

The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology



Edited by
Robbie Ethridge and Eric E. Bowne

ARCHAEOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY

“An exciting and novel contribution, emphasizing the importance of understanding that precontact groups had rich and varied histories that they shaped as active agents.”—**AMANDA L. REGNIER**, coauthor of *The Ritual Landscape of Late Precontact Eastern Oklahoma: Archaeology from the WPA Era until Today*

“Ethridge and Bowne have assembled a collection of thought-provoking contributions by some of the best minds in Southeastern archaeology.”
—**MARVIN T. SMITH**, author of *Coosa: The Rise and Fall of a Southeastern Mississippian Chiefdom*

THIS VOLUME USES CASE STUDIES to capture the recent emphasis on history in archaeological reconstructions of America's deep past. Previously, archaeologists studying “prehistoric” America focused on long-term evolutionary change, imagining ancient societies like living organisms slowly adapting to environmental challenges. Contributors to this volume demonstrate how today's researchers are incorporating a new awareness that the precolonial era was also shaped by people responding to historical trends and forces.

Essays in this volume delve into sites across what is now the United States Southeast—the St. Johns River Valley, the Gulf Coast, Greater Cahokia, Fort Ancient, the southern Appalachians, and the Savannah River Valley. Prominent scholars of the region highlight the complex interplay of events, human decision-making, movements, and structural elements that combined to shape native societies. The research in this volume represents a profound shift in thinking about precolonial and colonial history and begins to erase the false divide between ancient and contemporary America.

Robbie Ethridge, professor of anthropology at the University of Mississippi, is the author of *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540–1715*. **Eric E. Bowne**, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Central Arkansas, is the author of *Mound Sites of the Ancient South: A Guide to the Mississippian Chiefdoms*.

A volume in the Florida Museum of Natural History: Ripley P. Bullen Series

Front: Engraved shell gorget; Cox Mound style; Tennessee, Sumner County, Castalian Springs site, AD 1000–1400; marine shell, diam. 8.5 cm; National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, Cat. no. 138, Image Object 15/0855. Photo by NMAI Photo Services.

University of Florida Press
<http://upress.ufl.edu>

ISBN 978-1-68340-162-9 \$85.00



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Robbie Ethridge and Eric E. Bowne, Eds. 2020. [University of Florida Press](#), Gainesville, Florida. 258 pp. \$85.00 (hard-cover). ISBN 13: 9781683401629.

Reviewed by Edward R. Henry, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology and Geography, Colorado State University, Fort Collins & Director, Center for Research in Archaeogeophysics and Geoarchaeology (CRAG), Colorado State University, Fort Collins.

As Robbie Ethridge, Robin Beck, and Eric Bowne explicitly state in their introductory chapter to *The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology* (edited by Ethridge and Bowne), the mission of their book is to gather several approaches and perspectives involved in historicizing what archaeologists once called *prehistory* (pg. 2). This means exploring the pre-Columbian past in the Southeastern U.S. with similar methods and questions about history and causality that historians working on the Colonial and later histories of the region use. They do so in honor of the late Dr. Charles Hudson, a professor of anthropology and history at the University of Georgia who had a substantial influence on the development of Indigenous archaeology and ethnohistory in the Southeastern U.S. The chapters in this book take diverse, and sometimes divergent, paths to emphasize the turn toward archaeological work that interrogate historical processes and causal mechanisms in the past. Ethridge, Beck, and Bowne suggest that this variability implies an overratedness of Grand Theories; I could not agree more. Doing archaeology under the banner of history is not a cohesive project because the lived experiences of people are not uniform; the introductory chapter to this volume makes this clear.

The chapters in this volume flow chronologically from the Archaic, through the Woodland and Mississippian periods, and into the Colonial era. The volume concludes with two reflection chapters. Asa Randall's approach to an 'Archaic Historicity' (Ch. 1) opens the volume. His focus on how Archaic communities terraformed areas along Florida's St. Johns River differently through time highlights the shifting mnemonics that are embedded into such intense and durable acts of landscape engagement. Randall traces these changes archaeologically, and turns to Indigenous conceptions of sacred geographies, to offer a historical narrative on the gathering of Archaic communities along the St. Johns. Moving to the east and the Woodland Period Gulf Coast, Pluckhahn, Wallis, and Thompson (Ch. 2) summarize a multi-scalar approach to creating history that seeks to identify the detailed biographies and 'small histories' of local communities (e.g., the scale of sites) that can be used in a comparative endeavor to arrive at a larger understanding of 'big histories.' Their chapter is somewhat a history itself of how this process of 'Weeden Islandization' unfolded in the Gulf Coast region, highlighting the work of several authors that contribute to the stepwise creation of big history involving dynamic Swift Creek and Weeden Island com-

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munities there. The authors' focus on Bayesian chronological modeling shows one way many researchers around the world are working to untangle the temporality of big histories.

Histories of American Bottom Mississippian sites that form Greater Cahokia are approached by Susan Alt (Ch. 3) using theoretical perspectives on *assemblages*. It is the application of these, and other complementary Indigenous philosophies, that Alt argues offer a chance to radically alter the archaeological histories of these places as they are currently known. Alt concludes that we cannot overlook the roles of animals, celestial bodies, and how vibrant matter became entangled with places, people, and things through time if we are to explore the nuance of Cahokian histories. Staying in the general Mississippian World, but moving into the Middle Ohio Valley, Robert Cook wrestles with a Historical Processual paradigm as it relates to Fort Ancient vil-lage dynamics and their incorporation of Mississippian material culture and behavior (Ch. 4). Cook asks whether we need to throw out Processual approaches in favor of His-torical ones (p. 97–98) and ultimately suggests that archaeology is really “re-Turning” attention to complex social processes that fall between specificity and generalization.

Coming back to the American South, Christopher Rodning and Lynne Sullivan (Ch. 5) explore the importance of places in the production of Indigenous histories in the South Appalachians. Their discussion of Late Mississippian and Early Cherokee council houses or townhouses, and their relationship with domestic architecture, show the layered agentive properties of place when cosmological symbolism is embedded within an architectural grammar. This includes places as sites of healing, or ‘medicine.’ Following the historical turn into the Colonial era in the Southern U.S., Marcoux (Ch. 6) assesses the materiality of ceramic production among three Savannah (Shaw-nee) communities in Georgia and South Carolina. The approaches these communities relied on mirrored similar diasporic Shawnee populations in Illinois. Marcoux con-cludes that both cases show Shawnee populations moving toward European trading settlements as a response to the Colonialization of North America.

This book finishes with a contemplation piece on the integration of archaeology and history by John Worth (Ch. 7) and an Afterword by Kenneth Sassaman and Timo-thy Pauketat. Worth's chapter offers a reflection on what he sees as the aims of history and archaeology, and how they should both be grounded in empirical interrogations of data. He also argues for alternative possibilities and interpretations of data to always be explored. This perspective serves as the beginning of Worth's critique of alternate ontologies because the philosophical tradition gives too much leeway for archaeologists to describe histories that may have never existed. In place of historical ontologies, Worth advocates for a ‘histories of practice’ approach to the past that is grounded in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as born from the recognition of human practice as simul-taneous product, and a producer, of history. The Afterword by Sassaman and Pauketat is a commentary on chapters in the volume and the Historical Turn more generally. They caution the contributors and others adopting a similar historical approach to make sure Colonialist narratives are not reproduced and to consider alternate temporalities at play among Indigenous

societies of the past. Sassaman and Pauketat argue that this requires long-term archaeological engagements with sites where research takes place at small and big scales.

The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology brings together several diverse perspectives to show how archaeologists integrate historical frameworks into their research. This book is a substantial contribution to the 'history' of historical approaches in Southeastern Archaeology. In addition, it shows that seemingly conflicting theoretical approaches can work toward common goals, offering the space for diverse perspectives on the past to coexist. This book will be useful to archaeologists interested in turning toward a historical focus in their own work. The topics discussed within would also make an excellent contribution to graduate seminars that emphasize historical perspectives in archaeology