
THE OLD POTTER'S ALMANACK

Volume Seventeen, Number One: June 2012. ISSN 0965-7479

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the June issue of *The Old Potter's Almanack*.

In February 2012 I was delighted to take part in the Fifth Archaeological Workshop on Scientific Analyses of Prehistoric and Early Historical Pottery: Techniques, Applications and Evaluation, held at the University of Hamburg, and organised by Professors Britta Ramminger (Hamburg, Germany) and Ole Stilborg (Storefors, Sweden).

The day consisted of 13 talks, delivered in German and English, by both established scientists and postgraduate students from England, France, Germany, Sweden and Turkey. The talks addressed topics such as pottery provenance and function, and human diet and cultural identity, as well as technical aspects of archaeometric research.

Thomas Rose (Tübingen) summarised the different steps of the chaîne opératoire for ceramic production and which of the many archaeometric techniques are relevant to each step. This is part of an initiative to link archaeological research questions to the most useful research methods and sampling strategies. Sonja Behrendt and Oliver Mecking, from Weimar, compared the patterns in compositional data obtained by portable XRF to earlier studies of the same sherds by classical XRF and ICP-MS sampling, showing that, whilst the overall patterns are reproduced, portable XRF is most useful for measuring heavier elements, particularly in fine wares, and least successful at classifying coarser ceramics from a single site. Wolf-Achim Kahl (Bremen), Markus Helfert (Frankfurt) and Britta Ramminger (Hamburg) demonstrated the potential of Micro-CT to provide detailed three-dimensional structural information about Neolithic and Roman pottery without destructive sampling, including creating realistic casts of organic inclusions; revealing the forming techniques for handmade pottery; and mapping the distribution and sizes of inclusions of different densities.

Anders Lindahl (Lund) discussed how to distinguish between different forming techniques microscopically, basing his interpretation of prehistoric pottery from Guam, the Philippines, and southern Africa on results obtained during ethnographic work in southern Africa. The

Philippines and earlier Iron Age African assemblages were made by coiling, whereas the Guam and later Iron Age African pots were made by "pulling-up", a method that was observed directly, or the paddle-and-anvil technique. Erguen Lafli and Gülseren Khan Shahin (Izmir) discussed problems of ceramic analysis in a poorly-researched region of northern Turkey, south-western Paphlagonia, which was peripheral to the Hellenistic world and intermittently ruled by outsiders.

Ole Stilborg also discussed a cultural transition in pottery making, between the Funnel Beaker and Pitted Ware cultures in early Neolithic Sweden. Comparing three Funnel Beaker assemblages from sites on Öland, he found differences in the clay used and in the amount of temper added, with one assemblage matching a Pitted Ware assemblage in temper concentration. Current research on absorbed lipids may show a transition in diet from terrestrial resources, typical of the Funnel Beaker culture, to a more marine diet, often found at Pitted Ware sites. Using GC-MS and GC-IRMS, Nathalie Dimc (Stockholm) showed that absorbed lipids from Funnel Beaker and Pitted Ware assemblages support the interpretation, based on isotopic data from human bones, that the Pitted Ware population relied to a much greater degree on marine resources. This pattern appears to support the attribution of food culture as a social binder.

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Julien Vieugué (Paris) used SEM, GC-MS, and FTIR to investigate the function of early Neolithic pottery from Kovačevo, Bulgaria, by comparing organic residues and use-wear to traditional typometric characteristics (shape, size, thickness, capacity), and found that different vessel forms had specific uses. All vessels showed some use-wear, including decorated forms, and abrasion on lugs was consistent with their use to suspend the pot from ropes.

Several contributions focussed instead on pottery production. I spoke about the emergence of craft specialisation in the Adriatic region, at the end of the early Neolithic, as shown by minero-petrographic and SEM-EDX results from *figulina* and coarse wares. Josefine Friedrich (Frankfurt) used Mössbauer spectroscopy to study craft specialisation in the production of La Tène period ceramics in south-west Germany. Paul Petterson (Lund) spoke about his experimental work to understand the production and use of Bronze Age crucibles in southern Scandinavia.

Wenxing Xu (Mainz) fired discs of fresh clay from extraction pits at the pottery production centre of Mayen, western Germany, to monitor physical, chemical and mineralogical responses to changes in firing temperature, in order to determine the firing temperature of archaeological material produced at the same site – which was widely distributed in the Rhine basin and further afield from the 5th to 9th centuries AD. The discs were fired at temperatures of between 100 and 1200 °C, and tested with FTIR, DTA and XRD, as well as for colour and hardness. XRD was the most sensitive to differences in firing temperature.

Thomas Eriksson and Anders Lindahl (Uppsala/Lund) discussed the creation of a digital database of 4,700 pottery thin sections collected in the last forty years by the Geology department of the University of Lund (www.geol.lu.se/kfl). As well as data related to archaeological information, such as reports, articles, museum inventory number, dating, GIS results, vessel categories, etc., they showed trends, such as in the use of specific tempers across diachronic ranges and geographical regions.

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