

Introduction

New Approaches to Ancient Florida

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Florida inhabits a peculiar spot in our national narrative. As a vacation destination, it is a place to be celebrated, visited, and recorded in photographs. These experiences are materialized in pieces of the state. Painted seashells, postcards, and other kitsch are redistributed globally as mnemonics of this particular paradise. Largely because of its striking beauty, the state is also upheld as one of the last great vestiges of primordial nature to be enjoyed in the United States. The more ecologically conscious can delight in the environment for its own sake or for sport. The prospect of engaging with either of these Floridas has drawn many outsiders into the region (Mohl and Pozzetta 1996), reinforcing these conceptions. These two Floridas are, not surprisingly, often at odds. The tension between environmental preservation and development for recreation helps drive contemporary political agendas (Colburn 1996; Mohl and Mormino 1996). Despite their differences, these Floridas share a common origin. They have been crafted by environmentalists, land speculators, and inhabitants who have objectified the region as either timeless and pristine or full of potential for future economic success (e.g., Grunwald 2006; Noll and Tegeder 2009; Standiford 2002).

There is a third, much more ancient Florida. This is a place that is often forgotten, downplayed, or actively denied in recent grand narratives (Weisman 2003). The archaeology of ancient Florida has revealed vibrant cultures and communities filled with diverse persons who engaged with the world in various and at times competing ways. Human settlement of the region can be traced back to at least 12,000 years ago, and perhaps even earlier. Over successive millennia, inhabitants made histories of their own by modifying the landscape and through social interaction. These processes are materialized in well-preserved Paleoindian sites and wet sites laden with organic matter, represented by early and grandiose traditions of mound building, and evidenced by repeated moments of cultural contact extralocal connections, and by practicing distinctive traditions.

While our understanding of this ancient Florida continues to grow through archaeological field research and laboratory analyses, the richness of Florida's aboriginal past is too often appreciated by only a small group of practitioners working in the state. Several factors have impeded regional, national, or international consideration of Florida's significance, each leading to the creation of erroneous notions that continue to impede interpretations of the past. Foremost among these factors is that Florida has been maintained as a geographically peripheral appendage to southeastern North America. Sociopolitical developments in the ancient Southeast are regularly conceived as centered in places far from the Florida peninsula, often in various parts of the Mississippi Valley. For instance, Poverty Point in northeast Louisiana looms large as a Late Archaic center of nascent sociopolitical complexity (Kidder 2010; Sassaman 2005). Similarly, the well-known Hopewell Interaction Sphere of the Middle Woodland period is conceived as originating in the Midwest in areas of Ohio and Illinois (Carr and Case 2006; Charles 2006), and the "Big Bang" of Cahokia in southern Illinois set in motion a history of Mississippianization that would reach far into the deep south (Anderson 1994; Pauketat 2007). Although Florida communities were implicated in all of these broad-scale cultural and historical phenomena to some degree, their role has inevitably been interpreted as that of receivers rather than generators of grand traditions and social change. Florida is unquestionably unique in its archaeology and geography, and much of the state is far more proximate to the Caribbean than to the Southeast, as traditionally conceived. But the view that Florida is located on the geographical and cultural periphery tends to neglect the formative role of ancient Floridians in large-scale regional processes. Consider, for example, the remarkable abundance of Florida-made St. Johns pottery at Poverty Point (Hays and Weinstein 2004) or the widespread distribution of *Busycon* shells thousands of miles across the Midwest in the Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippi periods (Carr 2006; Claassen 1996, 2008). Indeed, when one considers the fact that many well-known and widespread phenomena (e.g., Hopewell, Mississippianization) originated on the edges of the Southeast, Florida's geographic remoteness would seem to be of little consequence in terms of engagement with or influence of regional politics and ritual processes.

Another factor that has diminished Florida's archaeological significance has been the tacit acceptance of our national narrative about the state's natural beauty and the assumption that Florida's inhabitants are best understood in purely ecological terms. "Adaptation," a long-standing legacy of the intersections of Steward's (1955) cultural ecology, various "New Archaeologies" (Binford 1962), and the environmental movement that burgeoned in the 1960s (e.g., Carson 1962), is a buzzword whose popularity can be traced throughout Americanist archaeology until very recently. Although research in many regions of the hemisphere has recently embraced holistic concepts of history and process that are informed by social theory, research

on Florida has often held fast to a somewhat narrow focus on ecology (e.g., Marquardt 2010a; Marquardt 2010b). This tendency is probably due, at least in part, to the formidable legacy of Elizabeth Wing's environmental archaeology program at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Study of the natural environment holds an important place in archaeological research, as it should, but the place of humans in the natural world must be considered in the context of a holistic view of social practices and institutions that enhances the relevance of archaeological work.

Finally, Florida's ancient past has been projected as a slow, long-term process that was separated from the modern world by the European encounters that began in the sixteenth century. Indeed, the pace of ancient Florida history appears insufferably sluggish at certain times and in certain places. For instance, from some long-term perspectives, the adoption of pottery could be considered the most exciting development over a period of more than a thousand years. This focus on technology can be seen as the counterpart to ecological determinism. These two frameworks of analysis work together to identify the histories of native groups as *developmental* (i.e., gradual) rather than *eventful* (i.e., punctuated or rapid) (Fogelson 1989). The resulting characterizations are especially problematic because they define the ancient past using Western post-industrialist notions of history that inevitably serve to separate, romanticize, and naturalize ancient communities as inherently different from modern and technologically advanced peoples. This separation of past and present worlds is not unique to Florida investigations (e.g., Cobb 2005; Harvey 1989), but they make an artificial separation between the dynamism of the present and the (presumed) stasis of the past.

This book brings together recent archaeological research in Florida that provides detailed and nuanced interpretations of the pre-Columbian past. The contributions to this volume cover much of the Florida panhandle and peninsula (figure Intro.1) and consider time periods between 7,500 and 500 years ago. While the archaeology of Florida has been the focus of several widely cited syntheses (e.g., Milanich 1994; Milanich and Fairbanks 1980), these broad treatments entrenched certain notions that are no longer tenable. In particular, data from fieldwork, the use of new techniques, and reconsideration of work by earlier preeminent archaeologists (e.g., Wyman, Moore, Bullen, Goggin, Sears, Fairbanks, and Milanich) has revealed considerable variation in how societies were organized across the state that was unanticipated and is often at odds with previous models that emphasize long-term continuities, environmental determinism, and localized social interaction. Recent work in Florida features significant contributions to several overarching anthropological themes that include the construction of monuments and meaningful places, the dynamics of how humans interacted with the environment, and how ritual is constituted through materiality. The archaeological record of Florida offers unsurpassed opportunities for investigating these questions, but

long-standing taxonomies, chronologies, and concepts have often hindered realization of this potential.

Each chapter in this volume reassesses long-held notions of the past, but the volume does not represent the definitive statement on pre-Columbian archaeology in Florida and is not the only recent evaluation of Florida as central to regional-scale ancient histories. Indeed, recent journal articles and chapters in books are steadily revising portions of the histories of ancient Florida. A recently published volume, *Late Prehistoric Florida* (Ashley and White 2012), showcases some of the most recent research pertaining to Mississippian period contexts across most of the state. While this volume partially overlaps with Ashley and White’s work in terms of time and space, this volume offers more significant time depth and deeply diachronic perspectives and is primarily focused on explicating themes derived from theory that have broad significance beyond Florida.

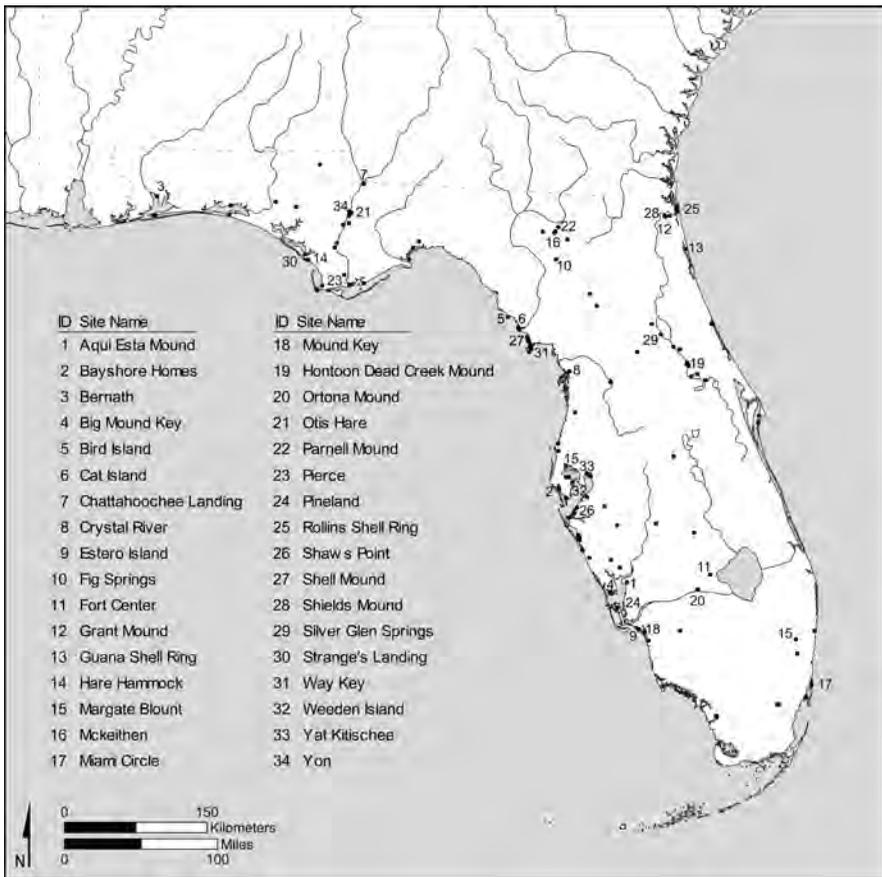


Figure Intro.1. Locations of sites discussed in this volume.