GREAT TOWNS AND REGIONAL POLITIES IN THE PREHISTORIC AMERICAN SOUTHWEST, AND SOUTHEAST

EDITED BY

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in the Prehistoric American Southwest and Southeast

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN
Multiscalar Analyses of Middle-Range Societies: Comparing the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast

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In what ways were sociopolitical developments in the Late Prehistoric U.S. Southwest and Southeast similar? In what ways were they different? Addressing these two questions has been a primary goal of this volume. Another goal has been to demonstrate how a multi-scalar analytical approach can be used to address such questions. The results, as seen in the various papers in this volume, are significant not only for what they tell us about the prehistories of the Southwest and Southeast, respectively. They are also significant for what they reveal about the regularities and diversity of middle-range societies and the process of cultural evolution.

This chapter summarizes the results of the Southwest-Southeast comparisons presented in the preceding chapters and considers the broader implications of those results. It begins by contrasting the two areas' archaeological research traditions. Next, the cultural similarities and differences evident at different spatial scales are summarized. Then, the possible effects of the two areas' environmental characteristics are considered. Finally, the implications that Southwest-Southeast comparisons have for the study of middle-range societies and cultural evolution in general are discussed.

Archaeological Research Traditions

Southwestern and Southeastern archaeology share several general similarities in their historical development. For both, the first century of research was dominated initially by the collection of museum specimens and then by culture historical concerns. Throughout this time, fieldwork in both areas was directed primarily to the biggest, most spectacular ruins, an emphasis that hindered recognition and interpretation of cultural variability. Consequently, the kinds of sites where most prehistoric peoples lived (e.g., hamlets and villages) were ignored. On those rare occasions when sociopolitical organization was considered, early researchers in both areas generally saw late prehistoric societies as being similar to contemporaneous indigenous societies—that is, egalitarian.

The past two decades of research in both the Southwest and Southeast have seen increased emphasis on the investigation of sociopolitical organization, an effort facilitated by the vast amount of new fieldwork that has occurred over this interval. In both areas this interest has prompted a reevaluation of earlier conclusions about egalitarianism and a greater concern for intra- and intersocietal variation. As a result, both Southwestern and Southeastern archaeologists have been able to identify evidence of organizational complexity in their respective areas. The
existence of chiefdoms in many parts of the Southeast is now almost universally accepted, and the presence of similarly elaborate organizational forms has been inferred for some parts of the Southwest. More recently, the most extreme claims for complexity in both areas (i.e., for state-like organizational forms) have themselves begun to be reevaluated, as seen in current work at Chaco and Cahokia.

While they share these general similarities, Southwestern and Southeastern archaeological research traditions differ in two significant ways. The first concerns their reliance on ethnography vs. ethnohistory. The second involves culture area systematics.

Ethnography vs. Ethnohistory

Early interpretations about the supposed egalitarianism of Late Prehistoric Southwestern societies were derived primarily from ethnographic analogy. The justification for this use of analogy was the egalitarian architectural continuity observed in the northern Southwest between the Prehistoric and Historic periods. The assumption was made that this architectural continuity reflected organizational continuity as well. Thus, ethnographic descriptions of modern Southwestern groups as living in socially and politically independent communities with an egalitarian organization were thought to apply to prehistoric groups as well. However, as Southwestern archaeologists have become increasingly interested in prehistoric sociopolitical organization, the validity of this assumption has been questioned. A primary reason has been the recognition of archaeological evidence for complexity, such as site hierarchies, burial differentiation, high population densities, intensive agricultural systems, and specialized forms of public architecture, all of which are lacking ethnographically.

Whereas ethnographic studies have had a significant impact on Southwestern archaeology, ethnohistoric studies have not. In fact, it has only been recently that Southwestern archaeologists have begun systematically to examine early historic accounts of indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, these documents are often vague and contradictory with key variables of interest to archaeologists being poorly described. In addition, they share with Southwestern ethnographic accounts the inadequacy of dealing with societies that were significantly less complex than some evidenced archaeologically.

Unlike the Southwest, the role of ethnography in archaeological interpretations of the late prehistoric South-

east has until quite recently been virtually nonexistent. The reason is that even the earliest ethnographies were typically done of displaced peoples whose cultures had been drastically altered by several centuries of Euro-American domination, extermination, and removal. These alterations undoubtedly contributed to the absence of any obvious continuity, architectural or otherwise, between prehistoric groups and those studied by ethnographers.

While Southeastern archaeologists have virtually ignored ethnography, they have relied heavily on ethnohistory. In marked contrast with the Southwest, the Southeast's ethnohistoric record is enviably rich with extensive accounts dating back in some areas to the period of initial European contact in the sixteenth century. Early ethnohistoric studies, as exemplified by the writings of John R. Swanton (e.g., 1911, 1922, 1946), tended to conflate several centuries of accounts. They concluded that, with the notable exception of unusual cases like the Natchez, Southeastern societies at contact were egalitarian. However, as interest in sociopolitical organization has grown and archaeological evidence for organizational complexity has accumulated, researchers have begun to study the available ethnohistoric documents more systematically and critically.

The picture of a more complex sociopolitical organization drawn from the Southeast's earliest ethnohistoric accounts has been consistent with the archaeological record but with the added advantage of containing information about individuals and activities impossible to detect archaeologically. Thus, for example, the Southeastern ethnohistoric record has provided insights into such topics as the motivations and machinations of prominent leaders and how polities sometimes joined to form everything from loose confederations to complex/paramount chiefdoms. This kind of information has given Southeastern archaeologists a much more detailed understanding of late prehistoric sociopolitical organization than their Southwestern counterparts who, at least for their most complex societies, must rely on the archaeological record alone.

Culture Area Systematics

Another significant difference in Southwestern and Southeastern archaeological research traditions concerns the definition of culture areas. Late Prehistoric period societies occupying the geographic entity of the U.S. Southeast have typically been given one cultural designation.
nation—Mississippian. While some cultural variation has been documented, the most notable cases occur on the margins of the region (e.g., Caddoan, Calusa, Timucua, Siouan-Algonkian), and have not (except perhaps the Caddo) been considered part of the Mississippian phenomenon. Thus, Southeastern archaeologists often use the terms Mississippian and Late Prehistoric Southeast interchangeably.

For the geographic entity of the Southwest, in contrast, no single cultural designation has been applied, and the same is true for the area's most complex societies. Instead, archaeologists have subdivided the Southwest into a number of discrete culture areas or traditions, of which the Anasazi, Mogollon, and Hohokam are the best known.

This difference in classification raises a series of related questions. Does it reflect fundamental differences in prehistoric culture, including sociopolitical organization, within different parts of the Southwest? Or is it simply the product of different archaeological research traditions? If the difference in classification does in fact reflect prehistoric behavior, then why did late prehistoric Southwestern cultural traditions never attain the same geographic extent as the Mississippian cultural tradition in the Southeast? This question is especially pertinent to the underlying structure and objectives of this volume, because it suggests that the most informative macroscale for Southwest-Southeast comparisons may not be between the Southwest as a whole and the Southeast as a whole but rather between individual Southwestern cultural traditions and the entire Southeast.

**Multiscalar Comparisons**

The multiscalar comparisons of the preceding chapters have revealed some general similarities and several fundamental differences in the societies of the late prehistoric Southwest and Southeast. These similarities and differences are summarized here for the range of scales considered in this volume: the great town, the polity, the macroregion, and beyond.

**Great Towns**

Big sites in both the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast had large scale public architecture that would have required the mobilization of group labor to build. In both areas, these structures, or the empty space formed by them, served as the centerpieces of settlement layout, giving all big sites a central focus. These structures also created a cultural landscape within which sociopolitical and ceremonial activities occurred. As discussed by Holley and Lekson (Chapter 3), further similarities also characterize both Mississippian and Classic period Hohokam sites as well as the Pueblo Bonito complex and Cahokia.

Together these similarities are balanced by two fundamental differences. The first concerns spatial and temporal variation. Throughout the Southeast during the entire Late Prehistoric period, an essentially similar site plan of mounds erected around a plaza was duplicated at all major settlements. The only marked variation was in various aspects of size—sites varied in their physical extent, numbers of mounds, sizes of mounds, and numbers of occupants.

In contrast, the Late Prehistoric Southwest was never characterized by a single site plan. There were instead regionally distinct architectural forms and layouts whose distributions generally correlated with the Southwest's major environmental subdivisions. Furthermore, shifts in architecture and layout occurred through time, with the most dramatic example being the transition from the Sedentary to Classic period Hohokam.

The second difference in Southwestern and Southeastern big sites lies in the function of their large scale public architecture. Throughout the Southwest, the function was social. Ballcourts, plazas, kivas, great kivas, and even perhaps great houses all served as arenas of communal ritual. Except for Classic period platform mounds, unambiguous evidence for residential differentiation was generally absent. In contrast, the focus of public architecture throughout the Southeast was elite individuals, and there is substantive evidence for residential differentiation. The layout of platform temple and mortuary mounds around plazas was intended to highlight the position of the elite both in life and death.

**Polities**

The big sites in both the Southwest and Southeast were part of multi-site organizational systems that in this volume have been called polities. These were the maximal independent sociopolitical units to which people belonged. The similarities in studying Southwestern and Southeastern polities are both methodological and substantive. Methodologically, archaeologists in both regions confront similar difficulties in interpreting site hierarchies and defining polity boundaries. Substantively, researchers have documented several similarities
in the two regions' polities. Economically, polities in both areas depended primarily on intensive agriculture, involving the same nonindigenous cultigens of corn, beans, and squash; local domesticates, while assuming greater importance in some areas, do not appear to have been critical to the provisioning of these societies. In both areas, significant labor investments were made in constructing public architecture. In both, craft production seems to have been at most a part-time activity, producing both sumptuary and utilitarian goods. Finally, in both, the polities that arose during the Late Prehistoric period did not last. Rather, they emerged, existed for some length of time, and then declined until they ultimately disappeared.

Underlying these general similarities are three significant differences: one involves the differential emphasis in social ranking, another relates to variation in basic polity organization; and the last concerns the reasons for polity collapse.

Evidence for ranking

The social relationships underlying Southeastern polities were characterized by a pronounced emphasis on ranking, and in the Southwest they were not. Consequently, the node at which the polity was expressed differed. In the Southeast, it was through the office of the chief; in the Southwest it was through allegiance to places or communities and was reinforced through collective ceremonials. These differences can be viewed as those between polities and ritualities, labels that highlight how the primary integrating mechanisms in the two regions differed.

In the Southeast, the archaeological evidence for social ranking is highly visible, pervasive, and redundant. High status individuals and their families were obviously and repeatedly distinguished from commoners in where they lived, what they wore, and how they were buried. As mentioned in the preceding great town comparisons, public space and architecture at Southeastern centers were clearly associated with elites, serving to highlight their special position both in life and death. Typically, these individuals and their families resided on or near templedomestic mortuary facilities (i.e., mounds, temples, or special cemetery areas) along with a variety of status markers and consistent symbols of leadership. Such mortuary differentiation had a long tradition in the prehistoric Southeast, with perhaps the best-known precedents being Hopewellian and Adena burial practices.

The archaeological evidence for social ranking in the late prehistoric Southeast has been corroborated by ethnohistoric research, which has also documented a high degree of competition for political power among contact-era Mississippian elites. While power and status were to varying degrees ascribed to certain family lines, who actually assumed preeminent positions among those eligible was determined in large part by achievement. The power of successful leaders was considerable—they could mobilize labor, control agricultural surplus, live sumptuously, and even (in some societies) enforce or oversee human sacrifice in special circumstances. These powers made leadership positions highly desirable, and provided the motivation for intense competition.

In stark contrast with the Southeast, evidence for social differentiation in the Southwest is infrequent, inconsistent, and relatively hard to discern archaeologically. Only a few cases (e.g., Chaco, the Classic period Hohokam, and Paquimé) exhibit any clear evidence for ranking and this evidence is usually not redundant. As was described previously, most Southwestern public architecture had a community orientation rather than the obvious and widespread association with elites as in the Southeast. The only Southwestern case with clearly identified elite residences is the Classic period Hohokam. Archaeologists disagree about whether or not Chacoan great houses were elite residences; similarly the evidence from Paquimé is ambiguous.

While there are a few high status burials in the Southwest, they are notable because they are rare. Only at Paquimé is there a robust pattern of ascribed status. The few rich burials at Classic period Hohokam sites, Chaco, and Paquimé are associated with public architecture, but because they are so few, the association does not seem to have been as institutionalized as in the Southeast. None of the Southwestern cases exhibit consistent status markers and symbols of leadership as seen throughout the Southeast.

In general, marked social differentiation in the late prehistoric Southwest seems to have been rare and relatively short-lived. When it did occur, there is varying evidence for control of agricultural surplus and the ability to mobilize labor. The evidence for human sacrifice is significantly less than in the Southeast. While the overall emphasis seems to have been egalitarian, competition for power probably did occur but apparently more infrequently and to a lesser degree than in the Southeast.
**Polity organization**

Southwestern and Southeastern polities also differed in the extent to which their basic organization varied. Because of the common site plan found throughout the Southeast, archaeologists have been able to apply one model of polity organization throughout the area. This building block model has as its basic unit a center and its surrounding villages and hamlets. It varies primarily in how multiples of the basic unit are combined. Simple polities consisted only of the basic unit—the center and its surrounding sites. In more complex polities, one of the basic units dominated others through a vertically-organized administrative and social hierarchy.

A building block model, employing centers and their surrounding villages and hamlets, can also be applied to polities throughout the Southwest. However, in the Southwest, the model is characterized by two kinds of variation not evident in the Southeast—one in the content of the basic building blocks and the other in the way building blocks combine to form polities. Due to the previously discussed variation in Southwestern site plans, the basic unit of the building block model differs depending on location and time period. In addition, unlike the Southeast, clear evidence for vertically-organized administrative and social hierarchies occurs infrequently. The more common pattern is what Johnson (1980) has called a sequential hierarchy in which power and control relations are spread horizontally. This difference in vertical vs. horizontal power relations is clearly related to the differential emphasis on social ranking in the two regions.

**Polity collapse**

In both the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast, polities emerged, existed for some length of time, and then declined until they ultimately disappeared. The ranges of polity duration in the two areas varied. In the Southeast, durations range from roughly 100 to 400 years. A relatively simple polity oriented around a single mound center might last just a few generations. At the other extreme, the most complex polities, which encompassed a hierarchy of mound centers, sometimes lasted several centuries.

In the Southwest, the range of polity duration was greater. The minimum duration was probably less than in the Southeast, lasting perhaps only a generation or two. For the most complex polities, the minimum spans of less than 300 years proposed for Chaco and Paquimé fall within the high end of the range defined for Southeastern polities. However, some Hohokam centers, and probably their associated polities, have documented spans of 500 or more years, which exceed the maximum duration of the most complex Southeastern polities. The longevity of these Hohokam polities can probably be attributed to their deep sedentism, resulting from the tethering of irrigation canals.

Southwestern and Southeastern archaeologists have used different labels and proposed different explanations for polity collapse, and associated population shifts, in their respective areas. Southwestern archaeologists have used the term abandonment to characterize the depopulation of various sites, localities, and regions in the post-AD. 1150 period. Proposed explanations cite various combinations of interrelated variables, such as climate change, resource exhaustion, and population and organizational growth beyond the minimal carrying capacity of highly variable environments.

Southeastern archaeologists have generally characterized polity collapse and its associated population shifts as the result of chiefly cycling. According to this explanation, centers and polities emerged, grew, and declined for a variety of (largely) interrelated reasons, of which the most important was elite competition for power. This competition within and among chiefly factions in the region's centers and polities is thought to have occurred throughout the Southeast.

Is Southwestern abandonment the same as Southeastern chiefly cycling? We would say for the most part no. In the Southwest, the greater emphasis on group solidarity rather than on individual competition for power together with the very few clear instances of complex polities would have made cycling, such as seen in the Southeast, less likely. This is not to say that cycling never occurred. Again, the issue is scale. While chiefly cycling was probably not a macroregional process characterizing the Southwest as a whole, it may have been an important component of change in areas associated with complex polities with multiple centers, such as Chaco and the Classic period Hohokam.

**Macregional Interaction**

Macregional interaction in the Southeast was qualitatively different from that in the Southwest in both its geographic extent, intensity, and historical precedents. The Late Prehistoric Southeast comprised a single, large...
macroregion that contained numerous, clearly hierarchical polities whose proximity with one another and resulting interactions created a politically complex and dynamic cultural landscape. Not only was this macroregion extensive, but the interactions comprising it were redundant. There was cultural unity as evidenced by common architectural plans and artifactual styles, there was religious unity provided by Mississippian ceremonialism and iconography (as exemplified by the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex), and there was long-distance exchange of both status and religious goods. Within this widespread pattern, competition and conflict added a dimension of volatility to the interactions among polities. Intensive and extensive macroregional interaction had a long history in the Southeast, dating as far back as Middle Archaic times (8,000-6,000 B.P.), with pronounced peaks during the Poverty Point, Hopewellian, and Mississippian eras.

In comparison to the Southeast, macroregionalities at the scale of the Southwest as a whole were weaker and more tenuous. Only one kind of linkage, the long-distance exchange of status goods, seems to have been operating throughout the Southwest, and only some of this interaction appears shaped by members of the region’s small number of more complex polities. Unlike the Southeast, these pan-Southwestern exchange networks of the Late Prehistoric period had a short history. They were not in place until the first millennium A.D. and had no earlier precedents.

It is only when one considers particular areas within the Southwest, rather than the Southwest as a whole, that evidence for more intensive and redundant interactions can be seen. It is at this smaller scale that the cultural uniformity that characterized the Mississippian world existed and that cults developed. If polity boundaries are defined conservatively, it is at this scale that regular interactions among at least a moderate number of polities can be seen. For example, if great houses were the centers of independent polities, rather than components in a unified Chacoan system, then their close proximity may have made interactions among them quite dynamic and volatile. The same may be true of relations between the Hohokam platform mound sites of the Phoenix Basin.

Beyond the Southwest and Southeast

Some polities participating in the Late Prehistoric Southwestern and Southeastern macroregions had more distant ties as well. These broader connections consisted almost entirely of long-distance exchange. Various Southwestern polities traded with populations in northwest Mexico, California, the Great Basin, and the western Plains. In the Southeast, various Mississippian polities traded with groups in south-central Florida, the south Atlantic seaboard, the upper Midwest, and the eastern Plains.

The area that had the greatest and most long lived influence on the Southwest was Mesoamerica. The earliest direct evidence of these broader ties is the introduction of Mesoamerican cultigens before 1000 B.C., and continued contacts of varying duration and intensity occurred throughout the following millennia resulting in a widespread pattern, competition and conflict added a dimension of volatility to the interactions among polities. Intensive and extensive macroregional interaction had a long history in the Southeast, dating as far back as Middle Archaic times (8,000-6,000 B.P.), with pronounced peaks during the Poverty Point, Hopewellian, and Mississippian eras.

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The issue of Southwestern-Southeastern contacts remains to be fully addressed. We know that late prehistoric polities in the eastern ranges of the Southwest and the western margins of the Southeast both maintained trading relationships with nomadic groups in the intermediate Plains area. Whether or not this trade resulted in any direct or indirect contacts between Southwestern and Southeastern groups is unknown at present. What does seem certain is that if such interaction did occur, it had little significant, archaeologically obvious impacts on sociopolitical developments in either area.
The World-Wide Scale

Both the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast were characterized by two sets of roughly contemporaneous developments that suggest that archaeologists need to consider even broader spatial scales in their research on these two areas. The first is the emergence of the two areas' largest, most primate centers, Chaco and Cahokia, at roughly the same time. The decline of these two centers and their respective polities may be roughly contemporaneous. These corresponding developments coincided with the beginning and end of a period of generally favorable climate worldwide. Lasting from roughly A.D. 850-1250, this Medieval Optimum or Neo-Atlantic period was followed by a deterioration in global climate variously called the Pacific/Neo-Boreal or "Little Ice Age" (e.g., Bryson 1988; Bryson and Murray 1977; Wendlund and Bryson 1974).

Another global scale process that affected both areas at approximately the same time and with the same consequences was a cultural one: the arrival of Europeans to North America. In both the Southwest and Southeast, European contact brought population decimation and massive culture change.

Comparing Scales

The goal of multiscalar analysis is to compare developments at different scales with one another to see how they may have been interrelated. In both the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast, there are clear linkages between the characteristics of great towns, polities, and their macroregions. The sizes of big sites were correlated with the preeminence of their associated polities. The kinds of public architecture constructed at big sites reflected the relative importance of social ranking vs. group solidarity within the broader polity. The emphasis on social ranking within polities, with the number and complexity of those polities, in turn affected macroregional interaction. Thus, developments had different scales and were highly interdependent. The lesson for archaeologists is that to get as complete a picture as possible of a particular prehistoric society, whether it is in the Southwest, Southeast, or elsewhere, all scales need to be studied and then compared.

Explaining the Differences

The preceding multiscalar comparisons of Late Prehistoric Southwestern and Southeastern societies have revealed two fundamental differences: one in the relative emphasis on social ranking in the two areas and the other in the extent and intensity of macroregional interaction. Both differences can be explained largely by differences in the two areas' natural environments. However, environmental characteristics alone do not explain everything. The effects of these characteristics are to impose constraints and offer opportunities. It is the interactions of social variables within the context of these constraints and opportunities that ultimately produce the trajectories of change evident in different areas.

Environmental Comparisons

The natural environments of the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast shared two similarities. First, as mentioned previously, both experienced the relatively favorable climatic conditions associated with the Medieval Optimum or Neo-Atlantic period and the deterioration of global climate that began around A.D. 1250. Second, in both environments water was a critical environmental variable determining where prehistoric populations lived and in what numbers.

Counterbalancing these similarities were several important differences in water availability, physiographic structure, and relative diversity. The Southwest is a harsher, less productive, and riskier environment than the Southeast. Its climate is arid, and precipitation is not only low but highly variable. Consequently, although prehistoric agriculture could be very successful in good times, it was not consistently a reliable subsistence strategy. In contrast, the Southeast is characterized by a moist temperate climate, which makes agriculture both a highly productive and (for the most part) a fairly reliable subsistence strategy.

The Southwest and Southeast also differ in physiographic structure, as created by and reflected in their respective river systems. In the Southwest, the major rivers are few, not very interconnected, and often intermittent in their flow. Thus, the best places to live prehistorically were small in number and widely scattered across a relatively inhospitable landscape. In contrast, the Southeast is spanned by a highly interconnected network of large permanent rivers and their tributaries. Consequently, the best places to live there prehistorically were numerous, closely spaced in a relatively hospitable natural landscape, and linked by easy routes of communication and transportation.

The Southwest and Southeast also differ in the relative diversity of their natural environments. The South-
west can be subdivided into several major zones, most notably the desert, plateau, and mountain, whose differences in elevation are in turn correlated with pronounced differences in temperature, rainfall, and vegetation. Biomass of use to human populations throughout the Southwest is quite varied and in some areas minimal. In comparison, the Southeast is a relatively homogeneous environment, with consistently higher biomass. While latitudinal and longitudinal variation can be defined based on temperature and precipitation, respectively, this variation is fairly continuous. Relatively distinctive macroenvironmental zones, with pronounced differences in biota, such as those seen in the Southwest, are absent.

**The Environment and Social Ranking**

Differences in the availability of water and biomass of use to humans in the Southwest and Southeast undoubtedly affected the relative emphasis on social ranking in both areas during the Late Prehistoric period. In the harsh, unpredictable, and less productive environment of the Southwest, subsistence would have been a constant concern. Consequently, the most adaptive social strategies would have been those that emphasized cooperation within (and to a lesser extent between) groups in order to even out risks of food shortage. In fact, these are the kinds of strategies that are most evident archaeologically. Throughout the Southwest, the emphasis on polity formation and functioning was the corporate group, not the individual, and the primary ties were ceremonial, fostering cooperation within and between groups. Surplus production would have been possible at some times in some locations, making social ranking possible at some places in the short term. However, ranking was never widespread and where it occurred apparently could not be sustained. Thus, the Southwest's environmental characteristics apparently contributed to an overall pattern of egalitarianism marked by just a few notable examples of ranking, examples whose archaeological indicators are not as clear-cut or consistent as those in the Southeast.

In contrast with the Southwest, the Southeast's rich, productive, and reliable environment not only made subsistence not an overriding concern from early on but offered a high potential for consistent surplus production. This potential would have provided individuals with seemingly ideal opportunities to enhance their social position through competition. As a result, there was a sustained and widespread emphasis on social ranking in the Southeast; and the focus of polity formation and functioning was the chief and proximate elites whose positions were generated through competition within and between ranked kinship lines. This competition contributed to the late prehistoric Southeast's political landscape being much more dynamic than that of the Southwest.

**The Environment and Macraregional Interaction**

Both the relative diversity and physiographic structure of the Southwestern and Southeastern environments affected macroregional interaction in the Late Prehistoric period. In both areas, macroregional interaction, as evidenced by the limits of major cultural traditions, corresponded to environmental zones. In the Southwest, there were several such zones, each with its associated cultural tradition. In the Southeast, similar environmental divisions were absent, and intensive macroregional interaction, as evidenced by the Mississippian cultural tradition, were pan-Southeastern.

Contributing to these differences was the two areas' physiographic structure, which hindered broad scale macroregional interaction in the Southwest and promoted it in the Southeast. The Southwest's relatively few, not very interconnected, and often intermittent rivers provided few really good places to live and made travel and communication by water difficult. As a result, complex polities were few and widely spaced. Interaction among them was less intense and less extensive than that seen among Southeastern polities. In addition, there was less conflict, which made the overall social landscape less volatile and dynamic than in the Southeast.

In contrast, the Southeast's highly interconnected network of large permanent rivers provided many good places to live, which were closely spaced and linked by easy routes of communication. As a result, there were numerous complex polities, and macroregional interaction was both far-flung and intensive. In addition, the frequency of conflict made the overall social landscape volatile and dynamic.

**The Limits of Environmental Determinism**

Environmental characteristics clearly contributed to the differential emphasis on social ranking and the different patterns of macroregional interaction in the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast. However, we would reject purely environmental explanations for these differences. While environmental differences explain a lot, the effects of social variables are also critical in both the Southwest
and Southeast. Environmental conditions set the stage, offering possibilities and imposing constraints. However, it was the interaction of social variables that determined whether the possibilities were realized.

Three brief examples, one from the Southwest, one from the Southeast, and one that applies to both areas, illustrate our point. First, the longer duration of those Southwestern polities that practiced large scale irrigation was due in part to environmental conditions (e.g., water flow, appropriate expanses of arable land) which made canal irrigation possible. In addition, corporate-solidarity enhancing mechanisms, such as the ball game, could have helped channel intra- and interpolarity individual and factional competition into socially desirable (and therefore less destabilizing) ends.

A second example is the greater volatility and dynamism of the Late Prehistoric Southeast’s cultural landscape. These characteristics were the product of not only the region’s environmental characteristics but also of the interaction of the region’s emphasis on social ranking, the reliance on competition for achieving high rank, and the proximity of numerous complex polities.

A last example of the inadequacy of environmental determinism is the effects that global climate change had on cultural developments in both the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast. As was mentioned previously, the roughly simultaneous emergence and decline of Chaco and Cahokia coincided with two major climate shifts, the first to favorable conditions and the second to more difficult conditions. The fact that these correlations occur at both Chaco and Cahokia suggest the possibility that climate was a factor in their developmental histories. Yet while climate may answer questions about timing, it cannot account for why Chaco and Cahokia were located where they were. Environmental factors other than climate may have been responsible, or some kinds of social variables, or the interaction between environmental characteristics and social variables.

There are also other questions about the rise of Chaco and Cahokia that cannot be explained by climate change alone. For example, why were Chaco and Cahokia qualitatively different from preceding and succeeding large sites in size, complexity, and impact on the regional landscape? After Chaco and Cahokia had peaked and gone into decline, what came after— even if possessing similar organizational properties—never approached these primate centers in size and architectural elaboration. Were Chaco and Cahokia as large as they were because they were the first? This may not be a question that can be answered by referring to climate change alone.

In both the Southwest and Southeast, the collapse of Chaco and Cahokia was followed by the spread of regional and macroregional cults. These cults may have been a response either to deteriorating climatic conditions or to the leadership and spiritual vacuum created by the disappearance from the cultural landscape of Chaco and Cahokia, both of which seem to have been ideological and political centers.

These examples demonstrate that while environmental characteristics are important, and may in some cases be very important, they alone cannot provide a complete explanation for why the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast were similar and different in the ways they were. Social variables, or more specifically the interactions among them, were also critical. Simple environmental determinism is inadequate. Instead, we strongly advocate a multi-variate systemic model that incorporates both environmental and social factors and focuses on the interactions among them all.

Broader Implications

The differences characterizing the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast have implications for studies of middle-range societies and the process of cultural evolution in general. Traditionally, both ethnographers and archaeologists have approached the task of explaining societal variation and change by classifying societies in a sequence of cultural evolutionary stages. However, the polities of the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast illustrate the inadequacy of such stages for understanding middle-range societies and reinforce the need for alternative approaches to the study of cultural evolution.

The Problem of Classification

In the most widely used cultural evolutionary typology (Service 1962), middle-range societies encompass the societal types of tribe and chiefdom. The differential emphasis on social ranking in the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast highlights a significant problem with using such categories. Namely they constrain our recognition of differing organizational systems and our understanding of how they formed and operated (see Blanton et al. 1996; Earle 1987a, 1991; Feinman and Neitzel 1984:40–45; Spencer 1987:379–383, 1990).
This problem is not so obvious in the Late Prehistoric Southeast. Among Southeastern archaeologists there is an almost universal consensus that most if not all of the late prehistoric societies of their area were chiefdoms. The diagnostic characteristics of chiefdoms, as traditionally defined, are readily apparent, including the obviousness and persistence of ranked kin groups and ascribed leadership. This classificatory success has had the beneficial effect of minimizing typological arguments, and has helped direct research to questions such as how these societies were constituted, interacted, and changed or evolved over time.

However, problems with cultural evolutionary typologies are readily apparent in the Late Prehistoric Southwest. Here, the chiefdom label is used infrequently and with much controversy, primarily because of the absence of clear-cut and sustained evidence for social ranking. While the designation of tribe seems applicable to many Late Prehistoric Southwestern societies, it is clearly inadequate for the area's most complex polities such as those of Chaco, Paquimé, and the Classic period Hohokam. Thus, traditional cultural evolutionary categories cannot accommodate the Southwest's most complex cases—they are neither tribes nor chiefdoms, if chiefdoms are defined as having ranked kin and ascribed leadership.

This difficulty is analogous to the classification difficulties that Southeastern archaeologists have encountered in their studies of societies dating to earlier periods. For example, a number of Hopewellian sites have public architecture and elaborate burials, but as in the Southwest, there is no clear-cut evidence for ranked kin or ascribed leadership. Consequently, as in the late prehistoric Southwest, neither the designation of tribe nor chiefdom seems to accommodate adequately what is known about Hopewellian societies.

These classificatory difficulties can be remedied using a typological subdivision of chiefdoms originally proposed by Renfrew (1974). For Renfrew, individualizing chiefdoms have pronounced kin-based social ranking, which is at least partially ascribed. In group-oriented chiefdoms, group cohesion rather than individual rank is emphasized. This distinction seems to correspond well to the differences observed between Late Prehistoric Southeastern and Southwestern polities as well as between Mississippian and Hopewellian polities.

However, while subdividing the chiefdom category remedies the classificatory difficulties created by the tribe/chiefdom dichotomy, it does not resolve the central task of understanding how Southwestern and Southeastern polities were organized and how they changed. The problem remains one of accommodating variation. In the Southeast, polities seem to fit neatly under the designation of individualizing chiefdom with the primary axes of variation being in their size and degree of complexity. In the Southwest, many Late Prehistoric societies fit neatly into the designation of group-oriented chiefdoms. These societies, like those in the Southeast, vary in their degree of complexity, and in addition, the group-oriented chiefdoms also vary in their basic structure. Thus, the category of group-oriented chiefdoms suffers on a smaller scale from the same problem of the broader chiefdom category—the problem of not being able to accommodate the variation evident in how prehistoric societies were organized.

A modern, and to date highly productive, resolution to this dilemma of classificatory ambiguity, has been to focus instead on delimiting the range of variation in middle-level societies (e.g., Feinman and Neitzel 1984) and on developing typologies based on explanations as to how and why such variation occurs. Thus, Johnson (1982) has examined how information flow and control mechanisms operate, offering the concepts of simultaneous and sequential hierarchies to describe how decision-making occurs in societies that are vertically as opposed to horizontally integrated; these administrative classifications conform nicely to those in individualizing versus group-oriented (or Southeastern and Southwestern) societies, respectively.

Likewise Feinman (1995) and his colleagues (Blanton et al. 1996) have argued for a societal classification based on political economy, specifically the kinds of individual behavior that produce two kinds of middle-range societies. When individual actors engage in "network" strategies, the resulting polities are characterized by individual-centered and externally directed hierarchies with power relations predicated on exchange and status enhancement. In contrast, when individual actors engage in "corporate" strategies, the resulting polities are group-focused and internally-directed, promoting group solidarity and relative egalitarianism, and suppressing self-aggrandizing behaviors. These corporate and network strategies, not surprisingly, clearly correspond to Renfrew's group-oriented and individualizing chiefdoms, and Johnson's sequential and simultaneous administrative hierarchies.

Together, variation in the kinds of societies that made up the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast strongly
reinforces the idea that middle-range societies are quite varied. As Yoffee (1993) has noted, complexity can take many forms. Comparisons of Southwestern and Southeastern polities highlight the need to develop alternative approaches that explain rather than obscure our understanding of this variation.

Studying Change

The Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast not only illustrate alternative approaches to social evolution, they can also be viewed as laboratories for the exploration of cultural evolution. If traditional cultural evolutionary typologies cannot accommodate the variation characterizing middle-range societies, then alternatives to unilinear evolutionary theory, from which these typologies were derived, need to be developed.

One major conclusion that can be drawn from the comparisons presented in this volume is that cultural evolution is not a unilinear process. The variation evident in the Late Prehistoric societies of the Southwest and Southeast suggests that there may be several trajectories middle-range societies can follow.

One problem that confronts anthropologists in any discussions of cultural evolution is determining when in fact evolution has occurred. This determination has been complicated in the past by the ambiguous definition of the terms change and evolution, terms which are sometimes given different meanings and sometimes used interchangeably. We feel that this conceptual confusion can best be remedied by viewing change and evolution as synonymous and as a scalar process that occurs along a continuum of magnitude. Change at the low end of this continuum is microevolution, involving simply oscillations around a norm. Change at the high end is macroevolution, involving fundamental structural change and the emergence of new forms. Between the two extremes is a continuum with no clear division between where microevolution ends and macroevolution begins. This continuum can take the form of embedded scales with microevolution occurring within the context of macroevolution, and lower-scale macroevolution occurring within the context of higher scale macroevolution. An example of the latter is the process of chiefly cycling which can be directional in the long run.

We would argue that evolution along the continuum from macro- to microevolution is a multiscalar process another way too. Time, like space, can be studied at different analytical levels. There are changes that occur over short intervals, those that take more time, and those that occur over even longer periods. These temporal units can be viewed as forming an embedded hierarchy, just as the spatial units do. The relevance of this temporal hierarchy for explaining change is that short term changes need to be considered with reference to the long term trends of which they are a part and vice versa.

It is macroevolution with which traditional cultural evolutionary research has been concerned in its conception of cultural evolution as a ladder-like progression through societal stages or types. As we have discussed, societal comparisons of the late prehistoric Southwest and Southeast demonstrate the inadequacies of this approach. We would argue that the Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast demonstrates macroevolution as a multilinear process, leading to a wide range of social forms. It is analogous to a branching tree with the branches extending in many directions (see Yoffee 1993).

Thus, the approach we advocate for studying macroevolution as a multiscalar, multilinear process is to document how specific variables relating to settlement, subsistence, political economy, social ranking, ideology, agency, the natural environment and other factors change over time; to compare the respective trends at multiple spatial and diachronic scales within societies; and finally to compare their interrelationships between societies.

In developing explanatory models for societal variation and change, our approach must be multivariate, multilinear, and multiscalar both in space and time. The result of such research may in fact reveal that different explanatory models are appropriate for micro- vs. macroevolution, for different time frames (a short term vs. a long term), and for different spatial scales. However, it will only be through research that accommodates all of these different perspectives that we will discover whether this is so.

Conclusion

The multiscalar perspective offers a powerful tool for disentangling the interrelated processes that produced the similarities and differences characterizing Late Prehistoric Southwest and Southeast polities. By requiring a consideration of the effects of scale, this perspective imposes a much needed degree of systematization on comparisons between both variables and cases and in turn offers an analytical framework for considering how developments at different scales may have affected one
another. The studies by Neitzel (Chapter 14) and Anderson (Chapter 15), and comparisons of the chapters that preceded them, have shown how developments at different scales in the Southwest and Southeast were interrelated, but sometimes in complex ways. Recognition of this fact highlights the importance of adopting a diachronic cross-cultural multiscalar approach to the analysis of archaeological data, with the goal of advancing our understanding of individual societies (past and present) and anthropological theory in general. Multiscalar analyses, in a very real sense, thus reflect an approach to archaeology capable of answering the kinds of questions appropriate to archaeological data, questions dealing with broad socioenvironmental processes operating over large areas and extended time spans.

As for our understanding of middle-range or intermediate level societies, the analyses presented here have two major implications. The first is that such societies are quite varied. They can vary in their size and degree of complexity, as is evident in Southeastern polities. They can vary in their basic structure or form as is seen both in the Southwestern polities and in comparisons of Southwestern and Southeastern polities. The second implication for middle-range societies is a consequence of the first—that societal types are not very useful for understanding these societies. Instead, documenting and comparing variation is critical; by masking variation, typologies, however precisely defined, hinder efforts to accomplish this goal.

One final conclusion that can be drawn from the comparisons presented in this volume is that cultural evolution is clearly a multilinear process, leading to a wide range of social forms—a branching tree rather than a ladder, and going in many directions rather than in a simple progression. This conclusion raises several questions. For example, what combinations of environmental and social factors were responsible for determining which trajectory a particular society took? Another question is which of these trajectories, if any, offered the greatest potential for the emergence of state-level societies? Given time, for example, would any Southeastern polities have broken the pattern of chiefly cycling and evolved into even more complex forms? If so, what conditions and/or processes would have made this possible? Multiscalar analysis, involving comparisons among variables, among scales, and among cases, is an essential approach for answering these kinds of questions in order to achieve a better understanding of both middle-range societies and cultural evolution.

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