The column in this issue includes five topics: 1) Obituary; 2) Reviews of Books; 3) Previous Meetings; 4) New Journal; and 5) Exhibition.

Obituary

Alan G. Vince (b. 30 March 1952-d. 23 February 2009), one of Britain’s leading experts on the ceramics of the medieval and early modern periods and a scholar at the forefront of Anglo-Saxon studies, died at the age of 56. He employed the geological sciences – especially petrological analysis — in the study of archaeological ceramics and integrated computer analyses into his research long before it became a norm. Vince analyzed ceramics from hundreds of sites and eventually founded his own company “The Alan Vince Archaeological Consultancy.” Americans perhaps know him best as the author of Pottery in Archaeology (Cambridge Manuals in Archaeology, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) with Clive Orton and Paul Tyers. He authored more than 250 technical analyses which are listed on his Web site, http://www.postex.demon.co.uk.

A lengthy obituary and tributes from his colleagues appears on the Internet at http://www.andididseefeet.blogspot.com/2009/03/alan-vince-alife-in-archaeology.html. He was born in Bath, educated at Keynsham Grammar School, and studied at the University of Southampton for eight years, where he came under the influence of David Peacock, who was in the 1970s pioneering the application of geological techniques to his studies of Roman pottery. Vince’s unpublished undergraduate dissertation at Southampton was 1974 The Distribution of Some Medieval Pottery Fabrics in the West of England (1974) and he wrote The Medieval Ceramic Industry of the Severn Valley as his doctoral thesis (1984). Vince was Urban Archaeologist with the Berkshire Archaeology Unit, served as supervisor at the Eastgate and St Albans Abbey excavations, and directed excavations in Newbury during 1979. That same year he assumed a position in the University of York and from 1995 to 1999 served as the first editor of the new on-line journal, Internet Archaeology. While continuing to work at York, he also founded his own company, “The Alan Vince Archaeological Consultancy” in 1997. The demand for his ceramic petrological assessments of material culture for numerous archaeological projects throughout the world became so great that within two years he decided to focus his work entirely on the consultancy. Vince worked on a diverse array of ceramics from sites in Britain and Europe, as well as overseas — Taiwan and Madagascar, for example. His analyses played a major role developing an understanding of pottery and building materials such as tiles and brick. Based on data collected from sites across mainland Britain, he established the AVAC “Ceramic Chemical Composition Database” and “UK Ceramic Thin-Section Database.” The consultancy Web site, http://www.postex.demon.co.uk, provides a great deal of additional information on the Database of Chemical Analyses, Ceramic Petrology, the Chemical Analysis of Ceramics, Pottery Assessment, Pottery Analysis and Publications; there is also a List of Clients and lists of Publications and Unpublished Reports, as well as Current Projects.

He was Secretary of the Society for Medieval Archaeology from 1988 to 1993 and between 1996 and 1999 served as President of the Medieval Pottery Research Group. He is survived by his wife, Joanna and their three children, Leon, Amy and Kate. His colleagues point out that Vince “rigorously” applied the geological and archaeological techniques eschewing the traditional art-historical approach that had previously dominated studies of medieval pottery. He examine the petrological composition of pottery vessels and sherds, compared its constituents with rocks and clays from known geological deposits and using thin-section analyses and other methods (INAA, XRF, ICP-ASE, and ICP-MS) determined the chemical analysis of these clays. In England, he was able to deduce the geographical origin of the vessel, sometimes even to the precise kiln that had produced it.

His pioneering work and enthusiasm will be sorely missed.

Reviews of Books

Dean E. Arnold, Social Change and the Evolution of Ceramic Production and Distribution in a Maya Community by Dean E. Arnold, Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008; 432 pp., 52 black-and-white photographs, 42 line drawings, 3 maps; ISBN 978-0-87081-9230- , $65.00 (cloth). [Note: Charles C. Kolb, editor of this SAS Bulletin column, reviewed the manuscript of this volume for the University of Press of Colorado in the summer of 2007 and recommended that it be published; the book was published in November 2008.] Dean E. Arnold, Professor of Anthropology at Wheaton College (Illinois) is an internationally-known scholar of ethnographic ceramics and contributor to ethnoarchaeological studies. His in-depth synchronic and diachronic research has benefited the academic community of material culture specialists both
anthropological/ethnographic and archaeological. Indeed, his research has especially benefited and illuminated ceramic ethnoarchaeological investigations in Latin America, the American Southwest and Northeast, the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, and Africa In 1996 the 7,000-member Society for American Archaeology bestowed upon him its “Award for Excellence in Ceramic Studies” in honor of his signal achievements – fewer than ten scholars have earned this accolade during the past two decades. Arnold classifies himself as an ethnographer – a scholar of contemporary societies – but this honor demonstrates that his careful, meticulous, longitudinal studies have benefited archaeology as well as researchers in archaeometry and materials science.

During the past 20 years, archaeologists and anthropologists interested in materials culture studies, and especially scholars of ceramics, consistently cite two seminal works which have become “classics,” namely, Dean Arnold’s (1985) Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process (Cambridge University Press) and Prudence M. Rice’s (1987) Pottery Analysis: A Sourcebook (University of Chicago Press). Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process has gone through four editions and is now available as “print on demand.” Arnold’s theoretical volume, backed with much substance, was much-praised by reviewers. In it he devised a theory of ceramics which elucidated the complex relationship between ceramics and culture and society. Drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of systems theory, cybernetics and cultural ecology, he develops cross-cultural generalizations to explain the origins and evolution of the craft of pottery making. These processes were organized into a series of feedback mechanisms which limit or stimulate the initial production of pottery and its transition from a part-time to a full-time specialized activity. Arnold provided extensive ethnographic documentation, taken from a wide-ranging synthesis of the available literature and employing many data from his own long-term fieldwork in Peru, Guatemala and Mexico, to illustrate the existence of these feedback relationships in societies around the world. Each mechanism is seen, not as a relationship which exists in a few of the world’s cultures, but as a universal generalization often based on some unique physical or chemical aspect of the pottery itself. Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process remains an innovative approach to the archaeological interpretation of ceramics which significantly extends our understanding of the social, cultural and ecological processes of ceramic production. Arnold’s later book, Ecology and Ceramic Production in an Andean Community (Cambridge University Press, 1993), followed the theoretical perspective of his 1985 volume. In this ethnoarchaeological study he examined the relationships of ceramic production to society and its environment in the Peruvian Andes. The book traced these contemporary linkages through the production, decoration, and use of pottery and relates them to the analysis and interpretation of ancient ceramic production. Utilizing an ecological approach within a single community (District of Quinua), Arnold expands the scope of previous ceramic theory by focusing on the population as the unit of analysis in production and decoration. Ecology and Ceramic Production is also available as “print on demand.”

Social Change and the Evolution of Ceramic Production and Distribution in a Maya Community is the third volume of what many of us thought was to be a trilogy, but Arnold informs us that he wants to work on a fourth monograph – a description of the pottery-making families of Ticul, Yucatan, Mexico and he has other Ticul materials for a fifth volume. Social Change isn’t a traditional ethnographic treatment – it is that and more – and follows the theoretical underpinnings of his 1985 volume. A quick review of the chapter titles tells us that he is tackling significant questions – problems that are perplexing to scholars of material culture as well as ceramics. Herein lays the strength of this informative volume – issues that transcend technological and cultural changes in the community of Ticul, the Yucatan, Mexico, and Latin America, The questions and in depth assessments have great value well beyond these geographic and cultural entities. He asks: How and why do ceramics and their production change through time? And then attempts to answer these questions by tracing social change among potters and changes in the production and distribution of their pottery in a single Mexican community over a period of thirty-two years. From 1965 to 1997, he made ten visits to Ticul, and witnessed changes in transportation infrastructure, the use of piped water, and the development of tourist resorts, which changed the demand for pottery. Nonetheless, most of the potters in 1997 came from the families that had also made pottery in 1965. Following his introductory chapter and the second chapter –“How Have the Population and Organization of Potters Changed?”— Arnold asks fundamental questions about modifications that have occurred in demand and consumption, pottery distribution, clay procurement, temper procurement, forming technologies, and firing technology and procedures. Hence, his synchronic and diachronic observations are informed by an intimate knowledge of the ecology, the physical characteristics of the community, the artisans themselves and their descendants. The impacts of technological changes and rapid cultural change (e.g., “modernization”) are documented and the impact of the influx of non-Maya-speaking entrepreneurs into the community are also characterized and explained in depth. Yet, Arnold’s work isn’t just with the native potters themselves, but is also informed by his interactions with other ethnographers, archaeologists, and archaeometricians. He correctly reminds us that “no one paradigm explains all.”

Although Arnold provides an assessment of ceramics, much of what he says in the “Introduction” (pp. 1-29) is also applicable to other forms of material culture and is a valuable resource for archaeologists as well as ethnologists who are interested in ceramics or other artifacts. New and Old World archaeologists would benefit from reading this analysis. His introductory essay provides an essential context for the volume and he considers paradigms of pottery and social change as well as specialization and evolving complexity, e.g., from Adam Smith and Emile Durkheim through Prudence Rice and Cathy Costin (notably the latter’s paradigm of context, concentration, scale, and intensity). He also visits evolutionary processes and technological choices, as well as cognitive anthropology and engagement theory and employs the latter two in his
presentation. Arnold also discusses data reduction and analysis, noting that his longitudinal analysis at Ticul derives from three data bases he devised and updates during his many visits to Ticul since 1965: genealogical (n = 1,024 individuals), production units (300), and potters (451). The subsequent chapters assess how changes have taken place through time in terms of: the population and organization of the potters (pp. 31-91), pottery demand and consumption (pp. 93-125), distribution (pp. 127-151), clay procurement (pp. 153-189), temper procurement (pp. 191-220), composition of the pottery fabric (pp. 221-228), forming technology (pp. 229-279), and firing technology (pp. 281-307). Let me highlight some of the parameters he considers in these chapters with emphasis on those of great interest to archaeologists (Chapters 5 through 9).

Both the population and organization of the potters changed dramatically during the study period. Arnold examines economic and social changes, noting the composition and continuity and growth of the population of potters and their production units. He reports on the evolution of full-time specialists, social continuity and how potters learn the craft, the shift from patrilocal to virilocal postmarital residence, forces of social change, and the increase in the size of the production unit (both permanent and temporary increases are documented). In the third chapter, he focuses on the shifting demand for traditional pottery and the collapse of the demand for water vessels but with a continuity and conservatism in the production of ritual vessels. Innovation and new demands from tourism are also reviewed and the importance of the regional geology, topography, hydrography, and water table as well as calcite inclusions are reported. Pottery distribution changed markedly from 1965 through 1997, notably in the transportation infrastructure as well as in markets, fiestas, fairs, stores (local and non-local), and the evolution of brokers as intermediaries between producers and consumers – a vertical integration issue. The pros and cons of brokers are also considered.

In chapter five, Arnold details under what conditions clay procurement changes, noting changes in resource ownership, clay scarcity and interpersonal politics, clay exhaustion and constraints of elite control, and the development of alternative sources. Organizational changes with the emergence of part-time and full-time specialists are documented in shifts in mining technology and a new procurement organization. He also provides three surrogate measures of production intensity and considers evolutionary social change in terms of elite control, procurement technology, social complexity, efficiency, and task specialization. Temper procurement (Chapter 6) provides valuable ethnoarchaeological information in the analysis of changes in tempers for cooking pottery versus non-cooking ceramics. Changes in procurement, land tenure and the expansion of sources, the depletion of raw materials and changes in sources, the development of mining specialists, and changes in temper variability are all documented, as are behavioral changes. Three surrogate measures of production intensity are also provided. Behavioral changes in fabric composition are reviewed, including changes in clay preparation, clay quality, mixing the pastes, and modification of paste recipes.

Arnold also notes diachronic changes in paste composition seen in INAA studies of kiln wasters.

The chapter on changes in forming technologies is especially compelling. He reviews technological as well as social and cultural choices in asking the question why new fabrication techniques were adopted in the face of conservatism and resistance. Arnold masterful discussions and documentation of the advantages and disadvantages of adopting three new techniques provide great food for thought. The adopted techniques include the potter’s wheel, the ball-bearing turntable, the borrowing and adoption of the molding technique, and – an “unlikely adoption” – slip casting. He reviews changing explanation of dimensional variability in traditional vessels and measuring techniques used by the potters, and points out the variability of vessels produced after the late 1970s, noting behavioral and organizational innovations. The conclusions are essential reading (pp. 272-279). His discussion of changes in firing technology focuses on issues of procurement and the use of fuels. Firewood demand and supply became a specialization as did kiln-making technology, with task segmentation, changes in kiln ownership, and specialization in firing. Most kilns are small updraft beehive-shaped but the producers also use square and pot kilns as well as gas and hybrid kilns. In addition, Arnold provides important observations on kiln size increases (as measured by the amount of wood needed to fire one), and their numbers and distributions, and knowledge needed to fabricate kilns.

In Chapter 10, “Conclusion” (pp. 309-326), Arnold summarizes the changes – all of which occurred at different rates – noting that changes in vessel shapes reflected social changes, while increased numbers of potters and production units resulted in more complex organization and task segmentation. Nonetheless, learning patterns are still household- and kin-based, reflecting the conservative nature of household production. He reconsiders social change and specialization, the latter as an evolutionary process, noting that social change is a stimulus for increased production, and examines two trajectories (task segmentation and vertical integration) while pointing out the need to examine issues holistically. Arnold also notes how Costin’s paradigm has been modified through several publications (1991, 2001, 2005) and he observes that his data does not fit her “efficiency” component. Lastly, he assesses Costin’s parameters versus the assembled data (pp. 322-323). There is a cautionary tale here.

Arnold’s well-known Ceramic Theory and Cultural Process (1985) remains a landmark publication and is now joined by this new, significant study which helps to bridge the gap between archaeology and ethnography, in that Arnold employs analyses of contemporary ceramic production and distribution to generate new paradigms useful to archaeologists who work with ancient ceramics. His explanations are placed in the context of the literature on craft specialization, so that insights can be applied to the archaeological record that confirm, contradict, and nuance generalizations concerning the evolution of ceramic specialization. Social Change and the Evolution...
of Ceramic Production and Distribution in a Maya Community is “must” reading.

MRS MIAA VIII Papers on Ceramics: P. Vandiver, F. Casadio, B. McCarthy, R. H. Tykot, and J. L. R. Sil (editors), Materials Issues in Art and Archaeology VIII, MRS Proceedings Volume 1047. Pittsburgh, PA: Materials Research Society. The published proceedings articles from Symposium Y from the 2007 MRS Fall Meeting includes 27 papers, four of which are on ceramics:

Theodore Borek, Curtis Mowry, and Glenna Dean, “Analysis of Modern and Ancient Artifacts for the Presence of Corn Beer: Dynamic Headspace Testing of Pottery Sherds from Mexico and New Mexico.” A large volume-headspace apparatus that permits the heating of pottery fragments for direct analysis by gas chromatography/mass spectrometry is described here. A series of fermented-corn beverages were produced in modern clay pots and the pots were sampled to develop organic-species profiles for comparison with fragments of ancient pottery. Brewing pots from the Traumata of northern Mexico, a tribe that regularly uses corn kernels to ferment a weak beer, were also examined for volatile residues and organic-species profiles were generated. Finally, organic species were generated from ancient potsherds from an archaeological site and compared with the modern spectra. The datasets yielded similar organic species, many of which were identified by computer matching of the resulting mass spectra with the NIST mass spectral library. Additional analyses are now underway to highlight patterns of organic species common to all the spectra. This presentation demonstrates the utility of GC/MS for detecting fermentation residues in the fabric of unglazed archaeological ceramics after centuries of burial. This, in turn, opens unexpected new doors for understanding the human past by means of GC/MS analyses. Paper #: 1047-Y01-05, pp. 185-194.

Charles C. Kolb, “Prehistoric Ceramics of Northern Afghanistan: Neolithic through the Iron Age.” For nearly four millennia, Afghanistan has been at the crossroads of Eurasian commerce and remains ethnically and linguistically diverse, a mosaic of cultures and languages, especially in the north, where the Turkestan Plain is a conduit for the so-called Silk Route, a series of “roads” that connected far-flung towns and urban centers and facilitated the transfer of goods and services. The research reported herein involves the comparative analysis of archaeological ceramics from a series of archaeological sites excavated in northern Afghanistan in the mid-1960s by the late Louis Dupree and me. I served as the field director (1965-1966) and analyzed the ceramics excavated from all six archaeological sites. These were Aq Kupruk I, II, III, and IV located in Balkh Province (north-central Afghanistan) and Darra-i-Kur and Hazar Gusfand situated on the border between Badakshan and Tarkar Provinces (extreme northeastern Afghanistan). Ten of the 72 ceramic types from the Aq Kupruk area have been published [1, 2, 3] but none of the 53 wares from northeastern Afghanistan have been described. The majority of the Aq Kupruk materials are undecorated (plain ware) ceramics but there is a unique series of red-painted decorated ceramics (Red/Buff, numbered types 45 through 52) with early first millennium BCE designs but the pottery dates to the BCE-CE period. The results of ceramic typological, macroscopic, binocular and petrographic microscopy (thin-section analysis and point counting) are reported. Paper #: 1047-Y01-02, pp. 147-174.

Chandra L. Reedy, “Preserving Intangible Aspects of Cultural Materials: Bonpo Ritual Crafts of Amdo, Eastern Tibet.” Ancient and historic products of past technologies exist in the form of material culture and archaeological finds, available for materials analysis. Technical studies and analytical work, coupled with the study of historical texts and archival documents, can help in reconstructing past technologies. But the act of making an object is, by its very nature, also an intangible part of human heritage. Production of material culture may be accompanied by specific rituals, social behaviors and relationships, music, knowledge gained from oral histories, meanings, intents, beliefs, and reasoning processes. For ancient objects, gaining access to these intangible aspects of cultural heritage may be extremely difficult, if not impossible. However, there are many societies where traditional crafts are produced within a context where the intangible aspects can still be recorded. Yet, these opportunities are disappearing at an alarming rate as development and globalization rapidly overtake more and more traditional communities. Documenting intangible data about craft processes can promote fuller understanding of the objects themselves, and aid long-term preservation of both the objects and the processes used to make them. Examples here are drawn from fieldwork conducted in 2007 at a Bonpo monastery (Serling) and nearby villages in the Amdo region of the eastern Tibetan culture area (in Sichuan Province, China). Bonpo practices, which pre-date the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, incorporate a variety of ritual crafts that are strongly rooted in a complex web of intangible relationships, behaviors, meanings, purposes, and beliefs. This paper focuses on votive clay objects (tsha-tshas) and barley-dough offering sculptures (tormas). Processes encompassing intangible aspects that are explored include the decision to make an object, when to make it and in what form, selection of raw materials, methods for processing the raw materials, fabrication procedures, selection of who will be involved in fabrication steps, where to place the finished object, and whether it will be preserved for the long term or considered to be only a temporary object. Results are placed in the context of larger theoretical issues regarding documentation and preservation of intangible elements of cultural heritage as part of a study of materials and technological processes. Paper #: 1047-Y02-03, pp. 331-351.

Pamela B. Vandiver, “A Ceramic Plaque Representing a Part of the Moses Panel by Lorenzo Ghiberti in the East Baptistery Doors (Florence, Italy).” A ceramic plaque was studied that depicts the figurative part of the lower half of the Moses Panel from the Gilt Bronze doors that Lorenzo Ghiberti and his workshop installed on the east side of the San Giovanni Baptistery in Florence, Italy. The doors were completed in 1452,