It is no surprise that studies addressing the ideological dimensions of prehistoric material culture have been few given the scientific orientation of archaeology since the 1960s. Accordingly, Obsidian Reflections is a refreshing and long-overdue exploration of the emic significance of obsidian in ancient Mesoamerica. One overarching concern apparent throughout the volume is how the meanings associated with obsidian shaped or influenced the socioeconomic aspects of its provisioning and use. Although some chapters are more compelling than others, as a whole the volume demonstrates the value of critically examining the significance of this material in the minds of the ancient Mesoamericans.

Making reasonable inferences about prehistoric ideology is not an easy task. Marshalling multiple lines of inquiry, the volume’s contributors approach this task by examining archaeological, iconographic, ethnographic, and ethnohistoric data. The 10 chapters are thematically divided into three sections: ethnohistoric and ethnographic perspectives, the symbolic dimensions of production and exchange, and interpretations of obsidian used in rituals. The coverage is geographically comprehensive and encompasses the Formative to Postclassic periods.

This commentary follows the organization of the volume. The introductory chapter by Marc Levine is a thoughtful discussion of the book’s contents. It examines the various theoretical approaches employed, ranging from materiality, embodiment, object agency, and landscape to Peircean Semiotics. These approaches are used to assess various questions, including whether some types of obsidian more “valuable” because of where they originated and/or their physical properties, such as color; what insights can be gained by attempting to define artifacts “life-histories;” and was obsidian “agentic” in any significant way?

The chapters by Véronique Darras and by Alejandro Pastrana and Ivonne Athie examine the ethnohistoric meanings attributed to obsidian. Darras (Chapter 2) reviews the Tarascan data discussed in the Relación de Michoacán. Although the Tarascan and Aztec obsidian conceptualizations overlap to a degree, they differ in interesting ways (e.g., meanings attributed to obsidian versus chert). Pastrana and Athie (Chapter 3) review the Nahua sources. Among a number of topics covered, their discussion of the various deities associated with obsidian from extraction to consumption brings together both ethnohistoric and archaeological data. Moving to the present, John Monaghan (Chapter 4) compares the modern Mixtec conception of stone tools (embodied today by the machete) with the Mixtec ethnohistoric codices. Of interest is how the modern machete relates ideologically to notions of gender, morality, and purity/pollution that may have been similarly associated with stone tools in the prehispanic past. Taken together, these chapters provide captivating comparative information that helps substantiate many of the interpretations in the chapters that follow.

Kazuo Aoyama (Chapter 5) primarily examines data from Classic Copan using a “ritual economy” approach. He cites a high prevalence of green Pachacá obsidian in elite contexts and discusses deposits of Ipetecodebitage in construction fill from the urban core. Presumably the latter indicate elite involvement in the ritual disposal of obsidian waste. Although this argument seems tenuous, he suggests that these materials indicate the symbolic use of obsidian to legitimate elite power.

Marc Levine (Chapter 6) treats data from the Postclassic site of Tututepec, Oaxaca, which has a comparatively high frequency of obsidian from remarkably distant sources (Pachucu and Pico de Orizaba). His analysis employs a “register” approach that attempts to account for tool function, obsidian meaning, and how such meaning was operationalized historically and contextually. It seems that Tututepec became an important player in the Aztec-dominated Mesoamerican world system, adopting some of the Nahua beliefs.
attributed to obsidian (e.g., the sacred nature of green Pachuca obsidian). Being so distant from the Basin of Mexico, this study brings into question "formal" models positing the acquisition of obsidian from proximal sources—something far more complex than energetic concerns resulted in the interesting composition of the Tlatilco dataset.

Shifting to the ritual use of obsidian, David Carballo (Chapter 7) examines the contextual composition of a probable temple termination offering from the Formative site of La Laguna, Tlaxcala. He uses a semiotic approach to infer the symbolic and social significance of the offering, suggesting that it represents a cosmogram. Comparison of this offering to similar ones from Teotihuacan exemplifies the importance of careful archaeological documentation of such features and how an ethnohistorically informed analysis can result in some very compelling inferences. One minor shortcoming is that the contents of the pivotal supporting figure (Figure 7.4) were not fully discussed.

James Stemp and Jaime Awe (Chapter 8) focus on the Classic Maya use of obsidian in five Belizean caves. The authors infer differential ritual use in light versus dark (deep recess) cave zones based on ethnohistoric information and use-wear analysis. The dichotomy of ritual cave use is interesting, but only one of the caves has a decent sample size and some of the use-wear interpretations are unconvincing.

Mari Carmen Serra Pucho, Jesús Carlos, Lucrecia Arce, and Monica Blanco Garcia Méndez (Chapter 9) consider ritual obsidian use in an elite residence at Epipaleolithic Xochitecatl-Tlatilco. Blades fashioned into blood-letting implements in association with ceremonial censers were recovered in one room of this residence. No other similar contextual associations have been identified at the site, supporting the inference that this room was a specialized ritual facility. One thing that could have been better supported was the argument that this residence was indeed an elite context.

The conclusion by William Parry (Chapter 10) highlights the individual and collective strengths of the contributions and makes some interesting cross-cultural comparisons. Oddly, none of the chapters focuses on Teotihuacan specifically. Parry thankfully fills this void by closing with a thoughtful treatment of this topic.

In summary, this volume is a useful pilot study that should be of interest to any serious Mesoenor American archaeologist. By and large, the contributions are consistent with the book's thematic focus and should stimulate further research on this fascinating subject. As a result, the editors are to be commended; putting together edited volumes is not an easy task.

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Works in Stone has its origins in a symposium at the 2011 annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology held in honor of the work of George Odell. The methodology of lithic analysis has expanded considerably over the past several decades, and as a result a volume on contemporary perspectives in the field can contain only a sample of current work. Editor Michael Shott has chosen 12 papers covering a wide range of geographic areas, time periods, and analytical approaches to reflect this diversity, but as is inevitable in doing so, the volume cannot have a single unifying theme. Because of space limitations, I cannot review each paper but will make general comments using a selection of chapters as examples.

Use-wear analysis, which is central to several chapters, has had its ups and downs over the years but, as Shott notes, it remains an important component of lithic analysis.