

Factional competition
and political
development in the
New World

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6 Factional competition and the political evolution of Mississippian chiefdoms in the Southeastern United States

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Introduction

From AD 900 to AD 1600 a complex and changing constellation of chiefdoms occupied much of the Southeastern United States. Called the Mississippian, after the central Mississippi alluvial valley where extensive remains from this culture were identified in the nineteenth century, this way of life was characterized by sedentary communities, intensive maize agriculture, platform mounds, and a hierarchical society. The subsistence economy was based on the intensive utilization of both cultigens and wild plant and animal resources, and large settlements were located, for the most part, on the terraces of major drainages.

The story of the emergence and evolution of these societies has fascinated archaeologists for over a century. Research emphases have changed from concerns about the origin of these "mound builders," to interest in material culture and chronology and, most recently, to questions about the organization, operation, and evolution of these societies. As archaeological research has progressed a tremendous amount of information has been collected. Thousands of Mississippian sites are now known from the region, and hundreds have been extensively excavated. In some areas chronological resolution on the order of 100-year intervals is now possible, giving researchers the opportunity to examine political and organizational change with a fine degree of chronological control.

A rich ethnohistoric record is also available, dating from the era of initial Spanish, French, and English exploration. The earliest sixteenth-century accounts, before the native chiefdoms collapsed from contact-

induced depopulation and warfare, contain invaluable descriptions of life in these societies, evidence of considerable value in the examination of archaeological materials. Through a combination of archaeological and ethnohistorical analysis, in fact, it is now possible to produce detailed pictures of the location, size, and operation of many of the region's pre-contact chiefdoms.

The Mississippian archaeological record is replete with examples of the emergence, expansion, and decline of chiefly polities in a complex mosaic of shifting power relationships that forms, as one researcher has put it, "one of the world's major observational laboratories for the study of [the] pristine evolution . . . of complex societies" (House 1982:37). How factional competition shaped the developmental trajectories that are observed in the archaeological record is examined, as are procedures by which the process may be investigated.

Southeastern Mississippian society: the ethnohistoric record

Early sixteenth-century European explorers in the Southeast, such as Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Hernando de Soto, Tristan de Luna, Juan Pardo, René Laudonnière, and John White, and others like them, saw complex Mississippian chiefdoms in near-pristine form, before they disintegrated as a consequence of contact. These early explorers were quite familiar with the processes and effects of factional competition. Many of the great nation states of the day had themselves only just emerged from intense periods of factional competition, as exemplified by struggles such as the Wars of the Roses in England or the events leading to the political unification of the Iberian peninsula. Well schooled in these processes – this was the period, after all, when Machiavelli wrote his classic work *The Prince* – these early explorers took advantage of indigenous factional competition in their conquests. Native factions were pitted against each other wherever possible, and descriptions of this process survive in the ethnohistoric record. The ethnographic value of these accounts, long overlooked, has been increasingly recognized in recent years (DePratter 1983; Hudson *et al.* 1985; Smith 1987; Hudson 1988, 1990; Anderson 1990a).

Settlement hierarchies

Recent ethnohistoric research has led to the identification of specific communities visited by early explorers, permitting the use of early accounts in the archaeological reconstruction of life at these sites and in these societies. The primary accounts of the 1539–43 De Soto entrada

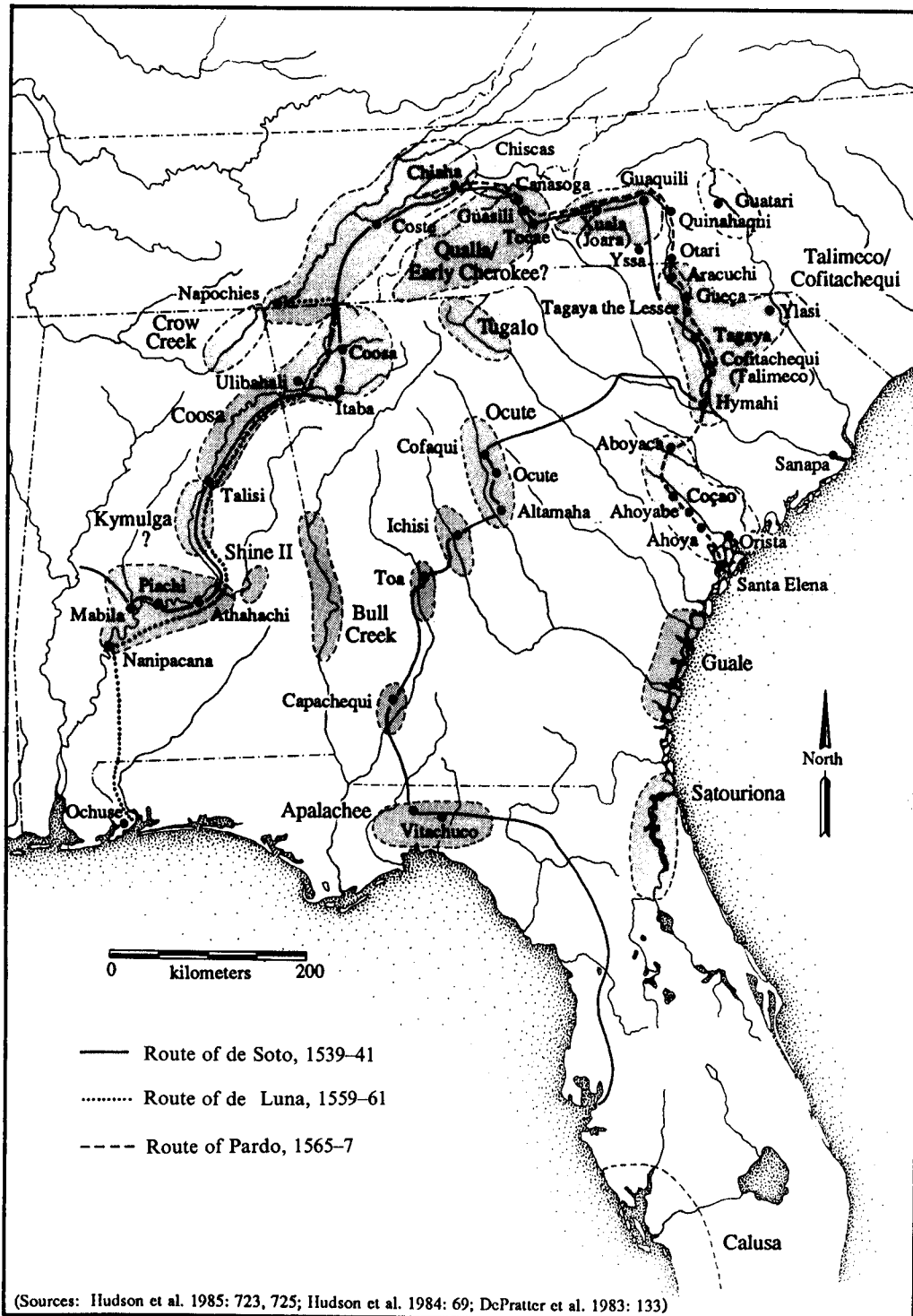


Fig. 6.1 European exploration and native societies in the South Appalachian area during the sixteenth century.

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(in chronological order: Ranjel, 1539–41; Biedma, 1544; Elvas, 1557; Vega, 1605) provide fairly detailed descriptions of the chiefdoms the Spaniards encountered, and some of these societies were later revisited by the De Luna (1560–1) and Pardo (1566–8) expeditions. Three geographically extensive, complex chiefdoms are described in the South Appalachian area at the time of initial European contact, the province of Coosa centered in northwest Georgia, the province of Ocute and a series of lesser chiefdoms in central Georgia, and the province of Cofitachequi centered in central South Carolina (Fig. 6.1) (Hudson *et al.* 1985; Hally *et al.* 1990).

The early sources provide a number of specific details about the operation of settlement and organizational hierarchies. Large numbers of towns were tied together in the more complex, areally extensive politics, which were characterized by at least two administrative/decision-making levels occupied by primary chiefs and their retainers and lesser chiefs and their retainers. Commoners had little power or influence in these societies. A three-level settlement hierarchy consisting of major ceremonial and political centers, larger villages/small centers, and scattered small hamlets or villages is documented for Coosa and indicated for Cofitachequi in the De Soto and Pardo accounts. Evidence from the De Soto accounts about Ocute is more ambiguous, but a two-level settlement hierarchy is suggested, consisting of hamlets scattered between larger centers (Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 89–90), which matches the pattern observed archaeologically (Kowalewski and Hatch 1991).

The most complex southeastern polities were geographically extensive, covering thousands of square kilometers, with subsidiary towns and polities held together through alliance networks and the use or threat of force. The De Soto entrada provides a direct record of the extent and power of these chiefdoms, and the degree to which these leaders were obeyed, facts which the expedition was quick to exploit. Upon leaving the principal towns of both Cofitachequi and Coosa, for example, De Soto forced the principal chiefs to accompany him. The Gentleman of Elvas' account noted that, by taking the Lady of Cofitachequi, De Soto:

brought us service in all the places that were passed, she ordering the Indians to come and take the loads from town to town. We traveled through her territories a hundred leagues, in which, according to whatever we saw, she was greatly obeyed, whatsoever she ordered being performed with diligence and efficacy. (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 70)

The complex chiefdoms of the early contact-era Southeast were thus composed of a number of subsidiary chiefdoms linked together in alliance, conquest, or tributary relations (DePratter 1983:21–2; Hudson *et al.* 1985).

The Pardo expedition documents are particularly valuable sources on the nature of power relationships within and between chiefdoms in the South Appalachian area. The existence of an elite social stratum was apparent to Pardo:

at the said Canos [Cofitachequi] ... I found a great number of chiefs and Indians ... From there I left for Tagaya, where I brought together the Indians and chiefs ... I went to Tagaya the Lesser and had all the Indians and the chief brought together ... From there I went to Ysa, who is a great chief; there I found many chiefs and a great quantity of Indians ... From there I went to an outlying district of the said Ysa, and brought together the Indians. (Pardo 1567 in Ketchum 1954:70–2)

The number of chiefs or elite varied considerably from community to community, and in at least some cases the number of chiefs present indicated the size and importance of the community (Anderson 1900a:115–18; Hudson 1990:61–7).

The elite supported and reinforced the status of the chief. They ruled in outlying communities, and served as something of a privy council as necessary. Decisions were typically made by the chief, although often after discussion with his principal supporters (Elvas, in Bourne 1904: I, 75; Laudonnière, in Bennett 1975:14). While the power of a chief might have been considerable, the stability and permanence of the position ultimately depended upon public acceptance of this power, particularly the support of other elites. Membership in the elite was at least partially due to inherited social position, although ability was sometimes recognized. The elite sometimes lived in close physical proximity to the chief, as evidenced by statements such as that by Le Moyne (1875:12), referring to Indians on the south Atlantic coast, who noted that "the chief's dwelling stands in the middle of the town ... Around this are the houses of the principal men." By serving as litter, awning, or fan bearers, as documented by De Soto at Cofitachequi, Coosa, and Tasculuza (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 65, 81, 101), the noble class demonstrated their subservience to the chief, and at the same time their close proximity both physically and socially. From this elite could come possible successors to the chieftainship, through legitimate succession or through conquest or rebellion.

The chief's residence was often set apart from the homes of commoners and sometimes served as a combination house, elite council room, and temple. The accounts contain explicit references to mound building and use. Thus, the dwelling of Tasculuza was described as "on a high place" (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 87), while Biedma noted that "it is the custom of the Caciques to have near their house a high hill, made by hand, some having the house placed thereon" (Biedma, in Bourne 1904:II, 28). The temple of Talimeco at Cofitachequi is described as a "house of worship . . . on a high mound and much revered" (Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 101). The chief was also set apart in death, and extensive mortuary rituals frequently accompanied his or her death. Among coastal groups this included the burning of his house (Laudonnière, in Bennett 1975:14-15). The bodies of the dead in many of the more complex southeastern chiefdoms were maintained in elaborate mortuary structures, of which the temple of Talimeco in Cofitachequi visited by De Soto has provided the fullest description (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:315-22; see also Biedma, in Bourne 1904:II, 14).

Tributary networks

Tributary arrangements within southeastern chiefdoms are particularly well documented in the early historic accounts (DePratter 1983:170-8). Within the major provincial-level polities, for example, lesser towns, leaders, and individuals submitted tribute to those above them in the hierarchy. Tribute thus served to help define and formalize social relationships in these societies, particularly those concerned with status positions, alliances, and trade. Tribute included foodstuffs and luxury goods, both of which were stored in large quantity:

Maize is kept in [a] *barbacoa*, which is a house with wooden sides, like a room, raised aloft on four posts and has a floor of cane . . . [around] the houses of the masters, or principal men . . . are many *barbacoas*, in which they bring together the tribute their people give them of maize, skins of deer, and blankets of the country. (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 53).

The early sources indicate that chiefs maintained *barbacoas* filled with food in outlying settlements, and could call on these stores when they wished. When De Soto's army arrived in Ylasi, a town some three days to the northeast of Cofitachequi, they found "seven *barbacoas* of corn, that they said were there stored for the woman chief" (Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 100). Food reserves in storage in many of the southeastern societies encountered by De Soto were extensive. Thus De Soto's

entire army of 600 men was able to spend the winters of 1539 and 1540 at Apalachee and Coosa, respectively, drawing on the food reserves of those complex chiefdoms. Numerous examples exist in the De Soto accounts, and in other sources from the sixteenth century, of the chief's ability to call upon stores located in other towns.

Tribute served to acknowledge power relations among elites within and between chiefdoms in the Southeast. DePratter (1983:176) cites a number of descriptions of tribute collection by subject chiefs in outlying communities for the use of the paramount. Luxury goods such as bark blankets, deer and marten skins, and other valuables constituted tribute between elites, and are commonly mentioned as the type of goods used to seal alliances or acknowledge power relationships. Bulk foodstuffs, in contrast, do not appear to have moved over great distances or served a similar role (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 65, 91, 129; Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 86, 99). Withholding tribute was considered an act of rebellion and could trigger punitive expeditions and warfare, and one account notes that seizing tribute was a capital offense (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 70, 101, 154).

Gift-giving was an important form of competitive display, a means of acknowledging tributary and power relations. Throughout the *entrada* De Soto was welcomed by native chiefs offering gifts of blankets, deer and marten skins, and other valuables, in addition to food and housing (e.g., Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 86, 99; Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 65, 91, 129). These were precisely the items accounted as tribute by the natives themselves, and it is probable that the gifts were an attempt to placate an unknown and potentially dangerous enemy, while simultaneously attempting to enter into a reciprocal alliance relationship with him. The act of presenting tribute, therefore, was an acknowledgment of power and a statement of relationship. The giving of gifts was not merely one way, from subject to ruler, but was also a method by which the paramount could demonstrate his own power and prestige. Thus, the chiefs of Pacaha and Casqui in northeast Arkansas, whom De Soto met the third year of the *entrada*, were "each striving to outdo the other in the magnitude of [their] gifts" to De Soto (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 129), although in this case each hoped to use the favor they gained with De Soto to the other's disadvantage.

While foodstuffs were apparently typically dispersed to storage facilities scattered throughout the chiefdom, luxury or prestige goods tended to be maintained in the temples in the central towns of these societies (DePratter 1983:138). This suggests that while prestige goods distri-

bution was limited, it has been more widely available, or at least has been, in the face of crop failure or control of wealth and maintenance of power and captives to appear to have been supported among Bennett 1975:150 exchange or distribution profound impact of decline of elite goods and organizational instability within a chiefdom.

Patterns of factionalism

Factional competition is described in Soto expedition of the interior undistorted picture disintegration:

almost all the traversed were at know that this organized army instances, or a ambition of some Their struggle which they attacked trips or in their fit they could find at they seized on some in perpetua we have seen in prisoners to be hostility among t than the harm th deaths, wounds, attempt to seize e more heated, they devastate fields, inflicted the desir own lands without the lands of other upon as the natur regardless of whei provided with arms, f enemies . . . a ca

spend the winters of Coosa, respectively, whose complex chiefdom in the De Soto from the sixteenth upon stores located power relations among ns in the Southeast. er of descriptions of n outlying communi-luxury goods such as ins, and other valu-elites, and are com-goods used to seal relationships. Bulk appear to have moved imilar role (Elvas, in l, in Bourne 1904:II, considered an act of tive expeditions and t seizing tribute was a 904:I, 70, 101, 154). form of competitive s tributary and power a De Soto was wel-lifts of blankets, deer tables, in addition to 1 Bourne 1904:II, 86, 91, 129). These were tribute by the natives at the gifts were an d potentially danger- attempting to enter hip with him. The act was an acknowledg-of relationship. The way, from subject to which the paramount r and prestige. Thus, n northeast Arkansas, r of the entrada, were r in the magnitude of 1 Bourne 1904:I, 129), s disadvantage. tly typically dispersed oughout the chiefdom, o be maintained in the se societies (DePratter e prestige goods distri-

bution was limited to the elite, food products may have been more widely redistributed, to elites and commoners alike, or at least held in reserve to accommodate periods of crop failure or harvest shortfall. The centralized control of wealth by the elite was closely linked to their maintenance of power. The distribution of luxury goods and captives to followers is well documented, and appears to have been a successful method of maintaining supporters among the lower ranks (Laudonnière, in Bennett 1975:150). Disruptions in prestige goods exchange or distribution networks could thus have had a profound impact on patterns of elite competition, and a decline of elite goods in circulation might signal organizational instability and shifting power relationships within a chiefdom or a region (Peebles and Kus 1977).

Patterns of factional competition

Factional competition within local Mississippian societies is described in some detail in the accounts of the De Soto expedition of 1539–43, the first European penetration of the interior Southeast, and arguably the only undistorted picture of these chiefdoms prior to their disintegration:

almost all the provinces that these Spaniards traversed were at war with each other . . . One should know that this was not a conflict of force with an organized army or with pitched battles, except in rare instances, or a conflict instigated by the lust and ambition of some lords to seize the estates of others. Their struggle was one of ambushes and subtlety in which they attacked each other on fishing or hunting trips or in their fields and along their roads wherever they could find an enemy off guard. And those whom they seized on such occasions, they held as slaves, some in perpetual bondage with one foot maimed, as we have seen in certain provinces, and some as prisoners to be ransomed and exchanged. But the hostility among these Indians amounted to no more than the harm they inflicted upon their persons with deaths, wounds, or shackles, for they made no attempt to seize estates. If sometimes the battle were more heated, they went so far as to burn towns and devastate fields, but as soon as the conquerors had inflicted the desired damage, they gathered in their own lands without attempting to take possession of the lands of others . . . This warfare, they now look upon as the natural order of things and, as a result, regardless of where they are found, are always provided with arms, for in no place are they secure from enemies . . . a cacique [chief] does not carry on

warfare with just one of his neighbors, but with all who share his boundaries . . . (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:487–8)

While this statement is exaggerated – alliances were possible ensuring relative peace within fairly large areas – the accounts do indicate considerable competition and conflict was occurring between elites. A pattern of continual warfare and hostility would promote group solidarity by promoting a concern for mutual self-interest and defense. It would also reinforce the position of the elite since, given the possibility of hostile reception elsewhere, commoner populations would have to stay in their place. Evidence for intense warfare during the Mississippian period has been documented archaeologically by the discovery of fortifications such as palisades, bastions, and ditches at many sites (Larson 1972:384–8; DePratter 1983:48–9). Somewhat more indirect evidence for warfare has also been recovered, such as evidence of burning or of skeletal trauma (e.g. Larson 1972:390; Blakeley 1988; Milner, Anderson, and Smith 1991).

Factional competition between elites in nearby polities is well documented in the sixteenth-century ethno-historic record. The long-term rivalry between the elites of the chiefdoms of Pacaha and Casqui in northeast Arkansas was described in detail in the accounts of the De Soto entrada. It was evident that Pacaha was expanding at the expense of Casqui:

For many centuries back this Cacique [Casqui] and his parents, grandparents, and more remote ancestors had waged war upon the lords of [Pacaha], a province bordering on their own. And since these lords were more powerful in both vassals and land, they had pushed and were still pushing [Casqui] into a corner and almost to the point of surrender, for he dared not take up arms lest he anger and irritate the Cacique [Pacaha], who as a more powerful person could and might do him harm. Hence [Casqui] had remained passive and had contented himself with guarding his boundaries, neither going beyond them nor affording his enemies an occasion to attack . . . (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:434–5)

The hostilities between Casqui and Pacaha, while ostensibly brought about by Pacaha's territorial expansion, were explicitly couched in terms of a jockeying for status and prestige (pp.434–8). Casqui's desecration of Pacaha's ancestral sepulchres, his wives, and his subjects, and his later insistence on a place of honor by De Soto when meeting with Pacaha, were all tactics

designed to reinforce his status relative to the other (Casqui was able to accomplish these victories against his more powerful neighbor by enlisting the aid of De Soto).

The same pattern of interpolity elite competition is also noted in the South Appalachian region, where the provinces of Ocute in central Georgia and Cofitachequi in central South Carolina were expanding at the expense of chiefdoms in between, in the Savannah River valley (DePratter 1989:140-3; Anderson 1990a:623-30). The long-term effects of this kind of expansion could result in the death or relocation of the losing populations, or their subjugation into tributary relationships. De Soto was told that the conflict existing between the provinces of Ocute and Cofitachequi had existed from time immemorial, with no apparent contact between the elites of these polities. The Indians of Ocute were reportedly intimidated and "dared not expand or go beyond their own boundaries" (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:284). Apparently nothing was said to De Soto about the Savannah River chiefdoms that had existed between these two polities only a century or so before.

Sometimes rivalries between polities were for the loyalties of elites in subject communities. A good example of this was documented during the De Soto entrada, when the expedition reached the town of Talisi at the western margin of Coosa:

Now the people of Talisi were not very obedient to the lord Coza because of the double dealing of another lord called Tasculuza, whose state bordered upon that of Coza, and who was both an unsafe neighbor and an untrustworthy friend. It is true that the two Caciques did not wage open warfare, but Tasculuza was an arrogant and bellicose person who displayed much artfulness and trickery . . . and, being such a person, had disquieted this town so that it was somewhat rebellious. (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:346)

Communities near the boundaries of a chiefdom, given their distance from the center, probably enjoyed considerable autonomy. The activities of rival factions in these communities would, accordingly, have been difficult for a paramount to address.

Accounts of revolts by subsidiary elites within particular societies also exist from the early Southeast. When the De Luna expedition visited Coosa in 1560, for example, they were enlisted in a military expedition to exact restitution from the rival town of Napochies that had refused to submit tribute (DePratter 1983:57-8, 173-4; Hudson 1988). The Napochies, apparently a sub-

sidary polity in the Coosa province twenty years earlier when De Soto came through, had taken advantage of the weakened state of the paramount following European contact to break away. The process of the decline of Coosa at the expense of its rival, Napochies, is outlined in the De Luna accounts, offering valuable information about the process of factional competition:

In ancient times the Napochies were tributaries of the Coza people, because this place (Coza) was always recognized as head of the kingdom and its lord was considered to stand above the one of the Napochies. Then the people from Coza began to decrease while the Napochies were increasing until they refused to be their vassals, finding themselves strong enough to maintain their liberty which they abused. Then those of Coza took to arms to reduce the rebels to their former servitude, but the most victories were on the side of the Napochies. Those from Coza remained greatly affronted as well from seeing their ancient tribute broken off, as because they found themselves without strength to restore it. On that account they had lately stopped their fights . . . [and] had not gone into the battlefield, for fear lest they return vanquished, as before. (Padilla cited in Swanton 1922:231-9)

The Spanish were enlisted on the side of Coosa and quickly defeated the Napochies. This apparently strengthened Coosa, for by the time of the Pardo expeditions in 1566 and 1567 it was again reported to be a powerful chiefdom. The example illustrates one mechanism by which chiefly authority might be challenged by a rival faction, specifically the withholding of tribute (although the Napochies were also actively killing Coosas). This would only occur as part of a bid for local autonomy, since war was the likely outcome of such a refusal. Warfare as a mechanism for establishing and enforcing tributary relationships is well documented in the sixteenth century Southeast (DePratter 1983:44-67; Anderson 1990a:150-7; Dye 1990). Competition between rival factions within a complex chiefdom could, therefore, lead to social fissioning and organizational collapse or relocation unless alliances (of a coercive or cooperative nature) could be developed between the contending elites, to counteract this tendency. Political relations *between* chiefdoms in the Southeast were, therefore, one way chiefs attempted to maintain control over rival factions *within* these societies.

The Napochies case illustrates how factional competition could have led to the replacement of one complex chiefdom by another. Population decline at a

paramount center brought warfare, famine, or even the numerical advantage held by that community strength of neighbor and confidence of the grow, and challenges to submit tribute, act alliances by the paramount refusal to cooperate in construction activities were could have been raised process would include one or more centers, luxury/prestige goods destruction, or abandonment time that another in the

In a classic example (1988:179-84) has summarized succession of paramount Calusa chiefdom of so was marked by severe brought on, at least in part the effects of disease, and of wealth. To ensure a succession of a particular chief were arranged among a planned or encouraged rivalry of principal rival: "an ostensibly orderly succession to the seat rivalry, jealousy, and the following one succession town: chiefs suspected case defined as a suspected One Spanish account described the chief of the the heads of four chief intended to rebel and g people. For this he had Marquardt 1988:180). T violence sometimes characterized office, and that threats could with harshly.

Ancestral shrines were centers of individual paramount centers of a rival society's burials, was considered a goal in warfare between examples from the accounts supporting this inference

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paramount center brought about through reverses in warfare, famine, or emigration could lead to the loss of the numerical advantage in manpower (i.e. warriors) held by that community over its neighbors. As the relative strength of neighboring societies grew, the power and confidence of the elites in these societies would also grow, and challenges to leadership would arise. Refusal to submit tribute, actively hampering the formation of alliances by the paramount with other communities, or refusal to cooperate in communal ceremonial or construction activities were ways by which such a challenge could have been raised. Archaeological correlates of this process would include evidence for population decline at one or more centers, a change in the regional flow of luxury/prestige goods and evidence for the decline, destruction, or abandonment of one center at the same time that another in the area was expanding.

In a classic example of elite competition, Marquardt (1988:179-84) has summarized accounts describing the succession of paramounts in the sixteenth-century Calusa chiefdom of south Florida. Accession to power was marked by severe social disruption, something brought on, at least in part, by recent European contact, the effects of disease, and the appearance of new sources of wealth. To ensure and legitimize the eventual succession of a particular candidate adoptions and marriages were arranged among allied factions, and these factions planned or encouraged incidents damaging to the authority of principal rivals. As Marquardt (p. 187) noted: "an ostensibly orderly, supernaturally sanctioned succession to the seat of power was in fact beset by rivalry, jealousy, and tension." Power was consolidated following one succession by the execution of some fifteen town chiefs suspected of treachery, which was in this case defined as a suspected allegiance to other leaders. One Spanish account, by the Jesuit Juan Rogel, described the chief of the Calusa as "dancing about with the heads of four chiefs whom he had been informed intended to rebel and go over to his enemies with their people. For this he had them slain" (Vargas Ugarte in Marquardt 1988:180). The Calusa example suggests that violence sometimes characterized competition for chiefly office, and that threats of rebellion could have been dealt with harshly.

Ancestral shrines were perceived as the ideological centers of individual polities (Brown 1985:104). Desecration of a rival society's temple, specifically its ancestral burials, was considered an ultimate insult and a primary goal in warfare between elites. There are several examples from the accounts of the De Soto entrada supporting this inference. The description of the sacking

of the principal town of Pacaha by Casqui is particularly graphic:

Not content with having sacked the town and the houses of the Curaca and with having made what slaughter and seizures they could, the Casquins moved on to the temple in the large public plaza, which was the burial place of all who had ever ruled that land - the father, grandfathers, and other ancestors of [Pacaha]. The temples and sepulchres, as we have stated elsewhere, are the most venerated and esteemed sites among the natives of Florida . . .

Summoning all of their forces so that everyone might enjoy the triumph, the Casquins went to this temple and sepulchre, and since they realized how much [Pacaha] (proud and haughty because of their not having attacked previously) would resent their daring to enter and desecrate this place, not only proceeded within but committed every infamy and affront they could. Sacking it of all ornaments and riches, they took the spoils and trophies which had been made from the losses of their own ancestors. They threw to the floor each of the wooden chests which served as sepulchres, and for their own satisfaction and vengeance as well as for an affront to their enemies, strewed upon the ground the very bones and bodies the chests enclosed. Afterward not content with having cast these remains to the ground, they trod upon them and kicked them with utter contempt and scorn. (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:437-8)

This was not an isolated incident during the entrada. Desecration of ancestral remains occurred when the Indians of Ocute first reached Cofitachequi in South Carolina, and when the Guachoyas entered Anilco, probably in southern Arkansas (Hudson 1985; Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:292-3, 493). Undermining an elite faction's authority, by striking at a source and inspiration for its power, might be one way a rival faction could coopt or bring about the relocation of retainees or commoner labor forces. Permanent site abandonment might follow such desecration; the attached dishonor may have been such as to preclude any reuse, regardless of the extent of the facilities in place (although Pacaha himself set his temple back in order; Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:45, see also DePratter 1983:63).

There is evidence from the accounts to support the inference that towns or centers might be abandoned upon desecration or defeat in warfare. The town of Vitachuco in Florida was destroyed by its inhabitants upon their defeat by De Soto. A Spanish troop,

returning to the town some time after its warriors were routed in battle:

discovered that the entire place had been laid waste and burned. Its walls had been leveled to the ground and all of the bodies of the Indians who had died . . . were now piled up in the fields, for their people had resolved not to bury them. The town had been destroyed and abandoned, as the Indians later explained, because it had been founded in an unpropitious and doomed place; and the dead had been left without sepulchre to serve as food for birds and wild beasts because they were ill-starred men who had not succeeded in their purpose. For among the Indians this was a most infamous punishment, which, according to their pagan custom, was bestowed upon those who were unlucky and unsuccessful in war as well as those who were accursed and nefarious. In this manner, therefore, they had rewarded both the town and those who died there. (Vega, in Varner and Varner 1951:198)

Equation of an ancestor cult with land ownership/holding is fairly common among more complex societies, hence the desecration of an ancestral shrine is a challenge not only to a chief's authority *per se* but also specifically to his right to hold or control territory. The fact that centers, once abandoned or desecrated, might not be reoccupied may help to explain why major Mississippian sites such as Cahokia were permanently abandoned well before contact.

The maintenance of temple/mortuary complexes would ideologically predispose an elite succeeding to the chieftainship to remain near his home community. Where succession was interrupted, specifically when a rival seized power, this same ideological predisposition could prompt the relocation of the center to the community where the new chief's ancestral temple/mortuary complex was located. Newly ascendant Mississippian elites were thus ideologically bound to their place of origin, where their ancestors were buried. Relocation to previously dominant centers where elaborate ceremonial facilities were already in place does not appear to have occurred invariably or even typically.

The effects of factional competition may thus be seen in the movement of chiefly political centers over the landscape, typified in the archaeological record by the abandonment of sites and areas, often with evidence of destruction. The Mississippian archaeological record from across the Southeast is filled with cases where chiefdoms emerged, expanded, fragmented, and then sometimes re-emerged, highlighting the dependent and

often fragile nature of the relationships between a paramount and the local and regional ruling elites in those chiefdoms.

Succession to chiefly office

Internecine warfare, commonly over succession to the chieftainship, was rife in Southeastern society. The early Spanish accounts are filled with stories of rebellion, treachery, and warfare directed toward obtaining chiefly authority. The extent of factional competition while a chief was alive depended on the skill with which potential rivals were controlled. The death or weakening of a chief would frequently trigger a period of upheaval, which would continue until a successor could consolidate power.

Chiefly succession appears to have been matrilineal in most Mississippian polities, that is, from a chief to his sister's son, or nephew (Figure 6.2) (DePratter 1983:100-10). Direct evidence for this was observed by De Soto in the South Appalachian area. At Chiaha, for example, the

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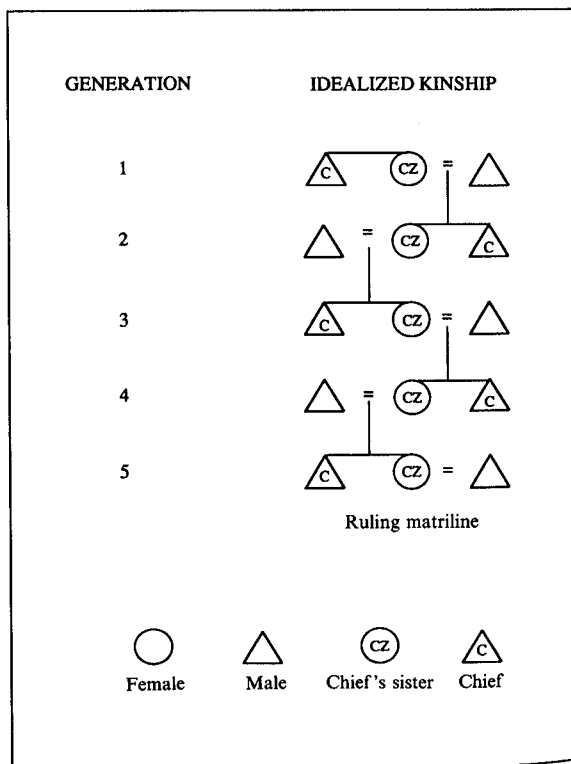
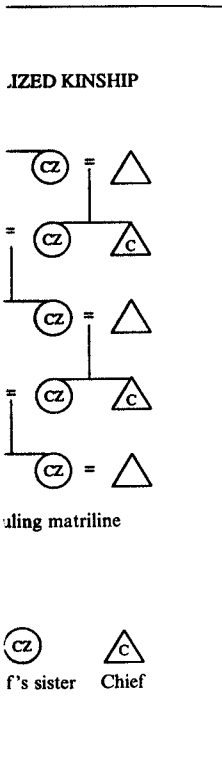


Fig. 6.2 Matrilineal succession to the chieftainship in Mississippian society.

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young cacique noted that "an uncle of mine governs this country, in my place, til I be of mature age" (Elvas, in Bourne 1904:I, 76), while at Cofaqui, where the chief was an old man, "his nephew governed for him" (Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 91). While succession was theoretically based on kinship, and typically was matrilineal, it was rarely secure. There is a considerable body of evidence from the historic accounts as well as supporting ethnographic data from other parts of the world to indicate that chiefly succession was frequently challenged (Anderson 1990a:50-7, 131-42).

Strict adherence to rules of succession was unlikely where obvious differences in power bases or ability existed between the designated heir and rival elites. Lawson, although referring to events at a much later date, around AD 1700, noted that violence sometimes accompanied chiefly succession:

The succession falls not to the king's son, but to his sister's son, which is a sure way to prevent imposters in the succession. Sometimes they poison the heir to make way for another, which is not seldom done, when they do not approve of the youth that is to succeed them. The king himself is commonly chief Dr. in that cure. (Lawson 1967:205)

The chief himself, or other principal elites close to him, might do away with potential heirs that did not meet expected leadership standards.

While genealogical ranking was unquestionably important in succession, so too was secular power, as illustrated in an exchange recorded between the rival chiefs of Pacaha and Casquin:

there was much contention, as to which of them would sit on the right hand of the Governor [De Soto]. Pacaha said to Casquin: "You know well that I am a greater lord than you, and of more honorable parents and grandparents, and that to me belongs a higher place." Casquin replied as follows: "True it is that you are a greater lord than I, and that your forebears were greater than mine . . . But you know well that I am older and mightier than you, and that I confine you in your walls whenever I wish." (Ranjel, in Bourne 1904:II, 143-4)

The size and stability of elite power bases, as well as genealogical position, were important considerations when power passed from one leader to another.

Resolving archaeological evidence for the succession of elites is difficult, because of the short time scales involved, although there is support for the inference that the death of a chief may have been marked by the

construction of new mound stages. This is indicated among the Natchez, although the account dates to the early eighteenth century: "When the great chief dies they demolish his cabin and then raise a new mound, on which they build the cabin of him who is to replace him in this dignity, for he never lodges in that of his predecessor" (Le Petit, cited in Swanton 1911:103). Descriptions of burials of chiefly elites in mounds also exist about this time from the Chitmach of the Mississippian delta area and among the Choctaw; in the latter case communal charnel houses were apparently covered with earth when full, and a new charnel house was then built on that location and the process repeated (Swanton 1946:726, 729).

The archaeological record can be expected to vary depending on the course factional competition took. The assassination of a chief and his replacement by a close relative, particularly one from the same community, would be unlikely to leave major traces, although the construction of a new mound stage or temple might take place. Such a process would probably occur fairly abruptly, and would be unlikely to be preceded by a period of overt public competition (i.e., entertaining and feasting, gift-giving, and the formation of marriage alliances) directed toward building a powerbase, since the usurpers, as tolerated and possibly trusted members of the paramount's community, would already be close in status and position (as well as physically close) to the leader they planned to depose. Competition between individuals or elites in a number of differing centers, such as between subsidiary or tributary polities of a complex chiefdom, in contrast, would probably initially center around prestige goods production and consumption rituals. Where strong factions were dispersed over a number of centers competition was probably more intense, as elites jockeyed for power, and would tend to leave more pronounced archaeological signatures.

Marriage and post-marital residence

Mechanisms dictating permissible marriage ties together with post-marital residence patterns also have a marked effect on the incidence of factional competition. Post-marital residence in the Southeast was typically matrilineal, although most of the cases for which good data exist date to well after contact. Accordingly, men would relocate to their wives' communities upon marriage. To reduce the influence of males marrying women in the chief's lineage, and hence relocating in close physical proximity to the center of power, specific rules were in place in some chiefdoms to suppress any political

ambitions these individuals might have. Thus, among the Natchez:

The princesses of the blood never espouse any but men of obscure family, and they have but one husband, but they have the right of dismissing him whenever it pleases them, and of choosing another among those of the nation, provided he has not made any other alliance among them. If the husband has been guilty of an infidelity, the princess may have his head cut off in an instant; but she is not herself subject to the same law, for she may have as many lovers as she pleases without the husband having any power to complain. In the presence of his wife he acts with the most profound respect, never eats with her, and salutes her with howls as is done by her servants. (Le Petit in Swanton 1911:1903)

The marriage of the chief's sister to an "obscure" commoner, and keeping of him in a subservient position, was one way to minimize factional conflict.

Strict adherence to a pattern of matrilineal residence would mean that chiefly heirs might be required to marry outside their local community. This would dramatically reduce the possibility of chiefly succession continuing within a given center, unless rules granting exceptions were in place. This appears to have been the case. Commoners in most Southeastern chiefdoms were typically monogamous and matrilineal, while elites were typically polygynous, with spouses either relocating or remaining in their own home (Swanton 1946:701-9). Among the Natchez, men could:

have as many wives as they chose. Nevertheless, the common people generally have but one or two. This, however, is not the case with the chiefs . . . Although they have many wives, they keep but one or two in their cabins; the rest remain at the houses of their parents, where they go to see them when they wish. (Le Petit cited in Swanton 1911:97)

Chiefly elites thus appear to have been exempt from matrilineal post-marital residence rules.

Polygyny and other marriage arrangements were important mechanisms by which status and power relations were acknowledged, alliances were sealed, and administrative structures filled in Southeastern chiefdoms. Although ethnohistoric accounts indicate that polygyny and the out-marriage of high-status females occurred among elites, how these rules were followed apparently depended upon the relative status of the participants. Given the importance of the chief's sister in producing his successor, and the presence of mechanisms

such as commoner marriage to keep her from falling under the control of rival elites, alliances by marriage in dominant Southeastern chiefdoms were probably sealed through the position of the chief rather than through his sister. That is, elite female outmarriage in complex Mississippian chiefdoms below the level of the ruling lineage was probably unidirectional, from lesser to more dominant elites. While the highest female elites had to marry commoners, lesser female elites, particularly those from other communities, could have married upward. Marriage elites of roughly equal status may have occurred to foster alliances. In subservient communities or polities alliance with higher centers may well have been sealed through the female line, with either the relocation of women to the chiefly center, or the marriage of one of the chief's relatives or supporters to a female elite in the outlying community.

A problem with matrilineal post-marital residence systems is that they tend to create groups of males with no vested interest in working together within individual communities. That is, males linked by proximity rather than kinship tend not to cooperate with one another. In a society with matrilineal descent and matrilineal post-marital residence this has advantages and disadvantages for a chief. His core male kinsmen tend to outmarry, reducing his primary support base, while males marrying in may raise challenges to this position. Adherence to a pattern of matrilineal post-marital residence (except for the chief) would, however, be an effective method by which a chief could disperse brothers or other close male relatives, thus building up a regional power base while minimizing the potential threats that arise from their close proximity (Figure 6.3). There is evidence that vassal chiefs administering outlying centers were often the direct kin of the paramount, and probably appointed by him (DePratter 1983:25-8). Thus, Satouriona, a paramount occupying the region of the St. John's River in Florida, was described by Laudonniere as having "thirty vassal chiefs under him, of whom ten were his brothers" (Laudonniere, in Bennett 1975:76), and comparable situations were encountered by De Soto. While this practice would place potential rivals in their own powerbase, it would also isolate them from other related elites (and hence potential supporters) in secondary centers, where they would not have the resources that the paramount could draw upon.

A strategy of dispersing near-kin through marital alliances, while initially stabilizing, would create problems later on, as these elites built up their own power bases, and as questions arose about how their successors would be chosen (Fig. 6.4). A critical question would be

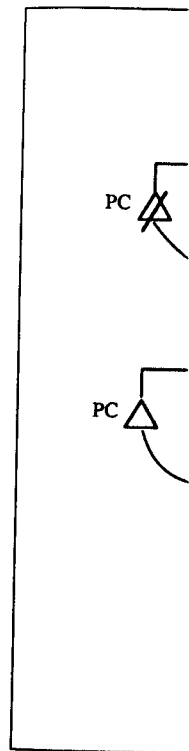


Fig. 6.3 Dispersal to relocate potential

whether the children they married into centers, or whether imposed from above matrilineal succession comprised a structuring characteristic of society.

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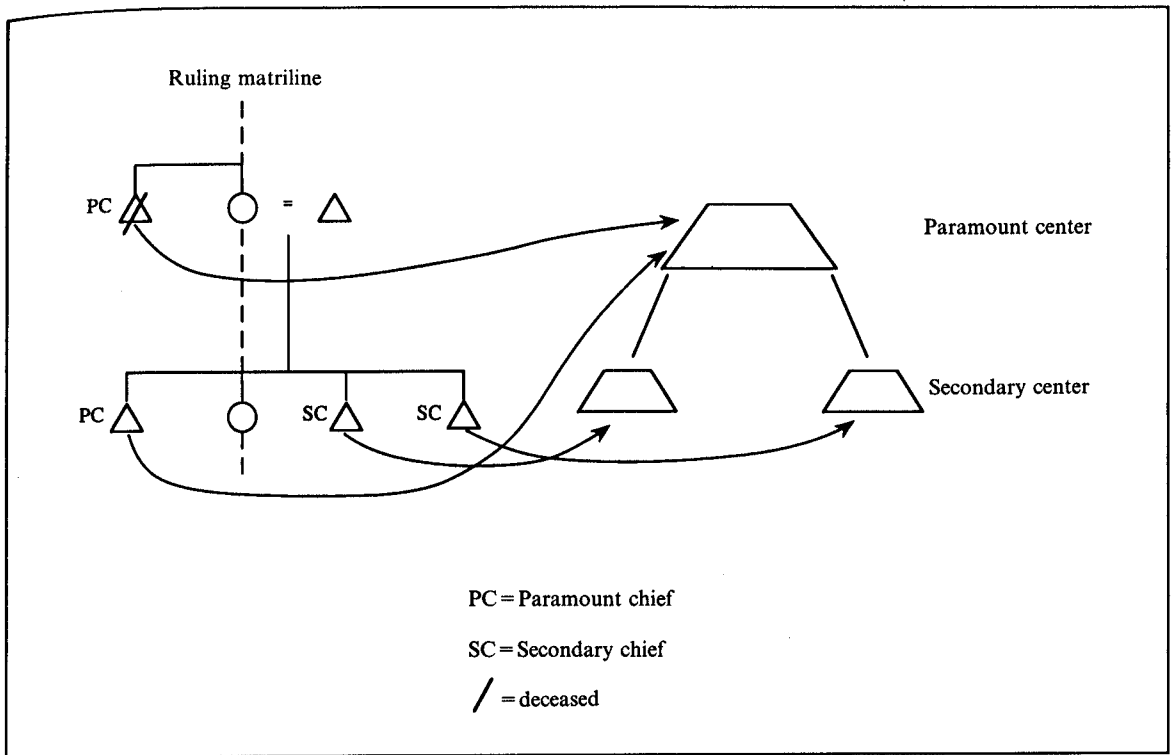


Fig. 6.3 Dispersal of chiefly elites in Southeastern Mississippian chiefdoms: use of matrilineal post-marital residence to relocate potential rivals while building a power base.

whether the children of relocated elites (in the matriline they married into) would succeed to power in these centers, or whether new elites/administrators would be imposed from above, from the paramount center. Thus, matrilineal succession coupled with matrilineal residence comprised a structurally ingrained, potentially destabilizing characteristic of Southeastern Mississippian society.

Archaeological correlates of factional competition: considerations from the Southeastern United States

Resolving correlates of factional competition and related historical factors that prompted sociocultural change in Mississippian society is a particularly exciting challenge facing Southeastern archaeologists. What we are attempting is the development of measures and linking arguments by which processes such as alliance formation and maintenance, elite legitimizing strategies, and political competition may be examined in prehistory. Such measures are critical to the study of socio-

political change in chiefdom societies. One procedure employed to measure factional competition involves examining changes in the production and distribution of elite goods. Brumfiel (1987a:667) has recently argued that elite consumption (i.e., prestige goods production, exchange, and use) "was the means by which status, power, and alliance were affirmed, contested, and changed" and that it served as "an idiom of political negotiation." It has been variously suggested that the volume of elite goods in circulation, and their quality (measured in terms of the labor investment in their production), may reflect the overall health or political stability of a chiefdom (Peebles and Kus 1977; Welch 1991). Marked changes in prestige goods flow, in this view, might signal changes in organizational stability and complexity. That is, when leadership positions were stable, elite goods production and distribution would also likely be stable. Leaders in trouble, in contrast, might step up the flow of goods, increasing the kind of activity designed to reinforce and legitimize their position. If attempts to re-establish a power base proved

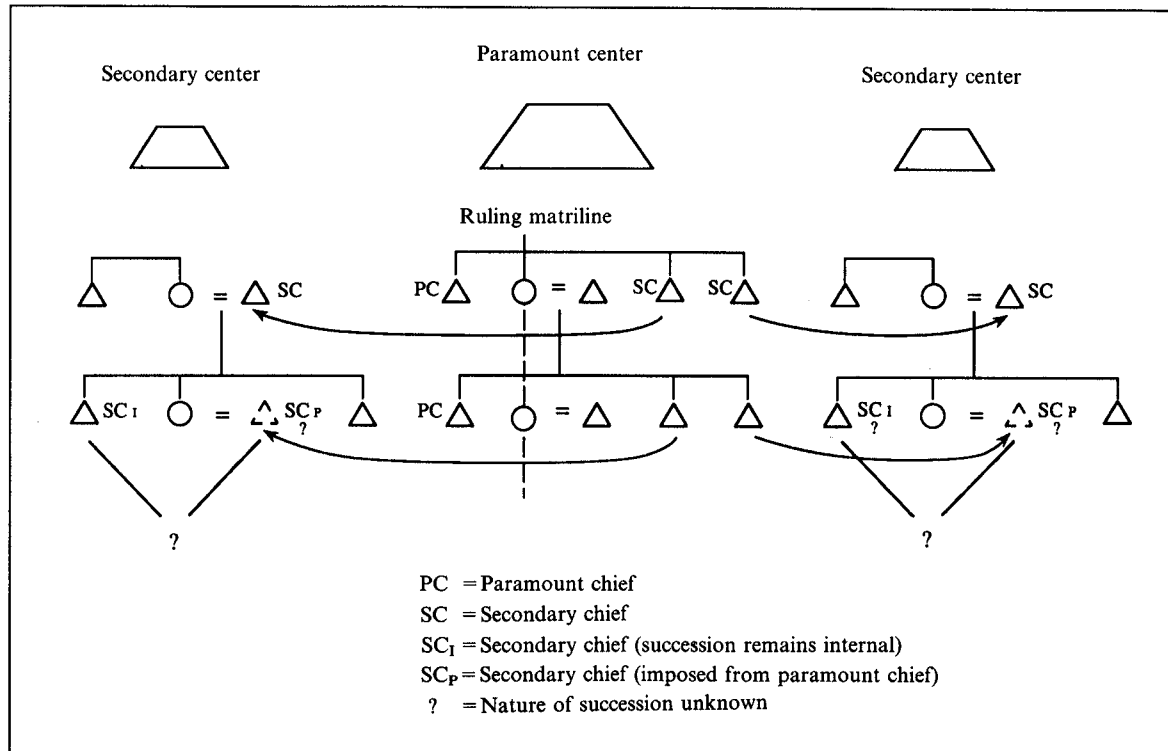


Fig. 6.4 Dispersal of chiefly elites in Southeastern Mississippian chiefdoms: sources of instability in later generations.

unsuccessful a decline in the flow of prestige goods might soon follow, since the elites would no longer control the resources (i.e., labor surplus) necessary to maintain the flow.

A decline in the flow of prestige goods within and between chiefdoms may not always mean these systems were in trouble, however. Instead, it might mean they were becoming increasingly powerful and centralized. In systems with strong authority structures, particularly those based on secular power (i.e. coercion) rather than ideologically based legitimizing strategies, less effort may have been required to keep followers subordinate. That is, loyalty could have been maintained by force rather than purchased or co-opted. Archaeological examples from the Southeast illustrate these processes. A decline in elite goods, as reflected in mortuary offerings, for example, has been observed prior to the abandonment of several centers in the region, notably at Moundville, Spiro, and in several small chiefdoms along the Savannah River (Fig. 6.5); at Moundville and at several of the Savannah River sites, moreover, this

decrease occurred well *before* the collapse of these societies, when they were still presumably in their prime (Anderson 1990a:593-6; Steponaitis 1991:208-20). At Cahokia elite goods exchange even increased for a time as the chiefdom declined, in what has been interpreted as a futile attempt by the elite to maintain their position (Milner 1990:31).

Another archaeological correlate of factional competition appears to be the amount of labor invested in the production of elite artifacts themselves. Competition between rival factions among elites is widely recognized as a primary, ingrained factor contributing to the instability of chiefdom political systems (Sahlins 1958:176-96; Helms 1979:24; Wright 1984). As competition between factions increased, the complexity of design and the quality of prestige goods sometimes increased (e.g., Feinman 1980; Brumfiel 1987a). Measuring levels of competition through analyses of elite goods occurrence and quality, however, is difficult in the Southeast given the nature of the surviving archaeological record. Contact period ceramic assemblages in many areas

known to have been fairly drab, suggesting exchange was in other. This is indicated in the repeatedly describe the explorers as consisting of mulberry fiber and deer capes. Lists of locally

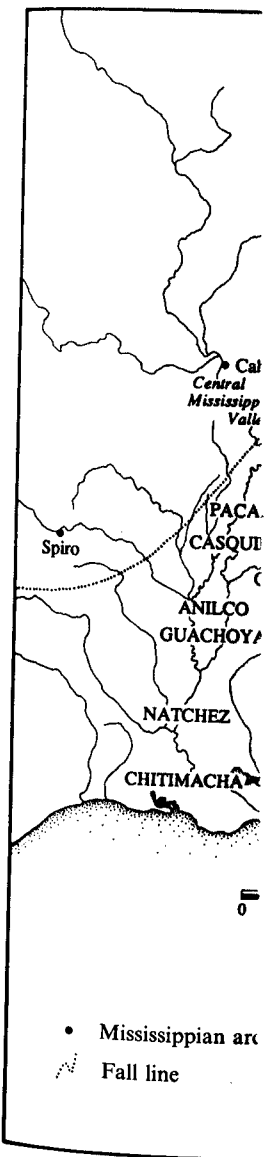


Fig. 6.5 Mississippian arc (sixteenth-century and late)

known to have been dynamic chiefdoms often seem fairly drab, suggesting prestige-based elite display and exchange was in other, more perishable commodities. This is indicated in the ethnohistoric accounts, which repeatedly describe the gifts given to the Spanish explorers as consisting of perishables such as food, mulberry fiber and deerskin blankets, and fur and feather capes. Lists of locally valued commodities from this

period, such as the description of the contents of the mortuary temple at Talimeco, in fact, tend to be dominated by perishable items. Unfortunately for archaeologists the ceramics, carved shell, and ground-stone artifacts that dominate local assemblages of presumed elite goods are rarely mentioned in the historic accounts.

Elaborate incised, engraved, or painted wares were present in some areas of the Southeast at various times

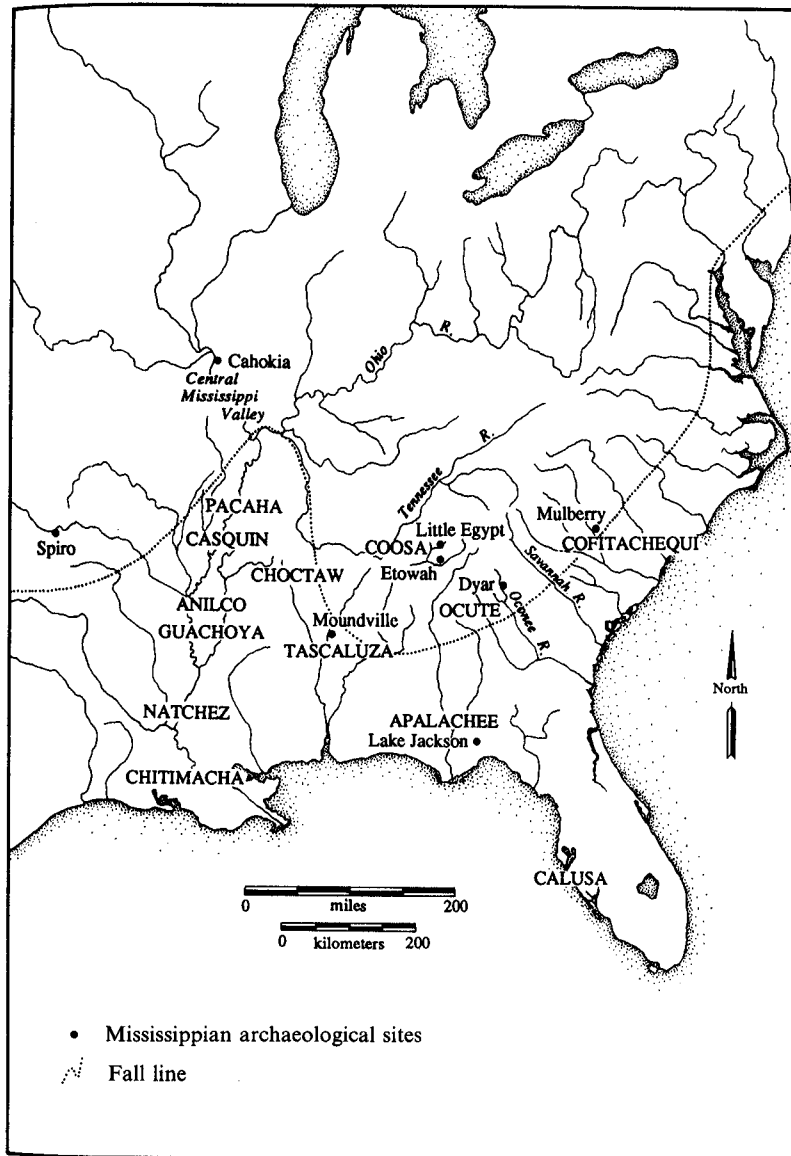


Fig. 6.5 Mississippian archaeological sites in the Southeastern United States (sixteenth-century and later polities in capitals).

during the Mississippian period, however. When these wares were widespread, such as the regional distribution of Ramey Incised pottery from Cahokia, they sent a strong signal that intensive elite exchange and interaction was occurring (Milner 1990; Pauketat and Emerson 1991). The contrast these esoteric wares provide when compared with most Mississippian ceramics has prompted some discussion about the existence of "sacred" as opposed to "secular" ceramic assemblages (Sears 1973). The more elaborate ceramics usually occur in mortuary or ceremonial as opposed to domestic contexts, or in contexts indicating use by elites as opposed to commoners. Given the role food played as tribute and as a means of rewarding and hence retaining followers, food containers or dispensers (i.e., elaborate ceramics) could have played a role in elite consumption rituals. Food distribution may have been a form of factional competition centered on feasting and the public display of wealth.

Analyses of seemingly mundane vessel assemblages have also revealed patterns that may be related to status signaling and elite consumption behavior. Shapiro (1985), for example, working with ceramics from the Dyar site in central Georgia, has shown that large storage jars tended to occur in disproportionate numbers in mound as opposed to village contexts, suggesting elite storage and control of commodities. Hally's (1986) work with ceramics from domestic contexts in several Georgia chiefdoms suggests that greater diversity in vessel form characterizes the more complex societies, which may in turn reflect greater local interest in consumption rituals. This inference could be tested through analyses of the location and context of these materials in site assemblages, particularly the kind and size of the structures they were found in or near, or the kinds of food remains found with them.

Factional competition can also be examined using settlements as well as artifactual data. The emergence of complex chiefly centers in some areas clearly occurred at the expense of elite factions in other nearby villages or centers, which either underwent a reduction in size and importance or were abandoned outright. This pattern – the occurrence of major episodes of moundbuilding and population increase at a primary center coupled with the reduction in the size and importance (measured in the incidence of elite grave goods) of nearby secondary villages and centers – has been documented at both Moundville and Cahokia (Steponaitis 1978:444–9; Peebles 1987:7–9; Milner 1990:28). Reducing the power and prestige of political rivals would greatly diminish the likelihood of successful challenges to chiefly authority.

In some cases, such as at Cahokia and Moundville, the emergence of a strong central community (and, hence, elites) is marked by the appearance of large numbers of small, widely scattered hamlets. Why such population dispersal occurred is not well understood. The most common explanation advanced sees it as reflecting population increase and the need to ensure the production of adequate food and other resources. Dispersing populations might reduce the stress on local resources such as firewood and game, while dispersing agricultural fields would have been an effective risk minimization strategy in a region where rainfall can vary from year to year and from location to location. Dispersing households might have been considered an effective defensive measure, since each residence could serve as something of a tripwire, capable of raising the hue and cry in the event of raids. Dispersing possible contenders to power, or at least their potential supporters, may have also helped reduce social tension and political challenges. Alternatively, the dispersal of commoner households might have been a stratagem of commoner resistance to elite rule. Speaking of the Natchez, Charlevoix noted "the savages, from whom the great chief has a right to take all they have, get as far from him as they can; and therefore many villages of this nation have been formed at some distance" (Charlevoix, in French 1851:159).

The archaeological record of complex chiefdoms in the Southeast illustrates their fragility and, with few exceptions, their rather ephemeral nature. Hally (1987), in an examination of mound stage construction at twenty-four Mississippian ceremonial centers in northern Georgia, found that few were occupied longer than 100–150 years, and many were in use for much shorter intervals. In some areas where centers occurred, notably within the Oconee and Savannah River valleys of eastern Georgia (Williams and Shapiro 1987; Anderson 1990a), centers were occupied and abandoned with such frequency that the political landscape has been likened to a series of blinking Christmas tree lights (Mark Williams: pers. comm. 1992). Shifts in centers of power may have occurred for ecological reasons, such as firewood or soils depletion, but it is probable that many cases reflect changing power relations, as first one faction and then another within a chiefdom or group of chiefdoms gained ascendancy.

The intensity of factional competition in various parts of the Southeast also appears to be related to physiography. Following arguments advanced by Blake and Clark (n.d.), social interaction is likely to be greatest in open, homogeneous, or otherwise unrestricted environments, and lowest in circumscribed, patchy, and restricted

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Complex chiefdoms in the Southeast, with few clear boundaries. Hally (1987), the stage construction at ceremonial centers in the Southeast were occupied longer than elsewhere were in use for much of the time here centers occurred, particularly in the Savannah River valleys (Shapiro 1987; Anderson 1987) and abandoned with a different landscape has been observed. Christmas tree lights (2). Shifts in centers of power for political reasons, such as the case is probable that many centers, as first one chiefdom or group of

competition in various parts of the Southeast related to physiographic factors argued by Blake and Clark to be greatest in open, unrestricted environments, patchy, and restricted

environments. Paramounts should thus be able to exercise greater control over elites in subsidiary communities or polities when they are situated in fairly uniform or homogeneous landscapes, with few natural barriers to interaction. Such a situation may characterize developments within the American Bottoms (Milner 1990). Less control over outlying populations, resulting in a greater likelihood of factional competition, would be likely in more irregular or patchy environments. Throughout most of the Southeast, Mississippian populations occur along widely separated linear river systems, a settlement distribution fostering local autonomy while hindering efficient information flow and the development of large polities. Information flow between communities in different river systems would have been difficult, restricting political development primarily to within individual drainages.

The incidence of factional competition in the Southeast may have also been linked to the ability of potential rivals to access elite goods exchange networks. Where a paramount was able to maintain rigid control over elite goods, such control would likely stifle rivals and ensure the paramount's stability. Where access to exchange networks was easy or unrestricted, in contrast, rival factions might emerge fairly readily. The centers of many of the larger Southeastern chiefdoms, such as Etowah and Spiro, were located at or near major physiographic boundaries. This may have been part of a deliberate strategy by the ruling elite to control the flow of prestige goods from one region to another, rather than or in addition to taking advantage of the environmental diversity and natural productivity of these areas, the traditional explanations for the occurrence of centers in these settings. The location of centers at major communications and transportation nodes would undoubtedly have had a stifling effect on elites in centers displaced from these nodes.

Factional competition in the late prehistoric southeast: evolutionary trends

Brumfiel (1987a) has recently shown how elite goods consumption varied in response to changing political conditions in the late prehispanic Valley of Mexico. Taking a similar stance, I argue that elite goods production, distribution, and consumption in the Southeast varied in response to changing patterns of regional political structure and inter-polity relations, as well as to changes in the mechanisms by which elites within individual chiefdoms maintained power. Such a view helps to explain a major change that occurs in the regional

archaeological record around AD 1350–1400, that demarcates the Middle to Late Mississippian transition.

In the Southeast, elite goods production and inter-regional exchange seem to peak from about AD 1200–1300, at the height of the occurrence of the elaborate iconography and mortuary ceremonialism of the Southern Ceremonial Complex (SCC) (Muller 1989). Religious symbolism pervades the region at this time, and is expressed on a wide range of materials, including marine shell, copper, and pottery. This period and the centuries immediately prior to it saw the greatest monumental construction in the region, with extensive mound building and elaborate mortuary ritual documented at centers such as Cahokia, Etowah, Lake Jackson, Moundville, and Spiro. Alliance, exchange, and ritual/ceremonial networks were apparently operating throughout the region. The incidence of extra-local prestige markers, such as marine shell and copper, peaks at many sites, while elaborate ceramics such as Ramey Incised pottery from Cahokia and engraved pottery from Moundville are found over large areas, suggesting elaborate exchange relationships between the highest tier of elites. Warfare does not appear to have greatly constrained inter-polity elite interaction or intra-polity monumental construction.

This pattern of elite goods exchange, monumental construction, and warfare changed dramatically in the Southeast after c. AD 1350–1400. Mound building diminished in many areas, while evidence for settlement nucleation and large-scale warfare increased markedly, the former apparently in response to the latter. Inter-regional elite goods exchange fell off, particularly the widespread exchange of icons and other elaborate artifacts characteristic of the SCC. While localized intra-polity exchange continued, the goods exchanged were for the most part local in origin. These trends have been documented in many areas of the Southeast, including in the American Bottom (Milner 1990:25, 31), in northeast Arkansas (Morse and Morse 1983:247–50, 255, 281–4), at Moundville (Peebles 1987:14–17; Steponaitis 1991:209; Welch 1991), and in northern Florida (Scarry 1990:183).

The Late Mississippian has sometimes been referred to as a period of cultural decline because of this diminution in mound building and inter-regional exchange (e.g., Peebles 1986). While mound building continued to occur, far less energy was invested, and effort comparable to that noted earlier at Cahokia, Etowah, or Moundville is non-existent. Elaborate mortuary behavior like that found in Mound 72 at Cahokia, at Mound C at Etowah, or in the Craig Mound at Spiro, centers that

were in marked decline or gone by AD 1400, is certainly not evident. Elite exchange continued, but the scale apparently shifted from the regional to the local level, with the flow of goods increasingly directed within rather than between polities. The purpose of this exchange appears to have been to develop and maintain the loyalty of subsidiary elites rather than to maintain alliances with the highest tier of elites across the region. The rise in warfare throughout the region may have made ties between polities difficult, and necessitated greater attention to defense (including maintaining the loyalty and support of followers, who would also be defenders) than to ceremonialism.

This patterning may also be related to changes in the nature of authority structures within Mississippian societies. Elites' appeal to ideology to legitimize their right to power appears to have given way, over time, to more secular authority structures, employing greater overt use of force (Anderson 1990b:193). That is, over the course of the Mississippian, the strategy by which elites legitimized their privileged position and authority (including how they controlled rival factions), I believe, changed dramatically. During the Middle Mississippian, elite control was maintained, at least in part, by their participation in region-wide ceremonial and exchange networks, which emphasized their control over events and materials at great distances, over what Helms (1979) has called "esoteric knowledge." In the Late Mississippian, in contrast, as regional populations grew, competition and warfare rather than cooperation and exchange came to dominate inter-polity relationships. The cooperation of local rather than more distant allies increasingly came to be required to maintain social prerogatives, and goods exchange tended in this direction, to develop and maintain local alliances. While the inter-regional elite goods exchange network characteristic of the Middle Mississippian helped reinforce local authority, in part through direct or indirect appeals to sacred authority, the Late Mississippian pattern of localized exchange was directed toward maintaining more secular cooperative or coercive mechanisms.

These changing regional patterns of warfare, elite goods exchange, settlement patterning, and political structure from the Middle to Late Mississippian should not be considered indicative of cultural decline, as is often suggested, but instead may reflect a natural, evolutionary trajectory that might have led, over time, to more

complex organizational structures. The complex chiefdoms encountered by the Spanish explorers penetrating the Southeast in the early sixteenth century were densely populated and geographically extensive, and were probably equal in scale to anything that came before. Where they apparently differed from the earlier chiefdoms was in how authority was maintained and utilized.

Conclusions

Competition between elites for followers was the basis of chiefly power, and the source of factional competition in Southeastern Mississippian culture. Because power in these societies was kin-based, this limited its scope and effectiveness, and necessitated a continual effort on the part of the dominant elites to maintain and legitimize their authority. The fact that a chief's principal supporters were also typically his most likely successors and, hence, potentially his greatest rivals, meant that factional competition was universal in these societies. Factional competition, I believe, played an important role in the evolution of Mississippian culture in general, and in the rise and decline of individual societies. The long-term evolutionary effects of this process should not be overlooked, since they may help to explain how more complex social formations (i.e., states) may have come about. The end result of a pattern of repeated challenges to chiefly authority in an area where such authority was initially weak would likely be the emergence of ever-stronger institutions of social and political control. Intensive elite factional competition would thus, over time, select for ever-stronger leaders and increasingly secular authority structures. The broad changes in political organization that are observed over the course of the Mississippian period in the Southeast appear to be directly tied to this process.

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