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A SEMI-SUBTERRANEAN STRUCTURE AT MISSION SAN JOSEPH DE OCUYA, JEFFERSON COUNTY, FLORIDA

by
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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of the Apalachee Indians and the First Spanish Colonial period in North Florida is limited because of a dearth of professional archaeological research. Prior to the spring of 1968 the locations of only three of the 18 Apalachee mission sites were known and professional reports were available for only two of the sites (Boyd, Smith and Griffin 1951).

During the spring of 1968, the writer was employed by the Board of Archives and History (now the Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Florida Department of State) and undertook research for the mission studies program initiated by L. Ross Morrell, state archaeologist. To date the research has included the excavation of the previously located site of *San Juan de Aspalaga* (Morrell and Jones 1970) and the discovery, identification and excavation of five major Apalachee and two Timucuan mission sites.

This report contains an analysis of the data obtained by the writer during excavations conducted in late 1968 and early 1969 at the mission site discovered in 1968 and identified as *San Joseph de Ocuya* (8 Je 72). Excavation of the site provided primary knowledge of an associated semi-subterranean structure and primary evidence of suspected cultural continuity and change based on artifacts found in stratigraphic context.

If the relationships of the various peoples who once inhabited the Florida area are to be understood, it is essential to achieve a comprehensive knowledge of the cultures of the early European contact and colonization period (A.D. 1500-1700). Only the historical period with its supportive data providing defined limits of geographical habitation and time of habitation can provide a precise beginning point from which cultural processes and change can be gauged.

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GEOGRAPHY

The region characterized as the Apalachee Province during the First Spanish Colonial period lies within an area measuring approximately 64 km (40 miles) long and 32 km (20 miles) wide located in the Big Bend area of the Florida Panhandle. Specifically, this includes the area of Leon, Jefferson, and Wakulla counties, although most of the recorded Apalachee sites are confined to the vicinity of the mission chain in southern Leon and central Jefferson counties.

The region is bounded on two sides by rivers that have their origins in southern Georgia. The Ochlockonee bounds the area on the west and the Aucilla forms the eastern boundary. Both rivers flow south and empty into Apalachee Bay which forms the southern boundary of the province.

Several small streams originate in this region and flow southerly to form the Wakulla and the St. Marks rivers. Burnt Mill Creek originates in western Jefferson County and flows southwestward passing near the mission site of *San Joseph de Ocuya* to form the uppermost branch of the St. Marks River. The Wakulla and St. Marks rivers merge just south of the town of St. Marks in Wakulla County before emptying into Apalachee Bay (Fig. 1).

being secondarily worked. Most are flat-sided giving the appearance of being flaked from cores. Most are less than 2 cm in length. They are all composed of local cream, yellow, tan, brown, and gray cherts.

UNIDENTIFIED POLISHED BONE OBJECT — The small, polished unidentified broken bone artifact was recovered from Zone 3. This example has a shallow groove on its surface possibly representing a portion of a decoration (Pl. 15, r).

Spanish Artifacts

This division primarily includes all Spanish cultural items other than majolica and olive jar fragments. These items may have been, in addition to the Spanish, used or altered by the aboriginal occupants. The eight cultural categories represented include items made from imported ceramic material, glass, iron, brass, and lead. These categories comprise: green glazed olive jar disc, green glass fragments, blue glass seed bead, iron nails and spikes, unidentified iron fragments, slag, unidentified brass fragment, and lead shot. These total 46 specimens from Zones 1, 2 and 3.

Spanish artifacts show a higher percentage frequency increase upwards than any other division of artifacts. An increase is seen from 18.5 percent of total artifacts in Zone 3 to 50 percent in Zone 2. If spalls, included in the Aboriginal Artifacts division are not counted, percentage frequencies for Spanish artifacts would run even higher indicating primarily a replacement of aboriginal artifacts with Spanish ones (see Tables 4, 9 and 10).

GREEN GLAZED OLIVE JAR DISC — This category was included under the Spanish listing because of the utilization of Spanish ceramics in its development, although the one specimen represented was probably shaped for aboriginal use (see "Pottery Spindle Whorls and Disc" under "Aboriginal Artifacts"). The one specimen in this category is from Zone 3. This example was shaped from an olive jar sherd with green glazing on both surfaces. It has ground, rounded edges, a diameter of 7 cm, and a thickness of 11 mm (Pl. 12, j).

GREEN GLASS FRAGMENTS — The eight small fragments recovered are from Zones 1, 2 and 3 and have a high occurrence of 33.3 percent in Zone 2 (Table 10). They are translucent and vary from light to dark green in color. Vessel shapes are uncertain, although at least one thin specimen appears, because of a rounded edge, to belong to a bottle that is rectangular in cross-section. The remaining sherds may belong to either sheet glass (window glass) or large flat-sided containers because they are flat in cross-section. Thickness ranges from 2 to 3 mm (Pl. 12, k, l).

BLUE GLASS SEED BEAD — The one specimen in this category was found through washing soil from Zone 2. This glass bead is opaque sky blue in color and has a doughnut shape. It measures 2 mm in diameter and is 1 mm in width (Pl. 16, a).

IRON NAILS AND SPIKES — Handwrought nails and spikes are represented from Zones 1, 2 and 3 where they comprise 50 to 56.6 percent of total Spanish artifacts (Table 10). All but five of the 24 specimens are broken. Most are headless. They are distinctly square in cross-section, a criteria useful in their identification. Twenty-two of these specimens fit into a group ranging from 3.8 to 10 cm and have heads of maximum flared widths or diameters of 1.5 to 2 cm (Pl. 16, e-i). The two remaining specimens are from Zone 2 and were found the vicinity of the pallisade trench. They have lengths of 15.5 cm and 18.4 cm and both have flared heads measuring 3.5 cm in maximum diameters (Pl. 16, c, d).

UNIDENTIFIED IRON FRAGMENTS — Four of the six unidentified fragments in this category have short rectangular shapes and are probable sections of iron nails (Pl. 16, j). The remaining two objects, both from Zone 1, are possibly from gun parts. One is a flat rectangular shaped piece of iron measuring 3 cm long, 1.3 cm wide, and 2 mm thick. The other object is a flat, round-ended fragment that is broken on one end. It measures 22 mm long, 7 mm wide, and 4 mm thick (Pl. 16, k, l).

SLAG — One large amorphous lump of unidentified solidified material resembling slag was recovered in the mixed zone category. This object is most likely from Zones 1 or 2, although zone association is uncertain. A gray to black glass like texture containing numerous gas bubble holes is characteristic of the example (Pl. 16, b).

UNIDENTIFIED BRASS FRAGMENT — One pointed piece of broken sheet brass from Zone 3 is represented. This broken object has a triangular shape and is 21 mm long, 6 mm wide, and 1 mm thick. It appears to be a portion of an ornamental object (Pl. 16, m).

LEAD SHOT — This category is characterized by four small specimens from Zones 1 and 3 (Table 10). Their small diameters, estimated to range from 7 to 10 mm (30-40 caliber), indicate that they are lightweight pistol shot, or buckshot. One of these, from Zone 1, is possibly a deformed late 19th or early 20th century bullet (Pl. 16, n-p).

Floral and Faunal Remains

Excavation and flotation samples produced very few vegetable and animal remains. Absence of these remains is apparently a result of high acidity and continued moist conditions of the soil. Samples obtained are from Zones 1, 2 and 3 (see

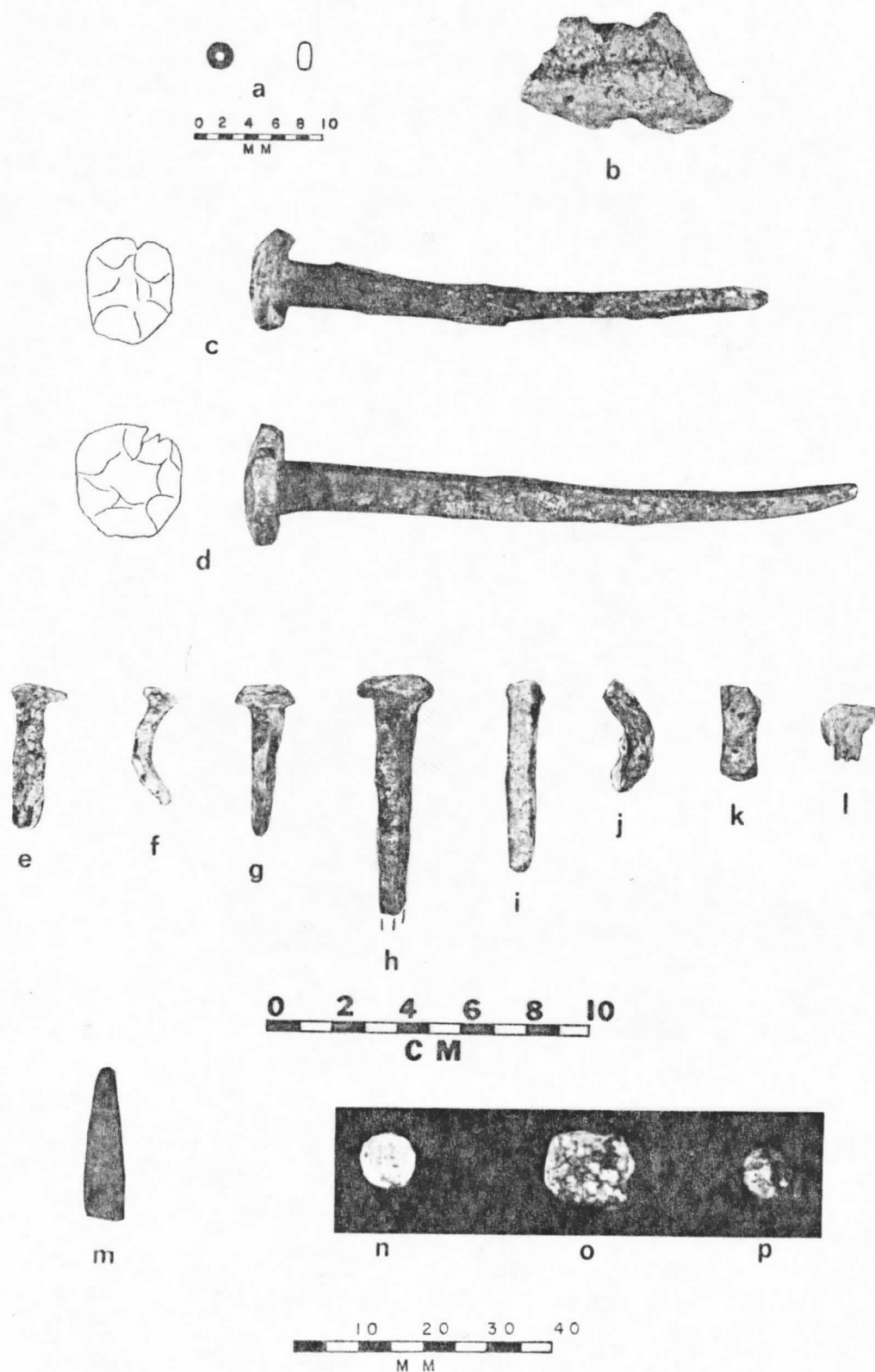


Plate 16. Spanish artifacts.

a, blue glass seed bead; b, slag (?); c, d, large handwrought iron spikes from Zone 2; e-i, handwrought iron nails or spikes; j-l, unidentified iron fragments; m, unidentified brass fragment; n-p, lead shot.