

## COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL MEMORY AT MOUNDVILLE

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*In this paper I highlight the potential of social memory research to enhance our archaeological understanding of Mississippian social organization and identity politics. Mississippian communities commemorated and invoked the past through the creation and manipulation of landscapes, places, and things. To demonstrate the utility of this approach I examine and discuss Mississippian architectural and mortuary data from the Moundville site in west-central Alabama. On the basis of this examination I argue that social memory played an important role in the negotiation of social identities and the organization of community space at the Moundville site and the Mississippian Black Warrior Valley.*

*En este trabajo discuto la importancia del estudio de la memoria social para mejorar nuestro entendimiento arqueológico de la organización social y política identitaria de los Mississipianos. Las comunidades Mississipianas conmemoraban e invocaban el pasado a través de la creación y manipulación de los paisajes, lugares y objetos. Para demostrar la utilidad de este método, examino y discuto la información sobre la arquitectura y funerales de los Mississipianos en Moundville en el centro-occidental de Alabama. Basado en este análisis, argumento que la memoria social jugó un papel importante en la negociación de las identidades y la organización del espacio comunitario en Moundville y en el Black Warrior Valley.*

How can thinking historically in terms of memory-making contribute to archaeology? Answering this question depends very much upon how memory acquisition and transmission are defined in relation to social groups, identity, landscapes, and material culture. For instance, if the phenomenon of memory is limited to an individual's cognitive ability to remember past experiences, then archaeology has very little to contribute. Archaeologists, after all, study the material remains of ancient societies. Psychologists and historians, on the other hand, have direct access to the kinds of face-to-face interviews and written texts through which an individual's memories are discursively preserved. Fortunately for archaeologists, memory studies have progressed beyond the psychological analysis and interpretation of an individual's personal recollections. Recent research has explicitly redefined memory as a social phenomenon subject to corporate negotiation, representation, and materialization (Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1980; Joyce 2003; Nora 1989). The social dimensions of memory involve

not only its verbal or written transmission but also its embodiment in places and things that have been collectively produced and modified over the course of time (Jones 2007; Van Dyke 2004; Yoffee 2007:3). Conceived in these social terms, memory becomes a topic open to archaeological investigation.

Like all things public, social memory is also political. Contemporary archaeological research has emphasized the varied, selective, and contested nature of social memory (Cannon 2002:192; Meskell 2004:63; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:2–3; Yoffee 2007:3). There are always multiple versions and interpretations of the past. Accordingly, the past is constantly reinterpreted and represented based on the changing political and economic needs of social groups (Alcock 2002; Meskell 2007).

Social memory is quickly becoming a common theme of archaeological investigation around the world (Hodder and Cessford 2004; Joyce 2000; Meskell 2004; Mills and Walker 2008; Sinopoli 2003). Van Dyke (2003, 2004) has employed the social memory concept to explain how Chacoan

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administrators attempted to negotiate a regional political crisis in the ancient southwestern United States by creating architectural references to a more socially and environmentally stable past. Bradley (1984, 1987, 1993) has interpreted the Bronze Age European practice of placing secondary burials around earlier Neolithic monuments as attempts by the ruling elite to legitimize their political authority through the creation of a fictitious genealogy emphasizing the great antiquity of the rulership (see also Holtorf 1998). In a modern example, Alcock (2002:3–5) has described how Greek nationalism inspired the removal of many medieval and early modern buildings from the Athenian Acropolis to emphasize a modern-day connection to the high Classical age.

Despite the growing popularity of the social memory concept, far fewer archaeological investigations have explored this concept in North America than in Europe. This difference likely relates to the presence of a stronger materialist theoretical tradition in the United States. It is also the case that most archaeological studies of social memory have been restricted to investigations of specialized elite contexts and material culture assemblages rather than the domestic architecture and everyday objects that have been the focus of much research in the Americanist-Processual tradition.

In contrast to such top-down approaches, I propose that social memory is a political resource widely available to all social groups for the related purposes of negotiating their social and economic interests. It is my goal in this paper to highlight the potential of social memory research for Mississippian (A.D. 1000–1500) archaeology and segmentary kin-based societies more broadly. In so doing I discuss key concepts and summarize avenues of inquiry that have emerged from their investigation. Finally, I demonstrate the relevance of this approach for investigating the occupational history of the Mississippian site of Moundville in west-central Alabama. Specifically, I argue that social memory played an important role in the way a variety of social groups negotiated their kin-based identities and their corresponding socioeconomic claims. On the basis of the careful and persistent claims on Moundville community space by the non-elite, it appears that relations of inequality were broadly negotiated throughout most of the site's Mississippian occupation.

### Putting Memory into Place and Practice

Places are created, rebuilt, abandoned, forgotten, rediscovered, reclaimed, and transformed. Due to these complex histories of use and modification, a place is never simply a *tabula rasa* that can be wiped clean and given new meaning with each phase of occupation (Basso 1996; Hodder 1995; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:1). Over time places accumulate meanings as they are continually drawn into different networks of power and identity. Additions, subtractions, and modifications to a place alter its meaning but always in reference to a landscape already imbued with significance. Over the long term a landscape can embody the changing and competing narratives of social groups (Hodder 1995; Meskell 2003).

How is social memory incorporated in a place? Simply put, social groups draw on and alter the material world to demarcate their social identities (Hendon 2007:308). Different social groups may occupy different places or use the same place differently (Lightfoot et al. 1998; Meskell 2003). Over time culturally specific habitualized practices develop in direct reference to particular locations. As a result, conceptualized patterns of gender, age, class, and ethnicity come to be associated with particular rooms, neighborhoods, streets, and courtyards (Bourdieu 1977:89–90; Meskell 2004:68; Whitridge 2004:232–233). Embodied with meaning in this way, places become organizational structures that influence the way people routinely move through space and interact with one another (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1977; Lefebvre 1991).

Bourdieu's (1990) study of the Kabyle house is an oft-cited example of how the spatial and symbolic organization of a house can produce broader ideas and relationships about gender, society, and the cosmos. Charged with gendered and generational oppositions and homologues, the Kabyle house is a microcosm for society and the cosmos. The movement through and use of different portions of the Kabyle house served to enact broader relationships, ideas, and values. Hodder and Cessford's (2004) archaeological research at Çatalhöyük represents an important archaeological example of this phenomenon. They argue convincingly that consistencies in the organization and use of domestic space at Çatalhöyük served to produce broadly shared social practices related to the politics of collective memory.



These studies demonstrate how continuity in the layout and design of social places provides a sense of permanence in the phenomenology of everyday life (Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1980). From a similar perspective both Ruth Tringham (2000:131) and Rosemary Joyce (2004:25, 2007:60) have argued that the use of architectural techniques that make buildings more durable serve to strengthen a social group's corporate solidarity and connections to place. Accordingly, the physical alteration of social spaces can have a profound effect on memory production. For example, in Byzantine Greece ancient buildings were razed, and the dispersed fragments were used to create or modify other places (Papalexandrou 2003). In this way, Byzantine buildings came to selectively reference other places, times, and events.

The destruction or removal of a place, in particular, can influence the ability of a people to remember the past. Such destructive acts are often carried out by those attempting to cause a kind of selective forgetting, as was the case with the Taliban's destruction of two third-century Buddhist statues in Afghanistan in 2001.

Indeed, the meanings and uses of a place need not remain stable and uncontested. Conflict over the historical importance and meaning of some places lies at the center of many past and present political struggles. For example, Bender (1998) has drawn attention to how the site of Stonehenge has served as a nexus for religious, nationalistic, and class-based contestation and co-optation throughout much of England's past and present (see also Alcock 2002:29).

### Incorporated and Inscribed Memory

Sociologist Paul Connerton (1989:72–73) has distinguished between two different but closely related processes of memory embodiment and transmission: *inscribed memory* and *incorporated memory*. Inscribed memory is a discursive form of remembrance that involves explicit acts of memory depiction and transmission. Examples of places that are inscribed in this way include commemorative monuments, museums, cemeteries, and archives. These sites of memory are intentionally designed to bring the present into relation to the past for the purpose of achieving future social goals. That is, such places are created to ensure that

a certain reading of the past will be remembered in the future. By memorializing wartime victories and sacrifices, or emphasizing continuity with a golden historical era, people employ the past as a means of future social aggrandizement. This kind of prospective memory and inscribed place-making characterizes the processes of political legitimation and ethnogenesis in a wide variety of regional and historical settings (Ambridge 2007; Joyce 2003; Sinopoli 2003; Van Dyke 2003, 2004). For example, Bradley (1984, 1987, 1993) has argued that some ancient monuments in England were modified and reused long after they had fallen out of use by post-Roman period groups attempting to genealogically connect themselves to ancient and prestigious lineages.

Indeed, many groups offer a biography of their origins and cultural heritage as a means of negotiating their position in society. If a social biography is well crafted and received, it can assist in legitimizing a group's claims to authority, resources, or territory (Connerton 1989:17).

Incorporated memory differs from inscribed memory in a number of important ways. For Connerton (1989:79–84), incorporated memory (similar to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*) is embodied in and transmitted through routinized bodily practices. In social terms, people acquire these practices by watching, mimicking, and receiving input from their peers. Incorporated memories need not take the form of depictive representations of the past. Indeed, there is often no intrinsic connection between the form and meaning of a bodily practice. Instead, the meanings of these routines are formed over the course of time as a result of frequent repetition. Ultimately such patterns of behavior and meaning will vary based on the kinds of political and ethnic groups in which people participate. Thus, walking, sitting, eating, and other culturally specific postural performances recall patterns of identity and group membership to both performers and observers (Connerton 1989:74). The origins and meanings of such practices are often not consciously considered when they are performed. One need not remember when he or she learned a particular gesture in order to perform it (Connerton 1989:72). Once committed to memory, however, such habitualized practices can play important roles in structuring social behaviors and identities (see also Bourdieu 1977).



### *Blurring the Lines*

Rosemary Joyce (2000, 2003:120–122, 2008:36) has recently argued that incorporated and inscribed memories should not be thought of typologically but as interrelated and overlapping processes of remembrance (see also Mills and Walker 2008:7). In a study of Classic Maya societies she found that elite family heirlooms that implicitly embodied social memories about kinship, status, and identity were later transformed into objects that more discursively commemorated certain historical and biographical events and relationships. Joyce's argument is important in that it dismantles what is arguably an arbitrary conceptual divide within what is more productively understood as a varied but continuous field of mnemonic practices. Discussed more fully below, I argue for the existence of a similar interrelationship between incorporated and inscribed memory at the Moundville site.

### **Social Memory in the Mississippian Southeast**

Social memory played an important role in the politics of identity, the formation of communities, and the legitimation of chiefly authority in the late Prehistoric southeastern United States. Earthen mounds are perhaps the most obvious sites of memory in the Mississippian world (Pauketat and Alt 2003). Ethnohistoric research indicates that these monuments embodied religious narratives of cosmological origins, ancestor veneration, and world renewal (Knight 1986:678–679, 1989). For example, several Historic-era Muskogee groups conceived of mounds as navels through which their ancestors first came forth onto the surface of the earth and through which their people would someday return (Swanton 1928a:52–53). The memoried aspect of this narrative is clear: mounds are literally associated with human origins. Mound construction also coincided with the foundation or relocation of many Mississippian towns and polities, marking a kind of collective birth or rebirth for political groups (Blitz 1999:585; Hally 1996:115; Knight and Steponaitis 1998:15).

Mississippian peoples employed a variety of other places and objects to materialize and invoke social memory. Artifacts with evidence of extensive usewear or repair have been recovered from a variety of different Mississippian mortuary and domestic contexts (Brown 1996). These artifacts,

typically elaborate display goods such as copper repoussé plates (Brown 2007:235–238), shell gorgets (Brain and Phillips 1996:268–269), and fineware pottery containers (Perttula et al. 2001:163) clearly had long use lives, perhaps being passed down through multiple generations. The long-term use and exchange of such heirlooms may have provided tangible linkages to ancestors and other important deceased individuals. Finally, cemeteries, mortuary rituals, and even the dead appear to have been constructed, performed, and manipulated in ways to strategically evoke the past (Hutchinson and Aragon 2002:46–47). Below I consider the issue of social memory by examining archaeological data from the Mississippian site of Moundville in the Black Warrior Valley of west-central Alabama (Figures 1 and 2). In doing so, I attempt to identify instances of and the relationship between both incorporated and inscribed memory transmission, as well as a possible case of selective forgetting involving the intentional destruction of an earthen mound. The results of this investigation provide insight into Moundville's sociopolitical organization.

### *The Dataset*

The data for this investigation derive from a number of Moundville site excavations conducted by the Alabama Museum of Natural History (AMNH) from the mid-1930s to the early 1990s. These excavations took place in locations throughout the Moundville site and, collectively considered, provide a diverse and spatially extensive window into the site's residential history (see Peebles 1979).

The AMNH excavations of the Moundville Roadway and the Moundville Riverbank are of particular relevance to this study as the recent analysis of the collections generated by these investigations has provided new insight into Moundville's community organization (Scarry 1995, 1998; Wilson 2008; Wilson et al. 2006).

The Roadway excavations were conducted in 1939 and 1940 at the Moundville site within a winding corridor, 50 feet wide and 1.5 miles long. This area was excavated prior to the construction of a road that now encircles portions of the plaza and areas east, west, and south of the mounds (Figure 2; Peebles 1971). In conjunction, several large block excavations occurred prior to the construction of an entrance building (the ADB tract) and

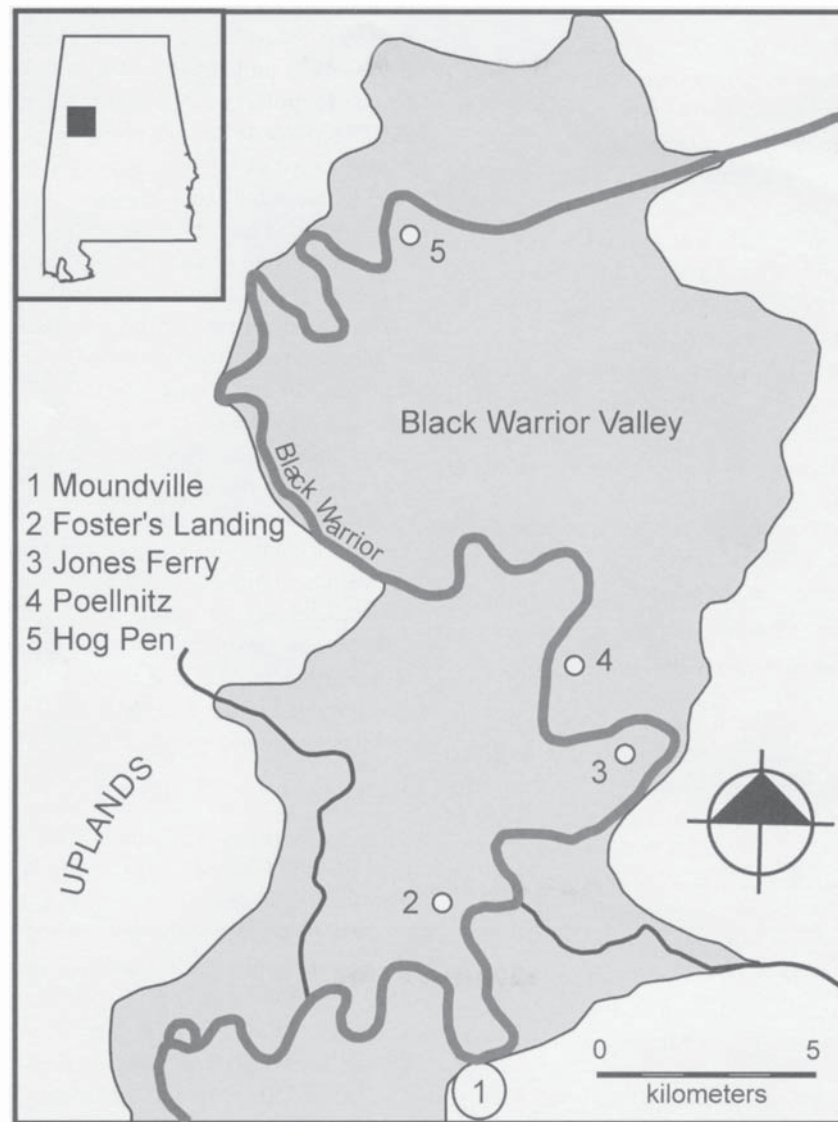


Figure 1. The location of early Mississippian Mound sites in the northern Black Warrior Valley.

site museum (the MPA tract). These excavations uncovered the archaeological remains of hundreds of Mississippian buildings and associated architectural features, a total of 289 burials, and over 100,000 artifacts.

The AMNH 1991 and 1992 excavations targeted two areas where erosion threatened portions of the Moundville site near the riverbank (Scarry 1995:1). The areas excavated during this project include the ECB tract (East of the Conference Building) and the PA tract (Picnic Area). These excavations uncovered the remains of 12 domestic

structures, 10 burials, and a portion of a palisade wall that surrounded the site during the Moundville I phase (Scarry 1998:67, 76, 83–84).

#### *Social Memory at Moundville*

Moundville had a long and complicated occupational history that we are still struggling to understand. The Mississippian occupation of the site began around A.D. 1120 at the beginning of the early Moundville I phase (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:13). Two small and widely spaced mounds were built at the sparsely populated site of



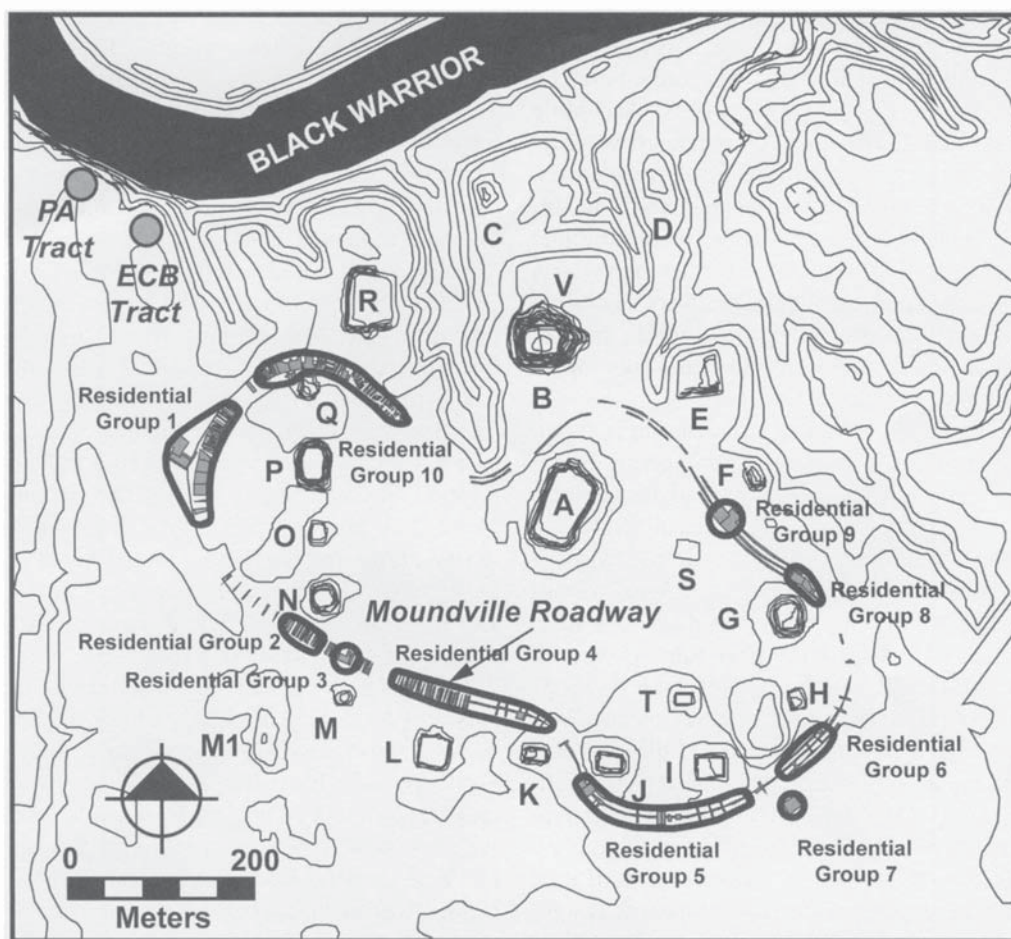


Figure 2. The Moundville site featuring the location of residential groups identified in the 1939 and 1940 Moundville Roadway excavations.

Moundville during this time. A variety of different domestic house styles reveals this was an era of architectural experimentation (Scarry 1995:139, 1998:68–69). There was also variation in ceramic assemblages involving the introduction, abandonment, and convergence of different regional potting traditions. A lack of spatial formalization also characterized the household cycle as families often chose entirely new locations to rebuild their domestic structures rather than staking claim to specific portions of the landscape (Wilson 2008:78).

The regional consolidation of the Moundville polity around A.D. 1200 involved the implementation of a number of formalized organizational patterns and practices. One of the two preexisting mounds was razed to make space for a new community order, consisting of between 29 and 32

mounds grouped in pairs around a rectangular plaza (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:3; Vogel and Allan 1985:63). Blitz (2007) has suggested that the intentional destruction of such an important monument may represent an attempt by the emerging Moundville elite to selectively remove from the landscape any reminder of a particular political group's presence while emphasizing continuity with another. Indeed, the rapid construction of the new mound and plaza arrangement at Moundville suggests that it was centrally planned and orchestrated.

There is a very orderly arrangement of Moundville's earthen monuments (Peebles 1971:83, 1978:381); the largest mounds are located on the northern edge of the plaza and become increasingly smaller going either clockwise or counterclockwise around the plaza to the south



(Figure 2). Steponaitis and Knight (2004:168) have interpreted this community plan as a sociogram, "an architectural depiction of a social order based on ranked clans" (see also Knight 1998). According to this model the Moundville community was segmented into a variety of different clan precincts, the ranked position of which was represented in the size and arrangement of paired earthen mounds around the central plaza. The largest earthen mounds on the northern portion of the plaza were associated with the highest-ranking clans while smaller mounds to the south were associated with lower-ranking clans.

Knight's (1990) concept of clanship is drawn from his analysis of early Historic period ethnographic records. Clans were exogamous kin units in the early historic Southeast (Swanton 1928b:199). Property and land were not owned or controlled by the clan (Knight 1990:5–6). Individual clans within any society would have belonged to one of two social divisions (Swanton 1928a:156–157). In some cases these divisions were exogamous and functioned as moieties. Each of the two divisions was assigned different and often opposing social and ceremonial responsibilities. Historically, such divisions were referred to as red towns and white towns (Hudson 1976:235). One town or division sometimes administered issues of warfare and the other peace. Knight (1990:6) has argued that an ingrained notion of hierarchy was fundamental to the relationship between these dual social groups as well as between the clans that comprised them. In some cases this hierarchy was merely ceremonial, but in other cases resulted in a formal ranking of social groups.

Subclan units differed from clans in that they were often co-residential domestic groups, tied to an estate, which produced and consumed in common (Knight 1990:6). Swanton (1928b:197, 203) refers to these subclan units as local groups or house groups, and there appears to have been some intra-societal diversity in their size and organization. Some of the most detailed descriptions of local groups are provided by Swanton (1928b) and Speck (1907) for the Chickasaw. Chickasaw house groups bore names such as "high corn crib," "little corn crib," "having a red house," "double hill," "a little round hillock," "broken post oak," "behind a tree," "a lot of weeds in the crop," and "a grown over field" (Swanton 1928b:204–206). Thus, Chickasaw

subclan group names generally correspond with localized geographic features or the character of a particular group's houses, outbuildings, and fields. This naming convention is important as it highlights the corporate and localized organization of house groups. This practice contrasts with the naming convention for Chickasaw clans that include totemic designations such as Wolf, Raccoon, and Wildcat (Swanton 1928a:115–116, 1928b:198).

These descriptions of Chickasaw house groups bear some resemblance to local groups among the Creek known as "huti" (Knight 1990:10). Both Chickasaw house groups and Creek huti had hereditary names and titles, with a house chief appointed by a council of elders. In terms of size and composition, Swanton (1928a:79) describes a typical Creek local group as consisting "of a man and woman, their children, one or more sons in law, some grandchildren, some aged or dependent individuals of the same clan group, and perhaps an orphan or two or one or more individuals taken in war." In reference to the spatial layout of Creek local groups, Swan (1855:262) notes that "these houses stand in clusters of four, five, six, seven, and eight together" Although vague, these descriptions indicate that Creek domestic groups may have consisted of 10 to 20 people occupying four to eight buildings. It is unclear how closely local groups among other southeastern peoples corresponded to the Chickasaw or Creek pattern. Timucuan clans were also subdivided by a number of hereditary local groups, but the specific nature of their corporate organization is less understood (Knight 1990:10). Indeed, the specific size and corporate organization of local groups among different southeastern social entities probably varied based on political, economic, and historical factors.

This review of the ethnohistorical record provides an important basis by which to consider archaeologically documented residential groups at the Moundville site. Below I argue that the distribution of domestic structures at Moundville is consistent with these ethnohistoric descriptions of subclan groups. Furthermore, I argue that social memory played an important role in the way both clans and subclan groups negotiated their corporate kin-based identities at Moundville.

### *Residential Groups and Social Memory*

Analysis of over 200 buildings from the Moundville



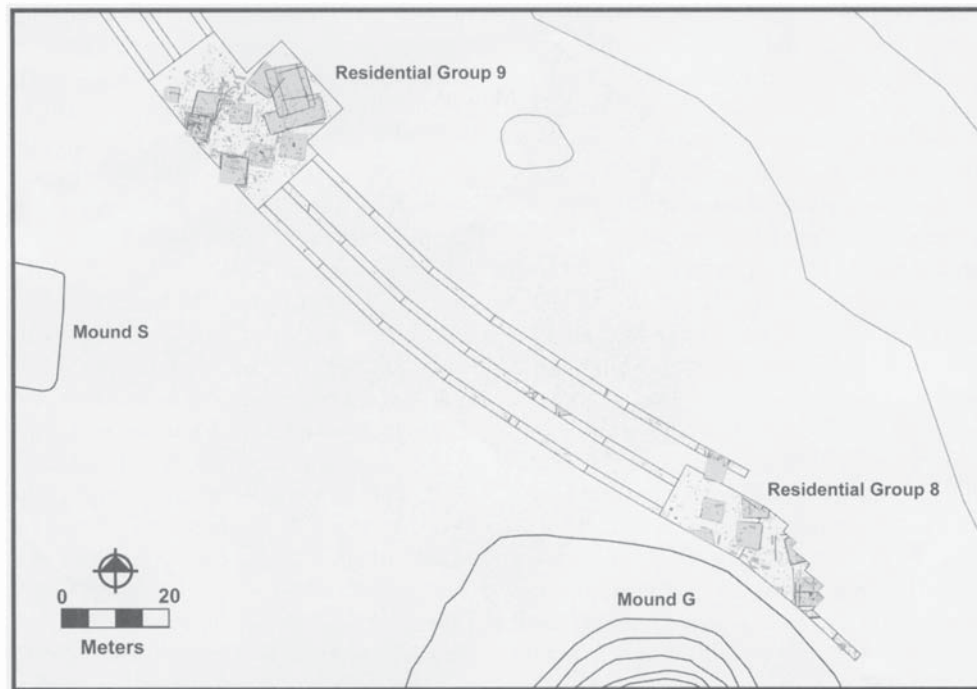


Figure 3. Close up of Residential groups 8 and 9 in the Moundville Roadway excavations.

site has revealed that an abrupt expansion in residential group size took place during the late Moundville I phase political consolidation of the Moundville polity (Wilson 2008:78, 87, 131–132). This expansion involved the construction of an estimated 10 to 20 structures in areas previously occupied by only a few households during the early Moundville I phase. These residential building clusters were separated from one another by sizable “blank” areas that lack evidence of subsurface features (Figures 2 and 3; Wilson et al. 2006:52). Based on the distribution of these clusters of domestic buildings, it appears that each clan precinct at Moundville included multiple subclan residential groups.

As residential groups increased in size, they adopted a more formalized organization of domestic space. Architectural building techniques also became more standardized and buildings were arranged in ways that created shared work spaces, paths, and ritual areas (Figure 4). These buildings were also repeatedly rebuilt in situ as many as five times to maintain particular domestic spatial schemes (Figure 4; see also Wilson 2008:79, 132). These well-maintained architectural arrangements

would have structured the ways residential group members routinely used and moved through space and interacted with one another.

The initial creation of these spatially discrete residential areas and the in situ rebuilding of domestic structures suggest conscious and ongoing attempts on the part of Moundville community members to delineate or inscribe a corporate kin-group identity. It also suggests that small-scale social groups were able to exert some level of control over community space and the activities that took place there during and after Moundville’s political consolidation. Once constructed, the enduring spatial layout of these Moundville residential groups would have channeled everyday movements, providing the means by which implicit social memories and meanings about kin group identity and status were perpetuated.

From a social memory perspective, the formalized and enduring organization of late Moundville I residential groups corresponds well with Connerton’s (1989) notion of incorporated or habit memory; that is, routinized daily practices guided by the consistent location, arrangement, and size of domestic buildings, shared work areas, paths, and



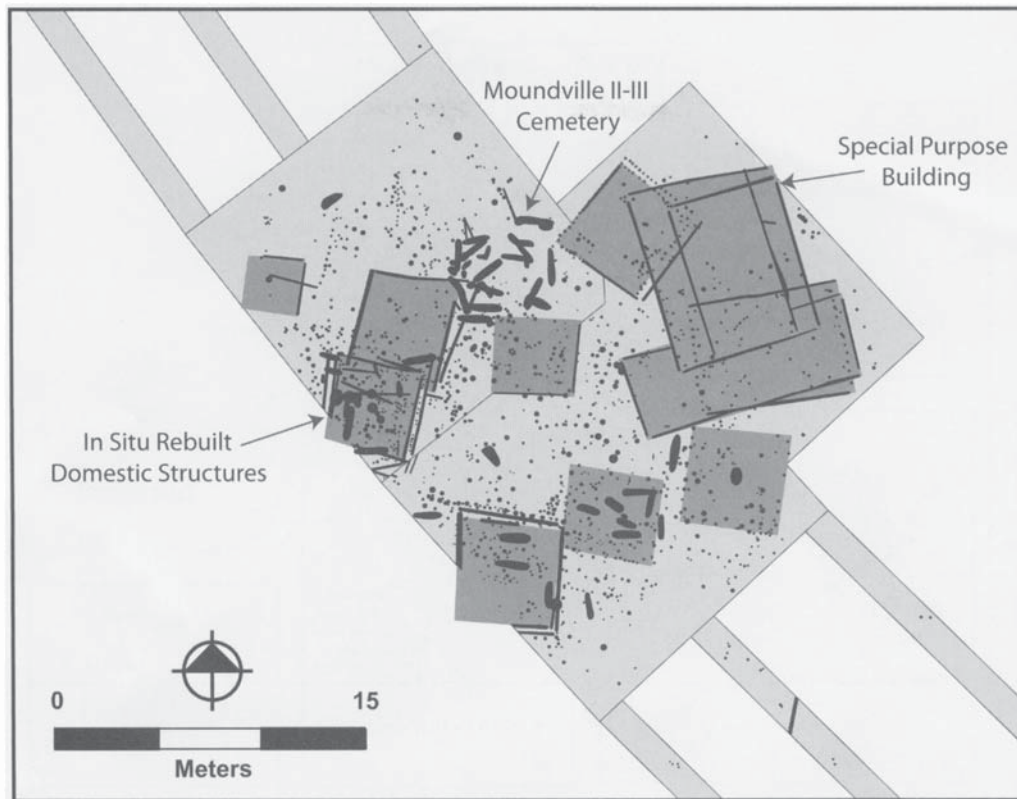


Figure 4. Close up of Residential group 9 in the Moundville Roadway excavation highlighting in situ rebuilt domestic structures and a large special purpose building dating to the late Moundville I and early Moundville II phases and a cemetery dating to the late Moundville II and III phases.

public buildings likely evoked spatially circumscribed domestic group identities and social positions within Moundville society. As stated by Connerton (1989:37):

We conserve our recollections by referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us. It is to our social spaces—those which we occupy, which we frequently retrace our steps, where we always have access, which at each moment we are capable of mentally reconstructing—that we must turn our attention, if memories are to reappear. Our memories are located within the mental and material spaces of the group.

The dynamic between the careful arrangement, construction, and repair of these dwellings and their day-to-day occupation highlights an interplay between explicit and implicit aspects of memory production—a pattern that seems to play out in a

different way later on in the Moundville site's occupation.

#### *Cemeteries and Social Memory*

Sometime during 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 rural occupants of the Black Warrior Valley buried their dead in a variety of different cemeteries (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:19–20; Steponaitis 1998:37–40). Although mound construction, mortuary rituals, and other ceremonial activities took place at the Moundville site, much of the regional population now lived in dispersed farming communities in the rural countryside of the Black Warrior Valley (Knight and Steponaitis 1998:18; Maxham 2004). 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



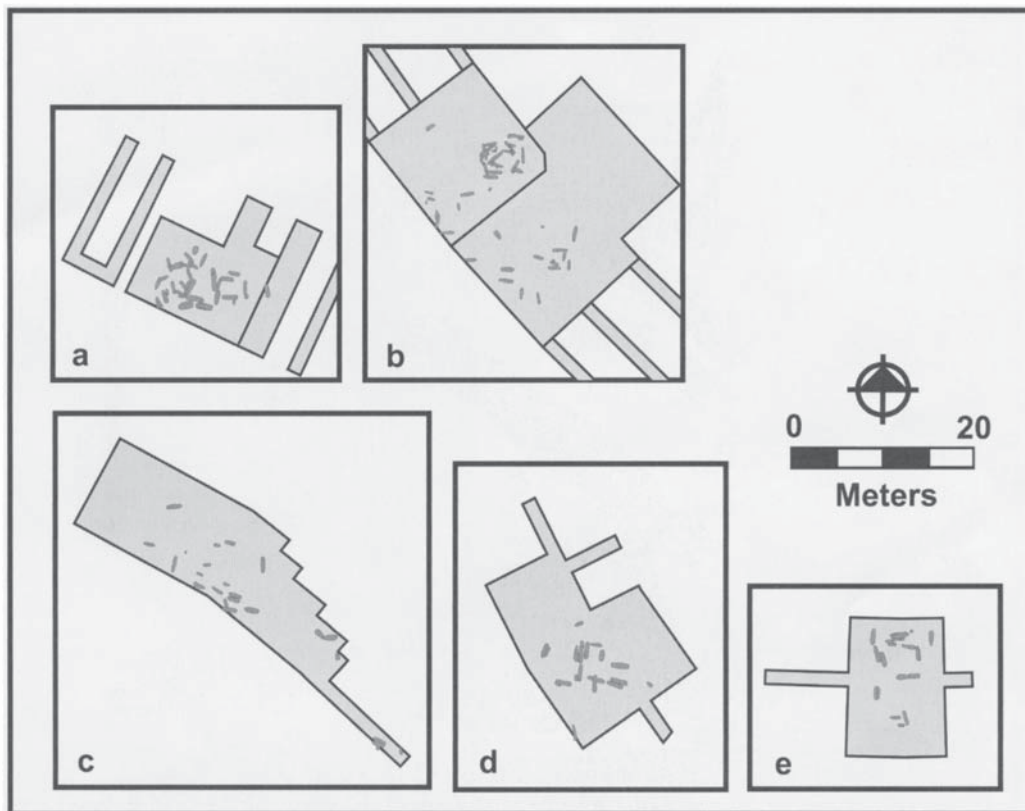


Figure 5. Selected Mississippian cemeteries from the Moundville Roadway excavations. (a) Roadway blocks 15+00 to 15+50; (b) Roadway blocks 48+00 to 49+00; (c) Roadway blocks 43+50 to 45+00; (d) Roadway blocks 26+50 to 27+50; (e) Roadway blocks 30+00 to 31+00.

(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).

Different explanations have been offered for why this outmigration took place. In one scenario Moundville's non-elite populace was expelled from the center as part of an elite strategy to stake exclusive claim to Moundville's religious and ceremonial facilities (Beck 2006:32–33; Knight and Steponaitis 1998:18–19). In another scenario this outmigration represents a loss of political authority by Moundville's elite as the regional populace was drawn away by chiefly rivals at other competing centers (Blitz 2008:67–68). Regardless of the motivation this was a dramatic disjuncture in landscape and community that would have entailed important changes in the ways social groups used space and negotiated their corporate identities, for no longer did kin groups dwell in the shadow of

earthen monuments; nor did families raise buildings over the foundations of their parents and grandparents homes.

The new Moundville was a place steeped in mortuary ceremonialism in the form of a multitude of different cemeteries. Based on a seriation of mortuary ceramics and a close examination of feature superimposition, it is clear that most of these cemeteries were used for some two centuries following the site's outmigration (Steponaitis 1983, 1998:37–38; Wilson 2008:86). Most off-mound cemeteries consist of tightly arranged rectilinear clusters of burials surrounded by a more dispersed pattern of associated burials (Figures 5 and 6; Wilson 2008:62–71; Wilson et al. 2010). An important feature of Moundville's off-mound cemeteries is their locations. Nearly every off-mound cemetery that has been excavated at Moundville was built on top of spatially discrete early Mississippian residential groups. It follows that part of the broader



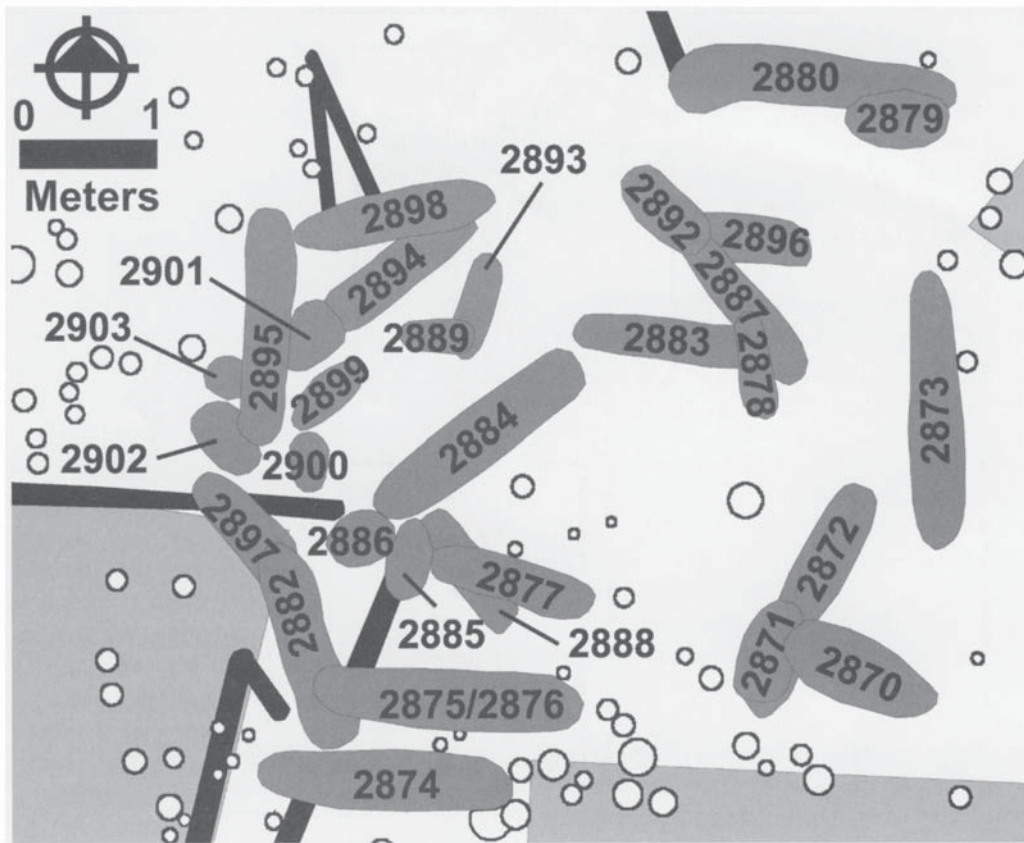


Figure 6. Close up of Moundville II–III phase cemetery in Residential group 9 in the Moundville Roadway.

meaning and purpose of these small cemeteries was to establish social and spatial continuity with ancestral residential space. Indeed, there are some clues in the spatial organization of these cemeteries that indicate that they were strategically designed to invoke an early Mississippian residential past. For example, the clustered, rectilinear arrangement of most burials in these cemeteries falls within the size range of early Mississippian domestic structures at Moundville (Wilson et al. 2010). 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.

Moundville cemeteries do not represent everyday lived space in which group memories were incorporated and localized. Instead, the mortuary rituals that took place during the Moundville II and III phases at Moundville can better be investigated

as archaeological examples of Connerton's (1989) concept of inscribed memory, involving commemorative ceremonies in which domestic groups *re-presented* their history of residential occupation in a ceremonial capacity. By building these cemeteries directly on top of earlier residential areas and arranging graves in rectilinear house-like patterns, they *intentionally* enacted this earlier era in a ceremonially embodied form. Over the long term, however, the memoried aspects of certain burial practices may have become more implicit as mortuary rituals were repeated in the same cemeteries across the span of two centuries.

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 membership entails. The heritability of sociopolitical, religious, and economic rights and resources no doubt helped inspire the initial construction of Moundville's mound and plaza complex as well as the clan-based political and ceremonial order it embodied.

Thus, the long-term use of discrete cemeteries appears to have been an important strategy by which subclan groups maintained a connection to ancestral kin space, a corporate kin-based identity, and the rights and privileges that came with it. This is not to imply there was seamless continuity between earlier residential groups and those that later used these spaces to bury their dead. The sweeping changes associated with Moundville's outmigration likely entailed negotiations in which some relationships were contested, reconfigured, or severed entirely. As part of these negotiations some kin-groups may have created fictitious genealogies to legitimize the co-optation of a rival group's claims to ancestral space and the privileges that came with it.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to highlight the potential of social memory research for Mississippian archaeology. I have argued that the social, political, and material dimensions of memory make it well suited for archaeological investigation. Social memory does not represent a new paradigm in archaeological research but naturally dovetails with contemporary interests in practice, place, and identity (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003:5–6; Yoffee 2007:3). The introduction of this broadly applicable topic of investigation is especially important at a time when the utility and appropriateness of many other analytical concepts and models of Mississippian political economy, such as prestige goods economics, dual processualism, and the chiefdom concept itself, are being questioned (Marcoux 2007; Pauketat 2007; Wilson et al. 2006).

Moundville's complex history of place-based identity politics provides a rich archaeological context to investigate the different ways in which Mississippian peoples materialized and invoked social

memory. The construction of earthen monuments and spatially discrete residential areas was a strategy by which different kin groups carved out their social positions within the early Mississippian Moundville community. It is difficult to overemphasize the changes in landscape and community that occurred with Moundville's outmigration around A.D. 1300. Traditional place-based methods of negotiating identity were challenged with the transformation of Moundville from a residential center into a necropolis. Establishing kin-group cemeteries in ancestral residential areas appears to have been one important way of facing this challenge. By commemorating an ancestral residential occupation at Moundville, rural kin groups made claims on identity, the past, and the socioeconomic rights and resources that followed from these claims.

These careful and persistent claims on space and identity indicate that politically charged relationships regarding community, religion, and ceremonialism at the Moundville site were broadly negotiated among a multitude of small-scale kin groups during an era that has been characterized by some scholars as a time when the ruling elite exerted exclusive control over the mound center (Beck 2006:32–33; Knight and Steponaitis 1998:18–19). The residential and mortuary patterns presented here favor a different interpretation for Moundville's late Mississippian outmigration than the top-down scenario just discussed. Blitz's (2008:67–68) recent argument, that Moundville's outmigration was tied to increasing factionalism and political decentralization in the late Mississippian Black Warrior Valley, is one possibility. At the very least it would appear that the regional populace continued to exert considerable influence over how the Moundville center was used and made meaningful long after its residential abandonment.

As a regional investigation of social memory the Moundville case has the potential to inform archaeological understandings of community and identity in other portions of the Mississippian world. For example, the shift from residential center to necropolis is a transition that defines the occupational histories of other Mississippian mound sites such as Cahokia in southwestern Illinois (Pauketat and Emerson 1997:28), Wickliffe in the Mississippi-Ohio confluence area (Clay 1997:25), and Town Creek Indian Mound in the Piedmont of



North Carolina (Boudreaux 2007:59–60). Town Creek in particular appears to have had a community history that closely parallels Moundville's. Boudreaux's (2007) recent research has revealed that early in its occupation the Mississippian community at Town Creek consisted of numerous, spatially discrete residential areas that he interprets as representing kin groups. After A.D. 1350 these residential areas were superimposed by small cemeteries, presumably by those attempting to establish continuity with an ancestral residential past at the site.

Comparable examples of social groups using residences and cemeteries to "live with" or otherwise commemorate ancestors have been documented in other portions of the world as far removed as Neolithic Europe (Bradley 1996), the Near Eastern Neolithic (Goring-Morris 2000; Kuijt 2000), and the Classic Maya (Gillespie 2002:72–73; McAnany 1995). The latter two examples are particularly relevant in that, like the Moundville case, social memories were materialized by both elite and commoners in the context of food producing economies, for the purpose of defining kin-group membership, identity, and hereditary claims on social and economic resources. Thus, social memory involving the careful construction and manipulation of buildings and bodies appears to have been an important strategy by which many kin groups in the Mississippian world and beyond insured their social and economic continuity.

But while these comparable examples point to certain cross-cultural regularities, it is also important to note that there are numerous instances of Mississippian residential and mortuary patterns that deviate from the Moundville pattern. For example, some Mississippian groups in the Central Illinois Valley and Central Mississippi Valley devoted sizable portions of nonresidential village space to cemeteries or placed them outside village boundaries all together (Smith 1990:164; Strezewski 2003:141–142). The analytical implications of this variability is that the connections that Moundvillians made between residential and mortuary space, the past, and their kin-based identities should not be essentialized as a model and applied categorically across the Mississippian world.

Indeed, social memory is a flexible and variable phenomenon that can be materialized and

employed by different groups in diverse ways for variable reasons. This highlights the interpretive potential of social memory, as it facilitates the investigation of complexity in a historical and noncategorical fashion. Clearly, future archaeological research stands to greatly benefit from adopting a more explicit concern with social memory and its use in the ancient past.

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