

LA CERAMICA IN ARCHEOLOGIA: ANTICHE TECNICHE DI LAVORAZIONE E MODERNI METODI DI INDAGINE

BY NININA CUOMO DI CAPRIO. PP. 748, B&W FIGS. 181, TABLES 11. L'ERMA DI BRETSCHNEIDER, ROME 2007. €90. ISBN 88-8265-397-8.

This book is the heavily revised second edition of a publication that first appeared in 1985. In those days, with a renewed interest in ceramic studies and in particular ceramic technology, and with the support of the so-called archaeological auxiliary sciences, Cuomo di Caprio's volume was an extraordinary innovation in the field. Finally, an archaeologist with a classical background had decided to diversify her own competences doing the utmost (and with a positive result) to include a variety of topics, such as chemistry, mineralogy, petrography, and physical studies in general. Such an approach was essential for anyone wanting to understand the history of each ceramic artifact; it also bridged a considerable gap by offering an extraordinary tool not only to specialists but also to students.

Now, nearly 25 years later, the second edition, which has been completely rewritten, expanded, and updated, maintains its focus on the same topic but offers new perspectives to the argument, reflected in the innovative editorial structure of the volume. It includes two broad sections, followed by an appendix that enables the author to distinguish the technological aspect of a ceramic artifact's "life"—its birth, use, death, and reuse—from those aspects specifically connected to archaeometric analyses. The appendix contains a selection of the most important ancient literary sources (in translation), which the author considers useful for the overall understanding of the text.

In the first section (more than three-quarters of the volume), Cuomo di Caprio proceeds from an analysis of raw materials—examining their compositional elements, and how the clay is worked—through the preparation phase of

the ceramic artifact—now ready for decoration with paint, relief, and so forth—to placement inside the kiln. This section clearly shows the author's expertise in the field of ceramic kilns, which derives from her in-depth study of the production complexes at Morgantina in ancient Sicily. Generally, a strong multidisciplinary approach emerges from the first section of the publication, which serves to focus not only the attention of the specialist but—above all—that of the student on the many aspects that require consideration when reconstructing the life of an ancient ceramic artifact. There are innovations and additions to the first edition of the book; the section relating to red-gloss sigillata wares, the Italian productions, and to those that the author defines as "arretino modo" is new. Many aspects of this kind of pottery remain unclear, especially given new discoveries in the eastern Mediterranean. The author points out this problem and puts forward some interesting new hypotheses.

Another new addition is the introduction of "finestre," that is, text boxes, inserted into and between the chapters, and "riscontri in archeologia e riferimenti bibliografici" at the end of each chapter. Although these additions are signalled by changes in layout (the use of italics or gray for the windows), they may initially confuse a reader who finds it hard sometimes to follow the book from page to page, and to combine the various pieces of information (particularly given long and frequent jumps forward and backward between bibliographical references and the main text). But once the reader understands this system, reading becomes much easier, and these windows are decidedly useful for purposes

of clarification. In my opinion, this is a most suitable editorial system, not least with regard to the multidisciplinary character of the work. Diagrams, figures, and tables support the text throughout, presenting clear information that is often little known or rarely considered by archaeologists with a humanities background. Also useful are the ethnographical approaches and the descriptions of experiments and/or reproductions carried out in modern ceramic workshops, which support the suggested hypotheses about the ancient production process.

Therefore, in this first section, the reader finds, condensed, all the phases of the life of a ceramic artifact; the reader is sure to pick up from each section the information necessary for a first attempt at analysis, necessary for any more profound understanding. In this respect, the author has achieved her main aim. The volume will enable students to understand productive and technological mechanisms rarely described in university courses. In fact, the original book arose from a series of lectures on ceramic technology, held in the 1980s at the University of Venice.

The second section is devoted to technical-scientific aspects. Here, the author considers the numerous types of laboratory analyses used to determine the compositional aspects of ceramic artifacts. Content and language are simple and comprehensible. In general, this section demonstrates that one should not believe that archaeometry can provide the

solution to every problem; at least one should know about the various techniques, so as to ask the right questions to the right people (i.e., laboratories), if one wants answers as close as possible to the truth. The remarkable number of graphs and tables given for each type of analysis facilitates overall understanding. Extremely useful, also, is the analytical index.

The volume is well printed, and the figures are rich and not superfluous. This volume remains, at least in an Italian context, a *unicum*, but it is on the same level of other handbooks published in international contexts, which unfortunately have not been updated. It would be favorable if the author and publisher considered an English edition that would find a wider audience. The book is mainly directed toward students on a first degree course in archaeology and to students in other disciplines who will find the text useful in didactic laboratories, specialized institutes of research, and so on. Finally, the price is attractive, which is quite innovative considering the high price normally asked for volumes published by L'Erma di Bretschneider.

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