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# By Unseen Hands: Regarding the Gender of Saladoid Potters in the Ancient Lesser Antilles

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## Abstract

This essay considers archaeological uncertainties about the sex and gender roles of the earliest, most widespread ceramicists in the Caribbean—members of a culture that settled the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico over two millennia ago during an era known as the Saladoid. Analysis of the sculptural and painted adornments on Saladoid ceramics suggests that the vessels embodied important Pre-Columbian Caribbean ideas about spirituality, the natural world and the cultural sphere, including gender. Employing archaeological, ethnographic and art historical research, this essay offers interpretations of key Saladoid ceramic adornments, and relates these motifs to the question of gender among the Saladoid potters.

**Key words:** Arawak, Caribbean, pottery, pre-Columbian, Taino