



Craft Production and Social Change in Northern China (Fundamental Issues in Archaeology)

Anne P. Underhill

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This book offers an anthropological analysis of how craft production changed in relation to the development of complex societies in northern China. It focuses on the production and use of food containers-pottery and bronze vessels-during the late prehistoric and early historic periods. A major theme is how production and use of prestige vessels changed in relation to increase in degree of social inequality. The research and writing of this book took place intermittently over a period of several years. When I first outlined the book in 1994, I planned to offer a more limited and descriptive account of social change during the late prehistoric period. In considering the human desire to display status with prestige goods, my initial approach emphasized how the case of northern China was similar to other areas of the world. I began to realize that in order to adequately explain how and why craft production changed in ancient China, it was crucial to consider the belief systems that motivated production and use of food containers. Similarly, a striking characteristic of ancient China that I needed to include in the analysis was the preponderance of food containers, rather than other goods, that were buried with the deceased. I decided to investigate the social and ritual uses of food, beverages, and containers during more than one period of Chinese history. Some strong patterns could have emerged during the late prehistoric period.

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