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7

The Siteless Survey: A Regional-Scale Data Collection Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades the investigatory universe for archaeological field research has gradually shifted from site to region. The major impetus for this change has come from Lewis Binford's programmatic statement, which systematically relates the spatial strategy of fieldwork to the demands placed upon archaeological data by archaeological approaches (Binford 1964). The shift from a qualitative summary of assemblages to the explication of variability in the archaeological record dictates that the data incorporate a controlled spatial element and provide an adequate basis for quantification. Distributions of artifacts in space, not simply the location of some set of artifacts, are requisite for these kinds of interests. Furthermore, both systems theory and ecological approaches require distributional data that can be correlated in the dimension of space with other cultural, biotic, and physical variables. Drawing upon Vescelius' (1960) work, Binford identifies probability sampling designs as effective techniques for the *operationalization* of his scheme (Binford 1964). Minimally, this technique permits demonstration of the relationship between the data analyzed and the universe for which conclusions are made.

Of Binford's initial observations, only probability sampling has seen substantial elaboration in subsequent literature (e.g., Mueller 1974, 1976; Ragir 1967; Redman 1973, 1974; Thomas 1969). While not detracting from the critical importance of the sampling discussion, it must be remembered

ADVANCES IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHOD AND THEORY VOL 6

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former can be quantified either individually or aggregated by environment and compared with similar quantifications of intercluster space. If cluster contents do not differ significantly from the contents of intersite space in the same environment, one can safely conclude that the clusters represent concentrated activity loci directly involved in the exploitation of that particular environment. If the two descriptions are not isomorphic, then, depending on the functional nature of the difference, it should be possible to show that they combine a processing activity with acquisition or that they include domestic functions or even that the clusters represent staging areas for a diverse set of procurement activities only one or a few of which were carried out in the immediate environment.

Clusters commonly occur on or near environmental boundaries, presumably because a variety of resources can be exploited from a single location. Interpretive arguments are usually based on spatial proximity and a knowledge of of the sort suggested here, it would the potential resources. With distributional data tions directly from the archaeological record. This kind of analytical approach is not restricted to the simple site location question originally posed, be possible to demonstrate these kinds of propositions directly from the archaeological record. This kind of analytical approach is not restricted to the simple site location question originally posed, nor is it the only kind of analysis that could be profitably undertaken. It does serve to show, however, that sites or clusters as *analytical* units can play an important role in this kind of approach. Instead of posing insoluable analytical problems, the systematic acquisition of the whole archaeological record, including low-density areas, can yield more valid and reliable insights into the nature of the archaeological record, even the nature of archaeological sites.

Lacking an intellectual reason for structuring the acquisition of archaeological data around the site concept, the clerical functions of the concept remain nonetheless real. Regardless of the utility of the view taken here, the site notion will undoubtedly continue to be a major organizing device in endeavors such as state surveys, site numbering systems, the National Register of Historic Places, and other inventory schemes. Although we are not prepared to address alternative solutions to the problems posed for these bookkeeping functions, it is important to note the effect that these activities might have upon the quality of the record as it is preserved, salvaged, or otherwise managed for the future (see Lipe 1974 for a discussion of these issues). The obvious consequence is that a bias toward high-density clusters inue to characterize our knowledge of the archaeological record and will cont that important elements of the total archaeological resource will be purged or simply unmanaged because they are not easily incorporated within this system. There are clear implications for the public sport of surface-collecting and similar activities. Preservation must be regional in scale if such biases are to be avoided.

A REGIONAL DATA ACQUISITION STRATEGY

If the foregoing observations about the assumptions that shape traditional approaches to archaeological fieldwork are correct, it is apparent that these same assumptions have been carried over in most modern work of regional scope. This is not to say that recent regional surveys fail to show substantial design improvement, only that many of the basic assumptions underlying data recovery have not been directly involved in these changes.

As noted earlier, systematic surface collections conducted within sites do provide a model for effective regional data acquisition that can be modified to accommodate regional requirements. Figure 7.2 presents a general model for the structure of regional data acquisition. It is intended to encompass

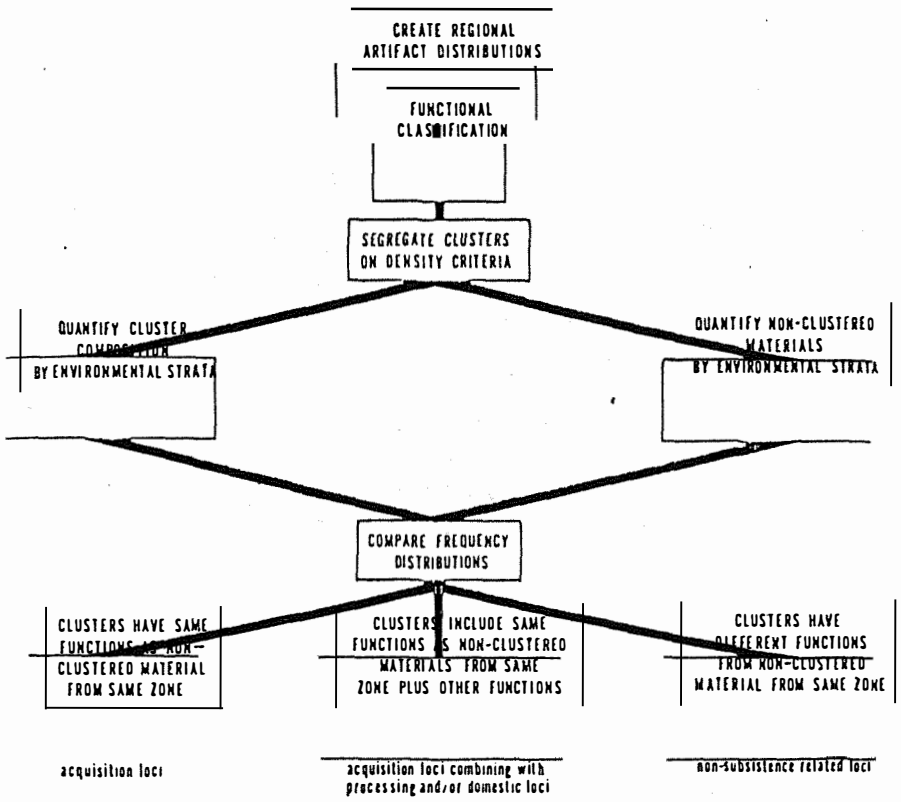

Figure 7.2. Model of archaeological data recovery. A multistage program involving both survey and excavation is obtained by successive redefinition of regions and repetition of the subsequent procedures.

Exhibit B.08c