

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

Khuzestan, especially pertaining to the causes of the massive decrease in settlement seen during this phase. Yet the old idea that major portions of the population became less sedentary has to remain a hypothesis.

J. R. Alden contributes a brief but important essay on a period (Susa III) that has been utterly neglected, arguing cogently for an upgrading in its historic evaluation in spite of the paucity of material available.

R. M. Schacht undertakes to summarize the evidence from the "Early Historic Cultures," that is, from the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C., in southwestern Iran, as does R. C. Henrickson for central western Iran. Both present new archeological material on periods previously studied mainly from written evidence.

L. D. Levine competently summarizes earlier studies of his and his colleagues, both from archeological and from written sources, on the Iron Age in western Iran, the later part of which is still poorly understood in spite of its eminent role in the times of the Medians and the Achaemenids.

R. J. Wenke, finally, covers the last periods before the Islamic conquest of Iran. Again, it is fascinating to see emerging from dirt-archeology a picture that in most cases is an important complement, sometimes even a corrective, to studies based on the written heritage.

More basic material has been published since these papers were written and more is to come. Yet the main lines of this account will remain valid for a long time, since no fieldwork has been possible in Iran since 1979. Though not in any way meant to be a handbook this volume doubtless will be used as such. It is a magnificent summary of our present knowledge of the archeology of western Iran.

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## Social Formations in Africa

**The African Frontier.** The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies. IGOR KOPYTOFF, Ed. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1987. viii, 288 pp. \$35.

*The African Frontier* consists of nine case studies written by anthropologists or historians and a long introductory essay by the editor, an anthropologist who has carried out field research in West Africa and Zaire. Though the majority of the case studies are excellent accounts of the emergence of particular communities illustrating the strate-

gies of incorporation discussed in the introduction, it is the introduction that will engage Africanists, for Kopytoff is here developing a theory explaining the dynamics of African history. He argues for a fluidity of ethnic and political boundaries encouraged by the frequent emergence of new polities formed in frontier zones where immigrants "had to face the problem of forging a new social order in the midst of an effective institutional vacuum" (p. 7). The new polities interacted with, sought recognition from, contended with, and sometimes conquered older regimes.

Kopytoff builds on the view current among Africanists that African societies are historical formations incorporating people of heterogeneous origins rather than descent groups writ large. For several decades research interests have been directed at how political identities are constructed and social boundaries manipulated by actors who use the rhetoric of descent, marriage alliances, priority of settlement, and ritual office as strategies for defining relative status. The originality of Kopytoff's thesis lies in his use of the frontier as a recurrent factor affecting the way polities developed and were organized.

He draws on Frederick Jackson Turner's old theory of the formative power of the frontier, well aware that it needs drastic emendation if it is to be applied to Africa. Contrary to Turner, the frontier neither encourages innovation and cultural transformation nor necessarily works in favor of egalitarianism. Rather, it gives immigrants the freedom to reinstate and so reinvigorate familiar organizational models brought with them from their homelands. The frontier therefore encourages continuity and conservatism. Nor was the frontier a short-lived phenomenon in Africa: the original outpouring of Neolithic peoples from the "Saharan-Sahel cultural ecumene" created dispersed communities, with plenty of sparsely occupied space in interstitial zones to continue to serve as frontiers.

Kopytoff has to amend Turner's thesis, since, if the frontier has been as pervasive an influence as he contends and frontier conditions encourage innovation, then Africa should display a great diversity of political and social forms. Yet anyone familiar with the ethnography of sub-Saharan Africa is struck with how much is held in common. This Kopytoff sees as a phenomenon explicable neither by diffusion nor by the rapidity of the spread of the early Neolithic farmers or the later migrating Bantu-speakers. The interplay between the dynamics of settled communities and the frontier provides the answer.

Social factors within "traditional" African

societies led to the periodic ejection of individuals and groups. Some joined existing communities. Many moved to areas where they could claim the prestige associated with first settlement and found new polities on existing models of legitimate social order. Adherents and dependents were given a stake in the new community by being defined as kin, but unequal kin, since generation and seniority within generation ensured hierarchy of status and control of privilege. If the unit grew and became more complex, further distinctions were drawn between rulers and subjects. New theories of legitimacy were required, backed by oral histories that associated rulership with priority of arrival or explained why newcomers had transformed an old order through superior gifts. In the latter case, former leaders were co-opted, usually by being given ritual office. This both implied their acquiescence and underlined the different basis of their own claims to preeminence. Offices were generally treated as the patrimonial inheritance of descent groups, emphasizing their unique origin. Conflicting claims led to challenge. Defeated dissidents might be pushed out to form new frontier societies, or the policy might disintegrate into rival factions vulnerable to invasion by other regional powers, who again arrived as strangers. That the old African states displayed many-layered ethnic groupings is no accident.

This is a brief sketch of a complex argument that demonstrates Kopytoff's control of anthropological and historical sources. It has considerable explanatory power, though undoubtedly it will be revised. The definition of "frontier" needs to be less fuzzy: it is difficult to agree that a frontier is a frontier because thinking makes it so, although Kopytoff claims that wherever people see themselves faced with "an institutional vacuum" that allows them to produce their own model of "a desirable social order" the frontier is at work. The use of "metropole" for any community of origin is idiosyncratic and frequently confusing. Little is said about technological factors that inhibited communication with and administration of border areas, which easily become power vacuums. Technological factors are taken as givens, as part of the dynamic that led to dispersal and restatement.

Space is lacking for discussion of the case studies. The paper by Murphy and Bledsoe on Kpelle manipulation of the rhetoric of kinship to define political relationships is of major importance for the skill with which the authors analyze the interplay between the politics of a Kpelle chieftainship and the

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