

## BOOK REVIEW



### *Potters and Communities of Practice: Glaze Paint and Polychrome Pottery in the American Southwest, A.D. 1250–1700*

Edited by Linda S. Cordell and Judith A. Habicht-Mauche, 2012.  
224 pp., 63 figures, 24 tables, preface, index, references, and abstract.  
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I have no doubt that the late, great Anna O. Shepard would be keenly interested in Cordell and Habicht-Mauche's new edited volume. They have assembled a collection of essays with fresh insights on late pre-Hispanic and early Historic period (ca. 1300 to 1700) Pueblo pottery, and specifically the manufacture, provenance, and circulation of glaze-painted pottery. The volume provides an excellent companion to another edited book, *The Social Life of Pots: Glaze Wares and Cultural Dynamics in the Southwest, AD 1250–1680*, published several years ago (Habicht-Mauche et al. 2006). In fact, *Potters and Communities of Practice* evolved from a 2009 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) session that was designed, in part, to extend and expand the research themes of that 2006 edited volume. The new volume continues themes of the earlier text, namely Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave's notions about social learning, networks, and identity in "communities of practice" (e.g., Wenger 1998). The papers also present a rich array of new technological data that helps nail down the technological nuances and histories of glaze-painted and polychrome pottery production in the Pueblo Southwest. The editors note in the preface that this volume presents the efforts of very diverse and "collaborative" research projects.

The volume begins with two introductory chapters. Cordell and Habicht-Mauche establish the theoretical tone of the volume in the opening chapter and envision the volume in three parts. As they put it, the first set of chapters examines the "origins" of ceramic traditions; the second set shifts attention to the "spread" of these traditions; and the final set focuses in part on the end of glaze-painted pottery production during the contact period. The next chapter (Chapter

Two) is, in my estimation, one of the most important contributions of the volume. Huntley and her colleagues provide a solid preamble to the chapters that follow by detailing the latest analyses of glaze paint "recipes," and in particular, the procurement and circulation of lead ores. In addition to the regional-scope lead isotope data they present, I appreciated their insightful discussion of the multi-scalar networks of resource and expertise.

The chapters that follow this introductory content examine (as the editors point out) the early development of late pre-Hispanic period polychrome and glaze-painted Pueblo ceramics. Phillips (Chapter Four) explores the roots of the Casas Grandes polychrome tradition and its possible ties to the Rio Grande region (and other areas of the Ancestral Pueblo World); Gilpin and Hays-Gilpin (Chapter Five) detail the historical sequence of polychrome pottery wares and types in the Hopi region; and Eckert (Chapter Six) examines pottery crafting in the fourteenth-century Zuni region with an eye on the complex, shifting "communities of identity" in the region. The next four chapters shift attention to glaze paint traditions in the Eastern Pueblo region. Franklin and Schleher (Chapter Seven) detail the circulation of glaze ware in the Middle Rio Grande region, suggesting that two neighboring villages participated in different exchange networks; Curewitz and Goff (Chapter Eight) address the flow of lead ore and glaze ware production in the Northern and Middle Rio Grande regions (namely villages on the Pajarito Plateau); and Ramenofsky (Chapter Nine) and Schleher and colleagues (Chapter Ten) specifically address glaze ware production at San Marcos Pueblo west of the Galisteo Basin.

Blinman and his colleagues explore the "technological details" and recipe preparation for glaze paints in Chapter Eleven, marking the start of the volume editors' third section. The chapter usefully expands on a number of recent compositional studies (some published elsewhere) by exploring the complex processes of pigment production, color rendition, and firing. Their "experimental" efforts in yielding different visual effects from an artistic "perspective" demonstrate, as they beautifully phrase it, the "complex alchemy of firing" (p. 116). Although I understand why the editors placed this valuable chapter in its location, it would have also worked well as a part of the "introductory" section alongside the first two chapters. In Chapter Twelve, Snow examines the "demise" of glaze paint traditions and the dissolution of the social networks of interaction and exchange that are discussed in previous chapters. His chapter, along with the next two (Thomas' Chapter Thirteen and Dyer's Chapter Fourteen), all detail the historical outcomes that arose when Native and non-Native "communities of practice" intersected during the early Historic period. Thomas' chapter is one of the gems of the volume. It is impossible to summarize his thesis in one statement, but he convincingly argues that colonial manipulation of mined ores that were essential to native pigment production disrupted the "moral economy" of Pueblo life, particularly with regard to the

manufacture of religious or ritual objects. As a big fan of Rosemary Joyce's scholarship on Mesoamerica ceramics, I was pleased to read her concise and insightful closing chapter (Chapter Fifteen). She offers a much-needed, big picture take on the "smaller details" and findings of the individual chapters, and reaffirms how identify, meaning, and history are all made (and remade) through changing "constellations of practice."

If you are a southwestern pottery geek like me, you will want to get your hands on this volume as soon as possible. It is data-rich and theoretically-grounded and I have no doubt that it will interest a wide audience of ceramicists working in other anthropological settings. One quick criticism in this regard: a wider audience would have benefited from a map of the American Southwest and the areas discussed in the volume in the first chapter (as a point of orientation). This minor quip aside, the tables and figures are clearly rendered and conform to the high production quality that The University of Arizona Press has delivered in other volumes within the *Anthropological Papers* series. In summary, this collection of essays is a solid and timely contribution to ceramic studies and Southwest archaeology.

### REFERENCES

- Habicht-Mauche, Judith A., Deborah L. Huntley, and Suzanne L. Eckert (editors)  
2006 *The Social Life of Pots: Glaze Wares and Cultural Dynamics in the Southwest, AD 1250–1680*. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson.
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