

Categories of Complexity and the Preclusion of Practice

Jon Bernard Marcoux and Gregory D. Wilson

Archaeologists working in the southeastern United States have found it increasingly difficult to reconcile the temporal and geographical variability exhibited by Late Prehistoric Native American groups with classic trait-list definitions of Mississippian culture, such as corn agriculture, shell-tempered pottery, and mounds (e.g., Cobb 2003; Scarry 1996; Smith 1990). In response, many have searched for analytical frameworks that can make sense of this variability while retaining some unifying notion of Mississippian. Overwhelmingly, answers to this search have taken the form of comparative categorical models that extend a shared definition of Mississippian-ness founded on the concept of “chiefdom” and that characterize variability among groups in terms of similarities and differences in political economy (Anderson 1994; Beck 2003; King 2003; Steponaitis 1991). Most notable among these are the simple-complex-(paramount) chiefdom model, dual processual theory, and the apical-constituent chiefdom model. The reason for the popularity of these frameworks doubtless lies in their ability to “explain” a vast amount of diversity by compartmentalizing it into two or three different categories. We argue that such a perceived benefit can also be seen as a major flaw, as the ease with which the interpretations flow from these frames has been achieved at the expense of understanding the particular practices that actually generated complex power relations at the local level (Alt, this volume, Chapter 1). Instead of the safe interpretations these frames allow, we argue for riskier ones that attempt to account for “com-

plexity” in power relationships by using methods that move more slowly and resist the urge to jump from local to global understandings (Alt, this volume, Chapter 8).

In this chapter we explore how Mississippian mortuary practices could be treated using an alternative approach to categorical models. Our perspective is derived from actor-network theory, or the sociology of translation (Callon 1986; Latour 1991, 1992, 2005; Law 1992, 1997, 1999). This moniker and its acronym (ANT) refer to an extremely diverse and dynamic set of premises and approaches that have a common foundation in a post-structural rejection of essentialist divisions and a shared view that the social consists of performed networks of human and nonhuman “actors.” The challenge laid out by ANT is to “reassemble the social” by tracing the associations between these heterogeneous entities rather than make the social a taken-for-granted starting point of analysis. After outlining actor-network theory, we briefly sketch out what an alternative ANT-like approach to Mississippian archaeological contexts might look like when applied to local mortuary practices at the Moundville site in west-central Alabama.

Critique of the Categorical

The simple-complex (paramount) chiefdom model, dual processual theory, and the apical-constituent chiefdom model are all part of a ramage that traces its descent from the neosocioevolutionary schemas of “complexity” developed by Fried (1967) and Service (1962). Like

their predecessors, these models present us with various ways of parsing out diversity along a single dimension that measures “complexity” as the degree of political centralization exhibited by a particular sociopolitical unit (see Yoffee 1993). Complexity in these models is tied to a particular notion of power that emphasizes how certain actors exercised power over other actors—usually phrased in terms of an elite-commoner dichotomy. The models seek to capture variability in this dichotomous power relationship by taking input consisting of settlement pattern, architectural, and mortuary data and sorting it into ostensibly defined categories. The simple-complex chiefdom model divides this variability vertically, dual process does so horizontally, and the apical-constituent model attempts to do both simultaneously (see Beck 2006; Blanton et al. 1996; Steponaitis 1991).

We contend that the central problem with these archaeological models lies in their essentialist foundations. There is a tautological logic that is inherent to these approaches in that they assume that the archaeological patterning in any given case can ultimately be lumped into one of two political-administrative categories (Pauketat 2007; Wilson et al. 2006; Yoffee 2005). The result of the search for material correlates of these categorical models is that not only mortuary events but also settlement patterns, architecture, mounds, and foodways have been treated as simple intermediaries that convey a single notion, that of political power. Indeed, in many studies the practices of entire communities are reduced to proxies for the political power exercised by a hypothetical chief and cadre of elites with only lip service, at best, paid to commoners (Yoffee 2005).

Very little space is given to the consideration of how the practices of individuals and social groups produce the social. What is more, one can see an instantaneous “jump” in these models from local to global interpretations in the form of a series of often implicit “if-then” statements. Everything becomes an example of the rule. A social group is either simple or complex... apical or constituent. Until we recognize this flaw, we are likely destined to continue to replace categorical models with other categorical models that offer yet more ready-to-use “frames” for our data.

Thinking Actor-Networks to Complexity

What would happen if we abandoned the search for macroscale categorical chiefdom models with which to understand Mississippian societies? What if we were instead to envision the complexity of power relations in these societies as the effect of associations—associations between many heterogeneous entities that required constant performance to maintain? In other words, what if we viewed “social structure” as a verb rather than a noun (Latour 2005; Law 1992:5)? This is the perspective followed by practitioners of actor-network theory, a dynamic corpus of ideas whose origins can be traced to studies in the sociology of scientific knowledge. ANT moves in the opposite direction of the categorical models in that it strives to talk about, appreciate, and practice complexity by emphasizing contingency, tension, movement, and fractionality rather than stability, structure, and fixity (Latour 1999:22; Law 1999:10; Anderson’s [1994] work presents a notable exception for Mississippian societies).

In direct opposition to the categorical models, actor-network theory requires that researchers begin by not assuming that which they wish to explain, namely, the existence of social aggregates like elites and commoners, or the notion of society itself. We are told instead to begin with a clean slate and to describe what the actors themselves are “telling” us by mapping their oppositions and tracing their associations (Latour 2005:8; Law 1992:2). The aim is to explore how actors generate what we know as social structure. Applying this approach to the archaeological study of Mississippian mortuary practices will require a radical shift in perspective, one that follows from abandoning the *a priori* existence of any particular kind of hierarchical social structure.

The shift includes three major moves: (1) a move away from an ostensive to a performative definition of social groups, (2) a double move to recast agency to include human and nonhuman actors and to de-center singular agents, and (3) a move to consider conceptions of power other than hierarchy or “power over.”

Move 1: Proponents describe ANT as a “ruthless application of semiotics” (Latour 2005:34–35; Law 1999:4). At the heart of the ANT is the notion that

all entities are defined by their relation to other entities, and as such, they are constituted by the performance of those relationships. As Latour (2005:35) says, “For ANT if you stop making and remaking groups, you stop having groups.” In the categorical models, we have ostensibly defined entities like elites and commoners, social groups whose existence is seen as given and perpetual, even if those who fill the categories change through time. Hence, they inhabit both the beginning and end of any analysis; they are at once the explanandum and the explanans. In ANT, the existence of groups, their apparent stability, is what needs to be explained through the empirical analysis of their performance.

Move 2: One of the most notable and controversial aspects of ANT is the way agency is conceived of and deployed. The categorical models presented above have a very straightforward view of agency, one that privileges those seen as being in power (i.e., elites) and their intentional strategies. Recently, researchers have put forth a more inclusive view of agency, one that is cast in the agency/structure dichotomy of Giddens (1979) and Bourdieu (1977). This perspective stresses the intentional actions and unintentional consequences of strategically positioned actors (e.g., Dobres and Robb 2000; Hodder 2000; Pauketat 2000). ANT presents us with a third alternative whose attempt to be inclusive elides the agency/structure dichotomy entirely. At the heart of this move is the recognition that networks consist of both human and nonhuman “actors.” The latter include materials such as texts, tools, architectures, and machines. More broadly, nonhuman actors might also include landscapes and spaces (Whitridge 2004). The key determinant to defining these nonhumans as “actors” is that they act as vehicles—costly means for extending the “life” of the associations that generate groups (Latour 1992). In ANT these human and nonhuman agents are both “sets of relations and nodes in those sets of relations” (Law 1991:173–176). The resulting focus of study, therefore, is not to define separately “agents” and “structures” but rather to analyze the durability of these “heterogeneous networks” in toto. This is very much a processual method because a network is never seen as being finished; instead, it is always moving, and as

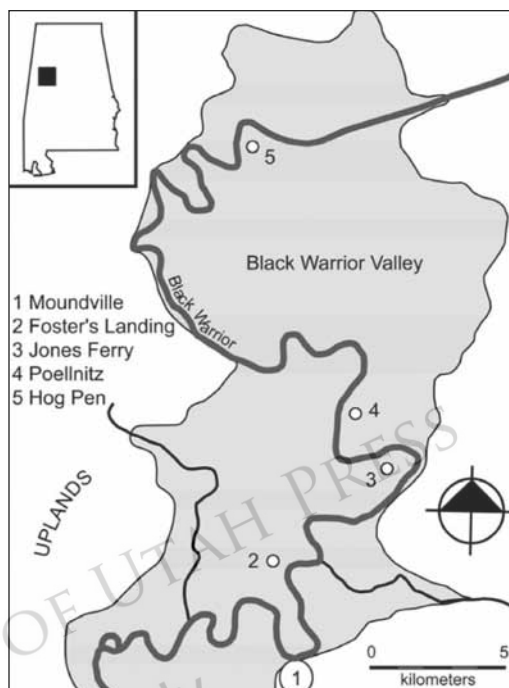


FIGURE 9.1. Early Mississippian mound centers in the northern Black Warrior Valley, Alabama.

analysts we are catching snapshots of networks in motion.

Move 3: Law’s (1991) approach to power can be very helpful in our attempt to trace power relations among Mississippian groups. In addition to the typical political-economy approach to power, “power over,” Law (1991:166–167) considers “power to”—the capacity to act as the non-zero-sum effect of relationships between entities (see also Barnes 1988; Foucault 1978). For any study of social complexity, this notion of “power to” adds a much needed complement to “power over” in that it helps us to remember that social collectivities are necessarily created and maintained through practices that beget solidarity. Both “power over” and “power to” can be stored and deployed by actors, but in the end, power is a function of a network of relations that are constantly contested and negotiated. As a consequence, when we are engaging with complexity, an ANT perspective encourages us to look at actors, their actions, and their relations, and to try to characterize the methods and the extent to which they have the ef-

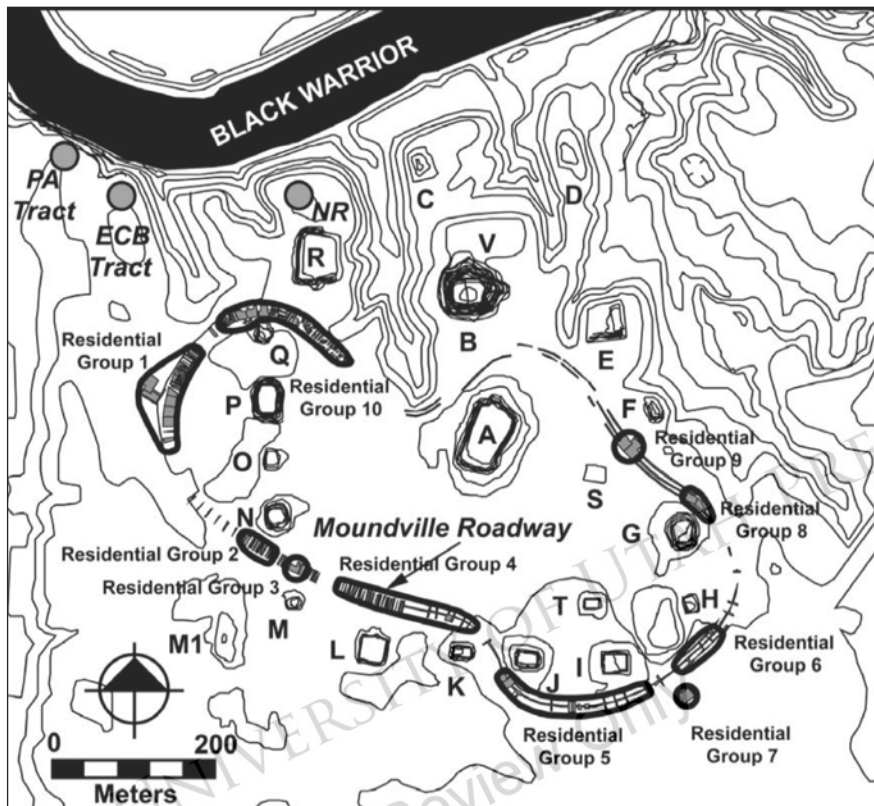


FIGURE 9.2. Geographic information system (GIS) representation of the Moundville site, featuring residential groups identified in the Moundville roadway and riverbank excavations.

fect of securing a store of “power to” and “power over” (Law 1991:176).

Together these three moves set forth a new challenge to the analyst—to explain social groups not by framing them within the context of some global social structure (e.g., elite, commoner, apical hierarchy, simple chiefdom, etc.) but by summing up their associations (Latour 1999:16–17).

Moundville’s “Complex” History

Located in the Black Warrior Valley of west-central Alabama, Moundville was one of the largest and most complex Mississippian polities in the southeastern United States (Figure 9.1). The Moundville site is located on a high, flat terrace where the Black Warrior River cuts close to the Fall-Line Hills (Knight and Steponaitis 1998; Peebles 1978). Today the site consists of 29 mounds arranged around a rectangular plaza (Figure 9.2; Knight and Steponaitis 1998:3). In all, the Mound-

ville site was about 75 ha in size (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:3). The primary areas of residential occupation are located between the plaza and the palisade wall. Much of the central plaza appears to have been unoccupied. However, a number of small residential areas have been identified along the outside edges of the plaza as well as outside the limits of the palisade (Figure 9.2; Wilson 2008).

Over a century of archaeological investigation has revealed that throughout its long history of residential and ceremonial use, Moundville community space came to be highly charged with social meaning as different kin groups incorporated the landscape itself into the politics of identity formation (Knight 1998; Peebles 1971, 1978). For the purpose of the current study, we divide Moundville’s residential and ceremonial history into two periods (Figure 9.3). The first period, which we call Consolidation and Emplacement, spans the late Moundville I phase to the early Moundville II phase (AD 1200 to 1300). The second period,

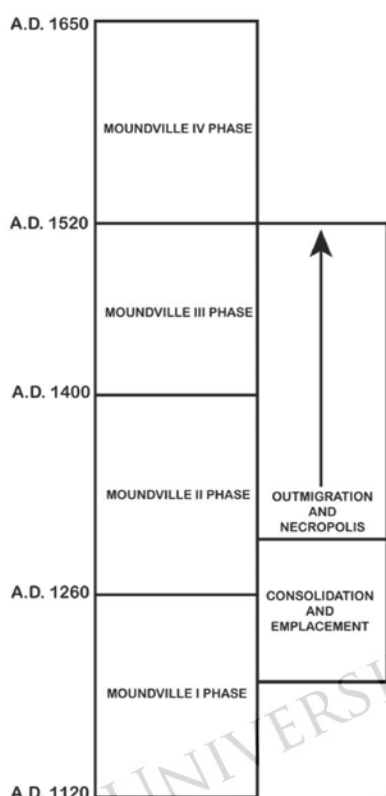


FIGURE 9.3. Mississippian period chronology for the Black Warrior Valley.

which we call Outmigration and Necropolis, corresponds with the late Moundville II and Moundville III phases (AD 1300 to 1550).

Consolidation and Emplacement

The decades bracketing AD 1200 correspond with the rapid political consolidation of the northern Black Warrior Valley and the rise of the Moundville site as a regional political and ceremonial center. During Moundville's first century and a half of occupation its inhabitants enlisted a variety of material entities, including mounds, plazas, and even small domestic structures, to embody and stabilize a network of kin-based social identity and ranking (Knight 1998; Wilson 2008). Archaeological excavations have revealed that construction began on Moundville's ceremonial precinct around AD 1200 in conjunction with a large-scale in-migration of the regional populace to the Moundville site. This ceremonial precinct

consisted of a minimum of 29 earthen mounds arranged in a very orderly manner around a rectangular central plaza (Figure 9.2; Peebles 1971, 1978). The largest mounds are located on the northern edge of the plaza, and they become increasingly smaller going either clockwise or counter-clockwise around the plaza to the south. With few exceptions these earthen monuments are arranged in pairs of larger and smaller mounds. The largest of the paired mounds served as elevated platforms for the temples and homes of the ruling elite. Some smaller mounds also functioned as platforms for special-purpose buildings and contained cemeteries that included many high-status burials (Knight 1998, 2004).

Knight (1998) has interpreted these paired monuments as the political and ceremonial facilities for discrete kin groups such as the matrilineal societies that comprised most Native American societies in the early Historic period throughout the southeastern United States. The decreasing size of these paired mounds from north to south is thought to demarcate the hierarchical ranking of these corporate kin groups around the central plaza. If Knight is correct, then the early Moundville community consisted of numerous, spatially discrete kin groups, each of which possessed its own monumental political and ceremonial facilities.

While larger kin groups endeavored to negotiate and perpetuate their corporate identities through the construction of earthen monuments, smaller subclan groups did so through the construction and in situ rebuilding of spatially discrete residential areas (Figure 9.4; Knight 1998; Wilson 2008; Wilson et al. 2006). The architectural analysis of hundreds of buildings and other domestic features throughout the Moundville site has revealed that its early Mississippian occupation was not spatially contiguous but separated into a number of spatially discrete residential groups (Wilson 2008; Wilson et al. 2006:52). Although Moundville's occupation during this period was nucleated, there were sizable unoccupied areas between residential groups. Rather than spread out or relocate when houses required repair or replacement, however, households opted to rebuild in place, reproducing particular architectural arrangements in particular places (Figure 9.4). The spatial distribution of these residential groups is consistent with broader social divisions

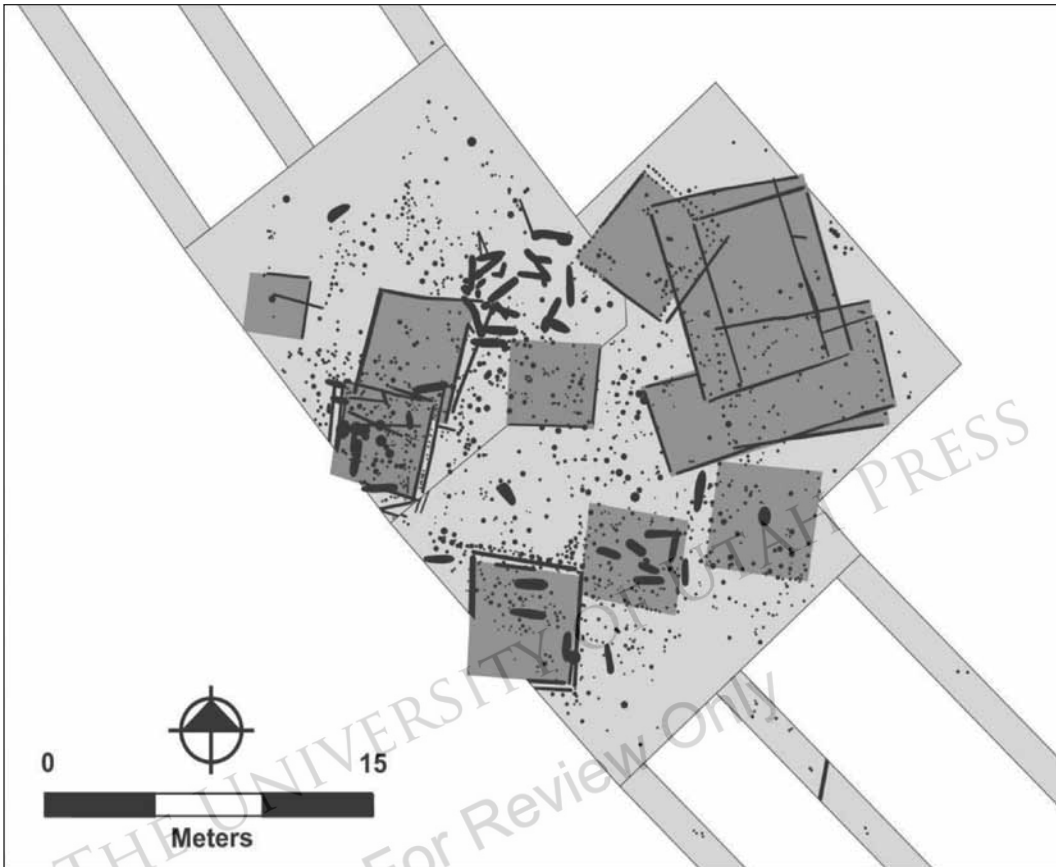


FIGURE 9.4. Late Mississippian burials superimposed on early Mississippian domestic structures at residential group 9.

in the Moundville community as represented in the arrangement and size of earthen monuments. Thus, each “clan” division at Moundville appears to have included numerous discrete “subclan” residential groups (Wilson 2008).

Outmigration and Necropolis

Sometime in the final decades of the thirteenth century Moundville ceased to be used as a nucleated residential center and was transformed into a necropolis where the rurally relocated occupants of the Black Warrior Valley buried their dead in a variety of different cemeteries (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:19; Steponaitis 1998:39–41). Most off-mound cemeteries at Moundville consist of tightly arranged rectilinear clusters of burials surrounded by a more dispersed pattern of associated burials (Figure 9.5; Wilson 2008; Wilson et al. 2010). A seriation of mortuary ceramics

and a close examination of feature superimposition indicate that most of these cemeteries represent the performance of mortuary events for some two centuries following Moundville’s outmigration (Steponaitis 1983; Wilson 2008; Wilson et al. 2010). What was once a bustling town became a vacant ceremonial center occupied primarily by a small number of Moundville’s elite and other religious specialists (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:17–21).

This outmigration corresponds with increasing population densities in the rural countryside of the Black Warrior Valley (Maxham 2004:129). Such a dramatic transformation of the regional landscape would have entailed important changes in the ways social groups used space and negotiated their corporate identities, for no longer did nucleated kin groups dwell in the shadow of earthen monuments, nor did families raise



FIGURE 9.5. Arrangement of burials in a cemetery in residential group 9 (early Mississippian domestic structures are removed from the map).

buildings over the foundations of the homes of their parents and grandparents.

With its many dynamic intersections of human and nonhuman actors, Moundville's historical narrative provides boundless opportunities for ANT analyses. We focus on mortuary events associated with Moundville's transformation into a necropolis because they represent very clear material "snapshots" of networks being performed at a critical time in the polity's history. Particularly, we argue that the disjuncture in landscape and community that occurred with Moundville's large-scale outmigration led the Mississippian inhabitants of the Black Warrior Valley to implement new patterns of mortuary ceremonialism. Ultimately, the goal of these new mortuary practices was similar to that of the earlier residential emplacement strategies—to create durable networks of human and nonhuman actors that promoted kin-based solidarity and associated claims

to social and economic resources (see Law 2000 for a discussion of the "fluid" nature of networks).

ANT and Mortuary Analysis

The recognition of the strategic opportunities created by the death of an individual is nothing new (see Arnold 2002; Gillespie 2002; Joyce 2001; Meskell 2001; Parker Pearson 1999; and Silverman 2002 for a similar postprocessual take on mortuary practices). These events and their associated practices offer ideal settings for an ANT approach because they represent the type of "crisis" moments when networks become visible as they are deleted, renegotiated, replaced, and mobilized (Latour 1992:233, 2005:65; Law 1992:4–5). When someone dies, networks are altered and new networks are negotiated. Mortuary events are practices that embody this performance. Death events bring about the intersection of different networks. The "deaths" of old networks are memorialized,

but in doing so mourners are also laying the foundations of new networks. What is too often mentioned uncritically in archaeological discourse is that Mississippian mortuary events included not only the deceased but also a host of other actors that were at that moment actively engaged in “performing” networks. We can view each mortuary context as a “setting” or a constructed collection of objects where each object is the effect of its relationship with other human and nonhuman objects. In other words, when looking at mortuary data, we should see the human remains, artifacts, burial location, and mourners not as reflections of some “thing” called social structure but instead as the variable effects of networks whose movements can be traced (Akrich and Latour 1992:259; Law 1999:3).

In our case study, examining Moundville cemeteries as sites of social production rather than correlates of a particular kind of social structure requires us to conduct an investigation of their composition and history. Whereas categorical models usually treat mortuary contexts en masse as ahistorical proxies for a particular type of social structure, in tracing networks we must turn up the magnification on these cemeteries in order to identify the disparate entities enrolled in each case. Only when we consider the histories of people, places, and things enchainé within these cemeteries can we begin to determine the broader social relationships and meanings that were stabilized through the cemeteries and the mortuary practices that created them. Consequently, our study of mortuary practices at Moundville includes a “roll call” of the sorts of things being enchainé; however, simply listing these participants is not nearly enough. As Latour (2005:128) states, “A good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don’t just sit there.” The something Latour refers to is the work that is being done by the participants in the network and the transformations that are taking place. Of great import to our consideration of Moundville is how transformative power relations (both “power to” and “power over”) were negotiated through mortuary events. To investigate this process, we consider the size, location, composition, and use histories of various off-mound cemeteries at the Moundville site.

Power To: Network Objects and Off-Mound Cemeteries

Researchers have long recognized that mortuary ceremonies are performances in which people, places, and things are brought into transformative relationships involving the deceased, the living, and particular cultural notions of the soul and the afterlife (Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1991:79–85). In terms of Moundville we consider two transformations particularly important in generative schemes of power (i.e., power to): (1) the transformation of the deceased individual into a network object—an effect of an array of relations (Law 2000:1)—symbolized by his or her status as an ancestor, and (2) the memorialization of an intimate shared history through the transformation of residential space into mortuary space.

The death of an individual in the Moundville chiefdom invariably constituted a threat to the stability of a host of networks. A prescriptive process of mortuary ceremonialism ameliorated this threat. An important component of this process was the burial furniture interred with some of the deceased. Most individuals in these cemeteries were buried with nothing or with only a ceramic serving container or two (Peebles 1974), but there are a few exceptions to this pattern in which individuals were interred with multiple items and/or elaborate display goods. Lankford (2007) and Steponaitis and Knight (2004) have recently argued that much of the iconography found on these display goods references mortuary themes involving death and the afterlife. Specifically, these iconographic items appear to have been part of a suite of mortuary practices intended to facilitate the passage of a deceased individual-cum-ancestor’s soul to the Realm of the Dead (Figure 9.6). A corpus of five closely related motifs (the hand and eye, skull, bone, winged serpent, and raptor) are thought to reference the Path of Souls, a treacherous celestial journey along the Milky Way that the souls of the deceased must navigate to make their way to the Realm of the Dead. According to the religious beliefs of many native groups from the Plains and Eastern Woodlands, the corpse had to be prepared in a ceremonially prescribed manner to ensure that the soul of the deceased would complete this journey (Lankford 2007). Souls that traversed this path and its obstacles successfully

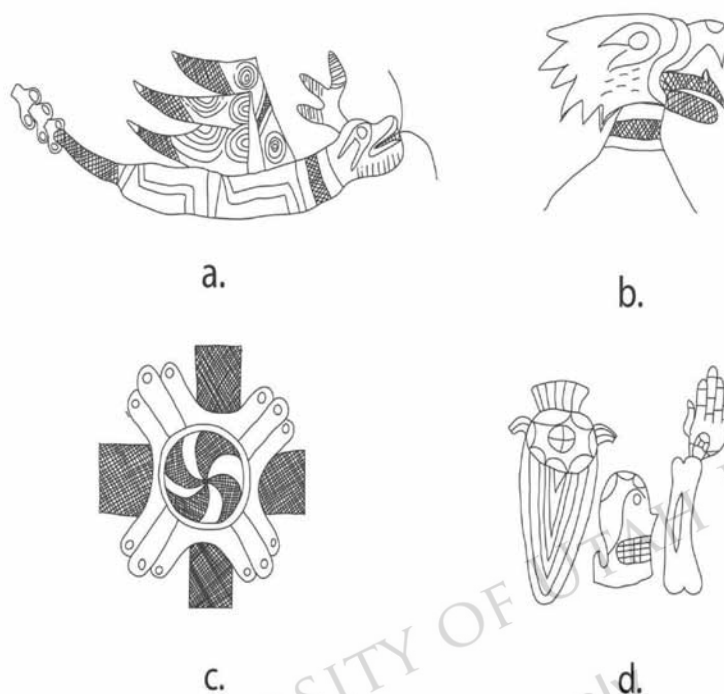


FIGURE 9.6. Iconographic designs linked to the Path of Souls: (a) winged serpent; (b) raptor; (c) center symbol, four quartered hands; (d) skull, bone, hand-and-eye (adapted from Lankford 2007).

became powerful allies to their living descendants, offering guidance and power. Souls that faltered along the path, on the other hand, sometimes returned to haunt the living or spent the rest of eternity in a liminal state (Lankford 2007). Through mortuary practices, mourners were attempting to stabilize a network in crisis through the transformation of an individual from a living actor to a nonhuman actor (i.e., an ancestor) who nevertheless remained an integral, if altered, network component (Law 2000; see also Giles, this volume).

One of the most important features of Moundville's small off-mound cemeteries is their location. Nearly every off-mound cemetery that has been excavated at Moundville superimposes spatially discrete early Mississippian residential groups (Wilson 2005). It follows that part of the broader meaning and purpose of these small cemeteries was to establish social and spatial continuity with ancestral residential space. Indeed, some clues in the spatial organization of these cemeteries indicate that they were strategically designed to invoke an early Mississippian residential past.

For example, the rectilinear arrangement of most burials in these cemeteries corresponds to the dimensions of early Mississippian domestic structures at Moundville (Wilson 2008). Thus, it is not unreasonable to speculate that these cemeteries served as a kind of metaphor for a house that embodied kin group identity while maintaining continuity with the residential origin and history of kin groups at Moundville.

From this perspective the mortuary rituals that took place during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries at Moundville involved commemorative ceremonies in which domestic groups re-presented their earlier history of residential occupation in a ceremonial capacity. By building the cemeteries directly on top of thirteenth-century residential areas and arranging the graves in a rectilinear house-like pattern, these groups intentionally and discursively enacted this earlier era in a ceremonially embodied form.

It is not surprising that specific Mississippian kin groups at Moundville used spatially discrete cemeteries to bury their dead. Drawing on global

ethnographic data, Goldstein (1980) and Saxe (1970) have demonstrated that agricultural societies with lineal corporate rights over the use and inheritance of land often have cemeteries that are used exclusively by specific kin groups. Both scholars argue that these exclusive mortuary arrangements are part of broader strategies by which individuals seek to affirm their descent group membership and the land inheritance rights that come with it. The heritability of social and economic resources no doubt helped inspire the initial construction of Moundville's mound and plaza complex and the clan-based political and ceremonial order it embodied.

*Power Over: Elites as
an Obligatory Passage Point*

While it is tempting to think of Moundville cemeteries as singular coherent units, we must remember that each is a collection of entities representing a convergence born out of the heterogeneous motivations and strategies of the mourners and other funerary attendees. The result of each and every mortuary event was a complex imbroglio motivated by grief, remembrance, claims of solidarity and difference, and aspirations to status and power.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that some actors would have been better situated than others in regard to recruiting people, bodies, and things into playing particular roles within mortuary events held at Moundville cemeteries. For example, Knight et al. (2001) have interpreted certain Moundville hair ornaments made of embossed copper as symbols referencing the ability of certain religious specialists to perform celestial spirit journeys. These hair ornaments, known archaeologically as bi-lobed arrows, are thought to represent "a conventionalized bow and arrow composite that operates as an instrument of soul flight, by which the bearer magically projects soul essence into the upper world" (Figure 9.7; Knight et al. 2001:137). Bi-lobed arrow hair ornaments have been found in direct association with burials in mounds at Moundville and Etowah—burials that fit the typical definition of "high-status" individuals. These ornaments are also iconographically depicted as regalia worn by the Mississippian "elite" on rock art, embossed copper plates, stone palettes, and marine shell black drink cups and

gorgets at numerous sites in the southeastern and midwestern United States (Diaz-Granados 2004; Dye 2004:Fig. 1; King 2004:Fig. 11; Phillips and Brown 1978:Pl. 6, 19; Steponaitis and Knight 2004: Fig. 13).

With specialized knowledge of the Path of Souls, certain members of the Moundville community were well positioned to strategically (re)configure mortuary ritual. To the degree to which the regional populace was convinced that these individuals performed an essential role in the journey to the afterlife, mortuary ceremonialism at the Moundville site would have served as a kind of obligatory passage point. That is, if family members wanted to ensure that the souls of their deceased kin successfully navigated the treacherous journey and transformation into an ancestor, then it may have been necessary to consult with one of these religious specialists who knew the proper ways to prepare and inter the corpse and who could serve as a guide for the deceased along the Path of Souls. This ability to translate the interests of, and exert "power over," others within mortuary events may well have produced and legitimized decision-making authority that extended beyond the arena of funerary practice.

Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout the course of our research it became apparent that ANT does not offer nicely framed archaeological interpretations. Indeed, we found that it is quite easy to fail in creating a completely faithful ANT-style narrative. Instead, we realize that the best we can hope to do is to construct a description that appreciates the complexity of the transformations that took place through practices enacted in the past. When we examine Moundville cemeteries, it becomes obvious that when mourners performed mortuary rites, they were literally folding time and space. We can observe this in the enchainment of mythical places and times through iconographic references to the Path of Souls and the Realm of the Dead on display goods. We can also see this in the way that cemeteries were built directly over ancestral residential spaces within well-demarcated clan and subclan precincts. At such high magnification we can see how human remains, an ancestral residential past, display goods, serving containers, mourners, the Milky Way, and an array of

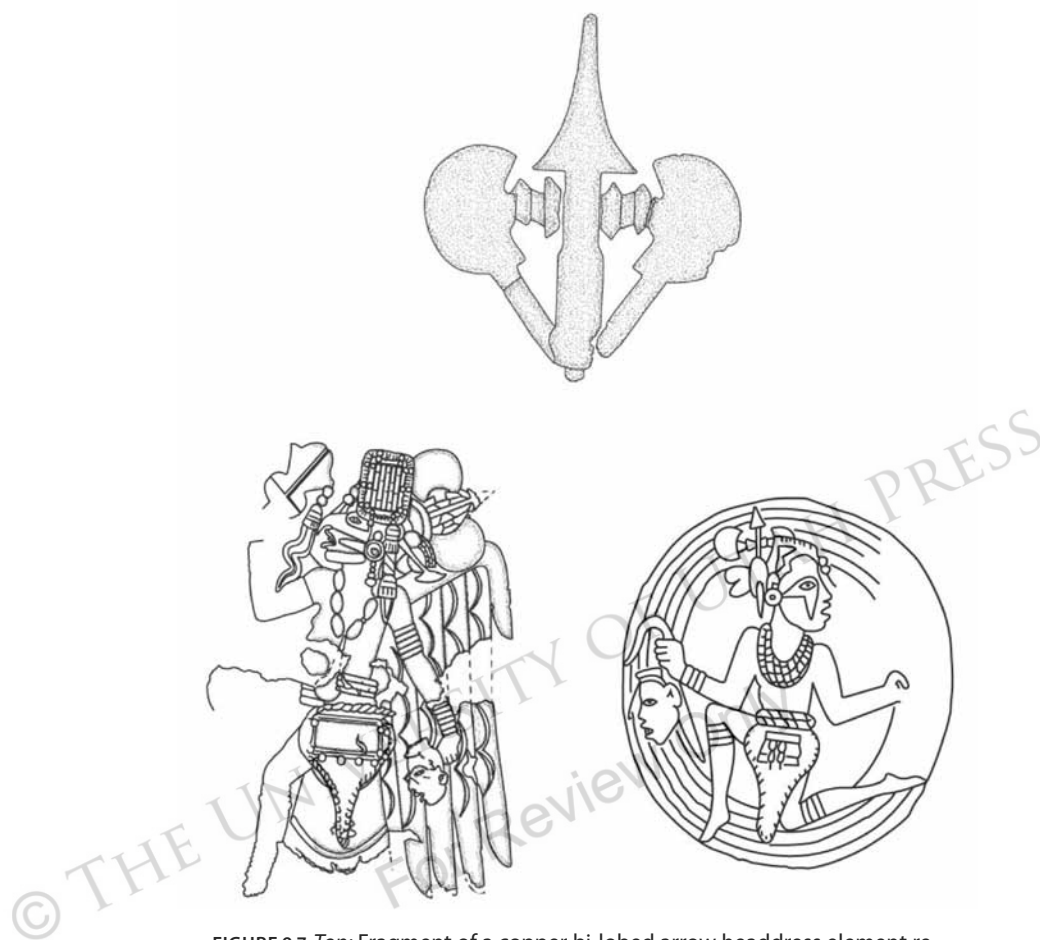


FIGURE 9.7. *Top*: Fragment of a copper bi-lobed arrow headdress element recovered from a burial context. *Bottom*: Depictions of mythical hero figures wearing bi-lobed arrow headdresses.

other cosmological entities were all recruited into playing specific roles within a network.

The key to our ANT analysis is that the processes of recruitment and reassembly that created Moundville cemeteries transformed all the various entities involved. Recognizing the various transformations returns movement and fluidity to social production—something that is sorely missing from static categorical models. Through their funerary practices, mourners were able to deploy generative effects of power. By transforming the deceased individual into a network object, mourners attempted to stabilize the crisis created in the aftermath of death. Individual cemeteries themselves were continually transformed through mortuary practices as they took on attributes of ruralized kin groups and various

cosmological entities through association with deceased community members, ancestral residential space, clan monuments, religious iconography, and the Path of Souls. Likewise, it can be said that the identities and interests of ruralized kin groups were transformed by Moundville cemeteries. Through association with centralized mortuary facilities, kin groups actively enlisted the past and the cosmologically distant via spatial associations with ancestral residential space, earthen monuments, and symbolic linkages to the Path of Souls. Finally, by virtue of having access to esoteric knowledge, certain members of society were able to exploit the transformations associated with death and mortuary rites in order to exert “power over” others.

Our principal goal in this chapter was to ex-

amine Moundville cemeteries as sites of social production rather than correlates of some pre-defined social structure. We hope we have been able to convey some sense of the complexity of this goal. In the end, we believe, the promise of ANT lies in posing challenges instead of offering easy solutions. In order to embrace these challenges, we need to identify the frames produced

by past social groups rather than impose them, in an a priori fashion, on the archaeological record. In doing so, we must focus on the composition and generative practices of actors, places, and things themselves rather than simply contextualize these entities in reference to the social forces that surround them (Latour 2005).

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Susan Alt for inviting us to take part in this provocative volume. Special thanks to Pete Whitridge for many stimulating conversations about actor-network theory. We also thank Mary Hancock, Stuart Smith, Vincas Steponaitis, and Amber VanDerwarker for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

References

- Akrich, Madleine, and Bruno Latour
1992 A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Nonhuman Assemblies. In *Shaping Technology, Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, edited by W. Bijker and J. Law, pp. 259–264. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Anderson, David G.
1994 *The Savannah River Chiefdoms: Political Change in the Late Prehistoric Southeast*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.
- Arnold, Bettina
2002 A Landscape of Ancestors: The Space and Place of Death in Iron Age West-Central Europe. In *The Space and Place of Death*, edited by H. Silverman and D. Small, pp. 129–144. Archeological Papers No. 11. American Anthropological Association, Arlington, Virginia.
- Barnes, Barry
1988 *The Nature of Power*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Beck, Robin A., Jr.
2003 Consolidation and Hierarchy: Chiefdom Variability in the Mississippian Southeast. *American Antiquity* 68:641–661.
- 2006 Persuasive Politics at Cahokia and Moundville. In *Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society*, edited by B. Butler and P. Welch, pp. 19–42. Occasional Paper No. 33. Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.
- Blanton, Richard E., Gary M. Feinman, Stephen A. Kowalewski, and Peter N. Peregrine
1996 A Dual Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization. *Current Anthropology* 37:1–14.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Callon, Michele
1986 Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of Saint Brieuc Bay. In *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by J. Law, pp. 196–233. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
- Cobb, Charles R.
2003 Mississippian Chiefdoms: How Complex? *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32:63–84.
- Diaz-Granados, Carol
2004 Marking Stone, Land, Body, and Spirit: Rock Art and Mississippian Iconography. In *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, edited by R. F. Townsend and R. V. Sharp, pp. 139–150. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Dobres, Marcia-Anne, and John Robb
2000 Agency in Archaeology: Paradigm or Platitude? In *Agency in Archaeology*, edited by M. Dobres and J. E. Robb, pp. 3–18. Routledge, London.
- Dye, D. H.
2004 Art, Ritual, and Chiefly Warfare in the Mississippian World. In *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South* edited by R. Townsend. Yale University Press.
- Foucault, Michel
1978 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Penguin Books, London.
- Fried, Morton
1967 *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology*. Random House, New York.
- Giddens, Anthony
1979 *Central Problems in Social Theory*. Macmillan, London.

- Gillespie, Susan D.
2002 Body and Soul among the Maya: Keeping the Spirits in Place. In *The Space and Place of Death*, edited by H. Silverman and D. Small, pp. 67–78. Archeological Papers No. 11. American Anthropological Association, Arlington, Virginia.
- Goldstein, Lynn
1980 *Mississippian Mortuary Practices: A Case Study of Two Cemeteries in the Lower Illinois Valley*. Archeology Program Scientific Papers No. 4. Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.
- Hertz, Robert
1960 *Death and the Right Hand*. Translated by R. Needham and C. Needham. Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois.
- Hodder, Ian
2000 Agency and Individuals in Long-Term Processes. In *Agency in Archaeology*, edited by M. Dobres and J. E. Robb, pp. 21–33. Routledge, London.
- Joyce, Rosemary A.
2001 Burying the Dead at Tlatilco: Social Memory and Social Identities. In *Social Memory, Identity, and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals*, edited by M. S. Chesson, pp. 12–26. Archeological Papers No. 10. American Anthropological Association, Arlington, Virginia.
- King, Adam
2003 *Etowah: The Political History of a Chiefdom Capital*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.
2004 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*, edited by R. F. Townsend and R. V. Sharp, pp. 151–166. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Knight, Vernon James, Jr.
1998 Moundville as a Diagrammatic Ceremonial Center. In *Archaeology of the Moundville Chiefdom*, edited by V. J. Knight, Jr., and V. P. Steponaitis, pp. 44–62. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
2004 Characterizing Elite Midden Deposits at Moundville. *American Antiquity* 69:304–321.
- Knight, Vernon James, Jr., James A. Brown, and George E. Lankford
2001 On the Subject Matter of Southeastern Ceremonial Complex Art. *Southeastern Archaeology* 20:129–141.
- Knight, Vernon James, Jr., and Vincas P. Steponaitis
1998 A New History of Moundville. In *Archaeology of the Moundville Chiefdom*, edited by V. J. Knight, Jr., and V. P. Steponaitis, pp. 1–25. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- Lankford, George
2007 The “Path of Souls”: Some Death Imagery in the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. In *Ancient Objects and Sacred Realms: Interpretations of Mississippian Iconography*, edited by F. K. Reilly III and J. F. Garber, pp. 174–212. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Latour, Bruno
1991 Technology Is Society Made Durable. In *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, edited by J. Law, pp. 103–131. Routledge, London.
1992 Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts. In *Shaping Technology, Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, edited by W. Bijker and J. Law, pp. 225–258. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
1999 On Recalling ANT. In *Actor Network Theory and After*, edited by J. Law and J. Hassard, pp. 15–25. Blackwell and the Sociological Review, Oxford.
2005 *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Law, John
1991 Power, Discretion, and Strategy. In *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, edited by J. Law, pp. 165–191. Routledge, London.
1992 *Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity*. Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University. Electronic document, <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Notes-on-ANT.pdf>.
1997 *Traduction/Trahsion: Notes on ANT*. Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University. Electronic document, <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Traduction-Trahsion.pdf>.
1999 After ANT: Topology, Naming and Complexity. In *Actor Network Theory and After*, edited by J. Law and J. Hassard, pp. 1–14. Blackwell and the Sociological Review, Oxford.
2000 *Objects, Spaces, and Others*. Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University. Electronic document, <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/>

- sociology/papers/Law-Objects-Spaces-
Others.pdf.
- Maxham, Mintcy
2004 Native Constructions of Landscapes in the Black Warrior Valley, Alabama, AD 1020–1520. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- Meskell, Lynn
2001 The Egyptian Ways of Death. In *Social Memory, Identity, and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals*, edited by M. S. Chesson, pp. 27–40. Archeological Papers No. 10. American Anthropological Association, Arlington, Virginia.
- Metcalf, Peter, and Richard Huntington
1991 *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Parker Pearson, Michael
1999 *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*. Texas A & M University Press, College Station.
- Pauketat, Timothy R.
2000 The Tragedy of the Commoners. In *Agency in Archaeology*, edited by M. Dobres and J. E. Robb, pp. 113–129. Routledge, London.
2007 *Chiefdoms and Other Archaeological Delusions*. AltaMira Press, Walnut Canyon, California.
- Peebles, Christopher S.
1971 Moundville and Surrounding Sites: Some Structural Considerations of Mortuary Practices. In *Approaches to the Social Dimension of Mortuary Practices*, edited by J. A. Brown, pp. 68–91. Memoir No. 15. Society for American Archaeology, Washington, D.C.
1974 Moundville: The Organization of a Prehistoric Community and Culture. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.
1978 Determinants of Settlement Size and Location in the Moundville Phase. In *Mississippian Settlement Patterns*, edited by B. D. Smith, pp. 369–416. Academic Press, New York.
- Phillips, Philip, and James A. Brown
1978 *Pre-Columbian Shell Engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma, Part 1*. Peabody Museum Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Saxe, Arthur
1970 Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- Scarry, John F.
1996 The Nature of Mississippian Societies. In *Political Structure and Change in the Prehistoric Southeastern United States*, edited by J. F. Scarry, pp. 12–24. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- Service, Elman
1962 *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*. Random House, New York.
- Silverman, Helaine
2002 Narratives of Identity and History in Modern Cemeteries of Lima, Peru. In *The Space and Place of Death*, edited by H. Silverman and D. Small, pp. 167–190. Archeological Papers No. 11. American Anthropological Association, Arlington, Virginia.
- Smith, Bruce D. (editor)
1990 *Mississippian Emergence*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- Steponaitis, Vincas P.
1983 *Ceramics, Chronology, and Community Patterns: An Archaeological Study at Moundville*. Academic Press, New York.
1991 Contrasting Patterns of Mississippian Development. In *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology*, edited by Timothy K. Earle, pp. 193–228. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
1998 Population Trends at Moundville. In *Archaeology of the Moundville Chiefdom*, edited by V. J. Knight, Jr., and V. P. Steponaitis, pp. 26–43. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- Steponaitis, Vincas P., and Vernon James Knight, Jr.
2004 Moundville Art in Historical and Social Context. In *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South*, edited by R. F. Townsend and R. V. Sharp, pp. 167–182. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Whitridge, Peter
2004 Whales, Harpoons, and Other Actors: Actor-Network Theory and Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology. In *Hunters and Gatherers in Theory and Archaeology*, edited by G. M. Crothers, pp. 445–474. Occasional Paper No. 31. Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.
- Wilson, Gregory D.
2005 Between Plaza and Palisade: Household and Community Organization at Early Moundville. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

- 2008 *The Archaeology of Everyday Life at Early Moundville*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.
- Wilson, Gregory D., Jon Bernard Marcoux, and Brad Koldehoff
- 2006 Square Pegs in Round Holes: Organizational Diversity between Early Moundville and Cahokia. In *Leadership and Polity in Mississippian Society*, edited by B. M. Butler and P. D. Welch, pp. 43–72. Occasional Paper No. 33. Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.
- Wilson, Gregory D., Vincas P. Steponaitis, and Keith Jacobi
- 2010 Social and Spatial Dimensions of Moundville Mortuary Practices. In *Mississippian Mortuary Practices: Beyond Hierarchy and the Representationist Perspective*, edited by L. P. Sullivan and R. C. Mainfort, Jr., pp. 74–89. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.
- Yoffee, Norman
- 1993 Too Many Chiefs? (or, Safe Texts for the '90s). In *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?* edited by N. Yoffee and A. Sherratt, pp. 60–78. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- 2005 *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States and Civilizations*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

© THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH PRESS
For Review Only