

RICHARD A. KRAUSE

A Universal Theory of Pottery Production

IRVING ROUSE, ATTRIBUTES,
MODES, AND ETHNOGRAPHY



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ARCHAEOLOGY

Through an analysis of ceramic production, appendage, and decorative techniques at the Paso del Indio archaeological site in Puerto Rico, Richard A. Krause's *A Universal Theory of Pottery Production* offers new insight into a classic theory of pottery manufacture by production steps and stages.

"*A Universal Theory of Pottery Production* deals with a very important topic that is all but ignored by new generations of American archaeologists: the theory behind classification systems. It will be of interest not only to Caribbean archaeologists, but also to scholars of the history of archaeology and anthropology."

—L. ANTONIO CURET, author of *Caribbean Paleodemography: Population, Culture History, and Sociopolitical Processes in Ancient Puerto Rico* and coeditor of *Islands at the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean*

"Krause shows how Rouse has had an impact on continental American archaeology, and I suspect that relatively few scholars are aware of these aspects of Rouse's work."

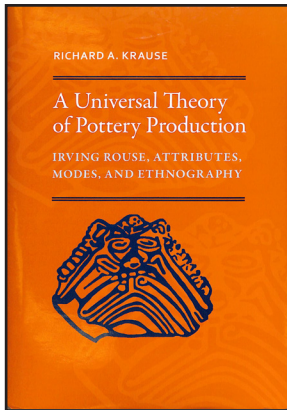
—SANDER VAN DER LEEUW, coeditor of *Time, Process and Structured Transformation in Archaeology*



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A Universal Theory of Pottery Production: Irving Rouse, Attributes, Modes, and Ethnography

Richard A. Krause. 2016. [The University of Alabama Press](https://www.ua.edu/publishing/). Tuscaloosa., x+214 pp., 52 figures, 1 map, 9 tables, works cited, indices. \$54.95 (Cloth), \$54.95 (eBook).

Reviewed by Alison E. Manley, MPhil University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

Richard A. Krause's *A Universal Theory of Pottery Production: Irving Rouse, Attributes, Modes, and Ethnography* is a formidable undertaking supported by a breakdown of pottery from Puerto Rico's Paso del Indio site. In it, Krause quickly identifies his goal, to "discuss Irving Rouse's basic ideas and create from them a universal theory of hand potting" in order to disprove the notion that culture history is "theory deficient, unimaginative, and uninformative" (p. 6). In his introduction, Krause clearly communicates his goal and the challenges set before him through direct examples of questions posed and opinions expressed by both mentors and colleagues.

Chapter One takes time to clearly define vocabulary. Definitions are essential to Krause's presentation, and in this first chapter he successfully sets up readers to have a common understanding of vocabulary used throughout the remainder of the book. One of the most important words defined is "mode." Deeply influenced by the work of Irving Rouse, as the subtitle suggests, Krause uses Rouse's definition (1939:313–325) identifying mode as "any standard, custom, or belief to which the artisan conformed when producing, modifying, or using artifacts." Further influenced by Rouse (1939:10), Krause notes an understanding of the mode is needed "to move from a general sense of patterned behavior to a specific and archaeological appropriate claim (or set of claims) about the relationship between patterned human acts and their observable consequences." This definition is a clear driving factor in Krause's evaluation of the pottery and data gathered from the Paso del Indio site.

Chapter Two, along with the subsequent chapter, contains some of Krause's most impactful writing. Krause clearly defines the various parts of a piece of pottery and how they relate to one another. Like the first chapter, this is an essential set up for properly understanding further data. In Chapter Three, he successfully clarifies how these different parts of pottery can be—or rather how they are likely—built. Krause argues at each step in the pottery making process the stylistic decision made will impact the possibilities in the next steps. For example, if an artisan chooses to use mass modeling as the building technique of a shouldered vessel, it is highly unlikely they would be able to start construction at the lip of the vessel due to weight distribution (p. 54). Krause provides further examples based on experimentation in this chapter. These two chapters, and the formulas provided, could easily be applied at sites around the world. This would potentially provide all studies of pottery assemblages a common language.

In Chapter Four, Krause justifies the need to generally classify, or sort, artifacts to further evaluate them since “all humans classify their sense experiences everyday” (p. 67). He provides a background of classification methodologies up to this point in time noting archaeologists from the Works Progress Administration to the Midwestern Taxonomic system and the Willey and Phillips Phase-Tradition-Horizon system (p. 68). I believe he successfully argues the need to classify objects to further discern trends. However, I think he places too much pressure on expecting his data to perfectly align with a previously established system. It may have been more useful to allow the dataset to drive the applicable classification method rather than hoping the pre-selected method would align with the data found. Krause again notes an essential point in this chapter: each step in the classification process (as defined in the previous chapter) can impact the next possible steps. The possibilities in pottery production are *not* endless. This again, is a principle applicable to all studies of pottery and is an approach that can and should be replicated elsewhere.

Chapter Five brings us to the geographic region of Krause’s study, the Paso del Indio site of Puerto Rico. This background is useful for setting a context, but it also contradicts the book title—in that this is a proposed *universal* theory. Of course, examples must be evaluated one at a time, but I hope application of these principles and definitions are attempted elsewhere to evaluate the universality of Krause’s theory. In this chapter, Krause also returns to the work of Rouse, stating, “The analytical potential and conceptual subtlety of Rouse’s mode have yet to be fully realized (as I hope this book will indicate)...” (p. 81). This is a lofty secondary goal.

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight comprise a full breakdown and evaluation of the data from the assemblage from the Paso del Indio site. Krause begins by defining “The Paso del Indio Sample Size, Morphology, and Manufacture.” Chapter Seven focuses on “Modes of Appendation” and Chapter Eight on the final steps of “Decoration, Drying, and Firing.”

In the final chapter, Krause gives an efficient summary of his findings. His data includes “...32,658 ceramic vessel fragments unevenly distributed through 20 systematically excavated strata” (p. 178), which would be an estimated 900 to 1,100 number of unique vessels (p. 179). The author confidently asserts the use of secondary clays and describe the quality of the work created by Paso del Indio potters based on clear archaeological evidence (p.180). He continues on to define the trends and style of shapes, appendages, and decorations.

In the discussion section of the final chapter, Krause admits attempting, “to fit the data generated....into the series and subseries scheme of cultural classification proposed by Irving Rouse (1939)...is a bit problematic,” as Rouse’s work is intended for broader applications (p. 191). He does place the Paso del Indio pottery within the Saladoid and Ostionoid series and concludes by stating specific styles (as described using the clear definitions provided in the early chapters) “were on the wane” and being replaced by another style (pp. 196–197). This is again clearly identified based on Krause’s provided descriptors.

Book Review

In critiquing this book, I found it lacking in visual support. Additional or larger images of pottery described and more graphs or charts showcasing overall trends in data found would benefit Krause's argument. The small illustrations were appreciated, but additional visuals would have greatly enhanced the presentation of information and engaged the reader.

As previously noted, the title was misleading. This study is location specific, and its universality is a theory not yet proven. The descriptors and definitions of pottery terms and techniques could be universally useful. The evaluations and formulas used by Krause could potentially be applied elsewhere, but the universality is not necessarily successfully argued. The impact of one decision or action in the pottery making process eliminating possible next steps is likely applicable across time and space. However, the dataset which Krause spends most of the book describing and fitting into Rouses' theory is very specific. Further studies should be completed to evaluate the broader scope of application, but this appears to be a promising venture.

Krause's goal was to dispel the view that culture history is, "theory deficient, unimaginative, and uninformative" (p. 6). In this, he is very successful. His high level of detail when describing possible production techniques are both creative and informative while based in solidly evidenced theory. Krause was also successful in realizing the potential of Irving Rouse's mode. His heavily data-backed conclusion clearly shows a change in, "standard, custom, or belief to which the artisan conformed when producing, modifying, or using artifacts" (p. 10). For these two reasons, I applaud Krause's work and look forward to future applications of his theory.