Book Reviews

Farming Communities and the Demands of Archeology

The Early Mesoamerican Village. KENT V. FLANNERY, Ed. Academic Press, New York, 1976. xii, 378 pp., illus. $14.50. Studies in Archeology.

This book is unique in the literature of New World archeology, and I suspect that its publication will mark a real increase in intellectual acuity, properly conceived research programs, and effectively executed excavation. Over the last 25 years the Second Coming has been proclaimed or predicted repeatedly in New World archeology. In this book Flannery claims considerably less than earlier prophets, but he and his associates demonstrate how it is possible to derive considerably more sound inference from archeological data than more dogmatic and logically coherent programs for salvation have been able to produce.

The intellectual rigor with which Flannery approaches his subject is hard to match. Even more remarkable is the degree to which the book is a work of literature. That Flannery is literate will come as no surprise to those who have read his earlier papers, in which he has progressively honed an ability to say insightful things clearly and often humorously. In this book, he goes beyond superb prose style and constructs a work of art from a series of superficially diverse essays. "Scientifically" oriented archeologists may feel that the literary qualities of the book are irrelevant or perhaps even detrimental. They might also suggest that such qualities should not be discussed in a journal bearing the austere title *Science*. My own feelings are those recently expressed by Gregory Bateson, "I don't know what science is. I don't know what art is"; and even those who would object most to this blurring of conventional boundaries must grant that Flannery's artistry makes some significant scientific principles obvious to the recalcitrant field archeologist who might not be dented by concepts expressed in "numbers, Greek letters, and giant summation signs."

The book has another marked characteristic that some have found offensive. Flannery writes with total frankness. Recently there have been a number of works in New World archeology in which the author has "let it all hang out." Frequently such self-revelation has been associated with a great deal of distortion, self-serving avowals, and an embarrassing lack of self-awareness. Flannery's candor is accompanied by a refreshing degree of self-awareness. As he points out, the worst stories he tells can and do refer to his own past failings. I find none of what Flannery says in poor taste or offensive. A combination of candor with humility cannot be other than cleansing.

What is the book about? This is a difficult question. It cannot be fitted conveniently into any established category of archeological writing. One could say that the book is about the early agricultural villages in the Mesoamerican culture area. This would be accurate but superficial. One could say that it concerns the application of research strategies developed as part of the "new archeology" to the data provided by the early farming communities of Mesoamerica in an attempt to see how well these strategies hold up when applied to a real world. This would be true and less superficial. The best characterization, however, is that the book describes an intense love affair with archeology and is an attempt to communicate its reality and vividness to other people. As Flannery points out, good archeology is a rare and difficult achievement, and its pursuit can become an all-consuming quest.

Flannery's book reminds me of *Death in the Afternoon*. As Hemingway attempts to communicate his reverence for what is meaningful in bullfighting, Flannery illuminates his quest for what is sound, enlightening, and promising in the practice of archeology. Hemingway takes as his device a dialogue between the author and an old lady. Flannery expands this device so that the most telling points are made in a debate among the author and three composite characters. Various relabeled but real misadventures of the archeologists who have worked in Mesoamerica form the core of these dialogues. Clearly this is a personal and idiosyncratic book.

The book grew out of several seminars at the University of Michigan, and a number of the chapters are essays expanded from the students' presentations. This in no way reflects unfavorably on their quality, since papers presented by graduate students in advanced seminars are often of higher quality than the papers published by professionals in the journals. The original seminars were on somewhat diverse themes. Supplying a running commentary and a number of articles of his own, Flannery has tied all this into the exposition of a strategy for the archeology of Formative Mesoamerica or of any other area where one is dealing with the appearance and development of efficient agricultural communities.

Flannery and his associates proceed from the problem of how one excavates houses where stone masonry is lacking to the organization of such houses into communities and what it tells about their society. There follows an examination of the relationship of the community to its catchment area and how the modeling of such relationships permits a more realistic assessment of past economic strategies than would be possible by building step by step from hard archeological evidence. The next section is the most satisfactory discussion of sampling yet to appear in the archeological literature. We then have a consideration of the spatial relationships among communities and how these relationships change through time. Then follows a discussion of stylistic analysis as a tool for understanding intra- and intercommunity relationships; a brilliant discussion of trade networks, in which the techniques of "hard" science are brought to bear on real anthropological problems in a uniquely convincing manner; and a substantive chapter on religion, or better said, religion as it relates to political power and social control. In an epilogue, Flannery sums up his thoughts, and, more important, his feelings about the long-term endeavor of doing archeological research.

Flannery's introductions to the chapters stand as a self-sufficient entity. If they are read consecutively, a cohesive exposition of the history, gossip, aims, and failures of Mesoamerican archeology over the last 60 years emerges. It is in these sections that the dialogues appear. One of the characters is Flannery. Another is a composite of North American archeologists who have a deep research

commitment to Mesoamerica and who have developed a vast amount of practical knowledge of the realities of doing fieldwork in this challenging and frequently frustrating region. This person is called the Real Mesoamerican Archeologist or R.M.A. A second participant is a composite of the more doctrinaire self-avowed "new archeologists," a type Flannery has already categorized as the hard-core law-and-order archeologist. This character is designated the Skeptical Graduate Student, or S.G.S. The third, less frequent participant in the dialogues is the Great Synthesizer. He is the least composite and least fictional of the three. It is hard for anyone familiar with the available sample of the Mesoamerican archeologists not to identify G.S. as G.R.W. Some have felt that at points Flannery's treatment of G.S. is overly harsh, and they are perhaps right. But one must also observe that Flannery places the only summary of the book in the mouth of G.S., and unless I have misread his intentions, it is a summary he would not disavow.

We have recently had a number of books that look directly at the problems of theory and method in archeology and that seem stiff, bombastic, inflated, or self-limiting. By attempting explicitly philosophical and epistemological formulation they achieve a Kantian or Hegelian ponderousness. Flannery, by following a Socratic formula, achieves transparency in dealing with the same issues. In my judgment there is no book that will introduce the beginning student to these problems in so joyous and coherent a fashion as *The Early Mesoamerican Village*. I have already used it as an introductory text book with great success.

The book also functions as an encyclopedia on the early farming communities of Mesoamerica. Within it is embedded a manual of procedures to ensure the retrieval of the widest range of data from even modest excavations; and the innovations in recovery techniques that Flannery and his associates brought to the Oaxaca project produced a richness of data unprecedented in Mesoamerica. In addition, the various chapters summarize the literature so that one can find out quickly what is known about early Formative architecture, community size and distribution, and even iconography and ritual materials. Those of us working in South America can well lament the lack of a comparable reference work for the early farming communities there. This book will long remain a standard for comparison in attempts to evaluate economic strategy and social organization of early farming communities within the zone of shared high civilization extending from Mesoamerica to Bolivia.

As Flannery predicts, a particular reader will react more favorably to some sections of the book than to others. But none of the sections is without intellectual provocation, and I think most of us will return to them repeatedly as a source of insight into our own materials and problems. My own judgment is that the chapters by Flannery alone, or jointly authored by him, are the most incisive and that in a number of instances analyses and model building based on simple plotting of sites on a map turn out to be in no way inferior to analyses based on complex mathematical manipulations.

The discussion of regional sampling is particularly masterly, and should once and for all make it clear that sampling is not a search procedure. Confusion on this matter has existed in archeology for too long. Flannery's parable on sampling could not be more telling, and he is a superb raconteur of historic moments in American archeology. I remember the 1964 confrontation in Detroit exactly as Flannery reports it. But in a way it is a pity that he did not describe the 1963 meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Boulder, when the late James A. Ford asked Lewis Binford what would happen if one took a random sample of the Moche-Chicama region of Peru and found that Chan Chan was not included in the sample. At that time Binford responded that if it was not in the sample it was not "cultural." The earlier incident suggests that the confusion over the difference between sampling and search procedures was not entirely on the part of the old fogies and that initially the "new archeologists" *were* claiming far too much for sampling techniques.

The discussion of the village and its catchment area should have a liberating effect on studies of agricultural origins and early agricultural economics. Flannery and the other contributors to this section scrutinize ancient economies as part of total systems. Even Flannery's ostensibly empirical approach (pp. 103–117) quickly slips into a consideration of how early societies utilized territories at varying distances from their base. This section of the book affords a license to speculate and make calculations as to how particular groups of people could have survived on the resources of limited segments of the earth's surface. A realistic attack on this kind of problem is possible only if one reconstructs the total socioeconomic system. Such a reconstruction must always go far beyond the hard data at hand; but once it is made it can accommodate enlightening manipulations of a wide range of quantitative data. The calculations presented by Flannery on the productivity of strains of maize with different cob length and the use of these figures for determining the amount of prime farm land necessary to support communities of a particular size have broad implications for understanding ancient economics and social interaction. The position of certain critics that we must stick to the facts will always, in the long run, be self-defeating.

I was particularly engaged by Flannery's introduction and the two essays by Stephen Plog and Nanette M. Pyne, that go to make up chapter 9, on the analysis of stylistic variation, since stylistic communication and its relation to other kinds of communication networks form a core area of my own research. Flannery correctly attributes to me the disparaging phrase "whispering potsherds," but I must emphasize that I do not share the antipathy to this subject that Flannery attributes to the Real Mesoamerican Archeologist. I am willingly in agreement with the assumption "that there is a relationship between the degree to which two groups are in contact and the degree to which they share ceramic styles and decoration." My only disagreement with the classic formulation of the Deetz-Longacre hypothesis is that I think it unlikely that the networks of stylistic interaction will map precisely on the networks generated by kinship, marriage patterns, and residence. Given the number of historical anecdotes recounted by Flannery in this book, I might be permitted to note that even this degree of skepticism has come to me rather late, and after an exhaustive study of stylistic interaction among a modern Tropical Forest group. Indeed, I was with Deetz in 1957–58 when the Arikara sherds sang together. I was at the session of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia in 1961 when Deetz publicly presented his basic model, and I observed the enthusiastic reaction of the late Paul Martin. It was the subsequent rapid appearance of Longacre's earliest publications on the subject that left me eternally committed to the importance of rapid, long-distance diffusion.

The essays by Plog and Pyne aroused enough conflicting feelings and insights in me to necessitate independent essays, and I hope such essays will be forthcoming. My major objection to Pyne's presentation (a contingency table analysis of the "fire-serpent" and were-jaguar in Formative Oaxaca) is that I think the potsherds could be made to whisper louder and tell an even longer parable than that she presents.

The section on sanctification and social control is equally stimulating, but I will limit myself to a single observation. It is ironic that Drennan concludes this last substantive section of the book with a discussion of the baleful effects of cognitive dissonance, while Flannery in his epilogue emphasizes that the mature and creative archeologist must continue to exist in deep cognitive dissonance.

Among the many points of sharp disagreement between Flannery and myself I will note only two.

The "fire-serpent" mentioned above is in my opinion incorrectly identified. This supremely important deity is a cayman with affixed elements of the harpy eagle. The "flaming eyebrow" often discussed in the book is a shorthand notation signifying the harpy eagle's crest, and thus carrying the denotation of "sky" or "upper half of the universe." These details of identification take on vast significance when one compares the iconographic structure underlying Olmec religion with that underlying Chavín religion, the earliest complex religion of the Central Andes. The two appear to be identical.

On the more general level, I would point to a statement Flannery makes on p. 2:

> Out of this initial stage of agriculturally based villages, the later high civilizations of Mesoamerica developed. With the appearance of these "primary village farming communities," Mesoamerica first became definable as a culture area, distinct from the desert food-gatherers to the north and the tropical forest peoples to the south.

I would rewrite the second sentence to read:

> With the appearance of these farming communities in Mesoamerica, Mesoamerica shared an essentially uniform culture which extended continuously from Mesoamerica to Northern Peru. This uniform agricultural basis *is* Tropical Forest Culture. It is only around 1000 B.C. that Mesoamerica on the one hand and the Central Andes on the other started to differentiate from this uniform agricultural substratum and embarked on their somewhat individual paths toward civilization.

The difference between these two points of view is profound. The fact that such profound disagreements can still be maintained shows vast areas of ignorance that should provide for at least 25 more years of active archeological research—all, it is to be hoped, up to the standards set forth in this volume.

Chapter 12 is Flannery's affirmation of a dedication to archeology. Throughout the book he has pointed to the polarization of archeological thinking and procedures between the admirable goals of the new archeology, embodied in the fanaticism of his Skeptical Graduate Student, and the pragmatism and deeply informed intuition of the Real Mesoamerican Archeologist. This polarization leads only to impasse, and Flannery continues to reach for a higher level of explanation that will embrace and transcend both positions.

Near the end, the Skeptical Graduate Student makes reference to *Heart of Darkness*. This is perhaps the one false note in the characterization of Flannery's three protagonists. The S.G.S.'s I have known read Ursula Le Guin and Tolkien, but otherwise seem to be rereading Hempel. None have read *Heart of Darkness*. The deeply expressed feelings of Flannery's last pages again forced my mind back to *Death in the Afternoon*. Amazed at the number of contradictory and apparently impossible demands that the art of bullfighting places on the matador, and the importance of all of these demands to a concept of manhood, the old lady remarks, "It must be most dangerous then to be a man." Hemingway replies, "It is indeed, madame, and but few survive it." Mesoamerican archeology is vital because at least one has continued to cope with all the demands the art of archeology lays on its practitioners. It is appropriate that this remarkable book is dedicated to the memory of another remarkable man, the late Matthew Stirling.

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Clan and Land

The Demystification of Yap. Dialectics of Culture on a Micronesian Island. DAVID LABBY. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976. xiv, 144 pp. + plates. $12.95.

What is so mysterious about Yap, an island in the U.S. Trust Territory of Micronesia? The reader of travel literature who has encountered Yap is likely to think of it as "the island of stone money," a place where people exchange large perforated stone disks—so large, in fact, that some must be carried on a pole through the middle by a team of men. The author mentions the stone money briefly, but the mystery that really interests him is the complex social structure of the rather small population (about 2600 at the end of World War II, although perhaps once a dozen or so times as large). The people of Yap were divided into two largely endogamous castes or classes, landed nobles and landless commoners, and each class was in turn divided into several ranks which tended to be separated from adjacent ranks by taboos on sharing food and by a hierarchical etiquette. The Yapese also had exogamous matrilineal clans, but tended to follow strict patrilineal inheritance of land and political office.

The author's mentor, David Schneider, claims in the foreword that the book provides a Marxist—that is, materialist and dialectical—solution to these mysteries. This is a refreshing approach, since the number of avowedly Marxist anthropologists in this country is rather small and the typical American anthropologist is devoted to describing "his people" in what he sees as their own terms and to emphasizing their incomparability to anyone else.

Marxist orientation notwithstanding, however, the greater part of this book is devoted to explaining the distinctive vocabulary and figures of speech that the people of Yap use to talk about their society and system of land tenure, and it gives only summary information about the material operation of the system. Evidently the Yapese still talk about the matrilineal clans as owning land, although they also recognize that, with clan exogamy and de facto patrilineal inheritance of land, each new generation must see a new clan introduced to each landed estate as the "owner" for the lifetime of the in-marrying women and their sons. While Labby writes at times as though the landed estates are generally preserved intact from one generation to the next in the hands of a single principal male heir, his description of the estates as being passed from one matrilineal clan to another would seem to imply that brothers and perhaps other matrilineal relatives of the main heir share some rights in the estate. One wonders, for instance, about the fate of younger brothers of the heir if they and the heir marry women of different clans: Can they permanently split off a share of the estate? Must their descendants be excluded from the inheritance and become landless commoners? Are there landless nobles?

Labby has an ecological or materialist explanation for the development of Yapese social structure. He postulates an earlier period shortly after initial settlement when the matrilineal clans held on to land continuously and worked it largely by shifting slash-and-burn cultivation, which is conducted most efficiently by cooperative work teams larger than a conjugal family household. A localized matrilineal extended family would be effective for this purpose, and arrangements like this are actually found elsewhere in some other islands in the gener-