

## BOOK REVIEW:

### *Ceramic Makers' Marks*

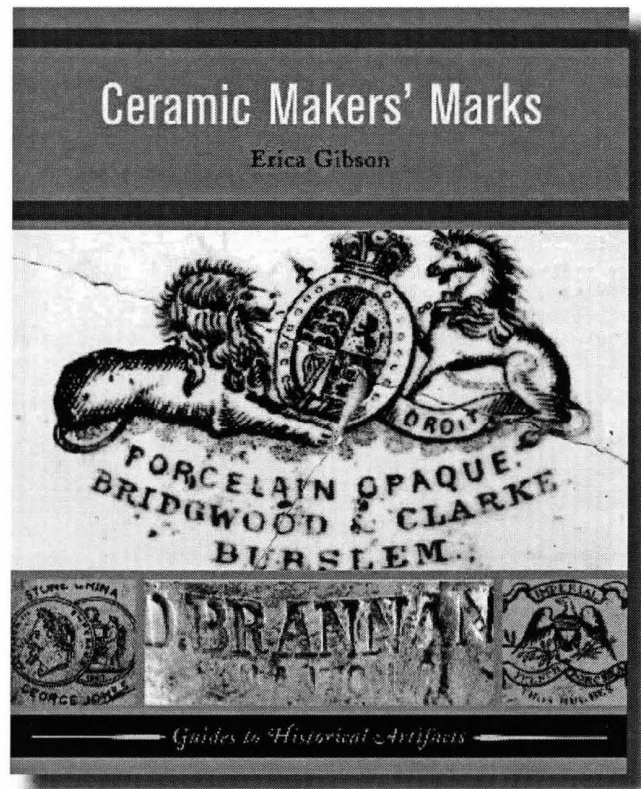
Erica Gibson. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA. 147 pp., ISBN: 978-1-59874-188-9 (hardcover), 978-1-59874-189-6 (paperback). \$89.00 (h/c), \$24.95 (p/b). 2010.

The new millennium has seen a renaissance in the field of historical archaeology in terms of sophisticated social/biographical and contextual studies of particular classes of material culture, along with a new generation of identification manuals intended to update decades-old classics. Left Coast Press (LCP) is contributing to this trend with its new "Guides to Historical Artifacts" series edited by Carolyn White and Timothy Scarlett, whose scope encompasses both the 'social' and 'identification' aspects of artifact studies. Although primarily edited and authored by archaeologists, these volumes are intended to appeal to an interdisciplinary audience that includes both professionals and amateurs. To date, LCP has released three volumes, including guides to Chinese export porcelain and brewery material culture, along with the guide to ceramic makers' marks reviewed here.

The author of *Ceramic Makers' Marks*, Erica Gibson, is a specialist in 19th and early 20th century material culture and is Director of the Archaeological Laboratory at Sonoma State University's Anthropological Studies Center (ASC) in California. The summary on the back cover proclaims the book to be a comprehensive catalogue of marks of British, French, German and American origin recovered from archaeological sites in North America. This slim volume is organized in a straightforward manner. The bulk of its 147 pages consist of an alphabetical list of ceramic manufacturers and associated marks. This is accompanied by a brief four-page introduction, a list of references, and an index/finding guide to aid in identification of partial marks. The primary source for the marks included in this volume is 250+ collections from ASC excavations of mid-19th to early 20th century sites across California over the past three decades. Overall, Gibson's goal is to present a more comprehensive identification guide that supplements, refines and corrects existing publications.

So what's here? In total, the book includes 343 marks from 112 manufacturers, with 257 of them depicted in photographs (printed marks) or line drawings (impressed marks). The alphabetically organized entries include the manufacturer's name, the pottery name and location, dates of operation, previous and subsequent operations, wares produced and additional firm details. For each manufacturer individual marks are numbered and include a description and transcription of the mark in standardized nomenclature, along with dates of use and occasional supplementary notes. To facilitate tracking down outside sources, there are separate lists of bibliographic references for the manufacturer and for each mark. The finding aids at the back are organized by city, country/state, design element, mark type (e.g., printed, impressed), word and maker. Furthermore, the introduction includes general comments on dating British ceramic marks.

As important as what *is* here, of course, is what's *not* here. As Gibson notes in her introduction (in contrast to the summary on the back), this guide focuses almost exclusively on British ceramic tablewares, with only a handful of manufacturers from the U.S.



and other countries. Emphasis is also on marks recovered from mid-19th to early 20th century archaeological sites in California. Consequently, not all possible marks from each maker are included, nor are marks outside this narrow date range. Despite its broad and encompassing title and ambitious summary description, then, this book has a fairly circumscribed scope and utility that potential users should bear in mind.

This guide functions exclusively as an identification and dating manual of ceramic marks, containing none of the "interconnections between objects and social identity" nor addressing "the role of individual objects or assemblages in social action" touted by the series' editors. It is modelled explicitly after Gates and Ormerod's (1982) guide to ceramic marks from the East Liverpool, Ohio pottery district and Praetzellis et al.'s (1983) similar guide to marks from Old Sacramento. In fact, Gibson's volume is best seen as an expanded and updated version of the Praetzellis book, which it closely resembles in format and content. This is particularly apt given that both volumes are based on work conducted or overseen by Mary and Adrian Praetzellis, who direct the ASC. In all three cases, these guides are distinguished by their photographic documentation of ceramic marks, which Gibson argues is preferable to line drawings and verbal descriptions characteristic of most manuals, particularly in identifying fragments.

In her introduction, Gibson notes that marked vessels from tightly dated contexts have in some cases resulted in more concise date ranges for certain marks, although she does not specify *which* marks, nor clearly indicate in the text the source (archival or archaeological) of the date range for each mark. Consequently, it is difficult to determine where significant updates have been made from Godden and other traditional sources, short of making side-by-side comparisons. Since chronology is a principal objective

of mark identification, a more explicit and detailed discussion of dating would have been a supreme asset. This alone, had it been present, would have made this book an essential purchase for historical archaeologists and set a new standard in the discipline. As it is, it serves as a very good update of an old standard.

Now, the best way to evaluate the utility of an identification manual is to put it through its paces using some actual artifacts. Consequently, I put this guide to work on some already identified English ceramic tablewares from my own doctoral research here in British Columbia, dating ca. 1885-1930, along with some sherds from SFU's reference collection. Of eight marks from seven manufacturers present in my assemblage, which I originally identified using Godden's *Encyclopedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks* and other sources, I found five in Gibson's guide (although there were entries for all seven manufacturers). Not bad. Using the SFU collection, I found seven of nine manufacturers in Gibson's book but in only two cases was I able to locate the identical mark. Granted, most of these reference specimens date after the turn of the twentieth century; however, this highlights one of the shortcomings of the volume, which the author herself acknowledges. There were also date discrepancies between sources and this is where it would have been helpful for Gibson to clearly document and explain her revised dates.

Despite its shortcomings, Gibson's manual is a worthy and welcome update and expansion of the Praetzelis original, and its small size in comparison to other guides makes it handy to carry in the field. In its use of photos of actual specimens rather than idealized drawings, and the author's effort to collate information from multiple sources, this volume is an intuitive and valuable single source for preliminary dating of British ceramic marks. It does not claim to be comprehensive (except in that misleading back-cover summary), which it isn't, and in this sense it reminds

me of Godden's *Handbook of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks*, a pocket-sized abbreviation of the original *Encyclopedia*. In each case, their handiness is both an asset and a frustrating drawback. As such, neither can be used alone but rather as a supplement to other identification guides, and ultimately users will find it necessary to go back to the classic sources to fill in the gaps.

Nevertheless, I heartily recommend this book as a useful first stop for academic, professional and avocational archaeologists working on 19th and 20th century historic sites, particularly in Western North America. If you only have room in your pack for one ceramic dating guide it should be this one, and I look forward to road testing it next time I'm in the field.

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**Doug Ross earned his Ph.D. in Archaeology from Simon Fraser University in 2009. His research interests and expertise focus on historical archaeology, Chinese and Japanese immigrants in western North America, transnationalism and diaspora, institutional confinement, and industrial labour. He is currently an instructor at SFU and Douglas College and is completing a book based on his dissertation to be published by the University Press of Florida.**

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#### References Cited

- Gates, William C., Jr., and Dana E. Ormerod. 1982. The East Liverpool, Ohio, Pottery District: Identification of Manufacturers and Marks. *Historical Archaeology* 16(1-2).
- Praetzelis, Mary, Betty Rivers and Jeanette K. Schulz. 1983. *Ceramic Marks from Old Sacramento*. California Archaeological Reports No. 22. Cultural Resource Management Unit, Resource Protection Division, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento, CA.

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## BOOK REVIEW:

# *Archaeologists as Activists: Can Archaeologists Change the World?*

Edited by M. Jay Stottman. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, AL. 207pp, 13 illustrations, hardcover, index. ISBN: 978-0-8173-1712-6 (hardcover), 978-0-8173-5622-4 (paperback). \$46.00 (h/c), \$29.95 (p/b). 2010.

"Any archaeologist can be an activist archaeologist; we just have to reconceptualize archaeology as activism."  
(Stottman 2010:13)

The product of a session at the 2004 Society for Historical Archaeology annual meeting called "Can Archaeology Save the World?," this book offers a collection of case-studies highlighting the trials and tribulations of being an "activist archaeologist." Introducing the volume, Stottman suggests that the movement towards an activist archaeology has been prompted by both an interest in the intersection between archaeology and heritage tourism, and concern over the rights and needs of descendant communities, in particular Indigenous peoples. Additionally, archaeologists are increasingly applying their craft to projects

of "public benefit," such as the identification of human remains in mass graves, and it is now commonplace for those working in cultural resource management (CRM) to be at the negotiation table with multiple "stakeholders." Stottman suggests that

through public archaeology, an archaeology can be conceived that can consciously be used to benefit contemporary communities and perhaps create positive change or help solve modern problems. It is public archaeology that forms the origins of an activist archaeology. (3)

Stottman then provides a brief synopsis of public archaeology, defined here as "a means to directly involve and educate the public in the discovery and experience of the past" (4). In particular, the role of archaeologists as "educators" in this ap-