

## BOOK REVIEW FORUM

### *On Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*

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The editors of this forum believe that some books are important enough, and likely to be influential enough, to deserve extended discussion, more than can be achieved in the typical 750- to 1,000-word book reviews that characterize most journals. In our opinion *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* by Timothy R. Pauketat is one such book that deserves greater critical attention, because of the impact it is likely to have or has had since its publication.<sup>1</sup> Although published in mid-2007 and not yet widely reviewed, it has already achieved an appreciable buzz through word of mouth, and as such is shaping the practice of archaeology in the American South and beyond. It is seeing use in classes and seminars on Southeastern archaeology, archaeological theory, and the development of complex societies and state formation. From comments about the volume overheard at meetings, discussed over beers, and read in scattered Facebook postings, it would appear to be something of an underground hit with archaeology graduate students, at least at some schools.

For these reasons we have invited a number of leading archaeologists studying the Southern United States and beyond to comment on the book, to be followed in turn by an essay by Dr. Pauketat, offering his thoughts on the commentary, and archaeology and archaeological theory in general. Our instructions to the participants were open ended. They could discuss whatever they wanted about the book, subject only to an approximately 3,000-word limit on their text. This introductory essay provides a brief synopsis of the volume, presenting its major themes and characters.

*Delusions* begins with a brief introduction stating the author's pur-

poses, which are multiple. Foremost among these goals is the presentation of new approaches to and theories of archaeological inquiry. In the author's words:

Today we might say that the reality of the past—the reality of history—is not so far removed from the evidence of that history—the potsherds, charred plant foods, bones—that archaeologists routinely recover. That is, the reality of the past *was what people did and how people experienced* social life. As it turns out, such a doing and experiencing of life almost always has a material and spatial dimension. . . . Archaeologists have direct access to this dimensionality through artifacts, spaces, and places. In fact, it is precisely this dimensionality of people's cultural practices and social experiences that newer theories in archaeology aim to understand. From the point of view of these theories (of practice, agency, memory, or landscape), archaeologists track the continuous *culture making* of people through the histories, trajectories, or genealogies of things, spaces, and bodies. Thus in some theoretical circles, archaeologists now claim explanatory priority with respect to the cultural processes that reside not in the mind alone but at the interface of the human body and external world. (*Delusions*, 2, emphasis in original)

A second goal of the author is to

reexamine Midwestern and southern chiefdoms in both comparative and historical terms. Why? [Because] I am dissatisfied with recent attempts to remedy the conceptual problems associated with the study of what are imperfectly called ancient complex societies or civilizations. (*Delusions*, 4)

For Pauketat the need for new ways of thinking and doing archaeology is driven, in part, by a clear sense of urgency. Given the rate at which the archaeological record is being destroyed, both by development as well as by ill-conceived or self-serving archaeology itself, there is not much time left to explore some of the major questions of interest to the professional and general public alike (*Delusions*, 4).

To convey his points more humorously and anecdotally, Pauketat creates four “composite caricatures of contemporary archaeologists I've known over the years: the Southern Pragmatist, Dr. Science, the Uncertain Graduate Student (UGS)” [and] “a fourth, a shady character

who's sold his archaeological soul to corporate interests [Darth Evader]" (*Delusions*, 4, 5, 34). The approach, of course, comes directly from Kent Flannery's classic edited volume *The Early Mesoamerican Village* and from his paper "The Golden Marshalltown: A Parable for the Archeology of the 1980s."<sup>2</sup> Over the course of *Delusions* we encounter these four characters again and again as a counterpoint to Pauketat's more direct synthetic and theoretical argument.

The vignettes in which these characters appear include dialogue that is both internal, as in the case of the Uncertain Graduate Student's endless mulling over how to settle on a dissertation project, and external, taking place between two or more of the characters, as in the discussions between the Southern Pragmatist and the Uncertain Graduate Student on the way to do archaeology properly and the typical talk over barbecue or beer at professional conferences or in the field. Appearances by the other two characters, Dr. Science and Darth Evader, are less frequent and more often consist of descriptions of or allusions to their work, rather than as characters speaking for themselves. Coupled with these fictitious accounts, the text includes real-life accounts from Pauketat's lengthy career in archaeology, liberally sprinkled with references to the work of many other archaeologists he has met along the trail. A first-person, rhetorical style dominates the text, and Pauketat is quite candid in describing what he thinks works and does not work in current archaeological practice.

But Pauketat does not merely critique; he offers a new way of doing archaeology by using what he calls the "back door to complexity." In other words, Pauketat advocates coming at the questions of complexity from new directions that will allow the researcher to consider new and different ways of conceptualizing polities, confederations, states, and civilizations. He suggests moving away from a purely scientific inquiry to a more historically oriented one; one that he terms "historical processualism." He is also clear that the goal in archaeology is to explain the big picture, the total history of North America.

The bulk of the volume, in fact, consists of a detailed overview of how complex societies emerged and developed in eastern North America, while the final part examines how this subject has been approached in other parts of the world, notably in the Southwestern United States, in Mexico, and in Mesopotamia. The synthesis of Eastern and Southern prehistory that is presented spans thousands of years, from the Middle

Archaic onward, and examines how hereditary inequality, monumental architecture, and complex societies appeared and functioned within local societies, and how these topics are being examined by scholars in other parts of the world.

In making his argument Pauketat examines very old and very impressive Southern and lower Midwestern sites such as Watson Brake, Poverty Point, the Hopewell sites in the Scioto Valley, the Toltec mound group in Arkansas, and the shell mounds on the coast and in the interior. He questions why the complexity of these places has gone largely unrecognized. His conclusion is that archaeological theory deriving from an acceptance of the scientific method, neoevolutionary concepts, and especially the processual school of the New Archaeology has masked this and other important factors of our ancient past, including the variability that existed within the later Mississippian chiefdoms. To demonstrate these points Pauketat then turns his attention to the Mississippian chiefdoms of the South and “parses” them both spatially and temporally in order to bring the variability of the Mississippian world into relief.

As a first step toward theorizing deep history and culture making, Pauketat introduces, or rather reintroduces, a concept first put forth by archaeologists Philip Phillips, James Ford, and James Griffin in 1951, called the “X factor.” The X factor is a kind of cultural and social gestalt wherein communities change through a process of new and varied experiences, at all social levels, emanating either internally or externally and synthesizing with conventional experiences and elements. The result is not a combination of the old and the new, but something entirely new. Pauketat offers a new history of the formation and duration of the Mississippian polities as an example of the X factor at work.

Pauketat then turns to Cahokia, the largest and most impressive pre-Columbian site in North America and one with which he is quite familiar, having spent much of his career studying it. In *Delusions* Pauketat summarizes much of the writing he has already published on Cahokia to demonstrate how using a concept such as “chiefdom” to describe Cahokia distorts its complexity, size, influence, and reach of social and political power. Indeed, Pauketat insists that the term *chiefdom* distorts the very essence and history of Cahokia as a dynamic city embedded in and interacting within a region-wide Mississippian civilization, and he offers comparisons to other ancient civilizations of Mexico, the American Southwest, and Mesopotamia to make his case.

Running throughout the entire volume is Pauketat's third major message, or goal, which is that if archaeologists are to adopt new ways of thinking about and exploring the past, they must first move away from their near-pervasive immersion within the theoretical framework of social evolutionary theory. According to Pauketat this is essential if archaeologists are to better understand "the development of inequality, identity, hegemony, and government, among other things." The "metaphor of social evolution" with its "counterproductive conceptual clutter" dominates our thinking and confuses and "emasculates an archaeology of complexity in general" (*Delusions*, 4). As such, it must be discarded and replaced by an archaeology that incorporates a concern with history, agency, and practice. Pauketat argues that neoevolutionary concepts like "chiefdom," a construct originating in ethnology, are "sophisticated delusions" created by anthropologists and not Native peoples.<sup>3</sup> When used to explore the past, such "delusional" constructs are both inappropriate and constraining, hence the title of the book (*Delusions*, 1–3). The widespread use of concepts like the chiefdom, in Pauketat's words, "stand as obstacles to understanding what really happened in the ancient world" since they "imply a cultural homogeneity and uniform political structure rather than a plurality and diversity of organizations, identities, and historical experiences" (*Delusions*, 3, 81). The book, in no uncertain terms, is devoted to removing such obstacles.

And now to our discussants' perspectives!

#### NOTES

1. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007) (hereafter cited in the text as *Delusions*).
2. Kent V. Flannery, ed., *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, (New York: Academic Press, 1976); "The Golden Marshalltown: A Parable for the Archeology of the 1980s," *American Anthropologist* 84 (1982): 265–78.
3. Pauketat takes the language of "sophisticated delusions" from Marvin Harris, "Comments," in *New Perspectives in Archaeology*, ed. S. R. Binford and L. R. Binford, 360 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

## History, Social Evolution, and the Culture Wars

CHARLES R. COBB

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984* have become analogical touchstones for the excesses of government and the pervasiveness of oppression in everyday life. Yet I think a more apt comparison for Timothy Pauketat's meditations on complexity and power would have to be "Shooting an Elephant." In this well-known autobiographical essay, Orwell explores the weight of authority as an agent of British imperialism who, against his better judgment, feels compelled to kill a tame elephant that had escaped its chains and run temporarily amok while in "must." He does so less because of the danger it posed to the Burmese villagers and more because his refusal to slay the beast would undermine the expectations of his position held by the colonial subjects. This story emphasizes the cultural dimension of subjugation—that no matter the degree of control over the material reins of power, holding command involves a process of eliciting consent that is frequently tenuous, at best partial, and always under negotiation. This, I argue, is the most important lesson in Pauketat's *Delusions*: how what we construe as culture is in reality a web of relations that is always in the process of being historically framed and reframed among people, and which constantly tacks between agency and structure.

Pauketat's critiques of social evolutionism will no doubt wound some Southeastern archaeologists who, in self-defense, will claim ownership of the chiefdom concept solely on a heuristic basis. Here I might suggest Cobb's Rule: if you claim that you're not really a social evolutionist but find yourself feeling defensive when the chiefdom concept is criticized, then at heart you're a social evolutionist.<sup>1</sup> It's not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with using *chiefdom* as a descriptive device.

As Pauketat argues, the problems arise when we attempt to use it as an explanatory device. Neoevolutionary taxa just do not easily embrace forms of organization that embody significant differences from standard social types. Pauketat may blanch at the notion, but I do see one strong similarity between his corpus of work and Lewis Binford's lifelong efforts in archaeological theory building. Binford has been consistent and insistent that explanation is about understanding variability. Although coming from a fundamentally different theoretical background, Pauketat is asking us to bear the same goal in mind. Rather than ecological variables, however, he stresses history and the "X factor," those cultural variables that distinguish one society from another.

Pauketat and Binford have very little patience with the typologizing that passes for addressing variability. This was the basis for Binford's well-known critique of John Yellen's attempt to characterize activity areas on !Kung settlements.<sup>2</sup> Binford argued that Yellen's study was ultimately based on normative constructs—empirical generalizations—that elided the interesting variation within !Kung communities, as well as between !Kung groups and other hunter-gatherer societies. Likewise, the normative constructs that comprise evolutionary stages bear the brunt of criticism in *Delusions*. Traditionally, once the evidence begins to show fundamental fissures in an evolutionary type, the typical processual response has been to create subtypes. Thus, as Pauketat points out, we have been treated to simple, complex, and paramount chiefdoms and, more recently, corporate and networking strategies in the attempt to apply the dual-processual model to Mississippian polities.<sup>3</sup>

Social types do have their uses, but as Pauketat emphasizes, these additional categories have assumed the status of normative constructs that have become the goal of analysis rather than a point of departure. Binford's earlier rebuke of "inductivists" (in his view, misguided processualists) likewise took them to task for the way in which they treat exceptions to patterned regularities: "[T]hey [the new patterns] are different, justifying the definition of a new category or taxonomic unit for subsuming the observed case and any other similar ones discovered in the future."<sup>4</sup> Here we have an intriguing instance of epistemological equifinality, where two scholars with widely disparate philosophies converge on the same criticism.

If the point of departure is not to create more subtypes, then where do we take our analysis to explain variation in the past? There is no

easy answer to this question, but at the very least we should hope that direction makes some nod to ongoing developments in theory in social anthropology and allied disciplines. History and the constitutive role of practice are pivotal to many of those theoretical currents, even if—like social evolutionists—one is largely interested in political developments as opposed to, say, the production of meaning, semiotics, or other avenues that processual archaeologists frequently (and often incorrectly) consign to the touchy-feely realm of postmodernism.

As one example of the promise of inserting “culture” into political theory, Phillip Corrigan and Derek Sayer in an influential study argued that British state formation involved a series of political revolutions embedded in cultural revolutions.<sup>5</sup> The regimentation of power under an emerging constitutional monarchy was strongly tied to such materialist venues as the imposition of enclosure and the expansion of colonial rule. At the same time, however, the ideology of power was broadcast via a moral rhetoric whereby English rule in the 1700s assumed a strongly theatrical nature. Internally, the monarchy and elite classes convinced themselves of their legitimacy by means such as highly ritualized displays of etiquette. Externally, attempts to equally convince the ruled of the moral authority of power consisted of overt acts of benevolence and punishment. In like fashion, Pauketat is asking us to examine the performances and production of culture that actively project power (and resist it), rather than trying to figure out how many tiers of administration constituted the British empire and how that compared with the French empire.<sup>6</sup>

Southeastern archaeologists do consider the matter of culture, but, as Pauketat observes, the notion still tends to be embedded in systemic renderings of complexity. If complexity is to be a central focus of our work, as he and others have advocated, it is far better to consider heterarchy alongside hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> Here I would caution that heterarchy does not mean merely “horizontal complexity.” It also implies a continual shifting and decentering of focus and power. Thus to argue that, say, gender and kin ties are important components of heterarchical complexity is at once correct and yet not enough. A historically based approach would necessitate an exploration into how gender played into the formation of heterarchy at one point in time, but would further ask how this came to be and changed thereafter. Otherwise, heterarchy becomes a reification of culture as static system and organic whole, a view that merely recognizes additional categories of complexity.



I should note here for the purposes of disclosure that Pauketat's book on one occasion makes positive reference to my own work via the voice of the Southern Pragmatist, so I could perhaps be accused of being biased in my positive assessment of his ideas. The reality of the matter is that my work does reflect many of Pauketat's views, but we certainly differ in important ways. Theoretically, I situate myself much more in the materialist vein of historical anthropology with its strong political-economic underpinnings. Pauketat is engaged in a project to synthesize elements from the likes of De Certeau, Giddens, and Bourdieu into a practice-based historical-processual approach. My leaning has been toward the more Marxian-influenced takes on lived experience, which range from Antonio Gramsci's views on "practical activity" to E. P. Thompson's demonstration that creativity and agency are not simply a product of structure, but are recursively constitutive of structure.<sup>8</sup> As Bruce Trigger observes, like practice-theorists, archaeologists in this tradition "stress intentionality and the social production of reality" rather than "treating individual human beings as objects of social forces."<sup>9</sup> More recently this has been rephrased as to how agency becomes manifest as structure or collective action in terms of *praxis*, best encapsulated by Randall McGuire as "something more than embodied practice, something more than practical consciousness, and something more than individuals simply making self-interested decisions. Agency becomes praxis only when social groups collectively seek transformational change to advance their own interests."<sup>10</sup> Of course, the difficulty lies in identifying which social groups have coalesced and gathered the momentum for change at any one historical moment, no mean feat for archaeologists.

I think that those who object to any of these frameworks do so in part because the theoretical literature can be jargon-ridden and almost self-defeatingly cryptic. During the heyday of the British invasion of the quasi-nihilistic theoretical currents emanating out of Cambridge in the 1980s, there seemed to be a self-congratulatory note among Southeastern archaeologists about our skepticism regarding theoretical overreach, which, ironically, also extended to the New Archaeology.<sup>11</sup> I suspect that many may lump practice theories with the more recent "excesses," and denigrate them accordingly.

Furthermore, practice approaches do not lend themselves to facile methodological checklists (e.g., four-tier settlement hierarchy = state) when it comes to actually interpreting what we have recovered from the

ground—although Pauketat does provide general guidelines for fusing his version of practice theory and empirical research.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps just as distressing to many processualists is the notion that understanding variability as a function of historical practice means dispensing with the idea that archaeological explanation should involve a strong element of prediction or retrodiction.<sup>13</sup> Although Pauketat doesn't focus on this angle, the belief that archaeology is potentially a predictive science can unintentionally promote the rise of his "Darth Evaders." In other words, if we become too comfortable in the notion that we can make "if . . . , then" assertions about the nature of unexplored variability in the archaeological record, we risk making unfounded extrapolations that can have very destructive consequences to that record.

This was manifested in one way in the 1980s and 1990s by the thesis emanating out of certain State Historic Preservation Offices that archaeological survey in rugged, upland terrain was no longer necessary because past work had shown that the likelihood of significant sites in these settings was so small. In effect our knowledge of settlement patterns, adaptation, and ecology allowed us to predict site location. During the 1990s Brian Butler and I worked at two incredible nonplowed Mississippian villages situated on very uninviting ridgetops.<sup>14</sup> These kinds of locations would have been written off under the newly advocated sampling schemes, which were based on intuitively obvious ecological variables such as proximity to water. One of the two sites, Millstone Bluff, was likely occupied because this small perch on a steep hill had been the locus of an earlier Woodland ceremonial stone enclosure. We suspect that cosmological significance and historical memory were key attractions to the return here of Mississippian peoples, who reinscribed their own meaning systems on the hilltop through the construction of a plaza and the rendering of several panels of rock art. Certainly, the local environmental setting had to be able to support a Mississippian lifeway, but the occupation of this exact spot was predicated by variables we associate more with "culture" than with ecology.

Pauketat's position that social evolutionists have neglected the importance of broad-scale processes is one on which I have a slightly different take. At the 1992 Southeastern Archaeological Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, I participated in a session on multiscale interactions organized by Kenneth Sassaman and Michael Nassaney that to some degree relied on this same critique.<sup>15</sup> Vincas Steponaitis, one of the discussants,

provided a litany of counterexamples to make the argument that this claim was exaggerated. So I was forced to rethink my position and have come up with the following: it is fair to say that issues such as long-distance exchange or the widespread occurrence of technological or stylistic traditions have never fallen out of favor in Southeastern archaeology. On the other hand, these phenomena typically are construed as sweeping, structural minihistories embedded within an evolutionary paradigm.

In this sense the Mississippian period writ large is often construed as a sequential, pan-regional composition through time. It begins with a prelude of maize agriculture and the mound-plaza complex. Around AD 1250 there is a fascinating intermezzo in the form of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Finally, there is a *dénouement* characterized by a decline in mound building and an upsurge in conflict before Europeans arrive on the scene. This kind of structural history as sequence of empirical generalizations, even if broadly accurate, often is viewed as a natural progression applicable throughout the Mississippian South. It does not do justice to how communities creatively produce their own subjectivities based in part on their interactions with others and on extralocal material culture (a critique to which I could subject myself).<sup>16</sup>

I might add here that Southeastern archaeologists do rely on another type of history as well, and that consists of relying on the documentary accounts of various Midwestern and Southern groups during the post-Columbian era to make analogical inferences about Mississippian societies. While I have no beef with the judicious use of the direct-historical approach and happily use it myself on occasion, oftentimes historical analogies seem to serve as substitutes for social theory. In short, I think Southeastern archaeologists as a group are not taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by our incredible data to engage scholars elsewhere on important theoretical themes that engage with historical process, such as embodiment or performance.<sup>17</sup>

On a final note, the correspondence between the political beliefs of conservative pundit Bill O'Reilly and myself could best be described as antipodal. However, I do agree with his argument that the schisms that divide the United States are much more involved than a simple matter of political beliefs, of big government versus free-wheeling *laissez-faire*. Just as important is O'Reilly's notion of "culture war."<sup>18</sup> This ideological struggle grounded in moral philosophy is no less important for deciding how society is organized and regulated than is the battle over the

ballot box. If this sort of rich complexity is associated with such divergent political formations as twenty-first-century North America and the eighteenth-century British Empire, why should we expect any less of twelfth-century Cahokia? Ultimately, I believe that is what Pauketat is asking us to accept.

#### NOTES

1. In homage to Norman Yoffee's Rule: "If you can argue whether a society is a state or isn't, then it isn't," a point that Pauketat debates in his book. From Norman Yoffee, "Too Many Chiefs? (or Safe Texts for the '90s)," in *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?*, ed. N. Yoffee and A. Sherratt, 60–78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

2. Lewis R. Binford, "Dimensional Analysis of Behavior and Site Structure: Learning from an Eskimo Hunting Stand," *American Antiquity* 43 (1978): 330–61; John Yellen, *Archaeological Approaches to the Present* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

3. The dual-processual model was first presented in R. E. Blanton, G. M. Feinman, S. A. Kowalewski, and P. N. Peregrine, "A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization," *Current Anthropology* 37 (1996): 1–14. Applications of this approach to Mississippian societies include Adam King, *Etowah: The Political History of a Chiefdom Capital* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003); Claudine Payne, "The Foundations of Leadership in Mississippian Chiefdoms: Perspectives from Lake Jackson and Upper Nodena," in *Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society*, ed. B. M. Butler and P. D. Welch, Occasional Paper No. 33, 91–111 (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 2006); Mary Beth D. Trubitt, "Mound Building and Prestige Goods Exchange: Changing Strategies in the Cahokia Chiefdom," *American Antiquity* 65 (2000): 669–90.

4. Binford, "Dimensional Analysis," 359.

5. Phillip Richard D. Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution*, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1985).

6. One of Pauketat's critiques of social evolutionism is the reliance on comparing political types by number of control hierarchies. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2007), 130–32.

7. Carole L. Crumley is widely credited with introducing this concept to archaeology; see Carol L. Crumley, "A Dialectical Critique of Hierarchy," in *Power Relations and State Formation*, ed. T. C. Patterson and C. W. Gailey, 155–59 (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987).

8. Gramsci's views on practical activity receive detailed treatment in Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966).

9. Bruce G. Trigger, "Marxism in Contemporary Western Archaeology," in *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, ed. M. B. Schiffer, 159–200 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993).

10. Randall H. McGuire, *Archaeology as Political Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 44.

11. This point was emphasized in retrospectives on theory in Southeastern archaeology by Robert C. Dunnell, "The Role of the Southeast in American Archaeology," *Southeastern Archaeology* 9 (1990): 11–22; and Christopher S. Peebles, "From History to Hermeneutics: The Place of Theory in the Later Prehistory of the Southeast," *Southeastern Archaeology* 9 (1990): 23–34.

12. As one example, see Timothy R. Pauketat and Susan M. Alt, "Agency in a Postmold? Physicality and the Archaeology of Culture-Making," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005): 213–36.

13. Lewis Binford's influential attempts to insert logical positivism into archaeology argued that prediction and antihistoricism were important elements of explanation, as laid out in Lewis Binford, "Some Comments on Historical Versus Processual Archaeology," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 24 (1968): 267–75. In this respect, he has also been consistent, arguing more recently that "to the extent that historicism is a major explanatory theme in anthropology, archaeologists would do well to reject this aspect of our intellectual patrimony." Binford, *Constructing Frames of Reference: An Analytical Method for Archaeological Theory Building Using Hunter-Gatherer and Environmental Data Sets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 30.

14. Brian M. Butler and Charles R. Cobb, "The Dillow's Ridge Site and the Production of Mill Creek Chert Tools," *Illinois Archaeology* 13 (2001): 57–87; Brian M. Butler and Charles R. Cobb, "The Millstone Bluff Site: A First Approximation," in *Current Archaeological Research in Kentucky*, vol. 7, ed. C. D. Hockensmith and K. C. Carstens, 85–109 (Frankfort: Kentucky Heritage Council, 2004).

15. Later published as Kenneth E. Sassaman and Michael S. Nassaney, eds., *Native American Interactions* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

16. Charles R. Cobb, "Social Reproduction and the *Longue Durée* in the Prehistory of the Midcontinental United States," in *Processual and Postprocessual Archaeologies: Multiple Ways of Knowing the Past*, ed. R. W. Preucel, Occasional Paper No. 10, 166–82 (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 1991).

17. Notable studies that have attracted scant notice in Southeastern archae-

ology include, for embodiment, Rosemary Joyce, "Archaeology of the Body," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 139–58; and Lynn M. Meskell, "Writing the Body in Archaeology," in *Reading the Body*, ed. A. E. Rautman, 13–21 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). Archaeological works on performance include Takeshi Inomata, "Plazas, Performers, and Spectators: Political Theaters of the Classic Maya," *Current Anthropology* 47 (2006): 805–41; and Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theater/archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001).

18. Bill O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006).

## In Search of the Back Door

JAY JOHNSON

As I understand my assignment, this is to be a short opinion piece, reporting my reactions to *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*. As such, in the best postmodern sense, I should start with a brief recount of my own perspective. I am fortunate enough to have done archaeology following the three major paradigms of the twentieth century. I began at Florida State in the mid-1960s and fell into a very strong undergraduate program. Working for David Phelps, I did a lot of fieldwork, directed the lab, and wrote a senior thesis based, in part, on my own fieldwork. My role models were the likes of Robert Wauchope, Gordon Willey, and, above all, Joffre Coe. Lewis Binford was not to be trusted. After a brief break I began graduate school at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. I quickly found out that Binford had something to say and I should read what he had written—everything. I have been associated with the Center for Archaeological Research since I showed up at Ole Miss in 1976, and my appointment is half academic and half research. The research has been mostly cultural resource management with its strong commitment to processual archaeology. While I knew that there had been a reaction to the archaeology that I had been doing, I did not pay it a lot of attention until 2001 when I inherited the graduate seminar in archaeological theory. There is no better way to get up to speed. After a couple of false starts I have settled on Bruce Trigger's *History of Archaeological Thought*, especially the second edition, and Robert Preucel and Ian Hodder's *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: A Reader* supplemented with a number of additional reading assignments.<sup>1</sup>

I first encountered *Delusions* in a seminar that Robbie Ethridge and I taught on current approaches to understanding the Mississippian

period. My initial reaction was mixed. I could hardly argue with the fact that the chiefdom model, the focal concept of much of the archaeology of the South during the past forty years, was broken. In addition to the standard programmatic statements that everyone cites, my generation had spent a good deal of time testing the implications of the chiefdom model, failing to find what we expected. What we did find was a remarkable amount of regional variation. The more we knew, the less we understood. However, it seemed to me, on that first reading, that the “backdoor approach” that Pauketat offers to fix the problem was poorly presented.<sup>2</sup> I finished the book without any clear idea of where that door was or how to enter it.

Nonetheless, this is a provocative and entertaining piece of work. It can hardly be original to compare it to Walter W. Taylor’s *A Study of Archaeology* on the one hand and Kent Flannery’s *The Early Mesoamerican Village* on the other.<sup>3</sup> While Pauketat takes on the major tenants of much of the archaeology that came before, he is far more diplomatic than was Taylor. The more interesting question is, will the alternative he proposes be any more accessible or productive than Taylor’s conjunctive approach? I will return to that topic.

Pauketat readily acknowledges his debt to Flannery and goes on to make good use of dialogues between caricatures of major theoretical stances to make his argument. While I will always have a place in my heart for Flannery’s Real Mesoamerican Archaeologist and Skeptical Graduate Student, I do find Pauketat’s cast of characters to be engaging. But, is their message as coherent? Contrast, for example, Pauketat’s Uncertain Graduate Student with her 1970s counterpart. The name says it all. In 1976 we thought we knew it all or would soon have it figured out. Hundreds of thousands of shovel tests, sampling strategies, catchment analyses, assessments of the distribution of status markers, and test hypotheses later, we are considerably less sure of ourselves. And, let us be honest, although the processual archaeology that we learned in graduate school promised us that culture is a system and *all* aspects of that system will be reflected in the archaeological record, we have spent the past several decades focusing on a very narrow range of questions. Many of us welcome the freedom that the postprocessual climate offers. However, like Pauketat’s fictional graduate student, we are not quite sure how to access that freedom in a responsible way.

So, on this second reading I have paid particular interest in trying to understand the back door. The backdoor approach, in Pauketat’s words,



is an attempt to delineate the “rich, sticky, uncertain, historical process” responsible for the archaeological record using “an agency or practice-based approach, or a historical-processual concern with place making” (*Delusions*, 163, 208). It is a response to the realization, clearly delineated by Pauketat, that “Mississippian” is very different throughout the South and it came to be that way following a number of distinct trajectories. There can be no doubt that the contingent nature of these varied historical sequences has been all but ignored for the past fifty years or so. The back door is, specifically, Pauketat’s historical processualism. In it, like Taylor, he is reacting to the archaeology that came before. In terms of fieldwork, the application of the historical processual approach is quite attractive as described by Pauketat. When we leave our Uncertain Graduate Student at the end of the book, after she has rejected the processual research design approved by her advisor, she is preparing to do a controlled surface collection in conjunction with a geophysical survey in order to locate house clusters that she can explore through broad-scale excavation. Isn’t that what Taylor recommended, that we should stop digging trenches and telephone booths to expose living floors? How is this different from Taylor’s conjunctive approach?

Taylor, in response to what he saw as a nearly exclusive focus on chronology, called for an archaeology that would combine multiple lines of evidence in order to derive a more holistic view of specific cultures in the past. For that reason he advocated maximum exposure of all the surfaces related to each individual occupation. Like Pauketat, Taylor provided provocative examples of the kinds of patterns that could be discovered by means of horizontal excavation. He did not, however, provide any clear statement of how the conjunctive approach is to be implemented. The result of the conjunctive approach, according to Taylor, would be the ethnography of a prehistoric occupation. Once archaeologists sought to understand their data in a broader context, they would no longer be doing archaeology but rather anthropology. American anthropology at that time (the dissertation upon which the book is based was finished in 1939) was overwhelmingly Boasian, which can, of course, be seen as a direct reaction to the overreaching evolutionary theory of the nineteenth century. Boas did not reject the possibility that anthropology would develop broad theories of culture change; he just argued that those theories should be founded on actual, documented histories of change for specific cultures. In fact Boas’s initial strategy was closer to Pauketat’s than it is to Taylor’s. Both are adamantly inductive and both

emphasize history. However, with their emphasis on the ethnographic present, the Boasians actually paid little attention to history, explaining, perhaps, Taylor's peculiar neglect of the role of chronology in the conjunctive approach.

How, then, does historical processualism differ from historical particularism? Perhaps the case study Pauketat presents in chapter 7 will serve to answer that question. After spending the first five chapters demonstrating that there are no such things as chiefdoms, he concludes in chapter 6 that Cahokia was not a chiefdom after all. It was actually an early state! The next chapter is a cross-cultural survey of "other world civilizations" (*Delusions*, 164). After a very interesting review of cases ranging from Chaco to Monte Alban to Mesopotamia, he concludes with a cross-cultural search for parallels. Instead of using the checklist approach that has crippled neoevolutionary archaeology for the past fifty years, he searches for "a series of relationships that played out historically. How were central places built, central orders memorialized, and producer autonomy sacrificed?" (*Delusions*, 192). So, what parallels emerge from this application of the comparative approach? First, according to Pauketat, in all of the examples under consideration there is evidence for the negotiation of pluralism. Multiple ethnic identities are resolved in the "mitigation of diversity" (*Delusions*, 206). Second, "monumentality is an omnipresent element of Formative civilizations" because, as I understand it, mounds and plazas represent the place making that is critical in constructing the negotiated resolution of pluralism (*Delusions*, 199). In the first place, I am hardly astounded to find that monumentality is regularly found in early civilizations since it is one of the most common criteria used to identify the rise of centralized power in the archaeological record. Most archaeologists, for example, are unlikely to identify a group as Mississippian if they did not build mounds. As to mitigating diversity, isn't that what all societies must do, at some level, whether that diversity is interpersonal or interethnic? Perhaps, as Pauketat seems to suggest, it is a matter of scale, with early states incorporating peoples of different ethnic or linguistic backgrounds (*Delusions*, 196). If so, like mounds, is this the cause or effect of civilization?

This last question brings up what is my biggest difficulty with historical processualism. In this, I am most clearly reflecting my graduate school indoctrination. Here and elsewhere, Pauketat, like Boas, argues that we must know how something happened before we can begin to ask why it happened. Like most of the archaeologists of my generation, I am

comfortable with that assertion. I have spent a career documenting how. Admittedly, that documentation has become considerably more contingent over the past decade or so. The point of contention is how we go about documenting local histories of, in this case, the centralization of power. Pauketat spends most of this book demonstrating that we have been misguided by the chiefdom concept. But, of course, he is able to do that only because our research has been directed toward evaluating that very concept. If we do not ask how and why at the same time, then I suspect that we will end up with a large number of very interesting local histories that will be difficult or impossible to reconcile. Agency, practice, and structuration are an attractive response to an archaeology that has neglected the fact that the archaeological record is produced as a result of the continued negotiations of cultural entities and that it is these negotiations that maintain and alter the context or structure of future negotiations. However, if we are to understand cultural evolution, it is the structures and their transformations that we should be studying, not just the negotiations. While it is clear that neoevolutionary theory is ultimately guilty of the same shortcomings as classical evolutionary theory up to and including, especially, an emphasis on unilineal stages, there is still the need to approach the archaeological record using models of structural complexity if that is one of the things we want to understand. It has become clear that these models can only be derived from the recursive elaboration of specific, contingent, localized sequences in conjunction with generalizing theories about the relationships that allow people to live together in asymmetrical relationships of power and how these relationships develop. These inquiries must be simultaneous. It seems to me that you cannot effectively do one and then the other.

#### NOTES

1. Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robert W. Preucel and Ian Hodder, eds., *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: A Reader* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).
2. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 14 (hereafter cited in the text as *Delusions*).
3. Walter W. Taylor, *A Study of Archaeology* (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1948); Kent V. Flannery, ed., *The Early Mesoamerican Village* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).

# Deposing the Chieftdom Model “Monster-God”

LYNNE P. SULLIVAN

Timothy Pauketat is right about the chieftdom model and neoevolutionary theory; it needs to go. Pauketat is not the first to delineate the chieftdom model's failings, but he is the first to forcefully make the case for interpretations of Mississippian Period archaeological complexes.<sup>1</sup> He gives us this message via engaging, humorous characters and anecdotes, but also with serious scholarship and logical arguments. The behavior of Pauketat's "Darth Evader" character, a corporate archaeologist who bypasses sites to please his clients and to increase his own profits, is in some ways analogous to the chieftdom model: always lurking in the background; seriously interfering with the research necessary for interpreting the archaeology of specific peoples and places; and placing a detrimental overemphasis on personal aggrandizement.

Many of us working in Mississippian Period archaeology have come to realize that the chieftdom model is indeed a monster that has devoured the discovery and discussion of real diversity in the archaeological record of late prehistoric Southern groups. Nevertheless, archaeologists continue to acquiesce to this model as if it were part and parcel of their own anthropological belief system. Unique histories of diverse peoples are sacrificed to this monster god. It has consumed the stories of the development of distinctive communities—along with an understanding and appreciation of differing traditions in gender dynamics, family life, conflict, and leadership (to name a few topics). Its veneration also has promulgated ethnocentric views of Native American cultures. For example, the "elite-centric" modeling that Pauketat's Uncertain Graduate Student ponders in chapter 2 too often has the result that Western notions of leadership and gender relationships permeate interpretations. Politically

powerful male chiefs (yet who are denied the power equivalency of Western “kings”) are the focus of attention while potential female power roles in matrilineal kin groups and networks, which are so important in many American Indian groups, are downplayed. Another significant sacrifice that is made to the chiefdom model, one unintentionally made by archaeologists—and that is alluded to in *Delusions*—is that the chiefdom model swallows stories of individual culture formation, thus concealing the histories of peoples and places. Pauketat asks in chapter 1, “Did the people of each province contribute in some way to the larger history of North America? Did they change the story of other people?”<sup>2</sup> My response is, What peoples have not done so? They all are important.

The chiefdom model’s comeuppance in the Mississippian South has been a long time coming. Back in the early 1980s, when I was writing my dissertation, the use of this model was still fairly fresh in Southeastern archaeology and the quest to find “archaeological correlates,” à la Peebles and Kus’s 1977 *American Antiquity* article, was in vogue.<sup>3</sup> For my dissertation project I dutifully searched for evidence of a chiefly lineage and hierarchy in the mortuary practices of the Late Mississippian, Mouse Creek Phase of southeastern Tennessee. All of that hereditary hierarchy just did not seem to fit the mainly age- and gender-based differentiation I was seeing. So, I concluded that “the historically recorded native societies of the southeastern Tennessee area provide better models for Mouse Creek phase social organization than [does] the chiefdom model.”<sup>4</sup> My conclusions largely were dismissed either as evidence of the collapse of Mississippian chiefdoms just before and at contact (since most historic-period American Indian societies are thought to be more “egalitarian” than those of the centuries before Europeans arrived on the scene) or that the Mouse Creek phase sites were part of a paramount chiefdom and the “elites” were interred elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

But to this day I remain convinced that the chiefdom model has been particularly detrimental to archaeologists’ ability to gain an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of late prehistoric cultures in the Great Valley of east Tennessee (which encompasses the Tennessee River drainage basin between the scarp of the Cumberland Plateau and the Blue Ridge), and indeed in Southern Appalachia. These peoples likely were *always* more “egalitarian” than Mississippian Period polities in other areas. It is somewhat ironic, in light of Pauketat’s focus on Cahokia, that one reason for my conviction is that there is no one major site in the

eastern Tennessee (or western North Carolina) region on which to place a paramount chief capital (i.e., there is no Cahokia, no Moundville—and Etowah is a good ways distant). Consequently, the numerous smaller Mississippian centers in eastern Tennessee are treated as booty to be attached to the realms of chiefly lords at sites elsewhere (some of which are larger than eastern Tennessee sites, some are not). These raids on east Tennessee booty are getting really tiresome. Even Pauketat has been deluded by some of them, such as the proposal that there was a vast paramount chiefdom encompassing most of eastern Tennessee, but with a capital in northern Georgia.<sup>6</sup>

Another problem that Pauketat also notes is that the incessant search for evidence of chiefdoms has overridden the more basic task of working out and refining chronologies. This problem especially is an issue in eastern Tennessee. Sadly, the seemingly never-ending quest for paramount chiefs also tends to bring acclaim to those who detect such prehistoric powerbrokers. The quest for glory has promoted archaeological interpretations of chiefly lineages, multitiered settlement hierarchies, and long-distance relationships between sites for which the much less celebrated work of examining collections and working out chronologies has not yet been done. As a result, inaccurate temporal associations are made between sites and, consequently, centuries of cultural developments are conflated and gobbled up by the chiefdom model.

So, good riddance to the chiefdom model. Pauketat has masterfully slain and dismembered this monster and I could not agree more with him that Southeastern archaeologists need to ensure that the corpse does not reanimate. But, what does Pauketat propose to replace this model? Is it another monster to be slain by a younger warrior in a few years? Are we just trading the forest for the trees? That is, are we giving up on understanding cultural development largely writ?

The answer to this last question very clearly is no. Pauketat's agenda is more ambitious than simply annihilating the worn-out chiefdom model. Much of what he is saying about the need to move past the problems of neoevolutionary theory and its typological models echoes Norman Yoffee's book *Myths of the Archaic State*.<sup>7</sup> Pauketat's and Yoffee's arguments are quite similar; both critique the use of "types" of societies and advocate the comparative study of developmental sequences as a way to understand diversity and complexity. Like Yoffee, Pauketat wants archaeologists to become more like ethnologists, but of course using our

data from material culture rather than from direct observation of living peoples. Pauketat states that “comparative archaeo-history, based on the principles of contemporary social theory [is] the key to transcending the problems associated with . . . social evolutionism and systems thinking in contemporary archaeology” (*Delusions*, 109). This approach, which incorporates the identification and comparison of cultural practices in historical contexts, certainly offers more latitude to investigate cultural diversity because it actually highlights diversity and difference rather than attempting to reduce cultures to “types” along a social-evolutionary scale.

Pauketat does have some disagreements with Yoffee. An entire chapter in *Delusions* is devoted to debunking “Yoffee’s Rule,” especially as it pertains to Cahokia. At first blush this rule seems like an off-hand comment that Yoffee may have made about societies not being states if you have to argue about it. Well, gee whiz, we have to argue about everything in archaeology! I thought maybe Pauketat was just being an Oversensitive Graduate Student at Michigan when Yoffee made this remark. But, Yoffee was serious! He published this opinion in 1993. Moreover, Yoffee does not consider Cahokia to have been a “state.” Are Yoffee and Pauketat, scholars who eschew neoevolutionary typology, actually arguing about the cultural-evolutionary-stage classification of Cahokia?! Maybe, but there is much more to the discussion than that. Pauketat’s real agenda—beyond debunking the chiefdom—is indeed to convince us that Cahokia was much more than a supersized Mississippian center, and that the Cahokia phenomenon has been underestimated in its scope, size, and, ultimately, role as a founding community for the Mississippian phenomenon across parts of the Midwest and most of the South. He sets out to show us that the Cahokians developed a civilization that is part of the big history of North America and that influenced other peoples’ lives.

To do so Pauketat proposes a general scenario for culture development that follows his model for the development of Cahokia. In this scenario new cultures arise from a primordial stew of cultural pluralism, fed by new traditions via migrations. He writes, “Migrations or displacements . . . led to the emplacement of pluralism at key settlements. The regrouped people of these places would comprise little melting pots, where hybrid identities and diverse cultural practices could produce any number of potential historical trajectories” (*Delusions*, 197). Pauketat dubs the historical processes that create culture in these melting pots as the “X fac-

tor.” This X factor was first proposed by Phillips, Ford, and Griffin in their famous 1951 *Archaeological Survey in the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley*. They explain that the X factor encompasses the “contributions made by the culture to its own development.” Pauketat further defines the X factor as “the historical process whereby foreign and local cultural processes ‘were quickly welded together to produce traits that appear unlike the items from which they were derived’”<sup>8</sup> According to Pauketat, these X-factor processes thus shaped communities and places; collective identities were formed. In the Cahokia case Pauketat proposes that the X-factor processes that led to Cahokia’s eleventh-century development in the first place also led to “Mississippianization” emanating outward from Cahokia.

To make his points about migration, cultural plurality, and identity formation as being significant components of X-factor processes, Pauketat discusses and compares case studies of several Mississippian sites and areas. First, there is the inevitable discussion of what is “Mississippian.” Then he reaches into a deep history of Mississippian development by pointing out the long history of mound building in the South. The case studies include examples of migration (including the Macon Plateau) and are used to point to a post-AD 1100 development for Mississippian sites outside of the Cahokia-sphere proper, as well as to bolster the case for movements and amalgamations of people as instrumental in these cultural developments. He then moves to comparisons of cultural processes and political formations in the American Southwest, Mexico, and Mesopotamia to show how culture broadly writ, that is, civilization, developed in these areas, again as a bolster for the Cahokia case. Migration and cultural plurality once again are important.

Although I perused a near-final draft of *Delusions* more than a year ago, I had the opportunity to read the published version word for word while vacationing in Belize, a small country in Central America. Maybe it was the Belikan beer, but I could not help but compare Belize to Pauketat’s primordial stew of cultural pluralism. The small, sparsely populated country of Belize is a veritable hodgepodge of cultures. Along with the small original Maya populations are Kriol (Belizian Creole) and mestizo people, Garinagu (people of mixed African, Carib, and Arawak heritage who were deported from St. Vincent by the British), and large immigrant communities of Mennonites and Amish. In smaller numbers are Chinese immigrants, a dash of other Asian and Near Eastern peoples,



and a healthy dose of Canadian and U.S. expatriates. Cultural plurality and migrations certainly are major factors in present-day Belize's composition. Some might refer to this coming together and complex connectedness among disparate cultures in Belize as "globalization."

Is this the kind of primordial stew that Pauketat envisions for culture making? If so, the result of culture plurality and migrations in Belize has not produced strong collective traditions or identity, unlike the scenario Pauketat proposes for presumably analogous conditions at Cahokia and elsewhere. Instead, the disparate peoples of Belize keep to their own traditions and, often, communities. Step across the border into Mexico and the story is quite different; there are strong national traditions. Food, lively markets, music, dancing, festivals, costumes . . . Even a Google search of Belize versus Mexico "national traditions" will reveal very distinct differences in these countries (e.g., unlike Mexico, Belize has developed no national cuisine; unlike Belize, Mexico has a plethora of national festivals). Am I missing the point that diversity *is* the culture in Belize? Has modern globalization somehow allowed disparate peoples to remain disparate, yet exist under an overarching legal and political structure? Is Belize a state in which a collective culture has not yet developed again, post-Maya collapse? Or, is the X factor just not working here? True, the population density is very low, allowing some groups like the Mennonites and Amish to maintain separate communities. But even in the diverse and hybrid communities, there seem to be only ingredients, no stew. What's missing? Could it be the heat, the fire?

The lesson from Belize seems to be that a gathering of diverse peoples is not sufficient in itself for creation of a collective culture or identity. Even with migrations, plurality, and centrality of place, cultural groups can simply coexist without creating much of the large-scale, shared cultural traditions, that is, civilization, as Pauketat has envisioned for the Cahokians. Perhaps the X factor must involve some force that pulls diverse people together and catalyzes the fermentation, some sort of common, powerful experience. Natural disasters, wars, religious movements, celestial alignments, take your pick, but without it, there is no heat to cook that flavorful cultural stew. So, what might have lit the fire at Cahokia? Is this something that Pauketat can address?

Cahokia certainly was awe-inspiring, and I sympathize with Pauketat about the down-playing of Cahokia that has been done by some. I have worked at Cahokia; eminent Cahokianist Mike Fowler was on my

doctoral committee; and I have even published on the ceramics from Mound 31.<sup>9</sup> Years ago, when Pauketat and I worked together at Southern Illinois University, we mocked the ongoing “minimization” of Cahokia. I remember joking that if the minimizers downplayed Cahokia any more, those of us studying regions with much smaller-scale sites, like those in eastern Tennessee, were going to have to resort to models derived from phytoplankton behavior!

But I am not ready to accept that Cahokia is the source of all things Mississippian. First of all, there is the timing issue. The reality is that we cannot yet get dates fine-tuned enough to prove that Mississippianization postdates Cahokia’s AD 1050 “Big Bang.” In east Tennessee the early Mississippian Martin Farm phase was defined in the 1980s by Gerald Schroedl, Cliff Boyd, Larry Kimball, and Steve Davis as dating between AD 900 and 1000. This dating was based on radiocarbon assays, with large sigmas, from the Martin Farm site on the Little Tennessee River.<sup>10</sup> The site features a mix of Mississippian and Late Woodland attributes, including Mississippian pottery forms, wall trench architecture, and a platform mound. Without letting the cat completely out of the bag on ongoing research, I can say that the tenth-century dating for the Martin Farm site is too early and the site does likely postdate Cahokia’s eleventh-century Big Bang. Other east Tennessee sites with tight accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) radiocarbon dates that also have characteristics of Mississippianization (e.g., wall trench structures, platform mounds, pottery forms) are on the AD 1050 fence. So, we cannot be sure that they are as late as Pauketat would like. For example, I published a date from the Davis site near Chattanooga in Adam King’s *Southeastern Ceremonial Complex*.<sup>11</sup> A charcoal sample from a circular wall trench structure just above the primary level of a platform mound produced a date of 900 plus or minus 50 BP. A 2-sigma calibration, done with the most recent curve, ranges from AD 1025 to 1223 with an intercept of AD 1120—a date Pauketat might like. But the reality is that the true date for Davis *could* be as early as AD 1025. While this point may be rather nitpicky, we will need a concerted effort to actually *prove* that Mississippian characteristics, like wall trench structures, appear after, and not simultaneous with, Cahokia’s Big Bang. A thousand-year tree-ring sequence being worked out for eastern Tennessee by Henri Grissino-Mayer and colleagues may well achieve the resolution we need to answer these questions. And while we are on the subject of dates, an error that I have to point out in *Delusions* is the

reference to Hiwassee Island dates on page 116. Pauketat seems to confuse Hiwassee Island *phase* dates with dates from the site itself. We have only very recently obtained the first absolute dates from the Hiwassee Island site. Again, without compromising ongoing research, I can say that a date very similar to the one discussed here for the Davis site was obtained for a wall trench structure at the base of the Hiwassee Island platform mound.

Another interesting observation from over here on the eastern side of the Cumberland Plateau is that Cahokia artifacts such as Cahokia-style chunkys, Ramey pots, and long-nosed god earpieces have not been found in a large sector of the East, including most of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Piedmont and the Appalachians. Yet, we have those potentially early dates for other Mississippian stuff, such as wall trench structures. Why might wall trench technology make its way this far eastward by the twelfth century, if not earlier, yet we have nothing that can be absolutely connected with Cahokia?<sup>12</sup> This issue resembles the old “Mesoamerican influence in the Southeast” problem: it looks similar, but it is not really the same and is not directly from there. We do, however, have some shared iconography with that of Cahokia, such as the bird-human that shows up in many places by the thirteenth century.

Could it be that folks over here actually resisted much of the Cahokianization? As I noted earlier, the Mississippians in the Great Valley of east Tennessee (and their neighbors in the Blue Ridge) likely always were more independently minded and egalitarian than some of their contemporaries in other areas. Instead of pits full of sacrificed women like at Cahokia’s Mound 72, Chris Rodning and I believe that women in our area were a significant part of the power structure in late prehistoric times and continuing with the modern Cherokee.<sup>13</sup> But, hey, we’re now discussing diversity and making comparisons. This is interesting! Anybody got a back hoe to bury that chiefdom monster’s body? Be sure to dig a deep grave.

#### NOTES

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2. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chieftoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 11 (hereafter cited in the text as *Delusions*).

3. Christopher S. Peebles and Susan M. Kus, “Some Archaeological Correlates of Ranked Societies,” *American Antiquity* 42 (1977): 421–48.

4. Lynne P. Sullivan, “The Late Mississippian Village: Community and Society of the Mouse Creek Phase in Southeastern Tennessee” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, 1986), 506.

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6. See for example Hally, “The Chieftom of Coosa”; and Charles Hudson et al., “Coosa: A Chieftom in the Sixteenth-Century Southeastern United States,” *American Antiquity* 50 (1985): 723–37; Smith, *Coosa*; but also see C. Clifford Boyd Jr. and Gerald F. Schroedl, “In Search of Coosa,” *American Antiquity* 52, no. 4 (1987): 840–44.

7. Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

8. Philip Phillips, J. A. Ford, and J. B. Griffin, *Archaeological Survey of the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley 1940–1947*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Vol. 25, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951; cited in Pauketat, *Delusions*, 129.

9. Lynne P. Sullivan and Timothy R. Pauketat, “Cahokia’s Mound 31: A Short-

Term Construction at a Long-Term Site,” *Southeastern Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (2007): 12–31.

10. Gerald F. Schroedl, C. Clifford Boyd Jr., and R. P. Stephen Davis Jr., “Explaining Mississippian Origins in East Tennessee,” in *The Mississippian Emergence*, ed. Bruce D. Smith, 175–96 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

11. Lynne P. Sullivan, “Dating the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex in Eastern Tennessee,” in *Chronology, Iconography, and Style: Current Perspectives on the Social and Temporal Contexts of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex*, ed. Adam King, 156–76 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

12. These wall trenches, however, likely result in different architecture; see Cameron Lacquemont, *Architectural Variability in the Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

13. Lynne P. Sullivan and Christopher B. Rodning, “Gender, Tradition, and the Negotiation of Power Relationships in Southern Appalachian Chiefdoms,” in *The Archaeology of Traditions: History and Agency Before and After Columbus*, ed. Timothy R. Pauketat, 107–20 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Lynne P. Sullivan, “Those Men in the Mounds: Gender, Politics, and Mortuary Practices in Late Prehistoric Eastern Tennessee,” in *Archaeological Studies of Gender in the Southeastern United States*, ed. Jane M. Eastman and Christopher B. Rodning, 101–26 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Lynne P. Sullivan, “Gendered Contexts of Mississippian Leadership in Southern Appalachia,” in *Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society*, ed. Brian M. Butler and Paul D. Welch, 264–88 (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 2006); Christopher B. Rodning, “Gender and Social Institutions of Native Communities in the Appalachian Summit,” paper presented at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Birmingham, Alabama, November 6–9, 1996; Christopher B. Rodning, “The Archaeology of Gender and Women in Traditional Cherokee Society,” *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 20 (1999): 3–27.

## Whose Delusions?

DAVID J. HALLY

Try explaining the politicians, populations, and social problems in the world today through a comparative study of contemporary nation-states. Ignore the history of European colonization and missionization. Ignore the slave trade, transglobal mercantilism, and imperial expansions that linked the Old and New Worlds. Pay no attention to migrations, ethnic cleansing, world wars and the unequal accumulation of economic capital. Forget social movements, rebellions, and revolutions of the past. Don't consider the Cold War, Sputnik, computers, or the Internet. And then try to explain our present-day world. You couldn't, without deluding yourself. . . . Same thing goes for ancient eastern North America.

— Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*

I think the above statement fairly well highlights the difference between Pauketat's and my views concerning how culture changes. I agree that one cannot understand the world as it exists today without considering the kinds of historically contingent events and processes that he lists. We differ in that he largely ignores the more general lawlike factors that affect how history plays itself out. Today, in 2009, we find ourselves in the grip of a deep worldwide recession. We cannot understand how it developed without considering historically specific phenomena such as subprime mortgages, low interest rates, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and financial deregulation. But full understanding will elude us if we do not also consider the current crisis as an example of the boom and bust financial cycles that have plagued the world at regular intervals since market economies first appeared. Dutch tulips, Tokyo real estate, dot-com stocks, and credit-default swaps are all related, but not in a his-

torical way. Financial systems in some respects do behave in predictable ways and are constrained in their behavior by economic, psychological, mathematical, and systems processes and structures.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, policy makers hope that understanding these processes and structures will help us avoid the next financial boom and bust.

As I began reading *Delusions* my initial impression was that the author is opposed to cross-cultural or universal causal factors of any kind. Turns out that for Pauketat historical processes such as migration, monumentalization, and materialization are universal causal factors and are intimately involved in determining the trajectory of historical change. Structural and functional characteristics of human culture, however, have a less certain role to play. For Pauketat, “Administrative information processing [and] tensions and contradictions within governments” may have an impact on change, but “large-scale regularities—things that can be explained through laws of science” are evidently uncommon and pale in significance compared to historical events and processes.<sup>2</sup>

I disagree. The anthropological literature is filled with examples of structural factors that constrain the way societies are organized and the way they change (dare I say “evolve”). And there would be more examples if archaeologists spent greater effort trying to understand how past human societies work and less effort trying to explain big-ticket changes such as the origins of chiefdoms, states, and Mississippian culture.

Why do most hunter-gatherer societies exhibit some form of territorial behavior?<sup>3</sup> Why do hunters and gatherers choose to pursue some food species over others?<sup>4</sup> Why do settlements in egalitarian societies seldom exceed five hundred members?<sup>5</sup> Why do the politically centralized societies that many archaeologists refer to as chiefdoms develop administrative hierarchies?<sup>6</sup> Why do chiefdoms with a single level of administration above the village or town frequently incorporate only about a half dozen villages or towns?<sup>7</sup> Why do chiefdom territories seldom extend more than twenty kilometers out from the administrative center?<sup>8</sup> Why do chiefdoms go through cycles of growth and collapse and why do they, in at least one part of the world, appear to endure for only about a hundred years?<sup>9</sup> Why do the leaders of chiefdoms and archaic states invariably build monuments? Why do these kinds of leaders so often use divine descent to justify their claims to political power?<sup>10</sup> Why do so many traditional societies have dualistic belief systems, trace descent matrilineally, terminologically class patrilineal cross-cousins

and paternal aunts together, and practice sympathetic magic in some form or other?<sup>11</sup> We don't have answers to many of these questions, but the frequency with which patterns such as these are repeated around the world and through time indicates that they are the result of more than shared traditions, historical contingency, and human agency.

The nature of these patterns and in some cases even their existence may be affected by specific historical factors. At a more fundamental level, however, they owe their existence to universal structural factors such as the amount of information the human mind can process at a time, the number of individuals a person can recognize, the distance a person can travel on foot in a day, the need to optimize calorie intake, the need to reduce competition between human groups for food resources, and the biological structure of the human brain.

Pauketat refers to and employs numerous historical processes in his attempt to understand Mississippianization, itself a historical process. These include migration, colonization, mitigation, creolization, syncretization, ethnicization, cultural construction, communalization, materialization, spatialization, monumentalization, domestication, politicization, centralization, decentralization, recentralization, and ruralization. As he defines them, these processes have one primary feature in common: they are directly dependent on the actions of people, and they grant people an active role in culture change. Indeed "practices *are* the processes."<sup>12</sup> But there are other kinds of processes, traditionally referred to as cultural processes, that lie beyond the control of human agents or the influence of history. There are processes that lead to political centralization, status hierarchy, wealth inequality, government bureaucracy, production specialization, and market exchange, to name a few. They are largely unaffected by agents and historical processes because they are the necessary or optimal responses to problems and opportunities presented by factors such as spatial and temporal variability in resource distribution, subsistence risk, resource competition, increasing sedentism, population density, and community size, which are themselves often beyond the control of individuals.

Scale is an important issue here, but not quite in the way Pauketat imagines it. Pauketat refers to scale often. Neoevolutionists, according to him, focus on small-scale cultural phenomena—single sites, single phases, etc.—in contrast to his historical-processual approach, which attempts to see the big picture of Mississippianization across the east-



ern United States and the development of civilization in different parts of the world. The large-scale processes he refers to, however, seem to be nothing more than processes operating at the level of a single phase or Mississippian polity—communalization, materialization, etc.—that he then projects across larger regions and longer periods of time. Thus, in Pauketat's view the same patterns and the same processes are found across all spatial and temporal scales.

When I look at Mississippian chiefdoms in northern Georgia, the area I am most familiar with, I see different patterns and processes of change at different spatial and temporal scales.<sup>13</sup> Individual polities go through cycles of growth and decline lasting typically about a hundred years. The cycle begins when people move into an unoccupied river valley. Through time, an administrative center with one or more platform mounds is established, and settlements grow in size and number. Eventually, however, the polity collapses, mound construction and use cease, and in many cases the valley is abandoned. This process is repeated upwards of forty times across northern Georgia between AD 1000 and 1600. Individual polities come and go, but the Mississippian way of life continues virtually unchanged. Individual polities are quite unstable, but the larger regional system appears to be stable and to have achieved a quasi-equilibrium state. The regular rise and fall of polities contributes to this stability by creating larger military buffer zones, by promoting extended fallow periods for depleted agricultural soils and wild food species, by redistributing human populations across the region, and by facilitating the spread of cultural practices and innovations. Interestingly, what is an observable pattern at the level of the individual polity—cycling—is, contra Pauketat, a causal process at the level of the regional system, and its effects lie beyond the control of the people involved in its perpetuation.

I think it is quite likely that the rise and fall of individual chiefdoms is tied directly to the actions of human agents and some of the historical processes recognized by Pauketat. But what role do these play in culture change at the level of the region and half-millennium-long Mississippian period? Apparently they play no roll, because nothing really changes at these scales. Oh yes, pottery styles, house forms, and religious symbols change and some regions are abandoned, but political centralization, divine chiefs, mound building, and status ascription continue. When I ask myself why this is, I can only conclude that it is because human agents and historical processes are not effective agents of change at the

level of the broader cultural system. Granted, culture change at this level can only come about through the decisions and actions of human agents, but that does not mean that they are the ultimate cause of such change. Unfortunately, Europeans destroyed the Mississippian way of life in the sixteenth century, and as a result we will never know when, how, or why it would have changed. Too bad!

Pauketat is correct to emphasize the important role that historical processes play in culture change. Cultural processes and structural factors, however, also play a role, and archaeologists need to consider them as well as historical processes. My own preference is to investigate those factors that constrain the ability of individuals to significantly alter the way future generations will live.

#### NOTES

Epigraph. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 54.

1. Benoit B. Mandelbrot and Richard L. Hudson, *The (mis)Behavior of Markets: A Fractal View of Risk, Ruin, and Reward* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

2. Pauketat, *Delusions*, 15, 20.

3. B. J. Williams, "A Model of Band Society," *Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology* no. 29 (1974).

4. Bruce Winterhalder and Eric Alden Smith, "Analyzing Adaptive Strategies: Human Behavioral Ecology at Twenty-Five," *Evolutionary Anthropology* 9, no. 2 (2000): 51–72.

5. Krisztina Kosse, "Group Size and Societal Complexity: Thresholds in the Long-Term Memory," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 9 (1990): 275–303.

6. Gregory A. Johnson, "Organizational Structure and Scalar Stress," in *Theory and Explanation in Archaeology: The Southampton Conference*, ed. C. Renfrew, M. Rowlands, and B. Segraves, 389–421 (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

7. Johnson, "Organizational Structure and Scalar Stress," 389–421; David J. Hally, Marvin T. Smith, and James B. Langford Jr., "The Archaeological Reality of DeSoto's Coosa," in *Columbian Consequences, vol. 2, Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on the Spanish Borderlands, East*, ed. David Hurst Thomas, 121–38 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

8. David J. Hally, "Platform Mounds and the Instability of Mississippian Chiefdoms," in *Political Structure and Change in the Prehistoric Southeastern United States*, ed. John Scarry, 92–127 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Patrick Livingood, "No Crows Made Mounds: Do Cost-Distance Calculations of Travel Time Improve Distance-Based Models of the Mississippian?"

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9. Henry T. Wright, "Prestate Political Formations," in *On the Evolution of Complex Societies: Essays in Honor of Harry Hoijer*, 1982, ed. Timothy K. Earle, 43–77 (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1984); David G. Anderson, *The Savannah River Chiefdoms: Political Change in the Late Prehistoric Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); Hally, "Platform Mounds."

10. Gillian Feeley-Harnik, "Issues in Divine Kingship," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985): 273–313.

11. David Maybury-Lewis and Uri Almagor, *The Attraction of Opposites: Thought and Society in the Dualistic Mode* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: McMillan, 1949).

12. Timothy R. Pauketat, "Practice and History in Archaeology: An Emerging Paradigm," *Anthropological Theory* 1, no. 1 (2001): 74.

13. David J. Hally, "The Nature of Mississippian Regional Systems," in *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians*, ed. Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge, 26–42 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

# Delusions of Chiefdoms

*An Ethnohistorian's Viewpoint*

GREG O'BRIEN

There is much to ponder in archaeologist Timothy Pauketat's indictment of the community of American archeologists who study the Mississippian era of the Mississippi Valley and South. The implications of his ideas go beyond fractious archaeological debates and need also to be considered by ethnohistorians of the Native South. Many of us who study the post-contact, and usually post-Mississippian, age of Indian-European contact in the South nonetheless utilize the same evolutionary-based understandings of how Mississippian chiefdoms worked that are criticized by Pauketat. We do so in order to establish a baseline for interpreting later cultural expressions and changes we see in the documents and oral histories produced in the colonial era. I suspect that many of us trained in history, even those like me who had a doctoral field in cultural anthropology, have not thought overly critically about the way that archaeologists portray Mississippian chiefdoms. We can quote the tripartite formula of simple, complex, and paramount chiefdoms that "cycled" from lesser to greater complexity and back again during the Mississippian era (ca. AD 1000–1600). We enumerate the "characteristics" of Mississippian chiefdoms without much thought: that is, that large multiple mound sites designate complex and paramount chiefdoms with social, political, and economic hierarchy and centralization as an operating principle, with outlying "satellite communities" under the sway of a central town, elite management of rare trade goods from far-flung places, and elite control of labor and agricultural resources. Using this basic formula, as Pauketat makes clear about even many archaeologists, we then generalize about all Mississippian settlements, altering our portrayal only according to chiefdom size and perceived complexity.

Other than the obvious overgeneralizations and incomplete understandings, inherent in too readily employing this evolutionary interpretation to precontact Southern Indians, there is another omission that Pauketat makes abundantly clear: that we need a historical focus on the Mississippian world. Utilizing a historical understanding does not mean searching for nonexistent documentary evidence in dusty archives, but rather to realize that all of the human past—whether documented in writing or not—constitutes history, and history means change over time, including human-directed abrupt change. Rather than seeing change among precontact Indians as occurring only in gradual, or developmental, hundred- or thousand-year sequences, Pauketat advises archaeologists to be alert for sudden changes and quick developments of new cultural expressions, technology, and political arrangements, especially when examining the Mississippian era. What is hidden in the anthropological terms used to describe Mississippian polities, Pauketat argues, are “the histories of governance, resistance, foreign relations, militarization, incorporation, provincialization, colonization, and migration (among other things).”<sup>1</sup> Put another way, how much do we really know about how Cahokia operated on a day-to-day basis and how the expansion of “Mississippian” culture occurred, as opposed to what we think we know by theorizing about idealized “chiefdoms”? Moreover, how do we account for regional and spatial variability, as well as temporal changeability, if we rely too heavily on an idealized notion of how Mississippian societies operated?

Trained as a historian, I find Pauketat’s perspective refreshing and characterized by common sense. Postcontact Indian history is replete with analysis of fast-paced change creating “new worlds” for Indians, colonizers, and African slaves alike. Pauketat suggests that for us to view precontact Indian history as any less capable of dramatic change or cultural variety, as something that was naturally and predictably evolving, limits our understanding of the possible and flies in the face of archaeological evidence.

Pauketat is especially eager for us to reconsider the role of Cahokia in the history of the Mississippi Valley and the South. Cahokia, when we ethnohistorians think about it at all, is usually considered a larger-than-usual paramount chiefdom that reached its pinnacle of power and size around AD 1100 and “cycled” back down into obsolescence before Europeans arrived in the Americas. Though admirable and curious

for its immense scale, Cahokia seems to have had little impact on the postcontact Native South. Pauketat and other archaeologists want us to reconsider Cahokia within the history of the South. Although the bulk of his work on Cahokia is published elsewhere, Pauketat offers some tantalizing scenarios about Cahokia in this book. Foremost among his and other archaeologists' suggestions are that Cahokians spread out beyond the central Mississippi River Valley to conquer other peoples throughout the interior South. Even where military conquest seems absent, an ideological domination seems to have emanated from Cahokia to parts of the South starting around AD 1200. According to Pauketat, migrations of peoples from the greater Cahokia region may have occurred throughout the South, or Native peoples living elsewhere in the South adopted some of the Cahokian ideology and material culture. Such migrations or sharing of ideology resulted in a cultural florescence in certain areas (Moundville, Etowah, Ocmulgee, and elsewhere), while the signs of war and destruction abound in the late precontact South. If connected with the newer work being completed by anthropologists and ethnohistorians on the migrations by Native people into, within, and out of the South in the early contact period, this scenario suggests that parts of the South were already experiencing dramatic change, violence, and emerging coalescent societies before, as well as after, European contact with North America.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it seems likely that the postcontact upheavals and the response of Native people in the sixteenth century and beyond followed, at least in part, older patterns of migration, resistance, and societal re-creation. Although we need not downplay the significance of the impact of the European arrival (via diseases, the slave trade, the fur trade, warfare, and missionization), it makes sense that Indian peoples responded to these pressures in ways that made sense to them historically and not just in novel manners.

Connected to this focus on migration, Pauketat suggests that archaeologists of the Native South pay more attention to the role of war as a history-changing event, and here too we can make linkages from the pre- to the postcontact era. The elaborate ritualized realm of warfare that we witness in documentary records from the sixteenth-century Hernando de Soto expedition through the early nineteenth century was clearly not newly created in the postcontact era. The pervasiveness of the supernatural and ideological aspects of successful participation in war could only have deep historical roots in a precontact time, and Pauketat makes

a compelling case for warfare, as well as emulation and ideological domination, as a defining feature of the expansion of Cahokia-like Mississippian communities in the South and Mississippi Valley. We know of the crucial role of warfare in Southern Native male identity and status through the early nineteenth century, and we therefore have a picture of how some aspects of political power operated as well. Achieved status via skill in warfare, including the ability to predict the outcome of battles beforehand, played a key role—perhaps the primary role—in determining which men became entrusted with diplomatic authority and other forms of “chiefly” power. The role of warfare in shaping community politics and in raising certain persons to prominent status is illustrated by many individuals known in the documentary record and declined only gradually in the eighteenth century among groups like the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws.<sup>3</sup> A key question is, to what degree did the role of warfare in Southern Indian politics reflect a more generalized American Indian emphasis on war as a basic component of life, or was it a holdover from precontact times? It is tempting to see an ideological continuity from the Cahokian colonizers theorized by Pauketat to have established new communities based on new ideologies throughout the South to the continued emphasis on the spiritual and political importance of warfare in the postcontact era.

Continuities, especially ideological continuities, from the pre- to the postcontact periods, or from the archaeological evidence to the documentary records, can be hard to find or demonstrate with certainty. As Pauketat points out, for example, there seem to be no or very few oral history references among Southern Indians to Cahokia or a Mississippi Valley “mother city,” whereas there are many such later references in the North American Southwest to the importance of the Chaco Canyon settlements. Sometimes we are treated to what seems to be a reference to Mississippian or Cahokian times in the documentary record that does not directly reflect what we think we know about Southern Indians living at that time. Perhaps we should think more broadly about what mattered to Mississippian-era Southern Indians and their descendants in terms of cultural continuity from the pre- to the postcontact eras.

One such documentary example that has long intrigued me stems from a diplomatic meeting between a delegation of Chickasaw Indians and British officials in Mobile in the winter of 1771–1772. One of the Chickasaw participants, Mingo Ouma (Red King), claimed to be the

“King of my Nation” and the “last of a Long Race of Kings.” He counted a leading Chickasaw war chief and principal negotiator with the English, Paya Mattaha (War Prophet), as “my Warrior,” and another Chickasaw delegate with the title Fannimingo (literally, Squirrel Chief) as his spokesman. Fannimingo explained Mingo Ouma’s importance via mnemonic devices and a history lesson. Holding a “Wooden Apparatus for making Fire” and a “small Earthen pot in his hand” he spoke to the British delegates about Mingo Ouma’s family. “The Red King[’]s Ancestors were the First That found the Earth of which such Untensils [*sic*] as this pot were made,” claimed Fannimingo. He continued that the fire maker represented Chickasaw technology before European trade brought flints into their world. Fannimingo gave the fire sticks and pot to the British officials as a symbol of Chickasaw dependence on English trade and their desire to acquire more trade. Mingo Ouma lent his status as a “king” to help legitimize the diplomatic negotiations, but he did not otherwise participate in the meeting, as far as the record shows.<sup>4</sup>

Mingo Ouma’s ancestors’ role as inventors or introducers of a new type of pottery supplied his claims to inherited authority, and their accomplishment clearly seems to have originated in a precontact period. Were Mingo Ouma’s ancestors migrants to the north Mississippi Chickasaw homeland—perhaps some of Pauketat’s Cahokian colonizers? Perhaps Mingo Ouma’s ancestors developed a new pottery style before the Mississippian era in the area that was still their homeland after contact. Whenever the Chickasaw “king’s” people created the new pottery, their late eighteenth-century descendants remembered the significance of pottery as their tie to the past and as a marker of sovereign identity. Only archaeology can answer the question about when a distinctive Chickasaw pottery first appeared, and the answer will help us make another direct connection between the pre- and postcontact Southern Indian worlds. The perils of relying on translations is always apparent, but the phrase that Mingo Ouma used to describe his ancestors, as a “race” of “kings,” implies a specific kinship or maybe ethnic identity among the Chickasaws and raises questions about the origin of “Chickasaw” identity and by what historical process Chickasaws incorporated new ethnicities and created new societies.

Regardless of where Mingo Ouma’s ancestors came from, it is also revealing to note the importance that the Chickasaws placed on pottery as a marker of cultural and ethnic change and identity in the precontact



era. This brief anecdote from the British accounts of a diplomatic meeting suggests the probable role of women, as makers of pottery, in cultural change among the Chickasaws. Mingo Ouma surely inherited his status, and certainly his family ties, through his mother's maternal ancestors in the matrilineal society of the Chickasaws. Building on Pauketat's call for archaeologists to pay more attention to nonelites in the archaeological record, greater attention to the role of women may unlock many puzzles about culture change in the Native South during Mississippian and postcontact times. If Cahokians physically colonized other areas, women must have played an important, indeed crucial, role in establishing new ethnic identities in the colonized areas. If only male warriors conquered and settled new areas, their offspring would have retained the local ethnic identity of the colonized peoples through the rules of matrilineal kinship. The postcontact documentary record is filled with Native women constructing new alliances and incorporating strangers through intermarriage; it is naïve to think that intermarriage is only a postcontact strategy.

To attempt an answer about where that Chickasaw pottery originated, further study of known Chickasaw pottery and archaeological investigation of Chickasaw and neighboring sites, perhaps even Cahokia itself, is likely needed. We may already have enough evidence to suggest an answer, but the answer may yet lie underground. On this point Pauketat makes an insistent plea: we must identify, protect, and study what archaeological evidence remains intact. He identifies many enemies, many destroyers of Native and Southern history, such as intensive farming, corporate agriculture, housing and business construction, as well as ignorance. Also indicted are archaeologists who seek out only large "complex" sites or fail to ask historically contingent questions of their evidence. The result, Pauketat makes clear, is the loss of the histories of the Native South, histories that hold relevance after contact and even through contemporary times. Ethnohistorians should take note, for the loss of that archaeologically derived history impoverishes our understandings of the Native South and of Southern historical trends.

#### NOTES

1. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 207.

2. See, for example, Robbie Ethridge, "Creating the Shatter Zone: Indian Slave Traders and the Collapse of the Southeastern Chiefdoms," in *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians*, ed. Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge, 207–18 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); and Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500–1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

3. Greg O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750–1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 27–49; and Patricia Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 357–73.

4. Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society: Volume V: Centenary Series* (Jackson: Mississippi Historical Society, 1925), 146–47. See also Greg O'Brien, "Supplying Our Wants: Choctaws and Chickasaws Reassess the Trade Relationship with Britain, 1771–72," in *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richmond F. Brown, 59–80 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

## On *Delusions*

ROBIN A. BECK JR.

Like many Southeastern archaeologists, I have been thinking about Pauketat's new book since its arrival (and even earlier—I recall its attention-grabbing title glaring up from an AltaMira advertisement several months prior to publication). Given the challenge that Pauketat has issued to his colleagues in Mississippian archaeology, it is timely and fitting that *Native South* offer its readers a forum such as this.

At the risk of slipping into literary criticism, it seems important to begin not with what Pauketat has to say in *Delusions*, but rather with how he chooses to say it. Before I am pegged as someone with an excessive sensitivity to matters of tone, I should point out that this is not merely a matter of being nice. As Pauketat, channeling James Griffin, puts it, “we must criticize each other to move ahead.”<sup>1</sup> I fully agree that critique is essential to the scholarly process, yet I believe that the way he makes his case threatens to overwhelm much of his message. He tells us at the beginning that “not wanting to offend, I borrow a technique from Kent Flannery”: the narrative device of the composite persona (*Delusions*, 4). But if we look closely, we find an immediate—if unintended—distinction between how Flannery and Pauketat use this device. In *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, Flannery refers to his three protagonists as “characters.”<sup>2</sup> Pauketat refers to his four creations as “caricatures” (*Delusions*, 4). This simple distinction conveys much of what seems misguided in Pauketat's tone.

Flannery is able to recognize a part of himself in each of his composites: the Real Mesoamerican Archaeologist (RMA), the Skeptical Graduate Student (SGS), and the Great Synthesizer (GS).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps because of his empathy, Flannery is careful to depict them as complex characters,

each of whom is trying to understand the early Mesoamerican village to the best of his abilities. Each has his own theoretical and methodological axes to grind and often goes about grinding these on his colleagues' heads, but Flannery's description of their questions and debates is always generous enough to portray them as fully human characters—as people—even as we are witness to their various faults and foibles. What is more, we find ourselves carried along in the debates because we are able to see each side; there are no heroes and villains in Flannery's tale, just archaeologists grappling with their imperfect understanding of the past. Indeed, in the end RMA hands SGS a check and an airline ticket (out of his own funds, no less) to begin fieldwork testing some shiny new processual ideas, and SGS gives RMA a bottle of fine tequila (the kind with the worm still in the bottle). Flannery's point is clear. If we are willing to get beyond the hyperbole and finger wagging, we might have something to learn from each other.

In *Delusions*, Pauketat eschews this constructive approach for one that is easier, if less intellectually satisfying. True to his word, he offers two-dimensional “caricatures,” or straw men upon whom he can heap his scorn and abuse. The white hats in Pauketat's tale are worn by the Uncertain Graduate Student (UGS) and by the Southern Pragmatist (and one could argue by Pauketat himself, who pops in now and then to offer sage advice to UGS). The dark hats are worn by Dr. Science and Darth Evader. Dr. Science is a processualist of the (now) old school, so attached to his rote explanations of Mississippian society—and so incapable of even understanding questions posed from a postprocessual perspective—that Pauketat concludes, “No reason to think that I could engage this guy in an interesting two-way conversation” (*Delusions*, 39). This is quite the departure from Flannery's approach. But we should keep in mind that Dr. Science is only a caricature. It is Pauketat himself who later asserts that only by adopting his ideas can we “give voice to our indignation over the dark forces working against human history” (*Delusions*, 207–8). So his is a story with good and evil, of dark forces and those who (one must surmise) work for the light. This is not the tone of someone actually searching for interesting two-way conversation. It is a polemic. And while Flannery uses the composite character device to show the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective, such that we can find a synthetic way forward, Pauketat simply uses it to place outlandish statements in the mouths of his two-dimensional villains.

This is not the worst of it. Pauketat argues that the baggage of neo-evolution, the chiefdom in particular, poses a “Crisis in Mississippian Archaeology.” But I think that a greater crisis is the moral imperative that he and other scholars have raised in their work: the idea that using the chiefdom concept amounts to racism.<sup>4</sup> In *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*, Pauketat argues that the chiefdom perpetuates the “subtly racist terminology of the nineteenth century,” and he makes the same critique in *Delusions*: “What with the legacy of the old mound builder myth and the lingering effects of racism against the American Indians in the contemporary world, a position that understates American Indian achievements seems unwise” (Pauketat, *Delusions*, 47).<sup>5</sup>

Pauketat introduces “civilization” in chiefdom’s stead, a concept that he believes better suits Mississippian achievements. And yet framing the issue thus simply reifies the old evolutionary idea that our categories should represent stages of cultural progress—that achievement should be intrinsic to our types (*Delusions*, 17). As much as he decries the sins of evolution, his argument is philosophically of a kind with the notion of progress, perhaps the ultimate defining principle of both nineteenth-century evolutionism and its modern-day counterpart. His crisis, then, apparently has less to do with the typologies founded on this notion than with making sure that his particular case is slotted into the proper niche. In fact, if past misuse is such an obstacle to morally or critically informed use today, then what are we supposed to make of this word, *civilization*? The term *chiefdom* may be but a short step removed from the deservedly discredited *evolutionism* of the nineteenth century, but *civilization* is about as close to that source as one could get. Yet he asks for patience:

Some people justifiably dislike the word “civilization” since it implies a demeaning ethnocentric bias that simultaneously labels “uncivilized” people as “primitive.” [Well, yes.] Their dislike is noted, and appreciated. But for present purposes, *I need a word*, and “civilization” is awaiting reclamation from the ethnocentrism and racism of an earlier anthropology. (*Delusions*, 17, emphasis added)

So there it is, he needs a word. But it begs the question: does embracing the term *civilization* really lead us from delusion to enlightenment? I agree with Pauketat, Kehoe, and many other Southeastern scholars that a richer and more nuanced understanding of the precolonial Eastern

Woodlands demands a novel approach grounded in social history rather than set in the outmoded frameworks of neoevolution.<sup>6</sup> It will come as no surprise, I hope, that many of us who still find use for the phrase “Mississippian chiefdoms” reject the irredeemable simplicity of the neoevolutionary approach. We recognize the cultural accomplishments of pre- and postcolonial peoples across the Eastern Woodlands, and we actively seek opportunities to work respectfully and conscientiously with the descendants of Mississippian peoples.<sup>7</sup> Pauketat’s admonition, cloaked in the accusation of racism, is little more than demagoguery—and philosophically confused demagoguery, at that.

There is another reason that Pauketat chooses the term *civilization*: it sets a clever trap. What he really wants to argue, rhetorically if not analytically, is that Cahokia was a state, and in *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians* he lays it out thus:

However, if Cahokia, Cahokians, and Cahokia’s mounds had been in ancient Mesopotamia, China, or Africa, archaeologists might not hesitate to identify pyramids in a city at the center of an early state. . . . So perhaps it is justifiable if a little cynical to wonder if Cahokia might be more readily conceptualized as a city if only Cahokians had built with stone instead of earth and wood, or if Cahokia had been in Asia or the Near East, instead of North America.<sup>8</sup>

I have doubts about this argument. There is a reason that many archaeologists still debate the nature of key Olmec centers like La Venta and San Lorenzo in Lowland Mesoamerica or massive early complexes such as Sechín Alto and Moxeke-Pampa de las Llamas in the Casma Valley of northern Peru. They defy our types. But why do *chiefdom* and *state* (or Pauketat’s synonymous *civilization*) remain our only options for thinking about this range of variation? Pauketat might have addressed this fundamental problem, situating Cahokia among places like these that cast a harsh light on the inadequacy of our types. Instead he lays a semantic trap. It is one thing to debate whether or not Cahokia was a state: one can mount a compelling case for either position with available data—and this is explicitly why it defies the type. But who among us would argue, with a charge of racism already on the table, that Cahokians were uncivilized?

So can we reject neoevolution while holding onto the chiefdom? We may just as well ask whether Pauketat can reject Lewis Henry Morgan’s

evolution while holding onto civilization. I think that in each case we can, but we need to acknowledge that each word has its own particular evolutionary baggage—and that this fact need not, in itself, preclude a critically and historically informed use today. It is no more delusional to write or speak of Mississippian chiefdoms than it is to write of Mississippian civilizations: they are both abstractions inherited or borrowed from related, flawed epistemologies. The issue before us now is less about which of these concepts owns the more disagreeable history than it is about the ends to which we put them today.

Pauketat has less to say about what “civilization” is than what it is not. It is not an “advanced type of social system,” nor is it “a dawning of high culture in some ancient world.” Instead, it “*is an ongoing historical process, not an evolutionary phenomenon*” (*Delusions*, 17–18, emphasis in original). This is well and good, but one could hardly be blamed for asking, isn’t everything social an ongoing historical process? Is he suggesting that everything in our human experience is or has been in the process of becoming civilization? And if so, where does that take us in our efforts to understand specific social histories? *Delusions* devotes an entire chapter to the question, “What Constitutes Civilization?” but clarity is no more forthcoming here than it is in the short quotation noted above. Granted, sometimes strict definitions have a tendency to box us in with rigid models and frameworks or to stultify our perspectives on variation—and sometimes we need our concepts to remain a bit vague, flexible, and ambivalent, as these qualities can, sometimes, allow us to recognize patterns in our data that we might otherwise miss for trying to squeeze them into prefabricated, unyielding types. And this is certainly a point that Pauketat is making in his critique of the chiefdom concept. But it is not enough to make this critique: we also need to see a way forward. By never actually engaging this word *civilization* in an analytical way, he misses that opportunity. Indeed, but for the misplaced charge of racism, how does it improve on *chiefdom*?

It is unfortunate that Pauketat makes such a brusque dismissal of other ideas about civilization, particularly the work of John Baines and Norman Yoffee on the role of “high culture” in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.<sup>9</sup> Far from the typical neoevolutionary fare, they propose that culturally specific notions of order, legitimacy, and wealth intertwine to support the flowering of high culture: “the production and consumption of aesthetic items under the control, and for the benefit

of, the inner elite.”<sup>10</sup> Their conceptual framework is more nuanced than I can give sufficient treatment here, and while we need not agree with all aspects of the model, it is constituted in such a manner that other scholars can evaluate its assumptions and propositions with new cases and different kinds of data.<sup>11</sup> Baines and Yoffee problematize *civilization*, a necessary analytical step if this word is to provide any real insights into the Mississippian phenomenon.

Applying the word to Mississippian, in the framework of a model such as this, has the potential either to expand our conception of what civilization is or to explore its limits and limitations. Mississippian archaeologists have recognized several geographically and thematically distinct artistic schools or traditions that are linked to important centers such as Cahokia, Moundville, Etowah, and Spiro.<sup>12</sup> The four schools linked to these particular places—Braden, Hemphill, Hightower, and Craig, respectively—flourished during the time from AD 1100 to 1400 and do hold much in common with the concept of high culture:

a civilization's style . . . is more or less coterminous with its extent in space and time. The style is created in a high-cultural context, is sustained by an elite that commissions and consumes the works that transmit the stylistic tradition, and incorporates fundamental values. . . . This value-laden stylistic complex is crucial to the transmission of the civilization's essence through time.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the productions of these Mississippian schools were crafted from difficult-to-obtain raw materials by specialists whose work was likely sponsored or commissioned by social elites—however we define that term—and many contain a rich symbolic load that expressed fundamental ideas about cosmologies and values. Such items are rare and their distribution is usually quite restricted. But unlike the civilizations that Baines and Yoffee discuss, certain elements of Mississippian high culture are also expressed in media whose distributions cross-cut different social segments, such as Ramey Incised jars at Cahokia or Moundville's Hemphill Engraved ceramics. What might such distinctions tell us about the origins and practice of high culture in ancient civilizations, and what might this model tell us about relations of order, legitimacy, and wealth in Mississippian social history? At the least, it puts flesh to the bones of “ongoing historical process,” should we not be ready to jettison such models for elegant phrases that lack analytical muscle.



Where does this leave *chiefdom*, the term that Pauketat finds so distasteful and—if he means for us to take his accusation of racism seriously—immoral? Many of those who read *Delusions*, especially young students of Southeastern archaeology or professionals in other areas with little specific knowledge of Mississippian, will walk away from the book with an indelible impression that the chiefdom has held us in an intellectual straightjacket since it was introduced here in the 1970s, preventing us from learning anything of lasting worth about Mississippian societies. This too is unfortunate. By the 1970s Southeastern scholars were asking questions about social process and social relations, turning from the descriptive preoccupations of an earlier era. With the chiefdom playing an important role in their intellectual agenda, they opened new frontiers in Mississippian studies: settlement pattern and mortuary analysis; approaches to political economies, craft specialization, and long-distance exchange; competition and cycling—the list goes on. Let us all agree, or not, about whether the chiefdom concept has outlived its usefulness, but let us not pretend that it had no part in advancing our understanding of the Mississippian world.

I think that the chiefdom can still play a role in how we understand Mississippian politics and polities, but I think that we have often asked too much of the word. We have expected it to enlighten us about the origins and organization both of economic inequality and regional political hierarchy, as though these issues were necessarily connected. With respect to the former, there is another concept that offers a more nuanced perspective: the social house. Originally described by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the house is a

moral person, keeper of a domain composed altogether of material and immaterial property, which perpetuates itself by the transmission of its name, of its fortune and of its titles in a real or fictive line held as legitimate on the sole condition that this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of alliance, and, most often, of both together.<sup>14</sup>

This is not the place to provide a lengthy explanation of the social house concept, but three edited volumes on the subject have been published since the mid-1990s, the most recent of which specifically focuses on archaeological applications.<sup>15</sup> In that volume James Brown uses the house to revisit an archetypal Southeastern case—Etowah's Mound C. In

so doing he challenges “the narrow manner in which evolutionary classification has been used by archaeologists.”<sup>16</sup> Brown’s analysis suggests that the structure of Etowah’s political economy is best conceived not as a single paramount lineage—the classical conception of inequality in chiefdoms—but as an aristocracy composed of rival if interconnected social houses. The social house concept offers a rich vocabulary for disentangling inequality and regional hierarchy and creates new avenues for exploring variability in Mississippian political and economic structures.

By relieving this part of its burden, by narrowing what we mean when we use the term, we may rehabilitate the chiefdom. Kalervo Oberg defined the concept for his work in lowland South America, observing that “multicommunity chiefdoms [are] governed by a paramount chief under whose control are districts and villages governed by a hierarchy of subordinate chiefs.”<sup>17</sup> There is nothing delusional in recognizing this kind of regional political relationship among neighboring towns and communities, nor is it delusional to seek to understand—through archaeological inquiry—the particular historical conditions that promote this kind of polity. If Pauketat can look past the heavy baggage that belongs to *civilization*, then *chiefdom* too is redeemable if we cease treating it as a type of society in a unilineal model of social change. Rather, we can view it as a historically situated but cross-culturally convergent locus for negotiating regional authority.

In the southern Appalachians early Spanish explorers Hernando de Soto and Juan Pardo encountered a number of Native leaders who held varying degrees of authority over their own and several nearby towns. Here we can include the leaders of towns like Joara, Coosa, Cofitachequi, Chiaha, and Guatari.<sup>18</sup> *Mico* is an indigenous term for such leaders that was recorded by both expeditions, and their regional status is contrasted sharply with the local authority of *orata* or town headsmen. I believe that Oberg’s original conception of the chiefdom provides a more useful and appropriate foundation for understanding this variability than Pauketat’s underdeveloped notion of civilization. Indeed, we might go on to identify convergent circumstances or processes—as well as divergences—that frame the trajectories of such polities in the southern Appalachians, in lowland South America, and in other parts of the globe. In making this case for the chiefdom, I am willing to concede that it might not fit Pauketat’s vision of ancient Cahokia. Again, this may be one of those places that defy traditional typologies. But it seems to me

Cahokia-centric in the extreme to suggest that Cahokia's particular lack of fit makes the term itself a delusion, or those who use it for understanding other cases delusional. And falling back on timeworn concepts like civilization, absent a coherent analytical framework, is ultimately no solution at all.

#### NOTES

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3. Flannery, *Early Mesoamerican Village*, 4.
4. Kehoe, Alice B., *The Land of Prehistory: A Critical History of American Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1998).
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6. See, for example, Robin A. Beck, Douglas J. Bolender, Timothy K. Earle, and James A. Brown, "Eventful Archaeology: The Place of Space in Structural Transformation," *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 6 (2007): 833–60; James A. Brown, "The Cahokia Expansion: Creating Court and Cult," in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Richard F. Townsend and Robert V. Sharp, 108–23 (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004); Charles R. Cobb, "Archaeology and the 'Savage Slot': Displacement and Emplacement in the Premodern World," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 4 (2005): 563–74; Charles R. Cobb and Adam King, "Re-Inventing Mississippian Tradition at Etowah, Georgia," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12, no. 3 (2005): 167–92; Adam King, "Power and the Sacred: Mound C and the Etowah Chiefdom," in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Richard F. Townsend and Robert V. Sharp, 151–66 (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004); Vincas Steponaitis and Vernon J. Knight, "Moundville Art in Historical and Social Context," in *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, ed. Richard F. Townsend and Robert V. Sharp, 167–81 (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2004); Kenneth E. Sassaman, "Structure and Practice in the Archaic Southeast," in *North American Archaeology*, ed. Timothy Pauketat and Diana Loren, 79–107 (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).
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8. Pauketat, *Ancient Cahokia*, 3.
9. John Baines and Norman Yoffee, "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia," in *The Archaic State: A Comparative Perspective*, ed. Gary Feinman and Joyce Marcus, 199–260 (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1998).
10. Baines and Yoffee, "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth," 253.
11. Janet Richards and Mary Van Buren, eds., *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
12. See, for example, Brown, "Cahokia Expansion"; King, "Etowah Chiefdom"; Steponaitis and Knight, "Moundville Art."
13. Baines and Yoffee, "Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth," 237.
14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Nobles Sauvages," in *Culture, Science et Développement: Contribution à Une Histoire de l'Homme. Mélanges en l'Honneur de Charles Morazé* (Privat: Toulouse, 1979), 47; Susan Gillespie, "When Is a House?" in *The Durable House: House Society Models in Archaeology*, ed. Robin A. Beck Jr., 33 (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, 2007).
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17. Karlavo Oberg, "Types of Social Structure among the Lowland Tribes of South and Central America," *American Anthropologist* 57, no. 3 (1955): 484.
18. See Robin A. Beck and David G. Moore, "The Burke Phase: A Mississippian Frontier in the North Carolina Foothills," *Southeastern Archaeology* 21, no. 2, (2002): 192–205; Chester DePratter, "The Chiefdom of Cofitachequi," in *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521–1704*, ed. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser, 197–226 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); David J. Hally, "The Chiefdom of Coosa," in *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521–1704*, ed. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser, 227–53 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Charles Hudson, *The Juan Pardo Expeditions: Explorations of the Carolinas and Tennessee, 1566–1568* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

# Past Action

## *Present and Future*

HENRY T. WRIGHT

Timothy Pauketat is an emergent figure in Mississippian studies. His many contributions include monographs, such as *Temples for Cahokia Lords*; books such as *The Ascent of Chiefs* and *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippian World*; edited volumes such as *Lords of the Southeast* and *Cahokia: Domination and Ideology in the Mississippian World*; and many provocative articles.<sup>1</sup> He has been in the forefront of efforts to use concepts of agency and practice in our understandings of the past. I feel privileged to have worked with him in his early career in the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology, and I looked forward to reading *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*, with great interest.<sup>2</sup> As I expect from Pauketat, the book is indeed passionate and intellectually challenging. It cannot be summarized or comprehensively assessed without a lengthy essay, perhaps even one longer than the book itself. For myself—whose knowledge of Mississippian has been acquired in casual reading, chance visits to excavations and surveys, and conversations over many a beer—any useful comments must be at a general level.

The first and most surprising point one must understand about this book is that—its title notwithstanding—it is not a dismissal of the importance of chiefs and even chiefdoms in the North American South. They were the lived reality in much of this vast region for many centuries. Rather, it is a plea for a different way of looking at these cultural realities. If there is a polemical—even angry—tenor to the earlier and later chapters of this book, it is perhaps because earlier pleas have not been heard. In this brief essay I will try to summarize my understanding of some of Pauketat's different ways of looking at these realities, and the

reasons why some archaeologists have not heard, or have heard and not accepted, these ideas.

Most fundamental to Pauketat's thinking is the axiom that all social participants have agency, and that a focus primarily on "chiefs" strips agency from a majority of the participants in these communities. Years ago in Ann Arbor, perhaps the very first time we spoke, Pauketat made this point, and it is a good one. It follows from this axiom that actual cultural trajectories are so complicated that no two are alike. If I understand Pauketat, this requires that in order to gain a general knowledge of the trajectories of past communities, we have to study the interrelated histories of the interactions of agents. To decide what past communities should be included in the field of study, Pauketat elaborates a multilevel construct integrating regional settlement structure, the plan of centers, public buildings in centers, and domestic buildings in all kinds of settlements, which enables him to recognize local cultural developments of interest. Armed with this construct he examines a series of developments across the South. The primary focus seems less on the lived realities of these cultural formations at the level of action, and more on the evidence of their inception or disappearance. He suggests that some develop from local circumstances, but others result from the immigration of entire communities or of segments of communities. Similarly, he suggests that some disintegrate because of local circumstances, while others are victims of war. The emphasis is on histories of external contacts, migrations, and attacks.

Pauketat next turns to what he argues is the ultimate source of these external forces, a body of material he knows well, the early Mississippian transformation of the American Bottoms around Cahokia. He characterizes this transformation as involving a new center from which multiple and competing sources of power manipulate the symbols defining and integrating groups and reorganize the surrounding countryside. Pauketat adapts this characterization from scholars who view it as a descriptive of "states," a description no one who has actually worked with the archaeology of the first states will recognize. To his credit, Pauketat has the good sense to realize that definitions are not an issue central to his own concerns. Surprising to me is the limited extantiation of agency and practice and the limited discussion of exactly how the development around Cahokia affected developments elsewhere in the rapidly emerging Mississippian World. The explanation of the rapid emergence

of Cahokia is attributed to a concept adapted from an early remark by Phillips, Ford, and Griffin, an “X factor,” “the contributions made by a culture to its own development.”<sup>3</sup> Pauketat then uses the megahistorical perspective he has outlined to look at accounts of other parts of the world, and to make, in the guise of a visit to the project of a metaphorical “Uncertain Graduate Student,” some final recommendations about how future Mississippian archaeology should be done.

Alas, there is little “theory” and no “explanation” in this account. There is little specification of what Pauketat means by terms such as *community, complexity, hierarchy, heterarchy, chiefdom, state, history, evolution, civilization, or power*. All of these terms have been the objects of contention. Some of them, such as *civilization*, are perhaps best left as primitive terms that researchers can use to define their broad field of interest. Others are intimate to explanatory constructs and require careful discussion. “Explanation” is critical for many researchers. Whether they define themselves as anthropologists, archaeologists, or historians, most of those who work on the human pasts share an elementary idea of explanation. We feel we have explained something when we have demonstrated that a set of conditions, factors, or variables account for variation in that thing. It is the entire construct that is the explanation, not particular conditions, factors, or variables. This is necessary because we need to be able to deduce implications that can be evaluated with evidence independent of that used to frame the construct. That which is explained may be either general, repetitive phenomena or it may be a single unique local phenomenon. Furthermore, while archaeologists are directly concerned with the material remains of the past, the world cultural record is a whole fabric, and we have much to learn from what cultural anthropologists, ethnohistorians, paleo-ecologists, and others have learned about developments we study or developments similar to those we seek to understand.

For example, a useful model of a seemingly peaceful process of change can be found in Aidan Southall’s study of the Alur polity in Interlacustrine Africa (also cited by Pauketat for other purposes) in which the chiefly representatives of an extant stratified society are invited to preside in a simpler society with little rank.<sup>4</sup> Southall’s specific model might have general utility in understanding cases in the North American South, Southwest Asia, or Mesoamerica. It is important to have similar studies of violence. Ethnographers do not often study actual wars, but we

have excellent studies of wars made by historians and ethnohistorians. To take an example from the Pacific, we have extensive ethnohistorical accounts of wars between chiefdoms in the Hawaiian Archipelago usefully analyzed by Robert Homman, in which victorious chiefs in many cases extirpate competing dynasties and move conquered populations.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of whence our ideas about the past—whether general or local—are derived, the implications of these ideas must be tested with archaeological evidence. The fieldwork and analyses of Pauketat and his teams are provocative examples of such empirical evaluation.<sup>6</sup>

A final word should be spoken to all those who have inflicted metaphoric (or perhaps metonymic) archaeologists upon us. They may be amusing, but I would be happy to sacrifice a thousand metaphorical archaeologists in the death pits of Cahokia for a direct, clear, and well-documented discussion of the interesting ideas in this book. Such a work would be long and detailed—probing the organization of positions, genders, and responsibilities within domestic units, the organization of labor for production, variation in ecosystems and their productivity, human biology and mortality, the active uses of symbols in coercion versus persuasion, strategic action in relations between polities, actual evidence for war and peace, and many other issues—but it would be worth the effort.

#### NOTES

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## My Delusions

TIMOTHY R. PAUKETAT

I appreciate the opportunity given me by the editors of this forum, David Anderson and Robbie Ethridge, to comment on this set of essays on *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (hereafter simply *Delusions*). I also appreciate the hard work of David and Robbie, along with that of the commentators, several of whom I have known and held in high regard since my graduate school days. There is much that they say with which to agree. As for the rest, allow me to react and redirect in what follows.

But first, I should begin with some background. Tom Emerson convinced me to write this book, which was to be the first in a new series that he and I were to edit for AltaMira Press. As it turned out, *Delusions* was a fun book to write, in part because I did it at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in part because it gave me the chance to review the grand sweep of pre-Columbian history in eastern North America, and in part because it allowed me to consider, in a nontheoretical way, broad relationships between people, places, and history—a topic that might otherwise be considered highly theoretical. It also allowed me to vent and to fret over this question: what do archaeologists need to do *now* in order to fulfill our moral and ethical responsibilities to a North American public who, through tax dollars, sustain our research into the history and cultural heritage of the continent?

When I initially proposed this book to Mitch Allen, then at AltaMira (now at Left Coast Press), his reaction was that, if I did it right, *Delusions* would serve as a new synthesis of Mississippian-period archaeology that, at the same time, would upset the archaeological establishment. I was interested in doing both and, judging from the commentators' varied

reactions, I might have succeeded. Of course, this means that I have not made everyone happy. Robin Beck seems particularly unhappy. He, Jay Johnson, and others seem to have expected a theoretical exegesis, which *Delusions* explicitly is not.<sup>1</sup>

But then, I did not write this book for the commentators or for other established professionals. *Delusions* was written to reach an audience not already set in its ways or locked into academic schools of thought. And, from my point of view, a couple of the commentators are, clearly, wedded to some rigid viewpoints. Thankfully, aging and opinionated archaeologists, myself included, are always followed by a younger generation. *Delusions* was written for them and for all open-minded students of human history, archaeologists and nonarchaeologists alike. Ethnohistorian Greg O'Brien seems to be one of them, and I am pleased that he sees in the book possibilities for reimagining the Native South. Like him, dissolving the prehistory-history divide has been a concern of mine for some time.<sup>2</sup>

Alas, *Delusions* is not, I acknowledge, a perfect book. For instance, there is a little slippage on my part when it comes to accepting the standard "evolutionist" scenarios that yet predominate the interpretations of some regions (e.g., elsewhere, Ned Jenkins reminded me that my Moundville summary is less critical than it might be of the orthodox evolutionist interpretation). The same criticism might be leveled, as indeed it is by Lynne Sullivan and Robin Beck, at my use of Cahokia as an example of a Mississippian polity that violates the standard chiefdom construct. Of course, I said as much in the book (*Delusions*, 163).

In addition, some might gripe that I merely *point* to a "backdoor" approach to understanding; I do not walk the reader through it, as Jay Johnson would have preferred. His is a reasonable criticism, and one that I anticipated. But since *Delusions* is not a theory book, the reader must look elsewhere. My apologies. Charles Cobb points to some of the places to look in his thought-provoking commentary. I would also suggest to the interested reader most any recent issue of the *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* or the *Journal of Social Archaeology*. As for my own work, I would suggest reading a selection of things from the 2000s.<sup>3</sup>

My goals in *Delusions* were mostly as Anderson and Ethridge summarize: to reject social-evolutionary models, to rethink Mississippian, and to urge the pursuit of new approaches in Eastern Woodlands archaeology (i.e., the backdoor). My goals also involved giving the establishment

a slap in the face, not out of malice but because of the clear and present danger to our archaeological heritage in the eastern United States, as Anderson and Ethridge also recognize. Irreverence, anecdote, and metaphor help convey my sense of urgency, often through the words of the Southern Pragmatist, hopefully in an accessible manner. Beck labels this “demagogic.” I think it is common sense.

The stakes, I submit, are high enough to demand a new approach. I tire of the same old, same old. Why do archaeology at all if we simply recycle old ideas over and over again? Time to wake up. Time to do things a little differently. Time to be the Orwellian elephant killer (in Cobb’s sense) or the monster slayer (in Sullivan’s words). We all need to be reminded occasionally of what our larger goals ought to be and how we might achieve them. Of course, Johnson and Cobb are correct: this is what Walter Taylor and Lewis Binford both did in one way or another. They pleaded for either “conjunctive” or “New” approaches and attention to context and diversity in ways much like what I do in *Delusions*. There are differences, but methodologically these are matters of degree or scale. Doing archaeology isn’t rocket science; we need more large-scale dirt archaeology. But it is also all too rare, especially in the post-WPA South.

Archaeology of the sort required, a combination of old-fashioned “settlement archaeology” with an intensive “contextual archaeology,” is more common in the Midwest and Southwest, where large, university-based Cultural Resource Management (CRM) programs or top-notch private CRM firms conduct some of the best archaeology in the world today. They are not motivated primarily by profit, but by a genuine concern for history and heritage. The Illinois Transportation Archaeological Research Program at the University of Illinois is, from my biased vantage point, among the best in operation today.

And today, more than ever, we need such a clear sense of purpose and an aggressive can-do spirit to recover what we can before reaching the point of no return. Ancient cultural landscapes are being heavily altered and sometimes entirely erased at a frightening pace. Where are the remains of rural settlement districts around Moundville (Alabama), Toltec (Arkansas), or Cahokia (Illinois)? Swallowed up by subdivisions and bulldozed into oblivion. Academics (of which I am one) in ivory towers promoting evolutionist models of societies, instead of rolling up their shirt sleeves and documenting the many varied histories in the myriad of ancient places, are unwittingly complicit in this endgame.

Johnson wonders about the similarities between Boas's historically particular concerns with what I have labeled "historical processualism." It is true, especially with regard to Boas's emphasis on documenting historical details, that there are parallels. But in other ways, my approach to understanding the past, best summarized here by Cobb and O'Brien, is quite different from Boas, Taylor, and Binford (among others). For starters, lest anyone be confused, historical processualism is a catchall, not a programmatic agenda.<sup>4</sup> However, of those approaches that might be arrayed under such a banner, all are based on a simple principle of postprocessual archaeology: that which people are and do has a physical dimensionality that constrains the continued being and doing by other and later people. *Because of this physicality principle*, the so-called systems that archaeologists such as David Hally commonly recognize as having a life of their own—society being among the most common—are not separate from the social experiences and cultural landscapes that entangle people, places, and material objects. They are contingent at multiple scales on these social fields.

There is much thought being devoted recently to the rejection of the Cartesian separation of mind and body/matter or structure and agency.<sup>5</sup> Some of this collapses the distinctions between agency, happenings, and landscapes that address Sullivan's concerns with properly locating the sources of large-scale and long-term change.<sup>6</sup> Suffice it to say here that people, places, and things are recursively related in a web of cause and effect. For instance, to answer one of Johnson's questions, yes, mounds as built and rebuilt features—i.e., as embodiments of cultural practices and identities—are at least in part a cause of "civilization" (indeed, this is my "Tragedy of the Commoners" argument).<sup>7</sup>

It is not that such causal relationships are always simply local, as misunderstood by Hally. Indeed, the whole reason for my use in *Delusions* of a notion of a transregional Mississippian civilization (which is not, I repeat, not to be misconstrued as some sort of "type" of social formation or cultural phenomenon, as per Beck's commentary) is to indicate that the material and spatial patterns that afford certain agentic moves (one might say "structural regularities" à la Hally) include subcontinent-wide historical configurations of people, places, cultural objects, substances, and elements.

Of course, people always act locally. But certain media have the potential to articulate such actions widely, even globally, giving them

large-scale effects. And this means that, yes, we do need to consider the transregional dimension of Cahokia's Big Bang or Moundville's and Etowah's expansions. We have to explain the possibly conflicting data on Mississippian wall-trench house distribution that I observed in *Delusions* and that Sullivan ponders. (As an aside, if wall trench architecture really did begin in eastern Tennessee, as Sullivan dangles before us, a rethinking of Mississippianization is in order; I eagerly await multiple lines of data on this).

And so I actually agree with Lynne Sullivan when she espouses the viewpoint that, surely, Cahokia was not "the source of all things Mississippian." Right. Many peoples had a hand in crafting Mississippianism in their own localities. But since Mississippian history, writ large, is a complex and entangled web, Cahokia might have played a unique role in ways that need not entail direct imposition of its ideology on others. It might have been an archetype, a place referenced by would-be leaders or priests elsewhere, or a centerplace where stories and legendary characters originated. This is what founding cities and pilgrimage centers do everywhere.

The effects would be similar to Arjun Appadurai's characterization of globalization or Tip O'Neill's description of politics.<sup>8</sup> Such things are always mediated or experienced locally. This point seems to go unrecognized by Hally. His examples of "structural factors that constrain the way societies are organized and . . . change" include (1) tautologies that he sees as "lawlike" generalizations (e.g., politically centralized societies are commonly hierarchical; egalitarian societies are small-scale) and (2) conflation of biological, neurological, or environmental constraints with cultural regularities (I certainly do not dispute that such things constrain).<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the point of using the Cahokia example or playing with the idea of civilization is not, contra Beck, to facilitate the construction of an improved typology of Mississippian societies. O'Brien cogently explains, from an ethnohistorian's point of view, the dangers of such a reliance on "idealized" models. He also realizes, better than many archaeologists, the potential importance of thinking about the past in historical-processual terms. If one begins by recognizing that the ancient past was as historically dynamic as the "historic period," diametrically opposite of Hally's and Beck's starting point, one asks different questions and, thereby, seeks other sorts of data to test one's hypotheses. One begins with the realiza-

tion, in other words, that there are many historical and organizational possibilities in the pre-Columbian Woodlands other than chiefdoms, no matter how one might define chiefdoms. Such alternate histories and organizations would have differentially constrained the futures of the peoples involved.

I am uncertain that all commentators in this forum appreciate this point concerning historical contingencies. For example, Beck seems to embody “Cobb’s Rule.” Suggestions that we “problematize” civilization, recognize “house societies” (rather than theorize personhood on which these societies are based), or narrow “what we mean when we use the term . . . *chiefdom*” scream typology. To be fair, Beck’s twisting of my words in his review might be my comeuppance for the summary dismissal in *Delusions* of his “apical-constituent” model of Mississippian chiefdoms.<sup>10</sup> So, I will remain hopeful that he recognizes the typological error of his anthropological ways in the future.

In the end, if I were to criticize my own book, I think I would have done it as does Henry Wright, my former advisor at the University of Michigan who was once described to me by James B. Griffin as the definitive gentleman and scholar. Wright notes that my argument, contra Hally or Beck, is not a denial of the large-scale political realities of pre-Columbian eastern North America. And, of course, it is not a rejection of all previous research on chiefdoms. Rather, it is that the more recent archaeological constructs have lost something in translating older anthropological descriptions into models.

Thus, my plea is for us to better understand what Wright describes as the “lived reality” of the ancient Eastern Woodlands. Of course, Wright wants me to go further. This is what I intend to do.<sup>11</sup> And this is what I urge a younger generation to do as well. That way, my *Delusions* will cease to matter, and our present-day archaeological delusions will not be delusions at all.

#### NOTES

1. Timothy R. Pauketat, *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 16 (hereafter cited in the text as *Delusions*).

2. Timothy R. Pauketat, “A New Tradition in Archaeology,” in *The Archaeology of Traditions: Agency and History Before and After Columbus*, ed. Timothy R. Pauketat, 1–16 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

3. Timothy R. Pauketat, “Practice and History in Archaeology: An Emerging

Paradigm," *Anthropological Theory* 1 (2001): 73–98; "A Fourth-Generation Synthesis of Cahokia and Mississippianization," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 27 (2002): 149–70; "Materiality and the Immaterial in Historical-Processual Archaeology," in *Essential Tensions in Archaeological Method and Theory*, ed. T. L. VanPool and C. S. VanPool, 41–53 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003); "Resettled Farmers and the Making of a Mississippian Polity," *American Antiquity* 68 (2003): 39–66; "Archaeology Without Alternatives," *Anthropological Theory* 4 (2004): 199–203; "Founders' Cults and the Archaeology of Wa-kan-da," in *Memory Work: The Archaeologies of Material Practice*, ed. B. J. Mills and W. H. Walker, 61–80 (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2008); "The Grounds for Agency in Southwestern Archaeology," in *The Social Construction of Communities: Agency, Structure, and Identity in the Prehispanic Southwest*, ed. M. D. Varien and J. M. Potter, 233–49 (Walnut Canyon, CA: AltaMira Press, 2008); Timothy R. Pauketat and Susan M. Alt, "Agency in a Postmold? Physicality and the Archaeology of Culture-Making," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005): 213–36; Timothy R. Pauketat and Lynn Meskell, "Changing Theoretical Directions in American Archaeology," in *Voices in American Archaeology*, ed. W. Ashmore, D. Lippert, and B. Mills (Washington, DC: Society for American Archaeology Press, in press).

4. Pauketat, "Archaeology Without Alternatives," 199–203.

5. Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden, and Colin Renfrew, eds., *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World* (Cambridge: MacDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2004); Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (New York: Springer, 2008); Lynn Meskell, *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies Past and Present* (London: Berg, 2004); Barbara J. Mills and William H. Walker, eds., *Memory Work: Archaeologies of Material Practices* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press, 2008).

6. Timothy R. Pauketat and Thomas E. Emerson, "Star Performances and Cosmic Clutter," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 18 (2008): 78–85.

7. Timothy R. Pauketat, "The Tragedy of the Commoners," in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. M. A. Dobres and J. Robb, 113–29 (London: Routledge, 2000).

8. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). See also "Tip O'Neill," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tip\\_O'Neill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tip_O'Neill).

9. Timothy R. Pauketat, "A New Tradition in Archaeology," in *The Archaeology of Traditions: Agency and History Before and After Columbus*, ed. T. R. Pauketat, 1–16 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

10. Robin A. Beck Jr., "Consolidation and Hierarchy: Chiefdom Variability in the Mississippian Southeast," *American Antiquity* 68 (2003): 641–61.

11. Timothy R. Pauketat, *An Archaeology of the Cosmos*, in preparation.