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# Anthropology Book Forum

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## **A Glocal Perspective on Native American Landscapes**

CHARLES R. COBB, 2019. *The Archaeology of Southeastern Native American Landscapes of the Colonial Era*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 286 pp. ISBN 978-0-8130-6619-6

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Landscape has been a significant field of research in anthropology since the 1990s. Scholars have explored the significance of place and space, the social uses of natural environments, the demographic motility and coalescence across regions, and the politics of landscape through conflict worldwide. In this book, Charles Cobb brings together these questions into a transdisciplinary synthesis on what is known about Native American Southeastern landscapes, from the Mississippian through the early federalist eras.

The value of this book primarily resides in the creative outlook that Cobb takes on the study of Native American history at the structural, theoretical, and thematic levels. Instead of using the traditional (and usually expected in historical accounts) chronological structure, preceded by an introduction and wrapped up in a conclusion, Cobb delivers his research in seven topical chapters across which population movement is the leitmotif. This structural choice probably stems from his intention to avoid linear evolutionary continuums and replace old paradigms with a fresh perspective on the North American indigenous past. The natural flow through which information is provided (sometimes, data partially overlap or are reiterated in different chapters) adds to the attempt to make historical discourse more accessible, giving the narrative a nearly conversational tone.

The first chapter presents the theoretical framework that Cobb uses to discuss landscape in the American Southeast. He adopts the precepts of neohistorical anthropology to approach the indigenous experiences from a “glocal” perspective (the intersection of global and local agencies), and to understand the impact of the Atlantic World on Native Americans’ lives. Concretely, he looks at the Native American landscape through materialist and postcolonial lenses, focusing his review on political-economic stances of power and inequality and highlighting Native Americans as primary actors in the process of modeling colonial landscapes.

Chapters Two and Three cover the history of the Southeast, from the Mississippian emergence until the 1830 Indian Removal Act, and develop the notion of “persistent places” as constitutive elements of the Native American identity and culture. Chapters Four and Five concentrate on forced and voluntary migration, displacement, and emplacement. In Chapter Six, Cobb describes the intertwined relationship between climatic patterns and the trajectory of Mississippian polities. He delves into political economy and historical ecology to understand the social responses from indigenous communities. In particular, he emphasizes the role of trade in the colonial political economy as a major contributor to the entanglement between Native Americans and Europeans, and between the Southeast and the Atlantic World. In fact, trade proliferation and its subsequent decline (extending from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries), affected Native American communities in various ways. Politically, it established power relations based on commodity flows instead of agricultural surplus; socially, it triggered further mobility and displacement; and environmentally, it promoted deer overharvesting and deforestation. The Revolutionary War (1781-1783) ruptured status and dwindled trade. This led to demographic dissemination into individual homesteads, reduction of communal spaces, and privatization, which altered traditional landscapes and lifestyles. Finally, the last chapter addresses indigenous persistence in the face of crisis. The history of Native American landscapes is defined by transformation in the event of major social, cultural, economic, and religious ruptures. Therefore, the European arrival did not trigger collapse, but a history of persistence and (sometimes forced, voluntary, or opportunistic) transformation composed by different actors.

To address these topics, Cobb draws from anthropology, archaeology, and ethnohistory. He combines high-level theory with a series of microhistories that illustrate the continuous changes in the Southeast during the colonial era. In addition to enlightening his narrative with microhistories of the Chickasaw, Catawba, Cherokee, and other groups, Cobb's chronicle is valuable for the thought-provoking, open-ended questions that he lays on the table: What happened to Yamasees sent to Cuba after the Paris Treaty? Why did a certain ceramic lingua franca style emerge in some Southeastern regions? Similarly, Cobb applies a linguistic approach to emphasize the importance of critical word-choice in social sciences. This way, he offers multiple constructive definitions of key concepts and conducts comparative analysis between them. Some of the most practical definitions he develops include the notion of landscape, the Atlantic World, emplacement and displacement, diaspora, colonialism, and colonization.

Yet, somewhat surprisingly, the author does not mention the important role that other disciplines play in his study of the landscape. Human geography is indisputably a disciplinary pillar in the investigation of the flow of peoples and goods across the landscape. Additionally, there are some aspects in the book that would need further consideration and clarification. Regarding the research sample, Cobb's framework is described to encompass "the lives of Native Americans during the colonial era as conveyed through the landscape [...] from the Mississippi to the Atlantic Ocean" (pg. 2). However, he does not give equal attention to all southern regions. The focus is placed upon the British area of influence, while the landscapes of La Florida and the French Louisiana are significantly underrepresented. Methodologically, this book fails to include Native American voices. Even though his primary goal is to remove Europeans from the limelight to study the way Native Americans experienced landscape, Cobb does not engage in collaborative work with descendant communities to inform his research. Another aspect that could have greatly enriched this monograph is the study of landscape agency over, and its effect on, Native American lives from vital materialism and political ecology approaches. Landscapes have been proven to be more than mere containers of social development—they are impactful actors in the unfolding of human cultures. The same approach could have been taken on the agency of, for example, deerskin, and the thing-power of nonhuman actants.

Furthermore, some specific conclusions also seem to be problematic. For instance, Cobb states that the loss of indigenous land due to the debt acquired with the British colony, and later with the United States, did not affect the Native American identity. According to the author, this is because indigenous identity has always been malleable and Native Americans were used to being uprooted for reasons of demography, conflict, religion, and ecology. Even though indigenous communities might have been more nomadic than other contemporaneous societies, Cobb's argument might be perceived subjective, ill-founded, or culturally insensitive, particularly because of the already mentioned lack of Native American voices in his historical recount.

Cobb also argues that the encounter (and subsequent processes of accommodation, resistance, flight, migration, and expansion) between colonizers and colonized peoples created a dialectical relationship that was translated into the landscape. In my opinion, the contact between Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans built a dialogic environment of countering, collaboration, and compromise. Biological and cultural hybridization occurred, and the convergence between cultures transpires in the archaeological record. For example, Fort Moore (in Beech Island, South Carolina) was a military garrison built in the eighteenth century at the core of a major Indian trade path for commerce and to protect the colonial frontiers. The excavation of the site has revealed that the strict segregational policies put in place were often ignored - a Native American burial found within the fort shows that the existence of social and physical porosity at the fort defenses. Similarly, the archaeological recovery of cutting implements made of glass bottles and stemware at the Brafferton Indian School (in Williamsburg, Virginia) proves children adapted their tradition to their new emplacement. These examples suggest the existence of a dialogue between cultures and traditions, rather than a dialectic opposition.

In conclusion, Cobb's monography is a highly recommendable recount of the transformations occurred in the Southeastern colonial landscapes within the larger evolution of the Atlantic World, and would be valuable to both practicing archaeologists and graduate students interested in these themes.

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