

Anthropology Book Forum

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Eds. by David Pollack, Anne Tobbe Bader, and Justin N. Carlson, 2021, *The Falls of the Ohio River: Archaeology of Native American Settlement*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press. 297 pp. ISBN: 9781683402039.

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The publication of the edited volume *The Falls of the Ohio River: Archaeology of Native American Settlement* provides a welcome addition to the literature on North American prehistoric archaeology. The volume was edited by David Pollack, Anne Tobbe Bader, and Justin N. Carlson and was published by the University of Florida Press. Eleven chapters focus exclusively on the archaeology of a particular region, that of the Falls of the Ohio River at Louisville. The study also encompasses the surrounding region of northern Kentucky and southern Indiana. The approach taken by the editors foregrounds the volume in a landscape archaeology of this particularly rich and varied region of Eastern North America. Most impressive is that many of these researchers have worked extensively and in some cases exclusively in cultural resource management (CRM), which, at its best, is becoming increasingly recast as public archaeology. So, while the academic *bona fides* of these contributors and contributions are many, the insights gained are very much built on the backs of archaeological work necessitated by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and by public-facing archaeological institutes, such as the Kentucky Archaeological Survey, the Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology at Indiana University, and the Anthropology Laboratory at Indiana State University. This is an impressive confluence of researchers, research trends, and findings and advances integrative landscape archaeology of this very important region.

Following an introduction that describes the unique physical environment of the Falls of the Ohio, the chapters are organized by time period and cover broad ranges of topics such as settlement and burial patterning, trophy taking, subsistence, and use of plants by Native American populations. The editors do a wonderful job of summing up what has been learned in a concluding chapter, which focuses on the perspective of landscape archaeology.

The reader will learn a great many things by engaging with this book. As a researcher who occasionally works in this region, I was struck by how much the state of knowledge has advanced recently. I provide a brief summary and comments on the chapters. The first contribution, by C. Russell Stafford, focuses on several important Early Archaic Kirk-related sites, investigations of which were occasioned by the Caesars Archaeological Project. The NHPA necessitated these investigations prior to the construction of a casino. Stafford details the finds of hundreds of Kirk Corner Notched and other Early Archaic projectile points, and a significant area for exploitation of regional cherts. Also, the geomorphology of this section of the Ohio River Valley is well described and explained.

Chapters 3-8 make up what for me is the heart of the volume, the analysis of Middle and Late Archaic cultures in the Falls Region. Readers are treated to in-depth explorations of Middle Archaic lifeways (Carlson et al.), the late Middle/early Late Archaic Scottsburg phase, newly defined by Bader, and descriptions of a well-excavated buried site at RiverPark, where a stratified burial series was documented (Duane B. Simpson and Stephen T. Mocas). Particularly, I found the attention to diachronic analysis by Simpson and Mocas to be worthwhile. Rick Burdin discusses evidence for Late Archaic-period increased sedentism at the Falls of Ohio. His review of pit house architecture and signaling through use of bone pins and bannerstones is noteworthy in how he ties disparate material culture media to larger trends. The exploration of trophy taking of skulls and forelimbs by Christopher W. Schmidt is exemplary in marrying primary osteological studies to concerns with societal violence, raiding, belief in the afterlife, and the spiritual power of human remains. Mocas and Simpson's reprise is a broad review of the Terminal Late Archaic transition (1600 BC-800 BC), a critical period in the development of sedentism, recurrent conflicts, and conspicuous consumption. They discuss the Riverton and Buck Creek phases from the perspective of the Knob Creek site and provide a great deal of perspective on these developments. After reading these chapters, my knowledge of Middle and Late Archaic cultures is much improved.

The Woodland period (800 BC-AD 900) receives the least comprehensive treatment of any period. Mocas' chapter though does a good job of summarizing what is known from several major excavations. The data primarily deal with settlement patterns, subsistence, and material culture. Very little information is presented on use of mounds or other mortuary facilities or the construction of earthworks, because very little investigation of these phenomena has taken place.

Jack Rossen and Jocelyn C. Turner put together a fine chapter on plant exploitation by Native Americans in the Falls region. Their contribution is a synthesis of what they see as four eras of Native plant use in the Falls region. I found the sequencing of these eras and the developments they describe to be compelling. They cover topics such as the domestication of native oily-starchy seed plants and the later introduction of tropical cultigens. Also, I appreciated the discussion of use of wetland plants, an under-studied topic in archaeology of the Midcontinent, and in CRM archaeology, nearly ignored. But, it was the discussion of the introduction of maize and the Falls region as a boundary zone between different regional maize cultivars, which I found to be the most fascinating.

Cheryl Ann Munson and Robert G. McCullough provide an intriguing study of the Mississippian period (AD 900-1650) in the Falls region. They start the chapter with a regional discussion, and then focus in on the Prather Mound Center. They do discuss connections with earlier Woodland period and incipient Mississippian cultures, and make some intriguing points about this hard to understand transition. The authors conclude that the Falls region was a frontier Mississippian outpost between Fort Ancient settlements further east and the Angel polity to the west.

Michael W. French and David Pollack wrote a quite useful study of Mississippian and Fort Ancient cultural identity and interaction. This piece segues nicely with themes engaged with in the previous chapter by Munson and McCullough. They examine material culture and subsistence markers of ethnicity among the Falls region Mississippian settlements and nearby Fort Ancient peoples. On the basis of this review, French and Pollack make credible inferences that, post-AD 1300, Fort Ancient peoples lived in the Falls region Mississippian settlement of Eva Bandman. We can only lament that the untimely passing of Michael French cut short such fascinating work, but Pollack and others carry on.

The concluding essay by Bader, Pollack, and Carlson, with the addition of Richard W. Jefferies, summarizes these fine contributions. They focus on cultural landscapes, persistent places and

historicity. Particularly, the importance of the persistent place, a term of art recently in archaeology, is quite evident in the Falls region. The environmental richness and diversity of the region is one reason for persistence. Also, The Falls is one of the few areas of easy crossing of the Ohio River, by buffalo, other game, and also by humans, but it is also a barrier to navigation. These facts indicate that it was, alternately, a region of passage, interchange, and settlement throughout prehistory. The combination of ecological richness, diversity, and this interchange means it was a favored locale for long-term sedentary residence.

The unity of themes and the synthesis presented in the book regarding landscapes, persistent places, etc., speaks of the integrative value that sustained study of a singular region can bring to our understanding of the effect the natural world has had on the history and evolution of human cultures. I feel that the only missing pieces to this edited volume are chapters on the Paleoindian period and the Historic period, but these omissions are understandable given the strength and consistency of each of the volume's chapters.

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