The Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis

Modern society is beset on all sides. War, climate, inequality, migration—the list goes on and on. Every day we are offered new potential solutions. Yet, nothing really works; there are no silver bullets. To paraphrase H.L. Mencken: for every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong. Solving complex problems demands serious scientific research.

We created the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis to use the science of the past to create a better future. Archaeology, through its study of human processes through deep time, is key to understanding where we come from and how we got here, prerequisites for envisioning a future different from the present. Today's societies may be more technologically sophisticated than those in the past, but many of our problems have been faced, and solved, before. All human groups must provide food and shelter and perpetuate themselves. They confront a myriad of problems that are at once unique to them and common to all. Since the dawn of humanity, humans have solved, or been undone, by these problems in all types of environments and under all forms of society, economy, and polity.
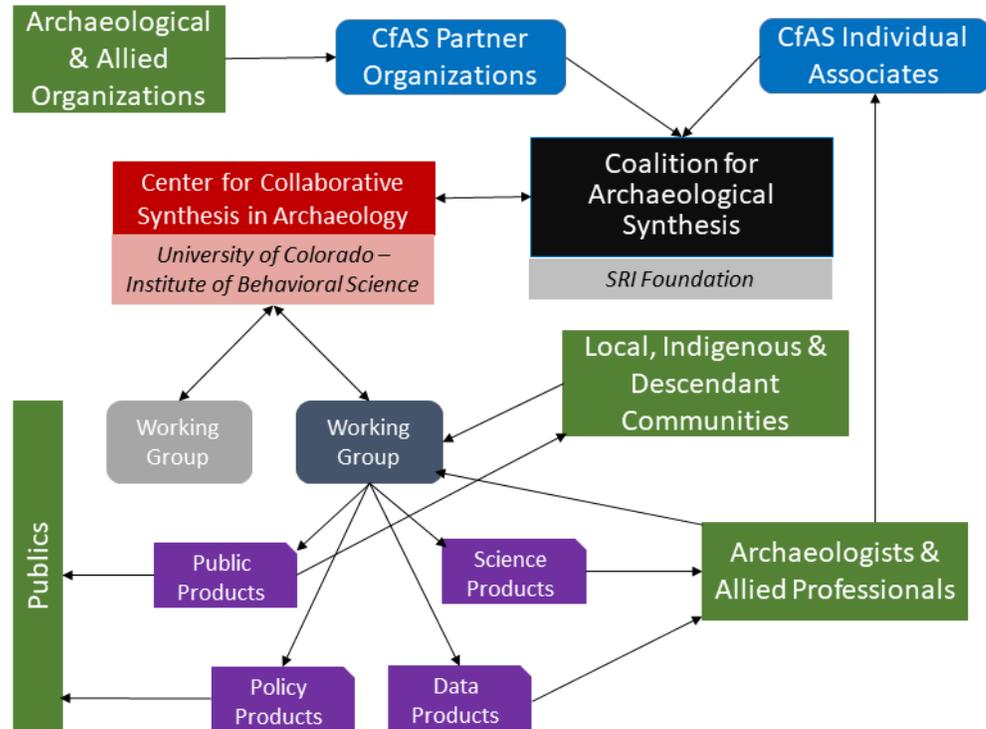
Discerning unique elements from common patterns requires us to apply to human behavior the same scientific rigor that split the atom, put a man on the moon, and mapped the human genome. Humans, however, are not atoms. They do not all react the same nor are their actions immutable. Yet, collective actions form patterns that while invisible to individual actors and immune to discovery using a shallow-time lens, are discernable if probed by the right questions at the right temporal and spatial scales. This approach allows us to capture first, second, and third order changes in socio-environmental processes that may take millennia to unfold. In that endeavor, we are likely to uncover an array of system states that are potentially possible, even if they have not been documented in the historical record, that provide insight for public policy to address societal challenges.

To this end, archaeologists need to identify and better understand the elusive deep time social patterns often invisible at the site or even regional scale. They need to spend less time interpreting project data sets and more time conducting broad comparative analyses that synthesize many data sets, leveraging the billions of dollars the public has invested in preserving the past. Such work involves assembling experts from science, humanities, and traditional knowledge working in collaborative networks creating tools that make these data accessible in interactive forms designed for problem-focused comparative research and devising theories that accommodate big, complicated, and multidisciplinary data sets.

To advance science, we must put in place the conditions that facilitate scientific advancement. The programs of the Coalition for Archaeological Research foster collaborative research by connecting scholars and building research teams best positioned to ask and answer the pressing questions of the day by breaking down institutional, disciplinary, and societal barriers. We recognize that archaeology is poised to make a quantum leap from a science rooted in understanding ancient mysteries to one that uses the past to envision the future. But archaeology, like all sciences, is conservative. Change occurs under the right conditions and if pushed in the right direction. Our mission is to be that push.

The goal of the Coalition is to promote synthetic research on important social science questions whose answers will have policy implications for addressing contemporary social issues. The synthesis efforts focus on questions for which archaeology's long-term perspective is crucial and exploits the enormous amounts of archaeological data that we have collected over the last century.

To accomplish those goals, leverage the many and varied capacities of our partner organizations, including: professional organizations, CRM firms, academic units, nongovernmental organizations, and archaeological cyberinfrastructure providers (list below). We'd ask you to join us in this effort by joining the Coalition as a partner.

Partner organizations benefit by:

- Being visible as Partners supporting the mission of CfAS on its website,
- Influencing the direction of the Coalition by nominating and voting for members of the CfAS Board of Directors, and
- Receiving notices of all funding opportunities, email bulletins, and annual reports from the Coalition.

Partner organizations are expected to:

- Support the objectives of the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis,
- Promote and publicize the activities of the Coalition as appropriate,
- Show their commitment to CfAS through payment of $200 dues annually, and
- Encourage sharing of archaeological data by their organization within constraints of the law or imposed by permits, clients, or other funders, subject to a reasonable embargo period after completion of projects.

Finally, we'd urge you, as an individual, to become a CfAS Associate and encourage others in your organization to do the same (it is free). You sign up as a Partner or an Associate on our web site, http://archsynth.org. The web site has more information about the Coalition. A more detailed presentation of our conception of CfAS is given in a brief paper in PNAS and a longer one in Advances in Archaeological Practice.

Partner Organizations
2020-12-18

Professional Organizations
- American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA)
- American Anthropological Association, Archaeology Division (AAA-AD)
- Archaeological Institute of America (AIA)
- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA)
- European Association of Archaeologists (EAA)
- International Council for Archaeozoology (ICAZ)
- International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM)
- PanAfrican Archaeological Association (PAA)
- Society for American Archaeology (SAA)
- Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA)

Cultural Heritage Providers
- Alpine Archaeology, Inc.
- Cultural Heritage Partners, PLLC
- Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc.
- Desert Archaeology, Inc.
- Far Western Anthropological Research Group
- Landward Research, Ltd
- PaleoWest Archaeology
- Statistical Research, Inc.

Archaeological Informatics Providers
- Archaeology Data Service (ADS; U. of York)
- ARIADNE
- IsoArcH
- Network for Computational Modeling in Social & Ecological Sciences (CoMSES Net)
- OCHRE Data Services
- OpenContext
- The Digital Archaeological Record, Arizona State U. Center for Digital Antiquity (tDAR)

Non-governmental Organizations
- Amerind Foundation
- Archaeology Southwest
- Center for American Archaeology
- Crow Canyon Archaeological Center
- The Field Museum
- Institute for Field Research (IFR)
- Integrated History & Future of People on Earth (IHOPE)
- Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)
- School for Advanced Research (SAR)
- Shiyani Research Institute (SRI; Rajkot, India)
- SRI Foundation
- Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research

Academic Units
- Arizona State U. Center for Archaeology & Society
- Capital Normal University Center for Public Archaeology (Beijing, China)
- Heidelberg Academy of Sciences & Humanities, The Role of Culture in Early Expansions of Humans (ROCEEH)
- Istanbul Technical U. Eurasia Institute of Earth Sciences, Dept. of Ecology & Evolution
- Macquarie University Center for Ancient Cultural Heritage & Environment (CACHE; Sydney)
- Santa Fe Institute (SFI)
- U. at Buffalo Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology
- U. of Arizona School of Anthropology
- U. of California, Berkeley Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology
- U. of California, Los Angeles Cotsen Institute of Archaeology
- U. of Colorado, Boulder Dept. of Anthropology
- U. of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology
- Washington State U., Dept. of Anthropology