

Conceptualizing Regional Dynamics in the Ancient Southwest

Alan P. Sullivan III and James M. Bayman

Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, investigators of the Greater Southwest's archaeological wonders have employed a variety of lexicons and systematics to organize the region's rich and extensive variability (Schwartz 2000). Many such schemes have been advanced (among others, Colton 1939; Daifuku 1952; W. Gladwin and Gladwin 1934; Martin and Rinaldo 1951; F. Roberts 1937), and several of them, such as the Pecos Classification (Kidder 1927), continue to prosper because they succinctly synthesize vast amounts of regional information (e.g., E. Adams and Duff 2004; Adler 1996; Reed 2000; Spielmann 1998a).

Interpreting the origins and evolutionary significance of regional patterns of variability has been another matter, however. Nels C. Nelson (1919:117), to cite one early key example, expressed the idea that the “geographic distribution of Pueblo traits takes the form of a *center* of high and unalloyed development and a *marginal zone*, different segments of which have been more or less affected by influences from other adjacent culture centers” (italics original; fig. 1.1). In contrast, Harold S. Gladwin (1965:359) asserted that ancient Plateau peoples “showed no disposition to expand, to subjugate other people, or to submit to the domination of any individual, clique, or dynasty.” The regional data entailed in both cases, distributions of large and small archaeological sites, are consistent with each interpretation, yet exclusive to neither—a common problem of archaeological research that contributes to the flux of the Southwest's literature and, simultaneously, revitalizes its research agendas (e.g., D. Fowler and Wilcox 1999:211–223). In many respects, therefore, the history of Southwestern archaeology can be considered a chronicle of this perennial struggle to secure strong inferences about the behavioral and organizational significance of heterogeneous regional patterns of architecture and ceramics (Longacre 2000; Tainter and Plog 1994). For our purposes, at least

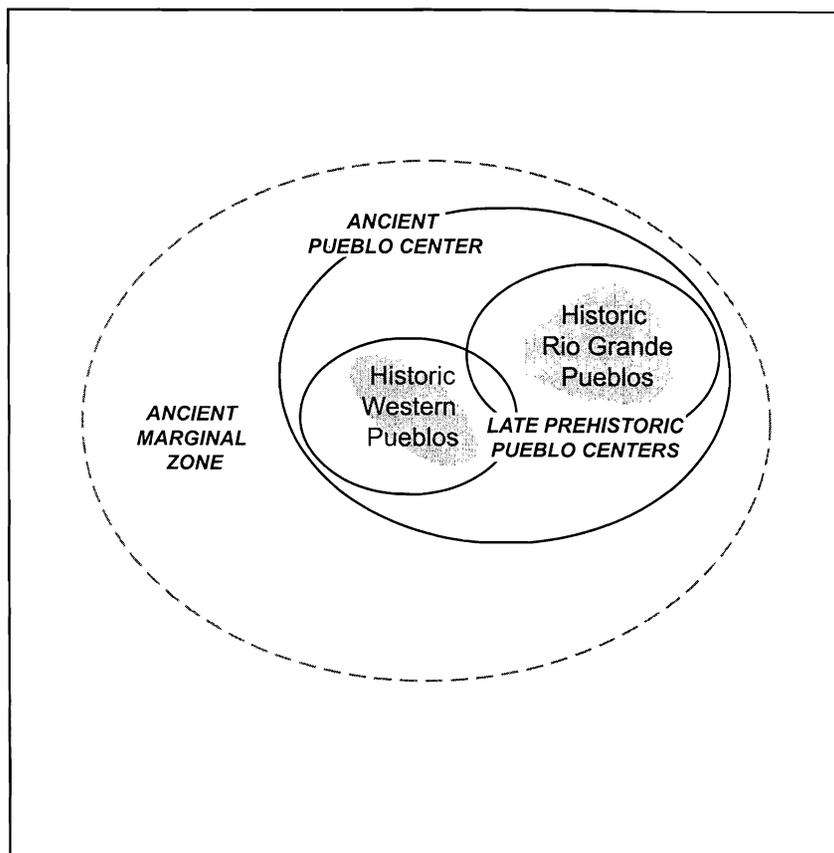


Figure 1.1 A redrawn version of Nels C. Nelson's (1919) cultural geography of the Southwest showing the spatial distribution of ancient and modern Pueblo "centers" and a perennial "marginal zone" of non-Puebloan territory.

two major conceptual frameworks can be distinguished that pertain to these issues (see also Reid et al. 1989).

One framework, which persists to this day (e.g., Elson et al. 2000), attributes regional variation in patterns of ceramics and architecture to the consequences of local decision making (Douglas 1995; Gumerman and Dean 1989). Gladwin, like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Harold S. Colton (1946) and Emil W. Haury (1962), imagined that the ancient Southwest was composed of relatively economically independent and largely egalitarian social formations that, under various "influences," periodi-

cally coalesced into bigger but, nonetheless, still largely autonomous communities (Chang 1958; Hagstrum 2001; also E. Morris 1921:21–22). In this view, the ancient Southwest was populated by hinterlands—areas whose socioeconomic formations were not subordinate to, or dependent on, others for resources or information (cf. Gills and Frank 1993).

The other framework, analogous to Nelson's, interprets patterns of regional variability, especially spatial distributions of key ceramic types, as consequences of alliance interactions (*sensu* F. Plog 1984) that were established to strengthen economic linkages between centers and their sustaining areas in order to manage social stress (e.g., warfare) or buffer environmental risk (e.g., drought; S. Plog 1984). These systems are commonly thought to have been politically centralized, "regionally integrated" (Cordell 1997:305), socioeconomic networks that involved significant investments in monumental architecture and technology (Bayman 2002; Wilcox 1979). In this view, the ancient Southwest was populated by heartlands—areas with long, continuous developmental histories, whose socioeconomic formations concentrated and controlled (if not monopolized) the distribution of information and resources, which were often secured from nearby hinterlands and upon which they may have been or became dependent (e.g., R. Adams 1981; see also DeBoer 1996; Kowalewski et al. 1989; C. Morris and Thompson 1985).

Since the late 1970s no fewer than three regional systems, patterns, macro-regional systems, or worlds—Hohokam (Crown 1991a; Wilcox 1979), Chaco (Dean 1989; Doyel [ed.] 1992; Judge 1991), and Casas Grandes (C. Schaafsma and Riley 1999; Whalen and Minnis 1999, 2001)—have been defined for the Greater Southwest (F. Plog 1984:218; see also Doyel and Lekson 1992) (fig. 1.2). The regional systems differ with respect to their origins, their attributes, and the amount of discussion they have generated since they were first proposed (McGuire et al. 1994). For the Hohokam regional system, its principal diagnostic attributes—ballcourts, buff-ware pottery, and glycymeris shell bracelets—have been known for at least a century (Crown 1991a; Wilcox and Sternberg 1983). Interestingly, the Hohokam regional system was widely adopted with little ensuing controversy, until recently (Neitzel 2000; chapter 2, this volume). In contrast, several of the defining attributes for the Chacoan regional system (Judge 1991)—such as roads (R. Gwinn Vivian 1983, 1997a), earthen berms (Cameron 2002), and "Great House" outliers (Kantner and Mahoney 2000; M. Marshall et al. 1979)—are fairly recent discoveries whose organizational and integrative implications,

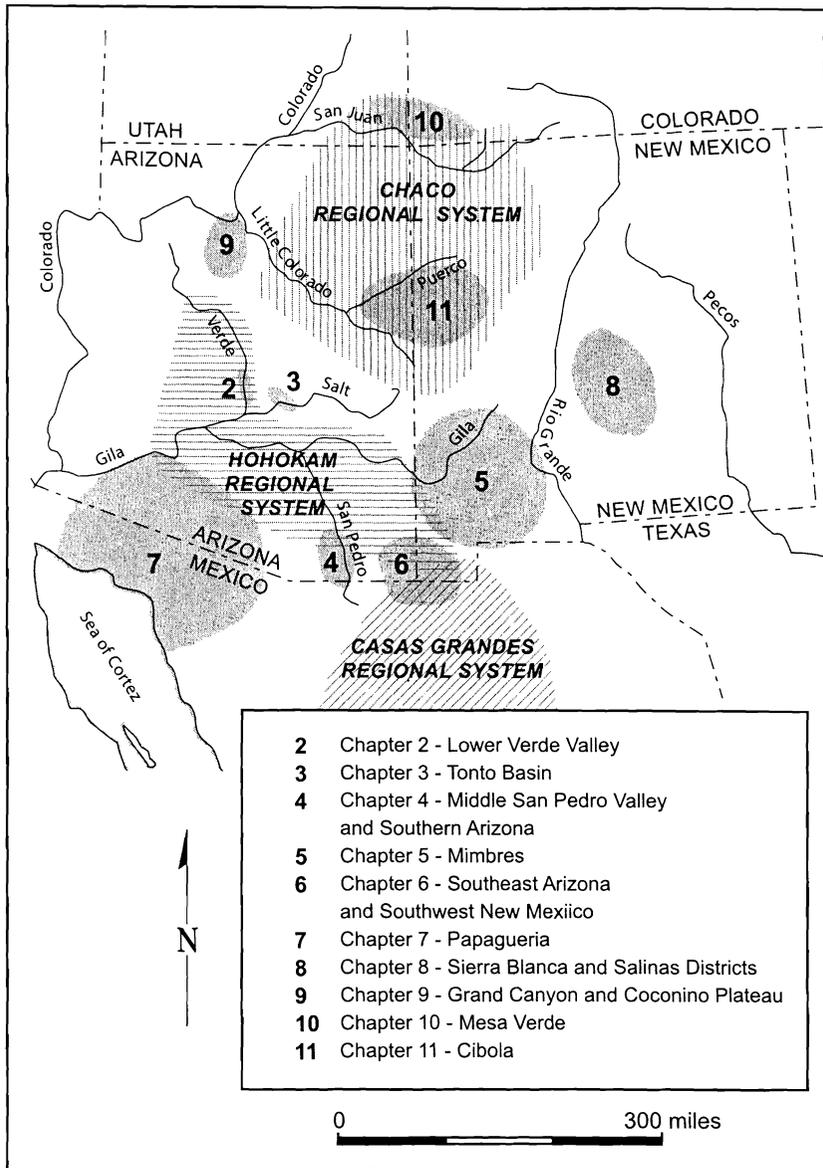


Figure 1.2 The Greater Southwest showing the extent of the Chaco, Hohokam, and Casas Grandes regional systems, as well as the study areas in this volume, identified by chapter number.

particularly their effects on local populations, have sparked considerable discussion and debate (e.g., Kantner 2003a; Van Dyke 1999; R. Gwinn Vivian 1997b:59–61; also B. Mills 2002). For the comparatively new Casas Grandes regional system (P. Fish and Fish 1999), originally considered a periphery of Mesoamerica (Di Peso 1974), variation in ballcourt attributes and macaw-breeding technology is believed to differentiate three interaction zones and the character of economic and political relations among them (Whalen and Minnis 2001). The Casas Grandes regional system has yet to generate much controversy, although it is implicated in models of pan-regional Southwestern political systems (Lekson 1999; see also Carpenter 2002). In various renditions of the distribution and scale of these systems (e.g., Wilcox 1996, 1999), it is important to note that they are unified by the assumption that the autonomy of outlying communities was surrendered, to varying degrees, as relations of social and economic dependency and inequality emerged (see especially S. Plog 1980; Kendrick and Judge 2000; also Urban and Schortman 1999).

Broadening Archaeological Models of Ancient Regional Dynamics

One of the reasons archaeological research in the Greater Southwest continues to be practiced so vigorously is the near certainty that paradigm-shattering surprises, such as evidence of 3,000-year-old irrigation systems (Damp et al. 2002; Mabry 2002) and corn production (Davis et al. 2000), are close at hand. Even though such discoveries often entail expansion or modification of descriptive lexicons and explanatory models (Gumerman and Gell-Mann 1994), the last thing that contemporary Southwestern archaeology needs is another set of terms, such as hinterlands and heartlands, cluttering an already vast literature. Unquestionably, the usefulness of any concept ought to be measured by how well it serves the investigation of problems (e.g., Falconer and Savage 1995). For example, in applying the idea of a “rural-urban continuum” to explain differences in sociocultural integration across the northern Southwest, Gumerman (1973) used the term “hinterland” to contrast the archaeology of Black Mesa (synonymous with “rural”) with that of the Rio Puerco (now known to have Chacoan great houses and road segments [Warburton and Graves 1992]) and Chaco Canyon (a near-“urban” center). Upham (1992) has argued for considering the importance of “hinterland areas and rural regions”

—so-called “empty spaces”—in understanding the emergence of population centers and the evolution of regional systems themselves.

Nevertheless, in view of the prominence of regional-system, world, or world-system studies in contemporary Southwestern archaeology (e.g., Hegmon et al. 2000; Peregrine 2001), resurrecting considerations of local systems, domestic autonomy, and economic independence seems unaccountably anachronistic. Even a cursory examination of the recent literature would support the observation that the investigation of regional variability has been dominated by a focus on large sites and big systems (e.g., Cordell 1996; Lekson 1999; Neitzel 1999; Upham et al. 1994; Wilcox 2005; cf. Hegmon and Plog 1996). “Big archaeology” has created, in our view, a situation where dialogues about local autonomy and livelihood have become comparatively inconspicuous—and if such processes are considered at all, the discussion is decidedly normative (e.g., Lekson 2002:608–609) rather than analytical (Douglas 1995). Yet it is a reasonable presumption that for any period in Southwestern prehistory, a considerable proportion of the Southwest’s entire human population was never fully integrated into any regional system (Haas et al. 1994:220). In addition, significant developments in Southwestern prehistory, such as aggregation, depopulation, and territorial abandonment, often were unrelated to, or unaffected by, heartland or regional system perturbations (J. Hill et al. 2004; M. Nelson and Schachner 2002).

As we see it, a key problem confronting contemporary Southwestern archaeology is integrating the vast range of well-documented regional sequences of occupation and abandonment, many of which are neither long nor continuous (e.g., Matson et al. 1988; Sullivan et al. 2002), with the premises and consequences of regional-system models (McGuire 1996). For some places, such as the Papagueria and the Coconino Plateau, hinterlands always prevailed, whereas in other places, such as the Phoenix and Tucson basins, heartlands were in place seemingly eternally. During other times and in other places, such as east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico, hinterland systems assumed the attributes of heartland systems. Whichever terms—empty spaces, marginal zones, weak patterns, hinterlands, peripheries, cores, centers, heartlands, regional systems, strong patterns, worlds—are adopted to theorize about regional variability across the Southwest, what ultimately is at stake is the veracity of inferences pertaining to the circumstances under which vast portions of the Southwest’s archaeological landscape arose (Cordell et al. 1994).

Themes and Organization of the Volume

This volume is not a backlash to regional-system studies, an advocacy of “small sites” archaeology, or a special plea to incorporate what some might consider peripheral areas into models of Southwestern prehistory (e.g., F. Roberts 1935: 14–15). Importantly, the volume’s contributors were not encouraged to adhere to any particular theoretical perspective or to subscribe to a programmatic agenda in order to create the appearance of interpretive unity. Instead, the volume’s case studies explore the ways in which a consideration of the highly variable archaeological records of hinterlands, which may be underrepresented in the literature (Gumerman and Gell-Mann 1994:16), can be used to expose the assumptions and test the implications of heartlands and regional-system models, and evaluate the degree to which different areas of the prehistoric Southwest were influenced, or not, by the emergence, spread, and decline of any of the regional systems mentioned above.

With these thoughts in mind, chapters 2 (on the lower Verde Valley [central Arizona], by Stephanie M. Whittlesey), 3 (on the Tonto Basin [central Arizona], by Mark D. Elson and Jeffery J. Clark), and 4 (on Southern Arizona and the Middle San Pedro River valley, by Rein Vanderpot and Jeffrey H. Altschul) focus on areas, generally considered to be in or near the core of Hohokam country, that disclose little or no evidence of having been impinged on by the Hohokam regional system. Chapters 5 (on the Mimbres [southwest New Mexico], by Michelle Hegmon and Margaret C. Nelson), 6 (on southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico, by John E. Douglas), and 7 (on the Papagueria [western Arizona], by James M. Bayman) discuss the nature of societies, economies, and patterns of interaction on the fringe of either the Hohokam or the Casas Grandes regional systems. Chapters 8 (on the Sierra Blanca and Salinas districts [south-central New Mexico], by Thomas R. Rocek and Alison E. Rautman) and 9 (on the Grand Canyon and Coconino Plateau [north-central Arizona], by Sidney W. Carter and Alan P. Sullivan III) focus on economic processes and patterns of resource procurement of two widely separated “persistent hinterlands.” Chapters 10 (on Mesa Verde and the northern Southwest, by Sarah H. Schlanger) and 11 (on east-central Arizona and west-central New Mexico, by Andrew I. Duff and Gregson Schachner) illustrate how two hinterlands evolved in different directions—one (Mesa Verde) was eclipsed by the Chacoan regional system, whereas the other (Cibola) was

verging on becoming the next major regional system or world (Zuni) in the pre-Hispanic Southwest. Finally, chapter 12, by Ruth M. Van Dyke, explores how modes of inquiry that focus on “relational thinking” can profitably blend considerations of the origins and evolutionary histories of heartlands and hinterlands alike, thereby providing an integrated framework to appreciate the complex interactions among peoples’ reactions to changing landscapes, identities, and power.

All of these efforts are intended to enhance our understanding of the ancient Southwest’s highly variable demographic, occupational, settlement, and economic histories. We think that progress in Southwestern archaeology is not measured solely by the number of competing conceptual structures in service but, rather, by degrees of intelligibility that emerge from continually challenging orthodoxy, exposing questionable interpretive assumptions, and rethinking old concepts in light of new data.

More than 30 years ago, Walter W. Taylor—no stranger to hinterlands archaeology (Taylor 1958)—remarked that “only by constantly making more specific and more stringent theoretical demands upon our data can we realize their full potential” (Taylor 1972:30). By privileging neither hinterlands nor heartlands, strong nor weak patterns, big sites nor small sites, decorated nor undecorated ceramics, we believe that the interpretive potential of the Southwest’s remarkable archaeological record can be realized and some genuine progress can be made in clarifying the Southwest’s rich and complicated cultural past.

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Not the Northeastern Periphery

The Lower Verde Valley in Regional Context

Stephanie M. Whittlesey

Archaeologists have struggled to explain regional variability in Hohokam culture since it was first determined that Snaketown was only one of many Hohokam sites. As a consequence of cultural-resource-management archaeology in the late 1970s and 1980s, it was realized as well not only that Hohokam sites were distributed from the Papagueria to the San Pedro River valley and from the Flagstaff region to the middle Santa Cruz River valley but also that all of these areas were archaeologically heterogeneous. They differed in population density, agricultural technology, ceremonial organization, ceramic traditions, and other attributes. Models proposed to explain this variability—which included environmental variation, political factors, economy, and even militaristic expansion—expanded along with the number of excavated sites. One model that proved extremely popular was that of the core and periphery (Wilcox and Shenk 1977), which rapidly became the accepted explanation for regional variability in Hohokam culture and settlement for several decades.

A long-term research project funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and carried out by Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI), provided a laboratory for evaluating the core-periphery model and other models of Hohokam regional organization (Whittlesey, Ciolek-Torrello, et al. 1998). For many years, the lower Verde region, along with the Tonto Basin, was regarded as the “Northeastern Hohokam Periphery” (e.g., Wood and McAllister 1980, 1984). The Lower Verde Archaeological Project (LVAP) demonstrated not only that this designation was indefensible but also that the core-periphery model was not applicable in prehistory. The project also showed that, despite geographic proximity and environmental similarity, the archaeology of the lower Verde River region differed from the Hohokam heartland *and* from the Tonto Basin, its twin in the so-called “Northeastern Hohokam Periphery” (chapter 3, this volume). Moreover, the lower Verde region, like other areas of central Arizona,

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