

Student Comments on this week's blog post:

1. Dane Clark says:

March 24, 2015 at 6:30 pm

Great post, Elizabeth! Watching Matt trim and join the cup was amazing! There were so many more steps involved than I would have expected! As an archaeologist, I found it particularly interesting how careful he was to cover up any visible traces of his tool marks. One of these counteractions was the addition of a thin coil of clay to join between the cup and the stem. After being attached, the coil was smoothed down until it was absolutely flush with the rest of the surface, rendering it virtually invisible. This was only one example of the many things I would have never even thought to look for when analyzing the broken pottery sherds at an excavation. This might sound a bit crazy, but I can't wait to see how some of our pots break after being fired! I'm really interested in seeing how or even if any of these things remain visible upon closer inspection of the pot sherds!

2. Anna Soifer says:

March 24, 2015 at 11:47 pm

Since, as Dane said, a conscious effort is made to erase all traces of the turning process, it seems that the dimples created in attaching the appendages are some of the only archaeological indications of the final stages in the process of creating a kylix. However, these marks have the potential to impart a good deal of information. For example, they can indicate during which stage of dryness the appendages were added, or even the amount of force used when attaching them. This in turn could lead to hypotheses about modes of attachment. We need to remember that every little mark can tell us a great deal about the vessel and that we should note what actions of ours create marks similar to those seen on extant vessels.

3. Lauren Aldoroty says:

March 25, 2015 at 1:24 pm

In addition to the information about the firing process and RTI images, Dr. Artal-Isbrand shared an idea about burnishing that we hadn't previously thought about. She said that pots weren't burnished. Instead, the entire piece was coated in a dilute layer of slip, imparting a glossy quality. I think this is worth a try, because we don't know what our slip will look like after firing. In addition to trying out another idea about how these pots were produced, it will act as an unburnished control pot.

Further, Dr. Artal-Isbrand's idea about burnishing made me realize that I hadn't considered different ways to burnish other than changing the tool we use. I looked up information about how modern potters burnish their work (links below), and found that a common technique is to lubricate the pot with oil, and then rub it with a smooth stone in varying directions. If we have time, an extra

tile, and leftover slip, it may be worth it to see how close a modern burnishing technique would get our pots to looking like the ancient ones.

<http://thepottersfriend.blogspot.com/2012/10/burnishing-unfired-claypottery.html>

<http://ceramicartsdaily.org/pottery-making-techniques/ceramic-decoratingtechniques/make-your-pottery-shine-without-glaze-sumi-von-dassow-explainsthe-basics-of-burnishing-pottery/>

<http://ceramicartsdaily.org/pottery-making-techniques/ceramic-decoratingtechniques/going-low-tech-a-step-by-step-guide-to-burnishing-pottery/>

http://bobgrenpottery.com/pb/wp_335bea15/wp_335bea15.html

4. Hana Chop says:

March 25, 2015 at 2:50 pm

I agree with Artal-Isbrand's opinion that a layer of slip is responsible for the all around glossy shine of the finished kylikes. It is also a much faster and more efficient method with smaller margin for error with such a delicate clay body. With our directed method, the areas that burnish are the painted areas and the rest of the pottery is unpainted, so I can't really imagine how those areas will come out with a glossy sheen that is characteristic of glazed pottery. It's true that I don't have prior experience working with this method, but still! I just can't picture it.

At Clayworks, with our looming deadlines, I feel a lot of pressure to execute our kylike. But the ancient Greek potters would have been creating countless more handles and completing more kylikes than we can in the span of several class periods! However, I am very excited to see our final products, and look forward to building the kiln.

5. Arthur Zhang says:

March 25, 2015 at 3:53 pm

Thank you Elizabeth for the great post. I wonder if burnishing is like the act of spit-shining leather shoes. Brush-shined shoes could only get you so far when polish shoes but with some drops of water and a great deal of patience, the shoes would become so polished it could be used as a mirror! Perhaps the rearrangement of water molecules and the molecules of the shoe polish gave rise to this shiny surface; could the same be said of the rearrangement of clay and water molecules during slip preparation?

6. Maddy Brancati says:

March 25, 2015 at 4:48 pm

Since we've started to experiment with the slip in order to paint our own tiles, I've been thinking a lot about relief lines lately. Artal-Isbrand gave us some great insights into the creation of relief lines, suggesting that they were made by either laying down or pulling an instrument called a "linierhaar" (a brush with only a few hairs). This seems very plausible considering the tool created the

same ridges and furrows as are observed on the ancient vessels. My main concern is how well this method will work when we use actual slip (Artal-Isbrand used a substitute material that was much thicker in texture). The slip seems like it is too thin to be picked up by just two or three hairs. My group was able to create a slight relief effect by adding honey to thicken the slip, but nothing quite like that on the ancient vessels. There seem to be so many ways to tackle this problem, which makes me think that there might not have been one uniform way that this was done in antiquity. It is possible that techniques varied regionally, or even by workshop or artist. For this reason, searching for the “right” method may be counter-productive. We just need to find one method that works, and (besides the whole slip thickness issue) the linierhaar method seems very plausible.

7. Haley Huang says:

March 25, 2015 at 5:32 pm

Thanks Elizabeth!

I agree completely with Maddy. The “slip” mimic Dr. Artal-Isbrand used was much thicker than the slip we are working with, so the linierhaar brushes aren’t working as well as expected. However, whether this is a matter of the slip formula or the tool is yet to be discovered. Since the slip formulae we are attempting to use have been used before by other experts, it’s difficult to believe that they are very far off the mark. But personally, for my own tile, I have yet to create a slip or tool that achieves a raised relief line. It’s frustrating to think that there is something we may just be “missing”...

When my group was working to add the stem to the “practice cup” we were given, it was difficult to believe that just adding water and a bit of clay would make the two pieces hold together with enough strength that Matt could pick his up by the base and hold it upside down. But difficulties centering and inexperience made it almost impossible for us to achieve as good as a replica. In the end, although the cup Matt made in class looked so good to us, he considered it ‘not good enough.’ I suppose that’s the difference between an apprentice and a master.

8. Ashley Fallon says:

March 25, 2015 at 7:26 pm

Something I was not counting on was the difficulty with making uniform handles. My group could barely get two identical handles made in the time it took everyone else to attach a foot, and even then they were not the right size. I often find that the handles on pottery are more likely to look rough or misshapen and it became clear why. An interesting point that was also brought up was the fact that the areas joined by slip are in danger of being the weakest points, but are also often the strongest, as they frequently survive in the archaeological record. A lot of fragments of handles and feet are found attached to sherds from broken vessels, and it was interesting to find out why.

9. Kelly McBride says:

March 25, 2015 at 10:17 pm

Interesting post! A lot of us are concerned with burnishing our pots after we paint them, but something that is concerning me is the difficulty I am finding with even painting my tile. Because the slip is just refined clay, it is the same color as the tile I am painting on, and it dries extremely quickly. The idea has been put forward by our experts that the ancients added some sort of inorganic material to the slip that changes the color and it fired out so that there is no trace of it. I think it would be very helpful (for future classes as we are working with very restrictive time constraints) to find something that could color the slip and make painting easier. I fear that when my tile is fired there will be lines all over the place that I didn't realize I painted!

10. Gianna Puzzo says:

March 25, 2015 at 10:47 pm

Great post! More and more this process reasserts the positions of the master potter and the apprentices. Watching Matt turning the pots and very quickly and efficiently assemble the handles and foot with the bowl of the cups is a constant reminder of his role as master potter in this project. This is why we will be painting cups made by Matt and Cami rather than the students because most likely the apprentices would not have been able to turn and assemble the bowl without the experience of a master. We did have a chance to attach a foot and handles to some extra cups, even a possible job for an apprentice. As for painting, I can't say any of us are master pottery painters (we've only been experimenting with painting with slip on clay for a few weeks now) but many of us do have painting and drawing experience which should make us rather equipped to transfer our images to the cups.

11. Savannah de Montesquiou says:

March 25, 2015 at 11:37 pm

I'm still so impressed by the magic of RTI! Having seen the variety of line revealed by RTI, I've gained a new appreciation for the images on our vessels, and have a better understanding of how to recreate them. Even though figures are formed in a deep black color, which tends to flatten images, layering of slip and incised lines are visible. We are not just viewing flat figures on the exterior of our vessels; they are complex paintings of great depth and style. I look forward to experimenting with looped lines and the stippling technique discussed by Dr. Artal-Isbrand on my own tile and exploring the depth of what I previously thought were flat images.

Also, please note that my smile in the image above is not a result of the rich earthy slime undertones tasted in the slip.

12. Travis Schmauss says:

March 26, 2015 at 12:02 pm

The Reflectance Transformation Imaging was such cool technology, and it was great that we could watch how different angles of light could reveal so much about the surface topography. It was fascinating to see Dr. Artal-Isbrands successes with the paste she used actually being quantifiably accurate.

Although it has been acknowledged that she wasn't able to use true slip, I'd like to get my hands on what she used in order to see its viscosity.

Elizabeth, since you used the word in your post, I would just like to point out something funny: I thought everyone was pronouncing the word "shard" with an east-coast accent much of this class. Only now do I realize "sherd" is archaeological jargon short for potsherd.