

Economics, chronology, traditions of manufacture, the use of paint and glaze, methods of firing (in terms of reduction and oxidation), the function of various sites, the introduction of certain forms and the validity of characterising the study area as an individual entity; all these are summarised and examined, with supporting tables, diagrams and maps. Some of the methods of presentation are unfamiliar, at least to this reviewer, including density curves for occupation levels and statistical distance charts for areas of production, and this serves to enhance the pleasure of reading this fascinating exploration of a wide range of themes.

This is an excellent publication, in all sorts of ways, and well worth seeking out. Pottery studies in France are developing quickly and in exciting directions. It is a long time since a regional study of this breadth and depth has appeared in Britain and Husi and his colleagues have set a marker for anyone in a position to follow them. That's the problem though, who, in Britain, is in a position to take on such a challenge? As the MPRG Research Framework has shown, many of our universities seem reluctant to engage seriously with post-Roman material culture studies, while the commercial imperative that drives much developer-funded archaeology is hindering the development of panoramic, synthetic pottery analyses. This latest in an increasingly impressive body of work from France (and it is not only in France that publications of such weight are being produced to such a high standard), provides much food for thought, in so many different ways.

Duncan H. Brown

Greg Stemm, Sean Kingsley and Ellen Gerth (eds)

Oceans Odyssey 4. Pottery from the Tortugas Shipwreck, Straits of Florida: A Merchant Vessel from Spain's 1622 Tierra Firme Fleet

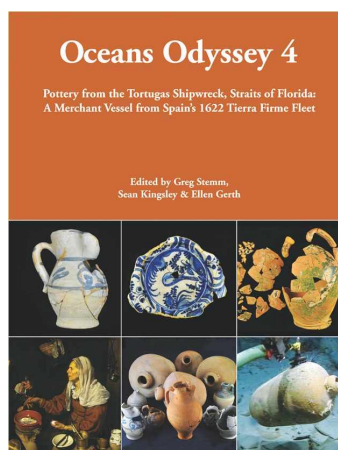
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Odyssey Marine Exploration is a company that seems to attract a lot of opprobrium. This is mainly because it has a reputation for selling finds from their seabed recovery projects in order to finance their research. Their critics deem this to be unethical and take the view that Odyssey Marine should not be given any publicity, presumably because that could be seen to condone their allegedly piratical practices. Some people, therefore, would probably think that *Medieval Ceramics* should not be carrying this review. It



seems highly unlikely that ignoring this publication will in any way affect the business of Odyssey Marine but it may be possible that offering a critique will benefit future analysis of seabed assemblages. What does seem to be true is that Odyssey Marine are seeking to establish some credibility, as are we all, and although composing a review will not really provide them with that, it is hoped that it will influence future work. If the fact that they sent four books to this reviewer, rather than the anticipated one, is anything to go by, Odyssey Marine are, at the least, embarking on a charm offensive. Very welcome though this generosity may be it is not possible to review all four volumes here, especially as only one of them is specifically about pottery. That said, receiving four hefty tomes affords a wider impression of the publication series as a whole. These books have been produced to a high standard, with hard covers, glossy paper and lots of photographs, and they are presumably subsidised, because the retail price is low. Leaving aside, if you can, the ethical debate, what of the content? This is, after all, how we should measure the success of this research, but this turns out not to be so easy because the preface, by Ivor Noel Hume, is a forceful defence of Odyssey Marine's approach. Entitled 'Archaeological Ethics in Free and Open Debate?', it is out of context with the rest of the text, which has the effect of putting the reader on alert from the outset, leaving them wondering what they are getting themselves into. What follows is either a relief or a disappointment, depending on what you were hoping for, as it is mostly capable reporting supported by comprehensive research. Look away, there is no scandal here.

The Tortugas shipwreck belonged to the Spanish *Tierra Firme* treasure fleet that was wrecked off Florida Keys in September AD 1622. This particular vessel, identified as the *Buen Jesús y Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, was by no means a treasure ship, although amongst the cargo were gold bars, silver coins and over 6,000 pearls. It is the pottery, however, that is the principal subject here. The assemblage comprises 3,862 complete pots and sherds and includes olive jars, tin-glazed, lead-glazed and plain earthenwares, and 'Colonoware' cooking vessels. The text is structured around those categories, with chapters on the table wares, 'Papal Politics and Propaganda' (a discussion of the papal motifs adorning some of the tin-glazed dishes), Spanish olive jars and Afro-Caribbean Colonoware. There are further chapters on chemical analysis and the clay tobacco pipes before

a final discussion of long-distance trade. Rather disconcertingly, each chapter reads like a separate journal article, which gives rise to repetition and makes the whole somewhat lacking in coherency. There is no index, for example, while the same figure appears twice (a reproduction of *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* by Velázquez: rather disturbingly, one version has a completely different colour tone to the other). Repetition is noticeable from the outset when, in Chapter 1, on the ceramic table wares, we are informed that ‘between June 1990 and October 1991, Seahawk Deep Ocean Technology of Tampa, Florida, excavated the wreck of a small merchant vessel that sank at a depth of 400m... The Tortugas shipwreck is interpreted as the Portuguese-built and Spanish-operated 117-ton *Buen Jesús* ... from the 1622 *Tierra Firme* fleet ...’ *etc. etc.* All of that should have been in the introduction and, furthermore, does not require reiteration in Chapter 3: ‘The policy of total sherd recovery implemented during the 1990–91 excavation of the 400m deep wreck, identified as the 117-ton Spanish-operated *Buen Jesús* ...’ *etc. etc.* This is not irksome solely for aesthetic reasons. The flow of the text may be affected but so too is the logic of the structure and the direction of the research, so that admirable passages of classification and quantification are wrapped up in somewhat distracting scene-setting, occasional self-justification (note the ‘total sherd recovery’; please note – total sherd recovery!) and what verges on rumination. A discussion of the distribution of the tin-glazed wares over the ballast mound (not illustrated by a plan) is followed by a passage that begins ‘the date of the ship’s sinking in AD 1622 coincided with a decline in the economic fortunes of Spain, whose tight control of its colonial dominions was fragmenting’, which in turn is followed, two lines later, by a lengthy section on the quantities of all the types of pottery present and how the tin-glazed wares have been classified typologically. This is all useful, perhaps important, but it does not seem to have been compiled, or presented, in the way that a pottery specialist would do it, with the aim of informing other specialists in any field. Organising the text under headings and sub-headings would help here, for example in the description of the method of quantification, which is somewhat convoluted and supported by tables of percentages that mainly seem to demonstrate why those percentages are problematic. The approach has been to discount body sherds in estimating numbers of vessels in favour of ‘solely counting rims, bases and handles’. That approach is also problematic, however, and the final analyses seem to have been based on counts of only intact or largely intact vessels, in addition to unique rim or base fragments. There are tables that show quantities of various types, according to each method, supported by both histograms and pie charts, but it is difficult to establish what the point is, especially as the tables have no overall total. The purpose of quantification,

apart from representing the vessel population for the ship, must also be to enable comparison with other assemblages, and it is debatable just how easy that would be. We are then treated to 37 pointless photographs of various pots *in situ* on the seabed. The actual typological classification of forms and decorative motifs that follows is much more coherent and well supported by photographs. There is good information here, including parallels from other marine and terrestrial assemblages. The chapter concludes with two more discursive sections that put the *Buen Jesús* table wares into the wider context of other shipwreck pottery and the economics of the trade from Seville.

Chapter 2 is entitled ‘Papal Plates and Propaganda on the Deep-Sea Tortugas Shipwreck, Florida (1622)’, although you’d think it really should be apparent to the reader of a book entitled ‘Pottery from the Tortugas Shipwreck ...’ that the Papal plates in question came from the Tortugas shipwreck. Furthermore, the first line of this chapter reads ‘The most unusual decorative scheme encountered amongst the 1,477 tin-glazed table wares recovered from the 400m-deep Tortugas shipwreck in the Straits of Florida ...’. Such repetition is necessary perhaps because the chapter is built around two dishes decorated in blue paint on a white background with the arms of the papacy. These are interpreted as direct products of the establishment of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in January AD 1622 and heralded as unique archaeological finds that represent the earliest manifestation of the Pope’s initiative and thus the presence on the ship of church administrators or missionaries. It is a good story, well researched and contextualised and richly illustrated but not really linked with much of the pottery assemblage as a whole.

The way in which the book is put together, as a series of seemingly separate articles, means that each chapter could be reviewed in its own right but considering the limitations of space, suffice to say that some of what is wrong with Chapter 1 applies to the rest of this work. In Chapter 3 the olive jars are not quantified as a whole group, there are more photographs of pots on the seabed (as well as being lifted by a suction device), there are tables showing dimensions and capacities and there is a competent typology. It looks like a pottery report but it does not really read like one. Chapter 4, on the Afro-Caribbean Colonoware really is a pottery report, however. Properly organised, illustrated only with relevant drawings and photographs, and exhaustive in its background research and presentation of parallels, this is more readable and rewarding. Among an estimated total of eighteen separate pots two vessel types are represented: jars and shallow pans or ‘cooking griddles’. A variety of rim forms are described and quantified before sections on the background to the recognition and study of Colonoware leads to a conclusion that African slaves

were present on the Tortugas shipwreck. The chapter on chemical analysis, by Michael Hughes is, as one would expect, detailed, well presented and concise. All the fabric groups were analysed, including tin-glazed wares, olive jars, unglazed and glazed coarsewares and Colonoware. With the exception of the last of those, the pottery is overwhelmingly Spanish, with Seville very highly represented.

There is no doubting the intent behind this book, nor the commitment of the various authors. An illustration of this is the final chapter, which seeks to examine the mechanics of long-distance trade through comparisons of Roman amphora with later olive jars. Such a discussion seems almost a luxury because it does little to illuminate any further our understanding of the Tortugas wreck assemblage, but it does demonstrate an enthusiasm for looking deeper

to draw out more profound lines of thought; and that is to be applauded and encouraged. It is frustrating, therefore, that there is no overall conclusion. The different strands are not finally brought together and although this assemblage is undoubtedly significant and has been exhaustively presented and researched, its meaning, and the lives of the people who used it, remain vague. It is therefore uncertain whether Odyssey Marine have succeeded in establishing their credibility but they have produced a volume that is probably worth forking out thirty quid for. It is possible to gain a lot from this book, although you'd have to have an abiding interest in the classification of Iberian pottery, if not photographs of pots both on and partially lifted from the seabed.

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