

Chapter 9. CENTRAL PENINSULAR GULF COAST: The Manasota Region: 2500 B.P.-A.D. 800

The central peninsular Gulf coast region extends from Pasco County in the north southward to Charlotte Harbor, encompassing Tampa Bay as well as Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Sarasota counties (Milanich and Fairbanks 1980:22, 24-26). During much of the post-Archaic, pre-Safety Harbor period it was the region of the Manasota culture, defined and described by George Luer and Marion Almy (1979, 1982). Less than 50 Manasota sites are recorded in the Florida Site File.

Manasota (which subsumes the Perico Island and Weeden Island designations in this region) can be divided into early (2500 B.P.-A.D. 400) and late (A.D. 400-800) periods, based both on changes in secular ceramics and on the presence of Weeden Island pottery in late Manasota mounds. Late Manasota is not a Weeden Island culture, although archaeologists recognize that Manasota burial ritual is related to that of the more northerly Weeden Island culture(s) (Milanich et al. 1984:14-15). A Weeden Island cultural manifestation apparently follows a late Manasota (ca. A.D. 800-900), but this needs to be verified.

Manasota Culture

The Manasota culture derives its name from Manatee and Sarasota counties where it was first recognized. Because the village ceramics associated with Manasota sites are largely undecorated wares with quartz (sand) inclusions, the traditional practice of equating a ceramic assemblage with an archaeological culture was not feasible. Instead, Luer and Almy (1979:40-41) used a constellation of traits to define Manasota and distinguish it from the earlier Archaic culture(s) and later Safety Harbor culture:

. . . Manasota culture is characterized by . . . sites which yield evidence of an economy based on fishing, hunting, and shellfish-gathering. The sites yield evidence of burial practices involving primary, flexed burials . . . Ceramic manufacture was limited to sand-tempered, undecorated . . . pottery such as . . . flattened-globular bowls and pots with a converged orifice. Many shell tools were used . . . including fighting conch shell hammers, left-handed whelk shell "spokeshaves" . . . columellae, and hammers. . . There was little use of stone tools. . . Bone tools include barbs and simple points made from longbones.

The Manasota population probably evolved from the late Archaic transitional period populations of the region. By A.D. 800 or shortly afterwards, Manasota developed into a late Weeden Island culture and, shortly thereafter, into Safety Harbor, a Mississippian period culture.

The Setting

Within the central peninsular Gulf coast the coastal strand is typified by narrow bays adjacent to well-drained pine flatwoods that extend from the shoreline inland to the uplands of interior south-central Florida (Luer and Almy 1982:37-39). Narrow, long barrier islands form a line paralleling the coast. Although some mangroves and coastal marshes are present on the coast, their limited distributions are in sharp contrast to the southwest Florida stands of mangroves and the north peninsular Gulf coast saltwater marshes. The eastern limits of the region are roughly placed at the Peace River.

Numerous streams flow into the region's narrow bays and into Tampa Bay, including the Hillsborough, Alafia, Manatee, and Little Manatee rivers. The shallow waters of the Gulf and the adjacent estuaries provided habitats for a variety of fish and molluscs, as did the freshwater streams and bayheads within the pine forests. Compared to northern Florida, the soils within the region were not well suited to aboriginal agriculture.

Inundated shell middens, some of them postdating 2500 B.P., are known from the peninsular Gulf coast, including Tampa Bay, and it is likely that some Manasota sites are now located beneath coastal waters (Bullen and Bullen 1950, 1953, 1963; Ruppé 1980; Warren 1964, 1970). An understanding of the coastal geomorphology of the region is essential to future studies of Manasota.

Material Culture

Manasota ceramics are almost all undecorated, and studies of temporal changes have had to rely on attributes other than pottery decorative styles (Luer and Almy 1980, 1982:41, 44-45). Flattened globular bowls with inward-curving rims and chamfered (beveled) lips help to define the early Manasota period, 2500 B.P.-A.D. 400. After A.D. 400 the globular bowls are replaced by pot-shaped vessels with straight rim and rounded lip. Another early Manasota vessel form is a pot with a slightly incurving rim and rounded lip with a slightly converged orifice, dating from ca. 2200 B.P.-A.D. 700. Simple bowls with outward-curving rim and flattened lip are very late within the Manasota period. The early forms tend to be relatively thick, often more than 1 cm thick. After A.D. 400 the pottery vessels are thinner, a trend that continues up to the Safety Harbor period.

Luer and Almy (1982:41-42, 44, 45) have also studied the shell and bone tool assemblages from Manasota village sites. Marine shell, heavy and durable, provided ready raw material for a variety of tools, some probably hafted in wood, including *Strombus* two-holed hammers (apparently limited to ca. 2300 B.P.-A.D. 700); *Busycon* spoons, pounders, celts, columellae, columella barbs, cutting-edge tools, and hammers; *Pleuroploca* and *Fasciolaria* columella "planes"; *Noetia* (valves) net weights; and *Mercenaria* anvils, choppers, hammers, scrapers, and digging implements. *Busycon* shells were also fashioned into gorgets, and beads were manufactured from *Oliva* shells.

Shark vertebrae were drilled for use as beads, and bone was also used to make projectile points, barbs, and awls. Stingray spine points and sharks' teeth tools (scrapers and knives) have also been identified.

Within the central peninsular Gulf coastal strand, stone is relatively rare and shell was more commonly used to make tools. However, some chert and agatized coral was available and used to manufacture tools (or, more likely, the tools were made elsewhere and brought to the coastal strand). Tools of these materials include scrapers, knives, drills, and projectile points (Sarasota, Hernando, and Westo points; see Bullen 1975). Mineralized (fossilized) sharks' teeth and dugong (an extinct sea cow) ribs were also used for tools.

Settlement Patterns

The largest number of Manasota sites have been found adjacent to the waters of the region's narrow bays and Tampa Bay, providing access to fish and shellfish (Luer and Almy 1982:fig. 1, 39-40, 43). Such coastal sites include large and small shell middens (often components within sites that include earlier and/or later components) that are believed to be village locations, and sand burial mounds. Large shell middens are linear deposits, some forming ridges, paralleling the shoreline. At some, shell refuse was used to construct ramps leading to the middens. The large middens tend to be spaced along the shore at distances of 5-10 km, perhaps reflecting coastal catchment requirements. Smaller middens are also found on the coast. Coastal sites had immediate access to the resources of the pine flatwoods and their freshwater habitats.

Presumed short-term village sites (without extensive shell middens) and special use sites are present away from the coast in the pine flatwoods near water sources. These sites tend to be placed on higher ground such as scrub oak terrain (Austin and Russo 1989). In some instances the height of the terrain was

enhanced by purposeful construction (Almy n.d.) Non-coastal sites include lithic and ceramic scatters like Curiosity Creek (8HI480), shell scatters like Catfish Creek (8S0608), lithic workshops like Rock Hammock (8HI556). Dirt middens may also be present, as suggested by the Myakkahatchee site (8SO397) (Luer et al. 1987).

Subsistence

Our knowledge of Manasota subsistence is based largely on George Luer's excavations at the Old Oak and Roberts Bay sites near Sarasota (Luer 1977a, 1977b), analysis of zooarchaeological remains from the Venice Beach site (8SO26), an inundated site just off the present shoreline (Fraser 1980), Brooks's analysis of collections from the Bayshore Homes (8PI11) and Weeden Island (8PI1) sites (Brooks 1974), and Russo's analysis of the faunal remains from Catfish Creek (Austin and Russo 1989). Luer and Almy (1982:43) note that fishing was the most important subsistence activity; fifteen species of bony fish and 10 of sharks and rays have been identified. The variety of bottom, open-water, and surface fish suggests diverse fishing methods were employed. Dolphins and other cetaceans were also taken, as were sea turtles.

Shellfish, gathered from the shallow waters adjacent to coastal villages, were also important within the Manasota diet. Luer and Almy (1982:43) report fifteen species collected from a variety of habitats, including barrier island beaches, turtle grass tidal flats, and mangrove forests. Middens are known that contain primarily either oysters or clams, suggesting specialized collecting from habitats.

The coastal Manasota peoples hunted and collected in the adjacent pine forests and freshwater habitats. Deer, wolf, dog, opossum, raccoon, rabbit, rat, reptiles, and amphibians have all been identified among the animal remains in shell middens, as have the red-breasted merganser and bald eagle.

Chronology

A number of radiocarbon dates have been secured from Manasota sites (see Bullen 1971:13; Bullen and Bullen 1976:25, 41; Luer 1977b:127; Luer and Almy 1980:216; Sears 1971:56; Austin and Russo 1989:Table 7). Those dates, coupled with dates from the post-Manasota Safety Harbor culture (Luer and Almy 1982:53) securely date the development of Manasota and its evolution into late Weeden Island and Safety Harbor. The idea that a late Weeden Island manifestation was present between Manasota and Safety Harbor appears to be valid (e.g., Milanich and Fairbanks 1980:26).

Burial Practices

Human burials during early Manasota times (2500 B.P.-A.D. 200) were made as primary, flexed interments in shell middens. During the period A.D. 200-400, similar interments were made, but within constructed burial mounds located adjacent to village sites. These early continuous-use mounds largely contained locally-made, undecorated pottery. Occasionally interments were extended or semi-flexed. During the period A.D. 400-600, Weeden Island pottery appears in the mounds. After A.D. 600 the relative amount of Weeden Island ceramics increases, and secondary burials were made (Luer and Almy 1982:42, 46-47).

Previous Research

Our basic knowledge of the Manasota region was synthesized by Gordon R. Willey in the 1940s (Willey 1948, 1949a), who incorporated information from the excavation of a number of sites dating back into the nineteenth century. Many of the turn-of-the-century and early twentieth century federal archaeological projects provided baseline data that are still important today (see Willey 1949a:15-35, for an extensive overview of Gulf coastal sites excavated during the century preceding 1946; also Bullen 1952).

Over the next two decades a number of archaeologists published the results of excavations at both mound sites and shell middens (e.g., Bullen 1950, 1951b, 1971; Bullen et al. 1978; Bullen and Bullen 1976; Bullen, Partridge, and Harris 1970; Sears 1960, 1971b). During the 1970s and 1980s archaeologists also began to investigate non-coastal sites (Almy 1976, 1982, n.d.; Hemmings 1975; Welch 1983; Austin and Russo 1989) and to undertake more problem-oriented studies of the shell middens and Manasota region ceramics (Luer 1977a, 1977b; Luer and Almy 1979, 1980; Austin and Russo 1989). Also during the 1970s cultural resource management surveys began to be carried out on a large scale (see, for example, the bibliographic citations in Luer and Almy 1982, and the discussion in Welch 1983:20-21). Data from these investigations provided a basis for reinterpreting the information gleaned from previous excavations. The result has been a synthesis and reformulation of our taxonomy and definitions of the cultures of the central peninsular Gulf coast (Almy 1976; Luer and Almy 1982).

Important Sites

Several Manasota sites--the Osprey Archaeological and Historical site (8SO2), the Weeden Island site (8PI1), the Prodie Shell Midden (8SO617) at the Keith Residence at Phillippi Estate Park, and the Bickel Mound (8MA83B), and one archaeological district containing Manasota sites, the Upper Tampa Bay Archaeological District (8HI2271), are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Many of the important mound sites excavated by C.B. Moore (1903) and others have long been destroyed, although the collections exist and are curated in various museums (e.g., Thomas Mound [8HI1], Safford Mound [8PI3]). Such collections provide a very important database. Extant mounds include Palmer Mound (8SO2) (Bullen and Bullen 1976) and Prine (8MA83C) (Bullen 1951).

Similarly, many shell middens have been totally or partially destroyed. Important remaining sites include the extensive middens at the Weeden Island site in Old Tampa Bay (8PI1) (see Brooks 1974; Fewkes 1924; and Sears 1971b), middens along the south shore of the Little Manatee River (Sellner site [8HI30]) (see Bullen 1952), shell middens on Siesta Maria Key (Luer and Almy 1979), middens on the mainland in and near Sarasota (e.g., the Old Oak [8SO51] and Roberts [8SO56] sites) (Luer 1977a, 1977b), small shell scatters on the mainland (e.g., Austin and Russo 1989; Almy n. d.) and middens adjacent to the Palmer Mound near Osprey.

Important inland sites include Cypress Creek (8HI471) on the north side of Tampa Bay (Almy 1982) and the now-destroyed Curiosity Creek (8HI480) in southern Hillsborough County (Almy n.d.), and the Myakkahatchee site (8SO397).

Research Questions

Because our knowledge of the Manasota culture has been summarized by Luer and Almy, research questions can be posed that take advantage of their synthesis.

Gaps in the database. Modern excavations of coastal middens, both large village sites and smaller middens, and excavations of noncoastal sites are needed to provide additional data important to understanding the types of Manasota sites and their distributions and to answer some of the questions

posed below. Reanalysis of extant data from the many sites already excavated (and since destroyed) should be undertaken as appropriate as future archaeologists carry out problem-oriented studies. Within the Manasota region, museum collections provide a very important database, especially as archaeological sites in the greater Tampa Bay region continue to be destroyed as development expands.

The concept of Manasota needs to be further refined, especially vis-a-vis earlier and later cultural manifestations, e.g., the old concept of Perico Island and the transition into Safety Harbor.

Chronology. Emerging data suggest that Manasota developed into a late Weeden Island and, thereafter, into the Safety Harbor culture after ca. A.D. 800. This sequence needs to be verified.

The relationships of Manasota to the preceding culture needs to be addressed. What is its relation to the earlier ceramic-making cultures associated with fiber-tempered and Perico Island pottery? Analyses of Manasota ceramics by Luer and Almy (1980) and by Mitchem and Welch (1983) need to be expanded, and the results tied to radiocarbon dates to provide attribute lists correlated with chronometric dates.

Settlement patterns. Clearly the Manasota culture has a coastal orientation. However, many inland, noncoastal sites exist, and the entire realm of sites needs to be studied as a system. Also, very few late Archaic sites with extensive fiber-tempered pottery components are present in the central peninsular Gulf coast region relative to Manasota, suggesting a population increase after 2500 B.P. However, such sites may have existed, but are presently inundated.

What do the inland sites represent? Are they special-use camps occupied for short periods of time or are they longer-term villages?

What are the relationships between coastal and inland sites?

What are the relationships between pre-Manasota and early Manasota settlements?

Was there indeed a large population increase after 2500 B.P., as apparently reflected in an increase in the number or extent of sites?

Are there changes in Manasota settlement patterns over time? Or are many pre-Manasota, late Archaic sites inundated or buried under shifting sands or more recent sites, and demographic growth within the bounds of an expected increase?

Are there differences in settlement patterns between the late Manasota and early Safety Harbor cultures, and what do these similarities or differences represent?

Social and political organization. To date, almost nothing has been written about the level of social and political organization of the pre-Safety Harbor societies of the central peninsular Gulf coast.

What level of social and political organization was present in the Manasota culture?

Does the appearance of mound burial reflect changes in social organization, i.e., the development of lineage-based kin groups as an integrative unit?

Health and nutrition. Human skeletal collections from Manasota mounds offer an excellent database for studies of social status and health and nutrition. Such data are very important as comparative information to aid in our understanding of the nutritional effects of chiefdom organization in the later Safety Harbor period. More detailed dietary studies based on excavated collections are also needed; such studies should include evidence of plant use.

How important was the estuarine system of Tampa Bay to the subsistence of Manasota peoples relative to, for example, the coast near Sarasota?

Are there environmentally-related reasons (i.e., the onset of more propitious estuarine conditions) for the apparent increase in the number of Manasota sites over those of earlier late Archaic peoples?

How does the health of the Manasota, presumed village-dwelling peoples, compare with that of the peoples of the Archaic and Paleoindian periods (e.g., from Little Salt and Warm Mineral Springs), who presumably were fulltime hunter-gatherers?

Regional relationships. The Gulf coast of Florida, 1280 km in length from Perdido Bay to Cape Sable (more than 8600 km of indented shoreline), exhibits subtle environmental and cultural diversity during the period 2500 B.P. to A.D. 800.

Can we correlate such cultural diversity among the northwest, north peninsular, central peninsular, southwest, and Ten Thousand Island regions to differences in coastal and adjacent inland environments?

Technological studies of Manasota Weeden Island ceramics from mortuary contexts are needed to determine if they are locally produced or represent items brought from more northerly Weeden Island cultures.

Preservation Goals

The destruction of archaeological sites in the central peninsular Gulf coast region has been ongoing since the nineteenth century, when shell middens along the shoreline of Tampa Bay were mined for shell to pave the roads of nearby towns. Commercial shell-mining of inundated middens in the bay has also occurred. The phenomenal growth in Pinellas, Hillsborough, Manatee, and Sarasota counties in the twentieth century, especially over the last few decades, has probably resulted in the destruction of more of the archaeological record in this area than in any other part of the state. Extraordinary efforts need to be made to protect the little that is left. This is especially true along the coast, where the shell middens that remain are only remnants of the extensive deposits once present in the nineteenth century.

A major task is to document the destruction of sites that has occurred. This will both provide a case study of what has been and is happening to Florida's archaeological record, and it will allow archaeologists to begin to reconstruct the archaeological record before most of it was destroyed by modern development and commercial shell mining. Such a reconstruction is important to many of the research questions stated here.

Locate unrecorded sites and evaluate the significance of all sites, especially those endangered through erosion or development.

Inventory extant artifact collections.

Document the fate of sites observed by archaeologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (up into the 1930s), many of which were recorded in the Florida archaeological site file in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Excavate sites representing varying types.

Nominate representative sites of varying types for listing in the National Register.

Cooperate with state agencies and conservation organizations to acquire lands which contain significant archaeological sites.

Initiate an educational campaign on the importance of protecting the archaeological record. Ideally, this would be a joint effort of the Division of Historical Resources and local historical and anthropological organizations, museums, corporations, and foundations. Such a project could be a pilot for similar programs elsewhere in the state.

