Book Reviews

Ann M. Early
Unknown

Heidi Vaughn

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ita

Part of the American Material Culture Commons, Archaeological Anthropology Commons, Environmental Studies Commons, Other American Studies Commons, Other Arts and Humanities Commons, Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons, and the United States History Commons

Tell us how this article helped you.

Repository Citation
ISSN: 2475-9333
Available at: https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ita/vol1994/iss1/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Index of Texas Archaeology: Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State by an authorized editor of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu.
Book Reviews

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.

This article is available in Index of Texas Archaeology: Open Access Gray Literature from the Lone Star State:
https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ita/vol1994/iss1/7

This volume has much to offer archeologists working in the Caddoan area even though only one article, by Robert L. Brooks, deals with a site that has a direct relationship to the region.

Archeologists have long known that the sites they investigate are almost never literally 'snapshots' of any moment frozen in time, and a great deal of effort over the last 15 years has gone into identifying and evaluating the natural and cultural processes that together have produced those sites. Much of this work has investigated formation processes, how artifacts and debris accumulate and are altered by cultural and natural forces. The effects of human behavior in the abandonment of artifacts, settlements, and regions are often not explicitly addressed, however, when we analyze the remains that we use to characterize prehistoric lifeways.

These essays which come from two 1990 SAA symposia on abandonment as an archeological process are good illustrations of how abandonment is a complex and varied set of behaviors that can significantly affect site assemblages and regional settlement patterns, and thereby can condition models of prehistoric societies.

Bracketed by an introductory essay on abandonment and archaeological interpretation by Cameron, and a summary paper by co-editors Tomka and Stevenson, the 13 topical essays are divided into four sections that represent two different approaches and two scales of investigation. Part II contains five papers dealing with ethnoarchaeological studies of regional abandonment processes, Part III presents three archeological studies of regional abandonment, Part IV narrows the spatial focus to the level of the site with two ethnoarchaeological studies, and Part V contains a group of three site level archeological studies of abandonment behavior.

The papers in Parts II and IV describe abandonment behavior in a wide array of cultures, most of which are agrarian to one degree or another. The studies include subsistence agro-pastoralists in Bolivia, northern Mexico, and northern Iran, Botswana Kalahari herder-foragers, modern Zuni farmers, rural Oaxacan peasants, and Nigerian and EuroAmerican agrarian societies. Each is a capsule review of human ecology, and an examination of the linkages between settlements, subsistence ecology, abandonment behavior, and the physical remains left at sites.

One point that these papers strongly relate is that abandonment can be a continual process, that some lifestyles involve a pattern of periodic abandonment and reoccupation of the same buildings, sites, or localities after intervals that range from a few months to many years. The relationship between a site assemblage and a range of activities that took place at the site is significantly affected by the removal of items from an unoccupied settlement which may happen all at once or gradually over many years. The resulting material signature
may suggest a far different life history for a site than the ethno­
graphic account relates. Steve Tomka’s article on abandonment
patterns at Bolivian agro­
pastoralist sites is particularly
noteworthy. His analysis of assem­
blages based on manufacturing
type, use category, and condition,
and comparisons with corresponding
cultural practices of seasonal
subsistence and mobility shows how
complex the relationship between
assemblages and behaviors are, how
important the impact of ‘delayed
curation’ or the periodic removal
of some artifacts from abandoned
sites is, and how key artifacts
diagnostic of site function may
disappear from an archeological
assemblage gradually over several
years of site abandonment.

Another significant point drawn
from all of these studies is the
dynamic nature of settlement in
these horticultural societies. Even
within ‘permanent’ communi­
ties or residences, families rou­
tinely leave their ‘main’ resi­
dence for periods of time. The
collective result is a multipli­
cation of sites within the land­
scape, and a far more complex web
of subsistence and settlement
relationships than archeological
models normally present. When this
dynamism is added to the complex
of behaviors related to abandon­
ment (caching some objects, se­
lecting others for immediate re­
moval, and the delayed removal of
others over the course of site
abandonment), the message to arch­
ologists is that simple taxono­
mies of site types and direct
conclusions of site function that
are extracted from their excavated
assemblages are almost certainly
wrong, or at the least very over­
simplified.

The archeological studies in
Parts III and V are fewer than the
ethnoarcheological cases and come
from only three regions. I suspect

that this reflects the smaller
number of archeologists who have
investigated abandonment behavior
in purely prehistoric contexts.
Four describe research in the U.S.
Southwest, one looks at Copper Age
regional abandonment in coastal
Portugal, and Brooks’s article
deals with the abandonment behav­
ior at the Washita River phase
Arthur Site.

Brooks’s article shows one ap­
proach to looking at abandonment
practices that has direct applica­
tion to Caddoan sites. He first
reviews ethnohistoric and
ethnographic data on household use
and abandonment among several
Plains Village societies, and then
looks at artifact and feature data
from houses excavated at the Ar­
thor site to identify a number of
criteria useful for investigating
abandonment patterns among the
houses at the site. Post hole
characteristics, the size and
distribution of artifacts and
construction elements on house
floors, and refit sequences are
identified as variables that can
be used to examine abandonment
processes at the site. As the
ethnoarcheological studies in this
volume show, there are in addition
many other ways that the life
histories of buildings, commu­

nies, and regions can be examined
from the perspective of abandon­
ment signatures.

Why is this approach useful to
Caddoan research? There are many
current characterizations of and
important questions about prehis­
toric Caddoan lifeways that could
be investigated from the perspec­
tive of abandonment. For example,
models of settlement pattern
change through time and of popula­
density within communities
and across regions are dependent
on assumptions about residential
contemporaneity. An investigation
of explicit evidence of abandon­
ment behavior in households is one

19