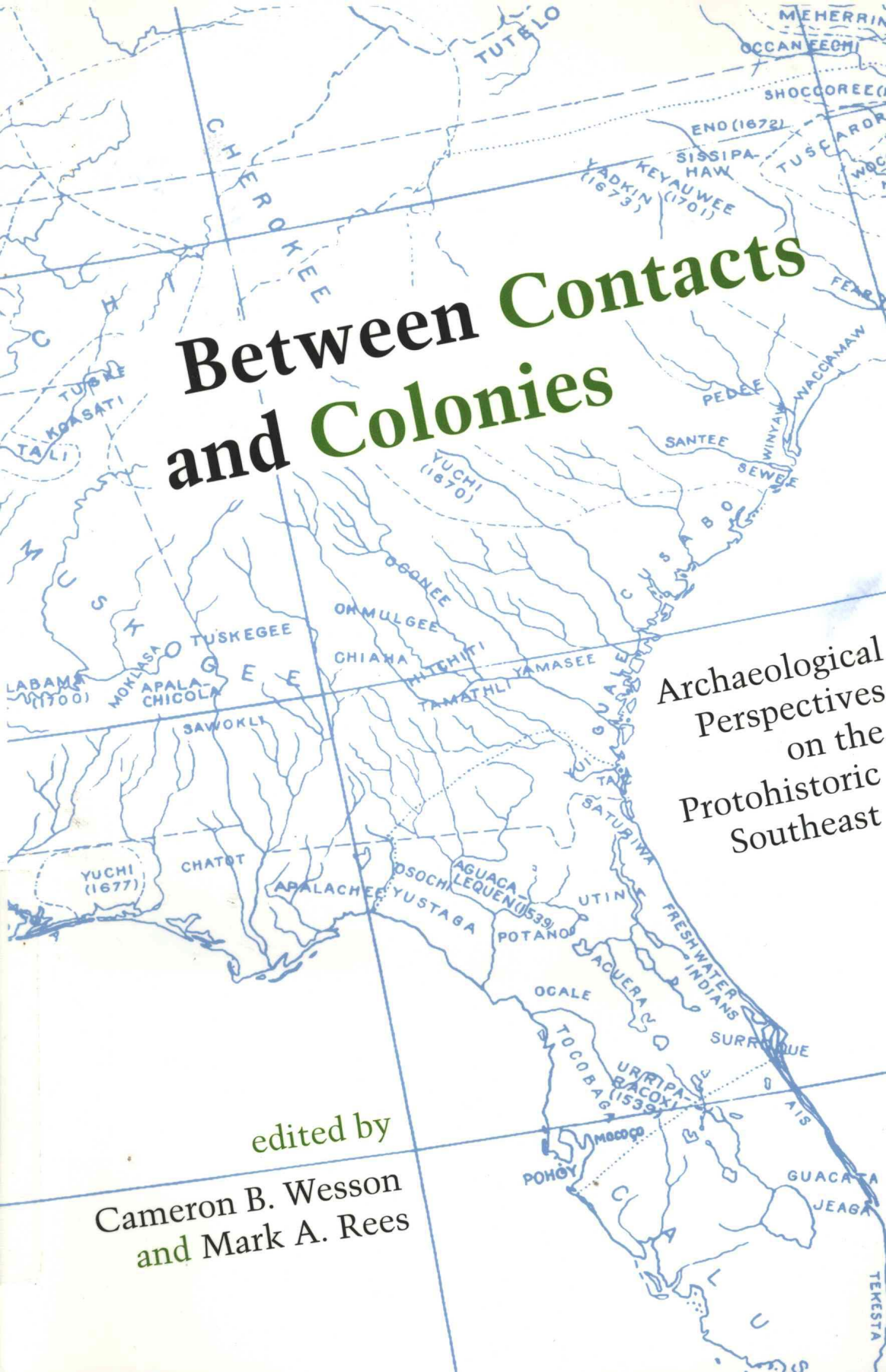

Between Contacts and Colonies

Archaeological Perspectives on the Protohistoric Southeast

edited by
Cameron B. Wesson
and Mark A. Rees

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An Overview

Cameron B. Wesson and Mark A. Rees

Initial contacts between Native Americans and Europeans set in motion a process of acute cultural transformation for indigenous peoples. These contacts were followed by widespread death from European-introduced diseases, displacement of local populations, reorganization of existing political economies, introduction of new material goods and technologies, and the emergence of political confederacies and ethnic identities. Although these events were profound and widespread, scholars interested in documenting the nature of post-contact Native American culture change are faced with several daunting research challenges. One of the principal impediments is a paucity of historic documents relating to the period immediately after initial Native American-European contacts. For most Native American peoples of the Southeast, almost two centuries passed between their first interactions with Europeans in the sixteenth century and the production of detailed historical documents in the eighteenth century (a temporal span commonly referred to as the Protohistoric period). Some accounts date from the opening moments of contact, others from almost two hundred years later, and there is little in the way of historical documentation to connect these disparate depictions of Native American cultures.

In addition to troublesome gaps in the historical record, the archaeological record presents its own difficulties with regard to protohistoric culture change. Chief among these impediments are divisions within the discipline of archaeology that have marginalized protohistoric studies. Theoretical and methodological boundaries between prehistoric and historic archaeologies have made studies of protohistoric phenomena problematic. Prehistoric archaeology has a traditional bias toward "untainted" pre-contact cultures, while historic archaeology has been biased toward indigenous cultures with suitable historical records (Beaudry 1988; Deagan 1988; Euler 1972:202; Galloway 1993:101; C. Hudson and Tesser 1994a; Lightfoot 1995; Trigger 1982:13, 1985:118; W. R. Wood 1990). Such disciplinary divisions, coupled with other research obstacles, have limited archaeological and historical inquiry into protohistoric culture change, resulting in a protohistoric Southeast which was,

until recently, a liminal terra incognita. As C. Hudson and Tesser (1994a:2) point out, the Protohistoric period represents "the forgotten centuries" of southeastern studies, lying somewhere between contact and colonization.

Research addressing the cultural dynamics of the Protohistoric period has accelerated dramatically with the intense scholarly attention directed at the recent quincentennial anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the Americas. Growing in number particularly over the past decade, archaeological studies of the Protohistoric period are now at the forefront of the field (Galloway 1993, 1997a; C. Hudson 1997; C. Hudson and Tesser 1994b; Lightfoot 1995; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Rogers and Wilson 1993; B. D. Smith 1990; D. H. Thomas 1990, 1991; Trigger 1985:116; Wilcox and Massey 1981; W. R. Wood 1990). Archaeologists are now focusing on the Protohistoric period throughout the Southeast, armed with an improved understanding of the complexity of culture contact situations and important new theoretical paradigms that attempt to reveal Native American perspectives on protohistoric culture change.

This volume presents current research examining protohistoric Native American culture change across the Southeast. Each contribution presents a unique perspective on protohistoric culture change, revealing how the knowledgeable use of historical documents, innovative archaeological research, and emerging theoretical perspectives in anthropology can be combined to better understand this crucial period. The remainder of this chapter examines the theoretical and methodological factors that have led to the present state of protohistoric studies in southeastern archaeology and places the individual contributions to this volume within this framework. In conclusion, we propose an approach to protohistoric culture change built on the analysis of indigenous political dynamics that synthesizes culture historical and processual explanations.

Archaeology, Ethnohistory, and Protohistory

Archaeologists and historians have long acknowledged that European contact acutely affected Native American cultures (Brasser 1978; Crane 1981; Hickerson 1997; Phillips et al. 1951:419–421). However, two diametrically opposed interpretations of these effects have permeated anthropological research for the majority of this century. An earlier generation of scholars downplayed the disruption European contacts represented to native cultures, while a later generation has exaggerated these same impacts. These differences in interpretation appear to be based more on the theoretical approaches and a priori assumptions of individual researchers than on discernable differences in the archaeological or historical records.

Observing these changes from the theoretical perspective of acculturation that dominated their era, earlier scholars viewed Native American culture change as the shift from indigenous practices to the adoption of Euroamerican cultural practices.

Studying protohistoric culture change was limited to charting the decline of indigenous practices and the rise of European-introduced customs (Corkran 1967; Crane 1981; Swanton 1928, 1946). Native American cultures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were thus seen as perfect and unbroken analogs of their prehistoric ancestors. Based partly on the nineteenth-century notion that native cultures were static prior to European contact, this view suggests a lack of creative intellect among native peoples and denies them an active, causal role in the process of culture change (Cusick 1998:134–139; Trigger 1982:11). Archaeological evidence was used to support these views by demonstrating that native cultures had changed very little over millennia. The changes that were observed in the archaeological record were usually attributed to migration, diffusion, or adaptation rather than to internal sociopolitical dynamics (Galloway 1993:89–92; Trigger 1982:11)

A contrasting view to that of the acculturationists is found in the work of scholars who view the Protohistoric period as an era of cultural collapse (Dunnell 1991; Ramenofsky 1987, 1990; Sheldon 1974; M. T. Smith 1987, 1994b). This collapse is thought to have been so profound as to make comparisons between prehistoric and historic southeastern cultures impossible (Dobyns 1983, 1991; Dunnell 1991). Scholars who take this position propose instead that we treat prehistoric and historic Native Americans as distinct (and disparate) cultures. As Dunnell (1991:573) contends, "modern Indians, both biologically and culturally, are very much a phenomenon of contact and derive from only a small fraction of peoples and cultural variability of the early sixteenth century." Thus, historic Native Americans are seen as fundamentally different and culturally distinct from their predecessors (Lightfoot 1995:202). From this perspective, stark divisions between pre-contact and post-contact cultures make the diachronic analysis of protohistoric culture change virtually impossible.

Dramatic changes most certainly occurred during the Protohistoric period, but these changes (like those for other non-Western cultures contacted by Europeans) did not completely sever native peoples from their pre-contact cultural predecessors (Deagan 1988; Dirks 1992; Wolf 1982). Views of essential continuity have also been exposed as naïve, unrealistic, and essentially ethnocentric (Galloway 1993). Trigger (1985:117) argues that "gratuitous revisionism is no less misleading than the discredited assumption of cultural immutability that it seeks to replace." In the end, both approaches inhibit our understanding of indigenous social and political change and disenfranchise Native Americans from their own histories.

Much of the confusion in these approaches stems from the improper use of historical documents. Unfamiliarity with the complexities of textual analysis and unwillingness to question textual authority have plagued the use of historical documents in protohistoric research (Galloway 1993, 1997a; Greenblatt 1993:xvii). As W. R. Wood (1990:101–102) notes, "too many archaeologists use historical records as they would . . . modern monographs—except that they tend . . . to be more criti-

cal of the modern data than of the older materials." Greenblatt (1993:viii) contends that traditional interpretations of Native Americans formulated on the basis of early historical documents render these peoples "either as Hobbesian pagans in a state of nature, condemned to lives that are solitary, nasty, brutish, and short, or as mute, naive, miserable victims, condemned only to deception and enslavement." Colonial encounters and Native American cultures were often misrepresented in European writing, resulting in static depictions of native peoples assimilated within local landscapes (Dirks 1992). As Dirks (1992:2–3) asserts, "Claims about nationality necessitated notions of culture that marked groups off from one another in essential ways, uniting language, race, geography, and history in a single concept. Colonialism encouraged and facilitated new claims of this kind, re-creating Europe and its others through its histories of conquest and rule." In either case, the end result is a misuse of historical documents, together with a further distancing of Native Americans from a history of sociopolitical process (Sahlins 1993).

Historical documents have traditionally been employed in archaeological research through use of the direct historical approach (Heizer 1941; Steward 1940, 1942; Strong 1935, 1940; VanStone 1970; W. R. Wedel 1938, 1940). Research based on this approach has often resulted in the application of a timeless, antihistorical ethnographic present onto Native American cultures, a continuation of earlier flawed attempts to understand the prehistoric-historic transition (Galloway 1993). Although the use of historical documents presents a significant challenge to archaeologists, appropriate techniques for using these sources may be effectively wedded to archaeological research (Galloway 1993, 1997a; Stahl 1993; Trigger 1982, 1985, 1986; H. R. Wood 1990). Written documents may provide a wealth of information that can be employed in the critical analysis of protohistoric phenomena.

In truth, Native American societies experienced dramatic political and economic changes prior to the arrival of the first Europeans. Before European contacts, Native American societies were not stable exemplars of evolutionary types existing in states of perpetual sociocultural stasis, as theorists traditionally maintained. Native cultural practices were indeed radically transformed by social actions throughout the Prehistoric, Protohistoric, and Historic periods (Trigger 1985). However, the nature of these changes cannot be inferred from general ethnological principles alone (Trigger 1982:13). In addition, although historical documents may reveal the effects of many of these changes, they do not allow for an unambiguous understanding of these societies prior to contact with Europeans. The study of Native American societies prior to and during initial contacts is primarily an archaeological rather than an ethnographic problem (Trigger 1982, 1985, 1986), and archaeologists play an indispensable role in understanding the nature of protohistoric Native American culture change.

Although the impact of acculturationist approaches to Native American culture

change has been profound, anthropologists working within theoretical traditions rooted in more historical perspectives have also had an impact (Linton 1940; Redfield et al. 1936; Spicer 1962; Trigger 1982:4). Their interest in interdisciplinary approaches to Native American history ultimately led to the development of the field of ethnohistory (Brain et al. 1974; C. Hudson 1973; Sturtevant 1966). As a result of increased interest in anthropological histories, ethnohistorical research has grown in importance, and the willingness to use historical documents has intensified (e.g., essays in C. Hudson and Tesser 1994b; Rogers and Wilson 1993; D. H. Thomas 1990, 1991).

There is much to be learned about Native American protohistory, and it is only with a more detailed understanding of this period of transition that we can begin to examine indigenous sociopolitical processes within specific cultural contexts. Despite these limitations, Trigger (1985:118) states that "archaeology offers the only hope for defining a substantial baseline for studying the initial changes brought about by European contact. In eastern North America, archaeological data from the sixteenth century are vital for understanding the nature of native cultures prior to the arrival of the Europeans and of the changes that followed." Whatever reservations archaeologists have concerning the incorporation of historical documents into their studies, it is apparent that the Protohistoric period is crucial to achieving an anthropological understanding of the Native American past. By uniting archaeological data and historical documents the borders of a historically relevant, archaeological anthropology can be expanded.

Prehistoric and Historic Archaeologies

Although the separation of prehistoric and historic archaeologies compromises the study of sociopolitical processes and long-term social change, this division has a long history in North American archaeology and is rooted in a segregated view of humanity (Lightfoot 1995:200; Trigger 1982, 1985, 1986). Native Americans and their villages were considered separate and distinct entities from Europeans and Euroamerican settlements, and their study seemed to require very different methodological and theoretical approaches (Lightfoot 1995:202). While prehistoric archaeologists were developing methods and theories appropriate for the investigation of Native Americans, historical archaeologists began to study colonial European material culture (I. W. Brown 1994:59–62; Ferguson and Whitehead 1992:5; Watson 1990:46). Although the availability or absence of historical documents entails distinct methodologies, the epistemological detachment of prehistory from history has had adverse consequences, not the least of which has been the distancing of archaeological theory from historical anthropology.

Paralleling the fragmentation of anthropology into a four-field discipline, arguments for maintaining distinct archaeological divisions have continued. Historical

archaeologists have argued that their subject matter is a separate intellectual field from prehistoric archaeology since historical archaeology has not benefited from the application of the methodological and theoretical approaches of prehistorians (Beaudry 1988:1; Deagan 1988; Lightfoot 1995; Mrozowski 1993:107–109). Prehistoric archaeologists who have been critical of ethnographic analogy and the use of the direct historical approach represent an intellectual tradition that relegates history and historical inquiry to "mere chronicle" and overly particularistic research (see Dunnell 1991:573; Leonard 1993; Ramenofsky 1991a, 1991b; Taylor 1983 [1948]). Following the incisive theoretical critique of Walter Taylor (1983 [1948]), the "New Archaeology" of the 1960s unjustly caricatured historical studies as exclusively event-oriented, preoccupied with "inadequate propositions" about the past, and generally lacking in anthropological significance (Binford 1968). Advocates of the new archaeology pursued the goals of evolutionary anthropology through the methodology of a positivist science (Binford 1962; Watson et al., 1971). A central focus of this research was cultural process, a synchronic concept independent of ethnographic context and divorced from long-term historical development (Brumfiel 1992).

This normative, homogenizing culture concept has had a profound impact on interpretations of prehistory, most notably in neo-evolutionary typologies of Native American societies. It has also produced a rampant misunderstanding of historical perspectives in archaeology (Trigger 1978:2–36). James Deetz, whose dissertation is often regarded as an early example of processualism, has been critical of the New Archaeology for its failure to address the simultaneously material and ideological nature of cultural processes through time (see Deetz 1960, 1988; Willey and Sabloff 1993:234–35). Deetz (1988:19) suggests that culture history and culture process approaches are similar in that both use material culture as a basis to learn about the past. A culture history that moves beyond chronology and diffusion to the interpretation of cultural production and sociopolitical process is clearly more anthropologically and historically relevant than a perspective that posits the "adaptive context" of a "total cultural system" (e.g., Sahlins 1985; cf. Binford 1962). In this light, according to Deetz (1988:20), "the distinction between prehistory and history fades into insignificance; it all deals with the past, and only the methods used on different data bases show a difference."

In some ways, southeastern archaeology was sheltered from this theoretical divisiveness through its contributions and adherence to culture history approach (Dunnell 1990). Despite recent criticisms of this approach (Dunnell 1990; Lyman et al. 1997; O'Brien et al. 1998), culture history has in fact recently enjoyed a resurgence, in part because of the production of more refined regional chronologies (see Barker and Pauketat 1992b; Knight and Steponaitis 1998). At the same time, cultural anthropologists studying political and social processes have returned

to an earlier emphasis on the importance of history and historical development (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1992; Friedman 1989, 1992; Gellner 1995; Roseberry 1989; Sahlins 1985; Wolf 1982; essays in Dirks 1992).

Within the last decade, southeasternists have made significant contributions to "substantive issues" in North American archaeology (cf. Dunnell 1990:17), most notably with regard to the origins of agriculture and the rise and fall of social complexity (Anderson 1990, 1994a, 1996a, 1996b; Fritz 1992; Fritz and Kidder 1993; Kidder 1992; Knight and Steponaitis 1998; Pauketat 1994; Pauketat and Emerson 1997b; C. M. Scarry 1993a, 1993b; Steponaitis 1991; articles in J. F. Scarry 1996d;). It is no coincidence that many of these theoretical advances have been made not from a stance of culture-process as law-like generalizations, but from improved knowledge of regional culture historical development. Indigenous political dynamics during various periods of European contact, the production of new ethnic identities, resistance to colonialism and missionization, and articulation with the capitalist political economy are issues relevant not only to southeastern archaeology but to the further advancement of anthropology as a social science (e.g., Barker 1992; Deagan 1990; DePratter 1991, 1994; Dye 1990, 1994, 1995; Galloway 1994, 1995; Knight 1994b; Milanich 1994b, 1995; J. F. Scarry 1994b).

Perhaps it is time, then, to rethink the culture historical approach in southeastern archaeology in a framework free from the earlier constraints of hyper-diffusionism, direct historical analogy, and historical particularism. This will obviate both the chronological preoccupation of pre-1960s culture history and the overly relativistic tendencies of some post-processualists. A synthesis of political process, social dynamics, and historical development holds the potential to reassert the relevance of southeastern archaeology within American archaeology and anthropology, as well as broaden the concept of Americanist culture history (Barker and Pauketat 1992a; Pauketat and Emerson 1997a:278). In short, a culture historical approach is alive and well in southeastern archaeology, although it is undergoing substantial transformation and is still in need of cohesive theoretical integration (cf. Lyman et al. 1997).

Instead of focusing on particular historical events, this new culture history is concerned with indigenous social dynamics and political process. This approach is informed by comparative data and theory from historical anthropology that place human agency and power relations at the forefront of analyses (Lightfoot 1995). Some proponents of this approach suggest the use of the temporal scales of long-term and medium-term historical processes as a heuristic device for in understanding political dynamics, social reproduction, and cultural transformation (Cobb 1991; Galloway 1997a; Hodder 1987; essays in Bintliff 1991; articles in Knapp 1992). Rather than advocating historical particularism or structuralist historiography, these studies situate social change within different historical contexts and tem-

poral scales, effectively drawing together the concerns of processualism for external constraints and post-processual attention to internal sociological variables (Kosso 1991; Preucel 1991; Trigger 1991; Whitley 1992).

Such studies need not cede to evolutionism or eco-functionalism a determinative role in social change. Instead, the collective agency of individuals should be examined as an intrinsic factor in historical development. McGuire (1992a:118–119) argues that such an approach allows "a discussion of the relative importance of human agency, structure, and culture in making human history," and that "a true dialectical understanding of the process of change is best achieved when investigators start by examining power (the universal ability of all humans to act) and ask how power shapes all social relations." Through an examination of the changing contexts of power in native societies it is possible for archaeologists to begin to examine the role of human agency, sociopolitical process, and ideology in protohistory.

Lying at the epistemological boundaries of history and prehistory, protohistoric studies are an ideal launching pad for this brand of processual culture history. Referred to as "ethnohistoric archaeology" by Brain (1988:8–11), the study of protohistory involves multiple lines of inquiry at the juncture of archaeology, historiography, and ethnography (see also Brain et al. 1974). An interdisciplinary perspective is thus crucial in bridging the temporal and theoretical constraints imposed by different intellectual traditions. The potential for protohistoric research to mend the rift between prehistoric and historical archaeologies ultimately lies in the transitional, syncretic nature of its subject matter.

The relevance of protohistoric archaeology to an anthropological understanding of Native American pasts is clear. With the implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, archaeologists have had to answer directly to a Native American constituency for the first time (Deloria 1995). The same social and political issues that led to the present state of relations between archaeologists and Native Americans also impose a collective ethical responsibility to address the protohistoric transition more fully (Trigger 1982:9). Without this ethical basis, American archaeology runs the risk of alienating its potentially most important audience. Both archaeologists and Native Americans stand to benefit from a more detailed and socially relevant knowledge of culture history.

Organization of the Volume

These theoretical developments represent a challenge to archaeologists engaged in examining the historical diversity of southeastern North America. By pursuing multiple lines of inquiry, new interpretive frameworks can be developed that will begin to address the paradigmatic divisions between traditional archaeological models of European and Native American cultures. History is no longer reserved for liter-

ate European societies but should be seen as an undeniable aspect of all cultural traditions (i.e., Wolf 1982). Thus individual chapters in this volume are organized around different thematic concerns, including cultural ecology, warfare, architecture, subsistence, disease, trade, the construction of social identities, and political economy. Numerous sites from across the southeast are discussed, with individual chapters assessing archaeological data from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

In chapter 2, Kristen Gremillion examines ecological changes among indigenous populations during the initial and indirect phases of European contact, showing that these changes are best examined using a multidisciplinary research strategy. She contends that archaeological, environmental, and historic records of ecological relationships differ in regard to processes of creation and epistemological significance, and that each requires a distinct interpretive approach. By assuring that evidence is rigorously evaluated and explicitly linked to hypothetical explanations, Gremillion demonstrates that archaeologists can synthesize disparate sources of information about human ecology and history. She uses paleoethnobotanical studies of protohistoric populations in the Southeast to illustrate the potential of this approach.

In chapter 3, Rebecca Saunders looks at the effects of contact between Europeans and Native Americans along the lower Atlantic coast. Although her case draws more heavily on the Historic period than other contributions to this volume, her research demonstrates the difficulties of bridging the protohistoric-historic transition. Saunders contends that the archaeological applicability of historical documents describing these contacts can be frustrating, given their biases and frequent discrepancies. She considers four specific research questions regarding European–Native American relations: site seasonality, sedentism, subsistence strategies, and the timing and effects of epidemics. Reviewing archaeological and documentary evidence, and considering the epistemological biases of each as she evaluates these issues, Saunders concludes that combined use of the archaeological and historical records can provide critical new insight into the Protohistoric period.

In chapter 4, Timothy Perttula considers Caddoan protohistory. The Caddo experienced a wide range of cultural changes during protohistory, yet many areas of their culture appear to have remained essentially unaltered. Perttula compares documentary evidence of Caddoan communities throughout protohistory, demonstrating the nature of cultural continuities, discontinuities, and sociopolitical relationships. He presents a complex picture of protohistoric Caddoan cultural traditions in which political leaders played decisive roles.

Christopher Rodning explores, in chapter 5, the contributions of the eighteenth-century travel journal of William Bartram to studies in southern Appalachian archaeology. He traces Bartram's travels through the historic Cherokee homelands in the southern Appalachians and considers how Bartram's writing complements the