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## Introduction to Numic Archaeology and Ethnohistory

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This volume's subtitle, *Numic Archaeology and Ethnohistory in the Rocky Mountains and Borderlands*, closely reflects its thematic content: prehistoric origins and cultural (archaeological, linguistic, and ethnographic) nature of Native American populations in the American West connected by a broadly common language background (the Uto-Aztecan language family) and permutations of broadly shared social and spiritual beliefs and practices. Early Euro-American encounters with those populations in postcontact times began with the Spanish in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Bolton 1950; Montgomery, chapter 12, this volume) and continued with early ethnographic fieldwork by the late-nineteenth-century (1868–1880) John Wesley Powell–directed exploring expeditions among the Ute, Paiute, Goshutes of Utah and Colorado (Fowler and Fowler 1971; Powell 1874, 1971). These encounters established an early historic and ethnographic baseline of Native culture and lifestyles. Powell himself, from ethnographic consultations with tribal members, described variations of the term *Numa* as referring to a “great family of tribes speaking different dialects or languages of the same stock,” now known as Uto-Aztecan (Fowler and Fowler

1971:5). Nearly a century later, ethnolinguist Sydney Lamb (1958, 1964) used the term *Numic* to describe native populations speaking Uto-Aztec languages and dialects in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountains. His analysis of those languages, using the historical-linguistic statistical technique of glottochronology, led to him to propose the hypothesis that historically documented and modern Numic language speakers migrated (spread) into major expanses of the Great Basin and Rockies from a “homeland” in the far southwestern Great Basin beginning around 1000 BP and either assimilated or displaced earlier (pre-Numic) Native American inhabitants.

Lamb’s Numic-spread hypothesis, writ large, has since prompted decades of debate, hypothesizing, and research on the reality, scope, and historical-archaeological-ethnographic context of that migratory diaspora. Robert Bettinger and Martin Baumhoff (1982, 1983), among early leading scholars on Numic-spread topics, emphasized the role of advanced, high-efficiency (wide-spectrum foraging) subsistence strategies (and technologies) employed by Numic hunter-gatherers, strategies that gave them a strong competitive advantage over preexisting, or pre-Numic, native populations in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountains.

In 1992, David Rhode, David Madsen, and P. Barker co-chaired a Numic roundtable at Lake Tahoe, California. The roundtable’s most significant outcome was an edited volume on the Numic spread, *Across the West: Human Population Movement and the Expansion of the Numa* (Rhode and Madsen 1994). That volume, containing 23 diverse, often competing, papers on Numic-spread topics, was organized within four thematic sections: (1) literature reviews and summaries of earlier publications on the spread debate, (2) theoretical and methodological issues, (3) regional perspectives, and (4) summary of the roundtable’s varied interpretations, analytical points, and conclusions (see published reviews of the volume by Connolly 1996; Delacourt 1996; and Wilde 1997). A concluding chapter (24) by the volume’s editors summarized the then-current state of theory and evidence for assorted Numic-spread models and listed areas of roundtable consensus, alternate perspectives, and agreed-upon directions for future research (Rhode and Madsen 1994). Key elements of that consensus are concurrent with many of today’s research agendas regarding Numic studies: geography and chronology (Where and When), processes and mechanisms involved in the migration (How and Why), and identification and distinguishing Numic culture and language bearers from non-Numic (including pre-Numic) populations in the archaeological-historical record (What).

Over the past two decades, many Numic-focused research categories discussed by *Across the West* authors and roundtable participants continued to evolve and, in some cases, were enhanced by new lines of inquiry, theoretical frameworks, and emerging methodologies. More recent Numic-associated archaeological studies in the Great Basin and Rocky Mountains, focused on

advancing chronology knowledge and dating techniques, statistical analysis, and material culture (ceramics, lithics, stone-tool material sourcing, etc.) have made important contributions and advances (R. Adams 2006, Bettinger and Eerkens 1999; Cater 2002, 2003; Eerkens et al. 2002; Eighmy 1995; Finley et al. 2015, 2017; Greubel 2002, 2005; Martin 2016, 2017; Middleton et al. 2007; Scheiber and Finley 2011b; Simms et al. 1997). Genetic (DNA and mtDNA) and ancient-populations research comparing modern Numic and non-Numic tribes with prehistoric and early historic non-Numic and pre-Numic populations first emerged in the late 1990s and have made important progress in identifying demographic and genetic patterns germane to testing Numic-spread models (Cabana et al. 2008; Kaestle and Smith 2001; O'Rourke et al. 1999; Parr et al. 1996; Raff et al. 2011). Although Numic-related genetics research is in an early phase of its probable long-term potential, current results support reality of the "spread" as a prehistoric event, indicating that at least some pre-Numic populations, including the Fremont, were distinct from, and not significantly engaged in genetic interchange with, incoming Numic migrants.

Another area of progress since the 1992 Numic roundtable has been research that better defines differences and parallels in subsistence-economic systems of Numic hunter-gatherer foragers (Mono, Tümpisa, Ute, Western and Eastern Shoshone, Goshutes, Comanche, Northern Paiute), mixed forager-farmers (Southern Paiute), and non-Numic groups (Fremont, Northern Anasazi) (Arkush 1999; Bright and Ugan 1999; Hockett 2009; Hockett et al. 2013; Metcalf 2002; Morgan et al. 2012; Morgan and Bettinger 2012; Scheiber and Finley 2010b; Simms 2008: 167–270; D. Thomas 2013a, 2013b). There is a growing body of research that models and tests evidence for economic systems embedded in forager-collector, communal hunting (e.g., Great Basin and Rocky Mountain game drives), ecological carrying capacity, ecological patch theory, GIS-based predictive site-location analysis, and seasonal migratory transhumance theory frameworks (Arkush 1999, 2015; Bettinger 2012; Brunswig 2015b; Hockett 2009; Hockett et al. 2013; Metcalf 2002; A. Reed 1997a; Scheiber and Finley 2010b; Stirn 2014a). With exception of southern Paiute forager-cultivators (Stoffle and Zedeno 2001), most historically documented Numic populations, were small-group (bands), residentially mobile hunter-gatherers. Reconstruction of their economic (as well as social and religious) adaptations in ecologically and topographically varied landscapes of the Great Basin and Rockies is of high interest.

A central objective, and hopefully an achievement, of this volume is not simply to duplicate and advance research on previously articulated Numic-Spread concepts, although several of the contributing chapters here do address earlier *Across the West* themes of chronology, material culture, distinguishing Numic from non-Numic ethnicity in the archaeological record, and reconstruction of

settlement patterns and subsistence systems (see Schroeder, chapter 2; Stirn, chapter 3; Loosle, chapter 4; Adams, Chapter 5; Greubel and Cater, chapter 11; Montgomery, chapter 12).

In geographic terms, this volume largely shifts its attention to the study of Numic archaeology and ethnohistory largely outside the Great Basin, centering that attention toward the central and southern Rocky Mountains and only the eastern fringes of the Great Basin, the Colorado Plateau, and the northern Southwest boundary regions. Historically documented Numic groups residing in those regions were (and are today) tribes and bands of the Northern and Eastern Shoshone and Ute. Several volume chapters provide up-to-date case studies of individual or collective site summaries with detailed scientific evidence for known or inferred Ute and Shoshone material culture (ceramics, lithics, features and structures, and long-distance movement [e.g., through trade or seasonal migration] of source-identified lithic materials such as obsidian), chronology (dendrochronology, radiocarbon dating, thermoluminescence), and subsistence systems (hunting camps, game drives, food sources [faunal and botanical evidence]) (Stirn, chapter 3; Loosle, chapter 4; Adams, chapter 5; Brunswig, chapter 7; Martin, chapter 10; Greubel and Cater, chapter 11; Montgomery, Chapter 12).

Distinguishing different hunter-gatherer “ethnic groups” (e.g., Late Fremont [Gateway Tradition]/Ute and Shoshone, early Navajo/Ute and Shoshone) who co-occupied, or interacted within each other’s territories through trade, raiding, or seasonal subsistence migrations (transhumance) is, as noted by Ives (chapter 6) and Greubel and Cater (chapter 11), a daunting task, particularly since the archaeology primarily involves ephemeral short- to medium-term-stay hunter-gatherer sites. Even the presence of ceramics, an extremely rare commodity in such sites, can be misleading when tradewares are involved or, as is the case with the northcentral Colorado Sue site (Brunswig, Chapter 7), an Uncompahgre Brownware pot with atypical traits (a handle and braided appliqué) *may* suggest a synthesis of technical traits from differing ceramic traditions (possibly Late Fremont and Ute). That vessel’s mixed traits, hypothetically evolved from its maker, presumably a female potter, could derive from the potter’s integration into a Ute band by marriage exchange or capture in a raid. Even when identifiable ceramic types can *potentially* point to a site’s likely cultural group affiliation—such as Uncompahgre Brownware (Ute) or Intermountain Ware (Shoshone)—both Numic and non-Numic hunter-gatherer sites with ceramics represent a very small percentage of recorded sites. Most such sites are primarily lithic scatters with tools and features that are nearly always “ethnically” indistinctive (see Schroeder, Chapter 2; Greubel and Cater, Chapter 11).

In fact, a key problem that retards distinguishing Numic (Uto-Aztec speakers with a broadly shared ideological tradition, see below) from non-Numic populations is archaeologically identifying “ethnicity” (if that is even

an appropriate term; see Schroeder, chapter 2). In making such a distinction, it is important to recognize Numic people were not the only contemporary inhabitants (permanently or seasonally) of what are historically known as their traditional homelands. They regularly interacted through late prehistoric and earlier historic periods, peacefully or in competitive conflict, with other Native American cultures. In the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries, migratory streams of Athapaskan hunter-gatherer bands moved along the western (ancestral Navajo or Dené) and eastern (ancestral Apache) margins of the central and southern Rockies and crossed through Numic-occupied lands (Brunswig 1995, 2012a; Seymour 2004, 2012a, 2012c; Gilmore and Larmore 2012; Greubel and Cater, chapter 11, this volume).

Although distinguishing Numic from Athapaskan hunter-gatherer sites in the archaeological record is often difficult or even, in some cases, impossible, well-preserved material culture from Utah's Promontory Point sites (Ives, chapter 6, this volume) provides compelling evidence of ancestral Navajo/Dené bands passing southward toward their now-traditional homelands in the northern Southwest. Even among different Numic subgroups such as the Shoshone and Ute (and in early historic times, the branching off and eastward migration of an Eastern Shoshone offshoot, the Comanche), there is evidence of regular contact, trade, and movement into and through their respective, historically documented mountain territories (Loosle, chapter 5, and Brunswig, chapter 7, this volume).

Distinguishing Numic from non-Numic site archaeology in the later historic period is difficult as well. With the spread of postcontact horse culture and Euro-American expansion pressure on northern plains tribes, many Ute and Shoshone traditional mountain territories were subject to periodic intrusions and economic resource competition by Navajo and Apache in the south and Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Sioux from the north and east (Brunswig, chapter 7; Brunswig, chapter 9; Martin, chapter 10; Greubel and Cater, chapter 11; Montgomery, chapter 12). And, as noted by McBeth (chapter 13), even after tribes were restricted to reservations in the 1860s and 1870s, many members periodically returned to traditional mountain lands for hunting and revisiting ancestral places, leaving behind "recent archaeology" as camp sites, wickiups, and peeled trees well into the early twentieth century (see Martin, chapter 10).

Assessing chronological origins and spread of Numic hunter-gatherers from the central and western Great Basin into the Rockies is a daunting task. Radiocarbon dating of Ute and Shoshone brownwares can be skewed by use of hearth-wood charcoal (or appearing as potsherd soot residue) that can survive for decades or centuries after originating trees, branches, or sagebrush have died, resulting in anomalously "old wood" dates (Martin, chapter 10). However, old-wood dating errors are, in some cases, subject to differences in geography and environment. AMS radiocarbon dates of stratigraphically equivalent

pottery-carbon residue, hearth charcoal, and animal bone (used as control dates) determined an *absence* of an old-wood problem at the Sue site (Brunswick, chapter 7). In general, early pottery-associated Ute sites from the Colorado Plateau to the Front Range Rocky Mountains provide a reasonably secure *ceramic-based* radiocarbon chronology from ca. AD 1300 to 1850, with some earliest outlier dates, possibly skewed by old-wood use, at ca. AD 1100 (A. Reed and Metcalf 1999:155; Martin, chapter 10).

Another important research question, discussed earlier, relates to the limited number of Numic sites more clearly identifiable as Ute, Shoshone, or Paiute through the presence of ceramics and the difficulty that often unclear identity presents in constructing a reliable chronological framework. Dating the expansion of Numic subgroups into the eastern margins of the Great Basin and central and southern Rockies is still largely dependent on radiocarbon, dendrochronological, and thermoluminescence dating of ceramic-associated sites. One intriguing trajectory of research is field studies of high-mountain (alpine) hunter-gatherer “villages” that formed the warm-season end of annual transhumance migration cycles from the western Great Basin (California and Nevada) to the central Rocky Mountains (Wyoming) (see Stirn, chapter 3, and Adams, chapter 5, this volume). Current chronological evidence suggests the possibility that early Numic (ancestral Shoshone) hunter-gatherers may have been occupying such villages earlier in the central Rockies than in the Great Basin, thus reversing prevailing views of the timing and direction of a Numic Spread. On the other hand, as discussed in this volume’s afterword (chapter 14), the alpine-village evidence described by Stirn and Adams could just as well show a postspread cultural transmission of an effective high-mountain transhumant subsistence strategy back along the original west-to-east Numic migratory pathway.

Our earliest likely Numic sites in the Great Basin, southern and central Rocky Mountains, and northern Southwest, identified by Numic brownwares, tend to be no older than AD 1000 and most postdate ca. AD 1300. Finley et al. (2017) recently utilized luminescence-dating methods on Numic-associated brownware ceramic, attempting to trace movement of Numic ceramic technology from the eastern Great Basin into the central Rocky Mountains. They concluded Numic bands adopted and modified ceramic ancestral Pueblo and Fremont pottery technology as part of a broad pattern of adaptive resource-intensification shortly before and after AD 1200, a working hypothesis that supports the above-cited chronology. It is considered possible by this author that earlier Numic populations in the eastern Great Basin and central and southern Rockies, as highly mobile hunter-gatherers, only sparingly adopted and actively used ceramic technology from agricultural populations they encountered (e.g., the late Fremont, their much earlier resident relatives, the Paiute, or Anasazi populations in the northern Southwest). Some early groups may even have elected not to adopt ceramic



technology, remaining effectively (or at least archaeologically) aceramic, leaving behind sites with no chances of incorporating pottery into their archaeological inventories. The presence of what are interpreted as uninterrupted short-term seasonal hunting occupations *sans* ceramics that postdate a Ute ceramic-bearing stratum at the Sue site, might conceivably reflect such an aceramic Numic phase (or non-ceramic-using hunter-gatherer bands) which predated the region's Ute acquisition (or utilization) of ceramic technology (Brunswick, chapter 7).

Another central theme of this volume involves investigations of Numic (primarily Ute) spiritual beliefs and their archaeological and ethnographic evidence with parallel evidence for Numic and non-Numic subsistence and material culture technology (e.g., the Sacred and the Mundane). Although ethnographic and archaeological studies in Numic religion were fairly common prior to the 1992 roundtable meeting (Hultkrantz 1961, 1974a, 1974b; Jorgenson 1964; Lowie 1909, 1924a, 1924b; Miller 1983; Reagan 1929, 1935a, 1935b; W. Reed 1986; Shimkin 1938, 1942, 1947, 1986a; A. Smith 1974, 1992; Steward 1932, 1938, 1940, 1943, 1955a, 1970; Stewart 1942), many focused on Great Basin rock-art archaeology (Heizer and Baumhoff 1962; P. Schaafsma 1980, 1994), an area of research that has since advanced in both sophistication and geographic scope (e.g., beyond the Great Basin) over the past two decades. The Great Basin has a rich and diverse rock-art tradition extending well into the Paleoindian stage (Whitley and Dorn 2010, 2012) but its limited inclusion in *Across the West* chapters suggests roundtable participants did not, at the time, consider it a critical defining cultural phenomenon relevant to the Numic spread.

Since the 1992 roundtable, numerous studies on Numic religion and archaeology, frequently supplemented by ethnographic and ethnohistoric documentation and modern-day Native American consultations, have brought greater clarity and holistic cultural insights to Numic prehistoric and historic lifeways throughout the American West (Brunswick 2013c; Brunswick et al. 2011; Brunswick, Diggs, and Montgomery 2009; Brunswick, McBeth, and Elinoff 2009; Diggs and Brunswick 2006, 2009, 2013; Duncan and Goss 2000; Francis and Loendorf 2002; Garfinkel and Austin 2011; Garfinkel et al. 2007; Gulliford 2000; Keyser and Whitley 2006; Loendorf 1999, 2004; Loendorf and Stone 2006; Naranjo and Lujan 2000; Whitley and Dorn 2010). Although often controversial (see Quinlan 2000 and Whitley 2000), such research frequently centers on such beliefs and related ritual activities as shamanic trance-dreaming (vision-questing), channeling natural world and Numic mythic spirits for hunting success, healing, prophecy, and protection from evil spirits. Studies of rock-art sites in eastern California's Coso Mountains and the Dinwoody region of northwestern Wyoming provide compelling arguments that later (late prehistoric and early historic) examples of rock-art images in those regions reflect Numic shamanic spirit-dreaming rituals. This author (and volume editor), along with several research colleagues, and after nearly

two decades of Ute and Arapaho tribal representative and elder consultations, have identified, classified, and GIS-sacred-landscape-modeled rock-features (e.g., vision-quest walls, prayer circles, astronomic alignments) comparable to Coso and Dinwoody ritual rock-art in northcentral Colorado's Rocky Mountains (see Chady et al., chapter 8, and Brunswig, chapter 9, this volume).

Within the geographic expanse encompassed by this volume's contributions, Numic subgroups (Ute and Shoshone) were primarily mountain people who, in the historic era, self-identified as not only residing in the Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana high mountains, viewed by them as traditional lands, but claimed various mountain localities as mythic and sacred origin places (Chady et al., chapter 8 and Brunswig, chapter 9). In historic and modern times (and almost certainly in the late prehistoric period, post-AD 1000 AD), they viewed traditional mountain homelands as sacred landscapes defined within the ideological context of a broadly shared, vertically layered, cosmological world-view (Francis and Loendorf 2002:120–122, figure 6.36; Goss 2000:42–49, figure 3; Loendorf 2004:213–215, figure 10.10; Chady et al., chapter 8). Although native definitions of Numic spiritual-world levels vary slightly, depending on which Numic subculture is referenced, they range from a lowest-level underworld through a water world and an earth (or ground) world, to the sky world and the heavens (stars) above, each inhabited by its own spirit people (little people, water ghosts, eagles, owls, mountain lions, wolves, and so on) and mythic spirit gods. The Numic (Ute and Shoshone) spiritual world in the Rockies and their borderlands highlighted important spirit beings of the sky world (the eagle) and upper-earth world (the bear) and embedded them into rituals and ceremonies celebrating the seasonal cycle of life and nature throughout the year. Early historic rock-art with Ute symbolic imagery, interpreted as reflecting shamanic spiritual practice and Numic cosmology, also occurs in northeastern New Mexico at the edge of the southern Rockies (Montgomery, chapter 12).