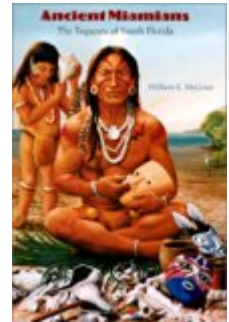


**William E. McGoun.** *Ancient Miamians: The Tequesta of South Florida.* Native Peoples, Cultures, and Places of the Southeastern United States Series. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xiii + 112 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-2495-0.



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*Ancient Miamians:* An Imaginative Recreation of the Lives of Native Floridians

In *Ancient Miamians: The Tequesta of South Florida* William E. McGoun presents the first comprehensive narrative of the history of pre-European Southeast Florida, using his skills as a journalist to bring to life the fragmented body of archaeological studies done on the area around the present-day Biscayne Bay. As part of the series "Native Peoples, Cultures, and Places of the Southeastern United States," the work is a major contribution to the rather small historiography of ancient Southeast Florida. The book presents a cohesive reading of this otherwise disjointed body of studies, drawing attention to the lives and perspectives of the native Floridians, even thousands of years before they entered into the Western historical narrative. As a result of the secondary source-base of the book, McGoun generally limits his discussion to topics such as hunting and fishing practices, diet, wildlife, tribal movement, and burial practices. In order to recreate scenes from the natives' daily lives, the author perilously ventures a number of assumptions regarding their

beliefs and values. In most cases, he attempts to minimize the guesswork by basing his postulations on analogies, a method which is resourceful but also highly problematic.

The book, whose massive scope spans some 10,000 years, is greater in breadth than in depth. In order to cover this time frame in a mere 112 pages, McGoun treats one era per chapter, narrating a single day from each of six distinct eras: 8000 B.C.E., 2000 B.C.E., 500 B.C.E., 500 C.E., 1568 C.E. and 1761 C.E. On each of these days he sets the reader alongside an inhabitant of Southeast Florida during the respective era. In order to recreate these life experiences by elaborating on the limited information available from the various eras, it was necessary for McGoun to employ his proficient imagination. Following the example of Oscar Lewis, this day-in-the-life approach creates a quotidian drama within the narrative. This structure--beginning each chapter as the inhabitant awakens and ending each one at the close of the day--aids the reader in comparing the lives of the natives during the various eras. At the same time, however, it ignores not only potential rhythmic differ-

ences among the societies depicted, but also nocturnal activities that may have played a key role in these societies.

McGoun clearly states in the preface that this book is intended for a casual reader; his clearly articulated sense of audience and purpose is one strength of this work. The combination of his day-in-the-life narrative approach, extremely simplified language, avoidance of conventional annotations, and explanation of archaeological methods in the introductory chapter, makes this book a relatively easy and enjoyable read, but far from scholarly. Better annotations would not have detracted from the readability, but they would have eased the ability to confirm sources for the information presented. The simplified level of discourse may prove irritating to the reader more experienced in the field, particularly one who is looking for a clearly defined theoretical framework. But at the same time, it will likely be welcomed by the non-expert reader, to whom the book is geared. For those interested in greater detail, McGoun provides a bibliographical essay as well as a list of references. The bibliographical essay is particularly helpful in that it points out where the author has based his narrative on archaeological, geological, zoological, historiographical or ethnographical studies, and accordingly, where suppositions have been made.

One strength of this book lies in the variety of secondary sources on which it relies. The narrative is source-driven, which is reflected in the adherence to similar topics in each chapter as well as in the inconsistent level of detail used to describe various objects and practices. McGoun discusses topics that the evidence—enhanced by his imagination—allows him to discuss, but in so doing, he looks to a wide variety of sources in order to put forth a thoroughly researched presentation. He refers a great deal to both published and unpublished reports of archaeological excavations in the Miami Dade County area, predominantly articles from *Florida Anthropologist*, including

several by Robert S. Carr. He also draws from ethnographies of past and present human behavior, encyclopedic descriptions of animals, paleontological studies of plants and animals, geological studies of land and weather transformations. McGoun also draws from some of the few contemporary written accounts of Tequesta life that are available. These consist of Spanish chronicles translated by Arva Moore Parks, Jeanette Thurber Conneor, John H. Hann and Ruben Vargas Ugarte. Albeit a creative approach, his use of Cherokee myths as a basis for his assumptions about a few of the unknown Tequesta beliefs is troubling, as are his assumptions about past human behavior based on analogies to present-day behavior. The various groups in question, while sharing some cultural elements, are separated by space and time to such an extent that one cannot assert similarities without solid evidence. Finally, to further clarify and enrich the narrative, the author includes several illustrations—the majority of them by Florida artist Theodore Morris—portraying imagined daily lives of the native Floridians. The wide variety of McGoun's sources reflects the fact that, as the author himself admits, the body of available information about the region during most of these eras is considerably limited; this is a testament to the author's unbridled imagination.

In an attempt to portray an aboriginal perspective, thus showing the human side of history, McGoun laces his work with constant reminders that several terms and concepts employed in our own society would have had no meaning to the native Floridians. He does this rather extensively, and, at times, excessively, resulting in the counterproductive effect of his subjects sounding extremely simple-minded. These constant reminders also undermine the effectiveness of the narrative approach in that they disrupt the narrative flow. Though the attempt is a noble one, the author is severely limited in it by the lack of primary aboriginal sources, making any attempt to portray his subjects' perspective a question of imposing a contemporary perspective upon them.

Unfortunately the book also leans heavily toward male-dominated narrative; male activities and perspectives receive far greater attention than do those of women. Except when women took on leadership positions in the community, they remain in the margins of the narrative. Yet to its credit, McGoun's work provides several openings, inviting further research in the areas of women's and children's daily lives.

While a clear sense of audience, creative use of sources, and attention to perspective are strengths of this book, there are some areas where the text could be enhanced. Though it is doubtful that a casual reader would miss a clear articulation of McGoun's theoretical framework, the book would benefit from more (albeit brief) explanations of how the author arrived at certain conclusions. Such cases include discussions of religious beliefs, social structures, and value systems. In chapter 6, for example, he discusses the religious importance of sharks, supporting his theory with concrete archaeological evidence, as he explains in the bibliographic essay (pp. 76-7). Knowing that this scene is based on solid archaeological evidence both increases the author's credibility and enhances the reader's experience of the novel. The book would be enriched by more such easily accessible explanations of the connections between concrete evidence and the narrative itself.

In all, McGoun seems to have accomplished what he set out to do. Forthcoming in the preface about his methodology, purpose and audience, the author makes no pretenses about the level of detail or the conventionality of his work; he targets the work to the non-specialist with an interest in Florida history. In this he sets out to paint a panoramic view of human life in Southeast Florida before the imposition of colonial rule. In interpreting and integrating several more specific studies about the flora, fauna and peoples of the region, McGoun provides a narrative framework that not only humanizes the history of the region,

but also, in its comprehensive scope, points to areas in which future, more concentrated studies are needed in order to more fully understand the lives of the ancient Miamians.

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