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THE MCRAE MOUND: A MIDDLE WOODLAND SITE IN  
SOUTHEASTERN MISSISSIPPI

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John H. Blitz

*Abstract*

*A reexamination of the 1925 Bureau of American Ethnology excavation at the McRae Mound site (22-Ck-533) provides insight into Middle Woodland regional interaction in southeastern Mississippi. The excavation is considered within a historical context and related to the archaeological perspectives of the 1920s. Specialized artifacts characteristic of the "Hopewellian" exchange network are examined. A comparison of the mound composition and artifact assemblage to contemporary regional complexes suggests that the McRae Mound may have functioned as a platform mortuary facility between A.D. 1 and A.D. 300.*

*Bureau of American Ethnology Research*

In the summer of 1925, Henry B. Collins of the Bureau of American Ethnology investigated a variety of archaeological sites in east-central and southeastern Mississippi. An assistant curator at the United States National Museum, Collins had acquired archaeological experience at Pueblo Bonito, New Mexico, and training in physical anthropology from Ales Hrdlička. Perhaps impressed with the strong cultural continuity between archaeological complexes and the native pueblo societies in the Southwest, Collins developed a research plan to examine the relationship between the historic Choctaw and the prehistoric cultures of Mississippi.

He pursued his work aided by a logical, albeit ambitious, strategy. First, he planned to visit early historic Choctaw villages and define the associated artifact complex. Once one end of the temporal sequence could be identified, he

intended to excavate local mounds, which he expected to yield both Choctaw and prehistoric burials. The final step was to correlate cranial measurements obtained from modern, living Mississippi Choctaws with measurements of prehistoric crania recovered in his excavations. Through this combination of archaeological and osteological methods, Collins hoped to construct a chronological sequence of cultural development.

Assisted by Hermes H. Knoblock of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Collins located several early historic Choctaw sites identified with the aid of archival materials, maps, and local histories. At these sites he found a distinctive pottery type characterized by bands of combed incisions. He concluded that this ceramic type, later defined as Chickachae Combed, was produced by the historic Choctaw (Collins 1927).

Collins' excavations at the McRae Mound in Clarke County revealed various construction stages, as well as copper, ceramic, and chipped stone artifacts, but no human interments. Also in Clarke County, Collins examined eight small mounds near Crandall that contained numerous disarticulated burials and evidence of cremation. A similar group of seven mounds was excavated in Wayne County near the site of *Yowanni*, an important historic Choctaw community. The final site investigated by Collins was the historic Choctaw community of *Kusha*, in Lauderdale County, where several graves dating to ca. 1840 were examined. These sites were interpreted as representative of three different time periods in the cultural development of the Choctaw: the McRae Mound as prehistoric proto-Choctaw, the small burial mounds as early eighteenth-century Choctaw, and the *Kusha* cemetery as early nineteenth-century Choctaw (Collins 1926). Collins then proceeded to Philadelphia, Mississippi, where he made a number of craniometric measurements on local Choctaws (Collins 1925).

This early example of the direct historic approach in the Southeast may strike modern archaeologists as naive, even strange. But when one evaluates the research from the anthropological perspective of the 1920s, Collins' work was entirely appropriate. He used the scientific method of his

day to set up criteria to measure and assess his discoveries objectively in order to solve a problem--what was the cultural and historical relationship between archaeological complexes and the modern indigenous people of the area?

Archaeologists of that era placed North American prehistory within a drastically collapsed temporal framework. The time span between the historically-known ethnic groups such as the Choctaws and the prehistoric societies that had constructed Woodland burial mounds was perceived in terms of a few centuries rather than more than a millennium. Within such a reduced temporal scale, a direct historic approach advocated by Dixon (1913) and others, if combined with the newly-recognized utility of artifact seriation (Spier 1917) or craniometric comparison (Hrdlička 1919), promised to be quite useful. It represented a pragmatic, theoretical advance from traditional antiquarian pursuits (Williams 1977; Willey and Sabloff 1980).

Today we realize that the direct historic problem is more complex than perhaps Collins and his contemporaries anticipated. The task of establishing an accurate cultural chronology in the Southeast had to await the extensive stratigraphic excavations of the 1930s. Not only did the prehistory of the region prove to have a greater antiquity than originally believed, but the utility of a direct historic approach is complicated by methodological and theoretical problems that remain unresolved (Halley 1971; Willey and Sabloff 1980; Brain 1981; Charlton 1981). In his attempt to establish a cultural sequence in southeastern Mississippi, Collins faced the problem of limited artifact samples and the lack of stratified deposits. Also poor preservation of the mound burials prevented comparative cranial measurements (Collins 1925).

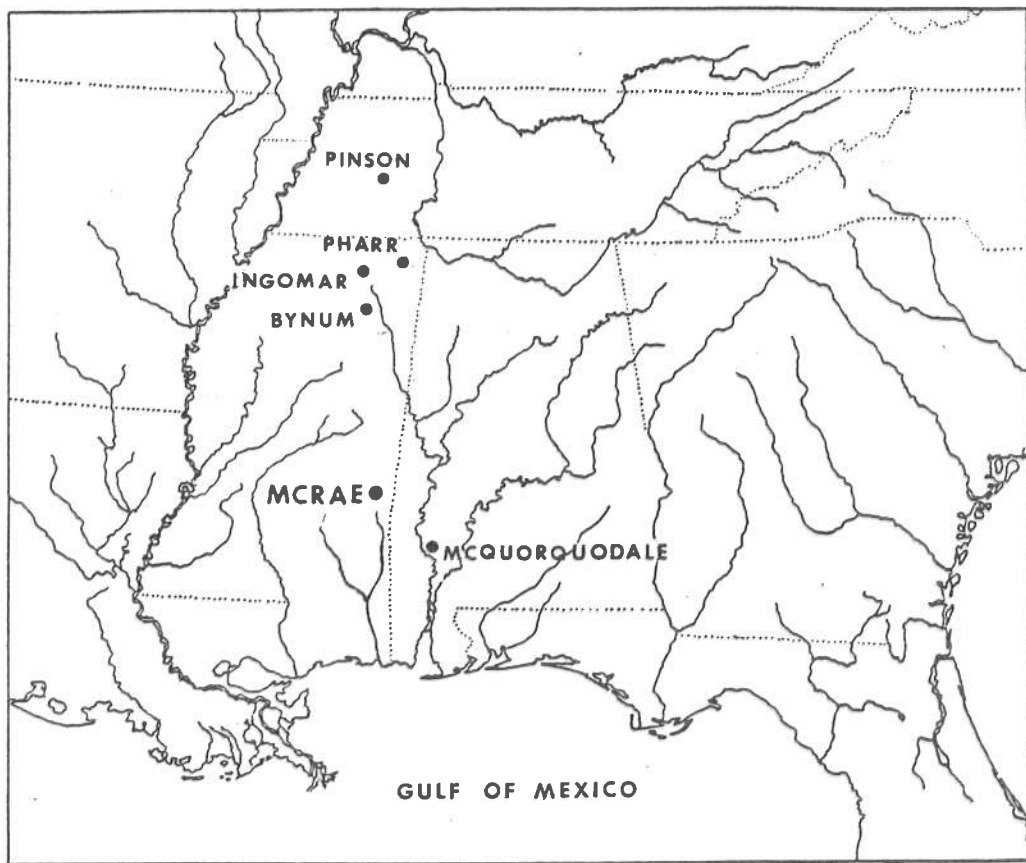
Despite the limited value of the anthropometric data, Collins' archaeological work provided a solid basis for future research. His association of a distinctive ceramic type with the early historic Choctaw has been confirmed by subsequent investigation (Penman 1980; Williams 1981; Ward 1983; Blitz 1985). As a result of the McRae Mound investigation, Collins noted similarities to artifacts in Ohio and Florida. In the 1940s, James B. Griffin examined the McRae Mound materials, recognized the presence of

"Hopewell" traits, and later included McRae among Middle Woodland complexes in his important synthesis of Eastern North American prehistory (Phillips, Ford, and Griffin 1951; Griffin 1967).

During my attempt to learn more about the McRae Mound, I was frustrated by the lack of detailed field notes or a site map with which to establish the stratigraphic or spatial location of the recovered artifacts, a common occurrence when examining collections from earlier eras. Despite this handicap for interpretation, the collection is important. In the sixty years since Collins' research, southeastern Mississippi has received little attention from professional archaeologists. Even the basic descriptive, spatial, and chronological ordering of the regional artifact complexes is in the initial stages of investigation. For this reason, it was felt that a reexamination of the McRae Mound excavation would provide a new insight into Middle Woodland regional interaction in a little-known area of the Gulf Coastal Plain.

#### *Environmental Setting*

The McRae Mound (22-Ck-533) is located on the upper reaches of Buckatunna Creek in Clarke County, Mississippi (Figure 1). The site was relocated only recently by Geoffrey Lehmann of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Buckatunna Creek forms one of the headwater tributaries of the Pascagoula River drainage basin. In the vicinity of the site, Buckatunna Creek is a small stream with a narrow floodplain. The stream originates in the rugged hills of the Tallahatta formation, a sharply dissected cuestas that lies along the southern periphery of the North Central Hills physiographic region (Kelly 1974). This same region is known as the Southern Red Hills within adjacent portions of Alabama. The landscape is rolling to steep with an elevation range from 200 to 500 feet above mean sea level. The locally variable topography creates a variety of ecotones supporting a diversity of flora and fauna. The dominant vegetation type is the oak-hickory-pine forest (Thomas 1974).



*Figure 1. The location of the McRae Mound and selected Middle Woodland sites mentioned in the text.*

*Excavation*

No site map survives, but a series of photographs taken at the time of Collins' investigation show a low, conical mound estimated to be 14 m in diameter and 1.5 m in height. A scrubby undergrowth covered the summit and the surrounding area was under cultivation. After a small surface collection was made in the field, a large rectangular trench was dug from the edge of the mound to the center, and the section walls were examined. Collins briefly described the excavation:

*Approximately one third of the mound was excavated by trenching, and while no skeletal material and only a few artifacts were found, the peculiar stratification seemed to warrant as thorough an examination as was made. This stratification consisted of a series of brilliantly colored sand layers, yellow, brown, orange, blue-gray, and pure white, from which, at the center of the mound, there suddenly arose a dome-shaped structure of compact yellow clay. This clay dome and the succession of colored sand strata probably had a ceremonial significance, having been placed on the floor of what had very likely been a temple, the site of which, still later, there probably stood a temple or council house. Colored sand strata in much the same arrangement have also been found in the effigy mounds of Wisconsin (Collins 1926:91).*

No postmolds or other clear evidence of a structure on any stratum were actually located. Instead, Collins' suggestion of a possible temple was apparently influenced by the supposed ceremonial nature of the colored sand and clay layers.

At the center of the mound, Collins made his most interesting discovery:

*Within this small inner mound or clay dome was found a rectangular ornament of sheet copper and silver enclosing a core of wood, shown in situ in figure 93. Both copper and silver are shown by analysis to be native American, probably from the Lake Superior region. Silver and copper ornaments practically*

*identical to this have been found in Florida, Tennessee, Ohio, and Michigan.*

*Thin, flaked knives, struck with a single blow from flint cores, were found both in the mound and in the adjoining field. These are identical in every respect with the flaked knives from Flint Ridge in Ohio which, while abundant in the Ohio mounds, are rarely found in other localities.*

*With the most significant features of the McRae Mound so strongly suggesting northern influence, we must conclude that the builders of this Mississippi mound maintained at least a close trade relationship with the northern tribes. While undoubtedly the many mounds and various other earthworks were built by Indian tribes of diverse stocks, there are certain resemblances between even the most distant of them which suggest a contact something more than sporadic (Collins 1926:92).*

The ornament discovered by Collins is a distinctly Middle Woodland artifact usually referred to as a "panpipe" or conjoined tubes. The McRae Mound artifact consists of three wooden cylindrical tubes (possibly of reed or cane) covered by a thin sheet of copper with silver overlay. This forms a rectangular artifact 15.8 cm long and 5.8 cm wide (Figure 2). The copper oxide preserved bits of fibrous cord that had apparently served to bind the tubes together. When found *in situ*, two small projectile points, one of red jasper and one of clear quartz crystal, had been placed upright at one end of the panpipe and appeared to be attached to it by cordage (H.B. Collins, personal communication 1983).

Several thin, blade-like flakes struck from cores of siliceous stone were recovered from the central mound feature and from the surrounding field. These lamellar blades average 4 cm long and 1 cm wide. Both the raw lithic material and these types of blades are not commonly found on Woodland sites in this region. The exact composition and source of the bluish gray, tan, and mottled white lithic material has not been identified with certainty.

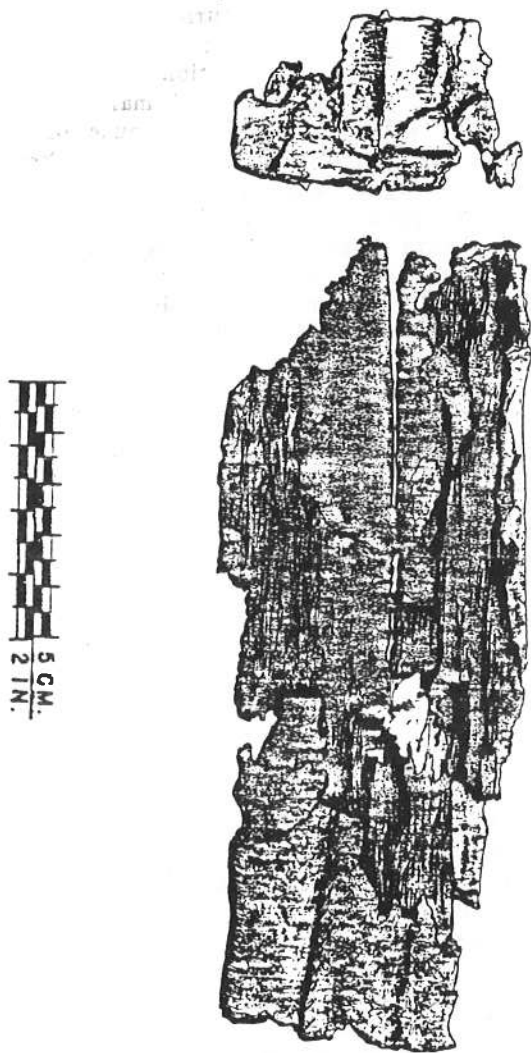
Both the mound excavation and the surface collection produced more than a dozen stright-based, straight-stemmed bifaces or projectile points. Locally available chert pebbles and Tallahatta quartzite were used as the raw material source. While these tools are not strongly diagnostic of a particular time period, there are similar to Middle Woodland forms from the Tombigbee River area (Joselyn 1960; Ensor 1981).

#### *Ceramics and Chronology*

Ceramic artifacts recovered from the McRae Mound provide a general chronological and cultural context for the site occupation (Table 1; Figure 3). In the years since the excavation, sherds from both the mound excavation and the surface collection have been stored together as one lot, so it is not now possible to assign individual sherds to a precise mound or non-mound context. Because of the limited nature of the sample, the assemblage cannot be regarded as representative of the ratios of individual types in use on the site at any one time, but a relative chronological range may be estimated for the McRae ceramics through comparison to adjacent Middle Woodland complexes: Miller I/II, Porter, and Marksville. Each of these regional Woodland complexes has been defined by ceramic frequency seriation that enables investigators to delineate distinct artifact complexes that are temporally and spatially unique. Yet each local Woodland complex shares certain broadly similar decorative styles and attributes.

Miller I is a Middle Woodland phase centered on the Tombigbee River drainage of northeastern Mississippi and west central Alabama (Jennings 1941; Jenkins 1979). Sand tempered plain, fabric marked, and cord marked types predominate. The early part of the phase is identified by the initial appearance of Saltillo Fabric Marked combined with Baldwin Plain. Slightly later Furrs Cord Marked appears as a minority type. Miller I has an estimated temporal range of 100 B.C. to A.D. 300, based on a relative ceramic chronology (Jenkins 1982a). Recent radiocarbon determinations, however, indicate that the Miller I component at Pinson Mounds, Tennessee, dates to 200 B.C. or even earlier, so the beginning date for Miller I





*Figure 2. The remains of the copper and silver-covered panpipe discovered in the McRae Mound by Henry B. Collins in 1925.*

could be pushed back several centuries earlier than previously expected (R. Mainfort, personal communication 1985). Accurate chronological definition for the initial appearance of fabric marked and cord marked wares on the Gulf Coastal Plain remains uncertain because of the lack of adequate radiocarbon dates. Saltillo Fabric Marked and Furrs Cord Marked are a significant part of the McRae assemblage. Other types found at McRae, such as Alligator Bayou Stamped, Santa Rosa Stamped, Marksville Stamped, and Marksville Incised, all together comprise no more than 3% of the total Miller I ceramic complex (Jenkins 1982a).

A decline in frequency of Saltillo Fabric Marked and a corresponding increase of Furrs Cord Marked defines the Miller II phase. Some time in the first half of this phase, ca. A.D. 350 to 450, Alligator Bayou Stamped, Santa Rosa Stamped, Marksville Stamped, and Marksville Incised are no longer found. Clay or grog tempered Mulberry Creek Cord Marked and Baytown Plain appear and increase substantially. In the central Tombigbee River area, the latter part of the Miller II phase, ca. A.D. 450 to 600, is characterized by the important minority types McLeod Simple Stamped and McLeod Check Stamped. Types of the Weeden Island series, such as Keith Incised, together form only a tiny fraction of the total complex (Jenkins 1982a). Excavations of Miller I burial mounds have produced evidence of nonlocal status-related artifacts acquired through regional exchange networks commonly referred to as the Hopewellian interaction sphere (Caldwell 1964). These distinctive artifacts are part of a general pattern of mortuary ceremonialism that appeared throughout the Eastern Woodlands during this time period (Griffin 1967). Two Miller I mound groups, Pharr and Bynum, have been excavated in the upper Tombigbee River drainage of northeastern Mississippi. The Miller I burial mounds contained a ceramic assemblage with many of the same pottery types as were found at McRae. These ceramic vessels demonstrate stylistic motifs (or perhaps actual vessels) shared through contact with other Middle Woodland groups.

For example, Mound E at the Pharr site consisted of a low clay platform with a crematory basin that had possibly been associated with a charnel structure. Miller I vessels

Table 1. Ceramics from the McRae Mound

plain, sand tempered	20
plain, clay tempered	8
Saltillo Fabric Marked	8
Withers Fabric Marked	2
Furrs Cord Marked	10
Flint River Cord Marked	1
Mulberry Creek Cord Marked	2
Santa Rosa Stamped	2
Alligator Bayou Stamped	2
Swift Creek Complicated Stamped (early variety)	5
McLeod Simple Stamped	5
McLeod Check Stamped	1
Marksville Stamped <i>var. Marksville</i>	2
Marksville Stamped <i>var. unspecified</i>	3
Marksville Incised <i>var. Marksville</i>	2
Keith Incised	1
Keith Incised <i>over</i> field of simple stamping	1
rocker stamped with crenulated implement, sand tempered	1
zoned punctated, sand tempered	1
zoned punctated, clay tempered	1
punctuation zoned by cross-hatched incision, clay tempered	1
punctated, sand tempered	3
incised, sand tempered	2
cross-hatched rim, sand tempered	2
cross-hatched rim, clay tempered	1
unidentified (eroded), sand tempered	13

found on the platform included Furrs Cord Marked, Baldwin Plain, and Saltillo Fabric Marked. Also associated with these vessels was a small Marksville Incised *var. Marksville* vessel. Among the ceramics found within features in the platform were three small sand tempered, zoned stamped vessels similar to Alligator Bayou Stamped, and a Flint River Cord Marked vessel (Bohannon 1972). Interred with

these ceramics as mortuary accompaniments were such nonlocal items as sheet copper, a greenstone platform pipe, galena lumps, and a copper and silver-covered panpipe (Bohannon 1972:64-66).

At the Bynum Mounds, small amounts of Marksville pottery were discovered along with the Miller types, particularly a fragmented Marksville Stamped *var. Marksville* vessel with a bird motif. Greenstone celts, marine shell fragments, galena lumps, and copper ear spools were placed with the burials (Cotter and Corbett 1951). A cache of corner notched projectile points in Mound B has been identified as Snyders, Gibson, or Norton forms and possibly originated in Illinois (Cotter and Corbett 1951; Griffin 1979; Jenkins 1979).

The Marksville pottery at Bynum, Pharr, and at the McRae Mound is diagnostic of the early Marksville phases in the Lower Mississippi valley. Only a few radiocarbon dates are available for early Marksville, which is estimated to date between A.D. 1 and A.D. 200 (Toth 1979). Cross-hatched rims are a characteristic decorative mode on early Marksville ceramics. One clay tempered and two sand tempered cross-hatched rims are in the McRae sample. Flint River Cord Marked pottery found associated with Marksville Stamped *var. Marksville* at Pharr and present in the McRae assemblage indicates interaction with groups in the Tennessee River valley and surrounding uplands of northwestern Alabama. In this area, Flint River Cord Marked pottery, copper, and marine shell artifacts have been found in stone mounds with burials radiocarbon dated at A.D. 140  $\pm$  90 years and A.D. 280  $\pm$  50 years (Oakley 1975).

South of the area occupied by Miller I, a distinctive Middle Woodland development along the lower Tombigbee River and Mobile Bay is known as Porter. Early investigators referred to this complex as "Porter Hopewell" or "Porter Marksville" because of the presence of nonlocal items in burial mounds and zoned stamped pottery (DeJarnette 1952; Wimberly 1960). The Miller types Saltillo Fabric Marked and Furr's Cord Marked occur only in very low percentages on Porter sites. Two types found at the McRae Mound, Alligator Bayou Stamped and Santa Rosa

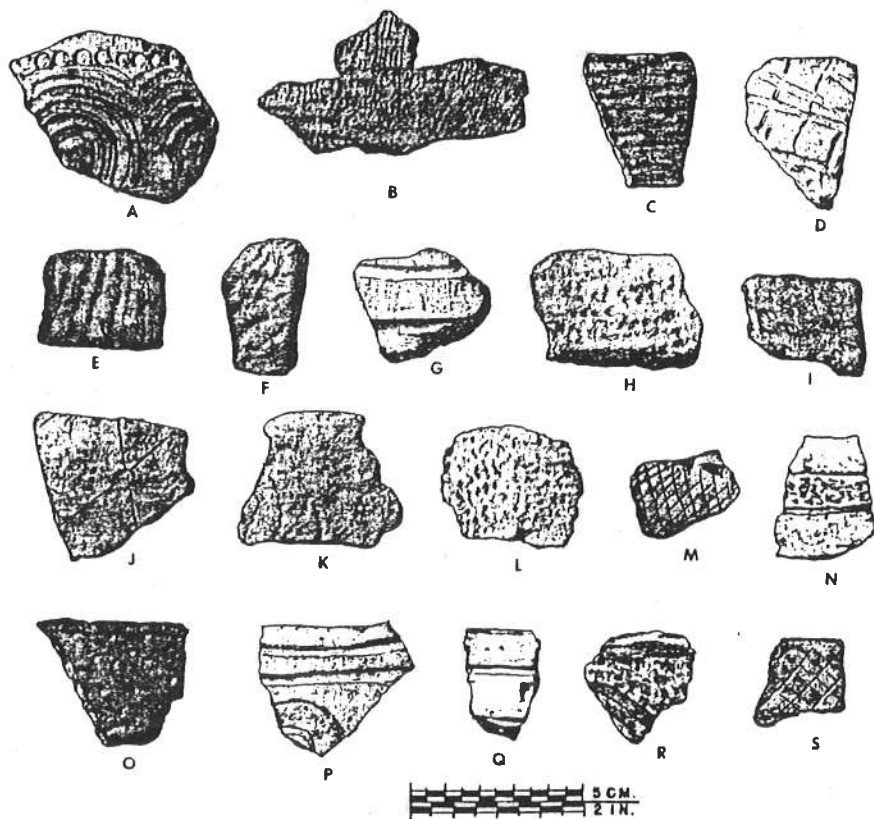


Figure 3. Ceramics from the McRae Mound site: A, Swift Creek Complicated Stamped; B,H,L, Saltillo Fabric Marked; C,E-F, Furrs Cord Marked; D, cross-hatched rim (clay tempered); G,P,R, Marksville Stamped; I,O, punctated (sand tempered); J, Keith Incised; K, rocker stamped with crenulated implement (sand tempered); M, punctation zoned by cross-hatched incision (clay tempered); N, Alligator Bayou Stamped; Q, zoned punctation (clay tempered); S, cross hatched rim (sand tempered).

Stamped, are definitive types of the early Porter sequence. These types were originally defined as a part of the Santa Rosa-Swift Creek "period" in northwestern Florida (Willey 1949). Because of these shared ceramic types, the Porter complex has been viewed as a regional variant of the Santa Rosa complex (Walthall 1979). Investigations along the lower Tombigbee River and Mobile Bay, however, have documented a strong continuation of ceramic style between the preceding Bayou La Batre complex and the Porter complex (Wimberly 1960; Brose, Jenkins, and Weisman 1982). Observing that the Santa Rosa ceramic series cannot be related to an earlier developmental ceramic complex on the northwestern Florida coast, Brose argues that prototypes for the Santa Rosa series originated in the late Bayou La Batre-early Porter transition (Brose 1984).

Similarly, the contemporaneous Marksville incised and stamped ceramics represent an indigenous ceramic development from the earlier Tchefuncte ceramic series, with possible stylistic influences (such as the widespread bird motifs) from northern Hopewell groups (Toth 1979). Early varieties of Marksville Incised and Marksville Stamped are consistently found in small numbers in the early Porter sequence. The Marksville and Porter types show subtle differences in decorative treatment and the use of clay or sand tempering. But on a broad comparative level, the zoned dentate stamped, zoned rocker stamped, and broad-lined incised types represent one of a series of ceramic developmental horizons that appear in developmental progressions across the Gulf Coastal Plain (Ford 1952).

Five sherds of Early Swift Creek Complicated Stamped were found at McRae. Complicated stamped motifs do not appear to be a part of the late Bayou La Batre-early Porter continuum. Early Swift Creek Complicated Stamped appears in only small amounts in the Porter ceramic complex (Wimberly 1960) and a very few sherds have been found in early Miller II contexts on the central Tombigbee River (Jenkins 1981). Swift Creek ceramics dating to *ca.* A.D. 200 have been recovered at the Pinson Mounds in Tennessee (R. Mainfort, personal communication 1985). Early Swift Creek Complicated Stamped has been radiocarbon dated between the first and third centuries A.D. (Smith 1979).

*Table 2. Artifacts from the McRae Mound Site in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution.*

<u>Smithsonian Catalog Number</u>	<u>Catalog Description</u>
331018	pitted stones
331019	roughly chipped blade
331020	notched blade
331021	flint chips
331022	projectile points
331023	projectile point*
331024	flakes
331025	petrified wood
331026	clay lumps (?)
331027	potsherds
331028	panpipe, copper with silver overlay

\* This artifact is a large (8.4 cm X 6.0 cm) fluted projectile point of grey, Fort Payne-like chert. Although incomplete, it appears to be of the Clovis type, ca. 10,000 B.P. Paleoindian artifacts are rarely reported from southern Mississippi.

Although it is clear that the McRae ceramic assemblage reflects its geographic position between contemporary Middle Woodland developments in adjacent areas, an attempt to provide a time span for McRae is somewhat precarious. Because of the uncertain stratigraphic or spatial context of the McRae ceramics, the sample cannot be considered a discrete ceramic complex in the usual sense (Phillips 1970). A further complication is the considerable time span that some of the pottery types were in use. While no ceramics in the sample can be definitely assigned to the earlier Gulf Formational periods, several large, rounded podal supports (sand tempered) are present. Although podal supports are a common feature of late Gulf Formational ceramics, they may continue into the local Middle Woodland ceramic complex. Given the present uncertainties about the regional ceramic

sequence, the presence of a late Gulf Formational component at McRae is a possibility.

However, the ceramic sample appears to bracket the McRae occupation within the Middle Woodland time span. It is doubtful that the McRae sample dates later than about A.D. 300 to 400 because check stamping is present only as a single sherd. In the adjacent lower Tombigbee River area, check stamping seems to appear about A.D. 400 and rapidly becomes a common decorative style (Jenkins 1982a, 1982b). Based on the predominance of fabric marked and cord marked pottery, the McRae Mound apparently represents a local variant of the Miller I phase. By comparing the ceramic assemblage with established regional sequences, it is estimated that the mound was constructed between A.D. 1 and A.D. 300.

#### *The McRae Mound and Hopewellian Regional Interaction*

Shared ceramic styles are not the only factors that imply a certain degree of regional interaction. Among the nonlocal artifacts that are characteristic of Hopewellian regional exchange, two kinds were found at the McRae Mound: the copper and silver-covered panpipe and lamellar blades.

The copper-covered panpipe with silver overlay is a distinctively Middle Woodland artifact. How panpipes were used in Middle Woodland societies is not known. Copper-covered panpipes are not found at the majority of Hopewellian sites, and when they are it is always in burials of adult males and almost always in mound interments (Griffin, Flanders, and Titterington 1970). Although possession of such a rare object undoubtedly conferred a certain degree of prestige on the owner, it does not appear that panpipes functioned as symbol badges for a formal chiefly office of ascribed status. Careful analysis of burials seems to indicate that most Middle Woodland societies had only modest social ranking that would result from sex and age categories, and from informal positions of achieved leadership (Braun 1979). This would almost certainly be the case at a small site like McRae.

Some investigators have doubted that panpipes were actually musical instruments as their name implies (Griffin, Flanders, and Titterington 1970). Perhaps individuals buried



with panpipes had used them as ritual items in shamanistic ceremonies. On the other hand, wooden panpipes may have been quite common items, but only those preserved by a covering of rare copper or silver have survived interment in acidic soils.

While the symbolic and sociocultural context of panpipes remains obscure, more is understood about the copper source from which they were made. Middle Woodland copper in the Southeast came from two general sources: the Great Lakes area and the Southern Appalachians (Goad 1979). At sites such as Mandeville, copper from both source areas was present. While most of the raw materials or possibly finished artifacts were acquired in exchange links to Ohio and Illinois regional centers, southeastern groups also produced panpipes and ear spools with copper from native sources (Goad 1979:244).

The overall scarcity of truly exotic artifacts found in the Southeast suggests that Middle Woodland exchange was not high in volume nor was it primarily the result of sustained long-distance contacts with northern Hopewellian groups. Instead, exchange may have involved both interregional and intraregional reciprocal transactions, particularly between regional centers and small dispersed groups (Brose 1979a; Goad 1979; Griffin 1979).

Whatever the social mechanisms of dissemination, copper and silver-covered panpipes were in use for a relatively brief span of time. A series of radiocarbon dates provides a chronological range for the use of these intriguing artifacts in the Southeast. Copper-covered panpipes were found in Marksville context at Helena Crossing, Arkansas, and dated to  $140 \pm 150$  B.C. and A.D.  $335 \pm 150$  (Ford 1963). At Mandeville Mound B, a copper and silver-covered panpipe was recovered in a feature dated at A.D.  $265 \pm 75$  (Smith 1979). Three copper-covered panpipes are associated with the Crystal River and Yent complexes, which have been radiocarbon dated between A.D. 150 and A.D. 400 (Brose 1979).

Closer to southern Mississippi, fragments of a copper and silver-covered panpipe were found on the Mound B platform at Pharr (Bohannon 1972). Another Mississippi example of a copper-covered panpipe was found with burials in a mound

in Panola County, but little other information is available (Johnson 1969). Two panpipes have been found associated with the Porter complex. In one of several small Porter mounds on the lower Tombigbee River, Moore found a copper-covered panpipe (Moore 1905). This discovery was made in the vicinity of the Jackson Creek site (1-Ck-209), where the Porter component has been dated to A.D. 200  $\pm$  50 (Weisman 1982). Further south on Mobile Bay, Moore recovered another copper-covered panpipe associated with burials at the Blakely Shell Midden Site (1-Ba-229; Moore 1905). These burials were presumably associated with the Porter component, radiocarbon dated at A.D. 45  $\pm$  60 and A.D. 250  $\pm$  55 (Stowe *et al.* 1977; Weisman 1982). From the available evidence, the use of panpipes in the Eastern Woodlands appears to be limited to the first three centuries A.D.

Caches of lamellar blade-like flakes similar to the McRae Mound specimens are a frequent mortuary accompaniment in Middle Woodland mound burials. At the Miller I Pharr site, 35 lamellar blades were found. The raw source material for several of these specimens was tentatively identified as chalcedony from Flint Ridge, Ohio, and flint from Elkhorn, Kentucky (Bohannon 1972). Lamellar blades from unidentified sources are frequently found in early Marksville contexts (Toth 1979). A cache of eight lamellar blades was found with a burial in Mound B, Helena Crossing, Arkansas (Ford 1963). Ford states that these blades are made of a blue-gray flint from Harrison County, Indiana. Microblades of a nonlocal material have been found at Pinson Mounds, Tennessee (R. Mainfort, personal communication 1985). Other Southeastern occurrences of similar blades, both of exotic and indigenous raw materials, include Tunacunnahee and Mandeville, Georgia (Jefferies 1979; Smith 1979); sites of the Connestee phase, North Carolina (Chapman and Keel 1979); Grand Gulf, Mississippi (Brookes 1976); and the Yearwood site, Tennessee (Butler 1979). James B. Griffin examined the McRae lamellar blades and stated that they "...look like the Illinois Valley and southwestern Illinois material and...they are not from Ohio" (Griffin, Flanders, and Titterington 1970).

Quartz crystal, either in an unmodified form or as artifacts, also occasionally occurs in Middle Woodland mortuary context in the Southeast. In historic times, quartz crystals were used by the Southeastern Indians for the purposes of divination (Hudson 1976). Quartz crystal projectile points such as the McRae specimen apparently are not very common, but examples are known from Copena burials (Walthall 1979) and Tunacunnahee (Jefferies 1979). The source of the McRae quartz crystal is unknown.

To my knowledge, no large-scale, systematic source analysis has been conducted on Middle Woodland stone artifacts suspected of being exotic to the southeast. Chalcedony, quartz, and chert are found at various locations on the Gulf Coastal Plain. It is entirely possible that some of the lithic materials that appear to be exotic actually come from Coastal Plain sources. Frequently the source cannot be identified with certainty because the location and distribution of local sources have not been adequately investigated by archaeologists.

#### *Mound Composition*

The fact that exotic artifacts usually occur in mortuary contexts raises the question of how the McRae Mound was used by the people who constructed it. The panpipe, lamellar blades, and quartz crystal point were associated with the yellow clay feature at the center of the mound. The nature of this feature cannot be ascertained with any degree of assurance, but a comparison of Collins' mound description with other excavated Middle Woodland mounds provides some clues for interpretation.

There are several kinds of burial facilities represented in Middle Woodland mounds. The two most common mortuary facilities in Hopewell mounds are the burial crypt, either a shaft or wooden box to contain the bodies, and the charnel house with associated crematory basin (Brown 1979). Similar arrangements have been found in the Southeast, along with another facility that consists of a low clay platform upon which cremated or primary inhumations were placed and then covered with layers of dirt to form a final cap. Mound E at the Pharr site seems to represent this type of facility, as

do a number of Marksville mounds (Ford and Willey 1940; Bohannon 1972; Brookes 1976; Toth 1979; Jenkins 1982).

The Middle Woodland mound chronologically and geographically closest to McRae for which there is adequate comparative data is the McQuorquodale Mound (Wimberly and Tourtelot 1941). This low sand mound was located about 50 miles southeast of the McRae Mound in Clarke County, Alabama. The site was interpreted by the investigators as a "manifestation of the Hopewellian phase" because of the presence of a copper ear spool, a copper bead, a siltstone cup, galena lumps, mica sheets, and other burial items.

The ceramics from the mound included fragmentary plain, sand tempered vessels with podal supports, sand tempered punctated and broad-line incised sherds, and sherds of Marksville Incised, which indicate that it is a part of the Porter complex (Walthall 1979). The mound was composed of a low clay platform upon which were placed six poorly preserved, disarticulated burials. Over this mortuary platform a mantle of sandy loam had been piled to form a rounded mound. Three more burials were placed in this final mound cap.

It is possible that the McRae Mound represents a mortuary facility similar to the McQuorquodale Mound. Unfortunately, an interpretation of the McRae Mound construction and composition is highly speculative because of the lack of original field notes or drawings. Profile photographs and Collins' description, however, provide some help. The photographs show a thick lower stratum covered with four or five thin lenses and then capped with a final thick stratum. Collins noted that the multiple lenses were composed of sands and clays of various bright colors. The use of special soils for fill in Middle Woodland mounds is widespread. Recently, Hall (1979) has suggested that this phenomenon might symbolize the Earth Diver creation myths shared by a number of historic Indian societies. The profile is consistent with an interpretation that the yellow clay feature at the center of the mound represents a mortuary platform facility. One problem with this suggestion is that Collins did not find any burials! Poor preservation, cremation, or the spatial limitation of the excavation may have prevented detection. Of course, it is possible that the

McRae Mound functioned as the focus of some other ritual activity that did not involve burials. Pending further excavation at McRae, the precise manner in which the mound was used by the prehistoric inhabitants will remain obscure.

### *Summary*

Across the middle Gulf Coastal Plain, Middle Woodland settlement patterns and site complexity appear to be quite variable. A few very large sites such as Pinson in Tennessee (Mainfort 1980) and Ingomar in Mississippi (Rafferty 1983) have large earthworks, platform mounds, and burial mounds. More common are smaller groups of burial mounds such as Bynum and Pharr. There are single mound sites such as McRae and McQuorquodale. There are also habitation sites, transitory camps, and the more ephemeral limited activity locations. The hierarchy in site size and complexity implies that there was a similar social hierarchy or variability that characterized Middle Woodland social relations. Populations at a few of the largest sites may have been organized as "minimal" chiefdoms (Carneiro 1981) but most Woodland societies appear to exhibit the nonhierarchical characteristics of "segmentary tribes" (Sahlins 1968). The majority of habitation sites seem to represent occupations by small groups, but whether these reflect seasonal base camps or sedentary communities remains to be demonstrated. We simply do not have the archaeological information available to understand how these various population clusters were integrated culturally and economically at the intersite, drainage basin, or regional level. Neither do we understand accurately the subsistence system that is reflected in the site distributions.

Many of the larger Miller I phase mound groups and population clusters are situated on ecotone boundaries between the North Central Hills and adjacent physiographic zones, a location that may have conferred economic advantages (see Jenkins 1982a; Rafferty 1983; Johnson 1984). Just 35 miles to the east of McRae is a cluster of three large Woodland mound groups on the Tombigbee River (Moore 1905; Sears 1977). The exact cultural identity of these mounds is uncertain, but limited investigation indicates

that they represent the Miller I-II phases and possibly the Late Woodland Tuckabum complex (Jenkins 1982a; Brose, Jenkins, and Weisman 1982). Between these central Tombigbee River mound groups and the Miller I cluster at the headwater tributaries of the upper Tombigbee River in northeastern Mississippi, a small number of Woodland mounds are scattered throughout the North Central Hills.

The McRae Mound cannot at this time be placed within a larger settlement system because of the lack of survey in southeastern Mississippi. Even the location and cultural affiliation of the other mound groups investigated by Collins --Crandall and Hiwannee--are not known. The McRae Mound appears to have been erected by a social group situated on the periphery of the larger population clusters. The people who constructed the McRae Mound participated in an extensive exchange network probably characterized by intermittent and small-scale reciprocal transactions of surplus resources. Just which resources passed through these exchanges is not known for certain, but salt, Tallahatta quartzite, *Ilex vomitoria*, greenstone, preserved foodstuffs, skins, marine shell, mica, quartz, siltstone, galena, hematite, limonite, alligator and shark teeth, copper and silver artifacts are some of the local and nonlocal items that have been suggested or recovered at contemporary Middle Woodland sites in the Southeast (Walthall 1979). Marriage transactions to promote kinship reciprocity may also have characterized the exchanges. At seasonal population aggregations for rituals that reinforced group solidarity, the achieved status of important individuals was symbolized by interment with nonlocal artifacts in mounds. The presence of the copper and silver-covered panpipe and the associated ceramic assemblage indicates that the McRae Mound was constructed ca. A.D. 1 to A.D. 300, the height of Middle Woodland Hopewellian interaction on the central Gulf Coastal Plain.

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*John H. Blitz is a graduate student of anthropology at Queens College of the City University of New York.*

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A CRITIQUE OF THE TYPE-VARIETY SYSTEM AS USED IN  
CERAMIC ANALYSIS

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Janet Rafferty

*Abstract*

*Analysis of pottery found on some Lowndes County sites raises the question of the applicability of the type-variety system for the Tombigbee valley in particular and for pottery classification in general.*

The pottery discussed here was recovered during test excavations at three sites, 22-Lo-860, 22-Lo-861, and 22-Lo-870, in the late summer of 1985 by archaeologists from Mississippi State University (Rafferty and Starr 1986). The sites are located in Lowndes County, Mississippi, near the Tombigbee River. Before analysis of the ceramics began, a decision was made to use temper/surface finish types rather than the type-variety system so often employed in pottery analysis in Mississippi and the Southeast. Temper/surface finish types traditionally have been used in Eastern North America and more recently in the Tombigbee River valley to establish the chronological placement of archaeological assemblages (Phillips, Ford, and Griffin 1951; Faulkner and McCollough 1974; Blakeman, Atkinson, and Berry 1976; O'Hear *et al.* 1981; Futato 1983). They have been used so often because temper and surface finish have been found to change through time in ways that make them satisfactory bases for temporal arrangement, when combined into types whose definitions include attributes of both temper and surface finish. For the purposes of the analysis, decoration, such as incising and punctation, was included in surface treatment along with finishes such as cord marking and fabric marking that more likely covered most of the vessel surface. This allowed decoration and surface finish to be

given equal weight in the classification, as they traditionally are in the most useful chronologically-sensitive typologies, such as those cited above. In cases where decoration occurred on a sherd with non-plain surface finish, the presence of both was noted in the classification.

In contrast, Jenkins (1978, 1981) has adopted the type-variety system advocated by Phillips (1970:23-31) and applied it to the central Tombigbee valley. His example has been followed by others (Atkinson, Phillips, and Walling 1980; Mann 1983) without much discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the system. Mann (1983:2) gives as the major argument for its use that it "has allowed types which are found both in the Tombigbee valley and the Mississippi valley to be compared and contrasted and has brought about a better understanding of the interaction of these diverse areas." Jenkins (1981:5) gives as his reason for adopting the type-variety system the belief that it could be used "to effectively describe the ceramic variability through time and space in the Tombigbee valley." He notes his belief that the Mississippi valley influenced ceramic development in the Tombigbee drainage more than had areas to the east (1981:5); because the type-variety system already had been applied to the Mississippi valley, it apparently seemed natural to extend its application to the Tombigbee valley to make comparisons between the two regions easier.

While ease of comparison with important neighboring areas might be one good reason for adopting a classification system, the type-variety system was not used in the analytic system described here, despite the need to compare the materials from the three Lowndes County sites with the Gainesville Reservoir Miller III assemblages described by Jenkins (1981, 1982). The position adopted in opposition to the type-variety system is that expressed by Ford (1961) and Dunnell (1971a, 1971b). Several important problems are seen in the type-variety system as applied by Phillips (1970); these are less prevalent, but still present, in Jenkins (1981).

First, the system produces classes that are non-comparable, in the sense that all types and varieties are not defined using the same sets of dimensions and