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The Neosho phase (A.D. 1400-1650) in northeastern Oklahoma, northwestern Arkansas, southwestern Missouri, and southeastern Kansas represents Late Pre-contact peoples engaged in widespread trade from the Plains to groups in the southeastern United States. The phase has confounded researchers since its definition, although debates mainly concern one of two main questions concerning the identity of Neosho peoples: origins and cultural affiliation. Most research to date has focused simply on the question of emergence. Early in these debates, Orr (1946) suggested that Neosho peoples represented one or more plains-oriented groups that had migrated into the area, while Wyckoff (1980) and others later argued that Neosho represented a dissolution of the Arkansas River Valley Caddo-Mississippian system. Numerous issues have inhibited progress in defending either of these models, including a dependence upon research methods that rely upon descriptive cultural trait lists, a reluctance to contextualize and emplace Neosho peoples within the region at large, and even the initial definition of the phase and culture area. This article represents the beginning stages of my dissertation research and will focus on discussion of the Neosho phase, including previous research, issues and debates, and ways to resolve and reinvigorate research in this area and time period.

Introduction

The Neosho culture (A.D. 1400-1650) on the southwestern fringe of the Ozark Plateau is widely discussed in archaeological literature beginning with Baerreis' (1940, 1941) definition of it as a distinct focus. However, in tracing the intellectual history of research concerning the Neosho phase, it is clear that researchers have struggled with its definition and in clarifying its relationship to preceding and surrounding cultures. Other than a few broad categorizations (e.g., mobile and dispersed community settlements; hunting, gathering, and horticultural subsistence) little is known about how these people conducted day to day activities or how they interacted with surrounding cultures.

With such limited knowledge, researchers have struggled to resolve several debates concerning the identity of Neosho peoples. It has been postulated that Neosho's relationship to preceding cultures can be explained by an in-situ development (Freeman 1959, 1962; Purrington 1971; Vehik 1993; Wyckoff 1980), while others suggest a migration of extra-regional peoples into the area (Baerreis 1940,1941; Chapman 1959; Orr 1946; Dickson 2002; Wedel 1959). To date, all arguments have relied upon material culture trait lists, depending heavily upon relative similarities in artifact assemblages to argue for one theory or the other rather than completing an in-depth analysis. Such reasoning has been proven insufficient and Neosho-related research has remained inactive and unrevised for 20-30 years. This article represents a synthesis of knowledge and research on Neosho people in preparation for a project that seeks to reinvigorate research in this part of Oklahoma on the Late Pre-contact period and to make the first major statement on the Neosho phase in several decades using contemporary methodologies and theories.

The Neosho Phase: Previous Research and Main Debates

According to the research that has been conducted to date, scholars believe that Neosho peoples resided on the southwestern fringe of the Ozark Plateau between A.D. 1400-1650. Originally, it was believed that they lived year-round in rockshelters, but these interpretations were based on an incomplete dataset and mixed rock shelter deposits (Dickson 2002; Freeman 1959, 1960). Many open-air sites have now been documented, although few have been fully investigated, throughout the Neosho culture area, which includes parts of northeastern Oklahoma, southeastern Kansas, southwestern Missouri,

and northwestern Arkansas (Conner 1999; Ray 2017; Ray and Lopinot 2008; Thomas and Ray 2002; Wyckoff 1964). As such, it is now recognized that Neosho peoples may have resided in rockshelters during winter months and then resided more intensively in open air sites during warmer periods where they would grow crops (Cobb 1976; Dickson 2002). This Late Pre-contact culture participated in hunting and gathering--bison hunting and gathering of nuts, primarily--as well as horticultural activities.

Material remains indicative of the activities of Neosho peoples include bison scapula hoes, shell hoes, various lithic tools including small triangular projectile points manufactured from local chert sources (Reeds Spring, Peoria, etc.) (Ray 2006a, 2007, 2013), end scrapers and side scrapers, Harahey knives, and shell-tempered pottery (Freeman 1962). The only distinct and defining material traits used in the past to identify and interpret Neosho phase sites are use of a highly localized chert resource in northeastern Oklahoma called Peoria chert (Ray 2013) and a "distinct" pottery type: Neosho Punctate (Figure 1). Freeman and Buck (1960) defined this type as a decorated variety of Woodward Plain, another shell-tempered utilitarian vessel type that is ubiquitous in the Arkansas Valley. They state:

> Paste and surface finish characteristics are essentially the same for both types…technique of decoration is limited to punctating, incising, and applique nodes. Punctates are most characteristically wedge shaped and deeper at the straight end than at the rounded end. Alternatively, and in the minority, are elliptical or round punctates. Incised lines are usually 3 to 4 mm wide but may also be about 1 mm wide. Often the decoration is not well executed...Decoration appears on the lip of vessels…lower rim and upper shoulder (Freeman and Buck 1960:11-12).

This type description continues to be used in conjunction with culture-historical narratives to argue for the identity of Neosho people in terms of their emergence as a "distinct" tradition as well as for their cultural affiliation. As such, Neosho represents a "ceramic culture," and interpretations and distinctions have been made mostly through visual comparison of similarities and differences in ceramic vessels and vessel sherds found at these sites, but with no in-depth stylistic analyses.

The available literature discussing Neosho sites, people, and material culture is sparse, but it is clear that the focus has been on one of two main questions relating to the identity of Neosho people: origins and

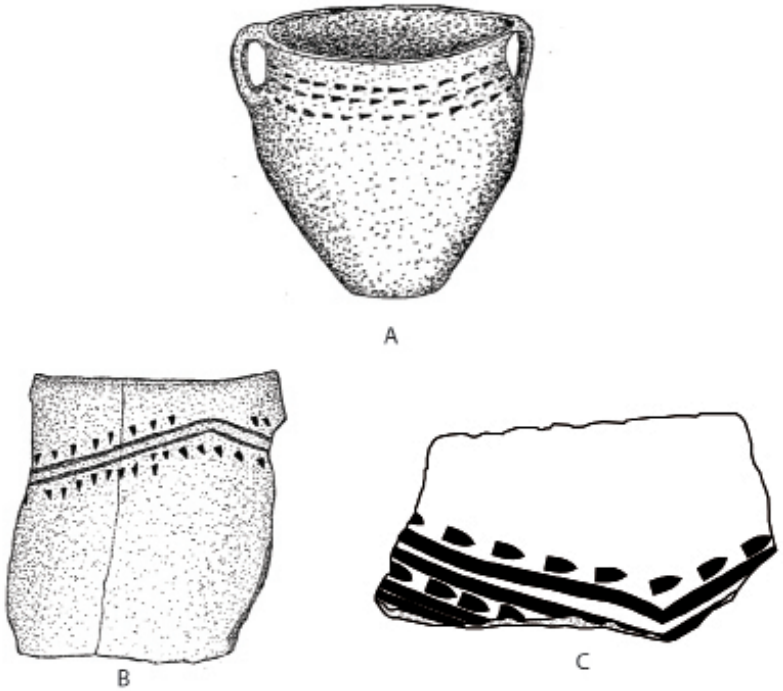

Figure 1. Examples of Neosho Punctate ceramics. (A) Complete Neosho Punctate vessel from 3BE181 (Dickson 2002:214); (B) Neosho Punctate rim sherd from 3BE174 (Dickson 2002:215); (C) Neosho Punctate rim sherd from 34DL39.

cultural affiliation. These debates, more simply, depend upon and circle around the classification of Neosho people as being more or less related to preceding and succeeding cultures located on the Plains or in the southeastern United States (i.e., Caddo-Mississippian peoples). Debates and arguments such as these show that archaeologists were and are grappling with how to best interpret the practices and material remains of cultures living in areas between two major environmental and cultural regions, choosing to rely upon models of diffusion of cultural traits.

After Baerreis' (1940, 1941) initial definition of Neosho, speculations about Neosho origins began. Baerreis (1940, 1941), Chapman (1959), and Harrington (1960) all postulated that Neosho represented a proto-Osage manifestation, resulting from a migration of peoples from the southeastern United States into the Ozark Plateau. In particular, Chapman (1959) examined historic Osage origins, and in the process, he concluded that Neosho was the result of the migration of proto-Osage peoples from the Lower Mississippi Valley into the southwestern Ozarks. He cited similarities in ceramic design to support his theory of a migration of peoples into the area. Chapman stated that similarities in ceramics between historic Osage, Oneota, and Neosho ceramics were due to a diffusion of ideas and designs. In doing so, however, he refuted the possibility of an Oneota affiliation for the Osage, which later scholars would actively show to be a more well-founded hypothesis for the emergence of Osage in the area (Yelton 1991). Oneota is commonly cited as a possible influence on Neosho culture, due to similarities in ceramic design (punctations and incised lines), although differences in design configuration and vessel shape lead to the belief that these similarities represent transmission through diffusion rather than direct association (Henning 1970, 1998; Purrington 1971).

Orr (1946) also hypothesized that Neosho peoples represented a migration of extra-regional peoples into the area, but unlike Baerreis and Harrington, he suggested that Neosho represented Plains peoples moving into the southwestern fringe of the Ozark Plateau. Their migration, he argued, was primarily due to unstable climatic conditions in the Late Pre-contact period. A similar migration is noted by Lorrain (1967:34), who argued that an intensive drought on the Plains in northwestern Texas and southwestern Oklahoma spurred people to move eastward between A.D. 1400-1500. She speculated that such a migration event could explain several Plains traits in Caddo Fort Coffee phase sites (A.D. 1250-1450), located just south of the Neosho culture area. Wedel (1959:628-629) wrote about a similar drought event in western Kansas and Nebraska around A.D. 1439-1464 that may have pushed other Plains groups to move into the area occupied in A.D. 1450 by Neosho people. Local climatic patterns and data derived from the North American Drought Atlas (drought.memphis.edu) corroborate these drought events on the Plains, but average conditions during the period of A.D. 1400 to 1450 show that there are also moderate to severe drought conditions in the areas in and surrounding Neosho occupations. Additionally, there are no sites on the Plains that can unequivocally be employed to associate Neosho people with a specific group of Plains peoples.

Freeman (1959, 1962) expanded upon Neosho research, examining rock shelter sites in Delaware County, Oklahoma. Refuting other scholars, including Baerreis, Orr, and Chapman, she proposed that Neosho peoples are the result of an in-situ development of cultures, with influence permeating into the southwestern Ozarks from nearby Arkansas River valley Caddo and/or Plains peoples. Central to her hypothesis was the idea that cultures in the Ozarks were very isolated through time, an "island" as Purrington (1971) described, only experiencing varying levels of cultural influence from nearby cultures. Otherwise, peoples residing in the Ozarks were thought to be culturally "conservative," experiencing high degrees of cultural continuity through time, and only ever achieving what Willey and Phillips (1958) would categorize as an Archaic stage of culture. Using this basic idea, Freeman (1959, 1962) noted evidence of cultural continuity in Neosho materials from previous cultures like Delaware A and B, with influences from cultures in the Arkansas River drainage and the Plains in the form of some lithic tool types and visible pottery attributes. Thus, she contributed a second theory for Neosho origins, an in-situ development, that was opposed to earlier theories of a migration of extra-regional peoples. Purrington (1971) also supported her theory based on his diachronic examination of sites in Delaware County. Other

researchers continued to excavate sites in the proximity of the Neosho culture area, and assign them Neosho cultural designations (e.g., Cobb 1976; Wyckoff 1964).

In later decades, there was a continuing concern for researching Neosho origins. Not opposed to, but elaborating on Freeman's (1959, 1962) hypothesis of an in-situ development, Wyckoff (1980) proposed that Neosho peoples represented the local dissolution of Arkansas River Valley Caddo societies. Conner (1999), Dickson (2002), Ray and Lopinot (2008), and Vehik (1993) would support his theory. After the Spiro phase in nearby LeFlore and Haskell counties of Oklahoma, there is evidence that mound-building activities ceased, and Fort Coffee peoples, residing in the Arkansas River Valley contemporaneously with Neosho peoples in the Ozarks, did not engage in intensive ritual activity noted in prior phases (Rohrbaugh 1982, 1984). There is little evidence to support the Neosho culture's involvement in mound-building or intensive ritual practices, although some have shown that Neosho peoples used and constructed earthworks in southwestern Missouri (Conner 1999:28; Ray and Lopinot 2008:66-68).

Rohrbaugh (1982, 1984) clarified the definition of the Fort Coffee focus (A.D. 1450-1600) and changed its McKern designation to phase. This was presumably an attempt to move away from the use of McKern's (1939) Linnaean cultural classification system in the region. In discussing the earlier Spiro site phases and their relationship to the later Fort Coffee phase, he cited differences in ceramics, house construction, and subsistence. He also discussed the Neosho phase in relationship to the Fort Coffee phase, and while they exhibit many similarities, settlement strategies appear to be different and ceramic design configurations are not exactly the same. Ware types found in Fort Coffee phase sites have incised lines and punctations, but unlike Neosho's characteristic wedge punctations, Fort Coffee vessels have "fingernail" punctations along the rim and lip. Fort Coffee vessels also include engraved types, not found in Neosho ceramic assemblages. With all that said, Rohrbaugh (1982, 1984) was silent on potential relationships between Neosho and Fort Coffee, though their proximity and similarities indicate a closer relationship. It is known that contemporary surrounding Caddo populations and Plains populations--more specifically the Lower Walnut peoples in south-central Kansas--were engaged in highly interconnected trade networks (Perttula et al. 2001). Neosho's relationship to the preceding Spiro phase (A.D. 1250-1450) and contemporaneous Fort Coffee phase (A.D. 1450-1600) in the Arkansas River drainage and to cultures in other adjacent regions remains unresolved (Sabo and Early 1990).

I speculate that, in part, the reason for this lack of clarity in the relationship between Neosho and surrounding cultures on the Plains and in the Arkansas River valley is due to its location on the southwestern fringe of the Ozark Plateau and perhaps the limited stylistic character of Neosho and other contemporaneous cultural assemblages in the area. The assumption that cultures in the Ozarks were relatively isolated and "conservative" lingered until Brown's (1984) exploration of prehistoric Ozark marginality and his assertions that dispel those common ideas based on environmental conditions. Neosho research has not been updated in light of these discussions. The Ozark environment is by no means impassable, but the assumption of marginality and the idea that cultural influence only permeated these uplands from the outside has resulted in stagnant interpretations of numerous cultures, including Harrington's (1924, 1960) bluff dweller cultures. Investigations of Neosho origins has remained static in part because of this assumption that cultural traits common in Neosho assemblages are seen as either stemming from the Plains or the Arkansas River valley in a unidirectional outward-in diffusion. Questions concerning Neosho culture remain unresolved because of the idea that the material culture of Neosho peoples must represent origins in either Plains or southeastern traits--because of their association with the Ozarks, a place "in between" two large environmental regions.

Another reason that Neosho research remains hindered is the lack of clarity in broad-scale interaction patterns in the region, resulting from a rigid culture history and reliance on trait list comparisons. No stylistic examinations of ceramic attributes--save one which attempts to distinguish varieties of Woodward Plain--have been conducted on Neosho and surrounding populations to better understand similarities and differences in design configurations. Research has continued on Neosho sites (Conner 1999; Dickson 2011;

Ray 2006b; Ray and Lopinot 2008), but numerous publications continue to reiterate the same information (Dickson 2002), and no new research on the topic of Neosho origins has surfaced since Wyckoff (1980) postulated that Neosho was the result of the dissolution of the Arkansas Valley Caddo system. As such, the study of Neosho assemblages has not been subject to updated research designs, methodologies, or theories, and the culture historical concern for Neosho origins remains.

Thomas and Ray (2002) have shown that Neosho peoples at the Dahlman site in Lawrence County, Missouri, were engaged in long-distance trade with peoples on the Plains and, indirectly, peoples in the southeastern United States. Their research is the first to examine Neosho in terms of a highly interconnected and far-flung network of relationships regardless of environmental determinism. However, there is still a lack of clarity of how Neosho relates to surrounding peoples and cultures.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Neosho research is troubled by issues that inhibit an understanding of the peoples themselves as well as the broader regional intercultural dynamics during the Late Pre-contact period. Reliance on ambiguous and rigid type descriptions of ceramic style and design to identify and relate Neosho people to surrounding groups impedes a general understanding of local and regional social processes. As a result, the intercultural dynamics and culture area definitions in the region surrounding the Neosho phase and cultures on the Plains and in the southeastern U.S. remain uninvestigated and confusing (Figure 2). Along with this systemic issue, there is a needlessly heavy focus on classificatory debates concerning Neosho emergence and cultural affiliation, ignoring evidence of intercultural interaction, and attending more to internal patterns and comparison of trait lists. Thus, Neosho research to date oversimplifies complex cultural processes in pursuit of dichotomous classification of Neosho people as either representing Plains or Southeastern cultures.

In order to overcome the various issues with Neosho research to date, my dissertation project will focus more broadly on processes of identity formation at a macro-regional scale, moving away from questions that engage with classificatory schema that seek to assign rigid identities to Neosho people based on the

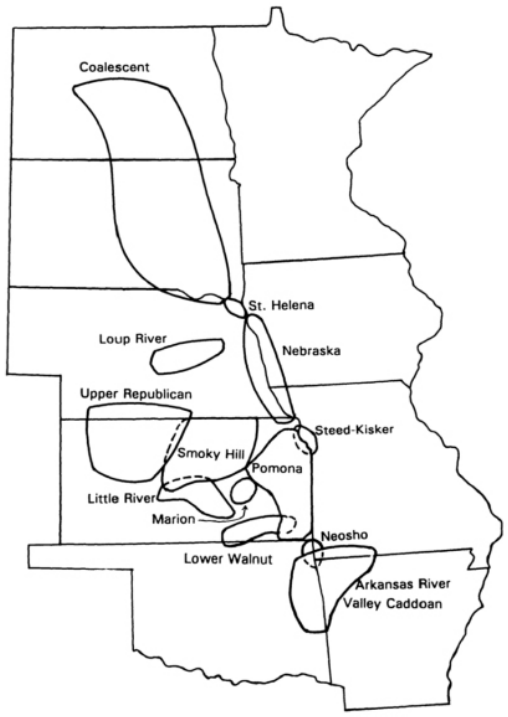

Figure 2. Location of Late Pre-contact Cultural Units (Vehik 1993:238).

dichotomization of cultural and environmental zones. By focusing on macro-regional patterns, I hope to clarify relationships within and between cultures in the area and overcome the systemic issues of typological classification of ceramics and culture areas in the region.

Methods, Theories, and Resolutions

In light of the various roadblocks that Neosho research has encountered, it is essential to incorporate a chosen method within a theoretical perspective that can both account for macro-regional processes of identification and interaction with more local processes of practice, history, and renegotiation. Cultural theory has recently begun to engage with globalization and what it means in terms of flows of information and its implications on culture--ideas that have direct implications for understandings of regional processes in the past. These more recent models are useful in that they begin to deconstruct boundaries and deterritorialize citizenship, a major hurdle that must be crossed to problematize culture area boundaries in archaeology as well as

provide a productive way of understanding material similarities.

Most of these new ideas stem from Appadurai's (1990) discussion of globalization as a mechanism for homogenization and heterogenization. In this discussion, Appadurai defines several different landscapes of flow including, but not limited to, ethnoscapes (movement of people) and technoscapes (movement of technology). Essentially, she argues that in these new spaces of global flows, there is a simultaneous homogenization and heterogenization of beliefs, products, techniques, and culture. Thus, in a global network there is a tension between wanting to be open to uniform global phenomena and wanting to maintain a distinctive identity of localization. Within such a model, local spaces of performance are places where people engage in various activities, where practices are negotiated, affirmed, denied, and reassessed. These performers or actors can elaborate on their practice in such local spaces and get immediate feedback on their acceptance or rejection within the already established cultural schema. As such, individuals have the potential to incorporate new elements into their performance and practice or to experiment within an arena that operates under an overall structural schema of accepted practice. These ideas then have some implications for how we discuss previously defined borders between culture areas and how we think about relative similarity through geographic space (Kearney 1991; Ong 2005; Tsing 2005).

Within archaeology, this gives an interesting elaboration on practice theory that illustrates the continuous instability of performed cultural phenomena, including practice as seen through material culture. This kind of perspective rejects fragmented and discontinuous spaces and instead sees social phenomena existing within interconnected spaces that are then made meaningful through agentive actions and continued practice (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Practice theory, as espoused by Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1991), has been elaborated within archaeology to account for history, agency, and transformation. It is particularly useful because we can better account for variation in material culture and speak not of "pots as people" but as the result of cultural practice by agentive actors. Practice provides a way to discuss similarities and differences in material culture through learning frameworks (Gosselain 1998, 2002, 2008, 2011; Wenger 1998) and to incorporate a discussion of the impact of history on transformations of culture. Practice, in this respect, is both molded by what came before and impacts what will follow (Pauketat 2001). If we incorporate ideas of globalization and local "spaces" of performance--of which there can be multiple within each community as they are inherently multi-scalar--within the already established practice frameworks, we can better account for resistance, irrationality, and intentionality in the material record. This destabilizes the boundaries between culture areas (not to mention destabilizes problematic material typologies) and instead variation in material culture can be understood as localized performances of agentive individuals.

From this framework, incorporating elements of globalization and localization with the tenets of practice, performance, history, and power, we can begin to think about the identities of people in the past as equally stable and unstable senses of self and the world. This kind of perspective incorporates more recent discussions in cultural theory on subjectivity and becoming (Biehl 2005; Biehl and Kleinman 2007; Biehl and Locke 2010). By drawing from theory about global flows of ideas and cultural patterns, we can begin to think about the exchange of techniques and ideas not as bounded entities that "belong" to one culture area or another but instead as an engagement with regional ideologies that become interpreted through localized frameworks of practice. Culture can be envisioned not within preconceived fragmented areas of difference but as space made meaningful through practice and performance as affected by historical relationships and operating within structures of power. In opening up spaces of performance within the already established practice framework, we are better able to understand local elaborations on broader "styles" as the result of agentive action and negotiations of regional and local entanglements and relations to self and world. Therefore, we can begin to see individuals as in a constant state of negotiation and relation with the world around them, in a consistent state of "becoming" where their sense of self and world are destabilized and made meaningful by performance and practice. Rather than identity connoting "oneness," instead it is possible to see

identity as an unfinished process of self-identification through history.

As Neosho research to date has relied on classificatory "either/or" schema in interpreting material remains and determining research questions, by incorporating practice theory, globalization, and performance spaces into my research, I can refocus Neosho research on understanding the process through which people relate to the world around them. In doing so, it will be important to overcome the various taxonomic brick walls that have stagnated research and perpetuated a premise of naturally discontinuous cultural space in the area and instead focus on how people made space meaningful through practice. In this way I believe that my research will better examine variation in the Late Pre-contact period in the area by understanding how aspects of identity are signified in practice and are negotiated through relational networks.

In pursuit of such broad patterns of practice, social interaction, identity formation, and intercultural dynamics, I will use ceramic attribute data and social network analysis to investigate how interaction between groups in the region affected their relative identifications. Social network analysis (SNA) is an emergent paradigm that derives from various interdisciplinary sources and seeks to address questions relating to interaction in the past (Knappett 2013). SNA is a unique method that can provide numerous insights into various social processes within a variety of theoretical frameworks (Mills 2017). For instance, Peeples (2018) incorporates identity theory derived from sociology in his investigations of the Prehispanic Cibola world. Thus, researchers can utilize this methodology in conjunction with research-specific theoretical approaches including practice, identity, entanglement, complexity, and human behavioral ecology. When used in conjunction with concepts and theories like identity, ceramic style, and practice, SNA can effectively map social interaction between sites and reflect processes of identity formation.

Methodologically, social networks are defined as a set of items, people, sites, etc. with connections between them (Knappett 2011). Networks in archaeology are presented such that nodes (points) represent people, or groups of people, and the edges or links (arrows) between these nodes represent various forms of social interaction (Figure 3). In utilizing SNA, researchers can characterize the structure of relationships among social groups (Wasserman and Faust 1994). Recent scholarship on SNA recognizes

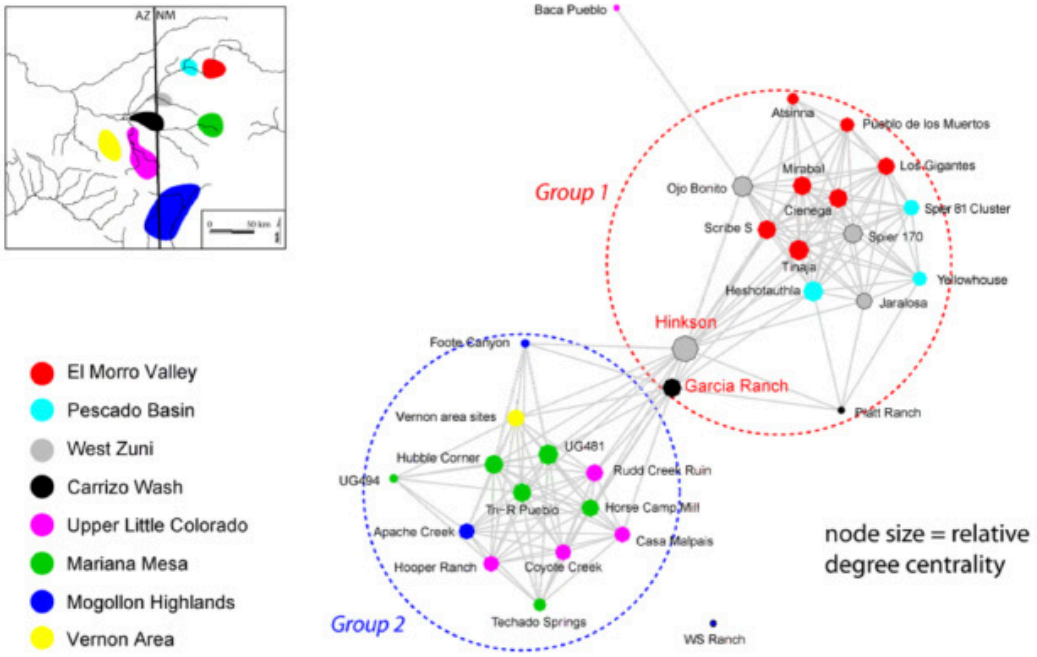

Figure 3. An example of a network of ceramic technology similarities among sites (the nodes) in the Cibola Region of the Southwestern U.S. Ties among settlements indicate technological similarities as derived from threshold similarity values for Brainerd-Robinson (BR) statistics (Peeples 2011:206).

four general characteristics inherent in the methodology and perspective (Bernard 2005:377). First, SNA focuses on ties (links) between people, households, and sites (nodes) rather than on the specific attributes of those multi-scalar actors. Second, SNA requires systematic collection of data to investigate those ties or relationships and to make inferences about what those ties signify. Third, there is a strong emphasis on graphical presentation of data and results. Finally, this method relies upon computational calculations to account for large amounts of data about social ties. Accordingly, SNA is primarily concerned with analyzing material and social ties or interactions between actors at numerous scales.

The basic archaeological understanding of interaction has two main characteristics: that interaction takes place within an absolute physical space and that it occurs at multiple scales (Knappett 2011). SNA is suited to illuminate both of these characteristics through archaeological data, but also allows the investigation of the types of social processes associated with those emplaced interactions. Paradigm shifts show an altered focus from spatial absolutism to relational approaches that postulate understanding information and resource flow among actors is needed to understand behavioral and social processes (Knappett 2011). SNA methods, when situated within an anthropological theoretical framework, can examine such processes at numerous scales from household-level decisions to macro-regional processes, which fits well within the above discussed framework of relative globalization and localized practice.

Importantly for the purposes of my research on Neosho peoples, SNA provides a methodology that does not assume the existence of "natural" boundaries (Borgatti and Halgin 2011). Due to the aforementioned difficulties with research to date, it has been important to incorporate an updated framework and methodology that allows me to disregard the cultural boundaries constructed by past researchers and instead understand the cultural dynamics in the region through material proxies. A common issue in archaeological analyses is the ability to define social boundaries through typologies and other material and social attributes. Boundaries within network analyses are more of a methodological consideration than one relating to process, as analysts arbitrarily assign boundaries for nodes--which can be households, sites, or regions depending on the dataset--and then another arbitrary boundary for the project area. But this method does not readily assume that boundaries are natural constructs that can be identified through material remains. Archaeologists agree that people do not live in typological, social, or cultural boxes, and as such, SNA provides a method for comparing the distribution of material culture attributes and to draw inferences on what similarities and differences in those attributes mean without having to place people or groups into typological boxes (Terrell 2013).

I will be recording ceramic data from Neosho sites including stylistic and technological attributes from which I will calculate similarity scores between sites (Table 1). Ceramic style will be used as a proxy through which to understand and map social processes (Hart 2012; Hart and Engelbrecht 2012; Carr 1995). Ultimately, the attributes I have chosen to focus on represent decisions made throughout the manufacturing process with specific focus on those middle- and last-order attributes that have been shown to reflect processes relating to identity formation (Carr 1995). Ceramic assemblage data from sites contemporaneous with the Neosho phase, including the Fort Coffee phase (A.D. 1450-1600) and Lower Walnut phase (see Figure 2) will also be acquired from existing collections at repositories in Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas.

Additionally, I will search existing collections for undated carbon samples to solidify the Neosho occupation age range. The Neosho phase has been dated to ca. A.D. 1400-1650, with several radiocarbon dates confirming this range (Cobb 1976; Conner 1999; Dickson 1991; Rohrbaugh 1984; Wyckoff 1964), but

Stylistic	Design/Manufacture
Decoration Type	Temper
Punctation tool	Color
Punctation shape (exterior and interior)	Rim Diameter (if applicable)
Incised line width	Rim Percentage (if applicable)
Incised line orientation	Exterior surface treatment
Incised line spacing	Interior surface treatment
Stage of decoration application	Rim/Neck form
Punctation size	Rim height
Punctation depth	Lip thickness
Location of Decoration	Midrim thickness
Decorative Intent (chevron, rectilinear, etc.)	Rim Base thickness
Punctate density	Shoulder thickness
	Manufacture
	Wall Thickness (max.)
	Vessel Form
	Use Wear
	Lip Shape

Table 1. Ceramic attribute measures.

more dates will be needed to clarify Neosho's history within Oklahoma and the surrounding regions.

Using the ceramic measurements and attributes in Table 1, I will construct a similarity matrix in which attributes will be compared in terms of their similarities between sites (Östborn and Gerding 2014). I will calculate similarity scores using Gower's General Similarity Coefficient, which measures proximity (or in this case, similarity) for data characterized by a combination of nominal and continuous variables. Higher coefficients indicate a stronger likelihood of communication and interaction or shared social relations (Mills 2017). Having compiled these data into this format, the similarity matrix will be input into the social network analysis. Links between nodes (i.e., sites) will be weighted in terms of relative similarity of ceramic attributes in order to investigate the structure of the network's weak and strong ties.

For the Neosho phase, I am interested in examining whole network attributes to better understand global and local processes of interaction, practice, and learning. As such, I am fundamentally concerned with questions concerning how people relate to one another in global and local contexts and how these dynamics affect their practices and processes of identification. From a network perspective, I am not concerned with spatially bounded entities and their importance to network structure but am interested instead in broader patterns of relations. Previous research has illustrated that geographic distance is not a predictor of artifact similarity (Hart 2012), and such problematic premises of similarity and proximity have framed Neosho research to this point. Instead, I will examine the relational aspects of attribute similarity, paying particular attention to interpretations emphasizing performance, practice, history, and agency at local and regional scales.

Conclusions

The question of Neosho phase origins, while interesting in the frameworks of previous research, is unproductive in light of contemporary theory and methodologies. Research must overcome the rigid culture history of the region, as their definition on the basis of similar material culture traits has clearly resulted in a complex and confusing mileu of similar but different cultures. Compounding these issues is the Neosho phase's existence in an area that lies between the major regions of the eastern Woodlands and the Plains, on the "island" that is the Ozark Plateau. The consolidation of various foci into larger taxa has remained difficult, as it has been impossible to understand the relative contribution of both the Plains and the Woodlands to the culture traits used in their definition. It is necessary, then, to reexamine and reconceptualize the region as representing an interconnected space, made meaningful by people in practice. By doing so, I can disregard taxonomic classifications in the region and instead focus on macro- and micro-regional networks of interaction and identification. Only then will it be possible to overcome the various assumptions and problems that have influenced research to date and better understand how peoples associated with the Neosho phase relate to past and contemporaneous cultures.

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