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# Perspectives. Households as assemblages.

Julián Salazar, Thomas Pluckhahn y Jennifer Kahn.

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# Archaeology of Households, Kinship, and Social Change

*Archaeology of Households, Kinship, and Social Change* offers new perspectives on the processes of social change from the standpoint of household archaeology.

This volume develops new theoretical and methodological approaches to the archaeology of households pursuing three critical themes: household diversity in human residential communities with and without archaeologically identifiable houses, interactions within and between households that explicitly consider impacts of kin and non-kin relationships, and lastly change as a process that involves the choices made by members of households in the context of larger societal constraints. Encompassing these themes, authors explore the role of social ties and their material manifestations (within the house, dwelling, or other constructed space), how the household relates to other social units, how households consolidate power and control over resources, and how these changes manifest at multiple scales. The case studies presented in this volume have broader implications for understanding the drivers of change, the ways households create the contexts for change, and how households serve as spaces for invention, reaction, and/or resistance. Understanding the nature of relationships within households is necessary for a more complete understanding of communities and regions as these ties are vital to explaining how and why societies change.

Taking a comparative outlook, with case studies from around the world, this volume will inform students and professionals researching household archaeology and be of interest to other disciplines concerned with the relationship between social networks and societal change.

**Lacey B. Carpenter** is Visiting Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department at Hamilton College and a Research Associate at the American Museum of Natural History.

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### **Archaeology of Households, Kinship, and Social Change**

*Edited by Lacey B. Carpenter and Anna Marie Prentiss*

# **Archaeology of Households, Kinship, and Social Change**

**Edited by  
Lacey B. Carpenter and  
Anna Marie Prentiss**

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## 2 Perspectives

### Households as assemblages

*Julián Salazar, Thomas J. Pluckhahn, and  
Jennifer G. Kahn*

While the physical structure of a house is at the etymological root of the word “household,” the term has historically stood for more than simply a dwelling or “a group of people ... living together as a unit,” including also “the action of maintaining a house or family” and “the contents or appurtenances of a house considered collectively” (*OED* 2011). To a certain extent, archaeologists have long recognized households as more than just either people or structures, or even both of these in combination (e.g., Wilk and Rathje 1982:618). There is, for example, a large body of literature devoted to the analysis of household artifact “assemblages” (especially ceramics), mainly as a means of understanding the size and composition of domestic groups and the organization of their labor (e.g., Arnold 1988; Arthur 2009; Beck 2006; David 1971; DeBoer and Lathrap 1979; Foster 1960; Hally 1986; Kramer 1985; Pauketat 1989). Domestic features such as burials, shrines, and caches are also implicated in many studies of household ritual (e.g., Bermann and Castillo 1995; Chadwick 2012; Grove and Gillespie 2002; LeCount 2001; Manzanilla 2002), principally for how they may inform understandings of gender, cosmology, ancestor veneration, and generational continuity, among other issues.

Nevertheless, the persistent conception of households in relatively restricted terms, with regard to both archaeological evidence (mainly structural remains, artifacts, and sub-surface features) and their interpretive potential (as indicative of co-resident activity groups, as units of settlement, as the building blocks of larger social and political units, or as the physical manifestations of social relations and worldview), has limited our ability to grasp their dynamic and blurry constitution as webs of relations of human and nonhuman agents. For example, in a seminal article, Wilk and Rathje (1982:618) recognized the material element of the household but defined this materiality as simply “the shell whose form reflects the demographic shape and the activities of households.” Missing from this definition and much of the archaeological work that has followed is the realization that human relations are not given but are always ephemeral and continuously negotiated within particular localized settings that are built through beliefs, practices, places, objects, and time (e.g., Glowacki and Barnett, Chapter 7; Kahn, Chapter 5).

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