



Standardization of ceramic assemblages: Transmission mechanisms and diffusion of morpho-functional traits across social boundaries



Valentine Roux

CNRS – Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie, 21 allée de l'université, 92023 Nanterre cedex, France

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 July 2014

Revision received 24 April 2015

Keywords:

Standardization

Diffusion

Pottery

India

Ethno-archaeology

Transmission

Social boundary

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question of the diffusion of morpho-functional traits across social boundaries. A present-day situation is examined. It describes the widespread adoption of a granite tempered water jar by two social communities of potters who used to produce distinct ranges of morpho-functional vessels. The analysis of the transmission mechanisms shows that diffusion of such traits occurred both through indirect and direct transmission. Indirect transmission occurred at the inter-group level while direct transmission under the form of technical guidance occurred at the intra-group level. These were triggered by the intention of the artisans to produce a model valued by the consumers and which sells well. This intention took place in a context of collapse of the previous economic system. These results suggest that in a context where ceramic production was previously diversified and economically complementary, the standardization of morpho-functional traits signals that an established «rule» was transgressed and therefore that major socio-economic changes took place.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

It is well recognized that material culture defines cultural boundaries whose relationship with social identities may, however, be difficult to establish, given that these boundaries fluctuate through a recurrent process of homogenization and fragmentation taking place at different space and time scales (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Gosselain, 2010a, 2011). Fragmentation and resistance to a general homogenizing process has been explored within different theoretical frameworks (Stark et al., 2008). Accordingly, it has been explained either in terms of group identity through affiliation dynamics and social distinction (Bowser, 2005, 2000; Degoy, 2008; Dietler and Herbich, 1998; Gosselain, 2000; Hegmon, 1998; Hodder, 1985; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Lemonnier, 2004, 1993; Stark, 1998), or in terms of adaptive advantages (Henrich and Boyd, 1998; McElreath et al., 2003; Richerson and Boyd, 2005; Shennan, 2002).

The homogenizing process raises the question of the transgression of the social borders established through affiliation and social distinction and experienced in daily life through the practice of a craft activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In archaeology, this transgression is explained in terms of either demic or cultural diffusion. The latter implies copying mechanisms, also called social learning strategies, which are described as either content dependent (adoption of a trait because it is considered superior to the other), or context dependent (adoption of a trait owing to its social or frequency

context) (Boyd and Richerson, 1985; Henrich and McElreath, 2003; Mesoudi, 2013; O'Brien and Bentley, 2011; Shennan, 2008). These copying mechanisms describe at the micro-level how traits may be copied and so how assemblages may become uniform.

However, many questions are still pending, on the one hand concerning the modes of transmission by which these copying mechanisms are implemented (direct or indirect transmission through movements of individuals, objects or ideas) depending on the nature of the trait (Gosselain, 2000; Sigaut, 1999); on the other hand concerning the conditions under which these modes of transmission and related copying mechanisms are triggered and can lead to the transgression of cultural boundaries. The hypothesis is that these conditions may correspond to regularities (Gallay, 2011; Roux, 2007), providing thus interpretative models for explaining large-scale historical dynamics responsible for the standardization of assemblages over large areas as evidenced, for example, by the oriental ceramic assemblages of the 2nd millennium BC (examples in Glatz, 2015).

This paper addresses these questions by providing new empirical data on the diffusion of morpho-functional traits between two social communities who once used to produce distinct ranges of vessels. In a first section, I describe the process through which the same type of jar characterized by both a specific clay recipe and vessel shape came to be adopted by all the artisans and distributed on a very large-scale area. Artisans belong to two distinct social groups both of which are specialized and work at the

E-mail address: valentine.roux@mae.u-paris10.fr

domestic scale. They are settled in the Jodhpur region (Rajasthan, India), scattered over an area of roughly 40 000 km². The water jars are distributed in both Rajasthan and Gujarat over an area of more than 140 000 km². In a second section I examine the context of diffusion, i.e. the context in which the social border between the two communities became “porous”. In a third part, I discuss the generality of the results obtained.

Let us specify that standardization, affecting either clay paste, composition of ceramic assemblages or metric dimensions, is most often studied to assess different types of specialization (Arnold, 2000, p. 200; Arnold and Nieves, 1992; Benco, 1988; Costin, 2001; Costin and Hagstrum, 1995; Kvamme et al., 1996; London, 1991; Longacre, 1999; Rice, 1991; Roux, 2003; Stark, 1995). This paper examines the standardization of ceramic assemblages (clay material and vessel shapes), but not in relation to craft specialization. Numerous examples are reported of craft specialists occupying the same geographical area and producing at a time t diverse ceramic assemblages (characterized by different ensembles of morpho-functional types) and, at a time $t + 1$ or $- 1$, uniform assemblages (characterized by same morpho-functional types). This process through which a diversified production becomes uniform is examined here.

1. Data and method

The region under study is the Jodhpur region. It includes mainly the districts of Jodhpur and Barmer. It is inhabited by two endogenous communities of potters: the Moila Kumhar who are Muslims and the Prajapat Kumhar who are Hindu. They live apart in different villages, or in the same villages (ex. Mokalsar, Siwana, Pachpadra, Banar, Fig. 1).

The Moila potters of the Jodhpur and Barmer districts fall in 40 villages and 354 households. All the Moila potters entertain family relationships with matrimonial alliances within the Jodhpur region. The Prajapat potters of the Jodhpur and Barmer districts

are few in numbers. They represent 10% of the Prajapat practicing 30 years ago. They live in rural production centers – Pachpadra and Sathin –, urban production center – Jodhpur city – and isolated villages. None of the Hindu potters distributed between the villages and the centers entertain family or professional relationships with each other.

We surveyed 15 Moila villages accounting for 259 households, 8 of them comprising more than 10 households (Banar, Banjara, Boranada Basni, Ramasani, Rudakali, Salawas, Sangasni, Sar). We surveyed three Hindu rural centers – Pachpadra with 40 potters’ households, Mokalsar with 12 potters’ households and Sathin with 5 potters’ households –, three Hindu isolated villages with one to three households (Palasni, Bisalpur, Hungaon), and Jodhpur city with 5 Hindu potters’ households (Fig. 1).

Up to 30 years ago, Prajapat and Moila Kumhar used to manufacture distinct ranges of ceramic vessels, the former being specialized in storage and transfer jars and the latter in “kitchen ware”. They were not in competition; they were complementary, distributing their pots through different social and economic networks. The Prajapat Kumhar used to exchange their ceramic production against cereals within the *jajmani* system. This system was well known in traditional India. Potters had to provide client families with specific vessel types at particular times of the year (e.g., birth, betrothal, marriage, and death). In exchange, they received a portion of their client’s crops. Their revenues were complemented by other professional occupations (often agricultural labor) as well as by distributing their production within economic networks through direct (in the case of rural centers or villages) or indirect sales (in the case of rural or urban centers). The Moila Kumhar used to sell “kitchen ware” through economic channels, either directly to the peasants (Hindu and Muslims), or indirectly to Jodhpuri shopkeepers or middlemen. They were important suppliers to Jodhpur, the main city of this area, the Hindu potters of Jodhpur not making the utilitarian vessels consumed by the urban population, i.e. mainly churns, cooking pots and dough troughs.

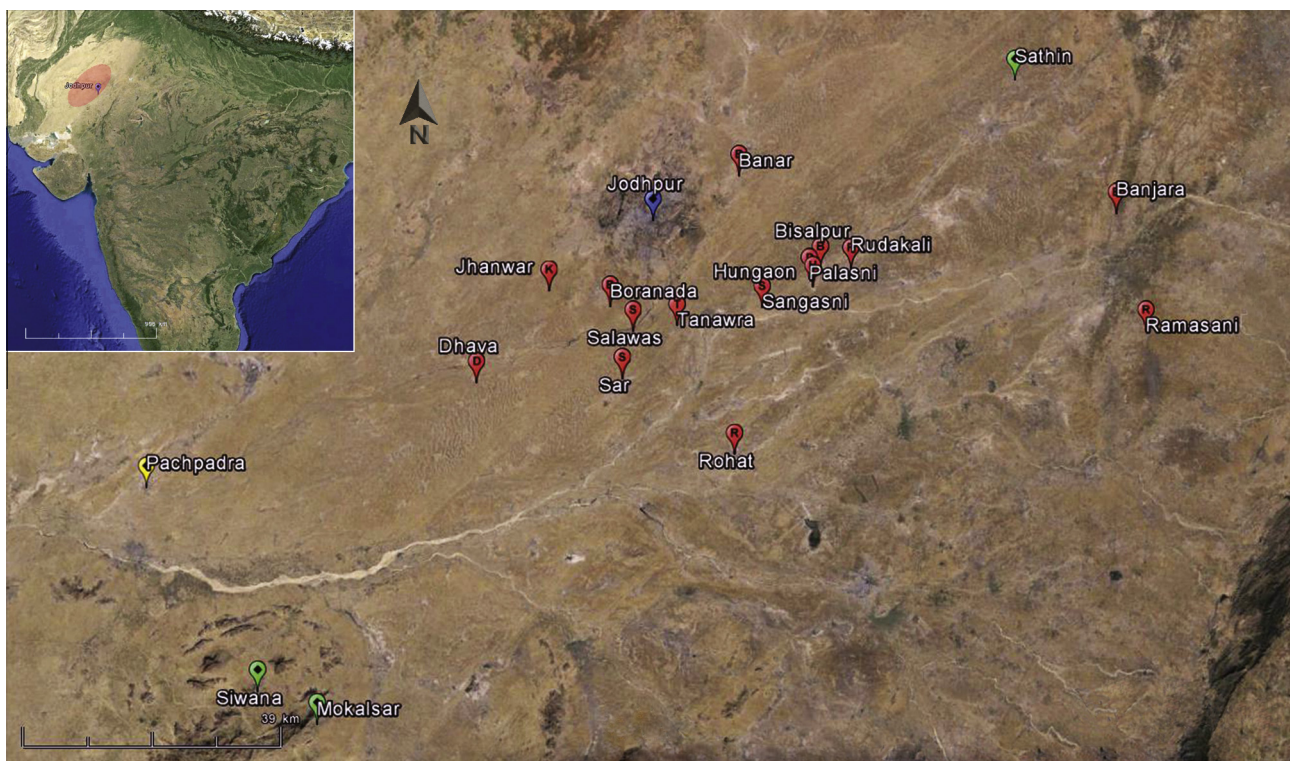


Fig. 1. Location of the villages surveyed.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7440482>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7440482>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)