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Book Reviews

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WEALTH: CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ENGLISH AMERICA by James G. Gibb 1996, Plenum Press, New York. Foreword by Halcott P. Green and Stanley South, 283 pages, \$49.50 (cloth).

Reviewed by Elizabeth S. Peña

James G. Gibb's book represents an important contribution to historical archaeology for several reasons. He provides an excellent, well-written summary and analysis of consumer behavior theory, stating that historical archaeologists can benefit from a technique that is not strictly anthropological, but one that is historical as well. He demonstrates this approach ably, with well-founded definitions of key terms (e.g., wealth, commodity), and thoroughly researched text backed up by footnotes. Gibb makes the plea that archaeologists re-focus on the household unit, arguing convincingly that consumer choice is linked to the perpetuation of individual households and the establishment and re-establishment of household identity. He is not the first to advocate this position (e.g., Deetz 1982, Beaudry 1984), and his words represent a return to basics, a re-awareness that the basic unit of archaeological study is the site. It is true that each household site is a "building block, enabling historical archaeologists to move to a higher level of abstraction" (Klein 1991: 88); however, the difficulties in assembling these building blocks should encourage archaeologists to take more detailed looks at individual sites. Though Gibb's data are from the 17th-century Chesapeake, much of his approach has merit even in 19th-century contexts. According to Gibb, all material culture is wealth, which is situated in the household, and households use wealth to express their identities and aspirations (pp. 40-43). Using archaeological evidence from the sites of Compton (1650s-1660s) and Patuxent Point (1660s-1670s), Gibb examines four types of wealth, or object domains: plantation siting, homelot organization, ceramic and glass vessels, and burial practices.

In Chapters 1-3, Gibb provides a foundation for his analysis by means of a detailed overview of consumer behavior theory in his-

torical archaeology. Chapters 4-7 consider various aspects of 17th-century Maryland. In Chapter 4, Gibb uses primary documents to derive 17th-century meanings for such terms as "wealth" and "commodity." Chapter 5 provides a history of Maryland and Chapter 6 details settlement, focusing on the significance of plantation siting. Chapter 7 focuses specifically on William Stephens Land, the tidewater area where Compton and Patuxent Point are located. The discussion and analysis of archaeological investigations at Compton and Patuxent Point follow in Chapters 8 and 9, respectively. Chapter 10 compares site variability, and Chapter 11 summarizes the finds in terms of consumer behavior.

Gibb begins with a thorough review of the literature, outlining the development of consumer behavior theory, as well as contributing his own critiques. While acknowledging the significance of world systems theory, Gibb finds that the emphasis on the "core" relegates life on the "periphery" to passive and reactive choices. Marxian approaches are criticized for blurring the distinction between individuals and socio-economic classes, while mentalist perspectives are viewed as being limited by their ahistorical nature and their inability to account for culture change. Much consumer behavior theory is constrained by its over-emphasis on socio-economic status. Gibb prefers the framework provided by material culture theory as espoused by Daniel Miller (1987) and Grant McCracken (1988). As Gibb summarizes, "consumer choice is situated in the household, which—through its acquisitions—articulates a sense of itself. . . The physical nature of the objects, the manner and contexts in which they are used, contributes to their significance" (p. 24). While Gibb does discuss Kopytoff's biographical approach (1986) outlining the "social lives" of objects (p. 51), he does not consider the cultural redefinitions of artifacts to any extent. Gibb blurs the line between production and consumption, asserting that this division is artificial, presentist, and sexist (pp. 21-22). This marks an interesting contrast to scholars focusing on somewhat later time periods (18th-20th century), who have reacted to the lack of

emphasis on symbolic behavior in consumer theory by advocating a more intent focus on the act of consumption, or "shopping as meaningful action" (Cook, Yamin, and McCarthy 1996).

Gibb's work is also important in its use of data from the "grey literature" of cultural resource management (CRM). While he found the data lacking in some respects, he was able to reanalyze them and create his own interpretation. Using CRM information is difficult, but possible. This is a significant point, because so much historical archaeological data are derived from CRM projects, yet the reports often remain unread on shelves at various state agencies and archaeological firms. Using these reports contributes to a more integrated field and to better archaeology.

At Compton, Gibb was unable to find evidence of spatial segregation other than the existence of three small, separate dwellings. Analysis of four middens around the dwellings, using Boone's H measure of heterogeneity, revealed no significant differences between them; all appear to have consisted of kitchen refuse with some trash. Most trash was disposed of in pits located a distance from the dwellings. Cluster analysis indicated that units nearest the homelot core produced the most artifacts and the most artifact classes. Up to 50 percent of the preparation and presentation vessels were non-English (Dutch), leading to the question of whether this fact influenced cooking and serving.

The spatial analysis of middens at Patuxent Point bore similar results to analysis undertaken for Compton. The biggest difference between the artifact collections from Compton and Patuxent Point is the absence of Dutch wares at the latter site, most likely attributable to the decline of Dutch trade in the Chesapeake. Patuxent Point contained a cemetery of 18 graves, composed of at least two households in three separate clusters. One of these clusters may represent servants, as none of the burials were in coffins, no children were included, and one individual appears to have been an African.

Gibb's careful work enables him to point to a number of features as consumer choices that are not usually considered as such. For example, holes and molds from load-bearing

posts at Patuxent Point revealed evidence of repair. Similarly, Compton bore evidence of chimney replastering and post replacement. While earthfast structures such as these have often been labeled "impermanent," Gibb highlights the significance of these minimal repairs, noting "Maintenance without expansion need not indicate stasis; it simply marks a different strategy in the use of wealth—a consumer choice" (p. 217). Surpluses, Gibb suggests, were used to purchase additional land (p. 233); or, as mentioned in a footnote, they were exhausted by debt (n. 15, p. 236).

Gibb notes that the ceramic assemblages from Compton and Patuxent Point belie the "hurly-burly" stereotype of the frontier (pp. 164, 208). While the ceramics are subjected to detailed distribution analysis, the discussion on ceramics might have been better served by a more detailed description of the role of these items in the 17th-century Chesapeake, and a related commentary on the significance of these wares. Because food is so central to family life, information about food preparation practices, from floral and faunal evidence as well as from documentary sources, would have proved insightful in understanding family identity, particularly in light of the Dutch wares from Compton.

The contextual approach that lies at the heart of *The Archaeology of Wealth* reminds us of the scope of historical archaeology: by examining specific households, Gibb has indeed provided for a greater general understanding of consumer behavior in English America.

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The author currently teaches archaeology courses at the University of Buffalo, as well as acting as a consultant in historical archaeology for Hartgen Archaeological Associates, Inc. Her teaching interests include economic adaptation and acculturation, specifically regarding wampum and its role in the colonial economy of the Northeast.

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LOOKING FOR LEADS: SHIPWRECKS OF THE PAST REVEALED BY CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD, by Christian Ahlström 1997, The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Helsinki. 238 pages, 57 figures, 16 tables, 1 appendix, no price given.

Reviewed by Stefan H. Claesson

Seafaring, perhaps the "most international of all man's innumerable industries" (p. 211), has been well documented in the post-

medieval period of Northern Europe, as pointed out by Christian Ahlström, author of *Looking for Leads*. Published by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, *Looking for Leads* is exactly that, a presentation of methods for analyzing written sources in identifying shipwrecks and the contributions of archaeological finds and historical documents to interpreting the past from a marine context. Ahlström's research focuses specifically on the post-medieval period in the Baltic Sea and presents a series of case studies that illustrate how maritime archaeology and history offer insights into our understanding of past political, economic, and societal patterns. Though Ahlström repeatedly insists that the methodological approaches proposed in this book should be used only "to chart and identify wrecks in specific geographical sectors of the Baltic" (p. 212), the interpretive approaches he posits can certainly also be applied to other geographical regions with extensive written archives.

At first glance, one may be distracted by typographical errors on the book's cover and the erratic flow of text that is probably limited by the translation to English. The clear and concise presentation of methodological approaches for the interpretation of maritime resources and contributions of maritime resources to history, however, is refreshing. Few publications have tackled theoretical issues within maritime archaeology or presented a "how to" approach toward identifying and interpreting shipwrecks and written sources. Beginning with basic definitions of history and archaeology, Ahlström highlights the importance of historical studies in providing overall views of the past, but also notes that history lacks the nuances and grassroots that are provided by archaeology. Through the presentation of problems of interpretation of material evidence, the scope and limits of documentary marine archaeology, and a number of theoretical perspectives, the reader is easily able to grasp the theoretical concepts and methodological approaches behind the presentation of the case studies of numerous Scandinavian shipwrecks (the flute ship *Anna Maria*, the naval frigate *Birger Jarl*, the Älvsnabben Finds, the wrecks at Jussarö and Borstö, Finland, and the schooner *Fäderneslandet*).