Nyanga pottery and the Manyika ethnohistory: towards a decolonised archaeology of the Nyanga agricultural complex

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ABSTRACT

Ancient pottery from the Nyanga agricultural complex (CE 1300–1900) in north-eastern Zimbabwe enjoys more than a century of archaeological research. Though several studies dedicated to the pottery have expanded the frontiers of knowledge about the peopling of Bantu-speaking agropastoral societies in this part of southern Africa, we know little about the social context in which the pottery was made, distributed, used, and discarded in everyday life. This mostly comes from the fact that the majority of the ceramic studies undertaken were rooted in Eurocentric typological approaches to material culture hence these processes were elided by most researchers. As part of the decolonial turn in African archaeology geared at rethinking our current understanding of the everyday life of precolonial agropastoral societies, we explored the lifecycle of traditional pottery among the Manyika, one of the local communities historically connected to the Nyanga archaeological landscape. The study proffered new dimensions to the previous typological analyses. It revealed a range of everyday roles and cultural contexts that probably shaped the lifecycle of local pottery in ancient Nyanga.

1. Introduction

For more than a century, archaeologists working in the Nyanga1 agricultural complex have recovered thousands of broken potsherds and few complete earthenware vessels left by agropastoral societies that resided in eastern Zimbabwe during the later Iron Age (Randall-Macliver, 1906; Mason, 1933; Fripp and Wells, 1938; Summers, 1958; Brand, 1970; Manyanga, 1995; Soper and Chirawu, 1997; Soper, 2002; Manyanga and Shenjere, 2012). Whereas typological analysis of the pottery based on the character and variability of the stylistic and decoration attributes has played a pivotal role towards expanding the frontiers of knowledge about the peopling of Bantu-speaking agropastoral societies in this part of southern Africa, we know little about the social context in which the pottery was made, distributed, used, and discarded in everyday life. This mostly comes from the fact that the majority of the ceramic studies undertaken were rooted in Eurocentric typological approaches to material culture hence these processes were elided by most researchers. As part of the decolonial turn in African archaeology geared at rethinking our current understanding of the everyday life of precolonial agropastoral societies, we explored the lifecycle of traditional pottery among the Manyika, one of the local communities historically connected to the Nyanga archaeological landscape. The study proffered new dimensions to the previous typological analyses. It revealed a range of everyday roles and cultural contexts that probably shaped the lifecycle of local pottery in ancient Nyanga.

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1 Also known as Inyanga (see Summers, 1958).

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where do we go from here? Regardless, this is not to suggest a farewell to ceramic typology analyses. For so long African-centred knowledge has been ignored in addressing this problem, yet it could be one way to usher us beyond this obvious dead-end (Nworu, 1996; Pikirayi, 1999; Pikirayi and Lindahl, 2013; Chirikure, 2016a,b). This paper is part of our recent efforts to reconfigure pottery studies of ancient Nyanga in a new direction. It explores the social lifecycle of Manyika pottery from modern-day Nyanga, right from production to discard to develop an emic perspective of the relations that possibly existed between the Later Iron Age (CE 1300–1900) communities of Nyanga and the various broken potsherds and few complete earthenware archaeologists recovered from their upland and lowland residences (senus Henrickson and McDonald, 1983; Appadurai, 1986; David and Kramer, 2001; Hodder and Hutson, 2003; Stark, 2003; Fowler, 2008; Pikirayi, 2007; Skibo, 1992, 2013 Ashley, 2010). This approach is in liaison with decolonial studies trends in global archaeology and ethnoarchaeology, where archaeologists and anthropologists now recognise the significance of locally-centred knowledges when approaching material culture (Dietler and Herbich, 1989; Collett, 1992; Lindahl and Matenga, 1995; Nworu, 1996; Gosselain, 2000; 2016; Ogundele, 2006; Pikirayi, 2007; 2015; Karega-Munene and Schmidt, 2010; Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010; Lane, 2011; Metwata et al., 2013; Nyamushosho, 2014; Chirikure, 2016; 2020; Haber, 2016; Cun- ingham and MacEachern, 2016; Chirikure et al., 2018; Chipangura et al., 2019). In light of this, we approach decolonised archaeology as a philosophical and archaeological practice that is independent of colonial prejudices and hegemonic discourses; hence studying and portraying past societies in a more engaging way that resonates with local meanings and contexts of their material culture (Stahl, 1995; Stark, 2003; Pikirayi, 2015; Cunningham and MacEachern, 2016; Haber, 2016; Chirikure et al., 2017). What we attempt here is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater or create a new academy that wipes off colonial wisdom, but decentring Eurocentrism which seeks to universalise archaeological meanings, and processes. Thus, our study builds on recent contributions which attempt to augment the current understanding of the everyday life of the Later Iron Age societies of ancient Nyanga using local epistemologies, ontologies, and practices (i.e. Mupira, 2001; Chirikure and Rehren, 2004; Murimbika, 2006; Shnjere, 2011; Nyamushosho, 2013, 2017; Pasipanodya et al., 2016; Chipangura, 2020; Nyamushosho and Chirikure, 2020). Nevertheless, the focus this time is on archaeological pottery which was recovered from the modern-day Manyika territory.

2. A brief background to the Nyanga agricultural complex and the Manyika

The Nyanga agricultural complex is one of the unique Iron Age landscapes in southern Africa that portrays a colossal footprint of intensified agricultural systems of Bantu agropastoral societies that thrived between CE 1300 and 1900 (Pikirayi, 2001; Soper, 2002; Mitchell, 2004; Philipson, 2005; Mupira, 2013). Geographically the complex is bordered by Nyangombe River to the north and Zowne River to the south (Figure 1). The majority of previous archaeological invesigations (e.g. Randall-Maclver, 1906; Mason, 1933; Martin, 1937; Summers, 1958; Sutton, 1984; Soper, 2002) concentrated on the north-eastern edge of the complex; however, recent studies uncovered architectural and ceramic evidence which extended the boundaries of the complex further north and south as far as Avila Mission (Shnjere, 2011) and the Zumba Mountains (Katsamudanga, 2007) respectively.

The recreated culture-historical sequence which is based on pottery style, decoration attributes, and radiocarbon data recognises the makers of Bambata ware (CE 150–650) as the earliest inhabitants of Nyanga, followed by the makers of Ziwa ware (CE 300–1000) and lastly those of Nyanga ware (see Mason, 1935; Martin, 1937; Schofield, 1948; Summers, 1958; Manyanga, 1995; Soper, 2002; Manyanga and Shnjere, 2012; Huffman, 2007). The later ware is associated with the terrace-building community that occupied the agricultural complex between the 14th and the 20th centuries (Soper, 2002). Nyanga ware mainly comprised necked pots with out-turning lips, hemispherical bowls with open lips, open bowls with out-sloping lips, and large-mouthed pots with out-turning lips (see Figure 2). These were occasionally decorated with raised ribs and cross-hatched incisions (Mason, 1933; Summers, 1958; Manyanga, 1995; Soper, 2002; Manyanga and Shnjere, 2012).

The cultural continuity of Nyanga ware into the recent times is denoted by the stylistic similarities with pottery from descendant Shona groups such as the Manyika who gradually succumbed to 19th-century British colonialism (Martin, 1937; Bhila, 1982). Today most of the Manyika descendants populate the area” drained by the Pungwe and Odzi Rivers (Figure 1). It is in this area where vast samples of broken and complete clay pots belonging to the terrace builders of Nyanga were recovered at archaeological sites such as Bingaguru, Watsomba, Dowe, Pungwe, Mkondwe, Murahwa, Fishpit and many others in the Nyanga National Park (see Figure 1). Since the 16th century, the term Manyika has been erroneously used by Africanists as an umbrella term to bracket the majority of the Shona communities native to eastern Zimbabwe, including the Sanunya, Hwesa, and Maungwe (Ranger, 1989). Thus, the term was more of a geographical expression than an ethnic one (Bernhard n.d.; Beach, 1980; Bhila, 1982; Mupira, 2001). However, now that meanings have been rethought in accordance with the local histories (Bhila, 1982; Ranger, 1989), the term Manyika will be used in this study to refer to the descendants of the Mutasa dynasty which at some point was a tributary dynasty of the Mutapa polity based in northern Zimbabwe (Bhila, 1982: 10, 157; Beach, 2002: 229). The Manyika were attractive for our ethnohistorical study because when compared with other autochthons of the Nyanga archaeological landscape, there is a huge collection of historical records dating back to the 16th century which documented many aspects of their history and culture (Theal, 1898; Bhila, 1982; Gelfand, 1977; Ranger, 1989; Beach, 2002). Furthermore, even though the technology of pottery making is gradually dying among the Manyika as in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa mainly because of modernity downplaying pottery consumption, it has managed to survive into the 21st century (Martin, 1941; Stead, 1947; Lawton, 1965; Gelfand, 1974; Gosselain, 1992, 2000; Fredriksen, 2009). Moreover, as similarly experienced in most parts of Africa during the precolonial and colonial eras, pottery of the Manyika fascinated many Europeans. As a result, some aspects relating to how their pots were produced and consumed were documented by traders, hunters, missionaries, travellers, explorers, ethnographers, and colonial administrators. Therefore, it is the main objective of this study to consolidate and examine this archived data to contribute towards a better understanding of everyday life in ancient Nyanga.

3. Methodology

Insights informing our study largely draws upon the ethnohistory of the Manyika. A comprehensive archival study of published and unpublished accounts from the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (Mutare, Bulawayo, and Harare), National Archives of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo), National Free Library of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo), Africa University Kent M. Weeks History and Archives (Mutare) and the Zimbabwe (Bulawayo), National Free Library of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo), National Free Library of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo), Africa University Kent M. Weeks History and Archives (Mutare) and the University of Cape Town African Studies Library was undertaken on the Manyika archaeology, history, and anthropology. The datasets included manuscripts, books, diaries, maps, photographs, reports, monographs, autobiographies, and journal articles in particular those from early explorers such as Theodore Bent (1892), Carl Mauch (Burke, 1969), Martin (1941), Stead (1947); Anne Lawton (1965), Michael Gelfand (1977) and others. However, it must be noted that like other sources from the colonial archive, there were some inconsistencies in some observations, hence we cross-evaluated the data with other scholarly sources. The indigenous experiences of some members of our research team who are native Manyika, and ethnographic insights we collected from elders

2 Currently and commonly known as Mutasa District.
of the Mutasa dynasty (including potters) also augmented the data. Manyika elders were engaged based on their knowledge of the subject matter and primarily served as the main reviewers who verified and substantiated our data. Ultimately, the combined dataset produced an integrated perspective of the lifecycle of Manyika pottery that stretched from production to discard. However, we undertook this study with the awareness that the worldview and practices of the Manyika like elsewhere were subject to continuity and change (see Lane, 1994/5; (1994-2000)).

4. Pots among the Manyika: ethnohistorical and ethnographic insights

4.1. From clay sourcing to vessel distribution

Among the Manyika, a pot is known as hari in the local language. In the plural, hari are clay containers for both liquid and solid matter. The art of pot making is locally known as kuumba hari and as largely observed among the broader Shona-speaking groups, pot making is mostly done by women (Aschwanden, 1989; Ellert, 1984; Jacobson-Widding, 1992; Collett, 1993; Lindahl and Matenga, 1995; Ndoro, 1996; Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010; Nyamushosho, 2017). The available data on Manyika pottery production largely draws from the work of Martin (1941), a Rhodesian farmer and amateur archaeologist who excavated some of the Nyanga stone-walled settlements at Mkondwe farm in Muponda Village in Penhalonga and that of Lawton (1965: 510), a former ethnologist at the then South African Museums in Cape Town who collected the data as part of her Master of Arts degree in Social Anthropology at the University of Cape Town.

As usual in most places in southern Africa, the initial phase preceding production of hari is raw material sourcing (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965) and generally, a special clay locally known as dongo is used by the potters for making their earthenware. This is meticulously quarried from nearby streams and riverbanks. Nearby termite hills are also potential clay mines since they have large quantities of kaolinite but there are no written records that some of the clay might have been mined from these sources. As noted by Martin (1941: 53) during her observations of two female potters in Muponda Village, clay sourcing can be a household effort where other family members of the potter including young children can

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Figure 1. The Nyanga complex showing the distribution of some archaeological sites situated in the Manyika territory. Source: Authors own.

3 Now known as Iziko Museums.
give a hand towards quarrying and transportation of the clay. Usually, the quality of the clay and the costs needed to transport it determines the selection of a quarry. Mining of clay is usually done using a hoe (badza) and the quality of clay is evaluated based on its texture and colour (Lawton, 1965). After being dug, the wet clay is covered using lumps of soil to maintain the moisture content and is later transported to the desired destination using reed baskets locally known as tswanda (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965). The next stages involve clay preparation and vessel construction. These two processes are mostly carried out in the open space within a homestead (Martin, 1941: 59) or within a specific hut designated as the workshop (Lawton, 1965: 511). Since pottery making is generally a dry weather craft, the working area must be shady to prevent sudden drying of the pots whilst still being manufactured (Lawton, 1965: 485).

Amongst the Manyika clay processing and sourcing overlap; for instance, during quarrying, a potter can refine the gathered clay by removing impurities such as grass, roots, and grit (Martin, 1941: 53). As we noted in Watsomba area, removal of these impurities is also achieved through pounding the clay on a stone slab (guyo) using a wooden pestle (mutwi), a similar practice was also recorded in Muponda area (see Martin, 1941: 53). Clay processing prevents the manufactured wares from cracking and because of that, it is only when the clay is smooth and plastic that vessel construction begins (Martin, 1941: 54; Lawton, 1965: 510).

Most of the Manyika potters design their earthenware in a similar sequence and similar spherical- form which is common in most parts of Africa (see Stead, 1947; Lawton, 1965; Gosselain, 1992; Ndoro, 1996; Arthur, 2002; Fowler, 2008; Wynne-Jones and Mapunda, 2008; Lindahl and Pikirayi, 2010; Fredriksen and Bandama, 2016; Thebe and Sadr, 2017). Thus, their anatomy is gendered, hence their physical structure is likened to that of a woman (munhukadzi). Firstly, the body (dumbu) of the pot is moulded; this is followed by the shoulder (bendekete), neck (mut-sipa), lip (muromo), and lastly the base (garo) (Figure 3). As far as the local potters and consumers are concerned, these anatomical parts are integral in determining the shape of a vessel (also see Stead, 1947) but not its local name. Thus, the local classification is built upon the consideration of the shape, and size of the vessel since there is a correlation between the function of a pottery vessel and its size and shape. The moulding process is achieved either using the coiling or pulling method (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965). As the vessel nears completion the Manyika potters smoothen its surface. The surface on the inside is smoothened using a curvy fragment of a broken calabash or pot locally known as mbemba whilst a flat-edged instrument (chipariro) is used on the outside (Martin, 1941). The newly formed vessel is also polished on the outer surface using a small quartz pebble (hurungudo) which is usually collected from the nearby river basins. Thus, among the Manyika smoothening preceded polishing the pot's surface (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965).

Decoration of the earthenware commences after it has been sun-dried for a while (Martin, 1941: 54–56; Lawton, 1965: 511). Most of the clay pot vessels used by the Manyika, regardless of their functions, are undecorated. The occasional motifs (zvidziro in plural) include...
cross-hatched incisions, graphited triangles, chevron bands, single line, and oblique incisions which are executed on either of the body, shoulder or the neck of a vessel (Martin, 1941: 52, 56; Stead, 1947: 101; Lawton, 1965: 511–516, 524; Jacobson-Widding, 1992: 16). The meanings of decorations on Manyika clay pots range from aesthetics (Martin, 1941: 56) to symbolism (Stead, 1947: 100). For instance, some moulded rib or lug decorations (minti) on small-sized necked pots are metaphorically regarded as breasts whilst the incised triangle motifs are associated with elegance (see Stead, 1947: 100; Jacobson-Widding, 1992: 12; Gosselain, 1999: 213).

The duration of drying a pot is generally determined by the prevailing weather. Usually, the pot is fired under an oxidising atmosphere; however, men are not welcome during the firing process since the process is metaphorically rated as disastrous to their potency (Jacobson-Widding, 1992: 10–11). Methods of firing a clay pot depend on the potter’s choices and constraints, particularly the availability of the desired fuel. Some Manyika potters observed by Martin (1941) preferred wood from Brachystegia speciformis woodlands locally known as musa and grass (Martin, 1941: 57), whilst those we interviewed in Watsonba opted for the bark of musa tree and cow dung (ndove). However, the use of open fires within the homestead, where the firing process ranges between 20 and 120 min is commonly practiced (Martin, 1941: 57–58; Lawton, 1965: 512).

On matters concerning labour organisation and mentorship of the technology of pottery making, ethnohistorical sources on the Manyika potters stress social connections between potters and their students as critical to the mastery of the art (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965). However, the skill mostly circulates within families and like most Shona groups it is critical to the mastery of the art (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965: 51). The majority of the Manyika kitchenware vessels are usually kept within the homestead, where the firing process ranges between 20 and 120 min is commonly practiced (Martin, 1941: 57–58; Lawton, 1965: 512).

4.2. From consumption to discard

Though heavily threatened by the proliferation of metal and plastic ware in most homesteads, hari continues to be visible in the daily lives of the modern Manyika. Most ethnohistorical sources emphasise the consumption of clay vessels as kitchenware (midziyo yekubikira) used by mazinai for preparing everyday meals for their families and in some instances, occasional meals for attendees of public gatherings such as nhimbe/jangano (work parties), kugadzwa humambwa/hushe, (chief’s inaugurations), mariro/rufu (funerals), chenura (soul-cleansing ceremonies and traditional post-mortem), and many others illustrated in Table 1 (Stead, 1947; Gelfand, 1974, 1977; Bhila, 1982; Ellert, 1984; Gelfand et al., 1985; Jacob-Widding, 1992; Fredriksen, 2009: 100–127). Among the most common culinary vessels is the mukate, also known as tsuyi or tsambakodzi (Martin, 1941; Stead, 1947; Gelfand, 1977; Jacobson-Widding, 1992; Fredriksen, 2009).

Figure 3. A Manyika potter with some of her products, photographed around the 1960s (Source: P. Matzigkeit).
(rain-petitioning), maganzvo/matatenda (harvest thanksgiving), kugadzwa humambo/hushe, mariro/rufu, chenura, kuripa/kutanda ngozi (appeasement of avenging spirits), and kugara nhaka (inheritance) (see Table 1). Mhamba is usually reserved for adults and its consumption is sparing unless during special occasions. On the other hand, magada is a beverage for all that is freely consumed anytime by both the young and grownups. Martin (1941) gives a fragmented but insightful description of how Manyika brewing pots are used to make mhamba, nevertheless, the

Figure 4. Manyika pottery vessels recorded by W. H. Stead more than 72 years ago Source: Adapted from Stead (1947:101).
### Table 1. Manyika ceremonies and other occasional events associated with pottery consumption.

| Ceremony                  | Description                                                                 | Use/s of clay pots                                                                                      | References                          |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Rokoto                     | Annual rain petitioning ceremony conducted before the beginning of every agricultural rainy season to enhance fertility. It is conducted at the village or chieftain level, at a sacred sanctuary in or outside the village such as under muhacha (Parinari curatellifolia) tree or mountain top. Directed by the svikiro (spirit medium) who asks for adequate rains and bumper harvest from Mwari (God) via the royal ancestry. | *Pots are used to prepare, store, transport, and serve food and drink consumed at the ceremony, particularly beer which is brewed, transported, and served using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga*<br>*Storing rain petitioning paraphernalia such as snuff consumed by the mhondoros (ancestral spirits) through their svikiros ( mediums)* | Gelfand (1974), 1977; Bhila (1982); Ellert (1984); Jacob-Widding (1992); Nyamushosho (2012) |
| Maganzvo                  | Annual thanksgiving ceremony is conducted after the rainy season where a village collectively gather at a sacred sanctuary such as under muhacha (Parinari curatellifolia) tree or mountain top to celebrate the successful agricultural season. | *Preparing, storing, transporting, and serving beer used in libations, as well as drinking by the participants*<br>*Storing rain petitioning paraphernalia such as snuff and water consumed by the mhondoros (ancestral spirits) through their svikiros ( mediums)*<br>*Preparing food feasted at the ceremony* | Martin (1941); Gelfand (1974), (1977); Nyamushosho (2012) |
| Kutamba guva              | A soul/spirit cleansing ceremony conducted a year after the death of a family member to bring back and welcome the spirit of a deceased adult individual into contact with its living family members where it can find joy in protecting its own, especially children. The ceremony is also conducted to ascertain the cause of death to the deceased by consulting a n'anga or svikiro to prevent a similar death. | *Pots are used to prepare food and drink consumed at the ceremony, particularly beer which is brewed, transported, and served using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga*<br>*Storing n'anga's or svikiro's paraphernalia such as medicines and snuff used by the n'anga or svikiro in the ritual;* | Gelfand (1974), (1977); Nyamushosho (2012) |
| Kutamba mudzimu           | An inheritance ceremony where the wife or husband of the deceased is given a new spouse from the family. The ceremony also includes the distribution of deceased belongings. | Pots are used to prepare food and drink consumed at the ceremony, particularly beer which is brewed, transported, and served using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga | Gelfand (1974), (1977); Nyamushosho (2012) |
| Madirambamba              | A ceremony conducted to pacify the spirit of an angered ancestor. | *Pots are used to prepare food and drink consumed at the ceremony, particularly beer which is brewed, transported, and served using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga* | Gelfand (1974), (1977) |
| Kutanda ngozi             | A ceremony conducted to repatriate, appease, and drive away the avenging spirit of a murdered individual by either offering a lady as a wife or livestock as compensation to the family of the deceased | *Pots are used to prepare food and drink consumed at the ceremony, particularly beer which is brewed, transported, and served using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga* | Stead (1947); Gelfand (1974), (1977); Nyamushosho (2012) |
| Kutanda boso              | A self-shaming ceremony conducted by son or daughter seeking atonement to get rid of poverty in their life caused by the avenging spirit of their mother whom they would have wronged or assaulted when they were still alive. | *Pots are used to brew beer consumed at the ceremony using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga* | Gelfand (1974), (1977) |
| Mudirira mumbe            | A ceremony where a bull is dedicated and named after an ancestor or deceased family head | *Pots are used to brew beer and food consumed at the ceremony using a variety of clay pots e.g., gate, mbairo, musudza, pfuko, nhera, mbiya, and hwenga* | Gelfand (1974), (1977) |
| Rufu                      | A funeral ceremony particularly the death of a wife | *Pots are used to brew beer and food consumed at the ceremony* | Gelfand (1974), (1977) |

(continued on next page)
account resonates with the experiences of some of our Manyika colleagues and that of Gelfand (1977).

The brewing process involves various stages in which a very large-sized necked pot with out-turning lip locally known as *gate* or *chikanga* is used to malt the cereal grain overnight (*kunyika*) and boil the malt (*masese*). Then *mbiziro*, a medium necked pot with out-turning lip is

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**Table 1 (continued)**

| Ceremony          | Description                                                                 | Use/s of clay pots                                                                 | References                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Mahumbwe /Mamhuza | Manyika version of playing house aimed at fostering gender roles in minors (5-14 years) | *Wife is buried with one of her pots placed near her head in the grave*            | Nyamushosho (2012)          |
| Marooro /Muchato  | A traditional ceremony where husband and wife are joined in matrimony       | *Ceremony is celebrated by feasting food & beer. The new wife comes in with new clay pots* | Gelfand (1974), (1977)      |
| Nhimbe/jangano    | A community collaboration or work party in tasks like ploughing, weeding & harvesting | *Pots are used to brew beer and food consumed at the ceremony*                     | Gelfand (1974), (1977); Nyamushosho and Chirikure (2020) |
| Kagadzwa humambo | Chief inauguration rite                                                     | *Pots are used to prepare food and drink consumed at the ceremony*                | Nyamushosho (2012)          |

Source: Authors own.

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**Figure 5.** The inside of a reconstructed kitchen hut in the Nyanga National Park showing pot stands on a *chikuva*. Source: Adapted from Quellet (2014).

**Figure 6.** Manyika kitchenware on a drying stand (*dara*) and a *har1* in background. Photographed in Nyakatsapa village around the 1960s. Source: P. Matzigkeit.

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5 In some texts, *mbiziro* (see Figure 7) is presented as a unique big pot with two mouths whose use restricted to chiefs (*madzimambo*) and headmen (*madzisadunhu*), at ceremonies such as *maganzvo* (Martin, 1941: 53; Ellert, 1984: 103).
finally used to ferment the *masese* to produce *mhamba*; the process normally takes one or two weeks. However, when brewing beer for the village or ward-level agricultural fertility rituals such as *rokoto* and *mandacona*, the use of gate and mbizo is customarily restricted to old women (*chembere*) who have reached menopause. This is done to avoid polluting the beer by sexually active and fertile women who are viewed as impure (*Gelfand*, 1974, 1977). To facilitate the pouring of liquids most of these vessels are usually designed with out-turning lips (*Martin*, 1941; *Stead*, 1947) and in terms of size their height can stretch up to a metre (Figures 4 and 7). Gate and mbizo are generally undecorated and mostly today they are produced in small quantities as they are easily being replaced with 200-litre drums and large metal pots used to make *mhamba* (*Ellert*, 1984:98). Nevertheless, because several Manyika people still consume *mhamba* and *magada* particularly when conducting rituals, they are still visible in most villages.

Usually, when the beer is ready for drinking and libations, it is stored and served in the medium to small-sized pots and bowls with out-turning lips such as *musudze*, *chipfuko*, and *mbiya* (*Stead*, 1947; *Lawton*, 1965; *Gelfand*, 1977). *Musudze* also known as *chirongo* or *pfuko*, is also used as a container in which women transport water from the source to their respective homesteads. In many instances, the vessel is also used by many families as storage vessels for drinking water (*Martin*, 1941; *Stead*, 1947; *Lawton*, 1965). Prominent decorations on, *musudze* include incised triangle motifs which are mostly executed on its shoulder or neck (*Stead*, 1947). *Chipfuko*, a smaller version of *musudze* is also used to store and serve *mhamba* or *magada*. However, in some contexts, the same pot is metaphorically used as a medium for communicating a bride’s virginity status during marriage rites (*Stead*, 1947; *Jacobson-Widding*, 1992: 12; *Gosselain*, 1999: 213). For instance, after the first sexual encounter of newlyweds (sensu honeymoon) the groom’s aunts (*madzitite*) check the bedding to find out any form of bleeding; this confirms whether their nephew married a virgin (*mhandara*) or not. Resultantly, they are obliged by tradition to publicly present the findings of their enquiry to the family of the bride (*mwenga*). Therefore, if the *chipfuko* is filled with water to the brim, it means the *mwenga* was still a virgin when she had sexual intercourse with their nephew, and when half-filled, that means the other way.

Other large and medium-sized vessels are used for storing, transporting, and serving both liquid and solid foods by Manyika (*Martin*, 1941; *Stead*, 1947; *Lawton*, 1965; *Gelfand*, 1977; *Ellert*, 1984). Typical vessels include *denhe*, and *nhera* (see Figures 4 and 7). Denhe also known as *muzeka* or *njeka* is a large neckless pot designed with an in-sloping lip for storing *upfu* (maize meal), dried grain and legumes such as *mapfunde*, *rukweza/njera*, *njene*, *mhunga*, *fondokoto*, *nyimo* and pumpkin seeds which are normally consumed as food and at times used as seed for sowing in the forthcoming planting season. Based on the average measurements we recorded during our ethnographic survey, the diameter and height dimensions of *denhe* range between 27-45 cm and 40–100 cm respectively, and generally its volume can go up to thirty litres. In the absence of *denhe*, gate can be used to serve its function since its capacity is also larger. For instance, it can hold up to 50 kg of cereal (*Martin*, 1941; *Stead*, 1947; *Ellert*, 1984). As we noted, *nhera* is the smallest vessel in most homesteads. This is a semi-hemispherical bowl with a straight lip that is used to store manyu (salt), *mafuta* (vegetable or animal fat), or *zvirungo* (spices) used during cooking. At the secondary level, *nhera* is used to store *mudhombo* (traditional stuff) which is mostly ‘snuffed’ or inhaled into the nasal cavity by *masvikiro* (spirit mediums) to facilitate *kusvikirwa* (process of the possession of the spirit medium by the spirit of the dead) during ritual activities such as *maganze*.

Rarely does one find the big brewing pots such as gate and mbizo stored inside the *imba yekubikira*. Mostly because they are large-sized and occasionally used, they are normally kept inside the granary (hozi) where they will only be brought out if there is a need to brew. The same also applies to *denhe*. In as much as some *denhe* vessels maybe placed in the *imba yekubikira* to facilitate access to *upfu* for preparing everyday meals such as sadza, most *denhe* are usually placed inside the hozi as ‘silos’ for containing harvested and processed grain and legume crops such as *mapfunde*, *rukweza/njera*, *njene*, *mhunga*, *fondokoto*, *nyimo* and pumpkin seeds which are normally preserved for future consumption and as seed for the forthcoming planting season.

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*Figure 7.* Manyika pottery vessels recorded by C. *Martin* more than 75 years ago. Source: Adapted from *Martin* (1941:357).

*Figure 8.* A discarded *denhe* now secondarily used as a chicken coup. Source: Authors own.

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*Image 1:* A discarded *denhe* now secondarily used as a chicken coup. Source: Authors own.
(caption on next page)
Clay pot vessels also feature as household ware in child plays and games such as *muhwambwe* (Gelfand, 1960: 36–37). This is a traditional Shona version of the playing house game which is aimed at fostering gender roles and norms for minors aged between 5 and 14 years. Hence, they imitate their parent’s behaviour by making mock shelters and pretending to have their own families in the open (harvested fields) (Gelfand, 1960: 36). Mothers supply necessary kitchenware such as old *mbiya* and *mukate* which are used by senior girls (who act as mothers) to cook *sadza* for their families, whilst big boys (fathers) drink *maheu* from beer vessels such as *chifuku* making it as if they are drinking real beer (Gelfand, 1960: 37).

Not much has been recorded concerning longevity, recycling, and discard patterns of Manyika pottery, but considering the cursory mentioning by some ethnographers, there is a possibility that ritual vessels have a better life span when compared to quotidian vessels which easily break as a result of constant use in the kitchen. For instance, as observed by Gelfand (cited below), some beer pots can be intentionally discarded on remote sanctuaries such as hills or around sacred trees such as *muhakata* (*partinari curatelifolila*) which are regarded as the abode of the *mhora* (lion spirits) during rituals such as *maganozo* or *mandaona*.

“*We have left your pots of beer at home, but you may drink this pot of beer, we have brought it to you.*” (Gelfand, 1974: 81)

Manyika pottery vessels are also intentionally discarded as mortuary goods when a married woman is buried with some of her kitchenware (Gelfand, 1977: 45). On the other hand, small-sized pots or bowls containing a concoction prepared by diviners (*n’anga*) for their clients are intentionally broken into sherds on a crossroad (*mharadzano*) as a ritual to set them free from *mashavi* (evil spirits) (Gelfand et al., 1985: 77, 340). In some instances, sizeable potsherds from broken pots (Figure 8) were reused as *hwenga* (pans), *zvirugu* (chicken coops), dustpans, or platters for feeding domesticated animals (see Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965; Gelfand, 1974; 1977; Ellert, 1984).

5. Discussion: integrating the ethnohistorical insights and the archaeology

The Manyika, ethnohistorical data enables us to situate ceramics recovered from the Nyanga agricultural complex into the everyday context that possibly governed their life cycle right from production to discard. Firstly, the data throws light on the processes and complexities of pottery production as handicraft and these are concordant to the archaeological record (sensu Stark, 2003). For instance, in terms of clay procurement strategies, there is a high probability that suitable clay was procured, vessel fashioning, and skill circulation. Hence, the probability is very high that Nyanga potters were predominately women who extensively relied on labour from their kin to achieve their production targets.

The Manyika ethnohistorical data also throws light on the spatial context of pottery craft production and distribution in the Nyanga agricultural complex. According to the ethnohistorical data, pot making is a dry weather handicraft mostly done within homestead spaces either in a designated hut or open space, however, not far distant from clay sources (Martin, 1941: 59; Lawton, 1965: 511). Considering this we can tentatively ascribe open spaces inside and outside the stone enclosures previously identified as residential zones at sites such as Fishpit, and Mkondwe (Martin, 1937:1038; Summers, 1958:65; Soper, 2002:182), as also activity areas for pottery craft production and retailing (see Figure 9). There is also a possibility that some spherical hammerstones recovered at Mkondwe (Mason, 1933:574) might have been used for processing clay to prevent the manufactured pots from cracking. Whilst we are not certain on where exactly pottery was moulded, based on the surface colour of Nyanga pottery – which ranges between black, brown and grey, (pointers to open firing) (manyanga, 1995: 38) – it is clear that the firing process took place in the open space encircling the pit structures and enclosures where other crafts such as iron smelting were undertaken (see Summers, 1958: 61, 98–101; Soper, 2002: 115–117; Chirikure and Rehren, 2004: 152). This is corroborated by ethno-archaeological data from the neighbouring Shona cluster groups in Zimbabwe (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995: 31; Pikirayi and Lindahl, 2013) and other Sub-Saharan Africa ethnic groups, such as the Ari, Oromo, Gulo-Makeda, and Gamo of Ethiopia (Lyons and Freeman, 2009: 87; Wayessa, 2011: 307; Arthur, 2013: 8,12), Kikumbiro of Buganda (Giblin and Kigongo, 2012: 70); Mafia of coastal Tanzania (Wynne-Jones and Mapunda, 2008: 1), Luo of Kenya (Dietler and Herbich, 1994: 462), and Zulu of South Africa (Fowler, 2011: 193) which highlight household space at different agropastoral sites as shared space that accommodated production and distribution of various crafts such as pottery, beads, cotton cloth, metals, and music instruments. Nevertheless, these conclusions should be substantiated by further ethnoarchaeological research since activity areas for the ceramic *chaîne opératoire* cannot be homogenised (Costin, 2000; Stark, 2003).

Figure 9. Above are reconstructed functional classes of pottery recovered at Later Iron Age settlements in the Nyanga uplands Source: Authors own (Ceramic data was adapted from Bernhard n.d.; Mason, 1933; Summers, 1958; Soper, 2002). Below is the site map of Fishpit depicting houses and open space that was probably used for crafting pottery (Adapted from Soper, 2002:181).
The Manyika ethnohistorical data offer archaeologists an opportunity to access the socioeconomic settings that possibly governed Nyanga potters and their handicrafts. Thus, from the modern Manyika we are presented with potters who operate on a part-time basis (Martin, 1941; Lawton, 1965). Whilst these artisans have the liberty to fashion their products using their own stylistic and decorative discretion which imprints desired aesthetics or metaphors, the potters are nonchalant about the stylistic attributes of their products, so long as they can fulfill their function. Consequently, the common denominator between pottery from modern and ancient Nyanga is the abundance of unadorned ware (see Figures, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 11). The reason why archaeologists have mostly recovered rarely decorated pottery in the complex is probably owing to the potter's stylistic choices in light of their everyday roles rather than incapacity to innovate (contra Summers, 1958). Thus, perhaps the answer to the burning question archaeologists pose on why Nyanga pottery (and other pottery from neighbouring Iron Age sites in southern Africa, see David et al., 1988; Nyamushosho, 2020) was rarely decorated (i.e. Summers, 1958; Manyanga, 1995; Soper, 2002) is being observed as it was largely quotidian. The presence of graphite burnishing on the recorded ethnographic vessels (Martin, 1941: 56; Lawton, 1965: 511) parallels typological data of Nyanga pottery recovered from both the upland and lowland sites (see Mason, 1933: 574–578; Summers, 1958: 139–146; Manyanga, 1995: 40; Soper, 2002: 251–256; Shenjere, 2011: 314). Thus, considering the rarity of local graphite deposits (Summers, 1958: 313) there is a possibility that some potters in the Nyanga archaeological complex outsourced graphite from their neighbours (Summers, 1958: 313). More research is needed to identify these places.

The Manyika ceramic ethnohistorical and ethnographic data elucidates the everyday roles of clay pots in the lives of the Nyanga agropastoralists (see Nyamushosho and Chirikure, 2020 for a detailed discussion). Reconstruction of some of the broken and partially complete pots recovered at Mukondwe, Murahwa, Fishpit, and other upland settlements in the Nyanga National Park revealed a range of functional classes that probably governed the use-life of Nyanga ware. As demonstrated in Figure 9, these medium to small-sized vessels included mbiya (2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13), chimbiya (10, 11, 15), and mukate (16). Based on their reconstituted sizes and shapes, all these vessels likely served as kitchenware which was used to prepare and serve everyday meals (Martin, 1941; Stead, 1947; Lawton, 1965; Jacob-Widding, 1992; Fredriksen, 2009). This is supported by the presence of soot stains on the surfaces of some of the vessels (see Figure 9) which probably accumulated as a result of continuous exposure to fire during cooking. Such a routine weakened the fabric of kitchenware, hence shortening its use-life. Perhaps this explains why most of the archaeologists working in the Nyanga agricultural complex recovered thousands of broken potsherds with soot stains (i.e. Randall-MacIver, 1906; Mason, 1933; Summers, 1958; Manyanga, 1995; Soper, 2002; Manyanga and Shenjere, 2012). Some of the cereal, legume, and animal food products that were cooked in the Nyanga ware probably included ground beans (nymbo), sorghum (mapfunde), game meat, and beef (nyma) from species such as Impala (mhara), buffalo (nyati), common cuke (mhembwe), waterbuck (dhumukwa), and cattle (momboka). Botanical, and faunal residues of these culitwins, and mammals were recovered in the Nyanga National Park (see Cook, 1958:152–158; Wild, 1958:175; Jonsson, 2002:249). Unless residue analysis is undertaken it will continue to be a challenge for archaeologists to identify the exact foods that were prepared in these vessels. Nonetheless, as part of the kitchenware, all these vessels were recovered around the utensils placed on surfaces (pl. 11, Figures 5) including pans (dzimba dzekubikira). Some of the dzimba dzekubikira included those excavated by Soper (2002:180–186) at Fishpit (Figure 9) and other house floors uncovered in the neighbouring settlements (see Mason, 1933; Martin, 1937; Summer, 1958).

The large to medium-sized vessels illustrated in Figure 9 likely served as beer brewing, and water (including beer) storage vessels (Martin, 1941; Stead, 1947; Lawton, 1965). Roger Summers' (1958: 144-145) assumption that Nyanga societies that resided in the uplands did not produce or consume large storage vessels such as gate, and musuzde, due to poverty of grain for brewing is undermined by the presence of these vessels. Additionally, his argument is too simplistic since it challenges their innovation capabilities. Whilst it is indisputable that the Nyanga uplands are heavily affected by soil erosion which makes it difficult to sustain extensive cereal agriculture as compared to the lowlands; there is little probability to believe that all the uplanders were not able to agriculturally adapt to this mountainous landscape. In fact, as recently revealed by the work of Robert Soper (2002) and the late Steve Chirawu (Chirawu et al., 1999), it is indubitable that cereal agriculture formed the basis of the subsistence of the Nyanga uplanders since they relied on terracing, intercropping, animal manure (mafuze), and many other agricultural adaptations which enhanced soil fertility. Above all, as highlighted by the ethnohistorical data, cereal beer has deep antiquity among the Manyika, and most importantly it is part of the liquid material culture that forms the lifeflow of the Manyika social life (Martin, 1941; Stead, 1947; Lawton, 1965; Gelfand, 1974; Bhila, 1982; Ellert, 1984). Therefore, there is a high probability that most households in the Nyanga uplands including those recorded at Mukondwe (Mason, 1933) and Fishpit (Soper, 2002) owned brewing and storage pots that were used at social gatherings that possibly included nhimbe, ndari, mukuwerera, mariro, kugara nhaka, maganweno, and many other ceremonies enlisted in Table 1 which are held in private or public spaces (see Stead, 1947; Gelfand, 1974; 1977; Bhila, 1982; Ellert, 1984; Gelfand et al., 1985; Jacob-Widding, 1992). Nevertheless, some of these vessels did not necessarily have the metric attributes that were anticipated by Summers (1958). This omission is prevalent in African archaeology (see Hall, 1983; Gosselain, 1992; Ndoro, 1996; Ogundele, 2006; Pikirayi, 2007; Ashley, 2010; Mtwatwa et al., 2013; Nyamushosho, 2017). Application of Eurocentric methods (that prioritise rims, decorations, and shapes of archaeological ceramics without attention to other body parts and overall vessel sizes) has robbed many ceramists the opportunity to appreciate the variability of pottery classes and uses. Ultimately, they fail to produce results that resonate with the communities who manufactured or used the pots in their everyday life. Elsewhere in east-central Arizona, Skibo et al.'s (1989) reconstruction of broken sherds recovered from Broken K Pueblo revealed inconsistencies in stylistic typologies that had been created by earlier researchers. Thus, the point to draw out is that the study at hand underscores the need to capture a wider array of descriptive variables, at the same time it is vital to be mindful of taphonomic processes and the challenges of estimating vessel sizes.

The lifecycle of clay pots produced and consumed by both the uplanders and lowlanders in the Nyanga complex was governed by some socially constructed restrictions, myths, and taboos conversant to the contemporary Manyika worldview. Whilst it is impossible for archaeology to directly uncover these intangible aspects, it is likely that part of the restrictions, prevented the washing of kitchenware in riverbeds (Gelfand, 1974: 79). Such acts of spiritual pollution were detrimental to their livelihood. They angered the Manyika ancestors, causing them to withhold the rains; these were key to agricultural prosperity.

Concerning discard, there is a possibility that some broken pottery vessels excavated at Mukondwe alongside a young female adult skeleton (see Mason, 1933; Galloway, 1937; Martin, 1937) were intentionally discarded as grave goods together with glass beads and metal bangles. This is corroborated by a similar mortuary practice recorded among the Manyika, where a married woman is buried with some of her kitcheware and jewellery upon death (Gelfand, 1977: 45). Furthermore, in as much as we do not have sufficient data, it is also possible that Nyanga pots were recycled upon breakage. Thus, large sherds from broken pots possibly regained a new lease on life as zvirugu (chicken coupes), hwenga (pans), dustpans, or a platter for feeding domesticated animals (i.e. chickens, cats, and dogs), transporting marasha (hot ambers) for making fire or burning powdered concoctions prepared by n'anga (diviners) for healing illnesses (matenda) (Gelfand et al., 1985: 20).
6. Conclusion

This ethnographical study highlights the potential of African-centred knowledge as an alternative framework for illuminating the lifecycle of Iron Age pottery from precolonial Nyanga. By situating the pottery in the Manyika worldview and practices, we were able to derive refreshing insights that shaped the production, distribution, consumption, and discard patterns of vessels that possibly served as storage, brewing, or kitchenware. In as much as we have tried to generate an understanding of the everyday and occasional roles of clay pots in ancient Nyanga, and how they contributed to the development of the agricultural complex; we do not render these chaine opératoire processes as captured in stasis since the 14th century. As we signalled earlier, this is a work in progress. We will conduct more ceramic ethnoarchaeological studies dedicated to fill the missing dimensions and establish our propositions. Whilst it is indubitable that much of our data was drawn from the colonial archive often marred by colonial prejudice, it is not surprising that when compared to the archaeological interpretations, the ethnohistorical dataset was more consistent with the Manyika worldview and practices. Thus, unlike ethnographers and historians, it appears archaeologists created a different version of Nyanga past difficult for most of the Manyika to relate with it. More importantly, we have shown here that what is required for archaeology to be qualified as decolonised is not necessarily doing away with the colonial archive or restricting the academy to Afropolitan scholars but approaching material culture in a more holistic manner that resonates with local ontologies, epistemologies, and practices. When viewed using a global lens, the implications of this study appeal to wider debates in archaeology, and (ceramic) ethnoarchaeology that calls for a transformation in knowledge production (i.e. Hall, 1983; Dietler and Herbich, 1989; Stahl, 1995; Ndoro, 1996; Stark, 2003; Karella-Munene and Schmidt, 2010; Lane, 2011; Pikirayi, 2015; Chirikure, 2016, 2020; Cunningham and MacEachern, 2016; Haber, 2016; Gosselain, 2016; Chirikure et al., 2017). Perhaps, one lesson that could be derived from our ongoing research is that there is enrichment in engaging local communities as key stakeholders in validating archaeological knowledge. In some ways, this resonates with the sort of ‘low science’ advocated by Gosselain (2011) and others (i.e. Cunningham and MacEachern, 2016) which accentuate the need to give local communities a meaningful voice in knowledge production.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Robert T. Nyamushosho: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Njabulo Chipangura, Foreman Bandam, Shadreck Chirikure, Munyaradzi Manyanga: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Takudzwa B. Pasipanodya: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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