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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FLORIDA
ARCHAEOLOGY TO THAT OF
MIDDLE AMERICA *

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Florida, as we all know, is a low coastal plain having as its principal element a limestone base, with its share of swamps and soft adhering mud which covers easily and in certain cases preserves. On the east and west coasts the environmental conditions differ from each other and from the peninsula itself, as well as from the entire southeastern area to which anthropologically it belongs, and from the rest of North America. On the western coast are the shell keys and coral reefs and not far distant on the eastern side, in addition to a few reefs, lie the mass of islands of the Bahamas and the Antilles. Indeed it is only forty miles from Gun Keys in the Bahamas to the Florida mainland. Geologically, therefore, with its coral and shell formations, Florida is analogous to the eastern coast of Middle America and to the West Indian inlands.

Added to this, we find on the eastern and primarily on the southern portions a curious mixture not of land, but of water elements. The waters surrounding the island groups and the regions to the south and west have long been utilized by traders who frequented what is now the Bahamas and the Antilles, as well as the coast of Yucatan and Spanish Honduras. We can say "long" and feel confident that we are not making an unjustifiable statement, for we have the very earliest reports to verify the existence of habitual interinsular and intercoastal trade at the time of the first advent of Europeans

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into the New World. When Columbus touched Guanahani Island, the natives began without any hesitation to give cotton skeins, parrots and darts in exchange for the glass beads and trinkets of the Spaniards. Afterwards, when what is now called Long Island was reached, men swam out to the boats with cotton on their heads for barter. They swam out calmly and naturally, as if accustomed to meeting and to exchanging with boats at sea. This is not meant to say, of course, that the size and shape of the European vessels were known and taken as ordinary objects by the Indians; it is merely to show that these Indians were familiar with the idea of barter and of meeting, by swimming with their wares on their head, some manner of vessel at sea. More definite yet is the native in a canoe Columbus picked up on his way from Guanahani to Long Island. This man was bringing, to quote the admiral, "a little of their bread, about the size of a fist, a calabash of water, a piece of brown earth powdered and then kneaded, and some dried leaves" (this last was tobacco). The man, furthermore, had "a native basket with a string of glass beads and two blancas". All of this shows not only that trade between the islands was usual, but also how quickly any new object was diffused by the Indians. But for the good wind which facilitated the speed of the European boats, the Spaniards would have arrived at an island for the first time and found their own coins ahead of them. An interesting problem of diffusion for future anthropologists!

Later, on his fourth voyage, Columbus met a large canoe filled with people and trade articles off Bonacco Island in the Bay of Honduras. This canoe had come from the north and was navigated by men who spoke a dialect that has since been proven Yucatecan-Maya.

The Maya were not especially fond of water as seamen-that we know. They were principally an inland people, so there is room for contention as to whether the Maya were the actual boatmen-traders. We do know, however, that the Mosquitia from the eastern coast of eastern Honduras and of Nicaragua were in the habit of making regular trips to the Grand Cayman Cays. They were seamen of the first order and there is really no reason why if they crossed the Caribbean by canoe to the Grand Caymans, they should not have gone just a little further to Cuba-perhaps the San Juan Valley where divers Middle American influences have been found.

These incidents, happening as they did before the establishment of western civilization in the New World, show the actual existence of commercial intercourse during the pre-Conquest era in the Bahamas, the Antilles and the Yucatecan-Honduran coast.

Now, all of these sections are within easy reach of one another, and the distances are lessened by the many currents which have their start in the waters of the far south. It is from Cape Maize that these currents split, that is, they divide in half. One goes in the old Bahaman Channel between Cuba and the Bahaman Islands while the other travels on the western side-through the channel of Yucatan and over to the east coast of Florida. This is the familiar Gulf Stream which is met in the Florida Straits by its sister current from which it parted at Cape Maize. Although this mighty stream shifts slightly in its natural run, it must still have played an important part in carrying occasional canoes northward, and it must have been known and respected by the various native traders who were in the habit of crossing the Florida Straits, or who came up as the Mosquitia to the smaller Antillian keys.

In Florida, therefore, situated almost in the way of the powerful Gulf Stream and in easy access to its relative, the current from the Bahamas, we have two avenues from which to expect a flow of foreign artifacts or importations. In addition to this, on the land side, there is the flatness of the Gulf coast which makes it easily passable, and its connection with the neighboring territory of the southwest which in turn is closely allied to Mexico. To the north and west there is again a link with the mound cultures of Georgia and the Ohio Valley. These in themselves are not entirely free from Mexican influences, and some students have even suggested migrations. Mrs. Zelia Nuttall, in a paper on the Etowah Mounds in Georgia, points out that the distance from the valley of Mexico to Nicaragua, where some Nahua-speaking people had settled before the Conquest, is approximately equivalent to the distance from the valley of Mexico to Georgia. If tribes migrate in one direction, there is no reason why it would not be plausible for a similar migration in the opposite direction. Be that as it may, we know for certain that the Muskogian tribes of which the Creek, Chickasaw, Seminole, and Natchez were members, were relatively modern invaders from the north who were splitting the previous civilization in half. It is also known that these people, the Creeks particularly, had a legendary history of migration from the west, and their creation story of origin from caves is not dissimilar to many of the Maya and Toltec peoples. The Cherokee, who were found also in western Florida, were an intrusive group of the same period as the Muskogians. These tribes, stepping in on top of people of whom we know nothing historically, brought with them their own culture which had with it its own supply of foreign details.

Archaeologically, there are three important features in Florida: the shell heaps, the keys, and the mounds.

The first two of these, the shell heaps and the keys, are bound automatically with the sea. They are dependant upon tides, currents, and in the case of the key people, the ability to use a canoe. Both types are distinct within themselves and each should be taken as a separate culture.

The shell heaps are found along the coast and even run up the rivers. Here there is a close relationship between objects in Florida and in the West Indies, even a slight relationship with parts of the Central American mainland. In these deposits, stone implements are rare, but their place is taken by those of shell. Henry J. Boekelman, who has made numerous excavations in both Florida and West Indian shell heaps, has obtained shell cups made of the specimen called "Busyon-perversa" in both sections. The West Indian type of conk shell chisel has been found in Florida, as well as various remains of conk shell trumpets. This last can be classed as a Middle American feature more than an Antillian element. Whether these shell mound people were fundamentally the same as those who were responsible for similar heaps on the east coast of Honduras from the Aguan Valley over to the Bay Islands, and hence to the Antilles, it is impossible to say from the scant research to date. Besides, the conk trumpets, which are Middle American rather than shell mound, and were probably brought north as trade pieces before their use was taken ceremonially, celts of the "stronbus gigas" shell have been found in St. Johns River, Florida. These are identical with celts from shell heaps belonging to the Siboney culture in the valley of San Juan, Cuba, and with celts from the Bay Islands of Honduras

as well as celts from shell heaps in Jerico, on the Spanish Honduras mainland. In the United States, celts of this shell are not found north of the key sites.

Another interesting similarity between Cuba and the St. Johns River are the specimens of "tellina radiata" or "sun shells" having crude paintings in black on the inside. They have been reported by Cushing from Florida and Boekelman from Cuba, and are associated with the Arawaks. The Arawaks were originally a South American people who were in the process of migration on the Antilles when the Spaniards arrived.

The key sites which are principally off western Florida have their own peculiar formation which was responsible for certain characteristics in the manner of aboriginal construction. Here the ground was low, having to be built up into low terraces and platforms of conk shells. The builders were fisher people who spent their life on the water. Marcos Key, in particular, is outstanding with suspicious culture traits. In the first place, Marcos Key had a careful arrangement of platforms about a water court. One could go by canoe through the court to the mounds. This layout of mounds around a court is a questionable feature. Where did it originate—was it a natural parallelism or was it influenced by the Mexican and Middle American habit of laying a town around a plaza or quadrangle? What makes Marcos Key more suspicious is the fact that when the mud of the water court was dredged, it yielded certain wooden objects of definite foreign character. Among these were atlatls or throwing sticks with two finger loops, the recognized Mexican types. There were masks and wooden tablets representing birds and animals which bore a striking similarity to Georgian artifacts and also

wooden clubs resembling those on copper plates from Georgia. These objects with such a definite Georgian background, similar to things from the Etowah mound, have been traced in part to Mexico-in part to a Georgia localization. Another outstanding artifact was a wooden stool of four peg legs. This is a decided West Indian type, and must have been carried over the Florida Straits. Stone objects also were found here. Thus we have a mixture of various cultures.

The last archaeological feature, the mound sites, were due primarily to the Muskogean tribes, and belong to the latest period of pre-history continuing into historic times. The Muskogean built pyramidal mounds which were merely supporting structures. These mounds are related to the Mexican pyramidal mounds, but contain occasionally artifacts and burials. Some of these grave objects are offerings of clay imitating animal and vegetable forms. These are very crudely made and are of a suspicious character. By that is meant that they probably are of Mexican origin. These are described by Holmes in Twentieth Annual Report of Bureau of American Ethnology, 1898-99, but were found originally by Moore.

A negative, and what is probably a questionable, evidence of trade relationships between the mainland and the Antilles, Middle America, and northern Columbia, is the presence of monolithic stone axes of a ceremonial nature.

Florida then presents definite Middle American elements in the shell celts, conk shell trumpets and "Busycon-perversa" shell cups. That the "Busycon-perversa" shells were definitely associated with Middle America is evidenced from many examples, one in particular being a piece of jadeite from the sacred cenote in Yucatan. A "Busycon-perversa"

shell is incised on this piece. In addition to this, there is the now lost evidence of Mexican atlatls and the somewhat debatable example of the layout of Marcos Key. South American connection is evidenced in the specimens of painted "Tellina radiata" or sun shells. There is little question that the shell objects and especially the *shell celts* arrived on the peninsula by water from the Bahamas and West Indian Islands, and belonged to the culture of fisher folk which stretched over from the Central American mainland. Of the popularity of the island waterways as early trade routes, we have numerous examples.

The plan of Marcos Key has been attributed to several sources. One is to Mexican influence coming by way of Cuba. In Cuba, Middle American influence has been found in a number of the early sites, and is evidenced both in the presence of ball courts and in the general arrangement of mounds. The other place held responsible for Marcos Key is the Georgia group of mound-builders who in turn show more than a few Mexican characteristics and whose influence is an additional evidence at the key site in the form of the wooden clubs and tablets with animal interpretations.

Finally, there is the confusing problem of the Muskogean tribes, with their Mexican characteristics in mound structure, their legends, and the actual evidence of migration. There is the nearness of the Etowah group of remains with their very definite Mexican features displayed by the incised designs on their copper plates. There is the continued link of Mexican influences traceable through the Pawnee of the Plains, through the southwest itself, on down to the valley of Mexico, and beyond.