

## **Bridging History and Prehistory: General Reflections and Particular Quandries**

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### Abstract

How can social entities derived from spatial and temporal patterning in material culture be reconciled with social entities derived from documentary accounts based on the assertions of both colonial and indigenous informants? How can archaeologists and ethnohistorians translate their independently-derived conceptions of the social landscape for one another? Using the Southeastern U.S. as a backdrop, this paper explores fundamental ontological and methodological differences between how we perceive and construct these social entities using material and documentary data, highlighting the rarely-challenged assumption that ceramic assemblages are reasonable indicators of the ethnic identity of their makers, and suggesting potential alternatives and solutions.

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For most of the Southeast, what might be described as an enhanced culture-historical framework (e.g. Lyman et al. 1997) is normally utilized by archaeologists to generate the geographical and chronological units that are employed in the analysis of Native American social structure. Even though the advent of processual archaeology during the 1960s is still explicitly avowed to have swept away the discipline's previous reliance on using the spatial and temporal distribution of material culture (particularly ceramics) as a basis for a normative model of culture that ignored the dynamic nature of culture process, Southeastern archaeologists still make extensive and effective use of the culture-historical concepts of phases and cultures in even their most sophisticated and modern analyses of prehistoric sites. Moreover, this foundational framework, and the principal assumptions that underlie it, is so pervasive as to influence most recent archaeological work on historic-era Native American groups, even when documentary evidence can readily dispute many important aspects of this perspective.

In the eyes of most prehistorians, the spatial distribution of artifacts on the landscape can be used to at least some extent as a direct reflection of the social groups that created them. More specifically, when archaeologists speak of archaeological *phases* with relatively discrete spatial distributions during later prehistory, they commonly conceive of them as equivalent to familiar social groups such as chiefdoms or tribes. This is perhaps most notably the case where there is clear evidence for multi-phase longevity in these discrete areas, especially when such phases are geographically bounded by relatively unambiguous unoccupied zones. Even though early theorists were fairly explicit in their warnings of "formidable difficulties" in "finding social equivalents for archaeological units" (Willey and Phillips 1958:48), this has nonetheless become somewhat entrenched in implicit practice, as evidenced by many examples of direct

correspondences between specific named archaeological phases and historically-documented polities. Examples of such proposals include a number of phases thought to correspond to polities documented during 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish exploration of the interior Southeast, and particularly during the Hernando de Soto expedition. These identifications include the Parkin phase and Casqui (Morse and Morse 1983; Hudson 1985; Hudson et al. 1987:853; Mainfort 1999:146; Jeter 2009:369, 371), the Nodena phase and Pacaha (Morse and Morse 1983; Hudson et al. 1987:853; Mainfort 1999:146; Jeter 2009:369, 371), the Mulberry phase and Cofitachequi (Ethridge 2010:104), the Caraway phase and Guatari (Ethridge 2010:104), the Walls phase and Quizquiz (Mainfort 1999:146), the Dyar phase and Ocute (Kowalewski and Hatch 1991:10), the Cowart's phase and Ichisi (Hudson 1994), the Lockett phase and Toa (Worth 1988), the Lake Jackson and Velda phases and Apalachee (Scarry 1990, 1996; Scarry and McEwen 1995:484-485; Ewen 1996), the Alachua "tradition" and the Potano (Milanich 1972a:35, 1978:76; Rolland 2012:126), the Suwannee Valley culture and the Timucua (Worth 2012:171), the Safety Harbor phase and the Tocobaga (Bullen 1978:50), the Irene and Altamaha phases and Guale (Pearson 1977:128; Saunders 1992:140-142, 2000:1, 15), the Kymulga or Shine II phases and Talisi (Hudson et al. 1985:731, 735; Smith 2000:100; Jenkins 2009:220; Ethridge 2010:70), the Big Eddy phase and Tascalusa (Jenkins 2009:215, 221, 223), the Furman phase and Mabila (Jenkins 2009:216), the Blackmon phase and Apalachicola (Worth 2000), the Estatoe phase and the Lower Cherokee (Hally 1986:95-111), the Qualla phase and the Middle Cherokee (Dickens 1976:213; 1986:84), the Brewster phase and Itaba (King 1999:116), the Barnett phase and the "heartland" of Coosa (Hudson et al. 1985:732; Hudson et al. 1987:850; Langford and Smith 1990), and portions of the Burke phase and Joara (Beck and Moore 2002:201; Ethridge 2010:104), to name but a few. This expected correlation between archaeological phases and

named polities was in fact so strong that when Charles Hudson and colleagues reconstructed the Coosa paramountcy to encompass all or part of no fewer than five distinct phases, they were prompted to remark that “One would expect that the chiefdom of Coosa should coincide rather more neatly with the distribution of protohistoric archaeological phases” (Hudson et al. 1985:724).

From the relatively easy-to-digest correlation between late prehistoric phases and named Native American polities on the comparatively stable social landscape of the early historic era, archaeologists have naturally been prone to make the leap between the material culture characteristic of those same phases, and the ethnic identity of the groups and individuals that relocated so frequently across the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>-century Southeastern landscape in the widespread diaspora of indigenous polities that occurred in the context of European colonialism. Many examples can be found in the archaeological literature attributing specific ceramic assemblages or types to the members of named ethnic groups, or *ethnies* (see Smith 1986), who once belonged to polities generally believed to be coterminous with phases characterized by the same or similar ceramics. To cite a few examples, specific named ceramic assemblages and types found in mixed or extralocal colonial contexts have been claimed to be diagnostic for a diversity of Native American ethnies, including the Guale (Deagan 1973:61; 1978a:31, 33; 1978b:115; 1990:304, 1993:95-101; King 1984:79; Hoffman 1997:33; Saunders 1992:143, 2000:1), the Mocama (Milanich 1972b:290-291; King 1984:77-78; Deagan 1990:304, 1993:95-101; Hoffman 1993:76; 1997:33), the Yamasee (Milanich 1972b:290; Deagan 1993:95-101; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 126), the Creek (Sears 1955; Silvia 2000:46, 217; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 124, 127; Honerkamp and Harris 2005:108; Johnson et al. 2008:11), the Apalachee (Goggin 1951:171; Deagan 1990:304; Worth 1992:171-182; Silvia 2000:26, 45, 122, 126, 217, 252, 305,

342-343; 2002:29-31; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 126, 127; Cordell 2002), the Chato/Chacato (Silvia 2002:27; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 124, 126-130), the Tomé (Silvia 2000:46-47, 217; 2002:29-31; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 125), the Mobilians (Silvia 2000:46-47, 217; 2002:29-31; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 125, 127; Cordell 2002:51-52), the Choctaw (Quimby 1942:265; 1957:127, 162; Silvia 2000: 217, 305; Waselkov and Gums 2000: 124, 128), the Natchez (Quimby 1942:268; Silvia 2000:48, 148; Johnson et al. 2008:11), the Taensa (Silvia 2000:48), the Cherokee (Caldwell 1955; Sears 1955), and the Caddo (Silvia 2000:46, 148), among others. Clearly, there is a long and ongoing tradition of lending ethnicity to pottery, even if only on an informal basis.

In sum view, Southeastern archaeologists have long been prone to connect assemblages of ceramic types both with the political identity of geographically stable polities, and also with the ethnic identity of geographically mobile groups and individuals. As one of my own anthropology professors (who shall remain nameless) once commented ironically regarding archaeologists' typical view of the relationship between pots and people, for most archaeologists, "the pots *are* the people." Despite protestations to the contrary, and routine clarifications and caveats in all the appropriate times and places, there seems to be a generally-accepted underlying consensus that pottery, as measured through assemblages of archaeological ceramic types, represents a reasonably good indicator of political affiliation and ethnic identity. Pottery, in other words, can almost be viewed to *possess* ethnicity, insofar as it is generally viewed as a relatively conservative dimension of everyday culture that persists alongside political and ethnic identification.

In recent decades, with the florescence of various strains of post-processual theoretical approaches to the archaeological analysis of material culture, there have been several attempts to

conceptualize this longstanding assumption within the framework of theories of agency and materiality, positing an active role for ceramics in constituting and communicating social identity. For example, Rebecca Saunders (1992:139, 2000:49-51, 169-170, 180-181) hypothesized based on extensive and detailed ceramic analysis that the presence of the “world symbol” in stamped pottery decorations among the Guale Indians represented a conscious communication of a distinctive Guale identity, and that the persistence of this style on documented Guale sites from both their homeland in the northern Georgia coast and at relocated settlements in northeastern Florida reflected the maintenance of this Guale identity throughout much of the mission period. In many ways, such interpretations have served to reify the longstanding presumption that ceramic assemblages reflect political and ethnic groupings, lending post-processual legitimacy to a culture-historical assumption.

My own research over the past few decades has led me to examine the question of equating ceramics with political and ethnic identity from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of circumstances. I have focused my efforts in particular on making concurrent use of dual sources of evidence, namely documentary and archaeological, in order to evaluate the extent to which archaeological ceramic assemblages corresponded either to well-documented polities or ethnies (e.g. Worth 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). While a detailed review of this research is far beyond the scope of this paper, it is instructive to point out several very clear examples as illustrations of my fundamental conclusion that ceramic variability as measured by archaeologists does *not* appear to be coterminous at any level or scale of social integration as traditionally conceived. Extensive documentary and archaeological evidence from the broad region within and just beyond the mission system of Spanish Florida provides firm and unequivocal evidence that ceramic style zones which crystallized within this region during the

17<sup>th</sup> century were equivalent neither to Native American political or linguistic groupings, nor to over-arching Spanish-imposed provincial groupings, nor even to the region of Spanish Florida as a whole. Ceramic assemblages within the regional style zone extending along the northern axis of Spanish Florida bordering the Atlantic coastline encompassed at least three distinct Native American political units (Mocama, Guale, and Escamazu), and crossed not only a major indigenous linguistic boundary, but also the very borders of Spanish missionization and direct political control (Worth 1997a, 2009a). The style zone along the western axis of Spanish Florida, extending across the peninsula to the Gulf of Mexico, encompassed two major political units (Timucua and Apalachee), again crossing a major linguistic boundary (Worth 1998, 2009a, 2009b). To the south, a third ceramic style zone extended along the Atlantic coast and inland waterways and lake districts to encompass a number of distinct political units, crossing yet another major linguistic boundary and extending well beyond the realm of direct Spanish control. The nexus of these three new ceramic style zones seems to have been the colonial capital of Spanish Florida at St. Augustine itself, representing a major change from the late prehistoric landscape of more localized ceramic style zones (Worth 2009b). In colonial Spanish Florida, therefore, Mission Indians were participants in three broad ceramic style zones, each of which comprised potters from multiple political and linguistic affiliations. A Christian Mocama potter living in a mission in northeastern Florida made the same general suite of ceramic types as a non-Christian Escamazu potter living outside the mission system in southeastern South Carolina, just as an Apalachee and Timucuan potter living on opposite ends of the western mission chain also shared a ceramic assemblage which was nonetheless substantially different from those of the Mocama and Escamazu. There is no level of sociopolitical integration as traditionally defined that is coterminous with the ceramic style zones that developed by 1650 across Spanish Florida.

I should note here that Saunders (2001, 2009, 2012) has recently adapted her earlier work on the Guale to suggest that these broad style zones represent a sort of “negotiated tradition” combining what she proposes were Spanish-influenced technological changes and persistent Native American stylistic norms, and that widespread marketplace production on a regional basis may be responsible for these spatial patterns in Spanish Florida. Without going into specifics, in my view, the documentary and archaeological record does not support this conjecture of such a fundamental shift from traditional household-level ceramic production to what would have to have been massive marketplace production and distribution, and in any case it should be viewed simply as an eminently testable proposition.

Moreover, the same lack of correspondence between polities and ethnies observed in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish Florida is also evidenced in other regions and times during the historic era. The Yuchi Indians who incorporated themselves into the Creek confederacy during the 18<sup>th</sup> century were reported by many contemporary authors to have been fiercely independent from their new neighbors in terms of their language and ethnic identity, but by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the assemblage of ceramic types on well-documented Yuchi sites along the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers was largely identical to that of their Creek contemporaries, making it largely impossible to distinguish the pottery made by Yuchi and Creek potters who would never have considered themselves to be the same people (Worth 1988, 1997b, 2009b; Braley 1998). A similar phenomenon is now emerging among the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Apalachee immigrants at Mission Escambe north of Pensacola in the far western Florida panhandle, where ceramics would have been visually quite similar to that of their Creek neighbors, with whom many of them had previously lived for more than a decade during the Apalachee diaspora after 1704, although their ceramic paste recipes bore unmistakable traces of their Apalachee heritage



(Worth et al. 2011, 2012; Johnson 2012). In both these cases, immigrants from more distant homelands seem to have rapidly adapted their own ceramic assemblages to match that of their more immediate neighbors, while they nonetheless seem to have maintained ethnic and political independence as a matter of public knowledge. This is also known to have been the case for the Yamasee immigrants into the Florida missions during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, whose ceramic assemblages quickly adapted to match those of their neighbors in both Mocama and Apalachee, and who continued to produce these ceramics after moving north just outside the mission system to the old Escamazu province bordering Guale (Worth 1997, 2004, 2009).

Finally, in an effort to examine ceramic stylistic variability at a sub-typological level, I have also conducted a study of incised design motifs excavated from households within the well-studied Coosa chiefdom in northwest Georgia (Worth 2010). Just as was the case for ceramic assemblages defined by types, there was no level of social integration, from the household to the chiefdom, displaying the kind of ceramic homogeneity that would imply the use of ceramic decorative motifs to signal group identity. Instead, the continuum of stylistic variability observed seemed a much better match for a model of interacting potters drawing upon a small suite of motifs decreasing in similarity with social distance between potters.

Clearly, the equivalency of archaeological phases with polities or ethnies is a proposition that must be demonstrated, not assumed. Since archaeological phases represent the material manifestation of patterned human behavior, and since the explanation of these patterns of behavior remains only an object of study rather than a pre-drawn conclusion, it only seems logical that we should initially focus our efforts on the behaviors themselves, and how those individual behaviors were situated in a broader social context. More specifically, we need to focus on the actual practice of ceramic production, and how such practices came into being and

were transmitted both spatially and temporally to create and maintain the patterns we witness in the archaeological record. In short, we need to turn our attention to the social context of learning and practice for the individual household potters who made the pots from which phases are indirectly constructed.

The concept of practice employed here corresponds to that embraced by adherents of broader practice theory, which explores the relationships between individual agency and collective structure, between intentionality and habit, and between tradition and change (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; Ortner 1984:144-160, 1992:11-18; Dobres and Hoffman 1994; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Dobres and Robb 2000; Pauketat 2001). As elaborated from foundational concepts proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Anthony Giddens (1984), practice theory posits that individual practice generates collective structure while that same structure reflexively influences and shapes individual practice, and situates human actions within the framework of habitual dispositions, or *habitus*, that governs the conscious and unconscious production and reproduction of these structures through daily practice. Nevertheless, my intention in this paper is not to focus on the precise nature of human agency and its production of and by structure in general, but instead to examine the nature of the social entity that might be responsible for the spatial patterns of human behavior that we see reflected in the archaeological record of ceramic assemblages, especially given that these patterns do not appear to be equivalent with polities or ethnies.

Social learning theory, which is grounded in a range of disciplines from anthropology and sociology to psychology and education, provides a useful framework for approaching the relationship between individual practice and its social context. In particular, the concept of *community of practice* would seem to be especially applicable to the phenomenon of household

ceramic production and its relationship to social organization and social identity. As a description of “a historically constructed, ongoing, conflicting, synergistic structuring of activity and relations among practitioners” (Lave and Wenger 1991:56), a community of practice is defined by Etienne Wenger (1998:72-85) as a special type of community united by three dimensions of coherence: (1) mutual engagement, (2) a joint enterprise, and (3) a shared repertoire. It is “a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises” (Wenger 1998: 85), and can also be described as “an aggregate of people who come together around a mutual engagement in an endeavor...defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet 1992:464). Moreover, because they are maintained and reproduced by patterns of learning, communities of practice can also be thought of as “shared histories of learning” (Wenger 1998:86).

From a spatial perspective, communities of practice can also be conceptualized as forming part of a broader “landscape of practice” on which “the texture of continuities and discontinuities...is defined by practice, not by institutional affiliation” (Wenger 1998:118). Indeed, such communities are qualitatively distinct from formal sociopolitical institutions as traditionally defined:

...since the life of a community as it unfolds is, in essence, produced by its members through their mutual engagement, it evolves in organic ways that tend to escape formal descriptions and control. The landscape of practice is therefore not congruent with the reified structures of institutional affiliations, divisions, and boundaries. It is not independent of these

institutional structures, but neither is it reducible to them (Wenger 1998:118-119).

Not only are communities of practice often discontinuous with traditional sociopolitical units, but they also display dynamic qualities based on the very nature of learning in practice; "...the geography of practice reflects histories of learning, but learning continues to reconfigure relations of proximity and distance...the landscape of practice is an emergent structure in which learning constantly creates localities that reconfigure the geography" (Wenger 1998:130-131).

I propose that archaeological phases or other equivalent "style zones" based on material culture (particularly ceramics) should not be thought of as behavioral by-products of polities or ethnies for which ceramic style is seen as a natural outgrowth of ethno-political identity, but should instead be conceptualized as *communities of practice*, fundamentally based on the routine practices of and interactions between the very craftspeople whose behaviors generated the patterned distribution of material culture that archaeologists study. Seen in this light, archaeological phases would be linked first and foremost to the practices of the individuals responsible for the material manifestation of phases, and only secondarily and indirectly to the ethno-political units that framed the landscape within which such practices took place. Instead of viewing material practice as a unidirectional outgrowth of ethno-political identity, practice and identity are perceived to be independent dimensions of variability, recursively related but each capable of producing distinct material manifestations on the archaeological landscape.

In this connection, it is useful to highlight Suzanne Eckert's (2008:2-3, 57-58) recent delineation of the difference between what she calls *communities of practice* and *communities of identity*. Though not explicitly based on the social learning theory concepts outlined above (Lave and Wenger 1991; Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet 1992; Wenger 1998), Eckert's

conceptual framework provides an important discrimination between two broad categories of community that may have influence on the practice of potters, coinciding quite nicely with the distinction I have alluded to above regarding identification based on membership in polities and ethnies, and identification based on shared practice. In her analysis of prehistoric Pueblo pottery in the American Southwest, Eckert defines communities of practice as “social networks in which Pueblo potters learn their craft from other women in the community...defined by a shared history of practice and not by spatial constraints” (Eckert 2008:2), contrasting these with communities of identity, which are “social networks in which potters share a group identity...based in a shared language, migration history, religion, kinship, or some other social process” (Eckert 2008:3). She furthermore observes that “As communities of identity are based on social perception, they may or may not correspond to communities of practice” (Eckert 2008:3). Indeed, a major part of her analysis is based on empirically determining which dimensions of ceramic variability may correspond to either or both types of communities.

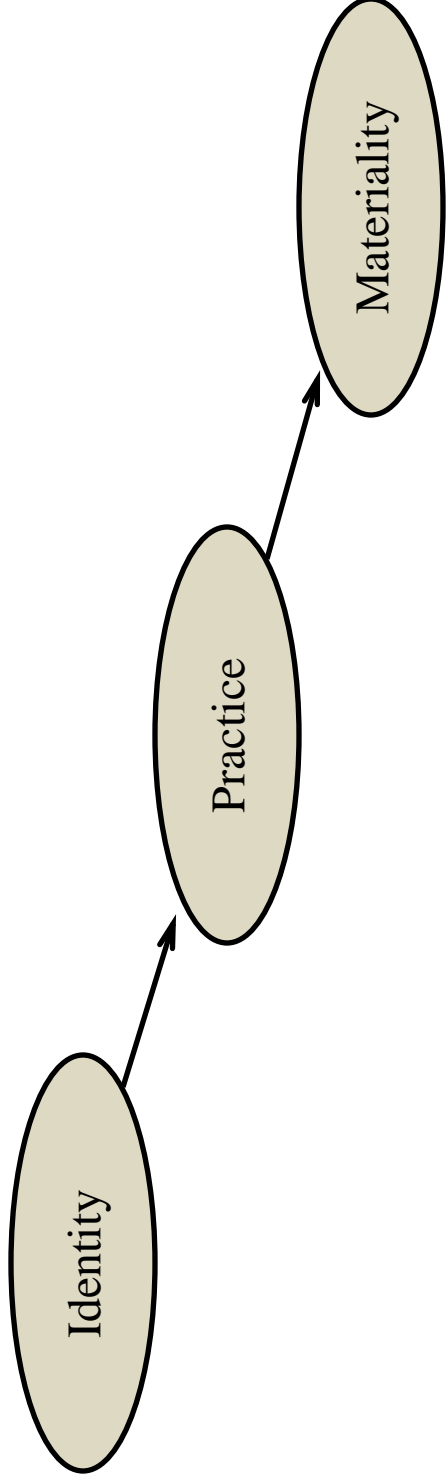
Incorporating these concepts into my own evaluation of the relationship between archaeological phases and historically-documented polities and ethnies, I suggest that the most useful approach is to classify archaeological phases as communities of practice, and to classify polities and ethnies as communities of identity. This is not to say that practice and identity have nothing to do with one another, but rather that each type of community is principally defined by different dimensions of human culture, and that only by analyzing these units by separate and appropriate criteria can any correspondence, or lack of correspondence, between the two types of community be demonstrated empirically. Members of a community of identity definitely conceived of themselves (or were identified by others) as belonging to the same social unit, but might not necessarily have shared a bond of common practice. In contrast, members of a

community of practice definitely shared a bond of common practice, but might never have conceived of themselves (or have been identified by others) as belonging to the same social unit. Perhaps most importantly from a methodological standpoint, polities and ethnies, as communities of identity, are most readily defined by the belief of membership, whether internal or external, and are therefore most readily observable through the documentary record, which is directly derived from the mental dimension of culture, and which only provides indirect access to the behavioral dimension. In direct contrast, phases and other archaeological style zones, as communities of practice, are most readily defined by spatially- and temporally-distinguishable patterns of routinized behavior, as shaped by learning and interaction, and are therefore most readily observable through the archaeological record, which is directly derived from the behavioral dimension of culture, and which only provides indirect access to the mental dimension.

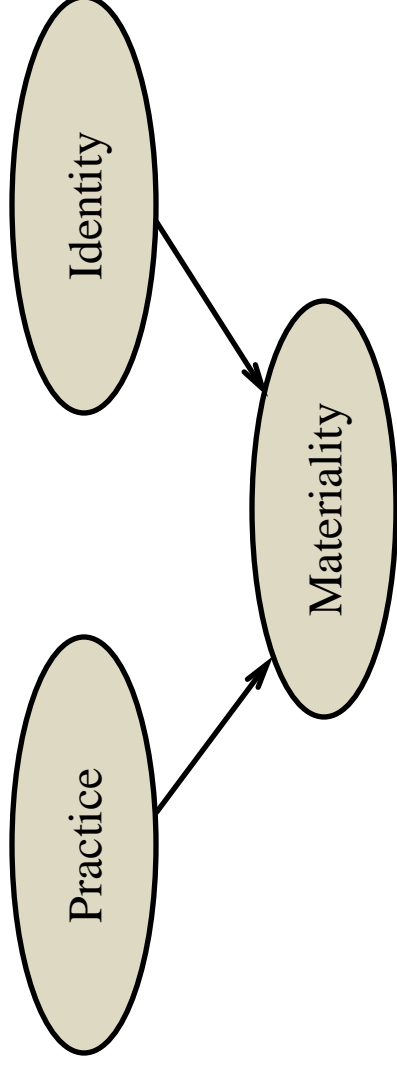
In detaching social entities based on practice from those based on identity, researchers will be more effective in their ability to analyze the precise relationship between material practice and ethno-political identity under a variety of different circumstances. Ceramics in particular will no longer be automatically or necessarily linked with political or ethnic identity, but instead with the practices of individual potters whose collective behaviors and interaction made up a different kind of social entity: a community of practice. Worth emphasizing here is the fact that in the Southeastern U.S., these communities of ceramic practice were almost certainly made up of women (e.g. Romans 1776:96; Bartram 1792:511), whereas the more familiar communities of ethno-political identity were likely dominated by men, making this distinction between types of communities particularly relevant to archaeological studies of gender. Moreover, in this context, we can actually explore the specific conditions under which

ceramic style zones either corresponded to or cross-cut political or linguistic boundaries, or under which immigrants or refugees either maintained, modified, or abandoned their ceramic traditions while nonetheless maintaining their distinctive ethnic identities. We can furthermore tease apart those elements, scales, and dimensions of ceramic learning and practice that may have reflected different degrees of correspondence to, or difference from, the ethno-political landscape within which potters found themselves. This includes breaking down the exact operational sequences, or *chaines operatoires* (Stark 1998; Gosselain 1998; Dietler and Herbich 1998), involved in ceramic production, and the social context of each step, as has been done fruitfully in other areas (e.g. Michelaki 2007; Crown 2007). What this approach really means is that we will be examining archaeological material culture as a result of practice, and separately addressing the extent to which these practices may or may not have been coterminous with political or ethnic categories so familiar to us from the documentary record. Admittedly, the bulk of this research remains to be carried out, and will undoubtedly require substantial revisitation of older conclusions and reanalysis of existing collections and databases in a new framework. Nevertheless, the disentanglement of ceramic practice from ethno-political identity will allow us to make more effective and reliable interpretations based on empirical evidence drawn variously from either the archaeological or the documentary realm, or both simultaneously. Given the undeniable importance to archaeologists of ceramic analysis in reconstructing the social geography of both the prehistoric and historic past, the reconceptualization of archaeological phases as communities of practice instead of communities of identity may provide us with an important tool in bridging the ontological and methodological gap between prehistory and history.

“Postprocessualized” Culture-Historical Perspective (aka Identity Perspective)

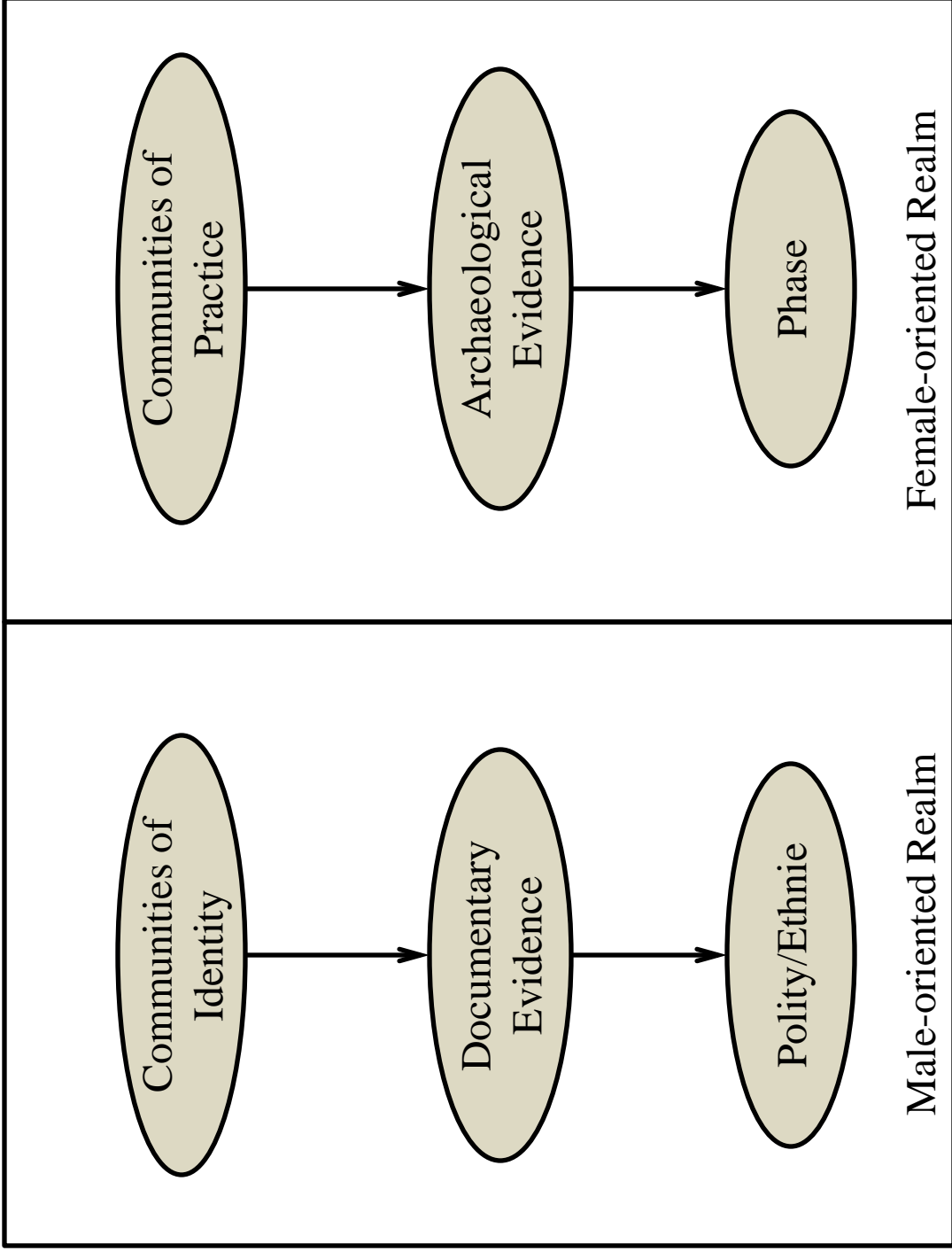


Practice/Social Learning Perspective





Identity vs. Practice



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