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Book Reviews

Pottery Analysis: A Sourcebook, second edition. Prudence M. Rice.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, 592 pp. \$55.00, paper.
ISBN 978-0-226-92321-5.

The second edition of Rice's comprehensive sourcebook on pottery analysis for archaeologists is a very overdue and most welcome substantive update and revision of the original published in 1987. As someone who regularly teaches a seminar and laboratory class on ceramic analysis in archaeology, I have been frustrated in recent years that all of the classic reference texts on this topic were either outdated, out-of-print, or, in most cases, both. The only other recent reference text with which Rice's current edition can aptly be compared is the second edition of *Pottery in Archaeology* by Orton and Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), which is part of the excellent Cambridge Manuals in Archaeology series. However, Rice's new sourcebook is better suited to the anthropologically based approaches to ceramic materials analysis that dominate the Americanist tradition in archaeology. This perspective is evident in the strongly behavioral emphasis that Rice takes throughout the text, her extensive coverage of ethnoarchaeological studies of traditional pottery production and use, and her insistence that pottery analysis in archaeology, especially the more technical material science approaches, must be driven by research questions and interpretive frameworks drawn from the mainstream of anthropological archaeology.

This edition follows that same basic structure as the first edition, beginning with a discussion of the raw materials of pottery production from chemical, geological, and ceramic engineering perspectives. Few archaeology texts deal with clay, nonplastic additives, and slips and pigments at this level of material science detail. However, as Rice (p. xxv) cogently notes, "[a]s compositional and other characterization analyses of archaeological pottery become more and more routine, it is worthwhile to understand how all those trace elements got into the potsherds in the first place." The text then moves on to cover, in parallel sections, the process of pottery production, use, and discard from both ethnographic and materials analysis perspectives. The final section of the book includes chapters that address how pottery analyses have been used to address specific research questions in archaeology, such as organization of production, vessel and assemblage function, and style and social interaction.

Some positive structural changes to the new edition include an expansion of the section on raw materials, which has been broken up into more, shorter, and more focused chapters, making each more readable and digestible for students and others

who have a limited background in chemistry, geology, or material science. New and expanded chapters on surface enhancement and firing methods have also been added to the section on ethnographic perspectives on pottery making. Another improvement is the use of text boxes to highlight common methodological procedures, making this edition a more user-friendly reference tool for the field or lab.

The second edition also provides substantially updated coverage of the tremendous amounts of new information, changes in topical emphases, and major analytical advances that have transformed the study of archaeological pottery since the 1980s. The new edition, for example, has a greatly revised discussion of the origins of pottery that is cognizant of our increased understanding of the use of pottery among early hunter-gatherer-fishers, with dates now going back 20,000 years, which defies older evolutionary models that linked pottery to the emergence of a “Neolithic technocomplex,” associated with the origins of farming. The chapter on “Style and Social Interaction” has also been significantly rewritten and updated to reflect current perspectives and new data on this topic.

Rice’s coverage of recent theoretical developments in the study of archaeological pottery, however, is less comprehensive and more problematic. Although she mentions the increasing influence of practice theory, social learning theory, and French techniques and technology approaches, she does not provide a substantive overview of the abundant literature in archaeological pottery studies based on these approaches published since the 1990s. She labels all such approaches dismissively as postprocessual and unscientific, oddly failing to grasp how and why these interpretive frameworks have been adopted in synergy with the many new technical advances in archaeometric and instrumental analysis. I suspect this position will confound a generation of archaeological pottery analysts who have embraced these theoretical approaches while walking around with well-worn copies of the first edition of her sourcebook tucked under their arms.

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