

Summary

We have postulated five major stages by which the culture-history of aboriginal America may be recounted. These stages are sequential and are derived from an inspection of archaeological sequences throughout the hemisphere. Certain criteria were selected for generalization from a detailed examination of numerous local and regional sequences. The method is comparative, and the resulting definitions are abstractions which *describe* culture change through time in native America. The stages are not formulations which *explain* culture change. Explanation, we believe, lies in the complex interplay of the multiple factors of natural environment, population densities and groupings, group and individual psychologies, and culture itself. Our culture-stage constructs are fashioned for the infinitely simpler purpose of describing types of cultures and the arrangement of these types in sequential order in the various parts of the New World.

Our earliest stage, the *Lithic*, is characterized by chipped-stone tools and weapons. These artifacts are found in environmental contexts of the late Pleistocene, under conditions indicating a climate quite different from that of the present and often with remains of extinct fauna. We have suggested the possibility of a major division within this Lithic stage, an earlier era featuring crude percussion-flaked choppers and scrapers and a later era in which stone-chipping was much more finely finished and in which lanceolate point forms were a diagnostic. As yet, however, the evidence for such a division is not conclusive. In general, it is believed that the period of the Lithic stage ranged from perhaps as early

as 20000 B.C. down to about 5000 B.C., although this later limit varies considerably. Subsistence was based upon hunting and gathering, with emphasis varying according to environmental conditions. Populations were small and scattered, but by 5000 B.C., or before, man had found his way over most of the New World. The stage is best represented, however, in the High Plains and the Greater Southwest of North America.

Our next stage, the *Archaic*, sees the continuation of hunting and gathering cultures into environmental conditions approximating those of the present. There is a dependence upon smaller and perhaps more varied fauna than in the Lithic stage and, in many places, an increase in gathering. Stone implements and utensils used in the preparation of wild vegetable foods first appear in this stage. Many of these were shaped by use rather than design, although, in many Archaic stage cultures, techniques of stone-grinding and stone-polishing were known. Domesticated plants, including maize, are found in some Archaic contexts, but it should be stressed that the presence of these food plants is not evidence for agriculture in the full sense of that term. As near as the archaeologist is able to tell, the Archaic cultures in question had but slight economic dependence upon these primitive crops. In most instances where such domesticated plants do occur on the Archaic level, the prehistoric societies involved seem to have been composed of smaller populations than the other Archaic cultures, where fishing or gathering was the means of subsistence.

Many Archaic stage sites of the rivers and coasts of the eastern United States, of the California and north Pacific coasts, and of the Atlantic littoral of Brazil show large, deep refuse deposits of shell, suggesting sizable and stable populations. In addition to numerous ground- and polished-stone implements and ornaments, pottery is sometimes present, as are carved bone, shell, and horn objects. Elaborate woodworking is an associated trait in many regions. From all this it is fully evident that an Archaic-type economy provided the basis for material wealth as well as socio-political and religious complexity in those societies where food

supplies were adequate. Thus, in a sense, certain Archaic phases, such as those of California or the Eastern Woodlands, represent a climax for the New World hunting-gathering tradition.

It is difficult to set meaningful date limits to the Archaic stage. At the earlier end of the range there is obvious overlap between cultures that we are forced to classify as Archaic and those whose technological inventory and environmental context is of a Lithic stage type. Thus, some Archaic cultures seem to antedate 5000 B.C., our very approximate and arbitrary upper limit for the Lithic stage. At the other end of the time scale, we know that many American cultures of the historic present subsist with an Archaic-type economy and technology. This does not impute to them "archaicism" or "backwardness" in non-technological aspects of culture but rather implies a great richness in the non-material fields for many of the prehistoric Archaic cultures that are known only from the meager archaeological record.

With the advent of the *Formative* stage there is, for most American areas, a fundamental economic shift from hunting-gathering to agricultural food production. This is the most profound change in our scheme of stages. The geographical focus moves from North America to Middle America and, perhaps, even farther south to the central Andes. All the gradual steps by which a sedentary, village, Formative way of life was achieved are not yet clear. It is likely that slow, steady experimentation and use of food plants by Archaic gathering peoples, such as those who occupied the Tamaulipas or New Mexican caves, eventuated in village life in which the primary dependence was upon crops like maize and beans. Agricultural villages and towns appear in Middle America, in several regions, in the earliest phases of Formative sequences and probably date back to as early as the middle of the second millennium B.C. In Peru similar agriculture-based village cultures are believed to be as old as the beginning of the first millennium B.C. Presumably, from these nuclear American centers, a knowledge of agriculture, fully developed maize, and other plants diffused, or were carried, over much of North and South America. By A.D. 1000, if not

earlier, the southwestern and most of the eastern United States were within this Formative orbit; and, in the other direction, the southern Andes and much of lowland South America were following an agricultural, village or town tradition.

A stable village or town life, with its potentialities for cultural and social development may, however, be made possible by economies other than agricultural. We have noted that, in certain Archaic stage archaeological phases, the size of the sites and the general indications of stability and wealth approximate conditions which are comparable to, or even surpass, those of the agriculture-based Formative stage cultures. Hence, we have placed the emphasis of our Formative definition upon settlement size, stability, and the social and cultural implications which these carry, rather than upon an agricultural economy per se. We have defined the Formative stage for the New World "by the presence of agriculture, or any other subsistence economy of comparable effectiveness, and by the successful integration of such an economy into well-established sedentary village life." But, in so doing, we must keep in mind that the economic potential for even the richest of the hunting-gathering societies was definitely limited in such a way that further development to what we have defined as a New World Classic stage was precluded. Such a development was possible only with agriculture and only in certain natural environmental settings.

The agriculture-based Formative cultures are characterized by the abundant use of ceramics. Weaving is usually well developed. The competencies of the Lithic and Archaic stages in the chipping, grinding, and polishing of stone are carried on. Site occupation tends to be stable and of long duration. Houses and other buildings are of permanent or semipermanent quality. The Formative village is the basic sociopolitical unit, and in some regions it is of town size. Specialized politico-religious architecture and/or sites are frequently features of the Formative stage. These may take the form of pyramidal mound-based temples within, or apart from, the village or town communities, as in Middle America or the southeastern United States, or, as in the Puebloan Southwest, the

special construction may be a subterranean kiva in the heart of the settlement. In many places these special buildings or sites imply a politico-religious organization and authority reaching beyond the confines of a single site or community.

The *Classic* stage marks the beginning of urban life in native America. The early New World cities were built around the temple pyramids and palace platforms of the ceremonial centers. They would, thus, appear to be the logical developments out of such centers and towns of the Formative stage. In many instances they are, indeed, the same sites, showing earlier Formative occupation and architectural levels overlaid by the later habitations and monuments of the Classic. These Classic stage cities were, most certainly, the nuclei of political and religious governments, of artistic and intellectual achievement, and of commerce and crafts. The temples, palaces, and other public buildings of the Classic are of great size and elaboration, attesting to the planning, skill, and labor organization of the builders. The Classic stage is also characterized by the appearance of great art styles, and these styles tend to be limited to well-defined regions. Craftsmanship in ceramics, weaving, stoneworking, carving of all kinds, and, in some places, metallurgy is of a high order. Craft specialization is a certainty. Differentiation in burial goods, in architecture, in the representations in art styles—all these things indicate the presence of a well-developed class stratification.

The Classic stage, as defined, is limited to southern Mexico and adjacent upper Central America (the area called Middle America) and to the Peru-Bolivian coast and highlands (the Central Andean area). These are the two centers of aboriginal American civilization, although it is possible that these Classic patterns may also be found along the Ecuadorian coast. Middle American and Peru-Bolivian Classic phases appear to be roughly contemporaneous and to occupy most of the first millennium A.D.

The *Postclassic* stage follows the Classic. It, too, is urban, perhaps more so than the Classic. It is confined to Middle America and Peru. At the onset of the Postclassic, each area sees the break-

down of the great regional art styles of the Classic. There are evidences of population shiftings and migrations, of war and troubled times. A decline in the aesthetic level of the Classic and in religious architecture suggests an increasing secularization of society. An increase in fortifications and fortified cities or towns gives a militaristic cast to many of the Postclassic cultures. The Postclassic civilizations are generally dated in the last six hundred years or so preceding the Spanish conquests of Mexico and Peru.

This completes our survey of a rather considerable sample of the data of New World prehistory solely for the purpose of testing a proposed historical-developmental classification. The difficulties of this kind of interpretation and the defects of our particular scheme have been candidly exposed and need not be repeated here. In its adherence to the broad outlines of historical reality the scheme has a certain value as a recapitulation of American archaeology, but it does not provide short and simple answers to the outstanding problems of history and process in that field. The adequacy of the data selected and the extent to which they have upheld the scheme we leave to the reader's better judgment.