ABSTRACT  In 2010, archaeologists investigated diverse, multilinear human histories and disagreed about what forces shaped these histories most powerfully. The varied new work covered in this review is organized into three broad themes. First, research on the relationship between people and environments included topics such as domestication and anthropogenic landscapes, social responses to environmental crisis, and adaptation. Second, archaeologists studying nonstate societies discussed the basis of inequality, the dynamics of early villages, kin organization (incl. “house societies”), lineage commemoration, social memory, and monumentality. A third body of literature concerned the complex interactions within, between, and around states, including colonial powers; here, archaeologists particularly emphasized the intersection of imperial or colonial processes with local actors. In all three themes, a focal interest concerns the extent to which local and regional histories were forged by conditions or by human actions and their chains of consequences. [archaeology, environment, inequality, archaic states, 2010 trends]

Contemporary archaeology is a varied, eclectic field—so much so that writing a coherent review of a year’s publications seems about as easy as getting a pot of spaghetti back into the cardboard box. But if archaeologists do not speak in unison, their conversations do partake of the particular flavor of the time, defined especially by a preoccupation with agency and by the recent tendency—now very common even among North American archaeologists—to view the past as historical, as a direct outgrowth of a specific deeper past. In other words, the past was shaped by the accumulated legacy of previous human actions, in large part through the material world of artifacts, technologies, built structures, and modified landscapes. True multilinearity, as produced by these path-dependent histories, is apparent everywhere in archaeological writing today; words like trajectories and pathways are sprinkled liberally throughout the literature. Far from vitiating cross-cultural comparisons, this perspective seems to have invigorated them; comparing trajectories opens up a rich territory of explanatory possibilities. Hence, many archaeologists are dealing in some way with questions of how conditioned and constrained local and regional histories were—and by what critical factors or processes. Some stress demography, environment, and social or economic organization; others lay more emphasis on the construction of meaningful monuments and commemorative traditions.

Meanwhile, much archaeological writing conveys a palpable sense of “affirmative action” in restoring agency to long-dead people, especially those involved in major transformations that outwardly appear monolithic and inevitable. The role of agency is a central question in studies of imperialism and colonialism, and it also informs bottom-up approaches to the adoption of agriculture and the establishment of inequality. How much room did actors of different kinds have to shape their futures and affect major transformations, and how much intentionality was involved? Broadly, our differences lie in the extent to which we stress contingency versus process, and agency versus conditions, in the making of diverse human histories.

There is no way to write a comprehensive review of the year’s work. Here I aim for the humbler goal of usefulness and try to cover new writing on a few broad themes of general interest: the relationship between people and environments; social organization and inequality in nonstate societies; and the complex interactions that states engender. I neglect a great deal of worthy work published in 2010, including almost everything addressing periods before the Holocene or after C.E. 1700, and I deal mainly with what happened
in the past and how to explain it, rather than method or the highest of high theory.

ENVIRONMENT AND SUBSISTENCE: HOW MUCH AGENCY?

Both previous *AA* archaeology “Year-in-Review” articles (Eiselt 2009; Rodning 2010) highlighted recent work on the interaction between people and environments. This remains a topic of great interest, encompassing historical ecology, social responses to climate change and natural disaster, and adaptations to environments. Although these topics sit within a broadly materialist paradigm, environmental archaeology in recent decades has emphasized human agency, resilience, and variability. A central issue, then, is how much control people have over their ecology. Daniel Contreras (2010) usefully divides the Andean literature on human–environment relationships into “modified,” “structuring,” and “sacred” categories; the first two are most relevant here. In “modified” visions of the environment, the dominant concern is how human agency works on the environment, often through the creation of anthropogenic landscapes. In “structuring” environments, the field of agency is more circumscribed, and environments powerfully shape human society either through dynamic changes (disaster, climate change) or as constraining settings (adaptation). Of course, this artificial division belies the fact that the relationship between people and environments is a two-way street, as archaeologists routinely recognize. An important secondary issue concerns how successful actions were: Did people use the land in sustainable or deleterious ways? Did environmental problems prompt successful or dysfunctional social responses? At the most basic level, obstacles remain in integrating paleoenvironmental history with archaeology. Geographers Chris Caseldine and Chris Turney (2010) note in particular the poor chronological control and limited regional applicability of many paleoclimate records and a weak understanding of what those records really mean in terms of past temperature, precipitation, seasonality, and predictability.

**Modified Environments: Domestication and Anthropogenic Landscapes**

People in the past transformed environments for both good and bad. Exciting work in the neotropics makes it ever clearer that these challenging environments were engineered and exploited in far-reaching ways. Isotopes and phytoliths from coastal French Guiana trace the pre-Columbian conversion of wetlands into large complexes of raised field beds for maize, manioc, and squash—raised fields that continued to have major impacts on the landscape long after their abandonment (Iriarte et al. 2010; McKey et al. 2010). Settlement survey in Bolivia’s Llanos de Moxos elucidates the use of the impressive earthworks and raised fields of this region (Lombardo and Prêmers 2010). Timothy Beach and colleagues’ trenching and analysis demonstrate that the Maya intensively modified wetlands in Belize, building canals and raised field beds (Beach et al. 2010). Such evidence suggests that past populations were deeply knowledgeable about local ecology and could manage it expertly. Indeed, Cameron McNeil and colleagues (2010) challenge the hypothesis that deforestation and environmental degradation precipitated collapse at Maya Copan. Their analysis of a long sediment core shows that episodes of deforestation occurred at the adoption of agriculture and at Copan’s founding, but gradual reforestation thereafter suggests forest conservation and sustainable land use. Yet some human land-use practices were deeply detrimental, perhaps especially those associated with first colonization (as at Copan). For example, Andreas Mieth and Hans-Rudolf Bork (2010) adduce new evidence from soil profiles that it was humans, not rats or climate change, who denuded Rapa Nui of its forests.

Such contrasts indicate major differences in the long-term sustainability of different practices and the sensitivity of different environments. Vernon Scarborough and William Burnside (2010) trace Maya land and water management over time to distinguish between “technotasking” intensification, the politically centralized application of labor-intensive technologies (e.g., canal systems), and heterarchical “labor-tasking” intensification, in which the land is incrementally engineered and managed by decentralized groups, forming a more sustainable and resilient infrastructure. But sustainability was not always an either-or matter. Michael Barton and colleagues’ (2010) computer models sketch out several decades of different land-use practices in catchments around archaeological sites in Neolithic Jordan to trace complex anthropogenic erosion and deposition patterns in which initially beneficial shifting cultivation and grazing gradually became detrimental as populations grew.

Studies of domestication provide another angle on how people altered environmental resources. Here, new work documents early domestinations, multiple domestinations, the keeping of unusual species, and diverse histories—a creative flourishing of human interventions in animal and plant kingdoms. Douglas Kennett and colleagues (2010) find evidence for early forest clearance and maize cultivation among Archaic people of coastal southern Mexico, who were previously thought to be hunter-gatherers. Genetic analysis of ancient turkey specimens by Camilla Speller and colleagues (2010) reveals separate domestinations in Mesoamerica and North America. Gregor Larson and colleagues (2010) use genetic evidence to document the early domestication and continuous long-term keeping of Chinese pigs as well as multiple additional (possibly independent) pig domestinations in other parts of Asia. Guy Bloch and others (2010) report archaeological evidence for surprisingly large-scale beekeeping in northern Israel dating from the tenth to ninth centuries B.C.E., while isotope analysis by Andrew Somerville and colleagues (2010) establishes that scarlet macaws were kept and bred at Paquimé (Casas Grandes) rather than traded in from their natural range far to the south.

Domesticates were not adopted quickly everywhere, and studying why agriculture appeared so much later in “peripheries” can be as revealing as investigations of its
primary heartlands—this, at any rate, is the very interesting argument made by Michael Harrower and colleagues (2010). They examine the transition to animal husbandry and eventually crop cultivation in the Horn of Africa and southwest Arabia several millennia after agriculture’s origins in the Levant to conclude that the different delays on either side of the Red Sea are best explained by specific social histories of these regions rather than climate or demography as determining forces driving toward (and away from) cultivation.

**Structuring Environments: Bad Times and Natural Disasters**

Two articles from one *Current Anthropology* (*CA*) issue address early natural disasters that that were, respectively, catastrophic and overrated. Juxtaposed, these articles highlight differences in the severity and impact of environmental catastrophes as well as, perhaps, differences in resilience or sheer luck among populations facing them. Liubov Golovanova and colleagues (2010) postulate that coeval European volcanic eruptions at circa 40,000 B.P. resulted in a volcanic “winter” over much of the northern hemisphere and caused a demographic collapse of the Neanderthals, felicitously opening these regions for the expansion of early modern humans (protected from the blast in more southerly climes). In contrast, Vance Holliday and David Meltzer (2010) draw on several lines of evidence, particularly radiocarbon dates, to rebut the hypothesis that a meteor impact caused a Paleolithic population decline and the end of the “Clovis culture.”

Likewise, Mark Collard and colleagues’ (2010) analysis of carbon dates finds gradual population expansion at the Clovis to Folsom transition, suggesting that the end of Clovis lifeways is better explained by climate change than the meteor.

The effects of environmental crisis and adverse climate episodes on past societies foreground agency and its limits. Nowhere have archaeologists considered environmental crisis to have a more determining effect on human populations than in the marginal ecology of the Southwest, where drought might trigger severe cultural disruption, violent conflict, and abandonment. *Leaving Mesa Verde*, edited by Tim Kohler and others (2010), combines new paleoenvironmental studies, demographic modeling, and a wealth of archaeological evidence to clarify when, why, and how the Mesa Verde region was abandoned in the late 13th century C.E. The contributors develop a robustly coherent picture of drought and environmental degradation that (in combination with rigid social practices) led to depopulation and violent conflict. Particularly interesting is the argument advanced by several contributors that outmigration itself caused social disruption that hastened further abandonment. In that volume as well as in *American Antiquity*, Kristin Kuckelman (2010a, 2010b) details a compelling case from the final years of Sand Canyon Pueblo, in which inhabitants transitioned from farming to hunting and gathering and soon thereafter were massacred in a brutal attack that ended the occupation of the village. Here, violent conflict directly followed re-source stress and forced the abandonment of this part of the Mesa Verde region. Such episodes were not unprecedented in southwestern prehistory. James Potter and Jason Chuipka (2010) uncover a brutal massacre circa C.E. 800 at the Sacred Ridge Site, the largest of several small sites in the Ridges Basin in Colorado, which they interpret as a case of interethnicty conflict perhaps triggered by colder and drier conditions. Shortly after a defensive palisade was constructed, the site was attacked, burned, and abandoned. At least 35 related individuals of both sexes and all ages were subjected to facial and head trauma, scalping, and very thorough fragmentation and burning—which suggests an attempt not just to slaughter but to utterly destroy even the corpses of a population that appears biologically distinct from the other inhabitants of the Ridges Basin.

Elsewhere, too, environmental stress apparently led to social conflict. Julie Field and Peter Lape (2010) test this relationship for the Pacific Islands, where fortifications became more common overall during the Little Ice Age (C.E. 1450–1850). Forts strongly cluster where ENSO (El Niño–Southern Oscillation) disruptions are most severe, although they do not correlate closely in time with periods of intense ENSO events but, rather, appear to lag somewhat after them.

Such treatments have obvious relevance to a contemporary world in which adapting to disruptive climate change becomes more necessary as hopes for effective political action fade. Jago Cooper and Matthew Peros (2010) highlight this idea as they review paleoclimate research and recent Caribbean archaeology, including their research in Cuba, to make a preliminary but intriguing assessment of how pre-Columbian populations coped with sea-level rise, variable rainfall, and episodes of frequent, severe hurricanes. Successful responses included building stilts houses in wetland areas, choosing locations in flood-resistant areas and outside of major hurricane alleys or in close proximity to caves for shelter, and establishing networks of interaction to ensure food security.

**Structuring Environments: Adaptation . . . or Not?**

“Adaptation” may be an unfashionable concept, but everyone knows that people in the past did something of the sort—especially hunter-gatherers. Variations on behavioral ecology continue to work to explain prey choice, from deer and rabbit exploitation in California (Coddington et al. 2010) and oysters and fish in Korea (Kim 2010) to extreme salmon specialization in British Columbia (Coupland et al. 2010). (Let us note, while talking of meat, that the exploitation of plant foods did not wait for the Holocene. Anna Revedin and colleagues [2010] present starch grains on grinding stones from Upper Paleolithic Italy, Russia, and the Czech Republic, showing that Europeans at about 30,000 B.P. were gathering and grinding what were most likely ferns and cattails.)

Such adaptive strategies had far-reaching social effects. Andrzej Weber and Robert Bettinger (2010) demonstrate
this point by synthesizing a variety of lines of evidence to assess variability over time in the strategies of Siberian hunter-gatherers. Differences in the reliance on fish versus game affected the distribution of settlements, cultural heterogeneity or homogeneity, overall health, and gendered workloads. Kevin Nolan and Robert Cook (2010) argue that spatial and temporal variation in precipitation, by affecting crop abundance, largely determined many societal outcomes in the Middle Ohio Valley from C.E. 800 to 1400: conflict and defense, exchange patterns, and social complexity.

Yet others argue that the structuring influence of environment and subsistence has been overstated, especially for hunter-gatherers. Kenneth Sassaman’s The Eastern Archaic, Historized (2010) rejects the vision of Archaic people as a static neoevolutionary type adapting to local environments, instead taking a historical vision of trajectories in the eastern Archaic shaped by large-scale interaction, migration, and ethnogenesis. Sassaman proposes that these phenomena were accomplished in part by the construction of earthworks, ritual performances, craft making, and gifting that made links to past times and other peoples. He also argues that Archaic shellfishing, fishing, and storage were not reducible to utilitarian adaptation to ecological conditions; rather, they responded to social needs and interactions. Some of his ideas build on the work of Cheryl Claassen (2010), who argues that Archaic freshwater shell middens of the Ohio Valley were the remains not of quotidian subsistence but of feasts and burial ceremonies. Ximena Villagran and colleagues (2010) reach similar conclusions about Archaic shell mounds on the Brazilian coast, asserting that their microstratigraphy resulted from many intentionally and ritualistically motivated depositions associated with funerary practices. In contrast, William Marquardt (2010) argues that domestic midden accumulation and disposal, and perhaps water control, are sufficient to explain “monumental” shell mounds for at least the southeastern United States. The shell-mound debate encapsulates broader tensions between materialist and culturalist visions in which the roles played by agency and intentionality are a particular sticking point. Though especially notable for hunter-gatherer societies, similar tensions can be seen in the literature on social organization and inequality.

VARIABLE HISTORIES OF NONSTATE SOCIETIES: SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, INEQUALITY, MEMORY, AND MONUMENTALITY

The year 2010 saw many explorations of variability in non-state societies. Again, one could attempt a crude division of these treatments into materialist and culturalist perspectives, emphasizing to different degrees material wealth, kinship organization, monumentality, and memory. Yet this literature is not easily divided, and central themes (such as inequality) appear throughout.

Inequalities and Organizational Strategies

On the materialist side, one “must-read” was not strictly archaeological at all: Current Anthropology’s February special section on intergenerational wealth transmission, based on an impressively coordinated large-scale program of ethnographic studies in a range of nonindustrial societies, from hunter-gatherers and horticulturalists to agricultural and pastoral people (Borgerhoff Mulder et al. 2010; Bowles et al. 2010; Gurven et al. 2010; Shenk et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2010a, 2010b). Rather than relying on informants’ statements, the authors use statistical measurements to test to what extent children’s wealth really does replicate that of their parents, and they define wealth broadly to include nonmaterial resources such as social relationships (“relational wealth”) and health, strength, skill, and know-how (“embodied wealth”). It turns out that these intangibles are not transmitted reliably between generations, helping to explain why long-term inequality is difficult to maintain in foraging and horticultural societies, where interfamilial difference (though it is sometimes quite considerable) mainly derives from those nonmaterial resources. Land and livestock, by contrast, are highly heritable—although inequality is not an automatic corollary because partible inheritance and external crises may dilute inequality from one generation to the next. True, these studies do not radically overturn long-held assumptions, nor do they explain why or how forms of wealth and ideas about property change or how leveling mechanisms are circumvented or lose their efficacy (Kelly 2010). Nevertheless, they are full of useful insights, principal among them that some things are more suited than others to be inherited and hence to form the basis of long-term social inequality.

That does not mean, of course, that more transient forms of social difference are unimportant. For instance, Angela Close (2010) writes a thought-provoking piece on inequality in skill, knowledge, and personal status (or “embodied” wealth, to use the above typology) in “egalitarian” societies. She urges archaeologists to look for these differences even in the most ancient time periods and the most modest artifacts, such as the lithic assemblage of an Egyptian desert sandsheet, where meticulous analysis reveals that cattle pastoralists circa 8,000 B.P. left flakes expediently struck on the spot as well as previously made, more carefully fashioned, retouched flakes. This apparent difference in the quality of basic personal possessions is her departure point for an exploration of subtle indicators of inequality in published literature about the Paleolithic. Difference between genders is another kind of “egalitarian” inequality. Jane Peterson (2010) reviews a broad range of evidence (bioarchaeology, mortuary treatment, household spaces, and figural representations) from the Neolithic southern Levant to conclude that although women’s and men’s lives and work differed, they were not clearly ranked, and social status was not based on gender. Interestingly, the variability in gender systems in the Neolithic Levant suggests that the adoption of farming did not determine gender roles in any predictable fashion. Gender systems may have taken time or certain conditions to solidify into rigid tradition. Barbara Roth (2010a, 2010b), in a chapter in her edited book Engendering Households in
the Prehistoric Southwest, traces changes in the spatial layout of Mogollon pithouses that may have accompanied more rigid gender roles and labor division at larger village sites after the late 800s C.E. In this case, aggregating into large communities raised the stakes for fixing and organizing social roles and identities, including genders.

The importance of that transition is underlined by Matthew Bandy and Jake Fox’s (2010) innovative edited volume, Becoming Villagers. This book, the product of an Amerind symposium, explores common cross-cultural patterns in the transition to sedentism in a variety of regions in both Old and New Worlds, shifting the emphasis away from the origins of agriculture and toward the novel processes and problems produced by early village life. Chapters address the rapid population growth and scalar stress associated with early sedentism as well as the resulting fissioning or coping mechanisms that villagers came up with, including, in some cases, an intensified level of ritual. The successes and contradictions of these solutions are visible in case studies that trace long-term trajectories of stability or dynamism. The major insight of this book is that, on its own, early settled life presented wholly new challenges and put in motion new social dialectics.

One kind of social “solution” to the problem of village organization was the formation of corporate kin groups larger than the nuclear family, spatialized and reinforced by separate houses, room blocks, or other edifices. These “house societies” have become a hot topic lately. For instance, Jodie O’Gorman (2010) explores longhouses as a distinctive type of community that intersected with other kinds of group identities, drawing on both Onecota archaeology and the ethnography of Iroqoian and Dayak (Borneo) longhouse traditions. One result of organization into corporate or lineage “houses” was the potential for social differentiation between these groups. Gregson Schachner’s article (2010) on the northern San Juan region of the Southwest pinpoints this process at the transition in the early eighth century C.E. from scattered single-family pithouses to large, aggregated pueblos. The largest of these pueblos, McPhee Village, was organized into architectural blocks corresponding to separate corporate groups, some of which not only played disproportionate roles in ritual and feasting but also, based on Schachner’s analysis, had a larger group size, more storage space, and more evidence of specialized production. Here, population aggregation and the formation of structured corporate groups appear closely related to new kinds of inequality based on both ritual and material wealth.

Another perspective is evoked in George Lau’s work at the Recuay chiefly center of Nayno in Peru’s northern highlands (Lau 2010b). This fortified town is composed of several high-walled, multi-storied residential compounds, each with just one difficult entry, each enclosing a central open space onto which apartment-like dwellings face. Differences in compound shape (rectangular, circular) and construction quality suggest discrete corporate groups of varying statuses, all concerned with strong distinctions between protected group members and excluded outsiders. Here, warfare formed the context and perhaps the impetus for the definition of group identities and new warrior-elite roles (Lau 2010a).

Finally, Vernon Knight (2010) contributes a detailed, data-rich treatment of findings from excavations conducted throughout the 1990s at Moundville: the chronology of mound construction and abandonment and the resulting evolution of public space; the pole-frame architecture that densely covered mound summits and blocked access and view; and the associated platform-slope middens that indicate this architecture was the site of elite residence and crafting activity. Distinct contemporaneous mounds suggest separate corporate groups and a segmentary quality to authority at Moundville. (However, this pattern may not hold elsewhere: as John Blitz’s review [2010] demonstrates, recent research indicates considerable diversity in Mississippian societies.)

**Lineage, Memory, and Monumentality**

Community organization into corporate houses or other lineage groups formed a logical pairing with rituals emphasizing ancestors and memory. A rich archaeological case is found in the identification and interpretation of “history houses” at Çatalhöyük: longer-lived houses with more rebuilding episodes, more architectural elaboration, more burials, and more curation (incl. of human body parts) that were perhaps the central nodes through which membership in a house society was expressed (Hodder and Pels 2010). These and other practices at Çatalhöyük are discussed in an unusual volume edited by Ian Hodder (2010) that compiles contributions from specialists in the anthropology of religion who were brought to the site with support from the Templeton Foundation. (A ritual emphasis on ancestor commemoration may have started extremely early in the Middle East: Natalie Munro and Leore Grosman [2010] uncover evidence of Natufian feasting on aurochs and tortoises associated with a burial context in a cave in southern Israel, and they posit that this kind of public ritual commemorated the dead, reinforced community, and smoothed over conflicts at the transition to increased sedentism.)

Notwithstanding the CA series on wealth transmission, many archaeologists would argue that commemorative burial practices can play key roles in the establishment and naturalization of inequality. This is one gist of Stephen Plog and Carrie Heitman’s (2010) contribution to the long-standing controversy about Chaco Canyon society. They reanalyze published data and archival sources documenting an extraordinarily rich burial crypt at Pueblo Bonito and date the human remains from this context to establish that the first and richest burials were interred soon after construction started at Pueblo Bonito in a room that continued to be used as a mortuary site for perhaps three centuries thereafter. This sequence suggests an emphasis on founding ancestors and establishing the burial place of a continuing elite lineage in a space sanctified by ritual deposits of symbolically charged
items. Plog and Heitman’s contribution, as it augments our understanding of the greatest southwestern center, also serves as a model for the reanalysis of information previously collected—in some cases, over a century ago.

Burial ritual and traditional lineage commemoration tend to get talked about nowadays as “social memory.” An example is Gregory Wilson’s article (2010), which analyzes collections and excavation reports from Moundville to identify the rebuilding of residential complexes in situ and the reuse of those residential spaces as cemeteries for centuries after their abandonment. These acts are interpreted as the creation of social memory and kin-based identity within a segmentary society. Alas, “social memory” may be a victim of its own trendiness, for it is invoked so broadly by archaeologists that its meaning has become quite vague. Two articles on the Andes take aim at this problem from a practice perspective. Andrew Roddick and Christine Hastorf (2010) move beyond the idea of social memory as either passive or active by defining a continuum between discursive (intentional, symbolic) and nondiscursive (embodied, habitual, unconscious) traditional practices. A long-term sequence in the Taraco Peninsula of Bolivia illustrates generally stable, resistant-to-change practices such as food and pottery production, suggesting the maintenance of routinized, embodied, highly restricted sets of actions—a nearly unconscious form of social memory. Other acts, such as the construction and renewal of ceremonial architecture related to ancestor commemoration, rose to the plane of the conscious and discursive as inequalities between lineages solidified; eventually, they entrained aspects of food and pottery production (feasting, communal drinking, decorative motifs) that also took on discursive meaning.

By contrast, Jerry Moore (2010) discusses nearly 5,000 years of deposits at a sacred mound site on Peru’s far northern coast to critique the “archaeology of memory.” Here, long hiatuses in occupation and major disjunctures in site use suggest that rituals at the site are best conceptualized broadly as “practice,” an idea that can encompass both conservative acts and innovations related more to the recognition and reuse of a sacred locale than to “memory” in any strict sense. Ultimately, Moore’s critique raises the question of whether archaeologists who identify sites of memory are truly investigating what and how their subjects communicated about the past or whether the term memory just allows them to avoid answering these difficult questions. Perhaps other words like tradition, commemoration, or history telling offer more precision for thinking about the uses of a past older than personal memory.

Several other contributions address the link between monumentality and elite power. Trenching at Cahokia (Alt et al. 2010) shows that the central plaza was very early and very large, requiring considerable labor investment. Julia Guernsey and colleagues’ edited book (2010), The Place of Stone Monuments, considers the meaning and use of stone sculptures in pre-Classic Mesoamerica through a close examination of their context, discussing stone monuments as conveyers of special, often politically charged messages. Other kinds of monuments have been recently investigated, such as Inca ceremonial platforms (unas; see Meddens et al. 2010). But perhaps some monuments didn’t accomplish much aside from attracting the attention of archaeologists: Christian Peterson and colleagues’ (2010) comparative study shows that Hongshan chieftdoms in northeast China, associated with rich burials in elaborate platforms, are not substantially different in terms of settlement, population, or regional extent than contemporary societies nearby without such impressive burial monuments.

**Comparing Pathways**

Contemporary approaches across the theoretical spectrum recognize a diversity of social pathways, including ones toward institutionalized inequality. One result has been exciting work that is both comparative and diachronic: the contrasting of regional trajectories. Here are two examples. Timothy Earle and Kristian Kristiansen’s (2010) tightly organized edited book, Organizing Bronze Age Societies, compares Bronze Age settlement patterns, land use, and household economies in Sicily, Hungary, and Scandinavia. The archaeological projects and analyses summarized in this volume used similar methods and recording strategies, allowing for unusually confident, detailed comparisons. The editors and contributors particularly emphasize environmental conditions, economic organization, and interregional interaction in explaining the distinct pathways taken by societies in different regions of Europe. Second, halfway around the world, Robert Drennan and Xiangming Dai (2010) compare early settlement patterns in two regions of North China with dramatically contrasting trajectories. One, in Chifeng, was characterized by precocious Neolithic settlement but slow population growth and political integration of relatively small regions; the other, in the Yellow River valley, despite a late start in settlement, was from the beginning on a “fast track” of rapid population growth and nucleation into unusually large settlements, culminating eventually in the emergence of the paramount center of a large regional polity. These kinds of comparisons help us glimpse answers to some essential questions. What enabled and encouraged dense nucleated settlement in some cases and not others? In an environment of competing regional centers, what favored the status quo or tipped the balance for one center to expand to supremacy at the expense of its rivals? Such questions lead to new research on an old topic: state formation.

**States in Action: Origins, Pathways, Interactions**

The dazzling complexity of ancient and recent states offers bountiful avenues for research. Recent work highlights the varied interactions between groups that states put in motion through processes of urbanism, factionalism, immigration, conquest, and colonialism.
State Formation and State Histories

Pinpointing first-generation states got a little more complicated in 2010. Jason Ur (2010) reviews new research in northern Mesopotamia that indicates an early and independent, if not unrelated, rise of complex society in the upper Khabur basin, including monumental architecture, urbanization, and craft specialization by about 4000 B.C.E. The area entered a phase of deurbanization by the end of the third millennium B.C.E. as southern Mesopotamian cities reached their height; after 2500 B.C.E., cities reemerged in a different form. Along with future work clarifying these fascinating transitions in northern Mesopotamia, we might hope one day for a better understanding of early southern Mesopotamia, for Carrie Hritz (2010), in a clever analysis of satellite imagery, demonstrates that the southern Tigris river channel has changed substantially, with major implications for understanding the region’s prehistory. In the Andes, Jean-François Millaire (2010) presents dates from residential and civic-ceremonial sectors of the Gallinazo Group in the Virú Valley and from a secondary administrative center to suggest regional state development coeval with the Moche or perhaps earlier. Processes of precocious centralization and urbanization were apparently going on in several valleys on the north coast in tandem.

How do states arise? Charles Spencer (2010) proposes a general model for primary state formation in which territorial expansion into areas farther than a day’s travel is the engine of state institutions, both funding and necessitating bureaucratic governance. In support are chronological correspondences between these processes in Mesoamerica (Oaxaca), Egypt, Mesopotamia (Uruk), and China (Erlitou) as well as tentative evidence in Peru and the Indus Valley. An extension of Spencer’s previous work in Oaxaca, the argument may rely too much on categories susceptible to endless debate (like “the state”) but does usefully highlight the processes that territorial expansion puts into motion. In a closely related piece, Jason Sherman and colleagues (2010) use several lines of evidence to argue that Monte Albán attempted to extend its reach to the Pacific coast.

As in Spencer’s model, ancient states often attributed their own origins to transformative conquest events—if we take their histories at face value. One such foundational moment was the Inca conquest of the Chanka, a highly centralized and aggressive confederation on their western flank, according to Inca state mythohistory. Now, archaeological survey by Brian Bauer and colleagues in the Chanka heartland of Andahuaylas, Peru, reveals not this dauntingly powerful foe but a politically and culturally fragmented region (Bauer and Kellett 2010; Bauer et al. 2010). Here are extremely different pathways of development in close geographical proximity.

And, indeed, some of the most promising research on state development is comparative, including studies of contrasting pathways after initial state formation. Saro Wallace (2010) synthesizes new information on Early Iron Age and classical Crete, identifying uniquely Cretan collapse and postcollapse processes to explain the divergent forms of government of subsequent Cretan states versus the democratic politics of central Greece. This work finds an intriguing echo in central Mexico, where contrasts in governance are explored by Lane Fargher and colleagues (2010). They argue that Tlaxcala developed a somewhat more egalitarian, council-based structure, involving more commoners in positions of authority than in other central Mexican polities ruled exclusively by nobility, and they suggest that it was this more collective political system that allowed Tlaxcala to successfully resist absorption by the Aztec Triple Alliance. The multilinear approach taken by these authors is particularly helpful in mapping out the wide realm of organizational possibilities in ancient states and in untangling causal factors. (Those interested in the topic will also wish to peruse Patrick Kirch’s [2010] new book on Hawaiian state formation, How Chiefs Became Kings, published too late in the year to be examined firsthand.)

Interaction and Imperialism

Much new research on ancient states addresses the nature of state interactions with peripheries or provinces. Here, the intersection of local agency with macroregional processes comes into sharp focus. Especially noteworthy is Michael Dietler’s Archaeologies of Colonialism (2010), which examines the long sequence of interactions between indigenous people of southern France and Etruscan, Greek, and Roman colonists. A history of encounters—including the trade and consumption of wine and food, violent confrontations, and the experience of new urban spaces and architectural styles—entangled natives and colonists in increasingly close relationships. One novelty of this book lies in Dietler’s argument that the legacy of the first millennium B.C.E. shaped (or misshaped) the origins of European identity and attitudes toward colonial expansion as a beneficent engagement with outsiders. Perhaps more significant to most archaeologists is the shift Dietler accomplishes in the vision of colonialism—from a grand premeditated imperial strategy to the unforeseen outcome of local engagements and native as well as foreign agency.

Michael Malpass and Sonia Alconini’s (2010) edited book, Distant Provinces in the Inka Empire, brings together a number of case studies from the edges of empire that illustrate both the variety of Inca strategies in different regions and the variety of local responses. The net result is an impression of many kinds of expedient imperialism in a single short-lived empire. Inca strategies also differed from their Andean predecessors. For instance, a survey by Charles Stanish and colleagues (2010) shows that Tiwanaku did not directly control the route to its most important colonies in Moquegua; instead, it relied on informal trade and transport mechanisms already in place (in contrast with the Incas’ later control of the same route). Beyond Wari Walls, a new edited book on Wari’s impact outside its heartland (Jennings 2010b), promises to bring new insights to the nature of Wari expansion, though it came out too late in the year to be
examined here. Alexander Martín (2010) examines interaction from the perspective of the Ecuadorian periphery, showing how the trade in Spondylus shells to Andean states to the south affected local developments and involved nonelites. Jeffrey Quilter and Luis Jaime Castillo’s edited book on the Moche (2010) highlights the emerging consensus that there were plural Moche states rather than one, with critical variations in structure masked by brisk interaction and shared fundamentals of elite culture and religion.

Similar ideas are taken up in William Parkinson and Michael Galaty’s (2010) edited book, *Archaic State Interaction*, which gathers scholars of the Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean to reassess and refine world-systems theory and develop models for interactions between societies of different shapes and sizes. Gary Feinman and colleagues (2010) use settlement survey to trace early Qin expansion into coastal China. Alice Yao’s review (2010) of earlier Bronze Age societies in southwestern China links their simultaneous paths of increasing complexity to a context of peer-polity interaction and trade with greater powers. Charged symbols of elite authority such as bronze ritual vessels, when mapped, show stylistic coherence along the Silk Road, suggesting that trade channeled interaction and the formation of elite culture. This is a multicentric view of the development of complexity.

Bioarchaeology and stable-isotope analysis have been yielding eye-opening findings about the movement of people into ancient state centers. One is documented by Margaret Judd (2010), who identifies a Nubian subgroup in Heirokopolis with attachment scars and wear typical of vigorous jumping and running. These individuals may have been athletes involved in performances or contests at the Egyptian center in the Second Intermediate Period. Another fascinating case is Tiffany Tung and Kelly Knudson’s isotope study (2010) documenting the abduction of nonlocal children (as well as adults) into the Wari capital and the transformation of their decapitated heads into trophies used in central state rituals. Were similar things happening at Kaminaljuyu, which has long been hypothesized to have ties to both Teotihuacán and the Maya region? Lori Wright and others’ stable isotope analysis (2010) shows that although the centrally buried individuals in high-status tombs were local, peripheral individuals and decapitated skulls may have been from the Maya lowlands. Some Maya elites moved around, too: Douglas Price and colleagues (2010) deduce from strontium isotopes that some royal individuals buried in the Acropolis at Copan, including the probable founder of Copan’s royal dynasty, were not local, lending credence to much-later Maya inscriptions about a founding king with ties to Tikal and Caracol.

These kinds of flows get summed up in Justin Jennings’s book *Globalizations and the Ancient World* (2010a), in which he argues that the phenomenon of “complex connectivity” that typifies contemporary globalization had analogs on a smaller scale in the ancient past, when the growth and urbanization of complex societies drew people, things, and ideas from huge regions into a core (examples are Uruk, Cahokia, and Wari). Although perhaps too hung up on the semantic quibble of what counts as *globalization*, the book directs attention to how particularly vigorous flows of information, goods, and people created chains of unexpected side effects.

**Architecture, Urbanism, and Production**

Archaeologists of ancient states have contributed new work on built spaces, on a variety of scales. Michael Smith (2010b) urges archaeologists of urban spaces to attend to subdivisions of cities—especially neighborhoods, those small areas of intense interaction—and the questions they raise. What was the social composition of ancient neighborhoods and the nature of differentiation within and between them? To what extent was bottom-up agency or top-down administration responsible for spatial patterning within cities? Such questions are also relevant to contemporary urban issues of sprawl, squatters, and sustainability (Smith 2010a). Lisa Nevett’s *Domestic Space in Classical Antiquity* (2010) examines a series of Greek and Roman houses in conjunction with written and iconographic evidence to reveal changes over time in identity and the use of space. Stimulating in its range of approaches to domestic space, this book could be a source of ideas and insight to those working on houses and households in any region. Cameron Monroe’s (2010) study of the architecture of successive royal palaces in west African Dahomey traces a sequence of increasing complexity, bureaucracy, and restriction of movement, suggestive of royal attempts to reinforce political order in unstable times.

As for portable objects, ancient state leaders apparently sometimes paid them great attention, sometimes little. Helene Bernier (2010) analyzes data from small ceramic, lapidary, and metal workshops to deduce that Moche craft specialists were “semi-attached”—neither wholly independent nor closely controlled by elites. By contrast, Maya elites of the Ik’ polity not only controlled polychrome ceramic production, they engaged in it themselves (Halperin and Foias 2010). The incidence of spindle whorls spiked under Chichén Itzá’s regime, suggesting that cloth was levied as a form of tribute, forcing domestic (probably women’s) craft production to intensify (Ardren et al. 2010). Yet, examining over 1,000 years of ceramic production in the Tarascan state heartland, Amy Hirshman and colleagues (2010) find no evidence for reorganization to meet the demands of the political economy.

**Colonialism and Historical Archaeology**

The study of European colonialism and its aftereffects reprises themes from ancient state interaction and imperialism, with the difference that the question of native agency, resistance, or accommodation is much more political. A dominant motif in recent work is the diversity of colonial experiences: distinct responses in distinct settings contradict the seemingly monolithic colonial juggernaut. Mark Schurr (2010) breaks down problematic dichotomies (resistance vs. acculturation, nativism vs. accommodation) with a very interesting study that matches historically known Potawatomi
village headmen of the early 19th century—some who successfully avoided being removed from the Great Lakes region to reservations, some who did not—with their archaeologically studied village sites. The material culture from these sites proves less than adequate to reflect the contrasting strategies and life histories of these men, a disheartening finding for prehistoric archaeologists. Meanwhile, an unexpectedly telling indicator is village proximity to waterways and trails, links to wider social networks and external patrons who were instrumental in successful resistance.

Where such rich documentary evidence is lacking, archaeologists can still gain insight into the colonial encounter by taking a diachronic view. In Laura Scheiber and Mark Mitchell’s (2010) edited book, Across a Great Divide, contributors look at Native North American societies across the continent both before and after contact with colonial regimes. Chapters address ethnogenesis, technological change, nativism, gendered experience, and internal factionalism, demonstrating a great diversity of experiences and responses. Diachronic change is also carefully addressed in Eric Jones’s (2010) reconstruction of fine-grained population change over the 16th and 17th centuries in two Iroquois nations, based on the sizes of well-dated, successively occupied village sites. This study reveals distinct local histories of depopulation and migration and provides concrete data on the impact of introduced diseases. Jeff Oliver’s book (2010) takes a novel approach to the conflicts and interactions of the indigenous and colonial experience in the Fraser River valley in British Columbia by emphasizing the transformation of landscape: how the land was used, claimed, remade, and conceptually reorganized.

Adding to a growing body of work on Spanish colonialism in the Americas (reviewed Van Buren 2010) are remarkable new finds from earliest Spanish Peru: bullet wounds in Inca bodies interred outside Lima (Murphy et al. 2010) and beautifully preserved fragments of paper at an early colonial coastal town, including a Spaniard’s jotted notes on a hitherto-unknown indigenous language (Quilter et al. 2010). More commonly, historical archaeology’s bottom-up approach uniquely enlightens daily experience outside written records. Diana Loren (2010) explores the various ways in which clothing and adornment expressed and refashioned identity in the multiethnic world of colonial North America, while Jillian Galle’s (2010) article on slave participation in the “consumer revolution” in 18th-century Virginia uses costly signaling theory to interpret the gendered consumption of expensive metal buttons and fine ceramics. Archaeology likewise bears witness to the unstoried side of capitalism’s development (Matthews 2010; Orser 2010) and even, potentially, to the postindustrial world of recent decades (Harrison and Schofield 2010).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Reading this vibrant assortment of new work gives one a tentative sense that archaeologists today are trying to explain the past in ways that do not make it seem inevitable. A couple of outliers help illustrate. On the side of predictability and even inevitability: Charles Spencer’s (2010) article on state formation through territorial conquest, mentioned above. On the side of radical contingency, even inexplicability: Douglas Bolender’s (2010) edited book, Eventful Archaeologies, which stresses the pivotal importance of sudden unpredictable transformative events. This book takes inspiration from the Annales division of historical scales but shifts the emphasis to the conjuncture—the turning point. This poses an obvious challenge for archaeological explanation: Is history (and prehistory) “just one damn thing after another,” after all?

The majority of archaeological writing, especially in North America, chooses a middle ground between these poles. Archaeologists try to accommodate both contingency and process in their explanations—to envision regional or local trajectories as unique, formed in part by accidents and agents, and at the same time as having general applicability and comparative potential. In this fertile middle ground, where archaeologists explain why, out of many possible pathways, a particular one was traveled, they emphasize to different degrees external conditions versus human actions and their chains of consequences. Of course, these questions are not unique to this moment in the discipline, nor indeed unique to our discipline, but we are tackling them in new ways now—or at least with new terminology.

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