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Indian Agency in Spanish Florida: Some New Findings from Mission Santa Catalina de Guale

David Hurst Thomas¹

Amy Turner Bushnell (1994:23-28) has provided a useful way of addressing the historiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth century missions of Spanish Florida. The earliest speculations about the Spanish missions of Georgia arose from the "Borderlands paradigm" championed by the Berkeley historian Herbert Eugene Bolton. Eager to dislodge the prevailing Anglo-American interpretations of United States history, Herbert Bolton and his students were inextricably drawn toward the most positive aspects of Spanish colonial policy (Weber 1987:336): "Equaled in humanitarian principles by that of no other country, perhaps, looked to the preservation of the natives, and their elevation to at least a limited citizenship" (Bolton 1917:52).

The unfortunate byproduct of such Spanish Borderlands hyperbole was the specious perception that Native Americans were unwittingly involved in the process. To Bolton, the mission system was an arm of the Spanish Crown reaching across the frontier to pacify and civilize an otherwise intractable population. So defined, American Indians became only peripheral participants in the colonial experience, typically discredited and dismissed. Bolton viewed Indians as "untamed savages" (Bolton 1915:19), "erstwhile barbarians" (Bolton 1917:58), eternally "unsociable" and little more than "children" (Bolton 1921:200).

Bolton's ardent student, John Francis Bannon, perpetuated this "Christophilic, triumphalist bias" into the modern era (Weber 1987:338). Writing from the Black Robed perspective of the Jesuit, Bannon downgraded American Indian culture and suggested that resistance to Spanish encroachment was a character flaw (Bannon 1955:142).

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Zephrin Englehardt, author of more than a dozen influential books on the California missions, wrote (apparently in all seriousness) that, "all accounts agree in representing the natives of California as among the most stupid, brutish, filthy, lazy and improvident of all the aborigines of America" (1930:245). Francis Guest, another church historian, more recently echoed a similar sentiment, calling the California Indian lifeways, "haphazard, irresponsible, brutish, benighted, and barbaric" (Guest 1966:206-207; see also Geiger 1940). This barefaced Hispanophilic bias was perhaps most explicitly expressed by Bannon, who saw the Spanish mission as, "a conspicuous feature of Spain's frontiering genius" (Bannon 1964:211), and eventually lumped all American Indians into the opprobrious catchall category of "Borderland Irritants" (1974:Chapter 8).

This Borderlands perspective arrived on the Georgia coast, full-force, with the publication *The Debatable Land* (1925) by Herbert Bolton and his student (and native Georgian), Mary Ross. Bolton and Ross used glowing terms like "constructive" and "brave" to describe the Spaniards of *La Florida*. Franciscan friars were, "pioneers of Georgia ... devout, gentle, zealous, tireless", while engaging in, "a crusade against heathendom" (1925:20). They also (mistakenly) identified the numerous antebellum tabby ruins as the archaeological remnants of the Spanish missions of *La Florida*.² Subsequent historians in the Boltonian Borderlands paradigm included Maynard Geiger (1937, 1940), Félix Zubillaga ("In mission history every page written with the blood of martyrs is glorious." (1941:430)) and John Tate Lanning (1935:4), who argued that that the Franciscans in *The Spanish Missions of Georgia* brought, "comfort and the most softening influence" to the "miserable life" of the "American aborigine."

To the modern eye, such Borderlands historiography comes across as simultaneously misguided and quaint. "Just as historians retold the friars' story of their own success, so too did historians emulate Franciscans by not lingering over disturbing questions about the morality of evangelism" (Weber 1990:430). There remains a vestigial tendency to accept, at face value, "eyewitness accounts" of the degree of dominance and control exerted by the Spanish among the Indian populations of the Georgia and Florida coastline (Ivey and Thomas 2005). Borderlands-style historians continued to follow Bolton's lead in viewing the Spanish mission system as entirely religious in nature, totally disrupting heathen traditions, populated by obedient Christian native people, and dependent upon kindly Franciscans to safeguard, "the welfare of their converts with the rights and dignity of the missions [tantamount to the] rights and dignity of the native peoples" (Gannon 1990:457; see also Bushnell 1978:24). There were, of course, the exceptions – the handful of rebels and troublemakers, who protested against the Spanish culture that had absorbed them and led the occasional rebellion to throw off the yoke of Hispanic oppression (Matter 1972).

The "Peripheries Paradigm" that emerged in the 1980s examination of the seventeenth century Spanish Southeast took exception to Borderlands-style historiography in several important ways, each of which revolved around the issue of Indian agency in which, "Spanish or Indian, the inhabitants of the *presidio* and mission provinces of Florida knowingly pursued their individual interests across an international arena" (Bushnell 1978:15). Several investigators questioned the Boltonian image of, "missions as self-contained theocracies" (Block 1980:176-178), arguing instead that the Florida

2 This myth was not corrected until James A. Ford conducted archaeological excavations at Elizafield (in Glynn County, Georgia), firmly identifying these tabby foundations as a nineteenth-century sugar mill (Coulter 1937; see also Griffin 1990).

Franciscans, “suffering from a chronic absence of their Royal subsidies, came to depend upon the Indians’ generosity for their very subsistence” (Matter 1973; Block 1980:177-178). In this perspective, the Florida mission “was no theocracy. It was a fully functioning native town governed by an interlocking set of hereditary and elected native leaders ... while Christian Indians in the Southeast played an important part in supporting the Spanish friars, soldiers, and settlers, they did so with comparatively little change to their own material culture and political organization” (Bushnell 1978:28).

The resurgence of Spanish mission archaeology in the American Southeast over the last three decades likewise demonstrates the fallacy of the rigid and misleading Borderlands perspective on Franciscan-American Indian interactions. While engaging in the archaeology of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale, I suggested a broader-based, “cubist” approach toward the Spanish Borderlands history to seek, “multiple, simultaneous views of the subject” (Thomas 1989:7). Archaeology can indeed provide a critically important window through which to glimpse the Native American and European interactions in the Borderlands as elsewhere. By “democratizing” the past, archaeologists are framing new perspectives on minority populations and their experiences with dominant colonial cultures (Deagan 1991; Lightfoot 2005:17).

Today, such inquiries are typically folded into the language and methodologies of the “postcolonial critique,” which challenges traditional colonialist epistemologies and questions those colonial and imperial representations of the “other” being colonized. Postcolonial theorists emphasize Native agency and investigate the hybrid, novel forms of culture that develop during colonial experiences (e.g., Gosden 2001; Lightfoot 2005:17; Leibman 2008:2; Patterson 2008:31-32).

In this paper, I examine how recent archaeological and ethnohistorical investigations of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale (Georgia) are contributing to a broader, more nuanced understanding of the Native-Spanish interactions that played out here.

The Archaeology of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale: Some Background

Archaeologists from the American Museum of Natural History began looking for Mission Santa Catalina in 1977.³ For three years, we conducted an island-wide, 20 percent systematic randomized sample of St. Catherines Island, discovering and testing approximately 135 archaeological sites. The regional archaeological survey of St. Catherines Island had two primary objectives in mind: (a) to obtain a relatively unbiased sample of archaeological sites from all time periods drawn from all parts of the island (Thomas 2008) and (b) to pinpoint the exact location of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale. The successful search for Mission Santa Catalina has been described elsewhere (Thomas 1987, 1988a).

We then spent 15 years excavating the ruins of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Franciscan missions at Santa Catalina de Guale (Thomas 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1992). Between 1981 and 1990, the research and excavations focused almost exclusively on the mission compound on St. Catherines Island. After that, we expanded our scope to include the Native American village (*pueblo*) at Santa Catalina. Two research monographs (Thomas 1987; Larsen 1990) were previously published to document our excavations at

³ We have discussed the overall history of archaeological research on St. Catherines Island at some length elsewhere (esp. Thomas et al. 1978:chapter. 4; Thomas 2008:chapter 1; see also Deagan and Thomas 2009).

Mission Santa Catalina. We have also published two volumes (Bushnell 1994; Worth 1995b; see also Worth 2007) providing a documentary context for these excavations, derived from the study of mission records and firsthand accounts of life in the Spanish missions on the Georgia coast. Over the past decade, we have been preparing several additional monographs addressing the archaeology of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale.

Some Previous Thoughts about Indian Agency in Spanish Florida

Working within the overall “Peripheries Paradigm,” archaeologists and ethnohistorians studying Southeastern missions have demonstrated the persistence of American Indian religious beliefs and explored the degree to which the Hispanic authorities vacillated over whether or not certain native practices were compatible with Christianity (e.g., Thomas 1988a, Worth 1998; Milanich 1999:148-149; Ivey and Thomas 2005).

We have previously suggested that our excavations in the cemetery (*campo santo*) at Mission Santa Catalina de Guale show considerable variance from Franciscan idealized mortuary patterns (Thomas 1988a, 1993). Conventional Franciscan doctrine held that parishioners should be buried to emulate the burial of Christ; and, true to form, our excavations show that virtually all of the neophyte Guale Indians were interred in characteristic “Christian” burial posture – in unmarked graves beneath the church floor, head oriented toward the south, with arms crossed on the chest. But Franciscan dogma likewise called for burial without grave goods and embellishments, and here the neophytes drew the line. For two thousand years, Native Americans in the American Southeast held the view that specific grave goods were necessary to reflect the sacred and secular beliefs of the now-dead. Faced with this deeply entrenched belief, the friars at Santa Catalina developed a remarkable flexibility with regard to grave furniture.

Within the 400-450 Guale graves located inside the church at Santa Catalina, we recovered a truly astounding array of associated grave goods, including complete *majolica* vessels, dozens of projectile points, a rattlesnake shell gorget, glass cruets, two dozen religious medallions (of bronze, gold, and silver), finger rings, copper plaques, and more than 67,000 glass trade beads. We previously suggested that these departures from Franciscan dogma were likely rationalized by the view that Guale neophytes were not “fully formed” in Christianity, a perspective that granted both friar and convert considerable latitude in the day-to-day practice of the new religion (Thomas 1988a). To the schooled Franciscan mind, this juxtaposition of Christian and pagan was a necessary step in the conversion process. That is, to achieve the outward symbols of conversion (specifically emphasizing burial and baptism records) and to stamp out offensive pagan practices (especially burial mounds and charnel houses), friars “permitted” the Guale Indians to continue their practice of grave goods (despite the fact that this practice directly violated church doctrine). For their part, the Guale clearly maximized their transitional status, simultaneously using the mission system for their own devices while retaining key beliefs from their own traditions.

Similar negotiations took place in the layout and architecture of other Southeastern missions. At Mission San Luis de Talimali, archaeologists discovered a huge council house measuring 120 feet across, capable of seating 2,000-3,000 people inside (Shapiro and Hann 1990). Long a mainstay of Indian villages in *La Florida*, the council house

functioned year-round as the seat of native government, a meeting place for villagers, the locus for interacting with Spanish authorities, and an inn to house scalps. As the most powerful symbol of native community, the council house was permitted to survive in the Franciscan missions of Spanish Florida — provided it sported a Christian cross above the door. The council house at San Luis fronted the main mission plaza, symbolizing in architecture the blending of native and Franciscan beliefs.

Then there is the matter of the ballgame, a centuries-old custom commonly played between competing villages with 50-100 participants to a side. Games typically lasted half a day, serious injuries were not uncommon, with omens and rituals attending every aspect of the game. During the late seventeenth century, considerable debate raged within the Church about whether or not the ballgame was compatible with Christianity. Was the ballgame a simple athletic contest or a survival of pagan demonic beliefs (Bushnell 1978)?

Initially, Spanish authorities supported the ballgame complex. The friars, always on the lookout for ways to promote sedentism among neophytes, recognized that attendance at ballgames translated directly into increased participation in the Mass. The Governor of St. Augustine also reluctantly supported the practice, fearing that banning the ballgame would cause the Indians to refuse to work for the Spaniards. In effect, the Franciscans “baptized” this seemingly “pagan” custom in order to effect conversion. As a direct result, ball courts became acceptable components within the missions of Spanish Florida.

But through time, the friars reversed their position, concerned over the clearly supernatural aspects of the game, especially the involvement of sun, thunder, and rain deities, which were long-standing components in the harvest rituals, one of the “traditional” religious beliefs that the Franciscans were seeking to stamp out. The Spanish eventually banned the ballgame altogether when some of the “converted” Apalache chiefs admitted that such non-Christian practices should not be permitted among Christianized Indian people.

John Worth has more recently articulated this argument in much greater detail, providing a fresh look at the relationship between the Spanish colonial system and the indigenous coastal chiefdoms of Georgia and north Florida (esp. Worth 1995a, 1998, 2002, 2004a, 2009a). Simply stated, Worth argues that, viewed through a broad anthropological lens, a colonial Spanish system reinforced internal chiefly power by providing a tributary exchange system in which access to indigenous land and labor was channeled through hereditary chiefs. Specifically, by trading in the external, colonial Spanish market, traditional Guale leaders transformed agricultural surpluses, land, and labor, all commodities under their chiefly control, thereby assuring military backing and continuing the long-term traditional practices of ostentatious public display. “In effect, Spanish Florida became a sort of modified paramount chiefdom through which the chiefly matrilineages of destabilized chiefdoms bolstered their own internal power by subordinating themselves to the Spanish crown” (Worth 2002:46).

The subsequent discussion explores the degree to which the newest results from archaeological and ethnohistorical research at Mission Santa Catalina de Guale articulate with the conflicting Borderlands and Peripheries paradigms of Spanish colonial Florida.

The Beads of Santa Catalina de Guale

Blair, Pendleton and Francis (2009) have recently analyzed the nearly 70,000 glass trade beads recovered from Mission Santa Catalina de Guale. Beads clearly played multiple roles in the lives and deaths of St. Catherines Islanders. The most obvious and tangible use of beads was as grave goods; 67,184 beads were recovered from the mission cemetery, most of which were found in direct association with buried individuals. Beyond their terminal usage as grave furnishings, the beads recovered at Mission Santa Catalina de Guale were clearly valued as personal adornment, as commodities of economic and social exchange, and as a medium for mediating relationships across a range of social boundaries.

It is quite remarkable that, despite the isolation and alleged relative poverty of *La Florida*, the Guale of St. Catherines Island had access to some of the most valuable beads from around the world. Most of the beads, of course, were manufactured in the major European centers, with Venice being the most important, followed by France, and, to a lesser degree, by Spain itself. Each region of Spain also seems to have supplied beads, including Andalucía (segmented and perhaps gilded beads), Cataluña (glass crosses), Galicia (jet), and perhaps Castile (cut crystal). Beads also came to St. Catherines from Holland, the Baltic Region, and Bohemia, although in small quantities. There are also Chinese glass beads and carnelian beads from India.

Most of these beads were objects of daily adornment, with only a small portion reflecting anything about the Catholic faith among the converted Guale neophytes. Although one might suspect that many beads found within a Spanish cemetery inside a Franciscan church would have functioned as rosaries, Blair et al. (2009) identified only six potential rosaries within this huge bead assemblage. Three of these rosaries were made of perishable materials (wooden or bone beads), meaning that perhaps other rosaries, now deteriorated, might have been buried in the mission cemetery but are seriously underrepresented in the archaeological record (Deagan, 1987:171; 2002:67-69).

Most of the grave furnishings, especially the glass trade beads, at Mission Santa Catalina are largely secular in nature. Although the Guale probably did receive some of the beads during the process of religious conversion and acceptance of fundamental sacraments of the church, most of the bead assemblage was more likely acquired through the sanctioned mission economy: as *regalos* (gifts presented by the Spanish to establish friendships and alliances among the Guale populace), as direct compensation for participation in the labor *repartimiento*, and as payment for goods during sanctioned trade with the St. Augustine presidio (Thomas 1988a:120-121; Bushnell 1994:104-124; Worth 1998:180, 195; McEwan 2001:640-641; Blair et al. 2009:chapter 16). It is likewise possible that some of the beads were given as formal exchange goods offered to local elites as part of a legal system of *rescate*, because, after all, not all *rescate* was illegal.

Beads also came illegally to St. Catherines Islanders as part of the *rescate*, a system of exchange that took place in unsanctioned ports. Along coastal Georgia, these transactions mostly involved exchanging deerskins for contraband oil, wine, vinegar, linens and silks, spices, hardware, and other goods (Bushnell 1994:29). The extent to which such illicit trade involved the French is unclear. Bushnell (1994:63) commented

on accounts that twenty French corsairs appeared along the Guale coast in 1580 and engaged in some trade with indigenous populations. She also notes that, in the aftermath of the 1597 uprising, some Guales expressed their desire to trade with the French rather than through sanctioned Spanish connections.⁴

It is unclear the degree to which French-Guale trade transpired following the reestablishment of Mission Santa Catalina in 1605, but such trade certainly did not stop completely within the province of Guale. Blair et al. (2009) suggest that blue Ichtucknee Plain beads, one of the most common beads found at Mission Santa Catalina, may have been manufactured in France, suggesting a previously undocumented level of illicit trade between Indians populations of the Georgia Bight and the French.⁵

Bead specialists have long speculated that France likely contributed beads for New World trade, which would have been available to nearly all colonial powers at most times. But exactly which beads were made in France? Blair, et al. (2009) suggest blue bubble-glass Ichtucknee Plain beads as excellent candidates. They are clearly not Dutch and are technologically inferior to Venetian beads. The St. Catherines bead assemblage supports the French connection in two ways. For one thing, many small bubble glass beads are the size of seed beads, and they were finished by the *a speo* method (just as were the larger beads), an indication that the beads were not Venetian (because seed beads of Venetian manufacture during this time period were finished by the *a ferrazza* method) (Karklins, 1993). Additionally, some of the blue bubble-glass beads also seem to mimic higher quality *Patronostri* beads made in Venice (with three bands of red on white stripes and a characteristic eye bead decoration).

We believe that this bead assemblage, along with the other grave goods found at Mission Santa Catalina, reflects the ability of the Guale province to produce surplus maize crops, reflecting the mission's status as a provincial capital and administrative center and its immediate access to the trade routes along the coast. Mission Santa Catalina de Guale, long considered the "breadbasket" of St. Augustine, provided the bulk of the corn used to supply that presidio (Thomas 1990:379; Bushnell 1994:147; Worth 2002:55). Blair et al. (2009) argue that maize was the most significant export that likely accounted for the extensive array of trade goods recovered from the Mission Santa Catalina cemetery. The mission period chiefdoms of the interior Georgia Bight engaged in an extensive and lucrative exchange system throughout the reach of legitimate Spanish interests and likely far beyond (Worth 1998:173-184; 1999; Blair et al. 2009).

4 Despite this possibility, Michael Francis notes that he has seen no documentary evidence for French involvement in the 1597 uprising (personal communication).

5 Even if the Guale people of St. Catherines did not trade directly with the French during the mission period, their neighbors at Satuache clearly did. This is significant because, in 1666, the aboriginal population living at Mission San Diego de Satuache was removed to St. Catherines Island and amalgamated with the existing Mission Santa Catalina population (Worth 1995b: 19). Blair et al. (2009) suggest that some of the Mission Santa Catalina bead assemblage belonged to individuals from Satuache, reflecting their illicit trade with the French.

The Zooarchaeology of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale

Elizabeth J. Reitz, Barnet Pavao-Zuckerman, Daniel C. Weinand, and Gwyneth A. Duncan have recently published *Mission and Pueblo Santa Catalina de Guale, St. Catherines Island, Georgia (USA): A Comparative Zooarchaeological Analysis* (Reitz et al. 2010). Working from an archaeofaunal assemblage consisting of 70,324 specimens (and an estimated 510 vertebrate individuals) and combining this evidence with results from the towns and missions in Spanish Florida, Reitz et al. (2010) highlight the dynamic relationship between native and immigrant people on St. Catherines Island. We have long understood that Mission Santa Catalina de Guale contains a uniquely rich material culture (Thomas 1990, 1993a; Blair et al. 2009). Reitz et al. (2010) clearly demonstrate that this same richness is likewise reflected in the animals consumed at this mission. These food bones derive from two primary contexts, namely (1) the central mission complex laid out around the town plaza and (2) the surrounding Guale settlement complex.

We cannot be certain exactly who prepared the meals represented by food bones recovered within the mission compound. If these foodstuffs were acquired and prepared by Guale women, then the mission compound diet represents a significant fusion of Guale traditions and labor with Spanish technology. But if the foods were obtained and prepared by the Spanish friars and soldiers themselves, then the change in Spanish behavior was profound.

In either case, Reitz et al. (2010) question the long-standing assumption that priests influenced all aspects of native life at missions. Based on the zooarchaeological evidence, they conclude instead that it was the lives of the missionaries that experienced more marked change, at least with respect to what they ate. The zooarchaeology of the central mission compound makes it clear that Spaniards significantly shifted their diet toward traditional local Guale subsistence, involving considerably more change than the Guale people did conforming to Spanish practices and expectations.

Although Eurasian animals like pigs, cattle, and chickens were present at the mission, they occurred in small numbers and seem to have been relatively unimportant. The species most important in the Spanish diet on St. Catherines Island were animals common to the marshes and estuaries of the southern Georgia Bight. The Spanish consumed considerably more venison at Mission Santa Catalina de Guale than did the citizenry in contemporary St. Augustine.

The zooarchaeological data from the Guale *pueblo* surrounding the central mission compound demonstrates both change and continuity in the dietary strategies of the indigenous people living there. These Guale shifted their traditional subsistence practices to some extent, but they refused to adopt Spanish practices wholesale, especially with respect to animal husbandry. Instead, they fused traditional subsistence practices with selected aspects of the Spanish diet, establishing a mission subsistence pattern that continued to rely on local estuarine fishes and turtles, augmented by local wild terrestrial foodstuffs, especially venison.

Reitz et al. (2010) documents a notable increase in wild mammals over precontact contexts, especially deer, but also opossums, rabbits, squirrels, bears, mustelids (such as mink), and raccoons. The taxa are well-known components of garden and field foraging, suggesting that perhaps the expanded mission fields offered greater opportunities to hunt and trap animals that raid gardens and fields or that prey on other animals feeding on crops.

Importantly, Reitz et al. (2010) also found a marked increase in deer hunting during the mission period, perhaps in part as a response to increased participation in the deerskin trade. Pavao-Zuckerman (2007:7) argues that deerskins comprised one of the most important commodities sought by early Spanish colonists and missionaries, and the deerskin trade likely figured importantly in the economy of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale (see also Thomas 2008:947). “Unlike at the Apalachee mission at San Luis de Talimali, where wealth was expressed in cattle herds, the wealth of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale was expressed in venison” (Reitz et al. 2010:133–135). It seems that the Guale functioned both as middlemen obtaining hides from inland groups (Waselkov 1989:129) and also as producers, through intensified local deer hunting.⁶

The Guale people living in the mission *pueblo* consumed a great deal more venison than did their late precontact ancestors, but they discarded fewer high-utility parts of the deer carcass, suggesting that perhaps the best cuts of venison were given to those living inside the mission compound. Deer skulls are particularly common in the *pueblo*, perhaps brought to the *pueblo* as containers for brains used to cure deer hides or as a favored item of consumption.

Considerable variability exists among the various sectors of the mission *pueblo*. It is difficult to know how Guale viewed Eurasian animals, the increase in venison, the higher diversity of their overall animal-use strategy, and changes in their fishing strategies. Reitz et al. (2010) speculate that perhaps these dietary differences reflect intra-societal social differences, or perhaps the *pueblo* was occupied by distinct ethnic groups. From this distance, it is not possible to determine whether the small amount of domestic meat consumed at Fallen Tree or at *Pueblo* South was a marker of a high status group, a low status group, or a household highly assimilated into prevailing Spanish lifestyles and, perhaps, marginalized the native community as a consequence.

Similarly, the Guale living in the northern and southern parts of the mission *pueblo* seem to have enjoyed differential access to higher-utility cuts of deer carcasses. Reitz et al. (2010) suggest if the difference in high-utility elements between the three *pueblo* subdivisions actually reflect social distinctions, then this could suggest spatial segregation within the *pueblo*.

Overall, the zooarchaeology of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale demonstrates that the dietary staples were animals very familiar to the Guale, but the Spaniards at the mission were consuming many unfamiliar foods. Fishes constituted most of the dietary items for Spaniards and Native Americans alike, and venison was the source of most of the animal-derived nutrients. From the Guale perspective, animal-based aspects of their cuisine changed very little with missionization.

A New Light on the Guale Uprising of 1597

J. Michael Francis and Kathleen M. Kole (2008, 2009, 2010) have recently published documentary research that radically changes our thinking about the nature and implications of the so-called “Juanillo Revolt” of 1597, much of which played out

⁶ Beads played a role in this trade, as deerskin traders to the interior would have exchanged them, as well as other European trade goods, for hides (Bushnell 1994:122; Blair et al. 2009), and beads would subsequently have been amongst the goods obtained by the Guale from Europeans in return for the hides.

on St. Catherines Island. Francis and Kole convincingly demonstrate that the nature of mission period Guale sociopolitical structure has been seriously underestimated. They also question any simplistic juxtaposition of supposed indigenous and Hispanic interests. This fresh perspective also underscores the serious limitations and sometimes tenuous footing of Spanish rule in Florida.

In his classic *The Martyrs of Florida*, originally published in 1617, Franciscan Luis Gerónimo de Oré vividly recounted a chilling tale of the deadly Guale uprising, which took place not long after Gonzalo Méndez de Canzo began his tenure as *La Florida's* new governor (Oré 1937). The story began in June of 1597, when Méndez met with the Guale *cacique* from St. Catherines Island. Less than a month later, the same *cacique* returned to St. Augustine, accompanied by two dozen Guale Indians, including the paramount chief (*mico mayor*) of Guale territory, don Francisco from Tolomato. Méndez must have been relieved because all the important *caciques* from Guale seemed anxious to maintain peaceful alliances and the governor reciprocated with gifts and foodstuffs.

Franciscan friars had shortly before established several small missions along Georgia's barrier islands (including the mission at Guale on St. Catherines Island), and these first years of missionization seemed to be successful. In 1595, the coastal tribes paid an annual tribute containing more than 11,000 pounds of maize. The next year, the tribute paid to Spanish storehouses in St. Augustine increased to more than 13,000 pounds.

It was puzzling, then, when the Guale paid no maize tribute after the fall harvest of 1597. The Governor's worst fears were soon confirmed when a messenger arrived with letters from Franciscan missionary Pedro de Chozas. Not only had a Guale war party staged an attack on Mission San Pedro (Cumberland Island) for reasons that are unclear, but the hostiles told of rebellion on St. Catherines Island and at neighboring missions. Believing that all the Franciscan friars had been murdered, Governor Méndez dispatched a military expedition to explore the Georgia Bight and seek eyewitnesses for interrogation. The Spaniards soon discovered the remains of three (of five) dead friars and learned that another had been taken captive. But the details remained sketchy because most of the mission Guale had been removed to the interior, hoping to avoid Spanish reprisals.

After years of sifting through the various testimonies, Governor Méndez concluded that the heir to don Francisco's title, known as don Juan (or "Juanillo"), was the individual responsible for the uprising, and he dispatched another Guale *cacique* to capture or kill don Juan. When Governor Méndez was presented with don Juan's scalp on November 27, 1601, he believed that the alleged perpetrator of the 1597 Guale revolt had been executed and the case of the five martyred friars was closed.

Although Oré was not in *La Florida* when the uprising occurred, his chilling account of this bloody indigenous revolt against Spanish rule has survived as the authoritative voice describing the 1597 uprising. Virtually all modern treatments of this episode emphasize Franciscan interference in Guale affairs and missionary opposition to the practice of polygamy. This historiography is virtually unanimous in identifying don Juan as the principal leader, so much so that in several accounts the episode is simply referred to as "Juanillo's revolt" (e.g., Lanning 1935; Gannon 1965; Hoffman 2001).

The meticulous new research by Francis and Kole (2008, 2009, 2010) sets out a story quite different from that framed by Ore's early account and reiterated in the secondary literature. After a three-year, exhaustive review of the relevant primary documents, exploring what they term "a four hundred year old murder mystery," they raise several unsettling questions:

- *Why was one of the friars spared?* Francis and Kole found documentation that, in exchange for the friar's safe return to St. Augustine, the Guale demanded that the Spanish governor return several young Indian boys who had been taken to St. Augustine two years earlier. All of these young boys were members of the Guale elite and heirs to various chieftaincies.
- *If the uprising of 1597 was an indigenous Guale revolution against Spanish rule, why did the destruction target some indigenous settlements and leave some mission buildings untouched?* At Tolomato, the alleged epicenter of the uprising, the Spanish first responders found that not only the Franciscan church and friar's residence had been burned, but the Guale council house had been torched as well. Similarly, at Topiqui, the entire mission and indigenous village had burnt to the ground. But, at Asao, the church, friar's residence and associated Guale village survived fully intact. If this was a rebellion to overthrow the yoke of Hispanic oppression, why the differential destruction?
- *And given the 1601 capture and execution of don Juan ("Juanillo") as the Guale culprit behind the uprising, why are there no direct references to don Juan in original documents dating to 1597?* Francis and Kole discovered that don Juan's name first appeared in Indian testimonies dating to the summer of 1598; and despite these accusations, St. Augustine's governor did nothing to reprimand don Juan. In fact, several letters written in 1600 reveal conflicting testimony about who had actually killed the friars and why they were executed. How, then, a year later, had don Juan been transformed into the uprising's mastermind and the individual most responsible for the friars' deaths?

This new archival research offers a fresh glimpse into the complex nature of Guale political and social structure within colonial Spanish Florida.

Francis and Kole document a shifting nexus of native alliances and competition, with previous power relationships breaking down and new relationships emerging. The new evidence makes it clear that the uprising of 1597 largely reflected the tensions between indigenous chiefdoms. To maintain hegemony, the paramount Guale chief depended upon maintaining alliance and tribute relationships with both lesser Guale chiefdoms and the Spanish government. They stress the extent to which native people struggled to adapt, resist, and conform to the challenges of Spanish colonial rule. Even within the span of a few years, these brittle alliances seem to have been repeatedly forged, broken, and reestablished.

Some Conclusions

Spanish colonists typically self-characterized *La Florida* as a place of poverty, neglect, and ruin. But the combined results of recent ethnohistoric and archaeological investigations demonstrate that this self-evaluation is only partially valid.

It is true that Spanish Florida lacked the gold, silver and other valuables found in many colonies located in Mesoamerica and South America. The value of St. Augustine was strategic – to guard the Fleet of the Indies through the Bahama channel as the treasure-laden ships sailed back Spain (Bushnell 1981:4; 1994:20; Fitzhugh 1985:174-175). External supply was difficult during the seventeenth century, leaving the citizenry of St. Augustine, “in the precarious position of having too many poor military families and not enough colonial farmers; as a poorly supplied garrison-town, St. Augustine quickly developed a reputation of a ‘wretched frontier town to which few colonists would relocate willingly’” (Worth 2002:54-55).

This is why the Spanish were forced to rely so heavily on the human and natural riches of *La Florida*. The economics of Spanish Florida were grounded in an exchange network through which native populations channeled their surplus food, primarily maize, and labor into colonial St. Augustine (Bushnell 1994:15). To facilitate this, Spanish authorities found it most effective to deal directly with the traditional indigenous chiefs, cementing the alliances with diplomatic gifts as a mechanism for, “achieving the voluntary assimilation of such societies into the expanding colonial system” (Worth 2009b:10).

Willingly or not, the indigenous people of the Georgia coast became involved in the global political and economic power struggles that characterized the Spanish colonial system. The bead assemblage from Mission Santa Catalina demonstrates, in a clear-cut and material way, that St. Catherines Islanders had access to beads from Spain, Venice, the Netherlands and France, Bohemia, China, and India. As the late Peter Francis put it,

“Who would have imagined that a small, isolated mission on the edge of a great empire would yield so much information about the rest of the globe? Moreover, until recently, who would have imagined that it would be the study of beads from this tiny settlement that would facilitate the extraction of that information?” (Blair et al. 2009:182).

Borderlands historians have long emphasized the unique Hispanic agenda. They were not seeking unoccupied land for immigrants, but, in the Spanish colonial enterprise, local native groups were sought out to create, from scratch, new multi-ethnic communities. To be sure, military and political forces backed up this strategy, but the basic idea was to foster communities that were more native than Spanish (Bannon 1964; Weber 1992:7-11; Worth 2009). Ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates that Spanish Florida of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a complex, multiethnic community in which the indigenous chiefdoms of *La Florida* were subjected to global issues of climate change, epidemic disease, warfare, and food shortages.

And the reverse is also true: Europeans living in seventeenth-century Spanish Florida had become participants — again, willingly or not — in the local political dynamics of indigenous chiefdoms, bolstering and reinforcing the political power of traditional Indian leaders (Matter 1972; Bushnell 1994:104). Hereditary chiefs retained

considerable internal autonomy over secular matters and ruled using traditional lines of authority (Weber 1990:439). "While the Christian Indians in the Southeast played an important part in supporting the Spanish friars, soldiers, and settlers, they did so with comparatively little change in their own material culture and political organization" (Bushnell 1994:28).

By pledging allegiance and obedience to Spanish officials, indigenous Timucua, Mocama, and Guale chiefs annexed a powerful military ally in the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine. In the process, the paramount chiefs of Spanish Florida not only created a new market for their agricultural surplus, but they also gained access to new tools and technologies to improve their yield. The caciques also readily converted their surpluses into Spanish goods, such as cloth, tools, and beads, and they received tribute from both the Spanish and their own people. The paramount chiefs thus continued to employ ostentatious displays of wealth and status items as a way to reinforce their hereditary status. "It seems no surprise that most aboriginal chiefs struggled to gain entry into the mission system and remained there for so long" (Worth 1998:126-214; 2002:58; 2009a:12).

Francis and Kole (2010) further this thesis by arguing that the Guale uprising of 1597 was not a wholesale indigenous rebellion against Spanish authority. Rather, the root cause of unrest seems to lie within the underlying tensions and competition between indigenous chiefdoms. As Worth (2002:55) has put it, "Florida was not so much an independent Spanish outpost interacting with neighboring and autonomous Indian societies ... but was instead a broader community of interdependent Spanish and Indian populations woven into a functioning, though inherently flawed, colonial system." Francis and Kole highlight the serious limitations and sometimes tenuous footing of Spanish rule in *La Florida*. They also shed a bright light on the importance of Indian allies to Spain's Florida ambitions, as well as the bitter disputes between Spanish officials themselves, both secular and religious. But perhaps most importantly, their book provides unique insight into the rich and complex nature of Indian society in the colonial southeast during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Analysis of food remains from Spanish towns and Franciscan missions, especially Mission Santa Catalina de Guale, likewise highlight the dynamic interchange between natives and immigrants, resulting in new, hybrid subsistence patterns. Perhaps the most striking finding is the degree to which Spanish dietary patterns changed when compared to the overall continuities evident in the indigenous diets of those living in the Guale *pueblo* at Mission Santa Catalina. Without doubt, the Guale supplied foods to Spaniards in great quantities, effectively augmenting and expanding the Spanish menu to look more like traditional, pre-contact Guale diets. In fact, it would seem that the residents of Mission Santa Catalina de Guale enjoyed a much higher standard of living than that of either Spanish citizens living in contemporary St. Augustine or Franciscan friars dining in the Convento de San Francisco. As Reitz et al. (2010:200) put it, "Instead of a single, inept, transient Spanish government dominating an invisible or resistant native population, we must now think of Spanish Florida as a place where resilient Native Americans developed new patterns of animal use while influencing the diet and exploitation strategies of immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Africa."

The bead assemblage from Mission Santa Catalina similarly reflects the ability of the Guale province to produce surplus maize crops, securing the mission's status as a

provincial capital and administrative center, and their immediate access to the trade routes along the coast. Mission Santa Catalina de Guale, long considered the “breadbasket” of St. Augustine, provided the bulk of the corn used to supply that presidio (Thomas 1990:379; Bushnell 1994:147; Worth 2002:55). Blair et al. (2009) argue that maize was the most significant export that likely accounted for the extensive array of trade goods recovered from the Mission Santa Catalina cemetery. The mission period chiefdoms of the interior Georgia Bight engaged in an extensive and lucrative exchange system throughout the reach of legitimate Spanish interests and likely far beyond (Worth 1998:173-184; 1999b; Blair et al. 2009).

Because Franciscan missionaries had authority only over religious matters, they functioned, “as subordinate religious practitioners within and beneath chiefly authority, just as indigenous religious practitioners had done before contact” (Worth 2009a:12).

In converting to Christianity and accepting resident Franciscan friars within their local jurisdiction, chiefs gained not only the largesse of the Catholic church and the Spanish crown, but also a resident cultural broker and advocate to act on their behalf with respect to the Spanish military government. All things being equal, the establishment of a tributary labor arrangement with the governor of St. Augustine must have seemed a small price to pay in return for the anticipated benefits of assimilation through missionization. (Worth 2002:57)

The primary personal motivation for these native chiefs for establishing relationships with the Spanish at St. Augustine was to maintain and enhance their internal political power within their own chiefdoms and communities.

This discussion clearly demonstrates that historical archaeology has come a long way since Ivor Noël Hume (1964) famously defined its purpose as serving merely as a “handmaiden to history.” Having transcended an early fascination with the “oldest,” “largest,” and “most historically significant” sites, many historical archaeologists are today pursuing the goals so clearly articulated by Kathleen Deagan (1982:170-171):

The unique potential of historical archaeology lies not only in its ability to answer questions of archaeological and anthropological interest, but also in its ability to provide historical data not available through documentation or any other source. Correcting the inadequate treatment of disenfranchised groups in America’s past, excluded from historical sources because of race, religion, isolation, or poverty is an important function of contemporary historical archaeology and one that cannot be ignored.