

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 will not be solved by technology alone. Moreover, many of these problems, which seem so intractable, 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, thereby leveraging the billions of dollars the public has invested in investigating and preserving the past. Such work involves intensive work by collaborative research teams that will involve experts from the sciences and humanities as well as those with traditional knowledge. We also need to develop tools that make our data accessible and useable for problem-focused comparative research and to devise theories that allow us to understand big, complicated, and multidisciplinary data sets.

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. The Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis is poised to make that push

The goal of the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis (CfAS) is to promote synthetic research on important social science questions whose answers will have policy implications for addressing contemporary social issues. Its 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 advance science, we must put in place the conditions that facilitate scientific advancement.



Partners and Associates: How We Move Forward Together

CfAS was established in 2017 as a coalition of Partner organizations and individual Associates that share our vision of expanding knowledge of the past to shape a more secure and just future and that are committed to assisting in our mission: fostering synthesis in archaeology to expand knowledge and benefit society. The programs of the Coalition for Archaeological Synthesis 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. CfAS works closely with the Center for Collaborative Synthesis in Archaeology (CCSA) at the University of Colorado, Boulder. CCSA provides critical organizational infrastructure for CfAS, by administering CfAS grants, programs, and projects and facilitating or communications and networking.

To accomplish our goals, CfAS leverages the varied capacities of more than 55 partner organizations and 450 Associates across the world, including: professional organizations, cultural heritage firms, academic units, non-governmental organizations, governmental units and archaeological informatics providers (partner list attached).

Partner organizations benefit by:

- Being visible as Partners supporting the mission of CfAS,
- 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 newsletters, 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 a \$200 initiation fee (\$50 for organizations based in developing countries), 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.

Associates:

- Receive notices of all funding opportunities, email newsletters, and annual reports from the Coalition, and
- Sign up, free, on our web site <http://archsynth.org>.

We encourage your organization to become a Partner and invite you to become an individual CfAS Associate. 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](#).

