Ceramics, Polity, and Comics

Visually Re-Presenting Formal Archaeological Publication

John G. Swogger

ABSTRACT

Formal archaeological publication is unimaginative in its use of images, and often the images used do not best serve the text. The result is that text and image poorly relate. But graphic formats that establish an interrelationship between text and image can be used to create new layers of richness. One such example is the use of comics. In order to illustrate how the visualization principles of comics can be used to re-shape formal archaeological publication, the author presents an adaptation of the first three pages of "Ceramics and Polity" by Michael Whalen and Paul Minnis, originally published in *American Antiquity*. The use of similar visualization principles opens up the possibility of new kinds of professional, interdisciplinary, and peer-to-peer narratives. The article is in the form of a 10-page comic.

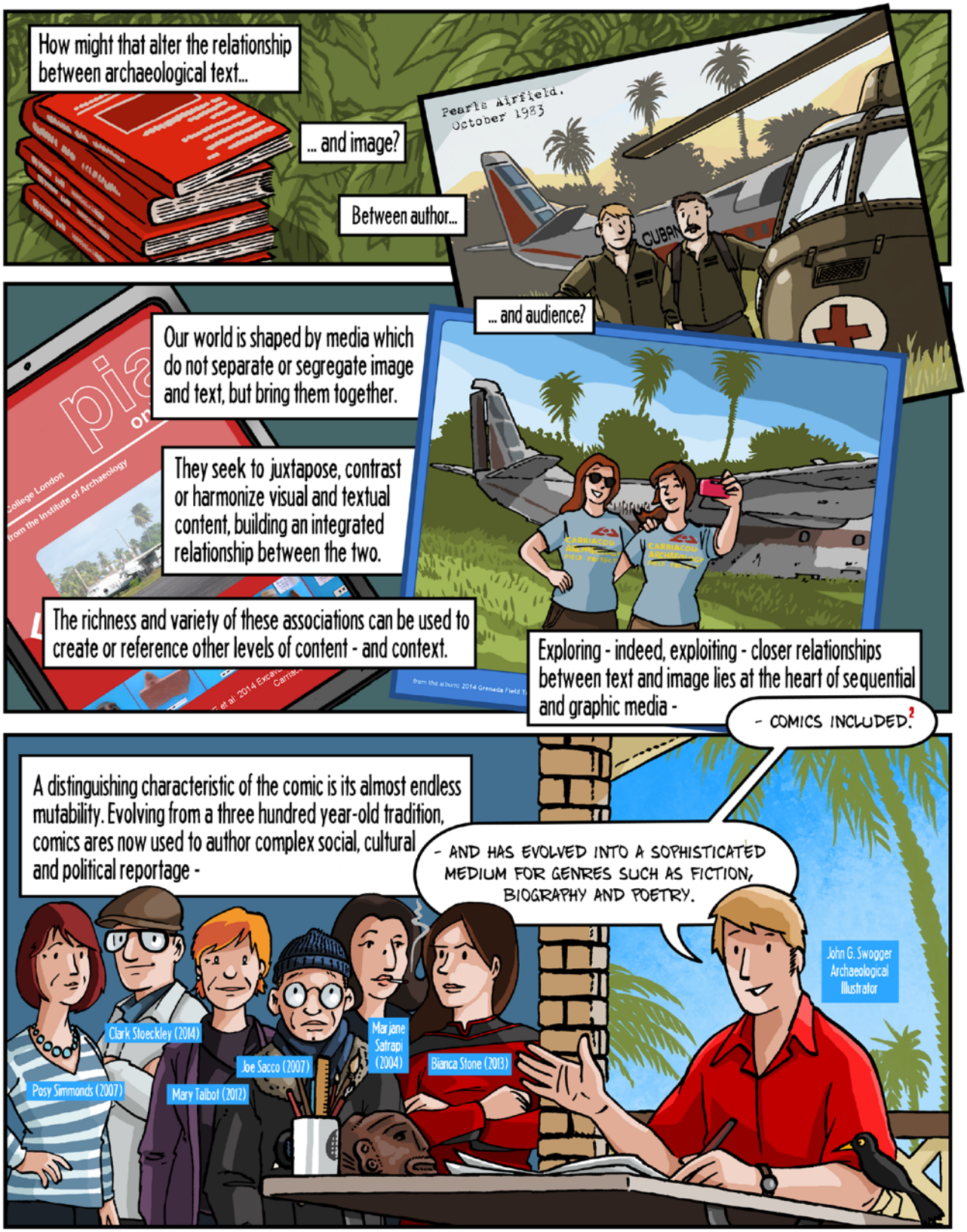
La publicación profesional en arqueología es poco creativa en el uso de imágenes y con frecuencia las imágenes no van de la mano del texto. El resultado es una publicación en la que el texto y la imagen no se correlacionan. Pero existen formatos gráficos que pueden utilizarse para enriquecer la correlación entre el texto y la imagen. Uno de ellos es el de las historietas. Como ejemplo de la forma en la que los principios de visualización de las historietas pueden utilizarse para mejorar la publicación profesional en arqueología, el autor presenta una adaptación de las tres primeras páginas de "Cerámics and Políticas", por Michael Whalen y Paul Minnis, publicado originalmente en *American Antiquity*. De forma similar, el uso de estos principios de visualización crean la posibilidad de establecer nuevas narraciones interdisciplinares, profesionales y entre pares. El artículo se presenta en forma de una historieta de 10 páginas.

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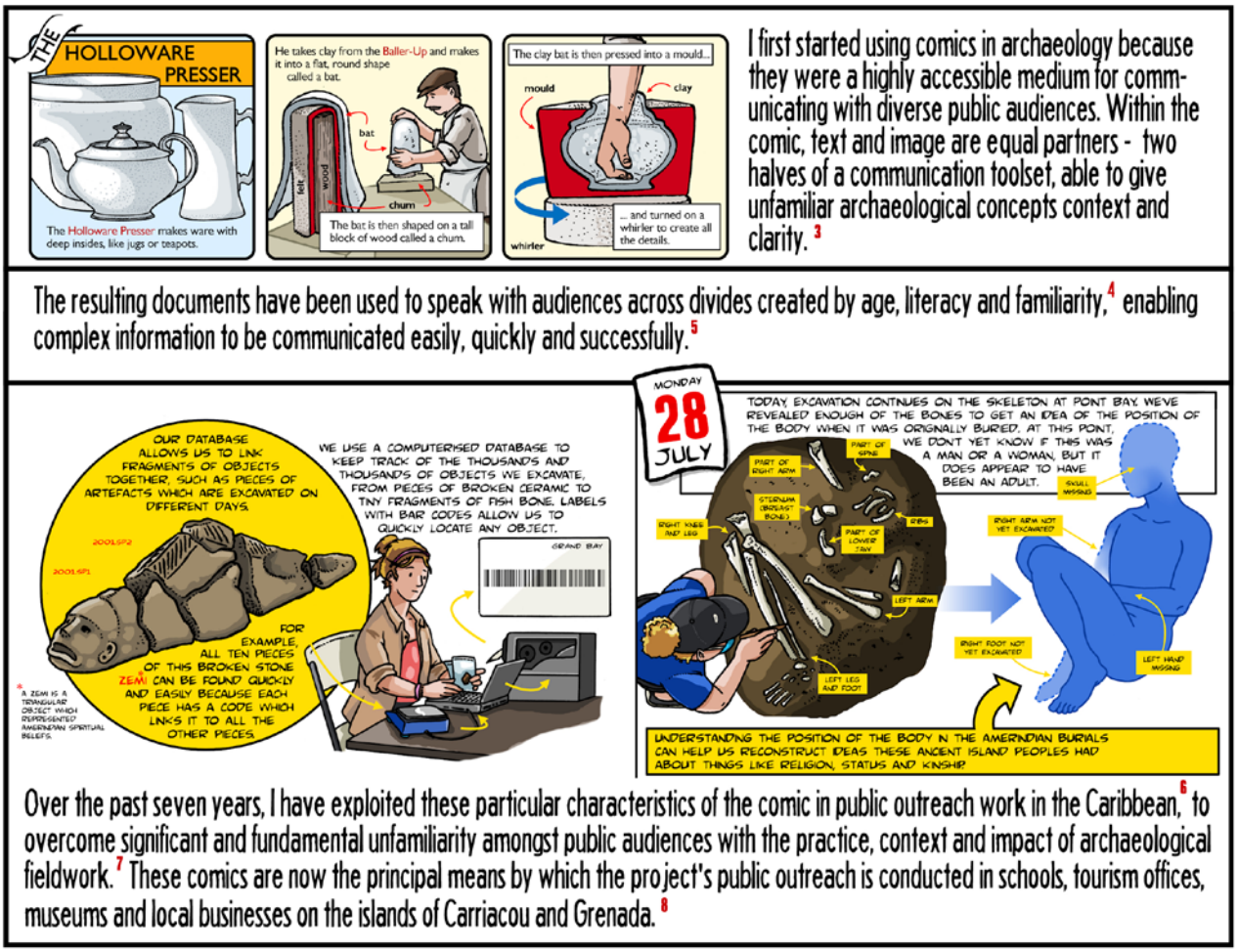
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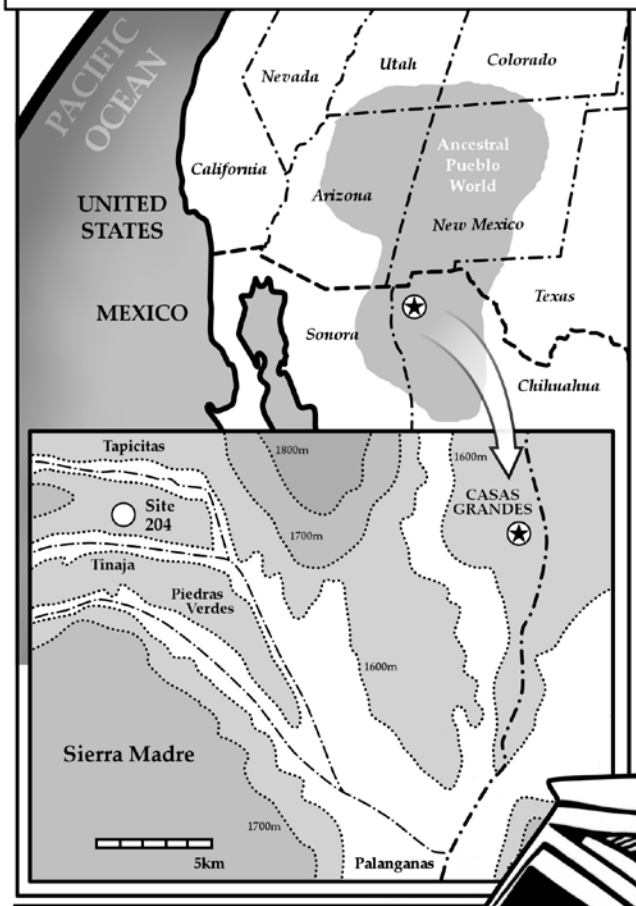
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CERAMICS & POLITY

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.

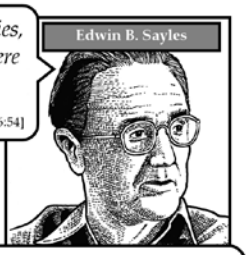


There, Casas Grandes - or **Paquimé** - long has been known to be the largest and most elaborate community of the Medio Period.



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]





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

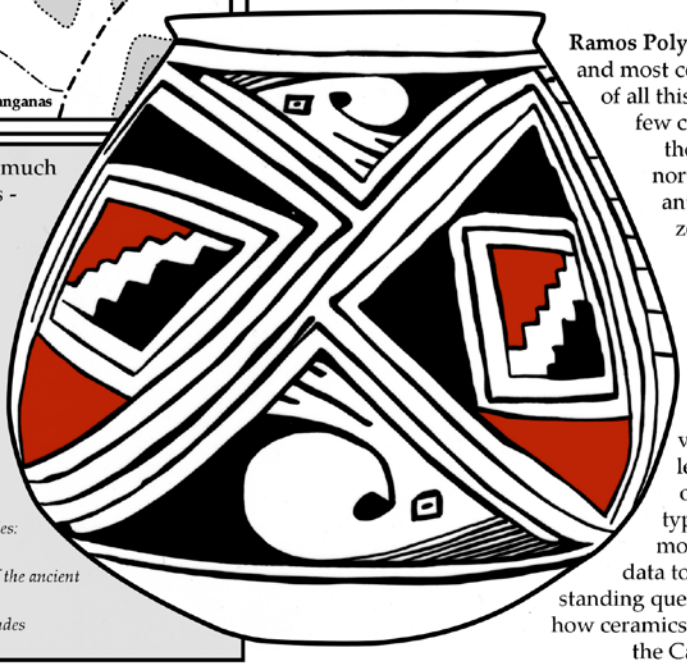
"... the hallmark type and the primary focus for Casas Grandes stylistic complexity." (Moulard, 2005:78)

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.

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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)

VIEJO
pre-Casas Grandes

associated with pre-Casas Grandes pit houses; repetitive geometric designs in red paint

MEDANOS
red-on-brown

repetitive geometric designs in red and black

DUBLAN
polychrome

more colors used

BABÍCORA
polychrome

design complexity increases

MADERA
black on red

CARRETAS
polychrome

CORRALITOS
polychrome incised

RED (and black) WARES
and incised wares

RAMOS
polychrome

VILLA AHUMADA
polychrome

elaborate decoration

finely executed

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.

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)

Michael E. Whalen

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)

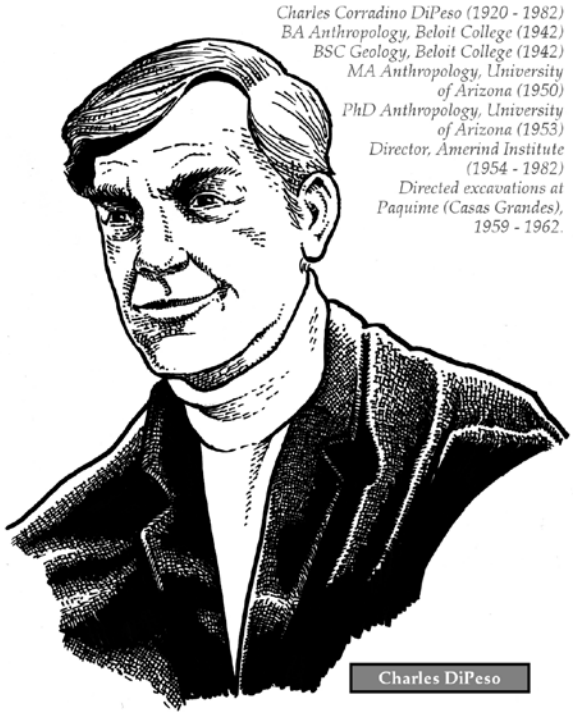
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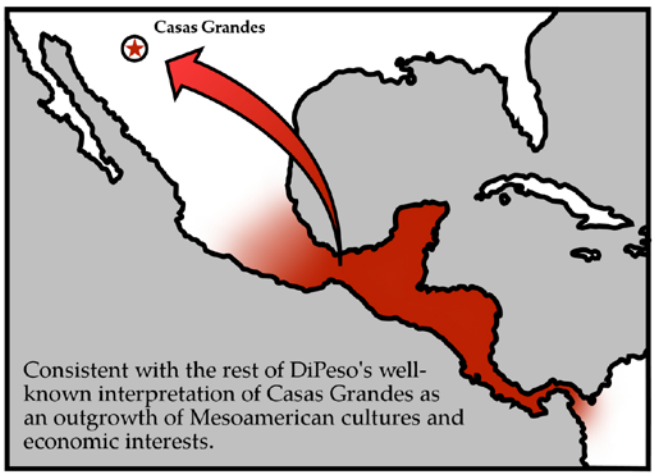
Discussion of local ceramic development is not relevant. I argue that the Medio period polychromes have Mesoamerican antecedents. Ramos Polychrome is possibly derived:

"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)





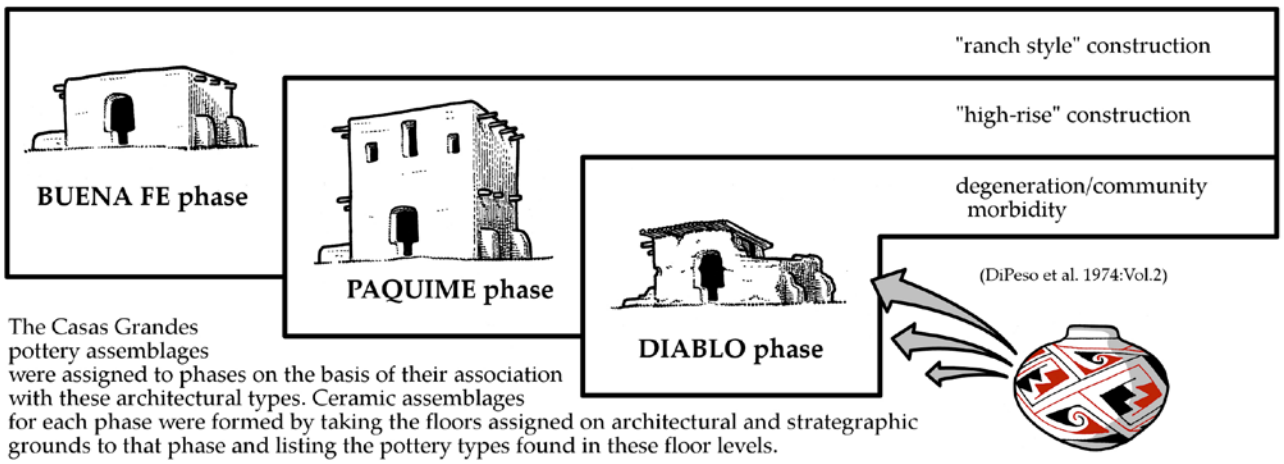
Construction of a developmental sequence for the Chihuahuan polychromes further was hampered by the way in which the Casas Grandes deposits were seriated.

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)

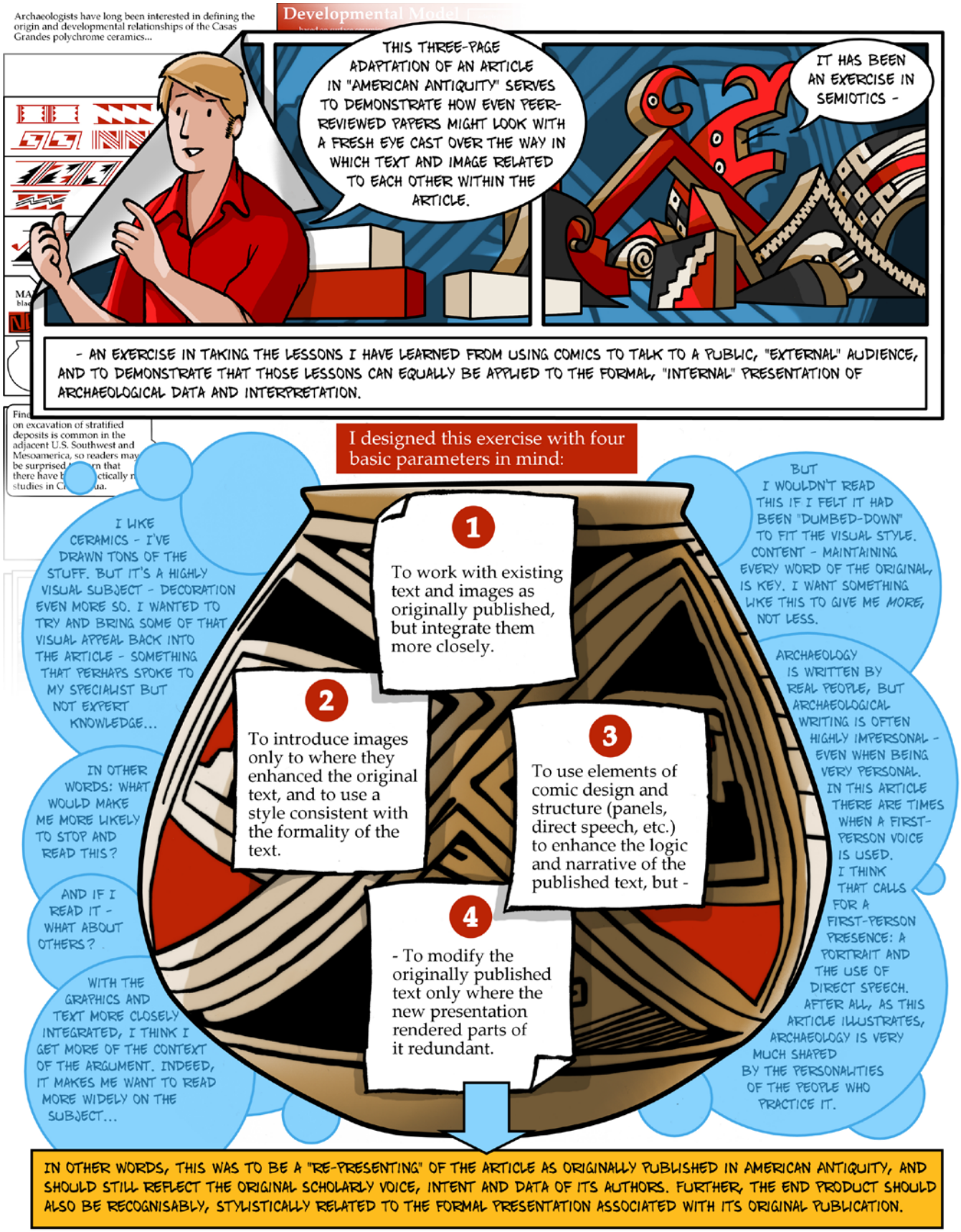
In fact, it seems that architecture was the primary distinguishing point:



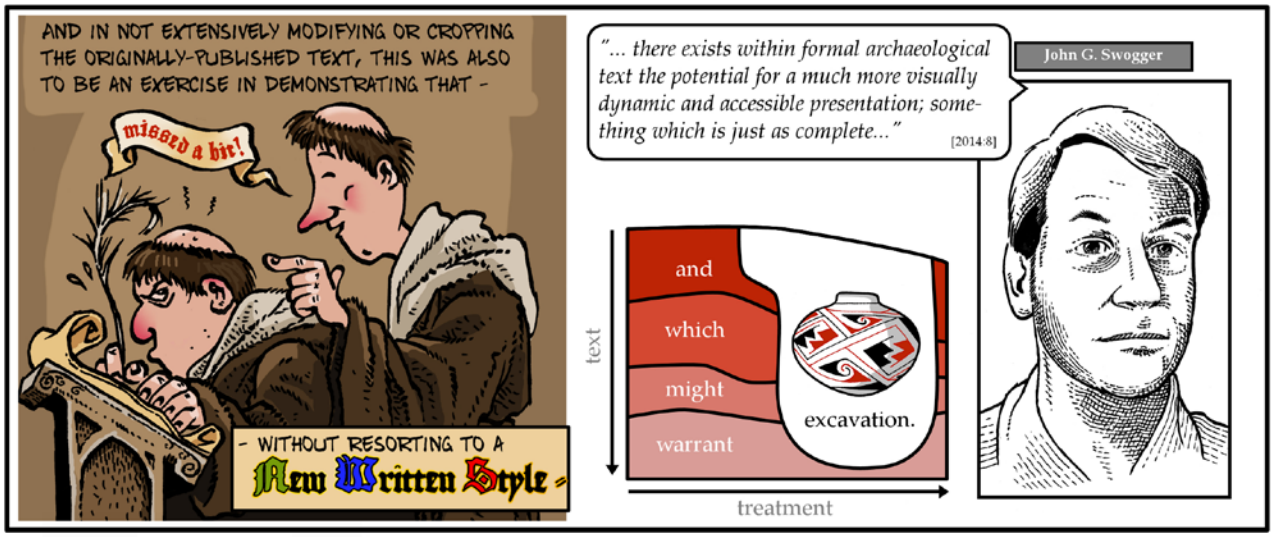
The Casas Grandes pottery assemblages were assigned to phases on the basis of their association with these architectural types. Ceramic assemblages for each phase were formed by taking the floors assigned on architectural and strategraphic grounds to that phase and listing the pottery types found in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

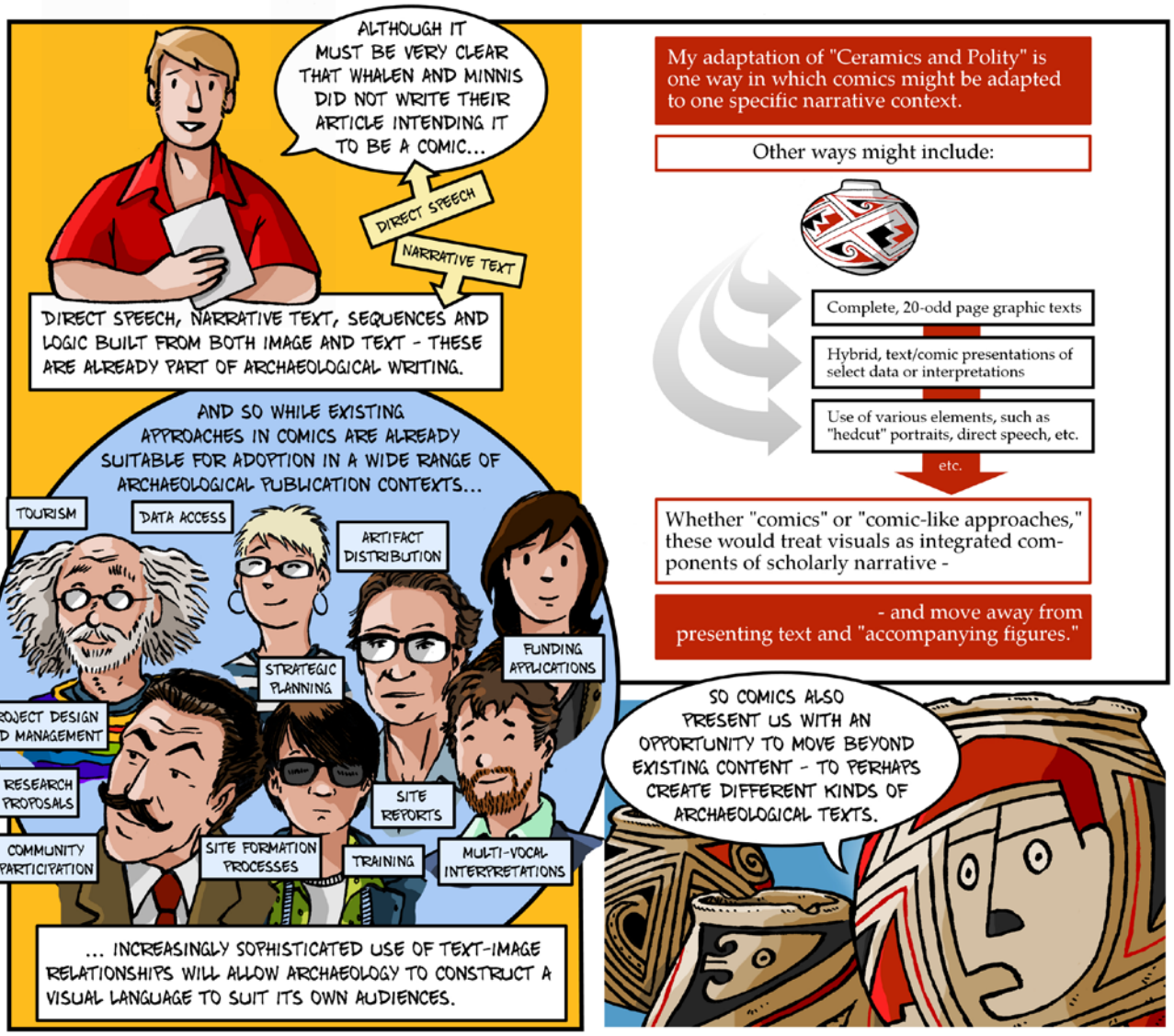
(DiPeso et al. 1974:6:84) The result was that the same 22 pottery types, including all of the polychromes, occur in each of the three phases of the Medio period.

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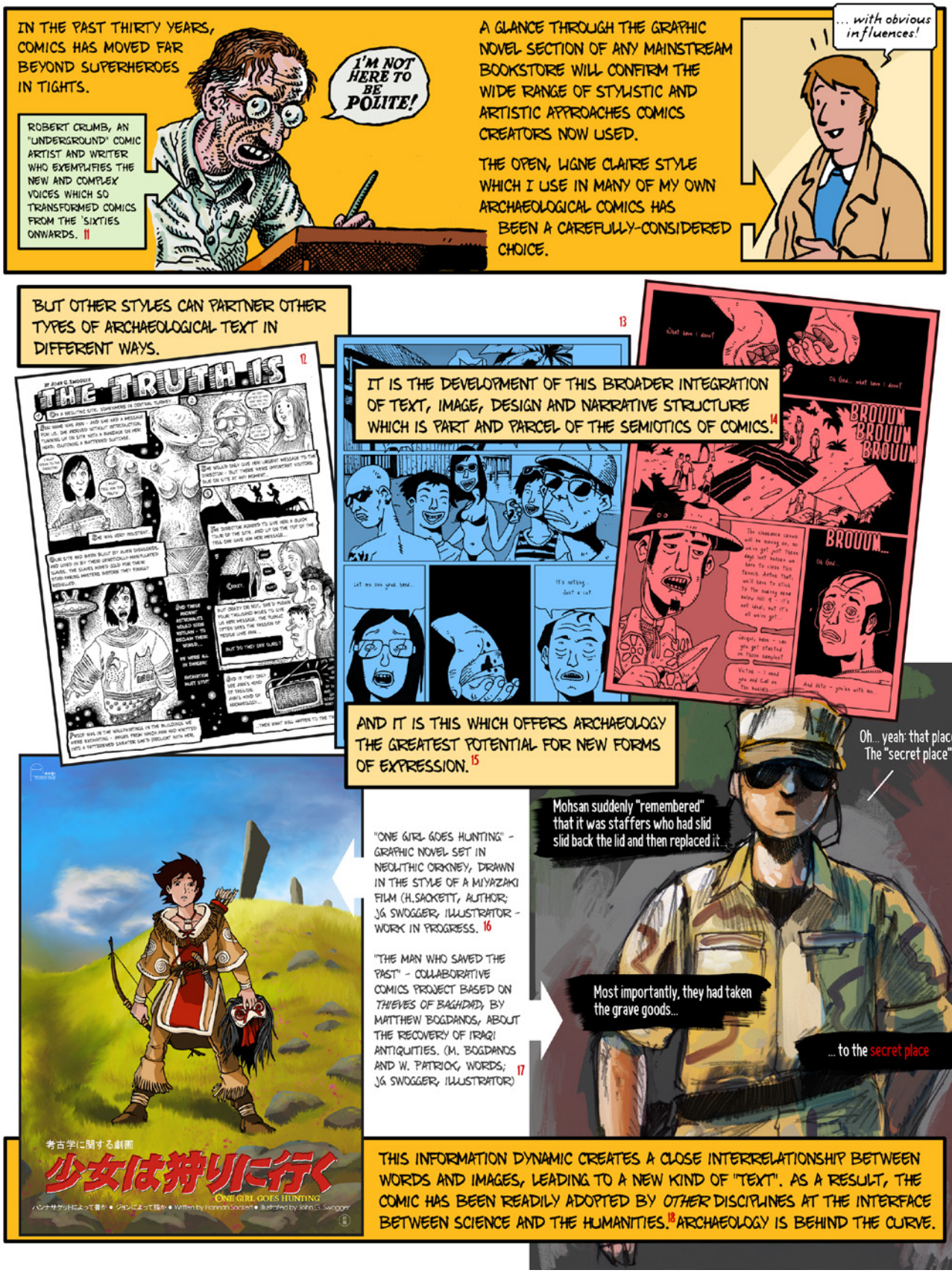


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Data Availability Statement

No original data were developed or used in the paper.

NOTES

1. Artwork by the author from *Archaeology on Carriacou (Shakespeare Mas)* (Swogger 2014a).
2. See McCloud (1993) for a comprehensive discussion.
3. Artwork by the author from *Middleport Pottery* (Swogger 2014b).
4. See Atalay (2012).
5. See Hosler and Boomer (2011).
6. Artwork by the author from *Archaeology on Carriacou* (Swogger 2014a).
7. See Quetta et al. (2010).
8. See Quetta et al. (2014).
9. Artwork by the author from *1983* (Swogger 2014c).
10. I selected Whalen and Minnis (2012) as an example of how a comics adaptation might work because its principal subject matter—a re-evaluation of ceramics decoration—seemed highly visual in nature, whereas the traditional presentation in *American Antiquity* lacked visual interest. I was predisposed towards selection of this article because, as an illustrator, I work with ceramics and am interested in the way they are presented visually. But, in truth, I could have selected any article within the volume for this exercise. My adaptation was not a collaborative project, as the object of the exercise was to work with a text that had not specifically been designed with this kind of visual treatment in mind. Nevertheless, my thanks to both Michael Whalen and Paul Minnis for their consent in its publication. For reasons of time and publication space, my adaptation covers only the first three pages of the article as originally published in *American Antiquity*. It would be interesting both to continue the adaptation of the remaining pages and to do so with its original authors. All references in this adaptation refer to citations within the original article.
11. See Crumb and Poplaski (2005).
12. Artwork by the author (Swogger, ed. 2014a).
13. Artwork by the author (Swogger 2012).
14. See McCloud (1993).
15. Hand in hand with creating these new forms of expression will need to be detailed discussions about the nature of forms and conventions used within the medium. Those adopted for this article, for instance, are in no way fixed. Those who chose to write, illustrate, edit, publish, and review comics in archaeology will need to do so at the same time as constructing the rules by which the medium functions as archaeological text.
16. Artwork by the author from *One Girl Goes Hunting* (Sackett and Swogger 2014)
17. Artwork by the author from *The Man Who Saved The Past* (Swogger, ed. 2014a)
18. In particular, since 2010, "graphic medicine" has developed as a distinct genre. See al-Jawad (2012) for podcasts, blog, and bibliography.
19. See Sacco (2007).
20. See Williams (2014).
21. This summer I created a daily comics journal for a local Tourism Office in the Caribbean to document the day-to-day work of an excavation project. This is comics as "process"—a distinctive application of visualization practice, where a documentary record is constructed incrementally, panel-by-panel, through the course of a season. Posting panels every day meant that the evolution of that record was on view at all times, giving our audiences an opportunity to observe the creation of archaeological knowledge as it happened. Comics utilized in this way have the potential to create opportunities for "real time" interaction and feedback, as well as to reveal the "process" of archaeology itself.
22. See Maleev and Furlong (2011).
23. See al-Jawad (2012).
24. See Swogger (ed. 2014b)
25. The long-running archaeological fanzine *Shovel Bum* (DeBoer 2004) was an early and inventive exponent of the use of comics as a storytelling medium for field experience. The 'zine gathered together a number of archaeological cartoonists—but, as of writing, I am uncertain how many of them continue to use comics in their archaeological work. Alta Mira Press is one of the few archaeological publishers—another being the SAA—which has ever published comics created by archaeologists.
26. See Allen et al. (2005).

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