

**Public Archaeology:
Balancing a Need for Clothed Museum Figures with a Limited Archaeological Record**

**A Poster Presentation at SAA 2010 in St. Louis, Missouri
By Mary Spanos**

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Mary Spanos, Anthropological Textiles

Woodland Era

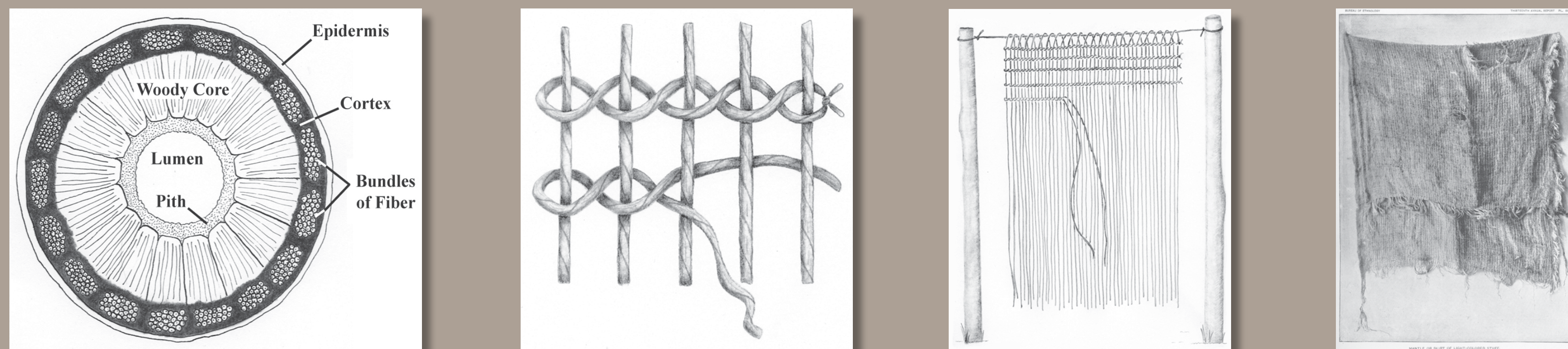
Beside their canoe at river's edge, a grandmother and granddaughter prepare oysters for smoking

The archaeological textile data recovered in the Southeast informs us about yarn and textile structures from the Archaic era and on through historic times. However, there is limited data on garments in use:



Femur wrapped in twined cloth from Archaic bog burial at Windover (Andrews, et al. 2002:165).
 Woodland-era textile impressed pot sherd and cast from Hammonds site (1DK71), Dekalb County, Alabama.
 Mississippian textile impressed salt pan sherd and cast from Beckum Village site (1CK24), Clarke County, Alabama (Spanos 2006).
 Female figure from Mound C at Etowah, Bartow County, Georgia (Sharp 2004:154).

Southeast Indian textile technology suggests possible constraints on garment forms:



A cross-section of a bast fiber plant. The fiber bundles were separated from the remaining plant material, then spun into yarn.
 Spaced, plain, twined fabric structure.
 Twining stand based on the 18th-century description of Le Page Du Pratz (1972 [1774]:344).
 Twined cloth from rock shelter on Cliff Creek, Morgan county, Tennessee (Holmes 1896:Plate III).

Given the lack of wardrobes to reproduce, the garments for the USA museum figures are interpretations based on the archaeological and historical record of the Southeastern region:

Grandmother From the account of the *Gentleman of Elvas* traveling with De Soto through Florida, "...the tribute paid them by their Indians, which consists of maize and deerskins and native blankets resembling shawls, some being made of the inner bark of trees and some from a plant like daffodils which when pounded remains like flax. The Indian women cover themselves with these blankets, draping one around themselves from the waist down and another over the shoulder with the right arm uncovered" (Clayton, et al. 1995:75).



Cloth impressed into pot sherds recovered at Beckum Village (1CK24) in southwest Alabama were reproduced for the Woodland grandmother's skirt and mantle.

The grandmother's shoes were based on a drawing by W. H. Holmes of a slipper that was found in a cave in Kentucky (Holmes 1896:35).

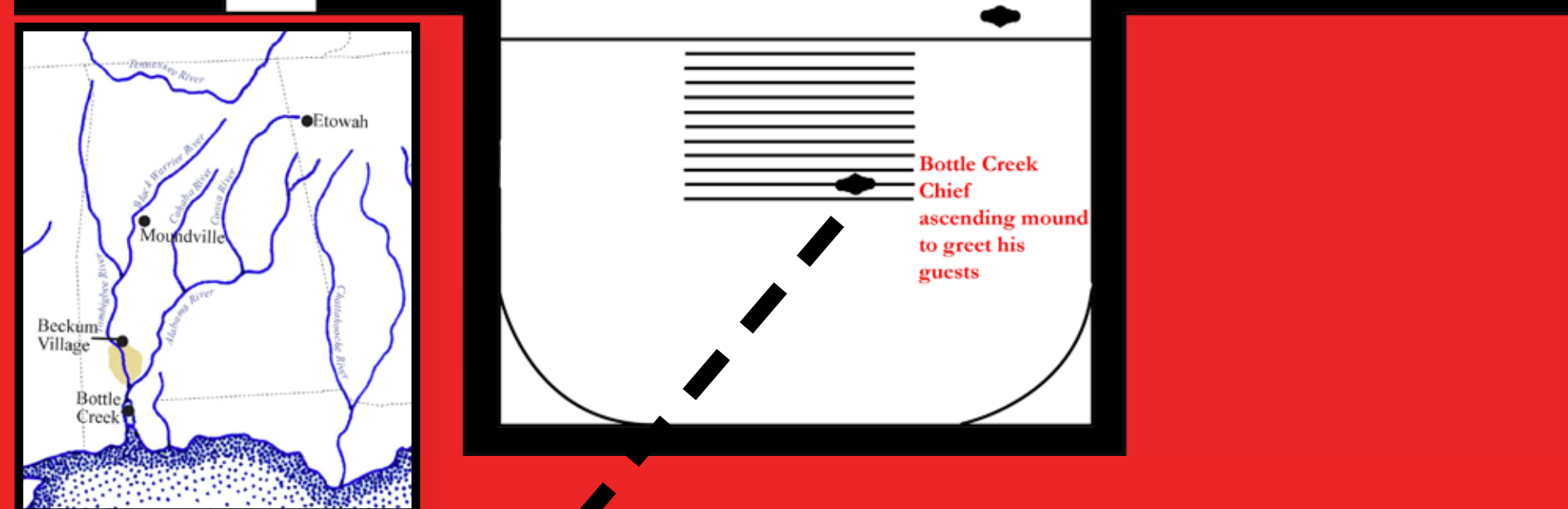
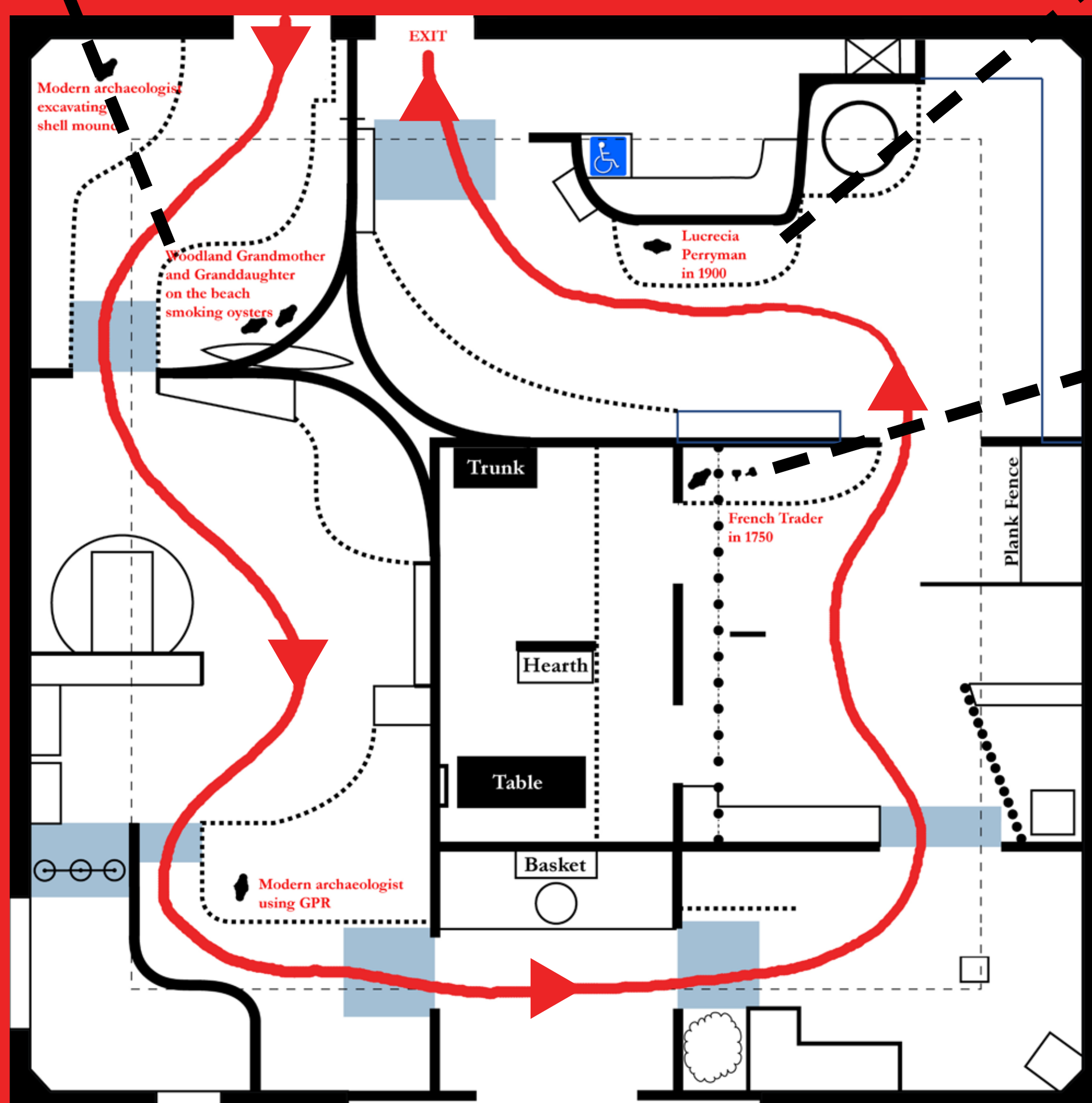
Granddaughter "The girl at the age of eight or ten put on a little petticoat, which is a kind of fringe made of threads of mulberry bark" (Le Page Du Pratz 1972 [1774]:344).



Alternate-pair twined cloth from rock shelter on Cliff Creek, Morgan county, Tennessee (Holmes 1896:Plate IV).
 The granddaughter's skirt is being made from yarn spun from nettle fiber, a novelty yarn currently imported from Tibet.
 The costumes for the grandmother and granddaughter figures incorporate hemp, nettle, and linen bast fiber yarns.
 PVC pipe served as a portable modern twining stand.

ENTER HERE

The humid climate of the North American Southeast preserves limited archaeological data to inform us about the prehistoric clothing of that region. Ceramic impressions of yarn and cloth were combined with prehistoric art and early European chronicles to outfit life-sized figures in a new archaeology museum at the University of South Alabama. The museum's sartorial tour of the Gulf Coast begins in the Woodland era and ends with a midwife (and former slave), circa 1900.



1900

Lucrecia Perryman, a resident of Mobile, a midwife, a laundress, and a former slave, was also the subject of an archaeology project by the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of South Alabama.



By 1900, the slow and laborious task of spinning thread and yarn had been mechanized and the sewing machine, which was originally developed for industrial use had been successfully marketed for home use. The industrial revolution provided households with sewing machines and an abundance of cloth and thread. A practical buttonhole attachment for residential sewing machines became available in the late 1860s (Cooper

1976:62). Buttons were made of metal, shell, and knotted yarns (the zipper was not invented until 1913). Important note regarding industrialization: Eli Whitney did not invent the cotton gin. He patented a new type of gin, but tools and machines for separating the cotton lint from the seed were in common use long before Whitney's time (Lakwete 2003).

1750

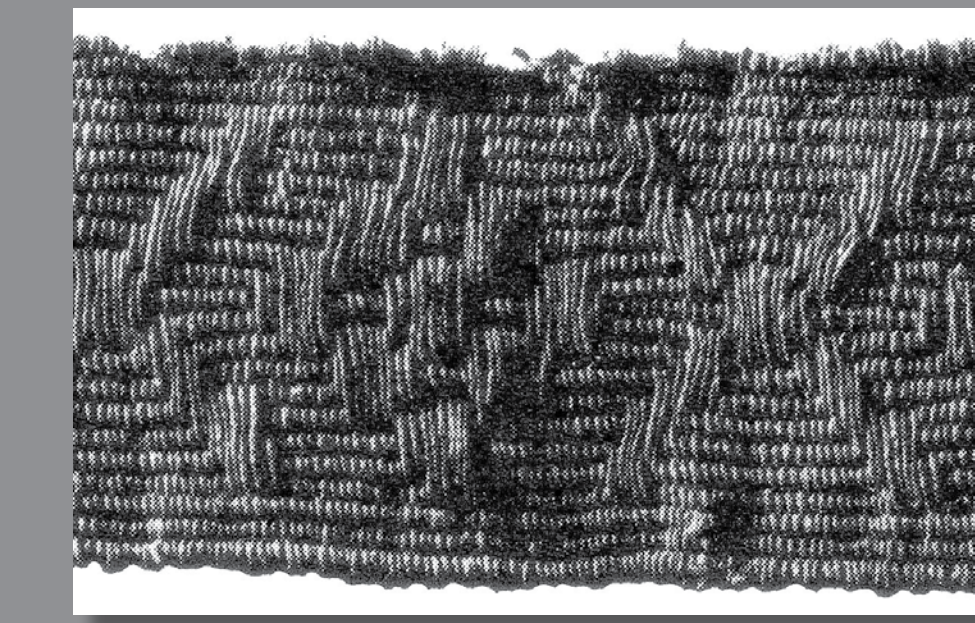
A French trader sits on the porch of his cabin, whittling a piece of catlinita. This diorama will inform the museum visitor of the importance of the observance of ritual in maintaining the peace between Europeans and Southeast Indians.



In 1750, the South was primarily a producer of raw textile materials, not completed garments. Cotton was raised, ginned, and shipped out to be spun and woven into cloth. At the dawn of the industrial revolution, European garment production was a complex manufacturing process: although the processes of preparing bast fibers and spinning yarn were technically similar in Europe as among Southeast Indians, the organization and management of textile businesses were quite complex. The USA French trader predates the invention of the sewing machine, which explains why he is not wearing blue jeans—his seamstress could not have pushed a needle through the layers of denim in the seam of modern jeans.



The archaeological analysis of the Le Machault (Davis 1982:113) provided a description of 18th century stockings worn by men. Recreationists offer much research for this period.



At left, a European ribbon from the mid-18th century Tunica Indian Village site (Brain 1997:217-218) provided guidance for the Frenchman's hair tie. At right, the Frenchman's deerskin shoes suggest a trade item (after Wood 2000).



Mississippian Era

A Bottle Creek chief climbs the log steps up the chief's mound to greet his visitors.

The Elvas account describes men as having, "their privies covered with a truss of deerskin resembling the breech cloths formerly worn in Spain. The skins are well tanned and are given the color that is desired; and so perfectly that if the color is vermilion, it seems to be very fine grained cloth, and that colored black is splendid" (Clayton et al. 1995:76).

Both the Elvas and the Rangel account mention, "feather mantles...made according to their custom, elegant and suitable for winter" and a "blanket of feathers down to his feet" (Clayton et al. 1995:83, 291).

The chief's hair style is based on Alexandre de Batz 1735 drawing of native people in New Orleans. The chief's tattoos are based on John White's 1585 paintings from North Carolina (Hulton 1984:78).



The chief's feather mantle is being constructed on a bast fiber net foundation. Individual wild turkey feathers will be tied onto each knot in the netting. The process of collecting, plucking, and sorting wild turkey feathers is ongoing. Got feathers?

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Abstract

The humid climate of the North American Southeast preserves limited archaeological data to inform us about the prehistoric clothing of that region. This poster presentation discusses how ceramic impressions of yarn and cloth were combined with prehistoric art and early European chronicles to outfit life-sized Woodland and Mississippian figures in a new archaeology museum at the University of South Alabama. The museum's sartorial tour of the Gulf Coast includes a French trader of the 1750s and a midwife (and former slave), circa 1900. Cloth samples from reproduction garments for these prehistoric and early historic figures will be available.

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