Understanding Pottery Function (Manuals in Archaeological Method, Theory and Technique)

James M. Skibo
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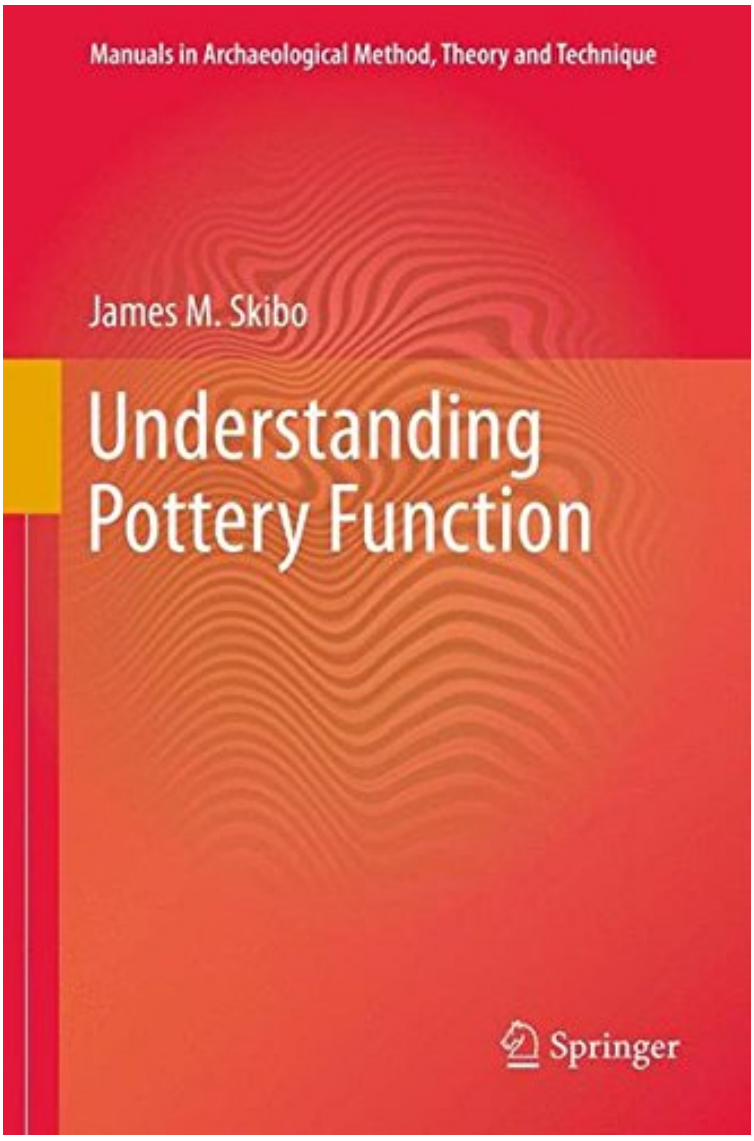

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James M. Skibo : Understanding Pottery Function (Manuals in Archaeological Method, Theory and Technique) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Understanding Pottery Function (Manuals in Archaeological Method, Theory and Technique):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Understanding Pottery Function (2013) and Pottery Function (1992)By Dr. Charles C. KolbUnderstanding Pottery Function, James M. Skibo, Manuals in Archaeological Method,

Theory and Technique, 2013. ix + 192 pp., 60 illustrations, 10 in color. ISBN 978-1-4614-4198-4, $99.00 (hardcover). Jim Skibo is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at Illinois State University, Normal IL, USA and is the author of more than a half dozen books on ethnoarchaeology and ceramics. The current volume builds on the research presented in Pottery Function: A Use-alteration Perspective (New York: Plenum Press, 1992, xv +, 205 pp., 65 monochrome figures, 8 tables). A brief review of that seminal publication (8 chapters and 3 appendices) provides context for the current volume which is, in spite of its title, quite a different treatise on pottery function. The 1992 volume, a revision of his dissertation at the University of Arizona was, of course, influenced by his committee: Michael B. Schiffer and William A. Longacre (co-chairs), Carol Kramer, and David Kingery, but also by Frederick R. Matson (Penn State) who wrote The "Foreword" to the Plenum Press volume. Following the "Introduction" (pp. 1-8) in which Skibo discusses Matson's (1965) approach termed "ceramic ecology," he discusses in turn "Ethnoarchaeology and Experimental Archaeology Defined," "Pottery Use-Alteration," "The Pottery Use-Alteration Study" (the Kalinga of the Philippines), "Absorbed Residues," "Use-Alteration: Surface Attrition," and "Use-Alteration: Carbon Deposition" prior to a "Conclusion," a single-set of "References" (pp. 187-201, n = 262), and an "Index." Appendix B is on "Fatty Acid Identification," coauthored with Jeffrey Clark. This 1992 publication applied ethnoarchaeological data collected among the Kalinga (Longacre's "Kalinga Ethnoarchaeology Project" 1987 ff.) and field and laboratory experiments, often conducted with Michael Schiffer, to establish principles for the considering pottery use-alteration traces (residue, carbonization, and abrasion). Skibo's study, analogous to lithic use-wear analysis, focused on method and theory and proposed connections between pottery use traces and function.After two decades and much more ceramic research and numerous high-quality publications, Skibo decided it was time to reassess his 1992 volume and evaluate what has been done and learned. The focus of Understanding Pottery Function is on how practicing archaeologists can infer function from their ceramic collections. One of the concerns of those working in pottery analysis is that they are unsure how to "do" use-alteration analysis on their collection. The second is being able to comprehend the users and potter's intended pottery function, including connections between technical choices and function. Skibo's 2013 volume is designed to answer these questions using case studies from the author and others who are applying use-alteration analysis to infer actual pottery function.The 2013 volume would initially appear to be shorter in overall pagination that the 1992 monograph (201 versus 220 pages) but this is not the case since the recent publication has a smaller font and tightened line-spacing so, in spite of the cost, the reader is getting much more text and a more comprehensive bibliography (564 references versus 262 in the 1992 edition), but slightly fewer illustrations (60 versus 65, although 10 in the 2013 volume are in color). Each of the five chapters has its own references. The author makes and initial statement that characterizes his approach in the new edition: "My ethnoarchaeological experience among the Kalinga changed forever the way I look at pottery" (p. 1).In the first chapter, "Understanding Pottery Function" (pp. 1-25, 160 references), Skibo discusses "The Joys of Pottery" and characterizes actual versus intended pottery function and the performance-based life-history approach, as well as differentiating and commenting on similarities among "life history," chane opratoire, and "behavioral chain" approaches. He further considers behavioral activities and interactions among these three, comments on performance characteristics. A brief summary of his approach to researching and writing this volume is a real-life story about pottery and people and the origins of pottery making using an examples from his own research on Grand Island located on the southern shore of Lake Superior. Chapter 2, "Intended Function: Inferring Manufacturing Performance" (pp. 27-62, 5 figures, 2 tables, 153 references) focuses on understanding technical choices and performance characteristics, notably vessel shape (morphology) and the recording morphological variability and the relationships of morphology to performance characteristics. Skibo also discusses paste composition: the types, sizes, shapes, and quantities of temper and the types and chemistry of clays. Case studies of Late Archaic and Early woodland period pottery from the eastern United States and Late Woodland/Early Mississippian shell tempered pottery from eastern North America are presented. Firing temperatures and their estimations and surface treatments and their characteristics are also reviewed, and a case study of Thule Culture pottery from the Arctic is presented. Lastly, he considers the problem of inferring intended primary and secondary functions; the Kalinga use of metal vessels for cooking rice but clay pots for cooking vegetables and mean provides a relevant case study.The core of Skibo's new book is Chapters 3 through 5, in which he considers three types of use-alteration traces associated with pottery function: sooting and carbonization, attrition, and residue. In the third chapter, "Sooting and Carbonization" (pp. 64-114, 20 figures in black-and-white and 10 in color), focuses on the deposition of external soot and internal carbonization but begins with a review of the Kalinga ethnoarchaeological project research on these topics. The author provides a very interesting, thoughtful discussion on the principles of external sooting, defines "soot," soot patches, and relationships of fire temperatures and distance from cooking fire, and modes of cooking, He also provides a case study on Late Archaic pottery and exterior sooting before moving to a characterization of the principles of internal carbonization, mode of cooking and related factors. A case study on the origins of pottery on the Colorado Plateau precedes a discussion on recording external and internal carbonization on prehistoric collections, documenting use carbonization and sooting patterns on whole vessels and sherds, recording use-alteration traces on sherds, "trickery" (fire clouds many mimic soothing), and drawing inferences about cooking activities.Chapter 4, "Attrition" (pp. 115-159, 22 monochrome

figures) begins with defining and identifying ceramic attrition and the Northern Tucson Basin Project. Skibo details use-attrition in terms of abrasive and nonabrasive processes, and differentiates marks and patches --the latter implies repetitive activities. Using a Kalinga case study, he examines use-attrition on exterior bases, lower exterior sides, mid-exterior sides, upper exterior sides, rims, interior rim and neck, upper interior sides, mid-interior sides, and lower interior sides and bases. Other case studies are included: Griffiths and Bray on Mimbres Black-on-White pottery from the American Southwest, Hardin and Mills (2000) on Zuni ceramics, Lpez Varela et al (2002) on Sherds as Tools, and McGovern et al. (2004) on Alcohol Fermentation. Skibo also references John Arthur's work on the Gamo of Ethiopia, calling Living with Pottery: Ethnoarchaeology among the Gamo of Southwest Ethiopia (2006) and "instant classic in ceramic ethnoarchaeology. (p. 155), reviewed in Society for Archaeological sciences Bulletin 31(1):19-21 (2008) by Charles Kolb. Skibo also considers recording attritional traces on prehistoric pottery and recommends that traces be recorded as batches of sherds are processed. Chapter 5, "Residue" (pp. 161-189, 3 black-and-white figures, 1 table), is co-authored by Mary Malainey. The authors review data on fatty acid ratios for a variety of foods (following Skibo 1992:92-97) and the work of Evershed et al. (1990) as well as Malainey et al (1999). Approaches to lipid residue analysis, sample selection, processing techniques using gas chromatography, and lipid residues are documented. Issues about diagenesis and compound-specific stable isotope analysis are characterized through GC-C-IRMS and the value of IR and Raman spectroscopy are detailed. Four case studies are presented: : Origins of pottery in the Upper Great Lakes , Late Prehistoric pottery function from Western Canada, finding evidence of maize processing in North American Mississippian sites, and the origins of pottery in southeastern Arizona. As a "final recommendation," Skibo states that "the first and probably the most important recommendation is that we must do our best to understand the life history of the sherds being tested" (p. 183) and as a "concluding comment" reminds us that "archaeological reconstruction and explanation is not easy, and it gets progressively more difficult as we continually try to extract more information from the archaeological record to piece together past lives. Pottery is in some ways the ideal artifact..." (p. 185). The volume concludes with "References" and a detailed "Index (pp. 191-192) two-column index incorporating proper nouns and topics.This is a splendid reassessment of pottery function and valuable to all who attempt to understand the life histories of sherds and pots. We are grateful that Skibo has taken the time to reflect upon studies over the past two decades and provide us with a thoughtful and compelling discussion on an important topic. Skibo acknowledges the influence of Michael Schiffer in his own research and writing and the reader will observe the long collaboration between Schiffer and Skibo in helping use better understand ceramic materials.This review appeared in different form in the Society for Archaeological Sciences Bulletin 35(4):28-30 (2012).[...]Both of Jim Skibo's books are available from .com.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Priceless read for ceramic researchersBy Archaeo-Fiero 'The Delorean' S.I consider this to be an indispensable resource for ceramic analysis, along with:Rice's Pottery AnalysisRye's Pottery Technologyand everything Skibo: Pottery Function, A Use-Alteration Perspective; Pottery and People, Kalinga Ethnoarchaeology, etc

The 1992 publication of Pottery Function brought together the ethnographic study of the Kalinga and developed a method and theory for how pottery was actually used. Since then, there have been considerable advances in understanding how pottery was actually used, particularly in the area of residue analysis, abrasion, and sooting/carbonization. At the 20th anniversary of the book, it is time to assess what has been done and learned. One of the concerns of those working in pottery analysis is that they are unsure how to do use-alteration analysis on their collection. Another common concern is understanding intended pottery functionthe connections between technical choices and function. This book is designed to answer these questions using case studies from the author and his colleagues for applying use-alteration analysis to infer actual pottery function. The focus of Understanding Pottery Function is on how practicing archaeologists can infer function from their ceramic collection.

From the reviews:James Skibos volume, Understanding Pottery Function, is a well-written and well-researched foray into the complex study of vessel use. Skibo demonstrates through a number of case studies how fruitful partnerships between archeologists and chemists might be formed . Case studies, in turn, form an integral part of this book and are one of its most pronounced strengths. this book is a stand-alone beginners guide for determining vessel function . (Joshua R. Lieto, North American Archaeologist, Vol. 35 (2), 2014)Understanding Pottery Function builds on Skibos original 1992 book, Pottery Function. I have no doubt that on reading this volume archaeologists will find that they look at pottery in a completely different light. It will provide them with a means to answer long-debated and seemingly unanswerable questions and also inspire them to ask new ones. Undoubtedly this volume will become a standard point of reference for pottery specialists. I certainly will return to it time and time again. (Gareth Perry, Assemblage the Sheffield graduate journal of archaeology, November, 2013)From the Back CoverThe 1992 publication of Pottery Function applied ethnoarchaeological data collected among the Kalinga and experiments to set forth the principles for the creation of pottery use-alteration traces (residue, carbonization, and abrasion). Analogous to lithic use-wear analysis, this study developed the method and theory making the connections between pottery use traces and function. At the 20th anniversary of the book, it is time to assess what has been done and learned. One of the concerns of those

working in pottery analysis is that they are unsure how to do use-alteration analysis on their collection. Another common concern is understanding intended pottery functionthe connections between technical choices and function. This book is designed to answer these questions using case studies from the author and many others who are applying use-alteration analysis to infer actual pottery function. The focus of Understanding Pottery Function is on how practicing archaeologists can infer function from their ceramic collection.About the AuthorJames M. Skibo is a Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at Illinois State University and the 2012 recipient of the Society for American Archaeologys Award for Excellence in Ceramic Analysis. Besides his ethnoarchaeological work in the Philippines he has conducted research in the American Southwest and he currently works in the Great Lakes and directs the Grand Island Archaeological Project.