

# Alexander Cumming - King or Pawn? An Englishman on the Colonial Chessboard of the Eighteenth-century American Southeast

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In 1730 Sir Alexander Cumming a Scottish Baronet, following a dream of his wife, visited the Cherokee Nation in South Carolina. Leaving Charles Town on March 13, 1730 Cumming spent approximately four weeks traveling throughout Cherokee space before returning to Britain claiming to have been crowned 'King' of the Cherokee during a ceremony at Nequasee Town House. Accompanied on his return by seven Cherokee 'chiefs' who he then presented to the King George II.

In his memorials to the Crown and members of the Board of Trade Cumming repeatedly stressed Cherokee submission to British domination, revisiting Cumming's journal and exploring additional contemporary documents this article suggests that Cumming, rather than ascending to the office of 'King' and facilitating British control and domination of the Cherokee, was actually a pawn in Cherokee relations with the British. His self-proclaimed coronation in reality being a political adoption by the Cherokee that, by using the correct ceremonies, positioned the British in an acceptable position to provide communication, trade, and interaction between the two nations.

The methodological tool utilized to reevaluate this moment of colonial interaction is spatial habitus. That is, the linkage of a person's identification with a specific location, or locations, as a means of verifying identity and informing the act of contact. Issues of fixidity and control underpinned the spatial Habitus of the British colonist. Whereas the Cherokee, although recognizing discrete spatial locations, combined this with an understanding of the possibility of linkage between spaces, a linkage structured and ritualized that when performed correctly allowed for movement between those spaces.

The story begins, not in the hills and mountains of the southeast but rather in the city of Edinburgh, Scotland, where on December 18, 1691 the protagonist of the story, Alexander Cumming, was born.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-eight years later in 1729, Cumming 'was induced, by a dream of Lady Cumming's, to undertake a voyage to America, for the purpose of visiting the

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<sup>1</sup> In 1703 at the tender age of 12 Cumming was granted a Captain's commission in the Earl of Mar regiment by Queen Anne and ten years later gained a Doctorate of Law from the University of Aberdeen. Over the next few years Cumming was to lead a company against the Jacobites in the 1715 uprising, turn down the Governorship of Bermuda, and in 1725, after his father's death, became the second Baronet of Culter. As the decade drew to a close Cumming's eclectic career included a failed attempt to enter Scottish politics and admission to the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge. Biographical details from The Scottish Tartans Museum Web site at <http://www.scottishtartans.org/cuming.html> 22 February, 2006

Cherokee nations.<sup>2</sup> From these mysterious beginnings came one of the strangest moments of British-Cherokee interaction that ended with seven Cherokees in the court of King George. While the full manuscript of Cumming's Journal is now, unfortunately, lost it was published in *The Daily Journal*, a London newspaper, upon his return to England.<sup>3</sup> The report was published in two sections. The first, published in September 1730, was an overview, detailing in broad strokes the daring deeds of Cumming leading up to his arrival in London with seven Cherokees, claiming to be the chosen leader of the Cherokee nation. The second report published the following month, gives a more detailed day-by-day account of his travels.<sup>4</sup>

In a period when the struggle for control of what Herbert Eugene Bolton has termed the 'Debatable land' of the southeast any statement of British spatial control was viewed not only as a geographical, but also as a political success.<sup>5</sup> The publication of Cumming's Journal, and the widely publicized presence of the Cherokee who accompanied him reassured the British public of their country's position strength in the region and also allowed the British government to solidify its relationship with the Cherokee. The combination of public and political consciousness assured that, in the eighteenth century, the trip was seen as a moment of unqualified success for British colonial ambitions.

Cummings position and role has been interpreted differently over time. During the nineteenth century, historians ascribed Cumming the role of official ambassador from the British crown, something that Cumming himself had denied in his journal, and also raised questions regarding Cummings.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Cumming has been viewed as nothing more than an oddity, 'a one-man firework display wildly emitting sparks and colored lights and blazing rockets' whose arrival coincided with the earliest steps of contemporary Cherokee state formation.<sup>7</sup> I plan to return to the journey and re-introduce Cumming as an important

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<sup>2</sup> For details regarding the impetus for his trip see Lyons, Daniel, *The Environs of London: Being an Historical Account of the Towns Villages and Hamlets, within Twelve Miles of that Capital: Interspersed with Biographical Anecdotes*, Volume 4, (London, 1795-96), p.20

<sup>3</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Number 3037, (Wednesday, September 30, 1730) and Number 3044, (Thursday, October 8 1730): The Journal was reprinted in *The Historical Register of 1731*; Note: Cumming refers to himself in the third person throughout the text.

<sup>4</sup> There is considerable overlap between the two reports; however, the details left out of the first 'claim to fame' piece that appear in the daily journal enable us to gain a better understanding of the events that unfolded.

<sup>5</sup> See Bolton, Herbert Eugene, (ed.), *Arrendondo's Historical Proof of Spain's Title to Georgia*, (Berkeley, 1925).

<sup>6</sup> For the claim of Cumming's official role see: Stocqueler, J.H., *A Familiar History of the United States of America, From the Date of the Earliest Settlements Down to the Present Time*, (London, 1865), p. 95; For his denial with regard to any official sanction of his trip see *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8, 1730; For details with regard to the question of Cummings sanity see J.H., 'Sir. Alexander Cumming', *Notes and Queries*, Series 1, Vol. V. No. 125, p'278.

<sup>7</sup> Steele, William O, *The Cherokee Crown of Tannassey*, (Charlotte North Carolina, 1977), p. xiii. and *Doyles English Colonies in America Vol V*

part of early eighteenth century Cherokee-British interaction and describe a moment when the British imagination of the southeastern Native American population prompted an attempt at political and spatial domination. An attempt concurrently viewed by the Cherokee through their own interpretation of the other, in this case the British. A moment when differing interpretations of colonial interaction are brought into sharp relief.

Arriving in Charles Town in December 1729 and using his title as collateral, Cumming convinced the colonists that he possessed considerable wealth and proposed to ‘settle in Carolina, and do wonderful Things for the Good of the Country.’<sup>8</sup> To solidify his position, and declare his intention to assist the people of the colony, he began to write promissory notes which ‘by his punctual Payment of them upon Sight, in a little Time they acquired a Credit and Currency equal with Money.’ With this secure footing, Cumming began to develop his financial dealings within the colony, buying ‘several large Plantations.’ In addition he opened a loan office issuing more notes bearing a ten-percent interest payment. Using the money gained from these several ventures, he was able to buy an ‘abundance of Gold and Silver and a great Deal of Country Produce which he shipt away continually.’ With his financial and social position secured, Cumming was able to draw on the help of several of the leading traders and merchants to furnish his journey among the Cherokee.<sup>9</sup>

On the afternoon of March 13, 1730, at ‘about five,’ Cumming left the home of Mr. James Kinlock at New Gilmerton, South Carolina, in the company of Indian trader George Chicken and Surveyor George Hunter, and headed into Cherokee country. Three days later, Cumming and his companions, who now included William Cooper, ‘a bold Man, and skilled in the Cherokee Language’, traveled to an underground cave near the home of a Mr. Coxe. Here, we receive we get an early indication of Cumming’s desire to leave his mark in South Carolina, in this case literally.<sup>10</sup> Cumming informs us that ‘Mr. Chicken, and Mr. Coxe, made several marks to show that they had been there.’ Not content to enter just his own name, Cumming branded the cave, and symbolically the land, for Britain engraving ‘King George II of Great Britain, wrote by S.A.C.’<sup>11</sup> By leaving this mark, Cumming was attempting to ensure that the space in which he stood became known not only physically but also conceived of as part of British jurisdictional and intellectual space. This desire to identify, fix and record is seen throughout the journey. Whenever Cumming met an ‘Indian’ he would ‘take his name down

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Extract of a Letter form South Carolina, June 12’, *The ECCHO: or Edinburgh Weekly Journal*, Number LXXXIX (Wednesday September 16, 1730); see also *The Grub Street Journal*, Number 36 (Thursday September 10, 1730)

<sup>9</sup> Cumming returned to England shortly before payment of his loans became due. After his departure, in an attempt to recoup their money, several members of the Charles Town community broke into his treasury. All they found inside were ‘some empty Boxes, old Iron and other Rubbish’ and it was ‘computed’ that he carried off ‘no less than £15000 sterling’ a substantial amount for the period. ‘Extract of a Letter form South Carolina’; Cumming’s Manuscript, Ayer MS 204, Newberry Library, Chicago, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8, 1730

<sup>11</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8, 1730; The cave is marked on George Hunters map to the south side of the Santee River slightly below the Township of Amelia

in his book saying that he had made a friend of him.' By this act Cumming has added each individual to the knowledge and control of the British.

Over the next few days, Cumming continued his journey along the Cherokee Path, the main trading trail into Cherokee Country.<sup>12</sup> Arriving at the Cherokee Town of Keowee on March 23, 1730, the true purpose of his journey was revealed to both the Cherokee and his traveling companions. Over dinner in the house of one of the Town's traders, Cumming was informed that there recently had been 'Messengers from the lower Creeks, with the Cherokees, desiring them to come over to the French Interests.'<sup>13</sup> Cumming suggests in his journal that this warning reinforced the danger that he was under and the courage he showed in his journey. However, I would like to argue instead that this warning provided the catalyst that forced Cumming's next action. As a self-conceived ambassador, acting, in his own mind, on behalf of Britain to visit, define, mark, and thereby control the Cherokee nation, Cumming acted upon the threat of French incursion into the region. Cumming demonstrated his response to the news in the events that unfurled in the Keowee Town House that evening.<sup>14</sup>

The Town House was full, with a reported 300 hundred Cherokees in attendance as well as nine British traders. Cumming entered and waited patiently while the Town's leaders spoke before making his own speech.<sup>15</sup> Cumming began by informing the Cherokee who he was and that he had come as an individual citizen, not as an official ambassador on behalf of King George. He then proposed a toast to the King during which he hoped, if not demanded, that all others would pledge their loyalty and allegiance to King George. After encouraging the shocked traders to fall to their knees, he turned to the Cherokee, revealed the four firearms and the cutlass he had under his cloak, demanded that the 'head Warriors... acknowledge his Majesty King George's Sovereignty over them on their knee.' Joseph Cooper, a trader who was the evening's interpreter also, declared:

If he had known before hand what Sir Alexander would have order'd him to have said, he would not have ventured in the Town-House to have been Interpreter, nor would the Indian Traders have ventured to have been Spectators, believing none of them could have gone out of the Town-House without being murdered, considering how jealous that People had always been of their Liberties.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Cherokee Path, mapped in 1730 by George Hunter, the Surveyor-General of the Province of South Carolina, ran for 130 miles from Charles Town and passed though the Cherokee Lower and Middle Towns before terminating at Settico in the Overhill Towns.

<sup>13</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30 1730

<sup>14</sup> Veteran trader Ludovick Grant, who was in Keowee that evening, left a report corroborating the events that occurred in the Town House. see 'Historical Relation of the Facts Delivered by Ludovick Grant, Indian Trader to His Excellency the Governor of South Carolina', *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, Volume X (1909)

<sup>15</sup> The named Europeans were Joseph Cooper, Ludovick Grant, Joseph Barker, Gregory Haines, Daniel Jenkinson, Thomas Goodale, William Cooper, William Hatton, and John Biles.

<sup>16</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8, 1730

Cumming and his contemporaries leave us no explanation of the Cherokee reaction to this alarming episode, although as all the British lived through the event we must assume that some form of accommodation was met. For Cumming, situated within the British spatial and political understanding, the meeting represented the conquest, or at least the first step in that process, of the Cherokee nation for the British crown. In Cumming's mind, the Town House is no longer a location for the meeting of Cherokee people to discuss and debate the affairs of their Town and through clan affiliation the broader Cherokee nation; the space is now the site where British political authority and control is established. The Town House and the space it occupies now personified Cumming's and through him Britain's, control of this Cherokee village. Cumming viewed the population of the village as British subjects, informing them that if they failed to submit to the king 'they would become no people,' for any population beyond British space had no fixidity, and therefore, no existence.

Cumming's intent to dominate the Cherokee is seen by his response to trader Ludovick Grant. When asked what he had planned to do if the Cherokees present had refused to submit:

he [Cumming] answered with a Wild look, that . . . if any of the Indians had refused the King's health to have taken a brand out of the fire that Burns in the middle of the room and to have set fire to the house. That he would have guarded the door himself and put to death every one that endeavored to make their Escape that they might have all been consumed to ashes.<sup>17</sup>

This statement, which worried the traders who heard it, indicates that, for Cumming, there were only two positions available to the Cherokee, to accept their position as subservient members in British space or death.

To affirm his position and his claim of dominance over the Cherokee, Cumming demanded a second meeting eleven days later, on April 3, 1730, at the Cherokee Town of Nequassee. Cumming informed the members of the Keowee community that he expected that 'one of their head Men should bring full Power from the lower Settlements, another full Powers from the upper Settlements, and the third full Powers from the middle settlements.'<sup>18</sup> In demanding individuals to represent the physical regions of the whole nation, Cumming planned to repeat his conquest of the single village on a national scale.

For those Cherokee in the Keowee Town House on March 23, 1730, operating in a different political understanding, an alternative interpretation of the events of would be realized. James Adair, a contemporary of Cumming, provides us with a clue as to the Cherokee understanding. Writing of Cherokee government Adair notes that:

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<sup>17</sup> Historical relation' Grant, p. 56

<sup>18</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8, 1730

They can only persuade or dissuade the people, by their force of good-nature and clear reasoning, or colouring things, so as to suit their prevailing passions. It is reputed merit alone, that gives them any titles of distinction above the meanest of the people.<sup>19</sup>

What Adair saw as a lack of authority within the administration of the Cherokee was actually recognition that each person's voice and opinion could, and would, be heard in debate. This belief in an egalitarian approach to politics did not mean, however, that every point contained equal value. As the quotation suggests certain people could gain a greater degree of influence through their action or 'merit.' This opens up the possibility for someone with a proven history of success in warfare or negotiation to rise into a position of heightened influence, what Adair referred to as, a 'title of distinction.'

Adair's quotation also suggests that strength of argument and oratorical skills played a large part in any debate. It is therefore possible that an individual could through force of personality and argument influence the policy of the Town. Accepting that all people could be heard and that a powerful debater could gain influence is it possible that this was the route that allowed Cumming to, apparently, dominate the community of Keowee. Cumming's behavior in Charles Town prior to his journey into Cherokee space indicates that Cumming had self-confidence and skills of persuasion, and his willingness to make such a dramatic display of force in the Keowee Town House suggests that he possessed considerable courage and assumed great authority. Both of which may have allowed him to assert power within the space of the Town House.

If we consider the incident at Keowee as an isolated and individual event, the apparent submission of the Cherokee appears puzzling, even allowing for Cumming's oratory skills and assertive behavior. However, if the events of the evening of March 23, 1730 are placed into a broader view, based within a Cherokee understanding, a different image begins to appear. Although Europeans reported, and Cumming believed that his actions he had ensured control and dominion over the Cherokees, in actuality Cumming was absorbed or adopted into Cherokee space.

The first step in understanding this alternate view of Cumming's involvement with the Cherokee focuses on the role of negotiation with Cherokee political life. Cherokee individuals involved in negotiations had authority, in a loose sense, to represent the position of the larger group, but no authority to enter into additional negotiations or agreements without further consultation with the larger group. Cumming's actions, therefore, can be reinterpreted through this understanding. Whereas Cumming saw his request at Keowee to summon other Cherokee leaders, as an instruction to facilitate a broader control, the Cherokee recognized it as an opportunity to adjourn the negotiations and return to the larger group to discuss the next step. For the Cherokee, the single Town of Keowee did not have the authority to commit the whole nation to a position of allegiance. The apparent Cherokee acquiescence in the Keowee Town House on March 23, 1730, was in actuality a necessary step in their political

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<sup>19</sup> Adair, James *History of the American Indians*, (New York, 1974) p. 460

structure, that is, they deferred the negotiations until a larger Cherokee group was able to convene and discuss Cumming's proposal.<sup>20</sup>

Working in tandem with the need for larger group discussion was a second aspect of Cherokee political life, the need for harmony. The Cherokee spatial and political system had at its core the recognition that discrete places needed to be combined through ceremonial means for life to continue. Within political debate, this aspect of the spatial persona played out through the pursuit of harmony. When harmony was threatened, the deferral of decision-making was a common method of maintaining harmony. When involved in negotiations the Cherokee, deflected requests for immediate resolutions instead choosing to withdraw, discuss and return.

An example of the manner in which pursuit of harmony through deflection operated can be found by turning to another of Cummings's contemporaries. On this occasion, we turn to Colonel George Chicken's 1725 embassy to the Cherokee to assist in the explanation of Cherokee reaction to Cumming's action. On Tuesday January 14, 1725 at the Town of Tugaloo, Chicken met with representatives from several Cherokee Towns. During the meeting, Chicken forwarded seven points for discussion, which ranged from details of recent activity among the Creek to the Cherokee relationships with the English. The fifth issue raised by Chicken, detailed below, marked the beginning of the Cherokee process of decision deferral. Chicken raised the question of a standing Cherokee army. He informed the Cherokee that:

... if you would but Consider Yourselves how Numerous you are and how little you would Miss the drawing out of each Town in the Nation a small Number of Men, you would not talk of defending your Towns but would Raise an Army of Men and Defend your Enemies before they come Nigh your Towns.<sup>21</sup>

As the above quotation shows Chicken, operating from within the British understanding assumed that the logic of a single unified national project, such as an army, would make sense and be acceptable to the Cherokee. For the Cherokee, however, the need for separate discrete spaces, i.e. towns, each responsible for its individual defense, was the logical answer to the challenge of an external enemy attack. In order to maintain harmony within negotiations where British and Cherokee views were clearly divergent, and not going to be easily resolved, the assembled Cherokee leaders attempted to defer a decision assuming that Chicken would recognize and accept this tactic.

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<sup>20</sup> Long-term English traders also recognized this need for full national endorsement. While discussing a failed transfer of land from the Cherokee, Grant was to suggest that, the reason for failure was 'because of the head men were not present.' Grant p. 64; for a discussion of the 'pragmatic' attitude by the Cherokee to external threats see Thomas, Robert K., *Cherokee Values and World View*, University of North Carolina 1958, esp. p 14

<sup>21</sup> Boehm, Randolph, (ed.) 'Journal of the Commissioner for Indian Affairs on his Journey to the Cherokees and his Proceedings there', *Records of the British Colonial Office, Class 5 Part 1: Westwood Expansion 1700-1783*, Volume 12, (Frederick, MD., 1972)

Initially the Cherokee promised to ‘all go and consult together abt [sic] what’ Chicken proposed promising to return later with an answer. Upon further discussion, the Cherokee informed Chicken that they would take action upon his suggestion to send out scouts to look for the enemy but, with regard to the formation of a national Cherokee army, they ‘had concluded to send to the other Towns in order to meet them to Concur abt [sic]’ the suggestion. Chicken’s response to this deferment was once more to promote the concept of a unified army. He informed the Cherokee that ‘unless they had a body of men to go out against the enemy when they were discovered that their Scouts would be of little Service to them.’ The Cherokee attempted to defer a decision for a fourth time, and Chicken again pushed for the creation of an army.

The Cherokee then attempted a different approach to defuse and deflect the problem. They informed Chicken that they accepted that ‘if the enemy comes on them before they can gett a body it would not be the Englishes fault because they have given them Notice of it.’ Even with this assurance that blame would not be apportioned to the English, an important concession in a clan based society like the Cherokee where culpability was a key factor in decisions of retaliation. Despite this assurance Chicken still refused to back off and once more pushed for a commitment to a standing army. In a final attempt to deflect the decision, driven, we must assume, by exasperation at Chicken’s continued failure to recognize the appropriate form of negotiation, the Head Warrior of Toxsoah agreed to go out and ‘gett what men he could to goe along with him.’ This final act allowed for an acceptable solution to both parties. Chicken assumed that this was the beginning of a national army with the Head Warrior of Toxsoah as the commander, while the Cherokee saw it as the promise of one man, not of the whole group. Thus after several hours of negotiation, harmony was restored.<sup>22</sup> The use of decision deferment was one intellectual tool available to the Cherokee during their interaction with Cumming. A second involved the Cherokee relationship to personal power.

Individual power for the Cherokee was not a fixed attribute possessed inherently. Rather, it was a potential that the correct behavior could reveal, and incorrect actions could remove. Power was therefore flexible, and no one was able to assess instantly how much power an individual might have. Thus, ‘overt deference and respect afforded the safest course to follow in interpersonal relations. Such behavior minimized the possibility of giving offense

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<sup>22</sup> This harmony ethic has continued to be an important part of Cherokee life. When John Gulick conducted research among the Eastern Cherokee in the mid twentieth century, he observed a similar need writing that

‘When social decisions must be made, involving the resolution of differing points of view, the aim is circumspectly to work out a unanimous decision. An outvoted minority is regarded as a source of conflict and disharmony. Anyone whose views absolutely cannot be accommodated to the otherwise unanimous decision simply withdraws from the proceedings.’ Gulick, John J., ‘The self-corrective service and persistence in Conservation Eastern Cherokee culture’ , *Research Previews*, (1959) p. 6



and, perhaps, suffering hostile repercussions.<sup>23</sup> Cumming's actions, bringing weapons into the Town House and demanding subservience, put him outside the normal rules of behavior for Cherokee negotiations. It made eminent sense for the Cherokees to defer a decision and palliate someone behaving so boldly and aggressively. Yet, these same actions suggested that Cumming possibly possessed personal power or *ulanigv*.<sup>24</sup>

An incident that occurred between Cumming's stance in the Town House of Keowee and his later 'coronation' at Nequassee suggested, from the Cherokee view, that Cumming may have possessed outstanding individual power. On March 27, as Cumming entered the Town of Tassetchee 'there happen'd to be most terrible Thunder, Lightning, and Rain.'<sup>25</sup> One European who had lived with the Cherokee for ten years in the early eighteenth century reported that Cherokee perceived thunder and lightning as bringing messages from spiritual beings. Individuals who assumed themselves to be superior to others and gave 'themselves over to al sort of crulletie and abominations' would be struck down by lightening as punishment for their inappropriate behavior. However, if lightening did not strike the offender but fell 'hard by Them,' then 'that is a message' for others to 'ammend thire lives and To obey thire seperriors.'<sup>26</sup> Cumming's decision to take guns into the Town house and demand the acquiescence of the Cherokees present would appear to locate him as one claiming undue prestige and superiority. Yet a Cherokee reading of the meteorological events of the evening of March 27 when Cumming remained unscathed by the thunder and lightning suggested that Cumming possessed strong spiritual power.

Cherokee caution regarding power combined with their preference to defer decisions when unanimity could not be reached suggest another was to understand the events involving Cumming between March 23 and April 3, 1730. Seen from a Cherokee perspective Cumming neither controlled nor dominated the proceedings. Instead, Cherokees constructed a meaning and a place for Cumming that allowed him to be respected but not accepted. They recognized the potential Cumming held but did not ascribe him authority. Rather, the Cherokees found a course within their political understanding to defer any decision making to a later date.

After leaving Tassetchee, Cumming headed to Great Tellico where he unwittingly describes an alternative set of political actions being played out. The actions taken by 'Moytoy, the Head Warrior' shift Cumming's journey from a daring and aggressive act of

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<sup>23</sup> Fogelson Raymond D Cherokee Notions of Power', in Fogelson, Raymond D., and Adams, Richard N, (eds.) *The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies from Asia, Oceania, and the New World*, (New York, 1977), pp. 189-90

<sup>24</sup> Fogelson Raymond D Cherokee Notions of Power', in Fogelson, Raymond D., and Adams, Richard N, (eds.) *The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies from Asia, Oceania, and the New World*, (New York, 1977)

<sup>25</sup> 'Account of the Cherrokee Indians, and of Sir Alexander Cuming's Journey Amongst Them', *The Historical Register*, Vol, XVI, No. LXI (1731), p. 3

<sup>26</sup> Longe, Alexander 'Small Postscript on the ways and manners of the Indians called Cherokees' *Southern Indian Studies*, Volume XXI, (October 1969), p. 39

British politics to capture the Cherokee within British space, to a move by the leader of one Cherokee Town to politically adopt Cumming, thereby creating a link between the Cherokee and the British. In the process, Cumming moves from being a King to being a pawn of Cherokee politics.

Arriving at Great Tellico on March 29, 1730, Cumming comments that he saw ‘a great many Enemies Scalps, brought in and put upon Poles at the Warriors doors.’<sup>27</sup> This is his first mention of the martial prowess of the Cherokee. Two interpretations can be made of this display. The first would be to suggest that Cumming, influenced by the scalps, saw the Town and its leader as a dominant force in Cherokee society. That he later positioned Moytoy as ‘Emperor of the Cherokee’ reinforces this view. By asserting control over Moytoy, Cumming, has created a fixed hierarchical structure within Cherokee society, which as a member as a member of the British aristocracy he would both understand and feel comfortable within. The second interpretation inverts the first. That is the possibility that the scalps had been intentionally displayed by the Town not to assert Moytoy’s primacy in Cherokee society but to demonstrate his skill as a warrior. As a warrior Moytoy was situated in the Cherokee space that dealt with diplomatic relations with outsiders, thereby offering himself as a suitable person to be the focus of interaction between Cumming and the broader Cherokee polity. Cumming saw an opportunity to assert British domination and control over the Cherokee, whereas the Head Warrior, Moytoy, saw an opportunity to create a link between the British and the Cherokee through Cumming. It appears that both parties viewed the meeting through the lens of their own political understanding.

During an initial meeting with Moytoy in the Great Tellico Town House, Cumming is informed that there had been discussion the previous year ‘among the several Towns’ of the Cherokee to make ‘Moytoy Emperor over the whole, but that now it must be whatever Sir Alexander pleased.’<sup>28</sup> With this statement Cumming drops his first indication that he personally will assume a position of dominance among the Cherokee, for if the man whom the Cherokee have already considered for leadership is prepared to submit to Cumming, then what apart from total dominance are the British to expect?<sup>29</sup>

The events that unfolded are, however, given a different light when viewed through the Cherokee spatial persona. Any power that Moytoy claimed was not to position himself as Principal Chief among the Cherokee. Rather he sought to position himself as the man who could control the potential power that Cumming possessed and by that control establish a link between the Cherokee and British.<sup>30</sup> The following day, March 30, while still in Great Tellico, Cumming was involved in another Cherokee ceremony, writing that he was ‘Particularly distinguished in the Town-house by Moytoy, where the Indians sung songs,

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<sup>27</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730 and Thursday, October 8 1730

<sup>28</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8 1730

<sup>29</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8 1730

<sup>30</sup> It must be remembered that the translator, or linguist, in these negotiations was Ludovick Grant, a trader based in Great Tellico who therefore had reason to promote the importance of the leader of his Town,

danced, and stroked his Head and Body over with Eagles tails.' This event was not included in Cumming's first published overview of his trip. In that document he included instead the later meeting at Nequassee on April 3, thereby highlighting the perceived coronation. However, for the Cherokee the March 30 meeting had considerable significance, for it provided the first step in linking Cumming and the Cherokee. By ensuring that the ceremony took place in the Town House of Great Tellico, and by assuming a leading role in the ceremony, Moytoy placed himself in the center of this process and positioned himself to act as spatial ambassador of the Cherokee.

The next major incident, and for Cumming the culmination of his ascendancy to leadership of the Cherokee, was the bestowing of the crown of Tannassy during his alleged coronation. This occurred on April 3, 1730, at the Town of Nequassee, where the 'Kings, Princes, Warriors, Conjurers, and Beloved Men were all met.'<sup>31</sup> Cumming described the events in the Nequassee Town House in the following terms:

Here with great Solemity Sir Alexander was placed in a Chair, by Moytoy's Orders, Moytoy and the Conjurers standing about him, while the warriors stroked him with 13 Eagles tails and their Singers sung from Morning to Night, and, as their Custom is on Solemn Occasions, they fasted the whole Day.<sup>32</sup>

Cumming informs us that he gave a speech during the coronation proceedings in which he detailed the power of the King and demanded the Cherokee's submission. Additionally he 'ordered that the Head Warriors should answer for their Conduct of the People to Moytoy, whom he appointed their Head, by the unanimous Consent of the whole People.'<sup>33</sup> For Cumming and his readers the image is clear. The Cherokee at this moment became subjects of Britain and if not totally controlled were at least no longer politically outside the British political space. In order to give physical presence to the events, Cumming collected not only the signed affidavits of the British traders present but in addition 'as Evidence of the Truth of what had happened' brought to London seven Cherokee.<sup>34</sup>

Cumming's actions on, and reaction and comments to, the events of April 3 indicate the manner in which a British spatial understanding, based upon fixidity and control, operates within a political act.<sup>35</sup> Cumming reached out from British space, looking for an opportunity to act *upon* the Cherokee, not to interact *with* them. At the first opportunity Cumming used force in an attempt to dominate and control the Cherokee, and as he continued his journey, he attempted forms of control, meeting Cherokees and recording names, fixing them in the

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<sup>31</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730

<sup>32</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730

<sup>33</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730

<sup>34</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730

<sup>35</sup> British and Cherokee spatial understandings are examined in my doctoral dissertation *Space the Final Frontier: Spatial Understandings in the eighteenth century American Southeast*, (University of California, Riverside, 2006)

record of his journey. Buoyed by early success he pushed his reach further, demanding a meeting with the leaders of the whole nation. At this later meeting at Nequassee, Cumming considers himself to have been crowned king of the Cherokee, thereby both securing his position and more importantly fixing the Cherokee nation within the knowledge of the English. One of his first acts is to dictate the structure of society and outline the political relationship between the British and the Cherokee, ordering 'the head Warriors should answer for the Conduct of their People to *Moytoy*, whom he appointed their head . . . and he to answer to Sir *Alexander*.'<sup>36</sup>

Historian Verner W. Crane correctly argues that the Cherokee 'had no real notion of acknowledging English 'sovereignty,' much less of parting with their lands to either Cumming himself or to the 'Great Man on the other side of the water.' Nevertheless, it is clear that something of a political and ceremonial nature did occur on this date. The Cherokee did meet in national council and Cumming was involved in some form of ceremony in front of the assembled Cherokee. If the events do not represent Cherokee submission to British authority then what do they represent? I suggested earlier that the events in Keowee as described by Cumming have a different meaning when viewed through the spatio-political behavior of the Cherokee. I now want to expand this argument further and refocus the view of Cumming's entire journey through the spatial and political understanding of the Cherokee.

Firstly, let us examine the importance and significance of the national council at which Cumming claims to have obtained sovereignty. The dramatic ceremony that Cumming viewed as a coronation may not be as dramatic or as singularly esteemed as Cumming would have us believe. In 1725, five years before Cumming's journey, Colonel George Chicken traveled throughout the Cherokee nation.<sup>37</sup> Chicken was not there to assert his control over the Cherokee but rather to convey a message or 'talk' from the South Carolina authorities. Like Cumming, Chicken spent only a short time in Cherokee space traveling from Town to Town before speaking to a gathering of all Towns. Chicken's actions suggest that in contradiction to Cumming's claim that the meeting surrounding his coronation was such a gathering as 'never was seen at any one time in that Country,' it was not unusual for the Cherokee to gather in large numbers to hear the 'talks' of British visitors. Chicken's 1725 journey provides another inconsistency in Cumming's claims. Chicken describes his own arrival in Keewohee (the Town Cumming referred to as Keowee), in the following manner:

At my Arrival here King Crow and the head men were out of the Town at their Plantations and a Messenger being sent to inform them of my Arrival, they Imediatly[sic]

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<sup>36</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730; If we compare this declaration of British spatial understanding, and the sense of control that it contains, to the following quotation from Robinson Crusoe upon his return to the island we find some interesting parallels. 'I shar'd the Island into Parts with 'em, reserv'd to my self the Property of the whole, but gave them such parts respectively as they agreed on.' Both Crusoe and Cumming, after claiming possession and control of the physical and intellectual space in which they found themselves, feel confident and able to redistribute that space to others. Defoe, Daniel, *Robinson Crusoe*, (W.W. Norton, 1975) Shinagle, Michael, (ed.), p. 220

<sup>37</sup> Colonel George Chicken was father to the George Chicken who later accompanied Cumming.

Repaired to the Town and soon after, they after their Ceremonial way placed me in a Great Chair in the most Publick Place in the Town and set down by me themself's fanning me with Eagles Feathers.<sup>38</sup>

The similarity between this ceremony and that which Cumming experienced in Nequassee is obvious. Therefore, we can suggest that the ceremony Cumming experienced was not as he thought, a coronation, but rather an often-used method to incorporate an external individual. It represented a political adoption which allowed the Cherokees to establish a link to an external discrete space. Thus, allowing the voice of that outside space to be heard. Additionally, Cumming's positioning of Moytoy as 'Emperor' in order to verify British control over the Cherokee is also open to a Cherokee interpretation. Moytoy's efforts can also be seen as his attempt to place himself as the gatekeeper to contact with the British. Moytoy did not declare himself sovereign over the Cherokee, although the British would increasingly view him as if he had but that he offered himself as the person who would sponsor Cumming's interaction and linkage with the Cherokee nation.

The final point to be made with regard to the ceremony of April 3, 1730 concerns the artifact that gave Cumming's claim of coronation its greatest legitimacy, the crown of Tannassy.<sup>39</sup> Cumming, in the published details of his journey, mentions the crown and ceremony simultaneously tying together the ceremony and the crown. However, a closer reading of the events reveals that Cumming did not receive the crown on the day of the ceremony, as his journal implied, but on the following day, suggesting a dissociation between event and artifact. There are other inconsistencies in the tale of the crown and how it came into Cumming's possession. The quotation below, from Cumming's initial overview report of the journey, details Moytoy's and the Cherokee's submission to Cumming and positions the crown as a symbol of that capitulation.

*April 4.* The Crown was brought from great *Tannassie*, which, with five Eagles tails and four Scalps of their Enemies, Moytoy presented to Sir *Alexander*, empowering him to lay the same at His Majesty's Feet.<sup>40</sup>

For the reading audience, this is a clear assertion that the Cherokee are within the British spatial and political knowledge as a people who are known and importantly controlled by the British. The next quotation, taken from Cumming's later day-by-day account, offers a subtle but significant shift in the role of the crown.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Colonel Chicken's Journal to the Cherokee, 1725' Mereness, Newton D., *Travels in the American Colonies*, (New York, 1916), p. 101.

<sup>39</sup> Ludovick Grant described Cumming's "crown" as a 'cap' worn by beloved men which 'resembles a wig and is made of Possum's Hair Dyed Red or Yellow.' Grant *Historical Relation*, p. 57

<sup>40</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730

*April 4.* The Solemnity continued, Sir *Alexander* made some Presents, received their Crown, Eagles tails, and Scalps of their Enemies, to be laid at his Majesty King *George's* Feet.<sup>41</sup>

The crown has shifted position. It is no longer offered to Cumming as a symbol of obsequiousness but rather as a gift given after and in return for, 'Presents' given to the Cherokee by Cumming. This subtle movement in the proceeding has turned the object from a symbol of authority to a symbol of reciprocal contact.

Examining the reports of other Europeans present at the presumed coronation ceremony further complicates the role of the crown. In his journal, Cumming suggests that as early as March 30 the possibility of his coronation was raised, writing that Moytoy and Jacob 'determined to present him [Cumming] with the crown of Tannassy.'<sup>42</sup> This early introduction of the supposed coronation reinforces Cumming's later assertion of authority. A different interpretation comes from trader Ludovick Grant, who explains the crown's introduction in the following terms:

From Telliguo we rode over to Tannassee and afterwards returned by Nequasse Where several Traders met us and a good many Indians. Sir Alexander had been informed of all the ceremonies that are used in making a head beloved man, of which there are a great many in the nation. They are called Ouka, and we translate that word king, so we call the Cap, he wears upon that occasion his Crown . . . Sir Alexander was very desirous to see one of them, and there being none at that Town One was sent for to some other Town. He Expressed Great Satisfaction at Seeing of it, and he told the Indians that he would carry it to England and give it to the great King George.<sup>43</sup>

Grant, who was with Cumming in both Great Tellico and Nequassee, indicates that, rather than being discussed prior to the ceremony of April 3, the crown was introduced at a later date. Additionally, it appears that the Cherokees had no intention of presenting the artifact to Cumming as a crown or any symbol of authority, but rather that it was an ethnographic artifact displayed only upon Cumming's insistence.

Finally, we must consider the role that physical geography played in the events that occurred during Cumming's journey, exploring the role that different spaces played in the Cherokees interaction with Cumming. The claimed coronation takes place in Nequassee and Cumming asserts that it is Moytoy, of Great Tellico, who performs the act. The crown itself comes from a third discrete Town location, Tannassee. This diversity of geographical location involvement in the interaction between the Cherokee and Cumming is expanded following Cumming's supposed coronation. On April 6, 1730, during his return to Charles Town, Cumming informs us that they 'proceeded to *Ookunny*, where Sir *Alexander* found a House

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<sup>41</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8 1730

<sup>42</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Thursday, October 8 1730

<sup>43</sup> Grant *Historical Relation*, p. 57

built for him.<sup>44</sup> Cumming will later claim that the house came with ‘certain Territories there unto belonging as an acknowledgement’ of his position ‘as their Governor & Lawgiver,’ stating that additional space was assigned to him ‘in every Town through which Sir Alexander had passed in his journey throughout the mountains.’<sup>45</sup> This act, the linkage between landholding and political power, would appear logical in Cumming’s spatial understanding, as it matched the associations seen within the framework of hierarchical and political control that operated in Britain at the time.

The act of constructing a house for Cumming adds a further aspect to the Cherokee understanding of Cumming’s visit. By constructing a house for Cumming, in a Cherokee Town, Ookunny, and in a Cherokee style, the Cherokee have positioned and included Cumming in their physical and intellectual space. They have created a way for Cumming to have a stake in one of the two aspects of Cherokee national membership: Town affiliation.

The positioning of Cumming’s residence in Ookunny, which appears to be a village with ties to the Township of Keowee, achieves two further objectives.<sup>46</sup> Firstly, it places Cumming at the edge of Cherokee space in the region most closely related to Charles Town, thereby increasing the ease of communication between British and Cherokee space. Secondly, it offers the intriguing possibility that Cumming may have acquired some form of national Cherokee membership, clan affiliation, for he now has links to the Upper Settlements through Great Tellico and Tannasse, to the Middle Settlements through Nequassee, and to the Lower Settlements through Ookunny and Keowee.

Taking all these points together, we find that an incident reported by an English traveler as a strong claim to European action based on a spatial and political understanding of control and domination is, in fact, a powerful demonstration of Cherokee authority.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730

<sup>45</sup> Cumming’s Manuscript, Ayer MS 204, Newberry Library, Chicago, p. 22 and 26

<sup>46</sup> Cumming reports that the ‘King, who had been just then made at Ookunny’ was the same person as the ‘King of Keowee’, *The Daily Journal*, Wednesday, September 30, 1730