


ARCHAEOLOGY
The Science of the Human Past, 3e
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*Chapter 11: Interpreting
 Past Cultural Systems*

**How Can Archaeology Answer
 Anthropological Questions?**

- **Culture:** “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired...as a member of society” (Edward B. Tylor, 1871)
- **Society:** people living together and sharing aspects of culture
 - Social structure
 - Social organization



Social Archaeology

Creating and testing models of past societies and cultures

- **An assumption:** past cultures operated in the same basic manner as contemporary ones.
- **An archaeological model of culture:**
 - Technology/material culture
 - Settlement and subsistence
 - Cultural systems
 - Cognition

Cognitive Anthropology

“The study of past ways of thought as inferred from material remains.”
(Colin Renfrew 1994)

Worldview:
People’s beliefs and assumptions about how the world works and should work.

❖ *Post-processual approach?*


Archaeology and Cultural Symbols

- **Symbols:** material expressions of ideas and meanings used to:
 - Communicate
 - Organize
 - Regulate social relations among people
 - Regulate social relations between people and supernaturals
- **Nonutilitarian vs. utilitarian** objects/designs

Interpreting Past Social Structures

People’s roles and statuses set the stage for social organization

- **Kinship**
 - Study of households
 - Skeletal analysis
- **Social Stratification**
 - Stratified vs. nonstratified
 - Mortuary analysis



Interpreting Past Social Structures

People's roles and statuses set the stage for social organization

- **Gender**

- Ethnographic analogy
- Dietary data
- Skeletal data/ Mortuary data
- Art



- **Ethnicity**

- Direct historical approach

Interpreting Political Organization

Political organization: a specific type of social structure that allocates and distributes power and authority in a society

- **Individuals with power**

- Political office
- Ritual office

- **Polity:** a group with independent political organization

Interpreting Political Organization

Four Levels of Political Organization

- **Bands**

- Nonstratified
- Small scale
- Hunting and Gathering
- Mobile

- **Tribes**

- Larger societies
- Chiefs
- More permanent settlement
- Mixed economy

Interpreting Political Organization

Four Levels of Political Organization

- **Chiefdoms**
 - Tens of thousands of people
 - Large, permanent settlements
 - Agriculture/specialists
 - Formal authority
- **States**
 - Millions of people
 - cities
 - Record keeping
 - Complex infrastructure
 - Labor intensive projects

Theories of the Origin of States

- **Hydraulic Theory**
 - Irrigation leads to complex management which leads to state level organization.
- **Warfare**
 - Agricultural prosperity leads to creation of military for defense and conquest.
- **Multicausal**
 - Each state develops through its own particular history of interrelating factors.

Interpreting Past Belief Systems

- **Religious Organization and Expression**
 - **Ritual Objects and Sacred Places**
 - Alteration of natural places
 - Special architecture
 - Symbolic or repetitive art
 - Ritual artifacts
 - **The Archaeology of Birth and Death**
 - Mortuary patterns
 - Art associated with birth and pregnancy



Cosmology, Philosophy, and Oral Tradition

- **Cosmology:** the understanding of one's universe, its origins, organization, and workings
- **Philosophy:** deals with ethics, values, aesthetics
- **Oral Tradition:** the narration of stories from one generation to the next
 - Writing
 - Art

Iconography, Art, and Expression

- **Iconography:** using artistic images to represent aspects of belief systems and other information.
 - Numerical systems
 - Hieroglyphics
 - Calendrical systems



Iconography, Art, and Expression

- **Art:** the creation of aesthetic objects
- **Representational Art:** paintings, inscriptions, sculptures
 - Two dimensional
 - Three dimensional
- **Rock Art**
 - Petroglyphs
 - Pictographs
 - Geoglyphs



Remembering the Individual

- **Imagining the individual behavior that created the archaeological record.**

- Speculative
- Difficult to verify
- Information about individuals can be learned from paleofeces and forensic analysis.