



Dissertation Abstract

Evaluating the Role of Social Movements in the Middle-to-Late Woodland Transformation on the Northern Gulf Coast of Florida

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Throughout histories worldwide, centuries-long periods of cultural elaboration are interspersed by episodes of apparent devolution, when the structures and practices of social complexity give way to diverse and seemingly disintegrated social formations. Sweeping changes in settlement, ritual, daily practice, and material culture are typically construed by archaeologists as period or phase transitions and interpreted for the public as waves of florescence and collapse. From an ethnographic vantage point such changes often result from purposeful social action, notably social movements aimed at changing the status quo. The goal of this dissertation is to evaluate the potential role of social movements in a social transformation that occurred on the northern Gulf Coast of Florida around A.D. 650. This region-wide transformation entailed the abandonment of Hopewell-influenced Middle Woodland civic-ceremonial centers, followed by dispersed, small-scale settlement, and significant changes in mortuary ritual, daily practices, and material culture. This dissertation turns attention away from the “collapse” of civic-ceremonial centers and the activities that animated them and towards the social movements that repurposed tradition as innovation for alternative futures.

Historically, collective action such as social movements have been most successful and lasting when the participants are linked through shared social identities (categorical identities) and strong social networks (relational connections). This research aims to establish categorical identities and relational connections of Middle and Late Woodland period communities of the Lower Suwannee area primarily through variations in the design, technology, and provenance of pottery. Specifically, Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA) is used in conjunction with petrographic and technofunctional analyses of cooking and serving vessels from nonmortuary ritual and residential contexts within two well studied Middle Woodland civic-ceremonial centers (Garden Patch [8DI4] and Shell Mound [8LV42]) and nine diverse Late Woodland period sites throughout the Lower Suwannee. Results of these analyses indicate that diverse practices and categorical identities in the Lower Suwannee during the Late Woodland period were influenced by the interplay of various social movements in an area that was routinely on the fringes of traditions originating from the northern interior and east.

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