

# GENERAL PATTERNS, QUESTIONS, AND THE ARCHAIC

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*California archaeology, as a field of study, historically has emphasized development of local sequences of cultural development more than the creation of syntheses that characterize shared cultural patterns among different ethnic groups across regions in the same era. This form of synthesis has been pursued much more systematically by archaeologists in other parts of the continent. Examples can be seen in the definition of such patterns as the Early, Middle, and Late Woodland and Mississippian traditions in eastern North America. One result has been the realization of a series of questions about the nature and causes of multi-regional patterns of shared cultural features and cultural differences across space, within the same general tradition. Eastern North American archaeologists, for example, pursue such questions as why socio-political complexity expanded during the Middle Woodland Period but contracted in the subsequent Late Woodland, or why the Ohio Hopewell cultures developed more elaborate ceremonial centers than did the Illinois Hopewell cultures of the same era and general cultural tradition. Questions at this high level of generalization can be extremely significant for understanding local cultural patterns, but they rarely are pursued by California archaeologists, because of the lack of inter-regional integration at that level. This paper provides a generalized model of some aspects of the California Archaic Period in order to define and begin to explore a few such questions.*

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When Julian Steward developed his models of cultural ecology and multi-linear cultural evolution a half century ago, his concept marked a significant theoretical departure from the Historical Particularist School perspective which then prevailed at the University of California, Berkeley, where Steward had been trained by A. L. Kroeber and the other members of that university's anthropology faculty. At the same time, significant elements of the Historical Particularist perspective remained in Steward's work. One can read such definitive papers as his *The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands* (1936), *ABasin-Plateau Aboriginal Sociopolitical Groups* (1938), *Theory of Culture Change* (1955), and *ASome Problems raised by Roger C. Owen's The Patrilocal Band* (1965) and find not only aspects of his theoretical innovation but also the collections of non-integrated, ethnohistoric details from various cultures that were so characteristic of the Historical Particularist approach (Harris 1968:250-289).

Although cultural anthropology has long since moved past the Historical Particularist orientation, an argument can be made that its effects can still be found in some other areas of anthropology, and specifically in California archaeology. I have argued elsewhere (Chartkoff 1996) that California archaeologists, as a group, have tended to be more resistant to the development of general syntheses than archaeologists in most other parts of the continent have been. This resistance can be understood in part as a logical consequence of the influence of A. L. Kroeber and his students, especially Robert F. Heizer, in the training of subsequent generations of California archaeologists.

The purpose of this paper is to pursue a consequence of this historical tendency. As scholars, we are committed not only to the making of observations about our data, but also to the asking and answering of questions about the data. The questions themselves are largely the consequences of the nature, patterning, and variation that

emerges as the data are analyzed. To a significant extent, the questions themselves are artifacts of the approaches we take in the analysis of our data. Failure to frame questions which colleagues elsewhere have defined may be a consequence of differences in the data at hand, but it may also be a result of differences in approach or methodology, such that questions which could arise are not being perceived.

If the latter is so, it follows that the research approaches we adopt have a significant effect on shaping the questions that we realize. Realizing what the questions may be is a requisite for the approaches we will adopt to answer them.

My thesis is that the tendency in California archaeology to emphasize local sequences, and the resistance to working regularly with models at the highest levels of integration, such as are used across most of the rest of the continent, does not simply cast California's archaeological reconstructions in a different format than that used by most other scholars. It hinders or prevents California archaeologists from perceiving an entire level of questions and issues addressed elsewhere, because these archaeologists too rarely operate intellectually at the same level of general synthesis that is used elsewhere.

### A MIDWESTERN ANALOGY

This point can be illustrated using a model from the Midwest whose time period and level of cultural development has some useful analogies with California counterparts; this will illustrate some significant differences that have resulted from the approach taken to the analysis of that archaeological evidence. If one considered Late Archaic sites in several parts of Michigan, dating from the period between about 5,000 and 4,000 years ago, one could find some very interesting variations among the sites coming from different regions within the state, in addition to finding a number of shared patterns.

By the time those sites had been developed, the ecosystem had long since modernized

from glacial conditions. Hunter-gatherer adaptations were being pursued throughout the area. Subsistence at that time was pre-domestication, and technology was pre-ceramic throughout the regions. Patterns of culture, however, were far from uniform (c.f. Fitting 1975; Halsey 1999).

Late Archaic cultures at that period in middle Michigan were characterized by tiny communities with micro-band organization and seasonally nomadic settlement. Micro-bands moved their campsites up to a dozen times a year. Subsistence was based on foraging, with no primary staples, no collection of surpluses, and no storage, even though many of the resources being used could have allowed it. Key resources in use at the time included freshwater fish, deer, and nut crops such as hickory, beech, walnuts, and acorns.

Not very far away, near Michigan's eastern shore at Saginaw Bay, peoples with similar technologies and habitats nonetheless achieved far greater sedentism, with more-substantial houses, more permanently-occupied villages, and more-extensive cemeteries. A key factor in their strategy was the exploitation of wetlands, especially along the five rivers that drain into Saginaw Bay. There, a practice was started of constructing long rock alignments to create raised edges to existing wetlands. Doing so artificially expanded the areas and volumes of the wetlands, thus increasing the growth of desired wild plant foods, such as goosefoot and amaranths (Lovis 1984). Central Michigan's Late Archaic populations also had access to considerable wetland areas, and were in direct trade contact with the people around Saginaw Bay, although they did not pursue this option.

On the western side of Michigan, wetland exploitation also did not develop much, but something else did. Starting about 5,000 years ago, communities in that region began to become involved in long-distance regional exchange networks. A key factor was the exploitation of raw copper, which occurs naturally in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Copper collected from the

surface or quarried from deposits in the Upper Peninsula was transferred from community to community over vast distances, in some cases as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. In return, raw materials and finished goods from the receiving areas were provided as exchange items. Conch shells from the Gulf Coast, black flint from central Ohio, and mica from the southern Appalachians were only some of the goods that began to be exchanged across vast stretches of eastern North America. Sites in western Michigan reveal the emergence of social and economic elites in their communities as early as the Late Archaic, as shown in distinctive mound burials.

Recognition of these different patterns raises questions as to why they occurred when, where, and in what forms they did. Why did Late Archaic exchange practices lead to the emergence of social differentiation in western Michigan, but not in the central or eastern parts of the state? Why was copper exchange so much more significant and prevalent at that time around the shores of Lake Michigan (this includes the western, or Wisconsin/Illinois, shore) than elsewhere? Why did the Saginaw Bay people develop sedentism based on cultivars, while their neighbors to the west did not? Why was participation in regional exchange a key element in the emergence of social differentiation, while the development of facilities that promoted sedentism through the generation of cultivars was not?

#### RELEVANCE TO CALIFORNIA ARCHAEOLOGY

These questions are not yet fully answered, though they are under energetic review. In addition, in their specific form they are not especially relevant to the archaeology of California, since they are far removed geographically and reflect different content than is found in the California archaeological record.

I suggest, however, that there is indeed something in this situation that can be extremely relevant to California archaeology. One aspect is cultural. In this case, it refers to cultural differences between the

archaeological communities of scholars who work in the two different parts of the continent. From a cultural standpoint, it can be suggested that the questions themselves are artifacts of the patterning that is realized as a result of doing multi-regional comparisons. The answers cannot be generated until the questions are asked. The questions cannot be perceived until the inter-regional patterns and variations are determined. The patterns and variations at that scale cannot be determined until comparison at an inter-regional level becomes a regular-enough practice to allow patterns at that level to be widely understood.

This practice has developed in eastern North America, of which Michigan archaeology is a part. By contrast, is there a comparable level of integration and synthesis involving California archaeology? For example, is there in California archaeology a basis for defining the Millingstone Horizon, which is fairly analogous to the Late Archaic, as a comprehensive, integrating model for all of California?

The answer, of course, is that it is not. Part of the reason lies in the enduring tradition among California archaeologists to focus primarily on change over time in local sequences, while paying comparatively little attention to variation across space in the same time period – a legacy of the culture historical approach of the Berkeley School which, in Boasian fashion, has emphasized local cultural evolution from an Historical Particularist perspective.

Another dimension that is involved also bears an intellectual relationship to the legacy of the Berkeley School and Boasianism as proselytized by Kroeber. This factor is the matter of synthetic generalization, a logical derivation of processual reasoning in the scientific method and an approach not logically inherent in Boasian or Kroeberian Historical Particularism. For example, as used in eastern North America, the concept of the Archaic Period involves a series of different degrees of generalization about what constitutes the identity of Archaic culture.

In effect, it involves a series of different levels of generalization, hierarchically organized, or stacked in sequence from specific examples to highly abstract, integrative models. When the Late Archaic of middle Michigan is discussed, a series of specific examples from specific sites can be cited. When the Late Archaic of Michigan as a whole is discussed, however, it is at a level of abstraction or generalization that is not simply a larger summary of specific sites. The idea of the Late Archaic of the Great Lakes is at a higher level of abstraction. The idea of the Late Archaic of eastern North America is at an even higher level.

The same can be said for comparisons over time. One can compare the Late Archaic of Saginaw Bay with the Early Woodland of the same area at one level of generalization. Comparing the Late Archaic with the Early, Middle, or Late Woodland of Michigan as a whole is at a higher level. One can compare the Middle Woodland with the Late Woodland east of the Mississippi at an even higher level.

By being able to operate at multiple levels of integration and synthesis, archaeologists in eastern North America are able to perceive and frame important questions that simply do not emerge locally. Why, for example, did elite burials and ceremonial mound complexes flourish during the Early and Middle Woodland periods but virtually vanish during the Late Woodland? Why did Middle Woodland complexes of the Hopewell Tradition flourish in Ohio and Illinois but scarcely at all in-between, in Indiana?

A review of California's archaeological literature shows that the synthesis of data into models at multiple levels of integration scarcely takes place among these archaeologists. Consequently, they apparently have not defined multiple levels of patterning in the same sense that archaeologists in eastern North America have done, so the questions and issues associated with those different levels have not emerged in much substance in discussions among California archaeologists.

## A POTENTIAL CALIFORNIA CASE

To cite one illustration, in the March 2001, issue of the *Society for California Archaeology Newsletter*, there is an excellent discussion by Kirk Halford about production and acquisition patterns in the use of Bodie Hills obsidian during the Early Holocene, or what elsewhere might be called the Archaic Period (Halford 2001). Though focused on Bodie Hills, Halford's paper also compares Bodie Hills data with those from three other western Great Basin sources. This comparison allows the definition of which factors are shared and which factors are unique among uses of obsidian sources in relatively neighboring areas. Although most of the problems or questions generated by the study focus on change over time, some questions about variation over space also emerge.

But consider, for a moment, what the framework of questions might be like if our scope could be even broader. Looking at California's own Late Archaic Period as a case, consider, for example, the situation around Clear Lake, where the local obsidian sources were already long involved in regional distribution and production. Based on the patterns of dispersal from different sources, the directions and the quantities reflected, we not only can characterize the patterns as they differed among the four major Clear Lake sources, but we also can ask how the patterning around Clear Lake compared with that around Bodie Hills. We can ask what relationship there may have been, if any, during the Late Archaic Period between patterns of obsidian dispersal and patterns of socio-political complexity in each area. We can then extend the comparison over time to see how evolutionary sequences developed in each area, and what might account for the resulting similarities or differences.

This comparison could be extended more broadly. Several sources of obsidian in eastern California and western Nevada were involved in trans-Sierra obsidian exchange. Sources in northeastern California and southern Oregon were similarly involved in regional dispersals. We could look at key

sources such as Bodie, Casa Diablo, and Modoc Glass Mountain for comparison. Obviously there are significant differences among them, but there also can be significant similarities. At a higher level of abstraction or synthesis, however, they all represent Late Archaic societies engaged in obsidian extraction, redistribution, and use.

It is possible to compare multiple regions at a point in time, as well as to compare developmental sequences in several areas, to determine what their significant similarities and differences were. Furthermore, it is possible to generalize more abstractly about the exchange of obsidian around California for each time period, so that time periods as a whole could be compared. Once we have the ability to see how the patterns are similar or different at different levels, we can then ask why they are that way, giving us both questions and answers currently not a regular part of the dialogue in California archaeology.

To extend the example a bit further as a useful case, some factors obviously can be brought forth, such as major differences in habitat and the subsistence resource base. Furthermore, it is easy to assume such factors will regulate other patterns. But do we know how valid such assumptions may be in any case? We can explore the issue in new ways by moving to even-higher levels of generalization. For example, we can raise the level of generality of the redistributed commodity from just obsidian specifically to lithic raw materials more generally. We might look at the patterning associated with the movement of banded chert across the South Coast Ranges and along the Santa Barbara Coast, for example, so that habitat differences might not be so dramatic. Then we could see analytically what happens when habitat differences are not terribly great. We could compare the patterning associated with marine shell exchange as it occurred in southern California with that of central and northern California. We could compare steatite exchange based on the Catalina Island sources with sources in the central Sierra Nevada foothills, and so forth, to go to a higher level of abstraction about exchange patterns than lithic exchange

alone.

## A NESTED-HIERARCHY PERSPECTIVE

It may be useful to illustrate some of this potential in a slightly different way. To return to Michigan archaeology for another example, when discussing the post-Archaic period for Michigan, archaeologists make use of a time frame used widely across the continent east of the Rocky Mountains. Following the Archaic Period, which ended about 3,000 years ago, came the Woodland Period. In the Great Lakes area, the Woodland Period lasted until the arrival of Europeans about 400 years ago. This period is further divided into segments: Early, Middle, and Late Woodland.

In any region of eastern North America, each of these parts will have its own distinctive manifestations. For example, Ohio's Middle Woodland Period features the Hopewell Tradition as its local manifestation. Farther west, in Illinois and Indiana, there is a distinct, but related, manifestation called the Havana Tradition, or the Havana-Hopewell. The Ohio Hopewell and the Havana-Hopewell have many features in common as well as distinctions between them. Within the Havana tradition itself, there are more-localized variants. For example, western Michigan's Norton Complex is distinguished from the Illinois Havana (e.g. Fagan 2000; Halsey 1999).

What this pattern illustrates for archaeological thinking is a nested series of levels in a hierarchy of models. Archaeologists in places such as Michigan readily move mentally up and down the scale, over space as well as over time. Comparative questions emerge at each level, and all the questions have merit. Here in California, archaeologists have a long and distinguished record of working productively at the more local and explicit levels. We simply are not regularly perceiving a whole range of questions, issues, and problems in our data because we do not work regularly at these multiple levels of synthesis in terms of

temporal/spatial integration.

In eastern North American archaeology, as exemplified in Michigan, one can compare and contrast aspects of culture between, say, the Norton Complex cultures of Grand Rapids and those of Benton Harbor. However, one can also move up a level to compare the Norton with the Havana of Illinois. One can move up to yet a more general level to compare Havana with the Hopewell, and then to a higher level to compare the Upper Midwest Middle Woodland with that of the lower Mississippi River Valley, all the while working within the single time period of the Middle Woodland. One could extend this comparison to even higher levels, such as comparing the Middle Woodland of eastern North America with the Late Preclassic cultures of Mesoamerica.

One can do the same sort of multiple-level comparisons with time periods at multiple levels of synthesis. The questions one can ask about each level have their own power and significance. For example, why did Late Woodland cultures in the Southeast evolve into Mississippian systems, while those of the Great Lakes region remained at the Late Woodland level?

### A DOMESTIC ANALOGY

It may be helpful to illustrate this perspective using an analogy from everyday domestic experience. It may provide a useful frame of reference, even though it is quite elementary. All of us live somewhere: on a street, in a neighborhood, in a community. Everyone experiences the acquisition of multiple identities as a result. One not only has a specific address, but in comparison to others who live on nearby streets, living on a particular street creates a sense of location and shared identity with one's neighbors. One also can be identified as living in a neighborhood defined by a set of adjacent streets, so that to people who live in other neighborhoods, one's own neighborhood creates a recognized identity. One's neighborhood is part of a larger community – a town, or a section of a city – by which one may also be identified as well

as identify oneself. One also can be identified with one's political county, as well as with the region of the state in which that county exists, along with one's state and nation, and even one's continent.

These various levels of identity all are valid. In addition, each can have differing characteristics, or features, issues and emphases, compared with those at every other level. The issues that engage one at the national level are quite different from those which do so at the state or local level, but all can be equally serious in terms of the dynamics of one's existence.

### CONCLUSION

All this is just to say that significant levels are out there in the archaeological record as well. We in California have paid attention to some levels far more than others. In spatial terms, we tend to focus especially on the smaller, local scales. A comparable observation was made at the 2001 annual meetings of the Society by Jack Meyer in his paper on geoarchaeological perspectives about buried archaeological landscapes (Meyer 2001). As a result, a number of relevant, even exciting, questions go unasked, much less unanswered. The contributions of California archaeologists should be a good deal more stimulating and rewarding if more were done to discover, ask, and answer such questions.

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