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A place's enduring human occupation creates bonds between people and their inhabited landscape. This people-place relationship attaches groups to their homeland in a way that largely defines their economic, ideological, and cultural identity. Yet, no human occupation is everlasting. As individuals, households, or whole communities inevitably end their occupation of a landscape, the ties binding them are either altered or severed. This process—*detachment from place*—transforms both the landscape and how it is conceived by its former inhabitants.

This universal process has many distinct and contrasting modern manifestations. Endemic warfare forces populations into exile toward more peaceful, but often more densely populated, areas. Rising sea levels across the world gradually displace cultural groups. Young academics become nomads, migrating between cities on a yearly basis. These distinct cases of detachment from place differentially alter, erase, or disrupt social ties and human-place entanglements (following Hodder 2016a). Each detachment leaves distinct material signatures on abandoned landscapes; in some cases, they are invisible or very subtle and in others dramatic.

## *Introduction*

MAXIME LAMOUREUX-  
ST-HILAIRE AND  
SCOTT MACRAE

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE VOLUME**

This volume takes a comparative approach to detachment from places located across the Americas, Africa,

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and Eurasia. Its chapters study physical manifestations of detachment that vary in relation to geopolitical and environmental contexts and to degrees of attachment to place. Since all its authors study relatively sedentary people, they emphasize anthropogenic landscapes and geography, while relying upon cultural-historical backgrounds. Questions of land modifications, the socioeconomic values associated with these, and the valuable knowledge of inhabited landscapes (Balée and Erickson 2006; Brookfield 1984; Feld and Basso 1996; Knapp and Ashmore 1999) all play a role in defining human-place entanglement (Hodder 2011a, 2016a).

Yet, this volume emphasizes how settled landscapes were detached from, thus highlighting the conundrum of sedentism which, ultimately, is a historical illusion. By focusing on archaeological proxies of detachment—artifacts, features, burials, architecture, and landscape modifications—most chapters have methodological and theoretical overtones, bringing forth the theme of settlement abandonment. Concepts of settlement abandonment and formation processes—including the contrast between archaeological and systemic contexts—are rooted in processual archaeology, specifically in the writings of Robert Ascher (1968) and Michael B. Schiffer (1972, 1976, 1985, 1987), who first theorized how archaeologists can study abandonment behaviors. Beyond owing to these foundational theories, this volume is aligned with comparable efforts geared toward a cultural and environmental understanding of how places were left in the archaeological past (Cameron and Tomka 1993; Inomata and Webb 2003a; McAnany and Yoffee 2010; Middleton 2012; Mock 1998; Nelson and Strawhacker 2011).

We began a recent article as follows: “What makes a settlement an archaeological site? It could be said that once a settlement is abandoned, it enters the archaeological record” (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire et al. 2015:550). Until recently, we felt confident about this “Schifferian” assertion, which remains true for some archaeological sites—especially within areas having suffered civilizational collapse and regional depopulation. However, it does not apply to many sites that are considered foundational for the identity of cultural groups—as living places for sacralized ancestors (e.g., see Birch and Lesage, chapter 4 in this volume; Birch and Williamson 2013; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; de Barros, chapter 8 in this volume; Glowacki 2015, chapter 3 in this volume), or as modern ceremonial centers (e.g., see Iannone, chapter 10 in this volume; Palka 2014).

As people go, places remain. Yet, most archaeological sites may never be truly abandoned and may simply be awaiting to be reinvested—be it by migrants, pilgrims, or researchers. We are not suggesting to discard advances from

settlement abandonment studies, which have made strong middle-range contributions to help us interpret the archaeological record, since “whether one sees abandonment processes as transforming the material record (e.g. Schiffer 1983, 1985), or as integral components of site formation (e.g. Binford 1981), all archaeologically recovered remains have been conditioned by abandonment processes” (Tomka and Stevenson 1993:191). Yet, recent advances highlight the limitations of the behavioral concept of “settlement abandonment” and call for a more nuanced approach to people-place disentanglement; hence our proposal of *detachment from place*.

As towns and regions are today abandoned by segments of their populations, these same people, or distinct groups, will inevitably return and idiosyncratically attach themselves to these transformed landscapes. Alternatively, vacant and even never-revisited places may retain essential cultural value for former, out-migrated inhabitants (see Stanton and Magnoni 2008). As an analytical framework, detachment from place goes beyond archaeological proxies of abandonment; it involves migration and resettlement, and inquires into the dynamic relationship between people and their landscapes before, during, and after abandonment. By studying detachment from place as such a decisive social process, this volume also emphasizes the formative powers of leaving—in other words, migration (see Anthony 1990). This perspective is rooted in ethnography, ethnographically minded archaeology, and heritage or engaged archaeology (see Cameron 2013; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; Glowacki 2015; McAnany and Rowe 2015) and contributes important nuances to settlement abandonment studies by reminding us that (1) ancient people may not be heuristically reduced to the landscapes we study; and (2) our scientific, archaeological approach is but one perspective on these landscapes, which value and significance may be entirely different for related cultural groups. Consequently, the authors of this volume rely on more than archaeology to study detachment from place, providing interdisciplinary and/or multivocal perspectives through the lenses of history, epigraphy, ethnoarchaeology, ethnography, oral history, and fictional accounts.

Besides its theoretical influences, the scope of this volume has been defined by internal academic dynamics. The life of this volume began with the 78th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (Honolulu, 2013), for which this first author coorganized a session with Patricia McAnany, entitled “Living Abandonment: The Social Process of Detachment from Place.” This productive session featured thirteen papers by scholars working in the Americas, the Near East, and East Asia and discussions by Catherine Cameron and Ian Hodder. After a hiatus, this concerted project was revived

by inquiries from the University Press of Colorado, giving momentum to the editors of this volume. A new (double) session was organized for the 116th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (Washington, DC, 2017), entitled “Detaching from Place: A World Archaeology Perspective to Settlement Abandonment.” This session was effectively a rehearsal for this volume and grouped twelve presenters, several of whom were part of the “Living Abandonment” session. This volume was thus six years in the making, granting its authors a certain perspective on its themes and composition. As will become apparent, the following chapters represent distinct theoretical and methodological perspectives unified by the objective of exploring the multifaceted complexities of detachment from place.

### VOLUME OVERVIEW

This volume covers a wide geographic distribution of case studies, which are sometimes separated by millennia: the Huron-Wendat region of Northeast America, the Mesa Verde region, the Archaic Southeast United States, the Classic Maya of Mesoamerica, the historical Bassar region of Togo, the Bronze Age Near East, and the Southeast Asian medieval capital of Bagan, Myanmar. These case studies are tied together by a desire to explore the complexities involved in processes of detachment from place; complexities that may be summarized by a set of interrelated questions:

1. What do we mean by detachment from place?
2. What were the *stressors* and *enablers* that prompted detachment from place?
3. How were cultural groups transformed during this process?
4. How were places transformed during this process?
5. How did “abandoners” continue to interact with groups that remained home?
6. How were “abandoned landscapes” reused by newly attached groups?
7. How can we study these questions with archaeological data?
8. How can archaeological studies and cultural studies of migration inform each other?
9. How do anthropologists and indigenous groups differently understand abandonment?

The chapters tackle these questions in distinct fashion through case studies spanning a variety of spatial and temporal scales, as well as theoretical perspectives. The following chapter 2, an initial foray into the topic of detachment from place by Patricia A. McAnany and Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire, breaks down the complexities of place-making and unmaking. The authors use several

archaeological cases, along with contemporary and popular culture analogies, to challenge traditional archaeological approaches to periodization and settlement abandonment by exploring questions of migration, memory, and reattachment to place. The ensuing, relativistic approach broadens the archaeological scope to study abandonment—framing *stressors* and *enablers* in relation to processes of community formation and their (dis)entanglement with landscapes.

In chapter 3, Donna M. Glowacki focuses on the thirteenth-century ancestral Pueblo people of the Mesa Verde region in the American Southwest. By placing a contextual understanding of Pueblo migrations within an ethnographically informed perspective, the author describes the social dislocation, reorganization, and continuity that occurred within Mesa Verde landscapes. Glowacki also critically reviews settlement abandonment literature to provide a strong theoretical framework—exploring “the when and how of leaving that inform on the why of it”—which ties together the interrelated concepts of leaving and migration. In addition, Glowacki addresses cultural issues that may derive from the blanket application of the archaeological concept of abandonment.

In chapter 4, Jennifer Birch and Louis Lesage address detachment from place at both the local and regional scales amongst the Northern Iroquoian peoples of the northeastern woodlands. Combining archaeological and historical data, oral histories, and contemporary indigenous perspectives, the authors investigate processes of detachment from place among ancestral Huron-Wendat communities. This case study, with its fine-grained chronology, challenges conceptions of both sedentism and abandonment by exploring practices of planned abandonment and short-distance migration by extended kin groups within a regional framework. The authors also expose the inadequacy of the concept of abandonment from the perspective of indigenous groups tied to ancestral landscapes.

In chapter 5, Kenneth E. Sassaman and Asa Randall explore macroregional abandonment within the Archaic Southeast United States. Their chapter focuses on several archaeological sites from this region (especially coastal Florida) that coalesced within the *cosmunity* of the early monumental site of Poverty Point, Louisiana. The authors draw connections between cosmology, the natural landscape, and environmental change—specifically sea-level rise. This ambitious, high-level theoretical exercise, anchored in a rich empirical framework, addresses the predictability of the detachment from and repositioning of archaeological sites among the Archaic indigenous groups of the northeast coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

In chapter 6, Scott Macrae, Gyles Iannone, and Pete Demarte shift the focus of this volume to Mesoamerica and the ancient Maya of the North Vaca Plateau

of western Belize. The authors emphasize the strong ties established between ancient Maya people and their landscape, while contrasting two closely related agrarian communities in terms of settlement history, climate change, and sociopolitical context. By exposing these *longue-durée* processes, the authors adopt and develop the concepts of *landesque capital* and *sense of place* to explain the differential abandonment scenarios for their two case studies.

In chapter 7, Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire, Marcello A. Canuto, Tomás Q. Barrientos, and José Eduardo Bustamante provide a second case-study from the ancient Maya world centered on the Classic Maya center of La Corona, Guatemala. Drawing on the historical record and rich archaeological datasets from the site's regal palace, the authors discuss the process of detachment from power experienced by the La Corona government. By studying a program of ritual termination, preabandonment middens, and on-floor assemblages, the authors explore how the La Corona regime adapted to a changing geopolitical context by gradually reducing the size of its political institution. This chapter takes a focused approach to processes of detachment from place related to the Classic Maya political collapse.

In chapter 8, Phillip L. de Barros turns our attention to the Later Iron Age in the Bassar region of Northern Togo, West Africa. Drawing on incredibly rich datasets derived from history, ethnography, archaeological excavations, and survey, de Barros studies warfare-induced detachment from place at the regional scale. The author evaluates questions related to site abandonment, relocation and reattachment to place, and connections and disconnections with abandoned landscapes. This case study convincingly ties together matters of settlement abandonment and migrations within a well-documented geopolitical context—slave raiding by organized military forces on smaller-scale societies.

In chapter 9, Michael D. Danti brings us to northern Mesopotamia to address the detachment from urban communities and increasing transhumant pastoralism of the later third and early second millennia BC. Questioning the relevance of the “megadrought hypothesis” for explaining regional abandonment, Danti provides a nuanced discussion of shifting regional subsistence economies. This rich empirical archaeological case study, strengthened by ethnographic data, addresses abandonment and continuity in the settlement patterns of northern Syria. Along with Macrae et al.'s chapter 6, Danti's chapter provides sound environmental and ecological perspectives to the volume.

In chapter 10, Gyles Iannone shifts the volume's focus to Southeast Asia and to sociopolitical entanglement and disentanglement at the Medieval Burmese capital of Bagan. In this final case study, Iannone provides a comprehensive discussion of Bagan's rich historical and settlement records by addressing the

relationship between its ruling elites, the Crown and Sangha (the Buddhist Church). This discussion, centered on the site's prominent architectural landscape, highlights the merit-building and patron-client relationships that made, unmade, and remade Bagan. The author's *longue-durée* approach provides a dynamic sociopolitical model for studying the recursive process of detachment from place at Bagan—which today remains an important ceremonial center.

The volume concludes with two discussion chapters, chapters 11 and 12. First, in chapter 11, Catherine Cameron provides a detailed discussion of each chapter's theoretical and methodological contributions. Cameron takes advantage of her decades of engagement with the field of settlement abandonment to provide insightful comments about all case studies, which she organizes along scales of detachment and sociopolitical organization. This discussion astutely summarizes the volume's contribution to archaeological approaches to landscape and population movement. Finally, in chapter 12, Jeffrey H. Cohen provides a nonarchaeologist's perspective to the study of how migration transforms the social and economic landscapes that are left behind. This methodologically minded commentary discursively engages discrepancies between the analytical frameworks of ethnography and archaeology.

## CONCLUSION

This volume represents a first attempt to study archaeological processes of leaving places from a world archaeology, comparative perspective. This collection of case studies centers on relatively sedentary communities that all detached from their home at very different times, under distinct circumstances, and following idiosyncratic practices tied to their attachment to landscapes. Assembling these diverse perspectives on detachment from place brings forth many anthropological themes, especially those related to identity, memory, subsistence, and sociopolitical and economic organization. As geopolitical and environmental contexts dramatically shift in the modern world, studying archaeological cases of detachment from place may become increasingly relevant. We hope that this effort is of interest for all students of population displacements, both ancient and modern.

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