9-1-1991


LuAnn Wandsnider

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln, lwandsnider1@unl.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/anthropologyfacpub](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/anthropologyfacpub)

Part of the Anthropology Commons


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
The goal of this volume is “to expand the explicit rationale for [full-coverage survey],
to affirm it as a practicable technique, and to illustrate its superiority as a basis for
archaeological inference” (p. 2). Full-coverage survey (FCS) involves “the systematic
examination of contiguous blocks of terrain at a uniform level of intensity” (p. 2), but
stipulates no minimum areal extent and no special intensity of coverage. This volume
argues that justification for expending limited resources on FCS lies in its potential to
capture settlement patterns, which somehow reflect settlement systems and which
cannot be approached by sample survey.

S. Fish and Kowalewski introduce the theme of the book, which is that of a general
reaction to sample survey studies. Eight substantive chapters provide examples of FCS
from a variety of archeological contexts, covering areas 50 to 2,150 sq km in extent. The
regional archeological pictures from the Basin of Mexico (Parsons), the Valley of Oaxaca
(Kowalewski), and the Kur River Basin of Iran (Sumner) are depicted. Wilson updates
settlement-pattern studies in coastal Peru, the home-hearth of such work. P. Fish and
Gresham describe the survey of a defoliated reservoir-take area from the vegetated
Georgia piedmont. In arid North America, survey results from Long House Valley,
Arizona (Dean) and the northern Tucson Basin (S. Fish, P. Fish, and Madsen) are
presented. Also, Whalen compares simulated sample-based projections with those
obtained through FCS of the Hueco Bolson (Texas), thereby duplicating findings of
similar 1970s exercises. He introduces his endeavor with a thoughtful section on the why
behind full-coverage survey.

 Appropriately, these chapters feature maps of site distributions with, as the auctioneer
said about the Navajo rug, “a lot of pattern.” In general, interpretations for the settlement
system are derived from the maps “as is,” with some supplemental geographical
analysis. Rank-size graphs and maps of sherd densities are also included, but since the
utility of such analytic tools also extends to data obtained through sample survey, they
do little to further the case for full-coverage survey. Settlement-system interpretations for
complex system examples appear undersupported so as to be in competition with
equally compelling interpretations. In contrast, Fish, Fish, and Madsen provide welcome
detail to support their interpretations for agricultural features in the Tucson Basin.
Commentary and summation fill out the volume. Kintigh and Cowgill call attention to
the importance of survey intensity. F. Plog, the principal sample-survey advocate,
provides an insightful critique of the case for full-coverage survey. Kowalewski and S.
Fish conclude with a reflective summary.

Various contributors observe that interest in generating estimates for numbers of sites
(the forte of sample survey) has waned; understanding settlement systems requires more
than frequency data. Herein lies the potential for full-coverage survey. In this volume,
regrettably, this potential is unfulfilled, although still tantalizing. Ten years ago,
Ammerman highlighted the need to understand the relationship between settlement
patterns and settlement systems (in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1981). This vacuum of
knowledge still yawns wide, and until it is filled our understanding of settlement
systems will continue to be fairly ad hoc. It cannot be filled by more data; many of the
authors who propose corrective research recognize this. Only Wilson, however, touches
on how critical definition of the basic unit of observation, the site, is to the entire
undertaking. Unfortunately, no one ponders the assumed relationship between site
contemporaneity, at scales of fifty to thousands of years, and site interrelatedness.
Nevertheless, students of archeological methodology and settlement-pattern studies
should invest in this book.