

### Cultural Behaviors and Their Sites

**Method and Theory for Activity Area Research.** An Ethnoarchaeological Approach. SUSAN KENT, Ed. Columbia University Press, New York, 1987. xii, 643 pp., illus. \$35.

Occasional disclaimers notwithstanding, archeologists rely on ethnography in interpreting the prehistoric past. In the last two decades and for a variety of reasons they have also taken to the ethnographic field in growing numbers. Kent defines ethnoarchaeology as a specialized way of acquiring or testing data: its practitioners study "the dynamic processes that created the archaeological record." Ethnoarchaeological research has covered a broad topical spectrum, from studies of butchering and bone discard and of production, use, and disposal of lithic and ceramic artifacts to analyses of settlement patterning and variation in residential structures. Unlike most other compilations of ethnoarchaeological papers, this volume purports to have a central focus: locationally differentiated activities and their archeologically recoverable signatures.

Thirteen papers are grouped into three sections, broadly conceived by the editor as methodological, theoretical, and applied. Six of them, based on direct ethnographic observations, are set in the Old World; three of these focus on hunter-gatherers. Another four empirical papers, three based on New World data, deal with the archeological record. The remaining three papers are the editor's introduction and concluding papers in the first and second sections, described by the editor as commentaries but bearing little direct relation to the contributions that precede them. The sometimes combative, occasionally obfuscating, and generally poorly written and edited introductory paper is meant partly to frame the remaining contributions in a larger historical and theoretical context. Carr's commentary closing the first section refers in passing to a few of the other papers in the volume but is primarily a review of analytic techniques useful in disaggregating and interpreting "intrasite artifact palimpsests," a major problem for archeologists throughout the world. Kent's discussion concluding the second section presents her view of some theoretical orientations currently guiding the Euro-American archeological enterprise.

The papers treating Old World hunter-gatherers are diverse, but all are thought-

provoking. Brooks and Yellen use a unique longitudinal database combining ethnographic observations and archeological excavations in Botswana to consider the content and spatial organization of debris generated by eight activities (such as manufacturing, construction, and excavation) and associated differences among, and differential preservation of, functionally diverse sites created by !Kung (San). The authors note the potential for underrepresentation of seasonally short-term or widely dispersed activities and suggest that some functionally specialized and intermittently but repeatedly used loci (such as hunting blinds) have a greater chance of entering the archeological record than do temporary or wet-season living sites. Noting that mobility reduction and associated changes in site size, structure, and duration figure prominently in theoretical discussions of transitions from hunting and gathering to food production, Hitchcock considers two groups of differentially sedentarized Basarwa (San), also in Botswana. He describes differences in built habitats, organization of work areas, patterns of refuse disposal, and sites' longevity, asserting that organizational shifts in settlement and subsistence systems should be reflected in archeological site structure. Hitchcock argues that (contrary to beliefs commonly held by archeologists) sedentary sites are often less visible archeologically than those of hunter-gatherers, that sedentism is not necessarily associated with either population growth or greater site size, and that site duration and number of activities are not necessarily positively associated with increased sedentism. San have also been discussed elsewhere by Binford, who sees a distinction between such foragers (who "map on" to resources, moving consumers to them) and collectors (who "logistically" move resources to consumers). Here he considers Australia's Alyawara, who also exemplify the foraging adaptation; he contrasts them with Nunamiut, Alaskan collectors described (by him) elsewhere. Focusing on one Alyawara campsite, Binford suggests that faunal remains inform on such differently organized subsistence-settlement systems, that direct and delayed consumption relate to differences in organizational principles, and that faunal residues can be used to distinguish "generic" residential sites regardless of variation in such principles.

Three additional papers based on ethno-

graphic observations in the Old World treat activity areas in residential structures rather than across entire sites. Reviewing differences in use of spaces in both a tent and a house owned by a single Bedouin family in Jordan, Layne suggests that domestic space in the house is more "privatized" because of reduced productive activities in the household context and increased availability of building materials. Oswald considers three Zulu compounds, providing details of household and construction histories, house longevity, and changes in room use. Evaluating "goodness of fit" between socioeconomic organization and residential architecture, she concludes that in the face of constraints precluding perfect "fit," two common strategies are reorganization of minimal residential units and recycling of individual structures. Like Oswald, Hodder deals with use of space in African homesteads. Considering the "meaning" of ash disposal to Kenya's Ilchamus (Njemps in some earlier publications), he points to multivalent associations among colors, substances, livestock, spatial partitioning, and the sexes; no single explanation for the complex dichotomies and relationships described is offered, for Hodder favors a "contextual, human science perspective." In this paper, thick with descriptive if ungeneralizable detail, it is probably no accident that the floor plans (unlike those in other contributions) are highly schematic and without scale.

Of the six papers based on ethnographic observation, only that by Brooks and Yellen refers directly to possible archeological application by citing specific prehistoric cases. The four papers dealing with excavated and ethnohistoric materials, in contrast, rely heavily on ethnographic analogies. Newell, the sole contributor dealing with "archeological" hunter-gatherers, considers the partitioning of activity areas surrounding a house in a still-occupied Alaskan village; distributions, associations, and numbers of excavated tools and organic materials suggest particular activities, and interviews with local Inupiat elders support the identification of emically significant activity areas. Though they also comment on outdoor activities, Seymour and Schiffer focus on house floors at Snaketown (Arizona), a key Hohokam site; referring to supporting observations among contemporary Pima, Papago, and Maricopa, they note that despite variations among the 86 sample houses (including differential preservation related to mode of abandonment), there is some uniformity in locational attributes of manufacturing activities and some evidence suggesting that distinctive craft activities were carried out by inhabitants of different house

groups. Gnivecki, discussing one late-third-millennium (Akkadian period) house at Tepe al-Atiqeh (Iraq), also focuses on activities and social groups, relying heavily on recent ethnoarcheological and epigraphic analyses of Near Eastern houses and households. Although he contends that the study of "household domestic spatial organization" is not hindered by combined use of (sparse) floor deposits and "occupational fill," he notes that this conflation of depositional contexts produces an "aggregate pattern" possibly representing more than one generation of occupants and concludes that spatial organization in the Akkadian house consisted of a series of overlapping zones, not necessarily partitioned in discrete spatial contexts or artifactual classes. Finally, spurning the houses on which fellow contributors and so many other archeologists rely, Leone turns here to another component of the built habitat: "pleasure" (as opposed to vegetable) gardens. Launching an "ethnoarcheology of American gardens" with a study of three 18-century gardens in Maryland, he argues that formal gardens are organized according to specific rules and designed to inspire particular moods. Differences between Maryland's gardens and those of Europe are attributed to the weakening position of the colonial elite, whose members relied on gardens as a vehicle for conspicuous displays of wealth to bolster their status during a period of real threat from abroad and potential threat at home.

Despite their broad topical and geographic spread, widely divergent sample sizes, and uneven quality, these papers share some noteworthy and salutary features. Unlike much published research based on short-term field observations, several papers focus here on situations involving change, exploiting a temporal dimension for comparative purposes or to explicitly suggest implications for archeological interpretation. Many also refer to the "smearing," "blurring," or "palimpsests" likely to develop when activities are not spatially bounded, when artifacts or their use areas are recycled, and when various post-abandonment processes remove, redistribute, or otherwise disturb stratigraphic and associational contexts and their contents. "Formation processes" and taphonomy are not the main focus of any of these papers (several contributors to this volume have considered these subjects in detail elsewhere), but the need to refine techniques for disaggregating artifact palimpsests and thereby improve archeological interpretations is a recurring theme. Finally, though some of these papers might be disparagingly characterized as "cautionary tales," most cite useful and sometimes rich and fascinating empirical observations of use

and discard of artifacts and location and structure of activity areas, and several offer constructive suggestions about the implications of these observations for reconstructing behavior from archeological remains. One of the signal contributions of ethnoarcheological research is its elucidation of material and locational correlates of a wide range of cultural behaviors. Even cautionary tales, pointing to limitations of the archeological record, ultimately serve to improve our understanding of relationships among objects, activities, locations, and archeological residues. Though these papers do not cohere as well as they might (partly because of the volume's overall organization), in this age of research on site formation, site structure, and functional differences among sites the collection is timely.

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## Near Eastern Settlement

**The Archaeology of Western Iran.** Settlement and Society from Prehistory to the Islamic Conquest. FRANK HOLE, Ed. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1987. 332 pp., illus. \$49.95. Smithsonian Series in Archaeological Inquiry.

Among the various regions of the Near East the archeological heritage of Iran received relatively little attention until a generation ago. Few and only special kinds of remains, primarily the magnificent architectural ruins and the rock reliefs of Persepolis and Naqshi Rostam, from Achaemenid and Sasanian times, were known. When traces of older periods were found they were too disjunct to form a picture by themselves and were given temporal and cultural context only through comparison with the richer archeological scene of the neighboring area of Mesopotamia.

In the 1950s and the '60s the number of archeological excavations in Iran—particularly in western Iran—rose sharply, yielding extensive information from a large number of sites and covering a long time range. It soon became obvious that the development of the area was quite distinct from that of Mesopotamia and needed to be understood on its own terms. Many of the contributors to the present publication played an active part in tracing out the peculiarities of the Iranian development. Hence their summaries of various aspects or periods are most welcome.

Of course, this is a book for the initiated, with its host of tables and distribution maps,

and although the chapters are arranged chronologically the result is not a coherent presentation of the developments in that part of the world. But for the reader who has a basic knowledge of the archeological and historical facts or who, being familiar with current issues in social and cultural anthropology, is looking for comparative material, this book is a mine of new information and new insights. In any case, the reader might well turn first to the last chapter, by G. A. Johnson, who not only summarizes very aptly the preceding contributions but succeeds in providing what he calls "a narrative of developments over some nine millennia."

The editor himself has contributed a third of the book: a general introduction to the problems of Iranian archeology is followed by a chapter of detailed discussion of the material extant from the various regions of western Iran for what he calls the "Village Period." This information, in turn, is discussed on a more abstract level in the third chapter under such headings as "variation and change in settlement," "specialization, status and hierarchy," and "organization." Though this is an excellent study I find a basic problem in the author's main characterization of the period because he nowhere defines what he means by "village." Since to my mind a new quality in organization is attained when a settlement becomes the center of an array of smaller settlements, and since we know of the existence of such centers at least in the later part of the period Hole lumps together, I also would have preferred a differentiation in terminology.

The fourth chapter, on the Uruk period in the plains of Khuzestan by Johnson, is an excellent and detailed discussion of that phase of "early state formation" characterized by the emergence of large centers and a new kind of administration. I would have preferred to retain the old-fashioned term "urban," which is avoided because of its lack of clear contours. Its very vagueness has merit because its connotations encompass an advanced level of organization and also "civilized." In this phase, if ever, there was a developing urban feeling, the creation of an identity distinct from that of the rural population that is a central aspect of urbanity. The most startling development of this period is the sudden disappearance of urban features correctly described by Johnson as the "Uruk collapse." The collapse, however, may have had its origin more in inability to maintain the socioeconomic foundations for this urban life than in an increasing rivalry between the centers as Johnson suggests.

H. T. Wright assembles the information available for the Uruk period from the mountainous hinterland of the plains of