HOUSEHOLD CHORES and HOUSEHOLD CHOICES

Theorizing the Domestic Sphere in Historical Archaeology

Edited by
KERRI S. BARILE and JAMIE C. BRANDON

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

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Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0380
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Typeface: Minion

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The paper on which this book is printed meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Science–Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Household chores and household choices : theorizing the domestic sphere in historical archaeology / edited by Kerri S. Barile and Jamie C. Brandon.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8173-1395-8 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-8173-5098-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. United States—Antiquities. 2. Historic sites—United States. 3. Material culture—United States. 4. Landscape—Social aspects—United States—History. 5. Households—United States—History. 6. Family—United States—History. 7. Sex role—United States—History. 8. Archaeology and history—United States. 9. Feminist archaeology—United States. 10. Archaeology— Methodology. I. Barile, Kerri S. II. Brandon, Jamie C.
E159.5.H68 2004
640'.973—dc22

2004001019

Acknowledgments

As editors, we would like to thank Maria Franklin and all our colleagues in her graduate seminar in household archaeology at The University of Texas at Austin, as well as all who participated in the symposium at the 2001 meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology in Long Beach, California, from which this volume has grown. Not all who gave papers could contribute to this volume, unfortunately, but all have in some way shaped our dialogue about households.

We would like to express our gratitude to Laurie Wilke and Amy Young, who read early drafts of this volume and provided us with invaluable advice and thought-provoking comments, and Mary Beaudry, for belatedly joining the volume and adding her insightful contribution. Judy Goffman, our technical editor, smoothed out all of the final wrinkles. Personally, we would like to thank Sean and T.J.—for putting up with the weekends spent at work and the "archaeology talk" at the dinner table.

Foreword

Maria Franklin

The social unit that we refer to as the "household" has been the subject of intensive study within anthropological archaeology, most notably since the 1970s, and particularly within prehistory (for example, Flannery 1976; Gero and Conkey 1991; Wilk and Rathje 1982). For archaeologists, the household is often the most basic social unit of analysis "accessible" through the archaeological record, typically via residential structures and activity areas. The focus on households, however, cannot simply be reduced to the issue of archaeological "visibility." Unpacking the household archaeologically may be as close as any of us gets to comprehending the experiences of past individuals and as far as we may go in revealing the intimacies of their lives. Moreover, its influence regularly transgresses the domestic, as the household is both a microcosm of society and an active agent instituting change within that society. As James Deetz (1982:724) once wrote, "Whether a structural, functional, or evolutionary approach is taken to obtain this information, the household reveals relationships of thought and substance that can aid immensely in understanding the past."

While it is certainly true that historical archaeologists have greatly concerned themselves with the "domestic" since the discipline's emergence, it also holds true that we have yet to develop a substantial theoretical body of work concerning historic households. Mary Beaudry's (1989a:84) observation still carries weight today: "if one uses the anthropological definition of households that stresses the dynamics of this highly variable social grouping as the yardstick for evaluating what has been done, it is clear that domestic sites of the historical period have seldom been examined from what can truly be called a household-oriented perspective." We typically fail to even define "household" while we regularly employ the term. The end result is often an uncritical imposition upon the past of our contemporary notions of the household. Since the dominant American household norm, or "domestic" realm, relies heavily on the intact, nuclear family for its definition, many of us presuppose that the

family does the same work as the household, then as now, and regardless of place.

The authors presented in this volume make no assumptions about the nature of households. As each chapter unfolds, it becomes apparent that just as it is ubiquitous, the household defies singular definitions and lays claim to a multiplicity of forms, functions, and meanings. The fluidity and vibrancy of the household is underscored as its life cycle is inextricably tied to the births, marriages, departures, and deaths of its members, whether living on a Spanish colonial rancho in the Rio Grande Valley or on a plantation in the Bahamas. The household as a social network instrumental to the formation and resilience of subjugated communities is highlighted in works concerning African Americans owned by Andrew Jackson and those establishing new lives in post-emancipation Texas. The household is deeply implicated not only in biological reproduction, but in the social reproduction of individuals where racial, class, and gender identities are constructed worlds apart from within a Colorado coal camp to a home in the Old South. The essentialized household as a cozy, safe, and peaceful domestic haven is challenged by research in Arkansas and South Carolina, where householders divided by race and slavery illustrate that household relations could be highly discordant. Yet we are also reminded of the household's role in reproducing and perpetuating naturalizing ideologies. In Massachusetts, where women's coalition-building threatened to disrupt Victorian gender norms in part by violating men's public spaces, paternalism worked to diffuse women's attempts to create a woman-centered, community-based household. Eight decades later in a California logging camp, we find company management using paternalism in the guise of the metaphorical family to maintain order and discipline over laborers (particularly single males), largely through household structure and organization.

From front to back, there is no shortage of concrete archaeological and historical analyses, rigorous theorizing, socially relevant questions, or political consciousness centered on the household within these pages. In their introduction, editors Kerri Barile and Jamie Brandon provide one of the very few historical perspectives and surveys of the study of households within historical archaeology. The volume is further strengthened by commentaries from two leading scholars of the discipline, Mary Beaudry and Suzanne Spencer-Wood. Each has been instrumental in advancing household-level research and social theory in archaeology, advocating in particular for contextual and interpretive approaches and feminist and gendered analysis.

To close, all of the authors are to be commended for their collective endeavor in revealing the productive potential of a household-oriented perspective. Given the diversity of case studies and approaches, *Household Chores and Household Choices* represents a critical step toward building a corpus of theories of households that is so direly needed in historical archaeology.

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1

Introduction

Household Chores; or, the Chore of Defining the Household

Jamie C. Brandon and Kerri S. Barile

The household is a school of power. There, within the door, learn the tragi-comedy of human life.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1883

A comfortable house is a great source of happiness. It ranks immediately after health and a good conscience.

Sydney Smith, 1843

Home is a name, a word, it is a strong one; stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit ever answered to, in the strongest conjuration.

Charles Dickens, 1844

"Home" is any four walls that enclose the right person.

Helen Rowland, 1903

Home is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse.

George Bernard Shaw, 1903

Reflecting upon the quotations that open this chapter, it can be no surprise that archaeologists and historians have a great deal of trouble untangling the terminology and meaning surrounding the words *house, household,* and *home.* These terms can point to a simple building, a more ephemeral place (geographically specific or general) connected to emotion and feeling, a "school of power" (as in the Emerson quotation), a terrain upon which culture is learned, a gendered space, shelter against nature, and the sum of its contents (the listing phenomena exemplified by both probate inventories and the "House that Jack Built" nursery rhyme). A household can elicit some of these images or all of these things at once. Above all, house and home can be used as metaphors for almost anything one can imagine—a fact that points toward the all-pervading

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nature of the term and the importance of unraveling its multiple meanings in order to understand the past(s).

Although it is a problematic concept, archaeologists have given a lot of thought and effort to households, recognizing almost from the discipline's inception the importance of house and hearth to understanding the past. Likewise, there have been many attempts to deal with this domestic rubric and to untangle that maze of strands that render past households difficult to discern clearly through the historical and archaeological records.

HOUSES, HOUSELOTS, AND HISTORIC HOMES: ROOTS OF HOUSEHOLD APPROACHES FROM ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Within the historic preservation movement, interest in *houses* was a paramount founding focus. In the United States, it is in the early roots of the preservation movement where "Americans developed their own distinctive version of historic preservation while Europeans were restoring their churches and castles or gathering vernacular architecture and folk objects into outdoor museums" (Alexander 1996:88). Alexander is referring to the historic house museum—a single dwelling or group of buildings, surrounded by a house lot or extensive acreage, with historic significance (once inhabited by a famous individual or family; representative of an architectural style or architect; or, signifying a particular historic event). The first historic house museum, the Hasbrook House in Newburgh, New York—Washington's headquarters during the Revolutionary War—was established in 1850. In 1856, Ann Pamela Cunningham began the fight to save Mount Vernon, Washington's plantation on the Potomac River. Her preservation work, and the ensuing creation of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, was to become the model of household preservation in the United States for the next 100 years (Alexander 1996:89).

Like Mount Vernon, early-twentieth-century projects that involved historical research and archaeology were framed around homes and the "enshrinement of home sites and landscapes belonging to the nation's 'founding fathers' " (Sanford 1999:7), thus bounding the definition and assumed function of the household by gender, race, and status. For example, archaeological and historical research at Stratford Hall Plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia, home of the Lee family and birthplace of Robert E. Lee, began in 1929 with the creation of the Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation, a group modeled on the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. Archaeological excavations concentrated on the area surrounding the Great House in an attempt to reconstruct the outbuildings and landscape built by, and modified by, the Lee *men* and, moreover,

to establish Stratford as "a civic shrine" dedicated to Robert E. Lee (Sanford 1999:7).

Certainly during the mid and late nineteenth century, as modernity solidified and industrialization progressed, "tokens from the nation's childhood" became symbolic of a dying past that needed to be preserved, catalogued, and recorded "to bolster the mature and rational evolution of the Bourgeois and bureaucratic state" (Boyer 1994:378). Part and parcel of the nation's new concern for remembrance is its obsession with forgetting and erasure (Flores 2002:20–25; Trouillot 1995). Historic homes, along with battlefield sites, became the perfect venue for both remembrance and erasure. Such strong focus on the white, wealthy male individual (such as Washington, Lee, or Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage in Tennessee) easily created an aggregate household completely subsumed under what the public identified as the "head of household." Any evidence that might complicate this picture of a harmonious household is "silenced by the weight of its structure" (Flores 2002:21), and the past was presented with idyllic, innocent charm.

Early-twentieth-century household archaeology and historic research was not limited to large-scale plantations and homesteads but also extended to the creation of some of the first historic districts in the country. Even these districts, however, remained focused on the "household as architecture" idea first established in the mid-1800s, one that was directly tied to the "great men of history" myth. The first historic district in the nation was created between 1928 and 1931 in Charleston, South Carolina (Howard 1987:115). Throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, prominent local citizens of Charleston witnessed the slow demise of large portions of the historic downtown area. The automobile and the creation of new commercial venues caused the widening of roads, the removal of streetside landscaping and ornate ironwork, and the outright destruction of several historic homes once belonging to the Charleston elite. The Charleston Historic District was thus designed to protect both the house structure and house lot from destruction or alteration. (See Brandon's chapter in this volume for the gendered implications of the Charleston historic preservation movement.) The establishment of local preservation legislation and the protection of household structures soon spread to other American cities, such as New Orleans in 1936, San Antonio in 1939, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1948, and Natchez, Mississippi, in 1951 (Howard 1987:115). Archaeologically, this period is certainly marked by the assumption that investigations into the architectural remains of a dwelling lead to an understanding of domestic behavior in the past (Allison 1999a:4).

From the late 1960s into the 1980s, however, anthropology and prehistoric archaeology attempted to move away from the static concept of household as

architecture and began to address questions beyond the physical fabric and layout of the home and house lot. Simultaneously, these disciplines struggled to achieve a "greater degree of precision" by separating the "two phenomena [encapsulated within the concept of household] that are logically distinct and vary somewhat independently: co-residence and domestic function" (Bender 1967). This distinction between structure and function was sought to "bridge the existing 'mid-level theory' gap" (Wilk and Rathje 1982:617) and "replace a culturally defined unit with one that is more based on observation and can be more readily compared across cultures" (Wilk and Netting 1984:1). Here, the "household" became "the most common social component of subsistence . . . [a] strategy to meet the productive, distributive and reproductive needs of its members" (Wilk and Rathje 1982:618), and inevitably households were primarily seen as the basic "measurable socio-economic unit" through which archaeologists could generate understandings of the past (Allison 1999a:1). Yet the conflation of the two "logically distinct" aspects proved difficult to evade, as households were still commonly grouped "on the basis of what kind of family lies at the core" (Wilk and Netting 1984:3).

Historical archaeology, suffering something of an identity crisis at the time (e.g., Honerkamp 1988), saw the deployment of many permutations of the aforementioned approaches. For instance, some researchers continued to "define the household in terms of the household head and his relative rank in society" (Beaudry 1989a:84), while others joined prehistoric archaeologists in attempting to refine definitions and separate function from form—although often falling right back upon the convenient conflation of terms when interpretations are sought (e.g., O'Brien 1984:26–27).

Stanley South's influential *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology* (1977) is a convenient example of processual thinking on households within historical archaeology. He states that each household "represents a system within a much larger system imposing on each household a degree of uniformity in the relationships among its various parts" (1977:86–87). For South, this uniformity was the basis for the generation of "household patterns" of material culture that could be used to attain his final goal—a clearer understanding of the broad processes of cultural evolution (1977:2–5). Similar sites should produce statistically similar patterns, while unusual sites will have patterns that deviate from the norm.

So it seems that processualists also saw the past as inhabited by "aggregate" households. These households were not necessarily conflated with individuals but rather were (when deployed ideally) entities unto themselves. That is, the processual household is an abstract "unit," usually a unit of production or consumption that makes rational choices about behavior within its worldview. Unfortunately, although South's approach was admirable in its attention to site

structure beyond architecture and its emphasis on contexts, the vast majority of those who flocked to his methods "used pattern analysis as if it were an end in itself" (Beaudry 1989a:85; South 1988:27), resulting in many sites being pigeonholed into patterns and a multitude of newly formulated patterns that threatened to outnumber the sites to which they were assigned.

Parallel to these processual approaches stressing artifact patterning is the structural approach to symmetrical patterning in architecture and other material culture advanced by researchers such as James Deetz (1977, 1982) and Henry Glassie (1975). Although Deetz (1982:720) was quick to point out that "households and houses are neither isomorphic with each other, nor with families," he quickly returned to the idea that *houses* (or the remains of dwellings) are "powerful mirrors for the way in which . . . [people in the past] saw themselves and their world and expressed the values of their culture in substance." Although he was often defensive of his structural approach (as "non-provable" and "non-predictive"), Deetz's goals have much in common with the processual approach of South and others. These goals include the positivistic idea of "reading" a knowable pattern "encoded" into material culture (and its patterns) which, in turn, point toward shifts in the larger worldview/belief systems of past peoples. Aside from the "essentially passive, reflective view of style" advanced here (Dietler and Herbich 1998:239), it has been pointed out that the vast majority of individuals will not build the house in which they will dwell (Allison 1999a:4), a problem that plagues both the strict structural approach and the return to houses and the "key" to past household behavior.

THE HOUSEHOLD PERSPECTIVE IN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY: HOUSEHOLD CORES AS PRACTICE

Given the long associations outlined, it may seem ridiculous to say that "household analysis" has been implemented within historical archaeology only since the mid-1980s, but that is indeed the case (Beaudry 1989a). At that time, historical archaeologists began a critical assessment of the definition of *households* (e.g., Beaudry 1984, 1986, 1989a; Mrozowski 1984; Stewart-Abernathy 1986a). Although somewhat distinct owing to intellectual traditions, these studies did seek to bring a "household oriented perspective" to historical archaeology, but the emphasis was on a "holistic, contextual approach" (Beaudry 1989a:84–85)—one that did not hinge solely on architectural or subsistence remains but employed dynamic, historicizing methodologies. Incidentally, Beaudry's formulation was set off alongside the idea of artifacts as "active voices" or the material manifestations of social discourse (Beaudry 1996; Beaudry et al. 1991; Yentsch and Beaudry 2001:226). Although it bears the difficulties of using a textual metaphor for material culture (cf. Dietler and Herbich 1998:243–244), this for-

mulation has more to offer than many of its predecessors, as it enables multiple, contradictory meanings within material culture, stresses contextualization, and represents the people who give material culture meaning in different situations.

A plethora of other theoretical forces impacted household archaeology (both directly and indirectly) throughout the 1980s and 1990s; they included consumption, consumer choice (Miller 1991; Spencer-Wood 1987a), feminist issues (e.g., Lawrence 1999; Spencer-Wood 1991a, 1996), and Marxist approaches, often combined with structural positions and utilization of consumer behaviors (Leone 1984, 1995; Leone and Little 1993; McGuire 1992; McGuire and Paynter 1991; Orser 1988, 1996, to name a few). More recent archaeological studies have attempted to look beyond the aggregate household—a view stressing economic production or belief systems painted with a broad brush—toward "the practical actions of daily life" (Pader 1993:114). For example, archaeologies influenced by Bourdieu's practice theory have become commonplace (e.g., Allison 1999b; Dietler and Herbich 1998; Wilkie 2000a; also see Battle and Stewart-Abernathy, this volume).

THIS BOOK AND THE LIST OF HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Discussion of an explicit "household perspective" seems to have receded somewhat in recent literature in historical archaeology (with some notable exceptions, such as the papers in Allison 1999b). Its most likely successor seems to be studies employing the "landscape perspective," which have become ubiquitous of late (e.g., Ashmore and Knapp 1999; Shackel 2001a; Stine et al. 1997; Thomas 2001; Yamin and Metheny 1996; Young 2000). Although landscape archaeology, in our opinion, provides a productive ground for understanding past power relationships and ideology, it must be said that many landscape analyses, as well as other recent works dealing with race, class, and gender in a more general way, still rely on household data or have households deeply embedded within their matrices.

The analytical move to landscapes, in fact, opens up interesting possibilities for household analysis—the household as "small" landscape. The same theoretical underpinnings are at work on the household level, no matter how one parses the definition. Practice theory, power relations, gender constructions, and many other subjects that have been treated successfully via landscape analysis beg to be applied in similar fashion to the household. This approach is, no doubt, influenced by Henrietta Moore's (1988, 1994, 1996) stressing of the symbolic uses of space and the reading of the complete "text" of households and their articulation with gender constructions.

Some of the authors in this volume move toward a landscape perspective,

such as Barile's discussion of plantation *household complexes* and the use of spatial alteration as the response to the fear of insurrection, Battle's focus on exterior, communally used areas, Pappas's interrogation of house plans in logging camps, and Stewart-Abernathy's keen observations about detached kitchens.

In a similar vein, although not overtly spatial, Wood's contributions utilize feminist, Marxist, and practice theory approaches in ways akin to those perusing landscape studies (e.g., papers in Ashmore and Knapp 1999 and Delle et al. 2000).

In addition, while gender is certainly prominent in these papers, we attempt here to see households as not *solely* the locus for an engendered power struggle (although it is certainly an important aspect of household analysis). To be sure, some authors confront gender constructions in the household (Spencer-Wood and Wood), while others examine the intersection of multiple identities in the household (Anderson and Brandon) or address gender in more subtle ways (Davidson, Galindo, and Stewart-Abernathy). Still others eschew gender as a category altogether in favor of other analytical registers (Barile and Bonine).

This book is, then, both in the "household perspective" tradition (as outlined in Beaudry 1989a) and a break with it. Like Allison (1999a:5), we feel that it is important to break free from a household archaeology dominated by architecture-oriented approaches. Further, we feel that we must problematize notions that behaviors of the past are simply "coded" in material culture and their patterns that can be easily "read" by archaeologists. Such notions often lead to disappointment in archaeology's abilities to answer social questions (cf. Allison 1999b; Dietler and Herbich 1998; and papers in Laurence and Wallace-Hadrill 1997), as well as overly simplistic and reductionist explanations of household analyses, which deny that cultural production is accomplished by "socially situated subjects with different cultural competencies and different, often contradictory, interest" (Dietler and Herbich 1998:239).

A variety of papers are included that, in varying ways, grapple with the meaning of household on their own terrain—the only place we believe these meanings can be clarified. We do not believe in a single, universal definition or approach to the household. Rather than presenting one definition of the household, the authors critically examine the concept within their own parameters. This move to the particular enables them to attempt to understand the workings of "house" and "home" in their own terms and the terms of their own data. This approach leads to the most promising and, we believe, the strongest facet of this book: each author first develops a context for his or her project and an understanding of the needed research questions, then attempts to define and analyze the household based on this framework.

In the United States today, there are many definitions of household. According to the U.S. Census, a household includes all those living within one space,

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