ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342110331

Book Review "The Archaeology of Human–Environmental Dynamics on the North American Atlantic Coast"

Article *in* The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology · June 2020

DOI: 10.1080/15564894.2020.1774447

CITATIONS
0

READS
82

1 author:

Dani Buffa
Pennsylvania State University

4 PUBLICATIONS **30** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

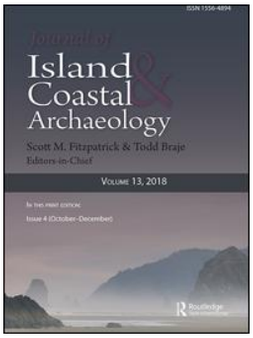
Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Project Shellfish harvesting in the Velondriake: paleoecology and community needs View project

Project Biby in 3D View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Dani Buffa on 11 June 2020.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.



The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology

ISSN: 1556-4894 (Print) 1556-1828 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/uica20

The Archaeology of Human–Environmental Dynamics on the North American Atlantic Coast

Edited by Leslie Reeder-Myers, John A. Turck, and Torben C. Rick. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. 2019. ISBN: 987-0-8130-6613-4 (hardcover $100), 290 pp.

Danielle Buffa

To cite this article: Danielle Buffa (2020): The Archaeology of Human–Environmental Dynamics on the North American Atlantic Coast, The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology, DOI: 10.1080/15564894.2020.1774447

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15564894.2020.1774447

Published online: 11 Jun 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=uica20

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

BOOK REVIEW

The Archaeology of Human-Environmental Dynamics on the North American Atlantic Coast. Edited by Leslie Reeder-Myers, John A. Turck, and Torben C. Rick. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. 2019. ISBN: 987-0-8130-6613-4 (Hardcover $100), 290 pp.

This edited volume delivers a comprehensive and succinct synthesis of the human history of North America's Atlantic over the past 10,000 years. In 290 pages, the book offers a sweeping review of research in integrative human–environmental interaction, focusing on Native people's resilience in changing environmental contexts, such as relative sea level rise and shifting species distributions. Through the lenses of culture contact, colonization, and resource intensification, the book carefully contextualizes social change. The chapters are organized by dividing the coastline into nine regions from north to south and are largely geared toward audiences with some knowledge of archaeological practices and conventions. The discussion sections at the end of each chapter are aimed at a broader public. Each chapter contributes an overview of integrative work in its respective region, with sections describing the environmental context, archaeology, and issues of human–environment interaction. The volume is simultaneously an accessible overview of the North Atlantic coast's environmental archaeology and a call to action for policymakers to draw on deeper time perspectives on how people have co-evolved with the region's landscapes. By tying together this carefully selected group of chapter contributions with a compelling introduction and conclusion, the editors succeed in their goal of delivering a volume that will satisfy the curiosity of professional scholars while sending a message to general audiences that archaeological perspectives should be a vital part of our conversations around environmental policy.

The editors assembled a group of contributing authors working both within academia and industry able to address several important themes. The theme of Native peoples' resilience in the face of changing ecologies is addressed in a chapter entitled "Coastal Adaptations to the Northern Gulf of Maine and the Southern Scotian Shelf" by Betts et al., in which they present a thorough account of the persistent adaptability of coastal communities in Northern Maine. Archaic subsistence strategies in this region are characterized by a generalized reliance on nearshore marine fishing, littoral foraging, and inland hunting. When sea level rise and increasing tidal extremes drove changes in the biological and physical properties of the Gulf of Maine, Maritime Woodland people responded with a decrease in open water fishing and an increasing specialization by season and locale. Subsistence flexibility was essential to the survival of people in this region and likely contributed to their resilience in the face of other disturbances, including European colonization.

A particularly good discussion of the anthropogenic effects of resource extraction on coastal ecologies is offered by Dillian in her chapter "Coastal Adaptations in North and South Carolina." She discusses cultural adaptations of Late Archaic and Woodland period populations to varied ecosystems in the Carolinas. Dillian first addresses the importance of social connections, trade networks, and seasonal mobility of communities in the mountains, in the piedmont, and along the coast for the success and resilience of all of these groups. Her focus, however, is on shellfishing as a primary adaptive strategy of coastal populations, using evidence from shell ring sites to support her argument. With so much evidence for the prominence of shellfish in coastal assemblages, the reader wonders what effect intensive harvesting may have had on the oyster and clam populations in especially harvested estuaries. Dillian answers with a discussion of how overharvesting potentially led to a shift in the demographics of fish and shellfish assemblages through time toward smaller and younger shells.

Marine environments were not only harmed by human activity, however. Place-based societies living on a landscape for millennia co-evolve with these landscapes. As Turck and Thompson note in the chapter on human–environmental dynamics of the Georgia Coast, "Native American shell deposition changed the shape and size of landforms. […] With vegetation and salinity tied to elevation, this shows Native Americans were significant actors in the formation and maintenance of the coastal landscape" (p. 190). This underscores that the coastline we see today is an anthropogenic landscape. Without adequate understanding of the ecological role of human communities, environmental protection initiatives risk operating on incomplete data and causing harm.

Several chapters featured well-developed discussions of how contact and interactions between different cultural groups further affected adaptive strategies. This was handled particularly well by Wolff and Holly Jr. in their chapter titled "Sea Ice, Seals, and Settlement: On Climate and Culture in Newfoundland and Labrador." In this chapter, the authors discuss how the earliest people to settle in this region, the Maritime Archaic, arrived with generalized coastal subsistence strategies and were succeeded by subsequent waves of peoples like the Pre-Dorset, Groswater Dorset, and Dorset with increasingly more specialized seal-hunting technologies. While it is uncertain why these groups disappeared, climate change and competition between cultural groups for limited resources likely played a role.

Culture contact was less effectively handled in other chapters. In several chapters, European colonization appeared to be a footnote, and differentiation between known cultural groups was blurred. While ending with or slightly before the period of European colonization does make for a more succinct narrative, doing so without sufficient ethnographic context may lead to the unintended perpetuation of the false narrative that these peoples are all gone. In truth, many Native communities adopted new strategies in the face of tremendous social change and survived. However, two chapters addressed this oversight by including insight from ethnohistory. These are Turck and Thompson's aforementioned chapter and Arden, Fitzpatrick, and Thompson's chapter titled "Island Chain Coastlines: A History of Human Adaptation in the Florida Keys." In the latter chapter, the authors call attention to the importance of understanding the adaptive strategies of island communities to environmental changes (i.e., sea level rise, ecological shifts, biogeochemical cycle fluctuations). This knowledge can directly inform policy to mitigate threats to modern island and coastal communities.

Overall, this book is a wonderful addition to the University Press of Florida's *Society and Ecology in Island and Coastal Archaeology* series. It is the third book in the series and is an attentive review of North Atlantic coastal human–environmental archaeology in a short, digestible format that leaves you wishing it was 300 pages longer. This book is great for sparking interest and is a special joy for East Coast residents who will delight in exploring the archaeology and environmental change of their home region. Chapters can be read individually or as a sweeping, cohesive view down the coast. It is especially recommended as an introduction to archaeology for readers with a climate science or environmental policy background or for mid-upper level anthropology students.

Danielle Buffa
Anthropology, Penn State University Park,
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA
dcbuffa@psu.edu

© 2020 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
https://doi.org/10.1080/15564894.2020.1774447

Check for updates

View publication stats