

art. Washburn (Chapter 8) analyzes the step fret motif found in both Mesoamerica and the U.S. Southwest, and she suggests that this decorative tradition derived from a common origin on cloth items containing goods that were traded between both areas. The motif was later incorporated on ceramics, and these shared traditions resulted from cultural interactions. Minich and Price (Chapter 9) analyze decorative motifs on 150 Caddoan ceramic vessels from three sites in neighboring river valleys in Arkansas and Texas. They identify types of symmetry that are indicative of Caddoan identity, with smaller contrasts in pattern choices between regions reflecting small-scale regional identity, and larger similarities in pattern structure suggesting connections with Mississippian ideology. This multilevel contrast unpacks identity on several cultural and spatial levels.

Part IV, “Charting Innovation through Diachronic Studies,” includes three chapters with innovative archaeological approaches to identifying the social and cultural forces driving changes in pottery. George Bey (Chapter 10) outlines a new unit of emic analysis—ceramic sets—encompassing entire groups of ceramic forms and shared similarities in paste, vessel shape, and surface treatment. He identifies five sets in the Toltec region of Mexico, and he considers temporal changes in Toltec pottery, which reflect ceramic innovation and changing consumer preference. He argues that these household and individual patterns would not be evident using the type-variety method. Gary Feinman (Chapter 11) traces pottery traditions in the Valley of Oaxaca from 1600 BC (the advent of pottery) to the period of Spanish contact (AD 1520) to ask why pottery forms and styles changed as they did and how these changes related to social change in the valley, especially the rise of Monte Alban. He focuses on three aspects of ceramic variability: basic ware, surface decoration, and vessel form. Although traditions are relatively stable overall, and pottery production remains at the household level, there is evidence for increasing intensity and scale of production. With the decline of Monte Alban, these trends reverse with lower levels of production, fewer firing structures, and less clustering of pottery producers. Amy Hirshman (Chapter 12) examines pottery change during the development of the Tarascan state in central Mexico. Contrary to expectations that pottery production would intensify under increasing social complexity, she finds continuity in household production. Only one new elite vessel category (spouted vessels used for chocolate) appears to have been made under direct elite control. Hirshman insightfully discusses how innovation occurs among potters, drawing on past ethnoarchaeological research in the region.

Approaches taken by researchers in art history, archaeology, and cultural anthropology differ even as underlying goals are often similar. The organization of the chapters into methodological sections highlights both shared goals and differences in approaches. I confess I was more comfortable reading the chapters written by archaeologists because I could more readily grasp their methods and themes. Art historians would likely regard other chapters written by their peers as more accessible. Nevertheless, both archaeologists and art historians would benefit from seeing these varied approaches in action. This volume is well edited, and the graphics are clear. It is aimed at professional audiences who will benefit from its considerations of diverse approaches to ceramic analysis.

Pottery Ethnoarchaeology in the Michoacán Sierra. MICHAEL SHOTT. 2018. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City. xii + 196 pp. \$45.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-60781-622-5. \$36.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-1-60781-623-2.

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This case study presents pottery inventory and use-life data from 24 households in Michoacán, Mexico. “Use life” in this context refers only to a vessel’s initial function (p. 4); it does not incorporate the pottery repurposing or recycling documented in multiple actualistic studies. The data were obtained over a five-year period that included yearly visits to most residences as well as “near-monthly” (pp. 59–60) visits to three households over a two-year span. The resulting data constitute a longitudinal, non-probabilistic sample derived from 95 census visits across six Michoacán communities.

The first four chapters offer context for the study. Chapter 1 outlines the project’s agenda, emphasizing the need for a “Theory of Use Life” (pp. 4–8). In Chapter 2, Shott highlights Schiffer’s (*Behavioral Archaeology*, 1976) (trans)formation theory and invokes Schiffer’s well-worn discard equation as a point of departure. Chapter 3 presents an abbreviated overview of the Michoacán study region, packing the entire pottery production sequence—along with 80 years of ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological background—into 25 pages. In Chapter 4, Shott discusses data collection and offers something of an apology for the data quality. He notes the difficulties in not only obtaining consistent information across communities and through time but also confronting “occasional

cases of ethnographic fatigue” (p. 53) among prospective participants.

The next two chapters present statistical analyses of the inventory data and comprise the real meat of the study. Chapter 5 establishes vessel groups based on their size/function and explores the impact of “contextual factors” such as household composition, cultural identity, and use frequency on vessel use life. The data suggest weak correlations among most variables, and Shott concludes that “contextual factors explain little variation in Michoacán vessel use life” (p. 110).

Given the limited impact of context, Chapter 6 extends the analysis to in-depth evaluations of use life and vessel size. Vessel size in this case includes weight as well as dimensional properties. Analyses reveal positive correlations between vessel size and use life for both *cazuelas* (casserole basins) and *ollas* (jars); the association of use life and vessel size for *comales* (round, flat griddles) is ambiguous. Comparisons of the annual inventory data with the near-monthly inventories are telling but hardly surprising. Vessels that last less than one year are likely underrepresented when the census interval spans one year or more (p. 139).

Many readers will find that Chapter 7 provides the most useful discussion because it places the Michoacán data in broader, cross-cultural perspective. One interesting outcome is the poor correlation between rim diameter and use life, but the overall finding is that vessel size and use life continue to covary in a strong, positive fashion.

Chapter 8 offers an ill-conceived exercise in which Shott generates a “discard assemblage” from 49 failed vessels collected from the three near-monthly census households. The remains of each vessel were bagged separately, and bagged sherds were then matched to the original inventoried vessel. The results indicate that the assemblage of broken pots was “characterized by high completeness and low brokenness” (p. 169). Given that this “discard assemblage” was intentionally curated after breakage, with no mixing and subject to neither depositional nor postdepositional processes, the correspondence between broken vessels and original whole vessels affords scant insight. The concluding Chapter 9 is a four-page précis in which Shott reiterates the correlation between use life and vessel size and appeals for more attention to formation theory.

I was quite frustrated by this read. On one hand it offers valuable, actualistic data on pottery use lives and ceramic inventories—in other words, it is a solid study of contemporary material culture. On the other hand, this research says little about any archaeological record, either in particular or in only the vaguest of senses. Consequently, although I applaud the “ethno” side of this effort, I find the “archaeo” side to be problematic.

This case study *is* successful, however, in highlighting the uneasy standing of ethnoarchaeology within the academy as well as its service to archaeology. To his credit, Shott calls out the poorly reasoned, postmodern critiques of ethnoarchaeology that have become fashionable of late (pp. 8–10). But his solution is scarcely better. Ethnoarchaeology makes its strongest contribution when it begins with a question derived from the archaeological record. Unfortunately, conducting a pottery census among modern households and collecting a few dozen broken pots says very little about any actual archaeological record. Just because one can model what *might* happen does not mean that it *has* happened or that it *will* happen. Why conjure fictional archaeological records when there are plenty of actual records that cry out for our attention?

Very few archaeological assemblages mimic ethnographic temporality (i.e., mini Pompeiis). Most represent deposits that span decades, if not centuries. Additional assemblages consist of construction fill that indiscriminately mingles debris from multiple time periods and contexts. Yet, Shott insists that, whenever possible, sherds should serve to establish an ethnographically meaningful “life assemblage” (p. 22). This same reasoning apparently justifies the questionable “discard assemblage” exercise in Chapter 8. But forgive me if I push back and simply ask, Why? Why should we strive to reconstruct the original number of vessels from an assemblage that conflates decades of accumulation? In fact, Shott’s own Chapter 5 data demonstrate no significant relationship between characteristics of household composition (family size, age/sex distributions) and characteristics of their pottery inventories (vessel frequency, vessel volume, vessel types). If representative, what do we learn about long-term human behavior by reverse engineering a ceramic assemblage as advocated in this chapter?

In sum, this case study offers well-documented information on modern material culture. In that regard, the data will certainly be mined for years to come. At the same time, its ethnographic lens distorts its archaeological utility. Consequently, in terms of the study’s relevance to building archaeological theory, I am afraid that its use life is destined to be considerably shorter.

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