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## Book Reviews

Ann M. Early  
*Unknown*

Heidi Vaughn

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## Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

*Abandonment of Settlements and Regions: Ethnoarchaeological and Archaeological Approaches*, edited by Catherine M. Cameron and Steve A. Tomka. Cambridge University Press. 1993.

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 archeological interpretation by Cameron, and a summary paper by co-editors Tomka and Stevenson, the 13 topi-

cal essays are divided into four sections that represent two different approaches and two scales of investigation. Part II contains five papers dealing with ethnoarcheological 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 ethnoarcheological 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 ethnographic account relates. Steve Tomka's article on abandonment patterns at Bolivian agropastoralist sites is particularly noteworthy. His analysis of assemblages 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' communities or residences, families routinely leave their 'main' residence for periods of time. The collective result is a multiplication of sites within the landscape, 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 abandonment (caching some objects, selecting others for immediate removal, and the delayed removal of others over the course of site abandonment), the message to archeologists is that simple taxonomies 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 oversimplified.

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 behavior at the Washita River phase Arthur Site.

Brooks's article shows one approach to looking at abandonment practices that has direct application 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 Arthur 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, communities, and regions can be examined from the perspective of abandonment signatures.

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