

# Investigating the Ordinary

Everyday Matters in  
Southeast Archaeology

Edited by Sarah E. Price and Philip J. Carr



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"Makes the case that the everyday should and does matter in archaeology. The content is fresh, the approaches are varied, and the case is convincing."

—**ADAM KING**, editor of *Archaeology in South Carolina: Exploring the Hidden Heritage of the Palmetto State*

**F**OCUSING ON THE DAILY CONCERNS, activities, and routine events of people in the past, *Investigating the Ordinary* argues for a paradigm shift in the way southeastern archaeologists operate and urges them to think of the archaeological record in new ways. Instead of dividing archaeological work by time periods or artifact types, the essays in this volume unite separate areas of research through the theme of the everyday.

The contributors to this volume bring together case studies detailing ordinary people and their lives, spanning the Paleoindian period to the nineteenth century. The essays include an examination of how the white-tailed deer was entangled in the lives of Middle Archaic people not only as a food source but as a social and spiritual creature, as well as a look at the domestic lives of those who made exotic goods for the political and social elites in the Middle Woodland period. Cooking vessels in the Late Archaic period help trace the daily lives of the many people involved in their production, use, and eventual deposition. Mound sites are reconsidered in light of the everyday—assessing not only the meaning of the sites but the mobilization of labor and the deployment of resources that went into creating them.

Taken together, these essays demonstrate that attention to everyday life can help researchers avoid overemphasizing data and jargon and instead discover connections between the people of different eras. This approach will also inspire archaeologists with ways to humanize their research and engage the public with their work and with the deep history of the southeastern United States.

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Cover: Crystalline quartz debitage from a single level in a test unit at Kolomoki. Artifacts from Test Unit 6, Level 2. See Pluckhahn (2003).

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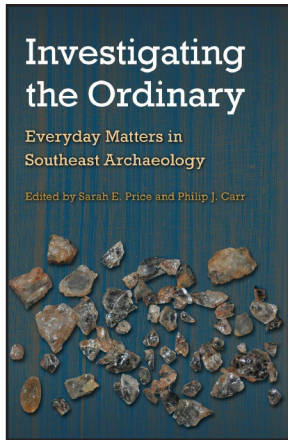


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## Investigating the Ordinary: Everyday Matters in Southeast Archaeology

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*Reviewed by Erin M. Benson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

This volume from Sarah E. Price and Philip J. Carr brings the focus of Southeastern archaeology to the matters of the everyday. As Price and Carr argue, though this scale of analysis has been neglected in the region, the “common concerns” of the past reveal important information about its people. After all, they state, the archaeological record was formed on a daily basis. The volume contributors cover four themes: The Everyday in a Different Way, Narrating the Everyday, Detangling the Everyday, and Reconsidering the Rare as Rote.

In the first theme, two chapters focus on using different methods of analysis and interpretation to gain insight into past lives. D. Shane Miller and Jesse Tune look at the Paleoindian period, which they recognize as a complicated palimpsest from which they tease daily activities. Despite the period’s complexity, they illustrate a productive way of starting at the micro-scale and working outward to make broader statements about Paleoindian lifeways. The subsequent chapter by Christopher B. Rodning, Jayur Madhusudan Mehta, Bryan S. Haley, and David J. Watt moves forward in time, focusing on the Contact period. They address the Southeastern “shatter zone” using the mathematical model of chaos theory, which contends that the initial conditions affect the outcome of changes to the conditions. While their analysis is useful, perhaps a more effective way to address the “shatter zone” is simply to address the historical context of each group. In other words, not to focus on the “initial conditions” that determined the result, but rather the entire history of each group that determined their positions post-Contact.

The second set of chapters present the most non-traditional approaches to the everyday. Relying heavily on archaeological, ethnographic, and/or ethnohistoric evidence, each of the authors spin narratives of what a day in the life in the past actually looked like. Importantly, Lance Greene calls out the ways that narrative and fiction force archaeologists to think more deeply about their knowledges and the questions they ask with their research. Kandace D. Hollenback and Stephen B. Carmody follow by immediately acknowledging the complexity of everyday life in the past, and though they are not placed in the “detangling” section of the volume, they recognize the complex ways in which social identity, politics, materials, and knowledges are entangled into daily life. I believe all the authors in this set of chapters would agree that the value of considering everyday life from a narrative perspective is that it allows archaeologists to recognize the richness of the relationships involved in the materials and practices of daily life. Each author in their own way recognizes that

using historical or archaeological fiction allows us to envision the actual people of the past, rather than imagining them as “faceless blobs” (p. 51; Tringham 1991). Ashely A. Dumas concludes this section well, arguing that imagination has value in anthropology, but recognizing that the value can be limited. For her, narrative is another useful interpretative tool that can supplement and complement broader-scale methods of analyses, providing archaeologists with a more robust and more humanized picture of a multi-scalar past.

The longest set of chapters is based in relational approaches to archaeology and deal with “detangling” the everyday. Christopher R. Moore and Richard W. Jeffries open the section with an exploration into human relationships with deer during the Archaic period. Moore and Jeffries offer a strong theoretical and animistic argument for the importance of recognizing social relationships between humans and other-than-human persons or entities. Such an approach is needed in Southeastern archaeology and welcomed, but I might suggest they take it a step further. Towards the end, they state that “though social relations are not material, the practices of creating and maintaining social relations are inherently material” (p. 93). I would push them further to think about objects and materials as not just the results and residues of people’s practices, but as important social beings in their own right. Asa R. Randall and Zackary I. Gilmore move towards this material-based relationality in their chapter on Late Archaic vessels. For them, materials bundle their social contexts and relationships, have their own itineraries, and are caught up in their own social meshworks. While materials come in to social contact with humans, this is not the sole source of their relevance. Chapters by Thomas J. Pluckhahn, Martin Menz, and Lori O’Neal and by Philip J. Carr and Andrew P. Bradbury continue in the material realm; Pluckhahn et al. address crafting, and Carr and Bradbury focus on lithic technologies. Carr and Bradbury set out to address the short-comings of the processual Organization of Technology (OT) model. As originally defined, an OT model does not make room for parsing out everyday life; however, the authors argue that by incorporating context and artifact life histories, archaeologists can change that. While the authors successfully suggest improvements, they are perhaps still too constrained by their model.

The final set of chapters is what the editors consider “most akin” to their original symposium vision. The first chapter in this section, by Renee B. Walker, deals with dogs, and re-visits the animal-human relationships discussed earlier by Moore and Jeffries. Instead of adopting a relational approach, Walker begins by theorizing dogs in terms of Optimal Foraging Theory and Human Behavioral Ecology. Many contemporary theoretical archaeologists find these models unfavorable, as they cast humans as rational actors living their most cost-efficient lives. Walker moves beyond these traditional models as she embarks on a narrative account of Dog that complements Hollenbeck and Carmody’s earlier narrative. Walker recognizes that the human-dog relationship is *not* all about cost efficiency, and that there are other cultural factors at play.

The remaining two chapters by Tristram R. Kidder and Sarah C. Sherwood and by Casey R. Barrier and Megan C. Kassabaum focus on the importance of mounds, mound-building, and plazas in everyday life. Kidder and Sherwood could go one step

further in their analysis of mound-building and adopt a more relational perspective in which mounds are not simply reflective of meaning but are themselves meaningful as important social participants. Both chapters are useful in recognizing the presence that places and the production of place have in people's daily lives, whether through their power to gather or through their constant reminder of meanings and power.

The volume closes with a piece from ethnographer Beth A. Conklin and a concluding chapter by the editors. Using her research in the Amazon, Conklin reminds the reader of the components of daily life that archaeologists might not find in the archaeological record, such as emotion, affect, and the senses. Price and Carr finish with an overview not of everyday life in the past, but of how and why the everyday matters to the contemporary archaeologist. As a volume geared towards all archaeologists, academic or otherwise, this book has two main strengths. First and foremost, it encourages archaeologists to consider the complexities of everyday life, and to recognize that the practices, animals, and materials that people engage with on a daily basis have important effects in the broader sociocultural context. The micro-scale in part determines the macro-scale. The other benefit of this volume is that many of the chapters bring vibrancy and vitality to time periods in the Eastern US that are often discussed as stagnant, or only in terms of their material culture (with some notable exceptions). As Moore and Jefferies state in their chapter, "we need to do a better job of humanizing the Archaic," (p. 94), and the same goes for the Paleoindian period. In thinking through the daily lives of people living during these times, the authors succeed in working towards this goal.

## **Reference**

Tringham, Ruth (1991) Households with Faces: The Challenge of Gender in Prehistoric Architectural Remains. In *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, edited by Joan Gero and Meg Conkey, pp. 93–131. Blackwell Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.