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Materiality, regimes of value, and the politics of craft production, exchange, and consumption: A case of lime plaster at Teotihuacan, Mexico

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ABSTRACT

Political economy has provided a broad framework for the study of power relations in early complex societies, but its top-down approaches have limitations for understanding the simultaneous formation of unequal and equal social relations. Through the conception of power as heterogeneous, contradictory, and multidimensional, this study addresses how inequality and equality are constituted through production, exchange, and consumption of material objects. Recent material culture studies grounded in practice theories highlight material objects as both medium and consequence of social practice and negotiation. Such a conception of material culture leads us to explore consumption as a key theoretical and methodological concept to understand the relationship between material culture patterns and social reproduction and transformation. This study explores how consumer demand is created by examining the process of the creation and transformation of the regimes of value, which allows to address the entanglement of material properties, multiple agencies, and the acts of production, exchange, and consumption. A case study from Teotihuacan documents archaeological evidence of changing distribution, direct evidence of production, and material characterization of lime plaster and demonstrates how changing social relations were embodied by production, exchange, and consumption of lime plaster.

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1. Introduction

In the two decades since the publication of a review article on political economy and archaeology by Hirth (1996), archaeological approaches to political economy have diversified tremendously (Smith and Schreiber, 2005; Wells, 2006). As Hirth (1996:205) states, while the original definition of political economy goes back to Marx, the redefinition of the concept within anthropology as "an analysis of social relations based on unequal access to wealth and power" (Roseberry, 1988;44 cited in Hirth, 1996:205) formed the basis for subsequent studies, which were concerned mainly with the relationship between the differential control of resources and sociopolitical complexity. These studies also expanded the scope of analysis by incorporating ideational perspectives to explore how differential access to resources was justified in terms of the Marxist concept of ideology or the Weberian notion of legitimacy (e.g., Blanton et al., 1996; Hirth, 1996:208–209). Thus, the study of ancient political economies necessarily employed top-down perspectives and developed a set of concepts and methodologies to discern various ways through which political elites controlled the production and/or exchange of resources to finance the polity (e.g., Algaze, 1993; Blanton et al., 1996; Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1997; Costin and Earle, 1989; D'Altroy and Earle, 1985; Earle, 1997, 2002; Feinman and Nicholas, 2004; Hirth, 1996; Pool and Bey, 2007; Scarborough and Clark, 2007). However, numerous studies have pointed to the importance of simultaneous formation of inequality and equality or power differentials and shared identity, which operates at multiple scales of social interaction and results from continuous negotiations among various individuals and collectivities (e.g., Campbell, 2009; Inomata, 2006; Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996; Kurnick and Baron, 2016; Murakami, 2014; Schortman and Urban, 2004, 2012; Schortman et al., 2001; Small, 2009; Smith, 2011; Yoffee, 1991). Furthermore, a series of recent studies demonstrate that corporate strategies, collective action, and cooperation, which may result in an equal access to resources, are important elements for the successful operation of polities (e.g., Blanton et al., 1996; Blanton and Fargher, 2008, 2011; Carballo, 2013a; Carballo et al., 2014a; Fargher et al., 2010, 2011; Levine, 2011). In this paper, I argue that an explicit focus on consumption and its integration into the study of production and

exchange are essential for understanding the formation of both inequality and equality.

While scholars have emphasized varying aspects of production and exchange, the archaeological study of consumption has mostly been restricted to festive activities (e.g., Bray, 2003; Dietler and Hayden, 2001; Wells and Davis-Salazar, 2007a) and few archaeologists have addressed consumption as a critical theoretical and methodological concept with some exceptions discussed below (see Smith and Schreiber, 2005:202–203; Wells, 2006). This is largely due to: (1) the separation of political and domestic domains, a long-held tradition in Western philosophy dating to Aristotle, in which production and exchange are conceived of as belonging to political domains and consumption to domestic domains and (2) the historical background of the study of consumer culture within sociocultural anthropology, which is closely associated with the development of modern capitalism (Appadurai, 1986, 2005; Miller, 1987, 1995), and our assumption that such studies would illuminate little about pre-capitalist societies (see Miller, 1987; Mullins, 2011). In terms of archaeological data analysis, consumption patterns tend to remain descriptive and are treated as a given and as a reflection of social relations, which, in turn, provide insights into the study of production and exchange (e.g., Hirth, 1998). In many cases, consumption is subsumed in the concepts of production and exchange and certain consumption behaviors and their process have been assumed, rather than investigated. For example, it is often stated that "production is organized to meet the needs of consumers" (Costin, 2004:191), but how these needs are defined is left unexplained. In regard to the simultaneous formation of inequality and equality, Schortman and his colleagues (2001; see also Schortman and Urban, 2004:206–207) demonstrate that elaborately decorated ceramics with possible symbols of a polity identity were produced at the regional capital and were widely distributed to people of all ranks in the Naco Valley during the Late Classic (600–900 AD), whereas the use of elaborate masonry structures and sculptures was restricted to political elites. What is lacking in this kind of archaeological narrative, however, is the agency of consumers (but see Brumfiel, 1987a, 1987b; Levine, 2011; Steel, 2002, 2013; Wells, 2006). What defined the collective demand for such artifacts? What kind of value systems promoted the consumption of certain objects? Clearly, we cannot assume faceless automata who consume objects whenever they were made available through certain exchange systems, productive forces, or decisions of ruling elites. Instead, we need a theory or theories of consumption to address the actual process of how demands are created and how consumption of certain objects enhances power and identity in order to fully understand the relationship between production, exchange, and consumption (Appadurai, 2005; Miller, 1987, 1995).

In the reminder of this paper, I first discuss the broad theoretical framework of this study, which centers on the materiality of power and identity. Then, I develop and operationalize some concepts revolving around consumption, specifically the regimes of value (Appadurai, 1986), and discuss methodologies to integrate production, exchange, and consumption. To illustrate the point, I present an integrative approach to the study of lime plaster in the early urban center of Teotihuacan, which was the capital of a regional state in Central Mexico from 150 to 650 AD.

2. Beyond political economy: materiality of power and identity

Political economy, as the polity finance based on unequal access to resources, forms a part of larger processes of the formation of inequality and equality. The simultaneous formation of contradictory principles, such as power differentials and shared identity, can be framed in terms of the multidimensional nature of power

relations. It is now widely acknowledged that power[1] should be conceptualized as multifaceted with a multiplicity of bases (e.g., Adams, 1977; Lenski, 1966; Mann, 1986; McGuire, 1983; Paynter and McGuire, 1991; Yoffee, 2005), and that different kinds of material culture (e.g., houses and mortuary offerings) do not necessarily constitute a single consistent axis of social relations (e.g., Carballo, 2009; Hirth, 1993; Kamp, 1993; Lesure and Blake, 2002). Thus, power differentials and equality may be enhanced along various dimensions. However, these different dimensions of power should not be reified as discrete entities because these bases of power are often overlapping and intersecting (Ehrenreich et al., 1995; see also Sewell, 1992:19). For example, public spectacles in complex societies may entail some transcendent power of ruling elites at the same time as they enhance shared identity through bodily experience of unity and sameness (Inomata, 2006; Murakami, 2014). Furthermore, the analytical separation of despotic and infrastructural power also entails multiple dimensions of power, the latter being defined as the state's ability to penetrate into civil life through its own infrastructure (Mann, 1984). Infrastructural power not only represents the ability of a polity, but also the power of the populace to influence the central decision-making processes. Implications of infrastructural power, specifically regarding how the actions and decisions of the state and its subjects are articulated with each other, have been extensively discussed in terms of collective action and cooperation, which points to the importance of the provisioning of public goods and services by the polity among others (e.g., Blanton and Fargher, 2008, 2011; Carballo, 2013a; Carballo et al., 2014a; Fargher et al., 2010, 2011).

An integration of post-structuralist theories, practice theories in particular (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Giddens, 1979, 1984; Ortner, 1984; Sahlins, 1981), in archaeological discourse further enhanced our understanding of the heterogeneous and contradictory nature of power relations by emphasizing that social relations are reproduced and transformed as a consequence of historically contingent negotiations among multiple individuals and groups with varying interests and practical capacities (e.g., Barber and Joyce, 2007; Brumfiel, 1992; Brumfiel and Fox, 1994; Hutson, 2010; Janusek, 2004; Joyce and Weller, 2007; Levine, 2011; Lohse and Valdez, 2004; Stein, 1998; see also Scott, 1990). These studies have contributed to the conceptual and methodological advancement in archaeological practice and provide a fertile ground on which to explore how contradictory actions, principles, and strategies are mutually entangled and result in the successful operation and failure of early complex societies. The current study follows the threads of these thoughts.

An important ramification of the integration of practice theories in archaeology is an explicit recognition that a material object is both a medium and a consequence of practice (e.g., DeMarrais et al., 1996, 2004; Halperin and Foias, 2010; Hendon, 2000, 2005; Hutson, 2010; Smith, 2011). This can clearly be seen in Giddens' concept of structure, which is defined as sets of mutually sustaining rules and resources (Giddens, 1979:104). Consequently, material culture, as a constituent of structure, both enables and constrains certain practices. Moreover, structure is conceptualized as manifold, meaning that varying structures exist "at different levels, operate in different modalities, and are themselves based on widely varying types and quantities of resources" (Sewell, 1992:16), which provides a theoretical basis for the multidimensionality of power. Hence, material culture is not a

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[1] In this paper I use the term *power* interchangeably with *power relations* which refers to the power exercised in the context of social interaction (or "power over" defined by Wolf (1990)), but the discussion of multidimensionality applies to different conceptions of power, including "power to" (or agentive power) and "power through" or diffused power (e.g., disciplinary power defined by Foucault) (see Giddens, 1979; Mann, 1986; Wolf, 1990).