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Some Notes on a Few Sites in Beaufort County, South Carolina

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SOME NOTES ON A FEW SITES IN BEAUFORT COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA

By REGINA FLANNERY

The Catholic University of America

This is a summary account of some archeological work done on Port Royal and the sea islands near Beaufort, S. C., by Dr. Warren K. Moorehead, February 8 to March 12, 1933. Assisting Dr. Moorehead were especially Woldemar H. Ritter, an architect of Boston, and Hughes H. Lake, of Port Royal Island. Mr. Ritter did the surveying, supervised the excavations, and carefully compiled the daily field report. Mr. Lake, devoting his whole time to the undertaking, was in charge of the workmen and assisted in the digging operations. Both Dr. Moorehead and Mr. Ritter have since died. The present writer participated in the work as a student assistant. She is not in a position to draw up a complete technical report;¹ she does, however, wish to put on record something at least of the culture revealed by the excavations in this little-studied region (fig. 34).²

The interest of Dr. Moorehead in the archeology of Port Royal Island had been awakened by Mr. Ritter, who, together with Mr. Lake, had done some exploratory digging in several sites during 1931 and 1932. The excavation of a burial mound on St. Helena Island prior to 1898 by Moore (1899) had been the only other archeological work done in the immediate region.

During some 20 years' residence on his plantation, Mr. Lake had accumulated a collection of surface finds from Port Royal Island. These comprise some 30 or 40 chipped-stone objects, including 1 fine black flint point 7 inches in length, 1 celt, a few decorated bone

¹ The detailed field report containing all notes, maps, and drawings is available for consultation at the Department of Anthropology, Catholic University. A few specimens from the Chester Field site are also here. Samplings of pottery were sent to the Ceramic Repository for the Eastern United States at the University Museums, Ann Arbor, for analysis. The bulk of the pottery, other artifacts, and all skeletal material were sent to the Charleston Museum. A few of the choicer specimens were retained in the small local museum at the Library, Beaufort, S. C.

² The writer wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to Dr. John R. Swanton and Dr. James B. Griffin for their valuable suggestions, and to Miss Grace Fowler for her kindness in drawing the accompanying map.

awls, and quantities of potsherds. There is also one small pottery figurine in the shape of an animal head. The stone and bone material is rather scarce as compared with the number of sherds.

The Lake Plantation occupies a considerable portion of the southern tip of the southwestern extension of Port Royal Island, and had been a strategic center for Indian life, with direct access to deep water as well as to numerous springs. In addition to the extensive

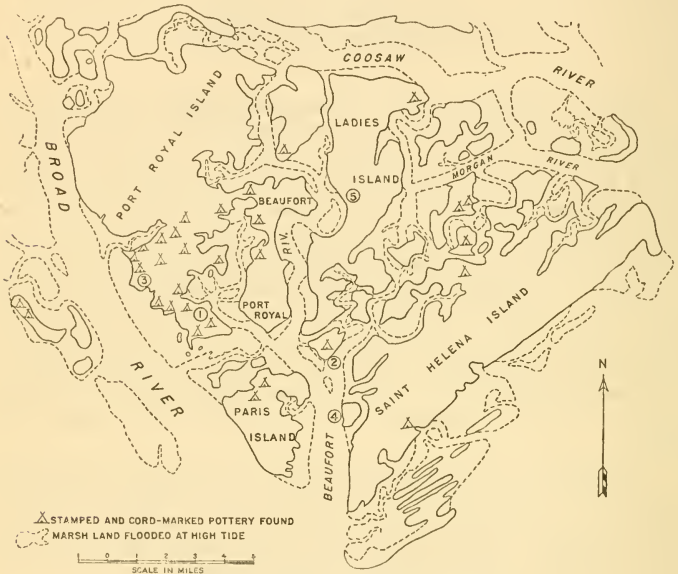


FIGURE 34.—Map of the Beaufort region.

1, The Lake Plantation. 2, Cat Island. 3, The Chester Field site. 4, The Jones Island site. 5, The burial mound.

shell heaps along the shores, the entire cultivated area of 20 or 30 acres north of the Lake house is strewn with broken oyster and conch shells, etc. Indian occupation of the locality indicated on the map drawn by Jacques Le Moyne, 1564, is borne out by the archeological evidence, although unfortunately we are unable to correlate the archeological and ethnological source materials.³

³ Dr. Moorehead concluded that the numerous shell heaps on the Lake Plantation represented temporary camp sites to which the Indians returned from time to time rather than permanent habitations. Juan Rogel, S. J., who arrived at St. Helena Island 1569, wrote that the Indians lived scattered for 9 months of the year, "each one to his own place, and came together only at certain feasts, which they held every 2 months, and this was not always in one place, but at one time here and another time in another place, etc." (See Swanton, 1922, p. 57). There is no evidence to date, however, which would indicate whether

More than 200 test pits were sunk at various points on the Lake Plantation. A great many oyster, periwinkle, and clam shells⁴ were found as well as a number of bones of deer and other animals,⁵ but, with the exception of pottery, scarcely any artifacts. In excavating the larger test pits it was noted that the earth had been disturbed in places to a depth of 6 feet. But there were no true ash pits, and no suggestion of a hearth or fireplace, except at one spot where the

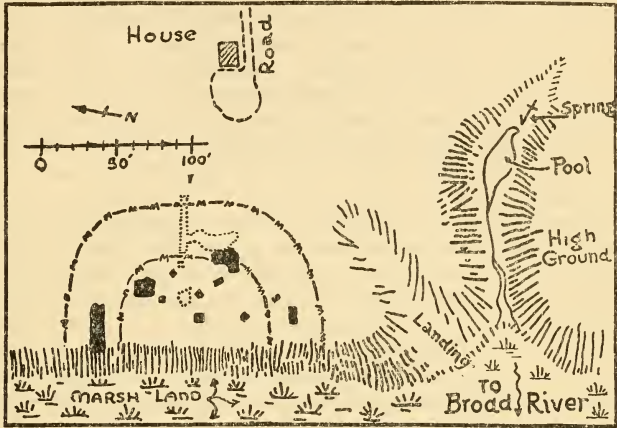


FIGURE 35.—The Chester Field site.

clay was rather hard and burned to a depth of 3 feet below the surface. Griffin (whose paper appears in this Bulletin, pp. 155–168) has analyzed the pottery from the Lake Plantation and has discussed it in its wider distributions. Ware similar to the types found there, with the exception of the few sherds of Stalling's Island culture

or not the Indians referred to used artifacts of the type recovered from the shell heaps. Griffin informs me that the available material gives us no reason to expect European trade goods.

⁴ A random sampling of shells from one of the larger pits was sent to Dr. Frank C. Baker, Museum of Natural History, University of Illinois, who kindly reported as follows: "Marine species—the common oyster, *Ostrea virginica* Gmelin, Nova Scotia south to Florida; a long narrow clam with thin shell, *Tangetus gibbus* Spengler, range from Cape Cod to Trinidad, West Indies; a small quahog or round clam, *Venus mortoni* Conrad, range Virginia south to Florida Keys; a salt water mussel, with coarse radiating lines at one end, *Modiolus demissus plicatulus* (Lam.), range Nova Scotia south to Georgia; a periwinkle or snail with very thick shell, *Littorina irrorata* Say, range Rhode Island south to Jamaica. Land snails—a 2-inch long, elongate ovate shell, *Euglandina rosea* (Ferussac), found from South Carolina to Florida and Texas; a small land snail, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter, shell thin, the aperture with 2 teeth or ridges on the base, *Gastrodonta gularis* (Say), range S. Carolina west to Tennessee, a rare shell in South Carolina at least."

⁵ A sampling of bones from the same pit was sent to Dr. Glover M. Allen, Curator, Museum of Comparative Zoölogy at Harvard, who wrote as follows: "I have examined the bones, and find most of them to be Virginia deer, some of the antler-bases of maximum size, but I can match them with material here. There is one raccoon jaw, and a fragment of a large radius as large as that of a medium-sized cow and apparently indistinguishable from domestic cow, but cut square across near the end. There were no other species."

type, were recovered by excavation of shell heaps at Cat Island and elsewhere from the surface as indicated on the map. Unfortunately, none of this material was sent to the Ceramic Repository and no more definite statement can be made regarding it.

On the same southwestern extension of Port Royal Island, but on the west side thereof, and on ground owned by Chester Field, is a horseshoe-shaped mound, the ends of which meet the steep overgrown bank of Broad River. (See fig. 35.) A marsh at the foot of the bank extends half a mile or so into the river, but is flooded at high tide. Whether or not the mound was at one time circular is impossible for the present writer to say. Nothing in the lay of the land suggested this possibility to Dr. Moorehead at the time. At present, however, the level space enclosed by the mound measures about 110 feet at its widest point and 55 feet from the riverbank to the center inner periphery of the mound. There is a good spring about 130 feet to the south.

Scattered in the central portion of the level area enclosed by the mound, seven test holes disclosed the ground disturbed to a depth of from 12 to 30 inches, but otherwise sterile. One test hole, dug by Mr. Ritter in 1932, in the true center of this enclosed area showed a fire pit, 24 inches below the surface and filled with debris. In the northeast section of the level area, another test hole, 10 feet by 10 feet, showed sand disturbed to a depth varying from 18 to 30 inches, and in the southeast corner of the test hole a compact shell deposit 12 inches thick and 16 inches below the surface. The artifacts recovered from this test hole comprise some 27 potsherds, a worked antler prong, several chipped flints and flakes, one-half of a round pitted stone, and some animal bones. The test hole on the opposite side of the level space enclosed by the mound showed near the surface a 6-inch layer of shells, below which was disturbed sand to a depth of 30 inches. Only 6 or 8 sherds and a few animal bones were recovered therefrom.

The mound itself is about 25 feet wide and varies in height from 3 feet above the level of the enclosed space on the south side, to 5 feet on the north side, or from 14 feet 8 inches to 16 feet 2 inches above the high-water mark on the bank. As Mr. Ritter and Mr. Lake had already excavated the central portion of the mound to some extent, a trench 10 feet wide was started where the north side of the mound meets the riverbank and was run 25 feet east through the middle of the mound. The mound is artificial, being composed largely of oyster and other shells, interspersed occasionally with irregular layers of dark earth several inches thick and containing a few shells and some debris. Pockets of periwinkle shells, measuring roughly about 2 gallons each, occur rather frequently. Undisturbed

ground is reached on an average at 30 inches below the present level of the enclosed area, which corresponds with the undisturbed base of the enclosed area itself.

Refuse occurred with equal frequency among the shells and in the irregular layers of earth. More than 1,000 potsherds were recovered from the midden when the trench had been extended 20 feet to the east. There were a large number of animal bones and pieces of antler, but relatively little stone—only 8 pieces of worked flint, several chips, 3 round rocks, and one pitted stone. Worked bone was represented by four carved pointed objects⁶ and one bone scraper broken into three pieces. There were also one antler prong, marked with an incised line, and one antler point.

The trench dug by Mr. Ritter and Mr. Lake in the central portion of the mound was then enlarged. The same type of midden composition as described above was noted. Parts of four more carved bone objects, a large flint nodule from which pieces had been flaked, and several worked antler prongs were added to the collection. Of the two test holes toward the south end of the mound, one revealed two potsherds with drilled holes, and the other, sunk at the highest point at the south side of the mound, yielded about 20 sherds and about 40 small pieces of animal bones. The shells were much decayed, and more dirt and sand were mixed therewith than was the case at the north end of the mound.

The Chester Field site seems to indicate a permanent camp or village, the level space enclosed by the mound evidently having been reserved for the dwellings. The numerous animal bones suggest that meat was an important element in the diet of this people, although seafood was probably the staple. There was no evidence of maize.⁷

The importance of the site lies especially in the fact that it represents another locality of the Stalling's Island culture. The complex is present at the Chester Field site in its essentials, though some of the items ascribed to the complex by Clafin (1931) are lacking. The pottery of the site has been analyzed by Griffin (p. 159), who states that it identifies the site as a component of the same cultural division as the Stalling's Island complex. Found in association with this type of pottery are decorated bone-pointed objects of the same general types as those described by Clafin. The designs on these objects are individual, no two of ours are identical in carving, nor presum-

⁶ Decorated bone objects of the same type are considered by Clafin to be ornamental pins. See Clafin (1931, pp. 23-24, and pl. 38, *f, d, g*).

⁷ Two caches of burned corncobs were found in Stalling's Island site (see Clafin, 1931, pp. 12-13) but not assigned definitely to the true Stalling's Island culture. Griffin informs me by letter that there is every reason to believe that maize was not grown in the Southeast at the Stalling's Island period.

ably are those from Stalling's Island. The stone material from the Chester Field site is not so varied as that from Stalling's Island, but so far as it goes it agrees therewith. In neither the Chester Field nor Stalling's Island sites was there any evidence of pipes of any sort, but worked and unworked antler is characteristic of both. The net sinkers, so numerous at the Georgia site, are lacking, so far as we know, from the Chester Field midden.

The Stalling's Island pottery type was yielded by one other mound investigated by Dr. Moorehead and his assistants in 1933. This shell mound, belonging to C. C. Jones, lies in the marshland, across the Beaufort River from Paris Island. The mound covers about half of the land left free at high tide, and runs parallel to the river for about 350 feet. The deposit is massed at the southern end, being exposed 30 inches above ground level and extending to a depth of 30 inches below level at the high point, which is on the western side. The deposit gradually pales off toward the other side of the mound and rather abruptly toward the land side, where the deposit is only a few inches thick and does not extend appreciably below the level of the ground. Several test pits were sunk and one small trench was dug. The mound is composed of compact shells, lacking the layers of earth as intermixed in the Chester Field midden. The ware is the same as the Stalling's Island type. One decorated bone object and a bone comb, together with some food bones and pieces of antler, were recovered.

Another site, the last one to be investigated, proved to be a burial mound, similar to that excavated by Moore on St. Helena Island. This mound is at the Kempfer place on Ladies Island, about 565 feet from the Beaufort River, on level sandy ground about 15 feet above the river which runs close to the steep bluff forming the bank. There are a spring and a small water course a short distance north of the mound, but no signs of Indian occupation in the immediate vicinity. The gently sloping mound is circular in shape, the diameter being about 70 feet, and the highest point 41 inches above the present surrounding level. The ground had never been cultivated, and four large live-oak trees are growing on the mound.

A systematic excavation was made of the central portion of the mound to include an area 15 feet by 15 feet, and 12 test holes were sunk at various other points. The mound is artificial and composed of sandy soil. At a level 48 inches below the grade at the highest part of the mound, or 7 inches below the present surrounding level, is a stratum of very dark earth, heavily colored by charcoal. This stratum is 4 inches thick in the central area of the mound and gradually thins out until about 10 feet from the periphery on the east-west axis it becomes very faint. Directly in the center of the mound,

and resting on this charcoal bed, were massed human bones forming a compact layer over an area 12 feet by 6 feet on the north-south axis. Disposition of the skeletal remains suggests that the bones were massed on the charcoal layer with no regard for order or completeness. Skulls, jawbones, and long bones predominated, representing at least 30 or probably 40 individuals. Evidence of cremation in situ on top of this layer of bones was noted in seven instances. The remains were in a bad state of preservation but were removed as carefully as possible to the Charleston Museum where they await further study. Three feet to the west of the northern end of the massed bones and just below the charcoal stratum was evidence of another cremation. Six feet west of the southern end of the massed bones, and just below the charcoal stratum, was a basin or depression about 24 inches deep and 18 inches in diameter, apparently lined with clay which had been slightly burned. Half of this depression was filled with charcoal and ashes.

There was no trace of any artifacts with the exception of one round sandstone with two hollows, found in the charcoal stratum, under the layer of massed bones, at about the center of the mound. The fact that, as Claffin notes (1931, p. 44), it was not a common practice of the Stalling's Island people to place mortuary offerings with their dead may suggest the possibility that the mound on Ladies Island may have been made by people of Stalling's Island culture. On the other hand Claffin (1931, p. 43) ascribes a number of flexed burials to the Stalling's Island people and, furthermore, concludes that it was customary for them to bury their dead beneath the floors of their dwellings. Investigation of the Chester Field village site showed no evidence of such a practice. It would seem then that no conclusion can at present be reached regarding the culture type to which belonged the people whose burial mound on Ladies Island was investigated.

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