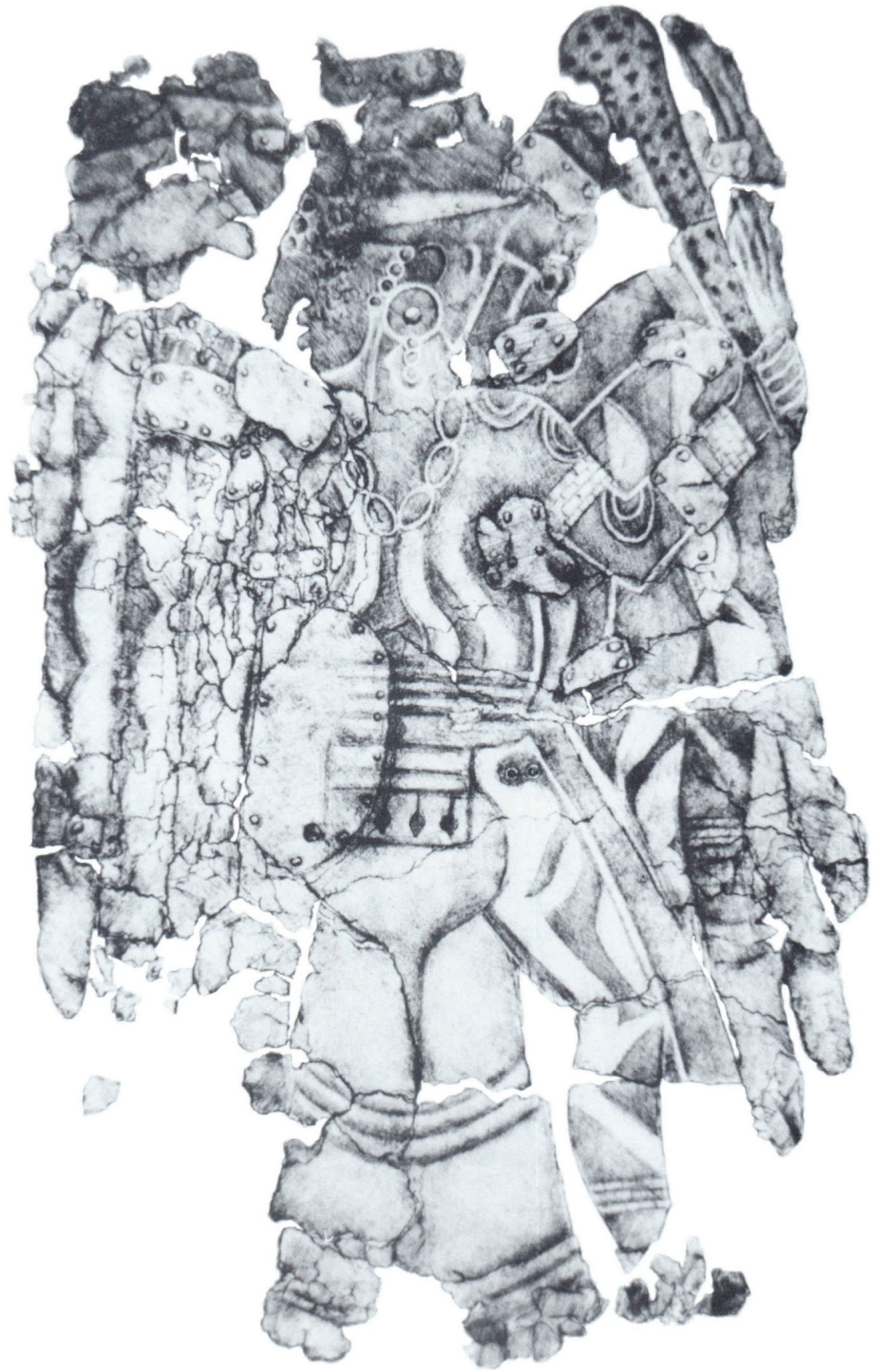


Phøebus 4



A continuing cultural characteristic in the Southeast throughout the period c. 1000 BC to AD 1500 is the presence of elaborate ceremonialism. A concentration on burial activity seems to have served as a focal point for a number of Southeastern cultures, albeit the details of ceremonialism exhibit expected local/regional/temporal variations. Excavations have established that in the period AD 300-1500, the aboriginal inhabitants of Florida produced numerous specialized artifacts in clay, metal and wood which were deposited in tomb/temple sites in a ceremonial context. Many of the grave goods appear to have been specially made for inclusion in burial sites. Others may have been the property of deceased individuals who had attained status within the context of their society. Over the extended period of time between AD 300 to 1500, certain details of ceremonial activity changed, but the basic structure and certain established thematic traditions persisted.

During the Weeden Island period, which lasted from c. AD 300 to 1200 a large number of ceremonial ceramics were produced and numerous examples have been found associated with tomb/temple sites throughout Northwestern Florida, especially in the panhandle region of the state. Weeden Island culture exhibits what has been called "sacred/secular dichotomy" within the area of ceramic production.¹ Ceremonial vessels differ in quality, form, and decoration from utilitarian wares. Mortuary ceramics are rarely found in village sites, being almost exclusively recovered from tomb/temple site areas.

Although secular traits such as house type and utilitarian pottery differ depending upon locale, ceremonial life and the material culture which supported it appear to have been shared throughout the Weeden Island area. Weeden Island ceremonialism is thought to have evolved out of the earlier Yent and Green Point complexes in North Florida and adjacent areas of Alabama and Georgia.² There is also evidence of contact with the Lower Mississippi Valley cultures, especially in the panhandle region. Thus, Weeden Island ceremonialism

Dancing figure, rubbing from repoussé copper breastplate, Lake Jackson mound, Leon County, Florida, c. AD 1350, 11"h., photo courtesy of the Museum of Florida History. Figure 6.

and socio-political organization were probably influenced to some degree by the diffusion of ideas eastward from the Mississippi Valley. Additionally, direct or indirect ties with Meso America, either trans-gulf or via the Lower Mississippi Valley, are indicated, although during the height of the Weeden Island period contacts with extra-regional spheres of influence appear to have been minimal.

During the early phase of development (AD 300-600), Weeden Island society appears to have been rather loosely organized, probably into lineages. Within Weeden Island social structure, some kin groups and individuals were regarded as more important and having higher status than others.³ A good example of this early form of Weeden Island structure is found at the McKeithen site, a burial mound and village complex located in North Central Florida. It is apparent from the distribution of grave goods at the site that some groups had greater control over exotic materials than others. Weak social stratification is present, but power was not centralized. The society did not have the same complexity that was later to manifest itself as Mississippian contacts increased. It is unlikely that Weeden Island society was organized into a chiefdom during the early period, although some individuals — especially those associated with mortuary activity — were apparently awarded special status.

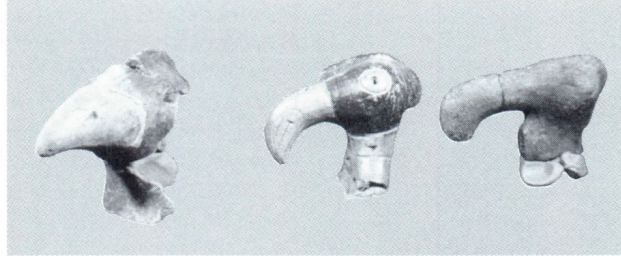
Within the ceremonial ceramic tradition associated with Weeden Island, effigy vessels provide the most elaborate examples. Effigy ceramics from the McKeithen site include this unusual bowl excavated from Mound C (Figure 1). McKeithen apparently functioned as a center for mortuary activity and included three mounds. Mound A served as a burial preparation area and storage depository for bone bundles which had been readied for interment. At some point in time — perhaps the death of a lineage head — the bone bundles were placed in a second mound, C, along with caches of mortuary ceramics and other grave goods. Mound C was found to contain at least eighteen Weeden Island ceramic vessels most of which had been buried in the Southeastern quadrant of the mound. The vessel illustrated in Figure 1 is characterized by an unusual group of rim adornments — four inward-facing creatures of which two are thought to represent dogs. One of the remaining effigy heads is in the form of a large-beaked bird.

The third mound, B, seems to have served as the base for a structure, likely the residence of the “mortuary specialist.” The resident of the structure was interred in a shallow grave dug in the floor of the house. A small log tomb had been constructed over him. The



Figure 1. Ceramic effigy bowl, McKeithen mound, Lake City, Florida, c. AD 300-600, photo courtesy of the Florida State Museum.

Figure 2. Ceramic bird's heads, McKeithen mound, Lake City, Florida, c. AD 300-600, Photo courtesy of the Florida State Museum.



structure had then been burned and the mound was capped with a covering of earth. Several ceramic bird heads broken off from pottery vessels were interred with the body along with a group of plates each decorated with stylized bird motifs (Figure 2). "It is easy to speculate that the raptorial bird represented on the plates and by the bird-headed effigies was a symbol associated with the house's occupant, the presumed mortuary 'director'."⁴

A number of the vessels found at McKeithen and elsewhere in Weeden Island sites were decorated with cut out patterns and could not have functioned as containers (Figure 3). They seem rather to have been sculptural objects — perhaps serving as incense burners or as guardian figures. Many have pedestaled bases and might have been arranged in or around the charnal house area, perhaps in a manner similar to that of the ceramic figures which guarded the entrances of early Japanese tombs.⁵ At the time that the bodies, which had accumulated in the charnal house were to be buried, all ritual items might also have been cleared out and placed in the burial mound. The charnal house was then buried and the mound was capped with a thick layer of sand.



Figure 3. Double-headed ceramic bird effigy, Washington County, Florida, c. AD 600-900, 8½" h., photo courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, cat. #17/4875.

During the latter part of the Weeden Island period (c. AD 600-1200), the burial mounds increasingly became tombs for high status individuals. Typical of this latter trend is the major Weeden Island ceremonial site located at Kolomoki in Southwestern Georgia. Kolomoki probably functioned as the focal point for an extensive Weeden Island polity headed by a major chief who controlled the lesser chiefs and villagers within his territory. By AD 800 this chiefdom pattern was accompanied by a further elaboration of specialized mortuary ceramics and other exotic grave goods which were interred with high status members of the group. In the North Florida panhandle area the Buck Mound, a Weeden Island site near Fort Walton Beach, Florida, provides an example of a later Weeden Island ceremonial area. The ceramic material recovered from the Buck



Figure 4. Polychrome ceramic effigy figure, Buck mound, Fort Walton Beach, Florida, c. AD 500-800, 15" h., photo courtesy of the Temple Mound Museum, cat. #1197.

Mound dates from c. AD 600-800.⁶ Evidence of cremation is present at the site, a practice not unknown within the Weeden Island context. Few human skeletal remains were recovered from the mound, however skeletal material may have been removed from the site by non-professional prior excavation. An interesting feature of the Buck Mound was the recovery of the complete skeleton of a small dog which had been ceremonially interred. No other dog burials have yet been discovered at Weeden Island sites, but similarities to Meso American practices certainly come to mind.

Twenty-three ceramic items were recovered from the Buck Mound including two bird effigies, one representing a vulture, the other an owl. Nearly all of the vessels had been smashed before being interred and most were located in the east side of the mound. The vulture effigy is of buff paste and was painted red. It exhibits incised decoration including an early appearance of the weeping eye motif. The owl effigy is of red clay paste covered with a deep red slip. Incised decorations and zones of white enhance the surface of the vessel. The rounded base is the remnant of a pedestal.

Probably the most spectacular effigy figure yet recovered from a Florida site is a ceramic urn from the Buck Mound (Figure 4). The vessel is fifteen inches high, covered with red paste, and zone-painted in white and black. The face of the vessel has a mask-like appearance, an effect further emphasized by its curious placement with regard to the rest of the body. Meso American analogies once again appear relevant, although regional equivalents have been found at sites from the Lower Mississippi Valley and elsewhere throughout the Southeast.

By roughly AD 800, the Weeden Island culture had begun to give way to new influences which were emerging and which were to culminate in the Fort Walton/Pensacola complex. Like many other Southeastern cultures of the period AD 1000-1500, Fort Walton manifests a number of traits reminiscent of those of the Mississippian societies who were responsible for the well-known ceremonial centers of Moundville in Alabama and Etowah in Georgia. Mississippian traits appeared in Northwest Florida as early as AD 900, and later manifestations are found along the central Gulf Coast around Tampa Bay.⁷ Until the mid-1970's, most researchers believed that Fort Walton culture represented an intrusion of Mississippian peoples into Northwest Florida. While this model has remained popular, most recent data suggests that Fort Walton probably evolved out of the earlier Weeden Island culture and represented the "Mississippianization" of Weeden Island society rather

than an intrusion into the area of an alien group of people from outside the region. "Rather than thinking of Weeden Island as a sophisticated local cultural development suddenly chopped off in its prime by Mississippian invaders who established Fort Walton culture, it is more useful and probably more correct to think of it as the breakdown of a long-standing adaptive system under the stress of population increases. . ."⁸ and to view the subsequent realignment of local culture along the lines of Mississippian models as an adaptive response to new socio-economic conditions.

The reason for the new conditions was probably linked to an increased emphasis on horticultural activity among the peoples of northwest Florida. The Fort Walton culture was characterized by a growing dependence on farming and the concomitant development of more structure and hierarchical institutions of social control which may have involved a shift from a tribal to a more highly structured chieftan level of social organization.⁹ Competition for agricultural land, the introduction of new cultigens, and subsequent population increases shared the responsibility for the advent of new cultural patterns. Mississippian influences can be seen in the growth of larger ceremonial centers which included flat-topped pyramidal mounds that functioned as a base for structures associated with religious/political authority. The development of these ceremonial centers indicates a growing political and religious cohesion and a rise in the power of community leaders.¹⁰ Kolomoki and other late Weeden Island sites represent the earliest examples of this emergent pattern.

While recent data suggests considerable continuity between Weeden Island and Fort Walton culture and probably overrules the earlier view of intrusive Mississippian peoples, it is important to retain an awareness of the distinctive differences which in fact do exist between the two periods. One area where these differences are abundantly evident is in ceramic decoration. Like the earlier Weeden Island culture, Fort Walton tomb-temple and cemetery sites often include deposits of special pottery vessels. These works are distinguished from utilitarian pottery found in village sites by more careful manufacture and by the use of a variety of incised decorations. While the basic technique of ceramic manufacture remains relatively constant throughout both periods, changes in the treatment of surface decoration are quite clear. The development of new design motifs and the resurrection of some earlier motifs reflect a significant change in ideology — specifically the shift from Weeden Island burial mound ceremonialism and its specially made mortuary ceramics to

Fort Walton ceremonial centers with the emphasis on public displays of authoritarian leadership. The growth of a hierarchy and the development of an elite class was accompanied by the manufacture of a variety of specialized paraphernalia designed to reinforce the position of the leaders. Ceremonial ceramics were increasingly one aspect of this outward display of affluence and power. As a result of this ideological shift, the purpose of ceramic decoration became less to enhance the religious significance of the artifact and more to enhance the status of the owner/user of the vessel. In accordance with this trend, Fort Walton ceramists relied increasingly on a pre-determined set of design elements which functioned both as decorations and as symbols identifying the vessel's association with members of the ruling elite.

Fort Walton ceremonial vessels have been found in a variety of shapes and sizes. The cazuela, a large shallow bowl, is one of the most characteristic forms. Bottles are also prevalent. Additionally, a variety of beakers, jars, and smaller bowls have been found. Noticeably absent from the Fort Walton repertoire are the elaborate pedestaled effigy vessels and the cutout forms which characterized Weeden Island ceramics. However, several new Fort Walton shapes appeared including hooded water bottles, six-sided plates, and shallow bowls shaped like seashells. Effigy ceramics with birds, waterfowl, and various animals as subjects continued to be produced, but the forms are generally more conventionally functional than Weeden Island examples, with effigy elements acting primarily as rim adornos.

Three surface treatments predominate among Fort Walton examples. A number of vessels were left a natural buff color with incised lines providing the major decorative element. Some of the vessels were additionally painted with tan or pinkish slip which gave the finished surface a distinctive sheen. (See Appendix). A number of vessels were also fired in a smothered atmosphere to give a dark finish to the pot, whether partially or totally. These vessels were additionally polished to create a glossy surface effect. Some of the most elaborate blackware also includes the use of shell paste as a filler to accentuate incised designs. One of the most beautiful examples of the filler technique is a large shell-shaped bowl from a site near Fort Walton Beach, Florida (Figure 5).

Fort Walton effigy ceramics include a greater variety of subjects than earlier Weeden Island examples, but birds continued to be especially represented. Owls and waterfowl are often found as adornos on bowl rims.

Figure 5. Ceramic bowl, site 8W30, Walton County, Florida, c. AD 1350-1750, 9" d., photo courtesy of the Temple Mound Museum, cat #1265.



Less frequently, one finds stylized designs incised on the body of the pot which suggest feathers or wings. While this practice is often seen in Weeden Island ceramic decoration, it is far less frequently employed in Fort Walton styles. Fish, frogs and other water creatures are also used as subjects by Fort Walton potters, along with a range of mammals such as opossum, fox, otter and squirrel. Additionally, the hand/eye motif, conspicuously absent from the Weeden Island design repertoire, makes a reappearance during Fort Walton times and is found, along with a variety of other design elements reminiscent of Meso American decorations, incised by flamboyant ceramic bowls.

Besides ceramic goods, artifacts created from other materials were often interred with deceased individuals. Several of the most spectacular examples of copper work in the Southeast were recovered from the Lake Jackson site, a Fort Walton period ceremonial center located in Leon County near Tallahassee, Florida. The pattern of Fort Walton communities seems to reflect the type of political and social hierarchy generally present among other Mississippian cultures. A centralized ceremonial center which served as a focal point for the political/religious structure of an extended polity is typical. Certainly, the Lake Jackson site with its six mounds, a plaza, and an extensive village midden, was such a center. It probably functioned for many years as the major Fort Walton focal point for the surrounding area. Status within the political unit appears to have been symbolized by the use of special costumes and other paraphernalia. Those members of the society who had attained status dressed, at least on ceremonial occasions, in costumes symbolic of their office. As at Etowah or Moundville, such symbolic costumes included copper and shell ornaments.

Calvin Jones of the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management, directed the 1976-77 excavations of the site and has recently published a summary of his findings. Jones's excavations reveal that the individuals buried in the tombs had been inter-

red wearing their costumes and with other paraphernalia symbolic of their high rank. Repoussé copper breast plates were found on several individuals (Figure 6). Fabric, preserved by the copper and adhering to the backs of some plates, evidently supported the plates while worn. All of the plates recovered by Jones were made from copper nuggets and that had been cold-hammered into thin sheets, riveted together, and then embossed with dancing figures.¹¹

The figures represented on the copper plates are similar to those found on shell and copper ornaments at Etowah, Moundville, and elsewhere in the Southeast. Each figure is wearing a falcon mask, an elaborate head-dress with a bilobed arrow motif, and a pointed pouch hung from the waist. The figures are further outfitted with a feathered cape and each holds a mace or baton in the right hand. The bodies of the costumed figures are decorated with stripes and patterns as though to imply body painting or tattooing. A variety of beads, large shell amulets, and other paraphernalia characteristic of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex is evident.

Gerald Milanich of the University of Florida writes:

The figures on the plates may represent a deity symbolized by the chiefs themselves. Several pounds of columella beads and a shell gorget incised with a dancing figure accompanied the Lake Jackson burial. Copper belts found in different burials were probably hafted in wooden handles carved in the form of woodpecker heads like the clubs found at Spiro, a Mississippian site in Oklahoma.¹²

Clearly, the Lake Jackson material serves to indicate that the Mississippian patterns evident at Spiro, Etowah and elsewhere in the Southeast extended into Florida where major ceremonial centers participated in a network of highly evolved religious/political organization.

Wood provided still another material for exploration by prehistoric Florida artisans. Unfortunately, wood decomposes very quickly in Florida's moist, warm climate. However, a few spectacular examples are extant, preserved only because they were buried in thick mud at Key Marco, an island off the lower west coast of the state. Wooden artifacts were probably common throughout the Southeast. Early European explorers described the presence of carved wooden birds and other creatures which were mounted on temple roofs or carried on poles during ceremonial occasions.¹³ Remnants of wooden birds and animal sculptures recovered from Fort Center and other Central Florida sites further attest to the tradition of wood carving which must have been very much a part of the pre-contact inventory of ceremonial artifacts. The Key Marco site is



Figure 7. Woodpecker effigy, w/c of painted wooden tablet, Key Marco, Florida, c. AD 1450-1500, 67 cm h., photo courtesy of the Florida State Museum, cat. #40697.

not a burial mount *per se*. However, John Goggin, among others, has referred to the area as a ceremonial site and certainly the quantity of specialized paraphernalia recovered from the place confirms that Key Marco was indeed a focal point for extensive ceremonial activity over an extended period of time.¹⁴ It is somewhat difficult to establish an exact date for the Key Marco material. Most scholars originally assigned a very late date of c. AD 1550-1600 to the site. More recently, the dates have been revised back to c. 1450-1500 on the basis of the presence of trade pieces from northern Fort Walton cultures and the fact that no evidence of historic material has been recovered from the site. Whatever the date of the artifacts, the Key Marco site was apparently abandoned hastily sometime in the latter part of the fifteenth century due either to some natural disaster or to a surprise attack by unfriendly visitors. Structures in the area were burned and the artifacts were found scattered about as though they had been left behind during a quick retreat.

The wooden masks, tablets, and sculptures recovered from Key Marco were carved from several different kinds of wood including cypress, pine and mangrove.¹⁵ Shell and stone tools were used along with shark-tooth adzes. Many of the surfaces of the artifacts were finely finished and indicate a sophisticated polishing technique. Decorative incisions were done with hafted shark-tooth knives. A number of wooden plaques and tablets were recovered from Key Marco. Frank Cushing, who directed the original excavation in 1896, described at least ten or twelve decorated specimens, but only a few are still in suitable condition to be of artistic interest. One of these is a painted wooden tablet now in the collection of the Florida State Museum. The pigment has faded, but the original image of what is believed to be a large woodpecker is still clearly visible (Figure 7). This lively, graceful painting with its strong outlines and decorative, patterned surface testifies in the verve and vigor with which the artist approached the subject. Cushing wrote of the tablet:

There were certain . . . touches of an especially symbolic nature in portions of this pictorial figure . . . It will be observed . . . not only that a considerable knowledge . . . was possessed by the primitive artist who made this painting, but also that he attempted to show the deific character of the bird he represented by placing upon the broad black bank beneath the bird's talons . . . the characteristic animal of the keys, the raccoon; by placing the symbol or insignia of his domain over the water — in the form of a double-bladed paddle — upright under the bird's wing; and to show his dominion over the four quarters of



Figure 8. Dolphin tablet, Key Marco, Florida, c. AD 1450-1500, photo courtesy of the Florida State Museum, cat. #40682.

the sea and island world...by placing the four circles or word signs, as if issuing from his mouth...as is so often the case with similar representation of mythologic beings in the art of correspondingly developed primitive peoples.¹⁶

A second tablet, now extremely deteriorated but seen here in a watercolor by Wells Sawyer, an artist who accompanied the Cushing expedition, portrayed a leaping dolphin and exhibits the same exuberant and graceful handling evident in the woodpecker painting (Figure 8).

A number of wooden masks were also recovered from the site. Most appear to represent various human-like forms, possible heroic figures or mythological beings. A few have animal characteristics. Frequently, the features of the being are distorted — noses elongated, mouths twisted, eyes dissimilar in size and shape. Most masks are painted with stripes, triangular shapes and circular forms. Some were originally inlaid with shell. Unfortunately, most of the masks have disintegrated, but again Sawyer's watercolors provide a record of these mysterious and beautiful works (Figure 9).

Several three-dimensional figurines and figure-heads of animals were found, the most well-known of these being an elegant small sculpture of a cat or a human costumed as a cat or panther (Figure 10). "Although it is barely six inches in height," Cushing wrote, "its dignity of pose may fairly be termed heroic, and its...lines are to the last degree masterly."¹⁷ Marion Gilliland, whose book *The Material culture of Key Marco Florida* provides the first comprehensive study of the Key Marco artifacts, writes, "This specimen resembles more closely ancient Egyptian or Babylonian art than any other specimen so far found in America."¹⁸ Once again, the elegance of line and the feeling for graceful form so evident in the painted tablets are here obvious in the three-dimensional media.

Similarly, the roughly life-sized head of a pelican which was found along with fragments of wing pieces and must originally have been part of a sculptural repre-



Figure 9. Effigy mask, Key Marco, Florida, c. AD 1450-1500, photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 10. Wooden effigy figure, Key Marco, Florida, c. AD 1450-1500, 6" h., photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute, cat. #240915.