

Mortuary Spaces as Social Power: Ceramic Exchange and Burial Practice at Safford Mound (8PI3)

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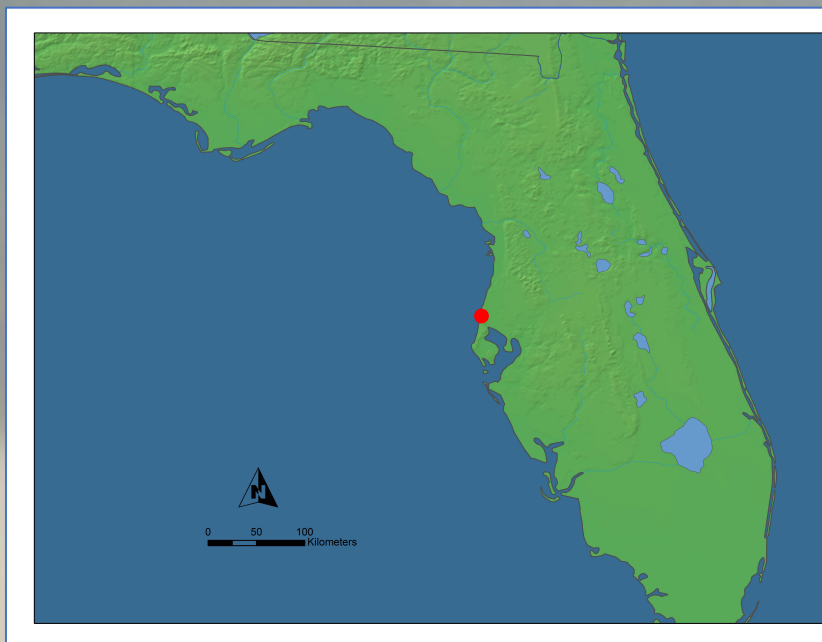
Introduction

Archaeologists now commonly associate the Late Woodland-Mississippian transition on the Florida Gulf Coast with the abandonment of prominent civic-ceremonial centers and mortuary complexes. Communities in the region often signaled the “death” of specific locations by placing sand caps atop burial mounds, and by depositing large quantities of Weeden Island mortuary pottery in the eastern peripheries of these structures. While this trend seems widespread, some burial mounds, including Safford Mound (8PI3), were revisited for several centuries after these events took place. We use petrographic data from ceramic vessels to investigate how people’s investment in mortuary practice tied collective memories to specific places. We surmise that the embeddedness of mortuary ritual within the daily lives of Safford’s visitors contributed to the persistence and growth of the mound through times of immense turmoil and social change.



Sampling

- 21 petrographic thin sections from Safford Mound (8PI3), located in Tarpon, Springs, Florida
- 11 samples associated with the Late Woodland/Weeden Island Period (AD 500-1000) and 10 with the Mississippian/Safety Harbor Period (AD 1000-1500)
- The goal of this study is to compare provenance, paste composition, and technological information to assess potential changes in social interaction and potting techniques between the two timeframes



Site Background

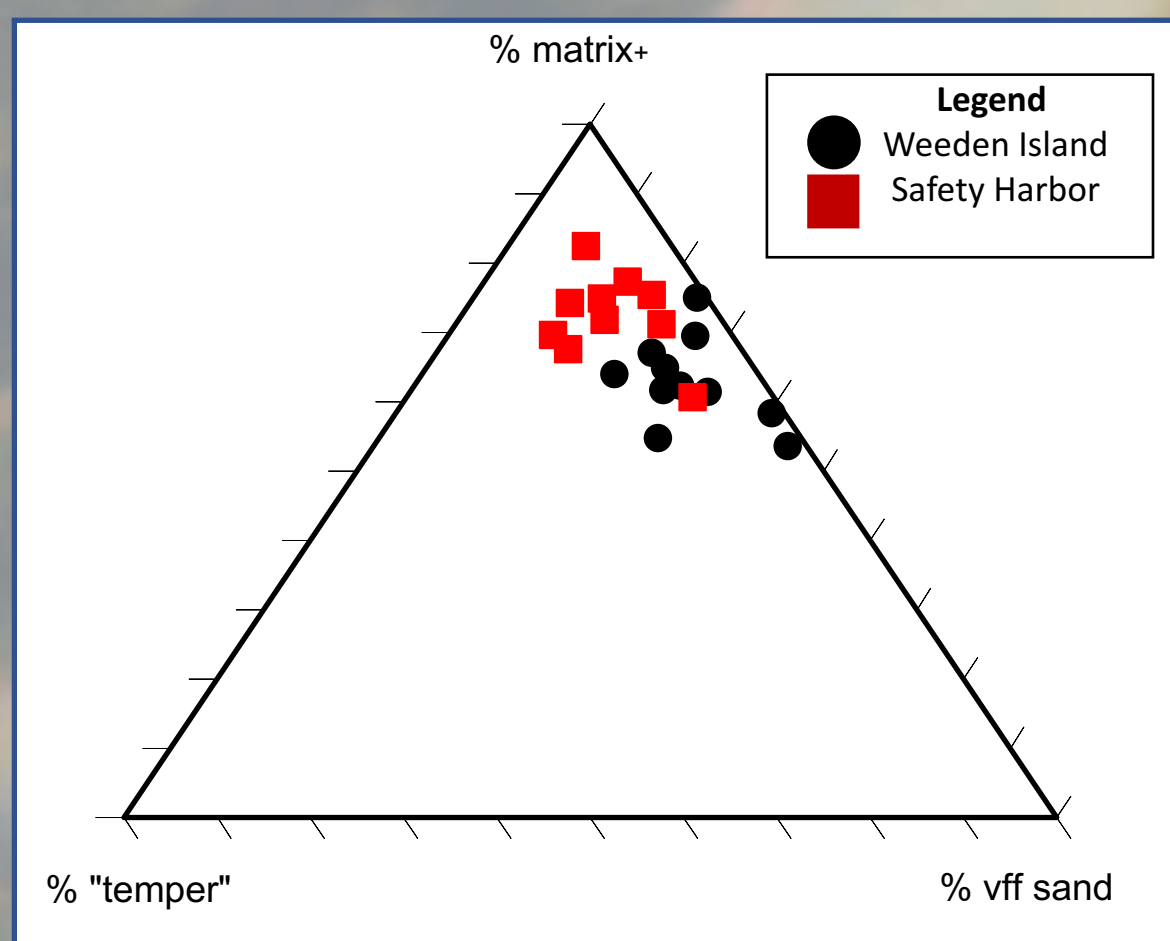
- Excavated in 3 distinct “strata” by Frank Hamilton Cushing in 1896
- Cushing’s excavations were poorly recorded, but what the assemblage lacks in contextual detail, it makes up for in sheer size and completeness
- Isolated burial mound, probably used by multiple communities

Methods

- We used petrographic analysis to establish textural variation within the sample population
- Textural categories were the primary analytical unit for assessing provenance and composition
- Petrofabric categories were determined by assessing mineral (quartz, micas, mafics, feldspars) and fossil (sponge spicules, phytoliths, diatoms) content
- Followed Stoltman’s (1989, 1991, 2000) point-counting method

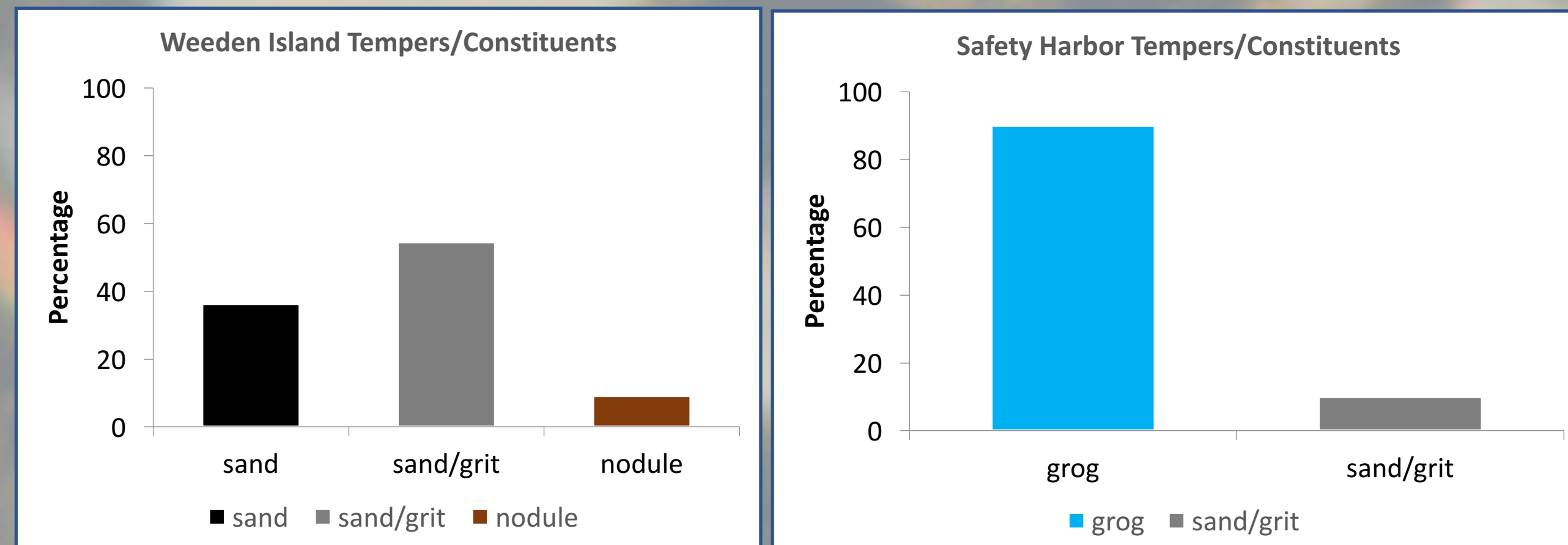
category	n (pottery)	n (clays)	description
■ sand	4	25	quartz; very fine to fine sizes
■ sand/grit	7	21	quartz; very fine to coarse sizes
□ grit	0	7	quartz and polycrystalline quartz; medium through very coarse sizes
■ ferric nodule	0	7	composition includes Fe rich nodules; also quartz component comparable to sand/grit and sand
■ clay/phosphate nodule	1	9	composition includes phosphatic and/or indurated clay nodules; also quartz component comparable to sand/grit and sand
■ grog	9	0	crushed sherd temper; also quartz component comparable to sand and sand/grit
■ St. Johns	0	3	sponge spicules and very fine to fine quartz
■ limestone	0	5	micritic limestone nodules; also quartz component comparable to sand/grit (shell in clays)
■ clay	0	4	very few aplastic constituents (except for silt in one)
■ calcareous	0	10	variable aplastics but calcareous matrix

Bulk composition



- These data show some overlap of Weeden Island and Safety Harbor samples, but mostly pinpoint separation between the two
- The high incidence of grog tempering in Mississippian samples mostly explains the separation
- Matrix percentages are roughly similar, and very fine-to-fine monocrystalline quartz sands are common in both sample populations

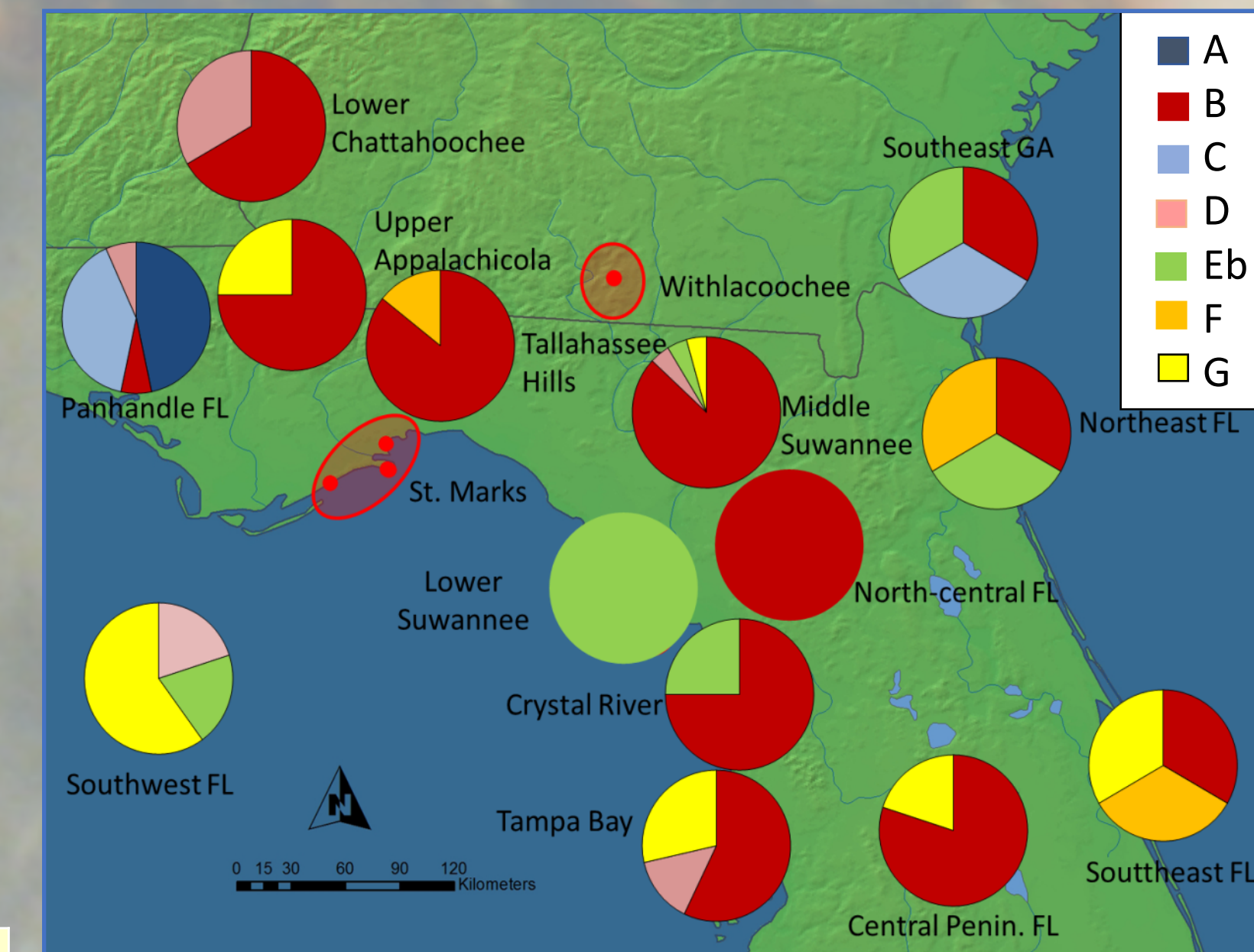
Gross temper/textural variation



- Gross temper/textural categories are markedly different between Weeden Island and Safety Harbor samples
- High representation of sand and sand/grit for Weeden Island
- Safety Harbor vessels are almost exclusively grog tempered

Petrofabric identification

- We assigned vessel lots to petrofabric categories following research by Cordell et al. (2017) and Wallis et al. (2016).
- Local manufacture is possible for sand, sand/grit, and mixed nodule categories. Most textural categories are widely distributed throughout the region
- Grog tempered ceramics may be either local or non-local. Grog tempering was prevalent throughout the Florida Panhandle and peninsula during the Mississippian period
- Petrofabrics with high quantities of mmf’s, especially mica, are non-local to the study area

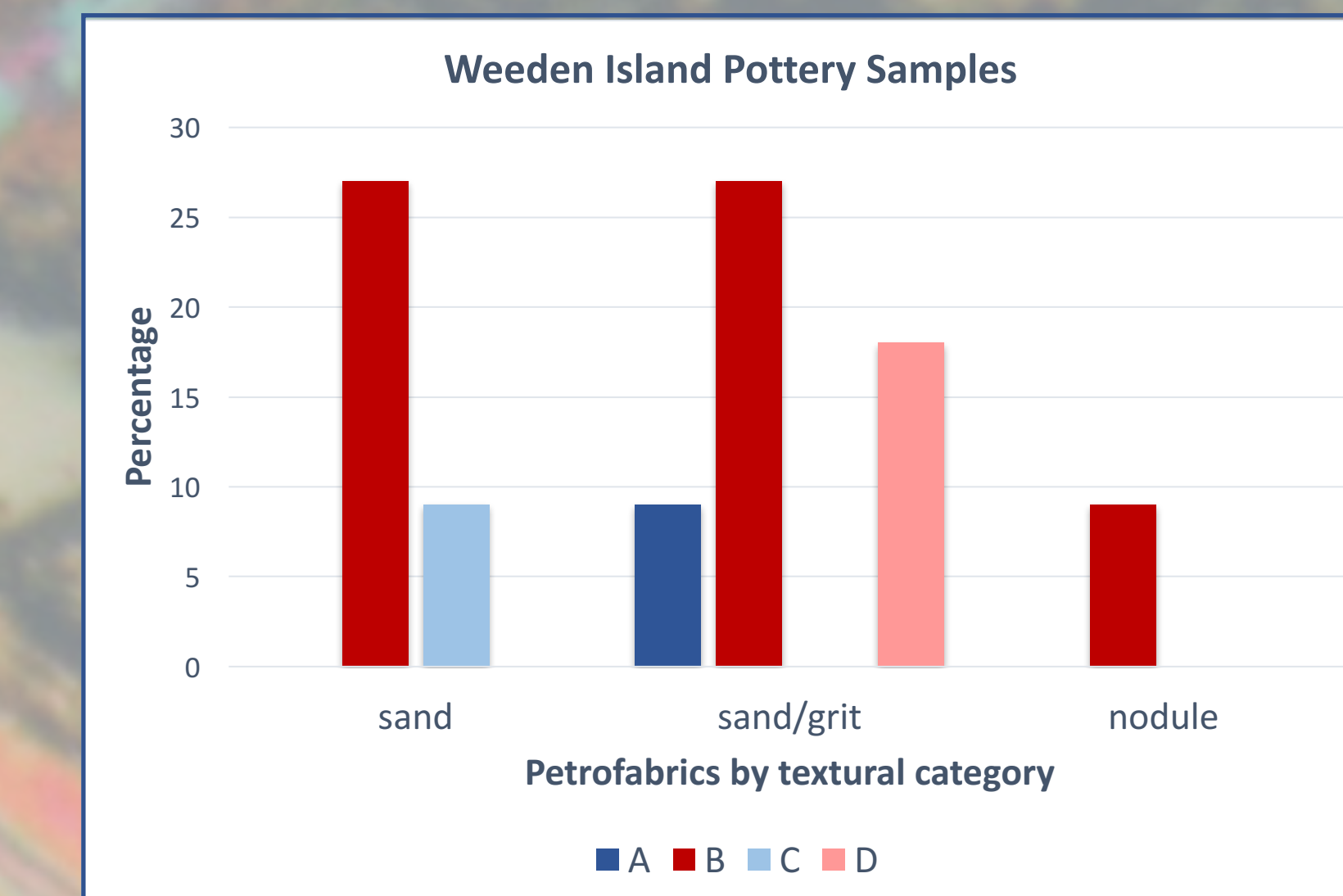


Petrofabric groups and vessel provenance

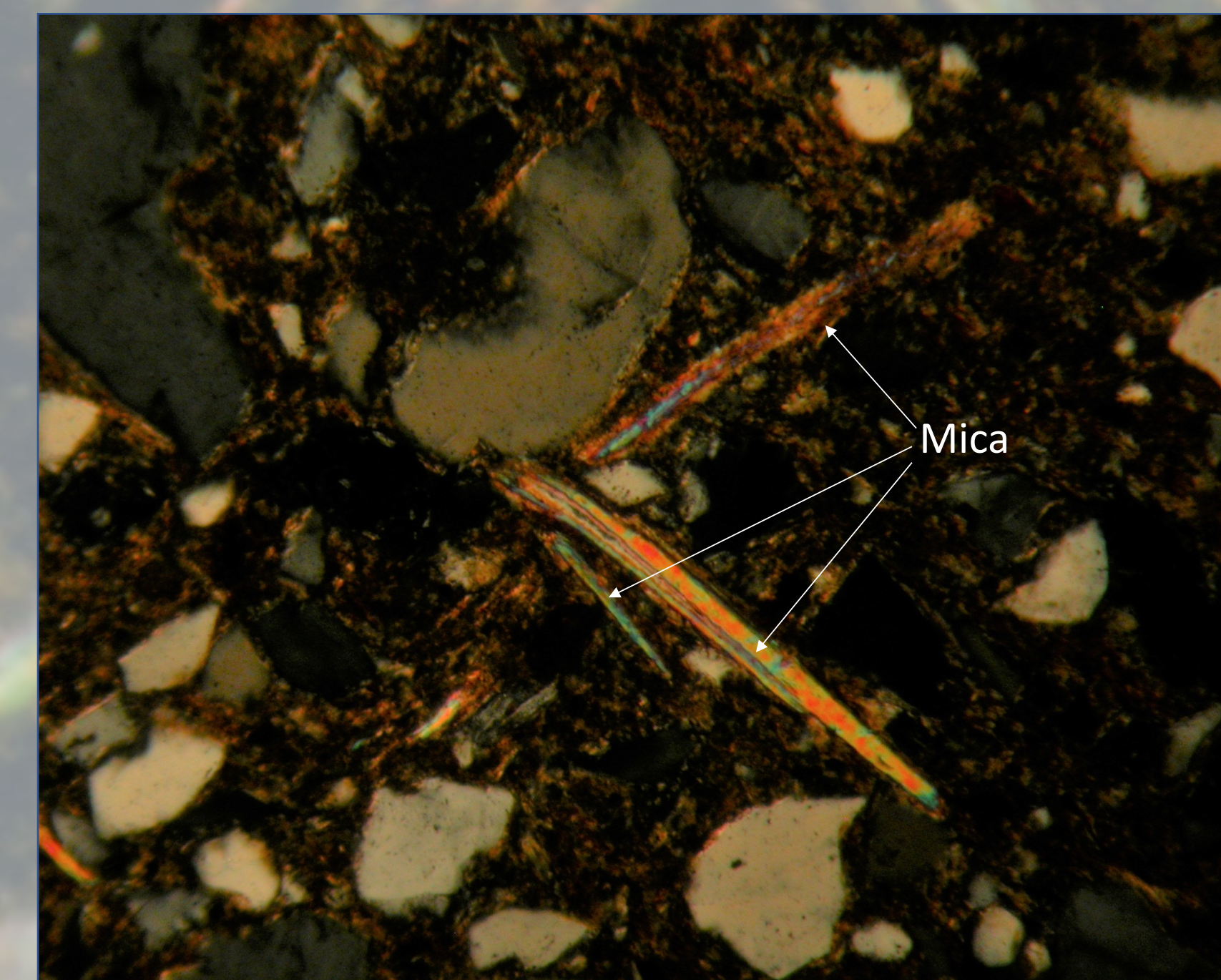
category	n (pottery)	n (clays)	description
■ A	1	7	frequent to common mica
■ B	11	53	none to rare mica
■ C	1	7	like A, but with Si fossils (sponge spicules, phytoliths)
■ D	6	5	like B, but with Si fossils
■ Eb	0	6	like D, but also with diatoms
■ F	2	3	frequent to common sponge spicules
■ G	0	10	calcareous matrix

- We identified 2 (18%) nonlocal vessels in the Weeden Island sample population
- These vessels were likely produced in the Florida Panhandle/Tallahassee Hills regions, over 300km northwest of Safford
- This pattern mirrors the broader trends found throughout the region. Research by Wallis (2018) indicates that between 20% and 50% of Weeden Island mortuary vessels in the Florida Peninsula were produced non-locally. The presence of non-local vessels at Safford probably signals connections to other important sites in the Gulf Coastal Plain, such as Kolomoki

- A total of 7 petrofabric groups have been identified within the region (Cordell et al. 2017)
- Petrofabrics A, C, and Ea are micaceous. Micaceous matrices generally pinpoint non-local production (relative to Safford’s location)
- Unlike A, fabrics C and Ea contain siliceous microfossils
- Petrofabrics B, D, and Eb lack mica inclusions, and are differentiated by microfossil content
- Petrofabric F is spicule-rich, and G is calcareous

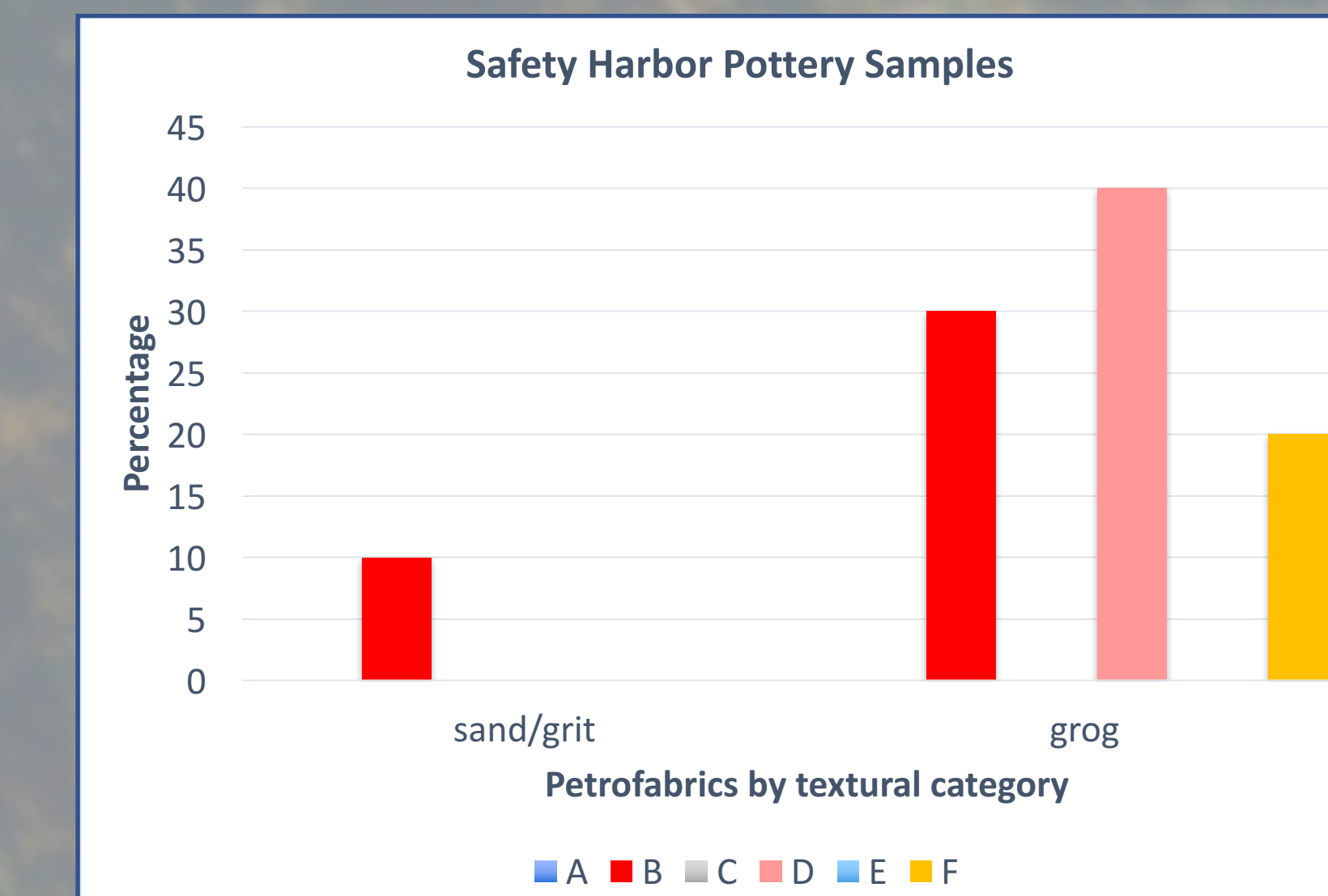


Petrofabric A (nonlocal). Weeden Island sample #NJW1098 at 10X magnification

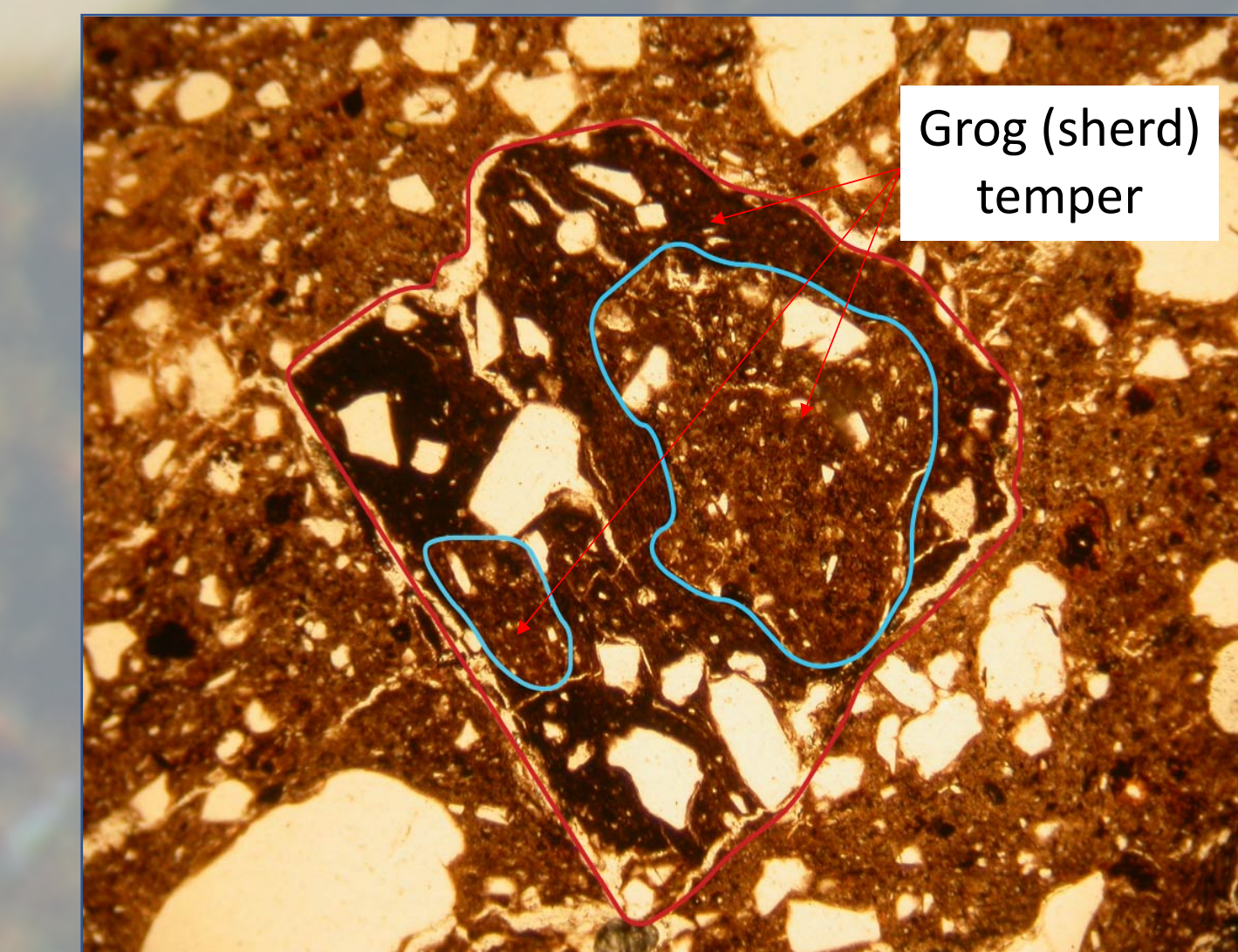


- However, non-micaceous petrofabrics B and D (64% and 18%, respectively) are by far the most common for Weeden Island samples at Safford
- We interpret the high abundance of fabrics B and D as possible evidence of extensive localized production of mortuary wares
- Yet, we make this association cautiously, considering that these fabrics are distributed elsewhere throughout the region
- Fabric B is nearly ubiquitous within local and non-local clay samples
- Fabric D is mostly confined to Tampa Bay (local), the Lower Chattahoochee River Valley, and the Florida Panhandle

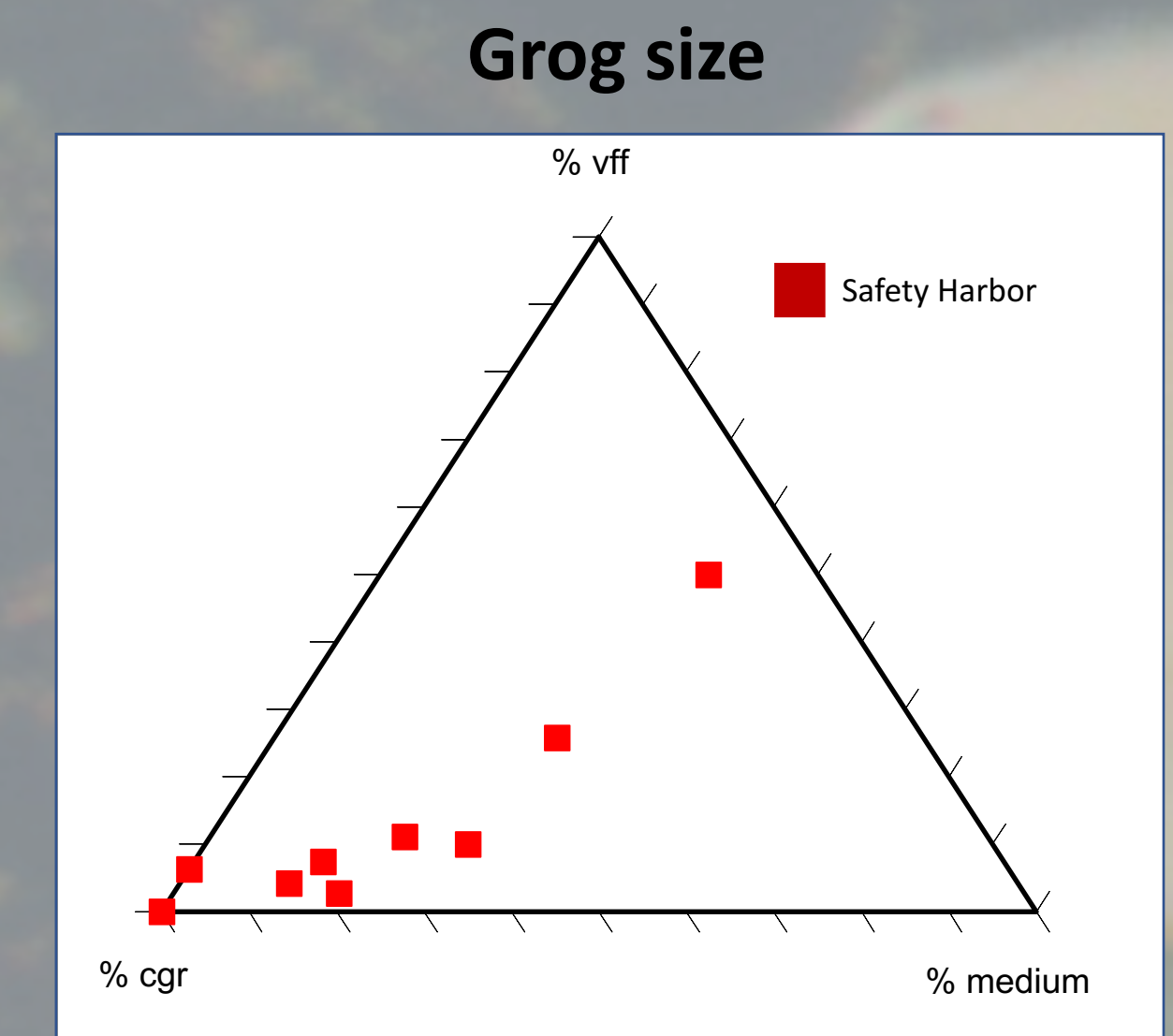
- We find no definitive evidence of non-local manufacture within the Safety Harbor samples
- The high prevalence of petrofabric D (40% of the overall sample) indicates that many Safety Harbor vessels were produced locally
- Petrofabric D is well represented in local (Tampa Bay) clay samples, but is also sparsely distributed across the Florida Panhandle and SW Georgia.
- Ongoing research with matching NAA data should provide better resolution of the ceramic ecology associated with these vessels



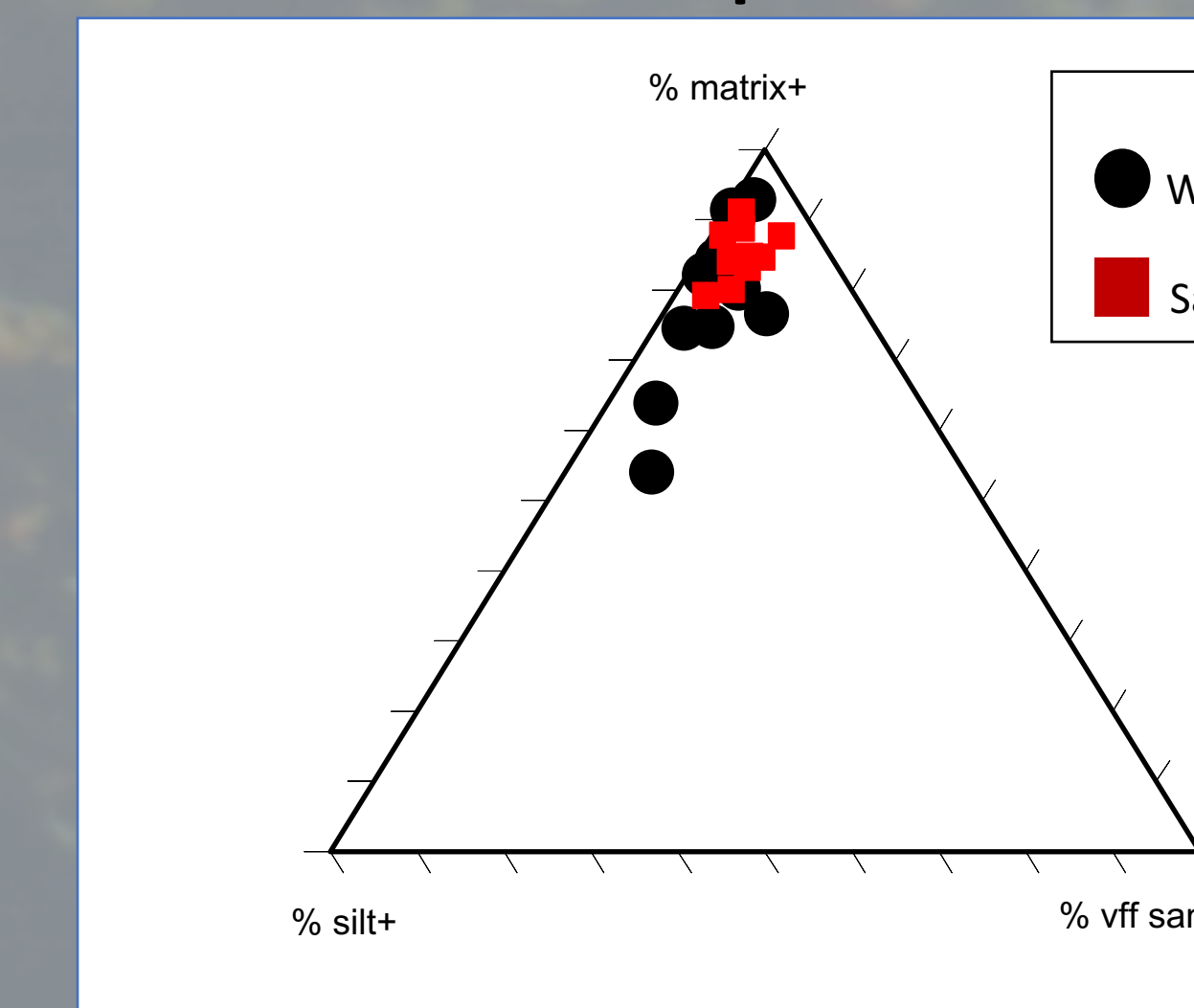
Multigenerational grog (sherd) temper. Safety Harbor sample #NJW1194 at 4X magnification



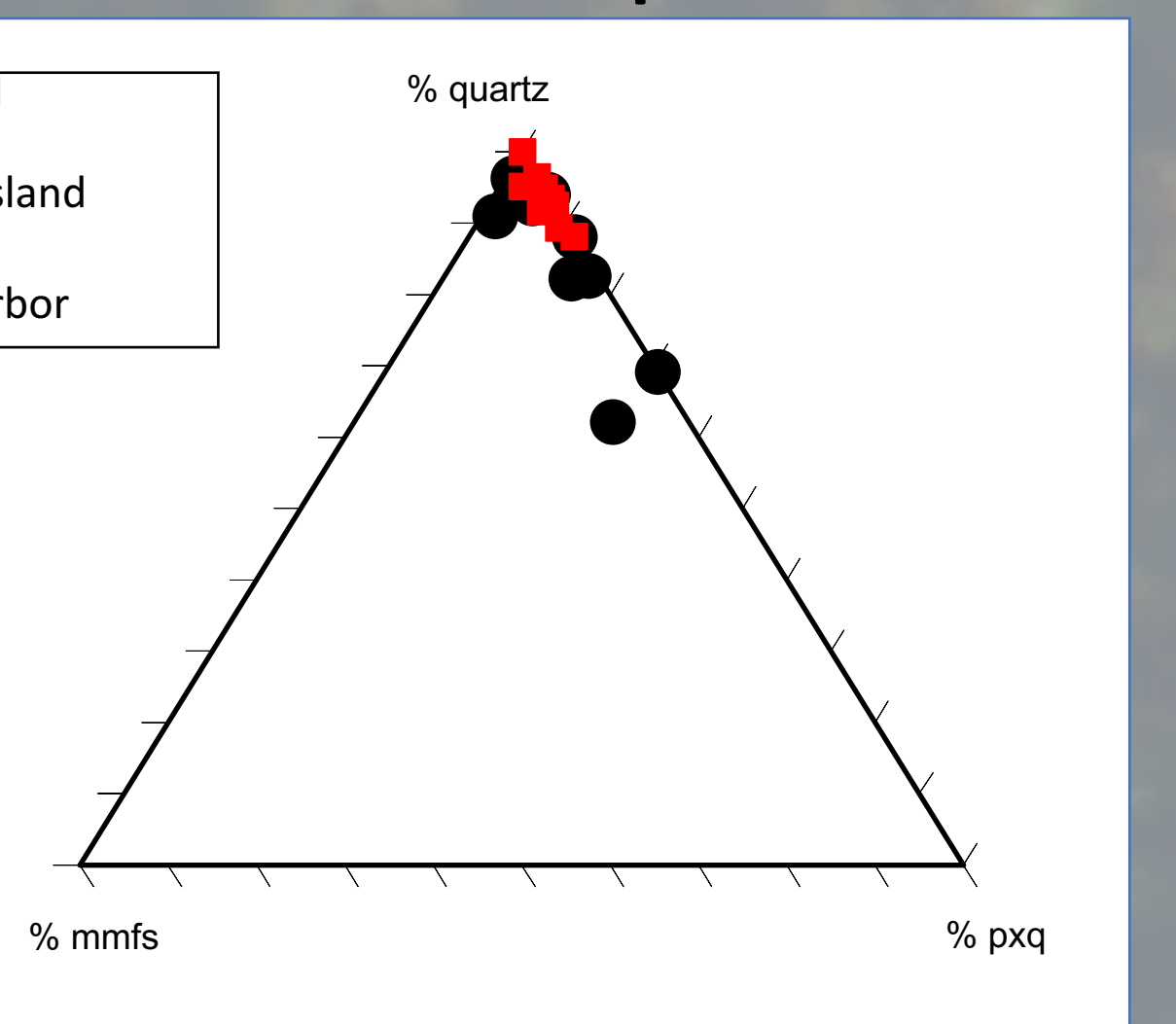
- The presence of multigenerational grog—sherds with grog-tempered grog—further points to local production of some Safety Harbor vessels
- Sample #NJW1197 was manufactured on petrofabric D, but contains spiculate-rich (F) grog temper
- Similarly, Sample #NJW1198 was manufactured on petrofabric B, but contains fossiliferous (D) grog temper
- Considering that petrofabrics B, D, and F all cluster together in the central peninsula, it is possible that vessels tempered with multigenerational grog in these specific combinations signal local production



Matrix composition



Sand composition



- We see similarity and overlap in percentages of matrix, silt, and very fine sand (all presumably “natural” to the clays) between the two sample groups
- If much of these matrices are local, which our data demonstrate is possibly the case, the patterning in these ternary plots indicates that local potters may have harvested similar clays through time
- The sand composition diagram also pinpoints a high degree of overlap between sample populations
- The two non-local Weeden Island vessels can be easily distinguished in the sand composition diagram. This separation is explained by higher quantities (relative to the sample) of mmfs and polycrystalline quartz in these samples

Discussion and conclusion



These data potentially highlight intensified local production of mortuary vessels during the Mississippian Period in the Tampa Bay region. As a caveat, we interpret the prevalence of grog tempering throughout the Florida Panhandle and Peninsula as evidence of continued ritual interaction across the region, even after many communities abandoned prominent civic-ceremonial centers during the Late Woodland.

Safford thus seems to have been in close proximity to potters whom were capable of mobilizing the technical and esoteric resources necessary to manufacture critical mortuary accoutrements. Yet, we do not assume that it was the potters themselves which imbued Safford with significance through time. Instead, we attribute Safford’s persistence and growth to the roles that mortuary ritual played in the daily lives of its visitors. Mortuary rituals do much more than communicate information about the dead; they organize kinship ties, renegotiate social relations in times of loss and uncertainty, and create lasting place-based memories which blur “quotidian” and “ceremonial” distinctions. Safford seems to have been a venue through which these phenomena operated during the Late Woodland and Mississippian Periods in the Tampa Bay region.

Acknowledgements

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