

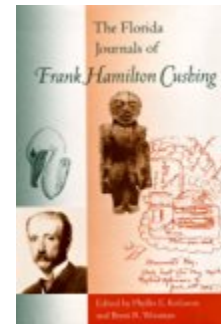
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Phyllis E. Kolianos, Brent R. Weisman, eds. *The Florida Journals of Frank Hamilton Cushing*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. xv + 161 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2804-0.

Phyllis E. Kolianos, Brent R. Weisman, eds. *The Lost Florida Manuscript of Frank Hamilton Cushing*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. xiv + 281 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2803-3.

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A Flawed Genius of Florida Archaeology

A few years ago I visited the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology as a consultant for a Florida museum. While in the collections area, I was privileged to hold in my hands several of the exquisitely beautiful artifacts from the Key Marco site in Collier County, Florida. Excavation of this site in 1896 yielded hundreds of unique objects, including realistic wooden carvings of animals and brightly painted masks. Because the Key Marco artifacts were submerged in continuously wet muck, they were saved from the ravages of time and emerged looking as if they had just been placed in the water. The collection is famous among archaeologists, and photographs of the artifacts have been widely published.[1] My heart raced as I saw the objects first hand and actually held some of them. It was certainly a highlight of my career.

The man who excavated the Key Marco site was Frank Hamilton Cushing (1854-1900). Employed by the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology, he was a colorful and eccentric individual who previously carried out important, respected research among the Zuni Indians in New Mexico. Both his contemporaries and later archaeologists generally regarded him as a flawed genius.[2] Although he completed a preliminary publication describing the Key Marco site and what he found there, a planned much larger and complete work

was never finished, and researchers assumed that even the drafts of such a book were lost, if they existed at all.

Diligent, extensive research in archives and museums by Phyllis Kolianos resulted in the discovery of not only the unfinished manuscript of Cushing's masterwork on his interpretation of the archaeology of southwest Florida, but also several of his diaries, maps, and descriptions of archaeological sites. These sources of information will be invaluable to archaeologists working in the region today and in the future.

Both books are heavily annotated by the editors, and the endnotes are detailed and full of interesting and useful information. In each case, reading them requires two bookmarks—one for the text and one for the notes section.

The smaller of the volumes consists of his diaries from two trips to southwest Florida in 1895 and 1896, along with letters, maps, drawings, and photographs from other sources, most placed at appropriate places in the text. The diaries were discovered in the National Anthropological Archives, while most of the other items came from museums and other repositories where Cushing's papers were donated after his death. The editors transcribed the diaries, written in longhand, and were perplexed by what they call "cryptic messages" at the end of some entries. They illustrate six of these, and while to

my eyes they bear some superficial similarity to Arabic script, we will probably never know their true meaning or why Cushing felt he had to encode part of his diaries.

Reading his correspondence and diary entries, one gets a feeling for the difficulty of mounting an expedition to southwest Florida in the 1890s. It is easy for us to forget that it was truly a frontier, and obtaining supplies, mail delivery, crewmen, and even a suitable boat was extremely difficult. When these factors are considered along with Cushing's eccentricities, frequent health problems, and bad luck, it was truly an ordeal. His sheer perseverance in the face of such adversities is in itself amazing.

The diaries are followed by a chapter discussing and introducing the "lost manuscript," which is the subject of the larger of the volumes. This section examines some of Cushing's influences from the field of anthropology and some of his interpretations and hypotheses about southwest Florida archaeology. In my opinion, this chapter is just a little too laudatory and uncritical of Cushing. He repeatedly based interpretations of archaeological deposits and even of the Calusa people themselves on his previous experiences among the Zuni. While some of these are thought-provoking, others are pure fantasy, and the editors seem to ignore the fact that many of his interpretations are in fact untestable hypotheses based on the beliefs of a culture more than a thousand miles away in a completely different environmental and cultural area. A brief conclusion chapter follows, and three appendices provide some information on the boat he used, examples of his cryptic messages, and a selection of comparative artwork he had gathered while studying the Key Marco artifacts.

The larger volume consists solely of his unfinished manuscript. It is important to remember that it was both unfinished and unedited at the time of his death in 1900. Cushing's writing style was largely long, flowery sentences, and the reader often gets to the end of a sentence and has to go back over it a couple of times to derive the author's intent. In short, the manuscript is tedious reading in places, but not everywhere. A succinct introduction by the editors puts the manuscript in the context of Florida archaeology and American anthropology at the time, and their endnotes are once again useful. A number of maps, drawings, and vintage photographs are included, which greatly enhance the appeal and usefulness of the book.

Although his primary aim was to excavate the muck site at Key Marco, Cushing also managed to record and map a number of other archaeological sites in southwest Florida. The descriptions and maps of these sites will be of use to twenty-first century archaeologists. While waiting for the boat to become available at Tarpon Springs, he had crews carry out excavations at two burial mounds in the area, the Safford and Hope Mounds. These sites were important burial mounds, and new information and descriptions of finds are present in Cushing's diaries and in some detail in his manuscript. I am not alone in wishing these data would have been rediscovered twenty years earlier.

Cushing dictated his manuscript to a series of secretaries, and they wrote down all of his rambling sentences. There is little doubt that his prose would have been cleaned up a bit had the manuscript been submitted for publication. The casual reader will find large sections unendurable, while specialists will revel in the detailed information he provides about specific keys or archaeological sites. There are some delightful passages that serve as wonderful vignettes of late-nineteenth-century Florida. A prime example is his description of an evening lecture he gave at Whiteside's store in Saint James City, where he and his eclectic audience were engulfed in smoke from four huge braziers to keep the mosquitoes at bay (*The Lost Florida Manuscript*, pp. 131-133).

These two volumes are valuable additions to the literature on Florida archaeology. They go a long way toward illuminating Frank Hamilton Cushing both as a person and as a researcher. Kolianos and Weisman hoped to enhance Cushing's reputation among Florida archaeologists, and they have succeeded in this regard. While their analysis is sometimes biased by viewing him through rose-colored glasses, it is tragic that his manuscript was not finished, edited, and published either during his lifetime or shortly after his death. It is interesting to speculate how both Florida archaeology and the view of Cushing over the decades would have been different.

Notes

[1]. Marion Spjut Gilliland, *The Material Culture of Key Marco, Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1975).

[2]. Neil M. Judd, *The Bureau of American Ethnology: A Partial History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp. 62-63.

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