

# Aliens have Landed in Georgia?! The Archaeology of Interaction

The Society for Georgia Archaeology, Georgia Archaeology Month 2008, Lesson Plan Series, No. 11

## What's happening?!

Imagine what it would be like if you heard that aliens from outer space had landed right here in Georgia! Think about what it would be like if a group of beings that you had never seen or heard of before suddenly appeared in your area. How do you think your life would change?

If extraterrestrials landed in Georgia, everything that we thought we knew would be different. At first they might seem friendly. They want to talk with our leaders and give us fancy new things the likes of which we've never seen! How would it affect our lives day-to-day? What if they decided to stay in the area? What if they kept coming back and then decided to live among us? How would we react and how would our lives be different?

## Who are these guys?

The truth is this would not be the first time aliens, or beings from another place, have landed in Georgia. During the 1500s, Europeans—mainly people from Spain—arrived in Georgia. They had never been to North America before. The Native Americans who already lived in Georgia had never seen anything like them in their lives! The Spanish planned to explore and settle in the New World. They brought new technologies, strange animals, and peculiar beliefs with them. The result of this first alien landing: the world was changed forever.

## So how do we know what happened?

There is not always a lot of evidence of this landing in Georgia. What we do know comes from two sources. The first source is historical documents like maps, letters, and government papers. The second important source is archaeology.

*Archaeology* is the respectful, scientific study of people in the past from the things they left behind. From studying *artifacts* and *context*, archaeologists can learn about how people lived. This might include what people ate, how they dressed, how they played, and even sometimes what they thought. Through *excavation*, archaeologists find and record any evidence they find in the ground. From these clues, archaeology can teach us about an unknown time in Georgia's history.

## First encounters (1525-1565)

We may never know exactly how the first meeting went between Spanish explorers and Native American Indians in Georgia. However, archaeologists have found enough evidence to get a pretty good idea.

At first, it seems that Indian people tried to understand the Spanish strangers in traditional ways. Before the Spanish showed up, the Indians had given certain objects special meaning. Some goods were so unique that they were considered to have a really high value. Goods like these were owned and controlled by the leaders of the Indian *chiefdoms*. They included objects that were rare or hard to make like shell beads and *monolithic* axes. These items were so special that they were buried with their owners.

When the Spanish showed up, they brought brand new goods made of brand new materials that the Indians had never seen before. These new things were made of materials like iron and glass, and they included objects like beads and tools. At first, the Spanish only traded with the Indians leaders. The new European objects were considered to be just as special as the traditional high status goods. They too were kept in special places and buried with the few *elite* Indians who owned them.

Early Spanish visitors came with different plans. Some came to search the land for gold and riches. Others came to capture native Indians to be used as slaves. Still other Spanish visitors came to set up permanent colonies in Georgia so that they could stay and control the land.

The first known meeting between Indians and the Spanish happened in 1526. A Spanish explorer named Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón tried to start a new Spanish settlement on the coast of Georgia. He brought 600 people with him. The new town didn't last for long however. After only six weeks, the colony broke apart because of many hardships and disagreements.

Archaeologists have no firm evidence where Ayllón's colony actually was but European goods have been found near the coast. They were found through archaeology conducted on Indian burial mounds. These excavations revealed artifacts like beads, coins, and iron tools.

Hernando de Soto explored the Southeast from 1539 to 1542. He and at least 600 soldiers marched over 4000 miles throughout the Southeast. During his visit, they crossed through Georgia twice. Although we have written accounts of his trip, some of our best evidence is from archaeology.

Most of the archaeological proof that de Soto was in Georgia is from the northwest corner of the state. This is the location of archaeological sites like Etowah, Little Egypt, and the King site, to name just a few. Excavations at these sites have revealed particular artifacts like special blue, white- and-red glass beads that we know de Soto used for trade, along with iron tools and weapons.

Tristan de Luna tried to start a colony in Florida in 1559. When the weather turned bad and wiped out his supplies, he sent 140 soldiers into Georgia to find help from the Indians. Through archaeology, we learned that de Luna was interested in creating a new settlement instead of exploring. Some of the artifacts found, like glass beads and iron tools, were similar to those found at de Soto sites, but new things were found too. These included farm tools, beads of different shapes, and more items made from brass and copper.

The effect on Native Americans wasn't always positive. Sometimes, it was very harsh. Many of the Native Americans were killed by diseases that they were not immune to yet. Sometimes the bones of people who die from disease will look different because of the disease. In this case though, new illnesses reduced the Indian population so fast that the bones did not have time to develop that evidence. Instead, some burials had more than one person in them. Some archaeologists believe that several Indians were buried together because there were not enough people left alive to create individual graves for all of those who died.

Other burials also show evidence of the fighting that occasionally took place between the Indians and the Spanish. Some of the skeletons show what might be wounds made by an iron

tool, maybe even a Spanish weapon. Wounds on skulls and leg bones of some skeletons might mean that the Indians and Spanish sometimes ended up fighting.

## **The Spanish come to stay (1565-1684)**

Spanish colonists began to set up permanent settlements in Georgia after 1565. These new settlements were religious missions located in or close to friendly Indian towns. Between the 1570s and 1670s, eighteen different missions were set up in what is now the state of Georgia.

One purpose of the missions was to attract Native Americans to the Catholic religion. Archaeological excavations at Spanish missions like the one on St. Catherines Island have shown that missions were made up of several buildings. There was a church and a churchyard, where the Indians who converted to Catholicism were buried. There was also a *Convento*, which included a *friary* and a kitchen. Usually no more than two friars would have lived there at a time.

Indian chiefs often wanted Spanish missions to come to their town so that they could control the goods that the Spanish brought. Artifacts found at missions include glass beads and Spanish pottery (called *Majolica*), but also items made of copper and iron. Many of these artifacts were of a spiritual nature such as religious medals, crosses, rings, and bells.

The missionaries encouraged Native Americans to grow food and work for the larger Spanish colonies. When missions were built in Indian towns, a system called *repartimento* was set up. In this system, a certain number of Native American men were chosen by the chief to work for the Spanish. This had terrible consequences for Native American towns.

Archaeology can tell us how the *repartimento* system affected the Indians. When the Indian men left their home towns, many of them died from disease or the hard work they

had to do. Others stayed in the Spanish towns and never returned home. The loss of these men led to a great loss of power for the Indian chiefdoms. Because of this, Indian settlements grew smaller and mounds were no longer built. Fewer artifacts are found at these sites as the population declined.

At the same time the lives of the Indians changed because of the missionaries, the lives of the Spanish changed too. Living in a new environment, the Spanish missionaries adopted many Indian ways of living. This included eating the same food, using similar pottery, and learning to build as the Indians did. We can prove this using archaeology.

Archaeological excavations have produced traditional ceramics, corn cobs, and seeds from mission trash pits. The missionaries would have learned to use Indian ceramics and eat the same food by watching the Indians. Also like the Indians, the missionaries used sticks and mud (wattle and daub) to create the walls of their buildings. The remains of these walls have been found through archaeology at Spanish mission sites.

Life at the missions was not always easy or peaceful. Sometimes the Indians rebelled and revolted against the Spanish and the attempts to convert them. For example, the *Convento* at St. Catherines was destroyed in 1597 by the Indians that lived there. The mission was demolished by fire. In the process, five missionaries lost their lives.

Archaeology conducted at the site shows evidence of this fire and of the rebellion. Artifacts like burned pieces of the clay walls and broken mission bells prove that life was not always peaceful. Archaeology also shows that the mission was abandoned for ten years and then rebuilt by the Spanish as they tried again to live among and convert the Indians.

Rebellion by the Georgia Indians was not the only way these missions were destroyed. Archaeology has revealed evidence that the English had started to move south from Virginia and the Carolinas. Pirates also attacked missions

from the coast. They thought that a mission, with its religious objects, might have gold and other valuable goods that could be stolen. These raids often left the missions and its inhabitants completely destroyed.

## **The Spanish leave**

During the middle of the 1600s, the Spanish mission system had started to fail. Through archaeology, we can see that many Indians abandoned their homes because of the raids from neighboring Indians and Europeans. Those who were left moved to other places they thought would be safer. Archaeology shows us that these new towns were smaller in population and that European goods were common.

In the end, the Spanish left Georgia and the Southeast in 1763. A small group of converted Indians also left with them. This little-known period in Georgia's history has had lasting and sometimes disastrous effects on the Indians who lived here. Archaeology has provided us with some of the best clues as to what happened and how the lives of thousands were changed.

## **Reading comprehension questions**

1. What is an alien?
2. Why did Europeans come to North America?
3. How did the Indians react to the Spanish arrival?
4. Why do you think the Spanish adopted Indian ways?
5. Could you be considered an alien? Why or why not?

## **Glossary**

*Archaeology*: the respectful study of past human societies through the physical evidence that they have left behind.

*Artifact*: any object made or used by humans.

*Chiefdom*: the territory and people governed by a hereditary chief.

*Context*: the position (both in time and space) where archaeological materials are found. This includes the dirt they are found in, what other artifacts are around them, etc. Sometimes, the context in which an artifact is found can be more informative than the artifact itself!

*Convento*: a complex of buildings in which friars or nuns live and work.

*Elite*: persons in the highest class of people who have the most influence over the others; above the common people.

*Excavation*: the controlled process of digging to recover evidence of past human activity.

*Friary*: the building in which the Friars lived.

*Majolica*: a type of Spanish ceramic.

*Missionaries*: people sent by a church intending to convert others to their religion.

*Monolithic*: made from one stone.

*Repartimento*: physical labor system imposed on the Native Americans by the Spanish in which a number of Native American men were forced to work for the Spanish for a certain part of the year. This system created negative consequences for the Native Americans.

## Word Search

Some of the words we've used today are new and unfamiliar. Can you find them all?



Archaeology

Artifact

Chiefdom

Context

Convento

Elite

Excavation

Friary

Majolica

Missionaries

Monolithic

Repartimento

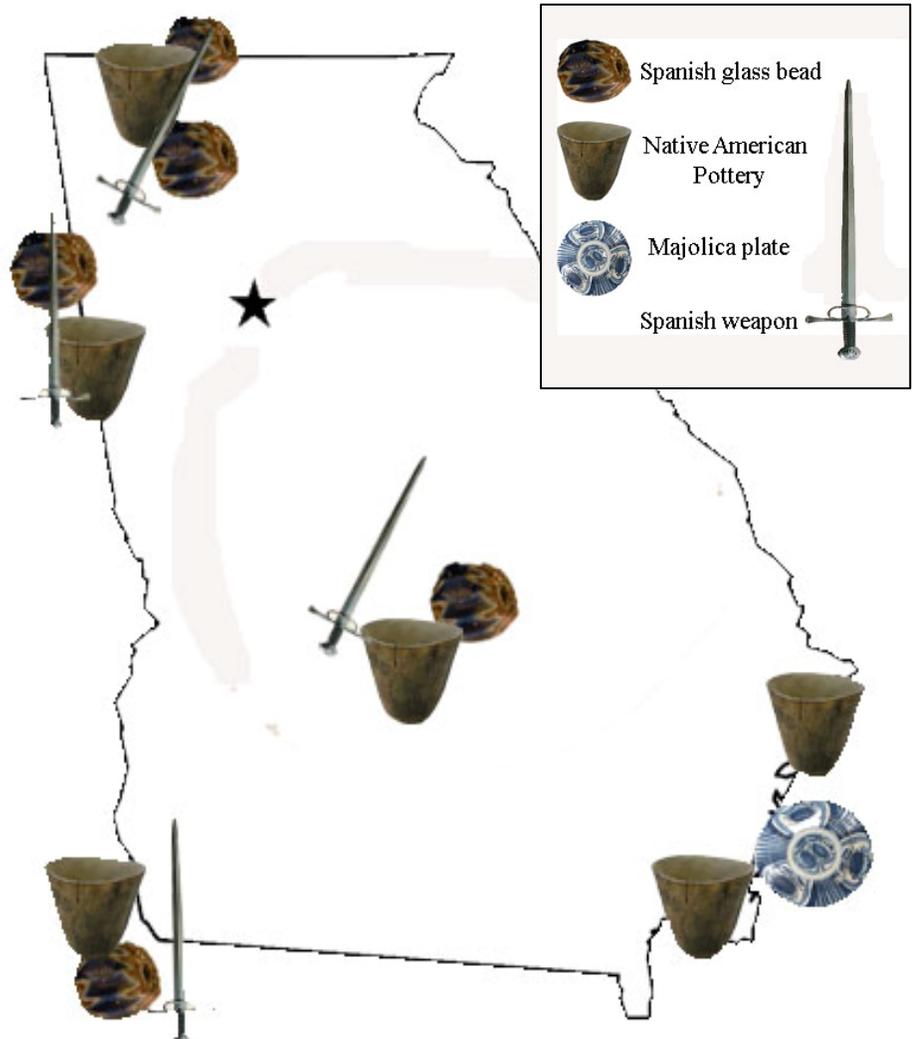
# Who goes there?

Look at this map of Georgia and pretend you are an archaeologist. Archaeological sites contain different artifacts depending on who lived at or visited each one. The examination of many archaeological sites gives us the most complete idea about what has happened in our past. Some of the artifacts found along the coast of Georgia are different than those found inland.

1. Who do you think might have been at these sites? Can you compare what is found in Georgia's interior with what is found along the coast? How are these sites different and how are they the same?

2. Do you see any patterns in the archaeological sites? Can you trace the movements of the Spanish? Who do you think might be responsible for the Spanish evidence at these sites? How did the Spanish presence affect the Indians of Georgia? How were their lives changed?

3. If you were an archaeologist studying the early contact between Native Americans and the Spanish, where would you excavate next? Why? What would you hope to find and what would you hope to learn?



Teacher Prompts/Answers:

1. Native Americans lived all over the state of Georgia. They had communities along the coast of Georgia as well as throughout the state. The Spanish explored much of the region, bringing with them iron tools and other exotic items, such as glass beads. Spanish explorers carried weapons in case of hostility and to control. Spanish missionaries settled for the most part along the coast, with one inland mission. These missions were usually set up at pre-existing Native American communities.
2. Hernando de Soto crossed through Georgia twice. The first time, he crossed from the southwest corner to the northeast corner. The second time, he moved east to west and headed south, across the northwest corner of the state. De Luna and other Spanish explorers retraced many of de Soto's steps as they too explored Georgia.

## Ownership and Meaning

Native American chiefs often requested to have Spanish presence within their chiefdoms. The Spanish brought with them exotic goods never before seen by the Native Americans living in Georgia. The possession of these items signified wealth, power, and status.

Think about the following items and try to answer the following questions.

- Who might have owned these?
- Who might have wanted them?
- How would they have gotten them?



religious medals



glass bead



iron tools



stone axe



shell bead

Many of these artifacts were considered to be rare or exotic goods. Items such as those made from shell or other specialty artifacts would have been owned by the elite, especially if they were found inland.

## In Conclusion:

Think about your life today. What items do you know about that are considered to be valuable or high-status goods? What items hold special meaning to you? How do people show that they have power and wealth? What kind of things do they own? How are these things acquired?

# Lesson Plan Objectives

Students will:

1. Understand how Native Americans adapted to another culture.  
SS8H1b, SS8H1c
2. Analyze Native American artifacts found in Georgia and interpretation of maps.  
8th grade SS skills matrix
3. Discover the techniques used by archaeologists to develop a picture of past civilizations.

## Resources and Further Reading

Cook, Jeannine (Editor)

*1992 Columbus and the Land of Ayllón: The Exploration and Settlement of the Southeast.* The Darien News, Darien, GA.

Dickens, Roy S., Jr., and James L. McKinley

*2003 Frontiers in the Soil: The Archaeology of Georgia.* Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Athens, GA.

Hoffman, Paul E.

*1990 A New Andalusia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century.* Louisiana State University Press, Louisiana.

Smith, Marvin T.

*1987 Archaeology of Aboriginal Culture Change in the Interior Southeast: Depopulation during the Early Historic Period.* University of Florida Press, Gainesville, FL.

*2000 Coosa: The Rise and Fall of a Southeastern Mississippian Chiefdom.* University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

The New Georgia Encyclopedia

2008 History and Archaeology. Electronic Document.

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Categories.jsp?path=/HistoryArchaeology/ArchaeologyandEarlyHistory&option=collapse#/HistoryArchaeology/ArchaeologyandEarlyHistory>, Accessed January 7, 2008.

Thomas, David Hurst

1988 Saints and Soldiers at Santa Catalina: Hispanic Designs for Colonial America. In *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, Mark P. Leone and Parker B. Potter, Jr., editors, pp.73-124. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.

1988 *St. Catherines: An Island in Time.* Georgia Humanities Council, Atlanta.

## Web Sites

Fernbank Museum of Natural History  
[www.fernbankmuseum.org](http://www.fernbankmuseum.org)

The Society for Georgia Archaeology  
[www.thesga.org](http://www.thesga.org)

The Society for American Archaeology  
[www.saa.org](http://www.saa.org)

The National Park Service Southeast  
[www.cr.nps.gov/seac](http://www.cr.nps.gov/seac)

The New Georgia Encyclopedia  
<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/>  
(Look under “Archaeology and Early History”)

The Society for Historical Archaeology  
[www.sha.org](http://www.sha.org)

Florida Museum of Natural History – Artifact Gallery  
<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/histarch/>

Lost Worlds of Georgia  
[http://www.lostworlds.org/gbo\\_faq.html](http://www.lostworlds.org/gbo_faq.html)

This is one of a series of educational packets produced annually by The Society for Georgia Archaeology during Archaeology Month activities in May. The series reflect new themes annually and is distributed free-of-charge, along with an associated poster, to all middle/junior high public schools in the state, regional libraries, state parks and historic sites, and other entities. With the exception of the Event Calendar, the posters and educational packets are timeless. Librarians at schools and regional public libraries are encouraged to catalog these materials so that they may be used in the future by educators and patrons. The 2008 issue represents the 11<sup>th</sup> in the series. We hope you enjoy it!

This packet was created by Kathryn Ruedrich and Dennis Blanton (Fernbank Museum of Natural History).

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