

REVIEWS

Seeking Our Past: An Introduction to North American Archaeology

Sarah W. Neusius and G. Timothy Gross
New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
vii + 688 pp., figs., tables, biblio., glossary, index, CD-ROM.
\$64.95 (paper) ISBN 0-19-517384-8.

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Summarizing the archaeology of a geographic region is a daunting task. There are obvious tradeoffs between presenting summaries and interpretations of geographic and diachronic variation and presenting primary data or case studies. Attempting this for a continent, especially one as varied as North America, is a monumental task. Sarah Neusius and Timothy Gross have done an impressive amount of research for *Seeking Our Past*, a text aimed at students in North American archaeology classes. The book, at nearly 700 pages of text, is obviously not a brief summary of trends in prehistory. Indeed, it is an extensive discussion of both prehistoric and historical archaeology, from essentially Casas Grandes north. If the text is not enough, a bonus CD contains nearly 300 pages of additional materials that did not make the main text. The CD covers topics such as the history of study in North America, field and lab methods, additional case studies and profiles of archaeologists, the full bibliography of references, and a study guide with questions for students, among other items.

The structure of the text includes two introductory chapters, one on the goals and practice of archaeology, the other on culture and climate. The next chapter examines the peopling of the continent, where Clovis and big-game hunting figures prominently, but Pre-Clovis is also considered. The next ten chapters are regional in focus and comprise the majority of the book (over 450 pages). The final chapter is of a summary sort, focusing on the future of archaeology in North America. Overall, the book is well-produced with a large number of high-quality black and white figures including maps, chronologies, pictures of artifacts, site overviews, and

so forth. Each chapter begins with a nice regional map showing the location of key sites, includes a number of special box features that examine a particular type of artifact or feature, and ends with an extensive case study (6+ pages each) highlighting a particular site. These extensive case studies are important for students as examples of how archaeologists do archaeology and make more sweeping statements about cultural processes.

The overall theme of the book is adaptation to different environments within North America. The chapter layout focusing on culture areas and the sections on paleoclimatic change reinforce this general approach. Even within chapters, the subject matter is generally organized by sub-regions, which reinforces the notion that geography is the main factor that contributes to variations in ancient and historical societies, especially subsistence, material culture, and settlement patterns. In the opening chapters the authors acknowledge the pitfalls and limitations of a culture-area approach. Geography is an obvious choice for organizing something as immense as North America. Indeed, I'm not sure an alternative organization, such as topics that cross-cut regions, would be any better, but the geographic organization is one that has been well covered in other North American archaeology texts. In this respect, the book is not groundbreaking theoretically or topically, although it is definitely more thorough than any other text out there.

Readers of this journal will be particularly interested in the treatment of California and the Great Basin within the text. In my experience, North American texts generally gloss over California by explaining that the region is diverse and complex (perhaps not surprisingly, like its many environments). Environment and/or population pressure are generally given as governing prehistoric lifeways and changes over time. This text is not very different in this regard. The California chapter devotes 24 of its 42 pages to the prehistoric period, and is subdivided into subregions (north coast, central valley, and south coast) and time periods (paleoindian, archaic, and late). A few paragraphs are devoted to describing artifact types and subsistence-settlement patterns for

each of the spatio-temporal culture historical units. It would be asking a lot for a summary text on all of North America to be synthetic of California history and prehistory in a new way, and this text is fairly standard in its treatment of California. Fort Ross serves as the case study for the chapter and is an excellent summary of why archaeologists need to undertake collaborative research with Native communities (Kashaya elders in this case) and undertake public outreach.

The Great Basin section focuses more squarely on prehistoric archaeology, with only three of the 44 pages devoted to protohistoric and historical topics. The chapter is again divided regionally into western and eastern portions, with special sections devoted to the Fremont and the Numic spread. The chapter is again fairly descriptive of the record, with pictures of artifacts, stratigraphic profiles, and projectile point sequences, with dry caves figuring prominently (e.g., Danger Cave, Gypsum Cave, Newberry Cave). Gatecliff shelter comprises the case study, and is an engaging piece written by David Hurst Thomas that describes the process of question-driven research.

In sum, instructors in North American archaeology courses will find this an up-to-date and thorough text. The book is not terribly expensive compared to other academic textbooks, and comes with a CD full of extra and useful material for both instructors and students. At the same time, the subject matter does not stray very far from the beaten path. The descriptions and interpretations are focused on material culture and subsistence patterns as they relate to changing environmental conditions. The culture areas organization of the chapters, and the sub-regional organization within chapters, will reinforce this notion for students. Some sections attempt to go beyond these themes, especially in other chapters dealing with areas outside of California and the Great Basin. In the end, would I use this book in my class? Absolutely. It's definitely the most extensive treatment of North America that I have seen. It's professionally prepared and edited, has lots of "special" boxes, links to websites, and poses a series of research questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. I think instructors in North American archaeology courses, and students, will be pleased with this option as a course text.



Island of Fogs: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Investigations of Isla Cedros, Baja California

Matthew Richard Des Lauriers
 Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010.
 221 pp., 123 figures, 26 tables, notes, references, index,
 \$60 (cloth) ISBN 978-0-60781-007-0

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Archaeological studies in Baja California have been undergoing something of a florescence during the last few years. Much of this work still resides in conference papers and journal articles, as well as in unpublished

theses, dissertations, and governmental *informes*. Matt Des Lauriers' impressive monograph on Isla Cedros is a significant landmark, being one of the very few book-length reports published on the subject, joining the recent Spanish-language studies by Rosales-López and Fujita (2000) and by Gutiérrez and Hyland (2002).

An introductory section presents some of the interpretive themes that are discussed again in Chapters 1–2 and 6–7. Prominent among these themes are the use of comparative approaches (particularly with reference to the Channel Islands of southern Alta California), cultural responses to environmental change, the nature of cultural insularity, and the problem of resource sustainability. The book would probably have been strengthened if the discussions of these issues, which are scattered in various chapters, had been more clearly organized and more sharply focused. However, the patient reader will certainly find much here that is well worth pondering.