

Everything Old Is New Again: Recent Approaches to Research on the Archaic Period in the Western United States

Maxine E. McBrinn

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Abstract There are regional differences in how archaeologists conduct their research on the Archaic period. The rich array of techniques and approaches used to examine this period in the West include human behavioral ecology and other evolutionary perspectives, technological style and aspects of practice theory, neuropsychological theory, and more. Recent research in the Great Basin, Southwest, Great Plains, Columbia-Fraser Plateau, and coastal California is surveyed to highlight commonalities and differences in the questions asked of the archaeological data and in the techniques that are used.

Keywords Western North America · Archaic period · Hunters and gatherers · Early agriculture

Introduction

This article reviews recent research on the Archaic period in the western United States (Fig. 1), a huge geographic area incorporating the Southwest, the Great Basin, the Columbia-Fraser Plateau, and the Pacific Coast. Research in northern Mexico and southern Canada also is addressed in some discussions. The Great Plains is minimally covered due to space constraints and its broader geographic affinities. The Archaic period, characterized by generalized hunting-and-gathering subsistence patterns, follows the Paleoindian period throughout the region and ends in some areas with sedentism and horticulture. In other places, especially in the Great Basin, the Archaic period lasts until European contact. By focusing on recent research, I intend to familiarize the reader with the nature of current topical investigations and theoretical approaches and hope to promote theoretical cross-

M. E. McBrinn (✉)
PaleoCultural Research Group, P.O. Box 745309, Arvada, CO 80006, USA
e-mail: arch81c@yahoo.com