

1997

Review of *The Prehistoric Pueblo World A.D. 1150-1350*, edited by Michael A. Adler. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996. 279 pages

Alan J. Osborn

University of Nebraska at Omaha, aosborn2@unomaha.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/anthropologyfacpub>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#), [Biological and Physical Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Osborn, Alan J., "Review of *The Prehistoric Pueblo World A.D. 1150-1350*, edited by Michael A. Adler. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996. 279 pages" (1997). *Anthropology Faculty Publications*. 95.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/anthropologyfacpub/95>

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 Prehistoric Pueblo World A.D. 1150-1350. Edited by Michael A. Adler. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996. 279 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

In 1990, twenty-two archeologists assembled in southwestern Colorado to present regional summaries of the prehistoric record

of Puebloan life between 650 and 850 years ago. The participants were asked to examine several research "questions" including: (1) the "disintegration" of the "Chacoan regional system" and its effects on later Puebloan societies; (2) local and regional abandonment of settlements; (3) changes in social integrative architecture; and (4) changes in interaction with Hohokam (southeastern Arizona) and Mogollon (southwestern New Mexico) peoples. The resulting published volume contains twelve regional summaries, two paleoenvironmental studies, a conflict and warfare study, and two discussants' overviews.

The contributors focused their attention on prehistoric settlements and other material remains scattered over a 150,000 mi² (384,000 km²) area within present-day Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. This material record reflects a broad range of activities carried out within the prehistoric Puebloan world during a 200-year period between A.D. 1150 and A.D. 1350 (Pueblo III). A number of significant changes appear to have taken place during this time including shifts in local and regional population size and distribution, land-use practices, and human interaction (cooperation and competition). The "core" of the prehistoric Pueblo world had centered on Chaco Canyon in northwestern New Mexico. Many archeologists have proposed various scenarios about the development of the "Chacoan regional system" based on the distribution of aboveground masonry structures ("Great houses"); masonry-walled pit structures ("kivas"); masonry towers ("signaling" towers); an assortment of prepared tracks, bridges, and stairways ("roads"); black-on-white ceramics (Dogozhi style); and a number of exotic artifacts, for example, turquoise jewelry, jet, shell, copper bells, and macaw "burials." Investigators have proposed that Chacoan society was perhaps based on resource redistribution, religious pilgrimage, or tribute. This regional system covered an estimated 8,000–10,000 mi² (21,000–31,000 km²; Adler 1996:4-5). By A.D. 1150, a number of these Great houses and surrounding hamlets and towns were "abandoned." During the Pueblo III period, the "Chacoan core area," as well, some of the surrounding regions began to undergo transformations that would later produce the historic Puebloan settlement system. Finally, it is estimated that by the late A.D. 1200s the Pueblo world prior to its "abandonment" extended over 23,000 mi² (60,000 km²; Adler 1996:5).

This volume provides the reader with very useful summaries and overviews of the archeological record for the prehistoric Pueblo III period. It also introduces the reader to a broad range of

research topics—models of demographic change, population aggregation, local and regional “abandonment,” architectural variation, settlement layout(s), living space, aspects of community integration, ceramic assemblages, land-use practices, carrying capacity, conflict, exchange, and macro regional interaction—that have been addressed recently in this area. In addition, this volume contains data about settlement numbers, sizes, and distributions for seventy-three districts within twelve regions. Districts were delineated on the basis of archeological patterns, established cultural chronologies, and/or environmental factors. Data regarding 800 large sites (>50 rooms) including site name, ID number, total rooms, total kivas, Pueblo III occupation span, and architectural layout is presented in an appendix and is also available on computer diskettes for archeologists upon request from Crow Canyon Archaeological Center.

This book does not, however, exhibit sufficient coherence or integration. The participants in the Pueblo III conference were asked to discuss the particularities of the archeological record within their regions and districts. The four “questions” that were selected for the conference were research topics instead of research problems. These topics did not serve to integrate a tremendous body of cultural historical, environmental, artifactual, architectural, and settlement system details. There is little continuity from chapter to chapter and, in some cases, the contributors fail to link their discussions to either their own work or the work of other researchers in numerous, recent publications. This same problem plagues Southwest archeology in general, given the enormous amount of information produced by cultural resource management work and the lack of a strong commitment to long-term, problem-oriented research. Also, archeologists have been repeatedly distracted by short-lived “trends”: gender studies, geographic information systems (GIS), chaos and complexity, postprocessual archeology, or “evolutionary” archeology. These trends come and go and they do little to synthesize what archeologists know. After more than one hundred years of research in the American Southwest, archeologists have yet to provide us with reliable knowledge about the prehistoric Puebloan world. Furthermore, once the data about 800 Pueblo III sites was assembled, no one summarized or analyzed it. This failure may result from the fact that neither the organizers nor the contributors had framed research questions in a manner that was amenable to quantitative analysis. The reader will, no doubt, ask, “If kivas served to integrate communities during Pueblo III times, why are

there no kivas in the Cibola region where average site size equals 259 rooms but there are more than 17 kivas per site in the Mesa Verde region where average site size equals 107 rooms?" Perhaps the participants could have utilized their data to examine the interrelationships between the degree of dependence on flood water farming, labor demands, community size, and integrative mechanisms, or the role of kivas structures in corporate food processing and sharing and how such practices varied with respect to winter severity, cold stress, and fuel conservation.

All archeologists in this volume have certainly made substantive contributions. For example, there are two papers that make use of large databases for the prehistoric Pueblo world. Wilcox presents several very interesting maps of 150 Chacoan sites that represent "potential daily in interaction within the Chacoan macro regional system" (Wilcox, p. 244, fig. 17.2). Two maps makes use of pedestrian "catchments" (within twenty-two-mile or thirty-six-kilometer radius) or the average distance that people might travel with packs in one day. Wilcox also points out that Chacoan sites like Pueblo Bonito were probably occupied for hundreds of years after terminal construction phases. Archeologists might be forced to rethink their numerous "abandonment" scenarios for other areas of the American Southwest once they acquire more fine-grained site history data. Van West's chapter summarizes research involving digital elevation and soil data, GIS-based reconstructions of variations in arable land quantity and distribution, and statistical analyses of tree ring data and predictions of the Palmer Drought Index for the period between A.D. 901 and A.D. 1300 for Sand Canyon and Mockingbird Mesa localities near Cortez, Colorado. Van West's analyses suggest that maize yields were adequate to support from nineteen persons/km² (plus a three-year reserve) to eighty-eight persons/km² (with a one-year reserve). Interestingly, Van West utilizes these predictions of "bountiful" harvests to downplay subsistence and environment and to emphasize the disruptions in the prehistoric Puebloan world caused by troublesome "social intercourse," the lack of "strong sanctions," and noncooperation. She does not, however, discuss the added costs that fluctuations in soil moisture and maize yields might create with respect to additional acreage demands, competition for local land, and added transport costs. Additionally, variation in the length of the frost-free period due to climatic changes associated with winter can impose considerable stress on labor supply and its organization. Significantly, Varien and others (this volume)

suggest that the prehistoric populations were, perhaps, more constrained by "wild game" and other "nonagricultural resources."

Finally, a central issue in this volume regards certain classes of architectural facilities—kivas, great kivas, unroofed great kivas, three-walled structures, and enclosed plazas—and their integrative functions within the prehistoric Pueblo world. The possible integrative role(s) of these features, particularly kivas, was discussed in the early 1900s by J. W. Fewkes for sites at Mesa Verde. The ambiguous and complex nature of kivas has been reexamined in considerable detail in a number of provocative works (Cater and Chenault's "Kiva Use Reinterpreted," *Southwestern Lore* 54(3): 19-34[1988]; Wilshusen's "Unstuffing the Estufa: Ritual Floor Features in Anasazi Pit Structures and Pueblo Kivas" and Michael Adler's "Ritual Facilities and Social Integration in Nonranked Societies" in *The Architecture of Social Interaction in Prehistoric Pueblos*, Lipe and Hegmon, eds. [1989]; and Adler's "Why is a Kiva? New Interpretations of Prehistoric Social Integrative Architecture in the Northern Rio Grande Region of New Mexico," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 49(4):319-346 [1993]). Furthermore, none of the contributors gives adequate attention to Gilman's "Architecture as Artifact: Pit Structures and Pueblos in the American Southwest," *American Antiquity* 52(3):538-564 (1987). In these writings and others, we learn that kivas served a number of functions. Kivas may have been used more as winter season residences and work areas in the past. Considerable emphasis has been given thus far to the role of ceremony, ritual, and religion within and around kiva structures as an integrative mechanism for prehistoric and historic Puebloan life. It is quite possible, though, that our understanding of kivas, aboveground rooms, and prehistoric Puebloan community integration is much more closely linked to food production, processing, and distribution within the varied American Southwest than any of these contributors have stated.

Michael Adler and the contributors to this volume must be commended for assembling this book. They have succeeded in sketching the limits of what archeologists know and hope to learn about a portion of the prehistoric Pueblo world. This volume will, no doubt, launch a number of even more successful synthetic efforts.

Alan J. Osborn
University of Nebraska, Lincoln