

**Betts, Matthew E., and M. Gabriel Hrynicky, *The Archaeology of the Atlantic Northeast*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022, 383 pages**

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# Book Review

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**Betts, Matthew E., and M. Gabriel Hrynicky,**  
***The Archaeology of the Atlantic Northeast.***  
**Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022, 383 pages.**

Tiziana Gallo

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*The Archaeology of the Atlantic Northeast* is the first overarching archaeological synthesis of a part of the continent long considered peripheral and at odds with pre-established definitions of archaeological periods for the American Northeast. In this volume, Matthew E. Betts and M. Gabriel Hrynicky put the Indigenous Atlantic Northeast at the forefront by regrouping data from a breadth of archaeological sites situated between Labrador and southern Maine. In addition to this unprecedented spatial articulation, they break temporal barriers by considering the long-term human occupation of the region. By connecting knowledge and pieces of history too often separated by recent administrative frontiers, the authors provide a cohesive perspective on the Indigenous past and present of the area and show that people, materials, ideas, and practices circulated well beyond these artificial borders. Informed by their experience as archaeologists working in diverse settings (academic, cultural resource management, museum) and by their collaborative work with Indigenous communities, Betts and Hrynicky present an extensive and dynamic history of the Atlantic Northeast's occupation from 13,000 BP to the present while also underlining the local emergence and transformation of archaeological practice, the growing involvement of Indigenous stakeholders, and the future challenges of the discipline.

This book is divided into twelve chapters that are organized in four parts. In chapter 1, Betts and Hrynicky situate their approach both theoretically and historically, while in chapter 2, they provide an overview of the Atlantic Northeast's climatic and physiographic changes over the last eighteen thousand years. Chapter 3 focuses on Indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Northeast in the present, their relations to their past and to archaeology. Finally, chapters 4

to 12 are dedicated to archaeological data ranging from the Paleoindian to the protohistoric periods (circa 13,000–350 cal BP).

Before embarking on a journey through time, the reader is introduced to the history of archaeological research in the Atlantic Northeast, and the impacts of archaeological narratives and practices on Indigenous histories. This highlights the foundational colonial legacy of early archaeologists, the gradual professionalization of the discipline, and the increased recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights and archaeological capacity. Once restricted to white male members of natural history societies during the nineteenth century, archaeological knowledge in the Atlantic Northeast has gradually become more multivocal, collaborative, and accessible. As Betts and Hrynck note, “Much work remains to be done on the part of archaeologists toward improving this relationship and the active decolonization of the discipline” (42). It is towards this goal that Betts and Hrynck bring together fragmented archaeological knowledges, so that Indigenous peoples can “[...] write their own histories, from their own perspectives” (4). While this volume is not collaborative per se, it is written with Indigenous perspectives and interests in mind. This is seen, for example, in the integration of unmediated Indigenous voices in the volume (Melissa Labrador, the cover illustration artist, and Donald Soctomah, the Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer), in the authors’ acknowledgment of their biases and limitations as non-Indigenous archaeologists, and their reflections on the pragmatic impacts of terminological conventions and theoretical choices.

Betts and Hrynck take on the challenging task of grounding data collected throughout the years into a processualized culture-historical framework to provide a cohesive regional archaeological foundation for researchers and the broader public. Although culture history is criticized for its oversimplification and reification of cultures and ethnicities based on similarities in artifacts, it remains an important step to begin tracing an archaeological portrait of the relations that Indigenous peoples have been building with the land and among each other for millennia. Betts and Hrynck overcome some of the approach’s limitations by searching for historical connections that highlight shared relations between site occupants and allow them to emphasize long-term cultural continuity. They place particular importance on the connections between places discussed in the volume and the Indigenous nations that inhabit them in the present, including the Wolastoqiyik, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, Wabanaki, Innu, Cree, Inuit, Abenaki, and Haudenosaunee. While their main

focus is towards human experience, Betts and Hrynck also address the relations between climate change and the archaeological record. They chronologically situate major post-glacial climatic events and their impacts on the landscape, water levels, and local fauna and flora, and stress the urgency of preserving coastal archaeological sites from the irreversible damages of erosion.

The bulk of the volume is dedicated to the chronological subdivisions of the proposed culture history. These emphasize the spatio-temporal interconnections observed through the lens of technology, settlement, and subsistence by presenting data from a wide range of archaeological sites. Betts and Hrynck discuss the current breadth of archaeological knowledge for each period while being explicit about limitations in the data and situating themselves among the different existing interpretations and debates. Although the archaeological record mainly consists of tangible materials, the authors regularly bring back into focus its “invisible” aspects by considering how cosmology, gender, and power dynamics within and between near and distant communities contributed to giving archaeological data shape. They use ethnographic examples as informative complements to the archaeological data without recurring to direct analogy.

In addition to the sheer amount of invaluable information that it contains, one of *The Archaeology of the Atlantic Northeast*'s major strengths resides in Betts and Hrynck's reflection about their roles as producers and diffusers of archaeological knowledge and the situated implications and representational charge of their terminological choices and dating conventions. For example, in chapter 9, reference to inland aceramic occupations dating between 3,500 and 500 cal. BP as “Boreal Woodland” allows them to approach these occupations as a whole—instead of as “cultures minus ceramics”—and highlight the region's specificities without severing its connections to a broader northeast. Decentering ceramics as the main factor of “woodlandicity” helps de-essentialize the concept by stressing the multiplicity of situated cultural expressions and trajectories. Other significant aspects of the authors' positionality are the stated limitations regarding the extent of their interpretative voice: they present archaeological data and propose original interpretations while making space for Indigenous perspectives and acknowledging their multiplicity.

Throughout all twelve chapters, Betts and Hrynck succeed in connecting to a broad audience by conveying complex histories in legible thought-provoking writing. Key terms more likely to be unfamiliar to non-archaeologist readers

are boldfaced and defined in a glossary. Text boxes distributed amidst the pages allow the authors to direct the reader's attention to important topics such as Wabanaki Oral History or NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) and elaborate on specific pre and post-contact technologies and certain aspects of the archaeological discipline. While some boxes could have been integrated into the text (for example, Box 1.1 Natural History Societies and the Archaeology of the Atlantic Northeast) and others feel tentative (for example, Box 10.1 Men's and Women's Spaces), all convey a sense of the range of research questions that can emerge from engaging with this volume.

It should be noted, however, that applying a culture-historical framework in the twenty-first century to describe over ten thousand years of history raises theoretical tensions that can be difficult to overcome. The volume's occasional generalizations appear to respond to the previous segregation of archaeological knowledge and artificial isolation of Indigenous peoples into discrete groups. While shared artifact types might not be as reflective of shared uses, worldviews, or ethnicity as proposed in this volume, Betts and Hrynich's approach helps trace important connections between people through time and space. Their relational perspective brings nuance to the text, its human focus however tending to overlook the active and creative role of the material world. For example, how might the many shifts in marine productivity during the Roman Warm Period relate to the broadening of subsistence practices during the Transitional Archaic period and to the expansion of networks? On the one hand, this helps avoid the pitfalls of environmental determinism. On the other hand, it testifies to Betts and Hrynich's restraint, as the complexities of Indigenous peoples' relations to non-human beings within the Atlantic Northeast's changing landscapes are best addressed by Indigenous peoples themselves. The massive spatial and temporal coverage of this volume and the authors' integration of a wide range of data and perspectives provide a solid starting point for anyone interested in learning about the area's archaeological histories.

Betts and Hrynich demonstrate that the Atlantic Northeast is a rich and complex area with unique histories that still have much to reveal. Reading this book, I often found myself wanting to know more about what might distinguish the practices in which similar artifacts and materials participated. They make room for this opportunity by laying strong foundations and providing the tools for researchers to pursue such questions and think more broadly about Maritime Indigenous cultures and their connection to the interior and surrounding areas. In addition to firmly situating itself as a must-read for anyone interested in the

history of the American Northeast, *The Archaeology of the Atlantic Northeast* will undoubtedly be an inspiring and lasting reference for generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and non-researchers.