

Power and Gender in Oneota Culture: A Study of a Late Prehistoric People, by Thomas Edward Berres. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001. xii, 253 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$35.00 paper.

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Two things immediately attract readers to this volume: its striking design and visual appeal, and its title, which incorporates two buzzwords now in vogue among social scientists. Archeologists, sometimes perceived as consumed by the study of objects rather than people, are now putting more effort into sorting out relationships of "power" within and between prehistoric societies. At the same time, feminist archeologists are diligently working to "engender the past" by closely examining archeological data in ways that may lead to an understanding of male *and* female roles and influence (i.e., power) within those societies. Oneota people, representing a widespread late prehistoric culture, occupied portions of the Prairie Peninsula, a mixed biome of grasslands and patchy timber that covered an area extending from Minnesota to Missouri and from Iowa to Indiana. The direct historical approach and archeological evidence have determined that the Oneota culture was ancestral to the historic-period Chiwere Siouan-speaking tribes, including the Ioway, Oto, Missouri, and Winnebago. Various Oneota groups occupied the Iowa landscape during the late prehistoric period (ca. 1100–1650), and the tribes just listed resided there at various times during the contact period.

Berres counts himself among a cadre of young archeologists who view themselves as the torchbearers for a new paradigm of archeological theory that he calls "Anthropological Archaeology." Berres informs us that "science offers no security, for there are no absolute truths about the real world" (22). He implies that Scientific Archaeology (a.k.a. the New Archaeology), the paradigm under which the profession has labored for much of the past 40 years, was something of a sham perpetrated by Lewis Binford (its most significant proponent) in order to garner National Science Foundation monies (17). I know from the bibliography that Berres has read the works of James Brown, Robert Hall, Clark Mallam, David Benn, Melvin Fowler, Dale Henning, and many other archeologists notable for their anthropological interpretations of midwestern archeological data, yet in a stunning bit of revisionism he claims, "The New Archaeologists waived their right to include religion, gender, cosmology, and ideology in their models" (20). The New Archaeology does represent an era during which the riddles of culture history, chronology, subsistence, and settlement patterning

have been carefully unraveled using the scientific method, but I don't recall an abdication by archeologists of the right to do anthropology!

Berres's anti-science bias is evident in his data set. In successive chapters, he describes faunal and ceramic data from the Lawrence and Keeshin Farm sites, two ostensibly "Oneota villages" situated along the Middle Rock River in northwestern Illinois. However, his analysis is not rigorous and fails to provide the context necessary for the reader to determine if these assemblages are actually comparable, let alone relevant to his primary arguments regarding power and gender. Conclusions drawn from the data are intuitive, if not trite. For instance, "Power permeated human social relationships and practices in Oneota everyday life and would be apparent within the household through certain stereotyped tasks: men hunting mammals, and women in charge of household economic activities. . . . One can then argue for gender complementarity for creative production, with both men and women actors performing important roles in society. Gender roles were interdependent to create unity or harmony" (122).

Berres does not define *power*, but interprets it as an unfocused presence in all matters of everyday life, such as management of household activities (30), artistic inspiration (34), interpretation of dreams and visions (37), reciprocity (49), food (80), luck (112), making decisions (119), creativity (137), material symbols (144), metaphor (160), ambiguity (165), artistic expression (166), habitual gatherings (168), food production (168), carrying out tasks (177), resistance to domination (182), imagery (192), and so on. He argues that power was ubiquitous, generative, and integrative, but never a coercive force. Berres suggests that men and woman in Oneota society shared power in a "separate but equal" fashion.

I did enjoy the chapter on thunderbird symbolism. I would recommend it for its review of ethnographic and archeological sources to those who may have an interest in the subject. In general, though, the book misses its mark. The "new" paradigm, as touted here, seems less revolutionary than devolutionary. The idea that the New Archaeology was not anthropological archeology is ridiculous. By rejecting the scientific method, Berres offers interpretations that are merely adventures in the "might-have-been." Still, there is much here that is interesting.

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