ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE EARLY MISSISSIPPIAN WORLD: LOOKING WITHIN AND BEYOND NORTHEASTERN FLORIDA

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Archaeologists interested in the late prehistory of the Southeast have tended to fix their attention on sedentary, mound-building agricultural groups, often excluding those that lacked farming and institutionalized societal ranking, the hallmarks of Mississippian life. Coastal societies of the period given any consideration are usually depicted as most similar to interior Mississippian chiefdoms; that is, coastal groups dependent on fish and other wild resources, with supplementary swidden agriculture and hierarchical sociopolitical organization. Southeastern North America, however, was not a socially and politically uniform landscape, and not all late prehistoric groups were farmers, nor were they all organized as chiefdoms. This article focuses on the St. Johns II peoples of northeastern Florida, who were coastal fisher-hunter-gatherers with a communally oriented political economy during the early Mississippian period (AD 900-1250). These coastal peoples were not cut off from the Mississippian world, but rather were actively engaged in interaction and exchange networks that brought utilitarian artifacts, exotic, and information to northeastern Florida.

A growing trend among archaeologists interested in the Mississippian Southeast is the investigation of the sociohistorical trajectories of individual communities and chiefdoms. As a consequence, it is becoming apparent that during the five centuries or so prior to European contact the social landscape of southeastern North America was far more diverse and dynamic than previously thought (e.g., Blitz 1993, 1999; Cobb 2000; Cobb and Garrow 1996; Lorenz 1996; Maxham 2000; Nassaney 1992; Rees 1997; Steponaitis 1991). While archaeologists are now expanding their research domains to incorporate rural areas and smaller sites away from primary and secondary mound centers, their sights are still squarely set on farming communities. In fact, most broad-brush overviews of southeastern late prehistory emphasize agriculturalists, and all but ignore those late prehistoric groups who lived primarily as fishers or foragers (Smith 1986:57-63; Steponaitis 1986:387-393). With the exception of the nonagricultural coastal Calusa chiefdom of southern Florida (Marquardt 1986, 1988; Widmer 1988), the only coastal groups given any attention are those portrayed as hierarchically organized, swidden agriculturalists (Bense 1994:188-

191; Crook 1986; Pearson 1979; Scarry 1994:28-29; Smith 1982). Rationale for such a seemingly myopic view is rather straightforward, and may be explained as follows: agriculture is a trait embedded in the definition of Mississippian, so to study Mississippian societies one must study those who practiced intensive farming.

Though interconnected and similar in aspects of material culture and organizational structure, there was considerable variety in Mississippian cultural patterns since each chiefdom was historically constituted with its own identity and internal dynamics (e.g., Anderson 1994; Blitz 1993; Cobb 2000; King 2001; Pauketat 1994; Steponaitis 1991; Welch 1991). Moreover, interspersed among the Mississippian farming communities were "non-Mississippian" hunter-gatherers, who interacted with agricultural groups but maintained a separateness (e.g., Jenkins and Krause 1986:84-85; Muller 1995:320; Stephenson and King 1992; Stephenson et al. 1996). If a challenge of current research is to account accurately for and to understand fully the range of societal development and variation across the late prehistoric southeastern landscape, then we must also spotlight those groups that do not fit the conventional definition of Mississippian. Thus, we must seriously consider those various-sized communities of either egalitarian or nonegalitarian hunter-gatherers or fisher-gatherer-hunters, who were neither isolated from nor ignorant of the Mississippian world around them.

In this article I consider one such society during the early Mississippian period (AD 900-1250)—the coastal St. Johns II peoples of northeastern Florida (and extreme southeastern Georgia). Northeastern Florida, herein, consists of coastal present-day Nassau, Duval, and northern St. Johns counties (Figure 1). Depending on which broad-scale map of the late prehistoric Southeast one consults, northeastern Florida lies either immediately within or just outside the southeastern boundary of the Mississippian world. Though situated on the periphery, the fisher-shellfish collectors of northeastern Florida were not insular coastal entities, but rather were integral and active participants in the exchange networks of the broader Mississippian world.

I synthesize a variety of archaeological data on the St. Johns II culture in order to add a new voice to the socially nuanced landscape of the Mississippian Southeast. I begin with a revised late prehistoric archaeological chronology of northeastern Florida, which is used to argue for interactions between St. Johns II groups in northeastern Florida and Ocmulgee hunter-gathers in south-central Georgia. Ocmulgee groups...
occupied the area surrounding the confluence of the Ocmulgee-Oconee-Altamaha rivers, a strategic contact that would have provided St. Johns II groups access to the interior Southeast and beyond. With links to the Mississippian world, possibly as suppliers of whelk shell and other coastal resources, St. Johns II societies were able to acquire an array of exotica. Much of the nonlocal minerals, metals, and stones, however, appears to have been consumed collectively in burial mounds by St. Johns II communities. I use the available data to argue for a communal political economy among St. Johns II societies, but one that availed itself of social inequality.

Late Prehistoric Chronology of Northeastern Florida

Archaeologists long held that St. Johns II and coastal Savannah groups both occupied northeastern Florida during the late prehistoric period, although the precise temporal sequence and social relationship between the two were unclear (e.g., Bullen and Griffin 1952; Russo 1992; Saunders 1989). Recently, however, some have argued against this notion, based on ceramic technological data and radiocarbon assays. The cordmarked pottery of northeastern Florida does not belong to the Savannah ceramic series, but rather includes two temporally and technologically distinct types (Ashley and Rolland 2002). The earlier type is grit-tempered Ocmulgee Cordmarked pottery (both nonlocal and local versions), which is part of the local St. Johns II ceramic assemblage (ca. AD 900-1250). The later type is St. Marys Cordmarked, a local sand-tempered ware manufactured after AD 1250. Recognition of this distinction has led to the development of a revised late prehistoric ceramic chronology, predicated on sequential occupations in northeastern Florida; first by St. Johns II peoples, and then by cordmarked pottery-making immigrants (St. Marys II) from southeastern Georgia (Table 1). The latter, the southern extent of Pluckhahn and McKivigan’s (2002) Satilla/St. Marys Cluster in Georgia, were dispersed fischer-shellfish collectors whose ancestry may be traced to the Ocmulgee peoples of south-central Georgia (Ashley and Rolland 2002:25).

St. Johns II Site Types and Settlement Distributions

St. Johns II sites in northeastern Florida occur along the mainland coast and on barrier islands, with a salient concentration along the south side of the lower St. Johns River, east of present-day downtown Jacksonville (e.g., Ashley and Thunen 1999; Bullen and Griffin 1952; Dickinson and Wayne 1987; Johnson 1988; Russo et al. 1993; Sears 1957). Based on their size and artifact content, St. Johns II sites include both small resource procurement loci or camps and larger, more permanently occupied settlements. The latter are each marked by shell middens and a sand burial mound, typically 1 to 3 m in height (Goggin 1952; Moore 1894, 1895, 1896; Russo 1992; Sears 1957). Overall the number of St. Johns II sites in northeastern Florida appears to be greater than that of the previous Woodland period suggesting an increase in the local population, a trend also observed to the south in the St. Johns region (Bullen and Griffin 1952:58; Miller 1998:85).

Aside from the small burial mounds, two large earthworks, Grant (8DU14) and Shields (8DU12) mounds, also date to the St. Johns II period. Both were described and excavated by C. B. Moore (1894, 1895) during the 1890s. Moore (1894:200-204) described the Grant Mound (8DU14), situated on a high bluff overlooking the river to the north, as a truncated cone about 8.1 m high, with a base diameter of approximately 65.8 m and a summit plateau diameter of 7.3 m. Two low ridges, forming a causeway, approached the mound from the south. Human burials were recovered from the mound, as were artifacts of both local and nonlocal origin (i.e., metal, stone, and mineral). Unfortunately, much of the Grant Mound was inexplicably destroyed during residential development in the late 1980s.
The Shields Mound (8DU12), at 5.5 m tall, was structurally more complex than the Grant Mound. Moore (1895:454) described it as “a great platform mound entirely unlike in form any aboriginal earthwork on the river.” It had a base diameter of 65.2 m and a summit measurement of 40.5 by 35.1 m. Although a house atop the “platform mound” had recently burned, Moore (1894:205) was rather adamant about it being a flattened mound. It was situated 137 m from the bluff, with a “graded way” or earthen ramp leading to the mound on the north, and a series of “curved ridges” extending off the mound in a south-southwesterly direction toward a small pond 546 m away (Moore 1895:494). The platform mound and portions of the ridges nearest the mound are extant, but their southernmost extent has been destroyed. While some of the extant ridges appear to be part of natural relic dune formations, their apparent modification by native peoples still bears witness to a considerable investment of human labor.

Moore encountered human remains in over 170 locations within the mound, although the actual number and distribution of these interments is uncertain. In fact, we are unable to glean any sex or age information from Moore’s descriptions on the burial population at either Grant or Shields. As was the case at Grant Mound, Moore’s excavation at Shields produced a variety of nonlocal artifacts that included a copper plate and two long-stemmed spatulate celts. Ongoing testing in nonmound areas of the Shields site has revealed discrete, single component shell middens and activity areas associated with the site’s St. Johns II component (Ashley 2000).

Though positioned only 750 m apart, the Grant and Shields mounds have traditionally been considered separate, sequentially utilized, St. Johns II constructs. However, shovel testing indicates that the two tumuli are interspersed with an almost continuous spread of St. Johns II refuse, with shell deposits thickest in the vicinity of each mound (Ashley 2000; Thunen and Ashley 1995). The ubiquitous distribution of St. Johns II refuse, in concert with radiocarbon assays from five separate middens, suggests that the two mounds are contemporaneous and together constitute the remains of a long linear village (hereafter referred to as the Shields-Grant site). Currently, however, the precise physical layout and spatial extent of the settlement is not known for any particular moment during the 350-year span of the local St. Johns II period.

Finally, the Grand site (8DU1) on Big Talbot Island, some 16 km northeast of the Shields-Grant locality, is another striking example of St. Johns II settlement architecture. The Grand site consists of a shell ring and sand burial mound complex (Ashley and Thunen 1999);
the ring has a diameter of about 45 m, and a maximum height of approximately 1 m above the surrounding modern ground surface. The ring walls, consisting of densely-packed shells, range from 10 to 15 m in width. The sand burial mound, partially positioned in the outer shell ring wall, rises an additional 2 m above the mounded shell. According to local informants, human burials were removed from the mound in the late 1960s, but no professional excavations of the burial mound have been conducted to date. Limited testing in the shell ring has revealed abundant St. Johns II pottery and bone refuse (Ashley and Thunen 1999:33-38).

Subsistence Economy

The subsistence economy of the St. Johns II peoples of northeastern Florida involved a year-round pattern of coastal exploitation focused on the capture of small estuarine fish, shellfish, and other aquatic fauna, both estuarine and freshwater (Hardin and Russo 1987; O'Steen 1999:20; Russo 1992:118-119; Russo et al. 1993:172). Zooarchaeological evidence indicates that fish were the largest contributor of vertebrate biomass to the diet, and species such as spot, mullet, silver perch, catfish, sea trout, flounder, sheepshead, Atlantic croaker, and various drums were routinely taken from the marshes and shallow tidal sloughs (O'Steen 1999; Russo et al. 1993:136-173). Presently, there is no evidence suggestive of an ocean or deep-water fishing or sea mammal hunting economy. Though the remains of shark and porpoise do occur infrequently in shell middens, these large animals may have been taken from the lower reaches of the St. Johns River.

Oyster was by far the most intensively collected shellfish species, although quahog clam, Atlantic ribbed mussel, stout tagelus, and whelk were also gathered from the marshes and mud flats, and coquina was procured from the ocean surf zone. The shells of many of these latter species frequently occur as inclusive lenses or deposits in otherwise oyster-dominated shell middens, suggesting that (in these instances) they represent refuse associated with individual meals. Seasonality data indicate that oysters were collected during the summer and fall, and perhaps spring, while quahog clams were harvested throughout the year, with peaks in the spring and winter (Hardin and Russo 1987; Russo et al. 1993:168-170).

Aquatic reptiles, such as mud and musk turtle, as well as terrestrial box turtle and gopher tortoise were also gathered, probably opportunistically. Deer, raccoon, opossum, and other mammals were hunted or trapped, but terrestrial fauna was not exploited to the same extent as aquatic animals. The bulk of the diet, therefore, was derived from estuarine waters and marshes, habitats widely distributed throughout the region and accessible to all members of society. There is presently no evidence suggesting that exploitation of subsistence resources was controlled by any elite or supra-household institution.

Researchers have long speculated that late prehistoric natives along the St. Johns River practiced agriculture, based primarily on early French accounts of maize, beans, and squash grown by the coastal Timucua (Bennett 1968:44). To date, however, no domesticated plant remains have been recovered from prehistoric St. Johns II contexts, although charred maize cobs have been reclaimed from later Spanish mission-period sites. Admittedly, with so few paleoethnobotanical studies undertaken on local samples, our knowledge of local plant procurement and utilization practices is acutely inadequate. There is, however, another source of evidence relating to diet. Stable carbon and nitrogen isotope ratio data derived from the bones of two male and two female burials from the McCormack site (8DU66) point to a local St. Johns II diet high in marine resources, with no indication of maize consumption (Hutchinson et al. 1998:403, 407, 2000:106, 110). Thus, it appears that the St. Johns II people of northeastern Florida were not farmers, but rather fishers and shellfish collectors dependent on aquatic resources, with portions of their diet coming from gathered plants and terrestrial fauna.

Domestic and Craft Production

Except for mound contexts, habitation sites demonstrate a high degree of uniformity in artifact assemblage composition. Pottery recovered from domestic refuse middens is very homogeneous and is thought to have been made locally at the household level. St. Johns pottery is characterized by its chalky tactile quality, traditionally attributed to the natural occurrence of microscopic sponge spicules within the raw clays used by St. Johns potters (Borreman and Shaak 1986). However, Rolland and Bond (2000) have recently argued that freshwater sponges were purposefully added to St. Johns pottery as temper. Most St. Johns II wares are either undecorated or check stamped, but chalky incised and punctated types as well as burnished plain wares also regularly occur on northeastern Florida sites. While some specialized pots of local manufacture have been retrieved from mound and ceremonial contexts, their presence and frequency do not necessarily imply the existence of craft specialization beyond the household level.

Shell and bone tools and ornaments, all made of locally available materials, are also found on habitation sites and in mounds. Both artifact types were abundantly produced, and some ornate bone pins show fine craftsmanship and detail, although members of indi-
individual domestic units could easily have produced all tools and ornaments. Flaked stone artifacts are typically infrequent and include small triangular points, bifacial and unifacial tools, and debitage, most of which consists of poor to moderate quality chert. The expedient nature of these lithic artifacts suggests they were made on site out of imported stone (since there is no naturally occurring stone in northeastern Florida). The small triangular points may indicate bow and arrow technology, knowledge of which could have diffused into the region via the same exchange routes that brought nonlocal Ocmulgee pots and exotics (Cobb and Nasaney 1995:208-209).

Ground stone implements and decorative items, such as celts, plummetts, gorgets, pendants, and beads, appear to have arrived in northeastern Florida in finished form. Some items are worn or battered, suggesting they entered northeastern Florida in used conditions, but still socially valued. With respect to copper artifacts, some late stage modifications may have occurred on site. For instance, rolled copper beads and copper covered artifacts of bone, wood, and shell could easily have been manufactured locally by cutting and wrapping sheet copper around items made of locally available materials.

At this time St. Johns II groups evidently engaged in craft production, not craft specialization; the latter is typically viewed as controlled production for exchange rather than domestic use (Costin 1991). There is currently no evidence of elite control over the production of St. Johns II craft items. Households seem to have been rather autonomous with regard to subsistence pursuits and the production of the necessities of daily life, though they presumably were required to contribute to community or collective activities, such as ceremony, warfare, and the construction of mounds or other large-scale architecture. Unfortunately, the lack of available domestic structure data precludes an examination of the variation in size and labor organization among households within and between villages.

Exotic Materials and External Connections

Moore's (1894, 1895) excavation of the Grant and Shields mounds found that each contained exotic materials and artifacts, many typical of mainstream Mississippian mound centers. Specifically, he recovered beaded and unbeaded copper plates of various types, copper beads, copper-covered wooden ear plugs, galena, mica, flaked stone projectile points, and tobacco pipes, beads, spatulate celts, and other ground stone objects of nonlocal origins. Local items included whelk shells, pearls, shell beads, whelk shell cups, shark teeth, bone points and pins, and ceramic vessels, including forms typically not found in domestic refuse contexts.

Copper foil covered small objects made of stone, bone, and shell. Though fragments of sheet copper were quite common in both mounds, Moore (1894:465, 483) was "somewhat disappointed" by his finds and expected "more varied forms of copper," based on earlier successes at Mt. Royal to the south. The Grant Mound yielded ten copper plates; just one was recovered from the Shields Mound. These plates were rectangular, ranging from 10-15 cm by 5-10 cm, and probably represented headress elements, though their use as gorgets cannot be ruled out. Most had a central oval boss, ringed with an embossed line or beading, and a centralized perforation for suspension or attachment (see Goggin 1952: Plate 10). Similar specimens were recovered from Mt. Royal, although Moore (1894:30-35) did not report finding any plates at Grant or Shields with iconographic designs, as was the case at Mt. Royal. Trace element analysis of several copper artifacts from Grant Mound and Mt. Royal linked the metals to sources in both the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Lakes region, as well as one source in Wisconsin (Goad 1978: 136-148).

From the Grant Mound, Moore recovered two copper long-nosed god maskettes, southern cult paraphernalia known from only a handful of sites in the Southeast and Midwest (Brown et al. 1990:261; Kelly 1991:73-74), and thought by some to have all derived from the same workshop (Williams and Goggin 1956:34). Grant Mound also yielded a copper-covered biconical ear spool similar to the "spindles" found in the Powell Mound at Cahokia (Williams and Goggin 1956:49-50). From the Shields Mound, Moore removed two long-stemmed spatulate celts; similar ones found elsewhere in the Southeast have been interpreted as badges or emblems of high status (Larson 1971; Paulaket 1983; Peebles 1971). Save for the long-nosed god maskettes and the spatulate celts, specific "Southern Cult" items or iconography are lacking on any medium. This may be partly due to the fact that the St. Johns II period in northeastern Florida predates the classic expression of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (see Galloway 1989; Knight et al. 2001). While the presence of these various exotic materials clearly indicates the existence of external exchange relations, we should not assume at this time that their occurrence on St. Johns II sites automatically equates to the existence of a Mississippian prestige goods economy, as defined by Peregrine (1992).

In addition to exotics, more mundane or utilitarian items found their way into northeastern Florida. Of primary significance is Ocmulgee III Cordmarked pottery, which occurs in low to moderate amounts on all major St. Johns II sites, highlighting social ties between groups in northeastern Florida and those living in the vicinity of the confluence of the Ocmulgee, Oconee, and Altamaha rivers in Georgia (Figure 2). Recent neutron activation analysis of a sample of 56 Ocmulgee III sherd
from south-central Georgia and northeastern Florida has revealed that some of the grit-tempered cord-marked wares on St. Johns II sites come from south-central Georgia, whereas others are local products (Neff and Glascock 2001, 2002).

From a St. Johns II perspective, the territory of Ocmulgee groups strategically provided access via three river systems into the interior, where Mississippian chiefdoms were located. The Ocmulgee groups may have allowed St. Johns II traders or other individuals to pass through their lands, or they may have served directly as trade facilitators (“middlemen”) by securing materials of metal, mineral, and stone from upriver locales, such as Macon Plateau, and passing them on to St. Johns II societies. From their hinterland origins, these materials would have been carried along the Altamaha River to the Atlantic coast, then south through the coastal sounds to northeastern Florida. Alternatively, people or goods leaving the Altamaha River may have moved south along the precursor of the historic Alachua Trail, and then east to the coast via the Satilla or St. Marys rivers (Vanderhill 1977).

With copper and other exotics coming into northeastern Florida, other things must have moved out. While foodstuffs, yaupon leaves, shark teeth, feathers, salt, and perishable artifacts of wood or textile could have been dispatched from northeastern Florida, the biggest export may have been marine shell, particularly whelk shells. Moore (1895, 1896) often commented on the abundance of shell beads in St. Johns II mounds, and he further stated that they were always found in association with human remains. Most are disk beads crafted from the outer whorls of whelk shells, but columella barrel beads are also mentioned. Of the beads, cups, plummets, various other shell ornaments, and unmodified shells recovered from St. Johns II mounds and middens, most appear to be whelk (Busycon spp.), although olive (Olivella spp.) shell beads are also reported. One individual from the Shields Mound was interred with “twenty conch [Busycon] shells” (Moore 1895:466). At Mt. Royal, Moore (1894:20-21) recovered 1,307 Busycon carica shells from his main excavation trench.

Within the Mississippian world, shell served as decorative items in the form of beads and as engraved, status-related, symbolically charged gorgets (Brown et al. 1990; Phillips and Brown 1978; Prentice 1987; Smith and Barnes Smith 1989). The number of artifacts of marine shell, particularly beads, recovered from interior sites is astounding. Several researchers have commented on the probable role of coastal groups in the movement of marine shells from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts to the interior Southeast (e.g., Brown et al. 1990; Claassen and Sigmann 1993; Mitchem 1996:234; Muller 1987, 1997). Northeastern Florida natives may have benefited from the demand for whelk shells during the early Mississippian period. Macon Plateau, in south-central Georgia, may have been a prime recipient of northeastern Florida marine shell. One burial at Macon Plateau contained over 17,000 disk and barrel-shaped whelk shell beads, whereas 26,000 olive shell beads were strewed across another multiple interment (Fairbanks 1981:22-23). Macon Plateau is an early Mississippian chiefdom that dates between AD 900 and 1100 (Fairbanks 1981; Williams 1994), a time coincident with the height of St. Johns II in northeastern Florida.

Marine shell was a potentially valuable export, given its ubiquity along the coast and its presence in various forms on interior Mississippian sites. Even whorl and columella fragments, abundantly strewed along the shoreline, would have been prized, since these pieces could have been traded as a source material for later bead or ornament manufacture. Shell debitage is often found at major inland Mississippian sites, suggesting that beads were manufactured locally (Muller 1987; Yerkes 1989). Gorgets, masks, and drinking cups, which would have required whole shells or very large sections of the outer whorl, are not as common in early Mississippian period mounds as they are in mounds that postdate AD 1250. Moreover, cups (as well as gorgets) appear to have been made from left-handed whelks (Busycon perouseum), whose present-day distribution and frequency are much greater along the Gulf coast than the Atlantic seaboard (Abbott 1974). The heavier and more robust knobbed whelk (Busycon carica) is most prevalent along northeastern Florida beaches (Hale 1976:68). Both the knobbed and lightening whelk species were a good source for beads. Olive shells, which also occur as grave good

Figure 2. Northeastern Florida, St. Johns II and Ocmulgee territories.
ornaments in Mississippian mounds, are distributed along the Atlantic coast.

I suggest that the Ocmulgee groups of south-central Georgia were riverine hunter-gatherers who helped foster exchange relations between coastal St. Johns II societies and interior farming chiefdoms. Specifically, they may have provided a link between Macon Plateau and coastal villages located near the mouth of the St. Johns River. Ocmulgee peoples presumably benefited from these interactions and may have acquired various foodstuffs for their role, possibly receiving corn and other cultigens from Mississippian farmers and dried/smoked fish and shellfish from the coastal groups. However, Ocmulgee hunter-gatherers do not appear to have been as taken with exotica as were those around them, since only a few pieces of mica and copper have been recovered from Ocmulgee sites (Snow 1977:36, 41).

As part of the political process, mates may have been exchanged between the Ocmulgee and St. Johns II groups to forge kinship ties and seal alliances. A movement of Ocmulgee women potters into northeastern Florida could account for the locally produced Ocmulgee wares that are virtually identical to those from south-central Georgia. It has been shown worldwide that intermarriage is among the most effective means of establishing intergroup alliances because of the obligations that attend kinship relationships (Kelly 1995:285-288). Moreover, the ethnographic literature reveals numerous instances of interdependence between hunter-gatherers and more sociopolitically complex societies, where the interacting groups maintain obvious cultural and material distinctions (Bahuchet and Guillaume 1982; Grinker 1994; Kelly 1995:24-28; Spielmann 1991; Spielmann and Eder 1994).

If the Ocmulgee groups were descendants of the Woodland-period Swift Creek peoples of south-central Georgia, then they may have had a history of movement and extralocal interaction. Even though design contacts show that complicated stamped Swift Creek pots (or paddles) moved over broad areas of Georgia and beyond (Snow 1998; Snow and Stephenson 1998; Stephenson et al. 2002; Stoltman and Snow 1998), there is little evidence for acquisition of exotica among the Swift Creek peoples of the Ocmulgee Big Bend region, as was the case with the later Ocmulgee groups in the same area. Settlement distribution data and the continued production of folded rim ceramic vessels further suggest continuity between Swift Creek and Ocmulgee peoples in south-central Georgia.

Some Ocmulgee peoples may have acquired shells themselves by going directly to the coast or by trading with groups living at or south of the mouth of the Altamaha River. For whatever reason, there appears to have been a long history of interaction between the peoples of the lower Altamaha and Ocmulgee areas and northeastern Florida, as evidenced by Swift Creek design contacts between the regions (Ashley 1998:206-207). Additionally, St. Johns pottery and even earlier fibertempered Orange ceramics are found on sites in the Ocmulgee Big Bend region (Snow 1977). We must keep in mind that the "motives for exchange do not arise merely from a perceived opportunity for gain by dealing with distant sources of valued goods, but involve a complex articulation of local and external interests related to social obligations, peer competition privileges of rank and a panoply of other factors" (Cobb 1993:65).

Sociopolitical Organization

St. Johns II societies, particularly those of the contactera, are typically portrayed as chiefdoms, though often described as Mississippian-like, implying some degree of divergence from coeval societies of the interior (Milanich 1994:269). In general discussions of St. Johns II sociopolitical organization, a lack of dependence on subsistence farming inevitably comes to the fore as the fundamental reason for the presumably attenuated or dilute Mississippian character of the St. Johns II culture (Milanich 1994:268; Mitchem 1996; Payne and Scarry 1998:25-27; Scarry 1994:21, 27-28, 1996:13).

The chiefdom label has specifically been pinned on the St. Johns II polity of the Shields-Grant vicinity, as well as the Mt. Royal polity to the south, based primarily on the presence of large sand mounds containing some burials in association with exotic grave goods (Milanich 1994:269). Mt. Royal, located some 100 km upriver from the Shields-Grant vicinity, was another large St. Johns II mound (Figure 3). There, Moore (1894:16-35, 130-146) recovered many of the same types of exotica he took from the Grant and Shields mounds, including copper plates and spatulate celts; an example of the latter has also been recovered from Macon.
ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE EARLY MISSISSIPPIAN WORLD

Plateau. One copper plate displays a "forked eye and blade" repoussé image, "almost identical in design and absolutely so in style" to one from the Spiro site in Oklahoma (Philips and Brown 1978:206-207). A small triangular point from Mt. Royal, depicted by Moore (1894:21), strongly resembles a Cahokia Side Notched point, indicating another tie to the Mississippian world (Williams and Goggin 1956:50). Moore (1894:20) also recovered over 1300 marine whelk shells from Mt. Royal, implying involvement in Mississippian-period shell trade. Taken together this information intimates early Mississippian-period links, albeit indirect, between Mt. Royal, Shields-Grant, Macon Plateau, Spiro, and perhaps even Cahokia, as previously noted by Williams and Goggin (1956:49-50).

Besides exotic artifacts, Mt. Royal shares several other things with Shields and Grant that intimate a cultural connection among them. First, the inhabitants of each 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 also been shown to occur at Mt. Royal (Neff and Glasscock 2001, 2002). Soot from a St. Johns sherd in association with cordmarked pottery yielded a calibrated AMS date of AD 1010-1050 (one-sigma), suggesting contemporaneity with the Shields-Grant site (see Table 1). Second, all three mounds apparently had causeway approaches, though the precise layout of each was different. Finally, site distributional data suggest that during the early Mississippian period St. Johns II populations were primarily concentrated in two sections of the St. Johns River: at the mouth and along the middle portion of the river, immediately north of Lake George (Miller 1996:78-87). Interestingly, Shields-Grant and Mt. Royal are situated at the northern and southern geographical edges of this settlement distribution, a situation that may reflect their involvement in long-distance exchange and their connection to the Mississippian world.

Few details are available on the formation and development of the Mt. Royal and Shields-Grant polities during the early Mississippian period. In fact, chiefdom-level sociopolitical organization has yet to be demonstrated archaeologically for late prehistoric St. Johns II societies in Florida, although European accounts describe the existence of chiefdoms in the Timucua territory of Florida and Georgia (Hann 1996; Milanch 1996, 1998; Worth 1998). However, I question whether this ethnohistoric depiction accurately captures the sociopolitical structure of early Mississippian period, St. Johns II societies of northeastern Florida, particularly since these groups were not maize farmers.

Archaeologists rely largely upon settlement patterns and mortuary data to infer sociopolitical complexity (Brown 1971; Earle 1987, 1991; Peebles and Kus 1977; Smith 1978). With regard to spatial organization, a hierarchical arrangement of settlement types in a region is often considered an archaeological marker of societal complexity (Johnson 1977). The presence of an intricately constructed platform/burial mound (Shields Mound) and another large burial mound (Grant Mound), both of which yielded numerous exotic artifacts, suggests that the Shields-Grant site represents some type of ceremonial center. The ubiquity of St. Johns II refuse between the two mounds further reflects the presence of a village. Except for the Grand site (8DU1) on Big Talbot Island, with its unique shell ring and burial mound layout, the remainder of the St. Johns II sites in northeastern Florida are either resource procurement camps or habitation sites (villages) with single, small burial mounds.

Table 2 provides a tentative list of nine possible St. Johns II village/burial mound sites and their distances from the Shields-Grant vicinity (Figure 4). Closest is the McCormack-Goodman site (8DU66), 4.5 km to the east, and the farthest is the Old Town site (8NA238) at the northern tip of Amelia Island, about 35 km to the north. Of the remainder, five fall between 10 and 16 km, and two are located 20 or more kilometers away. In all, there are four villages on the south side of the river (including the Shields-Grant site) and at least one village on each of the Florida barrier islands to the north.

How might we begin to interpret this distribution? The presence of a platform mound at Shields signifies a new form of architecture in northeastern Florida, one that may have accommodated public rituals attended by large numbers of people. Elsewhere in the Southeast, the presence of a platform mound is assumed to signify the political or administrative head of a Mississippian chiefdom (Hally 1993, 1996; Lindauer and Blitz 1997). Moreover, Hally's (1993) research in Georgia suggests that contemporaneous platform mounds found within 18 km of one another were part of the same polity, whereas those at a distance of more than 32 km belonged to separate polities. If all St. Johns II villages were coeval, and assuming that the St. Johns River served as a political boundary, then Hally's model might suggest the existence of two polities—one to the south, centered on the Shields-Grant complex; another to the north, perhaps focused on the Grand site, with its

Table 2. Possible St. Johns II villages in northeastern Florida, and their straight-line distances from the Shields (8DU12A)/Grant (8DU14) vicinity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Distance from Shields-Grant</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McCormack/Goodman (8DU66)</td>
<td>4.5 km</td>
<td>South side of river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield (8DU78, 5544-45)</td>
<td>10.0 km</td>
<td>South side of river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayport Mound 2 (8DU97)</td>
<td>13.0 km</td>
<td>South side of river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft. George Island Mound (8DU4)</td>
<td>14.0 km</td>
<td>Fort George Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Chappelle Midden&quot; (8DU1512)</td>
<td>15.0 km</td>
<td>Black Hammock Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar Point-Jones-Mermans*</td>
<td>16.0 km</td>
<td>Big Talbot Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand (8DU1)</td>
<td>20.0 km</td>
<td>Black Hammock Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hammock (8DU52, 67)</td>
<td>28.0 km</td>
<td>Amelia Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Mound (8NA48)</td>
<td>35.0 km</td>
<td>Amelia Island</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Cultural affiliation of mound at the site is still uncertain due to inadequate excavation or reporting.
shell ring serving a function similar to a platform mound. Although Hally's model, designed for interpreting interior agricultural Mississippian chiefdoms, may not provide a perfect fit for the distribution of fisher-hunter-gather settlements in coastal northeastern Florida, it can serve as a useful baseline for examining the spatial data.

Except for the size and contents of the burial mounds, all St. Johns II sites are relatively similar in material remains, suggesting that each produced and traded for its own daily needs, though they may have been linked ceremonially. Establishing contemporaneity among the villages is still a paramount problem to be resolved with additional radiocarbon assays, although it seems highly doubtful that all nine were contemporaneous over the entire 350-year span of St. Johns II activity in northeastern Florida (AD 900-1250). While the Shields-Grant site has yielded radiocarbon dates that cover the entire 350-year range, the more northern sites, such as the Grand site (8DU1) and Black Hammock Island Mound (8DU67), have been dated to ca. AD 1150-1250. One might infer from these few dates that the initial and most intensive St. Johns II occupations in northeastern Florida took place on the south bank of the St. Johns River, perhaps along the bluff fronting ecologically-rich Mill Cove vicinity, where there arose a polity centered on the Shields-Grant site.

In fact, the St. Johns II culture seems to have appeared rather suddenly in northeastern Florida around AD 900 (Ashley 2001). There is little reason to think that St. Johns II developed here directly from St. Johns I, as was the case in the St. Johns heartland to the south (Bullen and Griffin 1952:61-62; Russo 1992:114-115; Sears 1957:28-31, 34-35). At the Shields-Grant site, evidence of St. Johns I occupations does not appear beneath the St. Johns II middens (Ashley 2001). The processual dynamics of Blitz's (1999) "fission-fusion" model of Mississippian mound center formation might shed some light on St. Johns II development in northeastern Florida. Blitz's perspective, an alternative to Anderson's (1994) "simple-complex cycling" model of Mississippian chiefdoms, implicates population migration, relocation, merger, and dispersal as major factors in the formation of single and multiple mound sites during the Mississippi period.

The early Mississippi period occupation of the Shields-Grant site may signify a migration of St. Johns II peoples out of the middle St. Johns River region to the south, quite possibly in response to the emerging Mt. Royal polity (Ashley 2001). As Blitz suggests for the broader Southeast, such population movements may have been brought about by competition, factionalism, or warfare (or the threat of it) within a population's homeland. The presence of two large, coeval mounds, located less than a kilometer apart, may even represent the "fission" of two or more formerly distinct polities, communities, or larger kin groups. If migration proves to be true, how did local late Woodland groups in northeastern Florida handle the influx of St. Johns II immigrants? Assimilation of some local peoples may have occurred, and, through time, fissioning may have taken place at the Shields-Grant site, with some kin groups leaving to establish new settlements. Later immigrants may have established other villages.

By at least AD 1100, populations had grown and settlements were located on the Florida barrier islands to the north and in extreme southeastern Georgia. With settlements spread out over such a broad area, it is likely that distinct polities existed. If villages were occupied concurrently on both sides of the St. Johns River, then those on the south side may have been linked politically to the Shields-Grant site, whereas each island to the north may have had a separate polity, much smaller than that at Shields-Grant. A third possibility is that the northern groups were collectively tied to the Grand site on Big Talbot Island. At present, not enough settlement pattern or chronometric data are available to make a confident choice among alternative scenarios.

Distributions of nonlocal goods within and among villages in northeastern Florida may also provide insights into the sociopolitical organization of the region. Copper appears mostly restricted to the Shields and Grant mounds, although a few pieces have been reported for the Mayport Mound 2 (8DU97) and the Fort George

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Figure 4. Possible St. Johns II villages in northeastern Florida.
ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE EARLY MISSISSIPPIAN WORLD

Island Mound (8DU4). Though limited in number, other exotic stones and minerals (e.g., greenstone, graphite) have been reported for several of the small mounds (e.g., Jordan et al. 1963; Recourt 1975). A long-stemmed spatulate celt, similar to the ones from Shields Mound and Mt. Royal, was recovered by Mitchell (1875) from 8NA48 on Amelia Island, but information on his excavation is lacking (Goggin 1952: Plate 10b). While the paucity of copper might suggest that the Shields-Grant site had a monopoly on the exotic metal, sampling bias cannot be ruled out. In fact, none of the St. Johns II mounds have been excavated using modern field methods (Thunen and Ashley 1995:5-6). Based on the data at hand, the Shields-Grant site appears to have been the primary, but not exclusive, recipient of exotic items.

Though vague and ambiguous at times, the results of Moore’s (1894, 1895) excavation of the Shields and Grant mounds provide some information on mortuary ritual. With regard to the distribution of grave offerings in the Grant Mound, Moore (1895:475, 476) noted that “most burials were without accompanying relics when found,” but there were exceptions. More burials in the Shields Mound seem to have had material accompaniments, although the exact number is not certain. Shell beads and bone pins (probably hair pins) were common mortuary goods in both mounds, suggesting they were not necessarily symbols of high status. Similar types of artifacts have been recovered frequently from the smaller St. Johns II burial mounds in northeastern Florida. The two long-stemmed spatulate celts from the Shields Mound were each found “with human remains,” but Moore failed to identify the precise mode of burial and number of individuals represented. An association between the copper long-nosed god maskettes and human remains at the Grant Mound is equivocal due to a “cave in” during excavation that obscured their possible relationship. Exotic artifacts were in some instances placed “with human remains,” but, more often than not, these materials were positioned away from burials, suggesting collective offerings. Moore unfortunately failed to report information on the sex or age of any mound interments; such data would have assisted interpretations of ascribed or achieved social status.

Similar results were apparently encountered at Mt. Royal, since Moore (1894:21) noted that “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.” 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 (1894:31) 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.”

The large number of human remains recovered from both the Grant and Shields mounds and the randomness of the interments suggest that each earthwork was an accretional cemetery that gradually built up over time (Moore 1895:24). Burial of certain individuals with nonlocal exotic materials implies some degree of differentiation in mortuary treatment, with some individuals set apart from others. But no individuals are reported to have been buried in log tombs, crypts, or other specialized mortuary features, and none were interred with ceramic pots, as was the case in many Mississippian mounds housing chiefs and other presumed elites.

Available data suggest that St. Johns II communities consisted of fundamentally similar and self-sufficient households. Slight differences between certain individuals or kin groups and the rest of society are most noticeable at the Shields-Grant site in the form of inequitable burial treatment. However, there is presently a lack of clear evidence for the existence of a formalized “elite-commoner” distinction, as suggested by some political economic models of Mississippian chiefdoms (e.g., Welch 1991; Pauketat 1994). St. Johns II political economy appears to have been largely communal, with power shared collectively by different segments of society, such as kin-based lineages or clans. Blanton et al. (1996:6) refer to this as a corporate political economic strategy, involving “the establishment and maintenance of a cognitive code that emphasizes a corporate solidarity of society as an integrated whole, based on natural, fixed and immutable interdependences between subgroups.”

Recent studies of political organization have begun to disengage the links between hierarchical complexity, political centralization, and social stratification that attend general theoretical models (Blanton et al. 1996; Feinman 2000; McGuire and Saitta 1996; Saitta 1997). As a result, some researchers have begun to suspect that a communal or corporate political strategy does not necessarily translate to rigid egalitarianism, but rather can manifest itself in a variety of ways that may include the existence of inequality and even hierarchy. While communal social formations may possess or even require elites, limits are set, perhaps within a historically constituted cultural tradition, that stress decisions in favor of the community’s good over the empowerment and advancement of individuals in positions of leadership.

The existence of a communal ethic may serve to foster the “incorporation of disparate ethnically defined subgroups into the larger society” while legitimating the appropriation of surplus goods and services for communal projects (Blanton et al. 1996:6). In northeastern Florida, such a strategy may have provided an effective organizing principle for immigrant St. Johns peoples who were trying to establish themselves in a foreign territory. A promise to share in the wealth of the Mississippian world, however locally defined, may have enticed some St. Johns peoples to uproot themselves and
head north, and, furthermore, may have helped bring indigenous, local, Late Woodland groups into the St. Johns II fold. St. Johns II societies in northeastern Florida, like so many other Late Woodland societies throughout the Southeast, apparently were interested in integrating their historically-derived tradition with the wider network of ideas, goods, and symbols that we have come to call “Mississippian” (Cobb 2000:192; Muller 1995: 319). The communal consumption of grave goods in St. Johns II burial mounds, including the larger Shields and Grant mounds, may have served to bring together all members of the community as participants in the Mississippian interaction sphere. According to Saitta’s (1997:9) “thin definition” of a communal social formation, “equal access to resources and power is not required; what matters is the maintenance of guaranteed access to socially determined portions of surplus labor or communal social entitlements ... [that] can include subsistence goods as well as exotic prestige goods necessary to validate important life events and transitions.” Here, prestige goods are cast as “communal social entitlements” within the domain of social reproduction, rather than as exclusively the material expression of elite ideologies and power (Saitta 1997:10, 1999:137).

The sheer size of the Shields-Grant site suggests that a competent ruling body or leader was necessary to coordinate ritual and ceremonial events, direct communal labor projects (such as mound building), and negotiate political alliances and exchange interactions with neighboring and distant societies. Involvement in long-distance exchange was presumably fostered by the availability of local surpluses combined with access to exchange routes and social ties of alliance—possible reasons for the migration of St. Johns II groups out of the middle St. Johns region to northeastern Florida. It is likely that the resource-rich estuarine environment provided the necessary surpluses. But, as Saitta (1997:9-10) points out, appropriation of surplus in the form of goods or services does not necessarily have to be exploitative; it can take place for the benefit of the community.

Within Saitta’s communal political economy, elites mobilize surpluses on behalf of the larger community to ensure social reproduction. As such, exotic artifacts or raw materials may have played an essential role in communal activities, such publics feasts, rites of passage, renewal or thanksgiving ceremonies, and acts of diplomacy. Successful negotiation and alliance building at both local and regional levels would have further empowered certain individuals or kin groups, or at least given them a degree of economic or political clout. For example, establishing and maintaining successful ties with both Ocmulgee groups and Mississippian elites may have helped open access to the Mississippian world, whereby prestige goods, information, and ideology could have been secured. These political actors may have received a further cut of the communal pie as reward for their role as community spokesmen or chiefs in securing valuable items and esoteric information, with the prestige goods accrued in life accompanying them in death. This would have distinguished them materially and symbolically from others.

Individuals, such as leaders, ritual specialists, or trade facilitators, may have at times tried to parlay their communal elite position into a more exploitative one in order to advance their own wealth and social standing or those of their social group. It seems likely that over the 350-year period of St. Johns II occupations in northeastern Florida, certain political agents would have challenged the traditional communal structure and attempted to stimulate individual short-term surplus production in order to garner the labor and support of other village members, thereby bettering their own social and political agendas. Such actions may have required them to appropriate aspects of the dominant Mississippian ideology and manipulate it within local tradition in an attempt to bring about their desired goals. Pursuit of power and prestige by these political actors would have been negotiated, not assumed, and would have undoubtedly been aided by possession of effective personal qualities and political skills. Further, individuals or families may have tried to add the notion of personal aggrandizement and recognition to traditional community rituals and feasting meant to affirm community identity and solidarity and reproduce social relations (Hayden 1994). But they would have been forced to walk a thin line, since too much aggrandizing may have disrupted community harmony and led to resistance.

Thus, tensions between community ethos and the agendas of aspiring elites probably meant that St. Johns II societies were in flux, as was also true of most Mississippian chiefdoms. However, the communal structure of St. Johns II societies appears to have proven too strong and individuals or kin groups were ultimately unable to transcend the communal structure of society and assume centralized control over economic production and the development of institutional social hierarchies characteristic of Mississippian chiefdoms. Each village may have had a strong say in its own external operations, and such autonomy may have precluded any individual or kin group at the Shields-Grant site from achieving regional hegemony. In the end, internal strife and factionalism among St. Johns II villages combined with external factors, such as the collapse of Macon Plateau, may have contributed to dissolution of the St. Johns II culture in extreme northeastern Florida around AD 1200-1250. For whatever reason, most St. Johns II groups apparently abandoned northeastern Florida around AD 1250, and paved the way for immigrant cordmarked-pottery making groups (St. Marys II) from southeastern Georgia.
Conclusions

The data presented here suggest that St. Johns II groups in northeastern Florida were sedentary fisher-shellfish collectors organized into polities with a degree of social inequality. Their lives, however, were not confined to the mud flats and estuarine waters of coastal Florida. On the contrary, they were well aware of the broader Mississippian world, and, in fact, were active participants in long-distance alliance and exchange networks that brought exotic raw materials, finished goods, and possibly esoteric information to northeastern Florida. The Mississippian world was truly a sphere of widespread interaction, one that interconnected chiefdoms, riverine hunter-gatherers, and coastal fisher-hunter-gatherers. The interplay among distinct cultural entities did not create a homogeneous culturally uniform landscape, but rather allowed for the negotiation and formation of a variety of social relations in space and time, including dominance, resistance, separateness, emulation, and accommodation (Nassaney and Sassaman 1995).

The specific historical conditions and particular factors that gave rise to the local St. Johns II culture, as well as those that relate to its demise, in northeastern Florida remain unclear. Future research must address these issues and further explore the relationship between St. Johns II groups at the Shields-Grant site and those to the south at Mt. Royal, particularly since there is no evidence of St. Johns I antecedents in northeastern Florida. Could the founders of the Shields-Grant site be St. Johns II immigrants who moved north as a result of the rise of Mt. Royal? Research should also continue to explore the relationship between St. Johns II societies and Ocmulgee hunter-gatherers. Finally, attention should focus on the social relations of production that allowed some individuals or kin groups to challenge tradition and rise above others to create degrees of social inequality. This article provides only a first step toward understanding St. Johns II life within and beyond northeastern Florida.

Notes

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1 Ocmulgee Cordmarked pottery dates to the Ocmulgee phase (ca. AD 850 to 1250) of south-central Georgia prehistory. It is known to occur on sites in the Big Bend region of south-central Georgia (Blanton 1979:57-59; Snow 1977:33-49; Stephenson 1990a:100-105, 1990b; Stephenson et al. 1996:22). Snow (1977) has divided Ocmulgee Cordmarked into three geographical variants (I,II, III), based on differences in temper, cord orientation, and incidence of rim forms. Ocmulgee Cordmarked sherds on St. Johns II sites stylistically and technologically resemble the easternmost type, Ocmulgee III Cordmarked (Ashley 2000; Rolland 2000).

2 The St. Johns River flows north, so the lower St. Johns River is to the north. The river is an estuary from its mouth westward to downtown Jacksonville. A few St. Johns II sites have been recorded to the north in Camden County, Georgia (e.g., Adams 1985; Smith et al. 1981).

3 C. B. Moore (1894:200-205, 1895:452-468, 473-488) stated that both "bunched" and "burial in anatomical order" methods of interment occurred in the Grant and Shields mounds. He further noted that in the Grant Mound "burial in anatomical order largely predominated," but the Shields Mound burials were "in unnatural juxtaposition," in "most cases." However, when discussing grave goods in association with burials he simply noted that the items were "found with human remains." This is problematic, since it is unclear whether he is referring to primary or secondary burials, or single or group burials. In fact, in discussing specific burials at either mound, only once did Moore describe exotic goods in association with a "skeleton in anatomical order." Moore also stated that some burials were incomplete, but it is unclear, in all instances, whether this was an intentional burial mode or the effects of differential preservation.

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