

J. THEODORE PEÑA: *Roman Pottery in the Archaeological Record*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007. ISBN 987-0-521-86541-8. XVIII, 430 pp. GBP 55, USD 95.

Writing about pottery in classical archaeology means usually – even today – creating a catalogue of diagnostic pieces and little beyond. Although the catalogues are essential for further studies, they are relatively rarely used for trying to look at pottery or other types of finds from fresh perspectives. J. Theodore Peña's new book on Roman pottery is nothing like that; instead, the emphasis is on taking a look at the lifecycle of ceramics, allowing for varying kinds of approaches to objects beyond typology and chronology. The book has already attracted much attention among the scientific community, and even a special seminar was held in Athens in June 2008 on this subject.

The idea behind the approach is not new – Michael B. Schiffer already presented it in a 1972 article "Archaeological Context and Systemic Context" (*American Antiquity* 37, 156–165). The topic has been developed in many ways, particularly in the social life of artifacts, in the archaeological and anthropological literature of the 1980's and 1990's, but much of that remains outside of Peña's interests (and does not even get mentioned). His approach could be described as processual and it is summed up in a few flow diagrams tracking the life of pottery from raw materials (nature) through manufacture, use and discard (systemic context) to becoming part of the archaeological context. The main emphasis is on what happens during the use-life or the systemic context divided into 7–8 categories: manufacture, distribution, use/reuse, maintenance, recycling, discard and reclamation.

The volume is divided into 11 chapters, three of which are dedicated to developing and describing the model and the rest to the phases of pottery's lifecycle. The reuse of pottery is discussed in three chapters. The book makes an interesting reading, but sometimes Peña's aim at clear uses of terms and concepts results in repetition and even slightly amusing passages (e.g., pp. 121–123 on methods of amphora modification). The central part on amphorae is particularly heavy with detail which feels rather excessive. The images consist of black and white photographs and drawings. In many cases, the photographs look more than slightly out of focus and more than once a color photograph would have been necessary to fully grasp what is pictured. Inspection of the bibliography reveals that the manuscript might have been waiting for publication for a couple of years.

What is very important about this book is the way it charts all the evidence for each phase of the pottery lifecycle and shows the gaping holes in many of them. Surprisingly little is still known of each category. Previously, manufacturing processes and distribution patterns have been studied to some extent and this is evident from the synthetic manner in which the topic is approached. Prime use is already on a much less secure basis as shown by lack of references to specialist studies. Innovative use of all available evidence results in interesting discoveries, such as the charting of the use-life for amphorae used in Pompeii in AD 79 by starting from the dates mentioned in the *tituli picti*. As already stated above, the reuse of amphorae and other types of pottery take up a major part of the book, ca. one third of it. The list of uses for whole or fragments of amphorae is staggering and one has to wonder the ingenuity of the Roman users. Amphorae – the ancient equivalent of modern household tricks with a nylon pantyhose (a popular and amusing Finnish tradition at least)? The recycling chapter draws partly on similar material. The chapter on maintenance is also very interesting, showing how often and carefully the seemingly fairly easily replaceable pottery has been

repaired. The last chapter on the lifecycle is on discard and reclamation which approaches the subject through some contexts, such as pottery workshops, various storage and retail facilities as well as residences. Valuable additions are being made for reworking of this chapter by the new fieldwork conducted in Pompeii, where a great number of waste pits have been found and excavated in almost all outdoor areas, at least gardens, courtyards, and streets.

This is an innovative and exciting look into a topic which may appear boring and dry as dust. The book offers countless ideas for further research and discussion of the topics it has covered, but should also inspire work in fields that were not discussed. These include, e.g., many contexts where pottery is commonly found, such as burials, or the recovery and recording of pottery in classical archaeology. The same approach could also be applied to any type of material culture. In addition, the social life of pottery and other objects of material culture in the Roman context are also waiting for further studies.

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