

CERAMICS AND SOCIETY

METHODOLOGY

This document outlines the methodology used for recording sherds in the *Ceramics and Society* database. We are aware that there are many different ways of recording archaeological ceramics and we do not claim to have created a definitive system. The method described here was devised to allow us to address our particular research questions. These are to permit cross-comparison between assemblages, rather than being designed to allow the construction of a new typology or type variety system. Comparative goals relate to:

- Vessel form: recording basic formal differences such as between bowl and jar, and allowing appreciation of characteristics such as neck height, rim and lip shape, and vessel body morphology;
- Decoration: different types of decoration were recorded, including incised and impressed decoration and more comprehensive surface treatments such as burnishing, painting and graphiting. In addition, the different motifs used were codified, and the decorative location was recorded.

Sherd selection

The sample of sherds recorded was chosen by archaeological context, rather than by sherd characteristics. Within archaeological contexts deemed to be of interest, all diagnostic sherds were recorded, whether or not they were decorated. This meant that 100% of rim sherds were recorded; body sherds were included where these gave information on the original shape of the vessel; and base sherds were also included. Sherds smaller than 1cm in diameter were deemed undiagnostic and excluded. We did NOT select for particular vessel types, but recorded the full range from the archaeological context.

Sherd designation

Basic data on each sherd was recorded, including the site and context from which it came. Each sherd was assigned a unique ID for the project (CCPxxxx). Context was named according to the excavators' system with trench names (unit x) and context or layer numbers (unit y). In some cases the sherds had an ID number already marked on them; these were also recorded to allow cross-referencing with other publications. Where 'period' is indicated, this refers to the period assigned by the excavator.

Sherd measurements

Multiple measurements were taken on each sherd, allowing for reconstruction of the shape of the vessel, but also an approximation of the % of the vessel remaining and the size of sherds. We recorded the length and width of each sherd, the 'length' measured parallel to the rim, and width at 90 degrees from this measurement. Where possible, we measured rim diameter and indicated what % of the rim circumference we had. The other measurements recorded the characteristics of the vessel, and were located as indicated by Figure 1. Not all measurements were possible on all sherds, but we recorded whatever we could.

Vessel characteristics

The morphology of the vessel was described according to a set of characteristics designed to allow for the recognition of diversity. First, sherds were assigned to either bowls, jars or other vessels. There is

a degree of uncertainty to this, as a very wide-mouthed jar might function as a bowl, and deep bowls might likewise be used for storage, but it was useful as a basic characterisation that could always be refined based on the other attributes. The vessel was then described as either open (rim is the widest point of the vessel) or closed (rim is not the widest point of the vessel) and the rim morphology described. This was achieved via three attributes: the shape of the edge itself (lip shape); the shape of the rim in relation to the vessel (rim shape); and whether it was thickened or tapering (lip style). The final description of 'body characteristics' captures the overall profile of the vessel, with the constricted neck of jars being described here, and carinations or globular profiles being captured in this column.

Surface finish and decoration

The surface finish of the ceramics was described, along with the colour of the surface inside and outside. This was the colour of the ceramic, discounting decoration such as paint or graphite. If decoration was present, it was then described according to its position and method of execution.

Two types of decoration that commonly co-occurred were decoration around the neck/rim (normally incised or impressed) and a line of decoration on the shoulder. We captured this as decorative motif 1 (rim/neck) and decorative motif 2 (shoulder) as a means of exploring the various combinations. We used decorative motif 3 as a way of breaking down the variation we saw between finely executed decoration and the thick, deep lines found on other ceramics. Decorative motifs were numbered according to the system devised by Horton (1996) with additions from Fleisher (2003) and motifs added during the course of the project as new styles were encountered. The full list can be found in the 'Decorative motifs' document on the Ceramics and Society webpage.

Paint and graphite were treated separately and described according to location. They often co-occurred with each other and with incised or other decoration.

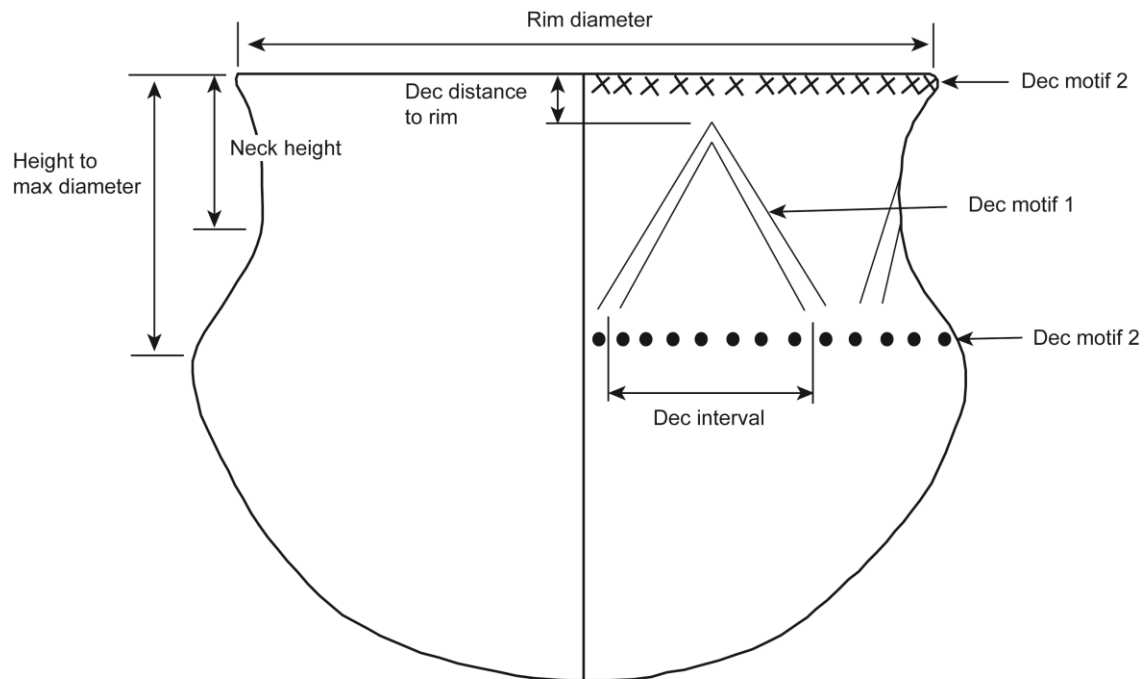
Technological information

We recorded as much technological information as we could for each sherd. Firing atmosphere was always recorded, by nipping the edge of the sherd and viewing the fabric. Temper and non-plastic inclusions were also recorded, although there was little variation viewed in this category. Basic observations were made about the fabric (fine/coarse) and whether it was possible to see construction details (further information on this aspect has been drawn out by Nkirote 2011). Discoloration that might relate to use was recorded, as was any post-depositional damage.

Notes

Anything not represented well by these categories was put into the notes, such as mend holes or peculiarities of manufacture.

Figure 1: Location of measurements taken



References

- Fleisher, J.B. 2003. Viewing Stonetowns from the Countryside: An Archaeological Approach to Swahili Regional Systems, AD800-1500. PhD thesis, University of Virginia.
- Fleisher, J.B. and S. Wynne-Jones. 2011. Ceramics and the Early Swahili: Deconstructing the Early Tana Tradition. *African Archaeological Review* 28(4):245-278.
- Horton, M.C. 1996. *Shanga: The archaeology of a Muslim trading community on the coast of East Africa*. Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa.
- Nkirote, F. 2011. Population and Ceramic Traditions: Revisiting the Tana Ware of coastal Kenya (7th - 14th century). PhD thesis, University of Paris.