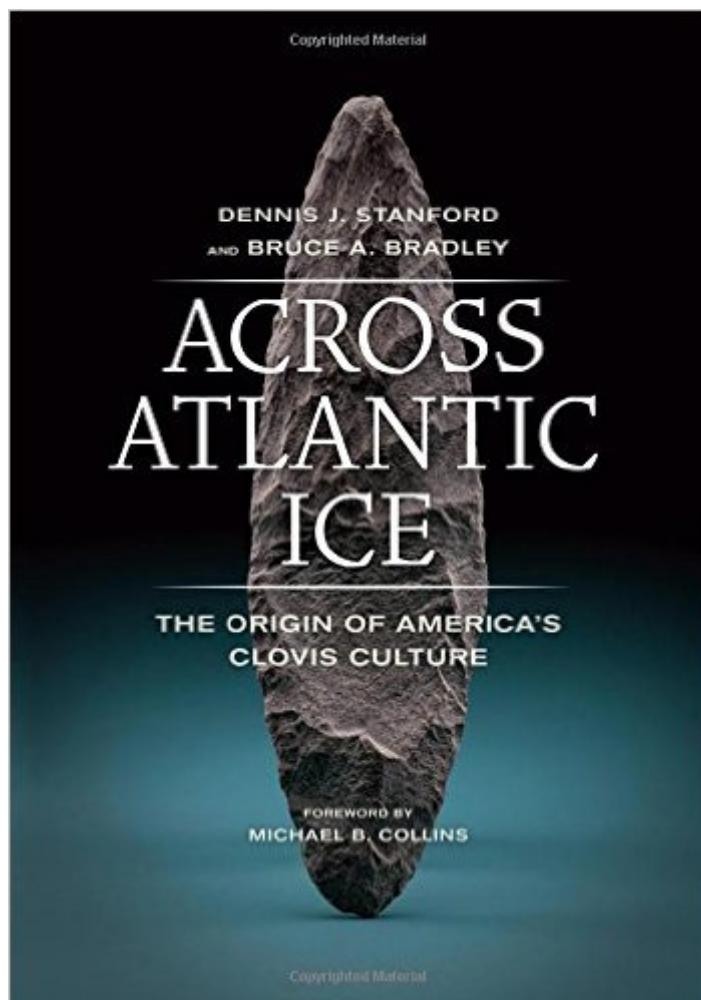


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Across Atlantic Ice: The Origin Of America's Clovis Culture



Synopsis

Who were the first humans to inhabit North America? According to the now familiar story, mammal hunters entered the continent some 12,000 years ago via a land bridge that spanned the Bering Sea. Distinctive stone tools belonging to the Clovis culture established the presence of these early New World people. But are the Clovis tools Asian in origin? Drawing from original archaeological analysis, paleoclimatic research, and genetic studies, noted archaeologists Dennis J. Stanford and Bruce A. Bradley challenge the old narrative and, in the process, counter traditional and often subjective approaches to archaeological testing for historical relatedness. The authors apply rigorous scholarship to a hypothesis that places the technological antecedents of Clovis in Europe and posits that the first Americans crossed the Atlantic by boat and arrived earlier than previously thought. Supplying archaeological and oceanographic evidence to support this assertion, the book dismantles the old paradigm while persuasively linking Clovis technology with the culture of the Solutrean people who occupied France and Spain more than 20,000 years ago.

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Customer Reviews

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, we were hit full on by the storm of New Archeology, which promised a whole new way, a scientific way, of explaining what archeological remains could tell us about the evolution of human behavior. Now, some 40 or 50 years later, archeology is still basically the same as it was before New became old archeology. A generation or two of archeologists raised on Popper and Hempill have come and gone, and much of the philosophy of science understood by archeologists today is still based on the Popper and Hempill models of half a century

ago. Experimental archeology was a (small) part of the New Archeology. Primarily it involved faunal analysis, and the application of ethnographic and experimental data to explaining the nature of bone assemblages and the behavior which produced them. Binford and his students led the way in this endeavor, and I view their results as some of the best, and only, useful products of the New Archeology. Experimental lithic technology studies were conducted, to be sure. But for the most part, these concentrated on "discovering" the methods used to manufacture lithic tools in a very mechanistic sort of way, or to discover possible uses to which the tools might have been put. As important as those studies were, they seldom really got to human behavior, and almost never to providing a useful way to trace the development and spread of either the technology, or, more importantly, the groups of people who were making their way in an evolving landscape using those tools. Across Atlantic Ice is not one of those aforementioned studies. It is what those studies should have been.

I have been awaiting this book hypothesizing a Solutrean origin for the Clovis culture for many years, in the meantime subsisting on the bits of information the authors have leaked through journal articles and lectures. Finally their book-length alternative hypothesis of the origins of the early American "Clovis" culture is out. As an archaeologist who specializes in stone tools analysis, and a mediocre flintknapper, I have to say that the totality of the similarities between Solutrean culture and Clovis culture is very compelling. This is especially true if sites such as Meadowcroft and Cactus Hill are being correctly interpreted as bridging the time gap between these two (putatively related) cultures. It is a very difficult thing to describe the profound changes one has to make when switching from one culture's tool manufacturing method to another's, and I don't think it was done totally successfully in this book, but as a flintknapper I agree that if ANY two sophisticated prehistoric groups made their tools the same way, it was these two. Above all, I think this book should be seen as a challenge to do new research, including that which may not assume all early Americans came from Asia. This book doesn't refute that there sites proximal to the Pacific coast of the Americas that DO represent Asian migration; they are only saying that a different wave of migrants was responsible for Clovis culture. As they opined (p. 185), if the Solutrean culture were found in Siberia, everybody would immediately recognize it as the progenitor of Clovis. Another strong point in the book is the review of LGM(last Glacial maximum) environments in BOTH eastern Siberia and southwest Europe.

Ice age man crossing along Atlantic ice, Europe to North America? Yes. But why and how? "Across

Atlantic Ice" -- it's an interesting book, and an even more interesting concept. A consensus seems to be forming that this indeed was the route of at least some of the early arrivals in North America. The book well substantiates the basic premise, and the stone tool evidence is fully covered. But why would man take his family out on the Atlantic ice? Were they looking for a better place as the authors suggest? Maybe not, maybe they thought they'd already found it. A home on the ice was probably seen as no more harsh than the ice age land. And food there on the ice was perhaps more available, and more easily taken. Just sit and wait at a seal air hole. Man's first sit-down job. Then a quick thrust of the tethered lance -- and that's lunch. Perhaps just as the plains Indians followed the bison, these people followed the seal. It provided everything needed -- meat for food, fat for fire and light, hides for clothing, boots, and so forth. Following the seal, small family groups likely wandered for years along the vast sea ice bridge (spanning Europe to North America). Then one day, there they were, standing on the American Continent. Their surprise was probably fully equal to our own. It seems entirely plausible, and most probable, that it happened pretty much that way. But now we come to the rest of the story. Just how did they do it, how did they cover the immense distances involved? Boats, the authors suggest, following along the face of the sea ice. Boats? It's difficult to see how a commitment to this idea is possible in view of the evidence, which seems not to exist -- not one relevant artifact was found.

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