Introduction

Pottery represents the most abundant category of portable material culture to come down to us from the Roman world, and it is thus by no means either surprising or inappropriate that pottery studies have enjoyed a position of some prominence in Roman archaeology. Whereas investigations carried out in the early years of Roman pottery research were concerned primarily with questions of typology and chronology, in the 1970s students of Roman pottery embraced the realization that pottery constitutes an important source of information regarding various aspects of the economic life of the Roman world, and much of the research that has been carried out since that time has focused on topics such as the geography, organization, and technology of pottery production; the mechanisms and intensity of pottery distribution; and the consumption, use, and performance characteristics of pottery. More recently, with the introduction into Roman archaeology of theoretical perspectives and research methods drawn from post-processual archaeology and material culture studies, students of Roman pottery have begun to explore ways in which pottery evidence can be mobilized to investigate topics such as the definition of individual and group identity, opening windows onto a range of social and ideological issues, such as native acceptance of and resistance to incorporation into Roman social, political, and economic systems, and the expression of gender in the Roman world.

Although the typological, chronological, economic, and sociological analysis of Roman pottery generally involves the study of groups of materials that represent the end result of a complex set of behaviors on the part of those who produced, distributed, and used pottery, students of Roman pottery have shown themselves largely indifferent to the investigation of these behaviors and their implications for how and when different kinds of pottery came to be incorporated in different amounts and in different conditions into different kinds of archaeological deposits in different kinds of locations. As a result, we know surprisingly little about these questions, and Roman pottery specialists have been, and are at present, operating on the basis of a set of unjustifiably optimistic, untested, and – to some extent – false

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assumptions regarding the origin and significance of patterning in pottery data, leaving open to question the significance of the results of much pottery research.

The purpose of this book is to begin the process of redressing this regrettable situation by articulating a general model of the life cycle of Roman pottery that will enable pottery researchers to more effectively envision the set of behaviors that governed the formation of the Roman pottery record – here defined as the universe of archaeological deposits containing Roman pottery that were formed during the Roman period – and to gain some appreciation of both the general and specific effects that these behaviors had on the nature of this record. Chapter 1 introduces the model, which takes the form of a flow diagram incorporating eight discrete behaviors – manufacture, distribution, prime use, reuse, maintenance, recycling, discard, and reclamation – that governed the passage of Roman pottery through its life cycle and its incorporation into the archaeological record. After Chapter 2 considers various topics that represent essential background information for the discussion that follows, Chapters 3 through 10 present systematic examinations of each of the eight behaviors included in the model, illustrating the nature of the evidence for these and the ways in which they operated through the discussion of examples drawn from the body of relevant textual, representational, material cultural (i.e., archaeological), and comparative evidence. The final chapter, Chapter 11, then synthesizes these observations, considering their implications for a broader understanding of material culture in the Roman world, identifying the individual and collective effects that the eight behaviors included in the model had on the nature of the Roman pottery record, and identifying directions for future research aimed at improving our understanding of the life cycle of Roman pottery and its implications for the Roman pottery record.

It is the author's hope that by presenting a general and systematic description of the behavioral system that governed the formation of the Roman pottery record, this study will serve to make students of Roman pottery more fully aware of the overall nature and scope of the challenge that faces us if we are to attain an adequate understanding of the sources of patterning in pottery data. Beyond this, by presenting detailed observations regarding the relationship between specific behaviors on the part of those who produced, distributed, and used pottery and the nature of the pottery record in those areas where we possess fairly good information, this study

will enable students of Roman pottery to approach the collection, analysis, and interpretation of pottery evidence in a somewhat more informed and sophisticated fashion than would otherwise be the case. Finally, by highlight-ing those areas where our understanding of these behaviors is either more limited or lacking altogether, this study will serve to indicate directions for future research aimed at improving our understanding of the nature of the Roman pottery record.

It is the author's hope that both the method employed in this study and some of its specific results will be of interest to scholars working outside the field of Roman pottery studies. Specifically, because, as already noted, pottery represents the most abundant category of Roman material culture available to us, some of the behaviors that can be documented in relation to its use and discard may be of interest to scholars concerned with broader issues in the production and use of material culture in the Roman world. In addition, because the body of evidence regarding the behaviors that governed the life cycle of Roman pottery and the formation of the Roman pottery record is substantially richer in many regards than that available for several other complex societies that are the object of archaeological investigation, this study may prove to be of interest to archaeologists and students of archaeological pottery more generally. In recognition of this second possibility, the author has adopted several descriptive conventions, which, although perhaps the source of some irritation to Romanists, will facilitate the use of this book by readers whose area of expertise happens to lie outside the Roman world.

One drawback to the generalizing approach adopted in this book is that it implicates a body of evidence so vast that no single researcher could possibly command anything approaching the whole of it. It is inevitable, then, that the evidence taken into consideration is weighted toward the areas of the author's own experience and expertise. This means that the preponderance of the archaeological evidence is drawn from the region of west central Italy and dates to the imperial period. More particularly, many of the illustrative examples employed belong either to the pottery assemblage from the Palatine East excavations in downtown Rome, a project for which the author serves as chief ceramics specialist, or to the pottery assemblage from the excavations at Piammiano, a small Etrusco-Roman settlement situated on the right bank of the Tiber River 80 kilometers to the north of Rome, probably to be identified as Roman Statonia, where the

author has served as co–director of research. In the area of textual evidence, the Latin sources are exploited more extensively than those in Greek and Late Hebrew/Aramaic. On account of these limitations, a substantial amount of relevant evidence has no doubt been overlooked.

In closing this brief introduction it may prove helpful to indicate some of the definitions and conventions employed in this study. The Roman world is defined as those regions under the political control of the Roman state from the late republic down to the end of the empire – that is, from roughly the second century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. The term pottery is understood to refer to ceramic containers and related items, including lamps. Items such as terracotta sculpture and architectural ceramics, including brick, tile, drain-pipes, vaulting tubes, and related items, such as terracotta sarcophagi, are thus excluded from consideration. All dates given are A.D. unless otherwise indicated. Settlements and geographical regions are generally referred to by their modern names, with the Roman-period name, when this is known, following in square brackets on the occasion of a locale's first mention in the text. The locations of all settlements and archaeological sites mentioned are shown in Maps 2–9 at the back of the book. The *regio* [quarter], *insula* [block], and doorway addresses conventionally assigned to structures at the sites of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia are presented in their full form on the occasion of a structure's first mention, rather than in the abbrevi-ated fashion normally employed in the specialist literature. In the interest of facilitating the use of this book by non–Classicists and non–Semiticists, all passages in Latin, Greek, and Late Hebrew/Aramaic are accompanied by translations in English. All terms in these languages are also translated into English on the occasion of their first use, with those in Greek and Late Hebrew/Aramaic given both in Greek or Hebrew characters and in translit-erated form, with the latter employed for all subsequent uses. All translations of texts in Latin and Greek are the author's, whereas the sources of transla-tions of texts in Late Hebrew/Aramaic are indicated in the notes. Literary works in Greek and Latin are referred to by their full titles rather than by the standard abbreviations normally employed by Classicists. Citations of passages in Late Hebrew/Aramaic drawn from the rabbinic sources indicate both the division and tractate to facilitate the locating of these by readers not familiar with the organization of these works. Latin epigraphical texts are rendered according to the set of standard conventions employed for the *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum* [*The Corpus of Latin inscriptions*, abbreviated

CIL] (Krummrey and Panciera 1980), with the exception that all texts pro–
duced on pottery (*graffiti*, *tituli picti/dipinti*, and stamps) are presented in
uppercase letters, with the letter V employed in the place of U, ligatures
indicated by rendering the relevant letters in boldface type, and letters of
problematic reading indicated by underlining.

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A Model of the Life Cycle
of Roman Pottery

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The persons who produced, distributed, and used Roman pottery engaged in various actions that determined how, when, where, why, and in what condition and quantity pottery came to be incorporated into the archaeological record. It seems a reasonable assumption that, from the time of its manufacture through to the time of its incorporation into the archaeological record, a substantial portion of Roman pottery was subjected to these actions in a more or less regularly recurring order that may be thought of as constituting a sequence akin in certain regards to the life cycle of an organism. In consideration of this observation, this study employs as its organizing basis a general model of the life cycle of Roman pottery. This construct is of value in that it not only helps identify the various actions that governed the formation of the pottery record, here termed *behavioral practices*, but also elucidates the ways in which these worked individually and in concert with one another to do so. This chapter presents this model, discussing its conceptual basis, describing its general organization, defining its individual components, and considering its limitations.

To construct a model of the life cycle of Roman pottery, this study takes the general model of the artifact life cycle – a conceptual scheme formulated by Schiffer in the early 1970s (Schiffer 1972: 157–60) that went on to gain wide acceptance in Americanist archaeology – and modifies this to take into account the specific set of circumstances relevant to Roman pottery. The general model of the artifact life cycle assumes that an artifact is normally subjected to a sequence of four distinct behavioral practices: *manufacture*, *use*, *maintenance*, and *discard*. Manufacture consists of the fashioning of an artifact from one or more raw materials obtained from nature; use is the utilization of an artifact for the purpose or purposes for which it was manufactured, followed in some instances by its use for some other purpose or purposes; maintenance involves the upkeep or repair of an artifact
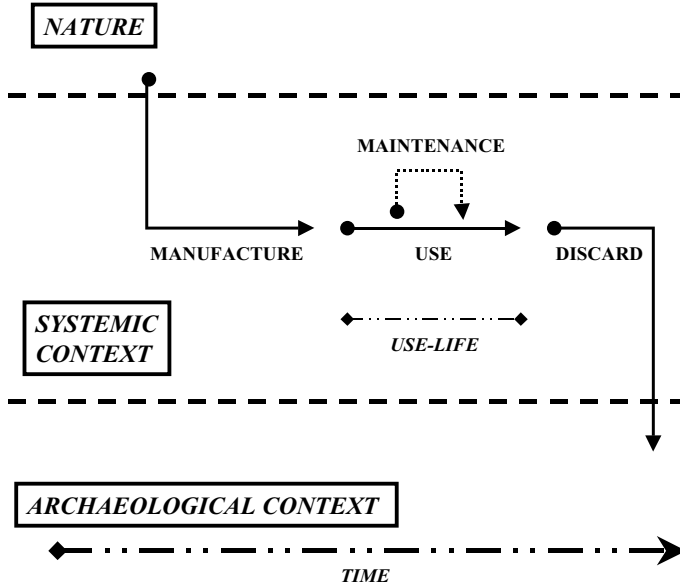
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FIGURE 1.1. Flow diagram representing general artifact life cycle. After Schiffer 1972: 158. fig. 1.

so that it can continue to serve for the purpose or purposes for which it is being used; and discard consists of the abandonment of an artifact at the termination of its use. The amount of time that an artifact remains in use is generally referred to as its *use-life* (Mills 1989: 135–41; Shott 1989, 1996: 463–4). Maintenance is considered an optional practice, in that not all artifacts are regularly subjected to it. Following discard, durable artifacts are sooner or later incorporated into archaeological deposits, thereby becoming part of the archaeological record. In the terminology employed in formation theory – the body of concepts concerned with the processes involved in the formation of the archaeological record (Shott 1998) – this involves the passage of an artifact from the *systemic context*, that is, a situation in which it is involved in a human behavioral system, to the *archaeological context*, a situation in which following discard it is no longer involved in a human behavioral system (Schiffer 1972: 157; 1996: 4). This set of concepts can be expressed in the form of a simple flow diagram, as shown in Figure 1.1.

It is necessary to revise this scheme in several ways to obtain an adequate representation of the life cycle of Roman pottery. An additional behavioral practice, *distribution*, must be introduced between manufacture and use to

reflect the fact that nearly all Roman pottery was manufactured by specialist producers and came into the possession of those who used it by means of some more or less complex set of exchange mechanisms. The regularity with which vessels and vessel parts were employed for some purpose other than that/those for which they were manufactured at the conclusion of their use for this purpose/these purposes makes it useful – if not strictly necessary – to divide the use portion of the life cycle into two distinct practices: *prime use* and *reuse*. A second new behavioral practice, *recycling*, must be added to reflect the fact that vessels and vessel parts were regularly employed as a raw material in some manufacturing process at the conclusion of manufacture, distribution, prime use, or reuse. Finally, a third new behavioral practice, *reclamation*, must be introduced to accommodate the fact that vessels and vessel parts were sometimes retrieved following their discard for use in some reuse or recycling application.

This set of concepts can be expressed in the form of a second flow diagram, as shown in Figure 1.2. All of the behavioral practices other than manufacture are here represented as optional (i.e., by means of a dotted arrow), in that no single vessel was necessarily subjected to any one of them. Maintenance is shown as occurring in the course of manufacture, distribution, prime use, and reuse, whereas recycling and discard are represented as following on from any one of these same four behavioral practices. Reclamation is shown as leading to either reuse or recycling as a raw material. In recognition of the fact that vessels and vessel parts were regularly employed in recycling applications, the zone at the top of the figure, labeled *nature* in the flow diagram for the general model of the artifact life cycle, has been relabeled as *raw material*. Finally, two distinct lines are presented for use-life – one for prime-use use-life, and one for reuse use-life. Readers will doubtless find it helpful to refer back to this somewhat complicated diagram on various occasions in the course of the chapters that follow.

It will prove useful at this juncture to provide an explicit definition for each of the eight behavioral practices included in the revised model:

Manufacture: The fabrication of a vessel from one or more raw materials.

Distribution: The physical transfer of a newly manufactured vessel from those who manufactured it to those who will use it.

Prime use: The use of a vessel for the application or applications for which it was manufactured.
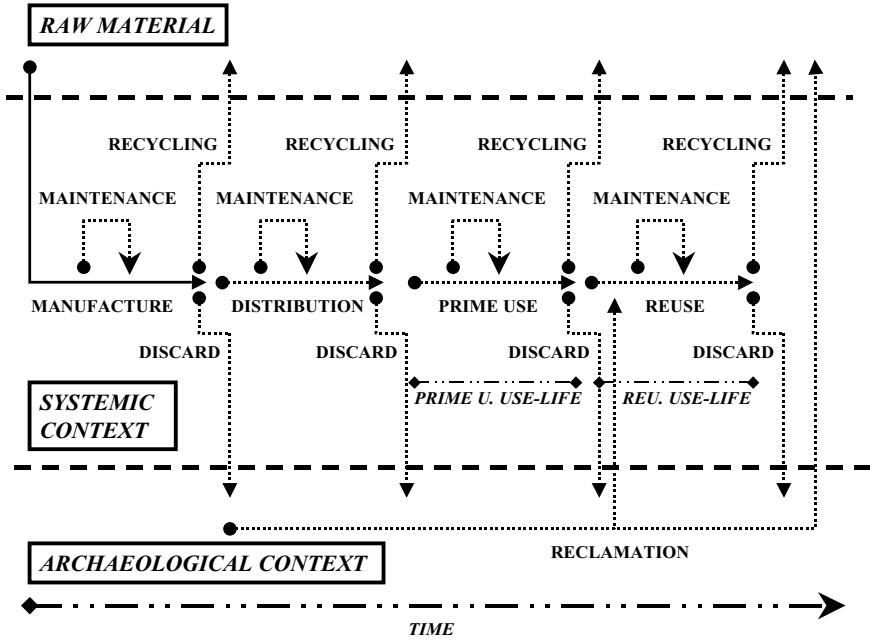
FIGURE 1.2. Flow diagram representing the life cycle of Roman pottery.

Reuse: The use of a vessel or a vessel part for some application after the conclusion of its use for its prime-use application.

Maintenance: The upkeep or repair of a vessel so that it can continue to perform some application.

Recycling: The use of a vessel or a vessel part as a raw material in a manufacturing process.

Discard: The deliberate and voluntary abandonment of a vessel or a vessel part by those using it with the intent of no longer using it.

Reclamation: The acquisition of a vessel or a vessel part after its discard.

Some of these definitions require further discussion to clarify the nature of the practices to which they refer.

1.1 / Prime Use and Reuse

The division of use into prime use and reuse, although helpful for certain elements of the discussion that follows, is to some extent problematic, in that it is based on two simplifying assumptions. First, there is no way of

ascertaining either the extent to which Roman potters had assumptions regarding the ways in which the vessels that they manufactured would be used, or the extent to which those who acquired newly manufactured vessels actually employed them for these purposes.[1] To take some account of this problem, one may wish to expand the definition of prime use to include an alternative definition, as follows: The use of a previously unused vessel for the application or applications for which it was acquired. Second, the assumption that the use-life of every vessel was marked by a specific moment at which it was retired from use for its prime-use application or applications (henceforth application), thereby setting the stage for its use for some new application that should be regarded as an expression of reuse, is no doubt a simplification and, to some extent, a misrepresentation of what were actual patterns of pottery use. In some cases the boundary between prime use and reuse was likely a fuzzy one, with a vessel coming to be employed for some new and different application while it continued to be used for its prime-use application, with the one perhaps eventually coming to replace the other.

In some instances the disposition of a vessel in the context either of a prime-use application or of a reuse application effectively removed it from contact with or manipulation by people. As examples of this phenomenon one may cite the placing of a vessel in a tomb as a grave offering or the incorporation of a vessel into a structure such as a drainage feature. In instances of this kind, although the vessel was still in a technical sense being used, it had, in effect, been removed from the systemic context. Whereas Schiffer considers instances of this kind to represent discard (Schiffer 1996: 80–89), they are here regarded as constituting expressions of prime use or reuse, with the general phenomenon referred to as *depositional use*.

This study recognizes three distinct types of reuse as determined by the nature of the application and whether or not it involved any physical modification to the original vessel. These three types of reuse, here termed Type A, Type B, and Type C for ease of reference, are as follows:

Type A: Reuse involving an application similar to the vessel's prime-use application without any physical modification to it.

Type B: Reuse involving an application different from the vessel's prime-use application without any physical modification to it.

Type C: Reuse involving an application different from the vessel's prime-use application involving physical modification.