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WIDE-AREA CONNECTIONS IN NATIVE NORTH AMERICA

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Long-distance contact throughout prehistoric times and the period of European exploration in North America had a pronounced impact on native cultures. Distance and geography did not limit far-flung social relations, travel, and trade among tribal peoples. The convergence of cultures in many regions, and, at times, a virtual homogenization of societies across wide areas, was not usually the result of random diffusion. Instead, archaeological evidence and ethnographic accounts imply extensive long-term relations among selected groups for specific social, economic, or political benefits.

To many of the colonizing Europeans, the New World was both an attraction and a repulsion. A variety of social, economic, military, and religious motives impelled settlers to the American shores. The largest proportion of these numbers settled on the coastal margins, and the residents largely confined their activities within a small radius around the village clusters. Toward the sea was an exception, for intercourse along the coast and across the sea was anxiously maintained.

In early colonial history, penetration of the interior took place with almost surprising deliberation. Contrary to popular belief, westward expansion resulted from something other than a burning desire to observe what lay over the mountain, or to confront the Indians. Land pressure resulting from depleted soils, along with economic and political compulsions, literally shoved certain segments of the population into the great beyond. Latecomers to America (i.e., those after 1700), marginal farmers, squatters, and ne'er-do-wells served as the not altogether willing vanguard of civilization in the wake of missionaries and traders.

At the beginning, America's landscape offered as great a psychological and physical deterrent to the white settlers as did the tribes who already dwelt there. The terms "forest primeval," "dismal wilderness," and "trackless wasteland" are legacies that recall the hesitant conquest of the American continent. These terms survive, even though the notion they convey is, at best, semilegendary. The natural American setting had immense forests, but they were laced by streams, pocked by glades, and dissected by the trails of animals.[1] Signs of human activity greeted the reluctant tenderfoot even in pioneer times. Paths and trade routes were active in most areas, affording proof that this seemingly formidable environment was not totally confining to its native inhabitants, the American Indians.

Thus, in view of the significant archaeological evidence for wide-area connections well before European colonization, the time-honored, cherished concept of a primeval forest deserves reinterpretation.

Migration and Travel

Migration and long-distance travel are fundamental types of wide-area connections. There can be no doubt that these activities played an important role throughout North American prehistory. Nevertheless, some archaeologists have been too eager to cite movements of this type to explain the convergences and similarities of cultures and peoples in widely separated locations.[2] Moreover, migration does not usually involve continuing, dynamic interactions; rather, it connotes a permanent departure and the resulting disruption of social and cultural connections. The emigrating unit subsequently develops in directions that are not closely relevant to its background and without receiving any further feedback from that source. One clear example is the prehistoric Athabaskan peoples who migrated to the Southwest and became the historic Navajo and Apache; there is little in the cultures of these two peoples that is reminiscent of their origins in the northwestern interior.

The earliest episode of American prehistory, known archaeologically as the Paleo-Indian epoch (approximately 8,000 to 15,000 years ago), is one in which considerable travel must have taken place. Although the precise origins of Paleo-Indian culture remain undemonstrated, the consensus holds that the New World Indian derived from somewhere in northwestern Asia at least 12—15,000 years ago. Man's arrival in the New World—probably across the exposed Bering Sea floor—and his spread throughout two very large continents, presupposes a good deal of roving. As one consequence, cultural and genetic drift have led to considerable differences between the recent populations of Asia and the Americas, providing a further demonstration of migration as an isolating mechanism. Because the lands of the western hemisphere are so large and varied,

however, there is a high degree of dissimilarity among the cultures on this side of the Pacific alone. These differences have occurred largely because of specialized cultural development in relative isolation.

Paleo-Indian times were marked by a late Pleistocene, or Ice Age, climate. Some portions of the New World—the Great Basin area, for instance—were considerably more well watered than at present; other regions—such as New England—were passing from a stage of treeless tundra through a succession of forest types during the millennia following the withdrawal of the Wisconsin ice sheet. It was in these various environments that man established his residence upon the continent. During succeeding periods, his intensified adaptations to individual regions produced a myriad of cultures, ranging from the highly distinctive to the unique.

Although the basic result of migration is ordinarily a disruption of the interplay between groups and an eventual shedding of the traits they shared in a common homeland, one instance where this general rule does not apply appeared during the late Archaic period, around 2,000 B.C. Along the Atlantic coast at that time lived bands of foragers, who subsisted by hunting, fishing, and collecting shellfish and vegetal foods. In their homelands, on the margins of the southern coast, these people employed a diagnostic inventory of stone tools manufacturered from locally abundant nonflinty materials. This combination of standardized tool types and somewhat peculiar lithic preferences was characteristic of these bands. It was with a measure of surprise that archaeologists discovered these traits in considerable quantities far north of the expected home range of these people, at a distance sometimes over 1,000 miles. Yet within a remarkably similar cultural context are found the rhyolite broadspears, steatite (soapstone) bowls, quartzite atlatl (spear-thrower) weights, and grooved axes that denominate the southern culture.

If, as the distances and degree of similarity in the above example suggest, an actual migration took place along the Atlantic coast (perhaps in response to climatic conditions),[3] how does one explain the widespread preservation, over several centuries, of the specific toolmaking technologies and the continued use of specific nonsiliceous stones, even in areas where such materials had to be imported? This remarkable conservatism suggests continuity of contact and cultural development among far-flung segments of this cultural tradition. Periodic returns to the southern coast, perhaps even the recombination of primary bands, would have augmented the cohesiveness that is so clearly manifested in this culture. Such contacts would have enabled the migrants to continue to secure the preferred raw materials from which to shape the characteristic implements. Sustained contact subsequent to migration seems to be a rarity, but it may be the best explanation of this particular example.

Trade for Basic Commodities

A more prevalent alternative to the recurrent fission described above is trade. Trade is probably both the major incentive for and the major agent of wide-area connections in native America.

Generally speaking, trade occurs under conditions of mutual advantage. The inducements for trade are enhanced by the dissimilarities of the trading parties. Differential allocation of natural resources, skills, people, or even good fortune provides the potential for exchange among human groups. If such differences do not exist, society will often invent them. Some imported goods today, for instance, are merely perceived as more desirable than their home-produced counterparts; the fact of their importation—the exchange—is really their desirable quality.

Priorities exist in the transactions of exchange. Subsistence and technology have fundamental emphasis in most cultures and provide the primary motivation for trade. Where there is little incidence of exchange in these categories, because of a similarity of economy and tools or a lack of benefits to be gained, handicrafts and ritual items are the next categories to receive emphasis.

Illustrations of these two major divisions of trade can be obtained from American archaeology. The first illustration is of trade as an agent for the procurement of basic materials. (However, even the exchange of basic commodities can have far deeper significance than merely the procurement of food or raw materials.)[4] The Paleo-Indians supply the example. For the most part the surviving evidence of their material culture consists of a few categories of stone tool-types. These lithic specimens, recovered from temporary habitation and kill sites, offer clues to the movements and contacts of these early hunting groups. Petrographic analysis of objects from a number of campsites demonstrates that these Paleo-Indians were familiar with and utilized flints from selected and sometimes quite distant outcrops.

An interesting pattern of lithic use has emerged from studies of Paleo-Indian workshops and camps in the Northeast. Most of these

stations have yielded tools and reject flakes struck from stones obtained from 30 to 100 miles away or more. Frequently these exotic materials have occurred in significant proportions. One prominent material employed during the Paleo epoch in this region was the distinctive, predominantly red and tan jasper derived from quarries in southeastern Pennsylvania. Artifacts and rejectage of Pennsylvania jasper, recovered in Paleo context, are liberally scattered from southern Virginia to northern New York and Massachusetts. Distances of more than 500 miles separate some points of recovery from the quarries. Some of this distribution pattern probably can be attributed to a relatively rapid movement of the group from the vicinity of a particular lithic source to a new territory. But not all occurrences fit this interpretation, because the products of several widely scattered quarries are often represented at an individual site.[5]

The pattern is reproduced on another Paleo-Indian site more than half a continent away. The Lindenmeier site in north-central Colorado is one of the first and largest of its kind discovered. Studies still in progress there indicate that no stone from the vicinity of the site was utilized. All of it was imported, and as many as 40 distant sources seem to be involved. Two of considerable importance include obsidian deposits in central New Mexico and in the Yellowstone region of Wyoming. These sources are each more than 200 miles distant, in opposite directions from the site, and are, moreover, separated by considerable geomorphic features. Other sources, more than 300 miles away, account for a smaller percentage of the 15,000 stone tools from Lindenmeier.[6]

Were these stones obtained by direct exploitation or were they secured through trade with other bands? Band exchange is the more likely mechanism, according to Wilmsen, who points out that even in early prehistoric America, band territoriality seems to have been observed as rigorously as in later times.[7] Although their range may have been considerable, three or four bands would probably have occupied the region between the Lindenmeier site and its farther flint sources. With such distances involved, exploitation rights would have been decidedly secondary to exchange options, and, therefore, it appears that the Paleo-Indians carried on a vigorous and widely scattered trade in a principal commodity.

Trade for Nonessentials

Subsistence and technology did not always comprise the bulk of trade in native America. Where economy and production techniques between tribes were approximately equivalent, there was sometimes an incentive to exchange goods of a different kind. Such goods might include handicrafts or items deemed to be exotic or rare within the recipient culture. Often, rituals and ceremonials demanded materials of this description.

Among the items associated with burials at the Indian Knoll site in Ohio County, Kentucky, are shell and copper artifacts. Indian Knoll pertains to the Archaic period, of some 4,000 years ago, which stressed the efficient utilization of local forest resources. Yet, despite this emphasis on the exploitation of nearby woodlands, these Archaic people maintained a wide-ranging contact that supported their value system and ceremonial activities.[8]

The shells found at Indian Knoll are from a mollusc that is endemic to the Gulf of Mexico, some 750 miles distant. The copper most likely originated in the important native ore deposits of the Lake Superior region, nearly as far to the north. Winters maintains the unlikelihood of the Indian Knoll people procuring either of these materials by mounting expeditions to the source areas.[9] The most likely explanation is a stable trade network involving people in the source areas and at points throughout the intervening territories. Perhaps what is suggested by Archaic-culture sites such as Indian Knoll is a growing preoccupation with the ritual ceremonialism of death.

The native copper items recovered from Indian Knoll are illustrative of a widespread use of that material throughout Archaic times. Ornaments and, particularly, implements cold-hammered from naturally occurring nodules of copper, passed from the source area on upper Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula through the Great Lakes region and on to the east and south for distances of more than 700 miles. Native copper is one of the most highly visible indicators in the study of ancient wide-area connections.

The importance of ritual in stimulating exchange can be illustrated further by the example of the Poverty Point site in Louisiana. The site is a large earthwork composed of six concentric ridges of octagonal form with an overall diameter of 1,200 meters. One interpretation, that the earth-ridge system may have formed the foundation for a planned settlement of at least 600 houses, suggests that the Poverty Point people may have enjoyed a more substantial subsistence base than most of their contemporaries during the late Archaic period, between 1500 and 1000 B.C.[10]

The most significant aspect of the Poverty

Point culture for this discussion is the amount of exotic material that found its way to the site. Hornstone, galena, quartz, cherts, copper, catlinite, grizzly bear claws, obsidian, magnetite, hematite, crystal, marine shells, and similar substances arrived from the Great Lakes, the Appalachians, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Rocky Mountains, over distances of hundreds, even more than 1,000 miles.

Exactly what the people at Poverty Point did with all this material is somewhat problematical. Perhaps the greatest proportion of it was not put to use at the site but was simply accumulated there for eventual exchange or redistribution to other groups.

A clearer example of this type of activity may be discerned a little later in prehistory, during the Hopewell phase (100 B.C. to 550 A.D.), centered in the Ohio-Illinois river area. At its height, Hopewell dominated much of the Mississippi drainage and even made inroads beyond this zone. Hopewell seems to be not so much a unified culture or tradition as a cultlike expression combining religious and ritual elements with aggressive foreign policy and social organization. It seems as though the Hopewell proprietors had a product to promote, and they somehow convinced a whole conglomeration of distinctive socieities throughout the midcontinent area that it was an offer that could not be refused.

The most perceptible symbols of Hopewell influence in the archaeological record are material goods and burial mounds, from which certain conclusions have been drawn with some confidence. The Hopewell cult seems to have been based upon the establishment and maintenance of a high-status group, reinforced by its position by abundant "capital" in the form of exotic raw materials and finished goods, as well as group-specific style concepts, ideologies, and ritualism.[12] Much of this ritualism centered around death and the construction of burial and effigy mounds.

As Struever and Houart point out, the raw materials that form the nucleus of the Hopewell expression "tend to be highly visible, scarce, durable, transportable, and available from localized sources only."[13] These source areas include the Rocky Mountains, South Atlantic-Gulf Coast region, Lake Superior, lower Appalachians, and Mississippi drainage. Many of the commodities had already been discovered at Poverty Point, and it seems likely that some of the same mechanisms were at work in both societies. This network of exchange has been labeled an "interaction sphere,"[14] and certain major sites appear to have served as "regional transaction centers" within this sphere during Hopewell times. As many as a dozen of these centers have been recognized. In them, the major exchange goods were stockpiled and later redistributed, including raw materials, plain and effigy platform pipes, marine-shell containers, obsidian artifacts, human figurines, worked bear teeth, carved bone and wood, copper earspools, celts, breastplates, and specialized Hopewell ceramics.

Through yet to be discovered manipulations, The Hopewell cult came to hold sway, to a greater or lesser degree, over numerous groups. The dispersal of Hopewell goods and mounds—hinting at other, more abstract elements—can be traced across most of eastern North America. It is obvious that the advocates of Hopewell operated a wide procurement and distribution network and that long-distance connections were essential to the maintenance of the cult and its controlling influence. By 550 A.D., the burial mounds associated with Hopewell were no longer being constructed in the Ohio Valley or elsewhere, perhaps because some disruption of the trade system precipitated the cult's rapid demise over most of its realm.

Long-Distance Sociopolitical Influence

There are few verified cases in the New World of trade and contact formally undertaken by specialists dealing directly with distant contacts. Hopewell, may have been one case, although the suggestion is mere conjecture. The prime example, however, is the *pochteca* class among the Aztecs. The *pochteca* were merchants who penetrated the empire and its environs, procuring and trading various commodities in quantity, particularly luxury items for use at the capital. They enjoyed elite status, great wealth, quasi-diplomatic standing, and even a kind of religious immunity wherever they ventured. The *pochteca* served as the eyes and ears of the emperor, as well as being his merchants, and they communicated with the most remote portions of the Empire and the outside world.[15]

Pochteca-like emissaries may have been the catalytic agents who combined remnant southern Hopewell manifestations with Classic Mesoamerican concepts to spark the climactic development in North American prehistory—the Mississippi tradition. Without considering this well-studied phenomenon in further detail, it is sufficient to cite the fact that the Mississippian, to an even greater extent than the preceding Hopewell tradition, made use of specific artifact inventories combined with design motifs and other cultural concepts, such as a town settlement pattern, platform mounds, farming, and

warfare. A few of the traits were familiar in Hopewell times, but some fundamental elements of Mississippian society—especially the death-oriented "Southern Cult," the temple-topped mounds, and the large agricultural communities—point to Mesoamerican sources. Perhaps survivors of the Classic Maya collapse of 900 A.D., or even more formal contacts from that quarter, introduced the indigenous population of the lower Mississippi valley to these new ways. By 1100 A.D., at any rate, Mississippian outposts had become established throughout the Southeast and up the great river and its tributary valleys as far as northern Wisconsin, southern Ohio, and eastern Oklahoma. Considering that their secondary influences extended even beyond this region (to the Iroquois, for example), it is fair to observe that most of eastern North America was united at a socioreligious level just before the arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth century.

It is owing to an ability to command distant resources and peoples that manifestations such as the Hopewell and Mississippian were possible. Stated another way, the very existence of these traditions is evidence of how extensive and efficient the wide-area connections were that they maintained. Through these channels they were able to secure valuable raw materials, obtain finished products, spread their doctrines, and wage war. Though local cultures may have retained too much autonomy to be considered integral parts of a prehistoric American empire, there was, nevertheless, the potential for subjugation through the existing avenues.

Homogenization of Culture

Journals and historical accounts kept by European and American explorers amply demonstrate the extensive contact maintained among Indian groups during the colonial and early national periods. These sources and subsequent ethnographic studies indicate the degree to which this intertribal access led toward a homogenization of cultures. As the white man expanded his settlement westward through the forests and onto the prairies and plains, this civilization often outpaced him. Particularly the items of his own material culture passed into Indian hands and swept from group to group along established trade routes. Even the white man's diseases penetrated native America far in advance of his actual arrival, serving as his harbinger.

Often the Indians traversed vast distances to reach the trading posts. The annals of New France indicate that the Huron and Iroquois frequently canoed and portaged for weeks toward Quebec to obtain European goods, which then began an even more extensive odyssey through the channels of indigenous commerce. Unfamiliar as they were with the existence, and persistence, of this widespread trade and social contact among the native Americans, European and American observers in the period of exploration manifested considerable amazement at its extent. Consider the case of Marquette and Joliet, the first white men to behold the Mississippi, when they met along the banks of that river with Indians bedecked in French cloth.[16]

Capt. John Smith of Jamestown, one of the first explorers of the mid-Atlantic coastal margin, observed several instances of European items in the hands of natives who may have been confronting European people for the first time. In one case, he encountered a group of Indians outfitted with "many hatchets, kniues, peeces of yron, and brasse."[17] They probably had obtained these items through trade with the Susquehannocks, who appear to have possessed European goods for as much as two decades prior to any direct trade with the settlers.[18] Clearly, the aboriginal communications system was effectual.

Among the most useful and extensive reports of such activity are the journals of Lewis and Clark, from which it is possible to reconstruct the exchange network in existence just before and during the first decade of the nineteen century in the upper Missouri valley.[19] Two primary trading centers operated in that region. One incorporated the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the Knife River in North Dakota, while, at the mouth of Grand River in South Dakota, the Arikara maintained the second. A network extending across much of the Midwest and Plains regions expedited the exchange of goods in aboriginal times. By the protohistoric period, however, the complexion of that trade had unquestionably been transformed. During the period of transition just before the arrival of the white man among the western tribes, many indigenous groups far beyond the verge of civilization—and some altogether unknown to the newcomers—already possessed a wide array of the white man's technological handiwork. Guns and ammunition, knives, kettles, hoes, axes, scraps of iron and brass, articles of clothing and adornment, horses and mules and their equipage—all of these had been conveyed from French and English traders primarily, through the hands of Indian middlemen to the more remote tribes further west. Furthermore, many nations had received similar items from the Spanish Southwest.

By the time Lewis and Clark and other early western travelers established direct contact with them, most tribes were already undergoing considerable adjustment as a result of indirect contact with the whites. Usually goods received in trade not only supplemented or replaced native materials but they also altered basic indigenous lifeways as the society became increasingly involved in the fur trade and other aspects of white culture. The horse, the gun, and commerce in furs led to new patterns of consumption, new hunting modes, new residence patterns, different labor organization and specializations, increased desire for European products, and drastic changes in subsistence, cultural values, and the bases of social authority.[20]

During later historic times, the white man played an even more major and direct role in Indian culture, through participating in the extensive native trade network. The Indian supplied huge quantities of furs, usually at the serious expense of neglecting the more routine activities of his subsistence and society. Moreover, the Indian made available to the traders many other commodities, such as buffalo robes, dried meat, guides, sexual partners, and transport, all of which further strained the basic fabric of his society. At the same time, many of these cultures had long been undergoing the ravages of a host of introduced diseases.

The Indian's insatiable appetite for, and his later reliance upon, the products of this exchange negatively repaid him, in terms of social stratification, economic changes, and technologies foreign to his society and to which he was unable to adapt in time. Frequently, these changes proved deleterious to the survival of an integral culture.

In many ways, what happened to the Plains Indian paralleled what had already taken place in the eastern woodlands, and it foretold what was soon to occur among the Northwest Coast tribes. Ironically, no more striking evidence for the efficacy of wide-area connections in native America can be found than by tracing the spread of white culture through these arteries. An even more subtle transformation took place, for the richly varied Indian cultures distributed across the continent forfeited, in some measure, their individuality, as they first turned toward the whites, became embroiled with them, and eventually withered under the new order.

Discussion

The question how wide-area connections originated can be answered only speculatively. One suggestion may be found in the social context of the prehistoric groups. Ethnographic analysis and a growing body of archaeological evidence indicate that early hunter-gatherers probably were organized in patrilocal, exogamous bands of 15 to 50 persons. In such groups, the males lived in the territory of their fathers but were forced to go outside the group for matrimony, so that ties of kinship were established with other scattered bands. These ties entailed further obligations and privileges. Thus, exogamous marriage provided a substantial basis upon which to create far-flung social and economic relations. In part at least, this explanation shows that wide-area connections would be a natural accompaniment of band social organization.

Another explanation may be that the desire for certain objects or materials of limited distribution was stimulated by hearsay or direct observation. A waxy flint used during a social event by a distant band or a colorful ocher used by a far-off acquaintance could open the channels for a widespread procurement system.

Exchange probably served equally as the major stimulus and agent in maintaining these communications networks. Exchange includes the formal and ritual presentation of gifts that accompany personal or group alliances, marriage, and friendship; it also includes less formal sharing and giving. As Sahlins points out, "the connection between the material flow and social relations is reciprocal,"[21] so that whatever one band is in some way involved with another, it can be expected that goods will pass between them. Trade is commercial reciprocity and can be a very effective agent of social interaction. The decision whether to have trading relations with another group is essentially a decision of foreign policy. What is traded and how the transaction takes place goes far in determining future affairs and has an effect on the economy of all involved.

To a surprising degree, trade can go undetected in the archaeological record. Entire classes of material culture, which may comprise a major proportion of exchange transactions, may be unrepresented because of the effects of time and decay. Basketry, textiles, wooden objects, leather, bark, and the like are seldom preserved in archaeological contexts. Food exchanges are frequent and have great significance in native societies yet would not be readily interpreted, even if the remains were somehow preserved. Some transactions may involve wholly nonmaterial goods: the selling of songs or a shaman's knowledge, for example. In an archaeological sense, only the tip of the iceberg of

trade is visible. Only a small proportion of the testimony has survived and it is at best a pale reflection of the long-distance activities during these periods. Nonetheless, trade and other kinds of communication should be considered for their important (even determinant) influence in native cultural development and history. The degree of population movement and contact indicated by even modest and selective archaeological evidence suggests that wide-area connections, especially on a regional level, comprised a major force in enriching and blending the cultures of prehistoric North America.

The wilderness of the New World was traversable, after all, as the Europeans themselves soon discovered. Such considerable north-south geographic features as the Appalachians, the Mississippi, and the Rockies, whatever their significance as boundary markers, did not long remain barriers for either aboriginal or European cultures. Movement in an east-west direction actually came to predominate in the new country, and evidence of trade and communication in Indian times reflects a similar lack of conformity to strict geographical convenience.

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