SITE 1Ce308: A PROTOHISTORIC SITE ON THE UPPER COOSA RIVER IN ALABAMA

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Introduction

The authors' interests lie in the effects of initial European contact upon aboriginal cultures in the southeastern United States. The first European contact in the interior Southeast was made by the expedition of Hernando de Soto. Therefore, in order to study the effects of initial contact it is first necessary to identify archaeological manifestations of (1) aboriginal sites contemporaneous with the Soto expedition and (2) post-Soto aboriginal sites. Site 1Ce308, an extensively looted site of the Upper Coosa drainage basin, is directly applicable to this research. Artifacts retained by the collectors are comparable to those of other postulated 16th century sites of the Upper Coosa.

Circumstances of Collection

Site 1Ce308 is a multicomponent site located at the confluence of Terrapin and Nances Creeks in Cherokee County, Alabama. Terrapin Creek is a major tributary of the Upper Coosa River. The site was deep plowed resulting in the exposure of several burials in the spring of 1976. A group of local citizens leased the land and began excavations soon after.

Archaeologists Greg Spies and Mike Rushing discovered the activities of the looters and reported their findings to Mark DeLeon and George Lankford who were working on a nearby archaeological project. Lankford was sent to the site in hopes of ending the devastation and recording available information. After overcoming the initial suspicions of the lessees, Lankford was able to conduct interviews, photograph collections, make surface collections, and open a test unit. Due to rain and lack of time the test unit had to be abandoned with only the plowzone removed.

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Five elbow pipes were examined. Of these, four were shell tempered exhibiting a burnished surface and an incised line parallel to the bowl's lip. The remaining pipe has a two-pointed rim and decorative applique. Whole vessels are described in the burial descriptions.

Shell

Gorgets. A total of 15 marine shell gorgets and gorget fragments has been examined. Nine of these (Fig. 1) exhibit rattlesnake motifs of the Citico style (Muller 1966). Descriptions of these artifacts are summarized in Table 2.

Ear Ornaments. Shell ear ornaments examined were manufactured from the columella of conch or whelk shells. These include ear spoons, ear spools, and ear pins (Plate 3) analogous to those described from the Dallas component at Hiwassee Island (Lewis and Kneberg 1946). The ornaments are summarized by provenience in Table 3.

Beads. Three convenient types of marine shell beads were recognized: Marginella apicina beads, cylindrical beads, and disc beads (Curren 1981). Marginella apicina beads are shells of that species altered with a perforation for suspending as a bead. Cylindrical beads are made from the columella of conch or whelk shells and are defined by a length greater than the diameter. Disc shells are also made from the columella of conch or whelk shells and are defined by a length less than the diameter. The beads are summarized by provenience in Table 4.

European Manufactured Artifacts

Iron. Iron artifacts examined include one dagger, two adzes, one chisel, two celt-forms, one spike (Plate 4), and one wire bracelet. Except for the bracelet from the surface, these artifacts all have burial contexts and are listed in burial associations.

Glass Beads. More than 21 glass beads and fragments were found in association with Burial 13. These are the only glass beads known to have come from the site. Tenative identifica-

tions of some of the beads include 1 chevron and 16 wire wound turquoise and royal blue beads (Kathy Deagan, Personal Communication).

Brass. Several objects examined appear to have been manufactured from native copper. There is a possibility, however, that some or all of these objects are made of an European copper alloy. These objects include one ring, two arm bands, one cresent-shaped gorget, and at least ten rolled beads. One other object from Burial L has been identified as a brass cup-weight and is similar to other found in sites with known 16th through 18th century Spanish contexts (Kathy Deagan, Personal Communication).

Burials

Over 35 burials were unearthed by the excavators during the looting activities of 1976. Due to unprofessional methods of excavation and almost total disregard for bone, little is known of the orientation and position of most burials. But, interviews with the collectors suggest that there were flexed, extended, bundled, and an urn burial. There were also superimposed burials, however, it is uncertain whether these burials were all interred in one pit or in a series of superimposed pits. Charcoal, mica, and red ochre were associated with some of the Protohistoric burials. Often, due to inadequate excavation methods and records, only those artifacts impressionable to the collectors' memories are given in association with burials when in fact other other artifacts were also in context.

List of Burial Positions and Associations

Burial A. Burial position and orientation unknown. A Lamar Plain globular jar and a Citico style rattlesnake gorget.

Burial B. A bundle of disarticulated bones and four skulls --two skulls on each end of an east-west oriented pit. In the extreme west end of the pit was a small Dallas globular jar with strap handles and nodes along the shoulder.

The evidence presented lends support to the hypothesized development of McKee Island ceramics in the Weiss Basin from Barnett phase pottery. In turn, distributions of these categories generally support the postulated time/space relationships presented by Marvin Smith. There are at least two important criteria met which support Smith's hypothesis of population shifts. (1) Traits of the relocated population should have no observable antecedents in the manifestations of earlier occupations in the newly populated area. Reports on the archaeological investigations in the Weiss Basin indicate that there is indeed an absence of earlier Mississippian components in that region (DeJarnette et al. 1973). (2) Traits of the original population should be demonstrated to be as old or older than these of the relocated population. Distributions of Categories 1 and 3 indicate this kind of relationship.

Artifact inventories and traits of upper Coosa Protohistoric sites have been discussed. Interpretations of time/space relationships have also been presented. The interpretations, however, are based on generalized traits. Additional analysis is needed to look at the various components of these and other traits, distributions of their various combinations, and the statistical significance of relationships between them. In this manner current interpretations of time/space relationships may be tested and refined and insight may be gained into the cultural systems of Upper Coosa Protohistoric cultures.

Conclusions

Due to the circumstances of initial data collecting, in this case treasure hunting, intrasite relationships at 1Ce308 are obscured. Artifacts from burials and a surface sherd collection were recovered. Utilizing these data we can suggest intersite relationships by comparisons of generalized traits with other sites of the Upper Coosa drainage basin. In effect, we can postulate the significance of 1Ce308 to the cultural history of the Upper Coosa basin.

Elaborate grave goods and burial positions recorded from 1Ce308 are analogous to these from the neighboring 16th century King site. The predominance of Barnett phase pottery and occurrences of the Citico style rattlesnake gorgets in combination

with the iron artifacts and a chevron bead are also indicative of early 16th century occupation. The Upper Coosa location and early occupation suggest that 1Ce308 was within the Coosa province visited by the Soto expedition.

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