

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF OCMULGEE OLD FIELDS, MACON, GEORGIA

Carol I. Mason

With a New Foreword by Marvin T. Smith

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Foreword

Marvin T. Smith

When I was asked to write the introduction to Carol Mason's "The Archaeology of Ocmulgee Old Fields, Macon, Georgia," I jumped at the chance. In my opinion, this volume is one of the most outstanding works to come out of the 1960s. In many ways, it was way ahead of contemporary archaeological studies of contact period archaeological sites, and it still provides useful data forty years later. By any measure, it is a classic study.

THE AUTHOR

Rochelle Marrinan (1999) provides a biographical sketch of Carol Irwin Mason that I have liberally utilized for this brief overview. Carol Mason (then Carol Irwin) began her career as an archaeologist as an undergraduate student at Florida State University. Here she studied under Charles Fairbanks, who was to become her mentor, and Hale G. Smith. She received a National Science Foundation fellowship to attend graduate school at the University of Michigan, where she studied under Fairbanks's teacher, James B. Griffin. Yet Fairbanks would still influence her career. He arranged for Irwin to study the Ocmulgee collections for two summers. The results of that study are presented in this volume, which was originally her doctoral dissertation at Michigan, completed in 1963.

After completing her degree, Carol Mason, now married, worked in the University of Wisconsin system in association with her husband, archaeologist Ronald J. Mason of Lawrence University. She retired from the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley in 1998 and is currently adjunct professor of anthropology at Lawrence University.

CREEK OR CONTACT STUDIES IN THE EARLY 1960s

While "The Archaeology of Ocmulgee Old Fields" was not the first treatment of either the historic Creek occupation of Ocmulgee or Creek studies

in general, it was easily one of the most exhaustive treatments of a contact period society in the Southeast at the time it was written. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, this statement is still true today.

Arthur Kelly had already written articles on the Macon Trading Post (Kelly 1938, 1939; Kelly and Friedlander 1939), but these descriptions provided little analytical detail of the discoveries. Pottery type descriptions for historic Creek wares were provided by Jennings and Fairbanks (1939, 1940) based on excavations at Ocmulgee. With limited changes, these types are still in use today. Charles Fairbanks (1952, 1956a) further described the Ocmulgee Fields period, with trait lists and ceramic counts and general descriptions.

Further afield, Willey and Sears (1952) published an article on the Lower Creek town of Kasihta on the Chattahoochee River. They briefly described the European trade goods and provided sherd counts. To the west in Alabama, DeJarnette and Hansen (1960) reported results of excavations at the Childersburg site, the location of the eighteenth-century Upper Creek town of Coosa. They provided descriptions of features, burials, European trade goods, and Upper Creek ceramics and made a few comparisons with the Ocmulgee collections. Caldwell (1948) briefly described the site of Palachicolas Town on the lower Savannah River, a Historic Creek site contemporary with the Macon Plateau site. During the 1920s and 1930s, members of the Alabama Anthropological Society had been “researching” Creek sites in the Montgomery, Alabama, area and publishing some of their finds in their journal, *Arrowpoints*. In essence, these reports constitute most of the accumulated knowledge of historic Creek archaeology at the time Mason undertook her study.

Mason’s work significantly advanced Creek archaeology in particular and the archaeology of European-Indian contact studies in general. She was writing in an era when there was little interest in studying the effects of European contact on Native Americans. Although, as Mason notes, some progress had been made in New York and Florida, intensive studies of the contact period in the interior Southeast were relatively new (see Williams 1962, Webb 1962 for examples). Mason saw the Contact Period as an exciting time of “special interest.” She combined excellent historical research with archaeological analysis, yielding a historical archaeological synthesis that was groundbreaking for the emerging discipline of historical archaeology. Here I suspect her influence from pioneering historical archaeologists Charles Fairbanks and Hale Smith at Florida State University were overshadowing her later Michigan training.

Her analysis of material culture went far beyond the usual descriptions of the day. For example, her ceramic descriptions went well past classifying sherds into types. She also very carefully described and quantified the vari-

ous incised motifs—an analysis that would not be duplicated in this region until Hally (1994) looked at motifs of protohistoric Lamar ceramics across Georgia. She further described vessel forms. Comparisons were made with “Creek” ceramics from central and northern Alabama to the west to the Savannah River to the east—essentially all of the known Creek-related wares at the time.

Her exhaustive treatment of European trade goods (including both basic descriptions, comparisons with other known archaeological specimens, consultation with other experts, and historical documentation) was well above the usual treatment of such artifacts in the 1960s. Typologies for European goods had not been developed when Mason began her study. Pioneering typologies for such items as beads (Kidd and Kidd 1970), bells (Brown 1975), and gun parts (Hamilton 1968) were developed later, but Mason’s descriptions are still useful today.

Mason also attempted to describe Creek architecture for the first time. Unfortunately, questions about the field notes leave some doubt as to the size of the structures she described (Mason, personal communication). It has been suggested that the large structures she discussed near the trading post were actually rebuilt council houses (Smith 1992:71–72). Her description of the European trading post and analysis of aboriginal features intruding this European feature are extremely detailed. She also was able to document Native use of the trading post area by the Creeks after the post was abandoned.

One of the most interesting sections of Mason’s work deals with the identification of the Creek town represented by the Ocmulgee site. First she reviewed earlier interpretations; then after consulting historical documents and early maps, she identified the town as Ocmulgee. Ocmulgee town does not appear on any maps of the area, and she based her identification primarily on a statement by Benjamin Hawkins that Ocmulgee was formerly located at Ocmulgee Fields on Ocmulgee River (Hawkins 1916:173). She was also influenced by the apparent continuity of the name Ocmulgee Old Fields. James Adair (Williams 1930:39) tied in Ocmulgee with the Lower Creek Trading Path, which crosses the Macon Plateau at the site.

In my own research (Smith 1992:42), relying on the Herbert-Hunter map of 1744, which I believe is actually the Herbert Map of 1725 with some updates by Hunter in 1744, I suggested a different identification. The Herbert-Hunter map places Cusitees (Kasihta) near the mouth of a major stream coming from the northeast, which I believe is Walnut Creek. Thus the Macon Plateau site would be Kasihta. Further reinforcing this interpretation is the fact that the Herbert map shows the Colomies on the western bank of the river opposite the town of Kasihta. There is a cluster of historic Creek archaeological sites in this area that would fit that interpretation,

some of the few identified historic Creek sites located on the western bank of the Ocmulgee River. It made sense to me that the major, impressive archaeological Macon Plateau site with its fortified English trading house would be a major town such as Kasihta, not a barely mentioned minor town such as Ocmulgee.

In his report on the excavations of the nearby Tarver sites, Pluckhahn (1997) reconsidered the evidence for the identification of archaeological sites with historically named Creek towns and suggested that the Tarver sites represent Kasihta, with the creek shown on the Herbert-Hunter maps being Town Creek instead of "Walnut Creek" as I have suggested. Pluckhahn thus believes that "Macon Plateau, Lamar, and other sites on the eastern side of the river could then represent the town of Ocmulgee, as Mason [this volume] suggested" (Pluckhahn 1997:358). Pluckhahn does point out several weaknesses of his identification, including the apparent small size of the Tarver sites when Kasihta should be a major town and the lack of known Creek sites opposite the Tarver sites on the western side of the Ocmulgee River that could be the Colomies. Clearly more research is needed before we can confidently identify archaeological sites with historically named towns. We need additional survey data and site size data. There is always hope that additional historical documentation will be located.

CREEK STUDIES AFTER MASON

For all practical purposes, Carol Mason has had the last word in the archaeology of the Ocmulgee site. She did continue to publish additional articles based on her dissertation research (Mason 1963, 1971, 1973). Nelson et al. (1974) analyzed material from excavations in the Ocmulgee Bottoms below the Macon Plateau and were able to demonstrate that the historic Creek occupation continues down into the river bottoms. I have summarized much of what was known about the Ocmulgee region in *Historic Period Indian Archaeology of Northern Georgia* (Smith 1992).

Recent excavations at the Tarver and Little Tarver sites, a few miles north of Ocmulgee National Monument, have revealed evidence of another early eighteenth-century Creek town (Pluckhahn 1997). This work now supplants Mason's Ocmulgee study as the most detailed analysis of a Creek town of the 1690-1715 period on the Ocmulgee River, but unfortunately this report has not been widely distributed. Several large block excavations revealed houses, burials, and pit features. Analysis included the usual descriptions of ceramics and historic artifacts but also included a demographic study of the sixteen historic Creek burials recovered, faunal analysis showing lack of introduced European domesticates, and a detailed floral analysis showing continued reliance on corn, cultivated Chenopod, hickory, walnut,

and peach. The best-preserved structure at Tarver indicates a house size of approximately 7 by 3 meters and is comparable to Creek summer houses excavated in Alabama (Waselkov et al. 1990).

Further west, Lower Creek sites continued to be excavated and reported in the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia and Alabama. DeJarnette (1975) reports on survey and excavations in the Walter F. George Reservoir. This report contains brief descriptions of work at several Creek sites. In recent years, more detailed reports have been prepared on historic sites in this region. Knight and Mistovich (1984) provide a much more detailed phase breakdown for Historic Creek occupations in this region. Excavations at Yuchi Town (Braley 1998; Hargrove et al. 1998), Kasihta (New South Associates 1997; ongoing work by Panamerican Consultants under the direction of Thomas Foster), and other Creek sites in the area (Elliott et al. 1996; Espenshade and Roberts 1992) provide a more modern analysis of Creek occupations in this region. Much information is summarized in Chad Braley's *Historic Indian Period Archaeology of the Georgia Coastal Plain* (1995) and a major synthesis of Lower Creek archaeology by John Worth (2000). Farther upstream, excavations at the late-eighteenth-century town of Okfuskenena were conducted by Harold Huscher, but only a preliminary report was ever published on this important site (Huscher 1972; see also Smith 1992).

Archaeology of the Upper Creeks in central Alabama also continues to be the focus of much research. Major projects have been completed for the Tallapoosa towns of Tukabatchee (Knight 1985) and Fusihatchee (Waselkov et al. 1990). With the final analysis of the extensive work at Fusihatchee still ongoing, we have much to anticipate for the future of Creek studies. Farther up the Tallapoosa, Roy Dickens (1979) conducted excavations at Horseshoe Bend and the Nuyaka town site.

Work on eighteenth-century occupation of the Coosa River has also continued since Mason's study of Ocmulgee. The contemporary late-seventeenth-century to early-eighteenth-century Woods Island site has been reported (Morrell 1965; Smith 1995), and Smith (2000) has traced the development of the Upper Creeks of the Upper and Middle Coosa Valley from the proto-historic period to the late eighteenth century. Near the southern end of the valley, Mueller (1992) reports work at the late-eighteenth-century town of Hickory Ground. Upper Creek archaeology has recently been synthesized by Gregory Waselkov and Marvin Smith (2000).

TRADING HOUSES

Mason's study includes a detailed look at the fortified English trading house at Ocmulgee. It remains the most complete description of a trading estab-

lishment available at this time. Waselkov (1994:193) updated Mason's interpretation of the trading post by suggesting, based on historical records, that the fortifications would have been begun in 1702 when the English feared reprisals for their attacks on Spanish Florida but would have been unnecessary by 1704 when the English destroyed the Spanish Mission system. This relatively brief interval when fortifications were necessary perhaps explains, in Waselkov's view, why the fortifications were never completed. Waselkov also points out that the trading establishment was constructed with Native building techniques but built in an English style and with English dimensions, suggesting that the construction was done by Creeks under English supervision.

Other examples of English trading houses in the deep Southeast are rare. Although archeological research was conducted at Fort Moore where a fortified trading house was excavated, the site remains largely unreported (Polhemus 1971). Another early-eighteenth-century trading post in South Carolina, the Congaree Fort (Michie n.d.), has been located but not excavated in more than a testing phase. Recently, the Musgrove trading establishment near Savannah, Georgia, has been thoroughly excavated by Southeastern Archaeological Services under the direction of Chad Braley, but it dates to a slightly later period and is not typical of the early trading forts. Analysis of this important site is currently ongoing.

Mason's pioneering study of the historical Native American occupation and associated English trading post at Macon Plateau will be an important reference for years to come. Out of this work, Mason (1963) published an important article of Creek culture change. Waselkov (1994:193) points out that this article was an early example of studies of the adaptations of Native Americans to European contact and competition with European colonial societies. Now that The University of Alabama Press has published the complete dissertation, the basis of this article can be fully appreciated and utilized by other scholars.

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Preface

Ocmulgee Old Fields near Macon, Georgia, is part of the multi-component, major Mississippian site of Macon Plateau. This great temple mound site early attracted archaeological attention, and the Lower Creek village and associated English trading house were but small parts of the large-scale excavations that took place there as part of public works following the Great Depression. Analysis of the late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century materials from the trading house and village did not take place until nearly 30 years after initial excavation. Part of the significance of this site lies in its secure identification with a known group of people and the linkage of those people with recognizable archaeological remains. It was among the very first for which this kind of identification was possible and thus stands at the head of a continuing tradition of historic sites archaeology in the Southeast. The report itself includes a discussion of the historic setting and an analysis of the archaeological materials with an identification of the Lower Creek town and possibly of the English trader who lived there.

When I began work at Ocmulgee, I was a newly minted anthropology major from Florida State University, not yet enrolled in graduate school but eager to understand what archaeology could tell of that fascinating period when Europeans and native peoples came into intimate and life-changing contact. What I did not know then about trade materials amounted to almost everything, and the site at Ocmulgee was my teacher. I can look back on my labors and wish I had known more at the time. I might have understood the differences between copper and brass, for example, and been able to negotiate more surely the pitfalls in European ceramic analysis. Since then I have learned about trading establishments through excavating them and about artifacts through leaning even more heavily on the expertise of others. The site at Ocmulgee was a continuing discovery as the unfamiliar became familiar, and the world of the contact period came alive.

This second edition owes much to the kindness of people who helped

Original 1963 Preface

During the years immediately following the depression of 1929, a number of large archaeological sites were excavated with labor provided by government agencies. Some of these sites have yet to be written up and their data made generally available; others have provided much of the backbone for archaeological interpretation in the Southeastern United States. The present paper is a report on part of one of the former sites, Ocmulgee National Monument, Macon, Georgia. This site, although not yet analyzed in its entirety, has functioned as one of the latter, with rich amounts of archaeological information available in a series of general and specific reports (Kelly 1938; Fairbanks 1956a).

I spent the summer of 1957 and the summer and fall of 1958 at Ocmulgee National Monument working with the archaeological collections and preparing the descriptive sections of this report. Dealing with material twenty-five years after its excavation involves some special problems in addition to the expectable ones of loss and misplacement during storage. For one thing, the unusually cumbersome field nomenclature has had to be retained for the benefit of those who may wish to use the site materials in the future; this is because the nomenclature is tied into the Ocmulgee National Monument catalogue system and is the only way of locating specific materials in the large collections. In addition, certain of the field records, photographic negatives in particular, have not aged very gracefully and have thus hindered the analysis.

I am grateful to a number of scholars who generously made their special knowledge available to me and in so doing contributed substantially to my understanding of the Ocmulgee material: John M. Goggin, University of Florida, who identified and dated the majolica; Ivor Noel Hume, Colonial Williamsburg, who identified and dated other European ceramics; Harold L. Peterson, National Park Service, who provided dates and identifications for the gun parts; J. C. Harrington, who examined some of the pipes; and

David L. DeJarnette, University of Alabama, who kindly permitted me to examine trade materials from the Childersburg site.

The superintendent, Louis R. Caywood, and staff of Ocmulgee National Monument made my stay in Macon most enjoyable, and I thank them all for their many kindnesses during the course of my research. Other National Park Service personnel, Wilfred D. Logan and John M. Corbett, have provided aid in many ways, and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. I would like to express my special thanks to Richard A. Marshall, University of Missouri, for providing the sherd drawings of *Ocmulgee Fields Incised* designs.

My husband, Ronald J. Mason, deserves my thanks for his moral support during the writing of this report and for his substantial contributions in the form of photographing specimens, preparing illustrations, and criticizing the manuscript.

I also would like to express here my appreciation to Charles H. Fairbanks, Florida State University, who provided the impetus for this study and aided it materially through his encouragement, criticism, and always valuable counsel.

Two institutions deserve special mention for their direct and indirect contributions. The staff and director, Donald Pieters, of the St. Norbert College Library, West DePere, Wisconsin, have been most helpful in obtaining for me many special books. Much of the following report was written while I was a fellow of the National Science Foundation. The generous financial support of that agency is deeply appreciated.

Carol I. Mason

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