

THE KINGSLEY SLAVE CABINS IN DUVAL COUNTY, FLORIDA, 1968

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INTRODUCTION

Although the institution of slavery in America ended slightly over a hundred years ago, there has been no concerted effort by archeologists to study the remains of this cultural institution. Recognizing this hiatus in our research as well as the contributions that excavation could make, the author determined to begin an examination of the material remains of plantations in the Old South. It was hoped that this archeological program, while concentrating on the actual slave quarters, could also investigate the locations of craft activities and perhaps of the actual productive areas of the plantations. The excavations at the Zephaniah Kingsley slave cabins are an early phase of what is hoped will be a long-range comparative exploration of the physical remains of slave communities in the South. Because of its proximity to the University of Florida and the relatively complete remains, the Kingsley Plantation offered an ideal beginning point. A modest grant from the Florida Park Service afforded us an opportunity to begin this important work.

The institution of chattel slavery has long interested historians and humanists. While contemporary accounts of Southern slavery have appeared for nearly two hundred years, much is yet to be learned about this peculiar institution. Almost always written from the viewpoint of the superordinate caste, they are generally lacking in specific information about the daily circumstances of the slaves. Such accounts as Fanny Kemble's almost neurotic attack (1863) on slavery failed to give us specific information on how the slaves lived and the details of their housing, crafts, family life, and daily activities. These are supplemented by excellent political and economic studies of the slave system (Olmsted 1861; Flanders 1933; Grant 1954).

It is precisely in this sort of situation that archeology can supplement and extend the understanding offered by written history. Archeology is consistently concerned with process, rather than events, with technology rather than politics. It can thus broaden and enrich the knowledge of our American heritage at a time when that tradition is in the midst of rapid and often baffling change. Some archeology has already been done in the "big houses" of the southern plantations (Caywood 1955; Noel Hume 1962, 1966). Ivor Noel Hume has reported the excavation of a trash pit believed to have been associated with slaves at Tutter's Neck (1966). Adelaide and Ripley Bullen reported the excavation of the home of a freed slave in Massachusetts (Bullen and Bullen 1945). James A. Ford excavated the remains of a sugar mill, presumably slave-operated, on the Georgia coast (Ford 1937). This author participated in the partial excavation of a slave cabin at the Ryefield site on Cumberland Island (Ascher and Fairbanks 1971). There is, however, a general dearth of reports on the excavation of slave areas in the available literature.

Cedar Grove plantation

While the buttons give the impression of a rather mixed bag of clothing the recovery of the iron handle of a flatiron does indicate that clothing was cared for by the inhabitants. Two badly rusted folding pocket knives are probably also to be considered as personal property.

The only item of personal adornment, aside from the double clay earspool of doubtful ascription described under ceramics, was a single pale blue glass bead of the faceted type so common from about 1780 to well into the nineteenth century. In another report (Ascher and Fairbanks) this was referred to as an "Ambassador Bead" because it is of a type given that name in Africa during the same time period. I now have strong doubts that this can represent an item brought from their original home by slaves. These faceted beads, usually in a pale blue metal are quite common in the New World, occurring in large quantities in Seminole graves from about 1780 to well into the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSIONS

The brief excavation of one of the larger slave cabins at the Kingsley Plantation revealed some definitive information on the construction of the cabin that is useful for restoration. It also indicated some specific things about the life of slaves during the period from 1813 to 1843. After Kingsley's death in 1843 it seems highly likely that the cabin was re-occupied at least sporadically. The sherd profile strongly suggests this continued occupation. The sherd assemblage also strongly suggests that the table wares of the cabin were discards from more formal groupings. It seems entirely likely that slave quarters were not supplied with any regular class of slave ceramics. The buttons, containing a number of eighteenth century types, also strongly suggest hand-me-down clothing rather than regularly purchased work clothes.

It was surprising that no surely African elements in the material culture could be identified. It has long been known that blacks arrived in this country with nothing but their chains. They did manage, however, to leave survivals of their language and other behavioral traits in the slave culture of the south which survive in Afro-American culture until the present. I felt that the special circumstances of Kingsley being a slave - importing station, and Kingsley's permissive attitude toward his charges, would assure that some elements of African material culture would have been recreated in the plantation situation. Pottery, ornaments, game pieces, or ritual objects might well be expected in such a milieu. We found nothing, however, that could surely be identified as such. The only possible exception was the dumbbell shaped bead of crude manufacture which is simply an exotic piece without any clear cultural identification. A possible explanation is presented that not sufficient time elapsed for the African individuals to recover from the shock of enforced migration and begin the process of recreating