TEN

Fluctuations between Simple and Complex Chiefdoms: Cycling in the Late Prehistoric Southeast

David G. Anderson

Chiefdoms are societies characterized by genealogically sanctioned leadership structures, tribute mobilization, and the limited redistribution of goods to lesser elites (Earle 1977, 225–27; Peebles and Kus 1977, 425–26; Service 1971, 134, 144–45, 159; Spencer 1987, 369; Steponaitis 1978, 428; Wright 1984, 45). Essentially two social strata are present, chiefly elites and commoners, with subdivisions in these strata directly related to polity size and organizational complexity (Feinman and Neitzel 1984, 57). Control of labor directed to surplus production and mobilization was of critical importance to furthering elite agendas, which typically centered on maintaining and enhancing personal prestige and power. This was accomplished, in part, through the redistribution of food and sumptuary items to lesser elites, usually close kin of the chief, as well as to other potential supporters, for the purpose of developing or maintaining a power base. Regularized redistribution for the benefit of all segments of society, to buffer subsistence shortfalls or ensure the exchange of resources unevenly distributed over the landscape, however, was uncommon.

Chiefdoms are also multicommunity political units, with the control of activities in a number of distinct villages, hamlets, or subsid-

iary centers directed by a hereditary decision-making group or elite typically residing in a central community (Carneiro 1981, 37–38; Earle 1987, 288). Lesser elites were sometimes dispersed over subsidiary communities as headmen or overseers. Ultimate decision-making authority theoretically resided in the hands of one individual, the chief, although the opinions and support of other elites was often of critical importance in day-to-day matters, just as maintaining the support of the populace was crucial over the long run. The size and power of a chiefdom can thus be measured by the number of polities or communities under the direct or indirect control of the primary center, whereas the importance of individual settlements in the political hierarchy can be determined, to some extent, by their size and the relative condition and treatment of their inhabitants, particularly their leaders.

The number of levels in the administrative hierarchy, or steps in the chain of the chiefly command structure, thus provide an effective measure of the organizational complexity of a chiefdom. The terms *simple chiefdom* and *complex chiefdom* are widely used to describe societies characterized by one and two administrative or decision-making levels above the local community, respectively (Steponaitis 1978, 420). The actual situation is somewhat more complicated, however, because most primary centers, whether of simple or complex chiefdoms, maintained direct control over populations in hamlets and villages that were close at hand, thus circumventing the need for a secondary administrative level (Milner and Schroedel 1994) (fig. 10.1). Three-level administrative hierarchies could also occur, specifically when one complex chiefdom acknowledged the authority of another, a situation indicated both archaeologically and in the early historic accounts from several parts of the Southeast (for example, Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990; Hudson et al. 1985, 1987; Milner 1990). The term *paramount chiefdom* has been proposed to describe the situation when a complex chiefdom exerts direct or indirect control over a series of other chiefdoms, including at least one other complex chiefdom.

How chiefly control was exercised varied appreciably and appears to have been related, at least in part, to societal size and organizational complexity. The authority a chief had over people in his own and other communities varied from absolute in some cases, with unquestioned obedience asked and received, to more indirect in oth-

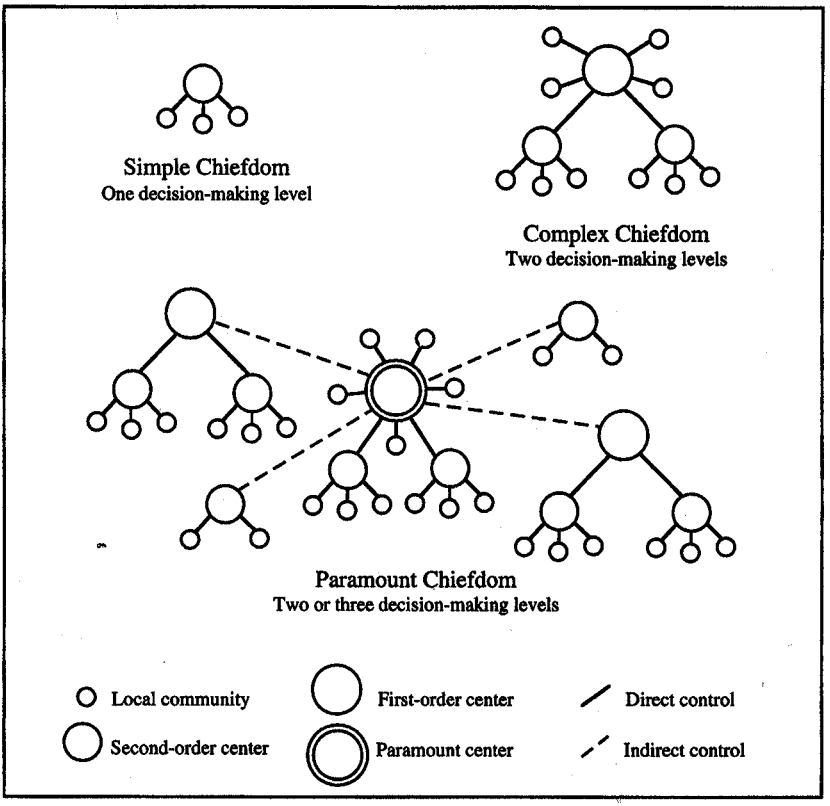

Figure 10.1. Idealized control hierarchies in simple and complex chiefdoms (modified from Anderson et al. 1994a, 9; Milner and Schroeder 1994)

ers, more an acknowledgment of power relationships and a willingness to offer tribute and service than a pattern of direct administration from a primary center. Given organizational limitations inherent in chiefdom society, specifically the difficulty in achieving direct administrative control over polities more than one or two days' travel time from a center, direct control by chiefly elites over appreciable areas was simply not feasible. As a result, the territory under the direct administrative control of most southeastern chiefdoms appears to have rarely exceeded 40 km in any direction (Hally 1993). The area under the *indirect* control of a center, where power relations were determined either voluntarily or through threats or

coercion, however and in contrast, could be much larger, as was often the case in the region's complex and paramount chiefdoms.

Cycling Behavior in Chiefdom Society

Organizational change in chiefdoms includes fluctuations between simple and complex/paramount chiefdoms, a process I have elsewhere called cycling (Anderson 1990a, 24–26; 1994b). More specifically, cycling encompasses the transformations that occur when the administrative or decision-making levels within the chiefdoms occupying a region fluctuate between one and two or (in the case of some paramount chiefdoms) three levels above the local community. Evidence for cycling is widespread, to the point where it appears to be a basic characteristic of chiefdom society, although its detection and identification requires examination at broad spatial and temporal scales, encompassing regions and generations. Archaeological analysis, fortunately, is ideally suited to the exploration of such processes.

Shifts in administrative hierarchies—the information processing and management control networks of chiefdom society—comprise a critical aspect of cycling behavior. How changes in administrative and control structures occur and, as a result, bring about changes in organizational complexity is a subject that has seen appreciable research, much of it directed to understanding how both chiefdoms as well as state-level societies could have emerged, and particularly how the latter social form could have developed from the former (for example, Earle 1987, 292–93; Earle 1991; Flannery 1972; Johnson 1973, 1978, 1982; Peebles and Kus 1977, 427–31; Wright 1969; Wright 1977, 381–82; Wright 1984, 42–44; Wright and Johnson 1975). Examining cycling can lead to a better understanding of such questions because, as an apparent inherent aspect of chiefdoms, the existence of the process suggests there are alternatives to unilineal evolutionary models of state formation, as well as new frameworks through which we explore and understand how long-term organizational change does occur (see also Yoffee 1993).

To understand how changes in administrative levels can occur, it is helpful to understand how these structures formed and operated in the first place. That is, how did hereditary decision-making groups emerge, and how did the authority of a privileged few come to be ac-

cepted by the remainder of the population? This is, of course, a question that philosophers, anthropologists, and social scientists have wrestled with for centuries, and there is no clear consensus on an answer. The formation of hereditary decision-making groups is perhaps most commonly seen as a solution to increased information-processing demands brought about by environmental change, population pressure, or increased social interaction and political competition, particularly competition for followers, prestige, and power (for example, see discussions in Bender 1985; Brumfiel and Fox 1994; Clark 1994; Clark and Blake 1994; Earle 1987, 289; Marquardt 1987, 1988; Patterson and Gailey 1987; Shryock 1987). The process is assumed to have been fairly gradual, on the order of generations rather than years, and lacking in intentionality. That is, the end result, hereditary social ranking and unequal access to resources, was unforeseen by the generations of individual actors participating in the process.

In brief, social strata appear to have emerged around the decision makers occupying the positions or levels in nascent administrative hierarchies and, hence, the evolution of both social ranking and decision-making apparatuses appears to have gone hand in hand (Cordy 1981, 220–21). How specifically did this happen? Quite simply, the decision makers' largesse in dispensing rewards to relatives, assistants, and retainers would create a group of people with a vested interest in maintaining and perhaps expanding such a system. Those so privileged would likely over time come to be equated with the primary decision maker(s) and assume similar trappings of status. Simple chiefdoms, in this view, have two social-rank echelons, commoners (typically dispersed throughout the chiefdom) and elites (typically located primarily at the chiefly center), whereas complex chiefdoms are those with three or more rank echelons, encompassing commoners (again, dispersed throughout the chiefdom), lesser elites (at local centers), and apical elites (located at the primary center) (Cordy 1981, 3–4). Changes in administrative levels in chiefdoms, or cycling, should thus also be accompanied by changes in patterns of social ranking.

Causes of Cycling in Chiefdoms

Why does cycling occur, and how is the process related to the transformation of some chiefdoms into state-level societies, the mainte-

nance of many others for hundreds or thousands of years in seemingly evolutionary stasis, or the disappearance of still others from some areas altogether? The causes of cycling, I believe, are complex and multivariate and encompass everything effecting the organizational stability of chiefdoms, defined here as the maintenance of administrative complexity, as measured by the number of decision-making levels in operation. The adoption of a regional perspective is crucial to the investigation of cycling, because chiefdoms typically expand or contract at the expense of or in response to the actions of their neighbors. That is, centers of power shift over the landscape as first one community and then another assumes prominence, and it is this regional pattern of the emergence and decline of complex chiefdoms that is what is meant by cycling behavior.

Specific factors that can effect the organizational stability of chiefdoms include societal evolutionary and developmental histories; the strength of ideologies sanctifying chiefly authority; the potential for conflict when matters of chiefly succession, population growth, territorial maintenance or expansion, and/or the incorporation of outsiders arise; the ability of chiefdom organizational hierarchies to accommodate stress brought about by social or ecological perturbations, such as warfare, crop failure, exchange network collapse, or pressure on subsistence resources; the ability of chiefdom administrative structures to handle changes in information load; the degree to which the elite maintain control over subsistence production as well as access to nonutilitarian luxury or status-marking prestige goods; the position of individual polities in prestige-goods exchange networks; and the impact of developments in one chiefdom on other such societies, both nearby and over a much larger region.

Although a great many factors can bring about cycling, factional competition between elites for power and prestige, and particularly the office of the chief itself, appears to have been a primary cause of much of the organizational instability observed in these societies. Because positions of authority were typically based on kinship, this meant that a chief's principal supporters were also his potential successors, an inherent structural weakness of this form of political control. That is, although a chief was dependent upon supporters for the maintenance of power, he or she had to take care to suppress or constructively channel the ambitions of these people. How succes-

sion was determined was thus of particular importance to the long-term stability of these societies. Unless rules of succession were strictly delimited and adhered to, for example, the death of a chief could presage a period of social turmoil until a successful claimant emerged, a pattern well documented in the ethnographic accounts (for example, Burling 1974; Goldman 1970; Helms 1979; Kirch 1984; Sahlins 1958). Chiefly cycling was thus brought about, in part, by an internal contradiction in the kin-based structure of these societies, the necessity of placing potential rivals into positions of power from which they could mount successional challenges, activity that precluded the development of stable organizational forms (see also Anderson 1994a for additional discussion of factional competition in Mississippian society).

Successional events resulting in changes in the number of decision-making levels, or cycling behavior, must be differentiated from events that merely resulted in the replacement of one chiefly elite by another in the same role. Successional crises could result in cycling behavior, though. The replacement of a strong leader by an incompetent one could cause a complex chiefdom to fragment, whereas the succession of a particularly skilled individual might result in the expansion of a simple chiefdom to a position of dominance over its neighbors, a process that could have led to the formation of a complex chiefdom. Competition between elite individuals and their factions for control of chiefly offices and associated privileges thus appears to have only rarely been directed against the system itself, because the primary goal of all contenders was achieving these offices, not seeing to their destruction. Thus, although a successful rebellion could result in the fragmentation of a complex chiefdom, this was probably not an intended consequence.

Partial to near-absolute elite control over the labor and surplus production of commoner populations was another characteristic of chiefdoms. The regular production, appropriation, and storage of surplus, which was typically defined in terms of subsistence products, was particularly critical to the organizational stability of these societies (Lenski 1966, 44–45; Orans 1966; Sahlins 1958). Beyond providing for the subsistence needs of the elite, food surpluses could be used to finance activities intended to help legitimize their position and authority, such as communal feasting to demonstrate chiefly

largesse, the construction of monumental structures intended to make visual statements about the importance and abilities of the chief as well as the society in general, or the production and exchange of prestige goods intended to enlist supporters as well as co-opt potential rivals (Earle 1978, 225–27; Helms 1979; Peebles and Kus 1977; Steponaitis 1978, 1981). Surpluses could also be used by local elites to facilitate their direct or indirect interaction with elites and peoples at appreciable distances, thereby demonstrating a control over sacred or esoteric knowledge (Helms 1979). Factors effecting surplus production, mobilization, storage, and use such as climate, warfare, or access to resources could thus have an appreciable impact on chiefly administrative structures and, hence, these areas were a focus of elite life and concern.

The emergence and spread of chiefdom organizational forms appears to have been closely tied to regional patterns of demography and interaction. As chiefdoms emerged within a region, the presumed adaptive advantage of this organizational form would have facilitated its spread, assuming they enjoyed greater reproductive success than neighboring nonchiefdom societies. This process has been described in conflict theory terms by Carneiro (1981, 66), who argued that warfare and conquest was a primary means by which chiefdom organizational forms would spread throughout a region. Selection, or the differential reproductive success of the victorious populations, is implicit in this argument. Given the extent of interaction that occurred between prehistoric societies in the Eastern Woodlands, however, it is highly unlikely that the spread of one or a few emergent chiefdoms was the mechanism by which this organizational form spread over much of the region between ca. A.D. 900 and 1100 (Smith 1990). Once chiefdoms emerged anywhere in a region, the seeds would have been planted for their appearance everywhere, through processes of defensive reaction or competitive emulation. That is, chiefdom organization forms may have been adopted as a form of self-defense by groups that perceived themselves threatened, or alternatively, they may have been adopted because this type of organization, once in place, would enhance the interests of certain groups. Regional patterns of prestige-based competition between potential emergent elites are thus thought by some scholars to have been the means by which the contemporaneous emergence of chief-

doms over a large areas occurred, in which conflict was only one of the ways that elite competition could have been acted out (Clark 1994; Clark and Blake 1994; Renfrew and Cherry 1986).

Once simple chiefdoms were in place within a region, the stage was set for the emergence and collapse of complex chiefdoms, or cycling behavior. Dramatic population shifts likely occurred as rival elites competed for followers, and as people were either killed, expelled from, or incorporated into the more successful polities. If, as appears probable, differential reproductive success accrued to capable leaders (for example, Betzig 1982, 1986; Betzig, Muldur, and Turke 1988; Chagnon and Irons 1979; Turke and Betzig 1985), and assuming no population-control or status-leveling mechanisms were in place, the resulting elite population growth may have forced expansion. That is, as increasing numbers of elite children were produced by the success of the system, places had to be found for them. The need to disperse possible contenders for power as well as maintain chiefly prerogatives amid increasing numbers of elite consumers may thus have driven the geographic expansion of some chiefdoms. In particular, if the numbers of elite increased too far, they may have placed strains on the ability of the remainder of society to provide for them, threatening overall organizational stability.

The power base of a chief was also linked to demographic patterns within specific communities, specifically the numbers of a chief's close supporters, typically his or her primary and affinal kin, compared to the numbers of nonkin and rival elites (Turner 1957, 61–62). Chiefs that had to deal with large numbers of nonkin may have been in a more precarious position than those in communities where kinship linked large segments of the population. When a chiefdom expanded, rival elites had to be either eliminated or co-opted, and unless this was done properly they might soon come to represent rival power bases. This was particularly true of elites situated in areas at some distance from the main center, and hence out from under its direct control. Chiefly cycling, from the perspective of conflict theory, thus represents a repeated pattern of conquest, expansion and, ultimately, overextension leading to organizational collapse, from which complex chiefdoms eventually emerged anew, as regional elites vied with one another to fill the power vacuum.

Regional physiographic structure, resource productivity, and cli-

mate were also important factors shaping and constraining chiefdom organizational stability. Regional physiographic structure placed constraints on the location and spacing of individual settlements, centers, and polities, as well as the avenues and directions along which communication and trade could occur (Clark and Blake 1994, 19–20; Carneiro 1970, 734–35; Hodder and Orton 1976, 224–36; Johnson 1977, 488–94; Johnson 1987, 115ff; Scarry and Payne 1986). The size, distribution, and stability of chiefdoms in various parts of the Eastern Woodlands appears to have been shaped, at least in part, by local and subregional physiographic conditions. In the eastern part of the region, from Alabama through the Carolinas, for example, the local Mississippian polities were typically fairly small and widely separated from one another, a pattern likely shaped by the widely separated, linear riverine systems that characterize this part of the region. In parts of the Central and Lower Mississippi River Valley, in contrast, chiefdoms tended to be more tightly packed on the landscape and, in some areas like the American Bottom, were appreciably larger than their counterparts in the eastern part of the region. This may be due to the tremendous subsistence resources and agricultural potential of the land along the Mississippi and its tributaries, the relative ease of transportation over long distances along these same rivers, and the more open or unrestricted environment, facilitating extensive interaction.

The occurrence and availability of plant and animal populations, agricultural soils and water, as well as short- and long-term variation in rainfall, frost, sunlight, and other climatic variables played a major role in shaping subsistence production and the generation of surplus, something particularly crucial to the maintenance of organizational stability of chiefdoms (Anderson, Stahle, and Cleaveland 1995; Cordy 1981, 30–44; Orans 1966; Sahlins 1958, 107–35, 201–17). Food resources and surplus production had to occur at levels sufficient to maintain elite prerogatives, which meant that land-management and storage systems had to be in place to ensure this was the case. Strategies by which this was attempted included the dispersal of agricultural fields over a number of microenvironments and over large areas to avoid the effects of localized climatic fluctuations; the dispersal of storage facilities in a number of communities, coupled with attempts to guard, hide, or restrict access to these reserves; and

the creation and maintenance of extensive hunting territories or buffer zones, from which wild food resources could be drawn to supplement crop yields (Burns 1983, 186–87; Chmurny 1973; DeBoer 1988; Ford 1980; Gluckman 1951, 9–10; Hickerson 1965; Mech 1977). Repeated harvest shortfalls, losses of stored food reserves, or infringement on resource/buffer zones could have, over time, been devastating to these societies.

The means and success by which chiefly elites received and processed information and then made decisions was also important in shaping the organizational stability of chiefdoms. Poor decisions by the elite could be disastrous if they disrupted the subsistence economy, resulted in great losses in warfare, or led to the collapse of exchange and interaction networks. That this happened frequently is well documented in both history and ethnography, where numerous examples can be found of incompetent rulers dissipating the accomplishments of their predecessors. The kin-based administrative systems of chiefdoms were such that, except in rare cases, the direct administration of outlying communities more than a day or two's travel from a center was rare (Hally 1993). The larger and more complex the chiefdom, as a result, the more difficulty it had with administrative and information processing demands. One measure of the information load, or potential stress a chiefdom was under, is span of control, or the number of subsidiary communities or centers under a given administrative center (Johnson 1982, 410); this can sometimes be inferred archaeologically using settlement data. As complex chiefdoms thus formed and expanded, the administrative load on the chiefly elites in these societies likewise increased, leading to either information overload and system collapse or the emergence of more effective or efficient decision-making apparatus. Except where primary or secondary state formation occurred, however, system collapse was what typically ensued. Cycling can thus also be viewed, in part, as an alternation between successful and unsuccessful responses to information processing demands resulting, respectively, in the formation and collapse of complex chiefdoms.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that the study of cycling necessitates the consideration of a wide range of factors promoting either organizational stability or instability. Causal links exist between many of these variables, furthermore, indicating that

exploring chiefly cycling requires the consideration of a complex and diverse array of variables. Documenting the process in the southeastern United States and advancing explanations for its occurrence occupies the remainder of this chapter.

Evidence for Cycling in the Mississippian Chiefdoms of the Southeastern United States

The late prehistoric and early contact era chiefdoms of the Southeast offer an outstanding laboratory for the study of cycling. Evidence for the emergence, expansion, collapse, and reemergence or replacement of both simple and complex chiefdoms has been found throughout the region, and the historical trajectories of major regional polities like those centered on Cahokia, Moundville, and Etowah have long intrigued scholars. Some centers were occupied for centuries; others saw use for little more than a generation or two, and in some cases the abandonment of a center was associated with a much larger pattern of depopulation, up to and including major portions of river valleys, such as along the Central Tennessee, the Lower and Middle Savannah, or parts of the Central Mississippi Valley (Anderson 1991; S. Williams 1990).

The archaeological database that can be brought to bear on these kinds of questions in the Southeast is immense, rivaling that in existence anywhere in the world. Literally tens of thousands of Mississippian sites have been recorded in the region, and hundreds have been extensively excavated, many in recent years in projects directed to the recovery of a wide range of information. Fieldwork, which a century ago was directed almost exclusively to mound exploration, has for many years been directed to the entire known range of site types, including centers, villages, hamlets, and special-activity locuses. In many parts of the region artifact-based chronological resolution on the order of 100-year intervals or less is possible, permitting the detailed investigation of settlement patterning, land use, and political change. An extensive historic record also exists describing southeastern chiefdoms during the period of initial European contact in the sixteenth century. Finally, extensive paleoenvironmental research has been conducted in recent years, work directed to the documentation and reconstruction of lithology and physiography,

vegetational communities, fluvial dynamics, site-formation processes, and climatic conditions, and their impact on human populations.

Evidence from Early Historic Accounts

At the time of initial European contact in the early sixteenth century, chiefdom societies were observed over much of the Southeast. The records of early explorers, most notably those from the De Soto, De Luna, and Pardo expeditions, contain a wealth of information about the internal organization, operation, and external relationships of these societies, including accounts of chiefly succession, warfare, tribute flow, buffer zones, the abandonment of towns and centers, and the effects of crop failures or other disasters on leadership positions (for example, Anderson 1994b; DePratter 1983, 1989; Dye 1990; Hudson 1976, 1986, 1990; Hudson, Smith, and DePratter 1984; Hudson et al. 1985, 1987; Knight 1981, 1986, 1990; Smith 1987; Smith and Hally 1992). Three and possibly four paramount chiefdoms were found in the South Appalachian area at the time of initial European contact that the Spanish described as the provinces of Apalachee, Coosa, Ocute, and Cofitachequi (DePratter 1989; DePratter, Hudson, and Smith 1983; Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990; Hudson, Smith, and DePratter 1984; Hudson et al. 1985, 1987; J. Scarry 1990b, 1994b) (fig. 10.2). These societies were characterized by a paramount chief ruling or at least owed fealty from a series of quasi-autonomous lesser chiefs and elites that themselves ruled simple or complex chiefdoms. A two-level decision-making hierarchy is evident in the region's simple chiefdoms, corresponding to officials at villages and centers, whereas a three-level decision-making hierarchy is evident in complex and paramount chiefdoms, corresponding to officials at the villages, secondary centers, and at the primary center (Hudson 1990, 61). These levels corresponded to village headmen (oratas), chiefs over a fairly appreciable number of subsidiary communities (micos), and paramount chiefs ruling extensive territories (cacique grandes). Ocute does not appear to have been as well integrated as the other three, because the accounts make no mention of the presence of a cacique grandes, and this province may instead represent a weakly linked group of simple and complex chiefdoms.

Factional competition directed to obtaining chiefly office was

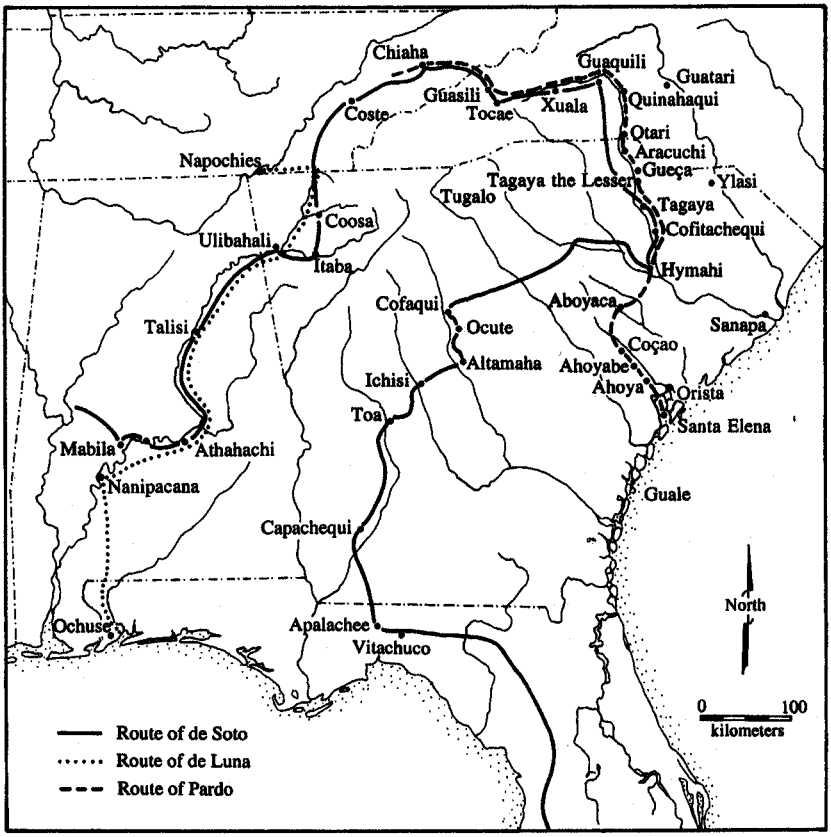

Figure 10.2. Mississippian chiefdoms in the south Appalachian area in the mid-sixteenth century

widespread in Mississippian chiefdoms of the contact era, and some of the accounts are quite graphic in describing the bloodshed that sometimes accompanied chiefly rivalries (Vargas Ugarte in Marquardt 1988, 180; Vega in Shelby 1993, 394–406). Succession was typically matrilineal, that is, from a chief to his sister's son, or nephew, something well documented in the early accounts, whereas postmarital residence, at least in the latter historic era, was matrilocal (DePratter 1983, 100–110; Hudson 1976, 185–95; Murdock 1967, 114). Because this would have resulted in male chiefly heirs relocating to their wive's communities upon marriage, some kind of excep-

tion was likely made, to ensure chiefly succession continued within a given community. That is, newly ascendant chiefs either relocated to the central community or their wives did; given various accounts describing polygyny (Swanton 1946, 701–9), it is likely that chiefly elites remained in their home community. Although subsidiary elites administering outlying communities were often related to the chief, it is not known whether their children succeeded to power or new elites were imposed from the primary center when leadership there changed hands. Matrilineal succession coupled with matrilocal residence could have thus been potentially quite destabilizing to these societies. Whether and under what circumstances chiefly succession was peaceful or violent is likewise not well understood. Although resolving archaeological evidence of succession is difficult because of the short time scales involved, there are accounts that indicate the death of a chief in some societies was marked by the construction of new mound stages or other facilities (Le Petit in Swanton 1911, 103; Swanton 1946, 726, 729).

Warfare played a major role in the cycling of Mississippian chiefdoms over the region, and in the rise and decline of individual societies (DePratter 1983, 44–67; Dye 1990; Larson 1972). The historic accounts provide a number of examples of military circumscription, and the tactics by which one chiefdom achieved domination over another. The province of Cofitachequi, for example, appears to have grown through a gradual war of attrition at the expense of the neighboring province of Ocute (Vega in Shelby 1993, 268), and quite possibly at the expense of the chiefdoms of the Savannah River in the late prehistoric era as well (Anderson 1994b; see also chapter 8 in this volume). Repeated minor victories in skirmish warfare, centered on the ambushing of hunting parties, rather than sudden all-out attacks on central settlements had, over time, resulted in the demoralization of the Ocute elites, and made them reluctant to challenge the people or enter the territories of Cofitachequi. The long-term effects of small-scale warfare could thus be as devastating as more intensive campaigns and could include the appropriation of tribute from defeated elites, the collapse of chiefly authority, and the relocation of populations. Although ecological factors such as competition for hunting territory, agricultural land, or cleared fields have been suggested as primary reasons behind Mississippian warfare (Gramly

1977; Larson 1972; Turner and Santley 1979), there is little documentary support for such an inference, aside from the accounts that indicate skirmish warfare could have had the effect, whether intended or not, of creating and maintaining buffer or resource procurement zones.

Warfare between elites as a means of achieving power and prestige and as a mechanism for establishing and enforcing tributary relationships, however, is well documented in the sixteenth-century Southeast. The members of the 1560 De Luna expedition, for example, assisted the leader of Coosa in the collection of tribute from a rival town called Napochies, whose elites had rebelled and refused to recognize the primacy of Coosa (DePratter 1983, 57–58, 173–74; Hudson 1988, 1990, 13, 104). This example, and others like it that De Soto encountered, such as the rivalry between Pacaha and Casqui in Arkansas or the double dealing of the chief of Talise who attempted to play his neighbors against one another (Vega in Shelby 1993, 325–26, 394–406), illustrate how cycling, or the replacement of one power center by another, could take place. If a polity became weakened, for whatever reason, something that may have been brought about through losses in warfare, or due to famine, disease, or emigration, it would no longer have the military capability to compel cooperation or submission of its neighbors, prompting challenges from them either for overall leadership or for autonomy. These challenges initially took the form of a refusal to submit tribute, and if the bid for autonomy was not recognized and accepted, a possible result was warfare, the replacement or reestablishment of paramount elites, and the shuffling of various centers in the dominance hierarchy.

Although providing rich detail on southeastern chiefdoms of the contact era, the ethnohistoric record does have its limits for the study of processes of political change, primarily in that the existing accounts are essentially synchronic portraits taken from brief and temporally widely spaced expeditions. Although our knowledge of several major sixteenth-century southeastern chiefdoms such as Coosa, Apalachee, or Cofitachequi is characterized by vivid detail, it is almost invariably based on accounts of visits that usually lasted no more than a few days or weeks, the interval the expeditions spent visiting or passing through. Many of these societies, furthermore, were never seen again or had changed almost beyond recognition

when these areas were revisited by subsequent European explorers years, decades or, in many parts of the region, more than a century later. Although the early accounts describe the foundations of chiefly authority and document individual episodes of political change, the causes and consequences of long-term processes of change are not well covered. For this reason understanding cycling requires the evaluation of both archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence.

Evidence from Archaeological Research

Instructive examples of cycling processes are evident in the archaeological record from the southeastern United States. Examining the number, size, and temporal separation of mound stages, for example, together with the number and kind of prestige goods in contemporaneous burials, has been used to explore the political fortunes of individual societies, and how and under what circumstances chiefly succession may have occurred (for example, Anderson 1994b; Blitz 1993a; Peebles 1986, 1987a, 1987b; Steponaitis 1991; Welch 1991). When the flow of prestige goods declines or is interrupted, as indicated by their incidence in burials, it may indicate that the position of the elite was growing precarious. The collapse of a number of southeastern chiefdoms, including Moundville and Spiro, in fact, has been attributed, in part, to interruptions in prestige-goods exchange networks (for example, Peebles 1987a, 30; Rogers, chapter 4 in this volume; but see Anderson 1994b, 312, chapter 8 in this volume, and the discussion below for evidence that collapse for such a reason may not have been either rapid or inevitable for at least some of the region's chiefdoms). If the construction of new mound stages reflects a successional event, such as the death or replacement of a chief, something supported by ethnohistoric accounts (DePratter 1983, 179; Hally 1993; Schnell, Knight, and Schnell 1981, 126–45; Waring 1968a, 58–62, 66), the numbers of successive stages in a mound (barring major interruptions) may indicate the number of chiefly leaders who occupied that center, and the size of each stage might indicate their relative power. Stage construction every twenty to thirty years is indicated at a number of sites in Georgia and the Carolinas, an interval that may indicate the tenure of local chiefs or paramounts (Anderson 1994b, 128; Hally 1993).

The polities centered at Cahokia, Moundville, and Coosa, perhaps

the best-documented paramount chiefdoms currently known from the Southeast, exhibit dramatic developmental histories useful for illustrating and examining the cycling process. Cahokia and Moundville had emerged, expanded, and then collapsed before European contact, whereas Coosa was at or near its height in the first half of the sixteenth century and was visited by Spanish expeditions. The American Bottom of the Central Mississippi Valley was occupied by the most complex chiefdom society to emerge during the Mississippian period in the Eastern Woodlands (Fowler 1975, 1978; Milner 1990, chapter 3 in this volume; Pauketat 1994). A series of multimound centers arose throughout this approximately 1,225-square-mile area after A.D. 800, the largest of which, centered on the site of Cahokia, included more than 100 mounds spread over an area close to 5 square miles in extent at its height in about A.D. 1200; one of the mounds was among the largest structures ever erected by human populations in the New World. By A.D. 1350, however, little more than a century after its peak, Cahokia and many of the other centers in the American Bottom had been abandoned, an organizational collapse that is itself as unprecedented in scale as the emergence of this society in the first place.

Over and above the long-term pattern of emergence, expansion, and decline, however, political power also shifted over the landscape over the course of the Mississippian in the American Bottom, illustrating the regional pattern of cycling in microcosm. The duration and intensity of occupation and the relative importance of the secondary centers was apparently shaped, to some extent, by Cahokia's interaction with societies across the larger region (Fowler 1978, 462; Milner 1990). During the Lohmann phase (ca. A.D. 1050–1100, using Hall's [1991] calibrated chronology), for example, when there is appreciable evidence for contact with chiefdoms to the south and southwest in the Lower Mississippi Valley and Caddoan areas, the Lunsford-Pulcher site at the south end of the American Bottom was a major center second only to Cahokia. During the subsequent Stirling and Moorehead phases from ca. A.D. 1100–1200 and 1200–1275, respectively, when contacts with areas to the north and northwest are evident, a major center existed at the Mitchell site at the northern end of the American Bottom, near the mouth of the Missouri River. Finally, as Cahokia declined, there is some evidence to

suggest that other centers were emerging elsewhere in the general upper Midwest and Central Mississippi Valley.

Like Cahokia, the Moundville chiefdom in the Black Warrior River Valley of western Alabama emerged, expanded, and declined over a period of several centuries (Knight 1994b; Peebles 1986, 1987a, 1987b; Steponaitis 1978, 1983a, 1991; Welch 1990, 1991, chapter 5 in this volume). Initially one of a series of simple chiefdoms, the Moundville site emerged as the center of a paramount chiefdom toward the end of the Moundville I phase (ca. A.D. 1050–1250). This polity expanded markedly in size and influence during the Moundville II phase (A.D. 1250–1400), when populations in scattered communities and subsidiary centers along a roughly 50-km section of the Black Warrior River were brought under the control of the paramount center. By the start of the Moundville III phase (A.D. 1400–1500) the Moundville chiefdom may have been one of the most powerful in the Southeast, although there is evidence that the population at the center itself was in decline. Shortly after the end of the Moundville III phase, however, the chiefdom had collapsed and the center itself had been abandoned, a pattern similar to that observed at Cahokia.

The actions of the Moundville paramountcy shaped the historical trajectories of chiefdoms throughout the surrounding region. The emergence of the paramount center appears to have been during a period of militaristic expansion. Societies in nearby drainages, notably along the Upper Black Warrior, the Central Cahaba, and the Central Tennessee disappeared during the Moundville II phase, something that suggests the deliberate elimination of potential rivals and the scattering or consolidation of their populations. Along the Tombigbee to the west, the disappearance of fortifications, the reduction or elimination of mound construction, and the impoverishment of local elites suggests the chiefdoms in this area were intentionally weakened and impoverished by the Moundville elites. Although there is appreciable evidence for the long distance exchange of prestige goods during the Moundville II phase, as evidenced from grave associations, little material is from the South Appalachian area (Welch 1986, 184–190), suggesting that the rivalry the Spanish observed in the early sixteenth century between the paramount elites of Coosa and Tastaluca in northwestern Georgia and central Alabama, respectively, may have had considerable time depth.

Following the disappearance of the Moundville chiefdom sometime around or shortly after A.D. 1500, the succeeding Alabama River phase (A.D. 1500–1700) occupations were characterized by small, egalitarian settlements evenly dispersed along the drainage. A marked decline in population skeletal health is indicated, something thought to have been caused by the collapse of the chiefly organization capable of buffering food shortages (Hill 1981; Powell 1988, 189–91). The collapse of the Moundville chiefdom has been attributed to a failure of the prestige-goods network, which undermined the ability of the elite to maintain their position (Peebles 1986, 30; 1987b, 14–15). The actual decline in the importation of prestige goods, however, appears to have begun about the time or soon after the chiefdom had consolidated its hold over the immediate region during the Moundville II phase (Steponaitis 1991, 208–12). That the chiefdom was able to continue for another two centuries suggests, however, that a decline in prestige goods in circulation cannot be invariably equated with a decline in organizational stability.

At the time of initial European contact the paramount chiefdom of Coosa was apparently one of the largest and most complex Mississippian societies in the southeastern United States (Hally and Langford 1988; Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990; Hudson et al. 1985, 1987). Visited or contacted by the three major Spanish expeditions into the interior that took place during the middle third of the sixteenth century, led by De Soto, De Luna, and Pardo, the province of Coosa at its height is inferred to have consisted of a series of linked polities stretching for about 400 km along the Coosa and Tennessee River Valleys. When De Soto came through in 1540 the chiefdom may have been at its peak, although it appears to have declined markedly following contact, as indicated by the accounts of the 1559–1561 De Luna expedition (including the discussion of the raid on the Napochies mentioned above), which suggested it was much reduced in size and importance. Its condition during the 1566–1567 Pardo expeditions, which reached only the eastern margin of the chiefdom, is unclear, although there is a suggestion that it had regained some or all of its former dominance (Hudson 1990, 103–104).

Archaeological research has identified a series of seven site clusters that appear to represent the constituent subchiefdoms of the polity,

although little evidence has been found to indicate they were part of the complex chiefdom described by the Spanish (Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990). The pottery within each site cluster can be distinguished at the phase level, and the inferred boundaries of the province span two major subregional ceramic traditions, Dallas and Lamar (Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990, 133). Although three mounds were present and in use at the presumed central town of the Coosa province, at the Little Egypt site, these mounds were much smaller than those present at sites like Citico, Etowah, and Toqua, although these had admittedly been built much earlier and were no longer in use when Coosa was at its height. The evidence suggests that political ties rather than shared material culture or monumental construction were what bound together the constituent polities of complex and paramount chiefdoms in the Southeast, at least in the later prehistoric and early contact era. The only distinctive artifact that may be associated with Coosa is the Citico-style gorget, found almost exclusively with adult female and adolescent interments in a distribution roughly coextensive in time and space with the inferred boundaries of the province; this distribution may indicate the geographic extent of marital alliance networks binding the paramount chiefdom together (Hally, Smith, and Langford 1990; Hudson et al. 1985, 732–33).

The work with Coosa, although highlighting the fact that complex and paramount chiefdoms may appear to be almost invisible archaeologically, offers suggestions about how these polities can be recognized archaeologically. Comprehensive regional survey may permit the resolution of site clusters representing individual chiefdoms, for example, and settlement analyses within and between these clusters may permit the identification of primary and secondary centers and subsidiary communities. In addition, the recognition of distinctive categories of artifacts shared by large numbers of sites may indicate to the existence and extent of political ties.

Conclusions

We have seen that the Southeast is an excellent area for the study of political change, and particularly for exploring the reasons behind the emergence and collapse of complex and paramount chiefdoms

against a regional landscape of simple chiefdoms. This process, which I have called cycling, is an inherent aspect of chiefdoms and helps us understand why these societies were able to exist for long periods in parts of the world. As such, the existence of cycling serves to remind us that there are alternatives to the assumed pattern of unilineal evolution from bands to states that has achieved near teleological significance in some cultural evolutionary formulations. This is not to say that cycling invariably resulted in evolutionary stasis, however. Far from it. Over time, in fact, the process could have resulted in profound evolutionary transformations. Where chiefly succession was subject to repeated and bloody challenge, for example, this might lead to the emergence of progressively stronger institutions based on secular power. This may be indicated in the Mississippian world, where extensive mound building and highly developed mortuary ceremonialism and iconography, together with evidence for widespread interaction and exchange of prestige goods, strategies designed to reinforce the sacred position of the elite, peaks in the thirteenth century and declines rapidly thereafter, never again assuming the same level of prominence (Muller 1989). Ideological transformations, that is, changes in world view and perceived relationships between groups of people, such as elites and commoners, may likewise become altered to the point where a reversion to earlier positions would have been difficult (1994a, 21–22). Only the massively disruptive effects of contact, for example, brought about an apparent widespread reversion to earlier and more egalitarian forms of social organization. A primary lesson from the study of cycling, it should be clear, is that human history is shaped, in part, by processes that operate at very long scales, and that archaeology can help us resolve and understand them.