

1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus. Charles C. Mann. New York: Vintage Books, 2006 .

PREFACE

Three main foci of new findings, and thus three parts to the book:

1. Indian Demography;
2. Indian Origins
3. Indian Ecology [xi]

“The overwhelming majority of the indigenous peoples whom I have met in both North and South America describe themselves as Indians.” [xii]

Re: Northwest Coast art: “... all was metamorphosis and surreal commotion.”

INTRODUCTION: HOLMBERG’S MISTAKE

ONE: A VIEW FROM ABOVE

In the Beni

Bolivian province (on Brazilian border) – alternately watery plain and desert.

Teamwork of archaeologists and anthropologists – “... as scientists have come to appreciate the ways in which past and present inform each other, the distinction between anthropologists and archaeologists has blurred.” [3]

30,000 square mile landscape “of forest islands and mounds” maze have been “constructed by a technologically advanced, populous society more than a thousand years ago.” (Clark Erickson) [4]

Challenge to conventional understanding – Indians had been here far longer, were far more populous, and had far more impact on the landscape than previously believed. [4]

These are highly controversial theses. [4]

Holmberg’s Mistake

A mound composed largely of broken crockery. [6-7]

Erickson argues that the crockery is evidence of a populous, highly structured society. [7]

Early 1940s, Allan Holmberg lived among the Sirionó, and published (1950) *Nomads of the Long Bow* about them, presenting the Sirionó as “among the most culturally backward peoples of the world” – without clothes, art, music, domestic animals, religion. [8]

He argued that they were without a narrative, without history before Columbus, and had “bloated changelessly through the millennia until 1492.” [9]

Actually, the cultural backwardness observed by Holmberg resulted from smallpox/influenza in 1920s – as much as 95% of the Sirionó population had been lost within a generation, forcing “a genetic bottleneck” (forced inbreeding). [10]

To aid white cattle ranchers, government had forced remaining Sirionó into ‘prison camps’ – those encountered by Holmberg had been on the run from such abuse. [10]

“... he never fully grasped that the people he saw as remnants from the Paleolithic age were actually the persecuted survivors of a recently shattered culture.” [10]

Linguistic evidence suggests that the Sirionó had migrated to the Beni from the North, probably about the time of Spanish settlement. [10-11]

They had moved into a landscape shaped by a previous culture, about which Holmberg knew nothing. [11]

William Denevan began studying/exploring the Beni in 1961. He observed “isolated hillocks of forest; long raised berms; canals; raised agricultural fields; circular, moat-like ditches; and odd, zigzagging ridges.” [11]

“...’a completely humanized landscape.” [11]

Beginning ca. 3,000 years ago, residents of the Beni “created one of the largest, strangest, and most ecologically rich artificial environments on the planet.” [11-13]

Perhaps a million people; this society reached its height 1000 years ago. [13]

“Ecologically, the region is a treasure, but one designed and executed by human beings.” [13]

“Empty of Mankind and Its Works”

The dominance of Holmberg’s mistake in both academic and popular culture – whether viewing Indians as vicious barbarians or Noble Savages – denied them *agency*. [13]

Las Casas (1530s) posited prelapsarian innocence; Thoreau say ‘Indian Wisdom’ as “an indigenous way of thought that supposedly did not encompass measuring or categorizing, which he viewed as the evils that allowed human brings to change Nature.” [14]

Historian George Bancroft (1834) posited precontact North America as ‘an unproductive waste’ and the Indians as ‘destitute of commerce and of political connection.’ [14]

Alfred Kroeber (1934) and Samuel Eliot Morison (1970s) placed the Indians in a changeless wilderness, having created no lasting monuments or institutions. [15]

Hugh Trevor-Roper (1965): The ‘chief function in history’ of Native peoples ‘is to show to the present an image of the past from which by history it has escaped.’ [15]

Portrayal of Indians in U.S. history textbooks went “resolutely backward” (Frances Fitzgerald) between 1840s and 1940s. [15]

“... many of the researchers who embraced Holmberg’s mistake lived in an era when the driving force of events seemed to be great leaders of European descent overwhelming nonwhite societies everywhere.

Throughout all of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, nationalism was ascendant, and historians identified history with nations, rather than with cultures, religions, or ways of life." [16]

Post WWII disintegration of colonial empires challenged this – as did the new ways to examine the past made possible by new disciplines and technologies. [16]

"... the idea that the only human occupants of one-third of the earth's surface had changed little for thousands of years began to seem implausible." [16]

"... the Americas were immeasurably busier, more diverse, and more populous than researchers had previously imagined." [17]

The Other Neolithic Revolution

Paradigm dominant for the past century, culminating in Haynes (1964), posited Indian emigration across the Bering Strait 13,000 years ago when climate change caused a land bridge, with simultaneous corridor opening in the ice sheet enabling southward movement. [17]

This coincided with 13,000 year old Clovis culture in New Mexico. [18]

By the late 1990s, discoveries of 12,000 year old settlements as far south as Chile, and doubts about the ice-free corridor challenged this. [18]

Many competing theories have emerged – as to dates, number of immigration waves, locations, etc. [18]

One constant: "In every imaginable scenario, they left Eurasia before the first whisper of the Neolithic Revolution" (i.e., the invention of farming). [19]

"... a second, independent Neolithic Revolution occurred in Mesoamerica" (ca. 10,000 years ago) – perhaps two independent American revolutions. [19]

Maize cannot reproduce itself, so Indians must have developed it from some other species – "In creating modern maize – Indians performed a feat so improbable that archaeologists and biologists have argued for decades over how it was achieved." [20]

"Coupled with squash, beans, and avocados, maize provided Mesoamerica with a balanced diet, one arguably more nutritious than its Middle Eastern or Asian equivalent." [20]

Olmec (southern Mexico, ca 1800 B.C.): "the first technologically complex culture in the hemisphere." [20]

Cities, art, writing, mathematics (invention of zero). [20-21]

"... by 1000 A.D. Indians had expanded their Neolithic revolution to create a panoply of diverse civilizations across the hemisphere." [22]

1492: "... the descendants of the world's Neolithic Revolutions collided, with overwhelming consequences for all. [22]

A Guided Tour

Near Lake Titicaca, 'state' of Tiwanaku (ca. 800 B.X.) – “Less a centralized state than a clutch of municipalities.” [22-24]

“... extreme ecological differences... a marvel of terraced pyramids and monuments... with its running water, closed sewers, and gaudily painted walls, Tiwanaka was among the world's most impressive cities.” [24]

Alan Kolatu (University of Chicago) posits a 1000 A.D. city population of 115,000, surrounding area 250,000 – ‘numbers that Paris would not reach for another five centuries.’ [24]

Neighboring and rival state of Wari, more heavily fortified. [24]

Natural (drought) and social stresses, which neither Tiwanaku or Wari “had the political resources to survive.” [25]

“Such newly discovered histories appear everywhere in the Americas.” [25]

Many Mayan settlements being excavated for the first time.” [26]

Maya = “home to one of the world's most intellectually sophisticated cultures.” [26]

Also a kind of Mayan Dark Ages, “as if scribes had lost the knowledge of writing and were reduced to meaningless imitation of their ancestors.” [26]

Cahokia (near St. Louis) – “once the greatest population center north of the Rio Grande.” (ca. 1000 A.D.) [27-28]

Great Plains Indians – “lives... as far from the Wari or Toltec lords as the nomads of Siberia were from the grandees of Beijing.” [28]

By 1000 A.D., “Trade relationships had covered the continent for more than a thousand years.” [28]

Another entire civilization in Brazil discovered only in 2003. [28]

It not seems clear that Amazonia was much more heavily populated in 1000 A.D. that it is today – with agro-forestry. [29]

This recent research “has begun... to fill in one of the biggest blanks in history: the Western hemisphere before 1492. [29]

“... a thriving, stunningly diverse place, a tumult of languages, trade, and culture, a region where tens of millions of people loved and hated and worshipped as people do everywhere.” [29-30]

Post-Columbian erasure – “... within a few generations neither conqueror not conquered knew that this world had existed.” [30]

PART ONE: NUMBERS FROM NOWHERE

TWO: WHY BILLINGTON SURVIVED

The Friendly Indian

Recent research into Pilgrim-Indian relations – “inquiry into the interactions between natives and newcomers in the era when they faced each other as equals.” [38]

Indian agency: Coastal Indians chose to cooperate with Europeans, seeking a stronger position vis-à-vis inland tribes. This choice yielded short-term success, but long-term catastrophe.

“The fall of Indian societies had everything to do with the natives themselves, rather than being religiously or technologically determined.” [38]

Chapters 2 and 3 explore Wampanoog and Inca reactions to European incursions. [38]

Colonial descriptions offer a glimpse into Indian life “not shaped by the presence of Europe.” -- windows into the past, “even if the glass is smeared.” [38]

Commonalities in differing stories of contact yield a ‘master narrative’ that has opened research possibilities. [38-39]

Coming of Age in the Dawnland

Tisquantum (‘Squanto’) from Patuxet (Massachusetts) in Wampanoog confederation, in alliance with other coastal settlements. [39ff.]

All spoke variants of Massachusett (of the Algonquin language family). [39]

New England shore = “Dawnland” / residents = “People of the First Light” [39]

After retreat of the ice sheet, Dawnland became extraordinarily ‘rich’ ecologically. [41]

Glottochronology = estimating how long ago two languages split from a common ancestor. [41]

Algonquin languages stem from a common ancestor appearing a few centuries B.C. [41]

Ca. 2000 years ago, Hopewell culture introduced monumental earthworks and agriculture to the Northeast – spread, perhaps, by a wave of spiritual ferment and conversion (much like the spread of Islam and Arabic). [41]

Introduced a vast trade network. “By the end of the first millennium A.D., agriculture was spreading rapidly and the region was becoming an unusual patchwork of communities, each with its preferred terrain – permanent settlements pervaded ‘New England.’ [42]

Diverse communities ‘joining and splitting like quicksilver in a fluid pattern within its bounds’ (Kathleen Bragdon) – a type of settlement with ‘no name in the archaeological or anthropological literature.’ [42-43]

Dwelling = *wetu*, a dome regarded by the colonists as superior to typical English homes. [43]

“Dawnland diets... averaged about 2,500 calories a day, better than those usual in famine-rocked Europe.” [44-45]

Colonists reported “close and loving” families among the Indians, with ‘education’ geared toward “molding character.” [45]

Tisquantum = a *pniese* (counselor-bodyguard to the sachem). [45]

Pniese-education involved intense self-discipline. [45]

16th century population growth among the Indians required “more centralized administration,” with more formal boundaries between groups, and thus increasing political tensions. [46]

Armed conflict became more common, though colonists regarded it as ‘farre less bloody, and devouring than the cruell Warres of Europe’ (Roger Williams). [46-47]

Tourism and Treachery

Several ‘visits’ by European ships in early 16th century, with descriptions of natives as “strikingly healthy specimens.” [47-48]

Puritans dismayed by their elaborate adornment (clothes, jewelry, hair, body painting). [48-50]

Indians tended to regard the Europeans as weak and unclean. [50]

Thomas Hunt (1614) took ca. 20-30 natives captive (including Tisquantum) and took them to Europe, introducing adversarial relationship to Native-European interaction. [53-54]

Tisquantum remained in Europe for five years – “When he returned, everything had changed” – Pilgrims had built their village literally on top of Patuxet. [54]

The Place of the Skull

The Pilgrims were so undersupplied and lacking requisite expertise that they “survived on Indian charity.” [56]

Hunt had sailed with Tisquantum for Spain, where the Church forced release of the Indians; Tisquantum travelled to London and arranged for return passage to America. [58]

Upon return to Patuxet, Tisquantum found his homeland filled only with untended dead – decimated by an epidemic (viral hepatitis?). [59-60]

The survivors fled, carrying the disease wherever they went. [60]

Between 1616-1620, “the pestilence... killed as much as 90 percent of the people in coastal New England.” [66]

Colonist Tomas Morton called it ‘a new-found Golgotha.’ [66]

Both Indians and colonists could only attribute the sickness to “the will of celestial forces.” [66]

The colonists believed that God had upheld their mission – the Indians that ‘their deities had allied against them.’ [61]

“... the New England epidemic shattered the Wampanoog’s sense that they lived in balance with an intelligible world.” [61]

Tisquantum eventually convinced Wampanoog sachem to ally with the British against the Narragansett, and to use him as translator/mediator. [63]

Much Indian technology impressed colonists – maize, moccasins, canoes. [64]

Part of Massasoit’s (Wampanoog sachem) strategy was diplomatic – the Narragansett were dependant on British trade, and would be unlikely to attack an ally of a British colony. [64-65.

He “was trying to incorporate the Pilgrims into the web of native politics.” [65]

Allowing the Pilgrims to remain proved to be “a drastic, even fatal, decision.” [65]

Machinations

Massasoit’s pact with the pilgrims lasted 50 years. In 1675, the Indians attacked, and the Europeans won, in part due to “Indian unwillingness to match the European tactic of massacring whole villages.” [67]

Narragansett crushed by a smallpox epidemic in 1633. [67]

“The People of the First Light could avoid or adapt to European technology but not European disease. Their societies were destroyed by weapons their opponents could not control and did not even know they had.” [67]

THREE: IN THE LAND OF FOUR QUARTERS

“Like a Club Right Between the Eyes”

Henry Dobyns’ research in Northern Mexico in 1953 studied Catholic sacramental records discovered a pattern: Spanish arrival = Indian death. [68-69]

Early 1960, Dobyns discovered Peru to be “one of the world’s cultural wellsprings,” a fact largely unappreciated “partly because the Spaniards so thoroughly ravaged Inka culture,” and partly because the Inkas had concealed the glories of cultures that had preceded them. [69-70]

Anthropologists had focused on Africa due to colonialism, and South America was largely ignored. [70]

Dobyns repeated his demographic work in Peru and revealed a “biocultural template,” i.e., “every Indian culture, large or small, eventually succumbed to Europe.” [70]

Tawantinsuyu

“In 1491 the Inka ruled the greatest empire on earth.” -- extending “over a staggering thirty-two degrees of latitude” ... and “every imaginable type of terrain.” [71]

Economically and linguistically diverse peoples, joined politically, economically, artistically, religiously. [71]

Inkan methods were brutal and efficient. [71]

“... the biggest road system on the planet” and a unique system of writing. [71]

John Muir noted that Peru is the only place on earth where millions of people choose to live 10,000-14,000 feet above sea level. And nowhere else have people at such heights “repeatedly created technically advanced, long-lasting civilizations.” [73]

Ecological/topological diversity: “In the short traverse from mountain to ocean, travelers pass through twenty of the world’s thirty-four principal types of environment.” [74]

Diverse areas made unique contributions: “Combining the fruits of many ecosystems, Andean cultures both enjoyed a better life than they could have wrested from any single place and spread out the risk from the area’s frequent natural catastrophes.” [74]

Generally, cultures remained small to medium, rather isolated because of difficulty of North-South communication/transportation. Three times cultures rose to dominate the Andes. [74]

1. 700 B.C. to the time of Christ: Chavin
2. 190 to 1000 A.D., 2 great powers: Wari and Tiwanaku
3. 15th century, Inka

Inkas appear to have migrated from Lake Titicaca to Dosqo ca. 1200 A.D. [75]

Another group (Chanka) attacked, and Inkas led the defense so effectively that they subsequently rose to power. [76]

After an internal struggle among Inkas, Pachakuti rose to power and expanded the empire, both economically and militarily. [76]

The entire population of the area was mobilized into this work of expansion. [77]

The Inkan empire tended to be *hegemonic* rather than *territorial* – i.e., co-opting local rulers instead of displacing them. [78]

Inkan artistic style “was severe, abstract, stripped down to geometric forms – startlingly contemporary.” [78]

In Qosqo, enormous central plaza (Awkaypata) was surrounded by monumental villas and temples – with facades of polished gold. [79]

Awkaypata as center of the empire, and the cosmos – from here, four highways radiated, dividing the empire into four quarters. [79]

“... the florid abundance of shrines and lines.” [80]

Villagers spent part of their time working in teams on community projects. [80-81]

All land and property belonged to the ‘state.’ [81]

“Peasants thus had to work periodically for the empire as farmers, herders, weavers, masons, artisans, miners, or soldiers.” [81]

“... the imperium shuttled people and material in and out of every Andean crevice.” [81]

This vast economic system “functioned without money,” and without markets. [81]

Europeans noted that hunger had been eradicated, and there was a vast surplus of goods. [81]
Inka practiced a “wholesale reshuffling of populations, encouraging maintenance of traditional dress/customs, but insisting on linguistic uniformity. [81-82]

“... if Pizarro had not interrupted, the Inka might have created a monolithic culture as enduring as China.” [82]

The Gilded Litter of the Inka

INCOMPLETE