southwestern France, on the other hand, are made of red copper, and the flared rim has

Figure 2. Red copper kettle, probably manufactured in southwestern France. The bail attachments, made of long iron bands, are riveted onto the kettle just under the lip. George MacDonald Collection, Bartibogue, New Brunswick, Canada.

been produced by bending the inner wall toward the outside, roughly at a ninety-degree angle; the bail attachments, made of long bands of iron, are riveted onto the kettle just under the lip. On the larger kettles, the two extremities of the handle, passing through the bail attachments, stick out several centimeters so that they can be held (ibid.: 45). These kettles can still be seen in homes and museums in the Landes region and in Basque country, and they are indisputably akin to the sixteenth-century kettles found at Amerindian sites.

Amerindian Uses for Copper

The use of European copper spread rapidly and widely in northeastern North America beginning in the second half of the sixteenth century. Introduced by Norman, Breton, and Basque fishermen, the copper was first traded in the coastal regions of eastern Canada and then began to circulate freely among the Micmac groups of the Acadian peninsula; these sites contain the largest amounts of it (Whitehead 1993: 23–70). Moving along prehistoric trade routes, the copper quickly began to travel southward and then up the great rivers of the eastern coast of America: the Kennebec,



Map 1. Distribution of Copper Kettles Found on Native American Contact Sites (16th–17th Centuries)
1. Pictou 2. Northport 3. Tabusintac 4. Ashuapmuchuan 5. St. Nicolas 6. Chase 7. Ball 8. Graham-Roger 9. Milton Height 10. Hamilton 11. Christianson 12. Grimsby 13. Factory Hallow 14. Tram 15. Madisonville

the Hudson, and the Susquehanna (Bourque and Whitehead 1985: 327–28; Bradley and Childs 1991: 9). Copper was brought to the St. Lawrence valley by the Basques as early as the 1580s; from there, it reached the Algonquian groups of northern Quebec (Moreau and Langevin 1992: 42; Denton 1994: 78; Langevin et al. 1995: 307–20), as well as the numerous Iroquoian groups in the Great Lakes region (Fitzgerald et al. 1993: 47–49). Before the end of the decade it had spread as far as the distant Ohio River valley, to the heart of the continent (Cowan 1992: 14).

The copper kettle was not the only article traded. Axes, knives, swords, and "other iron goods" were common in Basque and La Rochelle cargoes of the period.[13] Along with the metal items could be found sewing materials and accessories of "diverse kinds" (needles, ribbons, and raised satin), often accompanied by hats, bed linens, and "cottes" (long jackets with

"basques" or tails) in Scottish "foreze."[14] The Amerindians certainly made use of these European garments, for at Cape Neddick, on the Maine coast, in 1602 the English explorer John Brereton met up with a Basque shallop manned by six Amerindians, one of whom was wearing a jerkin and sailor's breeches in black serge, as well as shoes and socks (Bourque and Whitehead 1985: 327–28). Trade goods also included various glass beads and casks of flour and prunes (Le Blant and Delafosse 1956: 338, 354).[15] Yet articles of copper exceeded all other categories in importance. They always headed the lists of trade goods drawn up by notaries. They were likewise the first European objects to appear at Amerindian sites, and later they came to dominate archaeological finds of European origin (Trigger 1976: 242; Bradley 1987: 130; Wray et al. 1987: 249; Fitzgerald 1990: 113).

But copper fit into Amerindian belief systems and representations of the world long before the arrival of the Europeans (Miller and Hamell 1986: 315). Archaeologists have shown clearly that pre-Columbian groups were already exploiting copper deposits in the Appalachians and the Canadian shield (Leonard 1993). The earliest European travelers commented frequently on the Amerindian fascination with copper. For example, Verrazano, who in 1524 encountered Algonquians in Narragansett Bay (the present-day site of Newport, Rhode Island), noted that men and women alike wore "ear pendants in the manner of the Orientals, particularly strips of chiseled copper, a metal this people values more than gold. The latter . . . is not esteemed; indeed, it is the metal most scorned, on account of its color, people's taste favoring blue and red" (Julien et al. 1981: 89; my translation). The same attitude was prevalent among the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, who on several occasions spoke to Cartier of the marvelous realm of the Saguenay, where they found "the red copper they call *caignetdaze*" (Bideaux 1986: 132, 157; my translation).[16]

The intrinsic qualities of this metal explain its popularity among the Amerindians. Quite malleable in its natural state, copper readily lends itself to the fashioning of small decorative objects. Corrosion-resistant, it can be kept a long time, and a simple rubbing will return the luster to it. Moreover, its red color, underscored by the travelers, was reminiscent of blood and thus helped make copper a powerful symbol of life among all the peoples of the American Northeast (Miller and Hamell 1986: 325). Signifying fertility and vitality, red was likewise the color of power. More than the other attributes of the metal, its redness was what endowed copper with its virtues. Sometimes copper objects were coated with red ocher to make them even redder.[17]

Copper of European origin, however, acquired statutory and symbolic functions beyond those of native copper during the prehistoric period. Amerindian groups assigned greater value to European copper, no doubt

because of its intrinsic properties and its singularity. It came in the form of something new and virtually unreproducible (kettles); it was also vastly more abundant and more rigid. Its provenance apparently increased its representational power. If native copper disappeared from sites after the introduction of European copper, it is surely because the latter was judged superior.

European copper was reserved for ceremonial and ritual use. Among the Iroquoian groups of the Great Lakes region, copper kettles did not replace traditional earthenware pots, which continued to be used for everyday cooking (Bradley 1987: 131). Instead, the kettles were hoarded inside the house, where they enhanced the decor (L'Incarnation 1971: 776). They were taken off display only for special feasts, which called for the preparation of "sagamites," fatty corn-based soups consumed by the celebrants. The kettles were often broken down, before ever being used for cooking, to fashion body ornaments: bracelets, rings, pendants, and earrings (Bradley 1987: 130–36; Moreau and Langevin 1992: 42). These reworked kettle fragments were worn in battle or on diplomatic missions, for holidays or for funeral rites. They were thought also to be endowed with healing powers and were offered either to the shaman or directly to the patient.[18]

But the kettle itself seems to have been the most sought-after copper object. Certain groups accumulated hundreds of them. Marie de L'Incarnation (1971: 776), the Ursuline nun who lived in Quebec City from 1639 to 1672, recounted that in 1665 French soldiers took "fully four hundred kettles, and the rest of their riches" from a group of Mohawks, which suggests that the kettles figured among their most precious goods. The travelers all acknowledge the importance assigned to the copper kettle, but none as clearly as Nicolas Denys, in his *Histoire naturelle des moeurs et productions des peuples de l'Amérique septentrionale*, published in 1672: "The kettle always appeared to them [the Amerindians], and still does, the most precious thing they can get from us" (d'Entremont 1982: 259; my translation). Although the observers do not explain why the kettle was so prized, the uses to which it was put lead one to believe that it affirmed, more than any other object, the cohesion and continuity of the group. The kettle is repeatedly brought up in travel writings not as a mere object but as the attracting pole of an act of socialization, whence the often-penned expression *faire chaudière*. "Bringing out the kettle" signified a convocation at which food—the source of life, it need hardly be said—was to be shared. The importance of a feast could be measured by the number and size of the kettles marshaled for it (Sagard 1990: 232–33). It was likewise in "a large kettle," Sagard (ibid.: 242) reminds us, that the "disemboweled" bodies of captives were cooked, to be eaten "in a feast" (my translation). The

kettle assumed, therefore, a role in anthropophagy: it was the locus of the enemy's transformation into nourishment, the place in which the other's life was appropriated for transmutation into self.

The kettle also played a central role in the "feast of the dead," which was, according to the Jesuit Jean de Brebeuf, the most important ritual among the northern Iroquoians (Thwaites 1959, 10: 278). Celebrated especially by the Hurons, the Petuns, and the Neutrals, at intervals of twelve to fifteen years, and, as a rule, before a village was relocated, the festival brought together all the villagers, in particular those in whose families there had been a death. The bodies of the dead, temporarily buried either in the houses or outside the village, were exhumed (Fitzgerald 1979: 45), and the bones, thought to enclose the "souls" or the lives of the dead, were brought to the ceremony. Carefully stripped of any flesh, cleaned, and gathered into deer or beaver hides, the bones were deposited into a common grave, together with offerings made by the relatives and friends of the deceased: kettles, of course, and also axes, bracelets, bead necklaces, and "other things they judge to be of value," so that the dead could "display their booty and their riches that very day in the other life" (Sagard 1990: 296; my translation).

The most detailed description of such a feast is given by Brebeuf for the Huron village of Ossossane in 1636. About a dozen persons, standing in the grave, "placed three large kettles right in the middle"—the kettles themselves reproduced the form of the grave—and arranged the bones "close together all around [them]" (Thwaites 1959, 10: 298; my translation). Excavated by the archaeologist Kenneth Kidd (1953: 364–67), this ossuary—seven meters in diameter—contained about a thousand skeletons, placed around three kettles, more or less as Brebeuf describes. In his account Brebeuf admits that the Hurons called this ceremony "the kettle" and not the feast of the dead, as the French did. He thereby unveils the link that the Hurons made between the kettles used for cooking and those used for burial. The culinary rite and the funeral rite formed a continuum, because the "captains" spoke of the latter "even in the most serious councils under the sole name of kettle." Brebeuf adds that the chiefs, in speaking of the observance, "appropriate all the terms from cooking; in such a way that to say hasten or delay the festival of the dead, they will say cool or stoke up the fire underneath the kettle . . . and to say the kettle is overturned would be to say that there will be no festival of the dead" (Thwaites 1959, 10: 278; my translations). Far from a celebration of death, "the kettle" assured the passage from life on earth to life in the great beyond, "in the land of souls." The kettle was thus the object of mediation par excellence between this life and the "other life."

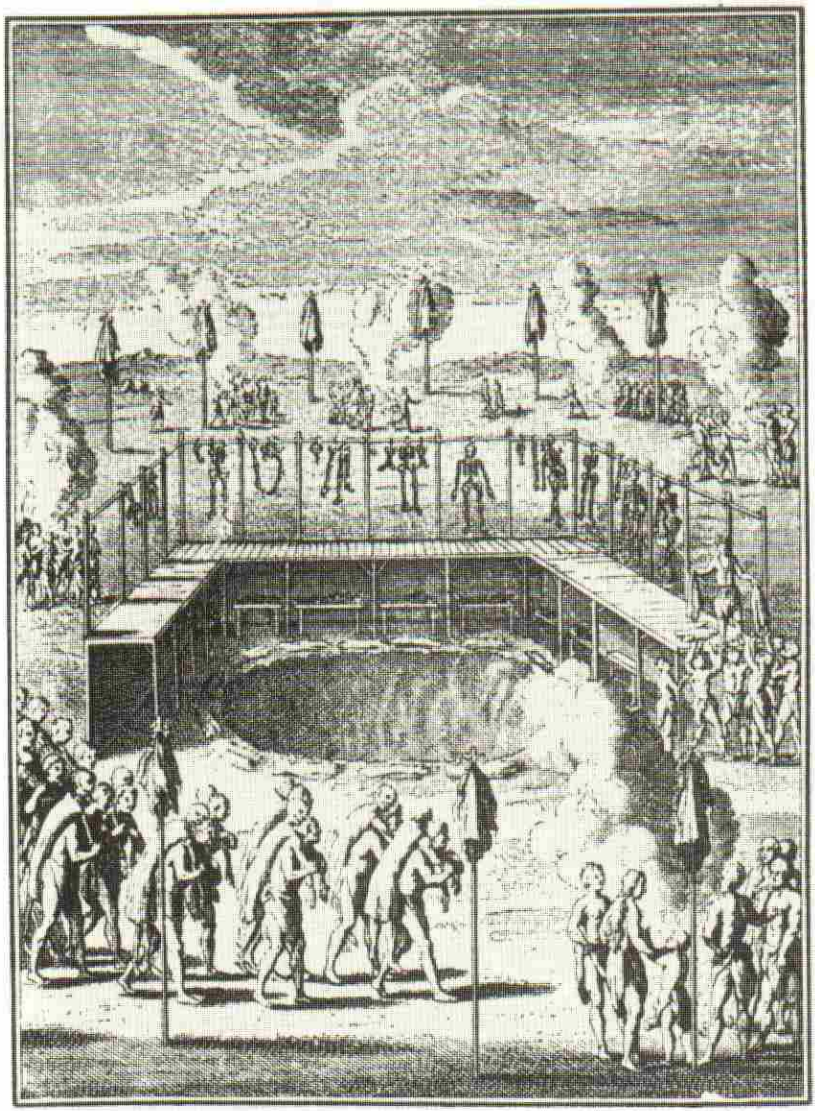


Figure 3. Wood-cut representing the "Feast of the Dead" from François Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages ameriquains*, Paris, Saugrain, 1724.

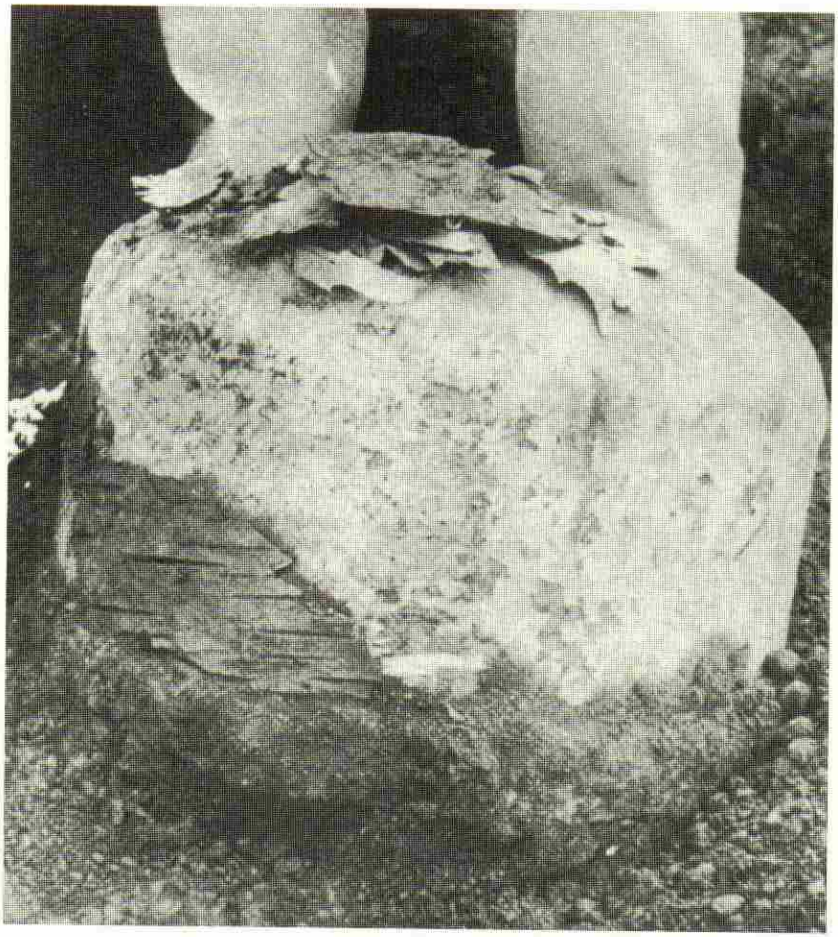


Figure 4. Copper kettle, with birch bark attached to the outside wall, photographed *in situ* during excavations at the Hopps Site in 1956, Pictou, Nova Scotia. Hopps Site Collection, Nova Scotia Provincial Museum, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

The copper kettle performed a similar function for the Micmacs of the Atlantic coast, even though the funeral customs of these hunter-gatherers—organized in small, highly mobile units—differed significantly from those of the Iroquoians. The body of the deceased was left in the open on a scaffold, and when the skin and flesh were dried out, they were separated from the bones. These three substances were later reunited, together with

Figure 5. Perforated copper kettle from Tabusintac, New Brunswick. New Brunswick Provincial Museum, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada.

funeral objects, in a compact mass, which was then placed on a birch-bark-and-hide rug and arrayed along the bottom of the grave (Whitehead 1993: 84–88).

Comparatively small, Micmac graves most often contain the remains of one or a few individuals. Even so, they have been found to hold a number of kettles, to which the Micmacs had ready access through direct contact with the Europeans. As a rule, the kettles have been placed upside down over the remains and grave goods and are, in turn, covered by beaver skins or moose or bear hides (ibid.: 54–55).[19] Many of the exhumed kettles show no trace of fire or wear but do carry the marks of deliberate destruction, effected with picks and axes to permanently deprive the kettles of their utilitarian function.[20] For example, the three kettles taken from a tomb in Tabusintac, New Brunswick, had been buried upside down and on top of each other, in the shape of a pyramid; the one that formed the base was intact and enclosed human bones, while the other two were empty and had been deliberately perforated (Smith 1886: 14–15). The salient point is that the undamaged kettle shows signs of wear, while those that were pierced are, for all practical purposes, new. Could it be that the new kettles, which most likely were buried shortly after having been acquired, without ever

having been used by the living, had been hacked and gashed so that they would seem to have been used? Ironically, mutilating them may have been a way of giving life to them. Be that as it may, what emerges is the intention to withdraw them from circulation, to appropriate them (for other aims), even to sacralize them. No longer operative below ground, they could be of service only to the souls in the great beyond; they thus became sacrificial offerings destined to strengthen the gods or reincarnated beings.

In a rare instance of dialogue in his account, Nicolas Denys alludes to the mediating function of the kettle and may even reveal its underlying significance. He reports the explanation of a Micmac "savage," to the effect that the "soul" of the kettle would be "of service to the deceased in the other world." He then specifies that the European kettle is buried with the mortal remains, because it is "a newly introduced utensil with which the other world is not [yet] supplied" (d'Entremont 1982: 259; my translation). Denys's "savage" is suggesting that the "other world" is inaccessible to Europeans. Amerindians alone had access to that world and had the ability to introduce European objects into it, through their funeral rites. Indeed, the kettle served the deceased, not the other way around, and he or she transported it to the other world. The sacrificial object was thus a conveyor of identity, because it was an appropriated object.[21] The kettle that had been pierced and buried reflected on the power of its owner rather than on that of its creator, on the act of appropriation rather than on that of mediation. In any case, attributing the power of mediation to an object was just one means of endowing it with strength.

In the final analysis, the function of the kettle seems to have been more political than eschatological. Brebeuf alludes on several occasions to the unifying force of "the kettle." Prepared well in advance, "in the most secret and most important councils" (Thwaites 1959, 10: 281), the celebration mobilized the inhabitants of the eight or nine villages of the land and those of "the foreign nations that may be invited to it" (ibid.: 281) to participate in a series of ceremonies lasting seven or eight days. Lodged by the inhabitants of the host village and nearby settlements, the guests took part in the discussions, games, and processions "from morning until night" (ibid.: 289), in anticipation of the burial of the bones of the dead on the final day of the celebration. At this most solemn moment everyone gathered around the gravesite, with the kettles arrayed in the center and a wooden gallery on each side; at the back, in "a sort of staging very well made" (ibid.: 293), bundles of bones suspended from poles were placed at center stage, as it were. Brebeuf compares this layout not to a French cemetery but to the Place Royale, in Paris. Constructed under Henry IV, this square (the present-day Place des Vosges) was still thought of, in the reign

Figure 6. Wood-cut by Pérelle of Place Royale (present day Place des Vosges), towards the middle of the 17th century, from Robert Henard, *Les jardins et les squares*, Paris, 1911, p. 13.

of Louis XVIII, as the most imposing one in Paris and, consequently, as the center of the realm (Champigneulle 1973: 607). If Brebeuf has chosen a political rather than a religious frame of reference, it is no doubt because he recognizes the highly political role of the site. Reunited in life, the community was equally brought together in death. Defleshed and disjointed, the bones were taken apart and then mixed together, so that individuals could no longer be identified (Désveaux 1993: 594). The ultimate decomposition of the individual, the return to original anonymity, was witnessed, but at the same time the community was reconstituted, in the reunited bones of its ancestors and even in those of outsiders in common ground, and its own identity reaffirmed. "The kettle" was, indeed, the incarnation of the polity.

While the travelers thought that the funeral offerings and the feast of "the kettle" went back to the prehistoric period, archaeological excavation, in villages and cemeteries alike, has shown that these practices were instead quite recent and short-lived. Little-known at the end of the prehistoric period, collective burial grew more common with the arrival of Europeans; cemeteries became widespread soon after contact, as much among the Algonquians of New England (Brenner 1988: 156) as among the Senecas of the Great Lakes region (Wray et al. 1987: 245). Similarly, the adoption of grave goods branched out to all Amerindian groups, and the majority

of these goods were of European origin (Trigger 1976, 1: 242–43; Bradley 1987: 110; Fitzgerald 1990: 557). It is noteworthy also that the European objects turn up in burial grounds, almost never in villages or at campsites (Wray et al. 1991: 393; Fitzgerald 1990: 103), which confirms their mainly mortuary use. The emergence of even stranger practices can be observed. For example, among the Senecas, thousands of whose tombs have been excavated, the graves become deeper, and the bodies, oriented eastward at first, progressively turn westward (Wray et al. 1987: 245). By the end of the sixteenth century half of these skeletons are turned westward (Wray et al. 1991: 398), as if salvation now lay in the direction of the continent and no longer in that of the rising sun, the origin of the white man. The festival of the dead, collective burials, and funeral offerings all tend to disappear with the breakup and dispersal of Amerindian groups in the second half of the seventeenth century (Hickerson 1960: 81).

Regroupings in death merely reflected the partnerships and coalitions in life. The appearance of cemeteries among the Senecas corresponded to the emergence of villages and of a specific tribal identity (Wray et al. 1987: 239). It seems likely that this happened around the time that the Senecas and the other four Iroquois groups, also in the process of formation—the Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Mohawks—established their confederation (Trigger 1976, 1: 163). Farther north, another regrouping created the powerful Huron confederation, comprising about twenty villages and thirty thousand inhabitants (Thwaites 1959, 9: 312; Delâge 1985: 60). These larger political entities no doubt saw themselves as a means of counteracting the threat posed by the other: first the Europeans and then the local enemy, for the Iroquois and Hurons were often at war. While the origins of these coalition-building movements remain unclear, the European presence and hostilities among Iroquoian groups reinforced and accelerated them.

The copper kettle became the rallying point for individuals and groups, because its force of attraction was stronger than that of any other known object. Around the kettle people gathered for festivals of life and of death; around the kettle they reflected on the community and on what they wanted it to become; around it, too, they rekindled such hopes. A site for the convergence of beings, the kettle sparked the emergence of new ritual practices as well. During this period of intercultural contact we see a tendency toward the ritualization of daily activities. In addition to the elaboration of mortuary ceremonialism, we observe the marked development of healing rites in response to epidemics. The act of smoking also assumes a more ceremonial and sacred character, as shown in the greater frequency with which pipes appear in burial sites, increasingly decorated, moreover, with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic effigies (Mathews 1980: 298–305;

O'Connor 1994: 43–61). More than just a sign of identity, the kettle conferred identity. As much through political coalitions as through the cultural practices it inspired, it helped prevent or even contain disorder, instilling vitality in those who possessed it.

Euro-Canadian Reappropriations

These copper kettles remained buried until Euro-Canadian scholars—above all, archaeologists and anthropologists—exhumed them, reappropriating them as objects of scholarly inquiry. During the second half of the nineteenth century American and, later, Canadian archaeologists began excavating Amerindian burial grounds to better understand the objects they contained. This was not an isolated development: European archaeologists of the same period, imbued with romanticism and nationalism (Trigger 1989), avidly sought the funeral trappings and corporeal remains of ancient races, or even of saints, in hopes of bringing these collector's items back to the nation as part of its patrimony. The growing interest in human skeletal remains also derived from the appearance of evolution theory, which interpreted racial difference as a function of evolutionary lag time and divided people into three main developmental phases: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. It then became imperative to find morphological proof of human evolution, from the primates up, by excavating prehistoric sites (Stocking 1988: 7–8).

In Quebec there were two precursors, one anglophone and the other francophone. John William Dawson, a geology professor at McGill University, was the first to publish reports of a prehistoric site. He described objects found by workers excavating a building site: human skulls, ceramic fragments, pipes, stone axes, and iron and copper fragments of European origin (Martijn 1978: 14). Dawson believed that this collection, now preserved as part of the McCord Museum's holdings, in Montreal, came from Hochelaga, the large St. Lawrence Iroquoian village that Cartier visited during his 1535–36 expedition. Dawson's work had been anticipated by that of Joseph-Charles Taché, a professor at Laval University, who had excavated sixteen Huron ossuaries in Ontario during the 1850s. He had probably been trained by Charles Brasseur de Bourbourg, a French priest teaching at the Quebec City seminary in the late 1840s who later became a leading expert on ancient Mexican artifacts (ibid.: 12–13). While Taché left no published account of his archaeological digs, he did establish a museum at Laval University, the Musée Tache, undoubtedly the first museum in Canada devoted to Amerindian archaeology and history (Bergeron and Milot 1993: 3). We know that the museum contained "copper [kettles],"

because three specimens found in Huron ossuaries were exhibited at the Fifteenth International Congress of Americanists, held in Quebec City in September 1906.[22]

It is perhaps no mere coincidence that these pioneering explorations took place during the period of rising ethnic tension and political agitation that led to Canadian confederation in 1867. Those in charge of the digs were also active participants in political debates and in the establishment of the Canadian state. Dawson, president of the Board of Public Education as well as an archaeologist, had a decisive impact on the creation of a Protestant and English school system in Quebec (Eakins and Eakins 1990: 256). Taché, whom his friends called "the Iroquois" because of his strong interest in the Amerindians, was a legislator as well as editor in chief of the French Canadian daily *Courrier du Canada*. Canada's representative to the World's Fair held in Paris in 1855, Taché was made a knight of the French Legion of Honour by Napoleon III. A fervent nationalist, he militated in favor of the rights of French Canadians while the Constitution of 1867 was drawn up (Nadeau 1990: 1105). Although we shall probably never know Taché's motives in excavating the Huron ossuaries, we can be fairly sure that he was familiar with Brebeuf's account and therefore with the central role of the kettle in the festival of the dead. The early Jesuit accounts were widely studied at the time, for after a fire had destroyed the extensive library of the Quebec legislature in 1854, several priests from Laval University and the Petit Séminaire of Quebec City prepared a first edition of the Jesuit writings, which appeared in 1858. Is it not possible that "the Iroquois" wished to tap into the power of the object and thereby awaken the dormant energy of its possessor?

While the kettle never acquired the symbolic value for the Euro-Canadians that it had for the Amerindians, it has continued to serve as a resource for museum collections in eastern Canada and the United States. The ritual of taking possession of a kettle is reminiscent of that undertaken by Amerindians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In accordance with the canons of the discipline, the place of discovery and removal is designated by the name of the landowner and then assigned an identification code made up of letters and numbers (the Borden code, as it is known in Canada). The object undergoes a transfiguration in the laboratory. It is carefully decluttered and cleaned: extraneous matter adhering to its surface is removed, such as rusted iron, birch bark, hair, and fragments of hides preserved by the mineral salts in the copper (Whitehead 1993: 23; Chrétien et al. 1995: 212). The fragile iron handles and bail attachments are washed with distilled water and then rustproofed to prevent further deterioration. Now purified, the object is marked with the identification

Figure 7. The copper kettle as artifact. Collection from the Hopps Site, Nova Scotia Provincial Museum, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

code and with an inventory number, after which these references are transcribed into the collection catalog; the object is thus granted official status as an artifact. It passes into public hands by becoming state property.[23] To complete the ritual, curators give the artifact a protective coat to ensure its preservation: the deteriorating parts of the kettle are coated with wax, and then everything is wrapped up either in acid-free paper or in strips of white polyethylene foam. This white envelope furnishes the "bare bones" of the object with a new skin, just as the hides did in the Amerindian burial process; thus the object is given new life. Finally, it is "buried" in museum storage or at some other well-guarded preservation site, under lock and key. Removed from circulation, safe from prying eyes and hands, the kettle has once more been sacralized. This time, it has been appropriated not in the name of religion but in the name of science.

Conclusion

The copper kettle served as a catalyst for identity formation because it was an appropriated object. The act of appropriation, more than the object itself, produced the creative tension involved in identity formation. It is as if the acquisition of European objects through trade allowed Amerindian groups to consolidate, extend their alliances, and distinguish and reinforce themselves in relation to other Amerindian groups. However, exchange with Europeans also opened a breach through which the latter penetrated the native group; thus it was necessary for this group to develop certain symbolic practices and, perhaps even more important, to affirm its identity by recourse to objects whose origin lay with the other. Far from a sign of acculturation, the burial of European objects represented a definite form of appropriation, a means of taking them out of circulation, of putting them beyond the reach of their creator. The copper kettle, more than any other European object, made possible the journey of souls to the other world, where, less threatened, they could hope to enter another life.

Similarly, when Euro-Canadians exhibit an Amerindian object, they express a double movement of opening up and shutting out. First, by resurrecting funeral objects, they resurrect those to whom they belonged. The study of indigenous objects is motivated by our desire to renew our knowledge of human society and to convey it to others. At the same time, the dead, in being resurrected, can become threatening. Therefore the reappropriated object must be sealed off by new symbolic schemes and new discourse. We take possession of the object and transform it physically: it is unearthed, inventoried, coded, classified, and placed elsewhere for safekeeping. It becomes part of a new order and acquires new meanings. A scientific discourse aimed at explaining group acculturation also shuts out the other, who is made to disappear, no less. Indeed, the notion of acculturation is based on a negation, for the objective is to retrace the stages of a process by which the other is transformed. In this altered state the Amerindian is, at best, a "métis," a being who no longer has any claim to authenticity. Traditionalism, nowadays quite pronounced among certain Amerindian groups, may be, in fact, a reaction against the scientific discourse of acculturation.

Every organized society seems to be subject to tensions surrounding the question of identity, some of them centrifugal and others centripetal. A society experiences, on the one hand, the need to open up in order to be renewed, regenerated, reinforced, and, on the other hand, the need to shut itself off in order to guarantee its cohesion, continuity, stability. The kettles, like human groups, oscillate between two positions: upright, they

open out toward others, furnishing them the nourishment required for life; upside down, they shut others out, affording their contents protection and security.

Notes

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1 For a thorough analysis of this conflict see Boileau 1991.

2 Unfortunately, there is no catalog for the exhibition, but Dufour (1992) summarizes its contents.

3 Amselle (1990: 54–62) shows clearly that the constructions of identity, and even the definition of culture, result from the competitive relationships among groups, an "intercultural balance of power," and not from tradition or collective memory as a historical process. I also rely on the work of Fall et al. (1994); Grossberg et al. (1992), who owe so much to the school of Birmingham; and particularly Bazin and Bensa (1994).

4 The pidgin lexicon of the Micmacs includes words such as *atouray* (Basque *atorra*, "shirt"), *echapada* (*ezpata*, "sword"), *mouschcoucha* (*biskotxa*, "hardtack"), *martra* (*marta*, "martin"), *matachiaz* (*patatxa*, "bracelets"), *basquoa* (*Baskoa*, "Basque"), *normandia* (*Normandia*, "Norman"), *chabaia* (*Xabaia*, "Savage"), *canadaquoa* (*Kanadakoa*, "Canadian" or "Amerindian dwelling in Canada"), *mercateria* (*merkataria*, "merchant"), *adesquide* (*adeskide*, "friend"), and *ania* (*anaia*, "brother"). See Lescarbot 1609: 626–45; Bakker 1989.

5 Sagard 1990, the latest critical edition, is the most complete and most reliable.

6 Olof Nygard (1958) and especially Velay-Vallantin (1992: 11–42) have renewed this method in accounting for the transformation of tales as a function of historical contexts and of the role of storytellers and audiences in their reproduction. Instead of seeing folktales as immutable productions of tradition, Velay-Vallantin gives them new life by describing their recompositions and social and cultural reappropriations.

7 Departmental Archives of the Gironde, Notaries (ADG), 3E 5425, fols. 449v–450v (28 April 1584). My translations.

8 ADG, 3E 5425, fols. 265v–267r (30 April 1586); 3E 5428, fols. 84r–86r (6 February 1587). Notarial records are decidedly incomplete. Since the Basque notarial records of the sixteenth century have disappeared, one is forced to work with

those of Bordeaux, where mention can be found of ships from Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure that docked there for provisions. I have been able to identify only three ships at Bordeaux for the period 1580–1600 whose trade items aboard were described, out of twenty-two Basque ships bound for Canada (Turgeon et al. 1992: 158). But it is legitimate to suppose that every ship had a cargo similar to that carried by the identified ships (between one hundred and two hundred kettles), which means a potential trading stock of between three thousand and four thousand kettles.

9 That is, the whole eastern coast of North America, from present-day Nova Scotia to the Florida peninsula (Turgeon 1990: 84).

10 Departmental Archives of the Charente-Maritime, Notaries, 3E 2149 (20 June 1565).

11 ADG, 3E 5424, fols. 507v–508r (1 April 1583). The notary specifies that the copper will be loaded onto one or several ships.

12 A goodly number of kettles were made in Bordeaux, for on 30 March 1580 Micheau de Hoyarsabal bought "kettles trimmed in iron" for trade from Gerault Freiche, the master kettle maker from Bordeaux (ADG, 3E 5420, fols. 546v–547r). Jehan de Pinssun dealt with kettle makers from Bordeaux such as Jehan de Sondencq (ADG, 3E 5407, fols. 45v–46r [10 January 1585]) and Anthoine Moysson, "master of the forge of Marquai les Perigueux" (ADG, 3E 5426, fol. 274v [12 March 1585]). He also had commercial links with René Duret of Bayonne and Martin Dagarrette of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, two merchants active in the fur trade (ADG, 3E 5456, fols. 464r–464v [8 May 1585]).

13 ADG, 3E 5425, fols. 449v–450r (28 April 1584); 3E 5427, fols. 265v–267r (30 April 1586). The 1584 contract concerns the purchase of 1,921 knives, 50 axes, and "several" swords.

14 ADG, 3E 5427, fols. 270v–271v, 277v–279r (1 and 3 May 1586). Foreze is doubtless a thick woolen cloth well suited to the rigors of the Canadian climate.

15 ADG, 3E 5425, fols. 449–450 (28 April 1584). The notaries name two types of glass beads: the "patinotes of Gayet," or jet (shiny, black, hard coal), and the "turgyns" (colored "Venetian blue"), purchased in lots of fifty thousand, no doubt the turquoise beads found by the hundreds by archaeologists on Amerindian sites of the Atlantic coast and Great Lakes.

16 It is not impossible that European copper was already circulating in the interior of the continent by the time of Cartier. The Amerindians he encountered on the island of Montreal told him that their brass (necessarily of European origin) came from the south and their red copper from the north, from the Saguenay region, where Basque copper kettles would be brought toward the end of the century (Bideaux 1986: 156–57).

17 Certain copper objects from the Northport Micmac site were coated with red ocher. Copper and red ocher are often found together (Whitehead 1993: 41, 55, 69; Chrétien et al. 1995: 206, 208–9). Several travel accounts from New France allude to the importance the Amerindians attached to the color red. The baron of Lahontan, for example, mentions his encounter with the "nation of the *Essanapes*," which means "the keepers of the red rock" or catlinite, from which the Amerindians made their calumets (Ouellet and Beaulieu 1990, 1: 399; my translation).

18 In the Jesuit accounts there are several examples of copper objects offered as gifts during healing rites (Thwaites 1959, 10: 174–76, 186; 15: 178; 17: 178, 204).

19 At the burial sites of Saint-Nicolas (Chrétien et al. 1995: 206–7) and at one

in Pictou (Whitehead 1993: 55), some of the bones and offerings were found outside the upside-down kettles, no doubt because they could not hold all the items or because the burial had been hasty and disorderly.

20 I have studied the collections of kettles from the following sites: Pictou (ten kettles), Northport (four), Bartibogue (four), Tabusintac (three), and Moncton (one). The collections are maintained by the Acadian Museum in Moncton; the Provincial Museum of New Brunswick, in St. John; and the Provincial Museum of Nova Scotia, in Halifax.

21 Here I am following up on an idea of Bazin's (1986: 272), developed in a magisterial article devoted to things as gods. Augé (1988) also clarifies the mechanisms by which the sacred is materialized in his study of the god as object.

22 See the catalog of "manuscripts and items printed in the languages of the savages and also of Indian relics" exhibited at the conference (Bibliothèque du Musée de l'Amérique française 1906).

23 In Canada the laws governing the ownership of archaeological objects vary from province to province. As a general rule, landowners are deemed the proprietors of such objects found on their property, but they almost always agree to donate them to a public institution (museum, municipality, ministry, etc.). Usually, archaeologists obtain the landowner's signature on an official certificate of donation before the excavation begins. Thus virtually all archaeological objects pass into the public domain.

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