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СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ К ИЗУЧЕНИЮ ДРЕВНЕЙ КЕРАМИКИ В АРХЕОЛОГИИ

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CERAMIC PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY: POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA – SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

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Abstract

Recently we have called for the broadening of the theoretical base in order to understand the social and other contexts of material culture items such as pottery (Pikirayi and Lindahl, 2013). The challenges encountered by archaeologists remain the huge ceramic assemblages, which are however, central in defining group identities in southern African Iron Age studies, but whose analyses is always relegated to typology. On the basis of available ethnographic data and archaeological case studies from Zimbabwe and South Africa, we argue here that pottery provides valuable information on the region's Iron Age if broader social and technological questions are addressed. Key technological questions include change in the production techniques overtime, while social questions may address aspects of meaning beyond function. Our findings are based on pottery produced by rural, 'traditional' potters as well ethnographic data compiled or collected during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Introduction

Although ceramics generally constitute the largest artefact category in southern African Iron Age archaeological studies, researchers are increasingly wary of their parochial usage, mainly restricted to addressing questions on relative chronology, their role as identifiers of past ethnic groups, and using typology, tracing regional movements of people (Huffman, 2007). Archaeologists are aware of the need to address the usage and sociological context of pottery in the past, but often fall short of posing relevant questions to their data (Pikirayi, 2007). While we agree that some of the questions archaeologists need to raise are found in the region's rich ethnographic record if carefully interrogated, we also content here that this has to be combined with ceramic technology. Further, on the basis of studies conducted on ceramics and group identities elsewhere (see Haour and Manning, 2011; Haour et. al., 2010), we are of the view that southern Africa Iron Age studies need a radical re-think on the same, limited as they are to the subject of ethnicity. We show in this paper that the value of ethnographic studies in pottery lies not only in illustrating some functional aspects of ceramics, but also highlighting aspects of ritual and ceremony,

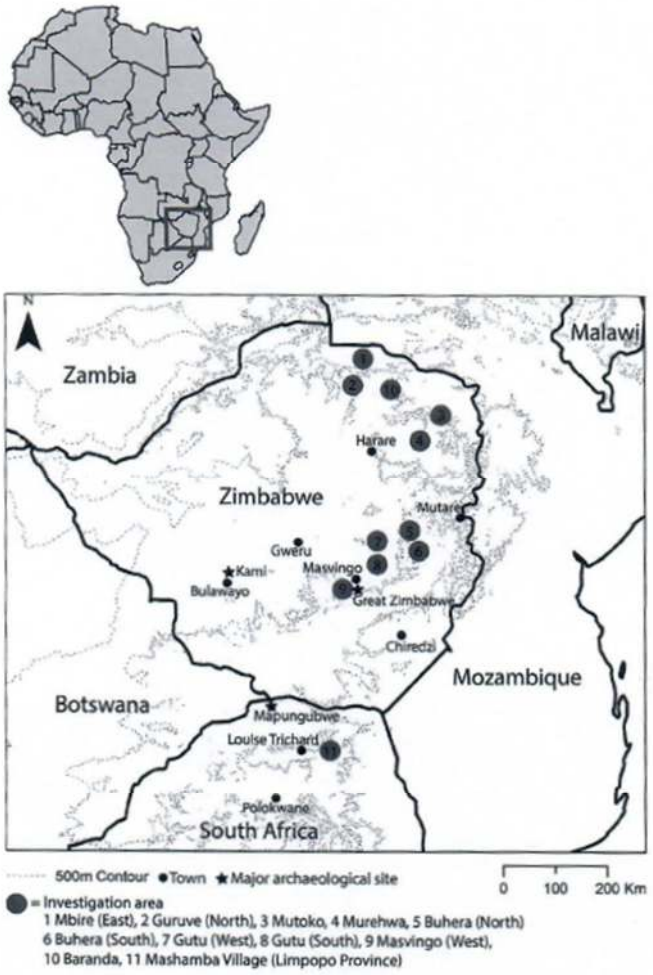

Fig. 1: Map of Zimbabwe and northern South Africa indicating the areas where field investigations were conducted.

and gender. Using other associated material remains found at archaeological sites, we show that it is possible to identify or predict ceramic patterning associated within household contexts (see e.g. Deal, 2005). Very often archaeologists have underestimated the value of ethno-archaeological studies in predicting and identifying prehistoric ceramic patterns found at some archaeological sites. We argue here, on the basis of preliminary observations of modern pottery manufacturing groups in northern South Africa and Zimbabwe, that the ceramic groups identified in the archaeological record as representing 'cultures' are in effect, representative of the spread of technologies linked with specific production and distribution centres. This underlines the value of ceramic technology in addressing broader aspects of production during the prehistoric past.

Aims and Objectives

In this paper we use records dating back from the first Portuguese incursions into the region (Theal, 1899–1902) to as recent as colonial times when some Europeans and other observers recorded the production of pottery among various ethnic groups in southern Africa (see for example Lawton, 1967). What emerges from some of these studies is valuable information which can be used to counter conventional perceptions of pottery recovered in the archaeological record. The broader questions addressed in this paper, attempt to understand the meaning of archaeological

ceramic assemblages. More specifically, we examine production and to some extent, distribution of pottery in 'traditional', rural households, and evaluate the possibilities of using available archaeological data to account for on-site patterning during the archaeological past. Some critical unanswered questions concern explanation of change over time, specifically whether there are significant technological differences and changes in ceramic manufacturing traditions between earlier and later Iron Age wares. This specific question is not addressed here however, but has been published elsewhere (Pikirayi and Lindahl, 2013). On the basis of pottery production techniques and processes observed in selected communities in the northern parts of South Africa, and eastern and northern Zimbabwe, this paper ultimately seeks to infer social meaning on ceramics found in the archaeological record (fig. 1).

Historical critique and the challenges of 'the ethnographic present'

Our conceptualization of this project arises from a critique leveled by some historians on archaeology. Jan Vansina (1995) criticized the use of ceramics in sub-Saharan African archaeology, and was especially concerned by the absence of discussion on the impact of pottery invention and ceramic change over time. He questioned the evidential basis for culture change – ceramic style – particularly in its use to detect past human movements or migration (see e.g. Huffman, 1989) and argued that it was subjectively defined, and consequently failed to explain internal changes in prehistory. Vansina (1995) argued that the inception of the Iron Age in southern Africa may not have been due to the migration of mixed farmers as suggested by Huffman (1989) but could have derived from the autochthonous Later Stone Age gatherers and hunters. Vansina called for an alternative approach to usage of ceramic style in order to overcome overgeneralizations based on intuitively defined cultural units.

Because of the general dissatisfaction on the subject, questions were raised as to whether it is possible to deduce social organization and associated cultural features from archaeological ceramics alone. In response to this Huffman (1989), for example, would argue that ceramic style reflected the entire stylistic repertoire of a given culture, thus representing or relating to a body of abstract signs or systems including language, which in turn shaped human views of the landscape around them and beyond. This also involved social structure as well as cosmology. On these premises, Huffman (1980, 1989) argued, ceramic style should be equivalent to, or be a derivative of, language or dialect, ethnic identity, social organization and ideology. An approach beyond stylistic considerations is imperative, to test this proposition.

A fundamental approach to ceramic studies is how ceramics as material culture objects relate to social structure. This approach marks a radical departure from tendencies by archaeologists to present ceramic evidence as if it is the only artifact category in defining the southern Africa Iron Age. Typological approaches in most archaeological reports are by their nature limited as they treat pottery as "text", something that can be read, and decoded for chronology and ethnic identity.' Very often, the link between pottery and ethnicity is tenuous. While the study of archaeological pottery leads towards the understanding of the people who made it, assigning it to ethnic entities is flawed because such an exercise unconsciously detaches these artifacts from their social contexts (Pikirayi, 2007). Recent research in southern Africa has shown how useful information can be obtained by examining ceramics in a broader regional and social context of socio-political alliances, which also involve marriages, and the movement of women from one group to the other (Esterhuysen, 2008). These studies add value to our understanding of the meaning of ceramic assemblages, especially the need to view pots as mobile, rather than static artifacts, in a given environment. Such approaches add value towards understanding and even interrogating the ethnographic present. Even more important in this regard is the development of appropriate methodological approaches, including laboratory analysis of ceramic ware, which seek to depart from conventional typological approaches in studying Iron Age ceramics in southern Africa (Lindahl, 1994; Lindahl, 2000; Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010; Rice, 1987).

The biggest challenge perhaps, in trying to understand Iron Age societies in southern Africa lies in the use of the "ethnographic present". In this paper we follow Mary Bouquet (2006)'s critique and operational definition of the term ethnographic present, in reference to 'the period before western contact when native life flourished' (p. 2). She also sees it as part of collections development, when European and other western museums amassed cultural material from non-Western populations. In

Fig. 2: Interviewing potters in Mashamba village, Limpopo province, South Africa. Some of pots are broken around the neck, but will still be used after the brakeage has been smoothened.

Fig. 3: Interviewing potters in Northern Buhera district, Zimbabwe. The older wife is teaching the craft to a younger wife.

this paper this would include ceramics, and thus the definition may be extended to include the collection and studies by colonial ethnographers and other persons of traditional, non-Western native pottery and pottery manufacturing techniques and relating them to the pottery found in the archaeological record. This is part of a process of understanding the origins of 'ethnographic society', and in a way involves reconstruction of evolutionary history (but see Bouquet, 2006. P. 1). The ethnographic present also involves human group representation by means of material objects, for example, pottery, which is equated to ethnic groups. Essentially therefore, the study of the southern African Iron Age primarily using ceramics as objects for human group identity is largely grounded in the ethnographic present. However, there are fundamental differences in approach: archaeologists who have studied these ceramics have been concerned with understanding cultural continuity, change and development over time. Some events of the last five hundred years provided glimpses to the so-called prehistoric period, when non-Western observers were around to document native southern African societies.

In this paper we employ the term 'ethnographic present' to refer to the last five centuries dominated by different degrees and intensities of encounter between Africans and Europeans in southern Africa. Very often the term is used in anthropological terms to refer to the artificial construction of a time before contact with Europeans, but early ethnographies were often written in a romanticized timelessness context, that gave the ethnographies an eternal, unchanging quality. Today, social scientists understand that this is an unrealistic construct that inaccurately portrayed native populations as isolated and cut off from the rest of the world.

Research Methods

A desktop assessment of available ethnographic literature and related ethnological studies was conducted to evaluate the degree with which early European and other observers made on pottery production among various societies in southern Africa during the last five centuries. These sources include George McCall Theal's *Records of South Eastern Africa* (Cape Town, Government of Cape Colony), randomly selected studies commissioned by colonial governments such as Schofield (1943, 1948), Van Warmelo (1944) and reports that are published in the Rhodesian *Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA)*. Detailed studies by Lawton (1967) on pottery production processes among various ethnic groups in the southern African region were extremely useful. The value of these studies, while emphasising the importance of understanding ceramic technology, also demonstrate the need to place more emphasis on the social context of pottery production, as called for in recent work (Ashley, 2010; Esterhuysen, 2008; Pikirayi, 2007).

During 2007 and 2008 field observations were made among potters in the Mashamba area of the Limpopo Province of South Africa. These potters manufacture pottery for domestic use and for commercial purposes and their craft has a very wide regional distribution (fig. 2). Although the authors did not record pottery manufacture, they were accorded the chance to document the range of finished products assembled in various households for the market, and compare these with published ones in Lawton (1967) and other works. In this regard, we found it necessary to include earlier data, based on interviews conducted during 1988–1991 and 1998–1999 with potters in the northern and eastern parts of Zimbabwe (Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010). The questionnaire used covered areas such as learning and transmitting knowledge of the handicraft and why the potter was interested in this particular handicraft, the meaning of decoration of pots, rituals and taboos involved in the collection of clays and the shaping and firing of the pots, the number, range and function of pots in a household, their distribution etc. (fig. 3). Parallel to the interviews, practical aspects of the production process were studied as well. This involved the quarrying of clay, the different phases in working with the clay and the forming of the vessel, and, finally the firing of the pots. The main objectives of these studies were to understand the nature of a ceramic assemblage in the modern context, and their relevance to archaeological studies.

In order to relate the pottery to other forms of material culture, and by extension, social structure, recently abandoned homesteads were surveyed and excavated in addition to interviews with people who had lived at or near the homesteads (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995) (fig.4). Pottery from various archaeological contexts has been analyzed by means of different laboratory analyses. Microscopy of ceramic thin-sections, for example, has been used to disclose variation in clay type. The method of impregnating the ceramic ware with a UV-sensitive colorant has been used to study vessel building technique (Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010).

Fig. 4: Ethnoarchaeological studies of abandoned homesteads. In this case the rapid process of abandonment has left behind considerable amounts of material remains including potsherds, grain bin platforms and house structures.

Fig. 5: The 16th and 17th century settlement of Baranda, northern Zimbabwe. During that time an integral part of the long distance trade.

Fig. 6: Some of the vessels made in a traditional style made by potters from Mashamba village, northern South Africa.

Results

Ethnographic literature

The Portuguese records detailing their experiences in south-eastern Africa from the beginning of the 16th century onwards are conspicuously devoid of ethnological data on domestic industries such as pottery manufacture and use. This is most surprising given that the Portuguese took control of trade that brought in large quantities of imported ceramics (and other items such as glass beads and glassware) from Asia and Europe (see Pikirayi, 1993) in exchange for gold and ivory. This silence on local ceramics does not mean they were not interested in them, as archaeological evidence from the 16th and 17th century settlement at Baranda (Massapa) in northern Zimbabwe suggests (fig. 5), but that they were an integral part of the long distance trade. Archaeologists in this instance are urged to frame appropriate or more informative questions when dealing with ceramic assemblages. The evidence from Baranda suggests that some high quality local wares were manufactured on site and were an integral part of the trade involving other items such as imported wares and glass beads. We will return to this point later after discussing the formation of household ceramic assemblages.

Antiquarian writings like Bent (1893, reprinted 1969) noticed some pots among Karanga and other households in 'Mashonaland' but had limited interest in the manufacture and use of these items. Bent apparently had more interest in wooden items than the pottery made by the Karanga. His mention of pottery manufacture, though very limited, is quite useful (see pp. 45–6). In reference to the Chivi district mention is made of villages that had a monopoly of pot making, and which traded pottery for grain and iron tools, pointing out that such villages practised no agriculture and did not keep cattle. He also made an illustration of the interior of a Karanga hut where he shows around 15 or so clay pots in association with grinding stones and basketry, with some in the process of food preparation (p. 274).

More focussed research on traditional pottery manufacture and use comes from the works of ethnologists commissioned by colonial governments in southern Africa during the first half of the 20th century. Here we summarise their observations. Clay pots are part of the traditional household material culture items of all farming societies in southern Africa. These are not the only clay objects or features found within the household (Berlyn, 1968), as for example the Shona hut is built of pole and clay plaster, and its floor is made of 'beaten' clay. Features within may include some skirting or some kind of ledges or platforms or kerbs which are also made of clay (Taylor, 1927). The pots are of various shapes and sizes and serve different functions, some of which involve ritual and ceremony. Although pots are normally regarded as cooking, storage and serving utensils (e.g. Stead, 1947. P. 102), they are also part of many ethnic burial practices, with some individuals being buried accompanied by pots or inside pots. The association of pots with the traditional grain bin and other basketry signifies their strong connection with grain and other crop production among traditional societies in southern Africa. The pots are also an important component of traditional rain making, and have been found in associated sites either as functional objects or as offerings to the ancestral world. Among some groups certain vessel types are used in puberty rites and rituals (Stead, 1947. P. 100). Some vessels serve functions related to ancestral worship, as is the case of multi-mouthed pots recorded among the Venda of the Zoutpansberg region of South Africa (van Warmelo, 1944), and which are thought to be exclusive to royalty, and often away kept from public view. The same vessels also serve as drinking vessels for the chief and his closest associates, thus it is also used in socialising.

Field observations

In South Africa field surveys were conducted some 45 or so kilometres east of Makadho, in the Limpopo Province, where several villages are known for their domestic pottery production. The village of Mashamba is perhaps the most well known, although there are others such as Mukondeni, were pots are also produced in substantial quantities. The 21 potters we observed at Mashamba are all women in their forties or slightly older in terms of age. They all speak the local Venda language although some of them have been married from neighbouring Tsonga and Sotho speaking groups. This area geographically is southern Venda (see Stayt, 1931), situated to the south of the Zoutpansberg mountains. The bulk of the vessel production consists of traditional cooking and storage vessels, but there is also manufacturing of vessels for purposes of interior and exterior décor (fig. 6–7).

Pertinent archaeological questions raised from such contemporary as well as ethnographic observations relate to the meaning of ceramic assemblages. In the case of the Mashamba potters we think a ceramic assemblage represents a

Fig. 7: Some vessels for interior and exterior décor made by potters from Mashamba village, northern South Africa.

Fig. 8: Traditional cooking and storage vessels made by potters in Buhera district, Zimbabwe. The cooking pots are black due to soot from the open fire.

9a

9b

Fig 9a: Cooking pot Malawian style, made by a Malawian potter living in Zimbabwe, compared to Fig. 9b: cooking and serving vessels shaped in a traditional Zimbabwean style.

number of things: the manufacturing process itself, the distribution of the ceramic craft, and part of the household space which also includes temporary/transient storage, since the fired products can be stored in the open as long as they are sheltered from other forms of mechanical damage. The storage space, which is part of the household, represents the transitional zone between manufacture and distribution of the product. Thus pots are not static items of material culture since they move within the household, the homestead and the landscape.

Our survey of potters in Zimbabwe covered a number of regions and ethnic groups in northern, south-central and east-central parts of the country (see Map). The potters fall under one umbrella identity of Shona, although those in the northern regions would fall under the Korekore dialect while those in the south and east-central regions would speak a Karanga dialect. Since the main objective of the study was to investigate traditional pottery manufacture, most of the potters participating in the study lived in rural areas distant from main tarred roads where you now find an expanding production of pots for tourists. Hence there are few references to the production of pots outside the local or regional community. Thus vessel shapes and decoration may be assumed to represent a local – traditional – repertoire of pots and motifs.

All the potters interviewed were women, no one had heard of a male potter. The only role for men in the production of pottery, in some areas, is assistance with the transportation of clay from the quarry to the homestead. The potter usually learned the handicraft from an aunt and not the mother. This may be explained by that in Shona customs it is common that girls are staying in the household of e.g. her fathers sister. Another way of learning is that a woman is the younger wife in the household and would have been taught how to make pots by one of the elder wives (fig. 8).

In this context it should be mentioned that most of the potters said that when a new bride came into the household of her husband, she brought a pot from her home in which she cooked the first meal for her father- and mother in law and her husband. This pot also stayed with her. One of the interviewed potters came from Malawi and she had brought a Malawian cooking pot, which is clearly distinguished from the Shona pots. This model became popular in the area and she had made several of them for the local community (fig. 9, *a*, *b*).

There are several taboos for women in the digging of the clay (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995; Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010). Most of them involve the prohibition for a woman to quarry clay if she is having her periods, or is pregnant or have had sexual intercourse. Young boys are not allowed to participate in the digging of the clay, as it is believed this would cause the clay to crack during the potting process. Some potters prohibit sharp metal objects such as knives at the clay quarry, while others barred coins. Furthermore, in order to make sure the manufacturing process was successful, some small offering was made, e.g. a lump of clay or bundle of twigs is sometimes thrown back into the clay source or placed by a nearby tree (fig. 10).

Most of the potters made vessels for their own use and for the local village community and in this case the pots were almost exclusively made on request (fig. 11). One potter had made several large cooking pots that she kept at her homestead. Theses pots could be loaned to others in the community when they needed large cooking vessels for a special function or parties (Lindahl, 1991) (fig. 12). The vessels made were used for cooking or storage of liquids and grains. Only one of the potters made other

Fig. 10: Potters digging clay in Guruve district northern Zimbabwe. The potters inform of different traditions and taboos involved in the quarrying of clay.

types of vessels and clay objects. This potter also claimed to be a spirit medium. Besides standard utensils she made pots that were for 'special' or for ceremonial use like small containers for liquids to be used at 'special' occasions and ladles made of clay. She is also the only one in the study who mentions anything about adding something to the clay that can not be described as technological or practical. In the clay mixture for certain pots she adds ground potsherds. The amount, which is very little in terms of quantity, can not be characterised as temper, but rather it symbolises continuation of certain traditional practices, "a way for the spirit of the old pot to live in a new" (her words). Aside from pots associated with food preparation and storing grain and other foodstuff several pots were made for cooking, brewing, storing and serving beer.

In one case several potters worked together as a collective. Although most of the pots they produced were of the traditional cooking and storage/drinking type, they had also crafted European types such as coffee pots, which are normally made of metal, different types of candlesticks, bowls, etc. They had also extended the distribution of pots to regional markets and fairs (fig. 13).

The common answer to the meaning of decoration was "to beautify the pot". Only one man – a traditional healer and rainmaker – mentioned the symbolic significance of decoration. He was not a potter himself (see above) but some of his wives were. He also kept a large collection of pots for different ceremonial uses as for example pots used for the bride and groom at weddings each one decorated in a special way (fig. 14). A few potters and the traditional healer claimed that the panels of triangles common on storage vessels symbolized aprons and incised hatches and crosshatches, mostly occurring on cocking vessels, were related to incisions on the human body.

Archaeological implications.

This research provides an opportunity to rethink the meaning of ceramic assemblages in archaeological contexts. In the ensuing discussion, we take one historical archaeological example from northern Zimbabwe, where local pottery was an integral part of the local and regional trade, but is not mentioned in written texts

We summarise the archaeological evidence from a 16th and 17th century trading site found in northern Zimbabwe. Identified with the Portuguese trading *feira* (market) of Massapa, the site of Baranda yielded considerable local pottery and Asian stoneware, earthenware and porcelains. There were also varieties of Glass beads mainly from India (Pikirayi, 1993; 2009). The local pottery was mainly thin bodied and

shaped mostly in the form of bowls which were polished, graphite burnished and also polished with some red ochre. Pikirayi (1993; 2009) identified the pottery with the later Zimbabwe phase in northern Zimbabwe, noting the high incidence of bowls that he linked with some kind of domestic consumption linked with the traders. Also found were burnishing pebbles, in associated with the local pottery. This suggests that the pottery was manufactured on site.

The quantity of the sherds as well as surface finish from the site of Baranda suggests an assemblage serving a function beyond traditional domestic usage, such as cooking and storage. While some of the pottery was evidently used for cooking to serve daily subsistence needs of the site inhabitants, a majority was traded in exchange of the imported earthenwares, stonewares and porcelains, or other items such as glass beads. The pottery displays considerable specialisation. In this context therefore, the ceramic assemblage at Baranda was a transient one, waiting to be moved to another location, as determined by market and social or other forces. We arrive at this conclusion not because the pottery was found in association with imported items of value, but because of our experiences with the Mashamba potters who made pottery beyond domestic consumption needs. This observation requires more thinking on the meaning of large ceramic assemblages recovered from the archaeological record. Further to this, we note the silence of the written text in ethnographic accounts when it comes to ceramics.

The value of employing ethno-archaeological studies in pottery studies lies in that they provide a medium with which to understand ceramics as part of a settlement system or process. In an ethno-archaeological study carried out 1990–1991 in Buhera District Zimbabwe recently abandoned homesteads were surveyed and excavated in addition to interviews with people who had lived at or near the homesteads (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995).

Fig. 11: Traditional potter in Buhera district, Zimbabwe. The potting is normally taking place in the kitchen house where the pots are shielded from the sun and the wind during the manufacturing process.

One main result of this investigation was that homesteads that had been abandoned more slowly and in an organised way left very few traits from the occupation. As the living areas and yard had been brushed clean when people were living on the site there was very little to find on the ground. A similar lack of finds was in provisional storage areas such as the space underneath the granaries since they had been emptied when the site was abandoned (fig. 15). The only areas with finds were the middens. Another homestead displayed a quite different picture. There were considerable potsherds, broken glass and pieces of metal on the ground. Under the demolished granaries were also broken pots and metal containers (fig. 16). Here the site had not been abandoned slowly. The last occupant had been an old woman who had lived more or les alone since her husband died. The fact that the woman, according to the neighbours, had only had little help to take care of the premises the last years of her life would explain the scatter of waste on the ground. After her death the homestead and its building had been left to deteriorate, thus

Fig. 12: A household assemblage showing the range of vessels in possession by a potter. Several of these were intended for rent by others in the community.

Fig. 13: Pots just after firing in an open fire. Traditional vessels (front) and imitations of European vessel types such as kettles (at the back). Note the elaborate use of graphite on the latter to imitate the luster on metal vessels.

explaining the broken pots in the provisional storage under the granaries.

In all the studies or observations recorded, pottery seems to be a women occupation, which is an important aspect of gender. However the archaeological relevance of such studies lie also in defining pottery as a category of material culture that is functional, socialised and also ritualized. Current ceramic studies in southern Africa lack spatial data indicative of where potsherds have been found, why they are found where they are found (Lindahl, 1986). The large vessels found within such sites such as main stone enclosures at the Zimbabwe type site of Zvongombe (e.g. Pwiti, 1996) could be associated with the storage of foods for the ruling elite (fig. 17, *a, b*). There is also a technological aspect that is relevant to discuss in connection with these vessels. The manufacturing tech-

Fig. 15: An abandoned homestead in the Buhera area eastern Zimbabwe. The gradual process of leaving the site has left virtually no material remains on the surface. The only thing remaining are stones upon which the houses once rested.

Fig. 14: A ceramic assemblage recorded from a traditional healer and rainmaker in Masvingo, south-central Zimbabwe.

nique, especially the forming, is the same as what is being observed in the field study of traditional pottery manufacture in from northern and eastern Zimbabwe today. How should this be interpreted? Is there an unbroken line of pottery making traditions embracing the same cultural, views, including technology as the people living there 500 years ago? The settlement on the Zvongombe hill is characterised as a site for the elite. Although pottery making is an important handicraft in a society there is no reference in ethnographic documentation as being part of the upper strata in the same way as being associated with metal

Fig. 16: A rapidly abandoned homestead in Buhera district, Zimbabwe. There is a large amount of scattered potsherds, pieces of metal and glass on the ground and remains of storage vessels under the granary platform.

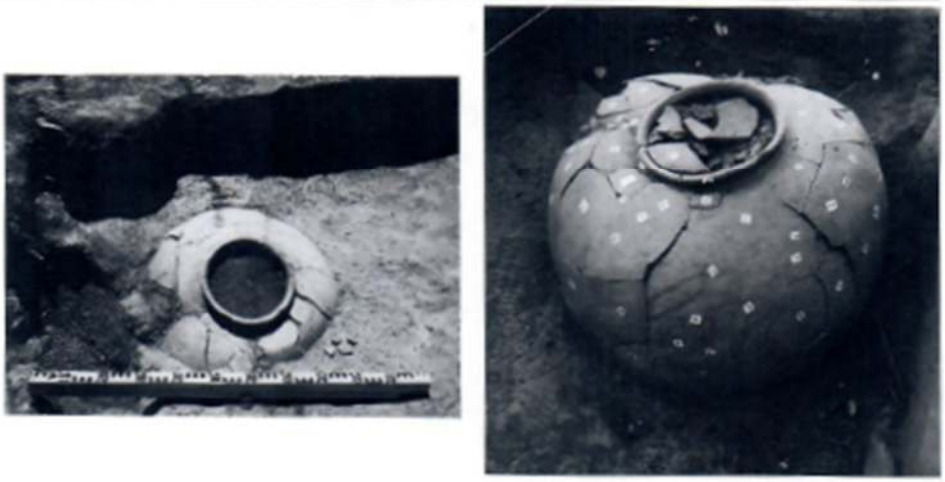

Fig. 17a and b: A large storage vessel recovered from the stonewalled site of Zvongombe, northern Zimbabwe.

craft – iron or the working with precious metals. Furthermore the plan of the hill settlement displays a dense agglomerate of houses, not the location suitable for the firing of pots (c.f. other contemporary sites like e.g. Kagumbudzi (Lindahl et. al., 2000)). Therefore the potters most likely lived and made the pots elsewhere. As observed in the study of traditional pottery manufacture the vessels were made for the local community and with few exceptions they were made on demand. It is fair to believe, especially since the pots at Zvongombe are large and heavy, that the manufacturing site should be found in the vicinity of the hill. An exception to local production could be if the pots were made for ceremonial use, in which case the potter may have had to be specialized. A spirit medium herself or sanctioned my one. (cf the potter/spirit medium in the field study above). In this case the pots may have been imported from some distance away.

Recent research in the middle Limpopo basin (e.g. Schoeman, 2006) is identifying sites associated with rain control during the formative period of Mapungubwe state, but remains unclear what kind of ceramic assemblages found their way to such sites and what happens to them (see Huffman, 2008).

The archaeological example from northern Zimbabwe demonstrates the importance of viewing the ceramic assemblage as not only as part of a production cycle, but also as part of distribution network, and such information can only be attained if pottery is related to other items of material culture on site. Pikirayi (2007) has warned of the severe limitations of archaeologists viewing pottery as it was the only evidence found on site. Further examples to this include the pottery found in varying frequencies in burials associated with the Musengezi and Harare traditions in northern Zimbabwe, where very little discussion has taken place regarding the ritual context of the sites, with archaeologists only seeking to document the range of ceramic vessels, and sometimes glass beads, observed (see e.g. Pikirayi, 1987).

The ethno-archaeological studies clearly indicate that the way in which a site is deserted can be displayed in the archaeological record. An immediate, hurried, departure often leaves a surplus of household goods such as more or less whole pots, in the houses, in the provisional storage areas and scattered on the ground. A slow, planned, departure leaves fewer finds in the living areas as well as in the provisional storage areas. The major areas for finds are the middens. Thus an abundance of finds recorded all over at an archaeological excavation of a site does not necessarily mean that this was a particular rich/wealthy site as compared to those with finds only in the garbage pits. Where in a settlement pottery is found and the degree of fragmentation is also very useful when interpreting the function of the site (Lindahl, 1986).

Conclusion.

In this study we note that the pot is a valuable social artefact which is part of a larger whole. Its manufacture, usage, distribution, etc reflects behavioural patterns beyond narrowly conceptualised archaeological ceramic assemblages, which is treated as if it is the only, or the most important category of evidence recovered from a site. Ceramics informs us a lot more

than limited chronological concerns and group identities. The largely ethnoarchaeological methods we have used in this study are of value in that they take the middle range approach between purely technological studies – which are beyond the reach of many archaeologists in the region – and conventional typologies – which are, unfortunately, understood by few, mostly, the older generation of archaeologists. Consequently, we have underutilised the value of ceramics found in the region's rich archaeological record and in the process denied ourselves better understanding of past social systems and forms of behaviour associated with social networks.

As our and many other ethnographic studies show, the gender perspective of pottery manufacture is very clear that it is a female handicraft. This also implies that it is the women that are the bearer of the ceramic tradition, technology and cultural expressions. Women would therefore also have a strong influence on the expression of social identity. The question is; is this then only one side of the story, reflecting the women's identity and world view? Or are the shapes and designs of pots ideologically incorporated in a broader part of society, meaning that the role and status of women should be interpreted as more equal. However, pottery is one of many ways to express social, ideological and political identities and in order to understand the gender relations pottery must be compared with other types of material culture such as e.g. metal, stone and ivory objects that are often considered to be part of the male sphere.

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Керамическое производство и общество: постколониальные подходы к изучению материальной культуры в Южной Африке - некоторые нерешенные вопросы

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В настоящее время назрела объективная необходимость расширения теоретической основы для более углубленного понимания и реконструкции различных аспектов древней материальной культуры и социальной истории населения на основе изучения археологической керамики. Огромные коллекции глиняной посуды, получаемые в результате раскопок поселений железного века южной Африки, остаются основным источником для выделения различных культурных групп населения этого периода. Сравнительное изучение этих коллекций и современных данных по этнографии гончарства Зимбабве и южной Африки создает широкие возможности для нового понимания как социальной жизни древних коллективов, так и самого производства глиняной посуды. Этнографические данные об африканском гончарстве, собранные в течение XIX и XX вв., дополняются нашими собственными полевыми наблюдениями над работой современных гончаров этого региона.