



Thomas J. Pluckhahn, Victor D. Thompson. *New Histories of Village Life at Crystal River*. Florida Museum of Natural History: Ripley P. Bullen Series. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018. Illustrations, tables. 298 pp. \$79.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-68340-035-6.

Reviewed by Kara Bridgman Sweeney

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Commissioned by F. Evan Nooe (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

In *New Histories of Village Life at Crystal River*, Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Victor D. Thompson provide a valuable history of one of the most significant southeastern archaeological sites, the three-thousand-plus-year-old Crystal River site in the central Gulf Coast of Florida. The authors trace the origins of the site as a ceremonial center and mortuary complex, and outline evidence for the major phases of site use and landscape transformation. This volume from University of Florida Press also reads as a partial history of generational changes in Florida archaeology, as Pluckhahn and Thompson ably summarize many years of research and various approaches to excavation, analysis, and interpretation.

While southeastern Indians began altering and transforming landscapes during the Middle Archaic period, we lack evidence for sedentary villages with public architecture before the Woodland period (circa 1000 BC-AD 1050). Pluckhahn and Thompson consider this co-occurrence of site features during the Woodland period a cultural milestone for the American Southeast: a fundamental “restructuring of the cultural landscape” (p. 4). At the Crystal River site, and at the later Roberts Island complex sites to the west, the authors note, relatively permanent settlement

would have been supported by the rich local estuarine and marine environment.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the volume provide historical context for the Crystal River site and other examples of early village societies. Previous work at the Crystal River site, conducted in the early and mid-twentieth century, established Crystal River as one of the most significant Woodland period sites in the Southeast, and as part of the Hopewell Interaction Sphere that extends into the midwestern United States. This earlier work was unsystematic and under-reported, focused primarily on the earthen and shell mounds and on artifacts made of exotic materials like copper.

Chapters 3-7 detail how the processes of early village formation were actualized at Crystal River, focusing on the local histories of the site before turning to a greater spatial scale in an extended discussion (in chapter 8) of early village development in the Gulf Coast region. Specifically, the authors place Crystal River’s transitions toward early village formation in broader social and cultural context, with comparisons to the Kolomoki and Garden Patch archaeological sites (in Georgia and Florida, respectively). Woodland period villages can be viewed as “population aggregations” that occurred as part of macroregional processes, and

not as isolated examples, according to the authors.

Pluckhahn and Thompson present a refined chronology for the Crystal River site throughout its history, placing the different cultural and occupational sequences (and episodes of construction and layering) at the site in broader regional context. Additionally, the authors synthesize their recent investigations and relate the results of their reanalyses of legacy collections held in state and federal repositories. These discussions build support for the thesis that Woodland period villages with large-scale public works (including enclosures, shell mounds, and platform mounds) are best understood in relation to historical and regional processes of cooperation and competition. The development of a complete chronological framework for the Crystal River site, beginning with its genesis as a destination for communal ceremonies, is arguably the most significant contribution of the book.

Directly dating Crystal River site deposits has been challenging even with the benefit of contemporary field methods. In a detailed description of dating techniques used at the site, the authors discuss ways in which shell-bearing samples can provide older and less reliable dates and related discrepancies, due to the marine reservoir effect and hardwater effect. This is one of many cautionary tales offered by the authors, and it is of great value to any researcher working on similar archaeological questions. Bayesian analyses of radiocarbon data are both summarized and explained here. The use of geophysical techniques allowed teams directed by Pluckhahn and Thompson to plan minimally invasive excavations in keeping with the current preservation ethic, and methods including coring targeted portions of the site to address specific research questions. The authors also excavated trenches in one-meter sections in order to capture stratigraphic views of midden and other potential cultural features in select areas. Notably, no coring or trenching was conduct-

ed in burial mound areas during these recent investigations.

Although the Crystal River site location was timbered in the early twentieth century and the area saw increased development (including bulldozing and shell mining) starting in the 1950s, many subsurface cultural deposits remain. This is largely thanks to the efforts of archaeologist Ripley Bullen to develop relationships with landowners so the state might acquire specific parcels over time. Resistance survey data allowed Pluckhahn and Thompson to recognize subsurface midden and mound features, and ground penetrating radar data revealed shifts in the composition of midden in some portions of the site. Illustrations of geophysical patterns showing more reflective shell layers and less reflective sands are described in detail.

Multiple figures throughout the text make it possible to track decades of field investigations at the Crystal River site, beginning with the earliest excavation and mapping project by Clarence B. Moore in 1903. A single comprehensive map (perhaps as a color foldout graphic) might have allowed readers to more easily synthesize the many investigations at the Crystal River site over the years. Labeling all mounds, and depicting the locations of all cores and trenches (containing numbered units) at the site, would prevent confusion about references to comparative data in discussion sections of the text.

Substantial contributions developed as part of student theses and dissertations are credited throughout this work, and the authors are to be commended for having provided research and publication opportunities to junior scholars. Pluckhahn and Thompson also formally acknowledge and cite their former students and other junior colleagues throughout this volume.

New Histories of Village Life at Crystal River is a valuable addition to southeastern archaeological research. Archaeologists and historians with interests in early village formation and archaeo-

logical field methods would benefit from reading this volume. Readers interested in best practices for comparative research will appreciate the detailed descriptions and explanations of current analytical techniques involving legacy collections. The location of the archaeological site on state lands within Crystal River Archaeological State Park allowed teams directed by Pluckhahn and Thompson to engage in public outreach, which was bolstered by significant grant funding toward research and interpretation that notably increased the visibility of archaeology in the broader region (in my opinion).

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