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José Iriarte

J. Christopher Gillam

University of South Carolina - Columbia, gillamc@mailbox.sc.edu

Oscar Marozzi

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Savannah River Archaeology Research

Archaeology of the Late Holocene Taquara/Itararé Culture in Argentina

By José Iriarte, J. Christopher Gillam, and Oscar Marozzi

Research on the site distribution, mound architecture, and social complexity of the late Holocene Taquara/Itararé Culture is beginning to shed new light on the formative cultures of eastern South America. In August 2006 and March 2007, test pit excavations, surface surveys, and geophysical mapping at the prehistoric mound complex (site PM01) near El Dorado in Misiones Province, Argentina, revealed new information on the complex architecture and lifeway of this prehistoric culture (Fig. 1). This research may also yield cross-cultural insight into the late Holocene mound-building cultures of South Carolina and the greater Southeast of North America that parallel in many ways the cultural developments in other regions of the Americas during that time.

Site PM01 is a ceremonial mound complex that once contained a central mound surrounded by an earthen embankment or ring, several connecting earthen rings, and an avenue with parallel earthen embankments. Only the central mound and portions of the primary and one secondary ring enclosure remain today. Surprisingly, excavations in the central mound, approximately 20 meters in diameter and two meters high, at site PM01 revealed no features of any kind, and

only small artifacts of secondary deposition from mound construction were recovered. This suggests the possibility of a single stage of construction. The consistency of the region's ancient red soils and lack of cultural features or other debris in

Small sherds were recovered, but these also appeared to be of secondary deposition or the remnants of small broken vessels: no complete vessels were recovered. The zone between the central mound and earthen ring was devoid of artifacts and features, highlighting its significance as ritual space.

Resistivity mapping in March 2007 confirmed the results of the test pits, with multiple features found within and outside of the earthen ring and no features between the ring and central mound.

Unfortunately, modern agricultural practices have leveled several adjacent mounded rings that once connected to the central mound and ring, in addition to destroying nearby ring features at sites within 2.5-kilometers of the central mound complex. Remnants of these features have been completely destroyed, evidenced by stones and artifacts from former ring features found

strewn throughout the local terrain. Fortunately, a portion of this complex was mapped in the mid-20th century before much of the damage was done. A 2.5-km catchment survey around the central mound has revealed habitation areas close to the river and adjacent streams. These adjacent sites highlight the significance of the locality for understanding the social dynamics of Taquara/Itararé culture throughout the region.

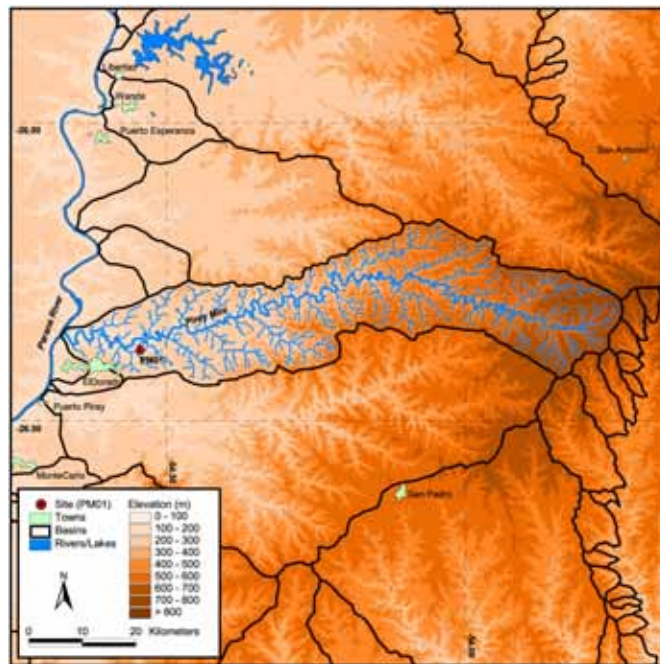


Fig. 1: Location of the mound complex (PM01) in the Piray Mini Basin, Argentina. (Map by J. Christopher Gillam)

layers precluded conclusive evidence of staged construction over time.

Conversely, excavations in the low, approximately one-half meter high, mounded ring surrounding the central mound revealed multiple stages of construction over a 200 year period (ca. 680-520 calendar years BP), stone-lined features (basalt) on some construction layers, smudge pits, post molds, and hearth features; these suggest that this was a ritually-active feature of the mound complex (Fig. 2).

Further grants are being sought to conduct a survey of archaeological sites throughout the Piray Mini Basin and for additional excavations at the mound complex and adjacent habitation sites. The interior highlands, near the headwaters of the Piray Mini River, may have pit houses preserved that will yield considerable insight into the livelihoods and diet of this prehistoric culture.

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Authors:

José Iriarte (Department of Archaeology, University of Exeter)

J. Christopher Gillam (Savannah River Archaeological Research Program, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of South Carolina)

Oscar Marozzi (SAR, Servicios Arqueológicos, Uruguay)

Grants Awarded to Researchers from R. L. Stephenson Fund

By Nena Powell Rice

The Robert L. Stephenson Archaeological Research Endowment Committee funded five SCIAA researchers for the year 2008. A total of \$18,227.00 was awarded.

Robertson Farms Site (38PN35)

Tommy Charles received \$3,800 to excavate an area previously tested to a depth of two meters where a stone feature was found with charcoal dating to 10,200-9,700 BP. Research objectives will be focused on identifying the cultural associations of this ancient feature.

Identifying Oconee Town

Chris Clement received \$3,939 to test one possible candidate for Oconee Town, a Lower Cherokee village located somewhere in Oconee County near Walhalla, South Carolina. In 1772, it is listed on the Francis Vernod census as having 184 inhabitants. Surface collections by private collectors are indicative of a Cherokee presence at this location that also fits historic descriptions.

The Search for the 'King of England's' Soldiers

Audrey Dawson received \$3,500 to utilize a 'search to find' metal detector survey on portions of Abercorn Island and Bear Island in the Savannah River Valley in order to locate the settlements associated with the "King of England's Soldiers," who were enslaved Africans and African-Americans who fought with the British during the American Revolution in return for their freedom. When the British evacuated Savannah, GA in 1782, this group was left behind.

Chronology, Technology, and Ecology of Paleoindian Cultures

Chris Gillam received \$4,000 for travel to Uruguay that will shed light on the similarities and differences of these distant cultures through technical analysis of artifacts, GIS modeling, and establishment of the regional chronology in Uruguay through primary fieldwork at select sites discovered during the Uruguay Paleoindian Survey of 2007 (n=19 new sites to date).

Documentation of the Iconographic Bearing Objects in the Tommy C. Beutell Collection

Adam King received \$2,988 to examine and photograph iconography-bearing objects in the private collection of Tommy Beutell of Tuckasegee, NC. There are important objects in the collection that have decorations whose imagery can be incorporated into analyses of style and meaning during the Mississippian cultural period.



Fig. 2: Stone features at the base of the mounded ring surrounding the central mound. (Photo by J. Christopher Gillam)