

Alice M. W. Hunt (ed)

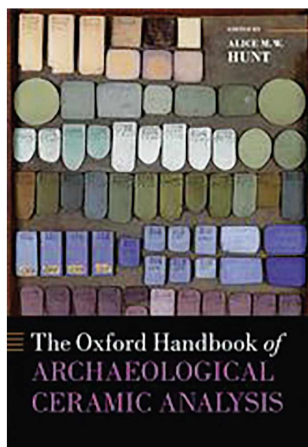
The Oxford handbook of archaeological ceramic analysis

2017 Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hardback, 724 pages, 9 plates, 138 figures, 23 tables

ISBN 9780199681532

Price £110



As for every Oxford handbook, this volume contains up-to-date surveys, here focusing on archaeological ceramics. In fact, one of the aims of this volume is to give new perspectives regarding this topic, which is certainly crucial for archaeological research: as mentioned in many of the surveys, ceramics is the most common find during archaeological excavations, and the importance of its analysis is therefore clear. A book of this character is challenging to produce, given the diversity of pottery classes, chronologies, technologies, and approaches across the World over many periods. However, the final result is indeed an overview of the most recent methods that can be used for ceramic analysis, thus accomplishing its aim of giving a wider perspective about how to study pottery. The most interesting – despite complicated – aspect of this work is the purely scientific approach to ceramic analysis, as often such an approach is still underestimated and less used because of prejudices about its complexity. As a global summary of the collection, I think that this work accomplishes its aim, as through the chapters it is possible to develop the kind of wide overview mentioned in the introduction. In doing so, the book deploys its chapters in a logical order, based around the various stages of ceramic analysis. The topics of the chapters are extremely varied, and they include approaches from different disciplines. As clearly explained by Hunt in the introductory chapter 1, interdisciplinary approaches are crucial, as each different form of analysis contributes to a specific aspect, such as provenance, manufacture technology, function, and date of ceramics. Only in this way it is possible to obtain integration between different data.

Moving on the text, the book is divided into different parts that follow the primary research questions which characterise ceramic analysis (provenance, manufacture technology, function, and date). Part one is the introductory section (chapter 1, Hunt, chapter 2, Tite). It concerns the technical structure of the work and the history of scientific research around the ceramic life-cycle. Part two focuses on the preliminary stages of ceramic analysis: how to integrate science and archaeology (chapter 3, Buxeda, Garricós and Madrid i Fernández), the general issues related to ceramic data (chapter 4, Hazenfratz-Marks), the quantification of ceramics using statistical methods (chapter 5, Bishop), and how to use together different sets of data (chapter 6, Boulanger). In general, this part is clear and concise, supported by good examples and charts that aid understanding. In particular, the sections about quantification and statistical methods are maybe too concise: given the importance of this step for ceramic analysis, the space given to this topic does not entirely accomplish its aim of being a broad introduction to quantification. However, the interdisciplinary character of the approach adopted in this volume is already clear in this second section and continues into the third, which is dedicated to the foundational concepts that are basic for studying pottery. This section guides us from raw materials to drawings, in a sort of journey from the most basic raw elements to the complete vessel. The first chapter of this part (chapter 7, Montana) describes the choice of materials, while chapter 8 (Roux) and chapter 9 (Duistermaat) focus on the process of creating ceramics, analysing all the various influences that might affect certain technological choices. Chapters 10 (Waksman) and 11 (Schneider) introduce us to provenance study, compositional groups, and mineralogical and chemical alteration: these topics will be analysed in more detail in parts four and five, but here we have a general overview, which is crucial for the more detailed parts that follow. In particular, these chapters are really important, as they give us a preliminary idea of which kinds of questions we need to address to ceramics. Then, the final chapters of this part (chapter 12, Santacreu, Calvo Trias, and García Rosselló, chapter 13, Whitbread, and chapter 14, Shirvalkar) are focused on the technical classification, description and drawing of ceramics. In particular, these chapters are really clear and they can be considered valuable introductions to the preliminary steps necessary for ceramic analysis. Then, as mentioned above, parts four to seven are the main focus of this work, as their aim is to answer the primary research questions presented in the introduction. Part four is about ceramic provenance, explaining several of the available methods. This part is the most scientific part of the entire volume, and each chapter focuses on a specific method: petrography (Brackmans and Deyse), micropalaeontology (Wilkinson *et al*), electron microprobe analysis (Ionescu and Hoeck),

isotope analysis (Wiegand), X-ray powder diffraction (Heimann), ED-XRF and WD-XRF (Hall), portable XRF (Holmqvist), particle-induced X-ray emission (Rizzutto and Tabacniks), spectrometry (Golitzko and Dussubieux), neutron activation analysis (Minc and Sterba), and synchrotron radiation (Greene). As it is possible to see from the quick overview above, each chapter analyses a specific method, showing its advantages and its limitations – the latter mostly related to costs and the destructive nature of certain analytical methods. This part is undoubtedly dense for those who are not experts in scientific methods, but all the chapters are characterised by clear examples and numerous tables and charts, thus making everything easily understandable. Part five regards ceramic manufacture, and this topic is discussed using both ethnography (Fowler), and scientific methods of analysis, such as experimental firing and re-firing (Daszkiewicz and Maritan), infrared spectroscopy (Shoval), Raman spectroscopy (Van Pevenage and Vandenabeele), x-radiography (Berg and Ambers), and organic inclusions (Mariotti Lippi and Pallecchi). The presence of different interdisciplinary approaches in this part makes the explanations really effective. Similarly, part six includes three chapters about vessel function, using typologies (Martínez-Carillo and Barceló), physical approaches (Müller), and organic residual analysis (Barnard and Eerkens). Finally, part seven analyses the methods for dating ceramic assemblages: typologies (Bortolini), and direct dating methods (Blain and Hall). This last part of the volume is clearly explained, but maybe too short, especially if we consider the importance of dating ceramics.

In conclusion, on the one hand, this volume fulfils the difficult aim of an overall presentation of the many methods that can be used for studying archaeological ceramics. On the other hand, scientific methods are predominant, thus some crucial aspects such as quantification and typologies are not as detailed as we might expect. Furthermore, given that the chapters are generally really dense, the absence of cross-referring between them sometimes creates some confusion. At the same time, while the introduction brilliantly summarises the questions that structure the volume itself, the absence of a conclusive chapter leaves the reader without a clear final overview of all the answers to such questions. However, surely this volume enriches us of new perspectives about the most recent methods of ceramic analysis, demonstrating that many aspects of this field still require further research.

Lucrezia Campagna

Robert Philpott with Ron Dagnall, Maurice Handley, David Higgins, Samantha Rowe, Jeff Speakman, Elizabeth Stewart and members of the St Helens Association for Historical Research

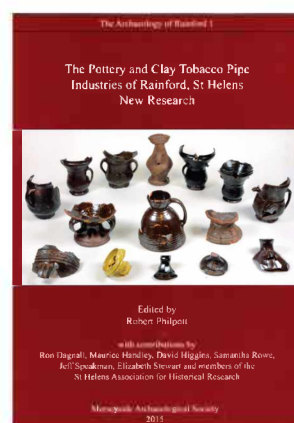
The Pottery and Clay Tobacco Pipe Industry of Rainford, St Helens New Research

2015. Merseyside Archaeological Society:
The Archaeology of Rainford 1.

Paperback, 226 pages, 145 figures, 14 tables

ISBN 978-0-906311

Price £20 (plus £3.50 p & p)



This substantial, well-illustrated volume is the direct outcome of the Rainford Roots Community Archaeology Project begun in 2013. It establishes for the first time that a fully-fledged Cistercian ware industry flourished in south-west Lancashire in the 16th century and went on to provide a regional hub for pottery production for the following two centuries. Although its main subject is pottery and clay pipes, the volume delivers a good deal more, providing much ancillary information from documentary sources about the potters and their lives.

The first chapter is an introduction to the Rainford Roots project, an overview of the development of the township from prehistory to the 19th century and a summary of previous archaeological work in the area. In the second Maurice Handley provides a clear and pointed account of the geology of the region and its significance for the development of the pottery industry. This includes excellent maps and diagrams as well as photographs of key sites and buildings. Chapter three by Ron Dagnall describes the history of Rainford potteries and their sites from documentary sources. In the following chapter he presents full transcriptions of six probate inventories of Rainford potters proved at Chester. The St Helens Association then adds a further 26 Rainford wills dating between 1619 and 1879.

Chapters five to seven provide the meat of the volume with over 150 pages. They present in full the results of three excavations on separate sites in Church