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The potters' perspectives: A vibrant chronology of ceramic manufacturing practices in the valley of Juigalpa, Chontales, Nicaragua (cal 300 CE - present)

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Summary

This research explores several problematic issues for the archaeological discipline in general and also for the particular archaeological narratives in southern Central America. To begin with, this manuscript tackles the question of Western and Cartesian perspectives of time, as found in the traditional practice of chronology building. Then, it challenges the dominant notions of change and materiality to compose a chronological narrative that connects different materialities. Here, materiality is seen as the embodiment of situated and incorporated gestures. This definition allows a portrayal of how the vibrant and vital experiences of the different communities of potters are entangled with their manufacturing practices in the valley of Juigalpa, central Nicaragua, since cal 300 CE through to today.

Previous chronological efforts in the research region were designed, executed, and narrated from a Mesoamerican point of view, predominantly portraying the research region as the southeasternmost border of that cultural area. However, the innovative theoretical, methodological, and technical approach of this book explores central Nicaragua first from the local universes of possibilities, and only then relating these to other regions of study. Results indicate that people in the valley of Juigalpa engaged with different communities, constellations, and networks of practices. This connected them to groups in faraway places in present-day Honduras and Costa Rica. In spite of these strong ties to lands beyond their cultural horizon, people in the valley of Juigalpa maintained their own ways of doing things, while also incorporating new ideas and practices.

In this text, the question of time and chronology-building in archaeology is analyzed from different perspectives. First, it deals with the linear conception of time; second the practice of ignoring the palimpsestic ontology of materiality, translated in

the use of formal attributes of ceramic vessels (decoration and shape), to infer social and cultural change. Third, the isolation of ceramic chronologies to a deep past; neglecting the transformation of the production and uses of ceramic objects today. One of the main problems, then, of traditional chronology-building efforts is the denial of the present, which is directly connected with the denial of the present tense of archaeological practices, and the fact that the materials that we use to narrate the past are actually temporal (and other types of) palimpsests.

This manuscript aims to challenge the paradigm of time and materiality as commonly used in archaeology, and to propose a new way of narrating vital chronologies. The point of departure for this endeavor is a *longue durée* perspective on the geographical unit of the valley of Juigalpa. A chronology including five different intervals is presented, through viewing archaeological materials—especially ceramics—as complex and embodied palimpsests; as the bundling of unfolding traces. The intervals run from the earliest traces of human practices through to the present. This research was conducted under the auspices of the *Proyecto Arqueológico Centro de Nicaragua* (PACEN), directed by Alexander Geurds. The chronology introduced in this book is based on more than a year of archaeological fieldwork in Nicaragua, including systematic surface survey, stratigraphic excavations, and ethnographic work; together with extensive laboratory work in The Netherlands.