

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 3

Issue 3 *Volume 3, Issue 3 (Summer 1994)*

Article 11

6-1-1994

Mitchell W. Marken, Pottery from Spanish Shipwrecks, 1500-1800

Jerry Gurulé

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

Recommended Citation

Gurulé, Jerry. "Mitchell W. Marken, Pottery from Spanish Shipwrecks, 1500-1800." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 3, 3 (1994): 356. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol3/iss3/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Pottery from Spanish Shipwrecks, 1500-1800. By Mitchell W. Marken. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. xiii + 264 pp. Illustrations, tables, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.)

In his book, *Pottery from Spanish Shipwrecks, 1500-1800*, Mitchell W. Marken journeys through the realm of underwater archaeological exploration to bring us an informative and well-documented study of Spanish shipwreck artifact materials.

The author begins with a short introduction in the first chapter, then a brief overview in chapter 2 of how Spanish colonial trade was developed and conducted. Chapter 3 follows with a description of each individual shipwreck and its circumstance. In his most important chapters, 4 and 5, the author concentrates on the analysis of the olive jar and tableware artifacts, respectively, aided by a multitude of tables, drawings, illustrations, and photographs. In chapter 6 Marken focuses on other types of pottery found in the same shipwrecks and ends the book with a short conclusion in chapter 7.

Students of Spanish colonial archaeology will be well served by Marken's book in which he covers a broad spectrum of era pottery in his research and analysis. The author utilizes the ceramic collections recovered from seventeen different shipwreck sites housed in Great Britain, Louisiana, Texas, Florida, Bermuda, and the Caribbean basin.

These sites hold immediate advantages over land sites for various reasons. Accurate dates can be given for the shipwrecks, and the quantity and quality of the artifacts are generally greater in such cases. This permits a better understanding not only of some specific uses of these wares throughout the Spanish colonial period, but also, most importantly of the different typologies and how they evolved. Although other types are briefly discussed, the author concentrates primarily on olive jars and tableware which represent part of the common everyday pottery of the time.

What makes the author's approach so significant is that it inherently promotes the development of a more precise chronological dating of artifacts. This was done through the specific identification of the different shapes of olive jar bodies coupled with their distinct rim styles. Marken's illustrations are particularly helpful in demonstrating the evolution of sizes, shapes, and styles from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century as well as certain areas in which they overlap. This study also includes a new flat-bottom jar type that seems to cover the period from the early to mid-1600s. Because the artifacts discussed are so numerous and varied Marken has also been able to detect a deterioration of technique over time which becomes an important factor in accurate dating.

Marken may be criticized for incorporating finds from legally salvaged shipwrecks. This criticism will most likely come from preservationists who believe that any collaboration with those who participate in salvage operations for profit hinder those who are attempting to preserve the shipwreck sites. He writes, "On the other hand, putting politics aside, there may not be the chance in our lifetime to study such a wide variety of wrecks and their associated contents. It is within this framework of rescue archaeology that my work was undertaken, in the firm belief that much of the material I was able to record, albeit often in far from ideal circumstances, would not be available for study a generation from now" (p. 3).

Following the pioneering efforts originally begun by John M. Goggin, Mitchell W. Marken gives us a comprehensive analysis of Spanish colonial era pottery as exemplified by the large body of artifacts studied. This has allowed him to follow the development of the olive jar and tableware and establish certain common characteristics and typologies. The results are significant, and much of this information comes to light for the first time in this book.

Jerry Gurulé
Spanish Colonial Research Center
University of New Mexico