

THE UNWRITTEN RECORD

AMERICAN Indian oral histories protect and preserve an important link to the past.

Did you know that Georgia is the ancestral homeland to about eighteen federally-recognized tribes, including Creek, Cherokee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Shawnee groups? Many of their ancestors lived and are buried in Georgia, so these tribes are interested in projects that affect their cultural link to this land.

American Indians were forcibly removed from Georgia but to this day retain stories of their removal, of their homeland in Georgia, and of their culture's history. Stories are an important way in which American Indians pass down their cultural knowledge and history from generation to generation.

Oral histories, such as stories, can provide insight into questions that may seem "unanswerable" to historians and archaeologists. Data that archaeologists may uncover can often be interpreted by studying American Indian oral histories.

So even though the past is far behind us, and American Indian groups no longer live in Georgia, their members have preserved information about their culture and history here.

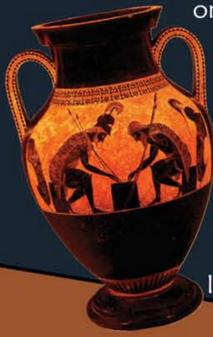


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Sometimes archaeologists can use a combination of living traditions and experimentation to learn about the past.

Here an archaeologist "stamps" wet clay with a wooden paddle as he recreates one of the vessels found at the Leake Site.



The intricate designs on Swift Creek pottery vessels might be religious symbols and could shed light on that part of Middle Woodland culture. Think about how historians use the images of gods and goddesses on Greek pottery to learn about mythology.



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In this picture Eliza Bark Carmen, a Keetoowah Cherokee woman, grinds hickory nuts to make a traditional food item - *kanuchi*.

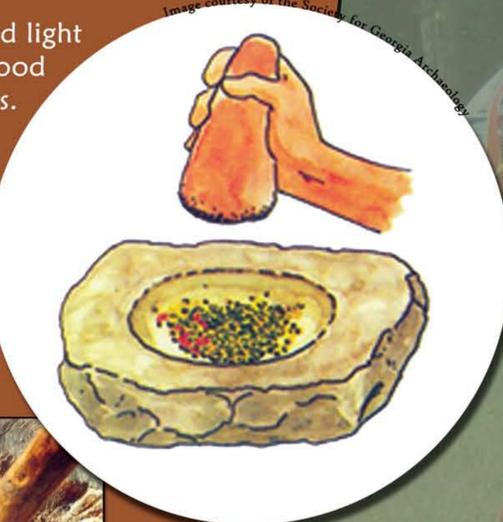


This tradition can shed light on older food preparation techniques.

Archaeologists often find "grind stones" at sites which were used to grind food and other things, much like Liz Bark Carmen is doing here.



These are just a few examples of how oral traditions and archaeology can work together.



Cherokee Creation Legend

Earth is floating on the waters like a big island, hanging from four rawhide ropes fastened at the top of the Sacred four directions. The ropes are tied to the ceiling of the sky, which is made of hard rock crystal. When the ropes break, this world will come tumbling down, and all living things will fall with it and die. Then everything will be as if the earth had never existed, for water will cover it.

(To hear more of this story, scan the QR code in the corner and listen to the podcast!)

These crystals were found here at the Leake Site. From the story above we know that crystals were valued by later American Indians. Perhaps the people who lived at the Leake Site held similar beliefs.



UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Archaeologists use objects to study the past, but artifacts can't tell us everything. After all, not everything humans do ends up as an object.

Here are some questions about the people who once lived here that archaeologists may not be able to answer on their own:

What did they call themselves and each other?

How did their language sound?

What were their rituals and ceremonies like?

What were their songs and dances like?