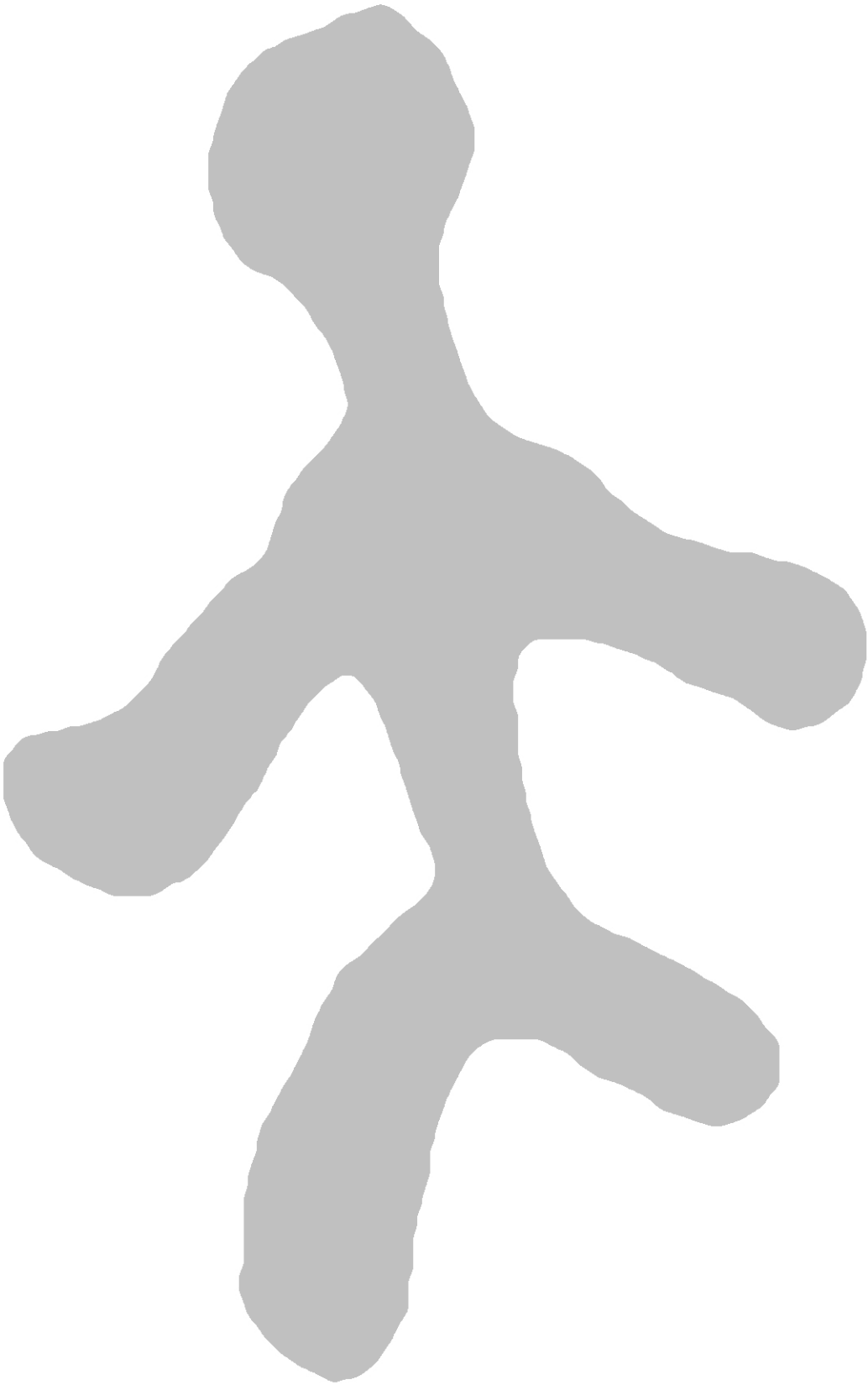




Part 4

**SHADOWS OF
PEOPLE**



Part 4

INTRODUCTION



Stone pipe from Cumberland County,
North Carolina, ca. AD 1000.

In 1492 Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in hopes of finding the Orient. He did not know two large continents would block his way. When he set foot on land, he thought he was in India and called the people he met “Indios.” This word translates from Spanish to English as “Indians.” Later historians credited Columbus and other early European explorers like Leif Ericson or Amerigo Vespucci with discovering the “New World.”

But what about this New World and the Indians living there? Certainly the “New World” was not new to them. Their ancestors had discovered and explored this land thousands of years before the first ships sailed from Spain, Portugal, Italy, or Scandinavia. They had followed the animal herds that sustained them across a now submerged land bridge between Siberia and Alaska during the last Ice Age. Certainly, too, the “Indians” encountered by Europeans were not homogenous like the generalized label implies. Across time and the continents, these earliest explorers and settlers evolved different cultures, spoke hundreds of different languages, looked different physically, and had different social structures.

Among them were the first North Carolinians.

Like people living anywhere thousands of years ago, North Carolina’s first peoples had no written language. The records they left are the traces and discards of life, such as food remains in fire pits, soil stains caused by decayed structures, or other objects (called artifacts) they made and used. Archaeologists study this sort of material evidence to reconstruct the lifeways and learn about the cultures of these people.

Archaeologists’ methods match those of any problem-solving scientist. Archaeologists start with a question, and they answer it through logical reasoning based on the systematic recovery and analysis of data. For archaeologists, this method involves collecting items like trash and tools, along with recording detailed excavation notes. Importantly, archaeologists try to link the data to how people behaved. For example, they might hypothesize about how the first Carolinians adapted to climatic changes at the end of the Ice Age and what their social structure was. Computers, laboratory studies, and theories about culture all interplay in archaeologists’ interpretations about past life.

In their quest to understand the past, archaeologists are generally guided in their research by three goals. One is *to obtain a chronology of the past*. This is a sequence of events and dates that, in effect, serves as a baseline for the history they reconstruct. For instance, an archaeologist may want to know when people in the Southeast began cultivating plants or when they started using the bow to hunt—and which activity came first. This kind of information lets archaeologists chart and date sequences of culture change and then compare histories in different parts of the country or world.

Another goal archaeologists have is *to reconstruct ways of life that no longer exist*. For

example, recent excavations of Pee Dee Culture Indian village sites in Montgomery County, North Carolina provide clues to the everyday life of the people who built Town Creek Indian Mound near Mt. Gilead. Before this research, archaeologists knew mostly about aspects of Pee Dee Culture ceremonial life occurring at the Mound. Now they can expand knowledge, such where the people's villages were located in relationship to the Mound, how many villages they had, and what their everyday life was like.

Finally, archaeologists want to understand *why human cultures change over time*. They may look, for instance, at the interplay of environment and human culture. A question could be: did small changes in gathering methods or modifications in shapes of hunting tools happen because of climatic shifts? Archaeologists look, too, at the interplay of different cultures, such as the extent to which a stratified agricultural society in the upper Midwest affected southeastern groups after AD 1000 or how small North Carolina tribes regrouped after European diseases decimated many of them after AD 1650.

What does all this mean for understanding North Carolina Indian history?

Here and across the state, archaeologists have unearthed hundreds of sites and studied thousands of artifacts. Each place and item becomes a thread woven into a multi-paneled historic tapestry depicting how Native Americans lived here during particular periods of time. Each scene on the tapestry represents a time and place. In technical terms, archaeologists call each scene a cultural period, which represents a span of time when large numbers of Indians shared a certain way of life. For example, in one period people hunted with an atlatl, and in another they used the bow and arrow.

For North Carolina, archaeologists distinguish at least five Native American cultural periods: Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, Mississippian, and Contact. The chapters in Part 3 present some of what archaeologists have learned about the first four of these periods, the ones that predate European contact. The Contact era is one that, for the moment, is left to written histories.

Lessons in this part stand alone, yet link to and expand on some tidbit in Part 3. For example, before doing Lesson 4.4, "Pottery Traditions," present and discuss information in Lesson 3.3's Woodland "Quick Study." Point out when eastern Indians started regularly making clay pottery. Point out the styles of their vessels changed over time and geographic space, giving some specific examples from Lesson 3.3.

Minimally, we hope you finish Parts 3 and 4 with two clear notions. First, the sequential, knowledge-building way archaeologists go about their work means they still have much to research, learn, and share. Second, and vitally, the "Indians" Columbus met were not frozen in time as many people even today believe. Rather, they were living very differently from those who crossed the northern land bridge thousands of years before. Their history is one of time passage, of journeys, of adaptations, of settling, of interactions, of conflict—everything that is the fabric of life.

Sources

Stuart, George E., and Francis P. McManamon. 1996. *Archaeology and You*. Washington, D.C.: Society for American Archaeology.

Ward, H. Trawick, and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. 1999. *Time Before History: The Archaeology of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [The image in this chapter's main heading is taken from Figure 6.4.]