

## MORTUARY BEHAVIOR ALONG THE LOWER ST. JOHNS: AN OVERVIEW

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Over the years northeast Florida has been the focus of numerous mortuary excavations. In this paper we attempt to synthesize currently available data on past burial excavations in order to gain insight into the social geography and mortuary behavior of prehistoric populations in northeast Florida. Specifically, we concentrate on those mortuary sites located along the lower reaches of the St. Johns River, in and around the city of Jacksonville (see Figure 1). A great number of mortuary excavations occurred in this area beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, little attention was given to scientific excavation of most mortuary mounds by past investigators. As a consequence, the potential for contemporary analysis of these excavations is limited; particularly in terms of mound construction processes and mortuary behavior associated with this cultural area. Although the intent of this paper is not to belabor the methodological deficiencies of past mound excavations, the reader should be informed that such biases do exist.

As mentioned above, there are several problems with this research. First is the lack of controlled excavations at local mound sites. While several nineteenth-century scientists and travellers have provided us with narrative accounts on their excavations in sand burial mounds and shell middens, these investigations lacked total stratigraphic and horizontal control (Wyman 1868, 1875; Mitchell 1875; Mayberry 1878; Douglass 1885; Moore 1894, 1895, 1896). C.B. Moore was the most conscientious and prolific of the early excavators, but even he was not as specific in detailing the location, position and treatment of human skeletal remains as we would like. More scholarly mound excavations have taken place within the last 40 years (Sears 1957, 1959; Jordan et al. 1963; Wilson 1965; Hemmings and Deagan 1973); however, only the latter two involved formal field screening procedures. In addition, two burial mounds (8DU68 and 8DU110) were excavated by local amateurs, both of which have come under recent study (Ashley, this volume; Lafond and Ashley, this issue).

Beyond problems in field methodology, several other shortcomings prevail. There is the virtual absence of any bioarchaeological analysis that would allow for an understanding of regional and local demographics, including such basic information as sex and age profiles for burial populations. Another problem is the lack of access to much of the original excavated material. Most artifacts have been

removed from the region, making relocation and reanalysis of some material difficult and expensive. Thus, we attempt here a broad and preliminary outline of mortuary behavior, knowing that our interpretations are cast with the difficulty of some 150 years of uneven excavations in the area.

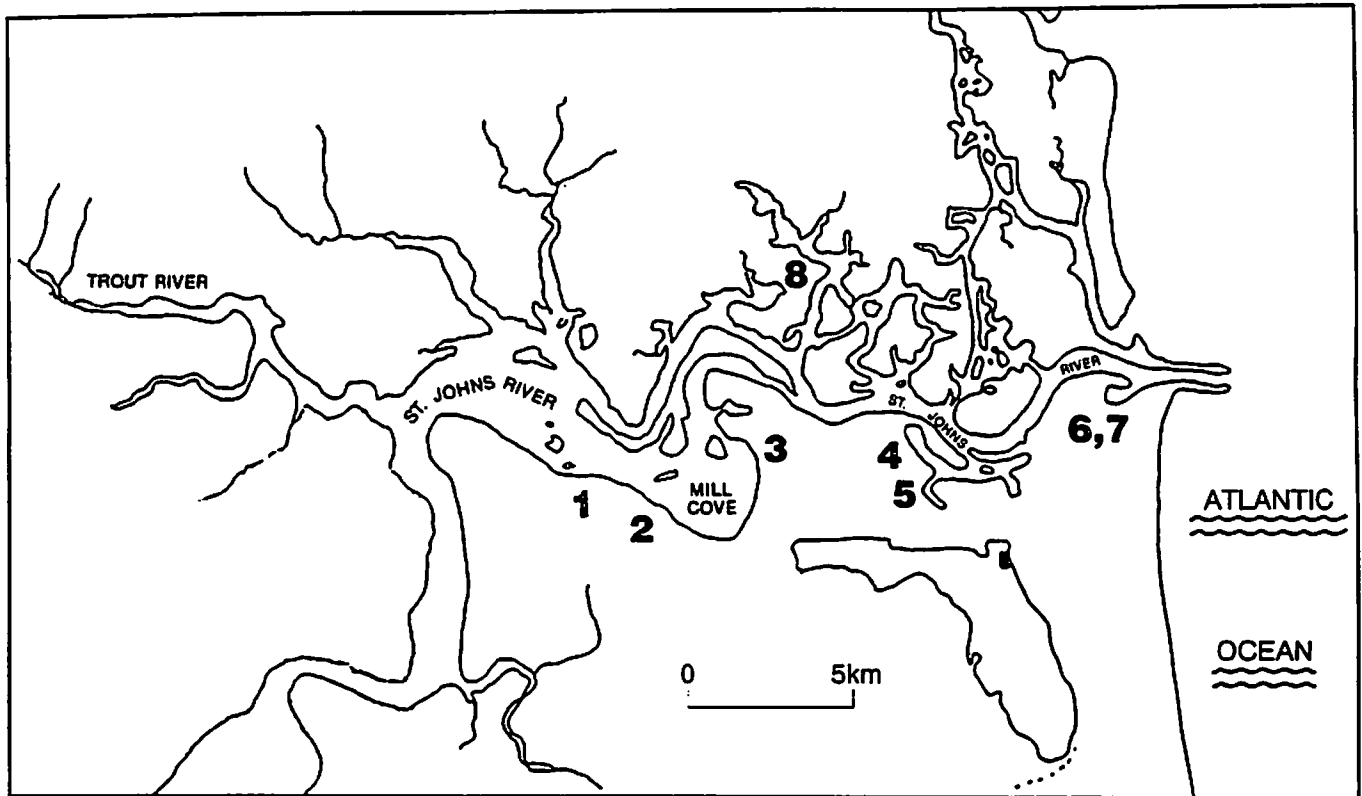
### Archaic Period (8000-500 B.C.)

In most broad overviews on Southeast prehistory it is the succeeding Woodland period that is marked by the construction of burial mounds and other types of formal cemeteries (B. Smith 1986; Steponaitis 1986). In fact, the tradition of constructing mounds for the disposal of the dead in northeast Florida is first ascribed to the St. Johns I period, beginning about 500 B.C. (Goggin 1952; Milanich and Fairbanks 1980). At present there is a lack of information regarding Archaic mortuary practices in northeast Florida. However, a growing body of evidence from sites along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of Florida (Beriault et al. 1981; Doran and Dickel 1988; Jones 1981; Russo 1991a; Wharton et al. 1981) suggests that formal cemeteries were also an Archaic period phenomenon.

Recent work at the Tomoka Mounds and Midden site (8VO81) in the central St. Johns region by Piatek (1992) suggests that preceramic Atlantic coastal peoples were constructing ritual burial mounds as early as the Middle Archaic, ca. 4000-2000 B.C. That formalized cemetery areas, whether mounded or not, were in use during the Archaic seems very plausible, if not axiomatic, though evidence of such mortuary activity remains elusive within the local archaeological record at this time. Our lack of evidence for Archaic shell midden burials may be related to the loss of large middens at the mouth of the St. Johns for road fill during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g., Wyman 1875).

### Woodland Period (500 B.C.-A.D. 800)

In the lower St. Johns River area, the Woodland period involved a coastal way of life, which was well established along the Atlantic shoreline of northeast Florida by at least Middle Archaic times (Russo 1992). Ceramic technologies during the Woodland period witnessed a change from hand-molded, fiber-tempered clay pots to coiled ceramic



- |                            |                  |                         |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Grant Mound             | 4. Brown Mound   | 7. Mayport Midden Mound |
| 2. Shields Mound           | 5. Queen Mound   | 8. Dent Mound           |
| 3. McCormick-Goodman Mound | 6. Mayport Mound |                         |

*Not Pictured:* Tomoka Mounds & Midden Site, Walker Point Mound & Mount Royal Site)

*Figure 1. Mounds discussed in text.*

containers of sandy and/or chalky paste. The latter ware, known as St. Johns Plain, is considered the hallmark pottery of the Woodland period in the St. Johns heartland, but its dominance at sites near the river's mouth has not been demonstrated (Goggin 1952:47; Russo 1992:115). Mortuary behavior dating to this period in northeast Florida is manifest most conspicuously as low sand burial mounds. Evidence for local antecedents to burial mounds is lacking in the immediate area.

Based on our current knowledge of the distribution of Woodland period mortuary sites (Moore 1894, 1895, 1896), low sand burial mounds dating to the Woodland period were once found at numerous locations along the banks of the lower St. Johns River, particularly between present-day Jacksonville and the Atlantic Ocean. Goggin (1952:48) used this distributional data, as it applied to the entire St. Johns region, to infer a substantial population shift from the interior river valley to the coast during the Woodland (St. Johns I) period. He attributed this demographic shift to the emergence of a stable and resource-rich estuarine ecosystem. With current data indicating sustained Middle and Late Archaic settlement and exploitation of the Atlantic coast (Russo 1988, 1992; Ste. Claire 1990; Russo and Ste. Claire 1992; Bond 1992; Piatek 1992), however, the concentration of Woodland mounds along

the river's tidewater zone now seems to suggest a localized Woodland mortuary expression rather than evidence of population migrations to the coast. In fact, Russo (1991a, 1992) has argued that groups living along the fringes of the St. Johns culture area possessed traits, such as mound building, that differed from those in the heartland.

What mortuary characteristics help to define the local Woodland period? To date, human burials from unequivocal Woodland period contexts are confined exclusively to burial mounds, though nonmounded burial of the dead cannot be ruled out. Over 20 burial mounds along the lower St. Johns have been dated to the Woodland period on the basis of mound artifacts, with perhaps at least 15 other local earthworks also dating to this time (Goggin 1952:51; Ashley 1993:10-12). The mounded cemeteries that have been confidently assigned to the Woodland period are very similar in shape and dimension, ranging in height from 3 to 6 feet (ca. 1-2 meters). None of the Woodland mounds is commanding in terms of height or volume, or unique enough to suggest that any served as a major ceremonial/mortuary center beyond the local residential unit. Internally the earthworks are unassuming and distinct mound strata rarely have been recorded. Incontrovertible evidence of substructural mounds is lacking, although data from the Queen Mound suggest the

possible existence of a burned submound structure (see Lafond and Ashley, this issue).

Burial modes revealed in the mounds are varied and usually include some primary extended inhumations, but secondary bundle and isolated skull burials tend to always dominate (e.g., Ashley 1993; Ashley, this issue). In some instances, the disarticulated bones of several individuals were interred collectively as a mass burial. Milanich and Fairbanks (1980:160) inferred that such masses of bones were the result of preburial processing and storage involving the use of a charnel facility. Evidence in the form of intentionally broken or killed pots, artifact caches, and fire pits in the mounds suggests that ritual behavior was involved with the disposal of the dead (e.g., Ashley, this issue).

Grave goods are occasionally found in direct burial association, but it was seemingly more customary to place artifacts in mound contexts unrelated to specific burials, perhaps suggesting enhancement of corporate solidarity rather than the promotion of individual wealth. In those instances where individuals were interred in direct association with grave goods, the level of personal embellishment does not compare to the inferred "big man or big woman" burials that have been revealed at other Middle Woodland sites elsewhere in the Southeast and Midwest (e.g., Brose and Greber 1979; Mainfort 1986; Milanich et al. 1984). Based on the excavations of Moore (1894, 1895, 1896) and others in local burial mounds, there seems to be a commonality of Woodland period mortuary goods. In addition to pottery, a low but persistent incidence of extralocal mineral and rocks, such as galena, mica, copper, fossil bone, pebbles, and greenstone, was placed in these tumuli. These items, which archaeologically are restricted almost exclusively to mortuary contexts, were interred as both unmodified raw materials and finished products.

Pottery found in local mounds is overwhelmingly undecorated, but whether these wares were sand tempered or chalky paste is problematic since early mound excavators failed to provide such data. At those Woodland period mounds where qualitative and quantitative ceramic data do exist, the majority of mound pottery is sand-tempered plain (Wilson 1965; Lafond and Ashley, this volume; Ashley, this issue). Although plain pottery is more prevalent, minority wares bearing decorative designs, such as check stamped (Deptford), complicated stamped (Swift Creek), and punctate (Weeden Island), provide the best temporal information. Partitioning the various Woodland mounds into temporal phases has met with limited success in the past due to the paucity of systematic mound excavations; however, a basic sequence is suggested. The early part of the Woodland period was marked by Deptford Yent-related mounds (e.g., Queen Mound, 8DU110), which were followed by Swift Creek-related mounds (e.g., Dent Mound, 8DU68; Mayport Mound, 8DU96) (Ashley 1993). Presumably later mounds yielding Weeden Island ceramics are also suggested (Moore 1894, 1895, 1896).

Continuous use of mounded cemeteries is suggested, as evidenced by the recovery of temporally sequential pottery assemblages at Dent and Mayport mounds (Ashley 1993:16-17). Excavations in these mounds yielded mostly plain wares, but also early Swift Creek, late Swift Creek, and Weeden Island pottery. This suggests that the mounds grew gradually over a long period of time, presumably involving little expenditure of human energy during each burial episode. At least one suspected single construction event mound has been recorded locally. The Brown Mound, 8DU62, was a presumed Weeden Island-related construct demonstrating a patterned burial arrangement enclosed within a submound shell ring (Sears 1957:16-17, 1959). Unfortunately, the lack of diagnostic artifacts from unquestionable mound contexts and the absence of any radiocarbon dates precludes a definitive temporal assessment of the mound.

What does the distribution of numerous, small, probably contemporaneous mounds along the river's tidewater zone suggest? If we accept the supposition that local Woodland period inhabitants were year-round occupants of the tidewater/coastal zones, then we can speculate that the mounds were formal cemeteries used by distinct corporate groups, such as extended families or lineages, for successive generations. Furthermore, the mounds could have helped demarcate a group's right to certain land and/or resources (e.g., tidal marsh ecosystems, oyster beds), though this is purely speculation (Charles and Buikstra 1983). That the mounds are so alike in size and content suggests that similarly organized local residential units or kin groups possessed shared artifacts and mortuary beliefs.

Based on the data at hand, it seems that local Woodland groups resided in small settlements, subsisted primarily on estuarine food resources, buried their dead in continuous-use mounds, and maintained an egalitarian social structure. Local Woodland populations were also involved in a potentially far-reaching native exchange network that allowed them access to a variety of exotic artifacts and raw materials that originated elsewhere. It seems unlikely that these groups were direct participants in Midwest Hopewell interaction, but they were undeniably in contact with Gulf coast people to the west, who were actively involved in the broader pan-Eastern U.S. Hopewell Interaction Sphere (Seaman 1979). Interregional interaction between local populations and groups residing along the Atlantic coast of south Georgia has been confirmed on the basis of shared complicated stamped designs, and local contact between coeval Swift Creek-related mounds is also suggested (Ashley, this issue). Thus the Woodland populations of the lower St. Johns were part of a dynamic social interaction and exchange network.

#### Mississippian Period (A.D. 800-1500)

Mississippian period adaptation generally began in the greater Southeast at approximately A.D. 1000. With this

adaptation a host of cultural changes occurred over time. The intensification of maize, squash, and bean cultivation is associated with an increasing centralization and hierarchical social structure. During this time public architecture and space became structured to emphasize those new social hierarchies. Differential access to temples and elite housing often placed on mounds became the norm. Burial programs also reflected the emerging social hierarchy (Brown 1971; Peebles 1971). Thus for the larger Southeast, there was not one unified culture that dominated the landscape. As subsistence and cultural practices were experimented with and accepted, there was a high degree of cultural variability. That variability reflected the adaptation of ideological and subsistence items by groups to help solve local cultural problems. Within the Southeast there was a continuum of societal forms ranging, in some cases, from local kin groups to simple and complex chiefdoms (Johnson and Earle 1987).

In northeast Florida there is no sharp distinction between Woodland and Mississippian period societies. Indeed, the archaeological record reflects a slow transformation into a cultural adaptation that shows some suggestion of the larger Mississippian period cultures to the north and west. In northeast Florida this time period is called St. Johns II (Goggin 1952; Milanich 1994; Milanich and Fairbanks 1980). It is characterized by the use and spread of St. Johns Check Stamped pottery, which appeared no earlier than at approximately A.D. 800 (Goggin 1952; Milanich and Fairbanks 1980). Unfortunately, precise chronological distinctions based either on ceramics or radiocarbon dates are lacking for the area. The key examples of mortuary behavior from this period come from the important sites of Grant (8DU14), Shields (8DU12), and Walker Point (8NA43). The Mount Royal site (8PU35), located in the middle St. Johns River Valley, is also discussed here because of its importance to greater northeast Florida area during this period.

One obvious difference in northeast Florida is the lack of multiple mounds, platform or conical, at any of these sites, in contrast to other parts of the Southeast. Mount Royal may be the exception in that the site includes at least one large central mound, an associated linear earthwork, and a small conical mound (Moore 1894:16-35). Grant Mound had a ramp and several small amorphous mounds adjacent to it, but at least two of the smaller southern mounds were Woodland, yielding Swift Creek Complicated Stamped vessels. Shields Mound had an associated ramp earthwork, but C.B. Moore found no other major mounds associated with any of these sites. This does not preclude the possibility that other mounds may have existed at these sites, but the style of earthwork planning and construction is not like that at Lake Jackson, Etowah, or Moundville, where multiple mounds centered around one or more plazas are the norm (Sherrod and Rolingson 1987). The use of space to emphasize or exaggerate social and ideological differences seems not to have been as complex or as architecturally structured as with those groups to the north and

west. This may reflect a lack of structured social hierarchies and ideological markers such as those found associated with the interior groups. Nevertheless, northeast Florida did have connections with other Mississippian period groups and did participate and interact with those groups.

The mortuary programs of northeast Florida for the St. Johns II period show a remarkable cultural continuity among sites. Goggin (1952:55) points out in his monograph on the area that St. Johns II burial mounds vary little from early St. Johns I period mounds. That is correct to a degree. The mounds are constructed out of sand as before, and they were apparently used as facilities for entire populations, and not for a specific section of that society, unlike Mississippian mound complexes to the west and north. However, there does appear to be a greater amount of exotic mortuary goods than before and, in general, the mounds are bigger both in terms of volume of earth and in the burial populations found within them. These generalizations are difficult to quantify due to reasons spelled out in the opening of this paper. We simply lack the data to do detailed statistical analysis of these sites. Grant Mound (8DU14) was an accretional mound which appears to have had a burial program that included primary and bundle burials and cremations. At the base of this mound at least two, possibly more, small mounded episodes defined by discrete colored sand layers suggest a complex beginning to the mound. Through time the mound was added to both in terms of bodies and mound fill. Colored sands were used to define some of the burial areas. Artifacts from this mound suggested to Goggin an early St. Johns IIa date, ca. A.D. 800-1300 (Milanich 1994; Milanich and Fairbanks 1980). This chronological placement was based on the two "Long Nose God" masks found at the site (Goggin 1952; Williams and Goggin 1956). Other artifacts from this mound included copper plates, copper beads, galena, and ceramic vessels (Moore 1894,1895). Shields Mound (8DU12), located 137 meters (150 yds) south of the river and east of Grant, is another enigma for northeast Florida. Is Shields ritually connected to Grant or is it chronologically later? It is unusual to find two large mounds so close together without some cultural tie between them. Moore suggested that this was a platform mound based on his opinion that the surrounding sides were free of miscellaneous debris. However, a house had been constructed on the top of the mound and the technology of the day, horse and drag lines, could have easily cleared off the summit and used that material for fill around the mound base. Thus the question of whether Shields was a platform or conical mound is still open. However, the mound did have an extensive ramp facing south (Moore 1895; Milanich and Fairbanks 1980:164), suggesting that the top surface of the mound was flat.

The base of Shields according to Moore (1895:11) measured 35 meters (115 ft) by 40.57 meters (133 ft) with a diameter of 65 meters (214 ft). He estimated the "fair average" height of the mound to be 5.49 meters (18 ft). Moore excavated in Shields during both his field seasons in

northeast Florida. He found bundle burials in the very top layers, with the use of colored red and yellow sands to define burial episodes. In Moore's (1895) second season he dug the mound's eastern section and found approximately 24 bodies. He then focused on the platform itself where at 150 "points" in the central portion of the mound human remains were found. Whether or not this means 150 bodies is open to question. The remains were in a very fragmentary state of preservation, though Moore did report burials in a primary (extended?) fashion and secondary or bundle burials (1895:13). Most remains were encountered at 4 feet, with some being at 6 feet below the mound surface. A group of six skulls was found associated with one burial. Signs of fire associated with a floor or activity surface (1895:13) were also uncovered. Based on Moore's descriptions at least two or three burial episodes are suggested, with both primary and secondary burial activities taking place. The presence of a charnel house is a possibility, but purely speculative. Moore (1895:24) does suggest the potential of a structure with his discovery of a "circular hole" located in a level of oyster shell some seven feet below the mound's surface.

Artifacts from Shields display a relative continuity to those recovered from Grant with several important exceptions. Twelve polished stone artifacts, including celts, chisels, and spatulate forms were found (Goggin 1952: Plate 10). Unfortunately, the contexts of the artifacts in relationship to specific burials were not recorded. The source for this raw material is probably in the interior Southeast and is suggestive of this area's connection to a larger Mississippian trade network. Five small, fragmentary copper sheets were also recovered. Nine small ceramic vessels were uncovered from Shields, and Moore (1895:14) describes two of the vessels: one a small bird effigy and the other a "toy" vessel that is 2 inches high and 3 inches long.

Check-stamped, complicated-stamped and cord-marked sherds were all found in the mound fill. Chronologically, Goggin (1952:84) suggested that Shields was a St. John IIa period site. Milanich and Fairbanks (1980:164) placed the site slightly later--at the beginning of St. Johns IIb--which they believed should start at A.D. 1100. This would make the site consistent with other emerging Mississippian cultures (Smith 1990).

Of all the St. Johns period mound sites in northeast Florida, Mount Royal (8PU35) is the most complex in terms of earth moved and earthwork variety. Mount Royal is 4.8 meters (16 ft) in height with a base diameter of 53 meters (173 ft). The mound is associated with a pair of linear embankments, some 0.60 meters high and 15 meters (49 ft) apart running north 750 meters (820 yds) to a pond. Also associated with the site is a small conical mound, which Moore (1894) tested but found nothing. Little is known about the burial program of the main mound.

Moore states that human remains in the main mound had not been preserved, and that little remained beside bone

fragments and teeth (Moore 1894:21). This makes any mortuary analysis impossible. Structurally the mound seems, like Shields, to have been built over several burial episodes each marked by distinctive building phases. The mound appears to have been capped with a hematite layer; colored sand layers were also found at Grant and Shields to mark mortuary areas.

From the number of exotic or extralocal items found in this mound, such as copper plates, copper ear plugs, celts, and spatulate celts, Mount Royal above all other mounds in the northeast Florida area suggests some status differences similar to those for other emerging Mississippian societies to the north and west. The Mount Royal site seems to have been a central node in a larger intraregional trade network. These prestige goods may certainly have marked and signaled the status of certain individuals. However, the degree and type of social hierarchy--ascribed or achieved status--must be left to future research. The major problem is the lack of hard information about the site's burial population. Does the mound represent use for a section of the society or as a container for the collected dead of the entire group? We suggest that the mound was used for only a segment of the society and separate burial areas away from the mounds were used for other components of the society. This would suggest a differentiated mortuary program similar to Etowah (Blakely 1977) or Moundville (Peebles 1971).

Chronologically, Mount Royal was defined by Goggin (1952) and Milanich and Fairbanks (1980) as a St. Johns IIb site, and several of the artifacts found at the site suggest a cultural connection to the interior Southeast. One copper plate displays the forked eye motif in a pattern suggesting the four cardinal directions. This plate has stylistic ties with designs from the Spiro site in Oklahoma (Goggin 1952:77; Waring and Holder 1977). As well, Moore recovered from the main Mount Royal mound some 137 polished stone artifacts ranging in form from chisels to pyriform and spatulate celts. This is perhaps the greatest concentration of celts in Florida. The spatulate celts from the mound suggest a tie both to Shields Mound and to the larger interior area which controlled the raw material either at Moundville or Etowah. A lithic point depicted by Moore (1894:21, Fig. 5) bears a striking resemblance to a Cahokia side-notched point (James Griffin, personal communication 1993). It matches those from the Mound 72 point cache at Cahokia (Fowler 1991: Fig. 1.15). The Mount Royal projectile point needs to be reanalyzed to see if the material can be sourced to the greater Cahokia region. A date of A.D. 1050 for Mound 72 at Cahokia ties the two sites together.

One group of iconographic artifacts missing from this area for this time period is the eagle warrior or bird warrior motif. That is, we do not find the iconographic materials from the Late Mississippian period in northeast Florida. Apparently this material did not penetrate or was not accepted into the area. Evidence from Mound 3 at the Lake Jackson site (Jones

1982) suggests that this iconographic material was moving into the area, but we do not find representations in northeast Florida. It is tempting to suggest that the social and ideological meaning that the bird warrior may have represented was not present here, but this is speculation at best.

The Walker Point Mound (8NA43) is a distinct and revealing contrast to the other mounds discussed in this section. The mound shares some structural construction elements—the use of colored sands and multiple burial modes—with the other mounds previously described (Hemmings and Deagan 1973). What the mound lacks are the diverse and exotic artifacts found at the larger mound sites. This mound appears to be the work of a small local group with perhaps the first stage of the mortuary processing having occurred in a charnel house. This mound may be more representative of local populations in northeast Florida than Shields, Grant, or Mount Royal. These local groups may have used and maintained small processing and mortuary areas tied to specific ecological and geographical areas.

The same may be said of the McCormick-Goodman Mound (8DU66) and the Mayport Midden Mound (8DU97) as well. The McCormick-Goodman mound was excavated by Jordan (Jordan et al. 1963) after being noted by Sears (1957) in his survey of the McCormick property. The mound was approximately 2 meters in height with an estimated diameter of 45 meters. Mound excavation revealed five burials from the core of the sand mound. One burial, a mass interment, by its central location, was suggested as the primary event in the mound's construction sequence. This mass interment constituted the remains of several children. Jordan and his co-authors suggested that this feature represented the child sacrifice ritual as witnessed by the French (Lorant 1946).

The sacrificial death hypothesis, although a powerful image, is a difficult hypothesis to test. Artifacts from the excavations included bone hairpins, bone and shell beads, worked puma teeth, projectile points, and a piece of graphite (Jordan et al. 1963:39-40). Follow-up excavations were conducted by the Northeast Florida Anthropological Society before the mound was destroyed in 1974. Additional human burials were recovered both from the mound fill and beneath the mound in the shell midden. Recovered artifacts included a broken greenstone celt and a carved human parietal bone (Recourt 1975). The unusual central feature of this mound suggests a variation from normal burial process. But the number and type of burials suggest a local affair tied directly to groups living along the surrounding bluff area.

The last St. Johns II period mound discussed here is the Mayport Midden Mound (8DU97). The nearby Mayport Mound (8DU96) was excavated because researchers thought it might reveal evidence for historic Timucua and French interaction (Wilson 1965). But 8DU96 turned out to be a Woodland period construction, as discussed in the previous section. In a bit of irony, it now appears that 8DU97, a 3 meter high shell mound, had the potential to date to the St.

Johns II period. This mound was excavated by local amateurs, and the material is currently under reanalysis. Based on preliminary information at hand, we would suggest that it was used by a small local group tied to the Mayport geographical area.

In northeast Florida during the St. Johns II period two basic mound forms appear to have been utilized. One was a small mounded mortuary area that served as a burial container for discrete local groups. Burial forms are quite varied, with extended and bundle being the two basic types. Artifacts reflect the local nature of these groups, being primarily ceramics and utilitarian objects. The second construction mode is that of large mounds with associated ramps or small earthwork features. These mounds probably served a larger geographical and social network. The exotic nature of some of the artifacts discussed above suggests a social network that extended beyond the St. Johns River Valley. Clearly, in northeast Florida groups were involved with the larger Mississippian cultural system. However, it was of a limited basis and groups here did not develop into the chiefdoms of the interior.

#### Protohistoric-Mission Period (A.D. 1500-1704)

The Protohistoric-Mission period in northeast Florida, known archaeologically as the St. Johns IIc period, is defined by the presence of European trade goods, structures, and religious material. Most excavated mortuary areas dating to this time are formal cemeteries associated with Spanish-Indian Catholic missions (see Chaney and Deagan 1989; Dickinson 1989; McEwan 1993; Saunders 1988). After the establishment of St. Augustine in 1565, Spanish friars set out to convert the indigenous population to Catholicism (Gannon 1965). Acceptance of the Catholic faith by members of the local Indian groups meant that upon death each Christianized native was afforded burial in the mission cemetery. Individuals were interred in a uniform manner, extended on their backs with their hands clasped on their chest and covered with a shroud. Evidence from Santa Catalina de Guale Mission on the Georgia coast suggests that individuals were placed in a hierarchical order within the cemetery, with the more principal men and women located closer to the altar (Larsen 1993; Thomas 1990:384).

Another example of such a cemetery was revealed at the seventeenth-century mission on Amelia Island (Saunders 1988). Research into this important aspect of Mission period life—the nature of status and changing religious life and its reflection in the archaeological record—is currently being defined and debated (McEwan 1993; Thomas, editor, 1990). In contrast to seventeenth-century Indians, we know very little about changes in the indigenous culture systems that immediately followed the first Spanish and French encounters of the sixteenth century. Evidence for a general cultural collapse following European contact, like Marvin Smith (1987)

has suggested for the interior Southeast, has not been investigated locally. It is intriguing to note that Moore (1894, 1895, 1896) found few sixteenth- or seventeenth-century European artifacts in any of the mounds in the St. Johns River Valley. This suggests that mound building as a fundamental aspect of religious and ideological behavior ends during the early contact period. Some evidence for a shift in mortuary behavior might be seen in a recently excavated cemetery (8DU66) along the St. Johns Bluff, east of Jacksonville (Robert Johnson, personal communication 1994). Within the excavated portion of the cemetery, two multiple primary burials were exposed, revealing bodies that appear to have been hastily and haphazardly buried one atop the other, as if expedience, not ideology, was the crucial factor. Perhaps this burial situation was the result of a European-induced epidemic among local populations. As more archaeology is done in the surrounding area, this time period should be better understood.

### Conclusion

The study of mortuary areas is one important, but not exclusive, line of evidence to reconstruct the past. Intentional disposal of the dead was an integral part of past cultural systems, reflecting a wide range of social, political, and ideological behavior. So many mounds and cemeteries have been lost in the face of past development in northeast Florida that it is essential that we protect and preserve the remaining areas. We have a moral and legal directive to prevent the accidental or deliberate destruction of these sites. However, if it becomes necessary to excavate such areas, let us keep in mind the very important research questions which can be addressed. From this preliminary overview we suggest a number of important research issues that need to be addressed.

The first is basic research. How do the mounds and cemeteries fit into the larger context of regional settlement and subsistence systems? This can be achieved partly through field survey, and a relocation and analysis of extant artifact collections. Furthermore, radiocarbon specimens included in these collections should be processed to help establish a finer chronology for the area. Second, if the evidence is present, a bioarchaeological analysis of skeletal populations should be conducted to help reconstruct the demographic profiles for these time periods. Third, we need to further define the social organization of these people through time, both in terms of regional and interregional structure. Archaeology in northeast Florida is alive and well, and future research should help to further our understanding of this critical area.

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