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ALABAMA-COUSHATTA INDIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC, HISTORICAL, AND ARCHEOLOGICAL REFERENCES

by Timothy K. Perttula¹

Daniel J. Gelo and Tammy J. Morales recently published a very useful annotated bibliography on the Alabama-Coushatta Indians, focusing principally on citations concerning the Texas and Louisiana Alabama-Coushatta populations. Their extensive bibliography, particularly the inclusion of the linguistics literature, provides a good sense of the various works that have been published in the last 100 years or so about the Alabama and Coushatta peoples, and the corpus of published works is characterized accurately "as a reflection of Indian-white relations."¹ However, the bibliography is not comprehensive, especially with regard to certain recent anthropological, ethnohistorical, and historic archeological references that concern the Alabama-Coushatta.

In this paper, I provide forty-nine additional bibliographic references on the Alabama-Coushatta. A number of the references listed below are recent works—mainly archeological—published since the original version of the bibliography was published.² The others, however, represent a spattering of anthropological {5, 7, 10-13, 15}, historical {1, 4, 6, 9, 17, 22-27, 35, 36, 37, 43, 46, 47, 49}, and ethnohistorical {2, 14, 18, 48} sources published over the years that provide basic ethnographic information about the Alabama-Coushatta, and/or consider the Alabama-Coushatta, among many Native American groups living in Texas and Louisiana, within the context of colonial and Anglo-American interaction with Native Americans.

The archeological research on Alabama-Coushatta native history represents a significant new approach to understanding the Alabama and Coushatta peoples, as they were in Alabama, and after they migrated to Louisiana and Texas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gelo and Morales note only one pertinent work on historical archeology in their annotated bibliography³, that being a short report written in 1969 on excavations in southeastern Texas at a looted cemetery containing probable mid-nineteenth century Alabama or Coushatta burials.

A number of Alabama and Coushatta Indian villages in Louisiana and Texas have been identified by archeological research since the 1970s and 1980s {19, 21, 38-40, 42, 44}, and several researchers have considered where these villages were likely to be located based on historical documents {6, 14, 16, 37, 47, and 48}. Among the villages identified to date are the early nineteenth century Alabama and Coushatta villages on the Red River in Northwest Louisiana – including the Coushatta village visited by the Freeman and Custis expedition in 1806 {6, 21} – and the 1820s-1830s village of Long King in southeastern Texas {40, 42}. Archeological investigations also have been conducted at seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Alabama villages in the state of Alabama {3, 19}, most notably the village near the post of Fort

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Toulouse on the Alabama River, built by the French in 1714 to guard their dominion in the southeastern U.S. and to carry on trade with the Native Americans {2, 8, 43, 49}.

Other archeological studies have concentrated on documenting the types of European and native artifacts – including ornaments, containers, guns, tools, dishes, and other items – and animal remains found on historic Alabama and Couthatta sites {19, 20, 21, 38-40, 42, 45}, for the purpose of determining “the extent of cultural contacts between Euroamericans, Texans, and the Alibamu-Koasati from an archaeological perspective.”⁴ What these studies have shown is that the Alabama and Couthatta peoples were experienced traders and consumers of European goods {2}, while also maintaining their native ceramic technology and maize-oriented culinary traditions well into the twentieth century and becoming successful herders of cows and pigs.

Another recent research perspective contributing new insights on the Alabama-Couthatta peoples has been the study of the modern material culture of the Alabama-Couthatta, most notably their basketry {28, 29}, but also cane mats, spanish moss twisters, yarn sashes, beaded garters, leggings, turbins, and collars, silver pins, gorgets, brooches, and bangles, smoking pipes, cane whistles, gourd rattles, spoons and dippers, bows, arrows, bamboo blow guns, and stirring paddles {30-34}. The material culture items made by the Alabama and Couthatta show the vibrant and strong character of their traditional culture, as well as “a dynamic feel for cultural change.”⁵

There is much to learn about the history and lifeways of the Alabama and Couthatta peoples. Hopefully, the bibliography by Gelo and Morales published in a recent volume of the *East Texas Historical Journal*, and this supplement, will spark renewed archeological, ethnographic, ethnohistorical, and historical studies of the Alabama and Couthatta.

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