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**Review of Tsuneki, A, Nieuwenhuys, O, & Campbell, S (eds.) 2017. *The Emergence of Pottery in West Asia*.**

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **Review of Tsuneki, A, Nieuwenhuyse, O, & Campbell, S (eds.) 2017. *The Emergence of Pottery in West Asia*. Oxford: Philadelphia, Oxbow Books.**

Michael Lewis

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Tsuneki, A, Nieuwenhuyse, O & Campbell, S (eds.) 2017. *The Emergence of Pottery in West Asia*. Oxford; Philadelphia, Oxbow Books. 196 pages (Hardbound). £70.00. ISBN 978-1-78570-526-7

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Opening the volume, Tsuneki, one of the co-editors, summarises the adoption of pottery in West Asia during the Pottery Neolithic along with framing key questions regarding the region's earliest pottery, many of which will be raised repeatedly throughout by the contributors. Such issues include the nature of, and context of the earliest pottery, fabric and form of the vessels, antecedents of the earliest pottery, ideas of intentional versus accidental firing and argued use of the vessels.

Le Mière follows succinctly from Tsuneki, by further developing upon a number of pertinent questions regarding the origins of pottery in West Asia. There then follows a series of site-specific case studies, focussed on sites from Northern Syria (Nieuwenhuyse on Sabi Abyad, Cruells, Faura and Molist on Halula and Akarçay Tepe, the latter in south-eastern Anatolia and Nishaki and Le Mière on Seker al-Aheimar) the Northern Levant (Odaka on el-Kerkh, Nieuwenhuyse on Shir) and south-eastern Anatolia (Miyake on Salat Camii Yani).

Campbell's chapter on carbon dating of the sites which provide earliest evidence of pottery is of noteworthy importance. Whilst, as he reiterates, and acknowledges, it draws upon primary data collected by other authors, it succeeds in demonstrating the scholarly benefit which comes from sharing of data. This chapter is vital in

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integrating the current body of absolute dating into a single article to produce a coherent dialogue.

Vitaly, the inclusion of sites further afield (Balossi Restelli on Yumuktepe in Cilicia, Bernbeck on the Zagros, Tsuneki on Tappeh Sang-e Chackhmaq in north-eastern Iran and finally Taniguchi on the Jomon pottery of Japan) are crucial contributions in moving the dialogue beyond an isolationist, north Mesopotamian focus, and engaging with studies of the earliest pottery from other, more distant regions. This is especially important, and should be commended given the growing consensus for independent invention of pottery in these regions and the general agreement that a diffusionist approach for the spread of pottery is too simplistic (Bernbeck, this volume).

This regional, North-Mesopotamian focus is partially a result of the quantity of sites with the earliest (known) pottery. It is accepted that this may bias perceptions (Nieuwenhuys and Campbell, this volume), particularly as pottery appears just as early in other areas, and, arguably, considerably earlier in others (Spataro et al. 2017). Although this argument rests on the defining accidental, or intentional firing, there are instances of other pottery from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic, though numerous examples of these are convincingly argued to be accidentally fired and come from burnt contexts (Picon and Le Mière 1998).

Many of the key themes raised by the contributors of the volume are raised in their prior research and are pertinent, nevertheless there is still considerable disagreement amongst the contributors.

An interesting issue is current evidence suggesting that pottery was invented, rejected, and possibly readopted multiple times in different micro-regions of the study area, and indicative of a conscious rejection of the technology in favour of existing containers. Evidence suggests that the earliest pottery was not an *immediate* agent of culinary change. Furthermore, there appears, as yet, no connection between the emergence of pottery, and the 'Neolithisation Process' in the Near East; the

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transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one of sedentism, characterised by pastoral societies and a reliance on agriculture.

The terminological issues surrounding the emergence of pottery is something which has not been agreed upon by the contributors. The maintenance of multiple names for the first pottery (e.g. ‘Early Mineral Ware’ [Nieuwenhuysen et al. 2010], ‘Early Dark Ware’ [Nishiaki and Le Mière, 2005: 61] or ‘Dark-Faced Burnished Ware’, [Nieuwenhuysen, chapter 8, this volume]) reflects its high degree regional variation. This is also mirrored with the lack of consensus regarding the terminology of the incipient pottery phases, and maintenance that site-specific chronologies are probably the best way to proceed. Whilst regional variability is a solid reason for maintaining the use of site-specific chronologies, the reviewer would suggest that ‘Pre-Proto-Hassuna-First-Phase’ as a name may be somewhat excessive (Nishiaki and Le Mière, this volume).

No clear consensus was agreed upon for use of the earliest pottery: cooking was suggested (Miyake, Le Mière), however chapters by Cruells et al. (chapter 4), and Nieuwenhuysen (chapter 3 and 8) persuasively argue that food preparation/cooking is plausible, and the presence of soot on some of the earliest pottery of Sabi Abyad agrees with this interpretation (Nieuwenhuysen et al. 2010: 83). Nevertheless, the rarity of pottery in these incipient pottery phases merits the prestige/conspicuous consumption aspect of the pottery (Nieuwenhuysen, this volume; Tsuneki, this volume) and its use alongside other vessels or containers, although proving this is a difficult task (Odaka, this volume).

Overall, as the first volume of its kind devoted specifically to the origins of pottery in West Asia, the work represents a landmark piece of research with valuable contributions by scholars who have been involved in researching the earliest pottery of the region for most of their academic careers. Importantly the volume paves the way, and outlines the need for further research in the future, and plausibly a second Tsukuba symposium. The primary importance of the volume however is its assembling of extensive data from multiple sites into a single body of work.

Geochemical analysis of pottery features relatively frequently within the volume, with multiple techniques utilised by the contributors. Petrographic research is used by Cruells et al., with Balossi Restelli's chapter also containing reference to geochemical investigations. Le Mière (chapter 2) also illustrates results of geochemical characterisation of pottery via Hierarchical Cluster Analysis from Tell Seker al-Aheimar and Damisliyya, though without direct reference to the primary data, the method of analysis carried out or its original place of publication. These beginnings of geochemical analysis of the earliest pottery are a notable step in the right direction for further research with Nieuwenhuys and Campbell stress the continued need for further such studies. Such studies would provide invaluable detail, particularly given the mixture of local production, and imports.

Subsequent research would benefit from a *chaîne opératoire* approach (c.f. Roux 2016) such as that utilised by Cruells et al. and highlighted as an avenue of future investigation by Nieuwenhuys and Campbell. This could prove especially pertinent in ascertaining the relationship between the currently accepted earliest mineral-tempered pottery (the focus of the reviewed volume), and the subsequent coarse chaff tempered wares.

Further work along the Zagros Mountains also are promising avenues for future research given the current situation in Syria. Renewed excavations at Pre-Pottery Neolithic-Pottery Neolithic transitional sites such as Jarmo in Iraqi-Kurdistan, and the Central Zagros Archaeological Project (CZAP) (where Neolithic pottery is known from Bestansur [Nieuwenhuys et al. 2012]) may hold important information for further research.

This volume undoubtedly represents an invaluable collection of papers regarding the origins of pottery in West Asia, with detailed accounts of the earliest pottery from individual sites in the region and crucial questions reiterated concerning the emergence of pottery in the region. Colour photos of the ceramics (exterior, interior, and importantly the internal fabric) make an important addition, as do the wealth of ceramic illustrations showing morphological forms, a vital addition for morpho-

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stylistic comparatives, and a huge leap forward from the norm in the majority of ceramic-based monographs whereby line drawings, and pottery plates are the norm.

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