

## CHAPTER II

# GEORGIA'S PAST



- PURPOSE

Chapter II, the longest in the book, describes the sequence of prehistoric and historic cultures in Georgia as defined by archaeological research. This is a story of change and adaptation over many thousands of years. The Native Americans of Georgia, through their own ideas and inventions, along with contributions from other New World cultures, gradually developed more complex societies, more productive economic systems, and more advanced technologies.

Although archaeologists now understand many of the basic elements of this long development, there is still much to be learned. Again, it should be stressed that the missing parts of the story will remain untold if archaeological sites are allowed to be destroyed without proper study. The sites represent our "reservoir" of knowledge, a portion of which must remain undisturbed if future archaeologists are to have anything to study.

- CONCEPTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

### **Georgia's Archaeological Sequence**

Chapter II begins by explaining how prehistoric people came to the area now called Georgia. These people were descendants of Siberians who began to populate the New World around 30,000 B.C. to 25,000 B.C. We are not sure when the first of these people wandered into Georgia. However, we do know that they were here by 10,000 B.C. The chapter is subdivided into sections based on the stages of cultural development recognized by Southeastern archaeologists and historians.

The Paleo Indian Period (ca. 10,000 – 8,000 B.C.)

The first archaeological period is called Paleo Indian. It lasted from 10,000 B.C. to 8,000 B.C. More is known about the cultures of Paleo Indians in western North America than in the East. In the West, Paleo Indians spent much of their time hunting large herd animals such as mammoth and giant bison. In the Great Eastern Forest, however, they probably hunted fewer large animals, concentrating their attention more on small game and edible wild plants. Paleo Indians lived in small bands composed of several related families. These are called microbands. Since they did not have knowledge of agriculture and had to depend on scattered wild resources, they frequently moved their camps. Because of the small size of Paleo Indian groups, and their nomadic life-style, we have found only a few of their sites in Georgia. Our sketch of hunter-gatherer culture, presented on pages 16-18 of the text, was compiled from information collected by cultural anthropologists who have studied groups such as the African Bushmen and Australian Aborigines. Thus, it is necessary to use our knowledge of contemporary hunter-gatherers to supplement the archaeological record for this early period.

The Archaic Period (8000 – 1000 B.C.)

After about 8,000 B.C., the environment--climate, flora, and fauna--of Georgia was much like it is today. The few large herd animals were extinct by this time. Archaeologists call this period from 8,000 B.C. to 1,000 B.C. the Archaic. During the early part of the Archaic Period, descendants of Paleo Indians came to rely on an increasingly broader range of natural resources. Gradually their use of these resources, especially plant and animal foods, were scheduled according to seasonal availability. During some seasons several neighboring bands might join together to form large social-and-economic units, which archaeologists call macrobands.

Archaic Indians also learned many ways to manipulate their environments in order to increase the yields of various food items. There is evidence, for example, that they made considerable use of areas they cleared in the forests. These open areas provided tender edible plants for both humans and the animals they hunted. One invention during the Archaic Period was the grooved stone axe, a tool that was ideally suited for chopping trees to produce the clearings described above.

Archaic Indians also developed the use of the spear thrower (by about 5,000 B.C.) and stone containers (by about 3,000 B.C.). Toward the end of the Archaic Period (by about 2,500 B.C.), pottery was in use in the coastal region of modern-day Georgia and South Carolina. Some of this fiber tempered pottery is similar to contemporary wares of Central and South America, which presents archaeologists with an intriguing problem. Was this pottery independently invented in southeastern North America, or was there a migration of people from the south who brought with them the knowledge of pottery-making? Further research is needed before this question can be answered.

Most of the stone projectile points found in the fields of Georgia are from the Archaic Period. Sometimes these artifacts are incorrectly called "arrowheads." Actually, the Archaic points were used to tip spears, not arrows. The bow-and-arrow was not used until the succeeding Woodland Period. Archaeologists have determined a long sequence of changes in the style of Archaic projectile points. If students bring to class points they have found, these artifacts may be compared to the ones shown on text page 29, or with illustrated examples in some of the archaeological resource materials listed at the end of the Teaching Handbook.

#### The Woodland Period (1000 B.C. – A.D. 800)

Around 1,000 B.C., important changes again were under way in the prehistoric cultures of Georgia. Archaeologists call the time from 1,000 B.C. to A.D. 800 the Woodland Period. During this period, agriculture (probably begun in simple fashion in late Archaic times) was commonly practiced. At first, the gardens provided only seasonal sustenance, but as time went along there was increasing dependence on products from intentionally cultivated fields. Settlements, now larger and more permanent, were positioned close to the most fertile soils in stream valleys.

With more abundant and dependable food from gardening, people of the Woodland Period developed larger social groups. These groups, called "tribes," were very different from the "bands" of the Archaic Period. Tribes were larger and more stable, had more formal leadership, and possessed clearly demarcated territories. Separate villages, distributed throughout several stream valleys, would have composed a single Woodland tribe. More formalized religious and ceremonial activities also developed hand-in-hand with the more complex social and economic institutions of the Woodland Period. The most important leaders seem to have been priests who required certain exotic goods and materials to aid them in their communications with the

supernatural. Burials of Woodland priests have been found and studied by Georgia archaeologists at several sites, including the Kolomoki site near Blakely in Early County. Some ceremonial sites also have been identified, such as the Rock Eagle mound near Eatonton and the Fort Mountain stone enclosure near Chatsworth.

The use of pottery spread from group to group during the Woodland Period. Archaeologists have studied the form, composition, and decoration of this pottery in great detail. In fact, it is now possible to associate certain styles of pottery with specific social groups (possibly tribes) and certain intervals (phases) of the Woodland development. Thus, pottery styles became time-and-culture "markers" for the Woodland Period in much the same way that projectile point styles marked changes during the Archaic Period. Just as pottery replaced older stone bowls, the bow-and-arrow was developed by Woodland peoples to replace the spear. Small stone, bone and wooden arrow points are evidence of this change. There were probably other important technological innovations during the Woodland Period that have not yet been identified by archaeologists.

#### The Mississippian Period (A.D. 800 – 1540)

The last prehistoric period in Georgia is called the Mississippian, named for the Mississippi River area, which many archaeologists think was the center of development of a new kind of culture beginning about A.D. 800. During the Mississippian Period, populations grew larger and became densely concentrated in the valleys of the larger rivers. Agriculture provided the principal source of food. Some Mississippian societies reached a highly complex level of development, forming what anthropologists call "chiefdoms." In these chiefdoms (some of which still exist in the modern world) a person's position was inherited. Often, those in the highest-ranking positions were treated as royalty. These ranking families might also control the distribution of many goods and services within the chiefdom.

Archaeologists think that the Etowah Mounds site near Cartersville was the center of a large chiefdom that stretched a distance of 80 kilometers (about 50 miles) from above Chatsworth to below Rome. The Ocmulgee site near Macon may have been the center of another chiefdom. Within these chiefdoms there may have been centers of secondary and tertiary leadership with many smaller villages and hamlets having their ultimate allegiances to the main ceremonial and political center. This kind of arrangement allowed for the redistribution of locally-restricted or seasonally-specific resources, so that there was less chance of shortages. A shortage of food would have been much more serious in a large, immobile population than in the earlier, small nomadic groups. Thus, although the large, sedentary, socially-stratified groups of the Mississippian Period had many advantages over the smaller and more nomadic predecessors, there were also many uncertainties in their more "advanced" way of life.

The high-ranking priest-chiefs of Mississippian societies used much elaborate paraphernalia in their costumes and rituals, and they dressed in spectacular costumes to attempt to portray the gods from whom they claimed to be descended. They required that their living quarters and their temples be constructed on the tops of large clay platforms. After many generations of rebuilding and additions, these platform mounds reached grand proportions. Spectacular examples of Mississippian platform mounds may be seen today at the sites of Etowah, Ocmulgee, and Kolomoki in Georgia, Moundville in Alabama, and Town Creek in North Carolina all of which are open to the public.

#### Historic Period (A.D. 1540 – Present)

The first European explorers to reach the southeastern part of North America encountered Indians living in the Mississippian Period. Descriptions of the native people, written by these explorers, mark the beginning of the Historic Period. Remember that archaeologists distinguish the historic from the prehistoric by the presence of written documents. Since the first written descriptions in Georgia come from the DeSoto Expedition of A.D. 1540, the Historic Period is dated A.D. 1540 to the present.

Most people are familiar with the historic Indian "tribes" of Georgia, such as the Cherokees, Creeks, and Yuchis, and they wonder about the relationships between these groups and the Mississippian cultures of late prehistoric times. A direct relationship exists, but it is one that is difficult to interpret for specific groups. The early Spanish explorers, such as DeSoto, described chiefdoms and tribes that they encountered in their travels over the Southeast. One group, which DeSoto's chroniclers called the "Guaxule," may have been the early Cherokees. Another, which they called the "Cooza," may have been the ancestor of the Upper Creeks. There are many problems in tracing individual historic groups back to specific archaeological cultures. Disruptions during the early years of contact caused the Indian groups to move from place to place. Some groups were seriously decimated before any European descriptions were ever written. The structure of the various prehistoric groups also changed greatly during European exploration and colonization. Villages and village clusters that previously had been relatively autonomous developed new allegiances in order to better cope with European encroachment.

Archaeologists have further difficulty in their efforts to directly identify the prehistoric antecedents of historically defined groups because most of the earlier definitions were based on linguistic and ethnic affinities rather than on commonalities in material culture. Still, there are some rather secure interpretations. For example, the late Mississippian inhabitants of northeastern Georgia probably were ancestors of the Lower Cherokee group, while the Ocmulgee site probably was occupied by Muskogean-speaking people known as Hitchiti.

During the Historic Period, three cultures--Native American, Afro-American, and Euro-American--came unexpectedly together, which produced rapid change and reorientation in all of them. The Native American and AfroAmerican cultures underwent the most drastic changes. AfroAmericans were uprooted from their lifestyle and native continent, brought forcibly to the New World and sold on slave markets to the highest bidder. From that moment forward they answered to their Master's bidding whatever the cost. Native Americans were subjected to diseases (introduced from Europe and Africa) which they did not understand and for which they had no natural immunities or cures. Ruthless practices of deer-skin traders, militarists, and land speculators further reduced Native American populations and forced major changes in their social and economic institutions.

An explicit example of European-imposed change on Native Americans was the "deer-skin trade." British traders found deer hides to be a good commodity for European fashion markets and they began trading guns and other manufactured goods to Native Americans for these hides. Since Native Americans without guns could not compete (in hunting or defense) with their neighbors who were obtaining such superior weapons more of them became traders. This need for guns led Native Americans in a "vicious circle" of hunting deer to get guns, to hunting more deer to get more guns, ammunition, etc. The other influencing factor in this circle was availability of deer. Previously hunted sparingly for food, the deer population was now becoming scarce in areas adjacent to Native American settlements. As hunter/tradesmen began moving farther from their homes to find deer and therefore being gone longer periods of time, their village based social structure was disrupted beyond repair. These kinds of "disruptions" caused aboriginal cultures to more easily succumb to the pressures of a dominant foreign culture.

Transplanted Europeans and Africans also changed as they adapted to life in the New World. Increasingly, archaeologists have been investigating the historic sites of Euro-Americans and Afro-Americans. On first thought, one might assume that written records contain all that is important to know about the cultures of the Historic Period. This is far from true, because in many instances there are no documents (they have been lost or destroyed) or the writings that do exist are biased (give only views considered desirable by the writer) or incomplete (describe only what the writer thought was important).

Archaeologists who work with the Historic Period are interested in the process of change in the Native American cultures, in the development and assimilation of AfroAmerican slave culture, and in the adaptations of agrarian European culture to New World environments. Some sites under exploration by historic archaeologists are no older than 50 to 100 years. Even these recent sites can provide valuable information on technological, economic, political, and social developments that have led to an urban-industrial South.

### **Interpreting the Archaeological Sequence**

The most important concepts brought forth in Chapter II are those of cultural change and cultural adaptation. From the time the first humans entered the Eastern Forest, they began adapting their behavior in ways that brought about increased efficiency in the exploitation of necessary resources. This greater efficiency was realized through changes in technology, economy, ideology, and organization of social units. Generally, society became more complex through time as, for example, in the shift from band to tribe to chiefdom, and from hunting and gathering to seasonal agriculture to intensive agriculture. As more efficient techniques and complex behaviors were adopted, populations grew, thus creating further demands for food and other necessary resources. This developmental process would have been totally imperceptible to any members of the cultures involved. Even the smallest changes were gradual, taking many generations.

The ultimate direction of prehistoric cultural development in Georgia is problematical. Perhaps a great civilization," similar to those of Mexico or Peru, ultimately would have arisen. We shall never know, since the native development was eclipsed and replaced with one that was mostly derived from Western Europe.