

CHAPTER 3
FORT CENTER WOODEN EFFIGIES

A vast wet prairie along Fisheating Creek was the landscape on which an array of earthworks and mounds were built. During the time of participation in the Hopewellian exchange network a cadre of wooden animal carvings, mounted on posts, were erected in and around a mortuary pond. Ritual specialists lived on an adjoining mound, probably a site for processing bodies before placement in the charnel pond. Fort Center is the first evidence for Glades tradition corporate art, reinterpreted from Hopewellian zoomorphic imagery. The context of the wood animal carvings allows exploration of a complex net of human and animal relationships. Most obvious is the relationship between the animal carvings and the deceased interred in the pond. Other levels exist between the ritual specialists of Mound A, who may be the authors of the carvings, as well as secular persons who may visit the site and observed the pond carvings. The presence of smaller carvings (i.e., deer antlers, effigy bowls, running mammals) and the movable tenoned effigies indicates the pond area and surrounding mounds were the site of occasional rituals, perhaps paralleling those of Hopewellian mortuary specialists in other parts of the Midwest and Southeast.

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Perhaps not coincidentally, Sears' research led him to extensive excavations at Fort Center, a mound and earthwork site along Fisheating Creek in Glades County (Sears 1982). One of the main components of the site is a multiple mound feature, enclosing earthwork and associated pond. This portion of the site produced artifacts suggesting some relationship to the Hopewellian cultures of the Gulf Coast, and perhaps those farther afield. The architecture of the Lake Okeechobee basin, and its relationship to other southeastern earthworks is the subject of another study, though comparative studies ranging from Squier and Davis (1848) to Morgan (1980) attest to the Hopewellian character of the Fort Center earthworks. Figure 3-1 illustrates a plan of the Fort Center site, as well as a detail of the Mound A-B and pond complex. The occupation of Fort Center at this time is termed "Period II," dating roughly from A.D. 200 to A.D. 600-800 (Sears 1982:186). Exotic goods from the Mound A and pond component include galena, quartz, and granite plummetts, as well as a duck head effigy plummet of foreign stone (Figure 2-17b). Sears (1982:27-29) notes that much of the trade pottery associated with the habitation and use of Mounds A and B is related to the Yent complex. Among the fascinating aspects of Fort Center are the mortuary pond and the wooden animal carvings preserved in it. Sears (1982:38) describes the pond as "D-shaped," and suggests

that a mortuary platform that incorporated the wooden effigies was constructed over the water. Figure 3-1 includes Sears' concept of the mortuary platform, which is highly conjectural. It should be noted that the platform is also thought to have been "D-shaped," with the front or straight side facing east. The bundled remains of the deceased, prepared by the resident mortuary specialists of the mound, were placed out on the platform in lieu of burial. Sears (1982:167) claims that at some point the structure caught fire and collapsed; many of the bodies were recovered and interred in the mounds. The result was an archaeological wet-site composed of the jumbled remains of the unretrieved bodies, the fragments of the platform, the effigies, and some grave goods.

Wooden Effigies

The wooden effigies recovered from the Fort Center mortuary pond are discussed at some length by Sears (1982) and Schwehm (1983). Both authors note that some of the effigies were structural elements of the mortuary platform, and as such were exposed to the elements for some time. This exposure gave the figures a stylized, windswept appearance, and undoubtedly removed much of the detail originally evident. The shallow nature of the pond, approximately four feet, may have allowed some drying to occur, contributing to the fragility of the specimens. Traces of white pigment on one of the bird effigies