

Boasian Archaeology

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As we all know, Franz Boas is responsible for fostering the American approach to anthropology that combines four subfields (archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, and biological anthropology) into one overarching discipline. He understood all of these areas to reflect parts of the human experience, even as he undermined the then-current nationalist and racial ideologies that saw them as tightly integrated. Boas also devoted a good deal of his time and energy to various forms of social engagement, what today might be called applied anthropology or action anthropology.

In this paper, I will try to do two things. First, I will draw your attention to some recent archaeological work that draws on all four subfields of anthropology to answer research questions. I would like to suggest that using this work as an example in your archaeology courses would link these courses to the others that you teach. The potential benefits are twofold: there are benefits to the instructor in using the same examples in two or more courses, and there are benefits to the students whose learning in one course is reinforced by exposure to the same basic material in a second course. Introductory anthropology students often have a difficult time remembering material because it is not connected to other things that they know or that they are learning. Second, I will address the issue of social engagement through the teaching of

archaeology.

A Boasian approach has been applied to an important problem in Southwestern archaeology. At the same time that the Upper San Juan drainage was abandoned, sites in the Tewa basin north of Santa Fe grew, and many new sites were founded. But rather than being a simple example of migration, there are clear differences between the last of the northern sites and the beginnings of the new sites along the Rio Grande. Not only did settlement patterns differ, the pottery found in the Tewa basin looks more like San Juan pottery from several centuries earlier than like the latest San Juan pottery.

Scott Ortman, now at the University of Colorado, has brought some resolution to this problem. To do so, he used not only the archaeological record, but historical linguistics, biological anthropology, and ethnohistory to bear on the problem. He calls his approach Historical Anthropology, but I see it as an application of Boas's approach—Boasian archaeology. Ortman (2000) demonstrates that an underlying conceptual metaphor links modern Tewa words to the structure of archaeological sites in the San Juan basin, to motifs on their pottery, and to the architecture of the kivas in them.

Ortman's argument makes clear that not only did the ancestral northern Tewa migrate from the upper San Juan, but that the migration originated in a revitalization

movement, one that living Tewa remember today. Furthermore, he argues that the Pueblo revolt of 1680, led by a Tewa named Pope, used the earlier event as a conscious model for the later rebellion.

Ortman is now initiating work on changes in the Tewa tradition after the migration, including those that derive from interactions with people on the Great Plains. Those populations included the ancestral Wichita, whose sites I am studying. Glazed pottery, obsidian, turquoise, and even mundane items such as shaft straighteners appear in Wichita sites in Kansas.

But before I talk about my recent work, I want to mention one of Boas' other accomplishments, reported by W.E.B. Du Bois (1939, vii):

Few today are interested in Negro history because they feel the matter already settled: the Negro has no history. This dictum seems neither reasonable nor probable. I remember my own rather sudden awakening from the paralysis of this judgment taught me in high school and in two of the world's great universities. Franz Boas came to Atlanta University where I was teaching history in 1906 and said to a graduating class: You need not be ashamed of your African past; and then he recounted the history of the black kingdoms south of the Sahara for a thousand years. I was too astonished to speak. All of this I had never heard and I came then and afterwards to realize how the silence and neglect of science can let truth utterly disappear or even be

unconsciously distorted.

In 1906, the leading African American intellectual of his generation knew nothing about the sub-Saharan empires. Neither did his students or, of course, most other Americans. Nearly 110 years later, you might consider the impact of Boas's talk on his audience and ask what it is that your students do not know, information that you might be able to share with them under the guise of teaching archaeology.

To prepare for this presentation, I went on line and examined the contents of the first high school history text I could access. Their coverage of North American history begins in 1492, leaving out 96.7 percent of its human heritage. Let's consider whether your students really *need* to know some of that.

The first English settlers on the eastern seaboard brought with them the concept of the "savage". The word, derived from Latin, originally merely referred to people who lived in the forest, remote from cities, but by the time of Elizabeth I, it had come to acquire the connotations of bloodthirsty nomads incapable of civilization. It was the fierce resistance of the Irish to repeated English invasions and to the idea that they should give up their pastoral way of life to become settled Englishmen, that led to the perception that "savages" were incapable of civilization. Once the English had this modern concept of the Savage, they applied it to the tribes of Scotland—some of my ancestors—and then to the people of the New World.

I did a quick search of Google Images for the word "savage," and the only identifiable ethnic group that showed up in the first 200

pictures was Native American. The good news is that neither the Irish nor the Scots, nor Africans are pictured either directly or indirectly in the first few hundred images, but Native Americans are. How might you counter this association in an archaeology course without being didactic?

One pretty good source is Charles Mann's (2006) *1491*, which covers many of the thriving civilizations that existed in the Americas before Columbus arrived. But here is what he had to say about the Great Plains:

Continue north, to the least settled land, the realm of hunters and gatherers. Portrayed in US history books and Hollywood westerns, the Indians of the Great Plains are the most familiar to non-scholars. Demographically speaking, they lived in the hinterlands, remote and thinly settled; their lives were as far from Wari or Toltec lords as the nomads of Siberia were from the grandees of Beijing. (Mann 2006, 29)

Were the Plains really thinly settled and remote from all centers of civilization? Can't you offer your students some solid evidence to counter this Hollywood stereotype?

Recently, I have been working on a site that was visited by Juan de Oñate in 1601. He had founded Spanish New Mexico a few years earlier, but the colony was struggling. So, in 1601, he set out to investigate a report of a town on the plains that was so large that it took two or three days to walk through. He ended up in an ancestral Wichita settlement of people he called Rayados, the same folks that Coronado had called Quivirans.

Challenging the idea that the Plains were thinly settled, the accounts of his expedition mention reaching a camp of people that the Spaniards called *Escanxaques*—a camp that held between four and six thousand people. A native-drawn map shows that this was one of eight such camps. The only part of the stereotype that pertains to the *Escanxaques* is that they were hunters and gatherers, not settled farmers like the residents of the large town.

Newly retranscribed and retranslated documents from the Oñate expedition (Craddock and Polt 2013) led me to re-investigate the protohistoric sites in southern Kansas. Those documents provide detailed evidence that I was able to compare to the archaeological record, with very productive results.

The official archaeological record has 21 protohistoric sites, all classified as villages, situated along the lower Walnut River, just above the modern Oklahoma border. Details in the Spanish accounts fit perfectly with what we know, but only when we allow that the town, which the natives called Etzanoa, was continuous for five miles (Figure 1). Oñate assigned four men to count the houses, and one of them reported that there were 2,000. The Spanish estimated ten people per house for a total population of 20,000. The same witness paced off the circumferences of houses and the distances between them. He further reported that the houses lay in clusters of 30 to 40, with the clusters separated by agricultural fields. He also mentioned that there were cellars—we would call them cache pits—adjacent to the houses.

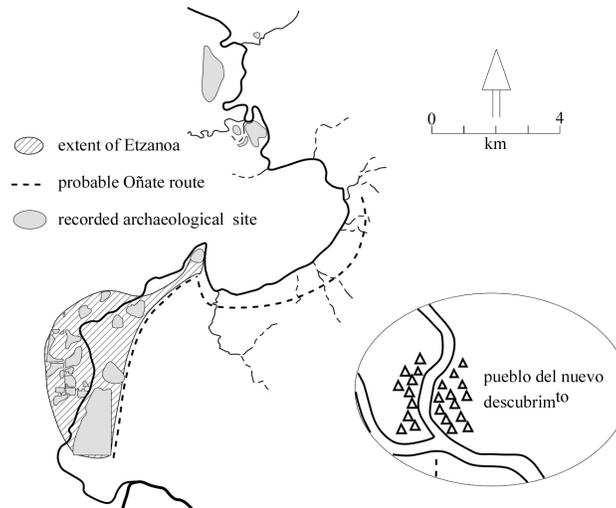


Figure 1. Location and extent of Etzanoa in 1601, from eyewitness accounts and official site records. The inset shows a detail of a map produced in 1602. (Image credit: Donald Blakeslee)

The details allowed me to create a model of the site structure. The houses were circular and covered with grass thatch. Between the clusters of 30 to 40 houses were pathways that defined the borders of fields, pathways that were too narrow for the Spanish carts. This last summer, I tested that model using two methods. In one area, I surveyed a plowed field adjacent to a spot where the Kansas State Historical Society had found a large number of storage features. That work had been done prior to levee and highway construction, and was a massive project that led the archaeologists to use heavy equipment to remove up to 40 cm of soil to expose features. That method guaranteed that they could not find the houses, which were built very near the surface.

In one spot, Historical Society researchers nevertheless uncovered a cluster of 56 pits. In 2015, there was a freshly

plowed field adjacent to the levee, where I worked with volunteers to do an intensive surface survey. We found a very thin scatter of flakes and other items until we neared the western edge of the field—at about the distance that Baltazar Martínez de Cogador reported in 1602. There, we found a very dense concentration of surface debris. We were marking individual items with grader flags, and the concentration was so dense that we literally ended up buying every grader flag in town.

A concentration of surface material, of course, does not necessarily prove the prior presence of a cluster of houses (evidence for which would have been destroyed by plowing) or of truncated storage pits below the plow zone. But in a previously unplowed section of the site, we also used a magnetometer, with the results shown here in Figure 2. The eastern block that we surveyed showed few prehistoric

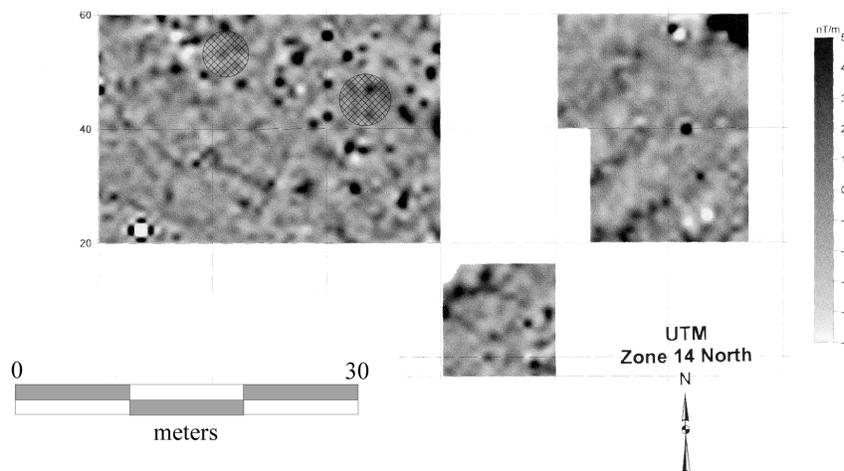


Figure 2: Magnetometry map showing apparent agricultural field (upper right) and house cluster with storage pits (upper left). Crosshatched circles are apparent house locations. (Image credit: Steve DeVore, National Park Service)

features, but some modern pieces of iron and some bands that appear to be bedrock features. To the west, however, is a dense concentration of features—the black dots—most of which appear to be pits. I have superimposed a circle the size of the reported houses to highlight the fact that some of the pits occur in circular patterns—these are cellars adjacent to the houses.

Everything found so far fits with the Spanish descriptions of a town that contained 20,000 people. In 1601, the Spanish learned of even more people upriver, and sites of the same complexity do occur there. So, in 1601, the Plains were far from thinly settled. But were they remote and isolated?

When Coronado visited Kansas in 1541, he was guided by a Wichita man who his men nicknamed El Turko, and one account mentions that El Turko could speak a few words of the Aztec language. Then in 1602, one of Oñate's men mentioned that some of the residents of the great settlement

spoke to the Spanish in the language of the Mexica—that is, Nahuatl. These are not the only references to Nahuatl being spoken on the southern Plains; apparently, the language was used as a lingua franca for purposes of trade. Rather than being rubes from the hinterland, unconnected to the larger world, the ancestral Wichitas participated in a trade system that connected them not only to the Tewa of the Rio Grande (and to the Pawnees of Nebraska and the Caddo of eastern Texas), but to the Aztecs of central Mexico as well. Their trade relationships extended for at least 1,750 miles north-south and 800 miles east-west. Do your students need to know that? If so, check out the video *Quivira: Conquistadors on the Plain*, which is available on the Archaeology Channel.

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