NOTES

1. The exception to this statement is Southern archaeology, which has been and continues to be at the forefront of American archaeology.

2. Catherine Dhavernas, *Le Destinataire à venir: culture et planéité à l'ére de refus* (Montréal: XYZ Press, 2005), 120.

3. Walter Benjamin, "Philosophie," in *Essais: 1936–1940*, Bibliothèque Médiations 241 (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1983), 198.

4. Charles Hudson, "Introduction," in *The Transformation of the Southeastern Indians, 1540–1760*, ed. Robbie Ethridge and Charles Hudson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), xxxviii–xxxxix

5. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 21.

6. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1:23.

7. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, trans. Philip A. Dennis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); see also Steven Conn, *History's Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 228; and Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and Their Futures* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 153–54.

Recent Discussions in Late Prehistoric Southern Archaeology

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One of the goals of this new journal, *Native South*, is to facilitate communication among scholars from different disciplines interested in the history of the original inhabitants of the South. This article hopes to further that goal by orienting nonarchaeologists to some of the recent discussions in the literature of Southern archaeology, particularly during the time period archaeologists are most consulted on by colleagues in history, namely the few centuries before European arrival. The archaeology of the centuries subsequent to European arrival deserves its own review. This article highlights some of the debates in the field that may be of interest to nonarchaeologists; it does not summarize what we now know about the prehistoric South. Readers interested in such information may consult several excellent syntheses that have recently been published.[1]

ARCHAIC SOUTH

One of the first contributions that archaeologists can offer scholars of the Native South is to share the fact that the first "Southerners" date back to approximately 9500 BC as the producers and users of a type of spear point that archaeologists have labeled Dalton.[2] Although there were people in the South millennia earlier it was not until the end of the Paleo-Indian period (11500 BC to 9500 BC) and the beginning of the Early Archaic (9500 BC to 7000 BC) that regionalization of cultures began. Around this time the population of North America had increased sufficiently to cause the territories and ranges of hunter-gatherers to shrink. Coincidently, an essentially modern climate and modern plant and animal communities were appearing across North America, and the South

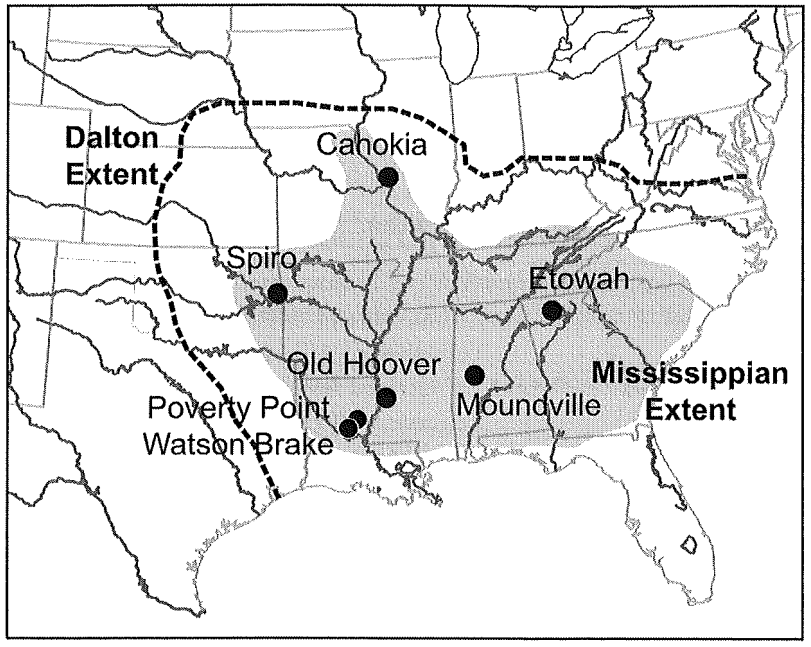

Fig. 1. Extent of the Dalton and Mississippian areas.

of 9500 BC was dominated by oak, hickory, and the woodland mammals that call such environments home.[3] The Dalton points were used by the people adapting to this new Southern climate and as such can be granted the title of the first Southerners.[4]

One of the most important discoveries during the past two decades concerning the Archaic South is the realization that mound building had much greater antiquity than originally thought. Prior to about 1990, Poverty Point in northeastern Louisiana was the only earthen mound site generally recognized as having been constructed before 1000 BC. Located in the Lower Mississippi Valley, Poverty Point was regarded as a large and enigmatic center dating to 1700 to 1300 BC. The only other contemporary sites that were even comparable were the shell mounds and shell rings constructed along the Atlantic Coast.[5] Since 1990 archaeologists have learned that dozens of earthen mounds were constructed during the Middle (7000 to 3000 BC) and Late Archaic (3000 to 1000 BC) periods, with most examples found in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Among the earliest and largest is the Watson Brake site in which eleven mounds were placed on an oval earthen ring 919 feet (280 meters) in diameter on a terrace overlooking the Ouachita River in Louisiana. Mound construction had started by 3400 BC, which means the once enigmatic Poverty Point site is no longer the earliest example of earthen mound construction in the South but one of the final expressions of a regional tradition spanning a millennium and a half.[6]

One of the current challenges that archaeologists face is inferring the social dynamics of the communities that built and lived at Archaic mound sites. Several factors complicate interpretation: (1) most of the Archaic mound sites contain few artifacts, which is part of the reason that their true age went unrecognized for so long, (2) many sites, such as Watson Brake, have had little excavation, and (3) human burials are almost unknown from Archaic earthworks, and burials are typically the most reliable means of detecting social organization.[7] What we do know is that there is little or no evidence of exotic or prestige items, feasting, storage facilities, craft specialization, elaborate burials, or public structures other than the earthworks themselves. This has led to the interpretation that these sites were not home to hierarchically ranked societies, despite the presence of sometimes impressive earthworks.[8] Certainly within the binary classification scheme of egalitarian and ranked societies as defined by Morton Fried, the Archaic mound builders appear to be egalitarian in organization.[9] More recent analyses have tried to go beyond typological approaches. Jon Gibson and Kenneth Sassaman both utilized data on the massive earthworks at Poverty Point to try to understand community organization, and Sassaman attempts to come to an understanding of what role the tradition of earth construction may have played in Poverty Point society.[10]

MISSISSIPPIAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Certainly the study of the late prehistoric Mississippian period (AD 800 to 1500) has been dominated in recent decades by interests in social organization. We have long known that Mississippian peoples who were the ancestors of the major Southern nations were maize agriculturalists who built flat-topped earthen mounds on which they constructed important civic-ceremonial structures such as temples, mortuary facilities, and elite residences. Interest in Mississippian politics can be traced to the New Archaeology of the 1970s and is typified by Chris S. Peebles and Susan M.

Kus's landmark article examining the distribution of goods among the graves at Moundville.[11]

Moundville is located in west-central Alabama and with twenty-nine mounds is generally regarded as the center of the second-largest Mississippian polity. Using cluster analysis Peebles and Kus identified similar burial types and showed that wealth was distributed hierarchically, providing evidence that Moundville represented a ranked society. Work during and subsequent to this period was oriented toward understanding Mississippians as one example of a chiefdom, as defined by Elman Service.[12] Service characterized chiefdoms as territorially organized regional polities with hereditary social hierarchies, but whose leadership lacked the coercive authority that can be found among states.[13] However, the original definition of *chiefdom* was primarily derived from ethnographic and ethnohistoric studies of Pacific Islanders, especially native Hawaiians. Therefore it presupposed that some features of eighteenth-century Hawaiian life, such as the support of craft specialists by the chief's household or redistribution of bulk commodities, were universal to chiefdoms everywhere. This led to work, for example, debating the extent to which full-time craft specialists existed among Mississippian peoples.[14] The outcome of such arguments was the realization that full-time craft specialization was at most extremely rare in the Mississippian South and probably nonexistent in most polities.[15] This also gradually led to a redefinition of the term *chiefdom* away from its Polynesian roots to a more all-encompassing category that emphasizes more universal features such as territorial control and hereditary inequality and de-emphasizes the features once thought to be significant but that now look to be found only in some chiefdoms, features such as attached craft specialists, redistribution of staple products, or village living.[16]

There are also significant numbers of archaeologists in the South and elsewhere uncomfortable with the term *chiefdom* and the typological approach that it embodies. One criticism is that these terms, especially those of the intermediate societies in Service's typology, such as *tribe* and *chiefdom*, lack precision and do not fit well to a sample of ethnographic examples.[17] Furthermore the term and its use grew out of a program of social evolution linked closely to the work of Morton Fried, Marshall Sahlins, Elman Service, and Leslie White, which was ultimately derived from approaches to history pioneered by Lewis Henry Morgan and Friedrich Engels. Critics have rejected the ideas central to social evolutionary approaches, which assert that all human societies progress through regularized transitions in a step-wise manner.[18] Furthermore they insist that even neo-evolutionary approaches to social systems will inevitably be burdened by the nineteenth-century racism of its original implementation because any such system inherently orders its types, leading to the privileging of societies matching the apical type and marginalization of all the others.[19]

One of the most recent attacks on the chiefdom concept has come from Mississippian archaeologist Timothy Pauketat in his book *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*.[20] His book considered whether Cahokia, the largest Mississippian polity, located in the American Bottom in Illinois, might be a state and presented an argument that, at a minimum, certain features are statelike. An American Bottom archaeologist like Pauketat views a term such as *chiefdom* as restrictive when applied to all Mississippian societies because Cahokia is approximately an order of magnitude larger in size and, he argues, exceptional in other respects as well. Because he rejects a culture evolutionary approach, Pauketat refuses to simply apply the category of state; rather, he favors a historically based and more particularistic form of analysis.[21]

His first argument that Cahokia could be characterized as a state is fiercely debated, as I will discuss later. His final argument is gaining acceptance, and there are increasingly more Southern archaeologists utilizing an agency and practice approach in their work.[22] His polemic against social evolutionary approaches in general and the use of the term *chiefdom* in particular is shared among some Southern archaeologists, but I predict that *chiefdom* or any of its circumlocutions such as *prestate complex society*, *ranked society*, *intermediate society*, or *kin-based hierarchical society* will not be removed from the Mississippianist's vocabulary any time soon. Despite (or because of) its historical baggage the term *chiefdom* has become a useful shorthand for the type of hierarchical, kin-based, hereditary, territorial polities that are so common throughout the South starting between the ninth and thirteenth centuries AD. Until better replacements are coined—and Pauketat's suggestion to use the term *civilization* seems even more problematic than the terms it is supposed to supplant—these labels will find a use. Furthermore, archaeologists worldwide interested in the dynamics of prestate complex societies increasingly reference work from the South, which means that over time the anthropological definition of *chiefdom* has moved away from

its Polynesian roots to being a term that is based on the Mississippian example.[23] If the term *chiefdom* is abandoned by archaeologists, Mississippianists may be among the last to give it up, not because of Southern stubbornness but because the term has slowly been co-opted by Southern scholars.[24]

This debate over terminology closely parallels another important debate in Mississippian archaeology, that between the so-called minimalists and maximalists. These terms were coined by James Stoltman in 1991 in reference to divergent opinions on the scale of Cahokia and in different approaches to understanding the role of Mississippian culture.[25] At one end of the scale, maximalists such as Patricia O'Brien unambiguously argue that Cahokia was a state and possessed all of the features of a state, such as control over a vast territory and centralized political and economic control.[26] The minimalist position, as typified by George Milner, sees Cahokia as somewhat larger than other Mississippian chiefdoms but qualitatively similar in economic and political behavior. Households are interpreted as being economically self-sufficient and the Cahokia paramount is argued to have controlled a territory similar in size to other Southern polities.[27] Archaeologists associated with the minimalist position tend to rely on ecological and functional arguments. A third label, that of idealist, was later suggested by Sissel Schroeder to describe American Bottom archaeologists that emphasize an agency approach and tend to privilege explanations invoking ideology over those invoking material, environmental, or economic factors. Examples of this third category include Timothy Pauketat and Thomas Emerson, who take an expansive view of Cahokia power.[28]

Despite the fact that these labels are caricatures, they have entered the Mississippianist's lexicon because they serve as a useful shorthand for interpretations outside of the American Bottom. For example, few reviewers of Jon Muller's book on *Mississippian Political Economy* could avoid mentioning that this work represented a minimalist approach to Mississippian studies, in which an explicitly Marxist-influenced materialist approach was used to analyze Mississippian social systems, and the overriding message was that smaller-than-commonly-believed and less-complex-than-commonly-believed communities could account for the patterns archaeologists have recovered.[29]

Fortunately debate over the matters that underlie these caricatures, such as what is the best means with which to measure complexity and how much variation exists, have stimulated important research that has improved our understanding of the Mississippian world. For example, historically much of our textbook understanding of the Mississippian period has come from the largest sites. These capture the imagination of archaeologists and the public, are usually excavated more extensively than other sites, and their dense concentration of artifacts, especially exotic preciosities, attract increased attention. In an effort to redress this inequity there has been significant work in the past twenty years to examine the lifeways of common Mississippians and their households.[30] There has also been work on understanding smaller Mississippian polities and their role in broader regional dynamics. Some of these polities lay on the periphery of the Mississippian world while others are geographically central but marginal in other ways.[31] For example, on the Big Black River in west-central Mississippi the Old Hoover site existed in the shadow of the large Mississippian sites of the Lower Mississippi Valley. According to Karl Lorenz the residents of Old Hoover built a single small mound, but otherwise there is no evidence of social ranking.[32] In fact the people of Old Hoover did not even use maize in any significant quantities and instead consumed acorn and hickory nuts at quantities similar to the Archaic and Woodland residents of the South. It appears that the residents of Old Hoover were influenced by Mississippian ritual, as evidenced by mound construction, but would not or could not adopt Mississippian subsistence technology or the changes in political organization so typical of their neighbors. In one sense Old Hoover represents a rural backwater, but it is also an important data point indicating the heterogeneity present in the Mississippian world and the diversity of responses available to its people.

In a survey of Mississippian mound-building practices, John Blitz and I found that there were qualitative discrepancies between small and large mound sites.[33] Larger sites, defined as those with nine or more mounds, had no statistical correlation between variables measuring the size of the mound, the amount of time the mounds were in use, or the number of construction stages. In contrast small and medium-sized sites had a modest correlation between those sets of variables. This informs us that mound building was done on a different schedule at the largest Mississippian sites and implies that it served a different societal role. Based on analysis of these variables we argued that mound construction tended to serve ad hoc political goals at the largest sites, whereas the

slightly more regularized schedule of construction at other sites suggests major construction was linked to periodic events such as the death of an important elite or the commemoration of a rare but significant event.[34] In sum this simple survey of readily available data suggests that much more work can be done to examine the heterogeneity in Mississippian life, and that life at small Mississippian sites was qualitatively different from life at larger sites. Archaeologists have long contrasted major regional traditions, but there is clearly much work to be done to catalog other forms of diversity in the Mississippian world.[35]

Another significant advance in the past two decades has been a much better understanding of Mississippian regional systems. Such studies are continuations of research programs begun with the New Archaeology of the 1970s and 1980s, which suggested that data on settlement patterns were fundamental.[36] This led to the development of more rigorous procedures for finding archaeological sites, in particular the small sites that had often escaped notice previously, and analytical tools for interpreting the environmental, economic, and political significance of the distribution of sites. Perhaps the most noteworthy result from using this data came from David Hally's study of the distribution of mound sites in northern Georgia and the surrounding areas of the southern Appalachians.[37] He found that mounds were regularly spaced such that they are almost always located either less than eighteen kilometers or more than thirty-two kilometers from each other, which thereby indicates the boundaries of polities. Mounds belonging to the same polity were located less than eighteen kilometers from each other, and there were typically buffer zones of several kilometers between polities. A computer analysis of travel times indicated that these distances correspond to a half a day's journey, that is, mounds that are part of the same polity are located no farther than six hours apart and mounds that are integrated into different polities are situated at least twelve hours apart.[38] This corresponds well to other archaeologically and ethnographically known chiefdoms worldwide in which the territory of a chiefdom rarely exceeds a twelve-hour journey from the center.[39]

One implication of this is a renewed appreciation of the historic maps produced by or with the aid of Southern Natives in the eighteenth century, which famously show circles as locatives for Native tribes. These maps have been interpreted as sociograms because they appear to communicate as much about social relationships in the size and placement of the map elements as they do about geographic relationships.[40] Archaeological evidence indicates that the overall pattern recorded in those maps, communities of related people living in bounded spaces separated from other communities by buffer zones, was the reality in the South since at least AD 1200.

Archaeologists are also coming to understand much more about the internal organization of Mississippian sites. This is perhaps most clearly visible at Moundville, where James Knight has documented the parallels between the mound arrangement at Moundville and a historically documented Chickasaw camp.[41] At Moundville, the mounds are arranged in two adjacent plazas: a smaller and more exclusive northern plaza bordering the bluffs overlooking the Black Warrior River, and a larger plaza to the immediate south where mounds are arranged in a parallelogram. The arrangement of mounds exhibits several forms of symmetry: (1) mounds around the parallelogram are mostly arranged in pairs wherein one of the mounds in a pair contain burials and the other mound is larger and contains no burials, (2) there is bilateral symmetry along a north-south axis that intersects and divides the two largest mounds, and (3) as one progresses from north to south along the parallelogram the mound pairs are progressively smaller. These patterns are interpreted to mean that the residents of Moundville were organized in moieties as evidenced by the bilateral symmetry with one moiety present in the eastern half of the site and the other in the west. The highest-status burials found in Mounds C and D may represent the burials of paramount chiefs representing each moiety; in addition, the pairs of mounds likely represent kin groups. The more highly ranked kin groups are located in the northern part of the plaza and the most lowly ranked groups in the southern part. This is precisely the way internally ranked clans were distributed in the historic Chickasaw camp.

Such an analysis was facilitated by the unusual abundance of mound architecture at Moundville, but there are other means of arriving at clues about the internal organization of sites. For example, at Etowah, in northwestern Georgia, Adam King has observed spatial patterning in the distribution of gorget types in burials excavated from the different quadrants of Mound C.[42] He interpreted these as evidence of corporate groups, likely kin groups or sodalities. At Cahokia, where there were once more than one hundred mounds, there are numerous plazas and the outlying sites contain numerous localized ritual centers. These have

led Alt, Byers, Pauketat, and others to suggest a multiethnic identity for the residents of the American Bottom who might have been drawn in from surrounding regions.[43]

For chiefdom researchers outside the South, perhaps the most widely cited Southern work is that of David Anderson and John Blitz on the instability of Mississippian polities.[44] Anderson examined the chiefdoms of the Savannah River, which forms the boundary between present-day South Carolina and Georgia. He found that these polities appeared and disappeared frequently, and most were short-lived. This has also been observed in other regions with well-established site chronologies, such as in the Oconee Valley in Georgia.[45] Furthermore, Anderson showed that polities in the Savannah River that were in existence for more than a century often underwent shifts in the scale of organization. He utilized a classification system for chiefdoms in which those with a single decision-making level above the local level are called a simple chiefdom and those with two levels are called complex. Settlement patterns are used as a proxy for levels of decision making based on the assumption that each mound site contains a chief representing one level of authority. Therefore polities with a single mound center are categorized as simple chiefdoms, and those with multiple centers are thought to be complex, with the largest center as home to the paramount chief.[46] Anderson assembled data from the Savannah River chiefdoms to show that chiefdoms frequently cycle between simple and complex, reflecting the fragile nature of the political coalitions that chiefdoms represent.

John Blitz modified and improved on this discussion of chiefdom instability.[47] He started by noting that the simple/complex chiefdom typology at the heart of Anderson's analysis is only capable of describing hierarchical relationships and does not account for polities where there are multiple mound centers in a heterarchical relationship or polities with a single multimound center possibly representing several tiers of decision-making authority.[48] Blitz noted that both cases are documented in the Savannah River and Southern Appalachian region. Rather than characterize chiefdom instability as cycling between simple and complex, Blitz instead chose to characterize the Mississippian dynamic as one of fission-fusion of social groups. He noted that in the eighteenth-century South the basic political unit was called the *okla* among the Choctaw and the *talwa* among the Muskogee, and these terms were defined as a people or town. The *okla/talwas* resemble single mound polities in the Mississippian in that both had hereditary leadership roles and comparable population sizes. According to Blitz, the patterns that we observe in the Savannah River Valley and the Southern Appalachians was caused by the movement of *okla/talwas* across the landscape and their fusion with or fission from other *okla/talwas* to form more complex political entities. Because these relationships were under constant negotiation they were necessarily fragile over the span of decades and centuries, which account for the observed instability of Mississippian polities.

MISSISSIPPIAN ICONOGRAPHY

Perhaps the single most important breakthrough in Southern archaeology in the past decade has been produced by a team of scholars who have shed new light on Mississippian iconography. In many ways this can be likened to a type of Rosetta Stone moment in our understanding of late prehistoric Southern people.[49] Before one can understand the significance of the discovery it is helpful to understand the nature of Mississippian iconography and a brief history of its interpretation.[50]

Archaeologists and the public have long been fascinated by the rich representational designs found on Mississippian artifacts such as copper plates, engraved shell gorgets, shell cups, figurines, and engraved ceramics. The late prehistoric people of the South probably made other objects that we might classify as art, but these are the only media that survive. The earliest scholars recognized the supernatural qualities of many of these depictions, but the first widely influential interpretations were penned by Antonio Waring and Preston Holder.[51] They viewed these objects as expressions of a short-lived cult with its origins in the Muskogean-speaking world, and the name Southern Cult and Southeastern Ceremonial Complex (SECC) became attached to the body of work.

Later in the 1970s James Brown was one of a handful of scholars systematically analyzing the large body of iconography from Spiro (in present-day eastern Oklahoma), which, along with Cahokia, Moundville, and Etowah, has the largest body of artifacts bearing iconographic depictions. Brown was struck by the diversity of styles on the Spiro shell as compared with the material from sites from the east. Based on a social analysis perspective, Brown argued that these icons were not the manifestation of a cult, but a product of interregional interaction that pro-

duced regional variation as a by-product of trade and production. For Brown, the symbols were just as related to the badges and operation of chiefly offices as they were with religion.[52] In subsequent publications Brown, along with Phillip Phillips, used an art historical approach to study and document the styles of iconography and eventually named the two most common schools Braden and Craig.[53] The Classic Braden style is now understood to have originated at Cahokia. It was itself based on iconographic styles used to decorate rock art in the Eastern Plains.[54] The Classic Braden style was exported to Spiro, where it influenced the Craig style. Later versions of the Braden style at Cahokia were exported to the Deep South and influenced the motifs of Moundville (called the Hemphill school) and Etowah (called Hightower).

Subsequent publications on Southern iconography refined our understanding of topics such as chronology and style, but did not substantially change the fact that we had a better understanding of the execution and use of the iconography, such as its style, distribution, and use in Mississippian religious and political systems, than we did of its content.[55] The only widely accepted analysis of the content was rather superficial, such as noting facts about Mississippian dress or noting that the depictions of two men fighting and the frequent depictions of human heads are probably indicative of the significance of warfare in Mississippian societies.

Starting in 1993 Mississippian scholars interested in iconography began to meet annually in conjunction with the long-running Maya Iconography meetings at the University of Texas. Mississippian scholars later founded their own annual meeting at Texas State University at San Marcos. These meetings brought together archaeologists, folklorists, art historians, anthropologists, and Native religious practitioners.[56] Their initial report, which almost reads as a manifesto, was published in 2001 as *On the Subject Matter of Southern Ceremonial Complex Art*.[57]

Their basic finding was that the core of Southern art reflects a supernatural reality and focuses on the celestial realm and the accomplishments of certain culture heroes. They define the core as comprising shell gorgets, copper plates, and related material and observe that expressive objects outside of this core appear to be related to different themes. For example, temple statuary has often been linked to ancestor cults. Within the core the themes are strikingly limited to celestial associations. Even iconography that was previously interpreted as quotidian images, such as one of two men fighting (famously known from the Hixon site), are now interpreted as examples of specific mythological events rather than a generic depiction of Mississippian warfare. Images formerly believed to be real-life depictions of dancers in costume, such as the bird-man from Etowah or a chunkey player, are now understood to represent supernatural part-animal figures.

This thematic consistency is remarkable. Other topics of mythological or ritual importance such as depictions of the trickster, of the widely told stories of mythological animals, or of agriculture and fertility, are almost entirely lacking.[58] Rather the art is hyperspecialized and related to culture heroes or celestial beings such as Morning Star, the Thunder and Lightning Twins, and Red Horn, or to celestial themes such as the Path of Souls, which was thought to be visible in the night sky as the Milky Way. Some of this material likely references stories that served as charter myths for Mississippian elites and as secret knowledge about the cosmos.

The texts most useful to the working group were the stories of culture heroes and astronomy collected from groups as widely dispersed as the Apalachee, Caddo, Winnebago, Pawnee, and Osage. Fascinatingly, the bulk of the iconography was produced by Muskogean-speaking people, but there are only fragmentary records of culture hero stories recorded among historic Muskogean speakers and almost no examples of historic Muskogean texts exhibiting the astronomical knowledge reflected in the iconography. The working group scholars have had more success matching the details of the iconography with stories recorded by groups peripheral to the South, some of whom, such as the Osage and Caddo, were likely descendants of the people of Cahokia and Spiro where much of the rest of the SECC material was produced. It is not yet clear whether the lack of correspondence between recorded stories of historic Muskogean speakers is a preservation issue or whether it represents a more fundamental transition in cosmology among Muskogean speakers during the later prehistoric and historic periods. Historic Muskogean ritual was focused on agricultural themes, such as celebration of the Busk, and it is possible that such a focus was a relatively new development postdating the Mississippian.

The combined efforts of the working group, now published in several collections, provide scholars with clues about the content of the iconography, not just its context. This has led to numerous exciting discoveries.

For example, Moundville archaeologists have long recognized that during the late Moundville II and early Moundville III phases (approximately AD 1300–1450) the resident population of Moundville left for nearby sites in the polity, and Moundville itself was used as a ritual center and a necropolis. Analysis of the corpus of iconography by George Lankford, Vincas Steponaitis, James Knight, and others indicates that the vast majority of it is related to themes of death, the Beneath World, and the Path of Souls. Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of the categories of objects reveals significant differences in their distribution. Objects such as copper gorgets and pendants, stone gorgets, stone palettes, painted pottery, and stone bowls had limited distributions among high-status burials and likely served as emblems of offices or ritual paraphernalia. In contrast, engraved pottery in the Hemphill style was a public style accessible to all because it was found among graves of all types and statuses, including at outlying farmsteads. Some of the Hemphill-style iconography depicts the Great Serpent as a winged rattlesnake. Lankford has argued that the wings serve as a locative indicating this version of the Great Serpent is located in the sky or the Above World. According to stories common to many Native groups the Great Serpent could also be encountered in the Beneath World as the guardian and protector of that world. In that guise it is frequently depicted as the Horned or Underwater Serpent, often with feline characteristics. It is interesting to note that depictions of the Great Serpent in a Beneath World form are only found at Moundville in restricted contexts. Clearly the Above World depiction of the Great Serpent was considered safe and has even been linked to a constellation visible in the southern sky where it is still not far from its home in the Under World. The Beneath World manifestation was considered much more powerful and was only handled by ritual specialists with the necessary knowledge and spiritual strength.[59]

The research of the iconography working group is revolutionary to our understanding of Mississippian life and has only recently been made available to the broader scholarly community in published form. It has the power to give us insight into Mississippian belief and to potentially track how those beliefs changed through time and space.[60] It can provide us with clues about how ritual and religion were used and challenged. It also will help us understand the origin and spread of the Mississippian way of life between the tenth and thirteenth centuries AD. Ultimately it has the potential to upend a significant portion of our textbook definition of *Mississippian*. Like most good research it raises as many questions as it answers. Why, for example, do historic Muskogean stories not correspond to the iconography in ways that Eastern Plains texts do? Why did the iconography express such a narrow spectrum of the ritual and myth that was likely a part of Mississippian life? And are other representational traditions such as temple statuary and zoomorphic images on pottery part of a different, more mundane artistic tradition, or are these holdovers from belief systems that go back millennia in the South?[61] The answers to these questions may be decades in the making.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion covers a selection of important discoveries and trends in Southern archaeology over the past two decades. It is by no means exhaustive and in fact omits discussion about advances in our understanding of Mississippian diet, more precise models for understanding the constitution of political authority, better models about the use and exchange of prestige goods, the identification of long-distance migrations of Mississippian people, improvements in our understanding of the role of gender, and other topics.[62] Despite these deficiencies this still provides a sense of what issues have dominated the study of the late prehistoric South.

It should also be apparent that many important advances, such as the improved understanding of Mississippian iconography or a better model of chiefdom instability, were made possible when archaeologists applied rich ethnographic and historic models to well-considered and well-studied archaeological datasets. Archaeologists are frequently consumers of the products of historians, ethnohistorians, and folklorists and the study of the late prehistoric Native South can only be improved by increased collaboration among these disciplines. Furthermore for historical scholars interested in explanations invoking historicity and the recursive relationship between structure and practice, it will become increasingly important for Native South scholars interested in the early historic period to familiarize themselves with the prehistoric past of the groups they intend to study in order to provide the appropriate historical context. Both goals can be facilitated by increased dialogue among all scholars interested in the history of the Native peoples of the South, and it is my sincerest hope that this journal will help to serve this role.

NOTES

I would like to thank the editors for including me in the inaugural issue of the journal. I would also like to thank Rob Beck, Scott Hammerstedt, Amanda Regnier, and Chris Rodning for many stimulating discussions on Southern archaeology.

1. For the broadest overviews of Southern archaeology written for a nonspecialist or student audience consult Judith A. Bense, *Archaeology of the Southern United States* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1994); Raymond D. Fogelson, ed., *Southeast*, vol. 14 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2004); or George R. Milner, *The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004). A collection of academic papers on topics associated with the study of earlier periods can be found in David G. Anderson and Robert C. Mainfort Jr., eds., *The Woodland Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); David G. Anderson and K. E. Sassaman, eds., *The Paleoindian and Early Archaic Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); and Kenneth E. Sassaman and David G. Anderson, eds., *The Archaeology of the Mid-Holocene Southeast* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996). Three books written for general audiences have recently been published concerning the two most significant Mississippian sites: for a discussion of Cahokia consult Timothy R. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Biloine Whiting Young and Melvin L. Fowler, *Cahokia: The Great Native American Metropolis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); and for Moundville refer to John H. Blitz, *Moundville* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008). An academic discussion of Moundville can be found in Vernon James Knight and Vincas P. Steponaitis, eds., *Archaeology of the Moundville Chiefdom* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998). One recent academic summary of the Mississippian can be found in Charles R. Cobb, "Mississippian Chiefdoms: How Complex?" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 63–84; and another is forthcoming in John H. Blitz, "New Perspectives in Mississippian Archaeology, 2004–2008," *Journal of Archaeological Research* (forthcoming).

2. All dates in this paper are in calendrical years, as opposed to radiocarbon years. For information on the site of Poverty Point consult Jon L. Gibson, *The Ancient Mounds of Poverty Point* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

3. The plant communities were modern but they were originally located at slightly different latitudes.

4. Others have made this association between Dalton and the first Southerners, such as Vincas P. Steponaitis, "Native American Cultures in the Precolonial South," in *The Natchez District in the Old, Old South*, Southern Research Report 11, ed. Vincas P. Steponaitis, (Chapel Hill: Academic Affairs Library, 1998), 1–22. The Dalton point was first described in print in Carl H. Chapman, "A Preliminary Survey of Missouri Archaeology, Part IV," *Missouri Archaeologist* 10 (1948): 135–64. A general overview of the period can be found in David G. Anderson and Kenneth E. Sassaman, "Early and Middle Holocene Periods, 9500–3750 BC," in Fogelson, *Handbook of North American Indians*, 14: 87–100; and more in-depth treatment can be found in Anderson and Sassaman, *Paleoindian*.

5. For information on shell mounds and shell rings see Michael Russo, "Measuring Shell Rings for Social Inequality," in *Signs of Power: The Rise of Cultural Complexity in the Southeast*, ed. Jon L. Gibson and Philip J. Carr (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 26–70.

6. Information on Watson Brake can be found in Jay K. Johnson, "Beads, Microdrills, Bifaces, and Blades from Watson Brake," *Southern Archaeology* 19 (2000): 95–104; Joe Saunders et al., "Watson Brake, a Middle Archaic Mound Complex in Northeast Louisiana," *American Antiquity* 70 (2005): 631–68; Joe W. Saunders et al., "'Watson Brake Objects': An Unusual Archaic Artifact Type from Northeast Louisiana and Southwest Mississippi," *Southeastern Archaeology* 17 (1998): 72–79. Discussions of Archaic Mounds, particularly those in the Lower Mississippi Valley, can be found in Jon L. Gibson, "Before Their Time? Early Mounds in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *Southeastern Archaeology* 13 (1994): 162–86; Michael Russo, "Brief Introduction to the Study of Archaic Mounds in the South," *Southeastern Archaeology* 13 (1994): 89–93; Rebecca Saunders, "Case for Archaic Period Mounds in Southern Louisiana," *Southeastern Archaeology* 13 (1994): 118–34.

7. Joe Saunders, "Are We Fixing to Make the Same Mistake Again?" in *Signs of Power: The Rise of Cultural Complexity in the Southeast*, ed. Jon L. Gibson and Philip J. Carr (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 146–61;

Kenneth M. Ames, "The Archaeology of Rank," in *Handbook of Archaeological Theories*, ed. R. Alexander Bentley, Herbert D. G. Maschner, and Christopher Chippindale (New York: Altamira Press, 2008), 487–514; and Paul K. Wason, *The Archaeology of Rank* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

8. Russo, "Measuring Shell Rings"; Michael Russo, "Why We Don't Believe in Archaic Ceremonial Mounds and Why We Should: The Case from Florida," *Southeastern Archaeology* 13 (1994): 93–109; Saunders, "Are We Fixing to Make the Same Mistake Again?" 146–48.

9. Morton H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* (New York: Random House, 1967).

10. Gibson, *Ancient Mounds of Poverty Point;* and Kenneth E. Sassaman, "Poverty Point as Structure, Event, Process," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005): 335–64.

11. Chris S. Peebles and Susan M. Kus, "Some Archaeological Correlates of Ranked Societies," *American Antiquity* 42 (1977): 471–48.

12. For examples of approximately contemporary Southern studies looking at Mississippians as examples of hierarchical societies or chiefdoms see James A. Brown, "The Dimensions of Status in the Burials at Spiro," in *Approaches to the Social Dimension of Mortuary Practice*, ed. James A. Brown (Washington, DC: Society for American Archaeology Memoirs, 1971), 92–112; Lewis H. Larson, "Archaeological Implications of Social Stratification at the Etowah Site, Georgia," in Brown, *Social Dimension of Mortuary Practices*, 58–67; and Vincas P. Steponaitis, "Location Theory and Complex Chiefdoms," in *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, ed. Bruce D. Smith (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 417–53. Elman R. Service, *Origins of the State and Civilization* (New York: Norton, 1975); Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization* (New York: Random House, 1962).

13. For more on chiefdoms and their definition see Alex W. Barker, "Chiefdoms," in *Handbook of Archaeological Theories*, ed. R. Alexander Bentley, Herbert D. G. Maschner, and Christopher Chippindale (New York: Altamira Press, 2008), 515–32; Robert Carneiro, "The Chiefdom as a Precursor of the State," in *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*, ed. G. Jones and R. Kautz (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 39–79; Timothy K. Earle, "Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987): 279–308; Charles S. Spencer, "Rethinking the Chiefdom," in *Chiefdoms in the Americas*, ed. R. D. Drennan and C. Uribe (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 369–90.

14. For examples of this debate during the 1980s see Timothy R. Pauketat, "Mississippian Domestic Economy and Formation Process: A Response to Prentice," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 12 (1987): 77–88; Guy Prentice, "Economic Differentiation among Mississippian Farmsteads," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 10 (1985): 77–122; Richard W. Yerkes, "Mississippian Craft Specialization on the American Bottom," *Southeastern Archaeology* 8 (1989): 93–106. For later work looking at control of crafting at Moundville see Paul D. Welch, *Moundville's Economy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1991); and Gregory D. Wilson, "Crafting Control and the Control of Crafts: Rethinking the Moundville Greenstone Industry," *Southeastern Archaeology* 20 (2001): 118–28.

15. Charles R. Cobb, *From Quarry to Cornfield: The Political Economy of Mississippian Hoe Production* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000); Welch, *Moundville's Economy*, 176–78; Wilson, "Crafting Control and the Control of Crafts."

16. For evidence of its transformation outside of the South see Drennan and Uribe, *Chiefdoms in the Americas*; Timothy K. Earle, *How Chiefs Come to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); and Elsa M. Redmond, ed., *Chiefdoms and Chieftaincy in the Americas* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

17. Gary Feinman and Jill Neitzel, "Too Many Types: An Overview of Sedentary Prestate Societies in the Americas," in *Archaeological Method and Theory*, ed. Michael Schiffer (New York: Academic Press, 1984), 39–102; John M. O'Shea and Alex W. Barker, "Measuring Social Complexity and Variation: A Categorical Imperative?" in *Emergent Complexity: The Evolution of Intermediate Societies*, ed. Jeanne E. Arnold (Ann Arbor: International Monographs in Prehistory, 1996), 13–24.

18. Norman Yoffee, "Too Many Chiefs? (or, Safe Texts for the '90s)," in *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?* ed. Norman Yoffee and Andrew Sherratt (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60–78.

19. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*, Issues in Eastern Woodlands Archaeology (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Yoffee, "Too Many Chiefs?"

20. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*.

21. For a discussion of his approach to practice and history see Timothy R. Pauketat, "Practice and History in Archaeology: an Emerging Paradigm," *Anthropological Theory* 1 (2001): 73–98.

22. For a discussion of practice and agency in archaeology in general see Marcia-Anne Dobres and Christopher R. Hoffman, "Social Agency and the Dynamics of Prehistoric Technology," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 1 (1994): 211–58; Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, "Agency in Archaeology: Paradigm or Platitude?" in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), 3–17; Jennifer L. Dornan, "Agency and Archaeology: Past, Present, and Future Directions," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 9 (2002): 303–29. For some examples of agency and practice in Southern archaeology see Robin A. Beck et al., "Eventful Archaeology: The Place of Space in Structural Transformation," *Current Anthropology* 48 (2007): 833–60; Timothy R. Pauketat, ed., *The Archaeology of Traditions: Agency and History Before and After Columbus* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001); Timothy R. Pauketat and Susan M. Alt, "Agency in a Postmold? Physicality and the Archaeology of Culture-Making," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005): 213–36; Kenneth. E. Sassaman, "Agents of Change in Hunter-Gatherer Technology," in *Agency in Archaeology*, 148–68; Sassaman, "Poverty Point as Structure, Event, Process."

23. Jeanne E. Arnold, "Review of 'Political Structure and Change in the Prehistoric Southeastern United States,'" *Southeastern Archaeology* 16 (1998): 79–80.

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25. James B. Stoltman, "Cahokia as Seen from the Peripheries," in *New Perspectives on Cahokia: Views from the Periphery*, Monographs in World Archaeology, ed. James B. Stoltman (Madison, WI: Prehistory Press, 1991), 349–54.

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28. Sissel Schroeder, "Mississippian Political Organization: Economy versus Ideology," *Review of Archaeology* 23 (2002): 6–13. Examples of idealist literature include Thomas E. Emerson, *Cahokia and the Archaeology of Power* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippian*; Timothy R. Pauketat, *The Ascent of Chiefs: Cahokia and Mississippian Politics in Native North America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*; Timothy R. Pauketat, "The Tragedy of the Commoners," in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), 113–47; Timothy R. Pauketat and Thomas E. Emerson, "The Representation of Hegemony as Community at Cahokia," in *Material Symbols: Culture and Economy in Prehistory*, ed. John Robb (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1999), 302–17; Timothy R. Pauketat and Thomas E. Emerson, eds., *Cahokia: Domination and Ideology in the Mississippian World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

29. For example David G. Anderson, "Review of *Mississippian Political Economy* by Jon Muller," *American Antiquity* 63 (1998): 352–53. See Jon Muller, *Mississippian Political Economy* (New York: Plenum Press, 1997).

30. For some examples of the studies of households see Ramie A. Gougeon, "Different but the Same: Social Integration of Households in Mississippian Chiefdoms," in *Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society*, ed. Brian M. Butler and Paul D. Welch (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 2006), 178–96; Mark W. Mehrer, *Cahokia's Countryside: Household Archaeology, Settlement Patterns, and Social Power* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995); J. Daniel Rogers and Bruce D. Smith, eds., *Mississippian Communities and Households* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); Gregory D. Wilson, *The Archaeology of Everyday Life at Early Moundville* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008).

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32. Karl G. Lorenz, "Big Men in the Big Black Valley: Small Prehistoric Community Organization in Central Mississippi" (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, IL, 1992); Karl G. Lorenz, "Small-Scale Mississippian Community Organization in the Big Black River Valley of Mississippi," *Southeastern Archaeology* 15 (1996): 119–31.

33. John H. Blitz and Patrick C. Livingood, "Sociopolitical Implications of Mississippian Mound Volume," *American Antiquity* 69 (2004): 291–301.

34. Patrick C. Livingood and John H. Blitz, "Timing Is Everything: The Periodicity of Mississippian Mound Construction." Paper presented at the 61st Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, St. Louis, MO, 2004.

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38. Patrick C. Livingood, "No Crows Made Mounds: Do Cost-Distance Calculations of Travel Time Improve Distance-Based Models of the Mississippian?" Paper presented at the 64th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Knoxville, TN, 2007.

39. For other examples see Brian S. Bauer and R. Alan Covey, "Processes of State Formation in the Inca Heartland (Cuzco, Peru)," *American Anthropologist* 104 (2002): 846–64; Ronald Cohen and Alice Schlegel, "The Tribe as a Socio-Political Unit: a Cross-Cultural Examination," in *Proceedings: Essays of the Problem of Tribe* (Seattle: American Ethnology Society, 1968), 120–49; Mary W. Helms, *Ancient Panama* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Kenneth Little, "The Mende Chiefdoms of Sierra Leone," in *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. D. Forde and P. Kaberry (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 70–92; Charles S. Spencer, "Human Agency, Biased Transmission, and the Cultural Evolution of Chiefly Authority," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 12 (1993): 41–74.

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42. Adam King, "Power and the Sacred: Mound C and the Etowah Chiefdom," in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Richard F. Townsend (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2004), 151–66. For more information on Etowah see Adam King, *Etowah: The Political History of a Chiefdom Capital* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003). For other observations on the spatial patterning of burials at Etowah refer to Jeffrey P. Brain and James L. Phillips, *Shell Gorgets: Styles of the Late Prehistoric and Protohistoric Southeast* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum Press, 1996); and Larson, "Archaeological Implications of Social Stratification" in Brown, *Social Dimension of Mortuary Practices.*

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45. Mark Williams and Gary Shapiro, "Mississippian Political Dynamics in the Oconee Valley, Georgia," in *Political Structure and Change in the Prehistoric Southeastern United States*, ed. John F. Scarry (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 128–49.

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47. Blitz, "Mississippian Chiefdoms and the Fission-Fusion Process."

48. For more on heterarchy see Carole L. Crumley, "Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies," *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 6, no. 1 (1995): 1–5.

49. For an introduction to the ideas of the working group see Vernon James Knight, James A. Brown, and George P. Lankford, "On the Subject Matter of Southeastern Ceremonial Complex Art," *Southeastern Archaeology* 20 (2001): 129–53. Collections of the published results of the working group can be found in Adam King, ed., *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Chronology, Content, Context* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007); F. Kent Reilly and James Garber, eds., *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms: Interpretations of Mississippian Iconography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); and Richard F. Townsend, ed., *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2004).

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57. Knight, Brown, and Lankford, "Southeastern Ceremonial Complex Art."

58. The final point is debated. Although Knight et al. argued that agriculture and fertility themes are absent, Pauketat and Emerson have argued for their presence in some Cahokian imagery.

59. The information in this paragraph is largely based on Vincas P. Steponaitis and Vernon James Knight, "Moundville Art in Historical and Social Context," in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Richard F. Townsend (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2004), 167–82. The history of Moundville is told in Vernon James Knight and Vincas P. Steponaitis, "A New History of Moundville," in *Archaeology of the Moundville Chiefdom*, ed. Vernon James Knight and Vincas P. Steponaitis (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 1–25. The analysis of the Path of Souls and Great Serpent motifs is found in George P. Lankford, "The Great Serpent in Eastern North America," in *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms: Interpretations of Mississippian Iconography*, ed. F. Kent Reilly and James Garber (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 107–35; George P. Lankford, "The 'Path of Souls': Some Death Imagery in the Southern Ceremonial Complex," in Reilly and Garber, *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms*, 174–212; George P. Lankford, "World on a String: Some Cosmological Components of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex," in Townsend, *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand*, 207–218.

60. As one example, see the different patterns of gender representations of flint clay figurines in Susan Alt and Timothy R. Pauketat, "Sex and the Southeastern Cult," in *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: Chronology, Content, Context*, ed. F. Kent Reilly and James Garber (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 232–50.

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62. For more on diet, see Gayle J. Fritz, "Multiple Pathways to Farming in Precontact Eastern North America," *Journal of World Prehistory* 4 (1990): 387–435; Kreisten J. Gremillion, ed., *People, Plants, and Landscapes: Studies in Paleoethnobotany* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); C. Margaret Scarry, ed., *Foraging and Farming in the Eastern Woodlands* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993); and C. Margaret Scarry and John F. Scarry, "Native American 'Garden Agriculture' in Southeastern North America," *World Archaeology* 37 (2005): 259–74.

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Excavating a Mississippian Frontier

Fieldwork at the Carter Robinson Mound Site

MAUREEN MEYERS

The Mississippian period (AD 900–1550) in the Southern United States is typified by corn agriculture, earthen mound construction, and extensive trade networks.[1] Although many of these traits had existed before this time, it was during the Mississippian period that institutionalized hierarchy became part of Southern cultures. Societies now had permanent leaders, and those leaders (and their retinues) had access to more and better material culture, seen archaeologically as larger houses located close to mounds; more varied diets, including choice foods; and burials accompanied by exotic artifacts. Chiefs, in turn, may have provided protection or stability to the inhabitants of the chiefdom. Chiefdoms were present throughout the South at this time, starting most notably at Cahokia in Illinois near present-day St. Louis, whose size and magnitude were not replicated again; however, large chiefdoms were also located at Moundville in central Alabama and at Etowah and later Coosa in northwestern Georgia. Many studies have attempted to better define Southern chiefly economies, politics, settlement patterns, diet, and interactions, so that we now know more about the nature of Southern chiefdoms than ever before.[2] As a result, researchers recognize the large amount of variation in Mississippian chiefdoms; although they are generally alike, there are also marked differences within and between regions. Examining such variation is one avenue toward better understanding the nature of these societies.

One way to identify variation is by studying the societies that were located on the frontier of the Mississippian world. The study of frontiers of any culture is important because frontiers are areas where multiple identities intersect, and where power can be re-created or reconfigured.