

THE
NATURE AND PACE
OF CHANGE
~ IN ~
AMERICAN
INDIAN CULTURES

PENNSYLVANIA, 4000 to 3000 BP



Edited by

R. MICHAEL STEWART, KURT W. CARR,
and PAUL A. RABER

"A true synthesis of the most recent and cutting-edge interpretations of this enigmatic time period to date. Perhaps what is most impressive about this volume, however, is how the information is clearly embedded in archaeological, environmental, and technological contexts. It truly fills a gap in our understanding of the archaeological record."

—WILLIAM SCHINDLER, *Washington College*

"Since John Witthoft's 1953 publication on 'Broad-spear' cultures in Pennsylvania, archaeologists have been fascinated by the so-called Transitional or Terminal Archaic. Building on earlier research, the contributors to this volume provide important new data and interpretive perspectives on Native American material culture, lifeways, and society in the mid-Atlantic region circa 4000–3000 years before the present."

—JONATHAN C. LOTHROP,
New York State Museum



The contributors are Joseph R. Blondino, Kurt W. Carr, Patricia E. Miller, Roger Moeller, Paul A. Raber, R. Michael Stewart, Frank J. Vento, Robert D. Wall, and Heather A. Wholey.

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Three thousand to four thousand years ago, the Native Americans of the mid-Atlantic region experienced a groundswell of cultural innovation. This remarkable era, known as the Transitional period, saw the advent of broad-bladed bifaces, cache blades, ceramics, steatite bowls, and sustained trade, among other ingenious and novel objects and behaviors. In *The Nature and Pace of Change in American Indian Cultures*, nine expert contributors examine the Transitional period in Pennsylvania and posit potential explanations of the significant changes in social and cultural life at that time.

Building upon sixty years of accumulated data, corrected radiocarbon dating, and fresh research, scholars are reimagining the ancient environment in which native people lived. *The Nature and Pace of Change in American Indian Cultures* will give readers new insights into a singular moment in the prehistory of the mid-Atlantic region and the daily lives of the people who lived there.

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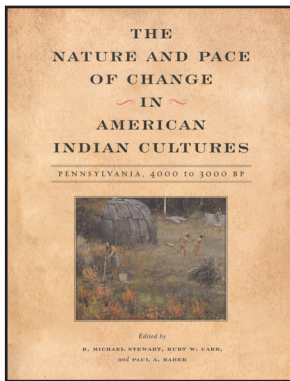
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The Nature and Pace of Change in American Indian Culture: Pennsylvania, 4000 to 3000 B.P.

R. Michael Stewart, Kurt W. Carr, and Paul A. Raber, editors. (2015) Penn State University Press. 152 pp., 32 figures, 24 tables. \$24.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Justin M. Reamer, Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania.

John Witthoft first used the term Transitional Archaic in 1953 to describe the period in Pennsylvania prehistory lasting from approximately 4500 to 2700 B.P. Since then many archaeologists working in the state have focused their efforts on studying this enigmatic time period, also known as the Terminal Archaic, which is defined by the temporary appearance of steatite bowls, cache blades, widespread trade, unique broadspear projectile points, a move to settlements in riverine environments, and a marked increase in the size and quantity of hearths containing fire cracked rock. *The Nature and Pace of Change in American Indian Culture: Pennsylvania, 4000 to 3000 B.P.* provides a comprehensive report of current archaeological knowledge about this period in Pennsylvania prehistory. Although focused very narrowly on eastern Pennsylvania, the book is more broadly relevant to archaeologists focusing on the archaeology of the Northeastern and Middle Atlantic United States because it addresses trends observed throughout the region at the same time, drawing on data from sites outside of state boundaries when appropriate. In addition to these more obvious connections, I argue this book is also relevant to archaeologists interested in the Archaic period throughout Eastern North America, as the unique cultural manifestations of the Transitional Archaic in Pennsylvania share many similarities. These include the use of steatite bowls, widespread trade networks, and the initial appearance of domesticated native crops, all of which occur nearly contemporaneously with cultural florescence seen throughout the Eastern Woodlands during the Terminal or Late Archaic at sites such as Poverty Point in the Lower Mississippi Valley and the Riverton culture in the Wabash River Valley. It is possible that these Archaic cultures of the Eastern United States were a reaction to climactic changes, as the authors of this volume suggest was the case in Pennsylvania, but it is also possible that larger cultural factors were just as important in causing cultural similarities amongst geographically dispersed peoples. Regardless of which explanation one chooses, this volume provides a useful data set for those seeking a better understanding of the cultural changes that occurred throughout the Eastern Woodlands at the end of the Archaic Period.

R. Michael Stewart (Introduction) begins the volume by introducing readers to the Transitional Archaic, discussing the common archaeological signatures of the period and the history of the archaeological study of these cultural changes. Stewart sets the tone for the book by discussing researchers' focus on the increased "pace of change" during the Transitional Archaic and the evolutionary and environmentally focused theoretical approaches

that most archaeologists, including the other authors in this volume, utilize when discussing this time period.

In his chapter, Frank J. Vento (Chapter 1) outlines the climactic and environmental changes that were occurring in the Middle Atlantic region and Pennsylvania during the Transitional Archaic. By doing so, he provides essential knowledge for understanding the perspective taken in the other chapters. Although focused on the Middle Atlantic region, the climactic events covered by Vento would have affected all of North America east of the Mississippi River in a similar fashion.

In Chapter 2, Robert D. Wall looks at the Late Archaic cultural manifestations in the Upper Susquehanna River Valley that directly predated those of the Transitional Archaic, such as the Lamoka type sites that dominated the region. Focusing on the cultural traits of this period, Wall argues that the trends that intensified during the Transitional Archaic have their roots in the preceding period and did not suddenly appear as others have argued in the past.

The next four chapters all examine different aspects of the cultural manifestations of the Transitional Archaic in the Susquehanna and Delaware river basins. Kurt Carr (Chapter 3) takes a heavily processual approach in his examination of the causes of "cultural adaptations" in both the Susquehanna and Delaware river valleys of Pennsylvania. Carr draws from a wealth of archaeological site reports to discuss how cultural traits of the Transitional Archaic manifested in both. Using these data, he argues that the diagnostic attributes of Transitional Archaic society, as discussed above, were developed to better exploit the environment following an increase in population size and environmental changes. In Chapter 4, Patricia E. Miller focuses on stratified sites in the Susquehanna River Valley from 3800 to 3000 B.P. to provide an overview of the changes that occurred during this period. In particular, she examines subsistence practices and the extensive trade networks focused on the movement of lithic materials that are believed to have been in place during the Transitional Archaic. Although not explicitly discussed, Miller's focus on subsistence, including the use of native domesticates and trade, highlights similarities between the Transitional Archaic cultures of Pennsylvania and other Eastern Woodland Late Archaic cultures. Joseph R. Blondino (Chapter 5) focuses on the Upper Delaware River Valley during the Broadspear through Fishtail or Orient periods (4200 to 2700 B.P.), looking largely at settlement patterns. Based on the evidence he collected from the Pennsylvania Archaeological Site Survey (PASS), Blondino provides a compelling argument against the designation of Transitional Archaic cultures as adapted to riverine settings and instead suggests that archaeologists should focus on smaller streams and wetlands to better understand the variety of environments being exploited at this time. Blondino's argument is applicable for archaeologists beyond the region as well, since an adaptation to riverine environments is thought to be a common characteristic of Late Archaic Cultures throughout North America.

Heather A. Wholey (Chapter 6) uses site densities to reconstruct population densities and social organization to counter Blondino's argument, and instead argues that Terminal Archaic people were adapted to riverine settings and lived in seasonal microband/

macroband groups in these areas. Wholey's argument for a riverine adapted culture relies on the fact that the sites presently identified are primarily in riverine settings, but this could be the result of not looking elsewhere, as Blondino suggests.

Finally, Roger Moeller (Chapter 7) seeks to answer what he terms the "Transitional dilemma," which encompasses a number of questions including how we define the Transitional Archaic period, the purpose of the large hearths full of fire cracked rock found at many of these sites, and why such hearths were only found during this period. Moeller argues convincingly that these hearths are a better diagnostic of the Transitional Archaic period than are biface types, as they are almost ubiquitously and exclusively found at sites dating to this period. He also emphasizes the problems with using lithic chronologies in defining Transitional Archaic sites because of how unrefined these chronologies are. This issue is an important one for archaeologists of all regions to consider carefully before assigning a site to a time period based only on lithics.

The wealth of readily digestible data presented by the authors of this volume makes it a useful resource to archaeologists working both within the Northeastern United States and those focused on the terminal portion of the Archaic Period in the Eastern Woodlands more broadly. This collection of works is of special importance considering that much of these data were previously only available in difficult to access sources or contract site reports at best. In particular, the chapters by Vento, Carr, and Moeller beautifully synthesized a large amount of data in a manner that would be easily accessible even to those not familiar with the archaeology of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, interpretations of the data were lacking, with too much emphasis being placed on environmental and population pressures to the neglect of cultural explanations for these important changes. This is especially true of the chapters by Carr and Wholey, who only used those two lines of evidence in reaching their conclusions. However, because of the clear and concise way that the large amounts of data were presented, I believe that this book will serve as a great jumping off point to address these concerns. It is, therefore, an essential read for anyone researching the Transitional Archaic Period in Pennsylvania and a useful resource for all archaeologists studying the end of the Archaic period in Eastern North America.