Special section
Issues in Brazilian archaeology

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Brazil is an important archaeological and ethnographic area, too little known in the anglophone world. A land of startling contrasts occupying nearly half the area of the South American continent, it borders nine of its other eleven nations. Its borders include one-third of the earth's remaining tropical forest, a central plateau and rolling plains in the temperate south, and the Amazon River basin which discharges into the Atlantic a volume of water equivalent to that from all the rivers of Europe.

Brazilian archaeology is important both for understanding the unique sequence of cultural events in this diverse landscape, and for the light it can shed on cultural processes. This Special section sees the archaeology of Brazil in both these contexts, with an emphasis on variability in the archaeological record and on the multiple interpretations given to that variation. The papers also address the need for more data from all parts of Brazil, and the need for research programmes more explicitly designed for understanding long-term socio-cultural variability.

During the past two decades Brazilian archaeology has moved into a new phase. Previously the majority of archaeologists working in the region were concerned with artefact typology and technology, with their development through time, and with the sequential and regional relationships of stone and ceramic assemblages. Recently, new approaches adopted by archaeologists themselves and advances in related fields — geomorphology, palaeontology, palaeobotany, palaeoclimatology — have swung research towards considering past cultures in their totality. And new archaeological and ethnoarchaeological discoveries have forced scholars to re-think old hypotheses with respect to Brazilian prehistory. From early unifacial stone-tool industries to large shell-middens, from early ceramics to large agricultural villages, these recent finds have demanded alternative interpretations of Brazilian prehistory. Within this new framework, there has been controversy and reconciliation: excessive claims have been made from few or shaky data for the continent's earliest people and ceramic cultures; we have learned that the eastern tropical lowland cultures of South America were not provincial and reliant on the influence of high Andean civilizations. We now see reciprocal interaction between eastern lowland and Andean cultures through time, which gives the lowland a prominent position in the origin and spread of agriculture and in early village developments.

Alongside new information on Brazilian archaeology, this Special section fills an important gap in the literature on pre-hispanic civilization in the Americas. Although many books have been written on the archaeology of Mesoamerica and the Central Andes, little is available in English on the subject of pre-colonial Brazil. For over 20 years the main summary in English serving as a scholarly introduction has been Gordon Willey's *Introduction to South American archaeology* (1971).

This Special section results from an informative symposium on Brazilian archaeology at the 1997 annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Nashville (TN). Its papers survey Brazilian archaeology over more than 12,000 years and most of the country. We have chosen archaeological areas and time-periods for

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FIGURE 1. *Brazil: boundaries and regions.*

which our understanding has most changed in recent years, to provide a sense of what archaeologists now know about the past of Brazil and how they have come to know it. We thank its contributors and others concerned with bringing it to press.

One theme of these Special papers is the relation between different sources of historical evidence and the cultural entities they recognize: are the entities defined in Brazil by archaeological traits — different ceramic, lithic or settlement characters — to be equated with the patterns identified by historical linguistics? And how does either pattern match biological entities in human populations, and the often self-defining ethnicities of historical times? Here the evidence from Brazil provides another study alongside three better-known examples from other continents, from Eurasia in the old 'Indo-European problem', from Africa in the relation between the African Iron Age and the Bantu peoples, from near Oceania in the meaning of distinctive Lapita ceramics and its relation to founding populations through the Pacific islands.

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In the Special section:

Cristiana Barreto sets the scene with the distinctive intellectual structures and influences on the practice of archaeology in Brazil.

Renato Kipnis gives a view of the early American hunter-gatherers from a perspective based in central Brazil.

Maria Dulce Gaspar explores the *sambaquis*, the characteristic shell-mounds of the Atlantic coast.

Erika Marion Robrahn González assesses the pottery-making groups of southern Brazil.

Eduardo Góes Neves outlines optimistic and pessimistic visions of Amazonian human settlement.

Michael J. Heckenberger tracks the role of manioc agriculture in human sedentism on the Upper Xingu.

Francisco Silva Noelli addresses the Tupi as an entity seen in terms of archaeology and of historical linguistics.

Irmhild Wüst examines continuities and discontinuities, by archaeology and by ethnoarchaeology in respect of central Brazilian ring villages.

Reference

WILLEY, G.R. 1971. *An introduction to American archaeology 2: South America*. Englewood Cliffs (NJ): Prentice-Hall.

Brazilian archaeology from a Brazilian perspective

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Key-words: Brazilian archaeology, history of archaeology, archaeological theory

Archaeology in Brazil shares many empirical similarities with Latin American and North American research but, as a social science, it has remained isolated from mainstream theoretical and methodological advances. The large size of the country, the lack of resources and government support, the difficulties of working in tropical environments, the lack of monumental architecture, and Brazil's being neither a Spanish- nor an English-speaking country have all been thought of as shaping Brazilian archaeology and its failure to integrate into a larger, Latin American or international context.

Foreign archaeology journals traditionally published little on Brazilian archaeology, while recent concerns about the antiquity of a few sites or controversies about cultural development in the Amazon among North American scholars have overshadowed other research in Brazil.

This limited knowledge of Brazilian archaeology confirms the North American misperception that equates Brazil's vast territory with the Amazon basin, and its archaeology with the study of past populations in tropical forests. On the contrary, the Amazon basin corresponds to only one-third of the country and is not all covered with tropical forest. Furthermore, most archaeological research done by Brazilians is outside Amazonia, mainly because it remains the country's least developed region. To this day, the most intensely researched areas are the southeastern coast, the southeast and the south in general (from Rio de Janeiro to Rio Grande do Sul states), and central Brazil (especially Minas Gerais and Goiás states), where chronological sequences and geographic distribution of cultural complexes are better understood.

A *Brazilian* archaeology exists, not because of its geographic boundaries nor because it is done by Brazilians, but because its institutions and professional community share a long history of theoretical handicap and misplaced foreign influences (Schwartz 1992).

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