

Ceramics, Polity and Comics

written & illustrated by
John G. Swogger

Visually re-presenting formal archaeological publication

Archaeological publication is a visual wasteland.

Our attitude towards the visual presentation of archaeology is fossilized.

We curate ancient standards, and transfer bygone ideologies of representation from old media to new.

For centuries, the visualization of archaeology has not changed significantly.

In particular, the relationship between text and image has remained virtually static.

Images accompany text...

... they do not inhabit it.

As a result, visualisation remains a secondary practice in archaeological communication.

And - ironically for such a visual science - images all too frequently become an afterthought to text. !

But what if that relationship were more...

... dynamic?



How might that alter the relationship between archaeological text...



... and image?

Between author...



... and audience?

Our world is shaped by media which do not separate or segregate image and text, but bring them together.

They seek to juxtapose, contrast or harmonize visual and textual content, building an integrated relationship between the two.



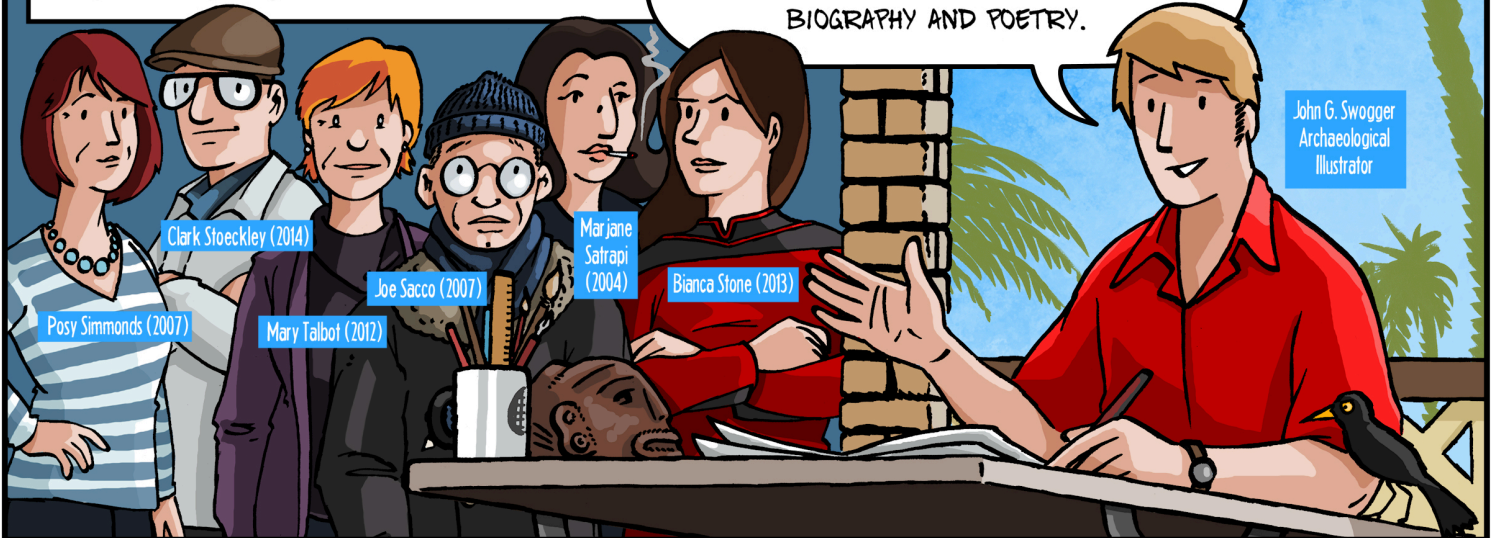
The richness and variety of these associations can be used to create or reference other levels of content - and context.

Exploring - indeed, exploiting - closer relationships between text and image lies at the heart of sequential and graphic media -

- COMICS INCLUDED?

A distinguishing characteristic of the comic is its almost endless mutability. Evolving from a three hundred year-old tradition, comics are now used to author complex social, cultural and political reportage -

- AND HAS EVOLVED INTO A SOPHISTICATED MEDIUM FOR GENRES SUCH AS FICTION, BIOGRAPHY AND POETRY.



Clark Stoeckley (2014)

Marijane Satrapi (2004)

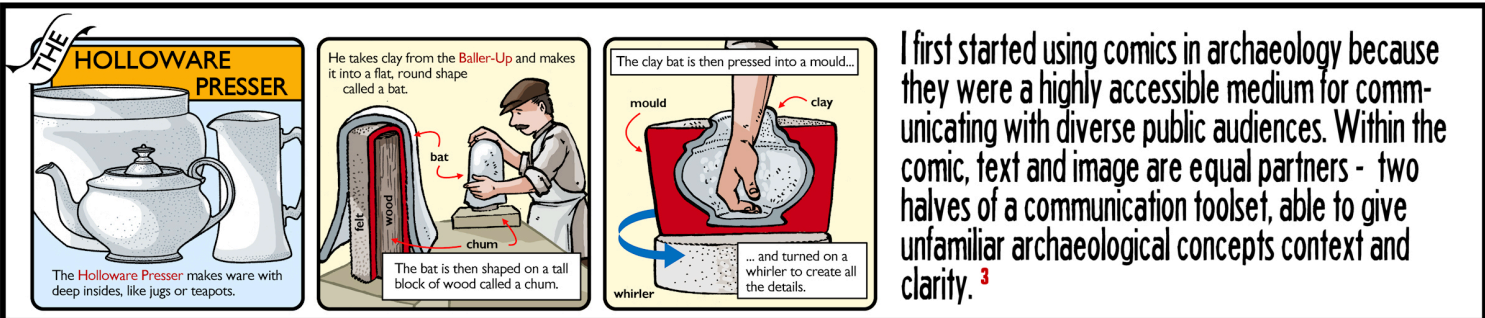
Bianca Stone (2013)

Joe Sacco (2007)

Mary Talbot (2012)

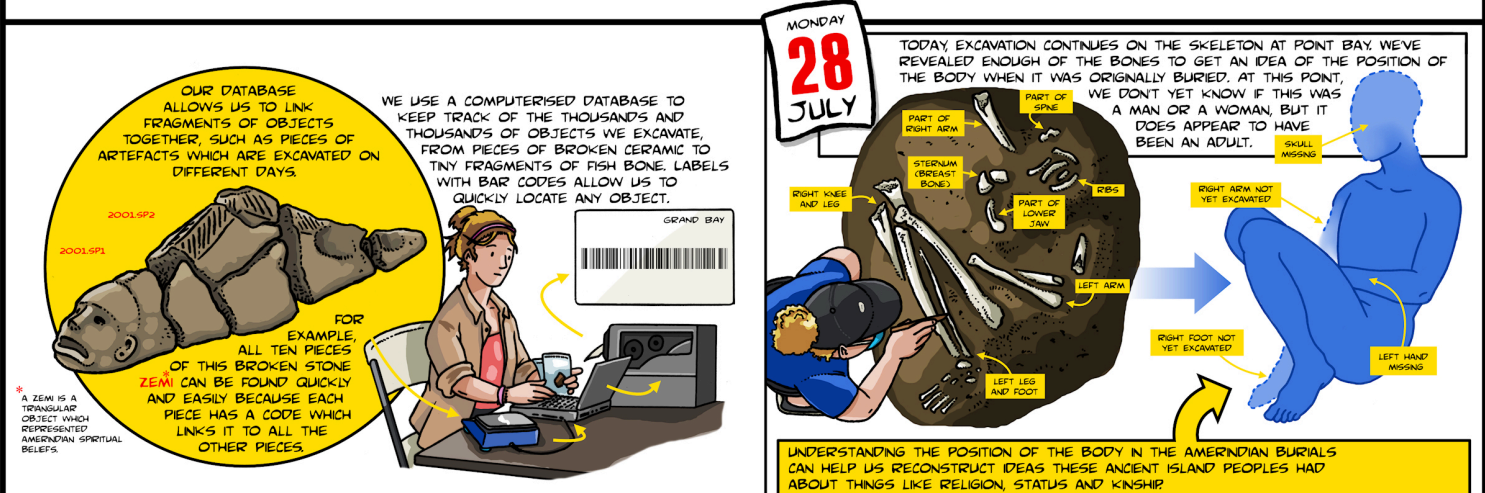
Posy Simmonds (2007)

John G. Swigger
Archaeological
Illustrator



I first started using comics in archaeology because they were a highly accessible medium for communicating with diverse public audiences. Within the comic, text and image are equal partners - two halves of a communication toolset, able to give unfamiliar archaeological concepts context and clarity.³

The resulting documents have been used to speak with audiences across divides created by age, literacy and familiarity,⁴ enabling complex information to be communicated easily, quickly and successfully.⁵



Over the past seven years, I have exploited these particular characteristics of the comic in public outreach work in the Caribbean,⁶ to overcome significant and fundamental unfamiliarity amongst public audiences with the practice, context and impact of archaeological fieldwork.⁷ These comics are now the principal means by which the project's public outreach is conducted in schools, tourism offices, museums and local businesses on the islands of Carriacou and Grenada.⁸



CERAMICS & POLITY

IN THE CASAS GRANDES AREA, CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO

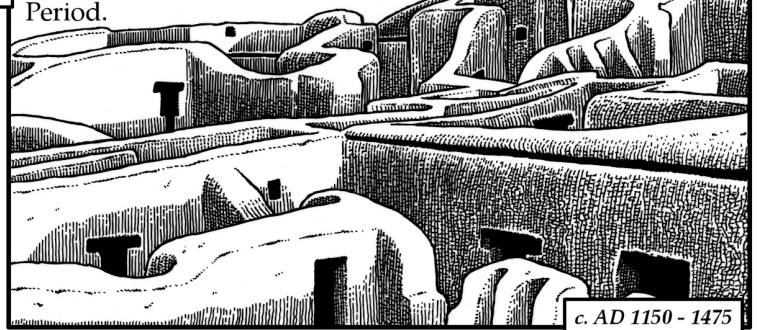
Michael E. Whalen, Department of Anthropology,
University of Tulsa

Paul E. Minnis, Department of Anthropology,
University of Oklahoma

illustrated by John G. Swogger

The Casas Grandes area of northwestern Chihuahua, Mexico lies in the southern part of the ancient Pueblo world.

There, Casas Grandes - or Paquimé - long has been known to be the largest and most elaborate community of the Medio Period.



c. AD 1150 - 1475

Equally famous are the community's painted ceramics.

"... the classic type of the Chihuahuan series, in which forms, designs, and treatment were all carried to their highest development in excellence of execution and in variety." [1936:54]

Edwin B. Sayles

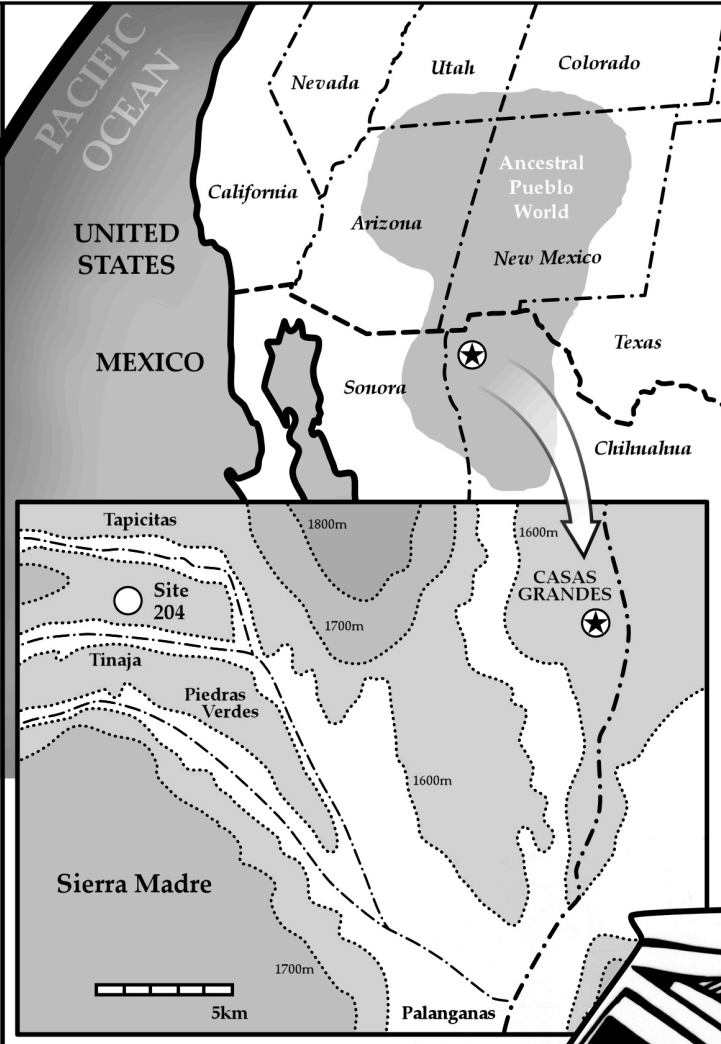


"... the signature ware of Casas Grandes," (2000:283)



Stephen H. Lekson

"... the hallmark type and the primary focus for Casas Grandes stylistic complexity." (Moulard, 2005:78)



This painted pottery has attracted much scholarly attention from early days -

Brand 1933, *The Historical Geography of Northwestern Chihuahua*.

Carey 1931, *An analysis of Northwestern Chihuahua culture*.

Chapman 1923, *Casas Grandes Pottery*

Kidder 1916, *The Pottery of the Casas Grandes district, Chihuahua*.

Sayles 1936, *Some Southwestern pottery types*.

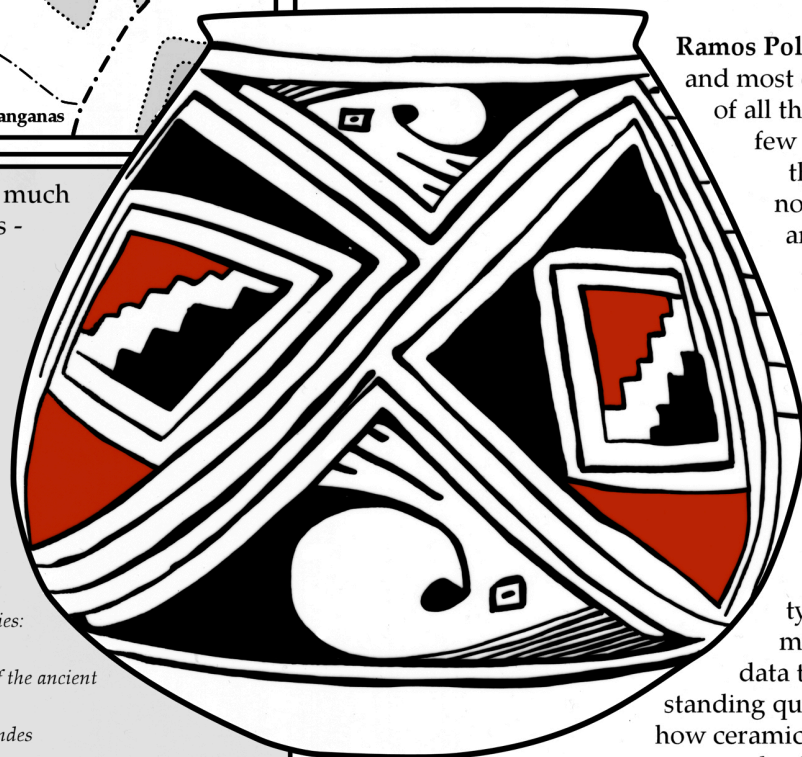
- to modern times:

DiPeso et al. 1974, *Casas Grandes, a fallen trading centre of the Gran Chichimeca*.

Lekson 2008, *The Archaeology of communities: a New World perspective*.

Townsend 2005, *Casas Grandes in the art of the ancient Southwest*.

VanPool 2003, *The symbolism of Casas Grandes*



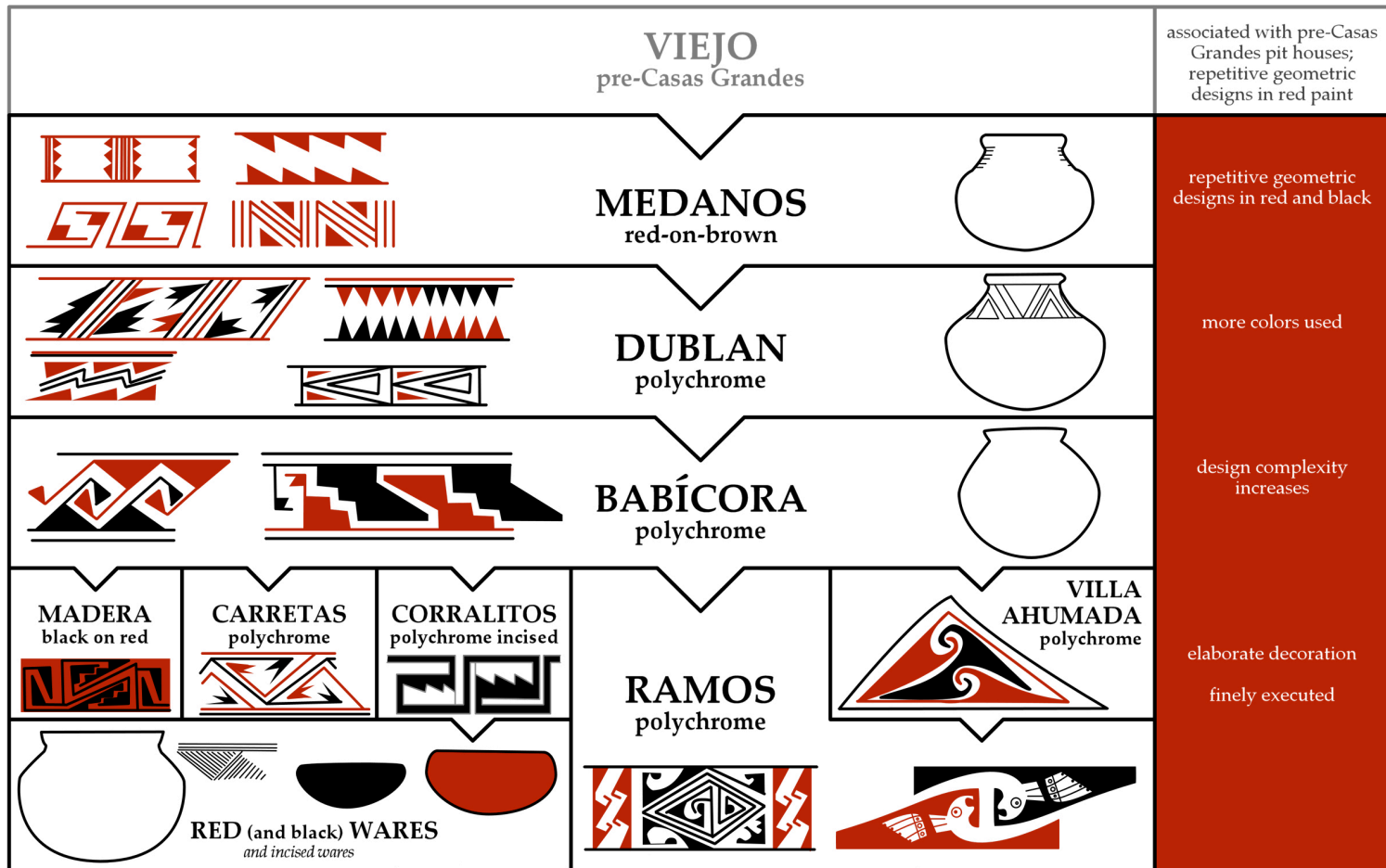
Ramos Polychrome is the finest and most complexly decorated of all this pottery. One of the few ceramic traditions of the US Southwest and northern Mexico to use anthropomorphic and zoomorphic imagery in addition to geometric designs. The origins of the pottery, however, always have been obscure. The present study reviews current knowledge of the histories of the area's ceramic types and their design motifs. It presents new data to answer some long-standing questions, and it shows how ceramics helped to structure the Casas Grandes polity.

Archaeologists have long been interested in defining the origin and developmental relationships of the Casas Grandes polychrome ceramics...

Developmental Model

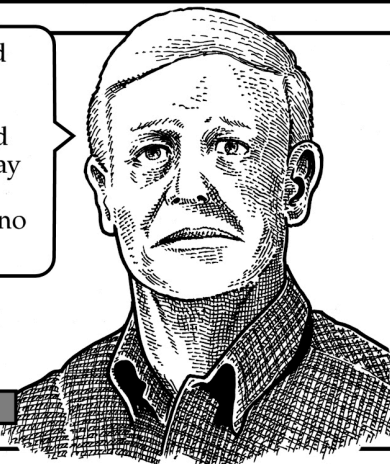
based on surface ceramics and whole vessels (looted or excavated)

adapted from Sayles (1936) and Whalen & Minnis (2012)



Fine ceramic seriation based on excavation of stratified deposits is common in the adjacent U.S. Southwest and Mesoamerica, so readers may be surprised to learn that there have been practically no studies in Chihuahua.

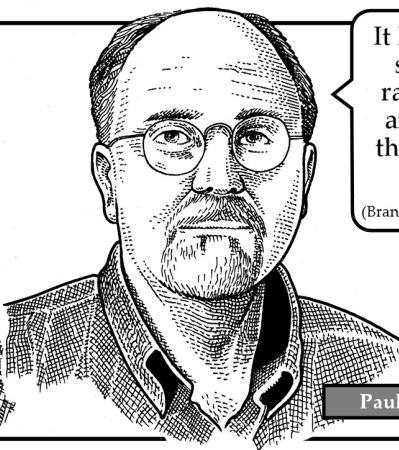
Michael E. Whalen



It has long been recognised that stratified midden deposits are rare all over the Casas Grandes area, and recent surveys found that middens were seldom seen on 300 recorded Medio sites.

(Brand 1993:91; Lister 1946:433; Whalen & Minnis 2001a)

Paul E. Minnis



Casas Grandes Excavation Project



The most detailed descriptions of Medio period polychromes come from the large samples collected in 1958-1961.

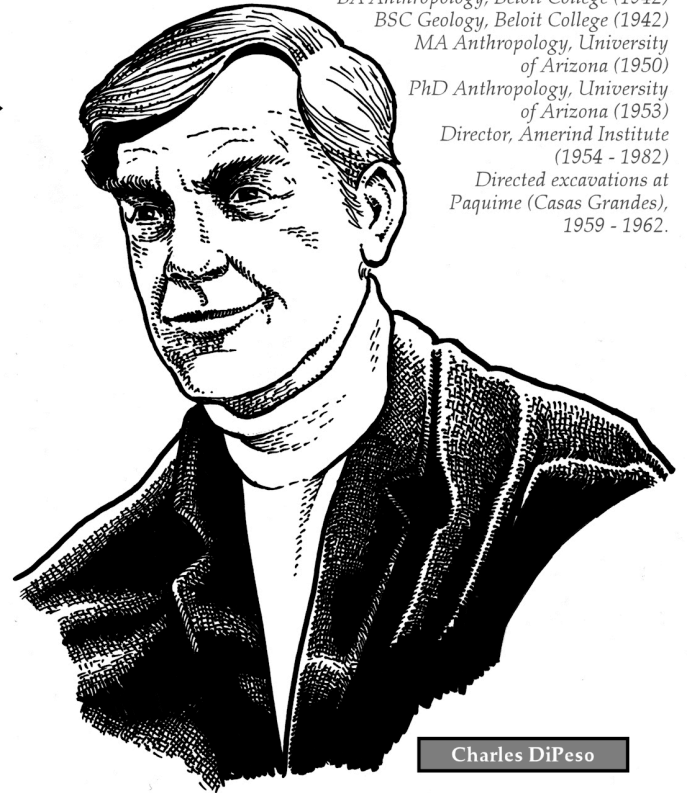
This analysis did not focus on the developmental histories of the wares, and almost all discussion consists of notations of trait similarities among types.



For example, trait sharing observations about Babicora polychrome stop there, without considering earlier arguments that Babicora is one of the oldest of the Chihuahuan polychromes. (as in Sayce's developmental model)

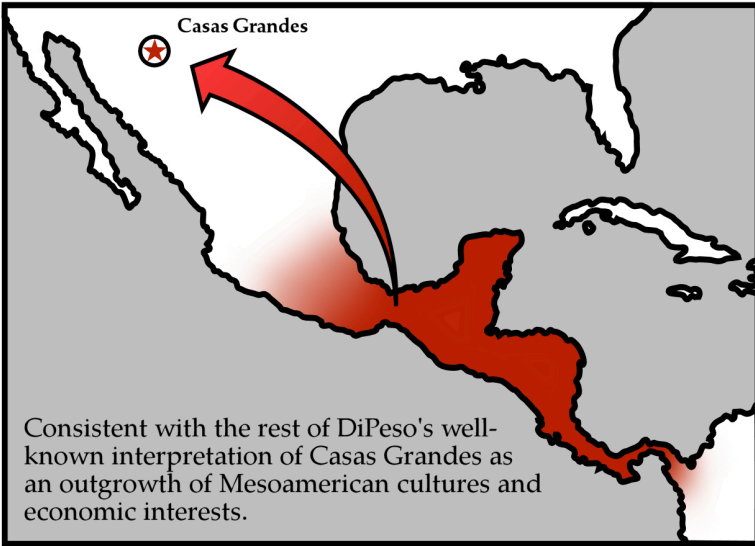
(DiPeso et al. 1974:6; DiPeso et al. 1974:6:2)

Charles Corradino DiPeso (1920 - 1982)
 BA Anthropology, Beloit College (1942)
 BSC Geology, Beloit College (1942)
 MA Anthropology, University of Arizona (1950)
 PhD Anthropology, University of Arizona (1953)
 Director, Amerind Institute (1954 - 1982)
 Directed excavations at Paquime (Casas Grandes), 1959 - 1962.



Charles DiPeso

Discussion of local ceramic development is not relevant. I argue that the Medio period polychromes have Mesoamerican antecedents. Ramos Polychrome is possibly derived:
"from some polychrome type made further south";
 Villa Ahumada and Babicora Polychromes may be a combination of local and distant ceramic traditions.
 (DiPeso et al. 1974:6: 183, 251, 300)



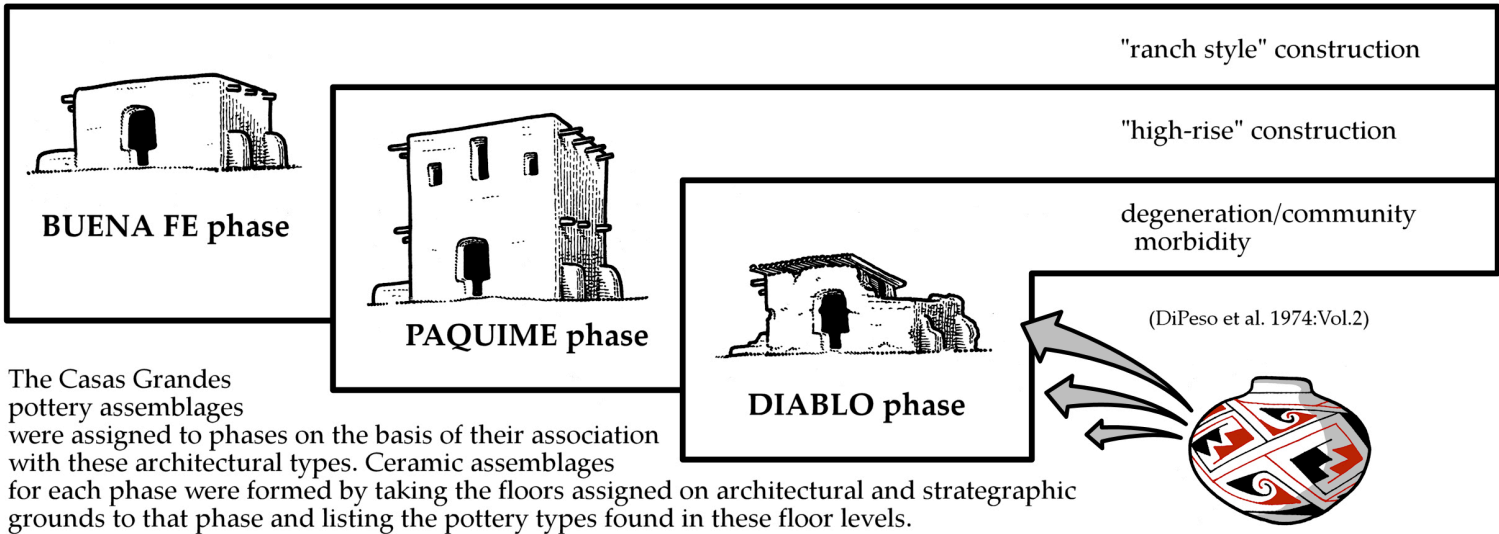
Consistent with the rest of DiPeso's well-known interpretation of Casas Grandes as an outgrowth of Mesoamerican cultures and economic interests.

Construction of a developmental sequence for the Chihuahuan polychromes further was hampered by the way in which the Casas Grandes deposits were seriated.

MEDIO PERIOD

Excavated rooms were divided among three phases. Such phase distinctions in the U.S. Southwest or in Mesoamerica characteristically are based on ceramic differences, so that each chronological division has a distinctive pottery assemblage by which its deposits can be recognised. This was not the case at Casa Grandes, where phases were defined:
"on the basis of stratigraphy and architecture" (DiPeso et al. 1974:6:84)

In fact, it seems that architecture was the primary distinguishing point:



The Casas Grandes pottery assemblages were assigned to phases on the basis of their association with these architectural types. Ceramic assemblages for each phase were formed by taking the floors assigned on architectural and stratigraphic grounds to that phase and listing the pottery types found in these floor levels.

(DiPeso et al. 1974:6:84) The result was that the same 22 pottery types, including all of the polychromes, occur in each of the three phases of the Medio period.

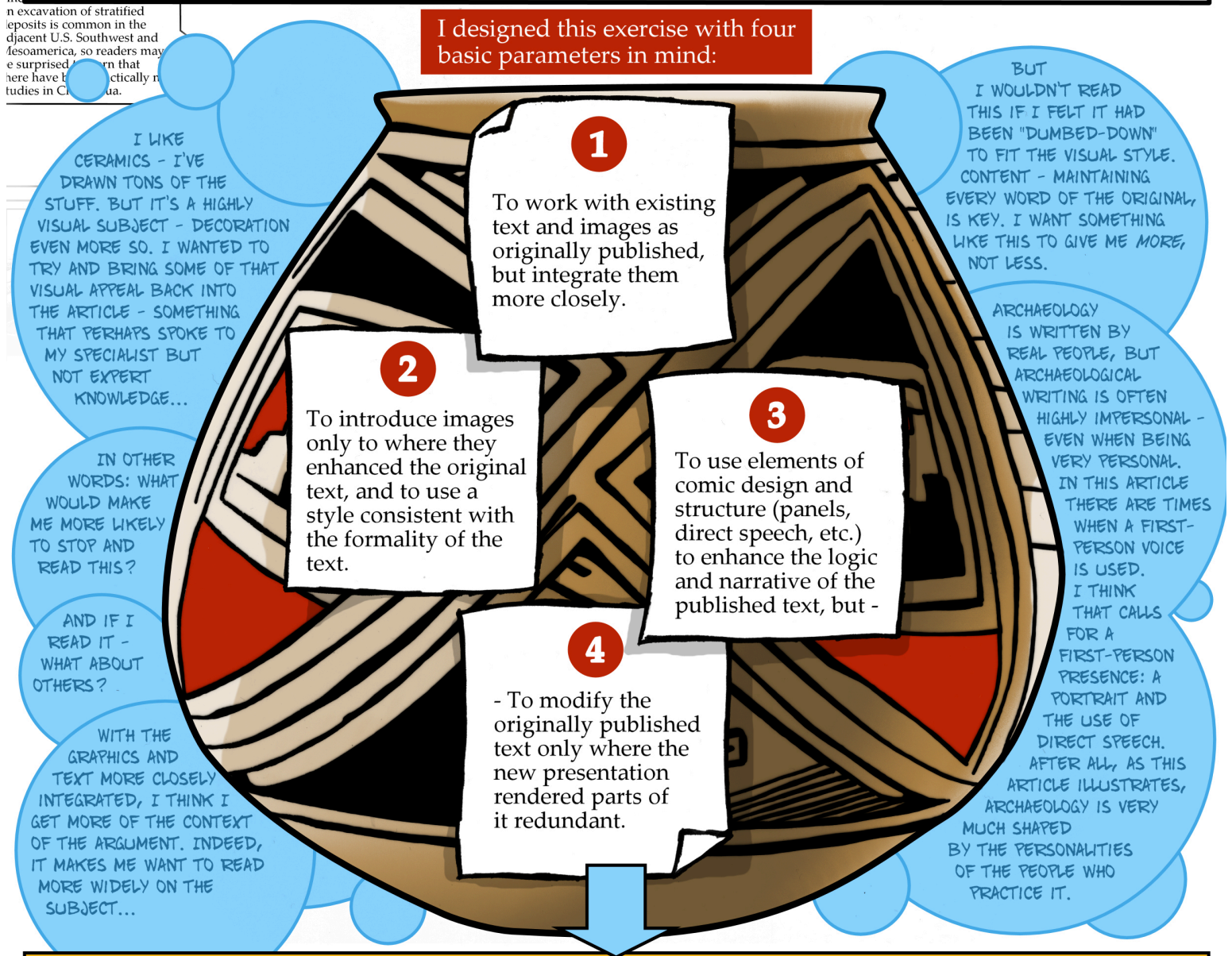
Archaeologists have long been interested in defining the origin and developmental relationships of the Casas Grandes polychrome ceramics...

Developmental Model



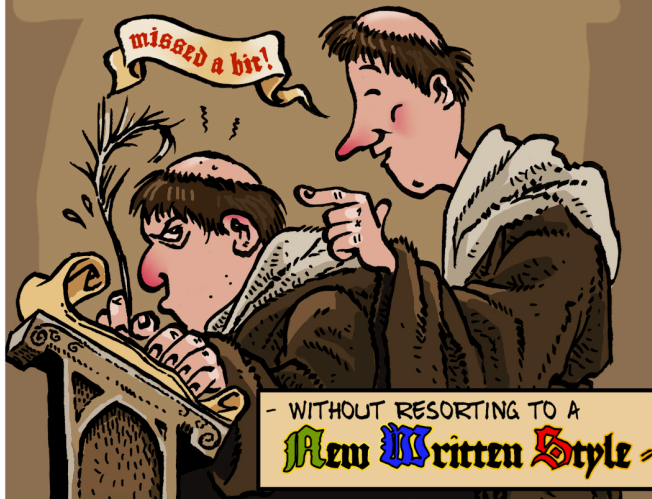
- AN EXERCISE IN TAKING THE LESSONS I HAVE LEARNED FROM USING COMICS TO TALK TO A PUBLIC, "EXTERNAL" AUDIENCE, AND TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THOSE LESSONS CAN EQUALLY BE APPLIED TO THE FORMAL, "INTERNAL" PRESENTATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA AND INTERPRETATION.

I designed this exercise with four basic parameters in mind:



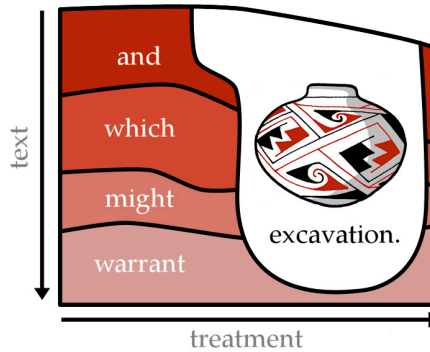
IN OTHER WORDS, THIS WAS TO BE A "RE-PRESENTING" OF THE ARTICLE AS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN AMERICAN ANTIQUITY, AND SHOULD STILL REFLECT THE ORIGINAL SCHOLARLY VOICE, INTENT AND DATA OF ITS AUTHORS. FURTHER, THE END PRODUCT SHOULD ALSO BE RECOGNISABLY, STYLISTICALLY RELATED TO THE FORMAL PRESENTATION ASSOCIATED WITH ITS ORIGINAL PUBLICATION.

AND IN NOT EXTENSIVELY MODIFYING OR CROPPING THE ORIGINALLY-PUBLISHED TEXT, THIS WAS ALSO TO BE AN EXERCISE IN DEMONSTRATING THAT -



"... there exists within formal archaeological text the potential for a much more visually dynamic and accessible presentation; something which is just as complete..." [2014:8]

John C. Swogger

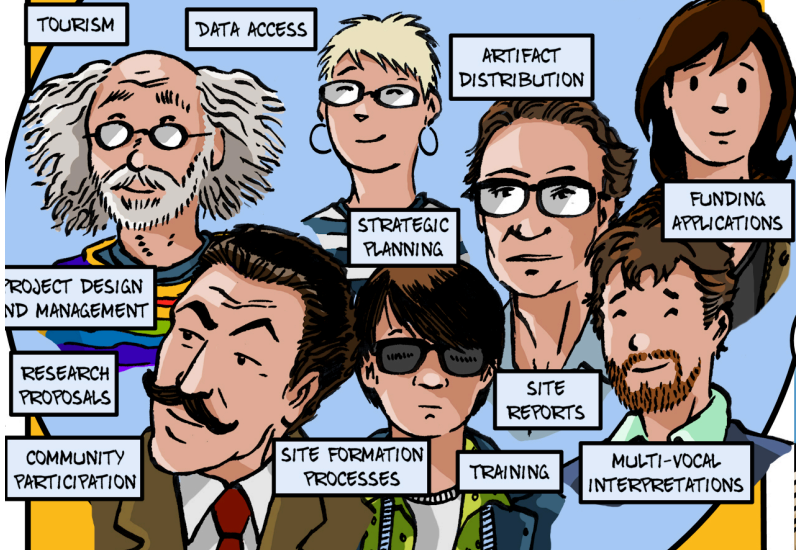


ALTHOUGH IT MUST BE VERY CLEAR THAT WHALEN AND MINNIS DID NOT WRITE THEIR ARTICLE INTENDING IT TO BE A COMIC...



DIRECT SPEECH, NARRATIVE TEXT, SEQUENCES AND LOGIC BUILT FROM BOTH IMAGE AND TEXT - THESE ARE ALREADY PART OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL WRITING.

AND SO WHILE EXISTING APPROACHES IN COMICS ARE ALREADY SUITABLE FOR ADOPTION IN A WIDE RANGE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL PUBLICATION CONTEXTS...



... INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED USE OF TEXT-IMAGE RELATIONSHIPS WILL ALLOW ARCHAEOLOGY TO CONSTRUCT A VISUAL LANGUAGE TO SUIT ITS OWN AUDIENCES.

My adaptation of "Ceramics and Polity" is one way in which comics might be adapted to one specific narrative context.

Other ways might include:



Complete, 20-odd page graphic texts

Hybrid, text/comic presentations of select data or interpretations

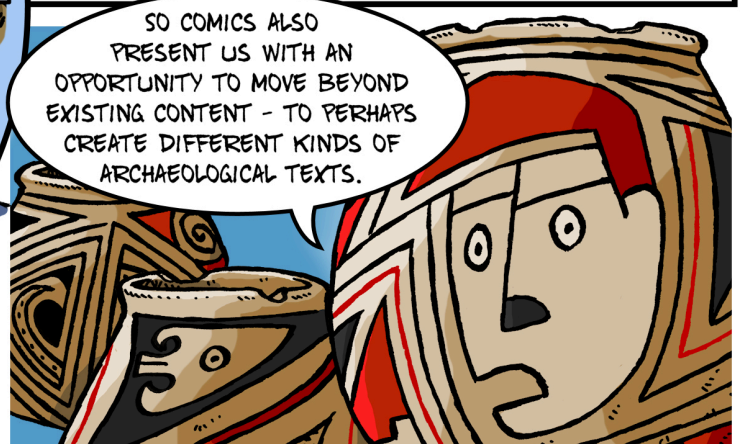
Use of various elements, such as "hedcut" portraits, direct speech, etc.

etc.

Whether "comics" or "comic-like approaches," these would treat visuals as integrated components of scholarly narrative -

- and move away from presenting text and "accompanying figures."

SO COMICS ALSO PRESENT US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO MOVE BEYOND EXISTING CONTENT - TO PERHAPS CREATE DIFFERENT KINDS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEXTS.



IN THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, COMICS HAS MOVED FAR BEYOND SUPERHEROES IN TIGHTS.

ROBERT CRUMB, AN "UNDERGROUND" COMIC ARTIST AND WRITER WHO EXEMPLIFIES THE NEW AND COMPLEX VOICES WHICH SO TRANSFORMED COMICS FROM THE 'SIXTIES ONWARDS. 11

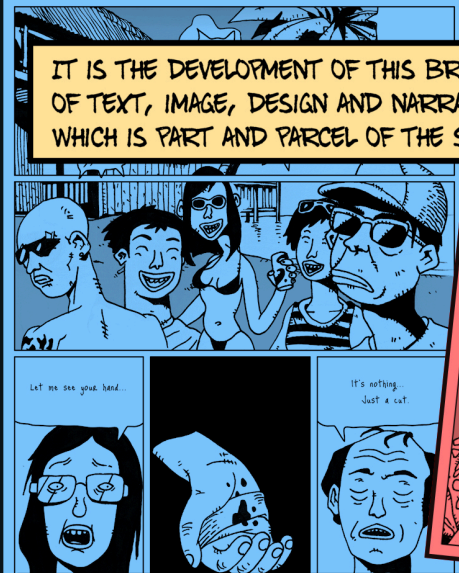


A GLANCE THROUGH THE GRAPHIC NOVEL SECTION OF ANY MAINSTREAM BOOKSTORE WILL CONFIRM THE WIDE RANGE OF STYLISTIC AND ARTISTIC APPROACHES COMICS CREATORS NOW USED.

THE OPEN, LIGNE CLAIRE STYLE WHICH I USE IN MANY OF MY OWN ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMICS HAS BEEN A CAREFULLY-CONSIDERED CHOICE.



BUT OTHER STYLES CAN PARTNER OTHER TYPES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEXT IN DIFFERENT WAYS.



IT IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS BROADER INTEGRATION OF TEXT, IMAGE, DESIGN AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE WHICH IS PART AND PARCEL OF THE SEMIOTICS OF COMICS. 14



AND IT IS THIS WHICH OFFERS ARCHAEOLOGY THE GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR NEW FORMS OF EXPRESSION. 15



考古学に関する劇画
少女は狩りに行く
ONE GIRL GOES HUNTING
ハンナ・サケットによって描か • ジョンによって描か • Written by Hannah Sackett • Illustrated by John G. Swogger

"ONE GIRL GOES HUNTING" - GRAPHIC NOVEL SET IN NEOLITHIC ORKNEY, DRAWN IN THE STYLE OF A MIYAZAKI FILM (H. SACKETT, AUTHOR; J.G. SWOGGER, ILLUSTRATOR - WORK IN PROGRESS. 16

"THE MAN WHO SAVED THE PAST" - COLLABORATIVE COMICS PROJECT BASED ON THIEVES OF BAGHDAD, BY MATTHEW BOGDANOS, ABOUT THE RECOVERY OF IRAQI ANTIQUITIES. (M. BOGDANOS AND W. PATRICK, WORDS; J.G. SWOGGER, ILLUSTRATOR) 17



Mohsan suddenly "remembered" that it was staffers who had slid slid back the lid and then replaced it...

Most importantly, they had taken the grave goods...

...to the secret place

THIS INFORMATION DYNAMIC CREATES A CLOSE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS AND IMAGES, LEADING TO A NEW KIND OF "TEXT". AS A RESULT, THE COMIC HAS BEEN READILY ADOPTED BY OTHER DISCIPLINES AT THE INTERFACE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND THE HUMANITIES. 18 ARCHAEOLOGY IS BEHIND THE CURVE.

The same mechanics which make it possible to write comics about the war in Bosnia¹⁹ or the experience of being a doctor with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder²⁰ surely make it a viable medium for communicating virtually any aspect of our own professional practice?

AND BEYOND COMICS AS SIMPLY A NEW MEDIUM, THE PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION OF COMICS EMBODIES ALTERNATIVE DYNAMICS OF INFORMATION EXCHANGE WHICH MAY PROVE INVALUABLE TO ARCHAEOLOGY NOT JUST IN DEVELOPING NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXISTING AUDIENCES, BUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH ENTIRELY NEW AUDIENCES.²¹

ARCHAEOLOGY'S PRINCIPAL CONCERN IS WITH TIME. COMICS, WITH THEIR ABILITY TO DEPICT THE PRESENCE OF TIME SPATIALLY, COULD CREATE MEANINGFUL VISUALISATIONS OF SEQUENTIAL EVENTS SUCH AS BUILDING PHASES, OR EVEN FORENSIC EPISODES. THERE WAS A GREAT SHORT COMIC USED IN "NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC" WHICH DID JUST THAT: SHOWING THE EVENTS WHICH LEAD TO THE DEATH OF THE "ICEMAN" IN COMIC FORMAT.²²

IT MAKES YOU THINK...



THE GERIATRICIAN DR. MUNA AL-JAWAD HAS SPOKEN OF COMICS AS HAVING AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY AS A TOOL FOR "NEGOTIATING DIFFICULT AREAS OF PRACTICE", THROUGH NARRATIVE VISUALS.²³ MIGHT COMICS PLAY A SIMILAR ROLE IN ARCHAEOLOGY, PROVIDING US WITH A TOOL TO VISUALISE PROBLEMATIC ETHICAL OR PROFESSIONAL ISSUES, FOR EXAMPLE?



NOT EVERY ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEXT CAN - OR SHOULD - BE A COMIC. HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT WILL "WORK"?

WHO CREATES COMICS IN ARCHAEOLOGY? WHAT GUIDES THE CHOICE OF STYLE, APPROACH AND VOICE? HOW DO WE ASSESS SUCH TEXTS?

THE UK-BASED GROUP "COMICS FORUM" RECENTLY HOSTED AN ONLINE DISCUSSION PANEL ON COMICS AND ARCHAEOLOGY, FOCUSING ON QUESTIONS LIKE THESE WHICH FACE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMICS CREATORS.²⁴

I AM CERTAINLY NOT THE FIRST IN ARCHAEOLOGY TO USE,²⁵ NOR TO ADVOCATE FOR,²⁶ COMICS. AT THE HEART OF MY ADAPTATION - MY "RE-VISION" - OF WHALEN AND MINNIS' PAPER ARE LESSONS LEARNED FROM TEN YEARS OF USING COMICS AS AN OUTREACH TOOL. I HAVE LEARNED THAT THE PRESENTATION OF MUCH OF OUR WORK UTILISES A STYLISTIC LANGUAGE WHICH MAKES POOR USE OF THE RICHNESS AND DEPTH OF ITS VISUAL CONTENT...

... AND THAT COMICS IS A MEDIUM WHICH HAS AN AS-YET UNTAPPED POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEXTS, ENABLING THEM TO BE SEEN DIFFERENTLY...

... TO BE SEEN IN A NEW LIGHT...

... TO BE RE-VISIONED.

FIN