Eberl’s archaeology is so good that it shows Houk’s definition in action. These villages were largely self-sufficient, yet depended on the urban core for access to key materials, particularly obsidian and some ceramics. The village elites received ritual sanction and emulated royal sacred activity. Both villages rise and fall with the dramatic rise and fall of the Petexbatun polity. Hence, royal elites in their urban centers were providing security on the open landscape. Eberl adroitly points out that the villages were not in defensible locations and were abandoned as the polity disintegrated in the eighth century. The villages came to an end when the kingdom’s enemies destroyed Aguateca itself.

In summation, then, Eberl’s work shows the way in which the city of Aguateca interacted with its countryside in a number of specialized economic, administrative, political, and religious functions. He shows the degree of local self-sufficiency and local identity formation under the auspices of an urban elite. He shows what the city provided, what the locals produced for themselves, and how the countryside followed the rise and fall of the city. It is brilliant research.

Archaeologists in the Maya region still do not have answers to the set of questions given above. The urban unknowns remain unknowns. The work of Brett Houk and Markus Eberl, however, shows how we’re going to get those answers.

Book Reviews


Reviewed by Antonia E. Foias, Williams College.

Arnold’s latest book complements his previous work by recording the lives of potters and their workshops in Ticul, Yucatan, since the 1960s. One of the foremost ethnoarchaeologists of Latin America, Arnold is still concerned about how ethnography can contribute to archaeological studies of prehispanic ceramic economies. But this book also has a broader humanistic scope, following the potters and their families over almost 50 years of tumultuous change. The monograph is divided into 10 chapters, mostly devoted to different potting families (from traditional to nontraditional, and from entrepreneurial to attached workshops).

The introduction contextualizes the lives of the potters that populate the rest of the book by reviewing how Arnold’s long-term ethnographic research in Ticul speaks to archaeological frameworks of ceramic production. Reviewing such concepts as specialization, scale, intensity, and context, which archaeologists employ to frame prehistoric production, Arnold reflects on how his research supports, modifies, or contradicts them. For example, Arnold favors recent scholarship that promotes considering scale as two separate variables: production unit size and labor recruitment. He critiques the importance placed by archaeologists on the division between part-time and full-time specialization, given that Ticul potters do not think in those terms. Rather, Arnold advocates recent approaches to production intensity that center on the household rather than the individual and that examine the role of weather, multi-crafting, and risk-management strategies on production.

Arnold also provides the historical trajectory of Ticul and its potting families over the last 50 years. In the 1960s, the potters were making mostly water vessels for distribution over the whole Yucatan peninsula, but when the Mexican government installed piped water in the 1970s, the demand for water jars vanished, and the Ticul potters adapted by reorienting their products toward the tourist markets in Cancun and Merida. Distribution also shifted to brokers (owners of large production units who had the capital to employ or buy a truck or to build formal stores). Arnold’s longitudinal study of the Ticul potting community is unique in being the longest in the world.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are devoted to the most stable organization of potters, the traditional household production unit, which still remains the typical form of pottery making in Ticul today. In Chapter 3, the history of the Tzum family, which dominated the potting industry from 1965 until 2009, is followed across generations. Chapter 4 follows six other potting households. Chapter 5 documents four other families who produced cooking pottery (in contrast to the non-cooking water jars made by the previous households) and who had a much harder time making the transition to the new tourist markets in the resorts along the coasts of Yucatan.

The transmission of the craft from one generation to the next in all these families followed kinship lines; most, if not all, children, male and female, learned the craft, but not all practiced it later in life. I was surprised by how intermittent pottery making was: some individuals would practice the craft for a while, quit, and then return to the craft. Many worked for other production units or workshops and produced only for themselves part of the time. Often, pottery making served to supplement the family income. This contrasts strongly with my previous understanding of craft specialization as an all-encompassing identity that could not be shed or donned at whim. Although Arnold stresses the importance of patrilocal residence and patrilinage inheritance in the continuation of pottery making, I found that his evidence also shows how important women were in teaching husbands and their offspring how to make pottery and in managing production units while their husbands were
engaged elsewhere. The history of these Ticul potters also highlights that the major change in pottery production was not an increase in scale, but rather an increase in intensity, which required a larger production space separate from generalized domestic spaces.

In contrast to traditional household potters, Chapters 6, 7, and 8 describe nonlocal and non-household production units, from entrepreneurial workshops to nontraditional potters to attached specialists in hotel workshops. These nontraditional production units are established by nonlocals, non-potters, government initiatives, or hotel owners and managers. All are unstable, not lasting beyond the lifetime of the original owner, with the few exceptions becoming household-based workshops. All but one of the entrepreneurial workshops came into being after the foundation of the Maya Riviera resorts. Although all the government workshops failed rapidly, Arnold underscores that they had a tremendous impact on Ticul because they taught the local potters new technology, such as the use of molds and nontraditional paints, and how to paint copies of ancient Maya designs.

The final two chapters return to the main points of the book: what was the major change in pottery production over the last 50 years, and how can the ethnographic study of Ticul potters help us to understand ancient pottery production? The answer to neither question is the obvious one. Clearly, pottery production in Ticul changed from traditional vessels to tourist ware (from plant pots to ancient Maya imitations to miniature Christmas creche scenes). Clearly, demand for Ticul pottery increased as tourism boomed in Yucatan, so Ticul pottery production intensified. But, not so obviously, Arnold demonstrates that this increased demand was met not by the evolution of larger production units, but rather by intensifying production within the same small-scale household units that functioned since the 1960s (pp. 243–247). Because of Yucatan’s climate and weather, the only way to intensify pottery production within households was to build more roofed space devoted exclusively to production, which would protect raw materials, unfired vessels, and crafting in all its stages from the elements. Lastly, Arnold reflects on what Ticul potters can tell us about ancient pottery production. Rather than thinking of these potters as part-time, we should see them as intermittent crafters, limited by the yearly and seasonal weather patterns, by rising and falling demands for their products, and by the potter’s life cycle. Even more importantly, Ticul potters are multi-crafters who practice potting and many other crafts (making hammocks, Panama hats, woven dresses, pedaling tricycle taxis, etc.) in a “very elastic” system of risk management based on the household (p. 283).

Arnold’s book is a testimonial to continuity in a whole community of potters in the face of tremendous social, political, and economic transformation over the last half century. By charting the history of these potters and their families, he provides a unique diachronic account of Maya crafting. He does, however, leave me with a few unanswered questions: What does potting mean to these individuals? Are they proud of it? Is it part of their identity? Why do some families drop potting so easily, while others continue to practice it without interruption?


Reviewed by Véronique Bélisle, Millsaps College.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on Middle Horizon Peru. The contributors to this volume present survey data from the Cotahuasi Valley in Arequipa and excavation data from one site identified on survey (Tenahaha) to understand the nature of Wari influence during the second half of the Middle Horizon. They document several areas of change through time and explore the role of the Wari state during these changes. The book moves away from a traditional imperial model and disentangles the notion of political control from that of stylistic influence.

Chapter 1 lays out the theoretical foundation of the volume. Justin Jennings and Willy Yépez Álvarez introduce the different models that have been proposed to explain Wari. They point out the weaknesses of the imperial model in understanding regions where little Wari impact has been noted and propose an alternative model—the globalization model. They suggest that the changes seen in Cotahuasi are not the result of the incorporation of that region into the Wari state, but instead are the product of local responses to increasing population, inequality, and interregional interaction.

Chapter 2 presents a brief history of research conducted in the Cotahuasi Valley and an assessment of the nature of Wari influence based on survey data. Jennings compares settlement pattern data that his team obtained in Cotahuasi for the pre-Middle Horizon, Middle Horizon, and Late Intermediate periods to the archaeological expectations of the imperial model. Changes in material culture, including the proliferation of Wari-influenced items, were not accompanied by either power consolidation (political centralization seen by a hierarchy of settlements) or economic reorganization for the extraction of tribute. Jennings concludes that the Wari did not dominate the valley during the Middle Horizon; Wari’s profound influence on local material culture was not supplemented by political control.

Chapter 3 introduces the site of Tenahaha, a 4-ha settlement on the semi-arid Collota Pampa where the editors