

EXCERPTS FROM REVIEWS

Although the title of this book indicates that its subject matter is the pottery of the Vučedol Culture in the Vinkovci region, this is only partially true. In reality, the book consists of two separate parts; each of them could function independently, but their logics are also intertwined. The first part is actually a general, very voluminous and comprehensive, almost encyclopaedic manual and textbook on the most frequent and the most numerous of all the finds yielded by archaeological sites of all periods: pottery artefacts. Here, the reader will learn about scientific disciplines involved in studying pottery artefacts and the information they can extract from them, about the emergence and development of specific technologies, and about the history of their research. We can find out all about the raw material needed for pottery production, about the physical properties of pottery, phases of the production process, and about the parameters used by archaeologists in the processing and typological classification of pottery. The author describes in detail the role of typology and the reasons that still make this approach essential. She particularly raises the issue of specific terminology missing from Croatian archaeological practice, which is most often reflected in subjective and capricious choices of terms. Finally, she presents a methodology of pottery processing, using the functional, aesthetic and taxonomic approaches.

In the second part, the theoretical framework and analytical methods described in the first part of the book are applied in practice, to concrete examples of the processing and analysing of pottery finds originating from two sites of the Vučedol Culture in the Vinkovci region. Beginning with a typological analysis of pottery finds, based on their morphological features, through to descriptive statistics, the author succeeds in establishing a pottery-production model which includes craft specialization, product standardization and organization of production. The technological analyses are complemented by petrographic-mineralogical analyses, and X-ray powder diffraction and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry analyses. The economic importance of pottery production within the Vučedol Culture is additionally confirmed by the results of archaeobotanic and osteological analyses. Thanks to an interdisciplinary approach to the study of pottery material from the selected sites – which has proven to be both necessary and very effective – the author has successfully demonstrated that pottery should not be seen merely as simple objects made for satisfying some basic needs such as the consumption, preparation and serving of food, but also as a medium in which a complex web is reflected, made up of social, economic and even religious relations between the human communities that designed them, produced them, used them and eventually discarded them.

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The book “Ceramics in Archaeology - Pottery of the Vučedol Culture in the Vinkovci Region” by Ina Miloglav is one of the very rare comprehensive studies on archaeological pottery. In contrast to traditional archaeology, which is still dominated by the culture-historical approach to the study of pottery, where the pottery is seen exclusively as a chronological marker and indicator of cultural groups, this book brings a current, contemporary outlook to this type of archaeological material. Pottery is seen primarily as a dynamic category which holds in itself information concerning human behaviour, everyday life and social relations.

The book consists of two large parts. The first provides an overview of everything encompassed by pottery studies, with an emphasis on their interdisciplinary nature and their unbreakable tie to ethnoarchaeology and archaeometry. A very important facet is the detailed discussion and explanation of the notion of terminology, and of the production sequence of pottery production. Great attention is rightly paid to the issue of typology, considered from both theoretical and practical points of view; in addition to various approaches to defining the purpose and goal of typology, which are critically presented, suggestions are also offered as to how to apply them correctly during the processing of pottery assemblages. Particular attention is paid to the vessels' anatomy and the morphological parameters used for their classification. The discussion focusing on inadequate terminology and risks involved in its uncritical use is particularly relevant. Furthermore, the book emphasizes the importance of considering the function of the vessels, with a view to gaining an understanding of food habits and food preparation, as important aspects of everyday life.

The second part of the book is dedicated to an analysis of the Vučedol Culture pottery from two archaeological sites: Ervenica in Vinkovci, and Damića Gradina in Stari Mikanovci. Here, the methods presented in the first part of the book are put to practical use. On the basis of its morphological parameters and formal attributes, the pottery is classified into functional classes: food preparation, consumption, serving and storing; these results have been processed using statistical methods, while petrographic and XRD analyses have been used to identify the composition of raw materials, and types and quantities of temper. Lipid analysis has also been done, and its results have demonstrated that beeswax had been used for treatment of interior surfaces in order to make them impermeable, and also for curation of vessels. Undoubtedly, the most important achievement of this book is the placing of pottery production in a social context. The results of the analysis of standardization, or of the coefficient of variation, suggest that the production was standardized, which had to result in a defined model of its organization, and the presence of specialized potters can be assumed. Given that such comprehensive analyses of pottery assemblages are still very rare, this book will have a major impact, and not just on scholars focusing on the Aeneolithic. Thanks to the clear, brief overview of all important aspects of pottery studies, and the notable and relevant methodology applied to the actual archaeological material, this will certainly be an item of indispensable reading, to students of archaeology and professional ceramologists alike.

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