Socialising Complexity: Structure, Interaction and Power in Archaeological Discourse, edited by Sheila Kohring & Stephanie Wynne-Jones, 2007. Oxford: Oxbow Books; ISBN-13 978-1-84217-294-0 paperback £32 & US$64; iv+244 pp., 40 figs., 4 tables

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This volume contributes to a growing literature in archaeology that grapples with the concept of 'complexity' and its relationship with other concepts, including hierarchy, social evolution, centralization, power, chiefdom and state. The editors and contributors work to 'complicate' complexity, by critiquing unilineal models of social evolution and the common, but often non-explicit, merging of complexity with hierarchy. By 'socializing' complexity, the editors seem to mean integrating variability, flexibility and individual agency into what they claim are excessively unilineal and simplified models of complexity that are heavily influenced by Western concepts of 'progress'. The volume provides an introductory chapter by the editors, two theoretical commentaries by Robert Chapman and Carole Crumley respectively, and ten case studies from Europe, North and South America, Africa and central Asia.

In Chapter one, the editors lay out their goals: to seek out alternatives to unilineal, mechanistic models of social evolution which ignore or miss the true complexity of individual societies and of the lives of active individuals in different times and places. Complexity

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should be understood not as a kind of socio-political structure, but

> the myriad, diverse relationships, the ways they interconnect and create new contingencies and how they are mediated through objects, individuals, and communities, creating the complex social realities embedded in all societies at all scales (p. 2).

Thus, archaeologists are encouraged to incorporate multivocality and multiple scales of analysis, especially that of individual agency, into their analyses. The editors suggest that several diverse theoretical perspectives may help us revive our analyses, including Complex Adaptive Systems, an approach borrowed from biology. However, contributors refer most often to heterarchy: structures or systems that include units that may be related in a ranked fashion or in a lateral fashion, or shift flexibly between these kinds of relationships. Heterarchy is meant to describe a system that is ordered and complicated, but not necessarily hierarchical, a structure that incorporates flexibility and shifting relationships as normative. Throughout the volume, authors use the metaphors of webs, weaving, mosaic, and 'meshwork' (in Crumley's contribution) to describe social complexity, eschewing metaphors of staircases, ladders, or pyramids.

I am sympathetic with the authors' frustration with unilineal evolutionary approaches that privilege structure over agency and conflate complexity with hierarchy and centralized power. I am persuaded that the 'bottom-up' approach (Herrera in this volume) has a great deal to contribute to our overly top-down understanding of prehistoric societies. The contributors turn to a variety of archaeological evidence to illuminate the enormous diversity and variability of what they construe to be complex societies. A common strategy is to compare evidence of relatively independent data sets, such as architectural plans and evidence of production, to analyse how family structure, political arrangements, and economic production might be interconnected and/or cross-cutting.

Several papers look at landscape and settlement evidence. For example, Elizabeth DeMarrais compares the layout of domestic space and public space in two different Andean locations to examine the interaction of different levels of social cohesion. In another Andean case study, Alexander Herrera analyses relationships among settlements, tombs, enclosures, and natural features of the landscape, to examine 'how did people socialize space in the pre-Columbian Andes' (p. 179) at different scales. Stephanie Wynne-Jones uses regional survey along the east coast of Africa to understand how the interconnections of early cities and hinterlands shift, leading to relationships that, at times, are quite different from those implied by documentary sources. David Robinson provides a case study from the interior of southern California in late prehistoric times; this differs from the other contributions by focusing on a prehistoric population using wild foods and impermanent architecture. Robinson effectively considers natural landscape features, rock art, bedrock mortars and evidence of camp sites as reflecting the mosaic of human adaptation in the region.

Other papers focus on production and distribution of artefacts in a community or polity context. Stella Souvatzi examines production of fine pottery and other crafts in Neolithic Greece; within villages, production appears to be specialized, but distribution is widespread and indicates egalitarian access by all households. Sheila Kohring and colleagues discuss ceramic production in a major Copper Age community in Iberia, using materials analysis to consider the organization of production and implications for larger questions of both vertical and horizontal social relationships. Several papers — Lane on the Andes, Giedelmann Reyes on the Muisca of Colombia, and Sneath on central Asia — incorporate ethnohistoric, ethnographic and documentary resources into their analyses. Finally, there is Kristian Kristiansen's chapter on Bronze Age Scandinavia, which seems a kind of resistance to many of the themes of the volume: while examining evidence of decentralization, he resolutely confirms the hierarchical, stratified nature of these societies, from a very top-down perspective.

Despite my sympathy with the fundamental goals of this volume, there are some problems. An odd thing is the lack of any explanation of how the book was developed and who the contributors are. No affiliations are provided for the editors or contributors: perhaps this is meant as a levelling mechanism? Or, did the 'Contributors' section get lost in the final editing? In the Acknowledgements of Bob Chapman's chapter, I learned that his paper had originated at a conference at Cambridge University; a quick Google, and one realizes that this volume contains a subset of papers from a 2005 conference called 'Defining Social Complexity: approaches to power and interaction in the archaeological record'. It contains the work mostly of Cambridge staff and recent PhD students. It is unclear to me why this is never mentioned. A self-reflective archaeology requires information about the context of research and publication.

The diversity and range of research discussed is a strength of the volume, and the chapters report on extraordinary long-term field projects. Unfortunately, the theoretical discussion becomes repetitive and somewhat frustrating. The basic problem is prefigured in the introduction where the editors state: '…yet it

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seems that every approach that attempts to generalize/define the various aspects leads to a narrowing of the concept: a simplification of diversity into a manageable form' (p. 2). Well…yes: that's what science — or analysis in general — does. While the approaches advocated here do lead us to rich descriptions of individual cases, the big picture is lost, and comparisons become very particularistic. One might argue that the big picture has received far too much attention, but I do not think that eliminating it entirely is the appropriate answer. The fundamental conclusion of these analyses is that all societies, of all time periods, are 'complex', and that to claim otherwise is demeaning to ancient and/or indigenous people: '…to regard complexity as a property common to all society and human interaction is only possible within a scholarship that has embraced inclusivity and multivocality' (p. 7). The authors seem to be using a common-sense understanding of 'complex' to mean 'complicated'. But, if everything is complex, then 'complexity' itself is not very fruitful to study. Demonstrating that all societies are complex leaves open questions about how societies are different, and which differences have been significant in the development of the ancient and modern world.

The editors and contributors have provided a legitimate, if somewhat repetitive, critique of simplistic taxonomies (e.g. chiefdom/state or ranked/stratified) and unilineal models. They have foregrounded the valuable point that lateral social relationships — e.g. kinship, gender, production, feasting etc. — play as important roles in daily life as vertical relationships, and archaeologists should put effort into understanding the materialization of these lateral relationships. In addition, they have effectively emphasized that large and differentiated social groups may share egalitarian communal ideologies and practices as well as hierarchical ones. However, in attempting to 'socialize complexity', they have thrown out the baby of broad comparative patterning with the bathwater of Western models of progress. The volume demonstrates creative analysis of rich sets of archaeological data. I hope that the authors in the future will escape from their current polemics and also contribute to the big picture of the development of human societies.

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