

CHAPTER 5
KEY MARCO

The wood carvings of Key Marco's "Court of the Pile Dwellers," recovered at the end of the 19th century by Frank H. Cushing, represent an extravagant and enigmatic example of southern Florida's ancient art. The Cushing collection is unique in the amount and quality of carved, painted and otherwise decorated wood and bone artifacts. The site and its ceremonial assemblage are equally enigmatic, with problems in temporal and cultural assignment having plagued archaeologists for one hundred years. The wooden art objects are often associated with the Calusa, a powerful native polity of the 16th and 17th centuries. The art of Key Marco has been widely illustrated and discussed, though a detailed analysis of form and style is still lacking (Douglas and d'Harnoncourt 1941; Dockstader 1961; Fundaburk and Foreman 1957; Mason 1951; Gilliland 1975). Clark (1995) has recently undertaken a study of the wooden masks and figureheads from Key Marco, providing the first real analysis of the Cushing collection.

My intent here is to reevaluate some of the major questions about Key Marco, using information provided by Cushing, the objects themselves, as well as their stylistic context within the Glades tradition. Key Marco is an

important site since it represents a non-mortuary assemblage of ritual and decorative paraphernalia. The bulk of the art objects recovered from the site fit within three broad categories, reflecting personal paraphernalia like that described in Chapter 4, large emblems or markers that may be related to the corporate art of Fort Center and Weeden Island discussed in Chapters 3 and 6, as well as a collection of objects representing ritual paraphernalia, costumes or disguises. This latter category has rarely been encountered in Glades tradition sites, though the ritual costumes of the SECC have been well documented (Waring and Holder 1945; Howard 1968; Phillips and Brown 1978:69-102). The intent of this discussion is to place the Key Marco collection within the developing model of Glades tradition art and symbolism. As many previous researchers have noticed (see above and below), some Key Marco artifacts appear to have affinities with motifs and themes of the SECC. As the model of Glades tradition art systems unfolds, it becomes clear that the basic pattern is one based on a mixture of local Archaic and Hopewellian-derived elements, with later additions that are related to Mississippian-influenced styles. This makes the Key Marco collection, and its apparent SECC ties an important case study of the types of changes experienced within the Glades tradition, and possible Florida influences on the developing SECC.

Based on Cushing's report, some general statements about Key Marco can be made. Cushing excavated a small portion of a much larger site. The area excavated by Cushing contained the remains of several structures, perhaps a priest's dwelling or the village temple. Along with the debris of these structures, which may have been destroyed by a natural catastrophe or wrecked intentionally, were the furnishings of these buildings. The objects recovered include personal ornaments and tools; implements of daily use, like bowls, ladles, knives and axes; as well as ceremonial objects, like the masks, animal figureheads, and ritual tools. There is some information from 16th, 17th, and 18th century Spanish and English sources about the use of these ceremonial items. Masked processions were observed among the Calusa, and painted and carved wooden plaques, as well as masks, were seen in temples, ceremonies, and graveyards in southeastern Florida (various chroniclers in Hann 1991:159-160, 195-196, 287, 422; Dickinson in Andrews and Andrews 1945:59).

Temporal, Spatial and Ethnic Position

Several arguments or controversies have centered on Cushing's find. Some of these date to the time of the original discoveries, and relate to the verisimilitude of some of the objects (see Gilliland 1988 for more on this). Other subjects of discussion have been the extra-areal relationships of the Key Marco art work, the precise dating