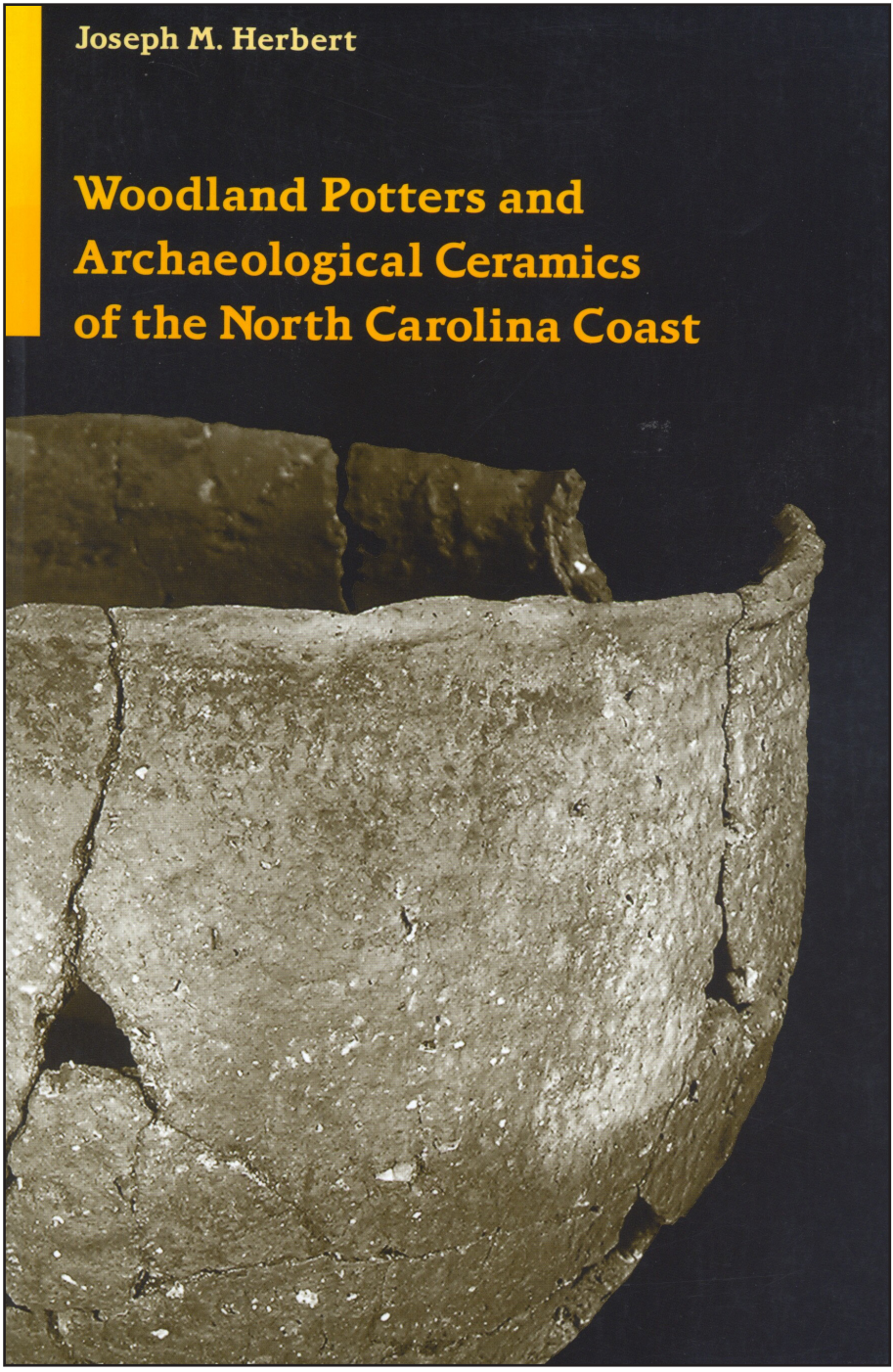
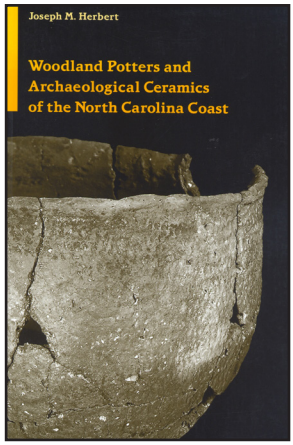


Contents



Woodland Potters and Archaeological Ceramics of the North Carolina Coast

Joseph M. Herbert. 2009. A Dan Josselyn Memorial Publication, The University of Alabama Press, xix+235 pp., 68 figures, 25 tables, references, index. $60.00 (hardcover), $36.95 (quality paper or e-book).

Reviewed by Ann S. Cordell, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Joseph M. Herbert is an archaeologist with the Colorado State University, Center for the Environmental Management of Military Lands, in the Cultural Resources Management Program at Fort Bragg North Carolina. Three principal and related objectives of this work were to refine a regional ceramic taxonomy, improve the sequencing of types, and assess their geographic distribution. The geographic focus is the Coastal Plain of North Carolina, and its relation to the greater Atlantic coast. The temporal focus is the Woodland period, from inception of pottery making in the Late Archaic until European contact, 2200 BC–AD 1600.

Herbert is ideally qualified to write a volume such as this, owing to his years of archaeological experience in the Coastal Plain of NC, and his vast experience with experimental pottery replication to distinguish among the various methods of impressed surface treatment that characterize much of the pottery of the region. This book is in fact, a pared-down version of Herbert's own PhD dissertation "Woodland ceramics and social boundaries of coastal North Carolina" (2003, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

With this volume, Herbert synthesized data from the region in order to reduce the many pottery typologies that have been in use to a single unified scheme for the entire coastal region. His data show that that some pottery series and types occurred over vast geographic regions. In making the leap from temporal and spatial patterns to actual behavior of the potters and ethnicity, Herbert acknowledged that geographic style regions almost certainly encompass many disparate ethnic and linguistic groups. He suggests that the documented geographic boundaries of ceramic technological styles reflect the limits of "transcultural communities of practice." More specifically, "Functional and stylistic variations...are viewed as manifestations of learning, practice, and individual agency expressed in the pottery-making craft as women [who were the potters] reaffirm group membership through the replication of technological styles" (p. 23).

Virtually all published and unpublished data on NC Coastal Plain archaeology, including CRM reports, unpublished MA theses, and other sources with relatively low accessibility, were considered in his synthesis. For convenience, Herbert divided the Woodland era into early, middle, and late periods. Temporal control for sequencing pottery types on the northern coast was based on pottery assemblages from stratified midden deposits. For the southern coast, sequencing was provided by consideration of existing radiocarbon dates and procurement of thermoluminescence (TL) dating of actual pottery samples from

sites in the Sandhills and lower Cape Fear River basin. Herbert is a strong advocate of TL dating and considered it essential for reliable absolute dating in this coastal region which is characterized by poor organic preservation, indistinct stratification, and equivocal associations between pottery and organics even when recovered.

The revised ceramic taxonomy is not merely based on consideration of previous pottery type descriptions paste and surface treatment. Herbert physically reexamined hundreds of potsherds from six well documented sites. Surface treatment categories were specified through comparing casts of archeological samples to impressions on clay test tiles of experimentally replicated cordage and textiles. The many photographic illustrations should be very useful for fellow NC archaeologists, researchers dealing with cordage or fabric impressed pottery, and those researching other prehistoric technologies involving cordage and textiles.

Temper categories were identified by particle size and composition by Herbert who examined the pottery (fresh breaks) with low power microscopy. Temper categories, methods, and standards of measurement are described explicitly. As an archaeologist who specializes in paste characterization studies, this was an important consideration for me in terms of assessing the veracity and comparability of Herbert's data. This reviewer and UNC-Wilmington geologist, Michael Smith, actually contributed to the project by conducting petrographic analyses of a subsample to help clarify temper attributions. Point-counts for quantifying temper abundance were not carried out at the time, but have subsequently been conducted for some samples (see, for example, Herbert, J. M. et al. 2012, Grog Tempering and Woodland Interaction in the Carolina Sandhills and Coastal Plain. Paper presented at the 77th Annual Meeting of the SAA, Memphis (with A.S. Cordell, and M. Smith).

In explaining how pottery traditions are perpetuated through time and space, Herbert makes the important point that paste/temper and surface treatment choices are independent of one another and each represents different steps in the *chain operatoire* of pottery making. Herbert made use of aspects of evolutionary-selectionist theory, social agency, practice, and learning theory together to explore the nature of regional and temporal variation in paste and style. The specific temporal and spatial patterns documented were interpreted with respect to environmental, technological and social influences and constraints. Several ethnoarchaeological case studies were considered for insights into the recognition of possible ethnic and linguistic complexity that may have existed within the stylistic regions described for the three Woodland subperiods.

This work is clearly written. The study goals were carefully conceived and operationalized. The explanations involving cultural sources responsible for the observed temporal and spatial variation are compelling and enlightening. On the whole, this book is a significant addition to the literature on the archaeology of North Carolina for its synthesis of extensive data, assembled chronometric dates, and improved pottery chronology. This book should also appeal to a broader audience including researchers and students of Woodland period archaeology, historians of pottery technology, researchers of fiber technologies, gender roles, as well as theorists who attempt to bridge the gap between artifacts and behaviors.