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Review of *After Collapse: The Regeneration of Complex Societies* by Glenn M. Schwartz and John J. Nichols

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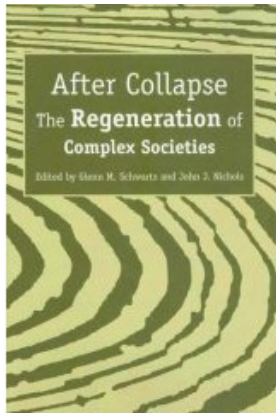
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## Reviews

### After Collapse: The Regeneration of Complex Societies



Glenn M. Schwartz and John J. Nichols, eds.  
The University of Arizona Press  
ISBN: 0-8165-2509-9  
Year: 2006

Studies of sociopolitical change in early complex societies tend to focus on the emergence, florescence, and collapse of state-level polities with minimal attention to post-collapse processes such as dissolution, reorganization, and regeneration. Most archaeologists recognize the inherent instability and cyclical nature of early complex societies, particularly since the publication of *The Collapse of Ancient States and Civilizations* edited by Yoffee and Cowgill (1988) and *Collapse of Complex Societies* by Tainter (1988). *After Collapse: The Regeneration of Complex Societies* follows up these publications by extending the study of sociopolitical change to include post-collapse processes. Schwartz and Nichols organize the volume into a series of case studies, most of which were originally presented at the 68th annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology.

Throughout the volume, archaeological and textual data are used to examine seemingly simple, yet complex questions such as what happens after collapse, why societal complexity is reestablished in some areas but not others, and how second-generation states resemble or differ from previous states. Schwartz provides a concise review of the factors involved in regeneration, such as survival of preexisting institutions, the role of external societies, individual agency, technological change, and resilience of adaptive strategies. While not explicitly environmental in focus, variables such as climatic fluctuation, resource allocation, landscape degradation, and environmental marginality are associated with the collapse and subsequent regeneration or non-regeneration of some complex societies. Other variables include sociopolitical, economic, and ideological factors.

Similar to previous research on the development of complex societies, one salient point of this volume is that regeneration does not occur through a single, uniform process. While *After Collapse* is not geographically comprehensive, it does provide several substantive case studies that illustrate the regional variability of post-collapse processes. One significant contribution is Bronson's typology distinguishing false, stimulus, and template patterns of regeneration. Template regeneration, which occurs where lasting records of cultural traditions and preexistent institutions serve as organizational models for reconstruction, is resonant throughout the volume (see Morris' example from pharaonic Egypt and McEwan's discussion of the Incan state). Even where template regeneration occurs, retention of old institutions may be selective and new ones introduced. Several case studies, such as Stark's study from ancient Cambodia, demonstrate that re-emergent states are not mere replicas of the preceding state. Other authors discuss the complex relationship between sociopolitical change at regional and local levels, such as Nichols and Weber's argument that local-level revitalization and economic resilience at Tell Umm el-Marra in western Syria contributed to regeneration. Sims' Tumulaca case study from Peru's Upper Moquegua Valley, where regeneration of urban complexity never occurred, serves as a point of contrast to other case studies. Although regional trajectories of regeneration are highly variable, the concluding chapters by Kolata and Yoffee provide thoughtful syntheses and show how cross-cultural patterns emerge through comparative analysis.

After Collapse is relevant to readers of Ecological and Environmental Anthropology interested in archaeology, urbanization, and the rise and fall of complex societies. While not the first to address the regeneration of societal complexity, After Collapse is a useful compendium that provides a foundation for a theoretical framework and lexicon for discussing post-collapse processes. The contributors in this volume illustrate how sociopolitical change during the so-called dark ages (an epithet often given to the intermediate periods following collapse) can be illuminated when spotlighted by thorough archaeological and documentary research.

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