The Archaeology of Ancient North America

This volume surveys the archaeology of native North Americans from their arrival on the continent 15,000 years ago up to contact with European colonizers. Offering rich descriptions of monumental structures, domestic architecture, vibrant objects, and spiritual forces, Tim Pauketat and Ken Sassaman show how indigenous people shaped both their history and North America's many varied environments. They place the student in the past as they trace how Native Americans dealt with challenges such as climate change, the rise of social hierarchies and political power, and ethnic conflict. Written in a clear and engaging style with a compelling narrative, *The Archaeology of Ancient North America* presents the grand historical themes and intimate stories of ancient Americans in full, living color.

- Includes a rich illustration program of 295 images, all reproduced in full color.
- Narrates the experiences of Native America in humanistic terms by emphasizing the culture and history of the people who settled the North American continent.
- Links the text with online computer applications and web sites.

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Both Sassaman and Pauketat are previous winners of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference's C. B. Moore Award in Southeastern Archaeology.

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of studying North America's past" (original prospectus submitted to CUP). If we have succeeded, it is in large part due to the emotional support from our wonderful partners over the years. Thanks Susan and Meggan.

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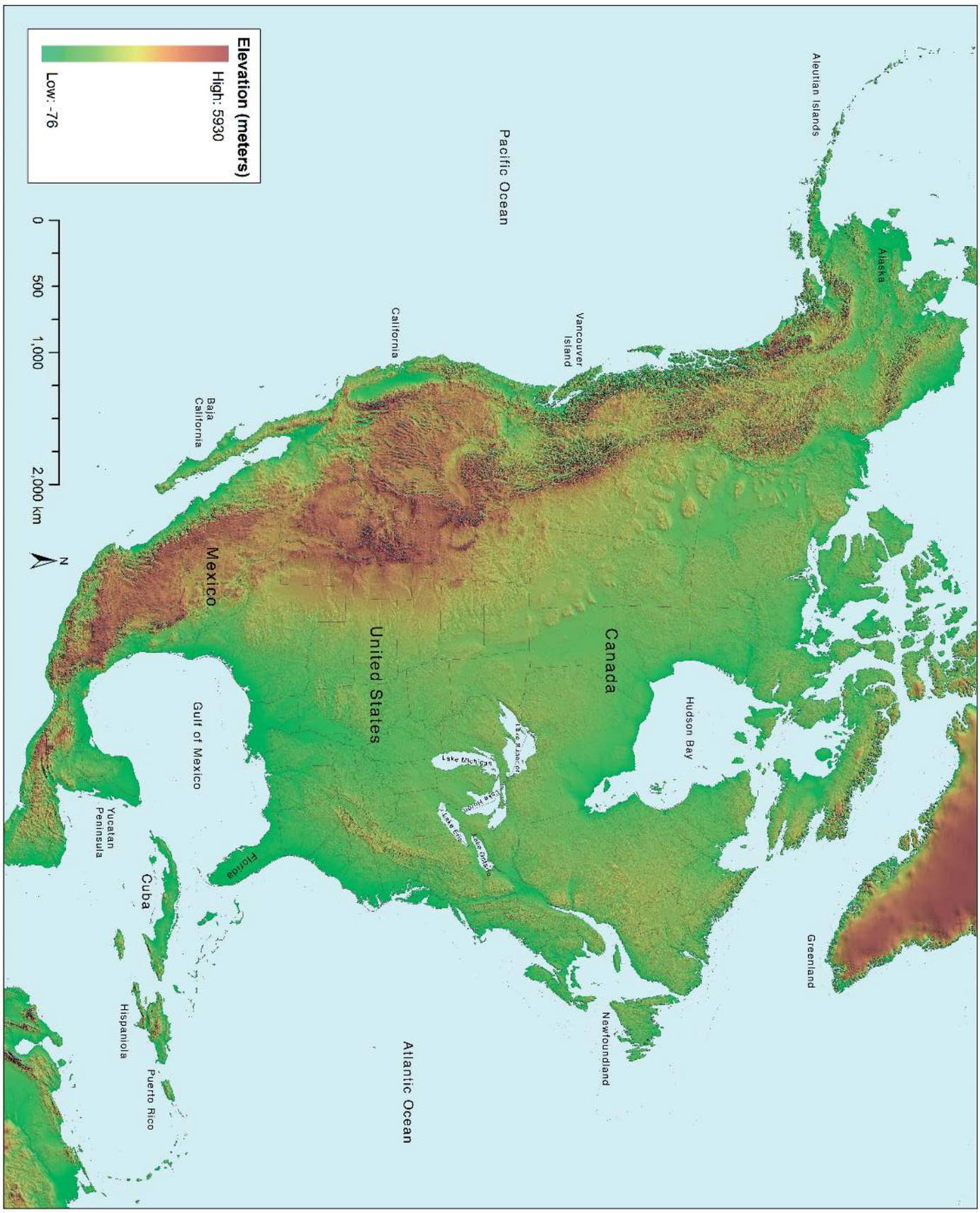
Preface: Rebooting North American Archaeology

Understanding the archaeology of any continent is an ambitious goal, whether you are a student, an interested nonspecialist, or a professional archaeologist. After all, the scope of the subject is but a few continental steps away from the history of the world (see Locator Map). Unfortunately, learning about the archaeology of native North America from a book, such as this, over the course of some manageable period – say, a few months – still entails glossing over many details about people, places, and things. Certainly, this book necessarily focuses on those aspects of the past that we think most important. These are the ones that shed light on the human experience, generally, and its causal relationships to human history. As you will see, this leads us to foreground particular sites and research projects, to follow particular archaeological narratives as they develop, to accentuate certain kinds of historical relationships (and not others), and to generalize.

Few authors feel comfortable with generalizing at continental scales. The reasons include the humbling recognition, unavoidable as an archaeologist, that the more one knows about any archaeological subject, the more one understands how little one actually knows. Sometimes this is the case regardless of scale. For instance, few of us can fully appreciate the big historical implications of momentous occasions that affect thousands, whether those events are weather-related, such as El Niño rains, or large-scale ritual spectacles held in villages or pueblos. Similarly, there exist many unknowns about sensory experience and its causal power – what specific people might be induced to feel or do given, say, the flavors of foods, the spectacular visual qualities of ritual gatherings and celestial phenomena, or the colors, textures, and designs of particular objects. Archaeologists have only recently begun to think seriously about how the embodied experience of movement through space, and hence the qualities of specific spaces or experiences, affect our humanity, shape our identities, or afford certain futures (see especially Chapters 5, 8–11, and 14–15). There are so many unknowns.

But these are all reasons to do archaeology. Understanding the causal linkages between sense, movement, design, and history is to some degree possible through an archaeology of the Native American, American Indian, or First Nations past. Such lessons, of course, may be of immediate concern to living descendants, whose heritage, identity,



and sovereignty are at stake. A good deal of respect and deference needs to be brought to the table of any study of the North American past. This is important also because North American archaeology's lessons are relevant to non-Indian peoples everywhere, who stand to benefit from knowing who, what, where, how, and why changes of all kinds happened in the past, are happening now, and will happen in our collective future.

Of course, bear in mind that in archaeology, as in history, there are no absolute truths. People are not mere matter that might be contained in a test tube or placed on a laboratory table and evaluated using the laws of physics or chemistry. Instead, history and heritage, both of which are rooted in the stuff – the artifacts, features, landscapes, etc. – that archaeologists deal in everyday, are always subject to negotiation. In fact, archaeological remains are very much the media of human imagination (or lack thereof), which is always reckoned with respect to the past and, from there, the things and places that comprise that past. This is why the news is filled with stories of pipelines threatening sacred sites, illicit diggers stealing pots, tourists and ranchers defacing rock art, and developers bulldozing whole village sites. This is why from time to time American Indians dispute interpretations that adversely affect their own narratives.

We, your authors, are not immune. Any First Nations, American Indian, Yupik, Iñupiat, or other native person reading this book might rightfully disagree with certain of our claims to knowledge and, thus, choose to narrate the past differently. Certainly, other archaeologists predisposed to think differently than us will dispute some of our inferences. That is as it should be. We do not claim to know everything or to speak for everybody. Our tack is to approach the human past with a good deal of intellectual and historical humility.

However, we do fervently believe that North American archaeology holds key insights into some important historical issues that matter for us all today. First and foremost among these is the manner in which we understand the mediation of human history, if not humanity generally. Who or what causes this or that, and where, when, how, and why?

Our commitment to asking such questions and the weight we give to media, to various other agents of change, and to narratives make our book unlike all previous textbooks on North American

archaeology – and there are a few (Fagan 2005; Neusius and Gross 2014; Snow 2010). Previous authors with ideas founded in older theories of cultural and societal change wrote almost all of these earlier works. The sources of change recognized by them often seem to be (1) gradual and long term, (2) external to the human experience, and (3) local and ahistorical (i.e., one region's or period's people seem unaffected by their neighbors or their ancestors). For many, climate change and population growth were the explanations for everything. What people did – and how they related to other phenomena, places, and things – mattered very little. Actual people – or their things and constructions – were but passive reflections of the times.

This strikes us as more than intolerably colonial. Few North Americans today, native or nonnative, would ever accept such ahistorical explanations of our own world. And yet, from these earlier viewpoints, societies and their institutions were the units of change, treated as if they evolved slowly through time in ways that shaped the docile bodies of human beings.

Of course, fetishizing society in such ways deemphasizes, if unintentionally, the immediate relevance of the North American past to the present (see Chapter 2). It does this by implying that pre-Columbian peoples were not the makers of history (see Chapter 9) but natural organisms, members of bio-social populations who were bound by putatively conservative cultures and subject in turn to immutable rules and norms. Culture and cultural materials were understood to be not active and malleable interlocutors of history but instead passive reflections of slow-moving, organismic, societal adaptations. Artifacts were, thus, either functional items that served some societal purpose or superfluous nonfunctional ritual objects. Nonhuman beings, substances, forces, and phenomena – even those that people may have recognized as integral to their humanity – are especially marginal to such social-evolutionary visions of the past. This is why so few of these earlier archaeologists questioned the use of the word "prehistoric" to describe pre-contact North Americans (but see Lightfoot 1995).

All such treatments of the indigenous peoples of North America, past or present, are highly problematic, if only owing to the colonial history of North America (see Chapter 3). All archaeology needs to work toward maximizing the roles and voices of American Indian

people – past and present. Any archaeology that denies an American Indian cultural logic to the North American past risks colonizing that past with its own biases. This is because pre-Columbian North America was unequivocally not (not, not) a place populated by modern individuals whose goals were to maximize caloric intake and minimize energy expenditures or who merely functioned as cogs in some mechanistic society (see Chapter 1's juxtapositioning of John Muir and Henry Ford). It is time to abandon such twentieth-century views and reboot North American archaeology.

Perhaps the place to begin is with the continent itself. And so, in Chapter 1, we use Google Earth to fly over it, hoping to transcend some of the traditional "culture area" divisions of the continent – the Plains, the Southwest, the Northwest Coast, the Eastern Woodlands – rooted in earlier beliefs that indigenous Americans populated societies that developed by adapting to environments (subject in turn to climate change and population growth). Admittedly, we do not fully abandon the subcontinental divisions, but we do shape our chapters around issues, with some chapters very intentionally comparing one region's history with another's.

The histories of which we speak are not, of course, written. Instead, histories are lived. They include the larger material-cultural constructions of people who relate to and through the forces, matter, and beings of their worlds. Histories result in altered configurations of people, places, things, substances, and phenomena that then, in turn, impinge on (not determine) future relationships.

Defined in this way, there were no prehistoric people. Moreover, there was an element of reading and writing in all people's historical constructions. That is, pre-Columbian people wrote their histories in the land and through objects. For example, certain "medicine bundles" contained a series of mnemonic objects that would be opened and read much like a scroll (see Chapters 3, 8, 10, and 11). One might call this oral history, but let us be clear: it was based on knowledge *recorded* via an ordered assemblage of things, much as written language is an ordered assemblage of abstract characters. Many cultural objects and even entire landscapes had similar mnemonic power to call to mind relationships, historical and otherwise – prayer sticks, sacred pipes, peace medals, decorated pots, designed architectural spaces, aligned mounds, geometric earthworks.

Hence, North American archaeological history is not reliant on identifying prominent, usually European, human actors – the Juan Cabrillos and Francisco Coronados of their time – or on reading their texts. Both human actors and texts do embody the sorts of historical relationships about which we speak, of course, but both can also mask the actual relationships that we need to explain. Instead, the histories of which we speak were contingent on understanding relationships that happened, and that always necessarily happen, through material, spatial, and corporeal media over time. These were historical contingencies that played out at local, regional, subcontinental, and, sometimes, even continental scales. We cannot ignore the Pacific Coast's relationship deep into the continent's interior, or the Southwest's historical impacts on the Mississippi Valley, and vice versa. If left to our own devices, we would not ignore north and west Mexico, or pretend that Mesoamerica had no impacts north of the US–Mexico border. It did.

Questions of Time and History

This brings us to the question of time in relation to history. As we repeat in Chapter 9, history in the western sense of the term would seem predicated on linear time, and on the recognition that linear time can be segmented into periods or eras. It also considers time to be objective and irreversible, unfolding at a constant rate. But history in the sense we use it in this book is not beholden to a linear narrative nor is it dependent on the actual events that fill time. It is, rather, what people make of the past, however that may be conceived. And it can unfold at different rates, depending on the kinds and qualities of experiences and relationships at play.

Certainly, we do base this book's narratives around chronological dates, and for ease of understanding we primarily use Gregorian calendar years BCE (Before Common Era) or CE (Common Era), as opposed to years BP (Before Present), BC (Before Christ), or AD (*Anno Domini*, Latin for "in the year of our lord"). In a few instances we retain calibrated BP date ranges (cal BP) in order to remind archaeologists who prefer them where we are in time. Generally speaking, all dates used in this book are based either on dendrochronology (tree rings), especially in the US Southwest/northwestern Mexico, or on radiocarbon assays. The latter are measurements of the amount of radioactive carbon within some archaeologically recovered organic

substance. Of course, because the amount of radioactive carbon in the atmosphere fluctuated in the past, archaeologists calibrate the radiocarbon date against some other standard, such as tree rings, in order to derive a calendar year estimate. We use calibrated dates and date ranges, though such estimates are seldom perfectly synchronized and are subject to change in the future.

It should be pointed out that even calendar years can be deceptive for reasons explained earlier. That is, history is not an absolute unfolding of time at a constant rate. In fact, it is well established – in part through Einstein's Theory of Relativity – that time speeds up and slows down relative to the contexts of its unfolding. Thus, archaeologists often speak of the temporality of some context, event, material assemblage, or landscape, by which they mean its temporal dimension or implications – what time felt like in that situation (Gosden 1994; Ingold 2000). A dark cave or monumental landscape has a distinctive temporality. It slows time down. So might a stark landscape (Chapters 4 and 8) or a big sky (Chapter 11). On the other hand, increasingly congested and cluttered fields of action, especially those filled with many small things, speed up one's sense of time passing (consider Chapters 14–15).

Hence, you might also conclude that history-making, in the way we describe it above, necessarily happened at different rates and scales. Long periods of apparent stasis (early Holocene foragers?) versus short bursts of change (early Mississippian?) might deceptively appear as if they were based solely in the presence or absence of great history-making people. But the contrasts might also be telling us that there were fundamental dissimilarities in the fields of social experience between epochs that, in turn, produced the people who ostensibly made the difference (Robb and Pauketat 2013). Transitions between such epochs, exemplified by the early mounding of the American Southeast (Chapter 9), the differences between the early and late Puebloan worlds (Chapter 14), or more obviously the era of Native–European "contacts" (Chapter 3), are even more critical for us to understand. So too does it become imperative to rethink the environment and climate change. Something like the ocean then becomes an actor in the worlds of people, and sea-level rise a historical factor central to human history (Chapter 5). So might weather events, such as those stemming from, say, the Neoglacial or the medieval warming (Chapters 6 and 10).

How to Read this Book

Because we reject simplistic cause-and-effect scenarios, where the environment might be said to cause cultural adaptations along with the histories of people generally, or where simple societies are thought to "evolve" into more complex ones, there are a number of ways to read this book. Chapter 1 is not a straightforward environmental summary, but one that builds a bit of history and your own experience into it – thanks to Google Earth. Chapter 2 delves more into the social history of people, past and present. Then Chapter 3 covers what some other authors would relegate to the last chapter – historic-era "contacts" and "colonialism." Given such beginnings, we could imagine some readers simply skipping to Chapter 4 in order to get to the meat of the book – the first people in the continent. Some might also choose to skip to specific research foci or areas of the continent, and this is yet possible despite our best attempts to break out of both the evolutionary approach to the past (foragers versus sedentary food producers) and the culture-area approach to the past. You can still find most of the late Pleistocene and early Holocene material in Chapters 4 and 5, much of the rest of the hunter-gatherer archaeology in Chapters 6 through 9, and most of the text on agricultural or "complex" societies in Chapters 10–15. Similarly, most of the information on the Arctic is found in Chapter 8; the lion's share of our text on the West is contained in three chapters (6, 11, and 13); the Southwest is largely covered in two chapters (14 and 15); and the Eastern Woodlands is spread primarily across four chapters (7, 9, 10, and 12).

But skipping the first three chapters might lead you to miss one of our big historical points: the past happened historically, and history is not a one-dimensional or simple-linear evolutionary process. In fact, history is to some extent always constructed in the present, based on the past, for the future. Likewise, the histories of some so-called culture areas most certainly and consequentially impinged on the histories of others. For such reasons, which we harp on now and again in chapters to come, we sometimes begin chapters with a later historical vignette. In the case of Chapter 9, we reverse the chronological order of the chapter entirely. In other cases, we reference time and again the causal relationships between the people, places, and things in otherwise separate chapters.

The causal elephant in the room, in fact, is Mesoamerica and the Caribbean. There is no legitimate reason whatsoever to believe that today's US–Mexico border, or the 150 km (90 mi) between the Florida Keys and Cuba, was much of a barrier at all in the past; there is also no reason to overlook the fact that west, central, and northern Mexican connections with people and places north of the Rio Grande were likely critical to the specific historical developments in the north. Specific cultural practices, gods, or religious movements likely have their genesis to the south. Yet even we, owing to the scale of the project before you and the realities of publishing in the twenty-first century, could not include a chapter on Mesoamerica and the Caribbean.

That is unfortunate since there are some startling parallel developments between Mesoamerica, the Southwest/Northwest, the Southeast, Midwest, and even Plains. Some such parallels – as with the big historical changes between California, Illinois, and New Mexico around 900 CE – surely have other explanations: the Medieval Climatic Anomaly, for instance, must figure prominently. Then again, our current reboot of North American archaeology, by rejecting old-fashioned notions of ahistorical development that have been far too dependent on prime movers (climate change and population among them), ends by reconsidering all of the causal factors of the North American past, including climate change, in a new way (sometimes called "post-humanist" or "new materialist" [see Chapters 1 and 16; Harris and Cippola 2017]). Our new-ancient history of North America and North Americans does not necessarily seek to strictly delimit human social history from culture, or from the landscape or the history of other things and phenomena: weather, nonhuman organisms, celestial objects, and other seemingly inanimate but powerful, locomotive forces. This tack, we hope, broadens the story of the continent and, we believe, enhances the relevance of the North American past in the present for the future.