

Searching for Sub-cultural Systems during the Terminal Archaic:
An Examination of Burial Rituals and Socio-economic Networks in Southern New England

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Broad-tool cultural activities and ritual behaviors, across southern New England, have characteristically been examined as attributes of a mono-cultural system, which expressed little cultural variation throughout the region during the Terminal Archaic Period (3,700–2,700 BP). Much of this stems from discussions dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, which generalized Narrow-Stemmed and Broad-tool cultures to ascertain whether the two existed side-by-side within a multi-cultural neighborhood 3,700 years ago. The idea that smaller, sub-cultural populations may have existed within the broader tradition has been largely ignored or overlooked by archaeologists. Concentrating on Broad-tool socio-economic exchange systems, lithic selection and deposit and the ritual burial of the dead, this research illustrates the existence of Broad-tool sub-cultural systems inhabiting Connecticut during the period.

Diagnostic Broad-tool bifaces were collected from multiple burial and non-burial sites in Connecticut to gain a generalized understanding of which lithics were routinely selected by Broad-tool populations. The distribution of lithic materials across the state demonstrates that all Broad-tool populations were not participants within the same lithic exchange networks nor did they exhibit identical preferences for lithic raw materials. Additionally, the inconsistencies witnessed in the size of Broad-tool cemeteries, the number of dead buried/cremated and the distribution of Broad-tool bifaces within burials suggests that cremations were not always large, communal events enacted to affirm cultural harmony.

Supported by data from the Moorehead Burial Tradition and the Meadowood Interaction Sphere in northern New England, the control of lithic resources may have provided certain Broad-tool families/populations with a socio-economic boost over less prestigious groups. This likely resulted in the formation of sub-cultural units within the Broad-tool tradition that participated in varying interpretations of what, in this paper, has been identified as the Broad-tool Interaction Sphere.

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