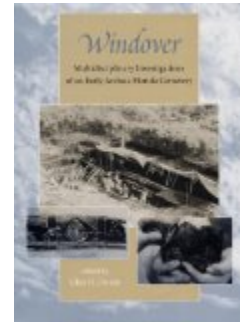


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Glen H. Doran, ed. *Windover: Multidisciplinary Investigations of an Early Archaic Florida Cemetery*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xix + 392 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2510-0.

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This long-awaited volume represents the culmination of over twenty years of work. It shows, in this beautifully illustrated collection, principal investigator Glen Doran assembles reports on the Windover site (8BR246) and its artifacts from a large, multi-disciplinary team of scholars and scientists. The work provides thorough documentation of the site, its artifacts and ecosystem, research strategies employed in excavation, and the context of the Windover site in Florida archaeology and in the greater scope of North American archaeology. Chapters include examinations of artifacts such as bone, antler, and dentary tools, textile and wooden artifacts, analysis of the mortuary patterns of the site, paleoecological information including pollen analysis, and examinations of the findings of human DNA recovered from the site. Although the volume was written for a scholarly audience for the purposes of presenting data, those with an active interest in Florida prehistory will also find much of interest.

The Windover site was accidentally discovered in 1982 outside of Titusville, Florida, during construction. Excavations began in 1984. Windover dates to the Early Archaic period (8450-6900 years B.P.), with most artifacts dated clustering around 7400 years B.P. The site consists of a series of ponds that had been used by its inhabitants as a charnal area, or burial site. Over the course of three field seasons, archaeologists recovered a minimum of 168 individuals from the mortuary ponds. By the end of the first season, the site had yielded such features and artifacts that it had become amply clear that Windover was a major find that would change viewpoints of the Archaic age. Chief among these finds was the preserved brain matter of ninety-one individuals. As a result of this discovery, the site made headlines around the country and

world. Headlines ranged from a 1986 cover story in *Nature* to a national tabloid cover story which read "Archaeologists Unearth and Try to Clone Prehistoric Cavemen" (p. 25).

The Windover site has long been considered to be one of the most important sites in North America, and was designated a National Historic Landmark site in 1986. In this volume, Doran and the rest of the Windover team examine the artifacts and material culture that make it so. Because Windover is a "wet" site, preservation of organic materials is exceptional. The site yielded a great variety of artifacts that are rarely recovered, such as tools of bone, antler, and teeth, textiles, and wooden artifacts. Each of these categories of artifacts is examined in a separate chapter, which considers the nature of the materials recovered, excavation and preservation strategies, and the impact of the Windover findings on the field. Of particular interest is the chapter devoted to the Windover textile collection. This team of investigators, led by the late R. L. Andrews, was able to identify among the Windover collection six different types of twining and one type of plaiting in fabrics, bags, and mats, which were made of processed cabbage palmetto and an unknown type of grass. The Windover textile collection is currently the most ancient sample of twined and plain weave textiles in North America, and possibly in the New World. As such, the collection pushes back the dates for this type of technology in the Americas (pp. 163-164).

The volume begins and ends with an examination of the site and its place in wet-sites archaeology. Doran does an excellent job of putting the site into context both on the Florida level and on a national level through description and through use of tables with listings of sites

with similar components. Doran bases his argument for the significance of the site on several key findings and observations. First, the Windover skeletal collection, comprising a minimum number of 168 individuals, is one of the largest collections of its antiquity. Its excellent preservation and demographic composition of 50 percent adults and 50 percent subadults ensures that scholars will be able to garner new information from this collection for years to come. Secondly, the human brain material collected from the Windover site has furnished both DNA and mitochondrial DNA samples for study, representing some of the oldest human DNA yet studied. As previously discussed, the variety of perishable artifacts recovered from Windover forms a large and complex tool kit. Floral and faunal studies of site materials are also making great contributions to our understanding of prehistoric environments. Finally, the discovery of remnants of a bottle gourd in one of the burials at Windover has pushed back the presence of this semidomesticated plant by 3000 years (p. 38). Doran successfully demonstrates that the discovery of this important domesticant “suggests that some adjustments in our interpretation of human-plant relations is overdue” (p. 14).

An unexpected but valuable contribution of the volume is found in appendix 1, “Wellpointing and Excavation Procedures: How to Dewater a Site.” Here, Doran and David N. Dickel provide a wealth of practical advice for archaeologists that find themselves in the unique situation of excavation of a wet site such as Windover. In

this appendix, Doran and Dickel describe, step by step, their experiences with the installation, maintenance, and costs of a wellpoint system. They demonstrate their success in maintaining “complete archaeological control ... meeting or exceeding that found in most dry sites,” and showing that “excavation in moist mucks and peats does not automatically result in loss of detailed provenience information” (p. 305). Chapter 15, “Future Directions,” similarly contains a list of Doran’s thoughts on practices and research techniques that would have made the Windover excavations more efficient and fruitful.

One of the clear focuses of this volume is Doran’s concern for the future state of archaeology. In particular, the author expresses concern about the increasing controversy surrounding the disturbance of Native American burial sites and the growing stringency of the laws and legislature concerning the excavation of skeletal collections and burial sites. Throughout the volume, Doran asserts that other Windovers exist in Florida and around the nation. He stresses the importance of public interest and support in archaeology, asserting that “questions ... are becoming more difficult to investigate despite a citizenry that is generally interested in archaeology and prehistory. Interest must be converted into action and action into thoughtful legislation, or we will all be the poorer for it” (p. 26). This volume is a testament to the wealth of knowledge that can be gained from excavation, and the fact that just one site can change the face of what we know about prehistory.

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