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Dam Projects and the Growth of American Archaeology: The River Basin Surveys and the Interagency Archaeological Salvage Program

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Kimball M. Banks and Jon S. Czaplicki have compiled a collection of papers that reflect upon the lasting impact left by the River Basin Surveys (RBS) and Interagency Archaeological Salvage Program (IASP) on American archaeology. Presented in three parts, the book documents the origin of the RBS and IASP (Part I), surveys the regional program offices and activities (Part II), and concludes with essays addressing the contributions and effects of these formative public works programs. The book does not attempt to cover all programs that came to define reservoir salvage archaeology; rather, it focuses on two important elements. While rather dry and redundant at times, the book manages to accomplish the commendable task of contributing to American archaeology's origin story without mythologizing it too much.

Tracing the legislative foundations, intent, and organization of the IASP and RBS, Chapter 1 (Banks and Czaplicki) memorializes the programs' origin in the planning for the return of World War II veterans seeking employment and the need for developing water resources to support an expanding population. With the passage of the Flood Control Act of 1944, Congress created a mechanism to fund archaeological survey and excavation ahead of major reclamation projects. While the funding was insignificant compared to the construction costs (a few thousandths of one percent), the resulting salvage archaeology was unprecedented and laid the ground work for the growth and development of cultural resource management (CRM). In Chapter 2, Theissen, Hull-Walski, and Snyder sketch out the role of the National Park Service (NPS) in funding the IASP and RBS through cooperating institutions. The authors

effectively argue that the work of the early IASP raised public awareness of the rapid loss of the nation's cultural heritage and directly catalyzed the eventual passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Part II of the book begins with Chapter 3, in which Wood describes IASP work in the Missouri River Basin, where nearly half of all post-War reservoirs were proposed. The work, carried out under the auspices of the Missouri Basin Project, led to notable advancements in site recording, zooarchaeology, mechanized excavation, aerial photography, and remote sensing.

Perhaps of greatest interest to readers of this publication is Chapter 4 (Moratto and Riddell), which chronicles the archaeological inventory of 20 stream basins in California. The chapter is somewhat novel in that it was assembled by Moratto long after the passing of Riddell, using material presented at a 2001 symposium held during the annual Society for American Archaeology meeting. Moratto weaves together a summary of RBS work in California with the reminiscences of Riddell.

The administration of RBS work in California was somewhat convoluted, but was spearheaded by archaeologists at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB). Work started in earnest in 1945, and eventually a cooperative agreement between the nascent California Archaeological Survey (CAS) at UCB, RBS, and cooperating federal agencies was executed. The fieldwork of the RBS was completed by CAS (later, University of California Archaeological Survey [UCAS]) staff, many of whom are well known to California archaeologists today: Robert Heizer (director of CAS and its successors until 1979), Franklin Fenega, Francis Riddell, Arnold Pilling, William Wallace, Martin Baumhoff, David Fredrickson, Adan Treganza, and Clement Meighan, among others. The methods employed were crude by modern standards and relied heavily on word of mouth and intuitive strategies, resulting in many missed sites. Reports of findings were cursory and lacking in depth or specificity. A summary of major RBS program surveys in California is provided in Table 4.1. Following anecdotes from Riddell's RBS surveys of the late 1940s, the chapter concludes with a review of the primary contributions of the RBS to California archaeology, most notably providing the first appraisals of hitherto unknown regions of the state.

Lyman provides a comprehensive review of the short-lived (1947–1952) RBS work within the Columbia River Plateau and northern Great Basin. In one of the best-written and researched chapters of the book, he lays out the theoretical underpinnings of the RBS at the commencement of work in the region, documents historical details of the Northwest RBS office, and provides a synopsis of the analytical work and unique aspects of the RBS during its brief period of operation within the Plateau and Basin. The RBS work in the Northwest appears to have achieved more in terms of delineating the temporal and spatial distribution of cultural traits, in contrast to California where work largely constituted a rough inventory.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 describe the work and accomplishments of the Texas, Southeast, and Washington D.C. RBS offices. In Chapter 9, Fowler provides a recitation of archaeological salvage and its major contributors within the Upper Colorado River Basin.

Part III of the book opens with Mirro's discussion (Chapter 10) of RBS and IASP contributions to physical anthropology and the rise of modern biological anthropology. In particular, the influence of William Bass and his intellectual descendants is examined. Ultimately, the contribution of the RBS and IASP to biological anthropology stems from the huge human skeletal populations that were generated, rather than any analytical advancements directly produced by the programs. Work conducted on skeletal populations collected by the RBS and IASP (sometimes decades after their initial exhumation) benefited more from advancements made in physical anthropology, rather than influencing them. Mirro's chapter highlights the mixed blessing created by the massive collections of human remains generated by the salvage era: it resulted in a huge backlog of unanalyzed specimens and unpublished manuscripts, yet ultimately provided a basis for studying large populations across individual and regional cemeteries.

Chapter 11 (Lees) considers the emergence of historical archaeology in the context of RBS Missouri Basin projects. Chapter 12 (Hoganson) outlines the effect the RBS had on the development of paleontological studies within the Missouri River Basin.

In Chapter 13, Knudson pays homage to many of the (largely unacknowledged) women who made significant

contributions to the success of the RBS and IASP. The role of women in reservoir salvage archaeology is placed in the context of a rapidly changing social milieu, one in which war helped propel women into work that was traditionally male dominated. The representation of women in each RBS field office is discussed, highlighting several of the notable pioneers. The Berkeley field office stands alone in the glaring absence of any women found to play significant roles.

A Native perspective is provided in Chapter 14, as Baker (Yellow Wolf) relays heartrending descriptions of the disruption and displacement of the indigenous peoples wrought by dam building in the Missouri River Basin. Baker's chapter highlights the consequences of the forced removal of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people to make way for the Garrison Dam through firsthand accounts, correspondence, and resolutions drafted by those affected. It is an important story that is otherwise overlooked in the retelling of the RBS and IASP histories.

Gradwohl provides an extended personal account of IASP work in Chapter 15. Relating the rugged living conditions, sometimes harsh weather, excavation at significant archaeological sites, and scant leisure activities, he manages to convey what life was like as he grew from a neophyte salvage archaeologist into a seasoned professional. His work on the IASP within the Great Plains propelled him along a path that ultimately resulted in his establishment of the Iowa State University Archaeological Laboratory in 1962, where his IASP-funded work continued until 1970.

In the concluding chapter (16), McManamon summarizes major milestones in American archaeology as it evolved from the salvage era in the wake of the Flood Control Act to CRM in the latter part of the twentieth century. The year 1974 is held up as a watershed for American archaeology, when a confluence of events brought about significant advancements in the discipline. Salvage archaeology prior to 1974 is contrasted with the early practice of CRM; the latter is distinguished by its application of the tenants advanced in Binford's *new archaeology* and a conservation ethic. Specifically, McManamon cites the use of research designs, testing of hypotheses, and improved site prospecting and evaluation methods as important advancements that distinguished CRM from salvage archaeology.

He concludes by outlining valid critiques of CRM and delineating four primary challenges for the discipline: the ability to provide quality access to archaeological information to inform ongoing research; maintaining a capable, professional workforce; effectively managing physical collections; and finding consensus on the goals of site conservation.

While this edited volume doesn't break any new ground, it manages to document what most contemporary American archaeologists know implicitly: that the era of reservoir salvage archaeology laid the foundation for many of the methods found in CRM archaeology today. The subject matter is fairly esoteric, even for a discipline largely concerned with the obscure, but it is essential reading for CRM archaeologists interested in tracing their lineage.

The book would have benefited from a broader view of reservoir salvage archaeology, but it does a fine job of memorializing two important programs of this bygone era. To be fair, summaries of the reservoir salvage era can be found elsewhere, and this volume certainly gives much deserved attention to the RBS and IASP. More focused editing could have avoided the retelling of the origins and purpose of the RBS and IASP, which appear time and again throughout. The book reflects a geographic bias towards work conducted within the Missouri River Basin, yet this is understandable given that the lion's share of reservoirs were proposed in that region during the salvage era. The book's graphics leave much to be desired; most of the three dozen figures suffer from diminutive size and poor resolution, rendering many of

them useless. This is particularly true of the photographic reproductions that are presented.

The critique and challenges facing contemporary CRM as presented in the book are valid (see McManamon), but the book overlooks the single largest obstacle, in my opinion: the need to maintain relevancy by clearly communicating the value of archaeology to the broader American public. Conservation of our national heritage is a cornerstone of the National Historic Preservation Act, as expressly stated in the preamble to the Act.¹ Yet, in practice, much of the reporting and interpretation in contemporary American archaeology remains insular, with a very limited audience.

While salvage archaeology has come to be viewed in a negative light, this book provides a reminder that, however limited or incomplete, work conducted during the reservoir salvage era undoubtedly contributed to the conservation and interpretation of hundreds of important archaeological sites, both directly and indirectly. This is an important lesson in these times of growing outside scrutiny of the discipline of archaeology. Perhaps if we view our own work with the same amount of detachment, it will facilitate continuous improvement in the scope and interpretive methods of contemporary investigations.

NOTE

¹"The Congress finds and declares that...the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people."

