

## CRAFTING HISTORY. HOW THE WORLD IS MADE.

### THE CASE OF ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY

*I wanna be a human being, not a human doing*

Scatman John, *Scatman's World*

In this paper an archaeological and theoretical perspective that builds a relationship between the concepts of craft and of identity is presented. Both of them are concepts very widely used in archaeological and anthropological theory nowadays, and they have often been linked in field studies. However these concepts are usually contemplated from very different points of view and with many diverse implication in each case. One of the aims of this paper is to show that craft and identity can be inserted in a common theoretical framework which in turn can be used to understand cultural change, or, in other words, history within culture. The paper will start with a necessary theoretical introduction to different concepts related to craft and identity, and then a discussion on how to link these different concepts will follow. In the last part of the paper, this theoretical perspective will be applied to a field which is familiar to the author, that of Islamic archaeology. A case example of the author's research in the Vega of Granada (south east Spain) will be brought to the fore. This part of the paper will show how the theoretical discussion developed above can contribute to solve one of the core questions of this field, that of the definition of an Islamic culture and its application to understand the daily life of people living within it.

#### AGENCY, ACTION, CRAFT AND IDENTITY

The works of B. Malinowsky (1961 [1922]) and P. Bourdieu (1977; 1990) are essential in the understanding of action as key to the process of transmitting and creating concepts and schemas that shape the individuals and the society (Bloch 2012: 149-154). If Malinowsky has not been so profusely quoted in archaeological theory, Bourdieu (1977; 1990) and Giddens (1984), ultimately inspired by him, have been widely used and discussed in the discipline since the 80s. Perhaps one of the most relevant application of these ideas in archaeological theory in general is in the work of J. Barrett (1994), who defended the idea that archaeology should reconstruct the material conditions of life of past communities in order to enable us to understand the possibilities and constraints that

marked their agency (see also Barrett 2000; *cf.* Dobres and Robb 2000; Robb 2010). The application of these ideas to the sphere of craft production is well exemplified in M.A. Dobres' *Technology and Social Agency* (2000).

One of the particular tensions that defines the archaeological concept of craft is that between the unavoidable constraints offered by the physical and chemical properties of the materials and processes that craft involves and the variety of cultural approaches to the latter in the way in which they are understood and used. We can say that craft is the result of culturally-mediated yet intentionality-driven interactions of human beings and things, the results of which are changes in the material world and in the relations between people and things. There is abundant literature that focuses on this tension and that tries to propose ways to bridge the gap between the two (e.g. Arnold 1985; Jones 2000; van der Leeuw 1976; Sillar and Tite 2000). These texts usually explore the problem by looking at the same time at the technical possibilities and constraint of a given craft and to social or anthropological theories that serve to give the technique a technological meaning, that is, a social context (*cf.* Lemmonier 1993; Pfaffenberger 1992a). Nevertheless, the focus of all this tradition is on technology, not on social identities through craft.

The approaches to the study of identity through craft focus on style in artefacts. Style had been considered a passive characteristic of the archaeological artefacts in the culture-historical approaches that had inaugurated the discipline since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 70s, under the paradigm of processual archaeology, style was conceived as an active way of exchanging information (Wobst 1977). According to Dunnell (1978) style was a different process of transmission of information than function, as the former was not subjected to the evolutionary constraints that determined the latter. Later the debate between Wiessner and Sackett (Wiessner 1983; Sackett 1985; and again Wiessner 1985) highlighted the problems that archaeologists faced when attributing the creation of styles to the role of individuals or to cultural influences. By then it came to be generally recognized that style was not necessarily opposed to function, and that style had to be found in human action and in traits of material culture at the same time (Hegmon 1992). Already for Hodder, style was related to cognitive processes, in the sense that it can be considered at the same time the way in which things are made but also a way of interpreting the world (Hodder 1990). This idea does not go too far from what it is argued in this paper.

The introduction of the theories of Bourdieu and Giddens in the studies about style played an important role in the development of later archaeological and ethnographical works that contemplated the analysis of technology as a way to understand style. An important development

following this introduction was the question of how to determine social boundaries or social changes through technological approaches (see for example the excellent works collected in Stark 1998a, and in particular: Dietler and Herbich 1998; Gosselain 1998; Hegmon 1998; Stark 1998b; see also Gosselain 2000; 2008; 2010; 2011; van der Leeuw 1993; Mahias 1993; Pfaffenberger 1992b). All these works relate the concepts of style and identity to technology, and therefore to the development of techniques to produce craft objects. According to Lemmonier, “a technique is the physical rendering of a mental schema” (1993: 3), that is, they are directly linked to the mind of individuals. Therefore the concepts of mind, identity, culture, individual and craft need to be related. But how?

The first thing that needs to be done is to define those concepts in a way that shows how they are linked. Craft, the ultimate focus of this paper, will be defined first. This can be done in two ways. On the one hand, craft is essentially transformative action, something that is equivalent to the concept of ‘labour’ in Marx’s *Capital*,<sup>1</sup> although it will still be referred as ‘craft’ in this paper for reasons that will be clear below. On the other hand, craft is understood by most archaeologists and anthropologists as an ordered set of techniques used to produce goods from raw materials (*chaîne opératoire*). Transformation is present in both definitions, but the former emphasizes change, while the second one focuses on the process. In the pages that follows the relation of this double definition of craft will be explored.

#### IDENTITY AND THE MATERIAL LINK TO CULTURE, INDIVIDUAL, AGENCY AND MIND

The link between craft and identity is a fundamental one. In order to understand it, however, it is necessary to review the concept of identity, which is extremely complex. Instead of a simple definition, a large range of elements that the concept of identity implies will be presented. These elements in turn link with other important concepts, as it will be explained below.

1. Identity is a discursive device at the shallowest level. To put it in the easiest possible way, an identity is a tag which is used to define an individual or a group and which is agreed between the participants of a conversation.
2. At a deeper level, any identity is based on a shared perception of the material reality involving on the one hand the participants of the conversation in which the discursive device

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<sup>1</sup> “The use values, coat, linen, &c., *i.e.*, the bodies of commodities, are combinations of two elements – matter and labour. If we take away the useful labour expended upon them, a material substratum is always left, which is furnished by Nature without the help of man. *The latter can work only as Nature does, that is by changing the form of matter*” (Marx 2010 [1867]: 30, the cursive has been added).

is used (that is, those who perceive the material reality) and on the other hand the entity or entities defined by it (that is, perceivable characteristics of the material reality).

3. Following the previous elements, an identity accepted in a given cultural environment becomes a social device used to draw boundaries inside society by defining ultimately a binary opposition between those who are defined by an identity and those who are not.
4. The social boundaries defined by identities create a social landscape to which individuals are attached to a certain extent. This means that there are boundaries which they cannot escape and boundaries which are permeable to them. The life of any individual can be defined as a travel inside and across different boundaries through a social landscape. Each travel is unique, because it is driven by different personal interests and stimuli and because each individual has a particular history (biography) that gives her/him access to different experiences.

These different elements of the concept of identity can now be linked to the rest of the concepts that are relevant to our understanding of craft.

The 'conversation' in which the discursive dimension of identity takes place and the 'shared perception of a material reality' are part of the concept of culture. Now, a complete definition of the concept of culture is far beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of the understanding of the aims of this text, culture can be defined here as the material and conceptual context that frames the relations between the individual, the institutions and the world inside a given social formation. With this definition, the use of the word 'society' or 'culture' in this text is almost synonymous.

The word 'individual' has been mentioned too. In this text, the concept of individual is based on the recent work of M. Bloch (2012). For this author, the individual (or the 'blob', as he puts it) is a biological phenomenon containing a neurological system which produces several levels of conscience and the capacity of storing and recalling autobiographical memories. This whole set gives the individual the ability to create meta-representations of himself. According to Bloch, anthropologists have frequently taken these meta-representations (that is, the reflective accounts of actors) as the real description of the individual itself. As these meta-representations are mediated by culture, the result is that modern anthropologists have found that it is difficult to categorize the concept in a single category, and thus they have frequently rejected the essentialist idea of the individual. Bloch suggests that the biological phenomenon of the individual makes possible the humanist conception of an essentially common individuality. However, that is not the same as saying that there is such a thing as a natural category of individuals. For Bloch, the different levels of conscience of the

individual do not stop in the biological individual itself. Rather they overcome the isolate organic entity and develop a common conscience with other individuals. Therefore the individual is essentially social, and it is bonded with other individuals around it in space and in time. Due to this phenomenon, individuals cannot be conceived without society. In other words, the individual that puzzles anthropologists is basically an experiment of thought (in a Cartesian sense) and can only be conceived as a meta-representation (that is, cultural) (Bloch 2012: 117-142).

As Bloch suggests, the experiment of thought of individuality is possible thanks to a complex neurological machinery, which has been the object of the neuro-scientific work of A. Damasio (2000). His compelling explanation of the basic neural mechanics that make consciousness possible is relevant for the understanding of the concepts that are being developed. Damasio is one of the sources of Bloch, and in particular he is responsible for the idea of different levels of consciousness (2000: 133-233) and of the relation between the autobiographical memory and an extended level of consciousness that allows human beings the deployment of the capacities of language, self-reflection and, ultimately, personhood and identity (194-233). Damasio is also the source of a distinction between emotion and feeling that is instrumental in this work. An emotion is a bodily state, a reaction of the most basic level of consciousness (the *proto-self*, in Damasio's terms) to a change in environmental conditions. The feeling, however, is the mental representation of that emotion for the superior levels of consciousness (35-81). The whole work of Damasio is based in these two concepts, and in how the two elements interplay with the different levels of consciousness to create a continuous state of interaction between the body, the mind and the environment.

The concepts of individual and consciousness of Bloch and Damasio are fundamental to the theoretical construction on which this paper is based. The relevant aspect of both concepts is that they require at the same time the availability of a stored biographical memory and the interaction with the external environment (including other individuals). In anthropological terms this can be conceptualized as culture. The continuous interaction of body, mind and environment is equivalent to the agency of the individual, which is a transformative activity of the relations between the individual and the world. Craft is the definitive manifestation of agency in that sense, as it is explained below.

The works of Bloch and Damasio do not reach that far, however. In the case of Damasio, his neurological field reaches its limit by stating that the development of consciousness requires the interaction with the world (2010: 296-305). Bloch clearly states the need to consider practice (and by extension craft) as the key element to link culture and the individual (2012: 149-154). He also hints

at the importance of material culture when he mentions houses as an example of the co-determination of concepts and schemas in the way that human beings create their own world (Bloch 2012: 181). However he does not engage in any attempt to define with detail the aspects of the interaction between mind and body and of its transformative power of the world. This will be the focus of the rest of this work.

#### MARRANCI'S TAUTOLOGICAL CIRCUIT AND THE MATERIAL WORLD

In his work on *Anthropology of Islam* (2008), G. Marranci proposes a relevant concept to understand Muslim identity which can be easily generalised. According to him, Muslims are those who define themselves as such, in other words, those who feel to be Muslims (2008:3). Of course, that implies that there is some perception in their relationship with the world that allows them to do so. That is Islam. For Marranci, the best definition of Islam is that of a map of discourses that helps to orientate the practices of Muslims (2008: 139).

Marranci's theoretical construction has inspired directly the definitions on identity that have been offered above. The important link to remark is that any identity depends on a perception on the individual with the world, that is, on individual practices (i.e. agency) that are aimed to engage in a particular way with the world. Marranci tries to explain this relation using the work of Damasio mentioned above, and particularly his distinction between emotions and feelings as fundamental in the creation of consciousness. Marranci suggests that human beings live in what he calls a tautological circuit (Fig 1). In an adapted version for the purposes of this chapter, the tautological circuit has the following stages: 1) production of stimuli from the environment; 2) bodily reactions to the stimuli (emotions); 3) rationalization of the emotions as feelings; 4) the conscience of the individual is affected by the chain stimuli-emotion-feeling; 5) the affected individual consciousness produces a re-evaluation of the relationship between the individual and the environment; and 6) the new evaluation of this relationship is compared with the records in the memory of the individual. This whole process can potentially affect the balance between individual and the world (or environment) which supports her/his identity (2008: 97-98). In normal circumstances, this sequence reflects the first part of the double process of identity, that of the organization of information. The second part occurs after the sequence, when the alteration of the conditions with respect to the status recorded in the autobiographical memory is so important that the balance between the self and the identity (that is, between the perceived reality and the expected one) is broken. Marranci calls this state *schismogenesis*. In it the second process of identity takes place in order to restore the

balance between identity and self. The way of doing this is by acts of identity, which aim to induce emotions in the individuals with the aim of reinforcing the lost balance (2008:98).

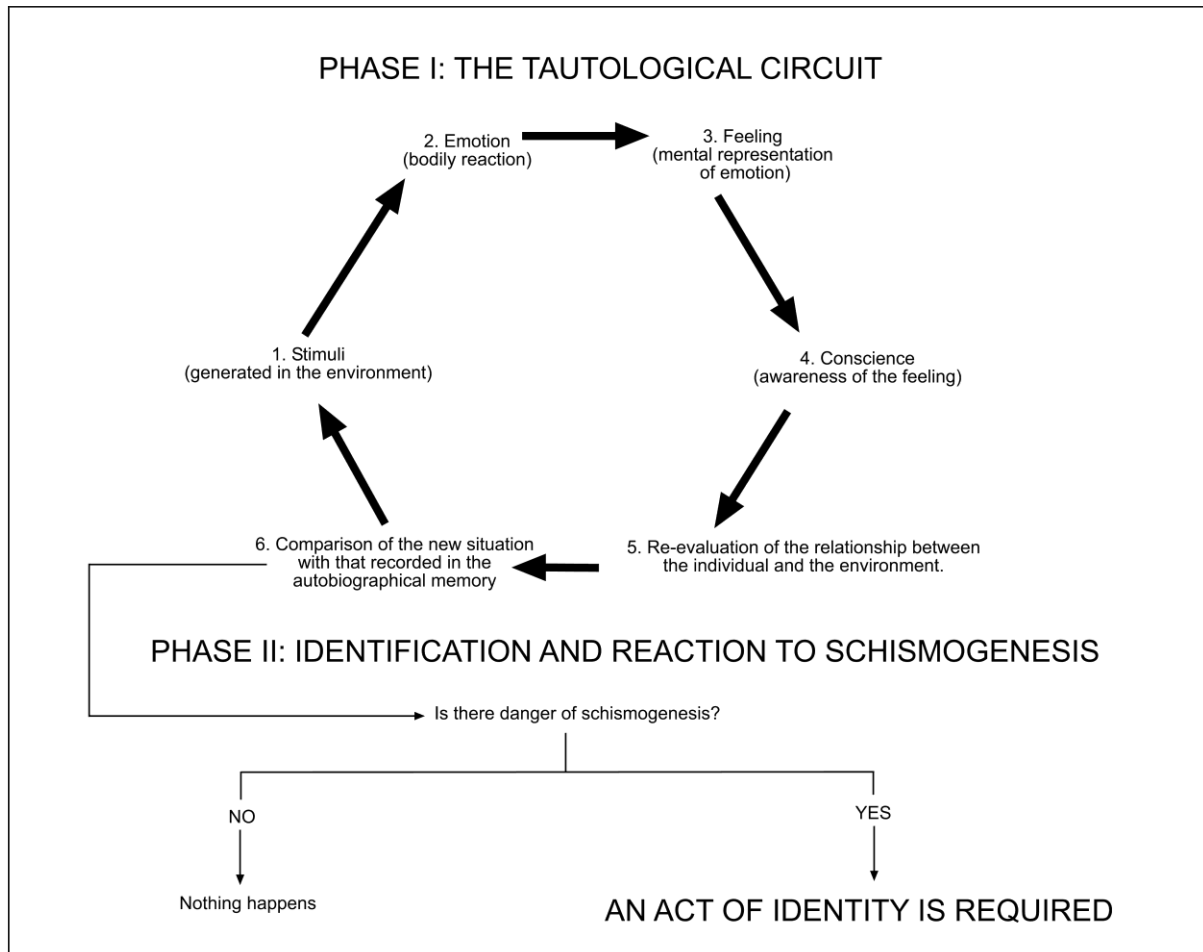


Figure 1: The tautological circuit, as explained by Marranci (2008) and adopted for the needs of this text.

In this way, Marranci, via Damasio, offers an explanation of the relationship between the individual as a biological entity and as an experiment of thought, and of her/his relationship with the world. There is a precise biological limit between individual and society, but the division is not that clear if we pay attention to the psychological and cultural processes that shape the mental representations of individual and culture and their respective meta-representations. It is important to remember than the concepts used to analyse anthropologically these processes are heuristic rather than

ontological. Apart from that, it is worth stressing Bloch's point that the opposition between nature and nurture has no place in this debate; they are not opposites, but overlapping processes that are only separated by our incapacity to model them in a single schema.

From the point of view of archaeologists, the most relevant part of the tautological circuit of Marranci is the role of the environment in the creation, maintenance and challenge of an identity. In this text 'environment' is equivalent to 'the world' and, especially, to the 'material world'. The rest of this paper will focus on the role of craft – as the definitive form of engagement of individuals in the material world – in the creation of identity, of society and, ultimately, of history.

#### CRAFTING THE WORLD, CRAFTING HISTORY

Two ways of approaching to the concept of craft have been advanced above. It is the moment to revise them in more detail, in the light of the concepts discussed so far.

##### *Craft as an example of transformative action*

This is a very wide definition of craft that links directly with the transformative nature of the activity. The ability to transform the world, that is, craft in its widest sense, has been long recognized as one of the markers of humanity. As archaeologists and cultural anthropologists, we are starting to recognize the dependence of this marker on the biology of our organisms thanks to the work of physical anthropologists and neuro-scientists. That does not make culture less important to understand. Quite the contrary, it gives a firmer base to address its study.

Craft is one of the ways – possibly the clearest way – in which identity can be manifested according to both parts of the double process established by Marranci. Inserted in the tautological circuit, craft makes possible the production and reproduction of practices (which constitute cultural patterns) by the constant transformation of the world. An artisan needs stimuli to produce. Of course we are talking about very complex stimuli, which take into account a lot of information and organization of that information involving the proto-self and all the superior levels of conscience, particularly the autobiographical memory. But it is exactly these stimuli that determine what has to be produced and when, what materials and resources need to be used and how, etc. In other words, culture (society) works as a constant source of stimuli that has a deep influence in the autobiographical memory of the individual. Culture is material, because only materials can affect the body and produce stimuli. Even language is transmitted ultimately by sounds (vibrations of air) or script (perceived by the eyes as vibrations of light reflected by a particular material).



Culture is therefore the missing link of the tautological circuit of Marranci, and, in its material quality, it is also the social link between the different individuals. Culture is itself expressed by means of the transformational quality of craft as well. In order to define a particular culture, we need to understand the way in which craft (in its widest sense) is done in that particular culture. This is something that archaeologists and anthropologist are certainly good at.

The wide definition of craft is also useful for the second phase of the tautological circuit, the act of identity in answer to the danger of schismogenesis, which Marranci does not define in depth. Under the framework that has been discussed the key fact of an act of identity is that it is directed at the same time to the individual and to the public. It is a reflexive and therefore discursive (or potentially discursive) meta-representation of the relation between the individual and the world especially designed and aimed to produce similar meta-representations in the individuals around. The agent finds in her/his autobiographical memory the situational details that will make this meta-representation an act of identity. S/he reclaims those elements that reinforce her/his balance between self and identity and challenges those that threaten it, and then makes them public through the act of identity. This duality reinforces the essentially continuous character of the individual and the society, that is, of the tautological circuit and the cultural/material world.

An easy example of this instance of craft is the work of a potter who at some point in her/his live decides to add some forms or decorations to her/his repertoire in order to make it more representative of her/his identity. For example, a potter who has recently converted to Islam may decide to include decorative motives in her/his product that mark her/his new identity. Perhaps s/he can refuse to include elements that were common to her/his repertoire before. This example, however, presents a problem: we understand the repercussion of the change in identity of the potter in her/his work because we know the change of identity beforehand. The usual challenge that archaeologists face is different, however: how can we understand the change of identity through the work of the potter alone? This question can be better answered if we are able to locate the locus of change of the production activity. And that can be achieved looking at craft from the other perspective that was suggested at the beginning.

*Craft as an example of chaîne opératoire.*

Most archaeologists and anthropologists would be happier with a more restrictive definition of craft, which emphasizes the dimension of craft as an ordered sequence of actions that make production possible. In this sequence, each one of the actions is carefully planned, staged and performed in order to achieve an end. Of course, each action can be looked at from the point of view of the

tautological circuit. The main difference in the examining the tautological circle of craft as an action and of each one of the actions comprising craft is the level of dependence of each action on the rest. Conceiving craft as a single transformative action only makes it dependent on a general cultural context, and therefore makes it more liable to be reflected upon, and thus more prone to become an act of identity. Actions inserted in a sequence, however, are more dependent on the actions of the same sequence, and therefore they are more subjected to 'quality standards'.

The expression 'quality standards' has been purposefully placed between inverted commas to mark that they are not scientifically deduced principles that will ensure best performance. The 'quality standards' are simply the accepted standards that will make the output of craft acceptable for the cultural role that it is called to play. Therefore, although subjected to the same general cultural standards as more independent actions, actions inserted in a craft sequence are mainly going to be evaluated according to the level in which they contribute, positively or negatively, to the general process of production of an object. In fact, being more dependent on the end result than on the control of schismogenesis, these actions are going to be relatively unaffected by acts of identity and therefore resistant to change. This does not mean that under certain circumstances they cannot become acts of identity in themselves, as it will be explained below.

What has been discussed above has a consequence: actions inserted in a sequence of production are less prone to change than actions that stand as transformative on their own. This is the reason why in appearance artisans are conservative (*cf.* Gosselain 2010) and why change, and not resilience, was the earliest focus of archaeological attention (for example, see Rice 1984). However, this is only an illusion. Actions is the very definition of the relation between mind and the physical world, and therefore they are continuously transforming one another. The only way in which change in actions can actually occur is through substitution of an action for another one. In a *chaîne opératoire*, change in actions or in their sequence is usually known as innovation. But conservatism may also imply changes in actions or in their sequence, when this change is aimed to keep the end result of the process of production as unchanged as possible. For example, a potter adding glaze to a previously unglazed ware is a sort of change that can be considered innovation. However, a potter can start using a different clay recipe to produce the same kind of pot in order to substitute a resource that has run out or that is no longer available. This shows that technical innovation and conservatism of traditions are not at odds with each other.

If spite of the fact that not all technical innovation is against an established tradition, the focus on change of archaeologists is relevant for one reason: an act of identity in craft is necessarily a change,

which means that the locus of the act itself must be found in a technical innovation that has been intentionally introduced inside the sequence of production. In fact, if the output of craft itself is to be considered an act of identity, there needs to be one or more acts of identity inserted in the sequence of production (Fig 2). For example, a Muslim potter can produce ceramic vessels with certain shapes and decoration motives that express her/his Muslim identity. S/he will choose particular sequences of actions amongst all the actions and sequences available to her/him, and it is these choices that define her/his particular identity as a *potter*. Along her/his life, changes can occur that will affect her/his Muslim or her/his identity as a potter and those will produce different acts of identity with distinct consequences on her/his choices. For example, s/he can live through a period in which the decorative motives that s/he had learned experiment changes in their social meaning, and s/he can undertake the inclusion or exclusion of those new meanings in her/his craftwork as an act of her/his Muslim identity. S/he can move from one village to another where other pottery traditions are dominant, and s/he may choose to learn the new ways or alternatively to keep attached to her/his old ways as an act of her/his identity as a potter (cf. Gosselain 2010; 2011).

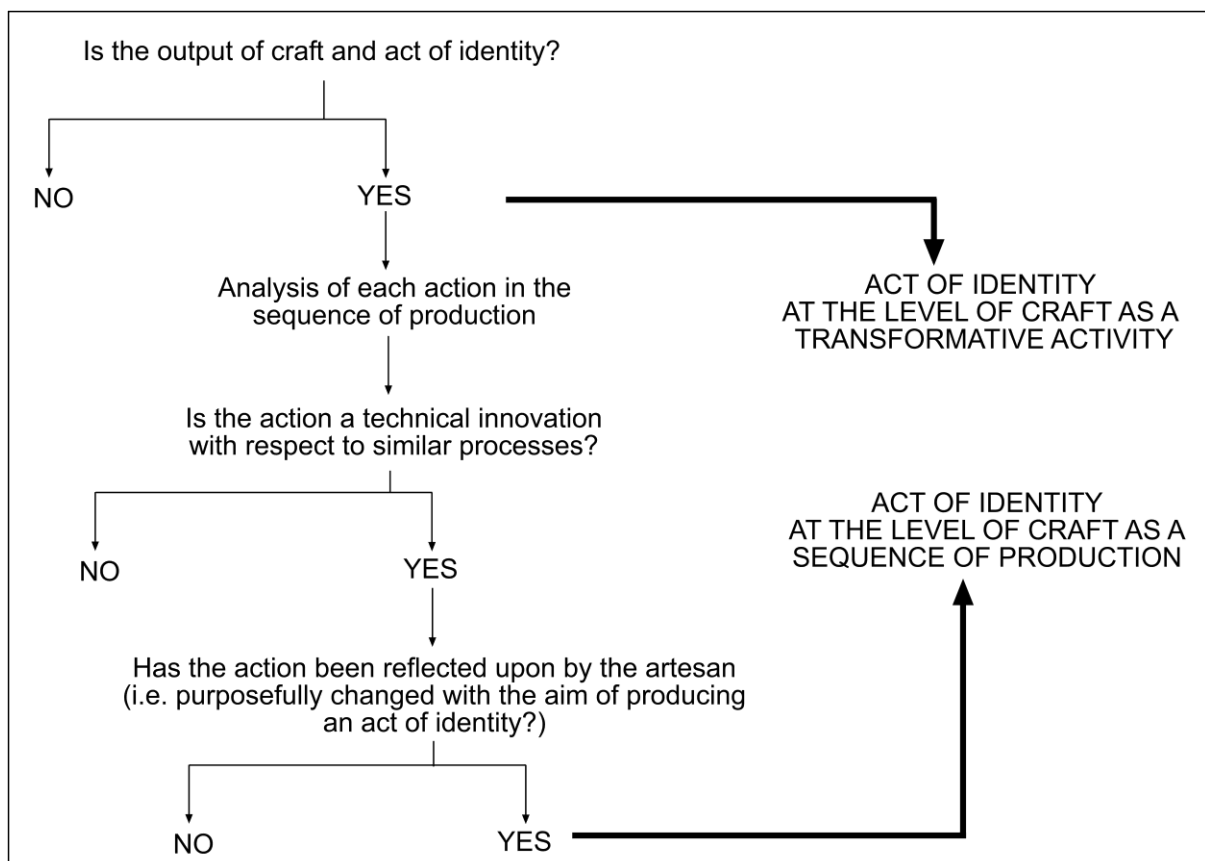


Figure 2: Acts of identity in relation to craft as a transformative action and to craft as a sequence of production.

## CRAFT AND IDENTITY

Acts of identity occur with relative frequency as part of the social interaction between individuals, in particular when one of the particular identities of an individual is at stake. However, the immense majority of actions are not acts of identity. They are inserted in sequences that aim to produce expected results. In fact, transformative actions that are the result of a complex sequence of actions can include a set of acts of identity and actions supporting the general sequence. In summary, actions are either acts of identity or supporting acts. When they are the former, their performance is considered as an end in itself by the agents, that is, they are reflected upon by the agent and the ultimate reason by which they are performed is that they are needed changes to correct something that was wrong. When actions are 'supporting acts', they are not reflexive actions, because they are only necessary steps to achieve an end that is not related with the aim of the action itself outside of the sequence of production.

To set an example of the discussion above, the Muslim potter of the example mentioned before may choose to produce a new type of shape or of decoration motif as an act of identity. This will imply a change in the sequence of production that can be partial (ie, s/he may need to change only some actions in the sequence). However, this is an act of identity in itself, since it produces a reorganization of the mental schema of production and the end result is totally new. Regarding the actions that are inserted in the process of production, they can be separated in two groups:

1. Those actions that remain unchanged or those that change because they are needed for the production process under the potter's criteria (ie, those related to collection and preparation of clay, basic techniques of modelling, drying, etc). These actions are 'supporting acts' inserted in the sequence of production, as they are not reflected upon by the potter in the pursuit of her/his new production.
2. Those actions that change as a result of the reflection of the potter upon them are in themselves acts of identity. This is one important result of the double consideration of craft as an action in itself and as a sequence of actions.

It is important to remember that the distinction between acts of identity and supporting acts inserted in a sequence of production is exclusively based on the particular circumstances of the individual and on the identity which is under consideration, and never on the nature of the action itself. The very same action can be an act of identity or a supporting act in different contexts. A potter can stop producing a given shape and start producing a new one for reasons motivated by her/his identity as a Muslim (*eg. s/he does not feel comfortable with the old product*), by his/her

identity as a potter (*eg. s/he reacts to a change in circumstances that affects her/his craftmanship*) or even by a combination of both identities. In any of these cases the relation of acts of identity and supporting acts in the sequence of productions will be different, as different are the implication of the actions on which the potter is reflecting.

#### A CASE STUDY: THE QUESTION OF ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND ISLAMIC IDENTITY THROUGH THE STUDY OF CRAFT

In the following pages this paper will discuss the application of the theoretical standpoint discussed above to a concrete case study which is the main interest of the author: Islamic archaeology and Islamic identity through craft. It is necessary to explain in some detail the current concerns of the discipline before proceeding to the application of the theory.

The definition of a field of study in archaeology can be tricky. Most scholars simply work along the lines established by academia, and very often they cross boundaries in healthy attempts to improve their perspective. In some cases, however, academic lines start to blur, and debates about the proper definition of the discipline are necessary.

The concept of Islamic archaeology is one such blurred field. It is an archaeological field generally independent of art history, Orientalism or Islamic studies, and just as close to those disciplines as any other archaeological field (such as Mayan or Aegean Archaeology) can be to similar counterparts. This kind of Islamic archaeology is a field that is becoming more and more central in the last years, for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, the wider perception of the Islamic world has changed in the last decades due to a number of circumstances. One circumstance is the combination of academic and political debates around a Post-Colonial world in which Islamic countries are key players. Another one is a notorious (and unfairly negative) profile of the Islamic world since the terrible events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars, terrorist attacks and changes of regimes. On the other hand, the discipline of Islamic archaeology seems to have reached a level of maturity, at least in the English-speaking world, reflected in the first general reviews (Insoll 1999; Milwright 2010a; 2010b; Vernoit 1997), the creation of international networks to discuss about Islamic archaeology (*eg. the International Congress of Islamic Archaeology, with one edition in Islamabad in 2001 and another one in Istanbul in 2005; the International Conference of Islamic Archaeology in the East (El Cairo, 2013) and the Symposium Islam and Identities (Southampton, 2013) and the Journal of Islamic Archaeology*. It is of course important to remember the long tradition of Islamic archaeology originating from colonialism. For example, the first specialised publication on Islamic Archaeology, *Archéologie Islamique* (no longer in print), was produced in France. In addition, it is important to

mention that some of the very first excavations were conducted by Russians, Ottoman and Spanish researchers in their own territories (cf. Milwright 2010b: 11). The works of the German scholars Sarre and Hertzfeld in Samarra, Iraq (1911-1920) are considered by many the starting point of the discipline. Afterwards, Islamic archaeology acquired more importance as a result of processes of decolonization, for example in Iraq in the 1930s (Vernoit 1997: 7). Finally, it is important to remember that the field has experienced significant advances by the accumulation of knowledge in some regions, like the Levant (see overview in Walmsley 2007) or Iberia (general reviews in Glick 1995 and Boone 2009). Yet none of these traditions has a definition of Islamic archaeology as a field separated from Islamic studies, history, or, indeed, a wider field of Orientalism. This is precisely the kind of development that is slowly taking place now.

So there is a vision of what Islamic archaeology is not, but how to define what it is? Probably the first serious attempt to do it is Insoll's (1999), who was the first one to express a clear dissatisfaction with Islamic archaeology (the "old" one) and proposed the term "archaeology of Islam" to present a new program of studies. The concern of the archaeology of Islam should be to examine "the issue of whether Islam can be seen to exert an influence in all areas of life as represented by material culture" and "to place Islamic material culture within its social context", with emphasis "upon interpretation and the importance of studies of material culture as a way of furthering our understanding of Muslim societies in the past" (1999: 2). Insoll's ideas have been criticized for placing too much emphasis on the religious identities, which can be difficult to reconstruct in the archaeological record without "assigning overarching religious identities to excavated material" (Milwright 2010b: 7-8). Instead, Milwright proposed reconsidering Islamic archaeology as a cultural-historical concept convenient to encompass a number of different fields of study of "things made and used both by Muslim and by non-Muslim communities within [...] historically defined regions and periods" (Milwright 2010b: 6). †The author of this paper has argued elsewhere that Insoll's archaeology of Islam and Milwright's definition of Islamic archaeology are the products of very different conceptions of archaeology, and yet there is in principle no problem in accepting the complementarity between them (Carvajal López 2014).

This discussion has the virtue of exposing clearly one of the problems of Islamic archaeology: being more an encompassing term than a proper concept of research, it does not have a well defined object of study. This characteristic is usual in archaeology, where only a few fields of research are defined by the particular material culture that is under study, and very often they are defined by cultural-historical or geographical adjectives (e.g., Byzantine archaeology, Aegean archaeology, etc). In other words, it does not usually mean any particular problem for the discipline, but in the case of

Islamic archaeology it does. The cause of this is that unlike many other archaeological fields of research, Islamic archaeology is particularly linked to Orientalism, understood here as a confusing vision of the lands and inhabitants of the Near and Middle East as homogeneously different (and, for some, inferior) to the West (*cf.* Said 1978). Although the debate on Orientalism is still raging and far from finished, the author of this work believes that it is desirable to be specifically critical about it. We should not avoid the “Orientalist” problem with the definition of Islamic archaeology.

There is no doubt that Islamic archaeology is linked to the belief in an Islamic culture, but, is there such a thing? Scholars, historians and art historians in particular (e.g. Grabar 1973; Hodgson 1974; Lewis 2002 [1976]) have defended the existence of an Islamic culture. In fact, nowadays the only aspect that seems to link together the many and heterogeneous territories where Islam became a dominant religion is the traditional academic structure, rather than an actual union of politics, culture or thought that was lost soon after the initial Islamic expansion (*cf.* Blair and Bloom 2003). This explains the complex and uncommitted definition that Milwright proposes for Islamic archaeology, where he avoids defining a real subject of study. It also makes Insoll’s criticism of the term understandable, as well as his proposal of a new focus of research (that is a, a new subject of study). The suggestions of these two scholars, again, are not as different as they may appear in a first look (although, it is fair to stress, the conceptions of archaeology behind them are very far apart indeed). They both have realized that the subject of Islamic archaeology cannot be an untenable “Islamic culture”.

It can be admitted with Milwright that, whatever one may think of its Orientalist background, the idea of an Islamic archaeology is a useful categorization of scholarship and therefore, very difficult to avoid. However, it is probably necessary to offer a more nuanced view of the concept, and that requires exploring in more depth the consideration of an Islamic culture. With the theoretical background discussed above, it should now be possible to define Islamic culture as the culture of those individuals who live under a noticeable influence of acts of identity that aim to reinforce the sense of a common identity linked to Islam (which is not the same as dictated by Islam). It is very important to make clear that these individuals do not need to be Muslims to be part of the Islamic culture. They are Islamized in the sense in which their identity as a community (which depends on the individual balance between their selves and their identities) is partly defined by the pressure of the predominant identity around them. If they are Muslims, they will produce acts of identity that show harmony with their general background. They could also make acts of identity that will challenge established conceptions within the accepted framework of Islamic identity, of course. If they are not Muslims, they will still be forced to mark their religious identity with reference to Islam

(this is why M. Hodgson established the difference between Islamic – relative to religion – and Islamicate – relative to culture – in his classical work of 1974, *The Venture of Islam*). Therefore, we are now in a position to define Islamic archaeology as the study of the people living under a Islamic culture, that is, of those whose identities are built in relation to historical interpretations of Islam. These are what we will call Islamic identities, and it is important to remember that in this theoretical construction this concept encompasses also identities which are non-Muslim by definition. The transmission of these identities is the result of acts of identity which can be ultimately (and very simplistically) understood as the answer of the organic structures of the brain to external stimuli. The combination of all these phenomena at the level of a whole society is what we call Islamic culture. However, it is still a very complex concept, as it is not possible to delimit it beyond the strict limits imposed by the methodological individualism of Marranci. This makes the concept of Islamic culture inoperative in archaeological terms. For this reason it is useful to come back to Insoll. Being confronted with the impossibility of anthropological concepts to separate individual and culture, he established differences between a superstructure and substructures in his definition of Islam: “a definable, cross-culturally applicable entity: [...] a uniform superstructure composed of the fundamentals of belief, with a diverse substructure of practices, cultures and their material manifestations below” (Insoll 1999: 1). In positing an Islam with multiple structures to have into account, Insoll is pointing at the multiple ways in which a same identity can be historically materialized. As a consequence of this claim, it follows that the understanding of Islamic culture cannot be achieved outside a consideration of the material conditions of life of the Islamic communities.

This is where craft plays a fundamental role in the understanding of Islamic culture and Islamic identity. In its double sense of transformative action and sequence of actions, craft is the best example of the way in which the individual shapes and is shaped by her/his identity, her/his environment (culture) and the material world at the same time. The traits of any Islamic identity present in any craft activity (decoration motives, shapes and even *chaînes opératoires* are transmitted from individual to individual through generations, but at the same time the interaction among individuals and amongst different Islamic identities produce a continuous emergence of acts of identity. These acts of identity in turn produce constant re-evaluation of the actions that are characteristic of any given identity, and therefore these actions are in permanent change, even if for ‘conservative’ purposes. The question that archaeologists should address therefore is not why change happens, but what links are there between change or resilience in craft and change or resilience in particular identities.



In the study of Islamic culture, craft can offer the crucial link between people and Islam, or more exactly, in between people and the superstructure of Islam. Since craft reflects the practice of people in the material world, a refined understanding of the elements of change and of resilience in craft in a particular society and in a particular time can be related to changing (or resilient) circumstances of the relationship between people and Islam. This relation can be useful to inform about processes of Islamization or about the construction of new relations between individuals and Islam due to changing historical circumstances (an event that could be well called Islamization as well).

Two particular case examples can be drawn from the author's research. Studies on early Islamic pottery have been carried out in the area of the Vega of Granada, in south east Spain, in what was the country of al-Andalus in the Middle Ages. Al-Andalus was created roughly in the area of Roman Hispania after the Islamic conquest of the Peninsula of 711-714 CE. The area of the Vega of Granada was particularly Arabized, in the sense that a substantial number of Arab immigrants (mainly from the area of Syria) are known to have established themselves there. The Vega was relatively far away from Cordoba, the capital of al-Andalus, where the political power of the state had its centre. The social dynamics of the town and of the area of the Vega of Granada were very different, and they would not run in parallel until several centuries after the conquest, when the Umayyad state of Cordoba expanded and created a social organisation based in towns which reflected and reproduced the power of the state in distant areas like the Vega of Granada, where the town in particular was Ilbīra (Carvajal López 2008; 2009). The research undertaken by the author has focused on the change of technological systems of production of cooking pots in different sites of the Vega of Granada between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (Carvajal López and Day 2013; 2015). In this period of time, two transcendental changes took place.

1. Between the beginnings of the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century the repertoire of vessel forms and modelling techniques of the cooking pots grew largely due to the arrival of the different immigrants that settled in the Vega of Granada: Arabs, but also Berbers. The most relevant aspect of the new and varied range of technical solutions is that they do not show any particular direction of change, but rather a mixture of trends which can be best summarized as follows:
  - A) The transformation in cooking pot typologies in this period show a sequence that is consistently maintained in the different sites of the Vega; this clearly indicates that different potters were in touch and shared common patterns about how a cooking pot should look like across time and space.

- B) The analysis of petrographic fabrics indicates that fabric recipes were resilient in each site. That is, independently of the forms of the vessels or on the modelling techniques, the fabrics used for cooking pots remained very local, probably produced in the vicinity of each site and using raw materials which were available in the immediate surroundings.
  - C) The analysis of modelling techniques in each site shows a very complex pattern in this period of time. Some sites feature only pots made in one particular modelling technique, others have only pots made in a different one and there are other sites in which pots could be produced with any of the two techniques. This pattern is characteristic of a society with a high mobility of potters across different sites, maybe due to the practice of moving residence after marriage (*cf.* Gosselain 1998), or maybe due to a practice of itinerant craftsmanship (*cf.* Day 2004).
2. The technological pattern of production between the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century is very different. Following the abandonment of many of the sites of the previous period, pottery production is concentrated in or nearby the two successive capitals of the Vega, first the town of Ilbīra, and afterwards the town of Granada. The cooking pots made in this period have well-defined standards in terms of technique, petrographic fabrics and forms, and the output of the workshops located in or nearby the towns serves to supply other subordinate settlements in the Vega, even if they used to have a production of cooking pots in previous centuries. In other words, the pattern based on production in multiple workshops found along the Vega and on distribution in small, local areas finished, and a new pattern based on urban production and wide distribution came forward.

These two different periods of technological change have been related with other historical information, and a very plausible interpretation of the whole picture is that the two periods of material change reflect two different forms of Islamization in time. The first one was an Islamization based on the daily contact between the conquered people of the Vega and the Muslim immigrants during the period in which the power of Cordoba was still relatively far away. The Muslims, as conquerors, had clearly the upper hand in political (and military) terms. The second period is marked by a new Islamization in which the state recasts Islam as an ideology to cement and support its power over the Vega (Carvajal López 2013).

This interpretation can be looked at from a different perspective: that of the changes in craft production of the artisans involved in the production of cooking pots in the Vega of Granada during

the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. In this case the methodological individualism that has been used in the theory explained above is not so useful, as it is not possible to isolate any individual's activity in the materials that have been retrieved in the archaeological study of the Vega. However, the analysis of the archaeological cooking pots retrieved in the Vega allows us to ascertain what the range of possible actions was and the implications of the choices taken by the potters for their social identities.

In the first period of Islamization, the consistency of the morphological type of cooking pot used in different sites through time shows that there is a certain common perception of what a vessel of these characteristics should look like, although it is not possible to know where the origin of this common perception lies. The fact that the production of cooking pots occurs at a very local level (almost a fabric for every site) and the evidence of different techniques used in the same sites sometimes suggest that there was a certain communication and exchange of techniques in between artisans. This would allow to keep the same clay recipes in the same site for long periods of time and to copy or adapt modelling techniques in between different workshops. This all implies a certain consideration of potters as 'equals', that is, inside a recognizable common identity, in spite of possible barriers between different political or religious groups. This common identity is remarkable, as it means an important degree of contact in spite of the physical separation of potters and the very probable seasonality of their production. These circumstances can account for other levels of the potter's identity which still weighed in her/his choices, as the variability of the sequences of production in the Vega attests: family, tribal group, community, religion, etc.

In the second period, things changed significantly for the potters. The concentration of workshops in or around the towns implied that potters became one urban social group, and that standards that had not been in place before were imposed in their activity, productivity and output. Written sources about potters are scarce in this period, but the available ones show that wholesale retailers certainly presented demands of this type (*cf.* Aguirre 2000; discussed in Carvajal López and Day 2013: 447). Potters seem to have been considered amongst the poorest social groups, as a small extract of an 11<sup>th</sup> century text suggests: "The house of the Banū 'Awf was impoverished before, to the point that some of its members had needed to work as potters" (Terés 1958: 99-100; translated from the Spanish by the author). If this general perception of the potters is true, it is highly possible that the links of solidarity of the potters amongst themselves and with other social groups were tight, and that necessarily contributed to the development of identities that all together would constitute an urban proletariat. Thus, in contrast to the earlier period, the identity of the potters did not reflect a wide variety of identities, but the unity of a single one that also represented a new Islamic order.

This archaeological approach to the early Islamic Vega of Granada offers an approach to Islam that includes the influence of superstructural Islam (according to Insoll's definition) but which also focus on the large and small scale social and political relations that create the conditions for everyday life. The concept of Islamic culture is understood as encompassing and conditioning, but never as determinant of what happens in the daily life of a given community, which is the scale at which the archaeological record is created. In this work, the potters' identity is presented as one of the possible Islamic identities that developed in different historical moments in conjunction with other possible identities that were as Islamic as that of the potters (including that of Muslim, but also potentially those of Christian, Jew, convert, etc, to mention only possibilities in the field of religion). Of course, it is not possible to determine which identities could mark the individual trajectory of a particular potter, and even the range of identities that we can pinpoint is limited by the precision with which we can read our data. But even so, this picture offers more detail and definition than a simplistic differentiation between what is Islamic and what is not.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have presented a proposal by which cultural dynamics can become clearer. An example has been presented in relation to the epistemological status of the discipline of Islamic archaeology, which is the author's field and is gaining an independent academic slot in the last years. However, this proposal goes beyond that discipline and seeks to offer an useful exploration of the concepts of culture, identity, action and material culture in social sciences and in particular in the field of archaeology. Craft is where all these concepts meet.

Identity has two different meanings. From the point of view of biological and methodological individualism, it is a meta-representation of the self, understood as a continuum between the physical and chemical processes of the organism, the human mind and the society. From the point of view of the social sciences, it is a common field of shared experiences, that is, a channel of individual identities.

Action, the essence of agency, is the materialization of the relation between the mind, the body and the physical world. In the case of humans, action results in material culture, which is the transformation of the world produced by individual actions inserted in a social and cultural (historical) context. Context is where the two perspectives of identity come into play and influence action. The combination of all these phenomena is what we call culture.

Craft is the definitive metaphor of action, because it is the only component of the archaeological record where we can find material evidence of all the phenomena that compose the cultural process. Understood as transformation of the world, craft is directly linked to identity (in any of its definitions). It is an act of identity that reproduces and transmits the cultural tracks that were amongst the stimuli that gave origin to the transformation. As a process, craft is the sequence of actions that are subordinated to a given end, most of which are not in themselves acts of identity. They are, of course, influenced by the purpose of the end result (which is an act of identity), and therefore they are ultimately dependent of the cultural process. However, they are also part of a wider process of transformation and it is the control of this process that determines the actions of the individual. This distinction between acts of identity and actions inserted in a process is not exclusive of craft. It can be applied to general agency in order to examine the cultural process. Nevertheless, it is in craft where action can be best analysed.

The case of Islamic archaeology as an encompassing term is an appropriate example of what happens when all these concepts are taken into account. There is indeed an Islamic identity, and an Islamic culture that makes it possible, but there is also immense variability between the structures and practices that make the feeling of being Muslim possible. Islamic archaeology and Islamic anthropology need to account for all these variations, as well as for what binds them together. The way to do this is to understand that Islam is “crafted”, produced and reproduced by means of acts of identity that require actions in processes to materialize. The actions in processes are the main cause of historical and geographical variation, as they provide identities with the baggage of former cultural tradition and with the adaptative ability to different conditions. The acts of identity are ultimately the causes of the shared experiences of individuals and the pillars of identity as a common field.

Culture is only transmitted as practice, that is, action. Actions have the transformation of the physical world as a result and therefore they produce new stimuli for other individuals. This is not exclusively communication, so the concept of symbol is not appropriated here. This is the transformation of the world, and thus of the conditions of life in the world, and then of the relationship between mind, body and environment. This is the generation of a new human being through human doing. We all are the human doings of other human beings and of ourselves. This is the consequence of living in a world where not only there is craft, but where human beings craft history.

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