

Early Georgia

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## THE ABERCROMBIE MOUND, RUSSELL COUNTY, ALABAMA\*

by

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The large mound on the old Fitzgerald Plantation about five miles south of Girard, Alabama has often been called to the attention of archeologists, professional and amateur, because of the abundance of potsherds on the plowed fields surrounding the mound. The writer has seldom seen such a litter of sherds on any Indian Village site. In recent years the site has been largely destroyed by commercial activities but literally tons of aboriginal materials once covered the ground.

Apparently the first serious work at the Abercrombie Mound was conducted by Peter A. Brannon, beginning about 1905. It is reported in 'Aboriginal Remains in the Middle Chattahoochee Valley of Alabama and Georgia' American Anthropologist, Vol. XI, No. 2, pp. 189-94, 1909. Clarence B. Moore also dug there in 1906, the excavations being reported in 'Mounds of the Lower Chattahoochee and Lower Flint Rivers', Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Vol. XIII, Part 3, pp. 449-50, 1907. Brannon refers to the mound as 'The Fitzgerald Mound', Moore as the 'Mound and Cemetery at Abercrombie Landing.' The writer made a reconnaissance of the site for the National Park Service in 1940 and secured a collection which is now at Ocmulgee National Monument. Other collections are at the Alabama Department of Archives, Montgomery. The location of the collections made by C. B. Moore is not known. It is probable that they are either at the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation or at Phillips Academy Andover, Mass.

The mound was originally about fifteen feet high and from seventy-five to ninety feet in diameter. It is described as somewhat irregu-

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lar in shape with a definately flat top. It was surely a temple mound, although no information is available on the size or shape of the temples once built there.

The most abundant materials from the site are sherds of several types. The collections at Ocmulgee National Monument consist of the following types:

	Number	%
Sandy Plain	17	1.7
Lamar Complicated Stamped	79	11.9
Lamar Bold Incised	21	3.8
Lamar Plain	144	21.8
Dallas Decorated	3	.5
Dallas Plain	5	.8
Ft. Walton Incised	3	.5
Total Lamar Horizon	272	41.0
Ocmulgee Fields Plain	316	47.7
Ocmulgee Fields Incised	65	9.8
Walnut Roughened	6	.9
Chattahoochee Brushed	2	.3
Black Painted	2	.3
Total Ocmulgee Fields Horizon	391	59.0
GRAND TOTAL	663	100.00

The Sandy Plain type is a very gritty plain pottery that seems to be earlier than the bulk of the Lamar types although it is counted as belonging to that period (Pl. 1, M). It will be seen that slightly less than half of the sherds are of the Lamar Horizon. The Lamar Complicated Stamped (Pl. 1, N-P) is very heavily tempered with sand and differs in no way from the original description of the type (Jennings & Fairbanks, 1939, Vol. 1, No. 2). The Lamar Bold Incised (Pl. 1, A, B, E) is very close to the original description (Jennings & Fairbanks, 1939, Vol. 1, No. 2). The Lamar Plain is greatly in the majority and evidently plain jars were more popular than stamped ones at the site. The types Dallas Decorated, Dallas Plain, (Pl. 1, C, D) and Ft. Walton Incised (Pl. 1, I) resemble closely the comparable types from Eastern

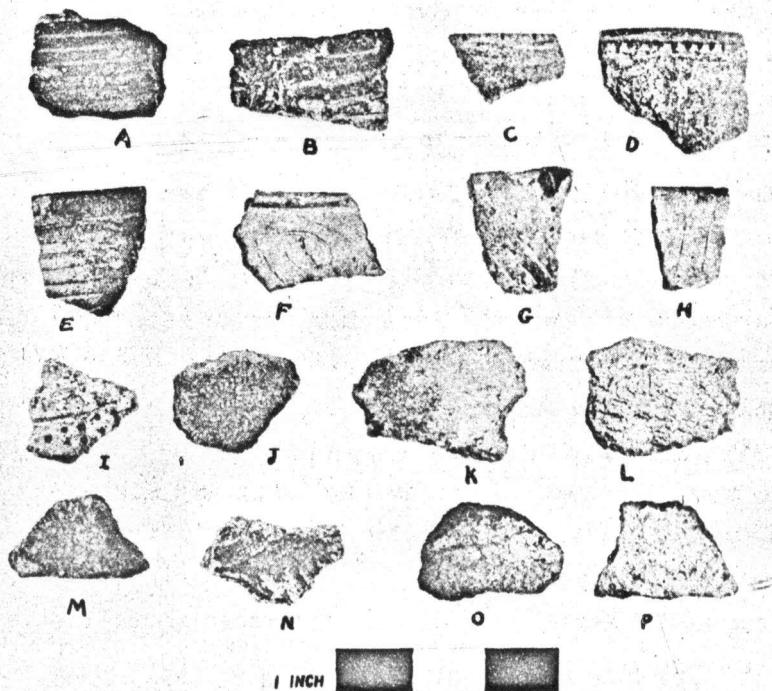


Plate 1

Tennessee and Northwest Florida. As the Chattahoochee forms a fairly easy route of travel between these two points it is not surprising to find trade sherds from those areas.

The Ocmulgee Fields materials, on the other hand, do not closely resemble the type sherds. The Walnut Roughened (Pl.1, J-L) is shell tempered and resembles the type description (Jennings & Fairbanks, 1940, Col.II, No.2, pp.10-2) but is definitely a minority. Four sherds were stippled, probably cob-marked, and two brushed. The Chattahoochee Brushed closely resembles Bullen's original description (Bullen, 1950, p.103), but again is in a minority. The sherds counted as Ocmulgee Fields Incised (Pl.1, F-H) are largely shell tempered, although some approach the temperless condition of the type sherds. Their chief variance from the type description lies in the quality of the incising. About half of them would fall midway between Ocmulgee Fields Incised and Lamar Bold Incised, the remainder are fairly typ-

Their incised lines are much more boldly incised than the type sherds from Ocmulgee National Monument and the designs are more coherent. They evidently should be placed in an intermediate status, although their relation to Ocmulgee Fields Incised in motifs and execution is clearly apparent.

The sherds called here Ocmulgee Fields Plain are, again, rather at variance from the sherds of the same type name from central Georgia. They are usually shell tempered and much more highly polished than the type sherds. The polishing or burnishing is often well done but in other cases the marks of the burnishing tool clearly show. They are usually of light colors, ranging from greyish white to buff or orange. As a group they seem to be somewhat related to the late or historic types from central Alabama. No Kasita Red Filmed was found, but two sherds, with generally Ocmulgee Fields characteristics, showed traces of what appeared to be black paint. Black paint is known from Kasita Red Filmed but does not occur alone, always being associated with red paint.

In all, this group of sherds differs significantly from the historic Creek ceramics of central Georgia and from those of the Lawson Field site just across the river from the Abercrombie Mound. In general, this difference seems to be a matter of more western attributes, i.e. those resembling the ceramics of central Alabama. The narrowness and shallowness of the incised lines which we associate with the historic Creek in central Georgia and at Lawson Field is replaced by a greater width and depth, which I associate with an earlier time Level. This bolder form is present both in Lamar and Dallas in slightly different styles. The Lawson Field Site, on Ft. Benning Reservation directly across the river from the Abercrombie Mound, has the same fine, shallow, sloppily incised Ocmulgee Fields Incised as at Ocmulgee Old Fields. It evidently represents the remains of the historic Kasita town of the early 18th century. Within the Mississippian incised cazuela tradition in the Georgia-Alabama area we have a progressive decrease in the weight of the line with time, accompanied in most

cases by a breaking up of the designs. This is less a simplification of the design or motifs than a carelessness in drawing so that the designs lose their coherence and unity. Essential parts of connected multi-line loops become mere curved filler elements between isolated loops. I think we can definitely point to these two elements, decrease in strength of line and loss of coherence, as progressive changes in the tradition. On the cazuelas there is also a progressive development of thickened, everted lips, features almost completely lacking on the Lamar Bold Incised cazuelas. Other changes are the progressive reduction in size of handles until they are lost or mere vestiges, the change from the folded rim with either pinching or cane punctates to a notched fillet below the lip, and a progressive rounding of bases. These last three changes occur on the Mississippian jar form.

Peter A. Brannon has figured (1909, fig. 39) three whole jars from the Abercrombie Mound. He has also kindly sent me a photograph of several bottle forms formerly in the collection of Dr. H. M. Whepley of St. Louis. Two of the jars are plain, one with strap handles. They would fall into our Lamar Plain category. The third jar with two strap handles is the type Dallas Decorated (Lewis & Kneberg, 1946, p. 105, plates 52B, 63A). The bottle forms are very similar to many that occur in the Dallas Focus and in other Late Mississippi foci. (see Lewis & Kneberg, 1946, plate 63C). They surely fall in the Lamar horizon.

Other artifacts besides sherds show a wide range. Perhaps most common are small discoids of stone and discs of pottery. The stone discs may be roughly chipped or nicely polished. They are characteristic of the Lamar horizon in most sites visited by the writer. Polished stone is well represented by many whole and broken celts, mostly with tapering polls. At least one stone chisel is known. Brannon reports the finding of several 'hoe-shaped objects' (1909, figs. 41-2), the highly polished, lobbed, perforated, flat, celt-like form that had a presumed non-utilitarian function. Brannon reports that one of these came from a flexed burial accompanied by many shell, bone, stone,

and glass beads, It is thus placed within the historic period at this site. Numerous projectile points are reported but not illustrated and the Ocmulgee National Monument collections do not contain any points. Interestingly enough, several grooved axes and one partly finished winged throwing stick weight ('bannerstone') are reported. These must surely belong to an earlier occupation as they are foreign to both the Lamar and Ocmulgee Fields complexes. Brannon also describes a unique stone pipe in the shape of a hammer. It cannot be placed in any complex known to me.

Oval and circular shell gorgets are fairly common as are several types of shell beads. These latter include *Marginella apicina* beads as well as spherical and disc beads of cut shell. The glass beads include both black and white stripes and a blue badly decayed type. These black, spherical, inlaid beads have also occurred at the Ocmulgee Old Fields and various Coosa and Chattahoochee Valley sites of the early 18th century.

Both Brannon and Moore refer to the area around the mound as a cemetery. The great quantity of sherds suggests that it is rather a village area with numbers of burials placed in the occupied area. Burial in the village area seems to be usual in both the Lamar and historic Creek horizons. Moore describes both flexed and extended burials, while Brannon mentions only flexed burials. Many burials were accompanied by historic trade objects. It is evident that some, at least, of the village burials belong to historic Indians. Both Brannon and Moore agree that the village burials belong to a later period than the mound. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that two types of pottery are found, namely Lamar and Ocmulgee Fields. Mounds are general in the Lamar period but are lacking in Ocmulgee Fields sites. The constellation of Lamar pottery types is known to be prehistoric in the central and southern Georgia areas. I believe it is to be equated, on stylistic grounds, with the Creek settlements of that area during the 16th and 17th centuries. It is clearly ancestral to the pottery of the Ocmulgee Fields complex. In many cases specific attributes of shape, design lay-out, motif, and appendages

can be traced from Lamar to Ocmulgee Fields sherds. There can be no doubt that one is ancestral to the other. It may be an unjustified hypothesis to assume that this genetic relationship means that the makers of Lamar pottery types were Muskogean-speaking. I do believe, however, that such was the case and that further work will establish it. At any rate it should be a fruitful working hypothesis.

We know, from excavations at Ocmulgee Old Fields and Lawson Field, that the Ocmulgee Fields complex dates from about 1680 until about 1720, probably extending considerably later. The sherds called Ocmulgee Fields Incised and Ocmulgee Fields Plain at the Abercrombie Mound date, on stylistic grounds, slightly before the Ocmulgee Old Fields and Lawson Fields sherds. As has been pointed out, we have a fairly definite evolution in types from Lamar to Ocmulgee Fields. It is thus possible to place the Abercrombie sherds in chronological position in to this known evolutionary sequence. We also know, from abundant documentary evidence which I cannot review here, that large numbers of Creeks did not share in the movement to the Ocmulgee in the closing years of the 17th century. I think we can assume that the later materials, including burials, at the Abercrombie Mound represent the remains of the Creek town of the middle and later years of the 17th century. There is a suggestion that Coweta was in this general area in this time span. Certainly Coweta was in this area slightly later as is shown by the well-established site of Fort Mitchell just to the south. It is even possible, if not probable, that the earlier Lamar occupation may be a form of ancestral Coweta. Whatever its specific town affiliation, the later occupation was clearly Creek.