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Archaeological Studies Leiden University

Make it and Break it: the cycles of pottery

A study of the technology, form, function, and use of pottery from the settlements at Uitgeest-Groot Dorregeest and Schagen-Muggenburg 1, Roman period, North-Holland, the Netherlands.

A.A. Abbink



Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University, 1999

In memory of my parents

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Preface

“Time brings everything and dragging years alter names and forms, nature and even destiny”

Plato

This dissertation has a long history. The ideas were developed during 1981 to 1984, when I was employed as a research assistant at the State Service for Archaeological Research (ROB), to catalogue all finds from the excavation at Uitgeest-Groot Dorregeest. This large-scale excavation of a ‘native-Roman’ and Medieval settlement in the province of North-Holland yielded vast amounts of pottery. The settlement at Schagen was excavated by Therkorn as part of the Oer-Y estuary project of the Institute for Prae- and Protohistory of the University of Amsterdam.

The study of indigenous pottery from the two settlements was started part-time with a grant of the Province of North-Holland. When in 1985 I was appointed to the University of Leiden as lecturer at the Institute of Prehistory, the progress was slowed down considerably and the rather ambitious scale had to be reduced. The many interruptions necessarily left their mark on the result. One consequence is that the references for the chapters dealing with fabrics are not up to date. This part of the research was basically closed in 1992. Another one is that the detailed analyses of construction and finishing techniques are here presented in a summary form only. The second part on the other hand, the analyses of vessel use in both practical and symbolic contexts has gained considerably in importance over the years, not in the least by the new and exciting results of the analysis of the settlement features at Schagen by Therkorn (forthcoming). As the fabric analysis was not updated for the pottery that in due course was added to the samples for the morphological analyses, there is a slight difference between the samples used for both parts of the study. However, the small variations in sample composition do not affect the interpretations and conclusions.

The content of this book is hierarchically structured according to the research model outlined in chapter 1 and 2. The starting point and aim was to follow the point of view of the makers and users of the pottery as closely as possible. The two major parts are the analysis of fabrics (chapter 4-7) and that of form and use (chapter 8). The methodology

consists of a series of independent analyses within the three major subjects. Their results are summarized throughout the chapters, in which progressively more categories of data are interconnected and associations between them are evaluated. This methodology necessarily leads to some repetition, but it enabled me to carry out observations at different levels of detail and to establish the most meaningful criteria for the definition of categories of pottery, as they may have been distinguished by the makers and users themselves. In chapters 4-7, the operational sequence of actions involved in making a vessel is followed as closely as possible to establish structured variations in raw materials and fabric properties. In chapter 8, all visible characteristics of the products, size, shape, and surface features, are studied for the presence or absence of associations between them. The pottery groups distinguished in this manner are the basis for defining a few primary functions, the intended use, of the pottery, while the study of residues provides independent information about the type of contents, and thus on the actual use. In chapter 9, the data on form and function are connected with those of the fabric analysis while the methods and techniques are evaluated. In chapter 10, all results are summarized and interpreted at a higher level of abstraction, completing the cycle of this pottery research.