A PERSONAL PREFACE

DAVID HURST THOMAS

Thomas D. Nicholson, a former director of the American Museum of Natural History, was fond of saying "It's not science until it's published." Tom was right, and he knew that "science" sometimes takes a while to finish.

The truth is that most of the fieldwork described here was finished by 1980, and this monograph could (should) have been published a quarter-century ago.[1] But it wasn't, and something really needs to be said about the delay.

In looking back, I believe the problem arose from a series of interrelated procedural, analytical, and theoretical complications that arose in the early 1980s. So, as a preamble to the empirical and theoretical dialogue that follows, let me explain those contexts and address some of the roadblocks encountered along the way.

After my first visit to St. Catherines Island (in 1974), we set out a modest research agenda to locate and test the various burial mounds scattered across the island. Our team also spent some time testing the various shell middens at Meeting House Field, a well-known late prehistoric site not far from the research compound. Encouraged by our initial results, the Edward John Noble Foundation invited me to frame a longer-term research design for St. Catherines Island, and I did that.

The most concrete result of this little visionary exercise was the ambitiously-titled monograph *The Anthropology of St. Catherines Island: 1. The Natural and Cultural History*, published as an Anthropological Paper of the American Museum of Natural History (Thomas et al., 1978). My coauthors were (1) ethnohistorian Grant Jones, who presented a brilliant reanalysis of the Guale Indians, the last aboriginal population to live on St. Catherines Island, (2) Roger Durham, a coastal Georgia historian who fleshed out complexities of post-Spanish historiography, and (3) Clark Spencer Larsen, my coprincipal investigator in those early mortuary excavations (who soon thereafter defended his doctoral dissertation on the bioarchaeology of St. Catherines Island).

The "natural and cultural history" monograph has aged reasonably well over the decades. It remains in print and still provides a useful overview of St. Catherines Island ecology. But its enduring legacy, in my view, is Grant Jones' contribution entitled simply "The Ethnohistory of the Guale Coast through 1684" (Jones, 1978). In this 33-page mini-classic, Grant not only summarized his comprehensive reevaluation of the key French and Spanish sources, but he also presented a still-controversial thesis. By taking exception to the prevailing ethnographic view of the 16th century Guale Indians (derived largely from the early Jesuit documents), Jones suggested an entirely new way of viewing the long-extinct aboriginal residents of the Georgia coast. Jones believed that the Jesuits had overstated the isolation of the Guale from the interior, the unproductivity of Guale horticulture, and the scattered quality of Guale settlements. Instead, he argued that, despite environmental and adaptive differences from better-known Mississippian groups, the Guale and the interior groups shared many basic features, including chiefdom-level political organization, military federations, matrilineality, and dual aspects of organization. Thus arose the "Guale problem," the singular issue that would frame the next 3 decades of our landscape research on St. Catherines Island.

One can feel free to argue either position—because there's ample support for both arguments in the extant ethnohistorical literature. A more satisfactory resolution to the Guale problem, it seems to me—then as now—is to articulate the conflicting ethnohistorical documentation with the wealth of archaeological evidence that lies out there, somewhere, buried beneath the live oaks, the palmetto thickets, and the hickory ridges that dominate the modern St. Catherines Island landscape.

Intrigued by the possibilities and promise of the archaeological record, we framed an Island-wide transect survey, setting out to recover the data necessary to resolve the Guale problem. Here's where we encountered our first *procedural* problem, an unintended consequence of our ambitious regional approach.

In framing a 20 percent, randomized, probabilistic transect survey across the entirety of St. Catherines Island, we defined two explicit objectives: (1) to obtain a relatively unbiased sample of the surviving archaeological record, and (2) to locate the long-lost Mission Santa Catalina de Guale (Thomas, 1987). Over a 3-year period (1977–1980), we accomplished both goals. Although locating and testing 122 archaeological sites in the Island-wide survey—and defining the empirical backbone of this monograph—we quickly became distracted with testing and exploring the newly discovered mission site. And this distraction with Mission Santa Catalina de Guale lasted more than 2 decades (Thomas, 1987, 1988, 1992, 1995).

We did not, of course, completely ignore the Island-wide survey throughout the 1980s and 1990s. We analyzed most of the resulting collections—the ceramics, the *Mercenaria* and radiocarbon samples, and so forth—in our laboratories at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Elizabeth Reitz and her students at the University of Georgia identified and interpreted the vertebrate zooarchaeological remains. Gale Bishop and Harold Rollins, working with students and associates, tackled the long-term geomorphological evolution of St. Catherines Island. But make no mistake about it—the precontact archaeological sites discovered and tested during the Island-wide survey took a backseat to our intensive excavations at Mission Santa Catalina de Guale.

And even beyond the rush of exploring, hands-on, a Franciscan mission that had been lost for more than 300 years, we were also forced to confront complexities arising from the unruly dataset consisting of 122 Island-wide transect survey sites. We lacked the guidelines and protocols for approaching such an extensive, regional sample, and several major *analytical* problems conspired to undermine (at least temporarily) our understanding of these archaeological results, uncertainties that further stalled publication of our findings.

The first issue was microchonological. As discussed in chapter 17, we spent a decade (during the 1970s and 1980s) trying to find a way for monitoring seasonal variability across the surviving aboriginal sites on St. Catherines Island. Working with modern and archaeological specimens of hard clams (*Mercenaria*), we turned up some unexpected results and were unsure how best to proceed. Previous studies of seasonality in *Mercenaria* along the eastern seaboard—all of them conducted north of the Chesapeake Bay region—had defined a characteristic pattern of rapid summer growth, followed by quiescence during the colder winter months. Translated to archaeological specimens, this meant that fast-growth was a summer phenomenon, and slow-growth took place in the winter. But our research, conducted in close collaboration with George R. Clark II, demonstrated just the opposite pattern—rapid wintertime growth followed by severely slowed growth during the summer months. Although our modern *Mercenaria* control sample confirmed this patterning, we were reluctant to project these results onto the large sample of sites generated in the Island-wide transect survey without some convincing, independent confirmation. But where to find such "convincing, independent" evidence?

We were stalemated for a decade, until Elizabeth Reitz suggested that her student, Fred Andrus, undertake a detailed study of oxygen isotopes in modern and archaeological populations of *Mercenaria*. Funded for a year by the Edward John Noble Foundation and the American Museum of Natural History, Andrus spent the next year visiting St. Catherines monthly to collect a systematic sample of modern hard clams (in the process, earning himself the moniker "Full Moon Fred" among St. Catherines Island staffers). This research, reported here in chapter 18, provided the linkages and confirmations necessary to support our initial

findings: Indeed, as it turns out, hard clams along Georgia Bight grow much more rapidly in the winter than in the summer (and independent research by Douglas Jones and Irvy Quitmyer further confirmed these same results, as discussed in chap. 17). Andrus' findings confirmed our preliminary findings and paved the way for the extensive analysis of incremental growth and seasonality that anchors the approach to foraging variability presented in this volume.

A second analytical problem arose in the radiocarbon chronology of St. Catherines Island. More than 3 decades ago, Joseph Caldwell recognized the potential for combining radiocarbon dating with ceramic analysis to establish the cultural chronology of the Georgia coast (Caldwell, 1970). But, given the realities of coastal archaeology, Caldwell found it necessary to process both charcoal and marine shell samples to assess the ceramic chronology; at the time, he commented that the marine dates seemed somehow older than the charcoal dates. Although Caldwell used marine and charcoal dates interchangeably in his chronological analysis, he cautioned that ''of course we shall continue to look for an oyster shell correction factor and other factors based on the available amount of radiocarbon in the biosphere at a particular time'' (Caldwell, 1971: 1). Ten years later, in our own excavations of several Refuge-Deptford burial mounds on St. Catherines Island, we followed Caldwell's lead. While paying lip service to potential problems with ''reservoir effects,'' we basically dismissed the problem (Thomas and Larsen, 1979: 138).

But as we worked through the data, we eventually accumulated nearly a dozen paired charcoal–shell dates that convincingly demonstrated the degree to which reservoir effects were skewing our St. Catherines Island results. This is why, in the mid-1980s, we set out to ''solve'' the reservoir problem for the southeastern Atlantic coastline. Contacting a number of natural history museums with relevant collections, we obtained nine mollusk samples that seemed to provide a diversified mix of known-age, pre-bomb specimens, spanning the Atlantic coastline from Beaufort (North Carolina) to Cocoa (Florida). By radiocarbon dating each specimen, we hoped to derive a regionally consistent *reservoir correction* for processing marine shell dates from archaeological specimens.

But the results of this pilot study were disappointing: Because of the tremendous variability in the radiocarbon determinations on these known-age specimens, we gave up trying to resolve the reservoir problem for the Georgia Bight. A decade passed before we decided to move away from an overarching reservoir correction spanning the Carolina–Georgia–Florida coastline. Instead, we decided to focus our efforts strictly on St. Catherines Island (which was, after all, the reason for our interest in the ''reservoir correction'' in the first place).

But where to find a decent sample of (1) known age, (2) pre-bomb mollusks, (3) from St. Catherines Island, Georgia? After kicking this problem around with Mr. Royce Hayes (Superintendent of St. Catherines Island), one of us—we each credit the other for this insight—realized the relevance of the late 19th century oyster industry that once thrived on St. Catherines Island. Over the years, we both had repeatedly visited the three rusty oyster boilers that still survive on the island, mute testimony to the once-flourishing oyster business in the tidal waters of St. Catherines Island. Each boiler is today surrounded by huge factory middens, comprised of *Crassostrea* harvested between about 1900 and 1920. Anticipating that such known-age, pre-bomb mollusk shells might be a useful addition to the reservoir effect study, Royce Hayes harvested the first of these industrial oyster samples in 1987, and we processed several additional samples in the process of reservoir correction research. This is how the 19th century commercial oyster samples helped us solve our second analytical problem.

The oyster boiler samples provided the internally consistent results necessary to derive an accurate reservoir correction factor for St. Catherines Island (-134 ± 26 radiocarbon years) that brings the charcoal and marine shell samples into line. As a direct result, we now have a workable database of

251 comparable ^{14}C dates from archaeological contexts on St. Catherines Island. Of these, we could extract 110 radiocarbon dates that were convincingly associated with aboriginal ceramic assemblages. These data allowed us to test Chester DePratter's (1979, 1991) northern Georgia ceramic chronology against independent chronostratigraphic evidence (a test that Chester himself had called for a decade earlier). The resulting St. Catherines Island ceramic chronology enabled us to control the temporal dimension across the hundreds of sites discussed in this monograph. This solved our third analytical problem.

But, even with the issues of microchronology, macrochronology, and ceramic sequence satisfactorily resolved (for now), we still faced a *theoretical* difficulty, and, in many ways, this was the most difficult problem of all. While making some headway to resolve the procedural and analytical issues raised in our study of aboriginal landscapes on St. Catherines Island, we still lacked the theoretical framework necessary to merge the parts with the whole.

During our initial fieldwork on St. Catherines Island (in the mid-1970s), we were simultaneously struggling to establish a workable epistemological framework to address the archaeology of Monitor Valley, Nevada. How could Binford's (1980) forager–collector model capture the broadscale adaptive diversity, but fail to explain why an almost global level of variability should exist in such a small area? At the time, I lamented that "we currently lack the theoretical models to explain that variability" (Thomas, 1983a: 39) and optimistically suggested that such a general theory would likely evolve through the interplay of innovative archaeological fieldwork and continued research in mid-range theory building.

Although noting the potentials of optimal foraging studies to bridge the gap between archaeological data and general theory (Thomas, 1983a: 18, 1986a, 1989: 543–550), I was critical of the way in which the archaeological evidence was treated in early applications of optimal foraging theory. I felt that general theoretical grounding would evolve through an intensive focus on building mid-range archaeological theory (to attribute meaning to our empirical observations). But I was wrong.

The breakthrough in general theory, as it turns out, came from a different direction. Particularly over the past decade, research in human behavioral ecology has achieved a remarkable symbiosis that articulates general evolutionary theory with high-quality archaeological data. My earlier reservations notwithstanding, I now understand that human behavioral ecology does indeed provide a workable general theoretical framework for approaching the long-term archaeological record of St. Catherines Island (and elsewhere). As discussed at some length (in part I of this monograph), we have wholeheartedly embraced the overarching theoretical framework known as optimal foraging theory, an outgrowth of the more general paradigm of human behavioral ecology. In particular, we have drawn upon a series of specific models—the diet-breadth model, the prey-choice model, and central place foraging theory—adopting certain simplifying assumptions and constraints, then deriving testable hypotheses about foraging behavior under certain environmental circumstances. Our research team has buttressed this approach with 2 years of optimal foraging experiments on the resource base of modern St. Catherines Island, in which we attempted to derive procurement and return rates for key marine and terrestrial resources. This monograph presents the results of these experiments and argues for their relevance to the archaeological record of St. Catherines Island.

This, then, is why the Island-wide research remained unpublished for a quarter century. This delay is regrettable because some of our collaborators dutifully finished their contributions in a timely manner and were forced to watch (gracefully, in most cases) their best efforts languish for too long a time. We also failed in making the basic field data available to our colleagues working on the Georgia coast and to those interested in coastal foragers elsewhere in the world. Timely publication should always remain an archaeological virtue, and I apologize for taking so long.

But the upside is this: Except for the barest descriptions, much of what we would have published 25 years ago would have been wrong—big time. Our seasonal inferences would have been largely unsupported; our radiocarbon comparisons would have been suspect, our faith in the ceramic chronology would have been just that (''faith''), and our theoretical grounding would have been incomplete, if not misguided.[2]

This is why I see this publication as a mixed blessing—beyond late, but probably, better for the delay.

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INTRODUCTION

Four deceptively simple questions have guided our long-term research into the aboriginal lifeways of St. Catherines Island:

1. How and why did the human landscape (settlement patterns and land use) change through time?
2. To what extent were subsistence and settlement patterns shaped by human population increase, intensification, and competition for resources?
3. What factors can account for the emergence of social inequality in Georgia's Sea Islands?
4. Can systematically collected archaeological evidence resolve the conflicting ethnohistoric interpretations of the aboriginal Georgia coast (the so-called "Guale problem")?

In this monograph, written by more than two dozen collaborators, we divide the presentation into three major parts, each one developing a somewhat different perspective on the aboriginal landscapes of St. Catherines Island.

Part I provides a context for the inquiry, describing the current thinking about the nature of Guale Indian society and reconstructing the changing coastal environments in which these aboriginal people (and their ancestors) lived for 5 millennia. This is a story of shifting physical and intellectual landscapes, from the dynamics of coastal geomorphology to the differing paradigms that archaeologists brought with them to St. Catherines Island. We also address the theoretical landscape that informs our current research program. We employ the general paradigm of human behavioral ecology, describing the specific models employed, addressing the assumptions involved with each approach, and summarizing the results of the extensive optimal foraging experiments that we conducted across the diverse habitats of St. Catherines Island. This part concludes with a series of specific, testable hypotheses regarding the subsistence and settlement practices of these aboriginal foragers and farmers, framed into the research design we employed to test these hypotheses.

Part II defines the chronological controls derived to monitor the temporal landscape of St. Catherines Island. We discuss the strengths and weakness of radiocarbon approaches available to us, and derive an island-specific reservoir correction factor necessary to integrate results from marine and terrestrial sampling. After developing a database of 251 radiocarbon dates from St. Catherines Island contexts, we compare this radiocarbon chronology with the established ceramic sequence for the region. We also develop a method of incremental growth sequencing in *Mercenaria mercenaria* to establish seasonality estimates for nearly 100 of the archaeological sites tested in the Island-wide survey.

Part II also presents the specifics of the archaeological landscape, sampled across the diverse habitats of St. Catherines Island. We present the site-by-site results of the Island-wide and shoreline archaeological surveys, describing the artifacts and zooarchaeological remains recovered. We also include a critical reanalysis of the mortuary evidence from St. Catherines Island and summarize our findings for the more extensive excavations at the Meeting House Field and Fallen Tree sites.

Part III draws together and synthesizes the diverse evidence presented in the first two parts of the monograph. Chapter 29 and chapter 30 combine the geomorphological and archaeological findings to reconstruct, in some detail, the changing configuration of St. Catherines Island during the past 5 millennia. We then summarize the aboriginal landscape on a phase-by-phase basis, addressing the available information regarding chronology, settlement pattern, subsistence, seasonality, bioarchaeology, and ritual activity from the Late Archaic through Spanish mission periods.

Finally, we examine the various hypotheses advanced through the paradigm of human behavior ecology. Chapter 31 and chapter 32 addresses the expectations derived from the diet-breadth model, particularly looking at prey choice and resource depression among the highest-ranking taxa, especially white-tailed deer, diamondback terrapin, saltwater fishing, and shellfish collecting. The next chapter looks at central place foraging

and patch choice modeling, evaluating long-term trends in site positioning on the Pleistocene core and Holocene beach ridges of St. Catherines Island. Finally, in chapter 33, we evaluate the evidence for population increase, occupational periodicity, resource intensification, and the emergence of social inequality along the aboriginal Georgia coast. The monograph ends with a reconsideration of the Guale problem in light of the new data available on economic intensification, residential mobility, and paleoclimatic fluctuations.

NOTES

1. Actually, the excavations at Fallen Tree and Meeting House Field continued through the mid-1980s, and we have conducted a number of additional, follow-up studies in recent years. We are also engaged in long-term excavations at the St. Catherines Shell Ring (mentioned briefly in chap. 20, this volume). Chapter 1 explains how the various archaeological projects on St. Catherines Island fit together.

2. And I certainly harbor no illusions that we've offered anything approaching a "final word" in these pages. We have not.