



Anthropology Book Forum

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ROBBIE ETHRIDGE AND ERIC E. BOWNE, 2020, *The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 258 pp., ISBN 9781683401629.

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Ethridge and Bowne's edited volume explores the historicization of Southeastern archaeology to decolonize old-fashioned Western accounts of the North American deep past and write a more inclusive, accurate, and historical alternative. Inspired by Eric Wolf's (1982) transgressive "Europe and the people without history," this book places Indigenous experiences, ontologies, and consciousness in the limelight of scholarly research. Through a selection of essays that bridge the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological gap between North American prehistory and history, Ethridge and Bowne shape the historical turn as a heterogenous, multifaceted, and complex venture that takes on multiple perspectives to address a common goal: to tell the full story of North America. In fact, this compilation of essays is built in a rhizomatic fashion that honors the nature of the historical turn. The lack of thematical unity, the theoretical diversity in the essays, and the divergent inferences drawn from the data analyses exude refreshing disarray. It is uncommon to stumble upon an archaeological publication that openly portrays the inherent contradictions within the discipline. However, this volume not only makes them evident but pays tribute to the dynamic and fluctuant qualities of scientific knowledge. The only aspect that remains normative is the structure of the book itself.

"The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology" is elegantly distributed in seven chapters, which loosely follow a chronological order from the Archaic to colonial times, that are framed by a preface and an afterword. R. Ethridge, R. Beck, and E. Bowne in the introduction, and K. Sassaman and T. Pauketat in the conclusion, explain the origin of the

history-prehistory divide and describe the evolution of the discipline until the historical turn occurred in the twenty-first century. This framework beautifully puts together an otherwise unruly mix of theoretical perspectives and methods, ranging from progressive to conservative approaches, that corroborates the healthy diversity existing in archaeological practice.

At the progressive end, post-structuralist entanglement theory and new materialism are pivotal in the historicization of prehistory. A. Randall (Chapter 1) studies the relational webs of meaning established between Archaic peoples along the St. Johns River in Northeastern Florida with their surrounding and cosmic geographies, their real and mythic temporalities, and their human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic agents of placemaking and social memory. The sum of these actors worked together in re-creating the world of ancient Floridians and constituted equally significant elements in their history-making. The link between landscape, sacred geographies, and local histories is also the core topic in Chapter 3, by S. Alt. The author advocates for the adoption of new ontological perspectives that include other-than-human persons and unseen powers to understand the Greater Cahokia urban phenomenon. By combining ethnohistorical accounts of Cahokian descendant groups and scientific data generated from excavating the Emerald Acropolis, Alt concludes that the assemblage of vibrant natural, anthropogenic, and mystic agents made the landscape of Cahokia an ideal cosmogram to access the underworld and interact with otherworldly powers, thus a desirable place to settle. Also centered on place-making is C. Rodning and L. Sullivan's Chapter 5, which focuses on the power that the built environment played in the history-making of the Southern Appalachian communities, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The functional and symbolic properties of domestic and public architecture turned Native American towns into places of dwelling, collective memory, individual and communal healing, sociopolitical geography and development, and cosmological connections.

R. Cook (Chapter 4), aiming to reconcile scientific and humanistic views in a "processual plus" endeavor (p.85), shows the benefits of synthesizing processual and historical approaches in archaeological research. The author examines the shift to Mississippian life along the Middle Ohio River to understand why and how the Fort Ancient lifeways spread along the Great and Little Miami Rivers.

From a more processual vantage point, T. Pluckhahn, N. Wallis, and V. Thompson (Chapter 2) address the Woodland period in the Florida panhandle and the adjacent interior regions of Alabama and Georgia. By conducting Bayesian modeling of radiocarbon and thermoluminescence dates, the authors compare the local biographies of individual communities to explain larger, multi-site processes. In particular, they investigate the deep social restructuring that occurred over the sixth and seventh centuries in nine different sites, which involved dramatic migration movements, transference of material traditions, and changes in ideologies and practices across the region. As a result, they reconstruct the “big history” behind the Weeden Islandization process along the Gulf Coast. From a similar processual perspective, J. Marcoux (Chapter 6) applies quantitative analysis techniques to pottery data to reveal how the early colonial turmoil triggered diasporic indigenous communities. By looking at the potter’s intentional choices, such as the tempering agents, wall thickness, or surface treatment in the Shawnee ceramic production in Georgia and South Carolina, the author concludes that various potting traditions coexisted within sites, which indicates extensive social reshuffling and coalescence as a result of European colonization.

Finally, at the far end of the processual spectrum, J. Worth (Chapter 7) reflects on the core values of the historicization of prehistory and advocates for a positivist historical turn, in which interpretations must be only based on verifiable empirical data. Hence, the author argues that only by doing research on communities of practice, which can be traced archaeologically and historically through material and textual evidence, can anthropologists gain some reliable understanding of the communities of identity. Despite Worth’s valuable perspective on the amalgamation of archaeological and historical disciplines for the reconstruction of the Native American past, his savage critique of post-processualism comes across as archconservative and untimely, considering the post-processualism-oriented pieces of research presented in the same volume.

In conclusion, “The Historical Turn in Southeastern Archaeology” intends not to lay the foundations of a new archaeological paradigm but to offer a taste of the endless possibilities that historicization can bring to academic research. This is because the historical turn is not a monolithic approximation to the past but an analytical principle open to interpretation. The natural indefiniteness and malleability of this concept make it highly powerful and widely

applicable, as it fits into any underlying theoretical parameters, from vanguardist to conservative approaches, as this volume successfully proves. Conceiving the ancient past as history instead of prehistory constitutes a fundamental step forward in the attempt to grasp the pre-colonial lives, practices, and agencies of humans and nonhumans in their complex, dynamic, and contingent cultural and natural landscapes. Furthermore, the repercussions of introducing the historical turn in southeastern archaeology exceed the merely scholarly purpose: it gives voice to descendant communities, decolonizes views of the Native American past, and brings American Indigenous into the flow of American history.

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