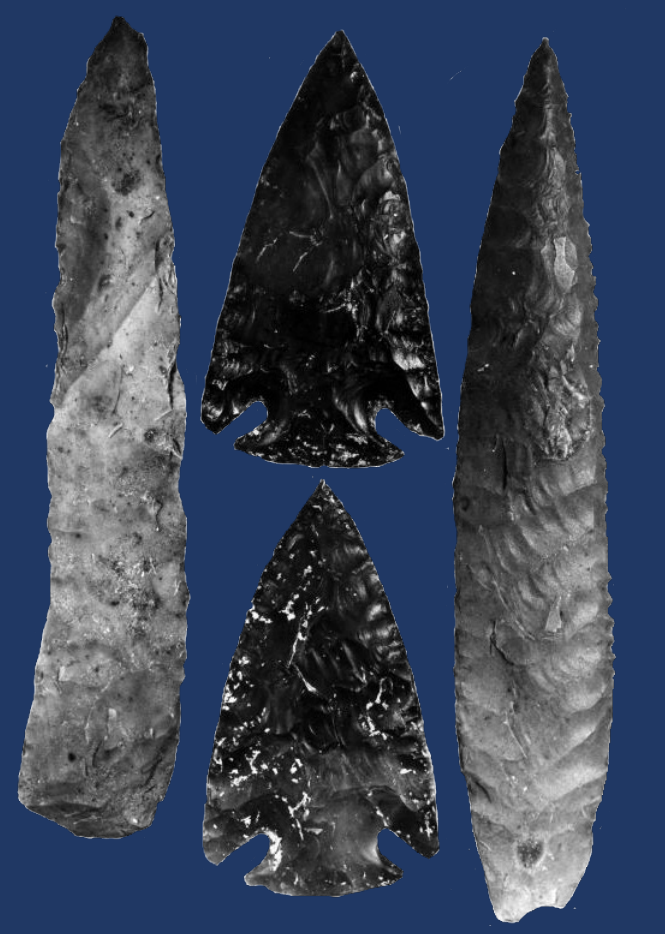




A Comparison of Hunter-Gatherer Mortuary Chronologies and Traditions Along the Texas Coast

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Overview

The Texas Coastal Plains (TCP) is home to some of the largest and oldest precontact hunter-gatherer mortuary sites in the US. In this poster, we compare three of these mortuary sites in order to evaluate the chronological distributions of burials, understand long-term patterns in burial populations, and better understand the distribution of burial goods and what these goods say, if anything, about social status.

All three sites have extensive mortuary complexes and burial goods including projectile points, lithic tools, fresh and marine shell ornaments and tools, and bone ornaments and tools.

1. The Morhiss Site (41VT1)

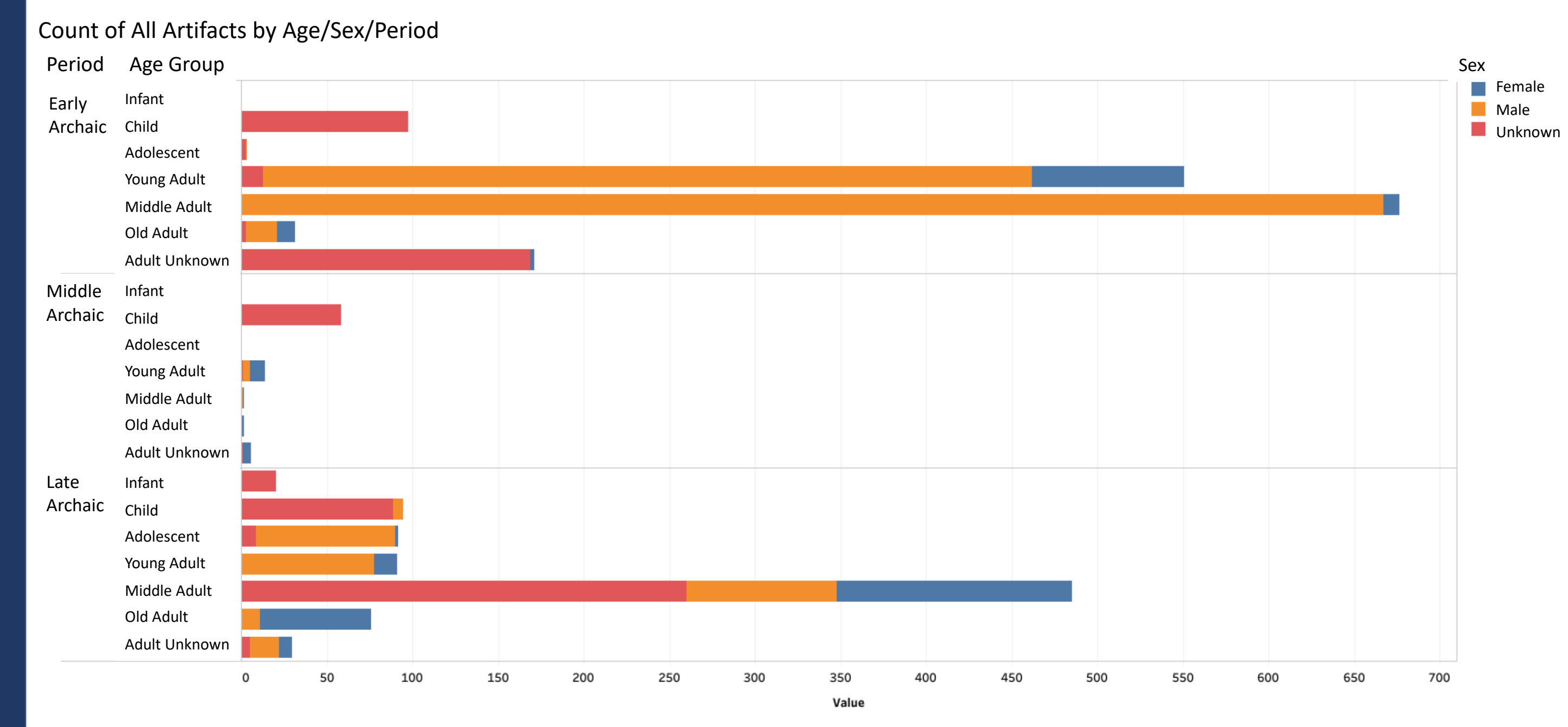
- As many as 304 individuals interred in a midden on a knoll-like terrace near the banks of the Guadalupe River channel.
- Ninety of the 41VT1 burials were dated recently by the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), with the oldest dating to around 7200 BP, the Early Archaic (9000-6000 BP).
- Most (64%, n=58) radiocarbon dated burials date to the Late Archaic (4000-1200 BP).
- Lies on the border of two ecological zones: the Riverine-Savanna Zone and the Coastal Zone.

2. Buckeye Knoll (41VT98)

- At least 120 individuals interred; the majority date to the Early Archaic.
- Located only 6 km from Morhiss.
- Lies within the Coastal Zone

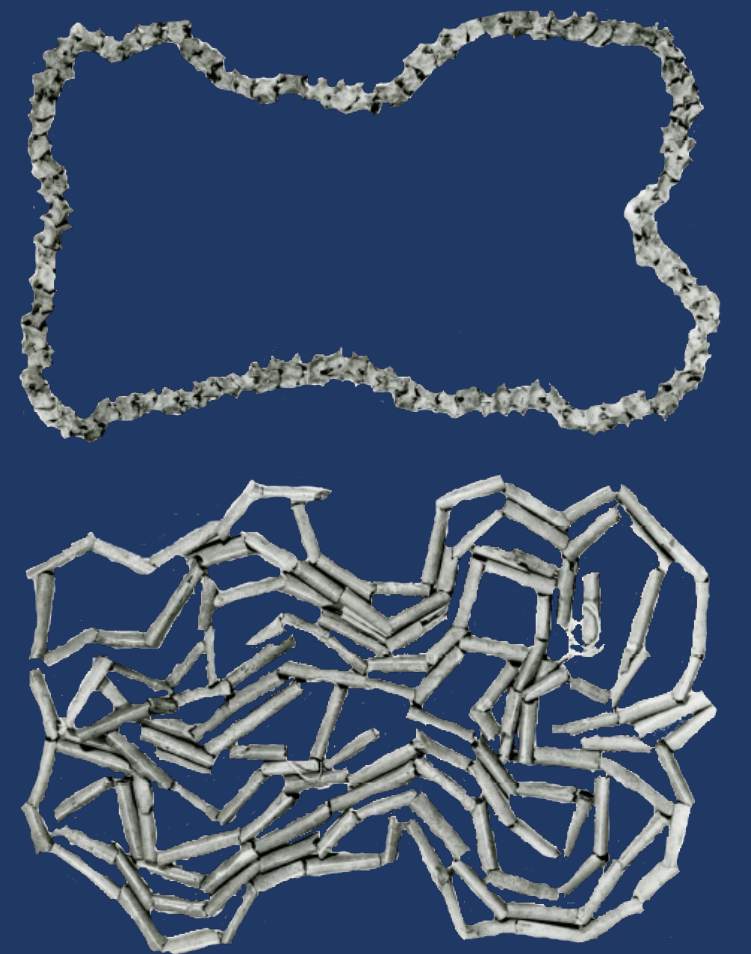
3. Ernest Witte (41AU36)

- Over 300 individuals interred; the majority dating to the Late Archaic, but some also date to the Middle Archaic (6000-4000 BP) to the Late Prehistoric (1200-300 BP).
- Lies within the Riverine-Savanna Zone.



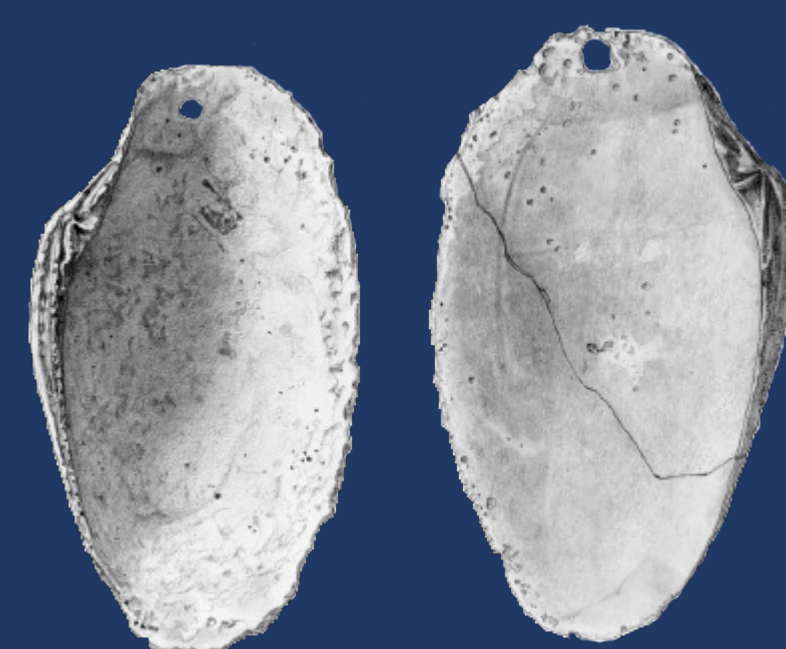
Artifacts by Sex, Age, and Time Period

- Most Early Archaic burials at Morhiss are of unknown sex and only general age categories are known, but Buckeye Knoll may help fill in the knowledge gaps at Morhiss.
- At Buckeye Knoll, most, but not all, burial goods were associated with males.
- At Morhiss, during the Late Archaic, there are a greater number of burial goods with males.
- There is limited Late Archaic data for Buckeye Knoll.
- Ernest Witte Late Archaic burials show more variation than any of the other two sites considered and any other time period.
 - Many burials are of unknown sex.
 - For those of known sex, there are more burial goods associated with younger males than with younger females, and older males.
 - For those of known sex, there are more burial goods associated with older females than with younger females, and older males.



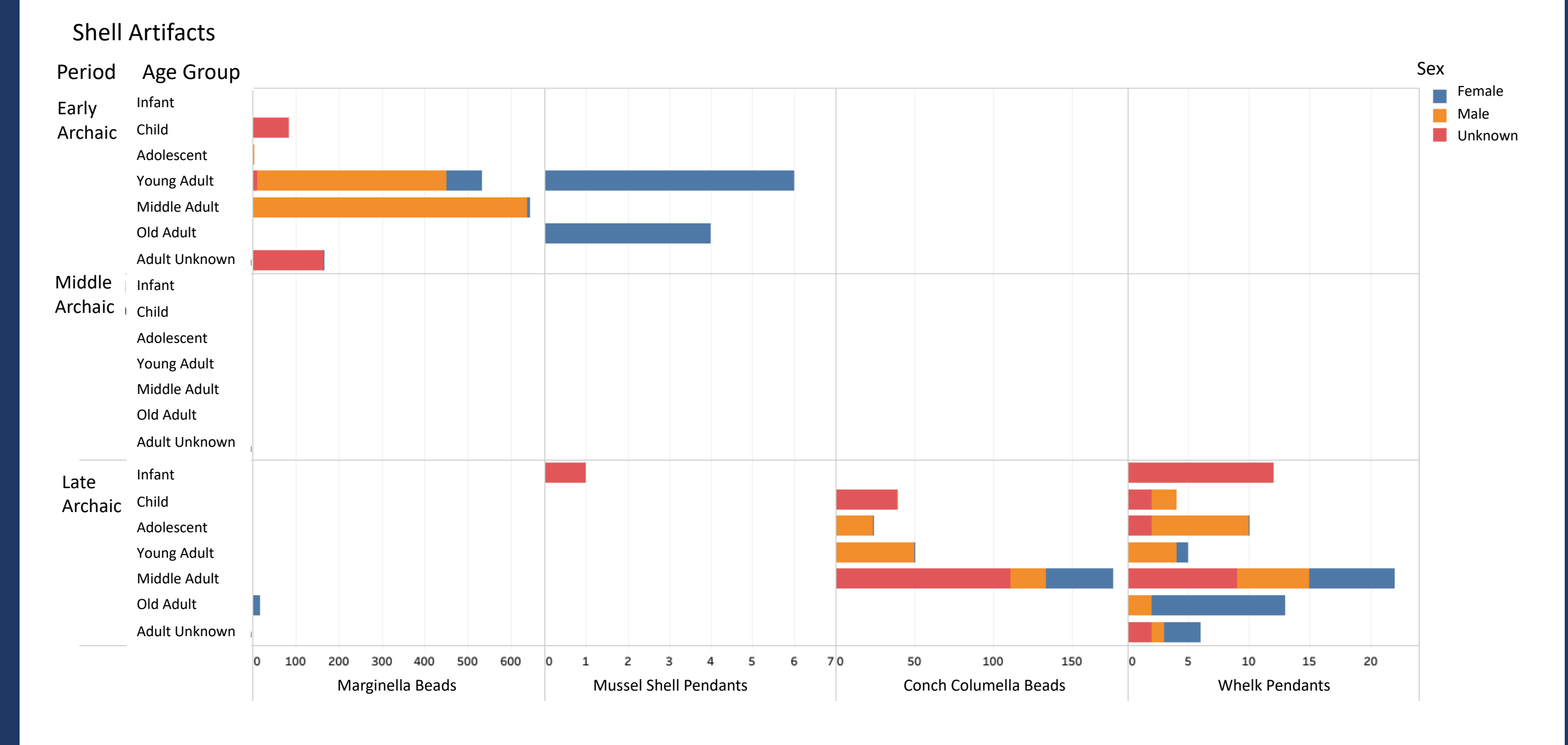
Methods

- M. Whisenhunt collected and compiled Morhiss data from various sources. As part of a larger project, K. Solis collected and compiled mortuary data from over 2000 burials throughout the TCP.
- We selected Morhiss (41VT1), Buckeye Knoll (41VT98), and Ernest Witte (41AU36) for our comparison as these three sites had long and overlapping use periods.
- Analysis was performed in ArcGIS and graphs were made in Tableau using simple counts.

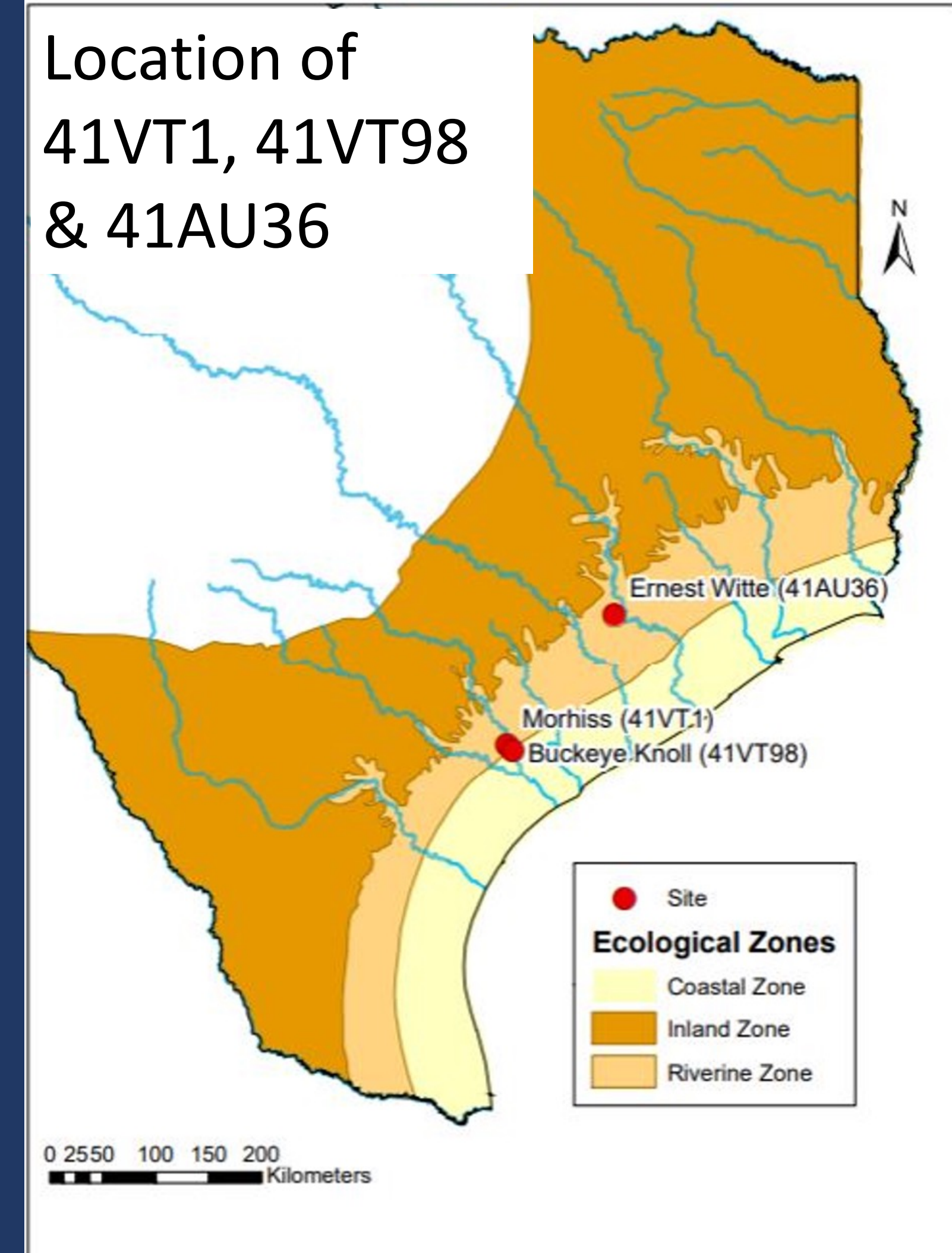


Select Shell Artifacts

- Marginella beads and freshwater mussel shell pendants are associated with Early Archaic burials.
- There are more marginella beads with male burials than with female burials.
- There are more freshwater mussel shell pendants with female burials than with male burials.
- Both marginella beads and freshwater mussel shell pendants seem to fall out of favor by the Late Archaic.
- Conch columella beads and whelk pendants become more common during the Late Archaic.
- Both conch columella beads and whelk pendants are associated with both sexes.
- Conch columella beads are associated with those between the age group of child and middle adult.
- Whelk pendants are associated with all age groups.
- Young males have a greater number of whelk pendants than young females.
- Older females have a greater number of whelk pendants than young males.



Location of 41VT1, 41VT98 & 41AU36



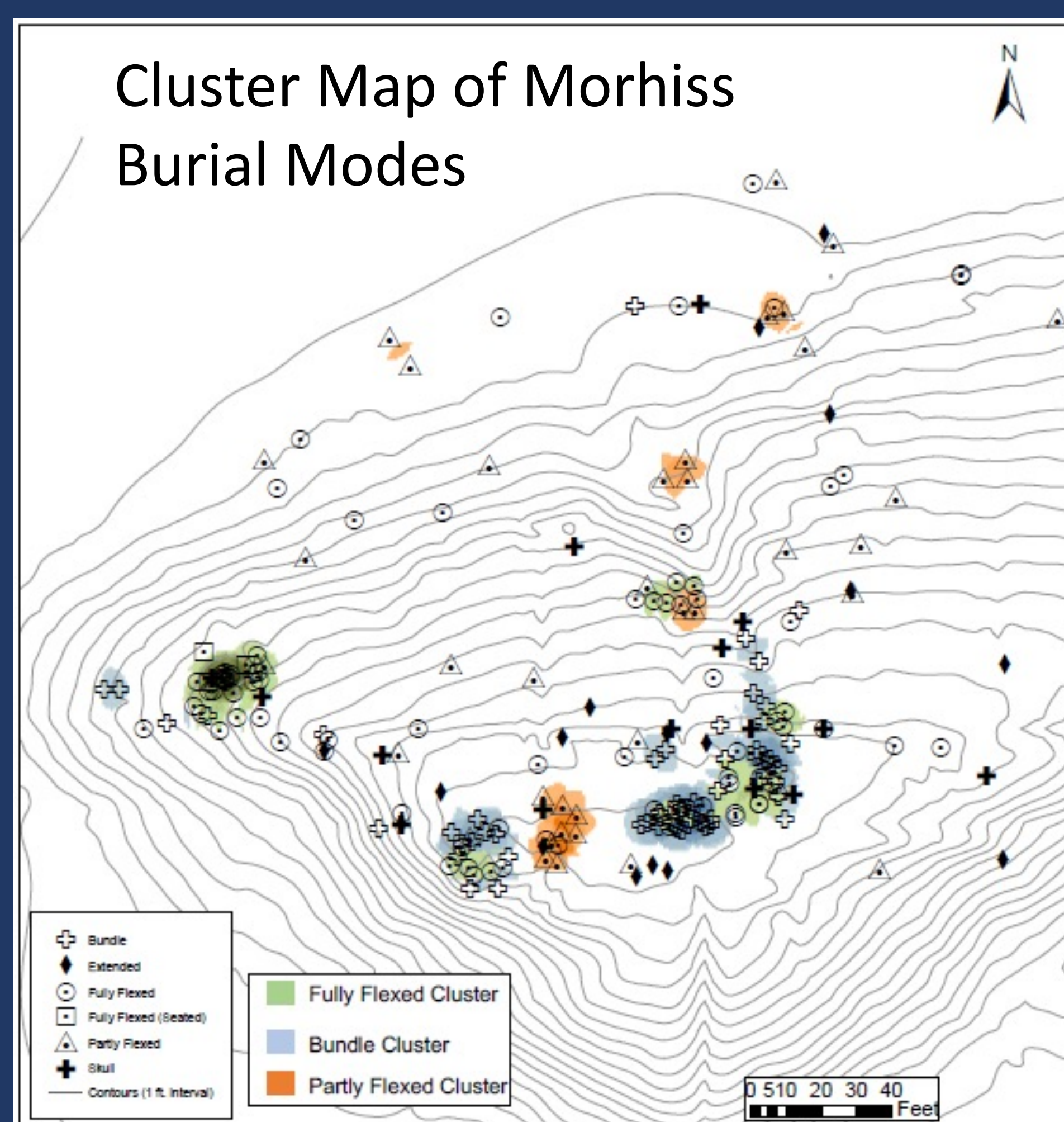
Burial Modes

- A cluster analysis of burial modes observed at Morhiss depicts bundle and flexed burials at the top of the midden and grid north.
- Bundle and flexed burials are generally, but not exclusively associated with Early Archaic interments at both Morhiss and Buckeye Knoll.
- Semi-flexed burials at Morhiss occurred in several clusters, one at the midden summit and three at descending slopes to grid north.
- At Ernest Witte, Middle Archaic interments are primarily extended and Late Archaic are mostly extended or semi-flexed.

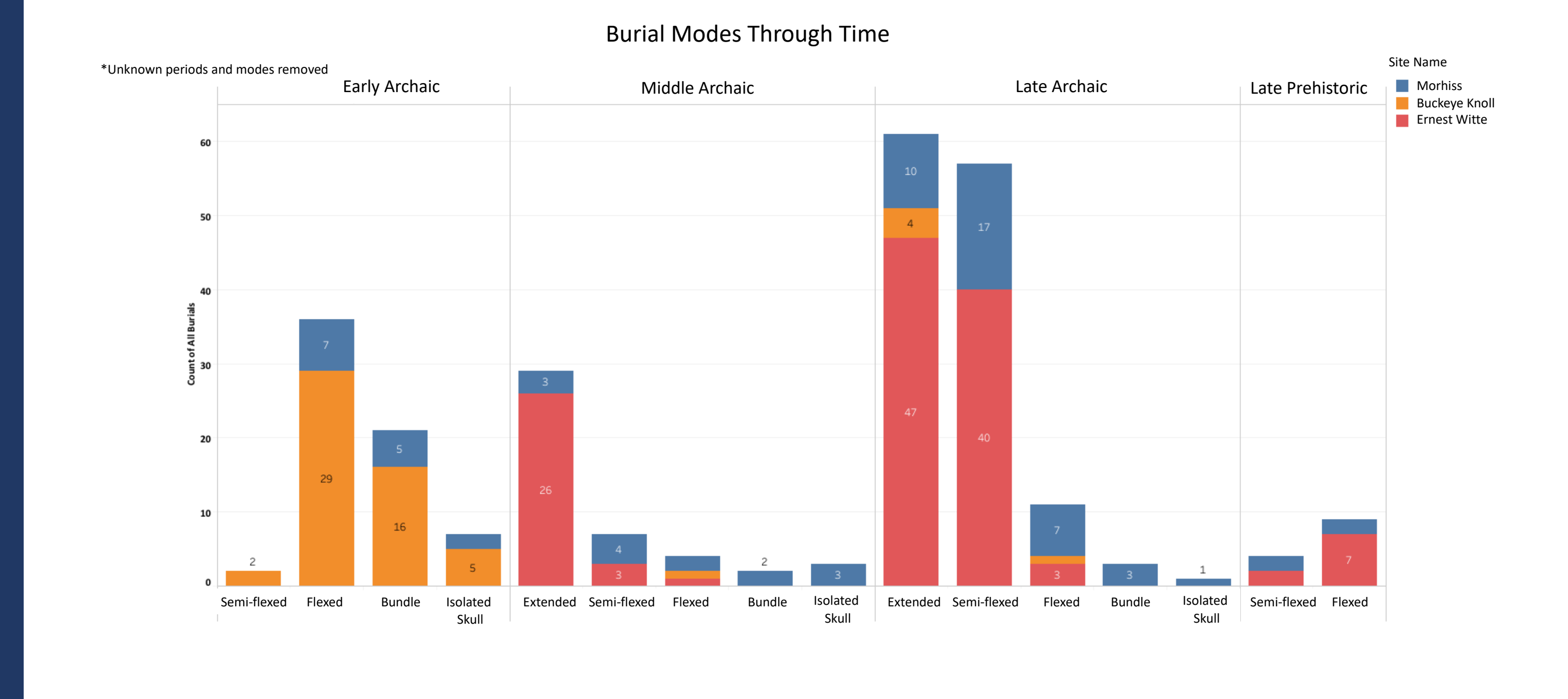
Scan QR code for full Tableau storyboard or visit: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/kristina.solis/viz/SAA-story2/SAA2023>



Cluster Map of Morhiss Burial Modes

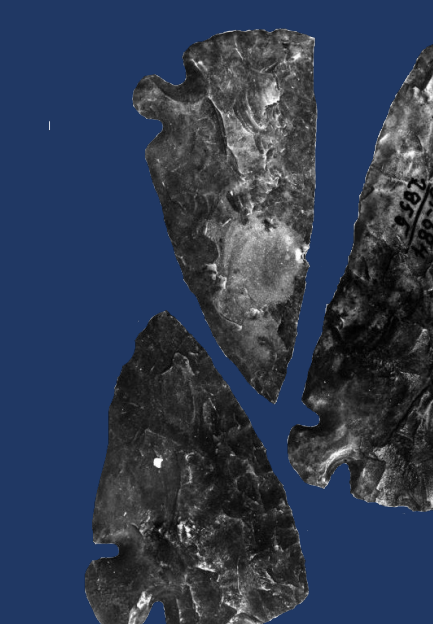


Burial Modes Through Time



References

- Dockall, John E. and Steve Black. 2006. Morhiss Mound, Texas. Beyond History. Texas Archeological Research Laboratory - University of Texas at Austin. www.texasbeyondhistory.net
- Hall, Grant D. 1981. Allens Creek: A Study in Cultural Prehistory of the Lower Brazos River Valley, Texas. Texas Archeological Research Survey Research Report No. 61. The University of Texas at Austin.
- Ricklis, Robert A., R.A. Weinstein, and D.C. Wells (editors). 2012. Archeology and Bioarchaeology of the Buckeye Knoll Site (41VT98), Victoria County, Texas. Coastal Environments, Inc., Corpus Christi, TX.



Key Insights

Burial Modes:

- Bundle burials, which are secondary burials, were associated primarily with the Early Archaic (41VT98) indicating that the peoples who once lived in the TCP during the Early Archaic returned to this location to bury their dead.
- Extended and semi-flexed burials found in the Late Archaic may indicate a permanent or longer-term resident occupation of the area as there was also a reduction in bundle/secondary burials. This is also correlated with sea-level stabilization (3000-1150 BP) during the Late Archaic.

Artifacts by age/sex/time period

- Going by artifact counts, it appears that males had higher status than females, particularly during the Early Archaic.
- By the Late Archaic, females appear to gain status with age.

Other

- The lack of Middle Archaic burials and burial goods coincides with hypotheses about Middle Archaic population decline due to significant aridity.
- Although females generally had less burial goods, Hall (1981) found that in a few cases, some females had higher value items than most males.