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Review Article

An ode to conference proceedings from the U.S. Southwest

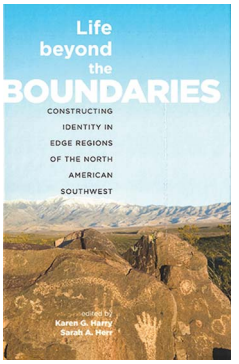
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Karen G. Harry & Sarah Herr (ed.). 2018. *Life beyond the boundaries: constructing identity in edge regions of the North American Southwest*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-666-3 hardback $85.

Karen G. Harry & Barbara J. Roth (ed.). 2019. *Interaction and connectivity in the greater Southwest*. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-734-9 hardback $95.

Robert J. Stokes (ed.). 2019. *Communities and households in the greater American Southwest: new perspectives and case studies*. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-884-1 hardback $79.



In this era of online indexing and scholarly social media, it is easier than ever for researchers to find papers and authors that they are interested in. But as access to information expands, choices over what information to consume are increasingly driven by pre-existing prejudices and confirmation bias. In this context, it takes ever more discipline for scholars to not become locked in their own echo chambers. All of us can see the damage that this same tendency is doing to our public life, so we should try to guard against the same thing happening in scholarship.

Traditional volumes of conference proceedings offer an antidote to this situation. They contain edited collections of essays on broad themes, by many different authors, only some of whom are familiar to the reader. Although it can feel inefficient, I find it valuable to force myself to read through such volumes from time to time precisely because some of the essays do *not* follow my prejudgments. They force me to spend time thinking about an issue from a different perspective, to ask why I disagree with a particular author's approach, to remind myself of the diversity of thought that exists in my field, to encounter the work of less-well-known scholars and to get a sense of the habits of thought of current practitioners. In this age of instant gratification, it takes discipline to consume the entirety of a proceedings volume. These three volumes, focusing on U.S. Southwest archaeology, reinforce my belief that it is good for you.

These volumes contain essays on themes ranging from households and communities to the dynamics of 'edge regions'. All three contain essays by a mix of established and early career scholars, and university-based and cultural heritage management researchers, and there is a fair amount of overlap in the themes, chapter authors and even specific chapter content across volumes. They do not cover the full range of work going on in the U.S. Southwest today, but

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they do provide a useful update on how the thinking of regional experts on household and community organisation and inter-regional dynamics has developed over the past decade.

Collectively, these volumes capture three related evolutions in thought. First, U.S. Southwest archaeology's greatest blessing has always been the combination of complete and accessible archaeological remains with a high volume of research. In many parts of the world the archaeological record is too sparse to interpret absences confidently. But this has become less of a concern to U.S. Southwest archaeologists. So if a Chaco great house has not been documented in the Taos Valley that is because there never was one (Fowles, in Harry & Herr); if evidence of craft production is not found in a house then that means craft production did not occur there (Roth, in Stokes and in Harry & Roth); and if radiocarbon dates on maize are earlier in the Virgin region than in the Kayenta region that is because maize agriculture really did appear earlier in the former region (Roberts, in Harry & Roth; Harry, in both Harry & Roth and Harry & Herr). The ability to interpret absences confidently, combined with a sense that there are reasons beyond simple isolation for them, is leading to surprising new links between archaeological evidence and social processes. This is most apparent in the volume on edge regions surrounding the canonical places of the U.S. Southwest, edited by Harry and Herr, where specific chapters focus on weak ties as the most important links in networks (Peeples & Mills); dissimilarity as evidence of active rejection (Fowles); ceramic exchange as evidence of forgetting (Borck); cultural and geographic peripheries as reservoirs of memory (Miller); and even the absence of evidence as evidence for "how people identified with their neighbors" (Ahlstrom, in Harry & Roth, p. 329).

Second, regional archaeologists are now able to break open our received social units to reveal their internal diversities and cleavages. A generation ago, study of these social units focused on processes of social integration and how it was achieved. These studies, in contrast, often emphasise the difficulties of achieving social integration, and the variety of ways that communities persist despite cleavages of status, wealth and ethnicity. This is especially prominent in the volume edited by Stokes, where there are case studies of failed inter-ethnic communities leading to migration (Whittlesey & Reid) or treachery (Potter); a drive towards social distancing within settlements (Wallace & Lindeman); dependent communities of the landless (Stokes); ethnic enclaves that persist below the radar (Rodriguez & Seymour); temporary and cross-cutting alliances among native groups as Spanish colonisation proceeded (Jelinek & Brenneman, in Harry & Roth); settlements that are more collections of kin groups than communities (Stone, in Harry & Roth); extended *vs* autonomous households in specific communities (Roth, in Stokes and Harry & Roth); and even an example of successful ethnic co-residence in Chacoan communities (Safi & Duff, in Stokes). There is a broad literature that documents the benefits of social integration, but these studies reinforce that such integration does not just happen. It takes work, it often fails, and in some cases, people learn from it.

Finally, because native societies of the U.S. Southwest are generally modest in scale, there has been a tendency among regional archaeologists to focus on ecology and subsistence. No longer. Today, U.S. Southwest archaeologists populate the past with households, communities and societies who experienced the full range of social dynamics that we know about from the history books, and from our own lived experience. Once again, this conceptual shift has been driven by an expanding empirical base. This is especially apparent in the studies of

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Fremont archaeology in Harry and Roth, which has transitioned from a focus on behavioural ecology to Chacoan shatter zones (Allison), status competition (Talbot & Johansson) and shifting stylistic alliances (Richards); but resistance, revitalisation, rejection and other dynamics are discussed throughout the volumes. It is striking that, as the amount of data expands, simple notions regarding similarity and proximity are becoming, well, too simple. Herr and Clark (in Harry & Roth) show spatial variation in expressions of Hohokam identity that is not a function of proximity, Hays-Gilpin *et al.*, and Eckert (both in Harry & Roth) document specific but widely separated influences between individual Hopi and Rio Grande villages, and variable relationships between cultural diversity and density (Thorgmorton in Harry & Herr; Douglas *et al.* in Harry & Roth).

One area that is not as well represented in these essays is the role of ideas and information in these richer and more dynamic societies. More than half of the essays cite the literature on 'imagined communities' and acknowledge its importance, but few delve into the specific ideas that structured social differentiation, integration or disintegration, beyond appealing to general anthropological concepts. So, Klucas and Graves (in Harry & Roth) consider the Hohokam as a house society; Rautman wonders why a specific village was circular; and Gilman *et al.* (in Harry & Roth) identify Mayan (purportedly Huastec) Popol Vuh imagery in Mimbres painted pottery. But even in these cases the analysis operates on the surface and avoids delving into specific ideas and meanings behind the practices. This is doubly unfortunate, first, because U.S. Southwest archaeologists have ample opportunity to learn about these ideas through ethnographic and linguistic studies of contemporary native peoples, and by working directly with native cultural experts themselves; and second, because social integration or disintegration is connected, not only to practice and identity, but with ideas and knowledge that vary across cultures. Based on the absence of such studies in these volumes, connecting the actual ideas that circulated in past societies to the rich social dynamics brought out by the authors would seem to be the unrealised opportunity in U.S. Southwest archaeology.

Collectively, these volumes are useful not only for the new directions in methodology, conceptualisation of evidence and social interpretation that they embody, but also for identifying gaps that future work should strive to fill. They provide a good sense of the contemporary research landscape, and in the process identify areas that need more thought and effort.

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