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Social Change and the Evolution of Ceramic Production and Distribution in a Maya Community.

The concept of change is central to Dean Arnold's book. On the one hand, this is not new. For decades, historically minded anthropologists have wrestled with how to identify and evaluate dynamic processes. On the other hand, Arnold's book differs because it uses a narrow scope and a microscale to analyze transformation. Written by a specialist of ceramic ethnoarchaeology, its focus is on nearly forty years of pottery production and circulation among members of a Maya community in Ticul, Yucatán.

Arnold argues that social, political, and economic changes materialize in pottery. Adopting anthropology's unique holistic perspective, he identifies and combines at least five paradigms that scholars have used to interpret change. As a result, readers weave through analytical frames such as specialization and evolving complexity, evolutionary processes, technological choice, cognitive anthropology, and engagement theory.

In thirty-two years, Arnold took ten trips to Yucatán. From the vantage point that extended fieldwork afforded, he observed and participated in the daily lives of potters. He watched as the demand for pots changed, altering patterns of consumption accordingly. He observed how weather, water, and other natural things shaped desire, and he saw how the advent of tourism and mechanized technology altered it. "The development of municipal piped water in the 1960s" shattered "consumer demand for water-carrying and storage vessels" (p. 124).

How industrialization impacts indigenous ways interests Arnold. References to ritual provide insight into the important but shifting roles that potters and their products play in demarcated space and time. For instance, various kinds of clay containers are used for ceremonies transacted on the Day of the Dead. Traditionally, members of the community purchased items such as bowls for food and burners for candles and incense. However, as Arnold notes, increased access to metal pots has "led to the replacement of clay cooking vessels with metal ones" (p. 124).

Alongside industrialization, Arnold glimpses globalization. A sharp opponent of synchronic studies, he defines globalization as a historical process. In doing so, he dismantles distinctions such as the globalized present and the non-globalized past, stating pointedly that "cultural evolution in the present is accelerating at a rapid pace, collapsing centuries of cultural evolution into the span of a scholar's lifetime" (p. 20). Arnold's analysis of globalization is peripheral, but
it is difficult to read and not realize that international forces are influencing contemporary village life in Ticul.

To what extent are these external influences new? What counts as change? These questions haunt this book. Arnold is meticulous in his efforts. He is attentive to details such as fabrication and firing technologies, forming techniques and turntables, and clay and temper procurement. Serious consideration of such factors risks diverting awareness away from the impact of long-term, large-scale transformation: conquest, colonization, independence, and revolution. Investigating historical events in tandem with current forms of social change could further disintegrate the artificial divides we carve into time; it could push us to wonder how people identify change for themselves.

Pottery is an important part of everyday life in Ticul. There are pots for plants, food, flowers, incense, music, coins, ashes, and souvenirs. They surface in stories. They are sold in markets. This book motivates us to be mindful of the mutable material processes that make pots possible.

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