

Alternative Histories and North American Archaeology

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North America is one immense outdoor museum, telling a story that covers 9 million square miles and 25,000 years (Thomas 2000a:viii)

The chapters in this volume highlight the story of a continent, from the Atlantic to Alaska, from the San Luis mission to Sonora, and from the Kennewick man of nine millennia ago to the Colorado coalfield strikes of nine decades ago (Figure 1.1). Given the considerable span of time and vastness of space, the reader might already be wondering: what holds North American archaeology together? Unlike other portions of the world, it is not the study of the sequential rise and fall of ancient states and empires that unified peoples into *a people* with a single writing system, calendar, or economy. No, North America is, and was, all about *alternative histories*. It is about peoples in the plural.

Peoples did things differently in North America. They made their own histories, sometimes forgotten, subverted, and controversial but never outside the purview of archaeology. Yet, in their plurality, the North Americans of the past show us the commonalities of the human experience. The inimitable ways in which people made history in North America hold profound lessons for understanding the sweep of global history, if not also for comprehending the globalizing world in which we find ourselves today. That is, like all good yarns, there is a moral to this archaeological allegory: what people did do or could do matters significantly in the construction of the collective futures of all people.

In this introduction, we explore the increasingly historical tenor of the archaeology of ancient and not-so-ancient North Americans. We explicate some of the ways that we have come to know the past and recognize some of the biases that were passed off, for a time, as enlightened science. Along the way, we advocate some new ways of knowing the past that bridge science and humanism, dramatized by contrasting long-term developmental trends with key moments of cultural change. The new ways of knowing to which we refer will be unfamiliar to some readers, but are increasingly popular additions to the dig kits of North America's archaeologists.



Figure 1.1 Locator map showing selected sites mentioned in the text

North American Cultures-in-the-Making

To some extent, North American archaeologists continue to discover the past just as each encounter between peoples in the past was a discovery of the unknown. In North America, these discoveries marked time, established landmarks, and defined peoples – Columbus and the “Indians,” the Vikings and the “Skraelings” (aka Inuit), Cahokians and the Mississippians, the Initial Coalescent peoples and their enemies – all the way back to Clovis, Kennewick, and the first Americans.

Back then, in the Ice Age, North America was a radically different continent, with wandering elephants, herds of giant bison on the Plains, and caribou along the northern ice sheets. Much of the continent, particularly the interior lowlands and coastal plains of the eastern half, was open to the movements of migratory animals and, late in the Pleistocene era, the first Americans. The major physiographic obstacles were the western mountain chains, deserts, the wide Mississippi River, the Great Lakes, and the Appalachians along the eastern seaboard

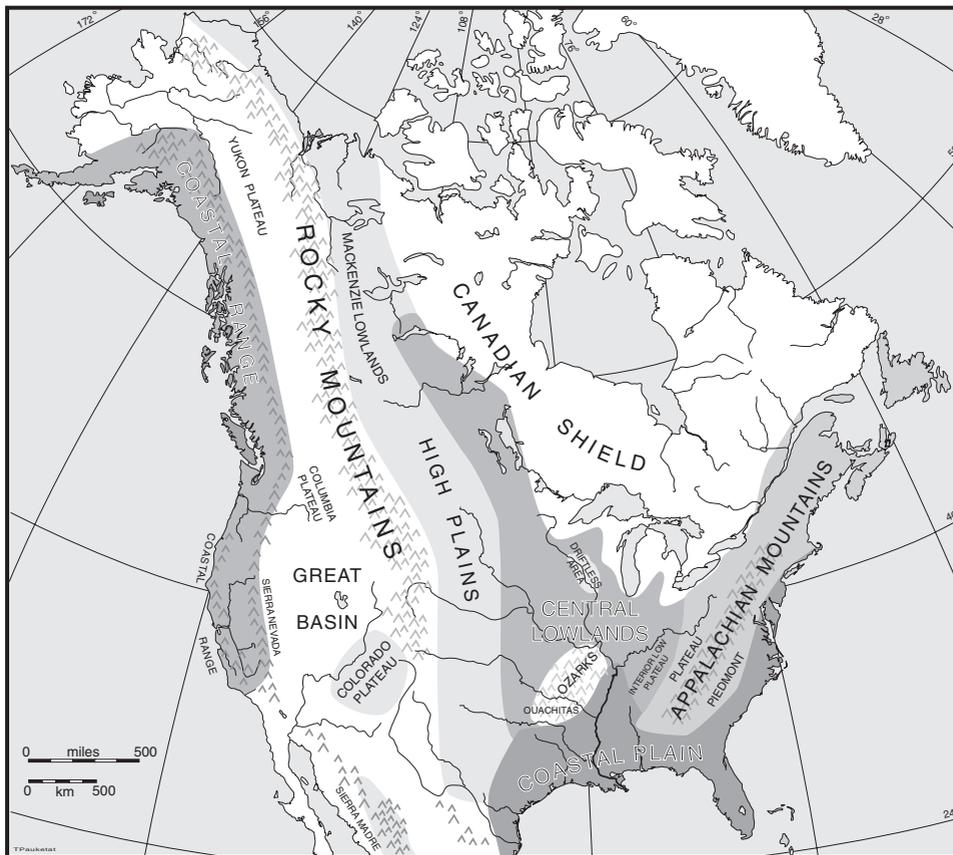


Figure 1.2 Major North American physiographic provinces

(Figure 1.2). Among the best-known European explorers and later Euroamericans are those associated with particular events or places where they passed, or failed to pass, one of these obstacles.

Indeed, as the European and Euroamerican examples attest, legends, sagas, and songs place (literally) persons and historical moments in cultural landscapes that, in turn, define the experiences of peoples. Consider that “Vinland Sagas” record the discovery of what were probably Labrador and Newfoundland around the year A.D. 1000 by the Norseman Eirik the Red and his sons, Leif and Thorvald. Or that the day on which Christopher Columbus set foot on San Salvador on October 12, 1492 is memorialized annually in the United States, a celebration for some and a bone of contention for others. Public parks mark spots where a supposed Viking runestone was found in Oklahoma or where Civil War battles occurred in Virginia.

All such memorials temporalize and spatialize cultural experiences, shaping one’s sense of time, space, heritage, and self, and our experiences today take place in

these rich landscapes. It was no different in the past. Today, as in the past, cultures are, in effect, peoples' lived experiences and interpretations of the world. They are always being made and remade, told and retold, sung and resung by people through their ongoing encounters with each other and with the sensuous dimensions of social history. They are not, and have never been, timeless, unchanging, bounded things. Cultures are always cultures-in-the-making.

Indigenous populations

It could be ventured that culture-making may be more easily measured in pre-Columbian and colonial North America owing to its modest population densities. North America had nowhere near the population densities of, say, ancient China or Andean South America. Conservative estimates of American Indian populations north of Mexico at the beginning of the 16th century fall around 1 million people, while maximal estimates exceed 10 million (compare Dobyns 1983; Henige 1998; Kroeber 1953). The truth probably lies somewhere in between.

By comparison, the central Mexican Aztec Empire prior to the devastating diseases of the 16th century included at least 6 million people (Brumfiel 2004:241). The most densely populated city in prehispanic Mesoamerica, the Aztec capital (with 200,000 people), sat in the middle of the Basin of Mexico's 1 million or more people (Nichols 2004:271)!

There were concentrations of population in North America, although at a lower order of magnitude than in Mesoamerica. Higher-density populations were situated around the rich salmon fisheries of the Northwest Coast and in the many small territories and language isolates of California (Kroeber 1953). Major southwestern towns had populations of several hundred to 2,000 people each (see Hegmon, this volume; Lekson 1999a; Rice 1998). During the Pueblo II period, up to 2,700 people may have resided permanently in the central cluster of Great Houses at Chaco Canyon (Lekson's "cityscape," this volume). Thousands more would have poured into the canyon to attend the great political-religious festivals there, raising population levels considerably if temporarily.

In eastern North America, densities were higher on average, although individual settlements rarely exceeded 2,000 people. For instance, Jacques Cartier met 1,000 people at the large Iroquoian village of Hochelaga on the St. Lawrence River in 1535 (Pendergast 1998) and other Mohawk and Huron villages in the early 17th century averaged 600–1,700 people (Chilton, this volume; Muller 1997:table 5.6). Likewise, some 1,000 or more people lived at one of the largest Mississippian towns in Alabama (Steponaitis 1998), while an uncounted number of Plains villages, Illinois-valley towns, and St. Francis-type central Mississippian centers had populations of hundreds to perhaps 2,000 people each (e.g., Conrad 1991; Phillips et al. 1951). Large multi-ethnic historic-era towns in the Southeast also had several hundred to 2,000 or so people through the 18th century (Muller 1997:197–198).

Population densities were higher in the greater Cahokia region at about A.D. 1100. This region was probably home to roughly 50,000 people, of whom up to

15,000 resided at the capital of Cahokia itself, disposed in such a way as to meet a generic definition of “city.” Whatever it is called, Cahokia was North America’s largest settlement until colonial Philadelphia grew larger shortly after A.D. 1800.

Over the millennia, North America’s indigenous population did grow through a combination of factors. However, to an important degree, the population concentrations noted above were the results of regional immigrations and multi-ethnic regroupings owing to historical circumstances (e.g., Pauketat 2003). Great social and political happenings in North America seem to have pulled people into them, possibly adding an element of cultural hybridity or pluralism to many population centers or village concentrations. These places may not have been characterized by homogenous cultural “norms” or rules that everyone understood alike. And if North American places pulled populations into them, then perhaps the “culture areas” associated with these historical developments were not stable if even real.

American Indian culture areas

But the early students of the American Indian, in particular Clark Wissler (1926) and Alfred Kroeber (1953), formalized the association of people and environment as “culture areas” to such an extent that it is unavoidable today. They correlated native art styles, languages, and cultural practices with North American deserts, woodlands, plains, and mountains and envisioned at least nine major culture areas (Figure 1.3). Clearly, these divisions encapsulate a certain amount of the trans-continental cultural variation. And there is some validity to analyzing that variability in terms of cultural traditions (see Pauketat 2001). That is, a Kwakiutl design made along the Northwest Coast is easily distinguished from Puebloan decorations owing to the histories of people and the genealogies of their cultural practices in each place.

However, at other scales of analysis, culture areas have fuzzy, indistinct boundaries because traditions are not static things and because analysts decide where lines are drawn depending on whatever traits they feel are significant (Ford 1954). Many contiguous cultures and languages were not necessarily so different. The sharpest boundaries resulted from historical disruptions that separated populations, a process exacerbated by natural obstacles (as in California and the Great Basin) and minimized by unobstructed open land (as in the mid-continent). A map of American Indian languages at around A.D. 1600 betrays millennia-deep histories of interaction and disruption: long-distance trade, political consolidations, pan-regional religious movements, migrations, wars, etc. (Figure 1.4).

Interestingly, culture areas have seldom if ever been used to pigeonhole immigrants or slaves from the Old World, presumably owing to their relatively recent relocation to the New World and the ethnic mixing associated with their new melting-pot homeland. Apparently, Old World diasporas in the New World did not have sufficient time to adapt to their new environments. The processes to which these historic-era people were subjected, then, are commonly assumed to have been unlike those of the “prehistoric” Indians. But was this really the case? No.

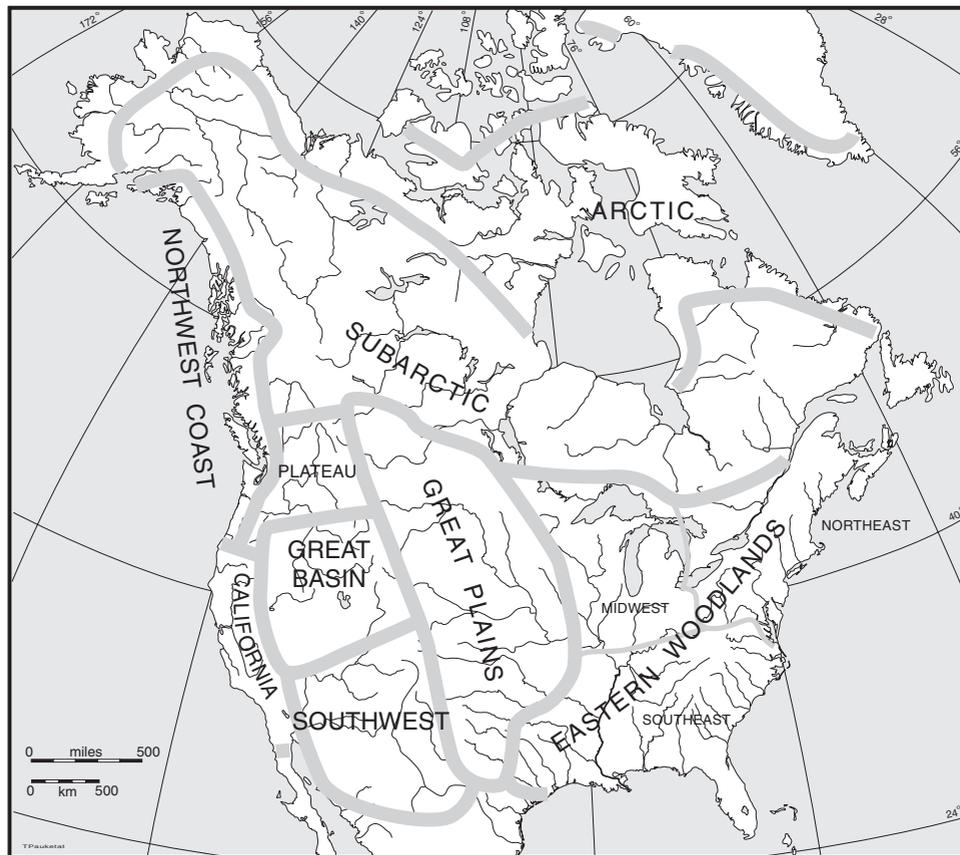


Figure 1.3 Native North American culture areas

Reconceptualizing History and Culture-Making

Conceptualizing American Indians as different from Western people originates in a well-known 18th-century Enlightenment view of American Indians and in the 19th-century “Moundbuilder Myth.” In the former case, Indian peoples were seen as uncivilized “noble savages,” closer to nature and less morally corrupt than Europeans (Trigger 1989). In the latter case, Indians were thought to be uncivilized and hence incapable of the coordinated labor evident in the ancient earthen mounds that Euroamericans found in the eastern United States. Someone else, a race of lost Moundbuilders, must have built the mounds (see below).

Archaeologists like to think that both views are dead, but they live on in the guise of politically correct stereotypes of North American Indians as more spiritual, ecological, ritual, and traditional than other peoples around the world. They also live on covertly in archaeological models that treat Indians as non-political, prehistoric people who evolved owing to natural forces outside their control.



Figure 1.4 Linguistic groups at ca. A.D. 1600

Perhaps using the word “prehistory” to identify a period of time before the written word might seem innocuous enough. After all, the period of European contact in North America was one of incredible change. And of course there was no native North American writing system, strictly defined, until Sequoyah completed the Cherokee syllabary in 1821. But there are two good reasons to avoid the word “prehistory.”

First, writing per se was not the great leap forward that some would have it be. Even in ancient societies where writing was invented, only a literate few people (typically, the elite) wrote down supposed facts about the illiterate masses. The problem is, the literati saw things as elitists do, and their histories present only one version of the past – an “official history” – defined and prescribed by peoples who wanted a lasting legacy (Trouillot 1995). At best, official histories only give us part of the story (e.g., Saitta, this volume). At worst, official histories are lies (histories are, after all, written by the victors), a means of controlling the construction of social memories.

Second, the idea of prehistory suggests that American Indians were powerless subjects of the external world, rather than players in history (see Nabokov 2002). The implication is that they had no history that mattered, since their cultural traditions evolved according to the laws of nature and died during the colonial era, as Native Americans were assimilated to European ideas, religions, and material culture.

Native Americans, Americans, and Identity Politics

Now, looking back on this history, we can understand some of the impetus by Native Americans to reclaim their history, heritage, and land, in particular through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) (Watkins, this volume). In recent years, Native Americans have argued their right for a say in the interpretation of history and the ways in which ancestral human and material remains are handled (Echo-Hawk 2000). The recent events surrounding “Kennewick Man” further highlight these issues. Dating to around 7000 B.C., the Kennewick human remains share certain morphological attributes of Eurasian populations unlike contemporary Native Americans, suggesting considerable Paleoindian genetic diversity. Some present-day native tribes argue that Kennewick Man is their ancestor and should be reburied; some archaeologists argue that the scientific study of these human remains should take precedence (Thomas 2000b).

The identity politics of today have a bearing on all of North American archaeology (Echo-Hawk 2000; Schmidt and Patterson 1995). How do peoples in the present define themselves and others and how did they do so in the past? The presumed continuity of cultural traits continues to be a legal criterion for legitimizing identity, thus belying the reality that cultures are always cultures-in-the-making (see Landsman and Ciborski 1992:432; see also Stahl et al. 2004). There is no easy way around this problem, as all peoples around the world are struggling with issues of self-definition and repatriation. Perhaps for our purposes we might consider using the term “American” to get at the host of people and identities that define North America’s 9 million square miles and 25,000 years of history.

Archaeological Reflections

Identity politics and alternative histories are not new issues in North American archaeology. From the beginning, some Europeans considered indigenous people to be different from themselves, incapable of rational thought (Loren 2001; Pagden 1982). By the 17th century, various Euroamericans did not believe that the remaining American Indian populations in the eastern United States had ever been capable of the coordinated labor necessary to build the impressive earthworks in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. Others must have been responsible, they reasoned – perhaps giants, Israelites, Danes, Aztecs, or Toltecs. Perhaps, some thought, the American Indians were a savage race who had eliminated some earlier more industrious race of Moundbuilders, pushing the latter south into Mexico. Thus began the “Myth of the Moundbuilders” (Willey and Sabloff 1993:22–25).

Dis-mything the Moundbuilders

The Moundbuilder Myth was spreading as early as the late 1700s, a time of growing antagonism and unrest between Native Americans and Euroamericans. This myth seems to have reassured the Euroamerican populace that displacement or elimination of the native population was unavoidable and perhaps just, even as the federal government laid claim to Native American lands.¹

There remained enlightened advocates of American Indian claims to the land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. George Rogers Clark, hero of the revolutionary war in the west and Virginia neighbor of Thomas Jefferson, argued in print with Noah Webster (of Webster's Dictionary) for the Native American construction of the mounds, based on his own interviews with American Indians near present-day St. Louis (Kelly 1994:4). However, prominent antiquarians and public officials fervently believed in the idea of the Moundbuilders, reflected in the Mexican names given to sites across the continent: Aztalan, Aztec, Montezuma's Castle, Toltec.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, archaeological activities increased markedly. Harvard University's Peabody Museum, founded in 1866 and, by 1874, headed by Frederic Ward Putnam, was an early center of activity. Putnam, an influential advocate of stratigraphic excavation, effectively standardized archaeological practices continent-wide, while the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE), founded in 1879, firmly established the continent's American Indian heritage. In the east, Cyrus Thomas had been appointed to resolve the Moundbuilder controversy. He and his field assistants accomplished the task via a 10-year systematic survey, locating many major sites, combined with excavations of more than 2,000 mounds (Thomas 1985[1894]). In the west, there were several BAE expeditions that also combined site survey and excavation to establish the historical linkages between ancient ruins and modern Puebloan peoples (e.g., Mindeleff 1989[1891]).

The culture-historical period

At about this same time, the Southwest began to be populated by Euroamerican ranchers. One of these, Richard Wetherill, was shown a number of sites around Mesa Verde by local Ute Indians. He was startled, and the discovery led him to take up archaeological fieldwork full-time. Wetherill employed stratigraphic techniques and European scientific standards of recording his finds. In 1896 Wetherill turned his attention to Chaco Canyon, excavating 190 rooms in Pueblo Bonito alone by the end of the fourth season and filling the shelves of the American Museum of Natural History back east.

The early part of the 20th century saw the coalescence of a "culture-historical approach" that sought to track the spread of cultures (see Trigger 1989; Willey and Sabloff 1993). There were important stratigraphic excavations everywhere. The "Direct Historical Method" was implemented (i.e., reasoning backwards in time from known Indian practices to ancient ones). "Seriation" became a popular tech-

nique for dating sites based on artifact stylistic change. And the funding of archaeological excavations by various organizations and museums increased.

In 1934 the Society for American Archaeology was founded, with its flagship journal *American Antiquity*. This professional society, and other regional organizations, were all a part of the increasingly systematized practice of archaeology, which also saw the refinement of cultural classification systems, the development of dendrochronology, the establishment of the University of Chicago field school (which trained a generation of eastern archaeologists), and the beginnings of federally funded excavations under the aegis of Franklin D. Roosevelt's various "New Deal" programs, especially the Works Progress Administration.

The federally funded excavations, many run by professionals trained at Chicago's field schools, dug key sites on a year-round basis using out-of-work citizens. Most of this activity in the 1930s was focused on southeastern sites. Excavations were extensive, exposing walls, houses, cemeteries, and mound interiors (Figure 1.5). Importantly, for the first time, archaeology was not simply an elite, academic exercise, but a public endeavor with the full range of citizen participants. WPA crews included both African American and Euroamerican men and women (e.g., Claassen 1999).

Of course, southwestern archaeological projects, beginning with Richard Wetherill's, had regularly employed Navajo excavators and technicians. And pioneering female archaeologists such as Ruth Bunzel (1929) and Anna Shepard (1936) moved

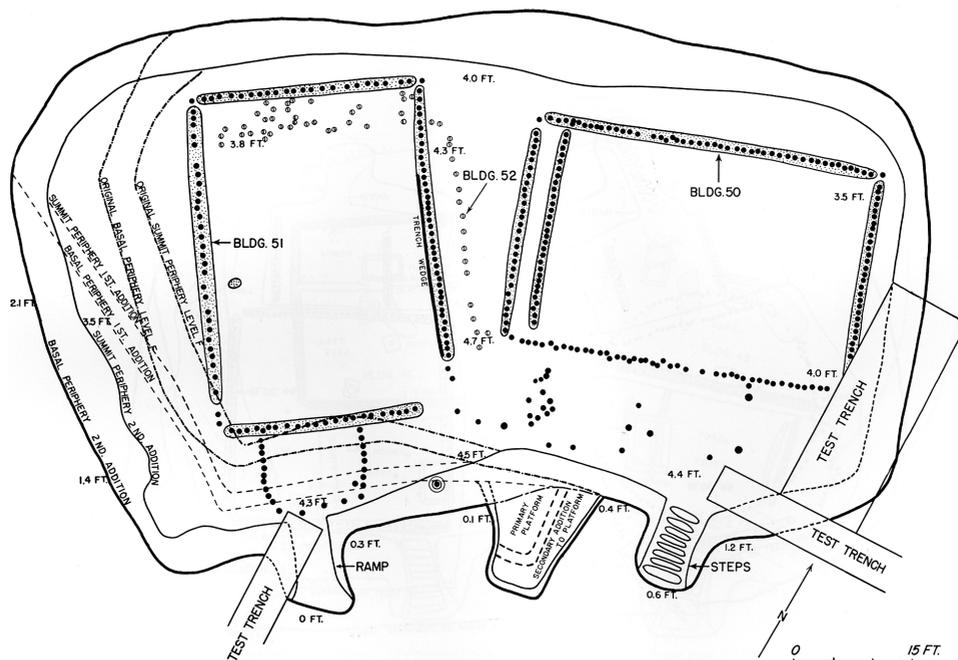


Figure 1.5 A construction stage within the dual platform mound at Hiwassee Island, Tennessee (Lewis and Kneberg 1946:plate 15; used with permission, University of Tennessee Press)

ceramic studies away from an obsession with chronology-building and toward interpretations of design, meaning, technology, and production. The latter especially were prescient developments, anticipating today's archaeological theorizing of agency, the body, and material culture (see below).

To behavior and back again

Prescient also was the beginning in 1940 of what would become the premier "settlement archaeology" study by Philip Phillips, James Ford, and James Griffin (1951). They used survey, digs, and seriation to reconstruct how whole societies "functioned" and developed (see Trigger 1989:279–286). Such a functionalist line of inquiry was the mantra of Walter Taylor, in a book that excoriated prominent North Americanists in 1948 (Taylor 1983). Around this same time, others began calling for an ecological approach that emphasized the study of human behavior and that treated societies as organic systems that adapted to the environment (Steward and Setzler 1938).

Ideas were changing and the practice of archaeology was also changing owing to the social, technological, and geopolitical realities of the post-war era: the "GI Bill" made a university education affordable for returning veterans; radiocarbon dating revolutionized archaeology everywhere in 1949; and left-wing political overtones and gendered interpretations were purged owing to conscious and subconscious fears of America's McCarthyized attitudes in the 1950s (Vincent 1990:238ff). Cold War presidents, from Truman to Eisenhower to Kennedy, feared invasion, nuclear war, and the prospect of Russian scientific superiority (heralded in 1959 by Sputnik). And so, federal monies poured into scientific research. Eisenhower, readying the national transportation system for the potential of nuclear war or Russian invasion, put into motion the construction of a federal interstate highway system.

The effect was an overhaul of archaeological theory and practice. Increasingly, the idea of culture was sidelined, or redefined, as "behavior" emerged in scientific discourse. In 1959 Joseph Caldwell called for a "New American Archaeology" and, with his contemporaries, began to construct the new systematics building of settlement archaeology (e.g., "interaction spheres," see Ames, Dancey, this volume). This incipient development was coopted by Lewis Binford (1962), linked with neo-evolutionism, and converted into the "New Archaeology" (aka processual archaeology) of the 1960s and 1970s, a cult-like movement with Binford as its charismatic spokesperson (see Trigger 1989).

Binford's early students at the University of Chicago spread the new religion across North America in landmark – if highly criticized – case studies that sought to demonstrate that "residence patterns" could be determined from statistical analyses of broken village pottery (Binford 1972). Another student, Stuart Struever, investigated the ecology of Middle Woodland food producers in the Illinois River valley, converting his research interests into a long-term academic and public research program. For a time, his deeply stratified Koster-site dig was the most

famous archaeological excavation in the world and, in the person of Stuart Struever, the New Archaeology was promoted and publicized in a way not seen before. Perhaps this was due to the ideology of “logical positivism” prevalent at the time, which seemed to make the unknowable knowable. In any case, the Binfordian movement was a juggernaut that forced archaeologists either to respond or capitulate. New Archaeology’s “young turks” created a cause with its own *raison d’être*: the science of human behavior (e.g., Thomas 1979).

The thought was that human behaviors were uniform, adaptive, and rational, and that there were universal laws of behavior out there just waiting to be discovered. The way ancient hunter-gatherers foraged, horticulturalists grew crops, or villagers broke pots could not only be understood by studying analogous behaviors around the world, they might all be explicable with reference to the laws of thermodynamics. By the mid-1970s, the confidence of some young and naive archaeologists in the regularity of human behavior was such that they assumed one need not excavate or analyze much more than 10 percent of any region, site, house, pit, or hearth (Mueller 1975)!

Such sampling strategies drew the ire of the more seasoned veterans, and there was dissent, spurred on by the effective critiques of Michael Schiffer and his band of “Behavioral Archaeology” students and cronies (see Schiffer 1976; Skibo et al. 1995). Schiffer posited that perhaps there were more human and natural factors involved in inferring behaviors than the New Archaeologists realized. To understand them, archaeologists came to realize the critical importance of studying actual human behavior either by conducting “ethnoarchaeology” or through “experimental archaeology.”

These were heady times for archaeology, punctuated by near-revolutionary methodological advances in archaeometry, geoarchaeology, taphonomy, and paleoethnobotany. The latter, in particular, benefited hugely from the development of “flotation” technology during Struever’s Koster-site excavations. Flotation, a technique where clean water is added to soil samples and the carbonized (and lighter than water) plant bits float to the top, had revolutionary effects on the study of plant-food production and domestication (see Minnis 2003, 2004).

In this same general period, another all-important North American development was occurring: cultural resource management (CRM). Instigated by a series of federal laws in the United States during the 1960s through 1980s, archaeologists under contract with public agencies or private firms (needing to comply with public laws) were required to identify and mitigate any adverse effects to the nation’s cultural heritage whenever public monies were expended. It was a boon for North American archaeology, since there were few laws protecting archaeological sites in the early 1960s. This was clearly evident around the Cahokia site, where archaeologists who had learned their trade in the reservoir archaeology of the 1950s in the eastern Plains found themselves up against Eisenhower’s interstate highways, which were to slice up major sites in the American Bottom, including Cahokia. The archaeologists, sometimes unsure of how relevant their “salvage archaeology” was to the lofty goals of the New Archaeology, nonetheless tirelessly faced down bulldozers, road graders, and angry union laborers (the latter supported by the Mafia) in what

must rank as one of the more colorful and weird episodes of North American archaeology (see Young and Fowler 2000).

However, the archaeologists' hard work built the infrastructure of the largest CRM program with the best track record of publishing its results in the United States – the FAI-270 Highway Mitigation Project and its offshoot, the Illinois Transportation Archaeological Research Program at the University of Illinois (Bareis and Porter 1984; Griffin 1985:16–17; Walthall et al. 1997). Founded in the principles of settlement archaeology, adopting the methodological rigor of the New Archaeology, but avoiding the sampling excesses of the behaviorists, the highway archaeologists insisted on total survey and total excavation, which dovetails nicely with newer historical models of culture change.

In its rigor and publication track record, the FAI-270 project is nearly matched by the Dolores project, near Mesa Verde in Colorado, and the nearby Black Mesa archaeological project. Again, the massive scale of archaeological investigations allowed for a refinement of the regional chronology and an ability to see spatial and temporal variation in horticultural practices that led to the rise of places such as Chaco Canyon to the south, where the National Park Service's Chaco project stands as a CRM runner-up to the list of the biggest and best CRM efforts (see Lekson, this volume; Lipe et al. 1988; Powell and Gummerman 1987).

Today, such upscaled CRM projects are finding a new relevance in what some North Americanists might have initially seen as a non-North American fly in the ointment: Ian Hodder's (1982) "post-processual" archaeology. Although it was slow to penetrate North America (and is still routinely misunderstood), elements of the post-processual movement in archaeology did ring true to a few pre-Columbian archaeologists. More accepting than them, however, were historic archaeologists who regularly encountered diverse colonial and post-colonial ideologies, ethnicities, cultural practices, and power struggles for which traditional cultural-historical or behavioral theory did not work.

Thus, the various sorts of post-processual archaeologies through the 1990s did manage to gain a foothold in North American archaeology (e.g., Duke and Wilson 1995; Loren, this volume; McGuire 1992; Saitta, this volume; Sassaman, this volume). Today, inferences that material culture or landscapes "recursively constructed social realities" or that the body is the "site of cultural production" are not as outrageous to North American archaeologists as they seemed just a few years ago. In fact, there is reason to pick up the positive tone set by the New Archaeologists even as we put considerable distance between their behavioral theories and more recent ones (see Hegmon 2003).

How is the North American Past Knowable?

If history is lived rather than written, then archaeologists can (in fact, must) recover it, although this admittedly demands greater spatial and temporal controls than can typically be recovered from a stratigraphic trench or a 10 percent sample of domes-

tic refuse (see Pauketat 2001). Some think this far-fetched. They think that archaeologists engage in story-telling (i.e., narrative construction or culture-making) and fail to appreciate that archaeology is a long-term self-correcting process involving detection, introspection, and contingent inference construction.²

However, many North American archaeologists have the tools and the datasets to understand the past as lived histories with spatial, material, and corporeal dimensions. Minimally, datasets of the scale and temporal resolution available from old WPA collections, settlement pattern studies, and CRM projects allow us to identify and evaluate the historical relationships between the apparent long-term developmental (some would say “evolutionary”) trends or “traditions” commonly identified by archaeologists and the real people, places, and moments of cultural construction of the past. Although not all authors in this volume would agree, the former are *patterns* evident at large scales, *not the processes of change themselves*.

These patterns are the beginnings of explanation. They are established through stratigraphy, seriation, horizon markers, the superpositioning of refuse deposits, and absolute dating, and form the basis of current archaeological chronologies in North America (Figure 1.6). Such chronologies typically involve the recognition of long periods of time punctuated by apparent moments of culture change or transition (e.g., climate change, European contact, etc.). Some researchers feel that this is an accurate way of characterizing the past. Certainly, in the absence of written history or large, fine-grained datasets, it is a simpler and less data contingent way. It is, in fact, deceptively simple.

The origins of agriculture, pottery, and the bow and arrow

In thinking about some long periods of time, it is easy to fall into the trap of suggesting that peoples stayed virtually unchanged for thousands of years. People, one might assume, do not alter their ways unless change is forced upon them by some jarring event or persistent external force. Thus, many understand a prolonged warm and dry spell ca. 6000–3000 B.C. – the “Hypsithermal” – to have led to increased population aggregation, sedentism, and, in some places in North America, intensification of food production and domestication. These arguments are based on sound correlations between settlement patterns and climate change. People really did begin concentrating in well-watered locations during this time.

However, correlation is not explanation, and the mere fact of the Hypsithermal is not sufficient to *explain* the various parallel trajectories of increased sedentism, gardening, and domestication leading toward agriculture. Climate change in this case was very definitely a constraint on “human–plant interactions,” but the more we know about specific localities in North America (through archaeology), the less we believe that climate directly caused anything. To understand the relationship between climate change and agricultural change, we need to know *how* change was generated in terms of the gendered, meaningful, power-laden cultural histories of food production, storage, religious practice, and political organization (Watson and Kennedy 1991). So, recent discussion has centered on the historically spotty and

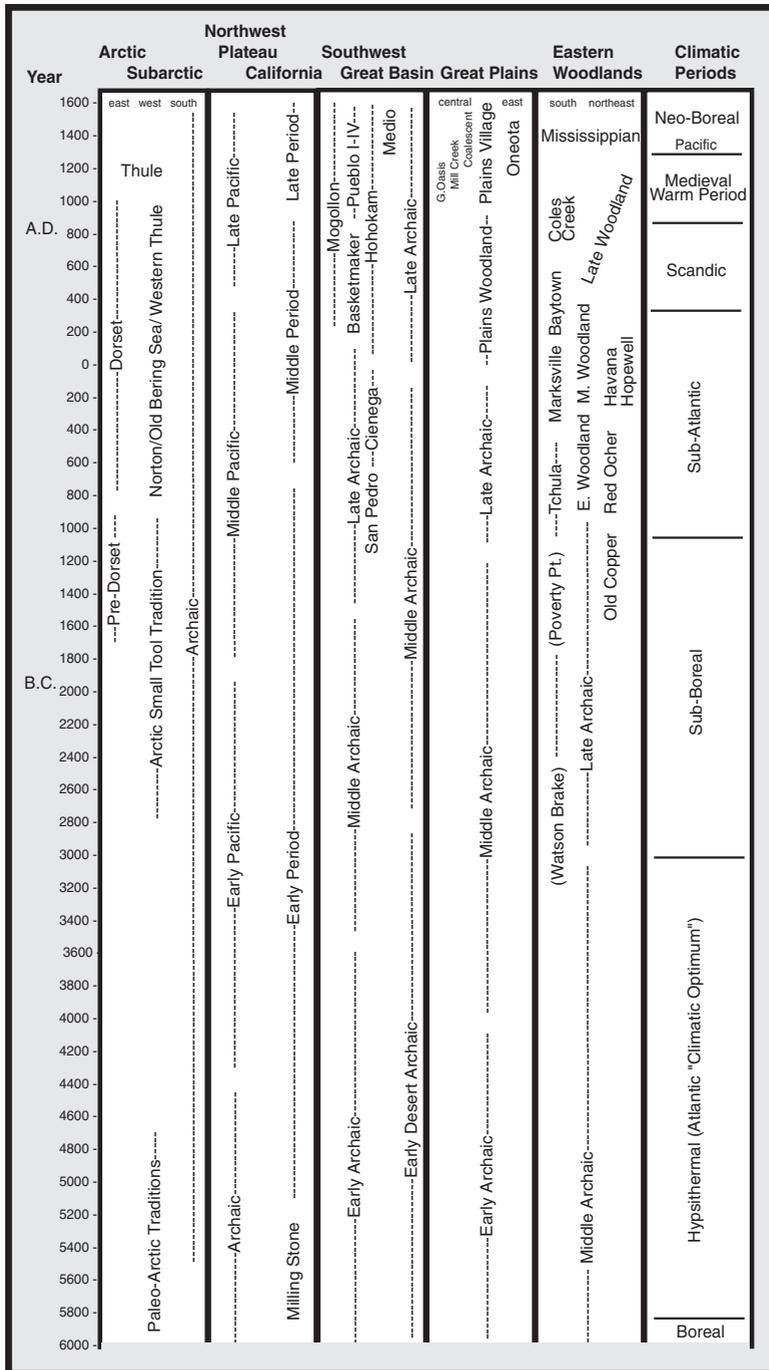


Figure I.6 Archaeological chronologies for North America (6000 B.C.–A.D. 1600)

discontinuous nature of plant-food production or the avoidance of agriculture or certain crops by some people in some times or places (e.g., Fritz 1990; Hart 1999; Kidder and Fritz 1993). There was no “revolution” or “innovation” of production that rational people readily adopted.

The same seems to apply to the “invention” of pottery, on the one hand, and the adoption of the bow and arrow, on the other. For instance, Ken Sassaman (1995) has argued that social contradictions involving gendered relations, material goods exchanges, and political alliances structured the localized adoption of or resistance to the earliest (Archaic-period) ceramic technology in North America. The evidence is unambiguously in his favor: although first appearing 4,500 years ago on Stallings Island, South Carolina, pottery took a full 1,500 years to be adopted across the Coastal Plain! Thus, Sassaman concludes that there were good reasons why people preferred age-old stone-boiling techniques over clay pots, and he finds those reasons by looking at the variable practices of food preparation and consumption on a site-by-site and region-by-region basis.

Likewise, the bow and arrow at one time was thought a technological improvement, adopted owing to its ability to put more meat on the table. The bow and arrow might have been adopted in certain localities only to be dropped later (Bradley 1997). At A.D. 200, it might have become commonly used in parts of the west, but seems to have spread rapidly around A.D. 600 \pm 100, displacing the use of fletched spears (sometimes called darts, thrown with “atlatls” or spear-throwing sticks) across much of continental United States, perhaps owing to social tensions and political developments (Blitz 1988; McElrath et al. 2000; Nassaney and Pyle 1999). Nassaney (2001:160) states that the bow and arrow, used both to hunt and to make war,

could have simultaneously challenged the relationships it was meant to reinforce. One could make a similar argument for the use of guns by early-nineteenth-century African captives in the American South. Whereas guns were provided to African Americans to allow them to supplement their subsistence base, these same tools were sometimes turned against the slaves’ legal owners in rebellion.

Monumentality, cosmology, and catastrophe

How different is the logic of this argument from the case for the relationship of monumentality to culture-making? In the Southwest, Ruth Van Dyke (2003:194) has posited that Chacoan Great Houses, Great Kivas, and even roads were the memorials of later descendants to some idealized ancestral past. However, in so memorializing that past, they changed their present, and “legitimated inequality and consolidated community” in ways radically unlike their predecessors (see Lekson, this volume).

In a similar vein, Pauketat and Alt (2003) have argued that the moundbuilding “traditions” of the mid-continent and Southeast dissolve into a series of commemorative practices that produced the veneer of continuity but that belie a dis-

continuous history (cf. Sassaman, this volume). The commemoration of someone's ideal in the form of a mound physically altered the landscape of cultural experience and inscribed a new reality into the lives of all people (Pauketat 2000). Similarly, Plains Indian "medicine wheels" are sacred sites, yes, but not static ones (Hall 1996). The circular patterns of stones in the high Plains show evidence of renewal, reconstruction, and revaluation (the latter, for instance, via the gifts of tobacco left behind by specific people for specific reasons). Sacred sites are dynamic sites, and this is increasingly realized to apply to various sorts of so-called ritual places, such as the caves and rock faces inscribed with petroglyphs or pictographs.

Some rock art sites contain actual inscribed narratives of the experiences of people – literally writing on a wall (see Francis and Loendorf 2002; Whitley 2000). Bearing this in mind, how many of the spiral, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic rock-art panels on the red sandstone cliff faces behind Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Ketl, for instance, are stories of happenings in this innermost sacred and political sanctum of Chacoan space? It has been speculated that at least one pictograph near another Great House in the Canyon records the occurrence of a supernova in A.D. 1054. There are other depictions of this supernova in the Southwest and several around the Cahokia site in Missouri (Diaz-Granados and Duncan 2000:199).

Could there be other such commemorations of astronomical events in North America? At least one researcher, John Kelly (1996:111), has wondered about the shape of a particular icon – the forked-eye motif – that appeared on the earliest Ramey Incised pottery known from Cahokia a few years after Comet Halley appeared in the sky in A.D. 1066. Such associations should be expected. Robert Hall (1989), among others, has noted the many associations, stories, and symbols that connect cosmological and celestial phenomena – stars, sun, moon, etc. – with human or superhuman characters in legend and folklore (e.g., "Red Horn" and the morning star: Pauketat, this volume). Religious leaders, magicians, and politicians – they are not always so different are they? – use the cosmos to explain for themselves and for others the history of people in relation to the supernatural. Some archaeologists suggest, often under their breath, that the mid-11th-century timing of a number of seemingly unrelated big events – Cahokia's "Big Bang," a Chacoan building spree, or even the construction of the anomalous Great Serpent Mound in Ohio (AMS dates of A.D. 1030 ± 70: Fletcher et al. 1994) – could have been related to particular people interpreting the skies with distinct local consequences (Figure 1.7).

Certainly, historical moments encompass natural events that seem outside the control of people. Obviously, such events do occur owing to celestial, geological, and climatological processes, biological agents, or random combinations of the above. Droughts and floods impact or decimate crops. A mudslide buried plank-houses at the small ocean-side village of Ozette along the Northwest Coast, ca. A.D. 1750, perfectly preserving carved wooden planks, nets, fishing kits, clubs, decorated boxes, and in-use household possessions (Samuels 1991). In eastern North America, similar catastrophic artifact assemblages are associated with the floors of thatched-roof Mississippian houses that burned during the occasional 13th- and 14th-century A.D. village conflagration, the results either of natural prairie fires or warfare (e.g., Conrad 1991).

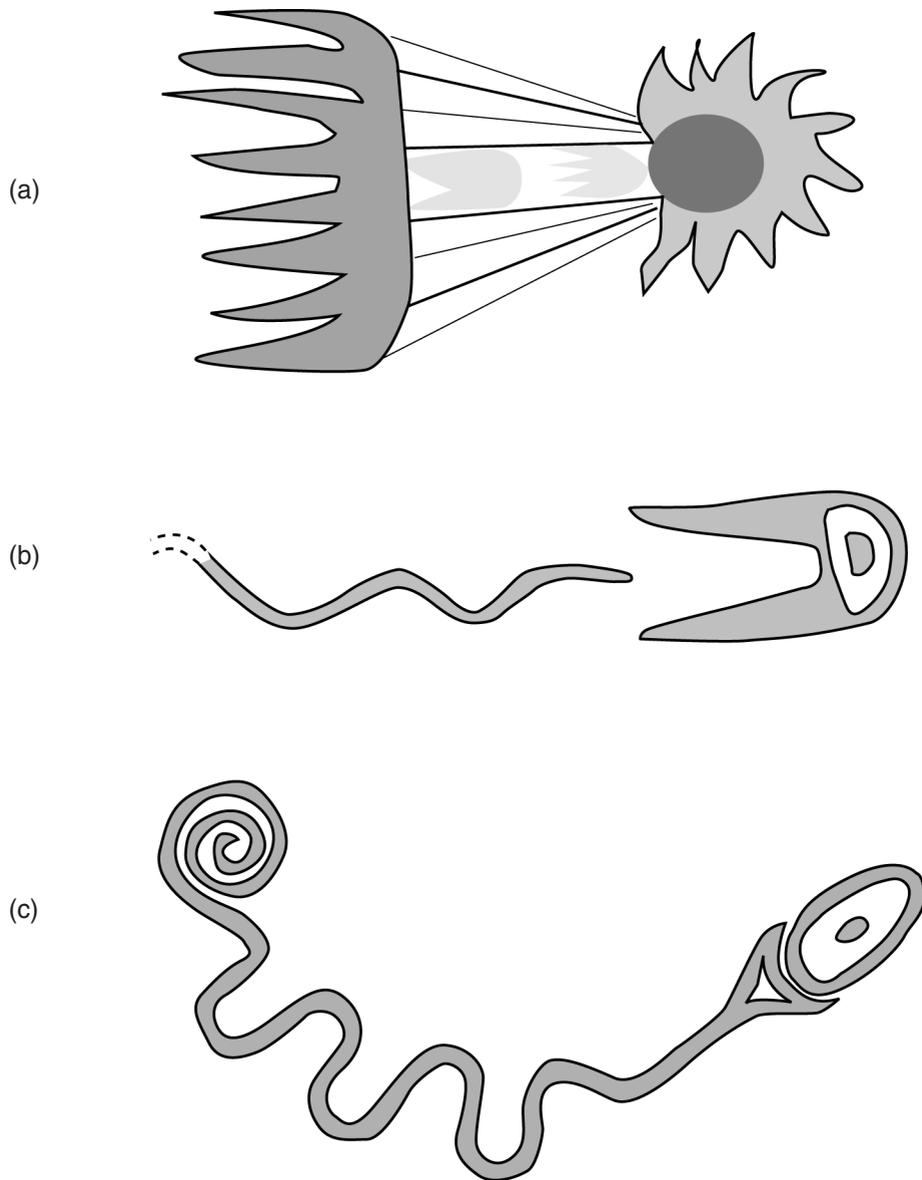


Figure 1.7 Possible mid-11th-century representations of Comet Halley: (a) the Bayeux Tapestry (adapted from Gibbs-Smith 1973); (b) Ramey Incised forked-eye motif (Grossmann site, courtesy Susan Alt); (c) the Great Serpent Mound, Ohio

However, as noted with the Hypsithermal, we should not conclude that the natural event or process actually caused some consequent cultural change. Even in the case of a mudslide or the incineration of a whole village, any attendant cultural changes were caused by the culture-making or “social negotiations” of people in

the context of the event, not merely as a result of the event. Different people in other times or places would have understood a similar event differently or reacted in other ways, with divergent consequences. So, the cultural process resides in the experiencing of that particular place with those particular people, not in the catastrophe.

This is perhaps clearer with another climatic shift well known to archaeologists: the Medieval Warm Period. Between A.D. 900 and 1300 or so, the northern hemisphere experienced a prolonged warm, moist period. Perhaps not coincidentally, inequality developed in the west (Ames, this volume); Chaco and the Classic Hohokam arose in the Southwest (Hegmon, Lekson, this volume), maize was intensified and polities or confederacies founded in the east (Chilton, Henning, Pauketat, this volume), and the Thule expansion began in the Arctic.

The Thule, the Vikings, and the Medieval Warm Period (A.D. 900–1300)

By the end of the ninth century A.D., there were two archaeologically distinct groups of peoples, the Dorset descendants of Arctic Small Tool Tradition people in the eastern Arctic and the Canadian archipelago (north to Greenland) and those in the west around Alaska called the Thule (Maxwell 1985). The latter organized themselves in large, gendered, “corporate” residential groups and whaling parties, led by wealthy whaling “captains.” The corporate groups included extended families and attached kinfolk who worked together, cooked and ate together, resided together, and identified with one another. Along with other characteristics – the use of large whaling boats, snow sleds, the bow and arrow, a distinctively abstract art style, an elaborate harpoon technology, marked social inequalities, and the potential for outward aggression, etc. – they stand in marked contrast to their Dorset contemporaries in the eastern Arctic (see Maxwell 1985; Park 1993). The latter were seal-hunting foragers who were organized in small groups with shamanistic ritual leaders and less evident potential to generate concentrations of wealth and social inequality.

With the warming up of Arctic waters, the breaking up of ice, and the shifting range of bowhead whales at around A.D. 1000, the Thule people – ancestors of the Inuit – began to migrate eastward from large Alaskan sites like Cape Krusenstern, Birnik, and Norton (see Anderson 1984). Current evidence suggests a contracting Dorset population “in crisis, and probably in severe decline” (Whitridge 1999:65). Earlier Dorset sites, such as Button Point, were abandoned with a retreat as far south as the Port au Choix site in Newfoundland. Whether the Dorset people had vacated the lands they had formerly occupied, were driven out by the immigrant Thule, or overlapped with and were ultimately absorbed into Thule populations (or some other combination of the above) remains uncertain. But the Thule people ended up as far away as Labrador and Newfoundland just a few short years later, where they met Norse colonists sailing in the opposite direction from Iceland and Greenland.

Like the Thule, the Norse exploration of the New World was an outward expression of what being a Viking was all about. As recorded in the Vinland Sagas, there were a number of Norse attempts to explore lands beyond Greenland, which itself

had been colonized before A.D. 1000. Apparently, rumors of a wooded land with wild grapes and other natural resources encouraged colonists to sail south, founding at least one small domestic settlement consisting of several sod buildings, cooking pits, boat sheds, cattle corrals, a forge, and a kiln (Ingstad 1985). Known as L'Anse aux Meadows, an unidentified band of Norse families set up a domestic outpost in Newfoundland around A.D. 1000, perhaps abandoning it altogether just after a few years. While exchange of European goods with the Thule peoples continued for a few hundred more years, the Norse colonists in the Arctic were unable to sustain their bases as the Medieval Warm Period drew to a close (McGhee 1984). They retreated to Iceland and Scandinavia with the inhospitable conditions of the Neo-Boreal period, or the "Little Ice Age" (see Fagan 1999).

In both the Thule and Norse cases, the Medieval Warm Period is a necessary part of the explanation of colonization and, ultimately, the abandonment of part or all of the eastern Arctic. But equally obvious is that the social histories of the Dorset, Thule, and Norse predisposed each population to become what they did. Peter Whitridge (1999) notes how being Thule was wrapped up in gendered practices and childhood experiences, such that Arctic colonization was an outward expression of their lived cultures-in-the-making. Climate caused neither the Thule nor the Vikings.

Commensality, inequality, and cultural orders

The locus of Arctic colonizations resided in the practices, production, and experience of people. A similar point can be made for any other case in this book: consider the corporate experience, construction, and commemorations represented by Iroquois or Hopewell houses, culinary practices, and mortuary traditions (see Chilton, Dancey, this volume). Or, consider the Chacoan Great Houses, Great Kivas, and roads, laid out for effect with wall construction mimicking the canyon walls and each Great House sited with respect to the horizon, to an *axis mundi*, to celestial phenomena, and to each other. Merely passing through the canyon, much less experiencing the sights, sounds, and smells of it, was a religious experience (e.g., Farmer 2003; Lekson 1999b). The objects with which people left, or that they associated with Chaco – whether or not utilitarian or ritual – were "pieces" of that place, conveying indelible meanings regardless of where they ended up (Bradley 2000, cited by Hegmon, Pauketat, this volume). In a sense, the effect of Chacoan pieces of place was another kind of Chacoan peace and a new southwestern landscape, *pax Chaco* (Lekson 1999a, 1999b).

The same may apply to southeastern places, such as Poverty Point, where artifacts suggest a close relationship between cooking and craft production (see Sassaman, this volume). Apparently, craft objects were used during on-site public events that, presumably, included large-scale commensal meals or feasts in the large Poverty Point amphitheater (see Gibson 2000). There may be no better illustration of the odd conflation of political and communal or public and private realms than in Poverty Point's seemingly dramatic performances of the mundane.

Likewise, at Cahokia, the mere act of building domiciles, using a particular style of pot, or walking through a public space merged the quotidian with the cosmological (Pauketat, this volume). The gargantuan feasts at that place clearly merged highly sacred acts and objects with the mundane, everyday realm of agrarian life (Pauketat et al. 2002). In this particular case, the politicization of the everyday and the cooptation of the communal produced something of greater magnitude, a sub-continental cultural order – a *pax Cahokiana* – that could also be labeled a “civilization” (see Pauketat 2004).

Embodying North American Archaeology

In contemplating the foundations of such cultural orders, most archaeologists now agree that inequality was an ever-emergent condition of social life (Ames, Sassaman, this volume). Many would also agree that “culture contact” was not a one-time European affair, but in fact characterized many small-scale and large-scale historical encounters of people with each other. What varied widely from people to people was the materiality and spatiality of either the accommodation of, or resistance to, the perceived inequalities or the “other” in culture contact situations (e.g., Alt 2001; Nassaney 2001). We see this historical principle even more clearly in the archaeology of the North America’s colonial and antebellum periods.

In the 1970s and 1980s, archaeologists discovered that what they thought they knew about African American slavery, based on written descriptions by literate Euroamerican observers and slave-owners themselves, was not accurate (Singleton, this volume). There was considerable material evidence of daily, covert resistance on the part of the slaves to the sensibilities and ideologies of the dominant Euroamericans – so much so that Southern social history is now understood to have been as much produced on a day-to-day basis by the seemingly powerless and often illiterate slaves as by the elite Southern planters (e.g., Ferguson 1992). Of course, few planters recognized or admitted as much in written texts.

That slaves did this is eye-opening, and allows us to reconsider the history-making processes of all non-literate peoples, lower classes, women, mixed-bloods, Native Americans, and those others “beyond the big house” (see Deagan 1988; Singleton, this volume). Kathleen Deagan’s research on Spanish St. Augustine and the 16th-century community of Puerto Real in Haiti focuses on these history-making processes (Deagan 1995). She stresses that the household was the site of “transculturation” – the mutual cultural exchanges between Spanish men and their Indian wives and African slaves. The colonial community was multiethnic; race and status were intertwined and the hybridity of people, architecture, and objects was instrumental in shaping new cultural practices and creolized identities (see Silliman, this volume).

Likewise, Kent Lightfoot’s research on the 19th-century community of Fort Ross, California serves as his basis for arguing that “the social environment of most North American colonies was considerably more complex, involving one or more local native populations, European peoples of varied nationalities and backgrounds,

and many 'other' peoples of color" (Lightfoot 1995:200). In the case of Fort Ross, the arrangement and use of space, the built environment, trash disposal, and domestic activity constructed new social identities for colonial native Californians, Russians, Alaskans, and mixed-bloods (Lightfoot et al. 1998:202).

Identities and the body

Our understanding of the pluralism of cultural construction and history-making can be taken one step further by reconsidering identity and the body. For years within archaeology, the concept of identity was used to refer to sameness. It was thought that whatever people had in common could be discerned through the identification of "cultural traits" and this, as we have seen, resulted in static conceptualizations of different ethnicities, ideologies, and cultures.³ But today we recognize the variability and diversity of social identities; identity was a complex negotiation of individuality, community, gender, status, power, personal beliefs, and religious and corporate ideologies (Fisher and Loren 2003). Identity was (and is) about both sameness and difference (Meskell 2002:279–280).

As with culture-making generally, the identities we see at any particular time are always identities-in-the-making. They are fluid, shifting, actively negotiated, and endlessly (re)constructed. So, we are looking at identity processes (rather than identity as product) and multiple identities (rather than just one). I define myself and people define me differently depending on context: what I wear, what language I speak, etc. By doing this, by taking on different personas, individuals cross existing social, racial, and political boundaries to construct new social identities (Loren 2001, 2003, this volume).

Importantly, the relationship between social identity and material culture is not straightforward, but rather ambiguous, as individuals (may have) chosen different kinds of material to express social identity (Upton 1996:5). And, while there is a lingering tendency within archaeology to reduce material culture to essential categories and to assume that only certain groups used certain forms of material culture, material culture is not merely reflective of identity (Upton 1996). Instead, identities formed as people chose or were forced to choose certain forms of material culture in the process of living.⁴

To overcome this lingering conceptual difficulty, North American archaeologists should turn to theories of the body (Joyce 1998; Meskell 2000).⁵ Bodily experiences are more than just gendered; they include concerns of race, class, age, status, etc. (Fisher and Loren 2003). There is an experiential aspect to the daily practices of all people in that we experience (or live) the world through our bodies in daily practices that take place in full view, on the landscape.

Conclusion: A Renewed North American Archaeology

The relationship between the landscape, material culture, and the body is active and constitutive: we understand the landscape and other social actors in that land-

scape by our experience of it (Fisher and Loren 2003:229). This is true of the clothed bodies of multiethnic and creolized French and Spanish colonial sites and the transculturation of landscapes (Loren, this volume). It is true of figurative sculptures and images of bodies, considered as gendered pieces of places (from painted pictographs to Plains Indian children's dolls, Cahokian redstone figures, and Chacoan effigy vessels). It is also true of the dead bodies in Cahokia's Mound 72, in the Crow Creek ditch, or on the Ludlow landscape (Pauketat, Saitta, this volume). In the same way, the body of the Kennewick Man shapes the landscape of American archaeology today.

Such bodies, like cultural objects and architecture in general, were not benign things that merely adapted to external changes. In the same sense, grand monumental expressions in North America were not symbols of raw political power in the hands of self-identified elites. Rather, these were built by individuals whose very bodily movements, during the act of construction, defined their sense of place, personhood, and cosmological order. Objects and houses likewise were pieces of landscapes. The spaces of particular places continued to channel movement and to redefine sensuous experience, cultural practice, and one's own sense of self in North American landscapes. Bodies moved through social spaces and engaged with a world that evoked memories, heightened and solidified notions of self and people, and enveloped the body with history (Bender 2001; Tilley 1994; see also Saitta, this volume).

North America's vast spaces were never neutral playing fields. North American peoples worked in and manipulated the landscape. They built homes and communities over older ones; they traveled on roads to trade and created physical avenues of movement; they migrated across vast and unfamiliar terrains to meet new peoples; and they defended spaces that they called their own. In doing so, and in the many dimensions of being an American, they constructed their futures, and set parameters around ours.

Their alternative histories are sometimes forgotten, occasionally subverted, and often controversial. But they matter in our attempts to understand an expansive and unfolding story of how people make history. Alternative histories are the subject matter of a renewed North American archaeology that, in its own history of practice, its large datasets, and its theoretical directions, is teaching us a lesson that promises to help all peoples understand the sweep of global history and the commonalities of the human experience.

To that end, the chapters in this book open the door to the rich human history on display in North America's immense outdoor museum. We only need look. Turn the page.

NOTES

- 1 Consider the US legislation governing Native American life, including the Indian Removal Act (1830), the Indian Assimilation Act (1857), the Code of Religious Offenses (1883), and the General Allotment Act of 1887 (see Deloria 1988; Waldman 1985).

- 2 Consider a couple of well-known North American studies. First, the Tuscon “garbology” project showed how archaeological measures of consumption revealed that some people misrepresent their daily practices (Rathje 1974). Second, the archaeology of the Battle of Little Big Horn undermined the official history of the late 19th century and, instead, verified the account of the Cheyenne and Sioux warriors who were there (Scott and Connor 1999)!
- 3 In this formula, social complexity and diversity are underestimated and, sadly (and chillingly), such definitions can be used to support nationalist, colonialist, or imperialist claims (Trigger 1989).
- 4 Once again, we must stop and consider how our identities in the present impact what we have to say about the past (see Meskell 2002:280). For North American archaeologists, this means that we must contend with the legacy of the Moundbuilder Myth, the ties between early archaeology and colonialism, and museum collections obtained by less than ethical means. North American archaeologists no longer operate under the assumption that their subjects are long gone and that they alone have the power to interpret the past (Brumfiel 2003:208; Schmidt and Patterson 1995).
- 5 Gendered research in archaeology has been around since the 1980s, but the intersections of gender and the body are of more recent origin (see Joyce 1998; Meskell 2002). The body, as it turns out, is the location of identity construction and cultural practice (Butler 1991).

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