

Ancient and Historical Ceramics

Materials, Technology, Art and Culinary Traditions

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Einleitung

Ceramics play a major role in the understanding of ancient societies, both because they were the first man-made material and because, if only in the form of pottery shards, they have a very high survival rate in archaeological contexts. A starting point for the study of ancient ceramics is the reconstruction of their life cycle from the procurement and processing of the raw materials, through their forming, decoration and firing, to their distribution, use and reuse. Reconstruction of the life cycle is then followed by its interpretation in order to obtain a better understanding of the people associated with the ceramics. Such a study requires a holistic approach, taking account of the fact that production, distribution and use are firmly embedded within the wider environmental, technological, economic, social, political and ideological context. Thus, close collaboration among archaeologists, historians and physical scientists is essential for success in such studies.

The present book, because of the very wide range of topics, both scientific and cultural, that are covered, represents an extremely valuable contribution to our understanding of the role that ceramics have played in ancient societies. The book starts with a comprehensive introduction to the basic science and technology associated with ceramic production. Of particular importance are the inclusion of a brief description of ceramic phase diagrams and their role in interpreting the mineralogical changes occurring during the firing of ceramics, together with a discussion of the mechanical and thermal properties of ceramics particularly when in use as cooking pots. The reader is then taken through the historical developments, production technologies, physical properties, and stylistic attributes associated with individual groups of ceramics used in preparation, serving and storage of food. Although, as the authors admit, the coverage cannot be exhaustive, it is unusually wide ranging both geographically, covering much of Europe, the Near East, the Far East and the Americas, and chronologically, spanning the period from more than 10,000 years ago up to the 18th century AD. In considering production technology, the authors include information provided by contemporary treatises such as those by Abu 'l Qasim at the beginning of 14th century AD and Cipriano Piccolpasso in 16th century AD, reports by contemporary travellers such as Marco Polo in 13th century AD and Père d'Entrecolles in 18th century AD, and in the case of the production of European porcelains, surviving contemporary documentation. In addition, full use is made of phase diagrams in explaining the mineralogical changes occurring during firing of the different types of porcelain. Finally, a unique feature of the book is that the last section of each of the thirteen chapters on specific ceramic types provides a description of the culinary traditions associated with the region and period. A selection of ancient recipes is included for some of which modern versions are provided and tested, with the finished product being photographed and presumably consumed.