ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF Mt. ROYAL

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Mt. Royal (8PU35) is among the most famous archaeological sites in Florida. In fact, most people familiar with Florida archaeology have heard of Mt. Royal and the exotic metal, stone, and ceramic artifacts unearthed there by C.B. Moore in the 1890s. However, little has been published on the site, save for overviews of Moore’s work (Milanich 1999) and brief references to its exotica. The aim of this paper is to bring together what is currently known about Mt. Royal, with emphasis placed on the site’s early St. Johns II component (ca. A.D. 900-1300). Artifacts recovered from the sand mound by C.B. Moore (1894a, 1894b) are used to date the tumulus and connect it to other mound sites throughout the Mississippian Southeast and Midwest. Select pottery types recovered from non-mound contexts by various researchers over the past half century are used to delineate the village area associated with the mound (e.g., Jones and Tesa 2001). I also review the distribution of other nearby archaeological sites in an attempt to provide insight into the early St. Johns II social geography of the Mt. Royal vicinity. Finally, I discuss Mt. Royal’s relationship to the Mill Cove Complex at the mouth of the St. Johns River, and its role as a major exchange center along the middle St. Johns River during the Early Mississippian period.

Geographic Location

Mt. Royal is located midway up the St. Johns River in Putnam County, between Lake George to the south and Little Lake George to the north (Figure 1). It is situated on a broad upland above a meander in the St. Johns River, immediately west of a lush wetland associated with Beecher Run. Physiographically, this segment of the river is referred to as the St. Johns River Offset, a westward realignment of the original river channel formed as an estuary cutoff from the northern and southern segments of the river during late Pliocene to early Pleistocene times (Brooks 1981; Schmidt 1997:12; White 1970). Today, the middle St. Johns River consists of a somewhat narrow, meandering channel linking a series of freshwater lakes, with Lake George being the largest at 23 km long and 6 km wide (McLane 1955:11-12). The river, lakes, and wetlands are productive and resource-rich biomes that would have provided the natives with abundant and diverse aquaflora. Terrestrial game would have been widely available within the riverine uplands. Today, Mt. Royal is located within the Mt. Royal Airpark, a rapidly growing subdivision with its own airstrip. The mound itself is contained within a 1-acre parcel that belongs to the State of Florida (Figure 2).

Archaeology of the Mt. Royal Mound

John Bartram and his son William first visited Mt. Royal in 1766, with the elder Bartram describing the mound and associated earthen berms (Figure 3) as follows:

...we landed at Mount Royal, and went to an Indian tumulus, which was about 100 yards in diameter, nearly round, and nearly 20 feet high; found some bones scattered on it. It must be very ancient, as there are live oaks growing upon it three feet in diameter. What a prodigious multitude of Indians must have labored to raise it. To what height we can't say, as it must have settled much in such a number of years, and it is surprising where they brought the sand from, and how, as they had nothing but baskets and boards to carry it in. There seems to be a little hollow near the adjacent level on one side, though not likely to raise such a tumulus the 50th part of what it is. But directly north from the tumulus is a fine straight avenue about 60 yards broad, all the surface of which has been taken off and thrown on each side. This makes a bank of about a rod [varies from 5.5 - 8 yards] wide, and a foot high, more or less, as the unevenness of the ground required, for the avenue is as level as a floor from bank to bank, and continues so for about three-quarters of a mile to a pond of about 100 yards broad and 150 yards long north and south, which seemed to be an oblong square...By its regularity it seems to be artificial; if so, perhaps sand was carried from hence to raise the tumulus...Here had been a large Indian town; I suppose there is fifty acres of planting ground cleared and of middling soil, a good part of which is mixed with small shells. No doubt this large tumulus was their burying place or sepulcher. [Bartram in Cruickshank 1957:64]

William Bartram returned to Mt. Royal and echoed his father’s description by stating:

...At about fifty yards distance from the landing place, stands a magnificent Indian mound. About 15 years ago [1766] I visited this place...At that time there was a very considerable extent of old fields around the mount; there was also a large orange grove, together with palms and live oaks, extending from near the mount, along the banks, downwards, all of which has been cleared away to make room for planting ground. But what greatly contributed towards completing the magnificence of the scene, was a noble Indian highway, which led from the great mount, on a straight line, three quarters of a mile, first through a point or wing of the orange grove, and continuing thence through an awful forest of live oaks, it was terminated by palms and laurel magnolias, on the verge of an oblong artificial lake, which was on the edge of an extensive green level savanna. This grand highway was
about fifty yards wide, sunk a little below the common level, and the earth thrown up on each side, making a bank of about two feet high. [Bartram 1928:101-102]

Samuel Haven, in his 1856 study *Archaeology of the United States*, considered the Bartrams' observations to be among the earliest "careful and intelligent" descriptions of a native American Indian mound (Haven 1973:21-22). However, neither Bartram dug at the site. This feat would have to wait until Clarence B. Moore burst on the scene in April of 1893. At Mt. Royal, Moore (1894a:16) set his sights on a large sand mound situated about 90 m from the river. He was informed that the mound had been previously plowed over, and he noted that slumping of
Figure 2. Sand mound at Mt. Royal (view to the north).

the mound sides had resulted in the accumulation of sand along its base, raising the surrounding terrain such that "measurements taken from the apparent base to the summit are diverse and misleading" (Moore 1894a:18). Nevertheless, he estimated a mound height of 4.9 m, though it had "a much greater height in former times," and a circumference of 168 m (Moore 1894a:18-19). He further remarked that the avenue described by the Bartrams "is still readily traceable, though its point of union with the mound is no longer visible." The intact segment of the avenue consisted of "a depression from twelve to twenty yards [3.6-6 m] in width...between embankments of sand with an average height of 2.5 feet [76 cm], and 12 feet [3.6 m] in breadth" (Moore 1894a:18).

During a 17-day period in 1893, Moore (1894a:19-20) and 21 men dug two, deep inverted trapezoid-shaped trenches to the base of the mound, with much of its remainder excavated to depths in excess of 2 m. He returned the next year and worked 22 days with more than 30 men, during which time "over two-thirds of the base...was laid bare" and the other third was "dug into a depth of seven feet [2.1 m]" (Moore 1894b:137). Upon completion, the mound was restored to its former state, so that such a "great and historical a land mark should not pass from sight."

Although Moore's excavation strategy was not as precise as modern archaeologists would like, insights can be gained and inferences can be made based on his descriptions and commentaries. With regard to mound stratigraphy and composition, Moore's first field season report is more informative than his second, since the latter placed more emphasis on artifact descriptions than on interpretations of mound construction and structure. Moore (1894a:19) hinted to the possibility that some sort of conflagration preceded mound construction by noting that "the sand at the bottom of the mound was...mingled with pieces of charcoal." Though open to interpretation, this could imply Moore's belief that the burning was part of an initial mound building ritual, particularly since he made such an interpretation explicit in his account of other St. Johns River mounds based on similar evidence.

The mound was composed mostly of yellow sand undoubtedly taken from the immediate area of the mound, perhaps from the pond located less than a kilometer to the north. Moore considered the pond to be artificial due to its rectangular shape. At the base of the mound were localized areas and layers of white sand, while throughout the mound he encountered layers and deposits of hematite impregnated sand that ranged in color from "crushed strawberry" to "brick red" to even "Indian red," depending on the amount of iron oxide mixed within the sand. A cap of red-colored sand covered the entire mound, and reached a maximum thickness of 2.1 m on the "northeastern portion of the summit plateau and adjacent slope" (Moore 1894a:19). He also noted that artifacts were more common in contexts marked by sand tinted red to some degree. Taken together this suggests distinct episodes of intentional deposition in combination with general mound filling.
Figure 3. Edwin Davis's Copies of Bartram's Sketch of Mt. Royal (adapted from Waselkov and Braund 1955).
With regard to the distribution of cultural objects, Moore reported that "nearly the entire collection made by us" was confined to the upper 2.1 m of the mound (i.e., ca. 2.7-4.9 m above ground surface). He went on to note that while all classes of artifacts (e.g., copper, stone, pottery) were infrequently encountered on or near the base of the mound, "almost nothing was met with" in the intervening area (i.e., ca. 0.3-2.7 m above ground surface). It is unclear as to whether the same distributional pattern applied to human remains, though he tersely stated that evidence of burials was met with in "every portions of the excavations." Preservation was a problem, and Moore bemoaned the fact that burials were always found in the "final stages of decay" and frequently represented only by teeth. Unfortunately, we are left with no demographic information regarding the age, sex, or health status of any human remains within the Mt. Royal burial population.

Moore boasted that the mound yielded a "considerable quantity" of copper, although based on his accounts it is difficult to tell exactly how many pieces and what forms of copper were present. None of the copper items was "exact duplicates in size and design," which he interpreted as an indication of native rather than European manufacture. Copper artifacts from the mound included square, disc, oblong, or oval shaped sheets, some embossed with decorations and central perforations (Figure 4). Also reported were rolled sheet copper beads; shell, clay, stone, and wood beads covered with copper foil; a few copper pins or piercing implements; two copper-covered pulley-type limestone earplugs; an upper and lower gray fox mandible wrapped in a veneer of copper; and a variety of other wood objects wrapped in copper. Moore further stated that it was common for copper pieces to have been "wrapped in bark or some vegetal fabric."

Perhaps the most spectacular finds from Mt. Royal were two copper plates with repoussé designs. The upper plate displayed a "forked eye and blade" image "almost identical in design and absolutely so in style" to one from Spiro in Oklahoma (Phillips and Brown 1978:206-207). The plate design is depicted on the frontispiece of his 1894a report. The presence of rivets indicated that this piece of sheet copper had been damaged and repaired sometime prior to interment. Alternatively, the sheet could have been composed of smaller pieces joined together and then embossed. The lower plate was embossed with concentric circles and a series of partially enclosed parallel and perpendicular lines in each of the four quadrants (see Moore 1894b:218). These plates were found in association with fragments of human skull with teeth, two pearls, and a copper-covered fox jaw.

After his first field season, Moore had several pieces of Mt. Royal copper submitted for chemical testing in the hope of identifying the quarry source. It was determined that the specimens were composed of copper and lead, which led Moore (1894a:35) to conclude that the metal was either of European origin or from a source other than Lake Superior, since previous analyses had never found lead in copper from the Great Lakes region. However, Moore (1894b:138) later rejected the chemical results and deemed them "valueless" due to contamination, since it was learned that lead was present in the sulfuric acid used to clean the copper specimens prior to analysis. More recent trace element analysis by Goad (1978) on Mt. Royal copper sourced the metal to multiple ore deposits in both the Appalachian Mountains and the Lake Superior region.

With respect to the contextual association between copper and human remains, Moore (1894a:31) reported that "[t]he custom of placing teeth, unaccompanied by other remains, with objects of copper was very noticeable at Mt. Royal, where it was of frequent occurrence." He considered the possibility that this was the result of bone decay and preservation bias, but eventually dismissed this interpretation because he believed that if additional bones had been placed adjacent to any items of copper they also would have been preserved. As supporting evidence he invoked his results of investigation at the "Sand Mound in Pine Woods" in Lake County. There a similar coupling of copper objects and human teeth unaccompanied with other human bone occurred, even though bone preservation throughout the mound was in a "much better state of preservation" than at Mt. Royal. Apparently, these were the only two mounds in the St. Johns River basin in which he ran across this perceived association.

Items of stone also were commonly found in the mound, and these were all imports since there are no lithic outcroppings in the middle St. Johns River region. Ground or polished stone tools included hatchets (n=137), chisels (n=6), spade-shaped implements (n=3), a perforated tablet or gorget, and a boatstone fragment (Figure 5). Moore failed to identify each specimen by raw material, but did mention that some were made of claystone and others greenstone. More than 100 flaked stone points were recovered, including 53 concentrated within a "yard of sand." Other lithic objects included quartz crystals and pebbles, polished and unmodified fragments of hematite, pieces of iron pyrite, ferruginous sandstone beads, and a calcite pendant.

Ceramic pots and other uniquely shaped fired-clay items were found throughout the mound and were more common in Mt. Royal than either in the Shields or Grant mounds to the north. Many were broken, and some contained pre-fired basal perforation or "kill" holes. Conventional-sized vessels were frequently encountered, but large vessels were absent. Unusual shaped vessels, which he often referred to as "freak wares," also were noted. A look at Moore's illustrations reveals plainwares as well as pots decorated with check stamping, incisions, punctuations, and impressions. He observed that the "presence of pottery, as a general rule, marked an interment" (Moore 1894a:27). It is interesting that Moore did not mention an association between human teeth and ceramic pots, as was the case with copper artifacts.

Shell, in various forms, was a common occurrence in the mound. Moore recovered 1307 whelk (Busycon) shells from the main excavation trench, which appears to refer to the 27-m long (and varying from 4.4 to 12.1 m in length) trench dug along the southern part of the mound. Most were Busycon carica (knobbed whelk) as opposed to the Busycon sinistrum (lightning whelk), the latter of which was used to manufacture shell cups and gorgets. These were found primarily in the
upper 2.1 m of the mound, rarely below this point, and often as caches, with the largest concentration containing 136 whelk shells. None of the shells were fashioned into drinking cups, and few had extensively battered or beveled beaks. Many,
Figure 5. Ground stone celts (A–C, E) and gorget (D) [A is 28.6 cm long] (Moore 1894a:23).
however, had perforated bodies, which Moore likened to that of the pottery with intentional kill holes, though, as Mitchem (1999:23) points out, these whelks may have been fractured or modified for purposes of hafting or snail meat extraction.

In addition to the large whelk shells, a considerable number of discoidal shell beads and fewer columnella beads were recovered; these appear to have been made from whelk shells. Shell beads were "always in connection with human remains" and not just teeth. Finally, other miscellaneous objects included shark teeth, perforated catfish vertebrae beads, freshwater mussel pearls, sheets of mica, and bits of galena. Clearly, the inhabitants of Mt. Royal were involved in far-flung exchange networks, as described below.

Archaeology of the Mt. Royal Village Area

None of the earlier investigators, such as the Bartrams, Daniel Brinton (1859), Jeffries Wyman (1875), or C.B. Moore, investigated middens or the village area at Mt. Royal. In fact, the first non-mound investigation at Mt. Royal did not take place until the 1950s. According to information on file at the Florida Museum of Natural History (FMNH), John Goggin visited Mt. Royal, and on several occasions sent University of Florida students to "surface collect" artifacts from the site between 1951 and 1956.

Artifacts were gathered from the exposed ground surface in orange groves and other cleared areas between the mound and the river to the south. This area was designated PU35a, and it included the main orange grove, but excluded the area immediately to the east, which was referred to as "PU35a-English Area." Later these areas were combined under the designation 8PU35A (Mt. Royal midden); the sand mound was designated 8PU35 (Goggin 1952:87-88). Another enigmatic area, tentatively labeled PU35B, was vaguely described as "across the gully, upstream near old cistern," where only 13 sherds were recovered. In 1997, the Florida Master Site File in Tallahassee "officially" dropped all suffix designations for the site, and retained 8PU35 as its state site number.

Goggin (or his students) subsequently analyzed the pottery collected from the Mt. Royal midden, with types and counts recorded on file cards. Table 1 provides an inventory of the aboriginal potsherds recovered from 8PU35 (including the English Area), based on Goggin's analysis sheets. Not included are the Spanish ceramics collected from the site, and thought to be associated with the seventeenth-century Spanish mission, San Antonio de Anacape. While some materials from the early collections are still curated at FMNH, it appears that the bulk of the sherds (i.e., St. Johns series) retrieved in 1956 were discarded some time after analysis. Although Goggin (1952:55) did not excavate at the site, he did note that while no longer visible on the ground (ca. 1950), the avenue observed by the Bartrams and Moore did "stand out quite clearly in air photos."

In 1973 Mt. Royal was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, but extensive archaeological work at the site did not take place until the early 1980s (Milanich 1999:8). In 1983, and again in 1994 and 1995 B. Calvin Jones of the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research (BAR) performed field investigations within portions of the site prior to planned residential development of the area (Jones and Tesar 2001; Tesar 2001). The 1-acre (0.4 ha) Mt. Royal Indian Mound parcel, which was donated to the State of Florida, was not examined. Excavation strategies included shovel testing; mechanical stripping of narrow linear cuts; and hand digging of larger blocks divided into smaller excavation units of various sizes. These investigative procedures centered on the former orange grove south and southwest of the mound, an area Jones referred to as the Mount Royal village area (Jones and Tesar 2001:81). Excavations eventually focused on the site's Spanish Mission component, although materials spanning the Middle Archaic through the late St. Johns II period were recovered (Table 2).

The 1983 field season was confined to areas of proposed road construction, immediately south and southeast of the mound. Exploratory shovel tests (50x100 cm) were randomly placed in or adjacent to proposed roads. A large subsurface feature was partially exposed in one shovel test, which was later expanded to reveal an aboriginal structure of the Spanish Mission period. This excavation area was designated "Structure 1 Block Excavation," and it was situated near the highest elevation in the orange grove, about 73 m southeast of the mound. All units were dug in arbitrary 15-cm levels, with the upper 30 cm representing disturbed plowzone. Mechanical stripping revealed a second mission-period structure (Structure 2) to the south within a proposed roadway.

In 1994, the focus of fieldwork shifted slightly to the southwest to an approximately 28-acre (11.2 ha) area planned for residential development. To gain a general understanding of this focus, shovel testing was conducted on a 30-m grid, although not all "grid interval locations" were tested. In fact, only 52 shovel tests (35x35 cm squares) were dug on the 30-m grid. Based on these results, an additional 21 units, most of which were 50x100-cm trenches, were judgmentally placed in areas that contained Spanish artifacts. Units were dug in arbitrary 35 cm levels and were discontinued once the midden/subsoil interface was encountered (ca. 60-80 cm below surface). However, the authors admit that "for many [of the shovel tests] excavation was terminated at the bottom of the first level" (Jones and Tesar 2001:82). All fill was screened through 1/8" mesh in an attempt to recover small artifacts such as glass beads.

In 1995, Jones returned to the same area sampled in 1994 to conduct a mitigation project. Fieldwork began with the excavation of 12 small shovel tests, south and southeast of the mound, to fill gaps in the grid not sampled during the 1983 or 1994 seasons. But the focus of the 1995 season was squarely on loci that had yielded high frequencies of Spanish artifacts during shovel testing in 1994. The primary area of investigation was in the south-central part of the 1994 project area. Mitigation strategies included a large excavation block gridded in 1-m squares and a series of narrow cuts made by heavy machinery. In all, 13 machine cuts were made that ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 m in width and 10 to 20 m in length. Five
Table 1. Aboriginal potsherds collected at Mt. Royal by the University of Florida, Florida Museum of Natural History.

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¹ According to analysis sheets on file at FLMHN, only 5 sherds from the 1956 collection were retained following analysis; the remainder was apparently discarded.

² According to analysis sheets on file at FLMHN, only 6 sherds from the 1956 collection were retained following analysis; the remainder was apparently discarded.

³ Those on file at the FLMHN are grit-tempered Ocmulgee Cordmarked.

Additional Spanish Mission structures were identified that included one interpreted as a convent; several cooking and/or trash pits were also excavated (Jones and Tesar 2001).
Table 2. Sherds Collected from Mt. Royal by the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research (Jones and Tesar 2001).

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<td>Grit-Tempered Wares</td>
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<sup>1</sup> St. Johns other includes brushed, moss/grass impressed, complicated stamped, fabric-pressed, mat-pressed, colonoware, and cob marked.

Mt. Royal, ca. A.D. 900-1300

The present study is interested in the village and mound complex at Mt. Royal that was coeval with the Mill Cove Complex to the north. Winnowing such information from the above data is difficult for several reasons. First, the sandy nature of the site combined with the fact that it was under periods of cultivation over the past 200 years has greatly disturbed the uppermost strata. Second, St. Johns Plain pottery was produced for two millennia (ca. 500 B.C. - A.D.
1500+), so differentiating St. Johns I from St. Johns II contexts in the absence of stratigraphy is difficult. Third, field methodologies employed over the years have varied in precision and consistency, particularly those of C.B. Moore. In addition, the most recent and systematic undertakings have focused on the site’s Spanish Mission component. But all is not lost. In fact, valuable insights on the site’s early St. Johns II component still can be gleaned from the data on hand.

**Sand Burial Mound**

Moore (1894a:16-35, 1894b:130-146) recovered from Mt. Royal many of the same kinds of exotic artifacts that he took from the Shields and Grant mounds, including embossed pieces of sheet copper and polished ground stone celts of various sizes and shapes. Based on the presence of such exotica, the Mt. Royal mound has long been attributed to the Mississippian period of southeastern U.S. native history (e.g., Goggin 1952:54; Griffin 1952:331; Waring 1948:154; Waring and Holder 1945; Williams and Goggin 1956:48). Prior to the widespread application of radiocarbon dating, Goggin (1952:54) temporally tied the mound to the St. Johns IIb or Middle Mississippian period, which at the time was dated to ca. A.D. 1400-1500. He placed Mt. Royal later in time than the Grant and Shields mounds, which he assigned to the St. Johns Ia period (ca. A.D. 1100-1400). Four decades later, Milanich (1994:269) assigned Mt. Royal and Shields Mound to the St. Johns Iib period, with a revised date range of A.D. 1050-1530. However, he attributed the “heyday” of Mt. Royal to the period A.D. 1050-1300, based on the types and styles of mound artifacts and their accepted dates elsewhere in the Southeast (Milanich 1999:11).

What evidence does Milanich rely on to pinpoint the heyday of Mt. Royal mound construction and use? First, the pottery depicted by Moore consists of plain wares, two incised pots, two zone impressed vessels, and a check stamped bowl. Although Moore failed to identify the temper or texture of any of these vessels, their general form along with mode of decoration fall within the accepted range for St. Johns II pottery (A.D. 750-1500+). In fact, one of the large rim sherds appears to represent Little Manatee Shell Stamped (Moore 1894a:Plate VII:2), which is associated with A.D. 900-1250 contexts in northeastern Florida. The absence of any European items suggests that the mound dates to the pre-Columbian phase of the St. Johns II period.

Next, some lithic materials can be used to date the mound. The polished stone celts recovered by Moore conform to two general varieties: petaloid and elongate. The former type tends to have broad, slightly converging bits and narrow rounded or blunt polls; these are what Moore referred to as “hatchets.” He reported that many of the hatchets had edge damage, indicating use, but not necessarily by St. Johns II groups. Interior Mississippian peoples may have exchanged exhausted stone celts to groups who lacked access to the hard stone, but were willing to acquire the material in any condition. Unfortunately, this celt style, found on numerous Woodland and Mississippian period sites throughout the Southeast, is not temporally sensitive.

The second type of celt is elongate, which consists of those with very long and slender bodies and others with flared bits wider than the celt body. Moore referred to the former as “chisels” and the latter as “spade-shaped” implements. Brown (1996:477-478) considers both the unmodified elongate or chisel form and the modified or spatulate variety to represent temporally-sensitive artifacts. Because these objects are most often found in burial contexts throughout the Mississippian period Southeast and Midwest, they are frequently considered sociotechnic or nonfunctional ceremonial implements denoting a person or position of authority or leadership (Brown 1976:126; Brown et al. 1990:264; Pauketat 1983).

In its classic form, a long-stemmed spatulate celt has a broad round bit with side notching, distinctive bars, and a slender, elongated and slightly tapering poll or stem. Two of the Mt. Royal specimens match this description, whereas the third has a much shorter and wider poll, with parallel sides (Moore 1894a:23). Long-stemmed spatulate celts are thought to have had a limited period of production and hence are a “possible time-marker” (Pauketat 1983). Such celts have been found at far-flung Mississippian mound centers such as Cahokia (Illinois), Spiro (Oklahoma), and Macon Plateau (Georgia) to name a few. Admittedly, not many burial pit or specific mound contexts containing spatulate celts have been directly dated via chronometric dating. The “Premound Precinct Complex Stage” at the Cemochocobee site on the Chattahoochee River in Georgia, which contained a burial interred with a long-stemmed spatulate celt, was radiocarbon dated to A.D. 930+65 (Schnell et al. 1981:37-39, 249). Two burials from Mound C at the George C. Davis site in eastern Texas each contained a spatulate celt and were one-sigma radiocarbon dated to cal A.D. 630-850 and A.D. 1100-1200, respectively (Story 1981; Story and Valastro 1977:86). Taken together these would suggest a Late Woodland-Early Mississippian timeframe, ca. A.D. 800-1200.

While providing a start, by no means do these three radiocarbon assays from two sites solidly date spatulate celts. Both Pauketat and Brown have attempted to date the celts indirectly using a cross-dating approach. Pauketat assigns them to the A.D. 1100-1350-period, but notes that they may be earlier in the South Appalachian region. Brown (1996:161-162; personal communication, 2001), on the other hand, drawing heavily on his work at Spiro, assigns them to ca. A.D. 1050-1250. Moore’s excavation at Shields Mound yielded similar-looking spatulate celts and recent excavations there indicate that the village area dates to A.D. 900-1250 (Ashley 2005a). Many also would place Macon Plateau in Georgia, which also yielded a similar-looking spatulate celt, within this same Early Mississippian time frame.

Another temporally diagnostic lithic artifact from the mound is a small, tri-notched triangular point that strongly resembles a Cahokia Side Notched (see Moore 1894a:21), an observation first made by Williams and Goggin (1956:50) nearly 50 years ago. This uniquely-shaped point dates to between A.D. 900 and 1150 (Justice 1987:233). A cache of hundreds of projectile points, including a collection of Cahokia
tri-notched points, was recovered from a context in Mound 72 at Cahokia dated to A.D. 1000-1100 (Fowler 1991:14). Recently, Fowler et al. (1999) have suggested that the mortuary event that involved the interment of the stone points occurred “in the earlier half of the period...and even in a decade or two of that period.”

Finally, the copper objects from Mt. Royal “leave no doubt that the mound dates from the Mississippian period,” although embossed copper plates also are found in some Middle Woodland period mounds in the Southeast and Midwest (Mitchem 1999:24). It has been suggested elsewhere that the square to rectangular plates with a central embossed node at Mt. Royal are similar to the copper headdress plate from the Cummings-McCarthy site in west-central Illinois, dated to ca. A.D. 900-1000 ( Sampson and Esarey 1993:463). Although unembossed or simply embossed copper plates could have been produced any time throughout the Mississippian period, the more elaborately designed repoussé plates arguably date to middle to late Mississippian times. According to Brown (personal communication, 2001; Brown and Kelly 2000), the more spectacular repoussé copper plates from Mt. Royal contain elements of the classic Braden art style that may have arisen at Cahokia, sometime after A.D. 1200, and very likely within the A.D. 1250-1350 time range. Taken together, the above data place Mt. Royal in the time slot, ca. A.D. 900-1300, corroborating Milanich’s estimate and rendering it contemporaneous with the Shields and Grant mounds.

**Village Area**

Turning our attention now to the village at Mt. Royal, what can be said about its occupational history? Jones’ excavations, combined with the earlier surface collections made by Goggins, clearly demonstrate that the site’s most salient period of occupation was during St. Johns II times, before and after European contact. The recovery of Orange pottery indicates a Late Archaic component, and the presence of Deptford, Pasco, and Swift Creek wares marks the existence of a Woodland or St. Johns I component. It is difficult, however, to judge accurately how extensive and intensive St. Johns I (500 B.C. - A.D. 750) habitations were at Mt. Royal, since St. Johns Plain, the hallmark ware of the period, was commonly produced during the later St. Johns II period as well.

In general, check stamped pottery comprises anywhere from 50 to 70 percent of the types in a St. Johns II assemblage on sites in the St. Johns region. Using this as a rough guide, we can then assume that some of the chalky plainwares in the village area are attributable to the St. Johns I period, since St. Johns Plain outnumbers St. Johns Check Stamped. However, a distinct St. Johns I component or activity area was not detected by Jones, who reports that, based on shovel test results, “the distribution of...St. Johns Check Stamped sherds replicates that of plain [St. Johns] sherds” (Jones and Tesar 2001:95).

In an attempt to delineate the extent of the site’s St. Johns II component, we can trace the horizontal dispersal of chalky check-stamped pottery. Jones’ 1983 field season recovered St. Johns Check Stamped sherds from loci immediately south and southeast of the mound. These same wares covered the entire sampling tract southwest of the mound during the 1994 and 1995 season. All of Jones’ investigations show that St. Johns II pottery types virtually blanketed the entire area between the river and mound, some 16 ha. It should be pointed out that an approximately 60-m wide strip fronting the river was not tested due to the presence of houses. This linear strip contains shell middens that have not been systematically investigated and dated, but check-stamped sherds have been found in this area by landowners (Richard Hamrick, personal communication 2003). Finally, no sampling to date has been performed in areas to the east, west, and north of the mound, so the occupational history of these locations is unknown. However, a decline in topography combined with the fact that no landowners have reported finding artifacts in the lower areas enables us to propose a somewhat confident southeastern site boundary.

While check stamped pottery was dispersed over a large area, Jones and Tesar (2001) noted that the distribution was variable and punctuated by a series of high frequency concentrations. Because check stamped pottery was made over a lengthy period of time (A.D. 750-1500+), we cannot conclude that this distribution directly corresponds to the size of the village coeval with the mound. In fact, the dominance of St. Johns pottery in mission-period features clearly indicates the seventeenth-century production of St. Johns pottery by local natives. The appearance of San Marcos (Altamaha) pottery at Mt. Royal denotes the arrival of Indians from missions on the Georgia coast and northeastern Florida, such as the Yamassee, who, according to Spanish documents, reoccupied San Antonio de Anacaone in the late 1600s (Jones and Tesar 2001:9-10).

By focusing on the distribution of certain minority wares suspected to have been produced only during the period A.D. 900-1250, we can gain some knowledge of the size and location of the village contemporaneous with the mound. I have examined some of the grit-tempered cordmarked pottery from both the Jones and Goggins (FLMNH) collections, and argue that they are virtually identical to the Ocmulgee series wares found in northeastern Florida. In addition, several rims with folds or appliquéd strips were identified, which is a distinguishing characteristic of Ocmulgee series pottery of southern-central Georgia (Snow 1977; Stephenson 1990). To better date this ware at Mt. Royal, soil from a St. Johns Check Stamped sherd—recovered from the same context as cordmarked sherds—was submitted for AMS dating (none of the cordmarked sherds we had access to contained enough soil for dating). The resultant assay yielded a one-sigma calibrated date range of A.D. 1010-1050 and a 2-sigma range of A.D. 990-1160, a date precisely contemporaneous with midden deposits at both the Grant and Shields mounds. Also dating to the A.D. 900-1250 era are Little Manatee Zone Stamped and Shell Stamped, which, at Mt. Royal, had the same distributional pattern as the cordmarked wares, but occurred in far fewer numbers.

In terms of their horizontal spread, none of these minority
wares was found near or east of the mound, but were broadly scattered over the entire tract surveyed in 1994, an area approximately 240 m (N-S) by 200 m (E-W) or 5 ha (Jones and Tesar 2001:99). These spatial dimensions, however, omit the 60-m wide strip fronting the river, since it is presently unclear whether the landowners have found cordmarked or Little Manatee series sherds in this location. Thus, the village dating to ca. A.D. 900-1300 appears to have been situated about 100 m slightly southwest of the mound, and possibly extending south to the river (Figure 6). It is unfortunate that this same location also housed the Spanish mission village. This latter occupation, coupled with extensive plowing and loose sandy soil conditions, adversely affected the stratigraphic integrity of the site, precluding the recognition of temporally distinct cultural strata. In areas of the site, intact features and burned structural remains did survive the ravages of time, but most features and all the buildings date to the mission period. The few features that definitively dated to the pre-contact St. Johns II period were simple refuse pits containing sherds, some freshwater shells, and occasional charred flakes.

St. Johns series pottery was the dominant ware on site, and, except for grit-tempered, cordmarked ceramics, only a small amount of nonlocal, Early Mississippian period pottery was recovered. A few Sarasota Incised, Weeden Island, and Alachua series sherds may fit within this temporal slot, as might several sherds described as "Safety Harbor-like" and "Fort Walton-like." Based on paste, the latter "appear to represent both trade ware and locally made copies" (Jones and Tesar 2001:258). A "bird-tail rim lug with micaceous sand-tempered" also was considered an exchange ware (Jones and Tesar 2001:255). An unusual vessel fragment is a gritty body sherd that retains a portion of a "strap handle" (Jones and Tesar 2001:263; Tesar personal communication, 2002). Though it was typed as cordmarked, it is mostly plain with a series of thick, widely-spaced and indistinct impressions along one edge of the handle. Some mission-period colonowares, loop or strap handled vessels are rare for northeastern and northern Florida, though they are found on some Mississippian-period wares, such as Bibb Plain from the Maco Plateau vicinity. While Macon Plateau may not be the ultimate source for this vessel, it appears to be an imported ware. Unfortunately, the sherd, along with the entire collection made by Jones, has been returned to the landowner, at his request, and is currently unavailable for study.

Besides pottery, additional non-ceramic artifacts were recovered from the village area (Jones and Tesar 2001). Other than obvious items of European manufacture, assigning nonceramic artifacts to specific cultural periods is a dubious endeavor. This is particularly true for the many lithic flakes and expedient tools, as well as the generic-looking stone, bone, and shell tools. Marine shell, mostly whelk (Busycon spp.) and some conch (Strombus spp.), was used to manufacture tools and ornaments. Items of shell from Mt. Royal include cutting edge tools, gouges, beads, pins, pendant, plummetts, and earplugs (Tesar 2001:18-20). Though these cannot be linked specifically to the period A.D. 900-1250, the recovery of similar items along with over 1300 whelk shells from the Mt. Royal mound makes it a strong possibility. The Early Mississippian inhabitants of Mt. Royal undeniably had access to the coast, either via travel or exchange. Tesar (2001:18) noted that the Atlantic coast is closer to Mt. Royal than the nearest chert quarry locale, located to the west in the Ocala Uplift.

Jones' excavations produced numerous projectile points, collectively spanning Archaic, Woodland (St. Johns I), and Mississippian (St. Johns II) times. Those of interest to the present investigation include Pinellas and Tampa varieties, but production dates for these cover the entire St. Johns II period (A.D. 750-1500+). Tesar (2001:21) also identified what he considered to be a St. Johns II microlith assemblage at Mt. Royal that differed from the Late Archaic-Early Woodland microliths found on site. The former included "Cahokia-like and related microliths of the late Woodland to Early Mississippian period" (Jones and Tesar 2001:161). These microlithic tools may have been used in the production of shell beads, which were a commonly burial accompaniment in the mound at Mt. Royal. Additionally, the tools could have been used to fabricate and engrave shell gorgets and other artifacts. Though most of the lithic artifacts are only of broad temporal assistance, it appears likely that a significant portion of the assemblage dates to the Early Mississippian period.

An interesting practice noted by Jones and Tesar (2001:159, 163, 168), but one that cannot be tied specifically to A.D. 900-1250, is the apparent scavenging and reworking of Archaic period bifaces by later St. Johns site inhabitants. The authors argued that lithic evidence pointed to the existence of a Middle Archaic component at the site (Jones and Tesar 2001:157). However, we must keep in mind that Jones/E excavation infrequently extended below 70 cm, meaning that potentially deeper and older cultural strata, if present, were rarely tapped. If the site does contain a Middle Archaic component than the site's St. Johns II occupants undoubtedly took advantage of lithic material already present on site. But, they very well may also have scavenged lithic material, flakes as well as points, from other nearby Archaic sites, mitigating the need to go to distant outcrops to secure stone. The collecting/heirlooming and/or reuse of Archaic period stone artifacts by St. Johns II peoples also has been documented to the north at the Shields site (Bland 2001).

Unfortunately, limited subsistence evidence has been uncovered at Mt. Royal. However, to date, no evidence for maize production or consumption has been recovered from precolumbian St. Johns II contexts, although charred cob fragments were reclaimed from later Spanish mission contexts at Mt. Royal (Jones and Tesar 2001).

St. Johns II Sites in the Vicinity of Mt. Royal

Apart from Mt. Royal, little serious archaeological attention has been given to the middle St. Johns River region, north of Lake George. Florida site file information reveals a cluster of St. Johns I and II sites between the northern fringes of Lake George on the south and its confluence with Dunns Creek on the north, a distance of roughly 26 km (Mill 1998:81-84;
Figure 6. Mt. Royal site boundaries.
Sassaman et al. 2000:107-111). Save for sand mounds excavated by Moore, few sites have been subjected to subsurface testing. At best, small surface collections have been made, but no site has produced more than 10 St. Johns Check Stamped sherds. Although sampling of these sites has been limited, few give the impression of being villages, and most appear to represent the byproduct of a range of short-term activities.

With regard to sand mounds, Moore (1894a, 1894b) excavated eight within this area, including Mt. Royal. The Norwalk Mound (8PU38), situated across the river from Mt. Royal, was a St. Johns I construction, whereas his testing of the "Small Mound near Mt. Royal" (8PU36) failed to produce any human remains or artifacts other than two partial stone projectile points (Moore 1894a:35). Near the confluence of the Oklawaha and St. Johns rivers, Moore dug the Bear Island Mound (8PU48), but met with negative results. The closest known St. Johns II mounds north of Mt. Royal are the Davenport Mound (8PU50), 16 km away along the Oklawaha River, west of its confluence with the St. Johns River; the Murphy Island Mounds (8PU20-21) along the St. Johns River near its confluence with Dunns Creek, about 26 km away; and the Dunns Creek Mound (8PU14), 5 km east of Murphy Island along Dunns Creek (Figure 7).

Wyman (1875:40) and LeBaron (1884:773) also mention several freshwater shell heaps (8PU34, 39-43, 46-47) and two mounds (8PU44-45). Antonio Waring (1944 in Goggin 1952:88) also appears to have visited the Norwalk Mound and identified an adjacent midden (8PU37). At present, it is difficult to assign these sites to specific time periods because of the lack of reported site information. According to the Florida Master Site File (as of January 2004), no archaeological surveys have been performed on the east side of the river in the Mt. Royal vicinity. On the west side, however, several cultural resource surveys, consisting exclusively of surface reconnaissance, have been conducted on U.S. Forestry Service timberlands.

South of Mt. Royal, another area of interest is Drayton Island at the northern end of Lake George in the river channel. After visiting Mt. Royal, William Bartram moved south along the river and soon encountered Drayton Island, where he exclaimed that:

[it] appears, from obvious vestiges, one of the chosen residence of an Indian prince...commanding a comprehensive and charming prospect of the waters, islands, east and west shores of the lake, the capes, the bay and Mount Royal...On the site of this ancient town, stands a very pompous Indian mount, or conical pyramid of earth, from which runs in a straight line a grand avenue or Indian highway terminating at the verge of a large green level savanna. This island appears to have been well inhabited, as is very evident, from the quantities of fragments of Indian earthenware, bones of animals and other remains, particularly in the shelly heights and ridges all over the island. [Bartram 1928:101-102]

Beasley (1995) equates the island with the location of the sixteenth-century Timucua village of Edelano, described by the French as having "an avenue about three hundred paces long and fifteen wide" (Bennett 1975:115; Lawson 1992:94). Based on these descriptions, the layout of the site on Drayton Island sounds remarkably similar to that of Mt. Royal; that is, each contained a large sand mound with a causeway that led to either a pond or wetland. Beasley (1995) observed an anomalous circle, approximately 364 m in diameter, on various aerial photographs of Drayton Island that he believes was associated with Edelano. A cursory walk-over of the island failed to discern the circle, although areas of intermixed shell and sand were observed. The site appears to have been "completely destroyed" by development activities during the early twentieth century, but the circle remains visible on aerial photographs as a distinctive vegetative growth pattern (Beasley 1995:1). However, Beasley did identify "two parallel ridges," 15 to 30-cm high, that he contends are the remains of the causeway described by Bartram and the sixteenth-century French Huguenot René Laudonnéire.

Although no subsurface testing was conducted, small amounts of St. Johns Plain and Check Stamped pottery were surface collected (Beasley 1995:4). Other than these finds and small artifact collections made at sites 8PU43, 8PU774, and 8PU745, little is known about the pre-Columbian occupation of Drayton Island. Presently, there is no information on what types of artifacts the sand mound may have contained.

If Edelano was indeed on Drayton Island as some suspect (Beasley 1995; Milanich 1999:12), then a late precolumbian village must have existed there. The presence of St. Johns Check Stamped pottery provides evidence for at least some activity on the island during the St. Johns II period. However, it is unclear as to whether Edelano or any St. Johns II site was located on the island during Early Mississippian times and coeval with the heyday of Mt. Royal. The archaeological site of Mt. Royal has been considered the location of the sixteenth-century Timucua village of Encape or Enecue (Bennett 1975; Lawson 1992), since both archaeological and documentary evidence exist linking the Mt. Royal site and the early seventeenth-century mission-period village of San Antonio de Anacapi. Thus, it is logical to assume that continuity in village name represents continuity in geographical space.

If there is spatial continuity between the Early Mississippian-period mound center of Mt. Royal, the contact-era village of Encape, and the mission-period village of San Antonio de Anacapi, then the site would have been occupied continuously for over 700 years. While this is a possibility, it seems to represent a long time for a village to be in the exact same place, considering local resource demands and carrying capacity (e.g., food, wood, etc.). I wonder if perhaps Mt. Royal was abandoned around A.D. 1300, with the seat of local power shifting (or people actually moving) to Drayton Island. If true, this would mean that Edelano was on Drayton Island in the 1560s and that the coeval village of Enecue was farther down river (north), possibly on Murphy Island. However, by Spanish mission times (late 1590s and early 1600s), the social geography had changed, as was the case farther down river in the Utina and Saturiwa districts (Worth 1998), and Enecue had been relocated to Mt. Royal (then known to the Spanish as
San Antonio de Anacape) and Edelano had been abandoned. More archaeological and documentary evidence are needed to test this hypothetical scenario.

In sum, though admittedly biased due to the paucity of work in the area, extant settlement pattern data suggest that St. Johns II midden-burial mound sites (villages) were few, and those that existed north of Mt. Royal occurred near the confluence of the St. Johns River and its major tributaries. However, all these sites paled in comparison to Mt. Royal. To the south, a large St. Johns II site existed on Drayton Island at
the north end of Lake George, 6.4 km from Mt. Royal, but it is presently unclear as to whether it was coeval with or later than Mt. Royal. Thus, there is little doubt that Mt. Royal served as both the population and ritual center along the middle St. Johns River during the period A.D. 900-1300.

Discussion

Mt. Royal is located some 100 km upriver from (south of) the Mill Cove Complex located near the mouth of the St. Johns River (Figure 8). Although we lack precise temporal clarity, some time during the early St. Johns II period (ca. A.D. 750-1000), Mt. Royal became the major settlement and mound center in the vicinity of Lake George. While Mt. Royal was definitely inhabited during some of the St. Johns I period, it was seemingly a small site lacking a mound. The dominant Woodland period mortuary and exchange center along this stretch of the St. Johns River was apparently on Murphy Island to the north.

Many of the same types of exotic taken from the Shields and Grant mounds were discovered at Mt. Royal (Moore 1894a:16-35; 1894b:130-146). In addition to shark teeth, sheets of mica, and bits of galena, stone spatulate celts were found that were similar to those from the Shields and Mitchell mounds in northeastern Florida as well as mainstream Mississippian centers like Macon Plateau. As mentioned, a copper plate embossed with a forked eye and blade design almost perfectly matches one from Spiro in Oklahoma, and a small triangular point looks very much like a Cahokia Side Notched point (Williams and Goggin 1956:50). Moore's (1894a:20) recovery of 1307 whelk (Busycon) shells from the main excavation trench, considerable numbers of discoidal shell beads, and fewer columnella beads suggests that Mt. Royal inhabitants had access to the coast and its resources, either via travel or exchange. Jones also recovered marine shell tools, ornaments, and production debris along with microlithic tools from village contexts (Tesar 2001:18-20).

Besides exotic artifacts, Mt. Royal shares several other things in common with the Mill Cove Complex mounds that intimate a cultural connection between them. At both settlements, large mounds served as corporate burial facilities where large numbers of individuals were interred; there is no evidence for non-mound village burials. With respect to mound burials, Moore (1894a:21) noted "though objects of stone [e.g., celts, gorgets, points, etc.] were sometimes deposited near the dead, more frequently no traces of burials were apparent with them, and...objects seem to have been deposited in a general way to do honor to the dead as a whole."

Moore encountered similar results at Shields and Grant mounds. Copper artifacts were found both with and without human bones at Mt. Royal, but in the majority of instances where human remains were identified, only teeth were present. Moore (1894a:31) acknowledged that this may have been due to skeletal decay, but alluded to the possibility that the human teeth were intentionally placed "unaccompanied by other remains, with objects of copper." Such deposits also could possibly represent "scrape" collected during the cleaning or sweeping of channel facility cleaning (cf. Milanich 1994:260).

Additionally, the inhabitants of Mt. Royal and the Mill Cove Complex possessed a similar pottery technology, predicated on the production of chalky St. Johns pottery with the same range of surface decorations. Moreover, nonlocal Ocmulgee III Cordmarked sherdS have been recovered within the Mt. Royal village. In fact, Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis has revealed that two grit-tempered cordmarked sherds from Mt. Royal match the chemical composition profile of vessels from southern-central Georgia, highlighting connections between Ocmulgee peoples and St. Johns II people at Mt. Royal (Ashley 2003:121). While northeastern Florida groups could have facilitated ties, Mt. Royal traders may have dealt directly with hinterland Georgia groups, whereby goods exited the Altamaha River and moved south along the precursor of the historic Alachua Trail (Vanderhill 1977), and then east to St. Johns River and on to Mt. Royal (see Figure 8). Soot from a St. Johns sherd in association with cordmarked pottery yielded a one-sigma calibrated AMS date of A.D. 1010-1050 (and a 2-sigma date of A.D. 990-1160), indicating precise contemporaneity among the three mounds and Ocmulgee peoples.

Moore (1894a, 1894b, 1895) also reported that the three mounds had causeway approaches, although the precise layout of each differed. Shields and Mt. Royal each had a long "avenue" that joined the mound to a distant pond presumed to represent a borrow pit from which mound fill was taken. Those at Grant Mound were less distinct, and appeared as two low, parallel ridges that extended off the mound for a short distance before eventually grading into ground level (Moore 1895:473). In addition to these mounds, the St. Johns II sand tumuli at the south end of Murphy Island and at the Thursby Mound appear to have been associated with low earthen causeways (Moore 1894a). Late-sixteenth century French accounts indicate the historic Timucua villages of Outina and Edelano along the St. Johns River had causeways (Milanich 1994:270, 1999:12). Such approaches may have been emblematic of St. Johns II monumental earthworks throughout the river valley.

Taken together this information suggests Early Mississippian-period links, albeit indirect, between Mt. Royal, Mill Cove Complex, Macon Plateau, Spiro, and perhaps even Cahokia (Figure 9), as previously noted by Williams and Goggin (1956:49-50). A direct connection between Mt. Royal and Spiro is probably an illusion, and it is more likely that the two centers received exotic materials from the same point of origin, most likely Cahokia. While the occupants of Mt. Royal were unquestionably involved in some of the same exchange networks as northeastern Florida communities, they also maintained connections with Florida Gulf coast populations. Jones’ excavations within the Mt. Royal village area yielded several Safety Harbor sherds and others possibly from areas to the southwest and northwest (Jones and Tesar 2001).

Mt. Royal’s strategic location along the St. Johns River, immediately north of Lake George and equidistance from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, has been summoned by several researchers as a factor contributing to its rise during the Early Mississippian period (Milanich 1999:10-11;
Figure 8. Location of Mt. Royal and other sites.

1996:234-235; Phillips and Brown 1978:207-208; Payne and Scarry 1998:46, 47). The tremendous quantity of whelk shells excavated from the mound by Moore implicates Mt. Royal in the exchange of Busycon shells. In fact, the large number and relatively unworked condition of whelks in the mound suggests that caches were placed there for storage. Such a scenario might be expected if Mt. Royal was involved in a "redistributiuional mode of exchange" that included, yet not exclusive to, whelk shell (Refrew 1977:77-79). Phillips and Brown (1978:207) considered Mt. Royal "a center of dispersal in the marine shell trade," and further speculated that some of its inhabitants were "entrepreneurs in the shell trade." Because Mt. Royal is not located along the coast, the site may have served as a center from which marine shells and other
resources, procured from either southern Florida or adjacent Atlantic and Gulf coasts, were accumulated and then funneled into the interior Southeast. Earlier generations of St. Johns peoples, particularly those living on Murphy Island, also may have benefitted from the demand for shell during Middle Woodland (St. Johns I) times.

Mitchem (1996:233-234) specifically infers a relationship between Mt. Royal and both Tatham Mound and the Old Okahumpka site to the southwest, since these three represent the southernmost sites in Florida with copper artifacts embossed with Mississippian iconography (see Figure 8). In southern Florida, pre-Columbian artifacts of copper are limited to ear spools (Widmer 1989:169). Mitchem (1996:234) has proposed a “route of shipment” that links Safety Harbor people to Mt. Royal to Lake Jackson in the Florida panhandle. However, Mt. Royal appears to have been in decline (or possibly even abandoned) before the Lake Jackson chiefdom reached its zenith. Nevertheless, connections with northwestern Florida may have allowed Mt. Royal to endure longer than the Mill Cove Complex; the latter may have sustained a tremendous blow with the fall of Macon Plateau and the movement of Ocmulgee peoples out of their homeland (Ashley 2002, 2003). But for yet unknown reasons, Mt. Royal’s active participation in Mississippian exchange appears to have ended around A.D. 1300, at which time the site may have been abandoned for a century or more.
With respect to political organization, Mt. Royal is often viewed as a chiefdom predicated on a prestige goods economy, based on the presence of some burials with exotic grave goods (Milanich 1994:269, 1999:10-11; Phillips and Brown 1978:207-208). Like Shields and Grant, Mt. Royal was clearly an accretionary and communal mortuary construction that was the final resting place for a large number of individuals, not only elites. I am struck by the fact that despite extensive surface reconnaissance in exposed-surface orange groves and excavation of the village area, no minerals, metals, or stone other than chert and a single greenstone celts fragment have been recovered (Tesar and Jones 2001). While marine shell is frequently recovered from St. Johns II middens and mounds, it appears that distant exotica were consumed communally in mortuary contexts, as was the case in northeastern Florida (Ashley 2002, 2003). I am not making the claim that there was not inequality nor that elites did not exist at Mt. Royal. Rather I believe the Mt. Royal political economy can be characterized as largely corporate or communal.

Conclusion

Mt. Royal was clearly the recipient of exotica from distant areas and linked to the Early Mississippian world (ca. A.D. 900-1300), likely as suppliers of whelk shell and other Florida resources. Many researchers have implicated its strategic location immediately north of Lake George, as a major factor in its rise to prominence as an exchange center (Milanich 1999:10-11; Mitchem 1996:234; Phillips and Brown 1978:207). While there is little doubt that involvement in long-distance exchange had a pronounced effect on the development of Mt. Royal during Early Mississippian times, we must refrain from overemphasizing the sole role of exotica in explaining its formation, function, and decline. Future research must also strongly consider local and regional processes that played a pivotal role in Mt. Royal’s development and decline or reorganization. While Mt. Royal appears to have been either abandoned or down-sized around A.D. 1300, it re-emerged as a Spanish mission village (San Antonio de Anacape) in the late 1590s.

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