

Style, Memory, and the Production of History

Aztec Pottery and the Materialization of a Toltec Legacy

by Kristin De Lucia

This article explores the role of material culture, specifically ceramics, in the construction of identity, social memory, and understandings of the past in the Postclassic Basin of Mexico. As ceramics are used in everyday activities and eventually discarded and abandoned, they come to take on different meanings, associations, and roles and, thus, may influence the ideas and actions of those around them. This article examines patterns of use of ceramics within domestic contexts at the site of Xaltocan, Mexico, coupled with regional patterns of stylistic change and distribution, to explore the ways in which ceramics and ceramic style both shaped and were shaped by people's conceptions of themselves and others. The results suggest that the adoption (and rejection) of style was an active choice on the part of producers and consumers. It is argued that Black-on-Orange ceramics were used by emerging city-states in Postclassic central Mexico to help materialize an idealized Toltec heritage.

Ceramics are more than goods to be produced and distributed or containers for food during a daily meal or feast; they also materialize social processes and interactions, have social lives of their own, and influence those around them. Further, ceramics are threads in broader entanglements (Hodder 2012), constraining and enabling human behavior, ideas, and interactions. Like all objects in the archaeological record, ceramic vessels have biographies and may acquire a range of meanings during various stages of manufacture, transportation, use, reuse, and discard (Gosselain 2000; Kopytoff 1986). All individuals and groups who encounter a vessel will likewise experience it differently, resulting in a multiplicity of ontologies (Alberti and Marshall 2009; Alberti et al. 2011). For archaeologists of prehistory it may be impossible to access all of these various meanings, threads of interaction, and relations, but style and context of use can help us begin to ascertain the ways in which ceramics not only materialized but also participated in social processes. In this article, I argue that when we consider the social roles, entanglements, and relationships of ceramics and people in both everyday interactions as well as extraordinary events, we can see style as actively produced, reproduced, and reimagined by historical agents. Moreover, I demonstrate that stylistic change and variation can provide an entry point for examining the threads of interaction between objects and individual experience, as well as the convergence of local memory with dominant narratives of the past. I take a closer look at the daily material practices of the people who used ceramics and situate

their practices within the broader regional political economy to begin to access alternative ontologies and to complicate our understanding of how and why styles changed and spread in prehistory.

Specifically, I explore shifting patterns in ceramic consumption and stylistic design during the pre-imperial period (AD 900–1350) in the Basin of Mexico at the site of Xaltocan, Mexico (fig. 1). I focus specifically on Aztec Black-on-Orange pottery, which is divided into four different styles (Aztec I, Aztec II, Aztec III, and Aztec IV) that are more or less chronologically distinct and sequential (fig. 2).¹ Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery (fig. 2A) was recovered from a handful of sites in the Basin of Mexico during the Early Postclassic period (AD 900–1200) and generally had a nonoverlapping spatial distribution with the stylistically distinct Mazapan-Tollan pottery complex (Blanton 1972; García Chávez 2004:5; Parsons 1971, 2008; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979). Most of the Aztec I–using sites were in the southern Basin of Mexico; however, Xaltocan was the only site in the northern Basin of Mexico to use and produce Aztec I pottery in large quantities (Parsons 2008:326). This same pottery is rare at contemporaneous sites located only a few kilometers away. Over time, Black-on-Orange pottery spread throughout the Basin of Mexico replacing the Mazapan-Tollan complex, although archaeologists have observed important stylistic shifts (see below). The unusual distribution pattern of Black-on-Orange pottery raises several questions: (1) Why was Aztec I Black-on-Orange and Mazapan-Tollan pottery nonoverlapping? (2) Why is Xaltocan the only site in the northern Basin of Mexico with substantial quantities of

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1. There is, of course, some overlap between the different styles of pottery, especially Aztec I and Aztec II, Aztec II and Aztec III, and Aztec III and Aztec IV.

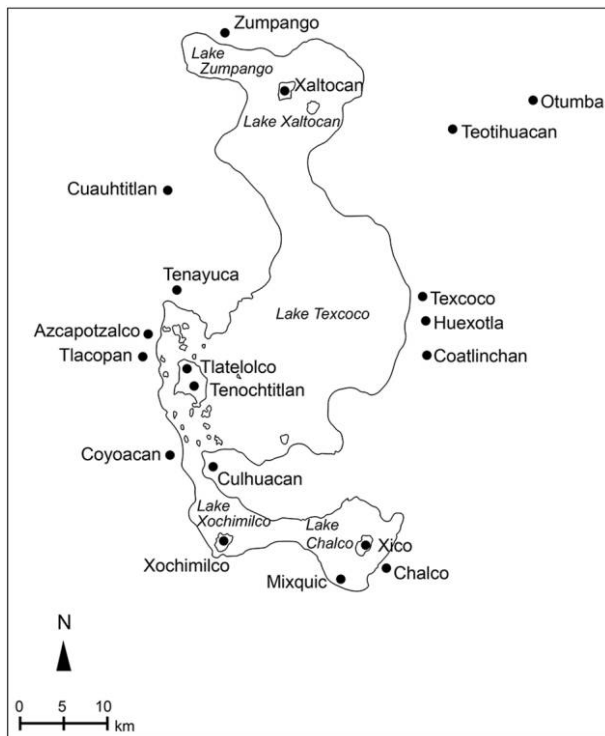


Figure 1. Basin of Mexico map showing location of Xaltocan as well as other important sites in the region. Drawn by Brian Ma.

Aztec I instead of Mazapan-Tollan pottery, which is common in surrounding sites? (3) Why do we observe stylistic changes in Black-on-Orange pottery throughout the Postclassic? To begin to answer these questions, I consider the contexts of production and use of Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery within domestic units, as well as regional patterns of change and distribution. I argue that a multiscalar approach that integrates our understanding of regional trends with community-level patterns and ways of using ceramics in everyday household contexts can offer new insight into these questions.

In this article, I argue that Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery served as a means of constituting a shared identity among powerful lakeshore communities such as Xaltocan during the Early Postclassic Period and that it was central to daily household ritual. The adoption of Black-on-Orange pottery and stylistic shift (to what archaeologists call “Aztec II”) by many former Red-on-Buff-consuming communities in the Middle Postclassic (AD 1200–1350), I argue, was a form of appropriation by rising city-states seeking to co-opt the influence and legitimacy of the Early Postclassic centers. Several scholars have argued that during the Late Postclassic (AD 1350–1521) the Aztecs, as recent intruders into the Basin of Mexico, sought to legitimize their status through the appropriation of artistic styles and symbolism from the earlier and greatly revered Toltec civilization (Anawalt 1990; López Luján and López Austin

2009; Umberger 1987); I argue that the adoption of Black-on-Orange pottery by rising city-states also played an important role in legitimization. Because Black-on-Orange pottery was central to identity and ritual among the powerful Early Postclassic centers, the appropriation of this pottery would have helped confer legitimacy and ritual authority to growing polities. I suggest that this pottery may have been associated with Toltec descent (even though it was not actually used by the Toltecs) because it was used by powerful Early Postclassic communities that were believed to be the legitimate heirs to the Toltec legacy. I conclude that people’s daily experiences, where they would have observed Black-on-Orange ceramic fragments scattered across the ground at important early sites, would have worked to construct new memories and give rise to imagined histories.

In the following discussion, I first examine shifting patterns in ceramic consumption and stylistic design during the pre-imperial period at the site of Xaltocan to understand the various social roles and meanings of ceramics by looking at contexts of use, ceramic form, and interhousehold variation. The data show that the consumption of ceramics in domestic contexts in Xaltocan was driven by multiple factors including the need to fulfill ritual obligations associated with daily life, the desire to fortify social relations between and within households, and functional necessity. I also consider regional variation in ceramic consumption and argue that differences in style worked to constitute communities of practice and assert identity. Next, I consider how and why styles changed over time. Although the transition from Aztec I to Aztec II to Aztec III and IV Black-on-Orange pottery is often understood as a gradual evolutionary process (Boas and Gamio 1921; Griffin and Espejo 1947; Vailant 1938) or as a reflection of population movements and political changes, I find that these transitions were neither gradual nor a product of diffusion but were often abrupt and patterned and, therefore, I argue, purposeful. Finally, I suggest that increased control over the production of ritually important Black-on-Orange pottery in the Postclassic was not only related to economic concerns but also to its purpose as an important mechanism of legitimizing and establishing political authority. Although this article focuses on stylistic traditions within the Postclassic Basin of Mexico, it may help us consider style more broadly as an active process involved in the practices of everyday life, the negotiation of social memory, and the production of history.

Style, Identity, and Memory

Archaeologists have long used style to document chronology, cultural interaction, economic exchange, status, social complexity, and population movements (Conkey and Hastorf 1990; Hegmon 1992; Rice 1987; Shepard 1965; Sinopoli 1991; Skibo, Schiffer, and Kowalski 1989; Wright 1985). Studies of style have recently expanded in scope to demonstrate that ceramics also lend insight into political affiliation (Bowser 2000), social re-

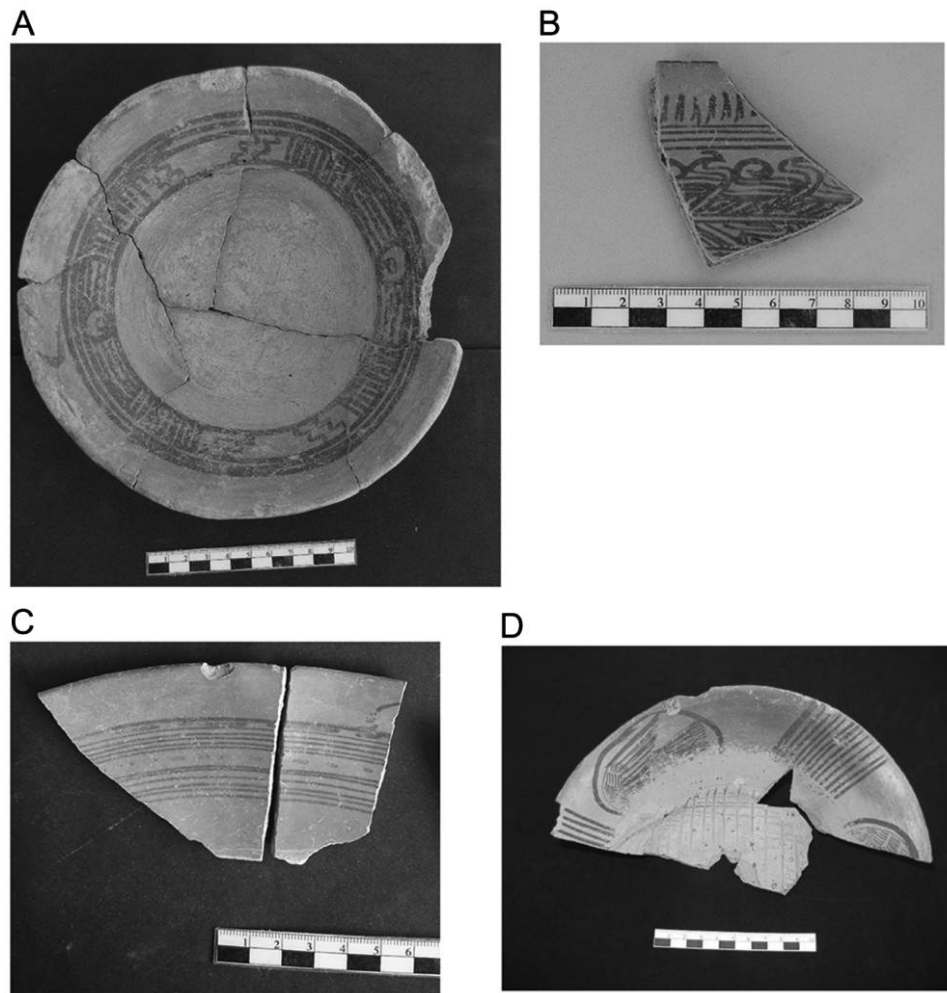


Figure 2. Black-on-Orange pottery styles from Xaltocan: Aztec I (A), Aztec II Calligraphic (B), Aztec III (C), Aztec IV (photo courtesy of Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría) (D). A color version of this figure is available online.

lations and identity (Pauketat and Emerson 1991; Rodríguez-Alegría 2005, 2016; Wonderly 1986), learning processes and cultural transmission (Bagwell 2002; Bowser and Patton 2008; Crown 2002; Stark, Bowser, and Horne 2008), ethnicity and identity (Emberling 1997; Fowler 2015), cosmological narratives (Brumfiel 2004; Pauketat 2013), and ritual practices (David, Sterner, and Gavua 1988; Weismantel 2004). In addition, in recent years, a focus on alternative ontologies has emphasized that people of the past experienced the world differently and that ceramics could play an active role in social processes (Alberti and Marshall 2009). Weismantel (2004), for example, in looking at South American Moche (AD 140–800) ceramics, argued that by depicting the dead engaging in sexual acts and by placing such pots in the tombs of the dead, the dead became participants in the reproductive process and the pots enabled the transmission of social identity from one generation to the next. Ceramic vessels, then, do not simply reference rituals or convey a message but can also play active roles in the ritual process.

Other scholars have further highlighted the various roles that ceramics play in daily life, including, for example, the apotropaic functions of decorations on vessels (David, Sterner, and Gavua 1988). Thus, in thinking about ceramic style, we must consider not only the meaning of stylistic design but also the various roles that ceramics may have played in daily life and the possibilities of multiple ontologies.

The recent trend away from representational approaches in archaeology toward relational archaeologies emphasizes that ceramics are entangled in relationships with everything around them and that it is these relationships that construct meaning (Hodder 2012; Ingold 2007, 2013; Miller 2010; Olsen 2010; Pauketat 2013). A relational approach allows us to consider the various ways in which people would have experienced, interacted with, and been affected by the ceramics that they used or encountered on an everyday basis. Miller (2010) notes that because objects are part of the background, or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), and are unconsciously taken for granted, objects “frame”

our perceptions; “the less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations” (Miller 2010:50). Ceramic sherds on the ground, as durable representations of the past, would have been part of the background of everyday life and would therefore influence perceptions of the past. As noted by Alberti and Marshall (2009), “assuming a straightforward representationalist approach to the meaning of the pots undermines the possibilities of discovering the ontological logic they embody” (351).

Material objects and their associated styles also play an important role in the construction of memory as they materialize a long-distant past (De Lucia 2010; Hamann 2002; Hendon 2000; Joyce 2000; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Ceramics in particular are durable and, even once broken, the traces of sherds from times past would have littered ancient landscapes so that people would have stepped on, dug up, and utilized such remnants of the past on a daily basis. Byron Hamann (2002:352) argues that material remains were regularly encountered in ancient Mesoamerica and were not simply reused but also were reinterpreted by later societies. Such objects may have been seen as living beings with the capability of affecting the present world and, therefore, we must think about how people would have related to, and interacted with, the material remains of the past. In Postclassic Xaltocan, for example, people collected and curated figurines from earlier times (Brumfiel and Overholzer 2009). The associated memory and history of ownership of such objects become important sources of meaning (Weiner 1992). As noted by Olsen (2010), “the past is not left behind but gathers and folds into the becoming present, enabling different forms of material memory” (126). Ceramics of the past, then, become ceramics of the present (Johnson 2010:12) and take on new meanings, histories, and functions over time (Appadurai 1986; Deal and Hagstrum 1994; Hamann 2002).

In thinking about production, research has demonstrated that style is an active process that is consciously produced and reproduced. Ethnographic research conducted by Bowser (2000) in the Ecuadorian Amazon, for example, found that the painted designs on ceramic pots are consciously produced by potters to signify their political affiliation and that these alliances can be recognized by other women in the community (Bowser 2000; Bowser and Patton 2008). This research is noteworthy because it emphasizes the involvement of women and domestic pottery in signaling identity (in this case political affiliation) and reveals that style is an active process. Bowser and Patton (2008) argue that “continuity in material culture is not simply the result of unconscious transmission of ideas from generation to generation . . . or a propensity to do things in the same way as the previous generation, according to the manner in which one is taught. Rather, decisions to imitate or deviate from the style of others represent choices by agents at multiple levels of consciousness” (16). Women in the Ecuadorian Amazon thus actively reproduce certain stylistic designs or innovate new ones as a way of constituting communities of practice and negotiating group boundaries. These strategies, as well as the designs

on pots, may change throughout the lifetime of an individual (Bowser and Patton 2008). At the same time, the decision to maintain styles over time is not inevitable but rather requires maintenance (also see Hegmon and Kulow 2005; Robin 2013:38). Thus, both continuity and change in stylistic design should be considered an active process.

It is important to note that in market economies such as that which existed in Postclassic central Mexico, the production of style also would have been driven by consumption practices. For example, which vessels were considered suitable for a given purpose and which ones were not? However, as argued by Dietler (2010), “Consumption is never simply a satisfaction of utilitarian needs or an epiphenomenon of production. Rather it is a process of symbolic construction of identity and political relations with important material consequences . . . Consumption is always a culturally specific phenomenon and demand is always socially constructed and historically changing” (215). Consumption practices are thus more than simply a consequence of economic factors, exchange relations, or political interaction; they are a product of social forces and daily practices that require the presence of certain forms of material culture and not others. As these daily practices change, so too will the consumption patterns that we can observe archaeologically at a broader scale. To understand why pots were produced and consumed, it is necessary to look at the contexts of use and to consider how the objects were used, or the “ways of using” (de Certeau 1984:35), and also which objects were not considered suitable for a given purpose (Dietler 2010). It is the ways of using that determine how a potter makes or decorates a vessel or which vessel a consumer selects at the marketplace. “Ways of using” would include not only a vessel’s functional purposes but also its various meanings and the experiences of individuals (Alberti and Marshall 2009). Moreover, because pots are entangled with everyday life, small-scale changes in the everyday use of pots can result in large-scale patterns of ceramic change that can be observed at the macro-level (Hodder 2012). Thus, changes in ceramic form, style, location of production, or exchange routes may be the consequence of political events and elite strategies but may also result from the everyday consumption practices and decisions of ordinary people.

If we are to begin to understand periods of transition and change in pottery style as well as the meanings of stylistic boundaries in the Basin of Mexico and beyond, we need to consider the relationship between these objects and the people that used them. Meaning is not inherent to style but rather emerges from and is shaped by a multiplicity of relationships and experiences and can thus change over time. I suggest that ceramics littered across the ground in Postclassic Mexico would have framed people’s understandings of the past and therefore their understanding of the world in the present. The use of pottery during a daily meal or a feast, as with other social practices, is not a discrete event influenced only by the economic or political conditions of the moment, but it is located within a much longer and continuous history, or *durée* (Bourdieu 1977), and

therefore must be contextualized within that longer history. As highlighted by Pauketat (2001), “Pottery is part of an everyday dialogue in which power and tradition are negotiated through food preparation, distribution, and consumption” (82). Key to understanding this dialogue is recognizing that ceramics and people have different temporalities (Hodder 2012), and therefore the meanings and roles of pottery are not static but will be reinterpreted and morph through time. I argue that, in Postclassic Mexico, ceramic fragments scattered across the ground did not merely reflect cooking, feasting, or exchange activities but also worked to construct social identities, create memories, and give rise to imagined histories.

The Production of a Toltec History

The heart of the Aztec Empire was located in the central Mexican Highlands in a region known as the Basin of Mexico. Prior to Spanish conquest, the low-lying areas of the Basin were covered by an interconnected series of shallow lakes. The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan was an island in the largest lake, Texcoco. In 1428, Tenochtitlan formed an alliance with two other city-states, Texcoco and Tlacopan, known as the Triple Alliance, to defeat the rapidly expanding Tepanec Empire. For the purpose of this article, I use the term “Aztec” to refer to the Triple Alliance (AD 1428–1521) and “Mexica” to refer to the founders of Tenochtitlan. Prior to the formation of the Triple Alliance, during the Early Postclassic period (AD 900–1200), many small city-states arose within the Basin of Mexico and formed regional confederations including the Tepaneca, the Acolhua, the Culhuaca, the Chalca, Cuitlahuaca/Mixquica, and the Xochimilca (Hodge 1984). Archaeological evidence suggests that the regional exchange of ceramics from urban centers began to increase during this period (Crider 2011, 2013; Nichols et al. 2002, 2009).

Prior to the alleged arrival of the Mexica in the Basin of Mexico, the Toltec capital of Tula, 75 km to the north of modern-day Mexico City, reached its height from AD 900 to 1150 (Mastache, Cobean, and Healan 2002:42), although Healan (2012:97) has proposed that Tula’s decline may have begun before AD 1150. Thus, Tula collapsed at least 150 years prior to the founding of Tenochtitlan, but the site and its Toltec inhabitants nonetheless took on mythical qualities to the Aztecs. The Aztecs believed the most important of Mesoamerican cultural achievements, such as the arts, calendar, and writing, derived from Tula, known to the Aztecs as “Tollan” (Berdan 2014:36), and they made a concerted effort to replicate Toltec artistic styles and fine art and to collect artifacts from the ancient site itself (Umberger 1987). Because the Mexica were Chichimec intruders into the Basin of Mexico, they did not have Toltec ancestry and sought to legitimize their status through the appropriation of Toltec artistic styles, artifacts, and symbolism (López Luján and López Austin 2009; Smith 2008:74; Umberger 1987). Anawalt (1990, 1996), for example, argues that the imperial blue cloak of Aztec rulers was a “heraldic device that as-

serted these Aztec nobles’ claim to a Toltec genealogy” (1990:297), as well as a link to divine status. Multiple forms of material culture were thus implicated in the construction of power and the production of history by the Aztecs.

The Aztecs linked the Toltecs with legitimate rulership and the first Mexica rulers sought to trace their genealogies to the past Toltec kings (Gillespie 1989:20; Smith 2008:85). The inhabitants of Culhuacan were widely recognized as “civilized,” *chinampa* (raised-field) farmers of noble Toltec descent (Gillespie 1989:20). As noted by Gillespie (1989), “The notion that the Culhua preserved the legitimacy of the previous civilized era is found as well in their name, for the root of their name is the word *colli*, meaning ‘ancestors’” (20–21). The Aztecs thus constructed their own Toltec heritage through marriage ties that linked the Tenochtitlan and Culhuacan dynasties.

Archaeological evidence has called some of these narratives into question. For example, we know that writing and the calendar predated the Toltecs by centuries. Moreover, rather than descended from Toltec dynasties, Culhuacan overlapped temporally with Tula, as suggested by the presence of Early Postclassic ceramics, including Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery as well as earlier types (Davies 1977:300; Séjourné 1970). Thus, Culhuacan was already an important center at the time of Tula’s collapse, although it may have provided refuge for some of Tula’s population following its fall (Davies 1977:300). Davies (1977:301) suggests that Tula and Culhuacan may have had a close relationship during Tula’s peak; however, Tula used Mazapan-Tollan pottery, while Culhuacan used Aztec I Black-on-Orange and its associated wares during the Early Postclassic. Further, scholars have long argued that “Tollan” and “Toltec” were just as much concepts as they were names of a particular city and its people (Boone 2000; Carrasco 2000:104; Davies 1977:25; Umberger 1987). The concept of “Toltec” was used in a broad sense by the Aztecs to refer to urban, settled peoples and their associated skills and sophistication in contrast to the nomadic, hunter-gatherer Chichimecs (Davies 1977:28; Umberger 1987), and the term was more likely an ideological rather than a literal description (Smith 2008:85). Thus, it was possibly Culhuacan’s “civilized” agricultural practices, long history, and non-Chichimec origins that linked it to Tollan rather than an actual connection to the site of Tula. In this way, the dynasties of Culhuacan could have claimed Toltec descent, irrespective of actual past events.

Many other places were also referred to as “Tollan” in documents, including Teotihuacan (Boone 2000), but two places most relevant to this study include Cholula, to the southeast of the Basin of Mexico in modern-day Puebla, and Chalco in the southern Basin (Davies 1977:31–33). Both places were important centers during the Early Postclassic, and both sites, like Culhuacan, are associated with Black-on-Orange pottery and Polychrome ceramics (Hodge 2008). Cholula, in fact, likely gave rise to the international Mixteca-Puebla stylistic tradition (including Polychrome ceramics) and was an important center for commerce as well as the center for the cult of Ehecatl-

Quetzalcoatl (McCafferty 1994, 2001b:300; Smith 2008:55), a deity who was intimately tied with Tula (Carrasco 2000). According to Carrasco (2000), the Toltec tradition transferred here following the fall of Tula and Cholula's people "possessed the classical Toltec qualities of wisdom, creativity, business acumen, superior artworks, and appreciation for precious things" (133). As noted by Smith (2008:55), kings throughout central Mexico went to Cholula to legitimate their authority. The site of Chalco was especially known for the productivity of its chinampa agriculture and the production of Polychrome ceramics, and it is also described as maintaining Toltec connections after the fall of Tula (Davies 1977:33). Thus, Davies (1977) notes, "One feels that the name 'Tollan,' in addition to implying metropolis . . . came to possess a certain aura of sanctity" (33). The site of Xaltocan had close ties to Culhuacan, Chalco, and Cholula during the Early Postclassic, as indicated through exchange relations (see below). To my knowledge, Xaltocan has not been referred to as Tollan in codices or historical documents; however, Pablo Nazareo (1940 [1566]) states that the first king of Xaltocan was Toltec, suggesting that the rulers of Xaltocan also claimed Toltec descent. Moreover, Xaltocan's relationship to these other Tollans, its island location, chinampa agriculture, and production of Black-on-Orange pottery may have conferred it a sanctified status as well.

Archaeological evidence, therefore, may not match up perfectly with historical narratives, but that does not mean that archaeologists should dismiss these narratives; rather, archaeologists should consider how and why historical narratives were constructed, especially given that material culture played such a vital role in the production of history. As noted by Umberger,

Revived objects, like past events, were used to validate and provide precedents for the present. . . . As events moved into the more distant past they gradually lost their historical specificity. For this reason, the inheritors of such traditions would have had as much trouble matching them to ancient remains as the modern scholar . . . material remains provided the only direct link with earlier cultures, and antiquities thus played an important part in the formation of the historical consciousness of New World people. . . . Antiques and archaizing objects brought the past and the present together. (Umberger 1987:63)

The blood of Culhuacan nobles, the adoption of sophisticated technological practices, and the appropriation of artistic styles and symbolism associated with Tollan all conferred legitimacy to the Mexica intruders and imperial authority. I argue below

that this process of legitimization began before the rise of the Aztecs and that Black-on-Orange ceramics similarly worked to construct a Toltec legacy.

Xaltocan

Xaltocan was an island community founded at the beginning of the Early Postclassic period (table 1). Although much of the northwest Basin was depopulated following the collapse of Tula circa AD 1150 (Parsons 2008; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979), Xaltocan became an important regional center. The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (Bierhorst 1992) states that some refugees from Tula settled in Xaltocan following Tula's collapse. According to historic accounts, by AD 1220, Xaltocan became the capital of the Otomí nation (Carrasco Pizana 1950:258–259; Gibson 1964:440), although both archaeological and documentary evidence suggests that Xaltocan was a multiethnic community (De Lucia and Overholtzer 2014). Xaltocan thus became an important regional center, and Carrasco Pizana (1950:116), citing the Codex Vaticano-Rios, suggests that during this period the Basin of Mexico was dominated by Xaltocan, Culhuacan, and Tenayuca. Archaeological evidence also indicates that Xaltocan was an important center, and Brumfiel (2005) notes that "Xaltocan's autonomy is indicated by its size, its architectural complexity, and its diverse economy" (349). Further, Xaltocan supported chinampa agriculture in the surrounding lake, which peaked during its period of independence (Morehart 2010, 2012a, 2014; Morehart and Eisenberg 2010; Morehart and Frederick 2014). The inhabitants of Xaltocan exploited the many resources of the lake and sold goods in marketplaces, which they could easily transport by canoe due to Xaltocan's island location (De Lucia 2011, 2013; Roush 2005). By the mid-thirteenth century, Xaltocan became embroiled in a local war with neighboring Cuauhtitlan, and by 1395 it was conquered with the help of the Tepanecs (Bierhorst 1992:75). The city was incorporated into the Aztec Empire in 1435 and likely paid tribute to Tenochtitlan and possibly Texcoco (Hicks 1994; Mata-Míguez et al. 2012; Rodríguez-Alegría 2016). Although Xaltocan's economy declined following its conquest (Brumfiel 2005), in the early colonial period Pablo Nazareo (1940 [1566]:361) states that 24 towns and villages had paid tribute to Xaltocan and that Xaltocan had marriage alliances with many important cities, demonstrating Xaltocan's importance and influence in pre-Aztec times (see also Hicks 1994).

Due to the highly stratified nature of archaeological deposits at Xaltocan, it is possible to document long-term changes at the

Table 1. Xaltocan chronology

Period	Date	Associated Black-on-Orange	Associated event
Early Postclassic	AD 900–1200	Aztec I	Xaltocan founded and rose to become Otomí capital
Middle Postclassic	AD 1200–1350	Aztec II	Conflict with Cuauhtitlan
Late Postclassic	AD 1350–1521	Aztec III	Xaltocan defeated by Cuauhtitlan in 1395, Aztec rule following 1435
Early Colonial	AD 1521–1650	Aztec III, Aztec IV	Xaltocan burned by Cortes in 1521

household level that correspond with broader-scale events. My research at Xaltocan, focusing on nonelite households, included the horizontal excavation of Structure 1, a multifamily residential compound located near the center of modern-day Xaltocan. The inhabitants of this house were farmers who also engaged in multiple production activities including fishing, processing fish, producing pottery, making mats, spinning, and weaving (De Lucia 2011, 2013). Excavations at Structure 1 allow for an analysis of activity areas from horizontal excavation as well as a diachronic analysis since the structure was occupied over several generations with at least five phases of occupation identified by the renovations of adobe walls and the laying down of new earthen floors. Radiocarbon dates from Structure 1 place its occupation in the mid-eleventh through mid-thirteenth centuries AD, with 2-sigma calibrated ranges from AD 1000–1170 to AD 1220–1290; thus, it overlaps with the Early through Middle Postclassic periods and is associated with Aztec I Black-on-Orange Pottery (De Lucia 2011, 2013). A later occupation associated with Aztec II Black-on-Orange pottery had been largely destroyed by a historic period building, but partial intact floors and a midden with a 2-sigma calibrated date range of AD 1260–1390 suggest that occupation of Structure 1 continued until the fourteenth century, when it was abandoned along with the other Early Postclassic houses (De Lucia and Overholtzer 2014). In addition to Structure 1, four other houses with Aztec I and II occupations were partially excavated across Xaltocan (Brumfiel 2005*b*, 2010; De Lucia and Overholtzer 2014), as well as houses occupied during Xaltocan's decline (Overholtzer 2012, 2013; Overholtzer and De Lucia 2016).² Only Structure 1 had large horizontal excavations with intact floors to compare activity areas between multiple rooms and over time; therefore, it is the focus of this analysis. However, test excavations conducted by Brumfiel (2005*b*) span the entire Postclassic period, allowing for a comparison of localized patterns with site-wide and temporal trends, and are integrated into this analysis. Xaltocan thus provides an excellent opportunity to examine the use of decorated ceramics in context so that we can begin to explore stylistic variation and boundaries.

Aztec Black-on-Orange Pottery

Black-on-Orange pottery was first illustrated by Boas and Gamio (1921), who divided the pottery into three variants based on style. Vaillant (1938) later employed stratigraphic evidence in combination with shifts in decorative style and historical accounts to establish the chronological sequence for the Basin of Mexico based on Black-on-Orange pottery that we still use

2. Brumfiel, Elizabeth M., and Enrique Rodríguez-Alegria, eds., *Estrategias de las elites y cambios políticos en Xaltocan, México: Informe Anual de 2007 al Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* [2010]. Field report on file at the Consejo de Arqueología, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de México, Mexico City.

today: Aztec I (dating to the Early Postclassic; fig. 2*A*), Aztec II (dating to the Middle Postclassic; fig. 2*B*), Aztec III (dating to the Late Postclassic through the early colonial; fig. 2*C*), and Aztec IV (dating to the early colonial period; fig. 2*D*). Griffin and Espejo (1947) refined these categories as Culhuacan, Tenayuca, Tenochtitlan, and Tlateloco Black-on-Orange, respectively.

Aztec I (Culhuacan) Black-on-Orange is pottery (fig. 2*A*) characterized by its thick black line drawings painted on the natural orange-brown color of clay and is associated with a wide range of floral, zoomorphic, and glyph-like motifs. Aztec I pottery was primarily restricted to the southern Basin of Mexico, including Culhuacan, Ixtapaluca, Mixquic, and Chalco, and extended into the Cholula area of Puebla (fig. 3); it was found almost exclusively at sites that also had Polychrome pottery. Aztec I was also abundant as far south as the Tetla zone of Chalcatzingo in eastern Morelos (Norr 1987). Several scholars have linked Aztec Black-on-Orange pottery with the Mixteca-Puebla ceramic tradition thought to have originated around Cholula, noting that it appeared unrelated to prior local styles (Chadwick 1971; Hodge 2008; Nicholson 1982; O'Neill 1962; Vaillant 1938) and was similar to earlier Cocoyotla Black-on-Natural pottery from Puebla, which first appears as early as AD 700 (McCafferty 2001*a*:58). Xaltocan is the only site in the northern Basin of Mexico with substantial quantities of Aztec I pottery (Parsons 2008). Contemporaneous sites in the Basin of Mexico that lack abundant quantities of Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery are typically associated with the Mazapan-Tollan pottery complex characterized by Red-on-Buff decorated motifs; the two pottery types are usually nonoverlapping (Blanton 1972; Crider 2011, 2013; García Chávez 2004; O'Neill 1962; Parsons 1971; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979; Vaillant 1950). Following earlier scholars (O'Neill 1962; Vaillant 1950), Parsons (1971) suggested that the two pottery complexes thus represent the competing "spheres of influence" (207) between Tula and Cholula during the Early Postclassic period, whereby sites in the northern Valley associated with Mazapan pottery fell within Tula's sphere of influence, and sites in the southern Valley associated with Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery fell within Cholula's sphere of influence. Blanton (1972: 117), in contrast, noted that Aztec I ceramics were associated with the largest lakeshore centers, while Mazapan pottery was generally associated with small, rural sites. He suggested that the difference represented two distinct cultural traditions where Aztec I pottery was a hallmark of urbanized, chinampa-farming cultures and Mazapan pottery represented dispersed rural communities using more traditional methods of farming. The presence of substantial quantities of both Aztec I and Mazapan pottery types at the island site of Xico (Parsons, Brumfiel, and Wilson 1982) and at the central Basin site of Chapultepec (García Chávez 2004) suggests that this relationship is still more complicated.

Aztec II (Tenayuca) Black-on-Orange pottery (fig. 2*B*) is scarce in the northern Basin and is generally associated with the central and southern Basin of Mexico (Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994; Parsons 2008; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley

1979; see fig. 4). Parsons (2008:77) suggests that the absence of Aztec II pottery in the northern Basin is due to local population decline. Aztec II pottery is primarily associated with the period of AD 1200–1350. A radiocarbon sample from an unmixed Aztec II deposit at Tenayuca, for example, provided a double lab-calibrated 2-sigma date range of AD 1030–1310 and AD 1350–1380, intercept AD 1240 (Parsons, Brumfiel, and Hodge 1996), and Raul García Chávez (2004:60) reported an intercept of AD 1230 from Aztec II contexts at Tenayuca II. Although archaeologists originally thought that Aztec I pottery and Aztec II pottery were used contemporaneously (Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994; Parsons, Brumfiel, and Wilson 1982), it is now apparent that Aztec I pottery was introduced earlier and is primarily associated with the Early Postclassic, and Aztec II pottery is primarily associated with the Middle Postclassic although there may have been some overlap (Crider 2013; García Chávez 2004; Overholtzer and De Lucia 2016). Aztec II Black-on-Orange pottery is characterized by a *zacate*, or grass-like, element and divided into two stylistic variants: a “Geometric” variant, which uses a repetitive pattern of a given stylized geometric motif to create a panel of decoration, and the “Calligraphic” variant (fig. 2B), which fills the wall with handwriting-like decorations (Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994:144).

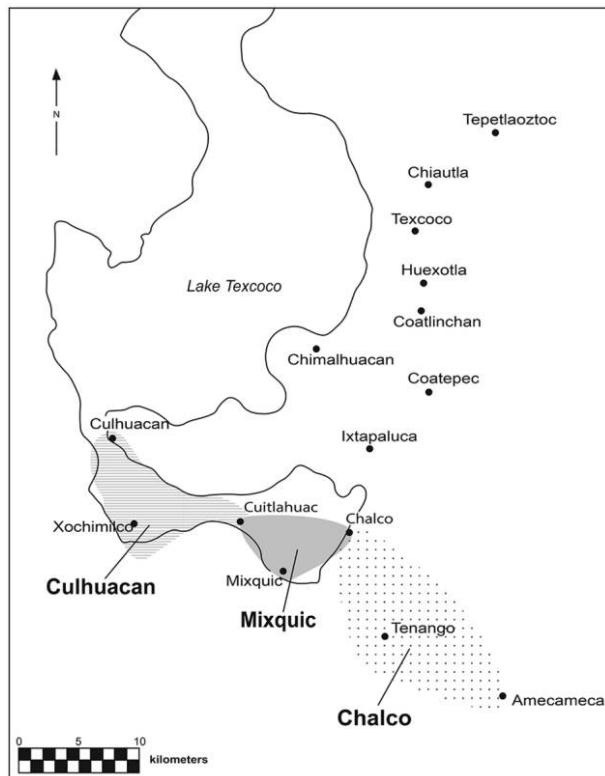


Figure 3. Spatial distribution of Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery types in the southern Basin of Mexico. Aztec I is not found in the northern Basin except at Xaltocan (not shown). After Minc, Hodge, and Blackman (1994, fig. 6.8). Drawn by Maria Vorobyeva.

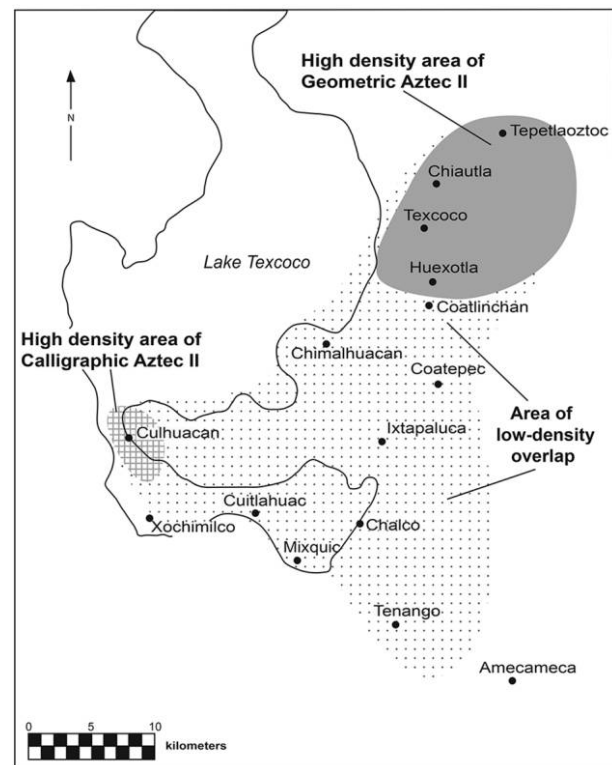


Figure 4. Spatial distribution of Aztec II Black-on-Orange pottery in the central and southern Basin of Mexico. Geometric and Calligraphic variants are both found at Xaltocan in the northern Basin (not shown). After Minc, Hodge, and Blackman (1994, fig. 6.9). Drawn by Maria Vorobyeva.

By the Late Postclassic period (AD 1350–1520), Aztec III (Tenochtitlan) Black-on-Orange pottery (fig. 2C) came to dominate the entire Basin of Mexico and corresponds with the political and economic integration of the Valley of Mexico. Aztec III pottery is generally characterized by a simple design with thin straight lines and dots or dashes. According to Hodge et al. (1993), vessels produced in the Texcoco region with “parallel lines and straight-line zigzag motifs have stylistic continuity with the Early Aztec Geometric decorative style produced in this area” (149). In contrast, vessels produced in the Ixtapalapa Peninsula have “small open circles, comb-like designs, and thickly filled-in wall” (Hodge et al. 1993:149). Nonetheless, scholars have noticed increased uniformity in Aztec III pottery over time (Hodge et al. 1993) and compared with earlier types (García Chávez 2004; Garraty 2013). Aztec IV Black-on-Orange pottery (fig. 2D) is similar in form to Aztec III, but decorative motifs have thicker lines, new configurations of elements, and some use of European-derived designs. Because this style is predominately associated with the early colonial period after AD 1521 (Charlton 1968; Charlton, Fournier, and Charlton 2007; Garraty 2009; Rodríguez-Alegría 2008, 2016), it is not discussed in this article.

Table 2. Frequency of common decorated ceramic types in Early to Middle Postclassic contexts

Type	Structure 1 Early Postclassic ^a		Xaltocan Early Postclassic ^b		Structure 1 Middle Postclassic ^a		Xaltocan Middle Postclassic ^b	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Aztec I	520	43.8	231	77.0	161	22.3	144	35.3
Aztec II	16	1.3	4	1.3	42	5.8	39	9.6
Plain/Unidentified Orange	10	.8	...	...	19	2.6	...	...
Plain Red/Black-on-Red	188	15.9	8	2.7	228	31.6	55	13.5
Black-and-White-on-Red	6	.5	2	.7	9	1.2	51	12.5
Chalco-Cholula Polychrome	177	14.9	35	11.7	68	9.4	53	13.0
Brown Incised	57	4.8	2	.7	98	13.6	14	3.4
Red-on-Buff	102	8.6	6	2.0	43	6.0	7	1.7
Mazapan Wavy Line	4	.3	...	...	2	.3	...	...
Other decorated	106	8.9	12	4.0	52	7.2	45	11.0
Total	1,186	100.0	300	100.0	722	100.0	408	100.0

^a Based on rim and body sherd frequencies from Structure 1. The use of rim sherd frequencies alone would have greatly reduced the sample size. Middle Postclassic deposits from Structure 1 correspond to Brumfiel's (2005a) "Phase 2."

^b Based on table 4.2 from Brumfiel (2005a). Note that Brumfiel only published rim counts. Because I do not have access to her original body sherd data, it is important to note this difference could create bias in the comparison of the two data sets. Nonetheless, the proportional differences (as well as similarities) are striking.

Large-scale studies of Black-on-Orange ceramics in the Basin of Mexico have traced economic changes in the distribution and exchange of ceramics and determined political boundaries (Crider 2011, 2013; Hodge and Minc 1990; Hodge and Neff 2005; Hodge et al. 1993; Minc 1994; Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994; Nichols et al. 2002, 2009; Parsons 1966; Parsons, Brumfiel, and Hodge 1996). These studies, among others, have been crucial to documenting large-scale patterns of production, distribution, and political interaction, but we still have little understanding of why ceramic style changed over time and how ordinary people used and conceptualized ceramics in their everyday lives (except see Brumfiel 2003, 2011*b*; Rodríguez-Alegría 2016).

Contexts of Use and Meaning

Archaeological research at Xaltocan has contributed a wealth of contextual data for the use of pottery at the household level allowing me to consider diversity and change in consumption and use through time. Black-on-Orange pottery was found in all Early Postclassic contexts across Xaltocan, indicating that it was not restricted to elite contexts but was used by ordinary people on an everyday basis (Brumfiel 2005a; De Lucia and Overholtzer 2014). Brumfiel (2005a) found that during the Early Postclassic the majority (77%) of decorated pottery was Aztec I Black-on-Orange (see table 2). Other common types of decorated pottery included Black-on-Red pottery and Polychromes, also recovered from lakeshore communities in the southern Basin of Mexico dating to this period, including Chalco (Hodge 2008:171; O'Neill 1962) and Culhuacan (Séjourné 1970). All houses in Xaltocan did not consume these pottery types in equal proportions, however. In Structure 1 described earlier, for example, Black-on-Orange pottery represented 43.8% of dec-

orated pottery compared with the average of 77% across the site (table 2). This house, instead, had a higher proportion of Redwares (15.9% compared with 2.7% site-wide) and Polychromes (14.9% compared with 11.7% site-wide), suggesting that ceramic consumption practices were variable across households. These differences in consumption practices could reflect status, social roles of inhabitants, personal preference, or any other number of possibilities.

Different types of pottery also served different functions (Brumfiel 2004). Aztec I pottery was used for both eating and drinking, with vessels for serving food (plates and dishes) and liquids (bowls and cups) equally represented. For example, in Structure 1, 43.7% of Aztec I sherds were for serving food, while vessels for drink represented 46.6% of Aztec I sherds (table 3). In contrast to this pattern, 77.6% of Redware vessels from Structure 1 were for consuming liquids, possibly pulque (fermented maguey sap) or cacao (Brumfiel 2003; De Lucia 2011), while only 5.3% were plates or dishes.³ Polychromes, in contrast, were used predominantly for the consumption of food with 73.2% of Polychrome vessels from Structure 1 in the form of dishes and plates and 16.9% as bowls (De Lucia 2011). In contrast to Black-on-Orange, the predominance of Redware drinking vessels and Polychrome food serving vessels might

3. Note that copas, which are used later for consuming liquids, are rare in Early Postclassic Xaltocan; therefore, reasonable inference suggests that bowls were used for the consumption of liquids at this time. Several historical documents including the Codex Mendoza and the Codex Tudela (p. 70) also depict people drinking pulque out of similarly shaped bowls. Gourds, which do not preserve archaeologically, were likely also used for the consumption of liquids. The Codex Mendoza (Folio 47r), for example, depicts "gourd bowls" for drinking cacao. It is likely that ceramic bowls, and later ceramic copas, were mimicking the shape of gourd bowls.

indicate that these wares were used together or that they were utilized for specialized food consumption. Further, Aztec I pottery was both produced locally and imported while finely decorated Polychromes were exclusively imported from the southern Basin and Puebla (McCafferty 1994) and would have thus been costly to obtain due to higher transportation and labor costs (Feinman, Upham, and Lightfoot 1981; Rice 1987). Crider (2011:438) used neutron activation analysis (NAA) to source Polychromes from Xaltocan and found that they derived from both the Chalco and Puebla (Huejotzingo) compositional groups and none were produced locally. Polychrome ceramics at Xaltocan, which would have been more difficult and costly to procure, are thus more likely to have been objects of display during feasting (LeCount 2001), and higher consumption of these wares may indicate elevated status. However, as I have argued elsewhere (De Lucia and Overholtzer 2014), there is no supporting evidence that any of the Early Postclassic houses excavated to date differed in wealth or status. In sum, by looking at contexts of use, we can see that different wares were used differently and therefore held different meanings to the people who used them.

The widespread use of Aztec I pottery does not, however, indicate that it was mundane. Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery was more commonly associated with ritual contexts in Structure 1. For example, a ritual deposit, which included dense concentrations of smashed pottery and ritual artifacts, had a higher than expected proportion of Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery (Aztec I sherds accounted for over 61% of decorated sherds in this deposit compared with an average of 44%, while Polychromes and Redwares were underrepresented, accounting for less than 5% and 9% of decorated ceramics, respectively). Further, common motifs on Aztec I pottery, particularly flowers (fig. 5) and *cipactli* (caimans), are linked to the beginning and ending of the 260-day ritual almanac, suggesting that they were related to calendrical cycles (Boone 2007); Brumfiel (2007, 2011a) associated the symbolism on Aztec I pottery with the divinatory (260-day) calendar and cycles of time. Megged (2010:118–119) notes that flowers were often a metaphor for the souls of the dead, and the deceased were said to encounter a *cipactli* called Xochitonal (Flowering Souls) on their journey to Mictlan, the underworld or land of the dead. The ritual deposit in Structure 1 not only contained a high proportion of Aztec I

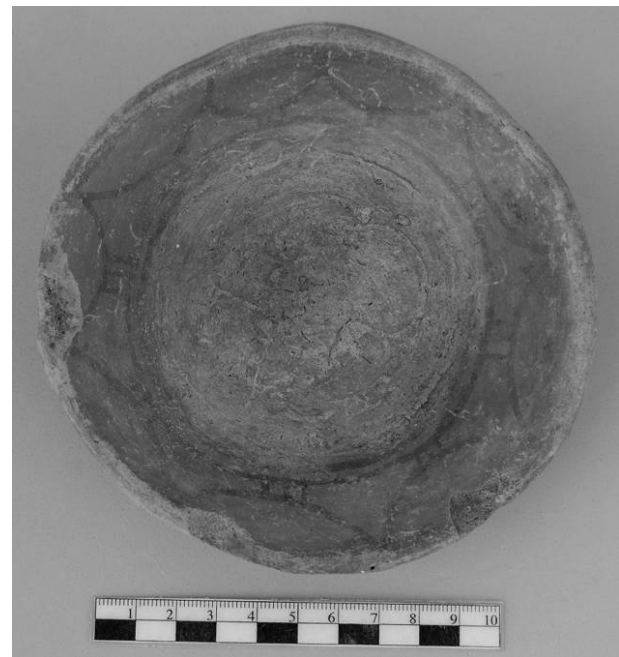


Figure 5. Interior-decorated Aztec I dish with stamped flower base and painted solar motif on vessel walls. A color version of this figure is available online.

pottery but also contained an effigy vessel depicting the deity Mictlantecuhtli, the Lord of the Dead (De Lucia 2014), which might suggest this deposit was linked to ancestor worship or burial ritual. As argued by Megged (2010:121), the overlap in events encountered by the dead on their journey to the underworld and the day names associated with the ritual calendar suggest that death was linked to the sacred cycles of time.

Solar symbols were also commonly associated with Aztec I pottery. Sun and flower motifs (figs. 5, 6), sometimes depicted together, are often similar and were associated with 14.2% ($n = 44$) of Aztec I sherds with identifiable motifs from Structure 1.⁴ The sun and flower motif has been associated with light and the sustenance of life (Brumfiel 2007; Hernández Sánchez 2008). Curvilinear spirals, likely signifying movements of the sun, were associated with 21.4% of sherds ($n = 66$). Furthermore, according to Hernández Sánchez (2008, 2010), who compared the iconography on Postclassic Mexican pottery to pre-Columbian codices, the orange background of the pottery was also linked to solar symbols, light, and festivity. In contrast, dark backgrounds were associated with themes of death and darkness (Hernández Sánchez 2008, 2010). Interestingly, small Black-on-Orange bowls with solar motifs (figs. 6, 7) were recovered from three out of the eight infant burials interred under house floors in Structure 1, while Redware and Polychrome vessels were absent from infant mortuary contexts (De

4. Solar and flower symbols become especially important during the Aztec period (see Brumfiel 2007 for examples).

Table 3. Form of decorated types (rims only) from Early Postclassic Structure 1

Form	Aztec I					
	Black-on-Orange		Redware		Polychrome	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Dish or plate	140	45.3	4	5.3	52	73.2
Bowl or copa	144	46.6	64	84.2	12	16.9
Miniature vessel	8	2.6	0	.0	0	.0
Other/unidentified	17	5.5	8	10.5	7	9.9
Total	309	100.0	76	100.0	71	100.0

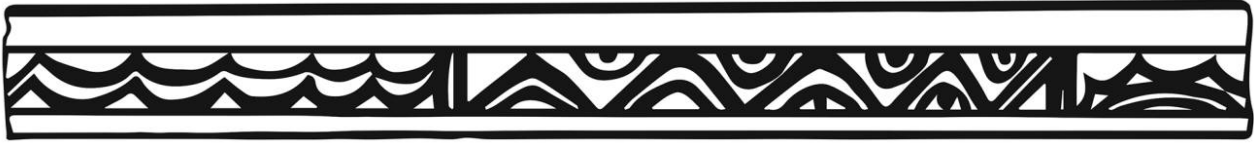


Figure 6. Exterior-decorated Aztec I bowl design roll-out incorporating a rising or setting sun motif.

Lucia 2010). One small Aztec I bowl from Structure 1 also had an exterior decorative panel (fig. 6) that represents the Mesoamerican sacred geography of water, mountains, and the sun (Gillespie 1993). The inclusion of these orange vessels with solar symbolism in the burials of infants and young children might reflect the belief that their souls returned to the heavens, the light, instead of the land of the dead associated with darkness (De Lucia 2010).

Herández Sánchez (2010) suggests that the iconography on Postclassic Mexican pottery served to communicate information related to ritual and was used in ritual contexts. The association of Aztec I pottery with a ritual deposit, burials, and cosmological and sacred symbols suggests that the daily consumption of food and drink was embedded in Mesoamerican cosmology and linked to broader concerns with sustenance, life, and solar cycles during the Early Postclassic. In prehispanic Mexico, food consumption was a ritual act (Morán 2016). According to Elizabeth Morán (2016), “the acts of eating and the various rituals performed by the Aztecs were not relegated to separate realms; instead these sacred acts were allied with ev-

eryday life” (5). Food was associated with cosmic change, transformation, natural cycles of the world, and the sustenance of life (Morán 2016); thus, it would not be surprising that the vessels used to contain and consume food would have ritual significance as well. Anthony Wonderly (1986), looking at Naco Bichrome pottery in Honduras, found that painted pottery produced and used in households was associated with complex mythical and symbolic meaning. Wonderly (1986) thus argues that “matters of food (and liquids?) were differentially invested with affective and symbolic values, and these values were extended to associated vessels” (526). Thus, Aztec I pottery from Xaltocan, closely linked to ritual contexts but also used in daily food consumption, would have been an important component in sacred traditions associated with food consumption.

Distribution and Identity: A Regional Perspective

To return to the questions posed at the outset of this article, why is Xaltocan the only site in the northern Basin of Mexico with substantial quantities of Aztec I Black-on-Orange pot-

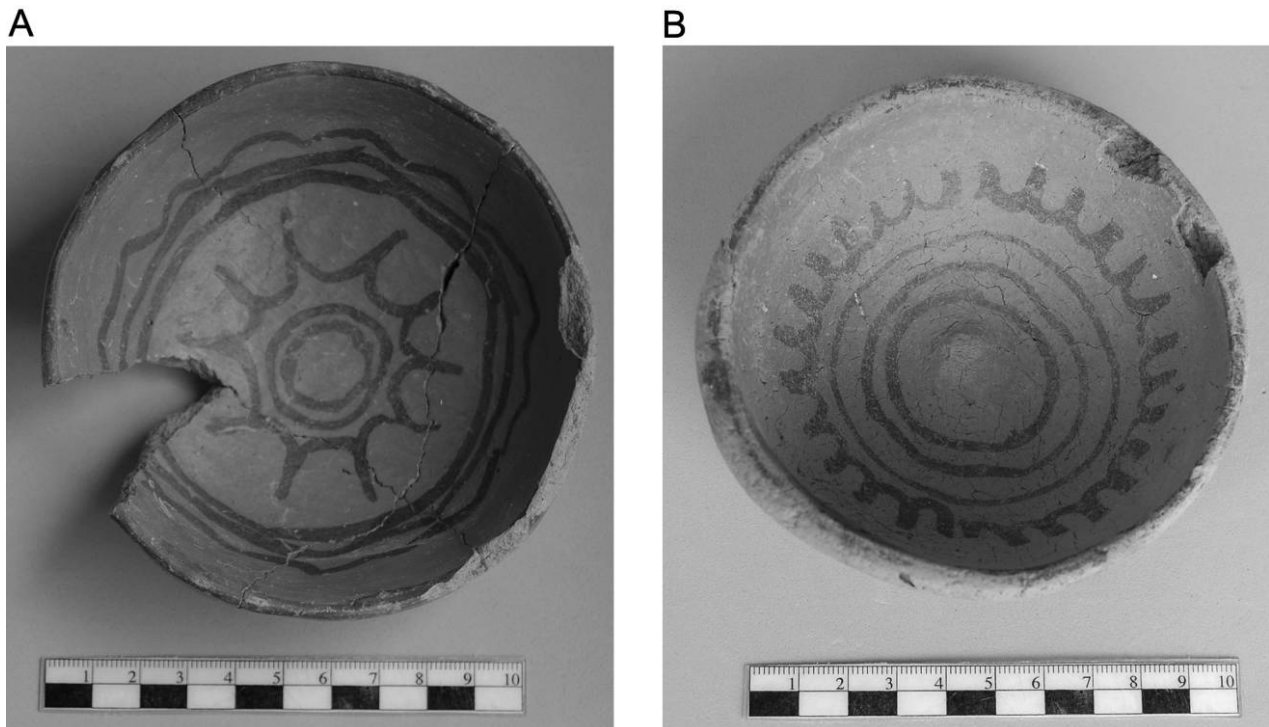


Figure 7. Two interior-decorated miniature Aztec I bowls with solar symbolism. A color version of this figure is available online.

tery instead of Mazapan-Tollan pottery, which is common in surrounding sites, and why are these pottery types generally nonoverlapping? Aztec I ceramics in Xaltocan derived from multiple production centers during the Early Postclassic, including Xaltocan, the Tenochtitlan/Culhuacan region, and Chalco, reflecting exchange ties between these communities (Hodge and Neff 2005; Nichols et al. 2002). The similarity between Aztec I sites was not simply in the use of pottery but also in the adoption of chinampa agriculture, their lakeshore or island locations, and their direct exchange ties. Xaltocan may have played an important role in the relationship between these communities. Xaltocan was the only center in the northern Basin to have supported chinampa agriculture (Morehart 2014, 2016; Morehart and Eisenberg 2010; Morehart and Frederick 2014), giving it unique power in this region during the pre-Aztec period (Morehart 2012*a*), and its island location facilitated market exchange throughout the Basin of Mexico (De Lucia 2013; Hassig 1985). Moreover, Xaltocan is the only site in the Basin of Mexico to have imported Polychrome pottery directly from Cholula (Crider 2011:438), which is surprising given that it is the furthest away of all the Polychrome-using sites. Further, Xaltocan has some of the earliest radiocarbon dates in the Basin of Mexico for Aztec I pottery (Brumfiel 2005*a*), which indicates that it may have had particularly close ties with Cholula. As noted earlier, Cholula was an important religious and economic center, which gave rise to the international Mixteca-Puebla stylistic tradition and inherited a Toltec tradition following the fall of Tula.⁵ Aztec I pottery thus may have become linked to a “civilized” or urban identity early in the Postclassic (Blanton 1972).

It is unlikely that the stark boundaries between sites that used Aztec I pottery and those that did not were due to a lack of economic or social interaction but rather that these boundaries were actively maintained. Commoners could have obtained different types of pottery at nearby markets and, in fact, they did; Xaltocan had small quantities of Mazapan Wavy Line sherds in Early Postclassic contexts but they constitute less than 1% of the ceramic assemblage in Structure 1 (table 2).⁶ Xaltocan also produced its own variant of Red-on-Buff ceramics (table 2), which are similar to Tollan-style pottery (De Lucia 2011). The presence of Mazapan ceramics at Xaltocan indicates that there was at least some economic interaction between Xaltocan and surrounding communities. Moreover, the proximity of Xaltocan to communities using Mazapan ceramics, as indicated by regional surveys (Parsons 2008),

5. McCafferty (1994, 2001*a*:57) notes that Cocoyotla Black-on-Natural is similar in decoration, finish, and form to X-Fine Orange from the Gulf Coast and thus may have been associated with the arrival of the Olmeca-Xicallanca to the area during the Epiclassic. Thus, Black-on-Natural may have originally reflected elements of Olmeca-Xicallanca ethnicity.

6. Brumfiel (2005*a*) does not have a category for Mazapan Wavy Line; therefore, I am not able to compare this frequency to site-wide trends. Either she did not find Mazapan Wavy Line sherds or she combined them with other types of Red-on-Buff in her classification.

would make it nearly impossible for there to have been a lack of social interaction between groups. Thus, a political economy perspective fails to adequately explain the lack of overlap between Aztec I and Mazapan ceramics. Instead, if we explore the meaning of pottery and style from within a cultural context and consider the relationships between pots and the people who used them, we may be able to better understand the meaning and distribution of stylistic variation.

Sharp boundaries in pottery style are most likely to be actively maintained if they are closely linked to identity (Emberling 1997:319). The use of Aztec I pottery at Xaltocan in a landscape dominated by Mazapan-Tollan pottery would have thus become a site for the negotiation of group boundaries (Barth 1969). The close physical proximity (and occasional overlap) of Red-on-Buff wares to Aztec I wares suggests that the boundaries were not a reflection of political boundaries or the limits of a distribution system but rather marked social or ethnic difference (Emberling 1997; Wonderly 1986). My argument here is not to equate pots with people but rather to suggest that the distribution of Aztec I pottery and its associated wares indicates that stylistic differences were socially meaningful rather than only reflective of economic or political relations. This point is further reinforced by the data presented above—although all recovered together, Black-on-Orange, Redwares, and Polychrome ceramics were used differently in household contexts, suggesting that Xaltocamecas did not see different types as interchangeable.

Further, each center of Aztec I pottery production produced a distinctive variant that can be distinguished on the basis of design and form (fig. 3). For example, Minc, Hodge, and Blackman (1994) defined three stylistic variants of Aztec I pottery, including Chalco, Mixquic, and Culhuacan, which are associated with their respective regions of production. Xaltocan also produced Aztec I ceramics and certain stylistic motifs are associated with the Xaltocan compositional groups (Crider 2011; De Lucia 2011; Nichols et al. 2002). For example, Nichols et al. (2002) found that interior decorated bowls with large loop motifs were produced locally and interior decorated bowls with wavy lines below the rim were from the northern Basin, either Xaltocan or Cuauhtitlan. My own analysis found that thick-lined horizontal bands below the rim followed by a panel of glyph-like designs divided by groups of vertical bars were produced in Xaltocan (De Lucia 2011). Although it may be tempting to dismiss such variation as inevitably associated with regional differences, Redwares, which are found at all the same sites, do not appear to be as regionally distinctive even though they are also produced in multiple locations. Although NAA demonstrated that half of the Early Postclassic Redwares from Structure 1 were produced locally, they were visually distinguishable only by paste color and not by design (De Lucia 2011).

I argue that the decision to use Aztec I over Mazapan-Tollan pottery at Xaltocan was an active strategy that served to link the identity of Xaltocamecas with the other Early Postclassic centers. Further, if archaeologists can distinguish differences between Aztec I variants, it is likely that the people using them

did as well. As noted by Bowser (2000), the imitation of pottery styles, as well as the deviation from common styles, represents an active choice. Thus, the decision to innovate new stylistic designs while reproducing others would have been an active process that served to constitute communities of practice. The use of Aztec I pottery would have thus simultaneously made a statement about a shared identity between communities while also asserting difference as each important center was trying to emphasize its own dominance during this period of decentralization.

Change through Time

If Aztec I pottery was tied to household ritual and community identity, why would we observe a stylistic shift, or the introduction of Aztec II pottery, in the Middle Postclassic? If the introduction of Aztec II pottery resulted from an evolutionary transition or expanding spheres of influence, we should see Aztec II pottery being produced and consumed in the same locations as Aztec I pottery and expanding outward, but we do not. Instead, Aztec II pottery was produced and consumed in the central and eastern Basin, which was dominated by the Acolhua, at sites that had not previously produced or consumed Aztec I pottery (see figs. 3, 4). Meanwhile, only low densities of Aztec II pottery have been recovered from former Aztec I—using sites (Blanton 1972; Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994; Parsons, Brumfiel, and Wilson 1982:371; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979). This pattern indicates that the change in style of Black-on-Orange pottery was not due to gradual change but, rather, was an intentional strategy.

In taking an approach that views style as an active strategy serving to constitute communities of practice and ceramics as socially meaningful and situated within a *longue durée* and possessing multiple temporalities, I argue that the production of Aztec II pottery in the central Basin was a form of cultural appropriation—that is, an active strategy by emerging powers to embody the power and legitimacy of the Early Postclassic centers. As noted earlier, several of the communities that produced and consumed Aztec I pottery were thought to have descended from the Toltecs. Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery, littered across the ground in Culhuacan, Chalco, Cholula, and Xaltocan, would have served to materialize that Toltec legacy. As new memories were constructed, the fact that Black-on-Orange pottery did not originate in Tula is irrelevant, just as it did not matter to the Mexica whether Culhuacan's ruling dynasties were actually descended from the Toltecs. What would have mattered would have been people's daily experiences, in which Black-on-Orange pottery was linked to cosmological concerns and ancestors and would have been visible on the ground in the powerful Early Postclassic centers that could claim Toltec descent. It is unlikely that the Mexica, as newcomers to the Basin, invented the notion that the Culhua were descended from the Toltecs; it is more likely that they tapped into preexisting beliefs and methods of legitimization that already existed in the Basin of Mexico upon their arrival.

If establishing links to Toltec heritage was key to the legitimizing of power in the Basin of Mexico, the adoption of traditional Black-on-Orange pottery, which was so entwined with cosmology and ritual in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people, would have provided continuity, power, and legitimacy (Rodríguez-Alegria 2016:180). These vessels would not have simply indexed a Toltec heritage, but the objects would have conferred it as well, as they were used in daily feasts and rituals. By adopting pottery that is strongly reminiscent of earlier types of domestic pottery, as argued by Wonderly (1986), “novelty and upheaval could be expressed as continuation of inherited custom” (519). Further, in producing Aztec II pottery, the Acolhua would have sought to materialize their own link to the powerful Tollans. At the same time, by creating a new stylistic variant of traditional forms, emergent political groups in the Middle Postclassic may have sought to distinguish themselves as the new heirs to this legacy.

Only one previous Aztec I center, Culhuacan, produced substantial quantities of Aztec II pottery (Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994). Culhuacan was conquered by the Acolhua in the mid-thirteenth century, suggesting that its political boundaries shifted from the southern Basin toward the central Basin at this time (Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994). The conquest of Culhuacan thus corresponds with its production of Aztec II pottery. Minc, Hodge, and Blackman (1994) propose that Culhuacan may have redesigned their ceramics to meet the needs of their Aztec II—consuming conquerors. Culhuacan, however, rather than producing the same variant being produced within the Acolhua confederation borders known as “Geometric,” produced a distinct “Calligraphic” style of Aztec II ceramics. The Calligraphic variant utilized stylistic attributes associated with Aztec I pottery, including the serpent jaw motifs and stamped bases (Minc, Hodge, and Blackman 1994), and thus may have been an attempt on the part of Culhuacan potters to integrate the cosmological motifs of Aztec I pottery with the new Aztec II style. Given that Geometric Aztec II was most closely associated with the historical boundaries of the Acolhua confederation, the production and use of Calligraphic Aztec II may represent a form of resistance on the part of Culhuacan potters against their Acolhua conquerors.

The distribution of Aztec II pottery across households at Xaltocan supports the interpretation that this pottery was viewed differently from the Aztec I pottery that preceded it and that the differences between the Calligraphic and Geometric Aztec II types were socially meaningful. Although Xaltocan consumed imported Aztec II pottery, in houses that previously used Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery, we observe very low consumption of Aztec II pottery in the Middle Postclassic: only 5.8% of decorated sherds in Structure 1 and 9.6% across the site (table 2). Of this sample, the Calligraphic variant produced at Culhuacan was much more common, representing 81% of all Aztec II sherds from Structure 1 (De Lucia 2011) and 90% from Brumfiel's (2005a, table 4.2) corresponding Phase 2 contexts. This pattern is similar to that in Chalco, another Aztec I producing site, where all of the Aztec II sherds were assigned to

the Culhuacan source group using NAA analysis (Nichols et al. 2002).⁷ None were from the Texcoco region (Neff and Hodge 2008). However, around this time we also see an influx of new immigrants into Xaltocan. Among these new immigrant houses, Aztec II pottery represented over 40% of the decorated ceramic assemblage (Overholtzer and De Lucia 2016).⁸ Moreover, in these new households the Calligraphic and Geometric variants of Aztec II were more equally represented (also see Brumfiel 2005a, table 4.2). Thus, the new populations settling at Xaltocan in the Middle Postclassic used a lot more Aztec II pottery and did not demonstrate a preference for the Calligraphic variant (Overholtzer and De Lucia 2016). I argue that former Aztec I—using households preferred the Calligraphic variant because it incorporated symbolic elements from Aztec I pottery; however, their overall low consumption of Aztec II would signal a rejection of the co-option of Black-on-Orange pottery by others. Thus, the patterns that we see across the entire Basin of Mexico described above are repeated at the level of the site in Xaltocan, where former users of Aztec I pottery appear to largely reject Aztec II pottery, with some exceptions made for Culhuacan Calligraphic, while culturally distinct newcomers consumed it in large quantities. Thus, I argue that households within the former Early Postclassic political centers such as Xaltocan appeared to reject the appropriation of Black-on-Orange pottery by emergent political groups.

The Growth of Empires

As the Tepanec Empire began to expand, they also adopted a new style of Black-on-Orange pottery, Aztec III, which demonstrates some stylistic continuity with Aztec II pottery (Rosado, Fournier, and Carballal 2007:293). The timing of the adoption of Aztec III pottery varies somewhat from site to site and, as argued by Hodge and Neff (2005), “corresponds most closely to the expansion of Azcapotzalco’s political domain in the late 1300s” (319). The combined forces of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan eventually defeated the Tepanecs in 1428, and the Triple Alliance came to assert control over all city-states in the Basin of Mexico, continuing to produce Aztec III pottery. Many scholars have argued that during the Late Postclassic, market distribution and the intensification of commerce were closely tied to political changes, especially the formation of the Triple Alliance (Garraty 2007, 2013; Minc 2009; Nichols et al. 2002, 2009; Smith 2010). Aztec III pottery had multiple production locations in the Basin, including Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, Ixtapalapa, and Chalco (Garraty 2007; Hodge et al. 1993; Nichols et al. 2002), but it was more standardized with less variation than Aztec I and Aztec II, with different production locales using similar motifs and decorative elements (García Chávez 2004; Garraty 2013). The standardization of the

Aztec III style has been attributed to greater market integration, the centralization of production in Tenochtitlan, and elite control over production (García Chávez 2004; Garraty 2013). Although I do not doubt that economic factors influenced the standardization of style in the Late Postclassic, we must also consider the meanings and consequences of this standardization. The continuity of the Aztec III style under Aztec rule may have served to highlight cultural continuity during a time of upheaval. As argued by Pauketat and Emerson (1991), “redundancy of symbolic expression may have been a necessary condition for the reproduction of political authority” (934–935). Moreover, if stylistic differences in pottery were associated with the construction of identity in the past, these associations may have been lost in the Late Postclassic as pottery became more standardized throughout the Aztec world.

Furthermore, greater state control over the production of Black-on-Orange pottery would have been an important mechanism for establishing political authority. If Black-on-Orange pottery indeed embodied a Toltec heritage, Aztec elites could emphasize their own ties to Toltec ancestors and highlight the empire’s authority through this form of symbolic expression. Lucero (2003) notes that “emerging political elites claim closer ties to the supernatural world, particularly ancestors, and as descendants of founding ancestors they can reach out to more people” (524). Many of the symbolic elements associated with Aztec I and some Aztec II pottery disappear from Aztec III vessels. Interestingly, Brumfiel (2007) finds that in the Late Postclassic much of the cosmic symbolism also disappears from spindle whorls, and they become more simply decorated or not decorated at all, as if women rejected the appropriation of these symbols by the state. Would this mean that Black-on-Orange pottery no longer played an important role in ritual as in the Early Postclassic? Additional research of the contextual use of this pottery in Aztec-period households is necessary to answer this question.

In sum, my goal is to underscore the importance of alternative ontologies and to suggest that Black-on-Orange pottery held deeply symbolic and cultural meanings that complicate our ability to understand style and distribution systems using political economy models alone. The standardization of Aztec III pottery and its widespread distribution thus would not only have been a consequence of market integration or an economic policy aimed at promoting growth and controlling production systems (Berdan and Smith 1996; Blanton 1996; Garraty 2006, 2007; Hicks 1987) but also could have been a strategy of legitimization.

Conclusion

As stated by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), “the past does not exist independently from the present. Indeed, the past is only past because there is a present” (15). Historical narratives are thus shaped not only by past events but also by current and previous understandings of the world. Following Trouillot (1995), I emphasize the role that material culture plays in constructing memory and understandings of the past. Material

7. Aztec I pottery represents 25% of decorated sherds from this same deposit.

8. Overholtzer and De Lucia (2016) report detailed numerical data on these trends.

objects become entangled with everyday human lives, and “the cohabitations of the past with the present may have been understood as actively shaping community identity and social existence” (Hamann 2002:354). Ceramics littered across the ground in the Postclassic Basin of Mexico would have contributed to the construction of historical narratives, as objects continue to have meaning even long after they have fallen into disuse (Wobst 1999:123). Ultimately, however, unequal distributions of power determine which narratives are remembered and which ones are silenced.

I argue that Aztec I pottery, the earliest of the Black-on-Orange ceramics, served as a means of constituting identity among the large lakeshore communities during the Early Postclassic period in the Basin of Mexico. By looking at the contexts of use and ways of using in households, I argue that Black-on-Orange pottery served a critical role in the daily ritual practice of commoners. Aztec I pottery in Xaltocan was used by all households for the consumption of food and may have played an important role in rituals associated with ancestors and cosmological cycles. In contrast, imported Polychromes and Redwares, while seen as part of this broader complex since they are almost always found together, likely served a different purpose as they were used for more specialized food consumption, perhaps involving inter-household feasting. I also suggest that the high density of Aztec I pottery at Xaltocan, and nowhere else in the northern Basin of Mexico, suggests that Xaltocan played a central political and cultural role in the northern Basin of Mexico during the pre-imperial period (also see Carrasco Pizana 1950; Morehart 2012a).

The abrupt introduction of Aztec II by many former Mazapan-using communities may have been an attempt by emerging empires to co-opt the historical legacy of the powerful Early Postclassic centers, while simultaneously asserting a distinct identity of their own. As emphasized by Wobst (1977:326), rapid changes in style serve to communicate information. Because Black-on-Orange pottery was used by the powerful Early Postclassic centers associated with a Toltec legacy and later appropriated by emerging empires in the Middle Postclassic, I suggest that this pottery became associated with Toltec descent even though it was not, in fact, a Toltec invention. Moreover, the adoption of some styles, as well as the rejection of others, would have been active choices on the part of producers and consumers. Aztec I-using households in Xaltocan, for example, actively rejected the appropriation of Black-on-Orange pottery by others, which they signaled by their low levels of consumption of Aztec II pottery and increased emphasis on Black-on-Red pottery at this time. Style might also reflect instances of resistance, such as the Calligraphic variant of Aztec II produced at Culhuacan; Culhuacan potters, although compelled to adopt the new style of their conquerors, found creative ways to reconfigure Aztec I motifs into the new style. Increased state control over the production of Black-on-Orange ceramics known as Aztec III would have later offered elites a new way to emphasize their political authority and broaden their role as ritual mediators, thereby increasing the dependence of commoners on elites.

The creation of a Toltec legacy was crucial to the establishment of power in the Late Postclassic Basin of Mexico, and I argue that Black-on-Orange pottery, along with other forms of material culture such as art and clothing, provided a means of materializing that legacy. Pottery style is neither random nor innocuous. Style is intimately connected to people’s understandings of the world and linked to the formation of social identity, but it is also a source of power to be co-opted. Style is an aspect of social practice and is not a product of permanent identities but can vary significantly through time (Stahl 1991: 250). Thus, we should recognize style as actively produced by historical agents and examine the individual contexts and patterns of use to consider why potters innovate new styles and, just as importantly, why they may maintain styles over time. At the same time, we should explore the ways in which these objects framed people’s understandings of the past and shaped social relations in the present (Gell 1998). Pottery style thus reflects active statements about the creation of difference and identity by commoners and elites alike. In order to better understand these statements, we need to consider the relationships between people and objects, rather than simply the objects in isolation from those that used them.

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Comments

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Archaeologists and ethnohistorians have long argued that the Aztecs sought to cement their status and authority in Late

Postclassic Mesoamerica by appropriating imagery and symbolism associated with the elite art and architecture of the earlier Toltec polity (e.g., Umberger 1987). Aztec nobles also sought to establish genealogical connections with the Toltec ruling line (Gillespie 1989). In this article, Kristin De Lucia shifts the focus on appropriations of Toltec heritage from elite culture to pottery and the everyday domestic lives of commoners at the Postclassic site of Xaltocan in the Basin of Mexico. She moves away from representationalist perspectives to explore the ways in which Black-on-Orange pottery was entangled with and actively shaped social identities of people during the Early and Middle Postclassic periods, prior to the emergence of the Aztec Empire. Her analysis indicates that stylistic differences associated with Black-on-Orange ceramics resulted from active assertions of identity among producers and consumers and therefore represents a welcome alternative to perspectives based solely on political economy.

Early Postclassic Aztec I pottery was used by powerful political centers associated with a Toltec legacy. Rather than linked directly to the Toltec political center of Tula, which was not associated with the use of Aztec I ceramics, De Lucia views the concept of “Toltec” in the more generalized sense embraced by later Aztec peoples as associated with a “civilized” or urban identity, in contrast to the nomadic Chichimecs. The link between Aztec I pottery and even this more generalized notion of Toltec could be made more explicitly, however. The political centers that used Aztec I pottery were concentrated in the southern Basin of Mexico and included Chalco, Mixquic, and Culhuacan. Xaltocan was the only Aztec I–using political center in the northern Basin and the stark boundary in ceramic styles between Xaltocan and surrounding communities supports the link between ceramic styles and identity. By the Middle Postclassic the area of Aztec II–style Black-on-Orange pottery shifts to the central and eastern Basin, which De Lucia convincingly argues is linked to the rise of the Acolhua confederation and possible claims to Toltec heritage via ceramic styles. She suggests that the production and use of a distinct variant of Aztec II ceramics by many communities that had previously made and used Aztec I pottery could be an expression of resistance to Acolhua domination.

An important contribution of this article is the argument that everyday domestic pottery, as well as monumental art and architecture, was used to assert Toltec heritage in ways that both constituted a shared identity and legitimated political power and inequality. Although it is clear that Black-on-Orange ceramics were actively consumed by non-elites in ritual settings and in daily food consumption at Xaltocan, it would be helpful to know more about the production and distribution of these ceramics. To what extent were the production and exchange of Black-on-Orange pottery controlled by the nobility, perhaps in part as a strategy of ideological production? This scenario is argued by De Lucia for Aztec III pottery during the Late Postclassic, although it is unclear if it also pertains to the earlier examples of Aztec I and II ceramics. Alternatively, as argued by Forde (2016) for Late Postclassic Tututepec in Oaxaca, perhaps

commoners had a range of choices in the ceramics that they consumed and actively selected pottery styles that reflected a concordance between commoner and elite ritual, cosmology, and ideology. Likewise, it would be interesting to consider the relationship of the domestic rituals in which Black-on-Orange ceramics were deployed relative to the ritual practices of institutionalized religions that served the interests of political and religious elites. Rather than focusing on a domination-resistance polarity, the ceramic data from Xaltocan could be used to consider how ceramics were entangled with the negotiation of political and religious relations among commoners and elites.

A potential fascinating inference that is touched on in the article is that ceramic styles actively shaped identity and politics both in their use in ritual and domestic contexts and as broken and discarded materials that littered the surface of Postclassic communities. The implication is that the material durability of discarded ceramics with outmoded styles still had the potential to inform the negotiation of politics and identity. Although this point is only briefly explored in the article, it is consistent with recent arguments for considering the ongoing significance of ruins, trash, and discarded things that, because of their durability, continue to affect people long after their time of primary use (Cameron 2002; Gordillo 2014; Hamann 2002, 2008; Hutson and Stanton 2007; Stanton and Magnoni 2008). De Lucia might explore the ways in which discarded pottery could have acted as agents of disruption by actualizing alternative pasts particularly at the Middle Postclassic communities that had previously made and used Aztec I pottery (see Olsen 2010:166–172). In this sense, the discarded sherds that littered the surface may have actualized a past in opposition to Acolhua domination.

Overall, the article by De Lucia is an important contribution to understanding the role of claims to Toltec heritage in later prehispanic Basin of Mexico polities. Her article demonstrates that common people as well as nobility participated in the appropriation of the Toltec past.

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De Lucia’s major contribution is considering why stylistic changes in pottery occur in the first place. As archaeologists, we know that styles change through time, as battleship curves show, but rarely do we think about the reasons why these changes happen. Is it because artisans developed a new technology or innovation in design that fundamentally improved the product? Is it because new producers introduced a novel, desirable, and affordable style? Is it because new political leadership emerged, which made certain products more accessible? Or is it because consumers marked their allegiance with a new

regime by adopting newly introduced symbolism? De Lucia urges us to consider what it means when styles do not change. Staying with the same, she argues, is as equally an active choice as choosing to innovate and change. Rather than indicating unwillingness to innovate or backwardness, the choice to stay the course, she argues, is equally meaningful. It might indicate that a new style is unnecessary and undesirable, or it might indicate reluctance or active resistance on the part of consumers when faced with multiple market choices and political pressures. In other words, sameness and difference are both purposeful choices. De Lucia also effectively argues that designs and symbols in material culture “create” particular ideologies rather than simply “representing” them. That is, it is in everyday use and visibility (even when items litter the ground as trash) that such ideologies manifest, reinforce, and create meaning, bolstering particular identities.

The article documents ceramic change (and lack thereof) at Xaltocan, an Early Postclassic center in central Mexico, which by the Middle Postclassic was conquered by the rising Aztec Triple Alliance. De Lucia argues that prior to the Mexica Aztec arrival and conquest by the Triple Alliance, Xaltocan was one of several Early Postclassic centers whose inhabitants chose to use Aztec I pottery instead of the Mazapan Red-on-Buff pottery used by people living in contemporaneous sites nearby. Xaltocan, at this time, was a powerful center with multiple tribute-paying constituents, whose residents would have had access to various styles of pottery. The Aztec I pottery that they used is closely linked to eating/consumption practices (based on ceramic forms), and the symbolism on the pottery (flowers, solar designs) references sacred traditions having to do with cycles of time. De Lucia argues that elites and non-elites in Xaltocan chose Aztec I pottery in part to link themselves to the civilized/urban “Tollan” identity that Aztec I pottery had come to represent (even though Toltecs at Tula, themselves, never used it). Xaltocan’s residents distinguished themselves from their neighbors by using Aztec I pottery—or producing a local variant of it—which served to link them to a particular politico-religious ideology associated with other powerful Early Postclassic centers. By doing so, Xaltocan’s residents marked their “sameness” with exalted Early Postclassic centers and, at the same time, marked “difference” from their neighbors.

Where the case becomes more intriguing (and perhaps more tenuous) is in the discussion of the Middle Postclassic Aztec II period, when Xaltocan households consumed newly introduced Aztec II pottery in small but different proportions. Aztec II pottery was primarily produced and consumed at sites that had not been previous consumers of Aztec I pottery and strategically incorporated salient iconographic elements from Aztec I pottery that helped to legitimize rising and upstart elites. Xaltocan experienced an influx of new immigrants during this time, indicated by the growth and establishment of new houses across the site. The adoption and use of Aztec II pottery in Middle Postclassic households at Xaltocan varied. De Lucia argues that houses that had previously used Aztec I pottery (i.e., established families that were present during the Early

Postclassic) only reluctantly used Aztec II pottery, while houses that were newly established (i.e., immigrants who were not present during the Early Postclassic) were largely the consumers of Aztec II pottery. To De Lucia, this indicates a socially varied landscape at Xaltocan, perhaps showing indifference in immigrants about choosing to use Aztec II pottery and a rejection by Early Postclassic residents (long-standing families) of Black-on-Orange pottery. To me, these differences raise more questions. I’m not convinced that the differences can only be explained by resistance or reluctance on the part of long-standing households. Perhaps, for example, those households with largely Aztec I users were comfortable with their wares and therefore opted for new ceramics that most closely matched what they had already been using and had grown accustomed to. Likewise, perhaps immigrant households, in needing to set up house, simply chose those styles that were most widely available or based their consumer choices on linkages to (or departures from) a particular tradition elsewhere. How can we be sure that the new households are immigrants rather than growth of the autochthonous population, whereby “new” houses were simply built by descendants of Early Postclassic families? De Lucia’s reading is intriguing and worth considering, but I am not sure the ceramic data from Xaltocan are robust enough to eliminate all other possibilities.

By the time Aztec III pottery came to be dominant, the Tepanec Empire was expanding. The widespread production and use of Aztec III pottery and standardization in forms and motifs, with a clear connection to Aztec II pottery, are reflective of greater market integration and rising elite control over design, production, and distribution. De Lucia argues that what political economy models miss is that the continuity of Aztec III style with Aztec II was a strategic choice made by rising elites and producers during a time of much political upheaval. She argues that the design choices evident in Aztec III pottery helped the Mexica demonstrate their authority in central Mexico and served to legitimize their connections to Toltec heritage. It also suggests that commoners were increasingly dependent on elites as mediators of ritual. In other words, the choice of particular ceramic styles by producers and consumers cannot always be explained by economic practices and political machination alone. Although Aztec III households have not yet been excavated in Xaltocan, it would be interesting to see what data they would reveal.

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This is a richly provocative manuscript that attempts to demonstrate the agentive use of Aztec Black-on-Orange (BO) pottery, the predominant decorated type from the Postclassic pe-

riod in the Basin of Mexico, as a strategy for asserting affiliation with a mythic Toltec legacy. The author uses contemporary archaeological theories, foregrounding the “entanglement” of material culture with human action, ideas, and histories to argue that ceramics played an active role in framing daily practice and social landscapes. Although I am not completely persuaded by all the interpretations, I thoroughly enjoyed the argument, which I believe will stimulate further discussion.

Aztec BO has a long history of manufacture and use, beginning in the Early Postclassic (ca. AD 900) with the unfortunate misnomer of *Aztec I BO* (since the actual Mexica/Aztec didn't arrive on the scene for several hundred years, this type of name itself is an artifact of previous scholarship). Through four iterations roughly linked to chronological changes, Aztec BO developed with changing stylistic traits and iconography. An important contribution of this paper is the linkage between stylistic change and contextual developments in regional politics and perhaps ethnic affiliations. Xaltocan, the focus of the article, was unusual because, although it is located in the northern Basin of Mexico, it featured a high frequency of Aztec I BO during its initial occupation, a ceramic type more characteristic of sites from the southern Basin of Mexico and in contrast to contemporary sites in the northern Basin. As the author suggests, this may relate to cultural or ethnic differences between the Toltec culture that controlled the northern Basin and another group, perhaps affiliated with Cholula from the Puebla valley, with influence in the southern Basin.

The historical context becomes key to the author's premise of “style, memory, and the production of history” and comes into play as she argues that the introduction of the related but stylistically distinct Aztec II BO of the subsequent Middle Postclassic is an intentional reference to the Toltec heritage, especially among communities where Toltec influence (as inferred from use of Mazapan Red-on-Buff pottery) had been predominant. But there is a little sleight of hand, either by the artisans of ancient Xaltocan or the author herself: if the early iteration of Black-on-Orange was diagnostic of Cholula and the southern Basin, then why would it come to symbolize the Toltecs with their distinctive Red-on-Buff pottery style? And why would this process of emulation be expressed through the introduction of Aztec II BO (still long before the Mexica arrive in the Basin and associated with the rise of an altogether different city-state)? De Lucia implies that it may have been because Cholula was also referred to as a *Tollan* place, where “Tollan” can loosely be interpreted as a “culturally sophisticated metropolis.” This transition does seem to be strongly related to identity politics, but I am not convinced by the Cholula/Toltec shift. Surely the consumers of Middle Postclassic Xaltocan could distinguish between Tollan Xicotitlan (Tula) and Tollan Cholollan (Cholula) and were making decisions based on that knowledge. Perhaps more copacetic would be that Early Postclassic Xaltocan was an outpost of groups affiliated with Cholula and the southern Basin, identified as members of the Olmeca-Xicallanca culture with origins on the Gulf Coast, and founding families from this ethnic group continued

as prominent members of the community in the subsequent period. It is absolutely a direction for further research.

During the Middle Postclassic at Xaltocan, new household consumers tended to prefer the innovative Aztec II BO, as opposed to older, founder households that still preferred the Aztec I version. This is very interesting and further demonstrates the value of nuanced interpretations available with a refined micro-chronology and extensive excavation of household materials. Notably, the introduction of the Aztec II BO (ca. AD 1200) also corresponds loosely with the abandonment of the Toltec capital of Tula (Hidalgo) and a diaspora of Toltec refugees that may have influenced historical events even beyond the Basin of Mexico. For example, this migration was the likely cause for the arrival of the Tolteca-Chichimeca in Cholula, where they resided along with the autochthonous Olmeca-Xicallanca (producers of the local variant of Aztec I BO and early Polychromes using the Mixteca-Puebla stylistic tradition). These newly arrived Toltec refugees were probably responsible for the violent abandonment of Cholula's Great Pyramid and subsequent relocation to a new ceremonial center around the Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl, as indicated in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (Kirchhoff, Güemes, and García 1976).

In conclusion, I found this discussion stimulating, moving a tired and antiquated dialogue about Basin of Mexico ceramics into a much more interesting discourse with real social actors materializing their identity strategies using a common but symbolically charged artifact class. My fundamental criticism exposes my profound case of “my site-itis” because the author largely ignores the dynamic cultural developments at Cholula in favor of the more traditional Mexico-centrism that focuses on the Toltec legacy (McCafferty 2007). Epiclassic and Early Postclassic Cholula rivaled Tula in scale based on the extensive construction program of its ceremonial center around the Great Pyramid, and despite the arrival of the Tolteca-Chichimeca at the beginning of the Middle Postclassic, it was not abandoned but rather continued as a prominent religious and economic center through the Late Postclassic. Xaltocan seems to have been at the frontier of these developments, and the research of De Lucia and other contributors from the project, especially Liz Brumfiel, holds promise for exciting revelations about this dynamic period of time.

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Kristin De Lucia's article places ceramics at Xaltocan within the broader context of the Basin of Mexico, as well as inspiring further research by multiple disciplines using different data sets. Focusing on the three pre-Spanish stages of Aztec Black-on-Orange (BO I, II, and III), the diagnostic ceramics of the

Postclassic Basin of Mexico in chronological order, she emphasizes their usage as a matter of conscious communal identity among householders at all levels of society. (Although not the subject of her study, differences in class would be indicated by quality.)

Most innovative is De Lucia's hypothesis that all three BO style stages evoked Toltec heritage in the hands of different polities over time. This might seem surprising, given that visually BO is not related in any way to ceramics at Tula, the site now recognized as the Toltec capital (Tollan) described by the Aztecs. Nevertheless, her argument is logical. Toltec heritage was an obsession in the Basin of Mexico—an obsession that increased over time to the point that revivals of forms seen at Tula were re-created to decorate the Aztec imperial capital, Tenochtitlan. De Lucia suggests that the reference was to Culhuacan, the origin city of the Basin version of Toltec culture. Whether Culhuacan had been a Toltec colony contemporaneous with the city of Tula, the place where survivors of the fallen city settled, or both, according to sources written after the Spanish conquest, the claim to Toltec heritage was passed to other cities through intermarriage. Culhuacan was also in the area where Aztec BO I originated; De Lucia considers this a purposeful connection, not a coincidence.

She also notes that Xaltocan's link with early Colhuacan is apparent in the density of Aztec I BO there too and the lack of this ceramic style in areas between the two cities. De Lucia suggests that this type of distribution was more a matter of identity than market forces. Later Aztec II BO coincided with the dominance of another polity, that of the Acolhua on the east side of the Basin, and Aztec III BO coincided with Tepanec dominance in the west Basin. Aztec III BO then continued under the Triple Alliance of Mexica Tenochtitlan, Acolhua Texcoco, and Tepanec Tlacopan and spread with Aztec conquests throughout the empire. I find convincing the assertion that Aztec BO symbolized the neo-Toltec connection with the ancient city and that the different phases represented the communal identities of different polities. But the iconographic interpretations of the motifs of each style phase need further study and the publication of many more images of the BO variations.

Further research should also involve deeper investigations into nonarchaeological data, which would complicate and perhaps clarify aspects of the questions raised by the ceramics. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1975–1977), the early seventeenth-century historian-descendant of the Acolhua dynasty of Texcoco, for instance, presents many pages detailing the genealogies of generations of Basin royalty that claimed a relationship to Culhuacan (among them, the rulers of Xaltocan). In other lengthy sections, he narrates the sequential adoption of different aspects of Toltec culture by the Acolhua—from agricultural techniques early on to the installation generations later of Nahuatl, the Toltec language, as the kingdom's official means of communication. Of course, all such passages are distorted according to political agenda (Ixtlilxóchitl's bias was Acolhua and colonial). However, the objective of analysis need not be to determine the

truth of particular claims but rather to gain knowledge of the issues and evidences offered.

Visual images also present information not available in ceramic studies. De Lucia mentions Patricia Anawalt's (1993) study of royal cloaks that were tribute items from different Basin provinces. These cloaks combine a section occupied by a blue, tie-dyed pattern (signifying Toltec heritage) with others of different colors. Each cloak type was individual to a particular area, so they are comparable to the BO styles in their linking of Toltec-derived patterns to local identity.

Other important examples are stone sculptures replicating Toltec forms. Early sculptures are relatively crudely carved images of the Chacmool, a traditional form that conveyed Toltec heritage, but, like BO ceramics, they represent a continuation of a tradition, not a revival. Such sculptures have been found scattered over areas extending from Tula in the north to a number of places in central Mexico further south. They were made between the fall of Tula and the late 1300s. The best known (and preserved) example was found still in situ on the platform of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan (ca. 1390).

In contrast are a number of monuments and even architecture from the imperial period of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Triple Alliance Empire. Surviving examples date from between 1450, in the reign of Moteuczoma I, and the Spanish conquest of 1521. These are obvious revivals of antique forms seen at Tula and other ancient sites (presumably revealing the expansion of the term "Toltec" to include all ruined cities). Through detailing with names, dates, and specifically Aztec motifs, their connection to contemporary political purposes is just as obvious as their connection with particular cultures (Umberger 1987). A few ceramic examples have also been found: for example, the orange pedestal funerary vessels of about 1469. All these forms at the imperial center, having resulted from the study of actual relics, provide an interesting contrast to the contemporary BO III ceramics used by all levels of society and representing a continuous tradition of links to Tula-Toltec heritage by a more circuitous route.

Reply

I would like to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful comments and responses to this article. I very much appreciate their thoughts and feedback. One of my primary goals in writing this article was to open a dialogue (rather than to offer a conclusion) that considers the agency of objects and ordinary people in the construction of identity and history and to expand models that view pottery as primarily functional or economic in nature. This is not to say that economic approaches are not important; my research in fact started out looking at the political economy, but I was unable to make sense of Aztec I pottery using an economic framework alone. I additionally wanted

to think about how ordinary people in the past enacted politics on an everyday basis through material culture. I thank the reviewers for further engaging with these ideas, and I hope that these discussions will continue into the future.

Joyce notes that an important implication for this study is that the “material durability of discarded ceramics . . . had the potential to inform the negotiation of politics and identity” and suggests that I further explore the ways in which discarded pottery acted as “agents of the disruption” during the Middle Postclassic. King suggests that I explore alternative possibilities and interpretations of why long-standing households may have used different types of pottery than the newly established ones in the Middle Postclassic. King suggests that the Aztec I consumers may have simply continued to use the styles that they were most accustomed to. These comments, at least in part, speak to the limitations of my data set, which included Middle Postclassic middens rather than intact houses, but ongoing research in Xaltocan looking at later period houses (see also Overholtzer 2012; Overholtzer and De Lucia 2016) will help to further explore these questions. Nonetheless, I argue that differences in consumption practices between original Xaltocan settlers and new arrivals in the Middle Postclassic have important implications. When faced with difference, what once would have been taken for granted would now take on new significance (Bourdieu 1977). In other words, in the face of change, the maintenance of style would come to signify difference and might become political in nature as noted by Bowser’s (2000) ethnographic work. The discarded pottery on the house mounds of the original settlers may have helped them to stake claims to place and further reinforce difference, or even opposition, as suggested by Joyce. King also suggests that perhaps the new households represent the growth of the autochthonous population. I argue elsewhere with Overholtzer (De Lucia and Overholtzer 2014; Overholtzer and De Lucia 2016) that the new households have distinct cultural differences that suggest they are immigrants.

Joyce wants to know more about the production and distribution of ceramics. Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery was produced in households in Xaltocan and was also imported from the southern Basin. Evidence for pottery production in households and the lack of any evidence for pottery workshops in Xaltocan suggest that the production of Aztec I pottery took place at the household level on a part-time, seasonal basis and would have taken place alongside other craft activities (De Lucia 2013). I argue elsewhere that during the Early Postclassic commoners were involved in market exchange (De Lucia 2013) and would have been able to purchase ceramics in the marketplace. Thus, their use of imported Black-on-Orange ceramics in a region where they were not readily available suggests that people would have had to go out of their way to obtain Black-on-Orange ceramics that were mostly concentrated in the southern Basin of Mexico during the Early Postclassic. However, the local production of Black-on-Orange pottery declined over time (Nichols et al. 2002), suggesting that production and distribution may have become increasingly under elite control.

Thus, I agree with Joyce’s suggestion that commoners “consumed and actively selected pottery styles that reflect a concordance between commoner and elite ritual, cosmology, and ideology.”

The reviewers offer several suggestions for further study. Joyce recommends considering the relationship between the use of Black-on-Orange pottery in domestic rituals compared with political elites. Black-on-Orange pottery is scattered across the site and is associated with all households, suggesting that it was not restricted to elite contexts. The relationship between commoner and elite rituals is a question that my current research in Xaltocan with Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría seeks to address, and we hope to be able to have a better answer to this question soon. McCafferty proposes that Xaltocan may have been “an outpost of groups affiliated with Cholula and the southern Basin, identified as members of the Olmeca-Xicalanca.” I think this is an intriguing possibility and would be interested in investigating this idea further in the future. I agree with McCafferty that Xaltocan likely had a close relationship with Cholula, especially given that Xaltocan is one of the only sites in the Basin to have imported ceramics directly from Cholula (Crider 2011). Given this connection, further consideration of Cholula’s political, economic, and cultural developments is a natural direction for future study. Umberger advises that I further study the motifs and iconography of Black-on-Orange pottery and publish additional images. I agree that additional research into the iconography of Black-on-Orange pottery, especially in relation to contextual information, could provide additional support to the arguments presented in this article, although such a study would require a much more in-depth discussion than I can do justice to in this space but see Brumfiel (2007) and Herández Sánchez (2010). Umberger also suggests deeper research into ethnohistorical texts and other types of nonarchaeological data to help clarify some of the points raised. For example, Umberger points out that Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1975–1977) notes that many generations of royalty in the Basin of Mexico, including Xaltocan, claimed a relationship to Culhuacan, offering support to the claim that legitimization through Culhuacan was widespread beyond the Mexica. All of the above comments convince me that this article is just the tip of the iceberg, as these suggestions deserve much further exploration than can be offered in the space provided here.

McCafferty asks why the process of emulation would take place before the Mexica rise to power. I propose that appropriation did not begin with the Aztecs but rather began earlier, when Early and Middle Postclassic polities began competing for power and sought to obtain legitimacy. In other words, the Aztecs were so obsessed with creating a Toltec legacy for themselves only because it would have already been important to the legitimization of power in the Basin of Mexico. It was not just the Mexica but also royalty across the Basin, as pointed out by Umberger, that sought ties with Culhuacan. King, Umberger, and Joyce note that this article highlights that both common people, as well as elites, engaged in the appropriation of the Toltec past. McCafferty argues that people would have been able to distinguish between

pottery from Tula and Cholula; however, I argue that the concept of “Toltec” was broader in definition than any one specific site (see also Iverson 2017). It was precisely because Cholula and the other city-states that used Black-on-Orange pottery were so important that people in rising city-states during the Middle Postclassic would have wanted to actively adopt this pottery, so that they too could make claims to elevated status. The distinct pattern of the spread and change in design elements of Black-on-Orange pottery during the Middle Postclassic strongly indicates appropriation to me. However, I am not arguing that Black-on-Orange pottery was linked specifically with the place of Tula, but rather that it became associated with the elevated status, legitimacy, and sophistication of the legendary Toltecs. I argue that over time, as the former Early Postclassic centers became associated with Toltec descent, the meanings and identities associated with this pottery would have shifted. Aztec I Black-on-Orange pottery would have been readily visible on the ground at sites known to have held Toltec heritage, such as Culhuacan and Cholula. I argue that seeing this pottery in these locations would have shaped people’s understandings of the past and its significance in the present.

History is constantly changing and manipulated and, as such, meanings can change rapidly and evidence can be ignored. In modern-day Xaltocan, for example, people regularly engage with the past by collecting artifacts on the ground, and they incorporate their understanding of the past into their conceptions of identity. As noted by Morehart (2012*b*) and Brumfiel (2000), the town has used Xaltocan’s place in history to emphasize its uniqueness and to elevate its status over surrounding communities. This modern-day construction of identity has materialized in very visible ways. At the entrance of Xaltocan is a statue of an Aztec warrior with the Xaltocan toponym placed on the center of his shield. In the main village square, there is also a statue of a sun disk resembling the Aztec Sun Stone, also with Xaltocan’s toponym in the center. Both of these statues place Xaltocan at the center of Aztec power. In reality, Xaltocan’s power peaked well before the rise of the Aztec Empire, and the town was ultimately subordinate to the empire. Although this knowledge is readily accessible, the people of Xaltocan choose to identify with the Aztec conquerors while simultaneously glorifying Xaltocan’s unique place in history (Morehart 2012*b*). The statues, referencing an imagined past, thus serve to both reflect and constitute local identity. As noted by Morehart (2012*b*), “The past is deployed strategically and flexibly at Xaltocan in ways that render such historical inconsistencies irrelevant—a blending process that is simultaneously imagined and real” (278). Understandings of the past are thus a product of memory making and forgetting and ultimately serve to meet the needs of the present (Trouillot 1995).

—Kristin De Lucia

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